The Strategy

HealthAccess Libraries, a program of Libraries for the Future, optimizes the library’s position to bring together health information, resources, and the people who need them most. The program builds partnerships among libraries and local agencies that share the goal of healthy communities. It is built on the idea that health literacy, or the ability to read, understand, and use health information, is the key to improving health, and that libraries are a critical partner in the effort to boost health literacy and provide reliable health information.

Dr. Cheryl Taylor, Southern University School of Nursing, Baton Rouge, LA, joined leaders from libraries, philanthropy and service organizations at the Langeloth Forum on Libraries and Health Information and shared best practices.

At a Glance

HealthAccess Libraries

The Challenge

Today, with medical costs soaring and the Internet overflowing with health advice, more and more people are seeking health information outside the doctor’s office. But what sources can be trusted? And how to interpret all that information? In the absence of a trusted family doctor, there is still a free and trustworthy resource in every community: the public library.

The Strategy

HealthAccess Libraries offer a variety of services and resources to help the public access high-quality health information.
Health Information for All

Langeloth Forum  A few innovative libraries have responded to the urgent need for consumer health information with new library-based programs, services, and structures. But until now, there has been no framework for assessing—or sharing—emerging best practices.

To answer this need, Libraries for the Future hosted the Langeloth Forum on Libraries and Health Information in 2004, with support from the Langeloth Foundation. More than 35 specialists working in a range of health organizations and libraries—urban, rural, suburban, and tribal—considered what has worked to position libraries as front-line health information providers. Their insights will be published in May 2005 as a guide for future HealthAccess Libraries.

Best Practices  At the Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls (NY), a health website helps answer patron queries, publicize the library’s expanded health collections, and decrease patient recovery time.  At the Boulder Public Library (CO), volunteers visit a local clinic and a family center weekly to answer health information queries in English and Spanish, and to direct new users to the library’s Grillo Health Information Center. And the Port Washington Public Library (NY) relies on a Health Advisory Council to keep its policies and Health Information Center up-to-date.

Many of the successful health information programs presented at the Langeloth Forum shared common elements, including: a dedicated staff person, a consumer health website, programming outside the library, and community partnerships.

“Libraries can play a critical part in building literacy skills, helping people access health information and helping people to translate information.”

Dr. Rima Rudd
Harvard School of Public Health

“Libraries are an integral part of our communities. As such, they have the potential to play an important role in helping individuals access reliable health information that is vital to them and their loved ones.”

George Labalme, Jr.
President,
Langeloth Foundation

HealthAccess Libraries Funders
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- Clark Foundation
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- New York Foundation
- Langeloth Foundation

HealthAccess Libraries is a program of Libraries for the Future, the program division of Americans for Libraries Council. The Council is a nonprofit organization that champions the role of libraries in American life and promotes new approaches to sustaining and developing libraries in the 21st century. Please visit our website at www.americansforlibraries.org. Or call 646.336.6236.

Roots of HealthAccess Libraries

1995  Brooklyn, NY  Flatbush branch of Brooklyn Public Library unveils health programming, after working with Libraries for the Future on outreach. October is “health month”; circulation soars.

2000  Brooklyn Health Information Access Coalition. A partnership between LFF and the Brooklyn Public Library soon grows to include 40 organizations collaborating on public programs and outreach.

2002  New York Area Coalition for Health Information. Organizations across New York City organize the region’s first conference on health literacy, optimizing the library’s role in supporting community health.

Coming in May: Building Healthy Communities through Public Libraries. To get your copy, call 800.542.1918