Executive Summary — French-Language Health Services in Manitoba (2025)

Provincial Report | February 2026 | OZi — 2024-2025 Data Collection

---

Context

This study, conducted by the Francophone Health Department of Shared Health – Soins communs with the support of the Secrétariat aux affaires francophones and Santé en français, provides a comprehensive picture of bilingual human resources and organizational practices related to French-language health services (FLS) in Manitoba. It draws on the analysis of over 70 files (80,000 lines of HR data), 2021 census data, and a survey of 93 participating programs, out of over 140 targeted managers and coordinators.

Demographic Profile

Manitoba has 112,115 residents able to converse in French (8.4% of the population), a slight increase from 2016. However, the Francophone community is aging significantly: the 55–74 age group is the most vastly populated, while a pronounced erosion is observed among those under 35 whose first official language is French. Linguistic renewal is therefore at risk, even though bilingualism is gaining traction among younger generations.

Health Human Resources — Key Findings

A Designated Bilingual Position (DBP) fill rate stagnating at ~45%. Of 1,406 DBPs (in FTE), only 632 are filled by staff with the required language skills. More than one in two DBPs remains vacant — an issue that goes beyond a simple labour shortage.

Knowledge of French ≠ Use of French. Of the 5,240 health professionals with knowledge of French, only 1,335 (25.5%) use it regularly or most often at work.

Independent organizations account for the largest share of bilingual capacity. Although they represent only 9.7% of the total workforce, they concentrate 64.2% of DBPs and filled DBPs. Conversely, Regional Health Authorities (90.3% of the workforce) hold only 35.8% of DBPs.

Sharp regional disparities. Southern Health–Santé Sud has 20.1 DBPs per 1,000 Francophones, compared to 0.7 for Prairie Mountain. The Winnipeg region, which accounts for 66% of the Francophone population, holds 65% of DBPs.

The Long-Term Care (LTC) sector accounts for nearly 50% of all DBPs (700 positions, 287 filled), making it the most exposed sector, catering to the aging population, yet also the one for which data remains the most incomplete — a blind spot that limits the scope of analysis.

Organizational Commitments vs. On-the-Ground Practices

A significant gap exists between declared commitments and practices actually implemented, particularly in leadership and accountability (55% progress in commitments vs. 28% in practices) and recruitment and retention (60% vs. 18%). Only independent Francophone organizations show close alignment between their commitments and their practices.

Active offer remains insufficiently embedded: only 52% of respondents systematically ask users for their preferred official language — a fundamental prerequisite for equitable access to care. Furthermore, 48% of programs do not have this basic practice in place.

Key Messages

1. **The system is not in crisis, but it is slowly drifting.** Indicators are stagnating or slightly declining, practices are not keeping pace with commitments, and the Francophone demographic base is weakening.
2. **Filling positions is not enough** — they must be placed in the right locations and supported by coherent organizational practices. The problem is as much organizational as it is demographic.
3. **Independent Francophone organizations are leading the way**, showing greater consistency between commitments and practices within Manitoba's broader health ecosystem.

Three Priority Levers

- **Reassess the distribution of DBPs** based on actual regional and sectoral needs.
- **Strengthen organizational practices** (not just commitments) in recruitment, retention, and active offer.
- **Embed these priorities** into the next version of the provincial strategic plan for French-language health services.

Funded by Health Canada under the 2023-2028 Official Languages Health Program. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of Health Canada or the Manitoba Department of Health.