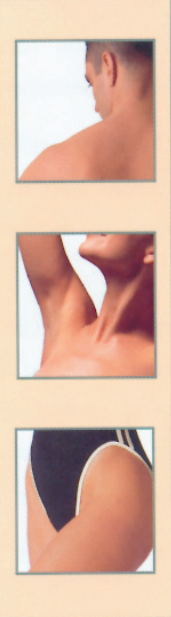


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Communication disorders affect 1 in 10 Canadians

Imagine going through life not being able to understand what people are saying to you. Having to constantly ask people to repeat themselves. Not knowing what's expected of you or how to behave. Imagine what it's like when you can't express your feelings to your family, friends or, especially, strangers. Imagine the sense of isolation, frustration, anger.

For one out of every 10 Canadians who has a speech, language or hearing problem, these things can be an everyday occurrence. But it doesn't have to be that way.

The ability to hear, understand and be understood is fundamental to our development as productive citizens and when hearing and speech problems go undetected and untreated, the results can be grievous.

According to the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA), the organization that represents 5,000 speech, language and hearing specialists across Canada, dealing with this crisis is an up-hill battle.

One of the biggest challenges is in getting referrals— being put in touch with people who need help. Often, individuals with hearing or speech disorders are labeled as having some type of behavioural problem. They're seen as either uncooperative or withdrawn, or unpredictable and hostile. This can be especially true with children. In many cases, this kind of behaviour is often merely the

symptom of a more profound hearing or speech disorder and unless these individuals are referred to a hearing or language specialist, the problem can go undetected and untreated.

Daycare workers, teachers, social workers, public health nurses and doctors need to understand that behavioural problems that appear to be purely psychological can often be traced to a hearing or speech disorder. Call in the experts— they know what to look for— the subtle signs that are so often missed by professionals in other disciplines.

CASLPA estimates that Canada currently has only about half the number of speech-language pathologists and audiologists that are needed to provide Canadians with an adequate level of service. The organization is currently involved in a study that will identify the extent of that need and what will be necessary to provide Canadians with adequate detection and treatment programs.

In the meantime, other health care and social service professionals can help make better use of existing resources. This has to be a team effort, and while SLPs and audiologists are an important part of that team, they are only one player, counting on the other members of the team— doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers— to help them, help others, in need.

—News Canada

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— Regional Chair Gary Carr

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