

Over Half of Canadian Provinces and Territories Lacking When it Comes to Newborn Hearing Screening

A report card released today by Speech-Language and Audiology Canada highlights need for improved programs across the country.

OTTAWA, ON (March 25, 2014) — Not good enough: too many provinces and territories still don't have adequate programs in place to screen babies for hearing loss and monitor children for hearing problems, says Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC).

A report card issued today by SAC and the Canadian Academy of Audiologists, and endorsed by the Elks and Royal Purple of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children, reveals that far too many babies in Canada are not being screened for hearing loss at birth. What's more, many provinces and territories do not have adequate programs in place to support and monitor children over the long-term.

"The initial newborn hearing screening is really just the first step. It's an extremely important step, but it's just the first one," says Dr. Roula Baali, audiologist and SAC Board Director. "When we talk about early hearing detection and intervention we are really talking about a comprehensive strategy to not only screen babies for hearing loss at birth, but also provide timely diagnosis and intervention programs for children who have hearing problems and surveillance of those who do not."

The new report card is a cross-country snapshot and astonishingly, it **ranks over half of the provinces and territories in Canada as insufficient in at least one of the two categories** it assessed: coverage and quality. Only British Columbia has excellent rankings in both.

"While we applaud the provinces and territories that have taken steps over the last few years to implement programs, there's still a lot work to be done," continues Dr. Baali. "We need to get to a point where every child in Canada has access to excellent services, regardless of where he or she lives."

Permanent childhood hearing loss has been described by some experts as a neurologic emergency. Studies show that extended periods of auditory deprivation can have a significant impact on a child's overall brain development.

"Hearing loss affects a child's understanding and use of language. It can also affect their cognitive, social, emotional, academic and communication development. The sooner we can detect a hearing problem, the better the chances for improvement and future success," explains Dr. Baali.

SAC believes that this is a national issue and is calling on the federal government to take a leadership role. "We want the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to go beyond the status quo," says Dr. Baali. "As it stands, there is far too much variability — we have some provinces like British Columbia and Ontario that are doing really well, and other provinces where there's no province-wide program at all. Plus, there are too many provinces and territories whose programs are just not



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good enough. Everyone should be striving for an excellent grade. We know what needs to happen, we know the steps we need to take... we just need to make it a priority.”

*We are **Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC)**, a member-driven organization that supports, promotes and elevates the professions of our members. We are the only national organization passionately supporting and representing speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel inclusively. Visit SAC at www.sac-oac.ca to learn more.*

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