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Libraries committed to equitable online access

The Australian Library and Information Association would like to work with the Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and her Department on the implications for Australia's public libraries and their users of the Protecting Families Online program, announced today.

The Australian Library and Information Association supports the provision of free internet filters to Australian families and the increased support for community education on safe internet use included in the Protecting Families Online package.

The Association's executive director, Sue Hutley, said that the increased funding for NetAlert, the government's internet education and advisory body is welcomed as it will allow NetAlert to expand its community education activities.

Australia's public libraries play a significant role in addressing the need for equitable community access to online information. The Association is concerned that requirements for the National Library of Australia and other State, Territory and Local Government libraries to provide filtering on public access terminals may restrict access for adult library users to legitimate online information, while not guaranteeing that children are protected from offensive or illegal content.

'While we agree with the government's move to provide parents with free, accredited filters for their home computers to allow parents to set access limits based on their own family values and needs, it is difficult to see how public libraries could meet the widely varying information needs of all their users if they are required to use filters on all public access internet terminals' Ms Hutley said.

'Public libraries provide information access to all members of the community, including children, and they take their duty of care very seriously' she said.

A recent survey by the Australian Library and Information Association of public library internet services found that the majority of libraries have policies and guidelines for the use of the internet. Many libraries meet the special needs of children by providing separate internet terminals and websites for children and young adults that link to resources specially tailored for them. Qualified professionals in libraries provide training and advice on internet use as an integral part of library services.

For further information: <http://alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>.

For further information:

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