

The Australian Media Literacy Alliance

Our National Agenda for Change



Media Literacy: The Challenge

Media technologies in the 21st Century have dramatically changed the way we interact with the world. Every day 8-in-10 Australians use media technologies to live their lives through media: to receive and share news; to get help and advice; to conduct business and connect socially; to learn; to share ideas, knowledge and opinions. However, their engagement increasingly demands sophisticated skills, knowledge and critical capacities.

The internet and its associated platforms have changed how society receives and shares information. News and information is now delivered through multiple channels, with multiple authors and consumers. It is produced and circulated across a rapidly evolving 24-hour cycle, often as events evolve, leaving little time to check sources, claims or opinions. In times of conflict or during natural disasters or politically-charged events, we experience an increase in the production and circulation of misinformation and disinformation, testing even the most sophisticated media literacy skills.

'Media literacy' is the ability to create, use and share media and to critically reflect on this engagement. It is now widely recognised as a form of literacy essential for full participation in society. Despite the rapid growth in media technology uptake and use over the past 10 years, media literacy is not scaling at a rate to keep up with sophisticated changes and production. This means citizens have been left to learn on their own: or face increasing levels of social, cultural and economic exclusion or threats to the livelihood.

The Australian curriculum is one of the few international curriculum policies that includes media literacy as a goal. However, media literacy education in Australian schools has been offered in an ad hoc and disparate way. Whilst the current national curriculum includes capacity for media literacy teaching for all students, research highlights that the quality and delivery is neither consistent nor effective.

Australia now has a national organisation tasked with championing and leading media literacy education for all Australians. The Australian Media Literacy Alliance, a newly created, independent structure, seeks to supporting a national, expert network of organisations at the forefront of media literacy education and advocacy at all levels. The Alliance brings together key public institutions to tackle the challenges of media literacy education as a national priority.

Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society.

The case for a national approach to Media Literacy education for all citizens

Around the world the dissemination of fake news has interfered with elections, disaster management, the justice system and human rights. The Australian bushfires of the 2019/20 summer and the COVID-19 global pandemic which followed were accompanied by significant examples of misinformation and disinformation, particularly on social media platforms. Both of these crises demonstrated the repercussions of misinformation and disinformation when presented as news and highlighted how vital high quality and accurate news media are to our individual and collective health, wellbeing and safety.

Media literacy education and advocacy has a critical role to inform debate and policy to thwart misinformation and biased communication.

A healthy democracy requires that citizens have the skills, knowledge and capacities to use media to engage with politics, policies and world events. It also requires that citizens can recognise when information is misleading or deliberately deceptive. In addition, media production skills are now critical for full participation in society, whether for work, strengthening family and social relationships, advancing health and education goals.

Given this, an ongoing, comprehensive and coherent national strategy for media literacy in Australia is required. This must not entail a quick-fix involving scattered, one-off and fragmented projects.

Most advanced economies now have a national policy, strategy and framework for media literacy. National approaches support media literacy educators and organisations to work together in a coherent way while allowing for benchmarking over time, which in turn enables an evidence-based approach.

It is critical that Australia moves in this direction.

Case study

A recent survey of Australian teachers into their thoughts and opinions about teaching news media literacy in their classrooms found:

Teaching news matters

- Almost all respondents (96%) believe it is very or extremely important for students to learn to critically read the news, with 94% of teachers believing it is very or extremely important for students to learn fact checking and verification skills.
- Over 90% of respondents believe it is very or extremely important for students to learn about bias in the news.

Barriers stand in the way of teaching about news media

Although 60% of respondents said they feel confident teaching students about news media, barriers to teaching were identified:

- Timetable constraints and curriculum structures (57%) and lack of time for planning (45%) are major barriers to teaching students about news media.

- Only one quarter of respondents (27%) said they were very well supported by their school to teach students about news media, while an additional 38% felt moderately well supported.

- Only 18% of the respondents had access to professional development opportunities about news media.

Changes to the Australian curriculum may be necessary to advance news media literacy

- Most teachers surveyed said they are not well supported to teach media literacy under the Australian Curriculum, and some believed schools do not value media literacy education highly.

Source: Dezuanni, M., Notley, T. & Corser, K. 2020. *News and Australian Teachers: How news media literacy is taught in the classroom*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University.

Who is the Australian Media Literacy Alliance?

Media literacy has never been more important for its citizens to survive and thrive.

Museums, archives, libraries, public broadcasters, school and universities already play a significant role in supporting media literacy and have done so for decades. The cohort of founding members represents a unique consortium of key institutions and networked organisations who are well-positioned to tackle this national priority.

The Australian Alliance of Associations in Education brings education associations across Australia together and provides a voice for educators and students.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is the national broadcaster which has a remit within its charter to educate all Australians. It has a long history of providing educational materials to Australian schools and families. In 2018, ABC Education introduced Australia's first Media Literacy Week.

The Australian Library and Information Association is the peak body for school, public, tertiary and other libraries. Libraries have always been a rich source of quality information, today they also play a vital role in bridging the digital divide. It supports 5,000 member organisations which are made up of libraries and information services.

The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House helps people to understand Australia's social and political history by interpreting the past and present and exploring the future. In 2019 it opened the new permanent exhibition Truth, Power and a Free Press.

The National Film and Sound Archive is Australia's 'living' archive of audio-visual materials, a provider

of media literacy education for students and lifelong learners, and a destination for deep engagement with Australian media culture based on its collections which are a rich resource for fostering critical perspectives on the media.

National and State Libraries Australia brings together the expert knowledge and innovative capacity of Australia's national, state and territory libraries, whose content collections are together valued at \$4.1 billion.

The Australian Centre for the Moving Image is Australia's national museum of film, TV, videogames, digital culture and art, celebrating the past, present and future of the moving image.

The Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University researches transformations in culture and society in the context of contemporary global change. It champions collaborative engaged research for a globalising digital age: the Advancing the Media Literacy of Young Australians project aims to advance the news media literacy of young Australians.

The Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology conducts world-leading research for a creative, inclusive and fair digital media environment.

The members work in partnership towards the goal of a government-endorsed national media literacy strategy for Australia, which will:

- State the importance of this form of literacy for all in society
- Articulate the achievements and challenges in the Australian context
- Provide direction for educators and curriculum development
- Raise awareness and encourage a whole-of-community response.

The need for leadership and change is widely supported. For example, the 2019 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Digital Platforms Inquiry recommended a program be established to fund and certify non-government organisations for the delivery of digital media literacy resources and training. The Inquiry also recognised the importance of digital media literacy education in schools and recommended that the scheduled 2020 review of the Australian Curriculum consider how digital media literacy education is approached.

Case study

COVID-19 conspiracies

As the COVID-19 pandemic saw escalating death rates across the world day by day, conspiracy theories, myths and misinformation about the virus spread throughout social media and news platforms. From theories about the origins of the coronavirus to treatments, an array of misinformation and fake news proliferated, hampering health measures or encouraging social discord and mistrust in scientific advice.

Conspiracies included claims that the disease was created in a Wuhan laboratory for political purposes, or created by the US military or the work of Bill Gates to profit from the pandemic. An Essential poll of May 19, 2020 surveyed 1,073 adult Australians to understand who believed coronavirus conspiracy theories:

- One in five people believed the media and government were exaggerating the death toll to scare the population.
- One in eight Australians believed the coronavirus was being spread by the 5G network
- Two in five believed the virus was engineered and released from a lab in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Many conspiracies were encouraged by unsubstantiated media commentary and were amplified by news reporting of the conspiracies across news media organisations.

Source: *Essential Report*, 19 May 2020.
essentialvision.com.au/category/essentialreport

Our National Media Literacy Education Initiatives

National leadership is a critical step to lead discussions and advocacy for ongoing investment in media literacy education through 5 initiatives:

Goal	Initiative
Advocacy for high quality media literacy education.	Ongoing teacher training leading to accreditation; media literacy forums for students and teachers; professional development programs for school teachers that map onto the national curriculum. Advocacy across Federal Government portfolios.
World leading evidence-based research to underpin media literacy education.	World class research program led by university partners.
National leadership through a network of media literacy champions.	Media literacy programs led and championed by national institutions, e.g National Media Literacy Week, media literacy events.
A national framework for teaching and measuring media literacy.	National survey – all ages, international bench-marking.
Production and circulation of engaging media literacy resources for all Australians.	Support the development of cohesive, accessible, evidence-based and relevant learning resources and programs.

Alliance members will deliver a unified strategy to support the implementation of media literacy initiatives across the academic, school, government, public and cultural sectors. These strategies will ensure media literacy is a key educational outcome across primary, high school, tertiary and adult learning education. National collections play a key role in developing media literacy programs, championing democratic values through authentic experiences. The Alliance will drive increasing scholarship in this field, developing evidence-based approaches and contributing to world-leading research outcomes.

Support media literacy in Australia

Support the work of the Alliance and help us champion media literacy education for all Australians.

Your financial or in-kind support will deliver vital research and program development, including teacher training, program partnerships with key institutions and networked organisations.

Your support will be acknowledged across Alliance materials and products, and by Alliance members in associated products.

Your Australian Media Literacy Alliance contacts

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