

2025

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Libraries ACT – Strategic Plan and Resource Improvement – Assembly Resolution of 19 March
2025 – Government response to 3(b) through (e)**

**Tara Cheyne MLA
Minister for City and Government Services
May 2025**

The Government is committed to preparing Libraries ACT to adapt to future needs while also providing a reliable and quality service to the Canberra community.

The agreed motion on 19 March 2025 noted at (2)(e) that: the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (2021) recommend a minimum of:

- (i) 64 opening hours per week for populations of 100,000 or more; and
- (ii) 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff per 3,000 residents for populations of 250,000 or more.

This, in part, informed the asks that the ACT Government is required to respond to by end May, being:

(3)(c) conduct financial modelling to forecast the additional costs required to increase staffing levels to 0.8 FTE per 3,000 residents and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May 2025;

(d) assess the need for services that Libraries ACT offer, including staffing requirements, and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May 2025.

It is important to note that (2)(e) refers to Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries 2021. This document stresses in its introduction:

There is, however, an inherent dilemma in attempting to produce national standards that apply to libraries of all sizes in all parts of metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. The diversity of communities and governance arrangements across the country make it certain that not every national standard or guideline will be completely relevant in every library setting.

Further, in describing how the Standards should be used:

Library standards should only be used when they are interpreted within an appropriate context.

Libraries and stakeholders are encouraged to take a rigorous and thoughtful approach to use of the standards to avoid the possibility of inadvertently compromising the integrity of library services. Most of the 2020 standards are presented as 'per capita' measures, which standardise library provision and use and make the standards more applicable across library services of different size. Per capita analysis is based on the population of the

catchment area/Local Government Area (LGA) served by the library service. The ABS annually reports Estimated Resident Population by LGA. Use of the standards in setting targets for libraries should only occur with a clear understanding of the geographic, demographic, jurisdictional and service context in which the library operates. Interpretation of the standards requires an understanding of the definition of the standard and its behaviour in different settings. Higher and lower performance against a standard may reflect the tension between service quality and service efficiency or productivity. 'Targets' are presented as the level expected to be achieved by a library service within its context (e.g. size, location). 'Enhanced' targets set a more aspirational goal for library services that have achieved the target level.

This response needs to be considered in the above context.

Response to (3)(c):

The staffing chapter of the Standards and Guidelines states that the staff per 3000 persons in a population of 250,000 or more has a target of 0.8. The chapter includes a section on how to interpret this, including but not limited to:

Libraries which use self-checkout/RFID and/or outsource collection management functions may find staffing requirements can be rationalised, freeing up staff for additional professional services and programs, and/or reducing the number of staff required for routine materials handling.

Staffing per capita is typically higher in library services and jurisdictions that have a large number of branches servicing relatively small populations (e.g. SA, WA, NT) and lower where the population is more concentrated (e.g. ACT).

Related, the Standards note that, regarding their recommended opening hours per week:

It is difficult to be prescriptive about opening hours given the variations in library service models and community area and population density. It is therefore appropriate to caution application of this standard without regard for the different ways in which library services are delivered to different communities. For example, opening hours and number of branches for a library serving a capital city are likely to be quite different from opening hours and branches for a library service striving to cover thousands of square kilometres.

The main variables which influence opening hours include: library structure and service models, funding, number of branches and other service points, population size and geographic area of the community/region served.

The modelling the Government has undertaken is on the blunt figures only.

Libraries ACT currently has 70% of staff in frontline roles, and 30% in its library support office. This ratio has been extrapolated within the financial modelling.

Based on a population level of 475,600 as at September 2024 (ABS), increasing staffing levels to 0.8 per 3,000 residents would result in an increase of the budgeted FTE by 30.2 FTE in frontline positions and 12.9 FTE in library support.

Additional funding of \$6.472m per annum would be required to reach this staffing level, taking into account salary increases outlined in the current Enterprise Agreement.

Response to (3)(d):

The Independent Working Group that has been established to examine issues impacting the reliability of service is considering service offerings as part of its remit. The IWG has not yet reported, and so a fulsome response is not yet possible.

Libraries ACT is committed to involving the community in future service and programming discussions where possible.

Currently, Libraries ACT deliver a range of programs and services to the community. These include, but are not limited to:

- Giggle & Wiggle (7 branches) - a weekly program designed for 0-2 year olds and their carers to introduce the early concepts of literacy and learning.
- Story Time (8 branches) - a weekly program for 3-5 year olds and their carers aiming to foster a love of books, reading and storytelling, laying the foundation for lifelong learning. The program is always followed by a craft or creative activity linked to the story.
- Sensory Story Time (2 branches) – a program that delivers the benefits of popular story time sessions in a way that supports and models neurodiversity-affirming participation.
- Bi-Lingual Story Time - an opportunity for the community to hear and read stories in a variety of languages, encouraging literacy and a love of reading across cultures.
- Story Dogs Reading (2 branches) – a program that supports children who have reading difficulties or who are reluctant readers. The children get to spend 20 minutes reading a

level-appropriate book to trained dog companions and their handlers to boost confidence in reading.

- Special events such as National Simultaneous Story Time, Book Week and Storytime takeovers to further build on and develop a love of literacy.
- English Conversation Classes (5 Branches) - volunteer-led classes for adult learners who speak first languages other than English.
- Geri-Fit (5 branches) - a hugely popular low intensity, seat-based exercise program specifically designed for older adults to help build strength.
- Shared Reading Program is delivered by Wellbeing EDvantage with an aim of building connections and reduce loneliness in the community. Stories are read aloud and participants are encouraged to share their perspectives and connections to the story.
- Author Talks covering topics from finance, health, writing, fiction and more, Libraries ACT regularly brings popular authors to Canberra to host sessions across the community.
- Lego Brick Club (5 branches) – a program for school-aged children to embrace their imagination and fine motor skills as they imagine, create and build anything their heart desires.
- Justice of the Peace (6 branches) - a free of charge weekly service provided by ACT Justices of the Peace Association. Each session goes for 2 hours and doesn't require a booking.

Community Corner drop-in sessions (4 branches) host community groups, government and social partners to engage with the public. Free sessions of 2 hours duration, partners have included COTA, LegalAid ACT, Disability and Aged Care.

Response to (3)(e):

While the ACT Government is not required to report on this within a particular timeframe, for completeness:

The way the community uses and accesses library services is changing, and reporting on factors such as total number of loans, physical collection items or visits, no longer paints the most accurate picture of library performance. The role of public libraries is evolving with a new focus as trusted connector, bringing people and services together, underpinned by the freedom to access information.

The Accountability Indicators for Libraries ACT are regularly assessed in light of this evolving role, aiming to ensure they remain a useful and appropriate measure of performance, covering the breadth of services our libraries provide. They also align where possible with the Standards and

Guidelines guidelines. These include metrics on membership rates, customer satisfaction, age of collection, use of digital resources, cost of services per capita and reference hours in the ACT Heritage Library.

Response to (3)(e): Libraries ACT already demonstrates its commitment to secure employment, noting that casuals only make up 11.7% of current FTE.