

Practice #21: *ConnectAînés* (pancanadian)

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Josée Benoît
Jean Nephetalý Michel

GRÉOPS

Groupe de recherche sur la
formation et les pratiques en santé
et service social en contexte
francophone minoritaire



uOttawa

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: the organization's collaboration with key players in the community.

The organization implementing this practice : The Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada (FAAFC)

The information described in this fact sheet is based on information available from various organizations' web pages including the Regroupement des aînés de la Nouvelle-Écosse (RANE); the Portail des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (FFTNL); the Fédération des aînés franco-albertains (FAFA) and also the official page of the ConnectAînés program: <https://connectaines.ca/>. The documentation was complemented by a telephone interview with Mr. Stéphane Lapierre, M.Sc. national coordinator at the FAAFC, on April 27, 2021.

Background

Living in an official language minority community is a significant population health challenge, particularly for Francophone seniors². These individuals often face linguistic and social isolation, a lack of resources (especially in rural and remote areas) and a lack of contact with other Francophone seniors. In addition, the National Seniors Council's report on the social isolation of seniors (2014) notes membership in an official language minority community as a factor that can impede seniors' social engagement³.

Objectives

The program entitled "Vers l'inclusion sociale des aînés en situation minoritaire" is an initiative developed by the Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada (FAAFC), with members across Canada, and with funding from the federal government's New Horizons for Seniors Program⁴. The program aims to increase the social inclusion of seniors in Francophone and Acadian minority communities, mainly through the ConnectAînés and Sentinelles entre aînés initiatives (see fact sheet #22 for a description of Sentinelles).

² Dupuis-Blanchard, S., Villalon, L., & Alimezelli, H.T. (2014). Vieillir en santé en situation minoritaire linguistique au Canada : enjeux, défis et mobilisation collective. *Global Health Promotion*, vol. 21, supp.1, 70–75. DOI : 10.1177/1757975913512161

Bouchard L, Desmeules M. (2011). *Minorités de langue officielle du Canada : égales devant la santé ?* Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec.

³ Conseil national des aînés. (2014). *Rapport sur l'isolement social des aînés (2013-2014)*. Gouvernement du Canada. Retrieved on April 23, 2021 from <https://www.canada.ca/fr/conseil-national-aines/programmes/publications-rapports/2014/isolement-social-aines.html>

⁴ Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada. (2020). *Rapport Annuel 2019-2020*. Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada. http://www.faafc.ca/images/rapport/FAAFC_Rapport_Annuel_2019-2020.pdf

To financially support these initiatives and ensure their sustainability, the FAAFC will also develop a conference program called Franc Savoir. This is a French online training program on a variety of topics, the profits of which will be reinvested in the ConnectAînés and Sentinelles entre aînés programs.

Inspired by the Seniors' Centre Without Walls program, the ConnectAînés initiative was developed to break the isolation of seniors in Francophone minority communities, particularly those with mobility impairments or those in remote areas who could not travel to participate in community centre activities. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the physical restrictions and distancing measures established in March 2020 provided an additional incentive to launch the program sooner, in April 2020⁵, given the even greater need for a platform enabling seniors to meet and socialize.

Features of the practice

Initially launched in seven provinces and one territory, the ConnectAînés program now includes nine provinces and one territory. ConnectAînés is a distance activity centre offering free conversation opportunities, workshops and exchanges on a variety of topics, available by telephone or videoconference. With the exception of a few nationally launched activities, the provinces and territory participating in this initiative manage their own program of activities in their own way to meet the specific needs of their population.

Challenges

Current challenges of this recently developed practice relate to videoconference content preparation and gathering resources relevant to Francophone seniors⁶.

An additional challenge is seniors' access to technology which enables them to participate in online activities. Some provinces have obtained additional funding or have used federal government emergency funds to offer a tablet computer loan program for people with technology access challenges, including a database with access to an internet connection. Some provinces also offer training in the use of the tablet. However, all ConnectAînés activities can be accessed by phone through a toll-free number.

⁵ Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada. (2021). Entre les branches. Bulletin de la fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada (p. 10). Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada. http://www.faafc.ca/images/bulletin/Entre_les_branches-fevrier_2021.pdf

⁶ Magny, A. (2020, 15 March). Prendre d'assaut l'isolement des aînés. I-express.ca. <https://l-express.ca/prendre-dassaut-lisolement-des-aines/>

Analysis⁷

Why is this practice considered innovative?

As mentioned earlier, a similar initiative already existed for English-speaking seniors, and the Centre de services Guigues in Ottawa⁸ had already begun to offer hybrid on-site and online programming for French-speaking seniors. However, a national platform like ConnectAînés is considered innovative for Francophone minority communities as a whole.

Emerging, promising or leading: A leading practice

Quality of evidence: Given the newness of this initiative, it has not yet been formally evaluated. However, a self-assessment is included in the quarterly project progress reports submitted to funders.

Impact: The ConnectAînés site does not keep official statistics on registration and attendance. According to the contact person, the number of participants varies from province to province, but the current average is approximately 8–12 people per session. Informal observations indicate that the ConnectAînés platform is an easy way for Francophone seniors in minority communities to meet, socialize and participate in a variety of activities from the comfort of their homes.

Applicability: This initiative is currently being implemented in nine (9) provinces: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador; and one territory: Yukon. Practice implementation is possible through the federations of Francophone seniors in each region. The *Fédération des aînées et des aînés francophones du Canada* (FAAFC), as well as its provincial and territory Francophone partner federations, are actively involved in disseminating the practice.

Transferability: We are not aware of any such initiatives for other minority language communities, but informal evaluations and observations of ConnectAînés suggest that the initiative could easily be adapted to other contexts.

⁷ This analysis is based on criteria defined in the *Innovative Practices Evaluation Framework* designed by the Health Council of Canada, available at: https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP_Framework_Eng_final_1.pdf and also outlined in the Introduction and Method document.

⁸ <https://montfortrenaissance.ca/programmes-et-services/services-aux-aines/centre-de-services-guigues>