

# Invest in a reading nation



## Reading transforms lives

All Australians deserve access to the life-changing benefits of reading for pleasure.

Research shows that people who read regularly report higher self-esteem, are less lonely, and are 58% more likely to empathise with others.<sup>1</sup> Reading slows the heart rate, reduces stress<sup>2</sup> and can even extend our lives.<sup>3</sup> High reading rates are acknowledged globally as a sign of a healthy, democratic society.

## Reading is at risk

Despite the huge benefits, 44% of Australians have low literacy<sup>4</sup> and almost 30% of Australians have not read or listened to a single book in a year.<sup>5</sup> Around 60% of Australians either never read, or read rarely. That's almost 13 million Australians, aged 15 and over.

Reading rates are in decline, with numbers of non-readers increasing.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, rates of misinformation are climbing.

## Building a reading nation

A reading nation has a thriving literary ecosystem – from local authors to our libraries, publishing houses and bookshops. Countries around the world are investing in reading, and providing successful, innovative and evidence-based models we can adapt for Australia. Through a focused strategy and scalable campaigns, we can work together to reach new, and diverse reading communities in Australia.

## The benefits of reading

A 20% reduction in mortality was observed for those who read books.<sup>7</sup>

Reading is 4x more influential on intellectual progress in teens than having a parent with a degree.<sup>8</sup>

74% of children agree that reading is a way to help them understand the world.<sup>9</sup>

Reading fiction for just five minutes can reduce stress by nearly 20%.<sup>10</sup>

## Leisure reading and literacy: related issues, different solutions

There is a critical relationship between literacy and reading for pleasure: without both the desire and the skills to read, Australians of all ages miss out on the life-changing benefits of reading. Improving literacy and leisure reading rates are essential and require different social policy interventions. Australia Reads' mission is to provide expert advice that will grow reading for pleasure.



# Recommendations for change

Through implementing these industry-backed recommendations, we can transform the lives of all Australians through the power of reading. To increase reading rates, Australia needs to follow in the footsteps of many countries around the world and have:

1. **A national reading strategy**
2. **National reading campaigns**
3. **Targeted reading programs**



## 1. A national reading strategy

Australia needs an expertly implemented reading engagement strategy. Initiatives to deliver a healthy reading culture include:

- **A cohesive plan** with the books and reading industry to increase rates of reading, with national targets and evaluation frameworks.
- **Shared knowledge, resources and skills** on best practice activities that are proven to effectively increase reading engagement.
- **A regular program of research** into reader and non-reader behaviour.
- **Funding for Australia Reads** as a partnership-based social enterprise to develop and deliver an evidence-based national reading strategy and program.

## 2. National reading campaigns

Highly visible reading campaigns increase the presence of books in daily life, encouraging Australians across all ages and stages of life to normalise reading for pleasure. With a focus on Australian stories, campaigns can draw on social change initiatives like Slip, Slop, Slap, and successful international reading programs such as:

- **Io Leggo Perché “I Read Because…”** (Italy): Extensive annual program aimed at talking about books, with over 3 million new books gifted by Italians to schools and families.
- **Enanbib, Enabib! “Let’s Read, Let’s Flourish”** (Ethiopia): National reading campaign that promotes access, infrastructure and engagement with books and reading.
- **Book Week Scotland** (UK): An annual celebration that encourages people of all ages to embrace the joys of reading, discover new books, and participate in literary activities.

# Recommendations for change

## 3. Targeted reading programs

By providing ignition funding for evidence-backed and scalable programs, the Australian Government can kick-start meaningful initiatives with the potential for long-term private investment, and social impact.



Reading programs with high social benefits and proven success internationally include:

- **Reading & health** – Reading Well program: A ‘books on prescription’ program which works with healthcare experts to recommend books to alleviate mental health conditions.
- **Reading & families** – Reading Together program: Family reading program, that promotes the benefits of shared reading for children and caregivers.
- **Reading & teens** – Cultural voucher scheme: Supporting young people to engage through books and reading through the provision of cultural vouchers.
- **Reading & communities** – Live Literature program: A coordinated program of regional, rural and outer-metro reading activity in schools and community centres, supported by libraries, bookshops and writers.
- **Reading & seniors** – Reading is Caring program: A shared reading program to support people living with dementia and anyone who cares for them.

To find out more about the mission to get more Australians reading, visit

[australiareads.org.au](https://australiareads.org.au), or contact us:

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Australia Reads is an industry collaboration on reading



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