

Monday, January 11, 2016

Hon. Sharon Blady, MLA  
Room 302, The Legislative Building of Manitoba  
450 Broadway  
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Blady,

**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. Overall, the progress report provides a rather disappointing picture of the state of EHDI programs in Canada. While a handful of provinces are now running comprehensive EHDI programs, many other regions still lag far behind.

Experts have described permanent childhood hearing loss as a neurological emergency, and studies have shown that extended periods of auditory deprivation can have a significant impact on a child's overall brain development. Moreover, if a child's hearing loss goes undetected and untreated, that child is more likely to experience lifelong linguistic, cognitive, academic, social and emotional difficulties. It is therefore imperative that all children in Canada, regardless of which province or territory they live in, have access to excellent early hearing health services.

We are aware that Manitoba plans to implement a universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS) program later this year, which will no doubt benefit babies across your province. However, UNHS is only the first part of an EHDI program. A strong EHDI program includes vital diagnostic and intervention services as well as a database that fully tracks births and outcomes. It is our hope that the release of the CIHTF's progress report will encourage your government to work towards implementing a more comprehensive early hearing health program at the provincial level.

.../2

-2-

The upcoming Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health is an ideal opportunity for you to consult with provinces that have already implemented strong EHDI programs, such as British Columbia and Ontario. The new federal government appears to welcome this type of 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."*

In closing, we would like to commend Manitoba for its renewed commitment to early hearing health. We hope you will take time at your meeting later this month to discuss with your fellow health ministers how your province can implement the strongest EHDI program possible. It's time to make 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