

IFA Calls for Increased Shingles Vaccine Access for Older Adults Across Canada

June 2025 – As Canada observes B.C. Seniors Week and Seniors Month in Ontario, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is calling for urgent and equitable public funding of the shingles vaccine (herpes zoster) for adults aged 50 and older. Shingles affects 1 in 3 Canadians in their lifetime, with incidence and severity increasing significantly after age 50. Shingles complications such as postherpetic neuralgia disproportionately impact older adults, compounding the burden of chronic disease and driving healthcare costs.

Evidence also shows that investing in adult immunization yields substantial economic benefits: for every dollar spent, there is a 341% return in health and economic value. Nationally, adult vaccination is estimated to save Canada over \$2.5 billion annually by reducing avoidable healthcare use and productivity loss. Despite these broader benefits, adult immunization programs, such as for shingles, remain underprioritized.

Accordingly, IFA has released a series of policy briefs calling for provincial action on shingles immunization. The reports focus on Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba—three provinces with differing levels of access but shared challenges in protecting vulnerable older adults.

Each policy brief provides a detailed review of the burden of shingles and related complications among older populations, assesses current provincial vaccination policies, and outlines key recommendations to improve coverage and equity. The briefs reinforce that while Canada's ageing population continues to grow rapidly—with people 65+ projected to represent nearly one-quarter of the national population by 2040—access to adult vaccines remains fragmented and underfunded.

“Shingles is not just a painful rash—it can lead to long-term nerve pain, vision loss, and significant declines in quality of life,” said Katrina Bouzanis, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Innovation at the IFA. “These policy briefs are a call to action for provincial leaders to remove cost barriers and prioritize preventative care through adult immunization.”

The policy briefs reveal important findings about the current state of shingles vaccination across the three provinces:

In Ontario, while shingles vaccination is publicly funded for adults aged 65 to 70, significant gaps persist in public awareness, accessibility, and equitable uptake. Approximately one in ten Ontarians do not have a primary care physician, making it more difficult for them to receive the vaccine through traditional healthcare channels. Expanding access to the shingles vaccine through pharmacy-based delivery could play a vital role in improving coverage and removing access barriers.

In British Columbia, shingles vaccination is not publicly funded for the general population, with the exception of First Nations Elders aged 60 and over. The province currently has a vaccination coverage rate of just 32.9 percent—substantially lower than other provinces with more comprehensive funding. The out-of-pocket cost, estimated at \$150 per dose, continues to be a major obstacle, particularly for older adults living on fixed incomes.

Manitoba also does not include the shingles vaccine in its publicly funded immunization program. In addition to cost barriers, logistical challenges further hinder uptake as residents must obtain a prescription from a physician before a pharmacist can administer the vaccine, adding an extra step that can discourage follow-through, especially among older adults with mobility issues. Despite a slightly higher coverage rate of 39.5 percent, Manitoba still falls short of meeting the needs of its ageing population, which experiences a high burden of chronic disease.

As provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island lead the way with universal funding for shingles vaccination, the IFA emphasizes the opportunity for others to follow suit.

“The momentum is building across Canada to protect older adults from shingles,” added Bouzanis. “We urge policymakers in Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba to seize this moment—invest in prevention, and close the immunization equity gap.”

To access the *Shingles Matters* policy briefs and learn more about IFA’s immunization advocacy, visit [Shingles Awareness Week 2025](#).

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.