

THE CHALLENGES OF PROVIDING FRENCH-LANGUAGE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

TOPICS COVERED:

- Provision of French-language health and social services
- Differences with respect to active offer from one province or territory to another
- Recruitment and retention of bilingual personnel
- Lack of awareness or knowledge about the benefits of active offer
- Other factors that hinder the provision of French-language services



According to a national survey conducted by the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM), 66% of respondents attributed difficulties in providing services in French to hospital staff's limited linguistic competencies (Forgues, Bahi & Michaud, 2017).

1. PROVISION OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES



The offer of French-language health and social services is part of a holistic approach in terms of planning and delivering health services intended for a minority community. A proactive approach considers the community's health status and its historic lack of health services in French.

This approach:

- Calls on community mobilization
- Takes into account the cultural diversity of patients or beneficiaries
- Is based on an ethical perspective
- Puts in place positive intervention measures, when needed
- Aims to ensure the quality of services and equitable benefits to which all Canadian Francophone citizens are entitled, regardless of their minority situation

Providing French-language health and social services of high quality, on an ongoing basis, and guaranteeing their availability at all times involve several challenges.

2. DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO ACTIVE OFFER FROM ONE PROVINCE OR TERRITORY TO ANOTHER



The challenge of providing health and social services in French varies significantly from one province to another, even from one region to another within the same province. Obviously, provinces where Francophones account for a very small share of the population will face greater problems in providing such services. And even in a province that is officially bilingual such as New Brunswick, challenges are still considerable.

Health comes under provincial jurisdiction; provinces have primary responsibility for regulating health care. The Federal Government also plays a role, although secondary. Therefore, laws, regulations and policies regarding health vary from one province and territory to another.

The Federal Government intervenes in two ways in the field of health: the Canadian Health Transfer and through official languages programs.

Language is also an area of shared responsibility. Each level of government can adopt different language laws.

3. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF BILINGUAL PERSONNEL



One of the major barriers to accessing services is French lies in the difficulty of recruiting bilingual personnel. Challenges are even harder to overcome in some settings, among which rural areas or long-term care institutions (de Moissac et al., 2014).

A recruitment strategy involving the offer of professional development placements in bilingual workplaces met with some success in the field of health and social services, because the structure and length of training programs fostered prompt entry into the labour market and increased bilingual settings' familiarity with recent graduates [Translation] (Savard et al., in Drolet et al., 2017, p. 249).

Some measures that may help in recruiting bilingual personnel:

- Integrating Francophones into the governance structure
- Relying on a detailed human resources plan related to providing French-language services
- Designating some positions as bilingual
- Establishing levels of language competencies according to particular professions
- Posting job openings on Francophone social networks
- Posting job openings in colleges and universities that offer health-related programs in French

Being able to work in a bilingual setting is an attractive recruitment factor for employees (Savard et al., 2017).

Some measures that may help in retaining bilingual personnel:

- Maintaining a bilingual workplace
- Providing required tools in French (forms, assessment grids, etc.)
- Providing ongoing training in French
- Supporting access to a network of Francophone health professionals
- Providing language training in French

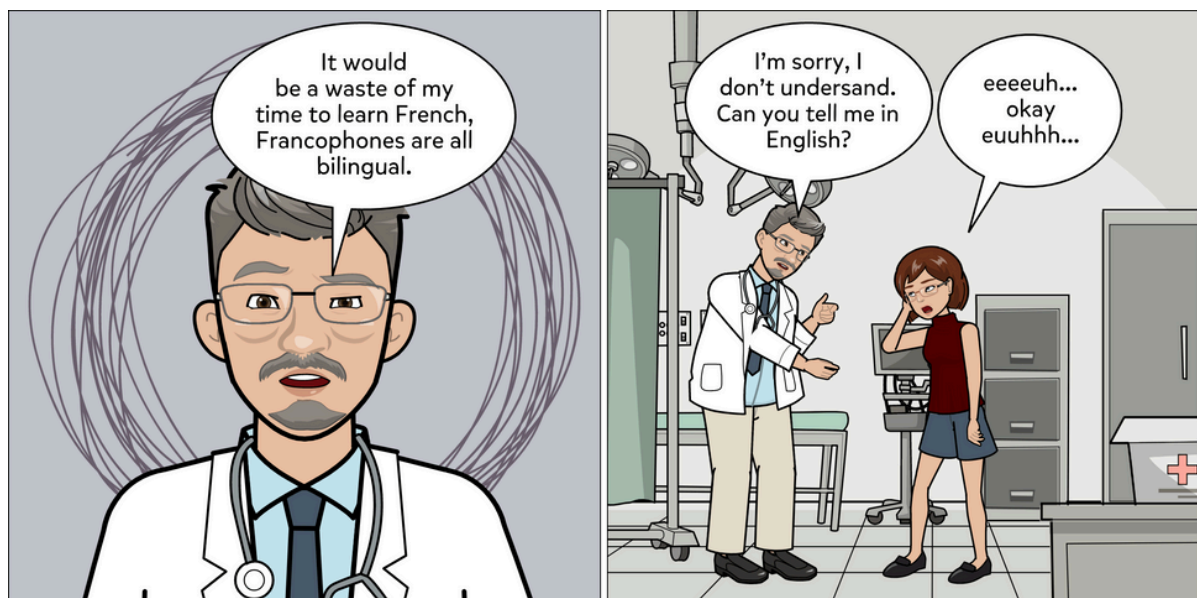
Among bilingual providers there is a strong sense of belonging to the Francophone community. Indeed, several mentioned having chosen their employer, at least partly, because the position allowed them to work in French and with Francophones. [Translation] (Savard et al., 2017)

4. LACK OF AWARENESS OR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF ACTIVE OFFER



Among senior management and staff in general, there persists a lack of understanding with respect to the impact of language on the quality of services and client safety, both on the part of unilingual Anglophones and on the part of some Francophones. Considering language as a simple communication tool, they do not quite understand why a bilingual Francophone would ask for services in French.

Decision-makers, managers, care providers as well as beneficiaries of services have limited awareness of the several benefits of French-language health services for minority communities.



Other factors that hinder the provision of French-language services

- The lack of knowledge among Francophone clients about the existence of French-language services
- The lack of integration and coordination in existing resources
- The difficulty of pairing care providers with Francophone clients
- Limited access to French-language assessment tools or documentation
- Management practices that favour hiring unilingual Anglophones (de Moissac & Drolet, 2017)
- The lack of commitment on the part of senior management with respect to providing services in the official minority language (de Moissac & Drolet, 2017)

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