

May 31, 2016

Office of the Premier
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Confederation Building, East Block
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Attn: The Honourable Dwight Ball

Re: Cuts to Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries

Dear Premier Ball:

The Canadian Health Libraries Association/Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada (CHLA/ABSC) is adding its collective voice to those expressing deep concern over the recent closure of over half of the province's public libraries. In addition to the effects these closures will have on general literacy and community services, closing 54 libraries will also have a negative impact on the health literacy of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), particularly in rural communities, since public libraries are important providers of consumer health information both in print and online.

The Internet is the primary resource for people who take an interest in their own health, and many consumers turn to their public libraries to access the Internet for health information (Zickuhr, Rainie, & Purcell, 2013). Public libraries tend to be one of the first places of contact for general inquiries on infectious diseases and emerging illnesses (Arding & McLeod, 2013). According to the Canadian Internet Use Survey, 69.9% of Canadians search for medical or health related information online, and 7.4% of NL survey respondents use public libraries for Internet access (Statistics Canada, 2009). Research indicates that those residing in rural and remote communities typically have poorer health status than those living in larger centres (Romanow, 2002), and therefore, public libraries that serve rural populations have an obvious positive impact on their communities' needs for consumer health information (Flaherty, 2013).

While many community members will be able to drive half an hour to get to a public library, this is not the case for both 15% of the province's population and for those who are less mobile due to health problems or economic hardship. This leaves a significant portion of the population potentially without access to essential information related to diseases, conditions, treatments centres, and health care providers. Finally, the 10% tax on books reduces the purchasing power of the remaining libraries thus impacting their ability to maintain a current and comprehensive consumer health information collection.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the members of CHLA/ABSC, I urge the government of NL to reconsider these closures as well as the allocated overall funding to NL public libraries. I would be happy to discuss this further with you.

Yours sincerely,

Lindsay Alcock
President, CHLA/ABSC
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cc. Hon. Dale Kirby, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
Krista Godfrey, President NLLA

References

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- Flaherty, Mary Grace. (2013). *The Public Library as Health Information Resource?* (Doctoral thesis). Syracuse, New York.
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