



Canadian Federation of Library Associations Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

POSITION STATEMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF Health Libraries in Canada.

All Canadians benefit from health decisions that are based on current and reliable information. In an increasingly complex healthcare environment, health professionals, policy makers, researchers, and students training for careers in health all require access to evidence-based health information and professionally trained library staff. Recognizing this, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) and the Canadian Health Libraries Association / Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada (CHLA/ABSC) jointly acknowledge and affirm the importance of health libraries to health professionals' training, professional development, and day-to-day patient care decision making.

Training tomorrow's health professionals requires reliable evidence

- Canada's healthcare staffing crisis has led to the expansion of established health education programs at colleges and universities across the country, and the establishment of new professional schools in Medicine and Nursing at some institutions.
- Evidence-informed practice (EIP) is the cornerstone of education in the health professions.
 - Students and their instructors require library subscriptions to reliable, high quality health information resources throughout these programs of study.
 - Health librarians play an active role in students' education by teaching principles of EIP and how to effectively find and evaluate information.

Learning doesn't end at graduation

- Health professionals are required to meet minimum standards for continued professional learning and development to maintain their license to practice. Post secondary institutions offer accredited workshops to practicing professionals but the underlying evidence is provided by the library at the workplace (e.g. hospital, public health unit, or clinics), or sometimes their professional association.
 - Health librarians and library technicians in the workplace use their expertise behind the scenes to manage electronic resources and provide specialized services beyond those traditionally associated with libraries.
 - Library staff conduct literature searches on medical conditions and best practices in treatment or rehabilitation of diseases, and support systematic reviews of the



Canadian Federation of Library Associations Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

literature to ensure the latest evidence is available for research into patient care topics, effectiveness studies, or improvements in health practices.

Having up-to-date, reliable health information is a necessity for patient care

- Access to health library services improves patient experience & reduces length of stay
 - Research indicates that health professionals' access to credible health information from library resources 'resulted in a better informed clinical decision' and 'contributed to higher quality of care'
 - Accessing the latest research via academic health sciences libraries or workplace libraries in hospitals or other health settings ensures that health practitioners bring new approaches and scientific discoveries into their healthcare discussions with patients and families.
 - The presence of digital resources which are managed by library staff ensures reliable, online access to up-to-date medical literature, drug reference tools, and clinical guidelines. Healthcare teams are empowered to efficiently answer critical clinical questions at the patient's bedside, reach diagnoses faster, and devise better treatment plans - ultimately reducing patient length of stay.
- Physicians are considered the most trustworthy source of credible health information by their patients (81% according to a CMA survey published in January 2024). Health care providers combat misinformation by providing patients and families with credible information.
 - The rise of online misinformation and disinformation related to health that can result in illness or death has caught the attention of the media in recent years.
 - Health care providers rely on authoritative information resources available from medical libraries, health sciences libraries, or workplace libraries.
 - Specialist information professionals work with health care providers to conduct searches using trustworthy resources enabling them to prioritize patient care
 - Patients and families benefit from special libraries that provide consumer health information in plain language



Canadian Federation of Library Associations Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

- Health sciences libraries provide access to credible, evidence-based resources that empower healthcare providers and patients to make informed decisions.
 - Inaccurate information, particularly related to medical treatments and public health, can severely undermine the quality of patient care and lead to misdiagnosis, substandard therapies, and even preventable harm, resulting in hospitalization
 - The spread of false or misleading health information can erode trust between patients and healthcare providers, thereby increasing the risk of delayed treatment or reliance on medically unproven interventions, ultimately jeopardizing patient safety.

Health libraries support health professionals throughout their careers by providing access to current, reliable information and the services of information professionals with specialized skills. But health libraries are struggling.

- Despite their critical role, health libraries across all sectors are increasingly asked to do more with less. What seems like a cut to one department impacts beneficiaries of library services spanning an entire organization.
 - Access to high-quality resources, that also come with a high price tag, is reduced as subscription costs increase and budgets remain stagnant or decrease.
 - Health information professionals possess specialized technical diplomas or masters degrees in library science. Expertise comes at a cost, and staffing is reduced in many health libraries. In some cases whole libraries have shut down.
- Constant changes and financial uncertainties impact the training of health professionals, continuing professional learning, and everyday patient care.
- Health libraries need stable funding and stable professional staffing to maintain the services required to meet the needs of health professionals and support them throughout their career journey.

Allow health professionals to spend their time doing what they do best - caring for patients - instead of hunting for information on their own.

There is an urgent need to prioritize health libraries in funding decisions to ensure that health library services are available to all health professionals. We call on all sectors touched by health libraries - health, education, researchers and research institutes, publishers and journal editors,



Canadian Federation of Library Associations Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

and various levels of government - to become better acquainted with the [roles of modern health information professionals](#) and the [CHLA/ABSC Standards for Library and Information Services in Canadian Health & Social Services Institutions](#) (2020). These standards outline the elements of an effective library service and the minimum staffing levels required to ensure that the information needs of health professionals and their patients are met. We also call on concerned individuals to contact their provincial or territorial legislators to educate them on the important role that health libraries play.

Canadian Health Care Professionals, students, and educators deserve access to timely, accurate, evidence-based health information through their health libraries. Collaboration between health information professionals, health professionals, and institutional decision-makers is necessary to ensure that health libraries remain sustainable, continue to benefit health professionals and their patients, and contribute to the quality of healthcare in Canada. Together, we can ensure that the essential services Canadian health libraries provide are preserved for the benefit of all.

References

Canadian Medical Association / Association Médicale Canadienne. (2024). Canadian Medical Association 2024 health and media annual tracking survey. <https://digitallibrary.cma.ca/link/digitallibrary29>

Ducas, A., Michaud-Oystryk, N., & Speare, M. (2020). Reinventing Ourselves: New and Emerging Roles of Academic Librarians in Canadian Research-Intensive Universities. *College & Research Libraries*, 81(1), 43. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.1.43>

Frati, F., Oja, L. A. ., & Kleinberg, J. (2021). CHLA Standards for Library and Information Services in Canadian Health & Social Services Institutions 2020. *Journal of the Canadian Health Libraries Association Journal De l'Association Des bibliothèques De La Santé Du Canada*, 42(1). <https://doi.org/10.29173/jchla29526>