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

PRACTICE #25

eQUITY Link – French-language health services made simple and accessible (Société Santé en français)

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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 also developed by the GReFoPS.[1] It presents initiatives implemented most often locally that respond to community needs and are considered innovative by the various actors involved in their implementation. The practices were identified, analyzed and 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 #25: eQUITY Link – French-language health services made simple and accessible (Société Santé en français)

This practice contributes to improving:

- Organizational resources: active offer and training of professional resources in their second language
- Inter-organizational coordination mechanisms, liaison and integration.

The organization implementing this practice:

Société Santé en français (SSF) and the French-language health networks developed the online eQUITY Link platform. This initiative was funded by Health Canada. The platform can be accessed at: https://equity-link.ca/en

The information contained in this fact sheet comes mainly from interviews conducted with Lise Richard, Manager at Société Santé en français, along with Gabrielle Laurin, Coordinator at the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario; Jérémie Roberge, Executive Director of Santé en français Manitoba; and Nathalie Gagné, Programs and Operations Manager at Santé en français Manitoba. The interviews were conducted in December 2024 and January 2025 and were complemented by documentary research cited in the notes.

Background

The project leaders had noticed that certain managers were willing to improve French-language services within their organizations but did not know how; they would often get stuck when recruiting bilingual workers.

The purpose of the eQUITY Link platform is to help health managers improve the delivery of their services in French. It provides pointers on the first steps to take and the methods to use. This resource was initially published online in 2021. In 2024, it was replaced by an enhanced version. While the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario assumed leadership at the outset of the initiative, it has been in the process of being transitioned to SSF since 2023. SSF also supports the marketing and dissemination of the platform.

Objectives

The primary objective is to guide organizations in sustainably implementing services in French.

Features of the practice

The eQUITY Link platform brings together a set of validated and evidence-based tools to help organizations understand how to go about implementing best practices. It is a user-friendly resource that enables managers to assess the capacity to provide services in French and to improve their service delivery by following the proposed process at their own pace. The process includes personalized support from experts.

According to the information on the platform, organizations that use eQUITY Link resources are better equipped to meet the criteria set out in the Access to Health and Social Services in Official Languages standard[2] and may apply for Accreditation Canada's Official Languages Recognition Program (OLRP).

In addition, any individual who is a certified member of the Canadian College of Health Leaders (CCHL) who completes training on eQUITY Link is eligible to receive credit towards their maintenance requirements for their certification. Société Santé en français is recognized as one of six specialized partners in health leadership that can provide support to candidates in the CCHL's Fellowship Select Program.[3] To earn the credits needed for certification, candidates must complete a structured learning program that includes the eQUITY Fundamentals training and others available on the platform.

The learning pathway starts with **eQUITY Fundamentals**, which is organized into four modules: understand, plan, implement and evaluate. The five principles of equity are active offer of services, clinical research, governance and leadership, workforce and quality assurance. The training includes four major themes: needs of Francophone and/or Acadian communities, planning for French language health services, key strategies based on the five principles of equity and lastly monitoring and evaluation.

The objective is to equip and guide producers in the process outlined above. However, anyone interested in developing expertise related to active offer of French-language services may find the training relevant. It enables participants to analyze their current situation and determine next steps to take to improve access to health services in French.

The information and lessons in the modules relating to eQUITY Fundamentals provide the basics users will need to benefit from the other trainings as well as two guides available on the platform:

Logic Model Guide

This guide presents the benefits of logic models and makes it easier to adopt them to improve the offering of French-language services in a given region.

Policy Guide to Support French Language Services

This guide is based on research and analysis of current practices. It helps users to develop language policies and procedures adapted to their organizational needs to support the active offer of health services in French.

2 Access to Health and Social Services in Official Languages – Reaffirmation, Health Standards Organization (HSO) in English, Accès aux services de santé et aux services sociaux dans les langues officielles – Confirmation, Organisation de normes en santé (HSO) in French.

3 Fellowship Select Program: https://cchl-ccls.ca/fellowship-application/health-leadership-specialties-partners/

The other trainings are:

Bilingual Health Workforce Strategy

This training is seven hours in length and organized into four modules. It complements the previous training (eQUITY Fundamentals). It offers a more holistic approach to planning, implementing and evaluating health services in French as part of developing a strategy to recruit and retain bilingual staff in a context of labour shortage in the health field. This training is associated with Practice #5 of the directory, the *Framework for Recruitment and Retention of Bilingual Human Resources in the Health Sector* and the *Health Human Resources Strategy*.

The Active Offer of French Language Health Services interactive online training

This training is five hours in length and organized into six modules. Its purpose is to raise the awareness of professionals and students in the health field about the value of active offer of French health services. Participants will learn about the role they can play in sustainably improving active offer and promoting safety and quality of care for service users.

Communities of practice: a collaborative approach to increasing French language services

This training, which is based on experience from the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario (RFSSO), was developed to support partners in the health field who wish to work in communities of practice (see Fact Sheet #24 of this directory). These partners must share the objective of supporting the offer of French-language services by creating strategic projects that address the issues and needs identified.

Café de Paris

This training is seven hours in length and organized into three modules. It is based on experience from the Horizon Health Network (New Brunswick). It enables managers of organizations to implement the Café de Paris approach in their region to provide a language support service that is adapted to health workers. The goal is to enhance the offering of French-language health services and patient safety. (See also Fact Sheet #6, Café de Paris, in this directory).

The platform also offers resources on Francophone immigration health. The main goal of the Santé Immigration Francophone (SIF) project is to ease Francophone newcomers' transition into the Canadian healthcare system.[4] Organizations that welcome these users will find a multitude of tools to build their capacity. Currently, the resources available are for Ontario and include webinars, trainings, videos and animated clips.

Challenges

Like any online resource, the platform has had to be adjusted over time. Organizing the content, specifically the number of resources, posed certain difficulties for managers accessing it for the first time. As a result, messages were simplified and adapted to align with a more learning-friendly approach. To do so, the *Groupe des technologies d'apprentissage* (GTA, learning technologies group) associated with the Université de Moncton and other technology experts were called on. Since the adjustments were made, managers and other interested people are now invited to complete self-evaluation of their organization's capacity to offer services to the Francophone community.

The evaluation results guide the user to the specific modules to address the needs they have identified. For example, after completing the self-evaluation, a manager may decide that it is necessary to strengthen language competencies among human resources in their organization. In this case, he or she can take the training on implementing a Café de Paris.

A second challenge is raising the profile of eQUITY Link and its associated services. To this end, a marketing plan was developed. Data collection on platform use, pre- and post-training evaluations and satisfaction surveys were used to inform managers and their teams, and to provide them the necessary support.

Some of SSF's provincial and territorial networks have had the opportunity to actively disseminate the eQUITY Link platform. Through presentations to major partners, network staff explained the content and objectives of the platform and how it works. Dissemination helps people to find out about the resources available and improves their adoption by managers who wish to improve French-language services in their jurisdictions. These partners are encouraged to use the platform themselves, but also to tell their networks about it, including managers of different programs and sites.

A third challenge, raised by one of the provincial French-language health networks, has to do with the availability of many trainings occasionally offered by health authorities that can be quite similar in content to those on the eQUITY Link platform (e.g. on active offer). In this sense, eQUITY Link may be seen not as a competing resource, but as supporting the efforts of service providers endeavouring to improve their offer of services in French.

Finally, there is a fourth challenge within SSF's networks, which often need to prioritize their actions to better utilize their human and financial resources.

4 Francophone Immigration Health project Immigration – eQUITY Link.

Analysis

Why is this practice considered innovative?

The platform is a collection of unique resources in an accessible virtual space that is free for managers who want to make changes within their organization to provide services in French. It is available to organizations in the public, private and community sectors and facilitates access to these resources in a centralized fashion. The platform meets the needs expressed by the community and by the funder of the initiative (Health Canada).

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: This initiative is fairly recent, but it was developed based on a logic model with defined objectives as well as in-depth research that underlies the resources on offer. Therefore, the eQUITY Link initiative, like the *Framework for Recruitment and Retention of Bilingual Human Resources in the Health Sector* that came before it, is based on rigorous data collection, a national and international literature review and a review of best practices that have been proven in Canada (see Fact Sheet #5).

Impact: The 2023–2024 annual report of Société Santé en français mentions certain impacts. For example, the number of people registered on the platform increased by 59% between 2023 and 2024 (321 were registered in 2024, according to the same report).[5] The number of platform users is increasing. The same period saw 48 new registrations for the eQUITY Fundamentals training. Coaching activities for managers have met with a positive reception, with 92 participants from 10 provinces and territories.

Furthermore, there has reportedly been an improvement in self-management of the progress of health institutions and government bodies thanks to the online learning tools, optimization of user experience via new features and the implementation of additional processes that will make it easier to capture user profiles. The platform managers have also been able to maintain various partnerships allowing them to maintain and improve the online tool, including with the GTA.

Applicability: The platform and its resources are useful to managers of health organizations in the public (regional health units), community (community health clinics) and private (long-term care centres) sectors who are interested in offering services in French. Participants from 10 provinces and one territory have used the platform with satisfaction. This demonstrates its applicability when it comes to supporting the improvement of French-language health services in multiple contexts in Canada.

Transferability: Lessons learned from use of the platform could be adapted and applied to help organizations meet the needs of other minority language communities or other vulnerable communities.

5 Société Santé en français: Rapport annuel 2023-2024 and Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario: Rapport annuel 2023-2024.