

Essential Public Health Library Competencies

Introduction

There are many distinctions between public health and medicine.ⁱ These are reflected in library services and as a result, while public health librarianship shares many similarities with other health and special library fields, unique competencies are required for public health librarians to achieve excellence. This document is intended to define these competencies and replaces the first edition of the OPHLA Core Competencies released in 2006. It should be used in conjunction with the Medical Libraries Association (MLA) and Special Libraries Association (SLA) competency documents.ⁱⁱ

1. Leadership and Management

- Assess and interpret the multidisciplinary needs of the public health workforce and local communities served and develop information collections and services to meet needs
- Align library practices and services to support the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS)
- Understand and function within the organization's political and funding environment and its organizational and governance structure
- Adapt to varied roles and responsibilities to respond to changing public health priorities
- Ensure all library information resources and services are compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Collaborate and support other public health librarians

2. Collection Development

- Facilitate access to provincial, national, and international government information in relation to public health issues, roles, and responsibilities as well as other relevant grey literature
- Actively seek and compile new online and grey literature resources and tools and make them available to library clients
- Develop and maintain a collection that supports the multidisciplinary programs and services outlined in the OPHS

3. Library Services

- Understand the diversity of bibliographic and non-bibliographic databases required to address public health's multidisciplinary areas
- Conduct complex literature searches across all relevant bibliographic databases to answer client questions, demonstrating the ability to search for both qualitative and quantitative evidence in the social and clinical sciences
- Conduct searches in the grey literature efficiently and effectively and understand the value of grey literature resources to public health, including as a form of synthesized information and practice-based information
- Understand public health is a largely practice-based environment, not clinical, and be able to provide information services that meet this need
- Understand the levels of evidence to systematically and efficiently search the research literature, prioritizing synthesized evidence

- Understand and apply appropriate research question frameworks to develop search strategies to effectively answer public and population health questions

ⁱ Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (n.d.). Public health and medicine: distinctions between public health and medicine. Retrieved from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/about/public-health-medicine/>

ⁱⁱ Medical Library Association. (n.d.). Professional competencies for health sciences librarians [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=39>; Special Libraries Association. (2016). Competencies for information professionals [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://www.sla.org/about-sla/competencies/>