



Submission in response to the Australian Government National Disability Strategy Position Paper September 2020

1. About us

Australian Library and Information Association

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. ALIA is the peak body for public, school, university, TAFE and special libraries. We work closely with the Council of Australian University Librarians and National and State Libraries Australia.

Over many years, we have developed and refined a policy for library and information services for people with a disability and we offer a biennial grant for ALIA Members to carry out research into improving services for library users with disability. ALIA is a founder member of the Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative and our members work for disability organisations, providing people with Braille, audio and large print books.

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance

The Australian Public Library Alliance is part of ALIA and represents the interests of the nation's 1500 public libraries. Offering books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, WiFi, PC internet access, learning programs, fun activities and expert staff help, these libraries are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource.

- More than 9 million registered users in 2018 and more than 111 million visits to libraries, 51 million visits to library websites.
- More than 250,000 programs eg storytime, Be Connected, attracted over 7 million attendees.
- Per capita annual cost of \$48.99, funded by councils, state and territory governments.¹

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increased their role in the digital space, enhancing people's online experiences, helping people connect to this new virtual world,

¹ <https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla-aus-public-library-stats-2017-18.pdf>

and providing a safety net for those who are in danger of being left behind, particularly in terms of the ability to access government information.

ALIA Schools

ALIA Schools is an important part of the Association. It promotes the interests of school libraries and teacher librarians, provides opportunities for professional development, advocates for school libraries with state and local groups, identifies and analyses current trends in teacher librarianship, and maintains the profile of teacher-librarianship within ALIA.

There are more than 9,000 schools in Australia. Almost all schools have a library of some description, but they vary enormously in terms of staffing, facilities and resources. The role of the school library is to support the core business of learning and teaching and provide for student wellbeing. It is essential that all students experience success in their learning and that all teachers have the right resources to teach effectively. Schools libraries provide a range of programs and services that include and are not limited to explicit teaching of information and literacy skills, growing collections of print and digital resources, offering learning spaces for classes, small groups or individuals, ensuring safer online experiences and being inclusive for all members of its community.

At the high end, there are flagship libraries with IT hubs and more than a dozen members of staff which includes qualified teacher librarians. At the lower end, there are schools with a few shelves of books and a member of staff with responsibility to look after those resources as well as have a teaching or administration role.

School libraries play a vital role in supporting the needs of students living with disability. This can be identified by the provision of safe, accessible spaces, through the variety of collections and resources and through participation in school initiatives or programs that foster good educational and social outcomes. The same is true of all the libraries represented by ALIA – public, school, TAFE, university, law, government, health and other special libraries.

2. Libraries and the current National Disability Strategy

Australian libraries are fully committed to the objective of the original 2010-2020 National Disability Strategy, to achieve a unified, national approach to 'an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens'.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, home library services have been maintained and where possible extended, acting as a lifeline for people who are housebound or whose disability makes them especially vulnerable to the virus.

City of Darwin Libraries, NT

April: "Home delivery of library books is being offered to anyone particularly vulnerable to more serious illness from COVID-19 like those over 70; in partnership with Tennis NT who are supplying three drivers and cars on Friday mornings."

Berrigan Shire Library Service, NSW

April: "Staff are phoning, selecting and packing items requested by patrons and delivering them to the patron's door."

City of Charles Sturt Library Service, SA

April: "Mobile library has ceased but home library service is being expanded to include all customers considered at risk or vulnerable. Strict hygiene measures are in place."

Libraries SA

April: Home delivery services adopted a "Drop and Wave" model to ensure social distancing rules were enforced.

Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries, VIC

Library staff rang 8,000 older and vulnerable registered library members in lockdown, to help with general information enquiries and assist people with accessing resources.

National, State and Territory Libraries

The libraries' focus on meeting accessibility guidelines for digital services has been expedited through COVID-19.

3. Architecture of the new National Disability Strategy

Question 1

The vision and outcome areas from the current strategy provide a strong framework for the new strategy. The six outcome areas are reflective of the ways that libraries engage with and support people living with disability, with access to information underpinning each one.

Question 2

Likewise, the guiding principles suggested in the Position Paper, in addition to the UN principles of respect, autonomy, non-discrimination, full participation, inclusion, equality and accessibility, would be welcomed by libraries. Guiding principles would be useful for program development – for example, children's storytimes, book clubs, homework help and study sessions, research support workshops and teaching of information literacy skills.

Question 3

We support improved community awareness and understanding of the challenges for people living with disability, as well as of the valued contribution they make to society, being part of the new strategy. With a place in almost every school and community, libraries are well placed to show how simple changes to accessibility can make a world of difference and improve experiences for everyone, not only those with disability. Public libraries play an important role in promoting discussion locally and engaging the broader community.

Questions 4 and 5

Public libraries come under local government, other libraries are a mix of government, education and private sector. We can (and do) provide guidelines and principles for delivering services to people with disability, but there is no mandate for implementation at a state/territory or national level. Clarity of roles would be useful and national communication of these would be required.

While recognition and communication of the role of libraries in improving outcomes for people with disability would be welcome, it would be difficult to provide details of a guaranteed service available to all Australians, and the same could well be true for other government and non-government providers.

Question 6

Library and information professionals engage in evidence-based practice and all data about service delivery, use and impact, is enormously valuable. Input and output figures are useful; outcome data are both the hardest to collect and the most useful in terms of our potential to improve lives. All information needs to be reliable, available on a regular cycle and released in a timely fashion. We would propose a government report is published at least every two years.

Question 7

Libraries play an important role in the lives of many people living with disability, and especially those with print disability. However, we are not in the mainstream of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and health providers. Targeted Action Plans could help us identify areas of specific focus for libraries and provide the impetus for us to partner with other organisations around a particular outcome. Libraries are a rich resource of information, activities and venues that Targeted Action Plans could make better use of.

Question 8

We fully support the Engagement Plan, to ensure that people with disability can actively participate in shaping future disability policies, programs and services. With libraries in most schools and communities, we are well placed to assist the government with a national consultation initiative.

4. In conclusion

The library brand is strong and trusted, our networks, both digital and physical, are well established and efficient, our workforces are adaptable and innovative, we have a deep and meaningful connection with our communities. These are some of the assets we bring to the current and new National Disability Strategy, and we are keen to be part of the discussion, in support of our library users living with disabilities.

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