



MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire OPLB Trustees

cc: Sonia Bebbington, Chief Librarian and CEO

From / Expéditeur Alexandra Yarrow, Program Manager, Board and Strategic Services

Subject / Objet Canadian Urban Libraries Council and Canadian Urban Institute Report: Overdue - The Case for Canada's Public Libraries **Date:** March 6, 2024

In October 2023, staff emailed trustees to advise them regarding publication of a report by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) entitled [OVERDUE: The Case for Canada's Public Libraries](#). Released in partnership with the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC), the report was the outcome of three years of engagement with Canada's urban public libraries.

In December 2023, the 2024 Board Continuing Education Plan and Conference Attendance Report (OPLB-2023-1205-10.3) indicated that staff anticipated delivering a presentation to the Board regarding this report in Q1 2024. Upon subsequent discussion, it has been determined that this memo highlighting key elements of the report and next steps would suffice.

Key points from the "Overdue" report

- Public libraries in Canada are addressing priorities at all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal)
- Public libraries receive the bulk of their funding from the municipal government (over 90% on average), but the tax base does not increase proportionally with population or economic growth. For every \$1 invested in Canada's urban libraries, \$6 is generated in community economic impact, a return of over 600%.
 - OPL context: OPL receives 97% of its funding from the City, and funding is close to aligning with population and economic growth. The "Overdue" report used a specific calculation formula described in an appendix to the report, which is different than that used by OPL; the economic benefit per active OPL cardholder in 2022 was \$609.49.
- The changing social landscape puts pressure on public libraries in Canada
- Libraries are uniquely placed to support growth and resilience in Canadian communities
- Two possible future scenarios:
 - Libraries are "stretched to the brink," and declining funding leads to reduced hours and services, which in turn leads to the erosion of social structures and a negative impact on the community)

- Libraries are "resourced for resilience," and enhanced funding from all three levels of government result in a public library that supports its community
- Three calls to action:
 - Priority 1: Relieve operational pressures, including by prioritizing neighbourhoods with libraries for coordinated services and investment in mental health, addiction and public safety, developing a pan-Canadian strategy on mental health and addiction that would include public library leadership, and increased funding for integrated community-based mental health and addiction services for people with complex needs
 - Priority 2: Establish libraries as critical infrastructure, including incorporating capital costs for new libraries into Infrastructure Canada planning, developing a new investment fund for capital costs for existing libraries, and developing a new social infrastructure investment fund by Canada's Infrastructure Bank, for which libraries are eligible.
 - Priority 3: Formalize sustainable investment streams, including exploring "mechanisms to commit provincial core funding for library operations," and the potential of allocating municipal funding on a per-capital basis.

Next steps

In light of the themes raised in the report (sustainable, varied funding for operating and capital expenses, safety and security, community development), staff will continue to monitor how the "Overdue" report may influence the broader advocacy work of public libraries. This will be pursued via OPL's involvement in the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL), the Ontario Library Association (OLA), CULC, and other sector groups, and will report to the Board regarding strategic initiatives.

For any questions, please feel free to contact me.

ALEXANDRA YARROW
Program Manager
Board and Strategic Services

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