



Alliance for Healthier Communities
Advancing Health Equity in Ontario

Principles for French Language Health Services in Ontario Health Teams

The [Connecting Care Act, 2019](#) recognizes “the diversity within all of Ontario’s communities and respect[s] the requirements of the [French Language Services Act](#) (FLSA) in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of health care services for Ontario’s French-speaking communities.: This includes in Ontario Health Teams (OHTs).

In order to support OHTs, the Alliance for Healthier Communities and its Francophone Advisory Committee¹ developed the following principles for advancing the health of the Francophone people and communities they serve. By operationalizing these principles, OHTs can ensure that French language health services (FLHS) are planned, designed, delivered, and evaluated appropriately, taking into account the diversity and various intersectional identities within and among Francophone communities in Ontario.

1. Use the expertise of the FLHPEs

Use the expertise of the [French Language Health Planning Entities](#) (FLHPEs) to support French language health services in OHTs, and ensure that they are at your OHT’s decision-making table. There are six FLHPEs mandated by the Ministry of Health to improve access to French Language Health Services. They work with provincial, regional and local partners to build and sustain health services for Ontario’s official-language minority. The FLHPEs can advise and support your OHT in the context of:

- FLHS obligations, including understanding if you are in a region designated under the FLSA.
- The promotion and active offer of FLHS.
- Navigation and coordination of FLHS.
- The identification and designation processes under the FLSA.
- Engaging Francophone communities and co-designing service models.

¹ *The Alliance’s Francophone Advisory Committee is comprised of Francophone and bilingual interprofessional primary health organizations as well as partners from French Language Health Service Planning Entities and the Assemblée de la Francophonie.*

See the [distribution of Entités across the province](#) as well as each of the Entités' websites:

- [Entité 1](#) : Erie St. Clair, South West
- [Entité 2](#): Waterloo Wellington, Hamilton Niagara, Haldimand Brant
- [Entité 3](#): Central West, Mississauga Halton, Toronto Central
- [Entité 4](#): Central, Central East
- [Réseau des services de santé en français de l'Est de l'Ontario](#) (RSSFE, Entité 5): South East, Champlain
- [Réseau du mieux-être francophone du nord de l'Ontario](#) (RMEFNO, Entité 6): North East, North West

Each Ontario Health region also has a French-Language Services regional representative.

2. Leverage existing resources

Leverage existing provincial and local resources and supports for OHTs relating to French Language Services. These resources were developed by health-system partners, and many of them can be found on RISE's webpage, [French Language Services supports for Ontario Health Teams](#). Some of the resources found elsewhere include:

- [Building better patient care and experience for Francophones](#) – a provincial guide highlighting the importance of identifying Francophone patients, including standardized and adapted data-collection tools based on linguistic identity.
- [Free online training course on the active offer of French-language healthcare services](#).
- [Provincial guide on the evaluation of French-language service delivery](#) including sample questions.

3. Ensure meaningful, ongoing Francophone engagement

Ensure Francophone engagement is ongoing and not a check-box exercise.

- Engage meaningfully with Francophone patients, families, caregivers, partner organizations, and communities who represent the diverse Francophone population(s) you serve.
- When engaging, empower them to contribute as partners to decisions about the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services – including but not limited to French-language services.
- Ensure that your local FLHPEs as well as Francophone organizations are at the OHT decision-making tables.
- Consider and make space for intersectionality. Francophone people and communities are diverse, and their identities may overlap with other priority and equity-deserving groups. Ensure that your engagement process is inclusive and addresses multiple barriers.



4. Prioritize services and programs by and for Francophones

Organizations governed and led by Francophones are important for linguistic and cultural safety in the delivery of care for Francophones.

- Ensure that the Francophone representation in OHTs is meaningful and appropriate.
- Work with your local FLHPE to ensure that non-Francophone organizations who offer services in French meet minimum standards and that they receive any guidance they need to deliver care that respects French culture and language.
- Ensure health equity and intersectional lenses are applied throughout the planning and implementation of initiatives, including deliberate attention to Francophone health.

5. Identify your Francophone patients (demand)

Ensure organizations in your OHT are collecting linguistic identifiers for Francophones using the [inclusive definition of Francophone](#). Note that *Preferred Language of Service* is not the same as *Mother Tongue*. Both are mandatory for Alliance-member organizations to collect as part of our sector's common Evaluation Framework and the updated [Health Equity Questionnaire](#) launched in 2024.

- The relevant questions for linguistic identification are presented below:
 - What is your mother tongue?
✎ [a. English; b. French; c. Other (Specify)]
 - If your mother tongue is neither English nor French, in which of Canada's official languages are you more comfortable?
✎ [a. English; b. French]
 - Do you require language interpretation?
✎ [a. Yes; b. No]
 - What language do you feel most comfortable speaking in with your provider?
✎ [Choose all that apply from a list of 50+ languages]
 - In what language would you prefer to read healthcare information?
✎ [Choose all that apply from a list of 35+ languages]
- This should take place in the context of broader socio-demographic and race-based data across OHT partner organizations. [More about our sociodemographic data collection and the Health Equity Questionnaire can be found here.](#)

6. Identify a pathway for a Francophone continuum of care

- Ensure your OHTs identify a pathway and continuum of care for Francophone patients that includes system navigation and care coordination.
- Respect patient choice according to the availability or proximity of services in French.



7. Identify and support the capacity of organizations and individuals who can provide FLS

- Ensure all partners are identifying designated Francophone positions as well as staff members who can provide FLS.
- Ensure that your OHT Human Resource Strategy includes a FLS HR recruitment strategy.

8. Ensure digital Health solutions meet the needs of Francophone patients and providers.

- Do the tools, software and digital resources used by your OHTs have a bilingual capacity?
- Ensure patient portals have capacity in both official languages at minimum.

9. Support advocacy for Francophone Health Equity.

Advocating for the following will help advance health equity for Francophones beyond your OHT:

- Addition of the linguistic identifier to the OHIP card.
 - Francophones have been fighting OHIP cards to include an identifier based on the inclusive definition of *Francophone* ([see #5, above](#)).
 - Including this identifier will facilitate active offer of FLS and the planning and distribution of Francophone and bilingual human resources.
- Ensuring the protection of current and future designations under the *FLSA*.
 - It is necessary to maintain the existing capacity and designation of organizations, services, programs and designated francophone roles in the context of changing health human resource pressures and strategies.

