

## **Medical Library Association Comments**

### **Re: Notice to Announce Request for Information to Assist in the Development of the Institute of Museum and Library Services' 2022-2026 Strategic Plan**

**July 30, 2021**

The Medical Library Association (MLA) appreciates having the opportunity to provide feedback to help IMLS envision its future. MLA proudly supports the IMLS vision to impact a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. Please consider MLA your strong partner as IMLS works to advance, support and empower America's museums, libraries and related organizations "to ensure the availability of museum, library, and information services adequate to meet the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the people of the United States."

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### **How can museums and libraries broaden participation in learning opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and needs?**

Underserved populations often have low levels of health literacy which has a negative impact on their capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions. IMLS can help libraries and their users overcome these barriers by:

- Funding opportunities for libraries and librarians to support [Healthy People 2020 Social Determinants of Health Goal](#) among their user communities. Healthy People 2020 highlights the importance of addressing the social determinants of health and has established the goal of creating social and physical environments that promote good health for all as one of the four overarching goals for the decade. A "place-based" organizing framework, reflecting five key areas of social determinants of health (SDOH), was developed by Healthy People 2020 which includes Health and Health Care. Health literacy is a key issue in the health and health care domain.
- Supporting the conduct of environmental scans of targeted audiences that libraries serve which will help identify how to fill specific learning needs and deficits. IMLS funding could then be used to support the development of learning

programs for the library user community based on the information gathered from the environmental scan. This effort would bolster IMLS's mission to transform our communities and support the Medical Library Association's core values to ensure the public and information professionals have awareness of, access to, and the use of high-quality health information, and the opportunity to be part of an open, inclusive, and collaborative environment within and outside the profession. These learning programs will help improve health literacy skills which result in better health outcomes. Some benefits could include the ability to read and comprehend essential health-related materials (e.g., prescription bottles, appointment slips, etc.), increasing a person's capacity to take responsibility for their health and their family's health, and understanding of how to prioritize and implement systems and interventions such as visual aids and counseling that increase understanding and thereby advance patient safety.

Ongoing anti-BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) practices in libraries create barriers to professional growth and career advancement, threaten recruitment and retention of BIPOC librarians, and ultimately impact the ability of libraries to provide their users with timely and relevant programs and services. The Medical Library Association fosters excellence and is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional practice, leadership of health sciences libraries, and information professionals, now and in the future. Toward that end, MLA believes that programs that create career pipelines as well as those that support mentoring and peer support networks will enable MLA to transform the professional librarian community which can lead to stronger, more equitable and relevant programs and services that transform their diverse community of users. MLA suggests that IMLS consider:

- Supporting BIPOC outreach programs that provide mentoring and peer support networks to help build librarian skills and confidence. Career pipelines can help attract and retain individuals from diverse populations into the librarianship field. Program development should also determine strategies for offering mentoring, outreach, and training opportunities to organizations and to individuals already in the field, transitioning to new roles or seeking information about the field. Community based programs could be developed through an alliance of librarians, health information providers, and community organizations to increase diversity, inclusion, and equity within the library and library science and scholarly publishing professions. Developing career pipeline programs that reach out to students as early as middle school in underserved areas could help attract future library and information professionals. These programs need to focus on creating incentives for engaging the interest of these students such as offering work programs and scholarships. Programs such as Careers in Libraries for Immigrants (<https://www.reforma.org/CILProgram>) are helping to build ethnic and racial diversity in adult immigrants in the library profession. *Consideration should be given to expanding this effort broadly across the library field to include health sciences librarianship.*

## **What essential skills will museum, library, and archives professionals need over the five years to address changes to their work?**

Our experience working with health sciences librarians shows that library professionals would benefit greatly from gaining higher level skills in the areas of a) expert searching, including complex reviews such as systematic reviews, and b) research and evidence-based practice (appraising and applying evidence to practice) that would enable them to improve services/collections and better serve health professionals and the public in the future. Librarians are increasing their status and profile within the health professions by teaching searching and research skills, evaluating research, and partnering with researchers on evidence synthesis/review teams. There is a need to provide training to enable them to further develop and refine their skills in these areas. Programs are needed to build their skills and confidence to support their growing roles in supporting the conduct and utilization of research.

## **How can museums, libraries, and archives better use outreach and partnerships to serve their communities?**

The health information needs of patients and their families with specific conditions AND information needs of general health consumers are varied and include clinical settings and non-clinical settings. Addressing these patient and consumer health information needs are critical in achieving the optimal well-being of patients and the public.

Public librarians are challenged to provide consumer health information services due to lack of training, inadequate health/medical collections, and fear of providing medical “advice.” Public librarians with training in consumer health reference, increased knowledge of trusted medical websites, and access to a community of practice for consumer health professionals to generate and share knowledge about consumer health information, would be better equipped to handle most if not all consumer health questions about specific diseases, drugs, treatment, and healthy living from end-users. Efforts such as these are indispensable for public librarians to overcome the challenges in offering health information service. MLA suggests that IMLS consider:

- Supporting new partnerships and strengthening existing partnerships between public libraries, academic medical libraries, hospital libraries, consumer health libraries, and the Medical Library Association to provide training and recognition for public librarians that would build their skills and confidence to provide timely, relevant, and accurate consumer health information for their users. As a stakeholder in the partnership, MLA would leverage its existing educational services, software, web and communication tools, scholarship and diversity programs to maximize broad impact and long-term sustainability. MLA’s [Consumer Health Information Specialization](#) (CHIS) which offers in-depth training in providing consumer health information services is open to medical librarians, public librarians, librarians working in consumer health libraries, allied health professionals Information professionals, and anyone who cares about providing accurate and useful health information to the public. With IMLS and partnership

support, the reach of the CHIS program could increase dramatically and ensure that librarians have a mastery of necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies via training. This training will lead to the effective and efficient delivery of consumer health information in public libraries, and ultimately generate optimal patron experience. It would also enhance healthcare outcomes throughout the community and our nation by helping to ensure that health consumers have access to health information resources.

- Investing in the development and dissemination of trusted consumer health resources and tools by consumer health information specialists (with the assistance of MLA's Consumer and Patient Health Information Caucus) and affiliated health professionals who have expertise and experience in locating, appraising, and synthesizing the best available evidence in consumer health information.
- Supporting partnerships between public libraries, academic medical libraries, hospital libraries, consumer health libraries, and the Medical Library Association (specifically the Consumer and Patient Health Information Caucus) to create and sustain a community of practice for consumer health professionals that would provide support and engagement of members to discuss consumer health questions and issues, and identify trusted consumer health resources for user communities, patients and families, and the general public.

### **What practices and tools in museum, library, and archives collection management, care, and access need to be updated or reinvented, and how?**

No comments.

### **What research and data are needed to help museums and libraries work more effectively for the benefit of the communities they serve?**

1. Librarian-led health information research supports quality health care and library practice. Despite the well-documented benefits of HLIS/LIS research and promising training interventions (RTI, IRDL, and RIPL), further research and evidence is critically needed in most areas of library practice. The most prevalent gaps in the LIS research literature have been articulated by several scholars in this area and various library organizations that have produced research agendas, including the Medical Library Association. Strengthening the body of knowledge in HLIS/LIS librarianship with additional quality research and research studies that builds upon previously conducted research is essential in moving the HLIS/LIS profession forward. MLA suggests that IMLS consider:

- Supporting the development of HLIS/LIS research projects that use a variety of rigorous methods to address important HLIS/LIS research questions and that build upon past knowledge.

- Supporting the development of HLIS/LIS systematic reviews to assess the quality of HLIS/LIS research literature, and to identify what important professional topics are lacking research and what research is needed on specific topics in the future.

2. LIS scholars have noted that too few health librarians and librarians in general do not consult the literature to find evidence about library or professional-based problems. One likely reason for this is the lack of findability of LIS research evidence that can result in derailing their searching efforts. Library literature is dispersed across a wide variety of resources and domains and *librarians have not developed efficient and effective methods, guidelines, or tools for searching library literature to identify, organize, and retrieve research evidence*. Guidelines about appropriate resources, search strategies (search terms and hedges), and quality filters (like the research study tools used in PubMed) which enable searches to be limited to the best evidence in library literature are vitally needed. Additionally, there is currently no single, freely available source to find critically appraised articles about librarianship. The creation of searching methodologies and tools to critically appraise library studies for validity, reliability, and applicability, and a single, filtered, open-source database consisting of high-quality research studies in librarianship would be an invaluable resource nationwide equipping librarians to apply relevant and quality research articles to their own practice to better assist their user communities through evidence-based practice. MLA suggests that IMLS consider:

- Investing in the development of methods, tools and technology that enable health librarians of all backgrounds and abilities to discover, use, and apply published HLIS/LIS-related research studies/resources to better serve their user communities.

3. Library schools must play a major role in encouraging new librarians to use evidence-based approaches to help guide their library practice. Most formal LIS master's programs lack instruction in research methods and do not foster an appreciation of the need, practical use, and importance of librarian-led research. Teaching research methods to all library students is essential for the library professional workforce to grow and become more evidence based. MLA recommends that IMLS consider:

- Supporting the training and development of research and evidence-based practice skills in formal library school programs and encouraging library schools to share and adopt research instruction best practices.

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The Medical Library Association appreciates having the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations for IMLS' five-year strategic plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2026. As you develop the new plan, please consider us your strong partner, and know that we stand ready to work with you to address any comments, questions, or needs that might arise.

Sincerely,

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