April 5, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Office of the Secretary, United States Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
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Dear Secretary Sebelius,

We write today to draw your attention to the upcoming third anniversary of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) highly successful Public Access Policy on April 7, 2011. Furthermore, we ask that you expand, without delay, the NIH Public Access Policy to all other Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association representing more than 12,600 academic and research librarians and interested individuals, has long supported the NIH Public Access policy and efforts to expand it by Congress. We believe that ensuring public access to the fruits of federally funded research is a logical, feasible, and widely beneficial goal. The NIH Public Access Policy, as enacted, provides a tremendous public benefit and accelerates the advancement and practical application of, and access to, knowledge.

Because ACRL represents libraries in all kinds of higher education institutions, our members support both teaching and research. The knowledge now accessible as a result of the NIH Public Access policy is particularly valuable to teachers and learners. It greatly benefits our “future faculty” (i.e., graduate students) and undergraduates who are interested in pursuing careers in science, technology, public health, or who want to be informed citizens about health care options.

The NIH and Director Collins have shown tremendous leadership in implementing the first U.S. policy to ensure that all members of the public – including patients and their families, health care professionals, researchers, students, teachers, entrepreneurs and business owners – are guaranteed free online access to articles reporting on the results of research that their tax dollars support. As a result of the NIH’s commitment to public access, the more than two million full-text articles in PubMed Central (PMC) provide a wealth of information on the very latest biomedical research without barriers. These articles are accessed by nearly half a million users every day from all sectors of the public – highlighting the demand for this important layer of information.
The full-text digital articles now contained in PubMed Central are linked to a wide array of other publicly accessible databases at the NIH, facilitating the ability to move seamlessly between articles and data, and apply new and cutting-edge computational tools and techniques to the entire collection of NIH-funded research results. Expanding the NIH policy to other federal agencies would open up connections to additional crucial resources that scholars, teachers and students require to carry out comprehensive and interdisciplinary research in this digital age.

Academic and research libraries across the country invested significant time helping their campuses prepare for and implement the new NIH policy – through outreach, copyright education, technical support, and other means. Should additional HHS agencies adopt public access policies, ACRL is well-suited to assist our libraries and campuses again by sharing best practices, promulgating model publication agreements, and providing education about the rapidly changing scholarly publishing environment in which these policies fit.

We, together with other leaders from ACRL, travel to Washington, DC. If you think it helpful, we would be happy to meet with you (or appropriate staff members) in person to discuss further how an expanded Public Access Policy would benefit librarians who are members of ACRL and the faculty and students they serve.

Sincerely,

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