

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Designation under Ontario's *French Language Services Act*

French Language
Health Services Network
of Eastern Ontario
Living Healthy Lives in French



What is designation?

Designation is a legal and administrative process that follows the rules and procedures prescribed by the [*French Language Services Act*](#), [*Ontario Regulation 398/93*](#) and Ontario Ministry of Francophone Affairs guidelines.

This process allows public service agencies to demonstrate that they have the capacity to actively offer French language services on a permanent basis while meeting the specific needs of the Francophone population they serve.

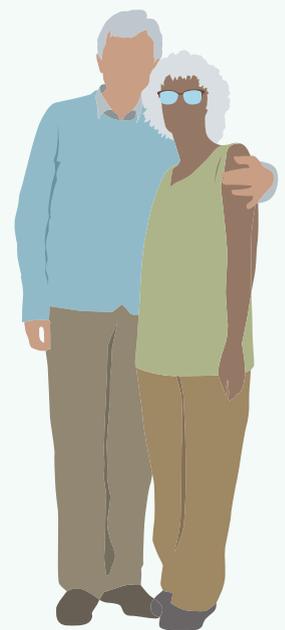
In Ontario, several types of institutions can be designated under the *French Language Services Act*, including universities, community organizations (ACFO, seniors clubs), and agencies providing health or social and community services (hospitals, long-term care centres, home care, etc.). Even the *Réseau* is designated!

It is important to note that to be designated, an agency must be located in a designated area. To be designated, an area must meet one of the following two demographic criteria:

- Francophones make up at least 10% of the area's total population (rural setting).
- The number of Francophones in the area is 5,000 or more (city, town or township).

In Eastern and South East Ontario, 8 areas have been designated under the *French Language Services Act*:

- City of Ottawa (all)
- Prescott County (all)
- Russell County (all)
- Glengarry County (all)
- Stormont County (all)
- Dundas County (Township of Winchester only)
- Renfrew County (City of Pembroke and Townships of Stafford and Westmeath only)



- Frontenac County (City of Kingston only)

To learn more: [Consult the list of designated areas in Ontario](#)

What impact does designation have on French language services?

Designation is the *Réseau's* preferred mechanism for planning the active offer of quality health care services on a permanent basis in our region.

Currently, designated health care agencies must comply with 34 requirements that ensure they have the capacity to provide French language services that are available at all times, offered in an equitable fashion and equivalent to the quality of services offered in English. Designated agencies must also submit a statement of compliance every three years to demonstrate that they still meet designation requirements.

As legal recognition, designation is rather like a seal of quality for French language health services.

Partial designation, full designation...What's the difference?

An agency may be designated to offer all of the services it provides in French. This is called *full designation*. In this case, all of its services must be actively offered in French on a permanent basis.

An agency may also be designated to provide only certain programs or services in French. This is called *partial designation*. In this case, only the designated services and programs must be offered in French.

How does an agency become designated under the *French Language Services Act*?

Designation is a long process that demands a lot of work from the agencies involved.

In the healthcare sector, the first step is *identification* of agencies for designation. An agency wishing to do so can ask to be identified for designation.

Local health authorities (formerly the LHINs) can also *identify* agencies on the basis of the local population's needs with respect to French language health services. The *Réseau* too can advise local health authorities to identify certain agencies, programs or services if it finds gaps in French language services along the health care continuum.



When a health care agency is identified for designation (or “identified to provide French language services”), it must implement a series of measures to become designated within a reasonable timeframe. This means in particular that the agency must develop and structure its French language services. It must also submit a designation plan to demonstrate that it is in compliance with the 34 designation requirements set by the Ministry of Francophone Affairs.

Once a designation plan has been completed, it is evaluated:

- By the *Réseau*'s internal team;
- By the *Réseau*'s designation committee;
- And finally, by the *Réseau*'s Board of Directors.

We should add that this is a quality assurance process that we enforce very strictly to make sure that the agency has the capacity to provide French language services 24/7.

Once the designation plan has been approved by the *Réseau*'s Board, the plan is recommended to the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Long-Term Care, which must give its approval. The plan is then sent to Ontario's Ministry of Francophone Affairs for final approval. Finally, the designation becomes official when it is announced in the [Ontario Gazette](#). From this moment on, the agency has a legal obligation to provide services in French.

In short, it can take a number of years to designate an agency, but it is a process that benefits the Francophone community. This work makes it possible to develop and structure quality French language health services in our region.

What is the *Réseau*'s role in designation?

Currently, **the *Réseau* guides and supports 59 health and long-term care agencies in the Champlain and South East regions** through the designation process.

This means that we offer free consulting services to facilitate the designation process for identified agencies. We also help designated agencies maintain compliance with the *French Language Services Act*. Every three years they must submit a statement of compliance to demonstrate that they still meet the requirements of the *Act*.

The *Réseau* can also make recommendations to local health authorities on identifying service providers to fill gaps in French language services (e.g., if there is no community health centre or mental health and addiction agency offering French language services in a designated area).

As part of its mandate as a French Language Health Planning Entity, the *Réseau* works with health care agencies funded by the Ministry of Health (through Ontario Health) and/or the Ministry of Long-Term Care.



Can all agencies providing health care services be designated?

As we know, there are exceptions to every rule! At present, some agencies providing health care services or long-term care cannot be identified or designated. This includes private health care providers (e.g., dentists, optometrists, laboratory services), public health units, primary care clinics (family doctors in private practice), and most agencies that fall under municipalities (paramedical services and some long-term care centres).

Similarly, some agencies given a mandate to provide health care services to the population (e.g., Home and Community Care Services) retain the services of private agencies as sub-contractors (these are called third parties). In such cases, it may be difficult to ensure compliance with French language services obligations, as third parties are not designated even if they sometimes provide services on behalf of designated agencies.

And of course, an agency cannot be designated if it does not serve an area designated under the *French Language Services Act*.

What can I do if a designated agency does not meet its obligations?

If an agency designated to provide French language services does not meet its legal obligations, you can file a complaint with the French Language Services Unit of the [Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario](#).

The French Language Services Commissioner has a mandate to protect French language rights in Ontario, oversee the application of the *French Language Services Act*, and resolve and investigate complaints about government services in French.

Before making a complaint, you should make sure that the agency in question actually is designated under the *French Language Services Act*. If the agency is partially designated, you should make sure that the service or program that is the subject of your complaint is also designated.

Accessing quality health care services in French is neither a luxury nor a whim; it is a matter of safety. We all know this: when we are sick, we are not bilingual! That is why compliance with the *French Language Services Act* is so important.

[To learn more about the French Language Services Unit complaints process.](#)



Resources for additional information:

- [Consult the list of agencies identified and designated to provide French language health services in the region \(Réseau web site\)](#)
- [Map Highlighting the French Designated Areas in Ontario \(external document\)](#)
- [Access the list of **ALL** designated agencies, programs and services in Ontario \(external web site\)](#)
- [Consult Ontario's *French Language Services Act* \(external web site\)](#)
- [Problems accessing services in French. Contact us. We can help. \(external document\)](#)

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