

2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey Report

March 2023



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Summary

Libraries are full of stories – both fictional and factual, historical and contemporary, as well as tragic, romantic, exciting and inspiring. Libraries are places where stories can be found, where stories are shared, where stories are celebrated and most importantly where tomorrow's stories are created. Storytelling is at the heart of public libraries.

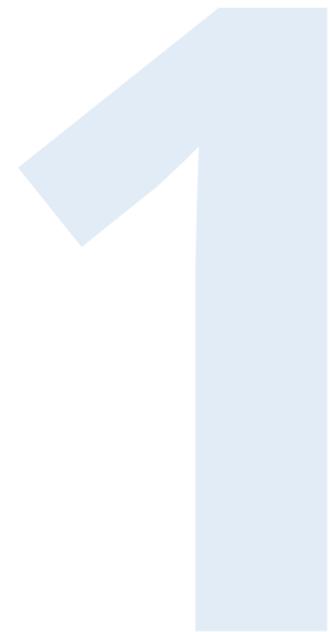
In early 2022, the State Library Victoria and Victoria's 51 public library services reached out to the community to help tell the story of our libraries today. A statewide survey of more than 18,000 library users gathered first-hand information on the people who use public libraries, the services they use and the significance libraries hold in their day-to-day lives. Two months later, on Tuesday 24 May, Victorian public libraries conducted a census of library users to capture a snapshot of a typical day in the life of a library. More than 60,000 people visited their library on Census Day, and a further 16,000 completed a short form about their use of and satisfaction with the library. Thousands more downloaded resources or engaged with outreach services in their community.

The findings from the 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey tell the story of widely used, much-loved, place-based community assets. The results show:

- 1. Libraries serve diverse communities
 - 2. Library use is multifaceted
 - 3. Library users love their library
- WHO uses libraries and WHAT they do**
-
- 4. Libraries deliver consistently high levels of service
 - 5. Libraries offer a diverse range of services and opportunities
 - 6. Libraries reflect their unique communities
 - 7. Libraries build social capital
 - 8. Libraries change lives
- WHY they love libraries**
-
- 9. Libraries have been hit hard by COVID, but are rebounding
 - 10. People want bigger, better, more accessible library services
- WHAT lies ahead**



This report highlights the main findings by exploring each of the 10 points above in greater detail. A breakdown of the results can be found in separate reports on the 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey as well as the accompanying data tables in this report.



Libraries serve diverse communities

On Tuesday 24 May 2022, 60,195 people visited their local Victorian library. This represents 0.9% of the Victorian population or around one in every 110 Victorians. As there was no marketing or promotion and no call to action to take part in the census – this represents a typical day in the life of Victorian public libraries. The scope of this census takes us from Mildura to Mallacoota and Warrnambool to Warrandyte, covering more than 250 library branches, mobile library stops and other service points. The more than 60,000 respondents include people of all ages, backgrounds and interests who went to the library to borrow a book, attend Story Time or another library program, use the computers or wi-fi, do some private study or work, read a magazine, print their résumé, meet someone or just hang out. In addition:

- **24,500 ebooks** and other digital resources were downloaded from library collections
- **31,000 people** visited library websites
- **1,100 people** attended library outreach programs in community locations, visited pop-up libraries or received deliveries of books through a Home Library Service.

The 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey demonstrate the wide appeal of libraries across all demographics and people of different socio-economic status. The data shows the demographic profile of public library users is broadly consistent with the Victorian population in terms of age, gender, Aboriginal status and language background.

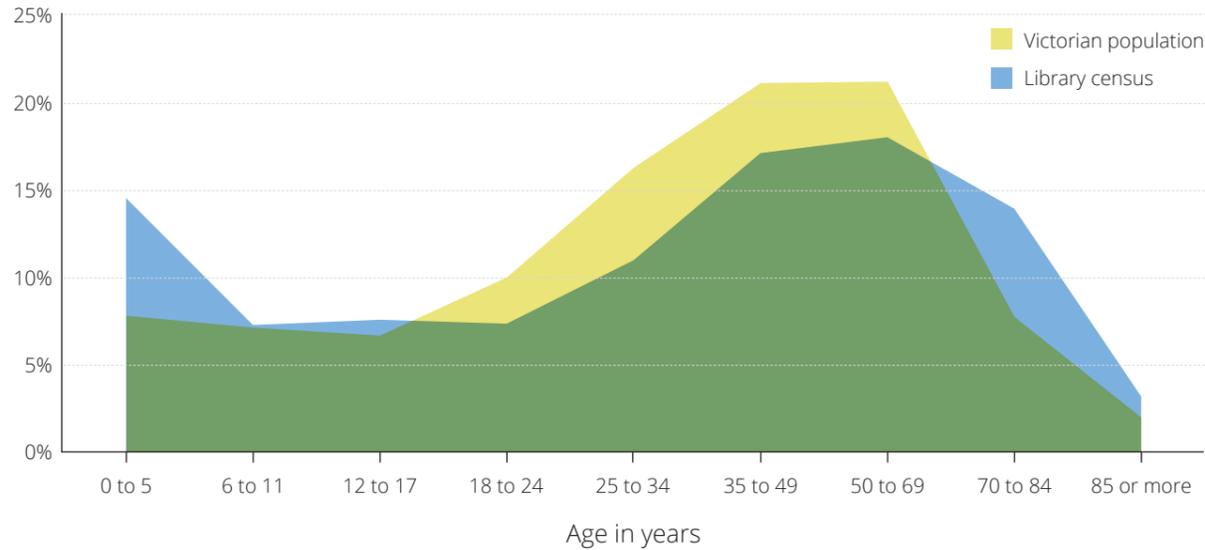
Library users by age and gender

Library census data indicates that the age distribution of public library users is similar to that of the overall population, with two main differences. These differences include over-representation among:

- **children aged 5 years and under**, who are brought to the library by their parents and helped to develop language and cognitive skills through access to libraries' extensive junior collections and early years' literacy programs
- **older people aged 70 years or more**, who are relatively free from the time demands of work and family and access recreational reading, lifestyle and interest programs and opportunities for social inclusion.

With primary and secondary school age children well-represented in the library user cohort, the over-representation of pre-school age children and adults over 70 is offset by there being proportionally fewer library users aged between 18 and 69 years. That is, people who are independent, part of the workforce or caring for young children.

Library visitors by age group



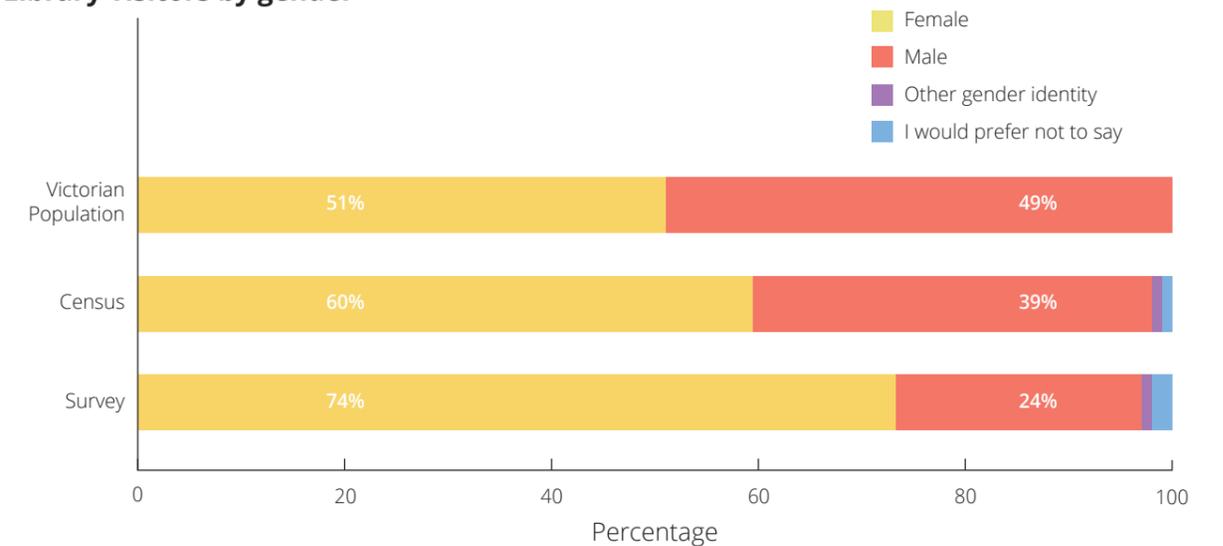
Service age group		Library Census		Victorian Population
0 to 5 years	Babies and pre-schoolers	14.5%	↑	7.8%
6 to 11 years	Primary schoolers	7.3%	-	7.1%
12 to 17 years	Secondary schoolers	7.6%	-	6.7%
18 to 24 years	Tertiary education and independent	7.3%	↓	10.0%
25 to 34 years	Young workforce	11.0%	↓	16.3%
35 to 49 years	Parents and homebuilders	17.1%	↓	21.1%
50 to 69 years	Older workers and pre-retirees Empty nesters and retirees	18.1%	↓	21.2%
70 to 84 years	Seniors	14.0%	↑	7.7%
85 years or more	Elderly aged	3.2%	↑	2.0%

Both the library survey and census illustrated the known gender imbalance in library use, with 60% of census respondents and 74% of survey respondents being female, compared with an average of 51% in the Victorian population. Three major contributing factors include:

- females (mothers, grandmothers) being more likely than males in the household to bring young and school age children to early years literacy programs and after school activities

- females living longer (on average) than males and having relatively higher representation in the 70 years and older library user age group
- females (across most adult age cohorts) having a higher level of recreational readership than males. This was particularly significant in the library survey which by virtue of being promoted via digital channels and social media was more likely to capture people who download ebooks and other digital resources.

Library visitors by gender



Those reporting 'other gender identity' represented 0.6% of census participants and 0.7% of survey respondents. The proportion of these respondents was highest in inner city libraries (0.9% and 1.6% respectively) and lowest in rural library services (0.3% and 0.5% respectively).

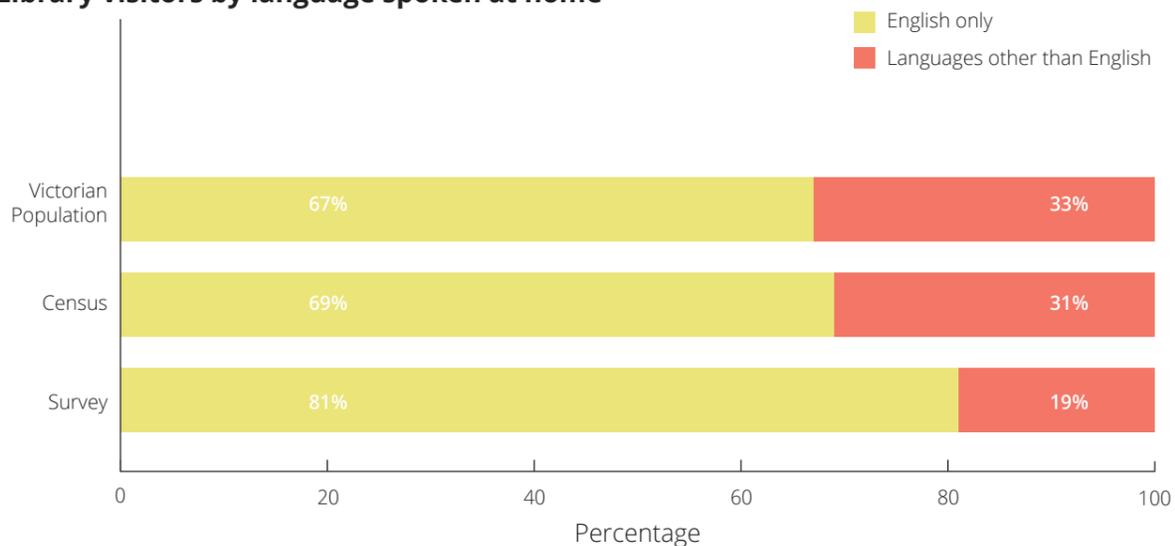
Library users by cultural and language background

The 2021 ABS census reported that 1.0% of the Victorian population identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This was matched by the 1.1% of library users who participated in the 2022 census and 0.9% of survey respondents who identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Library census data indicated that 69% of library visitors only speak English at home, with 31%

identifying other languages spoken in their homes. This is consistent with the 67% of Victorians in the 2021 ABS census who said that they spoke only English in their homes. The library census results were, however, markedly different from the survey response group in which 81% of respondents only spoke English at home. Given that the census captured feedback from people actually visiting the library, and through a simpler data collection form, this is likely to be a truer reflection of the Victorian library user population.

Library visitors by language spoken at home



The proportion of library census participants who speak languages other than English at home was as high as 43% in library services in Interface Councils, 39% in the general metropolitan libraries and 34% in inner city libraries. This was much higher than the 13% of library users in regional and rural Victoria who speak languages other than English at home. The library services with the highest proportion of users who speak languages other than English were Greater Dandenong (70%), Brimbank and Monash (each 59%) and Wyndham and Melton (each 58%).

Among library census participants, the most common non-English languages spoken were:

- 4.6% Mandarin
- 2.3% Vietnamese
- 1.7% Italian
- 1.7% Cantonese
- 1.5% Arabic
- 1.2% Greek
- 1.1% Hindi.

Significant concentrations of particular languages spoken in households in different geographic areas was consistent with the wider population profile. For example, the data shows 26% of library users in Monash and Whitehorse Manningham speak Mandarin or Cantonese at home; the proportion of Vietnamese-speaking library users was highest in Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong and Brimbank; and higher proportions of the respondents spoke Italian in Moreland, Arabic in Hume and Hindi in Wyndham.

Additional demographic data from the 2022 library survey showed that among library users:

- 33% are members of couples with dependents (nuclear family households) and 28% are members of couples without dependents (couples who do not have children, as well as older couples who do not have children living with them anymore)
- 29% are single persons (including young adults in the inner city and elderly persons living alone)
- 48% are employed and 2% are jobseekers
- 36% are retired
- there is a spread of household income, with 5% having family income above \$200,000 and 10% with annual incomes below \$25,000
- 81% have home internet access, 55% have access via a mobile device and 25% access at work
- 4% have no access to the internet other than at the library (mainly older persons in rural areas).



2

Library use is multifaceted

While a simple definition of a library is a place that people go to borrow books, the census and survey show that Victorian public libraries are much more than *just* a place to borrow books. The data collected indicates that around 94% of people who use public libraries visit their local library in person at some time every year, and that 82% of them do borrow books or magazines. But people access libraries in

lots of different ways, and people – including those who cannot read or have low literacy skills, those who do not borrow, and those who are not library members – do many other things beyond accessing information or borrowing from the library collection. The data reaffirms that a modern library includes much more than just books, reading material or reference information.

The ways people access public library services

Data from the library census and survey shows that:

26% of library users access library services more than once a week

- this includes people who come to the library every day to read the newspapers, people without internet access who regularly check emails, secondary and tertiary students who come to study and people who are otherwise socially isolated who come for connection

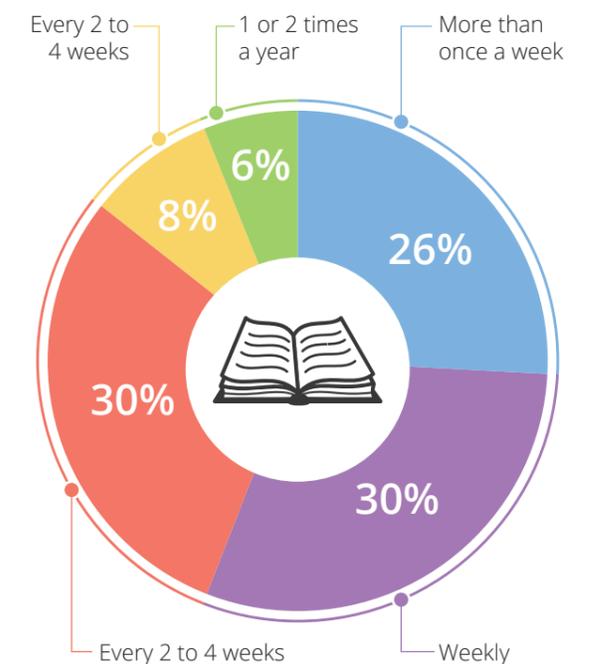
30% of library users access library services once a week

- this includes parents, grandparents and carers who bring young children to regularly scheduled Story Time activities or primary age children to after school programs

30% of library users use their library every 2 to 4 weeks

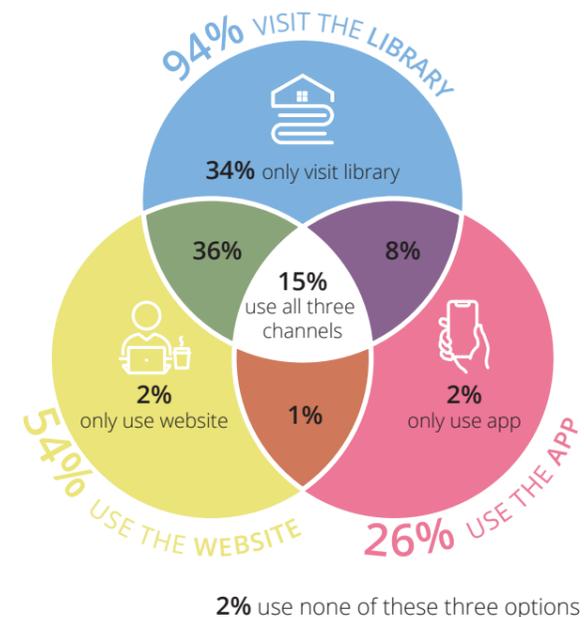
- this includes regular borrowers who cycle through their (physical or virtual) bag of books every two, three or four weeks in line with library borrowing limits

How often do you use the library?



- overall, 86% of library users use the library at least once a month, indicating that for these Victorians going to the library is a regular and integral part of life (noting that the frequency of library use decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and is still returning to pre-COVID levels)
- 67% of library users usually travel to the library by car or motorcycle, 22% walk and 5% use public transport
- 62% of users come to the library on their own, with many of these being older people (27% aged 70 years or more)
- 25% of census participants came with one other person, 8% came with two others and 5% came with three or more other people
 - people who come with pre-school and primary age children are most likely in the 25–49 year age range, and friendship groups span all ages from 12 to 85+
 - people who come to the library with a spouse or partner are most likely aged 60 years or more.

The different ways in which people access public library services are influenced by the services they use, the way services are delivered and their individual circumstances and preferences. Historically, the only way people could access library services was by visiting their local library. Then mobile libraries and home deliveries for housebound people increased the options for access. For more than 30 years now public libraries have also had websites which have transformed from being repositories of static information (such as catalogues, locations and opening hours, lists of library activities) to more dynamic sites where people can browse, reserve and extend collection items, book into library programs, reserve computers or print remotely, download podcasts and access digital resources. More recently library and third-party apps enable library users to conveniently access and download ebooks and other digital resources at home, on the train or while on holiday.



While the library survey found that **94% of library users still visit their library branch from time to time**, many also access services through the library website (54%) or app (26%). This diagram shows that most people access public library services by either just visiting their library (34%), or through a combination of visiting their library and accessing the

library website (36%). Additionally, another 8% combine library visits with use of the library app and 15% access services at various times through all three of these channels.

These four main modes of access all involve library users visiting the library. This indicates that despite the convenience and speed of access offered through technologically-supported options, the physical space is still very much a part of the library experience for the overwhelming majority of users.

Only 2% of survey respondents did not access library services through one of these three main means, with usage spread across mobile library only, home library only, book clubs, family members (such as spouses) borrowing for them, third-party apps or other means.

The library census also found that **84% of library users on Census Day were library members**.

This high figure reinforces the primary use of public libraries as a place for borrowing, but also shows that 16% (or 1 in 6 library users) are not library members. This cohort of non-borrowers includes people who use the library as a space to study, work, meet, read or relax, and those who utilise library facilities to access wi-fi and computer services, print, photocopy or scan.



Things people do at or through the library

The library survey examined use of library services through three simple questions, each with an identical question stem.

In the last year have you done any of the following things at/through the library?

Under each question respondents were presented with a list of activities that they might have undertaken at the library. In total, 29 library activities were listed, grouped in the three categories: collections, activity or technology.



Collections

Searching, borrowing, downloading and reading library collections and information

9 activities listed



Activity

Participating in library programs, using the library for study or work, catching up with friends or just being at the library

11 activities listed



Technology

Accessing and using technology services such as computers, wi-fi, printers, scanners, websites and apps

9 activities listed

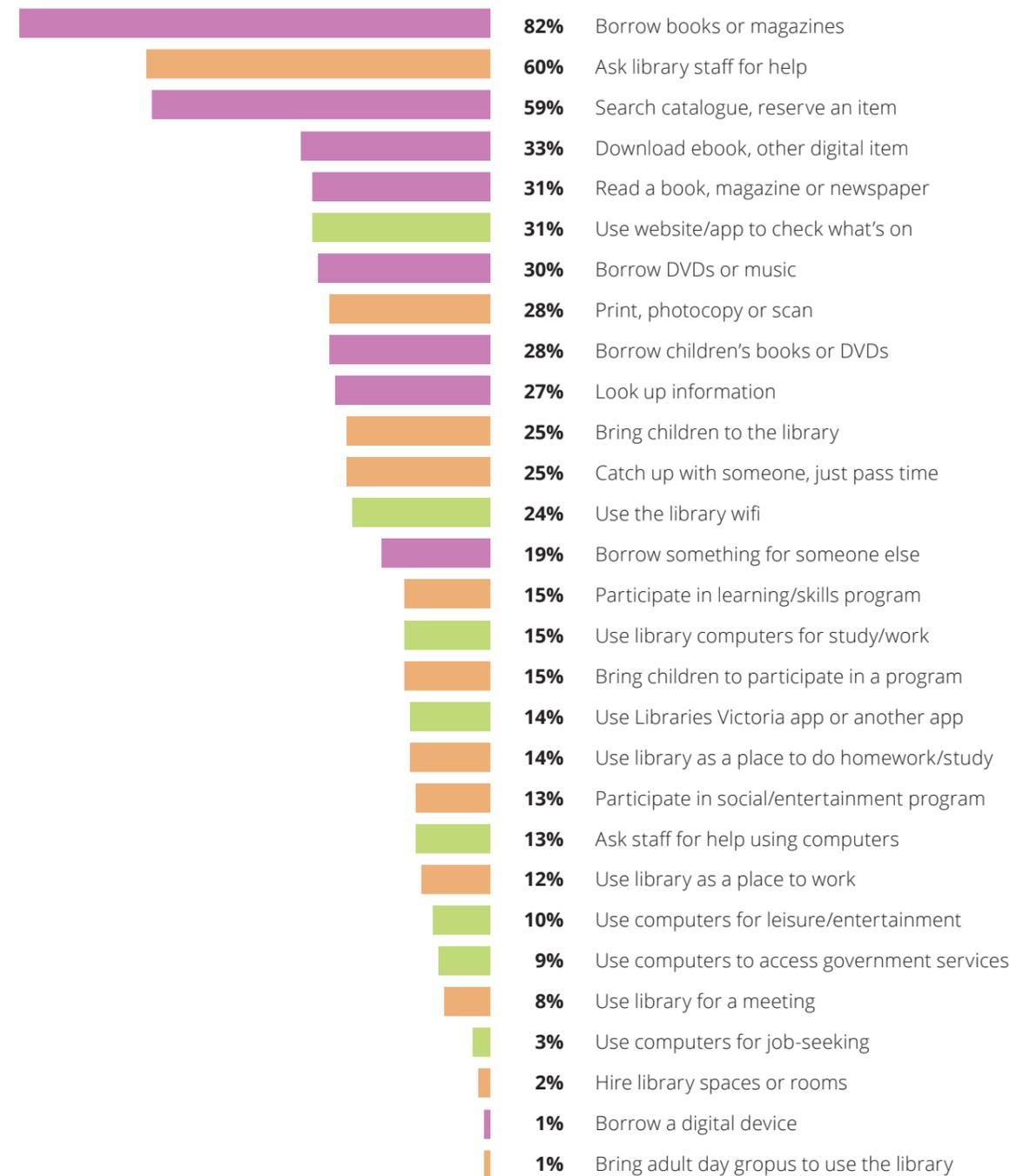


Respondents could tick as many activities as were applicable to their library use during the year.

There was no differentiation between activities which they did often (such as reading the newspaper every day) or infrequently (such as using library computers for job-seeking). Nor was there any differentiation of the value of each activity to the individual library user (such as borrowing a DVD or magazine for leisure or getting assistance to secure a job).

The survey found that the collection is (as expected) the core of the library, and borrowing books, DVDs or other collection items is still the single greatest reason why people come to the library. In the last year **82% of survey respondents had borrowed a book or magazine for themselves.**

In the last year have you done any of the following things at/through the library?





However, borrowing is not the only reason why people use a library, and for some it is not one of the many reasons they use a library.

Beyond the 82% of users borrowing from the collection there are two distinct groups of activities. The first group might be called 'information-seeking' or 'way-finding' and includes library users asking staff for help and searching the catalogue to find or reserve an item. Both of these activities were undertaken by around 60% of survey respondents.

The second group of activities were undertaken by between 24% and 33% of survey respondents in the past year, which is clearly more than the remaining library activities (most of which were done by fewer than 15% of library users). Ten activities fall into this group:

- five are related to collections – download an ebook or other digital item; read a book, magazine or newspaper at the library; borrow DVDs or music; borrow children's books or DVDs; look up information
- three are related to technology use – use website/app to check what's on; print, photocopy or scan; use the library wi-fi
- two indicate the use of the library as a place for activity or being – bring children to use the library; catch up with someone, just pass time.

While the collection remains at the core of library service – and borrowing for recreational reading, educational or research purposes is the principal library use for many people – public libraries are also well-used for activities related to digital inclusion and social inclusion. Free access to wi-fi and computers as well as cost-based printing and copying services are valuable for people who cannot access or afford them. Having a welcoming, safe, comfortable place to be with or around other people is also important for those seeking connection and community.

Beyond these activities, other library services appeal to distinct population cohorts. For example:

- use of children's services – collections (28%), general children's use (25%), participation in library programs (15%)
- program participation – to learn or develop a new skill (15%), for entertainment or social connection (13%)
- computer use – for work or study (15%), leisure (10%), accessing government services (9%) or job-seeking (3%)
- library as place – for study (14%), work (12%) or a meeting (8%).

On any single day

The percentage of users accessing specific services recorded in the library census was not expected to match the survey findings because the census only recorded activity on that one day and cannot capture the many different things a single person will do at the library over the course of a year.

However, the primacy of the collection was reinforced with 53% of census participants having borrowed a book, DVD or other item on that day; more than double the use of any other library activity. The other common activities undertaken at Victorian public libraries on Census Day included:

- reading, study or work (26%)
- using the computers, internet or wi-fi (19%)
- accessing children's books or activities (12%)
- printing, photocopying or scanning (10%)
- catching up with someone or just passing time (8%)
- getting information or asking library staff for help (8%)
- attending a library program (7%).

3

Library users love their library

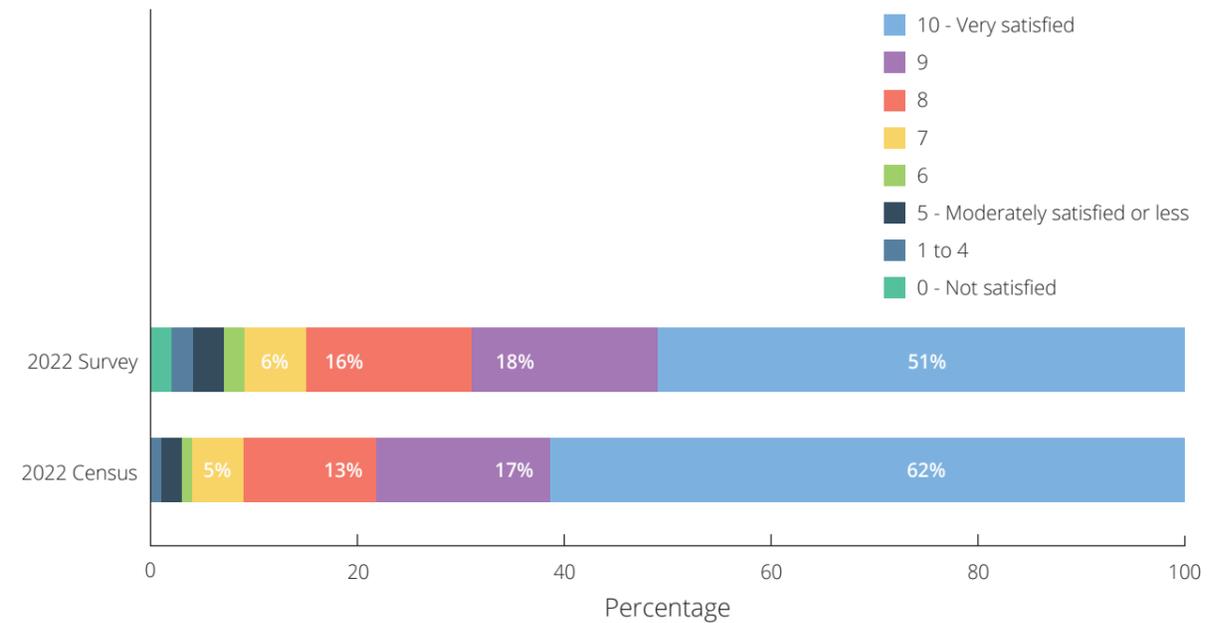
Customer satisfaction surveys typically show that libraries are one of the highest rating services provided by local councils. Average satisfaction scores around 8 or 9 out of 10 are not uncommon, and the 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey reinforced those findings with **average customer satisfaction scores of 9.26** and 8.74 out of 10, respectively.

These are extremely high satisfaction ratings, consistent with the qualitative feedback from numerous library user surveys which indicate that public libraries are especially valued for:

- the benefits they provide to individual library users
- the broader role they play in supporting reading, literacy, digital inclusion and wellbeing in the wider community.

The library census satisfaction score of 9.26 was driven by 62% of participants rating their library at 10 out of 10. Another 30% had a satisfaction score of 8 or 9, with only 8% giving the library a score of 7 out of 10 or less. Satisfaction scores were consistently high across the state and across different user groups, with only 3 of the 48 library services that participated in the census recording customer satisfaction scores below 9 out of 10. The highest satisfaction ratings (above 9.6) were recorded in rural areas.

Customer satisfaction ratings (out of 10)



The library survey's customer satisfaction score of 8.74 out of 10 was lower than the rating from the census. Fifty-one per cent of survey respondents rated the library at 10 out of 10, with another 34% giving the library a score of 8 or 9. Only 9% of respondents gave the library a score of 6 or less.

The COVID effect

While both measures of customer satisfaction are very good – few organisations could be disappointed with a rating of 8.74 out of 10 – two major factors appear to have contributed to the lower result from the library survey conducted in March 2022 when compared to the census conducted 2 months later.

The first of these factors is evident at the top end of the satisfaction scale, where 62% of census participants had a rating of 10 out of 10, compared with 51% of respondents from the library survey. This higher proportion of 10s contributed an extra 0.2 to 0.3 points to the overall satisfaction score and is likely to have been caused by both real and methodological factors. That is:

- a higher proportion of place-using but non-borrowing non-members in the census response group – a group which places high value on being able to spend quality study, work or leisure time at the library
- census participants being surveyed as they exited the library, when the value of the experience was immediate and front of mind
- this being a measure taken from a 2-minute census form as opposed to a 10-minute survey.

The second significant factor was related to the timing of the survey and the census. The survey was conducted at a time when people who were unvaccinated were not (by Public Health Orders) permitted to enter the library. This generated a very

negative response among a small proportion of the traditional library user base – reflected in both their written comments about being excluded from the library and 7% of survey respondents giving a satisfaction score of 5 or less (with 1.9% rating the library as 0 out of 10).

The comments were loud, passionate and, in some cases, aggressive and abusive towards the library service and library staff. The response was particularly forceful in Gippsland where there was an active campaign against libraries for not allowing unvaccinated people entry to the library. Of the 4 (out of 51) Victorian library services with an average satisfaction score from the survey below 8 out of 10, 3 were in Gippsland. It is estimated that without these single-issue negative scores of 0 out of 10 the average statewide customer satisfaction score from the survey would have been 8.88, not 8.74.

By Census Day in May 2022 the COVID-19 Public Health Orders had been lifted and all people were free to enter the library. While that negative sentiment had not completely dissipated, the ability to return to the library demonstrably eased concerns and only 0.1% gave the library a satisfaction score of 0 out of 10; a total of 18 out of 16,464 census participants. These rare scores of 0 are generally due to the respondent having had a bad experience with staff at the library, outstanding library fines or a negative opinion about the standard of facilities.



4

Libraries deliver consistently high levels of service

The 2022 Victorian Public Library Survey asked respondents to rate the performance of their library in several key areas on a scale from 1 – Very poor to 5 – Excellent. The ratings show that overall, **library users were very satisfied with the way library services are delivered at a local level and very satisfied with the customer service they receive from library staff.**

Library staff performance

Anecdotally, many library users say that the personal interest and care shown by library staff is one of the reasons why they love their libraries. For regular users it is being welcomed to the library by name, a familiar smile or being recommended an author that aligns with or which may expand upon their reading preferences. For new users it is that someone took time to listen to them, took an interest and helped them with whatever task, inquiry or challenge they faced.

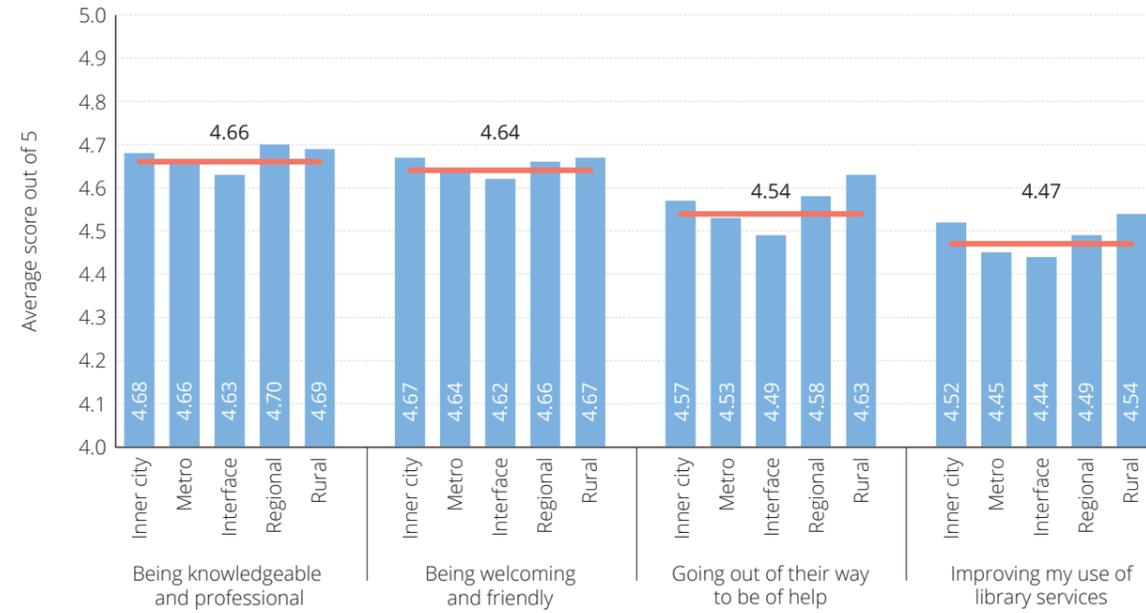
Library users' ratings of library customer service and staff professionalism were very high, averaging around 4.5 to 4.6 out of 5. More than 70% of survey respondents said that library staff were 'excellent' in terms of being 'knowledgeable and professional' and 'welcoming and friendly'.



Library staff performance	Users' ratings					Don't know	Average score
	1	2	3	4	5		
Being knowledgeable and professional	1%	1%	4%	19%	71%	5%	4.66
Being welcoming and friendly	1%	1%	4%	17%	74%	2%	4.64
Going out of their way to be of help	1%	2%	7%	19%	65%	7%	4.54
Improving my use of library services	1%	1%	7%	21%	54%	14%	4.47

The consistently high performance of library staff in the eyes of library users is demonstrated in the average scores for these survey question by library location. For example, the average scores for staff knowledge and professionalism ranged from a low of 4.63 for library services in Interface Councils to a high of 4.70 for libraries in larger regional centres (such as Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo).

Library staff performance (average score out of 5)



In effect, there was no statistically significant difference between perceptions of customer service across these five locational cohorts. Similarly, ratings for library staff being welcoming and friendly only ranged from 4.62 to 4.67. Average staff scores for Interface and metropolitan libraries may have been slightly lower than those for inner city, regional and rural libraries, but not to any great extent.

The universally high standard of customer service in public libraries was demonstrated by the fact that the lowest scoring library service in terms of staff 'being knowledgeable and professional' had an average score of 4.47, which in any other context would be cause for celebration. Similarly, the lowest average score for staff being 'welcoming and friendly' was an otherwise high 4.34.

What this data shows is that great customer service is not unique to your local library. **Professional, friendly and helpful customer service is a core feature of the Victorian public library sector.**



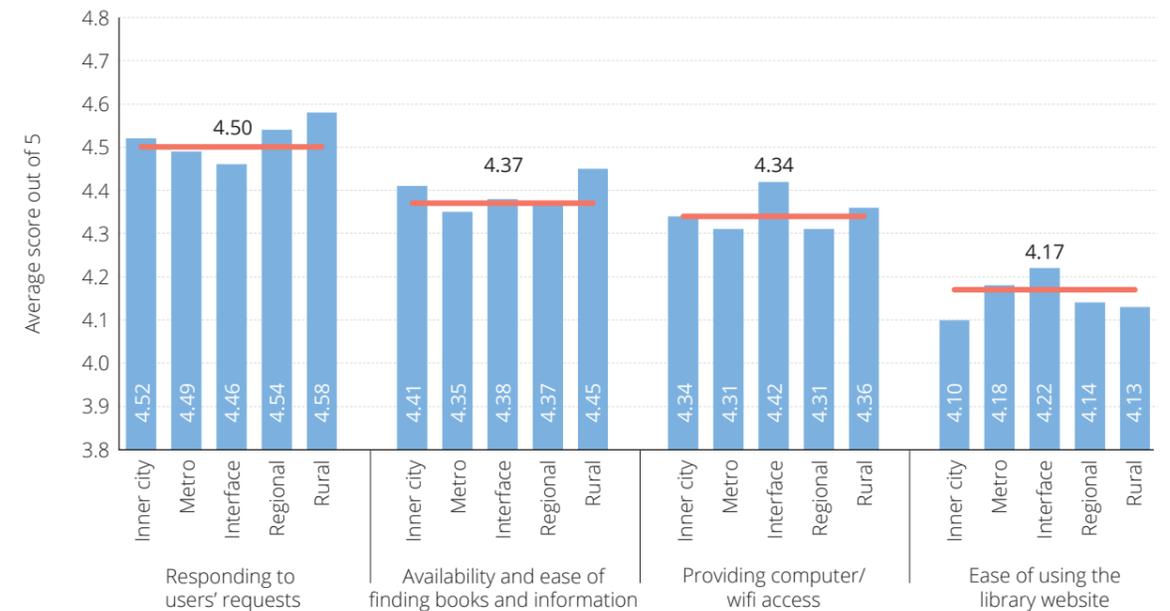
Library performance

A similar observation can be made about general library performance, with the survey data showing both **high levels of user satisfaction with library performance, and high levels of consistency in satisfaction ratings across the state.** This was especially the case for libraries considered highly responsive to users' requests, being accessible onsite and online, and making books and information easy to find – features that contribute to the high level of overall customer satisfaction with public libraries.

The survey ratings showed that overall people were very satisfied with the way library services are delivered at a local level, with average scores ranging from 4.16 to 4.50. Users experience libraries as being responsive and accessible and feel that services and facilities provided are easy to find and use. Once again, the spread of scores by library location (from inner city to rural libraries) was very small – around 0.10 points, although here it is notable that libraries in the Interface Councils tended to slightly outperform their peers when it comes to provision of technology access and the ease of using the library website.



General library performance (average score out of 5)



Library characteristic	Users' ratings					Don't know	Average score
	1	2	3	4	5		
Responding to users' requests	1%	1%	6%	22%	54%	16%	4.50
Availability and ease of finding books and information	1%	2%	9%	34%	51%	3%	4.37
Look and feel of the library building	1%	3%	11%	30%	54%	2%	4.36
Providing computer/wi-fi access	1%	1%	8%	21%	35%	34%	4.34
Opening hours	1%	3%	11%	34%	47%	4%	4.28
Ease of using the library website	1%	3%	14%	34%	38%	10%	4.17
Access to the digital library	1%	3%	12%	26%	33%	25%	4.16

Interestingly, two of these general library characteristics had a spread of satisfaction ratings, and both appear frequently in local feedback on library performance. That is, 'opening hours' and the 'look and feel of the library buildings'.

The average statewide performance rating for library opening hours was 4.28, but this ranged from 4.38 for libraries in Interface Councils to 4.10 in inner city libraries. Furthermore, ratings for opening hours ranged from a high of 4.50 in Yarriambiack to 3.65 in Corangamite Moyne. Here the performance ratings clearly related to local circumstances, as the highest and lowest scores include a mix of large and small, metropolitan and regional, and single branch and multi-branch library services.

Opening hours

4.50	Yarriambiack
4.46	Yarra Plenty
4.42	Wodonga
4.41	Boroondara
4.41	Frankston
3.99	Hobsons Bay
3.97	Melbourne
3.91	Warrnambool
3.65	Corangamite

Look and feel of library buildings

4.76	Glenelg
4.68	Wodonga
4.64	Campaspe
4.63	Greater Dandenong
4.59	Melton
3.99	Mitchell
3.97	Port Phillip
3.87	Moreland
3.36	Warrnambool

In terms of the standard of library buildings, the average statewide performance rating was a very good 4.36, ranging from 4.50 for libraries in Interface Councils to 4.25 for inner city libraries. It is notable that Glenelg, Wodonga, Greater Dandenong and Melton (high-scoring library services) each have a small number of library branches and most, if not all, of their library usage is concentrated in buildings that have been built or substantially redeveloped in the past 5 to 8 years. Conversely, the library services with lower ratings on look and feel of library buildings have had relatively little recent investment in library facilities. With that said, the new Glenroy Library in Moreland opened just 6 weeks after the survey was conducted and the new Library and Learning Centre in Warrnambool opened in late 2022.



5

Libraries offer a diverse range of services and opportunities

Victorian public library users value their libraries for many different reasons. These include both the quality and consistency of the customer service provided and the opportunity to access a diverse range of services, resources and activities at their library.

The APLA/ALIA *Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries* (December 2020) identify five core services provided by modern libraries to meet the recreational, educational, social, information and employment-related needs of library users of all ages, interests and backgrounds. These are:

- physical and digital content and collections, including general, specialist, local studies, heritage and cultural collections
- information and reference services
- reading, literacy, learning, wellbeing, cultural and creative programs
- access to computers, the internet, printers, scanners and other mainstream technology, as well as support in developing digital literacy
- places and spaces where people can relax, work, meet, learn, connect and create.

The guidelines also identify six broad individual and community outcomes from the provision and use of public library services.

Public library outcomes

- **Literacy and lifelong learning**

Public libraries help children to learn to read, support youth and adult literacy, and help people to improve their English language skills. Libraries also provide opportunities for people of all ages and interests to pursue formal and informal study and lifelong learning.

- **Digital inclusion**

The ability to access and use technology is fundamental to meaningful engagement in modern society. Public libraries play an important role in supporting digital inclusion and providing a safety net for those caught in the digital divide.

- **Personal development and wellbeing**

Public libraries are safe, welcoming and universally accessible places that provide access to authoritative information on health and wellness, support reading for pleasure and provide social interaction.

- **Stronger and more creative communities**

Public libraries strengthen communities and build social capital by providing an inclusive forum and support for expression of creativity and cultural identity. They preserve the past, celebrate the present and embrace the future.

- **Economic and workforce development**

Use of library services and programs by different groups in the community can support improved employment and productivity outcomes (e.g. jobseekers, entrepreneurs).

- **Informed and connected citizens**

People come together at the library to connect with one another and with what is happening in their community.

Two findings from the 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey illustrate the perceived value of libraries' diverse yet integrated service offering.

Multiple use of different services

The first comes from analysis of survey and census data on how often people use their library and what services they use. The library census found that 26% of attendees use the library more than once a week, with a further 30% using library services on a weekly basis. Thirty per cent use the library every 2 to 4 weeks, 8% use it every 2 to 3 months and the remaining 6% use the library once or twice a year. Combining these figures demonstrates that more than half of the census participants (56%) come to the library at least once a week, and 86% visit their library at least once a month.

Borrowing books or other collection items is clearly the most common activity undertaken at the library, attributable to 82% of survey respondents (who borrow a book or magazine at least once a year) and 53% of census participants (who came to the library on Census Day to borrow a book, DVD or other item). Frequent borrowing could explain 86% of library users visiting the library once a month, but it cannot explain 56% of library users coming to the library one or more times a week. That many people don't read that many books that quickly.

The explanation is that people come to the library to do many different things, and sometimes even different things as part of the one visit. The survey found that of the 29 possible library services listed:

- 15% of survey respondents accessed more than 10 of the listed services at some time in the year
- more than 50% of respondents used between 3 and 7 different library services
- 57% of respondents accessed a mix of library services across all three different service types (such as collections, activities, technology)
- only 11% of respondents accessed services of just a single type (such as 9% only access collection services, less than 1% only access programs and places, less than 1% only access technology services).

The census data told a similar story when users were asked to list what they did on their visit to the library on Census Day (with the option to choose up to three activities from a list of 11 options including 'other'). The responses showed that 63% ticked only one activity, 22% ticked 2 activities and 17% ticked 3 activities.



Of the 53% of census participants who 'borrowed a book, DVD or other item', 43% said that they did something else when they were at the library on that day. This 'something else' included accessing children's books or activities, reading or studying, using the wi-fi, asking library staff for help, catching up with a friend or printing something. There was no consistent pattern in the combination of activities associated with borrowing a book. There were lots of different combinations of 2 or 3 activities that were important to those borrowers on that day.

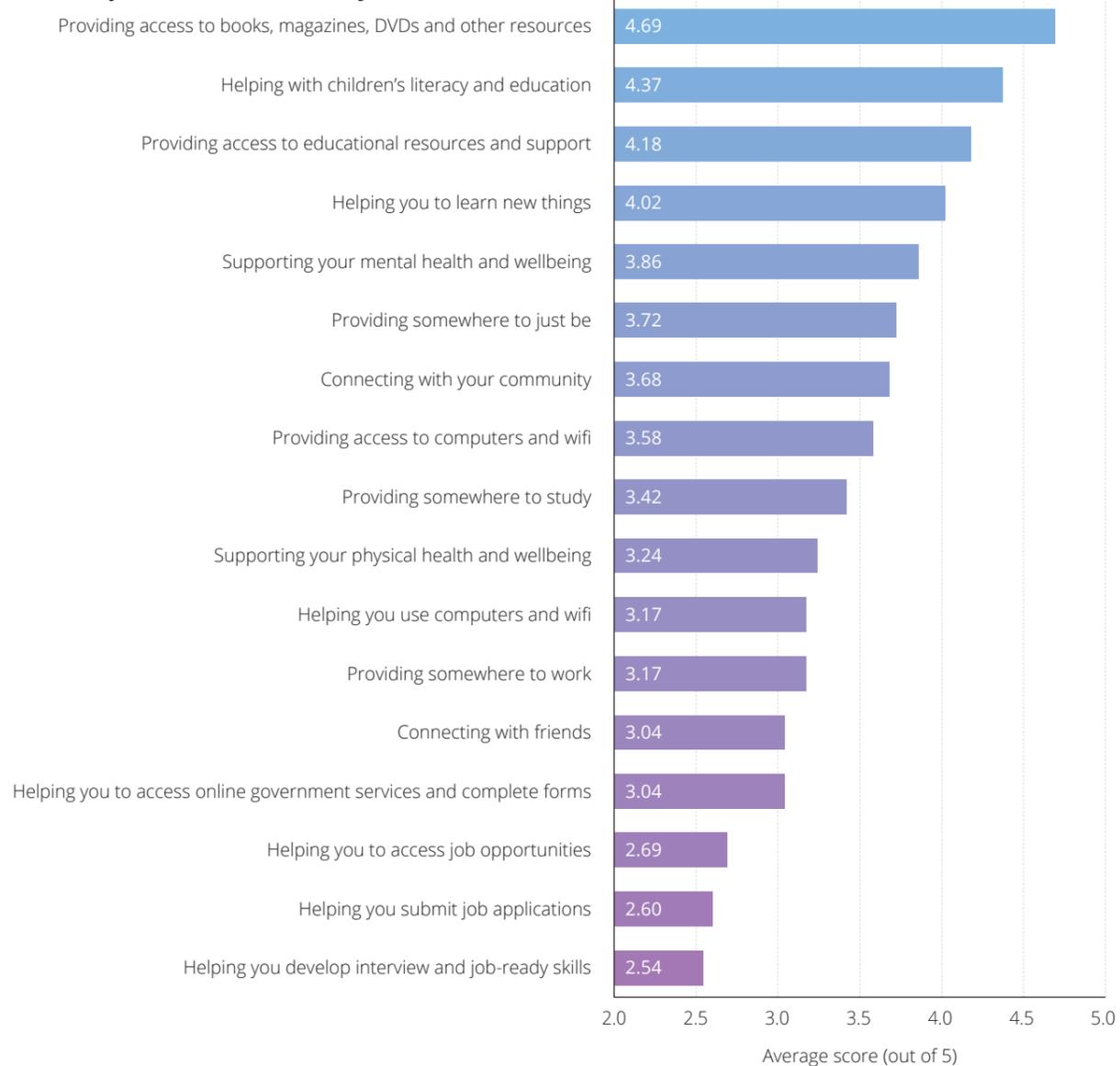
What will/did you do at the library today?	% of library visitors who borrowed something
ONLY Borrow books, DVDs or other items	57%
ALSO Access children's books or activities	13%
Read, study or work	11%
Use the computers, internet or wi-fi	9%
Get information or ask for help from library staff	8%
Catch up with someone or just pass time	6%
Print, photocopy or scan	5%
Attend a library program or event	5%
Use the library catalogue or website	5%
Download ebooks or other digital items	2%
Other activities	6%

In summary, for many Victorians **going to the library is motivated by interests and needs which can vary from one day to the next.**

Regard for different service benefits

The second key observation came from a survey question about the extent to which potential benefits of library use are important to individual library users. The benefit with the highest rating (on a scale from 5 – Very important to 1 – Not important) was (unsurprisingly) the provision of access to books, magazines, DVDs and other resources. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents said that this was very important to them, and it had an average score of 4.69.

How important is the library to ... ?



The second major benefit of public libraries was seen to be that they helped with children's literacy and education (average score 4.37). This reflects the obvious commitment of libraries to providing board books, picture books and early readers, dedicated children's spaces in the library and regular access to early years and children's literacy programs.

Thereafter, as seen in the average importance scores, there was a steady progression through benefits that were more, or less, important to different users. The user feedback showed that:

- reading and access to the collection is the main benefit of public libraries, across all locations and all demographic groups
- educational support is the second major benefit, including contributing to children's literacy and providing broader access to educational resources and support
- the next five highest scoring benefits (all with scores above 3.5) cover a diverse array of positive life outcomes for library users – lifelong learning, mental health and wellbeing, a safe place, social inclusion and digital inclusion
- some benefits from library services are very important to a specific and significant group of users but are seen as of no or little value to others (such as help using computers, help accessing government forms and support for job-seeking).

The survey findings show that Victoria's public libraries appeal to a wide cross-section of the community because:

- they are open to everyone
- they are a safe, supportive, non-judgemental environment
- they are a multi-dimensional community hub offering collections, technology access, programs, places and spaces and helpful assistance from librarians.

The modern public library has the capacity to offer different and complementary benefits from the one operation, because libraries do not operate on a simple input-output model where a single library service produces a single user benefit. Every library user can choose from an interconnected set of library services to produce the outputs and outcomes that they need. If library users choose, they can repeat that process every time they use the library to realise a similar outcome, or they can engage with a different set of services to achieve a quite different outcome; it all depends on what they want and need on any given day.

That is, the ability to expand the vocabulary and broaden the mind, to be transported to another world in your imagination, to fill in a Centrelink form, to update an app, to learn a new skill, to take a load off or to just be.

All things are possible at the library

6

Libraries reflect their unique communities

One of the more remarkable findings from the census and survey was not that the results were often consistent across the state, but that for some questions the results displayed subtle differences between library services that were entirely logical when considered in the context of available demographic data.

All Victorian public libraries offer the same set of core services: collections, programs, technology access, places and spaces, information and reference services. But the profile of library use and the profile of library users varies because they all serve slightly different communities. Libraries in inner Melbourne are not used in the same ways as those libraries in the Interface Councils on the city's urban fringes. Nor are these libraries used in the same way as rural Victorian libraries in Wimmera, Swan Hill, Indigo or East Gippsland, which ultimately reflects the users. To better understand the different regions and the library services, see the full categorised list in Appendix 1.

These were some of the key findings which demonstrated how unique communities have influenced their local library service, with a breakdown of the statistics which support these findings:





Borrowing is more common among older people, and in regional and rural areas where the population has a higher proportion of older people.

Borrowing is the primary use of library services for older users, with this demographic reporting at 70% compared to only 25% of younger users. Furthermore, on Census Day, 60% of library users in regional and rural Victoria borrowed from the collection, compared to scores of below 50% in metropolitan and Interface Council libraries. Regarding age, regional and rural areas have the highest proportion of visitors aged 50 and over, accounting for 44% and 50%, respectively, against the statewide average of 35%. The Mornington Peninsula has this highest proportion of library users aged 70 years or more (35%). More data which supports this finding is that higher levels of borrowing were reported in Bayside, Boroondara and Stonington, which are all Local Government Areas with higher socio-economic status and older populations and library users in Boroondara, Mornington Peninsula and Indigo placed the most importance on the library as a place to access reading material.



Use of library wi-fi and technology services is highest among young people in inner city areas but valued most in rural areas.

Inner city libraries have higher proportions of library users aged 25–34 and 35–49, which includes greater Melbourne (20% aged 25–34 years) and Moreland (17% in this bracket). These users rely on the internet access for study and work, perhaps seeking the neutral space of the library as a place to work remotely without being in their homes. In terms of home access to the internet, this was highest in the fringe areas of Boroondara, and lowest in the rural regions of Gannawarra, Mildura and the Goulburn Valley. By location the library users who put the greatest importance on the library as a place to access technology included Goulburn Valley, Wodonga, Campaspe, Glenelg and Mildura.



Libraries in the Interface Councils host more family groups and have fewer people who come to the library alone.

Libraries in Interface Councils have high proportions of library users aged 5 years and under and of school age from 6–17 years (37% vs 30% statewide), and fewer library users aged 50 years or more (25% vs 35% statewide). The proportion of library users who come to the library alone is higher in the inner city (69%), decreases as use moves away from the city until it hits a low of 52% in Interface libraries, and then increases in regional Victoria and increases again to 68% for rural library services. This leads to the unlikely grouping of Melbourne, Moreland, Glenelg and Gannawarra libraries as those with the highest proportion of users who (with otherwise quite different demographics) come to the library on their own. Family or group use of libraries is greatest in the new growth family-centric Interface Councils. Further evidence of this is that people in the 25–49 year age groups are just as likely to visit the library with a group (such a family group of parents or grandparents with young children) than come by themselves (49% with others vs 48% without) and young people aged 12–17 are least likely to come to the library alone (only 35%) and much more likely than any other age group to come to the library with two or more others (32%).



Use of the library for study or work is highest among young people (secondary and tertiary students) in metropolitan areas.

As a place to read, study or work, 67% of younger users reported this as their principal reason for visiting their library. Libraries in Interface Council areas have the highest proportion of users (37%) in the 6–17-year age bracket. Furthermore, young adults, those who are independent or pursuing further education, are more likely to visit the library along or with one other person, usually to study. By location, library users who placed the greatest importance on the library as a place to study or work included Brimbank, Glenelg, Greater Dandenong and Wyndham.

Put simply, the survey findings make sense – in that where there were variations in the profile of library users and library use between different library services and between libraries in metropolitan and regional areas, these differences can be easily explained by known or likely differences in the demographic and locational characteristics of those communities.

The data reinforces what library staff and library users have known for a long time. Victorian public libraries are well-loved and well-attended because, more than just offering a wide and complementary range of services to people of all ages and interests, every library does this in a way that responds to, reflects and honours the needs of their unique local community.



Libraries build social capital

Over 10 years from 2005 to 2014 State Library Victoria and the Victorian public library network conducted a landmark series of research projects exploring the social impact of public libraries. *Libraries Building Communities* (LBC) found that libraries play an important role in providing resources, programs, places and experiences that connect people to one another and to their communities. Particularly in vulnerable communities, libraries can play a pivotal role in building social capital.

In 2006 Victoria's public libraries undertook the first statewide Library User Census and Survey Project. The census and survey for the first time captured consistent user feedback from all Victorian public library services, producing a rich body of information on library use and user attitudes to public libraries. As this first report details:

The LBC data shows that public libraries play a crucial role in building social capital: bringing people together from across the social strata; forging greater understanding of other perspectives and other cultures; offering a safe space that embraces diversity; and providing connection into the community for people who are otherwise excluded. For many, public libraries provide that first important link to government information and services.¹

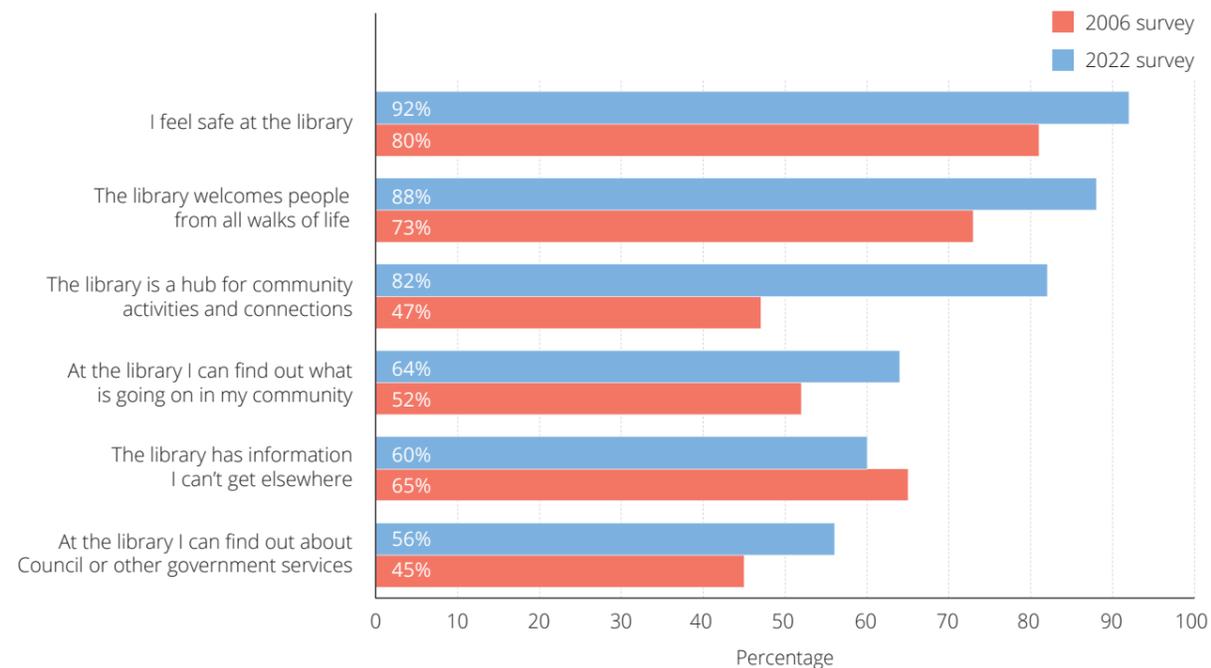


The 2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey sought to replicate, update and build on the original LBC research, and provide a contemporary perspective on the contribution of public libraries to building social capital. Consequently, some of the 2006 survey questions were repeated in the 2022 survey.

In the original LBC in 2006, 81% of respondents said that they felt safe at the library. While the Victorian population has grown and experienced periods of significant social, economic and technological change, 16 years on the 2022 library survey found that 92% of respondents felt safe at the library. With all that has transpired it seems that public libraries are, now more than ever, **highly valued for being a safe, accessible community space.**

¹ *Libraries Building Communities, Executive Summary*, State Library Victoria, 2005.

Do you agree with the following statements about your library? 2006 vs 2022



Similarly, comparisons between the two surveys demonstrate a significant shift in the perception of public libraries as being places that welcome people from all walks of life. From 2006, when 73% of survey respondents believed this was the case, the 2022 survey reported 88% of respondents agreeing that **libraries are places where everyone is welcome**. This result reinforces the earlier finding that libraries are used by people from all ages, backgrounds, cultures and socio-economic circumstances. It is possible this might have been even higher without the public health guidelines on access to libraries in place when the survey was conducted in March 2022.

However, the most dramatic change in community attitudes to public libraries came from the question about the role of libraries as a hub for community activities and connection. From a modest score in 2006 of 47%, the 2022 survey found that for that

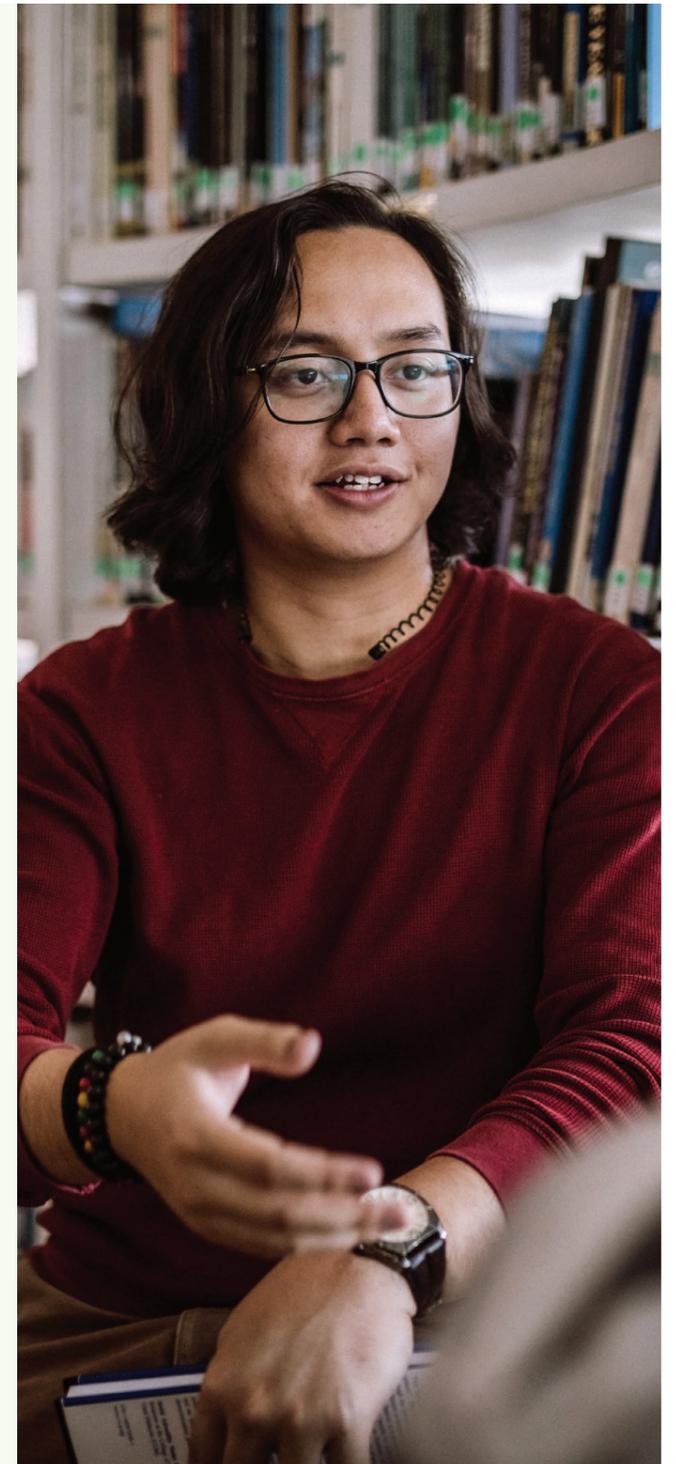
question, 82% of library users now held the view that libraries are community hubs. This finding reflects and endorses the deliberate evolution of Victorian public libraries over the past 16 years to be seen as **safe accessible places that welcome, engage, activate and celebrate community in all its forms**.

Overall, the 2022 survey found that when compared with the 2006 LBC a greater proportion of respondents felt that:

- libraries are a hub for community activities and connections (+35% points)
- libraries welcome people from all walks of life (+15% points)
- libraries are safe community places (+11% points)
- at the library they can find out what is going on in their community (+12% points)
- at the library they can find out about Council or other government services (+11% points).

In fact, there was only one survey question where the 2022 results understandably fell below the 2006 benchmarks. In 2006, 65% of respondents said that the library has information they could not get elsewhere. With the growth of the internet and digital information resources over the past 16 years it is remarkable that the 2022 response only dropped by 5 points to 60%. This suggests that beyond libraries being repositories of information, the complementary role of librarians in facilitating access to authoritative and credible information has not diminished over time.

Victoria's public libraries are valued not just for the benefits they provide to individual library users, but also for their **capacity to build social capital, community connections and community resilience**. At a time when communities are searching for stability and comfort it is reassuring that libraries are seen as safe, welcoming environments embedded in their local community.





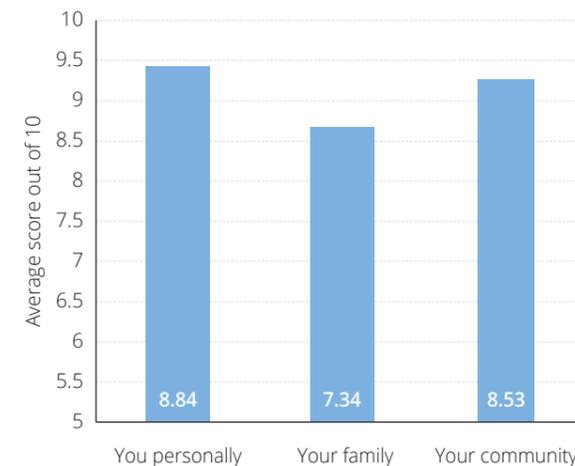
Libraries change lives

For all the benefits that public libraries deliver to their communities, **the main reason that people love their local libraries is the difference they make to their everyday lives.**

The statewide library survey asked respondents to rate the overall importance of the library on a scale from 0 – Not very important to 10 – Very important in three separate areas: to them, to their family and to their community.

Overall, 56% of survey respondents said that the library rated a 10 in terms of its importance to them personally. Eighty-two per cent gave scores between 8 and 10, and only 2% gave the library a score below 5. The average score was a very high 8.84.

How important is your library to ... ?



The importance of the library to the community also rated very highly with an average score of 8.53. Fifty-one per cent of respondents rated this a 10, with a further 26% rating an 8 or a 9. Only 4% rated the importance of the library below 5.

The importance of the library to respondents' families had a lower rating with an average score of 7.34. These scores were influenced by generally lower ratings and 7% of respondents who, given their demographic profile, do not appear to live with or near their family (such as older persons or those independent and undertaking further training).

The everyday importance of libraries was demonstrated through an open-ended survey question where respondents were asked to briefly describe what their library means to them and their community. Some chose to provide a short statement about the value they get from being a library user. Some wrote extensively and colourfully about a positive and productive experience they have had at the library, in some cases memories that they have held for many years. Others wrote eloquently about the role of a public library in a democratic society.

The following 20 quotes, taken from among more than 12,000 responses to this question, illustrate the high regard in which libraries and librarians are held in the eyes of people who use their services. They are passionate, profound, pragmatic and deeply personal.

“[The library] is a source of knowledge and other information. A place where community is developed, fostered and glued together. Where everyone, regardless of socio-economic, ethnic, cultural background is welcome. A civilized (sic) place which reminds us of the value of each other, learning and valuable institutions.”



“A welcome, democratic and above all a profoundly civilized (sic) personal, family, and community asset.”

“My library is a vibrant cultural and community centre that, by its very existence, reminds us how vitally important books are to our society. Libraries celebrate books and literacy without a profit motive – a noble and worthy contribution to make to our lives. Libraries are as essential to life as oxygen!”



“It’s a hub! A learning hub, a playing hub and a social hub! It has things we don’t have and couldn’t afford! It’s warm in winter and cool in summer!”



“My library is a place I know I can go to and feel safe and comfortable. Everyone is welcome regardless of wealth, status or any other criteria.”

“They represent the ideals of democracy and enlightenment: that people should be free to access information, learn, be exposed to ideas, and have a place in the community that is not dependent on spending money.”

“A comfortable, safe, welcoming space for diverse community. One of the few public places that brings together a great cross-section of our city.”

“Vital part of the community HUB where all walks of life can meet, gain access to a full suite of resources in a safe, comfortable environment, supported by knowledgeable, friendly and kind staff – ready to help at anytime.”

“A place where you feel welcomed, and the staff go out of their way to assist – carrying borrowed items for an elderly person with a disability all the way to their car.”

“Somewhere close to go with my baby when we have nothing else to do. 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.”

“When I took my toddler into my library after lockdown she looked around with her mouth wide open, then yelled “Books!” and started running along the shelves.”

“I would be lost without the library. My sons borrow 10 to 20 books a week and they read them excitedly because they chose them themselves and use their own library cards. We love to hang out and read the books on display. The different display themes give me different ideas about what to learn next or what to teach my children or crafts to try. We love the library.”



“The library is an enormous resource in terms of providing reading material, magazines, music and films. This is the main benefit I get from very high Council rates which I pay from an aged pension. I appreciate free access to all my reading and viewing material. I value the charm and compassion of the staff. And commend the library for dispensing with fees for late return of books, this is most welcome and a generous action which allows members to extend borrowing time to suit personal reading habits.”

“I think the library has made my brain big.”
[response from a child under 15 years]

“It’s a place for people to catch up and have a chat. Getting the elderly out of their homes and socialising. It helps the unemployed by allowing access to newspapers, internet etc.”
“During COVID they were the only people bar my doctor I saw or spoke to for two years. They were my lifeline and didn’t know it.”

“It’s a place where you can feel connected to the community ... especially good for my children and it fosters their love of books. Pre-Covid (sic) we went to Story Time a lot which my children loved. It helped me meet new people when we first moved to town and I was at home feeling isolated with young pre-school children.”

“It is a place where I can see the community and talk to other members of the local community – even though from time to time library staff tell me off for talking loudly with other library users.”

“Some of my earliest memories are about me in the library, crouching in the myths and legends corner.”

“The library is my friend and intimate companion. It feeds me with knowledge and power. The library is the yardstick to measure the literacy and cultural standards of the community.”



Once again, the feedback from library users highlights the fact that their library is not a single service or collection of services, nor is it a single space or place, nor is it just a community hub: it is all these things and so much more. We understand just how library users value the libraries because of the ways they described in the survey:

- they are me, they are my family, they are my community
- they are welcoming and free and safe
- they are books and reading and learning and fuel for the imagination
- they are active and fun, and calm and reflective
- they connect to an ever-digital world, and help me to connect when I don't think I can
- they connect me to other people, to information and to everyday and essential services
- they are filled with people I know and people I don't, people like me and people not like me
- they are served by knowledgeable, helpful caring staff
- they hold memories that are cherished and are the source of new family memories
- they provide comfort, sanctuary, challenge and inspiration
- they make my life better
- they make my community stronger, more resilient, more compassionate and just
- they represent what I want for the place where I live.

Which is why, in times of disruption and in light of significant social, economic and environmental challenges, **the role of public libraries in supporting community learning, connections and wellbeing has never been more important.**





Libraries have been hit hard by Covid-19, but are rebounding

Impact of COVID-19 on library access and use

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Australia at the beginning of 2020, and a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria on 16 March 2020. Within a week all public libraries were closed and the first mandated lockdown commenced from 31 March. By the time the sixth lockdown ended at midnight on October 21 2021, metropolitan Melbourne had been locked down for 263 days, with regional areas experiencing similar restrictions on movement.

However, having been declared part of the vaccinated economy, restrictions on access to Victorian public libraries continued until midnight on 22 April 2022. When libraries opened their doors on 23 April 2022 to welcome all users regardless of vaccination status, access had been restricted or limited for 446 days over a two-year period.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on library access was greater than just those missing days. Library users faced a range of challenges that influenced the way and extent to which they accessed public libraries. These included:

- a total lack of access due to library closures and 5 km travel limitations
- restricted access due to attendance caps at library branches, reduced opening hours, social distancing or vaccination status
- the forced shift in mode of access as libraries prioritised online and home delivery services

- the transition to new modes of access such as downloading ebooks or watching Story Time programs at home
- lack of online access due to insufficient internet connection or proficiency with online services (such as using the catalogue search, making reservations, downloading digital collection items)
- discomfort in physical access due to mask wearing or fear regarding proximity to other people.

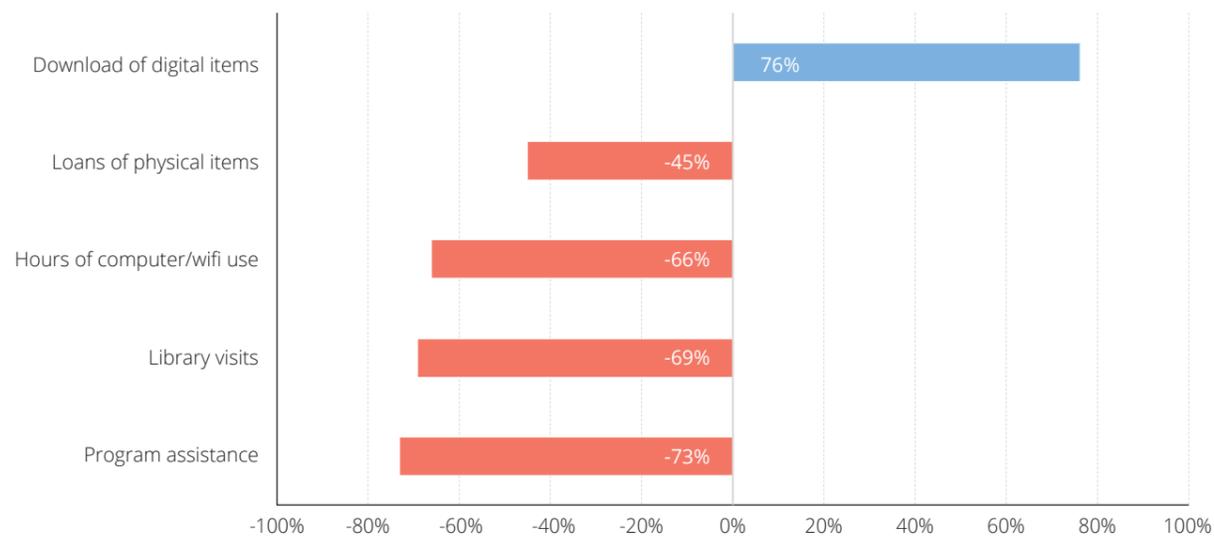
Unfortunately, what was once a strength of the public library brand – its position in welcoming people of all ages and interests – became a major risk factor as users were concerned about exposure to COVID-19 in an environment populated by so many different people.

Libraries responded to these challenges by introducing innovative click and collect services, home delivery and online programming models that enabled users to maintain their connection to the library through access library collections and activities. Overall, libraries were diligent in providing COVID-safe environments through upholding entry protocols, appointing COVID marshals, checking vaccination certificates, providing hand sanitiser, quarantining books, wiping down desks and screens, and complying with density limits.

However, all of this could not remove the risk of exposure, and entering a shared common space was too confronting, especially for older people with prevailing health conditions and parents with children who were too young to be vaccinated. Additionally there was the outrage from unvaccinated people who felt unfairly discriminated against by libraries that had always claimed to be open and accessible spaces for all.

Ultimately, **the impact of COVID-19 on public library use has been dramatic and significant.** Data from the 2020–21 PLV Annual Statistical Survey shows that statewide, when compared with the 2018–19 (the last full year pre-COVID), library use was down by 60–70% in terms of program attendance (–73%), computer and wi-fi use (–69%) as well as visits to the library (–66%). Loans of physical items were hit hard (–45%), propped up by home delivery and click and collect services. Use of digital resources soared.

Victorian Public Libraries - % change in library use from 2018-19 to 2020-21



Library census and survey

The Victorian Public Library Census and Survey were originally intended to be conducted in the latter half of 2021. However, with Public Health Orders associated with the COVID-19 pandemic the project was put on hold. Conditions began to ease in early 2022, but onsite library use did not return to pre-COVID levels as:

- some people were still reluctant to go out into the community, especially in indoor public spaces
- some people had shifted borrowing from physical to digital items

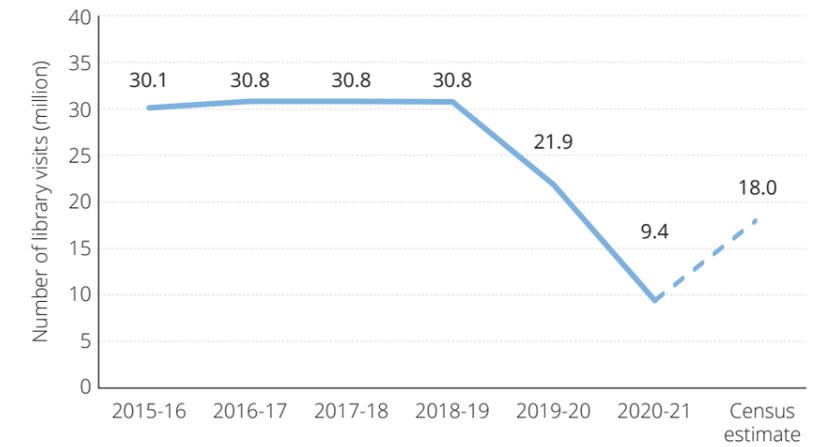
- proof of vaccination status for entry to a library was still required until 22 April
- rates of COVID-19 infection and a bad flu season meant that some people stayed at home to isolate or recover from flu-like symptoms.

Despite these continuing challenges the statewide survey ran in March 2022 and the library census on 24 May 2022.

Signs of recovery

While COVID-19 was still a factor in library visitation on the Census Day, 24 May was considered to be far enough away from the heights of the pandemic to provide an indication of where library usage was heading in a 'living with COVID' world. Extrapolating from census data and door counts from libraries on Census Day, would suggest 18 million library visits over the course of a full year.

Annual visits to Victorian public libraries (million)



This is a significant increase on the 2020–21 figure of 9.4 million, which included repeated COVID-19 lockdowns, but is not yet at 2019–20 levels of 21.9 million, which also included COVID-19 lockdowns from March 2020. The census estimate for 2021/2022 is still 42% short of the 2018–19 figure of 30.8 million visits to library branches and mobile libraries.

On the Census Day eresources were downloaded 24,456 times. This equates to around 8.9 million downloads over the course of a year. While this is consistent with the 8.7 million downloads reported from the 2020–21 PLV Annual Statistical Survey, under-reporting from some libraries means that the true figure is likely to be higher than estimated from the census returns.

Website visitors and download of eresources from Victorian public libraries (millions)



There were also 31,115 visitors to library websites on Census Day, equating to an estimated 11.4 million visits per annum. This reinforces the idea that the downturn in library usage experienced during COVID-related library closures is beginning to turn around.

While it appears that the recovery in use of Victorian public libraries from COVID-19 lows is underway, **there is still a long way to go until libraries get back to pre-COVID levels.**

Public Library Victoria's Return Yourself to the Library campaign is one initiative that aims to re-engage with those who are reticent to come back to the library, but more action will be required, both at a state and local level.



10

People want bigger/ better/more accessible library services

Although satisfaction with public libraries was very high, and 50–60% of users rated their library as 10 out of 10, there are still areas where libraries could – in the eyes of their users – improve the range of, access to and quality of their services.

When asked in the library survey what one improvement they would make to their library, respondents took the opportunity to have their say. With more than 18,000 survey respondents the survey generated literally thousands of ideas. Many were applicable to the individual library service used by the respondent, and in some cases to a specific library branch, service outlet or activity. Some suggestions could be addressed through simple fixes (such as repairing the return chute or improving signage) while others were service-wide (such as providing longer opening hours and new programs). Some were issues that could be acted on by the library service alone while others require collaboration with partners in Council or the community (such as increasing parking spaces or creating partnerships with schools and education providers).

The common theme among the library user suggestions was **bigger/better/more**. That includes:

- expanded and more diverse collections
- more library programs, especially related to literacy, learning, technology access and lifestyle
- longer opening hours
- bigger and better library buildings
- more spaces for individuals and groups, quiet and active pursuits, relaxing and purposeful endeavours.

However, what this might mean in practice is not straightforward, as illustrated by the demand for expanded collections. According to different survey respondents, even from the same branch, better collections could mean any one or more of:

- more adult fiction, young adult fiction and junior fiction
- more adult non-fiction and junior non-fiction
- more large print and audiobooks
- more graphic novels
- more classic literature
- more Koori and indigenous resources.

But it could also mean:

- more copies of current books
- more thrillers, or fewer thrillers or more crime and thrillers with less murder and body bits
- more books by multicultural writers
- more Language Other than English items (including Swahili and African literature, Urdu, Gujarati), or more language books (especially novels by prominent Hindi writers and Greek literature), or more Vietnamese DVDs or fewer titles in foreign languages
- more references, research papers and textbooks, more generic history research
- more ebooks (romance and historical romance), more eresources (sci fi and fantasy)
- add the *New Idea Royal* magazine
- increase the range of right-wing publications
- purchase holistic, metaphysical self-help books
- keep the Stanley Gibbons stamp catalogues up to date.

Or, as one respondent proposed, “greater variety to suit my esoteric tastes”.

The following table gives an idea of the scope of improvements suggested by library users.

Service access



- Increased opening hours, especially earlier opening (9am), evenings, weekends and public holidays
- Don't close at lunch time
- 24/7 access to library branches
- Improved website and app
- Short-term parking for quick drop off
- Better disabled parking
- Extend book delivery services
- Sandwich board/flag to show library is open

Places and spaces



- More comfortable seating for adults and children
- Refresh, with more light and colour
- Quiet work spaces
- More conversation areas, meeting rooms and group study spaces
- More outdoor spaces and covered seating
- Improved library layout
- Hanging signage

Facilities



- New library buildings, bigger libraries
- Coffee machine, café (or a wine bar)
- Water fountain
- Bike parking
- Somewhere to tie dogs outside the library
- A clean up of surrounding areas
- Toilets

Customer service



- Removal of Covid security guards (sic)
- Concierge at the front door to direct our use
- Separation from Council Customer Service ("bring back knowledgeable staff")
- Ability to make payments on mobile vehicles and non-branch service points

Collections



- Removal of late fines
- Removal of fees for reservations
- Extending loan periods on some items
- Toys and puzzles to borrow
- A better range of books
- Separate sections for fantasy and sci fi
- Facility to check authors of similar genre
- More frequent turnover of books
- Larger return chute, fixed return chute
- Vending machine of DVDs
- Voice activated book finder
- Email/SMS updates of new titles
- Less low shelving
- Better interlibrary loans
- eMembership of any library in Australia for borrowing digital items
- Absorb the local historical society

Technology access



- 3D printers and scanners
- Virtual reality corner and headwear
- Scan to email
- Air printing

Programs



- Movie club
- 1,000 Books Before School
- Basic computer classes
- How to download ebooks
- Workshops for families
- Job interview skills and small business advice
- Information talks by experts
- Courses for self-improvement and personal development
- Art classes for seniors
- Changing the days of regular activities so other people can access them
- Portal or links to other community events

Resourcing



- Larger library budgets
- Tax breaks for donations

Appendix 1

Victorian library services by location (and LGA)

Inner City

- Maribyrnong
- Melbourne
- Port Phillip
- Yarra

Interface

- Casey-Cardinia
 - Casey
 - Cardinia
- Hume
- Melton
- Wyndham
- Yarra Plenty
 - Banyule
 - Nillumbik
 - Whittlesea

Metropolitan

- Bayside
- Boroondara
- Brimbank
- Darebin
- Eastern
 - Knox
 - Maroondah
 - Yarra Ranges
- Frankston
- Glen Eira
- Greater Dandenong
- Hobsons Bay
- Kingston
- Monash
- Moonee Valley
- Moreland
- Stonnington
- Whitehorse Manningham
 - Manningham
 - Whitehorse

Regional

- Central Highlands
 - Ararat
 - Ballarat
 - Central Goldfields
 - Hepburn
 - Moorabool
 - Northern Grampians
 - Pyrenees
 - Southern Grampians
- Geelong
 - Colac Otway
 - Greater Geelong
 - Golden Plains
 - Queenscliff
 - Surf Coast
- Goldfields
 - Greater Bendigo
 - Loddon
 - Macedon Ranges
 - Mount Alexander
- Mildura
- Mornington Peninsula
- Warrnambool
- Wodonga

Rural

- Buloke
- Campaspe
- Corangamite-Moyne
 - Corangamite
 - Moyne
- East Gippsland
- Gannawarra
- Glenelg
- Goulburn Valley
 - Greater Shepparton
 - Moira
 - Strathbogie
- High Country
 - Alpine
 - Benalla
 - Mansfield
 - Wangaratta
- Hindmarsh
- Indigo
- Latrobe
- Murrindindi
- Myli
 - Bass Coast
 - Baw Baw
 - South Gippsland
- Swan Hill
- Towong
- Wellington
- Wimmera
 - Horsham
 - West Wimmera
- Yarriambiack

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