

Partnerships for Health:

NNLM MAR and Delaware Partners Make a Lasting Impact

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Introduction

What began in 1836 as a collection of medical publications overseen by the United States Army Surgeon General would eventually become the institution known as the National Library of Medicine (NLM). Now located in Bethesda, Maryland, as part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) campus, NLM is regarded as the largest biomedical library in the world. As well as providing an impressive collection of electronic and print resources, NLM also supports highly utilized health information resources like MedlinePlus, ClinicalTrials.gov, PubMed, and approximately 250 others.¹ These resources are invaluable tools for libraries and organizations across the country, and NLM remains a trusted entity in the health information community.

Though these resources are freely available to any individual or organization, it became necessary in 1965 to establish an outreach and engagement arm of NLM. The Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) exists as the conduit between trusted health resources and users from a wide variety of libraries and organizations. Eight NNLM Regional Medical Libraries (RMLs) serve the different regions of the United States, with each providing services to their respective states. Membership is completely free at both individual and organizational levels. NNLM support includes delivering virtual (and in-person, when feasible) introductions to health information resources and granting funding to network members to provide health programming in their communities. Because of the nature of network-based support, strong partnerships are essential to the work NNLM does. Leveraging existing networks and connections within any given region is not only an effective way to maximize reach, but also a way to ensure NNLM addresses, amplifies, and advocates for a region's unique needs.

NNLM Middle Atlantic Region (MAR) serves libraries and organizations in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. Throughout this organizational relationship, countless meaningful partnerships have been formed, resulting in many successful projects. Three specific collaborations are highlighted here, each of which promoted health information in creative and effective ways, with lasting impact throughout the health resources community.

Disaster Relief Efforts

In 2017, The Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware, NNLM MAR, and the Delaware Division of Libraries sponsored *Disaster Recovery for Delaware: Exploring Potential Partnerships Among Emergency Planners, First Responders, Librarians and Others*. This summit brought together Delaware public, health sciences, and academic librarians, emergency management directors, operation planners from Delaware Emergency Management Agency, the

Medical Reserve Corps, healthcare professionals, and other agencies involved with disaster planning, response, and recovery. This statewide event was intended to “connect library staff with emergency planners to help communities bounce back more quickly following a natural or man-made disaster.”² There was a deliberate focus on developing partnerships and strategies before an emergency happens, as a way to strengthen these essential relationships over time. Emergency responders spoke to the myriad ways libraries can assist them in mitigation and preparedness, response, and recovery. Libraries are often considered to be “second responders” in these circumstances, and the summit provided practical advice, ready-to-use toolkits, and volunteer opportunities throughout. Presenters also promoted the Disaster Information Specialization, a professional opportunity through the Medical Library Association (MLA) and NLM. Open not just to library staff, but to other interested professionals as well, this curriculum “trains individuals in providing access to information for disaster and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery supporting their institutions and communities throughout the disaster/emergency cycle.”³ Since then, the Medical Reserve Corps and library partners have continued to meet quarterly to continue these discussions and maintain the momentum sparked by the summit. The resources shared by presenters remain relevant today, and crucial to libraries that hope to support their communities in crisis. The *Disaster Planning and Recovery LibGuide* remains on the Delaware Division of Libraries website. Resources including emergency contacts, related guides, health information sources, and links to relevant mobile applications are all available on this page.⁴

Libraries and Public Health

Over the years, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Library has been an important NNLM partner. The library’s mission to “empower employees to provide quality services to Delawareans and assist the public with health- and social service-related questions...[and] provide access to current print and electronic research materials, time-saving tools and training, and skilled specialists to support...information needs” aligns well with NLM’s mission to promote reliable health resources, which makes this partnership highly beneficial for the populations served by both entities.⁵ Two library directors from this institution have served on NNLM MAR’s Health Professionals Special Advisory Group at various times and the library has partnered with NNLM MAR on several valuable projects.

In 2018, an escape room initiative at the DHSS Library was highlighted in a workshop titled “Developing Escape Rooms at Libraries” that was part of NNLM MAR’s monthly guest speaker series within the region. These escape rooms took a creative approach to introducing library services to health department employees. This kind of collaboration is a prime example of how partnerships between libraries and health departments can open up opportunities for out-of-the-box programming and innovative collaborative projects that impact audiences across disciplines.

In 2019, a representative from the DHSS Library partnered with NNLM MAR’s Health Professions Coordinator, Erin Seger, to present at the American Public Health Association Annual Conference as part of a session titled “Improving Health through Collaboration: Libraries and Public Health.”⁶ This session focused on a variety of library and public health partnerships, including collaborative efforts between the Delaware DHSS and public libraries throughout the state. The session also promoted practical NLM resources like the Disaster Information Management Research Center, a hub for disaster preparedness information that “connect[s] people to quality disaster health information and foster a culture of community resiliency.”⁷

Opioid Epidemic Response

Opioid overdoses have increased dramatically in recent years. Millions of people in the United States suffer from substance use disorders. NLM and NNLM have responded accordingly with increased online health information resources and training. Many of NNLM MAR's members—especially public libraries—have responded to the crisis with public events and staff training. For example, the Reading Public Library in Pennsylvania hosted a panel discussion that included the PA Physician General, first responders, and a mother who lost a child to the epidemic. After the public event, Lydia Collins, former NNLM MAR staff member, provided a training for library staff about how to navigate relevant health information resources. In addition, NNLM MAR Education and Health Literacy Coordinator Michelle Burda created a one-hour workshop focused on finding and using authoritative health information about opioid abuse, overdose prevention, and treatment options. This training, “Understanding the Opioid Crisis: Where Do I Begin,” was piloted with Medical Reserve Corps members from across Delaware.⁸

Conclusion

The nature of the outreach and education provided by NNLM makes it crucial to forge and maintain meaningful partnerships with public health institutions, libraries of various types, and community-serving organizations. Forming lasting relationships across disciplines serves to amplify the missions of all parties involved. This, in turn, gives the communities served by these institutions an even stronger foundation of knowledge to build on and draw from. NNLM is always excited to work with its Delaware partners, and the future is undoubtedly full of more collaborations to come.

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