

March 21, 2023

Dear CMA Board of Directors (Dr. Suzanne Strasberg, Dr. Alika Lafontaine, Dr. Kathleen Ross, Dr. Katharine Smart, Dr. Clare Kozroski, Dr. Alexander Poole, Dr. Courtney Howard, Dr. Nigel G. Walton, Dr. Carl Nohr, Dr. David Cram, Dr. Rachel Forman, Dr. Jean-Joseph Condé, Dr. Allison Kennedy, Dr. Gerard MacDonald, Dr. Larry Pan, Dr. Paula Cashin, Dr. Esther Kim, Santanna Hernandez and Janet Ecker), and CMA Leadership team (Tim Smith, Owen Adams, Dr. Jeff Blackmer, John Feeley, Dr. Caroline Gérin-Lajoie, Luce Lavoie, Joseph Mayer, Jimmy Mui, and Allison Seymour)

We are deeply concerned about some of the [recently announced](#) changes to Canadian Medical Association (CMA) programs and services, specifically the decision to retire the clinical information tools and services, including the [Ask A Librarian](#) service.

Library services have been instrumental in serving CMA members and filling important gaps for physicians and medical learners in Canada for 25 years, providing tools that are essential to do their work and conducting time-sensitive patient care literature searches that enable them to best serve their communities and improve quality of care (Hageman, 2019).

We are concerned that this change will add to the workload of physicians, medical learners, and to hospital libraries. While we appreciate that a [list of alternative clinical information providers](#) is being compiled, this is not a solution that will meet the needs of all physicians across Canada. Many hospital libraries are already spread thin and are struggling to meet the needs of their clients. Further, there are also many hospitals in Canada that do not have access to library services at all or that have closed down their libraries in recent years, which is extremely concerning. The Canadian Health Library Association/Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada (CHLA/ABSC) responded to this issue by releasing a [Statement on the Importance of Hospital Libraries](#).

Further, the list of alternative clinical information provided is also misleading: physicians without affiliations to these organizations will not have access to library resources and services. Many physicians working in community settings do not have access to resources provided by hospital libraries (Barrett & Hancock, 2021). For those physicians without affiliations to an academic institution or hospital providing library services, they will no longer have affordable or easy access to information and services such as literature review support or a librarian to inform their practice.

While some programs may exist across the country (such as the [Saskatchewan Health Information Resources Program](#)) that provide access to a basic suite of clinical tools for all licensed physicians in a particular area, the majority of areas in Canada do not have these types of programs in existence. Many unaffiliated physicians will fall through the cracks. Those in

rural and community settings will particularly be at a disadvantage, only widening the gap in access to resources and supports already being felt.

We agree with the CMA that there is absolutely [a healthcare crisis in Canada](#), but removing the services and resources provided and maintained by health library professionals is not the answer. They need to be part of the solution.

Sincerely,

Naz Torabi, 2022-2023 CHLA/ABSC President
president@chla-absc.ca

With support from:

Cari Merkley, President, on behalf of the Southern Alberta Health Libraries Association

Margaret Sampson, Secretary, on behalf of the Ottawa Valley Health Libraries Association

Minakshi Sharma, on behalf of the Toronto Health Libraries Association

Erin Watson, President, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Health Libraries Association

Andrew Moore, President, on behalf of the Health Libraries Association of British Columbia

Ali Foster, President, on behalf of the Northern Alberta Health Libraries Association

Caroline Monnin, President, on behalf of the Manitoba Association of Health Information Providers

Allison Salin, President, on behalf of the Waterloo, Wellington, Dufferin Health Library Network

References

Barrett, A., & Hancock, K. (2021). Access to Evidence-based Research for Unaffiliated Healthcare Providers and Policymakers: a Canada-wide Environmental Scan with Consideration of Options for Nova Scotia. <https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/80317>

Hageman, J. R. (2019). Medical librarians can help providers improve clinical decision-making and education. *Pediatric Annals*, 48(2), e49-e50. <https://doi.org/10.3928/19382359-20190116-01>