

Media release

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The vital work of Australian authors still doesn't deliver a living wage

The Australia Council has today released a [summary](#) of the *2022 National Survey of Australian Book Authors*, which provides valuable insights into the conditions faced by authors.

The survey was conducted by Paul Crosby, David Throsby and Jan Zwar from Macquarie University and supported by funding from the Australia Council and the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.

It examines how authors have fared and responded to industry changes since the previous survey in 2015, including changes brought about by COVID-19, and shows that despite a modest increase, authors still struggle to earn an income from writing that comes close to earnings for other professions.

Miles Franklin Literary Award winning Australian author Melissa Lucashenko said the report sheds light on the challenges faced by many writers.

"My life as a writer has far exceeded any dreams I might have had as a twenty-year-old housepainter who wrote a novel about underclass life in Logan City. The only thing writing hasn't done in thirty years is paid me a living wage. For the first two decades of writing my partner's income subsidised my writing. Then we divorced and I became a single parent. Physical disability forced me to drive Uber; I also worked with women leaving prison to re-establish themselves. Writing went by the wayside, for the most part. This new research shows that my story is, sadly, all too common. Even as a writer who has won or been shortlisted for about fifteen Australian literary prizes I was at the time unable to both write and put petrol in my car.

Writing is an industry, and a culturally important one. Australian stories and voices are critical to who we are, to our sense of belonging to each other, and thus to our democracy."

Australia Council Head of Literature Wenona Byrne said:

"Australian authors are critical to the success of the broader creative industries, shaping our country's cultural story and imagination. We hope this research will help to shed light on the circumstances book authors in Australia face, and support efforts to foster the growth and sustainability of Australian literature."

Copyright Agency CEO Josephine Johnston said:

"We welcome Macquarie University's updated research into Australian Book Authors' Incomes and to work with the outstanding research team of David Throsby, Jan Zwar and Paul Crosby. The research provides helpful insights into author incomes, including how they vary for different areas of writing and publishing."

The Australian Society of Authors has welcomed the research. CEO Olivia Lanchester said:

“This research is fundamental to informing the advocacy work of the ASA and elucidates why the ASA is calling for better investment in our authors and better government policies to make writing careers possible. If we care about Australian stories and Australian education, then we must care about the individuals who labour to create that work.

As in 2015, average incomes from practising as an author are again well below the poverty line in Australia. While we await the new National Cultural Policy, we must bear in mind that the Australian books we see in bookstores, in libraries, in schools and adapted for the stage and screen cannot be taken for granted. We are grateful to the Australia Council for the Arts and Copyright Agency for funding this critical research.”

Key findings:

- The average annual income from practising as an author is \$18,200, up slightly from \$14,630 (adjusting for inflation) since 2015.
- Incomes from practising as an author varied significantly between different categories and genres – while average earnings increased for writers of genre and children’s fiction, authors of literary fiction fared worse, on average. Annual incomes from practising as an author lie between \$5,700 (poetry) and \$26,800 (children’s books).
- Many authors rely on multiple sources of income to make ends meet. Two-fifths of authors rely on the income of their partner and two-fifths rely on income from a job that is unrelated to being an author.
- With the need to generate income from other sources, writers typically spend only around half their working time producing original work, demonstrating a potential loss of Australian stories.
- While the most common form of publishing is with a traditional publisher, self-publishing is on the rise. At least one-third of authors have self-published a book during their career, and one-fifth of authors in the past year.
- More than a quarter of authors had experienced infringement of their copyright in Australia or overseas and a further 25% were unsure if this had occurred.
- Traditional book reviews remain important, particularly for writers of literary fiction and creative non-fiction. Online platforms and social media have also elevated the role of reader recommendations, making these increasingly important compared to previous years.

More information is available on the Australia Council [website](#), including the [summary](#) and [full report](#).

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