

# Improving the Francophone Experience in Health Care



**Final Report**  
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**LE RÉSEAU DU MIEUX-ÊTRE  
FRANCOPHONE  
DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO**

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## PREAMBLE

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In 2018, the *Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario (Réseau)* received funding for a project on Francophone experience and more specifically, on improving their experience with health care services in Northern Ontario.

In the context of the project, we collected experiences from Francophone patients in order to validate the needs that have often been identified by Francophones regarding access and equity of French language health services. This data has allowed us to create resources to better equip health service providers to provide culturally competent care.

This document consists of a summary of the results of the meetings and discussions with Francophones from different regions of Northern Ontario as well as solutions, tools and resources to support health service providers in improving the active offer of health services in French.

We would like to thank the health service providers and Francophones who volunteered to participate in this project. We would like to acknowledge the collaboration and support of Ontario Health North in carrying out this project, as well as the financial support of Health Canada.

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## APPROACH

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The project adopted an experience-based design approach. This approach consists of using people's experiences to discover new perspectives, making it possible to highlight best practices and design resources. This allows health service providers to better help individuals navigate the health care system and be better supported along the continuum of care.

Despite the pandemic, many people participated in the project:

- ❖ Francophone clients of two health service providers
- ❖ Members of two Carrefours santé (Health hubs)
- ❖ Ten clients, caregivers and health professionals who participated in the filming of videos
- ❖ Twenty stakeholders who work with the French-speaking immigrant population.

To guide the gathering of information, we drew from a questionnaire from the NHS (previously known as the National Health Service, a world-renowned British national health organization), that we tailored and translated to the needs of the project. The [questionnaire \(French/English\)](#) asked participants about the accessed service points during the provision of health care services, the emotions experienced at each of these key moments and the reason behind these emotions.

We quickly realized that the experiences collected within the context of the project reflected the realities often identified by Francophones. While there were several positive experiences, the quality of the experience varied by community, health provider, and service. Access to culturally appropriate care was not equitable everywhere.

It should be noted that the results of the project are presented in this report in a generic manner in order to preserve the anonymity of those who shared their personal experiences. The findings presented here are relevant to all providers and stakeholders across Northern Ontario.

## SUMMARY OF THE COLLECTED EXPERIENCES

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To make it easier to share the collected data, we've prepared a summary of the challenges that the participants identified. These challenges were grouped into themes to better understand the reality of Francophone patients once they are in the health care system.



### CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CARE AND ACTIVE OFFER

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One of the main issues raised by participants as influencing their experience, is whether or not they have access to French language health services. The importance of active offer and culturally appropriate care remains an area of considerable importance to participants. Feeling safe and listened to was at the forefront of interactions with health care professionals.

### HUMAN RESOURCES

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In terms of human resources, many people noted that a lack of Francophone or bilingual staff triggered negative emotions such as frustration, insecurity, stress and fear. On the other hand, the presence of French or bilingual human resources made them feel good, reassured, understood, comfortable and safe.

## **SIGNAGE AND DOCUMENTATION**

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In addition to face-to-face or telephone communication with French or bilingual staff, elements such as signage and written documentation are also important. In fact, individuals stated that unilingual English signage and documentation caused them worry, uncertainty and anxiety, while having the documentation in French provided a sense of security.

## **LINGUISTIC IDENTITY**

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The question of identifying themselves as Francophone is, for many participants, a difficult one. The fear of not being able to access services without a long wait time often leads to a hesitation on the part of some people to identify themselves as Francophones and to express themselves in French.

## **FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION**

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For Francophone immigrants, the difficulty of accessing services in French and the difficulty of navigating the system is even more pronounced since everything in the system is new to them. They also often face a reluctance on the part of the health care system to understand and adapt to their situation.





## DEVELOPED TOOLS AND RESOURCES

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To better equip health service providers and increase awareness to the importance of providing culturally appropriate care as well as meeting the needs identified by project participants, we also developed various tools. These resources will support health service providers in improving the active offer of French language health services.

### **FRENCH LANGUAGE HEALTH SERVICES EXPERIENCE SURVEYS**

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The surveys were created to help health service providers capture the experience of their Francophone clients. One survey is for residents of long-term care homes and their caregivers while the other survey is for clients and caregivers using other types of health service providers such as hospitals, community health centres, mental health and addiction services as well as home and community care. A poster was also designed to encourage Francophones to share their experience through these surveys. These surveys are available in English and French on the [Réseau's website](#).

### **POSTER ON THE PROCESSES FOR SHARING COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS**

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In order to simplify the process of sharing concerns and compliments on French language services, the *Réseau* has created a [poster](#) explaining the sharing process so that they can share both successes and areas for improvement in French language services with their health service provider. With clear and specific steps, the poster helps simplify what can sometimes seem like a daunting process.

### **VIDEO TESTIMONIALS OF FRANCOPHONE EXPERIENCES**

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A dozen videos were created to gather the experiences of Francophones, their caregivers and health professionals to raise awareness among health service providers, health professionals and the general public about the role that the active offer of French language health services plays in the experience of these individuals. These videos are available on the *Réseau's* [YouTube channel](#) and [website](#).

## FACT SHEETS – CHEAT SHEET: FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

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### CHEAT SHEET: French Language Services

The information gathered through this project was used to develop [fact sheets](#) for French speaking and non French speaking frontline staff and managers. These fact sheets, available in French and English, provide concrete tools for serving Francophone clients.

## OTHER AVENUES FOR ACTION

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### **BUILDING CAPACITY IN *HEALTH CARE FOR WELCOMING FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANTS* PROJECT**

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This initiative aims to improve existing resources so that they better meet the needs of Francophone immigrants for French language health services. The *Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario* and the *Réseau des services de santé en français de l'Est de l'Ontario* are collaborating on this project, which is led in Ontario by the *Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario*. The information that was gathered and conclusions that were drawn with respect to Francophone immigrants within the context of the experienced-based design project will assist with the building capacity project.

### **ADAPTATION OF THE *RÉSEAU'S* RESOURCES**

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This project also served to enhance various tools and resources of the *Réseau* such as our [online training on active offer](#), our presentations, our website as well as our project on culturally adapted long-term care for Francophones.

## CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, it is important to understand that health services must take into account the experience of Francophones. Culturally appropriate care through the active offer of French language health services is essential across the continuum of care to ensure equitable access for Francophones. Additional resources, including previous research on the Francophone experience, have been added to the [Réseau's website](#) to support health service providers and organizations in capturing the Francophone experience and enhancing it through an active offer. The *Réseau* will also continue to develop tools and work with its partners to improve the health care experience of Francophones.