

Priorities of Manitoba's Francophone community

for the next provincial election

Electoral priorities 2023

Position statement from Manitoba's Francophonie in view of the next provincial election

Context

On the eve of the first provincial election since the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a host of issues facing the people of Manitoba - including the French-speaking community. Not only has the pandemic transformed the lives of Manitobans, it has also weakened the economy, raised significant new challenges and exposed some previously invisible vulnerabilities. For the Francophonie, the pandemic stressed the importance of access to services in French for all French-speaking people, including those whose only official language spoken and understood is French.

In this electoral context, the Société de la francophonie manitobaine (SFM) - the official spokesperson for Manitoba's Francophonie in all its diversity - is launching with its partners a canvassing campaign to present the priorities of the Francophonie and to obtain the support of candidates for these priorities.

This document serves as a roadmap for all candidates and political parties to support the French-speaking community. For more information, please contact Daniel Boucher at sfm@sfm.mb.ca. You can also consult the [Plan stratégique de la francophonie du Manitoba](#) (Strategic Plan for Manitoba's Francophonie), a roadmap that was unanimously adopted following consultations with 1,500 members of the community.



Education

It goes without saying that French education is the primary vehicle for ensuring the vitality and survival of Manitoba's French-speaking minority. From the very beginnings of Manitoba as a bilingual and multicultural province, and despite a long period of forced assimilation, the importance of French education has been recognized and supported by the provincial government.

The Francophonie is very proud of the institutions it has built up over the centuries. Given the close-knit nature of the Francophone community, these institutions have long worked within a continuum. This allows French-language learners to progress throughout their lives within the same continuum system, from early childhood to post-secondary education.

The early childhood system is currently in crisis. Among other things, the system is suffering from a lack of funding and lengthy processes to access new operating grants from the province. While many initiatives are underway at the community level to address the unique and specific needs of the French-language system compared to the English-language system, more needs to be done to strengthen the sector and meet the challenges facing the system.

What's more, despite strong demand for French-language childcare facilities, there is a glaring lack of space and major difficulties in recruiting, retaining and training French-speaking early childhood professionals. This forces parents to choose to stay at home with their children to pass on the language and culture instead of returning to the workforce, or to send their children to English-language childcare centres closer to home.

The labour shortage in the early childhood and education sectors represents a major challenge for the French-speaking community. While immigration is a clear avenue for increasing the number of professionals who can work in French, training qualified graduates to teach in daycare centres and French and immersion school programs is the only way to confidently, strategically and sustainably address the shortage.

Here are the five main recommendations:

- 01** | **That the Bureau de l'éducation française (BEF), which is of vital importance to students in French-language schools and Immersion schools, be strengthened.**
- 02** | **That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning (EECL) continue to promote a holistic, whole-of-government approach to French-language education by working more closely along a continuum that encompasses all French-language education services, from early childhood to post-secondary and continuing education.**
- 03** | **That access to French-language education be adequately funded so that all parents, whether entitled or not, can choose to send their children to a French-language school or an immersion school, as the case may be.**
- 04** | **That EECL further streamline the processes involved in awarding early childhood grants and open up more spaces in French-language childcare centres, which would not only increase their capacity to accommodate French-speaking youth, but also free up spaces occupied by Francophones in English-language childcare centres.**
- 05** | **That the provincial government financially support the Université de Saint-Boniface's development plan so that it can recruit, welcome and train an increased number of local and international French-speaking students, for the benefit of the entire province and to offset shortages in the education sector.**

Health

Health has become a critical issue for all Manitobans in recent years. While quality primary health care and mental health services are essential to the well-being of all Manitobans, this is also true for French-speaking people who need to obtain these services in their first official language spoken and understood.

According to studies [cited by Shared Health](#), language barriers have a significant impact on access to care, patient safety, quality and outcomes of care, and can result in additional costs due to readmission or prolonged hospitalization. Patients who do not speak the same language as their healthcare providers are 70% more likely to be hospitalized than those who speak the same language. Additionally, 67% of Francophones in Manitoba find it important to receive health services in French, and 40% have difficulty obtaining them.

At the same time, Manitoba is suffering from a severe labour shortage, and the health sector is no exception. While a number of initiatives are underway to try and remedy this situation, the fact remains that they often operate under a lens of support for the English-speaking majority and often without considering the advantages of bilingualism in the delivery of essential services. Given that French-speaking minority communities are less affluent and more culturally marginalized than the English-speaking majority, and that they are aging more rapidly, which increases pressures regarding healthcare, it is essential for the French-speaking minority that the next provincial government prioritize bilingual physical and mental health services. The well-being of the French-speaking community depends on it.

Certain achievements, such as the active offer of services in French as part of the Health Links-Info Santé telephone information service, were lost during the pandemic, at precisely the time when access to information in the minority language was most critical. While these telephone services had been provided from the Centre de santé de Saint-Boniface by a bilingual team, they were transferred to the Misericordia Hospital, putting an end to rapid and, above all, guaranteed access in French.

While these setbacks must be reversed, there are several initiatives that deserve to be applauded. For example, since the creation of Shared Health-Soins Communs in 2018, Santé en français has been working closely with its executive team and other health stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of Francophone population health and French-language services in the implementation of health system transformation. Santé en français has also continued its efforts to ensure the bilingual designation of Shared Health-Soins Communs.

In addition, the adoption in February 2022 of the *Provincial Health Care Multi-Year Strategic French Language Services Plan 2022-2027* and the *Shared Health-Soins Communs Multi-Year Strategic French Language Services Plan 2022-2024*, which have since received ministerial approval and been translated, represent a first for both plans and are also to be applauded. We hope that this trend towards bilingual care will continue with the arrival of the new Director of Shared Health-Soins Communs.

Here are the four health recommendations:

01

That the provincial government recognize the importance of French-language services to the well-being of French-speaking Manitobans and take concrete steps to continue improving access to French-language health services.

02

That the Department of Health support the work begun by Santé en français and Shared Health to ensure that a Francophone lens continues to be applied as part of the transformation of the health system, including primary and mental health care.

03

That the French-language service option be restored to the Info Santé telephone line, to ensure that French-speaking people have fast, guaranteed and equitable access to services in their official language.

04

That the provincial government take steps to address the shortage of francophone and bilingual health care professionals, both by strengthening the capacity of the Université de Saint-Boniface to train and recruit candidates for its programs, and by undertaking a recruitment campaign of its own in French-speaking countries, similar to the positive efforts of the Department of Labour and Immigration in the Philippines.

Immigration

If French education is used to help fill the labour shortage, immigration is a second main source of talent that can help alleviate this crisis. Welcoming French-speaking newcomers not only enriches our communities culturally, economically and socially, it also strengthens the demographic weight of the French-speaking community, which is experiencing an alarming decline across Canada, including Manitoba.

Manitoba's French and bilingualism are strategic assets and can be an integral part of its competitive advantage at the regional, national and international levels. It's worth remembering that 20% of all commercial transactions in the world are conducted in French. Manitoba now has the world's largest pea protein production site, thanks to investment by the French company Roquette, thanks in part to the drawing power of its French-speaking community. Recruiting, settling and retaining newcomers who can work and offer more services in Canada's two official languages must remain a priority for the province.

In particular, the SFM would like to applaud the work of the Manitoba Immigration Advisory Council, which last year examined the themes of recruitment, streamlining the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, and the settlement and retention of newcomers. As a community with one of the most important organizations in the country for the settlement of newcomers,

including all refugees settling in the City of Winnipeg, the Francophonie was delighted to see that the Council adopted several of the recommendations put forward by the SFM as part of this exercise.

It is vital for the French-speaking minority that a revised target be set for the public service, as it is easy for decision-makers from the unilingual English-speaking majority to forget, over time, the merits of concerted efforts to support the minority's demographic weight.

In November 2022, the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba (RIF-MB) published its [White Paper](#) on Francophone Immigration. This document provides a comprehensive overview of the current situation, with the goal of guiding the strategic measures and actions set out in it to advance Francophone immigration. It is a must-have reference not only for Francophone organizations in Manitoba, but also for our government partners, including the Government of Manitoba.

In addition to the recommendations contained in the White Paper, here are some of the main recommendations for the next Manitoba elections.

Here are the four main recommendations:

- 01** That the Department of Labour and Immigration re-establish the Francophone immigration target at 15%, in an effort to stabilize and strengthen the demographic weight of Manitoba's Francophone community.
- 02** That the Advisory Council on Economic Immigration and Settlement work closely with Francophone organizations specializing in the reception and settlement of newcomers to promote the advantages of Francophone immigration for the province and for Manitoba's Francophonie, and to facilitate the implementation of the priority measures proposed in the White Paper in a concerted, results-based action plan.
- 03** That the Department of Labour and Immigration promote Manitoba's Francophone communities and immigrant recruitment strategies in order to increase the number of Francophone immigrant individuals and families who settle and integrate into Manitoba's Francophone communities, with the active participation of the communities themselves.
- 04** That the Departments of Post-Secondary Education and Training, and Labour and Immigration continue to work together to improve and accelerate the process of prior learning recognition and skills upgrading for French-speaking immigrants, in collaboration with unions, professional associations and post-secondary institutions offering French-language programs.

Arts, culture, sport and tourism

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to recede, revitalizing Manitoba's economy remains a key challenge, especially in times of inflationary uncertainty. The arts, culture and tourism are key to Manitoba's vitality, both economically and socially. Indeed, in a context of interprovincial and international competition for labour, it is quality of life that determines where the most qualified people will go to live and work. That's why Manitoba must focus on artistic and cultural vitality as a vector for economic recovery.

Indeed, Manitoba's Francophone community is proud of the fact that it manages to retain 80% of Francophone newcomers for up to five years after their arrival in Manitoba. In our opinion, the key ingredients to our special sauce are the cohesion and tight-knit nature of our community, the strength of the organizations and institutions we have built up over the decades, and the vitality of our language and culture, not to mention the arts. It's a model that goes largely unnoticed by the unilingual English-speaking majority, but one that offers possible solutions at a time when the Province is advocating a whole-of-government approach.

Manitoba's Francophone and Métis culture and heritage can also serve as real magnets for attracting new tourist markets that Manitoba doesn't usually target. For example, did you know that only 20% of the approximately 180,000 Quebecers who drive to Alberta each year stop to visit our province? This is a largely untapped market that deserves significant investment to make Manitoba a destination for Francophones.

Fortunately, following a case study in Louisiana organized in 2015 by Entreprises Riel to discover best practices in tourism centred on the Francophone fact in this American state with many parallels with Manitoba - a historically bilingual and ethnically mixed people, With the banning of French in schools in 1915-1916

and the creation in 1968 of key institutions for the development of the Francophonie, namely the SFM and the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), Entreprises Riel and Voyage Manitoba have developed a new Francophone tourism strategy that was approved in 2021 by the provincial government, which should be applauded.

One of the flagship initiatives of this strategy is the construction and opening of a new Atrium de la francophonie on the site of the Centre culturel franco-manitobain (CCFM). Created as a provincial Crown corporation in 1974, the CCFM is the very heart of the artistic and cultural vitality of our Francophonie and an unparalleled centre for bringing together the French-speaking community. That said, the building is aging and in need of repairs, including to the roof, which is leaking in several places.

On the eve of the CCFM's 50e anniversary, Manitoba's Francophonie deserves a face worthy of its status as an official-language minority, through a new atrium that will not only serve as a new main entrance with shared reception and ticketing among all the organizations with offices and offering artistic and cultural programming in the Centre, It will also contribute to building the identity of the Francophonie by offering an overview of the history of Manitoba's Francophonie in all its diversity and from its very beginnings, while providing tourist information to the bilingual visitors that Tourisme Riel, the future tenant, will be able to attract.

At present, the French-speaking community does not have a one-stop shop of this kind that can bring all these elements together under one roof. With the 50th anniversary of the CCFM fast approaching, this project is a top priority for the French-speaking community in the run-up to the elections.

Here are a few recommendations for the Francophone arts, culture, sport and tourism sector:

01

That the provincial government fully support Travel Manitoba's Francophone tourism strategy in order to focus more on the historical and contemporary reality of Francophones and the discovery of Métis culture and heritage.

02

That the Province of Manitoba support the project to build a new Atrium de la francophonie at the CCFM in order to provide an exceptional showcase for the artistic, cultural and tourism vitality of Manitoba's Francophonie, while creating a popular gathering place in a modern facility worthy of Manitoba's official language minority.

03

That the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage increase its annual funding to the CCFM so that it can, for the benefit of the community, fulfill its dual mandate as set out in the CCFM Act, and ensure its financial sustainability by enabling it to generate new sources of revenue and build up a reserve.

Francophone Affairs

The SFM is pleased with the services it has received from the Francophone Affairs Secretariat (FAS) in recent years. The Secretariat acts as a key interlocutor for the SFM and Manitoba's Francophonie as a whole, as well as an indispensable ally in advancing the community's interests.

It is essential that there is a close relationship between the FAS and the minister responsible for Francophone Affairs. The FAS's mandate is horizontal and concerns the whole of government. Maintaining a close relationship between the FAS and the Minister is necessary for them to fulfill their responsibilities under *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act*.

In addition, while the SFM recognizes the great work undertaken to date by the Secretariat, among others, to ensure that all departments have multi-year strategic plans for French-language services under the *Supporting the Development of Manitoba's Francophonie Act*, the absence of a corporate plan for the entire public service under the Clerk's Office means that each of these plans operates in a certain organizational vacuum. Beyond the French Language Services Policy, more needs to be done to ensure consistency in Francophone affairs across government, so that the machinery of government is pushing in the same direction.

Here are the recommendations put forward for this issue:

01 That the French Language Services Policy be replaced by a new regulation stemming from the *Supporting the Development of Manitoba's Francophonie Act* that better clarifies the roles, responsibilities and processes for improving French-language services.

02 That the Francophone Affairs Secretariat be required to develop and implement a corporate, multi-year strategic plan for French-language services to ensure a consistent, government-wide approach in this area, while working with the Clerk's Office to raise the priority of this issue among all Manitoba public servants.



Municipal services

The sixth priority for Manitoba's Francophonie in the run-up to the provincial election is French-language municipal services. The SFM would like to highlight the excellent work done by the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba (AMBM) in recent years to develop the first maturity model for the delivery of municipal services in both official languages. This model, which is aimed primarily at rural municipalities, makes it possible to measure members' starting points, identify their needs, and then measure their progress in terms of service delivery in both official languages. As a member, the City of Winnipeg is playing a key role in sharing its experience and the mechanisms and tools it has developed with other bilingual municipalities, which deserves to be applauded.

The modernization of Part 9 of the City of Winnipeg Charter is also a priority with a view to improving the provision of municipal services in French. This part governs the use of the official languages in the delivery of municipal services, including City Council and its committees, communications and signage, among others. In particular, it guarantees active offer and services in French in the "designated region" of the Riel District, i.e. in the historically French-speaking neighbourhoods of Saint-Boniface, Saint-Vital and Saint-Norbert.

Today, although 58% of French-speaking Manitobans live in the City of Winnipeg, they are increasingly dispersed throughout the city's neighbourhoods. This includes many people whose only official language spoken and understood is French, including many newcomers and refugees from French-speaking countries, as well as seniors who have forgotten their learned language due to neurodegenerative diseases. These people are often among the most vulnerable in society, as they are often isolated and marginalized from society by language barriers. It is therefore essential that the Charter be modernized to ensure that all Winnipeg residents have an equal right of access to services in French, regardless of the neighbourhood in which they live.

What's more, despite the existence of Part 9 and a municipal by-law designed to implement it, a report by the City of Winnipeg in 2021 showed that it was only meeting 39% of its obligations. While the SFM is currently working with the City to make progress on this very important issue for Manitoba's Francophone community, the fact remains that this kind of oversight is contributing to the assimilation of Francophones, who are losing the habit of obtaining services in their own language.

Here are the recommendations put forward with a view to the provincial elections:

01

That the provincial government support the maturity model for the delivery of municipal services in both official languages developed by the AMBM, which reiterates the importance of services in French. In addition, that the idea of modernizing Part 9 of the City of Winnipeg Charter be supported, in close collaboration with the City of Winnipeg and the French-speaking community that will receive these services.

02

That Part 9 of the City of Winnipeg Charter ensure an equal right of access to all French-speaking people, regardless of their area of residence, and introduce mechanisms to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Charter, as well as the implementation of positive measures to encourage the expansion of French-language services beyond the minimum obligations.

03

That the Province of Manitoba work with the City of Winnipeg and municipalities to secure federal funding to support the delivery of French-language municipal services.



Conclusion

It goes without saying that Manitoba's Francophonie has a whole range of priorities, from education and health to immigration, the arts, Francophone culture and tourism, and the delivery of municipal services in our province's beloved capital city.

That said, we recognize that not everything can be done at once. What we are asking in the run-up to the elections, over and above the recommendations set out above, is that the interests of the Francophonie be taken into account and that the community be consulted in a meaningful and ongoing way on the issues that affect us.

After all, it wasn't long ago that Manitoba was a bilingual province. Despite some efforts in the past to suppress our language and culture, the francophonie has remained an unfailing partner of the anglophone majority in the economic and social development of our shared province.

As the voice of the French-speaking community, the SFM is also a partner of choice for the provincial government. By

working together, we can meet our respective mandates while improving the lives of the citizens we serve.

Thank you for your attention. Once again, if you would like further information or have any questions or comments, please contact me at sfm@sfm.mb.ca.

Yours faithfully,

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