

Worth Every Cent and More:

an independent assessment of the return on investment of health libraries in Australia

Gemma Siemensma

*Library Manager, Ballarat Health Services Library
(presented at the Health Libraries Inc. conference 2013)*

Health Libraries Inc. (based in Victoria) and Health Libraries Australia (a national group of the Australian Library and Information Association) commissioned award-winning firm SGS Economics and Planning to survey health libraries across the nation and from this to assess the return on the annual investment in these services to their organisations.

Released at the 10th Health Libraries Inc. Conference: #vital in October 2013, the indicative result from this work is that health libraries have been found to return **\$9 for every \$1 invested**. SGS says this is a conservative estimate and the true value of health libraries is likely to be even higher.

The report attempted to quantify the costs and benefits of health libraries across Australia. It is clear that health libraries provide an array of benefits to their users and, in turn, to the end-clients of these users. There is no doubt that these end-client benefits are likely to outshine any other benefits, if they could be appropriately quantified. However, quantifying these benefits is difficult. As a second best solution, SGS valued the benefits provided directly to health library users. These user benefits include:

- value of 'time' saved for library users
- value of 'out-of-pocket expenses' saved for library users (e.g. subscription fees/ content access fees).

The value of user time-savings was reflected in the 'efficiency' of health library staff in locating,

distilling and delivering information to users, as well as the 'opportunity cost' of user time. The value of out-of-pocket expenses was represented by the subscription/access fees that individual library users would need to pay in order to access the content that health libraries centrally provide. Given that this quantitative analysis only focused on quantifying benefits to the health library users, not their end clients, SGS said 'it is highly likely that the benefits of industry libraries outweigh their costs considerably'.

This economic value assessment supports the findings of *Questions of Life and Death: an investigation into the value of health library and information services*, published by Health Libraries Inc. (HLI) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in September 2012. In this survey-based report, library and information service users were asked how they believed their use of the library service over the last year had helped them:

- 83% said it had helped them improve health outcomes for their patients
- 76% said it had changed their thinking and improved their diagnosis or treatment plan.

The results provide a snapshot of the continued outstanding value of health libraries against a backdrop of significantly greater usage but declining investment. Patient and medical staff numbers and hospital expenditure are increasing, while health library budgets, space and staffing levels are decreasing. The investment in library and information services is small in the scheme

of things – just 0.1% of recurrent expenditure in Australian hospitals. The report suggests that a modest increase in spending on health libraries would allow for significant incremental benefits.

The full report: *Worth every cent and more: an independent assessment of the return on investment of health libraries in Australia* can be downloaded from the Health Libraries Inc. (<http://www.hlinc.org.au>) and ALIA (<http://www.alia.org.au>) websites.



*****SAVE THE DATE***SAVE THE DATE*****

HLI/HLA Conference 19th September 2014 State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Theme: Collaboration

The joint collaboration between HLI (Health Libraries Inc.) and HLA (Health Libraries Australia, the national ALIA health group) is both the context and the theme for the day.

It is generally accepted that 'collaboration is a good thing' but what does this really look like in practice? What are the real costs and benefits to the parties involved? What is the difference between collaboration, cooperation and partnership? And what are the critical success factors?

Aim:

The aim of the day is to explore the practical aspects of collaboration through presentations which highlight examples of successful case studies, programs, projects or initiatives which have been evaluated or assessed in some way.

Registrations: Opening soon so keep your eyes open for emails!