



Canadian Health Libraries Association Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada

January 2010: The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) awards funding for the Canadian Virtual Health Library to improve access to health information for Canadians.

Objective: The Canadian Virtual Health Library (CVHL) will improve the health of Canadians by making high-quality health information and evidence readily accessible to all health professionals for patient care, decision-making, policy and program development, research, continuous learning and patient education. By leveraging existing resources and services through a coordinated network of libraries, the CVHL will ensure that all health professionals, wherever they are in Canada, have ready access to the information they need. Training and assistance will be available from experts so that they can locate the best evidence to make informed decisions.

Background: A CHLA/ABSC Environmental Scan of international and Canadian virtual health library initiatives found that the availability of quality-assured health information through coordinated virtual health libraries (such as the US National Library of Medicine or the UK's NHS Evidence) delivers real benefit and has a positive impact on health care and population health outcomes. Canada lags behind other nations in developing a national strategy to address the disparities and inequities in service and access to health information resources.

As proof of concept, an ongoing trial of access to the Cochrane Library for all Canadians has been available since April 2009 through collaboration with the Canadian Cochrane Centre. Evaluation to date shows increased use and positive response.

Funding & Support: CIHR has approved multi-year funding of \$800,000 (year 1: \$500,000; year 2: \$200,000; year 3: \$100,000) to implement the CVHL structure. Additional funding from public funds and participating organizations will be identified for national licensing of electronic health resources, with a goal of self-sustainability within 3 years.

The Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (NRC-CISTI) will house the CVHL and provide technical support. The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists has committed funds for the first year of operation, and many other organizations have committed to in-kind support upon implementation. The Canadian Nurses Association, a long term supporter, has committed both time and funding and will continue to provide their input and backing.

The Public Health Agency of Canada, Canada Health Infoway and others were early supporters of the CVHL. Over the past eight years, CHLA/ABSC has hosted four stakeholder engagement meetings and conducted numerous individual consultations with stakeholders, in addition to commissioning a Feasibility Study. The grant application was accompanied by 37 letters of support.

**The Canadian Virtual Health Library, an initiative of the
Canadian Health Libraries Association / Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada**

Governance: The CVHL will have an independent Board of Directors and a national coordinating office with three senior staff, each responsible for a work stream.

Work Streams:

1. Stakeholder Engagement and Network Formation
Implementation will be phased, building from existing partnerships with professional associations, library organizations and government bodies. Additional stakeholders will be invited to participate as funders, in governance and as providers of services. This stream will include overall coordination and will be responsible for development of governance structures and coordinated approaches for network support and development.

2. Technology - CVHL Portal Design

A bilingual information portal will link Canadians, especially health professionals, to libraries and information networks and provide access to library services such as question answering and professional librarian expertise. Knowledge will be structured to interconnect with electronic health records and other systems.

3. Content - Information Resource Development

A national licensing program for electronic health information resources will coordinate and administer Canada-wide licenses to core health information resources on behalf of private and public sector libraries and knowledge and information service providers.

Evaluation: The impact of knowledge use via the CVHL will be evaluated using qualitative as well as quantitative methods, covering all phases and work stream activities.

The CVHL initiative was developed by a CHLA/ABSC Task Force including representatives of government and professional associations and building on work towards a National Network of Libraries of Health. Detailed information in English and French about the CVHL and the National Network is available at:
<http://chla-absc.ca/nnlh/>

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