

# TAKING NOTICE

An examination of  
Victorian government  
advertising spend and  
local news sustainability



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# Executive summary

This project provides an assessment of the Victorian State Government's decision to introduce a weekly page of advertising in local newspapers across the state to support their sustainability. It explores the relationship between local news and the dissemination of public notices and government messaging spend from the perspective of Victorian news proprietors and political leaders, as well as a critical examination of academic and grey literature on the issue.

In 2022, the Victorian Government pledged to buy the equivalent of a weekly full-page of advertising in newspapers that serve rural, regional and some outer-suburban areas. This commitment was an attempt to help support newspapers with niche circulation and distribution, so they could continue to provide important public-interest journalism to the towns they serve (Hess and McAdam, 2022). Most of the 105 newspapers affiliated with the Victorian Country Press Association have been eligible for this commitment and, combined, have received more than \$5.5 million annually. At the time, then Premier Daniel Andrews said:

*"Whether it is a bushfire, a flood emergency or a global pandemic, time and time again we have seen regional newspapers step up and serve their communities in incredibly important ways."*

- Regan, 2022

The placement of public notices in newspapers is a practice that stretches the globe and across centuries. The Acta Diurna "Daily Acts" were daily rituals in Roman Times to announce government decrees alongside marriages and deaths. By the 1700s, newspapers replaced the role of the town crier where printed public notices came from institutions such as courts and governments (Schiller, 2025). Government advertising became an important revenue stream for early newspapers. The rise of Big Tech more than two centuries later dissolved this historic relationship along

with the billions of dollars of indirect income it generated for local news outlets across the globe. In Australia, for example, government advertising shifted to social media platforms and larger publications or moved directly onto governments' own digital sites (Hess et al., 2023). The connection to sustainable public-interest journalism was eclipsed by an advertising edict now focused on digital reach, without assessing the full public value of this practice for news outlets considered to be journals of public record.

The fragile state of local news, meanwhile, continues to attract significant attention across the globe (Anderson, 2020; Ali, 2017; Hess and Waller, 2017). In Australia, scholars problematising the lack of local news in rural and regional areas suggest the impacts include social isolation, a reduction in political engagement and the rise of disinformation (see, for example: Mathews, 2022; Magasic et al., 2023). Recent studies highlight audiences want more local news to engage in community and civic affairs and to ensure those in power are held to account (Park et al., 2025; Hess et al., 2023). Maintaining the provision of public-interest journalism to rural and regional residents and sustaining local news businesses is proving to be a significant challenge, however. The industry is experimenting with various business models in an attempt to remain economically viable (Murschetz, 2024; Jenkins and Nielsen, 2020) and many governments, including the Australian Government, are searching for effective support packages for the sector.

Public notices and advertising expenditure is not the only way government serves as a revenue source for news in Australia but, as this report suggests, it is an important one. There are, of course, far more direct measures. For example, the nation's main public broadcaster the ABC – which is revered for its fearless and quality reporting across the nation – is fully funded by the Federal Government at a cost of more than \$1 billion a year (Australian Government, 2022). Its autonomy is protected by a combination of legal, structural and operational safeguards from legislative acts to editorial policies and independent board appointments. In recent years, there has been a shift towards government subsidies to aid local public-interest journalism that has been battered by digital disruption – and this has had bipartisan support. The Federal Government has committed more than \$70 million since 2017 to support local journalism, with another \$100 million on the way under its NewsMAP plan in 2025. Scholars and industry experts argue subsidies are certainly necessary but, given they are short-term, they do not offer structural surety for a sector in crisis. In comparison, the

Federal Government alone injects at least \$130 million into the media ecology each year through department public information advertising campaigns (Department of Finance, 2023). Almost half this funding goes to digital platforms.

The role of governments directly and indirectly supporting public-interest journalism can be a prickly conversation in Australia. Journalists are expected to serve as a watchdog across Australia's three tiers of government. There is a celebrated separation between 'church and state' in the interests of a free press to ensure it is independent of political or commercial interests. There is also a similarly contentious relationship between advertising and journalism with an idealised divide between the newsroom and the advertising department in the interests of impartiality and objectivity. The reality is, as we will outline, advertising continues to be the dominant way in which local newsrooms fund public-interest journalism in Australia. Nonetheless, the combination of 'government advertising' and 'news sustainability' does face an obvious perception challenge.

This report provides evidence of just how much local newspapers in the state of Victoria depend on public notice and government messaging spend for two key reasons - as a revenue source and as a way to reinforce their credibility as platforms of public record and sources of essential information for communities. This two-fold value comes at a time when governments are lamenting a decline in quality civic discourse and the rise of mis(dis)information due to the unregulated dominance of social media platforms. Australia's public notice and essential messaging expenditure is money that is likely to swirl around the information ecology for years to come and provide an economic and symbolic advantage for those media companies who currently receive it. Yet, the impact of this funding on competition, diversity, media legitimacy and public value has never been comprehensively assessed in Australia.

Ultimately this report suggests any source of government revenue that is directed towards media warrants scrutiny and its public value justified.

## Defining 'local'

Local can be a 'slippery' concept to define as it is broadly a cultural construct that means different things to different people (Hess and Waller, 2017). A key characteristic of the 'local' is that it almost always relates to the way we feel about and invest in a particular geographic location over time. It is especially acute in smaller settings such as towns, cities, villages and hamlets. It is important to emphasise that people living in all localities (recognised by postal codes in Australia) warrant access to reliable news about their patch.

We are also aware that, in many local newsrooms across Australia (including in Victoria) resources have been gradually reduced or centralised to save costs, and some publications are filled with increasing levels of generic and syndicated content, meaning information is not always relevant to the audiences they serve. This has led to the rise of 'zombie' newspapers (where news brands are local in name only) and 'pink slime' – ideologically driven publications of dubious quality masquerading as local news (Moore et al., 2023). Simply put, these are not publications governments should endorse through advertising. VCPA, however, has strict guidelines on the types of news outlets that can be members.

For this report, we situate 'local' in a geographic context. 'Local' news catchments typically correspond with local government or municipal boundaries, but not always. Topographical and cultural features such as rivers, lakes, roads – even football league areas – can form boundaries where a local area begins and ends (Blakston et al., 2025). In an ideal sense, local journalism then, should aim to report in the interests of all who live within a clearly defined geographic area whether it be rural, regional or suburban or have a connection to it rather than focus on specific political interests, cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds. This report outlines plans for a measurement tool that will help tiers of government readily identify which news outlets actually provide local news for the places they purport to serve, independent of their affiliation with associations or media ownership.

## Defining 'government advertising'

There are various types of advertising that governments, their departments and agencies undertake. The two main types of government advertising focused on in this report are what we refer to as 'public notices', which is the routine, informative advertising that usually relates to operational activities such as public and statutory notices, job vacancies, tenders etc, and 'public messaging', which is advertising that aims to raise public awareness of important issues such as bushfire preparedness, child immunisation, road safety etc.

It is important to understand the distinction between these forms of government messaging and the advertising that is undertaken by political parties during election campaigns. 'Election advertising' is designed to influence public support for an election candidate. When discussing 'government advertising' and its relationship to local news sustainability in this report, we refer only to public notices and public messaging, not election advertising.

## Victorian Country Press Association member mastheads

The Victorian Country Press Association (VCPA) collectively represents the largest number of local news producers in the state. There are 105 mastheads in its network, many of which have rich, long-standing histories in the communities they serve. The association is also increasingly becoming home to an array of new news publications.



# Key findings

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- ▶ Local news outlets providing place-based news and information in print and digital formats would likely face further consolidation or closure if the State Government removes its weekly advertising commitment. Public notices and government messaging provide long-term surety to the business model underpinning local news outlets in Victoria and reinforces their legitimacy as journals of public record in the changing digital era.
  - ▶ Local newspapers have mostly used revenue from this commitment to retain and/or recruit journalists. There is no clear expectation (and great discrepancy), however, around the number of journalists country newsrooms employ to serve a given population size or geographic catchment.
  - ▶ Political leaders in Victoria consider public-interest journalism important to democracy, social cohesion and connection but do not see a strong relationship between government advertising and the sustainability of local news outlets. They indicated their constituents were less likely to expect them to advertise in a local news outlet.
  - ▶ Three quarters of political leaders surveyed were not aware of the State Government's commitment to placing the equivalent of a full page of weekly advertising in every eligible country newspaper across the state. However, almost half of the political leaders surveyed said the arrangement should be continued for the long term. Only 10% said the commitment should be cancelled.
  - ▶ Political leaders view the local newspaper to be the most reliable source of information, first in print then in digital format. Leaders based in suburban areas highlighted the TV news bulletin as an important source of news, noting that many suburbs do not have a specific place-based local news presence. This was affirmed by news proprietors who said the print version overwhelmingly continued to be the primary platform their audiences used to read news stories.
  - ▶ Of all levels of government in Victoria, the State Government's departments provided the most reliable advertising commitment to local newspapers – more than twice that of local government revenue and eight times more than Federal Government departments. The State Government is largely advertising transport, health and public awareness messages in newspapers as part of its commitment.
  - ▶ Political leaders emphasised the need for clarity and nuance in public notices and government messaging. Many recommended that the State Government limit its use of public notices to essential information, rather than using them to promote policy and achievements. Local news proprietors say it is time that government advertising is recognised as a direct form of support to reinforce local news legitimacy in the digital age, and it should be legislated.
  - ▶ There is no clear, transparent way to determine which news outlets in Victoria should qualify for government advertising spend, especially in areas where more than one news producer is located in a given catchment. For example, there has been little attention directed to the potential disadvantage of those media outlets that are not considered appropriate channels to disseminate such messaging, or its impact on media diversity. Nor are news media themselves held accountable for demonstrating that they provide quality information and reporting for the local audiences they purport to serve.
  - ▶ Overall, political leaders representing local, state and national levels did not consider Facebook to be a credible platform for local news and information. However, 70% of them had a Facebook page they updated with news and information each week.
  - ▶ Advertising continued to be the dominant revenue source for local newspapers, representing 77% of overall income. While print subscriptions made up 10% of income, the contribution of other audience subscriptions, such as digital subscriptions and combined print/digital subscriptions, was minor.
  - ▶ News proprietors overwhelmingly described regular, reliable government advertising as the preferred funding mechanism, rather than subsidies – which they considered short term, unreliable and difficult to apply for.
-

# Literature review

Australia's 'local news crisis' has attracted significant attention from policymakers, given there is a well-documented link between public-interest journalism and its role in lubricating conversations about public affairs as well as providing communities with information that supports social order.

## The state of local news

In 2025, the Digital News Report (Park et al., 2025) highlighted that local news in Australia continued to be one of the most trusted sources of news among audiences, and people wanted more local content.

As political watchdogs, local news keeps people in power accountable and helps residents engage in democratic processes, often providing them with a voice and advocating for change (Firmstone and Coleman, 2014). Conversely, when there is no independent local news source, communities are left in the dark about council affairs and these areas tend to have greater levels of government secrecy and less transparent government (Posner-Ferdman and Cuillier, 2025).

A well-resourced local news outlet can act as a social connector, or the "social glue" (Olsen, 2021), that binds people to each other and to the places where they live and work.

Journalists and editors can also play the role of cultural ambassadors, or civic custodians, helping to construct a community's identity by highlighting its traditions and distinct geographies (Hess, 2015; Buchanan, 2009).

Further, local news outlets are acknowledged for serving as community recordkeepers, creating and collating a valuable archive of historic material that documents the every-day goings on of a place and the people who live there (Allen and Sieczkiewicz, 2010).

Many of Australia's local news outlets have struggled to maintain viability during the past decade, with hundreds of regional newspaper titles closing (some albeit temporarily) during COVID-19, while many others became online-only editions (Ward, 2021; PUI, 2020). Two major media companies, News Corp Australia and Australian Community Media [ACM], have instigated the majority of these closures and cutbacks, pulling resources and profits from their small, local publications to sustain their bigger regional and metropolitan publications and/or shareholder dividends.

Of course, this is not unique to Australia - the shutting down of newsrooms, and other 'downsizing' strategies, have led to wide-spread job losses and waves of redundancies across the local news sector globally (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Dodd and Ricketson, 2021).

It is also important to acknowledge, as we will highlight in a following section, the state of Victoria has a particularly robust local news ecology compared to other states and territories in Australia and this has been the case for some decades. Nonetheless, there has been a slow consolidation of media ownership across the local news sector in this state, new startups have emerged and faced challenges, and the issues outlined above are still felt acutely.



While it is clear revenue from advertising has declined, overall advertising spend in Australia is still estimated to reach

**\$29 billion in 2025**

Pash, 2025

## Funding models and the continued importance of advertising

The root of the challenges facing local news has of course been largely linked to the rise of digital platforms and a decline in traditional advertising revenue, which has shifted to tech giants such as Google and Meta. As a result, academics, industry and governments have explored and encouraged new ways of thinking about the business model needed for long-term sustainability of local newsrooms (Nel, 2010), urging local media companies in particular to pursue multiple business strategies and revenue streams. Newspapers have thus experimented with approaches varying from subscription models to crowd-sourcing, not-for-profit support and commodification of cultural artefacts (Murschetz, 2024).

Amid the pursuit for new ways of sustaining local journalism, there is a mixed attitude towards the future role of advertising. Some industry experts and commentators, for example, sound the death knell for traditional advertising as a funding model for local news, describing it as 'old' (Gettler, 2022), 'largely obsolete' (Ardia, 2020) or 'collapsed' (Bauder, 2019). Growing academic research in Australia and globally however, continues to show the importance of advertising as the dominant and consistent source of revenue for ongoing sustainability of commercial local news producers and increasingly not-for-profit media (Hess et al., 2023; Rebuild Local News, 2025). While it is clear revenue from advertising has declined, overall advertising spend in Australia is estimated to reach \$29 billion in 2025 (Pash, 2025). It is therefore a source of revenue for journalism that cannot be ignored.

## Government advertising and policy interventions

Government advertising is considered a key form of revenue for local news producers in Australia, with the nation's three tiers of government – local, state and national - obliged to communicate urgent, statutory or routine government messages, such as job vacancies or tenders, as well as promote awareness of important public matters, such as health campaigns and natural disaster preparedness. For example, municipalities in the US, UK, and Australia have been required under legislation for much of the 20th century - long before the rise of the internet - to disseminate public notices in newspapers. Scholars in Australia, Canada and the US especially, have begun charting this spend and its importance to news sustainability, referring to it as a 'silent subsidy' (Hess, 2018; Rebuild Local News, 2025). They note that the billions of dollars in revenue this represents declined significantly at the beginning of this century as governments turned to social media to promote key messaging.

As we have highlighted in the executive summary however, there is an ad hoc, uneven approach to how governments spend money on advertising in Australia across local, state and national levels.

## Current government advertising policies

The Victorian Government has led the way in mandating advertising expenditure in rural and regional media. Initially, it committed to ensuring its departments and agencies spend at least 15% of their campaign advertising expenditure in rural and regional media (Victorian Government, 2019).

During the pandemic, it announced a \$4.5 million advertising support package for struggling local mastheads (Hess and Waller, 2020). In 2022, it pledged to commit what is equivalent to a page of weekly advertising in every eligible local newspaper in the state. The commitment is for the current parliamentary term only and only applies to newspapers “with regional distribution who have been operating for a minimum of 12 months” (Victorian Government, 2025).

**This year, the Queensland Government** followed suite, committing a minimum of 75% of all press advertising placements to rural and regional newspapers across the state. Announcing the funding at the QCPA annual conference, MP Tony Perrett said the policy recognised “the vital role local media plays in local communities” (CPA, 2025a). The policy applies to all Queensland Government departments and came into effect on July 1.

**Conversely, in South Australia**, changes to legislation were announced in 2019 that provided freedom for the state and local governments to publish information on their own websites, removing their requirement to report public notices in local newspapers. Following lobbying by Country Press SA, the government provided a relief package to compensate for the shift in advertising spend. The current Labor government pledged to reverse the Bill and, while it has not yet done so, it has delivered on its guarantee to deliver 10% advertising spend to regional print. In the 2023/2024 financial year, the state’s expenditure on media advertising was \$39.7 million (Govt of SA, 2025), however it is not known which media platforms benefit from this expenditure.

**In New South Wales**, there too has been legislation passed that enabled governments to bypass local mastheads for public notice dissemination. As a result, this funding appears to have been redirected from small-town news outlets to larger metropolitan or national conglomerates, and bigger regional publications that could show digital reach. However, the New South Wales Labor State Government does now have a Regional Media Fund, which it announced at the Country Press NSW conference in 2024 would be topped up by \$3 million, bringing the total fund to \$6 million (Moriarty, 2024). These funds, allocated over three years, are for grant-related programs. There is also a \$3 million advertising program for regional print over three years.

**The Western Australian Government’s** advertising expenditure was audited in 2024, however the focus of the audit was on the type of advertising being placed, rather than which media organisations were being used. The audit found, however, that there remained a lack of transparency and the total cost of government advertising was not known, therefore it was difficult to judge where current advertising was being placed or if it was representing value for money for taxpayers (Spencer, 2024).

**In Tasmania**, government advertising policies are general and appear to be non-prescriptive in relation to which platforms should be used for advertising. The situation appears to be similar in the Northern Territory, however a spokesperson for the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet has said the NT Government “continues to select the best advertising channels to suit our specific campaign objectives. This includes print media and a range of other communication channels” (Pollock, 2023).

**In the past, the Federal Government** has implemented strategies that have had a negative impact on newspapers. For example, the Recruitment Advertising policy guide encouraged use of online recruitment over print media and, since this advertising policy was introduced in 2009, the government has increased its use of online media and social networking sites to target jobseekers.

Data from the Federal Government's Department of Finance indicated that the biggest year on record for taxpayer funded advertising was 2021-2022, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the government spent \$239.6 million on public information campaigns (Department of Finance, 2023). Advertising spend has reduced since: its 2022-23 report suggests more than \$131 million was spent on advertising campaigns by departments such as Defence, Education, Health, the Tax Office and Electoral Commission.

Most of this spending went to digital platforms (\$56.3 million). Television was the next preferred medium (\$40.8 million) then 'out of home' advertising such as billboards (\$16.1), radio (\$11.8 million) and cinema (\$4.3 million). Less than \$2 million (\$1.9 million) of this campaign advertising was spent advertising in the press, with Australia's newspaper sector only ahead of the magazine sector (\$0.2 million) on this list of preferred mediums (Department of Finance, 2023).

While the report highlights that \$12.7 million of the advertising expenditure went to First Nations media (\$4.9 million) and ethnic media (\$7.8 million), it does not provide details on rural, regional and metropolitan spending. Last year, the Federal Government announced, as part of its NewsMAP support package, that it would mandate a minimum commitment of \$3 million per year for two years from 2025-26 for advertising in regional newspapers.

**In 2024 the Federal Government announced it would allocate a minimum of \$3 million per year for two years from 2025 to 2026 for advertising in regional newspapers.**

## International approaches

While news associations and some academics in Australia have long suggested there is a direct link between declining government advertising spend and the local news crisis, the US and Canada are two other countries that have also been taking action in this space. In the US, the Rebuild Local News Initiative (Rebuild Local News, 2025) is developing guidelines for targeting state and city spending to community newsrooms to ensure transparency measures and disclosure requirements.

The Initiative's global review of government advertising spend highlights inconsistencies and a lack of agreed definitions or understanding around what constitutes 'government advertising spend'. It argues the key challenge is to highlight that placing government advertisements does not come with the risk of influencing editorial content. It contends:

*"We believe the judicious, accountable use of government ad spending is a powerful and sensible tool to help local news. But being candid about the risks and benefits to the government, media, and the public is crucial. If done poorly, this approach can harm all parties. If done well, it can strengthen local journalism and communities."*

## They argue for seven principles

- 1. The criteria for newsroom eligibility should be clear and as objective as possible.**
- 2. There should be an independent third party helping to provide accountability.**
- 3. The criteria and decision-making should be transparent, and there should be an appeals process.**
- 4. Government agencies may not make advertising decisions to reward or punish news organisations.**
- 5. There must be an easy way for media buyers and government agencies to target ads to community outlets.**
- 6. Ads should be clearly labelled as coming from the government.**
- 7. Government agencies can't be hindered from achieving their marketing objectives.**

In Canada, meanwhile, a 2021-2022 annual report noted approximately \$CAD141 million was spent on advertising (News Media Canada, 2025). Also, in 2024, the Ontario provincial government issued a directive to its four largest Crown agencies mandating that at least 25% of their advertising budgets go to Ontario-based publishers (Ford, 2024), while a Canadian research report advocates for federal and municipal governments to direct a portion of their advertising budgets to local publishers and broadcasters (MacLachlan and Uncles, 2025).

## From advertising to direct subsidies and policy support

Rather than address the systemic shift in advertising spend, governments instead have turned to short-term subsidies as a way of supporting a sector in need. Since 2017, the Federal Government has allocated more than \$70 million to local news and public-interest journalism in an effort to slow the decline, with the majority of these funds allocated to short-term subsidies, such as cadet recruitment, or for digital innovation.

In 2024, it announced plans to spend a further \$153 million on public-interest journalism - and broader news services and community media sectors - as part of its NewsMAP framework with a strong focus on supporting access, quality and diversity of news in Australia and bolstering funding for media literacy. As part of this, the government announced a short-term mandate to spend a minimum of \$3 million on regional newspaper advertising.

The news media industry – arguably once sceptical of direct government intervention in the interests of keeping politics at ‘arms length’ – began to consider these subsidies essential to its sustainability, although this support was also variously described as short-term, ad hoc (Australian Government, 2022a) and at times misdirected or leading to unfair competition.

In 2022, the government also introduced a world-first attempt to rein in Big Tech through its News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code. The code was designed to force companies such as Meta and Google to pay news producers for local content that appeared on their platforms, but the longevity of such arrangements is in question (Meese et al 2021) and, while some country newspapers were able to collectively bargain for a share of this revenue, many small newsrooms across the country missed out on funding.

While scholars have highlighted shortcomings of the mandatory bargaining code and other recent forms of government intervention, there are examples of other direct policy support which dates back hundreds of years in Australia and around the world. In New South Wales in 1825, for instance, legislation setting up the postal office system enabled newspapers to be delivered at a discounted rate. And, in the United States, in 1863, the magazine industry lobbied the government for support and the government created ‘second class mail’, which saved magazine publishers two thirds of the standard price for delivery. Postal subsidies played a vital role in the American magazine industry becoming one of the best in the world (Finkelstein and Ricketson, 2012).

More recently, governments in Norway, the UK, France and Canada have introduced tax breaks or exemptions for their more vulnerable media sectors and elsewhere, in the US and Australia, governments have adjusted media ownership and control rules (ACMA, 2020).

## The issue of legitimisation

For institutions or individuals to have legitimacy in society means they wield power that is considered right and good and meet certain normative criteria about how they obtain and exercise that power (Beetham, 1991). For the social or political sciences, something is legitimate if it is acknowledged as rightful by those involved in a given power relationship. On one hand, Australia’s Federal Government highlights the normative value of journalism in Australian society as a public good and has justified its news subsidy schemes as “critical to a healthy democracy, social cohesion and informed citizens” (NewsMAP, 2024). It could be argued that where governments distribute ‘essential’ information – such as public notices and awareness messages – bestows a degree of credibility on these information channels and platforms. At the same time, the Federal Government laments the impact social media has on information quality and yet continues to point significant ad spend in its direction.

For social scientists, legitimacy should include an assessment of how far a power holder conforms to the normative criteria they are expected to uphold (Beetham, 1991). For example, journalists and editors may face subtle or explicit pressure to shape coverage in ways that protect government advertisers or avoid critical reporting. Some scholars and commentators have been highly critical of government advertising spending during election campaigns – the more revenue from political parties media outlets receive, the less likely they are to report criticisms of the practice (see especially, Young, 2007; Griffith, 2022).

This emphasises the importance of transparency and accountability when it comes to assessing whether news organisations that benefit from any form of government support (direct or indirect) are actually credible, reliable sources of local information that have the freedom to report without fear or favour. Australia’s Federal Government has stated its funding for news media will be evidence based and targeted “while balancing the need to maintain the sector’s independence” (NewsMAP, 2024).

In the executive summary, we outlined a new measurement tool providing authorities with clarity on which news provisions actually serve the local areas they purport to cover and produce independent public-interest journalism (see also, Appendix 1).



**Table 1: Types of government support for local news**

| Type                                    | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Government               | Duration           | D/I      |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Government funding for media operations | Funding allocated to public broadcasters. In Australia, the ABC and SBS are sharing \$4.2 billion across the 2022-23 to 2024-25 triennium (Australian Government, 2022b). The ABC is a key provider of news in rural and regional Australia, especially in emergency broadcasting. Most recently, operational funding for the ABC has been changed from a three-year to a five-year agreement to move it beyond the federal electoral cycle.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Federal                  | Mid-term           | Direct   |
| Government subsidies                    | Subsidies are implemented in responses to market failure (Investopedia, 2025). Since 2017, subsidies and grants totalling about \$70 million have been offered by the Federal Government, largely to support small news providers. They are one-off, short-term initiatives designed to target specific areas of the news business but have been highlighted through senate and parliamentary inquiries for their failure to provide long-term surety to the business model sustaining local news. Some State Governments, such as NSW, have also allocated funds to support regional media.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Federal and State        | Short-term         | Direct   |
| Government intervention                 | A government intervention is any government action designed to influence or regulate economic activity in a particular market, with goals ranging from correcting market failures and protecting public interests to promoting economic growth. Examples of government interventions in the local news sector include tax exemptions for news providers in some European countries and Canada, and the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code in Australia. Due to the range of different interventions possible, their efficacy is best judged on a case-by-case basis.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Federal and State        | Case-by case       | Indirect |
| Government advertising                  | There are two types of advertising that governments, their departments and agencies undertake. The first is 'routine', 'simple', 'informative advertising' that generally appears only once or twice, and contains factual statements (Tasmanian Government, 2025). These advertisements usually relate to operational activities such as public and statutory notices, job vacancies, tenders etc. The second form of government advertising relates to public awareness messaging. This type of advertising is commonly described as 'campaign' advertising in government policy documents, and it tends to be "designed to inform, educate, motivate or change behaviour" (Department of Finance, 2023). For example, a government advertising campaign may raise awareness about bushfire preparedness or road safety. | Federal, State and Local | Long- term         | Indirect |
| Political election advertising          | In contrast to government advertising, political election advertising is used to promote parties and candidates during election campaigns and is "designed to influence public support for a political party, a candidate for election or a Member of Parliament" (Department of Finance, 2023).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Federal and State        | Cyclic, consistent | Indirect |

# Research approach

This research project examines the following questions:

## Research Question 01

What is the impact of government advertising spend on the sustainability of local news providers in Victoria?

## Research Question 02

How do Victoria's political leaders perceive the value of this advertising spend and its relationship to public-interest journalism?

Two online surveys were conducted to explore these questions. They were designed and developed using the software program Qualtrics, and a link to them was distributed via email in the first half of 2025. The questions in both surveys used a mix of Likert scale, sliding scale, multiple choice and qualitative questions that aimed to understand the impact of State Government advertising spend, attitudes and perceptions of local media access and quality, and the relationship between the sustainability of local news and income from government sources. Approval to collect data in this manner was granted by Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The first survey targeted owners of newspapers represented by the Victoria Country Press Association. A list of VCPA member mastheads is available on the Country Press Australia website, which at the time of the survey listed 91 publications in Victoria. The survey was emailed to the owners of each of these mastheads. Proprietors who owned more than one newspaper were required to fill in a survey for each individual masthead in their stable, in order to capture specific local context. They were permitted to nominate other representatives in their business to participate in the survey on their behalf. Participants were asked to provide a breakdown of all revenue sources as well as detail the differences between various levels of government and advertising commitment. Examples of other questions asked include "how do you use the income generated from the State Government commitment to advertising" and "to what extent do you agree with the following statement: news outlets that receive government advertising should provide public-interest journalism to communities".

The second survey had a targeted sample of political leaders representing electorates in Victoria. A list of all elected leaders was collated using information publicly available online, including each leader's name, electorate, email address and phone number. The list included: 128 members of the State Government, 38 members of the Federal Government, and 72 mayors representing local councils or shires. The survey was emailed to each leader on the list. Questions included, for example, "in the town city or suburb where you live, what do you consider to be the most reliable regular sources of local news?" and "to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements: 'there is a clear relationship between government advertising expenditure and its importance to the viability of local news outlets' and 'Facebook is a credible platform for local news and information'". Questions also asked participants to provide a percentage breakdown of their advertising budgets across platforms and sources.

# Victoria's news ecology

**105 mastheads**  
make up the VCPA network,  
the largest number of local news  
producers in the state.

Our research indicates Victoria is one of the states with the highest number of individual news outlets operating in Australia. The Victorian Country Press Association [VCPA] collectively represents the largest number of local news producers in the state. There are 105 mastheads in its network, including newly launched publications as well as long-standing newspapers (CPA, 2025b).

Print and online news outlets in Victoria are also represented by the Local Independent News Association (LINA), which lists 36 digital startups and newspapers in the state, however it should be noted that some of these do not have a specific local news focus, for example Crikey. Also, the Community Newspaper Association of Victoria represents 67 small newsletters and not-for-profit newspapers (CNAV, 2025).

Victorian broadcasters are represented by The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, which lists 68 stations (CBAA, 2025), and the Commercial Radio and Audio association, which represents 28 commercial radio stations (CRA, 2025). Further research is needed to determine how many of these provide local news bulletins to their listeners.

There are also news organisations that serve broader regional areas of Victoria, rather than specific towns and cities.

These include the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which has eight stations (ABC, 2025), and WIN Television, which has seven (WIN, 2025).

When this mix and spread of news providers is considered, deciding where and how to distribute government advertising and support in the interests of local news audiences, and to ensure there is not unwarranted market disadvantage, can arguably be challenging.

# Findings

Data from the two surveys conducted for this study provides qualitative and quantitative insights to help answer our key research questions.

For some time, Country Press Australia – the national body that represents rural, regional, remote and outer suburban mastheads, of which the Victorian Country Press Association is an affiliate – has tracked overall government advertising spend in its member mastheads through its advertising arm Regional Media Connect. This entity is a ‘one-stop-shop’ for advertisers, governments and agencies who want to advertise in its country newspapers (Regional Media Connect, 2025). Via Regional Media Connect, CPA has tracked government advertising spend over the 15-year period from 2010-11 to 2024-25. These figures suggest the Victorian Government out spends the Federal Government and all other State governments year on year.

In the 10 years to 2021-2020, the Victorian Government spent an average of \$3,468,129 each year in CPA member mastheads. In the same time period, the Federal Government spent an average of \$1,233,979 each year (see Figure 1).

The amount both governments spent on advertising in newspapers spiked during the peak COVID pandemic years of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, with the Victorian government spending \$7,727,224 then \$6,482,619 and the Federal Government spending \$2,336,089 then \$2,976,668. Federal Government advertising spending through Regional Media Connect has dropped significantly since this time: it spent \$813,206 in 2024-2025, which is less than it spent 15 years ago in 2010-2011.

## Over \$34 million

has been spent by the Victorian Government in CPA member mastheads over a 10-year period. The Federal Government spent over \$12 million in the same time.

Figure 1: Victorian State and Federal Government advertising expenditure 2010-2025

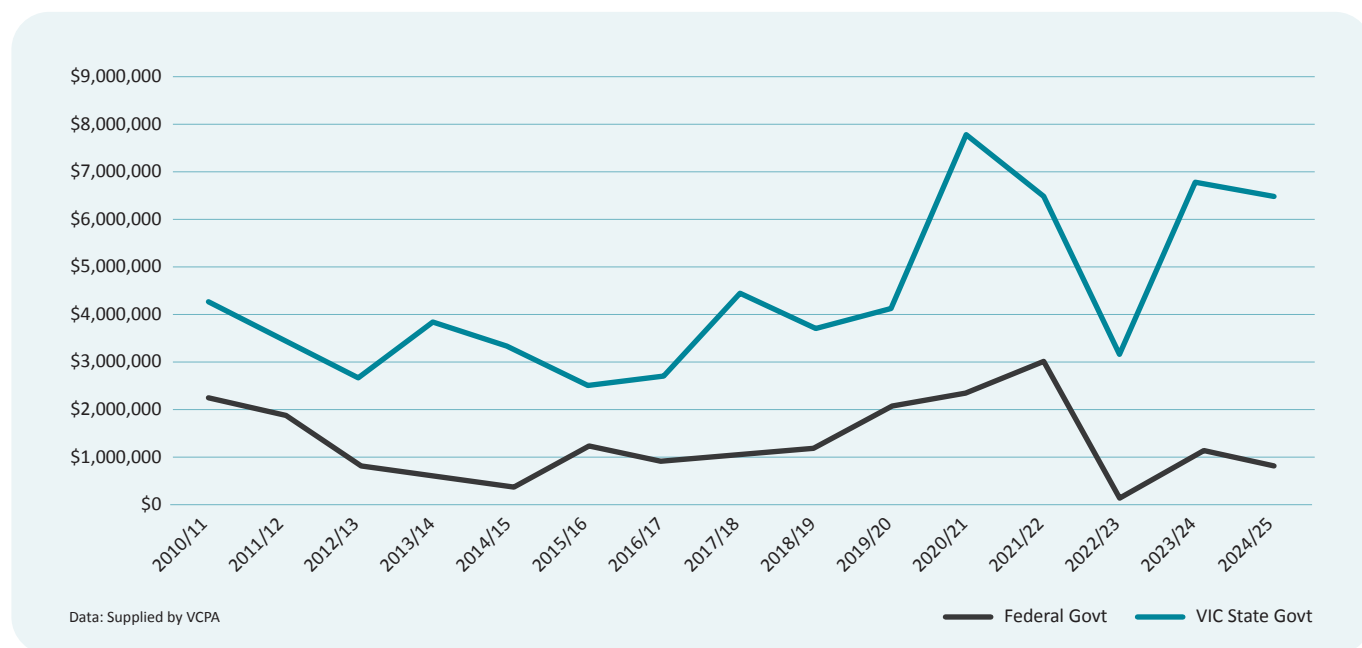
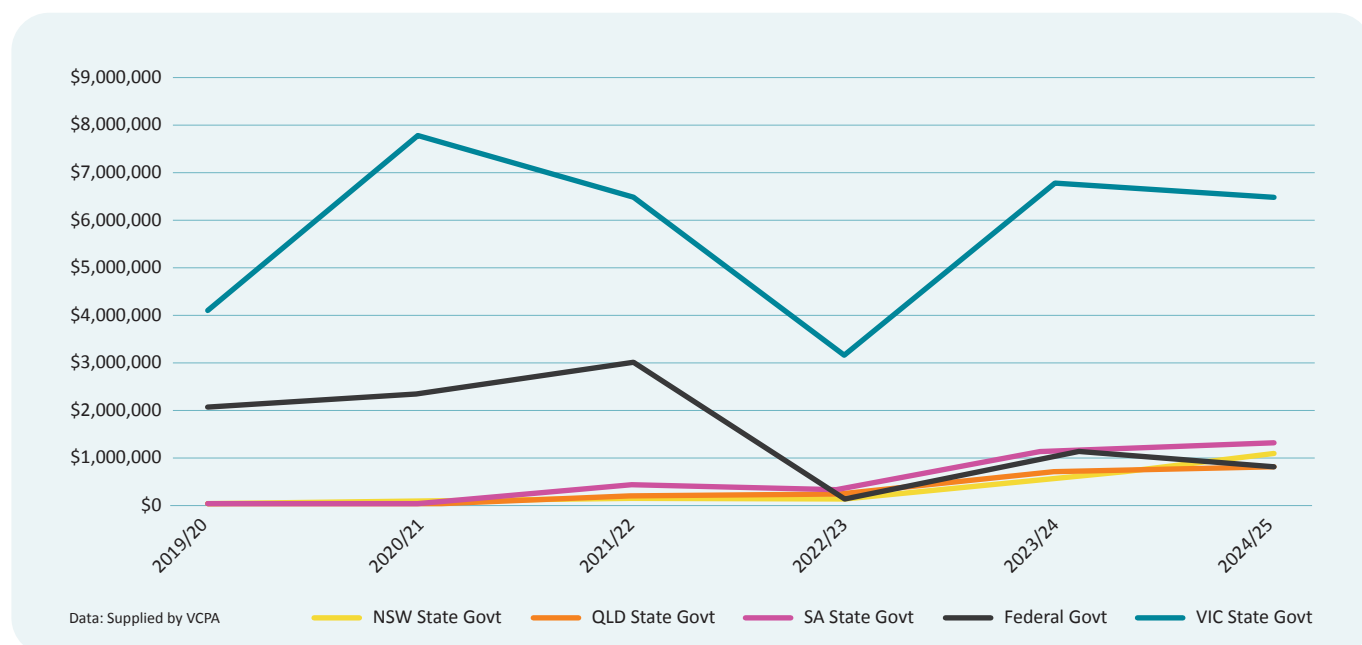


Figure 2: All State and Federal Government advertising expenditure 2019-2025



While these Figures 1 and 2 provide a broad overview of advertising spend by the Federal and some State governments, the study outlined in this report provides more detailed and nuanced quantitative data, including an insight into the amount local governments spend on advertising in Victoria's country newspapers. Also, it expands on the raw data to provide qualitative insights into the impact of this revenue stream on news providers, and how political leaders perceive the relationship between this advertising spend and local news sustainability. This data is presented in the following sections, via thematic analysis of the two surveys conducted in this research project.

The Victorian Government has spent considerably more than the South Australian, New South Wales and Queensland governments (see Figure 2).



# Survey

News Proprietors

01

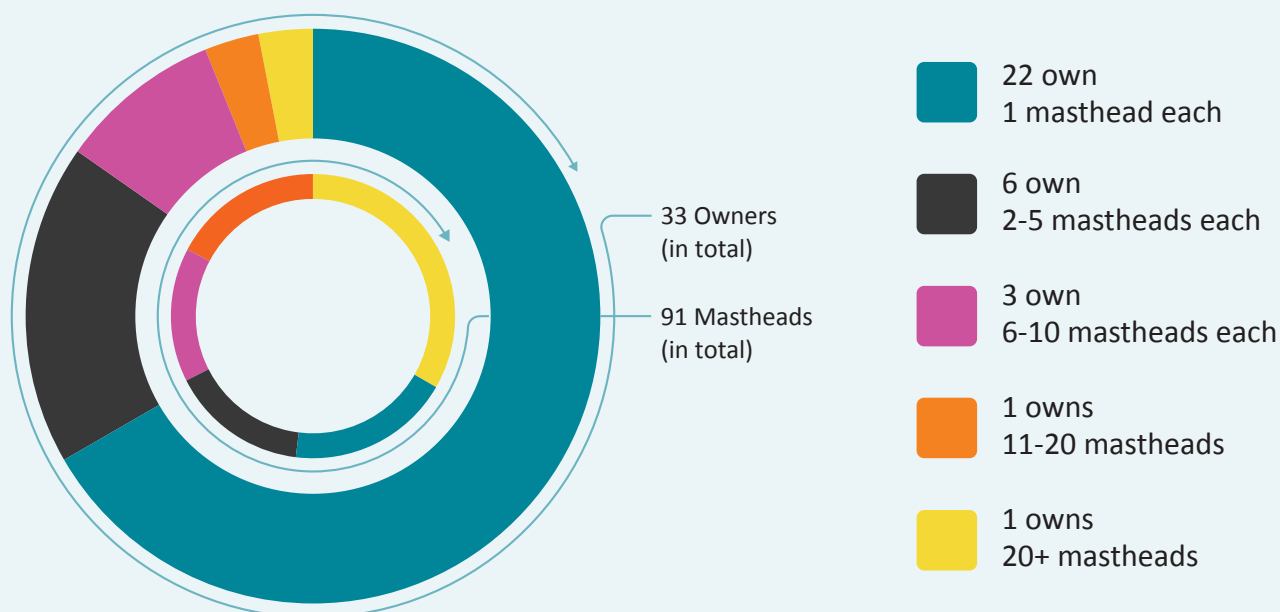
# News Proprietors

Ownership of newspapers across the VCPA varies. At the time this research was conducted there were 33 news proprietors representing 91 newspapers, although we note there has been further consolidation since the publication of this report, especially the Today News Group as a relatively new entrant to the Victorian market. This study's first survey was completed by 85 of these 91 publications ( $n = 85$ ). This is a response rate of 93.5%.

Of those proprietors who responded to the survey, 22 owned a single masthead, six represented between 2-5 mastheads, three proprietors had 6-10 newspapers, one owned between 11-20 publications and there was one proprietor with more than 20 newspapers in Victoria.

Q.

How many mastheads does your company/media business own in Victoria?



Separate desktop research indicates some of the bigger media companies within the network include Star News Group (with more than 20 titles in Victoria), McPherson Media Group (with more than 10 titles), WD News Publications, Times News Group and North East Media.

## Masthead and community demographics

Survey participants (news proprietors) were asked to state the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) reporters they employed at each of their mastheads. This data was compared to the size of the populations they purported to serve. Most (65.5%) of mastheads served towns of less than 40,000 people, while 15.5% served towns over 120,000. One newspaper employed 14 reporters to serve a population of 40,000-80,000, while at the other end of the scale, one newspaper that serves a population of more than 120,000 employed only 1.5 FTE reporters.

Of the 13 mastheads that served populations of more than 120,000, most employed two reporters, with the highest number of reporters being five in one of these newsrooms.

Of the three mastheads that served populations of between 80,000-120,000, most employed three reporters.

The number of reporters employed by the 11 mastheads that served populations between 40,000-80,000 varied greatly. The median number was four reporters, but one masthead in this sample only employed one reporter, while another employed 14.

There was also a large divergence in the number of reporters employed by the 22 mastheads that served populations between 10,000-40,000. The median number was 2.5 reporters, but four mastheads in this sample only employed one reporter, while another employed seven.

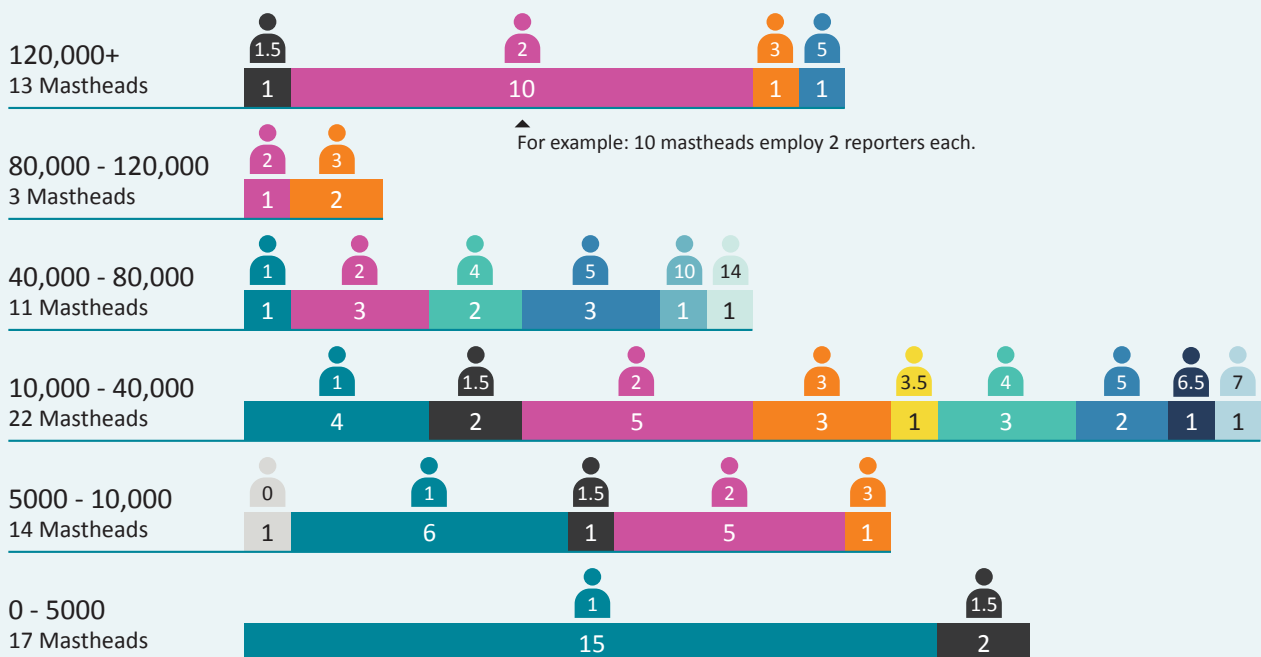
Of the 14 mastheads that served populations of between 5000-10,000, the median number of reporters employed in each newsroom was 1.2, however one masthead in this sample employed three reporters.

Of the 17 mastheads that served populations of less than 5000, most (15) employed one reporter, with two employing 1.5 reporters.

The total number of FTE reporters employed at the 85 mastheads was 195.

Q.

How many reporters are employed at newspapers serving Victorian towns?



Victorian towns by population size.  
Total mastheads.

This diagram illustrates the number of mastheads serving towns of different population sizes, and the number of reporters they each employ.

Survey participants were also asked to state how many other editorial staff, such as photographers or subeditors, they employed. The median number for the whole sample was one other editorial staff member. There were 17 news outlets that employed no other editorial staff, but one that employed 7.3 other editorial staff. In total, the 85 mastheads in our sample employed 115.25 other editorial staff members.

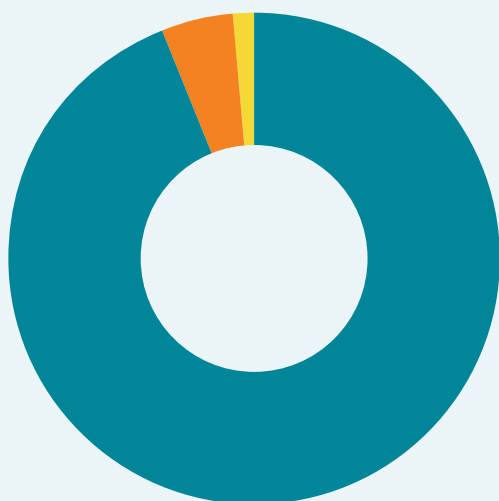
Survey participants were also asked to state how many other non-editorial staff, such as advertising or administration workers, they employed. Across the sample, they employed a median number of three other non-editorial staff. Six mastheads did not employ any other FTE non-editorial staff but there were three mastheads that employed more than 16.

All of the local news producers distributed their news content via print and most also via their own online websites (94%). They also used social media platforms (85%) and digital newsletters (65%). Overwhelmingly, respondents highlighted the importance of the print version to the local audience and indicated it was the primary platform their audiences used to read news stories (94%). This aligns with academic studies in Australia that note the popularity of the printed product in regional areas (Hess et al., 2023; Park et al., 2025).

Survey respondents also strongly disagreed with the statement 'print has no future', indicating an overall rating of 1.8, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree.

Q.

How important is the print version of your masthead to your local audience?



94%

Very important (it is the primary platform our audience uses to read our news stories)

4.8%

Somewhat important (it is just one way our audience reads our news stories)

1.2%

Not important (it is not how our audience prefers to read our stories)

## Revenue streams for local newspapers

Advertising continues to be the dominant revenue source for local newspapers.

Advertising from local businesses (49.2%), all levels of government (24%) and large national/international businesses (3.8%) made up 77% of overall income.

Audience subscriptions did not contribute significantly, with digital subscriptions providing only 2.4% of revenue and combined print/digital subscription packages providing only 0.6% of revenue. However, print subscriptions represented 10% of income. Other types of income included donations, the sale of merchandise, funding from the not-for-profit sector, and income from commercial printing operations.

It is important to note that the survey question relating to revenue sources did not provide scope to include funds from the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code, given this was not enacted at the time of the survey. However, we note bigger companies have benefited substantially from this source as well as one-off subsidies and support from Federal Government media assistance support packages.

Table 2: Examples of masthead income from government advertising

| Masthead    | Number of FTE reporters | Population size of town | Local Government spend | State Government dept | State Government MPs | Federal Government dept | Federal Government MPs | Total spend |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Masthead 01 | 1                       | 10k - 40k               | \$6000                 | \$10,000              | \$1000               | \$0                     | \$2000                 | \$19,000    |
| Masthead 03 | 1                       | 1k - 5k                 | \$1690                 | \$34,455              | \$0                  | \$0                     | \$1000                 | \$37,145    |
| Masthead 05 | 2                       | Over 120k               | \$17,352               | \$25,000              | \$2500               | \$1250                  | \$2500                 | \$48,602    |
| Masthead 07 | 3                       | 10k - 40k               | \$5000                 | \$10,000              | \$0                  | \$40,000                | \$0                    | \$55,000    |
| Masthead 09 | 1                       | 1k - 5k                 | \$25,500               | \$37,000              | \$5000               | \$2000                  | \$300                  | \$69,800    |
| Masthead 11 | 1                       | 0k - 1k                 | \$12,000               | \$54,000              | \$2000               | \$4900                  | \$1500                 | \$74,400    |
| Masthead 14 | 0.5                     | 1k - 5k                 | \$15,000               | \$56,000              | \$2000               | \$4000                  | \$3000                 | \$80,000    |
| Masthead 16 | 1                       | 5k - 10k                | \$19,000               | \$0                   | \$54,000             | \$4000                  | \$4000                 | \$81,000    |
| Masthead 18 | 2                       | 5k - 10k                | \$46,000               | \$30,000              | \$7000               | \$1000                  | \$0                    | \$84,000    |
| Masthead 20 | 1                       | 0k - 1k                 | \$12,000               | \$65,000              | \$2500               | \$5000                  | \$1800                 | \$86,300    |
| Masthead 22 | 1                       | 1k - 5k                 | \$20,000               | \$53,000              | \$5000               | \$4900                  | \$5000                 | \$87,900    |
| Masthead 24 | 1                       | 0k - 1k                 | \$17,000               | \$74,000              | \$600                | \$4000                  | \$0                    | \$95,600    |
| Masthead 26 | 3                       | 5k - 10k                | \$30,000               | \$52,000              | \$8000               | \$2000                  | \$8000                 | \$100,000   |
| Masthead 28 | 2                       | 10k - 40k               | \$20,000               | \$66,000              | \$10,000             | \$5000                  | \$5000                 | \$106,000   |
| Masthead 30 | 1                       | 5k - 10k                | \$53,000               | \$34,000              | \$10,000             | \$3000                  | \$10,000               | \$110,000   |
| Masthead 32 | 1.6                     | 10k - 40k               | \$50,000               | \$30,000              | \$5000               | \$30,000                | \$8000                 | \$123,000   |
| Masthead 34 | 1                       | 5k - 10k                | \$61,053               | \$64,303              | \$800                | \$0                     | \$4233                 | \$130,389   |
| Masthead 36 | 1                       | 40k - 80k               | \$8499                 | \$122,270             | \$727                | \$5000                  | \$0                    | \$136,496   |
| Masthead 38 | 6.4                     | 10k - 40k               | \$55,607               | \$85,249              | \$4180               | \$6150                  | \$0                    | \$151,186   |
| Masthead 40 | 4                       | 10k - 40k               | \$87,000               | \$58,000              | \$6000               | \$6000                  | \$4000                 | \$161,000   |
| Masthead 42 | 2                       | 40k - 80k               | \$45,000               | \$90,000              | \$15,000             | \$2500                  | \$23,000               | \$175,500   |
| Masthead 44 | 5                       | 10k - 40k               | \$85,504               | \$86,938              | \$9923               | \$0                     | \$7489                 | \$189,854   |
| Masthead 46 | 3                       | 80k - 120k              | \$30,298               | \$155,247             | \$6410               | \$0                     | \$14,882               | \$206,837   |
| Masthead 48 | 2                       | 40k - 80k               | \$90,500               | \$99,912              | \$1770               | \$6860                  | \$14,560               | \$213,602   |
| Masthead 50 | 3                       | 10k - 40k               | \$15,000               | \$200,000             | \$5500               | \$0                     | \$11,000               | \$231,500   |
| Masthead 52 | 3                       | 80k - 120k              | \$153,000              | \$35,000              | \$22,000             | \$139,000               | \$5000                 | \$354,000   |
| Masthead 54 | 14.1                    | 40k - 80k               | \$170,645              | \$185,607             | \$25,717             | \$7264                  | \$38,011               | \$427,244   |



## The value of government advertising

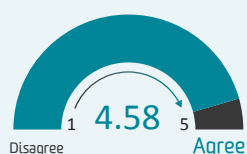
Respondents overwhelmingly considered there to be a strong correlation between government advertising spend and their future viability and that, in return, they should be required to provide communities with relevant and reliable place-based public-interest journalism. These quotes from the survey highlight the value of government advertising:

*"Pretty much, without government advertising to offset costs, we would not be able to exist."*

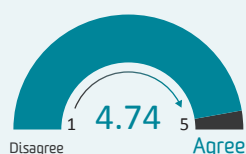
*"There's no doubt, it's keeping the lights on."*

Q.

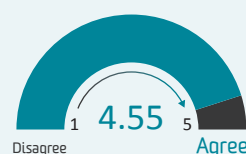
Extent to which news proprietors disagreed (1) or agreed (5) with these statements?



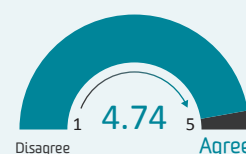
There is a strong correlation between all forms of government advertising and the health of local news in Victoria.



Local news outlets receiving any form of government advertising should provide public-interest journalism (accountability reporting) to the communities they purport to serve.



Local news outlets receiving any form of government advertising should have journalists living and working in the primary locality they purport to serve (within 50km).



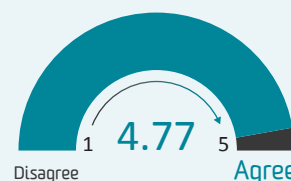
Government advertising should prioritise media that invests in credible, reliable news and public-interest journalism.

All respondents received income from State Government advertising. All but one received income from Local Government advertising and all but seven received income from Federal Government advertising. News proprietors considered all levels of government advertising to be essential to their economic survival. Importantly, they also felt that regular government advertising at all levels helped to legitimise their news outlet as a credible source of news and information for their communities.

Q.

Disagree (1) or agree (5) with this statement?

Regular government advertising at all levels legitimises my newspaper as a credible source of news and information for my community.



The total annual income from advertising by all levels of government was \$8,441,054. This equates to an average of \$99,306 for each of the mastheads in our total sample.

Of the government advertising each newspaper received, 56% of it came from State Government departments, 27% came from Local Government, 4.76% came from State Government MPs, 8.19% from Federal Government departments and 3.75% from Federal MPs.

Q.

Annual income from government advertising?

|                                |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Local Governments              | \$2,309,738 |
| State Government Departments   | \$4,752,239 |
| Local State Government MPs     | \$465,707   |
| Federal Government Departments | \$581,403   |
| Federal Government MPs         | \$331,966   |

Local governments spend a combined \$2,309,738 annually on advertising in the mastheads that completed this question of the survey. The median advertising revenue from Local Government was \$20,000 at each masthead that received this sort of income. Eight indicated they did not receive any Local Government advertising spend, while three mastheads received more than \$100,000 annual income from Local Government advertising.

State Government departments spend a total of \$4,752,239 on advertising in the mastheads that completed this question of the survey. The median advertising revenue from State Government departments was \$56,000 at each masthead that received this sort of income. Again, eight indicated they did not receive advertising from State Government departments. At the other end of the scale, two indicated they received \$200,000 or more annually in advertising revenue from this source.

State Government MPs spend a total of \$465,707 annually on advertising in the mastheads that completed this question of the survey. The median annual income from State Government MPs was \$4306 at each masthead that received this sort of income. Fifteen survey participants did not know how much their local State Government MPs spent annually on advertising in their masthead, and 10 indicated they did not receive any income from this source.

Federal Government departments spend a total of \$581,403 annually advertising in the mastheads that completed this question of the survey. The median annual income from this source is \$4000 at each masthead that received this sort of income. Fourteen mastheads indicated Federal departments did not spend any money advertising in their masthead, while two mastheads received more than \$100,000 annually from Federal Government departments in advertising revenue.

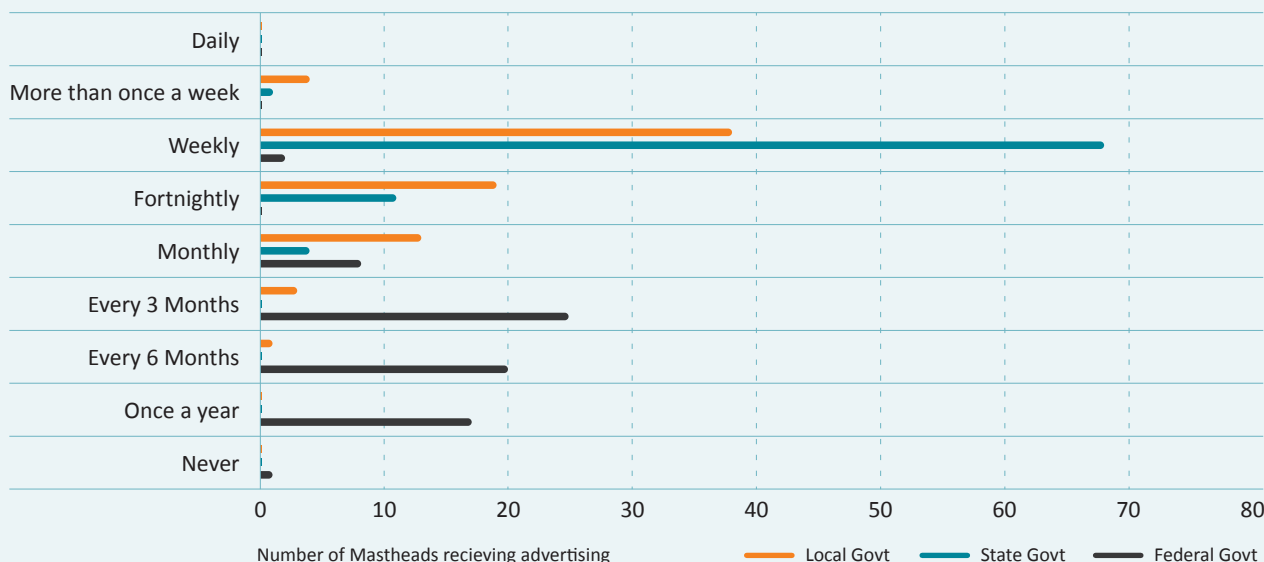
Federal Government MPs spend \$331,966 annually on advertising in the local newspapers that completed this survey. The median annual income from this source is \$3000 for each masthead that received this sort of income. Thirteen respondents indicated they did not know how much their local Federal Government MPs spent on advertising in their masthead, while 15 said they received no advertising from their local Federal Government MPs. There was one masthead that received \$38,011 income from advertising by their local Federal Government MPs.

## Frequency of government advertising

Most newspapers in our sample receive income from Local Government advertising on a weekly (48.7%) or fortnightly (24.3%) basis. This was also the case when it came to State Government advertising - most (79.7%) received this advertising weekly, or fortnightly (13.9%). The frequency of advertising by the Federal Government was lower, with most income from this source only occurring every three months (34.2%) or every six months (27.4%).

Q.

How often do different levels of government advertise in VCPA mastheads?

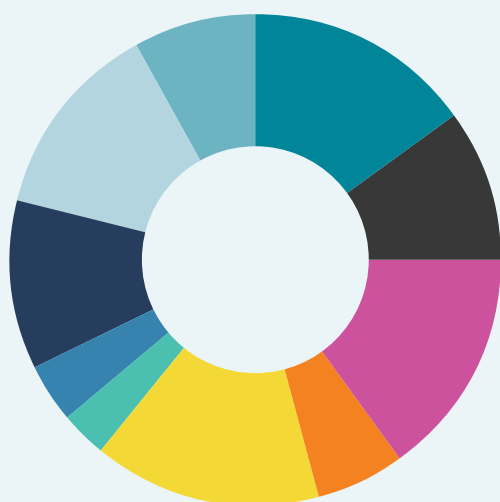


## Types of government advertising

Survey participants indicated that about a third of Local Government advertising took the form of public notices (30.4), followed by the advertising of events (25.7%) and employment opportunities (22%). The advertising placed in the newspapers by State Government departments tended to relate to public awareness and safety messages (15.4%), transport and infrastructure (15.2%), health (15.2%) and tourism (12.6%). The advertisements placed by Federal Government departments tended to be public awareness and safety messages (33.5%), health messages (23.7%) and government promotion (13.4%).

Q.

What type of content does State Government advertising typically feature?



|       |                                  |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| 15.2% | Transport                        |
| 9.6%  | Events                           |
| 15.4% | Public awareness messaging       |
| 6.2%  | Government promotion             |
| 15.2% | Health messaging                 |
| 3.2%  | Funding announcements            |
| 4%    | Grant opportunities              |
| 10.6% | Major projects                   |
| 12.6% | Tourism                          |
| 8%    | Agriculture and primary industry |

## Mandating government advertising in local media

Almost all (96%) of news proprietors said local, state and federal governments should be required under legislation to advertise in local media that provides public-interest journalism. This contrasts with responses from political leaders in our second survey, which found that most had a 'neutral' view about whether local and federal governments should be required to advertise government messages in local media.

Most news proprietors did not see any issue with mandating all levels of government to advertise in local media. However, some highlighted the importance of transparency, while others suggested that the State Government clarify its criteria for eligible outlets, to ensure outlets that received this income were credible, employed local people and reported on relevant issues and information for their communities. Survey respondents were asked if they knew of any examples where governments at any level had bypassed advertising in the local newspaper, and if they felt this had jeopardised public awareness of an issue. This question received the highest number of qualitative responses in the survey - more than a third (38%) indicated they had examples of this happening. Some highlighted, for example, how the Australian Electoral Commission had not advertised in many local newspapers, which left an information gap for citizens wanting to know where they could vote locally. Other comments included:

*"When our closest train station is having work done or changed schedules, readers are not informed by way of advertising."*

*"Election, telecommunication announcements, road closures and maintenance, building permits, bushfire and emergency announcements, important public notices, funding opportunities. You name it."*

## Inequalities in government advertising

Some respondents highlighted the inequalities that arose when there was more than one local media outlet serving a particular town or city, with a lack of clarity about why governments were choosing to advertise with certain publishers over others.

There were proprietors who suggested that the State Government clarify its criteria for eligible publishers to ensure they are credible, that they employed local people and they reported on relevant issues and information for their communities. There were also those who highlighted the issue of ad hoc Local Government advertising:

*"At the local level, the previous council relied solely on just one selected media outlet to spread awareness. This caused a lot of angst in the community as many people missed out on important messaging around projects happening."*

Respondents also highlighted the tendency of Federal Government, especially, to advertise in metropolitan locations or on social media at the expense of rural and regional areas:

*"While the Federal Government provides very little advertising overall, one clear concern is the tendency for departments to rely heavily on metropolitan or digital channels, bypassing local newspapers. For example, key initiatives - such as changes to regional infrastructure funding or agricultural support programs - have often been promoted nationally without any targeted communication in our paper. This limits local awareness and engagement, particularly in communities where print remains the most trusted and accessible source of information."*

Aging demographics were also consistently highlighted, for example:

*"We are a very small independent newspaper and, while we try to serve our district as best we can, we just don't get a lot of advertising anyway as social media has taken over and it is a free service with a much broader reach than our newspaper. The demographic of our readers are mainly elderly people as the younger generations are leaving the print industry in droves and doesn't matter what you do they won't come back to a paying service when they can do it for free."*

Those who did not receive any local and/or Federal Government advertising all said they felt disadvantaged by the lack of support and that it created inequalities within the sector. Consider these comments below:

*"Local constituents are far less informed about projects and activities being undertaken by local council"*

*"Federal Government members of parliament speak and promote themselves in local papers because they know that local communities are great consumers of local newspapers, however media buyers living in isolation in capital cities in Australia are completely numb to local community activity."*

*"As a single masthead, independent publication, my publication must pay its own bills when local advertising is in extremely short supply so government advertising is vital. My readers are not getting these government announcements at their fingertips."*

## Local Government relationships

Survey participants (news proprietors) believed they had a respectful relationship with their local council, and most ensured their reporters attended every council meeting to provide accountability reporting for the community on council matters.

While 92% of news proprietors had not had a local council withdraw or threaten to withdraw advertising from the newspaper over a story they were unhappy with, 8% indicated this had been the case. For those who indicated local government had threatened to withdraw advertising, the key reason related to disputes over editorial content that was critical of council affairs or municipal operations. Some of the comments included:

*"They haven't exactly threatened to withdraw advertising as they barely advertise with us, but they want to control the narrative, which we won't allow."*

*"Advertising was reduced. Relationships were fractured."*

*"Council has threatened to withdraw advertising after we printed a story about the dissatisfaction of staff. They never went through with their threat."*

*"[The council] withdrew advertising for articles they felt were critical of council."*

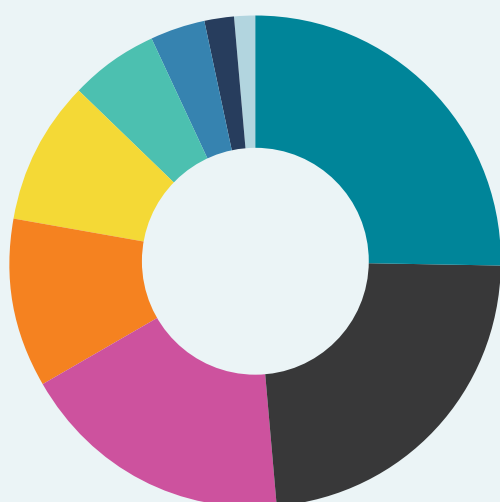
## How income from government advertising is used

More than a quarter (25.4%) of survey respondents said they primarily used the money generated via the State Government's commitment to advertise in country newspapers to retain existing journalists. The other main areas of the business this income supported was covering printing costs (23.4%), paying other staff (18%) and recruiting additional journalists (11.2%). Of the 9.3% who said they used the income to invest in innovation, their spending tended to have a digital focus, going towards websites, apps, podcasts and IT.

It is interesting to note that the funds were not used to expand the newspapers' geographic coverage, with only 3.5% indicating they had used income from government advertising to stretch into towns currently on the periphery of their circulation area.

Q.

How is income from State Government advertising used by newspapers?



All survey respondents said there was benefit to the community from the State Government advertising in their publications, and provided extensive qualitative responses to discuss the impact. Consider these examples:

*"It provides us with the resources to produce more public-interest journalism than would otherwise be possible, resulting in a more cohesive and informed community. Public-interest journalism is the democratic infrastructure that keeps communities such as ours strong."*

*"The financial contribution helps sustain independent local news, ensuring that our community continues to have access to relevant, trusted reporting. By choosing to advertise in regional newspapers rather than only digital platforms, the government reinforces the value of local media and supports small businesses that rely on community engagement. Overall, the presence of State Government advertising strengthens our ability to serve the community by keeping readers informed and financially supporting independent regional news."*

*"In November 2022, the Victorian Government recognised the importance of regional newspapers to their communities and as a part of their communication strategy committed to a full-page advertising in every masthead. Since the official Victorian policy of advertising support for regional media was announced it has had a positive impact on [this masthead], enabling us to sustain our journalist and deliver trusted and reliable public-interest news to our readers."*

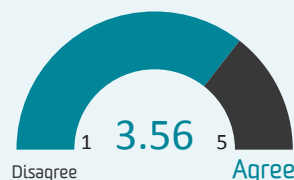
## The best form of support

When asked about local news sustainability, survey respondents were clear about the value of the support the State Government commitment provided them. They also indicated they would prefer regular government advertising spend over other government support mechanisms, such as subsidies or grants, which they have to apply for.

Q.

Disagree (1) or agree (5)  
with this statement?

There should be a public register  
that details the news outlets in  
Victoria where government  
advertising is spent.



# 79%

Agreed or strongly agreed that their newspaper would have closed if it was not for the State Government's weekly advertising expenditure.

# 86%

Agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer regular government advertising spend over government grants/subsidies that I have to apply for.



Key reasons news owners preferred regular government advertising over other forms of government support included the transparency and reliability that traditional advertising offered news outlets, as well as time:

*"It maintains our existence and we don't have the permanent staff to be applying for grants and subsidies."*

*"Government advertising is a preferred source of revenue over subsidies or other types of government support because it maintains independence, sustainability, and fairness in regional media. Unlike direct subsidies, which may raise concerns about media influence, advertising is a transactional arrangement where the government pays for space to communicate important information. This ensures that newspapers remain financially supported without compromising editorial integrity."*

*"Advertising allows newspapers to generate revenue in a market-driven way rather than relying on unpredictable or temporary government grants. It supports the industry without creating dependency and ensures newspapers can continue operations beyond the life of any funding program."*

*"Subsidies often require eligibility criteria and bureaucratic processes, which may favour some publications over others. Advertising revenue, on the other hand, allows all eligible newspapers to compete on their merits by offering effective audience engagement and readership reach."*

*"Grants are difficult to apply for and take a large amount of time to complete. This time is never included in the grant as a contingency amount in order to be able to recoup some of the employee hours used to apply for grants. If the grant is not received, it is a lot of 'wage' time wasted that the employer has no way of gaining back."*

*"Surely it's a win-win for both parties. The government actually gets something in return when advertising - by promoting important messages to the public. Grants are great, but they're inconsistent, which makes it hard to plan our business around them. Consistent government advertising is the most important factor in keeping our business sustainable."*

*"Governments need to advertise. It's an existing and essential cost. Communicating their messages through a local, credible new source as part of their normal budget and operations makes more sense than providing handouts to media outlets such as us. The revenue provides some certainty and a stable base around which we can structure the costs of our business."*

Unsurprisingly, all proprietors said the revenue generated via the State Government's commitment to advertising in country newspapers had a major positive impact on their sustainability. This is exemplified by the comment below:

*"State government advertising benefits our community in several ways. It informs the community - government ads provide important public health, safety, and service information that directly impacts residents, such as bushfire preparedness and local infrastructure updates."*

*The financial contribution helps sustain independent local news, ensuring that our community continues to have access to relevant, trusted reporting. By choosing to advertise in regional newspapers rather than only digital platforms, the government reinforces the value of local media and supports small businesses that rely on community engagement."*

*Overall, the presence of State Government advertising strengthens our ability to serve the community by keeping readers informed and financially supporting independent regional news."*

# Case studies

## Maryborough District Advertiser

When Daniel Andrews visited central Victoria in 2022, carrying a lifeline to struggling regional papers, The Maryborough District Advertiser's Mike Rossi met him with a handshake and a blunt truth: "I thanked him and said you probably saved about 30 mastheads in Victoria." Andrews' reply was candid: "He said once a newspaper closes, it very rarely ever reopens. He knew the problems we were facing."

Amid the upheaval of COVID-19, with 70% of its team working from home and its advertising pipeline severely impacted, The Advertiser made a public pledge to its community: it would persevere for as long as it could.

Now, the guaranteed page of State Government advertising in each edition of The Advertiser accounts for almost 7% of its annual turnover. Mr Rossi, The Advertiser's general manager, said this advertising commitment has given his newspaper "fire power". "It's allowed us to employ another journalist," Mr Rossi said. "We've got four reporters now. Three of them, it's basically their first start. I'm lucky, they're all very good. We can cover things properly, and in the way our audience expects and deserves."

In recent times, this has meant strengthening its council coverage and championing the community's campaign to save the heritage-listed Maryborough Municipal Olympic Pool - a movement that successfully secured the majority of the project's \$10 million funding across all three tiers of government.

"We were there. We covered that," Mr Rossi said. "That's the beauty of the local newspaper, you're a team with your local community. The State Government funding gives us extra boots on the ground to do that."



From left: Riley Upton, Sam McNeill, Mike Rossi, Niamh Sutton and Jonathan Peck.

## West Vic News



Craig Wilson owns three newspapers in Victoria's west and is proud that every page speaks straight to the locals it's written for. A significant helping hand, says the West Vic News proprietor, has come from State Government advertising - equivalent to a full page of advertising each week in both the Ararat Advocate and The Pyrenees Advocate.

"We go out and we take the photo, we attend the events, we take notes, we go back, we write a story," Wilson said. "The advertising support means that you've actually got the money to do things properly rather than just reproducing press releases and contributed photos. That's not journalism."

"For example, on Monday night one of our reporters is going over to Avoca to cover a retirement for somebody who's worked for Elders for 40 years. This weekend, our sports reporter will be out covering three different football games as we approach the finals."

Wilson's third publication, The Stawell Times, is still awaiting regular State Government advertising - a change he hopes is on the horizon, given it remains the only one of his three newspapers yet to turn a profit.

The Ararat Advocate was one of at least six "green shoot" regional and rural newspaper titles to emerge during the COVID-19 pandemic - a period of intense strain for the global news media industry, which saw more than 180 Australian newspapers halt publication or close permanently.

Wilson published the first edition of The Ararat Advocate in his hometown on May 1, 2020, two weeks after Australian Community Media suspended the printing of the Ararat Advertiser for three months during the pandemic, before closing it for good. From a modest team of two reporters and a designer, the three newspapers have grown to include four full-time journalists, a sales team and two designers.

"People will say a lot of things about Daniel Andrews, but the support they gave us during COVID and beyond, I think in a lot of cases has kept some newspapers going," Wilson said.

"We would have struggled if we didn't have that money."

"Government money has just allowed us to employ extra resources to actually provide the content for the newspaper."

# Survey

Political Leaders

02

# Political Leaders

The second questionnaire surveyed political leaders in Victoria. This included State and Federal Members of Parliament (MPs) and the mayors of each Local Government Area.

There are 79 councils in Victoria. The survey was completed by 25 mayors, equating to a response rate of 31.6%. There are 128 State MPs in Victoria and we received responses from 12 MPs. Of the State MPs, responses were received from: three Labor Party MPs, three National Party MPs, two Greens MPs, two Independent MPs, one Legalise Cannabis Party MP and one Liberal Party MP.

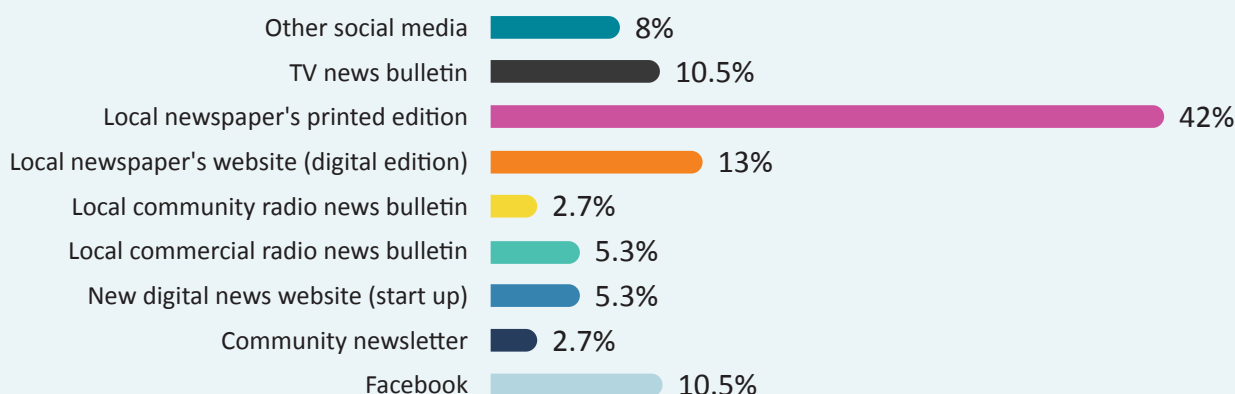
The response rate from Federal MPs was low - a figure that could have been impacted by the timing of the survey, which was conducted in the lead up to the 2025 federal election. There are 38 federal electorates in Victoria. The survey was completed by only one member of this cohort. Overall, the survey was completed by 38 Victorian political leaders (n = 38).

## Local news sources

Political leaders were asked what they considered to be the most regular reliable source of news in the town, city or suburb where they lived. They ranked nine different platforms including Facebook, TV, radio etc. The highest ranked platform was the printed local newspaper, with 42% of respondents putting it at the top of the list. The second highest ranked source of regular reliable local news was the local newspaper's online website, with 31.5% of respondents placing it second on the list. These figures were slightly higher among leaders in rural and regional areas, compared to those who represented metropolitan areas. Leaders in metropolitan locations rated the TV news bulletin as the most regular and reliable source of news for their area.

Q.

Which local news source do political leaders consider the most reliable?



More fine-grained analysis focused on the largest cohort in our sample (mayors). It suggests the local newspaper's printed version is preferred by Local Government mayors in rural and regional areas especially, with 60% of this group rating the printed newspaper the most reliable and regular source of local news in their area. For suburban mayors, the response was more varied – 27% of this cohort highlighted TV news bulletins as the most reliable regular source of local news, with social media and printed editions of local newspapers also rating highly. It is important to acknowledge that, in the qualitative data, some suburban mayors highlighted there was no locally focused media serving their areas and that they existed in 'news deserts'.

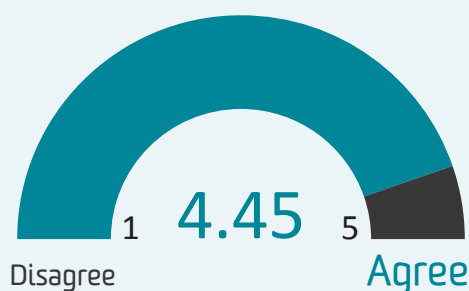
## Local media and its role in democratic societies

Political leaders across rural, regional and suburban areas strongly indicated that securing the future of public-interest journalism was important to democracy, and that local news was important to the social fabric of their area and the sense of community among their constituents.

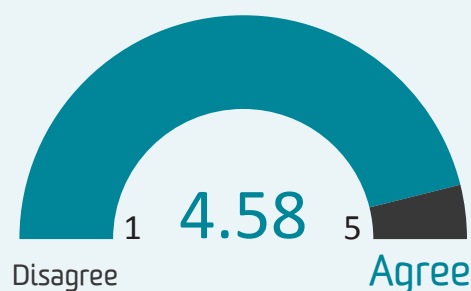
Q.

Extent to which political leaders disagreed (1) or agreed (5) with these statements?

Securing the future of public-interest journalism is important to local democracy.



Local news is important to the social fabric and sense of community among my constituents.



## Government advertising budgets

The State and Federal Government MPs who completed the survey indicated that they spent 36.2% of their advertising budget on Facebook and other social media platforms, 26.5% on printed flyers, marketing material and signage, and 18.7% on advertising in their local newspaper's print and online editions. Ten per cent of their advertising budget was spent on community radio and 5.5% on advertising in community newsletters. When it comes to election spending, State and Federal MPs who completed the survey indicated they spent 30% of their advertising budget on Facebook and other social media platforms, 27.8% on printed flyers, marketing material and signage, and 22.2% advertising in the local newspaper's print and digital editions.

Mayors indicated councils spent 30.9% of their advertising budget advertising in their local newspaper's print and digital edition. They spent 26.4% of their advertising budget on the local council publication, 19.19% on printed flyers, marketing material and signage, and 11% on advertising on Facebook and other social media platforms. Mayors representing rural and regional areas were more likely than metropolitan mayors to use the local newspaper's print and digital editions to place council messages, indicating they spend 39.3% of their annual advertising budget on this platform.

State and Federal government MPs indicated that they spent 22.2% of their advertising budget in the local newspaper's print and digital editions, while mayors indicated councils spent 30.9% of their budget on these platforms.

## The State Government's advertising commitment

Somewhat surprisingly, 80% of respondents were not aware of the Victorian Government's commitment to placing a full page of weekly advertisements in every eligible country newspaper in the state. Nonetheless, 46.7% said this commitment should be continued for the long-term, with just 10% saying the arrangement should be cancelled.

Participants were asked to elaborate on their reasons via a qualitative response. Almost all saw merit in the State Government supporting local news outlets with advertising spend, with comments including phrases such as *"it's easily justifiable"*, *"important"* and a *"reasonable expectation"*. Consider these responses:

*"This is a vital component of a small paper's annual revenue and it (money) should not be held hostage to the whims of the government of the day."*

*"This should be long-term. It will sustain rural and regional newspapers, as without it they cannot survive."*

Many highlighted a need to ensure the advertising spend was targeted appropriately. For example, one participant suggested that the State Government should only advertise 'necessary' or essential information rather than content 'promoting' government spending and policies. Three of the 17 qualitative responses had a negative view of the arrangement continuing into the future, for example:

*"We are bankrupt. Taxes should be spent on services not propping up unviable industries."*

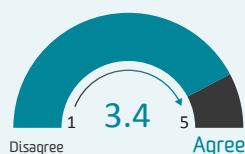
There was an overall neutral view among survey participants as to whether Local Government should also be required to regularly advertise in a local newspaper, although attitudes varied dramatically between leaders in rural and regional areas (mean average 3.5) and those in metropolitan areas (mean average 1.8).

## The relationship between government advertising and local news sustainability

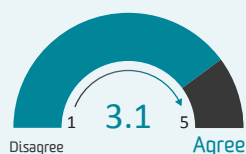
Overall, political leaders had a neutral attitude towards government advertising expenditure and its relationship to the viability of local news outlets. They were presented with a series of statements and a ranking scale of 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. They considered there to be a slightly higher relationship between the value of government advertising expenditure and local news viability (3.4 mean average), but were more neutral on whether they thought their constituents expected them to advertise in a local news outlet (2.97).

Q.

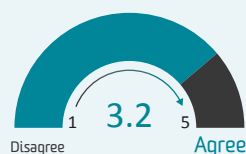
Extent to which political leaders disagreed (1) or agreed (5) with these statements?



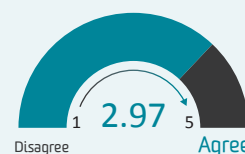
There is a clear relationship between government advertising expenditure and its importance to the viability of local news outlets.



There is a correlation between where political leaders spend advertising money and what is considered to be a legitimate platform for quality news.



Where I spend my advertising money matters to the health of our state's news ecology.



My local constituents expect me to advertise in a local newspaper.



The relationship between advertising and news viability was considered more important among rural and regional leaders (3.7) compared to metropolitan leaders (2.97), with these leaders viewing suburban constituents less likely to expect them to advertise in a local news outlet (1.8).

As a follow up question, political leaders were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagree with the statement 'Media that relies on government advertising spend for its viability has no future'. This response had a mean average of 3.41, meaning they slightly agreed with this statement.

Survey participants were invited to provide further feedback or comments regarding their relationship with local news media and/or the issue of government advertising in local media outlets. We received 14 qualitative responses that can be grouped into three key themes:

- 
- ① The challenge of declining news provision, and governments and councils filling voids with their own newsletters.

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  - ② The need for more targeted approaches to ensure consideration is given to where government advertising is placed.

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  - ③ The rising challenge of social media algorithms.
- 

In regards to declining local news, some political leaders highlighted they were part of a rich news and information ecology, but others were lamenting the loss of news outlets and public-interest journalism in their area. Comments relating to this included:

*"Regional areas have shrinking access to credible media sources and the loss of genuine news organisations will cost many of those communities, not just a local news source but also a voice."*

*"We don't have a local newspaper, however if one was here, advertising would assist with viability and is a cost effective way to get messages to residents."*

There was one political leader who strongly disagreed with mandating advertising in local newspapers, suggesting it played a counter-productive role to democracy:

*"Taxes are for basic services and infrastructure, not for pork barrelling industry sectors for votes - which is what this is. If news sources rely on government money for survival that is a conflict of interest AGAINST democracy, not a measure to protect it! I'm wondering if this is a taxpayer funded institution being used to promote or research a particular party [view] or policy rather than making that party do it themselves."*

## Social media

Increasingly, challenges associated with social media were also highlighted. Overall participants slightly disagreed that Facebook was a credible platform for local news and information (mean average 2.54) but 70% of respondents said they had a Facebook page they updated with news and information each week.

*"Our area has an above-average amount of community FB pages. They are the worst. I could not think of a more effective way to destroy community cohesion and make everyone in a community feel angry at each other. I avoid social media as much as possible."*

*"Facebook is an unsafe space for news and information, and sharing Council updates and priorities. We will be going back to Ward newsletters to reach bigger audiences - the reliance on social media needs to swing back."*

# Conclusion

Government public notice and essential messaging spend has long (indirectly) supported the business model sustaining news outlets in Australia, and its sudden, rapid shift to social media platforms from the 2000s onwards has had a clear impact on the financial decline of local news media outlets.

This study has found that the Victorian State Government's advertising commitment is acting as an important financial support mechanism for local newspapers across the state. In many cases, it is providing revenue that enables news outlets to continue operating as well as reinforcing their legitimacy as reliable providers of information that serve the public interest. This suggests this type of government support is, at least in part, helping to ensure rural and regional communities in Victoria have access to local news, and therefore staving off the spread of 'news desert' areas.

The situation in other states of Australia, and across other levels of governments, however is at best ad hoc. There are deep inconsistencies across local, state and federal government departments and their attitudes and directives around public notice dissemination. While the Victorian State Government is making an annual commitment to local newspaper advertising at a cost of more than \$5 million, the Federal Government has pledged \$3 million over two years into local newspaper advertising spend across the entire nation.

But even within the state of Victoria, directives around public notice spend can be inconsistent across departments and this raises important questions for the future. For example, in 2024, Resources Victoria set its advertising requirements for minerals exploration, prospecting, retention and mining licence applications. Regulation 22 states that all licence applications are required to advertise the information "in a newspaper that circulates in each locality" where all or part of the area that is the subject of the application is located (Resources Victoria, 2024, p5). If no newspaper is circulating, then an applicant must erect road signage or notify all affected landowners and occupiers directly via letter. Radio is also considered appropriate if the station broadcasts to each relevant locality, but social media should not replace the advertising requirements in the regulations.

Regulation 22 acknowledges the importance of the local newspaper in disseminating public notices, but it also highlights a number of challenges. Firstly, how do we know a local masthead actually serves the area it purports to serve? And should it be considered a journal of public record for a given geographic area if it doesn't actually provide original, relevant and reliable local news?

On what basis is print the preferred dissemination approach? What happens, for example, if the local radio station or a digital-only platform provides stronger access to quality, relevant local news and information for audiences? Local mastheads that continue to operate in print tend to do so because they understand the needs of their audiences and evidence certainly suggests that print continues to be popular across rural and regional areas in Australia (Hess and McAdam, 2024). But there are also many printed newsletters operating across the state that do not employ professional journalists, do not cover court or local council affairs, and are run by volunteers.

At the same time, there also needs to be clarity around what is meant by government advertising spend, and this is a key finding of this report. Political leaders have highlighted the need to refine the policy to ensure there is clarity around public notices (eg: tenders, recruitment, mining licences) and essential messaging (eg: road safety; bushfire awareness), as opposed to political promotion or election advertisements. The political sphere's power to impose legitimacy and credibility on other fields in society through policymaking and funding is widely established, theoretically and empirically (Bourdieu, 1986). The powerful impact government advertising spend (across federal, state and local levels) plays in local news media is therefore twofold:

- 1. It provides sustenance and surety for the ongoing sustainability of news outlets that provide public-interest journalism and meet essential information needs for the places they serve.**
- 2. It reinforces the legitimacy of certain information providers as credible sources of information in which government chooses to disseminate key messages promoting social order, a healthy democracy, civil discourse, wellbeing and safety.**

There are, therefore, important implications associated with the placement and allocation of government public notices and essential messaging. Directing spending away from local news providers and towards other outlets, such as Facebook, creates an uneven landscape and effectively 'rubber stamps' the platform as a credible and reliable source of information and local political discourse.

In an era troubled by misinformation and disinformation, there should be a commitment to disseminate public notices via reliable media channels that serve as a form of public record for communities in the interests of democracy itself. This is exemplified by information providers who invest in public-interest journalism.

We suggest that the flow of government advertising revenue across local, state and national levels should be more thoroughly scrutinised. This requires establishing transparency to ensure governments can both support institutions entrusted with providing quality discourse and ensure important public messages are reaching all corners of government boundaries at local, state and national levels. Our project team, in partnership with the ABC and others, is developing a world-first index measurement tool to identify how well 'placed' and invested individual news outlets are in providing the forms of public-interest journalism most needed by local communities in Australia. This tool can help governments determine appropriate channels to advertise their public notices and essential messaging (see Appendix 1).

# Recommendations

- 
- ▶ The State Government continues its commitment of weekly advertising in local news outlets across Victoria, with some refinement to achieve a more targeted approach that ensures essential civic and political information reaches all rural and regional Victorians.
- 
- ▶ That a measurement tool be introduced to assess suitable news outlets as platforms of public record in which to disseminate public notices and government essential messaging across Australia. Priority for public notice dissemination should be given to news providers that demonstrate a) at least two dissemination channels to reach citizens (eg: print and digital) in order to account for access and diversity, and b) employ at least one professional journalist.
- 
- ▶ That the symbiotic relationship between government public notices/essential information messaging and news media sustainability and credibility is recognised across local, state and national levels and re-instated or reaffirmed in appropriate legislation.
- 
- ▶ Government public notices and essential information that is disseminated by a news outlet should be free to access and archivable in the interests of the public record. For example, if a printed newspaper has a cover charge or subscription fee, these notices should be made accessible for free on the masthead's website.
- 
- ▶ A register of all government advertising spend across local, state and national levels of government should be established to support transparency.
- 
- ▶ Appropriate checks and balances be put in place to preserve journalistic independence, enable transparency and ensure news outlets can continue to report without fear or favour. Equally, news outlets should be held accountable for providing reliable, regular, original, quality public-interest journalism.
- 
- ▶ The State Government should clarify that any mandated messaging spend in local news outlets focuses on public notices and essential information/awareness only, not election campaign spending or promotion of party policies and activities.
- 
- ▶ Further research is undertaken to establish a minimum standard for the number of journalists in newsrooms, factoring in population size and geographic catchment, in the interests of quality local news coverage.
- 
- ▶ An education and awareness campaign is introduced to inform citizens of 'where to go' for reliable, quality news and information in the digital age as part of media literacy initiatives and activities.
-

## Appendix 1

# The Australian Local News Proximity Index

### Introducing the ALNPI

Determining where and how best to direct support to struggling parts of the local news sector and promote media access and diversity remains a challenge, especially because the term ‘local news’ is a slippery concept, creating challenges when formulating policies and solutions. The Australian Local News Proximity Index (ALNPI) is a new measurement tool developed to help identify which news outlets are genuinely embedded in the communities they claim to serve. It responds to the need for a more nuanced and practical way of assessing local news provision, beyond simply mapping where outlets are located, and can easily be adopted by researchers, policymakers and industry. The ALNPI is based on a three-dimensional understanding of proximity:

**Geographic proximity:** The physical presence of a news outlet in the place it serves, and its ability to cover issues within a clearly defined locality.

**Cultural proximity:** The extent to which a news outlet reflects, understands and participates in the shared values, identities and narratives of a local community.

**Social proximity:** The depth of a news outlet’s engagement with the institutions, services and networks that shape daily life in a specific place.

Together, these dimensions form the basis of an index that evaluates how well a news outlet is positioned to provide relevant, accountable and community-oriented journalism. A quantitative survey is used to gather data that determines a news provider’s Local News Proximity Index score (ALNPI score). The survey is divided into five key sections:

- ▶ Journalism investment
- ▶ Infrastructure investment
- ▶ Place-based orientation
- ▶ Contextualisation
- ▶ Reach

These criteria were selected to represent a benchmark for the ‘ideal’ local news provider – one that demonstrates maximum geographic, social and cultural proximity, and is closely aligned with the information needs of the community it serves. Based on their responses, news outlets are then assessed and placed in one of four types of proximal relevance.

### Potential applications of the ALNPI

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**Identify vulnerable areas in Australia’s local news ecosystem where support is most urgently needed.**

---

**Guide targeted government funding and/or public notice expenditure, ensuring that outlets with strong community ties receive appropriate support.**

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**Inform the selection of local media partners for government public awareness campaigns and service announcements.**

---

**Help startups and new providers identify under-served local areas and market gaps.**

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**Complement other measurement frameworks or mapping tools for local news.**

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**Encourage collaboration between types (for example, a news provider in Type 4 operating at a distance from ‘place’ may work with a news provider in Type 1 to improve investigative reporting).**

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### Australian Local News PROXIMITY INDEX

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of ABC Research Lead Dr Angela Ross in helping to lead the development of the Index.

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