



Language Access
Coalition of Canada

La Coalition pour l'accès
linguistique au Canada

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Budget

By: Language Access Coalition of Canada

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the government amend the Official Languages Act to recognize non-official languages to reflect Canada's diversity.

Recommendation 2: That the government implement a language access strategy in relation to its Official Languages strategy.

Recommendation 1: That the government amend the Official Languages Act to recognize non-official languages to reflect Canada’s diversity.

The voice of Canada is changing. [Recent data from the 2021 census](#) shows that linguistic diversity is on the rise in Canada. The number of Canadians who mainly speak a language other than English or French at home grew to 4.6 million in 2021, representing 13% of the population. A full quarter of Canadians report having a mother tongue other than English or French. As our multilingual diversity grows along with our immigrant and newcomer populations, the importance of strong, equitable and accessible language services will be important for our country’s long-term goals for the economic security, health, and civic inclusion of all citizens. Although Official Languages Strategy states that [“High-quality data is crucial to provide evidence for decision- and policy-making, and to assess the results of actions”](#), current investments do not reflect the most recent data surrounding language in Canada, which demonstrates the need for supports for those who do not primarily speak one of the official languages.

The current scope of the Official Languages strategy is focused on increased advocacy for French-English bilingualism, language education, minority language communities, and cultural awareness. The Federal government acknowledges that the Official Languages Act needs to undergo “modernization” to better reflect Canada’s diversity: [“As Canada has welcomed an increasingly diverse immigrant population, its official languages coexist with other languages. Learning both official languages represents a valuable tool for integration”](#). However, coexistence is not enough when so many Canadians face barriers due to the fact that they speak a language other than the official languages.

Recommendation 2: That the government implement a language access strategy in relation to its Official Languages strategy.

To address the service access needs of all Canadians, especially given the need for increased migration to address our labour shortages, it is imperative that Canada have [a language access strategy](#) in place. As Canada 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.](#)

The absence of a language access strategy also puts the health and safety of Canadians at risk. [As acknowledged in the 2020 report from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages](#), key emergency communication regarding the Covid-19 pandemic was not being communicated

in both official languages, which put minority language communities at risk. As we saw Covid [particularly impact racial and ethnic minorities and migrants](#), those who do not speak our official languages were [in severe need of emergency communication in their mother tongue](#). There is also evidence [that professional language services not only ensure equitable access to critical information and services that ensure health, safety and civic engagement of marginalized communities, but is can cut overall institutional costs and improve efficiency in the long run](#).