

On June 3, 2021, the Ministry of Francophone Affairs launched a public consultation on improving access to French language services and modernizing the *French Language Services Act*.

Together, let's make our voices heard!

L'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario has prepared a guide for the community on the issues surrounding the modernization of the *French Language Services Act*. You can consult it [here](#).

We encourage our Francophone communities to take part in the consultation. The **deadline for participation is July 5, 2021**.

Entité 4 responded to the survey with an emphasis on enhancing French language health services, you can see our answers below.

To take part in the Ministry of Francophone Affairs consultation, click [here](#).

Section 1: Access to French language Services

Which key service sectors and essential frontline services require better access to French language service delivery?

Ontario is home to the largest Francophone population in Canada, outside of Quebec. The rich diversity across Ontario's Francophone population translates into complex and varied health needs. When it comes to accessing health services, language barriers can have a significant impact on patient safety and care quality, including increasing the risk of diagnostic errors and reducing treatment compliance.

Building Access to Health Services in French to Promote the Well-being of Ontario Francophones

As one of Ontario's six French Language Health Planning Entities, Entité 4 is mandated by the Ministry of Health to increase access to French language health services and our feedback will be focused with this objective in mind.

Entité 4 works with local, regional and provincial partners across four priority sectors – **primary care, mental health services, home and community care, and palliative care** – to deliver real improvements for Francophone patients and their caregivers. Improving French language service capacity across these sectors is crucial to meeting the health care needs of Ontario's Francophone population.

Receiving care in a person's official language of choice enables patients to fully understand their diagnosis, take an active role in their treatment and is essential in building trust and comfort. Additionally, as people age, their ability to speak a second language deteriorates. Providing health and **long-term care** services in French for Ontario's Francophone seniors is an important part of meeting their health care needs throughout their lifetime.

Integrating French Language Services in Public Health Units Across the Province

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of providing easily accessible, clear and accurate information to the communities we serve in the face of a rapidly evolving crisis. Clear communication

helps protect citizens and language barriers often hamper these initiatives. A lack of communication in French, particularly in the early days, is evidence of the need to better integrate French language services across Ontario's 34 public health units.

What barriers have you encountered when looking to access French language services?

Service Gaps Across the Health System

Patients and their caregivers struggle to navigate the health care system, especially when seeking services in French. Within our service area, a limited number of Health Service Providers offer French language services, and these services are often program specific.

Currently, Ontario's Francophone population is unable to access a full continuum of health services in their official language of choice.

Within some health service sectors, such as mental health, demand for services often exceeds capacity. Many French-speaking Ontarians fear that requesting services in French will further exacerbate wait times.

Lack of Accountability in the Planning and Delivery of French Language Health Services

Designation and identification are two processes within the health system that help ensure the sustainability of French language health services over time.

The identification process is the selection of a health service provider to plan for and deliver French language services. Health service providers that offer regional services or are the only provider for a specific service are automatically identified for the provision of French language services.

When the identification process was introduced, it was meant to be the first step towards achieving designation under the *French Language Services Act*. However, there is little incentive for organizations to continue towards designation – which remains a voluntary process.

Additionally, there is a lack of accountability and consequences when identified agencies do not plan for and deliver services in French to meet community needs.

What practices could improve and/or increase access to French language services?

Establishing Cascading Accountability Throughout the Health System

Improving access to French language services is a shared responsibility throughout Ontario's health system. The Ontario government needs to clearly define expectations for the delivery of French language health services and ensure ongoing accountability.

Leveraging Data to Improve Access

Integrating the patient's official language of choice on the Health Card will provide a better understanding of the needs and health service utilization by Ontario's Francophone communities to improve decision-making.

Additionally, data collected through the OZi portal relating to French language service capacity across health service providers can help match services with community needs.

Creating Mechanisms to Support French Language Service Integration Within Ontario Health Teams

Ontario Health Teams will have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the communities they serve as health service providers work together as one coordinated team to plan and deliver care.

Expanding the identification process to include Ontario Health Teams is a first step in respecting the role of Francophones in the the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of services for their community.

Additionally, through the identification process, Ontario Health Teams would be able to access supports designed to help organizations meet their French language service obligations, including translation services and the French language training reimbursement program.

Ensuring Greater Consistency Across Ministries

Funding for programs and supports for children and youth with special needs as well as mental health services for children and youth is provided through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Supports available for designated agencies vary across ministries and the concept of identification exists only within the Ministry of Health.

The health system transformation is leading to greater collaboration across agencies with diverse funders. A consistent approach to ensuring the sustainability of French language services will help build a continuum of services and supports for Ontario's Francophone population at all life stages.

Connecting Through Virtual Care

The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly shifted care delivery across the country. Virtual consultations and care services are increasingly accepted and sought out by patients and their caregivers. These virtual health services should be leveraged to match health system capacity with community needs.

Increased interprovincial collaboration with provinces such as Quebec and New Brunswick can even be leveraged in building French language capacity.

Applying the Principles of Active Offer

All health service providers and centralized intake services should proactively seek to connect patients to care in their official language of choice.

Section 2: Delivery of French language services

Are there delivery models you consider effective and to be considered to improve access to French language services?

Best Practices Within Health Care for Integrating French Language Health Services

French Language System Navigation and Care Coordination

The integration of bilingual health promoters and patient navigators into health care teams is an emerging best practice. Patient navigators work directly with patients and their families to overcome barriers to health care access and bridge gaps in transitions of care. Health promoters work with communities to encourage healthy behaviours and create supportive environments that enable people to improve their health. Delivering these services in French for Francophones is a key component of patient centred care.

Extended Care Models for the Provision of French Language Long-Term Care Services

Creating a Francophone cluster within a long-term care home offers a viable solution to offering linguistically appropriate care to official language minority groups.

Providing a dedicated space for residents based on common language has been shown to improve social interaction. Additionally, by grouping residents together allows homes to build a cultural environment for the residents that includes music, artwork and activities that are cultural or linguistic matches to their residents.

The clustering model has been implemented with great success within Bendale Acres, a City of Toronto long-term care home which includes 37 beds prioritized for Francophones within the Pavillon Omer Deslauriers. All services are available in French for residents in the Pavillon.

For service providers offering expanded care models to address specialized care needs through linguistically specific care, creating a priority long-term care waitlist for Francophones can help streamline access.

The creation of a prioritized waitlist is made possible through clause 173 of O. Reg 79/10 under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*.

Expanded Virtual Care Options

For the Francophone communities we serve, the increased reliance on virtual connections throughout the pandemic ensured virtual French language health promotion activities and webinars were available to Francophones across our territory and the province.

To meet demand for French language services, which professions or occupations are experiencing a lack of francophone and/or bilingual workers? How could we improve recruitment and retention of these workers?

Increasing Training Opportunities to Build Frontline Service Capacity

Increasing the number of health care workers and health professionals able to provide services in French to Francophones is critical. Within the long-term care and home and community care sectors, there is a significant need for bilingual personal support workers as well as nurses. Additionally, specialized services, such as speech therapy, must be available in French for Francophones.

Expanding the number of health care workers able to offer services in French can be done by:

- Offering more health profession training opportunities in French
- Increasing access to advanced language training for health care workers with an intermediate level of French or better

Staffing shortages among bilingual health care workers and professionals are further compounded as many health service providers do not have mechanisms in place to match Francophone patients with bilingual workers. Providing bilingual health care workers and professionals with additional opportunities to utilize their expertise in serving patients in their official language of choice will contribute to achieving the four objectives of the Quadruple Aim framework that designs and delivers an effective health care system.

How can the process of designation under the French Language Services Act be improved for service providers and service users?

Expand and Clarify the Identification Process Across Ministries to Increase French Language Services

Within the health sector, the identification has played a significant role in improving access to French language health services. As the process is simpler, and particularly in areas with lower Francophone population, agencies are more willing to be identified for the provision of French language services. Within the area served by Entité 4, 14 service providers have been identified for the provision of French language services, and by comparison, only three service providers have achieved designation.

Incentivize Designation

The Ontario government provides identified and designated service providers with supports designed to help organizations meet their French language service obligations, including translation services and the French language training reimbursement program.

The supports offered by the government are the same for both identified and designated agencies, providing little incentive to progress towards designation. Additionally, some requirements for designation come at a considerable cost to agencies, such as bilingual signage.

The government should consider additional supports and incentives for agencies seeking designation in recognition of their significant commitment to the provision of French language services.

Simplify the Designation Process

Currently, agencies seeking designation must satisfy 34 criteria, some of which may be difficult to achieve. For agencies seeking only a partial designation, for a specific program or services, must also meet all 34 criteria even if they are not essential to the provision of the designated service in French.

Designation criteria should be reviewed to ensure that each required aspect truly impacts the provision of direct client services in French.

Celebrate Excellence in French Language Services

Although designation represents an official recognition by the Ontario government of an organization's ability and ongoing commitment to provide high-quality services in French, these certifications are conferred in relative obscurity.

Designation should be recognized as an indicator of excellence and a critical component of patient-centred care within the health system.