

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2024 Federal Budget

By: Canadian Urban Libraries Council



February 2024

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada:

- Ensure libraries have reasonable access on reasonable terms to e-content from multi-national publishers through consideration of amendments to the federal Competition Act and/or legislation like that introduced in the United States to ensure libraries have reasonable access to e-content;
- Introduce legislation to ensure that practices that discriminate against libraries and harm library users is prohibited.

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

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada build upon the work of the Canadian Urban Institute in “Overdue: the Case for Canada’s Public Libraries” and implement its recommendation to establish a National Task Force on the Future of Public Libraries to:

- Undertake a comprehensive national assessment of the value and impact of public libraries on community well-being and health
- Aggregate data on the state of library buildings to create a long-term investment plan for renovations and construction of new libraries, including in multi-use facilities
- Contribute to the program development of Canada’s Long-Term Funding Plan for libraries, acknowledging the library’s role in supporting broadband access through the network of libraries
- Identify whole-of-government leveraging opportunities for strategic partnerships among federal agencies and libraries for local service delivery

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada ensure that adequate transitional funding is provided to the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) until the Equitable Access to Reading Fund (EARP) is fully launched and funding can be accessed.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada recognizes the significant impact of mental health and addiction in Canadian communities and work with provincial governments to develop a pan-Canadian strategy on mental health and addiction that would include input from library leaders.

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 54 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 727 locations and virtual services. Annually we loan over 200 million items and have 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.

More than 78% of all Canadians are served by a CULC/CBUC member library. CULC/CBUC libraries comprise more than 80% of Canada's public library activity.

Canada's urban libraries are integral to a vibrant democracy, a strong economy, and thriving communities. Community libraries promote the value of learning, literacy, access to technology, digital literacy, and workforce development in an enjoyable and relaxing environment. Communities thrive when local libraries can provide their core services of providing access to literacy and learning and as an important gathering place for community members. All community members have the right to access our libraries. Libraries do everything they can to ensure this is always the case.

CULC/CBUC members are proud of the role libraries play in providing welcoming places that provide critical services in Canadian communities that meet the needs of families, youth, seniors, new Canadians and those who face barriers.

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 Charlotte Gray's book, *Passionate Mothers, Powerful Sons* is available to libraries for \$23 in hardcover, \$84 in eBook, and \$107 in eAudio. The eBook and eAudio cost allows the title to be checked out electronically for 2 years. A paper edition would be expected to last at least 3 to 4 years at less than a third the cost of the eBook.

While Canadian publishers have consistently made e-content available to Canada's public libraries, multinational publishers, as noted above, continue to place barriers in front of public library users.

While e-content has become mainstream, Canada's publicly supported libraries are finding the evolving marketplace a difficult one in which to build digital collections. The current contractual landscape for e-content between primarily multinational publishers and libraries prohibits libraries from purchasing e-content at fair market prices. Instead of allowing the purchase of e-content on the same terms as traditional content,

publishers set conditions, prices, and terms for licensing e-content to publicly supported libraries that publishers cannot obtain for print sales.

Pricing schemes treat e-content differently than traditional print without justification, allowing publishers to drive up prices to the detriment of libraries, their readers, and the public. The cost of digital purchase and license renewal is up to 10 times higher than that of a printed book. This barrier to digital access impacts public library users, including those from vulnerable populations who depend on library resources for vital information.

This anti-competitive behaviour is being permitted and is having a significant impact on the ability of libraries to serve users and the communities in which they reside.

In the United States, several states have advanced legislative proposals that empower libraries to negotiate fairer contracts. For instance, this year, Massachusetts filed a new bill to address libraries' access to e-content to be considered in the current legislative session. The legislative text is designed to make fair and equitable licensing terms in eBook contracts by mitigating inequities between libraries and publishers.

Other proposed legislation, such as in Maryland and New York, provide more robust protection for libraries by requiring that eBooks available to the public also be made available to libraries on reasonable terms.

Reasonable terms provisions address both the contracting inequities and the refusal of some publishers to enter contracts with libraries. Reasonable terms provisions would require publishers to make eBooks available to libraries for a price comparable to, for example, current paper books.

Members of CULC/CBUC believe that the federal government should take steps to address issues related to libraries' access to e-content by amending the federal Competition Act. They also recommend that the Minister of Canadian Heritage introduce legislation like that in the United States, to ensure that Canada's public libraries have reasonable access to e-content from multinational publishers on reasonable terms.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada ensures libraries have reasonable access on reasonable terms to e-content from multi-national publishers through consideration of amendments to the federal Competition Act and/or legislation like that introduced in the United States to ensure libraries have reasonable access to e-content and introduce legislation to ensure that practices that discriminate against libraries and harm library users is prohibited.

Funding Libraries to Deliver on Federal Priorities

The Canadian Urban Institute published *Overdue: The Case for Public Libraries*¹ in Fall 2024. The Report detailed how 'Canada's public libraries have evolved into highly capable partners for every level of government, supporting the common good by serving critical mandates that fall under municipal, provincial and federal jurisdiction.'

Libraries have a unique capacity to quickly adapt and respond to the changing needs of the

"Libraries are essential to Canada's value proposition of an inclusive and prosperous country. They are the heart of every community, open to everyone, providing connections and experiences essential to our economic opportunities, equity, and democracy. They are essential to social cohesion and the healthy functioning of modern life."

*Overdue: The Case for Public Libraries;
Canadian Urban Institute*

¹ [Overdue: The Case for Public Libraries, Canadian Urban Institute](#)

community they serve. Libraries are now, more than ever, centres for community well-being, fostering individual and collective potential, and a key partner in delivering federal priorities, from newcomer settlement, sustaining workforce development, championing entrepreneurship, to fostering mental health at every age.

Libraries have evolved to provide many different types of study spaces, ranging from traditional quiet reading rooms to areas for collaborative learning and interactive, hands-on acquisition of new skills. Libraries provide a community access point for digital resources, creating equitable access to knowledge and services. Improving literacy is a worthy end on its own, but there are important spillover effects. By improving literacy, libraries close the gap in education, reduce the likelihood of unemployment and poverty and sustaining ongoing workforce development.

Libraries create perfect spaces and opportunities to gather in-person and online. They invite everyone to share and exchange ideas. Visitors to library can access – and often create culture. Reading diverse voices, enjoying free access to films and music and dance, and creating new cultural content through interactive opportunities. As champions of free expression, libraries providing access to a wide range of ideas and information and encourage community dialogue – even when we disagree with each other.

Working closely with community organizations and governments, libraries advance positive health outcomes for a vast cross section of community members. Touching upon every indicator of social determinant of health including early childhood development, literacy and employability, and social inclusion and non-discrimination, public libraries create a better health outcome for all.

Canada’s public libraries have taken a leading role in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s 94 Calls to Action, through programming and collections that elevate indigenous voices and Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge. Again, meeting important federal priorities in Canada’s relationship with indigenous communities.

Libraries are catalysts for urban life. From Vancouver to Kitchener to Halifax they are the anchors that create stronger downtowns and connect neighbourhoods. The natural space for communities to come together to engage with each other, access information, and participate in learning and fun, libraries are where we meet new people, understand each other better, and achieve a sense of belonging for all. Libraries are free and for all. That makes them among the most democratic spaces in Canada. They must be invested in by all levels of government to support this important work.

Yet, as the Canadian Urban Institute found, Libraries are an underfunded asset even as they support the government in delivering on their obligations.² Governments must begin to see libraries as part of a community’s and nation’s critical infrastructure – as important as transportation, sanitation, emergency responders, and hospitals. And as noted in “Overdue: The Case for Canada’s Public Libraries”, “provincial and federal governments must invest in the vast network of libraries to reach Canadians from coast to coast to coast, in order to achieve their most important mandates: addressing climate change, Indigenous reconciliation, affordability, and digital equity.”³

As recommended by the Canadian Urban Institute, to ensure libraries can continue to fully meet the needs of their communities and support government priorities, the Government needs to establish a National Task Force on the Future of Public Libraries so that it can fully understand the value libraries are providing our

² [Overdue: The Case for Public Libraries, Canadian Urban Institute](#)

³ IBID

communities and plan for the funding and investment needed to secure these critical assets and contributors to Canada’s future.

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

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada build upon the work of the Canadian Urban Institute in “Overdue: the Case for Canada’s Public Libraries” and implement its recommendation to Establish a National Task Force on the Future of Public Libraries to:

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- Identify whole-of-government leveraging opportunities for strategic partnerships among federal agencies and libraries for local service delivery.

Centre for Equitable Library Access

Budget 2022 allocated \$7 million/year for 3 years starting in 2024-25 to launch a new Equitable Access to Reading Program (EARP). This is a decision that CULC/CBUC members support and are eager to see the new program actively funding organizations that provide accessible reading products to the 3 million people in Canada with print disabilities.

CULC/CBUC works closely with and supports the work of the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) which, with the help of federal government funding, provides accessible reading services to those with print disabilities across Canada.

It is critical that those who depend on the services of CELA for accessible reading products can continue to access all services during the transition to the EARP. We strongly recommend that the federal government provides transition funding to CELA until such time as the EARP is fully operational and able to distribute funding directly to organizations like CELA.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada ensure that adequate transitional funding is provided to the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) until the Equitable Access to Reading Fund (EARP) is fully launched and funding can be accessed.

Support for Mental Health and Addiction

Public libraries across Canada are facing an unprecedented increase in the frequency and intensity of security and safety incidents in their spaces. While Canada’s urban libraries are intentionally accessible and welcoming spaces for all residents – including those at risk – libraries are not the appropriate public space to address the serious mental health and addiction issues happening across the country. By way of example, Edmonton Public Library experienced almost 100 overdoses on site in 2022 where naloxone had to be administered. Other urban libraries are experiencing similar numbers.

Libraries are not alone. Transit systems, community centres, and retail/private businesses are experiencing these issues. The impact on libraries is felt by a broad cross-section of users – including children and the elderly, who should all feel safe and welcome.

Front-line care of ongoing mental health and addictions issues are outside the mandate of public libraries, and it is paramount that these issues be addressed within a health-care framework. Doing so would allow libraries to focus on our core mandate including creating opportunities for learning and literacy, celebrating cultural heritage, and being a vital public space where community connections can be made, and all feel welcome.

To be clear, CULC/CBUC members are not seeking funding resources to allow libraries to address safety and security issues on-site. CULC/CBUC members believe that if health-related services in our communities, who have as their mandate assisting those with mental health and addiction issues, are provided the resources by the federal and provincial governments to engage those individuals at risk and help them with the professionalism and experience they have at hand, the security issues libraries are current facing will ease.

CULC/CBUC members are asking that federal and provincial governments be made fully aware of the impacts facing urban libraries because of the failure to adequately invest in community-based mental health and addiction services. The solution is to appropriately fund community mental health and addiction services: services which may already exist but are unable to fulfill their role due to funding that is not meeting demand, and other stressors. We ask that governments ensure community safety, via these existing community resources.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada recognizes the significant impact of mental health and addiction in Canadian communities and work with provincial governments to develop a pan-Canadian strategy on mental health and addiction that would include library leadership.

Conclusion

CULC/CBUC appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to Finance Canada in advance of the next federal budget.

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

For further information, please contact:

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