



MOVING FORWARD: Building Research Capacity Related to Quebec's English-speaking Seniors

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INTRODUCTION

The Canadian population today is aging more rapidly than ever before. In 2011, an estimated five million Canadians were 65 years of age or older. This number is expected to double over the next 22 to 25 years to reach 10.4 million by 2036.

Here in Quebec, the challenges and opportunities of an aging population are amplified. In 2011, nearly 1.3 million people living in Quebec were aged 65 or older. Among them, about 160 000 were aged 85 or older. As the baby-boomers (those born between 1946 and 1966) continue to age, it is estimated that the number of persons age 65 or older will increase from 16 per cent of the population in 2011 to 26 per cent in 2031. This represents an additional one million seniors in Quebec over the next 30 years.

Why a research project on English-speaking seniors in Quebec?

While Quebec's English-speaking seniors share many of the same needs and priorities as their French-speaking counterparts, as an official linguistic minority community (OLMC) they also have needs and priorities that are unique within the broader senior population. While there has been a great deal of research on Quebec's demographic shift and its senior population, little -- if -- any attention has been paid to the specific needs and priorities of Quebec's English-speaking seniors who are an official language minority community in Canada. One notable exception is the recent 2013 report entitled 'Enjoying your senior years in your own language' for the Office of the Commissioner for Official Languages, which employed 2006 Canadian census figures.

Why does this matter?

English-speaking seniors in Quebec have been aging without the benefit of policy and programs that acknowledge their particular situation as an official linguistic minority group.

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This matters because more than one quarter of Quebec's English-speaking population is 55 years of age and older. The 2011 Canadian census figures tell us that there are 1,058,250 English-speaking people living in Quebec and 268,696 of them are 55 years or over. In other words, seniors represent one quarter of (25.4 per cent) of Quebec's English-speaking population. That's a big number. Here's another way to think about it: as a group, the English-speaking senior population of Quebec is larger than the population of Prince Edward Island and spread across a large provincial territory three times the size of France.

Not only are they geographically dispersed but there are significant differences among the age 55 and over population in terms of their size and demographic weight in their own communities. In urban Montreal, for example, 152,701 seniors live within 20 kilometers of each other. In tiny Bas-Saint Laurent, there are fewer than 500 seniors in the whole Rimouski-Métis area.

This project represents an important contribution not only to the growing field of research on aging in Canada, but more specifically towards building a province-wide body of research that focuses specifically on the needs and priorities of Quebec's English-speaking seniors.

PROJECT RESEARCH PRIORITIES

In December of 2012, a Steering Committee chose the research priorities to guide this project. They are as follows:

1. Language barriers in communicating with, and accessing information provided by public institutions and agencies
2. Social support networks and living conditions in the communities in which English-speaking seniors reside
3. Best practices and models for creating "an effective voice" for Quebec's English-speaking seniors

OUR EVIDENCE BASE

The evidence base compiled during this project offers the most up-to-date and detailed portrait of English-speaking seniors in Quebec. Using a participatory action approach to research, our team gathered information using a variety of different methods including a literature review, a review of statistical data from the 2011 Canadian census and the 2010 provincial Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)/CROP Survey of Community Vitality, as well as our own survey carried out from August to December, 2013, in eight selected regions of Quebec.

This project was always about more than just developing data. Because Quebec's English-speaking seniors are so diverse and widely dispersed, it can be an overall challenge to the connectedness that is necessary for collective mobilization and finding a unified voice. A

big part of our mandate, then, was about building research capacity and fostering networking opportunities among seniors, researchers and community members to promote greater awareness and understanding of the situation facing Quebec's English-speaking seniors.

One of the ways we did this was by employing a participatory action approach to research. What this means is that English-speaking seniors themselves have been involved at every step of the process – from identifying the research priorities, to helping develop the project design, to carrying out our survey and to disseminating the findings in their own communities.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

What follows below are some highlights from the statistical profile with data drawn from the 2011 Canadian census and the 2010 provincial Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)/CROP Survey of Community Vitality, and the findings from our own project survey carried out from August to December, 2013. The full project report – entitled **Moving Forward: Building Research Capacity Related to Quebec's English-speaking Seniors** – is available on our website at www.qcgn-seniors.org. The French version can be found at www.qcgn-aines.org.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The 2011 census findings tell us that:

- **More than one quarter of Quebec's English-speaking population is 55 years of age and older.** There are 1,058,250 English-speaking people living in the province of Quebec; 268,696 of them are 55 or over. This senior group represents one quarter (25.4 per cent) of Quebec's English-speaking minority.
- **The majority of Quebec's English-speaking seniors live in Montreal and the Montérégie** on the south shore of the metropolitan area. They represent a combined total of 196,545 individuals aged 55 and over.
- **In the Estrie (Eastern Townships) and Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine regions, just over one in three English speakers is 55 or over.** The English-speaking communities of the Estrie and Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine regions have the largest proportion of English-speaking seniors at 37.7 per cent and 36.5 per cent respectively.
- **English speakers Quebecers who are 85 and older tend to live longer than their francophone counterparts.**

BILINGUALISM

Aside from the variance of the English-speaking seniors in terms of their numbers and weight within their regional communities, their knowledge of official languages also varies according to region and gender.

The 2011 census findings tell us that:

- Regions with the greatest concentration of English speakers 55 plus are among those with the lowest levels of bilingualism.
- Quebec's English-speaking seniors display lower levels of bilingualism when compared to younger English-speaking Quebecers.
- Women, who represent the majority of our English-speaking seniors, display lower levels of bilingualism.

Why does this matter? English-speaking seniors in Quebec are living longer than ever before and English-French bilingualism is a crucial factor in the quality of the lengthening years that seniors now enjoy. Their use of public institutions and services – whether it be health services, life-long learning or legal advice – coincides with an increased need to communicate in what may be a second and increasingly third language. (See Immigration and Cultural Diversity below.)

Typically, policy and legislation can impact service delivery and access to resources, all of which tend to be organized according to the characteristics and needs of the majority group. In the absence of the recognition of linguistic, cultural, and other social and economic characteristics – including age – that particularize a minority group, challenges may arise that compromise their quality of life.

IMMIGRATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The 2011 census findings tell us that:

- **The proportion of English-speaking seniors who are immigrants substantially exceeds the Canadian norm as well as that of Quebec's French-speaking majority.** In Canada, there are 4.5 million seniors (age 65 and over) living in non-institutional settings. Of these seniors, **29.9 per cent** are immigrants. Among Quebec's English-speaking population, there are 138,000 seniors (age 65 and over) and almost half (**47.8 per cent**) are immigrants. Among Quebec's French-speaking population there are 969,000 seniors (age 65 and over) and **8.2 per cent** of these claim immigrant status. **This means that nearly half of English-speaking seniors across Quebec were born outside of Canada.** Our project survey supported these

statistics. About half of respondents were born outside of Canada, 9.5 per cent in another province and 40.2 per cent were born in Quebec.

- Quebec's English-speaking seniors claimed a higher proportion of individuals who are members of a visible minority.
- English-speaking seniors are almost five times more likely than their Francophone counterparts to have been born in a province outside of Quebec.

Why does this matter? We need to explore how the distinct composition of Quebec's English-speaking senior group may shape their experience of aging. For example, does policy designed with the majority seniors group in mind address the needs of Quebec's culturally diverse linguistic minority?

EDUCATION

The 2011 census findings tell us that:

- **When age groups from the 2011 census are compared, the 65 plus age group of English speakers have the greatest number of individuals without educational certification (high school diploma).** Among Quebec's English speakers who are 65 years and over, almost one third (30.6 per cent) have no educational certification.
- There are big regional differences here, too. When the 65 plus age group is broken down by region, the proportion of English speakers with low education range widely from a substantial 75.5 per cent in Nord-du-Québec, 68.9 per cent in Côte-Nord, and 52 per cent in Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine to 12.7 per cent in Chaudières-Appalaches and 18.9 per cent in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region.
- **English-speaking Quebecers over the age of 65 have a higher proportion of individuals with high levels of education (post-secondary certification) compared to their French-speaking counterparts, but this advantage declines across the generations.** Among those over the age of 65, in 11 of 17 regions, they display higher educational levels compared to the majority. For those aged 45 to 64 this discrepancy declines to five of 17 regions. For those aged 25 to 44 this is true in only two regions.

Why does this matter? The extent to which seniors are engaged in lifelong learning and reaping the benefits of learning at later life stages is an important consideration in calculating education as a factor of socio-economic status. Given the extended length of time many seniors have spent outside the formal education system, many are at great risk of losing skills because of diminished use of their literacy skills over time. Research has found that higher levels of physical and psychological health, stronger social support and

higher levels of personal autonomy and self-determination are among the benefits of learning for those in late adulthood.¹

INCOME AND LABOUR FORCE ACTIVITY

The 2011 census findings tell us that:

Income

- **There is a high level of income disparity among English speaking Quebecers.** The English-speaking population displays high levels of low income (no income or less than \$20,000) and high levels of high income (\$50,000 and over). This is observed within the 55 plus group, between age cohorts and across regions.

Why does this matter? Beyond the assessment of either high or low income, it is generally acknowledged that income disparities within a population are associated with a lower health status and social inequalities. Income disparity, both within the English-speaking 55 plus group and between English-speaking age cohorts, is an important factor in assessing the socio-economic status of English-speaking seniors.

Labour Force Activity

- According to the 2011 census, there were 53,553 unemployed English speakers (age 15 and over) residing in Quebec. They represent almost 10 per cent (9.4 per cent) of the total English-speaking population. This is an increase from 8.8 per cent in 2006. **The proportion of unemployed is substantially higher for Quebec's English-speaking minority when compared to the French-speaking majority.**
- The greatest variation between the minority and majority language group with respect to levels of unemployment lies in the 25-44 age group. **The proportion of Quebec's unemployed English speakers aged 25-44 is substantially greater than French speakers of the same age.** These are crucial years in the workforce and for household formation.
- **The rate of those out of the labour force is fairly similar for the English-speaking minority and the French-speaking majority across the 17 regions for the 65 plus group.** Among the 45-64 age group, in six regions of out 17, the minority language group displays a greater proportion of those out of the labour force than the majority.

¹ Abu-Bader, S., Rogers, A., and Barusch, A. (2002). Predictors of Life Satisfaction in Frail Elderly. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 38 (3) Haworth Press. See also Schuller, T., Preston, J., Hammond, C., Brassett-Grundy, A. and Bynner, J.(eds.) (2004) *The Benefits of Learning. The Impact of Education in Health, Family Life and Social Capital*. London and New York: Routledge

- When the younger generations are considered, the relative difference between the minority and majority language groups increases with respect to proportion of those out of labour force. **For the 25-44 age group, there are 12 regions where the proportion of those out of the labour force in the minority exceeds that of the French-speaking majority.** In the 15-24 age group, there are 13 regions wherein the proportion of those out of the labour force in the English-speaking population exceeds that of the French-speaking group.

Why does this matter? You may be wondering why we are highlighting the labour force activity of younger English speakers, instead of focusing only on seniors. Here's why: When studying the socio-economic status of Quebec's English-speaking seniors, an intergenerational analysis can help to highlight a simple but critical point: **Today's youth are tomorrow's senior citizens.**

In order for English-speaking communities to prepare themselves for the significant increase in the number of seniors over the next 25 years, they must also have a firm grasp on the evolving socio-economic status of the individuals who will live that future.²

Just as the experiences of those in the early to mid-stages of education and work (ages 15 through to 44) have a bearing upon the senior population in their communities, so, too, the experiences of our English-speaking senior groups have an impact on the opportunities and resources of the younger generations.

It is also important to mention that the family of an individual is understood to be a factor in their socio-economic status. In the case of seniors, the socio-economic situation of individuals in young and middle adulthood, both family and non-family, has an impact on their quality of life.

Here is an example of how all these pieces come together:

Aging baby boomers across Canada, including Quebec, are increasingly finding themselves in a position of financially supporting their children for many more years than they themselves were supported by their parents. Caregivers located in middle adulthood (aged 45-64) may find their resources spread increasingly thin between the competing needs of unemployed or low income children and (unilingual) aging parents without accessible public services and affordable housing.³ If, as we see, that the proportion of Quebec's unemployed English speakers aged 25-44 is substantially greater than French speakers of the same age, then it follows that their English-speaking senior parents are more likely to be supporting them financially.

² *International Federation on Ageing (IFA) (March 2012). Current and Emerging Issues Facing Older Canadians, P.7-8. <http://www.ifa-fiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/current-and-emerging-issues-facing-older-canadians-final-report-30-march-2012.pdf>*

³ *Williams, C. (2004). "The Sandwich Generation". Perspectives, Vol.5, No.9, pp.5-12. Statistics Canada Catalogue No.75-001-XIE*

QCGN 2013 SURVEY ON ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS

Our project survey questionnaire was distributed among English-speaking seniors 55 years of age and over who live in eight of Quebec's administrative regions: Capitale-Nationale, Estrie, Montreal, Laval, Outaouais, Gaspé, Laurentides, and Montérégie. We chose to survey these eight regions because they account for 96 per cent of Quebec's 55 plus English-speaking Quebecers. They are also regions which capture the range of environments in which English-speaking seniors are located, specifically, urban/semi-urban/rural/and isolated. Aside from age and region of residence and other demographic characteristics, survey respondents were identified by a set of questions which probed their language use as well as their sense of connection to the English-speaking community.

As part of our commitment to participatory action research, we reached out to QCGN member organizations and our steering committee to help us identify 10 researchers – themselves English-speaking seniors – who would be trained and assume responsibility for working with local organizations to recruit respondents, and to distribute and collect the surveys. The 10 researchers were drawn from the eight regions where the sample population reside.

Our researchers carried out the survey, which was available to respondents both in paper format or online, from Sept. 6 to Dec. 9, 2013. They far exceeded expectation by collecting just over two times the projected return rate for the survey – a total of 835 respondents.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR SURVEY FINDINGS:

AGING IN PLACE

- The majority of survey respondents live in their own home (86.9 per cent)
- More than two thirds (38.1 per cent) were satisfied and more than half (52.2 per cent) were very satisfied with their living arrangements.

Respondents who expect to relocate:

Almost one third (32 per cent) of respondents said they planned to relocate in the next five years.

When asked why, these were their top four reasons:

1. The need for services in English
 2. Increased need for support
 3. Downsizing for retirement
 4. Desire to be close to family
- When this group was asked where they would likely relocate, half (49 per cent) said within the same local area. Fewer than one quarter (22.2 per cent) said out of the province.

- Respondents in Capitale-Nationale were the most likely to expect relocation (47.4 per cent). Those in Gaspésie were the least likely (10.9 per cent).
- Female respondents (35.6 per cent) were more likely than males (23.8 per cent) to expect to relocate.
- Among age groups, respondents aged over 75 (36.2 per cent) show the strongest tendency to anticipate relocating in the next five years.
- Among seniors expecting to move in the next five years, about half (49.4 per cent) planned to relocate in the same local area, one quarter (24.4 per cent) planned to relocate outside of Quebec and only 6.9 per cent would move within the province.

Primary mode of transportation:

- The majority of respondents (62.6 per cent) drive a car as their primary mode of transportation. This was followed by public transportation (17 per cent) and transportation provided by a friend or family member (12.4 per cent). (Note that there are significant regional differences in regards to transportation needs and priorities for seniors.)

Respondents who feel language curtails potential:

- According to the survey, 68.5 per cent of Quebec's English-speaking seniors feel that their ability to realize their full potential is curtailed by language barriers.
- Seniors living in Laval (70.7 per cent), Montreal (70.6 per cent) and the Outaouais (67.7 per cent) regions were the most likely to feel limited by language barriers.
- Senior women were more likely than men to feel language barriers curtail their potential.
- No matter their age, English-speaking seniors feel that their ability to realize their potential is limited by language barriers.

Respondents who feel role as caregiver limits opportunities:

- According to the survey, nearly half (47.9 per cent) of English-speaking seniors feel that their role as caregiver limits their opportunities.
- Seniors living in Laval (58.3 per cent), Montreal (50.9 per cent) and Estrie (44.4 per cent) were most likely to experience these limitations.
- Half of English-speaking senior women (50.5 per cent) were much more likely to feel their role as caregiver limits their opportunities when compared to men (38.9 per cent).
- Among age groups, the 55-64 cohort is the most likely to feel their caregiving role limits their opportunities.

SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Frequency of social media use:

- According to the survey, 45.2 per cent of seniors interact with their families on a daily basis using social media.
- The use of social media daily to interact with family varies from a high of 64.7 per cent in Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine to a low of 26.8 per cent in the Estrie region.

- Female survey respondents (49.8 per cent) are much more likely to use social media daily for family interaction compared to males (33.1 per cent).
- Seniors 75 plus are less likely to use social media daily for family interaction compared to younger seniors.

Respondents who volunteer:

- According to the survey, 61.4 per cent of 55 plus English-speaking seniors are volunteers.
- The highest levels of volunteering among seniors are found in Laurentides (74.3 per cent), Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine (72.3 per cent) and Outaouais (70.3 per cent) regions.
- English-speaking men (68.3 per cent) were more likely to report volunteering activity compared to women (58.8 per cent).
- Among age groups, seniors between 65-74 show the highest rates of volunteering (69.5 per cent), followed by those aged 55-64 (67.7 per cent) and the 75 plus group (48.5 per cent).

INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Respondents who need assistance to communicate:

- According to the survey, nearly one third (27.7 per cent) of English-speaking seniors need assistance when it comes to communicating with public service providers.
- Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine (44.2 per cent), Laval (39.1 per cent), Montérégie (38.5 per cent) and Estrie (37.9 per cent) show the highest levels of seniors needing assistance.
- The greatest need for assistance in communicating with a public service provider is found among senior women (29.4 per cent) compared to men (22.6 per cent).
- The 65-74 age group (31.7 per cent) is more likely to need assistance in communicating than the other age cohorts.

Importance of English information:

- Among survey respondents, the vast majority (93.8 per cent) reported that information in English regarding public services was important. Almost three quarters (73.1 per cent) said it was very important and (20.7 per cent) said it was important.

Challenges in accessing information

When asked what was the biggest challenge respondents faced when receiving information from Quebec's public institutions and agencies? these were the top three answers:

1. Agency forms are not available in English
2. The respondent would prefer to talk to somebody rather than read or use the computer
3. The respondent cannot find information in English

LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

When we asked respondents what issue(s) should be addressed by those seeking to improve the situation of English-speaking Quebecers of your generation, here are the top three answers they gave us:

1. Improved access to health and social services
2. Improved living arrangements for older adults
3. The situation of vulnerable seniors (low socio-economic status, overburdened caregivers, social isolation)

Awareness of seniors group:

- Almost half (54.1 per cent) are aware of a seniors group in their municipality.
- Fewer than half (42.9 per cent) are aware of a seniors group in their region.
- Fewer than one third (32.2 per cent) are aware of a provincial seniors group

Representation by community leadership:

- When seniors are considered by age, the 65-74 age group are the least likely to feel fairly represented among community leadership.

Representation in municipal bodies:

- Among survey respondents, about one third (32.8 per cent) reported feeling fairly represented among municipal bodies.
- The percentage of respondents who feel fairly represented in municipal bodies varies widely from a high of 51 per cent in Estrie to a low of 5.3 per cent in Laval.

KNOWLEDGE OF FRENCH AMONG ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS

Half of respondents reported being able to speak French (50.2 per cent).

- The regional 55 plus respondent populations vary from 41.7 per cent in Montreal to 89 per cent in Capitale-Nationale with respect to their ability to speak French.
- English-speaking male respondents (57.3 per cent) were more likely than females (48.0 per cent) to be able to speak French.
- Respondents 75 years of age and over were the age group with the lowest tendency to speak French.