State of Our Libraries Report
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Executive Summary

The network of public libraries across New South Wales reflect the vibrant communities within which they operate. From July 2017 to July 2018, 1.75 million people attended 87,700 programs across the state.

Public libraries are the heart and soul of these communities, providing a wide range of services which are deeply valued by everyone who uses them. Indeed, it would be tough to find a single person in NSW who does not love their library.

However, in 2018, after 40 years of ongoing state government underfunding, our public libraries were facing an unprecedented funding crisis. Without an increase in funding and a secure funding model, our public libraries would have struggled to continue to provide the services and resources that communities across NSW so desperately love and rely on.

That’s when we turned to the community for help. The Renew Our Libraries campaign was launched in August 2018. Thousands of community members joined libraries, councils, Councillors, the NSW Public Library Association and Local Government NSW in asking all NSW political parties to support an increase in public library funding.

The Renew Our Libraries campaign was successful in generating support from right across the political spectrum, resulting in an additional $60 million in funding for the current quadrennial funding period out to 2022/23.

The love, support and passion of all stakeholders in the community for their local libraries was a major contributor in securing this substantial injection of additional funds from the NSW Government.

The NSW Public Libraries Association, who partnered on the campaign with Local Government NSW, was heartened by the multi-partisan commitments to library funding during the 2019 election campaign, demonstrating that the value of the NSW public library network is indeed acknowledged by all sides of politics.

Just 12 months after facing a funding crisis, we can safely say that our libraries are not just surviving, they are thriving.

But it’s important that our libraries receive the support they need to stay open – and stay relevant – for good.

To ensure that the funding for public libraries does not revert to the perilous crisis situation it was in prior to the 2019 election, it is now critical that further action is taken by government.

The first step is to ensure that the current funding can keep pace with cost of living increases by indexing the funding for our libraries every year.

In addition to this, it is critical that the entirety of the full funding package is included in specific public library legislation that guarantees these funds for the long term.

These simple steps will provide a certain future for NSW libraries, and enable them to provide ongoing support to their communities right across the state.

Dallas Tout
President, NSW Public Libraries Association
Today’s Modern Library Network

NSW has a strong network of fantastic libraries across the state. These vibrant community spaces respond to a broad variety of community needs by providing spaces where people can connect to:

- multi format collections that are available to inform, educate and entertain library borrowers
- information services to keep communities informed
- technology, online information and services to help bridge the digital divide
- programs for all ages and demographics that inspire, connect and engage communities

Our public libraries are more and more becoming the community living rooms of towns, suburbs and cities across the state.

And to ensure that residents in outlying suburbs and rural towns get a piece of the library action, there are 22 mobile libraries that cruise around the state delivering collections, programs and services well beyond the traditional library walls.

Public libraries are resilient. Despite various dire predictions over the past 20 years of the imminent demise of libraries due to their forecasted declining relevance in the digital age, our libraries are more popular than ever. A recent article about libraries published by Jane Cadzow (A Turn Up For the Books, Sydney Morning Herald/The Age, 28 September 2019) said “If attendance figures are any indication, the public library is our most valued cultural institution”.

Libraries are not at all surprised by this revelation, because they are the masters of reinvention and adaptability. Far from being challenged by technology, our libraries own that space. Library collections have successfully integrated a broad range of eResources, meaning that the “virtual library” is a reality.

Library staff have, by sheer necessity, become expert navigators of the online service world, helping constituents to access online government and other business services that they may not have the equipment, connectivity or skills to utilise individually. As well as facilitating online access and equipment libraries also offer a range of technology courses, including the Tech Savvy Seniors and Be Connected programs, to help bridge the digital divide and reduce the number of people who would otherwise be left behind in the age of technology.
The $24m library grants program that is part of the increased funding package will have an infrastructure focus that will stimulate investment in new and refurbished library buildings as well as technology projects, further enhancing the community development capacity of NSW libraries.

The additional $60 million in public library funding will make a massive difference to the contribution that NSW libraries can make to their constituents until 2023. Already, there is talk of additional opening hours, staffing, collections, programs and services to be funded by the “new money”.

These are not abstract concepts or funds that are tied up in planning processes – they are real services and products for real people across the state.

Public libraries in NSW and right across Australia make a massive contribution to community wellbeing. They are safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces that engage, inspire, educate and entertain their constituents.

The 3.3 million library members across NSW are sure to agree.
FUN FACTS

Libraries at a Glance

- **375** public libraries & **22** mobile libraries
- **2,300** library staff
- **14.8 million** visits to library websites (2017/18)
- **13.1 million** collection items (2017/18)
- **40.2 million** loans (2017/18)
- **34 million** visits in person (2017/18)
- **87,700** programs & events attended by **1.75 million** people
Like parks, playgrounds and sports fields, libraries are core piece of infrastructure that local government delivers for our communities. Libraries are open to everyone in the community and are constantly evolving to meet local community needs.

While no two libraries are the same, there is a constant thread that connects all libraries: that they are inclusive and accessible to everyone.

When you walk around your local library at different times of the day - you will see families with young children spending precious time building a love of reading, school students finding a quiet space to focus and study, community members using the computers to access a government service, people catching up on the daily news reading the paper and magazines, people researching and writing that university assignment or simply borrowing a book that they have been wanting to read.

It is in these ways that libraries strengthen connections within and across communities, by providing spaces and resources for people with new and emerging interests to come together to connect and reflect.

A fantastic example of one of the new and innovative ways that libraries connect and strengthen communities is how Melbourne City Council has hired a social worker for its libraries, to provide support services for the homeless. It’s in thoughtful ways such as these that public libraries can adapt to the needs of the community around them, as a place of information, social connection and support.

This is how libraries change lives.

Who uses libraries?

- Students
- Young families
- Older people
- People from a non-English speaking backgrounds
- New residents and migrants
- Job seekers
- Vulnerable members of the community
- And more!
Today’s Modern Library Network

In September 2019, the NSW Public Libraries Association surveyed over 1,200 members of the public from NSW about how they use their local library.

Here’s what we found out:

- **74%** of respondents were frequent users of their local library with many having family members who frequented libraries just as often.
- **96%** of respondents were most likely to go to the library to borrow books.
- **44%** respondents attend events or classes.
- **50%** respondents borrow DVDs.
- **44%** respondents access newspapers and magazines.

Many respondents also cited using the internet, reading ebooks, listening to audiobooks and using computers for email, fax and printing as additional library services they used.

Respondents also shared uplifting stories of their experiences with libraries, with many saying that libraries have made a huge difference in their lives.
Library Lovers Say...

“I visit Manly Library on Sydney’s Northern Beaches at least once a week. As a freelance journalist I often work from the library – there’s something so motivating about being surrounded by books – and I’m constantly borrowing books and requesting inter-library loans. My library is essential for both my work and leisure time, and I see every week that plenty of other people feel the same.”
- Hannah, Balgowlah

“I am at our library at least twice a week every week, picking up books that I’ve reserved for myself, my husband and our two primary school children. We are so grateful for this service as it means we save so much money on buying books, and we’ve realised that borrowing books is so much more sustainable than buying and then discarding them. The library means so much to our family as it gives us access to a world of books we otherwise wouldn’t read.”
- Sarah, Haberfield

“Libraries are invaluable to a healthy, happy community. My library is a wonderful oasis, a sanctuary of quiet and intellectual nourishment.”
- Saxon, Byron Bay

“I love the library as I believe that reading should be available to all, no matter what their circumstances are. As the campaign has shown, it’s more than books too, as people need spaces away from home or work that is welcoming and free.”
- Robert, Haberfield

“Last year I’d fortunately gone along to the Marrickville library to learn how to use the online electronic loans service just before I suffered a detached retina! Once this catastrophe had befallen me, my vision was very compromised, and I wasn’t able to move about freely after the sight saving surgery. So I borrowed talking books online from my much loved council library! I’m now thankfully recovered, and can once more read print books, but the sanity saving company and entertainment of downloaded books during that time of pain and fear was priceless!”
- Ailsa, Marrickville

“As a new settler in Australia in 2008, the library offered me great resources. I was able to access books about Australia and its people and way of life as I navigated my new life. The public library is a unique and valuable source for research that is not available elsewhere.”
- Sarah, Lismore
Renewing libraries for a bright future

While many predicted the downfall of libraries against the ever-rising tide of technology, what has resulted, demonstrated in this report, is exactly the opposite. As technology increases and the platforms in which we access information have become more diverse – public libraries are proving to be more essential to our lives now more than ever.

Our libraries and their librarians have more than proven their ability to be versatile and agile against the waves of technological and social change.

The more challenges our communities face – the more often they are turning to their libraries as a secure and safe space to access information, meet new people and familiarise themselves with their community.

If provided with secure, long term funding, the future of our public libraries is bright. The power they hold in connecting our communities and empowering the individuals within them is limitless. But in order to reach their full potential, or just to stay open at all, the current funding for public libraries needs to be protected.

In 2019 the campaign to Renew Our Libraries succeeded in securing the additional $60 million over the next four years that libraries need, to continue to deliver those vital services to our community. However, without protecting this additional funding in legislation, and indexing it to keep up with inflation, the full funding package is not guaranteed beyond 2023. The consequences of not protecting this funding will be devastating for our public libraries and the communities that depend on them.

We must act now to secure the funding to ensure that our beloved libraries never fall into this crisis again. The Renew Our Libraries campaign will continue its endeavour to see public libraries stay open, for good, by asking all parliamentarians to support legislation to index the current funding and protect it in legislation for future years to come.
Love your library week!

Love Your Library week from December 2 to December 8, is a chance for all state MPs to visit their local libraries and get involved in the Renew Our Libraries campaign.

Renew Our Libraries supporters will be asking their MPs to commit to visiting their local library and taking a photo with our pledge to support keeping libraries open, for good.
Find out more

You can contact the NSW Public Libraries Association by emailing Robert Knight knight.robert@wagga.nsw.gov.au

Or email the Renew Our Libraries campaign on info@renewourlibraries.com.au

You can also find out more about the Renew Our Libraries campaign on www.renewourlibraries.com.au

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