



Seniors Action Quebec brief  
Vieillir et vivre ensemble, chez soi, dans sa communauté, au Québec  
(VVE) - Plan d'action 2024-2029

SUBMITTED TO THE SECRÉTARIAT AUX ÂÎNÉS  
DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE DES ÂÎNÉS ET DES PROCHES AIDANTS  
MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX

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## **The Seniors Action Quebec organization**

Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) is a provincial not-for-profit organization that

- advocates for the needs of English-speaking seniors throughout Quebec.
- collaborates with, supports and brings together English-language community organizations working to maintain and enhance the vitality, well-being and health of English-speaking Quebec seniors.
- works in partnership and harmony with community groups, institutions and government agencies to identify needs, gaps and shortcomings in service offerings for English-speaking seniors.
- develops and proposes solutions and policy alternatives, in collaboration with its partners, that address these needs.
- monitors the impact of legislation and policy and program initiatives as they effect English-speaking seniors.
- works with all levels of government to identify and address challenges and strategic issues faced by English-speaking seniors.

We believe that every effort, action or gesture that identifies, addresses and responds to the particular needs of Quebec's English-speaking seniors contributes positively to the vitality of all communities in Quebec.

## **Profile and portrait of the English-speaking seniors context in Quebec**

The English-speaking population, according to the 2021 Statistics Canada Census, has grown from 1,1M to 1,25M in the 2016 – 2021 period. In 2021, the English-speaking population represents 14,9% of the total Quebec population.

English-speaking seniors 65 years of age and older represent 15,5% of the English-speaking population. The majority of these 0,2M seniors live in the Montreal metropolitan area. The remainder live in every other region of Quebec.

Quebec's English-speaking minority, all age groups considered, is more likely to have knowledge of the English and French languages than the French-language majority (64,4% vs 41,7%).

It must be remembered that English-speaking seniors, when they were of school age and lived in Quebec, did not have access to the quality of French language education that would have allowed them to live and work in French. It is not surprising then that 47,3% of English-speaking seniors over age 65 are unilingual English. However, one must not forget that it is also the generation of English-speaking seniors that insisted on and fought for the creation of school French immersion programs for their children.

There is a high level of French unilingualism among Quebec's French-speaking majority at every age level. Consequently, English-speaking seniors find themselves in situations where they cannot communicate their needs to persons they encounter in everyday situations. This inability to communicate is particularly problematic in crisis situations.

There are only 67 (58 public and 9 private) institutions or establishments in the Health and Social Services Sector (RSSS) recognized by virtue of Article 29,1 of the Charter of the French Language mandated to offer all of their health and social services in English to English-speaking Quebecers. (<https://www.quebec.ca/sante/systeme-et-services-de-sante/droits-recours-et-plaintes/services-population-expression-anglaise>).

English-language health and social services are not available in all administrative regions of Quebec.

Many municipalities offer bilingual programs and activities for seniors, but not all, and in particular smaller municipalities with small English-speaking populations.

There are French-language and English-language community groups and organizations providing services to English-speaking seniors in larger urban settings. English-speaking seniors living in rural communities generally are served by English-speaking community groups and organizations. These English-language community groups and organizations generally have broad mandates (serving all ages; bridging with health and social services) and do not offer exclusive services for seniors. Some community groups and organizations have received funding to support activities in the recently created Wellness Centres that serve English-speaking seniors primarily.

## **The Consultation – preliminary remarks**

The document provided for this consultation by the Secrétariat aux aînés du ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) is excellent in its description of the needs of seniors, and of challenges seniors continue to face. All observations related to these needs and challenges are equally valid for seniors of all linguistic and ethnocultural backgrounds. The various action plans and associated programs described in the consultation document that have been implemented over the past few years are far-reaching, comprehensive, sensitive and responsive to the needs of seniors. The research references are pertinent and document the needs of seniors accurately. The orientations and themes of this consultation are appropriate, timely and welcome.

This consultation document recognizes that English-speaking seniors face particular challenges and that a “linguistic barrier” may limit their access to health and social services and active participation in the social life of their communities. This is certainly the case. However, this document’s acknowledgement of their reality is much too succinct and requires elaboration.

We are pleased to have been invited to deposit our memoire on this important issue. Our comments, observations and recommendations that follow below reflect our particular concern for English-speaking seniors. However, we recognize that all organizations and groups that have been invited to participate in this consultation share a common purpose which is to improve the quality of life of all Quebec seniors, regardless of language, race or creed. We applaud this effort. We are proud to be part of our modern and diverse Quebec.

## Observations regarding issues particular to English-speaking seniors

The following is a partial list of some of the issues that are particular to English-speaking seniors that are not necessarily considered within the broad remit of the various public and private service networks throughout the province that serve the majority French-speaking population well.

- English-speaking seniors often have their adult children living away from them – other cities/towns in Quebec, in other provinces, in other countries. Consequently, this initial default level of support in case of emergency/immediate need often does not exist. Even after an immediate crisis is resolved, seniors often cannot rely on continued family support or extended care and must turn elsewhere.
- English-speaking seniors, particularly those living in small rural communities that are primarily French-speaking, often have a very small circle of friends to whom they can turn for assistance. Old age, illness and death reduce this circle with time, increasing their isolation and the range/scope of available support.
- Community services/events organized by municipalities, CLSCs, chambers of commerce, Golden Age Clubs, etc. for seniors are often only offered in the French language, de facto excluding unilingual English-speaking seniors.
- Seniors' residences, nursing homes, hospitals, convalescent centers, etc., particularly in the regions, that develop and offer English language programs and services for seniors on their territories are rare.
- Public/community organized transportation services for seniors are limited or non-existent outside the larger municipalities. English-speaking seniors requiring these services face obstacles related to receiving information about the services and to arranging for services when they are available.
- People living in rural communities, who have to travel long distances to access necessary goods and services, are dependent on their cars for personal transportation. Seniors who can no longer drive themselves are dependent on family members, friends or community volunteers to help them. English-speaking seniors no longer able to drive often are without immediate family members and friends to call upon for help, and must rely on community volunteers for assistance with their transportation needs, where this service exists.
- Over the years, places of worship of many denominations serving English-speaking communities have closed due to drops in worshipper populations and rising costs, throughout the province. The pastoral/spiritual support services that were offered by the clergy and leaders of the different faith groups were not necessarily maintained and are now frequently unavailable or completely absent in many communities. For some seniors, the absence of spiritual guidance/support is acutely felt in times of illness, loss, grief, isolation, despair, confusion, separation, etc. This absence is equally true for seniors living in their own homes, in seniors' residences, in hospitals, in long term care facilities, etc.
- Professional support services (psychologists, family doctors, psychiatrists) for French-speaking and English-speaking seniors with mental health issues is in very short supply in Quebec. The situation for English-speaking seniors is particularly acute, and, even more acute for those living in the regions.
- Seniors whose adult children may be experiencing mental health problems, marital problems, suicide, job loss, or problems with the health and well-being of the grandchildren often find themselves at their wits' end with no one to turn to, resulting in mental health problems for themselves. This reality has been aggravated by the recent Covid pandemic.

- English-speaking seniors living in poverty are particularly vulnerable. Quebec's population historically had and continues to have high levels of functional illiteracy rates in its 16-65 year-old population. Illiteracy and the non-completion of secondary education go hand in hand with poverty. This problem unfortunately also is intergenerational, i.e., it is very challenging for today's school age children living in a home with parents and/or grandparents who have not completed their secondary education to do so. Literacy decline, mental acuity decline and memory loss are associated with aging. Opportunity for engagement and cognitive stimulation contribute to the maintenance of mental and physical health – unfortunately, opportunity and poverty are inversely related. Some seniors are unfamiliar with and uncomfortable with modern information technology tools and services. For some seniors these services are not accessible and/or unaffordable. Consequently, English-speaking seniors living in poverty are at high risk of isolation and victimisation on many fronts.
- Seniors' lifelong learning opportunities (formal, non-formal and informal) are available in English throughout Quebec, particularly for those who are educated, motivated and financially secure. However, it is especially challenging to attract seniors who are not financially secure and who have a limited formal education to participate in lifelong learning opportunities as currently structured, notwithstanding the creation of Community Learning Centres and Wellness Centres.
- There are unresearched, undocumented and under-explored realities concerning the lives and circumstances of English-speaking seniors from ethno-cultural communities and from the LGBTQ+ community, who may be either recent immigrants or long-term residents/citizens of Quebec, that merit study.
- Proper and affordable housing and short and long-term residences are difficult to find in many areas of the province. For unilingual English-speaking seniors living in residences that do not have staff that can speak to them in English, isolation, and all of the negative impacts associated with isolation, is increased. For those living in their own homes, without support or not knowing what support is available, isolation can become unbearable.
- Program initiatives offered by government, by municipalities, by organizations and community groups that are not described and provided in English make them inaccessible for English-speaking seniors without additional outreach, support strategies and organizational efforts.
- Seniors contribute of their time, knowledge and experience as volunteers, mentors, care givers and role models. The Covid pandemic has had a negative impact on seniors on many levels. Community groups and organizations are experiencing greater difficulty since the pandemic in retaining and recruiting seniors, and others, to serve as volunteers or to fill staff positions.

## Recommendations

1. The Action Plan must include a reference to the particular needs, challenges and circumstances of English-speaking seniors. All actors involved in the implementation of this Action Plan must take the needs of their English-speaking population into account when planning and developing implementation strategies. Local, regional and provincial community groups and organizations already serving this seniors populations are a valuable resource that could contribute to this exercise.
2. All community groups and organizations (local, regional and provincial) that currently work for the welfare and well-being of English-speaking seniors and that are funded by the Quebec government or its agencies should continue to receive funding at a level that is at least equivalent to pre-pandemic and pre-recession levels and that factors in the capacity to respond to new demands.
3. French-language information from all levels of government and its service networks addressed to seniors that is not made available in English, de facto has the detrimental effect of excluding English-speaking seniors from available programs and services. Additional resources are needed to translate, communicate and distribute pertinent information to and by the various community groups and organizations serving English-speaking seniors.
4. The ITMAV program initiative is an excellent and successful service for seniors. Certain English-speaking community groups and organizations have been able to participate in this initiative. All English-speaking community groups and organizations wishing to participate in this program should receive the necessary support to be able to do so.
5. The Programme de soutien à la démarche Municipalité amie des aînés (MADA) seeks to support seniors who wish to live in their community. MRC's and municipalities should be reminded to consider their English-speaking seniors when planning their programs and activities and to engage with their local English-speaking community groups and organizations to identify specific needs and determine appropriate responses to these.
6. Resources need to be made available to support the provision of transportation services in the regions for English-speaking seniors who are no longer able to drive and are obliged to rely on English-speaking community volunteers for assistance with their general and adapted transportation service needs.
7. Recurring additional resources need to be made available to support research capacity, policy development capacity, communications capacity and advocacy capacity related to the specific realities and needs of the diverse and dispersed English-speaking senior population.
8. Additional resources need to be provided to local, regional and provincial English-language community groups and organizations to allow for enhanced partnering with municipal, MRC and provincial authorities as well as with private sector organizations/institutions charged with implementing new and existing programs, policies and plans of action to ensure that intended resources and services reach English-speaking seniors.
9. Resources need to be made available to community groups and organizations to secure the pastoral/spiritual support services that once were offered by the clergy of various denominations in rural communities throughout Quebec when needed.
10. Information about Home Care Services needs to be made more widely available in English. Many English-speaking seniors do not avail themselves of these services and carry responsibilities that they should not or neglect doing tasks that are necessary for their personal health and wellbeing.
11. Future publicity campaigns and communication strategies must take the particular needs and circumstances into account. Key messaging must be made available in the English language on the same platforms as French language messaging (TV, print media, digital platforms, etc.)

12. All seniors are victims of overt or covert ageism at some time or another. Certain groups of seniors, e.g. women, members of ethnocultural communities, of racial communities, of religious communities and the LGBTQ+ community, are more frequently targeted than others. Any communication strategy aimed at reducing ageism needs to consult with the different community groups and organizations representing these diverse communities in its developmental stage.
13. Resources are needed to develop and maintain fine-grained data bases and demographic maps of the English-speaking population, of senior populations in particular and of the various public, private and community service points serving seniors throughout Quebec.
14. Additional resources are needed to monitor and evaluate the results and impacts of the programs and services that will be defined in the new Action Plan related to seniors.