



Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists
Association canadienne des orthophonistes et audiologistes

There was a striking contrast in last week's article "*Restraint budget invests in First Nations but critics say it's not enough*": Finance Minister Jim Flaherty promises to "unlock the potential of Canada's First Nations children", but the federal budget committed to cutting Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's budget by \$27 million. In order to unlock the potential of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, Canada must prioritize funding for programs that are critical at a young age, especially health care and education. The unaddressed need for speech-language pathology and audiology services in Canada's First Nations communities is just one example of where the government is currently falling short in this regard.

This lack of service has major repercussions. When left untreated and undiagnosed, speech, language, and hearing disorders become more difficult to correct. These disorders can cause long-term learning and social problems, which will only lead to greater difficulties for First Nations' youth in the school system. Indeed, acting early often means the government can avoid more complicated, and expensive, treatment in the future.

NDP MP Linda Duncan is right that more money is needed to make sure education in First Nations communities is on par with that of other Canadians, but we also need to prioritize it strategically. There must be a focus on early diagnosis for health conditions that will have a serious impact on future learning.

This past January, the government had taken positive steps in meeting with Canada's First Nations leaders, and we are disappointed that the new budget does not reflect this promise for progress.

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