



ALIA-APLA Joint Statement on International Day of Democracy

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Canberra, 15 September 2023: Today, on the International Day of Democracy, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) join with colleagues across the sector to draw attention to the essential role of libraries and information services in maintaining Australia's democracy.

Australia's public libraries have established a trusted position in local communities and are uniquely placed to support public engagement and the democratic process. Through their collections and their provision of information services, libraries support people to find information, encounter different points of view and be informed citizens. As the world contends with the rapid spread and impact of mis and disinformation, library staff are increasingly called upon to help members of the community to both navigate the wealth of information at their disposal, and to develop critical information, digital and media literacy skills.

"Libraries are one of the few remaining public spaces where you don't have to pay money to enter, and you can ask a real person for help. Across age ranges and backgrounds, public libraries are an essential service, and part of daily life." says APLA Chair Viv Barton

Access to information and intellectual freedom are fundamental requirements of democratic society. Public library collections cover a wide range of topics, express a variety of viewpoints and cultural understandings, and represent a diversity of people, places, events, issues and ideas. Recent challenges seeking to remove materials from libraries and shut down library programs are a challenge to fundamental democratic principles. The targeting of certain groups and content, most notably LGBTQIA+ people, is not acceptable.

"Public libraries are here for everyone. We value the diversity of our community, and welcome all to enjoy and feel safe accessing our diverse collections." says ALIA President Jane Cowell

"Everyone has the right to free access of information at their public library and we know that a democracy only gets stronger with well-informed communities."

"I commend all the library staff across Australia who work every day to ensure that equitable access to information and intellectual freedom are secure.

