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Implementing COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Strategies for Other Necessary Immunizations Could Help Save the Lives of Thousands of Older Canadians

TORONTO, November 18, 2021 — Each year, preventable illnesses like influenza, shingles and pneumococcal disease (a common cause of pneumonia), cause thousands of avoidable and unnecessary deaths across Canada, particularly among older adults. Known as the “Big 3,” these illnesses pose acute risks for older Canadians, who are at a higher risk of serious health outcomes. The good news is, there is a solution.

In a new report, entitled [*Lessons Learned: What Successful COVID-19 Immunization Efforts Taught Us About Improving Vaccine Coverage Among Older Canadians for Other Vaccine-Preventable Diseases*](#), the National Institute on Ageing shows how best practices developed for COVID-19 immunization efforts can be applied to increase vaccine uptake among older adults for influenza, shingles and pneumococcal disease.

“Influenza, shingles and pneumococcal disease are vaccine-preventable illnesses. This means that being vaccinated against them provides older adults with an important layer of protection,” says lead author and NIA Director of Health Policy Research Dr. Samir Sinha. “By drastically increasing immunization efforts for these, and other vaccine-preventable diseases among older adults, Canada can save lives, strengthen prevention efforts and improve overall community health.”

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted important discussions about the critical role vaccines play in individual and community health. Canada is an international leader in COVID-19 vaccination efforts and has achieved one of the world’s highest rates of immunization for older adults. As of November 6, 2021, 93% of Canadians aged 60 years and older had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 91% had been fully vaccinated with two doses.

Despite this success, Canada has yet to meet its national goal of vaccinating 80% of adults aged 65 years and older against influenza and pneumococcal disease. Shingles vaccine coverage has remained very low among adults aged 50 years and older, the group for whom the vaccine is recommended. In order to increase vaccination rates for the “Big 3” among older Canadians, federal, provincial/territorial and local governments can implement the lessons learned and the best practices developed during the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

“We have the strategies, the tools, the knowledge and the networks to make these vital vaccinations available to older Canadians in communities across the country. We can save lives, starting today,” says Dr. Sinha. “What we need is coordination and sustained political will, at all levels of government.”

The report provides the following seven actionable policy recommendations to increase vaccine uptake among older adults and reduce the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases in Canada:

1. Increase public awareness about the importance of vaccination for older adults and the burden that vaccine-preventable diseases place on health systems
2. Increase public confidence in the safety and efficacy of vaccines
3. Provide influenza, pneumococcal, and shingles vaccination free of cost to all older Canadians
4. Expand access to vaccines and vaccinations through pharmacies, primary health care providers, community clinics, and targeted homebound vaccination programs
5. Create more culturally targeted information campaigns that speak to older adults from diverse backgrounds
6. Capitalize on ongoing COVID-19 vaccination efforts to administer other recommended vaccinations to older adults
7. Develop an integrated national vaccine registry and surveillance systems to effectively monitor vaccine uptake

By applying these evidence-based recommendations, provincial, territorial, and federal governments can address long-standing vaccination gaps to reduce preventable deaths, improve health and decrease the burdens these illnesses place on the healthcare system.

For more information, read the full report: [Lessons Learned: What Successful COVID-19 Immunization Efforts Taught Us About Improving Vaccine Coverage Among Older Canadians for Other Vaccine-Preventable Diseases](#).

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About The National Institute on Ageing

The [National Institute on Ageing](#) is a Ryerson University think tank focused on the realities of Canada’s ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@RyersonNIA](#) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS_Now](#).

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