Impact of the 2021 COVID-19 lockdown on NSW public libraries

Report of a survey into how library services adapted to lockdown

State Library of NSW
November 2021

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NEW SOUTH WALES

This survey was conducted by the State Library of NSW to examine the effects of 2021 COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on library operations, staffing, programs and services.

This report is a companion piece to the survey and report conducted in 2020 in partnership with Library Consultancy 641 DI, *NSW Public Libraries - the COVID-19 response: report of a survey into how library services adapted to a pandemic*.

Cover image courtesy of Sutherland Shire Libraries: Click & Collect service at Engadine Library, October 2021

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COVID-19 LOCKDOWN TIMELINE: June – August 2021

16 June	First confirmed case in NSW of the COVID-19 Delta variant
18 June	Return of masks on public transport in Greater Sydney
23 June	Social distancing restrictions announced for residents of Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour. Residents of six LGAs not permitted to leave the Sydney metropolitan area, except for essential purposes.
25 June	Lockdown in eastern suburbs (Waverley, Randwick, Woollahra, and City of Sydney). Residents allowed to leave home for four reasons: food or other services; travel for work or education if you can't from home; exercise; or medical or caring reasons.
26 June	Lockdown extended to all Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour.
9 July	First extension to lockdown. Social distancing restrictions tightened further. Victoria closes its border to NSW on July 11.
17 July	Construction shut down. Movement restrictions for residents of "areas of concern" in Western Sydney. Most workers in those areas not permitted to leave those areas for work. Non-essential retail moves to click and collect only, and takeaway for food services.
21 July	Short lockdown announced for Orange City Council, Blayney Shire Council, and Cabonne Shire Council areas of the Central West of NSW.
23 July	The Premier declares a "national emergency" and appeals to the National Cabinet for other states to divert Pfizer vaccines to NSW. Queensland closes its border to NSW.
31 July	Construction returns with health restrictions.
5 August	Stay-at-home orders issued for Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens and Singleton.
8 August	12 suburbs in the City of Penrith LGA identified as areas of concern.
9 August	Tamworth, Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, City of Lismore and Richmond Valley Council LGAs enter lockdown.
11 August	Dubbo, Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett and Warren LGAs locked down.
14 August	All NSW residents under lockdown. Operation Stay at Home announced for Greater Sydney. Restrictions on leaving Greater Sydney tightened. Residents required to obtain a permit to leave the region.
20 August	Lockdown extended until the end of September. Masks made mandatory outdoors. Curfew imposed on residents in areas of concern.
26 August	Roadmap of freedoms for fully vaccinated adults announced. Regional NSW lockdown extended.
31 August	Total number of cases since 16 June reached 21,208 with 100 deaths. There were numerous anti-lockdown protests across the state.

Sources: NSW Government; NSW Health; Wikipedia

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries in NSW have continued to adapt and innovate in response to the challenges that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In June 2021, a rapid escalation in community transmission of COVID-19 resulted in the lockdown of Greater Sydney (as well as the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour) with a state-wide lockdown following in August. In response, the State Library of NSW conducted a survey of NSW public libraries to collect information about the effects of COVID-19 restrictions on library operations, staffing, programs and services. The survey was run in August 2021, when all NSW public libraries were closed to the public. Respondents were asked to complete a short survey about the impact of lockdown and /or restrictions on their organisation.

The survey findings show that libraries moved swiftly to adapt their services to the change in circumstances, with many libraries drawing upon their experience during the 2020 lockdown. Overall, most libraries felt that they were better prepared to deal with the library closures in 2021 in comparison to the March 2020 closures and were able to confidently transition their services and programs. However, the prolonged length of the lockdown period presented challenges including providing meaningful work for staff.

Respondents identified key gaps that were difficult to fill during the period, such as reaching people who aren't online, providing access to technology, and supporting school students learning from home. They also identified risks relating to public health, staff resourcing, and service provision. The heightened risk of disease transmission of the Delta variant and tighter health restrictions presented new or different risks for many libraries in comparison to 2020. These risks resulted in more staff working from home in 2021 and suspension of home library delivery services.

The survey results show the impact of the tighter health restrictions on facilitating access to physical collections. During the 2020 closures, many libraries had developed successful click and collect' services which they were keen to reintroduce. However, due to the stricter stay-at-home conditions in 2021, particularly in 'areas of concern', this was not permitted under the public health order at the time of the survey and was identified as a source of frustration for library staff. An exemption was sought by the State Library of NSW and was granted by the Minister for Health on 13 September - after the survey period.

Although the lockdown proved to be a challenging time for library staff, the experience also highlighted their resilience and the appreciation received from their local communities.

> *The team have been incredibly resilient. They have been 100% focused on the community - calling all our older members and staying connected with them. Being an LGA of concern has been a challenge to understand the different restrictions in place and to support the community during this time. Overall, I think the team have used what they have learnt from the 2020 lockdown and put it in place this year. It's been a challenge, but their resilience has shone through. I'm very proud to be working with them.*

This report is a companion piece to the survey and report conducted in 2020 in partnership with Library Consultancy 641 DI, *NSW Public Libraries - the COVID-19 response: report of a survey into how library services adapted to a pandemic*.

Survey methodology

An online survey was distributed to all public library managers across NSW. The survey covered the period 25 June – 28 August 2021 and contained a mix of multiple choice, open-ended and ratings questions.

There were 79 valid responses from a broad cross section of library services which provided a good representation of libraries from within the Greater Sydney area and from across regional NSW.

As the local government areas (LGAs) of the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour were included in the lockdown restrictions imposed on Greater Sydney, they have been included with the results for Greater Sydney in this report.

The distribution of survey responses was as follows:

- 26 libraries from Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour

- 53 libraries from regional NSW (other than the locations listed above).

SURVEY FINDINGS

Library closures

Q2. When did your library close to the public?

Q3. Please enter dates of any previous closure/re-opening during this period if applicable.

The first confirmed case of the Delta variant outbreak was reported on 16 June in Sydney's eastern suburbs. Over the next week the number of cases acquired in the community grew, with outbreaks spreading from Sydney's east to the outer suburbs. As the situation worsened the NSW government reintroduced the wearing of masks on public transport on 22 June and a raft of social distancing restrictions on 23 June such as caps on household visitors, masks in all indoor spaces and the reintroduction of the 1 person per 4sqm rule for all indoor venues.

On 25 June a lockdown was announced for four Sydney LGAs (Waverley, Randwick, Woollahra and City of Sydney). The following day the lockdown area in NSW was expanded to cover all Greater Sydney, the Blue Mountains, Central Coast and Wollongong. The initial lockdown was for two weeks until 9 July but was extended on several occasions.

Of the libraries who responded to the survey (n=79) six libraries closed on 25 June, with the 21 remaining Greater Sydney[1] libraries closed to the public between 26-28 June.
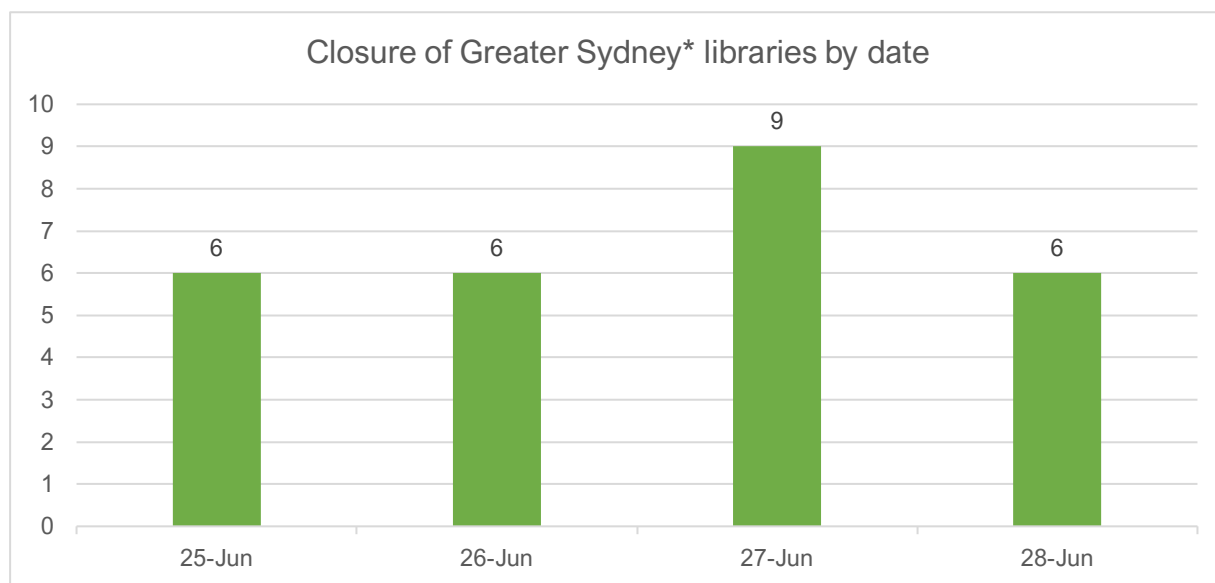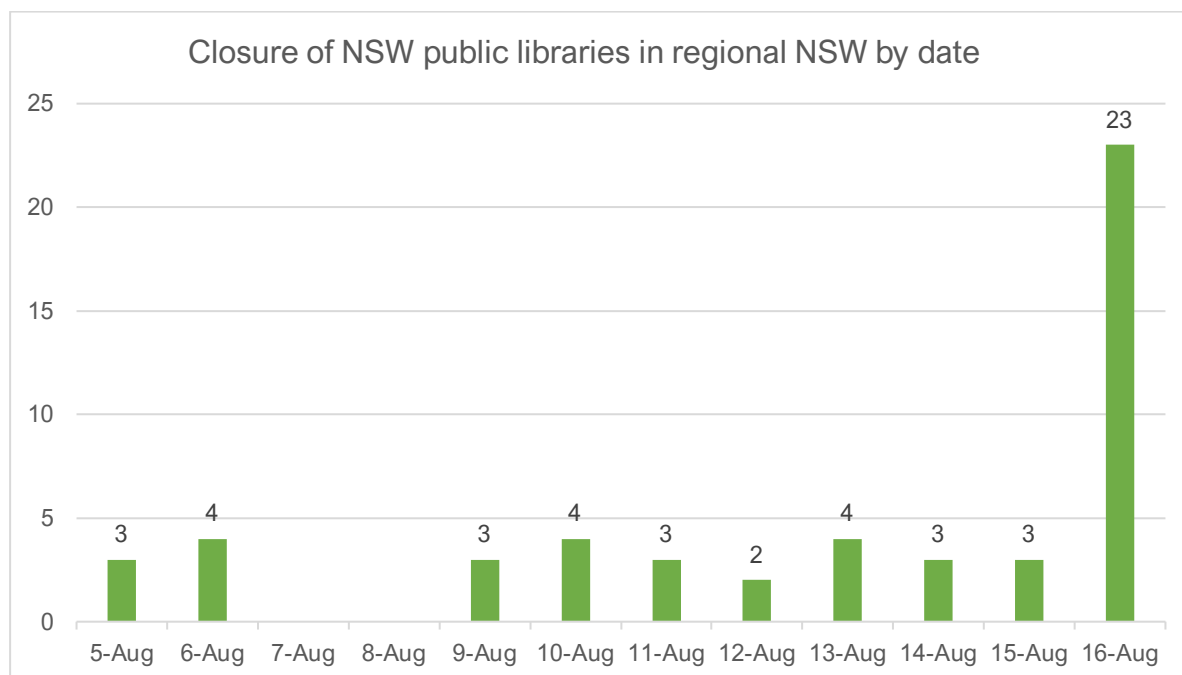

*includes libraries in Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour.

Most libraries in regional NSW remained open throughout June and July, with closures limited to areas with localised lockdowns. In early August this situation changed as COVID-19 cases spread from Greater Sydney to regional and remote communities. On 5 August Newcastle and the Hunter region went into lockdown, followed by Tamworth, Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, City of Lismore and Richmond Valley Council LGAs on the NSW North Coast on 9 August. Stay-at-home orders were introduced in Dubbo, Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett and Warren LGAs on 11 August. Due to these lockdowns, 23 of the respondent libraries closed to the public between 5-13 August.

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[1] Also includes libraries located in the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour.

On 14 August the whole of regional NSW went into lockdown for an initial seven-day period, which was later extended. The remaining 29 respondent libraries closed between 14-16 August.

Closure of NSW public libraries in regional NSW by date

Date	Count
5-Aug	3
6-Aug	4
7-Aug	
8-Aug	
9-Aug	3
10-Aug	4
11-Aug	3
12-Aug	2
13-Aug	4
14-Aug	3
15-Aug	3
16-Aug	23

Managing community/staff response to the pandemic

Q4. How did your library manage community/staff response to the pandemic prior to closure?

With the number of COVID-19 cases in the community climbing daily, there was a heightened sense of anxiety in the community and amongst staff in the period prior to lockdown.

> *There was a lot of fear and general negativity around the pandemic prior to closure, both in the wider community and amongst library staff.*

> *There was nervousness as cases were being reported in venues close to libraries.*

In the lead up to the lockdowns in both Greater Sydney and later across regional NSW, library management reported implementing several changes based on daily advice from NSW Health. Since their reopening in June 2020 all libraries had been following the mandatory COVID safety plan for information and education facilities[2] and implementing safety measures such as physical distancing, venue capacities and restrictions on activities (e.g. singing) as directed.

> *We have kept all other aspects of social distancing since the 2020 closure - our new normal.*

When health advice changed, for example to reintroduce the wearing of masks in indoor public spaces and the mandatory use of QR codes to check in to venues, library staff worked to communicate this to their community.

> *Adherence to COVID safety plans in line with public health orders. Appropriate signage. Discussions with team members re key messaging and responses re mask wearing, social distancing, program delivery.*

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[2] https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/business/safety-plans/information-education-facilities

Some libraries provided additional measures such as providing hand sanitiser, using people counters to ensure compliance with capacity limits, and cancelling or limiting programming.

Many libraries reported the planning and preparation for staff to work offsite, with some libraries preparing their staff to work from home for the first time.

We started preparing plans such as split team rosters, testing tech from home, reviewing/refining home delivery processes, etc. This gave everyone comfort that we were prepared and ready for the lockdown if it was to happen.

However, with the announcements of both lockdowns occurring on the weekend, some libraries were caught off guard and without enough time to prepare.

No prior information was available as the lockdown happened when the library had closed for the day.

There was no opportunity, lockdown with 3 hours' notice.

We were only given 2.5 hours' notice unfortunately - it was announced on Twitter and the ABC news on Saturday afternoon. This meant that we told the people in the library and messaged the community with social media. Staff were rung at home because it was a Saturday afternoon and only 3 people were onsite before we heard the news.

Communication with the community about library closures was achieved via a variety of methods with most libraries reporting a mix of online (website, email, enewsletters and social media), media release to local media, announcements on community radio and print signage and posters on library buildings. Communication with staff was via phone call, email and in-person.

Preparedness

Q5. How prepared was your library for this lockdown period?

On average, most libraries felt that they were reasonably well prepared.[3] At one end of the scale, around 8.9% of respondent libraries stated that they believed they were highly prepared, whilst at the other end, only 2.5% stated that they felt they were not prepared at all for the lockdown.

Some libraries were able to use their experience in 2020 to assist them in planning and delivering services.

My team used the experience from the previous lockdown to make a smooth transition into this lockdown.

The library knew what to expect if a lockdown was announced and had been discussing different scenarios for a few weeks prior.

We have maintained a constant awareness of developing situations, and had some scenarios planned.

Staff in regional areas had the experience of their counterparts in Greater Sydney to draw upon.

We had been expecting the shut down and had already discussed procedures that we would follow in our staff meetings so everyone, and everything was prepared.

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[3] Weighted average across all responses was 7.14

We thought it might be coming but living in a regional area with no cases, weren't entirely sure when/if it would happen to us.

Although libraries were prepared for the lockdown, the length of the lockdown period presented challenges for some libraries to provide meaningful work for staff.

During the lockdown in 2020 staff who could work from home were able to work from home, but the majority of staff continued to work from the library. When working from the library it was easier to find collection work for staff to do. When it became apparent that the lockdown was going to be long and that staff needed projects to complete from home a new list of tasks was needed.

While the process of closing the library was straight forward, providing customer service staff with meaningful work has proved challenging

[We] were not prepared for the length of the current lockdown period

Comparison to March 2020 lockdown period

Q6. How would you rate your preparedness in comparison to the March 2020 lockdown?

On average most libraries felt that they were more prepared to deal with the library closures in 2021 in comparison to the March 2020 closures.[4] At one end of the scale, around 28.2% of libraries stated that they were more prepared, with 7.7% stating that their preparedness was about the same as the previous closure.

Because we knew what to do, staff were more confident in their approach to tasks - also, because we had been discussing a possible lockdown, staff were more mentally prepared.

Having experience doing this in the past we were confident in how to manage the closure

We had our experience of March 2020 to guide us - for example, daily house bound deliveries instead of weekly - much more manageable; acquisition of the council pool car - we knew what we were going to do, and what we needed to make it happen, so it all went seamlessly.

We were able to put things into place quickly, because we had done it before and had procedures to hand.

At the other end of the scale only 2.6% stated that they felt they were not as prepared.

We were not prepared at all for this lockdown.

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[4] Weighted average across all responses was 7.97

Business continuity plans and their effectiveness

Q7. Did your library have a business continuity plan?

Q8. Please rate the effectiveness of your business continuity plan in responding to COVID-19.

Just over half of library services surveyed (55.7%) reported having a business continuity plan in some form prior to the lockdown. However, 31.7% of libraries reported that they do not have a business continuity plan and 12.7% were unaware or responded that they didn't know if they had a plan.

Most libraries commented that they were included in a council wide plan. Many of those libraries who do not have a formal business continuity plan did report having guidelines to follow.

> *Not as such. We have agreed services and programs that we continue to provide during restrictions, but no formal BCP.*

> *We don't have a formal plan in writing but do have a verbal plan and a workplan for all staff.*

Over 70% of libraries with a business continuity plan rated them as effective, with 6.6% rating their plan as highly effective. At the other end of the scale, 4.9% of libraries rated their plan as not at all effective.[5]

> *The BCP provided a scaffold/ roadmap to manage the changing nature of a pandemic outbreak and the impact on your operations.*

Several libraries commented that their plans did not cover a pandemic or needed to be updated.

> *Needs a new section devoted to pandemics.*

> *Needed to include statement re pandemics last year and needs reviewing again.*

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[5] Weighted average across all responses was 6.43
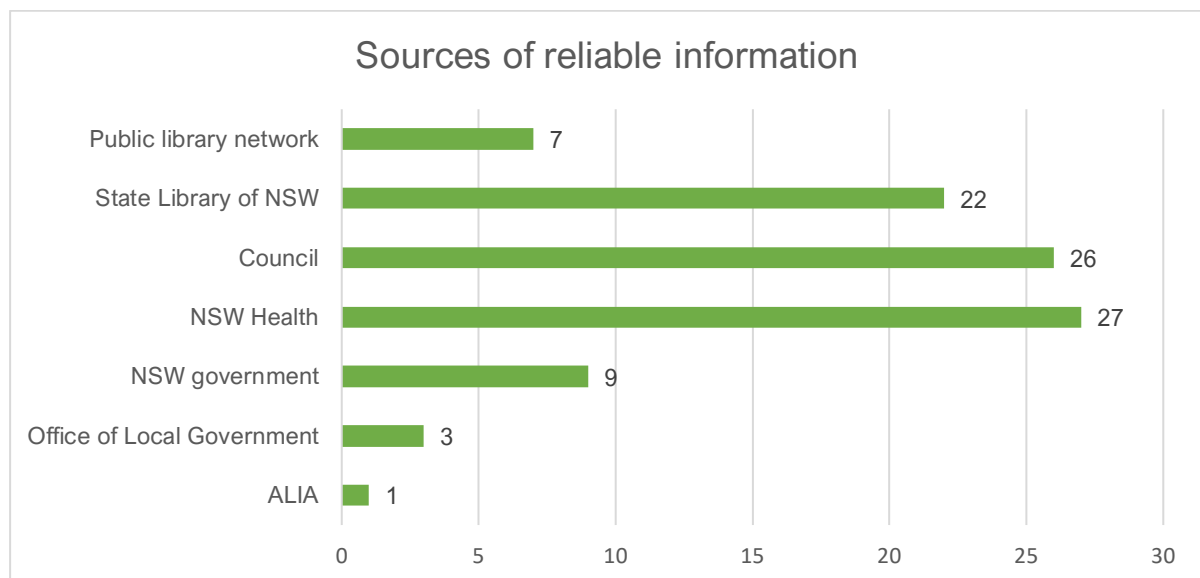
Sourcing reliable information

Q9. Did you know where to get reliable information about COVID-19 to assist in managing your response?

Almost all libraries (97.5%) knew where to find reliable information about COVID-19 to assist them in managing their response to the lockdowns. The two key sources of information were NSW Health and their own councils. The State Library of NSW was also seen as an important trusted source of information and advice.

We have been receiving information from a number of sources including NSW Health and our own regular council updates. It has also been very helpful to have the feedback from the other managers and SLNSW.

Respondents also reported that their peers in the public library network were helpful for feedback, especially for regional libraries who could draw upon the experience of libraries in Greater Sydney when they were faced with their own lockdown.

It has been useful to follow the conversation on the PLN list and we benefited from the experience of Greater Sydney libraries that have been in lockdown weeks before us.

Sources of reliable information

Source	Value
Public library network	7
State Library of NSW	22
Council	26
NSW Health	27
NSW government	9
Office of Local Government	3
ALIA	1

Although library staff knew where to look for reliable information, it was not always easy to locate. Fourteen libraries indicated that there was a degree of difficulty locating appropriate and/or timely information to assist them during this period.

There is so much information on the NSW Health website and the information changes often and is not the same across all regions, it is sometimes hard to find the right page with the information we need, even for an information specialist.

Identified risks

Q10. Were any risks identified when the current lockdown period happened?

Respondents identified many risks relating to public health, staff resourcing, and service provision. Unlike the previous lockdown in March 2020, when many staff were able to continue working onsite, the heightened risk of disease transmission due to the Delta variant and tighter public health orders meant that more staff were unable to work from the library. This presented new or different risks for many libraries.
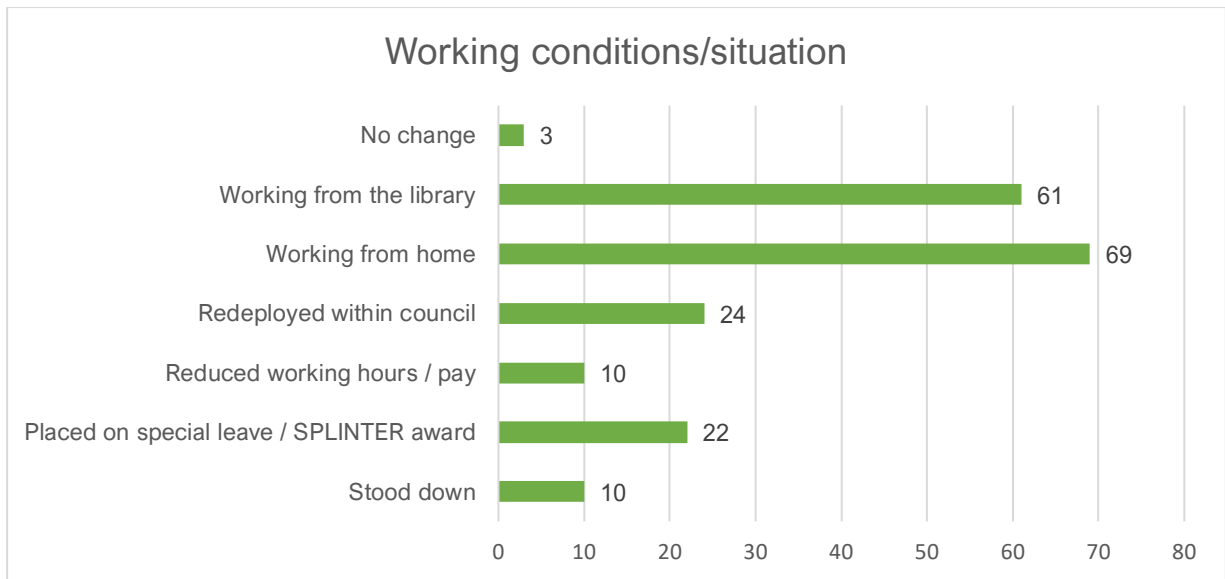
Area	Risks identified by respondents
Staff resourcing	• Working arrangements for staff working from home • Communication with casual staff • Staff ability to work from home • Ergonomic risks of staff working at home • Restrictions on staff movements • Staff living in different LGAs, or in LGAs of concern • Cross border issues with staff working/living in different states or territories • Having enough meaningful work for staff working from home
Health	• Delta strain more virulent • Risk of infection between staff • Risk of exposure in staff moving between branches • Risk of increased number of travellers from Greater Sydney into regional NSW • Staff more nervous and reluctant to work on site • Potential for lockdown fatigue • Mental health and wellbeing more pronounced • Heightened sense of stress and anxiety due to high level of community transmission and contagion • Personal safety concerns • Risk of running services such as Home Library Services
Service provision	• Reputational risk • Economic costs of shutdown • Inability to provide services to vulnerable clients • Community dissatisfaction with closures

Staffing

Q11. Please describe the working situation/conditions for your staff during this period

Most library staff were either working from home (87.5%) or working from the library (77.50%). For those libraries with staff working from home, only a minority (17.5%) were working exclusively from home. Most libraries had a combination of working situations with some staff working from home, others from within the library, and some redeployed within council (30%) or placed on special leave (27.5%).
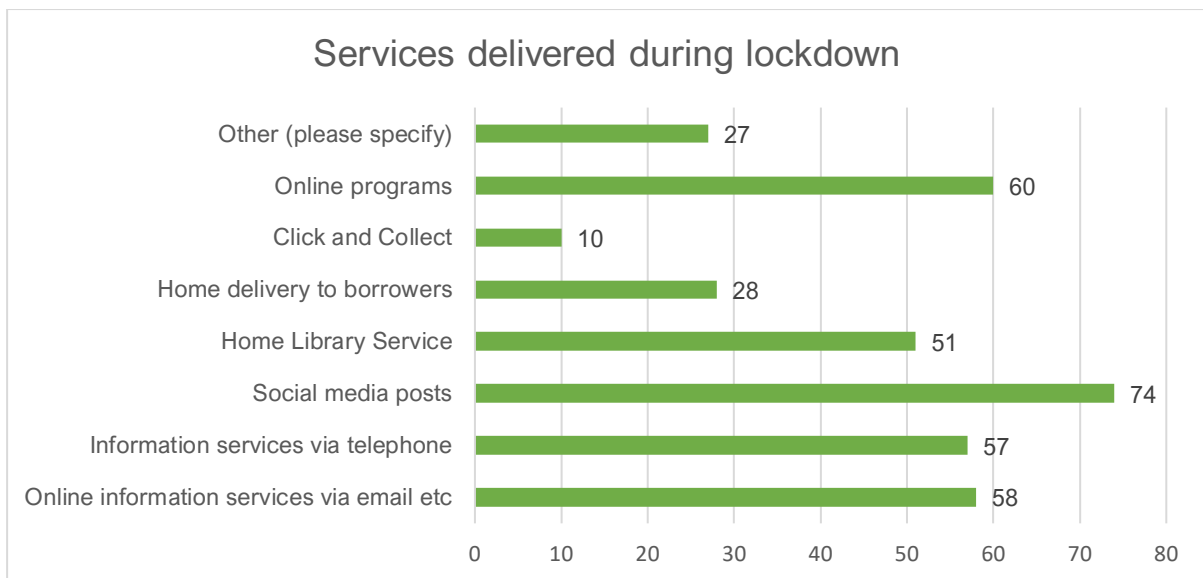
The working situation for casuals also differed amongst libraries with five libraries reporting that casuals were not employed during the period and three libraries reporting that casuals were either paid average hours or paid for their confirmed rostered shifts.

Working conditions/situation

Category	Value
No change	3
Working from the library	61
Working from home	69
Redeployed within council	24
Reduced working hours / pay	10
Placed on special leave / SPLINTER award	22
Stood down	10

Library services during lockdown

Q12. What services have you continued to deliver during lockdown?

Libraries quickly adapted their services during lockdown. At the time of the survey an exemption to the stay-at-home orders was being sought for click and collect by libraries[6]. Many libraries indicated that they were unable to deliver this service due to ambiguity about the status.

Services delivered during lockdown

Category	Value
Other (please specify)	27
Online programs	60
Click and Collect	10
Home delivery to borrowers	28
Home Library Service	51
Social media posts	74
Information services via telephone	57
Online information services via email etc	58

Other services included staff placing wellbeing calls to identified vulnerable clients, purchase of additional eLibrary resources, including expansion of items with simultaneous loans, mailouts of activity packs, "Boredom Buster" packs for families in COVID-19 isolation delivered by local police, and a contactless printing service.

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[6] As of 13 September 2021, NSW public libraries were allowed to offer click and collect services. This was provided through an Exemption under Public Health Order (No 2) 2021

Service gaps

Q13. Have you identified any service gaps?

Respondents (n=70) identified a wide range of service gaps. After the successful introduction of click and collect or home delivery services during 2020 many libraries were keen to reinstate this service but were unable to do so due to the lack of clarification in the public health orders at the time of the survey.

> *Borrowers want books and at the moment that is not possible. Many have made the transition to e-resources but there is still a large section of library users who do not use computers/iPads/smartphones*
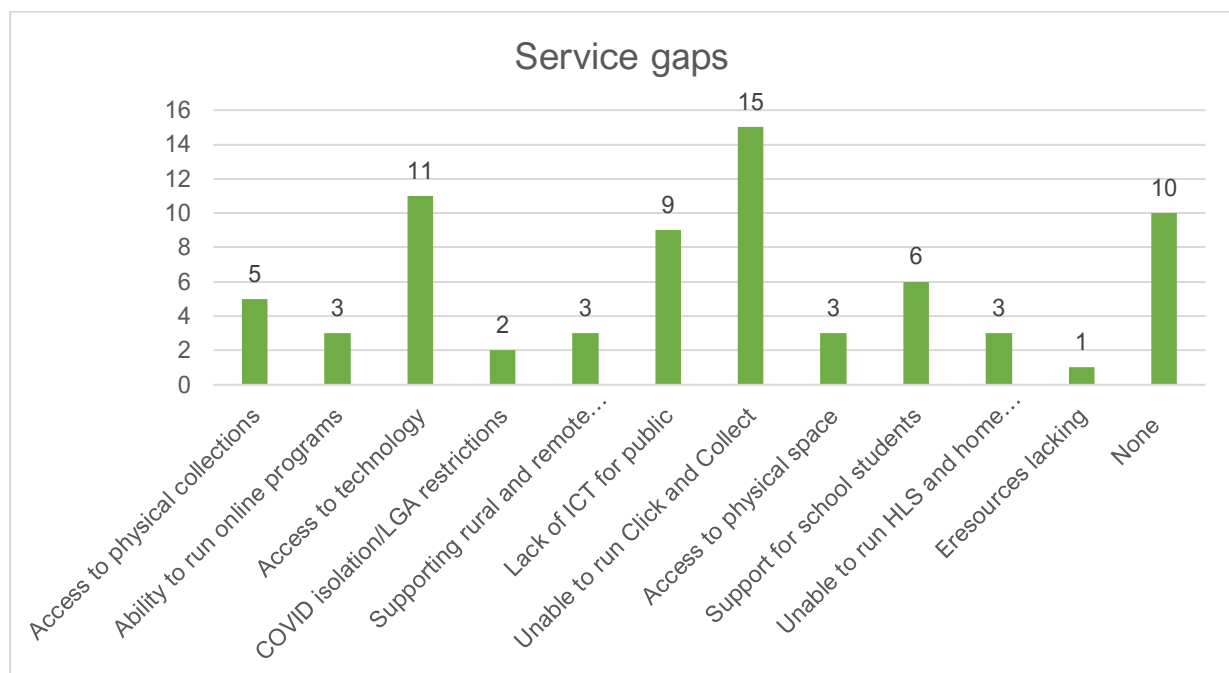
> *Physical collections are essentially "locked down"*

Respondents recognised that their clients who did not have ready access to ICT and social media would not be able to access online services, even if these were increased to compensate for the closure of library buildings.

> *The digital divide is the main issue that is difficult to address with the strong reliance on digital services during a lockdown period.*

Without physical access to the library many clients would be cut off from technology.

> *No public access to printing and computers; there are still many people who rely on the library for this.*

Service gaps

Category	Count
Access to physical collections	5
Ability to run online programs	3
Access to technology	11
COVID isolation/LGA restrictions	2
Supporting rural and remote…	3
Lack of ICT for public	9
Unable to run Click and Collect	15
Access to physical space	3
Support for school students	6
Unable to run HLS and home…	3
Eresources lacking	1
None	10

Barriers and issues to delivering library services

Q14. Are there any barriers/issues to delivering library services?

Respondents (n=74) identified a wide range of barriers and issues that emerged for their library services as they were locked down. The lack of clarity within the public health orders on click and collect services for libraries was the most frequent barrier noted by respondents.

Lack of clarity (within PHO) on Click & Collect services and Home Deliveries for Libraries have resulted in inconsistent approaches between LGAs that have affected community expectations

Barriers and issues identified by public libraries

Area	Barriers identified by respondents
Staff resourcing	• Limited staff capacity • Staff living in hotspot areas unable to travel to work • Staff living in a different LGA to the library • Staff not permitted to work onsite • Cross border staffing • Staff tested for COVID-19 needing to isolate • Delivering programs and completing tasks when most staff deployed or stood down • Single staffed branches not able to provide delivery services • Ensuring appropriate amount of resourcing available to support programs • Not enough staff with drivers' licences to support delivery service
Technology	• Limited technology access for staff at home e.g. phone access • Staff competence in digital delivery • Relatively high cost of eResources • Limited access to appropriate platforms for live online programs • Digital divide in the community • Technology skills and access to devices • Internet access in rural areas
Compliance	• Lack of clarity about click and collect in public health orders • Restrictions in public health orders, especially for 'areas of concern' • Definition of 'authorised worker' not clear • Ensuring compliance with other agencies such as aged care services • Ensuring staff comply with all safety controls during contactless delivery
Physical	• No access to buildings • No access to physical collections • Access to local history collections • Unable to process new material • Limited access to vehicles to support delivery services • Unable to meet demand for home delivery service • Size of LGA for home deliveries • Travel restrictions • Library members in home isolation
Communication	• Lack of separate library website and social media accounts • Lack of communication to elderly without internet or radio • Difficult communicating with clients without social media • Ability to share messaging about library closures

Adapting service delivery

Q15. Please rate how well you believe that your library and your council adapted to deliver services to your community.

Using the weighted average there was very little difference between how library management rated the response of the libraries (7.64), as compared to how they rated the response of their councils (7.51).

> *Both have adapted quickly to continue delivering much needed community services as best they can in a 'remote' way.*

Many respondents commented on the nature of the work they did to adapt their services as a result of the lockdown.

> *The library team are ready and willing to deliver to the community - to support online access and get out on the streets to support those who don't have online access. The library team have seen a massive increase in tech skills which have enabled work to continue - delivering programs, tech and readers advisory services online or on phone; planning for new services or projects to improve the community experience in libraries when we are back in the branch. The library team are streets ahead other parts of the organisation in working collaboratively in an online environment and are often held up as examples of excellent 'pivoting' and productive use of lockdown time.*

Libraries commented that while they had learned from the 2020 library closures the situation during the 2021 lockdown was quite different and necessitated a different approach.

> *The Library team have adapted well to this lockdown as it has been completely different to the last one. We went from working from the library to working from home exclusively in a very short time and they adapted well. Council has done an excellent job at providing additional services to the community - food security, vaccination and testing centres etc and have trusted us more to make our own decisions about things.*

Not all libraries were able to adapt their services as easily as others due to variety of reasons including low digital capability.

> *Most other council services have continued uninterrupted, but the library is difficult to run remotely.*

Some libraries felt that their council did not appreciate the issues involved in the change in work circumstances. In addition, there were a few libraries who felt that they, and/or their council, didn't adapt very well.

> *I don't think that the GM fully understands how labour-intensive adjusted services are.*

> *Council still behaves in a fairly reactive way to crises.*

Further information

Q16. Any further comments about your library's response or experience during the lockdown period.

A total of 41 libraries responded with data for this question. The majority of comments (63%) were positive, with respondents detailing how they were able to pivot their services and draw on lessons learned from their experience in 2020. Respondents also highlighted the resilience of their staff, and the appreciation received from their local communities.

> *Our experience during lockdown (while difficult not having that face-to-face customer contact) has been overwhelmingly positive, with so many messages of gratitude from customers who are receiving home delivery. It is extremely rewarding to know we are making a difference!*

> *Offering positive alternatives for service, supported by clear messaging to the community have been the key elements of the library's response.*

Looking after staff wellbeing, keeping them employed and finding meaningful work for them was an important factor in management of the lockdown for these libraries.

> *No staff have been stood down, we have worked to support the community and keep people employed.*

> *With staff working at home or from the library [it] has been an isolating resulting in everyone feeling emotionally drained. This necessitates finding ways in which to keep people connected and motivated.*

> *Weekly MS Teams meeting with ALL library staff whether WFH, COVID Leave, Job Retention Allowance etc., has been very valuable and greatly assisted in reducing anxiety and uncertainty.*

> *During the last lockdown period, the majority of staff were placed on the Job Retention allowance, causing a huge burden on morale that impacted the service for months afterwards. This time all staff are proactively engaged in meaningful work from home and are relishing in the opportunity, coming up with inspired programs and plans that can be introduced once the service is reopened.*

Not all responses were positive however, with some libraries expressing frustration with or confusion about health directions.

> *It's again very frustrating that there is no consistency with what libraries are doing even just in Sydney. If SLNSW on behalf of public libraries could identify a model/ scheme of services, endorsed/approved by NSW Health that we can choose to deliver as appropriate for our staffing and community that would make more sense. At the moment it's every library for themselves and we're all doing different things.*

> *We feel that there needs to be clear direction in the NSW Public Health Order to support libraries to offer services to the community.*

Libraries where staff were unable to work, either due to staff shortages or to redeployment or being stood down, expressed disappointment that they could not contribute to their community in a meaningful way.

> *We could have done more but there were real concerns about the mental health of staff. There is also the added issue of staff shortages - six staff working in areas of concern.*

> *The library team were disappointed that the Splinter Award was enacted for them. In 2020 they felt that they had contributed significantly to meet the organisations engagement and wellbeing goals.*

In addition, some library staff expressed frustration that their council did not understand the nature and importance of library-related work.

> *Sometimes there is a lack of understanding in council regarding non service desk work. Highlighting the work that is done off the desk and keeps staff employed is problematic. They will understand scanning property records, but not so much tagging historic images and cataloguing books.*

Overall, the responses highlighted the positive experience by libraries during the period, despite the obstacles that they faced.

> *Responding better this time. We need recognition that LIBRARIES ARE AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE in times like this!*