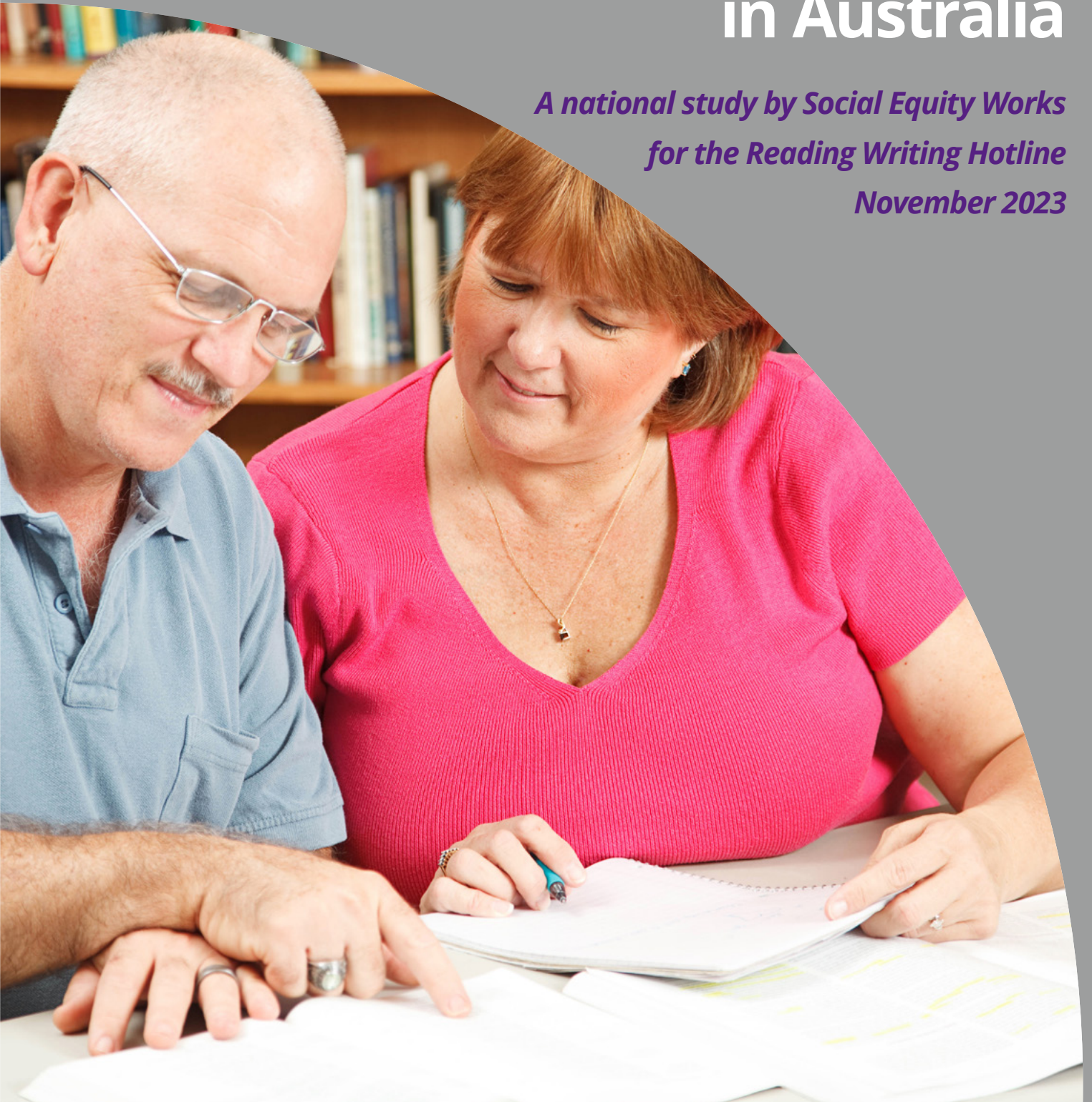


Uncovering Adult Literacy and Numeracy Needs in Australia

*A national study by Social Equity Works
for the Reading Writing Hotline
November 2023*



Report Summary

www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au

Reading Writing Hotline
1300 6 555 06



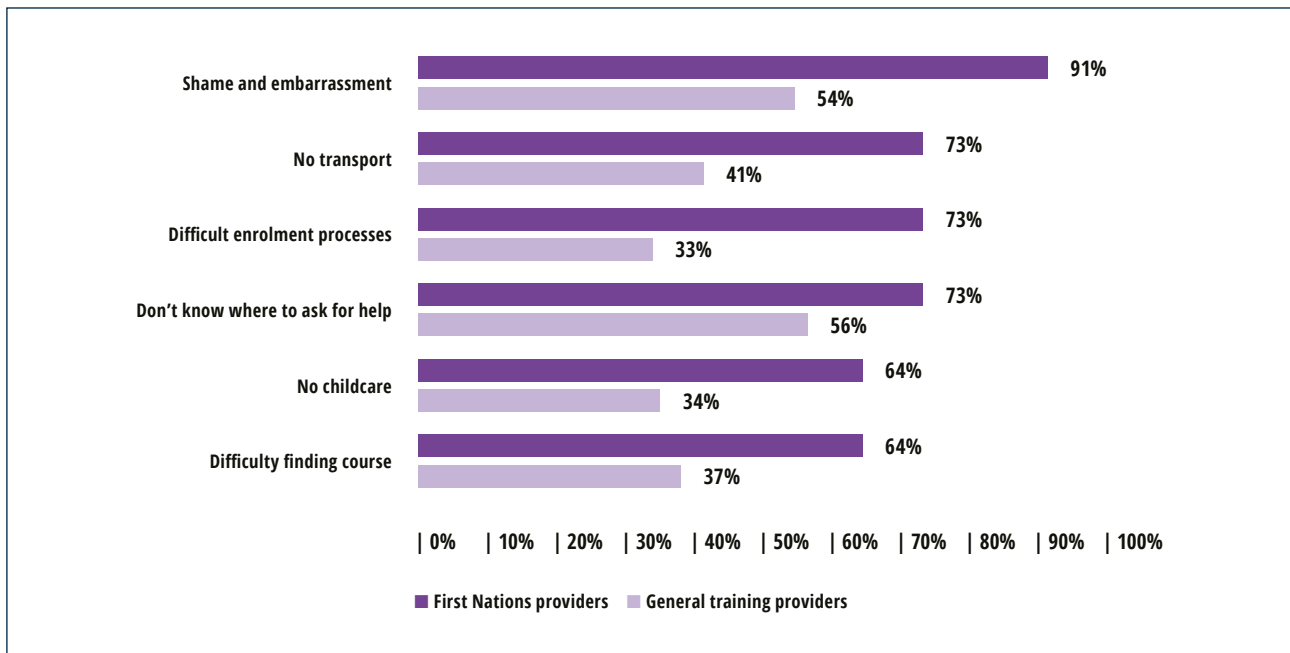
About the study

We talked to 483 training providers and community organisations about adult literacy needs, and barriers. We captured voices with deep practical experience at the 'coal face', including public libraries, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and community sector providers. The research focuses on literacy needs rather than English Language needs.

89% of respondents from diverse organisations reported unmet literacy needs in their communities.

Barriers for adult literacy learners

- shame and embarrassment
- don't know where to ask for help
- lack of local courses
- lack of transport, distance and cost



Barriers for organisations

- lack of qualified teachers
- inadequate funding
- lack of flexible options to meet individual literacy needs

What's the impact?

Lower literacy/numeracy makes people more vulnerable to disadvantage:

- can't fill in forms to access government services
- financial stress from unpaid bills and fines
- can't understand health and medical information
- social isolation
- hard to sustain employment or meet workplace requirements

What adult literacy needs aren't being met?

- individual tailored literacy help
- informal courses delivered in community
- help with filling in forms and documents
- pathways to accredited courses
- wrap-around support e.g. child care

'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.'

Hotline Caller

What action is needed?

- funding for both formal and informal programs
- rebuild specialist adult literacy teaching workforce
- trained volunteer tutors in communities
- outreach and partnerships to deliver courses in local area
- smaller classes, informal courses for beginners
- more delivery in rural and remote locations

First Nations communities also need

- culturally appropriate courses, teachers and learning materials
- programs led by, and designed with, community
- beginner level courses

'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.'

Did you know?

- More than **7 million** adults in Australia have literacy skills below what is needed for everyday life and work. More than 9 million have numeracy gaps. (ABS 2013)
- More than **4,000** Australian adults and businesses call the Hotline every year for advice on literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- **38%** of our callers are already employed; **53%** have completed Year 10 or higher

Access the full research report at
www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/resources
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