

Supplementary information to the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into adult literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in Australia - following the ALA presentation at the 12 July 2021 hearing.

1. How to overcome reluctance for adults with low literacy and numeracy to come forward due to shame and stigma – any evidence of successful strategies here or overseas?

Addressing the stigma and inequality associated with low literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills will ensure a fairer and more productive Australia post COVID-19.

a) Promotion - public awareness

As part of a national strategy to address low levels of adult literacy and numeracy, design and implement a comprehensive suite of communication and marketing strategies that de-stigmatise adult literacy and numeracy issues in the community and influence national attitudes. It could build on existing campaigns through:

- [Reading Writing Hotline](#)
- [Adult Learners Week](#) 1 – 8 September
- [International Literacy Day](#) – 8 September
- [26Ten campaign for adult literacy](#)

International

There are international learnings from [UNESCO's International Literacy Year](#) which promoted the critical role of literacy followed by the United Nations Literacy Decade campaign.

Ireland's [National Adult Literacy Agency](#) (NALA), an independent charity committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society, has run successful campaigns to encourage people to improve their literacy <https://www.nala.ie/>

b) Provision

Increased demand for adult literacy and numeracy programs will require investment in adult and community education provision. As outlined in the [ALA submission](#) (number 77). By its very nature, adult and community education (ACE) programs offer 'soft entry points' through informal or non-accredited programs such as driver licence programs, cooking, gardening or vocationally orientated taster programs which often act as enticements for adults to engage with local learning places and spaces in their communities.

What our members tell us and from our experience and research is that many of these adults need different entry points that don't carry the stigma - especially

for those who are not actively seeking work - they benefit most from environments where they feel safe in local place-based face to face community programs – and approached from an elementary and enabling level. [Learn Locals](#) in Victoria offer a successful program that attracts adults to both their non-accredited and accredited programs in this way.

Our submission provides a number of other examples of community based and locally responsive non-formal literacy and numeracy programs (pg. 7). Venues such as libraries and neighbourhood houses also provide a starting point for intergenerational activities involving participating parents and children through story time or reading out loud and stimulating literacy development for both. The parents are empowered to practice and develop their literacy and language skills in a safe, low risk environment.

Once a learner is engaged it is critical they feel supported to continue to meet their literacy challenges. This is where the ACE or the community sector has expertise and does best as providers have networks/connections to better support build confidence and capability because often complex issues/individuals involved.

Volunteer groups like [Read Write Now](#) in Western Australia also play a part in offering individual support to build the confidence of adults who need literacy support to help maintain their participation to complete their goals. An example of this was a [recipient of a 2019 ALW scholarship](#).

According to Dymock and Billet's (2008) research with community providers for the National Centre for Vocational Education, motivation for learners to join language, literacy and numeracy programs is largely based on a general need to improve their language and literacy skills for daily use, employment related needs, and person-oriented needs such as social interaction and developing self-esteem. The authors conclude that learners may be more concerned with meeting their immediate needs than with pathways to education or employment.

c) Professional development for practitioners

Supporting quality provision will require attracting, supporting, developing, and retaining quality literacy educators and building the capacity and capabilities of the sector.

ALA has significant experience in developing and implementing professional development for the adult and community education sector. ALA is currently contracted by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) to develop and implement a professional development program for practitioners delivering adult literacy and numeracy pre-accredited programs. It is aimed at both experienced practitioners and others who may be new to pre-accredited

training. This program helps identify areas for exploration and discovery to equip practitioners to meet the needs of learners.

Different learning modules need to be designed for practitioners at different levels to cater to the range of practitioners. For example:

- i. New to the field - awareness raising, basic strategies/skills based), relevant also for volunteer literacy workers or ppl from Other 'learning sectors' e.g. community services workers
- ii. Intermediate
 - non accredited or prevocational
 - accredited
- iii. Higher level - Adult LLN theory and Practise
- iv. Master classes - various

d) Program delivery

Adult Learning Australia has a history of delivering complex national and state programs for governments including

- i. 5 years of delivering the Broadband for Seniors Program for the Department of Social Services, funding community groups to build the digital literacy skills of older people across all states and territories of Australia.
- ii. 10+ years planning and delivering Adult Learners Week for the Department of Education Skills and Employment
- iii. 7 years delivering Learn Local projects for Victorian Department of Education and Training and the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board

ALA has also established a charitable organisation and provides operational support for the Learning Changes Lives Foundation to assist disadvantaged learners to improve adult literacy and numeracy. It provides grants for community projects/programs and scholarship funding to individuals through the charity <https://learningchangeslives.org.au/> to break the cycle of disadvantage.

2. Northern Territory and literacy as mentioned by ALA at the hearing. [A Statistical Overview by Fiona Shalley and Allison Stewart for the Whole of Community Engagement Initiative](#). The report suggests that the issue of low English LLN skills in the NT Aboriginal adult population is highly significant and requires deliberate action from governments, service providers, education and training institutions, and Aboriginal leaders. [Case study](#) included.

References

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Contact:

Jenny Macaffer | **Chief Executive Officer**

45 Moreland St, FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

P: (03) 9689 8623 | M: 0488030073

E: j.macaffer@ala.asn.au