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Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages
Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 0A4

Subject: Study on healthcare services in the minority language

Dear Members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages:

I am writing in response to your invitation to present Horizon Health Network's position in relation to the study on healthcare services provided in Canada's two official languages. Although I am unable to appear in person before your committee, I would like to share my comments with you in writing.

Horizon Health Network is one of two regional health authorities in New Brunswick and is a significant employer in the province with over 15,000 employees, including physicians. Horizon operates 12 hospitals and more than 100 medical facilities, clinics and offices spread across four zones (Fredericton and Upper River Valley, Saint John, Moncton, and Miramichi), covering nearly two thirds of New Brunswick, part of the land traditionally known as Wabanaki Territory.

Horizon provides services ranging from acute and specialized care to community-based health services. Our primary care system is comprised of a number of facilities and services, including community health centres, clinics, public health services, community hospitals, as well as addictions and mental health services.

With a collaborative team approach to offering services in English and French, Horizon delivers sustainable, safe and quality healthcare services to residents of New Brunswick, as well as northern Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. We are also committed to improving services for Indigenous individuals living within and outside First Nation communities.

Horizon provides major critical and trauma services and is responsible for unique programs such as:

- NB Heart Centre
- NB Organ and Tissue Program
- NB Perinatal Health Program
- NB Stem Cell Transplantation Program
- NB Trauma Program
- Operational Stress Injury Clinic
- Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Unit

As you know, government institutions in New Brunswick are subject to New Brunswick's *Official Languages Act*. For Horizon, this means that all members of the public have the right to communicate with Horizon and receive services in the official language of their choice. Horizon must ensure that appropriate measures are taken to make it known to members of the public that services are available in the language of their choice, and Horizon must also ensure that all postings, publications and documents intended for the general public are in both official languages.

Horizon has taken all measures to ensure that these legal requirements are respected. Horizon also values ensuring equal access to quality healthcare and delivering quality person-centred care that is safe, fair, equal and just.

Over the years, Horizon has developed a robust framework that includes policies, procedures, training, and tools to ensure service delivery in both official languages. This framework is designed to support and guide employees with the end goal of providing consistent delivery of services in the public's official language of choice.

This framework includes:

- Official Languages Policy
- Procedures on:
 - Determining language needs for vacant positions
 - Managers working towards an ideal "Linguistic Profile – Team Approach"
 - Developing a contingency plan
- Training:

- Mandatory eLearning program for all employees (included in the new employee orientation package)
- Mandatory eLearning program for all people leaders (including 4 modules building Awareness, Preparedness, Measurement, and Process Improvement)
- Language Training:
 - Formal group in-class language training
 - Informal language tutoring sessions (to accommodate varied schedules of healthcare workers)
- Tools:
 - Automated real-time linguistic profiles
 - Learning metrics (eLearning modules, language training, tutoring, etc.)
 - Key phrases quick access tools
 - Contingency plan quick access tools
 - Online language resources
 - Employee intranet resource page
 - Maturity Index
- Metrics on the provision of the Active Offer:
 - Data collection project on the provision of the active offer using the mystery shopper concept (2014 to 2017)
 - New data collection project underway. This will consist of internal audits conducted by managers. The intent is to create accountability, to provide the opportunity for “teaching moments,” and to reward and recognize employees who provide the active offer consistently.
 - Data collected by the New Brunswick Health Council in their acute care survey
- Processes:
 - Official Languages complaints:

Each complaint received from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages or directly from a patient or member of the public is investigated thoroughly by the Official Languages Team. A follow-up on the complaint is conducted with the manager and employees involved. Remedial measures are implemented to avoid reoccurrence. All data collected during these investigations is recorded in Horizon’s incident management system for tracking purposes.
- Community Engagement:
 - Francophone Liaison Committee and local subcommittees

- Partnership with the Société Santé et Mieux-être en français du Nouveau-Brunswick
- Liaison with the local francophone community centre
- Liaison with the multicultural associations and newcomers' associations
- Liaison with the Mouvement acadien des communautés en santé du Nouveau-Brunswick
- Translation and interpretation services (when appropriate and needed)

Horizon has a dedicated Official Languages Team comprised of one regional director and eight employees: four official languages advisors, three language tutors and one administrative support position.

Despite all the great work that Horizon has done over the years to ensure the organization is equipped with the framework and tools it needs to succeed in providing services in both official languages, our organization still has challenges to overcome.

As previously mentioned, Horizon is spread across almost two thirds of the province. However, these geographical areas are areas where francophones are living in a minority situation. Francophones living in areas such as Saint John, Fredericton, and Miramichi account for a small percentage of the total population of these areas. This makes recruiting bilingual staff in these areas especially difficult.

Since 2021-2022, Horizon has access to data on the language capacity of its staff through the automated linguistic profile tool. Here is a snapshot of our average numbers of bilingual staff based on their first language for the last fiscal year. This is an average for all zones combined and does not include physicians.

	French (primary language)	French (second language)	Total number of employees
HORIZON	851	1444	14995
	5.7%	9.6%	15.3%

Recruitment in healthcare is challenging without having to consider language requirements. Recruiting bilingual staff who speak both official languages is especially challenging. There are many contributing factors that are outside of Horizon's control. The demographic distribution of the population is a challenge. The location of academic institutions has an impact on where graduates decide to pursue their careers and establish their lives. The efficacy of the immersion program and the assimilation of French-speaking families all have impacts on our current and future workforces.

Students aspiring to become physicians can now choose to study in New Brunswick in either French or English. There are limitations in the fields in which they can currently stay in New Brunswick to complete their residency. Currently, graduates of medical school can pursue their residency locally in internal medicine, family medicine and psychiatry. This means that Horizon and its counterpart, Vitalité Health Network need to work hard at trying to bring these individuals back to the province to practise here.

It would be beneficial to our future workforce if academic programs included linguistic and cultural competency training in their curriculum. As they enter our workforce, our in-house training would serve as a reminder to what they have already learned.

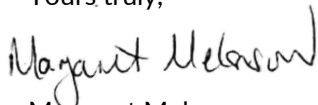
In areas where bilingual healthcare staff are scarce and extremely difficult to recruit, it would be beneficial to explore what role technology could play in providing interpretation services to ensure that the public is able to communicate in their language of choice. Horizon currently provides telephone and video interpretation for over 240 languages, including sign language. Current legislation in New Brunswick does not recognize interpretation as a service of equal quality, so it is only used by Horizon employees as a last resort for patients requiring services in French. We believe that interpretation services should be used when no bilingual staff is immediately available to provide quality care, ensure patient safety and improve patient outcomes.

In summary, Horizon has developed a solid framework to support the delivery of services in both official languages. The areas that Horizon would benefit from additional resources, funding and support are the following:

- Improving the efficacy of New Brunswick's immersion program, thus increasing the pool of potential bilingual candidates
- Enhancing the academic programs by adding linguistic and cultural competency training so that the future workforce is already aware of the need for and importance of providing care that is linguistically and culturally adapted to the needs of the public.
- Providing funding for dedicated recruitment resources focused on recruiting hard to fill positions.
- Providing dedicated funding and resources to build better partnerships with the linguistic minorities we serve.
- Providing dedicated funding and resources to gather data on the needs specific to the minority groups so that program planning can be more targeted on the right needs at the right time in the right place.
- Providing dedicated funding and resources to maximize telemedicine and modern technologies to provide care to patients in their language of choice.

In closing, I want to thank the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages for providing Horizon with this opportunity to share our work and our challenges, and to share what supports may contribute to improving access to healthcare services in both official languages in our province. Horizon remains open to further dialogue as this study continues. Horizon is committed to meeting all legal requirements under the *Official Languages Act* and values the vital role that language plays in the quality of services we provide, thus minimizing patients risks, improving patient outcomes, and ensuring person centred care.

Yours truly,



Margaret Melanson

President and CEO, Horizon Health Network

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