



SCHOLARS
STRATEGY NETWORK

Congress Could Stop Free Public Access to Government-Funded Research

Mayank Chugh, University of Maryland-Baltimore

Have you ever needed to read a research paper, only to find it was locked behind a paywall? Your next step was likely to search on Sci-Hub, an illegal repository created by Kazakh graduate student Alexandra Elbakyan, that provides free access to millions of research papers.

While Sci-Hub is controversial, its widespread use points to a crucial question: Shouldn't taxpayer-funded research be freely and immediately accessible to the public? We're finally close to achieving this vision — so long as Congress doesn't stand in the way.

Every year, Americans invest hundreds of billions in federal research. For instance, in 2022, the U.S. government's research and development budget was \$171 billion. Despite that, Americans — students, researchers, educators, and the public at large — don't have free access to the outputs they fund. U.S. colleges and governments spend tens of billions on journal subscriptions to access published research funded by taxpayer money in the first place.