

Medical Library Association/Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries Comments to the Federal Communications Commission re: “Restoring Internet Freedom”, Docket 17-108

Submitted July 14, 2017

The Medical Library Association (MLA) and Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) call for the retention of the net neutrality protections adopted by the FCC in 2015, and for continued enforcement of the current Open Internet Order.

Libraries require an open internet. Health sciences libraries make extensive use of the National Library of Medicine’s (NLM) health information services, which now provide near-instantaneous reliable access to high quality health information resources when and where decisions are made. It is critical that health sciences libraries have the ability to provide unencumbered access to NLM’s almost 300 databases in support of health care, education, and research. Health sciences libraries also provide Internet access to images that support telemedicine, particularly in remote areas where Internet service can be disproportional or uneven and to reach the underserved. An example of this is the Health-E-Access program at the University of Rochester Medical Center/Golisano Children’s Hospital, which is designed to increase access to healthcare for children, improve the economic stability of inner city families, and improve early education for underserved children. Health-E-Access connects an ill child and Telehealth assistant located at a childcare center, with a physician or nurse practitioner, located at Golisano children’s Hospital, through a broadband digital communication link. Teleconferencing cameras allow real-time, face-to-face interaction. Health-e-Access has enabled more than 10,000 visits in child care programs and elementary schools, most of which were performed by a clinician from the child’s own medical home.

The public also requires internet access without restrictions and barriers, whether accessing consumer health information from a computer in a public library, home, school, senior center or other consumer-based setting. Examples of heavily used databases that enable the public to take charge of their health include NLM’s MedlinePlus, ClinicalTrials.gov, and PubMed Central. MedlinePlus provides more than 1 million consumers daily with trusted, authoritative health information on more than 1,000 topics in English and Spanish and has become the top destination for those seeking health information over the internet. Each day, more than 65,000 different users access information found in ClinicalTrials.gov, the world’s largest clinical trials registry, which includes more than 238,000 registered studies and summary results for more than 24,500 trials, many of which are not published elsewhere. Patients, clinicians, scientists, and health information professionals need fast and ready access to these databases. PubMed Central also contains more than 4.2 million biomedical free full-text articles, and enables the public to search for an article they may come across while researching a particular health issue.

Net neutrality is critical not only for the provision of Internet access, but because libraries are increasingly creating and making available content that they themselves hosts. For example, many academic libraries are part of coalitions that provide educational opportunities online to people around the world in the form of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs frequently provide online education in a video format. Many libraries, particularly those at universities, are also providing access to large datasets to promote research and collaboration.

Net neutrality is critical to our libraries, our missions, our patrons, and the public. The Internet serves as an important information and communication resource for all our users who are entitled to continued robust, fast, and dynamic access.

MLA and AAHSL urge the FCC not to turn back the clock of time. Please continue to preserve and protect the key principle of network neutrality.

Organizational Bios

The Medical Library Association (MLA) is a nonprofit, educational organization with 3,500 health sciences information professional members worldwide. Founded in 1898, MLA provides lifelong educational opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.

The Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) supports academic health sciences libraries and directors in advancing the patient care, research, education and community service missions of academic health centers through visionary executive leadership and expertise in health information, scholarly communication, and knowledge management.