

Media release

## **Adult Learning Australia welcomes the Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult Literacy**

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) welcomes the new Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult Literacy recently launched by the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Australia has highlighted significant issues facing vulnerable and disadvantaged adults at risk of being left behind due to their lower levels of language, literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills. The Inquiry provides a unique opportunity to hear how best to reduce the barriers and discrimination associated with low literacy in our society.

All Australians, regardless of their employment status, must be supported to develop these skills to achieve productivity gains and ensure they can live healthy, autonomous and full lives. Adults need sufficient literacy to comprehend health information, understand government information and services, get job-ready and maintain a connection during this time of rapid change. Australians with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills are vulnerable to social isolation, mental health issues and unemployment as jobs disappear in the face of technological change, globalisation and COVID-19.

The OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey, which measures key cognitive and workplace skills, found that around 44% of Australian adults lack the literacy skills required in everyday life. PIAAC's data suggests that of these, 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills and 1 in 3 (30%) have below-proficiency level literacy making them vulnerable to unemployment. Many more struggle with numeracy, with around 53% of the population at below proficiency levels. And while there has been much commentary on the scale of the problem, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the urgency of finding comprehensive solutions.

'Literacy has been recognised by the United Nations not only as a right in itself but also as a mechanism for the pursuit of other human rights. It confers on individuals, families, communities and nations opportunities to reach their best potential and to contribute to a more informed and active society', says Jenny Macaffer, CEO, Adult Learning Australia.

Adult Australians with low literacy and numeracy skills often feel shame and experience stigma due to their lack of skills in this area. Even in the workplace, current workers on farms, in factories, and the aged care, health and child care sectors, for example, need critical literacy skills for tasks associated with work, health and safety and managing efficiently day to day.

There has never been a better time to bring literacy out into the open. Addressing literacy inequality will ensure a fairer and more productive Australia post COVID-19. ALA congratulates Mr Andrew Laming MP on his appointment as the Committee Chair to the Inquiry. ALA looks forward to submitting to the Inquiry and encourages others to do the same.

**About ALA**

Adult Learning Australia is the national not for profit peak body for adult learning and community education with over 1,000 members representing all states and territories of Australia.

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Visit [www.ala.asn.au](http://www.ala.asn.au) or call 03 9689 8623 for more information

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