



Speech and Hearing BC

# Advocacy Toolkit for Speech and Hearing BC Members

**You Play a Vital Role!**



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**Speech and Hearing BC** is committed to advocating for adequate services and tools to ensure all British Columbians have access to adequate communication health services. As the provincial voice in British Columbia, Speech and Hearing BC is the leading advocate for our profession as well as the patients our members serve.

We understand how vital our professions are for all British Columbians to receive the professional services provided by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists – it is now up to us to ensure that the provincial decision makers understand as well. Our goal is to ensure that our voices are heard and understood.

Our advocacy will succeed by engaging local members to deliver our messages to elected decision makers. We need you to work with us to bring the issues of S-LPs and Audiologists to the forefront, and also increase awareness of our profession.

The Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit will prepare you for your advocacy work, and includes the following:

- Key Speech and Hearing BC Advocacy Messages
- Meeting Request Letter Templates
- Political Decision Makers Meeting Guide
- Debriefing Questionnaire
- Elected Officials Websites

We look forward to working with all members as we focus on raising our awareness and highlight our advocacy goals across British Columbia.

A copy of all the documents included in this toolkit can be found on the Speech and Hearing BC website at: [www.speechandhearingbc.ca](http://www.speechandhearingbc.ca)

**Note on advocacy activities:** *The BC Human Rights Tribunal offers clear protections for those who advocate towards government. The Human Rights Code forbids against discrimination on political beliefs from employers. More information can be found here:*

<http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/human-rights-duties/characteristics.htm#political>



## **Checklist for Successful Grassroots Advocacy**

### **1. Write a Letter**

Enclosed you will find a sample meeting request letter (Appendix B) for your elected officials, which can also be found online at [www.speechandhearing.ca](http://www.speechandhearing.ca). Please personalize this letter to reflect your own views, region, and workplace. Then print the letter with your contact information and mail, e-mail, or fax it to your elected official's offices to kick off your local advocacy efforts. It's important to remember that your personalized letter will have a far greater impact than a form letter. Feel free to involve your colleagues and concerned citizens in your letter-writing campaign!

### **2. Schedule a Meeting**

Request a meeting with your local elected official to discuss the issues outlined in your letter. If the official is unavailable for a meeting, try to schedule a phone conversation so that you can express your views directly.

### **3. Prepare an Agenda**

Before you meet with your local elected official, please take a few minutes to review the enclosed meeting guide (Appendix C) that will assist with your preparation. When speaking to the elected official, be sure to tell them exactly what you want. The most effective one-on-one technique requires emphasizing your specific requests. Following this, the elected official can then discuss what precise actions they can take to help achieve our goals.

### **4. Take Notes at the Meeting**

Once you have concluded the meeting, please fill out the debriefing questionnaire (Appendix D).

***Note:** If you need assistance finding your local elected official, please refer to the websites listed in Appendix E. When entering your postal code, be sure to enter both your home and office postal codes, as the elected representative may vary based on each location. The more politicians you can meet, the more effective our advocacy efforts will be.*



## Appendix A – Key Advocacy Messages

### Early Childhood Intervention

Speech and language skills influence the trajectory of a child for a lifetime. These skills also link to cognitive development, social skills, and success in academic learning.

At least one in ten preschoolers need to see a **speech-language pathologist (SLP)** for support in developing age-appropriate communication skills.

It is not unusual for children to be left waiting for months or years to see a publicly funded SLP in BC, due to individual SLP caseloads of over 80 children. Some children will not have access to a SLP before kindergarten due to wait lists.

The recommended caseload for one full time equivalent (FTE) SLP is 25-40 children. Assuming the maximum caseload of 40 children and a prevalence rate of 10% of preschoolers requiring SLP services, BC would require 552 full-time SLPs to address the estimated need, significantly more than the current 165.

#### **ACTION**

We recommend that the government take immediate steps to address the lack of adequate SLP services in the early intervention community. Immediately adding 175 full-time SLPs will go a long way towards addressing these critical unmet needs.

### Hearing Aid Funding

The **second** area of concern relates to hearing aid funding. Over 10% of British Columbians experience some form of hearing loss but less than 25% actually seek assistance, largely due to prohibitive cost barriers. For many with hearing loss, hearing aids can be essential to maintain the ability to communicate and safely move around their environment. Untreated hearing loss can lead to feelings of social isolation and depression and increase risk for cognitive and physical health issues.

The prevalence of hearing loss increases for those aged 65 and older, the standard age to begin receiving a fixed pension income. The estimated \$2,000-\$8,000-dollar cost for a set of hearing aids, which will require replacement in 5 years, poses a significant burden to a pensioner earning less than \$10,000 annually.



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BC falls behind other provinces in providing basic financial support for hearing aids and assistive listening devices. Hearing aids are not covered under MSP with only limited third party funding.

## **ACTION**

We recommend the government better support BC residents by providing some degree of funding for hearing aids and assistive listening devices. This will mitigate poor health outcomes associated with untreated hearing loss and ultimately reduce the burden on the health care system.

### **Residential Care Services**

The **third** area of concern today is full-time SLPs providing Residential Care Services. According to statistics provided by Speech-Language Audiology Canada, British Columbian have the dubious honour of having the second lowest number of SLPs per capita of all provinces.

SLPs are vital in evaluation and treatment of communication and swallowing disorders that are often the result of progressive neurological disorders such as; Parkinson's disease, dementia, ALS, and MS, strokes, traumatic brain injury, head and neck cancers, and many other health problems.

Lack of access to timely identification and treatment of communication health disorders affects overall health outcomes, length of hospital stays, and quality of life. MSP does not cover rehabilitation services resulting in minimal treatment and care options for individuals suffering with communication and swallowing disorders.

## **ACTION**

We recommend increasing the number of practicing SLPs per capita to the **national average** to ensure British Columbians with communication and swallowing difficulties have access to critically needed services. 200 additional publicly funded FTE SLP positions must be added to our healthcare system for adequate service provision to those in the general community and residential care facilities. Access to care should also focus on ensuring all regions in our province are receiving equitable services.



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## **Appendix B – SAMPLE Meeting Request Template**

{Insert MLA NAME}

{Insert date}

Dear {MLA Name}:

As a constituent in your riding and a {Speech-Language pathologist/audiologist/insert role} in your community, I would like to take the opportunity to share with you the important role that Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists have in the lives of all British Columbians.

One in ten Canadians experience some form of communication disorder, which often is derived from a speech, language, or hearing problem. Communication disorders can greatly affect the daily life of millions of British Columbians. Speech and Hearing British Columbia is a Canadian non-profit society that supports over 1200 speech-language pathologists by providing educational resources about a wide range of speech-language and hearing disorders.

Accessibility to Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) in the province of British Columbia is one of the lowest in Canada, specifically in residential care facilities. Speech-Language Pathologists are registered, highly educated healthcare workers who provide services to seniors that can improve quality of life by supporting communication following a stroke and aiding with swallowing; these improvements can often drastically improve other health matters

I would much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss these issues, and the steps we can take to improve resources and accessibility to Speech Language Pathologists, and Audiologists in British Columbia. I can be reached by phone at {insert phone number}, and by email at {insert email}. I look forward to further discussing these issues with you.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME



## **Appendix C – Elected Officials Meeting Guide**

1. Be mindful that most elected officials and government representatives will schedule you for only 15-30 minutes, so be brief and to the point. If you are joined by others, decide beforehand on a principal spokesperson to outline the main points. The remaining participants can comment at any time to offer background and other useful information. As a rule of thumb, speak to your issue for approximately 15 minutes, and allow the remaining 15 minutes to be used for questions from the elected official.
2. Begin your meeting by thanking the elected officials for taking the time to meet and discuss these important issues.
3. Introduce yourself by giving your name and title, as well as the profession you represent.
4. Outline briefly the purpose and aims of your meeting:
  - a. To raise the profile and build awareness of the significant role of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists
  - b. Identify the areas for improvement/growth: early intervention/children's services/schools, residential care facilities, etc.
5. Note that you will be reporting the results of your meeting to other Speech and Hearing BC members and colleagues in your constituency
6. Feel free to share personal anecdotes during your meeting. Elected officials can be very receptive to personal stories.
7. **Summarize the main points on the issues you are raising. You can add that should they have additional questions or for additional information, they can contact Janet Campbell, Operations Manager at [janet@speechandhearingbc.ca](mailto:janet@speechandhearingbc.ca).**
8. Request to have a photo taken of your meeting with the elected official, and share it with Speech and Hearing BC. Don't be shy about this – most MLAs want photos for themselves to share their advocacy with their constituents and stakeholder groups.
9. Complete the debriefing questionnaire (Appendix D) after the meeting and return it by fax to **604-736-5606** or email [janet@speechandhearingbc.ca](mailto:janet@speechandhearingbc.ca).



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## Appendix D – Debriefing Questionnaire

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Riding/Constituency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Political Party:

- Liberal
- NDP
- Green
- Other

### Duration of the Meeting:

- 15 Minutes or Less
- 15-30 Minutes
- 30 Minutes or more

### I found this individual to be:

- Knowledgeable of the issues facing SLPs/Audiologists Yes  No
- Supportive of their role in the health care system Yes  No
- Interested to support our advocacy goals Yes  No
- Interested in more information Yes  No

### Comments and follow-up:

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Questionnaire completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete and return by fax to **604-736-5606** or by email to [janet@speechandhearingbc.ca](mailto:janet@speechandhearingbc.ca).

Name of the individual that you met with: \_\_\_\_\_





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## **Appendix E – Find/Contact your Elected Official**

**Website to find your local elected official in British Columbia:**

[www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members](http://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members)