



RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECREASE THE IMPACT OF A COVID-19 SECOND WAVE ON “CULTURAL COMMUNITIES”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from the report “Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Montreal “cultural communities”. Study on the sociocultural and structural factors affecting vulnerable groups.”
[Full report available here >>](#)

COLLECT DATA ON COVID’S SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

Systematically collect data to document whether the prevalence and severity of COVID-19 are linked to social determinants such as ethnicity, language, migratory status, occupation, use of public transit and housing conditions. The Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse du Québec has made a similar recommendation¹.

FACILITATE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND CONSULTATION

In the context of a pandemic, public health interventions will be more effective if they take population diversity into account and promote community involvement through consultation and participation (Barker et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2017). Community organizations constitute allies for public health directorates and CIUSSSs,

¹ https://www.cdpcj.qc.ca/Publications/LETTRE_collecte-donnees-desegragees_Covid-19.pdf



Integrated Health and Social Services University Network for West-Central Montreal



EN BREF



COLLECT DATA ON COVID’S SOCIAL DETERMINANTS



FACILITATE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND CONSULTATION



IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES THROUGH A MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION



PROMOTE ACCESS TO HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES



PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT MEASURES



ENSURE THAT COVID-RELATED WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES ARE RESPECTED



GUARANTEE FOOD SECURITY



PREVENT EVICTIONS LINKED TO THE PANDEMIC



PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING



STRENGTHEN INTERCOMMUNITY RELATIONS AND ACT AGAINST RACISM

and closer collaboration will help strengthen collective response to the health crisis. Collaboration may be developed by involving a broad variety of community groups in identifying needs, orientations and adaptation of measures, perhaps through neighbourhood Tables de concertation. This should include not only community groups, but also ethnocultural associations, religious groups and informal mutual aid groups, in order to ensure a very broad and diversified representation of different sectors of the population.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES THROUGH MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

Study results show that allophone individuals face challenges accessing the constantly evolving information concerning public health guidelines and social and economic support measures. At the beginning of the crisis, translations were being done by community organizations rather than by government services. It is important to make COVID-related information and services available in the main languages of Montreal residents, including French, English, and the 15 other languages currently used on the Santé Montréal webpage (Arabic, Haitian Creole, Spanish, Farsi, Hindi, Italian, Lingala, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog, Tamil, Vietnamese, Yiddish). More specifically, multilingual access to information and services could be improved through the following measures :

- Disseminate multilingual information concerning COVID-19, on the Santé Montréal² webpage and other platforms;
- Disseminate multilingual information on COVID-related workplace health and safety guidelines, and also on the rights and remedies available to workers if such guidelines are not implemented;
- For the Info-Santé phone line and any other phone line concerning COVID health services, offer access to telephone interpretation services (e.g., Language Line Solutions) in order to be able to respond to callers in their language if they speak neither French nor English;
- In COVID testing clinics and throughout the health system, take measures to communicate with patients in their language as much as possible, notably through use of interpreters;
- Develop information tools that are easy to understand for people with low literacy, particularly by improving graphic presentation, with more

images and less text, and through producing short video clips;

- Call upon health professionals from Montreal's main cultural communities to help create content (e.g., video clips) that are adapted in cultural and linguistic terms. If possible, it would be advantageous to call on people who are well known and respected in their community;
- Use media that may better reach certain cultural communities, including:
 - Radio stations of certain communities (e.g., Haitian, Filipino...);
 - Cultural community newspapers;
 - Facebook and other online pages of various ethnocultural associations and community groups;
 - Cellphone applications (e.g., Whatsapp) to reach people who have no computer or internet;
 - Posters in the public transit system.
- Create and regularly update a webpage with a centralized list of all essential resources linked to the pandemic in Montreal (e.g., food banks, financial support measures) and hyperlinks to other important webpages (e.g., Santé-Montréal).

PROMOTE ACCESS TO HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES

Study results show that in the context of a pandemic, it is important to implement measures to guarantee universal, free access to testing and treatment related to COVID to all people living in Québec, regardless of their migratory status.

- To achieve this goal, we recommend adopting a policy similar to the one that has been implemented in Ontario since 20 March 2020, which guarantees free access to all health services for all people living in the province, regardless of their migratory status. Patients cannot know in advance whether or not their symptoms are due to COVID. If universal coverage is limited to testing and treatment of COVID, as is the case in Québec since 31 March 2020, people without RAMQ cards often hesitate to undergo testing, for fear of having to pay if the test is negative.
- In any case, these new universal access measures should be widely publicized, both in the health care system and the general public, more particularly among cultural communities.
- COVID testing clinics and other healthcare facilities should clearly commit to protecting the

² <https://santemontreal.qc.ca/population/coronavirus-covid-19/informations-multilingues>

confidentiality and privacy of all their patients, including non-status people, and to not communicate any information regarding these patients to the Canada Border Services Agency or other immigration authorities.

With regard to availability of health and psychosocial services:

- If there is another lockdown, measures should be taken to maintain an adequate level of medical, psychosocial and home care services for the entire population, particularly the most vulnerable groups.
- Offer a phone help line in multiple languages, in addition to French and English, to provide psychological support.

PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT MEASURES

In order to fully protect vulnerable people, access to COVID-related financial support measures should be universal, and extend to people who are without status.

ENSURE THAT COVID-RELATED WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES ARE RESPECTED

In terms of workplace health and safety, the following measures would make it possible to improve the situation of the most vulnerable workers in the context of the pandemic :

- Strengthen the ability of the CNESST and the DRSP to conduct inspections and to impose the measures required to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in all workplaces.
- Conduct a multilingual information campaign on the right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions and on the remedies available in case of reprisals by the employer. The public transit system is a particularly good place to disseminate such information.
- Ensure that all people working in healthcare facilities (hospitals, CLSCs, CHSLDs, etc.), have access to:
 - Adequate personal protective equipment (PPE);
 - Training in how to use PPE, taking the necessary measures to ensure that the information is well understood (e.g., translation of information tools into the main languages used by these workers);
 - Offer workers at high risk of exposure to COVID the option of being housed outside the family home, giving priority to people

living in apartments that are small, overcrowded or shared with people who are particularly vulnerable (e.g., seniors);

- Ensure protection of all workers, including those providing “essential services” outside of the health sector, by making sure that they have access to all measures necessary to protect their health, and that these are furnished or organized by the employer in their workplace (including workers provided by temp agencies as well as those with direct employment status);
- Minimize mobility of temp agency workers from one workplace to another in order to reduce the risks that they contract and spread infection;
- For people with precarious status or without status, ensure that they will not be penalized if they test positive for COVID-19 or if they denounce working conditions that do not comply with health guidelines or refuse to work in such conditions. This includes a commitment to protect confidentiality as well as a campaign to inform precarious status and non-status migrants.

GUARANTEE FOOD SECURITY

Given the adverse impact of the pandemic on food security, the following measures should be implemented in order to protect the most vulnerable in case of another lockdown or epidemic :

- Provide financial support to the organizations that provide food aid so that these services will be available everywhere in Montreal, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods, with adequate amounts of food and, as much as possible, food that is adapted to the preferences of families using the service.
- Ensure that people involved in providing food aid have access to PPE.

PREVENT EVICTIONS LINKED TO THE PANDEMIC

If there is another lockdown, restore the moratorium on evictions of tenants.

PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING

If there is another lockdown or major health crisis, the following measure should be adopted to promote family well-being :

- Provide access to childcare services to all “essential” workers (not only healthcare workers), and guarantee access regardless of migratory status.

If distance learning is being offered in primary or secondary schools :

- Ensure that all students have access to a computer or tablet, and also to internet;

- Offer special support to students whose parents are not fluent in French and/or who have a low literacy level (either for reading or computers);
- Offer special support to the most disadvantaged families so that children, especially preschoolers, receive stimulation and supervision that is adequate to promote development.

STRENGTHEN INTERCOMMUNITY RELATIONS AND ACT AGAINST RACISM

Knowing that the pandemic may exacerbate social tensions, measures should be implemented to promote harmonious relations and to restore or strengthen minority communities' sense of safety by protecting them from hateful words and acts, in particular :

- In cases where there are concerns about social tensions, adopt a preventive approach through calling on existing community resources and intercultural mediation to promote intercommunity dialogue;
- Provide access to multilingual information on remedies available in the case of hate incidents or crimes, and encourage individuals to report them.

TO CONCLUDE

In the context of the pandemic, as pointed out by the World Health Organization, protection of the dignity and rights of the most vulnerable requires States to pay particular attention and to adopt specific measures to protect against discrimination (WHO, 2020). The Pan American Health Organization also recommends the adoption of targeted measures adapted to populations that are vulnerable due to inequalities, exclusion and discrimination, which implies an improved understanding of the challenges they face and compilation of disaggregated data (PAHO, 2020). These concerns are consistent with the values contained in the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

In view of these concerns and values, this report has adopted a perspective of social justice in health, in order to promote a collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic that is inclusive and all-encompassing. This perspective takes into account the physical, mental, economic, social and (inter-)community health of the population. By fostering a better understanding of the experiences of Montreal cultural communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, this report seeks to contribute to discussions regarding plans for the ongoing public and community response of Québec society to the health crisis. To meet the complex challenges resulting from the pande-

mic, we believe that it is essential to take into account the needs of those who are most vulnerable (due to linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic or migratory factors) and to promote intercommunity collaboration.

A SHERPA University Institute publication, 7085 Hutchison, Montréal, Qc., H3N 1Y9
sherpa.dlm@ssss.gouv.qc.ca
<https://www.sherpa-recherche.com>

Recommendations from the report : Impacts de la crise de la COVID-19 sur les « communautés culturelle » montréalaises. Enquête sur les facteurs socioculturels et structurels affectant les groupes vulnérables
 Publisher : SHERPA University Institute
 Authors: Janet Cleveland (PhD), Prof. Jill Hanley (PhD), Annie Jaimes (PhD), Tamar Wolofsky (MSW)
 Graphic design: Andréanne Boisjoli
 Photo first page : Mural « Rencontre entre les cultures », Centre éducatif communautaire René-Goupil, 4105, 47e rue (coin Pie IX), Montréal. By MU / Yannick Picard. [Photo Ville de Montréal CC BY-ND 2.0 \(détail\)](#)