

REPORT  
SERVICEWA APP ASSISTANCE GRANTS



- Armadale Public Library, City of Armadale





## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic in Australia was a part of the ongoing worldwide pandemic. The coronavirus was reported to the World Health Authority (WHO) on 31 December 2019; WHO confirmed the outbreak a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The first confirmed case in Australia was identified in Australia on 25 January 2020 in Victoria.



In Western Australia, under the State of Emergency declaration, a Direction was enforced from 1.30am on 24 March 2020 to restrict Western Australian borders, in the interests of limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our community. This action delayed the arrival and spread of COVID-19 into WA for some time, with West Australian's able to continue their lives as usual and allowed for vaccination rates in WA to be at a high level prior to the WA borders reopening on 3 March 2022. The State of Emergency in Western Australia ended on Friday 4 November 2022.

### Background - ServiceWA app

The WA Government launched the ServiceWA app on 11 January 2022. The app was designed to allow people to show proof of their COVID-19 vaccination, check in at businesses and venues with SafeWA, and access their G2G pass for interstate travel. Setting up the app required the user to set up or use a digital identity to create an account to prove who they are online. The app made proof of vaccination requirements more robust, with no additional identification required to enter certain businesses and venues.

Initially the ServiceWA app aimed to assist the community during the COVID-19 transition, with plans to expand the app to include other services into the future.

Setting up the ServiceWA app and digital identity took some time and proved to be very challenging for many members of the community. Public libraries quickly found that they were inundated with requests for help from people needing to install the ServiceWA app on their phone.

On 4 February 2022 the President of Public Libraries Western Australia (PLWA) emailed a letter to the Honourable Mark McGowan requesting *“urgent allocation of funding in the amount of \$200,000 to help community members set up the ServiceWA app”*.

In response to this request, the State Government made funds available to all public libraries through the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) together with the Department of Local Government Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC). A total of \$375,000 funding was subsequently made available to all local governments for public libraries to provide direct support to West Australians with installation and use of the ServiceWA app.

The State Library of Western Australia administered the distribution of the funds (up to \$375,000) via grants to public libraries around the state. This funding could be used for extra staffing, translation services, outreach initiatives or other resources that would assist the community to better understand and use the ServiceWA app.

### Funding Categories



A total of **\$375,000** funding was made available to local governments in WA to assist with staffing and other service costs associated with providing support to the community with the installation and use of the ServiceWA app since 11 January 2022. The funding was provided GST exempt. Funds were allocated based on the Public Library Services Framework, with

Local Governments being eligible to receive funding for each library branch operated dependent on their respective tier and meeting the opening hours criteria.

### Tier One

All Local Governments in Tier One were eligible to apply for a maximum of \$3,000 funding per public library branch open more than 20 hours per week

### Tier Two

All Local Governments in Tier Two were eligible to apply for a maximum of \$1,500 funding per library branch open more than 20 hours per week.

### Tier Three

All Local Governments in Tier Three were eligible to apply for a maximum of \$1,000 funding per library branch per week.

## SLWA Management of ServiceWA App Assistance Grants

Applications for the ServiceWA App Assistance Grants were made via Submittable, an online grants management platform accessed through the SLWA website. CEOs and Library Managers from all WA local governments were advised of the grants and provided with information on how to apply. Information was also made available on the Public Libraries Online (PLO) website and promoted by PLWA to their members.

ServiceWA App Assistance grant applications opened on Monday 14 March and closed on 13 May 2022. The application process was designed to be as simple as possible to reduce any barriers for libraries wanting to apply. Applications were considered and awarded as they were received to ensure timeliness of funding being provided to Local Governments. Successful applicants were required to submit a brief acquittal report by 5 August 2022 outlining the types of activities undertaken, the number of individuals and groups assisted and any anecdotes or feedback from members of the public who accessed the assistance.

## Applications Received

A total of **61** applications were received from Local Governments, for the ServiceWA App Assistance Grants, with a total amount awarded of **\$276,958.12**.

Whilst the majority of local governments applied for the full amount available per eligible library branch as per the guidelines, a small number of local governments did not apply for the full amount that they were eligible to receive.

Tier	No. of applications	Amount awarded
1	38	\$241,320.12
2	20	\$32,400
3	3	\$3,238
Totals =	<b>61</b>	<b>\$276,958.12</b>

## Support provided by WA public libraries

A total of 61 Local Governments applied for and were awarded funding under the ServiceWA App Assistance grants. This section references the information provided by those 61 Local Governments when completing their acquittals. State Library does not have visibility of support provided for the ServiceWA app by the 71 Local Governments that did not apply for



the grant. Local governments that elected not to apply for a ServiceWA App Assistance grant included Tier one (14) / Tier two (21) / Tier three (36).

A total of **22,222** people were assisted with the ServiceWA App by the 61 Local Government library services in WA, that received financial assistance from this grant.

Below is a summary of the support provided by public libraries during the time that the ServiceWA App was implemented:

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- Libraries provided support in a variety of ways, including group sessions, drop-in sessions, one-on-one or small group sessions
  - The level of support required often included setting up an email address, setting up a MyGov account, linking Medicare to MyGov, setting up of MyGovID, and importing digital certificates into ServiceWA, and ensuring the person was confident in being able to use the app before they leave the library.
  - Many libraries reported that the task of installing the ServiceWA App was particularly daunting for seniors, who may be computer and smart phone illiterate.
  - Many seniors' phones or devices were too old for the App to be installed – this caused these people a great deal of stress
  - Some appointments took as much as 60 minutes (and on occasion longer), due to the need to complete a number of steps prior to finalising the installation of the App.
  - By improving the digital literacy skills of (mainly) older people, they are now able to take their new knowledge and apply it to other related areas, such as Medicare and Centrelink.
  - In addition to the support provided to the community in installing the ServiceWA App, many libraries provided additional services such as free vaccination certificate printing and laminated vaccination certificates (driver's license size for wallets) for community members who may not have had a phone, or that the phone was not recent enough to allow for the App to be installed.

Members of the WA community were incredibly grateful for the support that they received from public libraries:

- Many libraries received cards and gifts in appreciation of the service provided, and much appreciation was verbalised
- A great deal of positive feedback was received
- In addition to the tokens of appreciation and gratitude expressed, libraries reported that library staff experienced a sense of pride in developing the digital literacy skills of the community.
- The positive feedback received brought the library service to the attention of Councillors and CEOs

Positive outcomes for public libraries:

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- Libraries reported that they have received an encouraging increase in bookings to similar library programming
  - Referrals have been received from local medical centres, for clients seeking assistance
  - Library staff witnessed the overwhelming sense of achievement library customers experienced when successfully installing the app, and that this provided quite a boost of confidence to many of them.
  - By offering the one-to-one environment and sharing a cuppa, this provided a socialising opportunity for many of the community that don't often engage with the library.

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- Libraries gained additional library members and by providing a welcoming space, this assisted in alleviating stress for people overwhelmed by the COVID-19 situation.
  - The program helped to raise awareness of library services beyond providing reading materials and reintroduced some members who had not visited in a long time.
  - All the staff loved helping our community and it was an amazing feeling knowing we were making a difference.

## Testimonials

Public libraries were required to provide testimonials when submitting their acquittal. Below is a snapshot of the testimonials provided:

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- “Staff was incredibly patient setting up and helping with all I need for COVID-19 ID apps, etc. It’s a fantastic service and we are extremely lucky having this wonderful facility. Thank you”.
  - “I would like to thank (library staff names) who helped very much. They worked tirelessly to endeavour to get to each and every one of us.”
  - “We want to thank the (LG name) for providing this critically important opportunity – we, without intervention, and even with a reasonable degree of tech knowledge, would not have achieved the end goal of this workshop, being to easily access the dual requirement of COVID ‘check-in’ and simultaneously confirm vaccination status at entry point of any public facility”.
  - Our oldest client was 94 years old; he had been in and out of hospital and he and his wife were ecstatic that we could help them with the process. Due to their family all being in England, they were unsure how they were going to get the help they needed.
  - A large majority of our seniors were very stressed at how hard the process was and we spent a great deal of time providing reassurance whilst setting up their phones.
  - One lady had never used her phone for anything other than to receive calls. Didn’t know how to send a message. After a full day spent with her creating her accounts and setting up her ServiceWA app, she then left the centre feeling more confident.
  - “The lady who helped me must have the patience of a saint, cos it took ages. I don’t know her name, but she was brilliant. Thank you”
  - “I felt I had to write and say how pleased I was with the service I received from the staff at (Library name). I am 80 years old and nothing was too much bother for them. They were so patient and were able to explain things to me in an easy-to-understand way”.
  - “It was excellent, we couldn’t have done it without you, great communication and interpersonal skills, very friendly, eager to help, very professional, so patient, couldn’t have done it without you! Such an excellent service for the elderly and computer illiterate, we had nowhere else to go”
  - One participant was so impressed, they told everyone at the bowling club to come to the library to get the app downloaded.
  - Being able to provide technical support with the ServiceWA app at such short notice, and on a walk-in basis, was extremely positive for developing community trust.
  - “The assistance to seniors in connecting to the digital world is invaluable. We cannot put a price on the feeling of inclusiveness we experience when our friendly, patient, and efficient library and CRC staff give to the senior community when they connect us through our devices to the technology age”.
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## Conclusion

It is clear from the above that the support provided to the 22,222 members of the WA community by public library staff at 61 public libraries was both necessary and well received. The support for assisting with installation of the ServiceWA app was provided by public libraries at the time of need for the community, and in a manner that benefitted many.

Statewide, public libraries have assisted more than the stated 22,222 community members, as it is likely that many of the 71 Local Governments that did not apply for the ServiceWA App Assistance grants, also provided support with the installation and use of the app.

This was a significant and unexpected workload undertaken by public libraries and the impact cannot be overstated. Public Libraries responded immediately to this need, reprioritising services to the community as was needed. The service was an amazing achievement overall by our WA public library system and demonstrated in a concrete manner the value public libraries deliver to the people of Western Australia.



*- Albany Public Library ServiceWA event, Albany Town Hall, City of Albany*

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