

Libraries face growing cyber demand

Seniors seek help to log on safely.



HELP DESK: Libraries can provide cyber training for seniors

Libraries are in a prime position to help seniors have a safe online experience, but the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has told federal parliament's Cyber-Safety Committee they are constrained by the limited resources currently available to them.

With the number of Australians aged over 65 growing rapidly, ALIA said libraries are reporting a growth in membership and demand with many seniors seeking assistance and training to help them take advantage of the benefits the internet brings.

"This ever-increasing demand includes help with everyday needs such as setting up email accounts, online

banking, setting up mobile phones, completing government forms, accessing e-government information, applying for Centrelink benefits, etc," ALIA said in its submission to the committee's inquiry into cybersafety for seniors.

ALIA said with more funding libraries could reach a wider group within the community and could provide services such as internet training for those who are housebound.

It has called for a comprehensive cybersafety plan for seniors similar to one the federal government launched in 2008 to educate young people about cybersafety.

"The same level of resources and support should also be available to senior Australians in order to prevent

their exploitation, increase their quality of life, and provide them with equal opportunity and access to online resources," ALIA said.

While seniors comprise the fastest growing demographic of online users, the committee has heard a large number of older Australians are still hesitant to go online.

Committee chair Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas) said the committee was looking to find the best ways to get reluctant seniors online safely and upskill competent users without overemphasising the risks.

"Older people who have never worked with computers or who have been retired for a long time can be very intimidated by the internet, or not see its utility," Senator Bilyk said.

ALIA said with a strong presence in most communities, libraries are in a unique position to provide a platform and resources to assist seniors with internet and cybersafety training.

"Public libraries and their partner state libraries offer an existing infrastructure, staff that are connected into their communities, existing local partnerships with seniors groups, and access to those who are socially isolated.

"Libraries are perceived as neutral spaces where people can go and get information and support without judgement. Libraries are trusted places, seen as civic and community spaces where you go to find out something you need to know.

"Communities respond well to initiatives conducted in their local area. Local initiatives are easily accessible, trusted and comfortable." •

LINKS

www.aph.gov.au/jsc
jsc@aph.gov.au
 (02) 6277 4202

To find out about the Australian parliament's international program
 visit: www.aph.gov.au/international