



ALIA Health Libraries Australia (HLA) Statement on Hospital Libraries in Australia

Hospital libraries are an integral part of health care delivery in hospitals across Australia, linking clinicians, researchers, and policy makers with the best evidence to inform practice resulting in improved patient outcomes (1-5). They are comprised of 3 key elements:

- qualified specialist staff,
- curated resources, and
- managed study facilities.

Expert health librarians, as members of the health care team, provide a range of specialist health contextualised services to connect clinicians, researchers and policy makers/executive with reputable information and best practice resources to support professional practice and enhance patient care.

They provide:

- searching and consultation services enable provision of resources to directly support patient care, to create and maintain clinical practice standards and guidelines, and to conduct both primary research and evidence syntheses (including systematic reviews). Expert librarians use specialist skills and knowledge to undertake literature searches and provide relevant results to support evidence-based practice.
- access to curated information resources including journals, text and reference books, databases (e.g., MEDLINE, CINAHL), medication resources, and point of care resources (e.g., UpToDate, DynaMed, BMJ Best Practice). Increasingly these resources are acquired online by subscription and then made available to hospital staff using a combination of systems (library websites, resource portals, open URL resolvers, authentication systems) to provide seamless access. Specialist knowledge and skills are required to manage these systems and resources efficiently and effectively. Hospital libraries also provide document delivery services to provide access to scholarly and clinical information resources outside of the library collection.
- managed study facilities including PCs, study spaces, printing/scanning facilities and other relevant facilities to support hospital staff undertaking professional development, further study, or research. These spaces are managed and co-located with staffed service points to provide expert advice and support clinicians and others to use information resources effectively and efficiently.

Research into the requirements for library services to support trainee accreditation by professional medical colleges in Australia undertaken in 2023 shows that trainees require access to a medical library with appropriate resources for their specialty plus support and search facilities and services (6). Many medical specialty accreditation standards for training include research support requirements; for example, a requirement for trainees to engage in research, and to prepare and publish research papers (7), or “provision of research support and opportunities ... including but not limited to systematic reviews for publication in the Cochrane Library, systematic literature reviews, case reports and local audits” (8). The Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions



recommends that “review authors should work closely, from the start of the protocol, with an experienced medical/healthcare librarian or information specialist” (9).

In 2024, the Australian Medical Council Ltd (AMC) implemented a 2-year prevocational training program for PGY1 and 2 doctors. There are 4 domains within this prevocational training. Domain 4 is Scientist and Scholar and this domain “describes the doctor who applies and expands their medical knowledge and evaluates and applies relevant evidence to their clinical practice” (10) and includes the ability to “Access, critically appraise and apply evidence from the medical and scientific literature to clinical and professional practice”. The AMC National standards and requirements for prevocational (PGY1 and PGY2) training programs and stipulates provision of library facilities and notes that where physical library facilities are not provided on site that relevant support is available (11).

In 2013 SGS Economics and Planning was commissioned by Health Libraries Inc. and Health Libraries Australia to assess the return on investment for health libraries across Australia. The results of this work indicated that health libraries return \$9 for every \$1 invested as a minimum (with the figure likely higher when the improved quality of search results when undertaken by a librarian rather than a clinician and the impact of this on clinical practice are taken into account) (12). The final report highlighted benefits to users including: “*The value of ‘time’ saved for library users, and the value of ‘out of pocket expenses’ saved for library users*” and noted that library staff can more efficiently and effectively undertake research and literature searches, source content and manage referencing tasks (including being 3.3 times faster) (1). The presence of health libraries staffed by expert health librarians was shown to promote evidence-based practice through the delivery of quality services in a more efficient manner than would be done by clinicians and other health staff.

Health Libraries of Australia (HLA) is the national professional organisation representing librarians and other information professionals working in the health sector. The vision of HLA is for all Australians to benefit from health library and information professionals’ expertise that is integral to evidence-based health care. HLA advocates strongly for hospitals to retain and appropriately fund their libraries to support evidence-based practice for improved patient outcomes and advises that reducing library services in hospitals will result in a decrease in use of evidence in decision making and patient care. HLA further advises that hospitals cannot close their libraries and rely on access to university library collections as these are predominantly behind paywalls and licensed only to staff and students of their respective institutions.

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