



# READING AND LITERACY FOR ALL:

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

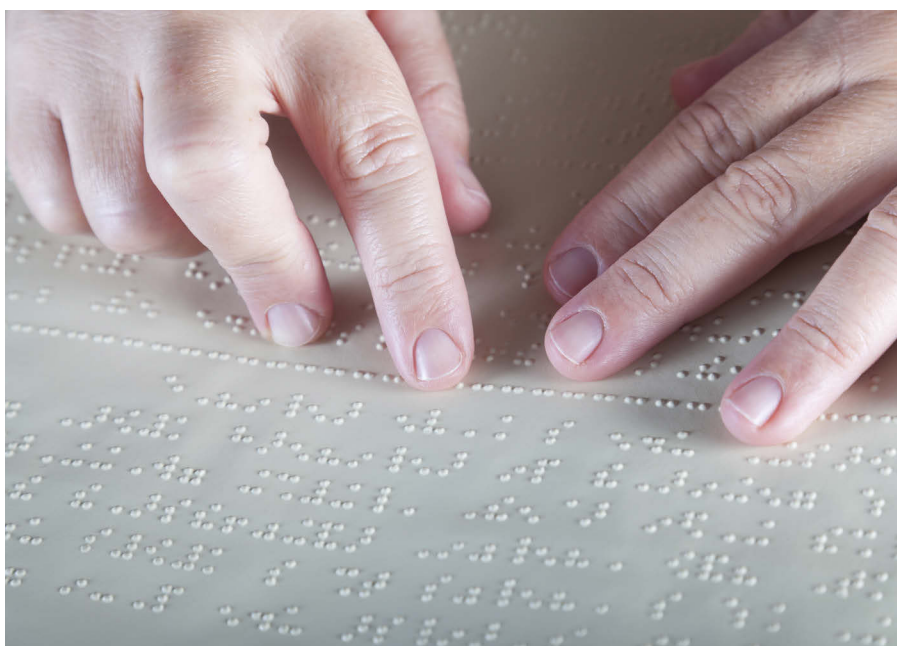
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*Literacy is an essential life skill for all Victorians. It is fundamental to all learning, a building block of education and development, integral to economic, civic and social participation, and it is the cornerstone of our state's future prosperity.*



Literacy is an essential life skill for all Victorians. It is fundamental to all learning, a building block of education and development, integral to economic, civic and social participation, and it is the cornerstone of our state's future prosperity. Through reading we are informed, enriched and inspired.

Yet too many adults do not have the literacy skills they need to cope with the increasingly complex demands of everyday life and work, and thousands of children start school each year without the literacy skills they need to be their best.

Victoria's public libraries – State Library Victoria and the network of 47 library services – are uniquely positioned to support reader and literacy development. Public libraries are widely accessible across the state, are welcoming and inclusive, and are responsive to local

community characteristics and needs. Providing free access to rich and varied collections and engaging programs, libraries are the places in our communities where people come together to read, to learn, and to learn to read.

The Library Board of Victoria, through the State Library, and Public Libraries Victoria Network are committed to working together to ensure that our great public libraries continue to provide Victorians of all ages with access to books, collections, quality programs and services that encourage them to read for pleasure and expand their literacy skills. By implementing the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework we will enhance reading and literacy levels, and demonstrate and celebrate more creative, more productive and more resilient communities.

**John Wylie**  
President  
Library Board of Victoria

**John Murrell**  
President  
Public Libraries Victoria Network



# The framework

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Libraries are dynamic landscapes of information and inspiration, where curiosity is rewarded and ideas flourish. Libraries are also places for communities to come together for a book club, a children's storytime, a dip into family history or an armful of movies.

Victoria's public libraries (which include State Library Victoria and Vision Australia Information Library Service) encourage and nurture a love of language and reading among people of all ages and actively support literacy development at key life stages.

However, Victoria's literacy levels are lower than they should be. As a robust network of libraries, we are ideally positioned to be an agent of change and make a positive impact on the literacy of all Victorians.

The *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework lays out the unique role of public libraries in supporting and promoting reading for pleasure and addressing Victoria's low literacy levels, with the aim of improving it and establishing reading and literacy for all – regardless of age or demographic.

# Why we need a literacy framework

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Literacy is an essential life skill for Victorians of all ages. It's vital, not only for education and employment, but for interacting comfortably and confidently in the everyday world.

While Victorians' performance on key literacy measures is as good as our national peers, it has shown little sign of improvement over the past decade. At the same time, literacy levels in the world's top-performing nations are improving rapidly. Public libraries can help steer these results in a more positive direction.

## Child and youth literacy

Research shows that early learning participation in Australia is among the lowest in the developed world. Only 18 per cent of three-year-old Australians participate in early childhood education, compared with an OECD average of 70 per cent (Australia ranks 34th of 36 OECD countries).

Data from the triennial Australian Early Development Census indicates that 16 per cent of Victorian children of pre-school age are developmentally 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' in the domains of language and cognitive skills. Children who start school behind typically stay behind: if a child is a poor reader at the end of Year 1, there is a 90 per cent chance that they will still be a poor reader at the end of Year 4. The 2014 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show that 22 per cent of Year 9 students in Victoria are at or below national minimum standards for reading.

## Adult and lifelong literacy

There is substantial scientific research and anecdotal evidence to show that reading, not only for information but also for pleasure, is good for us. Beyond the direct literacy benefits, reading contributes positively to personal wellbeing, health, social and economic outcomes. Sharing a favourite book with family or friends is a bonding experience; reading helps us build relationships and increases our understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. Reading for pleasure is also an important way to maintain literacy levels throughout our lives, preventing the decline of these vital skills that can occur once formal education has been completed.

Nearly half of the adult population cannot read fluently, and many homes are not literacy-rich environments. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies; PIAAC) reports that in 2012 up to 46 per cent of Victorians did not have the literacy skills they need to cope with the complex demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy.

Many people face barriers every day of their lives because they cannot read or write. Research indicates that low levels of literacy and education can also have serious implications for an individual's life and health outcomes (such as an increased likelihood of social isolation and mental health issues). A life without literacy can be a cold and difficult experience – but we can change this.



# How libraries improve literacy in Victoria

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With 1.1 million active members in 2013–14, the public library is perhaps Victoria's biggest club. We offer initiatives that can improve the literacy and sense of belonging of people in these kinds of numbers – for free. This framework aims to harness the opportunity to affect long-reaching change in the literacy levels – and the quality of life – of hundreds of thousands of people.

Victoria's public libraries provide a rich array of community-oriented reading and literacy programs – onsite, offsite and online – including:

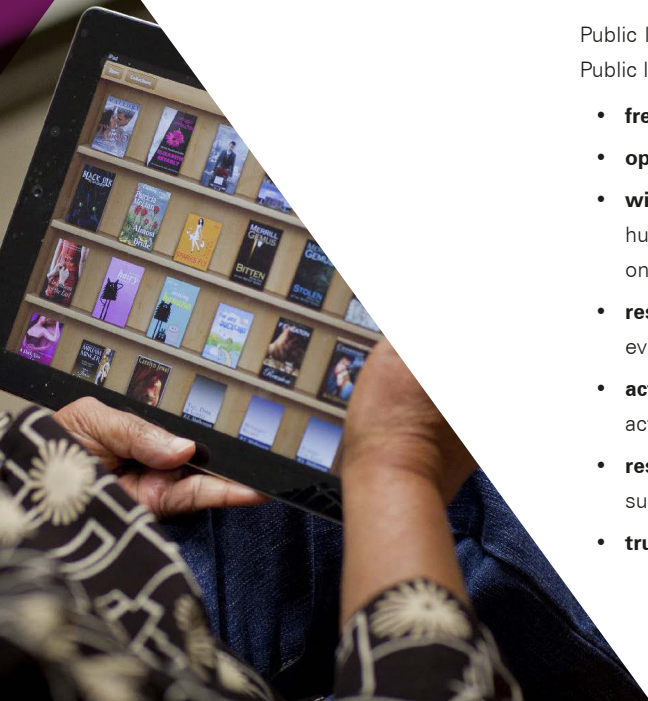
- Baby Book Bags, Rhyme Time and similar programs aimed at children aged three years and under
- storytime and its many variants (e.g. bilingual storytime, storytime on YouTube) aimed primarily at children aged between two and five years and their families

- school holiday programs
- homework clubs and tutors
- youth activities, manga clubs
- book clubs
- author talks and book launches
- literary festivals and events (e.g. Children's Book Week)
- writing competitions and awards, poetry slams
- outreach activities (e.g. pop-up libraries; home library services; visits to kindergartens, schools and nursing homes)
- Conversation Café, English conversation classes
- adult literacy programs.

## The unique role of public libraries

Public libraries have a natural advantage when it comes to supporting literacy development. Public libraries are:

- **free** – with no membership or entry charges
- **open to all** – with a welcoming, inclusive environment
- **widely accessible** – with 266 branches across Victoria; plus 30 mobile libraries servicing hundreds of small regional and rural areas; home library services; outreach activities; and online services
- **resource-rich** – with nearly 10 million physical and digital collection items, meaning everyone can find something to read, listen to or watch
- **active and engaging** – with a variety of reading, literacy and community programs, activities and services for people of all ages
- **responsive** – with knowledgeable and experienced staff who actively promote and support library users' reading, information and digital literacy
- **trusted** – with a widely understood non-commercial, non-political place in community.





## Child and youth literacy at the library

Victoria's public libraries have a long history of supporting early literacy development – every Victorian public library (including State Library Victoria) runs a version of storytime, and every week an estimated 15,000 pre-school children and their families participate in these programs. Public libraries are unique in that they help families to be effective first teachers for their children; and some libraries run outreach programs in community settings to engage families who might not normally visit a library, including those with low literacy levels.

However, research into early literacy development has led to new understandings of best practice for public libraries in areas such as:

- pre-reading skills
- parental involvement
- outreach
- collaboration with partner organisations
- library staff training and support
- learning environments
- multilingualism.

Through implementing best practice principles in our programs, public libraries seek to engage children and their families in building early literacy skills and encouraging a love of reading.



## Adult and lifelong literacy at the library

Public libraries have always attracted confident readers. They can also play a vital role in encouraging people with low-level literacy to be a part of the library scene, which is where there is the greatest opportunity for positive impact. There is a whole suite of engaging adult literacy activities currently available.

- Around one in three libraries have creative writing events, competitions or workshops that encourage adults to write.
- Around three out of every four libraries have book clubs where people can share their reading experience – with clubs meeting on different days and times, reading different genres, and attracting different types of readers.
- Around 40 per cent of public libraries provide adult literacy activities or English-language programs explicitly targeted at improving reading and oral skills for adults with low literacy levels. These programs include English conversation groups, classes and language cafes; access to online adult literacy programs; and library tours for adult education students.
- Many libraries have targeted adult literacy and/or English-language collections that can be used by adult learners to improve their literacy skills.

Public libraries also contribute to improving intergenerational literacy through storytime programs for children and their families, seeding pleasure in reading through all life stages.





# Our vision – and our plan

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Our vision is simple: reading and literacy for all. All Victorians deserve the opportunity to develop and maintain their reading and literacy skills. Every Victorian has a right to be informed, enriched and inspired through reading. Communities with strong levels of readership and literacy are more creative, more productive and more resilient, and libraries are the ideal community destination for people to come together to read, to learn, and to learn to read.

To make our vision a reality, Victoria's public libraries will work together to strengthen our contribution to national and state education agendas and improved literacy outcomes.

*Victoria's public libraries have agreed on five guiding principles to underpin the Reading and literacy for all strategic framework. Reader and literacy development activities should be:*

- 1 | **equitable and inclusive** – accessible to all people at all stages of life and learning, and respectful of cultural diversity
- 2 | **community-centred** – reflecting local community context and people's needs, backgrounds, interests and perspectives
- 3 | **collaborative** – enabling community, government, education and business partners to work together to leverage combined resources and problem-solving capacity to strengthen and extend the reach of library activities
- 4 | **evidence-based** – grounded in relevant research and contemporary educational thinking, and underpinned by a disciplined cycle of planning, evaluation and continuous improvement
- 5 | **sustainable** – designed, resourced and implemented to grow personal and community capacity.

*We will be guided by five key goals:*

## TRANSFORMATION

We will encourage and enable increased levels of reading by individuals, in families and in communities, as a means of sustainably improving literacy outcomes across all life stages. Every library will incorporate a focus on reading and literacy outcomes into its strategic and business planning processes, with regular reviews of reader and literacy development activities. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network will provide targeted statewide professional learning support for libraries and library staff to improve the reach and quality of reader and literacy development activities.

## EVALUATION

We will implement a sector-wide approach to collecting and showcasing evidence of increased readership and public libraries' role in achieving this. Every library will collect data on participation in, and the impact of, reader and literacy development activities. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network will collect and analyse sector-wide evaluation data to inform decision-making.

1.

## ALIGNMENT

We will ensure that Victorian public libraries consistently deliver and benchmark quality reader and literacy development programs and services to the community. Every library will work collaboratively to continuously improve the quality of reading and literacy programs.

2.

3.

## COLLABORATION

We will build strong, productive relationships across the education, community and business sectors to enhance and extend opportunities for reader and literacy development. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network will actively seek out opportunities to build relationships with potential partner organisations, and every library will explore local opportunities for partnership development, with an emphasis on partnerships that engage people with low-level literacy.

4.

5.

## ADVOCACY

We will promote the value of reading and its impact on childhood and lifelong personal development and wellbeing, and the critical role of public libraries as a place for creating community opportunities. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network will promote the role and impact of public libraries in increasing reading levels and improving literacy levels. This will involve advocacy to national, state and local government; business; community groups; and education providers.

# Evaluating progress

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Victoria's public libraries will adopt a consistent and outcome-focused approach to evaluating reading and literacy development activities. Libraries will measure and monitor participation in and the impact of these activities in ways that align (where relevant) with comparable measures used by government agencies, education organisations, employers and researchers.

In some cases the measures will reflect the direct role and impact of public libraries on reader and literacy development. In other cases the measures will reflect the contributing role of public libraries in achieving high-level reading and literacy outcomes within communities.

For more information about our Reading and Literacy strategy, or to discover State Library Victoria and Victorian public libraries, visit [slv.vic.gov.au](http://slv.vic.gov.au) or [plvn.net.au](http://plvn.net.au).



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres
- Department of Education and Training
- State Library of Queensland
- The Smith Family
- 26TEN Strategy Tasmania.

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