

2 August 2024

Members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages

Senate of Canada

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4

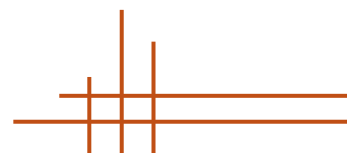
Dear Senators,

Subject: Study matters relating to minority-language health services

For background information, my name is Phiautha Eulodie Dantiste, Director, [Réseau en immigration francophone du Nouveau-Brunswick \(RIFNB\)](#) [IN FRENCH]. The RIFNB is an issue table that brings together 30 organizations (reception and settlement, culture and youth, employment, health education and law and governance) working directly or indirectly with immigrants. As an organization that supports shared francophone immigration work in New Brunswick, we have the duty to advocate for our members, their challenges and their issues. This brings us to today's topic: Minority-language health services with a more focused vision on vulnerable communities, and in our case, this refers to immigrants.

We have the duty to place immigrants in all our reflection and decision-making approaches. We have the duty to consider all aspects of immigrants and to think about all the needs they may face. To strengthen the Francophone Integration Pathway (FIP), we must think about the integration, inclusion and retention of immigrants, and health is an indispensable factor.

We are aware that immigrants need some stability in their day-to-day lives to ensure their effective integration and proper inclusion; in other words, they have to feel safe, understood and represented. The document on multisectoral action clearly states that “[w]hile the medical care system is an important element of our health, most of our health is shaped by the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, age, and play – known as the social determinants of health.” To improve health services, there is need to start working upstream and not just look at offers in hospitals. Focus on prevention.



## At the community level

To do so, there is need to think about:

- Improving promotion of the [determinants of health](#) [IN FRENCH]
- Better tools for community organizations
- Empowering and including communities

Immigrants become vulnerable when they immigrate. They understood the health system in their countries of origin and spoke the same language as service providers and the majority of the community; they were familiar with system vicissitudes to get into housing and had an entire network behind them. They do not have any of these reference points when they arrive in a foreign country and have to first turn to the community to adapt. A community that is unfortunately not adequately equipped to support them because communities themselves are not knowledgeable about the determinants of health. This means that community organizations must be able to reach the population to better inform and better educate them. Improving promotion of the determinants of health could result in a more educated population, and this would lead to better health prevention and the health system would be less stifled.

However, community organizations do not have adequate tools to reach communities. They lack financial and human resources. Community organizations are responsible for reaching many sectors and for meeting objectives which do not necessarily match available resources. Community organizations are often understaffed, and personnel are overburdened and required to handle the work of multiple people. The result of this is that individuals have no time to help people fully and stress and anxiety increase on both sides; immigrants feel they are not well informed and make efforts to look for alternative resources and personnel try to provide as many services to as many people as possible.

Nevertheless, we often hear extraordinary accounts about individuals in some communities coming together and opening their doors to welcome newcomers, giving their time to show them around and learn about their neighbourhoods and sharing their material goods so that newcomers can settle with as few challenges as possible. All this goes to show that communities are only waiting for opportunities to take action and contribute with alternative solutions. If they have all the tools they need and receive adequate support, they will be able to contribute more broadly and this could result in a more educated and healthier community and in turn, newcomers that are better supported and better educated and who have fewer health problems, individuals who are integrated and included, and a higher rate of retention.

## System level

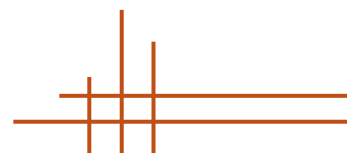
Let us take a brief look at some numbers. In 2023, 32.5% of immigrants reported they had trouble navigating the health system, 6.7 % reported they had a language barrier communicating with a health professional, and 13.9 % reported they had skipped a doctor-recommended medical test, treatment or aftercare because of the cost. These data are from the website of the [New Brunswick Health Council](#). The system is overburdened and has been pushed beyond its limits, hospital emergency rooms are always full and wait times can be nearly 20 hours. Devising ways to decongest the system further would be a solution that can be looked at through the following points:

- Recognizing qualifications
- Promoting available services
- Strengthening communities
- Better tools for community organizations
- Focusing on multisectoral actions

A 2022 report by [ICI Nouveau-Brunswick](#) noted that New Brunswick has a shortage of nearly 200 doctors and 800 nurses. This number has no doubt gone up, bearing in mind the large immigration wave over the last two years. Immigrants who come to this country include many health professionals that are already job ready. However, the process of recognizing qualifications is often difficult and slippery and it ends up turning seasoned doctors into taxi drivers and basic attendants in retirement homes. My point here is not to denigrate these positions, which are also all worthy and important in our society, but to show that we lose knowledge and individuals that could currently be offering services and saving lives directly. There is a pressing need to devise ways to expedite and standardize the recognition of qualifications so that these professionals can enter the job market faster. Most of these professionals are multilingual with French and English in addition to their mother tongue. Many more patients could have the opportunity to receive health services in French and even in their mother tongue in the best of cases.

On the flip side, these professionals will be used to their full potential and will be more fulfilled individuals. A bit more focus on the determinants of health would address two determinants: income and social status and employment and working conditions. This will have a more positive impact on their overall health and result in the retention of immigrant health care professionals and other professionals in the health care system.

With such a saturated system, services offered are not promoted. A significant share of the population is not aware of all the available services and/or their benefits and importance in terms of prevention. I am referring here to holistic health care services such as osteopathy,



chiropractic care, massage therapy, etc. Immigrants often avoid seeking these services and believe that the cost is too high and that the practice is not effective, unaware that insurance may cover a proportion of the cost; in some cases, they think that it is better to go to the hospital. Mental health service is one of the levels most impacted by this because this area already has a shortage and wait lists are really long; as most immigrants are very resilient, they look at their negative outcomes as a step in integrating into the society. As a result, they experience these destabilizing moments for as long as humanly possible and this just makes the situation worse. The result is people living with constant anxiety and stress, which cause visible physical health problems and the next step will be a visit to the hospital to treat the visible effects without really addressing the real cause of problems.

Multisectoral action is another very important and crucial point. Immigrants are human beings with complex individual needs, as the determinants of health show. It is vitally important for various authorities to take a deeper look at their collaboration in order to have more effective outcomes. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has the mandate to increase the number of immigrants in the country; however, with effective collaboration with the Department of Health Canada, it could break down its recruitment better to address the actual needs of the society in terms of the health care workforce.

In conclusion, immigration can be a significant part of the solution to address health care system needs; however, it should be used wisely and gain from the skills we recruit. The community is also an essential point for a better health care system. With support and the right tools, immigrants will be better included and there would be a remarkable increase in the retention rate, including in smaller communities. It is important to use the resources we have to their full potential.

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