

Francophone seniors in Ontario: A health portrait

Introduction

This short report highlights the main health issues and health behaviors of francophone seniors (65 and over) in Ontario compared with the rest of the population in the same province. This information can be especially useful to inform knowledge users and influence future healthcare planning and policy. The report is based on data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a cross-sectional multi-stage survey that collects information related to health status, health care utilization and health determinants for the Canadian population. Eight CCHS cycles from 2001 to 2009 covering 130,000 respondents (annually or over two years) was used for analysis.

Methods

Health regions of Ontario (as defined by Statistics Canada) were grouped into three larger regions representing Central/South-West, East/South-East, and Northern. The total Ontario population and the population of Francophones aged 65 and over living in the three regions were both considered for analysis.

Sample size by region for Francophones 65 and older (n)

Ontario-total	1,593
Central/South-West	173
East/South-East	607
North	813



Aging francophone population over years

Based on the CCHS surveys, (Ontario's aging population) population aged 65 and over constituted approximately 14% of Ontarians. This proportion slightly increased over years from 14.2% in 2001 to 15.1% in 2009. In comparison to the total population, **the proportion of francophone seniors in Ontario maintained higher demographic levels and varied from 17% in 2001 to 22.5% in 2009.**

Weighted proportions were used to compare and highlight similarities and disparities between aging francophone populations in Ontario's regions. The estimates are presented in relation to the general population of the province. Topics explored included perceptions of health, stress, disabilities, chronic diseases, lifestyle, preventive behaviors and healthcare services.

Overall the **proportion of seniors** was higher in the francophone population compared to the total population of Ontario. The largest seniors population was in the North (21%) versus 18% in the Central/South-West, 16% in the East/South-East, and 14% in Ontario overall.

Sex distribution: Women constituted 63% of the senior francophone population in the Central/ South-West region. The differences in female to male ratio were lower in the East/South-East (55% of women) and North (56% of women).

	Ontario-Total	Francophones 65+		
		Central/South-West	East/ South-East	North
Less than secondary education	23.3%	50.6%	49.8%	67.4%
Income				
Low	19.8%	24.9%	37.2%	47.2%
High	20.1%	11.1%	8.1%	3.2%
Worked at job or business in the last 12 months	75.2%	15.7%	13.9%	5.9%
Live in rural area	14.6%	11.0%	21.4%	29.6%
Immigrant	31.0%	43.1%	8.6%	2.4%

Physical and mental health

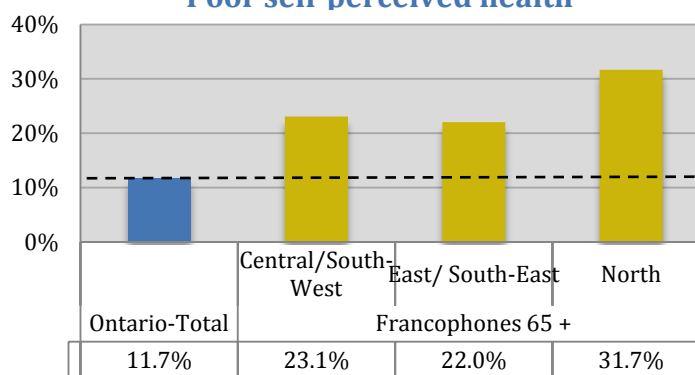
*Question: In general, would you say your **health** is: fair, or poor?*

Francophone seniors tended to report higher percentages of poor overall health compared with the overall Ontario population: 32% of Northern francophone population and 23% in the Central/ South-West and 22% in the East/ South-East regions.

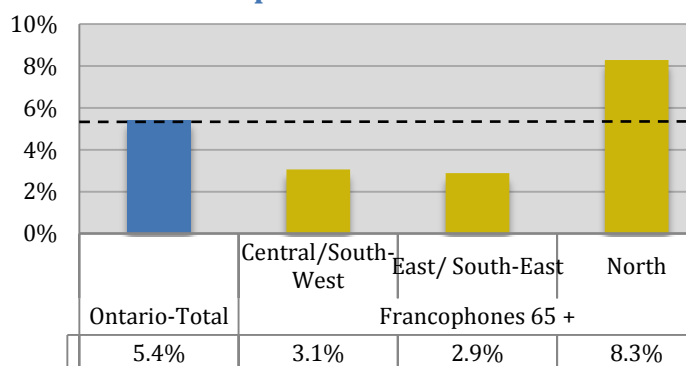
*Question: In general, would you say your **mental health** is: fair, or poor?*

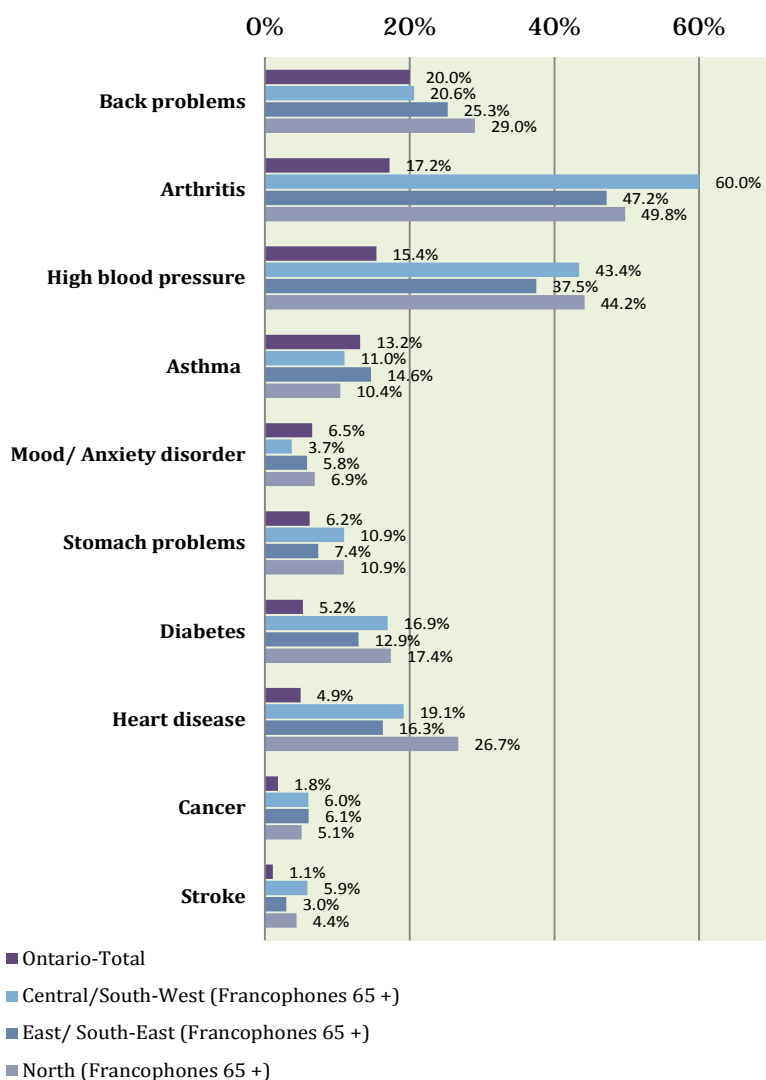
Francophone seniors in the North reported poor mental health more often than those in the other two regions and much more often than the overall Ontario population. However, life and work related stress was lower in the aging francophone population than in total population.

Poor self-perceived health



Poor self-perceived mental health





Chronic diseases

Francophone seniors in the **North** felt more pain and discomfort, had more back problems, mood disorder, and heart disease than Francophones in other regions and at the provincial level.

Prevalence of chronic disease was the highest in the North and the lowest in the Central/South-West region.

Arthritis was more prevalent among francophone seniors in the **Central/South-West** region.

Needs, access, and quality of health care services

7% of francophone seniors in Ontario reported **not having a regular family physician**.

Reasons for not having a doctor:

- ❖ None in the region: 23.0%
- ❖ Not accepting new patients: 20.0%
- ❖ Not tried to have one: 32.4%
- ❖ Doctor's departure or retirement: 35.6%

11% of francophone seniors had not seen a doctor and 23% a nurse in the last 12 months.

	Ontario-Total	Francophones 65 +		
		Central/South-West	East/South-East	North
Need to visit a specialist	28.1%	33.8%	42.1%	30.0%
Need for a routine care for self or family	51.9%	58.5%	74.9%	67.0%
Need of immediate care for a minor health problem for self or family	36.2%	8.0%	25.9%	21.2%
Need for health information for self or family	45.1%	27.8%	32.1%	31.7%

Difficulties in receiving health care services

(Francophones 65 and older):

- ❖ Medical specialist: 14.6%
- ❖ Routine healthcare services: 6.5%
- ❖ Immediate care for a minor problem: 32.4%
- ❖ Health information: 6.7%

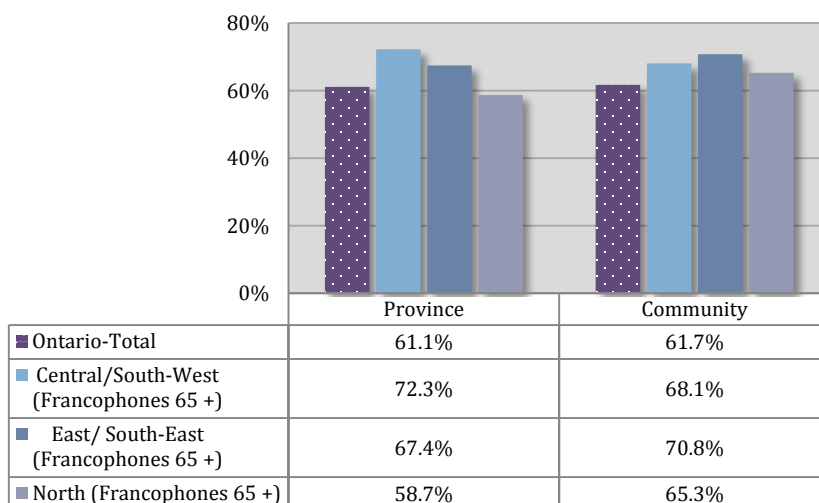
Overall francophone seniors were more satisfied than the Ontarians in general with the quality of overall health services (96% versus 87%) and the services received in hospitals (90% versus 82%).

Northern aging francophone population rated the availability and quality of care at the community and provincial levels the lowest.

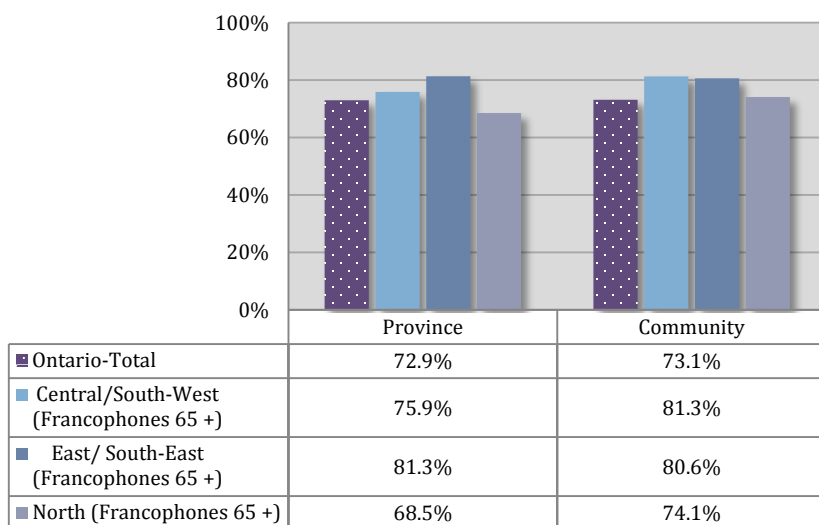
Older Francophones in the Central/South-West region were hospitalized the least (19% versus 34% in the East/South-East and 27% in the Northern regions respectively). They received as well less home care (10% versus 17% in the East/South-East and 11% in the Northern regions respectively).

Compared to the francophone senior population in the Central/South-West and East/South-East regions, **francophone seniors in the North** region were in poorer health. However, they tended to be more involved in their community life and have a strong sense of belonging

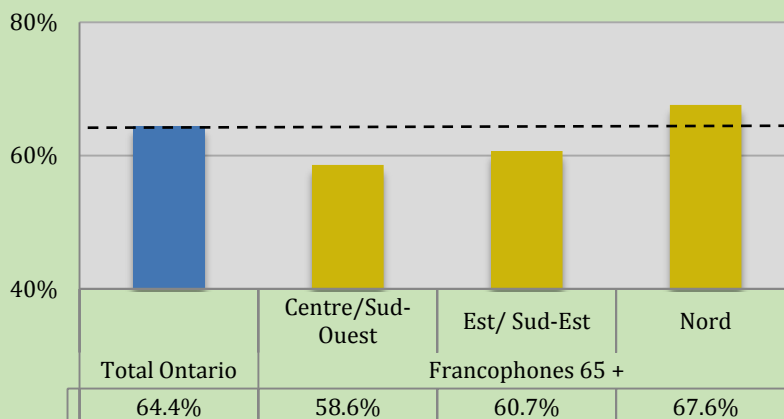
Rating of availability of health care: excellent/ good



Rating of quality of health care: excellent/ good

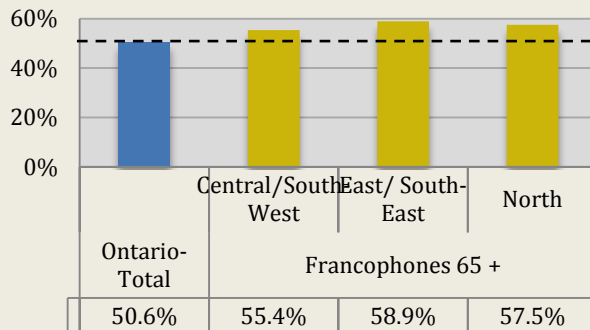


Sense of community belonging: *strong*

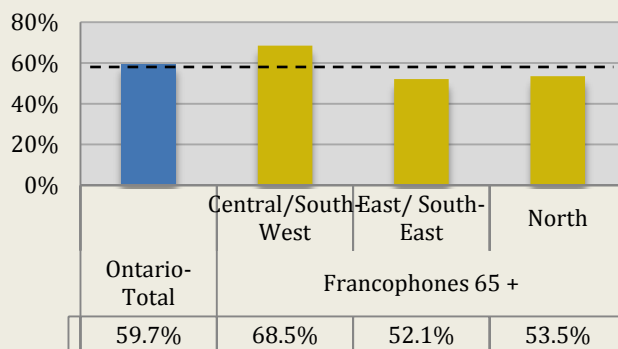


Lifestyle

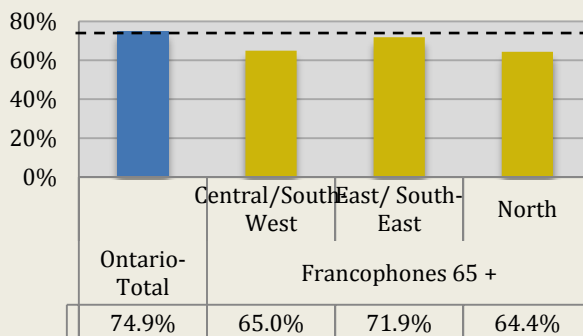
BMI: overweight/obese



Fruits & vegetables: less than 5 servings per day



Alcohol: regular/occasional



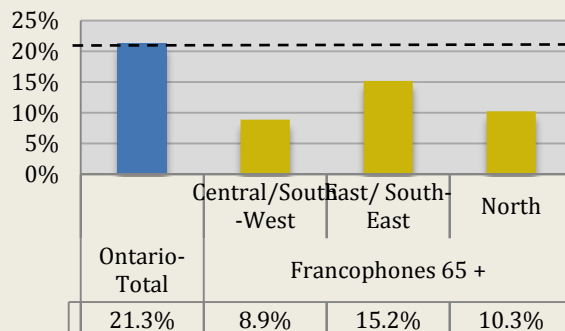
Approximately 50% of francophone seniors made changes in their lives over the 12-month period preceding the survey, with the intention to improve their health.

Francophone seniors in the three regions were slightly **more overweight or obese** than the Ontario general population; 55% in the Central/South-West, 57% in the North and up to 59% in the East/South-East had a BMI index over 25. Central/South-West francophone seniors were the least and the most physically active among the three regions of Ontario.

However, in terms of **healthy-eating habits**, a greater proportion of the aging francophone population in the Central/South-West region (68%) were less likely to eat on average fruits and vegetables five times per day than the same age group of Francophones in the East/South-East (52%) and the North (53%). In comparison, 60% of the Ontario population consumed less than five daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

The highest number of **regular smokers and drinkers** was observed in the East/South-East (15% and 72% respectively) and the proportions of regular smokers and drinkers decreased in the North (10% and 65%, respectively) and Central/South-West (9% and 65%, respectively) regions.

Smoking: daily/occasionally



Conclusion

Our study shows that francophone seniors in Ontario belong more often than the rest of Ontarians to a low income category, hold a lower level of education and are more likely to reside in rural or remote areas with the exception of the Central/South-West region.

Regarding their health indicators, a greater proportion of Francophone seniors (65 and older) are overweight or obese and less physically active compared to the total population of Ontario. They are more likely to report poor physical and mental health, suffer from at least one chronic disease, a known restriction of daily activities and they often need help with daily activities. Finally, our analysis shows that health indicators are worse in the following three groups :

- Seniors in the North region;
- Senior immigrant women in the Central/South-West; and
- The isolated seniors

Strengthening interventions based on a population health approach and targeting the three groups mentioned by specific interventions is highly recommended.

L. Bouchard, E. Makvandi, G. Sedigh and Solange van Kemenade (2014) The Health of the Francophone Population Aged 65 and over in Ontario. A region-by-region portrait based on the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). Réseau de recherche appliquée sur la santé des francophones de l'Ontario, University of Ottawa. <http://www.rrasfo.ca/>