



From the Desk of the Registrar

April 2022

Dear Regulated Members,

“From the Desk of the Registrar” series was intended to be issued 3 or 4 times a year but, just one month after the first article, I’m back! Enjoy ...

ACSLPA reports decreasing SLP numbers in 2021

ACSLPA’s annual report for 2021 has been published ([click here](#) to view) and one of the interesting items it contains is that ACSLPA experienced a decrease in the total number of registered SLPs last year. (The total number of audiologists registered with ACSLPA grew slightly.) Although the decrease was small, it is noteworthy because it is only the 2nd year of registration decline in the College’s 20-year history (the last was in 2008), and it comes at a time when the College has received calls from employers and the public who are struggling to find SLPs to fill vacancies and provide services. Numerically, the total number of registered SLPs in Alberta contracted last year by 1.3% (against population growth of about 1.1%, according to Government of Alberta data).

This contraction is part of a larger trend that has been building for a few years. From 2012 to 2018, ACSLPA averaged 119 new registrations per year. These new SLPs and audiologists were needed by employers and the public each year to account for population growth, increased demand for services, retirements, and other departures from practice including out-migration to other provinces (last year alone 111 Alberta SLPs left active practice). Meanwhile, from 2019 to 2021 we averaged only 90 new registrations, a 24% drop from the 2012 – 2018 period. (Aside: this could be attributed to COVID-19 effects if the trend wasn’t well established a year before the pandemic.)

Potential legislative solutions

Some messaging in recent months has tended to paint professions regulators, like ACSLPA, as barriers to employment, timely patient services, and prosperity in Alberta. To address this perceived barrier, late last year the Government passed Bill 49, the *Labour Mobility Act*, with hopes that this legislation will enable more workers to migrate to Alberta more easily.

This comes on the heels of the *Fair Registration Practices Act* coming into force in 2020 with the aim of decreasing barriers to international migration. While I cannot comment on the situation among other regulators, ACSLPA had already been focused on mobility and access for many years and had already optimized its registration systems to be exceptionally fair, efficient, and effective. Barring any surprises that arise when the new legislation is brought into force later this year, ACSLPA would seem to meet or exceed all of the targets of the legislation already; our application processing times are already far faster than any benchmarks that have been set by Government, we already meet or exceed the Government’s fairness standards, we already have the least restrictive registration requirements of any SLP/audiology regulator in Canada, and we have among the lowest overall fees for new registrations in Canada (all without compromising public safety or the standards of the profession).

In case there is any doubt surrounding these claims, no applicants were refused in 2021, all international applicants had at least an interim decision in well under 90 days (the government target is 6 months), and new graduates and interprovincial mobility applicants were typically registered within 1-2 business days of their applications being completed (the government target is 20 business days).

Considerations for attraction and retention

While the effectiveness of ACSLPA's registration systems *is* within the College's control, the broader issue of ensuring an adequate supply of SLPs and audiologists for Alberta is beyond the College's mandate. As mentioned above, on average, Alberta seems to need between 90 and 119 new practitioners each year to keep up with demand (depending on which period you look at). Keeping in mind that 111 SLPs left active practice last year, Alberta would need that many new SLP practitioners just to maintain the status quo. Where do these needed practitioners come from? Only 60 SLP graduates are produced in Alberta each year (there are no audiology programs in our province) but of those graduates, typically only 35 to 45 stay in our province. This means that Alberta has to attract between 50% and 60% of new SLPs and 100% of new audiology practitioners *from somewhere else* each year to keep up with the needs of employers and the public.

Since the number of new Alberta-trained graduates has held steady in recent years, and we're hearing of SLP shortages from employers and the public, and the total number of applications has dropped off by 24%, this suggests to me that Alberta is no longer outcompeting other provinces as a place for SLPs and audiologists to practice. All of this is also happening at a time when the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS), published by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) forecasts that there will be an overall shortage of 1,000 SLPs and audiologists Canada-wide by 2028. If Alberta is having trouble competing for needed SLPs and audiologists today, the situation is likely only going to become more challenging in future years.

In closing

While labour-market and workforce considerations are outside the College's mandate, recent legislation has made it clear that bodies like ACSLPA can't create unnecessary regulatory barriers that restrict the supply of practitioners. Our commitment is to continue registering people as fairly, efficiently, and effectively as possible without compromising the standards that ensure SLPs and audiologists are competent and ethical in their practice.

A broader discussion of whether or not the province might be headed towards a shortage of SLPs and audiologists may be warranted. Policy-makers, employers, post-secondary institutions, and professional associations may want to consider which strategies might be used to train, attract, and retain enough practitioners to meet the needs of employers and the public. I hope that my observations, from the desk of Registrar, will help inform some of those discussions.

Sincerely,



Michael Neth,
Registrar & CEO