Early identification of speech and language disorders shortens recovery time and reduces cost of treatment.

A public awareness campaign by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association is aimed at educating the public about the warning signs of communication disorders. At the core of the ASHA campaign’s message is that speech, language, and hearing disorders are treatable and early detection is a major contributor to speedier recoveries, shortened treatment periods, and reduced costs for individuals and society alike.

“We know that early intervention, whether it’s for a child or for an adult who has acquired a communication disorder, is effective,” said Vicki Simonsmeier, a Faculty Fellow at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities and assistant clinical professor in USU’s Communication Disorders and Deaf Education department. “Early intervention in speech and language problems for children can mitigate not only further communication difficulties but ultimately can have an impact on early academic skills and later, literacy skills.”

Simonsmeier said research is clear that early intervention for children with swallowing disorders can decrease or eliminate the problem. When a child begins to stutter, early intervention and counseling of the family can have a huge impact on the outcome for the child. When an adult has had a stroke, the sooner the medical, communication and swallowing (dysphagia) interventions begin can have an impact on the individual’s outcomes.

“The research is becoming even more clear in autism, that if we can intervene early in the child’s life, that they have the potential for greater chance of ‘normalizing’ their interactions with peers in academic, home and community environments,” Simonsmeier said. “When hearing loss is identified early in children the early use of hearing aids or cochlear implants can have dramatic effect on the child's ability to learn speech and language skills that are commensurate with their peers.”