CLA Statement on Public Access to the Internet
February 24, 2015

Canadians visit public libraries every day to use public computers to access the internet, to connect to WiFi with their mobile devices, and to obtain assistance from library staff. They come to access government services, to reach out to their friends and families via email and social media, to research health information, to explore new opportunities and to learn. Canadians find support from library staff with their information and technology needs, whether they're learning to use a computer or access email for the first time, finding out how to protect themselves online when using social media, or researching an area of personal interest.

While Statistics Canada found in 2012 that 83% of Canadians had internet access from computers at home or could afford mobile devices with data plans, nearly 1 in 5 depended on free public access at libraries, retail and community locations to connect. Access is tied to income, and just 58% of Canadians in the lowest income quartile had access to the internet at home in 2012.[1] Affordability continues to improve, however, many continue to depend on free public access to help them bridge the digital divide.

A number of media reports on Canada's Bill C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015, have incorrectly reported that Canadian public library computers protect people participating in criminal activity. The Canadian Library Association wholeheartedly refutes this notion.

Public libraries use software to ensure that private health, banking, and personal information of Canadians using library computers will not be compromised when the next individual logs on. Such software also ensures that each individual's passwords and browsing history remain private. The choice to access the internet in a public facility does not lessen the importance of protecting personal information while online. The Canadian Library Association maintains that the privacy and freedom of law-abiding citizens should not be compromised. As Canadians discuss Bill C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Canadian Library Association remains committed to promoting public libraries' role in providing free and safe access to the Internet. Public libraries' internet use policies consistently reinforce that illegal activities are not permitted on library computers and library staff across the country continue to cooperate with law enforcement as required.

The Canadian Library Association encourages anyone with questions about managing internet use in libraries to contact their local public library for more information.

---

[1] Statistics Canada. *Table 358-0167 - Canadian Internet use survey, household access to the Internet at home, by household income quartile, Canada and provinces, occasional (percent),* CANSIM (database). (accessed: 2015-02-16)