



## ***COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATION – WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?***

The membership of both “colleges” and “associations” is generally considered as representing a group of professional individuals who have completed extensive academic and clinical study in a specific field of interest (e.g. psychology, physiotherapy, speech-language pathology, audiology, etc.) and who come together for a particular purpose. However, very few professionals who belong to either a college or an association fully appreciate that each functions very differently in terms of its purpose and that the one is not interchangeable with the other when it involves discharging its duties and responsibilities.

### **Colleges Regulate in the Public Interest**

Organizations with regulatory status are considered to be “colleges” and are mandated by provincial legislation at all times to: (a) serve and protect the public; and (b) exercise its powers and discharge its responsibilities in the **public interest** and not in the interests of the members. These organizations are expected to regulate the practice of the profession, to govern its members in accordance with the Act and the bylaws under which they were formed and to assure the public of the knowledge, skill, proficiency and competency of members in the practice of their profession (*from template legislation, Sask Health*).

Registration with a college is mandatory in almost all Canadian jurisdictions for an individual to obtain licensure and to practice his or her profession.

Regulatory status provides the organization with the distinct privilege of self-governance, a status that is not easily achieved with, nor conferred lightly by government. The benefits of self-governance include:

- Reservation of professional titles
- Ability to set minimum standards for the purpose of entry to practice in the profession
- Formal commitment to continuing competency
- Accountability for investigation and discipline
- Focusing on the public best interests
- Prestige and recognition of the profession
- Greater control and influence over the direction of the profession
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### **Associations Advocate for Member Interests**

Associations are formed for an entirely different purpose – to represent its **member interests**. Associations are free to focus on professional activities, lobbying and member advocacy, including compensation and related issues.

Association membership is optional, although members are usually registrants of their professional college as well. Registration with an association is not a requirement for an individual to obtain a licence or practice his or her profession.

Associations also govern themselves, although not through any type of legislative authority; instead, associations may decide to formalize their existence through incorporation. The benefits of belonging to an association include:

- Ability to identify issues of common concern and establish forums to address
- Support for provincial advocacy around identified needs
- Promotion of the professions
- Provision for professional development opportunities and resources
- Negotiation of professional fees and rate reductions for conferences, liability insurance and other amenities



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### **The SASLPA Conundrum**

Our organization was originally founded as the Saskatchewan Speech and Hearing Association (SSHA) in September of 1958 by six “therapists” who wanted to establish a “professional association” in the province. The purpose was to increase public awareness of the speech and hearing professions and to establish a “recognized standard for speech and hearing therapists”.

In its formative years and through to 1968, the primary focus of the SSHA was on professional interests and advocacy although a need for “certification” was also identified. From 1968 through to the early 1980’s, the SSHA began to lobby government for coordination and expansion of speech and hearing services and for the establishment of minimal qualifications for practising speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

In 1975 the Saskatchewan Speech and Hearing Association began to actively pursue status as a regulatory professional body. Over the next several years, the SSHA members took an active role in lobbying government and in 1983 the Department of Health established a Cabinet Committee to consider licensure. Two years later, the SSHA changed its name to the Saskatchewan Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (SASLPA) to acknowledge the professional titles of its membership that had by then grown to approximately 100.

In spite of many delays and setbacks along the way, the dedication and perseverance of the Association members of the time ultimately resulted in success. On May 31, 1992 *The Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists Act* came into force whereby the Saskatchewan government granted SASLPA the authority to **regulate** the professions of speech-language pathology and audiology **in the best interest of the public**.

So, what happens when an organization that began as an “association” is granted a “college” status?

From the provincial government’s perspective, *“a health profession becomes self regulating because there is a significant risk of harm to the public if the activities were performed by someone lacking the requisite knowledge, skills, or abilities acquired through defined training and experience. If the organization chooses to also be the ‘professional association’ for that profession, the expectation is that the organization will . . . first and foremost engage in activities that provide protection to the public. Furthermore, the leadership of the association is expected to distinguish between the public interest and the self-interest of the association and its members and, in situations of conflict . . . resolve the matter on the side of protecting the public interest”.* (Ministry of Health correspondence).

From the perspective of the membership – SASLPA should continue to provide for both its regulatory (college) and association functions. However, based on observations by Council as well as the types of demands and expectations expressed by the SASLPA membership itself over the past few years, many members do not appear to fully appreciate what it means to act in the public interest. They still believe, maybe because of the historical roots of the association or maybe because it is the members’ fees that pays for its operations, that SASLPA’s primary role is to lobby, advocate and protect the interests of the members.

Therein lays the SASLPA conundrum. SASLPA cannot administer both roles with equal dedication. Governing “in the public interest” often presents a conflicting situation to the SASLPA leadership. While our title still carries the name “Association”, government expects SASLPA to function as a college “*first and foremost*” and that is what we must do. SASLPA members must recognize that, when faced with a potential conflict of interest situation between public and member interests, SASLPA must always act in favour of the public interest. Also, when faced with limited resources, SASLPA must always adhere to, and prioritize its regulatory duties and responsibilities, even if a consequence is to sacrifice its association functions.



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	<b>College</b>	<b>Association</b>
<b>Mandate/Purpose</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is the duty of the college at all times:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) to serve and protect the public; and</li> <li>(b) to exercise its powers and discharge its responsibilities in the <b>public interest</b> and not in the interests of the members.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. The objects of the college are:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) to regulate the practice of the profession and to govern the members in accordance with this Act and the bylaws; and</li> <li>(b) to assure the public of the knowledge, skill, proficiency and competency of members in the practice of their profession.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	Purpose of an Association is different from a College. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Associations are free :               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) to represent and support <b>member interests;</b></li> <li>(b) to focus on professional activities and member advocacy, including compensation and related issues.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Members are usually members of the professional college as well</li> </ol>
<b>Authority</b>	Provincial Legislation. Government grants the right of self-governance	May establish itself as a corporation
<b>Membership</b>	Compulsory to practice the profession	Optional
<b>Types of Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shall establish Council in accordance with legislation</li> <li>- Shall establish Standing (Regulatory) Committees in accordance with legislation (<i>Registration &amp; Membership, Legislation &amp; Bylaws, Professional Conduct, Discipline</i>)</li> <li>- May establish Special Committees in accordance with legislation</li> <li>- Provide for and administer a Code of Ethics</li> <li>- Prescribe Standards of Practice,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Practice Guidelines &amp; Position Statements</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Establish &amp; Administer               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bylaws in accordance with legislation</li> <li>○ Entry to practice requirements, registration &amp; renewal processes</li> <li>○ Licenses to practice</li> <li>○ Continuing competency &amp; quality assurance programs</li> <li>○ Mentoring and continuing education programs</li> <li>○ Reintegration/re-entry to practice programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Establish and administer public complaint processes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Investigate and conduct hearings of complaints alleging member misconduct or incompetence</li> <li>○ Report and publicize results of disciplinary actions</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Produce and post public register of members</li> <li>- Demonstrate accountability to government &amp; Membership:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Annual Reports to Government &amp; Members</li> <li>○ Conduct Annual General Meetings and Special Meetings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May establish managing board</li> <li>- May establish membership requirements and applications</li> <li>- May establish Committees, Special Interest Groups (e.g. School Services)</li> <li>- Engage in promotional activities relating to such items as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Benefits of Membership</li> <li>○ Opportunities to support professions</li> <li>○ Job fairs</li> <li>○ Media events &amp; campaigns</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Engage in advocacy &amp; lobbying on behalf of members:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family Forums</li> <li>○ Recruitment &amp; Retention</li> <li>○ Employer Liaison</li> <li>○ Government Liaison</li> <li>○ Funding for programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Advertising:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Employment</li> <li>○ Professional products, resources &amp; professional conferences</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Negotiate private practitioner fees with 3<sup>rd</sup> party agencies</li> <li>- Generate &amp; publish Private Practitioner Listings</li> <li>- Create professional development opportunities</li> <li>- Facilitate online discussion forums</li> </ul>