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LATEST REPORT CARD REVEALS CANADA STILL FAILING WHEN IT COMES TO INFANT HEARING HEALTH

OTTAWA, April 2, 2019 – Canadian audiologists are urging decision-makers at all levels to prioritize child hearing health. A new report card from the Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force (CIHTF) reveals that little has changed since the Task Force's 2014 Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Report Card, with Canada once again receiving an overall grade of "insufficient".

The 2019 EHDI Report Card demonstrates the slow rate of progress at the provincial and territorial level and exposes an alarming disparity in the hearing health services available to infants and children in Canada.

"Every child in Canada deserves access to timely and high-quality hearing health services. Your postal code should not determine whether your child can access early and appropriate hearing healthcare available from a comprehensive EHDI program," says Marlene Bagatto, AuD, PhD, from Western University and Chair of the CIHTF. "It's time for the federal government to take a policy leadership role and provide guidance to provinces and territories. Too little progress has been made since Canada's failing grade in 2014. Five years later, Canada's overall grade remains insufficient."

The CIHTF is calling on the federal government to establish national hearing health guidelines for children. These guidelines would serve as a policy roadmap for provinces and territories, drawing on best practices from provinces and territories that have already implemented successful and sustainable EHDI programs.

While the CIHTF is pleased to report that Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon have improved from 2014 to a sufficient grade in 2019, the Task Force is disappointed to report that **over half of the provinces and territories in Canada have received an insufficient grade**. In the case of two provinces (New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island), their overall grade fell from sufficient in 2014 to insufficient in 2019.

The grades in the 2019 EHDI Report Card were based on whether all five components of an EHDI program are available province or territory-wide.

"It is important to remember that universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS) is only one component of a comprehensive EHDI program," explains Dr. Bagatto. "Along with screening, a comprehensive and

effective EHDI program also includes a complete hearing assessment to confirm the presence or absence of permanent hearing loss, intervention services including technology and language development, family support as well as monitoring and evaluation of the program. While high-quality pediatric audiology services are available in Canada, access to these services and their coordination within the broader healthcare system remains a problem in many regions,”

Healthy hearing and communication development have important implications for brain development, learning, behaviour development, personal and social relationships, and well-being. The most critical time for learning language is from birth to 2 years of age. The earlier a baby’s hearing loss is detected, the sooner language development supports can be put in place to help a child learn language - whether it’s spoken, signed, or both – and communicate with the world around them.

The CIHTF is determined to change the status quo. “We will continue to advocate for improved EHDI programs until all children in Canada have equal access to comprehensive early hearing health services,” says Dr. Bagatto. “We are now calling on the federal government to take action and establish national guidelines.”

[Read the 2019 EHDI Report Card.](#)

[Read the 2016 EHDI Progress Report.](#)

[Read the 2014 EHDI Report Card.](#)

***The Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force** is a national group of leaders and experts in matters related to early hearing detection and intervention (EHDI), formed to promote, support, and advocate for comprehensive universal EHDI programs in all Canadian provinces and territories. The group is a joint effort of the Canadian Academy of Audiology (CAA) and Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC). www.InfantHearingCanada.ca*

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