

Improving Access to Health Services in Official Language Minority Communities

Health Canada's Action Plan 2018–2023 in support of section 41
of the *Official Languages Act*

Official Language Community Development Bureau (OLCDB)

Strategic Policy Branch

Health Canada

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YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY... OUR PRIORITY.
VOTRE SANTÉ ET VOTRE SÉCURITÉ... NOTRE PRIORITÉ.



Executive Summary

This document presents activities that Health Canada will be carrying out over the next five years to implement its commitments under section 41 (Part VII) of the *Official Languages Act* (OLA), which reads as follows:

- **41(1)** The Government of Canada is committed to (a) enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and (b) fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.
- **(2)** Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that positive measures are taken for the implementation of the commitments under subsection (1). For greater certainty, this implementation shall be carried out while respecting the jurisdiction and powers of the provinces.

Action Plan 2018–2023 responds to recommendations flowing from a review of the 2013–2018 Action Plan (Part VII of the OLA) with respect to supporting official language minority communities (OLMCs) through the Official Languages Health Program (OLHP), increasing employees' awareness of their responsibilities under section 41 (Part VII) of the OLA, and identifying opportunities for internal and interdepartmental collaboration.

Health Canada is also making sure the activities set out in the Action Plan align with the policies of the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023: Investing in Our Future*, namely:

Pillar 1: Strengthening the vitality of OLMCs

Strengthening the vitality of OLMCs will require the consolidation and the creation of new partnerships within the Health Portfolio, as well as partnerships with other federal government departments to better meet the health needs of OLMCs.

Pillar 2: Strengthening access to health services in OLMCs

Access to health services in OLMCs will be supported by funding initiatives through the OLHP, such as the training of bilingual health professionals, networking activities and the creation of innovative projects. The OLHP will see its budget increased by \$16.9 million over five years as part of the federal Action Plan for Official languages 2018–2023, for a total budget of \$191.2 million over five years.

In addition, Health Canada plans to strengthen and improve access to and analysis of data on OLMCs in order to better support decision making in health.

Pillar 3: Promoting a bilingual Canada

Measures will be taken to build capacity within Health Canada to meet the requirements set out in section 41 (Part VII) of the OLA, thereby helping improve access to health care services in OLMCs and promoting a bilingual Canada.

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Objectives of Action Plan 2018–2023

Through its Action Plan 2018–2023, Health Canada aims to improve access to health services for OLMCs and enhance their vitality in the official language of their choice, in accordance with the objectives set out in section 41 (Part VII) of the OLA.

The achievement of these objectives is grounded in the principles of equity, service quality and patient safety, and involves the development of partnerships within Health Canada, with other departments, with community stakeholders, and with provincial and territorial governments, in particular through networking activities funded by the OLHP.

Foundations of Action Plan 2018–2023

Action Plan 2018–2023 is based on the results of activities and events carried out in previous years:

- An online consultation on the OLHP (2016);
- The creation in 2017 of the Federal Health Portfolio Consultative Committee for OLMCs, which discusses the health needs of OLMCs and facilitates joint action between the federal government and community partners;
- The *Review of Major Achievements of the 2013–2018 Action Plan Part VII of the Official Languages Act*, which recommends strengthened partnerships, better training for employees and managers regarding their obligations under section 41 (Part VII), better access to data on OLMCs' health status and access to health care services;
- The results of a consultation conducted within the Department in August and September 2018 on the draft Action Plan 2018–2023.

In addition, Health Canada's Action Plan 2018–2023 is aligned with the three pillars in the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023: Investing in Our Future* (announced in March 2018).

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3
Strengthening the vitality of OLMCs	Strengthening access to health services in OLMCs	Promoting a bilingual Canada

The Government of Canada’s *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023: Investing in Our Future* has allocated an additional \$16.9 million over five years to Health Canada to improve access to health services in OLMCs. This amount includes an increase of \$4.4 million in core funding to organizations funded by Health Canada and an increase of \$12.5 million for activities under the OLHP.

The OLHP’s budget increases from an investment of \$174.3 million for 2013 to 2018, to \$191.2 million for 2018 to 2023, for the following initiatives: expansion of health training programs in five postsecondary institutions to cover regions where it is difficult to access French-language programs (\$5M); addition of three new English-language health networks to the 20 existing ones and 10 satellite networks in rural and remote areas of Quebec (\$3.5M); and establishment of innovative projects to help official language minority communities across Canada better meet their health needs (\$4M).

Pillar 1: Strengthening the vitality of OLMCs

One of the objectives of Action Plan 2018–2023 is to explore opportunities to contribute to the vitality of OLMCs through strategic intra- and interdepartmental partnerships that integrate the diversity of health needs. These potential partnerships will seek to create synergies and amplify the impact of interventions to improve access to health services in OLMCs. Among other things, Health Canada plans to:

- Study, in collaboration with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the possibility of integrating the interests of Francophone and Anglophone minorities on files such as workforce training and the well-being of seniors and persons with disabilities;
- Establish a dialogue with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) with a view to improving access to health services for immigrants in their official language of choice, and attracting and retaining health professionals of Francophone and Anglophone immigrant backgrounds; and
- Collaborate with Health Canada’s Gender and Health Unit to ensure better integration of sex- and gender-based analysis (SGBA) in projects for OLMCs.

Furthermore, Health Canada’s Official Language Community Development Bureau (OLCDB) will be seeking a better understanding of the health needs of OLMCs.

Information on those needs will be shared with the Department's partners and with other federal government departments and agencies to support planning of the Health portfolio's activities. Among other things, Health Canada could lead consultations with OLMCs through the Federal Health Portfolio Consultative Committee to identify their needs and their level of satisfaction with measures aimed at strengthening the vitality of OLMCs through improved access to health care services.

Pillar 2: Strengthening access to health services in OLMCs

For the 2018–2023 period, initiatives funded by Health Canada under the OLHP will continue to contribute to improving access to health services in OLMCs by increasing the availability of health services in the minority official language and improving access to Francophone and Anglophone health professionals.

In line with the previous initiatives, the improved access to health services in OLMCs will be aligned with the shared priorities of the federal, provincial and territorial governments, i.e., home care, mental health, and palliative and end-of-life care. In addition, other measures related to the *active offer*^a of services in the language of the minority will be considered, such as the inclusion of the user's preferred official language on provincial/territorial health cards. Among other things, Health Canada plans to:

- Support the creation of Anglophone health networks in rural and remote areas of Quebec and the consolidation of Francophone health networks outside Quebec to adapt health services to needs and ensure equitable access for OLMCs;
- Provide broader access to French-language or bilingual training programs in various postsecondary institutions to increase the number of bilingual health professionals and keep them in their positions in situations where Francophone minority communities are isolated or dispersed;
- Facilitate access to home care and mental health services for OLMCs, as well as the development of innovative practices that can be transferred to other provinces and territories; and
- Support the development of measures that promote *active offer* in the provinces and territories by encouraging their governments to develop a project to introduce a health card indicating the official language of preference of the card holder (similar to a project in Prince Edward Island funded by Health Canada).

^a *Active offer* is reflected in a set of health services available in the minority official language and offered proactively. This implies that the services are clearly advertised, visible and readily accessible at any time with the assistance of various tools and good practices.

Given the lack of data to properly support decision making, improving the availability of health data and access to health care in OLMCs, as well as opportunities for internal and external collaboration, will be explored as part of a research strategy. In this respect, Health Canada will be looking to improve the collection and accessibility of data and research through partnerships with Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Pillar 3: Promoting a bilingual Canada

Action Plan 2018–2023 aims to build departmental capacity by supporting Health Canada employees so they can fulfill their obligations under section 41 (Part VII) of the OLA.

The OLCDB will provide information and training sessions tailored to employees' needs, as well as tools facilitating the inclusion of OLMC considerations in memoranda to Cabinet, Treasury Board submissions and transfer payment programs. Among other things, Health Canada plans to:

- Submit Action Plan 2018–2023 and the requirements under Part VII of the OLA to the senior management committees of Health Canada, such as the Table of Official Languages Champions and Coordinators, and the DGs' Policy Committee, so that every branch gives consideration to the requirements of the OLA in its respective files and is engaged in monitoring and evaluating the action plan;
- Develop and make available to employees support tools for analyzing official languages considerations in order to support the development of memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions;
- Provide access to training for employees, so that policies and programs systematically include the perspective and needs of the OLMCs and measure the impact of the training; and
- Organize awareness activities and events highlighting linguistic duality.

Monitoring and accountability

The implementation of Action Plan 2018–2023 will be monitored and assessed through the following:

- the Performance Information Profile (PIP), which will incorporate data from various sources, in addition to the OLHP recipients' reports, to ensure alignment between intermediate and long-term outcomes;
- in accordance with the 2018–2019 Financial Management Accountability Framework, the Department will report on official languages requirements related to the *Policy on Transfer Payments*;
- the Annual Report on Official Languages, covering activities in support of section 41 of the OLA, which is submitted to Canadian Heritage by Health Canada;
- an evaluation of the OLHP, to be completed over the next five years, in accordance with the requirements of the Treasury Board Secretariat's *Policy on Results*;
- internal initiatives, such as training on Part VII, will be evaluated.

Follow-up on Action Plan 2018–2023

Health Canada's Action Plan will be coordinated by the OLCDB, which remains the departmental lead for section 41 (Part VII) acting as facilitator and catalyst for the various branches of the Department.

The OLCDB will provide support to Health Canada's branches and work in collaboration with the Official Languages Program (OLP) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) on measures related to employee training on section 41 (Part VII).

Conclusion

The initiative *Improving Access to Health Services in Official Language Minority Communities: Health Canada's Action Plan 2018–2023 in support of section 41 of the Official Languages Act* is an opportunity to promote positive and innovative health measures in OLMCs in all of their diversity, thanks to the commitment of Health Canada's various branches and the creation of new partnerships.