

Press Release

Empowering Canadian civil society organizations in the fight against influenza

14 January 2021 – Influenza is among the leading causes for hospitalization in older adults in Canada.¹ 60% of hospitalizations due to influenza in 2018 occurred among adults over 65 years of age, and 87% of those had more than one chronic condition.² For these at-risk groups, influenza can lead to serious complications including significantly diminished functional ability and death.

Yet despite the illustrated severity of influenza in older adults, the decline in influenza vaccination and suboptimal rates for 2018-2019 are evidenced by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) in the Departmental Results Report on Infectious Disease and Control,³ and far below the national coverage goals of 80%.⁴

Today in the release of the report on “Bringing Canadian Patient Organizations Together in the Fight Against Influenza” the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) together with Cardiac Health Foundation of Canada, National Pensioners Federation, Active Aging Canada, Canadian Pharmacists Association, the Lung Association, the Lung Health Foundation and CanAge is calling for stronger support that enables civil society organisations to be an empowering voice that advocates to its member and the broader community the importance of being vaccinated against influenza.

Patient and advocacy organizations are mindful of the burden influenza and other vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs) such as pneumonia can impact the lives of older adults and those with underlying chronic conditions. Not surprisingly, organizational awareness of influenza risk and level of engagement in advocacy is proportional, those organizations most involved in advocacy are more knowledgeable in the dangers of influenza for Canadian seniors. Despite awareness of influenza risk, both organizations and seniors face significant barriers to prioritization.

Increasingly smaller budgets and capacity issues are significant barriers to prioritizing adult influenza vaccination on agendas. Smaller budgets mean that organizations have to rely on social media and e-newsletters rather than being able to invest in population-specific campaigns. They voiced concern about having to meet the demands for services, resources, and information on a constrained budget which resulted in human resources being stretched thin. Amidst these limits, organizations view adult immunization as very important but requiring particular expertise that extended beyond the capacity of some organizations. Despite these limitations, organisations see the common issues as an opportunity to partner with larger organizations to complement the broader immunization promotion strategy.

While seniors face many barriers to being vaccinated such as transportation, poor mobility competing appointments, shortages of high-dose vaccines, civil society organizations are solution driven with the ability to communicate evidence-based messages directly to their members many of whom are in the highest risk category for influenza.

There is consensus for collaborative efforts across sectors and disciplines through CSO platforms to reach a greater population to positively influence influenza vaccine uptake rates – unique targeted messages and accessible channels are key actions to raising population awareness that ‘action’ in being vaccinated against influenza and other VPDs is the most effective solution.

To read the full report, [click here](#).

Media Contact

For more information or interview opportunities, please contact Ms Berenice Anaya, Media, Marketing and Communications Officer, IFA at BAmaya@ifa.ngo.

About the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

IFA is an international, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Now over 45 years old, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. Through IFA's formal relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and general consultative status at the United Nations and its agencies, the IFA is in the position to advocate directly with member states and contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue.

¹ Wilhelm M. (2018). Influenza in Older Patients: A Call to Action and Recent Updates for Vaccinations. *Am J Manag Care*. 24(2 Suppl): S15-24

² Government of Canada (2019). FluWatch report: May 12 to May 18, 2019 (Week 20). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/fluwatch/2018-2019/week20-may-12-may-18-2019.html>

³ Government of Canada (2020). Public Health Agency of Canada 2018-2019 Departmental Results. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/transparency/corporate-management-reporting/departmental-performancereports/2018-2019.html#a312>

⁴ Government of Canada (2019). Vaccine Uptake in Canadian Adults in 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/2018-2019-influenza-flu-vaccine-coverage-survey-results.html>