

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2023 Federal Budget

By: Canadian Urban Libraries Council



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List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada introduce legislation to ensure that Canada's public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities in communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries performing these critical services.

Introduction

Incorporated in 2008, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) works to strengthen public library service in Canada's urban areas. CULC/CBUC members are the 49 largest public library systems in Canada, along with Library and Archives Canada and the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

CULC/CBUC is committed to the strengthening of vibrant urban communities through building the capacity of Canada's urban libraries. Our members collectively serve more than 8 million active users who annually visit our 721 locations and virtual services. In 2019 we loaned over 200 million items, and had more than 560 million uses in person and online. CULC/CBUC member libraries expended over \$110 million on collections including \$11 million on digital resources. More than 12,000 library workers are employed by CULC/CBUC member libraries.

In excess of 75% of all Canadians are served by a CULC/CBUC member library. The activity in CULC/CBUC libraries comprises more than 80% of Canada's public library activity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on CULC/CBUC's members as many members had to close physical library branches and, when possible, provide reduced service via curbside pickup and online access to available e-content. The closure of public libraries branches resulted in significant staff reductions and revenue losses. Many libraries are only now beginning to recover.

CULC/CBUC is committed to working with the federal government to ensure a successful restart for Canada's Arts and Cultural Sector. Given the significant role libraries across Canada have in delivering and providing access to Arts and Cultural materials, CULC/CBUC has an important perspective on the impacts of the pandemic on the sector and the need to ensure a successful restart.

Access to E-Content

An important aspect of a successful restart is ensuring Canadians have reasonable access to arts and cultural materials through Canadian libraries. The pandemic's impact on in-library services magnified public libraries' need to have increased access to e-content – including both eAudio and eBook content - from multinational publishers.

Multinational publishers (collectively known as the "Big 5" plus Amazon) are limiting Canadian libraries' access to e-content. Even when a publication is made available these multinational publishers make it prohibitively expensive to acquire e-content. For example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book, *A Better Man*, is available to libraries for \$22 in hardcover, for \$60 in eBook, and \$81.50 in eAudio. The \$60 eBook cost allows the book to be checked out electronically 52 times or for 2 years – whichever happens first. A paper edition would be expected to last 3 to 4 years at just over a third of the cost.

While Canadian publishers have consistently made e-content available to Canada’s public libraries, multinational publishers continue to place barriers in front of public library users. This occurred even as demand for e-content increased due to Canadians staying at home as a result of the pandemic. This barrier to digital access impacts public library users, including those from vulnerable populations who depend on library resources for vital information.

Libraries in the United States have experienced similar problems and legislation was recently passed in both New York and Maryland state legislatures to ensure library access to e-content. Both the New York and The Maryland laws “require “publishers who offer to license e-books to the public” to also offer those e-books to libraries on “reasonable” terms. The bill’s summary states that the law is designed to ensure that “widely accepted and effective industry practices remain in place while prohibiting harmful practices that discriminate against libraries and harm library patrons.”¹

CULC/CBUC members believe that the federal government, via the Minister of Canadian Heritage, should introduce legislation, similar to the New York and Maryland statutes, to ensure that Canada’s public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada introduce legislation to ensure that Canada’s public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

Support for Vulnerable Populations

Aly Veshi, from Toronto Public Library, and Richard Thornley from Edmonton Public Library detailed in *The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations*² how libraries provide essential support for vulnerable populations.

CULC/CBUC members across the country are reminded daily of the important role public libraries play in these vulnerable populations’ lives. Many of these services libraries provide to their communities align with federal priorities and policy initiatives.

Support provided by our public libraries includes providing a welcome space and support through computer and internet access, the availability of literacy and employment tools, and assistance from staff trained to find and provide sought-after information. Groups that benefit from these services include those seeking employment skills training, new Canadians seeking access to settlement resources and tools in their native language, the homeless and those requiring housing assistance, youth at risk seeking educational support as well Indigenous community members and official language minorities.

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¹ <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/86637-new-york-legislature-passes-library-e-book-bill.html>

² [The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations](#)

Increasingly libraries are expanding their services to meet the needs of these vulnerable groups and find themselves needing to take their services directly to the community and, oftentimes, beyond the physical limitations of the library space. To meet these needs to our communities and to vulnerable populations, libraries must now ensure staffing requirements can address the wide range of services being provided. Not surprisingly this requires funding support.

Each of the group's libraries are providing needed services to are significant priority groups for the federal government. It is therefore incumbent upon the federal government to recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities to vulnerable communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries performing these critical services.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities in communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries performing these critical services.

Centre for Equitable Library Access

CULC/CBUC is a founding partner in the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). Both CELA and the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS), are national not-for-profit organizations that provide accessible reading services to the approximately 3 million people across Canada with print disabilities.

CULC/CBUC members appreciated the government's commitment in Budget 2022 to allocate \$7 million/year for 3 years starting in 2024-25 to launch a new Equitable Access to Reading Program (EARP). CULC/CBUC supports the creation of the EARP and thanks the Government of Canada for this important measure in support of those across Canada with print disabilities. We look forward to working with CELA and NNELS, as well as the federal government, in ensuring this program meets the objectives of the print disability community.

Conclusion

CULC/CBUC appreciates the opportunity by the Standing Committee on Finance to provide this submission in advance of the next federal budget.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on public libraries. The financial pressures being faced by both municipalities and public libraries puts our ability to provide essential library services at risk.

We are available to respond to any questions Committee members may have.

For further information please contact Jefferson Gilbert, Executive Director of CULC/CBUC at jgilbert@culc.ca.