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Librarians and health literacy

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May 2025

Health literacy has traditionally been defined as «the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions».

Librarians play a **critical role** in advancing **health literacy** by acting as information navigators, educators, and community health advocates. Their expertise in accessing, evaluating, and disseminating reliable health information makes them vital in bridging gaps between medical knowledge and public understanding.

Key Roles of Librarians in Health Literacy

1. Information Mediators & Guides

- Help patrons **find trustworthy health information** from sources like:
 - **PubMed, MedlinePlus, CDC, WHO**

- **Local health department resources**
- Teach users how to **evaluate online health information** (avoiding misinformation).
- Explain **medical terminology** in plain language.

2. Developers of Health Collections

- Curate **evidence-based health books, pamphlets, and digital resources**.
- Ensure materials are **up-to-date, unbiased, and easy to understand**.
- Include **multimedia resources** (videos, podcasts) for varied learning styles.

3. Health Reference Specialists

- Provide **one-on-one consultations** for health-related questions (e.g., symptoms, treatments, clinical trials)



4. Health Literacy Educators

- Conduct **workshops** on topics like:
 - Chronic disease management (diabetes, hypertension)
 - Mental health awareness
 - Nutrition and preventive care
- Teach **digital literacy skills** for accessing telehealth and online health tools.

5. Researchers & Data Curators

- Track **community health needs** to tailor programs (e.g., opioid crisis, maternal health).
- Collaborate with **public health researchers** to improve outreach.
- **NNLM (National Network of Libraries of Medicine)** – Librarians promote NIH resources.

Conclusion:

Librarians can be effective leaders or participants in efforts to make health care organizations “health literate”. So, Librarians have long sought to improve consumers' access to and use of high-quality information, and so have a natural role in the promotion of health literacy.