



# Summary Report

Characterizing the Francophone  
Population in Greater Saint John  
(2015-2020)

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**NB-IRDT**

New Brunswick Institute for  
Research, Data and Training

## Project Title

Characterizing the Francophone population in Greater Saint John (2015-2020)

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## Project Number

P0082: Characterizing the Francophone Population in Greater Saint John

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## How to Cite This Product

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[Read the Full Report](#)



## Why is This Study Important?

Bilingualism makes New Brunswick unique and brings a high level of linguistic diversity and cultural enrichment to the province. However, as Canada's only officially bilingual province, New Brunswick also faces issues of language barriers that affect segments of its population. For instance, there is limited information about the size of the Francophone community that would prefer to receive services in French in majority Anglophone areas. Without this information, it is impossible to accurately represent the demand for French-language health and social services and learn how to meet that demand most efficiently.

To date, the only information on language preference in New Brunswick's administrative data is based on records in the province's Medicare system, and there is reason to believe these might underestimate the actual preference for French health services. Because language barriers can pose a serious threat to patients' safety and quality of care, we attempt to provide a more accurate account of language preferences in the province -- by considering adjustments to the existing data based on the measures for area-level language fluency reported in the 2016 Canadian Census.

This report constructs a profile of the Francophone population in the Greater Saint John. It considers the need for more French-language services in majority Anglophone areas of the province by comparing factors like New Brunswickers' health status and their service use between Francophone and Anglophone households based on where they live.

New Brunswickers have the right to receive healthcare in the official language of their choice -- and to support these rights, we need to understand the potential demand for French language services across the province.



## How Was This Study Completed?

To undertake this study, a team of researchers from NB-IRDT used 2016 area-level Census data and linked demographic Citizen Data, Social Assistance Data, Long-Term Care Data, chronic condition and NB Cancer data, hospitalization Discharge Abstract Data, and NB Physician Billing data.

This report uses three definitions of language:

- Preferred language for correspondence (from Citizen Data)
- Language spoken most often at home (from the 2016 Census)
- Mother tongue (from the 2016 Census)

Outcomes using each definition are compared, and scaling factors are applied to results by determining how each language proportion compares to its Citizen Data baseline. Geographies are grouped into five areas using a combination of Census Metropolitan Area and Forward Sortation Area (postal code) divisions.

Demographic characteristics include population by area, language, age, sex, household composition, immigrant status, duration of residence, and mortality rate as of July 1, 2018. Socioeconomic measures include income quintile, the number of people receiving social assistance, and the number of people in home care. Chronic disease measures include prevalence rates and average years since diagnosis for acute myocardial infarction, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), dementia, diabetes, epilepsy, heart failure, hypertension, ischemic heart disease, mental illness, mood and anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, stroke, and cancer.



Hospital admissions and total days in hospital are calculated for each individual each year from 2015-2020, and physician visits (2015-2018) are calculated with a focus on Médisanté Saint-Jean.

# Measuring New Brunswick's Francophone Population

Using 3 language definitions, we estimate **20-33%** of New Brunswickers self-report as Francophones.

**Medicare  
Correspondence**

**20%**

**Language  
Spoken at Home**

**29%**

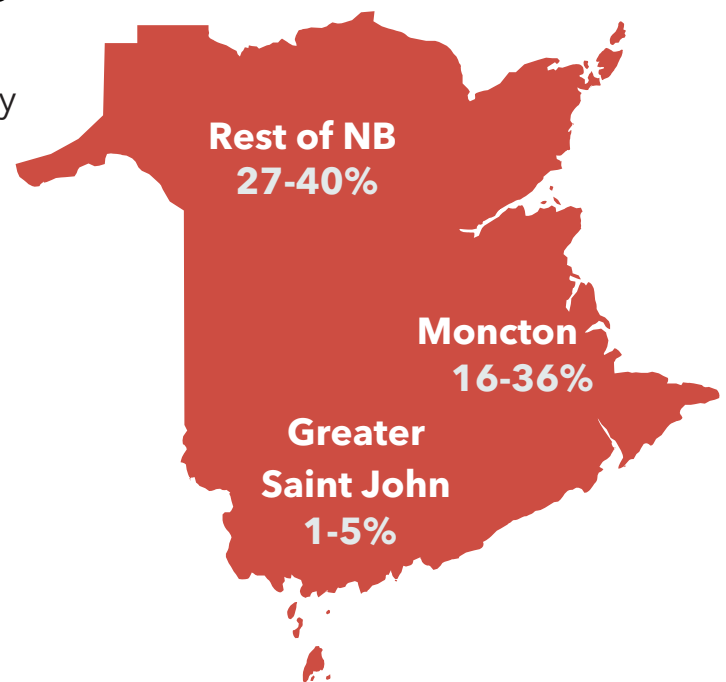
**French  
Mother Tongue**

**33%**

## How does this break down by region?\*

Data from the 2016 Census suggests Medicare data consistently under-estimates the proportion of Francophone New Brunswickers.

For Greater Saint John, the proportion of the population with a French mother tongue is **nearly 5 times greater** than the proportion that receives Medicare correspondence in French.



## Is this discrepancy significant?



The difference between 1% and 5% may look small, but this discrepancy means **nearly 4,000** Francophones in Greater Saint John are not accounted for in health service planning.

## \*What areas fall under "Greater Saint John" and "Rest of NB?"

**Greater  
Saint John**

City of Saint John, Rothesay, Hampton, Quispamsis, surrounding areas

**Rest of NB**

All Forward Sortation Areas fully outside the Saint John and Moncton Census Metropolitan Areas

# Profiling Francophone Families in Greater Saint John

Francophones in Greater Saint John are **twice as likely** as the general population of NB to not be citizens or long-term residents of NB.

**Francophones  
in GSJ**

**8%**

**Population  
of NB**

**4%**

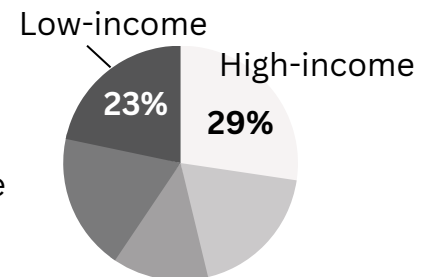
Not considered NB citizens or long-term residents



Francophones in Greater Saint John are also **twice as likely** to have lived in the same Forward Sortation Area for less than 5 years (**21%**) compared to the general population of NB (**10%**), which suggests greater population mobility.

## Comparing Income Dispersion

- The NB population has evenly dispersed income quintiles, with 20% of its population in each quintile.
- The Francophone population in Greater Saint John is less evenly dispersed, with more of its population in the high-income and low-income quintiles, and less in the middle.



Despite having a comparatively higher proportion of low-income families, Francophones in Greater Saint John only account for **0.5% - 2%** of social assistance in the region.

## Comparing Chronic Health Conditions

Francophones in Greater Saint John have the same prevalence of common chronic diseases as the population of NB but have lower:

Rates of hypertension

**26%** vs. 33%

Years since diagnosis

**5 years** vs. 10

# Home Care and Healthcare Use in Greater Saint John

**Less than half** of Greater Saint John Francophones preferring French medical correspondence received home care in French.

**20%**  
preferred medical  
correspondence  
in French



**8.6%**  
received home  
care services in  
French



In comparison, **nearly 100%** of Greater Saint John residents who preferred English medical correspondence received home care in English.

## Hospitalizations (2015-2020)\*

- Medicare data show that 850 Francophones in Greater Saint John were hospitalized, but if we scaled this number to include all individuals with French as a mother tongue, it could rise to 3,980.
- Francophones in Greater Saint John have the lowest rate of hospitalizations per capita (**0.14**) while Anglophones in the Rest of NB have the highest (**0.19**). They also have fewer days in hospital (**7.0**) compared to Anglophones in the same region (**9.2**).

## Physician Visits (2015-2018)\*

- Francophones (as identified in Medicare data) in Greater Saint John comprised **4,940** visits (only **24%** of visits) to the French Médisanté clinic. If everyone who reported French as a mother tongue attended Médisanté for their physician visits, this would make **20,650** visits -- equal to **100%** of current Médisanté visits.
- Similarly, Francophones (identified by Medicare) comprised **27,965** of all physician visits in Greater Saint John, but this number would scale to **130,875** if applied to all residents with a French mother tongue.

\*It is important to note that Francophones in Greater Saint John are younger, on average, than Anglophones in the region.

## Conclusions

Overall, this report's comparison of French language preferences between Medicare data and 2016 Census data suggests there is a much larger proportion of Francophones living in New Brunswick than the Medicare data show. This is especially true of the Greater Saint John region, where the proportion of Francophones could be up to almost 5 times larger than Medicare data suggest. This discrepancy is important to keep in mind when assessing the demand for French home care and healthcare services in the provinces -- as using only Medicare data could lead to an under-reporting of the true demand.

Compared to the general population of New Brunswick, the Francophone population living in Greater Saint John is more mobile, with a higher proportion of high- and low-income earners and a lower proportion of social assistance recipients. It also has lower hospitalization rates and a lower average number of years since diagnosis.

Given these differences, it perhaps isn't surprising that Francophones in Greater Saint John make up a lower proportion of visits to the Médisanté clinic in Saint John than the Anglophone population. While there was an overall increasing number of visits to the clinic, this increase was larger among Anglophones than Francophones.

That being said, the proportion of Médisanté visits from Francophones varies widely depending on the definition of language used. Results that rely on Medicare data on language preference suggest that Francophones comprised only 25% of visits to the Médisanté clinic. However, this proportion would grow to around 100% if we used scaling factors based on the proportion of individuals with French as a mother tongue (indicated in Census data).

These findings imply that if all individuals with a French mother tongue were to make their physician visits at Médisanté, that number of visits would roughly equal the total number of visits to the clinic by all individuals (both Francophone and Anglophone) during the 2015-2018 study period.