



# READING AND LITERACY FOR ALL:

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK  
FOR VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



STATE LIBRARY  
VICTORIA



Public Libraries  
Victoria

# Foreword

---

Reading and literacy are essential life skills for all Victorians. They are the building blocks for lifelong learning, personal development and education.

They help us participate fully in society, fulfil our civic duties and contribute to the economy. They are also our key to entering the wonderful world of stories, poems, plays and other forms of literature, which we can enjoy alone or share with friends and family.

Yet up to one million Victorian adults lack the level of literacy they need to cope with the increasingly complex demands of everyday life and work, and each year, nearly one in seven children start school with below-average language and cognitive abilities.

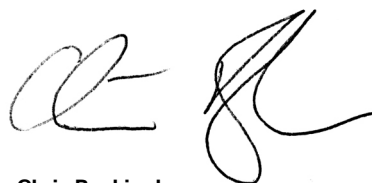
As friendly, accessible community hubs that welcome people who want to read and learn, our public libraries are uniquely positioned to help Victoria meet this challenge. By providing access to books, collections, programs and services that match local needs and interests, they play a key role in encouraging everyone to read for pleasure and expand their literacy skills, regardless of their age, interests or location.

This document explains how the Library Board of Victoria (through State Library Victoria) and Public Libraries Victoria are working together and with partners to implement the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework.

By enhancing reading and literacy levels across the state, the framework will, we hope, ensure every Victorian reaches their personal, social and economic potential.



**John Wylie**  
President  
Library Board of Victoria



**Chris Buckingham**  
President  
Public Libraries Victoria







# Introduction

Victoria's public libraries have nurtured a love of language and reading for more than 165 years.

Our modern library network – which includes Public Libraries Victoria, State Library Victoria and Vision Australia Information Library Service – continues to bring a love of books, language and reading to communities across the state and actively supports literacy development at every stage of life.

Victoria's public libraries have the resources, experiences and people to help improve the community's literacy and reading levels by actively encouraging reading for pleasure and providing literacy programs for all ages and abilities.

This document explains how we will do this.

It describes the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework, why Victoria needs it, and how its success will be measured.

Through the framework, we will:

- define a consistent approach to planning and decision-making across the Victorian public library sector
- set professional standards and expectations for what we can and cannot do
- proactively develop and deliver contemporary community-centred literacy and reading programs
- ensure individuals and communities enjoy the benefits of libraries supporting reading and literacy
- create a platform for partnership development, advocacy and influence
- provide a basis for benchmarking and evaluation so libraries' reading and literacy services can keep improving.

## VICTORIAN LIBRARIES— LEADING THE WAY

Founded in 1854, State Library Victoria was Australia's first public library and one of the first free libraries in the world. Today, Victorian public libraries receive at least 100,000 daily visitors of all ages at more than 270 branches and their associated websites.

Victorian library services are accessible to all. In more than 300 smaller townships and rural areas, mobile, home and community services deliver books and resources to people who cannot reach their local branch, while library websites are available at any time.

What's more, library services have evolved. Members can now borrow audio books and DVDs, attend story-telling sessions, access the internet, improve their English reading skills, enter writing competitions, hear authors speak and much more.

There really is something for everyone.

# Literacy and reader development in the 21st century

---

15.4%<sup>1</sup> Victorian **Prep school students** whose language and cognitive skills make them 'vulnerable' or 'at risk'

19%<sup>2</sup> Australian **Year 4 school students** with below-average literacy skills

39%<sup>3</sup> Victorian **Year 9 school students** below national proficient reading literacy standards

15.4%<sup>4</sup> Victorians aged **15-74 years** with very limited literacy skills

>46%<sup>5</sup> Victorian **adults** without sufficient literacy skills for daily life and work

## WHY LITERACY MATTERS

*‘Schooling and learning is not a race, but if it were, for those students who have no or low literacy skills when they start school, it would be like starting 50 metres behind those with literacy skills and trying to make up that gap. In literacy learning, we know that the gap doesn’t close. Students who are behind at the start will remain behind, unless we do something.’*

**Sue Thomson**, Deputy CEO (Research), Australian Council of Education Research (ACER)<sup>6</sup>

Any form of literacy intervention, especially for children and young people, will significantly improve personal and community wellbeing in the long term, and have a flow-on effect for our national and state economies.

More than one in eight Australians has ‘very limited’ literacy skills, finding it difficult to match text and information or to draw basic conclusions from simple print or digital text.<sup>7</sup> In Victoria, the lives of up to one million people are compromised by it.<sup>8</sup>

Some groups are particularly vulnerable. Research shows that across Australia, literacy skills are lower among Year 4 students who:

- are male
- are Indigenous
- come from a low socioeconomic background
- speak a language other than English at home
- live in a rural area OR
- have fewer books at home<sup>9</sup>.

Having lower than average literacy skills affects a person’s ability to read, interpret, understand and communicate information and ideas, all of which are vital for participating fully in modern life. Often, it means they cannot fulfil their potential at school or work, interact comfortably with other people, or go about their everyday lives with confidence.

### Daily tasks

Adults with low literacy often struggle with daily tasks that others take for granted. For example, it is harder for them to read and write lists, interpret medicine labels, understand road signs and use maps or instruction manuals.

### Social integration

Having low literacy levels can exclude people from society because it limits their ability to understand forms, information and other communications. This prevents them from participating fully in many things, from elections and community events to claiming government entitlements.

*‘Poor levels of literacy ... [are] bad for the economy, bad for society, and – most important – bad for those who have their life potential blighted by an inability to read.’*

**Gail Rebuck**, Chair, Penguin Random House UK<sup>10</sup>

### Work and career prospects:

Low literacy can lead to unemployment or low-paying jobs that provide little or no chance of promotion. Applying for jobs and promotions is harder when you don’t fully understand the process and paperwork.

Over one fifth of school leavers do not have the sufficient literacy and numeracy skills required to be effective employees, a figure that is of growing concern to employers.<sup>11</sup>

Also, OECD data shows that Australia has a lower proportion of adults with high-level literacy skills than many other countries<sup>12</sup>. High-level literacy is a requirement of many complex jobs.

*‘A lack of basic skills can lead to unemployment or low-paying jobs that provide little or no chance of promotion; to political exclusion; and to sustained intergenerational disadvantage.’*

**Phil Rabinowitz**, Co-founder, the Literacy Project <sup>13</sup>

## READING CHANGES LIVES

Reading has many benefits. We know from scientific research and anecdotal evidence that reading for pleasure supports our personal wellbeing and health.

Reading is particularly important for disadvantaged adults as it builds their confidence and skills, which motivates them to continue learning. It also benefits their families because adults who either cannot read or don't enjoy reading are less likely to read with their children, creating a cycle of poor literacy that can last for generations. In fact, reading enjoyment is reportedly more important to a child's educational success than their family's socioeconomic status.<sup>14</sup>

Reading improves our relationships with others and provides insights into ourselves and the world around us. Sharing a favourite book with our family and friends is a bonding experience that builds and strengthens relationships, and develops empathy for others.



### Getting a job

'A young man was printing something then cutting and sticking sentences from one document to another. He looked stressed, so I asked if I could help. He had lost his job and his first child was on the way. He needed to update his resumé but had poor computer skills and low literacy. Together, we quickly typed up a simple resumé. Months later, someone called to me while I was out. I turned around but did not recognise anyone. "My baby was born three weeks ago, and you got me the job. Thank you," said a young man. Then I remembered his face.'

**Librarian**, Mitchell Library



### A new lease on life

'It is the only place where I am asked my opinion and people listen, the only activity where I am not told what to do, what to think or what to say. My body might not be working, but my brain still is.'

**Participant**, aged care reading group, City of Bayside



### Finding your place

'I was approached at the circulation desk one afternoon by a young woman of colour, clutching the graphic novel *Moonstruck* by Grace Ellis that I had put on display. She burst out, "I need the next one! She [the character on the cover] looks just like me!"'

**Librarian**, Hobsons Bay









## Non Fiction / Large Print



# The unique role of Victorian public libraries



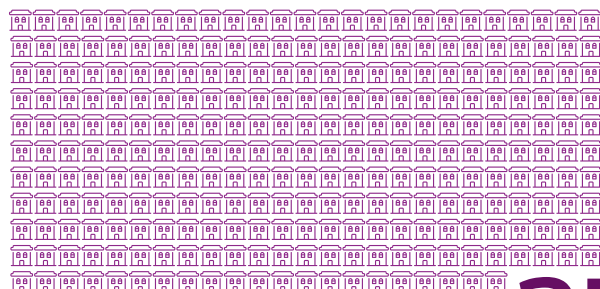
Library services

48



Library members

2.2 million



10 million

Physical and digital items

Library branches

271



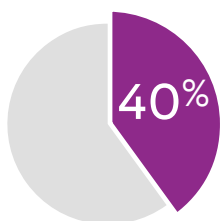
Loans of book and e-books every day

120,000

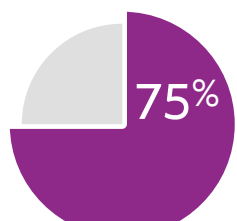


Mobile branches

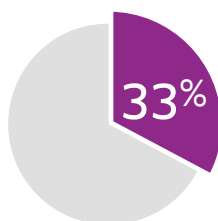
28



Libraries with adult literacy or English language programs



Libraries with book clubs



Libraries with creative writing events

Our public libraries are well-placed to play a significant role in supporting Victoria's reading and literacy goals. They are:

**Free**, with no membership or entry charges

**Open to all**, offering a welcoming, inclusive environment

**Widely accessible**, through local branches, mobile libraries, home and community services, outreach activities and online services

**Well resourced**, so 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

**Responsive**, thanks to knowledgeable and experienced staff who support users' reading, language, information and digital literacy needs

**Trusted**, because they play a non-commercial, non-political and non-judgmental role in the community.



# How libraries improve reading and literacy

Our public libraries provide a huge range of free resources, advice, experiences and reading and literacy programs at branch libraries, in the community and online.

## SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH READING AND LITERACY

*‘Thank you so much for including us. The more children connect with libraries, the more they are interested.’*

**Teacher**, Live Stream Storytime

### PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Collections of children’s books, picture books, board books and audio books
- Books for children with dyslexia
- ‘Baby Book Bags’, ‘Rhyme Time’ and similar programs for children aged under 3 years
- Storytime for kindergarten children
- ‘1000 Books Before School’ and other active reading programs
- Mobile libraries
- Outreach activities e.g. visits to kindergartens and schools
- School holiday programs, homework clubs and tutors
- Youth activities, festivals, manga clubs
- Creative writing events, workshops, competitions, awards and poetry slams

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to support early literacy development and reading enjoyment in Victoria. They provide:

**Books and other reading materials** that families can borrow to read with their children at home.

**Programs** that are designed and delivered to meet best practice standards based on early literacy research (e.g. *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*; *Quality Indicators for Early Years Literacy Programs*) and input from education partners.

**Experienced presenters** with a passion for education and reading.

**Free and open access across the state**, both within libraries and through community outreach programs for families who might not normally visit a library.

For example, every public library runs a version of ‘Storytime’, and every week at least 16,000 pre-school children and their families participate in library-run reading and literacy programs. These create positive reading habits and literacy skills early in life, help families to be effective first teachers, and encourage a love of reading among children, parents and carers.

For young adults, dedicated collections and spaces help to broaden their reading interests and explore different genres, ideas and story-telling techniques. These are complemented by youth-focused activities that include local young adult book clubs and literary festivals, collections of manga and graphic novels, the dedicated youth literature website [Inside a Dog](#), the [Premiers’ Reading Challenge](#), and the [Inky Awards](#), Australia’s only literary prize for young adult literature that is judged by young adults.

## SUPPORTING ADULT READING AND LITERACY

*‘The most cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars is to help someone become a stronger reader. No other investment of public funds comes close in terms of the dividends paid.’*

National Council for Adult Learning<sup>15</sup>

### PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE FOR ADULTS

- Adult literacy programs
- Special collections for low-level literacy adults and non-English speakers
- Access to online adult literacy programs
- Library tours for adult education students
- English language programs e.g. conversation groups, classes and language cafés
- Book clubs that encourage reading and sharing experiences
- Mobile libraries
- Outreach activities e.g. pop-up libraries, home library services and nursing home visits
- Digital literacy programs, support and mentoring
- Author talks, book launches, literary festivals and events

Libraries provide free books and other resources that encourage reading for pleasure beyond childhood, and many of them directly encourage and enable adults with low-level literacy to improve their skills.

Most libraries have targeted adult literacy and/or English language collections and 40 per cent of them provide adult literacy or English language improvement programs. Three quarters of our libraries run book clubs where people can share their reading experiences and one third run creative writing events, competitions or workshops for adults.

## SUPPORTING LIFELONG READING AND LITERACY

As well as providing dedicated resources, Victorian public libraries act as strategic leaders, advocates, service deliverers and collaborative partners for lifelong literacy development by:

- designing and delivering innovative adult literacy activities and programs – often in conjunction with partners – that tackle high priority needs in the community
- leading the development of strategic, integrated community responses to adult literacy needs through networks of local community and education providers
- referring people to programs and support services delivered by local providers and providing space and resources for delivering the programs.

### 1000 BOOKS BEFORE SCHOOL

Victorian public libraries’ ‘[1000 Books Before School](#)’ program encourages parents, carers and grandparents to increase children’s cognitive and language skills by reading library books to them for 5–10 minutes every day before school. From 2016 to 2018, over 59,000 pre-school-aged children read 5.4 million books.

### STORYTIME

Run at every library, ‘Storytime’ sessions help to engage children aged 2–5 years and develop their love of books. Some target special groups; these include bilingual ‘Storytime’ and ‘Storytime’ on YouTube. For children who cannot get to their local library, State Library Victoria broadcasts its ‘Storytime’ live on the [Kindergarten IT website](#) every week.

### CONVERSATION BUDDIES

Many migrants can face barriers when developing their literacy, including low confidence, having nowhere to practice English, or cultural beliefs that discourage talking to strangers. Held at various libraries, ‘Conversation Circles’ offer the opportunity to have a real conversation, and learn from, other migrants.

### OUR STORIES

‘[Our Stories – Greater Dandenong](#)’ is a short story collection created by English learners as a learning tool. Written by Dandenong community members, the stories were developed with a professional storyteller, English language tutors, volunteers and library staff. The writers then read and recorded them on an accompanying CD.

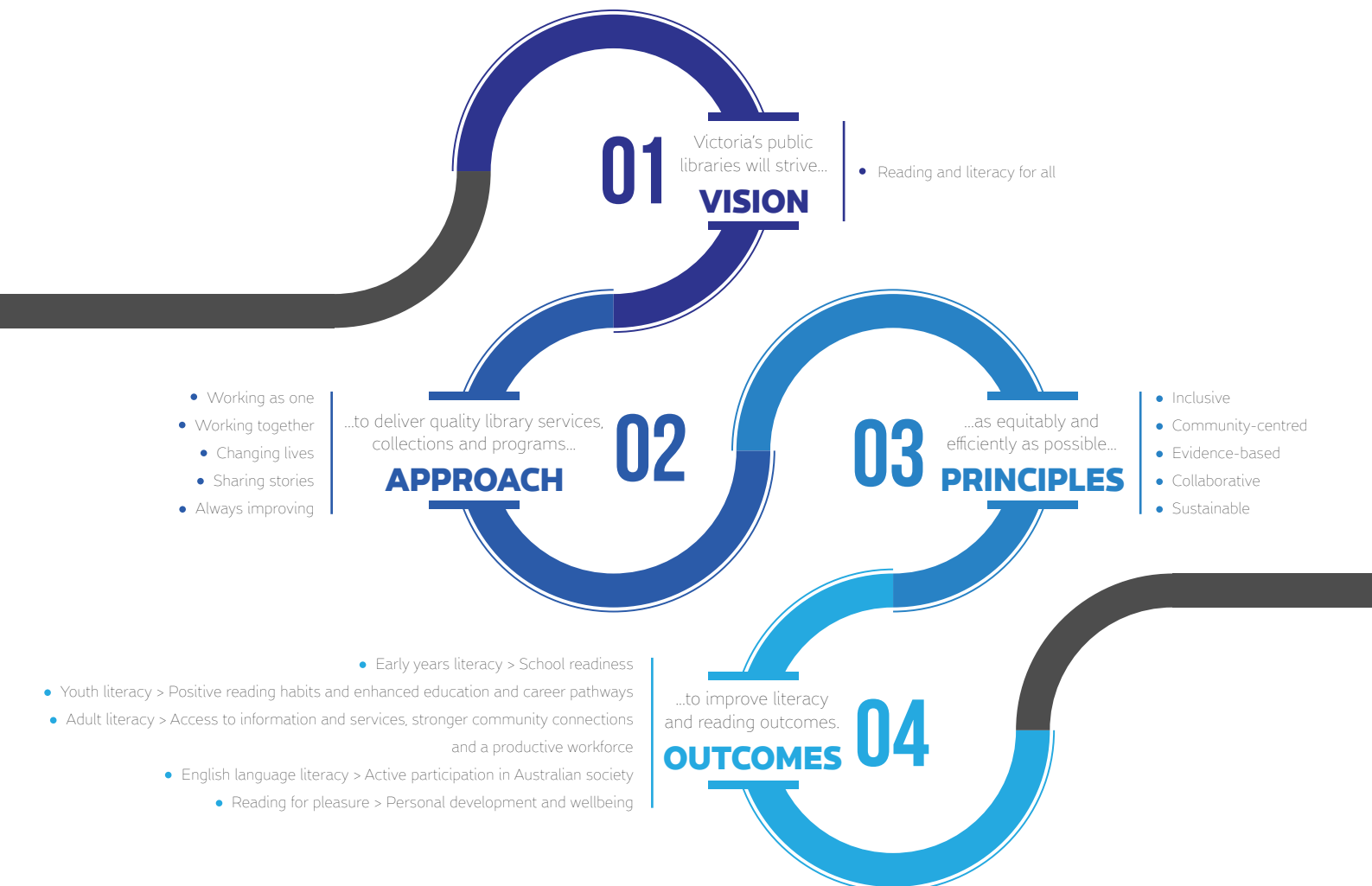


# Our strategic framework

As the strategic framework document shows, Victoria's future prosperity and the lives of many Victorians are compromised by low levels of early year, youth and adult reading and literacy skills.

State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria believe all Victorians should have the opportunity to develop and maintain these skills throughout their lives. By working together and in partnership with other organisations, we will strengthen the library network's contribution to the creation of this opportunity by:

- making a greater contribution to national and state education, economic and social agendas
- improving literacy and reading levels
- helping every Victorian to be informed, enriched and inspired by reading.



## VISION

---

Reading and literacy for all

## APPROACH

---

To make our vision a reality, Victoria's public libraries will take the following approach.

### Working as one

*We will ensure Victorian public libraries consistently deliver quality reader and literacy development services, collections and programs to the community.*

The public library network will work as one to benchmark and continuously improve the quality of reading and literacy programs – sharing knowledge, professional expertise and ideas and fostering innovation.

### Working together

*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 will actively seek out opportunities to partner with other lead organisations.

Every library will explore local partnership opportunities, particularly those that reach out to people of all ages with low-level literacy and people who could benefit from reading more.

### Changing lives

*We will encourage and enable increased levels of reading by individuals – in families and in communities – as a means of sustainably improving literacy and wellbeing outcomes across all life stages.*

Every library will incorporate a focus on reading and literacy outcomes into its strategic and business planning, with regular reviews of reader and literacy development activities.

State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria will provide targeted statewide professional learning support for library staff to improve the reach and quality of reader and literacy development activities.

### Sharing stories

*We will promote the value of reading and its impact on childhood and lifelong personal development and wellbeing.*

State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria will promote the critical role of libraries in creating opportunities for people to increase their reading levels and improve their literacy. This will involve advocacy to national, state and local government, business and community groups and education providers. It will involve capturing and showcasing evidence of increased readership and public libraries' role in achieving it.

### Always improving

*We will develop and implement a cycle of planning, evaluation and continuous improvement.*

Individually and collectively, we will compile and analyse data on participation in, delivery of and impact of reader and literacy development activities.

State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria will use the data to make better decisions, be better at what we do, and make a difference in people's lives.



## PRINCIPLES

---

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:

**Inclusive:** accessible to all people at all stages of life and learning and respect cultural diversity

**Community-centred:** reflect local community context and people's needs, backgrounds, interests and perspectives

**Evidence-based:** grounded in relevant research and contemporary educational thinking and library practice

**Collaborative:** enable community, government, education and business partners to work together to leverage their combined resources and problem-solving capacity to strengthen and extend the reach and impact of library activities

**Sustainably:** designed, resourced and implemented to increase personal and community capacity in a sustainable way.

## OUTCOMES

---

Libraries are the ideal community destination for people to come together to read, to learn, and to learn to read. Together we will strengthen our contribution to national and state education, economic and social agendas, and improved literacy and reading outcomes.

### Early years literacy

- Parents are supported to be their child's first teacher
- Children commence school ready to learn
- Families and communities have wide access to collections, programs and resources that support early years literacy

### Youth literacy

- Intellectual and emotional development and exposure to new ideas blossom as a result of the creation of positive reading habits.
- Access to tertiary and vocational education and work is enhanced as a result of increased literacy

### Adult literacy

- Literacy reduces the impact of social and economic disadvantage
- People can easily access information and the community and government services they need to live healthy, meaningful and productive lives
- People in and entering the workforce have the literacy skills they need

### English language literacy

- People from all language backgrounds can communicate and engage with one another
- Communities accept, embrace and celebrate cultural diversity

### Reading for pleasure

- People of all ages develop a love of reading
- Readers have increased emotional and psychological wellbeing
- Communities are more creative and connected through sharing stories, ideas and experiences

## EVALUATING OUR PROGRESS

As part of the framework, Victoria's public libraries will adopt a consistent and outcome-focused approach to evaluating participation rates and impacts for reading and literacy development activities. Our methodologies will reflect comparable measures used by government, educators, employers and researchers, using measures that reflect:

- a. the direct role and impact of public libraries on reader and literacy development; and/or
- b. the contribution of public libraries to 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 the [State Library Victoria](#) and [Public Libraries Victoria](#) websites.**



# Endnotes





# Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> 2018 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), <https://www.aedc.gov.au/>.
- <sup>2</sup> 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), ACER 2017, <https://research.acer.edu.au/pirls/2/>.
- <sup>3</sup> 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): Reporting Australia's results, ACER 2017, <https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=ozpisa>.
- <sup>4</sup> State and Regional Indicators, Victoria, June 2008, ABS report 1367.2 15/8/2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAC), ABS, 2011-12.
- <sup>6</sup> ACER media release 2016 <https://www.acer.org/id/about-us/news/media-releases/year-4-literacy-improves-but-more-to-be-done-pirls>.
- <sup>7</sup> Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD 2017, <http://www.oecd.org/australia/building-skills-for-all-in-australia-9789264281110-en.htm>.
- <sup>8</sup> State and Regional Indicators, Victoria, June 2008, ABS report 1367.2 15/8/2008.
- <sup>9</sup> 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), ACER 2017, <https://research.acer.edu.au/pirls/2/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Reading and literacy for all: Adult Literacy – Victorian Public Libraries in Action, SLV/PLVN 2016.
- <sup>11</sup> Workforce Development Needs Survey, Australian Industry Group, 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First results from the survey of adult skills, [https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20\(eng\)-full%20v12-eBook%20\(04%2011%202013\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20(eng)-full%20v12-eBook%20(04%2011%202013).pdf).
- <sup>13</sup> Reading and literacy for all: Adult Literacy – Victorian Public Libraries in Action, SLV/PLVN 2016.
- <sup>14</sup> Research evidence on reading for pleasure, Education Standards Research Team, UK Department of Education, May 2012.
- <sup>15</sup> Public Libraries and Adult Education, National Council for Adult Learning, 2017, <http://ncalamerica.org/blog/public-libraries-adult-education/>.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original strategic framework was developed by State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria through a series of statewide consultation workshops involving:

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

The framework update was informed by a consultation workshop with representatives of Public Libraries Victoria and State Library Victoria.

## PROJECT TEAM

**Project sponsor** ..... Debra Rosenfeldt, State Library Victoria

**Project management** ... Jacqui Horwood, State Library Victoria

**Writers** ..... Ian Phillips

**Editor** ..... Jane Clement

**Design** ..... Chocolate Designs

## PROJECT WORKGROUP

Jenny Fink, Ballarat Libraries

Rebecca Henson, State Library Victoria

Libby Kotschet, Murrindindi Libraries

Danielle Marie, Brimbank Libraries

Katie Norton, Whitehorse Manningham Libraries

Kathie Olden, West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation

Genimaree Panozzo, Moreland Libraries

Anne-Maree Pfabe, Melbourne Library Service

Carole Smith, Darebin Libraries

Loueen Twyford, Wangaratta Library

### Address inquiries to:

Library Sector Engagement

State Library Victoria

328 Swanston Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

Australia

Telephone +61 3 8664 7000

[slv.vic.gov.au](http://slv.vic.gov.au)

This report is available online from State Library Victoria, [slv.vic.gov.au](http://slv.vic.gov.au), and Public Libraries Victoria, [publiclibrariesvictoria.net.au/](http://publiclibrariesvictoria.net.au/).

© 2019 State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and subsequent amendments, and no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means or process whatsoever with the prior written permission of the publisher.

Photographs supplied courtesy of Victorian public libraries and used with permission.

ISBN 978-0-9808754-8-5

