

Facts about Preschool Speech Services in British Columbia

Revised March 2019

General:

- ◆ As of 2013, BC was second to last in Canada for providing speech-language pathologists per 100,000 people living in the province. (factsheet map found on www.sac-oac.ca)
- ◆ A Masters degree is required to work as a speech-language pathologist in Canada. The province of BC also requires membership in the governing body - the College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia. (www.cshhpbcc.ca)
- ◆ The University of British Columbia has a Speech Pathology Masters program which takes 36 students per year. The Masters program takes two-three years to complete.
- ◆ As of March, 2017, there were 1209 speech-language pathologists registered to work in BC. We have no accurate data on how many of these speech-language pathologists are currently working, whether they work full or part time, or the client population with whom they work, whether adults, school children or toddlers/preschoolers. (www.cshhpbcc.ca 8th Annual Report: 2016-2017)

Speech Service to Preschoolers in BC:

- ◆ 165 speech-language pathologists, self-identified as working in publicly funded agencies with preschoolers, were registered with Speech and Hearing BC in 2017. Note: this is a professional association with volunteer membership. (Supplied by email communication with association office.) (www.speechandhearingbc.ca)
- ◆ In BC, publicly funded speech services for children aged 0-5 years are provided free of charge and are located at Health Units or Child Development Centres. They are funded by the Ministry of Health (via public health authorities) and the Ministry of Child and Family Development (via Children and Youth with Special Needs). Currently the Ministry of Health funds about 89.25 speech-language pathology full time equivalents (FTEs) located at health units. MCFD funds 75.9 speech-language pathology full time equivalents (FTEs) located at Child Development Centres.
- ◆ The total number of publicly funded speech-language pathology FTEs in BC working locally with toddlers and preschoolers is 165 FTEs. (Funded through Health and MCFD).
- ◆ Together, the Ministry of Health and Child and Family Development fund an additional 32 FTE for speech-language pathologists working in specialized diagnostic and intervention facilities. These agencies may take clients from across the province or for specialized intervention such as toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- ◆ Government funding is provided to individual families who have toddlers and preschoolers diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Parents can use the money to pay for a speech-language pathologist who may be in private practice. Most children with Autism Spectrum Disorder require support from a speech-language pathologist.
- ◆ HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership at UBC) data for the province shows that about a third of children in BC are not ready to learn when they reach kindergarten age and this learning readiness gap can follow them their entire life. This data reflects back on the environmental conditions that impact speech and language development in babies, toddlers and preschoolers; environmental conditions which can be manipulated for greater positive outcome. (earlylearningubc.ca)
- ◆ Research conducted in the United States on trends in childhood disability over ten years (2001-2011) showed an increase of 63% in speech-language disorders/challenges for children under six years of age including the increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnoses. Houtrow, Amy J., Larson, Kandyce, Olson, Lynn M., Newheck, Paul W. & Halfon, Neal. (2014) Changing Trends of Childhood Disability, 2001-2011. Pediatrics, 530-539.
- ◆ There are 220,652 children under five years of age in BC (Canadian Census 2016). A conservative estimate (prevalence rate of 10%) would predict that 1/10 preschoolers need to see a speech-language pathologist for support in developing age-appropriate communication skills. Conservative prevalence rates would predict that 22,065 children in BC will need to see a speech-language pathologist before entering kindergarten although that number likely under-estimates the actual need given the data from HELP. (Reference for prevalence rate is from SAC Position Paper on Early Identification of Speech and Language Disorders October 2012 found on www.sac-oac.ca.)
- ◆ Waiting for months or even years to see a publicly funded speech-language pathologist is a common experience for families with toddlers/preschoolers in BC. Some children who are waiting are unable to access a speech-language pathologist before entering kindergarten. (Parent Feedback Report Dec. 2016 available on www.inclusionbc.org website under Early Childhood Intervention tab.)

Key facts about speech and language development from birth to age five:

- ◆ The development of language occurs at the fastest rate within the first three years of life. The capacity for language development is elastic; development is highly dependent on the quality of interaction between a child and others in his/her daily environment. (earlylearningubc.ca, tmwcenter.uchicago.com, developingchild.harvard.edu)
- ◆ Early speech-language development is inextricably linked with cognitive development, social skills, self regulation and academic learning. (Vouloumanos et al. (2014) Listen up! Speech is for thinking during infancy. Trends in Cognitive Sciences. Vol. 18. No. 12 642-646)
- ◆ Language development in the very early years is a 'social determinant of health' and affects the trajectory of a child's lifetime. LoRe, Danielle; Ladner, Peter; Suskind, Dana. Talk, Read, Sing: Early Language Exposure As an Overlooked Social Determinant of Health. Pediatrics 2018; 142 originally published online August 9, 2018. (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182007>).

- ◆ Families and other key people in children's lives can learn how to support stronger language development in their child. (developingchild.harvard.edu, tmwcenter.uchicago.com)
- ◆ The cost to individuals and society for the missed opportunity to support and enrich children's language development in the earliest years is huge. (Warr-Leeper, Genese Ph.D. Communication at the heart of Education (January 2006).)

Recommendations and Conclusions:

- ◆ Recommended caseload size for a full time speech-language pathologist working with children prior to kindergarten entry is 25-40 children. BC's Paediatric Therapists: Promoting Manageable Workloads Project. Phase 2- Preferred Practice Guidelines for BC Paediatric Therapists, (December 2008). (www.therapiesbc.ca)
- ◆ Recommended wait times for very young children range from zero to four months. (Rvachew, Susan and Rafaat, Susan. Report on Benchmark Wait Times for Paediatric Speech Sound Disorders (Spring 2014) Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Vol. 38, No.1 82-96 and two other reports on wait times for infants and children with fluency or language disorders available only to members of Speech-Language and Audiology Canada on www.sac-oac.ca.)
- ◆ Recommended caseloads of 25-40 children per full time speech-language pathologist would allow wait times for assessment and treatment to fall within or close to nationally recommended benchmark guidelines. With a conservative prevalence rate estimate of 10% and using 2016 census numbers for resident preschoolers, BC needs 552 full time Speech-Language Pathologists working with toddlers and preschoolers to provide an appropriate level of service to address the current need. Currently BC has just 165 FTE to address this need in local regions and another 32 FTE in specialist diagnostic centres.

All children have a right to learn to communicate to the best of their ability.

We can make a difference.



Compiled by Lynne Patrick MSLP
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