

Speech-Language and Audiology Canada

2023 ALBERTA ADVOCACY PLAN

This document outlines key advocacy priorities as identified by the 2022 Alberta Advocacy Member Survey and as advised by the Alberta Regional Advocacy Committee.

Continuing and ongoing communication with Alberta members and associates will be essential to the plan's efficacy.

Advocacy and relationship building to provincial government departments will need to be re-established due to new leadership, changes in cabinet ministers, the recent appointment of a new Premier, and a spring 2023 election.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2023

- Advocating for a provincial-wide approach for delivery of speech-language pathology services in schools.
- Increase the profile of speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants with government and other stakeholders.
- Improved access to speech-language pathology and audiology services for Albertans of all ages.
- Recruitment and retention. Alberta needs more speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- Advocate for the development of an Audiology program at the University of Alberta.

Advocating for a provincial-wide approach for the delivery of speech-language pathology services in schools.

In 2019, the Alberta government cancelled the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) model used to deliver services to children and youth in their communities. The RCSD was a partnership between school authorities, Alberta Health Service (AHS), Child and Family Services (CFSA) and other community stakeholders. Its purpose was to ensure that the children and youth in any given region had streamlined and coordinated access to supports and services. It has not been replaced. SAC will advocate for a new model with a provincial approach to speech-language pathology services for schools to improve the educational, social and emotional outcomes for students with speech-language and literacy challenges.

Outcomes

- Increased focus on the importance of speech-language pathology services for children.
- Decision-makers have the evidence that enables them to better understand the role of speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) and communication health assistants.
- SAC members and associates will have concrete tools and the evidence to support their efforts for recognition within the education system.
- Effective and more efficient use of S-LPs within the education system.

Tools and Tactics

- Use SAC fact sheets on the benefits of S-LP services for students.
- Meet with relevant stakeholders and decision-makers to help them understand the roles and the value S-LP services offer Alberta's children and youth.
- Utilize SAC resources to inform decision makers on S-LP caseloads and workload issues in schools.

Increased profile with government and stakeholders for speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants.

From the management of swallowing and feeding disorders to matters related to hearing health, there is a lack of visibility and understanding of the role of speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants in healthcare and education. SAC will raise the awareness of these issues to government stakeholders, in particular the need for S-LP and audiology services in a variety of practice settings. SAC will take every opportunity to raise the profile of the work done by SAC members and associates.

Outcomes

- Better-informed government stakeholders on the value of the role of SAC's members and associates.
- Increasingly better-informed decision-making processes used by government organizations (provincial, regional/municipal as well as school districts) related to SAC members and associates.
- Increased profile of SAC members and associates with provincial MLAs and decision makers.

Tools and Tactics

- Meetings with relevant decision-makers and stakeholders.

- Use current SAC resources to highlight the role of S-LPs, audiologists and communication health assistants.
- Establish connections with specific patient and public facing stakeholders to raise awareness to highlight the value and special skills that SAC members and associates provide to Albertans. Examples could include: Stroke, Aphasia, Autism, Long Term Care, Teachers and associated unions.

Improved access to speech-language and audiology services for Albertans of all ages.

SAC will advocate for improved access to S-LP and audiology services across the lifespan. SAC will ask the provincial government to recognize communication, hearing and swallowing health as essential for all Albertans.

Outcomes

- Better-informed government stakeholders on the status of access to speech language and audiology services in Alberta.
- Better-informed decision-making, based on the impact of reduced access to speech language and audiology services. For example, reduced access leads to worsening health outcomes (e.g., lack of early intervention and extended hospital stays and long-term care placements) and education outcomes (e.g., lack of early intervention negatively affects childhood literacy).
- Increased funding to provide more speech-language and audiology services to communities at risk (e.g., First Nations, new Canadians, and other marginalized communities), rural and remote communities and long-term care facilities.

Tools and Tactics

- Share relevant SAC resources that showcase the impact of early intervention and literacy in school aged children to decision makers and all stakeholders.
- Share relevant SAC resources on the negative impacts of reduced access to services (i.e., health and education outcomes) to decision-makers and all stakeholders.
- Evaluate and highlight the status of access to speech-language and audiology services in Alberta.

Alberta needs more speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

Currently in Alberta, there are 1,492 practising Speech-Language Pathologists and 205 audiologists for approximately 4.5 million people. Wait times to access services are too long. Case loads are too high. S-LPs and audiologists are stretched over remote and rural locations. Morale is low. S-LPs and audiologists feel over worked, under paid and undervalued. The attrition rate is climbing.

Outcomes

- Decision-makers and stakeholders will understand that retention and recruitment efforts should include S-LPs and audiologists.
- Decision-makers and stakeholders will understand the need for detailed human health resources data that includes S-LPs and audiologists.
- More registered, active practising S-LPs and audiologists in Alberta.

Tools and Tactics

- Share work being done by SAC on the retention and recruitment of S-LPs and audiologists with employers.
- Work with Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (ACSLPA) to share relevant data.
- Work with the University of Alberta on retention incentives for new graduates.

Audiology program at the University of Alberta

SAC will advocate for an audiology program at the University of Alberta to train and recruit audiologists to practice in Alberta. Currently, there are only four training programs for audiologists in Canada. The University of Alberta has a successful training program for speech language pathologists and the addition of a training program for audiologists would be beneficial for the province. SAC will ask the provincial government for a commitment, including funding, to start an audiology program in Alberta.

Outcomes

- Decision makers understand the benefits of instituting an audiology program at the University of Alberta.
- Funding to start an audiology program at the University of Alberta.
- Train and graduate audiologists in Alberta.

Tools and Tactics

- Demonstrate the need for more audiologists in Alberta.
- Work with the University of Alberta to lobby the government to fund an audiology program.