



**NCLIS**

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## **News Release**

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# **National Commission Seeks Expanded Health Information Role for Libraries**

## ***NCLIS Recommends Private/Public Partnership for Conducting Study***

Washington, D.C. May 11, 2005— The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) today called on President George W. Bush and Congressional leaders to support libraries as health information distribution centers. This specific role for libraries—already successful in many communities—will position libraries as the central resource for providing citizens with consumer health information, particularly when they require health information in a critical or unusual situation, and for helping citizens learn how to live a healthy lifestyle.

The Commission's recommendation is included in a transmittal letter addressed to President Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, as President of the Senate, and Speaker Dennis Hastert of the U.S. House of Representatives. In the letter, which accompanies a Commission report describing award-winning health communication programs already in place in libraries, NCLIS Chairman Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons advises the President and Congress to "authorize the creation of a private/public partnership to study how libraries can be positioned to serve as their communities' knowledge nexus for health information." The recommended partnership, according to Dr. Fitzsimmons, will be made up of leaders from government agencies concerned with healthcare, from the several healthcare professions, from the commercial sector, and from the library and information science profession. Its task will be to investigate how libraries can serve as citizen health information centers for their respective communities.

"Once the partnership completes its study," Dr. Fitzsimmons said, "NCLIS will then work with the partnership to distribute authoritative guidelines for helping library managers set up consumer health information programs, if they are not already providing health information. And if they are, the guidelines will help them improve programs already in place. The goal is to establish libraries as the logical resource for consumer health information and for promoting a healthy lifestyle for all American citizens."

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The Commission, created in 1970 to advise the President and Congress on national library and information policy, is seeking to strengthen the relevance of libraries in the lives of American citizens and has, in fact, chosen library relevance as one of its goals.

“I can’t think of a better way to do that than to encourage libraries to take the lead in providing consumer health information,” Dr. Fitzsimmons said. “In the Commission’s awards initiative, we created a program to recognize libraries that have outstanding health communication programs. It was through that awards initiative—described in the report just delivered to the President and to Congress—that we were able to establish just how good libraries can be at providing consumer health information. Now we want to encourage more of them to do it.”

The report, which describes exceptional consumer health information programs provided by 37 libraries throughout America, is “Libraries and Health Communication: Model Programs in Health Information Provided by Libraries Throughout the Nation—The 2004 NCLIS Blue Ribbon Consumer Health Information Recognition Awards for Libraries.” It can be viewed at: <http://www.nclis.gov/info/ModelProgramsReport04-19-05.pdf>.

In the report, the Commission makes the point that libraries are a suitable and natural resource for health information. From the Commission’s perspective, libraries that deliver consumer health information are simply building on what they already do well. In all communities, libraries provide a variety of consumer information to citizens, and the Nation’s vast network of libraries of all types (some 122,000 public, academic, government, specialized, and research libraries) is a trusted and respected source of information. Providing consumer health information and encouraging lifestyle improvements fits comfortably into that consumer information role. When acted upon, the Commission’s recommendation to the President and Congress will benefit the American people by encouraging libraries to continue to provide information that is sound, authoritative, and for the common good.

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### **About NCLIS**

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) is a permanent, independent agency of the Federal government charged by Public Law 91-345 to advise the President and Congress on national and international library and information policies, to appraise and assess the adequacies and deficiencies of library and information resources and services, and to develop overall plans for meeting national library and information needs.