

The Australian Media Literacy Alliance

Our National Agenda for Change



AUSTRALIAN
MEDIA
LITERACY
ALLIANCE

Media Literacy: The Challenge

Every day 8-in-10 Australians use media technologies to live their lives through media: to receive and share news; to get help and advice; to conduct business and connect socially; to learn; to share ideas, knowledge and opinions. This engagement with media and technologies increasingly demands sophisticated skills, knowledge and critical capabilities. However, our research shows that many adults and children have a low level of confidence in their own media abilities and most say they are not getting support to help them.

The internet and mobile phones have changed the way people receive and share information. News and information is now delivered through multiple channels, with multiple authors and consumers. It is produced and circulated across a rapidly evolving 24-hour cycle, often as events evolve, leaving little time to check sources, claims or opinions. At the same time sources of entertainment are diversifying and these forms of media can be just as influential in shaping people's attitudes and worldviews.

Media literacy is the ability to apply critical thinking to digital and non-digital media through analysis, evaluation and reflection. It is now widely recognised as a form of literacy essential for full participation in society. Despite the rapid growth in media technology uptake and use over the past 10 years, media literacy is not scaling at a rate to keep up with sophisticated changes to technology and media production and distribution. This means citizens have been left to learn on their own: or face increasing levels of social, cultural and economic exclusion or threats to their livelihood.

The Australian curriculum is one of the few international curriculum policies that includes media literacy as a goal. However, media literacy education in Australian schools has been offered in an ad hoc and disparate way. Whilst the current national curriculum includes capacity for media literacy teaching for all students, research highlights that the quality and delivery is neither consistent nor effective. At the same time there are no national structures developed to help deliver adult media literacy support.

Australia now has a national organisation tasked with championing and leading media literacy education for all Australians. The Australian Media Literacy Alliance, a newly created, independent structure, seeks to support a national, expert network of organisations at the forefront of media literacy education and advocacy at all levels. The Alliance brings together key public institutions and networked organisations to tackle the challenges of media literacy education as a national priority.

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society.

The case for a national approach to Media Literacy education for all citizens

Misinformation can circulate at speed and scale on digital platforms. Misinformation challenges democratic processes, social cohesion and public health outcomes by diminishing people's ability to make timely and well-informed decisions.

In Australia, misinformation has been created around the past two federal elections, the 2019 Black Summer bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As these events unfolded, false claims were used to influence the way people voted, promote racist attitudes, encourage illegal activities and advocate for dangerous health decisions – for example, by contributing to COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

Media literacy education and advocacy has a critical role to inform debate and to thwart misinformation and biased communication.

A healthy democracy requires that citizens have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to use media to engage with politics, policies and world events. It also requires that citizens can recognise when information is misleading or deliberately deceptive. In addition, media production skills are now critical for full participation in society, whether for work, strengthening family and social relationships, advancing health and education goals.

Given this, an ongoing, comprehensive and coherent national strategy for media literacy in Australia is required. This must not entail a quick-fix involving scattered, one-off and fragmented projects.

Many advanced economies now have a national policy, strategy and framework for media literacy. National approaches support media literacy educators and organisations to work together in a coherent way while allowing for benchmarking over time, which in turn enables an evidence-based approach.

It is critical that Australia moves in this direction.

Research: Teachers

A recent survey of Australian teachers found:

Teaching news matters

- **Almost all respondents (96%) believe it is very or extremely important for students to learn to critically read the news, with 94% of teachers believing it is very or extremely important for students to learn fact checking and verification skills.**
- **Over 90% of respondents believe it is very or extremely important for students to learn about bias in the news.**

Barriers stand in the way of teaching about news media

Although 60% of respondents said they feel confident teaching students about news media, several barriers to teaching were identified:

- **Timetable constraints and curriculum structures (57%) and lack of time for planning (45%) are major barriers to teaching students about news media.**
- **Only one quarter of respondents (27%) said they were very well supported by their school to teach students about news media, while an additional 38% felt moderately well supported.**
- **Only 18% of the respondents had access to professional development opportunities about news media.**

Source: Dezuanni, M., Notley, T. & Corser, K. 2020. *News and Australian Teachers: How news media literacy is taught in the classroom*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University.

Research: Young Australians

A recent survey of young Australians found:

Online news engagement increases with age

- While family are the most common source of news for both children (aged 8-12 years) and teens (aged 13-16 years), three quarters of teens (75%) use social media to get news often or sometimes. A little over one third of children use social media to get news often or sometimes (38%).

Almost half of all young Australians pay very little attention – or no attention – to the source of news stories they find online

- 46% of young people say they pay little or no attention to the source of news with very little difference between children and teens.
- Just one third of young Australians (36%) agree they know how to tell fake news from real news.

Young Australians are not receiving much support at school to develop their news media literacy

- Just one in five young people said they had received a lesson in the past year to help them work out if news stories are true and can be trusted.
- Just three in ten had received lessons in the past year to help them create their own news stories.

Source: Notley, T., Dezuanni, M., Zhong, H.F. & Chambers, C. (2020) News and Australian Children in 2020: How young people access, perceive and are affected by news media, Research Report, Sydney, Western Sydney University and Queensland University of Technology.

Research: Adult Australians

A recent survey of adult Australians found:

Adult Australians most commonly use either two or three different types of media every day

- More than four in five adults (83%) are using social media on a daily basis and almost half of all adults.
- Australians (49%) report using more than three different social media platforms in the past week.

Overall, adult Australians have a low level of confidence in their own media ability

- Less than one quarter of adults can edit a video and post it online and only one third know how to edit a photo.
- Less than half say they can change social media privacy settings.

Yet, most Australians say media literacy is important to their lives

- Staying safe online as the most important among the 14 different activities we listed, followed by 'staying connected with my friends and family', 'knowing how to think critically about the media I consume' and 'knowing how to recognise and prevent the flow of misinformation'.
- However, many Australians have had no media literacy support across their lifetime (30%).

Source: Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021) Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.

Who is the Australian Media Literacy Alliance?

Media literacy has never been more important for citizens to survive and thrive.

Museums, archives, libraries, public broadcasters, schools and universities already play a significant role in supporting media literacy and have done so for decades. The AMLA founding members represents a unique consortium of key public institutions and networked organisations who are well-positioned to tackle this national priority.

ACMI (formerly Australian Centre for the Moving Image) explores the power of media and culture on screen – fostering the next generation of makers, players and watchers. ACMI's exhibitions, screenings, commissions, festivals, and industry and education programs reveal the stories, technologies and artists that create our shared screen culture.

The **Australian Broadcasting Corporation** is the national broadcaster which has a remit within its charter to educate all Australians. It has a long history of providing educational materials to Australian schools and families. In 2018, ABC Education introduced Australia's first Media Literacy Week.

The **Australian Library and Information Association** is the peak body for school, public, tertiary and other libraries. Libraries have always been a rich source of quality information, today they also play a vital role in bridging the digital divide. It supports 5,000 member organisations which are made up of libraries and information services.

The **Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology** conducts world-leading research for a creative, inclusive and fair digital media environment.

First Nations Media Australia is the peak body for First Nations not-for-profit broadcasting, media and communications.

The **Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University** researches transformations in culture and society in the context of contemporary global change. It champions collaborative engaged research for a globalising digital age.

The **Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House** helps people to understand Australia's social and political history by interpreting the past and present and exploring the future. In 2019 it opened the new permanent exhibition Truth, Power and a Free Press.

The **National Film and Sound Archive of Australia** is the nation's living' archive of audio-visual materials, a provider of media literacy education for students and lifelong learners, and a destination for deep engagement with Australian media culture based on its collections which are a rich resource for fostering critical perspectives on the media.

National and State Libraries Australasia is the peak body for Australia's national, state and territory libraries. Its nine member libraries hold joint responsibility for collecting and providing access to Australia's documentary heritage, including electronic publications and websites.

The **Special Broadcasting Service** is Australia's multicultural and multilingual broadcaster. SBS inspires all Australians to explore, respect and celebrate our diverse world and in doing so, contributes to an inclusive and cohesive society.

The members work in partnership towards the goal of a government-endorsed national media literacy strategy for Australia, which will:

- **State the importance of this form of literacy for all in society**
- **Articulate the achievements and challenges in the Australian context**
- **Provide direction for educators and curriculum development**
- **Raise awareness and encourage a whole-of-community response.**

The need for leadership and change is widely supported. For example, the 2019 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Digital Platforms Inquiry recommended a program be established to fund and certify non-government organisations for the delivery of digital media literacy resources and training. The Inquiry also recognised the importance of digital media literacy education in schools and recommended that the scheduled 2020 review of the Australian Curriculum consider how digital media literacy education is approached.

The Australian Federal Government has accepted these recommendations and is working toward their implementation.

AMLA Consultations

In 2021 AMLA hosted six consultation events in Perth, Hobart, Brisbane and online involving 121 people representing 89 organisations who were identified as key stakeholders.

- The consultation process revealed strong agreement amongst the participants that there is an urgent need to make Media Literacy a priority for all Australians.
- Participants argued that Media Literacy should be considered a lifelong process that receives attention and support throughout the life stages, including early education, primary and secondary schooling, post school education, adult education and in the later years of life.
- A key theme to emerge from the consultation process was the need to understand that Media Literacy programs will be more successful if they are community-based and offered in ways relevant to those communities. There was also strong support for fostering community-based Media Literacy champions.
- There was consensus that a unifying framework is needed to bring consistency to Media Literacy efforts in very diverse settings. There was strong support for AMLA's Media Literacy.

Our National Media Literacy Education Initiatives

National leadership is a critical step to lead discussions and advocacy for ongoing investment in media literacy education through 5 initiatives:

Goal	Initiative
Advocacy for high quality media literacy education.	Ongoing teacher training leading to accreditation; media literacy forums for students and teachers; professional development programs for school teachers that map onto the national curriculum. Advocacy across Federal Government portfolios.
World leading evidence-based research to underpin media literacy education.	World class research program led by university partners.
National leadership through a network of media literacy champions.	Media literacy programs led and championed by national institutions, e.g National Media Literacy Week, media literacy events.
A national framework for teaching and measuring media literacy.	National survey – all ages, international bench-marking.
Production and circulation of engaging media literacy resources for all Australians.	Support the development of cohesive, accessible, evidence-based and relevant learning resources and programs.

Alliance members will deliver a unified strategy to support the implementation of media literacy initiatives across the academic, school, government, public and cultural sectors. These strategies will ensure media literacy is a key educational outcome across primary, high school, tertiary and adult learning education. National collections play a key role in developing media literacy programs, championing democratic values through authentic experiences. The Alliance will drive increasing scholarship in this field, developing evidence-based approaches and contributing to world-leading research outcomes.

Support media literacy in Australia

Support the work of the Alliance and help us champion media literacy education for all Australians.

Your financial or in-kind support will deliver vital research and program development, including teacher training, program partnerships with key institutions and networked organisations.

Your support will be acknowledged across Alliance materials and products, and by Alliance members in associated products.

Your Australian Media Literacy Alliance contacts

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