



Joint statement from PLNZ and LIANZA on library overdue fines 2022

Position

Public Libraries New Zealand (PLNZ) and Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) encourage all public libraries to remove library overdue fines for all members to ensure New Zealanders have access to information, reading, learning, and connections to their communities. Removing fines increases the use and membership of libraries. Using libraries provides communities and families with fair and equitable access to information and lifelong learning, with access to reading to build literacy and empathy, and with opportunities to learn and flourish in their community and the economy.

Principles

PLNZ and LIANZA support the removal of overdue fines because:

- Library fines undermine one of the core principles of public libraries - the provision of free and universal access to information¹
- The people who can least afford to pay fines are often the ones who need the library service the most
- There is no evidence that overdue fines encourage meaningful compliance²
- Library fines create a disproportionate administrative burden on library staff
- Local authorities are responsible for improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of our communities and libraries are a key instrument for keeping communities connected³
- Removing fines helps communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic consequences⁴
- Research indicates that removing fines will result in greater use of public libraries including increased membership and borrowing, and support better literacy outcomes and better return on investment⁵

¹ [IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994](#)

² The City of Sydney discovered that without the threat of a fine, three times as many books were returned to their libraries.

³ [Local Government \(Community Well-being\) Amendment Act 2019](#)

⁴ [Santa Monica Public Library Drops Overdue Fines \(surfsantamonica.com\)](#) "The program is meant to further the city's recovery from the coronavirus shutdown and is part of an effort "to remove barriers to accessing the Santa Monica Public Library," City officials said." February 2022.

⁵ In Tasmania after all libraries scrapped overdue fees in 2018 more than 8,000 new members signed up in just five months in contrast to the loss of 900 members in the same period the year prior. In Salt Lake City public library issues increased 16% the year after removing fines



Recommendations

PLNZ and LIANZA make the following recommendations to library services currently charging fines for overdue items.

- Build a case to remove fines
 - Review your fines policy, carry out a full financial assessment to uncover the true cost of monitoring and collecting fines
 - Take note of other libraries' experience in terms of the return of items when overdue fines have been lifted
 - Survey your community to evaluate the role of fines in deterring people from borrowing
 - Inquire into the impact of library fines on those members of the community who are most in need of library services and can least afford to pay overdue fees
 - Consult with your Council's financial and governance sections to determine the best way forward for your community and how to use the Annual or Long-Term planning process to achieve discussion and endorsement
 - If fines make a positive net financial contribution, aim to identify alternative sources of revenue
 - Seek advice from your council PR and marketing team about the impact of library fines on image and reputation management
- Regularly review your fines and charges policy in the context of national and international library trends
- If removing fines altogether is not achievable
 - Consider transitioning to remove children's and young people's fines as a first step
 - Consider the level of debt that triggers blocks to borrowing
 - Consider ceasing to send debt recovery to external debt agencies to reduce fear and shame and long-term consequences
 - Consider running amnesty campaigns to encourage people to return items and renew their borrowing rights