



THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

What is the *Official Languages Act (OLA)*?

The Government of Canada is committed to:

- (a) enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and
 - (b) fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.
- The *OLA* establishes a framework to facilitate the implementation of official languages policies and programs.
 - The *OLA* provides a legislative base for policies that urge the use of both English and French as languages of work and that support the development of official language minority communities.
 - The *OLA* encourages the Government of Canada to enhance Federal/Provincial/Territorial cooperation in the provision of services to official language minority communities.

Why is the implementation of the *OLA* in the health sector important ?

- Linguistic duality is an important aspect of Canadian identity, and the Government of Canada is committed to promoting full recognition and use of French and English in Canadian society.
- Canadians in official language minority communities are entitled to comparable health care services in their mother tongue.
- Approximately two million Canadians live in official language minority communities. Providing comparable health care services to all Canadians, no matter where they live, is an essential element to improving and maintaining the health of the population.

Benefits for Canadians

- Improve access to health services for all Canadians in the official language of their choice.
- Create lasting links among the stakeholders including training and health care institutions and share best practices. .../2

- Increase the number of bilingual professionals through better access to health training.
- Increase research capacity and gain an understanding of the needs of the French- and English-speaking minority communities.

Progress to date

- In 2000, Health Canada created two consultative committees to address issues relating to the French-speaking and English-speaking minority communities and to advise the Minister of Health on the health priorities of these communities.
- In September 2001 and July 2002, these committees presented to the federal minister of Health a report on their needs, making recommendations for improving access to health services.
- In March 2003, the Government of Canada unveiled its action plan on official languages. A total investment of \$119 million over five years was allocated to health, including \$63 million for implementing initiatives for the training and retention of French-speaking health professionals. This \$119 million investment includes the \$30 million allocated by Health Canada for initiatives to improve access to primary health care services in both official languages.
- Following this announcement, Health Canada established the Contribution Program to Improve Access to Health Services for Official Languages Minority Communities. This program, spread over 5 years, addresses the needs identified by the communities, especially two of the key recommendations of the consultative committees—i.e. support for networking and for the training and retention of health professionals.