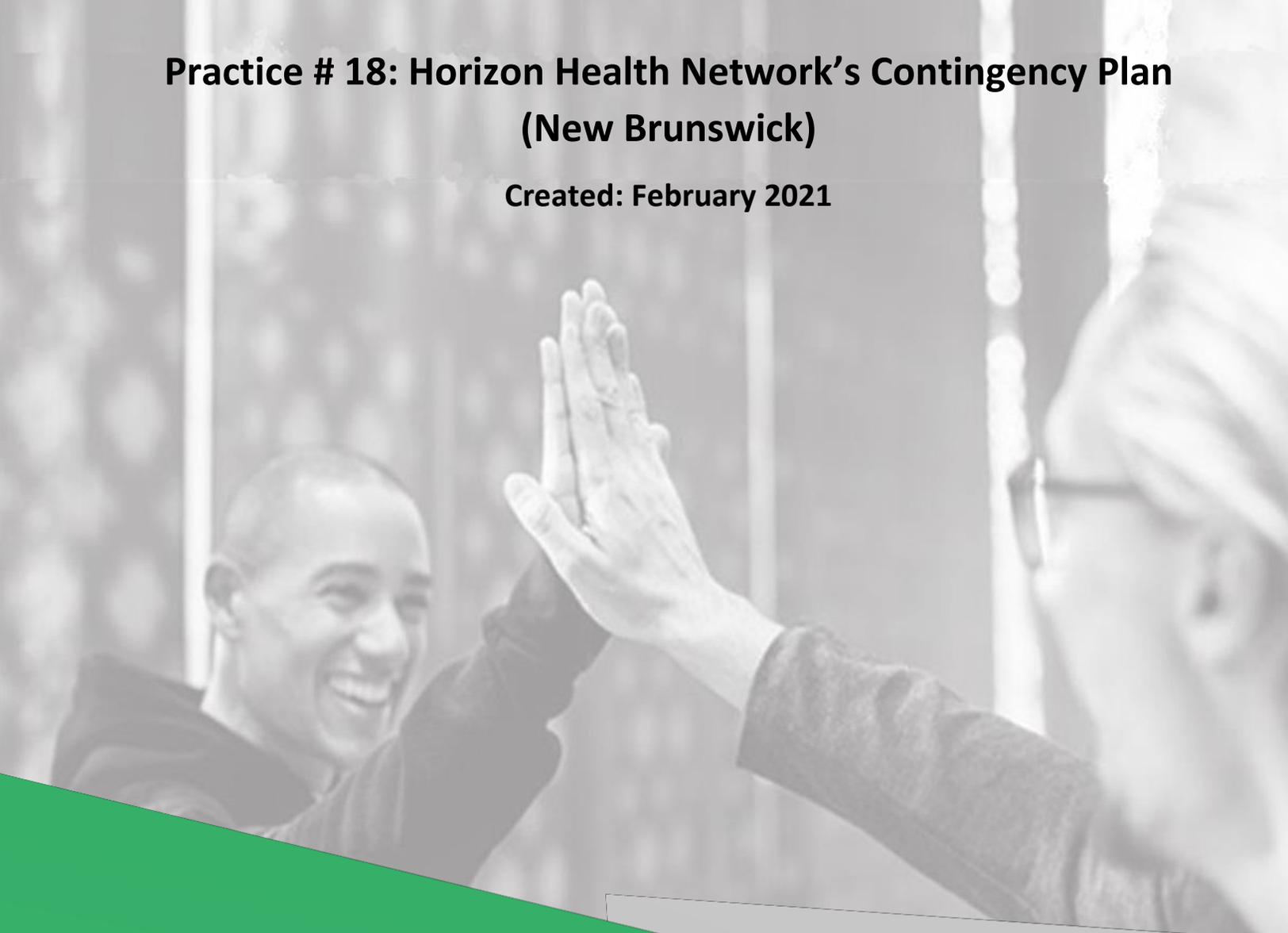


Practice # 18: Horizon Health Network's Contingency Plan (New Brunswick)

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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)

Practice # 18: Horizon Health Network's contingency plan (New Brunswick)

This practice contributes to improving:

- Your organization's values and principles: Innovation and service offer in the user's preferred official language;
- Active offer (welcome and visibility; continuity of services in the minority official language);
- Relations with service users.

The organization implementing this practice: The Horizon Health Network, New Brunswick
The information contained in this fact sheet was obtained from a presentation by Lorna Mansfield, Official Languages Advisor at Horizon Health Network, on contingency plans, and from an email conversation with this person (February 9, 2021).

Background

In New Brunswick, health services are grouped under two Regional Health Authorities (RHAs): Vitalité Health Network and Horizon Health Network. Each RHA has a general mandate to provide health services in New Brunswick and is governed by a board of directors. Horizon Health Network is the largest Regional Health Authority in New Brunswick and the second largest in Atlantic Canada. It manages 12 hospitals and over 100 facilities, clinics and offices in central and southern New Brunswick. Horizon offers services ranging from acute and specialized care to community health services². The language of work in the Horizon Health Network is generally English, but the services provided must be offered in both official languages, like all public services in New Brunswick³.

In the winter of 2017, Horizon Health Network launched a pilot project called Active Offer Every Day, beginning with an active offer survey of staff, patients, and visitors, wanting to determine the quality of active offer at Network facilities. The results showed that some services were doing well, while others were facing challenges. The reasons ranged from lack of resources to lack of compliance. As a result, ways were sought to ensure that all staff and management were aware of and compliant with New Brunswick's Official Languages Act, and that they promoted best practices in both official languages to ensure patient and family-centered care.

As a first step, the Network set up dialogue sessions (see Practice # 17) to familiarize employees with the law, and to create exchanges with staff on their needs and recommendations for improving the quality of their French-language services. It was clear from the active offer dialogue sessions that many departments were unprepared to deal with requests for services in French when the person receiving the client cannot respond themselves, with either outdated or non-existent contingency plans. Many participants were not aware of a plan in their unit or department.

² Réseau de santé Horizon (s.d.). About us. Retrieved on June 9, 2021 : <https://en.horizonnb.ca/home/about-us.aspx>

³ Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. Status of Legislation - First Reading Bill. Retrieved on June 9, 2021 : <https://www.gnb.ca/legis/bill/editform-e.asp?ID=134&legi=54&num=0&page=>

Objectives

The objective of the contingency plan is to allow employees to become aware of the bilingual resources in their department and organization and to put in place an action plan to easily find linguistic assistance when needed. It is recommended that each department develop its own personalized contingency plan taking into account its needs and resources.

Features of the practice

In her presentation to the department or unit managers of the Horizon Health Network, the project leader presented the development of a contingency plan in four levels:

- 1) the first level is common to all and involves a bilingual greeting and the identification of the client's language of choice.
- 2) the second level is specific to each department and includes the identification of bilingual personnel available in the unit. The project leader provided an example of an Excel spreadsheet of staff rotations in which bilingual employees are identified with an asterisk. In addition, the official languages team suggests the use of a dry-erase board, visible to all within the unit, highlighting the bilingual resources for the shift.
- 3) the third level includes the identification of available support from external resources, such as reciprocal agreements with other units and departments, the official languages advisors, and, as a last resort, the use of a telephone interpretation line.
- 4) the fourth level represents a solid contingency plan and a team ready to offer services in the user's official language of choice.

The Network's Official Languages Team also provides a template in which the contingency plan can be entered. This is a device in the form of a flip menu, double-sided, laminated and cleanable, that can be placed at the front desk or in visible and accessible locations in each department. The front (which must face outward so that it is visible to the public) tells the service user that their response to "Hello/Bonjour" would let the employee know which language they should use to continue the conversation. The reverse side is intended for employees. It provides relevant information related to the contingency plan, such as bilingual resource persons who can be called upon as needed, contact information for members of the official languages team within the Network, an index card containing key phrases in English and French, instructions for accessing the interpretation services phone line (to be used as a last resort), and information regarding language training opportunities (see Practice #19). This format allows each department to customize the cards according to employee needs and available resources. Such a contingency plan should be known by all employees and allow them to feel prepared to greet users in both official languages, regardless of their comfort level in their second language.

The contingency plan is a partnership project that was designed, developed and promoted by the Horizon Health Network's managers, staff, and official languages advisors. Managers promote the plan to the staff. Staff must ensure that they are prepared on each shift to provide service in the language of choice of the service user by being aware of the various bilingual resources available. Resources change based on employee schedules. The official languages advisors' objective is to support staff and managers.

To promote the adoption of contingency plans across the Network, a webinar called "Creating a Contingency Plan for Service in Both Official Languages" was developed during the Summer of 2020. It was presented to the Horizon Health Network managers and team leaders from August to December

2020. Using the resources and examples provided (webinar instruction, flip chart menus, etc.), managers were asked to revise their existing plans or create new ones, and inform staff of the rationale for the contingency plan and the steps to follow to provide services in the user's official language of choice.

A learning program on official language obligations is being developed for managers, and will be delivered via a distance communication platform. It will include specific requirements for creating and implementing contingency plans.

Challenges

Some managers were able to develop a plan and implement it immediately, others are still working on it, often as time permits. At the time of publication of this fact sheet, some departments still did not have a contingency plan in place. Official languages advisors continue to coach managers in this regard.

The COVID-19 crisis was an obstacle to the realization of the contingency plan pilot project. Several services and resources had to be quickly adapted to meet the restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. Initially, most of the official languages team was redeployed to support other areas of need within the Network. Upon returning to their home department, the team members resumed the work that had begun earlier, supporting service departments in their commitment to provide quality care in both official languages. Competing priorities continue to create challenges.

Another challenge relates to time constraints due to ever-changing health care needs, with many competing priorities and some lack of buy-in.

Analysis⁴

Why is this practice considered innovative?

The contingency plan stems from the need for the staff of each department to put in place a concrete and personalized plan giving them quick access to the resources needed to greet users and offer them services in the official language of their choice in a timely manner. The idea of a contingency plan is not new, being put in place in various establishments or companies to ensure that activities are maintained in the event of an emergency or crisis and to minimize negative consequences. However, creating this type of contingency plan to ensure the continuity of French language services is not common. Also, the format proposed by the Horizon Health Network can be considered innovative, that is a contingency plan in the form of a flip menu, customizable according to the unit's needs and resources, available to all employees and easily accessible when needed.

Emerging, promising or leading: An emerging practice

Quality of evidence: The practice was the subject of a project charter developed in consultation with a quality consultant from Horizon Health Network, describing objectives and expected results. Progress was monitored by the advisor who was project lead and the Official Languages management team. At

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

the time of publication of this fact sheet, there was no formal evaluation report on this practice. The Network continues to work on its implementation.

Impact: The development and update of a contingency plan increases manager and employee awareness of language skills available on each unit. Employees have a visible and updated plan with available resources when needed, and managers are more aware of the level of language proficiency in their unit. According to the resource person, the contingency plan should have positive effects on the active offer of services in both official languages throughout the Horizon Health Network. Employees should feel more confident in making an active offer, and patients should feel more satisfied with being able to receive services in the language of their choice. At the time of publication of this fact sheet, the webinar had 175 participants and 594 flip menus of resources had been distributed throughout the Horizon Health Network.

Applicability: Although contingency planning is a common practice in various organizations, its use to ensure the continuity of services offered in French and the concept of a contingency plan in the form of a flip menu available to employees is a practice developed by the Horizon Health Network and implemented in all of the Network's institutions.

Transferability: We are not aware of any organization other than the Horizon Health Network that has implemented a contingency plan in the form of a flip menu for employee use. However, the comments received and informal observations lead us to believe that the practice could be carried out in other health care institutions that would like to offer this type of support to their staff in order to assist them in offering services in both official languages.