



**SENIORS
ACTION
QUEBEC**

Brief for Consultations with the Secrétariat aux relations
avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise

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Who is Seniors Action Quebec:

Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) is a Quebec provincial not-for-profit organization that promotes and speaks on the needs of English-speaking seniors and organizations who work directly with English-speaking seniors throughout the province.

SAQ works to maintain and enhance the vitality of English-speaking seniors in Quebec by identifying and addressing challenges inhibiting a healthy and prosperous lifestyle, while promoting solutions for English-speaking seniors and improving their ability to access services.

Seniors Action Quebec works with all levels of government to identify and address challenges and strategic issues faced by English-speaking seniors through research and policy work.

Situation:

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

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, they represented 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%)

Additionally, 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 unilingual English. 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-language health and social services are not available in all [administrative](#) regions of Quebec. There are only 67 (58 public and 9 private) institutions or establishments in the Health and Social Services Sector (RSSS) recognized by virtue of Article 29.1 of the Charter of the French Language mandated to offer all of their health and social services in English to English-speaking Quebecers. Many municipalities 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.

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 our-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) who consider it essential that English-speaking Quebecers are able to understand the directives of health providers to the successful delivery of these services. Patients who are not cared for 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.

All this is made more concerning by the recent adoption of Bill 15. The newly adopted health reform law, which puts in doubt the continued availability of Access Programs which are instrumental for the access and delivery of health programs for all English-speaking Quebecers. At the time of writing this brief, the ramifications of this bill's passing are yet to be fully understood.

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.

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 preferred 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 received no support services over the past 12 months. The survey also showed that many caregivers lack funding, resources, and information about what is 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.

Moreover, the entire province is still dealing with the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had disproportionate adverse effects on seniors as they felt more worried for their health, were cut-off from their way of life, and were pushed further into isolation which resulted in increased physical and mental health challenges. The impact on the mental health of seniors is still being assessed.

The figures above paint a portrait of an English-speaking senior's population that is growing, that may be struggling financially, that is living alone and that is unable to access and/or is unaware of what health services may be available to them in English. It discusses issues in access to programs and health services by seniors and by their care providers. Further work remains necessary by community organizations to determine the extent to which seniors, and the institutions that serve them, are being impacted by an ever-changing reality. Seniors Action Quebec is committed to working with its partners, with researchers and with policymakers to address many of the issues highlighted here. However, additional support is necessary for:

- Continued research into the realities of life for English-speaking seniors in Quebec. How are they managing with any of the issues listed above.
- Research into new problematic areas for seniors to ensure policymakers and community organizations can address issues before they become a crisis.
- Supporting the community organizations that offer front line services to seniors. Our membership had indicated an increase in the demander 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.

Previous Seniors Action Quebec project results suggest a renewed sense of uncertainty and insecurity among English-speaking seniors. As the linguistic landscape has once again shifted in Quebec, English-speaking seniors will need to be made even more aware of the range of government services that are available to them and how they can be accessed.

Observations regarding issues particular to English-speaking seniors

The following is a partial list of some of the issues that are particular to English-speaking seniors that are not necessarily considered within the broad remit of the various public and private service networks throughout the province that serve the majority French-speaking population well.

- 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 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.
- Proper and affordable housing and short and long-term residences are difficult to find in many areas of the province. 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.
- Professional support services (psychologists, family doctors, psychiatrists) for French-speaking and English-speaking seniors with mental health issues is 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.
- Program initiatives offered by government, by municipalities, by organizations and community groups that are not described and provided in English make them inaccessible for English-speaking seniors without additional outreach, support strategies and organizational efforts.
- 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.

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

Location	Total English Pop	English Seniors 65 +	Eng 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%