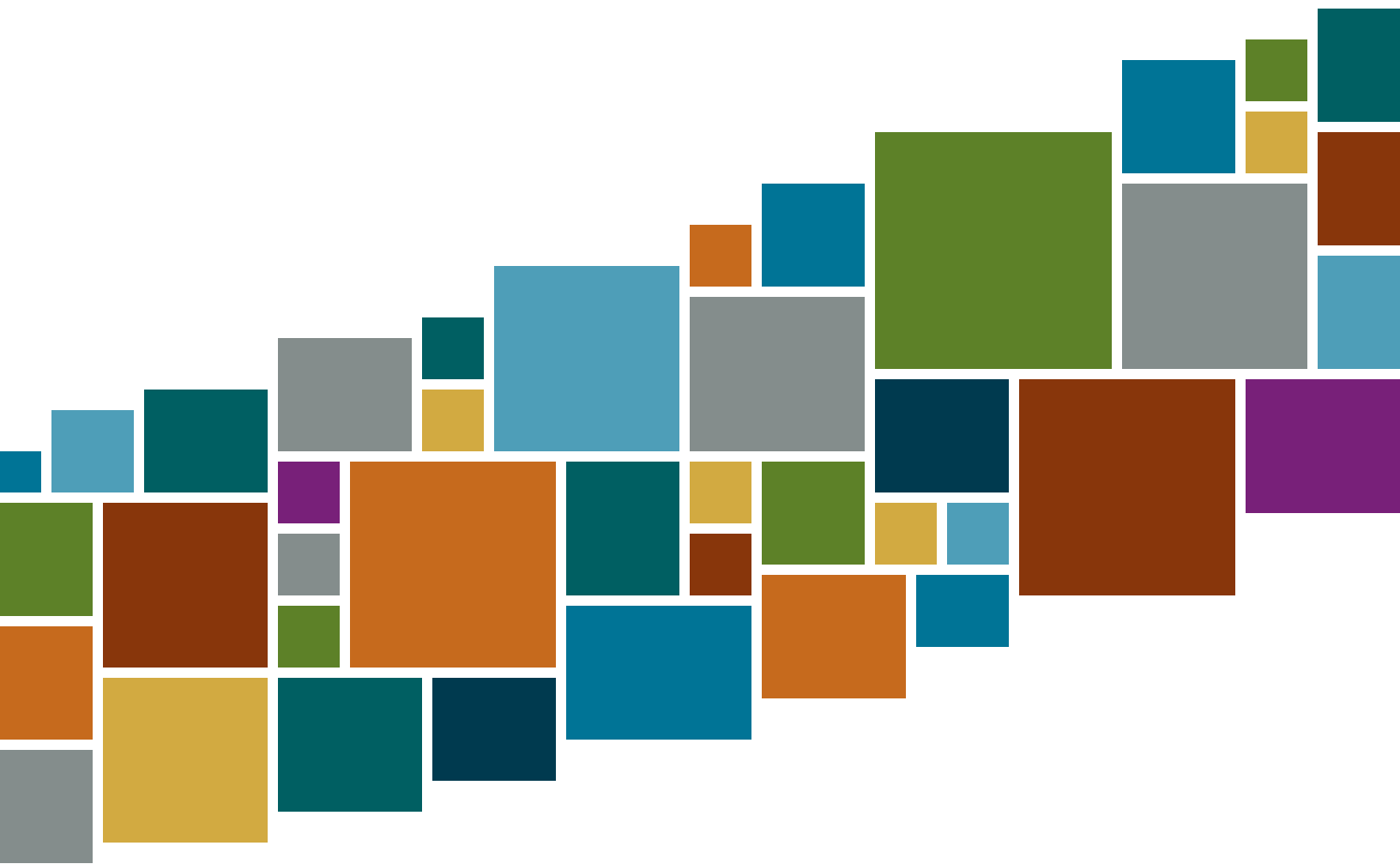


Bonjour Hello

2020-2021

REPORT ON FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES



MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

2020/21 was a year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic changed so much in our lives, such as the way we worked, interacted with our friends and families, even the way we shopped for groceries. Manitoba government operations were equally affected. Faced with an unprecedented health crisis, the government had to move quickly to navigate the constantly changing information and roll out processes and procedures to protect Manitobans. We must recognize that the needs of the Francophone community were sometimes overlooked in our haste to implement these critical measures.

COVID-19 has been an accelerator of change. It has highlighted many gaps in service delivery and technological issues that must be addressed so we can find better solutions to support all Manitobans. It is therefore very important that we learn from these challenges and collaborate with the Francophone community to improve the provision of services in French, not only during an emergency, but at all times.

For this reason, the increased number of complaints received during 2020/21 compared to previous years provides an opportunity to identify the areas where we need to work harder. When Manitobans who rely on services in French reach out to let us know we have fallen short of their expectations, we can use this information to work with public bodies on meaningful and sustainable solutions. This is an occasion to raise awareness across government on our shared obligations towards the Francophone community.

Despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic, I am happy to say that there were also examples of progress. Many public bodies continued to reach the targets established in their multi-year strategic French-language services plans, thereby improving their support for the Francophone community. These included formally recognizing employees making exceptional efforts to provide services in French, making completion of the active offer training a condition of employment, creating a bilingual focus group to test public information materials, establishing contingency staffing plans to ensure that any changes in branch activity and capacity always take French language services into consideration, and making all social media posts bilingual.

We still have work to do to normalize the use of French in all government activities, but I appreciate that improvements are being made at all levels to support our Francophonie.

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by Rochelle Squires

Honourable Rochelle Squires
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs

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Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Manitoba is on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk peoples.

We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis.

We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

We respect the spirit and intent of Treaties and Treaty Making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act was created in order to provide a framework for ensuring the ongoing vitality of Manitoba's Francophonie. An aspirational text, the Act recognizes the contribution of the French-speaking population to the province. It also acknowledges the importance of collaboration and dialogue between the government and the community it serves, as well as the need to establish progress through steady growth in the provision of services in French. The key to implementing the Act is the use of multi-year strategic French-language services (FLS) plans.

Each public body is obliged to develop and adopt its own FLS plan. Bodies must also report annually on measures taken to enhance services in French and the vitality of the Francophone community. Deputy ministers and chief executive officers are expected to provide general oversight and approval of the plan, as well as endorsing the information compiled for the annual report. Executive leadership needs to play a champion role to facilitate implementation of action steps in the FLS plan and create accountability.

The Act has created concrete obligations for the government to provide more services, programs and information in French. To be successful, the multi-year strategic FLS plan must be implemented across the public body. Active, top-down support from senior leadership will help government entities meet the objectives of their FLS plan. The exceptional challenges faced by public bodies in 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the importance of this top-down commitment to FLS.

The government communicated more with the public than ever before – publishing daily bulletins, organizing regular press conferences, requesting citizen feedback through the EngageMB portal, and advising Manitobans about emergency health orders and support programs. The unprecedented amount of information created and distributed led to a 52 per cent year-over-year increase in the volume of French translation produced by the province, which is a testament to the efforts made to ensure these critical documents were made available in both official languages.

Furthermore, and for the first time, Manitoba arranged for the presence of interpreters at the daily press conferences held by the chief public health officer. They created a taped French version of the conference that was posted to the government's YouTube channel to allow Francophones to follow the proceedings in their official language of choice.

Throughout this global pandemic, the government also heard of multiple instances where improvements are needed to better address the concerns of the Francophone community. For example, the Secretariat received questions and complaints from community members and Francophone media about issues including:

- support program packages being rolled out in English only
- up to a week's delay in providing French translations of key documents and forms
- the absence of active offer greetings and information in French
- the lack of bilingual staff providing services in French (see Complaints section on page 5)

Across all public bodies, COVID-19 highlighted gaps in the delivery of services in French, and demonstrated ongoing challenges based on the lack of awareness regarding Manitoba's obligations to the Francophone community. The Secretariat recognizes the urgent nature of the situation, the short operational timelines, and the fact that information was changing extremely rapidly. Throughout the public health crisis, Manitoba's COVID-19 response has undoubtedly struggled to keep up with the demands of releasing bilingual communications simultaneously as required under the Act and the FLS policy. However, the government is committed to making improvements in this vital area.

While some of the team leads assigned to the different work groups tasked with Manitoba's pandemic response consulted with the Secretariat on how to best integrate FLS into the new processes, and others were already aware of the obligation to provide services in French, many public servants given responsibility for implementing the provincial pandemic response did not appreciate the government's language requirements. This made applying the Francophone lens particularly challenging.

The government undertook an internal reflection in the summer of 2020 on the positive and negative results of Manitoba's handling of the health crisis. The Secretariat had an opportunity to address how the expectations of FLS legislation were not always being met. At the end of 2020/21, the Francophone Affairs Advisory Council mandated the Secretariat to work with the Communications and Engagement Division to develop an action plan to enhance bilingual communications during emergencies. Elements to be covered include press conferences, press releases, websites, outsourced services, social media, advertising campaigns and correspondence. It is hoped that the plan's recommendations and policy directives will also guide regular bilingual government communications in the future.

Although challenges continue, public bodies have an opportunity to use the knowledge acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic to create a better path that will allow them to enhance their provision of services in French.

GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

Francophone Affairs Secretariat

The Francophone Affairs Secretariat provided regular support and advice to the minister responsible for Francophone affairs and public bodies regarding implementation of Manitoba's FLS legislation in 2020/21. As of April 1, 2018, all public bodies must have FLS plans in place. Since these are implemented for different lengths of time, plans must be renewed as they conclude. The Secretariat continues to assist in the evaluation and development of these essential tools. One multi-year strategic FLS plan was renewed, while 11 other renewals were being developed and approved.

The pandemic meant that no in-person active offer training sessions were held, but approximately 850 public servants completed the online version available on the learning management system for departmental public servants. The Secretariat started exploring the possibility of creating an online learning portal that would also be accessible to public servants in Crown organizations and other government agencies so they can also follow online active offer training. This would ensure a uniform application of the concept, with Manitobans guaranteed to receive the same level of service regardless of the public body with which they are working. This new portal should be activated in 2021/22.

The Secretariat coordinated French language training at the Alliance Française du Manitoba and the Université de Saint-Boniface for government employees. This past year, 194 students registered for classes – a year-over-year increase of 15 per cent. Both institutions quickly transitioned to online learning platforms. This format offered a significant benefit to public servants working outside Winnipeg, since they were able to attend virtual classes regardless of where they live. Additional study is necessary to see how online language training might be permanently incorporated into learning options.

Staff from the Secretariat also participated in a number of community-led working groups throughout the year. Sectors covered included justice, immigration, tourism, economic development, healthcare and social services. This work ensures the Secretariat is kept informed of community priorities and can leverage its position to ensure increased collaboration between public bodies and Francophone stakeholders on strategic objectives.

The executive director delivered two presentations on language rights in Manitoba – one to law students at the University of Manitoba, and one to the general public through an initiative organized by the Association des juristes d'expression française du Manitoba. She also sits on steering committees for a variety of sectors and participated in the evaluation of several strategic plans and programs that aim to support the Francophone community.

Complaints

When a complaint is submitted, the Secretariat works with the public body to hear their perspective on what happened, determine measures to improve the service, and ensure the same issue does not occur again. The Secretariat relies on a collaborative approach to help public bodies meet their obligations under The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act and the FLS Policy, and always reports back to the complainant to share the outcome.

The Secretariat received 86 complaints regarding French language services in 2020/21. This is a significant increase over the previous year, when it processed 29 receivable complaints. Almost 50 per cent of complaints were directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat

received complaints throughout the year, showing not enough progress was made in learning from earlier mistakes to plan for services in French.

Issues raised included:

- the lack of information in French posted to COVID-19 pandemic websites in a timely manner
- an absence of telephone services in French, particularly at call centres
- citizen feedback surveys in French not being posted in a timely manner, thereby preventing Francophones from responding in time for their comments to be considered
- no active offer of services in French at vaccination centres

As mentioned, many of the problems noted by Francophones stemmed from a lack of awareness. Improved planning might have occurred if the requirement to provide bilingual services and information had been recognized at the highest levels and the concept of active offer had been properly implemented. This would have allowed time for translation and bilingual staffing capacity to be integrated into the pandemic response.

When the Secretariat was following up on complaints, it learned some projects were outsourced to third parties, notably those relating to IT initiatives. For example, contracted vendors built interactive portals like HelpNextDoor and StudentJobs, but they did not fully consider the need for bilingualism. These vendors proposed automatic machine translation as a solution to providing services in French. However, only certain browsers offer automatic translation, and it was not always clear to Francophone users that this option was available. In other cases, the automatic translation was not as good as the English version and contained multiple mistakes.

Some issues also arose due to the complexity of the government's approval processes. Documents were being changed and finalized right up to the last minute. As soon as they received approval, they were published. This meant that web pages, correspondence, forms, surveys and press releases could only be sent for translation after they had been made public.

The remaining complaints covered many different sectors and types of government activity like healthcare and social services, assessment services, online licences and signage in parks. The lack of French information on websites and portals and the lack of active offer in government offices and on telephone lines was often an issue. Specific examples include:

- the inability for one parent to register a newborn for their Manitoba health card in French
- cancer screening documents available in English only
- the closure of designated bilingual government centres in Somerset and St-Pierre-Jolys
- the lack of a French version of the eLicensing portal when it was launched, and challenges accessing telephone services in French

FLS complaints provide government with an opportunity to learn from its shortcomings and enhance services to better respond to the Francophone community's needs. If public bodies do not know where issues exist, they cannot work to address them. This is why the Secretariat welcomes feedback from Francophones who use government services.

Anyone with a complaint about FLS can contact the Secretariat directly (fls-slf@leg.gov.mb.ca, 204-945-4915) or through the online complaint form at https://forms.gov.mb.ca/fls-slf/file_complaint.html. The Secretariat also assists the public with general questions, concerns and service requests regarding FLS.

Bilingual Service Centres

The Bilingual Service Centres (BSCs) continued to help Francophones access a wide array of programs and services offered by all three levels of government and community organizations in the designated bilingual regions:

- Mountain (Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes)
- Red River (St-Pierre-Jolys)
- Seine River (Ste. Anne)
- Interlake (St. Laurent)
- St. Boniface
- St. Vital/St. Norbert

The six centres closed to in-person services in March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, BSC staff offered remote services by phone and email. They played a key role in sharing material about new support programs, particularly those offered by the federal government. The BSCs' federal partner, Service Canada, closed its in-person centres between March and October 2020, so clients relied on BSC staff to help them access this critical information.

The four rural centres reopened in May 2020, although services were initially limited to urgent and essential requests. Clients had access to tools and resources to support their interactions with the provincial government, including photocopying and scanning, and were also able to use public access workstations. The St. Boniface centre reopened in July 2020 but was forced to close again in December due to the worsening healthcare situation in the city. Staff from the two urban centres were redeployed within the public service to support the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Regardless of the challenges, the information specialists were able to stay connected to their communities to assess and respond to the changing needs of their clientele. By leveraging technology, they quickly adapted to virtual service delivery models and were also able to continue some of their outreach activities. The navigator in the Interlake BSC offered culturally appropriate support to the Métis community, facilitating access to government services and promoting programs for healthy living. Information specialists coordinated a variety of virtual presentations on subjects like cultural awareness, fraud and scams, tax credits and government benefits, as well as sessions on the history and evolution of the Francophone community and government services in French.

Mobile and promotional kiosks were cancelled due to the pandemic restrictions, but information specialists continued to support community projects relating to government priorities like immigration, services for seniors, tourism, culture and heritage. Despite the pandemic, the BSCs responded to 56,186 requests for service in 2020/21.

Francophone Affairs Advisory Council

The Francophone Affairs Advisory Council (FAAC) met in the presence of the minister responsible for Francophone Affairs twice in 2020/21: in person on September 23, 2020, and virtually on March 25, 2021. Discussions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Francophone community were on the agenda for both meetings.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie

The Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie (MCCF), created in 1994, is the only intergovernmental forum that brings together the ministers responsible for the Canadian Francophonie.

The 2020 annual MCCF meeting scheduled to be held in Quebec City in June was postponed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Honourable Rochelle Squires, minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, participated in federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) and provincial-territorial (PT) video conferences on December 4, 2020, to discuss areas of concern to Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities.

Ministers agreed to continue their efforts to promote Francophone immigration, commissioned a feasibility study related to the creation of a national portrait of unmet needs for Canada's bilingual workforce, adopted a new strategic plan, and recommended proceeding with a change in status to create a not-for-profit organization under a new name: the Ministers' Council on the Canadian Francophonie. They also held a roundtable discussion to determine strategic priorities for the next three years.

Intergovernmental Network of the Canadian Francophonie

There were no in-person meetings of the Intergovernmental Network of the Canadian Francophonie (INCF) in 2020/21, but the group – charged with carrying out follow-up activities to implement priorities of the MCCF and preparing for the next edition of the conference – held multiple video conferences throughout the year. The Secretariat's executive director continued to chair the French Language Services Committee and, along with her Ontario counterpart, led the work to create a national portrait on the unmet needs for a bilingual workforce. This included meetings with Employment and Social Development Canada and the Labour Market Information Council.

FPT Working Group on Access to Justice in Both Official Languages

The COVID-19 pandemic also meant there were no in-person meetings of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Access to Justice in Both Official Languages. However, the Secretariat's executive director and a Crown attorney from the Department of Justice represented the Manitoba government at the annual meeting, held virtually on December 15, 2020. The working group brings together representatives from the sectors of Francophone affairs and justice to discuss initiatives and strategies to improve how Francophones interact with the justice system. This year, the group focused on training and professional development opportunities in French that support access to justice.

Canada–Manitoba Agreement on French-Language Services 2018-2023

The Francophone Affairs Secretariat administered funding under the 2018-2023 Canada–Manitoba Agreement on French-Language Services (CMAFLS). Under this cost-sharing arrangement, the federal government matches the Manitoba government's expenditure up to a maximum of \$1.4 million per year (\$7 million over five years) to support the development, delivery and expansion of quality government services in French, and to support foundational initiatives that enhance the community's vitality. The agreement supported a wide variety of projects in 2020/21, including in the priority sectors of healthcare and social services, early childhood, municipal services, economic development and tourism, and culture. Funds from the CMAFLS also supported language learning for public servants, translation initiatives and the operation of the BSCs.

A special project was created in 2020/21 to support the work of the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba (AMBM) and its efforts to provide French translation of critical documents related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Municipal Relations was the provincial partner for this initiative, which provided an additional \$60,000 to the organization.

Manitoba–New Brunswick and Manitoba–Quebec

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on these cooperation programs. With travel restrictions in place for most of the year, community organizations could not develop projects that rely on exchanges, mentoring, training, and sharing of expertise. As a result, very few applications were received for the Agreement for Cooperation and Exchange Between the Government of Manitoba and the Government of Québec With Respect to the Francophonie and the Memorandum of Understanding on Interprovincial Cooperation Between the Government of Manitoba and the Government of New Brunswick. The Manitoba government contributed \$7,500 toward two Manitoba–Quebec projects and \$6,450 toward two Manitoba–New Brunswick projects, with matched funding from its counterparts.

Ronald-Duhamel Award

The Prix Ronald-Duhamel – Ronald Duhamel Award is a joint initiative of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine (SFM), Manitoba’s Federal Network of Official Languages, the Francophone Affairs Secretariat, and the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM). It is presented every two years. Officially launched in March 2005, the award was created to recognize an employee or group of employees of a government or quasi-governmental body at the federal, provincial or municipal level for distinguished service to Manitoba’s Francophone community.

The 2021 award was presented to Michel Loiselle on March 8, during a virtual ceremony. Mr. Loiselle – a federal public servant – was recognized for his work in finding ways to reconcile local priorities with available funding. This has greatly contributed to increase urban and regional economic development within the Francophone community. Mr. Loiselle led an extensive public engagement initiative with the Francophone community that identified its economic development needs and interests. His efforts led to projects that responded to specific communities’ needs, including programs and supports for businesses and employability, initiatives targeting youth entrepreneurship, and the promotion and inclusion of Francophone artists within Manitoba’s cultural industries.

Members of the general public and public sector employees at the federal, provincial and municipal level are invited to submit nominations for the award. Additional information is available online at www.prixronaldduhamelaward.mb.ca.

PROVISION OF SERVICES BASED ON ACTIVE OFFER

The active offer concept is the cornerstone for the provision of French-language services. It is therefore important that the multi-year strategic FLS plans include a solid foundation based on this concept. The provision of services can further be broken down into three categories:

- Internal FLS Policies, Governance and Resources
- FLS Training and Awareness
- Client Services

In the two years since public bodies first developed and implemented their multi-year strategic FLS plans, there has been steady progress regarding the normalization of services in French. However, nearly all sectors reported challenges in 2020/21 when completing certain action items or moving forward on unfinished commitments from their plans. The following pages set out some of the issues, strategies and accomplishments regarding service delivery for the year.

Internal FLS Policies, Governance and Resources

This category examines what public bodies are doing to facilitate the integration of services in French into their regular operations. While the government has a corporate policy, many public bodies used their plans to commit to developing internal procedures to ensure the meaningful implementation of Manitoba's FLS Policy.

Reports submitted to the Secretariat indicate approximately half of the actions related to policies and procedures outlined for completion in 2020/21 received considerable attention. Even so, only 30 per cent of initiatives were completed or on target, with 21 per cent being slightly delayed. However, 49 per cent of proposed initiatives saw little or no progress, with public bodies reporting that action was required to get back on track. For instance, some public bodies have yet to review their current resources and guidelines concerning the provision of services in French, while others mentioned delays in applying a Francophone lens in their decision-making processes. Specific examples of challenges caused by this lack of progress include not considering how services will be affected after a program is reorganized and not including FLS provisions in third-party service agreements regarding services intended for the general public.

Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting the success of one public body that undertook a comprehensive internal review of the services it provides in French. It achieved this through a survey of employees and managers on the types and frequency of service requests they receive, and an analysis of how this correlates to the presence of bilingual staff. The Secretariat is in conversation with the public body to see how its process could be adapted and used by other program areas to support their own internal FLS reviews.

Along with clear policy guidelines and processes, the Secretariat recognizes FLS committees can also play a critical role in ensuring the successful implementation of strategies to improve the delivery of services in French, and the monitoring of a public body's multi-year strategic FLS plan. Their work is enhanced where the public body's FLS coordinator has a clearly defined role and the authority – with the assistance of the committees – to provide status updates to the deputy minister or CEO who is ultimately responsible for the public body's plan. There was some progress in 2020/21 on action steps associated with committees and coordinators, with public bodies reporting 27 per cent of their actions steps for these initiatives as on target. However, most departments and agencies needed more time to reach their annual goals. In 58 per cent of cases, work had started but progress was slower than planned and timelines had to be adjusted. Minimal or no progress was made for 12 per cent of action steps, and one

department noted its coordinator's participation in internal meetings could not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some reports lacked clarity because the public body did not offer complete explanations or include strategies to accomplish uncompleted action steps for the next year. For example, reasons provided for delays were the same as those given in previously submitted annual reports. This shows the lack of a fully functional committee that meets regularly to review progress under the FLS plan has a negative impact on a public body's ability to effect change and provide meaningful reports.

On the other hand, one public body demonstrated it had taken concrete steps to integrate the FLS coordinator and committee into its operations. It reported on how their inclusion into other working groups helped them influence outcomes to enhance services in French and raise awareness about the objectives of the organization's FLS plan.

FLS Training and Awareness

Public bodies proposed a variety of initiatives to raise awareness about services in French and the associated policies, regulations and laws in place in Manitoba. In the 2019/20 report, the Secretariat expressed a concern that only about half of the action steps to communicate this information to new and current employees were on track for completion. This continues to be an issue in 2020/21, since only 11 per cent of efforts to share this information with new and current public servants were on track. More time to share the orientation with new employees was required in 33 per cent of cases and in 27 per cent of cases for current employees. More significantly, public bodies reported almost 50 per cent of planned activities saw minimal or no work carried out to implement such orientation for new and current employees (50 per cent and 47 per cent of action steps, respectively). A small percentage noted these delays were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but most public bodies did not clearly explain why more progress was not made.

The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act sets out the active offer concept as the cornerstone of providing services in French. This is why almost all public bodies have included action steps in their plans regarding active offer training for staff. The Francophone Affairs Secretariat could not offer in-person training due to the public health measures in place for most of the year, but public bodies called on Secretariat staff on several occasions to provide virtual training through Microsoft Teams. The online training offered through Organizational Staff Development (OSD) was available at all times for employees who have access to the government's managed environment.

Despite the free availability of the online training, public bodies reported difficulties meeting targets for active offer instruction for staff. Only a quarter of activities were reported as completed or on track to be completed for training new (24 per cent) and current (25 per cent) employees, while under a fifth of activities needed slightly more time to be completed. There was little or no progress achieved on over half the projects regarding formal active offer training for new (55 per cent) and current (54 per cent) public servants. A couple of public bodies said the COVID-19 pandemic was the reason the training did not take place.

The Secretariat will continue to work with all government entities to address obstacles to meeting commitments for training. The public bodies that noted difficulties also said there was not a broad push to make the completion of active offer training mandatory. A commitment from managers or executive leaders could help entities struggling with this action item to make progress. Reports over the last couple of years show the greatest success in meeting active offer training targets occurs when initiatives are supported by the top levels of management and defined timelines for completion are provided.

Finally, one public body reported it has made the completion of active offer training a condition of employment for all new staff. This will ensure enhanced services in French and bring more awareness about FLS requirements. Over time, the public body will create a culture that encourages all employees to apply a Francophone lens to their daily work.

Client Services

Client services are at the heart of Manitoba's FLS Policy. Whether they choose to interact with the government in person, by phone or online, Francophones need easy access to readily available and quality services in French. In keeping with the spirit and intent of the Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act, the action steps proposed in the multi-year strategic FLS plans should allow for gradual progress in the provision of FLS across Manitoba's public service.

Having frontline services available in English and French is vital for all Manitobans, but success in completing action steps targeting a public body's ability to provide information and services in French was inevitably affected by the health crisis. Thirty-eight per cent of government entities reported these initiatives were on target, with 30 per cent slightly behind their planned timelines. However, public bodies reported they had not made any progress on 32 per cent of their frontline services projects.

A key aspect of implementing the active offer concept is to use Hello-Bonjour identifiers. This includes badges and lanyards worn by staff, and countertop signage. These identifiers inform the public as soon as they enter a government office that services in French will be available. While there has been progress – 30 per cent of planned action steps were completed – the work to ensure the use of active offer identifiers was not on track over 50 per cent of the time, with the COVID-19 pandemic cited as the issue in 10 per cent of cases. Many government offices and buildings were closed to the public for long periods throughout the year, but the delays in implementing these actions are surprising given the identifiers are available free of charge to all public bodies and could be procured at any time throughout the year.

The review and normalization of bilingual signage in public offices also continue to cause challenges. Public bodies reported being on track to complete action steps within the planned timelines for 17 per cent of cases, with completion of another 30 per cent faced with a slight delay. However, as was the case with active offer identifiers, almost half of the planned activities saw minimal or no work. The Secretariat will continue to work with public bodies to develop and implement realistic strategies to increase the use of bilingual signage, especially in regions serving Francophone communities.

The government increasingly relies on online platforms to inform the public about its programs and services. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition in 2020/21. This is another area where public bodies encountered challenges in meeting their targets. Of the reported measures for the year, 25 per cent were on target and 14 per cent were slightly delayed. Most action steps concerning the provision of website information in French were significantly behind schedule.

Specific issues mentioned included the lack of resources available for publishing translated content on the public body's website and the loss of previously translated materials due to staffing changes or internal reorganizations. In another instance, outsourcing the development of a new portal led to significant delays in posting the French version of the tool – while the public body had hoped for a bilingual launch, there was a six-month delay before the French version was published.

Many public bodies continue to offer a high degree of bilingual information on their websites, with some reporting gains over previous years and others indicating they have reached upwards of 90 per cent bilingual web content. This is especially encouraging in the case of Crown organizations, since they are unable to access free translation from provincial Translation Services. These entities are now factoring the cost of translation into their overall operating costs. Other Crown corporations will hopefully be able to adopt similar best practices for the development and maintenance of their own websites.

Producing French versions of public information documents, forms and other materials continues to be a struggle for some public bodies. Thirty-six per cent of initiatives required immediate action, and five per cent were delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is significantly more than in 2019/20, when public bodies could not meet their timelines for translating public information in just 26 per cent of cases. Some entities mentioned an increase in rush translation requests. While there are some concerns this could signify insufficient planning, most urgent translations were related to the pandemic and were therefore to have been expected.

Given the extraordinary amount of information produced by the government – particularly during the COVID-19 crisis –, the Secretariat continues to advise public bodies to identify which materials are most needed by Manitoba's Francophone community and encourages them to prioritize their translation requests accordingly. This should help facilitate the steady progress required under The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND BILINGUAL CAPACITY

Bilingual Capacity

Having staff who are able to provide services in both official languages is an essential component for the implementation of Manitoba's FLS legislation. It is therefore critical all public bodies track their bilingual capacity.

All designated bilingual positions within core government departments have been recorded automatically in SAP since 2019, so only Crown corporations and regional health authorities (RHAs) continued developing action steps related to this kind of inventory in 2020/21. Some of these public bodies noted they are changing the way they track designated bilingual positions, moving from a manual method to an automated one. One of them explored ways to record designated bilingual positions automatically in its payroll system. Some Crown corporations also indicated they are looking at how to develop automated solutions to record designated bilingual positions and bilingual employees in non-designated positions.

To ensure that their bilingual capacity is adequate to provide FLS that meet the needs of the Francophone community, about one third of public bodies have undertaken a review of their designated bilingual positions. This review shows if existing designations are still valid, if some need to be transferred to other positions and if some previously undesignated positions should be formally recognized as requiring French and English communication skills. Forty-five per cent of the action steps planned for 2020/21 were on target, 20 per cent were slightly delayed, and 30 per cent received little or no attention. Different explanations were provided for the delay. One public body reported it had to prioritize work on COVID-19 pandemic supports and programs, while another noted internal reorganization meant it was unable to meet its timelines for conducting its review. On the other hand, one Crown corporation built on the review it completed in 2019/20, and is now updating its position descriptions with specific information related to the level of language competence required.

It is equally important for public bodies to track how many of its employees in non-designated bilingual positions are able to provide services in French, and most of them have included action steps relating to this work in their multi-year plans. This kind of inventory relies mainly on self-declaration. Different strategies have been developed to encourage public servants to come forward, including a communication plan, a survey, and a letter from executive management. Two RHAs reviewed and updated their self-declaration forms and posted them online to be easily accessible to all employees. These organizations also imbedded self-declaration into the hiring process by adding a question about language proficiency on the employee profile form.

Nearly all the actions related to self-declaration were on target at 80 per cent. Fifty-nine per cent of action steps related to work on inventories of bilingual capacity were on target, 27 per cent were delayed, and 14 per cent had minimal or no work done. This represents an improvement compared to 2019/20, when only 41 per cent of the action steps were on target.

As public bodies complete work on their bilingual capacity inventories, they can also update their referral lists. These records of bilingual public servants who are willing and able to support unilingual Anglophone colleagues provide services in French ensure government entities can implement the active offer of service. Ideally, the referral lists should be updated at least once a year and shared with all frontline staff who may be asked to provide services in French. Many public bodies created online versions of their referral lists in 2020/21, and one RHA promoted its use through its regular staff bulletin. Fifty per cent of measures associated with referral lists were on target, but 14 per cent of action steps saw no progress.

Recruitment and Retention

When public bodies have a clear understanding of their current bilingual capacity, they are better positioned to develop the recruitment and retention strategies needed to ensure there are enough bilingual staff willing and able to provide services to the Francophone community. The multi-year strategic FLS plans include a number of action steps for these elements.

Adding “French is an asset” on job postings represents one way of increasing bilingual capacity in non-designated bilingual positions. In 2020/21, 14 public bodies worked on this particular strategy. Forty-seven per cent of action steps were on target, 18 per cent were delayed, but minimal or no work had been done for 29 per cent of them. One public body said action was deferred in 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, not all entities are at the same stage in implementing this measure, and others mentioned challenges to advancing on this strategy.

For example, some managers still resist the measure because they feel their program area may be disadvantaged by including bilingualism in job postings. One public body noted it was difficult to track the exact number of competitions that included a preference for bilingual candidates, and another reported internal reorganization caused less openness to including this preference on job postings since the need for bilingual staff had not yet been determined. Furthermore, hiring bilingual staff for positions that require a high level of technical skill or in competitions to fill vacancies in rural offices continues to be an issue – even when the ability to speak French is included as a preferred criterion. When there is a limited pool of potential candidates and the recruitment process is challenging regardless of language requirements, more sophisticated strategies are needed to address the issue.

Of the 32 action steps related to the recruitment of bilingual employees planned for implementation in 2020/21, 45 per cent were on target, 16 per cent were delayed and little or no action had taken place for 26 per cent. Public bodies mentioned 13 per cent of planned actions were delayed due to the pandemic. Among the more successful strategies were initiatives based on improving the relationship and understanding between program managers and human resource consultants, engaging with Francophone organizations to promote bilingual competitions, and consulting with the community on measures to support the development of the pool of potential bilingual candidates.

Over the years, the RHAs have developed collaborative and integrated approaches to support recruitment initiatives. These include the adoption of multiple and complementary steps tackling challenges finding candidates who meet both technical and language requirements. Working with post-secondary institutions allows for increased use of practicums, and RHAs also attend career fairs across Canada to promote job opportunities to high school and university students. These recruitment initiatives bear fruit and could potentially serve as a model for government departments and Crown corporations. All public bodies need to reassess their strategies to ensure they are meeting their recruitment goals and take corrective action if necessary.

Given the obstacles to recruiting bilingual staff, it is equally important for public bodies to take measures to retain them. Only five entities had action steps to support their bilingual staff in 2020/21. Eighty-three per cent of these were on track, but 17 per cent required urgent attention due to lack of progress. A range of strategies was created to retain bilingual employees, including celebrating Francophone culture, organizing special activities during Festival du Voyageur, supporting active offer training by holding a prize draw for participants,

providing French writing assistance software for bilingual staff, developing a repository of online resources, and securing French-language mental health supports for public servants during the pandemic.

Ongoing recruitment and retention issues inevitably cause an increase in the number of vacancies in designated bilingual positions. This was unfortunately the case in 2020/21, with a 15 per cent vacancy rate across public bodies compared to 11 per cent in 2019/20 (see Appendix for more detailed information). When designated bilingual positions are not filled, there is a direct and negative impact on the provision of services in French. This impact is felt in the short-term, but also has long-term repercussions for succession planning. This is why it is important that public bodies and their human resource consultants must understand the intent behind the creation of designated bilingual positions and recognize they need to be given specific consideration. All government entities need to find innovative and sustainable solutions to fill vacant designated positions with bilingual staff and fully support these employees once they have been hired.

Training

Providing staff with French-language training options remains one of the most powerful ways public bodies can support their bilingual capacity, both for employees in designated positions and for staff who will be able to provide back-up services as required. This training plays a key role in enhancing language skills and building confidence to use French at work. Many incumbents in designated positions have noted they do not get many opportunities to work in French, so it is important to practise.

Nearly all public bodies have measures related to the support of language learning in their multi-year FLS plans, including strategies to promote and encourage French-language training, provide additional resources, and create informal conversation options. However, only 57 per cent of planned action steps were on target in 2020/21. Eighteen per cent were delayed and 14 per cent saw no progress. This was a step back compared to the previous year, when almost 70 per cent of action steps were on track.

There were some innovative approaches to supporting language learning. At least two public bodies reported using the annual performance evaluation to propose training as part of their employees' learning plan. Another launched a "French Phrase of the Week" activity in designated bilingual sites. One RHA procured a business licence for Rosetta Stone, a self-guided language learning software, as part of a two-year pilot project. It is currently monitoring and evaluating use by staff to assess overall efficiency and efficacy of this language support over time.

The online course "Communiquer avec assertivité", developed in with OSD and the Université de Saint-Boniface, had limited success in 2020/21, with only eleven employees enrolled. The Secretariat will continue to monitor and assess feedback to see how it might be seen as a more interesting option for professional development opportunities in French.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly had a negative impact on action steps relating to training. With so many public servants redeployed to the pandemic response, and public bodies prioritizing program sectors and populations particularly affected by the healthcare crisis, it is not surprising that there was less progress than in previous years.

CONSULTATION AND COLLABORATION WITH THE FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY

Consultation

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted a few action steps related to consultation activities. Public bodies cancelled meetings – especially at the start of the 2020/21 year – and delayed plans to hold discussions with Francophone community stakeholders. However, as the year went on, online meetings and consultations became more commonplace, allowing some public bodies to get on track. Of the 45 action steps planned around consultation activities for 2020/21, 36 per cent were on target (compared to 32 per cent in 2019/20), 27 per cent were delayed (23 per cent in 2019/20) and 27 per cent saw little or no progress (45 per cent in 2019/20).

Public bodies with established relationships that were already in the habit of holding meetings with stakeholders and partners found it easier to adapt and maintain their previous level of community engagement. By consulting with the Francophone community, entities gathered feedback regarding strategies, innovative service delivery methods and community needs regarding FLS. The development of the EngageMB web portal also supported departmental consultation activities. However, due to accelerated timelines for the launch of many consultations, there were often delays in providing French versions of engagement materials (see page 6), which meant Francophones did not always have the same length of time as Anglophones to respond. This was particularly challenging for time-sensitive matters, such as surveys about reopening Manitoba's economy.

Cooperation With the Francophone Community

The COVID-19 pandemic also delayed 10 per cent of the collaboration and partnership actions planned for 2020/21. These delays were greater for public bodies that were planning on developing new partnerships, and did not seem to affect existing partnerships.

Fifteen public bodies developed action steps related to collaboration with the Francophone community. Of the 21 proposed action steps, 43 per cent were on target, 29 were delayed and 19 per cent saw little or no progress. This represents a decrease compared to the results of 2019/20 (64 per cent, 13 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively). This change compared to the previous year would seem to be the result of shifting priorities across public bodies due to the pandemic.

Collaboration is often implemented through working groups. Some departments have newly established or long-running groups working on areas like municipal development, tourism, immigration and access to justice. Four Crown corporations have also created a working group with two major Francophone community organizations to develop strategies and share best practices for services in French.

Another way public bodies can collaborate with the Francophone community is through service agreements and other forms of financial support. Many public bodies provide funding to Francophone organizations, with a significant proportion of these agreements being in place for several years. Francophone organizations could also benefit from the COVID-19 pandemic-related grants. However, much of the promotional funding usually available for arts groups was cancelled due to the restrictions on in-person cultural events.

Overall, only 31 per cent of action steps related to support of the community were on target or completed in 2020/21. Forty-six per cent were delayed, and little or no work had been undertaken on 15 per cent. The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned as an obstacle for completing planned activities in eight per cent of proposed measures.

Cooperation With the Bilingual Service Centres

Most public bodies that include cooperation with the BSCs in their FLS plans base this collaboration on initiatives related to the sharing of information with the Francophone community. This includes sending them bilingual job postings or sharing brochures, resources and other materials that the public body would like the BSCs to communicate to the Francophone community on their behalf. Certain entities have begun planning more advanced collaboration. For example, one department worked with the BSCs on installing point of sale terminals to make it easier for Francophones to purchase licences and permits in the designated bilingual regions.

Unfortunately, not all public bodies were successful in advancing this type of cooperation. A full 29 per cent of action steps were stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was for reasons including the cancellation of in-person meetings that would potentially have taken place in the BSCs, halting production of print materials in favour of online documents, and a lack of human resources for outreach activities. Only five per cent of planned action steps were on target, compared to 43 per cent in 2019/20. It is to be hoped that initiatives to promote and increase cooperation between public bodies and the BSCs will see some progress as the public health restrictions are lifted.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, 2020/21 truly was a unique year. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt in all areas of government activity and across all parts of Manitoban society, including in the Francophone community.

However, the COVID-19 health crisis has also created a space to rethink old service delivery models and explore how to adapt them to best meet the changing needs of Manitobans. Building on a culture that promotes transformation, the provincial government can work more proactively to ensure it applies a Francophone lens as it introduces new policies and procedures. This year's annual report has highlighted two sectors where changes might be implemented to enhance services in French: the transition to more online services and the development of public bodies' bilingual capacity.

The government has increased its digital footprint over the past few years and this process was accelerated by the pandemic. Restrictions to in-person services meant Manitobans expected easily accessible online services and information. This move towards interactive portals and transactional websites provides an opportunity to implement policies across government that would make sure special consideration is paid to the needs of the Francophone community when such initiatives are being proposed.

For example, when third parties are engaged to build interactive portals, public bodies could include the obligation to provide bilingual portals in their requests for proposals. Similarly, authority-seeking documents for building new portals or websites could contain a brief section in which the public body would have to explain how comparable services in French will be provided. If government entities are obliged to consider the needs of Manitoba's Francophone community as part of the assessment process, it will help create a culture where services in French are normalized.

Certain staffing challenges that had been noted in previous years were also exacerbated by the public health crisis, with numerous public bodies reporting difficulties in recruiting and retaining bilingual staff. Indeed, human resource issues have frequently been cited as obstacles to progress in both public and private sector workplaces since the pandemic began.

The government can better support public bodies looking to increase their bilingual capacity by updating its procedures on managing designated bilingual positions and hiring qualified candidates to occupy them. All program areas benefit when human resource consultants are aware of the government's obligations towards its French-speaking citizens and fully understand the additional steps needed to recruit bilingual employees.

An integrated approach that includes options for mentoring, language training and succession planning can help departments and other government agencies build their bilingual capacity. This will ensure French-speaking public servants are available to offer services in French, and also support efforts to increase awareness and establish a network of FLS champions who can provide advice to their colleagues and recommendations to their supervisors about how the government can meet its commitments under The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act.

The active, top-down support of executive leaders mentioned at the start of the report is essential if we are to see real progress in the provision of FLS. Additionally, all public bodies must consider the needs of the Francophonie proactively and work collaboratively and horizontally to implement common solutions. Finally, building this consideration into regular administrative procedures like human resources and financial planning will allow the government to fully recognize the role Francophones have played historically in the development of the province and – more importantly – the role they can play in supporting Manitoba's ongoing prosperity and success.

APPENDIX - STATISTICS ON BILINGUAL CAPACITY

Table One - Departments

Public Body	Designated bilingual positions	Designated bilingual positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Designated bilingual positions filled with non-bilingual incumbents	Vacant designated positions	Non-designated positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Total bilingual capacity 2020/21	Total bilingual capacity 2019/20
Agriculture and Resource Development	10	3	1	6	22	25	34
Central Services ¹	3	2	0	1	Unknown	2	2
Civil Service Commission	11	6	3	2	14	20	22
Conservation and Climate	7	2	3	2	14	16	15
Economic Development and Training ²	26	20	0	6	27	47	53
Education	83	63	2	18	14	77	83
Families	90	65	9	16	68	133	144
Finance	35	28	1	6	23	51	63
Francophone Affairs Secretariat	27	24	0	3	0	24	25
Health, Seniors and Active Living ³	6	3	3	0	19	22	22
Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations	0	0	0	0	4	4	2
Infrastructure	4	3	0	1	25	28	31
Justice	65	54	0	11	119	173	162
Legislative and Public Affairs ⁴	5	3	2	0	Unknown	3	–
Municipal Relations	15	8	5	2	3	11	7
Sport, Culture and Heritage	16	6	2	8	4	10	13
Subtotal	403	290	31	82	357	647	678

¹ Central Services was established in October 2019. Its FLS plan was signed in February 2021, but bilingual capacity was not yet known.

² Economic Development and Training was divided into two new departments in January 2021: Economic Development and Jobs; Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration. The work to administratively separate the two was not completed by March 31, 2021. Combined statistics are provided for 2020/21.

³ Health, Seniors and Active Living was divided into two new departments in January 2021: Health and Seniors Care; Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. The work to administratively separate the two was not completed by March 31, 2021. Combined statistics are provided for 2020/21.

⁴ Legislative and Public Affairs became a formal government department in January 2021.

Table Two – Crown Corporations, Offices of the Legislative Assembly and Extra-departmental Agencies

Public Body	Designated bilingual positions	Designated bilingual positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Designated bilingual positions filled with non-bilingual incumbents	Vacant designated positions	Non-designated positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Total bilingual capacity 2020/21	Total bilingual capacity 2019/20
Auditor General	0	0	0	0	3	3	3
CancerCare	3	1	2	0	28	29	29
Efficiency Manitoba ⁵	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Elections Manitoba	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Authority of Manitoba	5	0	2	3	3	3	7 ⁶
Manitoba Advocate for Children & Youth	0	0	0	0	5	5	4
Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation	5	3	0	2	6	9	13
Manitoba Arts Council	2	2	0	0	3	5	3
Manitoba Film and Music	2	2	0	0	4	6	5
Manitoba Hydro	23	23	0	0	269	292	305
Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation	150	137	8	5	69	206	204 ⁷
Manitoba Ombudsman	2	1	1	0	8	9	9
Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation	88	67	10	11	65	132	133
Shared Health ⁸	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Sport Manitoba	6	4	2	0	5	9	9
Status of Women	2	2	0	0	0	2	2
Travel Manitoba	5	5	0	0	2	7	6
Workers' Compensation Board	6	6	0	0	25	31	33
Subtotal	299	253	25	21	496	749	766
Total	702	543	56	103	853	1396	1444

⁵ Efficiency Manitoba was created under Manitoba Hydro in 2019/20. It did not have an approved FLS plan in place by March 31, 2021.

⁶ Adjusted amount (error in 2019/20 bilingual capacity calculation).

⁷ Adjusted amount (error in 2019/20 bilingual capacity calculation).

⁸ Shared Health was created as a new entity in 2019/20. It did not have an approved FLS plan in place by March 31, 2021.

Compared to the previous year, the number of designated bilingual positions increased by almost four per cent in 2020/21. It is important to note, however, that Crown corporations and other reporting agencies made more progress than departments in this regard, increasing their number of designated positions by almost nine per cent (see Table Two).

The total number of designated bilingual positions filled with bilingual incumbents increased slightly. Again, Crown organizations and other reporting agencies fared better than departments, with a year-over-year increase of just over nine per cent. The number of designated bilingual positions filled with bilingual incumbents in core government actually decreased by five per cent. This is mainly due to a higher number of vacant designated bilingual positions – a 34 per cent increase across departments compared to 2019/20.

It is also worth noting that the total number of designated bilingual positions filled with non-bilingual incumbents decreased by 13 per cent (64 in 2019/20 down to 56 in 2020/21). This tendency is more pronounced in Crown organizations and other reporting agencies, which reported a 17 per cent decrease.

Despite these essentially positive results, the bilingual capacity across all public bodies decreased by about three per cent in 2020/21. This is due to the lower number of bilingual staff occupying non-designated bilingual positions (a six per cent drop compared to 2019/20). This trend has continued since 2018/19, but this is the first time the decrease in bilingual capacity has outpaced the decrease in the overall number of civil service employees.

Table Three – Regional Health Authorities

NOTE: The regional health authorities do not have a uniform method of tracking bilingual capacity, with some using the number of positions and others the number of full-time equivalents (FTE). It is therefore impossible to compare this data to that of other public bodies.

Public Body	Number of designated bilingual positions	Number of designated bilingual positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Number of designated bilingual positions filled with non-bilingual incumbents	Number of vacant designated positions	Number of non-designated positions filled with bilingual incumbents	Total Bilingual capacity 2020/21	Total bilingual capacity 2019/20
Interlake-Eastern	46 32.61 (FTE)	12 9.95 (FTE)	34 22.053 (FTE)	1 1	88 64.78 (FTE)	100 74.73 (FTE)	88 68.93 (FTE)
Prairie Mountain	6	3	3	0	15	18	14
Southern Health	701	406	243	52	69	475	427
Winnipeg	1044 (FTE)	596 (FTE)	448 (FTE)	0 (FTE)	685 (FTE)	1281 (FTE)	1200 (FTE)

Data reported by the regional health authorities show each has increased their overall bilingual capacity compared to 2019/20. However, this is mainly due to the increase in the number of bilingual employees occupying non-designated positions. There continues to be a high number of designated positions occupied by non-bilingual incumbents – a testament to the RHAs’ struggle to find candidates who possess both the technical and linguistic competences required for these positions. Similar to the previous year’s statistics, an average of only 48 per cent of designated bilingual positions are occupied by a bilingual incumbent.

