Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts

PRACTICE #21

FrancSavoir (previously *ConnectAînés*) (Canada-wide)

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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 complements the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*, which was developed by the GReFoPS.[1] It presents local initiatives that respond to community needs and are considered innovative by the various actors involved in them. The practices were classified using an evaluation framework from the Health Council of Canada and definitions from the Public Health Agency of Canada. This enabled us to distinguish between emerging, promising and leading practices.

Some of these practices were suggested by Société Santé en français and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or by other collaborators.

We refer the reader 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, and 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 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 #21: FrancSavoir (previously ConnectAînés) (Canada-wide)

This practice contributes to improving:

- Community resources: the organization's collaboration with key players in the community

The organization implementing this practice:

Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada (FAAFC)

The information contained 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 Stéphane Lapierre, M.Sc., National Coordinator of the FAAFC, on April 27, 2021. In January 2025, the initiative was updated with the collaboration of Stéphane Lapierre. Funding for the ConnectAînés ran out in August 2024, but certain members of the FAAFC decided to continue it in the form of FrancSavoir by including it in their regular programming.

Background

Living in an official language minority community is a significant population-level health challenge, particularly for Francophone seniors.[2] These persons often face linguistic and social isolation and a lack of resources (especially in rural and remote areas). In addition, the National Seniors Council's *Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors* (2014) notes that belonging to an official language minority community can impede seniors' social engagement.[3]

It was in this context that the FAAFC, together with its members across Canada, launched the *Vers l'inclusion sociale des aînés en situation minoritaire* program in 2019.

Objectives

The *Vers l'inclusion sociale des aînés en situation minoritaire* program received federal government funding[4] through the New Horizons for Seniors Program. *ConnectAînés* is a component of the FAAFC's wider *Vers l'inclusion sociale des aînés en situation minoritaire*, whose purpose is to increase the social inclusion of seniors in Francophone and Acadian minority communities. Age Well at Home / *Soutien à domicile Colombie-Britannique* is another component of the same program (see Fact Sheet #22).

2 Dupuis-Blanchard, S., Villalon, L., & Alimezelli, H.T. (2014). Vieillir en santé en situation minoritaire linguistique au Canada : enjeux, défis et mobilisation collective [Healthy ageing in a linguistic minority situation in Canada: issues, challenges and collective mobilization]. *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 National Seniors Council. (2014). Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors (2013-2014). Government of Canada. Accessed on April 23, 2021: https://www.canada.ca/en/national-seniors-council/programs/publications-reports/2014/social-isolation-seniors.html

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

Inspired by the Seniors' Centre Without Walls program, the *ConnectAînés* initiative was developed to break down 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 2020,[5] given the even greater need for a platform enabling seniors to meet and socialize.

To complement the offering of virtual activities and to financially support *ConnectAînés* activities, the FAAFC developed a program of presentations entitled *FrancSavoir* as well as a catalogue of presentations and workshops (https://faafc.ca/initiatives/catalogue-de-conferences-et-dateliers/) for members and other organizations or businesses wishing to provide training to their own members and staff. It is a set of online training sessions in French on a variety of topics; the profits are reinvested into the *ConnectAînés* program. This is the component that continues in 2025.

Features of the practice

FrancSavoir is defined as an online sharing platform for Francophones aged 50 and older. The platform is a place for users to strengthen or reinforce knowledge, explore a wide range of topics and socialize with the Francophone community. Presenters share their knowledge on the topics offered, from general knowledge to current events. Five activity series are offered: (a) *Les Grandes conférences*, presented by public figures (e.g. understanding eco-anxiety); (b) *Plaisir d'apprendre*, in which different topics are explored (e.g. the fall of the Soviet Union or Canada and the Cold War); (c) *Films et documentaires* (movie and documentary screenings followed by discussions with the director); (d) *Série Ateliers* (e.g. writing workshops that give participants the chance to write their life stories); (g) *Vitrine culturelle* (cultural showcase); and (f) *Pause Mieux-être* (wellness breaks, e.g. Better aging through yoga).

The *FrancSavoir* program now includes nine provinces and one territory. 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

The main challenges reported in 2021 had to do with preparing content for videoconferences and gathering a variety of resources relevant to Francophone seniors.[6]

An additional challenge had to do with seniors' access to technology enabling them to participate in online activities. Some provinces have obtained additional funding or have used federal government emergency funds to offer a tablet loan program for people with challenges accessing technology, including a data bank with access to an internet connection. Some provinces also offer training on how to use the tablet. However, all *ConnectAînés* activities can be accessed by phone through a toll-free number.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an overabundance of online activities was noted, which sometimes led to lower participation from seniors, or even a lack of participation. This did not affect the motivation of the organizations that continued to offer the *ConnectAînés* program, which eventually became *FrancSavoir*. Project leaders confirmed in 2025 that the program is working well and that the number of participants is growing. However, given the end of the funding, the program is being offered by the FAAFC, which covers operational costs. Member organizations can purchase the training sessions or propose events that are part of FrancSavoir, thus improving the variety of their program offerings. Given how the programs have developed and given the diversified offering of activities from the FAAFC and its member organizations, there have been discussions on coordinating the planning of these activities. Accordingly, *FrancSavoir* offers programming that complements that of its members to prevent competition.

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). https://faafc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Entre_les_branches-fevrier_2021.pdf

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

Analysis

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 Ottawa[7] had already begun to offer hybrid on-site and online programming for French-speaking seniors. However, a national platform like *ConnectAînés* and the *FrancSavoir* program is considered innovative for Francophone minority communities in general.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: When the *ConnectAînés* program funding ran out, the FAAFC submitted activity reports to the funders. No formal evaluation has been reported.

Impact: According to the contact person, the number of participants in *FrancSavoir* activities varies between jurisdictions (provinces/territories), but the current average is approximately 18–23 people per session. Information on registrations and other relevant data are not available, because partner organizations (seniors' federations) manage this information separately. Informal observations indicate that the *ConnectAînés* platform and *FrancSavoir* activities are 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 running in nine provinces: Alberta, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador; and one territory (Yukon). Implementation of the practice is made possible through the Francophone seniors' federations in the different regions.

Transferability: The FrancSavoir program has demonstrated the capacity to be implemented into all Canadian provinces outside Quebec, including one territory. It could inspire project leaders in other minority language communities. Informal evaluations and observations of *FrancSavoir* suggest that the initiative could easily be adapted to other contexts and foster seniors' participation in stimulating activities.

7 https://montfortrenaissance.ca/programmes-et-services/services-aux-aines/centre-de-services-guigues