



Recommendations for Pediatric Hearing Services in Alberta

Date:

To:

Cc: Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL) [Email address: aadl.audiology@gov.ab.ca]

Cc: Alberta Association of Audiologists (AAoFA) [Email address: info@aaofa.ca]

From:

Introduction:

In October 2018, the Alberta Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Program (EHDI) became a provincial program administered by Alberta Health Services. EHDI is a screening program that identifies permanent congenital hearing loss in infants.

In November 2021, Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists (ACSLPA) jointly published the [Pediatric Amplification \(PedAMP\) protocol](#). This Protocol mandates routine hearing assessments, hearing aid maintenance and verification services for children aged 0 – 17 years old.

In Alberta, pediatric amplification for children 0-17 years old is provided mainly by private audiology clinics. There is a limited number of clinics offering pediatric audiology services. Services are limited within major urban centers and rural areas. These services are limited because specialized audiological expertise, expensive equipment and multiple face-to-face appointments are needed to meet the PedAmp protocol's requirements.

Audiology reimbursement does not cover the salaries and operating costs required to serve this population. Increases in provider service fees are necessary to encourage more audiologists to cater to the pediatric population and meet Alberta's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program goals.

Rationale for Incentives & Increased Fees:

Registered Audiologists are the only hearing healthcare professionals qualified to assess and fit children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing with hearing aids.

Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL) is the provincial program responsible for hearing aid funding in Alberta. Some service fees for fitting pediatric amplification benefits have remained the same since 2012, and the pricing for some pediatric amplification equipment has not changed since 1997, even though market prices have changed significantly.

The PedAmp Protocol requires routine monitoring and a minimum standard of service. Children need specialized testing equipment, regular monitoring of their hearing and ongoing adjustments to their hearing aids as they grow. The time commitment for fitting children is substantially higher than that of adults. As a result, private audiology clinics struggle to cover the costs associated with fitting this high-needs population. Stagnant fees pose financial challenges and hinder private practice audiology clinics from providing timely and necessary services.

The economic and social impacts of untreated hearing loss are significant and are counteracted by early intervention. Studies have shown that money allocated to early intervention services for children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing generates nearly double the value in social, educational, vocational, and economic benefits.

The deficit in active pediatric audiologists in Alberta threatens the cohesion of services and impedes the quality of care for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Consistent services that follow provincial and regulatory standards for fitting pediatric hearing aids are crucial.

Expected Benefits:

Obtaining hearing assessments and hearing aids from private practice audiologists for children under 18 years of age is consistent with the existing private practice model for Optometry in Alberta, where children undergo vision tests and obtain glasses through private practice Optometrists. Audiological monitoring and hearing aid fitting services provided through private practice audiologists would be a cost-effective service model for the province.

Improving provincial compensation for pediatric amplification providers in Alberta through the AADL Program will encourage more provincial Audiologists to consider participating in the AADL program and retain those already working with them. Increasing pediatric audiologists will improve the availability and access to provincial audiological healthcare services. It will promote a more equitable and accessible healthcare system and align with the Alberta Government's goals to improve access to healthcare.

Your support in advocating for these changes is pivotal in improving the quality of life for young Albertans facing hearing challenges. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further details.

Sincerely,