

*Let's Talk Libraries: November 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025*

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## **What we heard from you.**

Library board members, municipal councillors, and library staff spoke with **over 925 library users between November 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>**, in all 7 libraries. We asked why they use the library and what they valued. We also reached out to over 120 community partners who depend upon libraries in some way, either through help for their clients or directly supporting programs. Our goal was to be clear and transparent to our users. Changes are coming. If users wished, they could contact their MLAs as they are now seeking input into the next provincial budget.

### **Your Public Library**

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Public library services and programs directly support the overall health and well-being of citizens. The seven branch libraries in the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL) are community hubs with 175,983 visits last year. This is only one part of our library service. We have a 24/7 online presence, a Borrow by Mail service and an active outreach capability. The library is free, paid for by taxes and fundraising, with no conditions for membership. We strive to be inclusive, accessible, safe, diverse and equitable. Library staff are well-trained to work with and support a diverse clientele with multiple and sometimes complex needs. PARL is proud to be a community-responsive not-for-profit with a community development focus. Partnerships are core to our mission and practice.

At the same time, public libraries are under financial stress and at risk. The recent government-led Public Library Funding Formula Committee recognized that public libraries are under-resourced for the work they do. There have been no increases to the provincial core funding for six years, only one-time grants meant to bridge libraries to a new funding formula. Inflation has increased by 21% and the minimum wage by 31%. At the same time, libraries are being asked to do more and more by government and the community. Our 8 municipalities increased their funding in 2025/2026, and PARL increased fundraising. **But without sustainable provincial funding, changes are coming in 2026, specifically cuts to open hours, services and programs.**

### **What We Heard**

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In all 7 locations, people called the public library their community hub. They referenced the multitude of services, programs, and activities the public library offers. Users equate the library as a place to socialize, and it is important in their overall well-being. Several people said the library was their only social lifeline.

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## Other key points raised often by library users

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- **Affordability and the rising cost of living** were mentioned significantly by seniors and families. Libraries offer a wide range of critical services and programs for free. There are fewer and fewer places to go where people are not expected to pay.
- Access to **reading and learning resources** is still the primary reason people come to the library and they want more books and materials. Most pointed out they **could not afford to obtain these resources without libraries** and they would have no other place to turn to.
- **Internet and WIFI access.** Many cannot afford the high costs of internet at home. Especially with the current inflation. Seniors regularly use the help and training services to learn new technologies. They get help from staff to **access virtual health care and to access government online services.**
- **Not-for-Profit organizations** throughout the community, including government departments, depend on library spaces to carry out meetings, public presentations, offer services, meet with clients, and raise awareness about their activities. They make use of the technology available and value the help they get from staff. **They want more access to these spaces, not less.**
- Library users visit to engage with library staff, to seek assistance, guidance, and feel supported.
- A significant number said they get help from staff to **access online government services**, forms, and to find the right contact. They are often referred to the library by MLA offices, telephone government help lines, Service Canada and Access Nova Scotia sites, health providers, and others.
- In the five locations that have **community pantries**, several mentioned this as their primary reason for coming to the library. But when they arrive, they stay for the warmth and feelings of social interaction, security, and safety.
- We also spoke to **parents, youth, and children.** Parents go to the library regularly to meet other parents, play with their children, and generally get out of the house. Youth use the library after school while they wait for parents to get off work. Parents appreciate having a safe space for their children to go, with lots of activities.
- The library is a key **transit stop**, with shelter, washrooms, and safety.
- **Newcomers** are a sector that heavily uses libraries, especially as a way to meet others in the community, especially families.

When we spoke about how libraries are funded, most had not really thought of it. But when it was explained, users realized their taxes pay for public libraries, as well as community contributions. When we informed people that each taxpayer in the region contributes **\$21.62** each per year in provincial taxes, for all of the services, they universally felt it was a very good deal. But they also realized inflation and the cost of living have taken a toll. **All library users understood that sustainable funding was needed.**