

## Speech-Language and Audiology Canada

### 2023 FEDERAL ADVOCACY PLAN

#### KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2023

- Engage with key provincial and federal stakeholders with the aim to embed speech-language pathology services into early learning centres and national early learning standards.
- Having a voice in the federal government's Aging at Home Programs and policies.
- Engaging Health Canada on emerging guidance regarding the sale and distribution of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids in Canada.
- Having a voice in the federal government's Health Human Resources strategy for Health Professions, including recruitment and retention efforts.
- Increased profile with governments for speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) and audiologists in the area of health human resources recruitment and retention.

#### **Advocating to embed speech-language pathology services into early learning centres and national early learning standards.**

SAC will advocate at the provincial and federal level to encourage the provinces to use their daycare deal funding to embed or expand speech-language pathology services in early learning environments. At the federal level, SAC will continue to advocate for a national approach to speech-language pathology services for children in daycare environments to improve educational, social, emotional and health outcomes for children with speech and language disorders and delays in Canada. This work will be primarily achieved through collaboration with the national advisory council on early learning and childcare and through partnerships with influential organizations, such as the Canadian Childcare Federation.

#### Outcomes

The following are expected outcomes:

- Increased focus on the importance of speech-language pathology services for children.
- Provincial and federal decision-makers will have evidence to better understand the role of speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) and communication health assistants in early learning environments.
- Members and associates will have concrete tools and evidence to support their efforts for recognition in early learning and childcare settings.

- SAC will increase partnerships and collaborations with early-childhood educator groups.
- SAC will engage with parent-facing groups to foster awareness and education about speech-language pathology services.
- SAC will increase awareness of early intervention benefits in the zero to six years population.

### Tools and Tactics

- Develop evidence-based fact sheets on the benefits of speech-language pathology services for children in early learning and childcare settings.
- Meetings with relevant stakeholders and decision makers.
- Develop a fact sheet on how S-LPs can work with early childhood educators.
- Develop and deliver a presentation to early childhood educators about speech, language and hearing including identifying potential delays and when to refer for speech-language pathology and/or audiology services.
- Deliver a presentation to the National Advisory Group on the benefits of early intervention by S-LPs and audiologists in early learning and childcare settings.

### Having a voice in the federal government's aging at home tax credit and policy development.

In Budget 2022, the federal government proposed the creation of an **expert panel** to discuss the potential benefits of Aging at Home. The panel will report to the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health. The federal government has also expressed interest in hearing about how health professions can help people living in Canada age in their homes or prevent an admission to long-term care. SAC has an opportunity to highlight the vital roles our professions play in supporting caregivers and helping Canadians age at home.

### Outcomes

- Decision makers will understand the important role S-LPs and audiologists play in helping Canadians age well at home.
- SAC will contribute to the expert panel studying the Aging at Home Benefit.
- SAC members will have tools to demonstrate that their services are applicable for Aging at Home tax credits.
- The **National Seniors Council** will understand the important role S-LPs and audiologists play in helping Canadians age at home.

### Tools and Tactics

- Meetings with relevant decision makers and stakeholders.
- SAC will develop and release a fact sheet to elaborate on how our professions help Canadians age well at home (one for speech-language pathology and audiology each).
- SAC will engage with the National Seniors Council on the Aging at Home Benefit.
- SAC will form partnerships with CanAge and other relevant groups to advance our messages.

### Engaging Health Canada on emerging guidance regarding the sale and distribution of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids.

In the fall of 2022, the U.S Federal Drug Administration (FDA) released its final rule for over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids. Shortly after, Andre Picard wrote an [op-ed](#) in the *Globe and Mail* encouraging Canada to approve the sale of OTC hearing aids in Canada. SAC is anticipating that Health Canada will explore a similar decision rule. SAC wishes to be on the front-end of this issue.

### Outcomes

- Health Canada will engage SAC in consultation regarding OTC hearing aids.
- SAC will support its members with tools and guidance should a decision be made to regulate the sale of OTC hearing aids in Canada.
- SAC will collaborate with relevant stakeholders connected to this issue, such as the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, etc.

### Tools and Tactics

- Outreach to Health Canada about the issue.
- Outreach to relevant stakeholders involved in discussions around OTC hearing aids, such as the Pharmacist Association, *Consumer Health Products Association* etc., to discuss joint messaging or share our positions.
- A fact sheet on OTC hearing aids.
- A position statement on OTC hearing aids.
- Tools and resources to support members in relation to OTC hearing aids.

## Increased profile of speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) and audiologists with provincial/federal governments for health human resources recruitment and retention initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the cracks in our healthcare system and in particular the issue of recruitment and retention issues for health professions beyond physicians and nurses. In recognition of burnout amongst healthcare professionals, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (HESA) is planning a health human resources (HHR) study. The aim of this study is to explore how the federal government can facilitate recruitment and retention of physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and other health care providers in the public healthcare system, particularly in rural and remote communities. In May 2022, SAC presented to HESA on HHR issues impacting S-LPs and audiologists. Additionally, SAC has participated in the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) Assessment on Health and Human Resources roundtables and the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness consultation regarding expanding this program to other health professionals.

This work began in 2022, but SAC expects engagement on this issue to continue into 2023.

### Outcomes

- Decision-makers and stakeholders will understand that retention and recruitment efforts should include speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- Decision-makers and stakeholders will understand the retention and recruitment issues of speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- Decision-makers and stakeholders will understand the need for detailed human health resources data that includes speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

### Tools and Tactics

- A fact sheet on the retention and recruitment of speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- Collaborate with provincial regulatory bodies for data collection to support evidence-based submissions.
- Participation in relevant consultations.
- Participation in meetings with influential decision makers on this issue.
- Continued engagement with the Canadian Health Workforce Network.
- Continued co-advocacy with the *Extended Healthcare Professions Coalition (EHPC)* and *Organizations for Health Action (HEAL)* on this issue.

### Raising the profile of SAC members and associates.

SAC members continue to identify raising awareness about our roles and scopes of our practices across settings as a priority issue.

SAC will continue to raise awareness of the need for speech-language pathology and audiology services with government stakeholders across a variety of practice settings. SAC will take every opportunity to highlight the work done by SAC members and associates.

This is not a short-term objective but rather a long-term commitment for SAC. A number of activities (reflected in the “tools” section) will support reaching this long-term objective.

### Outcomes

- Government stakeholders will be better-informed on the vital roles and contributions of S-LPs, audiologists and communication health assistants.
- Decision-making processes by government organizations (federal, provincial, regional/municipal and school boards) will be increasingly informed on speech-language pathology and audiology services.
- SAC will increase its profile with provincial and federal MPs and decision makers.

### Tools and Tactics

SAC will continue to seek opportunities to raise awareness of and value for the professions through:

- Continued participation in committee appearances and consultations that are relevant to the professions.
- A pre-budget submission that aligns with the member’s interests.
- Continuing to use the month of May and the annual Speech and Hearing Month campaign to raise awareness as to the role of our professions with decision makers and the general public.

SAC will also continue its participation in strategic coalitions (e.g., HEAL and EHPC) and projects to raise our profile (e.g., Speech and Hearing Month, International Communication Project, etc.). Participation will take place strategically, recognizing limited resources and concurrent priorities.