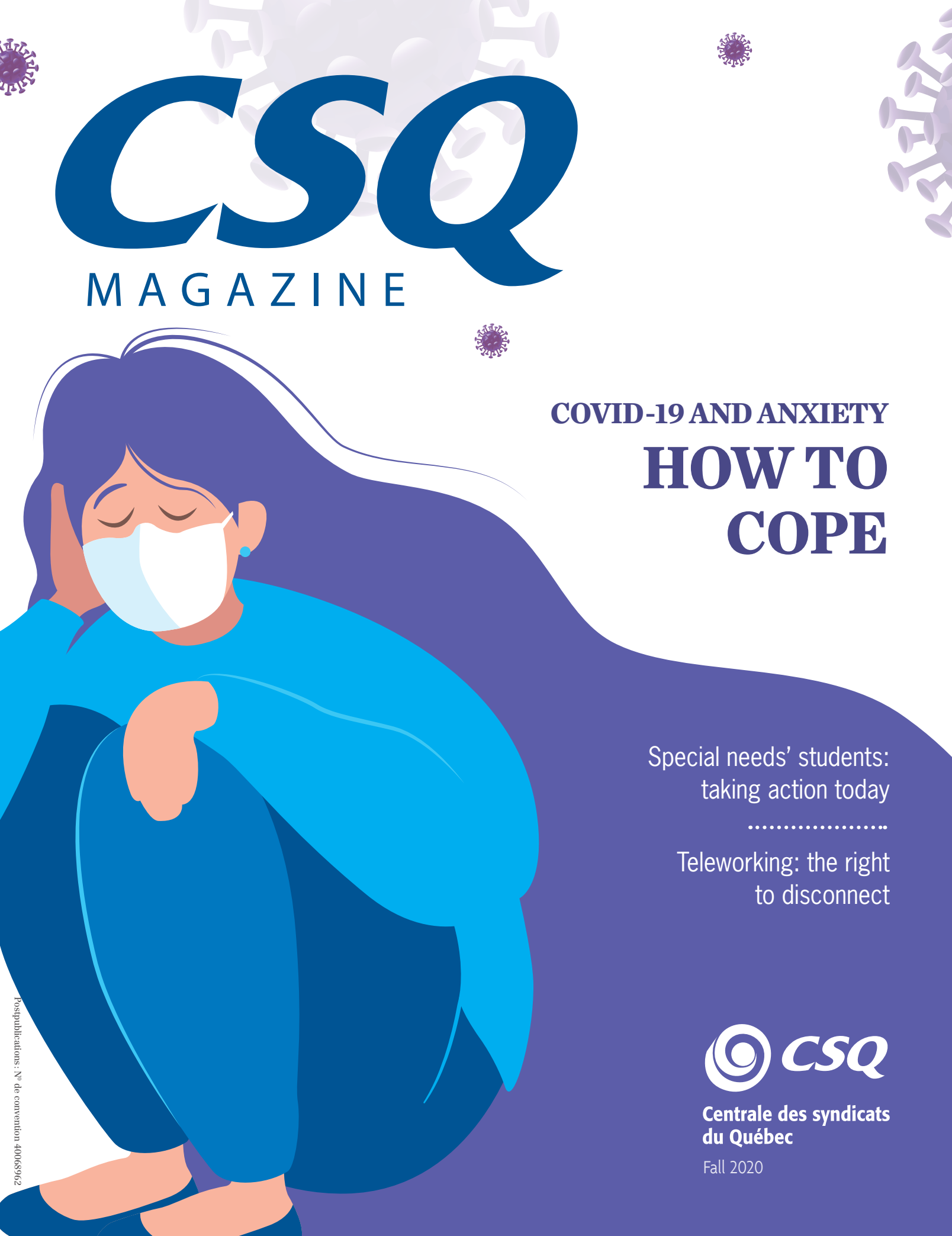




CSQ

MAGAZINE

COVID-19 AND ANXIETY

HOW TO COPE

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taking action today

.....

Teleworking: the right
to disconnect



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Photo François Beaugard

THE URGENCY TO ACT

Several months after the start of public sector negotiations, we are still waiting for a clear signal from the government as to the improvement of working conditions.

The current pandemic has proven the limits of short-term accounting management. The already difficult working conditions have worsened, and you are likely experiencing, like everywhere else, the shortage of labour which is more significant and more severe than ever. The reality is that women are at the front of public services and have, for far too long, paid the price of austerity, cuts, and underinvestment.

We saw how disastrous the situation was when the government resorted to the Canadian Army and outrageously well-paid medical specialists to make up for the lack of personnel in CHSLDs. This was to compensate for the attendants' poor working conditions, denounced for many years. Due to a lack of staff in our schools, the CAQ government announced it would pay up to \$412 per day for retired teachers to fill the shortage, demonstrating how desperate working conditions have become.

How did this happen? For years, we have been required to do more with less, regardless of the government of the day. The working environments and conditions of education, health, and higher education staff have been trampled on by decrees and special laws from budget to budget. For 20 years, governments have preferred to cut potential revenues by lowering taxes rather than investing in public services.

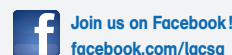
The austerity of recent years has hurt, and Québec has reached a crossroads: invest now in public sector working conditions or let the situation fall apart.

Solidarity!

Sonia Ethier
Sonia Ethier | PRESIDENT

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COVID-19

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

COVID-19 not only has physical effects, but also affects the population's mental health. So much so that many worry about a second wave, psychological this time. How can employers and employees protect themselves?

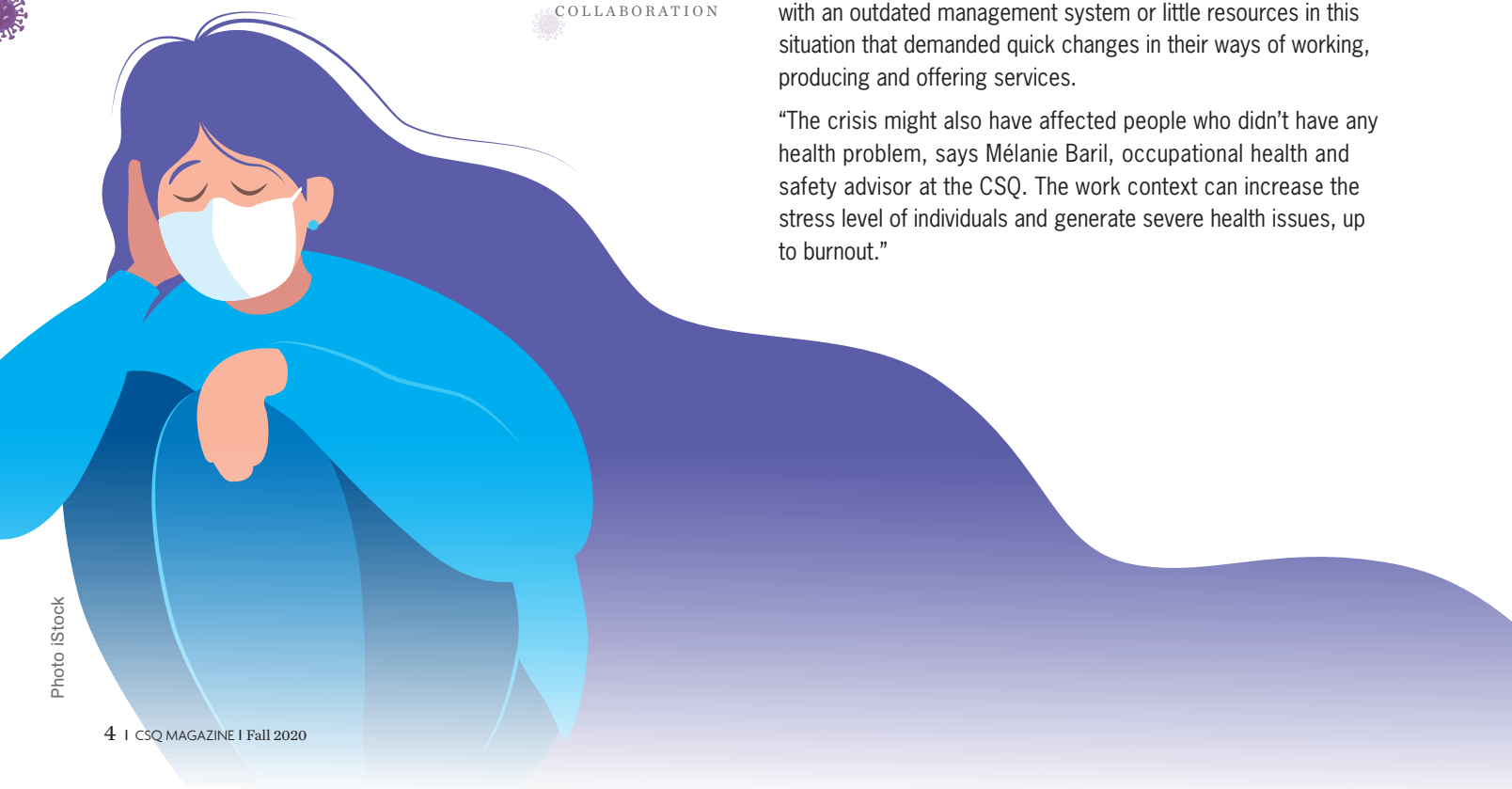
Anne-Marie Tremblay
COLLABORATION

The pandemic created a shockwave, bringing together all the stress-generating ingredients. "On top of being unexpected, this health crisis was uncontrollable. Today, we still don't know when and how this will end," says Alessia Negrini, researcher in occupational health psychology at the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST).

Stress is a natural response to adapt to an event, she explains. "For a certain part of the population and organizations, the situation became an opportunity to reorganize, to learn, to review their way of doing things."

But for already fragile individuals, the crisis might have exacerbated some vulnerabilities, like anxiety or distress. The same goes for organizations which might have found themselves with an outdated management system or little resources in this situation that demanded quick changes in their ways of working, producing and offering services.

"The crisis might also have affected people who didn't have any health problem, says Mélanie Baril, occupational health and safety advisor at the CSQ. The work context can increase the stress level of individuals and generate severe health issues, up to burnout."



PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AT OUR DOOR

The pandemic also upended the work life: teaching personnel were catapulted into remote learning, nursing personnel ended up on the frontlines and some childcare practitioners had to maintain their activities in the emergency childcare services.

“Many workers experienced the fear of losing their jobs, but also of getting the disease or transmitting it to a loved one,” mentions Dr. Michel Vézina, occupational health psychology advisor at the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ).

The result? Last spring, almost one out of every two persons among Québec workers said they felt psychological distress, as measured by a research team led by Caroline Biron, professor at Université Laval and director of the Centre d'expertise en gestion de la santé et de la sécurité du travail. In total, 56% of women and 41% of men reported a high level of psychological distress, according to a survey of 1,215 people between April 30 and May 7, 2020. The proportion climbs to 60% for health and social services' workers.

The level of psychological distress has been increasing since 2015. A study conducted that year by the Institut de la statistique du Québec showed that 33% of women and 24% of men experienced psychological distress. Preliminary results also show that this proportion slightly decreased with the lifting of the lockdown, but remains higher than in 2015, adds the researcher.

EFFECTS ON WORKERS

Memory problems, difficulty concentrating, intrusive thoughts, judgment errors, musculoskeletal troubles: stress can have multiple consequences. “But most of all, chronic stress can lead to anxiety, depression or burnout,” underlines Marie-Anne Bougie, organizational guidance counsellor and psychotherapist at Gestion-Psychologie-Santé. Some people, witness to extreme events like what happened in CHSLDs, even experienced post-traumatic shock.



Photo Stéphane Lemire

Dr Michel Vézina



Photo FSA ULaval

Caroline Biron

That's why we must be on the lookout for the slightest hints of psychological distress, from the loss of appetite to dark thoughts. “If, for example, you feel sad most of the time, you have a tendency to increase your alcohol consumption or smoke to fall asleep, or you no longer feel interested in things you love or you have insomnia, it needs to be addressed,” says Marie-Anne Bougie.

If the symptoms last more than two weeks, we need to react. “The quicker you act, the more you avoid the paths that may to settle in the brain over the long term, with drops in serotonin and dopamine,” adds the psychotherapist.

First step: talk about it with the people around you. “Sometimes, the simple fact of talking about what is happening to you helps you feel less lonely,” she explains. Also, one should not wait until the situation deteriorates before turning to a professional, be it from the employee assistance program or another resource.

Thus, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! “What also helps to reduce stress is breaking the feeling of helplessness, to equip yourself and take back some control,” adds Marie-Anne Bougie.

“Fear is worsened by not feeling protected, and it's very well documented.”

— Dr. Michel Vézina, occupational health psychology advisor at the INSPQ

“To get through the crisis, you must be able to let go of certain aspects and act on what you can change, like planning your own routine or the way to protect yourself when in proximity with other people.”

— Alessia Negrini, researcher in occupational health psychology at the IRSST

PROTECTING AND REASSURING PERSONNEL

Regarding psychological health, employers also have a role to play. Indeed, only individual help is not enough when the problems come from work organization, explains Dr. Vézina. “Workers need to be heard and listened to when something functions poorly in the organization.” If the employees feel helpless and overloaded, there’s a risk they’ll withdraw, he adds.

The personnel must also be adequately equipped to face the health risk, as if sent to the frontlines. “Fear is worsened by not feeling protected, and it’s very well documented,” explains the specialist.

Furthermore, the personnel shouldn’t feel left to their own device once they return to work. What will happen if there is an outbreak? Is there protection equipment available? If so, where is it? Will part of the work, like class preparation, be done remotely? The clearer the instructions are, the more people’s stress decreases. “We need to plan different scenarios, explain hygiene measures to the personnel and train them if needed, explains Alessia Negrini. Effective communication will help reassure the workers.”

This is all the more important because the situation constantly evolves, like we saw in the schools regarding the class ratios, the distance between children or the implementation of bubbles, mentions Mélanie Baril as examples. “Of course, we need to give people time to make these new measures their own, but knowing they are properly applied and respected is very helpful,” she says. Likewise, supervisors must show flexibility and review their priorities in light of those changes.

Mélanie Baril adds: “Employers have the obligation to act in regard to prevention to avoid their personnel suffering from a work injury, like an adjustment disorder or a depression, as the result from an unusual work context. They need to put limits on hyper connection and on the overflow of working hours that are done at home.”

Thus, managers thus listen, communicate and care, indicates Ghislaine Labelle, certified human resources advisor and organizational psychologist at Groupe SCO. She suggests, among other things, to create pairs of workers so they can help each other and share what they are experiencing. “In meetings, we could discuss not only what went well, but also employees’ concerns. Do people feel good? What can we do so that things work better? Asking those questions gives legitimacy to the demands.” According to Alessia Negrini, it’s also an opportunity to exchange success stories.

Photo François Beuregard



This approach also allows to keep an eye on different psychosocial risk factors that might have been increased with the crisis. That’s why the IRSST advises employers to act in prevention. “We must make it so the environment stimulates cooperation, sharing and decision-making, to promote autonomy. Furthermore, it’s important that employees exert some control on how they work,” mentions Mélanie Baril. We thus must ensure that managers have tools, and training, regarding mental health issues, adds Alessia Negrini. “Ultimately, employees must feel protected, heard, supported, recognized and respected,” summarizes Dr. Vézina.



Caroline Biron's team's research indeed says the same. Individuals working in "caring" organizations felt less psychologically affected by the crisis. "We found that these companies pay attention to the situations that might jeopardize psychological health, they offer opportunities to talk about this issue, without taboo, they request the participation of all hierarchical levels and their senior management is involved and quickly corrects problems of this nature," says the specialist. In the organizations where all these factors were present, 24% less people reported a high level of distress and 12% more workers perceived themselves as "highly performing."

HELPING YOURSELF

When everything is happening at once, you need to take back control over your life, which might seem difficult, however, in a pandemic context. "To get through the crisis, you need be able to let go of some aspects and act on what you can change, like planning your own routine or the way to protect yourself when in proximity with other people," indicates Alessia Negrini.

The simple fact of giving yourself time allows you to feel better. "You can also decide to do meditation or yoga, but what is really important is creating a moment just for you. Because putting limits gives you back power. You do it because you chose to," specifies Marie-Anne Bougie.

In the same vein, you must find ways to disconnect, by pursuing a hobby you like. "Physical exercise also allows to unload the day's

stress. Others will put on sweatpants when coming home from work. They feel they're changing their skin," adds the psychotherapist. A way to create a separation from the job.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and not isolating yourself are also key to keeping a balance. "It's important to remember that it's not the first time you find yourself faced with an obstacle or a stressful event in your life, adds Alessia Negrini. You need to think back on strategies and resources you used to get through other difficult situations." In short, remembering the positive helps to have confidence in the future.



Photo Éric Massicotte

HOW TO CONFRONT ANXIETY?

There are various strategies to adopt when faced with anxiety. Some are **individual**, for example:

- be aware of your negative and irrational thoughts;
- let go of aspects you can't control;
- maintain a healthy lifestyle (good nutrition, physical exercise, etc.);
- compensate physical distancing by virtual connections;
- call on the employee assistance program.

Other strategies are **collective** and allow to take action in an environment that is harmful for mental health, for example:

- engage in discussions within the health and safety committee;
- apply the right of refusal;
- lodge complaints at the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST);
- lodge grievances;
- train and inform workers and raise awareness about these issues.

TELEWORKING AND THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

SERIOUS REFLECTION IS IN ORDER

Logging in early in the morning, reading emails late at night, being called on by your employer at any time of the day or night: this is the context in which many people who work from home find themselves in since the start of the COVID-19 health crisis. It's time to disconnect.

France Bernier
CSQ ADVISOR

93%
**OF ADULTS
IN QUÉBEC**
**HAD AN INTERNET CONNECTION
AT HOME IN 2018.¹**

During the initial lockdown, teleworking proved essential. However, the context threw many workers into unplanned and disorganized teleworking situations, where performing professional tasks in the presence of a spouse, young children, teenagers, or roommates became inevitable.

Workers had to adapt in order to perform their tasks without access to the usual technology. However, the one essential tool for teleworking, a home Internet connection, remained accessible to all, or nearly all. Yet, as indispensable as it is for teleworking, it can also become a trap.

WHEN THE LINES BECOME BLURRED

Since the start of the lockdown, balancing work, or rather telework, family and personal life has gradually become an individual responsibility. Each person is free to organize their work within the demands of family and personal responsibilities, with employers often relinquishing any responsibility for the of teleworking.

In no time, the constant connection to work has taken hold and the lines between all aspects of life have started to blur.

In 2017, a CSQ survey carried out among education and higher education personnel had already revealed that tasks carried out on personal time, outside normal working hours, such as reading and answering emails, had increased for 76.5% of respondents in recent years.

If, in 2017, the constant connection to work resulting from the development of digital tools had already taken hold, it goes without saying that the teleworking imposed by the lockdown has only reinforced this trend, without regard to the consequences on personal and family life.

¹ Source: CEFRIQ



DOES LOCKDOWN LIFTING GO HAND IN HAND WITH DISCONNECTION?

Nothing is less certain. Yet, on June 3, 2020, Québec Solidaire announced the tabling of a bill on the right to disconnect. The purpose of this bill is to “ensure that employee rest periods are respected by requiring employers to adopt an after-hours disconnection policy.” According to the terms of the bill, this disconnection policy should be drawn up in collaboration with the designated employees, or where applicable, by the persons representing the accredited associations.

Despite its relevance, it is by no means certain that the bill will pass, especially without the support of the governing party. Moreover, the Minister of Labour, Jean Boulet, has been reluctant to impose it on employers.

UNION ACTION

It is important to acknowledge the benefits of teleworking. “During a period of lockdown, it allowed many workers to maintain an employment relationship while ensuring a work income,” explained CSQ president Sonia Ethier. For many, teleworking has also helped them have better control over the organization of their work, while avoiding the pressures of productivity and performance associated with the intensification of work.

Despite these benefits, teleworking will have left its mark on the practices of creating a constant connection with work that will continue to intensify. “The risk that the lines between personal and professional lives increasingly blur is indeed real,” added Sonia Ethier. However, it is important to remember that the need for rest is a legitimate one for everyone and to ensure a break

from work. It is essential for maintaining good mental health and a balance between the different parts of life.

“Though union reflection on the subject has yet to be developed, it must be initiated in order to take action in our communities. This should be done with respect for different points of view in order to find a collective solution that will guarantee the wellbeing of all and safeguard the balance between work, or telework, and family and personal lives,” concluded Sonia Ethier.

TO KNOW MORE

Digital technology: meeting the challenge, providing the support

Consult the results of the 2018 CSQ survey conducted among 130,000 members in education to understand the impact of digital technology on the conditions of work and professional practice.

lacsq.org

› Dossiers › Éducation › Numérique

Bill 492, Right-to-Disconnect Act

To learn more about the bill tabled in the National Assembly by Québec Solidaire on June 3, 2020.

assnat.qc.ca

› Parliamentary Proceedings › Bills › Choose a session:
Current session – 42nd Legislature, 1st Session
(November 2018 -) › Scroll down the list of bills to Bill 492.

FAMILY-WORK-STUDY BALANCE

MUCH NEEDED MEASURES

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the daily lives of many people, raising issues of balance on several levels.

Julie Pinel | CSQ ADVISOR

Exhaustion, stress, physical and psychological fatigue, difficulty concentrating, impatience: these are the effects of family-work-study balance on many people.

In April 2020, the Coalition pour une conciliation famille-travail-études (CCFTÉ), of which the CSQ is a part, held a consultation via social media. The results of the consultation highlighted the various balance issues encountered during the lockdown period. Just over 600 people responded to the questionnaire, the vast majority of which were women (83%).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF HEALTH MEASURES

The closure of schools and of the majority of early childhood educational services and school daycare services in the spring of 2020 created a whole balance conundrum for many Québec families.

In fact, these closures are among the four main health measures having had the greatest impact on family-work-study balance. The other two are teleworking or online learning, and the lack of a quiet place that promotes concentration.

EFFECTS ON MENTAL HEALTH

The lockdown period also deprived many families and caregivers of their usual support network (family, loved ones, etc.). Caregivers and parents were left to fend for themselves with a complete lack of collective reconciliation measures.

Despite the opening of certain early childhood education services and emergency school daycare centres, people who worked and studied remotely or worked in essential services (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) had to remain available for work or study, while also being responsible for their children or loved ones.

It's no wonder that in such a context 15% of those who responded to the CCFTÉ consultation reported exhaustion, stress, physical and psychological fatigue, sometimes accompanied by difficulty concentrating, impatience with children, and a loss of energy.

MEASURES THAT ACCOMMODATE ...

Nearly three-quarters of those who took part in the consultation said they benefited from accommodation measures related to work or study time, while 26% said they did not.

The consultation also found that balance rested on the shoulders of students and workers, and that there was a lack of support and flexibility from managers or educational institutions during this period.

THE FOUR MEASURES WITH THE MOST IMPACT ON BALANCE:

- the closure of early childhood education services and daycare centres
- the closure of schools and school daycare services
- teleworking and online classes
- the lack of a quiet place that promotes concentration



39%

OF CCFTÉ CONSULTATION RESPONDENTS

would have liked more flexibility in terms of schedule, work or course load, as well as reduced work or study time, without financial penalties, to facilitate family-work-study balance.

In the absence of collective measures, teleworking, normally seen as a measure promoting family-work-study balance, comes with its share of problems.

... BUT NOT ENOUGH

To facilitate family-work-study balance, 39% of respondents would have liked more flexibility in terms of schedule, workload or studies, as well as a reduction in work or study time, without financial penalties.

Changes in the work environment regarding ergonomics and work tools were also identified as a desired measure. While workers who occasionally worked from home before the pandemic could make do with their kitchen tables, the arrival of full-time telework has changed the game.

IN CONCLUSION

The general finding of the consultation is that the individual means put in place by respondents in an attempt to reconcile the different areas of their lives were not sufficient. The lockdown has highlighted the need for collective measures since tele-

working can no longer be considered an effective means of reconciling family, work, and studies.

The results of the Coalition's survey were presented to the Minister of Labour and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, as well as to resource persons at the ministry of Families responsible for this issue.

The CCFTÉ recommends that the Québec government implement an umbrella act aimed at promoting and supporting family-work-study balance that would apply to the private, public, and parapublic sectors.

15%

OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED

reported having experienced exhaustion, stress, physical and psychological fatigue, difficulty concentrating, impatience, and low energy.

TO KNOW MORE

To review the results of the survey:

ccfte.wordpress.com

› Documentation › Résultats du questionnaire

To find out more about the demands:

ccfte.wordpress.com

› Documentation › Plateforme de la Coalition

To follow the Coalition and learn more about its work:

facebook.com/CCFTE



STUDENTS WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS

TAKING ACTION TODAY FOR THEIR FUTURE

Photo iStock

School closures during the pandemic led to a disruption of services and increased the needs of students in vulnerable situations. Now that schools have reopened, it is time for the government to invest in supporting students and the school community.

Sébastien Marcil | CSQ ADVISOR

Quebecers are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on children's educational success. According to a CROP opinion survey¹ conducted during the summer of 2020, 66% of respondents said they were worried about the situation. So is the CSQ.

"The closure of schools at the start of the COVID-19 crisis last spring amplified the needs of students in vulnerable situations, from preschool to adult education and vocational training," said CSQ president Sonia Ethier, adding that the issue was glaring long before the pandemic began. "The needs of these students have not lessened, on the contrary! The majority of students have not attended school for nearly six months!" she adds.



Photo François Beuregard

DEMANDING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

To support students with learning difficulties, the Québec government must provide school teams with increased financial resources.

"Teachers, support personnel and professionals deserve the resources necessary to support students and provide them with the services they are entitled to," stated Sonia Ethier.

"The school teams now want an ambitious, innovative, and structured response to tackle the inequalities amplified by the crisis," added the union leader. "Anything short of that will entail social and economic costs for Québec and for our children, including an increase in the dropout rate. Collectively, we can't let this happen!"

INVESTING IN TOMORROW'S SUCCESS

More than ever, school teams play a role in student development. Therefore, allocating resources in education today is an investment in tomorrow's success. In fact, the opinion survey confirms that 92% of the population support additional investments to help students with special needs.

The ministère de l'Éducation must earmark more resources to ensure that students with difficulties are not put in the same groups, according to FSE-CSQ² president Josée Scalabrini. "This would increase the challenge for teachers over the next years," she says.

"For those who experienced half-group teaching days in the spring of 2020, it was a resounding pedagogical success," explained Josée Scalabrini. "The teachers told us that they felt they were able to teach their subject in class and supervise special needs' students like never before."

The FSE-CSQ president stated that the success of the students also depends on the teaching staff who cannot constantly be overwhelmed by the task. Teachers need more time to prepare their materials, do their follow-ups, get organized, and just breathe. "It's critical to take better care of teachers and improve teaching conditions to attract and retain them in the youth sector, vocational training, and adult education," she says.



Photo François Beuregard

¹ CROP public opinion survey of 1,000 Quebecers regarding the primary and secondary school sector as well as education within the context of the pandemic. The survey was conducted through a web panel between July 22 and 29, 2020.

² Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement.

FOCUSING ON REAL NEEDS

However, the proper resources must be allocated in the right places in order to enhance the skills and expertise of support staff, but mostly for the wellbeing of the children, said FPSS-CSQ³ president Éric Pronovost. “For too long, finances have taken precedence over the real needs of children,” he said. “Solutions implemented are often inadequate and needs remain unmet.”

The FPSS-CSQ president added that it is not uncommon to see management call on someone from a lower paid job class to meet a need that would require someone from a better paid job class who is also better equipped to deal with the situation. For example, an attendant for handicapped students may be recruited to fill the position of a special education technician, even though the two have completely different training. The attendant does not have the skills to meet the specific needs of the student they are accompanying. As a result, it is the child who is penalized.

“This way of doing things must be corrected fast,” said Éric Pronovost.

FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Implementing a minimum level of services to guarantee vulnerable students equal access to services is essential for the FPPE-CSQ.⁴ Its president, Jacques Landry, reminds us of the essential role



Photo François Beaugard

professional staff play in student success: “We are pleased that the schools have reopened and that all students, including several vulnerable youth or those with learning difficulties, are back in class to develop and socialize. On the other hand, there is a significant lack of professional resources to provide everyone with equal opportunities to succeed. We want to be part of the solution and support the school teams, but we are worried about the increasing needs of students in the particular context of the pandemic.”

According to Jacques Landry, the announcements made by the government in recent weeks in no way guarantee the addition of staff required to meet the various needs in the school system. “The time has come to move away from the historical model, in which resources are sought as needed, without prior planning, and to establish thresholds exclusively for professional resources through protected budgetary measures,” he said.

A MASSIVE CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

To emphasize the importance of supporting students of all grade levels, especially those experiencing difficulties, the CSQ has launched a campaign under the theme: Taking action today for their future.

Through this campaign, the CSQ is calling on the government for more resources to support schools. “The Québec government keeps repeating that education is its main priority. It’s time to make it happen. Our message is clear: We must act now!” concluded Sonia Ethier.



Photo François Beaugard

³ Fédération du personnel de soutien scolaire.

⁴ Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l’éducation du Québec.

HURDLES OF THE NORTH

In Northern Québec, the start of the school year for education personnel is always a bit special. This year, with the pandemic, the challenges were even greater.

Isabelle Tremblay-Chevalier | CSQ ADVISOR

Be it north of the 49th parallel, in the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region, where the Cree School Board's institutions are, or north of the 55th parallel, in the Nunavik region, territory of the Kativik School Board, practising your profession in education means working with more limited resources than elsewhere in Québec.

"On top of the school environment, particular to the North, and the public health measures that had to be applied because of the COVID-19 crisis, our members experienced additional hurdles," explains Larry Imbeault, president of the AENQ-CSQ.¹

Indeed, at the Kativik School Board, classes didn't start at the same time as in the rest of Québec. Back to school season was instead staggered from August 31 to September 14, 2020, based on each the needs of the communities and on the available personnel.

"On top of that, staff members coming from the South, and even those already in the North, had to have a negative COVID-19 test before going to the community where their school is located in Nunavik," adds Larry Imbeault.

Personnel from the South had to have their result before boarding the plane. Once arrived in the North, the workers also had to respect a 14-day isolation period before going to their workplace in the schools of one or the other of the two school boards.

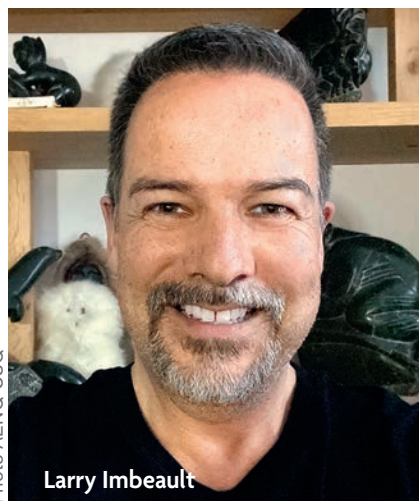


Photo AENQ-CSQ

All the health measures were put in place because a great fear remains about a potential contamination to COVID-19 in the North. This region's population is vulnerable and the health network's capacity is limited.

PROTECT THE POPULATION AND THE STUDENTS' SUCCESS

If schools were to close because of a COVID-19 outbreak, would the students' success be compromised? "That's one of the big worries in the North," claims Larry Imbeault.

Due to a lack of resources, tools or Internet access, the last school year was interrupted. Despite government programs being put in place to ensure accessibility to the required material, major problems subsist. Educational tools and Internet access remain very much uneven from one community to another.

"Hats off to the education personnel who, despite the lack of resources, does everything in their power to ensure the well-being, the health and the success of the students. Let's hope that the crisis will continue to spare the Cree and Inuit communities," concludes Larry Imbeault.

¹ Association des employés du Nord québécois.

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL IN A PANDEMIC

BETWEEN CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

The exceptional situation the education community has been experiencing since last spring has an impact on personnel. In the private education sector, workers wanted to testify about their reality.

Matthieu Pelard | CSQ ADVISOR

"To ensure the health and safety of students and staff members, huge efforts were deployed to guarantee a safe back-to-school season. The organization of teaching was upended, and this new employment reality raises many worries," states the FPEP-CSQ¹ president Stéphane Lapointe.

Following these major changes in the working conditions of private education staff, the FPEP-CSQ conducted a quick poll to know the new working reality of its members and make it known. In total, 21 unions representing about 1,500 workers, across all job categories, described the increased workload created by complying with health guidelines as well as the remote teaching and follow-up the students receive.

AN UNPRECEDENTED PLANNING

Who could've imagined, only a few months ago, that teachers would have to give in-person classes, all the while offering students the possibility to follow what is taught remotely and in real time?

Yet, 47% of the people surveyed by the FPEP-CSQ say they received instructions from their educational institution's management to

offer simultaneous remote teaching for students. For 20% of the people surveyed, the remote teaching duty will be added to the job done in person, since it will need to be done outside of the scheduled period and in the way chosen by the teacher. At the time the poll was done, at the end of August 2020, 33% of the surveyed personnel still had no indication about the situation or nothing had yet been planned.

TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS AND WORRIES

Stéphane Lapointe explains that, in the current health emergency context, the accelerated (or imposed) deployment of technological tools requires even more that boundaries be set for their use, so as to respect the rights and privacy of the workers.

"This emergency nature doesn't justify all the exceptional measures taken by management, he says. The use of technological tools is vital for some teaching duties, but, as long as the terms of use, collection and monitoring

of data aren't clearly defined, we need to remain vigilant in our work environments."

Photo François Beaugard



Stéphane Lapointe

¹ Fédération du personnel de l'enseignement privé.



“Many parents recognized the amazing work of the teaching, professional and support staff. When some of our members were totally reinventing their way of working remotely, others were suffering from unjustified layoffs. This spring will forever be remembered.”

— Stéphane Lapointe, FPEP-CSQ president

IMPROVE EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION

Health and protection equipment was made available in a satisfactory way, according to 83% of respondents. Adjustments are nonetheless still requested to get to full satisfaction. The shortage of protection equipment and the lack of hand disinfection stations, for example, are among the worries most often mentioned.

HEALTH OR WAGES: AN UNACCEPTABLE CHOICE

The shortage of personnel in the education network calls into question the preventative withdrawals of some workers. Sadly, the priority is too often given to the shortage rather than to the pandemic, regrets the FPEP-CSQ president.

“While we thought the rules were clear to ensure the protection of those whose health condition puts them at risk, the return to

class of many workers becomes mandatory. Choosing between your health or your wages, that's the new forced choice! The government has to act so that the protection of the public's health doesn't happen on the backs of the workers,” argues Stéphane Lapointe.

INTERVENTIONS WITH THE MINISTÈRE

In a context where everything is unheard of, the extension of some duties' duration, the work overload and the absence of additional resources make the job of teaching staff even more remarkable.

“Multiple interventions have been made in the last weeks with the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur to convey the FPEP-CSQ members' worries. We will not back down when faced with the weakening of our members' protections, the disruption imposed on our working conditions and on the respect of our professions' gains,” concludes Stéphane Lapointe.

EMERGENCY CHILDCARE

ON THE FRONTLINES IN SPITE OF THE CRISIS

In emergency childcare services, the childcare practitioners continued to give the best of themselves during the first wave of the pandemic, a stressful experience that will stay with them forever.

Mathieu Morin
FIPEQ-CSQ ADVISOR

On March 13, 2020, the Minister of Families, Mathieu Lacombe, announced the closure of all educational services. He would change his mind two days later, asking all services to open for parents working in a service deemed essential. Myriam Chayer and Josée Lemire lived this period with a great amount of stress.

“The manager summoned all personnel to evaluate how many children we would have, recalls Myriam Chayer, educator at Le Petit Palais daycare centre (CPE) in Montréal. We eventually welcomed 19 children who were not of our CPE, because their service had closed.”

Meanwhile, Josée Lemire, home childcare provider (RSE) in Sherbrooke, chose to keep her service open, since the parents of eight of her nine children worked in essential services.

Even if, in the weeks that followed, the Minister of Families authorized all home childcare services who wished to do so, to close with full compensation, it was out of the question for Josée Lemire. “It was stressful, but I felt an obligation to continue. It’s like we were going to war. We had to allow parents to go take care of the sick. Nurses needed to have peace of mind,” she says.

ADAPTING TO INSTRUCTIONS AND CHANGES

As the pandemic evolved, the government’s instructions completely changed. It was the case, for example, with the instructions surrounding personal protection equipment. “It was hard to be told that, yesterday, we were not allowed to wear a mask, but today, we are required to have one. At our CPE, that’s how it happened,” recalls Myriam Chayer.

“We went to the frontlines without a mask!” insists Josée Lemire, who found the situation stressful. She states, however, that she redoubled her efforts to stay true to herself and continue her work with the children.



Photo Stéphane Lemire

Josée Lemire

UNKNOWN PARENTS

A major difference between Josée Lemire and Myriam Chayer's experiences has been not knowing the children. While Josée Lemire's little ones remained the same, Myriam Chayer welcomed four new children in her group without having the opportunity to talk with the parents. The COVID-19 measures put in place forced the family to stay outside the CPE.

"The pedagogical aspect was a bit left aside, she recognizes. It's difficult to make observations about a child you don't know. My objective was thus to establish a connection with the child by focusing on their interests, so they would want to come back the next day."



Photo François Beaugard

RULES TO RESPECT

In the first weeks, at the CPE, hygiene rules were at their height. Groups couldn't cross each other outside, every toy had to be disinfected after use, items made of wood and other materials that could increase spread were removed: the job became more one of monitor than educator.

The adaptation, however, was more difficult for the adults than for the children, claims Myriam Chayer. "When parents from the health network arrive with a mask and their child jumps into your arms, while you were told not to wear a mask, you have some worry," she recalls, mentioning the contradictory instructions between the networks at the beginning of the pandemic.

THE LACK OF RECOGNITION

With all these changes and adaptations, both educators were hoping for a better recognition from Minister Mathieu Lacombe and the government. "We didn't even get a little pat on the back. Parents were telling me they didn't understand how come we weren't better recognized," says Josée Lemire.

In family environments, none of all those additional duties were financially compensated. "It's outrageous, she adds. I love my profession, but at one point, I started to cry, to worry, and I decided to shut down my service. But, fortunately, I ended up reversing my decision after talking with my son."

Josée Lemire says that, despite the lack of recognition from the government, the situation has increased the parents' awareness about the essential nature of the services they provide. "All the parents of my service's children supported me, even in the more difficult moments," she concludes.

ELECTORAL REFORM

SO THAT EVERY VOTE COUNTS!

One of the most important institutional decisions a democracy must make is that of choosing an electoral system. The choice is seldom made consciously and deliberately. Québec is no exception to this rule.

Matthieu Pelard | CSQ ADVISOR

In September 2019, the Québec government introduced Bill 39: An Act to establish a new electoral system. The event was described as historic, because the current system has not changed since 1862. The system is no longer in tune with the expectations of Québec society, according to CSQ president Sonia Ethier. “Significant changes need to be made so that the system promotes real proportional representation,” she said.

DISTORTION OF THE POPULAR WILL

One of the main shortcomings of the current voting system is its distortion of the popular will. For example, in 2018, the CAQ won 37% of the popular vote, but it obtained 59% of the seats in the National Assembly. The Parti Québécois and Québec Solidaire each won 8% of the seats, even though they obtained a vote of 17% and 16%, respectively. This scenario is repeated from election to election.

PARITY IS NOT A LONG QUIET RIVER

Another shortcoming of the current voting system is parity. In the past 20 years, only 30% of elected MPs have been women, on average. The last election was a significant step forward, with 53% of women elected. It is important to protect this progress, which is not guaranteed for the future.

WHAT DOES THE REFORM ENTAIL?

If the Québec government does not implement the new voting system for 2022, it will be reneging on its promise. The next general election would therefore take place under the old system. The people of Québec would then vote by referendum on the question of establishing a system of mixed member proportional representation and if the vote is in favour of it, the system would only be implemented for the election of 2026.



PROPOSED CHANGES

Concretely, the proposed changes would mean that on election day, Quebecers would vote to elect 125 Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), as they do now. However, they would fill out two separate ballots:

- one vote on a ballot for a candidate running in the electoral district
- one vote on a ballot for a candidate for a seat in the electoral region

As is currently the case, 80 National Assembly seats would be chosen by majority. As for the 45 remaining seats in the 17 electoral regions, they would be elected using a calculation method that would convert the number of votes obtained and districts won by a party into a number of seats.

To be eligible for this regional compensation system, a political party would have to obtain at least 10% of the votes across Québec. Each party would present a regional list of candidates (the choice for the second vote) to indicate who would occupy regional seats if they are eligible for this compensation.

WHAT THE CSQ RECOMMENDS

The CSQ supports the reform of the Québec government. However, Bill 39, which was introduced by the Legault government, limits the improvements that a mixed proportional voting system could bring to Québec. It should therefore be modified in order to:

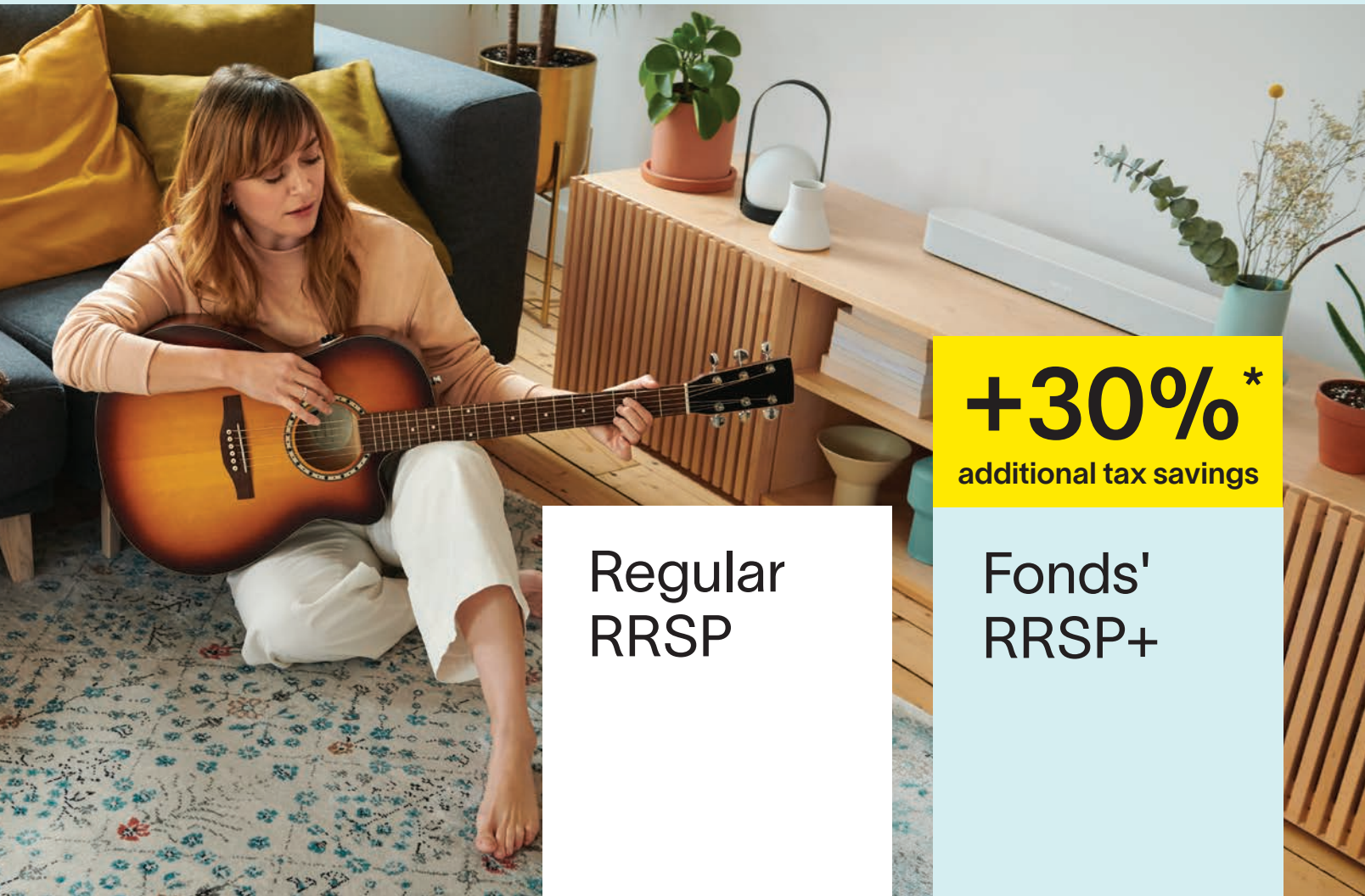
- respect gender parity
- guarantee parliamentary access to the political party that obtained 2% to 5% of the vote across Québec
- ensure better proportionality by reducing the number of regions in the redistribution of seats
- avoid holding a referendum under any circumstances during an electoral period so as not to undermine the importance of such a societal choice

Despite the pandemic, the bill to establish a new electoral system is still active and led by Minister Sonia LeBel. It may be referred for further study in the National Assembly during the next few months. This is what the CSQ is hoping for.

“The time has come to walk the talk. Let’s get closer to the ideal where every vote really counts,” concludes Sonia Ethier.

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