

## **International Federation on Ageing (IFA) Launches Educational Campaign in Response to Survey Findings on Older Adults' COVID-19 Vaccination Attitudes**

**October 16, 2024** - The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) has unveiled an educational campaign following the results of their recent survey that highlights a concerning decline in COVID-19 vaccination intent among Canadians aged 50 and older. According to the survey, only 58% of older Canadians intend to be vaccinated against COVID-19 this respiratory disease season.

The IFA conducted the survey in August 2024 to gather insights from older Canadians on their perceptions of COVID-19 and vaccination practices. The findings reveal significant changes in public attitudes, including diminishing trust in information sources, decreased awareness of current vaccine recommendations, and rising concerns about vaccine safety and effectiveness. These findings call for increased education and awareness to support COVID-19 vaccination among older people.

"The survey underscores the importance of understanding the factors driving older Canadians' decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccination," said Katrina Bouzanis, Acting Director of Policy, Advocacy and Innovation at the IFA. "There is a pressing need to address knowledge gaps and rebuild trust in vaccination efforts in Canada."

Key findings from the survey include a sharp decline in perceived risk: while 83% of respondents viewed COVID-19 as a serious health threat at the onset of the pandemic, only 50% consider it a concern today. Among those intending to receive the COVID-19 vaccine this season, 96% cited personal protection from the virus, 69% expressed concern about variants, and 69% aimed to protect their communities.

Conversely, concerns about side effects (48%) and skepticism about the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine in protecting against disease (40%) were the main reasons given by those previously vaccinated as to why they do not intend to be vaccinated this season. Given these findings, it is important to note that Canada's public health authorities and experts, including Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), have highlighted the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccination in preventing disease.

The survey also revealed a reduction in trust across all COVID-19 information sources, apart from healthcare providers. The sources with the largest trust disparities between the beginning of the pandemic and now include television and radio (19% difference), government agencies (16% difference), and print media (12% difference). This growing distrust in information from reputable sources may also contribute to current gaps in knowledge. For instance, only 43% of respondents were aware of current vaccine recommendations, and only 46% felt informed about COVID-19 variants.

Despite public health authorities recommending that older adults receive COVID-19 vaccines three to six months from their last COVID-19 dose, only 60% of Canadians aged 50 and over believe annual vaccinations are necessary. This highlights a critical gap in understanding on the ongoing risk posed by COVID-19 to older adults, especially those with chronic conditions like heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes.

Nina Snyder, Chief Operations Officer at Alberta Lung emphasized the need for clear and consistent public health messaging, stating, "The Alberta Lung Association supports IFA and its programs. Lung disease affects seniors at a disproportionately higher rate, our most vulnerable need to be informed and aware of all factors affecting their lung health. Exercising, eating right and immunization can help prevent

hospitalization.” The IFA's educational campaign will focus on restoring trust and confidence in COVID-19 vaccines, stressing the importance of immunization for older people to protect themselves and reduce strain on Canada's healthcare system. The campaign and resources include a message bank sharing information on COVID-19 vaccination, a social media and printable toolkit and national and provincial infographics sharing the results of the survey. The resources are additionally available publicly to share and adapt, including by other patient, professional and civil society organizations working to promote vaccination amongst their members and constituents.

The IFA calls on provincial and federal public health authorities, as well as patient and professional organizations, to emphasize the need for vaccination and vaccine literacy during this respiratory disease season. Ensuring the protection of older adults and vulnerable populations through vaccination is critical to supporting Canada's ageing population and minimizing the healthcare burden.

### **About the International Federation on Ageing**

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.

### **About Alberta Lung**

[Alberta Lung](#) has been at the forefront of improving lung health in Alberta for decades. Through our commitment to continuous improvement, we are advancing our work to serve you better. We lead in respiratory health, connecting, advocating, and engaging community members to support better lung health for all.

### **About Health Coalition of Alberta**

[The Health Coalition of Alberta](#) is an alliance of health charities, patient groups, non-profit organizations and individuals driven by a unified purpose. Through the strength of our membership, we have a voice and influence into public health decisions that impact the health of Albertans.

Formed by a group of volunteers in 2006, the Health Coalition of Alberta formalized as a registered non-profit society in 2014. Our membership base quickly grew to one of the largest advocacy coalitions of its kind in Canada; more than 100 members inform our work.

We use a collaborative, solution-focused approach to engage with governments, health policy decision-makers and other stakeholders to achieve our goals.



## **About Manitoba Lung**

As the [recognized leader](#) and primary resource in lung health, our mission is to enable all Manitobans to breathe with ease. Our main goal is to have a province free of lung disease.