



Société Santé  
en français

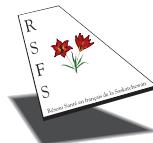
# French-Language Health Promotion in Canada



2010 Edition.

Reprinted in 2016: the cover page and the current have been updated to reflect organizational changes since the initial edition. The rest of the document is reproduced in its original version.

## The French-Language Health Networks of Canada



\*In 2013, Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario replaced Réseau francophone de santé du Nord de l'Ontario and Réseau de santé en français du Moyen-Nord de l'Ontario.



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## Introduction

The *Société Santé en français* (SSF) is proud to present the national strategy *French-language Health Promotion in Canada*. This national health promotion strategy is intended to be a source of inspiration for the French-language health movement in the country, a guiding document for the *Société Santé en français* and its 17 Networks and their partners, as well as a tool for strengthening provincial and territorial health promotion and disease prevention strategies.

This strategy is the result of concerted efforts by many people and organizations, by all partners including community members who, with their Networks, have participated in, reflected on, and committed to this wonderful challenge of strengthening French language health promotion across Canada.

This strategy purposely defines health promotion using a concept of health that is "broad, positive, empowering and above all social." This concept is diametrically opposed to the biomedical concept of health, which is essentially focused on illness.<sup>1</sup>

The *Société* wishes to thank particularly the Public Health Agency of Canada for its support and advice.

This document presents the main thrusts of a strategy designed to allow **health promotion in French** to be implemented in Francophone and Acadian minority communities across the country, factoring in the current state of health promotion in the province/territory/region in question. The strategy is above all designed to serve as a catalyst for encouraging and accompanying French-language health promotion efforts across the country.

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Raeburn and I. Rootman, *Le concept de santé: une nouvelle proposition*, in M. O'Neill et al, *Promotion de la santé au Canada et au Québec, perspectives critiques*, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, Collection sociétés, cultures et santé, Lévis, 2006.



*Pour la promotion de la santé en français au Canada*

## Background on the Société Santé en français and its Networks

The **Société Santé en français** is a national organization whose mission is to provide, in close collaboration with its 17 provincial/territorial French-language Health Service Networks, a better access to quality French-language health programs and services in order to improve the health status of all Francophone and Acadian minority communities.

The 17 French-language Health Service Networks Networks, based in all provinces/territories or regions, bring together key partners from the health care system in a partnership model inspired by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Networks are essential platforms of collaboration in improving health services for Francophones in minority communities. They are also enabling instruments to empower communities about health related matters and provide added value in the implementation of innovative solutions.

Since 2002, the Société, the Networks and their partners in the provinces and territories have carried out over 100 health initiatives, mostly in health promotion and involve deliverables such as:

- Health guides;
- Service directories;
- Prevention programs involving various health issues, such as diabetes, cardiac rehabilitation, physical activity, etc.;
- Health education and promotion programs targeting specific groups: children, adolescents, women, seniors, etc.;
- Documentation and tools for training and capacity building in health promotion.

In 2005, the SSF launched the project *La promotion de la santé dans les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire* [health promotion in Francophone minority communities] to allow Francophone and Acadian minority communities to become familiar with the health promotion field as a key element of





accessibility to health services in their own language. Through this project, over 20 health promotion forums and activities were held and innovative health promotion tools were developed. From these forums emerged new knowledge, information sharing and recognition of best practices as well as the identification on a provincial/regional/territorial basis of concrete avenues for action and issues to pursue in health promotion. The project also allowed the Networks to identify and associate with new partners in health promotion, thereby breaking down barriers and extending collaboration beyond the traditional health system.

In 2007, the *Société* reiterated its firm belief in a "Health"<sup>2</sup> approach, and confirmed health promotion as one of the **major strategies** of its *Plan directeur 2008-2013, volet organisation des services* [2008-2013 master plan, organization of services component]. For the SSF and the Networks, Francophones and Acadian minority communities must benefit from the health promotion advancements made in recent decades. It is against this backdrop that the SSF, the Networks and their partners pursued their reflection and concerted action in 2008 and are presenting the *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy.

Over the upcoming 2009-2013 period, the *Société Santé en français* will begin the implementation of measures designed to achieve results in French-language health promotion in Canada.

## **Santé en français' National health promotion strategy**

The *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy is rooted in the provincial/territorial/regional strategies and supports the recent reflection within the French-language health movement on the importance of health promotion. These reflections are contained in the *Stratégies nationales intégrées, Pour faire la différence, une vision intégrée de nos actions* (April 2007) [national integrated strategies, to make a difference, an integrated vision of our action] and the SSF's *Plan directeur 2008-2013, Des communautés francophones en santé* (October 2007) [2008-2013 master plan for healthy Francophone communities]. These guiding documents were developed through a consultation process within the Networks with input from the movements' partners, and were approved at the annual general meeting of the *Société*.

This strategy is also in conformity with the Ottawa Health Charter for Health Promotion (1986), the International Union for Health Promotion and Education Declaration (2007), and the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health Report (August 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease."



## Principles

The *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy is guided by the following principles:

- **An all-encompassing vision of health:**  
Special attention must be paid to integrating key health determinants in an all-encompassing vision of health to avoid making individuals solely responsible for health inequalities. Emphasis must be placed on developing individual and collective mechanisms for promoting health.
- **The role of the community:**  
Any health promotion measure must be based on communities and supported through an approach focusing on the *grassroots* of communities. Citizen and community participation is essential to this strategy's success.
- **An intersectoral approach:**  
Emphasis will be placed on an intersectoral approach<sup>3</sup> to ensure that all partners play their role, thereby generating complementarity and synergy between the players. The strategy must therefore not only engage players in the health care field but also stakeholders from education, literacy, social solidarity, the economy, employment, the various levels of government and organizations already working in health promotion.

## Strategic directions

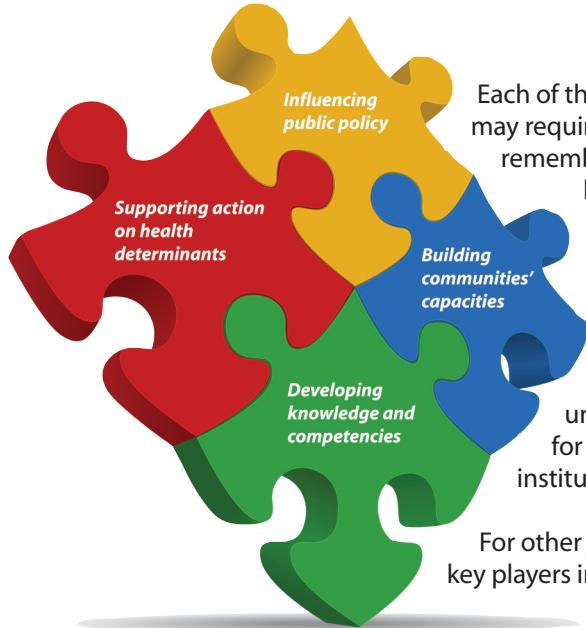
The national strategy *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* is based on four strategic directions, namely:

- Influencing public policy to create equity in health for Francophone minority populations and communities in Canada;
- Supporting concerted and innovative action on the major health determinants to create communities and living conditions that are conducive to health and wellness;
- Building communities' capacities to support health and wellness in French (community empowerment);
- Developing the knowledge and competencies needed to identify best practices in health promotion.

**4** <sup>3</sup> The intersectoral approach involves joint and concerted action by all players in society involved in the health and wellness of communities, including economic players.



## The strategy's four directions



Each of these directions, which constitutes a component of the strategy, may require sequential or simultaneous action. It is important to remember that the French-language Health Networks operations are based on their communities' priorities and how health promotion is evolving in their settings. This means that in some provinces/territories, governments have already signalled their interest in health promotion and wellness by creating ministries or structures devoted to this field. This constitutes an important asset for these communities. Indeed, this situation opens the door to strengthening the dialogue already underway with official partners in order to garner recognition for the issues affecting Francophone minority communities and institute measures to address their concerns and aspirations.

For other jurisdictions in different circumstances, the identification of key players in health promotion and wellness remains a major challenge. Recognition for, and action on, the needs of Francophones in their province or territory are therefore more difficult. The strategy must then be very flexible to reflect the asymmetry of environments and facilitate building on existing progress in the various communities.

Furthermore, in addition to direct action, the SSF and the Networks want each strategic direction to generate knowledge and competencies that will become true **qualification cards** with the ability to influence systems and policies. Throughout the implementation of this strategy, the SSF and the Networks will forge partnerships with organizations to obtain support, build their mutual capacities, support action research, and evaluate the impacts on the health of the target population and on public policy in promotion and prevention.

Finally, even if none of these strategic directions constitute a priority, the successful implementation of this health promotion strategy in Francophone and Acadian minority communities will require action on each of these directions sequentially or simultaneously. Above all, they will need to be tailored to local capacities and the interests of the partners (and Networks).



## **Influencing public policy to create equity in health for Francophone minority populations and communities in Canada**

“Public policy is the broad framework of ideas and values within which decisions are taken and actions, or inaction, is pursued by governments in relation to some issue or problem.”

*Taking Action Through Public Policy; A Focus on Health and Environment Issues,*  
Environment Canada and Health Canada, 2002.



This strategic direction will make it necessary to **create ties and build relationships** with the authorities in place and system spokespersons in order to place communities' health promotion priorities on the government's agenda. It will need to ensure that adopted public policies give communities and individuals equal access to services and programs that improve their health status in their own language. This makes it necessary for the health and the prevention issues affecting Francophone and Acadian minority communities to be known, discussed, and treated as priorities and for concrete action and satisfactory funding to follow. For this to happen, the SSF and the French-language Health Service Networks acknowledge that this strategic direction is rooted in citizen and community participation in health and wellness. Indeed, this is the approach being proposed by the *Santé en français* movement for all these measures.

The Networks must develop knowledge, competencies and tools **to take concrete action and participate** with their partners in the various public consultation and public policy development processes in the health promotion field, nationally as well as in each province, territory or region.

The work of the Networks and their partners must, over time, translate into policies and programs that are tailored to meet the specific characteristics and issues of Francophone and Acadian communities. For example, each community must minimally have access to major health promotion campaigns, favourable public policies and healthy environments and benefit from a strengthening of collective capacities for action. All levels of government must be involved, including the oft-forgotten municipal level, whose actions nevertheless have a direct impact on several of the health determinants of communities.

“To influence future healthy public policy we must work hand in hand with communities and civil society, and ensure that our communications are accessible to all and understood by all.”

*Shaping the Future of Health Promotion: Progress and Recommendations*, International Union for Health Promotion and Education, 2007.



## Expected outcomes

- Identification of system spokespersons and the raising of their awareness to the needs and issues of Francophone and Acadian minority communities in the field of health promotion and wellness;
- Inclusion of the community and Networks in the health promotion consultation and public policy development processes on issues related to health promotion;
- Development of argumentation and content to support the process of influencing public policy;
- Services and programs that are equitable and tailored to the needs of communities;
- Improvement in the health status of Francophone and Acadian minority communities.





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## **Supporting concerted and innovative action on major health determinants to create communities and living conditions that are conducive to health and wellness**

The main characteristic of the Société and the French-language Health Service Networks is the emphasis placed on networking people and the organizations in which they work. The health care system, including the fields of health promotion and public health, is above all a field of experts who are often working on their own, in silos. To have an impact on health promotion, the SSF and the Networks recognize the importance of creating multi-jurisdictional partnerships, of breaking down these silos, and of bringing together all the partners who have an impact on health in general or who are working to influence health determinants. Through this concerted approach, the SSF and the Networks wish to create communities and living conditions that are conducive to the wellness of Francophone and Acadian minority communities.



### **Health determinants<sup>4</sup>**

- 1 Income level and social status;
- 2 Social support networks;
- 3 Education and literacy;
- 4 Employment and working conditions;
- 5 Social environments;
- 6 Physical environments;
- 7 Health habits and personal ability to adapt;
8. Early childhood development;
9. Biological and genetic heritage/background;
10. Health services;
11. Gender;
12. And culture.

This strategic direction includes concrete action on health determinants, support for projects and local initiatives, and tailoring existing programming to communities' needs — for all health determinants. Making communities aware of health determinants is an important element of the strategy. Collaborative efforts with community organizations that are already active in health promotion or working on certain determinants are also integral to the inclusion processes being supported. The Networks will work to identify key partners in relation to the health determinants of Francophone and Acadian minority communities and make action more effective through concerted action.

Special attention will be paid to social determinants of health<sup>5</sup> that play a significant role in population health because few major policies currently address them.

<sup>4</sup> [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

<sup>5</sup> According to the World Health Organization, the 10 social determinants of health include early childhood development, education, employment and working conditions, food security, health services, housing, income level and social status, social exclusion, social support network, and unemployment and work security.



Vigilance must be maintained to ensure that actions have a positive impact and to avoid removing responsibility from governments (by blaming individuals or transferring responsibility to communities) that would make individuals or communities solely responsible for their health and wellness status.

This strategic direction is intended to support and establish more structured initiatives such as Healthy Cities/Communities/Schools/Workplaces, an approach which is recognized by the WHO and has already been explored in some provinces. These initiatives have already proved their effectiveness in improving the vitality and health of communities, and through the knowledge thus acquired, the Networks will be able to put forward solutions that have already been successfully tried elsewhere in the country.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Prioritization of local initiatives and identification of champions to help promote French-language health promotion and wellness initiatives for Francophone and Acadian minority communities;
- Establishment of coordinated mechanisms for collective empowerment and sustainable development with health promotion partners;
- Implementation of structured initiatives, including a Healthy Cities/Communities/Schools/Workplaces-type initiative.





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## **Building communities' capacities to support health and wellness in French (community empowerment)**

This strategic direction is a key element of the health promotion strategy in as much as it is designed to engage the public, the community and its players from all sectors and gives them a voice. This is an integrated and intersectoral approach that engages the community and the individuals who make it up, not only in identifying needs and prioritizing issues but also in determining the best potential solutions to improve health. This strategic direction is intended to develop people's and communities' capacity to take action so they are able to play their role as full-fledged partners in health promotion.



This strategic direction includes two important elements:

- Raising the awareness of Francophone and Acadian minority communities and mobilizing them to take charge of their health and wellness through French-language wellness campaigns, events, or health promotion and wellness tools;
- Building the capacity of communities and populations to express themselves and to make their own choices and thereby identify priorities and measure related to participatory processes.

Owing to their vitality and partnership model, the French-language Health Service Networks are well positioned to pursue community empowerment measures instituted during promotional forums. Their efforts are based on the certainty that health is not a matter reserved for experts and ministries of health, but rather involves each individual and a large number of players originating from multiple sectors of civil society. The Networks thus support a grassroots and intersectoral approach. This inclusive approach centres on partnerships to avoid overlap and pool resources.

The SSF and the Networks, with their experience in approximately one hundred health projects and the national research *Setting the Stage* (2004-2006) behind them, also recognize the importance of supporting government priorities and of influencing these to magnify the impact of their joint efforts. Based on their local circumstances, the Networks will be able to pursue raising awareness of major health determinants and start the process of citizen participation on issues specifically affecting Francophone and Acadian minority communities. Some of the themes already identified during the health promotion forums held by the SSF's Networks have included mental health, social inclusion, the aging of the population, etc. The Networks act as catalysts to create community engagement and empowerment through citizen and community participatory-type approaches. They also promote information sharing and knowledge of best practices and communities' most successful projects. This is designed to recognize and strengthen communities' capacities and to create dynamic communities that are confident of their abilities.



## Expected outcomes

- Improvement in communities' information and awareness with respect to health determinants;
- Use of citizen and community participation approaches on issues related to health promotion;
- Increase in the number of alliances between communities and other partners to build Francophone and Acadian minority communities' ability to take action;
- Better knowledge of the needs and circumstances of communities with respect to health promotion;
- Communities engaged in taking charge of their health.





## **Developing the knowledge and competencies needed to identify best practices in health promotion**

Everyone would like to have better knowledge of the situation, challenges and issues in health promotion in order to ensure that proposed solutions have a greater impact. On the other hand, everyone acknowledges the difficulties involved in determining the health status (inclusive of health determinants) of populations and of developing measures and indicators able to evaluate this. The SSF and the Networks recognize, however, that extensive literature exists representing a goldmine of knowledge on the challenges and issues facing communities and on best practices in promotion/prevention. This literature and expertise are spread out across the country and are therefore little valued (or used) and quite inaccessible.



This strategic direction is designed first and foremost to bring all existing knowledge together and to share it with promotion experts and researchers so it can be improved on an ongoing basis and so that new knowledge and competencies in health promotion and wellness can be developed. The creation of an integrated data bank and resource centres on the health of Francophones is certainly an objective supported by all. This initiative will also make it possible to integrate, as of implementation of the strategy, processes for evaluating the effectiveness of the measures taken and making necessary adjustments.

This new knowledge will support the development of competencies in all communities and the emergence of new leaders in promotion and wellness. They will also facilitate the recognition and convergence of the competences and experiences of those already involved, often in the background and in a decentralized manner. The development of training programs resulting from this new knowledge and tailored to communities' needs will strengthen community efforts and their acquisition of new skills. Making this information available will equip stakeholders in the various communities, give them better knowledge of the communities they serve, and familiarize them with best practices in their field.

Finally, based on the outcomes and learning resulting from the work performed in communities, the concerted and innovative action by partners, and the analysis of existing or newly developed knowledge, the SSF and the Networks will support the development of health and social service profiles related to differences in health and in access to services by Francophone and Acadian minority populations. In return, this improved knowledge of the health issues will allow the SSF and Networks and the communities they represent to have true **qualification cards** in hand—solid knowledge coupled with capable resources — that will allow them to support their efforts to gain influence with authorities at the provincial/territorial levels and national level.



## Expected outcomes

- Bank of resources, knowledge and data related to health promotion in Francophone and Acadian minority communities;
- Partnerships with experts in health promotion and the research community to support evaluation of the impacts of the strategy on the health of communities;
- Development of training programs, activities and capacities;
- Sharing of existing knowledge, competencies and best practices in health promotion by all the partners and within the *Santé en français* movement;
- Acquisition of knowledge and competencies in Francophone communities to increase their empowerment and improve their health status.





## **Conditions for success**

The *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy for the benefit of Francophone and Acadian minority communities is a dynamic, evolving and innovative process. It requires concerted action on public policy, strengthened participation by communities, the networking of the players and competencies in the health promotion field, as well as the creation and sharing of knowledge and the building of capacities. Achieving this entire strategy will impact on the outcome sought by the SSF and the Networks, namely the increased empowerment and improved health status of Francophone and Acadian minority communities.

Achieving this national strategy depends on the following conditions for success:

- Broadening of the concept of health to include all the partners with influence over health determinants;
- Linking of the efforts made to provincial/territorial health promotion strategies;
- Consideration of the Networks and communities as the foundation of French-language health promotion in Canada and efforts to take charge of same;
- Substantial investments in health promotion to support the Francophone and Acadian minority communities of Canada, the Networks and the SSF in implementing the national strategy, while respecting their circumstances, diversity and desire to participate fully.



## Conclusion

The *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy is a major multi-year initiative based on local action, regional collaboration, and national support.

"Health promotion programs are most successful when linked to the normal daily lives of communities, building on local traditions and led by community members."

*Shaping the Future of Health Promotion: Progress and Recommendations*, International Union for Health Promotion and Education, 2007.

Health promotion and wellness is an integral part of access to services and improvement in the health status of Francophone and Acadian minority communities. The strategic directions and the approach adopted by the Société and the Networks flow from a strong, grassroots movement. The strategy recognizes there is no miracle cure that will cure all ills and proposes concerted, structural action in support of health promotion and wellness within Canada's Francophone and Acadian minority communities.

"The means of action are in the economic, physical and social environment, in public policies, and in gestures of solidarity. It is precisely here and nowhere else that solutions will be found."

*National Report on the Health Status of the Population of Québec, Producing Health*, 2005.

Field work in provinces, territories and regions is the hallmark of the *French-language Health Promotion in Canada* national strategy. The French-language Health Service Networks, in combination with their partners, will be responsible for developing and implementing action plans that are appropriate to their respective communities, tailored to their needs and the characteristics of the national strategy at their disposal, and designed to pool efforts. These plans will have to be attuned to provincial/territorial priorities in order to ensure maximum impact and identify priority measures in each province and territory.



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