

Report of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs to the Government of Saskatchewan



November 2021

Services for Seniors

Letter of Transmittal

Mr. Todd Goudy
Legislative Secretary, Francophone Affairs Liaison

I am pleased to submit this report for your review, following the February 26, 2021 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs.

On this date, we met with representatives from the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the Ministries of Health and Social Services, and community organizations to discuss access to services in French for seniors in Saskatchewan.

On behalf of the Advisory Committee, I am pleased to present this report. The recommendations within aim to guide the government and the Saskatchewan Health Authority in the improvement and enhancement of services offered to seniors in Saskatchewan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'MDubé', with a stylized, flowing script.

Michel Dubé
Chair, Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs
November 2021

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Introduction

In Saskatchewan, senior services fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, and there has been a minister responsible for seniors since August 2019. This minister is responsible for key issues of interest to seniors, mental health and health in rural and remote regions.

Saskatchewan's healthcare system offers a range of health services under the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Through the Ministry of Social Services, the government also offers a range of services and support programs for seniors. Some programs and services are offered directly by these ministries and the province's health authority, while others are offered by third parties.

The Advisory Committee recognizes the efforts of the two ministries and the Health Authority concerned with services offered to seniors and is encouraged by some projects currently in development. The recommendations in this report aim to build on what completed work has achieved and suggest strategies to improve the services offered to this growing segment of the population.

Recommendations

1. The Francophone Affairs Branch and concerned ministries should work together to translate and update documentation about programs and services for seniors.
2. The Government of Saskatchewan should improve the framework for its duties towards seniors in the short term by creating a central office focused on coordinating programs and services for seniors, and in the medium term by creating a ministry responsible for seniors.
3. The Ministries of Saskatchewan, especially for Health and Social Services, should conduct consultations on programs for seniors in both official languages.
4. The Ministries of Saskatchewan, especially for Health and Social Services, should expand the service offerings for seniors to enable them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.
5. The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority should implement a support policy with programs for informal caregivers.
6. The Ministry of Social Services should engage in dialogue with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise to survey the housing needs of the Fransaskois population.
7. The Saskatchewan Health Authority should support French-speaking health professionals by offering language training that follows the *Café de Paris* model and other continuing education programs.

Advisory Committee Mandate

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan adopted its French-language Services Policy. With this policy, the Government of Saskatchewan committed to “enhancing the services offered to Saskatchewan’s Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community.”¹

The policy is organized according to three areas:

1. Communication;
2. Development and delivery of services; and
3. Consultation.

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs is to advise the Legislative Secretary, Liaison for Francophone Affairs, through the review and analysis of programs and policies to guide the implementation of Saskatchewan’s French-language Services Policy.

Context

Population aging is an ongoing concern in Canada, and the advancing age of the baby boomer generation is accelerating demographic aging. On July 1, 2020, 18% of Canadians were at least 65 years old.² Saskatchewan is no exception, and its Francophone population is older than the Saskatchewan population as a whole. In fact, according to data from the 2016 census, Saskatchewan’s total population that year was 1,083,235 residents, 14.82% of whom were aged 65 and older. One third (33.75%) of people who speak French as a first language were aged 65 and older. This percentage represents more than double that of Anglophones in the same age category, at 13.95%.³

On February 26, 2021, the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs met with officials from the Ministries of Health and of Social Services, and the Saskatchewan Health Authority, as well as representatives from Francophone organizations that work in health and seniors’ services. The goal of the meeting was to determine concrete actions that could be taken by the government to improve services offered to seniors in Saskatchewan.

First, discussions with representatives from community organizations have helped the Advisory Committee members target the needs of Francophone seniors and the challenges they face. Second, this meeting allowed representatives of the two Ministries and the Health Authority involved in the services offerings for seniors to communicate the state of its affairs to the Advisory Committee, and provide updates on their ongoing projects. Following this meeting, the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs formulated seven recommendations.

¹[Government of Saskatchewan French-language Services Policy](#)

² Statistics Canada: Annual Demographic Estimates: Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2020

³ Statistics Canada: Language Highlight Tables, 2016 Census

Programs and services of interest for Francophone seniors

The current challenges for services provided to Francophone seniors are generally comparable to those for Anglophones in Saskatchewan. However, Francophone seniors and representatives from organizations that provide services to Fransaskois seniors unanimously agree on the almost complete lack of government services in French in the province.

The Advisory Committee recognizes that improvements have been made for access to French-language documents of interest to Francophones in the province, but would like to stress that first language use becomes more essential with age. As we age, our ability to communicate in a second language fades, and the lack of access to information in our own language can be a major obstacle to staying physically and mentally healthy and maintaining a good quality of life.

Consequently, it is essential that documents and resources relating to services currently offered to seniors in Saskatchewan be accessible in both official languages.

Recommendation #1

The Francophone Affairs Branch and concerned ministries should work together to translate and update documentation about programs and services for seniors.

Improved coordination of services offered to seniors

The Advisory Committee members recognize the step taken by the government by appointing a minister responsible for issues relating to seniors. However, the provincial organizations advocating to improve the services offered to this segment of the population affirm that they have not observed any changes. Services for seniors are still part of the public services offered to citizens of all ages in Saskatchewan, provided by different ministries and government agencies.

To guarantee the improvement and implementation of better services for seniors, the Advisory Committee would like the province to set up a government structure dedicated solely to seniors' issues. Since this age category continues to grow, it would be even more advantageous to consider the creation of its own ministry.

Recommendation #2

The Government of Saskatchewan should improve the framework for its duties towards seniors in the short term by creating a central office focused on coordinating programs and services for seniors, and in the medium term by creating a ministry responsible for seniors.

Identifying the needs of Francophone seniors

During the Advisory Committee meeting with community representatives, the latter took issue with the lack of information available about the situation of Fransaskois seniors and the lack of awareness within the provincial government about their needs and concerns. The Advisory Committee members deplore the lack of willingness on the part of the provincial ministries to keep in mind the need to offer services for seniors in French. Indeed, the fact that they have conducted consultations solely in English only entrenches the limited availability of bilingual services and further undermines the well-being of seniors whose first language is French.

To better serve Francophone seniors, a collaborative approach between the provincial ministries and the Francophone community is needed. The Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan (RSFS) and the Fédération des aînés Fransaskois (FAF) are two key players in the community that are advocating to improve services for seniors. These organizations would be able to give a good overview of the needs of Francophone seniors and the challenges they face. Consequently, their participation in consultations, strategy development, and French-language service development would guarantee more targeted and suitable interventions.

Recommendation #3

The Ministries of Saskatchewan, especially for Health and Social Services, should conduct consultations on programs for seniors in both official languages.

Aging in place

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the segment of the population aged 65 and older is facing unprecedented growth in Canada in general and in Saskatchewan in particular. The term “Aging in place” means “to remain at home in familiar intergenerational neighbourhoods while maintaining independence, activities, and social lives.”⁴

A national survey conducted in October 2020 on the subject of aging in place and home modifications revealed a disparity between the number of Canadians who would like to age in place and those who feel like they will be able to do so. While 78% of Canadians would like to remain in their current homes, only 26% of Canadians think they will be able to do so. Also, the current Covid-19 crisis has only increased seniors’ desire to remain at home and avoid long-term care homes.⁵

⁴ [Aging in Place: A Saskatchewan Perspective](#)

⁵ Transforming Lives through Home Modification: A March of Dimes Canada National Survey

In Saskatchewan, home care includes palliative, support, and acute care, provided to people who need it to remain at home and maintain their independence. Some of these services are offered at no cost, while others are paid services. People working with seniors in the province unanimously agree that adequate services and adapted programs to help seniors remain in their homes until the end of their lives are almost completely nonexistent. The Advisory Committee members would like to see more initiatives from the government to support “aging in place”, as so many seniors in Saskatchewan want.

Recommendation #4

The Ministries of Saskatchewan, especially for Health and Social Services, should expand the service offerings for seniors to enable them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

Recognizing informal caregivers

Just like a growing number of seniors, Francophones want to keep living in their own homes and cultural communities for as long as possible. However, because of a lack of support for informal caregivers in the province, seniors cannot stay in their own homes and are forced to move to an unknown environment, which leads to challenges like cultural uprooting and language barriers, especially for Francophones in Saskatchewan. Such situations of cultural and social isolation have inevitable consequences on their mental health, quality of life, and well-being.

Support services performed by family members play a critical role in satisfying seniors’ desire to age in place. Contrary to the neighbouring provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, informal caregivers are not recognized in Saskatchewan, and the province does not offer any programs to support people who care for their senior relatives. In addition to the two westward provinces, the Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia governments all recognize informal caregivers and offer support services for them.

The growing needs of Saskatchewanian seniors, whether for transport services, care, or home services, and the right to receive assistance in French are of a sufficient number to justify setting up a policy and strategies to recognize and support informal caregivers in the province.

Recommendation #5

The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority should implement a support policy with programs for informal caregivers.

Housing needs

Although the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provides dwellings to seniors, organizations supporting seniors in Saskatchewan report an ongoing lack of services for high-quality and affordable housing in the province. These needs are exacerbated in the Fransaskois community, which is doubly affected by population aging compared to the Anglophone community.

The future and continuation of the Fransaskois community relies in part on Francophone immigration. To that end, the Advisory Committee would like the government to consider the existence of the unique housing needs of Francophones in the province. Developing adapted strategies is critical, not just to meet the needs of Fransaskois seniors, but also to meet the needs of immigrants who find themselves in precarious income situations.

Recommendation #6

The Ministry of Social Services should engage in dialogue with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise to survey the housing needs of the Fransaskois population.

Training healthcare professionals

In the health sector, the Advisory Committee recognizes the government's efforts, particularly in providing Fransaskois citizens with access to TAO Tel-Aide since December 2020 and in creating a bilingual communications advisor and Francophone projects coordinator position within the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Considering that seniors are more in need of physical and mental health services, it would be best to focus on improving the French communication skills of medical workers in the province. As people age, they tend to fall back on their first language to better express themselves. Conversely, Fransaskois seniors often communicate with their healthcare providers in English to facilitate discussions, but over time, the impact of aging reduces their ability to continue communicating in English. This situation causes patients deprived of the ability to communicate in their own language to feel frustrated and face enormous challenges.

The British Columbia Société Santé en français has organized courses called *Café de Paris*, which are French conversation groups adapted for healthcare professionals who already have some knowledge of French. Once healthcare professionals have been identified in Saskatchewan, the Advisory Committee would like the province to explore offering continuing education for professionals who would like to improve their French communication skills.

Recommendation #7

The Saskatchewan Health Authority should support French-speaking health professionals by offering language training that follows the *Café de Paris* model and other continuing education programs.

Conclusion

The Advisory Committee is encouraged by the actions already taken by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the increased collaboration with the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan. However, considering the major demographic changes observed in the province and across Canada, now is the time to take action. As mentioned above, services for seniors need to be improved and adapted for current challenges. Creating a distinct coordination structure for programs and services for seniors is strongly recommended to then develop new programs for this growing segment of the population.

It would also be ideal to conduct consultations in both official languages of Canada to better understand the specific needs of Fransaskois seniors. Developing French-language programs and services for Francophone seniors would help to fulfill their sociocultural and language needs, which would in turn improve their well-being.

Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs - List of Members

At the February 26 2021, Advisory Committee meeting, the members were as follows:

Michel Dubé (Chair), Prince Albert

Michel Dubé was born in Duck Lake. He has been involved with the Francophone community in Saskatchewan for a long time, notably in community development and education. He was a member of the board of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise between 1999 and 2010, first as the community representative from the Prince Albert district and then as president between 2006 and 2010. Mr. Dubé has been a journalist, consultant and entrepreneur. He has owned several businesses including a produce farm and a fishing lodge. He is now owner of a small store featuring local goods and operates a bison farm north of Prince Albert.

Janice Murphy, Regina

Living in Saskatchewan for almost 20 years, Janice first worked at Collège Mathieu, offering, among other things, computer training for Francophone women in the province. She has volunteered with various Fransaskois associations, including the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises (FPF), the Association communautaire fransaskoise de Gravelbourg (ACFG), and the Association canadienne-française de Regina. She founded a family with her spouse from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, enabling her to experience French education from daycare to Grade 12, and to better understand the challenges and successes of French-speaking newcomers. She currently works as a senior human resources partner with the Crown Corporation, Farm Credit Canada (FCC).

Élizabeth Perreault, Bellevue

Élizabeth Perreault and her husband own and operate a farm near Bellevue. Ms. Perreault has volunteered within many organizations in her community, including the local Francophone association and the Francophone school in her area. She has represented the St-Isidore school district (Bellevue) on the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since 2008.

Joanne Perreault, Hoey

Ms. Joanne Perreault has worked for more than 10 years with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, several years of which as deputy director. Living in Hoey, Ms. Perreault is self-employed, providing consultation and coordination services, and continues to be involved with the Fransaskois community.

Roger Gauthier, Saskatoon

Living in Saskatchewan for the past 40 years, Mr. Gauthier has been actively involved in the Fransaskois community both as a professional and as a volunteer at the local, provincial and national levels in multiple sectors: communications, economics, community development, cultural and artistic development, education, and involvement with parent and early childhood issues. Over the past seven years, his commitment has focused more specifically on improving access to health services in French through his role with the Réseau Santé en français.

Jolanta Bird, Saskatoon

Jolanta Bird is a student, entrepreneur and active community member. As an Aboriginal woman, she is keen to learn about First Nations traditions, notably through her involvement with the Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre Company. She graduated from École Valois in Prince Albert where she was president of the student council. She is active in the Francophone community as vice-president of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise (Fransaskois youth association). As a board member of the youth association, she participated in a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the *Official Languages Act*. She currently studies Business at the University of Saskatchewan and plans to pursue her studies in Law.

Denis Simard, Regina

Denis Simard has been involved in the Canadian Francophonie for many years. A graduate of College Mathieu in Gravelbourg, Denis was Executive Director of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise and of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF). An engaged Fransaskois citizen, he first became involved with the Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the Conseil culturel fransaskois, and the Centre culturel Maillard. He was elected president of the ACF in 2018.

Alpha Barry, Regina

Alpha Barry was born in Senegal, a country famed for its hospitality ("teranga" in Wolof), and has lived in Saskatchewan since 2005. A proud Francophone, husband, and father of three young children, he has been a board member of the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since November 2014, and has been its Chair since 2017. He is also a member of the University of Saskatchewan's Senate, mandated by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to speak on behalf of the school community, from kindergarten to Grade 12. Mr. Barry holds a degree in Business Administration and is a member of Chartered Managers Canada (CIM). He is part of the administrative team at the University of Regina, as the operations manager and project coordinator for French-language health training for La Cité universitaire francophone of Regina.