



April 29, 2024

The Hon. Mark Holland
Minister of Health
Brooke Claxton Building
Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9

Subject: Investing to bolster adult vaccination programs

Dear Minister Holland,

I am writing to you on behalf of CARP (Canadian Association of Retired Persons) to bring to your attention a critical issue concerning the health and well-being of our older adult population in Canada: adult vaccination.

As the Government of Canada plans its budget allocations, we urge you to invest additional resources into the National Immunization Strategy to help the provinces and territories ensure the latest approved and recommended vaccines are accessible to older Canadians and to implement public awareness campaigns to increase uptake.

The rationale behind this request is clear: the prevention of serious illnesses among older adults not only significantly reduces the burden on our healthcare system but also preserves the quality of life for countless individuals and their families.

The impact of preventable illnesses, as evidenced by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, is profound and far-reaching. Despite the availability of safe and effective vaccines for diseases such as pneumococcal disease, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), shingles, and COVID-19, vaccination rates among our older adult population remain suboptimal.

This is concerning, given the significant health risks associated with these illnesses, particularly for older individuals. For instance, while Canadian public health authorities aim for an 80% vaccine coverage rate for pneumococcal disease among adults aged 65 and older, the current rate stands at just 55%.¹ This means that a large portion of our older

¹ Health Canada, Vaccination Coverage Goals and Vaccine Preventable Disease Reduction Targets by 2025, August 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization-vaccine-priorities/national->

adult population is left vulnerable to potentially life-threatening diseases, placing unnecessary strain on our healthcare resources.

One of the key barriers to increasing vaccination uptake is a lack of awareness among the public regarding the severity of these illnesses and the preventive measures available. A recent survey conducted by CARP revealed that only 52% of respondents were aware of the seriousness of pneumococcal disease – specifically, that pneumonia coupled with the flu ranks among the top 10 leading causes of death for Canadian adults.

The CARP survey showed that over 90% of respondents want the federal government to allocate additional financial resources to the provinces/territories so they can provide the latest pneumococcal vaccines. The survey also indicated that over 90% of respondents want governments to do more and invest more to encourage greater use of pneumococcal vaccines.

We therefore strongly urge the Government of Canada to allocate additional funding to the provinces/territories through the National Immunization Strategy so they expand access to the latest adult vaccines, including for pneumococcal disease. Some of the newer vaccines offer more comprehensive protection and were specifically developed for the older adult population. We also encourage the federal government to allocate resources to support the provinces/territories in conducting comprehensive public awareness campaigns to promote vaccination uptake among older Canadians.

These efforts will not only better protect the health and well-being of our seniors but also contribute to future cost savings for our healthcare system.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the health and well-being of our older adult population in Canada.

Sincerely,

Bill VanGorder

Bill VanGorder
Chief Advocacy and Education Officer
Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)

cc: Stephen Lucas, Deputy Minister of Health

[immunization-strategy/vaccination-coverage-goals-vaccine-preventable-diseases-reduction-targets-2025.html#1.1.2](https://www.immunization-strategy/vaccination-coverage-goals-vaccine-preventable-diseases-reduction-targets-2025.html#1.1.2)