

Follow-up submitted by Barbara Losier of the Mouvement Acadien des Communautés en Santé du N.-B. (MACS-NB), further to her appearance on May 15, 2023.

Update on the Franco Doc and Franco-Santé projects

The Franco Doc project [2015-2018] identified francophone and francophile students in the 13 English-language medical schools and had a positive impact [see program evaluation by Cathexis - 2017]. The evaluation showed that there are a considerable number of francophone and francophile university and college students interested in improving their French skills. In medicine alone, over 720 francophone and francophile students were identified in the 13 faculties involved in the project. This number is all the more significant given that faculties do not systematically identify the languages spoken by their students, which would help connect them to the resources developed by the French-language healthcare movement and thereby help identify and place francophone doctors and connect them with the needs of the community. More than half of the students identified have participated on an ongoing basis in activities organized by the health networks and, several years after the end of the project, continue to be allies of French-language health and remain connected to their community. These students are keenly interested in working with French medical terminology and getting to know francophone minority communities. The project also served to engage these same faculties of medicine in the importance of French-language health services and helped forge ties with French-language health networks across Canada. The project has also supported successful initiatives, such as the national Ambassadocteurs meetings and the simulated patient language proficiency clinics developed in Saskatchewan.

One anecdote illustrates the impact of this project: several years after participating in French-language networking activities, a doctor was able to help the spouse of an executive director of a French-language health network to give birth in French. The doctor spoke about how important these activities had been to getting her involved in delivering health care in French.

The experience resulted in a promising model that the SSF and the French-language health networks wanted to replicate with other English-language faculties and post-secondary health training programs, targeting new professions: nurses, nursing assistants, speech therapists, social workers, psychologists, pharmacists, occupational therapists and dentists. Opening the initiative to other fields gave rise to the Franco-Santé project. While the Franco Doc project no longer receives Health Canada funding, medical students have continued to be involved in these activities.

The objectives of the Franco-Santé project are to:

- identify francophone or francophile students who, once in the workforce, will be able to deliver health care in French to minority francophones and Acadians;

- educate these students about the concept and importance of active offer of health services in French;
- provide students with learning activities and regular simulation labs; and
- connect post-secondary students, university health faculties and college health programs, and networks to provide mentoring and a link with the field when students undertake internships and start their careers.

This project targets a larger number of students than those involved in the mission of the CNFS, who will also be involved in serving minority francophone and Acadian communities wherever they practise in Canada. The fact that French-language health faculties and programs are not available in all provinces and territories means that young francophones and Acadians are often forced to pursue their post-secondary education in English, resulting in linguistic insecurity once in the field.

Despite the pandemic and the resulting challenges in engaging students and post-secondary institutions, and despite funding smaller than for the Franco Doc project, Franco-Santé has been a resounding success. During 2022-2023, the initiative recruited over 250 students. A variety of activities have been held across the country, including social events such as the Olympiades pour la santé, language capacity-building activities, meetings with francophone healthcare professionals in their field, and presentations on the importance of active offer.

In addition, the project has expanded the pilot project of simulated patient language proficiency clinics, creating a national bank of simulated patients capable of supporting activities organized by the networks in other healthcare fields.

To illustrate how successful it has become, Franco-Santé became a permanent program when the 2023-2028 agreement between Health Canada and the French-language health movement was renewed.