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Health services now available En Français

Vancouver, BC – Francophone residents in Prince George can now more easily access French-speaking health care providers, French-language health information, and a 24/7 interpreter service for health appointments thanks to En Français -- a project partnership by the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) and RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique.

The En Français project offers Francophone residents in the region improved access to French-speaking interpreters, doctors, and other health care providers, and linkages to French-language health education materials and health care services.

The almost 2,000 Francophone people living in Prince George help to make BC's Francophone community the fifth largest Francophone community in Canada. However, the language barrier may have compromised the ability of Francophone British Columbians to have their health care needs met.

According to a Sept. 2001 Report to the Federal Minister of Health, a lack of access to health services in one's own language can have a number of detrimental health care impacts. Lack of access can:

- Reduce the use of preventative services;
- Increase the time spent in consultation, diagnosis and treatment;
- Decrease the probability of patient compliance with treatment.

Dolores Patenaude, a Prince George schoolteacher and mother-of-three who only recently learned about the En Français project, knows firsthand the challenge of finding French language health services for her fellow Francophones. A native of Winnipeg, Dolores and her husband are both fluent in English; however, over recent years, she has frequently found herself in the position of playing amateur interpreter for her non-English-speaking Francophone friends.

"I've often had to book off time from my work or my kids to take a friend to the doctor or the hospital because there was no way for them to communicate with their health care provider without my help," said Patenaude.

The Provincial Language Service (PLS), a PHSA program, provides health-focused interpreting, translation and cross-cultural program development services throughout BC. Interpreting services are provided in over 100 languages. The PHSA/PLS En Français initiative, made possible through federal and provincial funding, has specifically supported access to health services for BC's Francophone population. As a result, PLS now offers the following resources and services for Francophone British Columbians:

- A one-stop, province-wide access point for health care interpreting and translation services in French. In the Prince George area, call toll-free, 1.877.BCTALKS or 1.877.228.2557. People with general questions about this, or the following PHSA En Français initiatives, can email: ACarnot@phsa.ca

- French-language health resources – a provincial directory of French-speaking health care providers, and an increasing number of French-language health information materials available through the PHSA website at: www.phsa.ca/francais
- A formal connection/collaboration between the assessment team for children with special needs at Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF) and the services of Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, BC Children's Hospital, and the BC Autism Assessment Network.

“The goal of En Français is to help maximize positive health outcomes for Francophone British Columbians by making it easier for them to access health services in both of Canada’s official languages,” said Suzanne Barclay, director, the Provincial Language Service, PHSA.

“We are informing health care providers and their patients across BC that help is available if they face a language barrier. Health care providers need simply to contact our one-stop, province-wide access point for health care interpreting and translation services,” added Barclay. “Or, if the patient or client simply wants to see a French-speaking doctor directly, our provincial directory is available online. These services are not only designed to reduce the experience of alienation and powerlessness common to people dealing with health issues in a language not familiar to them, but also to enable health care professionals and health care organizations to deliver better care to BC’s increasingly linguistically-diverse communities.”

Patenaude was enthusiastic when she heard about the En Français project and the helpful services it offers her fellow Francophones in the region. “This is great. I really hope people hear about these services. When you’re ill, it is too much work to try to speak in a language that is not your own. It is very difficult,” said Patenaude.

Patenaude was especially happy to hear about the new Francophone-friendly access to services for special needs children through Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

“My eight-year-old son David is autistic so, already, he faces a language barrier. He speaks both languages but speaks French 95 per cent of the time. So, if we take him to a doctor that speaks only English, he’ll literally echo back what the doctor is saying. He won’t answer the doctor’s questions and won’t get his health care needs met,” added Patenaude. “I believe the new French-language services will make a difference in the lives of children like him, and for Francophone Prince George residents overall.”

En Français was made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada through the Société Santé en français, a national health network working to improve French-language health services. Additional funding was provided by the BC Francophone Affairs Program for the purposes of increasing access to French-language translations of Ministry of Health and Ministry of Children and Family Development documents, and to fund a Francophone initiatives liaison position with the PLS.

PHSA plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians.

Based on beliefs of respect, diversity, equity, and accessibility, in a spirit of partnership and dialogue, RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique supports the development, integration, and sustainability of French-language health services throughout BC.

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