

Minister of State
(Public Health)



Ministre d'État
(Santé publique)

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

Ms. Linda Stewart
Executive Director
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
502 - 425 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1T6

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Dear Ms. Stewart:

Thank you for your correspondence of January 24, 2005, concerning the Association of Local Public Health Agencies' resolution numbers A03-5 (Monitoring of Human Exposure to Chemicals) and A04-8 (Preschool Language and Audiology Funding). I regret the delay in responding.

It is gratifying that your association is supportive of the Canadian Health Examination Survey. While monitoring chemical exposure is not among the responsibilities of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Health Canada has an interest in such monitoring and has been able to measure human exposure to chemicals in selective areas of Canada. For example, testing in the Canadian North showed that the marine mammals of the Inuit peoples traditional diet carried increased levels of pollutants because of long-range transport into the Arctic. In southern Canada, there is currently a cooperative study with Mexico and the United States to check contaminants in maternal blood on a regional basis in North America. These programs have allowed Health Canada to contribute to controlling contaminants on a global scale and to help protect the health of Canadians. Since the Canadian Health Examination Survey offers an opportunity to gather useful information on a larger scale, Health Canada has been cooperating with the lead federal agency, Statistics Canada, in planning for the Survey and in recommending what the Survey will measure.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch works with First Nations communities to help them improve their health and well-being by supporting their capacity to identify, understand and control the impact of exposure to environmental contaminants through community-based research, risk assessment and education. These activities include the integration and interpretation of scientific data to understand the

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exposure level and possible impacts of environmental contaminants on the health status of Aboriginal peoples. A major focus is providing information on the potential health risks associated with consuming various foods possibly affected by environmental contaminants, while promoting the importance of traditional diet.

With respect to resolution A04-8, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), through the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program (AHSUNC), recognizes speech and language development including the need for specialized speech and language programs as a priority for Aboriginal children. According to AHSUNC's National Process Evaluation, speech and language disorders are identified as the most prevalent special needs of AHSUNC children.

AHSUNC is currently engaged in several initiatives to address this priority. Some examples include workshops by speech and language specialists at the 2004 Joint National Training Workshop, the 2004 *Building a Community of Communities* Roundtable discussion on *Aboriginal Early Child Development: What Can Research Offer Aboriginal Head Start*, and AHSUNC's ongoing participation in the *Aboriginal Children With Special Needs Interdepartmental Working Group*.

In April 2005, AHSUNC commissioned Dr. Jessica Ball, a professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, to prepare *Talking Points: Exploring Needs and Concepts for Aboriginal Early Childhood Language Facilitation and Supports, Concept Discussion Paper*. This paper will be used as a focal point for dialogue and development of a national training strategy that will strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal communities and organizations to support language development for Aboriginal children.

AHSUNC is the only PHAC program that can directly address speech and language development issues. However, primary responsibility for speech, language and audiology programs falls within the purview of the provinces and territories, rather than the Government of Canada. Therefore, you may wish to share your concerns with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care at the following address:

Province of Ontario
Queen's Park, Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Telephone: (416) 327-4300
Facsimile: (416) 326-1571
E-mail: infomoh@gov.on.ca

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'C'.

Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M. P., M.D.