



NCLIS

U.S. National Commission on
Libraries and Information Science

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News Release

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New Award for Model Library Health Information Programs Launched *National Library Commission Announced Award Initiative at Kick-Off Event*

Washington, D.C. May 2, 2005—Libraries that excel in providing health information and promoting healthy lifestyles will now be nationally recognized. The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) today announced the first nationwide award for libraries with exemplary consumer health information programs. Over the course of a year, the NCLIS Health Award for Libraries initiative will identify libraries in each state with outstanding health information programs. In May 2006 a top winning library will be announced and representatives from that library will travel to Washington, D.C. to receive a \$20,000 cash prize.

The NCLIS Health Award for Libraries initiative was launched tonight at a special gathering of library and health professionals at the National Agricultural Library, in Beltsville, Maryland. Chief officers of state library agencies from across the U.S. and its territories—together with some 200 other leaders committed to health communication and health literacy—turned out to launch the award program. The state library leaders were recognized for their work in the Commission's pilot awards program, given in 2004 to 37 libraries which were identified by their states' leaders as having notable health programs.

At the event, National Agricultural Library Director Peter Young welcomed guests and described NAL's efforts in health communication, calling special attention to NAL's new nutrition Web site (www.nutrition.gov). NCLIS Chairman Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons announced the NCLIS Health Award for Libraries, pointing out that since strengthening the relevance of libraries is one of the Commission's 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." Fitzsimmons then invited guests to visit an array of exhibits set up by the American Academy of Family Physicians, the National Library of Medicine, Healthy People 2010, and several other health and library organizations.

NCLIS Executive Director Trudi Bellardo Hahn talked about why libraries are a "natural" resource for health information. "The Commission established the Health Award for Libraries initiative to encourage all libraries to build on what they already do well," she said. "The Nation's libraries already provide easily accessed, authoritative, and trusted consumer information of all kinds to their users. Identifying exemplary health information projects through this prize will provide direction and insight for library managers across the country. NCLIS is delighted to support a program of such vital importance."

Award History and National Need

NCLIS encourages libraries to align their resources to address the needs of the country. The need for health and medical information continues to be a pressing one as Americans struggle with health issues and try to live healthier lives. Americans may be aware of the recommendations of health scientists to maintain healthy weight, exercise regularly, eat more fruits and vegetables, and avoid risky behavior like smoking and drugs. Yet only 3 percent of Americans follow the health advice, according to a recent report in the Archives of Internal Medicine.¹

In 2004 the Commission sought to address this issue by sponsoring the NCLIS Blue Ribbon Consumer Health Information Recognition Award for Libraries, to identify best practices among libraries (see the report at: www.nclis.gov). Members of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) assisted with the awards that were presented to 37 libraries across the country. The new NCLIS Health Award for Libraries program grew out of the Blue Ribbon Awards pilot program and will focus a national spotlight on best library health information practices.

NCLIS Commissioner Mary H. Perdue leads the NCLIS Libraries and Health Communication Task Force. As a former national syndicated columnist, she recognizes the importance of healthcare in the lives of Americans everywhere. She said, “In the United States, one dollar in seven is spent on healthcare. That amounts to \$1.7 trillion dollars annually. Health scientists know that up to 70 percent of what we spend wouldn’t be needed if we practiced healthy lifestyles. Healthy lifestyles can not only save us untold personal misery, they could also save the country a trillion dollars, if we all did the following: ate better, exercised more, had our preventive check-ups, and avoided risky behavior (like smoking and drugs).”

“There is a huge need in this country for changes in lifestyle,” said Perdue, “and there is a structure that can help meet this need: That’s the library. There are 120,000 libraries, including roughly 16,000 public libraries, across the Nation. There are 1.2 billion visits to libraries each year, so libraries are a perfect place for disseminating healthy lifestyle information. This award program presents the ultimate ‘win, win, win.’ The libraries win. The consumer wins. The country wins.”

Dr. Fitzsimmons noted that the award should prompt more people to turn to their libraries for health information. “Citizens need to know that authoritative and accessible consumer health information is available at their local libraries,” she said. “The accurate and free information libraries provide is an excellent use of our tax dollars.”

Award Judges and Collaborators

Several library and health organizations are collaborating with NCLIS on the Health Award for Libraries initiative. One of the most involved groups is COSLA. COSLA members—state librarians and chief officers of state library agencies—have agreed to set up panels of state judges to select 52 state winners, one from each state and two territories.

¹ *Arch Intern Med.* [2005;165:854-857](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajph/95.5.854)

After a second round of judging by an NCLIS taskforce, a top winner will be selected by a panel of five distinguished judges, each of whom has helped set national policy in the healthcare or library arenas. The five judges are:

- **Dr. J. Edward Hill**, President-elect of the American Medical Association
- **Joseph Califano, Jr.**, President and Chairman of the National Center on Substance Abuse at Columbia University and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare
- **Dr. Louis W. Sullivan**, Chairman of the National Health Museum and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services
- **Dr. Donald A. B. Lindberg**, Director of the National Library of Medicine
- NCLIS Chairman **Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons**.

Within the health and medical fields, the Health Award for Libraries is being lauded for the value it will provide consumers. “Libraries are outstanding venues in which to communicate health information to the general public,” said Louis W. Sullivan, MD, Chairman of the National Health Museum. “With more than 1.2 billion annual visits to public libraries nationwide, there is an unparalleled opportunity for these institutions to work with museums such as the National Health Museum to help meet the needs of Americans for reliable public health information,” he said.

Other organizations are excited about promoting the award through programs of their own and appreciate the collaborative effort going into the Commission’s initiative. Michael Fleming, M.D., Chair of the American Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors, put it this way: “The American Academy of Family Physicians, through its Americans in Motion initiative, is pleased to partner with the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science to help Americans lead healthier lives through the important and effective services offered at libraries.”

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