

Australian public libraries during the COVID-19 crisis: Implications for future policy and practice

Welcome to the survey on the response of public libraries to COVID-19. What you see below is the **information for participants**. It includes information about research, ethics approval and questions that you might have about this study. You can also [download a PDF](#) copy of the questionnaire (the link will open in a new page) if you wish to see all of the questions before starting the survey. After reading the information below, please click on Next at the bottom of the page to start the survey.

Information for Participants

Names of researchers

Chief Investigator: Dr Jane Garner, Lecturer, School of Information Studies

Co-Chief Investigator: Dr Simon Wakeling, Lecturer, School of Information Studies.

Co-Investigator: Professor Philip Hider, School of Information Studies.

Co-Investigator: Dr Hamid Jamali, Senior Lecturer, School of Information Studies.

Co-Investigator: Dr Jessie Lymn, Lecturer, School of Information Studies.

Co-Investigator: Dr Yazdan Mansourian, Lecturer, School of Information Studies.

Co-Investigator: Dr Holly Randell-Moon, Senior Lecturer, School of Indigenous Australian Studies.

You are invited to participate in a research study on Australian public libraries' responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

This study is being conducted by the above listed members of the Charles Sturt University Libraries Research Group.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. The survey will remain open for two weeks and you will be reminded to complete the survey after a week.

What is the purpose of this study?

This research will explore how public libraries across Australia have responded to the COVID-19 crisis. It will assist public libraries in understanding their own roles and performance in a community crisis and will enable them to better prepare for and react to similar crises in the future so that community needs are met as efficiently and effectively as possible. In addition, the research will identify possible trends in future service and resource provision resulting from measures put in place during the COVID-19 crisis.

Why have you been invited to participate in this study?

You have been identified by the state or territory representative of the Australian Library and Information Association as a person with operational responsibility for the closure and resourcing decisions for a library or group of libraries during the COVID-19 crisis. We are seeking one response from each library service. We recognise the complexity in managerial structures across the Australian public library sector and are aware that operational responsibility is sometimes found with the leader of an individual library branch, and sometimes with the Chief Executive Officer of a large library corporation.

What does this study involve?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a number of question survey that will take you around 20 minutes to complete. You will not be required to identify yourself or your library by name. You will be asked to name the State or Territory of your library and to identify your library location as urban, regional or remote. The survey questions seek to identify the nature of your library/ies responses to the COVID-19 crisis, including changes you have made to service and resource provision, and staffing. The survey also seeks to identify the challenges your library/ies has faced in implementing these changes, how you have or plan to evaluate your responses, and what changes will persist once the crisis is resolved.

Are there any risks and benefits to you taking part in this study?

We anticipate there is no risk to participants associated with this research. This study has been endorsed by the Australian Library and Information Association and the Australian Public Library Alliance as research that will benefit the public library sector of Australia. The research will allow us to gather a comprehensive data set that will illustrate how public libraries have responded to the COVID-19 crisis. We will be able to determine how public libraries have responded to the crisis, develop an understanding of how all public library services have been affected, how these libraries have maintained or adapted their services and resource offerings and how they have or will evaluate the effectiveness of these responses. We will be able to determine where public libraries have been successful in meeting their users' needs and what barriers to success have been experienced.

How is this study being paid for?

This study has been funded in full by Charles Sturt University. All researchers involved in this study are staff members of the University.

Will taking part in this study cost you anything, and will you be paid?

There are no financial costs to you associated with participating in this survey. There is no reimbursement or payment to you for participating.

What if you don't want to take part in this study?

Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate is your decision and will not disadvantage you.

What if you participate and want to withdraw later?

You are being asked to contribute your data anonymously, so it will not be possible for you to have the data you contribute withdrawn from the study as we have no way of linking responses to an individual.

How will your confidentiality be protected?

You will not be asked to identify yourself by name, and you will not be asked to name the library service for which you are responsible. Your responses will therefore be anonymous.

What will happen to the information you give us?

The information you share through this survey will be combined with the results of all other participant surveys and together will form a data set that will support the generation of a report of findings. This report will be shared with the Australian Library and Information Association and the Australian Public Library Alliance and made available to participants through their official channels. A journal article reporting on the survey findings will be submitted to the Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association and a report will be published on the CSU Libraries Research Group homepage for public access. In addition, the data gathered through this research will inform a second stage of the project where three libraries will be selected to be used as case studies.

The data set produced from this survey will be made available on the Australian National Data Service for public reuse. As neither the name of participants nor the name of any library service will be gathered at any stage during this survey, individual participants will not be identifiable in the published data set, or identified in any reports arising from the project.

What should you do if you want to discuss this study further before you decide?

If you would like further information please contact Dr Jane Garner at jagarner@csu.edu.au or (02) 6933 4318 or Dr Simon Wakeling at swakeling@csu.edu.au or (02) 6933 2325

Who should you contact if you have concerns about the conduct of this study?

Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics and Compliance Unit via the following contact details:

The Governance Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Ethics and Compliance Unit
Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678
Tel: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Support services

Although we do not anticipate that participating in this survey will cause any distress, should you require support as a result of your involvement we identify the following services that may be of use:

- o Beyond Blue - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> or 1300 224 636 (24 hours, 7 days)
- o The Black Dog Institute - <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>
- o SANE Australia - <https://www.sane.org/>
- o MensLine Australia - <https://mensline.org.au/> or 1300 78 99 78 (24 hours, 7 days)
- o MINDSPOT - mindspot.org.au or 1800 61 44 34
- o Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health - <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/>
- o Head to Health - <https://headtohealth.gov.au/>
- o Your local General Practitioner

Conclusion

Thank you for considering this invitation. You may [download a PDF copy](#) of the information for participants if you wish to keep a copy (the link will open in a new page).

By clicking 'NEXT' you are indicating that you are agreeing to participate in the above research and you will be freely providing your informed consent to have your responses to the following survey questions gathered and included in the study that has been described above. You are agreeing that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered to your satisfaction.

If you do not consent to have your data gathered and included in the study, please close this window now and do not click 'NEXT'.

Background

1. Your State/Territory:

2. Which of these area types describes the location of your library service? If necessary you can look at [this map](#) for help identifying your area type. If your service spans more than one area type then please select all that apply.

- ☐ Major city
- ☐ Inner regional
- ☐ Outer regional
- ☐ Remote
- ☐ Very remote

3. Number of library sites for which you are responsible:

4. Please indicate the status of your library sites at the following points of the crisis:

	All sites closed to public	More than half of sites closed to public	Less than half of sites closed to public	No sites closed to public	n/a
Prior to any official directive to close	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immediately following State/Territory directive to close (if applicable)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immediately following Federal Government directive to close	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Today	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Service change

5. What online resources and services have been provided to users during the crisis? Please check any of the following activities that your service offered and tell us whether it was an existing service or a new service added during the closure.

	Existing	Expanded existing	New	Not offered
Online membership registration/renewal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual programming (storytime, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual events (author events, competitions, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual reference services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
eBooks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Audiobooks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to databases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone reference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of library materials (e.g. by mail)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Click and collect or kerbside pickup	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpline	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please tell us about any other new or expanded services during this time:

6. In your opinion, how effective have these services been in meeting the needs of your users?

	Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	Not offered
Online membership registration/renewal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual programming (storytime, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual events (author events, competitions, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual reference services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
eBooks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Audiobooks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to databases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone reference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of library materials (e.g. by mail)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Click and collect or kerbside pickup	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpline	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please elaborate (optional):

7. Which of the new / expanded services are you considering continuing after the crisis?

- ☐ Online membership registration/renewal
- ☐ Virtual programming (storytime, etc.)
- ☐ Virtual events (author events, competitions, etc.)
- ☐ Virtual reference services
- ☐ eBooks
- ☐ Audiobooks
- ☐ Access to databases
- ☐ Phone reference
- ☐ Delivery of library materials (e.g. by mail)
- ☐ Click and collect or kerbside pickup
- ☐ Helpline

Please provide details about the new or expanded services you are considering continuing, including any concerns you might have about funding for these services.

Communication

8. How are you communicating service changes to your users? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Other social media
- ☐ Newspapers
- ☐ Library website
- ☐ Email
- ☐ SMS messaging
- ☐ Signage

Other (please specify)

9. Have you introduced any public health awareness/support activities in response to the COVID-19 crisis?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, please provide details

Services to specific groups

10. Have any specific actions been taken to address the needs of the following groups during the crisis?

	Yes	No
The elderly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with English as a second language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indigenous Australians	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People experiencing homelessness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People with limited access to technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People who require literacy support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify any other groups

11. If applicable, please describe the changes or additions to your services that have been implemented to serve these groups during the crisis.

Plans and documents

12. Please indicate how useful the following plans, documents and resources have been in guiding your response to the crisis.

	Not useful at all	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Do not have
Business continuity plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Risk management plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disaster management plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with marginalised groups plans/policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collection management plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Code of ethics and conduct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reader and visitor code of conduct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privacy policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ALIA resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Existing health and safety guidelines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments, including whether plans and documents were at a library or council/parent body level

Staffing

13. How would you describe your service's response to the closure of libraries in terms of staff undertaking library-related duties?

	Remained on full hours	Partially reduced hours	Reduced to zero hours	Not applicable
Permanent Staff	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Fixed-term Contract Staff	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Casual Staff	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Volunteers	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

14. What proportion of you library staff (if any) have been required to undertake non-library work for the council/parent body?

- ☐ All staff
- ☐ More than half of library staff
- ☐ Less than half of library staff
- ☐ No library staff
- ☐ Please provide details if applicable

15. For staff that remained working, have they been:

- ☐ All working from home
- ☐ Some working from home, others working on site
- ☐ All working on site

16. Please provide a short summary of staffing issues you faced during the crisis. This could include decisions about standing down staff (permanent and casual), the need to give staff new roles / responsibilities, and issues transitioning staff to work from home arrangements.

17. How challenging have you found the following aspects of managing your service's response to the crisis?

Please tell us more about these and any other challenges you have faced, and how significant they were

[illegible]

19. Have you formally reviewed or do you plan to review your service's management of the crisis?

- ☐ We have reviewed
- ☐ We have not reviewed but we plan to
- ☐ We have not reviewed and do not plan to
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Evaluation method

20. Please tell us which formal processes you have used or plan to use to review your service's management of the crisis.

- ☐ Survey of staff
- ☐ Interviews with staff
- ☐ Usage data
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Perception evaluation

21. Have you formally evaluated or do you plan to evaluate user perceptions of your service's response to the crisis?

- ☐ We have evaluated
- ☐ We have not evaluated but plan to
- ☐ We have not evaluated and do not plan to

Perception evaluation method

22. Please tell us which formal processes you have used or plan to use to evaluate user perceptions of your service's response to the crisis:

- ☐ Survey of users
- ☐ Interviews with users
- ☐ Usage data
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Final page

23. In your opinion, what roles have your service and staff played in serving your community during this crisis?

24. Based on your experiences so far through the response and recovery process, is there anything you would have done differently?

25. How might the changes made during the crisis influence future resource and service provision?

26. Do you have any additional comments about the response of public libraries to this crisis?

Thank you for participating in this survey. We appreciate your time and help.