



## ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

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Honourable Deborah Mathews,  
Minister of Health and Long Term Care,  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 2C4

March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011,

Dear Minister Mathews,

I am concerned that speech and language services for children are inadequate with long waiting lists and wait times for services. I would like the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to act on the Recommendations of the Deloitte and Touche, Final Report on the Review of School Health Support Services Program. In particular, I would ask you to work with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education to implement Recommendation 1 to:

- *Clarify the scope of services delivered under the mandate of the SHSS program*
- And,
- *Optimize resources and enhance coordination of speech and language service system*

The speech and language service system includes the Preschool Speech and Language Program, School Health Support Services Program and school board speech and language services. I believe that there are opportunities to consolidate and enhance the speech and language service system, reducing duplication and ensuring that children get the services they need.

There is clear evidence that speech and language intervention is effective and the earlier the treatment is begun, the better the result. Speech and language disorders are frequently associated with other disabilities including Hearing loss, Physical and Developmental disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders and Learning Disabilities. Professional intervention can make a big difference. Without help, children with communication disorders are more likely to struggle at school, develop behaviour problems, be in trouble with the law, end up on welfare, and have difficulty with social relationships. This will cost the government more money.

Please act on the recommendation in the Deloitte Report and work with the other Ministries to reduce fragmentation, and ensure that the speech and language system is adequate to meet the needs of children with communication disorders. I look forward to your immediate response.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Morse,  
Provincial Co-ordinator

## Provincial Speech and Language Crisis

- Speech and language service system for children is complex and difficult for families to navigate as it involves different Ministries
- Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) School Health Support Services inadequate:
  - Confusion over scope and mandate of program
  - Inconsistent criteria and prioritization of children's needs across province
  - Multistep referral and access process even for children requiring a single service
  - Multiple assessments required during the process
  - Provincial wait times of up to 500 days for speech and languages services
- Preschool Speech and Language Programs are not meeting demand:
  - Services eroding due to lack of annual increases
  - Average provincial wait times for initial assessment is 18 weeks and varies between 5 weeks and 40 weeks
- School Speech and Language Services
  - Inconsistent processes for referral and tracking of wait times and wait lists

### What are the solutions?

- Implementation of Recommendations from the Review of School Health Support Services Program by consultants Deloitte, Inc, released in January 2011
- Review of speech and language services provided by Ministry of Children and Youth, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and create system efficiencies
- Annual increases in funding for services to reflect increases in staff and program costs
- Clear and consistent program criteria and service delivery and improved coordination and accountability