

## **Violence against women**

### **FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES AND UNILINGUAL ANGLOPHONE AGENCIES IN A DESIGNATED AREA IN ONTARIO**

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

This guide is intended for Ontario agencies whose mission is to provide services in English to survivors, but that are located in a designated French-services area.

The guide can help your agency review its mechanisms for meeting the needs of Francophone women.



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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 organization have formal procedures for referring Francophone women to Francophone or bilingual agencies?

## 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 Francophone women who are victims of violence 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 organization 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

As a unilingual English-speaking organization, you are not required to directly provide services in French. However, if you are located in a designated area, as a best practice, you could establish practices and mechanisms that ensure you are offering Francophone women the best possible service. You should become familiar with existing Francophone and bilingual agencies in your community, negotiate a memorandum of understanding with them and establish procedures for identifying and referring Francophone women.

A Francophone woman in crisis, or who is vulnerable, might not ask if she can receive services in French, because her priority will be to solve her immediate problem. But if you inform her that there is a nearby agency that provides services in French, it is highly likely that she will ask to be referred to it.

It is not a woman's responsibility to ask for services in French. It is the agency's responsibility to inform her of the existence of local organizations providing services in French.

## Questions to ask yourself

The following questions will help you assess your organization's ability to refer Francophone women adequately.

### Knowledge of local Francophone agencies

- Does our community have Francophone or bilingual agencies offering French-language services to survivors?
- Are our employees aware of all local agencies offering services in French?<sup>2</sup>
- Do we have a memorandum of understanding with those agencies?
- Do we often refer women to those agencies?
- Are all of our workers aware of Fem'aide, the province-wide French-language women's helpline?<sup>3</sup>
- Do we have ties with Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Many Francophone agencies working in the VAW sector provide services to survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

<sup>3</sup>For more information about Fem'aide, see page 8 of this guide.

<sup>4</sup>For more information about Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, see page 9 of this guide.

## Initial contact

- Does our website have a French section directing women to one or more agencies in the community that provide services in French? Is there a link to Fem'aide?
- Does our outgoing voicemail message include a statement in French referring callers to Fem'aide or other agencies in the community?
- In our reception area, is there a sign in French informing Francophone women that our services are available in English only, but that there are French services available elsewhere in the community?
- From initial contact, do we have a procedure to determine a woman's preferred service language?
- Are all of our employees aware of that procedure?
- From initial contact, do we tell women that they can receive services in French through another agency in the community?
- Do we have written material about agencies offering services in French in the community that we can easily give to Francophone women (phone number for Fem'aide, agencies' leaflets, etc.)?
- Do we have a procedure for facilitating women's access to agencies offering French-language services (phoning the agency, accompanying them there, etc.)?

Since most agencies offering services to women keep their address confidential, women rarely visit in person. Initial contact is more often made by phone or email, making it possible to determine from the beginning whether a woman prefers to receive services in English or French.

## **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
  - Coordination of the province-wide sexual violence awareness campaign
- **Voisin-es, ami-es et familles (Neighbours, Friends and Families)**  
www.voisinsamisetfamilles.ca
  - Coordination of the province-wide domestic violence awareness campaign
- **Other projects:**
  - Development of tools for children who have witnessed domestic violence, development of tools on human trafficking, etc.

Most of the services and tools developed by the AOcVF are available for free, even to non-member agencies.

For more information, please write to:  
info@aocvf.ca

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