

Uncovering Adult Literacy and Numeracy Needs in Australia:

*A Comprehensive
National Study
2023*



Prepared by Social Equity Works for the Reading Writing Hotline

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Glossary of Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Centre for Educational Research
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CDU	Charles Darwin University
Cert I-IV	Certificates I-IV are the first four certificate levels of the Australian Qualification Framework
ESB	English speaking background
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FSFYF	Foundation Skills for Your Future
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LLN	Language, literacy, and numeracy
LND	Literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RWH	Reading Writing Hotline
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment Program
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Executive Summary

This report is a summary of the two phases of the research conducted by Social Equity Works for the Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) on adult literacy, numeracy and digital (LND) needs from 2021 to 2023. For the purpose of this research, the report focuses on literacy needs rather than English Language needs.

The first phase of the research was an in-depth national survey of LND providers. Those results were published in the 2022 interim report *Insights from the classroom – a survey of adult literacy providers*. It identified high levels of unmet adult literacy needs around Australia, and the common barriers to literacy learning and delivery by training providers. It also identified the types of adult LND delivery offered by providers and made recommendations to address barriers and unmet needs.

This second phase of the research was designed to hear from a broader range of community stakeholders about needs and barriers. The rich data captures a range of voices with deep practical experience of the literacy needs of their communities and clients. It gives unique insights into unmet adult LND needs in communities and the ways providers, community sector organisations and libraries work across this continuum of need at the 'coal face'. The comprehensive reach of the survey and candid responses reflect the community and industry relationships built through the Hotline's work over the past 30 years.

Adult LND provision is a complex field with many different:

- learner needs
- organisations offering support
- types of provision.

An understanding of these complexities was essential to create a valid and reliable survey.

The research aimed to:

- build a national picture of the current community need for adult LND programs and support
- identify the barriers faced by adults in accessing courses and support, and by providers in delivering programs
- identify the roles various sectors play in providing good practice training and support for adults with LND skills gaps.

The report is based on 483 responses through surveys and focus groups representing:

- LND program providers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program providers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)
- Councils of Social Service (COSS) peak agencies and other community sector providers
- library staff involved with LND support programs for adults
- RWH National Steering Committee.

The report also incorporates the voices of Hotline callers through case study data from the RWH database. The needs and barriers RWH callers identify consistently align with those identified by the survey respondents.

This research does not focus on rates of delivery for different programs, firstly because there is wide variation in how people describe LND courses and programs and, secondly, because this information is already available through the RWH database. Individual survey responses did not consider the size of the organisation, number of enrolments or community populations. Information from responses about LND delivery is contained in Appendix B.

1 Major Findings

1.1 Unmet Need

The research revealed significant unmet need for LND courses and support programs. 89% of respondents from diverse organisations reported unmet LND needs in their communities. This finding was supported by RWH call data, with no suitable provision available for 13% of calls nationally, and 48% of Northern Territory calls.

Formal course provision and informal literacy 'mediation' by community organisations and libraries were both recognised as important components of LND support. There was also broad acknowledgement that adults who seek to improve their LND skills do so for a range of reasons, not always related to improved employment outcomes.

Areas of highest unmet need for all respondents **from provider, community sector and library sectors** were:

- individual and tailored literacy assistance
- wrap-around support to address barriers
- help with filling in forms and responding to other important documents
- pathways to accredited courses
- non-accredited courses delivered in community settings.

First Nations providers and community sector respondents also identified the following as significant gaps:

- culturally appropriate courses for First Nations people
- reading and writing for work
- culturally appropriate learning resources
- lack of beginner courses.

1.2 Barriers to provision for learners and organisations

The main barriers identified for **adult learners** with LND needs in accessing courses and support programs were:

- shame and embarrassment
- learners not knowing where to ask for help
- lack of local courses in rural and remote areas, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- lack of transport, distance and cost in rural and remote locations.

The main barriers for **organisations** in delivering courses and support programs were:

- inadequate funding
- lack of qualified teachers
- lack of flexible models of delivery that can meet learners' individual LND needs
- lack of culturally appropriate courses and teachers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers and community organisations.

1.3 The impact of unmet need

Respondents made it clear that lower LND skills increase people's vulnerability to disadvantage. They identified many ways that low levels of LND literacy can impact individuals, including:

- being unable to access government services, understand government requirements or fill in forms
- being at risk of increased financial stress due to unpaid bills and fines
- experiencing reduced community participation, which can lead to social isolation
- being unable to gain and sustain employment, or manage all work requirements
- experiencing longer term impacts on health and wellbeing
- being unable to understand legal documents important to quality of life.

Specialised areas of literacy were of particular concern for community sector respondents, including:

- health literacy: inability to understand health-related documents
- governance: inability to read documents required as part of governance roles¹
- legal literacy: disadvantage in relation to legal matters, the interpretation of legal documents and court processes.

1.4 Ways to address unmet LND need

There was marked agreement across respondents about ways to address unmet LND needs:

- An increase in literacy and numeracy funding, as well as better targeting of existing funding and provision.
- An increase in trained adult literacy teachers and increased professional development for the sector.
- An increase in trained adult literacy volunteer tutors who are provided with ongoing support.
- The ability to enrol adults in smaller class groups and provide them with literacy programs that support their individual goals.
- Greater options for funded programs that deliver non-accredited outcomes and beginner courses.
- More flexibility to deliver courses in community settings via outreach models or partnerships with community organisations and libraries.
- More delivery in rural and remote locations.
- More delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a matter of urgency with the proviso that these programs are:
 - ◆ led by, and designed with, community
 - ◆ delivered to meet real need in consultation with community members
 - ◆ include strong LND mentoring components for workers.

1 By governance the author is referring to membership on Boards and Management Committees in the community sector.

The LND requirement for these roles is high and includes being able to read and understand board papers, constitutional matters and financial management documents such as budgets and audit reports. The issue was specifically raised by respondents to this research in relation to LND support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these roles.

2 Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on the report's major findings.

2.1 Rebuild the LND workforce:

- 1 Increase the number of qualified teachers through targeted incentives.
- 2 Provide professional development programs for LND teachers.
- 3 Train and support tutors, including First Nations educators, to meet the demand for adult literacy instruction and provide ongoing training and support in community settings.

2.2 Increase funding and flexibility:

- 4 Increase funding to address unmet LND needs across both formal and informal programs.
- 5 Address the inequity in service delivery in remote locations and prioritise providing culturally appropriate programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 6 Expand the scope of LND programs beyond employment outcomes, emphasising access to government services, social inclusion, community participation and overall quality of life.
- 7 Support the delivery of non-accredited courses and programs, particularly in community settings, and foster partnerships between providers, community sector organisations and libraries.
- 8 Increase literacy resources and coordination at the local level, including establishing Literacy Coordinators to support the community and foster partnerships.

2.3 Enhance delivery and access:

- 9 Increase the availability of appropriate paper-based learning resources for diverse learners in various settings.
- 10 Prioritise the delivery of LND courses in workplaces, community settings, and rural and remote communities.
- 11 Develop and deliver culturally appropriate English language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs for First Nations people, ensuring community involvement and leadership.
- 12 Recognise and adequately fund the valuable contributions of community organisations, including First Nations organisations and libraries, in providing pathways to literacy and informal support.
- 13 Increase community engagement programs to destigmatise literacy gaps experienced by this cohort of adult learners.
- 14 Develop community outreach and partnerships to deliver programs and courses in local, safe environments.
- 15 Increase flexibility in delivery patterns and timing of courses.
- 16 Improve infrastructure and technology support for learners.
- 17 Increase access for providers and learners to appropriate LND resources.

Note: Since the research was conducted the Australian Government has announced a re-design of the SEE program.

3 Introduction

This is the final report of the research commissioned by the Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) to build a comprehensive picture of the need for and delivery of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy programs across Australia. RWH received funding from the Australian Government for community consultation to identify and report on the need for adult LND programs, courses and support.

This research was conducted following the Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult Literacy and its importance, which identified a lack of availability of research and data in the adult LND area. It also took place at a time of significant consultation and re-design of adult foundation skills.

The research involved consultation with adult literacy providers, community sector providers and libraries. It surveyed First Nations adult education providers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other community sector organisations around Australia. Methods included online surveys, follow-up phone surveys, online focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

Respondents were asked about the following issues, which form the basis for the thematic analysis in this report:

- levels of adult literacy need and unmet need in their communities
- barriers to adults accessing LND courses and support programs
- barriers to LND delivery for training providers and organisations
- what works well in LND delivery to adults, and preferred LND delivery models
- what is needed to address unmet community need
- the impact of low LND skills on adults' independence, participation and wellbeing.

Providers were also asked to report on current delivery of courses, the impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters, and the demand for learning resources.²

3.1 Rationale

The 2022 interim report for this research identified high levels of unmet literacy needs for adults around Australia and the common barriers to literacy learning and delivery faced by education and training providers. It also identified the types of adult literacy service delivery currently offered and made recommendations to address these barriers and the unmet need.

This second phase of the project was designed to hear specifically from:

- First Nations literacy providers and community sector organisations
- general community sector providers
- Councils of Social Service and other community sector peak agencies
- public libraries
- the Reading Writing Hotline National Steering Committee.

² For in-depth analysis of the findings for general LND providers see the interim report from this research, *Insights from the classroom – a survey of adult literacy providers (2022)*.

The aim of this phase was to expand on the findings of the interim report by gathering additional data about specific levels of unmet adult literacy need in communities and the barriers faced by community members. This phase also identifies how organisations work across this continuum of need to provide appropriate literacy programs and other informal supports to adults.

It is important to distinguish between the **demand** for current LND courses and the **need** for courses that actually address the goals of those seeking them. Several key national reports³ recognise that there are many in the community who are unable to access classes that meet their needs. This has an impact on their ability to gain and keep employment, participate in education and training, and participate in family and community life.ⁱ

Underpinning this research is a lack of ‘current’ data on adult literacy levels and need. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) measures adult competencies in three key areas: literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments. The most recent PIAAC survey, which measured the skill levels of Australians aged 15–74 years in these three areas, was conducted in 2011–12. It 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 could be traced back to initial schooling.

PIAAC data is collected at the population level, so little is known about local variations in need or the needs in Aboriginal communities. Recent investigations by Charles Darwin University (2017) and Lin et al. (2021)⁵ have identified a high need for greater provision and support in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly in remote locations.

An estimated 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have minimal English literacy, a figure that rises to as high as 70% in many remote areas.⁴

The Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System also identified that people with lower levels of literacy and numeracy are less likely to be employed or more likely to be employed in low-skilled, insecure work and are at greater risk of redundancy. It cites the Hotline call data as evidence of this fact.⁶

³ The Hon. Steve Joyce, *Strengthening Skills – Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System* (2019); Productivity Commission, *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).

⁴ Lowitja Institute, *Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign* (accessed July 2022).

⁵ Fiona Shalley and Allison Stewart, *Aboriginal Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) in the Northern Territory: A Statistical Overview*, Whole of Community Engagement Initiative, Office of the PVC of Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University (2017); Sophia Lin, Frances Williamson, Jack Beeton, Ben Bartlett, Bob Boughton and Richard Taylor, ‘Quantifying low English literacy in Australian Aboriginal Communities: a correlational study’, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 2021, 48:267–280.

⁶ Joyce, *Strengthening Skills*, p. 17.

The impact of low levels of LND literacy on adults, including quality of life and wellbeing, was also a focus of this second phase of the research. Low levels of LND literacy are linked to intergenerational disadvantage and poverty. The Charles Darwin University (CDU) study found that literacy and numeracy gaps for Aboriginal adults are implicated in many areas of relative disadvantage, including:

- understanding health information or prescriptions and engaging in confident conversations with doctors and hospital staff
- engaging in education and employment
- interactions with the justice system, and other government and community services
- understanding and managing finances and contracts such as rental agreements
- navigating and using online information.⁷

Research into Australia's digital divide has found that

poverty is the strongest indicator of digital exclusion followed closely by age. People living on an income of less than \$35k have the lowest digital inclusion score of all groups. There is also a strong relationship between age and digital literacy level, with 2.7 million of the population 50 years and over (34%) having low digital literacy or being digitally disengaged. These levels of digital literacy place Australians living in poverty and older Australians at an increased risk for disadvantage and may impair their ability to access the services and assistance they require. For older people on low incomes below \$35k this will further compound as they age.⁸

Research reported by the Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) has shown that improving English language, literacy and numeracy levels can change patterns, especially within disadvantaged populations. For example, improving foundation skills in both parents and children can reverse intergenerational patterns of low achievement.⁹

Adults with low LND skills often attend community sector organisations and libraries looking for support to address the impact of these skills gaps on their daily lives – for example, completing government forms, understanding health information and reading formal letters/emails.

An underlying aim of this research has been to shine a light on the important but mostly 'hidden' role that community sector organisations and libraries play in informal support for people with low levels of LND literacy.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Roy Morgan, the Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University and RMIT, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019* (2019) p. 5.

⁹ The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Public Enquiry: Adult Literacy and Its Importance* (2021) p. 5.

This hidden work of 'literacy mediation' – a term coined by Sally Thompson in her 2015 research with Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria – was a launching point to investigate the literacy mediation role of community sector organisations and staff in libraries. Thompson's research found that staff from Neighbourhood Houses 'acted as literacy mediators and were spending around 10 hours per week on the provision of this informal literacy support'.¹⁰ This research also found that the time spent on this assistance was increasing and that the digitisation of many bureaucratic documents adds another layer of difficulty for people with low literacy levels. Much of this work performed by Neighbourhood Houses staff is informal and unfunded. It is absorbed in the day-to-day support services provided to clients and therefore adds an unreasonable burden on staff and budgets.

3.2 Scope

The project's focus was on determining level of need in communities and the barriers for current providers and learners across Australia. The research also identified what people thought was working and what was needed to address unmet need.

The project did not aim to quantify delivery of LND programs nationally. This is because low enrolment levels resulting in low delivery may be due not to lack of need but, rather, to program offerings not meeting the needs of the learners. Individual survey responses did not take into account the size of organisations, number of enrolments or community populations.

The data sets vary in type and comparability due to the variety of data collection methods used. Online surveys provided some comparable quantitative data, while qualitative data was gathered across all data collection methods. The First Nations Adult Literacy Need survey was customised for the user group, which limited the ability to aggregate data across the three surveys. All respondents were asked to provide feedback on community or learner need, barriers to delivery and barriers for learners, demand for delivery, what was working well and what people needed to address any unmet need in their communities.

3.3 Methodology

The general provider survey was distributed to 1,321 individuals via email addresses registered on the Hotline database of LND providers. Networking through the RWH First Nations Engagement Strategy identified contact organisations for targeted online surveys and focus groups. Social Equity Works used its networks to identify and recruit community sector organisations. Social Equity Works and RWH co-designed the consultation tools including online surveys and questions for the focus groups.

¹⁰ Sally Thompson, *Literacy Mediation in Neighbourhood Houses*, *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 55(3), 477–495 (2015), p. 485.

Table 1: Sample of Respondents – Group, Method and Respondent Numbers

SAMPLE GROUP	METHOD	RESPONDENTS
General Adult Literacy Providers	Online Survey	382
First Nations Providers	Online Survey, follow-up phone interviews and one written submission	22
First Nations Community Providers (ACCOs, AMS etc.)	Online Survey and follow-up phone interviews	34
Community sector Providers and Peak Bodies (COSS etc.)	Focus Group and follow-up phone interviews	12
Library Services	Focus Group and follow-up phone interviews	12
RWH Steering Committee members	Focus Group and written submissions	21
TOTAL		483

There were 483 respondents from across Australia. The methods of gathering data and feedback included:

- a national online survey of general LND providers on LND needs
- a targeted online survey of First Nations providers on LND needs and follow-up interviews where required
- a targeted online survey of First Nations organisations on community need for LND provision
- online focus groups with libraries delivering LND programs and support
- online focus groups with key stakeholders in the community sector, including Councils of Social Services to identify LND needs in their communities
- Steering Committee Focus Group
- written submissions and follow-up interviews with a small number of organisations and key stakeholders
- an analysis of calls to the RWH recorded on its database from 2021 to 2023 and caller case studies drawn from the database.

4 Findings

The findings of this research are presented thematically. Findings across all respondent groups demonstrate a high level of unmet need for adult LND provision and support programs across Australia.

LND providers tended to highlight the need for flexible program delivery tailored to learner needs and the value of both accredited and non-accredited and beginner courses. Respondents from community sector organisations, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), highlighted the need for:

- more local course delivery, especially in rural and remote locations
- beginner-level courses
- a focus on non-accredited programs and adult literacy volunteer programs in communities to better support people with everyday needs including filling in forms, understanding government correspondence, paying fines and accessing health, legal and other information critical to improving their quality of life.

Face-to-face delivery and one-on-one individualised support were identified as best practice in delivery of adult LND programs. Some respondents also called for more coordination of programs in regional, rural and remote locations.

The need for skilled and qualified teachers was widely reported as an urgent issue. Community sector organisations and libraries that provide informal LND support reported a need for greater funding to support volunteer literacy tutoring programs. They also highlighted the need for access to learning resources that help adults in their community programs to build their LND skills to support everyday reading and writing needs and address their personal learning goals.

What is clear across all respondent groups is that adults with LND skill gaps are at increased risk of negative social and economic outcomes or reinforcement of social disadvantage as a result of these gaps. Adults with LND skills gaps often have high levels of complex needs and organisations and learners face multiple barriers in addressing this need. In some cases, providers also unintentionally create barriers for learners through difficult course information systems, inappropriate advertising or lack of outreach services. The findings across all respondent groups also highlight the role low levels of LND skills play in exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and risk factors and compounding social exclusion for many adults.

4.1 Unmet Community Need

Significant community need for LND provision and support was identified by all the respondent groups in this research.

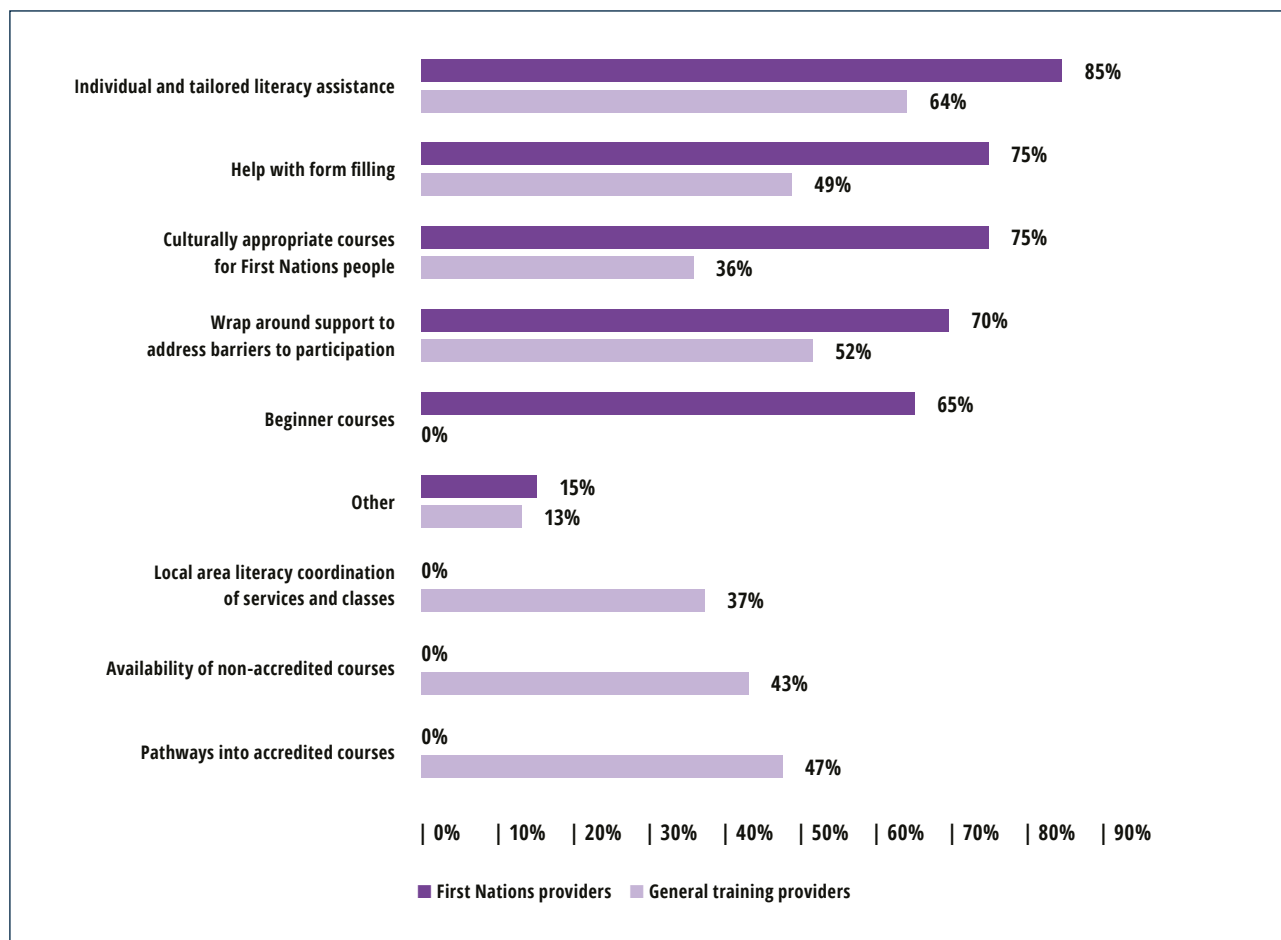
4.1.1 What survey respondents told us

Across the three online surveys:

- 89% of respondents reported unmet need for LND support programs in their communities
- 84% of general providers, 90% of First Nations providers and 99% of First Nations community organisations reported various levels of unmet need.

These findings were reinforced by the feedback from participants in the community sector and library focus groups and in the submissions from RWH Steering Committee members. Figures 1 and 2 following, show the key areas of community need identified by adult training providers (Figure 1) and First Nations community organisations (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Unmet Need – General and First Nations Training Providers Comparison

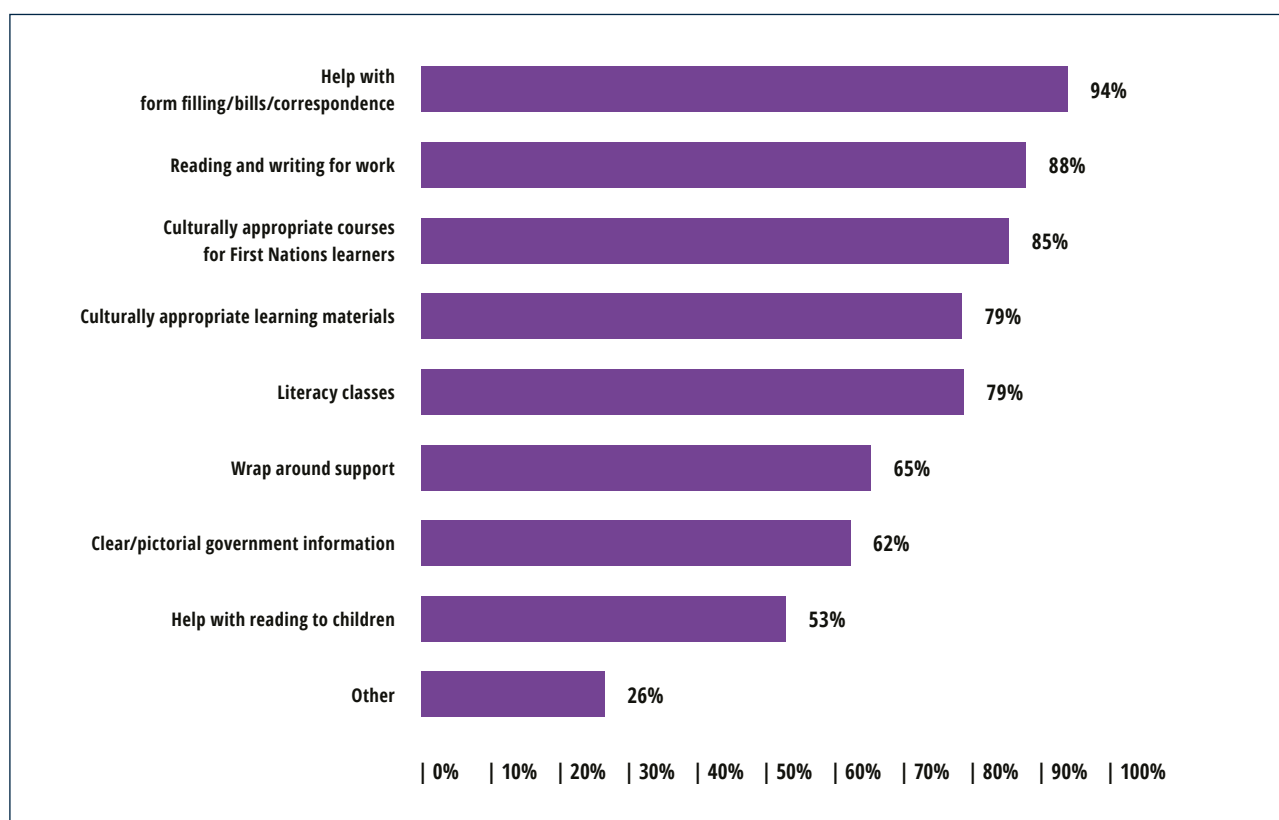


Both general and First Nations providers identified individual and tailored literacy assistance, wrap-around support to address barriers and help with filling in forms as areas of highest unmet need. For First Nations providers, culturally appropriate courses for First Nations people and the lack of available beginner courses were also identified as significant gaps. For general providers, pathways to accredited courses, availability of non-accredited course delivery in community settings and lack of local area literacy coordination were also rated as areas of high need.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Courses are centrally set with unit assessments that are too onerous and inappropriate for students with low LLN. With the current funding 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.'*
- *'The funding [for LND] needs to be ongoing and needs based. We can't make up for lack of years of schooling in six months or a year. Our students gain their basic qualifications, Cert I in one year and Cert II in 2 years usually (Year 10 equivalent). Flushed with success they want to go on studying. But we only get one year of funding per person and no re-enrolment allowed.'*
- *'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.'*
- *'In an ideal world we would like to have literacy trainers/facilitators employed in their own communities who could organise, influence and deliver literacy at a local level.'*

Figure 2: Unmet Need First Nations Community Organisations



Unmet need is reinforced by call outcome data from the RWH database. Over the recent two-year period, 1161 (or 13% of) calls to the RWH could not be referred to an appropriate provider and were classified as 'no appropriate provision'. Figure 3 below shows outcomes of calls to the Hotline between January 2021 and May 2023.

Figure 3: Outcome of Call Data – RWH 2021–2023

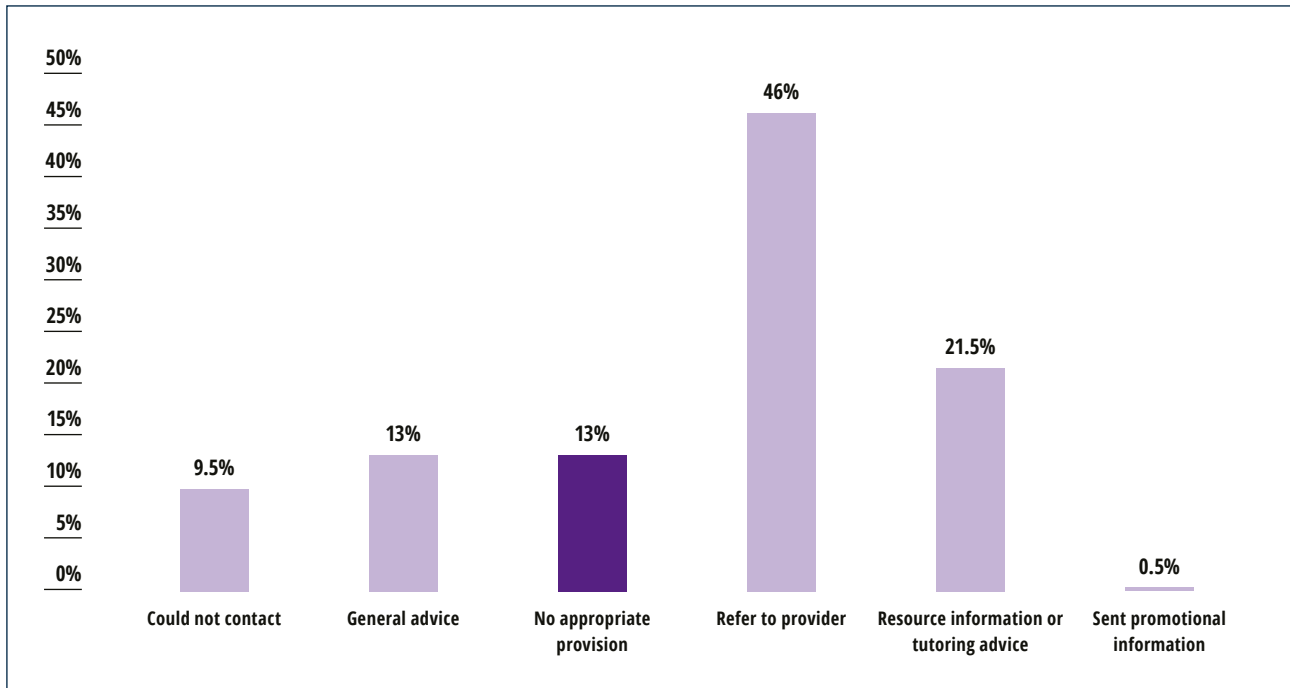
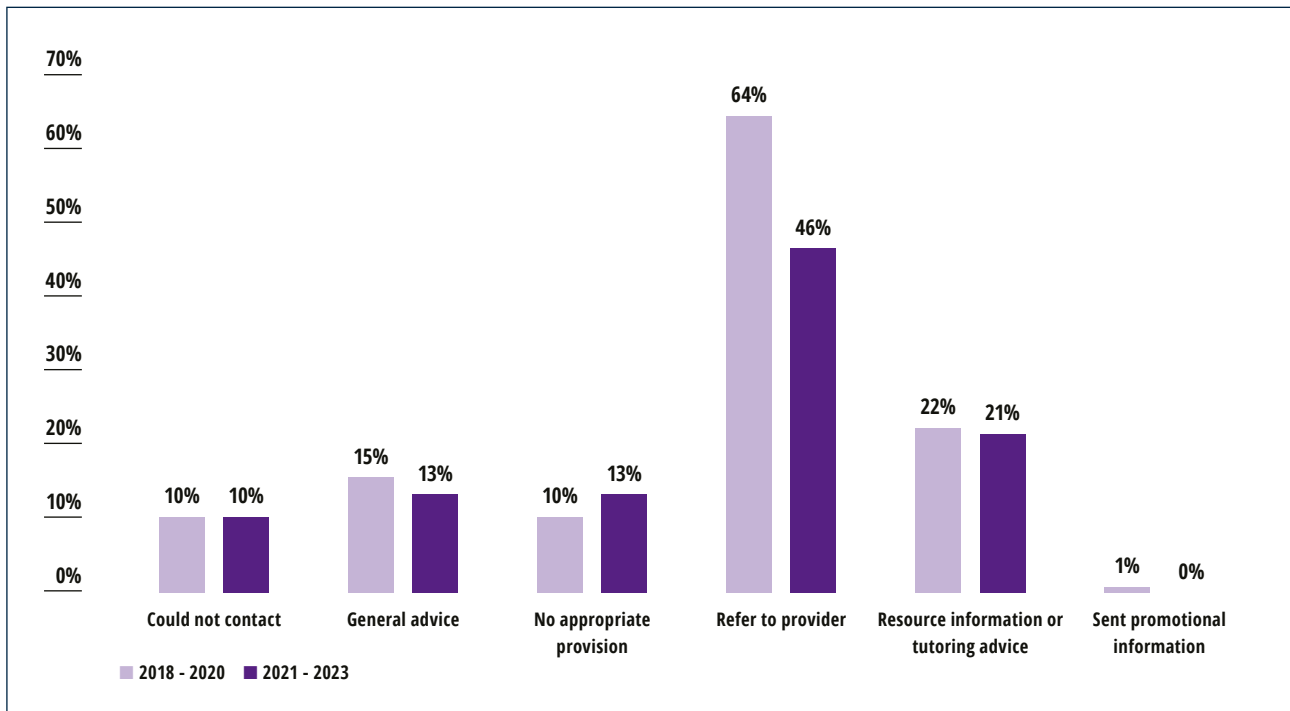


Figure 4 following shows the outcomes of call data comparing the years 2018–2020 with 2021–2023. It indicates an increase of 25% in 'no appropriate provision' over the period and a similar decrease (28%) in referrals to providers.

Figure 4: Outcome of Call Data RWH Comparison of 2018-2022 with 2021-2023



Note: The columns in this table total more than 100% as more than one option may be applicable.

According to Reading Writing Hotline statistics for the reporting period 2021–2023, 3% of all calls came to the Hotline from remote or very remote locations. In the same reporting period, remote communities were significantly over-represented when looking at calls with no provision available: 44% of callers from remote or very remote areas had no appropriate provision available compared to 10% for callers from major cities and 21% for callers from regional areas.

Hotline Caller Case Studies

Peter – ‘It’s hard to find anyone to help and I want to do it myself’

Peter rang us after trying to find the courage to call for many years. He had been working as a landscaper but had an accident at 27. After many operations, he was unable to continue working. ‘I need to improve reading because I don’t understand paperwork. I’m a single dad with a daughter with special needs. I need help to submit stuff for her NDIS. It’s hard to find anyone to help and I want to do it myself.’

Peter was told by his employment provider there are no classes available for him.

Distance education is not available for Peter’s literacy level. Eventually the Hotline was able to link Peter with a volunteer literacy tutor.

Pat’s story – ‘I had a real bad raising.’

Pat was born on a mission and went to school but was taken out when very young and his stepfather had him working as soon as he could to earn money. His work was physically very hard and as a result he is now in constant pain. The Hotline could not find classes available.

Pat said he would like a private adult literacy tutor. ‘I’d love to write! I’m done with not being able to read and write.’ The Hotline located a tutor to work with him until a class became available.

4.1.2 What community sector focus groups told us about unmet need

There is a high level of community need for adults who have low levels of LND, which has far-reaching impacts on the individuals themselves, their families and the wider community and community sector organisations nationally.

Cost of living increases, the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters have amplified this need.

Quotes from respondents

- *‘...people present to a community service saying, “I need help with this issue”. Most don’t say they’ve got a issue, but we’re not set up for literacy.’*
- *‘The Australian energy regulator has issued a forward strategy on improving equity in the energy system, and they’ve heavily cited concerns with adult literacy as one of the barriers, not the only one certainly, to households affording the energy that they needed to live a comfortable life.’*

- *'The need is huge. We are seeing a huge increase in people who are struggling to keep their housing, their jobs and pay their bills and pay for food. So we have a lot of community members coming in with paperwork, and they ask us to read it to them and ask us to highlight the things that they need to be aware of before they'll take action something, again it confuses them. If you've got programs that you're running to assist community members with their literacy and numeracy – reading forms, printing off forms, filling them out, while helping them to do things online – it is challenging when you're a small underfunded, neighbourhood centre at the coalface of community and crisis...'*
- *'It's now a new barrier to people overcoming poverty. And I think we absolutely need to focus on overcoming that barrier, to be able to help people who might have poor literacy to be able to access the services that we know they need for health, for education, for welfare. Just to be able to survive in society.'*
- *'Providing this extra level of support [for LND] is time consuming. But because we ensure that we treat everybody with dignity and respect we work with [people] on this as well. In your discussions with community members there are clues or hints that there may be an underlying challenge like literacy.'*
- *'The other thing that we're hearing very strongly from the Neighbourhood Houses is that they were put under a lot of pressure through COVID and continue to be coping really admirably with the pressure with the cost-of-living crisis, more people than ever accessing services which is a struggle.'*

4.1.3 What library focus groups told us

There is growing need for literacy and digital literacy skills support among adults in the community who access library services. Libraries also report there are insufficient services and resources to meet this need. Libraries respond in a number of ways to LND needs. They provide adult literacy volunteer programs, front desk support to people who want to use library computers, and help completing forms. Staff also provide digital literacy programs targeted at older Australians.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Adult literacy need is there even in this town. That's the reason they set up the program, because you'd see middle-aged blue collar fellows struggling to get a resume on one of our computers. They're not the people that we see in the program, but we're a coal town and if you look at the stats the level of education here is quite low.'*
- *'The people who are coming to us for digital literacy assistance, their literacy skills do vary. We do find there are some people who want help for applying for jobs, creating resumes, learning how to use Word from scratch, learning how to use a computer from scratch etc. And their literacy skills are a little bit lower.'*
- *'[Native English speakers]... are the people that I envisaged in this program initially and that's who we used to have. But we're not reaching them as well as we used to, and I think it's the personal outreach. The establishing relationships. I think that's a barrier at the moment. We want those people back in the program... I think the demand is just slowly increasing, again, post COVID.'*

4.1.4 What Steering Committee members told us

Submissions from Steering Committee members identified high levels of need and disadvantage in communities. In some states, an inflexible funding model, lack of funding for resources and the restriction of the Foundation Skills Training Package exacerbate this need. There is also concern that there is unmet need in the area of entry level ICT training.

There is unmet need for culturally appropriate foundation skills program and specific strategies that need to be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal community members, especially in remote areas, to meet LND needs in these communities. Providing LND programs in partnership with youth services was also identified as a need.

The collated response from Community Colleges also highlighted high unmet need and the lack of specialised literacy educators, trainers and staff. It also raised concerns that the Foundation Skills Training Package lacks a focus on building basic everyday LND and life skills and is therefore not suitable for addressing this need.

4.2 Need in Remote First Nations Communities

A high level of unmet need in rural and remote locations was identified in the interim report of this project.¹¹ This finding was reinforced in the second half of the research by responses to the First Nations education and training providers and First Nations community sector provider surveys. It was further reinforced in feedback provided in the focus groups by staff from Councils of Social Service, community sector organisations and libraries.

As highlighted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research,

*'[L]ocation 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.'*¹²

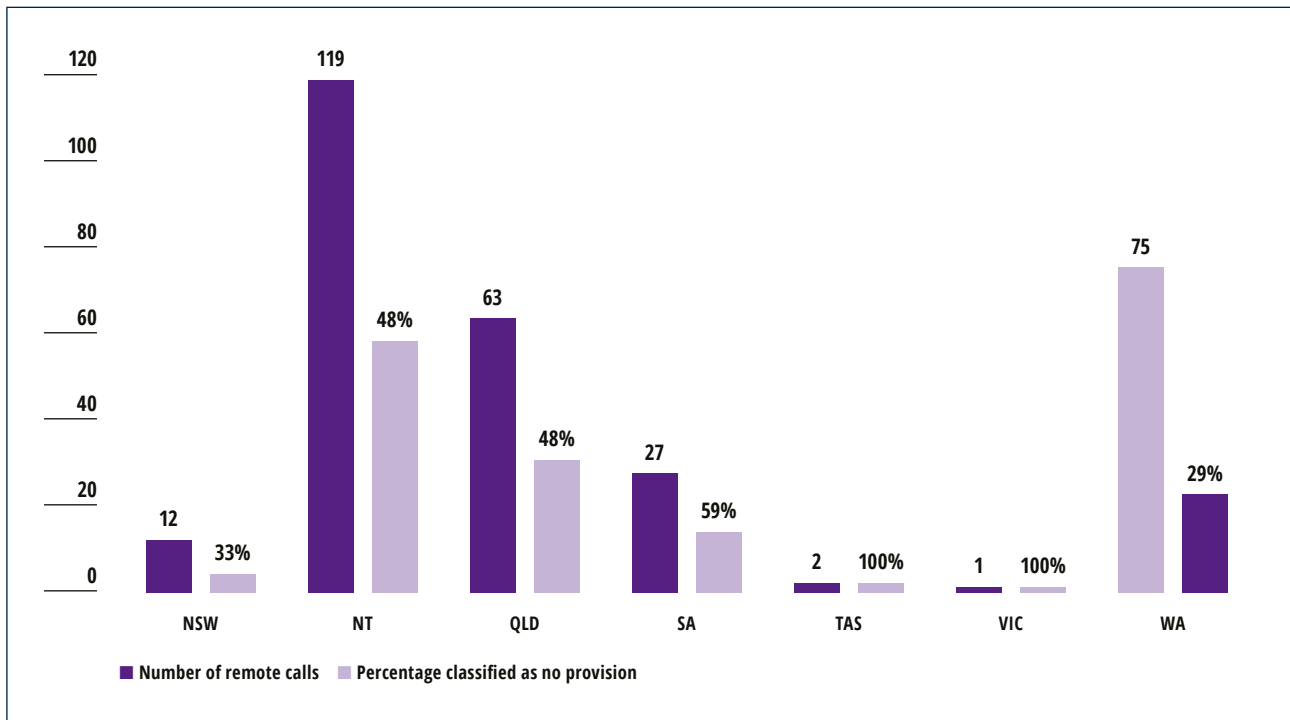
Figure 5: Percentage of Calls and Calls with No Provision Outcomes by Location 2021-2023



¹¹ Refer to the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy for data on lack of access to and provision of tertiary education options for people living in rural and remote locations as cited in *Insights from the Classroom: A Survey of National Literacy Providers* (2022)

¹² Lisa Nechvoglod and Francesca Beddie, *Hard to Reach Learners: What Works in Reaching and Keeping Them?* (Adult, Community and Further Education Board, 2010), p. 7.

Figure 6: Number of Calls from Remote Location by State/Territory and No Provision



The Northern Territory (NT) recorded the highest group of remote callers, and of these 48% received no referral to a provider due to lack of provision.

Quote from respondent

- ‘The lack of high-quality sustained English literacy training for adults in remote/very remote Indigenous communities is a blight [on] efforts for self-determination and a scandal. When the vast majority of people finish school without obtaining English literacy and basic computer skills this means that young adults have minimal choices or opportunities to continue education. Working with people highly experienced in remote and very remote communities to develop appropriate resources and support could move mountains.’*

The following section explores this issue in greater depth.

It is important to consider the specific adult literacy needs of First Nations people living in remote communities. According to National Rural Health Alliance data in 2011, 65% of Australia's First Nations people were living in regional and remote areas. In comparison, only 29% of Australia's non-Indigenous people lived in regional or remote areas.¹³ More recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that while there has been a drift to urban areas, 58% of Aboriginal people still live in regional, rural and remote Australia.¹⁴

There is limited data on adult Aboriginal English literacy rates at the local level. Lin et al. report that the lack of data on Aboriginal adult literacy rates

*'should be of major concern to policymakers, not just in education but across a whole range of services and programs in which the literacy of potential users and beneficiaries is likely to play a significant role, for both access and effective participation... Among health professionals and providers, "health literacy" has long been a major concern... but similar concerns are now common in regard to "financial literacy", "legal literacy", and the literacy required for effective participation in community organisation and governance.'*¹⁵

Vocational education and training (VET) Foundation Skills courses are also not seen as an appropriate first step for Aboriginal adults. According to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO),

*'VET Foundation Skills courses are often posited as the first step to improving adult literacy skills, yet to have the competency level needed to complete Certificate I and II courses, a moderate level of literacy is needed. Both Literacy for Life Foundation and Charles Darwin University found that most participants in their respective studies were below the level of English literacy required for Certificate I or II programs. The CDU report concluded that, more than 24,000 Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory would not have the English LLN skills needed to successfully complete a VET Certificate I or II course.'*¹⁶

13 National Rural Health Alliance, *Aboriginal Demographics* (2011). <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/book/demography>

14 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing – Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (2023).

15 Lin et al., 'Quantifying low English literacy in Australian Aboriginal Communities'.

16 NACCHO, *Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Inquiry Into Adult Literacy and Its Importance* (May 2021), p. 5.

4.2.1 What survey respondents told us

Of 420 respondentsⁱⁱ who answered the question on location, 40 (9.5%) were from remote locations. Of the respondents to the First Nations Adult Literacy Needs survey 16 (47%) were remotely located services.ⁱⁱⁱ

100% of First Nations survey respondents who came from remote locations identified a need for adult literacy and numeracy support and a need for help with form filling/bills/government correspondence. They also reported that there was a critical lack of services and support for adults with literacy needs, a lack of qualified teachers and teachers who were from and based in the community. Respondents spoke of having a 'lack of any options' and 'no availability of literacy programs in remote communities'. They identified wanting more provision in their communities and 'funding to work with adult literacy trained teachers to work with us in providing our clients and staff with adult literacy support'.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Clients seem to have difficulty completing the required forms for housing making the process "too hard" and people tend to not continue so [they] become homeless.'*
- *'People living in remote communities are not dumb or illiterate, but they do require assistance to understand what information they need to provide particularly when completing forms or making major decisions, e.g., starting bank accounts, accessing super, assessing welfare or employment options.'*
- *'There is only a primary school here, student is flown out of community to boarding school [for secondary education]. This is a major barrier as many refuse to leave community or don't want to go back after their first year. Therefore, the level of attained education drastically drops off post primary school.'*
- *'Adult English literacy for the majority who don't finish school. Taught in a way that recognises that a majority of remotely located Indigenous stakeholders speak Indigenous languages and are capable but not given enough sustained culturally appropriate learning opportunities.'*

Literacy and numeracy was also reported as an issue for staff in some First Nations services.

Quotes from remote Aboriginal Communities

- *'The vast majority of our 20+ Indigenous staff and 300+ members have limited literacy and numeracy skills. Very few finished high schools. There are very limited options for literacy and numeracy training support in our remote town. Even for our organisation who actively seek it out to support formal TAFE training, options are limited.'*
- *'We often encounter First Nations staff and constituents who cannot read and write. It is really hard to find resources and support for them that is not targeted at children or migrants. We have nowhere to refer them for training and support. Only CDU [Charles Darwin University] offer in-house programs, which need minimum numbers. Overcoming shame to ask for help is hard enough – to then not have a referral system is heartbreaking.'*

Hotline Caller Case Studies

Struggling to recruit staff

Kerry called us from a large Aboriginal organisation. She struggles all the time to recruit Aboriginal staff for positions in finance, administration, maintenance, and asset management. 'When I'm recruiting, I'm finding that a lot aren't job ready, mainly because of literacy. Is there a way we can support them?'

'We need something in the community'

'People want to learn how to fill out forms, set up email accounts, be aware of cyber security and learn to write. They feel comfortable and safe here in the Community Centre, but they feel shame to say straight out that they need reading and writing, even though they really want to learn. They don't want to fill out all the forms and sit in a formal class. If they can see there's a teacher who can help them, they'll come forward quietly. We want a qualified literacy teacher here, to work alongside our social worker. When they have confidence and more education, they'll be able to do the things they want.'

Another issue identified by First Nations providers and community related to the need for LND training and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on governance bodies, boards and management committees.

Quotes from remote Aboriginal Corporations in remote areas

- *'Directors of Aboriginal corporations cannot access FSFYF [Foundation Skills for Your Future] funding because they are not employees. But their need is as great – and they could potentially contribute more to the Australian economy if we were able to support their ability to manage their corporations to the point that they could set up further businesses, but we can't deliver programs without funding.'*
- *'There are some small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in communities where some Board members cannot read or write. We don't want to exclude people from decision making or positions of community power because they cannot read and write, however it does open them up to vulnerability. They have signed up for a position where they have legal responsibilities that they probably cannot fulfil without adequate language and literacy skills. Everything about governance is really wordy... So you're asking people to take a lot of time out of their personal lives to commit to something that actually has really significant legal responsibility.'*

Concern around the need for literacy to assist with governance was corroborated by other focus group participants and has also been highlighted in previous research.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lin et al., 'Quantifying low English literacy in Australian Aboriginal Communities'.

4.2.2 What community sector focus groups told us

The key issues identified by participants of the community sector focus groups that impact people living in remote communities, including Aboriginal communities, were:

- lack of in-language resources
- lack of provision and local supports other than the local community sector organisation
- negative past experiences of formal schooling
- lack of well-targeted resources using graphics and representing Aboriginal people,
- barriers to vital information for maintaining health and wellbeing and gaps in the cycle of care for chronic conditions and to everyday information and supports
- shame about asking for help
- frustration at not being able to understand information and the impact on community sector staff when people 'need to vent' this frustration¹⁸
- digital exclusion
- using phones and other technology in a different way, including sharing of phones and other devices
- vulnerability to exploitation due to needing others' help when accessing online portals such as Centrelink and banking
- cultural barriers to accessing courses and supports including Sorry Business¹⁹, family and other kinship responsibilities
- vulnerability to misinformation through channels such as Facebook and TikTok which become people's main source of 'news'.

4.2.3 What Steering Committee members told us

Feedback from some Steering Committee members also identified high unmet need exacerbated by learner barriers and inadequate funding.

¹⁸ See Appendix A – Case Study 2 Aboriginal Health Service.

¹⁹ Sorry Business is a term which refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cultural activities around bereavement.

Responses from Steering Committee members

- *'There is unmet need in Aboriginal communities for culturally appropriate foundation skills program and specific strategies developed in collaboration with Aboriginal community members, especially [in] remote areas.'*
- *'The delivery of LND [support] in the NT is largely through the federal Government SEE [Skills for Education and Employment] and FSFYF programs. There are a small number of programs run by private RTOs and Aboriginal organisations, delivering retail, construction, and community training in a limited number of communities. Alongside this they provide LND support. There is no evidence of any funded programs for the general public to attend where they can develop their LND skills.'*
- *'There is an unmet demand of community members who are not eligible for the SEE or FSFYF program but would still like to engage with LND training to develop their skills for self-development, empowerment, independence and to participate in community activities.'*

Hotline Caller Case Studies

Multiple barriers

'Tracey rang from a regional community in the Northern Territory. There were no local courses, so the Hotline sent workbooks and offered teacher support through phone and email. In the interim Tracey moved twice and the workbooks were lost. The Hotline then arranged literacy support from the local library and sent materials there. At the first meeting, the library tutor realised immediately that Tracey couldn't see properly. This resulted in an eye operation. With other health issues, family illness and sorry business, it took over fourteen months for Tracey to be able to return to study. The Hotline and the library tutor kept in touch over this period providing regular encouragement. Tracey has now re-started her tutoring sessions and is enthusiastic about what she is learning.'

Ellie's story – unsuitable distance provision

Ellie called the Hotline from a rural location, very upset about her difficulties accessing literacy learning. She was enrolled at a college but now they only offer online courses. She doesn't have a computer but really wants to learn maths and writing because she was not able to progress at school. She has severe anxiety and can't do a face-to-face class. Working on paper-based books with a teacher over the phone was working well for her previously, but this is no longer available.

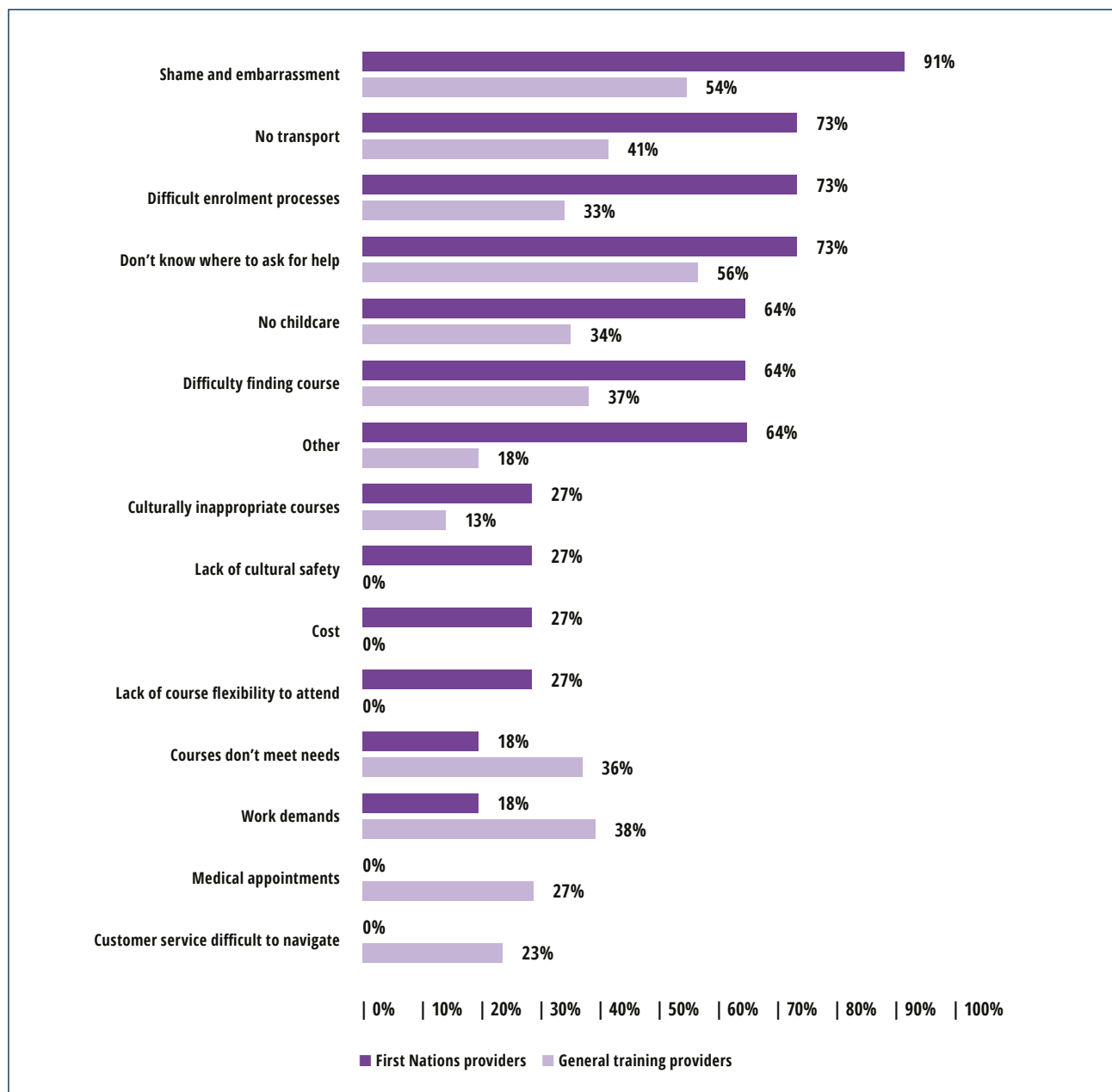
4.3 Barriers for Adults

Adults face a multitude of barriers in accessing successful courses and support programs that meet their LND needs. For many people living with disadvantage who are unable to read and write, especially those who are living in poverty, these barriers further compound their disadvantage. Even if they can overcome their embarrassment, find a class and navigate complex enrolment processes, they may still be unable to get to class due to lack of transport, cost, carer or family responsibilities or health and wellbeing barriers.

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.

4.3.1 What survey respondents told us

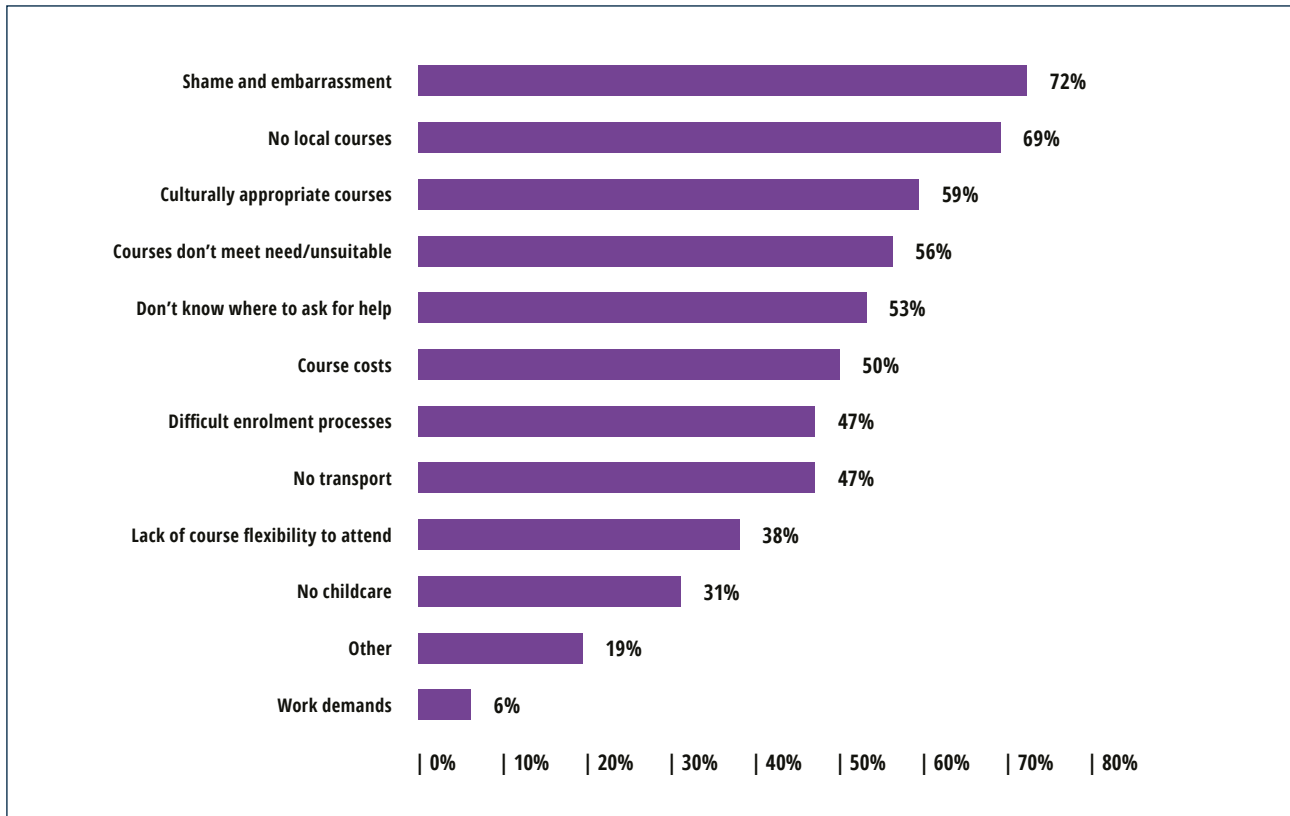
Figure 7: Barriers for Adult Learners Identified by General and First Nations Training Providers



*As described in the methodology on page 13, the survey for First Nations providers was customised for the user group and contained slightly different responses to the General Training Provider survey which is evident in 0% responses in Figure 7 and 9.

Figure 7 shows the most common barriers for learners as reported by respondents of both the general training provider survey (365 respondents to this question) and the First Nations provider survey (11 respondents to this question). Figure 8 shows the responses to this question from First Nations community organisations to the First Nations Adult Literacy Need survey (32 respondents to this question).

Figure 8: Barriers for Adults Identified by First Nations Community Organisations



Shame and embarrassment:

The most cited barrier for adults accessing LND courses and support programs was shame and embarrassment. Shame and embarrassment affect people’s ability to come forward to seek support. Caller stories from the RWH database highlight this barrier.

Hotline Caller Case Studies

Issues in a small community

Travis wanted to work on his reading and writing, but the only class available in his town was English for migrants. As a native English speaker, he didn't fit in, and felt he was wasting his time. To make matters worse, an admin worker at the college joked with the locals about Travis' enrolment, adding to his shame and frustration. He rang the Hotline as he was too embarrassed to learn in his home community and told us he was willing to relocate to learn if something was available.

55 years of embarrassment

'For the best part of 55 years I have had a problem with my spelling and punctuation. Each morning the same ad would come on the television for the Reading Writing Hotline. After a couple of weeks, I decided I would pluck up the courage and give the phone number a call. This was by far the hardest and most rewarding call I have ever made. I mean that without reservation. To have a problem that you have hidden from everyone but your closest loved one's for fear of embarrassment, and then to make it public, is a very daunting thing to do, as it is an admission by you that you have a flaw in your character which needs addressing.'

Not knowing where to get help

When the barrier of shame and embarrassment is overlaid with other common barriers – such as not knowing where to ask for help, lack of local course provision and complicated enrolment processes – it is clear that there are many in the community and the workforce who suffer silently and are unable to reach their personal goals.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Aboriginal people are shamed and don't let people know that they cannot read or write. They tend to bring the forms to [our] LALC [Local Aboriginal Land Council] office, and we assist in completing or calling the companies asking for assistance.'*
- *'It is difficult to find literacy courses on the [provider website] system and enrolment can be fraught.'*

Hotline Caller Case Studies

Ray's story – not knowing where to get help

Ray works for a government entrepreneurship program designed to address the barriers preventing people from succeeding in small business. He is concerned about the number of people in the program who have identified LND literacy as major barriers to their success. Peter rang the Hotline seeking assistance to find them classes. Most of the program participants have completed Year 12 but still struggle with their literacy.

Course names

The tendency of some course providers to use long and complex course names that would be unfamiliar to learners can also act as a barrier. Courses title like 'Certificate 2 Access to Skills for Vocational Education' are unclear, as opposed to titles such as 'Help with Reading, Writing or Spelling'. Difficulty finding a course can indicate a lack of LND course provision but, more broadly, it also reflects difficulty finding or understanding relevant course information.

Cost of courses

This is often high on the list of issues for people in considering whether or not to access education and training. Hotline teachers report that cost is an issue for most callers. Often callers will seek reassurance, asking several times in the conversation whether the course or tutor is free. When the only literacy provision available is a paid tutor, callers usually decline the referral.

Hotline Caller Case Study

Jane's story

Jane, a fifty-year-old woman, wanted help with completing a course which she could only access online. 'I left school in Year 10 so I missed out on all the digital stuff. I'm struggling with the digital side of things.' Jane said she could go through a local provider but that was very expensive, and she hasn't been able to find any free support.

Alex – complexity and cost

Alex has low level reading, writing and numeracy skills. 'I want help with the whole lot and computers.' Alex works casually in security but was unemployed when he rang. 'With work they want me to go on computers to find out all I need to know – everything like pay slips. Someone has changed the computer and made me a casual, but I've been working for them for years.' Alex can't afford private tutors as his medication is costing him too much.

Transport

This was identified across the three surveys as a major barrier for learners and adults with LND support needs, being selected by:

- 41% of respondents to the general provider survey
- 72% of the First Nations provider survey
- 47% of respondents in the First Nations Adult Literacy Needs survey.

Respondents said that this is exacerbated in regional and remote areas.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Public transport in regional areas is limited. Difficult for single parents to attend classes due to limited public transport.'*
- *'I just added to the list transport, childcare and out of hours access for people who are working.'*
- *'Transport to the library [is a barrier] if they live in a regional area. Public transport outside of metropolitan areas isn't great. Also transport to get [literacy] tutors out to people in the community isn't great.'*

Hotline Caller Case Study

Alone and disconnected

An older woman rang for digital literacy advice. Her reading and writing is fine, but she can't use a computer. She is living alone, and her only help is a domestic once a week. She can't leave the house and has no transport. Support to get connected and learn basic computer skills would change her life.

Delivery times

Timing for LND programs and opening hours for libraries were also problematic for working people.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Delivery times not accessible for many learners [who work]. No weekend classes.'*
- *'Work demands have increased because of COVID-19, which makes it harder to attend classes.'*
- *'Library opening hours are a barrier. People may be working or have family commitments that don't allow them to visit during the normal opening hours. They might need after-hours support.'*

Other factors

There were other factors identified as barriers for some adults taking the next step in their literacy journey including:

- mental health issues such as anxiety or depression
- intergenerational poverty
- low levels of schooling and/or previous negative experience of education
- fear of COVID-19 during the height of the pandemic
- parents and children being homeless and/or in crisis due to domestic violence
- individual learning needs, undiagnosed learning difficulties, older people with intellectual disability, lack of awareness of Deaf culture, Auslan issues.

4.3.2 What Community Sector focus group participants told us

Participants in community sector focus groups identified the following barriers to providing adequate support to people in the community with low levels of LND literacy:

- a lack of Easy English materials to provide bridging support
- shame, embarrassment and lack of confidence
- intergenerational poverty and no positive family role modelling of the benefits of reading
- limited funding for community-based adult education
- lack of vocational teachers with LND underpinnings
- remoteness as a barrier and lack of provision in remote locations
- isolation caused by factors other than geography
- courses being offered solely online without LND support where there is low, or no, internet coverage, and other forms of digital exclusion.

Quotes from respondents

- *'It is true that people don't know what they don't know. If they can't read and write, then they don't know what supports are available to build their literacy.'*
- *'People learn to get by and to mask their poor LND levels. They might rely on family members or a friend to do their banking, access the internet. There is a risk that their family member doesn't know that they're eligible for supports. So it's a compounding problem.'*
- *'Providing services to people who need literacy support is time consuming, but this comes down to mitigating the shame and embarrassment that people feel and treating people with dignity and respect.'*

4.3.3 What library focus group participants told us

One of the main barriers to people accessing library services is the perception that libraries are not a place for people who cannot read and write.

- *'The [biggest] barrier for people accessing library support is that libraries are notoriously full of words. The last time a lot of people went into a library was when they're at school, school may have not been a good experience for them. And they walk into a library and it's intimidating. So that's a huge barrier.'*

4.3.4 What Steering Committee members told us

Steering Committee focus group participants identified the following additional barriers for adult learners:

- *'Confusing enrolment processes continue to be a significant barrier for learners. Also inadequate digital skills that were highlighted during COVID. Another issue is that staff are not trained to teach individuals with disabilities and mental health issues.'*

Access to technology to support digital learning and provide access to educational options, particularly in regional and remote areas, was a barrier highlighted in one state. In another state, and especially in Aboriginal communities, family obligations, cultural obligations, governance obligations and pre-existing learning barriers were also highlighted as barriers for adults in accessing LND support.

4.4 Barriers for Organisations

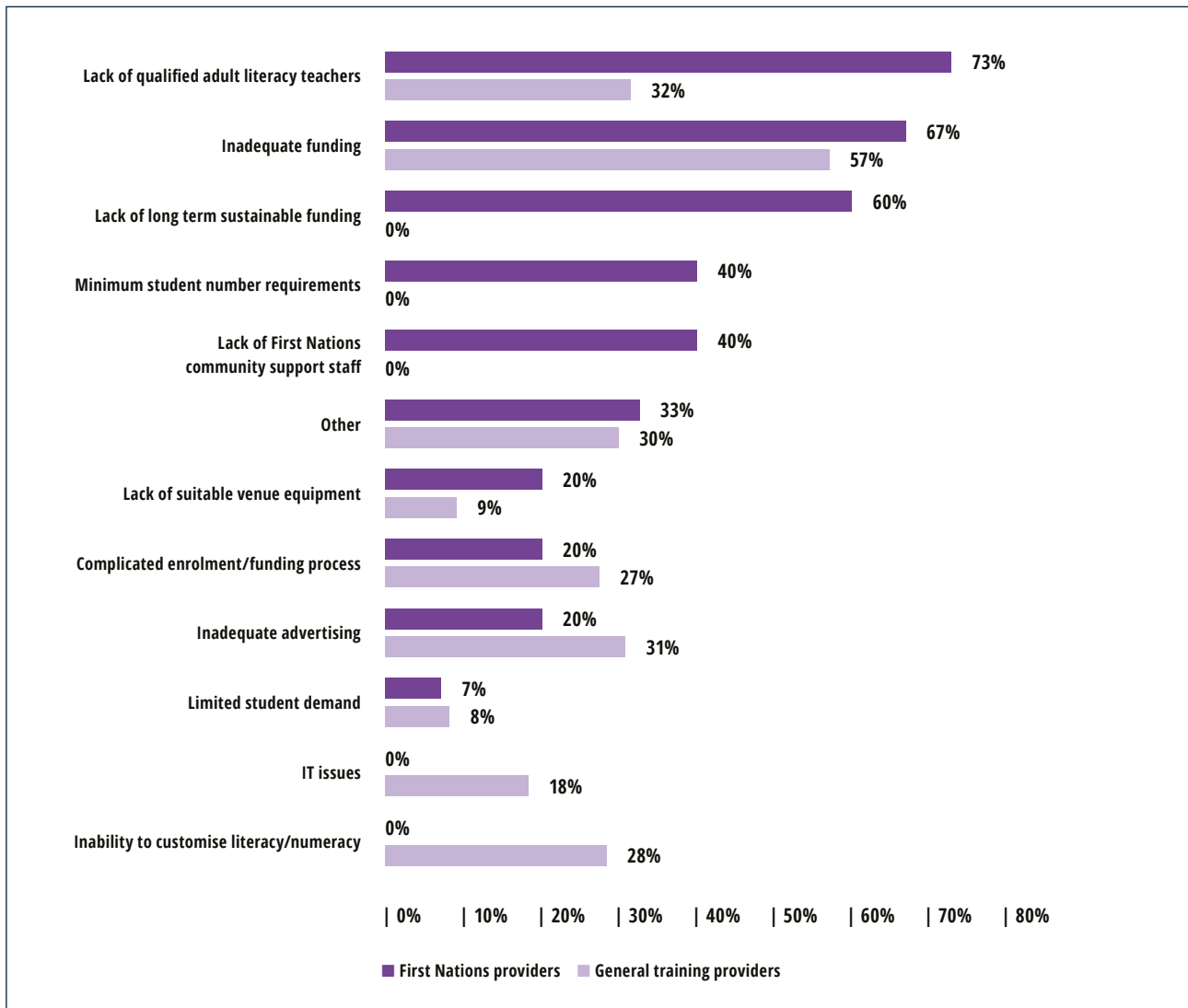
Respondents in all groups identified a range of common barriers to the provision of LND courses and support programs for adults. While First Nations providers identified a lack of qualified teachers as the main barrier (73% respondents) it was also considered a significant barrier by general training providers. Inadequate funding was highlighted as a key barrier to delivery by all providers.

4.4.1 Barriers for LND Providers

81% of the 411 respondents from both the general and First Nations providers surveyed identified barriers to delivering LND programs. The majority identified multiple barriers, with the most across both surveys being:

- lack of qualified teachers and well supported tutors
- inadequate funding
- inadequate advertising
- inability to customise teaching to the individual learner
- complicated enrolment processes
- lack of First Nations teachers, tutors and support staff and lack of culturally appropriate delivery options
- lack of local course offerings
- lack of delivery and staffing in remote locations.

Figure 9: Barriers to LND Delivery for General and First Nations Training Providers



Respondents indicated that a difficulty in meeting demand arose for a number of reasons and was complicated by structural factors such as:

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

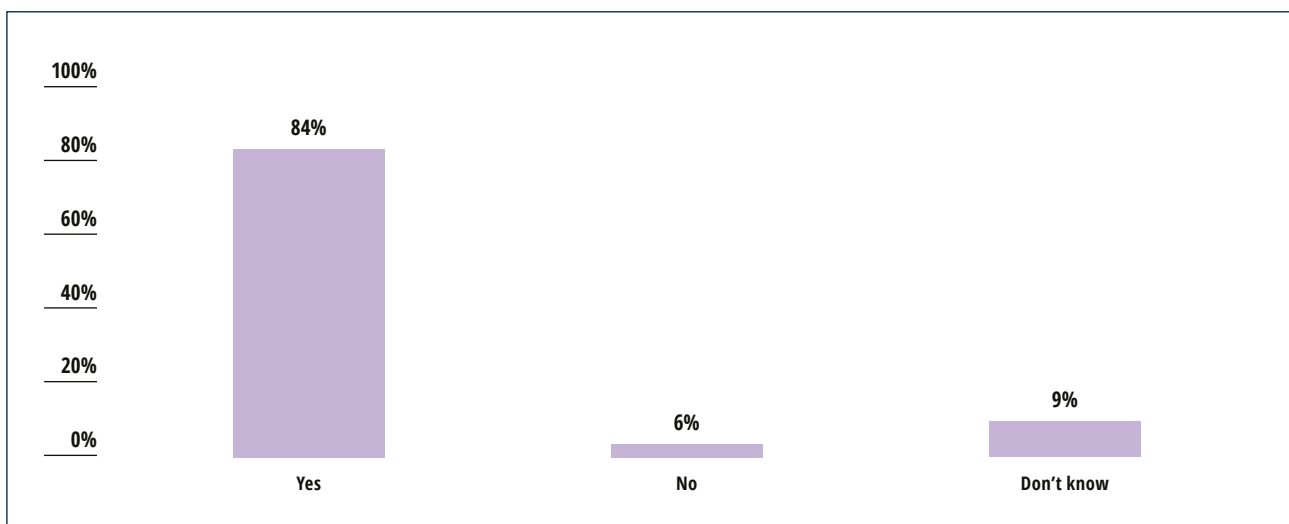
4.4.2 Barriers for Community Organisations

Community sector and First Nations community organisations identified that they would like to provide more substantive support to clients and community members but were constrained by lack of:

- funding to provide the levels of literacy support they currently deliver or to deliver any more in-depth LND support programs or link up with partners to deliver community-based courses and programs customised to local need
- local coordination and not knowing where to go to support their clients
- local delivery
- qualified teachers and tutors.

84% of the respondents to the First Nations Community Provider survey said they wanted to provide (or provide more) LND literacy programs.

Figure 10: Desire to Provide (or Provide More) LND Programs



First Nations survey respondents said they would like to provide a range of LND offerings including culturally appropriate LND delivery based on consultation with community, programs targeted to their workforce needs, and programs to support vocational learners. They identified a need for better resourcing if training providers were to be able to meet their community LND needs:

Quotes from respondents

- *'We deliver engagement-based safety training, but we see literacy issues in the classes. It would be nice to have the ability to offer one on one tutoring for those we notice struggling.'*
- *'Support with basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as increasing their digital literacy confidence. Many participants have had little to no exposure to a computer. Computers aren't readily available to the public.'*

- *'[Our organisation] needs to upskill its Aboriginal workforce to develop career pathways and improve capability of staff in the field. [We] may also have a role in linking providers with organisations on the ground in community.'*
- *'For our Arts Worker Extension Program delivered to small groups working in remote Indigenous arts centres across northern Australia – we would like more pathways for graduates to link in with high-quality, culturally appropriate English language literacy training in order to be equipped to further develop their careers, increase self-advocacy and ability to work for their communities.'*

What community sector focus group participants told us

Barriers to provision of services and programs to meet need in the community sector included:

- the time-consuming nature of providing LND support
- having enough public access computers to assist people
- not having extra funding to address the extra provision of literacy support
- a lack of providers offering introductory programs to refer people to locally
- lack of providers interested in delivering outreach or programs in community settings
- reliance in many organisations on volunteers to provide literacy mediation, including form filling
- older volunteers being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and either reducing or ceasing volunteering.

4.4.3 Barriers for libraries

Library focus group participants also identified a range of barriers to the delivery of increased support for adults with LND needs. These barriers include:

- lack of funding for LND support programs for adults delivered by library staff
- lack of priority given to the delivery of adult literacy programs by senior staff
- community members seeing libraries as places for people who can 'already read'
- lack of funding and resources to support adult literacy volunteer programs, which are critical to providing support for adults in the community
- transport barriers for regional and remote libraries where community members and volunteers cannot easily access library locations.

Quotes from library sector focus groups

- *'Most of us are either doing it as part of another job. I [would need] more people to get out there and do the outreach. And also having more people to coordinate in the office as well, to promote the [library] services.'*
- *'I would still benefit from guidance on selecting good volunteers. I think it is a highly skilled role where rapport and relationship matters. And I've realised I need to improve the way that I'm communicating the volunteer role expectations.'*
- *'One of the biggest barriers we face is the people we have coming to our sessions are already engaged in Library Services. We promote our things through our What's On booklets. A poster or a handout in the library, we use social media, but you either need to be visiting the library or checking our website or following us on social media to know about these things.'*

4.4.4 Barriers across all survey/focus group participants

Lack of qualified teachers and trained adult literacy tutors

Lack of suitably qualified adult education teachers and trainers, volunteer tutors and staff was identified by all respondent groups as a barrier to delivering courses and support programs and as perpetuating low levels of provision, regardless of location.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Two key issues – firstly, not enough literacy specialists who understand the need for negotiated learning and non-assessable programs. Secondly, not enough recognition by funding bodies that this mode of teaching adult literacy should be the predominant one and funded accordingly.'*
- *'We need the experts. We need Adult Literacy Trained Teachers to teach our people. How can we make this happen???'*
- *'Casualisation of the workforce makes it harder to engage and retain qualified LLN trainers.'*
- *'Trainers have industry backgrounds and a trade Certificate 3 or 4. Actually progressing up in qualification to include adult education LND isn't feasible. So a lot of VET trainers don't have the skills to teach a person to read and write.'*

Hotline Caller Case Study

Neighbourhood Centre – can you help us with tutors?

'We are interested in setting up a volunteer tutor network to help clients to develop their literacy skills. We already help people to complete various forms. The local Library once had a tutor program, but it folded. Would you be able to provide training and resources to help us facilitate this?'

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding was seen as one of the most important barriers to delivery regardless of the sector (education and training, community sector or libraries).

Quotes from respondents

- *'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 to enable customisation.'*
- *'There is a lack of funding streams. Demand for courses far outstrips funding available.'*
- *'Lack of funding. This area really requires a boost in funds to enable organisations to successfully support mainstream VET students with LLN needs.'*
- *'A lot of libraries see there's an unmet need in the community but putting together something to support that is hard. Cost of running the program is one thing. The Reading Writing Hotline has just put out the free tutor training course, which is fantastic. That takes away the money cost, but then it becomes a time cost to actually roll out the training.'*

Other provider issues

In addition to the main barriers for providers, respondents identified further barriers. These can be broadly grouped as:

- the shift to online learning
- unsuitability of courses on offer
- limited teaching time
- LND embedded in English language classes
- lack of relationship with employment services to ensure appropriate referrals to appropriate LND courses and supports.

On-line learning

The move to digital delivery tended to disproportionately disadvantage LN learners due to:

- limited digital literacy skills
- lack of internet access in remote locations and many Aboriginal communities
- lack of access to home computers
- print-based resources with one-on-one support being preferable for adult LN learners
- insufficient self-directed learning skills to manage online programs.

Course options

Unsuitability of courses on offer also proved problematic for providers.

Quotes from respondents

- *'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".'*
- *'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 LND skills.'*
- *'Students are only allowed to enrol in a literacy course once, whereas students need more time to practise the skills they're learning.'*
- *'When class sizes are large, it is too hard to give people the one-on-one attention they need. They get lost.'*

Mixed learner cohorts

Adult LND programs being delivered in classes containing both native speakers and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners was an issue for some respondents. While language, literacy and numeracy provision is often discussed in the same breath, English language provision has differing funding streams, learner requirements, teaching and learning resources and learner needs.

- *'When we do get literacy students, the Foundation Skills Training Package does not meet their needs and being placed in a class with ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] students is alienating.'*

Employment services

The relationship between employment services and LND provision was described by some respondents as a barrier to provision. They reported a 'lack of referrals' from employment providers, few 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.

Quotes from respondents

- *'If students are linked with Employment Services, they tend to be pushed towards studying a Cert III or above course (which is outcome-focused). Unfortunately, the students who need LLN classes are referred into this direction because of mutual obligation and are being set up for failure.'*
- *'The students who need the LND courses – they are often not identified by Job Network providers and are funnelled into vocational training when their real barriers are LND. This is particularly the case with ESB [English speaking background] students.'*

5 Impact of Literacy Gaps on Adults

It is clear that LND skills gaps can increase people's vulnerability to disadvantage. The gaps make jobseekers less competitive in finding work and those employed vulnerable to potential job loss or lack of progression. They can compound a person's economic disadvantage, making it harder for them to access the supports they need and reducing their options. They 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.

Impacts identified by respondents included:

- being unable to access government services and incentives and having difficulty filling in forms, accessing government portals and understanding government requirements
- being at risk of increased financial stress due to unpaid utilities bills, unpaid fines and other unaddressed costs
- reduced capacity for full community participation, which can lead to social isolation and exclusion
- being unable to gain and sustain employment or, if employed, difficulty in managing all work-related requirements
- longer term impacts on health and wellbeing
- not being able to understand legal documents and other specialist materials that are important to quality of life.

There were specialised areas of literacy identified by COSS respondents as being of particular concern.

- Health literacy: people being unable to read and understand health related documents and maintain appointments and the cycle of care.²⁰
- Governance: people being unable to read and understand the requirements of governance positions.²¹
- Legal literacy: disadvantage in relation to legal matters, interpreting legal documents and navigating court-related processes.

High levels of disadvantage in the community, exacerbated by COVID-19 and natural disasters, create significant barriers for adults. Such disadvantage is reinforced where intergenerational poverty is coupled with low levels of literacy.

Quotes from respondents

- *'If a person is living with intergenerational poverty and also has low literacy levels, then this is a holistic thing that's happening in their life. It has an impact on a person's life, their relationships with family or others.'*

²⁰ See Appendix A – Case Study 2 – Aboriginal Health Service.

²¹ See Lin et al., 'Quantifying low English literacy in Australian Aboriginal Communities'.

- *'Literacy barriers mean that people miss out on the level of care they need to stay healthy. Lack of literacy means that you don't know what is expected or what someone is explaining to you. If you get an appointment card but can't read it then you are less likely to attend, which leaves gaps in care for people with chronic diseases. So it can have that sort of deep and far-reaching impact.'*

5.1 Impact on Community Sector Workers

In addition to the impact low LND literacy has on individual adults, this research identified the considerable impact providing support for adults has on community sector workers. This affects the support they are able to provide their clients. Respondents spoke in depth about the impact that low levels of LND literacy in the community have on the sector, including:

- increased community need
- increased demand for services
- no increase in funding to meet the increased demand
- worker burnout
- difficulties with worker and volunteer recruitment and retention, especially in regional and remote locations.

Supporting people with low levels of LND literacy with completing forms and interpreting information is essential but also time consuming. It also does not address the underlying cause by delivering LND skills to the individuals. This work is unrecognised and unfunded. Complex need and intergenerational trauma also have implications for community sector organisations and workers.

Quotes from community sector focus group respondents

- *'With challenges to so many people struggling with the barriers it's just the complexities of the forms they need to complete. Take social housing as an example, the best of us would be scratching our head trying to complete these forms. So of course, it [low levels of LND literacy] just adds another layer of stress and then that affects functionality.'*
- *'It's a challenge relying on volunteers, as so many of us do. If you've got programs to assist community members with their literacy and numeracy: reading forms, filling them out, while helping them to do late things online is challenging when you're a small underfunded, Neighbourhood Centre at the coalface of community and crisis...'*

Appendix A:

Two Case Studies – Remote Aboriginal Services

The following case studies have been developed from edited transcripts from one of the community sector focus groups with participants from two remote Aboriginal services in NSW and NT. They are included to offer insights into the experience of providing community services to people living in remote communities. In these communities English is often a person's second, third or fourth language and limited literacy, numeracy and digital literacy increases the disadvantage people experience. It makes them vulnerable to, among other things, misinformation, exploitation, poorer access to health and wellbeing programs and services and poorer personal outcomes such as the cycle of care for chronic conditions.

Case Study 1: Aboriginal Controlled Women's Organisation

(Edited transcript of feedback)

I don't know that much about literacy, but I can tell you what we see here. We deliver services to about 30 remote communities on the border. So some of the most remote communities you can work with. People are a very long way from an urban centre here. What we find is people have other languages other than English. They may speak a number of languages so English is another language to learn. And they may be able to speak it but not read it.

Lack of resources

Most people are functionally illiterate. Some of the older people learnt the language on the missions but not all. There really is a lack of resources or books for people to read. There may only be the Bible or things like that. And that is in their own languages as well. Apart from the ones we have created in our programs. So there is a hunger for resources.

Teachers say books that have Aboriginal people in them or people they (the reader) know these are the first books that are picked up. Doesn't matter what it is about – it's the books that reflect their lives back to them. There are just very few things around.

Barrier to services and everyday life

Literacy is a real obstacle to anything – filling in any sort of form – like housing. If you move into town getting a house requires a lot of forms. Getting ID is also really hard, like birth certificates. A lot of older people didn't have their births registered. So that requires [literacy] support. It's a massive undertaking to get ID, even though there are more services to help with this it is still a big barrier.

And it is a massive burden on staff. If someone needs a passport, for example, it is months and months and months of really hard work to unravel those bureaucratic processes. And even for day-to-day things, ID cards, getting licences or learners permits needs English and so people need a lot of help to get that sorted out and if they don't or they can't then you end up with people driving around without it and that is a whole other story. There is the spiral into the justice system. So yes, it has all sorts of impacts.

Everyday life requires people to have help in some ways. Feeling like they are in another world – and they are in some ways. Because they can't access the things they need without support.

Digital exclusion

The communities out here have only had mobile phone coverage in the last 3–5 years, which has led to the huge cost of phones and data. We have found that people use phones in really different ways to other people. Here phones get shared a lot. So if they need a passcode or a password and the phone is not theirs or they have given their phone to someone else then it's really difficult. Accessing sites and apps gets really difficult. People don't use email very much either.

If you are on the pension and you have to go online to report income, then this is a barrier. We have some older people on the pension who are also working but find it hard to report their income online. And they get advised to stop working rather than lose their pension. Which is really, really depressing because they love their work, and they are really good at it. So there are lots of exclusionary things like this.

People don't have broadband, so they are only using mobile data, so they are racking up enormous bills. Things are shared. So young people download videos on mobile data and then someone has to pay for it. Or if they are using prepaid data, it runs out after a couple of days.

Exploitation

Illiteracy opens people up to being exploited. You hear all sorts of stories. People letting people log into Centrelink for them because they can't, and their details become public and used by other people. And their pensions can be diverted to other people's bank accounts. And it is the same with online banking. People can get really exploited because they have to rely on other people to do those things for them. So it amplified the impact on people of being from another culture and speaking another language and living in a remote place and being far away from services. You would think that there is great potential for people doing things on line but because of these things it is not really working in their favour.

People assume that people use digital tools and platforms in the same way that people in the city do and that is not the case.

Vulnerable to misinformation

So people are really vulnerable to the sort of misinformation that is shared on Facebook and that became evident during COVID. Suddenly people who had trusted their local health service and been having vaccinations their whole lives became suddenly got really, really worried about it. Because Facebook and TikTok these things are the internet to people. They are not getting their news from The Age or the ABC, they are getting it from whatever pops up on Facebook and this really opens people up to all sorts of scams. And there are millions of cases of that across the whole of Australia with people in remote locations being open to all sorts of exploitation. It's also opened up the world of online gambling. So while there are some good things about the internet it has also opened people up to a whole lot of negative things as well. And it's all come at once rather than as a gradual process [over] twenty to thirty years. This has been an onslaught so for people who don't speak much English or don't have any literacy it has really been baffling and exclusionary.

Access to accurate information and good design

People here – there are people from the communities who will say there are people who are under the umbrella – that is the umbrella of this organisation – but others are outside the umbrella and these people are living in this information vacuum, they don't know what is going on and they are not in touch. So things like health campaigns and whether you should get vaccination, it all became obvious during COVID but there are lots of people who are not seeing and not reading information. Posters and things like that. If they are just looking at the pictures. They are not reading.

Lots of this information is developed by non-Aboriginal people, non-language speakers, so it becomes really hard for people to learn from those things. You really need to start at the very beginning with what is it that people can understand and how do we make sure that our message is accessible to as many people as possible.

Case Study 2: Aboriginal Health Service

(Edited transcript of feedback)

Estimate of literacy issues

Not sure what it actually is but I know it is potentially a big underlying problem for us. We have approximately 20% 'do not attend' rate for appointments that are being made for people and there is a variety of reasons like being too busy, or health not being their first priority, or having to look after kids or other carer roles or just simply their disadvantage – like housing or not enough money – but literacy is underneath some of it too.

People missing out on important information

One of the issues that comes up is that while we modernised our practice and moved to things like SMS to remind people of their appointments and appointment cards to people's houses and providing written material to back up what they are hearing, we still don't reach all the people that we need to, and some people get the information but don't understand it.

There is a degree to which this is because they are not really familiar with the information that is sent to them. For example, when it is flu season, we send flu vaccination letters to 2,000 people on our books. And we have never asked ourselves 'Is that useful to people?'

There is the overwhelming sense there are a lot of people who either don't trust the info, or they move, or they can't read what is in the letter.

So for people who can't read they will see our logo on the letter and bring it in and ask the practice admin staff 'what is this about' and they will say you're due for a flu vaccination. So we know it is an issue along with these other things.

Lessons learnt from COVID communication

It certainly was a factor in how we tried to get information out to people about COVID. We didn't just use letters or flyers; we did a lot of work with the community radio station. And TV and commercial radio because we recognised that people needed to hear the information not just see it, and many people couldn't read it. So we made sure if we were using newsletters or posters, it was highly graphical.

When I went looking for graphical material – because we don't do this in-house – what appeared to be targeted info from the Department of Health that was Indigenous-targeted, it wasn't as good as work that was done by other ACCHOs [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations] interstate. So I relied heavily on this information.

And I just think rather than relying on someone in the family to translate for them or tell them what it is about, if you can say it with graphics and still get the message across this saves people the shame of having to ask someone what this is about. They can actually take in the information themselves.

COVID gave me a crash course in how to get information out to people as easily as possible because it was so important.

Impact on cycle of care for chronic conditions

Broadly, literacy barriers means that people have the potential to miss out on the level of care they need to stay healthy. Best practice for chronic conditions says that you should see your GP regularly and have an annual check with your specialist. You need pathology and other tests, so you need to see the GP for this. A general lack of literacy means that you don't know what is expected or what someone is explaining to you. If you get an appointment card but can't remember what it was for and can't read it, then you are less likely to attend that appointment, which leaves gaps in what we call our cycle of care for people with chronic diseases and generally means that they are not getting the level of care for their condition that is optimal. So it [low literacy] can have that sort of deep and far-reaching impact but, overall, I get a sense that people who the issues we often have at the front counter can be frustration.

Frustration and trauma

One of the issues that we often have is if people have to attend the [Emergency Department] because we are not open, and they have to wait there overnight. For example, they wait for three hours and then are told they need to fill in this form, so they are really frustrated. By the time they come in to us then they are really upset, and they have a big vent at the admin or practice staff. So they have to take the time to sit with them somewhere quiet and find out what is wrong. And help them understand what they have to do and usually fill in the form for them. And that is really hard for the staff. Most of the staff (around 80%) are Aboriginal so they understand but, even so, it's still hard, it still has its impact.

They understand that many of these people have been traumatised – have experienced lots of trauma in their lives – so this becomes too much. But yes, that has a really big impact on staff, and we have to be careful that they can debrief and unpack what has happened. It is so frustrating for people.

Some feedback about resources and information that would better support remote Aboriginal communities

Both participants identified a number of strategies and resources that could better support community members with low levels of LND literacy. These resources need to be:

- easy to read,
- highly pictorial/graphical
- relatable, by showing representations of Aboriginal people and/or people known to community
- translated into community languages
- available via multiple channels and modes so that people don't miss out.

Strategies for communicating effectively include:

- using local radio and TV and word of mouth to reach more people
- considering whether people are able to access online delivery before choosing this option, as digital exclusion is a huge barrier in our communities.

Appendix B: Provision

The primary focus of this research has been on adult literacy need and demand, barriers both to providing and to accessing courses, services and support, and impacts of this unmet need on adults and communities rather than identifying actual levels of adult LND service provision by location, enrolments or course offerings.

What can be seen from analysis of the data is that there is a continuum of delivery and support to adults who have LND needs. This continuum ranges from general and specialised First Nations education and training providers delivering accredited and non-accredited courses in formal and informal settings, through to First Nations community sector and general community sector organisations and libraries providing a range of informal supports, linkages and partnerships to adults with low levels of LND literacy in community settings. In addition, there are volunteer and paid adult literacy programs delivered by private and not-for-profit organisations and through libraries providing one-on-one literacy support.

This continuum is an important way of understanding the range of delivery options available to adults who may not be accessing formal LND courses. Delivery approaches are diverse and include:

- accredited LND programs delivered as stand-alone courses or as embedded support within vocational, education and training courses
- LND education delivered as a component within foundation skills courses or employment-focused courses such as FSYP and SEE
- one-on-one LND learner support for adults enrolled in other courses
- non-accredited courses and programs, including beginner courses, often delivered in community settings, via outreach and in partnership with community sector providers, community groups or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- literacy mediation such as support with filling in forms, understanding correspondence, accessing online services (especially government services), health and legal literacy, and on-the-job coaching and mentoring provided by community service organisations and some libraries
- adult literacy volunteer tutor programs offered by volunteer organisations, not-for-profit community sector providers, ACCOs and libraries
- home-based tutoring and self-directed learning using paper-based learning tools and resources.

The majority of respondents in this research expressed a preference for face-to-face delivery of LND education or supports to adults. While COVID-19 saw a shift to online learning environments, in the main this was not preferred as a delivery model for LND services.

Online learning without sufficient one-on-one support can disadvantage people with low levels of LND as they may not have the skills to complete enrolment processes online or understand written instructions, assessment tasks, course handouts etc. For some providers, the shift to online delivery was seen as a positive one especially for maintaining enrolments through the pandemic or where there is geographic isolation or lack of course and other service provision. For many, however, the digital divide, poor or no access to the internet, the high cost of data where it is available and lack of IT infrastructure, including computers and modems, make online learning options exclusionary.

General training providers reported delivering the following course and learner support offerings.

- LND embedded in accredited and vocational courses.
- Standalone LND foundation skills courses.
- LND as a component of FSFYF and SEE.
- LND embedded in ESOL and Adult Migrant Education Program programs, which often have clearer funding streams and higher demand.
- Digital and online options, which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic but were seen by many as less appropriate to the needs of LND learners.
- Non-accredited courses and beginner courses.
- Outreach delivery and partnerships with community organisations to deliver programs and support in community settings.

First Nations providers reported delivering the following course and learner support offerings.

- Community-based programs and support customised to meet individual need.
- Beginner courses including digital skills training and introduction to computers.
- LND support for employment and on-the-job English language support.
- Culturally appropriate courses and support resources.
- One-on-one tutoring and mentoring.

First Nations respondents to both the provider and literacy need surveys were vocal about the lack of culturally appropriate beginner courses, courses and learner resources and the lack of qualified and culturally sensitive trainers, training and support being delivered in communities. In rural and remote locations and communities, course costs – which include the hidden costs of transport and childcare – and lack of transport options were also identified as significant barriers.

Community sector providers reported that people with low levels of LND find it difficult to access supports and government services, apply successfully for services, rebates and incentives (both in hard copy and online) and understand important documents including bills, fines, legal documents, health information and governance requirements. Disadvantage – including poverty and intergenerational trauma and homelessness – and external pressures such as the increased cost of living, natural disasters and COVID-19 can be further exacerbated by low levels of literacy.

Generalist community sector providers reported delivering the following literacy support programs.

- Literacy mediation where clients have low levels of LND including help with filling in forms, understanding official correspondence and using public access computers and online portals.
- Support with health, legal and other literacy needs.
- Partnerships with training providers to deliver courses in community.
- Some (although a minority) receive funding to deliver literacy programs and volunteer tutoring programs.
- Referrals to LND courses where these are available through TAFE or other local RTOs.
- Referrals and calls to the RWH to find suitable provision for their clients.

Libraries provide important support for many adults with low levels of LND literacy by providing volunteer adult literacy tutoring, digital skills programs, help with using public access computers, support for filling in forms and community hub environments that are safe and welcoming. Participants in the library focus groups reported working in partnership with other community and government agencies to support adults with low levels of literacy. Libraries reported delivering the following literacy support programs:

- Volunteer adult literacy tutor programs.
- General one-on-one literacy mediation, support and advice to library users, including help with filling in forms, accessing online portals including visa applications etc.
- Partnerships with community providers to deliver adult literacy courses in library spaces.
- Referrals to and from employment service providers, CALD community sectors and others to support adults with literacy needs.
- Digital literacy skills programs, often targeted to older adults.

First Nations community organisations also reported providing a range of both formal and informal support to community members, from filling in forms and help with letters to on-the-job training and adult literacy programs.

Quotes from respondents

- *'Formal – when our rangers attend conservation and land management Certificate 2 and 3 courses, we try request that TAFE also allocate an Indigenous learning support officer or literacy support worker to support the group block training. Our more literate staff also do a lot of informal on the job learner support during training, e.g., fuel mixing ratios, completing forms, reading, or writing simple reports, or support staff with everyday life admin tasks, e.g., filling in forms, phoning the bank etc.'*
- *'We use multi-modal formats to create workplace safety resources with the mob. They own the result, and we all learn more as we go. Engagement in the workplace is where it starts for all of us.'*
- *'We provide some financial literacy support to help groups understand their money stories, also develop communication aides to help groups understand their legal rights and to make informed decisions about different options and proposals.'*
- *'We have developed a small resource to support Indigenous arts workers employed in community-controlled art centres to access assistance technologies via iPads or iPhones to support reading and writing in English. This is not intended as a literacy learning tool although it does support learning. It is rather intended to help reduce barriers to careers development by making it easier for people to access reading and writing in English.'*
- *'Help with forms, letters, health literacy, health resources, advocacy, language app, consumer voice.'*

Endnotes

i It has been acknowledged that there are many in the community who are unable to access classes which meet their needs (see Joyce, [Strengthening Skills](#); Productivity Commission, [National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review](#); ACER, [Public Enquiry: Adult Literacy and Its Importance](#)). This has an impact on their ability to gain and maintain employment, participate in education and training and participate fully in family and community life. The Joyce Report 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' (Joyce, [Strengthening Skills](#),). 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 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' ([National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review](#),).

ii There were 437 respondents across the three surveys in this research. There were 382 respondents to the general provider survey, 21 respondents to the First Nations provider survey and 34 respondents to the First Nations Adult Literacy Need survey which was distributed to First Nations Community Sector organisations including ACCOs, ACCHOs, Land Councils, Aboriginal Medical Services etc.

iii There were 21 respondents to the Literacy Needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Providers survey. All 21 answered the question regarding where their service/organisation was located. Of the 21, there were 11 metro (52.38%), 9 regional/rural (42.86%) and 2 remote (9.52%) providers. There were 384 respondents to the Reading Writing Hotline Training Providers survey, of whom 365 answered the question regarding where their organisation or service was located. Of these, 216 (59.18%) said they were located in the metro area, 156 (42.74%) were regional/rural and 15 identified as remote (4.11%). Finally, there were 34 respondents to the Adult Literacy Needs for First Nations People survey, all of whom answered the question regarding their service location. There were 3 metro services (8.83%), 15 regional/rural services (44.12%) and 16 remote services (47.06%).