

2019 - 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Access to French-language health services: MAKING INROADS ACROSS ALBERTA!

Throughout 2019-2020, the Réseau santé albertain continued its strategic progression, working toward the advancement of French-language health care across the province. Looking out at the provincial landscape, we see that we are making inroads, improving access to French-language health services for the benefit of Alberta's Francophone population.

We carried out several successful networking activities, including those stemming from our flagship Health Allies initiative and First Aid in Mental Health (FAMH) program. We also launched a new province-wide Early Childhood Health Development project. Part of a national initiative funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) through the Société Santé en français (SSF), this project will run for three years with the possibility of an extension. Our focus will be on developing French-language health care for young Francophone families, a key population segment with pressing health needs.

Another new development adding to our momentum is the hiring of a project officer in February 2020, a first in our organization's history.

Isabelle Déchène-Guay is tasked with the implementation of various projects, and we are proud to have her on our team.

In early childhood health development and in the area of higher education, in the health system and throughout the community, access to French-language health care is improving. These are the signs of progress that motivate us to continue forging ahead in order to achieve even higher goals.

Réseau santé albertain's core message resonates across Alberta: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Much can be done to prevent health problems and provide a cure when we speak the patient's language. In difficult times and post-pandemic, this will prove to be even more crucial.

- Paul Denis, Executive Director

NETWORKING

Networking has remained a key component of our advocacy work, raising awareness, building understanding, and mobilizing stakeholders. Under a formal agreement, we strive to improve access to French-language health services by maintaining and strengthening ties with five major stakeholder groups: communities, health professionals, post-secondary educational institutions, health care authorities and political decision-makers. Last year's efforts focussed on reaching out to key influencers in four of these sectors, encouraging them to engage in the active offer of French-language health care.

★ **Strategic relations with AHS senior management:** building sustainable government relations has been a core component of our work, mainly with Alberta Health Services (AHS), specifically with Dr. Verna Yiu, President and Chief Executive Officer, and Dr. François Bélanger, Vice-President, Quality, and Chief Medical Officer. Regular meetings and contacts at the highest level are unprecedented in our organization's history. And it must be said that the ongoing collaboration of Alberta's Francophone Secretariat is of tremendous help to us.



Fall of 2019: Executive Director Paul Denis delivered a keynote address to participants at the annual convention of Alberta's francophonie of which the Réseau santé albertain is a proud partner.

★ **French-language health care on the military base:** military personnel have access to French-language health services on the base (Namao), and the new on-site clinic more than adequately meets their needs, but not those of their families. They have to go off base for their health care, in the city where access to French-language health services is extremely difficult, >>>>

if not impossible. Discussions with representatives of the AHS Edmonton Zone, the military and families, as well as a member of the Alberta Legislature, have led us to implement a common action plan. Our goal: to ensure these families have better access to French-language health services on the base itself.

And with respect to military clients, we applaud the sustained efforts in recent years by the Centre de santé communautaire Saint-Thomas (CSCST) to increase its capacity to better serve them. The CSCST, located in La Cité Francophone, can now provide on-site health services to Francophone military families. Its clinic is also expanding to accommodate a growing number of health professionals, including a psychiatrist.



The Réseau santé albertain is also a proud partner of Calgary's Marché solidaire which distributes Christmas food baskets to families in need.

✧ **Historic health care meeting:** for the very first time, three major stakeholders will come together to discuss access to French-language health care with the Réseau santé albertain, namely AHS, Alberta's Ministry of Health and Francophone Secretariat. This historic meeting will be held in the post-pandemic phase, but the groundwork has been laid and we are committed to moving forward together. Discussions will focus on two of our recommendations, both aimed at reducing Alberta's health care spending:

- ▶ To record patient/client language preference in the *Connect Care* system so that health care professionals can provide culturally appropriate services;
- ▶ To clearly identify what services are available in French and where.

With the help of our health allies, the Réseau santé albertain will continue to encourage health professionals to make known their ability to provide French-language health care. These health allies are volunteers we recruited across Alberta to help us identify French-speaking health care professionals. It is important to remember that promoting access to French-language health care is at the heart of our mandate as a provincial health care advocacy organization.

✧ **Community pulse, measuring what matters:** at different times, in different regions and in different ways, we will continue to survey our communities on key issues to ensure we keep pace with changing needs and expectations. One of the ways in which we have kept our finger on the community pulse is through the work of our Executive Director Paul Denis as President of both the ACFA Foundation and the Saint-Thomas Health Centre Community Committee.

✧ **Collaborating with Campus Saint-Jean:** we enjoy strong academic and community ties with Campus Saint-Jean. In addition to being part of the research group GRIF-SF — Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire et de formation en santé des francophones — we joined the working group tasked with renewing the training program for personal care workers. We also made a presentation to the Ministry of Advanced Education on a related issue, i.e., the importance of providing such training to ensure quality health care to Alberta's Francophone population. We also reached out to students pursuing a bilingual Baccalaureate in Nursing about the importance of practising their future profession in a Francophone community.

✧ **Calgary Health en français:** our liaison officer continues to work closely with Southern Alberta's Francophone community. This entails staying abreast of concerns and interests and helping the community tackle regional health challenges. One challenge calls for boosting the supply of and demand for French-language health services, and another involves supporting the work of the Calgary Health Working Group (CHWG). This group is comprised of 12 stakeholders representing the community, health professionals, health care decision-makers and educational institutions. Being involved at the regional level makes all the difference. We hope to be able to set up yet more satellite offices elsewhere in the province to help other regions improve access to French-language health care in their communities.

✧ **Collaboration among French-language health networks:** we are one of 16 French-language health networks in Canada active under the umbrella organization known as Société Santé en français (SSF), our national funding agency. Together, we represent 9 provinces and 3 territories. In addition to monthly strategic meetings, we contribute to the work of various committees, including the governance committee, the working group on the SSF structure and governance, and the selection committee for the new SSF Executive Directorship.

The four western-based networks and the three covering the Northwest Territories also work together on issues of common interest. This past year, we mapped out a geographically tailored immigrant health project funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It involves conducting a first-ever provincial/territorial study to scope out the physical and mental health status of Francophone immigrants residing in Western Canada and remote areas, namely Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Newfoundland and Labrador. Implementation is scheduled for the post-pandemic period. As project leader, we will have the full support of the interdisciplinary research group at Campus Saint-Jean.

★ **Newfoundland and Labrador Health Passport:** 100 copies of this health passport were distributed to members of the Franco-Albertan community, a bilingual booklet of key health words designed to help them communicate more effectively with health professionals.

★ **Partnership with the Société des Manoirs and the Centre de santé Saint-Thomas (Covenant Health):** we actively promoted the availability of seniors' residences in Edmonton and available on-site services. Some 1,300 pamphlets were sent by e-mail and more than 300 distributed locally.

★ **Increased demand for collaboration:** we have observed a growing demand for our organizational expertise and support. Requests for assistance come mainly from Francophone organizations, but also from Anglophone stakeholders. A direct result of our networking efforts!



Proud sponsor Réseau santé albertain presented the Health Award at the International Women's Day Gala held in Calgary. Left to right: our liaison officer Céline Bossé with award recipient Dr. Anusha Kassan, and Evelyne Kemajou, Executive Director of the Immigrant Association Portal (IAP).

HEALTH ALLIES

A Regional and Provincial Force

Efforts in 2019-2020 also focused on recruiting yet more health allies across the province, particularly among members of the regional ACFA's with the ongoing collaboration of the provincial ACFA, Alberta's designated French-language advocacy organization. To date, we have successfully recruited 40 health allies, each awarded a **Health Ally** pin upon signing up for volunteer work.

We also worked closely with the Centre collégial de l'Alberta on the development of training tailored to the role of our health allies, which is to stimulate the supply of and demand for French-language health services in their respective regions. Training is scheduled for next year.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (MHFA)

Our continued collaboration with St. John Ambulance Alberta led to the provision of French-language MHFA courses. That organization now offers the basic training component in French (i.e., initial support to individuals); a French-speaking youth facilitator (for the 12-24 age group) has also been trained. And although the recruitment and training of a facilitator for the senior component remains a challenge, we managed to provide a two-day training session to the Peace River population in McLennan, thanks to the Alberta division of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Also, close to a dozen participants attended the MHFA courses geared to seniors in January 2020.

Given how crucial mental health first aid is, we will continue to ensure the availability of such courses because they provide people with the essential knowledge and skills to intervene appropriately in all settings — social, family and work. In addition to an extended collaboration with St. John Ambulance Alberta, we are exploring the feasibility of involving regional ACFA organizations in the regionalized delivery of MHFA courses.

EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH DEVELOPMENT (ECHD)



Last fall, we laid the groundwork for the launch of a three-year national project funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). To ensure we meet all funding agency requirements and deadlines, we retained the services of specialist Marcel Préville, who mapped out a three-year provincial implementation plan.

Given that Alberta had already established a provincial coordination group in this sector and how quickly we moved on planning, we are ahead of schedule. Key stakeholders slated to join our organization in this provincial effort are as follows:

- ▶ the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta;
- ▶ the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta;
- ▶ the Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta;
- ▶ the Centre collégial de l'Alberta.

In view of the extremely tight roll-out timeframe, we opted to survey parents online about early childhood issues in the 0 to 6 age group. More than 150 families and a dozen organizations responded to our survey. A call for project proposals was also issued to Francophone organizations resulting in several submissions.

***We are off to a great start
in this highly promising sector!***

At the local, regional, and provincial levels, we will continue to strongly advocate for culturally appropriate health care for the Francophone population, calling on health care professionals and decision-makers across Alberta to act on an inescapable truth:

***FRENCH-LANGUAGE HEALTH CARE
IS ESSENTIAL TO HEALTH!***

ECHD PROGRAMMING AT-A-GLANCE

Year 1

- ★ Theme development by the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta and training of playgroup facilitators provided by the Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille and the Centre d'appui familial.

Years 2-3

- ★ Joint action by the Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille and the Centre d'appui familial in the creation and facilitation of parent and children's groups (0 to 6 years) in 20 target regions.
- ★ Implementation by Les Petites Abeilles de Cochrane preschool of a health promotion program (nutrition, fitness, safety and development) for toddlers (preschool and kindergarten) and their families.

Years 1-2-3

- ★ Delivery of a support and training program to immigrant parents (child development, parenting skills, health promotion, etc.) by the Centre for Wellness and Prevention for African Canadians in Alberta.



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