

Guest Editor

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We are grateful to Tim Gibbs and the Delaware Academy of Medicine for the opportunity to feature the contributions of public libraries to public health. The Delaware Academy of Medicine has a long history of partnership with Delaware libraries, providing consumer health information, training for librarians, and much more. Libraries support individuals and communities to achieve their full potential, and health is a key foundation for human growth and development.

In *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*, sociologist Eric Klinenberg studied the 1995 heat wave in Chicago and the essential role that social infrastructure, including libraries, plays in supporting community health and resilience, especially during a disaster.¹ As “second responders,” libraries around the nation adapt their services instantly in response to crisis, more and more frequently. The COVID-19 pandemic is transforming library services significantly, yet again, to help communities evolve from surviving to thriving.

Perhaps you remember from school, an information organizer that libraries use called the Dewey Decimal Classification System (there will not be a test!), which represents all the world’s knowledge. Health issues primarily fall under 600s (Applied Science) and 300s (Social Sciences). Libraries also serve all needs, represented by a modified version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs – Find, Connect, Learn, Inspire, Transform. In support of social infrastructure, the statewide Delaware Library Consortium (delawarelibraries.org) infrastructure was established to enable seamless collaboration across libraries for more equitable and effective services in response to community needs. Currently 74 libraries are Delaware Library Consortium members, supporting interests with millions of books, movies, music, magazines, newspapers, Internet access, programs, workshops, community collaborations, and more! And with a computer or smart phone, you can access library services from wherever you are!

The strength of social infrastructure is also dependent upon partnerships among all of the subject matter experts.

Delaware libraries are proud of our partnerships with Delaware Health and Social Services for Social Workers and the Department of Labor for Employment Specialists, as well as numerous additional partnerships with nonprofits and agencies to support Delawareans’ needs and ambitions. Libraries develop partnerships and services to support health and societal evolution in multiple areas, such as the long term effects of poverty and trauma, racial inequality, gender inequality, and so on, to help the public overcome trauma and rise above the challenges in their lives.

Our contributors for this edition are leaders with perspectives at the local, state, regional, and national levels on library partnerships with health organizations to provide health information and services throughout communities. We hope you find within, ideas to spark additional partnerships with libraries to help you achieve your goals. Special thanks to The Honorable Bethany Hall-Long, Lt. Governor, a nurse and Chair of the Behavioral Health Commission, and to First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, Honorary Chair of the Delaware Library Card Campaign and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, part of the First Chance initiative for children.

Emerging from crisis is a powerful opportunity for change, and libraries are standing by to collaborate with you to strengthen the social infrastructure for our communities. Thank you for your passion and partnership! Let's devote our wisdom, hard work, and ingenuity to design a vibrant healthy future!

References:

1. Klinenberg, E. (2018). Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life. Crown Publishing: New York.

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