

International Federation on Ageing Urges Canadian Provinces and Territories to Support COVID-19 Vaccination Access for Older Adults

COVID-19 presented a novel threat to the health of older adults, which continues today. Vaccines are a life-saving intervention which prevent death, long-term consequences due to COVID-19 and alleviate burden on health systems which have not entirely recovered from initial effects of the pandemic and face an onslaught of respiratory disease cases each year.

While the Government of Canada has procured COVID-19 vaccines since the pandemic, in 2025 provinces and territories will be expected to make decisions on COVID-19 procurement and the extent to which COVID-19 vaccination will be included in publicly funded provincial and territorial immunization programs. IFA urges provinces and territories to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available broadly for older and at-risk adults in Canada, to ensure no one is left behind.

Since the onset of the pandemic, COVID-19 has resulted in over 7 million deaths globally. (1) Even this number is likely underestimated due to waning testing and diagnosis. Estimates indicate that the full death toll associated directly or indirectly with the COVID-19 pandemic (described as “excess mortality”) was approximately 14.9 million, with the greatest death toll amongst older adults.(2)

In Canada, this respiratory disease season alone (since August 25, 2024), a total of 85,244 COVID-19 detections were reported.(3) Older people continue to be at the greatest risk of adverse consequences due to COVID-19, with individuals 65 years of age and older accounting for 93% of deaths and for most hospital admissions.(3)

It is estimated that COVID-19 vaccination has saved millions of lives, demonstrating the power of this public health intervention.(4) Additionally, vaccination against COVID-19 provides significant health and social benefits. At the individual level, COVID-19 reduces the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death among vaccinated individuals, particularly older adults. In addition, vaccination has broader societal benefits, helping to support continued function into later life, enabling greater contribution to the workforce, greater economic productivity and cost-savings to governments and health systems.

“For older and at-risk Canadians, COVID-19 vaccination supports healthy ageing, longevity and the ability to contribute to and meaningfully participate in society. Ensuring the broad availability and accessibility of prevention services, such as COVID-19 vaccination, protects the health of Canada’s populations and health and social systems and, crucially, ensures universal and equitable health coverage.”, says Ms. Katrina Bouzanis, Director, Policy, Advocacy and Innovation at the International Federation on Ageing (IFA).

As of June 30, 2024, over 5.5 million Canadians aged 50 and over received an XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine, demonstrating that older and at-risk adults want access to up-to-date vaccines.(5) A recent IFA survey on COVID-19 uptake in Canada finds that almost 2/3rds of Canadians 50 years of age and older currently believe COVID-19 to be a threat.(6) Of those choosing to be vaccinated, 96% indicated that they wanted to protect themselves from developing COVID-19 and associated risks and symptoms.(6)

Equally, there is a need to continue to promote the importance of COVID-19 vaccination, starting with clear recommendations and implementation into provincial and territorial programs. Clear public health messaging and education, along with comprehensive programs, is needed to ensure sustained vaccine uptake, and ultimately, the health and well-being of populations.

About the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

The [International Federation on Ageing \(IFA\)](#) 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 the 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. Through its [Vaccines4Life](#) program, IFA has worked alongside committed organizations to address barriers to improve adult vaccination rates in the context of healthy ageing.

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