

# Tips and Best Practices: Bilingual Human Resources in the Health Sector



One of the major challenges to accessing French-language health services in Canada is the recruitment and availability of a sufficient number of health professionals having the language skills required to offer services in English and in French.

Bilingual staff represent an **essential link** in ensuring direct, effective communication to increase the quality and safety of health service delivery for official language minority communities.

## Bilingualism in the health sector

- The term "bilingual staff" refers primarily to proficiency in communicating in both official languages: English and French
- The ability to speak English and French is an additional skill that should be recognized in the same manner as another professional or technical competence
- Knowledge of medical terminology in both languages is also required

## Bilingualism and communication skills

- Even if a person is bilingual, there is a difference between having skills in a language and mastering a language
- One language tends to be dominant and linguistic competence may vary according to context
- Fluency in a language can vary across the four communication skills:
  - ▢ **Speaking** ▢ **Understanding** ▢ **Reading** ▢ **Writing**
- Practicing both languages in the work environment is essential to maintain the level of bilingualism

## Type of communication

**Two-way communication:** staff communicate in English or French at a level appropriate to their occupation, function and to their client

**Three-way communication:** staff communicate in English and in French between two or more parties to facilitate communication in a role related or not to his occupation

The bilingual employee can also serve as an **occasional interpreter**, provided they are trained to do so

## Benefits of qualified bilingual staff

Very valuable resources when organizations effectively use their language skills. They can :

- Directly provide client services in English and in French
- Reduce the need for interpretation services and reduce costs
- Increase the quality of French-language services and client satisfaction
- Provide increased knowledge of the local Francophone community and of its needs

## Success factors for the recruitment and retention of bilingual human resources

- 👍 Engage the community and defining health needs and priorities;
- 👍 Increase awareness among all staff of the importance of language services;
- 👍 Define the linguistic profiles and explicit roles of bilingual positions;
- 👍 Evaluate linguistic competencies in French and in English using standardized tools
- 👍 Adopt additional tailored measures to welcome and integrate bilingual staff
- 👍 Train bilingual staff and provide tools to enable them to work effectively in both languages
- 👍 Recognize the contribution of bilingual human resources;
- 👍 Assess the workload and satisfaction of bilingual staff and of the targeted client group.

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