



Speech-Language & Audiology Canada
Orthophonie et Audiologie Canada
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Monday, January 11, 2016

The Hon. Dr. Jane Philpott, PC, MP
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Philpott,

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 have taken steps in the right direction, there are many regions still lacking adequate child hearing health programs.

As you may know, 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 passionate about advocating for improved EHDI programs in our country because we are passionate about the health and well-being of all Canadian children. Relative to most other health-care programs, the implementation of an EHDI program is neither expensive nor complicated, and yet ongoing funding restrictions, staffing issues and a lack of government commitment are preventing provinces and territories from moving forward.

Despite the shortfalls outlined in the EHDI Progress Report, we do have reasons to be optimistic. To begin with, we are pleased to see the Liberal government's renewed commitment to pan-Canadian collaboration and innovation and are hopeful about what it could

mean for EHDI programs in our country. The following sentence in your mandate letter from Prime Minister Trudeau signifies a new focus on partnerships and knowledge sharing:

“...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.”

We would also like to applaud you, Dr. Philpott, for taking the initiative to bring together all of the provincial and territorial health ministers so soon after your appointment. While we understand that you will undoubtedly have a full agenda at your upcoming Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health, we urge you to make time to discuss the state of EHDI programs in Canada. A health issue such as this is best addressed through pan-Canadian collaboration, and your conference presents an ideal opportunity for provinces that have strong EHDI programs, like British Columbia and Ontario, to share their lessons learned with provinces and territories that do not. With your leadership, we can ensure that every child in Canada is given the same access to vital hearing health services.

As mentioned above, we will release the EHDI Progress Report to the public on January 18, 2016. We have sent advance copies of the report to every health minister with the same urgent call to action: it's time to make our children's hearing health a national priority.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, review the EHDI Progress Report and reflect on this important issue. We wish you all the best for a productive and engaging meeting with your fellow health ministers.

Sincerely,



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Speech-Language and Audiology Canada



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