

MEDIA RELEASE

Adult Learning Australia Response to the 2024/5 Federal Budget

Australia's peak body for adult education has welcomed a focus on skills, training and education in the 2024/2025 Federal Budget but is disappointed that another opportunity has been missed to fund the adult and community education sector which supports adults to have access to the literacy, numeracy and digital skills they require to succeed.

Adult Learning Australia, CEO Jenny Macaffer, welcomed the additional \$88.8 million for the Fee-free TAFE program, but said there needs to be analysis of the completion rates of students who take up these opportunities but then struggle or are unable to complete the courses because they need additional support to build literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

'We strongly believe that targeted funding for the adult and community education sector to complement TAFE would significantly improve completion rates. Students needing to re-engage with learning (and to learn to learn) would receive the necessary wrap-around support and access to the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills training required to succeed,' said Ms Macaffer.

Literacy, numeracy and inequality

At least 44 per cent of adult Australians between the ages of 15 and 74 have very low literacy skills that make everyday tasks difficult, while 54 per cent have very low numeracy skills.

The Australian Government has recognised this is an issue and has commissioned Jobs and Skills Australia to develop a survey into adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills for 2025. Furthermore, the Australian Government and States and Territories in the National Skills Agreement have committed to building Foundation Skills¹ for Work and Life.

Ms Macaffer said people with low literacy and numeracy skills are being put at risk by an increasingly cashless society.

'People with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills may struggle to access and use online banking platforms, which can limit their ability to manage their finances effectively or

¹ English language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) and employability skills.



independently without someone's help. Being reliant on other people means they are also potentially at risk of people taking advantage of this vulnerability'.

Sector role in dealing with men's violence

Ms Macaffer said with men's violence against women currently receiving high-profile attention, more consideration should be given to the crucial role that ACE can play at a local level.

'Adequate funding is essential to support adults, particularly women, staying engaged with adult learning and community education. Wrap around support services are necessary to ensure their learning, connection, and safety are protected,' she said.

Ms Macaffer said ALA wants to partner with the Government to ensure there is also a stronger focus on lifelong learning for life and work, 'especially in terms of health and wellbeing and people's ability to be connected to their communities'.

About Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia, operating for 60+ years, is the national peak body for the nonprofit adult and community education (ACE) sector. Its membership encompasses both organisations and individuals from every state and territory, representing the sector's diversity.

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