

Monday, January 11, 2016

Hon. Paul Okalik, MLA  
Minister of Health  
Government of Nunavut, Legislative Office, P.O. Box 2410  
Iqaluit NU X0A 0H0

Dear Minister Okalik,

**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, several other regions, including Nunavut, 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 recognize that implementing a comprehensive EHDI program in your territory is challenging, since your small and widely dispersed population makes the provision of audiology services difficult. However, we encourage you to keep exploring innovative solutions to ensure that all children in Nunavut receive a newborn hearing screening test and have the opportunity to access proper diagnostic and intervention services.

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The upcoming Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health is an opportunity for you to start thinking about a plan to improve your territory's early hearing health services by consulting with provinces that have implemented strong EHDI programs. The new federal government appears to welcome this type of pan-Canadian collaboration, innovation 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."*

We encourage you to make time at your meeting later this month to talk to your provincial and territorial counterparts about how Nunavut can develop and implement a comprehensive EHDI program. 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