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Declaration statement in support of literacy and numeracy for all adult Australians

As signatories to this Declaration, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and coalition partners seek to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all adult Australians. We believe this is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and that it will position Australians to live more healthy, fulfilling, and productive lives.

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into adult literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in Australia provides a unique opportunity to explore the issues faced by adults at risk of being left behind due to low levels of literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills.

All Australian adults, regardless of their employment status, must be supported to develop literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills to achieve productivity gains and live healthy, autonomous, and full lives. Adults need sufficient literacy to be work ready, maintain social connections, and comprehend information, including health and government information and services.

Those with insufficient skills are vulnerable to social isolation, mental health issues and unemployment as the jobs market adjusts and changes in the face of technological advancement, 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. Of these, 14% have very poor literacy skills and 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.

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 enables individuals, families, communities, and nations opportunities to reach their best potential and to contribute to a more informed and active society. Australia has signed and ratified both the Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs commit Australia to a target to ensure that '*all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy*' (UN, 2015).

The release of the statement coincides with Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 26 – 30 April 2021.

Call to action

The partner coalition calls on the Heads of Australian governments to:

1. Take a whole of government approach to developing a national adult literacy and numeracy strategy in consultation with key stakeholders that is targeted and resourced; and which prioritises socially and economically marginalised communities.
2. Commission research that provides a deeper analysis of the characteristics of all adults with low literacy and numeracy and explores regional differences in terms of place and population cohorts, including a focus on remote Indigenous communities.
3. Commit to attracting, supporting, developing, and retaining quality literacy educators and building the capacity and capabilities of the sector.
4. Recognise and acknowledge the diverse range of informal and non/pre-accredited and literacy and learning pathways that occur in community settings and expand the offerings available.
5. Renew the Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education and outline strategies to support Adult and Community Education organisations as they continue to support adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy.
6. Promote and implement strategies that facilitate partnerships and collaborations amongst adult literacy and numeracy providers i.e., VET, TAFE, and community providers that support adults with low levels of LLN.
7. Make the connection between early literacy and adult literacy by identifying whole of community, family literacy and learning approaches, as well as library-based literacy programs, that break cycles of low formal education and literacy.
8. Ensure nationally consistent support for adult learners requiring literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills to achieve vocational competence.
9. Implement a comprehensive suite of communication and marketing strategies that de-stigmatise adult literacy and numeracy issues in the community and influence national attitudes and behaviours.

Addressing the stigma and inequality associated with low levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills will ensure a fairer and more productive Australia post COVID-19. We look forward to the outcome of the Inquiry and the commitment of the Heads of Australian Governments to appropriately enacting and resourcing the recommendations.



About ALA

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is committed to ensuring that all Australians can access the benefits of lifelong and lifewide learning. It is the largest national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). We are a not-for-profit entity that has been in operation for more than 60 years, with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of ACE

About ACAL

ACAL is the national peak body for adult literacy and numeracy practitioners, researchers, and organisations. Since 1976 ACAL has advocated on behalf of equitable adult literacy and numeracy provision for all Australians. ACAL aims to build understanding of adult literacy and numeracy issues and promote adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice.

About ACOSS

The Australian Council of Social Service is a national advocate for action to reduce poverty and inequality and the peak body for the community services sector in Australia.

About ALIA

ALIA is the peak body for library and information professionals in Australia, representing the nation's public, school, TAFE, university, government, health, law, and other special libraries, which together serve more than 10 million Australians.

About ACED

The Australian Coalition for Education and Development (ACED) was established in 2008 and brings together 15 non-government organisations in Australia working on education in global development with a particular focus on Education for All.

About RWHotline

The Reading Writing Hotline is a national adult literacy and numeracy referral, information, and advisory service.

About ANCHA

The Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) is the national peak body for Neighbourhood Houses and Centres in Australia.

About Literacy For Life

The Literacy For Life Foundation is an Aboriginal - led charity tackling low adult literacy in Australia's Indigenous communities.

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