

## **Position Statement: The Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in People with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

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This document serves as a guide to the roles and responsibilities of speech- language pathologists working with individuals with ASD in British Columbia.

### **Position Statement**

- Speech- language Pathologists (SLPs) are experts in speech, language and social communication and as such play a critical role in screening, assessment, diagnosis and intervention of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- Individuals with ASD need access to evidence based, coordinated, multi-disciplinary services across the life span
- BCASLPA strongly advocates for the rights of all individuals to have access to specialized services including speech language pathology and audiology

### **Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

ASD is a complex developmental disorder. Core deficits include difficulty with communication, social skills and behavior.<sup>1</sup>

### **Scope of practice**

SLPs play an important role in:

- Applying their specialist skills and knowledge to comprehensively address the impairments of speech, language, processing and production and social language
- Developing intervention goals and strategies tailored to meet the needs of the child based on their clinical expertise, assessment of the child's needs and strengths, and parental priorities
- Developing a curriculum and intervention approach to increase social engagement, joint attention, eye contact, gestures speech, language and play.
- Supporting the individual, the environment and parents and other communication partners to maximize opportunities for interaction, to overcome barriers and facilitate language learning
- Addressing the underlying social, communication, and cognitive impairments experienced by individuals with an ASD in order to promote inclusion, independence, and productive participation across the lifespan.<sup>4</sup>

SLPs draw from a variety of intervention approaches that are evidence based. These range from highly structured to more naturalistic approaches based on the target response and the child's interests and learning profile.<sup>2</sup>

When ASD exists with other conditions such as acquired brain injury, intellectual impairments and Specific Language Impairment, sensory and motor deficits, SLPs bring additional clinical skills and services including alternative or augmentative communication and speech output technology.

### **Multi-disciplinary Team**

The MCFD **Parent's Handbook**<sup>4</sup> outlines best practices for autism Intervention including collaboration between behaviour consultants and therapists such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists. SLPs work with other health care professionals, educators and behaviour consultants to develop an intervention plan to reduce challenging behaviours that interfere with the child's language and learning.

### **Evidence Based Practice**

Due to the complex nature and wide range of severity there is no evidence to support adopting a single autism treatment as the gold standard (pediatric reference). SLPs draw on evidence based approaches to meet the unique needs of each child or adult to address the speech, language and social interaction challenges that are key deficits in Autism.<sup>6</sup>

#### References:

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