

## CONTACT

Janine Logan, Director, Long Island Health Collaborative

VP, Communications and Population Health, Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council

631-334-8321; [jlogan@nshc.org](mailto:jlogan@nshc.org)

### ***LI-based Research Study Confirms Libraries' Key Role in Community Health Mental health needs a top concern expressed by library patrons***

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. (January 23, 2023) – A new [study](#) co-authored by a team led by senior author Dr. Lisa Benz Scott, Professor and Executive Director of the Program in Public Health at Stony Brook University, was published this month in the *Library and Information Science Research* journal. The team reported that on Long Island, where the study was conducted, that mental health was one of the top needs identified by library personnel when asked for their perception of concerns presented by library patrons. The study was conducted by faculty and student researchers at Stony Brook University, Program in Public Health and Adelphi University, Master in Public Health Program with support from the Long Island Health Collaborative, the Suffolk Cooperative Library System and the Nassau Library System.

The Long Island study was an extension of a similar one conducted by the University of Pennsylvania among the urban Philadelphia library system. On Long Island, 97 in-person staff interviews were conducted at 32 public libraries between December 2017 and January 2020. Researchers sought to understand how library personnel in a socioeconomically diverse suburban setting address the health and social needs of patrons and to identify strategies for promoting more effective public library-public health partnerships.

Other top needs identified were exercise, diet/nutrition, technology literacy, housing, and employment.

The research confirmed the increasing public health role public libraries play in their communities. In lower-resourced communities, study participants noted that patrons routinely seek more basic social service needs (employment assistance, food scarcity, free screenings). In higher-resourced communities, participants found patrons sought more enrichment-like services (cooking classes, art programs). Prior research has found that public library visits are highest among the working poor and those who are middle income. These patrons seek services beyond access to books and are looking for assistance in what is known as the “social determinants of health.” Social determinants are those factors outside of clinical care that influence an individual’s health. They account for nearly 80 percent of health outcomes and are now widely accepted as contributing to health inequities. These factors include education, poverty, access to transportation, safe and affordable housing, health insurance coverage, and access to nutritious and affordable foods, among others.

“Our public libraries are trusted resources in communities,” said Janine Logan, director of the Long Island Health Collaborative. “This is why we are seeing more health and social service programming occurring in our libraries and often the programming is a result of collaboration between the library,



local hospitals, local universities, and community-based organizations. Some libraries even employ social workers either full-time or per diem."

The researchers recommend more evidence-based training workshops to help library personnel address patrons' needs, more widely available collaborative programs, and pairing of library personnel with professionals who hold specific expertise to promote access to and utilization of health and social services. These and other innovative solutions require the support of local governments, policy makers, healthcare systems, health sciences and medical libraries, assert the researchers.

#### **About the Long Island Health Collaborative**

The [Long Island Health Collaborative](#) is a partnership of Long Island's hospitals, county health departments, physicians, health providers, community-based social and human service organizations, academic institutions, health plans, local government, and the business sector, all engaged in improving the health of Long Islanders with a focus on the reduction of chronic diseases. The LIHC initiative is overseen by the [Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council](#), the association that advocates for Long Island's hospitals.