



COMMUNITY HEALTH &
SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK

RÉSEAU COMMUNAUTAIRE DE
SANTÉ ET DE SERVICES SOCIAUX

Brief in Response to Bill 1 – Québec Constitution Act, 2025

Brief submitted to the
Committee on Institutions – Gouvernement du Québec

By
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Urgent Need to Affirm English-Language Health Service Rights in the Proposed Québec Constitution

The proposed Québec Constitution (Bill 1) marks a pivotal moment in defining the governance and values of Québec. While we understand the Government's intent to consolidate Québec's constitutional autonomy, we are deeply concerned that the current draft fails to affirm the rights of English-speaking Quebecers—particularly the right to receive health and social services in English.

This omission risks weakening legislative guarantees of services in English and undermining the well-being of 1.2 million English-speaking residents. We urge the Government of Québec to amend the proposed Constitution to explicitly reflect these rights.

1. Existing Legal Guarantees Must Be Reflected in the Constitution

Since 1986, the legislation governing the health and social services system has recognized the right of English-speaking persons to receive health and social services in their language. Article 18 of the *Loi sur la gouvernance du système de santé et de services sociaux* states:

English-speaking persons are entitled to receive health services and social services in the English language, in keeping with the organizational structure and human, material and financial resources of the institutions providing such services and to the extent provided by the access program referred to in section 415.

This right was reaffirmed in 2022 through *Bill 96*, which amended the Charter of the French Language while maintaining protections for English-language health services (Article 22.5 (8)). The current draft of Bill 1 references the English-speaking community only once—in the tenth “whereas” clause of article 1:

“AS the State of Québec intends to pursue that objective in a manner that is respectful of the institutions of the English-speaking community of Québec;”

This limited recognition does not affirm or guarantee the rights of the English-speaking community. These rights include the guarantee of health and social services in English through a legislative framework that has guided government actions for nearly four decades to ensure access to services in collaboration with English-speaking communities.

We propose two modifications to Bill 1:

- (a) That a section be added to the law entitled “The rights of the English-speaking community of Quebec”;
- (b) That in the enumeration of these rights, a clause be inserted stating:
“English-speaking persons are entitled to receive health services and social services in the English language in accordance with article 18 of the *Loi sur la gouvernance du système de santé et de services sociaux* and affirmed in article 22.5 (8) of the Charter of the French language.”

2. Language Is Central to Safe, Equitable Care

Language is not a preference—it is a prerequisite for quality care. For English-speaking Quebecers, receiving services in their language is essential to understanding diagnoses, expressing symptoms, and making informed decisions. Language barriers can lead to misdiagnosis, delayed treatment, and diminished trust in the health system.

The Government of Québec has long acknowledged this reality through designated institutions, regional access programs, and community partnerships. These efforts must be constitutionally protected—not left vulnerable to omission or reinterpretation.

3. Community Vitality Depends on Institutional Recognition

English-speaking Quebecers are a vital part of Québec's social fabric. Their well-being depends on access to services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. Health and social services in English are not discretionary—they are essential to community retention, development, and dignity.

The proposed Constitution must reflect this reality. By failing to include existing legislative guarantees, Bill 1 risks sending a message that English-speaking communities are peripheral to Québec's future.

4. About CHSSN

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) was founded in 2000 by a group of community leaders who recognized the importance of mobilizing English-speaking communities to ensure better access to English-language health and social services. Since its inception, CHSSN has built the capacity of organizations across the province to become experts on the needs and realities of English-speaking communities and equipped them to actively participate in improving access to services in English.

Today, CHSSN is a network of over 60 community resources, associations, foundations, and other stakeholders dedicated to the development—through partnership—of health and social services for English-speaking communities in Québec.

Conclusion

We respectfully call on the Government of Québec to amend Bill 1 to include a clear affirmation of rights of English-speaking Quebecers, including the right of English-speaking persons to receive health and social services in English.