

Hon. Jim Reiter
Minister of Health, Saskatchewan
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April 7, 2017

RE: Impact of Elimination of Hearing Aid Program on Infant Hearing Services in Saskatchewan

Dear Minister,

As the chair of the Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force, I am writing to express my concern over the impact of closing Saskatchewan's Hearing Aid Program on services to infants with hearing loss. While we understand that budgetary constraints require tough decisions and acknowledge the value of services offered by excellent private practice audiologists in Saskatchewan, the elimination of the program will result in a loss of 9 audiology positions that are responsible for the provision of services to vulnerable citizens—including services to infants identified through the infant hearing program in Saskatoon. This is particularly unfortunate given the absence of a province-wide Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program in Saskatchewan (http://www.infanthearingcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FINAL_Progress-Report_2016_EN.pdf).

Hearing loss is one of the most common congenital conditions, with significant permanent loss affecting 2–3 per thousand babies. When undetected, infant hearing loss is associated with poor speech and language development, poor self-esteem, and poor educational attainment, as well as long term support costs. These problems can be avoided through a provincial EHDI program.

These programs are efficient, cost-effective and result in vastly improved outcomes for children with hearing loss. In light of the high educational and vocational support costs associated with unidentified hearing loss, early hearing programs lead to a tax savings. For example, a 2008 report from the Institut national de santé du Québec estimated that universal neonatal hearing screening would result in a net benefit of \$1.7 million per year for taxpayers in Québec.

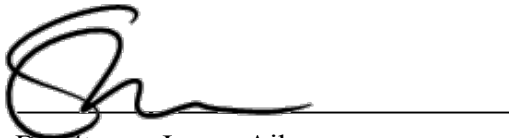
EHDI programs are the standard of care in modern healthcare systems and are well established in most countries and all US states. In contrast to the incorrect statements made in the Legislative Assembly, comprehensive provincial EHDI or universal hearing screening programs are in place in most Canadian provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba; and are currently in development in Alberta and Québec. **In fact, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland are the only provinces in Canada that do not currently offer province-wide programs or have programs in development.**

The absence of a provincial program in Saskatchewan (i.e., a program not limited to the Saskatoon region), in spite of the strong evidence supporting the value of these programs, is a disservice to many of the youngest and most vulnerable citizens of the province. Eliminating the Hearing Aid Program, which provides important intervention support for this population, is thus very troubling.

All children in Canada deserve a chance to hear and communicate and a chance to succeed, including those born in your province. I urge you to consider the implications of closing this program for infant hearing services and to act on the call for an EHDI program that has been issued by our Task Force and by the Canadian Pediatric Society. Your citizens deserve better.

We would be happy to provide more information and to discuss this matter further. More information can also be found at our website www.infanthearingcanada.ca.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Canadian Infant Hearing Task Force

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