



## The Impact of Communication Challenges on the Delivery of Quality Health Care to Minority Language Clients and Communities

Abstract of a Position Paper

Submitted to the Canadian Council of Health Services Accreditation (CCHSA)

By the PEI French Language Health Services Network,

In collaboration with the Société Santé en français

Providing health services in the client's preferred language is an issue of quality of care and risk management. A review of the literature demonstrates that providing services in a client's first language has the following benefits: improves the accuracy of health assessment; improves access to health services, particularly health promotion and disease prevention activities; treatment received enables interpersonal interaction, thus enhancing the therapeutic relationship leading to more positive clinical outcomes; the client has a better understanding of the treatment plan and is more likely to adhere to it; client satisfaction improves; quality of care provided improves; risk management issues in service delivery are reduced.

Health care organizations tend to narrowly view access to services in both official languages as a "rights issue" and overlook the inherent risks associated with the failure to address language barriers encountered during the provision of health care services. For example, language barriers directly impact on issues of informed consent and confidentiality of health information, both of which have legislative requirements.

*The Impact of Communication Challenges on the Delivery of Quality Health Care to Minority Language Clients and Communities* includes a position statement, a comprehensive survey of available research and their application to the topic, recommendations, as well as a review of the current Canadian Council of Health Services Accreditation standards and possible adjustments. The research highlights the impacts of a language barrier in areas such as consent, patient safety, medical errors, hospital admissions, mental health care, and patient satisfaction. Recommendations made to the Canadian Council of Health Services Accreditation by the PEI French Language Health Services Network were:

1. Strengthen CCHSA standards and guidelines related to language-culture access for minority language communities and clients.
2. Encourage the Self-Assessment Teams to review their composition to reflect the communication needs of the community, clients and families in the delivery of health care.
3. Develop indicators or other means of evidence related to language access.
4. Identify the accreditation standards which represent the highest potential risk to patients due to communication challenges.

Using the accreditation model for addressing communication challenges for minority language clients and communities keeps the focus on the most important aspects of health care: quality and safety. Achieving quality of care and patient safety by addressing communication challenges requires the organizational integration of these values and instills a sustainable process of creating a culture that supports these values.

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The Prince Edward Island French Language Health Services Network (PEIFLHSN) is a joint government and community committee whose vision is: To ensure that Acadians and Francophones of Prince Edward Island have access to a full set of health and social services in French of comparable quality to English-language services.

**For more information or to download a copy of the position paper**

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