

Section 2

Active Offer of French Language Services

Section 2

Active Offer of French Language Services

Within this context [of the Local Health System Integration Act], the active offer of services in French becomes a means to correct inequities by proposing a tangible method to reconcile health services with the needs of the Francophone population. The active offer of services in French represents an equity measure specific to ensure respect of the Act: so that equal status implies equal treatment.³ [unofficial translation]

Active offer happens when Francophone members of the public are informed about available services in French, have access to these services and are satisfied with the quality of these services.⁴

It is often heard that clients do not ask for services in French. Research consistently shows that people will not ask for services in French if they feel it is not easy, they will have to wait or the service will be of a lesser quality. Services in French need to be readily available and visible, hence the concept of active offer. Francophones should not have to ask for services in French. Rather it is the responsibility of health service providers to provide services in French.

An active offer of French language services would be:

- Results-oriented.
- Integrated into an organization's overall service delivery model.
- Proactive.
- Based on the result of a dialogue with the population served and ultimately reflective of their needs.
- In place for the life-cycle of the service, activity or initiative.

Key Elements of an Active Offer Approach include:

- Bilingual greeting in person and over the phone.
- Visual identification and general print material.
- Identification of Francophone patients/clients.
- Community Engagement.

³ Bouchard, Louise, Marielle Beaulieu et Martin Desmeules. *L'offre active de services en français en Ontario : une mesure d'équité* dans Reflets : revue d'intervention sociale et communautaire, vol. 18, no 2, 2012, p. 38-65.

⁴ *The OPS Framework for Action: A Modern Ontario Public Service*, 2006.

Bilingual Greeting in Person and Over the Phone

- **Switchboard/Reception:** Services should be offered in both languages. A bilingual greeting is a proactive way of offering services in French. It is an open invitation to patients/clients to use their language of choice when dealing with the organization.
- When answering the phone or greeting visitors, the person could add “bonjour” or “comment puis-je vous aider” at the end of the usual greeting, such “Erie St. Clair LHIN, bonjour” or “South West LHIN, Denise speaking, comment puis-je vous aider?”.
 - › If the person greeting patients/clients is bilingual, he/she continues in the language of choice of the caller or visitor.
 - › If the person is not bilingual, he/she should say “Un moment, s’il vous plaît” (one moment, please) and promptly transfer the call to a French-speaking employee or ask the French-speaking employee to come and speak with the visitor.
- **Automated Greeting/Voice Mail:** Telephone greeting should be bilingual.
 - › French option - Callers should be given a choice to hear the message in French by prompting them to press a number such as “*pour le service en français, appuyer sur le 2*”.
 - › French greeting following the English. “Hello, Bonjour. A French message will follow. You have reached the name of organization. Please leave a message at the tone and we’ll return your call as soon as possible. Thank you and have a great day! Vous avez joint le nom de l’organisme. Laisser un message et nous vous rappellerons le plus tôt possible. Merci et bonne journée.”

Visual Identification and General Print Material

- **Identification of Bilingual Staff:** Patients/clients should be able to easily recognize French-speaking staff. To do this, provide bilingual staff with buttons or lanyards saying “Je parle français”. A few samples of such buttons and lanyards are included in the pockets of the toolkit bag. To obtain more, please contact the Erie St. Clair or South West LHIN French Language Services Coordinator.
- **Signage – Interior and Exterior:** All signs in public areas should be bilingual.
- **Bilingual Welcome Sign at the Reception:** A bilingual welcome sign informing patients/clients that the organization offers services in French should be placed at entrances and/or reception desks. One sample of such a sign is included in the toolkit. To obtain more, please contact the Erie St. Clair or South West LHIN French Language Services Coordinator.
- **Business Cards** should be bilingual for staff members in designated positions or capable of providing services in French.
- **Written Material:** All documents intended for public distribution should be available in both languages preferably in a bilingual format. Depending on the printing format, a note should be added in French in the English document, and vice versa, stating that “Ce document existe en français”/ “This document is available in English” or “Français au verso”/ “English on reverse”. For example:



It has been shown, time and time again, that active offer has a considerable impact on the demand for services. The more actively a service is offered, the more demand there is for it. This is as true for health as for any other sector”.

François Boileau, French Language Services Commissioner, *Special Report on French Language Health Services in Ontario*, 2009, p. 10.⁵

⁵ For more information on the French Language Services Commissioner, please refer to Section 7 on legislation.

- › Forms, such as assessment and intake.
- › Instructions, such as pre-surgery and discharge.
- › Flyers.
- › Promotional material.
- › Websites.
- › Etc.

Health service providers need to know who their patients/clients are and what their needs are in order to serve them adequately and provide them with the best opportunity for optimal health options.

Identification of Francophone Patients/Clients

Definition of Francophones

Those persons whose mother tongue is French, plus those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an Official Language and use French at home.⁶

The first step is to identify Francophone patients/clients. Health service providers should include linguistic variables as part of their intake/admission process.

Two questions are suggested in order to identify Francophone patients/clients.

1) What is your mother tongue?

English French Other _____

2) If your mother tongue is neither English nor French, in what official language are you most comfortable?

English French

Please note that LHIN-HSP accountability agreements include requirements related to developing a mechanism to identify and track the number of Francophone patients/clients served each year.

⁶ Office of Francophone Affairs,
www.ofa.gov.on.ca/en/franco-definition.html

Community Engagement

*Community engagement refers to the methods by which LHINs and HSPs interact, share and gather information from and with their stakeholders.*⁷

The second step is to engage with the Francophone community *to inform, educate, consult, involve, and empower in both health care or health service planning and decision-making processes to improve the health care system.*⁸

Community engagement is an important part of the day-to-day operations of health service providers as it allows them to provide quality services that are responsive to the needs of the community.

Furthermore, the *Excellent Care for All Act* stipulates that health care organizations must survey their patients/clients on a yearly basis to collect information about their satisfaction with the services provided to them.

When it comes to the Francophone community, it is important to develop and sustain a working relationship with French language services providers, the community of Francophone individuals and entities (Francophone Community groups), in order to help both understand and act on the needs or issues that the Francophone community experiences with regard to health and health care services.

Tools

The *Consortium national de formation en santé* produced a series of teaching videos on active offer for health care professionals. Available in French with English subtitles, these videos feature Francophone individuals telling about their experience with the health care system and the impact of the lack or availability of services in French. To watch the videos, please visit cnfs.net/fr/vidlist.php.

Any organization or program could include these videos in the staff orientation package or use them as part of cultural and linguistic competence training in order to create awareness around equity and delivery of safe quality services. For more information on these videos and the *Consortium national de formation en santé*, please go to page 53.

For more tips on the active offer of French language services, please refer to fact sheets developed by the North East LHIN for employees and employers on pages 55 and 57.

⁷ LHIN *Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit*, 2011, p. 5, available on the Erie St. Clair and South West LHIN websites

⁸ Ibid.