

Hon. Deb Matthews  
Minister, Children and Youth Services  
14th Flr  
56 Wellesley St W  
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

August 17, 2009

**Re. alPHa Resolution A09-6, Preschool Speech and Language Program Budget**

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On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) I am writing to introduce alPHa's Resolution on Preschool Speech and Language program funding, passed at our 2009 Annual General Meeting.

The Ontario Public Health Standards make it very clear that children's growth and development are critically important factors in health later in life, which are in part dependent on reaching accepted milestones in their ability to learn, understand and communicate. This is reflected by Ontario's provision of local Preschool Speech and Language programs at no charge to parents, which are designed to assess progress, identify problems and inform treatment interventions.

It is essential that these services are sufficient, effectively delivered and equally available throughout Ontario. We also believe that these services should include strategies to target high risk groups including First Nations people living in Ontario, and that they should be expanded to address speech and language issues in school-aged children, through school-based programs.

We invite you to consider the attached Resolution and we look forward to working with you to ensure that these programs continue to serve the goal of giving all of Ontario's children the best possible start in life.

Sincerely,

Linda Stewart,  
Executive Director

**Copy:** Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education  
Hon. Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion  
Hon. David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ontario)

**Encl.**

**alPHa RESOLUTION A09-6**

**TITLE:            Preschool Speech and Language Program Budget**

**SPONSOR:       Thunder Bay District Health Unit**

**WHEREAS**       Ontario's Poverty Reduction Plan (Government of Ontario, 2008) identified that The Best Start Plan is designed to help ensure that children are ready to learn by the time they start Grade One, and that the Plan includes provision of preschool speech and language services at neighbourhood Best Start hubs to increase access; and

**WHEREAS**       Speech and language skills are essential to a child's healthy development, ability to communicate, learning readiness, academic and literacy success; and

**WHEREAS**       Preschool Speech and Language Services are directly linked to the Ontario Public Health Child Health Standard Requirements; and

**WHEREAS**       The Ministry of Children and Youth Services' objectives for the Preschool Speech and Language (PSL) program are to identify and serve the estimated 10% of children in the preschool population with speech and language disorders; lower the average age of identification to 24 months; eliminate waiting lists; provide parents with direct access to the system; provide common speech and language assessment protocols; provide interventions appropriate for the age and needs of the child; and provide services as close to home as possible; and

**WHEREAS**       Preschool Speech and Language Services are funded by a variety of different funding sources and are offered by different agencies with varying accountabilities, resulting in duplication of infrastructures and uncoordinated services for children and their families; and

**WHEREAS**       A child's need for speech and language services can continue after the age of five, and may begin at any point during childhood; and

**WHEREAS**       There is little consistency regarding levels and model of service delivery across the province when a child makes the transition from Preschool Communication Services to school based services; and

**WHEREAS**       Children living in the north and other underserved areas are frequently excluded from access to speech and language services because of unique barriers such as transportation costs and remote locations; and

**WHEREAS**       It has been demonstrated that schools are the most appropriate and effective services providers for children past the age of five;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** alPHa urge the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to increase the 2009/2010 funding for preschool speech and language programs to continue to deliver services at current levels at a minimum;

**AND FURTHER THAT** special consideration is given to communities that include a high urban

aboriginal preschool population;

**AND FURTHER THAT** the Ministry of Children and Youth Services take a leadership role in reviewing the current funding structures for preschool speech and language services throughout the province of Ontario with a view to increasing accountability;

**AND FURTHER THAT** the Ministers of Health & Long-term Care and Health Promotion work with the Minister of Education and Training, and the Minister of Children and Youth Services to ensure school boards of Ontario are recognized as the appropriate provider of speech and language services to Ontario's children;

**AND FINALLY THAT** a smooth transition to school based speech and language services be achieved by supporting the school boards of Ontario to provide speech and language services, and funding school boards to do the same.

**ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:**

Moved: M. Harding (Thunder Bay)

Seconded: V. Blackmore (Middlesex-London)

**Resolution CARRIED AS AMENDED**