

**Brief submitted by Collège La Cité as part
of the study on minority-language health
services**

**Submitted to the Standing Senate
Committee on Official Languages**

Ottawa, October 30, 2024

Recommendations

1. Fair treatment in the implementation of the *Official Languages Act* (OLA)

Pursuant to the new *Official Languages Act* (OLA), we recommend that federal government departments and agencies promote an equitable approach tailored to the specific realities of anglophone and francophone minority communities. This includes measures to protect and promote French, as well as to advance access to quality education in the minority language, from early childhood education to post-secondary education.

2. Increased and targeted investments by Health Canada in French-language post-secondary institutions

We recommend that Health Canada increase investments in French-language post-secondary institutions. This increased support would make it possible to develop creative, tailored solutions to meet the unique needs in minority communities, such as when small group sizes result in prohibitive costs. We also recommend adding targets or guidelines for initial training and career development, as well as mentorship for students and on-the-job coaching for professional staff.

3. Post-graduation work permit (PGWP) eligibility

We recommend that the federal government adapt the eligibility criteria for the post-graduation work permit (PGWP) for international students enrolled in francophone minority post-secondary institutions. The criteria should take into account the unique realities of these institutions and the importance of their role in supporting francophone communities. In particular, exemptions could be established, or flexibility could be provided, to encourage the integration of francophone graduates in the Canadian labour market, which would help overcome skilled labour shortages in various sectors, including health care.

4. Consultation with minority language communities

We recommend that federal funding agreements include not only language clauses, but also requirements for meaningful consultations with minority language communities and publicly funded post-secondary institutions. This would ensure that resources are tailored more appropriately to the specific needs of these communities and would prevent unintended negative effects and actions that seem inconsistent with OLA requirements.

5. Promotion of health research in minority communities

We recommend that national strategies be implemented to promote academic (university/institute) and applied (college) health research in French. These strategies should include project evaluation criteria that take into account the realities of francophone communities. Applied research at colleges and academic research at universities on health in French, particularly in minority settings, must be recognized as a priority to meet the specific needs of these populations.

Brief from Collège La Cité as part of the study on minority-language health services

Collège La Cité would like to thank the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages for its invitation to appear or to submit a brief, and for its invaluable interest in minority-language health services in Canada.

For the purposes of this brief, La Cité will focus on three topics of interest to the Committee: the inclusion of language clauses in federal health transfers, the shortage of health-care professionals in public or private institutions, and the needs of francophone post-secondary institutions outside Quebec in terms of recruitment, training and support for future graduates in health-care disciplines.

La Cité

As the largest French-language college of applied arts and technology in Ontario, La Cité's clientele includes over 7,250 students and approximately 20,493 learners in adult education and corporate training. This clientele is spread across seven schools and institutes that offer over 140 programs and training courses with experienced teachers and state-of-the-art facilities.

Our programs foster authentic learning in a stimulating environment designed to meet market needs. Firmly rooted in eastern Ontario and Ottawa, where our main campus is located, La Cité also has a skilled trades institute in Orleans and satellite campuses in Hawkesbury and Toronto, where we offer innovative services in partnership with local employers. Our students are primarily from Ontario, Quebec and the rest of Canada. We also have a large international student body from Haiti, Africa and Western Europe, among other places.

Since September 2024, a new Bachelor of Science in Nursing has complemented the education programs offered at our Institut des sciences de la santé et de la vie (ISSV), which also offers an Honours Bachelor of Science in Biotechnology, as well as 13 other health and wellness programs. One of the ISSV's flagship programs was developed in collaboration with the Montfort Hospital in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques—the only one of its kind in French-speaking Ontario.

Graduates of the new four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program will join the approximately 850 students who graduated from one of La Cité's health and wellness programs between 2019–20 and 2023–24.

Numerous professional and community partnerships in Ottawa, in eastern Ontario, across the province and elsewhere in francophone minority communities in Canada provide students with the opportunity to benefit from enriching and authentic learning experiences. Mindful of the needs of its community, La Cité has set up optical and dental care services available to the public at its Ottawa campus. The college also provides services in the community through partnerships. For example, at the request of the Wabano Centre in Ottawa, students in the optician program serve the local Indigenous community.

Fundamental consideration

To address the topics of interest stipulated at the beginning of this brief, we will begin with a crucial point that came up repeatedly in the Senate Committee's deliberations. As Dr. Denis Prud'homme, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Moncton, said at the meeting of April 8, 2024:

For francophones, asking to receive health services in French is not a whim; it can save your life.

It is important for La Cité to frame its arguments accordingly. It goes beyond language rights, public policy and intergovernmental relations. It is about serving a community to the best of our ability to protect and promote its most valuable asset: health.

Many studies on the issue tend to show that living in a minority setting can be a determinant of health, thus the need for language- and culture-tailored education in the health-care field. Similarly, not having access to health care in their first language can negatively impact an individual's health.

Including language clauses in federal health transfers

Promoting and defending French and English bilingualism in Canada is fundamentally the responsibility of the federal government. Including language clauses in federal health transfers is necessary because it provides some protection for today and tomorrow at a time when the francophone minority is gradually shrinking across the country and the health-care sector is experiencing multiple labour shortages, not to mention skyrocketing costs.

In concrete terms, we believe that these clauses allow the federal government to stimulate necessary investments so that linguistic minorities can have equitable access to health-care services in their language by providing provinces and territories with an incentive to provide health-care services to their linguistic minorities. Research also tends to show that access to services in French, including in the crucial area of health care, helps a minority community preserve its language and ensure its vitality. When francophone staff provide health-care services in French, they become aware of the importance of the language for clients and the community, and at the same time they make a professional and personal contribution to La Francophonie.

Shortage of health-care professionals in public and private institutions

All francophone stakeholders in Ontario and across Canada agree that there is a labour shortage in health care, as demonstrated by many research reports and evidence given before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages.

As Dr. Bernard Leduc, Previous President and CEO of Montfort Hospital in Ottawa, said:

The human resources crisis in health is a perfect storm, unfortunately entirely predictable. I'll quickly give you some numbers.

In 2009, the Canadian Nurses Association published a report predicting a shortage of 60,000 registered nurses by 2022. A study published in 2018 estimated this number at 117,600 in 2030. That was prior to the pandemic, so you can imagine the scope of the problem. We note a considerable decline in human resources as compared with service-related needs.

The ratio of nurses per 1,000 seniors fell from 59 in 2013 to 52 today. A similar decline was observed among family physicians and specialists.

We saw historical vacancy rates in 2022-23 between 18% and 25%, depending on the profession, and those vacancy rates are equivalent to 13,000 full-time positions. The sick leave rate increased to 17% in 2021-22, compared to an average of 3% over the previous five years.

La Cité is trying to address this shortage by offering a variety of health programs using creative and sustainable delivery models that aim to meet its clientele's needs as much as possible. For example, since 2022 La Cité has successfully expanded its "off-site living classroom" model to its Practical Nursing program. In partnership with Hawkesbury General Hospital (HGH), which is facing staff recruitment and retention challenges in that area, La Cité is currently paving the way for a second cohort (2022 and 2023). This approach involves offering theoretical training remotely, while practical learning, laboratories and internships happen within HGH and at the Prescott and Russell Residence.

A report prepared on behalf of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario (AFO) regarding post-secondary opportunities in Ontario noted the following: "We believe that French-language post-secondary institutions are well suited to labour market needs. In particular, graduates have better employment rates six months after graduation than their counterparts. It appears that this labour market demand for francophone graduates will remain steady or increase over the next few years. The main jobs requiring French at work normally require post-secondary training and, among the 10 occupations with the most job opportunities in French in Ontario, the majority are in the health care, education and IT sectors—occupations that typically require post-secondary training."¹[TRANSLATION]

In its 2023 report, the Ontario Ministry of Francophone Affairs stated: "Immigration is central to increasing the Francophone workforce. Ontario is working with the federal government to increase Francophone immigration to Ontario. In 2022, Ontario reached its 5% Francophone immigration target for the first time. Of the total number of newcomers to Ontario, 5.3%, or 9,760 people, were Francophone." Similarly to the province, La Cité must rely on international students to support its programming and meet the growing needs of the community. It should also be noted that the federal target for francophone immigration has been increased to 8.5% of total immigration to Canada.

La Cité had high hopes for the amendments to the *Official Languages Act* aimed at enhancing the vitality of anglophone and francophone minority communities in Canada; protecting and promoting French; and strengthening opportunities for francophone and anglophone minorities to receive high-quality education in their own language from early childhood to post-secondary education.

However, the January 22 announcement by Marc Miller, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC), raised serious concerns. He announced a cap on study permits, reducing the number of approved permits by 35% across Canada and by 50% in Ontario. At that time, no specific measures were planned to mitigate the disproportionate effects on francophone minority institutions and communities. La Cité had to rely on the province's intervention to maintain its number of international francophone students for the 2024–25 year, even though the resulting uncertainty and delays led to a 15% drop in that student population. La Cité remains deeply concerned about the long-term impacts.

In addition, recent changes to the eligibility criteria for post-graduation work permits (PGWPs) may exclude nearly 75% of La Cité's international students—including in health-care and wellness programs and several other areas that will have an impact on the services provided to francophone communities. This measure could also make college studies less attractive to a clientele that is already difficult to recruit from minority communities.

Unfortunately, the new eligibility criteria, which are being applied in the same way for students in majority and minority settings, do not take into account the unique challenges faced by francophone communities and the educational institutions that serve them. To give just one example, the ratio of

¹*Étude sur les études postsecondaires en Ontario*, Final Report, Jonathan Naisby, Marie-Ève Pépin, Matthieu Brennan [available in French only].

offers of admission to actual enrolments is considerably lower for international francophone students. This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that French-speaking countries often have fewer financial resources than the countries where a large portion of Canada's English-speaking institutions' students come from.

La Cité therefore readily supports what Martin Normand, recently appointed President and CEO of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC), said when he appeared before the Senate Committee: "Today, the ACUFC wishes to reiterate that it is extremely concerned about this cap, as are its members. We believe that IRCC erred in setting this cap by failing to take into consideration the new commitments incumbent upon federal institutions under the modernized version of the *Official Languages Act*."

Needs of French-language post-secondary institutions in minority communities in terms of recruitment, training and support for future graduates

We will now move on to the recruitment, training and support needs of post-secondary institutions in minority communities.

La Cité commends the federal government's efforts in recent years to support post-secondary training in minority communities, particularly through the Consortium national de formation en santé. La Cité received over \$5.6 million in investments between 2019–20 and 2023–24, which allowed it to offer 17 health care and social services programs in Ontario in areas that are critical to communities, sought-after by students and essential to our recruitment efforts. For example, these investments have made it possible to purchase state-of-the-art equipment, arrange placements for interns in remote areas that are often underserved and compensate them financially, as well as develop educational resources.

Another important aspect is that these programs make it possible to train and educate students and provide them with appropriate resources to promote the active offer of health-care services in French over the long term. As we mentioned at the beginning of this brief, active offer tailored to clients' needs is first and foremost a health-care issue rather than a language issue.

Active offer is based on two essential aspects that deserve financial and public policy support: research and training. The results of a research study published in 2017 on active offer, its scope and its determinants show the same thing and reflect the need for initial and ongoing training. "The results demonstrate a strong link between perceived organizational support and individual behaviours when it comes to active offer. With equal organizational support, the individual characteristics associated with a greater propensity to demonstrate active offer behaviours include active offer training, identity affirmation and proficiency in French." [TRANSLATION]² La Cité would therefore welcome corresponding federal support, and we believe all French-language minority post-secondary institutions would as well.

Earlier, we discussed language clauses in federal transfers. La Cité is of the opinion that language clauses could also be accompanied by conditions or guidelines that would, for example, provide incentives for part of the funding to go toward applied research, work placements or services to the community, which are critical areas in health care that are often overlooked or underfunded in the public sector.

² Savard, J., Casimiro, L., Benoît, J., Bouchard, P. (2017). *Les comportements favorables à l'offre active, leur mesure et leurs déterminants* (Chapter 12). In: Marie Drolet, Pier Bouchard and Jacinthe Savard (eds.). *Accessibilité et offre active : Santé et services sociaux en contexte linguistique minoritaire*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press. 415 pages.

Below are two examples illustrating this need.

Providing workplace internships is quite a juggling act, given the small number of potential institutions to accommodate French-speaking students and the lack of funding to establish a permanent structure that would ensure high-quality mentorship and succession planning. This structure could also conceivably accommodate on-the-job professional development needs to better prepare staff to mentor interns in a francophone or bilingual work environment in the health-care field.

In terms of applied research, La Cité is proud to have collaborated with the Jules-Léger Centre Consortium (a school serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students, among others) in developing Dico LSQ, an app that supports students, parents and the community in learning Quebec Sign Language. This tool allows people in minority situations who are hard of hearing to communicate in French through sign language, including in health-care settings.

We readily recognize that technological advances are undeniably providing opportunities in terms of the offer of services to francophone clients in the many under-served regions of Ontario. We posit that applied research is ideal for supporting businesses and organizations in developing tools and services, or for going about providing health services in French.

For example, we believe that research into developing innovations, tools and resources in telehealth is an important avenue for increasing access to health services in French.

This brings us to another important point, which is that health-care tools developed in French, regardless of context, must be adapted to the target audience. More specifically, if tools or resources are not developed in French at the outset, they should be translated and tested with the target audience to ensure cross-cultural adaptation.

In fact, even if the terminology is accurate, if stakeholders and the intended audience are not familiar with the terminology, the tool will not be effective. Similarly, if stakeholders and the target audience are not familiar with the technology used or they do not receive proper support, the tool may not be as useful as it could be. Comments were made to the Senate Committee that illustrate this point: a significant proportion of nursing students would rather take their certification exam in English, because they are unfamiliar with the French terminology in the exam and have access to far fewer resources to prepare for it.

Of course, there are training strategies that help reduce these barriers and meet the needs of francophone communities. Examples include training in living classrooms or distance learning courses that can use laboratories in the community. As with work placements, however, implementing these initiatives requires considerable human and financial resources.

We will briefly discuss professional development, which is an under-served area that La Cité would be pleased to explore if funding were forthcoming. It would allow La Cité to develop training tailored to the requirements of professional health-care environments and to offset the additional costs associated with smaller numbers.

In conclusion, we recognize that, overall, La Cité benefits from an environment conducive to its growth, even though it must constantly be agile and creative in its programming and finances to serve its student population and the community.

That is why we think it is essential that funding agreements include language clauses, that the profound impact of health-care staff shortages in minority communities lead to equitable solutions, and that the

federal government recognize that the needs of francophone minority communities require interventions in terms of training, ongoing professional development and institutional mentorship.

It is a matter of equitable treatment—not to be confused with equal treatment—and of maintaining the vitality of francophone minority communities.

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