



## General Estates of Social Work in Quebec: Written Contribution

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### About Us

Founded in 1978, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB), in partnership with the government of Quebec, is responsible for the administration of health and social services for all persons residing permanently or temporarily in Region 18, the administrative region of the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Quebec corresponding to the Cree territory of James Bay. Our mandate is defined in Chapter S-5—An Act respecting health services and social services for Cree Native persons. Cree values and traditions were envisaged as key to the development of health and social services delivery systems in Section 14 of the 1975 James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), which was the basis for the creation of the Cree Health Board. (<https://creehealth.org/about-us/our-mission>)

#### VISION STATEMENT

Individuals, families and communities strive to achieve Miyupimaatisiun (well-being) reflective of Nishiiyuu (culture).

### Introduction

We sincerely appreciate this provincial-scale consultation initiative aimed at shaping social work in Quebec. We wholeheartedly applaud the collective efforts of all those involved in driving this process forward. This presents a valuable opportunity for us to raise our voices and thoughtfully contemplate potential solutions to the challenges faced within our Indigenous, convention-based organization.

Given this opportunity, we have focused on three primary themes: language barriers, culturally safe practices and accessible training, and the recognition mechanisms of the OTSTCFQ (Ordre des travailleurs

sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec). Changes are required in these areas to meet our population's needs effectively. The initial section will serve to share our observations on these themes, while the subsequent section will be dedicated to formulating recommendations based on these observations.

## Observation

### **Language barriers:**

The language barriers between Quebec's government organizations and Indigenous communities have been documented in the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec (Viens Commission). According to the Commission's findings, 41.1% of the Quebec Indigenous population has English as a second language. Cree stands as the primary language for the Cree nation, followed by English. However, the provincial public services operate primarily in French. Therefore, communications are typically conducted in French as well. As a matter of fact, accessing this public consultation posed difficulties since most documents and information were exclusively available in French. Consequently, we needed to translate them before distributing them across our organization.

Many calls for action within the Viens Commission are aligned with that fact. For example, Call of Action 17 emphasizes that all official communication between government bodies and Indigenous authorities should include translations in either English or Indigenous languages, depending on the preferences of the community or organization involved. However, based on the tracking table for responses to calls for action by the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between indigenous peoples and certain public services progress (report September 2022), numerous initiatives addressing language barriers have remained on hold for several years. These initiatives need to be reevaluated in light of the provisions of the Act respecting French as the official and common language of Quebec. Over the years, government organizations have occasionally provided English translations of official communications originally in French. Nonetheless, this practice has recently declined due to policies focused on preserving the French language. As a result, we continue to face challenges regarding effective communication within the broader health and social services network and accessing valuable resources.

These language barriers result in several direct consequences. This includes a lack of representation for our organization, leading to the selection of French-speaking individuals, often non-indigenous, for various committees or working groups. Additionally, substantial challenges arise concerning the recognition of our English-speaking social workers. This is due, in part, to the fact that the mandatory training provided by the OTSTCFQ, such as the deontology code training, is no longer available in English. To illustrate another effect of these language barriers, consider the case of an Indigenous social worker within our organization. They encountered difficulties when applying for a license because all received communications were exclusively in French. As a result, they needed help understanding the

requirements. The representative from the OTSTCFQ responded that they were prohibited from communicating in English and advised the social worker to get a translator's help.

Language barriers result in additional costs and time, stemming from the need to translate documents or training materials. However, more importantly, these language barriers lead to our isolation by denying us access to numerous valuable resources such as training courses provided by organizations like CRAIP (Centre de recherche appliquée en intervention psychosociale) and the OTSTCFQ. Ultimately, language equity hinders the collaborative efforts with other organizations, so our realities are only sometimes considered in Quebec's strategies for improving social services.

### **Training:**

Regarding training, options for both initial and continuing education are limited and often fall short of addressing the needs of the Indigenous population. Language barriers present a substantial challenge, as accessing training in English remains problematic. As long as these language barriers persist, even if the training aligns culturally with the realities of Indigenous communities, it will stay out of reach for most of our present and prospective workers.

Several of our workers conveyed that the social work University's curriculum needs to adequately prepare future professionals to intervene effectively in Indigenous contexts due to its prevalence in Quebec, whether within urban environments, Indigenous territories and/northern realities. While certain Universities have taken steps to integrate specific courses addressing Indigenous realities into their curriculum, more is needed. Some of our Social Workers have reported that the Universities' curriculum varies a lot from one to another, and other provinces in Canada offer more Indigenous-focused study programs that better prepare social workers for intervention with Indigenous populations (e.g., Indigenous Social Work Program at Laurentian University).

The approach that social workers must adopt when intervening with Indigenous communities involves significant distinctions that the social worker must grasp. For example, the social determinants of health differ for First Nations and Inuit communities, and these distinctions aren't adequately covered in the initial training provided by Quebec Universities. The notion of health and well-being takes a holistic form, encompassing four elements: emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual, symbolized by the medicine wheel. Furthermore, to addressing and seeing the interconnections of historical discriminatory laws and policies that enforced the sad legacy of residential schools and its residual affects today.

Effective interventions and practice must account for all four components of an individual along with identity and cultural reconciliation. Moreover, there is a requirement for a more balanced distribution of practical and theoretical training within the University's' programs. Curriculum are sometimes mentioned

to be disconnected from the reality of the work. Increasing the number of practicums can effectively contribute to the consistent skill development of future workers.

Regarding continuing training, challenges are posed by both accessibility and relevance. Beginning with accessibility, some crucial training, such as homicidal assessment, is restricted to individuals with specific academic backgrounds (like a bachelor's degree). In addition to not being in English or reflecting the Indigenous realities, it doesn't consider that our workers need this training no matter their academic background. In fact, they have to do homicidal assessments, and yet they don't have access to the proper tools and training. It's important to acknowledge that our communities face educational disparities due to our territories' absence of post-secondary institutions. Denying access to vital training based on academic background overlooks these considerations and jeopardizes our population's safety if social services workers aren't appropriately trained to address such situations. Enhancing accessibility also entails considering the geographic isolation often experienced by our communities. Providing a broader range of online English training activities would benefit our workers. Additionally, our workers often report the financial strain arising from expensive training and OTSTCFQ membership fees as another obstacle to accessibility.

There's also an identified need to expand the recognition of continuing training to meet the standards established by regulatory bodies like OTSTCFQ. Frequently, the most effective training for our workers comes from in-house or other Indigenous organizations. Unfortunately, the OTSTCFQ doesn't always acknowledge these trainings for meeting requirements. Incorporating training that spotlights Indigenous culture, originates from our communities, and encompasses diverse training approaches would improve the relevance of continuing training for our workforce. As some of our workers reported, it's essential to recognize that the training needs can vary depending on the population with whom you must intervene. For instance, considering the frequency of concerns related to suicidal risk assessment, making it a mandatory training while ensuring cultural appropriateness and straightforward accessibility is crucial for our organization.

### **Recognition Mechanisms of the Quebec Order of Social Workers:**

There have been good initiatives in this direction in recent years, for example, the committee on applying Bill 21 with FNI (First Nations and Inuit). And more recently, Bill 32 for the cultural safety approach within the healthcare and social services network. This will lead to an amendment in the Professional Code to allow Indigenous individuals, not members of a professional Order, to practice certain reserved professional activities. The work carried out within this committee will no doubt positively impact our organization by increasing the number of First Nations and Inuit (FNI) workers authorized to perform activities reserved under Bill 21.

Based on insights gathered from our workforce, the norms established by OTSTCFQ are perceived as strict and fail to accommodate Indigenous communities and voices. Frequently, our workers find themselves compelled to adapt and subsequently experience a sense of isolation. Underlying concerns within our workforce revolve around the recognition mechanisms of OTSTCFQ members that do not reflect the reality of the Quebec population and, thus, generate adverse consequences within our organization. Given that safeguarding the public is a significant mandate both for the OTSTCFQ and our workers, there is a collective aspiration among our workforce for the OTSTCFQ to proactively initiate more endeavours to bridge the gap with Indigenous communities.

## Recommendations

1. Ensure that an English translation accompanies all government and OTSTCFQ correspondences with Indigenous organizations and communities;
2. Implement measures to facilitate the practice of English-speaking social workers who studied outside of Quebec;
3. Translate available training and relevant documentation for social workers in English;
4. Develop and increase training available in English remotely;
5. Develop and implement a culturally, linguistically and trauma-informed relevant training program including cultural safety/humility (Cegep and University) recognized by the OTSTCFQ and in collaboration with Indigenous organizations and communities;
6. Include training created by Indigenous communities that includes Indigenous-based interventions and practices and recognized by the OTSTCFQ for annual continuing training hours required;
7. Review the process, mechanisms, mandatory training and recognition criteria for the OTSTCFQ membership in partnership with the Indigenous population of Quebec;

## Conclusion:

In summary, a significant stride towards achieving our shared objectives of improving approaches, promoting the well-being of the population, and supporting the professional development of social workers involves the following key elements: granting our workers access to valuable resources and relevant training, using English as a meeting place to incorporate our voices, and fostering openness to seek our input on how to recruit, train, and retain more Indigenous workers and lived experiences capable of addressing the needs of our communities. We firmly believe that solutions exist, and these recommendations can serve as a stepping stone towards achieving our common goals.

