



Submission in response to the Meeting of Cultural Ministers National Arts and Disability Strategy Discussion Paper

3 December 2018

1. About us

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. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, national, state and territory libraries and the professionals who work in them.

Australian public libraries

Australia has more than 1500 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 million customer visits each year¹. Offering books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, wifi, PC internet access, learning programs, fun activities and expert staff help, they are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource. Families with young children are an important audience and there are some 121,000 storytimes held each year, with more than 3.1 million participants.

The public library sector within ALIA is represented by the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance².

2. Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the National Arts and Disability Strategy discussion paper on behalf of our Members. It is good to see within the document the acknowledgement of libraries as community infrastructure promoting access to the arts for everyone.

Public libraries across Australia are transforming their facilities, programs, services, technologies and staff skills to meet the challenges of our increasingly digital society, all the while ensuring that access is maintained and wherever possible improved, for people living with disability.

¹ https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf

² <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/public-libraries>

3. Accessible by design

Public libraries are centrally located close to transport hubs. Buildings are designed to be safe, welcoming and accessible. They provide information about health and wellbeing. There are tailored programs, for example sensory storytimes for children with autism. There are book collections for people with print disability, as well as supporting devices, including DAISY readers and tablets. This is particularly important for our ageing population. Most libraries offer outreach services for people who are unable to attend the library, and these are often supported by both staff and volunteers.

Accessibility is embedded in library guidelines and policies:

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance commissioned the *ALIA Standards, Guidelines and Outcome Measures*³, which are the benchmark for Australian public libraries and have been used by at least one other country overseas to review their own standards. Of particular relevance to people living with disability are G1C (Maximise accessibility), G2.1 (Services for targeted population cohorts), G7 (Access for all to content and collections), G10 (Access to special technologies), G12.1C (Accessible library buildings), G12.3 (Home library services), G12.4 (Accessible web design).

Other relevant policies are the ALIA statement on the provision of library and information services for people with a disability⁴; the ALIA guidelines for Australian home library services⁵, and the ALIA guidelines on library standards for people with disabilities⁶ (all currently under review).

ALIA is an active participant in the Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative, an industry-created collaboration to work on ways of implementing the *Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities*, signed by the Australian Government in June 2014.

4. Libraries and the arts

Libraries have many roles in communities. They support literacy, informal learning, students, job seekers, small businesses. They promote social cohesion and participation in the democratic process. And they are vibrant hubs for arts and culture.

In 2014, *Creative Communities*⁷ was published, shedding light on the cultural benefits that Victorian public libraries deliver in their communities. This was followed in 2015 by *The impact of libraries as creative spaces*⁸, providing a framework to help libraries plan and evaluate creative activities.

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<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20Standards%20and%20Outcome%20Measures%20for%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines/library-and-information-services-people-disability>

⁵ <https://www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-and-guidelines/alia-policies/guidelines-australian-home-library-services>

⁶ <https://www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-and-guidelines/alia-policies/guidelines-library-standards-people-disabilities>

⁷ <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Creative-communities-summary-report.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.plconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/manage/research/libraries-as-creative-spaces>

Both these projects illustrate the strength of libraries around the country in providing accessible, engaging activities; gallery and exhibition facilities; performance spaces; makerspaces and media labs for creative expression.

5. Future opportunities

ALIA endorses the Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative submission in response to this discussion paper, and its two recommendations:

ALPI recommends that the Meeting of Cultural Ministers (MCM):

- *Acknowledge ALPI as an exemplar of cross-industry support for inclusivity in its report on the National Arts and Disability Strategy.*
- *Consider a special funding provision by the MCM to advance this agenda. A modest contribution of \$2 million would carve three years off the timeline and put a greater number of accessible books in the hands of people living with print disability by 2021.*

7. Conclusion

Thank you for enabling us to contribute to this discussion. We would be pleased to provide further input about any of the points raised in our submission.

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