



Government of Alberta's 2025 Budget:
Funding Key Initiatives to Optimize Implementation of the *French*
Policy

Brief submitted by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta (ACFA) to the Honourable
Nate Horner, President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, as part of the Budget 2025
Public Engagement

Nathalie Lachance, President, ACFA
Isabelle Laurin, Executive Director, ACFA

January 13, 2024

Summary of Recommendations

1. **Create a new position of Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat.**
2. **Increase funding for Francophone schools to ensure equivalence with the Anglophone majority, as set out in Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.**
3. **Prioritize the provision of services by and for Alberta's Francophonie in Requests for Proposals to meet the specific needs of Francophone communities.**
4. **Provide annual operational funding to the ACFA to support the implementation of the *French Policy*.**
5. **Provide one-time funding to the ACFA to coordinate the mental health and social services sector within Alberta's Francophonie.**
6. **Allocate funding to ensure the renewal of the ACCENT project, a bilingual directory of educational, cultural, and recreational activities and resources offered in French to school communities in Alberta.**
7. **Allocate funding to support the organization of celebrations and initiatives to mark the centennial of the ACFA and of an organized Alberta Francophonie in 2026.**
8. **Ensure that some funding under the *Aging with Dignity* bilateral agreement (2023-2024 to 2027-2028) goes to projects targeting health care services in French.**
9. **Allocate a budget for the translation of signage, resource materials, and hiring bilingual human resources to bilingualize provincial parks as part of the next *Plan for Parks*.**
10. **Allocate a budget for the translation of public communications in French to improve the coordination of natural disaster response and recovery of Francophone communities.**

Introduction

[1] The Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta (« ACFA ») thanks the Government of Alberta for the opportunity to present this brief as part of the Budget 2025 consultations. The ACFA wishes to bring to the government's attention specific investments for Alberta's Francophonie that it could include in its next budget to implement its *French Policy* and offer services and programs in French.

[2] Founded in 1926, nearly 100 years ago, the ACFA is the spokes organization for Alberta's Francophonie. Its mandate is to represent Alberta's French-speaking population; promote their physical, intellectual, economic, cultural, and social well-being; and encourage, facilitate, and promote French-language learning and Alberta's Francophonie at large.

[3] In 1964, the Government of Alberta formally recognized the ACFA and passed *The A.C.F.A Act¹* to incorporate the organization. Since the Government of Alberta adopted its *French Policy* in 2017, the ACFA has also been identified as one of two stakeholders to be consulted to establish priorities.²

[4] In this brief, the ACFA shares the following:

- a) The **status of the French language in Alberta** by (1) presenting a demographic portrait of Alberta's Francophonie and (2) highlighting five legislative texts that support the offer of services in French and the recognition of the Francophonie in the province;
- b) **Recommendations for investments** relating to the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028* and the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*.

Status of the French Language in Alberta

Demographic Portrait

[5] Alberta's Francophonie is well-established in the province due to its history, demographics, and institutions

[6] The first francophone presence in Alberta dates back to the 18th century, well over 250 years ago. French was the first European language spoken in the territory that became Alberta. As early as the 19th century, several Métis communities, Franco-Catholic missions, and Francophone villages were established. Four (4) of these villages became officially bilingual: Beaumont, Legal, Falher and Plamondon.³

¹ Province of Alberta. 1964. *An Act to Incorporate l'Association Canadienne Française de l'Alberta*.

https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/1964_ACFA-Act.pdf

² Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy : Enhancing Services in French to Support the Vitality of Alberta's French-Speaking Communities*, page 8. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/713b7d93-c164-496a-8da8-813a34066ec4/resource/e9a9be57-1625-4bb7-82fb-cdfdb84c83c2/download/cul-french-policy-2023-english.pdf>

³ Government of Alberta. <https://www.alberta.ca/fr-CA/francophone-heritage.aspx>

[7] Today, Alberta has the largest population with French as its first official language spoken and living in a minority setting in Canada after Ontario and New Brunswick.⁴

[8] According to Statistics Canada 2021 Census of population, 79,010 (1.9%) Albertans report French as their first official language spoken; 85,290 (2%) report French as their mother tongue; and 260,415 (6.2%) report knowledge of French.⁵

[9] French ranks 4th among mother tongues in Alberta, after English which ranks 1st (3,083,840), Tagalog 2nd (108,395), and Punjabi 3rd (91,070). However, French, ranks 2nd behind English in terms of knowledge of the language.⁶

[10] Among French-speaking Albertans, Statistics Canada estimates that 119,690 are likely to request services in French, or 2.6% of Alberta's population.⁷

[11] Alberta also has the second-largest population of children eligible for minority language education in the country (excluding Quebec). The 2021 Census indicates that there are 67,154 children, aged 0 to 18, with at least one right-holder parent under Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, representing 6.9% of children in the Alberta population.⁸ However, these figures have some limitations, since they consider families in the same household. Some children may have been excluded from this count if one of their parents, brothers or sisters did not live in the same household. Statistics Canada then produced a study to estimate this number of children; the new figures came to 75,055 eligible children.⁹

[12] It is also important to note that the median age of the Francophone population is 43, which is higher than the median age of the province's total population, which is 38. In fact, the Francophone population has a higher proportion of people aged 65 and over (18%), compared to the proportion observed among the general population (14%).¹⁰

[13] Moreover, there has been an increase and diversification of the French-speaking population over the years. This reality has a significant impact on the growth of Alberta's Francophonie and the demand for French-language services.

⁴ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁵ Sociopol. 2024. *Demographic Portrait of Alberta's Francophonie : Provincial Profile*. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Alberta-Portrait-provincial_Traduction-EN.pdf

⁶ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁷ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait...* p.10.

⁸ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.42.

⁹ Statistics Canada. 2024. *Study on the Underclassification of Children Eligible for Instruction in the Minority Official Language in the 2021 Census*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/98-26-0008/982600082021001-eng.cfm>

¹⁰ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.21.

[14] The number of Albertans with French as their first official language spoken increased by 35.9% over 20 years (2001-2021).¹¹ The number of Albertans with knowledge of French increased by 54.6% over 30 years (1991-2021).¹²

[15] Although many Francophones were born in Alberta, the majority came from across Canada and around the world. Among Albertans with French as their first official language spoken, about 24% were born in Alberta, 44% came from elsewhere in Canada, and 32% came from elsewhere in the world.¹³

[16] A closer look at the 2021 census data reveals that 3,120 (4%) Francophones have an Indigenous identity, mainly Métis (74%).¹⁴

[17] In terms of ethnocultural diversity, 22,935 (29%) Francophones belong to a visible minority group. Of these, 11,480 (15%) identify themselves as Black, 4,340 (6%) as Asian, 3,845 (5%) as Arab, and 2,665 (3%) as Latin American.¹⁵

[18] The percentage of Albertans with an immigrant background within Alberta's Francophone population is also higher than within Alberta's total population, which stands at 23%. Africa is the birthplace of 50% of Francophone immigrants, a significant difference from Alberta's total immigrant population, 57% of whom come from Asia.¹⁶

[19] Moreover, the French-speaking population is scattered throughout the province, as Francophone communities have historically been established across the province. About one-third of the French-speaking population lives in Calgary, one-third in Edmonton, and the remaining third is scattered among medium-sized cities (Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Lethbridge), towns with federal services such as national parks (Jasper, Banff) and military bases (Wainwright, Cold Lake), more traditional rural communities (Peace River region, St. Paul, Bonnyville, Legal, Morinville, Beaumont, Plamondon), and newer communities (Edmonton and Calgary Metropolitan regions, Brooks).

[20] Here is a table summarizing the Francophonie's presence in these municipalities, including the number of children eligible for instruction in the Minority Official Language¹⁷ :

¹¹ Statistics Canada. 2019. *The French Language in Alberta, 2001 to 2016: Facts and Figures*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/fr/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019016-fra.pdf?st=xgAyz9SW>; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

¹² Statistics Canada. 2019. *The French Language in Alberta, 2001 to 2016: Facts and Figures*; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*; *Census Profile, 1991 Census of Population, Alberta*; *Census Profile, 1996 Census of Population, Alberta*.

¹³ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.26-27.

¹⁴ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.31.

¹⁵ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.32.

¹⁶ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...* p.26-27.

¹⁷ Sociopol. *Demographic Portrait ...*

Municipalities	French as their first official language spoken (FOLS)	Knowledge of French	Potential demand for French-language services	Aboriginal identity within FOLS	Children (0 to 18 years old) eligible for instruction in the Minority Official Language	Ethnocultural diversity within FOLS
Airdrie	1 525 (2.1%)	5 410 (7.3%)	2 460 (3.3%)	40 (2.6%)	1 850 (8.6%)	455 (29.8%)
Banff	265 (3.9%)	880 (12.8%)	845 (10.2%)	0 (0%)	110 (12.4%)	20 (7.5%)
Beaumont	790 (3.8%)	2 030 (14.5%)	1 265 (6.15%)	40 (5%)	700 (11.1%)	130 (16.5%)
Bonnyville and surroundings	865 (4.4%)	2 265 (11.6%)	1 380 (7%)	70 (8.1%)	610 (12.1%)	10 (1.2%)
Brooks	390 (2.7%)	540 (3.7%)	385 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	205 (4.9%)	285 (73%)
Calgary	23 590 (1.8%)	86 140 (6.7%)	34 640 (2.7%)	695 (2.9%)	19 845 (6.9%)	8 370 (36%)
Camrose and surroundings	235 (0.8%)	1 035 (3.6%)	425 (1.5%)	15 (6.4%)	240 (3.9%)	15 (6.4%)
Canmore and surroundings	920 (5.4%)	3 180 (18.6%)	1 395 (8%)	0 (0%)	425 (14.7%)	40 (4.3%)
Chestermere	300 (1.4%)	925 (4.2%)	390 (1.8%)	0 (0%)	360 (5.9%)	100 (33.3%)
Cochrane	790 (2.5%)	2 880 (9.2%)	1 150 (3.6%)	10 (1.2%)	790 (9.7%)	25 (3.1%)
Cold Lake	815 (5.3%)	1 930 (12.6%)	1 100 (7.1%)	50 (6.1%)	555 (13.1%)	45 (5.5%)
Crowsnest Pass and surroundings	125 (1%)	500 (4.1%)	250 (2%)	0 (0%)	65 (3%)	0 (0%)
Edmonton	23 205 (2.3%)	67 175 (6.7%)	33 165 (3.3%)	600 (2.6%)	17 265 (7.9%)	10 750 (46.3%)
Falher and surroundings	1 240 (25.3%)	1 815 (37.1%)	1 610 (29.5%)	30 (2.4%)	420 (35.9%)	20 (1.6%)
Fort Saskatchewan	420 (1.6%)	1 495 (5.6%)	735 (2.7%)	0 (0%)	525 (8%)	70 (16.9%)
Grande Prairie	1 575 (2.5%)	4 890 (7.7%)	2 315 (3.6%)	150 (9.5%)	1 650 (10%)	250 (15.9%)
Grande Prairie County and surroundings	410 (1.4%)	1 470 (5%)	675 (2.3%)	35 (8.5%)	455 (5.6%)	20 (4.8%)
High Prairie, Slave Lake and surroundings	365 (2.2%)	625 (3.7%)	675 (4%)	0 (0%)	210 (4.9%)	35 (9.9%)
Hinton, Edson and Yellowhead County	575 (2%)	1 825 (6.5%)	855 (3%)	55 (9.6%)	375 (5.8%)	35 (6.3%)

Jasper	175 (4.5%)	765 (19.5%)	465 (10%)	25 (13.9%)	150 (21%)	10 (5.6%)
Lac La Biche County and surroundings	410 (5.4%)	895 (11.8%)	580 (7.7%)	35 (8.5%)	290 (16.5%)	10 (2.4%)
Lacombe and surroundings	330 (0.9%)	1 530 (4%)	655 (1.7%)	15 (4.8%)	395 (4.1%)	10 (3.1%)
Leduc and surroundings	990 (1.9%)	2 990 (5.7%)	1 395 (2.7%)	70 (7.3%)	710 (5.4%)	100 (10.2%)
Legal and surroundings	1 400 (2.8%)	3 610 (7.3%)	2 245 (4.4%)	50 (3.6%)	915 (7.5%)	35 (2.5%)
Lethbridge	920 (1%)	5 060 (5.3%)	1 795 (1.8%)	15 (1.6%)	955 (4.6%)	275 (29.9%)
Lloydminster	185 (1%)	935 (4.9%)	345 (1.8%)	15 (8.1%)	295 (5.7%)	30 (16.2%)
Medicine Hat	475 (0.8%)	2 210 (3.6%)	1 035 (1.7%)	25 (5.3%)	640 (4.9%)	60 (12.8%)
Okotoks and surroundings	1 120 (1.5%)	4 425 (6.1%)	1 685 (2.3%)	75 (6.8%)	1 025 (5.9%)	65 (5.9%)
Peace River and surroundings	605 (4.6%)	1 365 (10.4%)	850 (6.5%)	25 (4.2%)	370 (11.1%)	50 (8.3%)
Red Deer	1 285 (1.3%)	5 315 (5.4%)	2 200 (2.2%)	60 (4.7%)	1 370 (6.1%)	340 (26.5%)
Red Deer County and surroundings	500 (1%)	2 145 (4.4%)	840 (1.7%)	35 (6.8%)	630 (5.5%)	10 (1.9%)
Rocky View County	395 (1%)	2 805 (6.9%)	865 (2.1%)	15 (3.8%)	650 (7.1%)	55 (13.9%)
St. Albert	1 815 (2.7%)	7 115 (10.6%)	2 930 (4.3%)	75 (4.1%)	1 480 (9.7%)	270 (14.8%)
St. Paul and surroundings	1 025 (7.8%)	2 145 (16.2%)	1 525 (11.4%)	55 (5.4%)	650 (20.2%)	0 (0%)
Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and surroundings	1 250 (1.4%)	4 775 (5.4%)	2 400 (2.7%)	65 (5.2%)	1 120 (5.3%)	145 (11.6%)
Strathcona County (including Sherwood Park)	1 660 (1.7%)	6 725 (6.9%)	2 725 (2.8%)	60 (3.6%)	1 745 (7.9%)	245 (14.8%)
Wainwright	150 (2.4%)	340 (5.4%)	215 (3.4%)	30 (20%)	155 (10.6%)	0 (0%)
Wood Buffalo (including Fort McMurray)	1 650 (2.3%)	4 380 (6.1%)	2 485 (3.4%)	120 (7.3%)	1 340 (6.9%)	385 (23.3%)

[21] To provide services to this population, there are a number of organizations and institutions managed by Alberta's Francophonie. These include four (4) Francophone school boards (Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord; Conseil scolaire FrancoSud; Conseil scolaire Centre-Est; Conseil scolaire du Nord-Ouest), which administer 45 Francophone schools and have a total of 9 550 students. In the early childhood sector, there are more than 50 daycare centres and preschools, many of which are integrated in Francophone schools. There is also the ACFA and its 13 regional offices, as well as more than sixty community organisations. Alberta's Francophonie also has access to numerous private companies.

[22] Other organisations and institutions are managed by the majority, but offer services in French, such as a French-language post-secondary institution (the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean), 225 schools offering French immersion programs, and numerous schools offering French as a second language courses.

Legislative framework

[23] Five main pieces of legislation govern the provision of French-language services in Alberta and the recognition of Alberta's Francophonie: (1) the *Official Languages Act*, (2) the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, (3) the *French Policy*, (4) the *Education Act*, and (5) Alberta's *Languages Act*.

[24] At the federal level, Alberta's Francophonie is recognized as an official language community in Canada under the *Official Languages Act*. Adopted in 1969 and modernized for the last time in 2023, the *Official Languages Act* recognizes French as one of the country's two official languages, while highlighting its vulnerability and the need for specific measures to protect it. The *Official Languages Act* guarantees access to French-language services in federal institutions, many of which are located in Alberta.

[25] As part of its obligations under the *Official Languages Act*, the federal government makes a number of transfers to the province of Alberta concerning official languages. These include the *Canada-Alberta Agreement on French-Language Services*¹⁸ and the *Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction* ("OLEP")¹⁹.

[26] In addition, Alberta has constitutional obligations regarding the provision of French-language services under Sections 19 and 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.²⁰ These sections respectively guarantee (1) the right to communicate in French in federal courts, and (2) the right to a Francophone education of equivalent quality to that offered to the Anglophone majority for all children of Canadian citizens whose mother tongue is French, who

¹⁸ Government of Canada. "Supporting access to French-language services in Alberta."

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2024/12/supporting-access-to-french-language-services-in-alberta.html>

¹⁹ Government of Alberta. "Official Languages in Education Programs." <https://www.alberta.ca/official-languages-in-education-programs>

²⁰Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy: enhancing services in French to support the vitality of Alberta's French-speaking communities*, page 5. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/713b7d93-c164-496a-8da8-813a34066ec4/resource/e9a9be57-1625-4bb7-82fb-cdfdb84c83c2/download/cul-french-policy-2023-english.pdf>

received their primary school instruction in French in Canada, or one of their children received primary or secondary school instruction in French in Canada, including school management.²¹

[27] At the provincial level, Alberta adopted its *French Policy* in 2017, which was revised in 2023, to develop its offer of French-language services and broaden its access to the federal government funds available for this purpose.²²

[28] Through the *French Policy*, the "Government of Alberta acknowledges the past, present and continued social, cultural and economic contributions of the province's significant and diverse French-speaking population. Through meaningful engagement, dialogue and collaboration, the government is committed to enhancing services in French to support the vitality of the Francophonie in Alberta in a targeted and sustainable manner as resources allow."²³

[29] The *French Policy* "applies to all government of Alberta departments, agencies, boards and commissions, and to court services."²⁴

[30] To support the implementation of the *French Policy*, the Government of Alberta released its *French Policy: 2024-2028 Action Plan* in May 2024.²⁵ This is the province's third action plan since the adoption of the *French Policy*.

[31] In its Education Act, there is a section specifying who may access Francophone education in Alberta, in accordance with the principles of Section 23 of the *Charter*, as well as provisions for the establishment of Francophone school regions, including the appointment of Francophone school trustees.²⁶

[32] Finally, Alberta's *Languages Act* also allows Albertans to use French in the province's courts, and members of the Legislative Assembly to use French in the Legislature.²⁷

Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028

[33] The *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie* ("Action Plan")²⁸ is the most ambitious initiative ever undertaken by Alberta's Francophonie to identify its priorities in terms of French-language services offered or funded by the provincial government.

²¹ Government of Canada. "Section 23 – Minority Language Educational Rights." <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csjsjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd/check/art23.html>

²² Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*.

²³ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, p.6.

²⁴ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, p.6.

²⁵ Government of Alberta. 2024. *French Policy: 2024-2028 Action Plan*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/2b40e62c-9c60-4cbf-adb8-d8b9ec6041e0/resource/ffe50331-5dde-47e3-b6b1-e8e9d210ca52/download/acsw-french-policy-action-plan-2024-2028.pdf>

²⁶ Province of Alberta. *Education Act*. https://kings-printer.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=E00P3.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncIn=9780779846450

²⁷ Government of Alberta, 2023. *French Policy*, p.5.

²⁸ ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028*. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Version-officielle-Plan-daction-FRAB_EN.pdf

[34] Elaborated by the ACFA in 2022, and revised in 2024, the *Action Plan* is a credible tool to help guide government, elected officials, public servants, and political parties toward the priorities, opportunities, and issues of Alberta's Francophonie for implementing the province's *French Policy*.

[35] The ACFA conducted a rigorous community engagement process in 2021-2022. In all, 200 community leaders, representing over 40 community organizations and institutions, as well as 520 French-speaking Albertans participated in engagement sessions via interviews, focus groups, and a survey.

[36] The *Action Plan* includes nearly 200 actions over five years period in eight targeted intervention sectors: (1) Government Institutions, (2) Arts, Culture, and Heritage, (3) Education Continuum, (4) Economic Development, (5) Immigration, (6) Justice, (7) Health and Physical Activity, and (8) Social Services. Many of these actions are directly linked to the Government of Alberta's priorities (e.g., business plans, action plans, mandate letters) and can be implemented at a low cost.

[37] Since its unveiling, the ACFA and several community organizations have held several meetings with the Government of Alberta to present this document. When the Government of Alberta unveiled the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan* on May 7, 2024, the ACFA noted that 75% of the proposed initiatives were directly aligned with community priorities identified in the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*.

[38] That is why the ACFA's recommendations for Budget 2025 are based on the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, but also on the government's priorities identified in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*.

Recommendations

#1 – Create a new position of Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat.

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

[39] The ACFA would like to sincerely thank the Government of Alberta for the remarkable efforts made over the past year to improve the offer of French-language services in the province. In addition to presenting a new *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan* aligned with community priorities, the ACFA particularly welcomes the substantial increase in funding allocated to the development of French-language services.

[40] In the 2024 Budget, the Government of Alberta announced a \$3 million increase in funding for the Francophone Secretariat. For several years, the ACFA had advocated for an increase in funding so the Francophone Secretariat could strengthen its structure and have the necessary financial resources to meet the growing challenges associated with government-wide responsibilities.

[41] The ACFA also congratulates the Government of Alberta on the positive outcome of the negotiations with the federal government regarding an increase in transfers from the *Canada-Alberta Agreement on French-language services*. Thanks to this improved agreement, Alberta now receives a fairer share of federal funding, better reflecting the demographic reality of the province's French-speaking population. This major step forward represents the culmination of nearly a decade of joint efforts between the ACFA and the Government of Alberta.

[42] The increase in federal funding, which has tripled from \$650,000 to \$2.2 million²⁹ per year, will make it possible to develop French-language services and better meet the needs of French-speaking Albertans. It is in this favourable context that the ACFA proposes to go further by recommending the creation of an assistant deputy minister position specifically responsible for the Francophone Secretariat.

[43] The ACFA has been advocating for the creation of this strategic position for three years now. To date, the Francophone Secretariat is headed by an executive director, a structure that presents hierarchical limits to the decision-making process. The Francophone Secretariat must regularly collaborate with Assistant Deputy Ministers, designated by each ministry, to advise them on the implementation of the French Policy. However, this current organization can slow down initiatives that are essential to Alberta's Francophonie.

[44] Transitioning the Executive Director position to an Assistant Deputy Minister position would give the Francophone Secretariat a higher position in the government hierarchy, giving it greater authority and legitimacy to act more effectively and to optimally coordinate actions related to the implementation of the French Policy across all ministries. This strengthened structure would be a crucial lever for accelerating the French Policy's implementation and ensuring greater efficiency of French-language services in Alberta.

#2 – Increase funding for Francophone schools to ensure equivalence with the Anglophone majority, as set out in Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Infrastructure

[45] In Budget 2024, the Government of Alberta made significant investments in Francophone school infrastructure, which include two (2) full construction projects for École Boréale in Fort McMurray and École Sainte-Catherine in Lac La Biche, two (2) design projects for École Héritage in Falher and a new school in Calgary, and four (4) planning projects for École Beauséjour in Plamondon, two new schools in Calgary and a new school in Edmonton.³⁰

²⁹ Emmanuel Prince-Thauvette. "L'Alberta triple son enveloppe budgétaire pour les services en français." *Radio-Canada*, December 16, 2024. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2127369/entente-canada-alberta-services-francais-2024>

³⁰ Government of Alberta. "Budget 2024 School Projects – Alberta Education." <https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/educ-approved-school-capital-list-2024.pdf>

[46] The ACFA would like to thank the Government of Alberta for approving eight (8) new infrastructure projects, a record number in recent years. We were pleased that the government organized a press conference to specifically announce these new Francophone projects.

[47] However, the needs remain considerable. In fact, only two schools have received funding for full construction, while the other projects remain uncertain in terms of full funding. What's more, the two full construction projects are intended to replace existing infrastructure, not open new schools.

[48] While 9,550 children attend the province's Francophone schools in 2024, Statistics Canada's 2021 Census reveals that there are 75,055 children aged 0 to 18 eligible for Francophone education. The significant gap between the number of eligible children and those who actually attend a Francophone school underscore an important issue.³¹

[49] This gap can be partially explained by an underfunding of Francophone schools. Access for Francophone students to infrastructure equivalent to that of the Anglophone majority remains a challenge, despite more than thirty years of school management. Although some 20 new infrastructures have been built among the 45 francophone schools, the needs are far from being met.³²

[50] It is not uncommon for start-up Francophone schools to resort to creative solutions to operate before obtaining infrastructures equivalent to those of the Anglophone majority. Many schools have started up in temporary, often outdated or unsuitable facilities, such as former Anglophone school board buildings, portable classrooms without gymnasiums, or even unlikely locations such as a community center in another town more than 15 km away, a seniors' home, Canadian Legion spaces or a former convent that had been used as a drug rehabilitation center.³³

[51] Although new buildings were inaugurated, some of them quickly reached full capacity within a few years of opening, due to the fact that Francophone school boards did not have access to the number of children eligible for Francophone education until 2021. This is the case of École des Hautes-Plaines in Airdrie, which opened in 2015. Built to accommodate 400 students, the school reached its maximum capacity after just 5 years. Several spaces not originally intended for classrooms have been converted into classrooms to accommodate enrolment. In 2023, the Government of Alberta announced a second school in Airdrie to serve the region's more than 1,850 eligible children.³⁴

³¹ Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta (FCSFA), ACFA and Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta (FPFA). 2024. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone, de la petite enfance jusqu'aux études postsecondaires, pour une francophonie albertaine en croissance*, pages 16-18. Only available in French. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/20241223_Memoire_Etude-continuum-de-leducation-francophone.pdf

³² FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³³ FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³⁴ FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

[52] The current number of Francophone schools (45) is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of children eligible for Francophone education in Alberta. While it's difficult to estimate precisely how many additional schools are needed, the infrastructure deficit remains considerable.³⁵

[53] Currently, the Government of Alberta typically funds two complete construction Francophone school infrastructure projects per annual budget. At this rate, it would take years to adequately meet infrastructure needs and provide all eligible children with equivalent access to French-language education.³⁶

[54] To comply with Section 23 of the *Charter*, Francophone school boards must offer Francophone education to rights-holders “where numbers warrant”, and that number “is somewhere between the known demand and the number of students who could potentially take advantage of the service”.³⁷ To do this, funding must be sufficient to provide “an educational experience that is truly equivalent to that of the majority, regardless of the size of the school or program in question”.³⁸

[55] The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that substantive equality may require differential treatment for Francophones to consider their particular circumstances and needs.³⁹ The Supreme Court recognized that a larger per-student funding allocation will normally be required because these schools tend to be smaller, fewer in number and further apart.⁴⁰

[56] In rural areas, for example, Francophone schools often have lower enrolments, yet face operating costs comparable to those of larger schools. This is the case for several Francophone schools in Alberta, such as École des Grands-Vents in Bellevue (27 students), École des Fondateurs in Camrose (13 students), École Sans-Frontières in Lloydminster (19 students) and École Sainte-Catherine in Lac La Biche (30 students).⁴¹ In comparison, rural English and French immersion schools have over a hundred students enrolled.⁴²

[57] Similarly, in Francophone schools offering primary and secondary education in the same facility, enrolment in grades 7 to 12 is often much lower, representing a small proportion of the school's total enrolment. For example, these enrolments represent 17% at École Saint-Christophe in Wainwright, 17% at École Boréale in Fort McMurray, 18% at École Nouvelle Frontière in Grande

³⁵ FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³⁶ FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³⁷ *Arsenault-Cameron v. Prince Edward Island*, 2000 SCC 1. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1762/index.do>; FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³⁸ *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2020 SCC 13. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/18390/index.do>; FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

³⁹ *Arsenault-Cameron v. Prince Edward Island*, 2000 SCC 1.; FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

⁴⁰ *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2020 SCC 13.; FCSFA, ACFA and FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

⁴¹ Government of Alberta. “2023/2024 School Enrolment Data.” *Student population statistics*. <https://www.alberta.ca/student-population-statistics#jumplinks-2>

⁴² FCSFA, ACFA et FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

Prairie, 25% at École du Sommet in Saint-Paul, 25% at École Beausoleil in Okotoks, 25% at École La Prairie in Red Deer and 27% at École Citadelle in Legal.⁴³

[58] Despite the many steps taken by Francophone school boards, current funding is still not sufficient to provide an education equivalent to that offered to the Anglophone majority in English and French immersion schools.⁴⁴ The Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028 specifically emphasizes the need to revise funding and develop infrastructure plans, and to "revise the funding formula to reflect the additional costs associated with instruction in French".⁴⁵

[59] The ACFA therefore urges the Government of Alberta to continue its collaboration with Francophone school boards to revise financial support to reduce the gap between potential demand and current capacity in Francophone schools. In fact, one action for the Ministry of Education identified in *the French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan* emphasizes this collaboration: "Engage with Francophone education stakeholders to support Francophone education that is substantially equivalent."⁴⁶ The ACFA hopes that the next budget will include substantial investments in new Francophone school infrastructure to better meet the growing needs of Alberta's Francophonie.

#3 – Prioritize the provision of services by and for Alberta's Francophonie in Requests for Proposals to meet the specific needs of Francophone communities.

Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services

Autres ministères

[60] When the Government of Alberta issues Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to award new contracts, it should consider the specific needs of Alberta's Francophonie to ensure the vitality of Francophone communities. The concept of "vitality" is one of the *French Policy's* guiding principles.⁴⁷

[61] Currently, RFPs aim to offer general services to the entire population, sometimes with a bilingual dimension, without considering the particularities of Alberta's Francophonie. This approach compromises the quality of services for Francophones, as they require adjustments to be truly equivalent to those offered to the Anglophone majority. Simply translating services is not enough: a deep understanding of the linguistic and cultural issues specific to Alberta's Francophonie is required, as well as an understanding of the community architecture of Alberta's Francophonie.

[62] Alberta's Francophone organizations, often small and specialized, are best placed to meet the unique needs of Francophone communities. However, the current reality puts these organizations at a disadvantage, as it is often English service providers, often larger and not rooted in Francophone communities, that win the contracts. These service providers rarely have

⁴³ FCSFA, ACFA et FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

⁴⁴ FCSFA, ACFA et FPFA. *Un continuum de l'éducation francophone...* pages 16-18.

⁴⁵ ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028*, page 12.

⁴⁶ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-2028 Action Plan...*, page 10.

⁴⁷ Government of Alberta. *French Policy*.

the capacity to understand the cultural and linguistic subtleties required to deliver quality service to Francophone community members.

[63] Access to services where French language and culture are simply integrated into an Anglophone majority setting does not ensure equal treatment. Members of Francophone communities must be able to have most of their personal relationships within their language group to ensure the communities' vitality⁴⁸. In our opinion, these practices run counter to the objectives of the French Policy, which specifies that "when government provides services in French, those services are of comparable quality and accessibility to equivalent services provided in English."⁴⁹

[64] The ACFA would particularly like to draw attention to two ministries where the involvement of local Francophone organizations in future RFPs would be crucial.

[65] Firstly, with regard to employment services funded by the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, the Ministry currently funds French-language employment services in several regions of the province, such as Edmonton, Red Deer and the Northeast, through the Francophone organization Parallèle Alberta. However, in regions such as Calgary and Fort McMurray, English service providers are responsible for offering these services to Francophones. This poses a challenge, as Francophones accessing these services are often referred to Francophone organizations, which must then provide support, without receiving any financial support from the province for these additional services.

[66] Secondly, the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services is considering the creation of a Police Review Commission and is planning, among other things, RFPs for cultural competency training services for its employees. It is essential that this training consider the realities of Francophone communities. Only Francophone organizations, rooted in these communities, can truly understand and convey the cultural and linguistic specificities necessary for a relevant and respectful education.

[67] With this in mind, the ACFA recommends that the Government of Alberta work closely with stakeholders within Alberta's Francophonie. Together, it is possible to design service agreements that more accurately and equitably meet the needs of Francophone communities. This partnership should be a priority when launching new RFPs in 2025, to ensure the vitality of Alberta's Francophonie, in keeping with the *French Policy*.

[68] Moreover, this collaboration with Francophone organizations within the framework of the RFP would enable the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services to achieve two objectives set out in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*, namely⁵⁰:

- "Foster collaboration on French-language career and employment services between government and Francophonie stakeholders."

⁴⁸ Linda Cardinal and Rémi Léger. 2017. "La complétude institutionnelle en perspective." *Politique et Sociétés* 36, no 3: page 5. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1042233ar>

⁴⁹ Government of Alberta. *French Policy...* page 6

⁵⁰ Government of Alberta. *French Policy : 2024-28 Action Plan...*, p. 11.

- “Enhance career and employment resources and services in French by providing operational funding to service providers and increasing content on the ALIS.ab.ca website.”

#4– Provide annual operational funding to the ACFA to support the implementation of the French Policy.

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

[69] The Government of Alberta has identified the ACFA as one of two stakeholders to be consulted (the other being Francophone school boards) in identifying priorities for implementing the *French Policy*, because of its central role as the spokes organization for Alberta's Francophonie. The ACFA greatly appreciates this recognition by the government, which is a sign of trust and a shared desire to advance the offer of French-language services based on community priorities.

[70] However, with this commitment for regular engagement since 2017, the ACFA finds itself in a delicate situation. The ACFA has no recurring operational funding from the Government of Alberta, which limits its ability to fulfill its role optimally.

[71] The ACFA is frequently solicited by various ministries to provide strategic information on the priorities of Alberta's Francophonie, establish collaborations, and participate in constructive dialogues. These solicitations generate a considerable workload: regular meetings with government officials, invitations to engagement sessions, dissemination of information through our networks, participation in multi-stakeholder working committees, collaboration in organizing activities, and production of documents in French and English to provide evidence.

[72] The ACFA also plays a role in supporting the network of Francophone organizations, namely when they are consulted by the public service, to enhance their capacity and contribute to the development effective public policy proposals.

[73] Since 2020, the ACFA has invested close to a million dollars of its own resources to meet these needs, a considerable effort that nevertheless has its limits. The ACFA's small team struggles to meet all of the government's demands due to the broad scope of the French Policy, which applies to all “departments, agencies, boards and commissions and to court services.”⁵¹

[74] For example, the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women provides operational funding to other organizations that offer strategic advice to the ministry, such as Provincial Heritage Organizations and Provincial Arts Service Organizations. The ACFA, as part of the implementation of the French Policy, carries out similar work, but on a much larger scale, collaborating with a dozen ministries and all Francophone organizations and institutions.

[75] To support its efforts, the ACFA submitted a funding proposal to the Francophone Secretariat in 2024. Although Minister Tanya Fir confirmed in March 2024 before the Legislative Assembly that this request was under consideration, it was ultimately denied a few months later,

⁵¹ Government of Alberta. *French Policy...* page 6

leaving the ACFA in a difficult position to adequately respond to the growing needs of Alberta's Francophonie.

[76] For the time being, the ACFA has received funding from the Ministry of Health in June 2024 to carry out policy analysis and liaison work in the health sector, including the hiring of a human resource. These funds will enable the ACFA to make significant progress in improving the provision of services in French, but only in the health sector; they come from *the Canada-Alberta Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians (2023-24 to 2025-26)*.

#5 – Provide one-time funding to the ACFA to coordinate the mental health and social services sector within Alberta's Francophonie.

Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services

Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

[77] During community engagement sessions held in 2021 to develop the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, it became apparent that the mental health and social services sector was facing considerable needs, in large part exacerbated by the societal challenges brought on by the pandemic. However, this sector within Alberta's Francophonie remains largely disorganized. The majority of organizations offer certain services on an ad hoc basis, often reactive and without a coordinated structure.

[78] With this in mind, in September 2022, the ACFA commissioned KPMG to carry out an in-depth review of the sector. The purpose of this initiative was to gain a better understanding of the challenges, needs, and opportunities. Thanks to funding from the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Calgary Foundation and the Fondation franco-albertaine, the ACFA was able to carry out this in-depth analysis.

[79] The review included focus groups with over 30 Francophone organizations and a survey to which over 700 participants responded. A number of key findings emerged⁵² :

- There is a lack of access to French-language mental health and social services.
- Improving access to mental health supports is a priority need.
- Increased collaboration between organizations could reduce fragmentation and improve service delivery.
- Culturally sensitive approaches are essential to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- There is a lack of resources and French-speaking staff in the mental health and social services sector.

[80] In light of these findings, a long-term strategic plan was developed by KPMG to address systemic challenges related to the supply of and access to French-language mental health and social services in Alberta⁵³.

⁵² ACFA. 2023. *Rapport final de la Revue des services sociaux et de santé mentale en français en Alberta préparé par KPMG*. Available only in French. <https://acfa.ab.ca/en-action/affaires-communautaires/services-sociaux-et-sante-mentale/>

⁵³ ACFA. 2024. *Plan stratégique pour le secteur des services sociaux et de santé mentale*. Available only in French. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/20240724_ACFA-Plan-Strategique-pour-le-secteur-des-services-sociaux-et-de-sante-mentale-Final.pdf

[81] The more than 30 francophone organizations involved in the development of this strategic plan identified the ACFA as the key organization to coordinate the sector and ensure the strategic plan's implementation. However, the ACFA cannot accomplish this task without dedicated funding, which is essential to ensure effective and sustainable coordination of French-language services and supports.

[82] The ACFA has already initiated discussions with several elected officials and public servants regarding this initiative, and has submitted a funding proposal to the Francophone Secretariat, the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. In January 2025, the ACFA met with the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, as well as the Francophone Secretariat, to discuss the funding proposal in greater detail.

[83] Funding for the ACFA to coordinate the sector would enable the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services to move forward with the implementation of the actions set out in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*, namely⁵⁴ :

- "Maintain, enhance and promote services, tools and support in French for vulnerable Albertans, such as information brochures from the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee."
- "Maintain, enhance and promote housing resources and services offered in French."
- "Maintain, enhance and promote seniors' resources and services offered in French."

[84] Similarly, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions has committed to "ensure Albertans can access a continuum of recovery-oriented supports in French that meet their unique needs to improve their mental health by enhancing and promoting resources for patients, offering 211 Alberta and telephone support services and more."⁵⁵

#6 – Allocate funding to ensure the renewal of the ACCENT project, a bilingual directory of educational, cultural, and recreational activities and resources offered in French to school communities in Alberta.

Ministry of Education

[85] The ACCENT directory is a strategic and essential project, funded by the Alberta Education, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2026. This unique project supports several educational objectives in a significant way; it brings together educational resources available in French, linked to the Alberta curriculum, while offering a list of curricular and extracurricular activities that promote identity building within Francophone schools and improve language security for students learning French.

[86] Since its inception, ACCENT has demonstrated excellent results. Not only has the project achieved its objectives year after year, it has also developed a strong partnership between ACFA and Canadian parents for French. The directory is consulted by nearly 2,000 users, has 433 resource sheets and over 1,150 subscribers to its monthly newsletter.

⁵⁴ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan...*, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan...*, p. 13.

[87] French-language school communities know ACCENT as an essential and trusted tool for finding suitable educational resources, both for teachers and for families who are Francophone, Anglophone or interlinguistic. It is important to mention that the ACCENT directory is available in both French and English.

[88] With project funding set to expire in 2025, it is imperative that the Government of Alberta maintain and increase funding for the ACCENT directory in the next budget. Renewed funding for ACCENT is a priority of French-speaking Albertans, as identified in the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*: "Maintain funding for accentalberta.ca, a bilingual directory of French language educational, cultural, and recreational activities and resources available to school communities in Alberta for use in the classroom and to provide home support for Francophone, interlinguistic, and Anglophone families."⁵⁶

[89] In addition, the new curriculum for Kindergarten to Grade 6 now includes the teaching of Francophone perspectives for the entire Alberta population. In this context, ACCENT is an essential tool for ensuring that school communities have the resources they need to achieve this. Continued funding of ACCENT would ensure that all school communities have easy access to the resources available, while maximizing their use in classrooms and with families.

[90] Funding the ACCENT directory would also contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*. Indeed, it would support two key actions⁵⁷ :

- "Promote new or existing provincial assessment resources and/or services in French to support francophone education stakeholders."
- "Develop and acquire resources related to implementation of French curriculum to support French education stakeholders."

#7 – Allocate funding to support the organization of celebrations and initiatives to mark the centennial of the ACFA and of an organized Alberta Francophonie in 2026.

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

[91] The ACFA is preparing to celebrate its centennial in 2026, an event of major historical and cultural significance, both for the ACFA and for all Francophone communities in Alberta. This anniversary will mark not only the recognition of ACFA's efforts since its founding in 1926, but also the rich and dynamic history of organized and thriving Francophone communities in the province, which have come into being and flourished thanks to ACFA's ongoing support.

[92] The ACFA, as the voice and catalyst of these communities, has played a key role in their development, through various sectors such as education, economic development, culture, and community services. This commitment has helped build a solid network of Francophone organizations and institutions, serving Alberta's Francophonie.

[93] The centennial celebrations, scheduled to begin in December 2025, will run until October 2026. These celebrations are perfectly in line with the *French Policy*, which adopts recognition as one of its guiding principles and, more specifically, "recognizes and embraces its Francophone

⁵⁶ ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan...*, p. 10.

history and the continued contributions of its dynamic and diverse French-speaking population.”
⁵⁸ This recognition includes the objective of acknowledging contributions through specific initiatives and promoting symbols of the Francophonie.⁵⁹

[94] The Government of Alberta could play an essential role by supporting the organization of community activities in 2026, through one-time funding, or by implementing symbolic initiatives within its own institutions. For example, the Government of Alberta could consider unveiling a display case on Alberta's Francophonie in its permanent exhibition at the Royal Alberta Museum, an action in line with the following priority: “Include the history of Alberta's Francophonie in the provincial narrative in museums, historic sites, interpretation centers, and archives to affirm Alberta's cultural identity and allow the community to share and preserve its history.”⁶⁰

[95] Dedicated funding for major celebrations and initiatives in 2026 would enable the Alberta government to achieve several objectives set out in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*⁶¹:

- “Increase the visibility of Alberta’s Francophonie and raise awareness about Francophonie symbols, such as the Franco-Albertan Flag.”
- “Ensure that collections, exhibitions and learning programs at the Royal Alberta Museum reflect the experiences of the Francophonie.”
- “Support Alberta’s Francophone artists and culture through the Alberta Culture Days Grant program.”

[96] By investing in this unique celebration, the Government of Alberta will not only honor the province’s Francophone history and cultures, but will also help build a more inclusive Alberta that is proud of its cultural diversity.

#8 – Ensure that some funding under the *Aging with Dignity* bilateral agreement (2023-2024 to 2027-2028) goes to projects targeting health care services in French.

Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services

Ministry of Health

[97] The Government of Alberta has already made considerable funding efforts to improve the provision of French-language health care, in collaboration with Francophone partners such as the ACFA and Réseau santé Alberta, who receive \$5,400,000 in funding under the *Canada-Alberta Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians (2023-24 to 2025-26)*⁶². This collaboration has made it possible to develop initiatives aimed at meeting health care needs, particularly in the field of primary care. The ACFA recognizes and appreciates this commitment by the Government of Alberta.

⁵⁸ Government of Alberta. *French Policy...* page 7.

⁵⁹ Government of Alberta. *French Policy...* page 7.

⁶⁰ ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan...* pages 9, 12.

⁶² Government of Canada. 2023. “Canada-Alberta Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians (2023-24 to 2025-26).” <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/transparency/health-agreements/shared-health-priorities/working-together-bilateral-agreements/alberta-improve-care.html>

[98] However, significant needs remain, particularly for the aging Francophone population. Indeed, as mentioned above, Alberta's Francophone population has a higher median age than the province's total population, and a higher proportion of Francophones than Anglophones are aged 65 and over. This demographic trend creates specific health service challenges, including increased pressure to meet the need for continuing care and care for seniors in French.

[99] In this context, the ACFA recommends that the Government of Alberta allocate a portion of the funding under the "Aging with Dignity" bilateral agreement (2023-2024 to 2027-2028)⁶³ to projects specifically targeted at improving French-language health services for the aging population. It is crucial that this funding be used to strengthen the offer of continuing care in French to fill current gaps and meet the growing needs of Francophone seniors in Alberta.

[100] According to the agreement, "Alberta makes ongoing investments in health consistent with its broader responsibilities for delivering health care services to its residents and in supporting diversity, equity, and the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis; and underserved and/or disadvantaged populations, including, but not limited to **official language minority communities**, rural and remote communities [...]".⁶⁴

[101] A number of concrete actions could be considered in this context. For example, access to health care and mental health services in French is limited in rural areas of the province. One of the major obstacles remains the lack of bilingual health care professionals in these regions. It is, therefore, essential to invest in the recruitment and retention of French-speaking health care personnel in rural areas. This initiative would improve access to care and reduce health disparities between Francophones and Anglophones. The Ministry of Health could allocate funds to implement strategies for recruiting and retaining bilingual, English-French health care professionals, particularly in rural areas.⁶⁵

[102] Finally, an investment in initiatives specific to continuing care and Francophone seniors would enable the Government of Alberta to fulfill one of the actions set out in the *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan*⁶⁶, namely: "Offer key resources related to continuing care programs and/or legislation in French." This would ensure that Francophone seniors receive the services they need in their language, while responding to changing demographics and increasing health care needs for this population.

⁶³ Government of Canada. 2024. "Canada-Alberta Aging with Dignity funding agreement (2023-24 to 2027-28)." <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/transparency/health-agreements/shared-health-priorities/aging-dignity-bilateral-agreements/alberta-funding.html>

⁶⁴ Government of Canada. "Canada-Alberta Aging with Dignity funding agreement..."

⁶⁵ ACFA and Réseau santé Alberta. 2024. Follow-up Note - *Ministry of Health's Engagement Sessions on Refocusing Health Care*, pages 10, 15. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/20241219_Note-de-suivi_Sessions-de-consultation-reforme_EN.pdf

⁶⁶ Government of Alberta. *French Policy: 2024-28 Action Plan...*, p. 12.

#9 - Allocate a budget for the translation of signage, resource materials, and hiring bilingual human resources to bilingualize provincial parks as part of the next *Plan for Parks*.

Ministry of Forestry and Parks

[103] In August 2024, the Ministry of Forestry and Parks held a public engagement on the development of a new strategic plan for Alberta's provincial parks, *Plan for Parks*. During this engagement process, the ACFA and other community organizations submitted a brief detailing strategies for gradually bilingualizing some of the province's provincial parks. These strategies included the introduction of bilingual signage, the translation of resource materials and the hiring of bilingual French-English human resources. These elements would be necessary to offer tourism and school programming in French in a few targeted parks.⁶⁷

[104] The designation of provincial parks as bilingual is a priority clearly expressed by Francophone communities and is included in the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*: "Identify potential sites (e.g., parks, heritage sites, museums) to be designated bilingual French/English in collaboration with Alberta's Francophonie stakeholders."⁶⁸ This measure not only responds to the needs of the Francophone population, but also constitutes a strategic lever for tourism development and meets the province's obligations in terms of Francophone education equivalent to that of the majority in Alberta.⁶⁹

[105] For this objective to be fully realized, it is imperative that the Government of Alberta allocate specific funds within the *Plan for Parks*. These investments would be aimed at funding the translation of park signage and hiring bilingual human resources to ensure a quality French-language tourism and educational experience. A preliminary analysis conducted Alberta's Francophonie has identified over twenty (20) provincial parks that could be targeted. These changes, which could be implemented over several years, would make the parks more accessible to French-speaking visitors and enhance the province's unique cultural heritage.⁷⁰

#10 - Allocate a budget for the translation of public communications in French to improve the coordination of natural disaster response and recovery of Francophone communities.

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services

[106] Alberta has faced major natural disasters in recent years, as was the case with the forest fires in Fort McMurray in 2016 and Jasper in 2024. These events had particularly significant consequences for the Francophone communities in these regions, which had to be evacuated in an emergency.

[107] During such crises, the ACFA frequently receives requests for information in French regarding services offered to the evacuated Francophone population. Unfortunately, the

⁶⁷ ACFA, Société historique francophone de l'Alberta (SHFA) and Parallèle Alberta. 2024. *Bilingualizing our Provincial Parks : A Plan for Parks Inclusive of Alberta's Francophonie*. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/20240816_Memoire_ACFA_SHFA_PA_Plan-strategique-parcs-provinciaux_FINAL_EN-1.pdf

⁶⁸ ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ ACFA, SHFA and Parallèle Alberta. *Bilingualizing our Provincial Parks...*

⁷⁰ ACFA, SHFA and Parallèle Alberta. *Bilingualizing our Provincial Parks...*

province's official communications are available only in English, and the French-language media provide very little coverage of such situations. As a result, many Francophones turn to the ACFA for essential information in their language.

[108] In emergency situations, it is a well-known fact that Francophones prefer to use their mother tongue to better understand crucial information. This reality can limit their ability to fully grasp messages in English, which can seriously compromise their safety.

[109] In a 2020 report, Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages stressed that access to information in French in times of crisis is fundamental to guaranteeing the safety of Francophones. He stated: "It is absolutely essential that provincial and territorial agencies—and all those who are responsible for the well-being of Canadians in emergencies—understand that there is a vast difference between using one's second official language to navigate daily life, social situations and the workplace and using that same language when one is injured, intimidated, or afraid for the safety of a loved one... Individual bilingualism is not absolute, and in emergency situations, it is only natural that Canadians revert to the instant ease and reassurance of their first official language."⁷¹

[110] In the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, the Francophone communities have prioritized three elements that relate to the Government of Alberta's response to natural disasters⁷² :

- "Translate press releases with relevant information for the Francophonie into French."
- "Work with stakeholders within Alberta's Francophonie to enhance the coordination of disaster response and recovery for Francophone communities."
- "Ensure that the emergency alert system informs the public in Alberta in both French and English."

[111] The ACFA, therefore, met with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency in August 2024 to better prepare the response from the province and Francophone communities for 2025.

[112] It's crucial to emphasize that, to ensure an adequate and effective response to natural disasters, the Government of Alberta must allocate a portion of its budget to the translation of official communications into French. The absence of this information in French compromises the safety of Francophones, who risk not receiving or understanding alerts essential to their safety. Without equal access to information in their language, Francophone communities are exposed to an increased risk of confusion, delays in rescue efforts and, ultimately, serious human and material consequences.

⁷¹ Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. 2020. *A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*. <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/publications/studies-other-reports/2020/matter-respect-safety-impact-emergency-situations-official>

⁷² ACFA. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie*, p. 8.

Conclusion

[113] To conclude, the ACFA hopes that the Government of Alberta and the ministries concerned will consider the ten (10) recommendations presented in this brief. These proposals are part of ongoing initiatives within the Government of Alberta, and would ensure that Francophone communities have equitable access to French-language services comparable to those offered to the Anglophone majority, while considering ministerial priorities and available resources