

# Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2025 Federal Budget

By: Canadian Urban Libraries Council



August 2024

## List of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada work with Canada's libraries to create a funding program to increase access to technology and learning tools that support innovation in communities across Canada.

**Recommendation 2:** The Government of Canada recognize the significant impact of mental health and addiction in Canadian communities and works with provincial governments to appropriately fund community mental health and addiction services to ensure critical community services are available to those in need in our communities.

**Recommendation 3:** The Government of Canada expand the funding parameters of the Equitable Access to Reading Program to ensure that the Centre for Equitable Library Access can continue providing a full range of equitable reading services to the 5.2 million people in Canada who have difficulty reading print, and make the Equitable Access to Reading Fund (EARP) permanent and tie future increases in the funding allocated to the EARP to the cost-of-living index.

## 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's mission is to facilitate advocacy, collaboration, and research that strengthens and promotes the value of Canada's urban libraries as integral to a vibrant democracy, a strong economy, and thriving communities.

- **Research:** Create, analyze, and disseminate information that will further the mission of the organization.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthen the capacity of urban libraries to anticipate and respond to the needs of the community.
- **Knowledge Transfer and Exchange:** Strengthen our ability to transfer knowledge, share information with CULC/CBUC, and to advance the urban agenda.
- **Organizational Resiliency:** Focus on capacity building initiatives in order to strengthen the resources required for the organization to meet its mandate.

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. 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. CULC/CBUC member libraries employ more than 12,000 library workers.

More than 77% 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.

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 children, youth, seniors, new Canadians, and the unemployed.

## I. Libraries are Integral to a Vibrant Democracy

Canada's urban libraries are integral to a vibrant democracy, a strong economy, and thriving communities and are steadfast in their commitment to building welcoming spaces, where everyone has a right to access their libraries.

As stated in the Canadian Urban Institute's Report *Overdue: The Case for Public Libraries*, "Libraries are the one institution that provide a remarkably broad array of critical supports to our communities, including for knowledge distribution, culture, health, reconciliation, belonging, and our democracy."

Libraries have a unique capacity to quickly adapt and respond to the changing needs of their communities. 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 education gap, reduce the likelihood of unemployment and poverty and sustain 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 the library can access – and often create culture. Reading diverse voices, enjoying free access to films, music and dance, and creating new cultural content through interactive opportunities. As champions of free expression, libraries provide 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, by addressing settler-centric structural biases in existing knowledge organizations and information retrieval systems.

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.

Innovation, Science and Industry Minister, François-Philippe Champagne, said that "Canada is interested in spurring a knowledge-based, innovative, and competitive economy."<sup>1</sup> Much like its

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.innovatingcanada.ca/technology/canadian-innovation/qa-with-minister-champagne-how-canada-excels-at-fostering-innovation/>

role in ensuring a vibrant democracy, libraries are integral to ensuring our communities have access to technologies that can spur this knowledge-based, innovative and competitive economy. Libraries introduce people to technology that is not widely accessible in the community and act as a dynamic hub where the collision of ideas and skills inspires new ways of thinking, doing, and creating. The federal government has an important opportunity to partner with libraries in expanding this dynamic hub by increasing access to technology and helping to enhance and grow the Canadian economy in all regions of the country.

**Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada work with Canada's libraries to create a funding program to increase access to technology and learning tools that support innovation in communities across Canada.

## II. Support for Mental Health and Addiction

CULC/CBUC member libraries firmly believe that everyone has a right to access their libraries. This core value of access means that, at times, library staff work with those who are experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges and addiction (libraries are not alone in facing the societal challenges of safety and security concerns arising from poor mental health and addiction – transit systems, community centres and retail/private businesses are experiencing the same issues).

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. Urban libraries across Canada are experiencing increased rates of overdose and the need to administer naloxone onsite.

To support library staff, many libraries have hired teams of social and community workers to work with the community while in their spaces – which impacts the ability of libraries to provide services to a broad cross-section of users – including children and the elderly, who must all feel safe and welcome.

Front-line care of ongoing mental health and addiction issues is 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 their core mandate – which includes 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.

CULC/CBUC members are asking that federal and provincial governments be fully aware of the impacts on urban libraries caused by the inadequate or insufficient funding of community-based mental health and addiction services and ensure that the funding and programming required to address these issues are met. Our members believe that if health-related services in our communities are provided with the funding and programming resources to engage those individuals at risk and help them with the professionalism and experience they have at hand, the security issues libraries are currently facing will ease. We call upon the federal government

to show the leadership required and work with provincial partners to address this critical funding and programming need.

**Recommendation 2:** The Government of Canada recognize the significant impact of mental health and addiction in Canadian communities and works with provincial governments to appropriately fund community mental health and addiction services to ensure critical community services are available to those in need in our communities.

### III. Equitable Access to Reading Program

CULC/CBUC members strongly support the federal government's launch of the Equitable Access to Reading Program (EARP) in May 2024. This was a program that CULC/CBUC actively advocated creating in advance of Budget 2022, and its launch is an important milestone in support of the more than 5.2 million people in Canada who have difficulty reading print.

CULC/CBUC is a founding partner in the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). CELA is a national not-for-profit organization that provides accessible reading services to those with print disabilities. CELA has depended on \$3 million annually in federal funding to produce accessible reading materials otherwise unavailable to vulnerable groups across Canada – including individuals with visual, physical, or learning disabilities.

While supportive of EARP, CULC/CBUC members are concerned that the maximum annual funding available to CELA is being set at \$2 million annually – a one-third reduction in CELA's direct funding.

We understand that CELA is working with NNELS and CFLA cooperatively to ensure a full range of accessible reading services can be fully funded and available to fully serve public libraries across Canada.

Currently, the EARP only provides funding until 2027, with no clear indication that the program will be available beyond this date. The current expiry date for the EARP needs to be addressed to ensure organizations like NNELS and CELA (and others providing equitable access to reading services) can continue to provide the critical services our users depend upon.

We urge the government to make the funding for the EARP permanent and tie increases in funding to the cost-of-living index so as not to put undue cost pressures on these organizations.

CELA provides a broad range of accessible reading services, in both French and English, for people across Canada with print disabilities, and has proven capacity and expertise to deliver these services. Ensuring it has the appropriate funding to continue to offer a full range of services is of critical importance to CULC/CBUC members.

**Recommendation 3:** The Government of Canada expand the funding parameters of the Equitable Access to Reading Program to ensure that the Centre for Equitable Library Access can continue providing a full range of equitable reading services to the 5.2 million people in Canada

who have difficulty reading print, and make the Equitable Access to Reading Fund (EARP) permanent and tie future increases in the funding allocated to the EARP to the cost-of-living index.

## Conclusion

CULC/CBUC appreciates the opportunity provided by the Standing Committee on Finance to make this submission 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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