



## **CAUL and AOASG welcome open access to scholarly content during the COVID-19 pandemic**

**20<sup>th</sup> April** – The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the crucial role that free, open and immediate access to research plays in combating this threat to human life, society and our way of life.

CAUL and AOASG welcome moves by commercial publishers to open up their content at this critical time. The rapid development of tests, potential treatments and vaccines to clinical trials has been made possible by the frictionless and immediate sharing of new and early stage research and data by researchers and access to previously paywalled content being provided by publishers.

The speed with which many publishers have enabled open access to COVID-19 related content is commendable, and some have also taken the significant step of relaxing access restrictions to content more generally.

It also demonstrates that open access to research should be the new norm. The time has come to make free and open access to all research a reality. It is critical that once the pandemic is over, in order to accelerate the global transition to free and open access, publishers do not once again restrict access to COVID-19 content. This will be especially crucial in light of the economic challenges all sectors of society will be facing, including universities dealing with constrained scholarly content budgets.

Therefore, we urge publishers to make a commitment to:

- **Ongoing open access to COVID-19 related research publications and data** – the 2002-2004 SARS epidemic, the 2010-11 Christchurch earthquakes in New Zealand and the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic has shown that access to this critical research has not been long term. There exists now an opportunity for this to change for the better.
- **FAIR terms of use** – the terms under which most research is being made free and open access in the current crisis is unclear and this means that it could be withdrawn at any time. There is also a significant difference between ‘free to read’ and free to use and reuse. We encourage publishers to make the research available according to [FAIR](#) principles enabling research to be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable, ideally with an associated Creative Commons open licence.

- **Seamless open access to scholarly content** – the most effective way to do this is to make content openly available at the publisher’s site. However, the current requirement for many libraries to negotiate access on a case by case basis is adding unnecessary logistical and administrative burdens.

It is crucial that the advances gained from sharing of information at this difficult time are not lost once the emergency is over. An open scholarly publishing environment that ensures FAIR and seamless sharing, access and use of research and data will put humanity in the strongest possible position to face future global challenges.

**End**

**For comment:**

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**About CAUL**

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia. CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia and the 8 members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL). To learn more about our position on open scholarship see our policy [Statement on Open Scholarship released in 2019](#).

**About the AOASG**

The [Australasian Open Access Strategy Group](#) (AOASG) is supported by twenty universities in Australia and eight in New Zealand; Creative Commons Australia and Tohatoha, New Zealand are affiliate members. AOASG works to make Australasian research Open and FAIR and to promote innovation in all areas of scholarly communications.