

## **The importance of languages of communication and services in the context of Covid-19**

As we watch the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, it is clear that the health and social care sector is under enormous and unprecedented pressure, with everyone trying to do their utmost to prevent the impact of the storm that we are facing. At moments like these, we must think of those who are in distress – some seriously ill in hospital, fighting for their lives, others lonely isolating at home or protecting vulnerable family members, whether older people or young children.

Some would argue that language is not a priority in such challenging circumstances; but in fact, the opposite is true. It is important to be able to communicate and to receive services in one's own language, whether it be French in Canada, Spanish in the United States, Welsh in Wales, Basque in Europe, Indigenous languages and all other languages in minority situation. As anxiety increases, it is important to remember that many patients within linguistic minority groups use their mother tongue when communicating with health care service providers. Giving an 'active offer' of patients' language services can facilitate valid assessment, accurate diagnosis and a better understanding of treatment and care. Alarming data reveal that patients are being left behind due to lack of communication in their mother tongue. See [here](#). We must also remember those who are frail and isolated at home can be better comforted when spoken to in their mother tongue.

Language is a crucial issue in all crisis management. What is more important than being able to communicate with its citizens in their language in order to inform them, give them the instructions to follow and reassure them in order to maintain social cohesion and trust in public authorities? Communication is not incidental. How public authorities and different health and social service providers cope with compliance during this period of instability is important. Admittedly, public authorities and suppliers are under enormous pressure to cope with the daily crisis situation, however, we firmly believe that language standards must be respected alongside other sectoral standards.

We all believe/ We the undersigned believe that fighting for the language is part of a wider fight for social justice and fairness. This is at the heart of our campaign. This is why we demand appropriate language services in the public sector, particularly in the area of health and social care, where ensuring that people have a right to justice and fair treatment is key at a time when they feel at their most vulnerable and needy.

We urge the WHO, public authorities, and public health providers to make a public statement regarding the importance of an 'active offer' of language services across the health and social services sector during this crisis, and to remind providers of the way in which language appropriate services can strengthen their ability to deliver effective, fair, safe and high-quality health and social care.

### **ENDORSERS/SIGNERS FROM CANADA**

#### INSTITUTIONS/ORGANIZATIONS

- **ACUFC (Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne)**
- **Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (Ottawa)**
- **ICRML (Institut canadien de recherche sur les minorités linguistiques)**

- **Institut du Savoir Montfort (ISM)**
- **SSF (Société santé en français)**
- **CHSSN (Community Health and Social Services Network)**
- **CCS (Collective Community Services)**
- **4 Korner (Laurentides, Québec)**
- **Townshippers' Association (Sherbrooke, Québec)**
- **Assistance and Referral Center (Greefield Park, Québec)**
- **CAMI (Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders)**
- **ECOL (English Community Organization of Lanaudière)**
- **QCGN (Quebec Community Groups Network)**
- **Vision Gaspé-Percé Now**
- **Montréal West Island Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre**
- **ECO-02 (English Community Organization Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean)**
- **Integrated Health and Social Services University Network for West-Central Montreal**
- **Literacy Quebec**

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- **SOCDEMCAT** (The Catalan Association of Medical Enciclopaedic Dictionary)

#### **ENDORSERS/SIGNERS FROM THE BASQUE COUNTRY**

##### ORGANISATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

- **Administrazioa Euskaraz Taldea**, Group for Public Administration in Basque
- **Aintzat** – Health professionals and patients group for health services in Basque
- **EHE** (Euskal Herrian Euskaraz) Organisation for the revitalization of the Basque language
- **EH Bildu**, Basque Political Party, with representation in the Basque, Navarrese and Spanish Parliaments
- **Euskal Herriko Bilgune Feminista** Feminist Movement of the Basque Country.
- **Euskal Herriko Emakumeok Mundu Martxa**, Feminist association of the Basque Country
- **EHKOlektiboa**, (Collective of farmers and neighbor who work and promote agroecology in the Basque Country)
- **ELA (Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna)** -Basque Workers Union
- **Geltoki kooperatiba** (Geltoki cooperativist and cultural association)
- **Hiruki Larroxa Kolektiboa** (Rose Triangle Group), LGBTQ critical thinking organization.
- **Hizkuntz Eskubideen Behatokia**, or Language Rights´ Watch
- **LAB (Langile Abertzaleen Batzorea)**, Worker´s Union
- **Medikuntza Asanblada** - (Assembly of Medical Students of the UPV/EHU-University of the Basque Country)
- **Naziogintza Taldea**, Cultural and Political group for the Basque language
- **OEE** (Osasungoa Euskalduntzeko Erakundea- Organisation for Health Care in Basque)
- **NUPeko Osasun Fakultateko Euskara Taldea** (Basque Language Association of the Health Sciences School at the Public University of Navarre-NUP.)
- **UEU (Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea)**, Basque Summer University
- **Kontseilua, or Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua** (Council of the Basque Language Organizations)

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