



Speech-Language &
Audiology Canada
Communicating care

March 10, 2025

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Submission Consultation in
Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

By: Speech-Language & Audiology Canada

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Prioritize recruitment and retention of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in Canada's health workforce strategy.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen Federal oversight of over-the-counter hearing aids to protect Canadians.

Recommendation 3: Eliminate Barriers to Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Services for Indigenous Communities.

Recommendation 4: Embed speech-language pathology and audiology training in Early Childhood Education (ECE) Programs.

Recommendation 5: Implement a National Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program across Canada.

Summary

Speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) and audiologists are regulated health professionals who provide evidence-based care to Canadians of all ages. They play a crucial role in diagnosing, treating, and managing communication and hearing disorders that can significantly impact quality of life, from childhood through to old age.

Ensuring that S-LPs and audiologists have the necessary resources and support is essential to maintaining high-quality care and improving the well-being of Canadians across the country. These professionals are uniquely trained to support individuals with communication, balance, and swallowing disorders, promoting social and economic inclusion. As integral members of Canada's health system, S-LPs and audiologists must be intentionally a in all healthcare improvement strategies.

The following sections outline key priorities for advancing speech-language pathology and audiology services in Canada.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Prioritize recruitment and retention of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in Canada's health workforce strategy.

The federal government must address the critical shortage of S-LPs and audiologists across Canada. This shortage is limiting access to essential care, particularly in rural and remote communities.

As part of a comprehensive health workforce strategy, the federal government must prioritize S-LPs and audiologists alongside physicians and nurses. These professionals play a crucial role in helping individuals, from newborns to seniors, communicate and improve their quality of life.

To address growing patient demand and reduce strain on the healthcare system, we recommend the federal government:

- Expand the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to include S-LPs and audiologists.
- Provide support and funding to federal and provincial/territorial programs and initiatives that assist S-LPs and audiologists practicing in rural and remote areas.

- Provide support and resources to provinces and territories to expand speech-language pathology and audiology post-graduate programs - especially in less populated provinces and territories – like the support provided for primary care physicians.
- Include S-LPs and audiologists in the health workforce planning initiatives currently underway in the following government departments:
 - Health Canada;
 - Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada;
 - Health Workforce Canada;
 - Canadian Institute for Health Information;
 - Statistics Canada; and
 - Other government-funded projects.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen Federal oversight of over-the-counter hearing aids to protect Canadians.

The federal government must strengthen regulations on over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids to prevent misuse, misdiagnosis, and worsening hearing conditions among Canadians.

SAC urges Health Canada to immediately:

- Mandate stricter performance and safety standards for OTC hearing aids, ensuring they meet clinical efficacy requirements.
- Enforce clear, evidence-based labelling regulations to prevent consumer confusion and potential harm.
- Launch a national consumer education campaign to help Canadians make informed decisions about OTC hearing aids and recognize when professional assessment is needed.

Recommendation 3: Eliminate barriers to speech-language pathology and audiology services for Indigenous communities.

The federal government must act now to:

- Streamline the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program and Jordan's Principle reimbursement processes to reduce administrative delays for service providers.
- Increase federal investment in Indigenous-led speech and hearing health initiatives to improve access to culturally appropriate service delivery.
- Expand telehealth and mobile clinic programs to reach remote Indigenous communities where specialist services are limited or non-existent.

Recommendation 4: Embed speech-language pathology and audiology training in early childhood education (ECE) programs.

SAC calls on the government to:

- Require training on speech, language, and hearing development in all federally funded ECE programs, to help educators recognize early signs of communication disorders.
- Provide sustained federal funding to expand ECE training programs that integrate speech-language pathology and audiology expertise.
- Work with provinces and territories to establish national best practices for incorporating S-LPs and audiologists into licensed daycare settings.

Recommendation 5: Implement a National Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Across Canada.

To strengthen early hearing detection and intervention, the federal government should:

- Fund universal newborn hearing screening across all provinces and territories to ensure every baby is tested at birth.
- Support comprehensive early intervention services to support timely care for children diagnosed with hearing loss.
- Expand national research and monitoring efforts to track and improve EHDI outcomes across Canada.
- Work with provinces and territories and including the Canadian Infant Hearing Taskforce to establish national EHDI program guidelines.

About SAC

Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) is a member-driven organization that supports, promotes, and elevates the professions of our members and associates. It is the only national organization representing speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and communication health assistants inclusively. Through this support, it champions the needs of people with communication disorders.

References

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3. Newborn Screening Ontario. (n.d.). Blood Spot Screening for Hearing Loss Risk Factors. https://www.newbornscreening.on.ca/sites/default/files/blood_spot_screening_for_hearing_loss_risk_factors_letterheadphase1b.pdf.
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