

# WRHA FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES RESEARCH TIDBITS

Issue 3

## LANGUAGE & HEALTH

The conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age have an undeniable influence on people's health. For linguistic minority communities, several factors, including language, can interact and must be taken into account during health interventions. Since, without a doubt, all health care professionals have the ultimate goal of delivering quality health care, they must take steps to understand and be understood by the patient. Language is also a key factor for the safety of patients. Several studies have indeed demonstrated the numerous risks that could result in not taking into account the language and linguistic barriers in a health care context.

## DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

### DID YOU KNOW?

"(...) there is a stronger correlation between primary language and health care levels than between income and health care levels." (Bowen, 2001)

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By focusing on the patient and his context, rather than only on the illness, the patient-centered approach represents one of the most efficient and effective methods of solving issues and improving the quality of health care offered to minority populations. (Working Group on Certification Process, 2010).

### FACTS & FIGURES

- ▶ Francophone seniors experience more pronounced economic instability than seniors in the Anglophone majority;
- ▶ Both language and belonging to the Francophone minority have been shown to be determinants of poverty;
- ▶ Francophone populations have fewer years of education and more often live in regions where the economy is less stable, which makes it more difficult to develop and access social and community resources;
- ▶ The Francophone population in minority contexts is not only aging more rapidly, but is less wealthy and is culturally marginalized.

Source: (Bouchard et al., 2013; Bouchard et al., 2015).

## WHY DO WE NEED SERVICES IN FRENCH?

Obstacles and access can be even more overwhelming for an aging population facing increasing health problems, as is the case in official language minority communities in Canada. In all these communities, regardless of certain socio-demographic variations among provinces, the aging of the population is even more pronounced than in the majority language population.

# THE 12 DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

1. Income and Social Status
2. Social Support Networks
3. Education and Literacy
4. Employment and Working Conditions
5. Social Environments
6. Physical Environments
7. Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills
8. Healthy Child Development
9. Biology and Genetic Endowment
10. Health Services
11. Gender
12. Culture

Source: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007



## THE COMPETENCY PROFILE FOR WORKING IN A LINGUISTIC MINORITY CONTEXT

Future professionals should have knowledge about the following themes: language as a determinant of health; conditions in which members of official language minority communities live; and characteristics of working in minority contexts. Professionals with this profile would be more inclined to adopt behaviours that promote the Active Offer of French language services and be better prepared to take up the challenges they encounter while working in these settings. (Bouchard & Desmeules, 2011)

### Competency Profile of Healthcare Professionals in Winnipeg (Knowledge):

- Language as a health determinant;
- Characteristics of work and profile of competency in a minority context;
- Demographic information;
- Conditions in which members of official language minority communities live;
- Identity construction;
- Practical examples;
- Revitalizing language rights.

### Competency Profile of Healthcare Professionals in Winnipeg (Skills and Attitudes):

- Commitment to Francophone community/bilingualism;
- Openness to diversity;
- Leadership;
- Networking;
- Self-knowledge and self-affirmation;
- Linguistic and cultural competencies;
- Social and interpersonal relationship skills;
- Autonomy;
- Competencies linked to working in a minority context;
- Importance of going beyond the profile of competencies.

## THE ISSUE OF HEALTH LITERACY

The level of health literacy refers to the capacity of a patient to understand the treatment and care she or he receives and it is recognized as a core determinant of health:

"Importantly, we now understand that poor health literacy adversely affects people's health. Literacy has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of health status along with age, income, employment status, education level and race or ethnic group." (*Jakab in Kickbusch et al., 2013, p. iv*)

## DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH THAT IMPACT FRANCOPHONES

**Social Environments:** The array of values and norms of a society will influence in varying ways the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations. In addition, social stability, recognition of diversity, safety, good working relationships, and cohesive communities provide a supportive society that reduces or avoids many potential risks to good health. Social environments are a key factor which include the recognition of diversity, values of inclusion, and the sense of security. Some persons or groups may face additional health risks due to a socio-economic environment.

**Culture:** Some persons or groups may face additional health risks due to dominant cultural values that contribute to the perpetuation of conditions, such as marginalization, stigmatization, loss or devaluation of language and culture and lack of access to culturally appropriate health care and services. Culture includes language as a health determinant. Language and cultural barriers, as well as lower literacy, are correlated not only with decreased participation in preventive programs, but also with lack of awareness of risks, lifestyle interventions, warning signs, and benefits of screening (*Bowen, 2000*).

## DID YOU KNOW?

In the last few decades, a number of studies have demonstrated the importance of language and, more broadly, a minority language context as a determinant of health. To summarize, social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, live, and die, and the systems put in place to promote a better state of health. Looking more specifically at the impact of language on health, research on the linguistic and cultural barriers to health, especially in official language minority communities across the country (*Bouchard & Desmeules, 2011; Bélanger, 2003; Bowen, 2001*), testifies to the interest social scientists have in the issues faced by Francophones in these communities. In particular, this research shows that language barriers have a proven impact on access to and use of services (*Flores, 2006; Yeo, 2004; Sarver & Baker, 2000; Hu & Covell, 1998; Solis et al., 1990*) and more broadly on the health of these populations (*Leis & Bouchard, 2013; Bouchard et al., 2009*), as well as on the quality of care and services (*Ava et al., 2004; Woloshin et al., 1997*). In general, researchers recognize that "language barriers contribute to the risk of error in diagnosis (and/or delays in diagnosis) and decrease the probability of adherence to treatment" (*Beaulieu, 2010; CNFS, 2010; Tremblay, 2012*).

## OUR COMMITMENT

The Winnipeg Health Region and all its service providers aim to:

- ▶ Improve access to health services in French, including primary health care;
- ▶ Ensure there are an appropriate number of organizations able to provide health services in French, consistent with Ministry standards;
- ▶ Ensure an adequate distribution of health professionals who are able to provide care in French;
- ▶ Provide information and resources in French;
- ▶ Respond to issues of interest and concern;
- ▶ Focus on the Active Offer of services in French;
- ▶ Increase staff awareness about needs of the French-speaking community;
- ▶ Collaborate with Francophone community representatives, and;
- ▶ Facilitate changes to improve the quality of services provided.



## RESOURCES

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority French Language Services mandate is:

To assist the WRHA in promoting and providing health services in French in accordance with its French Language Services policies, the Government of Manitoba French Language Services Policy, and regulations established under the legislation governing the Regional Health Authorities of Manitoba.

### VIDEO - The importance of Active Offer



### VIDEO - What is an Active Offer and why is it so important?



## CONTACT US

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