

Executive summary

POURQUOI PAS? STRENGTHENING FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICE DELIVERY IN ONTARIO'S CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SECTOR

**Policy-ready paper developed by the Ontario Centre
of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health**

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French language child and youth mental health services

With the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' *Moving on Mental Health initiative*, the goal is for all children, youth and families, as well as the service providers supporting them, to know what mental health services are available in their communities, and how to access these supports when and where they need them (Gitterman, 2012). To make this the reality for all Ontarians, is important that the experiences of Francophones¹ are also addressed. **The goals of this policy-ready paper are therefore to understand the unique needs and strengths of Ontario's Francophone population within the transforming child and youth mental health system; and to provide evidence-informed recommendations to guide French language service delivery for the province's Francophone children, youth and families.**

Consultations with youth, families, service providers and other stakeholders

An inclusive engagement approach was adopted to ensure that the policy recommendations provided in this paper are grounded in the literature, but more importantly, are relevant and meaningful for Ontario's Francophone children, youth, families and service providers. A policy-ready paper advisory committee (PRPAC) comprised of staff from the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (the Centre), and a young person and caregiver with personal experiences accessing and using French language services was formed to help define the scope of the paper, support stakeholder engagement and consultation, generate key discussion themes, identify policy priorities, and review the paper before dissemination.

Youth, family members and service providers were consulted through surveys, focus groups and interviews to understand their experiences of French language service delivery in Ontario's child and youth mental health system. Surveys were customized for each stakeholder group and widely disseminated in both French and English, and in paper and online formats. In total, survey responses were collected from 14 youth, 81 family members, and 161 service

providers. To further explore themes discovered through the surveys, youth and family respondents were invited to take part in phone interviews. In the end, interviews with two youth participants were held. Survey and interview data provided great insight into a number of issues, however, findings from these consultations cannot be generalized, and do not represent the full spectrum of experiences with French language child and youth mental health services.

In the early stages of the paper's development, the lead writer met with the Ontario French Language Services Commissioner, Mr. François Boileau, and some of his staff to discuss the purpose and goals of this project. Both formal and informal discussions with provincial government representatives and policymakers also took place. In June 2016, a meeting with nine ministry stakeholders was held, where participants responded to semi-structured questions about the challenges regarding French language service access and delivery, capacity building and infrastructure, as well as potential solutions to these challenges. Other professionals and representatives from community organizations with relevant experience were also consulted through teleconference meetings. Surveys and consultations with stakeholders yielded useful information about current strengths, challenges and opportunities for French language services in Ontario. These findings, along with the academic and grey literature, provide a rich backdrop for the policy directions recommended in this paper.

Key themes from the literature and consultations

Our review of the literature and consultations explored the following topics:

- Demographic profile of Ontario's Francophone communities
- The relationship between language, health and quality of care
- The history of French language rights
- Active offer: The backbone of French language services
- The state of French language services across sectors
 - French language health services in Ontario
 - French language services for persons with developmental disabilities in Ontario

¹ In this paper, "Francophone" encompasses all children, youth and families who would prefer to be served in French (i.e., those whose mother tongue is French, those who converse at home or at school in French, or allophones who do not speak English but for whom French is their second language).

- French language child welfare services in Ontario
- French language services in the province of Manitoba
- French language child and youth mental health services in Eastern Ontario
- French language child and youth mental health services in Ontario
- Organizational capacity to support bilingual or French-speaking service providers
- Lack of French research, evidence-informed practices and trainings

Recommendations

Based on the literature and consultations with youth, families, service providers and other stakeholders, six recommendations have been put forth. In moving forward with these recommendations, the diversity of Ontario's Francophone communities and local contexts and considerations must be taken into account and a *pour et par* approach is needed with Francophones leading the implementation process.

1. DEVELOP AN OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF ACTIVE OFFER TO BE CONSISTENTLY APPLIED WITHIN CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AGENCIES ACROSS ONTARIO

Ontario's Francophones must have access to French language child and youth mental health services that are based on the concept of active offer. The goal should be equity with English language services, and the provision of French language services should be articulated as a right.

Active offer must occur at each stage of service delivery: information seeking, first contact with agency, receiving service, and documentation. A coherent strategy to plan for and support the implementation of active offer is necessary to enhance the provision of French language services in Ontario.

2. STANDARDIZE THE MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING OF FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES AND ACTIVE OFFER ACROSS CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AGENCIES

A standardized process for outcome measurement and data reporting is needed to provide a complete picture of French language services within the child and youth mental health system and to guide ongoing service planning and delivery. To move forward, we need:

- a broad picture of the state of French child and youth mental health services in Ontario, including an assessment of need, wait times, satisfaction with services, and outcomes

- guidelines to organize the collection of these data
- mechanisms to build capacity to collect and report of these data

3. OPTIMIZE FRENCH CAPACITY IN THE SYSTEM THROUGH A UNILINGUAL STRATEGY

To ensure we have the French capacity needed to support Francophone children, youth and families (i.e. staff, resources, infrastructure), a unilingual French language services strategy should be adopted to embed competent French-speaking employees in work places and entities where the language of day-to-day interaction and service provision is French. Discussions about the potential to leverage existing structures to support a unilingual child and youth mental health strategy for French language services should take place between relevant ministries and sectors, with special attention to program issues and mechanisms for evaluating success.

4. CENTRALIZE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

To ensure that Francophones have access to high quality services in their mother tongue, critical infrastructural supports should be centralized, or at the very least, regionalized. This central entity could be made responsible for establishing various human resource functions and processes such as:

- recruiting and hiring French-speaking professionals
- supporting networking across French language service providers
- creating and maintaining a roster of French-speaking specialists and experts
- developing service-related documentation
- providing training and continuing education in French
- developing and supporting a central French language child and youth mental health website and 1-800 information phone line to simplify access for Francophone families
- conducting French research and program evaluation, and leading quality improvement processes across agencies delivering French language services
- linking with French language university programs and researchers (within and external to Ontario) to support the ongoing growth and development of the field

5. LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS TO STRATEGICALLY AND COLLABORATIVELY SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mechanisms should be put in place to enable an Ontario-based entity (such as the one recommended above) to pursue partnerships across other sectors within Ontario (e.g., French Language school boards, Francophone universities)

and across jurisdictions (such as Quebec, New-Brunswick, Manitoba and across the Federal government) to support an infrastructure for a French language services research and development strategy (Lemay, 2011; Barwick, 2007). This strategy would endorse and financially support collaborative partnerships to share knowledge; and translate, adapt and create evidence-informed practices and related materials that can help meet the needs of Francophone children, youth and families. Such collaborations can provide Ontario-based services with French language resources that might otherwise be too expensive for the province's child and youth mental health sector to produce on its own.

6. ENSURE BOTH NEW AND SUSTAINED FUNDING, AND A SOLID PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

To proceed with the recommendations above and ensure the consistent active offer of French language services that are of the same quality of those available in English, a significant and targeted investment of new funding is needed, and must be sustained over time. A comprehensive implementation plan should be developed and adequately resourced to ensure successful change in this area. Without a significant investment, and a plan to coordinate change efforts, the mental health needs of Ontario's Francophone children, youth and families will continue to be unmet.

Conclusion

This paper aims to bring to the forefront the unique needs and strengths of Ontario's Francophone populations and to provide evidence-informed recommendations to guide the French language service delivery within the transforming child and youth mental health system. As Ontario's child and youth mental health sector is in the midst of significant renewal, the time is right to address the challenges that continue to hinder French language mental health service delivery. The goal of achieving accessible, effective and high quality services is within our grasp, and we can make equity a reality—un fait accompli. Pourquoi pas?

References

Gitterman, A. (2012). *Moving on Mental Health - A system that makes sense for children and youth*. PowerPoint Presentation to the November 20, 2012 Children Mental health Ontario conference. Retrieved from: <http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/res-cmho-plenary-session-MCYS-nov-20.pdf>

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