

French Language Services Policy

BU / Division Name	
Department	Community Engagement
Version Number	3.0
Date	January 29, 2024
Effective Date	September 2022

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Provincial French Language Services (FLS) policy is to ensure that Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS) fully meets its obligations as a Crown Corporation under the *French Language Services Act* (FLSA), Section 29.1 of Regulation O.Reg.187/22 under the *Connecting Care Act, 2019*, and *Active Offer Regulations* in actively offering our services in both official languages. HCCSS recognizes that language and culture play an essential role in the provision of health care services. Access to high-quality health services offered in French is necessary to achieving its vision of healthy people and healthy communities. This policy enables a consistent, inclusive and equitable approach to the provision of French Language Services in meeting the needs of our Francophone patients, their families, and caregivers, across the 14 HCCSS geographies.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees of Home and Community Care Support Services, as well as Board members, students, volunteers, Community of Advisors, and contracted service provider organizations (SPOs), as indicated in the document.

POLICY STATEMENT

Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS) is committed to active offer to ensure effective delivery of services to Francophone patients, families, and caregivers.

DEFINITIONS

Active offer: Active offer means that FLS are offered to the patient/family upon first contact and throughout their patient journey. The onus is on HCCSS and its contracted service provider organizations to actively offer services in French, rather than wait for the patient, family member, caregiver or health care partner to request it. Active offer of health services in French is the regular and permanent offer of services to the Francophone population. Active offer of services respects the principle of equity, aims for service quality comparable to that provided in English, is linguistically and culturally appropriate to the needs and priorities of Francophones, and an important contributing factor to their safety.

Designated Bilingual Position (DBP): Designated Bilingual Positions are those that are identified as requiring French language proficiency in order to serve our French speaking population and ensure service continuity. Each designated bilingual position requires a specific level of French language proficiency for oral and/or written skills as defined by the position, the linguistic profile of the community, and the level of interaction with patients, family members and the public.

Designated Areas (DA): In 1986, the French Language Services Act [designated specific areas](#) (In 2022 there are 26 areas) where FLS must be provided by government agencies. About 80% of Franco-Ontarians live in a designated area. For an area to obtain designation, French-speaking residents must usually make up at least 10% of the population. In urban centres, the French-speaking population must usually be at least 5,000.

Francophone: People whose mother tongue is French, as well as those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but who have a particular knowledge of French as an official language and use French at home.

Senior Leadership: Refers to HCCSS Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chiefs, Vice-Presidents, and Director level roles.

Service Provider Organizations (SPOs): Refers to all service providers contracted by HCCSS to deliver home and community care services to patients.

Internal HCCSS Staff: Refers to all front line patient services delivered by individuals directly employed by HCCSS which may include but is not limited to care coordination, care coordination assistants, therapies, nursing, nursing practitioners.

Preferred official language: Refers to the language the patient identifies as being the language in which the patient is most comfortable receiving their home and community care services. It is a very important patient centered question that aims to make sure that the patient can communicate effectively with their health care provider, understand the services provided (including care instructions) and give informed consent.

PROCEDURE

Governance

The Board of Directors (Board) demonstrates knowledge and support of HCCSS to fully meet its obligations as a Crown Corporation under the FLSA. Annually, the Board is informed and receives an annual report on the implementation of French Language Health Services (FLHS) in HCCSS. The Board plays a key role in ensuring expectations are communicated throughout the organization and ensures accountability on all parameters of this Policy. Although Board members are appointed through the Public Appointments Secretariat, it endeavours to have Francophone and French speaking members as part of the Board composition reflective of the percentage of the population that identify as Francophone within the Province.

Leadership

Representation of Francophone and French speaking leaders within the organization from the Manager level and above brings a skill set of French speaking ability that serves to advance the development of, and compliance with French Language Services policies and procedures throughout the organization. Reasonable efforts are made to ensure that the percentage of leaders speaking French is representative of the percentage of the population that identify as Francophone in each respective HCCSS region.

Reporting

The Annual French Language Health Services Report, coordinated across 14 geographies by the Director, Community Engagement, is reported through the Ministry of Health's French Language Health Services Database (FLHSD). This report will be presented annually to the Board of Directors.

An annual report on French Language Services is also to be produced for the Ministry of Francophone Affairs, coordinated by the Director, Community Engagement.

Contracted service provider organizations report their compliance with the requirements for the delivery of French Language Services on an annual basis via the Service Provider Annual Report template.

Progress made on FLS commitments is reported through the Annual Business Plan as a priority.

Planning

HCCSS works with the French Language Service Entities to embed the FLS perspective in health system processes, structures and programs that are part of the organization's mandate.

The Annual Business Plan defines a focus on FLS delivery, outlining efforts planned for the year ahead.

Annual reporting on FLS services is sent to the Office of French Language Services at the Ministry of Health through the French Language Health Services Database. Reports generated are shared with the Provincial FLS Committee for review and recommendations, as well as the Senior Leadership Team and the Board.

Patient Services

HCCSS has an obligation to provide active offer to its callers seeking information and/or referral related to patient services.

By making a verbal active offer on first point of contact and at every step along the patient journey, the employee assumes the responsibility to determine the preferred official language of the patient, caller or member of the public who requests information on services.

An active offer means that the employee is accountable to indicate that services are available in both French and English, and to inquire, determine and confirm the patient's language preference, as opposed to the onus being on the patient to request access to services in either official language. After a patient indicates preference for FLS, this preference is recorded in the Client Health and Related Information System (CHRIS) so that all future communications continue in French, including the provision of patient information and patient care plan. All HCCSS agencies enable CHRIS settings to record mother tongue, oral, and written preferences of patients and substitute decision maker/primary contact (if applicable). Please see Appendix for Active Offer to Intake Process Map.

Access to French Speaking HCCSS Staff

Once preferred language of service has been identified as French, the patient is assigned to staff who will provide service in French. Alternate local bilingual or Francophone HCCSS staff within individual HCCSS geographies may be used to support the provision of care as needed.

Where HCCSS is a direct employer and provider of patient care through various programs such as Mental Health and Addiction Nursing, Telehome Care Nursing, Rapid Response, Nurse Practitioner, therapy services, it is responsible for ensuring that a number of positions are designated as bilingual, in accordance with the relative percentage of Francophone population in the community/region.

Contracted Service Provider Organizations

Service providers are responsible to provide active offer to patients and assign French-speaking staff to provide care. Requirements for the provision of French Language Services and reporting on performance are identified in the Service Provider Organization contracts.

Communications

Home and Community Care Support Services ensures that the public and patient facing materials it produces are available in both official languages. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Inquiries made through Reception;
- Automated Messages/Voice Mail, as appropriate within designated areas;

- Visual identity and public facing documents including signage, display stands, posters, banners, press releases, brochures, local and provincial websites and other documents released to the public including promotional materials and social media platforms;
- Patient information materials such as the Patient Bill of Rights, Patient Welcome booklets, patient handouts, thank you cards, sympathy cards, and other patient facing documents;
- Job postings and promotion of job postings for any designated bilingual positions and others where operationally feasible;
- Memos to sector health system partners (unless emergency, upon which French can follow);
- Care planning and discharge documents.

Correspondence, including voicemail, email and letters received in French from patients, families, caregivers, health system partners, MPPs, and the media are automatically responded to in French.

Home and Community Care Support Services provides a central translation service for public facing documents from English to French and French to English. To identify local contacts and submit requests, visit the [Provincial Translation Service page](#) on the Connection intranet.

Patient Relations

HCCSS staff representatives address complaints specifically about the receipt of services in French. Should these complaints not be resolvable by staff, the local complaints escalation process is followed. Please refer to your local Complaints and Appeals Policy.

Patients who express a language preference and who have not been served in French may file a complaint with their Care Coordinator through the formal Complaints, Appeals and Feedback process detailed on the HCCSS website, or through the [Ontario Patient Ombudsman](http://www.patientombudsman.ca) (www.patientombudsman.ca, 1-888-321-0339 or 416-597-0339.)

Patient Experience

Patient experience feedback surveys such as the Client and Caregiver Experience Evaluation survey, and the Voices surveys are provided/administered to Francophone patients, families, and caregivers in French and include the evaluation of patient satisfaction on the delivery of services in French.

Community Engagement

HCCSS staff take into account the cultural realities and perspectives of Francophones, respond to their needs and demonstrate a commitment to active engagement of the Francophone population in community engagement activities, including translation of materials and enabling participation in French. Home and Community Care Support Services staff collaborate with the French Language Health Planning Entities to ensure we are meeting the needs of Francophone patients in our communities.

Business Analytics

Databases and platforms used by HCCSS staff will have the ability to track and share information about unique patients served who are Francophone. All data indicators should be able to be tracked by linguistic preference. This data will be embedded into reporting.

Responsibilities of Staff

All HCCSS Staff:

- Are orientated to their obligations under the *FLSA* and *Connecting Care Act, 2019* and *Regulations*, and Active Offer Regulations. Staff shall demonstrate appropriate knowledge and awareness of the roles and responsibilities of HCCSS with respect to the provision of FLS.
- Complete training on the Provincial FLS Policy, active offer training and refresher courses as assigned through their learning management systems.
- Apply and promote the principles of active offer throughout the health care system.
- Respect the language of correspondence from the public and patients, families, and caregivers by ensuring that all correspondence received in French is answered in French within the same response times as English correspondence.

Active Offer Training

All staff, including new hires, shall receive active offer training with a desired completion rate of 100%. Training is delivered via an external e-Learning platform (activeoffertraining.ca), administered by the Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario. Training highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural competency in ensuring positive experiences and outcomes of care.

All staff are required to complete the first 3 modules and management & HR required to complete an additional 3 modules.

Ongoing Updates

As required, the Director of Community Engagement provides ongoing education to keep HCCSS staff informed of changes in legislation, new processes, and projects related to French Language Services.

Language Skills Development

HCCSS encourages employees to develop their French language skills. Depending on role and function, appropriateness of language training, organizational need, and budget, FLS education programs may be available to employees. Employees interested in French language development should consult with their Managers.

Human Resources / Staffing

Human Resources supports an enhanced focus on recruitment, training and development of a Francophone and bilingual workforce.

Identification of Francophone & Bilingual Staff

Human Resources works with Patient Services management to identify which roles within the organization should be designated bilingual and to what level of proficiency is required. The requirement for a position to be a Designated Bilingual Position is re-evaluated as positions become vacant, or upon creation of a new position. Patient Services Managers, in collaboration with HR, assess the need for DBPs based on multiple factors including operational needs, designated geography, Francophone patient population, patient caseloads, and overall team capacity to meet patients, family, caregiver and public bilingual language requirements.

Human Resources maintains a record of DBPs and bilingual staff and is able to provide Patient Services with a current inventory of DBPs and bilingual staff that can be connected to any patient, family, caregiver, or member of the public who wishes to receive service in French.

Recruitment

As we work towards building a bilingual workforce, efforts will be made to post Designated Bilingual Positions (DBPs) and other positions in French and English where operationally feasible. Every position posted or advertised will specify language requirements.

Job postings for DBPs indicate that bilingualism is a requirement of employment. In some instances, job postings for positions that are not DBPs may indicate that bilingualism is an asset (as opposed to a requirement).

Targeted recruitment efforts may be required in order to elicit the desired Francophone candidates for designated positions. Human Resources identifies and leverages local and regional Francophone resources to maximize targeted recruitment.

Evaluation and Selection of Candidates for Designated Bilingual Positions

There are three elements to recruitment for DBPs with regards to French language abilities: screening, interviews and proficiency testing.

- Interviews are conducted with candidates as part of the selection process. Human Resources staff conducting the interviews will endeavour to speak with candidates for DBPs in French to informally screen French oral comprehension and expression skills.
- Human resources staff will endeavour to ensure that the selection committees for DBPs include at least one bilingual person and include interview questions in French to help assess the candidate's oral comprehension and expression in French. The informal assessments provided at the phone screen and/or interview stage help determine whether the candidate's French language skills are adequate to consider for testing.
- Formal language testing will occur before an offer of employment is made. Human Resources will schedule language testing.

French Language Services Committees

The Provincial FLS Committee supports a consistent, inclusive and equitable approach to the delivery of FLS thus meeting the needs of our Francophone patients, their families, and caregivers across the 14 organizations and the Provincial FLS Committee ensures our collective compliance under the *French Language Services Act*, Regulations under the *Connecting Care Act, 2019*, and *Active Offer Regulations*. The work of this Committee presents an opportunity for building on best practices by sharing across geographies as our organization works as one.

Local FLS Committees and working groups focus on operationalizing the requirements outlined in the Provincial FLS policy.

Inclusive Culture and French Services for HCCSS Staff

For internal operational purposes, English is the language of business at HCCSS. However, HCCSS is committed to - and fosters - a culture of inclusiveness and encourages interaction in both official languages.

Employees may request access to information related to pension, benefits, and employee assistance programs in both official languages.

Supplies and Equipment

Appropriate supplies and equipment are available to staff to ensure quality FLS can be provided. These may include, but are not limited to, French keyboards, software, dictionaries and reference documents.

Document Control Record

Version History

Version Number	Date Issued	Description
3.0	January 29, 2024	Revised Policy
2.0	September 15, 2022	Final
1.9	August 8, 2022	Final Draft

Note: This document is scheduled for review **one year** from date of publication

References

[The French Language Services Act, and Regulation 407/94 - French Language Health Services - Ministry Programs - Public Information - MOHLTC \(gov.on.ca\)](#)

[Map-designated-areas EN \(ontario.ca\)](#)

[Provision of French Language Services on Behalf of Government Agencies \(Regulation 284/11\) - French Language Health Services - Ministry Programs - Public Information - MOHLTC](#)


Related Procedures, Forms & Template:

Document Type	Title
N/A	N /A

Other Related Policies:

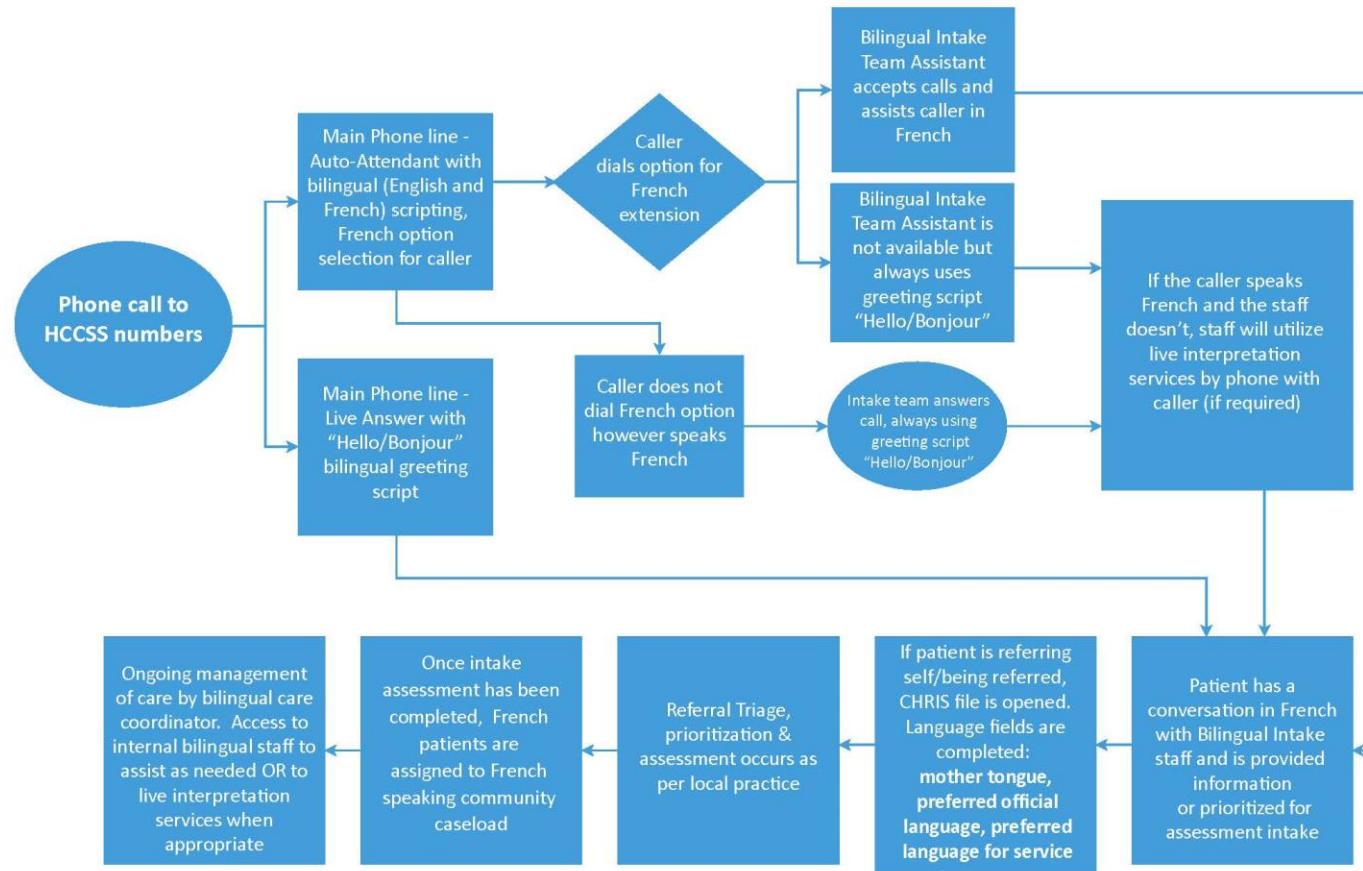
Department	Policy Name
N/A	N/A

Document Sign-Off:

Name	Title	Responsibility	Signature	Date
Senior Leadership Team	CEO			January 29, 2024
Senior Leadership Team				September 13, 2022
Regulatory Steering Committee				August 17, 2022

Appendix

From Active Offer to Intake Process Map – HCCSS



Note: Not all geographies have live interpretation services, in which case a call back may need to be scheduled.

Note: Not all geographies have mandatory language fields. If not mandatory, language fields still need to be completed as soon as possible.