SOCIAL EQUITY WORKS

Reading Writing Hotline
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Insights from the classroom – a survey of adult literacy providers

A REPORT ON

ADULT LITERACY, NUMERACY AND DIGITAL LITERACY NEED

(2022)

Prepared by Social Equity Works for the

Reading Writing Hotline

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ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult Continuing Education
ACER	Australian Centre for Educational Research
ACO	Aboriginal Controlled Organisation
AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Program
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCA	Community Colleges Australia
Cert III	Certificate III is the third certificate level of the Australian Qualification Framework
Cert VI	Certificate IV is the fourth certificate level of the Australian Qualification Framework
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DHH	Deaf and Hard of Hearing
DL	Digital literacy
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of other Languages
ESP	Employment Service Providers
F2F	Face to face delivery
FIFO	Fly in fly out
FSFYF	Foundation Skills for Your Future
FSK	Foundation Skills Training Package
JA	Job Active providers
LN	Literacy and numeracy
LLN	Language, literacy, and numeracy
LLND	Language, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy
LND	Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PSTRE	Problem solving in technology-rich environments
RRR	Regional, rural and remote
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment Program
VET	Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a high-level summary of outcomes from a national survey of adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LND) needs, undertaken by adult literacy and numeracy teachers, trainers, private tutors, volunteer tutors and managers offering LND programs and services around Australia. The survey was commissioned by the national Reading Writing Hotline and co-designed with and administered by Social Equity Works.

The aim of this research is to build a picture of current delivery, the need identified for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs across Australia and the barriers experienced by both providers and learners.

Major Findings
- 82% of respondents identified barriers/multiple barriers to providers offering/delivering LND programs
- 32% of respondents said that a lack of qualified teachers was a barrier to delivery
- 57% indicated inadequate funding was the main barrier for providers
- 85% of respondents identified one or more barriers for learners
- 56% indicated that learners not knowing where to ask for help was the main barrier for learners
- 54% indicated shame and embarrassment was a barrier for learners
- 80% of respondents requested beginner literacy resources
- 64% indicated individual and tailored literacy assistance is the main unmet need
- 81% need targeted teaching and learning resources
- 14% of delivery was workplace based

A combination of barriers experienced by both providers and learners can make it difficult for learners to access suitable literacy and numeracy classes.

Providers indicated that unmet community needs were high and included:

- individual and tailored literacy assistance (64%)
- wrap around supports to address barriers and enable participation (52%)
- help with form filling (49%)
- pathways into accredited courses (47%)
- the lack of non-accredited courses delivered in community settings (43%)
- local area literacy coordination of services and classes (37%)
- culturally appropriate courses for First Nations people.

'Please keep representing our learners' needs - whether it be to have access to literacy support in remote areas or paper-based distance classes for those students who are housebound or who live remotely or who just cannot attend a face to face class due to anxiety or other issues. These learners often say that the few hours they spend studying with their lessons provides some relief from their anxieties or whatever issues. Learners also feel that they are taking some control and doing something for themselves. It seems so unfair for these students to be denied paper-based lessons.' (Metro, NSW)

While there was significant reporting of unmet need there was also concern from some providers that they don't have enough enrolments to run a 'viable' class. The findings suggest that this may be exacerbated by learners feeling uncomfortable joining mainstream classes due to shame and embarrassment and/or learners not knowing how to access a class.

The most commonly identified barrier for providers located in metropolitan areas was 'inadequate funding' at 56%, followed by the 'inability to customise courses' as the second highest barrier at 30%.

Respondents from regional and rural services identified 'inadequate funding' as the main barrier at 59%, followed by 'lack of qualified teachers' at 42%. Over one third of respondents from regional and rural areas identified 'inadequate advertising' as a barrier to delivery.

For remote providers 'inadequate funding' was the main barrier to provision at 62%. Having 'a lack of qualified teachers' was the next most significant barrier to provision at 38%.

An increase in literacy and numeracy funding, as well as better targeting of existing funding and provision would enable providers to reduce barriers so that provision does meet the needs of learners as identified.

There appears to be wide variation in what is being delivered and how it is being delivered. These inconsistencies can lead to confusion for funders, providers, learners and researchers. For example, respondents to the survey reported that the main literacy program offered is one to one support. However, they also strongly highlighted the unmet need for individualised and tailored literacy assistance. This could be explained by types of one to one support not meeting the needs of learners as discussed in the Learner Support Section of the report.

LND learners are also a heterogenous group and show considerable variety in both their needs and the outcomes they desire from LND education. A thematic analysis of respondents' feedback identified a number of different LND learner types which include:

- Jobseekers from an English speaking background who need customised literacy programs and one to one support in order to progress to employment or VET studies

- Employees from an English speaking background who need customised LND and/or one on one literacy support to ensure that they can meet the LND requirements of their current workplace, either to meet the requirements of their current role or seeking to progress to other roles. Workplace literacy can include compliance standards, report writing, complying with WHS standards

- Adults from an English-speaking background who are not currently job seeking and who face significant social, economic and sometimes health-related barriers.

- Parents, grandparents, and caregivers from an English speaking background who wish to be more able to assist their children to learn to read and write or with schooling more generally

- First Nations adults from both English speaking and CALD (linguistically diverse) backgrounds facing substantial barriers to LND provision. This can include lack of culturally appropriate courses and lack of English as an additional language provision

- English speaking adults living remotely who have no access to face to face classes and are unable to access online provision due to lack of access to technology and data, insufficient data coverage and digital literacy skills gaps.

Respondents said that:
- Face to face individualised and learner centred delivery is what works best for LND learners.
- Online courses can provide access for some. However, the digital divide and low LND skills make it a less appropriate delivery mode for most LND learners.

- The Foundation Skills Training package is not meeting the needs of many LND learners.
- Workplace delivery is low and many currently working are unable to access LND courses outside of work hours.
- Certificate 1 courses may need longer than one semester to achieve learner outcomes.
- High levels of disadvantage in the community, exacerbated by COVID-19, bushfires, floods and other natural disasters create significant barriers for these learners. This reinforces LND gaps where there is intergenerational poverty coupled with low levels of literacy.
- Learners in rural and remote locations have less access to courses and these communities have less access to qualified teachers.

Respondents also identified that they need:
- more funding
- more qualified teachers
- more LND teacher training available and more teachers being trained
- more suitable courses being offered including:
  - more funding for non-formal and non-accredited courses located in community settings
  - flexible attendance and course completion hours
- greater access to appropriate paper-based learning resources for a range of learners in a diversity of settings
- greater literacy coordination at the local level such as a Literacy Co-ordinator role to support the community

It is apparent that a person's LND skills gap increases their vulnerability to disadvantage. It makes jobseekers less competitive in securing employment and those employed vulnerable to possible future job loss or lack of progression. It can compound a person's economic disadvantage, making it harder for them to access the supports they need and reduce their options. It can also make it harder for a person to fully participate in all aspects of life, whether that be within the family, socially or in the wider community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this survey it is recommended that there be:

- a greater variety of classes, especially at the lower certificate, non-accredited and pre-accredited level
- the option for learners to enrol in multiple LND programs to allow them to practise and embed these foundational skills
- more flexible funding models to meet the diversity of literacy needs
- more qualified teachers and greater access to teacher training to support delivery
- community engagement programs to destigmatise literacy gaps experienced by this cohort of adult learners
- community outreach and partnerships to deliver programs and courses in local, safe environments that minimise shame and embarrassment and promote access
- funding for First Nations English literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs that are culturally appropriate & reflect diversity of models as identified by communities
- improved infrastructure and technology support for learners
- increased flexibility in delivery patterns and timing of courses
- access for providers and learners to appropriate LND resources
- increased delivery of workplace based LND or providing courses at times that are accessible to working adults.

BACKGROUND

In 2021 the Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) received additional funding from the Australian Government to undertake community consultation to identify and report on the need and demand for adult literacy/numeracy programs, courses and support, nationally. The aim of this work is to build up a comprehensive picture of the need for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs across Australia and examine current delivery patterns.

This survey, and report on its findings, forms part of a significant Community Consultation strategy for the Hotline over 2021-2023. It is the first in a suite of online surveys and other data collection strategies to investigate adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. Other data collection strategies, to be completed in 2022, will include:

- Survey of First Nations providers on literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs
- Survey of First Nations organisations – community need for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy
- Focus group with identified libraries delivering literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support to identify key issues
- Focus groups/ or forum with key stakeholders in the community sector to identify literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs in their communities

The online survey asked respondents to report on:

- their current LND delivery
- any barriers they perceived to organisational delivery
- barriers for adult learners.
- unmet demand for literacy programs
- the impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on delivery
- demand for learning resources

The aim of the surveys and focus groups is to provide a snapshot of current literacy/numeracy provision, collate information on needs of adults seeking to improve their literacy and numeracy, gain more insight into unmet needs, and promote the Reading Writing Hotline more widely.

Knowledge of the Reading Writing Hotline

The last section of the survey asked respondents to provide feedback on their contact with and knowledge of the services provided by the Reading Writing Hotline and their interest in new projects and products being produced by the Hotline in support of their delivery. A full analysis of the data will be ongoing and will be integrated with the findings from subsequent surveys

It is important to distinguish between the demand for current LN courses on offer and the need identified for courses that address the goals of those seeking them. It has been acknowledged by Joyce report - *Strengthening Skills*, (2019), the Productivity Commission Report - *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* Review (2020) and more recently the Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult Literacy and its Importance report *Don't Take it as Read* (2022) that there are many in the community who are unable to access classes which meet their needs. This has an impact on their ability to gain employment, maintain employment, participate in education and training and participate fully in family and community life.

The Joyce Report *Strengthening Skills* 2019 stated that: 'A lack of foundation skills clearly limits the quality of life and employment opportunities for a significant group of Australians, and it is likely to

leave them particularly vulnerable to future changes to work"[i]. It recommended that: "The Commonwealth and the States and Territories commit, over time, to supporting fee-free foundation-level education for all Australians who need training to bring their language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy levels up to Level 2 in the Australian Core Skills Framework".

The Productivity Commission Report *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* 2020 found that: "Without these skills, people cannot participate fully in the economic and social life of the country. Improving the foundation skills of these Australians would yield public and private benefits."[ii]

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

It is important to note that the survey is not focussed on the rates of delivery of LND programs nationally. Instead it is focussed on determining needs and barriers for current providers and learners across Australia. It looked at unmet need and also asked about the impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on LND delivery.

Because there is a great variety in the use of terms and how people describe LND courses and programs, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the rates of delivery for each program type. Individual survey responses do not take into account the size of provider and number of enrolments in each delivery type. This information is highly variable for each provider.

Since the survey was distributed through the Hotline database of providers and also literacy provider networks, it also received a number of responses from overseas literacy providers. Their responses have been removed from the analysis of findings.

METHODOLOGY

Social Equity Works and the Reading Writing Hotline co-designed an online survey for LLN and DL educators, providers, adult literacy tutors and trainers. It was pilot tested with adult LND providers between late March and early April 2022 and then deployed between late April and late May 2022.

The survey was distributed to 1,321 individuals via email addresses that are registered on the Hotline database of LLND providers.

The survey was designed in three main parts: a) establishing the types and locations of programs currently offered by respondents; b) identifying the barriers and unmet needs of providers and learners; c) determining how the Hotline can assist these literacy and numeracy providers.

SAMPLE

There were 382 responses from all over Australia. Respondents were, in the main, teachers, tutors, workplace trainers, curriculum developers and managers from TAFE, not for profit community education providers, private providers and volunteers from volunteer tutoring programs.
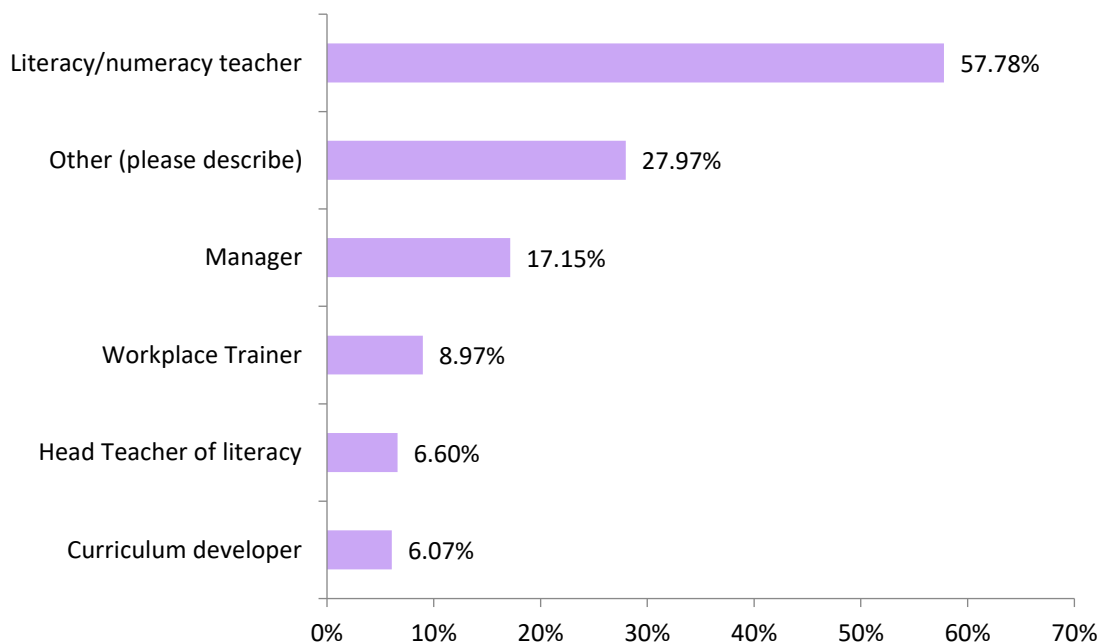

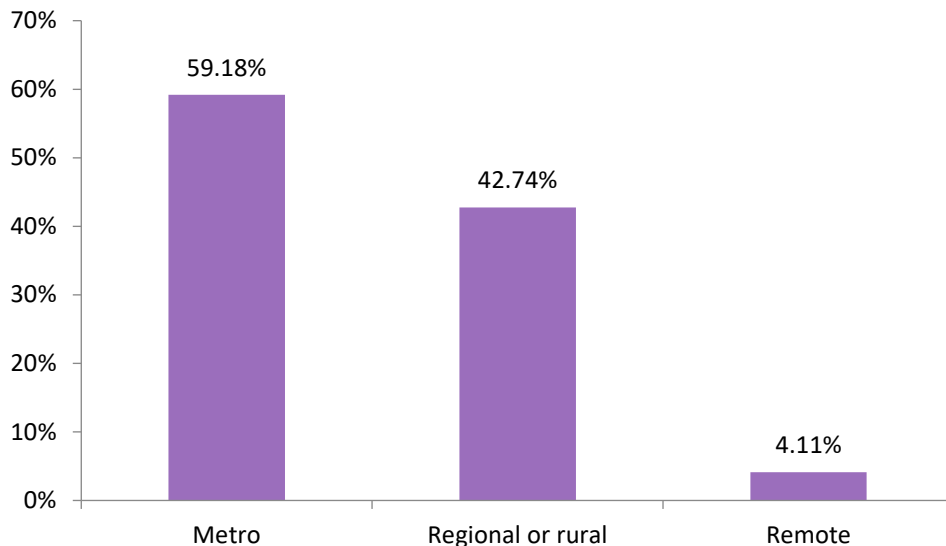*Figure 1: Role of Respondent in their Organisation*

Figure 2: Location of Respondents' Organisations

Respondents were asked about the location of their delivery by metropolitan, regional or rural and remote. 59% of respondents were from metropolitan locations, 43% were from regional and rural locations and 4% delivered programs in remote locations. Some respondents reported delivering in more than one location.

The largest single group of respondents were literacy or numeracy teachers. Of these, 59% were from metropolitan areas, 41% from regional/rural areas and 2% from remote areas. Some providers delivered in more than one area so the total is higher than 100%.

There is an overrepresentation of views from regional and remote areas of Australia compared to population data. According to the ABS, around 7 million Australians - or 28% - live in rural and remote areas (ABS 2022c). Almost half of the respondents to this survey are located or delivering in regional, rural, and remote locations. They are important voices to be heard.[iii]

The map on this page shows the distribution of locations where respondents reported they were delivering courses and programs. It is important to note that, while there were 382 survey respondents, 374 respondents answered this question with several indicating that their service was located in more than one location, which is why the figure totals 379. A small number of respondents, 13 or 3%, reported that they deliver their courses or programs nationally.

Figure 3: Delivery Location of Respondents Organisation

Overall, 48% of respondents to the survey were from TAFE providers, 22% from community providers with an RTO arm, 10% from community providers without an RTO arm. 8% from private training providers, 7% from private tutors and 0.5% from University Learning Centres. NSW had the largest number of TAFE providers responding. 'Other' responses came from a range of services and agencies, including government departments, Aboriginal -controlled community organisations and libraries.

By State and Territory	By location	TAFE provider	Community provider with RTO arm	Community provider without RTO arm	Private training provider	Private tutor	Uni. learning centre	Other
Overall responses		48%	22%	10%	8%	7%	0.5%	12%
ACT	9	33%	11%	11%	44%	11%	0%	11%
QLD	43	46%	9%	16%	7%	5%	2%	21%
NSW	160	68%	20%	2%	2%	6%	1%	9%
NT	3	0%	33%	0%	67%	0%	0%	0%
TAS	23	26%	4%	17%	22%	13%	0%	30%
VIC	69	30%	36%	13%	12%	3%	0%	12%
WA	56	16%	29%	20%	14%	14%	0%	12%
SA	13	54%	15%	15%	15%	0%	0%	8%

Table 1: Respondents by Provider Type by State and Territory

[1] Note: This table shows survey response rates for people who answered both the question about location - state and territory *and* provider type. Totals do not add up to 100 because these both of these questions allowed multiple responses and some respondents ticked more than one response to either or both questions. 12% of respondents also selected 'Other' to the provider type question however on closer analysis this was used by many people to clarify or give more detail about their provider type within the overarching categories.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings from this survey (2022) demonstrate the high level of need for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy provision across Australia. They highlight the large number of barriers to delivery experienced by providers in addition to the barriers identified for learners. Underpinning delivery are the high levels of often complex needs experienced by adults with LND skills gaps and the multiple barriers that organisations and learners face in addressing this need. The findings also highlight the significant variance in the delivery of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs, in approaches across states and territories, and in approaches by different providers.

The Context

The 2011-12 Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey measured the skill levels of Australians aged 15 to 74 years and found that:

- One in five Australians had low literacy and/or numeracy skills.
- There was a significant gap between the most proficient and least proficient adults in literacy and in numeracy.
- Numeracy represented a particular challenge in Australia and poor numeracy performance could be traced back to initial schooling.
- In addition, and significant for all levels of government if they are to meet their commitment to Closing the Gap targets, an estimated 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have minimal English literacy, a figure that rises to as high as 70 per cent in many remote areas.[iv]

The COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters have exposed the extent of the literacy gaps for those people who require access to recovery support and disaster relief. Access to such relief involved filling in of forms, often available only online, exacerbating their difficulty. There was an increase in calls to the Reading Writing Hotline during 2020 and 2021 from people needing assistance to access online platforms and to apply for disaster recovery payments and other supports. The increased digitisation of the forms and application processes required to access emergency relief and other government assistance is proving a considerable barrier to many. The impact of the pandemic, in particular on the access of adults to LND programs, has been marked. It has led to increased isolation, decreased mental health and wellbeing, and further entrenched the digital divide for many adult Australians, especially those experiencing financial disadvantage, geographical or social isolation.

Not knowing where to ask for help and shame and embarrassment are reported as the two most significant barriers for adults facing LND challenges. However, the majority of respondents reported that learners face multiple barriers. For particular groups of Australians, barriers are higher. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those living in remote locations without access to education providers and exposed to the 'tyranny of distance', those disadvantaged by the digital divide, those with past negative experiences of schooling or early school leaving, those who have grown up with intergenerational low levels of literacy, people with a range of disabilities that make accessing mainstream provision and programs difficult and people who experience complex disadvantage and current crisis, including trauma, mental health, domestic violence and alcohol and other drug dependence.

Research reported by the Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) has shown that improving LLN can change patterns, especially within disadvantaged populations. For example, improving foundation skills in both parents and children can reverse intergenerational patterns of low achievement. For disengaged adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy, there is evidence of a strong connection between participation in literacy and numeracy programs and changes in literacy and numeracy practices that can in turn lead to increased proficiency levels over time.[v]

Providers are addressing these needs in the context of their jurisdiction, location, and provider type. Within these delivery contexts they can experience divergence in funding arrangements, in bureaucratic processes and practices, in geographical and locational specificities and community needs, each of which must be responded to. Addressing these needs is similarly complicated. One-on-one learner provision is the most common adult literacy program preferred by providers across all delivery settings. However, this may include one-on-one tutoring, learner support or individual assistance to learners in vocational courses and subjects. Other delivery solutions to meet learner need that were identified included customised delivery and outreach to communities and learners, especially those geographically and socially isolated. While distance and digital delivery models are used, there is still a strong preference for face to face delivery or hybrid delivery and providers remain sceptical about the applicability of online delivery for this learner cohort.

While a proportion of adults seeking LND learning are jobseekers, a significant proportion are also in the workforce but may be struggling to meet the LND requirements of their job. They may also be underemployed and seeking to increase their skills to increase their hours of employment or employment options. The low levels of workplace delivery highlighted in this report raise concerns, especially in the current economic climate with its record low unemployment rates and high job vacancies.

Where learners are jobseekers, providers reported that they were finding gaps in the referral process between employment services and educational providers that they felt led to many adults missing out on access to the individualised LND support they need. This was especially the case prior to entering the vocational training or employment program classroom. Many vocational training and employment courses are reportedly only offering courses at too high a qualification level, with student teacher ratios and assessment requirements which limit LND learners' opportunity to succeed. This not only disadvantages the learner and places added pressure on vocational teachers but also risks the learner 'failing' to meet the course requirements. This further reinforces barriers to future training or risks them entering the workforce without this foundational skill gap being appropriately addressed.

According to the Expert Review of Australia's VET System by Hon. Steven Joyce 'there are many adults currently in work around Australia whose low levels of literacy and numeracy will leave them vulnerable if the nature of their job changes'. [1] Joyce goes on to cite the findings of the 2012 PIAAC Survey which identifies that '13 per cent of Australia's working-age population (about two million people) have literacy levels below Level 2. This is below the level required to meet basic demands of modern work and life. Further, 20 per cent have numeracy levels below Level 2. These levels map across to Level 2 in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), which is Australia's tool for describing individuals' performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.

The review also identifies that people with low levels of literacy and numeracy are less likely to be employed or more likely to be employed in low-skilled insecure work and at greater risk of redundancy. He cites the Hotline call data as evidence of this fact. 'The Hotline received calls from over 3,800 people seeking support in 2016. Of callers between 2012 and 2016, 56 per cent were employed at the time.'[2]

Joyce recommends that 'the most effective way to build foundational skills in adults is in the workplace, where people can readily see how the skills improve their work performance. This mode of delivery

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[1] Joyce (2019) p. 11
[2] Ibid p. 17

reduces the stigma adults may perceive to be associated with low literacy skills and does not create additional demands on people's time outside of work.' [3]'

These findings suggest that a renewed focus on the delivery of LND in the workplace will be more important than ever.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into Adult literacy and its importance report *Don't take it as read: Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance* found that 'Demand for informal, unaccredited and entry level LLND education is not currently being met, and again this is particularly a problem in regional and remote locations.'[vi] Providers in regional and remote locations also highlighted the difficulties in attracting and retaining suitably qualified teachers and tutors and were often unable to provide programs in remote communities. Learners in remote locations are often required to travel considerable distances and at great cost, if they wish to participate in LND programs in a classroom setting. Greater coordination of LND delivery especially in regional, rural and remote locations was also identified by respondents as a strategy that could greatly assist with access, participation and improved outcomes from LND provision.

The current grouping of adult LND provision with English language programs in many RTOs also has its challenges. While there is a high need for the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) that targets the teaching of English as a second or additional language to migrants and refugees, this is a specialised program not designed to the needs of English speakers with good oracy levels but wanting to improve their reading and writing. Adults from an English speaking background and First nations adults from CALD backgrounds are not eligible for this program.

88% of respondents reported a multitude of barriers to the delivery of LND, lack of adequate funding being the most significant. The ability to provide learners with individualised attention requires more suitable classes, which are predicated on having more qualified teachers or tutors available. This is often not possible with current funding models requiring minimum class sizes.

Face to face teaching and learning models also have higher delivery costs than digital and online learning. Professional development requirements and decreased administration requirements were also identified by many respondents. While providers across Australia continue to deliver quality programs to adult LND learners, there is clearly a need to significantly increase LND funding to deliver well targeted, flexible, and diverse provision to meet the broad range of learner needs.

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3 Op cit, p. 48.

BARRIERS FOR ORGANISATIONS

82% of the 382 providers surveyed identified one or multiple barriers to delivering literacy/numeracy/digital literacy (L/N and DL) programs. The majority of respondents identified multiple barriers. The most common barriers identified were:

- inadequate funding 57%
- lack of qualified teachers 32%
- inadequate advertising 31%
- an inability to customise teaching to the individual learner 28%
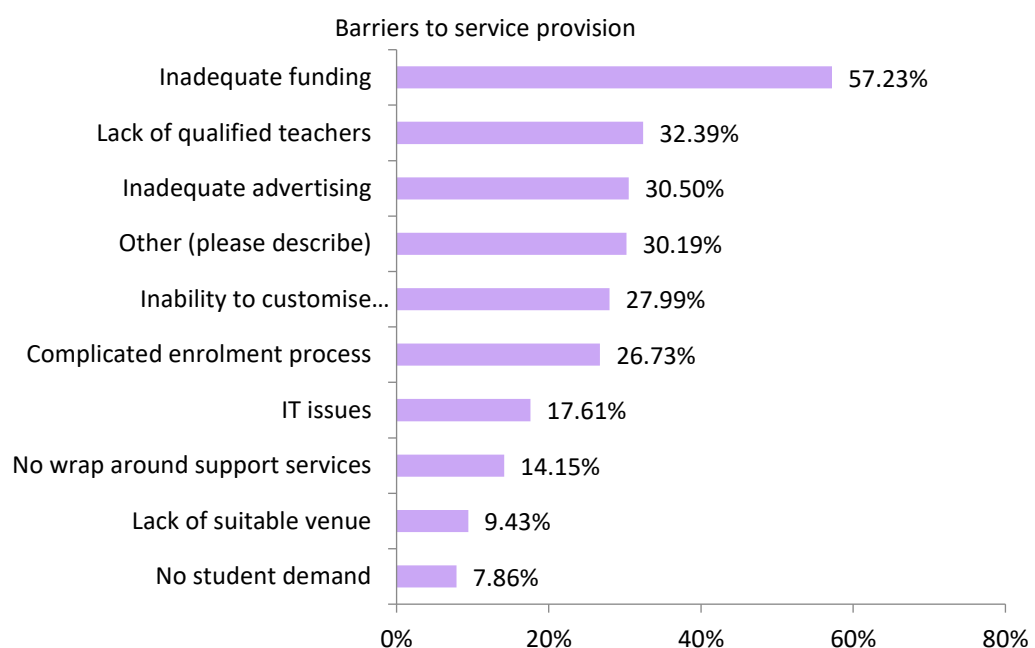- complicated enrolment processes 27%

Barriers to service provision

Barrier	%
Inadequate funding	57.23%
Lack of qualified teachers	32.39%
Inadequate advertising	30.50%
Other (please describe)	30.19%
Inability to customise…	27.99%
Complicated enrolment process	26.73%
IT issues	17.61%
No wrap around support services	14.15%
Lack of suitable venue	9.43%
No student demand	7.86%

Figure 4: Organisational and Other Barriers to Service Provision of LND

Difficulty to meet demand arose for a number of reasons and was complicated by structural factors such as:

- reduced funding and VET policy shifts leading to a lack of adequate, well targeted provision
- lack of advertising and promotion
- lack of prioritisation of LN courses
- lack of suitable qualified teachers
- higher learner needs
- student teacher ratios that fail to meet the RTO/funding requirements for a viable class.

Qualitative commentary from respondents included:

Inadequate Funding

> 'Be flexible with funding, adjust the orientation of the expectations for Foundation Skills courses, recognise non-accredited training, simpler procedure to get training products on scope

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to enable customisation 'There is a lack of funding streams. Demand [for courses] far outstrips funding available.' (Metro, NSW)

'Lack of funding. This area really requires a boost in funds to enable organisations to successfully support mainstream VET students with LLN needs.' (Metro, WA)

'Lack of funding stream. Demand far outstrips funding.' (Rural, regional and remote, national)

'In many instances we did not have sufficient numbers to run dedicated LLN classes due to funding and minimum class size requirements.' (Metro, NSW)

'Although literacy is acknowledged as a significant barrier to employment, further education and training for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) cohort by the state government and TAFE providers we have not been able to secure funding to develop resources or programs [to] make literacy and numeracy support accessible.' (Metro, VIC)

'[Our organisation is] entirely volunteer-run so more funding would allow more work to be done.' (Metro, WA)

'[There is] not enough recognition by TAFE NSW and other funding bodies that this mode of teaching adult literacy should be the predominant one and funded accordingly.' (Metro, NSW)

'Funding also requires that there be over 8, but ideally 12 people, in a classroom to make [the class] feasible. It can be hard to meet the very diverse needs of 8-12 people who may have all different levels of learning and needs.' (Metro, VIC)

Lack of qualified teachers
Lack of qualified teachers and the level of qualifications required by teachers were also identified as playing a role in perpetuating poorer outcomes for learners:

'Two key issues - firstly, [there are] not enough literacy specialists who understand the need for negotiated learning and non-assessable programs. Secondly, not enough recognition by TAFE and other funding bodies that this mode of teaching adult literacy should be the predominant one and funded accordingly. '(Metro, NSW)

Casualisation of the workforce for trainers makes it harder to engage and retain qualified LLN trainers.' (Regional, NSW)

'Recruiting skilled and VET qualified teachers is a challenge.' (Regional or rural, TAS)

'A major issue in LLN is that the minimum qualification is a Cert IV in Training and Assessment. There is no requirement for teachers to have any education in Adult Literacy. Feedback from students is that this does not work and consequently, students failed in their attempts to improve their literacy. 'Failure' adversely affects their confidence and willingness to persevere with learning.' (Metro NSW)

'…there are currently no people with lived experience of Deafness qualified to deliver Literacy and Numeracy support or LN programs in TAFE or further education.' (Metro, VIC)

Lack of advertising

'Often the lack of grassroots -targeted advertising means students don't know about courses for lots of reasons like - not being able to find details.'(Metro, NSW)

'[Our organisation] doesn't see a benefit in what we do [LND], consequently marketing of our courses is inadequate despite many attempts at trying to do this. When I recently wanted to publicise a great Digital Literacy program we ran with a library, the only way a story would be looked at was if it was directly related to a current worker who needed the skills for his career. Unfortunately, many of our learners are unemployed, needing to develop the skills for further training or to apply for jobs.' (Regional, NSW)

Complicated enrolment

'The main barrier is the organisation's VET enrolment process, which is based on a philosophy of 'enrol first and worry about students' under-pinning skills later'. (Metro, QLD)

Other provider issues

In addition to the main barriers for providers that were specified as choices in the survey, respondents identified further barriers and/or made additional explanatory comments. These can be broadly grouped into the following categories.

- shift to online learning
- lack of suitability of courses on offer
- limited teaching time
- LND embedded in English language classes
- relationship with Employment Services

Shift to online learning

Respondents spoke about the impact of the pandemic and made it clear that provision of LN programs was best done face to face rather than online. The move to digital delivery tended to disproportinately disadvantage LN learners due to:

- limited digital literacy skills
- lack of access to secure internet access,
- print-based resources being preferable for adult LN learners
- lack of access to home computers
- insufficiant self directed learning skills to manage online programs.

Lack of suitability of courses on offer

'There are many people in [our location] who work seasonally but have significant LN issues. The lack of flexibility of literacy and numeracy courses prevents the LN section from engaging with these students. The focus on training packages, competencies and unit completion rates hinders the delivery of literacy and numeracy activities and programs for the potential participants in the community.' (Rural, NSW)

'Accredited training demands get in the way of successful outcomes for students . Lower level accredited training has been stopped and some students have been turned away because of government funding structures for 'successful outcomes'. Some staff do not feel confident teaching higher needs/ lower ACSF level students and have persuaded managers to drop these classes from programs.' (Rural, WA)

'Students who really need LLND training first do not see any value in undertaking stand-alone courses in FSK. They want to enrol in VET programs, get a qualification and start working. Unfortunately, with stimulus packages such as Job Trainer funding, prospective adult literacy

students are bypassing SEE or FSK training and expecting to develop their LLND skills while doing their VET course. For many, it is not possible to 'upskill' them to the required level while they also complete their VET course. This results in high attrition rates and disillusioned students. It's a fault of the VET system that there are usually no pre-requisites for VET courses and limited mechanisms to adequately pre-assess students' underpinning skills.' (Metro, QLD)

'The courses are focused on skills for work - this is not suitable for many students.'

'Students are only allowed to enrol in a Literacy course once, whereas students need more time to practise the skills they're learning.' (Rural, NSW)

Limited teaching time

Other requirements on teacher time, including increased administration, have, for some, impacted on their ability to provide additional 1:1 support for LN and DL learners. A number of respondents reported being aware of the difficulty in meeting the needs of this cohort.

'Teacher/trainers continually given multiple and expanding admin tasks, unable to provide enough support time for clients.' (Metro, WA)

'When class sizes are large, it is too hard to give people the one-on -ne attention they need. They get lost.' (Regional, NSW)

LND embedded in English language classes

A number of respondents reported that adult literacy and numeracy programs were being delivered in classes containing both learners for whom English is their first language and CALD learners and that this was leading to unintended barriers. While LLND provision is often discussed in the same breath, language provision for the two groups has differing funding streams, learner requirements, teaching and learning resources and learner needs, particularly where the literacy learners were born in Australia.

'There's an assumption that, if you are a provider with many ESOL programs, you are covering off on your responsibilities to improve community adult literacy. These are 2 different notions completely.' (Metro, NSW)

'When we do get LN students, the Foundation Skills Training Package does not meet their needs and being placed in a class with ESOL students is alienating.' (Metro, NSW)

'In many instances we did not have sufficient numbers to run dedicated LLN classes due to funding & minimum class size requirements. So we had to place LLN students with ESOL students that was alienating & did not suit their needs.' (Regional, NSW)

Employment Services

The relationship between LN and DL provision and employment services was described by some respondents as being problematic. These respondents reported 'lack of referrals' from employment providers, little or no incentives for employment providers to make LND referrals, a focus on employment-only outcomes and/or inappropriate referrals to high level courses and programs delivered by the same employment provider.

'If students are linked with Employment Services, they … tend to be pushed towards studying a Cert III or above course (which is outcome-focussed). Unfortunately, the students who need LLN classes are referred into another direction of mutual obligation otherwise [of enrolled at this level] are set-up for failure.' (Regional, NSW)

'Employment Service Providers lack the experience [and/or] knowledge to refer to LND and do not have any incentives to encourage referrals.' (Regional, NSW)

'Employment Service providers offer own 'in-house' courses.' (Regional, TAS)

'Issues with accessing the students who need the LLN courses - they are often not identified by job network providers and are funnelled into vocational training when their real barriers are LN. This is particularly the case with ESB students.' (Metro, NSW)

Metro, Regional and Remote Barriers for Providers

The most commonly identified barrier for providers located in metropolitan areas was 'inadequate funding' at 56% followed by the 'inability to customise courses' as the second highest barrier at 30%.

Respondents from regional and rural services identified 'inadequate funding' as the main barrier at 59%, followed by 'lack of qualified teachers' at 42%. Just over one third of respondents from regional and rural areas identified 'inadequate advertising' as a barrier to delivery.

For remote providers 'inadequate funding' was the main barrier to provision at 62%. Having 'a lack of qualified teachers' was the next most significant barrier to provision at 38%.
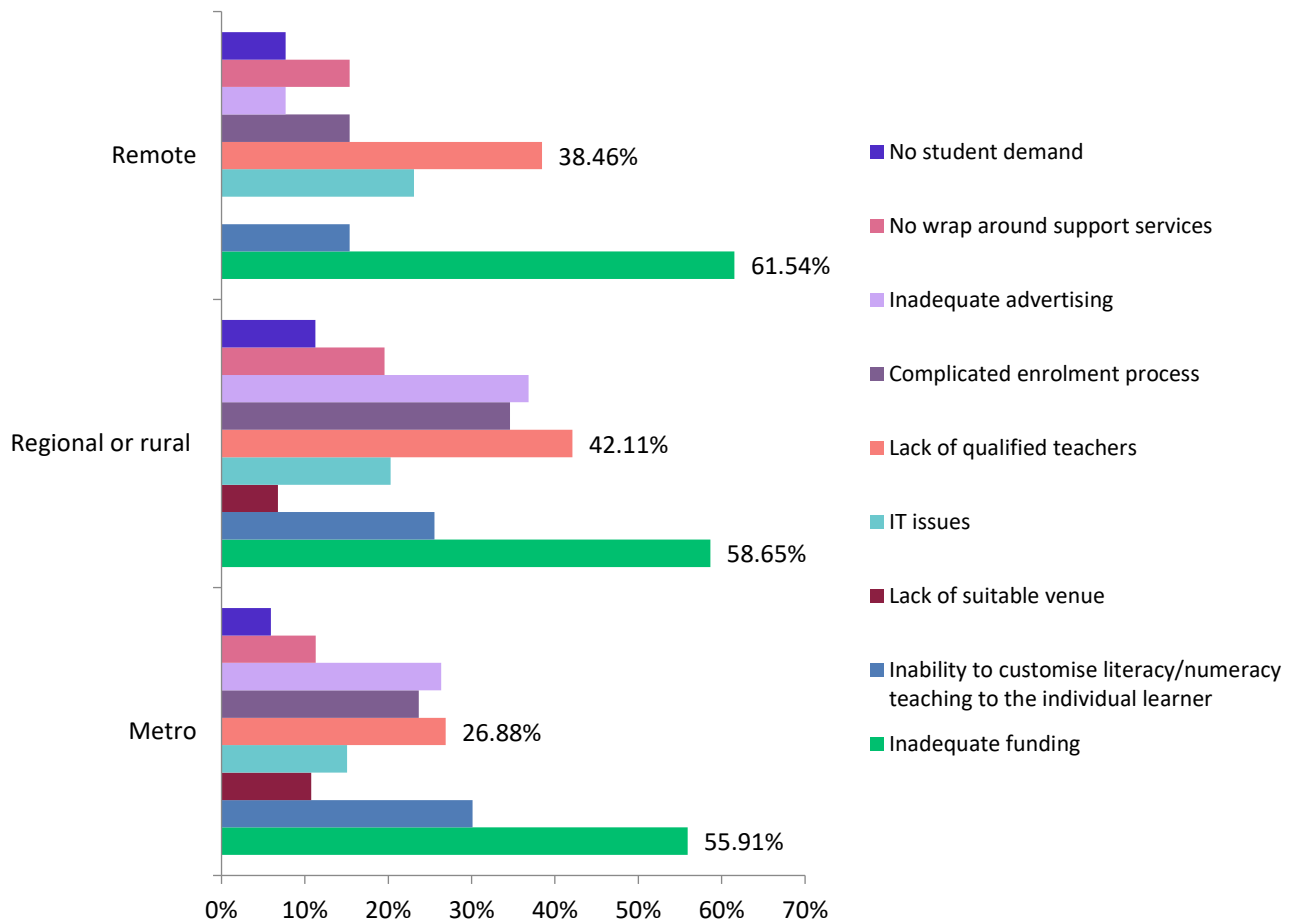

Figure 5: Organisational Barriers to Provision by Metro, Regional and Rural and Remote[4] location

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[4] To assist with comparison by location the percentages for 'inadequate funding' and 'lack of qualified teachers' have been included in Figure 5. as these were the two highest rated barriers overall.

According to the National Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Tertiary Education Strategy, regional, rural, and remote (RRR) students have less access to tertiary education options in their local community. RRR areas are often 'thin markets' for education provision, particularly in outer regional and remote areas, where a low population density can make it unsustainable for providers to operate or provide a large suite of academic programs.

Stakeholders have consistently highlighted that the issue of "thin markets" has a significant impact on levels of educational participation and attainment.[vii]
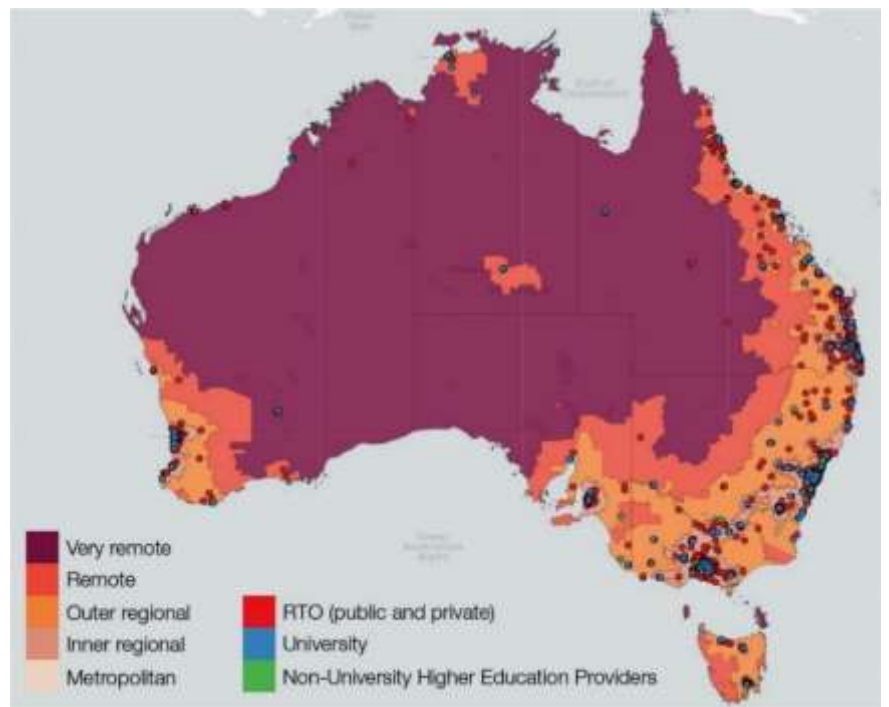

Figure 6: Source: National RRR Tertiary Education Strategy (the Strategy)

BARRIERS FOR LEARNERS

Barriers for learners are a major impediment to accessing successful programs that meet the LND needs of adults. A better understanding of these barriers can help in the design of better programs, courses and learner support resources and assist with the re-design of systemic barriers such as enrolment processes.

325 respondents (85%) answered this question and indicated that there are multiple barriers experienced by learners in accessing LND support. Respondents made 1335 selections from the list below with an average of 4 barriers per respondent. Figure 6 shows the most common barrier for learners in their community as reported by respondents .
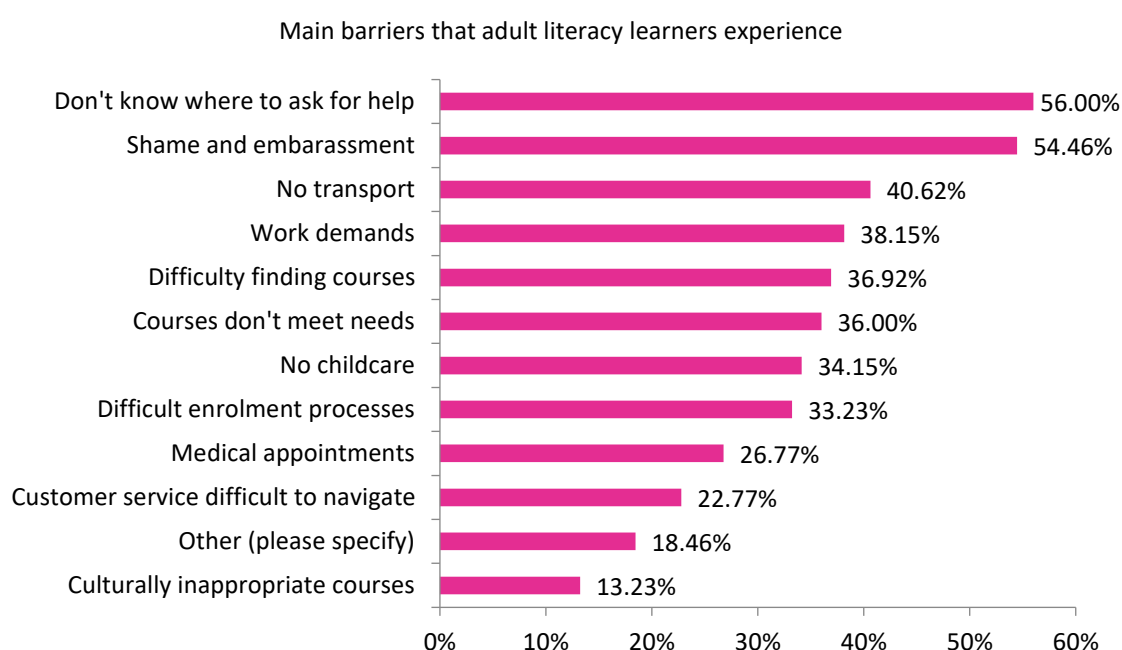
Main barriers that adult literacy learners experience

Barrier	Percentage
Don't know where to ask for help	56.00%
Shame and embarassment	54.46%
No transport	40.62%
Work demands	38.15%
Difficulty finding courses	36.92%
Courses don't meet needs	36.00%
No childcare	34.15%
Difficult enrolment processes	33.23%
Medical appointments	26.77%
Customer service difficult to navigate	22.77%
Other (please specify)	18.46%
Culturally inappropriate courses	13.23%

Figure 7: Learner Barriers to LND

For learners nationally, the most common barriers overall experienced by people wanting to access LND support were not knowing where to ask for help (56%) and shame and embarrassment (54%).

Not knowing where to ask for help

The most cited barrier for learners was not knowing where to go to ask for help (56%). For adults with limited literacy and/or digital literacy skills, hardcopy course information such as flyers and posters and online course information via provider websties create extra barriers for the learner. Several respondents mentioned that there was 'a lack of easily accessible online information about courses available to the community'. Not knowing the course options available to them presents 'a practical barrier to everyday life' for people with LND needs.

> 'It is difficult to find literacy courses on the [provider website] system and enrolment can be fraught.' (Metro, NSW)

The tendency of some course providers to use long and complex course names that would be unfamiliar for those seeking beginner reading and writing courses can also act as a barrier. Courses title like 'Certificate 2 Access to Skills for Vocational Education' are unclear as opposed to something clear such as 'Help with Reading, Writing or Spelling'.

Shame

The effect of shame and embarrassment is that people are reluctant to come forward to seek support from a literacy provider. When this barrier is overlaid with the largest barrier – that people don't know where to ask for help - it is clear that there are many in the community and the workforce that suffer silently and are not able to reach the goals they set for themselves.

> 'As well as being ashamed (initially) of being in the classroom. There may be many negative experiences that the adult literacy learner may need to overcome.' (Metro, VIC)

> '…feedback indicates that this group of learners has had lifelong negative learning experiences, resulting in a lack of confidence and belief in their ability to learn and therefore a lack of confidence in their ability to be part of the community.' (Metro, SA)

Difficulty finding a course

37% of responses to the question of barriers cited difficulty finding a course. This can refer to a lack of LND course provision. However, more broadly, it refers to being unable to find or understand relevant course information. Some of the sentiments expressed in the top responses from across diverse locations (metro, regional and remote) were:

> 'Public transport in regional areas is limited. Difficult for single parents to attend classes due to limited public transport.'

> '[There is] lack of funding for childcare.'

> 'I would ideally like to offer a class for native English speakers (great demand in this area due to lower than average literacy levels) that's separate to ESL.'

> 'Delivery times not accessible for many learners [who work]. No weekend classes.

> 'Courses are too hard for real beginners, courses not tailored i.e. if person's job is a removalist, they need to learn room names to put on boxes etc.'

> 'Many [learners] only have a phone which is not user friendly to learning online.'

> 'Aboriginal students' literacy needs are not given adequate focus or priority.'

> 'There is limited provision for Aboriginal learners in locations that work like community settings.'

> 'Lack of guidance to courses by job service provider for new clients.'

> 'Work demands have increased because of COVID-19 which makes it harder to attend classes.'

Transport

Transport is also identified as a major barrier for learners by 41% of providers. This would be exacerbated in regional and remote areas where distances to major centres and/or training providers can be great due to limited provision in rural and remote locations.

For many vulnerable and disadvantaged people there are often multiple barriers which prevent them from accessing a classroom. Even if they can overcome their embarrassment, find a class, and complete complex enrolment processes, they may still not be able to access transport to get to the class.

In addition to the list of barriers provided in the survey, a further 18% of respondents indicated other barriers for learners. Table 5 below summarises the responses from approximately 100 respondents relating to these additional barriers.

OTHER BARRIERS FOR LEARNERS	QUALITATIVE COMMENTS
Lack of classes, flexible delivery options and type of provision available	- Lack of flexibility in delivery options - The online courses are not designed for adult digital learners with low literacy - Online materials difficult – they are more appropriate for face to face context - Difficult to access community-based, non-accredited adult LNDL courses. - Not enough LN support in VET courses; students not adequately prepared for VET study success - SEE unavailable to many people - Class sizes: we need to be able to run classes with 5-6 student and programs catering to individual needs. The current Nationally Non-Recognised (NNR) skill sets give us the potential to do that but again we are directed that we can have no fewer than 15 in a class.
Course levels too high and not customised	- Courses are centrally set with unit assessments that are too onerous and inappropriate for students with low LLN. - Under the current funding model we are forced to focus on completing assessments resulting in there being not enough time to actually teach the students, let alone focus on individual needs. It is difficult to find literacy courses on the TAFE system and enrolment can be fraught. - No low level units for basic financial skills - Several of my students were retraining to other job requirements. The jump from basic reading and writing skills to academic language was very difficult.
Lack of appropriate Teaching and Learning resource	- No paper-based materials. 'There are not enough print-based resources, which is what learners need.' - No access to computers at home so no way of practising skills.
Issues with Employment Providers	- Job providers have differing expectations. - Access to referral to our LLND programs by Employment Service providers is a significant barrier, especially in regional and remote NSW. - ESPs have no material incentive to refer and will often stream their clients into their own training, which leads to some clients who needed LLND support failing those Cert 3 Job Access courses.
Inadequate IT infrastructure	- Digital access is a huge barrier. - Limited access or no access to digital devices and poor internet
Health, mental health, and other compounding challenges	- Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression - Intergenerational poverty. - Low levels of schooling and/or previously negative experience of education - Fear of COVID-19 - Parents and children homeless and/or in crisis due to DV - Disabilities impacting on learning and lecturers not knowing best way to work with individual learning needs, undiagnosed learning difficulties resulting in lack of learner support, older people with intellectual disability. Lack of awareness of need of Deaf culture, Deaf experience, Auslan. - Lack of motivation and focus

OTHER BARRIERS FOR LEARNERS	QUALITATIVE COMMENTS
Issues for Aboriginal learners	• High numbers of Aboriginal adults need literacy support but government funding for programs , based on evidence of what works for the community, is almost non-existent.
Learner needs	• Lack of digital skills • Some learners want 1:1 support which cannot be provided. • Every learner is different. • Learners experiencing financial hardship need to work rather than attend classes. • The belief that [mainstream] VET teaching methodology is adequate for 'all' students, and the hidden rejection of students that don't fit in
Cost and other access issues	• Shoalhaven has limited transport options and travel can be expensive. • Financial barriers • **Too expensive** - learners tend to stay in insecure lower paying jobs and help for literacy is expensive.

Table 2: Qualitative Comments on Other Learner Barriers

Learner barriers metropolian, regional or rural and remote

Metro: The most common barriers were 'not knowing where to ask for help' and 'shame and embarrassment.' Providers also thought 'mental health', the 'impact of COVID-19' and 'financial disadvantage and cost' were important barriers.

Regional or rural: The most common barriers were 'shame and embarrassment', 'not knowing where to ask for help' and 'no transport'. Providers also cited poor access to internet, poverty and 'undiagnosed learning difficulties' or 'negative past experiences of school' as key barriers.

Remote: The most common barriers were 'courses not meeting student need' and 'shame and embarrassment.' The lack of programs tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal adults was also highlighted.
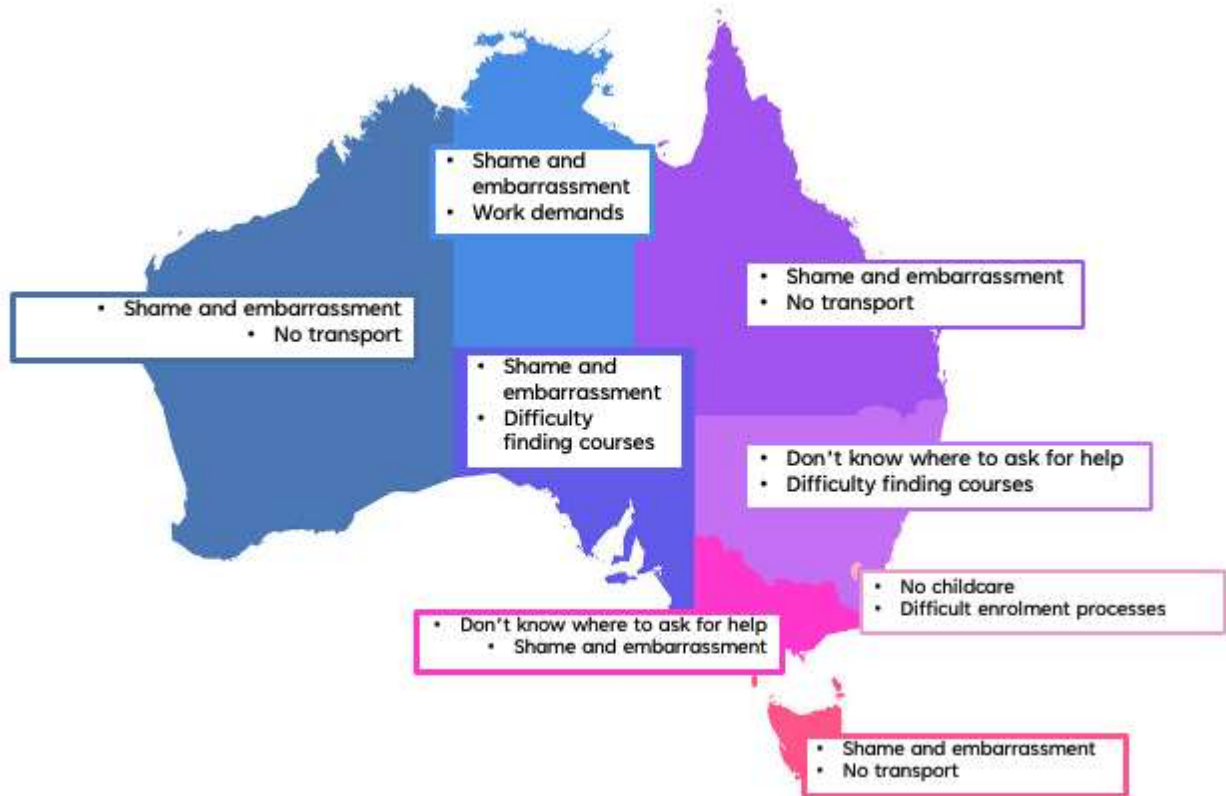
Figure 8: Most Significant Learner Barriers by State and Territory

As highlighted in the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) report *Hard to Reach Learners,* location matters: 'Location is important. Delivering the course in the right place helps overcome barriers to learning such as transport, develops the social capital of the local community and can link in with other services located in the area. Rural locations pose particular challenges due to isolation, distance, lack of learning programs and access to a reliable internet service. They require special solutions that might include partnerships with local employers.'[viii]

It is clear that there are many barriers faced by learners in accessing, enrolling and participating in adult LND classes. This poses significant problems when coupled with the organisational barriers already discussed.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND NATURAL DISASTERS

It is unquestionable that COVID-19 and the recent natural disasters such as bushfires and floods in Australia have significantly impacted literacy and numeracy program provision. These events have created another layer of barriers for the LN cohort on top of other barriers already discussed. The pandemic and natural disasters tend to disproportionately affect socio-economically disadvantaged communities - the same disadvantaged communities that struggle to access LND. Most commonly, these events resulted in a change in delivery mode, poorer attendance by learners and decreased enrolments.

According to the latest ABS statistical analysis of work-related training and adult learning, Australia's COVID-19 restrictions – including stay at home orders - were a barrier for learners. 'Almost three-quarters (74%) of the people in the ABS sample who reported 'other barriers' to non-formal learning also said they had experienced barriers to non-formal learning because of COVID-19.' [ix]

61% of respondents to the Hotline survey reported that COVID-19 had changed the attendance of students. 58% said it had resulted in a decrease in enrolments and 63% reported a change in delivery mode. 25% of respondents reported a lack of available teaching staff. Less than 10%, reported that there has been no impact.

COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in a move from face to face to online learning which is still having a large impact on the mode of delivery despite the easing of public health restrictions. This represents a significant disruption to literacy, numeracy and DL learners who can find online learning difficult and who as a result of complex lives are often reported to be the first to disengage and the last to return to learning.

> 'Disruption to classes creates further marginalisation of already marginalised communities.'
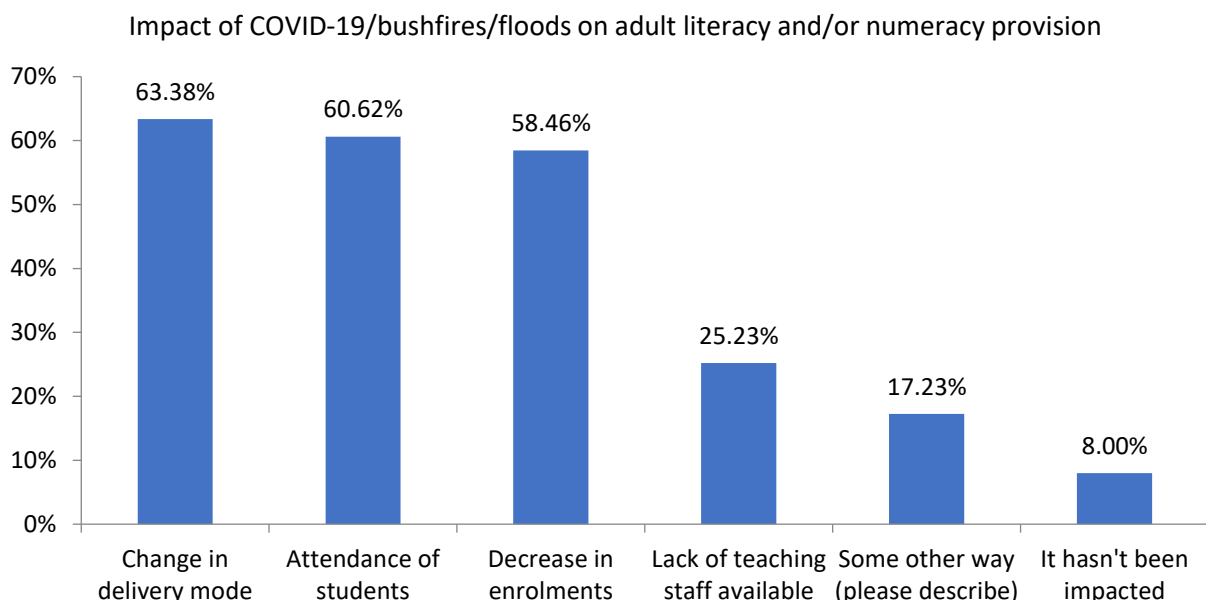> (Aboriginal provider, National)

Figure 9: Impact on LND Provision from COVID-19 and Natural Disasters

These impacts played out somewhat differently across states and territories, which may be explained at least in part by the geo differences in COVID lockdowns and disaster events. For example. In NSW and QLD there was a significant change in the attendance of students. Respondents from WA, TAS and VIC

commonly reported changes in delivery mode of their programs. Lack of teaching staff available due to the pandemic and natural disasters was most commonly reported in the NSW and in SA. By metropolitan, regional and rural and remote location the data shows that:

- metropolitan areas were more likely to see a change in delivery mode,
- regional or rural areas were more likely to see a change in the attendance of students, and
- remote areas were more likely to see a decrease in enrolments and change in delivery mode as a result of the pandemic and natural disasters.

The change in the delivery mode to online learning, brought about in response to the pandemic, has further exacerbated the digital divide. There were positive comments from six respondents about the move to online learning. It was seen as a way of extending their reach to remote locations and also for others as a way of maintaining delivery during lockdowns.

> '[COVID bought about some] Positive change - we now offer online support in addition to the face to face, which benefits regional students and those with full-time jobs. [They] can arrange to do it after hours.' (Metro, TAS)

> 'We got more requests from students living further away (e.g. far NQLD, NT)'

A more common response was concern for learner access and the barrier presented by low digital literacy skills.

Disadvantage came through strongly as a theme when it came to LND adults accessing digital learning options. Many respondents felt that students lacked adequate access to the internet and/or the tools to engage with providers remotely. This created difficulties in service delivery; especially digital literacy programs and for learners with a disability or language barriers. Respondents also reported that online provision required more preparation, and this was often overlooked by management and funding bodies. Some services in QLD reported short term effects of floods for some learners who could no longer participate in classes. Access to technology was identified as disproportionately affecting more vulnerable learners as highlighted in the comments below:

> 'Lack of digital devices and digital literacy support to [be able to]continue remotely.' (Metro, TAS)

> 'Students not having the technology or data to undertake the course online, low levels of IT skills to undertake online courses, students with a disability, former refugees found online extremely challenging. Students in the past have also feel scared/deflated with the circumstances and don't care about planning for the future (rather one-day at a time). (Regional, NSW)

> 'Also, [it was hard for some] learners who couldn't leave home and go to a venue to continue their study. For some, they need the break – coming to class - to minimise barriers that exist at home e.g. noise, challenging family members, no support at home, etc.' (Metro, VIC)

> 'The problems our cohorts tend to face make access to the hardware (computers/ phones) and internet extremely unpredictable and unreliable.' (Metro, NSW)

> 'Difficulties with delivering programs online to disadvantaged students with minimal IT skills or issues with access to internet.' (Metro, NSW)

COVID-19 and the need to self-isolate led to a reported increase in poorer health and mental health effects and other compounding challenges for learners and staff.

'More students presenting with mental health issues - mostly depression and anxiety. There was increased anxiety amongst students.' (Regional, NSW)

'Students are unconfident about coming into the college.' (Metro, NSW)

'[We have seen] increased mental health issues that learners need assistance with. The number of counsellors in TAFE NSW has dropped and services reduced to phone or MS TEAMS. Most learners refuse assistance with a counsellor via phone or MS TEAMS. This leaves teachers dealing with critical situations and trying to access local services for learners which are mostly not set up for critical situations or are booked out for 6-12 months.' (Regional, NSW)

'General malaise in clients due to isolation – it takes time to develop good learning techniques. And extremely high levels of domestic violence has led to clients being in survival mode with children.' (Bunbury, WA)

Self-isolation due to COVID-19 was also commonly reported as a barrier to learners' attendance. A number of services mentioned that an increase in mental health issues for both learners and teachers meant that provision became difficult, especially when delivering remotely. Some reported a general decrease in confidence for learners when learning online. Several respondents identified self-isolation as a significant factor in decreased attendance. For some learners' self-isolation due to COVID-19 or floods acted to further compound already existing mental health issues. When this was coupled with lack or technology and poor internet, it caused individuals to be cut off and isolated from services including education and training that had moved largely online.
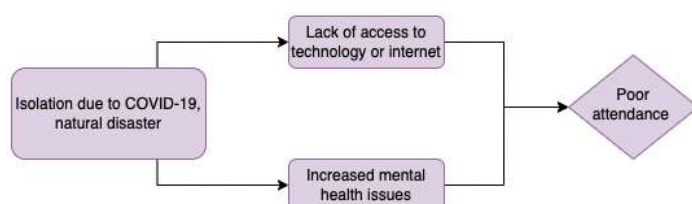

Figure 10: Impact of Self Isolation on LND Attendance

Two respondents reported that they were unable to support learners in prison settings during the pandemic because prisons were locked down due to COVID-19 (TAS) or prisoners were locked in their cells when COVID-19 was active in the prison population (WA).

There were similar impacts for staff as well with 'increased anxiety amongst teachers' and 'ill health or concerns about health keeping teachers off work' being reported as concerns by respondents.

At a practical level COVID-19 and natural disasters led to disruption of classes, which were either postponed and rescheduled, cancelled for a finite period of time or cancelled completely.

Reportedly many of the students with literacy needs are referred by Employment Services providers and this referral has dramatically declined since COVID-19. This was due to 'lack of incentives for referral by employment services', 'changes to the mutual obligation requirements for job seeker' and 'employment services setting up their own training arm for direct delivery to clients'.

These findings correlate with those from a recent survey undertaken by Community Colleges Australia (CCA), which looked at the impact of COVID-19 on NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) Providers (2022)[x]. More than 85% of NSW ACE providers report that the Omicron impact on their organisations as

'severe' or 'major'. Metropolitan providers appear more impacted than regional and rural providers. A small number of (mostly metropolitan) providers report the overall organisational impact as sufficiently 'severe' as to place their organisational viability in jeopardy in the short to medium term, if substantial government assistance and support is not provided. The severely impacted organisations operate in areas of high need and high socioeconomic disadvantage.

The shift to online learning brought about by the pandemic, on the one hand, offers an opportunity to expand the reach of education and training to socially, physically, and geographically isolated adult learners. According to the OECD policy response to COVID-19, *The potential of Online Learning for Adults* (2020) despite the opportunities of online learning comes with concerns around inclusiveness that relate to access to infrastructure, devices and sufficient ICT skills and knowledge:

> 'Inclusiveness is one of the key concerns when it comes to online learning. While online courses could make access to training easier for disabled adults or for those living in rural communities, the pre-requisite of basic digital skills and devices, as well as a reliable internet infrastructure can limit access significantly.' [xi]

UNMET NEED FOR COMMUNITIES

Calls to the Reading Writing Hotline often indicate there are many needs in communities not being met by current LND classes and offerings. To investigate this further, respondents were asked to comment on the level of unmet need for literacy programs for their communities with 319 (84%) people answering this question. Responses indicate there are significant unmet community needs.

The unmet need most cited by respondents to this survey was the need for 'individual and tailored literacy assistance' (64%). The second most cited unmet need was for 'wrap around supports to address barriers and enable participation' (52%). This was followed by 'help with form filling' (49%). Two other areas identified by respondents of high unmet need were 'pathways into accredited courses' (47%) and 'lack of non-accredited courses delivered in community settings' (43%).

Unmet needs in communities

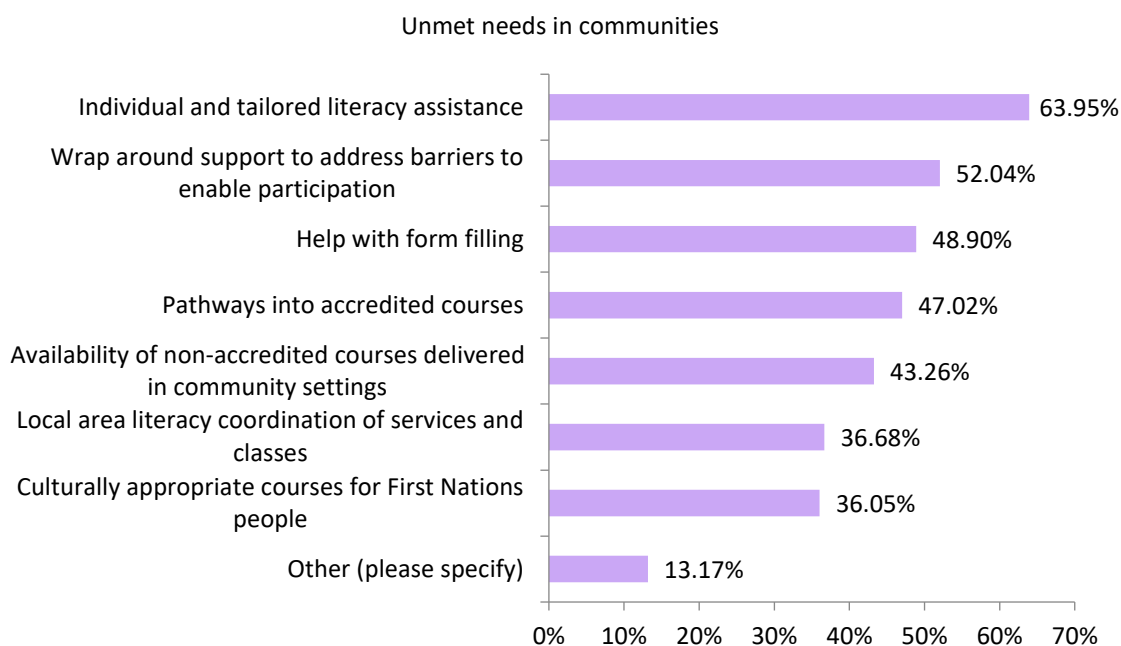| Category	Percentage
Individual and tailored literacy assistance	63.95%
Wrap around support to address barriers to enable participation	52.04%
Help with form filling	48.90%
Pathways into accredited courses	47.02%
Availability of non-accredited courses delivered in community settings	43.26%
Local area literacy coordination of services and classes	36.68%
Culturally appropriate courses for First Nations people	36.05%
Other (please specify)	13.17%

Figure 11: Unmet Need for Communities

Lack of classes being offered was significant.

> '[There are] not enough classes that support learners real needs.' (Metro, VIC)

The lack of wrap around support for learners is essential to supporting them to overcome the barriers they face to learning. Lack of, or limited, pathways into accredited courses and assistance with filling in forms were also identified as being areas of high unmet need.

Respondents highlighted that there were not enough individualised courses to meet adult learners needs. This included:

> 'It is really important to have wraparound services. Helping people to overcome all of the barriers that stop them from being able to learn. i.e. transport, housing insecurity, food insecurity, family violence, health issues, other family issues etc.' (Regional Vic.)

- people with additional support needs, such as those with mental health issues, an intellectual or learning disabilities including dyslexia, and people from the DHH community

- people who were currently in the workforce were limited by the lack of availability of classes offered outside of work hours and the lack of workplace delivery and literacy programs, customised to address the specific literacy needs in workplaces.
- unmet literacy needs for people with complex disadvantage e.g., people with mental health issues, people who experienced intergenerational poverty and those leaving prison
- the need for more specialised First Nations literacy teachers and more LND delivery for First Nations people

Respondents' comments included:

'For First Nations people, lack of devices, lack of access to internet and a lack of trained literacy teachers to support learning are issues.' (Metro, NSW)

'Drop-in and night classes for individuals who work, employment services and other services promoting literacy courses within their services and marketing advantages of LLN for individuals/employers/employees.'

'Non-accredited courses not accepted as an activity by Centrelink.' (Metro and Regional, SA)

'There is a need for targeted spelling instruction.' (Metro, VIC)

'Assistance for those in work to access classes easily and associated funding.' (Rural, QLD)

'Courses are centrally set with unit assessments that are too onerous and inappropriate for students with low LLN. With the current finding model, we [teachers] are forced to focus on completing assessments resulting in there being not enough time to actually teach the students let alone focus on individual needs. ' (Regional, VIC)

Support for digital literacy and adult literacy learners online was also highlighted as an area of need.

'[There is a need for] greater support for digital literacy.' (Metro, VIC)

'Everything online is a struggle for many students. It is hard to support without face to face contact.' (Regional, NSW)

'Online learning does not support all learning styles and many situations do not account for the differing learning needs of participants.' (Metro, TAS)

Respondents also identified that there was a lack of suitable paper-based resources to support adult learners.

'Paper-based lessons to students who can neither study online due to lack of resources, poor internet [lack of] digital literacy etc.' (Metro, NSW)

Demand for Resources
The Hotline produces a range of literacy resources for teachers and learners. There was a high level of interest from respondents across the country for beginner literacy resources and workplace literacy resources with demand for all four resource categories amongst providers surveyed rating above 50%. 81% of respondents to the survey wanted access to more literacy resources. 80% of respondents specifically wanted to access beginner literacy resources. This may reflect the lack of suitably qualified teachers in the field, time constraints for teachers and/or inappropriateness of current resource offerings as well as literacy and numeracy resources not being widely or easily accessible.
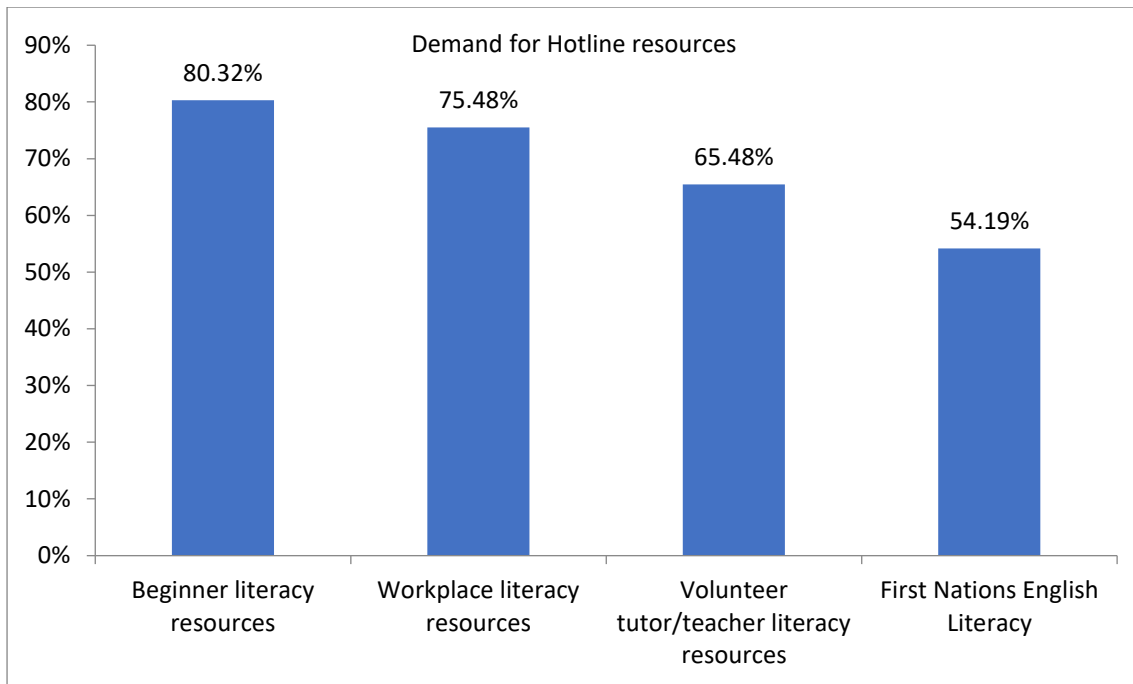
Figure 12: Demand for Hotline Literacy Resources

It is clear from responses, there is a high demand for beginner, workplace and First Nations English literacy resources, as well as volunteer tutor/teacher literacy resources for the LND sector. The improved coordination of literacy provision would improve learner outcomes by supporting learner needs through the provision of more appropriate tools for adults with low levels of LND.

PATTERNS OF DELIVERY

As highlighted at the beginning of this report the patterns of delivery described by respondents does not reflect actual delivery rates or the scale of delivery nationally. This information can be obtained from the Hotline database of service delivery which captures more comprehensive data on delivery in all states and territories. Analysis of the database of service delivery will be a latter part of this project.

There is a complexity involved in these results as survey respondents may be answering on behalf of their organisation, rather than from their individual section/campus. There is also no generally agreed definition to describe types of program delivery. This complexity needs to be explored in further research, as there is such a variety of programs delivered and it is described differently by a range of providers nationally. When one looks at the kinds of delivery offered, one-on-one learner support is seen as a significant component of literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy delivery. One-on-one learner support can represent a variety of different delivery modes and is unpacked in more detail in the next section of this report.

Programs	Delivery	
Literacy (L) Programs and delivery		
One on one learner support	55.28%	178[5]
Literacy teaching embedded in accredited vocational subjects	40.99%	132
Accredited literacy courses	37.89%	122
Foundation Skills for your Future course	34.78%	112
Adult literacy tutoring with a private or volunteer tutor	26.09%	84
Informal/non-accredited literacy courses	28.26%	91
SEE program	26.71%	86
Community based delivery	23.29%	75
Workplace based delivery	13.98%	45
Other (please describe)	12.73%	41
Numeracy (N) programs and delivery		
Numeracy teaching embedded in accredited vocational subjects	45.61%	109
One on one learner support	49.79%	119
Accredited numeracy courses	38.49%	92
Adult numeracy tutoring with a private or volunteer tutor	22.59%	54
SEE programs	28.45%	68
Informal/non-accredited numeracy courses	23.85%	57
Community-based delivery	20.50%	49
Workplace- based delivery	10.88%	26
Other (please describe)	9.26%	23
Digital literacy (DL) programs and delivery		
Digital skills integrated with your literacy class	76.78%	205
Standalone digital literacy class	54.68%	146
One-on-one learner support	44.19%	118
Community-based delivery	22.85%	61
Informal tutoring/drop in classes	21.72%	58
Workplace-based delivery	13.11%	35
Other (please describe)	5.99%	16

Table 3: Delivery of LND program type by Provider Sample

'Literacy teaching embedded in vocational courses' appears not to be a universally understood term. Reponses indicated that this program type could refer to team teaching with a VET teacher and a literacy/numeracy teacher or it could mean a literacy/numeracy unit imported into a vocational course and taught by a literacy teacher. It could also mean an introductory short course before a VET course

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[5] Note: The sample size for responses to these three questions varied. 371 people answer *Question 7 Literacy Programs*, 362 people answered *Question 9 Numeracy Programs,* and 358 people answered *Question 11 Digital Literacy Programs*. Providers may offer more than one program type.

e.g. Pathways into Nursing. Further exploration of the kinds of delivery being offered is important to ensure that there are program offerings suitable for learners, needing LND support in order to successfully complete a VET course. These learners will be seeking accredited or non-accredited literacy/numeracy classes.

242 respondents reported delivering numeracy programs of varying types, most often one-on-one learner support (50%), or embedded in accredited vocational subjects (46%). The Hotline database data suggests that there is very little numeracy provision occuring nationally. So further research is needed into who is delivering numeracy and how it is being delivered.

268 respondents reported delivering digital literacy skills programs with 205 (77%) respondents delivering these as part of a literacy class. 146 respondents reported offering standalone digital literacy classes.

In general respondents reported that:

- 'One-on-one learner support' and 'literacy teaching embedded in vocational subjects' were the two highest reported types of literacy delivery by respondents to the survey.
- 'Accredited literacy' and 'accredited numeracy' programs were both ranked as the third highest type of program delivery by survey respondents.
- 'FSFYF' program was the fourth most common literacy program delivered followed by 'informal/non-accredited literacy courses'.
- 'Adult numeracy tutoring' was also being delivered by 23% of respondents.
- Digital literacy skills were most commonly delivered when 'integrated into literacy classes' (77%). There was also a high percentage of people who said they were delivering 'standalone digital literacy classes' (55%). 'Community based delivery' was reported as being highest for digital literacy programs and literacy programs (both 23%) followed by numeracy (21%).
- Workplace-based delivery was the lowest type of delivery across all three domains literacy (14%), numeracy (11%) and digital literacy (13%).

LEARNER SUPPORT

When asking respondents to clarify what learner support involves in their organisation, it is clear the kind of learner support that is offered by providers varies greatly.

In some organisations learner support is offered by trained adult literacy teachers, either in a VET classroom or in a separate tutorial outside of class time. It can also be offered by vocational/trade teachers and adult literacy tutors. Learner support may be offered as soon as a course starts or could be offered later in the course, once it becomes clear a student requires further support to meet course expectations. In this case the focus is likely to be on assessment completion rather than explicit literacy/numeracy instruction. Learner support may also refer to a general drop-in study centre available for an hour or two once a week for help with assignments rather than systematic LN provision.

352 people responded to the question about learner support, with 317 of these (90%) reporting that they provided either literacy and/or numeracy learner support. However, the nature of this provision requires further exploration.
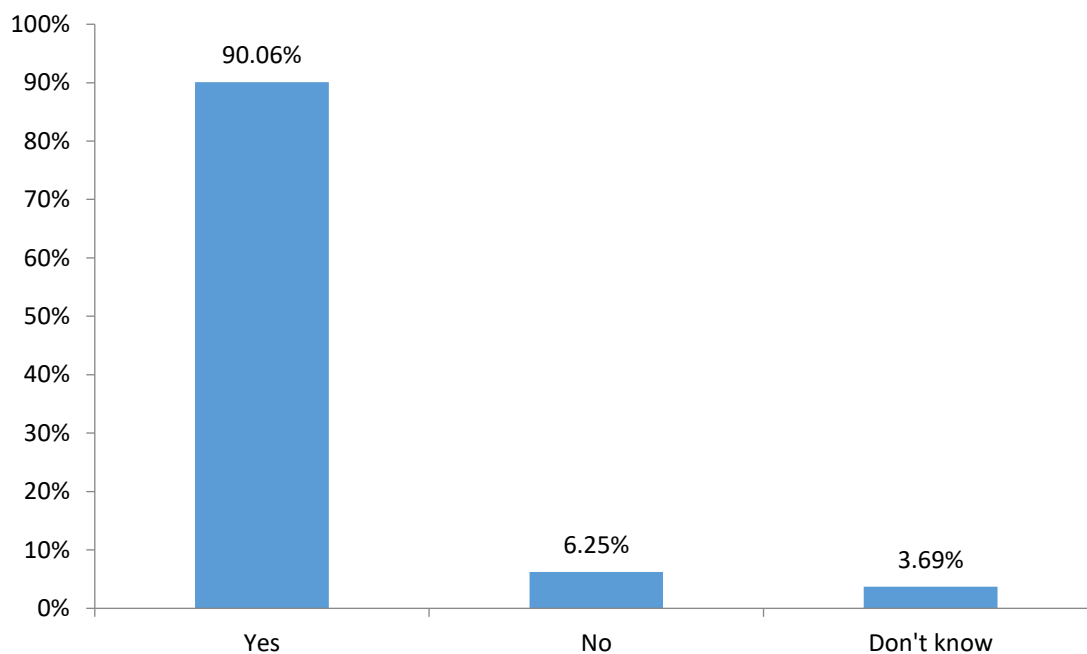

Figure 13: Reported Provision of Learner Support by Respondents
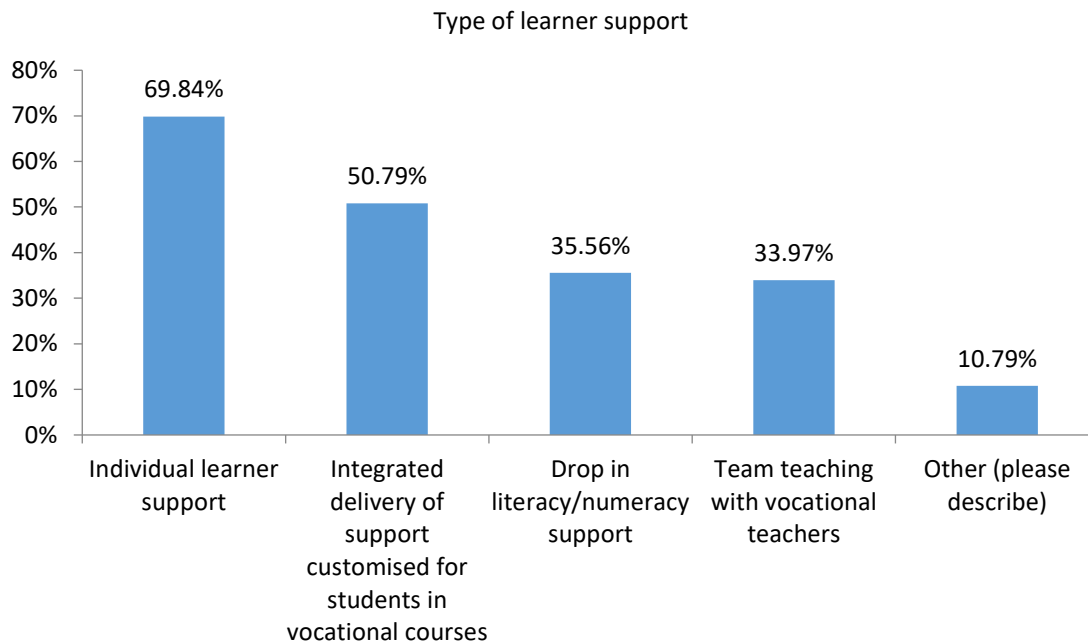
Type of learner support

Figure 14: Types of Learner Support Offered by Providers

315 responded to the question about the type of support they were providing, which was overwhelmingly 'individual learner support' and 'support customised for students in vocational courses'.

It is important to clarify that Figure 14 indicates that 70% providers surveyed say their organisation offers individual learner support rather than stating that 70% of learners are receiving individual learner support. What is actually being offered for each student and how often it is offered can vary considerably both from site to site and semester to semester in this volatile landscape.

Other learner support offerings identified by respondents included:

- English language teaching and tutoring – AMEP
- Online or web-based support
- Pre-vocational course support, assessment or bridging prior to vocational higher study
- Aboriginal support and tutoring
- Pre-accredited classes and individualised support customised to student need
- Learners with a disability supported with Individual Training Plans and Reasonable Adjustment
- Volunteer Literacy Tutors and Private Tutors
- Mentoring and coaching
- Workplace support and tutoring for employees.

These 'other' responses reinforce how varied people's understanding are of what constitutes Learner Support and how and where it is delivered.

THE MODE OF DELIVERY
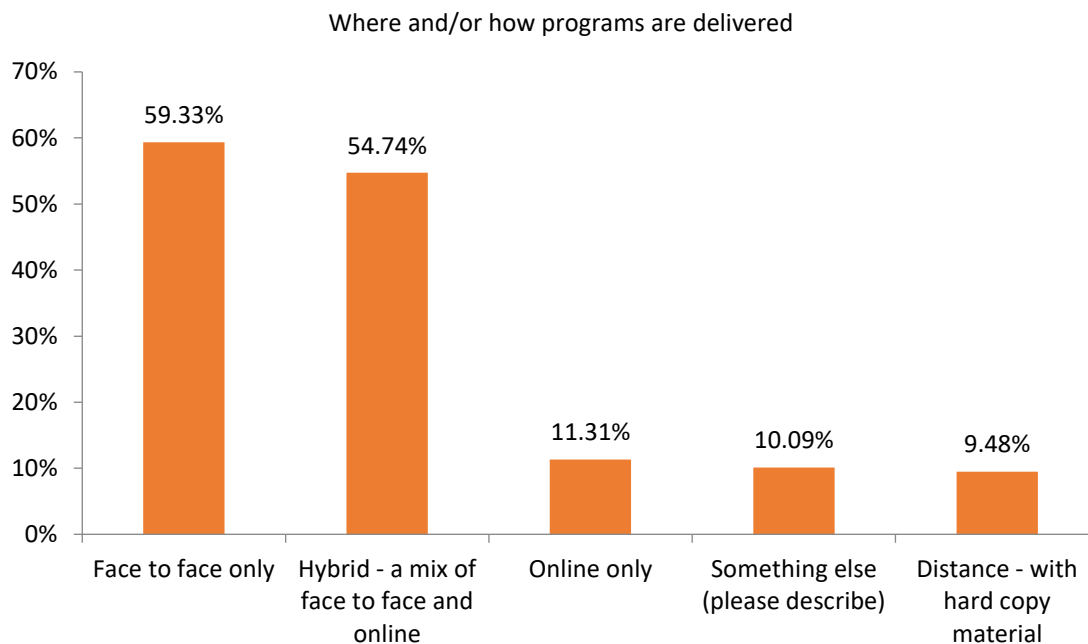
Where and/or how programs are delivered

Figure 15: Rates of LND Delivery by Method

Providers report face to face delivery as the main delivery mode for LND at 59%. Hybrid delivery, which includes a mix of face to face and online delivery, was at 55% with a number of respondents reporting that this was due to the impacts of the pandemic. Distance delivery, which involves phone or online support for isolated learners using hard copy materials, was reported by 9% of respondents, while fully online delivery was only reported as being delivered by 11%.

> 'Face to face only [usually] but some hybrid as a result of the pandemic.' (Metro, NSW)

> 'A mix of face to face and distance (with hard copy material, not online).' (Metro, WA)

Face to face delivery was impacted by COVID-19, with a number of respondents reporting that they had moved to hybrid models as a result of the pandemic. This was also impacted by vaccination status of students and staff.

> 'F2F [was provided] if up-to-date COVID vax (both tutor and student); online if not fully vaxxed (either stakeholder); online - Fly in Fly Out (FIFO) or on request.' (Metro, WA)

> 'Hard copy packages with telephone and MS TEAMS support - mostly used during COVID - but [this mode is] now also used to increase our flexibility and to assist appropriate learners who find it difficult to attend face to face classes.' (Regional, NSW)

IMPROVED POLICY AND FUNDING TO INCREASE DELIVERY

57% of respondents identified funding as the greatest barrier to delivery. This also came through as a theme in the qualitative comments. Increased funding was seen as closely linked to other improvements that are required to meet the needs of this cohort including:

- More qualified teachers and increased wages
- Funding that allows for smaller class sizes to provide more one-on-one attention and support to learners with high needs
- Improved venues for program delivery
- Funding for First Nations learners that are culturally appropriate and incorporate team teaching,
- Improved infrastructure, and technology
- Increased flexibility in delivery patterns

Respondents called for policy responses linked to funding increases that would benefit adult LND learners, improve course delivery options and learner outcomes and improve the capacity of communities to overcome significant disadvantage.

'A supportive policy backed with a very significant increase in funding so that all those that need assistance can access it. In particular there needs to be a large pool of funding made available to Aboriginal communities to deliver community-controlled non-formal, non-accredited LLND training.' (Aboriginal Not-for-Profit, National)

'We use the Foundation Skills Training Package to meet the needs of learners that are seeking to build their LLN skills for employment and/or further study options. However, this does not meet the needs of an ever-increasing number of students who have a range of highly complex learning requirements. Acquiring basic LLN life skills is a major challenge.' (Metro, SA)

'[Government][needs] to fund courses appropriately. Dealing with underprivileged and disadvantaged learners results in low enrolment numbers particularly in regional and remote areas. Low enrolments results in non-viable courses which are at risk of delivery. Funding foundation skills LLND courses requires a greater commitment from governments both state and commonwealth to ensure those in need of LLND skills development can access courses within their local area.' (Regional, NSW)

'Smart and Skilled funding should not insist Cert I courses be finished in one semester. These basic courses are the most important and sometimes need more time for students to develop skills. Our accredited courses run for 16 weeks, 3 days a week to complete 12 or 14 units.' (Metro, NSW)

'Greater governmental funding. Our postcode is seriously disadvantaged with regard to housing, employment, transport, health, mental health, disability, Aboriginality, remoteness, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, crime, and domestic and family violence. We are SO disadvantaged.' (Rural, NSW)

Concerns were raised by rural and remote respondents about the lack of ability to attract and retain qualified adult literacy teachers and the barrier that they perceived high qualifications presented to increasing the number of teachers attracted to rural and remote locations.

A dedicated training program for teachers who may not currently have the higher quals, but would like to enter this area of teaching, would be highly beneficial in Regional and Remote NSW. Is it better to have some delivery to invigorate communities or wait for many years for the

remote possibility (in many regional and remote communities) that someone with an adult post graduate qualification with LLND may become available to teach. A project to attract and train people with LLND teaching skills, plus the skills to support clients appropriately would be great. Also from experience, if LLND teachers have other skills, such as Art or VET skills, this often has a positive impact on enriching the learning environment and retaining students, with relevant and interesting LLND programs. (Regional, rural and remote, NSW)

A number of respondents suggested establishing a state based or regional literacy coordination role in the community, to support teachers, tutors, community providers and learners with information, resources, referral to providers and linkages.

Respondents called for improved advertising and promotion that is targeted appropriately to adult learners in format and methods that would reach them including:

- through community service providers and community forums
- through libraries
- using Facebook, TikTok and other social media platforms
- using auditory methods that will engage vision impaired adults.

Other supports for increased delivery included:

- Appropriate resources such as more paper-based materials for students who don't use/have computers
  - '… a huge barrier I face daily is finding adult appropriate resources for literacy and numeracy. Resources that are aimed at adults rather than children would be a great help.' (Metro, SA)
- More support from management for customisation and learner support and promoting literacy and numeracy
  - 'Being less profit focussed. Cease rolling intake in the SEE program. More flexibility for attendance and more time between assessments in the SEE program.' (Regional, QLD)
- Greater cross sectoral collaboration
  - 'Stronger collaboration between Job Actives / CDP, local Government departments, and community organisations.' (NT provider)
- Increased Professional Development for teachers
- Customised and/or courses more appropriate to learner needs
  - 'More variety in literacy courses. Workplace focus is fine for some but there are so many other learners with other needs. We just don't recognise this anymore.... and yet the needs still remain.' (Metro, NSW)
  - 'Better coordinated integration with accredited course teaching teams.' (Metro, VIC)
  - 'More volunteer tutor support or one-on-one support.' (Regional, VIC)
  - Appropriate courses to address LLND needs of students. At the moment, TAFE only offers Foundation Skills courses which do not suit all students who need reading, writing and numeracy help.' (Metro, NSW)

Certainly, all of these improvements and supports require a significant shift in policy focus including funding and a commitment to prioritise the needs of these adult learners.

'[What is needed is] a commitment at the policy level that LLN is a priority focus for VET.' (Metro, NSW)

THE REACH OF THE HOTLINE

People were asked if they had had contact with the Hotline in the past 12 months and 293 respondents (78%) reported that they had. The type of contact varied. Most often the contact with the Hotline was through the Hotline's e-newsletter Literacy Links (37%) or to access general information (33%). People also had contact with the Hotline through a referral for an adult learner or to access adult literacy resources. The Hotline constantly updates the provider contacts on its database and 17% of respondents reported contacting the Hotline for this purpose.
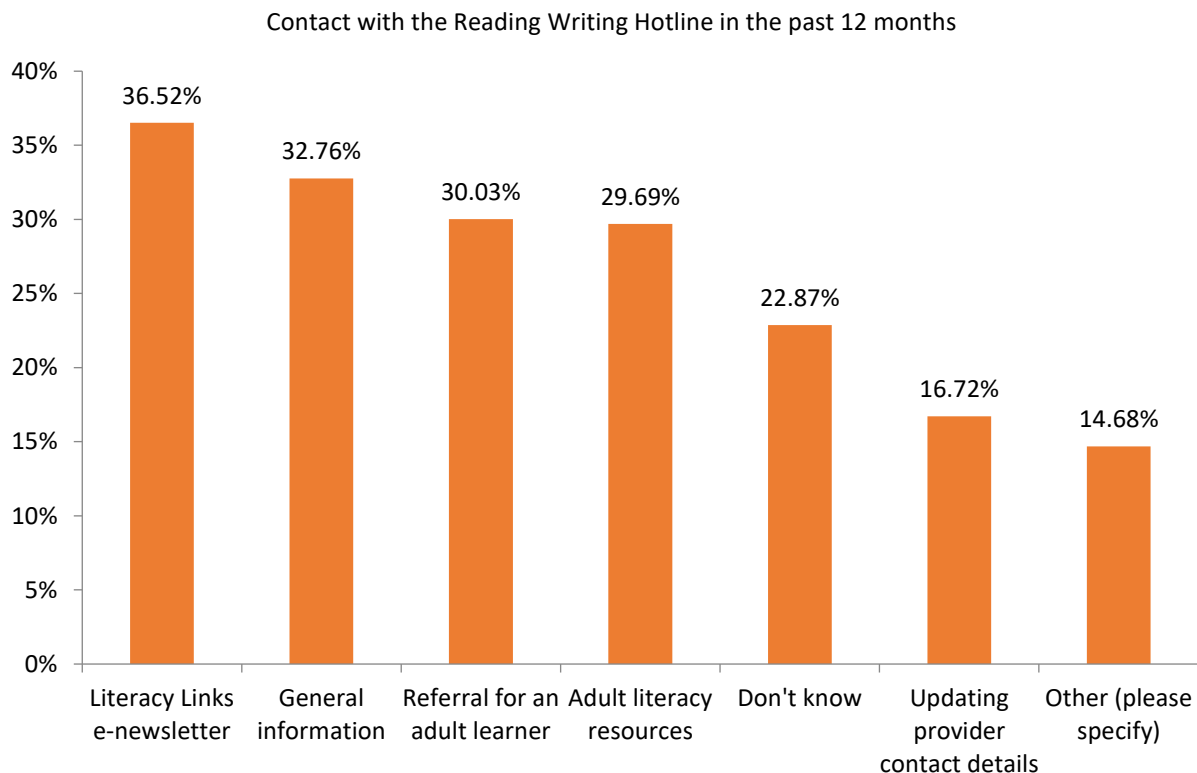
Contact with the Reading Writing Hotline in the past 12 months

Figure 16: Contact with the Reading Writing Hotline in past 12 months

While a number of respondents had a limited level of knowledge of, or contact with, the Hotline most were supportive of the role of the Hotline in providing information, referrals for learners and perhaps most importantly providing much needed adult literacy resources tailored to meet a range of learner needs and contexts.

Demand for Resources

The Hotline develops a range of adult literacy resources. Respondents were asked which of the main categories of resource were of interest to them. 310 people answered this question and, as discussed earlier in this report, there was high interest in accessing resources to support beginner literacy and workplace literacy. 249 respondents, or 80%, reported wanting access to beginner literacy resources. 234 respondents, 75%, reported wanting access to workplace literacy resources, followed by 65% who wanted access to volunteer tutor/teacher literacy resources and 54% who wanted access to First Nations English literacy resources.

RWH Initiatives

The Hotline is working on two new initiatives - an Adult Literacy Volunteer Package and a Plain English – Reader Friendly Communication Course. Respondents were asked to register their level of interest in these initiatives. 52% of services were very interested in the Plain English Communication Course and 42% of services were very interested in the Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Package.

Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor package	**Plain English - Reader Friendly Communication Course**
This package includes resources to help set up and support volunteer tutor literacy programs and individuals who want to be volunteer tutors	This is a self-paced course to help make provider's communication more reader friendly

Figure 17: Reading Writing Hotline Initiatives 2021-2022

ENDNOTES

[ii] Joyce, S. (2019) Strengthening Skills - Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System. p 110

[iiii] Productivity Commission (2020) National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (COAG) p.375.

[iii] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022) https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health

[iv] Lowitja Institute *Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign (accessed July 2022)* https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/research/research-categories/cultural-and-social-determinants/social-determinants-of-health/completed-projects/aboriginal-adult-literacy-campaign'

[v] The Australian Council for Educational Research Limited (ACER) (March 2021) Public Enquiry: Adult literacy and its importance p. 5

[vi] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (March 2022) *Don't Take it as Read*

[vii] Regional Expert Advisory Group (2019) *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (the Strategy) *Final Report*

[viii] Source: Victorian Department of Education (accessed July 2022) https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/acfepublications/hardtoreachlearn.pdf

[ix] Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2016-17* Table 15, 2020-21 Table 17

https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/work-related-training-and-adult-learning-australia/latest-release#barriers-to-formal-study

[x] Community Colleges Australia - CCA (2022) *COVID-19 Impact on NSW Adult and Community Education Providers* (23 February 2022)

[xi] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD (2020) The potential of Online Learning for Adults: Early lessons from the COVID-19 crisis p. 5.