

Monday, January 11, 2016

The Hon. Terry Lake, MLA
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health, PO BOX 9639 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9P1

Dear Minister Lake,

Re: New progress report on the state of provincial and territorial child hearing health programs

We are writing on behalf of Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC) and the Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force (CIHTF) to give you an advance copy of the CIHTF's new Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Progress Report and Position Statement, both of which will be officially released on January 18, 2016.

The new progress report is an interim status update on the EHDI Report Card, also included with this letter, which we published on March 25, 2014. While many provinces and territories continue to lack sufficient early hearing detection and intervention programs, we are pleased to see that British Columbia's EHDI program continues to excel. In particular, we would like to commend your province for its use of telehealth services to reach children living in remote communities.

While your province's EHDI program provides a leading example for other regions in Canada, there are still far too many children to the east and north of you that do not have access to adequate early hearing health programs. This is especially troubling because, as you know, undiagnosed and untreated hearing loss can result in long-term linguistic, cognitive, academic, social and emotional difficulties.

Overall, the progress report provides a rather disappointing picture of the state of EHDI programs in Canada. We continue to hear from audiologists and other professionals that ongoing funding restrictions, staffing issues and a lack of government commitment stand in the way of universal access to early hearing health programs. It is for this reason that we encourage you to reach out to your provincial and territorial counterparts across the country to share your lessons learned.

The upcoming Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health is an opportunity to start a national discussion about EHDI programs in Canada. The new federal government

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appears to welcome increased pan-Canadian collaboration and knowledge sharing. As you are aware, Prime Minister Trudeau's mandate letter to Dr. Jane Philpott, Minister of Health, outlines the following as a top priority:

"...advance pan-Canadian collaboration on health innovation to encourage the adoption of new digital health technology to improve access, increase efficiency and improve outcomes for patients."

There are many provinces and territories that could benefit from learning about how British Columbia has managed to implement the most effective and comprehensive EHDI program in Canada. We hope you will take time at your meeting later this month to share insights on your EHDI program with the other ministers. It's time to make our children's hearing health a national priority.

Sincerely,



Dr. Chantal Kealey, AuD, Aud(C)

Director of Audiology and Communication Health Assistants
Speech-Language and Audiology Canada



Dr. Steve Aiken, PhD

Chair of the Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force
Associate Professor, Dalhousie University