

English on the agenda

New plans, new procedures, new participation. The parameters regulating access to health and social services in English in Quebec have just been so broadened as to give the English-speaking community a much larger role in improving its access to services in the public healthcare system.

The first order of business is selection of a provincial access committee that will advise the Health Minister on the quality and availability of English services in the public system. This committee will monitor access plans that are to be developed by public institutions in each region. To ensure that this committee is fully representative, its 11 members will be selected solely from the English-speaking community. (There will be five members from Greater Montreal.)

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) and the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) were designated to develop a slate of candidates from which the Minister will appoint the committee members. Community organizations have been asked for nominations to ensure the calibre of candidates being put forward.

There are also to be access committees in each region, drawn from the English-speaking community, which will work with local institutions in developing regional access plans that will pass under provincial committee scrutiny on the way to Ministerial approval. Nominations for these committee members will come from the English community organizations. Some 200 volunteers will be playing a vital role in the services access process.

As these new access plans are being developed – and delivered – there will be greater emphasis on continuity of services as English-speaking users navigate through the public healthcare system. And there is now a commitment by the Minister to ensure that there will be sufficient human resources to carry them out.

Federal funding up

Investing in our Future is the title of the federal government's 2018-2023 action plan for investment in Canada's official-language minority communities. An increase of \$500 million over five years on top of current investments brings the total to \$2.7 billion.

Within the new envelope are important additional monies allotted to improving access to health and social services. Health Canada has earmarked \$10 million to fund early childhood health promotion programs, mental health initiatives, and support for vulnerable children and families. An additional \$4 million is designated for innovative projects in mental health, addiction, homecare for seniors and community care for seniors. What portion of these allocations comes to Quebec's English-speaking minority is being determined. In the meantime, other funding has been announced.

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) receives \$3 million to expand community health networks across the province. There will be three new networks, bringing the total to 23, and 10 new complementary satellite offices. This expansion will broaden the scope of CHSSN activities and projects designed to improve access to health services in English in Quebec.

"This new funding will enable us to weight our action plan to favour the most immediate needs," explains **Jennifer Johnson**, CHSSN executive director. "We've modified our programming to reflect priorities in our communities – which are also the priorities of Health Canada. So instead of health promotion, we're now focusing on outreach to address the healthcare problems of our vulnerable populations: youth, seniors and families."

The new monies are welcome. "I'm really pleased with the commitment of Health Canada to minority-language issues," Johnson affirms. "This increase in funding underscores the priority they're giving to dossiers that so concern the importance of maintaining the vitality of English-speaking communities in the province."

Forum focuses on priorities

The annual Montreal Community Network Forum held in February brought together members of local organizations involved with improving access to health and social services in English in the Montreal region. The significant progress made over the past decade in improving accessibility rests solidly on the partnerships forged between community networks and the public system. Forum participants examined four priority areas to identify the types of partnership initiatives that would produce the best results in the future:

Availability of information on services available in English: In light of the major reorganization of the healthcare system and development of new access plans, there is need to provide more information on accessibility. Attention must also be paid to information requirements within institutions, such as consent forms, medical instructions, and patient information on medical procedures.

Organization of services in English: Adaptation of service programs in the public system to ensure access for English-speaking persons is a key element. Partnerships between institutions and community networks have already laid a foundation for collaboration. These models need to be reinforced with new initiatives.

Adaptation of human resources: Recruiting and retaining professionals, and providing language training for those already in the system, will help build and maintain a sufficient complement of personnel capable of providing services in English.

Community participation in the HSS network: The major reorganization of the healthcare system and development of new access plans have underscored the importance of having effective representation from English-speaking communities within its consultative and administrative structure.

A report of the Forum's findings has been sent to the coordinators of access to English services in each of the regional health and social services institutions.

Indigenous agreement a first

The Quebec government has signed a landmark agreement on protection of Indigenous children with the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw. Youth protection services, previously under the authority of the Department of Youth Protection, will now be offered by an agency created by and for the Atikamekw people. It will bear full responsibility for protection and wellbeing of Atikamekw children.

This was the second significant piece of legislation concerning treatment of Indigenous children in Quebec. Late last year, the Civil Code was amended and legislation introduced governing adoption and parent disclosure information. The practice of customary adaption was recognized for the first time with a legal pledge to prioritize placing children in foster families who belong to the same Indigenous communities as they.

"The primary consideration is the best interest interests of the child," says **Geoffrey Kelley**, minister responsible for Native Affairs. "These are examples of changes we have made with a view to favouring the preservation of language and cultural identity of children in care."

Homeless count counts

On April 24 a small army of volunteers took a second count of Montreal's homeless. In 2015, 700 volunteers counted over 3,000 people sleeping on the street or in shelters across the city. Although these counts are limited to the visible homeless population, they indicate the order of magnitude of the homelessness problem.

Different levels of government are seeking solutions. Montreal has introduced a three-year plan to create 950 housing units for itinerant people, plus \$7.8 million for support and follow up to ensure that those who move into this social housing do not end up back on the street. Quebec has announced \$11 million funding, over six years, for a program of visiting itinerants in social housing.

Dedicated to LaSalle seniors

Diane Doonan was the driving force in the start-up of a dynamic seniors centre in LaSalle back in 2010. “It spoke to a need,” she affirms. “On our first day we were expecting around 25 people, but 140 showed up. Numbers had reached 400 when the Centre ran into some lean times due to a loss of funding. Fortunately, in 2016, our luck turned with a grant from the Father Dowd Foundation that enabled the hiring of a full-time director; we then found larger space in the local Legion.” The newly revitalized facility is now LaSalle D&D 50+Centre.

LaSalle is 43 per cent English-speaking; 9,000 residents are over 65. “Many are unilingual,” explains Doonan, “and are cut off from the broader community. We’re doing a lot of outreach to help isolated seniors re-build connection with their English-speaking community. Since May there has been an influx of 90 new members.”

The centre offers a wide range of services including referral assistance, physical and social activities, home calls and guest speakers. “Our first goal now,” says Doonan, “is to ground the centre with steady operational funding. We’ve applied for charitable status.” For information: 438 882 7771.

Justice in English: a first

No justice without access: working together to ensure access to justice in English. That is the theme of a forum held by the Quebec Community Groups Group Network on April 16. This assembly brought together community and justice system representatives from across Quebec to discuss barriers to justice services in English in three specific areas: seniors, youth protection and young offenders and labour relations and employment.

Funded by Justice Canada, the forum is a first step in a multi-year initiative to pursue more comprehensive access to justice in English as the new federal Official Languages Road Map comes on stream in 2018-19.

Black youth in business

Since it was first established in Little Burgundy some 10 years ago, a key goal of the DESTA (Dare Every Soul to Achieve) Black Youth Network has been to alleviate the systemic employment and business challenges faced by marginalized youth in its community. A pilot project now under way is making important inroads on this serious issue.

With a \$140,000 grant from the Community Investment Fund of the Quebec Community Groups Network, DESTA has set up its Entrepreneurship and Employability Project. It is designed to assist Black youth, aged 18 to 35, who face systemic challenges to employment or obstacles in setting up or running their own business. To date 55 business-minded youth have been participating.

“It’s stirred such enthusiasm that we haven’t had to do any promotion,” says **Bonnie Zehavi**, designer and director of the project. “We were preparing promotional pamphlets but got such an amazing response through word of mouth that we never did finish them.”

The project is two-streamed. One offers a 15-week on-site course, Starting your own business, given by MBA students from the John Molson School of Business. The other is an employability program for youth looking to find work, improve job prospects or embark on a new career path.

“To take the course, participants either have to have a viable business idea to develop or have an existing business,” Zehavi explains. “They will have access to an in-house marketing agency offering small business services, shared office space and conference rooms. For youth who are new to, or returning to the labour force, we provide one on one career counselling and funding to cover some training expenses. And we’re setting up a job bank.

“This project has had a huge impact on DESTA,” says Zehavi. “It has now refined its mission to focus more specifically on education, entrepreneurship and employability.” For information: 514 664 5042.

Donated computers available

Refurbished or donated computers and laptops are being offered to non-profits by another nonprofit engaged in minimizing the growing problem of e-waste. The Electronic Recycling Association (ERA) supplies charitable groups with donated IT equipment which it receives from organizations and individuals across Canada. The goal is recovery, refurbish, re-use. For information: 514 312 6735.

Camp for bereaved children

Camp Erin Montreal is a free, weekend bereavement camp sponsored by the YM-YWHA for children and teens. It is for children experiencing grief from the death of someone close to them. Under the guidance of trained professionals and volunteers, the camp provides grief education, peer bonding and emotional support. The camp is being held on Friday, August 10, through Sunday, August 12. For information: 514 737 6551, ext 264.

Katimavik is back

Katimavik Volunteers, a national federally-sponsored organization, has been revived after being suspended for several years. A community-based program for youth development, the Katimavik experience is based on young adults, from 18 to 25 years old, spending six months living together in at least two different regions, volunteering with community organizations. They will connect with local Indigenous communities in partnerships and projects and undertake their own learning activities and group projects. For information: katimavik.org.

Youth for youth

A new organization has been formed to address the challenges facing English-speaking youth in Quebec. Youth for Youth, or Y4Y, was formed to assist and encourage young anglophones to stay in the province. For information: www.y4yquebec.ca.

In brief

Lyse Byer de Weaver was named director general of St. Columba House.

Barkley Cineus Jr. was named interim director of DESTA.

Paul Desmarais Jr. was awarded the Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire Award, for a volunteer's exceptional contribution to advancing the mission of Centraide of Greater Montreal.

Centraide of Greater Montreal raised over \$56 million in its 2017 fund-raising campaign.

Implementation of 211 as the social services hotline number is now completed for the 94 municipalities in the Greater Montreal area. Some 5,000 social and community organizations have been catalogued and are now easily accessible to the public.

The Foundation of Greater Montreal reports an additional \$35.7 million in donations in 2017, bringing its total assets to \$252 million.

AMI-Quebec is holding an outreach event, It's a Family Affair, on May 24. Speakers are couples in which one partner has a mental illness, the other is the caregiver. For information: 514 486 1448.

AMI-Quebec will be holding a tele-workshop on Teenage Depression and Mood Disorders on May 15. For registration: amiquebec.org/teleworkshops.

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is holding a training day, Building a volunteer manager toolkit on May 15. For information: 514 842 3351, ext 231.

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The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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