

Speech-Language and Audiology Canada

2023 SASKATCHEWAN ADVOCACY PLAN

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

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

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2023

- Engagement with relevant stakeholders to advocate for the full scope of practice role of speech-language pathologists and audiologists within the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) agreements in Saskatchewan. Short-term, this may entail adding additional speech, language, hearing, pre-literacy and literacy milestone training to the ECE curriculum. Longer-term, this will entail hiring more dedicated speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants to work in this sector.
- Increase the profile of speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants in the province of Saskatchewan with government, public and private sector stakeholders, and the public.
- Work with professionals in the province to identify barriers /bottlenecks to accessing services, which is partly due to lack of adequate staffing and partly due to waitlist pressures exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Advocate for increased funding of services through private insurance and other third-party agencies.
- Engagement with relevant stakeholders to advocate for the role of speech-language pathologists and audiologists to support residents in Long Term Care (LTC) settings and those in homecare/aging-in-place in Saskatchewan.

1) Provincial approach to speech-language pathology and audiology services for children in early learning and child care (ELCC)/daycare settings.

In 2023, we will advocate for an integrated, comprehensive approach to speech-language pathology services for children to improve the educational, social, emotional and health outcomes for children with speech, language and literacy challenges in the province. In 2023, we will ask that relevant stakeholders in government, public and private sectors to support us in incorporating speech-language pathology services into the Provincial Early Learning and Child Care System to ensure that all children have access to the

support they need during these critical early years of development. This system should include speech-language pathology services specifically designed to meet the needs of Indigenous children. We will also advocate for speech-language and audiology additions to the ECE curriculum in Saskatchewan.

Outcomes

The following are expected outcomes:

- Decision-makers have evidence that enables them to better understand the role of speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), audiologists and communication health assistants in the daycare and pre-school aged populations.
- Members and associates have access to a dedicated section on the SAC-Saskatchewan website pages that include concrete tools and evidence to support their efforts for recognition and advocacy within early learning and childcare, and school systems.
- ECE curriculum is enhanced to include updated information on developmental milestones, red flags, screening tools, referral pathways and available speech-language pathology and audiology resources in the province.

Tools and Tactics

Through the process, we will develop or customize available tools produced by SAC, which will be distributed to Saskatchewan members and stakeholders as needed.

- Evidence-based materials and research regarding the benefits of speech-language pathology and audiology services for children in early learning and childcare, as well as schools, will be shared with all relevant stakeholders.
- Collation of available data on the number of speech-language pathologists and audiologists currently providing services to this population in the province, including sources such as the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI), *The Saskatchewan Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (SASLPA)*, and others as necessary. Where data isn't available, members will be surveyed to collect the relevant data. We will also advocate for more comprehensive data collection from our regulatory college and public and private employers. In the future, we will actively support the establishment of a provincial centralized store of workforce data as needed.

2) Increase the profile of speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants with government, public and private sector stakeholders, and the public.

Introduction letters will be sent to key government, public and private sector stakeholders. In these letters, we will highlight how our professions can assist with meeting needs of Saskatchewan residents with communication, swallowing/feeding, hearing, and balance concerns/disorders.

We will highlight for example, how access to speech-language pathology and audiology services across the lifespan improves:

- Outcomes in pre-school and school aged children leading to better outcomes educationally, socially and emotionally.
- Swallowing and feeding health can increase wellbeing and nourishment across the lifespan as well as helping to prevent acute health care admissions.
- Increased hearing health care lowers the risk of dementia, falls and cognitive decline.

We will also support initiatives that encourage recruitment and retention of professionals in the province. These include affordable, high-quality professional development opportunities, increased remuneration for specialty designations, more flexible work schedules/formats and work that is Saskatchewan-focused in that rural and remote area concerns will be adequately addressed.

Outcomes

The following are expected outcomes:

- Our professions are identified as primary service providers for communication, swallowing/feeding, hearing, and balance concerns.
- Decision-makers have evidence that allows them to identify our professions as key service providers. This will entail education at a wide level regarding full S-LP and Audiology scopes of practice with relevant stakeholders.
- Speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants will see more inquiries and client referrals for services, increased FTE and increased employment opportunities.

Tools and Tactics

SAC-SK will distribute existing resources from SAC or develop province specific tools:

- Short videos produced in collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan School of Rehabilitation Sciences focused on the role and scope of practice of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in the province of Saskatchewan. Videos would be owned by SAC and distributed at our discretion with acknowledge of production partnership with University of Saskatchewan. These would be of use to our rehabilitation professional and medical colleagues, as well as third party payors such as the *Saskatchewan Government Insurance Agency* and the *Worker's Compensation Board*, for example.
- Targeted webinars or in-person sessions in collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan School of Rehabilitation Sciences, which will have appeal to all Allied Health disciplines, Physicians, Nursing,

and members of the public. Proposed sessions include “Communication strategies for working with the Adult Neurological Population”, “The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist in Head and Neck Cancer rehabilitation”, and “The Role of the Audiologist on the Balance Care Team”.

- Members of SAC-SK RAC will sit on the Program Advisory Committee for the University of Saskatchewan School of Rehabilitation Sciences, ideally one Public Health and one Private Practice representative for each of the professions.
- We will develop and/or distribute fact sheets on the professions and the role they play in different health and education settings in the province of Saskatchewan.
- Disseminate information on how our professions can assist the provincial government, public and private sector stakeholders in meeting key mandates, including those identified for the provincial government in the 2022-2023 budget year.

3) Identify barriers/bottlenecks to accessing speech-language pathology and audiology services in the province of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan members cited large caseload sizes and/or lengthy waitlists as areas of main priority. Our aim is to collect up-to-date data regarding caseloads/waitlists from members, along with their areas of specialty to better inform and advocate to key stakeholders.

Outcomes

The following are expected outcomes:

- Engagement of professionals to gain an understanding of wait-times/bottlenecks to services. In 2023, we hope to see decreased wait times for services in both public and private sector settings.
- Develop a strategy to collect and house data from members around waitlists and bottlenecks to services collation and dissemination of collected data from professionals to key stakeholders.
- Development and dissemination of possible care pathways for access to services.

Tools and Tactics

- In-person and virtual Town Hall meetings for members to discuss caseloads, waitlists and barriers and bottlenecks to services as well as possible solutions.
- Collation of existing data on wait times, services, providers and barriers to access/evaluation/treatment. Where this information isn't available, a survey of members may be required.
- Invite members in both public and private practice settings to participate in tracking information over a set period e.g., six months regarding wait times, services, providers and barriers to access/evaluation/treatment.

- Implementation of a plan to collect information from providers in the province in both public /private sector settings, including areas of specialization, fees/billing information, wait times and hours of service.
- Expand the number of providers including Audiology that are recognized for the provincial Autism Strategy funding.

4) Advocate for expanded coverage of services with third parties.

Our members state that lack of sufficient reimbursement for services from third parties affects their ability to provide adequate care to their clients and operate to their full scope of practice.

In consultation with SAC RAC-SK and members, advocacy with third parties at the provincial level will be initiated or expanded. This will include Supplemental Health Benefits, First Nations and Inuit Health-Saskatchewan, Worker's Compensation Board-Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI), and provincial offices of private insurers. Key messages will be communicated to these agencies including:

- Role of professions and scope of practice;
- Specialty services available in the province;
- Current concerns regarding wait times and access;
- Facilitation of service delivery through both public and private sector providers.

Outcomes

The following are expected outcomes:

- Increased engagement with third party agencies. Our goal is to have two SAC RAC-SK members (one from each profession) participate in meetings related to negotiation of fee schedules and funded services for Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology.
- Increased and expanded funding opportunities.
- Increased referrals for third-party clients.

Tools and Tactics

- Development of an infographic of services currently covered by third party agencies, public services and elucidation of any service and/or funding gaps that exist.
- Development of an infographic of expanded service provision and benefits (to the agency and their clients) for allowing increased access, increased funding and expanded services.

- Develop recommended fee schedule for Private Practice Audiology/Speech-Language Pathology services in the province, to align with Billing Advisory planned by the provincial regulatory college (SASLPA). More transparency in this regard and information on coverage by insurance third parties may lead the public to seek out services from an expanded list of professionals.

5) Speech-language pathology and audiology services in long-term care.

In 2021, the Health Standards Organization (HSO) began consultations about a new National Long-Term Care Services standard that will provide long-term care (LTC) homes across Canada with evidence-informed practices to allow for safe, reliable and high-quality care for residents. In 2022, SAC's RAC-SK will liaise with relevant stakeholders and advocate for inclusion and expansion of speech-language pathology and audiology services in LTC settings.

Outcomes

- SAC's RAC-SK is part of the process that leads to the implementation of provincial standards for LTC including speech-language pathology and audiology services.
- The role of SAC-SK members is recognized in the provincial standards for LTC.
- Increased referrals to Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists for services in LTC settings and homecare.
- Increased number of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists providing services in publicly-funded LTC settings and homecare.

Tools and Tactics

- SAC-SK will meet with relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the role of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in the LTC settings and homecare.
- SAC-SK will share existing SAC and HSO submissions related to the importance of our services in treating hearing, speech-language, swallowing, communication and balance disorders in this population.
- SAC-SK will collate available data on the number of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists providing service to this population, highlighting any gaps in services.
- SAC-SK will develop recommendations for services to this population based on available best practice and upcoming HSO recommendations, considering the resources available in the province and unique needs of Saskatchewan residents.