

Australian libraries
responding to

COVID-19



COVID-19 and Australian public libraries

Interim report 30 April

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Introduction

Background

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), with input from the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, has been monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on Australian public libraries since early March. This report summarises the feedback from 225 of the 400 library services (in total covering 1500 locations) nationally, including several joint use school community libraries.

This interim report has three purposes:

1. To provide peer-to-peer guidance for library teams
2. To inform government at all three levels of the impact for communities
3. To assist the planning for libraries to reopen.

Overview

On 30 April, most public library buildings across Australia are closed, and communities are having to come to terms with the loss.

Public libraries regularly appear at the top of the satisfaction ratings for council services and no-one would deny their popularity, but it is now that councils are seeing the real value of libraries to their communities. With buildings shut and services reduced, many people who rely on public PCs are denied access to the internet and government services online; housebound readers have lost a service which greatly assists their sense of connection; families with young children cannot attend real world storytime to give their children the best start with language and literacy.

Despite the challenges, this interim report shows that library staff are finding creative ways to transform some services to digital delivery and to support their communities through the COVID-19 pandemic. A surge in online borrowing in many libraries from members who can no longer borrow physical books reaffirms the extent to which people value the access to reading materials that libraries provide.

When buildings reopen and the full range of services resumes, it will be a cause for community celebration; an opportunity for library staff to reassess 'the new normal', and a time for local government to plan investment in this essential community resource.

Timeline

Date	Activity
11 March	The World Health Organisation characterises COVID-19 as a pandemic ALIA cancels its National Conference, 4-8 May, Sydney
13 March	Library programs and events begin to be cancelled or postponed First reports of restricted use of library spaces and mobile library suspension
18 March	Library building closures begin to be reported in significant numbers
18 March	ALIA negotiates agreement on copyright for virtual storytimes
19 March	Click and collect, home delivery, collection items by post services begin
20 March	Library programs and events underway as virtual activities Many libraries subscribe to new eresources to meet demand Libraries begin heavy promotion of online resources
23 March	First day of library building closures in many locations
25 March	PM announces libraries will close from midnight 25 March New activities: online trivia, reading challenges, local history projects Book clubs move online
26 March	Library buildings closed to the public, staff remain on site
6 April	More new activities: online craft, workshops, talks
8 May	Australian Government National Cabinet has flagged the potential easing of restrictions
15 May	Northern Territory libraries to open from noon
25-31 May	ALIA Library and Information Week
27 May	ALIA National Simultaneous Storytime

Library users

Libraries play an important part in the lives of the 9 million registered members and many more Australians who use them as places for quiet study, group learning, respite and social connection. For book borrowers, there is the double whammy of being confined at home and having limited access to reading materials. For the 2.5 million Australiansⁱ who are not online at home, there is the worry of being without access to government websites, help and advice.

Joining the library

Where most libraries have previously required people to present at a branch with photo ID in order to become a library member, in March and April more libraries have introduced online membership with immediate access to online services.

Libraries ACT

29 April website: "We are offering a new temporary measure so anyone in the Canberra community who is not already a library member can fast track their membership and join Libraries ACT online.

"To become a member, visit the [register page](#) of the Libraries ACT website and complete the membership form. After applying you will need to send through a selfie (clear photo of yourself) holding your proof of ID and ACT residency. This needs to show your full face, so we can check we're joining up the right person and that you live in the ACT. This also makes sure we can meet our agreements with the suppliers of our digital resources."

City of Sydney, NSW

29 April website: "We've introduced temporary online memberships for City of Sydney residents and ratepayers living in NSW, allowing you to join our library without visiting a branch. With this membership, you'll get free access to our entire digital collection including ebooks, eaudiobooks, emagazines, enewspapers, and film and music streaming services.

"Temporary memberships are valid until 30 June 2020, subject to review of library reopening dates. When our libraries reopen, you'll easily be able to convert to a full membership by visiting a branch and providing proof of identity, including your current permanent address."

Oberon Library, NSW

"New members have been added over the phone. This was initially due to the increased demand in residents wishing to access the ebooks, but has evolved to include residents who would like to borrow the library's physical collection of books and DVDs."

Ipswich Libraries, QLD

April: "Virtual library cards offered through the library's app. There was a notable bump in both membership registration and in the use of eresources that occurred month on month for February, March and April."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

March: "Online registrations were extended and promoted mid-March, with 1319 new online registrations since Tasmanian libraries closed their doors on 24 March."

Eastern Regional Libraries, VIC

April: "Online membership for adults and children. Membership numbers are emailed to patron for instant access."

Library staff

Library managers are balancing considerations about the needs of their communities with the health and wellbeing of their staff. A primary concern is how to minimise their teams' exposure to the Coronavirus.

While for many staff, health is the major worry; for casual workers, being stood down is also a very real concern. Councils are not eligible for the federal government's JobKeeper payments although individuals can apply for JobSeeker and there are special arrangements for local government employees in some states.

Safe working practices

Libraries have adopted new working procedures, including social distancing between colleagues, regular hand washing and sanitising, cleaning and sanitisation of collection items and quarantine of returned items.

Department of Health, WA

With the Closure and Restriction (Limit the Spread) Directions closing all libraries to the public throughout Western Australia, several libraries have developed home delivery services to ensure members of the community still have adequate access to library items. To ensure the safety of library staff and members of the community, the following Infection Prevention and Control advice must be followed when offering home delivery services:

At the library

- Hand hygiene facilities (sink with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser) must be available for staff to perform hand hygiene prior to handling, and after handling all items.
- Library staff must wear disposable gloves when handling all returned items and when handling chemical cleaning agents. Hand hygiene must be performed after removal of the gloves. The gloves are to be disposed of into the rubbish bin after removal.
- Returned items must be segregated from regular library items. There must be an area dedicated for these items to be returned to, where cleaning procedures or quarantining of items can take place effectively.
- Returned items that can be cleaned (e.g. DVD cases, plastic covered books) on return, are required to be thoroughly wiped over the with a detergent/disinfectant cleaning product/wipes. These items must be left to dry and can then be returned to the catalogue.

- Returned items that cannot be cleaned on return (e.g. non-plastic covered books), must be left for 24 hours prior to being returned to the catalogue system. •
- Consideration must be given to delivery and pick-up processes for transporting the library items. For example, library items can be delivered and received back in the same reusable plastic bag. These bags and other items can be quarantined for 24 hours with other quarantined items.

During delivery

- At drop off and collection of items, social distancing is to be observed which involves no face to face contact. Hand hygiene must be maintained during delivery service. • The vehicle used to transport the library items to and from residential addresses should be wiped clean at the end of each shift with a detergent/disinfectant based cleaning product/wipes, paying particular attention to the area the items were stored in and high touch areas such as door handles.

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Behind closed doors

While library buildings are closed, most libraries remain open for digital services 24/7. Administration duties, collection management and maintenance, development and delivery of digital services, email and phone enquiries, continue regardless.

In some locations, home deliveries, printing and other services have remained available, and click and collect or kerbside pick-up options have been introduced.

Staff have also been usefully occupied reviewing policies, strategic planning, stocktaking, weeding and reorganising collections, while others have been redeployed to provide information on council and state/territory government helplines. Library teams have also taken the opportunity to redevelop spaces.

Flinders Mobile Library Service, SA

April: "Staff present in library with varying hours."

City of Mandurah, WA

April: "All team members still working in the library space are contributing to the City of Mandurah's response to COVID-19 through one of five project teams within the Vulnerable Communities Working Group."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

"In addition to back-room duties and continuing to support online delivery, many front-line staff are taking on new duties in areas such as digitisation, management of our archives collection and reviews of our public library programs and services. This is helping us advance some of our longer-term priorities more quickly."

City of Rockingham Libraries, WA

"Staff are continuing the development of a local history library and a new tech space 'the studio' while the library floor is empty."

This regular and additional workload has supported the continued employment of full-time, part-time and casual employees wherever possible. Volunteer-led services have, for the most part, been suspended as volunteers tend to be older and more vulnerable due to pre-existing conditions.

Working from home

There have been limited opportunities for staff to work from home but local governments are taking measures for staff welfare.

Adelaide Hills Library Service, SA

3 April: "Majority of staff including vulnerable staff and contact centre staff are working from home. All branches staffed to maintain services – reduced movement between branches as much as possible plus no Sunday hours. Plan developed to have all library and customer service work from home should it be necessary."

City of Marion, SA

April: "Mix of work from home and on-site. While working from home, staff are focusing on professional development opportunities online."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

April: "We have a mixture of staffing arrangements including working from home and on site. Many staff are working successfully from home on projects such as design and development of innovative extensions of physical and online service and program delivery to clients, including collection of COVID-19 stories for our archives collection and virtual adult literacy tutoring."

Physical spaces

Public libraries have been in lockdown since 26 March. Many closed from Monday 23 March and this decision was confirmed at the national level when the Prime Minister announced that libraries along with other public venues would close from midnight on Wednesday 25 March.

Opening hours

From 18 March, libraries began to close their physical spaces, commencing with community meeting rooms and progressing to the full library building.

Stirling Libraries, WA

16 March: "Cancelled all events, outreach programs and services; extended loan periods; reduction of library service points (including computers)."

National Library of Australia, ACT

17 March: "Temporary suspension of all onsite public programs including guided tours and onsite learning programs until further notice." 20 March: "The library building, including reading rooms, exhibition galleries, bookshop and cafes will remain open." 23 March: "The NLA will close at 5pm each day and public spaces on levels 3 and 4 will be closed from 23 March until further notice." 25 March: "Closed to the public until further notice."

State Library Victoria, VIC

16 March: "Temporary closure." 3 April: "Closed until 30 June, the library has urged the public to use its digital offerings."

Social distancing

Before full closure, libraries rearranged furniture and removed fixed seating to separate PC stations and provide at least 1.5 metres between public access computers. Libraries found other ways of limiting contact, by restricting activities.

Cairns Libraries, QLD

19 March: "Capped visitors at fewer than 100 in all library branches. Closure of all library meeting room facilities."

Hills Shire Council, NSW

17 March: "Libraries are only open for borrowing or returning books. People will not be permitted to remain in the library for long periods of time to read or study."

Quilpie Library, QLD

24 March: "Closed to the public except by appointment to borrow books or to use the Centrelink self-service kiosk."

City of Darwin Libraries, NT

23 March: "Cancellation of all library programs; start of Senior & Disability Hours between 9am-11am; extension of loan period; limit of 25 customers in library with 30 minutes per visit."

Hibberd Library, QLD

24 March: "Cancellation of all programs and play space. Removal of access to all bar two computers."

Circulation

Libraries were already seeking ways to make their collections more accessible by remote users and COVID-19 has seen a speeding up of this activity, as teams have put energy and creativity into moving collections and services online.

Print books are still in demand and, where they can, libraries are offering 'click and collect' or other takeaway servicesⁱⁱ. In some cases, books are provided on extended loans so they don't have to be returned until after stringent lockdown rules have eased. In other cases, libraries have put in place quarantine measures for returned items.

Home library services for people with limited mobility have also been maintained where possible, as this is a lifeline for people who are housebound.

Loans and returns

One of the first reactions we saw from libraries was an increase in borrowing limits, the suspension of fines, an extension of loan periods for print books and automatic renewals to cover the lockdown period.

Alice Springs Public Library, NT

17 March: "Suspension of all library programs and events; lending limits have been doubled; static services have been reduced."

Some libraries continue to accept returns, others do not. Some accept reservations of physical items, others not.

Burdekin Library, QLD

April: "Return chutes are open – returned books are being isolated for 24 hours and cleaned before being reshelved."

Flinders Shire Public Library, QLD

April: "Continue to fill reservations and requests from Rural Libraries Queensland libraries."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

March: "The number of books clients can borrow and the length of loan periods were increased prior to closure. Members were notified via email of these changes, with many taking the opportunity to stock up on reading material. We saw a significant increase in loans in the days immediately before closure."

Interlibrary lending is another aspect with a variable response, which the National Library of Australia captured on its website.

National Library of Australia, ACT

"Some libraries have reduced their services in response to the COVID-19 situation. Please check the Reduced interlibrary loan and document supply services pageⁱⁱⁱ for details."

Home delivery

Libraries are reluctant to leave housebound library users without a service and many continue to run a home library service, in some cases extending it to other users. However, mobile library services were suspended with the closure of library buildings, and libraries

ended visits to aged care facilities where residents were extremely vulnerable.

[Northern Beaches Council, NSW](#)

20 March: "Temporary closure of three libraries; reduced hours in the remaining open libraries; expanded home library service."

[City of Darwin Libraries, NT](#)

April: "Home delivery of library books is being offered to anyone particularly vulnerable to more serious illness from COVID-19 like those over 70; in partnership with Tennis NT who are supplying three drivers and cars on Friday mornings."

[Berrigan Shire Library Service, NSW](#)

April: "Staff are phoning, selecting and packing items requested by patrons and delivering them to the patron's door."

[Narrandera Library, NSW](#)

23 March: "Mobile library services, school visits, library programs and events suspended."

[Wollongong City Libraries, NSW](#)

24 March: "Delivering collection items via mail."

[Mareeba Shire Council, QLD](#)

April: "We have arranged for the local rural Post Offices to act as collection points for our rural customers who can no longer come into town."

[City of Charles Sturt Library Service, SA](#)

April: "Mobile library has ceased but home library service is being expanded to include all customers considered at risk or vulnerable. Strict hygiene measures are in place."

[Casey Cardinia Libraries, VIC](#)

April: "Home delivery of holds and binge bags via ausPost."

Click and collect

Click and collect, kerbside pick-up and contactless delivery mirror the retail grocery stores' response to COVID-19.

[Ipswich Libraries, QLD](#)

April: "Lending through SmartLockers at Springfield and the Karalee Library Pod. Customers can request online from any branch and pick up from those locations 24/7 (both are in shopping centres)."

[Central Coast Library Service, NSW](#)

April: "Click and Deliver service operating – this is a contactless delivery service to the library member's house. Includes customer selected reservations, book bundles (selected by library staff) and craft packs."

Richmond-Upper-C Clarence Regional Library, NSW

April: "Services provided – click and collect, printing, mobile library drop-offs, housebound drop-offs, online book club."

City of Salisbury, SA

ALIA website case study: During the COVID-19 pandemic, Salisbury Library Service started providing its community with a 'Click and Collect' service to pick up physical collection materials on hold. For those who were self-isolating and could not visit the library, they also offered a free 'Library to your Door' delivery service.

These services were implemented by first deciding on how the service would operate and conducting the risk assessment. Staff then worked with the Marketing and Communications team to develop the collateral to advertise the service.

For both services, customers could select items online or call and have the library staff select for them. Although a global change to extend due dates was applied, the library also provided a pick-up service for customers to return items.

For existing Home Library customers, including residential villages and nursing homes they doubled the frequency of deliveries and number of items. As they are one of the larger library services in metropolitan Adelaide, they have a large collection to select from.

Staff delivering 'Click and Collect' were integral to refining how the service operates and they tweaked several aspects to ensure that they operated safely and efficiently. One staff suggestion that was implemented was to develop activity packs for children and adults that included puzzles, quizzes and further information on library services such as Digital Library.

The most obvious risk was that staff or community would contract COVID-19 through face to face contact or after handling items from the collection. A risk assessment was conducted by the Manager of Environmental Health and Safety, who was the chair of the COVID-19 work group and the Team Leader Safety and Wellbeing. This assessment documented the controls and treatments in line with current Federal and State Health advice. These controls included:

- Contactless service in that customers communicate with staff by phone on arrival and items are placed in the vehicle to maintain social distancing requirements.
- Staff wearing gloves when handling items.
- Staff washing hands and using hand sanitiser as required.
- Increased hygiene cleaning of all workspaces.
- All returned items sanitized and quarantined for a period of 7 days, as per the advice from various sources including information provided via ALIA: *How safe are library books and devices?*

A 'With compliments' slip added to the items, providing information on alternative delivery options and advice for customers with the following information: *Please wash hands thoroughly before and after handling library books, exercise good personal hygiene, and avoid touching face whilst reading books.*

State Library of Western Australia, WA

17 April: "Mystery Box drive-in service where customers who have ordered can pick up a box of books from our van dock – we have packed more than 1000 boxes."

Activities

Over the last four recorded years, the number of programs offered by libraries increased by a third, from 187,000 in 2014-2015 to 250,000 in 2017-2018 (Victoria excluded)^{iv}. Demand has driven this growth and by far the most popular events are storytimes for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers. These are not only fun activities, but also play an essential part in the development of early language and literacy.

Events and programs

The physical delivery of public programs ended with the closure of library buildings. Events in libraries have been postponed, cancelled or moved online. ALIA's National Simultaneous Storytime on 27 May and Library and Information Week from 25-29 May have been reinvented for digital delivery.

Bathurst Library, NSW

23 March: "Storytime and Baby Rhymetime both online; children's programs moved to digital including the Autumn School Holiday program and homework help."

Central Coast Library Service, NSW

April: "Interactive group sessions for family history and table-top gaming; virtual events and author talks commence at the end of May."

Clarence Regional Library, NSW

25 March: "Library LEGO Legends online challenge, book club, writers' corner, virtual storytimes."

Macquarie Regional Library, NSW

April: "Maker Monday craft and STEM activity sessions on Mondays at 11am, through the library social media and YouTube."

City of Darwin Libraries, NT

1 April: "LEGO club and after-school board games clubs are being run online. The library is working on offering its annual Young Territory Author Awards workshops online this year using webX, as well as Library and Information Week events, an author workshop and National Simultaneous Storytime."

[Burdekin Library, QLD](#)

April: "Virtual Kids' Club with LEGO Challenges, Cleverpatch Craft afternoons, science experiments and art activities. Library and Information Week virtual author talks and workshops. Be Connected webinars with online links."

[Whitsunday Regional Libraries, QLD](#)

April: "All branches closed from 26 March until further notice. Virtual First Five Forever sessions, Baby Bounce, Library Play, Storytime via Council Facebook page."

[City of Mandurah, WA](#)

23 March: "Translation of face to face programs to digital programs, and offering rhymetime, storytime and LEGO Club weekly challenges live on Facebook."

[City of Rockingham Libraries, WA](#)

10 April: "Junior book club invited to participate using video blogs and via Zoom meetings, adult book clubs via Zoom meetings to commence 1 May. So far a small selection of storytime and stop motion videos available online, adult craft sessions, junior craft sessions, art classes and more are in development and being added to the city's YouTube channel as they are available."

[Shire of Harvey Libraries, WA](#)

April: "Free books, puzzles and children's activity sheets available outside the front door at Harvey Library."

Virtual storytimes

On 18 March, Books Create Australia, the collaboration between the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Australian Publishers Association (APA) and the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) announced a special arrangement for library storytimes during the COVID-19 outbreak. For the duration of the pandemic, virtual storytimes will be sanctioned by an industry agreement.

As a result of this agreement, libraries are able to record or livestream their storytimes, with many taking the opportunity to develop creative, fun, online experiences for families with small children at home. On 30 April, the ALIA website featured links to almost 100 library virtual storytime and rhymetime channels.

[Libraries ACT, ACT](#)

15 April: "Libraries ACT is excited to bring you two of our most popular kids' programs online until our branches reopen: Giggle & Wiggle Online and Online Story Time. You can find links to watch them on the library website."

New Online Story Time videos will be shared every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning with our library staff sharing some of their favourite Australian picture books. A new Giggle & Wiggle Online video will be added every Monday morning. Sing and dance along and share a great Australian picture book. Watch and repeat, the repetition helps young kids with their language learning.

Thank you to the Australian Society of Authors, Australian Publishers' Association and the Australian Library and Information Association for allowing us to bring stories to you in this way. All songs used are in the public domain.

City of Parramatta, NSW

17 March, website: "We encourage you to continue to enjoy Story Time with your children via Story Time Videos that our Children's staff have created for you to watch in the comfort of your home. Bibs 'n' Books, Toddler Time and Story Time recordings."

Riverina Regional Library, NSW

31 March: "A daily virtual storytime has been introduced and during the Easter school holidays, there was a daily challenge (craft or other activity) for young people."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

April: "We are offering storytime and STEM activities live on Facebook, and one-on-one adult literacy volunteer tutoring continues in some locations through a variety of online platforms."

Authors online

Libraries have needed a quick way to find authors who have the capacity and willingness to present to audiences online. ALIA worked with the Australian Society of Authors and Australian Publishers Association to set up a page for writers and illustrators who are available to deliver online events.

Moreton Bay Region Libraries, QLD

ALIA website case study: Moreton Bay Region Libraries delivers a program of regular author events. When the COVID-19 restrictions were announced, they had already booked popular Australian author, Nick Earls, for an event. The library approached Nick to prepare an online event, which became the first in their 'Yes, you can ask that' series. A week prior to the event, the library put out a call to its community on social media, to send in their questions for Nick Earls could respond to. The library team then worked with Nick to record a 35-minute video, answering the questions.

The community responded positively, with over 200 views in the first couple of weeks, which was an excellent outcome, particularly for a half hour video. The library has continued to use this model, with further interviews featuring authors Isobelle Carmody and Natasha Lester.

Information technology

One of the greatest needs is for access to public PCs for people who don't have their own devices or the skills to use the internet independently. This includes older Australians, homeless people and those from low income families. There are 13,900 public access devices in libraries across Australia^{vi}, which provide a lifeline for those who are not able to afford their own or don't have access to high speed broadband internet at home.

Where government has allowed it, some libraries have been able to provide limited access to PCs by opening a small area for restricted hours, enforcing social distancing through the spacing of terminals, sanitising keyboards and screens between users and making the service available only to those who have pre-booked.

Public internet access

As previously described, the vast majority of libraries have closed and their users no longer have access to PCs.

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

"The online chat service staffed by our librarians and archivists is available Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 5pm to answer any questions about accessing resources online."

City of Perth Library, WA

April: "Express computer access for vulnerable patrons (no printing), from 4 May."

State Library of Western Australia, WA

"We have set up a special room with three computers and access to the internet that allows – under very controlled conditions – those who do not have access to the internet (the homeless) to continue to be able to enjoy what most of us take for granted."

Free WiFi

Some libraries have chosen to turn off WiFi, to discourage people from gathering outside the building. Others have taken the reverse approach and have boosted WiFi availability so people with their own devices can have free use of the internet in the immediate vicinity of the library.

Riverina Regional Library, NSW

April: "Coolamon Shire Council Library WiFi currently still on and community members can still use it outside the building if they wish to. Cootamundra Library recently featured in the news for its work. Home delivery ongoing, staff working still inside the library – not working from home. WiFi still on for people to use outside the library."

Flinders Shire Public Library, QLD

April: "Flinders Shire has free WiFi in the town that is easily accessed."

Leigh Creek School Community Library, SA

April: "Staff are on site for background duties only. Public WiFi is not available."

Onkaparinga Libraries, SA

April: "WiFi is available for customers. Planning digital literacy training and activities virtually."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

March: "WiFi remains available for clients across all library sites."

Casey Cardinia Libraries, VIC

April: "WiFi is off except at Bunjil Place Library."

City of South Perth Libraries, WA

April: "WiFi hours increased – availability from 6am to midnight."

Information and enquiries

Library users are taking to the phone to contact libraries for the latest information and advice. As trusted sources of definitive information, librarians provide a valuable service to members of their community who are without internet access, find it difficult to navigate the online environment, or need the reassurance of a human response.

Oberon Library, NSW

April: "Staff are present in the library to answer phone calls including fielding reference queries and setting people up on personal devices to access BorrowBox [ebooks]."

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

March: "A central phone number established for clients who would otherwise contact one of our 45 libraries directly has been handling high numbers of general inquiries."

Yarra Plenty Regional Library, VIC

April: "Ask a Librarian each weekday from 10am to 12pm on Twitter and 10am to 4pm on Facebook. As many kids start Term 2 schooling from home, the library's teacher librarians will be available for one-to-one homework help sessions to assist in their transition to at-home learning. While our branches are closed, library staff are calling all YPRL members aged 70 or over (more than 5,500 people) to have a chat, connect them with essential services and offer any technical assistance that they might need. Family and local history help, 'Let Me Research That', weekend activity guides – everything you need to stay active, keep learning and have fun at home."

Albany Public Library, WA

March: "Staff 'live chat' from the website. Cold calling patrons over 75 years old who do not have an email address to check in with them. Albany History Collection librarians and resources accessible online."

City of Mandurah, WA

April: "Library and heritage services enewsletter continuing. Contributing to the community COVID-19 Update enewsletter. Establishing the corporate library by cataloguing resources held across the organisation. Telephoning all members over the age of 65 to advise of library closure and promote eresources."

City of South Perth Libraries, WA

April: "Reviewing our eresource web pages – updating information, collating help sheets and video tutorials on how to register and create accounts for each resource."

Collections

Public libraries have moved seamlessly into providing both physical and electronic items for loan. There are approximately 40 million items available and while books in various formats (print, ebooks, audio books) form the greatest part of library collections, there are also DVDs, streaming services and local history materials, both hard copy and digitised^{vii}. Many public libraries have made the latter available as part of the National Library of Australia's Trove platform^{viii}, which is the fourth most visited federal government website, serving 20 million unique users each year.

Physical items

Books, DVDs, toys and devices, such as virtual reality headsets, raise the issue of whether or not items for borrowing can harbour the virus and enable the transmission of infection.

Queanbeyan-Palerang Library Service, NSW

19 March: "Suspension of all programs and events; closed toy library; removal of every second computer."

Cairns Libraries, QLD

19 March: "Withdrawal of all toys and games from public spaces."

Excelsior Library, QLD

20 March: "Cancellation of holiday programs and outreach; reduction of computers to allow for social distancing; withdrawal of toys and soft furnishings; increase in loan limits and loan period."

Minlaton School Community Library, SA

19 March: "Cancellation of all community events and programs; removal of shared items (toys, pencils, etc)."

Western Downs Libraries, QLD

23 March: "All public programs suspended. Public computers and technology (VR etc) removed from access."

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, UK

29 April website: "During the COVID-19 emergency every person - including library staff, those using library books and those working in, or visiting, the library space - is advised to wash their hands more frequently to protect themselves from any contaminated surfaces."

Please note guidance from the COVID-19 Guidance Cell of Public Health England's National Infection Service, as advised to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on 27 March 2020:

- The risk from books covered in a plastic cover handled by someone who is a possible COVID-19 case is negligible after 72 hours.
- The risk from books with a cardboard/paper cover is negligible after 24 hours.

CILIP notes that each individual library and information service has developed their own policies and protocols for safe book handling, including leaving books in 'quarantine' for 72 hours before handling.

Electronic resources

Libraries are investing in additional ebooks, eaudio books, emagazines, online learning platforms, film and video streaming services, and electronic databases, to keep members entertained, support students and businesses, and provide researchers with the information they need to continue their work.

[Berrigan Shire Library Service, NSW](#)

April: "Online book club launched, Story Box Library, Indy Reads, promoted using #StayConnected."

[City of Parramatta, NSW](#)

22 April: "3115 new registered library members since 23 March, 11,962 digital loans (ebooks, eaudiobooks, emagazines) – including double the monthly average on the library's main ebook site ePlatform. Approximately 2,500 new ebooks and eaudiobook titles have been added to the collection, with special collections of the Premier's Reading Challenge ebooks added for children."

[Wentworth Shire Libraries, NSW](#)

April: "Purchased additional digital resources including a new subscription to StoryBox Library [digital storytimes] and additional BorrowBox [ebook] titles. Launched brand new Wentworth Shire Libraries app."

[City of Port Adelaide Enfield Libraries, SA](#)

30 April: "Local history library staff are working on important digitisation projects such as the scanning and indexing of local Births, Deaths and Marriages Registers. This project makes local records accessible online for family history researchers."

[Libraries Tasmania, TAS](#)

April: "There has been a 28 per cent increase in use of our ebook and eaudio services for the month of March (compared with March 2019), with a 46 per cent increase in the number of individuals borrowing an ebook. Junior ebook issues have increased by 82 per cent as a proportion of the collections used, with junior audio books proving popular."

[City of Melbourne Libraries, VIC](#)

29 April: "23 per cent surge in eLibrary usage (19,182 loans) compared with the same time last year, with eaudiobooks (10,345 loans) the most popular service."

[City of South Perth Libraries, WA](#)

April: "Increased eresources and physical resources. Additional BorrowBox ebooks and eaudio. New Comics Unlimited, PressReader and Beamfilm subscriptions."

[State Library of Western Australia, WA](#)

17 April: "Digitisation on demand – researchers that used to visit us and in person and order documents they could study in the flesh can now order digitised copies of our materials – free."

Other aspects

Financial transactions

[North Burnett Regional Council Libraries, QLD](#)

23 March: "No longer accepting cash payments."

Justice of the Peace

[Adelaide Hills Library, SA](#)

19 March: "All adult and children's programs and library events cancelled; mobile library services discontinued; community room bookings and Justice of the Peace services discontinued."

Reopening

The Northern Territory is the first jurisdiction to announce the reopening of library services^{ix} from 15 May, as part of stage two of its roadmap for the 'new normal'. While government can make broad statements about libraries reopening to the public, the detail will need to be carefully planned by library managers to mitigate any remaining risks for staff and library users.

[Grenfell Public Library \(Weddin Shire\)](#)

April: "Plans for reopening will be rolling back the same way we rolled in, loans and returns only for a period before computers and activities being reintroduced."

Reopening will not mean going back to the way things were pre-COVID-19, it will mean putting in place the 'new normal' approach to library services.

This is the opportunity for libraries to prioritise their existing services and refocus investment on the services which are most highly valued by users. It is the opportunity to introduce more digital services as a permanent fixture, reaching new users and providing more content and activities for existing users. This is the opportunity to rethink programs and events, taking advantage of the heightened awareness of, and interest in, public libraries.

Libraries Tasmania, TAS

April: "Recovery planning is well underway as we continue to respond and reflect on what we have learnt. We are planning for a phased approach to re-commencing our physical services, prioritising library services and programs that are highly valued by our clients and those we can offer while respecting social-distancing and hygiene guidelines."

Some services which have been established for the duration of the pandemic will need to be removed as they will be redundant; there will no longer be the capacity to deliver them, or they will no longer be permissible. Some online programs will fall into the first category; click and collect may fall into the second, and virtual storytimes will need to be deleted from library channels with the removal of the ALIA/book industry copyright agreement allowing for recording and live streaming of children's picture books. However, other innovations such as becoming a member online will most likely become part of normal service.

In practical terms, there will need to be a greater focus on the safe handling of items for borrowing and display. The Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and Battelle in the US^x are collaborating to develop an evidence-based approach to safe reopening practices, providing information about how to handle materials, training and cleaning in libraries.

Each library will have its own plans for reopening, but there are five questions every library team needs to consider.

1. Which services have our library users missed most?
2. Which services have we introduced that we want to keep?
3. How do our services rank in terms of high, medium and low risk?
4. How do we reintroduce services while keeping our staff and users safe?
5. How will we celebrate the library being open again and bring our members back?

The National Cabinet meets on 8 May and we anticipate greater clarity after that meeting about when libraries may be able to ease restrictions on services and reopen fully.

Checklist

Planning

- Risk assessment
- Operations and communications plans
- Timeline and phasing (easing of lockdown, partial reopening, full reopening)
- Celebration of full reopening

Communications

- Guidelines and training for staff
- Information for stakeholders
- Media alert through Council media team
- Notification of services available (English and LOTE)
- Be prepared for increased phone and email enquiries during the reopening phases
- Use the opportunity to communicate the value of the library

Social distancing measures

- Signage promoting social distancing (English and LOTE)
- Floor marking
- Rearrange furniture
- Separate entrance and exit
- Limited opening hours
- Opening hours for specific community groups
- Limited spaces open to the public (children's area, meeting rooms, café, toilets)
- Limited number of people in the library
- Limited period of time in the library
- Remove PCs to create space between terminals
- Time limits on PC sessions
- Limit numbers for face-to-face activities

Safety precautions

- Work Health and Safety risk assessment to identify high risk areas
- Cleaning schedule with focus on priority areas including shared devices and materials
- Quarantine and/or sanitise returned items
- Availability of wipes and sanitiser for staff and public use
- Install screens where social distancing measure are less effective
- Ask people who are unwell not to attend the library

Staff support

- Shift work to reduce the number of staff in the library
- Promote use of self-check stations
- Manage expectation of face-to-face assistance for library users

Community support

- Extended loan periods
- Automatic and repeated loan renewals
- Waiving of fines

Operations

- Bring back staff
- Reactivate return chutes
- Reopen library buildings and restart mobile library service
- Maintain extended home library service or return outreach services to pre-COVID level
- Reintroduce, retain or phase out click and collect, kerbside pick-up
- Make PCs available for public use
- Reintroduce cash transactions
- Review and instate calendar of programs and events, real world and virtual
- Remove virtual storytime recordings from media channels
- Reintroduce live large group programs and events as the final phase
- Consider reintroducing volunteers
- Review 2020-2021 budget including balance of investment in print and eresources

Framework

	Current status	Restrictions eased	Restrictions lifted
Planning			
Communications			
Social distancing			
Safety precautions			
Staff support			
Community support			
Operations			

What is safe?

It will be up to the library's organisation, as advised by local authorities, to determine the library is deemed safe to reopen. This may be dependent on local circumstances, such as the prevalence of community transmission of COVID-19, and the judgement of the relevant state or territory's Chief Medical Officer. Once the library is declared safe to reopen, there are important guidelines to consider in managing the safety of staff and visitors to the library:

Physical distancing

Maintain at least 1.5 metres distance between people.

- Rearrange furniture and computer facilities.
- Provide a separate entrance and exit to the space.
- Mark out the distance from the main service points, to minimise face-to-face interaction.
- Ask people who are feeling unwell to stay away from the library.

Limit the usage of the space to one person per 4 square metres.

- Calculating the area of the public floor space. Divide the area by four. Limit the number of people in the space (including staff) to this number.
- Set up a safe queueing space outside the library – marking every 1.5 metres on the ground.

Safe handling of physical materials

- Wear gloves when moving collections into quarantine and remove them immediately afterwards.
- Ask visitors to use self-checkout machines to minimise the exchange of physical items.
- Avoid handling cash or credit cards – use 'tap and go' if receiving payments.

Sanitising objects and surfaces

- Providing hand sanitiser and/or alcohol-based soap for staff and visitors.
- Clean and disinfect public computer equipment between uses.
- Avoid the sharing of close-contact equipment such as headphones and VR headsets.

Quarantining and sanitising collections

- For paper-based products, leave books untouched in a dedicated quarantine area for a 24-hour period prior to handling and recirculating. Sanitising books with liquid disinfectants can damage books and is not recommended.
- For DVDs or other materials with plastic covers, wipe them down with alcohol wipes.
- Clean and disinfect hard, high-touch surfaces, such as railings, doorknobs, faucets, light switches, at least once a day – more often if possible.

This information has been gathered based on guidelines provided by Safe Work Australia^{xi} and advice provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (ILMS)^{xii} and the Northeast Document Conservation Center^{xiii}.

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