

Quietly Adopted Regulation Could Hurt Quality of Health Care for English-speaking Quebecers

MONTREAL, January 12, 2022 – Despite strong objections from the English-speaking community that included a 4,500-name petition tabled in the National Assembly, the Quebec government has eviscerated the Provincial Committee for the Provision of Health Services and Social Services in the English Language. The government is now recruiting replacement members.

“Two days before the petition was tabled in the National Assembly on Dec. 10 – in the middle of a public health emergency during which the population is fully fixated on COVID-19 – the government stealthily enacted a new regulation governing the provincial committee,” says Marlene Jennings, president of the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN). “The committee’s members were all terminated, creating an acute void at a critical time for the English-speaking community.”

Many months will be required to recruit and appoint replacement committee members and bring them up to speed. Meanwhile, the government will proceed with second reading of Bill 96 which will have a significant negative impact on access to health and social services for English-speaking Quebecers in our own language.

“At the same time, the government will continue its review of access programs prepared in 2019 and 2020, along with recommendations submitted to the minister last July by the former committee members,” explains QCGN Director General Sylvia Martin-Laforge. The access programs must then be brought to cabinet for approval: “Current access programs are wildly out of date having been approved a decade ago, prior to a massive reorganization of the province’s health-care network.”

“If there are questions, no one representing the English-speaking community will be authorized to answer,” says Jennings. “And, at a time when the English-speaking community requires knowledgeable representation able to provide the government with facts and evidence, this new regulation delivers a committee whose membership, functioning, and communication will more than ever be under government control.”

“Access programs are at the very heart of the public health and social service network’s response to the legislated right of English-speaking Quebecers to receive services in English,” notes Jennings. Access programs specify each of the services guaranteed under law to be accessible in English: “This is the mechanism to ensure which health and social services can be accessed by those who require services in English.”

“The appropriateness of access programs to the needs of English-speaking Quebecers are integrally linked to the quality of committee members who review them,” adds Jennings. She notes that the new regulation gives our community much less influence over who sits on the committee, “thus compounding the serious concerns English-speaking Quebecers have over the future of access to health and social services in English in our own province.”

“Faced with a fait accompli, the QCGN aims to ensure the new committee is composed of members of our community who are truly committed to ensuring we have access to essential health and social services in our own language,” says Martin-Laforge, adding that the QCGN aims to raise awareness of the call for candidates and plans to support and encourage qualified individuals to come forward by the Feb. 5 application deadline.

The QCGN has also written to Health Minister Christian Dubé seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the Provincial Access Committee and the process underlying access programs, in order to ensure that they can achieve the health and well-being outcomes set forth in Section 1 of Quebec’s Act Respecting Health and Social Services.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action it identifies, explores, and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec and encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions, and leaders.

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