

## Futureproofing the SA Health Library Service: a transformative approach

SA Health Library Service Management Team

This paper is part of an ongoing commissioned series on health library updates from around Australasia. Please note information was correct at the time of writing, but some time has elapsed between then and the article being published.

In recent years, the SA Health Library Service has undergone significant change within our workforce. We have faced a situation familiar to many in the library sector, with a substantial portion of our staff reaching retirement age simultaneously. As of 2024, following an extensive recruitment effort, most of our management team and over half of our reference librarian team have been in their current roles for less than two years.

Alongside this workforce shift, our patrons' needs have also evolved. Whereas our reference queries once primarily focused on medical issues stemming from individual clinicians, requests now primarily originate from departmental divisions, governance units, and improvement managers; and are concerned with service redesign, patient flow, safety, and clinical improvement. Additionally, there is a growing emphasis within our local health networks on fostering an active research culture across their own workforce.

An external presence that is also being felt by our service is the growth of Artificial Intelligence; the library is receiving numerous enquiries into the appropriateness of using AI tools for clinical practice and research purposes, as well as fielding approaches from vendors who are rapidly developing new products in this space. More concerning however is the direct marketing of new AI products directly to clinicians, particularly those who are involved in managing electronic medical record systems.

While these changes present challenges, they also offer the SA Health Library Service with a valuable opportunity to leverage the new skills within our team, reassess our current services, and strategically plan for the future. From May until July 2024 the SA Health Library Service Management team undertook a library planning exercise to develop a strategic plan for the next two years, the process we followed will be outlined in this article.

The SA Health Library Service benefits from direct senior executive leadership, so to kick off our strategic planning project, we held a management meeting with our divisional lead SA Health's Chief Medical Officer (CMO). During this meeting our

CMO shared his vision for the library service, emphasising the need to prioritise 'push' services, enhance agility, and anticipate evidence needs before they arise. He also highlighted the importance of embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and preparing to integrate this emerging technology into our operations.

Next, to enable the project team to understand the wider library industry challenges and identify gaps within our own service, an environmental scan was undertaken by our reference librarian team. The findings of the environmental scan were then correlated with our own library experiences through undertaking a SWOT analysis.

We then carried out a SA Health wide information needs survey, to determine the current and future information needs of our patrons. We also asked our clients questions relating to barriers they encounter, as well as current satisfaction levels with the library service to elicit benchmark consumer satisfaction metrics.

Building on all these initiatives the next stage of the planning process was for the management team to work on creating new vision, mission, and values statements for the SA Health Library Service. After finalising these elements, the team moved on to establish measurable objectives for the next 3 years, that encompass our existing services as well as any gaps that had been identified through the planning process.

Finally, a new library portfolio plan was developed to incorporate both our existing and proposed new service areas and designate management leads.

Our reference librarian team undertook an extensive environmental scan of the health library sector in a horizon scanning effort. In summary this highlighted that health libraries are undergoing a digital shift, integrating technologies and digital resources to enhance service delivery. Innovations and automation are optimising resource management, improving efficiency, and streamlining operations. Physical and virtual spaces are being redesigned to better facilitate user interaction and engagement. Effective adoption of these changes presents challenges and requires careful planning, ongoing evaluation, and a focus on both user and staff needs. This shift is accompanied by an evolution in roles, with functions becoming increasingly specialised to support users more effectively. Libraries are focused on providing comprehensive research support, commitment to evidence-based practice and education, and promoting information and health literacy. Health libraries play a pivotal role in capacity building and service enhancement through strategic partnerships with key stakeholders. By addressing barriers and investing in key areas, libraries can significantly impact research support, education, and clinical settings. Health libraries must align with organisational objectives and demonstrate value through stakeholder engagement. We are hoping to synthesise this research into a publishable form in the future.

Looking more specifically at our own service; with the transition to a SA Health statewide service in 2010, our reference librarians' roles have narrowed in scope, with a focus on providing mediated literature search services and patron training sessions. While there are some local site services and tasks undertaken, professional tasks have been reduced, and workloads are high because several experienced librarians commenced their transition to retirement.

Likewise interlibrary loans and document delivery requests have diminished, with significant changes in the resource sharing landscape. We believe this is a result of increased availability of open access and breadth of our eResources.

To attract and retain professional staff, we will be undertaking a skills and knowledge audit and creating a whole of service staff training plan. Coupled with the new library portfolio plan, this will provide increased number of career pathways within the service and hopefully impact positively on staff satisfaction.

The SA Health Library Service plays a critical role at SA Health in combatting misinformation and disinformation. We are recognised experts in information literacy and have existing extensive strong relationships across our state network. Leveraging these connections through outreach and educational initiatives is crucial for ensuring high level digital health literacy for our health workers and consumers, particularly in this rapidly evolving environment.

Introducing any new initiative presents its own set of challenges. We face constraints due to our current staffing levels, skills, and knowledge. Additionally, our library budget is under continual financial pressure led by rising vendor costs and fluctuations in the US dollar. Supporting our organisational medical and health research agendas or introducing any outreach clinical librarian programmes will require innovation and agility.

SA Health is experiencing multiple approaches from our publishing vendors who are developing AI additions to their existing products. As we are sure is the case with all health departments worldwide much of this approach is targeted towards our clinicians and electronic health system departments, rather than towards the library itself. SA Health Library Service is extremely fortunate in that we have a strong relationship with our senior executive and are located within the same department as these teams and are being included in these initial conversations. Our initial impression of these products is that they are still very much in their development phase, with product development conducted overseas. Our key concerns at this point surround localised evidence, currency, data privacy, and source data. However, we are primarily concerned with the clinical risk of embedding one single resource into our electronic management systems as a presumed 'source of truth'. Whilst the vendors are very clear that their evidence is only one part of the clinical decision

process which can only present a “global evidence” context to be used alongside local guidelines and frameworks; the tone of these products is quite decisive and does infer to our busy clinicians that it is the authority answer.

Bringing this discussion together, our library planning project has identified a number of areas that our service has not strategically addressed, particularly in the areas of marketing, outreach, and research support. Many of these specialties have been partially addressed in the past by our site managers and reference librarians, but they have been managed in an ad hoc fashion, with no direct planning or strategy. Similarly, there are areas where we already have a strong focus such as our highly popular Current Awareness Service. This service helps address the challenge set by our Chief Medical Officer to be more proactive in anticipating evidence needs, with additional planning we could further expand and enhance this service. Additionally, it is evident that we are not engaging fully with our stakeholders when making decisions, an issue which we are keen to resolve.

The health library industry is currently undergoing significant change, driven by technological advancements and evolving user expectations. Awareness of emerging trends is essential for libraries to remain progressive, relevant, and effective. The current trends in health libraries reflect a dynamic shift towards digital transformation, user-centred services, and innovative resource management.

There are several initiatives we will undertake over the next six to 12 months that will position the SA Health Library Service to meet these identified challenges, these will include:

- Implementing the SAHLS Portfolio Plan. This model will give all staff an opportunity to learn and grow in their preferred health library pathway and ensure there is a strategic approach to all aspects of our service delivery
- Establishment of an internal Professional Development Model to help staff foster development of new skills to meet our changing environment and evolving user information needs
- Develop an ongoing service performance evaluation framework with clearly defined key performance indicators underpinned by real-time performance or usage data
- The internal publication and dissemination of the SA Health Library Service Business Plan 2024-2027