



## Violence against women

**FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES**  
PROVIDED BY BILINGUAL  
AGENCIES IN ONTARIO

[www.aocvf.ca](http://www.aocvf.ca)

This guide is intended for Ontario agencies whose mission is to provide services in either official language to domestic and sexual violence survivors.

The guide can help your agency analyze the quality of its French-language services and, if necessary, make improvements.



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The opinions expressed in this document are those of Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and do not necessarily represent the point of view of the Ontario government.



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## Key considerations

Do you believe women may experience different vulnerabilities, challenges and obstacles depending on their particular situation?

Do you believe that women belonging to specific groups should receive adapted services?

Does your organization have procedures for meeting women's varied needs?

What is your approach to serving Francophone women?

Does your agency have specific procedures for delivering services in French to Francophone women?

## Why offer French-language services to Francophone survivors?

The French language has a particular status in Ontario, and Francophone Ontarians have specific rights. The *French Language Services Act* affirms their right to services and communication in their own language when dealing with governmental organizations in 26 designated areas of Ontario<sup>1</sup>. *Regulation 284/11* extends obligations with respect to services in French to third parties responsible for delivering services on behalf of the government of Ontario. Rape crisis centres and women's shelters can be considered to be third parties subject to the *French Language Services Act*.

Legalities aside, it is important that French-speaking survivors receive support in their own language in order to facilitate the healing process. Because healing requires that a woman be able to talk about the violence and her feelings about it, she needs to be able to express herself in her own language – even if she's perfectly bilingual. She also needs to see that the person listening and helping her understands her. Finally, she needs an environment where she feels at ease, where she can break out of her isolation. In other words, a Francophone survivor needs to be able to contact an agency that can provide high-quality services in French, and that clearly welcomes Francophone women.

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<sup>1</sup>For more information, please consult the website: Government services in french.

## Active offer of French-Language services

The concept of active offer means that French-language services are:

- Easily available and accessible
- Publicized
- Of equivalent quality to services provided in English
- Adapted to the needs and realities of Francophone women

Maintaining an active offer in French involves a real commitment from an agency. A weak list of French-language services often leads to weak demand, which encourages agencies to conclude that no one is interested, leading to still more cutbacks in services. In fact, the more active an agency is in offering high-quality services in French, the more people request those services.

A Francophone woman in crisis, or who is vulnerable, might not ask if she can receive services in French in her community, because her priority will be to solve her immediate problem. But if you ask her if she would like to be served in French and inform her that this will not involve any additional waiting, it is highly likely that she would choose to receive the services in French.

It is not a woman's responsibility to ask for services in French. It is the agency's responsibility to make it clear that it offers such services.

**As a bilingual agency, it is recommended that you regularly review your French-language services to ensure that you are meeting the needs of Francophone women. Services in French must be comparable to those you offer in English, and backed by a similar promotional effort.**

### Questions to ask yourself

So that you can provide accessible, high-quality services in French, the following questions can help you evaluate your ability to fully serve Francophone women. Your answers will help you determine if your agency truly gives Francophone women a viable French-language service option.

#### Initial contact

- Does our agency also have a French name?
- Is our website fully bilingual?
- Is our outgoing voicemail message bilingual?
- Is initial contact by phone or in person made in both languages?
- Do we have a sign at the reception indicating "Français/English"?
- Is our receptionist bilingual?

- Upon initial contact, do we have a procedure for determining the woman's preferred language of service?
- Upon initial contact, do we tell women that they have the option of being served in French?
- Do we have French-language documentation? Is it clearly visible?
- Do we direct Francophone women to Fem'aide, the province-wide Francophone women's helpline (information on our website, our voicemail message, in person, etc.)?<sup>2</sup>

By posting a wheelchair pictogram or a rainbow sticker, you are telling women with a disability and LGBTQI2S people that they are welcome. A "Français/English" sign tells Francophone women that they too are welcome.

### Services for women and their children

- Do we offer all of our services in both languages (individual support, groups, legal support, counselling, support for children, etc.)?
- Are we able to offer our services in French at all times?
- Are we able to deliver services in French within a similar timeframe as our English services?
- Is it fair to say that the services we provide in French are of the same quality as those we offer in English?

<sup>2</sup>For more information about Fem'aide, see page 10 of this guide.

## Internal capabilities

- Are there any Francophone women on our board of directors?
- Do we have one or more workers who are Francophone or are fluent enough in French to speak, read and write in the language?
- Do we have one or more workers capable of working in French, i.e. able to understand everything the woman says and respond adequately in French?
- Do our French-language services rely on a single worker?
- Do we have procedures for avoiding interruptions in our French services in case one or more Francophone workers are absent (sick, vacationing, resigned, etc.)?
- If needed, do we refer Francophone women to Francophone women's support agencies in our community?
- How do we evaluate the quality of the French spoken and written by our Francophone workers, particularly during job interviews?
- How do we evaluate the quality of the French in our various written resources?

## Recruitment and Retention

- Is bilingualism attached to a job rather than to a staff person?
- Have we developed recruitment strategies that really reach Francophones who could fill the jobs?
- Have we built support mechanisms in French for our Francophone workers?
- Do our Francophone workers regularly have to work in English?

- Do our Francophone workers have access to administrative and clinical supervision in French?
- Do our Francophone workers have access to training offered in French?
- Do our Francophone counsellors have access to French-language resources, including intervention tools?
- Do we ask our Francophone staff to perform tasks unrelated to their position?
- Do we provide sufficient time for our Francophone workers to establish links with the Francophone community?

## Francophone community knowledge and involvement

- Do we have ties with Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes?<sup>3</sup>
- Do we know the other Francophone agencies in our community?
- Do we work with the other Francophone agencies in our community?
- Do we recommend these agencies to Francophone women?
- Do we promote our French-language services to our local Francophone community?
- Do we participate in Francophone events in our community?
- Are we aware of the specific challenges and oppressions experienced by Francophone women?

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<sup>3</sup>For more information about Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, see page 10.

## French-language provincial resources related to violence against women, Fem'aide

### Fem'aide [www.femaide.ca](http://www.femaide.ca)

Fem'aide is the provincial Francophone women's helpline. It offers support to Francophone Ontarian women coping with violence, as well as information and help finding appropriate services in their community. Fem'aide can also answer requests for information from people close to a woman in a violent situation. The service is confidential and available 24/7.

Feel free to give women the phone number for Fem'aide: 1-877-336-2433, **ATS** 1-866-860-7082

### Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF) [www.aocvf.ca](http://www.aocvf.ca)

AOcVF is a province-wide coalition of Francophone feminist agencies working toward eradicating violence against women.

The member agencies of AOcVF are rape-crisis centres, women's shelters and violence against women programs, offering French-language services throughout Ontario.

## AOcVF leads a number of activities:

- **Institut de formation en matière de violence faite aux femmes**  
[www.institutdeformation.ca](http://www.institutdeformation.ca)
  - Development of French-language materials
  - Online and in person training
- **Centre de services juridiques pour les femmes francophones de l'Ontario**  
[www.aocvf.ca/service-juridique/](http://www.aocvf.ca/service-juridique/)
  - Development of family-law resources for women, through the Femmes ontariennes et droit de la famille / Family Law Education for Women campaign
  - Legal information in Family law provided to women and workers
  - Summary legal advices in family law for women
- **Traçons-les-limites (Draw-The-Line)**  
[www.traconsleslimites.ca](http://www.traconsleslimites.ca)
  - Coordination of the province-wide sexual violence awareness campaign

