

Practice #14: The Fédération des aînés et des retraités francophones de l'Ontario (FARFO)'s Information Fairs

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ABOUT THE FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is part of the *Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts* (available at: https://www.grefops.ca/directory_innovative_practices.html)

The *Directory of Innovative Practices* (formerly the Handbook of Innovative Practices on the Integration of Official Language Minority Health and Social Services) is a complementary resource to the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*¹. It presents initiatives that have been put in place, most often at the local level, that respond to a community need and are perceived as innovative by the various actors involved in their implementation. The practices were identified, analyzed and classified according to an evaluation framework developed by the Health Council of Canada. This framework allowed us to distinguish between emerging practices, promising practices and leading practices. Some of these practices were suggested by the *Société Santé en français* and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or other partners.

The reader is referred to the [Introduction and Method](#) document for information about the authors and collaborators, background on the project, a description of the methodology used to create the fact sheets, definitions of the following concepts:

- Leading Practice, Promising Practice, Emerging Practice
- Quality of evidence, impact, applicability, transferability
- Service coordination, service integration, liaison
- Active offer

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¹ The self-assessment Tool is available in English and French and can be accessed at the following Web address:
https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment_tool.html (English version)
https://www.grefops.ca/outil_autoevaluation.html (French version)

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This practice contributes to improving:

- Community resources: collaboration of the organization with key community stakeholders.

The organization implementing this practice:

The Fédération des aînés et retraités francophones de l'Ontario (FARFO)

The information contained in this fact sheet was mainly acquired from documentary research and these sources are cited in the references. The information was validated by Jean-Louis Schryburt, then President of the Fédération des aînés et des retraités francophones de l'Ontario (FARFO), Ottawa Region, and with Mrs. Cécile Paquette, currently President of the Ottawa Regional FARFO.

Background

The Fédération des aînés et retraités francophones de l'Ontario (FARFO) was created in 1978 and its 10,000-strong membership brings together individuals and affiliated organizations from across the province. Its mandate is to promote the interests of all Ontario Francophone seniors and retirees and to enhance their quality of life. In addition, it aims to encourage a positive outlook on aging and community engagement.

Since 2015, the FARFO is in charge of managing information fairs intended for Francophone seniors. Previously, these were held under the direct auspices of the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat (2004–2009). Since their launch in 2004, information fairs have been part of a larger educational initiative targeted at Francophone seniors and funded under the Canada/Ontario Agreements on French Language Services.² As a result of this initiative, the FARFO is also able to convey the needs of its members to health and social service providers, including the need to access these services in French.

Objectives

The objective of the fairs is to provide information to Francophone seniors in their own language, on a variety of topics that may have an impact on their quality of life. They also foster networking between various organizations that provide French-language services and Francophone community groups.

Furthermore, this practice also intends to ensure that Francophone seniors contribute to the vitality of Ontario's Francophone minority community.

² This initiative is funded by equal contributions from the Federal government, under the Canada/Ontario agreements on French-Language Services. The agreement reached between the FARFO and Ontario's Seniors' Secretariat covers a five-year period (2013 – 2018). It was subsequently renewed by the Ontario Ministry of Seniors' Affairs (OMAS), now the Ministry of Seniors' Services and Accessibility.

Features of the practice

Information fairs are valuable awareness-raising and educational tools to address issues that affect seniors' health and quality of life (for example, abuse and fraud prevention, nutrition, financial and legal issues, mental and physical health, safety, as well as locations where these services are offered in French). In addition, information fairs are networking platforms and an opportunity for participants to establish/renew partnerships. By participating in information fairs, Francophone seniors gain better knowledge about the services available in French while organizations become better acquainted with the needs of Francophone seniors.

Information fairs are led by the FARFO's provincial body, in collaboration with each regional entity. Privileged partners are: host organizations, community care volunteers, seniors' clubs and active living centers, and French-language health services networks. While the vast majority of information fairs were held in urban areas between 2004 and 2014, this project now aims to encourage these information activities to be held in rural or more remote centers as well.³

Challenges

The first challenge is that seniors must travel to these activities, particularly in major regions. The second challenge emerges from a misunderstanding on the part of organizations that wish to participate in information fairs while providing no French-language services to the area's Francophone population. When launching activities, organizing booths or transmitting information, organizations must be able to do so in the official minority language, which, for many of them, is not the case. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result of the province of Ontario's health guidelines, the organization of fairs was suspended in 2020. The fairs will be resumed once the collective health conditions are safe.

Analysis⁴

Why is this practice considered innovative?

This practice meets a community need. It aims to fill an information gap for Ontario Francophone seniors and organizations who serve this population. Furthermore, each information fair report contains positive comments about these events providing better information to Francophone seniors living in a linguistic minority context, by addressing relevant themes and helping these seniors age in good health. In a few cases, organizations that provide French-language services indicated that information fairs enabled them to uncover many of this population's needs.

This practice, renewed annually since 2004, encourages the participation of francophone seniors in the visibility of service needs in their language and in the vitality of their community. In addition, it is perceived as an opportunity for networking by all partners.

³ The five targeted Ontario areas are: East, Far North, Mid-North, Ottawa and Southwest.

⁴ This analysis is based on criteria defined in the *Innovative Practices Evaluation Framework* designed by the Health Council of Canada, Retrieved from: https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP_Framework_Eng_final_1.pdf also outlined in the Introduction and method document.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: The practice has not been researched. However, there are reports containing some indicators specifying the number of participants and other relevant information. They also provide information on some of the benefits of information fairs. In general, these reports emphasize the positive aspects of these activities. Host organizations may use a template for the final report that seems to frame data collection in such a way that enables the evaluation of these activities.

Impact: Based on the information collected about this practice, three types of impacts were identified: a) the information better equips Francophone seniors living in a minority context; b) community mobilization leads to awareness-raising among service providers about the importance of active offer in the user's preferred language; c) information fairs are networking opportunities, increasing collaboration between organizations that promote the continuum of care in the minority official language.

Applicability: Thirty-seven information fairs were organized between 2013 and 2019 in various regions of Ontario, more than five fairs per year, which, in our view, is a good success indicator for this practice.

Transferability: Transferability of this practice to other organizations and other provinces has been possible. Clubs and active living centers for Francophone seniors have taken over the organization of fairs in their respective organizations. The main point is that it requires a great deal of community participation and a good amount of volunteer work. Moreover, financial resources are also required to fund the event's logistics.