

*Delivery of Health Care Services
in Both Official Languages:*

Let's see to it!



Réseau-action
formation et recherche



Société
Santé et Bien-être en français
du Nouveau-Brunswick

Acknowledgment

The Société Santé et Mieux-être en français du Nouveau Brunswick (SSMEFNB) wishes to thank and acknowledge the valuable contribution of the regional health authorities' Official Languages Coordinators as well as the Official Languages Coordinator with the Department of Health. The organization greatly appreciates their participation, support and expertise in planning and developing this brochure, and wishes to thank all those who shared advice and devoted their time to reviewing its content.

Note: The use of the masculine gender bears no sex discrimination and is used only to lighten the text.

Background

This brochure is designed to provide health care managers and professionals with information on the delivery of services in both official languages within New Brunswick Regional Health Authorities. It also includes working examples of service delivery and strategies to enhance service provision in both official languages. However, this document should be considered as a source of information only, because it does not provide a comprehensive look at service delivery in both official languages within New Brunswick's Health Care Sector.



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The production of this document was made possible through the financial contribution of Health Canada through the Société Santé en français.



1. For a better understanding of service delivery in both official languages:

1.1 What is the Province of New Brunswick Language of Service Policy?

The Province of New Brunswick Language of Service Policy and Guidelines were developed to assist and guide departments, provincial agencies and establishments, including regional health authorities, in fulfilling their obligations under the *Official Languages of New Brunswick Act*¹ with regards to service delivery.²

All regional health authorities must comply with the Province of New Brunswick Language of Service Policy and Guidelines. However, depending on particular characteristics, some may choose to adopt their own policies or guidelines on language of service, but they must reflect the provincial policy.

Under its Language of Service Policy, the Government of New Brunswick ensures that members of the public or organizations who **wish to communicate** with any department, agency, crown corporation or institution of the Provincial Government, including regional health authorities, **can do so in the official language of their choice** and they can expect **to be offered and receive** the available service in the official language of their choice, **wherever** the governmental service is provided.²



1.2 What does language of service mean for regional health authorities?

Language of service means actively offering and providing services to clients or patients in English and French across the province.³

1.3 What are services of equal quality in regional health authorities?

Services of equal quality are services which are actively offered in both official languages and which are available without undue delay in the language chosen by the client or patient.²

Service quality is closely related to the stakeholder's ability to assist, advise, guide and educate clients or patients. The ability to understand and to be understood is therefore essential for developing efficient relationships between health professionals and users of health services.⁴

1.4 What does active offer mean for regional health authorities?

The *active offer* of services means informing the client or the patient, at the first point of contact, that services are available in both official languages.²

¹ New Brunswick Government, Official Languages of New Brunswick Act (on line): <http://www.gnb.ca/acts/acts/o-00-5.htm>

² New Brunswick Government, Administration Manual System (Volume 2), Language of Service Policy and Guidelines. AD-2919. Last change: October 2005.

³ New Brunswick Government, Office of Human Resources, Official Languages: Straight Talk on New Brunswick's Language of Service Policy (on line): <http://www.gnb.ca/0163/oal-blo/straight-e.asp#1>.

⁴ Consultative Committee for French-Speaking Minority Communities (CCCFSM), Report to the Federal Minister of Health, 2001.

1.5 From a linguistic viewpoint, what does service to the public mean for regional health authorities?

Where services are offered to the public by a regional health authority⁵, there is a legal obligation to **offer** and **provide** such services in the official language of choice of the public. There are no exceptions based on the existence of minimum numbers of either linguistic community in a particular area. Employees providing these services should not normally require the use of interpretation services when providing service. If interpretation is required, it should be immediately available. Translation services will be available for forms, reports, correspondence and lengthy documents.²

For regular and specialized services normally provided under the Act, services to the public include, but are not limited to:²

- Signage;
- Oral communication;
- Electronic service delivery channels (e-mail, internet, voice-mail);
- Correspondence;
- Public forms and public documents;
- Judicial and Administrative Tribunals; and
- Public services contracted to third parties.

1.6 What role do functional teams within regional health authorities play in ensuring services to the public?

Regional health authorities must ensure that all services to clients or patients are offered and provided in French and in English. This means they have a responsibility to **ensure their functional teams provide continuous services to the public** in both official languages.

Functional teams must be structured in such a way that they can provide, at all times, services in the client's or patient's language of choice. The number and nature of contacts between the functional team and the public and clients, and the area served, will determine its language composition, and in turn the language skills required from each team member.³ Information regarding the development and maintenance of linguistic profiles is available in the Language of Service Policy.

1.7 What does provision of services in the language of choice mean?

Culture, including language, is a determinant of health. Determinants of health are those factors and conditions that characterize the individual, the community and their interactions, which influence health status.⁶

Providing services in the language of choice extends beyond simply respecting the client's or patient's culture.

It is an aspect sometimes essential to improving health status and having the population take ownership of its health. Incidentally, numerous studies have shown that the absence of services in the client's or patient's language:

- reduces the use of preventive services;
- increases consultation times, the number of diagnostic tests and the probability of mistakes in diagnosis and treatment;



⁵ The public should be understood to include any person or group of persons, association, organization, municipal body and provincial or federal institution.

⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada, Population Health, What determines health?
(on line): <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html>

- affects service quality in situations where effective communication is crucial;
- reduces the likelihood of medication compliance; and
- reduces client/patient satisfaction with the care and services received.⁴

The **active offer of services** and the **continuous provision of services** are important elements to consider when taking measures to improve access to quality health care in both official languages, namely due to the vulnerabilities and the health status of the people who normally receive health services and care⁴.

2. Working examples of the active offer of services and continuous provision of services to the public:

Regional health authorities must comply with the guidelines provided in the Province of New Brunswick Language of Service Policy regarding services to the public and **services offered and provided in both official languages** relating to language of service and linguistic profiles. To meet these guidelines, some provincial health care establishments have developed practices that enable them to enhance the active offer of services and the continuous provision of services to clients and patients. The following examples outline the efforts put forth by regional health authorities to better meet the needs of the linguistic communities in their region.

Complete identification bracelets!

In order to enhance the continuous provision of services in French to the Francophone community in the Miramichi, the Miramichi Regional Health Authority displays the official language preference on the bracelets of patients admitted to

its health care establishments. This measure will reduce the need for patients to reiterate their language of choice during interdepartmental transfers as well as minimize any potential communication problems due to language.



Actively campaigning for the active offer of services!



The ACADIE-BATHURST Health Authority produced signs, pins and stickers to make patients and visitors more aware of the fact that they can choose services in the official language of their choice. The campaign's active offer materials were customized to match the colors of the authority's logo. Pins and stickers were distributed to employees who deal directly with the public. As a result, clients and visitors can more easily

identify employees who are fluent in French and in English. In total, close to 200 signs were displayed in publicly accessible areas throughout the authority's facilities and services.

Linguistic training works!

For many years now, the Restigouche Health Authority (RHA) has been offering employees training in French and in English to help them acquire basic work-related concepts in their second language or maintain and improve the abilities developed throughout the years. The RHA relies on the services of a qualified language teacher. Courses are offered on site to small groups of employees in a relaxing atmosphere, which greatly encourages attendance.

Service provision in a Francophone majority area...

The Regional Health Authority Four actively offers services in both official languages as stipulated in the Province of New Brunswick Official Languages Policy, and this, even though the local area's predominant language is French, whether as a work or service language. In addition, over the last few years, some positions have been designated as officially bilingual, and some doctors have taken a refresher course in English, which was partially funded by the authority. Although clients are very satisfied with their linguistic choices, the authority plans on continuing its initiative, thus giving more exposure to the processes of the active offer of services in both official languages.

Eye-catching pins!

In 2005, the River Valley Health developed a pin for staff members involved in French language training. The pin, which prompts people to speak French to an employee, was created initially to help staff members in training to practice speaking French and maintain their French level between training sessions. Today, all employees wishing to speak French in their working environment wear these pins. Employees were made aware of this pin through information sessions and memos. New employees were also informed of the pin during orientation sessions. This initiative helps the French-speaking personnel and those in training feel more comfortable speaking French in their working environment.

A dynamic mentoring project!

The New Brunswick Heart Centre, in collaboration with the Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation (AHSC) department of Organizational Learning, has developed a mentoring project between employees in French training and French or bilingual employees working in the same area. The program encourages both learners and mentors to speak French during working hours. In addition to informal meetings between teams of learners and mentors, weekly language training sessions also take place. A real spirit of camaraderie has developed between the mentors and learners, as well as a healthy rivalry between different teams of learners and mentors in attaining the best results at the final linguistic assessment, which will take place at the end of the project.

A diversified promotional campaign for active service provision!

The Atlantic Health Sciences Corporation (AHSC), through Organizational Learning has launched an awareness campaign on active service provision in both official languages. Its goals were to: 1) make employees more aware of the Health Authorities' efforts to comply with the *Official Languages Act* and the Province of New Brunswick Official Languages Policy and the need to provide services in both official languages; 2) provide tools and resources to facilitate service provision, and 3) support the departments' plans to provide French-language services. To meet those goals, information sessions were held in various facilities of the AHSC.

French-language training for all tastes!

The South-East Regional Health Authority (SERHA) offers free French courses to its employees and board members. Those who are interested in learning French or improving their abilities to speak it have access to French-language training on site, depending on their schedules. Different levels of courses are offered, from beginners to more advanced. Individual one-hour sessions are also available. Approximately 125 participants are presently in training.

Varied services in a Francophone Regional Health Authority...

For several years now, the Beauséjour Regional Health Authority has been offering services in both official languages to its clients. Each reception desk has functional bilingual services capacity; furthermore, services provided include the active offer of services and continuous provision of services in both official languages. On an individual basis, employees who wish to perfect their second language can submit a request to their employer. A translation service is available for dictations of specialists from the Dr. Léon Richard Oncology Centre to ensure a continuum of care to the facility's clients when they return to their regional doctors.

3. Strategies to promote the active offer of services and the continuous provision of services in both official languages

"The Official Languages Act is in a way a master plan or social contract for change in New Brunswick in the area of language rights. Despite specific measures in the Act regarding the obligation to actively offer services and to provide those services effectively in the public's language of choice, the changes in attitudes and behaviour required to attain that objective will not occur at the same rate across the province."

Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick⁷

Improvements achieved in recent years regarding the access and delivery of health services in French and in English in New Brunswick demonstrate a sincere commitment from the province to provide services in the official language chosen by the client or patient. However, there is still work to do in order to ensure services of equal quality are available province-wide. The following suggestions are provided to help regional health authorities promote the provision of services of equal quality:⁸

- **display** procedures used to ensure services are offered in both official languages in **reception areas**;
- **encourage** bilingual staff to wear **identification pins**;
- **display**, as required, **the procedure to obtain available translation or interpretation services** to ensure support in both official languages;
- **raise the staff's awareness level** about the importance of **service of equal quality**, the **active offer** and the **Official Language Act** through presentations, memos, posters, internal newsletters, promotional campaigns, etc. ;
- **prompt employees to inform the client or patient that he is entitled** to services in the official language of his choice;
- **display procedures to follow in the case of complaints** related to the use or implementation of the policy;
- assemble **committees** comprised of members of the community and RHA representatives that will specifically examine **the provision of services of equal quality**;
- **inform employees about moral and ethical responsibilities** related to service of equal quality;
- **encourage immersion or mentoring programs** that will facilitate the learning process of employees who are learning French or English;
- encourage managers to **use employee files to document provision of service of equal quality**;



⁷ Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick, Annual Report of 2004-2005, 2005

⁸ Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick, La Santé en français au Nouveau-Brunswick. Vivre en santé en français (on line): <http://www.saanb.org/santeenfrancais.html>

- encourage managers to **promote language training in their department**;
- **Survey the community** about provision of services of equal quality- set baseline for comparison, identify priorities...;
- keep the **linguistic profiles** of functional teams updated based on the criteria set out in the Language of Service Policy ; and
- ensure new employees **are made aware** of the importance of service of equal quality at the time of orientation.

4. Conclusion

Services of equal quality in both official languages have evolved in recent years in New Brunswick. This improvement was achieved thanks to the implementation of actions and measures designed to educate all health partners and promote services in both official languages, among others.

The provision of services of equal quality in both official languages at the provincial scale will require changes in attitude and behaviour, which will take time. It is therefore important to recognize that an adjustment period will be necessary to provide those services. However, we must collectively ensure that we make every effort to guarantee health services are accessible to all in both official languages. In New Brunswick, accessible health services in both official languages for everyone is a matter of rights, but also a matter of quality and values!

"We have put too much emphasis on a rules-based approach rather than an approach based on values. It is easy to lose sight of a right, and even easier to forget an obligation, however, it is not easy to forget an ingrained value. When you really believe in something, you remain impassioned by it, you live it everyday".
Lucienne Robillard⁹

5. Important resources:

Straight Talk on New Brunswick's Language of Service Policy:
<http://www.gnb.ca/0163/ool-blo/straight-e.asp>

Province of New Brunswick Official Languages Policy:
<http://www.gnb.ca/0163/ool-blo/policy-e.asp>

Official Languages Act: <http://www.gnb.ca/acts/acts/o-00-5.htm>

Commissioner of Official Languages of New Brunswick:
www.languesofficielles.nb.ca

Desjardins, L. (2003). *La santé des francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick : étude entreprise par la Société des acadiens et acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick*. Éditions de la francophonie: Moncton.



⁹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. New Brunswick Federal Council - Symposium on Language of Work (on line): http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/media/ps-dp/2002/1106_e.asp?printable=True