



Speech-Language & Audiology Canada  
Orthophonie et Audiologie Canada  
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*SAC Position Paper on*  
**Differences Between Audiologists and  
Hearing Instrument Practitioners in  
Hearing Health Care**

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*Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC) is the business name under which the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) operates in Canada. Please note that this document was produced when SAC was operating as CASLPA both legally and in a business capacity.*

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A position paper represents the direction CASLPA has taken on a particular topic or provides guidelines for particular areas of practice. These positions are time-bound, representing the thinking at a particular point in time.

## Position

It is the position of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) that audiologists are experts and leaders in hearing health and auditory disorders. CASLPA acknowledges that there are predominantly two health-care professions that provide services to conduct hearing tests for the purposes of selecting, fitting and dispensing hearing aids and other assistive listening devices. These two groups, audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners who are not also audiologists (also known as hearing instrument specialists, hearing aid dispensers, hearing aid practitioners and hearing aid dealers), have different scopes of practice, which are defined by their education and training and by regulatory distinctions. CASLPA believes that the two professions must provide hearing health care within their scopes of practice for the populations they serve and that the public must be made aware of the significant differences between the two professions when seeking hearing health-care services.

## Rationale

In some work environments across Canada, audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners work collaboratively in group practices. However, there has been a long history of confusion and controversy regarding the titles and scopes of practice of audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners. It is not surprising that some of this confusion persists given the many changes that have occurred in the training of hearing health-care professionals and the quality and amount of information available to the public on the Internet.

As a national professional association, CASLPA aims to raise awareness of and to promote the profession of audiology to assist the people of Canada in making informed choices regarding their hearing health-care needs. With this document, CASLPA aims to clarify the differences between the two professions and make recommendations that we believe are in the best interest of the people who both audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners serve.

## Background

CASLPA conducted a review of both groups in all jurisdictions across Canada, focusing on levels of educational and clinical training as well as scopes of practice including regulatory distinctions. The results indicate considerable variability within the educational and clinical training for hearing instrument practitioners across Canada. For audiologists, there is minimal variability as the entry-to-practice requirement is a minimum of a master's degree or equivalent. There is minimal variation in the scope of practice within each of the two professions across Canada; however, there are significant differences in the scopes of practice between audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners in all provinces/territories. The regulatory environment also varies between provinces/territories for both professions. It should be noted, however, that regulatory changes are underway in parts of Canada for both professions.

## Education

The academic and clinical training of audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners differs significantly. For audiologists, the minimum educational requirement in Canada is a master's degree or equivalent; which typically consists of 2-3 years of education after achieving a baccalaureate degree. Depending on the type of bachelor's degree earned, an applicant to a master's program in audiology may be required to do additional university coursework prior to admission. In addition to coursework, master's students in Canadian audiology programs must also complete a minimum of 350 hours of supervised clinical practicum. This typical 5-7 years of baccalaureate and graduate degree university education prepares audiologists to exercise their profession using a high-level of independent clinical judgment and critical thinking based on evidence-informed practice when assessing and managing patients with audiological disorders.

For hearing instrument practitioners, there is no standardized minimum educational requirement to practice across Canada and the credentials for hearing instrument practitioners vary significantly between provinces/territories. There is also no agreed-upon standard across Canada in the areas of regulation/registration; requirements for post-secondary education related to hearing health and hearing-aid dispensing; on-the-job training or demonstration of competence prior to licensing. Depending on the province/territory, an individual considering a career as a hearing instrument practitioner may or may not be required to pursue formal education and may complete a self-study program (which can be achieved in a few months) or a college or university diploma or certificate program. Some programs require a high school diploma for admission, while others evaluate applicants on a case-by-case basis. The college or university diploma or certificate programs are typically 2-3 years in length and focus on hearing testing and hearing-aid technology.

## Scopes of Practice

Both audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners conduct hearing tests for the purposes of dispensing hearing aids and other assistive listening devices. Despite sharing this similarity, the hearing instrument practitioner's scope of practice is narrower than the audiologist's. Hearing instrument practitioners test peripheral hearing for the purpose of selecting, fitting and dispensing hearing aids and other assistive listening devices. Hearing instrument practitioners are typically not permitted to provide services to children (age-range defined differently in various provinces/territories) as their scope is generally limited to adults and is reflected as such in regulation, where it exists.

Audiologists are uniquely qualified to assess, identify, diagnose (restricted in some provinces) and manage individuals with peripheral or central hearing loss, hyperacusis, tinnitus and balance disorders; and to select, prescribe, fit and dispense hearing aids and other assistive listening devices. Audiologists also receive extensive training in counseling and (re)habilitation, which extends their practice beyond the selection and fitting of amplification. Audiologists are trained to perform these services for all ages – from newborns to adults.

## Recommendations and/or Guidelines

CASLPA recommends the following to relevant stakeholders:

- Promotion to the public about the differences between audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners, presenting information in a fair and clear manner.
- Standardization of minimum educational and clinical training requirements for hearing instrument practitioners across Canada.
- In provinces/territories where it has not yet been enacted, continued support from CASLPA for regulation of the profession of audiology in Canada.

## Conclusion

In summary, there are significant differences in the scopes of practice and educational training levels between audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners. Audiologists bring a broad range of clinical skills and services to a patient's hearing health care and hearing instrument practitioners have a narrower scope of practice. Though differences exist, there are work environments where audiologists and hearing instrument practitioners work collaboratively, both contributing positively to the hearing health care of patients. The public, including stakeholders such as other health-care professionals and policy makers, must be well informed when making decisions about hearing health care. CASLPA promotes and supports audiologists as experts and leaders in hearing health and auditory disorders.

## References

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## Other relevant links

[Canadian provincial/territorial licensing/regulatory/registration bodies](#)

[Canadian university programs in audiology](#)