

Report of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs to the Government of Saskatchewan

August 2025

Social Services

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Saskatchewan! 

Letter of Transmittal

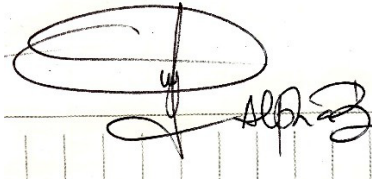
The Honourable Alana Ross
Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport

It is my pleasure to submit this report for your review, following the June 14, 2024, meeting of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs.

On that occasion, we met with a representative from the Ministry of Social services. We also met with representatives of the Fransaskois organizations whose clients often benefit from social services provided by the government. These discussions enabled us to better understand and identify the needs and challenges of Francophone citizens in terms of social services.

On behalf of the Advisory Committee, I am pleased to present this report. The recommendations made are intended to advise the government on ways to improve the provision of social services in French.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alpha Barry', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and includes a large, circular flourish at the beginning.

Alpha Barry
Chair
Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs

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Introduction

On June 14, 2024, the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs met to discuss the topic of social services. Another meeting on this subject was previously held in September 2012, and a report containing four recommendations to the government was presented in August 2013.

The social services sector covers a wide range of fields and a variety of programs and services. The Ministry of Social Services is primarily responsible for this file, but also collaborates with other ministries, municipalities and government and community organizations. Broadly speaking, the Ministry of Social Services helps vulnerable individuals and families improve their quality of life, including in the following areas:

- Income support
- Child welfare
- Housing
- Disability services
- Youth services

Committee members are concerned that information on almost all of these programs and services is only available in English, making it very difficult for the province's Francophones to access them. The Committee believes that there is much to be done to serve Fransaskois in the area of social services, and it is with this in mind that it presents potential avenues to explore in this report. To formulate its recommendations, the Committee met with representatives of the Ministry of Social Services and four Fransaskois organizations: the Association des parents fransaskois, the Service d'accueil et d'inclusion francophone, Vitalité 55+ and the Communauté des africains francophones de la Saskatchewan. The committee members would like to thank all participants for their contribution.

Recommendations

1. That the Ministry of Social Services make better use of available language capacity and take a proactive approach by assigning bilingual staff to cases where the use of French is clearly preferable.
2. That the Ministry of Social Services and other government bodies translate and promote social services documents and information into French.
3. That the Ministry of Social Services take the needs of Francophones and the Government of Saskatchewan's French-Language Services Policy into account and create designated bilingual positions.
4. That the Ministry of Social Services inform Fransaskois organizations about the services offered and identify the needs and services that exist within the Fransaskois community.

Current Situation

The Fransaskois community is evolving from year to year, mainly due to the arrival of Francophone immigrant families and the aging population, which has a greater impact on the Francophone population than on the overall Saskatchewan population. Indeed, the province's Francophone immigrant population has increased over the years. In 2006, approximately 6% of Saskatchewan Francophones were foreign-born. In 2016, this rate reached 16%, a higher proportion than that of the foreign-born provincial population (10.5%). In the 2021 census, more than a quarter (25.7%) of Saskatchewan Francophones aged 15 and over were born outside the country, a proportion that is also higher than that of Saskatchewan's foreign-born population (17.5%). Furthermore, 17% of Saskatchewan residents were aged 65 and over at the time of the 2021 census, while a third (33%) of citizens with French as their first language were aged 65 and over.¹

In the area of social services, the province's Francophones are faced with a situation where services offered in French are practically non-existent. What's more, unlike all other sectors, no single Fransaskois organization is directly responsible for social services, making the lack of French-language services and support in this sector even more complex. When citizens need access to these types of services, it is often at a difficult time in their lives, or when they are in a particularly vulnerable situation and need to ensure their safety or meet their basic needs. These are also situations where confidentiality regarding the circumstances they are facing is important and should be guaranteed. Unfortunately, with no French-language services available, Francophones who use these services often face challenges communicating in English and have no choice but to use interpretation services. In certain situations, the lack of information in French can lead to non-compliance with new societal rules that newcomers must navigate.

Better Use of Available Language Skills

During the meeting, representatives of the invited Francophone organizations told the Committee that they lack the resources, skills and tools needed to help their clients. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that no Francophone organization is directly responsible for the social services sector, even though the majority of Fransaskois organizations claim to serve a population that includes people who require social services.

In its responses to questions from Committee members, the Ministry of Social Services indicated that it maintains a list of bilingual or multilingual employees who are able to provide services in other languages, including French. The Ministry also indicated that it provides telephone interpretation services in several languages to users who are not fluent in English. On the [saskatchewan.ca/bonjour](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/bonjour) website, a directory of offices that offer French-language services lists some 20 offices in the Ministry of Social Services section. Given the government's current linguistic capacity, Committee members are concerned that generally, employees who do not speak French are the ones who work with a clearly Francophone population (for example, Fransaskois schools or Francophone families). The Committee believes that the government should show more foresight in assigning the few bilingual employees it has to sectors and situations where there are language barriers or where translation services are impractical.

¹ Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Recommendation 1:

That the Ministry of Social Services make better use of available language capacity and take a proactive approach by assigning bilingual staff to cases where the use of French is clearly preferable.

Ensuring the availability and promotion of information and documents in French

The Committee recognizes the government's efforts to translate more documents and information into French. However, it is concerned about the near-inexistence of French-language documentation and the lack of actively offered services in the social services sector. The Ministry of Social Services manages a range of programs and services, either directly or in partnership with other government and community stakeholders. However, as no Francophone community organization is directly responsible for the sector, potential users of these programs and services are not aware of them and therefore cannot take advantage of them.

During the meeting, representatives of invited Francophone community organizations pointed out that language is a major barrier for their clients, many of whom have difficulty expressing themselves well in English. These community stakeholders have reported difficulties navigating the government website when trying to provide guidance and support services to their clients. The Committee would therefore like to see more effort put into identifying and translating the most useful and essential documentation for the Fransaskois community. Similarly, promoting the availability of French-language information to Francophone community organizations would improve the support they provide to their clients in accessing social services. The Committee also believes that establishing a resource centre within the Fransaskois community to help residents access social services would create a direct link with Ministry stakeholders and help promote available services.

Recommendation 2:

That the Ministry of Social Services and other government bodies translate and promote social services documents and information into French.

Creating designated bilingual positions

Social programs and services are intended for citizens in vulnerable situations and, in most cases, for people with basic and immediate needs. With a growing Francophone community made up of an increasing number of immigrant families and seniors, it is safe to assume that the number of Fransaskois using these services and programs is on the rise. For the province's Francophones, their social challenges are compounded by the language issue, forcing them to expose their vulnerability and needs when accessing interpretation services.

Indeed, according to information received from the Ministry of Social Services, there are currently no designated bilingual positions available to serve Francophones to maintain their privacy and provide immediate access to services. The Ministry claims to offer interpretation services in several languages, including French. Francophone users do request interpretation services most of the time, which compromises the confidentiality of personal information they would prefer not to disclose. These cases may, for example, involve refugee families who are still vulnerable because of the situations they have experienced, or involve domestic issues that people would prefer to keep confidential. In addition, using a family member or close friend as an interpreter may not be appropriate in certain situations or

cultures.

The Committee wishes to call on the government to take the needs of Francophones into account and to adopt measures and strategies to actively offer services in French. Despite a sizable list² of French-speaking employees at the Ministry of Social Services, these employees are not actually required to speak French, nor are they available to the public at all times. It would therefore be appropriate to modify hiring practices to recruit bilingual front-line staff. These practices would help affirm the status of French as an official language of Canada, rather than just another language. The Committee recalls that the Government of Saskatchewan adopted a French-Language Services Policy in 2003, and that it is high time that concrete action be taken to implement it. Moreover, it should be noted that a Committee report published in 2013 contained a recommendation calling for the designation of “*one or more Client Service Centre positions as bilingual French-English positions*” within the Ministry of Social Services.

Recommendation 3:

That the Ministry of Social Services take the needs of Francophones and the Government of Saskatchewan’s French-Language Services Policy into account and create designated bilingual positions.

Raising awareness of existing services and challenges

The Ministry of Social Services does not currently have a sufficiently clear picture of the Fransaskois community’s specific social services needs or the range of services it already offers its population. Francophone community organizations also lack accurate and accessible information on the Ministry’s programs and services, as well as on the resources available from other government or community partners.

The Committee recognizes that this situation is due in part to the absence of a Fransaskois organization with an explicit mandate in the social services sector. That said, this coordination gap is not new: in 2013, a recommendation was made for dialogue between the Ministry and the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF) to better identify needs and publicize existing services. It must be said that no concrete action has been taken in response to this recommendation. Twelve years later, this status quo is having very real consequences, particularly for the most vulnerable, such as newcomer families with no command of English. As these families are less familiar with administrative systems and social programs, they are particularly at risk of marginalization due to a lack of information, linguistic support and culturally appropriate services. They often turn to Francophone community organizations, which become their de facto point of reference, despite these organizations not having a formal mandate to take action in this area.

In this context, the Ministry of Social Services is invited to adopt a proactive and structured approach to building lasting dialogue with the Fransaskois community. Most importantly, it is urged to make every effort to seize all funding opportunities available under the federal action plan, as the Ministry of Justice is already doing, to ensure the vitality of the Fransaskois community.

This approach is also in keeping with the spirit of the Government of Saskatchewan’s French-Language Services Policy, which was adopted in 2003 and aims to improve access to government services for the Fransaskois population. The policy is based on the principle of active services, encouraging a visible,

² [Répertoire des services en français](#)

available and easily accessible service offering in French. It also emphasizes the importance of close collaboration between government ministries and community stakeholders, particularly in community-designated priority sectors. Given the needs expressed and the issues of vulnerability, the social services sector is unquestionably one of these sectors.

The Committee therefore recommends the creation, with government support, of an advisory and focus group including Francophone stakeholders and the Ministry. The objectives of this group would be to:

- work together to identify the community's French-language social services needs.
- make existing services better known to the Fransaskois population.
- pave the way for innovative and equitable partnerships for greater linguistic inclusion.

In the short term, the Ministry could take advantage of mechanisms already in place, such as executive tables, forums of Francophone elected officials and Fransaskois schools, to disseminate information about its services and consult with the educational community, parents and youth. These regular discussions, ideally held every two or three years, could assist with the Ministry's strategic planning and promote an active offer of social services in French, in line with the realities and aspirations of the Fransaskois population.

Recommendation 4:

That in accordance with the Government of Saskatchewan's French-Language Services Policy, the Ministry of Social services establish a regular mechanism for communication and consultation with Fransaskois organizations in order to:

- introduce them to existing social services.
- better understand the needs and initiatives already in place in the community.
- lay the foundations for formal partnerships to promote an inclusive, bilingual social services offering.

Summary

The Committee recognizes that the social programs and services offered in the province are satisfactory, but that they are very difficult to access for people who have difficulty with the English language. Saskatchewan is growing, its population is diversifying and the number of French-speaking citizens, especially immigrants, is increasing. Furthermore, one third of Saskatchewan's French-speaking population is aged 65 and over, an age when expressing oneself in one's first language is more reassuring and preferable. The support of the Ministry of Social Services and the provision of French-language services, where appropriate, would therefore contribute to the well-being of the province's Francophones and comply with the French-Language Services Policy adopted by the province in 2003. The Committee believes that French-language services can be strategically and responsibly introduced by implementing the four recommendations contained in this report.

Advisory Committee Mandate

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan adopted the French-Language Services Policy. Through this policy, the government is committed to “enhancing the services offered to Saskatchewan’s Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community.”³

The Policy focuses on three areas:

1. Communication
2. Service delivery and development
3. Consultation

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs is to advise the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport and Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs on reviewing and analyzing programs and policies to guide the implementation of Saskatchewan’s French-Language Services Policy.

Appendix

Recommendations made in the August 2013 report

1. That the Ministry of Social Services meet with representatives of the Assemblée communautaire francophone (ACF), to discuss the current level of services available from the Ministry and to learn of what services are being provided by the community.
2. That the Ministry of Social Services prepare and distribute internally a formal list of Social Services employees who have the capacity to provide services in French. That the Ministry of Social Services formalize the process ministry employees follow when they receive a request for service in French.
3. That the Ministry of Social Services should designate one or more Client Service Centre positions as bilingual French-English positions, to ensure that services can be provided in French upon request.
4. That the Ministry of Social Services ensure that all service providers, including both government employees and employees of community organizations mandated to provide services for the Ministry, are made aware of the French-Language Services Policy and the commitments set out therein.