

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget 2015 Consultation

Executive Summary:

Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) is Canada's premier association representing the professions of audiology and speech-language pathology. SAC is the largest association of its kind in Canada, with over 6,000 speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants.

SAC is dedicated to improving communication health in Canada. Communication health includes everything from speech, hearing and language to swallowing, balance and auditory processing.

SAC has worked to achieve high national standards of practice in speech-language pathology and audiology in Canada and maintains a strong tradition of collaborating with provincial and territorial professional associations and regulatory bodies as well as working closely with other health care partners.

SAC's Recommendation:

We recommend that the federal government take a leadership role to recognize the importance of communication health and to work with provinces and territories to invest and implement comprehensive early identification and intervention programs.

COMMUNICATION HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL.

One in six Canadians has a speech, language or hearing disorder. The ability to speak, hear and be heard is extremely important to our daily lives as communication is the vital link between human beings. For children specifically, the ability to communicate effectively with others is the very foundation of their social, emotional and educational development.

Early identification and intervention of a communication disorder is absolutely key: the earlier a communication problem is identified, the better the chances for improvement or even recovery. Because learning is a cumulative process, difficulties early-on can have a cascading effect on the rest of a child's life. A slow start out of the gate will mean playing catch-up for years to come. Early problems with speech and language development can result in later life high risk behaviours including, depression, poor resiliency and isolation in society.

- A child's vocabulary upon entering school is a prime predictor of school success or failure. In fact, every \$1 spent on early childhood health and development saves up to \$9 in future health, social and justice services equating to a return on investment of 800%.

- In Canada, boys with language impairment have higher rates of arrests and convictions than boys who do not. Because hearing loss causes difficulties with auditory attention, memory and comprehension, 47% of Canadians between the ages of 15 and 64 who have a hearing limitation report being unemployed.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF COMMUNICATION DISORDERS IS IMPORTANT, AT ANY STAGE IN LIFE.

Canada's ageing population means that there is now an increased need for services that care for the elderly, including rehabilitation centres and nursing homes. Speech-language pathologists are vital contributors to the health of those recovering from strokes or handling the degenerative effects of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other forms of age-related dementia.

Solutions:

1. The federal government should actively support and invest in early hearing detection and intervention (EHDI) programs throughout the country. EHDI screening programs use an inexpensive and painless test to quickly and accurately screen infants for PCHL. The screening process is simple and should be performed before a baby is discharged from the hospital.

An SAC report from March 2014 on the status of Canada's EHDI programs concluded that over half of the nation's provinces and territories do not have adequate EHDI programs in place.

2. The federal government should invest in early identification and treatment programmes to ensure that all children in Canada have access to comprehensive speech and language services, regardless of which province or territory they live in.
3. Minister Ambrose's new Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation should consider the importance of communication health programs when *"examining potential federal actions that can complement provincial and territorial efforts to improve their health systems."*