2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey

Comparison with 2006 Census and Survey Results

March 2023

Contents

Executive Summary

In the first half of 2022, the Victorian public library sector conducted a statewide survey and a statewide census of public library users. These were similar exercises to the survey and census taken as part of the landmark *Libraries Building Communities* research in 2006.

Although some of the questions in the survey and census had changed – recognising the changing mix of services – there were sufficient common or similar questions to gauge shifts in who uses public library services, the services they use and the benefits they derive.

This short report details the shifts between 2006 and 2022. Some findings were unsurprising: borrowing remains a core activity, while access to and use of digital collections has grown in line with technological advances. Yet it was interesting to find that the social value of libraries rated even higher in 2022 than in 2006, when responses were already encouraging. There were significant changes to 'social capital' indicators: more library users felt safe, welcomed and supported to find out what is going on in their community, and saw libraries as a hub for social connection.

Key findings

Comparison of the 2006 and 2022 results shows:
- a high degree of consistency in responses for some central aspects of library operations
  - borrowing from the collection is still the core of a public library
  - library staff continue to provide high levels of customer service
  - customer satisfaction with library services is still very high
- changes in access to and use of library services, in line with advancements in technology
  - growth in the use of digital collections
  - growth in the use of wi-fi services
- increased use of library programs and places as libraries (in the absence of alternative community infrastructure) have evolved to become vibrant community hubs and places of learning, connection and inclusion.

From 2006 to 2022:

Some things stayed the same

- **Visiting the library is a key part of the experience**: 93% of users access services by visiting the library (94% in 2006)
- **Use of children's services**: Stable at about a quarter of library users
- **Program attendance**: Steady at just over 20% of library users
- **Use of library printers and copiers**: Down slightly, from 33% to 28% of library users
- **High level of customer satisfaction**: Average customer satisfaction scores consistently around 8.6–8.7 out of 10
- **High levels of customer service**: Users continue to perceive staff as welcoming and professional
- **LOTE speakers underrepresented**: Percentage of library users who speak languages other than English still below the population average
- **Employment and household status**: Little change in employment profile of library users, other than small re-alignments linked to population trends

Some things changed

- **Ageing library user cohort**: % of library users aged 60 to 84 years up from 30% to 45%
- **Increased personal access to the internet**: 96% of library users now have access to the internet at home and/or via mobile (compared with 55% in 2006)
- **Alternative modes of access**: In addition to visiting the library, many people now access library services through websites and apps
- **Use of ebooks and digital collections**: 33% of library users download digital items, with some of this being a shift in format from the physical collection (eg books and magazines)
- **Use of wi-fi**: 24% of library users now access free library wi-fi on their own devices, rather than using library computers
- **Use of library 'as place'**: 41% of library users now visit the library to read, study or work
- **Engagement with library staff**: Staff freed from transactional desk duties can engage with users more productively
- **Greater contribution to social capital**: Significant increase in users' perceptions of the value of libraries as safe, welcoming hubs for community connections

By far the most significant change observed between 2006 and 2022 was in library users' perceptions of the contribution of public libraries to building social capital. The 2022 survey found that in five of the six areas where the same or similar social capital-related questions were asked in both surveys, the 2022 results significantly exceeded the 2006 results.

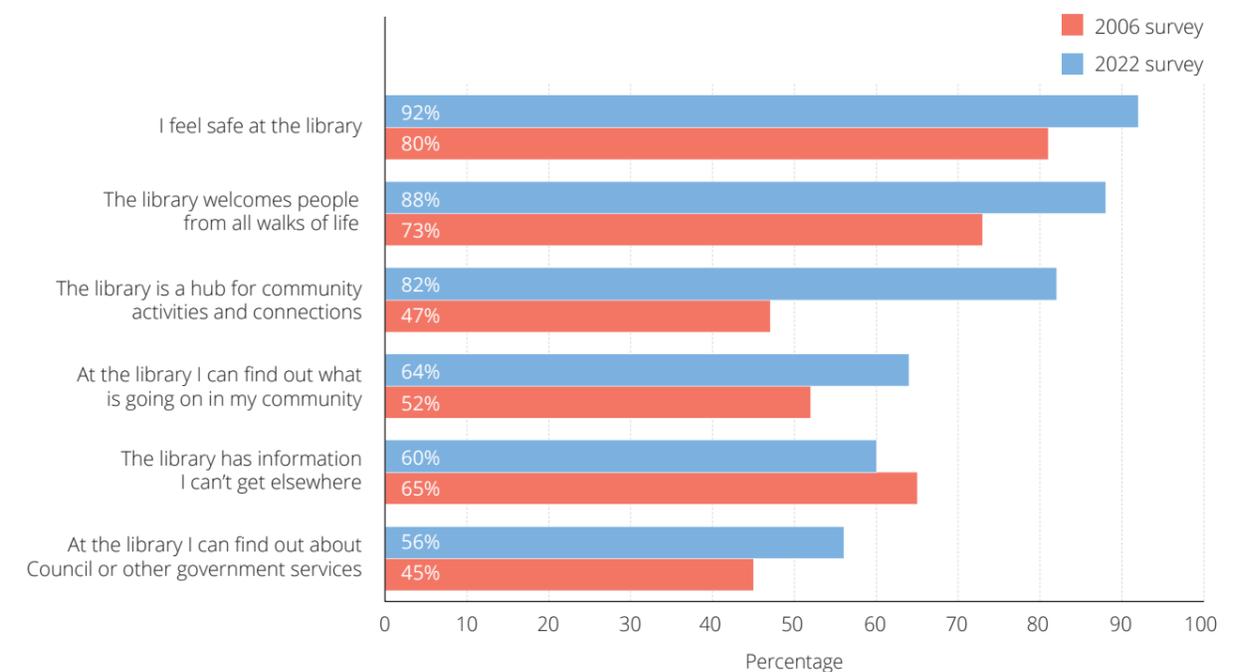In 2022, a greater proportion of respondents feel:

- safe at the library (+12% points)
- that libraries welcome people from all walks of life (+15% points)
- that they can find out what is going on in their community (+12% points)
- that they can find out about council or other government services (+11% points).

The most dramatic improvement relates to libraries' function as a social hub: in 2022, 82% believe that their library is a community hub and connecting place, up from 47% in 2006.

This reflects and endorses the deliberate transformation of Victorian public libraries over the past 16 years. Libraries have strived in this time to offer a wider range of resources, programs and spaces that appeal to different community cohorts. This has been especially important for people looking to connect with others and their community, for people looking for informal learning opportunities, and for vulnerable communities at risk of social or digital isolation.

At a time when communities are searching for stability and comfort, it is reassuring that libraries are seen as safe, welcoming environments embedded in their local community.

Do you agree with the following statements about your library? 2022 to 2006

Legend: 2006 survey, 2022 survey

Statement	2022 survey	2006 survey
I feel safe at the library	92%	80%
The library welcomes people from all walks of life	88%	73%
The library is a hub for community activities and connections	82%	47%
At the library I can find out what is going on in my community	64%	52%
The library has information I can't get elsewhere	60%	65%
At the library I can find out about Council or other government services	56%	45%

Percentage

The one question with a decline showed that fewer people think the library has information they cannot get elsewhere. Yet with the growth of the internet and information resources over the past 16 years, it is remarkable that the 2022 response only dropped by 5% points – perhaps indicating that the complementary role of librarians in facilitating access to information has not diminished over time.

In addition to these highlights, comparison of the 2006 and 2022 statewide library surveys and censuses reinforces the important role public libraries continue to play in providing resources, activities and spaces where individuals and community cohorts can read, learn, work and relax.

1

Introduction

Libraries Building Communities

In 2005, the State Library of Victoria (SLV) and Public Libraries Victoria (PLV) initiated the *Libraries Building Communities* (LBC) research. Over 10 years, from 2005 to 2014, LBC documented the social, economic and cultural impact of Victorian public libraries on their communities through a series of publications:

- *Libraries Building Communities: The vital contribution of Victoria's public libraries*, 2005
- *Connecting with the Community*, 2008
- *Dollars, Sense and Public Libraries: A study of the socio-economic value of Victorian public libraries*, 2011
- *Creative Communities: The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries*, 2014.

A key component of the original phase of LBC research was a Library User Census and Survey Project, conducted in 2006. The census and survey captured, for the first time, consistent user feedback from all public library services, providing both a rich body of information on library use and user attitudes to public libraries, and the opportunity for libraries to 'benchmark' their user profile and performance against one another. A total of 33,996 library users completed the short library census and 12,927 completed the more detailed library survey.

Many of the questions from the 2006 survey continue to be used today by library services across Victoria when undertaking local community research on service uptake and community satisfaction.

2022 Victorian Public Library Census and Survey

Since 2017, SLV and PLV (through the Statewide Public Library Development Program) have collaborated on the *Libraries Change Lives* advocacy campaign, through which the library sector and individual library services have demonstrated the value of public libraries to key stakeholders and communities.

In 2021, the public library sector's Advocate Program Workgroup sought to complement the *Libraries Change Lives* campaign by conducting a statewide census and survey of public library users, building on the 2006 research. The primary objective of the census/survey project was:

> *to design, deploy, analyse, and report on Victorian public library user demographics and viewpoints.*

Collectively, the statewide census and survey aimed to provide rich insights to the use and value of public libraries by collecting and recording data on:

- the volume and scope of current use of public libraries
- the importance of and satisfaction with public library services and resources
- the contribution of libraries to social capital
- user demographics.

Most importantly, this data would inform strategic planning at a local library service and statewide level, and contribute to advocacy to the State Government and other stakeholders about the importance of public libraries to their communities.

The statewide library survey and census were taken in March 2022 and May 2022 respectively, when the impact of COVID-related library restrictions was easing – but still being felt.

Comparison with 2006 census and survey results

The findings from the 2022 survey and census have been reported in separate publications. This report compares the findings from the 2022 survey (18,131 responses) with those from the original 2006 research (12,927 responses). It also compares the 2006 census results (33,996 responses) with those from the 2022 census (16,464 responses).

The provision of library services has changed significantly over the past 16 years, with:

- growth of digital collections
- greater use of library computers that shifted to use of library wi-fi on personal devices
- greater focus on community programming that supports social inclusion, digital inclusion, reading and literacy for all, and individual and community health and wellbeing.

A key question for this report was: to what extent would these changes be evident in data about use of public libraries and attitudes towards them?

Table 1 correlates the 2 sets of survey results to show where identical or similar questions were used to capture information on:

- library user demographics
- access to library services
- use of library services
- satisfaction with library services
- contribution of library services to social capital.

Table 2 correlates the 2 sets of census questions, showing where they overlap.

Table 1: Correlating survey questions

Survey question	2006	2022
Demographics		
Gender	Q25	Q20
Age	Q26	Q21
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin	Q29	Q22
Language spoken at home	Q30	Q23
Household status	Q27	Q24
Country of birth	Q28	-
Highest level of education	Q31	-
Current educational institution	Q32	-
Employment status	Q33	Q25
Occupational status	Q34	-
Family income (different tax ranges in 2006 and 2022)	Q35	Q26
Internet access	Q36	Q27
Suburb/town	Q37	Q28
Access		
Main library used	Q2	Q1
Invitation to complete survey	-	Q2
Library membership	-	Q3
Access to library services	Q1	Q4
Length of library use	Q3	-
Frequency of use	Q4	Q5
Travel to library	Q5	Q6
Come to the library with others	Q6	Q7
Number of children brought to the library	Q7	-
Age of children brought to the library	Q8	-
Use		
Use of children's services	Q9	Q8, Q9, Q10
Benefits of children's services	Q10	-
Use of collections	Q11	Q8
Use of programs and places	Q11	Q9
Use of technology services	Q11	Q10
Other library services	Q12	-

Survey question	2006	2022
Satisfaction		
Customer satisfaction	Q13	Q11
Importance of library services	Q11	Q12
Library performance – General	Q14	Q13
Library performance – Staff	Q15	Q14
Areas of dissatisfaction	Q16	-
Improvement to library	Q17	Q18
Social capital		
Engagement at the library	Q18	-
Contribution to social capital	Q19	Q15
Impact of library use	Q20	-
Importance of library to self, family and community	-	Q16
Most like about the library	Q23	Q17
Value of library to the community	Q24	Q17
Other		
Recommendation of the library	Q21	-
Volunteering at the library	Q22	-
Use of State Library of Victoria	-	Q19

Table 2: Correlating census questions

Census question	2006	2022
Library visited on Census Day	Q1	Q1
Library use	Q2	Q2
Come to the library with others	Q8	Q3
Frequency of use	-	Q4
Library membership	-	Q5
Gender	Q3	Q6
Age	Q4	Q7
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin	Q7	Q8
Language spoken at home	Q6	Q9
Customer satisfaction	-	Q10
Household status	Q5	-

The following sections use tables to show variations in responses to the same or similar questions. Where the distribution of the 2022 responses varies by more than 5% points from the 2006 results, the difference has been marked in bold – **green** if 5% points more, **red** if 5% points less. (The green/red colouring is *not* intended to indicate better or worse outcomes. It simply highlights differences that are then examined in the commentary.)

2

Survey – Library user demographics

The 2006 and 2022 surveys had 7 common demographic questions that captured information on respondents':

- gender
- age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status
- language spoken at home
- household status
- employment status
- access to the internet.

Gender

Library surveys consistently show that the majority of library users are female, with the ratio of females to males varying from about 1.5:1 to 3:1. This is influenced by females being more likely to bring preschool and school-age children to the library during the week, and older women being more likely to be recreational readers than older men. The 2022 survey had a higher proportion of female respondents than the original 2006 survey – 74% compared to 68%. This increase could reflect a change in library usage over the past 16 years (for example, due to an ageing population), or could be the result of females having a greater propensity to respond to online surveys than males.

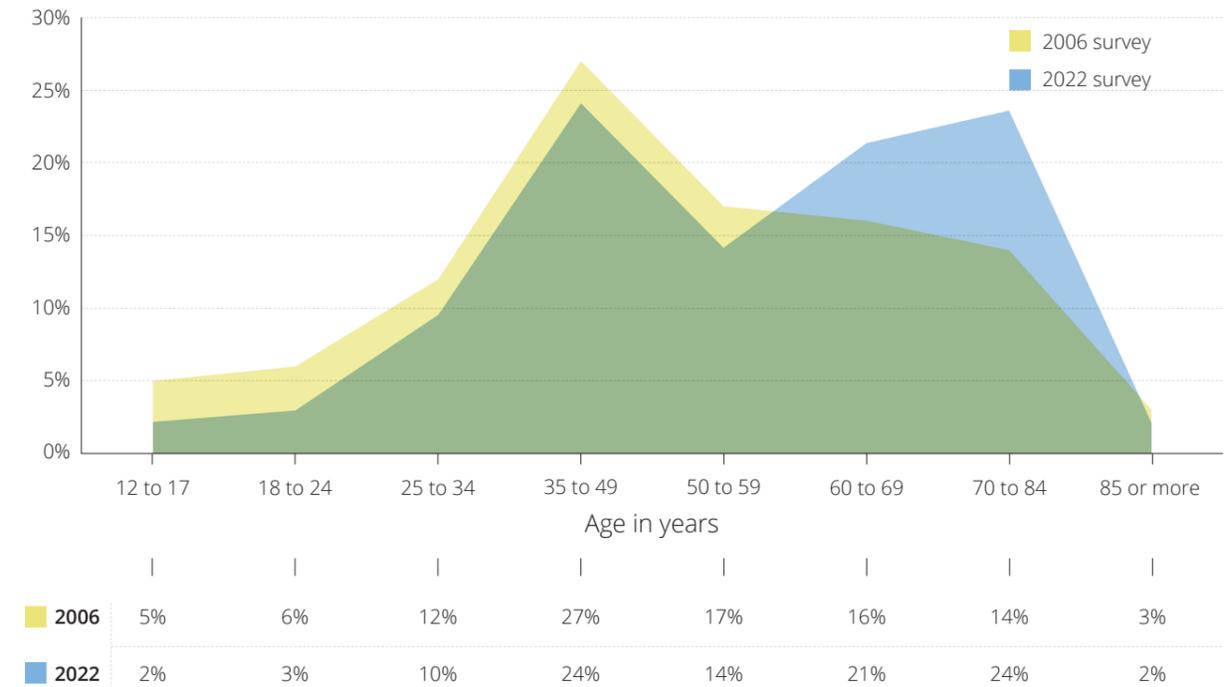| What is your gender?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Female	68.0%	74.0%	+6.0%
Male	32.0%	24.0%	-8.0%
Other gender identity		0.7%	
I would prefer not to say		2.1%	

Age

Based on survey responses, the age profile of library users shifted between 2006 and 2022. The more recent survey found lower proportions of library users in all age groups below 60 years, and higher proportions of library users in the 60 to 84-year age brackets – up from 30% of all library users in 2006 to 45% in 2022.

The drop in the lower age brackets was about 2 to 3% points in each age range. The 60 to 69-year age group ('empty nesters' and retirees) now represents 21% of library users, up from 16% in 2006, while the largest increase was seen for seniors 70 to 84 years. This may in part reflect a generally ageing population, libraries retaining a loyal cohort and not attracting newer, younger users, or be the result of library programming being targeted at and engaging older persons who have more free time and may access activities that support social inclusion.

What is your age? *	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
12 to 17 years	5%	2%	-3%
18 to 24 years	6%	3%	-3%
25 to 34 years	12%	10%	-2%
35 to 49 years	27%	24%	-3%
50 to 59 years	17%	14%	-3%
60 to 69 years	16%	21%	+5%
70 to 84 years	14%	24%	**+10%**
85 years or more	3%	2%	-1%

 * The 2006 survey used different age categories to the 2022 survey. To enable comparison, the 2006 responses have been mapped to the 2022 categories.

Shifts in library users by age group – 2006 vs 2022

	12 to 17	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 84	85 or more
2006	5%	6%	12%	27%	17%	16%	14%	3%
2022	2%	3%	10%	24%	14%	21%	24%	2%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Across all Victorian library services, 0.9% of 2022 survey respondents identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This was consistent with the 0.8% reported in the 2006 survey, and approaching the 1% of Victorians (66,000) who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 ABS census.

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Yes	0.8%	0.9%	+0.1%
No	99.2%	99.1%	-0.1%

Language spoken at home

Language diversity has increased in Victoria since 2006. Yet the survey results suggest library use has not shifted to reflect this. The 2006 ABS census found that 74% of Victorians spoke English only, while 26% spoke languages other than English at home. By 2021, the ABS census showed one-third of Victorians spoke other languages at home. However, the proportion of respondents to the library survey who speak languages other than English at home has not changed between 2006 and 2022 (19% for both surveys).

Do you speak a language other than English at home?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
No – English only	81.0%	81.0%	+0.5%
Yes – Mandarin	3.7%	2.1%	-0.5%
Yes – Cantonese		1.1%	
Yes – Italian	2.3%	1.4%	-0.9%
Yes – Vietnamese	1.7%	1.1%	-0.6%
Yes – Greek	1.1%	1.0%	-0.1%
Yes – Spanish	0.8%	0.8%	-
Yes – French	0.8%	0.8%	-
Yes – Hindi	0.6%	0.7%	+0.1%
Yes – Arabic	0.7%	0.7%	-
Yes – German	0.8%	0.7%	-0.1%
Yes – Other	6.6%	8.2%	+1.6%

This may indicate that libraries are not engaging successfully with newer cohorts of Victorians, through collections, programs and services in diverse languages to ensure library usage reflects our diverse population. It may also be influenced by the mechanism used to engage library users with the survey (email and/or electronic messaging), which may not reach diverse communities as well as in-library survey recruitment.

Notably, a larger proportion of respondents indicated that they speak a language outside the 10 most common languages at home, with 8.2% choosing 'other' compared to 6.6% in 2006. This likely reflects broader population shifts as new migrant groups settle in Victoria.

Household status

The profile of library users by household status showed little change from 2006 to 2022, with the same proportions of children under 15 years, of single people and of sole parents. The only change of note in the surveys was the reduction in the proportion of library users who are dependent students aged 15 to 24 years (down from 6% to 2% of total). This was offset by an increase in the proportion of library users who are part of a couple without dependents (most likely older couples).

Which of the following best describes you?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Child under 15 years	3.0%	3.0%	-
Dependent student 15 to 24 years	6.0%	3.0%	-3.0%
Single person	29.0%	29.0%	-
Member of a couple with dependents	35.0%	33.0%	-2.0%
Member of a couple without dependents	24.0%	28.0%	+4.0%
Sole parent with dependents	3.0%	3.0%	-
Yes – Arabic	0.7%	0.7%	-
Yes – German	0.8%	0.7%	-0.1%
Yes – Other	6.6%	8.2%	+1.6%

Employment status

Similarly, the surveys indicated only subtle changes between 2006 and 2022 in the distribution of library users by employment status. The shifts that did exceed +/- 1% in the 2022 results all correspond with broader socio-economic and population changes since 2006, such as the increased proportion of retirees, reduced unemployment and casualisation of the workforce, which has drawn (previously) stay-at-home parents into the labour force in part-time employment.

What is your current employment status?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Full-time employment	19%	20%	+1%
Part-time/casual employment	19%	23%	+4%
Self-employed	6%	5%	-1%
Jobseeker/unemployed	6%	2%	-4%
Retired	30%	36%	+6%
Home duties or carer	12%	6%	-6%
Student	5%	4%	-1%
Disability pensioner		2%	
Other – please specify	3%	2%	-1%

Internet access

The wide digital divide that existed in 2006 has narrowed as more people now have personal access to the internet – at home (81%) or via a mobile device (55%). In 2022, only 4% of library users reported not having access to the internet at home, compared with 26% in 2006. Today's digital divide is now driven by factors related to affordability (for example, whether you can afford a mobile phone data plan) and digital ability (whether you have the skills and confidence to use technology effectively).

| Do you have access to the internet apart from at the library?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
No	26%	4%	-22%
Yes – at home	56%	81%	+25%
Yes – on a mobile device		55%	+55%
Yes – at work	23%	25%	+2%
Yes – at school, TAFE or university	9%	5%	-4%
Yes – at an internet cafe	3%		
Yes – other	3%	1%	-2%

3

Survey – access to library services

The 2006 and 2022 surveys had 4 common questions that captured information about how people access library services. These covered:

- method of access
- frequency of library use
- travel to the library
- whether a person visited by themselves or with others.

Method of access

The overwhelming majority of respondents still visit their local library to access library services. Of course, this is not the only way people access collections and services – but for more than 90% of library users, going to the library remains an integral part of their library experience.

The 2006 survey shows that for many, visiting the library was the only way they accessed library services. By 2022, 54% said they accessed services through library websites (up from 23%) and 26% said they accessed services through library apps.
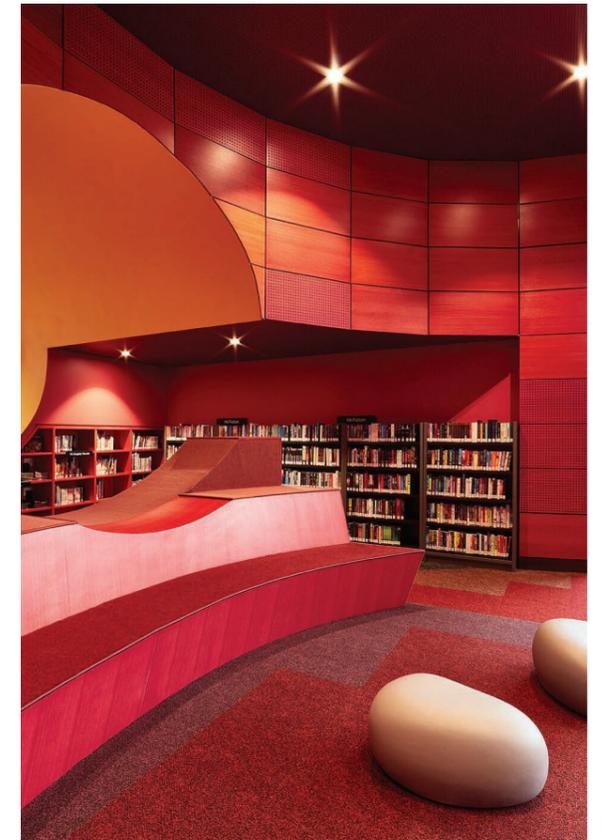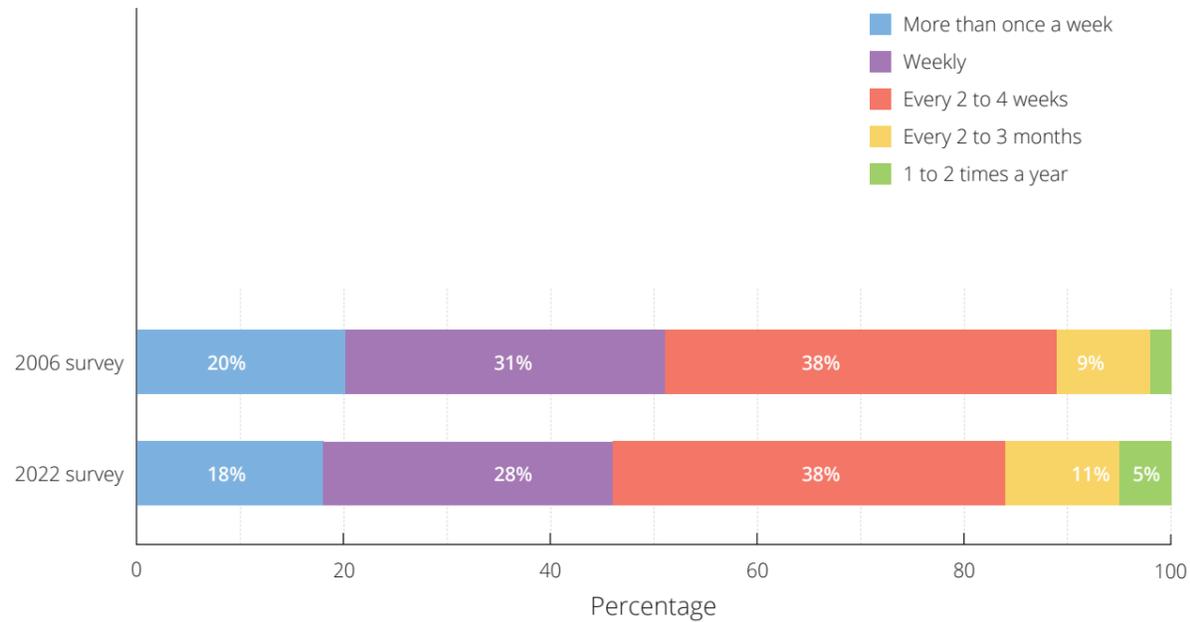

How do you access public library services?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
By visiting a library	94%	93%	-1%
Through the library website	23%	54%	**+31%**
Through the library app		26%	**+26%**
Through the mobile library	5%	3%	-2%
Through the home library service or other outreach service	2%	2%	-
Third-party app		2%	+2%
Other	1%	3%	+2%

Frequency of library use

The 2022 survey suggests a subtle shift in the frequency of library use: the proportion of library users who access library services at least weekly fell from 51% in 2006 to 46% in 2022. This has been offset by a greater proportion of library users who have more infrequent library use. For example, engaged users who visit up to 4 or 5 times a year.

Library users by frequency of use – 2006 vs 2022

Legend:
- More than once a week
- Weekly
- Every 2 to 4 weeks
- Every 2 to 3 months
- 1 to 2 times a year

	More than once a week	Weekly	Every 2 to 4 weeks	Every 2 to 3 months	1 to 2 times a year
2006 survey	20%	31%	38%	9%	
2022 survey	18%	28%	38%	11%	5%

Percentage (x-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

The change in distribution of responses related to frequency of library use could be the result of:

- a loss of regular library users (for example, people who used to come to the library every day to read the newspaper who now access news and information online at home)
- a sliding shift in frequency of use, meaning that some people who used the library multiple times a week have shifted to once a week, while others have gone from weekly to fortnightly, and so on
- attraction of new 'occasional' library users who use the library up to 4 to 5 times a year (for example, to attend special interest programs or do photocopying) as regular borrowers (who might come to the library every 3 to 4 weeks) decline.

Travel to the library

The 2006 and 2022 statewide library surveys asked respondents how they usually travel to the library. However, while the 2022 survey allowed respondents to identify only one 'main' method of travel, the 2006 survey allowed respondents to choose more than one option if relevant. Therefore, the following data is not directly comparable, with the 2006 percentages expected to be, on average, greater than those from 2022.

That said, the distribution of responses in the 2006 and 2022 surveys are broadly similar, with the most significant feature a reduction in the proportion of people who walk to the library. This is consistent with:

- a general decline in the proportion of people who walk as a mode of transport
- increased populations in outer Melbourne who (unlike their inner-city counterparts) have to travel 2 to 4 km to their nearest library and usually use their car (as they do to access retail, health, education and other services)
- an ageing library user population who may have mobility challenges.

How do you usually travel to the library?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Car/motorcycle	73%	68%	-5%
Walk	36%	21%	**-15%**
Bicycle	6%	3%	**-3%**
Public transport	9%	5%	-4%
Mobility scooter/wheelchair		0%	
Other	2%	3%	+1%

* Multiple responses were allowed in the 2006 survey.

'Come to the library with others'

The 2006 survey found that 72% of library users usually come to the library on their own. In 2022, this proportion had increased slightly to 76%. The proportion of library users who usually bring children to the library also increased slightly, from 24% in 2006 to 26% in 2022. The proportion who usually come to the library with a spouse or partner dropped from 18% in 2006 to 13% in 2022.

Who do you usually come to the library with?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
By myself	72%	76%	+4%
Children – Preschool		13%	**2022 total = 26%**
Children – Primary school	24%	14%	
Children – Secondary school		5%	+2%
Spouse or partner	18%	13%	-5%
Friends	6%	6%	-
Parents	5%	2%	-3%
Other	2%	4%	+2%

* Multiple responses were allowed in the 2006 survey and the 2022 survey. (Hence, for example, 2022 the tally for people visiting with children totalling 26%: some parents would bring children in more than one age category.)

4

Survey – use of library services

The 2006 and 2022 library surveys captured information on library use in slightly different ways. In 2006, respondents were given lists of library services and asked to identify which ones they used, their satisfaction with those services and the importance of those services to them. The 2022 survey simply presented lists of library services (collections, activities, technology) and asked respondents if they had accessed/used those services in the last year.

In addition, while the lists of library services and activities in the 2 surveys were fairly similar, they were not identical due to slight variations in language and descriptors, grouping of some services, and changes in the service offering (for example, there was no Libraries Victoria app in 2006).

The table below has matched library services where the descriptors were close enough to allow for meaningful comparison of responses. All the main activities undertaken at public libraries are included in the table.

In the last year, have you done any of the following things at/through the library?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Collections			
Borrow books or magazines	92%	82%	**-10%**
Borrow DVDs or music	60%	30%	**-30%**
Download an ebook, e-audiobook or other digital item (e.g. e-magazine, video streaming)		33%	**+33%**
Borrow children's books or DVDs	27%	28%	+1%
Use library resources to look up information (e.g. catalogue, reference material)	23%	27%	+4%
Activities and spaces			
Ask the library staff for help	46%	60%	**+14%**
Bring children to use the library	26%	25%	-1%
Bring children to participate in a library program or event	11%	15%	+4%
Read a book, magazine or newspaper in the library		31%	2022 total
Use the library as a place to do homework or study	24%	14%	= 41%
Use the library as a place to work		12%	**+17%**
Catch up with someone or just pass time at the library		25%	
Attend book clubs, reading groups, writers' workshops, language and literacy programs, cultural events, exhibitions, lectures or special events	21%		+1%
Participate in a library program to learn something or develop a new skill OR for entertainment or social connection		22%	
Use meeting rooms/Use library as a place for a meeting	6%	8%	+2%

In the last year, have you done any of the following things at/through the library?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Technology access			
Use the library computers for school, study or work		15%	2022 total
Use the library computers for leisure or entertainment		10%	= 23%
Use the library computers to access government services or complete forms	37%	9%	**-14%**
Use the library computers for job-seeking		3%	
Use the library wi-fi		24%	**+24%**
Print, photocopy or scan	33%	28%	-5%
Use the library website/app to check what's on at the library	33%	31%	-2%
Use the Libraries Victoria app or other library app		14%	**+14%**

Library services with significant change in use from 2006 to 2022 (changes expressed as % points)

Borrow books or magazines	-10%
Borrow DVDs or music	-30%
*Download ebook or other digital item	33%
Ask library staff for help	14%
Read, study or work in the library	17%
Use library computers	-14%
*Use the library wi-fi	24%
Use Libraries Victoria / other app	14%

Percentage of survey respondents - change expressed as % points
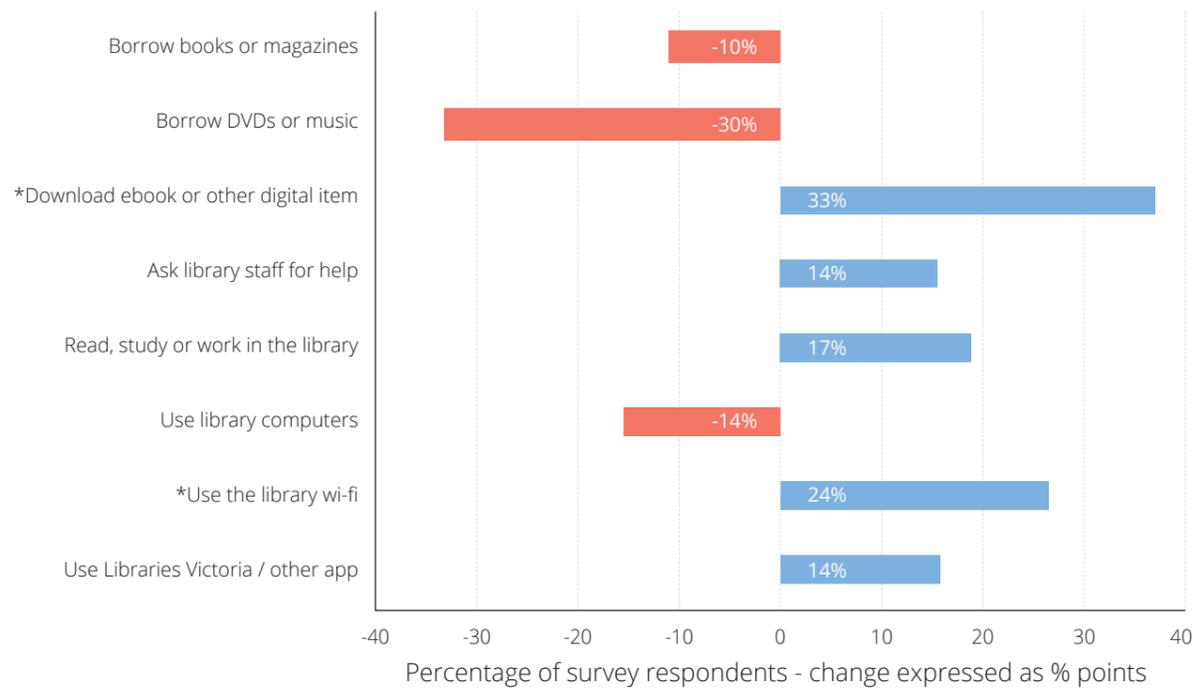
* New services – not available or limited availability in 2006.

Use of library collections and services has changed in several distinct ways over the past 16 years. Notably, the survey data indicates:

- **shifts in collection format**, with fewer people borrowing physical books and magazines (-10% points) or DVDs and CDs (-30% points), and the introduction of ebooks, digital resources and streaming services, which are now used by 33% of library users
- **increased engagement with library staff**, with more library users asking for help in finding information, selecting reading material, accessing technology, etc. (from 46% in 2006 to 60% in 2022) – aided by the introduction of self-service stations and library staff spending more time 'out on the floor' and less time behind a desk
- **increased use of library 'as place'**, where people use the library as a place to read (31%), study (14%) or work (12%) – collectively 41% of library users do one or more of these activities in 2022, compared with 24% in 2006

- **shifts in mode of access to technology**. A small proportion of library users access library computers (down from 37% to 23%) and 24% now access free library wi-fi on their own devices. In addition, 14% of library users in 2022 access information, services or collections through the Libraries Victoria app or other library apps.

Each of these findings is consistent with the known and deliberate evolution of Victorian libraries over the past 16 years.

The survey data also highlights how use of some services has changed very little since 2006. For example:

- use of children's collections and services has held steady at about a quarter of library users
- attendance at library programs has held steady at about 22% of library users
- use of the library as a place to print, copy or scan has dropped only slightly, from 33% to 28% of library users.
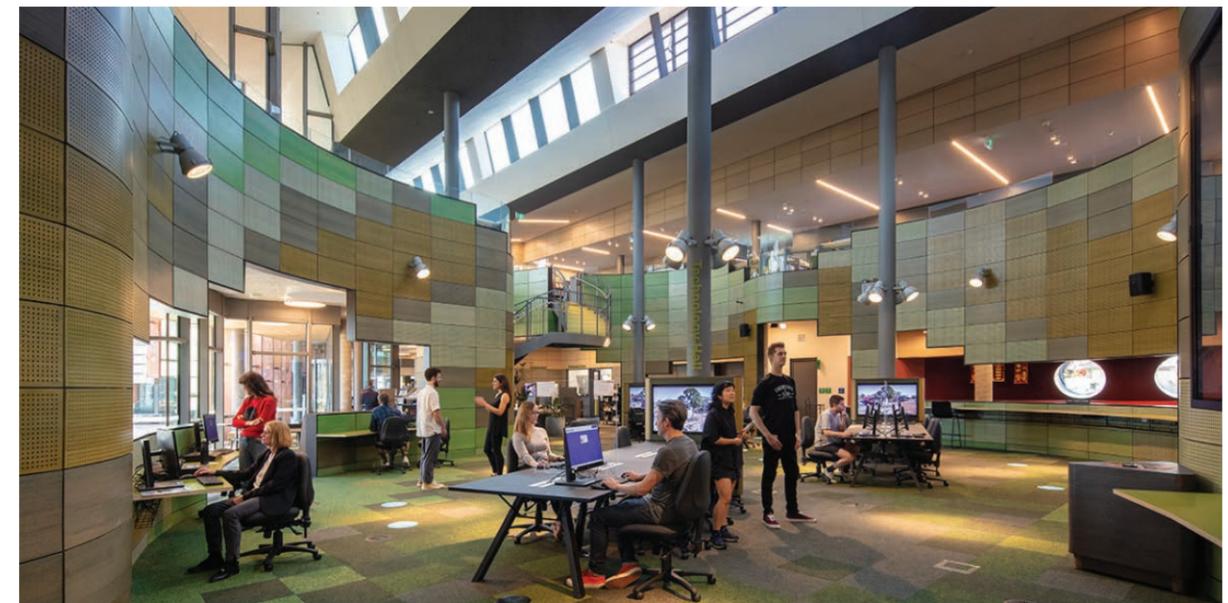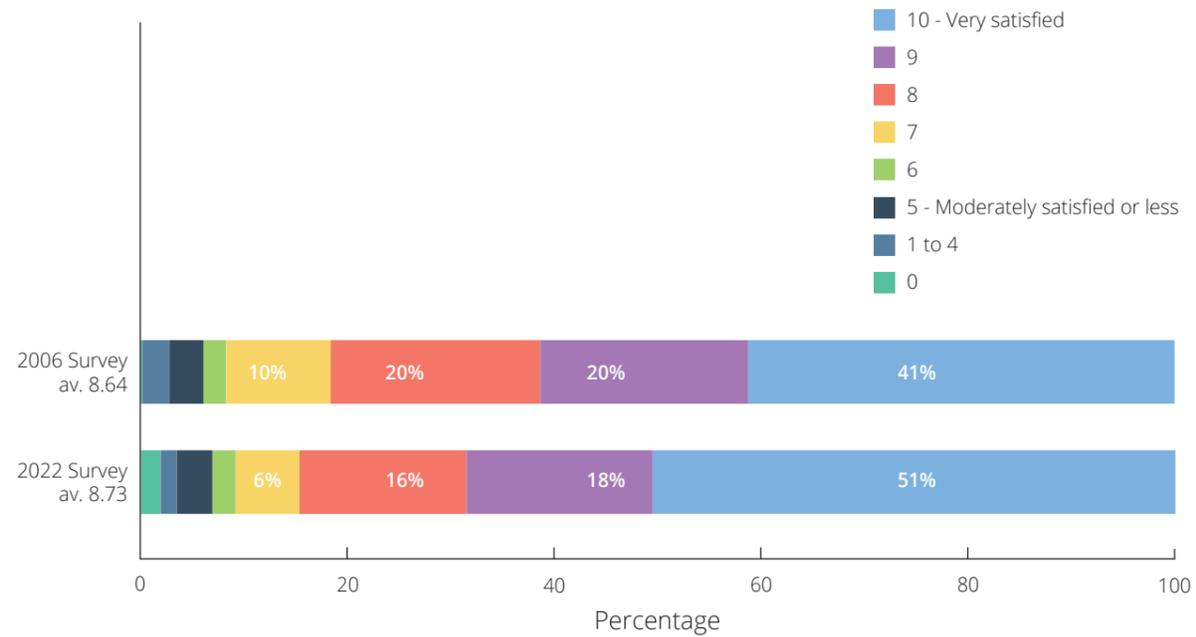
5

Survey – satisfaction with library services

Customer satisfaction

Surveys of public library users consistently show very high levels of customer satisfaction with the services they receive at their library. This was demonstrated in the original 2006 *Libraries Building Communities* survey, and again in the 2022 survey. In fact, the overall library satisfaction rating increased from a high 8.64 in 2006 to 8.73 in 2022.

The most notable shift was that an extra 9% points of library users rated their library at 10 out of 10 (up from 42% to 51%). This was somewhat offset by corresponding decreases in ratings from 7 to 9 (down from 50% to 40%).

Overall, how satisfied are you with the services of your library?	2006*	2022	Difference (points/ % points)
Average score (out of 10)	8.64	8.73	+0.09
0	0%	2%	+2%
1	0%	0%	-
2	1%	1%	-
3	1%	0%	-1%
4	1%	0%	-1%
5	3%	4%	+1%
6	2%	2%	-
7	10%	6%	-4%
8	20%	16%	-4%
9	20%	18%	-2%
10	42%	51%	+9%

Customer satisfaction ratings (out of 10) – 2006 vs 2022

Legend:
- 10 - Very satisfied
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5 - Moderately satisfied or less
- 1 to 4
- 0

2006 Survey av. 8.64: 10% | 20% | 20% | 41%

2022 Survey av. 8.73: 6% | 16% | 18% | 51%

X-axis: Percentage (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

* The 2006 survey used a scale from 1 ('not satisfied') to 5 ('very satisfied'). To enable comparison, the 2006 responses have been mapped to the 2022 categories.

The other notable change in customer satisfaction ratings from 2006 to 2022 was the proportion of library users who in 2022 gave the library a '0 out of 10'. Most of these responses can be linked directly to negative feedback and a high level of dissatisfaction with not being able to access public libraries in March 2022, due to Victorian Government mandates on COVID vaccination status. If these one-off responses were excluded from calculations, it is estimated that the overall 2022 satisfaction rating would have been as high as 8.88 out of 10.

General library performance

The library survey asked respondents to rate the performance of their library in several key areas on a scale from 1 ('very poor') to 5 ('excellent'). The 2022 ratings show that overall, people are very satisfied with the way their library performs, with average scores ranging from 4.17 to 4.50 out of 5. Results indicate that people find their libraries responsive and accessible, and feel that the services and facilities they provide are easy to find and use.

How well do you think the library performs on the following? (average score out of 5)	2006	2022	Difference
Responding to users' requests	4.50	4.50	-
Availability and ease of finding books and information	4.29	4.37	+0.08
Look and feel of the library building	4.15	4.36	+0.21
Opening hours	4.18	4.28	+0.10
Ease of using the library website	4.19	4.17	-0.02

The 2022 ratings for library responsiveness and ease of using library websites were almost identical to those reported in the 2006 survey. The ratings on access to collections and satisfaction with library opening hours were also close – about 0.1 points higher in 2022 than in 2006.

The one marked change over this period was in how people perceived the 'look and feel of the library building': the average performance rating jumped from 4.15 out of 5 to 4.36 out of 5, an increase of 0.21 points.

While this response will in part be attributable to recent developments of new and outstanding library buildings in many local government areas across Victoria, it also reflects:

- the library sector's greater effort in providing library spaces, layouts, furniture and settings that appeal to different user cohorts (for example, dedicated children's spaces, spaces for young adults, quiet study zones and casual reading areas)
- a reduced physical collection footprint (aided by growth in digital collections), which has freed up library space and contributed to more open-plan layouts with greater visual appeal than long rows of high bookshelves (which were more common in 2006), in turn facilitating greater use of public libraries 'as place' for those who read, study, work or relax in the library.

Library staff performance

Similarly, survey respondents in both 2006 and 2022 were asked to rate the performance of library staff on a scale from 1 ('very poor') to 5 ('excellent') in terms of their customer service and professionalism. The ratings for staff were even higher than those for general library performance, with average scores mostly at or above 4.5 out of 5. Furthermore, the 2022 scores were also very close to the 2006 scores, indicating that satisfaction with library staff performance has been and remains very high.

How well do you think library staff perform on the following? (average score out of 5)	2006	2022	Difference
Being knowledgeable and professional (competent)	4.62	4.66	+0.04
Being welcoming and friendly (courteous and helpful)	4.67	4.64	-0.03
Going out of their way to be of help	4.47	4.54	+0.07
Improving my use of library services	4.26	4.47	+0.21
Provide useful assistance	4.62	-	

* 2022 respondents scored on a scale from 1 ('very poor') to 5 ('excellent'). 2006 respondents had an 'agreement' scale that has been mapped to the 2022 categories.

The one significant shift in performance ratings was again an increase: library staff are now seen as being even more responsive in terms of assisting library users to improve and increase their use of library services. This probably reflects the fact that public libraries in 2022 offer a wider range of services to customers than they did in 2006 (such as more programs, greater technology access and support), and that library staff are better able to support customers, as they are more likely to be stationed on the library floor and not behind a circulation or reference desk.

Importance of library services

Finally, the 2006 and 2022 library surveys asked respondents how important different services were to their library experience. Although the questions in each survey were framed slightly differently, and canvassed some different options, it is possible to make some comparison of the results.

Library users in both surveys believe that the most important role of the library is providing access to collections and educational resources and support. These core library functions were both highly rated in 2006, but were seen as even more important in 2022 – especially the library's role in supporting educational outcomes.

If you use this service, how important is your library in ... (% 'very important'/'important'/'high importance')*	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
Providing access to books, magazines, DVDs and other resources	87%	93%	+6%
Providing access to educational resources and support	69%	80%	+11%
Providing access to computers and wi-fi	64%	62%	-2%
Providing somewhere to study or work	56%	60%	+4%
Helping you use computers and wi-fi	60%	51%	-9%
Helping you to access (online) government services and complete forms	47%	47%	-

* The ways in which the 2006 and 2022 surveys asked respondents to rate the importance of a range of library services (Q11 in 2006, Q12 in 2022) were slightly different. That is, the 2006 survey only asked respondents who had used a particular service to rate its importance, whereas the 2022 survey asked this question of all respondents. The table above adjusts the published 2022 ratings to exclude people who said this service was 'not applicable' to them (thereby providing a level of consistency with the 2006 approach).

Two areas saw drops in perceived importance. Respondents in 2022 placed less importance on libraries' role in:

- providing access to computers and wi-fi, which is likely to be linked to more people having home or mobile access to computers and the internet
- helping library users to use computers and wi-fi. Although still seen as important by 51% of respondents, this probably reflects the growing proportion of the population and of library users who were 'born digital' – that is, who have grown up with technology being an integral part of their everyday life.

6

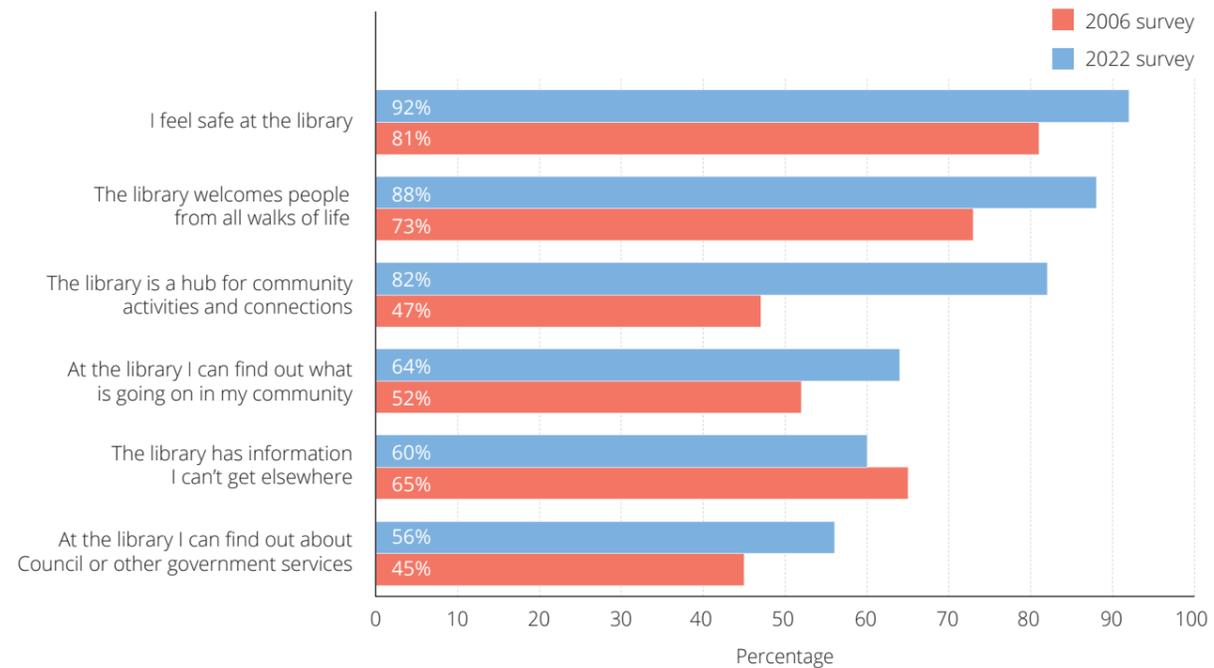# Survey – contribution of library services to social capital

One of the primary objectives of the original Libraries Building Communities research was to look beyond the services libraries provided and understand the extent to which public libraries have the capacity to build social capital, community connections and community resilience. Consequently, the 2006 survey asked respondents whether they agreed with a series of statements about the importance of their library to them and their community.

The 2006 results showed that a high proportion of library users felt that their library had a reputation for being a safe place in the community (81%) and that it attracted people from all walks of life (73%). These were, at the time, very encouraging results.

Do you agree with the following statements about your library?	2006	2022	Difference (% points)
I feel safe at the library	81%	92%	+11%
The library welcomes people from all walks of life	73%	88%	+15%
The library is a hub for community activities and connections	47%	82%	+35%
At the library I can find out what is going on in my community	52%	64%	+12%
The library has information I can't get elsewhere	65%	60%	-5%
At the library I can find out about council or other government services	45%	56%	+11%
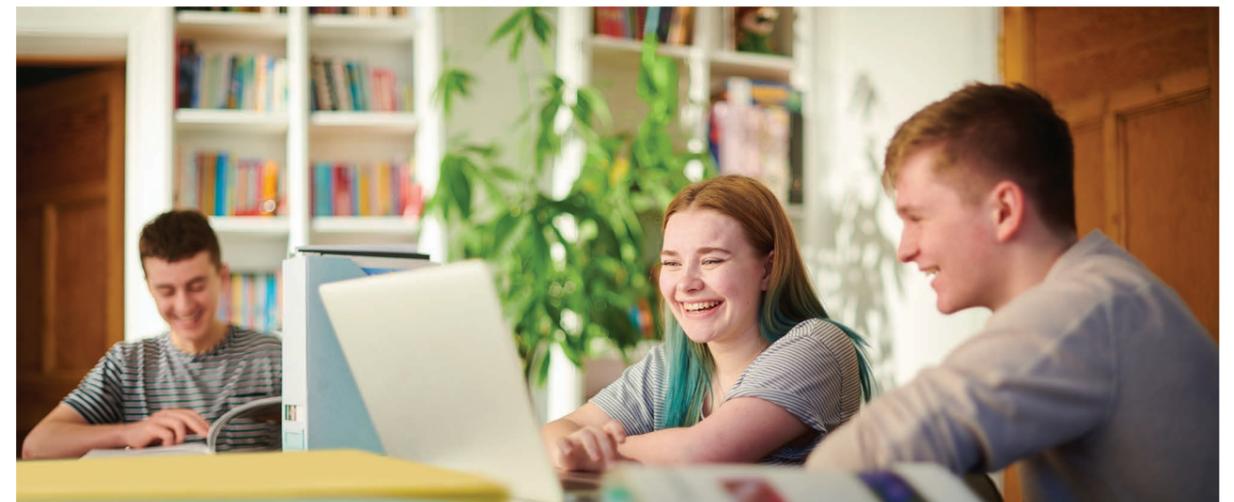
Do you agree with the following statements about your library? 2006 vs 2022

Legend:
- 2006 survey
- 2022 survey

Statement	2022	2006
I feel safe at the library	92%	81%
The library welcomes people from all walks of life	88%	73%
The library is a hub for community activities and connections	82%	47%
At the library I can find out what is going on in my community	64%	52%
The library has information I can't get elsewhere	60%	65%
At the library I can find out about Council or other government services	56%	45%

Percentage (x-axis: 0 to 100)

The 2022 survey exceeds the 2006 results in 5 of the 6 areas where the same or similar social capital questions were asked – improving on already positive results.

In 2022, a greater proportion of 2022 respondents feel:

- safe at the library (+11% points)
- that libraries welcome people from all walks of life (+15% points)
- that they can find out what is going on in their community (+12% points)
- that they can find out about council or other government services (+11% points).

The most significant change in this group of questions is the increase in library users who believe that their library is a hub for community connections: 82% agreed with this in 2022, compared with 47% in 2006.

This shift is testament to Victorian public libraries striving to offer more resources, programs and spaces to appeal to different groups – in particular, to those looking to connect with others or for informal learning, as well as to people from vulnerable communities at risk of digital and social isolation.

There was one question in this group where the 2022 results showed a decline. In 2006, 65% of respondents said that the library had information they could not get elsewhere, compared to 60% in 2022. Yet with the exponential growth of the internet and information resources over the past 16 years, it is perhaps remarkable that the 2022 response dropped by only 5% points. This could suggest that the complementary role of librarians in facilitating access to information has not diminished.

7

Census – library user demographics

The 2006 and 2022 library censuses were both short-form data collection exercises targeted at people as they left their library on Census Day. Designed to be completed in 1 to 2 minutes, the census forms captured only a small amount of information on customer demographics and library use. The intention was to track who actually visited the library on a single day to more accurately reflect the demographic and use profile of library users than the survey (where there was potentially a self-selection bias, as library users opted into the survey).

Both censuses asked 4 common questions on library user demographics related to gender, age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and language spoken at home.

Gender

The gender profile of library users did not change significantly from 2006 to 2022, with two-thirds of respondents female and one-third male. Some of the slight variation between the 2 sets of results is due to the extra gender response options offered in the 2022 census.

What is your gender?	2006	2022	Difference
Female	68.0%	65.0%	-3.0%
Male	32.0%	33.0%	+1.0%
Other gender identity	-	0.6%	-
I would prefer not to say	-	0.6%	-

Analysis of the 2022 census data used estimation techniques to determine the demographic profile of everyone who attended Victorian public libraries on Census Day, including those whose presence at the library was noted in the census form of another person who reported coming to the library with other people. For example, parents bringing children to the library completed only a single form that recorded their details, not those of the children in the group. The overall profile of library users on 2022 Census Day is reported in a separate report. For the purposes of like versus like comparison, the data below matches actual survey response data from 2022 and 2006 – that is, the data provided by the library customers who completed the census form.
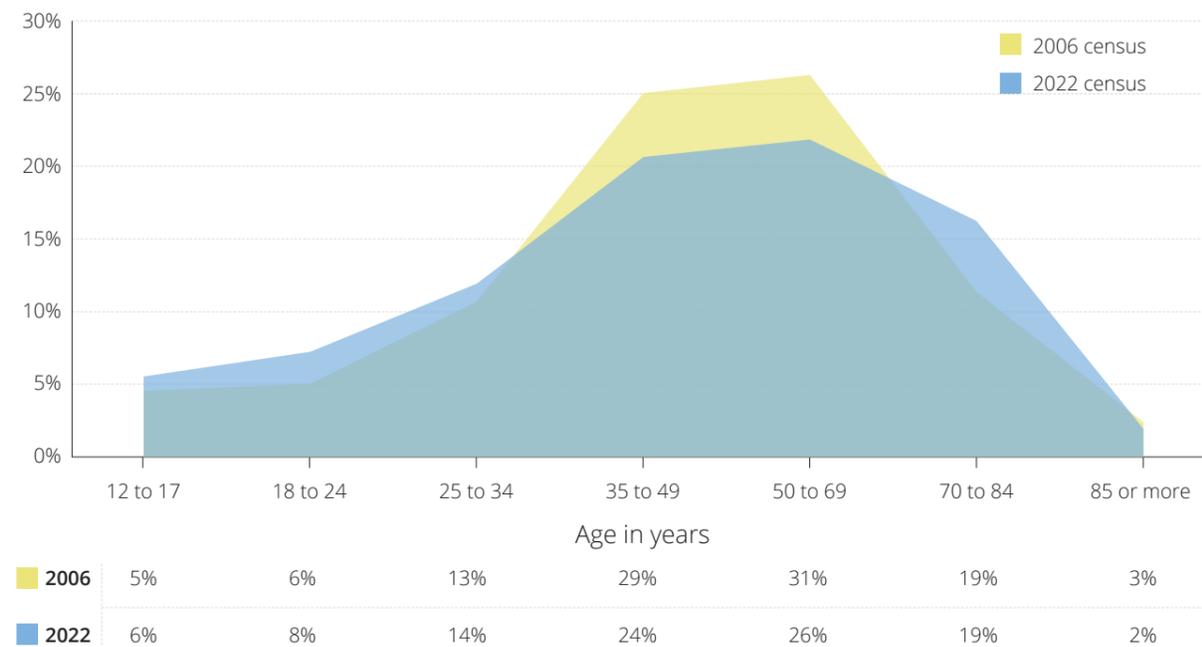
Age

According to the library census data, there has been a flattening of the age distribution of library users between 2006 and 2022. In 2006, it was estimated 60% of library users were aged between 35 and 69 years, with 24% aged under 35 and 16% aged 70 years or more. The 2022 census found that only 50% of library users were in the central 35 to 69-year age groups, with a slightly higher proportion aged under 35 years (28%) and a clearly higher proportion (21%) aged 70 years or more.

What is your age? *	2006	2022	Difference
12 to 17 years	5%	6%	+1%
18 to 24 years	6%	8%	+2%
25 to 34 years	13%	14%	+1%
35 to 49 years	29%	24%	-5%
50 to 69 years	31%	26%	-5%
70 to 84 years	13%	19%	**+6%**
85 years or more	3%	2%	-1%

* The 2006 survey used different age categories to the 2022 survey. To enable comparison the 2006 responses have been mapped to the 2022 categories.

Library users by age group – 2006 vs 2022

	12 to 17	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 69	70 to 84	85 or more
2006	5%	6%	13%	29%	31%	19%	3%
2022	6%	8%	14%	24%	26%	19%	2%

The ageing of the library population at the top end is consistent with what was found in comparison of the 2006 and 2022 library surveys (see Section 2). What the 2022 census data also shows is that some of that flattening of the profile is also accounted for in the younger age groups, potentially through a higher proportion of late secondary and tertiary students using their local library as a convenient place to study (see Section 8).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Just as the comparison of the 2006 and 2022 survey results found, the proportion of library users identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin remained steady, with only a small increase from 1% to 1.1%.

| Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?	2006	2022	Difference
Yes	1.0%	1.1%	+0.1%
No	99.0%	99.0%	-

Language spoken at home

The library census is likely to provide a more accurate reflection than the corresponding survey of the distribution of library users by language spoken at home. This is because some people whose first language is not English may have chosen not to complete the online survey (even though print copies were available in libraries in 5 main community languages). The much simpler census form could be completed on leaving the library, and in some libraries was administered with a library staff member or volunteer asking the questions.

Do you speak a language other than English at home?	2006	2022	Difference
No – English only	81.0%	69.0%	**-12.0%**
Yes – Mandarin		4.6%	
Yes – Cantonese	4.9%	1.7%	+1.4%
Yes – Vietnamese	2.6%	2.3%	-0.3%
Yes – Italian	2.7%	1.7%	-1.0%
Yes – Arabic	1.2%	1.5%	+0.3%
Yes – Greek	1.8%	1.2%	-0.6%
Yes – Hindi	0.6%	1.2%	+0.6%
Yes – Spanish	0.9%	0.8%	-0.1%
Yes – Other	5.0%	16.0%	**+11.0%**

Library users who speak a language other than English at home, compared to Victorian population
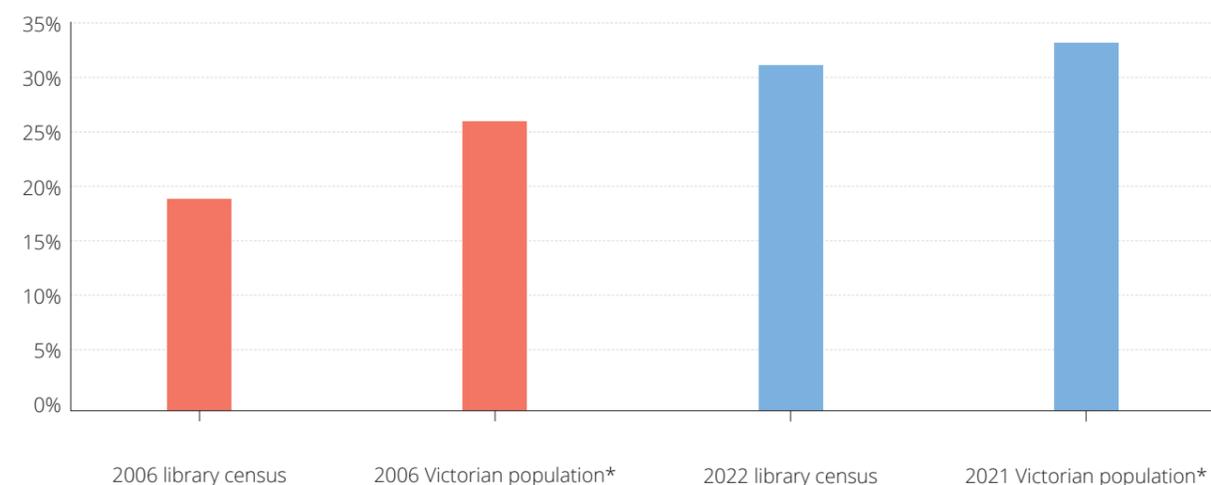
* ABS Census figures

The 2022 library census data indicates that the library user population, in terms of language spoken at home, more closely resembles the diversity of the Victorian community than it did in 2006. The 2022 census found that 31% of library users spoke languages other than English at home, just below the whole-of-Victoria average of 33%. This gap of 2% points was considerably less than the 7% point gap reported in 2006.

The non-English language groups of library users with the largest increases over the past 16 years included Mandarin and Cantonese (+1.4%), Hindi (+0.6%), Arabic (+0.3%) and 'other language' (up from 5% to 16% of library users). The main decreases are in library users who speak Greek and Italian. These trends are consistent with broader trends for the Victorian population (based on ABS census data for 2006 and 2021).

|	Change (in % points) of population	
Language spoken at home	Library census 2006 vs 2022	Victorian population ABS: 2006 vs 2021
English only	-12.0%	**-7.0%**
Mandarin / Cantonese	+1.4%	+2.0%
Hindi	+0.6%	+0.6%
Arabic	+0.3%	+0.3%
Spanish	-0.1%	+0.2%
Vietnamese	-0.3%	+0.3%
Greek	-0.6%	-0.8%
Italian	-1.0%	-1.3%
Other	+11.0%	**+6.1%**

8

Census – library access and use

The 2006 and 2022 library censuses each had 2 questions about access to and use of library services.

The first asked people who were visiting the library whether they came by themselves or with others. Both censuses produced identical results: in both 2006 and 2022, 62% of library users attended alone and 38% came with one or more other people. The 2022 census also asked how many other people came to the library with the respondent: 25% came with one other (most commonly a child or partner), 8% came with 2 others (typically children or friends) and 5% came with 3 or more other people (again, children or a friend group).

Did you come to the library with other persons?	2006*	2022*	Difference (% points)
By myself	62%	62%	-
With others	38%	38%	-

The census questions about library use varied, with the 2006 census asking the person's 'main reasons for using the library' and the 2022 version asking what the person 'did at this library today'. With multiple responses allowed in both questions, the 2006 question provided for a wider scope of response, as it did not restrict the range of options to what happened on Census Day.

Consequently, where 93% of 2006 library users said they borrowed books or other resources from the library, only 53% of 2022 customers said they would be borrowing a book, DVD or other item on that day. Therefore, the 2006 *census* data below has been compared with the 2022 *survey* responses, as these questions were more closely aligned.
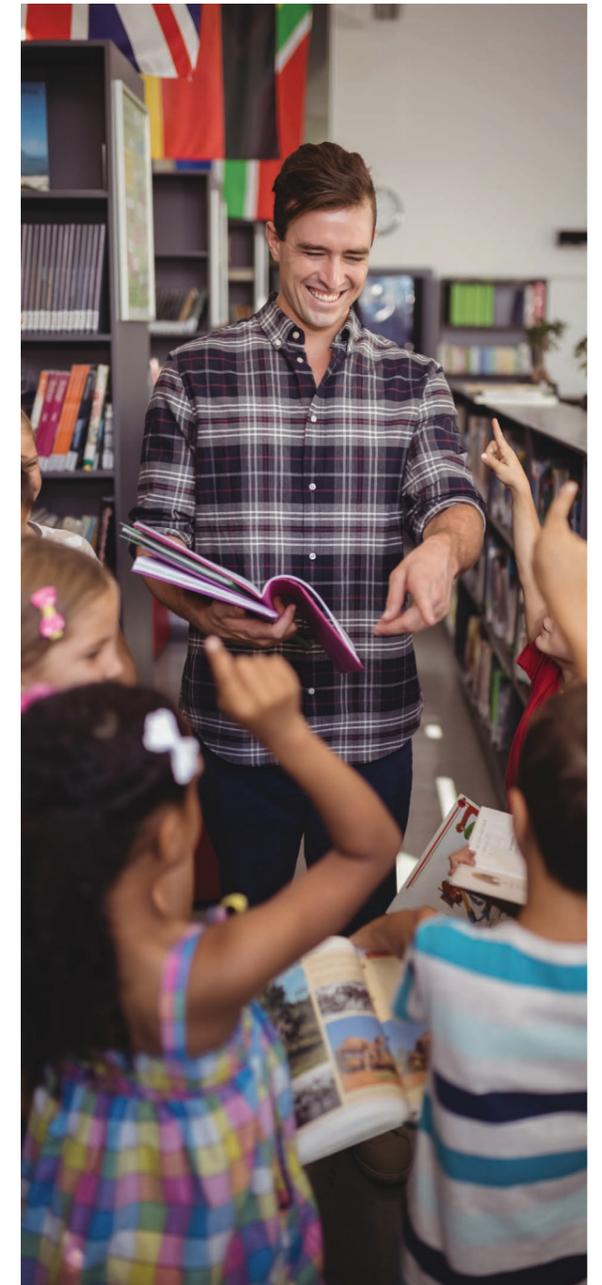
The data highlights the changing role of libraries over the past 16 years. The collection is still the core of a public library, and by far the most common reason for people using a library is to borrow books, DVDs or other resources. But the proportion of library users who borrow collection items has decreased over time, down from 93% to 82%. This drop is likely to have come from a combination of:

- a reduction in the proportion of the population who are recreational readers
- introduction of streaming services, which people use for recreation
- a reduction in people using library resources to find information, as they now have ready access to the internet and online information resources
- an increase in the proportion of people using the library for non-borrowing purposes.

This second point is evident in the library census data, which shows that 24% of library users now come to the library to use the free wi-fi (a service that only became popular from about 2007), in part as a substitute for physical reference and information collections. The third point can also be seen in the significant increase in the proportion of library users who use the library as a place to read, study or work (+17% points), use children's services (+11% points) or attend library programs and events (+11% points).

What is your main reason for using the library? (multiple responses allowed)	2006 census	2022 survey	Difference (% points)
Borrow books or other resources	93%	82%	-11%
Use computers/internet	21%	PCs 21%	-
		wi-fi 24%	+24%
Use as a place to read, study or work	17%	34%	+17%
Use children's services or activities	14%	25%	+11%
Attend activities or special events	6%	17%	+11%

In summary, the 2022 census data highlights the changing profile of library use in-line with the evolution of public libraries to give their communities a wider and more diverse service offering.

Acknowledgements and Contact Information

Project Team

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