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Setting  
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Scene

English-speaking Quebecers have a legal right to receive health and social services in English.

This pamphlet explains how this right works in practice, how to file a complaint if necessary and where to find information on English services in your region.

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- Filing a Complaint About Health or Social Services
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**This pamphlet is up to date to June 14, 2021.**  
It has general information only. If you need legal advice on a specific situation, consult a lawyer or notary.

# Institutions Covered by the Rules

The rules explained here apply to public institutions such as CLSCs, hospitals, youth protection centres, residential and long-term care centres (“CHSLDs”) and rehabilitation centres.

They also apply to other organizations that have contracts with public institutions, such as group homes offering services under a contract.

## Right to Services in English and Limits

In each region of Quebec, there are government bodies responsible for public health and social services. They are called integrated health and social services centres or integrated university health and social services centres (CISSS and CIUSSS in French).

Each CISSS and CIUSSS must create an “access program.” The access program must list all the services in the region that will be available in English.

### Access programs must include:

1. All the services in “designated” institutions: These institutions must provide all their services in English. Institutions can be designated (recognized) by the government when a majority of the people they serve speak a language other than French.

2. Services outside designated institutions: The access program must identify which services will be available in English. So some services outside designated institutions might not be available in English.

The CISSSs and CIUSSSs have some freedom to decide how to ensure services in English. For example, they can make an agreement with another region to send patients to the other region, use technology or interpreters to provide services in English, or have specific time-slots for providing services in English.

Access programs must be approved by two committees representing the English-speaking population and by the Quebec government. They must be reviewed every five years.

## Complaints

Do you have a complaint about a lack of services in English that should be provided under an access program?

A complaint can be filed by the person using the services, or by someone acting for that person.

Complaints should be filed with the “**complaints commissioner**” for the institution. Ask a representative of the institution for the commissioner’s contact information. Part of the commissioner’s role is helping people express their complaints.

You can also get help from the **complaints assistance and support centre** in your region: 1-877-767-2227 or [www.fcaap.ca](http://www.fcaap.ca).

Note that not all of these centres have service in English.

Another place to turn is the “**users’ committee**” of the CISSS or CIUSSS or of the institution you are dealing with. If people are staying at the institution on a long-term basis, there might an “**in-patients’ committee**” that can help.

If you are not satisfied with the complaint commissioner’s answer, or you do not get an answer within 45 days of filing your complaint, you can ask the **Québec Ombudsman** to review the complaint. To contact the Ombudsman, go to [www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](http://www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca) or call 1-800-463-5070.

## Language of Patient Records

There is no right for patients to have their health and social services records in English. The general rule is that the person preparing a document for a patient record, such as a doctor, can decide whether to write it in English or French. However, a health or social services institution does have the option of requiring documents to be written only in French.

## Language of Signs and Posters

You might wonder why some institutions have signs and posters in English and French, and others only in French.

Institutions can only have signs and posters in English if they are a “designated” institution. (See No. 1 in the section “The Right to Service in English and Limits.”) In other words, the majority of people served by the institution speak English.

Designated institutions must still have French on their signs and posters along with English.

Finally, if a sign or poster is needed for public safety, it can be in both French and another language, even if the institution is not designated.

## Find English Services in Your Region

1. Contact the integrated health and social services centre (CISSS or CIUSSS) for your region. To find your centre, go to [www.msss.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca). Switch to English, look for “Network” on the left side and then “The Quebec Health Regions.” Click on your region.
2. Contact one of the community groups that is a part of the Community Health and Social Services Network. Go to [www.chssn.org/members](http://www.chssn.org/members). The CHSSN works with the public health and social services network to ensure services in English.