

Monday, January 11, 2016

Hon. Victor Boudreau, MLA  
Minister of Health  
HSBC Place, P. O. Box 5100  
Fredericton NB E3B 5G8

Dear Minister Boudreau,

**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.

New Brunswick introduced a strong EHDI program in 2002, however provincial support and management for the program have decreased in recent years. It is our hope that the release of the CIHTF's progress report will encourage your government to renew its commitment to early hearing health and to address some of your program's current shortfalls.

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.

The upcoming Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health is an opportunity to start a national discussion about EHDI programs in Canada. We encourage you to share your lessons learned with your provincial and territorial counterparts so that they may benefit from

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what New Brunswick has achieved. At the same time, we suggest you consult with ministers from regions that are running excellent EHDI programs, like British Columbia, to learn about innovative strategies that may help advance your own early hearing health programs.

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 New Brunswick for implementing a province-wide program and urge you to recommit to improving access to adequate early hearing health services. We hope you will take time at your meeting later this month to discuss Canada's EHDI programs with the other ministers. 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