

Media Release

The Hon Shaun Leane MLC
Minister for Local Government
Minister for Suburban Development
Minister for Veterans



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MECHANICS' INSTITUTES SERVING COMMUNITIES 180 YEARS ON

The Victorian Government is helping Mechanics' Institutes continue to serve hundreds of Victorian towns, cities and suburbs – more than 180 years after the first one was opened to the public.

The Institutes were established to provide free education and a meeting place for the community, and 10 still provide free library services.

These Institutes will now share in \$100,000 from the Labor Government's *Public Libraries Funding Program* to create public internet access, buy audiobooks, replace furniture and undertake renovations.

The Melbourne Mechanics' Institute opened in 1839 and was later renamed the Melbourne Athenaeum. It continues to operate a library, theatres and shops in Collins Street and, along with the Ballarat, Berwick, Bonnie Doon, Footscray, Talbot, Stanley, Maldon, Little River and Prahran Institutes, will benefit from the new investment.

The Melbourne Athenaeum will receive \$10,000, towards the refurbishment of its library, including new Victorian-made timber tables that will replace old, donated and mis-matched furniture.

The Little River Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1910, will receive \$12,000 for repairs to heritage collection books and to install audio-visual and theatrical lighting facilities. The Prahran Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1854, will receive \$11,400 to upgrade the library's lighting, making it easier for people to access its wide-ranging collection.

The Government is also providing \$30,000 to the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria for IT upgrades, collection-building, cataloguing and a redesign of the magazine *Useful Knowledge*. Published three times a year, the magazine features scholarly articles and news from the Mechanics' Institute movement both in Victoria and around the world.

Mechanics' Institutes began as a model for free education for workers in Scotland and were established throughout Britain's colonies. Mechanics Institutes opened in Australia in the early 19th century and were extremely popular, with one in almost every town in Victoria.

Today, 562 Mechanics' Institutes remain in Victoria, providing a space for community groups, exhibitions, talks, events – and libraries.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Local Government Shaun Leane

"For nearly two centuries Mechanics' Institutes have been there for Victorians – it's an amazing record of service."

"We're proud to help these local institutions maintain and expand their collections and do things like improve lighting and access. Let's hope our Mechanics' Institutes are around for many decades to come."

Quotes attributable to Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria acting president Steven Haby

"This is a real boost for our confidence as we work to broaden the reach of Mechanics' Institutes across Victoria and in people's minds."

"We want people to see the Mechanics' Institute halls when they visit a country town and be excited to learn more."

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