

Official Languages Report

September 2013



Overview

New Brunswick is Canada's only officially bilingual province. Its unique status is part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter states that English and French are the official languages of New Brunswick, and that both Anglophone and Francophone communities in the province have equality of status and equal rights and privileges.

As an officially bilingual province, government services must be provided in both of these languages. The *Official Languages Act* of New Brunswick describes the rights of citizens and the obligations of the government and organizations. According to *The Act*:

- Members of the public have the right to communicate with any institution and to receive its services in the official language of their choice.
- An institution shall ensure that members of the public are able to communicate with and to receive its services in the official language of their choice.
- An institution shall ensure that appropriate measures are taken to make it known to members of the public that its services are available in the official language of their choice.
- Institutions shall publish all postings, publications and documents intended for the general public in both official languages.
- The Province and its institutions are responsible for ensuring that all services offered to the public by third parties on their behalf are delivered in both official languages.

Horizon Health Network (Horizon) is committed to providing patients, their family and all members of the public with quality health care in the official language of your choice. At Horizon, we know that the basis for good health care is good communication and have taken many initiatives to improve access to services for both linguistic communities.

The Official Languages Strategic Plan, implemented to enhance the provision of bilingual services in all of our facilities, is a testament to that commitment. It was developed in collaboration with the Francophone Liaison Committee and aligns with the Provincial Health Plan. Its goals include:

- Promoting cultural awareness and understanding
- Ensuring quality health services in both official languages
- Continual enhancement of Horizon's ability to provide bilingual services

Horizon supports a team approach to ensure the best possible health-care services for patients from both linguistic communities. This means that although not all of our employees are bilingual; our staff will work as a team to serve its clients in their official language of choice.

Some years ago, the Department of Health requested that each Regional Health Authority complete a linguistic profile. The following chart outlines the profiles for each area.

Area	Date of Linguistic Profile	Percentage of Bilingual Staff
Fredericton	2008	28.83%
Miramichi	August 2008	21.99%
Moncton	May 2007	44%
Saint John	March 2011	13.63%

As part of its 'rattrapage' initiative, the Department of Health recently provided Horizon with funding of \$750,000 over five years, or \$150,000 annually. With this funding Horizon must identify and implement "rattrapage" initiatives, which will improve health-care services to its minority Francophone population.

To that end, Horizon has initiated a review of its Official Languages Strategic Plan in collaboration with the Horizon Francophone Liaison Committee. The plan will assist in the realignment of priorities, which are to continue to support employee and non-employee personnel with the tools needed to fulfill their language requirements, to build awareness among staff members of Horizon's obligation regarding *The Official Languages Act* and to improve the accessibility of health services in both official languages.

Accomplishments

Since the development of the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan, a number of initiatives have been introduced including the development and implementation of an e-Learning program on the Active Offer, which was completed by over 4,500 employee and non-employee personnel. This e-Learning program, implemented in November 2011, describes what constitutes a proper active offer of services, gives the reasons why employees must make the active offer, explains what to do when they can not converse in the chosen language (contingency plans) and supplies phrases in French that employees can practice.

The Official Languages Contingency Plan e-learning program was launched in April 2013. The program assists managers in ensuring that their unit or department is capable of serving patients and members of the public in their official language of choice even when the employee in question cannot speak the chosen language, or when there are no bilingual employees working at a given time in the department. In other words, bilingual employees are identified within the department as well as other neighboring departments. This allows the employee to access a bilingual employee without undue delay in the delivery of services.

Horizon has also published an information pamphlet on Horizon's commitment to the delivery of services to patient, their families and members of the public, in their official language of choice. The pamphlet, as well as other useful information, can be found on Horizon's Official Languages Website.

Offering quality health services in both official languages

OUR OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMITMENT

Because it's the right thing to do!

Horizon Health Network is committed to providing you, your family and all members of the public with quality health care in the official language of your choice. Our *Official Languages Strategic Plan*, implemented to enhance the provision of bilingual services in all of our facilities, is a testament to that commitment.

Horizon's *Official Languages Strategic Plan* was developed with the following goals in mind:

- Promote cultural awareness and understanding
- Ensure quality health services in both official languages
- Continually enhance Horizon's ability to provide bilingual services.

To view Horizon's *Official Languages Strategic Plan*, please go to www.HorizonNB.ca

Improving Your Healthcare Experience

At Horizon, we are committed to offering the highest quality health care to all members of our community and have taken many initiatives to improve access to services for both linguistic communities. These initiatives, which go hand in hand with our *Official Languages Strategic Plan*, include implementing various policies and procedures relating to official languages, identifying recruitment strategies and initiatives for bilingual staff, and creating bilingual signage and patient material for all Horizon facilities. More initiatives are planned for the coming years as well.

Teamwork Skills at Your Service

Horizon supports a team approach to ensure the best possible health care services for patients from both linguistic communities. This means that although the first person you speak to may not be bilingual, staff members are trained to seek the assistance of a bilingual colleague when required to ensure that you are served in the language of your choice.

Your feedback matters!

We want to learn more about how we can improve your health care experience. Please contact us with your feedback:

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Horizon's Official Languages Department has given a number of educational sessions on Official Languages to staff. The Department of Organizational Learning offers French language training sessions, which are available to Horizon employees. These training sessions vary in length and format.

Earlier this year, local Francophone Liaison sub-committees were established in the areas of Saint John, Miramichi and Fredericton to better identify and address area-specific health-care needs. The local committees play an active role in the implementation of the initiatives identified for the rattrapage funding.

Horizon has also collaborated with government in conducting a community needs assessment of the general population and the Francophone minority in the Fredericton area. The goal is to develop a prioritized list of health issues, which will guide decision-making, establish health priorities, and reduce health inequities among population groups. Horizon has started to address some of the identified issues through its rattrapage initiatives.



Challenges

Despite the strides we have made in improving the provision of health care in both official languages, Horizon still faces challenges. In order to provide safe, quality care, staff and patients must be able to communicate effectively with one another.

With this in mind, we must recognize that *The Official Languages Act* and its role in the human resource practices of the organization is complex.

- Horizon is a union of previously distinct regional authorities where identical positions may have been designated differently.
- The process to maintain regional linguistic profiles is a manual process that is labour intensive.
- Some staff members are reluctant to make the active offer.
- Through workforce adjustment it has identified that Horizon needs policies and procedures in hiring employees for bilingual positions.
- There are many areas within Horizon that struggle to consistently have bilingual staff available 24/7.

Official Language Complaints Process

Between April 2011 and March 2012, six formal complaints were made. All complaints involved the lack of an active offer, and were observed at the patient's first point of contact. One patient also indicated an absence of service availability in the language of choice, while another highlighted the employee's attitude towards services in French.

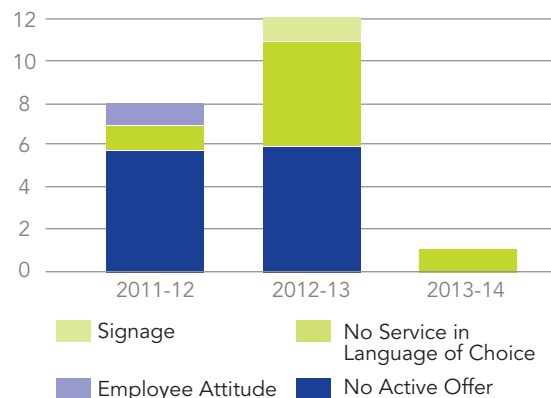
During the last fiscal year, April 2012 to March 2013, 10 formal complaints were made. A number of factors may have contributed to this increase, including greater awareness of the language issue and complaint process. However, it should be noted that unlike the previous year, which saw complaints from throughout the region, 80 per cent of this year's complaints were from the Fredericton area.

Most of these complaints involved the lack of an active offer and/or the absence of service in the language of choice. Seven out of 10 of the complaints were observed at the patient's first point of contact. Two of the complaints were with regard to the lack of group therapy programs in French at the Fredericton Mental Health Centre.

Considering the nearly one million patients visits each year, the number of official complaints are very low. However, Horizon takes every complaint seriously. The complaint process provides Horizon, its managers and staff an opportunity to review their processes and improve services.

In most of these cases, managers worked to increase their employees' awareness of their language requirements and modified current practices to ensure that the active offer is made consistently, and that services are provided in the language of choice.

Some departments had all their employees complete the Active Offer e-Learning program as an effort to build awareness and enforce the active offer. However, there remains a lot of work to do on building cultural awareness and sensitivity. There is a difference between doing something and believing in it. To believe in something, we



need to better understand its value. The role of language in patient safety needs to be further emphasized and management support is crucial.

The importance of delivery of services in both official languages in Mental Health is two-fold. A large portion of the treatment involved in Mental Health is talk therapy. Good communication is crucial when treating and dealing with patients. For this reason, a higher level of language proficiency is typically needed to understand the cultural, personal and linguistic nuances. This applies to group therapy programs as well. To better meet the needs of the Francophone population, the material for group therapy programs has been translated so that it can be offered in both official languages. The minimum number of participants for some group therapy programs have been reduced to expedite the delivery of these programs to Francophones that might need to access them.

This process is further complicated by the fact that some bilingual patients who may be more comfortable and may prefer to access treatment in French, will opt to get services in English because it can be accessed quicker. This reduces the waiting list for French language services, and prolongs the waiting period for other Francophone; If the numbers are insufficient, group therapy is ineffective.

So far this fiscal year, only one complaint has been made. The complaint, from Fredericton, was made in regard to the language of choice not being available at diagnostic imaging. It was determined in this particular complaint, that the employee in question did make the active offer. The patient, perhaps perceiving that they would have to wait, decided to proceed in the other language. Horizon recognizes that it is important to support our employees when they do their job properly and as expected. However, this does highlight the fact that, as an organization, we need to manage expectations and public perception.

For more information contact:

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