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July 30, 2004

The Honorable Elias Zerhouni
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

The Medical Library Association (MLA) supports the recommendation of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee that the NIH provide free public access to articles resulting from NIH-funded research. MLA has always advocated that information generated by public funds is a vital national resource, and that all Americans have the right to have access to this information developed from their tax dollars.

MLA concurs with the findings of the NIH's report to Congress on "Access to Biomedical Research Information" that widespread dissemination of research knowledge is an essential component of our nation's investment in research. In a May 2004 statement, "Public Access to Health Information: Finding the Balance," MLA states, "that having access to information is critical to advancing science and promoting healthy people, and that knowledge is indispensable to making informed decisions in health care, education, and research." Publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Academic Medicine*, document that having timely access to health information helps to significantly lower costs and shorten hospital stays.

MLA joins with its library association partners and SPARC in noting that placing taxpayer-funded research in a public archive will provide practical access to hard-to-find research by physicians, public health professionals, and disease advocacy groups, and will also help students, teachers, and scientists at thousands of academic institutions, including hospitals, research laboratories, and corporate research centers throughout the country by ensuring their access to the latest medical research.

Currently, the vast majority of research funded with public dollars is available only through increasingly costly subscriptions (often more than \$10,000 annually), institutional licenses (more than a million dollars annually for many universities), or per article purchases (as much as \$30 for each). These increasing costs prohibit access to the information that in turn undermines the health of our nation.

Health sciences librarians recognize the important role that publishers play in creating value-added products that support the needs of health professionals and the public. For this reason, they have always played an essential role in facilitating a balanced approach that ensures the public's rights to appropriate, authoritative, easily, and readily accessible health care information and protects the owner's rights, including intellectual property, recognition, and compensation. The Medical Library Association applauds your efforts to bring together all the stakeholders to understand their concerns and identify and discuss the complex issues surrounding open access to current medical information.

The Medical Library Association believes that the open access provision called for in the House Appropriations Committee report will help remove unnecessary barriers by making the results of taxpayer-funded research available online, upon publication, and for no extra charge to the American public. We thank you for your efforts to address the important recommendations of this report and for taking into consideration the views and interests of the information and publishing communities.

Sincerely,



Joanne Marshall, AHIP, FMLA
President



Carla J. Funk, CAE
Executive Director