



STATE LIBRARY
VICTORIA

PUBLIC LIBRARIES FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION

Strengthening community wellbeing through places,
programs, people and partnerships



Public Libraries
Victoria

sva | consulting

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

State Library Victoria acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present Traditional Custodians and Elders of this country on which we work.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: WHY, HOW, AND THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Libraries change lives: why public libraries are needed

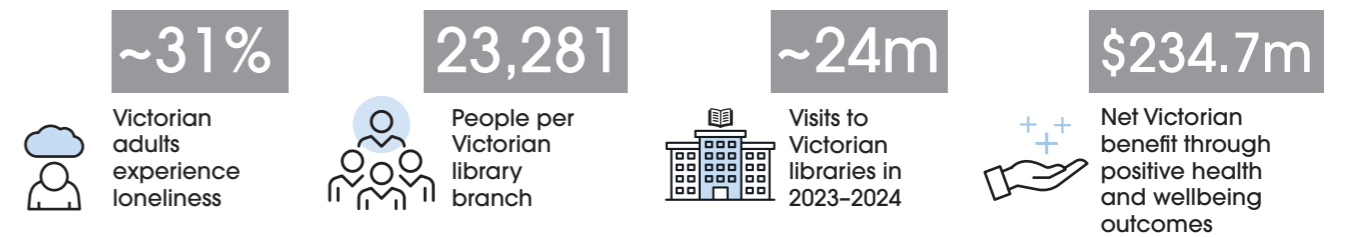


Figure 1: Key statistics informing this work¹

Social connection is not a luxury; it's a public health necessity.

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies social connection as a key determinant of health, on par with physical and mental wellbeing.² Globally, 1 in 6 people experience loneliness.³ Almost 1 in 3 Australians feel lonely, and 1 in 6 are experiencing severe loneliness.⁴

Public libraries are an essential part of social infrastructure.

Open to all, deeply embedded in local communities, and trusted by the people they serve, libraries offer a great deal in addition to books. The WHO Commission on Social Connection (2025) report identifies libraries as part of the social infrastructure of communities.⁵ They provide welcoming spaces, inclusive programs, and skilled staff who foster belonging and connection. Libraries link individuals to their communities and connect local action to broader social outcomes.

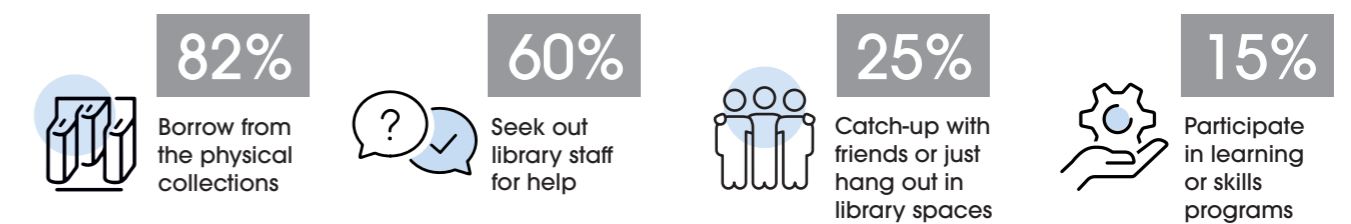


Figure 2: Reasons why library users reported visiting the library⁶

Libraries strengthen social infrastructure and social opportunities.

Intentionally designed for social interaction and accessibility, libraries support participation in civic life, relationship building, connection with culture and country, and access to information. Their role is especially important for those at risk of exclusion, including older adults, young people, First Nations peoples and culturally diverse communities.⁷ The Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report (2021–2022) indicated there were 1,706 library outlets across Australia, or 1 per 14,901 people. This is almost a third more public libraries than there were McDonalds (1,034 outlets) in the same period.⁸

The value is clear.

Social value assessments underscore the powerful impact of public library investment. According to the Libraries Work! (2018) report, every dollar allocated to public library services yields an impressive \$4.30 in broader community gains, spurring growth in gross regional product, creating jobs, and enriching educational outcomes.⁹ Another study from 2023 found that each dollar invested in public libraries generates \$1.98 in individual and community wellbeing benefits.¹⁰ Together, these figures demonstrate the strong social and economic return on investment, and provide further evidence that libraries are not just cultural institutions, but vital community assets that deliver measurable economic and social value. Investing in public libraries strengthens local economies, fosters social connection, and supports community wellbeing. Libraries provide safe and inclusive spaces where people can learn, connect, and access essential services – contributing to more resilient, informed, and engaged communities.



How libraries build social connection

When you come here it's not just about doing art and learning something, it's about being with other people and socialising.

– Library participant¹²

Libraries nurture social connection through four core activities:

- ▶ **Places:** Libraries offer free, safe, inclusive spaces, both physical and digital, where people can gather, spend time and connect to each other. Evidence from the WHO report shows that poorly built environments (such as limited public spaces and inadequate transport) are linked to higher rates of loneliness, while societies with strong public social infrastructure report lower levels of isolation.¹¹
- ▶ **Programs:** Libraries run diverse, inclusive programs and activities that bring people together, provide opportunities for social connection, and support lifelong learning.
- ▶ **People:** Library staff play a vital role in fostering connection through respectful, whole-person-centred service.
- ▶ **Partnerships:** Libraries work with other organisations to extend their reach and respond to community needs.



Figure 3: Core library activities in 2023-2024, places, programs, people, and partnerships¹³

This work happens at both local and system levels. Local libraries tailor programs and services to their communities, while State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria (PLV) provide leadership, coordination, and sector-wide advocacy, forming a network that supports social connection across Victoria.

The power of public libraries: measuring their impact on social connection

Libraries can use this report as both an advocacy resource and a practical guide – drawing on the evidence, principles, and tools it contains to plan services, measure outcomes, build partnerships, and communicate their social impact to councils, funders and the wider community.

This report outlines two complementary approaches designed to be used in conjunction with other existing tools:

- ▶ **Public Library Toolkit:** Practical principles that outline ready-to-use templates and tools for library staff to collect evidence and tell powerful stories of impact.
- ▶ **Statewide Measurement:** A coordinated approach to evaluating key programs like Storytime and the Home Library Service.

By implementing the approaches outlined in the report sections 'The power of public libraries: measuring their impact on social connection' and 'Social connection principles for public libraries', libraries can enhance their role in building social connection. These strategies are designed to be flexible and scalable, aligning with the capacity of the sector. They empower libraries to advocate, raise public awareness of their value, inform service design but also to clearly demonstrate their critical impact on community cohesion and ultimately strengthening their case for increased funding to sustain and expand these essential activities.

Building connection, belonging, and community wellbeing

Social connection is now recognised globally as a public health priority – and public libraries are among Victoria's most powerful frontline tools to address loneliness and isolation.

This report demonstrates how libraries foster connection through places, programs, people and partnerships, and provides the tools and principles needed to measure and communicate their impact.

To unlock their full potential, libraries need sustained investment and recognition as essential social infrastructure embedded in Victoria's health and wellbeing agenda. By investing in libraries, we invest in healthier, more resilient communities – and a more connected future for all Victorians.



BACKGROUND: PUBLIC LIBRARIES AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

As trusted, inclusive, and accessible spaces, public libraries are already doing the vital work of supporting social connection and treating others with empathy. They act as central social infrastructure, places where people gather, learn, and connect. An important part of this is their work strengthening community infrastructure as

frontline hubs responding to emerging contexts, such as AI-driven changes, digital disruption and the transformation of employment. Embedded in local communities and linked to government through funding and partnerships, libraries are uniquely positioned to advance Victoria's mental health and wellbeing priorities.

State Library Victoria, Public Libraries Victoria and the library sector

Opened in 1856 as 'the Melbourne Public Library', State Library Victoria is Australia's oldest public library and one of the first free public libraries in the world.¹⁴ Envisioned by founders as a 'great emporium of learning'¹⁵, the Library is a leader in learning, knowledge and culture, and a trusted source of information. Its civic spaces are a vibrant hub of activity in the heart of the city, anchored by free access to the collection, a full program of exhibitions, conversations and events.¹⁶

State Library Victoria sits within the Creative Industries portfolio, overseen by Creative Victoria, part of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. To meet its legislative responsibilities and its strategic goals,¹⁷ the Library provides leadership across Victoria's public library network and maintains strong connections with local, national and international libraries, including participation in both the Australian Library and Information Association, and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. State Library Victoria leads, connects and collaborates across the broader library and information landscape, partnering with galleries, archives, museums, educational institutions, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations. These relationships strengthen knowledge sharing, collective initiatives and help extend the range of services available to the Victorian public.

THERE ARE 302 LIBRARY BRANCHES IN VICTORIA ACROSS 51 SERVICES (INCLUDING NETWORKS)

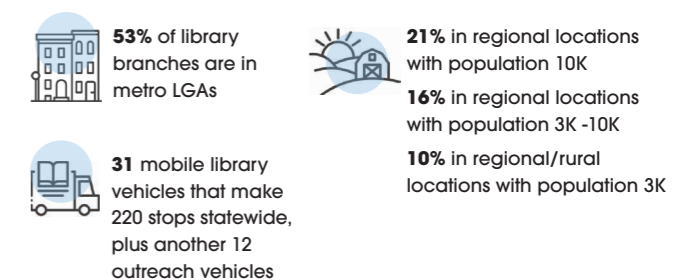
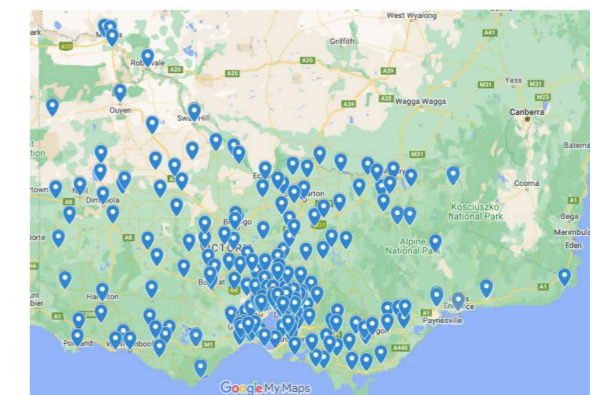


Figure 4: Map of Victoria with approximate distribution of public libraries

State Library Victoria has a long-standing, strategic collaboration with public libraries across Victoria. Public Libraries Victoria (PLV) is the peak body for public libraries in the state, supporting member libraries to maximise the value they deliver to communities.¹⁸ Central to the success of the collaboration between the Library and PLV are the individual public library services that serve communities across Victoria. Victorians of all ages rely on their public libraries for free, universal access to resources that enhance literacy, wellbeing and social connectedness.¹⁹

"Victoria needs to be a place where people look out for one another, build social connections, and treat others with empathy."²⁰

Public libraries, wellbeing and social connection

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to address significant public health concerns around loneliness and isolation. They provide free and equitable access to opportunities for social connection, supporting the health and wellbeing of communities across Victoria.

The Libraries for Health and Wellbeing: A strategic framework for Victoria public libraries towards 2024 (2021) report positions public libraries as places that “empower, support and connect communities and partners for a healthy and thriving Victoria.”²¹ Libraries contribute to the health and wellbeing of their communities in three key areas:



Figure 5: Libraries impact areas

Good mental health and wellbeing is not just about the absence of mental illness; it is the ability to fully and effectively participate in society.²⁴

This report focuses on social connection, exploring why and how libraries play a crucial role in fostering social wellbeing – a recognised determinant of health.²²

The Victorian Government takes a whole-of-community, prevention-focused approach to mental health and wellbeing. This direction was set out in the landmark Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021),²³ which called for a reimagined system that supports the whole person, not just clinical services, but by fostering social connection, inclusion, and community (place) based support.

Key milestones in Victoria's mental health and wellbeing reform agenda:

- **2021:** Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System delivers its final report, calling for a reimagined system that supports the whole person, not just clinical services, by fostering social connection, inclusion, and community-based support.
- **2022:** Establishment of the Wellbeing Promotion Office, tasked with driving whole-of-government efforts to promote mental wellbeing.
- **2022:** Launch of the Victorian Social Prescribing Collaborative, recognising the role of non-clinical supports, including public libraries, in improving mental health through social connection and community engagement.
- **2020–2023:** Libraries for Health and Wellbeing Innovation Grants, delivered in partnership between State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria, aimed to enhance public library contributions to community health and wellbeing.²⁵ The grants supported various initiatives, including mental health literacy workshops and wellbeing-focused community events.
- **2023:** Evaluation of early library-based social prescribing initiatives demonstrates impact on community mental health and social connection, underscoring the positive impact of library services on community health.²⁶
- **2024:** Expansion of library wellbeing programs statewide, supported by Victorian Government funding through the Statewide Development Projects 2023-2026. This includes extension of the Libraries for Health and Wellbeing program, aiming to further enrich the sector's impact on community health and wellbeing. Key initiatives include updating the strategic framework and conducting research on the role of public libraries in fostering social connections.²⁷
- **2024–2025:** Greater integration of public libraries into formal mental health networks and Primary Health Network referral pathways, recognising them as key partners in community wellbeing.²⁸
- **2025:** Growing recognition from the Victorian Government and Primary Health Networks of the social prescribing initiatives delivered by libraries.²⁹

WHY PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE VITAL FOR NURTURING SOCIAL CONNECTION



Social connection is a cornerstone of individual and community wellbeing.³⁰ It helps people feel safe, valued and part of something larger than themselves. When people are connected, they're more likely to thrive, mentally, physically and emotionally. In an increasingly fragmented and digital world, fostering genuine human connection is not just beneficial, it's essential.³¹

Why is social connection important?

Social connection is not a luxury – it's a public health imperative. The WHO (2025) equates the health risks of loneliness to smoking and obesity.³² In Victoria, 1 in 3 residents report feeling lonely, with women disproportionately affected (42%).³³ The economic toll of social isolation and loneliness can be substantial including reduced workforce participation, increased healthcare costs, and diminished wellbeing. For example, in Spain, the estimated cost of loneliness in 2021 was 14 billion euros (including health-care costs, productivity losses and losses in wellbeing).³⁴

Different cohorts are at risk of, and experience loneliness differently across their life.³⁵

Evidence shows that First Nations peoples experience disproportionately high levels of social isolation, emotional distress and disrupted community connection,³⁶ all of which are key indicators of elevated loneliness risk.

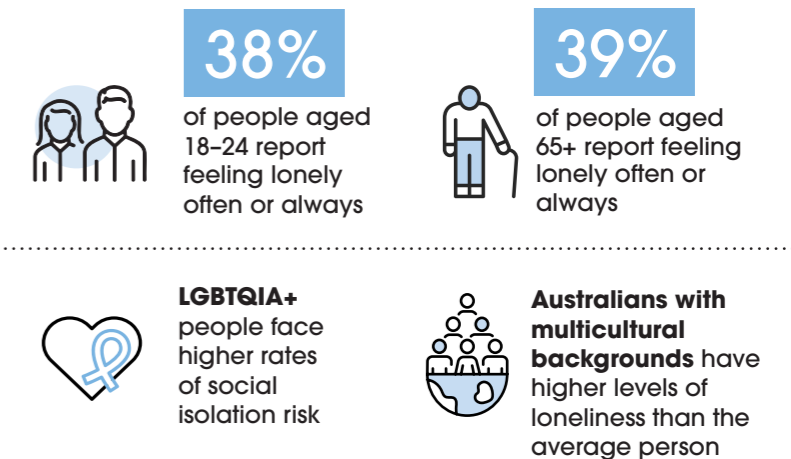


Figure 6: Cohorts at risk of, or experiencing loneliness

Strong social infrastructure provides opportunities for social connection

Successful social infrastructure enables people to connect to Country and culture, feel safe, empowered, included and as though they belong in a place.³⁷ People forge bonds in places that have healthy social infrastructure – not because they set out to build community but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow.³⁸



Public libraries are a proven solution

Libraries work at the intersection of people, purpose, and place. Public libraries uphold strong ethical standards through the Australian Library and Information Association and contribute to global leadership via active participation in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. These bodies champion equitable access to information, foster inclusivity and continuous improvement, ensuring libraries remain trusted future-focused and responsive public spaces.

They are free, inclusive, and universally accessible institutions, embedded in every community. This means they bring together diverse people and uses within the same shared infrastructure – supporting different needs, addressing inequality, and helping build trust across communities. Libraries are positioned as frontline hubs supporting the transformation of employment and future ways of working. Many provide access to technology either with computers, labs or other programs and resources supporting workforce readiness. They also connect people to local services, support organisations and specialist agencies. Including building digital and health literacy, strengthening inclusion and bringing diverse groups together.³⁹

Public libraries deliver measurable outcomes: they increase community participation and engagement, reduce loneliness and isolation, and improve wellbeing by creating safe spaces, fostering connection to Country, culture, belonging, and building trust.

Libraries deliver what communities need

Libraries are not passive buildings, they are dynamic social and physical infrastructure driving participation, wellbeing and resilience. They help build stronger, more connected communities by providing:

- welcoming places to gather, dwell, connect to Country, and form social connections
- programs, activities and initiatives that spark engagement, support connection to culture, and reduce social isolation
- physical and digital resources that support individuals and communities access information and technology, supporting upskilling and literacy (including digital)
- staff who treat users with respect and inclusiveness, sustaining meaningful relationships by understanding individual needs and fostering trust
- partnerships that connect sectors, enabling libraries to work at community intersections such as local health, education, and social inclusion strategies (for example, the VicHealth 10 Year Strategy 2023-2033)⁴⁰
- support impact at scale, achieved through a trusted, accessible and effective statewide network, public libraries collectively serve all Victorians and can deliver coordinated responses to complex social challenges.⁴¹

LIBRARY USERS

There were almost 23 million visits to public libraries between 2023-2024. According to the Victorian Public Library Census (2022):⁴²

- 84% of visitors reported holding a library membership
- 183 different languages were spoken by library users
- 43% full-time or part-time employed, 36% retired and 2% jobseekers were using library services
- all age groups were represented: 30% were aged 17 years and under, 28% were between 25-59 years, 18% were 50-69 years, and over 17% were aged 70 years or older
- between 2023-2024, 5% of library programs were focused on informed and connected citizens.⁴³

PARTNERS

Partnerships at the local level look very different from library to library, however all partnerships support local communities.

- 3,334 local partnerships with businesses, education or community organisations between 2023-2024.⁴⁴

As highly trusted sources of information, government benefits from being associated with libraries.

Clear return on investment

Investing in public libraries delivers economic and social value. Public libraries are valuable social infrastructure, supporting vibrant, connected and inclusive civic life in Victoria's communities.

On a national scale, Australia's social infrastructure sectors contributed 12.5% of Australia's GDP in 2018.⁴⁵

Economic activity generated by Victorian public libraries equates to approximately \$328 million in gross regional product.⁴⁶ This figure includes direct and indirect economic impacts, such as spending on library services, increased workforce participation, and improved community wellbeing.

Social value assessments show the powerful impact of public library investment. According to the Libraries Work! (2018) report, every dollar allocated to public library services yields an impressive \$4.30 in broader community gains, spurring growth in gross regional product, creating jobs, and enriching educational outcomes.⁴⁷

In 2023, research revealed that each dollar invested in public libraries generates \$1.98 in individual and community wellbeing benefits. Improving an individual's subjective health and wellbeing by 8%.⁴⁸ The total annual benefits of public libraries are double the costs of running them, resulting in a net benefit of \$234.7 million towards Victorian health and wellbeing each year.⁴⁹ These results align with other studies on the social value created by libraries and library programs, in Australia and overseas.⁵⁰ While each study deploys distinct methodologies and direct comparisons are not possible, together they paint a vivid picture: public libraries deliver outstanding value for money. One study highlights the widespread socio-economic benefits, while the other quantifies improvements in personal wellbeing and substantial savings for the health system.

Importantly, these monetary estimates only scratch the surface, they remain conservative figures that do not fully capture the profound, enduring contributions libraries and their partners make to the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of individuals and communities. These findings provide robust evidence for advocacy, showcasing libraries as indispensable engines of societal progress.

Public Libraries Theory of Change

Strengthening community wellbeing through places, programs, people and partnerships



Places

Welcoming, accessible, and thoughtfully designed physical environments—both inside and outside—that encourage gathering, interaction, and belonging, are safe and support wide range of programs or activities.

Programs

Inclusive, responsive activities and services (e.g., physical collections, digital resources, literacy, cultural events, outreach) designed to meet community needs. Programs provide opportunities for connection, enhance learning, knowledge, and support empowerment and equity.

People

Librarians and staff committed to care, inclusion, and community-building; diverse library users from all backgrounds and abilities. Providing continuous care – relational work for people coming into libraries.

Partnerships

The public, private and philanthropic partners working with public libraries to meet community needs.

OUTCOMES

LIBRARY USERS

Inclusive approaches support lifelong learning

Spend time with diverse cohorts

Growing social connections

Improved understanding

Enhanced social skills

Increased confidence

Expanded potential

GOVERNMENT

Greater accessibility and equity

Improved community perception

Stronger social infrastructure

PARTNERS

Improved opportunities for collaboration

Increased reach

Have greater ability to respond to community need

SHARED LIBRARY AND PARTNERS

A strong sense of belonging

Feel safe and welcome in library spaces

Trusted partnerships

Improved access to aggregated data

HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTION



Public libraries are not just buildings or online platforms; they are engines of social connection



Across Victoria, libraries deliver measurable social impact by:

- Creating inclusive places that foster belonging and civic participation
- Delivering diverse programs that reduce isolation and build resilience
- Empowering people, with library staff acting as vital community connectors
- Forging strategic partnerships that amplify reach and drive innovation.

Across Victoria (metropolitan, regional and rural), public libraries are trusted civic anchors. In 2023-24 visitation rose by 14%, compared with 2022-23.⁵²

I love my local library. It is a place where I felt welcome from day one – I was an immigrant, and this gave me a sense of belonging when everything felt foreign and different.

– Library user ⁵¹

Places that connect

Public libraries are essential social infrastructure, offering inclusive physical and digital spaces that foster connection, belonging, and civic participation. They provide two complementary types of social infrastructure:

- **Physical places:** the free, safe, welcoming environments designed for people of all backgrounds to gather, learn, and connect. They support lifelong learning and encourage social inclusion.⁵³ Open layouts, flexible lounge-style seating, on-site cafes, dedicated children’s areas and accessible design⁵⁴ invite both casual interaction and focused engagement.⁵⁵
- **Digital spaces:** online platforms, tools, and hybrid programs extend social connection beyond the library building. These digital offerings ensure that no one is left behind in an increasingly online world, bridging the digital divide and supporting access, skills development, and connection.

Modern libraries are no longer solely repositories of knowledge – they are dynamic, tech-enabled community spaces responding to community priorities.⁵⁶ From makerspaces to allied health service points, libraries adapt to support wellbeing, inclusion and innovation. The 2023-24 PLV survey found that 31 library services now offer a ‘Library of Things’ to their community enabling the sharing of resources beyond books and information.⁵⁷ Digital engagement is also surging: in 2023-24, library users spent 1.45 million hours on library computers (an 18% increase), and 4.4 million people launched the Libraries Victoria app.⁵⁸

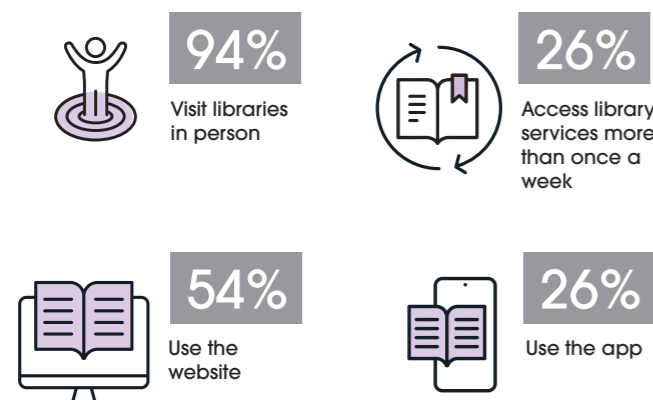


Figure 7: Library usage

Programs that drive inclusion

(includes all library projects, activities and initiatives)

Library programs are powerful tools for connection, bringing people together through inclusive, purpose driven activities that respond to local needs. Across Victoria, libraries deliver a wide range of programs – from digital literacy and language groups to intergenerational storytelling, youth programs that go beyond study groups to explore creative activities such as writing, art, and music-making.

Programs are designed to reflect the diverse identities and circumstances of their users, considering factors like age, culture, ability, and income to ensure everyone feels welcome and supported.⁵⁹ One third (33%) of programs are targeted at adults and 6% are intended to appeal to people of all ages.⁶⁰

Programs are delivered in-person, online, or in hybrid formats to maximise access. They bridge gaps by providing resources and opportunities (social connection, education and development) that some participants might not otherwise access. Most programs 52% focus on literacy and lifelong learning, however digital inclusion (16%), AI transformation and digital upskilling is positioning libraries as frontline hubs supporting digital literacy, technology access and workforce readiness. Other programs focus on personal development (13%) as a key priority and are supporting individuals engaging directly with AI-driven changes and adapting to the transformation of employment.⁶¹ The majority of programs (85%) are delivered at the library by library staff.⁶²

By embedding opportunities for interaction into every program, libraries reduce isolation and build social cohesion.⁶³

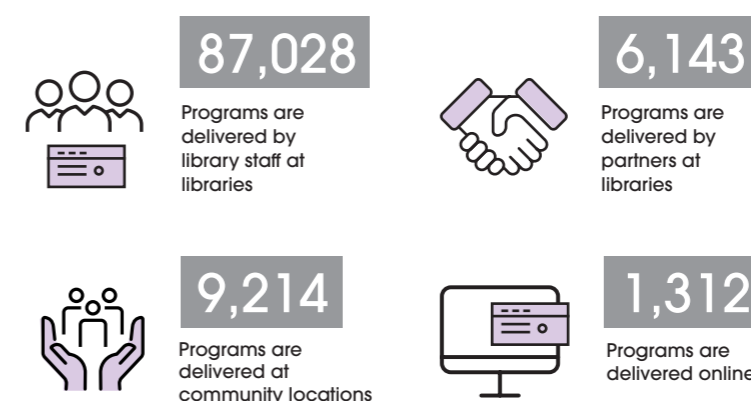


Figure 8: Modes of delivery

Supporting libraries and staff for stronger communities

Balance service demands: Libraries are increasingly frontline access points for public services. Government should allocate resources to ensure libraries can maintain core social connection programs while supporting users with tasks like Centrelink applications and government registrations.

Protect staff wellbeing: Clear boundaries and manageable workloads are essential to prevent burnout. Targeted training, including trauma-informed care, equips staff to respond effectively to complex situations.

People who make it work

Library staff are the heart of connection. They build trust, offer support, and engage with users in ways that help foster social connections and create spaces where everyone feels seen, safe, and valued.⁶⁴

People use libraries for far more than borrowing books or finding information; they come to connect, seek support, and feel part of a community.⁶⁵

I can borrow books and the staff always say hello to my baby and talk to him. This means a lot when we have otherwise been stuck at home all day.

- Library user⁶⁶

The work of public-facing staff is relational, not transactional. Every day, they support users with care, empathy and expertise.⁶⁷ More than 74% of Victorians say library staff help foster a sense of safety and belonging.⁶⁸

Ever since I picked up my first good book at the library it's changed my life for the better... The librarians and the communities in the library are so positive and open minded to everything, it makes you feel right at home.

- Library user⁶⁹



Much of the vital work that enables libraries to foster social connection (planning, coordination, and relational care) happens behind the scenes,⁷⁰ and often goes unnoticed until funding lapses. Public libraries frequently serve as vital connectors between communities and government services, sometimes directly providing in-person support on behalf of state and federal agencies, while in other cases facilitating access without direct service delivery. Ongoing investment across all levels of government into public libraries is essential to sustain and strengthen these critical roles. Relying solely on local council risks cost-shifting and threatens the sustainability of libraries as critical infrastructure.



Figure 9: Relationship of library staff assistance with health and wellbeing outcomes⁷¹

Partnerships that amplify impact

The work our library team do out in our community by bringing library services to residents who cannot attend in person is highly valued.

– Campaspe Shire Council Mayor, Cr Rob Amos on the impact of library social prescribing program with allied health partners ⁷³

Libraries are trusted community connectors, working with partners to extend reach, amplify impact, and respond to local and statewide priorities. With a strong reputation as a trusted, community-oriented icon, libraries are naturally attractive to a range of partners. In 2023-24 Victorian libraries worked with over 3,300 local partners.⁷²

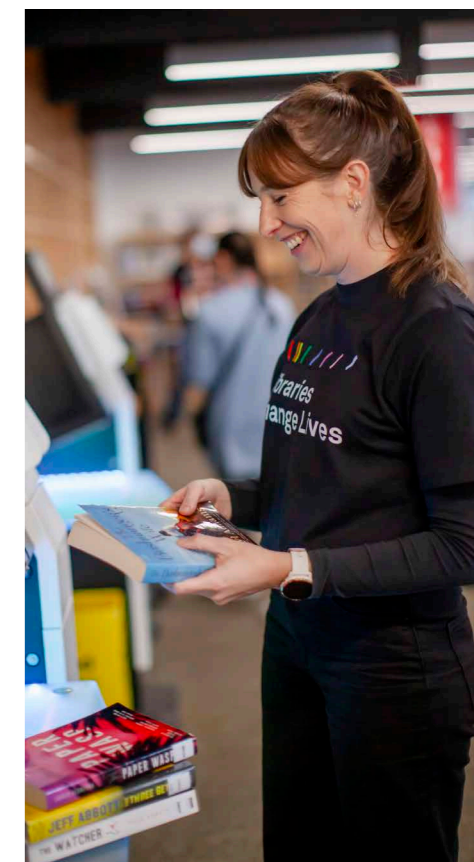
Beyond their collections and event spaces, libraries have a strong focus on community impact. Libraries collaborate across public, private, and philanthropic sectors to deliver programs that meet emerging needs and support specific cohorts. Their reputation as safe, inclusive, and community-driven spaces makes them ideal platforms for partnership.

Libraries play a vital role in bridging the gap created by the shift of government and business services to online platforms. Rather than serving as direct service providers, libraries act as connectors, linking individuals to specialist services and resources. Each library tailors its partnerships to address the unique needs of its local community, ensuring that support is accessible and relevant. This can include:

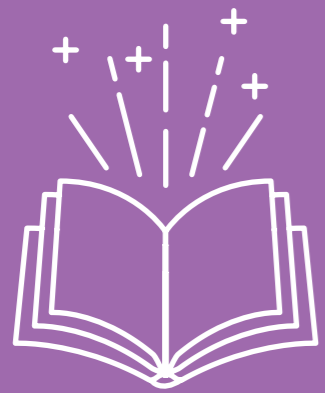
- acting as gateways to community
- providing neutral spaces for civic engagement
- supporting early intervention aligned with state frameworks.

Libraries translate policy into action, delivering on the goals of:

- **Libraries for Health and Wellbeing Innovation Grants** – demonstrate how libraries support projects targeting improvements to community health and wellbeing. Since 2020, 24 strategic projects have been funded across Victoria, tailored to local community needs.⁷⁴
- **Statewide Mental Health and Wellbeing Service and Capital Plan (2024-2037)** – Victoria’s first comprehensive plan for mental health infrastructure. Libraries are recognised as an intersecting service under the broader government and community service stream. Libraries provide safe, accessible spaces for early engagement, social connection, and mental health initiatives, supporting community-centred care and expanding access to mental health services across the state.⁷⁵
- **Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF)** – guides Victorian Government investment in early intervention programs and prioritises addressing issues early to improve outcomes and reduce long-term costs. Libraries deliver programs targeting early childhood development, literacy, and social support for vulnerable communities.⁷⁶
- **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework** – supports professionals who work with children aged 0 – 8 years of age.⁷⁷ Libraries support this work with free access to board books, picture books and early readers, and programs promoting language and literacy development supports this framework. In 2023-2024, nearly 15,000 children and more than 12,000 adults attended early years programs each week.⁷⁸



The library social connection journey



STORYTIME (Caregiver and child)

Librarian / library staffer



- Selects Storytime book to suit local audience
- Sets up space and props for Storytime
- Plans effective ice-breakers to encourage carer interaction

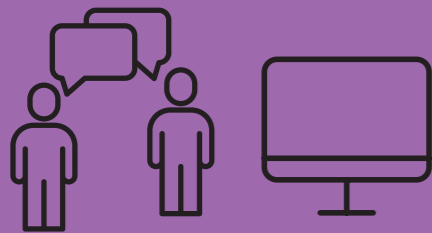
7. Lasting impact



- ▲ Greater confidence, establishes a routine and builds sense of belonging in local community

Awareness

Learns about Storytime and the services and supports available at libraries for carers of children



Word of mouth

From friends who've been

Flyer

From the Maternal Child Health Nurse

Website

Looks up the library website to see what is on and when

1.



2. Anticipation

Feels hopeful it will be a good experience, unsure what to expect

3.

Travel / access

Prepares to attend the program, travels to library



4. Experience

- ▶ Feels welcome into library spaces
- ▶ Participates in the library program
- ▶ Connects with other parents and carers
- ▶ Spends time after program browsing library spaces

5. Departure

Leaves feeling uplifted and with more familiarity and comfort attending library

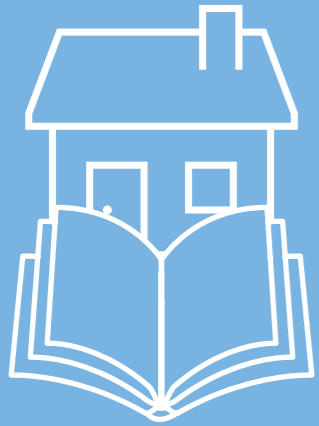
6.

Return planning

Tells others and plans to return to participate in the program(s)



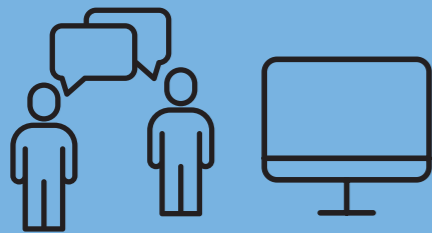
The library social connection journey



HOME LIBRARY SERVICE (Isolated adults)

Awareness

Learns about the Home Library Service via council or community worker



Word of mouth

From community worker

Flyer

From library in local council newspaper

Website

Looks up the library website to see what is on and when

1.



2. Anticipation

Feels curious about how it works, but unsure

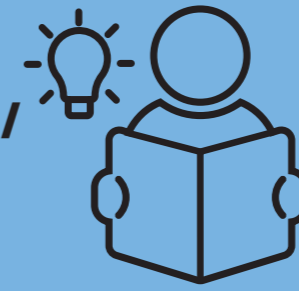
3.

Travel / access

Waits for a home visit following registration



Librarian / library staffer / volunteer



- Collects prepared materials for client
- Considers what other related titles or authors might be of interest
- Thinks through some conversation starters or things to chat about in advance of home visit

4. Experience



- Feels excited to welcome staff into home
- Spends time chatting to staff over a cup of tea at the kitchen table
- Feels welcome into library program by staff
- Receives material from staff

5. Departure

After the staff have left, feels positive about the experience and excited to read books



7. Lasting impact

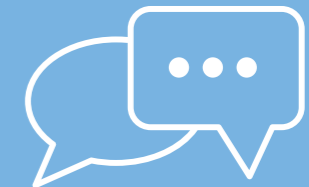


Reduced isolation, feels more connection to community and experience ongoing social support

6.

Return planning

Tells others and prepares for next visit



THE POWER OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES - MEASURING THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIAL CONNECTION



Why measurement is critical

Public libraries are delivering real, measurable impacts on social connection, but to secure sustained investment, it must be proven. Measuring social connection is complex. Global authorities including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, WHO, and the UN Commission on Social Connection highlight critical gaps in data, terminology, and evidence – especially for diverse and younger cohorts.⁷⁹ They call for:

- clearer definitions and consistent terminology
- evidence on effective interventions
- inclusive data across all age groups
- national strategies and global indices to track progress.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to address these priorities. Their programs directly foster connection, reduce isolation, and build community resilience. Yet, without robust and consistent approaches to measurement, this impact remains under-recognised by governments, funders, and partners.

Social Value: measuring what really matters

Social value is about understanding the importance people place on changes to their wellbeing and using these insights to make better decisions. It is an approach to understanding, measuring and valuing the changes created by programs, organisations and businesses that puts people at the centre. In practice, 'putting people at the centre' means asking people affected by change what the change means to them. The Principles of Social Value can guide the approach to doing this in a meaningful and credible way.⁸⁰

Understanding and measuring social value helps ensure that decision-making goes beyond simple financial metrics to capture the outcomes and benefits that are most valued by individuals and communities. Analysis has found that investing in public libraries generates a positive social return on investment by creating value for communities, improving the subjective health and wellbeing of Victorian adults engaging with them by 8%.⁸¹ Libraries can build on this evidence base by collecting their own data on the impact and social value of their work to nurture social connection in their communities.

This report recommends two strategic approaches to capture and communicate impact:

- 1 Public Library Toolkit:** A highly practical toolkit that public libraries can use to gather and use data to understand and demonstrate their impact
- 2 Statewide measurement:** Collaborating to measure and demonstrate the impact of Statewide activities

Each strategy is described below, with further guidance and tools in the Appendix.

Public Library Toolkit: empowering libraries to measure and showcase local impact

Library staff are already creating social value but often lack the time and resources to measure it. Designed to complement existing measurement approaches, the Public Library Toolkit provides a practical, modular framework libraries can tailor to be used alongside existing approaches to collect and communicate their impact.

Key tools:

1. **Public Libraries Theory of Change:** visually demonstrates how libraries bring together places, programs, people and partnerships to create changes for key stakeholders.
2. **Case study template:** a standard format that can be used to capture stories of programs and initiatives that build connection.
3. **Observation template:** records meaningful behaviours and in real time.
4. **Visitation:** monitors usage, participation and reach.
5. **Impact Story Builder:** synthesises data and stories into compelling narratives.

Other tools which can be used include the Local Government customer satisfaction surveys and performance reporting Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) and Culture Counts.

Libraries can adapt these tools to fit their capacity and align with the strategic goals or governance structures of individual libraries. Sector-wide adoption will enable PLV and State Library Victoria to demonstrate collective impact at the state and system level.



Statewide measurement: coordinated data for shared programs

Some programs are delivered across multiple libraries, creating a unique opportunity for collaborative measurement. This report recommends coordinated data collection for two high-impact activities:

- **Storytime** – regular (often weekly) sessions designed for specific age groups or cohorts and include stories, songs, rhymes and sometimes craft activities. Free, drop-in sessions held across the library network supporting babies, children, and their carers.
- **The Home Library Service** – an outreach program that delivers library materials to individuals who are unable to visit a library due to illness, disability, or mobility challenges. Offering a free and convenient way for housebound residents and their carers to access a range of resources including books, magazines, large print, audiobooks and more.

Surveys and methods for these programs are included in the Appendix. By working together, libraries can generate robust, scalable evidence that informs policy, secures funding, and strengthens advocacy.



CONCLUSION: PUBLIC LIBRARIES BUILDING CONNECTION, BELONGING, AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING



Public libraries are more than buildings or digital platforms – they are catalysts for connection, belonging, and wellbeing.

As trusted, inclusive, and accessible social infrastructure, libraries are uniquely positioned to respond to one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time: social isolation, loneliness and disconnection.

But recognition must be matched by investment.

As libraries take on greater roles in supporting mental health, digital inclusion, AI transformation, and civic engagement, their capacity to deliver this work must be strengthened. A commitment to equity, treaty, and representation for First Nations peoples and other diverse communities should be at the heart of this work. The tools and frameworks presented in this report, alongside existing approaches, offer a clear pathway for libraries to measure, communicate, and advocate for their impact on social connection, locally, systemically, and nationally.

Now is the time for bold action.

With the WHO elevating social connection as a global health priority, and governments increasingly acknowledging its role in wellbeing, libraries must be positioned, and funded, as central players in the care economy. This means embedding libraries in policy, resourcing them to meet growing demand, and recognising their work as essential, not optional.

By investing in libraries, we invest in healthier, more resilient communities.

Elevating and supporting their role in fostering social connection unlocks their full potential to create inclusive, thriving communities for all, especially those who have historically been excluded or underserved.

Together, we can build a future where every person feels connected, valued, and supported – with libraries at the heart of that transformation.

APPENDIX A: SOCIAL VALUE FRAMEWORK



This appendix provides further detail on the two strategies proposed for how public libraries can measure their impact on social connection.

- 1 Public Library Toolkit:** A highly practical toolkit that public libraries can use to gather and use data to understand and demonstrate their impact
- 2 Statewide measurement:** Collaborating to measure and demonstrate the impact of Statewide activities

Strategy one, the Public Library Toolkit, has been developed for all library personnel, including frontline staff and managers, to guide the measurement, data collection, and demonstration of how libraries foster social connection. Strategy two is targeted at State Library Victoria and PLV in their role providing leadership and oversight of the sector as a whole.

1. Public Library Toolkit

The toolkit has been created to be used alongside existing approaches and help public libraries measure how what they do supports social connection. It has been designed to be:

- i Practical:** For use by busy library managers and staff with limited time and technical resources. No specialist training is needed.
- ii Modular:** Libraries can begin with one or two tools and grow their efforts over time – many libraries are already doing some of these things.
- iii Respectful:** Avoids over-burdening library users or staff. The mixed methods approach means we are blending data and insights from library users and staff.

There are five elements of the toolkit;
(1.1) the Public Libraries Theory of Change
(1.2) Case study template
(1.3) Observation template
(1.4) Visitation data points for tracking and
(1.5) a final Impact Story Builder.
Each are detailed in the following sections.

1.1 Public Libraries Theory of Change

The Public Libraries Theory of Change (ToC) (see page 19) outlines how public library activities are expected to contribute to social connection outcomes. It maps the pathway from activities to short, medium, and long term outcomes, clarifying the assumptions that underpin this progression. Library personnel can use the ToC to guide planning, strengthen evaluation, and support evidence-based advocacy.



1.2 Case study template

The case study template provides a structure to capture and present key information about projects supporting social connection. It can be completed at the end of a program, project or activity. By following the template, library managers and staff can clearly document what was done, who the target audience was, and the social connection outcomes or lessons learned.



CASE STUDY TEMPLATE

DESCRIPTION	Provide a 2-3 sentence overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project purpose • Project objectives
TARGET COHORT	Who was the program or activity aimed at? (e.g., children, seniors, culturally diverse groups, students)
PARTNERS	Did you collaborate with any external or internal partners? If yes, who? What did your partners do and how did they contribute to the project?
APPROACH	What did you do? Please describe the approach taken, including the following as relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing – when was the program run? How long? (e.g., 45mins, once per week) • Location – where did the program take place (e.g., classroom, outdoor space, library hall, general seating area?) • Methods – any tools, techniques or processes used?
PROMOTION	How did participants find out about the program? (e.g., website, newsletter, social media, word of mouth)
IMPACT	Provide a 2 – 3 sentence summary of the programs impact, particularly in terms of social connection. Including the following if available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program duration (number of sessions) • Number of participants • Feedback or quotes from participants
CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEXT TIME	If running the program again, what would you do differently? Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well • Challenges faced and how they were addressed • Suggestions for improvement

Figure 1: Case study template instructions for use

1.3 Observation template

This tool offers a simple way for library staff to record brief, qualitative notes that capture meaningful behaviours and moments observed during their interactions with patrons. Observations aren't restricted to programmed activities; they can also highlight how the physical spaces set up in libraries are supporting social connection.

They can be completed on an as needed basis or built into other library activities as suits the local resource capacity.



OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

1

DATE:
TIME:
WHO TOOK THE NOTE:

SELECT WHICH GROUP THIS INVOLVES:

- LIBRARY USER
- LIBRARY PARTNER
- OTHER (PROVIDE DETAILS BELOW)

3

WHICH OUTCOME DOES THIS SUPPORT:

Program / Location

Where did the observation occur?
(specific program or location within the library)

Description

Brief clear summary of what you saw

Context

Relevant background information

Impact

How does this reflect social connection?

Frequency or duration (if relevant)

How often, or long was the behaviour observed?

1.4 Visitation data

This is the quantitative data collected across the public library network (e.g. visitation rates, demographics and participation). It helps build a picture of how people use libraries and how their behaviour changes over time. We recommend that libraries continue tracking these metrics to provide evidence of their social connection impacts.⁸² In particular, for activities contributing to social connection the following high-level points can be used:

- Number of program attendees
- Number of members (total, active, and borrowers)
- Demographic details (age cohort, gender, cultural identity, language)
- Number of respondents reporting that they feel more socially connected because of the program/library (when relevant)

In addition, participation in the annual PLV library survey (focused on outputs),⁸³ and data captured through the PLV Library Scorecard will strengthen the evidence base for advocacy activities.

Other sources include the Local Government customer satisfaction surveys, LGPRF indicators and Culture Counts (where available).

1.5 Impact Story Builder

The Impact Story Builder turns your data and real-life experiences into clear, engaging stories. The aim is to show how libraries empower users and foster a sense of belonging. It brings together other tools from the toolkit and can be used for reports, presentations, and advocacy.

IMPACT STORY BUILDER

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE:

- **Choose your focus:** Select an outcome you want to highlight, such as users gaining confidence to connect socially or feeling a stronger sense of belonging.
- **Gather your evidence:** Collect relevant data and personal stories or quotes from library users that relate to your chosen outcome.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

1. **Headline/title:** Write a short, attention-grabbing summary of the story.
2. **The challenge/opportunity:** Briefly explain the issue or need the library addressed.
3. **The library's response:** Describe the program, service, or initiative offered. Don't forget to include your partners (this could come from the case study or observation template).
4. **Evidence/data:** Present key numbers or findings that show the impact (this could be from program survey responses or observations).
5. **Personal story:** Share a real user's experience or quote that brings the story to life (this could be from observation notes).
6. **Outcome/impact:** Summarise the difference the library makes for library users and the community, and link to any partner goals or objectives.
7. **What's next:** Note any plans or ongoing needs.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

- **Keep it short and simple:** Aim for one to two concise paragraphs. Use plain English to make the story easy to understand and relatable.
- **Tailor it for your audience:** Think about who will read or hear your story (e.g., council members, partners, the public) and use language and examples that will resonate with them.
- **Review and refine:** Ask a colleague to review your story for clarity and impact. Make sure the story connects the data and personal experience to the broader outcome.
- **Share and celebrate:** Use your impact stories in reports, presentations, websites, or in meetings to demonstrate the value of your library's work and inspire ongoing support.

2. Statewide activity measurement



Measuring across the library system will help to build a shared language, understanding and evidence base about the collective impact of public libraries in supporting social connection.

Each library runs a wide variety of programs, but some activities are common across libraries throughout Victoria. These shared programs offer opportunities to collaborate and better measure their impact on social connection.

This report recommends that together, State Library Victoria, PLV, and public libraries collaborate to track data for two widely delivered programs:

- **Storytime** – Regular sessions designed for specific age groups or cohorts and include stories, songs, rhymes and sometimes craft activities. Free, drop-in programs held across the library network supporting babies, children, and their carers.
- **Home Library Service** – An outreach program that delivers library materials to ~5,713⁸⁴ individuals who are unable to visit a library due to illness, disability, or other mobility challenges. Offering a free and convenient way for housebound residents and their carers to access a range of resources including books, magazines, large print, audiobooks and more.

The proposed roles, responsibilities, approach and outputs are outlined below.

▶ ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- **PLV** – Lead coordination of the initiative on behalf of the public library network. Support libraries to participate by providing guidance, tools and timelines. Incorporate a ‘most significant change’ question on social connection into sector-wide surveys (such as the annual PLV survey) and collect participation data from libraries. Collate responses and share compiled data with State Library Victoria.
- **Public libraries** – Deliver the selected programs, collect data and stories of change from consenting participants using the agreed approach and templates, and submit findings to PLV in a timely manner.
- **State Library Victoria** – Synthesise and report on the data and stories collected by PLV and public libraries. Develop summary materials, case studies and communications resources to share the collective findings across the library sector and with external stakeholders.



▶ APPROACH:

- **Establish system-wide buy-in** – Use existing collective meetings to build support and alignment for the initiative. Apply practicality and proportionality by using existing data and tools where possible.
- **Adopt a ‘most significant change’ approach** – Focus on how participants experience social connection outcomes, using the Public Libraries Theory of Change in this report as a starting point to identify the most significant change that happened because of the program.
- **Agree timeframes and complete measurement activities** – At agreed intervals (e.g. annually), complete the following:
 1. Public libraries invite consenting program participants to respond to a ‘most significant change’ question using the observation templates provided in the toolkit. Each library to decide the two or three most impactful stories to share with the network.
 2. PLV administer existing survey to library network to collect participation numbers for the selected programs.
 3. State Library Victoria and PLV aggregate, synthesise and report on data. This includes turning findings into materials for publication and sharing broadly.
 4. State Library Victoria and PLV report back findings and materials to public library network. As well as reporting up to Library Board of Victoria, National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), Australian Library and Information Association, and others as required.

Outputs: A brief summary for each program demonstrating the key outcomes experienced by program participants, the participation numbers and highlighting stories of change.

“What do you think was the most significant change to your social connections as a result of participating in this program?”

Additional prompts:

“Can you describe a time when something you learned or experienced at the library helped you connect with others or build new relationships?”

“In what ways has the library helped you feel more confident to engage with your community?”

.....

APPENDIX B: SOCIAL CONNECTION PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Social connection principles

Libraries demonstrate their role as vital places for reducing social isolation and loneliness for individuals and community by intentionally designing spaces, programs and activities and partnerships to foster social connection.

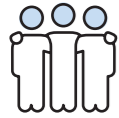
The six principles of social connection were developed in alignment with the Australian Public Library Standards,⁸⁵ the WHO Commission on Social Connection recommendations, and research on contemporary social infrastructure. They provide practical evidence-based guidance to inform daily operations and strategic planning within public libraries.

There are six principles of social connection for libraries to consider:

-  **1** **Activate welcoming and inclusive spaces**
-  **2** **Develop diverse, purposeful programs that encourage and invite participation**
-  **3** **Embed cross-sector collaborations and partnerships centering local community**
-  **4** **Leverage technology to bridge digital divides**
-  **5** **Support a culture of connection through staff training and development**
-  **6** **Adopting an action, measurement, reflection cycle**

Each principle is outlined with a brief description, considerations for implementation and evidence supporting their inclusion.

1. Activate welcoming and inclusive spaces



Design and maintain physical and digital spaces that are safe, accessible, and inviting for all community members.

Implementation: Create pro-connection environments

- **Ephemeral places:** Pop-up spaces, themed zones, festivals, or one-off events within the library
- **Hybrid spaces:** Areas that connect in-person and remote participants for shared experiences
- Provide **diverse seating arrangements** to suit different needs and preferences
- Incorporating **“bumping spaces”** that encourage casual, unplanned encounters
- Including **quiet zones** for individual reflection and low-stimulus interaction
- Apply **accessible design principles** (e.g., clear navigation, screen-reader compatibility, captions or transcripts for audio/video)
- Create **moderated community forums or chat channels** that encourage respectful interaction
- Offer **virtual “drop-in” spaces** such as open Zoom rooms, digital lounges, or Q&A sessions for informal connection
- Integrate **interactive features** like polls, breakout groups, or collaborative whiteboards to spark engagement
- Provide **clear community guidelines** that set expectations for inclusive behaviour
- Ensure **mobile-friendly access** so participation isn't limited by technology.

Next steps: Audit existing spaces against these criteria and implement changes to actively foster both planned and spontaneous social connection.

Evidence: The social space of libraries is incredibly dynamic; libraries are seen as innovative in their ability to assess and adjust spaces based on community need.⁸⁶ Swinburne research highlights the importance of ‘hot-spots’ where social connection naturally occurs. The standards and guidelines for Australian Public Libraries include the provision of “physical and digital places to read and relax, study and work, meet and connect and collaborate and create.”⁸⁷

2. Develop purposeful programs that invite participation



Design and deliver programs that reflect community needs, foster interaction, and support lifelong learning.

Implementation: Create programs that actively encourage connection

- **Co-design** programs with community members to ensure relevance and inclusivity
- Collaborate and **leverage partnerships** with other organisations to meet community needs (see Principle 3)
- Schedule sessions at **varied times** (e.g. mornings, evenings, weekends) to maximise access
- Use icebreakers and **informal conversation starters** to help participants connect
- **Include time** before and after programs for casual interaction
- **Offer hybrid formats** to engage both in-person and remote participants
- **Tailor programs to different cohorts** (e.g. youth, older adults, First Nations, and CALD communities)
- Integrate **social themes into learning activities** (e.g. storytelling, digital literacy, cultural exchange)
- **Use feedback loops** to refine and improve program design.

Next steps: Audit the libraries current program calendar for diversity, timing, and connection opportunities. Trial one new engagement tactic per program cycle.

Evidence: Programs that combine social interaction with purposeful tasks to strengthen bonds.⁸⁸ The WHO Report stresses purposeful engagement as key to nurturing social connection. Australian library standards emphasise literacy, lifelong learning, and cultural programs as social capital builders. Swinburne’s research shows that activities like problem solving, learning, creative arts, cultural events, and group advocacy help people build strong connections with each other.⁸⁹

3. Embed cross-sector collaborations and partnerships centering local community



Build and maintain partnerships that extend reach, amplify impact, and respond to local needs.

Implementation: Strengthen collaboration through

- **Establish local advisory groups** or community panels to guide partnership priorities
- Partner with **organisations aligned to community wellbeing** (e.g. health, education, social services)
- **Host joint events or co-branded initiatives** that connect library users to broader supports
- **Share resources and data** with State Library Victoria, PLV, and partners to inform joint planning
- Use **library spaces as neutral venues** for cross-sector dialogue and engagement
- **Support informal referrals** and warm handovers to partner services.

Next steps: Map current and potential partners. Identify one new collaboration opportunity and initiate contact within the next quarter.

Evidence: Literature review indicates that multi-sector collaboration is essential for effective social infrastructure.⁹⁰ Libraries (and staff) have pivotal roles in forging partnerships with other social institutions.⁹¹ Supporting alignment of libraries with broader agendas and keeping with the standards of Australian Library and Information Association which expand this idea to also include the involvement of volunteers.

4. Leverage technology to bridge digital divides



Use technology to enable access, build digital confidence, and support meaningful online connection.

Implementation: Bridge digital gaps

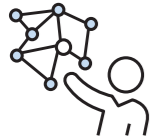
- **Provide free access** to Wi-Fi, devices, and low-cost printing
- Offer **regular digital literacy workshops** tailored to local needs
- **Support users with online tasks** (e.g. job applications, government forms)
- Create **hybrid programs** that combine in-person and digital participation
- Ensure **digital platforms are accessible** (e.g. screen-reader compatible, mobile-friendly)
- **Promote safe and respectful online engagement** through clear guidelines
- **Monitor usage trends** to identify gaps and opportunities.

Next steps: Review digital access points and training offerings. Schedule one new digital inclusion activity per month.

Evidence: The Australian Public Library Standards identify digital inclusion as fundamental to social connection and community participation. The WHO Commission on Social Connection identified that digital technologies may be most beneficial for people who are experiencing marginalisation, (for example, due to poverty or disability). SGS Economics and Planning reported digital collections and technologies have numerous flow-on benefits for users.⁹²



5. Support a culture of connection through staff training and development



Equip staff with the skills and confidence to foster social connection in every interaction.

Implementation: Build a connection-focused workforce

- **Embed social connection** goals into staff induction and performance plans
- **Provide training in trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and co-design**
- Encourage staff to **initiate friendly conversations** and support new users
- Create **peer learning opportunities** to share best practice
- Hire staff with community engagement or social work experience where possible
- Recognise and **celebrate staff contributions to community connection.**

Next steps: Conduct a staff training needs assessment. Schedule one connection-focused training session per quarter (or as budget allows).

Evidence: Literature on social infrastructure highlights the importance of “connector people” – staff who build and activate social networks within communities. Equipping staff with these skills supports stronger social connection outcomes.⁹³



6. Adopt an action, measurement, reflection cycle



Use evidence to improve practice, demonstrate impact and inform strategic decisions.

Implementation: Embed continuous improvement

- **Define priority outcomes** for social connection and aligning measurement tools
- Use the Public Library Toolkit (Appendix A) adopting observation templates, develop case studies and **tell stories of impact**
- Hold regular **reflection sessions** with service staff to review what’s working
- **Share findings** with State Library Victoria, PLV, and partners to **inform sector-wide learning**
- **Use stories of change to advocate** for funding and support.

Next steps: Select one program to pilot a measurement and reflection cycle and use insights to refine delivery.

Evidence: Findings from the WHO Commission on Social Connection report emphasises outcome measurement as critical for sustaining effective social infrastructure. The report calls for robust, cross-sectoral data collection to evaluate the long-term impact of interventions on social connection. It also highlights the need for consistent metrics to track progress and ensure accountability, particularly in low-resource settings where social isolation is most acute.⁹⁴

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY



Social infrastructure includes physical spaces,⁹⁵ digital platforms, and the services and policies that support them.⁹⁶ It brings people together, supports interactions, and helps build social connection across different groups in a community.⁹⁷ Good social infrastructure is guided by the understanding that people have different identities⁹⁸ and experiences, and an aim to create inclusive and welcoming environments for all.

Social connection is the interactions and relationships people have with others in their community. Strong social connections⁹⁹ support wellbeing, belonging and happiness.¹⁰⁰ Research shows that social factors play an important role in health outcomes.

Social prescribing is when health or community professionals connect someone with non-medical community supports, such as groups, activities or local services, to improve wellbeing and strengthen social connection.¹⁰¹

Social isolation and loneliness means having few or no social connection opportunities. Loneliness is the feeling of being unhappy with the quality or quantity of those connections. Both can negatively affect health and wellbeing.¹⁰²

Social capital describes the trust, shared understanding and willingness to support one another that develops through relationships and networks. These connections provide access to information, resources and opportunities within a community.¹⁰³

Social cohesion describes how connected and included people feel in a community or society. It reflects shared values, mutual trust and a sense of belonging across different groups.¹⁰⁴

Social determinants of health describe the non-clinical influences on a person's health. These include where someone is born, grows, lives and works, and the broader social and economic conditions that affect a person's daily life.¹⁰⁵

Place-based approaches describes long term work in a specific geographic area. They involve collaboration between community members and local organisations, responding to local needs and building on local strengths.¹⁰⁶

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