



**SENIORS
ACTION
QUEBEC**

Brief to the

Pre-Budget Consultation Chaired by M. Éric Girard,
Minister of Finance

February 10, 2025

« Pour le Gouvernement du Québec, la nation québécoise ne se limite pas à la réalité d'une société majoritairement francophone. Elle inclut l'ensemble des personnes habitant le territoire du Québec. Elle valorise les appartenances plurielles et est attachée aux valeurs de démocratie, d'ouverture et d'inclusion. En plus de la majorité francophone, la nation québécoise reconnaît notamment onze nations autochtones et inclut aussi les communautés québécoises d'expression anglaise.

Il est important que les communautés d'expression anglaise se sentent à part entière chez elle, au Québec. Elles y ont de profondes racines, y jouent un rôle important dans son développement socioéconomique et contribuent à l'édification du Québec moderne et à l'expression de son identité. Le Québec tout entier profite de son apport. »

Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise, « *Renforcer la vitalité des communautés d'expression anglaises du Québec* », Cadre normatif 2022-2025, p.2.

INTRODUCTION

Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) is a not-for-profit provincial organization whose mission is to identify, advance, and address the needs of English-speaking seniors and to support organizations who work with and on behalf of English-speaking seniors throughout the province of Québec.

By promoting solutions and the improvement to the access of services, SAQ provides a strong voice to champion the needs of English-speaking seniors and contributes to the development of local leadership and collaborative policy initiation at all levels of government.

Across Quebec, SAQ will be a strong voice to champion the needs of English-speaking seniors, will work to promote solutions and improve access to services and will support local initiatives and collaborative policy development at all levels of government.

A PORTRAIT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS IN QUEBEC¹

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Canada's English linguistic minority communities are collectively referred to as the English-speaking Community of Quebec (ESCQ). According to the 2021 Statistics Canada Census, Quebec's English-speaking population grew from 1.1M to 1.25M in the 2016 – 2021 period, representing 14.9% of the total Quebec population. English-speaking seniors 65 years of age and older numbered at 193,685 at the last census, representing 15.6% of the English-speaking population and increasing from 2016 by 34,015 or by 21%. The majority of these 0.2M seniors live in the Montreal metropolitan area but English-speaking seniors are found in each of the 17 administrative regions of Quebec. Issues impacting seniors in Quebec and issues

¹ The portrait, challenges and issues facing English-speaking seniors in Quebec have not evolved since the presentation of the SAQ brief in the pre-budget consultation of January 2024. While restructured, much of the content and statistical data in this section remain unchanged from the brief presented last year.

impacting English speakers in Quebec intersect when working with English-speaking seniors compounding them into problems that require innovative and particular solutions.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND POVERTY

Work done by the [CHSSN](#), shows that in 2021, there were 24,845 English-speaking seniors living below the low-income cut-off representing 13.5% of all English-speaking seniors. This is a higher rate than that among French speaking seniors (9.2%). In 2016, among English-speaking seniors, 32.8% had an annual income of less than \$20,000. Furthermore, in 2016, among English speakers, there were 46,165 aged 65 years and over living alone, representing 28.9% of English-speaking seniors. This number has increased in 2021 to 54,745 seniors over 65 reporting living alone (30%). Over 8,400 English speakers aged 85 and over reported living alone in 2021. [Work done](#) by the Provincial Employment Roundtable, using 2021 census data shows that while English-speaking seniors (65 +) are less unemployed than their French counterparts (12.7% to 18.6%), English-speaking seniors still have a higher poverty rate (5.4% to 3.2%)

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. 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.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES

Due to historical and sociological reasons, generations of English-speaking seniors 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 unable to communicate in French. Consequently, English-speaking seniors find themselves in situations where they cannot communicate their needs to persons they encounter in everyday situations. 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.

This inability to communicate is particularly problematic in crisis situations, like the need to access health and social services. A [report](#) produced with the support of the One Voice Coalition in 2021, (a coalition managed by Seniors Action Quebec of Montreal area organizations serving seniors), and the CHSSN, surveyed English-speaking seniors and organizations working on their behalf. The results demonstrate, among other issues, that respondents reported difficulties accessing family medicine, hospital services and CLSC services. 75% of respondents reported that access to information in English about health care and social services in Quebec was average or worse.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The 2023 CHSSN Crop Vitality [survey](#) on English-language Health and Social Services Access in Quebec indicates that issues with access to service remain, despite improvements. Some of the issues include: 36% of seniors over 65 reported not being served in English at CLSCs, while 30% reported not being served in English by Info-Santé and 24% reported not being served in English at the emergency room or out-patient clinics. All this despite 80% of seniors reporting it being very or somewhat important that their health and social services professional spoke to them in English.

Effective communication is deemed necessary to the delivery of quality health and social services. This has been [affirmed](#) by the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux (MSSS), which consider it essential that English-speaking Quebecers are able to understand the directives of health providers for the successful delivery of these services. Patients who are not treated in their preferred language are more likely to: receive incorrect prescriptions or not know how to take their medication; will not understand their diagnosis; may spend extra time in emergency departments; may be exposed to unintentional injuries or complications; and may be discharged from hospital without a follow-up appointment scheduled. They are also less likely to use the mental health services that are available, or to be satisfied with their care, and thus fail to show up to future appointments.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS OUTSIDE THE REGION OF MONTREAL AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The full range of English-language health and social services are not available in all administrative regions of Quebec.² Some municipalities may offer bilingual programs and activities for seniors, but not all, especially those in smaller municipalities with small English-speaking populations. This leads to problems accessing services and resources. When seniors are unable to access the programs that are put in place for them, this contributes to negative health outcomes and leads to them becoming isolated.

The QCGN Senior Care Services in English in Quebec [report](#) demonstrates that while some health and social services may be available to seniors and caregivers in English, large portions of the community are either unaware of their availability or too intimidated to ask for them in English. Even more worrisome is that the survey results conducted for the QCGN report indicate that a majority of caregivers (70%) anticipate a growing need for care services.

Professional support services (psychologists, family doctors, psychiatrists) for French-speaking and English-speaking seniors with mental health issues are 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.

² « Certaines régions n'ont pas d'établissement offrant tous leurs services en langue anglaise. Les personnes peuvent alors communiquer directement avec l'établissement de leur région ou encore consulter son site Web pour connaître les services spécifiques qu'il offre en anglais. » See <https://www.quebec.ca/sante/systeme-et-services-de-sante/droits-recours-et-plaintes/services-population-expression-anglaise> (consulted February 5, 2025),

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND CAREGIVERS

Further heightening the problem of senior care is the exacerbated burden that has been placed on caregivers. In Canada, 1 out of 4 individuals is a caregiver and it is likely that many Canadians will become caregivers in their lifetime. Caregiving by family and friends, or paid care giving services are becoming increasingly common in Quebec, not just out of desirability but out of necessity. An overburdened public system leaves many seniors slipping through the cracks. Even if these services are available to them in their region, English-speaking seniors may be reluctant to enter a home or make use of these services, if the providers cannot communicate with them in their language. This anxiety places emotional and financial strain on them and their families and could add to further isolation.

Reporting from a [survey](#) conducted by the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence in 2023 demonstrates that over three-quarters of caregivers questioned had received no support services over the previous 12 months. The survey also showed that many caregivers lack funding, resources, and information about what was available to them, and how to provide the best possible care for their families. As families have become more instrumental in the delivery of senior care, improving the information and resources necessary would go a long way to improving senior care outcomes. Seniors Action Quebec will continue to monitor and report on how caregivers are becoming more critical to the well-being of seniors.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND ISOLATION

English-speaking seniors often have their adult children living away from them. 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. 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.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS AND ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Additional challenges for seniors, as recent work from Seniors Action Quebec demonstrates, are seniors struggling with isolation, food insecurity, housing issues, cybersecurity (fraud and scams) and struggling with continuously adapting to new realities. Seniors are not citizens who have recently arrived in society but rather they have been tax paying citizens for decades, who often feel as though they have been forgotten and left behind as they age.

Proper and affordable housing and short-and long-term residences are difficult to find in many regions of Quebec. 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.

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.

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF SENIORS ACTION QUEBEC

1. The Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA) is provided with adequate financial resources to respect its mission and mandates.
2. The funding program of the SRQEA to sectoral, regional and provincial groups is expanded to ensure that the concerns of English-speaking Quebecers are taken into consideration in the development of government policy direction and decisions.
3. The Government of Quebec consults with Seniors Action Quebec on all policy initiatives pertaining to seniors.
4. The SRQEA ensures sufficient funding for the maintenance and development of Senior Wellness Centres in all regions of Québec.
5. The Government of Quebec ensures sufficient funding to community organizations that offer front line services to seniors. We note an increase in the demand for their services while government support has not increased at the same level. Community organizations are often at the forefront of senior care and their work, and the work of their staff, need enhanced resources and support.
6. The SRQEA ensures that sufficient funds are allocated for purposes of researching the needs and realities of English-speaking seniors in Quebec to ensure policymakers and community organizations can address these issues based on current data and empirical evidence.

Geographical distribution of English-speaking Senior Population 65 and over across Quebec Health Regions³

Location	Total English Pop	English Seniors 65 +	English Seniors % of Area
Quebec	1,253,580	193,685	15.5%
RTS du Bas-Saint-Laurent	1,465	275	18.8%
RTS du Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	2,150	355	16.5%
RTS de la Capitale-Nationale	17,565	2,645	15.1%
RTS de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du- Québec	7,695	1,405	18.3%
RTS de l'Estrie – CHU de Sherbrooke	41,075	10,205	24.8%
RTS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal	210,160	37,710	17.9%
RTS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal	203,360	35,080	17.3%
RTS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal	95,515	8,800	9.2%
RTS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal	101,405	14,960	14.8%
RTS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal	81,675	10,875	13.3%
RTS de l'Outaouais	83,130	12,080	14.5%
RTS de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue	5,765	960	16.7%
RTS de la Côte-Nord	5,300	1,050	19.8%
RTS de la Gaspésie	7,075	2,140	30.2%
RTS des Îles	660	145	22.0%
RTS de Chaudière-Appalaches	5,055	855	16.9%
RTS de Laval	104,525	12,685	12.1%
RTS de Lanaudière	17,485	2,545	14.6%
RTS des Laurentides	47,010	8,990	19.1%
RTS de la Montérégie-Centre	63,650	10,475	16.5%
RTS de la Montérégie-Est	24,640	3,550	14.4%
RTS de la Montérégie-Ouest	100,150	14,380	14.4%

³ Demographic Profiles of Québec's English-speaking Communities- CHSSN Baselines Data Report 2022-2023 (page 13) <https://chssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2021-BDR-Province-of-Quebec.pdf>