

Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Services for Seniors in Canada

According to Statistics Canada seniors represent the fastest growing segment of our population, expected to make up $\frac{1}{4}$ of the country's population (9.2 million Canadians) by 2041.

A large number of these individuals are significantly affected by communication disorders and experience problems with their speech, language, swallowing and hearing. In fact, hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic disability among older adults. 20% of adults over the age of 65, 40% over the age of 75 and 80% of all nursing home residents have a significant hearing problem. Additionally, 6-12% of seniors experience speech, language or voice difficulties.

The services of speech-language pathologists and audiologists help seniors to improve their ability to communicate which allows them to optimize their health, independence, safety, socialization and overall quality of life.

Speech-language pathologists provide assessment, treatment and follow-up for: difficulties speaking or understanding, voice problems, thinking and memory problems and swallowing difficulties. Communication, speech, language and swallowing difficulties experienced by seniors can be caused by: stroke, head injury, neurological diseases such as Parkinson's or ALS, tumours, respiratory illnesses, effects of medications, Alzheimer's disease and psychiatric disorders.

Speech-language pathologists might recommend any number of things including: direct treatment, further instrumental examination or referrals to other appropriate health care professionals for further investigations, diet/texture modification and/or safe feeding strategies, compensatory communications strategies, use of alternative and/or augmentative devices to assist with communication, client/family counseling or establishing links to community resources such as day centres or long-term support groups/programs.

Audiologists provide assessment, treatment and follow-up regarding: hearing loss, balance problems, tinnitus (noises or ringing in the ears) and related disorders. Hearing related disorders in seniors can be caused by the aging process, noise exposure, heredity, middle ear dysfunction, medications that are toxic to ears, neurological diseases such as stroke, head injury or tumours.

An audiologist might recommend: consultation with an Ear-Nose-Throat/ENT physician, use of hearing aids or other assistive listening devices, aural rehabilitation, consideration of cochlear implants, client/family counseling or other supportive strategies.

The services speech-language pathologists and audiologists provide can be: consultative, direct/indirect, individual/group, intensive, long-term support groups/programs, short term/intermittent. Our work settings include: ambulatory/outpatient facilities, clinics, home care, hospitals, long-term care facilities, private practice, and rehabilitation centres.

Consumers should seek the services of a qualified professional. Speech-language pathologists and audiologists in Canada must hold a minimum of a Masters degree in Speech-Language Pathology or Audiology or equivalent. In some provinces S-LPs and audiologists are regulated and must hold a license. In others, they should be a member of their provincial/territorial and/or national professional association. CASLPA also grants national certification to speech-language pathologists and audiologists who: hold full membership in CASLPA, meet clinical training requirements and successfully pass CASLPA's certification exam.

Speech-language pathologists and audiologists are important collaborative partners in the primary health care system, working to maximize communication and, in turn, participation in the community. Using the services of a speech-language pathologist or audiologist helps ensure seniors can continue to enjoy engaging, productive and rewarding lives. Early detection is vital! If you suspect a problem consult your yellow pages or visit our website to find a speech-language pathologist or audiologist near you.

www.caslpa.ca