

A Report on the Legal Status and Statistics of Canadian Sign Languages



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Executive Summary

Overall Summary

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the historical influences on policies regarding sign languages in Canada, as well as the historical evolution of Canadian sign languages. It then explores the current legal status of sign languages at the Canadian federal level, including statistics on usage and learning. The report also delves into the statuses of sign languages within different provinces and territories across Canada, followed with highlights of international language policies relevant to sign languages. Recommendations from various organizations to further enhance accessibility and inclusion of sign languages or Deaf individuals conclude the report.

History

This section briefly traces the historical paradigms of international policies, cultural and academic perceptions of sign languages, and their evolution. It subsequently summarizes the development and transformation of sign languages in North America and Canada.

Statuses of Sign Languages at the Canadian Federal Level

At the national level, Canadian federal policies defining sign language status include the Charter of Rights and Freedom Section 14, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Accessible Canada Act, and the Official Languages Act. This report discusses these policies, relevant court decisions nationwide, and the influence of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. An overview of the ASL and LSQ Recognition Campaigns and statistics on sign language users in Canada follows.

Statuses of Sign Languages at the Provincial and Territorial Level

The report subsequently discusses provincial and territorial human rights policies, language policies (including language usage within public services and educational acts), and

accessibility legislations recognizing sign languages as the primary language of Deaf individuals. It also lists and explains relevant resolutions and private member bills recognizing ASL, LSQ, and Indigenous sign languages, which have been debated in various federal, territorial, and provincial legislatures.

The report provides an overview of environmental scans related to sign language curricula within the Ministry of Education, sign language services, programs, resources, and initiatives supporting students, post-secondary students, youth, and adults in learning and using sign languages as part of lifelong learning.

Lastly, the section explores legal documents related to case law decisions, legal citations, and human rights decisions accommodating sign language for Deaf individuals in public education, training, and services for effective learning and communication throughout Canada.

International Sign Language Policies

The report shares statistics and relevant research sources on the recognition of sign languages in policies worldwide. It explains the phenomenon of International Sign Language and summarizes the positions of the world Federation of the Deaf, along with its guidelines.

Key Recommendations

Recommendations are presented, starting in the international section and continuing in the recommendation section. These recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. **Amend Official Languages Act:** Propose the Canadian government to amend the Official Languages Act to include American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language (MSL), and Indigenous Sign Languages (ISLs) as primary languages for Deaf Canadians. This amendment supports the principles of the Accessible Canada Act and enhances data accuracy in censuses and surveys.

2. **Expand Definition of Official Languages:** Recommend the expansion of the Official Languages Act to encompass not only spoken languages (English and French) but also signed languages, Protactile language, written language, and other non-spoken forms like Braille, broadening inclusivity.
3. **International Commitment and Recognition:** Urge Canada to sign the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Charter of Sign Language Rights for All, aligning with international obligations and reinforcing its role as a leader in human and linguistic rights.
4. **Education and Resource Integration with WFD Principles:** Advocate for inclusion of sign language resources in public and educational programs, integrating principles from the WFD's 2023 position paper. This includes prioritizing Deaf individuals in the development and teaching of sign languages, establishing sign language teacher training curricula, and recognizing the valuable cultural contributions of Deaf communities to a diverse range of learners.
5. **Research and Curriculum Development:** Encourage research on the status and use of sign languages in Canada, conducted by university linguistics departments, and suggest the development of a comprehensive sign language curriculum for both academic and community levels.

These recommendations are aimed at enhancing the recognition, accessibility, and inclusion of sign languages in Canada, thereby supporting the well-being and linguistic rights of the Deaf community and contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.

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Introduction

Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD), a registered non-profit organization incorporated in 1973, represents the cultural interests of Canada's Deaf population and is recognized as one of Canada's national arts service organizations. CCSD has received numerous awards for its sign language(s) and Deaf arts productions, publications, and digital sign language programming (Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, 2023). Sign Language Institute Canada (SLIC) was established under the auspices of CCSD to strive for national standards in teaching American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes Québécoise (LSQ), and signed languages of Canadian Deaf Communities across Canada. CCSD along with SLIC has served and worked with and for people who are Deaf Canadians, non-Deaf Canadians learning and using sign languages, children, youth, and adult sign language learners of all levels for 50 years. CCSD now operates virtually across Canada.

Statistics Canada does not provide enough information about the numbers of immigrant persons using sign languages. In other words, this report notes a gap in research and data collection that may not include sign languages used by Deaf immigrants and their families and communities. Among the 38 million Canadians, CCSD represents approximately 38,000 Deaf Canadians that use sign language as their primary language as well as an additional 3.8 million Canadians who are second language learners, hard of hearing, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA), people with disabilities or aging individuals with different degrees of hearing learning and using sign language (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2021).

The exact numbers of sign languages used in Canada are not known, and valid collection of numbers of signers need to be done by Statistics Canada. There is little research on the status of sign language(s) including American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language (MSL), and Indigenous Sign Languages. Additional statistics

on the Canadian population learning and using sign language(s) (i.e., hearing babies, high school and post-secondary students, Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), interested citizens, Canadians with disabilities, Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened and DeafBlind individuals need to be collected. Information and data about individuals working in sign language related occupations such as sign language interpreters, sign language support workers, sign language interpreting students, sign language students, and educational assistants would be interesting and may be relevant.

This report is on the subject of sign languages in Canada, the numbers of Canadians learning and using sign languages, and the legal status of sign languages on federal, territorial, and provincial levels. To provide the clearest context for the forthcoming information, an introduction to the nature and cultural significance of sign languages is necessary. Sign languages are considered the language of Deaf people around the world as sign languages are accessible languages that Deaf people can easily acquire (Wheatley & Pabsch, 2012).

The distinction between “Deaf” with a capitalized “D” and “deaf” with a lowercase “d” is a convention established decades ago by Dr. James Woodward; the lowercase *deaf* refers to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the capitalized *Deaf* refers to a particular group of deaf people who share a culture and language (Padden & Humphries, 1988; Woodward, 1982). In Canada, there are many sign languages known and used by Deaf persons. Each sign language is accompanied by a heritage and culture shared across generations. In July 2004, the Deaf Canada Conference adopted the goal of amending American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes Québécoise (LSQ) to the Official Languages Act. This recommendation is supported by the Supreme Court of Canada’s Eldridge decision (Eldridge v. British Columbia, 1997).

Another distinction needs to be clarified here. *Signers in Canada* include those who are native signers, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA), children with disabilities, people who know—or

are learning–sign language, hard of hearing people, and aging individuals with hearing loss who are learning sign language (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2021). This report provides an overview of the current statistics/census on the numbers of Canadians and immigrant population learning and using Sign Language(s) in Canada and brings these statistics into conversation with broader knowledge of American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes Québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language (MSL), Indigenous Sign Languages (ISLs) and the current legal status of sign language(s) in Canada.

The purpose of this paper is to support the advancement of knowledge within the Government of Canada and the Governments of Provinces/Territories across Canada and by their officials with respect to the use of sign language(s) in Canada and current statistics/census of numbers of Canadians and immigrant populations learning and using sign language(s) in Canada. Through research and analysis that include literature reviews, an environmental scan, and community outreach/engagement, the present state of the use of sign language(s) among Canadian and immigrant populations will be explored. This report will assist all levels of government and other key stakeholders (i.e., businesses, not for profit organizations, colleges and universities) to address the barriers and gaps deaf persons face accessing sign language instructor training programs, sign language employment opportunities, and sign language services and resources, as well as to build capacity through the identification of best/promising practices.

International Congress on the Education of the Deaf

In 2010, the 21st International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) in Vancouver, BC, made history by rejecting the resolutions passed at the 2nd ICED conference held in Milan, Italy, in 1880 (World Federation of the Deaf [WFD], 2010). The original resolutions passed in Milan in 1880 forbade the use of Sign Language in the education for Deaf

children worldwide and promoted the exclusive use of speech and residual hearing using a teaching methodology called oralism (Moores, 2010). The updated resolutions, passed in Vancouver came to be known as the *New Era Accord*, and the ICED apologized for the detrimental effects that oralism has had on the Deaf population for 130 years (WFD, 2010).

The infamous 1880 resolutions from ICED Milan, Italy, have been described by many scholars and historians as an attempt at linguistic and cultural genocide as well as a systematic effort to institutionalize audism, the belief that to hear and speak is superior to being Deaf. The congress organizers in conjunction with the British Columbia Deaf community released the accord titled *A New Era: Deaf Participation and Collaboration* at the opening ceremony in Vancouver, B.C., on July 19, 2010. The *New Era Accord* rejected all the resolutions passed at the ICED Milan 1880 Congress, which denied the inclusion of sign language in educational programs for Deaf students. The New Era Accord acknowledged and expressed sincere regret for the detrimental effects of the ICED Milan Congress of 1880 and called upon all nations to ensure that educational programs for the Deaf accept and respect all languages. The key milestones in legal recognition of Sign Languages in Canada and around the world are listed in a table in Appendix D.

History

Over the past 150 years, linguists have considered sign languages to be primitive and a component of a gestural communication. Today, we recognize that sign languages are truly natural languages (Woll, 2013). During the 18th century, ASL was used throughout the northeastern part of the United States and Canada which was influenced by Laurent Clerc, known as the first Deaf teacher at the American School for the Deaf, Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817 (Lucas & Valli, 1992). Clerc came to America from Institut National de Jeunes Sourds de Paris, France and accompanied Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. Fifteen Canadian Deaf students

attended the Hartford school and used American Sign Language. Clerc's influence on American sign language was clearly present as he trained Ronald MacDonald, a hearing man from Québec who then established the first Canadian school for deaf children in the city of Québec in 1831 (Carbin, 1996).

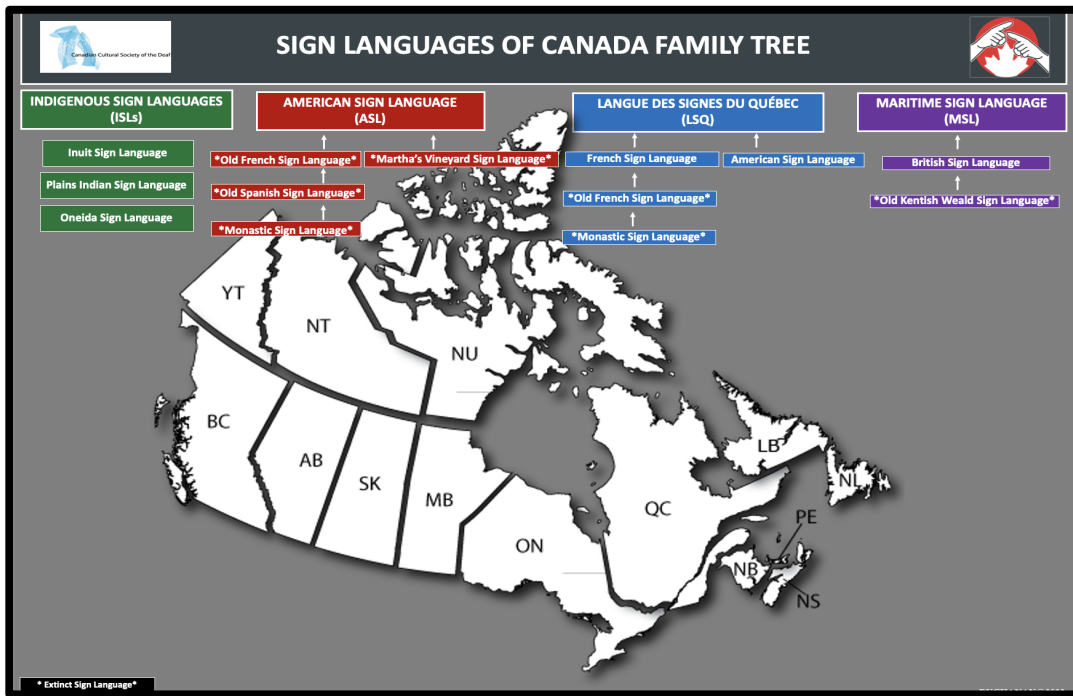
Quebec Sign Language, known in French as Langue des signes Québécoise (LSQ) emerged in Canada in the first part of the early 19th Century from the United States and France. LSQ is the predominant sign language of francophone Deaf communities in Canada, primarily in Quebec. LSQ is also used within communities in Northern Ontario and Acadian New Brunswick as well as certain other regions across Canada (Parisot & Rinfret, 2012). The emergence of LSQ coincided with the first deaf school in Quebec City in 1831 to instruct deaf children and adolescents. The instruction was mainly in a form of language contact with spoken French. During the early 20th century until the 1960s, the main language of instruction in the classroom in all schools for the Deaf was done via speech, however sign language was widely used outside of the classroom (Carbin, 1996).

Sign Languages in Canada

Several sign languages have emerged in Canada, including American Sign Language (ASL), Quebec Sign Language or Langue des signes Québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language (MSL), and Indigenous Sign Languages (ISLs). In addition to these sign languages, many Deaf persons immigrating to Canada whose primary languages are signed languages of their countries of origin are also included in the Deaf population in Canada.

Figure 1.

Sign Languages of Canada Family Tree



Deaf Canadians and non-Deaf Canadians are learning and using sign language. This includes many sign language learners of all ages learning a first and second sign language. Today, we have 38 million Canadians with approximately 38,000 Deaf Canadians using sign language as their primary language and an additional 3.8 million Canadians learning sign language as their second language. Second language learners such as hard of hearing, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA), children with disabilities, aging individuals with hearing loss are learning how to use sign language (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2021).

Figure 2.

Deaf Communities and Sign Languages of Canada

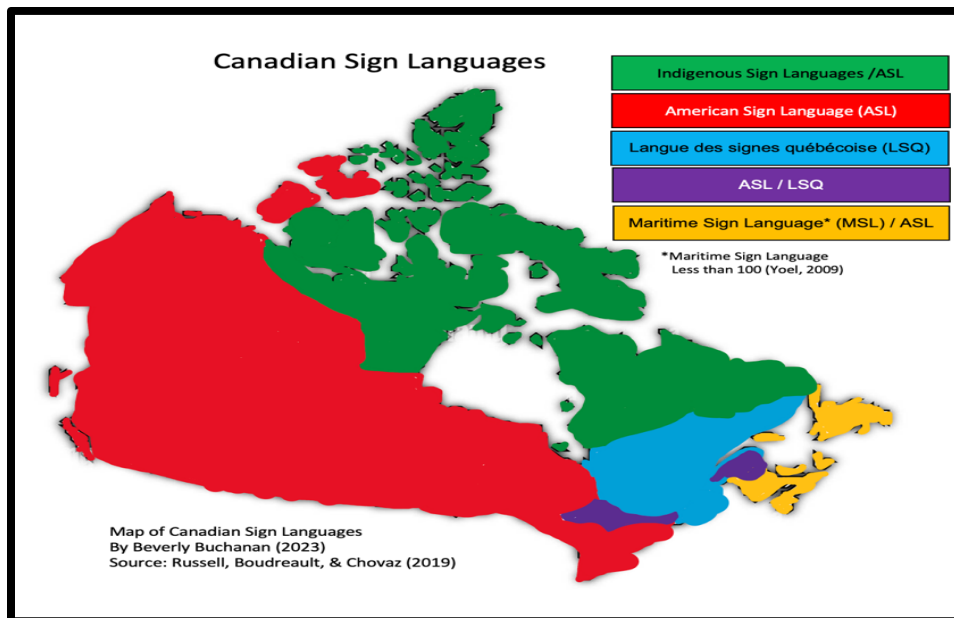
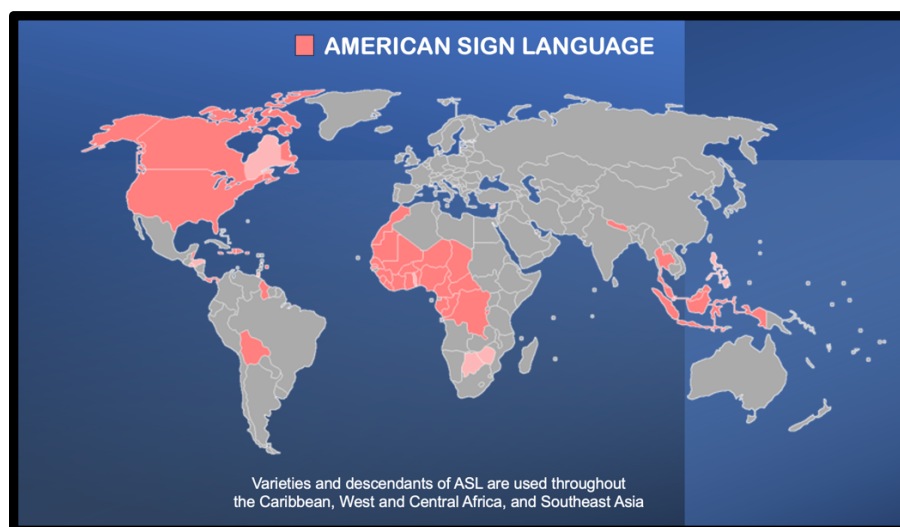


Figure 3.

American Sign Language Map



American Sign Language

American Sign Language (ASL) is a language used by Deaf people throughout North America. Sign languages are distinct from and are fully formed visual languages (Luski, 1994). ASL has its own sign order and its own rules of grammar through visual language. ASL does not depend on linear production as do spoken languages in which one word follows another in a time sequence since ASL can incorporate two or more concepts simultaneously in space (Neisser, 1990). The development of ASL in North America was influenced by the method of teaching of Deaf educator Laurent Clerc who had come to America from Paris, France to aid Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet in establishing a school for Deaf students in the United States in 1817. Through a combination of French Sign Language (*langue des signes française*, LSF) and pre-existing sign languages developed by Deaf persons in the New England region (including Martha's Vineyard Sign Language), American Sign Language was born (DawnSignPress, 2016). As schools for the Deaf were established across the United States and Canada in the 19th Century, ASL spread as the primary language of instruction for Deaf students and Deaf teachers.

Deaf teachers were also sign language models for Deaf students whose parents were hearing and/or did not sign (ASL Fact Sheet: See Appendix A)

Langue des signes québécoise

Figure 4.

Map of Langue des signes québécoise



Quebec Sign Language or langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) is used in Quebec and other francophone regions of Canada. While previously called “Langue des signes canadiens-français” (French-Canadian sign language), a Deaf man by the name of Raymond Dewar, who was a political advocate of the Deaf community, coined the term “Langue des signes québécoise” in the 1980s (Lachance, 2002; as cited in Parisot et al., 2015).

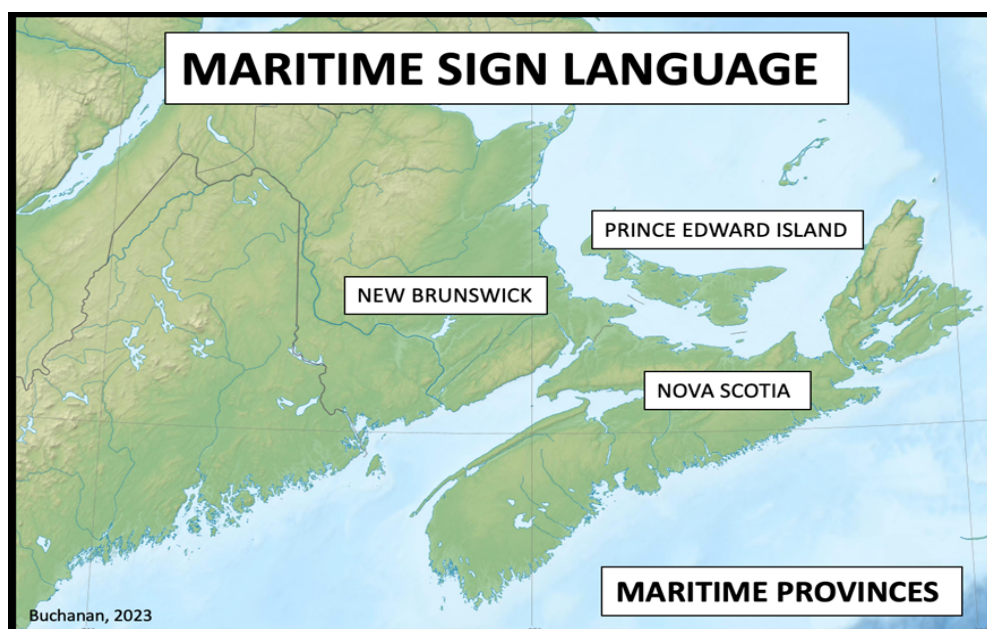
Historically, LSQ has been influenced by ASL due to geographic and cultural proximity of communities of ASL users, and by LSF as schools for the Deaf were staffed by teachers who studied with Laurent Clerc and who brought LSF to schools for the Deaf in the United States (Parisot et al., 2015). While there is language contact between LSQ and ASL as well as spoken French and English, LSQ is its own distinct sign language. The emergence of LSQ coincided

with the first Deaf school in Québec City established in 1831 to instruct deaf children and adolescents (Carbin, 1996). At that time, the language of instruction of that institution was French. Until the 1960s, the main language of instruction was spoken French; however, LSQ was widely used outside of the classroom (Carbin, 1996). In the 1990s, a non-profit organization, the Metropolitan Montréal Deaf Community Center [Centre de la Communauté Sourde du Montréal Métropolitain] (CCSMM) had several objectives, including: to have LSQ recognized as the official language of the francophone Deaf community in Québec; and to establish a school that used LSQ as the primary language of instruction (Carbin, 1996). (LSQ Fact Sheet: See Appendix B).

Maritime Sign Language

Figure 5.

Map of the Provinces that use Maritime Sign Language



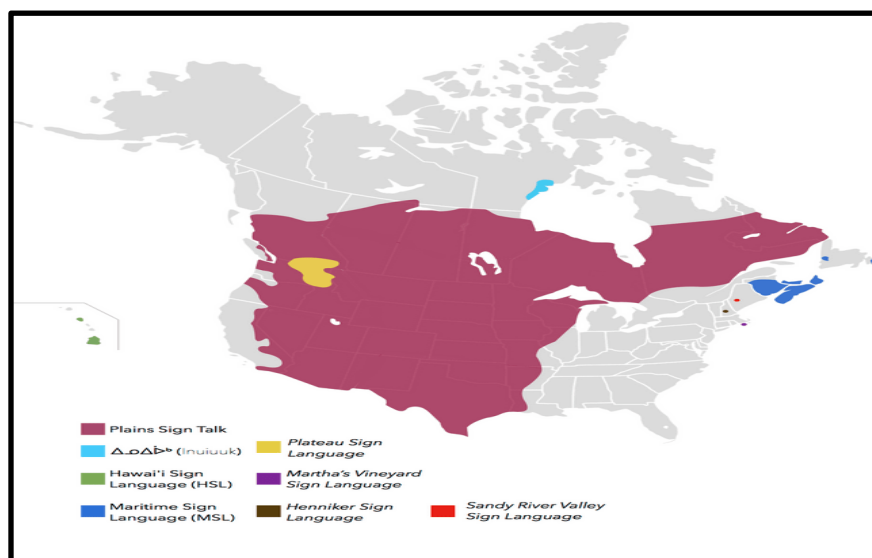
Maritime Sign Language (MSL) is used in the Atlantic provinces of Canada and emerged around the 17th century (Buchanan, 2021) and the root of MSL is from British Sign Language due to the historical immigration from the United Kingdom to the region in the 18th and 19th

centuries. ASL and BSL are distinct signed languages and belong to two different sign language families (Yoel, 2009). Due to the spread of ASL through the majority of Deaf communities in Canada, there are fewer MSL users compared to ASL or LSQ users; thus, MSL is considered an Endangered Sign Language (Buchanan, 2021). However, the language and culture of MSL users contribute significantly to the diversity, history, and heritage of Canada's Deaf communities. Furthermore, the dialect of ASL that is signed in the Atlantic provinces is greatly influenced by MSL (MSL Fact Sheet: See Appendix C).

Indigenous Sign Languages in Canada

Figure 6.

Map of Indigenous Sign Languages



Long before the development of ASL or LSQ in North America, Indigenous people used sign languages such as Plateau Sign Language, Inuit Sign Language, and Plains Indian Sign Language (Perley, 2020). Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL) is still known by some Dakota, Cree, Blackfoot, and others in Canada, Deaf and hearing. PISL was developed by Deaf individuals and their families on the Great Plains, and its use spread as a lingua franca across Turtle Island as a means of communication between Indigenous nations that spoke different

languages (Davis, 2015). A young Indigenous Sign Language influenced by ASL and Plains Indian Sign Language is Oneida Sign Language (OSL) of the Oneida Nation of the Thames. Deaf members of this First Nation have been working with master Oneida language speakers to develop their sign language as a visual language that maintains a connection with the land and reflects their Iroquois culture and tradition (Oneida Language & Cultural Center, 2016).

Inuit Sign Language (IUR) is a rich language with a proud cultural history. The Inuit Societal Values (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit) are instilled and enacted through the use of sign language communication by many non-Deaf persons in Nunavut. This recognition and preservation of ISL has supported the revitalization of language and encourages future generations of sign language users in Nunavut. As put forth by the Canadian Deafness Research and Training Institute (CDRTI) in Montreal, Quebec, the recognition of ISL is equally important as recognizing the use of spoken and written Inuktitut languages which represent social, cultural, linguistic, and historical values. Further research into Indigenous Sign Languages is required to determine an accurate total number of ISLs known across the country and to discover in which communities they are used.

Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL). PISL is also known as Hand Talk, Plains Sign Talk, and First Nation Sign Language. PISL was a trade language that was once a lingua franca across central Canada, United States and northern Mexico. PISL was used for storytelling, oratory, various ceremonies, and by Deaf people. As a result of several factors, including the massive depopulation and the Americanization of Indigenous North Americans, the number of Plains Sign Talk speakers declined from European's arrival. In 1885, it was estimated that there were over 110,000 sign-talking Indians. There are few Plains Sign Talk speakers in the 21st century.

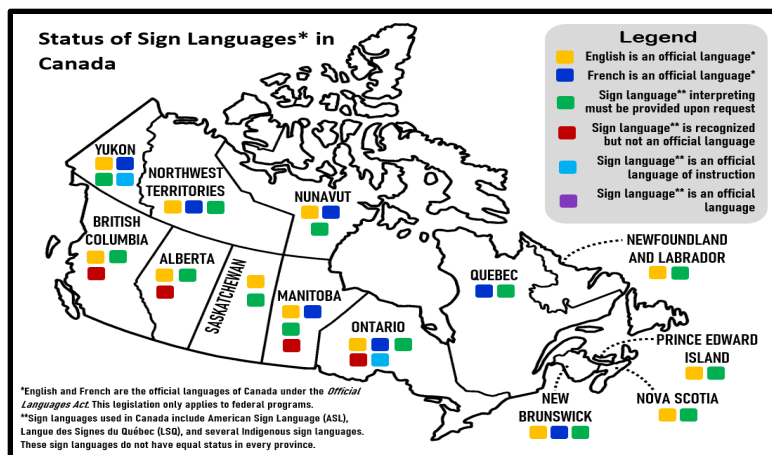
Oneida Sign Language (OSL). OSL is a relatively new sign language in Canada (Dawe, 2022). The OSL Project began in 2016 and the goal was to create a new sign language that would allow Deaf Oneida individuals to participate and immerse themselves in their own culture.

Inuit Sign Language (IUR). IUR is an Indigenous sign language in the northern part of Canada among Inuit communities. It is currently used within certain communities in Nunavut, particularly Baker Lake and Rankin Inlet. Although there is a possibility that it may be used in other places where Inuit live in the Arctic, there were an estimated 155 deaf residents of Nunavut in 2000, around 47 were thought to use IUR, while the rest use American Sign Language (ASL) due to schooling. It is unknown how many hearing people use the language, nor how many people are monolingual. As it is a highly endangered and a relatively hidden language, it has no protection under the federal or territorial governments of Canada. IUR has existed alongside ASL interpretation within the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut since 2008. There has been increased interest in the documentation of the language which would be done through the Nunavut Council for People with Disabilities and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC).

FEDERAL

Legal Status of Sign Language in Canada

Figure 7. Map showing Statuses of Sign Languages in Canada



The Government of Canada has recognized American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), and Indigenous Sign Languages and they have created a Bill C-81 which is an act to ensure there will be a barrier free with communication access in Canada (Employment & Social Development Canada, 2019). The Accessible Canada Act recognizes sign languages as primary languages of Deaf Canadians. The Government of Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2018), the Supreme Court of Canada's Eldridge Decision (1997), and the Federal Court of Canada Canadian Association of the Deaf Decision (2006) have all contributed to the federal recognition of sign languages.

Currently, ASL and LSQ are recognized as official languages under the Ontario Education Act through Ontario's K-12 ASL/LSQ Curriculum as first language (L1) for the study of language and Ontario's 9-12 ASL/LSQ Curriculum as Second Language (L2) for the study of language. The Provinces of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have addressed ASL and Deaf Culture Curriculum within their Ministries of Education. In the context of the Accessible Canada Act, the topic of sign language recognition first emerged in December 2016 media reports, which stated there are two sign languages used by Canadian people who are "medically deaf": ASL and LSQ. However, when Bill C-81 was first introduced in the House of Commons on 20 June 2018, it did not mention sign language, despite lobbying by the Canadian Association of Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC). In fact, sign language recognition was not included in the text of Bill C-81 until 13 May 2019, when the Senate passed the bill with amendments that included the addition of the following clarification to the section titled "Purpose of the Act".

On May 3, 2019, Don Davies, M.P. Vancouver Kingsway, British Columbia, introduced his motion in his private member bill M-236 –Sign Languages as Official Languages of Canada.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should recognize American Sign Language (ASL), langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), and Indigenous Sign Language (ISL) as official languages of Canada. On July 11, 2019, the Government of Canada passed the Accessible Canada Act which recognized American Sign Language, langue des signes québécoise, and Indigenous Sign Languages as the primary languages of Deaf persons in Canada. The purpose of the Act is to make Canada barrier-free by the deadline of January 1, 2040, in the areas of employment, communication, the procurement of goods and services, the design and delivery of programs and services, transportation, and more (Government of Canada, 2020).

The Indigenous Languages Act (Bill C-91) received royal assent on the same day as the Accessible Canada Act. Bill C-91 includes Indigenous sign languages within the purpose and direct scope of the Act to support and promote the use of Indigenous languages and support the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages. This legislation includes Indigenous sign language rights that include language education initiatives and teaching materials, research, funding, and monitoring by way of a Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. The legal recognition of Indigenous sign languages in Canada is now much stronger than legislation that recognizes ASL and LSQ and perhaps stronger than most sign language recognition that exists elsewhere in the world (Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019a, 2019b).

In 2022, Heritage Canada of Official Languages ran public consultations between May 24 and August 31 to determine whether the objectives and initiatives of *Action Plan 2018-2023* are still appropriate given the changing linguistic landscape across the country (Government of Canada, 2022). The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf responded and participated in these public consultations to address the Action Plan's successes and challenges in regard to meeting

the needs of Deaf persons of Canada who use primary languages with ASL, LSQ, and Indigenous Sign Languages (CCSD, 2022).

Legal Citations:

Supreme Court of Canada's Eldridge and Federal Court of Canada's Canadian Association of the Deaf Decisions.

The Supreme Court of Canada's Eldridge decision (1997), and Federal Court of Canada's Canadian Association of the Deaf (2006) decision have clearly impacted accessibility not only in medical settings but all public services, private services and not for profit organizations that received public funding from government in municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal levels across Canada. All human rights cases from provincial, territorial, and federal human rights commissions across Canada, and case laws do provide support to Deaf people who have filed complaints with human rights commissions or civil cases via private law firms in the courts. Deaf individuals do have victories in favor of their Deaf rights and the rights of Parents of Deaf children which actually have happened in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador on the Human Rights Case with the Churchill decision.

The following key highlights include legal decisions that the Canadian Association of the Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC) has used from the Canadian legal system to advance jurisprudence on the following issues:

- Eldridge v. British Columbia. (1997). Deaf people do have rights to get interpreters in any medical setting as a decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed the right of Deaf Canadians to accessible services in medical and health care
- Vlug v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp. (2000). This decision was made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and became a landmark in establishing our right to captioning of

all broadcast material. A first legal decision of this kind in the world, the complainant, Henry Vlug, was a former president of CAD-ASC and a Deaf lawyer in Canada.

- Canadian Assn. of the Deaf v. Canada. (2006). James Roots, Gary Malkowski, Barbara La Grange, & Mary Lou Cassie were the participants with the Federal court that ruled that the federal government must provide interpreters for Deaf employees or non-employees for any meetings. The court issued three declarations:
 - a) Where a deaf or hard of hearing person receives services or participates in programs administered by the Government of Canada, sign language interpreters are to be provided.
 - b) Where the Government of Canada engages in public or private consultations with non-governmental organizations in the development of policy and programs in which the deaf and hard of hearing have identifiable interests, sign language interpreters must be provided where organizations of deaf and hard of hearing people wish to be involved.
 - c) In the above circumstances, the Government of Canada is responsible for the cost of access.

Federal Court legal proceedings such as Eldridge in 1997, Vlug v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp. in 2000, and Canadian Assn. of the Deaf v. Canada. (2006) as well as decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada were victorious moments for people who are Deaf, late-deafened, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing.

Communications With Political Parties and Committees

In communications with the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) has recommended the inclusion of signed languages in the proposed Bill C-13, An Act to Amend the Official Languages Act (Bill C-13, 2022). ASL, LSQ, MSL, and ISLs become fully developed rule-governed languages used by signing communities

across Canada (CCSD, 2022). The recognition of spoken, written, and signed official languages is in alignment with the Government of Canada's formal ratification of the UNCRPD (UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) as of on March 11, 2010, with United Nations Treaty Collection (United Nations Treaty Collections, 2022). This ratification includes the convention's definition of "language" which includes spoken languages such as English and French, signed languages like ASL, LSQ, and ISLs, and other forms of non-spoken languages of Pro tactile signed languages of Deaf-blind persons (United Nations, 2022).

Recognition of signed languages as official languages of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Canada will enable such individuals to have equal access to federal government information and services. An example of the above was led by René Arsenault, a chair of the standing committee on official languages with the Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf. The proposal was to have sign language videos accessible with the federal government websites in ASL and LSQ translations, to provide ASL and LSQ video interpreting at federal government services, and to include ASL and LSQ instruction for learners of sign language as a second language for federal employees who seek to communicate effectively with federal public services customers who use sign language (OCSD, 2022). Additionally, the proposal included provisions of ASL-English or LSQ-French interpreting services between constituents who are Deaf using ASL or LSQ when meeting with their MPs or Senators at Parliament Hill or their constituency offices. Picture-in-picture of ASL and LSQ interpretation services are recommended to be included on broadcast television programs and digital communications during the Period of Oral Questionings and Proceedings in the House of Commons, or during emergency alert announcements; and other relevant services. This recommendation is supported by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 14 and 15; the Canadian Human Rights Act; the Accessible Canada Act; as well as the aforementioned CRPD (OCSD, 2022).

ASL and LSQ Recognition Campaign

ASL and LSQ are not yet recognized at the federal level in Canada even though sign languages appear in several provincial government legislation including the UN CRPD that Canada had ratified in 2010 (United Nations, n.d.). The Canadian Association of the Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC) has been campaigning to get it recognized to ensure equality of communication access for Canadian Deaf people. Achieving the recognition of ASL and LSQ as an official status would allow access for Deaf people to fully participate as citizens of their own country. Signed language is mentioned as a language in the introduction to the CRPD. Signed language and Deaf culture is used in four of the fifty articles within the CRPD that came into force in 2007. These four articles are:

- Article 9: Accessibility;
- Article 21: Access to Information;
- Article 24: Education; and
- Article 30: Recreation (United Nations, 2022).

The Recognition Campaign continues to fight for ASL and LSQ to be recognized and to ensure that there will be more legal rights for ASL and LSQ users; better access to public services; better education for Deaf individuals across elementary school, high school, training and post-secondary school; better employment opportunities for Deaf people; improved mental health and supports; better interpreting quality and monitoring; and to improve the quality of lives of Deaf people in Canada.

Statistics of Sign Languages in Canada

Historically, the population of Deaf and hard of hearing persons in Canada has been estimated by Deaf organizations and by Statistics Canada in different ways. The formula presently used to estimate these populations has been utilized by The Canadian Association of

the Deaf -Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC) as well as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) (CAD-ASC, 2015; CRTC, 2012). This formula calculates 10% of the overall population to be deaf. Table 1 presents the estimated Deaf and hard of hearing population based on Canadian population growth between 2016 and 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2022) using the aforementioned formula utilized by CAD-ASC and CRTC and indicates a population of over 380,000 Deaf persons across the country.

Table 1.

2022 Canadian Population: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Statistics

Province/Territory	Population	Deaf ASL/LSQ	Profound Deaf	Hard of Hearing
Canada	38,929,902	38,929	389,299	3,892,990
British Columbia	5,286,528	5,286	52,865	528,652
Alberta	4,543,111	4,543	45,431	454,311
Saskatchewan	1,194,803	1,194	11,948	119,480
Manitoba	1,390,249	1,390	13,902	139,024
Ontario	15,007,816	15,007	150,078	1,500,781
Quebec	8,487,628	8,487	84,876	848,762
Newfoundland/Labrador	525,972	525	5,259	52,597
New Brunswick	800,243	800	8,002	80,024
Prince Edward Island	170,688	170	1,706	17,068
Nova Scotia	1,002,586	1,002	10,025	100,258
Nunavut	39,589	39	395	3,958
Northwest Territories	45,605	45	456	4,560
Yukon	43,744	43	437	4,374

Identifying Deaf Canadians who use sign language, data was generated by Statistics Canada focusing on getting the information on the population growth and a formula was used by CRTC and CAD-ASC. During the CRTC Feasibility Study Report (2012) commissioned by Bell

Canada Mission Consulting Inc, they used a formula that calculate.01 percent with 34,000,000 Canadian Population to identify Deaf Canadians who use sign language. (See table 2 on Phase 9 of the Final Report of the Feasibility of Video Relay Services -VRS).

Table 2.

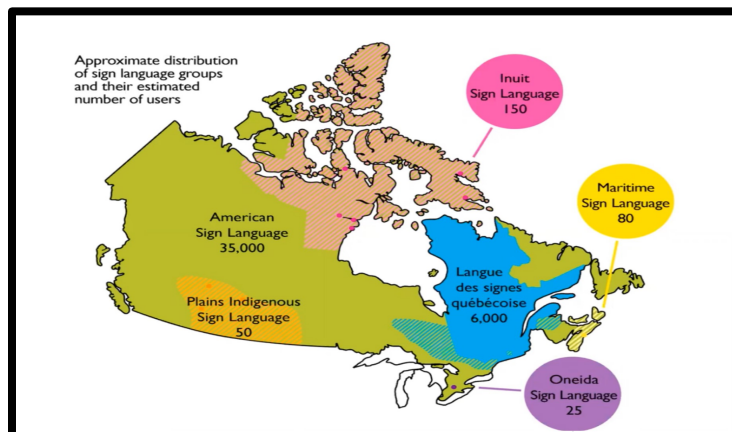
Canadian Demographic Estimates

Total 2010 Canadian population	34,100,000
Total population in Canada with some form of hearing loss	3,400,000
Total population identified as profoundly Deaf in Canada	340,000
Total sign language users (as primary language, both ASL and LSQ)	34,000
Total potential ASL VRS users in Canada	26,100
Total potential LSQ VRS users in Canada	7,900
Total reported sign language Interpreters in Canada	782
Total reported ASL interpreters in Canada	599
Total reported LSQ interpreters in Canada	183

See a map that reflects an estimate of Deaf persons who use sign language including ASL, LSQ, and Indigenous Sign Languages across the provinces and territories of Canada.

Figure 8.

Known Sign Languages in Canada



As of October 2022, there is limited data regarding the number of ISLs presently in use and their distributions across Canada. Above is a Canadian map of the approximate distribution of known sign languages across the country, created by the Canadian Language Museum's exhibit *Sign Languages of Canada* (2022).

As these estimates are only for Deaf persons, there is currently no data regarding the families of Deaf individuals who also use sign language to communicate, nor is there data regarding the many Deaf individuals who immigrate to Canada and bring with them their language and culture. Furthermore, the signed languages included in surveys and national censuses are ASL and LSQ; this exclusion of other signed languages that are used by Deaf people in Canada (such as Maritime Sign Language or Inuit Sign Language) results in the marginalization of these linguistic communities. Further research and the expansion of the scope of surveys is necessary in order to gather accurate information regarding the total number of Canadians who know and use sign languages.

CAD-ASC Position Paper on Statistics on Deaf Canadians

Statistics on Deaf Canadians are hard to collect, and no two organizations seem to agree on the numbers involved. It is the opinion of the CAD-ASC that no fully credible census of Deaf, late-deafened, and hard of hearing people has ever been conducted in Canada. Attempts in the surveys to distinguish between deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing people by measuring the ability or inability to hear within the context of “conversation with one person” and “group conversation”, are in reality meaningless to all three groups. In fact, by this measure, Deaf people could qualify as the “most hearing” of the three categories, because their conversations (whether with one person or with groups) are usually with other Deaf people in Sign language, resulting in problem-free communication!

The CAD-ASC filed a human rights complaint against Statistics Canada on all of these matters in 2008. A resolution was achieved in 2009, which, if it had been implemented, would have resulted in greatly improved accuracy in deafness-related statistics, as well as increased accessibility of information from the agency. Unfortunately, before the agreement could be fully implemented, the federal government eliminated both the “long form” Canada Census and the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), effectively destroying all hopes of obtaining reasonably accurate statistics about Deaf people in Canada.

With strong disclaimers as to the dependability and accuracy of any data, then, the CAD-ASC considers that there are approximately 357,000 profoundly Deaf Canadians and possibly 3.21 million hard of hearing Canadians (Canadian Association of the Deaf, 2015).

Statistics Canada Census of the Population

The censuses of the Canadian population of the years 2016 and 2021 recognized ASL and LSQ; however, if an individual responding to the census used another signed language or did not specify which sign language, it was recorded and collected under the category of “Sign Language, n.i.e.” where “n.i.e.” is a contraction of “not indicated elsewhere” (Statistics Canada, 2019). It can be only assumed that included in such a category are Indigenous Sign Languages, Maritime Sign Language, and other sign languages of the countries of origin known and used by Deaf persons and their families who have immigrated to Canada.

The following section presents data regarding sign language as reported in the Census of Population collected in 2011, 2016, and 2021. Statistics Canada just released the 2021 Census of Population on November 30, 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2022) including a table that has information on the use of sign languages at work by industry sector.

Table 3.

Languages used at Work

Language used at work	Single & multiple responses of language used at work	Single responses of language used at work	Multiple responses of language used at work
Sign Languages	8,245	860	7,380
American Sign Language	6,540	735	5,805
Quebec Sign Language	975	80	895
Sign languages, n.i.e.	895	55	840

Signed Languages as a Mother Tongue in Canada

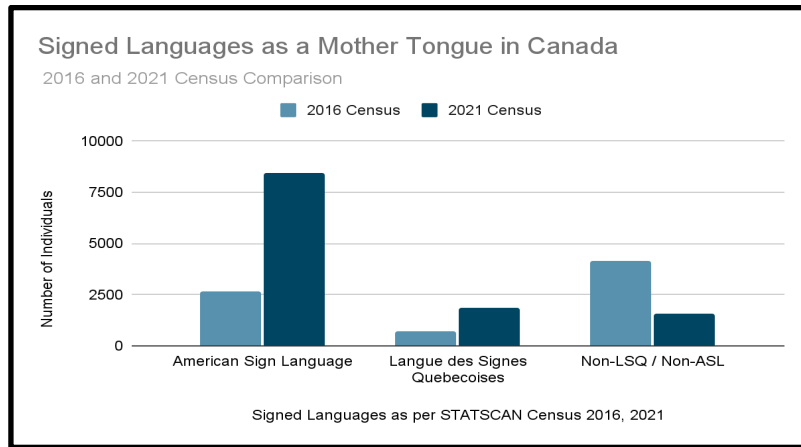
According to Statistics Canada (2022b):

Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data was collected. If the person no longer understands the first language learned, the mother tongue is the second language learned. For a person who learned more than one language at the same time in early childhood, the mother tongue is the language this person spoke most often at home before starting school. (para. 1)

The number of Canadians who reported their mother tongue (or one of their mother tongues) as ASL in 2016 was 2,685, and in the 2021 census this number more than tripled to 8,420 Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022). LSQ has also experienced an increase: from 695 Canadians reporting LSQ as their mother tongue in 2016, to 1,855 in 2021, which is an increase of more than double. Conversely, the number of respondents to the Canadian census that reported a signed language that was not ASL or LSQ decreased significantly from 4,120 to 1,575 (Statistics Canada, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022a).

At this time, there is limited data regarding the knowledge and usage of ISLs in Canada. Future censuses would benefit from the recognition of ISLs in Canada in order to paint a clearer picture of the diversity of sign languages present in Canada.

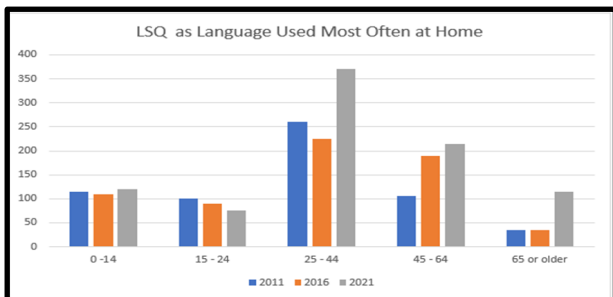
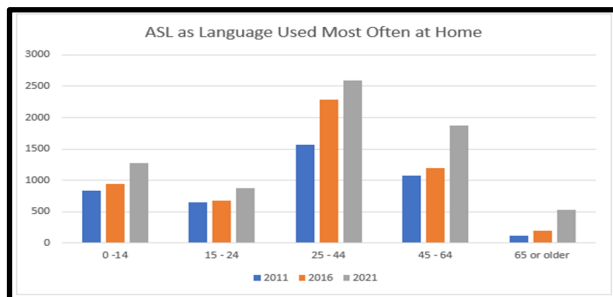
Figure 9. Signed Languages as a Mother Tongue in Canada



Sign Languages Used at Home in Canada

In comparison to data from the 2011 Census and 2021 Census, the average number of persons whose language most often used in the home reported as ASL has had an average increase of 68.6% across age groups over the course of 10 years. Between the 2011 & 2021 census, the average number of persons in Canada (mainly in Quebec) who reported LSQ as the language used most often in the home increased from 615 to 895 (45% increase over a period of 10 years).

Figures 10 & 11. ASL & LSQ used at Home

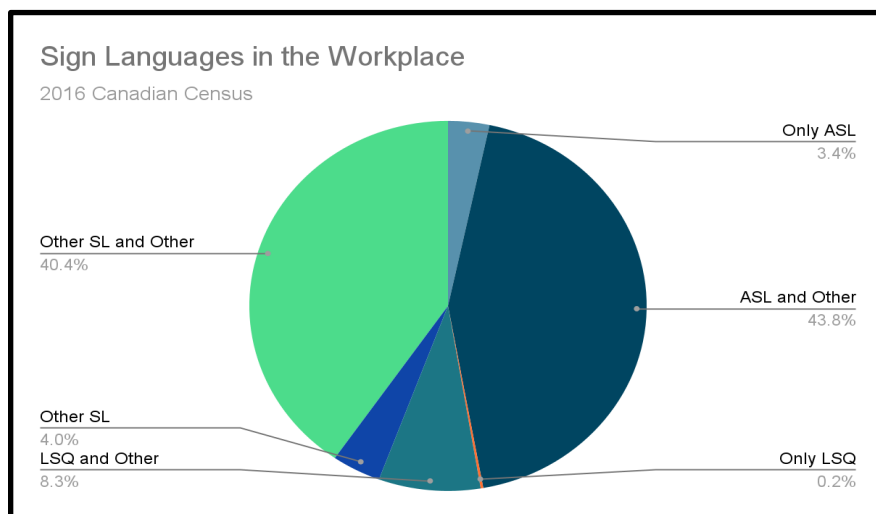


Sign Language in Canadian Workplace

In the 2016 census, a total of 11,725 Canadians in the workforce reported using sign languages in the workplace (Statistics Canada, 2019). Of this count, 5,550 reported American Sign Language as a language of their workplace, 1,000 reported langue des signes québécoise as a language of their workplace, and 5,220 reported a signed language that was not ASL nor LSQ as a language they use in their workplace (Statistics Canada, 2019).

In the pie chart below, sign languages reported as a language used in the workplace are shown as the sole language of the workplace and as one of at least two languages of the workplace (Statistics Canada, 2019). As the sign language industry grows with the population of persons who know and use sign language, more employment opportunities arise including but not limited to sign language instructors, Deaf educators / teachers of the Deaf, sign language interpreters, and intervenors. Such examples are fields in which sign language is central to the occupation; however, there are countless occupations that Deaf and hard of hearing persons may hold that expand the reach and necessity for recognition of sign languages as primary languages of the Deaf in Canada, federally and provincially.

Figure 12. Sign Languages in the Workplace



Knowledge of Sign Languages in Canada

According to the 2021 Census, 51,265 persons in Canada have knowledge of signed language (Statistics Canada, 2022). However, across Canada there is no consistent recognition of sign languages as primary languages of Deaf persons nor as the language of instruction for Deaf students. The rights and recognitions of these languages and cultures of Deaf persons across Canada are not consistently protected by legislatures between provinces and territories.

Canadian Charter of Freedoms and Rights & Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms

In addition to ASL/LSQ law and resolutions, there are a few other laws in Canada and the Provinces that are specific to the Deaf.

Interpreters

Canada is the only known country in the world to have the word “Deaf” in its constitution. Section 14 of the Charter of Rights states a party or witness in any proceedings who does not understand or speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted or who is deaf has the right to the assistance of an interpreter. Quebec’s Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms provides in section 36 that every accused person has a right to be assisted free of charge by an interpreter if he does not understand the language used at the court or if he is Deaf.

While there are a few laws in Canada that are specific to Deaf people, there are many laws of general application that impact Deaf individuals and the Deaf community. Most significant of these laws are the equality laws. The Charter is applicable to the government and its interaction with people. The Charter has no application to non-governmental actions. The human rights legislation does apply to both government and non-government actions. The Charter and the Human Rights laws are powerful and should provide all the protection that Deaf people need. The Supreme Court of Canada’s Eldridge decision in 1997, Federal Court of

Canada's Canadian Association of the Deaf decision during 2006 and BC Human Rights case, Howard v. UBC in 1993, states all levels of government and non-government actions such as universities are legally obligated to a duty to accommodate Deaf persons who require sign language interpreting services for public health services and education services. Universities are required to provide sign language interpreters for their Deaf students if the students cannot get another party such as Vocational Rehabilitation to pay (Howard v UBC, 1993).

CANADIAN PROVINCES

By 1993, only three provinces had officially recognized ASL as a language of Deaf Canadians: Manitoba and Alberta governments passed resolutions to recognize ASL as the language of the Deaf community and the Ontario government recognized ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction. It should be noted, however, that resolutions are not binding upon the provincial governments (Carbin, 1996; Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019).

Deaf people from many different countries need official recognition of their official languages. As part of our human rights, often we find a lack of recognition with sign languages as official languages which cause linguistic ethnocide with other cultures. Often children's native language is not recognized in classrooms, vital to transmit knowledge to our future generation (Parisot & Rinfret, 2012). In the past 20 years, although some provinces and territories have made steps toward the recognition of sign language, Deaf children and adults across Canada do not have equal access to education and other enjoyments of societal participation.

British Columbia

Prior to 2021, there had been no legislature on the subject of sign language in British Columbia. On June 17, 2021, the province recognized sign languages including, but not limited to, American Sign language and Indigenous Sign Languages as the primary languages of Deaf citizens of British Columbia (Accessible British Columbia Act, 2021). This recognition,

however, does not include the right to access schooling in which sign language is the language of instruction.

Alberta

On June 19, 1990, Alberta became the second province to recognize ASL as the primary language of Deaf Albertans and as a language of instruction to be available in elementary and secondary schools (Carbin, 1996). Motion 216, a proposal regarding the language of the Deaf community presented by William Edward Payne, Progressive Conservative Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Fish Creek, was agreed upon unanimously. This motion mentioned that the Legislative Assembly urge the government, given the cultural uniqueness of Alberta's Deaf community and the linguistic uniqueness of American Sign Language, to recognize American Sign Language as a language of the Deaf in Alberta, and to incorporate it into Alberta's grade school and postsecondary curriculum as an available language of instruction. (Carbin, 1996). The province's *Education Act* permits an educational board to authorize a non-English language as a language of instruction (Province of Alberta, 2022); however, it does not specify sign language.

Saskatchewan

In the Ryley Farnham case from 2005 in Moose Jaw, SK. Judge Orr stated that:

The witnesses who appeared before the Court, and the persons in authority of whom the Court heard, physicians and medical personnel, audiologists, educators, child protection workers, and others, are undoubtedly caring and capable professionals. It was also clear that, throughout, as they should, these people acted in strict accordance with the policies, directives, and mandates of the governmental or other bodies for whom they work. (par. 5 as cited in Snoddon, 2009a, p. 122)

Judge Orr also ruled that:

A massive commitment must be made to teach [R.A.F.] American Sign Language. The present regimen of one hour-per-day instruction by a woman who is not a qualified sign language teacher, and who is herself just learning sign, is inadequate... must be provided with a qualified teacher of American Sign Language, ... The window is already beginning to close, and immediate action is required. (par. 25-49 as cited in Snoddon, 2009b, p. 259)¹

On November 3, 2014, the Hansard (parliamentary debates) shows Mr. Forbes speaking of his experience at the Western Conference on ASL he attended the month prior:

“All of the deaf community advocacy groups all want to see ASL officially recognized as a language of instruction here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I hope that all members will join me in supporting this very important cause.”

While Mr. Forbes continues to speak out on the recognition of Sign language, he gets a denial documented in this April 11, 2017, Hansard:

There’s been a lot made of just the recognition of American Sign Language as a heritage language. Are you prepared to recognize that as a language of instruction?”

Don Morgan responds with: “...But no, I’m not going to make a specific declaratory position here today without a lot of due consideration and a lot of discussion with the Human Rights Commission and understanding . . .²

On November 6, 2018, Hansard has Mr. Forbes rallying to recognize ASL, ISL and LSQ as an official language of instruction: “Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would ask all members to join me in supporting this very worthwhile mission of ensuring ASL, ISL, and LSQ become

¹ <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/27L4S/141103Debates.pdf>

² <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Committees/HUS/Debates/170411Debates-HUS.pdf>

official languages of instruction here in Canada and someday here in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.”³

Bill 103-The Accessible Saskatchewan Act was introduced in the Legislature in December 2022. In Bill 103, Part 2 outlines Sign Language, Accessibility Plans including Recognition of sign languages. Sign languages are recognized as the primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Saskatchewan, including, without limitation: (a) American Sign Language; and (b) Indigenous sign languages.

The Saskatchewan Hansard dated March 7, 2023, calls to amend Bill 103 to include LSQ: American Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages are being codified as the primary languages for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Is there more that this legislation could do? Absolutely. This is just a start. We know that this legislation will need to be reviewed and will need to be added to as we continue to build a more inclusive society. And I would really hope that future iterations include amendments that will include Quebec Sign Language, recognition for francophone hard-of-hearing communities here in Saskatchewan.⁴

Bill 103, the Accessible Canada Act received Royal Assent on May 17, 2023.^{5 6}

According to The Education Regulations effective October 10, 2019, no educational institution may provide 100% instruction in a language other than English beyond the level of grade 3 unless it has received approval of bilingual English and French immersion programming (Saskatchewan Regulations, 2019). Sign languages have yet to be recognized as a language of

³ <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/28L3S/181106Debates.pdf>

⁴ <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/29L3S/20230307Debates.pdf>

⁵ <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Minutes/29L3S/230517Minutes.pdf>

⁶ YouTube video of Bill 103, the Accessible Saskatchewan Act, Royal Assent being announced
<https://youtu.be/HJvpzG0MCDA>

instruction or as the primary language for Deaf persons in the province (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015).

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission Report on Deaf, deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing People: A Report to Stakeholder Report Part 1 (2016) described the challenges faced by D/deaf and hard of hearing communities and proposed 15 specific issues to be addressed.

“Access to and Equality for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing People: Update to Stakeholder 2021” Report Part 2 including Deaf Indigenous Issues⁷ summarized successes during the past four years and highlights outstanding challenges still faced by D/deaf and hard of hearing communities.

Saskatchewan Child and Youth Advocate’s The Silent World of Jordan Report⁸ described Jordan, a deaf young indigenous boy experienced language deprivation and formal sign language was limited. The report highlighted the review of challenges and limited services Jordan received provided by the Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing, Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, Courts and Tribunals Division, and Agency Chiefs Child & Family Services Inc.

Manitoba

In 1988, Manitoba was the first province to officially recognize ASL as the language of the Deaf community (Carbin, 1996). The following resolution statement was passed unanimously by the Manitoba legislature as it mentioned that Canada takes pride in its cultural mosaic and officially endorse the policy of multiculturalism. Deaf Manitobans view themselves as a distinct community with their own language, customs and values; and ASL is distinctive, with its own grammar and rules of usage, thereby making it the true and complete first language of Deaf. Deaf Manitobans are entitled to the full advantages and privileges of citizenship. The

⁷ <https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/systemic-advocacy/d-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-advocacy/>

⁸ <https://www.saskadvocate.ca/assets/the-silent-world-of-jordan-public-report-june-15-2016-0.pdf>

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognizes the cultural uniqueness of Deaf Manitobans by recognizing American Sign Language as the language of the Deaf in Manitoba (Carbin, 1996).

Ontario

In 1993, Ontario became the third province to recognize ASL, and the first province to recognize both ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction for Deaf students via Bill 4, an amendment to the Ontario Education Act. An earlier bill (Bill 112), which would have made ASL and LSQ heritage languages of the Deaf community and languages of instruction, was moving successfully through the legislative process until the September 1990 general elections thereafter a new political party gained control, and Bill 112 lost its support. (Carbin, 1996).

In April 1993, Bill 4 was introduced and on July 29, 1993, Bill 4 was read and passed into law and became an amendment to the Ontario Education Act (Carbin, 1996). In correspondence with The Hon. Gary Malkowski, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and Training in 1993, Dr. Yerker Andersson, professor of the Department of Sociology at Gallaudet University, stated: I confirm that as far as I know, Ontario is the first province or state (not country) to specify American Sign Language and la langue des signes quebécois as languages of instruction for Deaf students (Personal communication, 1993). Dr Yerker Andersson developed such expertise as he served as a foreign news editor first in Sweden and later in the United States and as a long-time board member of the World Federation of the Deaf. Since 1949, he has visited deaf clubs in different countries around the world (Personal communication, 1993).

In 2007, MPP Ernie Parsons for Prince Edward-Hastings, introduced his private member's bill, Bill 213: An Act to Recognize Sign language as an official language in Ontario. This bill recognizes the inclusion of sign languages as official languages in Ontario in the courts,

education, public services and in the Legislative Assembly (Bill 213, 2007). Bill 213 was carried at its First Reading, and as of October 2022, it has not had a Second Reading.

Quebec

On March 14, 2013, the president of the Quebec Foundation of the Deaf (La Fondation des sourds du Québec, FSQ), Daniel Forgues, presented recommendations for Bill 14, An Act to amend the Charter of the French language, the Charter of human rights and freedoms and other legislative provisions, to have LSQ be recognized as the primary language of Deaf persons in Quebec and as a language of instruction for Deaf students (Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2013). With Forgues, assistant to the president, André Hallé, the president of La Société culturelle québécoise, Dominique Lemay, as well as Michel Lelièvre, who is a linguist specializing in study of LSQ presented a thesis on the subject of instruction in LSQ for Deaf children. This thesis discussed the importance and positive impact of LSQ education on Deaf children in Quebec and the preservation of LSQ and the culture of the LSQ Deaf community.

The Larose Commission Report (2001) recommended the following: Government should recognize LSQ as the primary language of instruction in a complementary LSQ/French bilingual relationship, and, if need be... section 72 of the Charter of the French Language be amended accordingly (Larose, 2001). The community, represented by the Société culturelle des sourds du Québec (SCQS), requested a progress report from the Office québécois des personnes handicapées (OPHQ). The application sought an independent measurement of Quebec's LSQ situation in order to support its recognition (Laroche 2001). This overview of the LSQ situation produced ten conclusions, five of which directly addressed school services and LSQ:

1. Acknowledge LSQ as a language of instruction
2. Assign school boards to structure the LSQ services offered
3. Require school boards to meet the LSQ service needs of deaf pupils

4. Promote a bilingual approach for deaf children who are learning LSQ
5. Offer LSQ lessons to pupils who use the oral/modality as their primary means of communication and who wish to join the Deaf community (cited in OPHQ) 2006, 43-46, our translation)

Two task forces were created by the OPHQ in order to follow through with its ten recommendations: a working committee on the recognition of LSQ (2006) and a working committee on the training and evaluation of SL interpreters (2005-2009). The Quebec Ministry of Education (MELS) has yet to recognize LSQ as a language of instruction (Parisot and Rinfret, 2012).

A memo by Ontario Legislative Research Services was sent to the deputy minister of education (M. Pierre Lucier) on July 22, 1994, asking whether LSQ/ASL are recognized as a language of instruction in the Province of Quebec. In early August, a response was received from a Quebec official. He noted that LSQ/ASL does not have status as a "language of instruction" in the Province of Quebec. Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms provides in section 36 (1975, c6, 1982, c 61, s.13) that every accused person has a right to be assisted free of charge by an interpreter if he does not understand the language used at the hearing or if he is deaf.

Newfoundland and Labrador

On November 4, 2021, the Accessibility Act was passed into provincial legislature and established recognition of signed languages including, but not limited to ASL and Indigenous Sign Languages, as primary languages of Deaf persons in the province (Accessibility Act, 2021). The purpose of this Act is to protect the rights of all persons in the province to fully participate in society and to prevent and remove barriers that prevent persons from doing so. As stated in the Act, this is in respect to the following: the design and delivery of programs and services; built environment; information and communication; the procurement of goods, services and facilities;

accommodations; education; health; employment; and an activity or undertaking prescribed in the regulations (Accessibility Act, 2021). As per the Act, the public bodies responsible for complying with the above include, but are not limited to, public and private educational institutions. However, the protections of signed languages as languages of instruction have not explicitly been stated in provincial legislation.

Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Decision: Churchill vs NLESD

Recently on March 1, 2023, the chief adjudicator released his decision for the case of Carter Churchill v Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). Carter's parents, Todd and Kimberly, filed this complaint in 2017 claiming that the School District was not providing sufficient communication access support for Carter. Carter has cerebral palsy and is profoundly Deaf. His primary form of communication is ASL. The school district placed Carter in a classroom with hearing children when he was in kindergarten and the classroom was taught in English only. Carter received some support from special services in the classroom; however, his parents believe that he was not receiving enough access to education. The district placed Carter in a classroom with hearing students from Kindergarten to Grade 4. Eventually, Carter was later moved to a classroom with other Deaf students. In his self-contained classroom, the classroom lessons were taught in ASL.

Following the human rights complaint procedure, a hearing was held at the end of August and continued into the beginning of September. At this hearing, 26 different witnesses spoke about their involvement in Carter's education and two experts discussed Deaf education in general. After the hearing, the human rights adjudicator found that the educational support staff that worked with Carter between Kindergarten to Grade 3 did not provide sufficient support. By providing inadequate support to Carter, the District had not met or not fulfilled its duty to accommodate Carter's disability. Thus, Carter was denied meaningful access to education. The

adjudicator made the final decision that the whole process was discriminatory and the Churchill family was awarded \$95,000 in general damages, reimbursement for private tutoring they had already paid for, and partial payment of their legal fees.

New Brunswick

As of August 2023, there has yet to be recognition of any signed language as a primary language of deaf persons nor as a language of instruction for deaf students in New Brunswick.

Prince Edward Island

As of August 2023, there has yet to be recognition of any signed language as a primary language of deaf persons nor as a language of instruction for deaf students in Prince Edward Island.

Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, there has yet to be recognition of ASL, LSQ, or ISLs that reached Royal Assent. On October 10, 2019, Bill 190, an amendment to the Health Authorities Act, was introduced by Hon. Tammy Martin, an NDP member of the House of Assembly for Cape Breton Centre. The purpose of the amendment to the Act is to establish the right to a qualified interpreter for Deaf and hard of hearing patients in hospital emergency departments and emergency centers (Bill No. 190, 2019).

On March 12, 2021, the Member Equity Act, Bill 27, was introduced by Hon. Alana Paon, an independent Member of the House of Assembly for Cape Breton-Richmond, in order to ensure equity among Members, including equity of language access for all Members who use English, French, the Mi'kmaq language, American Sign Language, and "other languages as determined by the House of Assembly Management Commission" (Bill No. 27, 2021). As of October 2022, Bill 27 and Bill 190 have yet to have a Second Reading.

In regard to education, while it is the right of students in Nova Scotia to “be informed of their educational progress on a regular basis” and it is “the duty of a student” to “participate fully in learning opportunities”, no sign languages have been recognized as languages of instruction or as primary languages of Deaf and hard of hearing students (Government of Nova Scotia, 2018).

TERRITORIES

Yukon

In Yukon’s *Education Act*, “an educational program or part of an educational program [may] be provided in an aboriginal language after receiving a request to do so from a School Board, Council, school committee, Local Indian Education Authority, or, if there is no Local Indian Education Authority, from a Yukon First Nation” (Education Act, 2002, ch. 61, s. 50). In this Act, sign language is not specified; however, an ISL would be included in such a definition.

Northwest Territories

In the Northwest Territories, the *Education Act* recognizes that the language of instruction may only be selected from the official languages listed in the province’s *Official Language Act*: English, French, and Aboriginal languages recognized by the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board (Education Act, 2022; Official Languages Act, 2020). Similar to Yukon, sign language is not specified; however, the definition of “Aboriginal language” is determined by the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board and its interpretation, and thus Inuit Sign Language’s status is precarious.

Nunavut

As in the previous territories, the languages of instruction are only specified to be English, French, and the Inuit language (Education Act, 2022). Any sign language, such as Inuit Sign Language, has not been noted in the legislature. Officially, Inuit Sign Language is offered no rights or protections beyond what is found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,

meaning no province or territory has established it as an official language. However, alongside ASL, interpreters have used IUR at Nunavut's legislative assembly since 2008 and excerpts details from the speaker at Nunavut Hansard on Tuesday, September 16, 2008, can be found in Appendix F.

INTERNATIONAL

Sign Languages around the world are currently emerging and flourishing in many different locations around the globe.

Figure 13. Sign Languages of the World



WASLI

World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) is a membership organization aimed at advancing the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide. WASLI's definition of International Sign can be found on their website (www.wasli.org). International Sign (IS) is used in a variety of different sign language contexts through different contacts from different sign languages, particularly used at international meetings such as the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), Deaflympics, and in international video clips produced by Deaf people. International Sign is also useful when Deaf people travel and socialize in an international setting. International Sign can be seen as a pidgin form of sign language, which may not be like natural sign languages. International Sign has a limited lexicon. The final point is to stress the importance of knowing International Sign as it is a language tool to empower Deaf people around the globe. It is important to know that International Sign empowers Deaf people and their sign languages at the national level. We see the need for more work to be done on language planning as it provides strategy and highlights the significance of language that is an outgrowth of Deaf people and Deaf communities (Rathmann and Quadros, 2023).

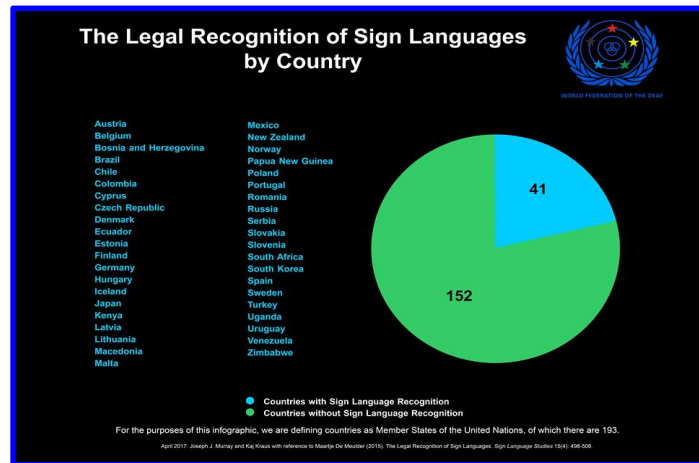
World Federation of the Deaf

The Government of Canada has not yet signed the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Charter of Sign Language Rights for All. The WFD Charter on Sign Language Rights for All is a document that outlines key principles that signatories agree to support. Signatories to the Charter can be individual persons, organizations, or government entities. As of today, there are only four Countries that have signatories: Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, and Iceland. (WFD, 2019).

Legal Recognition of Sign Language

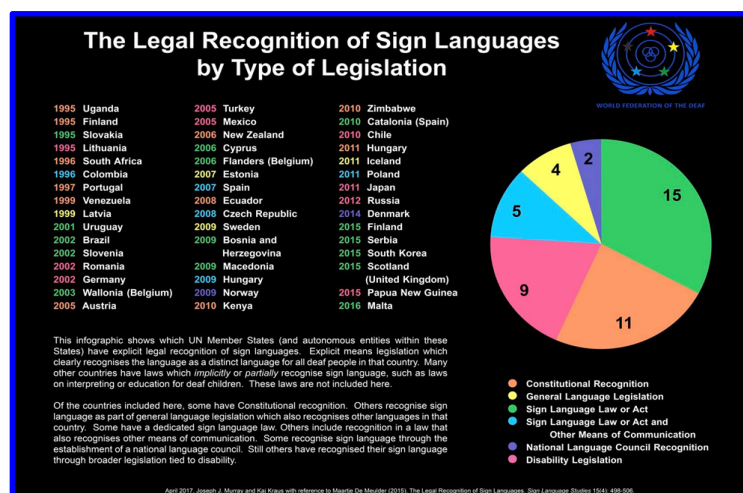
This infographic illustrates the various legal frameworks that countries have adopted to recognize Deaf people’s linguistic and cultural rights. Sign languages are legally recognized in twenty-two countries (WFD, 2017).

Figure 16. The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages by Country



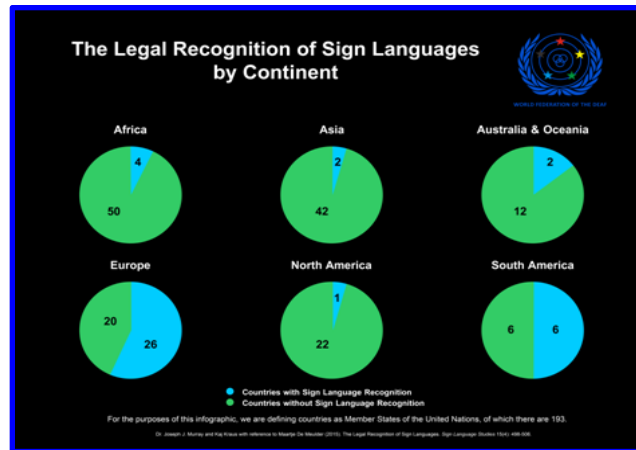
This infographic illustrates a legal recognition of Sign Languages by types of Legislation that recognized Deaf people’s linguistic and cultural rights. The first country that received legal constitutional recognition of sign language was Uganda in 1995 (WFD, 2017).

Figure 17. The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages by Type of Legislation



This infographic illustrates a legal recognition of Sign Languages by continent that recognized Deaf people’s linguistic and cultural rights. Europe is in a leading position to have legal recognition of sign language by the Continent. (WFD, 2017).

Figure 18. The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages by Continent



The World Federation of the Deaf Position Paper on the Primacy of Deaf People in the Development and Teaching of National Sign Languages states that WFD is concerned about reports from countries around the world highlighting where opportunities to teach national sign languages are being taken up by people who are not deaf, often excluding deaf people from teaching their own language. Teachers who are not themselves deaf are forming businesses which take on sign language teaching, and schools, colleges, and universities that offer sign language courses may hire hearing people to teach these courses. This has the effect of reducing teaching opportunities for deaf people and deaf communities. Furthermore, the quality of sign language teaching is impacted when deaf people do not teach their national sign languages. This has a negative impact on sign language interpreter training and the training of other individuals who teach and work with deaf children and adults. WFD has made the following key recommendations such as that states parties should take all necessary steps to ensure the capacity and capability of deaf people to serve as cultural and linguistic models, and that teachers and disseminators of their national sign languages should establish appropriately resourced sign

language teacher training courses and teacher training courses for deaf people. Second, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as private businesses and individuals fluent in national sign languages, should ensure that the principle of deaf communities and deaf-led organizations leading the teaching and development of their national sign languages, is integrated into their work. Projects involving national sign languages should be undertaken with the involvement of deaf-led organizations, including representative national associations of deaf people.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) works with 135 member countries around the world to ensure their national sign languages are fully acknowledged, respected, and safeguarded. The WFD released its new Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights. This publication is an advance for our efforts to advocate for equal rights for deaf people globally, through the legal recognition of our national sign languages.

Recommendations

It is essential for all levels of government to incorporate sign language data collection in future censuses and surveys of the Canadian population. This is crucial to account for knowledge of American Sign Language (ASL), langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language (MSL), and Indigenous Sign Languages (ISLs). We propose that the Government of Canada amend the Official Languages Act, as supported by the Accessible Canada Act, to recognize these languages as primary languages for Deaf Canadians and official signed languages of Canada. Making census forms accessible in these languages would improve the accuracy of responses from Deaf Canadians. This accessibility initiative requires collaboration with Deaf community agencies and Indigenous communities, aiming to reach users of sign languages that are in development or at risk of extinction.

In line with the recently released WFD position paper, “Primacy of Deaf People in the Development and Teaching of National Sign Languages” (March 2023), it is emphasized that Deaf people and communities must lead all activities related to sign languages. This includes providing opportunities for Deaf individuals to teach their own national sign languages. As the field of sign language teaching is still emerging, developing sign language teacher training curricula and ensuring proper qualifications is vital. This approach empowers Deaf people in this field and leverages the rich cultural and linguistic resources of Deaf communities for learners, including deaf children, families, and others in society.

The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf suggests expanding the Official Languages Act’s definition to include spoken languages (English and French), sign languages (ASL, LSQ, MSL, ISLs), written formats (text/captions in English and French), and other non-spoken forms (Braille, Pro Tactile, PTASL, Pro Tactile LSQ for DeafBlind persons). This expansion is crucial for the enhancement of Bill C-13: An Act to amend the Official Languages Act.

Canada is recommended to sign the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Charter of Sign Language Rights for All, a document that underscores key principles to support sign languages and aligns with international obligations under the UNCRPD. This action further strengthens Canada’s existing commitment to linguistic rights and inclusivity of minority languages, including those of francophones and other minority groups. Dr. Debra Russell, a notable figure in Deaf associations, supports this initiative in her letter to the Minister of Official Languages (August 29, 2022). Additionally, the WFD’s position paper on “Access to National Sign Languages in Health Needs” underlines the importance of sign languages for the holistic health of the Deaf community (Snoddon et al, 2022). Recognizing the United Nations International Day of Sign Languages on September 23 annually would also be a significant step.

In the educational sector, public and academic programs should integrate sign language resources to support learning and usage among the Canadian population. Sign Language Institute of Canada (SLIC) is seeking researchers from university linguistics departments to study the status and use of sign languages in Canada. This research will focus on gathering accurate statistics and understanding the needs of diverse Deaf populations, including those in rural areas, Indigenous communities, and immigrants.

SLIC recommends using the findings from this research to help guide development of a comprehensive sign language curriculum for academic and community education. Potential and future researchers should address essential questions, such as: What are the current statistics on the Canadian population learning and using sign languages? Is the statistical information on sign language accurate, considering the diverse Deaf population living in rural areas, Indigenous Deaf Canadians in reservations, Deaf immigrants and refugees? Do they have access to information or the ability to use technological devices? Accurate statistics are vital for informed policymaking and ensuring inclusivity.

These recommendations collectively aim to enhance the recognition, accessibility, and inclusion of sign languages in Canada, significantly benefiting the well-being and linguistic rights of the Deaf community. Implementing these changes will support a more equitable and inclusive society.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Marty Taylor, Dr. Anita Small, Dr. Jenelle Rouse, Samuella Jo Johnson, Ph.D. student, Caroline Hould, Étienne Lemyre (Statistics Canada), Alice Dulude, Carlisle Robinson, Shawna Joynt, and Leanne Gallant for reviewing and providing information and insights. In addition, we sincerely thank Geneviève Deguire for

reviewing and translating the report into French. We thank those contributors and reviewers for their time with this Report on the Legal Status and Statistics of Canadian Sign Languages.

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APPENDIX A

Fact Sheet of American Sign Language

- American Sign Language (ASL) emerged in Canada around the 18th century from the United States
- ASL had some influence (i.e., among Protestants) in Quebec during the earliest days
- Thomas and Margaret Widd first taught ASL in class with deaf students in the 1870s
- First exclusively signing deaf school established in Montreal, The Mackay Center for Deaf Children – 1870
- ASL was suppressed socio-educationally but continued to thrive socio-culturally
- In the 1960s, William Stokoe at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC recognized ASL, studied and described the linguistic features of ASL.
- During the 1980s and 1990s, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario recognized ASL in their legislations (i.e., MLA resolution(s) in Alberta and Manitoba; Ontario Education Act [e.g., Bill 4] passed in Ontario 1993 recognizing ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction)
- In the 2000s, schools in several provinces incorporate ASL as a language of instruction for the classrooms with deaf students across Canada
- In 2002, Canadian Dictionary of ASL was published by University of Alberta Press
- Bill 213, Recognition of Sign Language as an Official Language Act, 2007, An Act to recognize sign language as an official as an official language in Ontario
- ASL, along with Quebec Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages are recognized as the primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Canada in the Accessible Canada Act, 2019
- ASL has not yet been recognized as an official language federally in Canada
- Currently, approximately 40,000 culturally deaf people in Canada sign ASL
- United Nations International Day of Sign Languages is held annually on September 23rd

APPENDIX B

Fact Sheet of Quebec Sign Language

- Quebec Sign Language, known in French as Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) emerged in Canada first part of the early 19th Century from the United States and France.
- LSQ is the predominant sign language of francophone Deaf communities in Canada, primarily in Quebec. LSQ are also used within communities in Northern Ontario and Acadian New Brunswick as well as certain other regions across Canada.
- The emergence of LSQ coincided with the first deaf school in Quebec City in 1831 to instruct deaf children and adolescents. The instruction was mainly in a form of language contact with spoken French. During the early 20th century until the 1960s, the main language of instruction in the classroom was done with speech, however sign language is widely used outside of the classroom.
- The use of 'LSQ' was only used for the first time in 1979 instead of French-Canadian Sign Language, and it was a period of raising self-awareness in Quebec with their language and culture. The first LSQ dictionary was published in 1981.

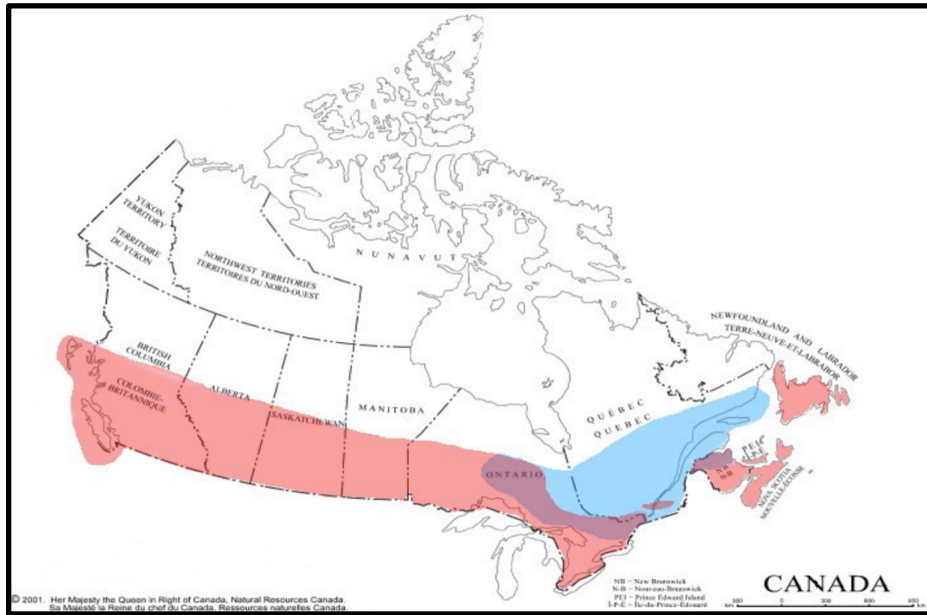
Laws

- Ontario Education Act [e.g., Bill 4] passed in Ontario 1993 recognizing ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction)
- In Quebec in 2002 following the passing of Bill 104, recommendations presented to the Commission of the Estates-General were rejected. In 2013, the Québec Cultural Society of the Deaf (SCQS) presented additional recommendations during discussions on the update of Bill 14 which would ultimately modify the Charter of the French Language.
- Three recommendations were proposed modifying the Charter such that LSQ is recognized along the same lines as done for the language and culture of North America Aboriginal Peoples and the Inuit of Quebec. The first was noting that LSQ is the primary language of communication for Deaf Quebecers, the second that Deaf youths be taught bilingually (French/LSQ) in all cadres of education and the third that French be rendered accessible to all Deaf people within the province. Bill 14 was never voted on by the National Assembly due to the minority party being unable to amass enough support from other parties
- LSQ, along with American Sign Language and Indigenous Sign Languages are recognized as the primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Canada in the Accessible Canada Act, 2019
- Canada has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to recognize signed languages, 2018.
- United Nations International Day of Sign Languages is held annually on September 23rd

Current Status of LSQ

- LSQ has not yet been recognized as an official language federally in Canada
- Currently, approximately 5,000-7,000 culturally deaf people in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick in Canada are native users of LSQ.
- Currently, there are only three schools that provide bilingual instruction (French and LSQ).
- Based on the current data, LSQ is considered as an endangered language due to its diminishing intergenerational native speakers.

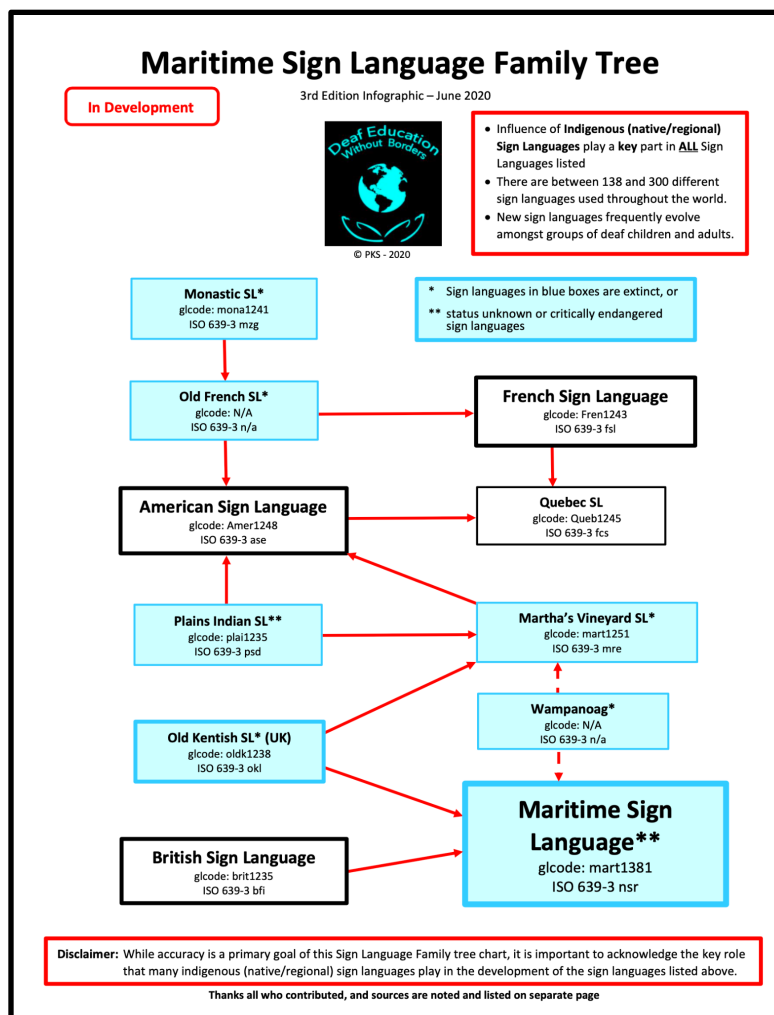
Map of ASL and LSQ Use in Canada



APPENDIX C

Fact Sheet of Maritime Sign Language

- Maritime Sign Language (MSL) emerged around 17th century in Atlantic Provinces
- Two Deaf Scottish immigrants—William Gray & George Tait taught first Deaf class in Old British Sign Language
- Established Halifax School for the Deaf-1854
- First four Superintendents from Scotland used British Sign Language (BSL)
- Halifax School for the Deaf students were fluent in one and two-handed fingerspelling alphabet
- Halifax School for the Deaf was closed in 1960
- During 1960s, William Stokoe discovered linguistic features of American Sign Language (ASL)
- Established a new Deaf school-Interprovincial School for the Deaf in Amherst, Nova Scotia-1961
- Language shift occurred in 1960s as MSL shifted to ASL
- MSL is considered an Endangered Sign Language as there are few MSL users as of today



Disclaimer: While accuracy is a primary goal of this Sign Language Family tree chart, it is important to acknowledge the key role that many indigenous (native/regional) sign languages play in the development of the sign languages listed above.

APPENDIX D

Key Milestones of Legal recognition of Sign Languages in Canada and around the World

Name of Organization	Notes	Reference
United Nations International Day of Sign Languages	September 23 (Annually)	
United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Ratified by the Government of Canada in 2010	
World Federation of the Deaf Charter on Sign Language Rights for All	Sign Language Rights for All implemented in 2019	
World Federation of the Deaf	Position Paper on the Primacy of Deaf People in the Development and Teaching of National Sign Languages in 2023	
Accessible Canada Act	An act that came into force in 2019 and recognized ASL, LSQ, and Indigenous Sign Languages as the primary languages for communication by Deaf persons in the provinces and in Canada as identified communication as a priority area	
Provincial/territorial accessibility legislations	Various legislative measures that came into force over the years and heightened expectations among sign language users that interpretation and sign language instruction services/resources will be available to support their interactions with governments, community organizations and businesses	

APPENDIX E

Summary of the Minister's Statement 219–2(4):

Inuit Sign Language (Tapardjuk)

Hon. Louis Tapardjuk (interpretation):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform my colleagues of a very important project aimed at documenting for the first time ever the development and use of Inuit Sign Language in Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides a high standard to accommodate the use of sign languages in government services. Through policies, programs and services we can promote the use and culturally appropriate development of Inuit Sign Language in Nunavut.

The Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth also recognizes the uniqueness and importance of Inuit Sign Language. It is different from any other known sign language, and virtually no resources exist for it.

With thanks to the Department of Justice for initiating this project, I would like to especially thank the minister on my left for that, for the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth provided funding to the Canadian Deafness Research and Training Institute to promote the use of Inuit Sign Language, by way of its 2007-08 and 2008-09 Grants and Contributions Program.

Mr. Speaker, this is also a historic day for this Legislative Assembly as we are providing for the first-time interpretation of our proceeding in sign languages. Deaf Nunavummiut will gather in Iqaluit from September 15 to 19, 2008 to launch and learn how to use the new CD-ROM, glossary, and story book. These resources will be used for teaching and training. Once again, I congratulate them for their achievements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.