

Ontario 2023 Budget Consultation Submission

Presented by the Language Access Coalition of Canada

<https://www.languageadvocacyday.org/>



Recommendation: That the government implement a language access strategy in relation to its Official Languages strategy.

To address the service access needs of all Ontarians, especially given the need for increased migration to address our labour shortages, it is imperative that Ontario have [a language access strategy](#) in place. As Ontario increasingly relies on immigration to grow our population and labour force, the statistics of non-official languages will continue to rise. While there is an expectation that newcomers will either come to Canada with some familiarity with either English or French, or quickly learn one of these languages upon arrival, the reality is different. [In many parts of the country there are long wait lists for language courses that are not always effective in teaching the elements of the language necessary for day-to-day survival.](#)

Additionally, there are Canadian immigrants who have lived in the country for decades, and as they age, [can start losing some of their official language fluency.](#)

Why should governments implement language access strategy/language access plans?

Language access plans should rely on internal and demographic data to understand the audience requiring language access in a given scenario: a rural hospital, an urban legal clinic, during an emergency like a pandemic or ice storm, etc.

While individual language access plans differ, some core elements include:

- Language Interpretation Access
- Who will provide these services?
- Will they be available on demand, by request, through active offer?
- What languages are required?
- What certification are the interpreters required to have?
- How will the organisation ensure interpretation accuracy?
- How often will these processes be reviewed?

Language Translation Access

Vital documents and information need to be translated to ensure access for all audiences.

Important entry-points that need to be translated will include:

- Websites
- Application forms
- Eligibility forms
- Complaint forms

Notification of Language Access Services

- Designated individuals or teams are responsible for notifying people with limited English proficiency who to contact in the agency
- Using public service announcements, non-English media and community and faith-based resources to reach target audiences
- Prominently displaying appropriate language taglines on critical documents, web pages currently available in English only, technical assistance and outreach material
- Highlight the availability of consumer-oriented materials in other languages on the organisation's website

Staff Training

- Ensure all employees understand the importance of providing language assistance and know the mechanisms to do so (frequently by designating one person to be responsible for training and evaluation)
- All staff should be aware of the policies and procedures of the Language Access Plan
- All staff should know how to access interpretation and translation services when needed, and be able to define when the need is present
- Front-line service providers should receive additional training on how to work with interpreters and how to communicate effectively, respectfully and in a culturally sensitive way with linguistically diverse clients

Recognizing this will be a significant change requiring time, training, resources, consultation, etc., the LACC recommends that the provincial government should begin with essential sectors, primarily the healthcare and legal systems.

It is vital that all Ontarians have equitable access to adequate healthcare and access to justice within the judicial system, regardless of the language that they speak or sign, but at present, there is insufficient data to inform language access strategies or plans. Therefore, the starting point for a Provincial Language Access Strategy would be to ensure hospitals, medical centers, clinics, courts, etc. collect and share data with the provincial government regarding the language(s) an individual speaks, as well as their proficiency in that language. The level of proficiency in a language is not currently being captured by Statistics Canada, so although an individual may record that they speak one of the official languages, what is not captured is their ability to access key services and information in that language.

As a step in opening the dialogue around language access strategies and plans, the LACC is asking that all MPPs put a “language services available” poster in their offices. Presently, two MPPs in Ontario have done so, and we are willing to work with Parties or individual MPPs to develop strategies to encourage all MPPs to follow suit and encourage their peers to do the same.

To this end, we suggest the Government of Ontario make it a condition of grants and other funding offered to agencies that they create language access plans, including defined funds for the purchase of interpretation, translation and other language services.

We are prepared to work with you and appropriate agency and private sector partners to develop and execute strategies to address these structural challenges, including the standardization of data collection, the promotion of language services and the harnessing of new opportunities through technology and public engagement.

Sincerely,

The Language Access Coalition of Canada Team