



Développement économique,  
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*Affaires acadiennes et francophones*

C.P. 58, Wellington  
Île-du-Prince-Édouard  
Canada C0B 2E0

*Acadian and Francophone Affairs*

PO Box 58, Wellington  
Prince Edward Island  
Canada C0B 2E0

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

May 22, 2024

**Subject: Study on health care services in the minority language**

Dear Members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages:

I am writing in response to your letter of January 31 regarding the study on health care services in the minority language. Although I am unable to appear before your committee as part of this study, I would like to share my comments with you in writing.

The Government of Prince Edward Island is deeply committed to providing services in French, including in the health care sector. The Government of Prince Edward Island supports the province's official language minority community. Furthermore, the Prince Edward Island *French Language Services Act* is a testament to our government's commitment to the French language and the Acadian and francophone community.

Thanks to our numerous consultations with the province's Acadian and francophone community, particularly through the Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee, the Société acadienne et francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard and the Réseau de Santé en français, we know that health services in French are a key priority for the community.

The Government of Prince Edward Island is continually working to improve health services in French through a variety of initiatives. For example, the use of bilingual health cards allows our government to collect linguistic data on the use of health care services by francophone Prince Edward Islanders, which enables us to take into account the evolving needs of the Acadian and francophone community when planning health care programs and services.

Prince Edward Island's primary care delivery model is evolving, and initiatives are being taken to ensure that this new reality considers the needs of the province's francophone population. Significant steps have been taken to expand home care and long-term care services in French in our province. A French-language home care pilot project is underway in Prince County, and work is currently being done to expand this project into Kings County. Bilingual households have also been put in place in the Summerset, Maplewood and Beachgrove long-term care facilities.

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Tél./Tel: 902 854 7446 gov.pe.ca

Télec./Fax: 902 854 7255

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Language training and support initiatives for health care professionals are also being implemented. Health PEI has online training available on active offer to health care professionals throughout the province. A project to combat linguistic insecurity is underway in Prince County, which enables bilingual employees to use their French-language skills to care for their patients. In addition, our government recently announced a reimbursement program for English tests for registered nurses and licenced practical nurses. This program will mitigate financial barriers for health care professionals trained in French who must meet the language proficiency requirements of their association.

The Government of Prince Edward Island also designated the 211 telephone service, which provides assistance to connect with social, government, health and other types of services, and the 811 Telehealth service under the *French Language Services Act* to ensure that services continue to be provided in French and to ensure active offer. These services illustrate the potential of leveraging technology to provide additional services in French. Opportunities for collaboration on that front offer solutions not only to mitigate the challenges associated with the availability of bilingual human resources, but also to improve accessibility for francophone Prince Edward Islanders.

We have seen steady growth in designated services, bilingual employees and designated bilingual positions in the health care sector. While we are not immune to recruitment and retention challenges in the health care sector, our province is relying on innovative recruitment practices through our bilingual recruitment coordinator and exploring recruitment opportunities as part of our Francophone Immigration Strategic Action Plan.

Our numerous collaborations with the federal government have been fruitful, including in the health care sector. They have contributed tremendously to the vitality of Price Edward Island's Acadian and francophone community, to its rich heritage and to the French language in our province. I can assure you that Prince Edward Island will continue to work on French-language health care services, and I look forward to the results of your study on this matter.

Sincerely,

[signed]

The Honourable Gilles Arsenault  
Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade  
Minister Responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs