

**Wednesday June 29, 2005**

**A Sound Start for Nova Scotian Children  
Improved Access to Hearing and Speech Services**

Halifax, NS - Today, Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres (NSHSC) celebrated the government's recent budget announcement of funding for A Sound Start. A Sound Start will include access to Universal Newborn Hearing Screening for all babies born in Nova Scotia; improved access (reduced waiting time) to speech-language pathology services for preschool children; more speech-language treatment options for preschool children across Nova Scotia communities; and enhanced community-based prevention and promotion activities in the area of hearing, speech, language, and pre-literacy development. Lynn Fraser, CEO of NSHSC provided an overview of A Sound Start and the impact that government support for the program will have on service delivery throughout Nova Scotia, "We are pleased to stand with the government today, and to share the significance of this milestone event. There is a provincial drive to build brighter futures for the children of Nova Scotia and programs like A Sound Start will help to achieve this goal. The Centres has worked diligently during the past couple of years to develop a program that will provide innovative service delivery options to children throughout Nova Scotia, and we thank the government for their financial support in making A Sound Start a reality."



Honourable Angus MacIsaac, Minister of Health, observes newborn hearing testing.

Health Minister Angus MacIsaac shared his enthusiasm with regard to the program that will improve hearing and speech services for children throughout Nova Scotia. He outlined the government's commitment of approximately \$1 million to execute full implementation of A Sound Start by 2007. The partial investment of \$275,000 will improve access for pre-school children in five areas of the province with high waiting lists. "Today we're pleased to stand together with our partners to share the news of improved access for children who are the most in need. We all agree that early identification of speech, language, and hearing disorders is vital.

This takes financial support, and we are now in a position to do that," said Mr. MacIsaac. "We are taking action to improve the waiting periods that all families have experienced, and to ensure that all babies born in Nova Scotia will have access to Universal Newborn Hearing Screening."

Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres currently screen high-risk babies (20-30% of births) throughout the province, and 80% of all babies born at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. The importance of screening, diagnosis, and intervention by six months of age cannot be over-emphasized. If those targets are not met, children with hearing impairment will quickly fall behind their peers in social development and language skills. Also, these children with hearing impairment can suffer serious language delays in communication and academic achievement.

Almost 13,000 preschool children in Nova Scotia have some form of communication disorder. Children, three years of age and under, with speech and language disorders are at high-risk for reading disabilities and academic failures. These disabilities and failures will have significant economic, social, and personal implications for these children as they grow to adults. Currently, preschool children wait up to twenty-four months for speech language services.

NSHSC services include prevention, identification, and treatment of hearing loss and its related disorders. NSHSC assess, counsel, and provide rehabilitation for pre-school children with speech and language delays. This care is also given to adults, including those who have lost the ability to communicate as a result of stroke or head injury.

NSHSC are located in twenty-five communities throughout the province. Last year, the Centres' caring and highly trained team of professionals recorded more than 50,000 visits from Nova Scotians with communication disabilities. NSHSC are dedicated to meeting their needs. If you wish to know more about NSHSC, please call 902-492-8289 or visit their website at [www.nshsc.ns.ca](http://www.nshsc.ns.ca)