



# **In the Age of Data: Modernizing Manitoba's Health Card**

## **Through the Inclusion of a Linguistic Identity Marker**

**March 2024**

## Introduction

As the official voice of Manitoba's francophone community, Santé en français promotes access to quality health and social services in French and engages in collaborative leadership that mobilizes and supports partners.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of providing health care in French is well documented. According to Gauthier and Reid (2012), "[translation] a number of studies show that language barriers have a direct impact on the health of minority francophones in Canada."<sup>2</sup> Research also confirms the crucial role of communication in safe, equitable and quality health and wellness services (Seale et al., 2022).<sup>3</sup> Several researchers assert that access to comprehensive data helps ensure quality patient care in a patient-centred approach (De Moissac and Bowen, 2019).<sup>4</sup>

"[Translation] To ignore the importance of language in health care is to jeopardize the health and well-being of Canadians."<sup>5</sup>

Manitoba's health care system uses data to plan health services for the public and ensure informed decision-making. This data should include information on the health status of French-speaking Manitobans and their use of health services. Access to such data would ensure better planning and delivery of services tailored to the needs of francophones and facilitate the improvement of French-language health services and referrals.

In an age where data is becoming increasingly important, updating Manitoba's health card would benefit everyone. We applaud the provincial government's recent commitment on March 28, 2024, to implement a modernized health card in both plastic and digital form. The new card could herald a new age if it allowed for enriched data collection on populations such as francophones, Indigenous peoples and allophones, for which the current card does not collect specific information.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Santé en français, visit [santeenfrancais.com](http://santeenfrancais.com).

<sup>2</sup> Gauthier, H., and Reid, M.-A. (2012). *Compétences linguistiques et qualité de services : argumentaire pour des services de soins de santé en français de qualité*. Report for Santé en français.

<sup>3</sup> Seale et al. (2022). Patient-physician language concordance and quality and safety outcomes among frail home care recipients admitted to hospital in Ontario, Canada, *CMAJ* 2022 July 11;194: E899-908. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.212155

<sup>4</sup> De Moissac, D., and Bowen, S. (2019). Impact of language barriers on quality of care and patient safety for official language minority Francophones in Canada. *Journal of Patient Experience*, 6(1), 24-32.

<sup>5</sup> Société Santé en français. (September 2022). *Agir ensemble pour la santé et le mieux-être en français: Convergence 2028*.

## Background

Santé en français is part of a national movement consisting of 16 networks across the country working to support the health of minority francophone populations.<sup>6</sup>

A report<sup>7</sup> on the state of minority francophone communities, their health needs, the services available to them and the workforce capable of providing care in French highlighted the urgent need for data back in 2010.

In 2014, Santé en français set up a working group that included officials from government and the regional health authorities to address the lack of data, and a document was produced to guide the group's work.<sup>8</sup> Creating a new health card that would capture data on the French-speaking population was one of the main recommendations. At the same time, Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) launched an initiative to combine the driver's license with the health card, thereby creating a multi-functional personal identification card. Santé en français met with MPI to work on the project, given the convergence of interests in modernizing the health card. Elections were subsequently held in 2016 and, unfortunately, the matter was not a priority of the government at the time.

One Canadian province has seen the relevance of acting on its health card. Prince Edward Island has had a bilingual health card since 2016 that collects data on the province's francophone population and the services it uses. The initiative has been recognized as a best practice by the Santé en français movement across the country and hailed as a landmark achievement.<sup>9</sup> The GReFoPS research group, which studies health and social service training and practices in minority francophone settings, considers the initiative a promising practice in terms of quality of evidence, impact, applicability and transferability.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on Santé en français, visit [santeenfrancais.com](http://santeenfrancais.com).

<sup>7</sup> Consortium national de formation en santé et Société Santé en français (April 2010). *La santé des francophones en situation minoritaire : un urgent besoin de plus d'information pour offrir de meilleurs services*.

<sup>8</sup> Santé en français (February 2016). *Des informations sur la santé et l'utilisation des services de santé chez les francophones du Manitoba : pour mieux planifier et prendre des décisions éclairées. Argumentaire sur la variable linguistique préparé par Consultation Deroche Consulting Inc. pour le Comité de travail sur la variable linguistique*.

<sup>9</sup> PGF Consultants (March 2022). *Rapport - Documentation de l'expérience de la carte santé bilingue à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (Î.-P.-É.)*.

<sup>10</sup> Groupe de recherche sur la formation et les pratiques en santé et service social en contexte francophone minoritaire (GREFPOS) (February 2019). *L'intégration de la variable linguistique dans la collecte de données (Île-du-Prince-Édouard)* - Retrieved from: *Cahier de pratiques novatrices dans le domaine de l'intégration des services sociaux et de santé en langue officielle en contexte minoritaire*.

## Current situation

There is currently no mechanism in Manitoba to systematically and automatically identify francophones in the health care system. The provincial health card does not capture linguistic identity, which poses considerable challenges when it comes to researching the health of francophones. A study entitled *Health and Healthcare Utilization of Francophones in Manitoba*,<sup>11</sup> produced by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP), for example, ran into problems initially owing to the lack of available data on the francophone population. Where such data exists, sample sizes are insufficient to ensure effective reporting. The study overcame the difficulty with a methodology that is far more complex than when data is readily available.

Few surveys and administrative data capture linguistic identity. MCHP maintains a dataset known as the Population Health Research Data Repository. “The Repository is a comprehensive collection of administrative, registry, survey, and other databases primarily comprising residents of Manitoba. [...] The administrative health database, for example, holds records of virtually all contacts with the provincial health care system, the Manitoba Health Services Insurance Plan (including physicians, hospitals, personal care homes, home care, and pharmaceutical prescriptions) of all registered individuals. MCHP acts as a steward of the information in the Repository for agencies such as Manitoba Health.”<sup>12</sup> While the databases are linked to the personal identification numbers (PINs) found on health cards, it is not possible to identify francophones because the health card does not capture linguistic identity. This is a considerable obstacle, as without access to this rich data, it is difficult to assess the health status of francophones and their use of services. It is also not possible to link the various databases with the administrative data from the health card to create a representative sample of francophones and conduct retrospective analyses.

Capturing cultural and linguistic identity on the health card would ensure that francophones, Indigenous peoples and allophones are systematically and automatically identified. Modernizing the health care would also present an invaluable opportunity to track gender identity. Capturing the cultural, linguistic and gender identity of these populations could serve as the foundation for a database, providing information on their health status and bringing about the necessary improvements in health service delivery.

In short, a modernized health card could be linked to the Population Health Research Data Repository dataset. By capturing the cultural, linguistic and gender identities of cardholders, the health card would allow that information to enter the databases.

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<sup>11</sup> Chartier, M., Finlayson, G., Prior, H., McGowan, K., Chen, H., de Rocquigny, J., Walld, R., and Gousseau, M. (2012). *Health and Healthcare Utilization of Francophones in Manitoba*, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Winnipeg, Man.

<sup>12</sup> Chartier, M., Finlayson, G., Prior, H., McGowan, K., Chen, H., de Rocquigny, J., Walld, R., and Gousseau, M. (2012). *Health and Healthcare Utilization of Francophones in Manitoba*, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Winnipeg, Man.

## ***The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act***

Following the work begun by Santé en français on the health card in 2014, a new law came into effect in July 2016, entitled *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* (Bill 5). The Act reaffirms the importance of the many initiatives undertaken by Santé en français, including the updating of the health card.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Shared Health***

Manitoba's health care system has undergone a major transformation, at the heart of which was the creation of Shared Health in 2018.

Immediately following the announcement of the creation of Shared Health, Santé en français began working closely with the Francophone Affairs Secretariat to ensure that the health of francophones and access to French-language health services were an integral part of any major strategies developed.

Tripartite projects involving Shared Health, the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and Santé en français were implemented over a five-year period, from 2018 to 2023. Thanks to the leadership of Santé en français, the organization obtained federal funding from Société Santé en français through Health Canada.

Two important gains stemming from those projects were: 1) the establishment of an office for francophone health within Shared Health, and 2) the confirmation of Shared Health's bilingual status. *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* requires Shared Health to develop a strategic plan for French-language services (FLS) to meet the needs of Manitoba's francophone community, and Shared Health did indeed develop a multi-year strategic plan for FLS delivery under the provincial health care plan for 2022-2027.<sup>14</sup> The plan includes more than 15 references to the importance of data on FLS and the health of francophones.

To support the implementation of Shared Health's Clinical and Preventive Services Plan, and with a view to ensuring the application of a francophone lens, the following strategy was identified in Shared Health's multi-year strategic plan for FLS delivery:

“Analysis of current provincial systems that identify health system clients' linguistic profile/preference. There is very limited FLS-specific demographic, health status and utilization data available beyond Statistics Canada and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy report (2012). Identification of linguistic

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Manitoba. *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act*, retrieved from <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/pdf.php?cap=f157> on March 12, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Shared Health. Provincial Health Care Multi-Year Strategic French-Language Services (FLS) Plan 2022-2027. March 2022 Retrieved from <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/fh-provincial-fls-strategic-plan-2022-27.pdf> on March 12, 2024.

identity and preference is required to be able to analyze utilization data from an FLS lens.”<sup>15</sup>

Another strategic initiative of Shared Health’s multi-year FLS strategic plan also includes the following commitment:

“Continue expansion and refinement of FLS indicators through Digital Health systems by supporting the development and implementation of a standardized provincial approach to French-language patient identification across the system (i.e., linguistic identity and preference) by defining indicators and data requirements.”<sup>16</sup>

These action items in Shared Health’s multi-year FLS strategic plan align perfectly with the intent of a modernized Manitoba health card, including cultural and linguistic identification. Collecting such data would ensure that francophones are systematically identified for database purposes, so that we know the health status of francophones and how they use services. As mentioned early, modernizing the health card would also present an invaluable opportunity to capture data on gender identity.

It is worth mentioning that an external firm evaluated the tripartite project. The importance of obtaining evidence and data through the health card was raised during the evaluation. One of recommendations in the final report included the following:

“[Translation] Standardize access to data, whether for the identification of French-speaking patients or bilingual staff via the SAP or some other system. Capturing data through the health card is a solution worth considering.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Progress on French-language services data in Manitoba**

Another point worth making is that Manitoba has made progress in collecting FLS data, thanks to the Santé en français initiative and its work with various partners, including Shared Health and the regional health authorities. A few questions on the topic are now included in the survey sent to patients after a hospital stay, and other surveys are supposed to include questions to identify francophones and report on their experiences, especially in primary health care and long-term care.

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<sup>15</sup> Shared Health. Provincial Health Care Multi-Year Strategic French-Language Services (FLS) Plan 2022-2027. March 2022 Retrieved from <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/fh-provincial-fls-strategic-plan-2022-27.pdf> on March 12, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Provincial Health Care Multi-Year Strategic French-Language Services (FLS) Plan 2022-2027. March 2022 Retrieved from <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/fh-provincial-fls-strategic-plan-2022-27.pdf> on March 12, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Prairie Research Associates (May 2023). *Évaluation du Projet tripartite pour l’intégration des services en français: Rapport final*.

Another achievement is the implementation of the OZi strategy in Manitoba, which seeks to gather data on the capacity to offer FLS from which performance indicators can be generated to track the development of such services in designated bilingual and francophone facilities. The latest report, produced in June 2023<sup>18</sup>, provides a snapshot of providers' readiness to offer French-language health services in each region of the province. The data deals with governance engagement and program and site practices at designated bilingual and francophone institutions. The 2023 report indicates that designated bilingual health authorities and independent facilities successfully engaged 100 programs and sites to participate in data collection, a significant increase over previous years; the number of participating programs in 2021 was 27 and in 2022, 71. This indicates a greater ability on the part of the system to identify programs, and a greater commitment to FLS on the part of designated bilingual programs.

Despite these advances, however, major challenges remain with respect to data collection, particularly in relation to data on francophones and their use of services. A modernized health card could remedy this. As the OZi report of 2023 noted:

“[Translation] The potential inclusion of data on practices that enable francophones to navigate all programs would make it possible to support the commitments of health authorities and independent facilities to francophones and French-language services, regardless of their responsibility for French-language services.”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, bilateral agreements between Canada and Manitoba on health funding and cooperation play a key role in improving health care in the province. On February 14, 2024, Ottawa and Manitoba announced over \$633 million in funding to improve health care in Manitoba. Under the Working Together agreement, the federal government will provide nearly \$434 million to support Manitoba's three-year action plan to improve health care. Ottawa will also contribute approximately \$199 million under the Aging with Dignity agreement to support Manitoba's five-year action plan to improve home, community and long-term care for seniors.

Note that both plans contain language explicitly addressing official language minority communities, including commitments to “implement measures that also respond to the needs of underserved and/or disadvantaged populations,” share “available disaggregated data with CIHI and work with CIHI to improve availability of disaggregated data for existing and new common indicators to enable reporting on progress for underserved and/or disadvantaged populations,” and improve “access to services in French [...and consideration of] bilingual employee needs as a component of future health human resources planning and strategies.” The funding announced in both bilateral agreements can provide viable financial support for capturing cultural, linguistic and gender identity data as part of Manitoba's move towards a modernized health card, and this would enable the current government to enter a new age of data, enhance the delivery of quality, safe and equitable services, and thus secure a return on investments in health care.

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<sup>18</sup>OZi (June 2023). *Améliorer l'accès aux données sur l'offre de services de santé en français (Manitoba)*.

<sup>19</sup> OZi (June 2023). *Améliorer l'accès aux données sur l'offre de services de santé en français (Manitoba)*.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this document was to describe the current situation and the need for additional data on the health status of francophones and their use of FLS, so as to be able to effectively plan the services delivered to Manitoba's francophones and ensure informed decision-making. Many of the documents consulted arrive at the same conclusion: the urgent need for additional data that could be provided through the identification of culture, language and gender. A modernized health card could be that vehicle.

The Manitoba government has a leadership role to play in implementing recommendations that provide a clear and ongoing picture of health status and health service utilization in the Manitoba health care system. It could be a champion in Canada, and the first province after Prince Edward Island to collect data on the health status of francophones and their use of services via the health card.

Santé en français is committed to working with the Manitoba government and any other partners to implement the recommendations suggested in the next section.

## Recommendations

To ensure robust planning of health services offered to francophones and informed decision-making, and given the requirements for planning and evaluating French-language health services and the fact that information on the health status of francophones and their use of services is insufficient, it is recommended:

- Following the Manitoba government's commitment to implementing a modernized plastic and digital health card,<sup>20</sup> that the linguistic identity of health card holders be captured in an inclusive and standardized manner, and that this information be entered into the government's database, thus making it possible to link PINs to the Population Health Research Data Repository dataset.
- That the linguistic identity of cardholders be visible on the health card, by way of a symbol, for example, and that the health card be bilingual. Systematic and automatic identification of francophones will facilitate the active offer of services available in French.
- That the Government of Manitoba, Shared Health, the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and Santé en français work together on this initiative and commit to it officially.

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<sup>20</sup> Government of Manitoba (March 28, 2024). Press release: Manitoba Budget Will Implement Plastic Health Cards <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=&item=62697>