

THE JOY OF BEING HEARD

Speech-language pathologists

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What is a Speech-Language Pathologist?

According to Speech Language and Audiology Canada, Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are health professionals who identify, diagnose, and treat communication and swallowing disorders across the lifespan. SLPs offer a wide range of services to many individuals with varying diagnoses. These services include working on speech sound production, tone, expression, language understanding and expression, literacy skills, feeding and swallowing, alternative and augmentative communication, and oral rehab.

There are multiple practice settings in which speech-language pathologists can work. Some of these include hospitals, schools, private practice, community programs, long-term care facilities, clients' homes, universities/colleges, and more. SLPs also have the opportunity to provide care online. Many SLPs work as a part of interdisciplinary teams, collaborating with other health professionals. These other professionals include audiologists, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and psychologists. Speech-language pathologists may also practice privately in their own independent practice's.

How does Parkinson Disease impact communication and swallowing?

Changes in voice and speech is common in Parkinson's, many notice changes in voice and speech early on in their Parkinson journey. Common

challenges include a soft or quiet voice, changes in tone for example flat, slurred, or mumbled speech. In addition, choking and other swallowing difficulties, also known as dysphagia, are common in people with Parkinson. People with Parkinson Disease may experience the feeling or sensation that food is caught in the throat, coughing or choking while eating or drinking, difficulty swallowing, and excess or insufficient saliva. In addition to changes in speech, voice, and swallowing, for some people changes in cognition can make it harder to find the right words, focus on conversations, or get a sentence started. Sometimes, limited facial expression or reduced or unintended body language can also cause miscommunications.

The primary approach to managing speech, voice, and swallowing difficulties is working with a SLP. SLPs are trained to do assessments and treat issues with speech, voice, language, and communication, including those linked to cognitive changes. SLPs also specialize in diagnosing and treating swallowing disorders. During an evaluation, an SLP will review medical history and examine facial muscles, as well as movement of the lips, tongue, and jaw. They will also assess speech, voice, and swallowing abilities. An SLP can help work on voice, speech clarity, swallowing, and cognitive changes that may come along with Parkinson Disease, this is done through individual and/or group therapy sessions.

Where can you access an SLP in Alberta?

Alberta Health Services (AHS) offers publicly funded SLP services in different settings. This includes in-patient and outpatient services. This can look like individual support sessions or group therapy sessions. What is available depends on location and services needed. Majority of publicly funded SLP services through AHS can be self-referred too. Some programs may require a referral from a health care professional like a general practitioner, nurse or nurse practitioner, occupational therapist, or social worker. Service listings can be found on AHS website or through 811 or 211. You can also connect with us a Parkinson Association of Alberta for help finding and accessing SLP services.

Another option is private SLP services, you can search through the Alberta Speech-Language

Association of Private Practitioners (ASAPP) to find a private practice SLP in Alberta. Private services can be costly, some insurance and benefits plans may provide certain amounts of coverage for SLP services. You can also search on the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (ACSLPA) website by checking the public register. This has information on all registered Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists in Alberta and Northwest Territories. If outside of Alberta or the Northwest Territories each province has its own college with similar public registry lists.

Final thoughts

For people living with Parkinson's, changes in speech, voice, and swallowing can feel like barriers to everyday life. That is where speech-language pathologists' step in bringing expertise, creativity, and compassion to help promote clarity, safety, and confidence. Through tailored therapy, SLPs support stronger voices, smoother conversations, and safer meals. At its core, SLP support is about preserving connection, dignity, and the simple joy of being heard. ■

