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Better health.*

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Health services now available En Français

Vancouver, BC – Francophone residents on Vancouver Island 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 6,000 Francophone people living in Victoria, and the almost 1,500 living in Nanaimo, 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.

Victoria resident and veteran volunteer Evelin Pitzele Gildenhuys knows firsthand the challenge of finding French-language health services for her fellow Francophones. Born and raised in the Congo and in Belgium, the active 69-year-old earned the alias, "Zee French Connection," for single-handedly connecting local Francophones with various community services, including health services.

"There is definitely a need for Francophone people to have access to the interpreter service, and to know how to find a French-speaking doctor," said Pitzele. "This is especially true for elderly people.

"There is a French expression that applies in this case: you die in your native language. When you are ill, it's important to have the ability to be treated by someone who speaks the same language as you," added Pitzele.

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. On Vancouver Island, 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.”

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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