

TIP OF THE ICEBERG:

Vaccinating Canadian Caregivers Against Influenza

Roundtable Takeaways and Calls to Action





Introduction

On October 14, 2021, the Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA) hosted a virtual roundtable convening leaders from Canadian caregiving organizations, patient advocacy groups, health policy, and others from GCOA's cross-sector network of global experts to discuss the importance of vaccinating Canada's caregivers against influenza and identify strategies to engage, activate, and reach this often overlooked population.

Participants

Melissa Andrew,

Professor, Dalhousie University

Jane Barratt,

Secretary General, International Federation on Ageing

Bob Bell,

Professor of Surgery, University of Toronto; Former Ontario Deputy Minister of Health

Lucie Marisa Bucci,

Senior Manager, Immunize Canada

Amy Coupal,

CEO, Ontario Caregiver Organization

Mike Hodin,

CEO, Global Coalition on Ageing

Barbara MacLean,

Executive Director, Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Allison McGeer,

Infectious Disease Consultant, Sinai Health's Mount Sinai Hospital

John Papastergiou,

Pharmacist/Owner, Shoppers Drug Mart

Jess Rogers,

Vice President, Programs and Services, Lung Health Foundation

Bruce Seet,

Director of Medical Affairs, Sanofi

Samir Sinha,

Director of Geriatrics, Sinai Health and University Health Network; Director of Health Policy Research, National Institute on Ageing

Laura Tamblyn Watts,

President & CEO, CanAge

Bill VanGorder,

Chief Operating Officer & Chief Policy Office, Canadian Association of Retired Persons

Claire Webster,

Founder, Caregiver Crosswalk; Founder, McGill University Dementia Education Program

Grace Whiting,

President and CEO, National Alliance for Caregiving; Governing Board Member, International Alliance of Carer Organizations



Geriatrics and Gerontology

Sinai Health's
Mount Sinai Hospital
International Federation
on Ageing



Caregivers Organizations

Caregivers Alberta
National Alliance for Caregiving
Family Caregivers
of British Columbia
Ontario Caregiver Organization



Patient Advocacy Groups

CanAge
Canadian Association
of Retired Persons
Lung Health Foundation



Vaccines and Infectious Disease

Sanofi
Immunize Canada



Health Policymakers

Province of Ontario



Pharmacists

Shoppers Drug Mart

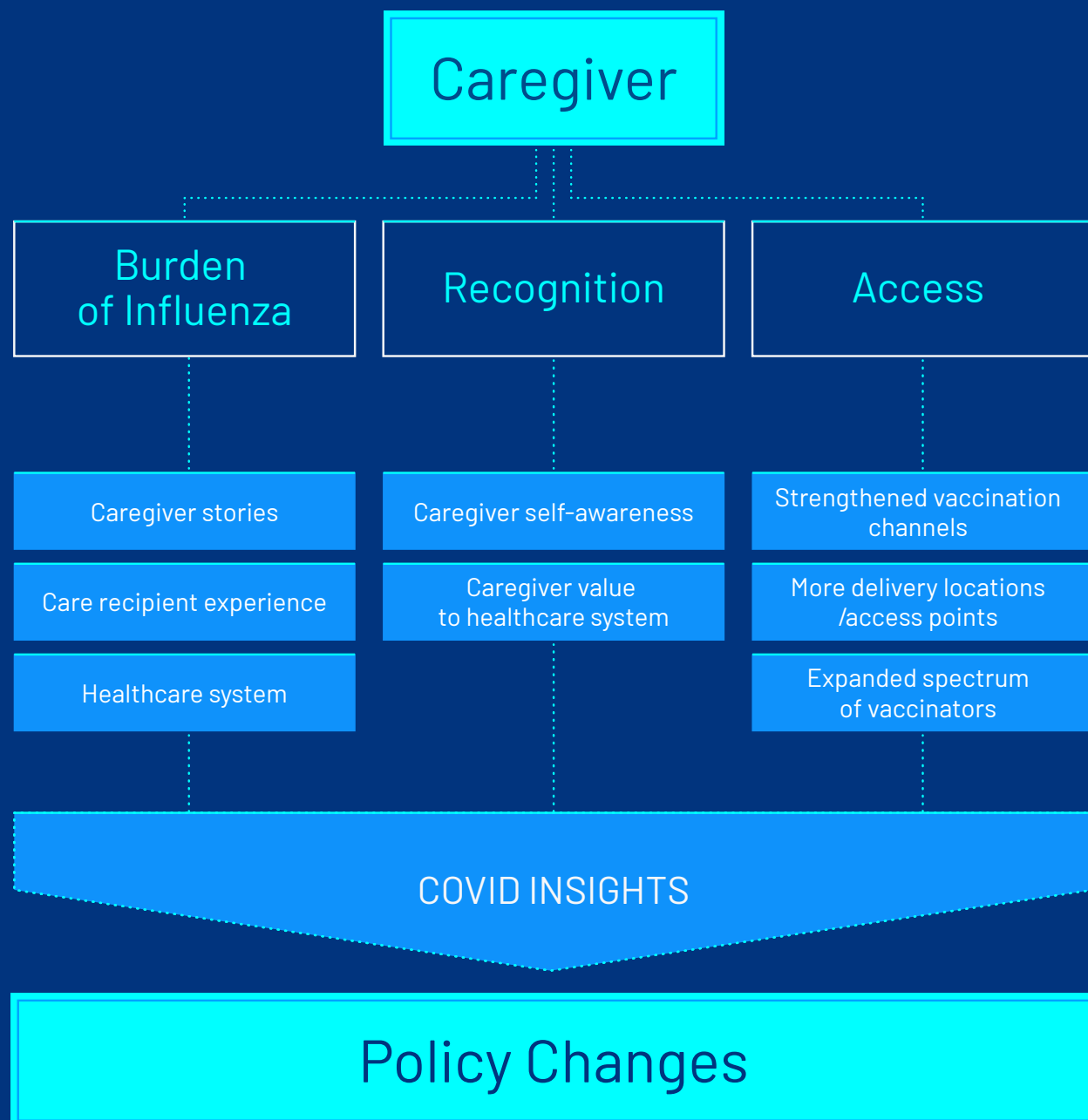


Research and Academia

McGill University Dementia
Education Program
Dalhousie University
National Institute on Ageing



Conceptual Framework: Insights to Actions



Key Takeaways

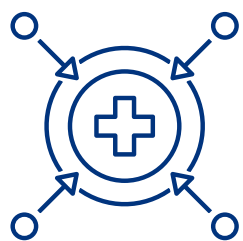
1.



Influenza can have a devastating impact on individuals, families, and the capacity of the Canadian healthcare system.

Influenza and its resulting impact—such as increasing heart attacks and strokes, as well as worsening COPD, viral pneumonia, and other conditions—can incapacitate a previously healthy caregiver. Influenza annually causes increased hospital admissions and overcrowded and unsafe conditions in hospital emergency departments.

2.



Caregivers are a critical partner of Canada's healthcare system and economy but are not recognized as such.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified that the Canadian health system does not have built-in structures or policies identifying caregivers as partners in care and to adequately support them in their roles. Yet the Canadian health system, and therefore the economy, would not be able to survive without family caregivers.

3.



Canadian caregivers are diverse, and many do not self-identify as caregivers.

Canada's 8 million caregivers differ in age, gender, relationship to their care recipient, and access to resources. Caregivers that do not self-identify as caregivers may not recognize themselves in messages targeted to caregivers. Further, they may not consider themselves to be someone whose own health status is both vital and vulnerable.

4.



Many Canadian caregivers have expressed distress due to the burden they carry as caregivers and are in the dark on how to optimize their own health and well-being, including through immunization.

Canadian caregivers already experience a heavy physical, emotional, and financial burden, and their well-being has declined as a result of COVID. Many are unaware of available resources—including routine immunizations intended to protect them and their loved ones—and have little opportunity to access them. Targeted changes in policy to expand access points and reimbursement can address this gap.

5.



Influenza vaccines for family caregivers and others represent a positive prevention strategy.

This strategy will have positive impact on Canada's healthcare system, families, and caregivers and aligns with the global goals of the UN and WHO. Keeping adult caregivers healthier through influenza prevention has application globally to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Decade of Healthy Ageing.

6.



Successful strategies to vaccinate Canadian caregivers against influenza—whether in policy or practice—must cover the spectrum from messaging to the ability to deliver shots to people where they are.

This requires engaging the right people at every level across the ecosystem, including employers; changing policies around access and reimbursement so caregivers can be vaccinated where they are; and ensuring that communication efforts encompass caregiver diversity.

Calls to Action

Evidence



Collect evidence from across Canada on the burden and cost of influenza on caregivers, the Canadian healthcare system, and society, and identify best practices to reduce them.

To support concerted action on influenza prevention for Canada's caregivers, it is critical to collect evidence quantifying the burden on caregivers and their families, the healthcare system, and beyond and on the best practices that can reduce this burden, such as expanded access and better communication.

Access



Introduce policies to expand where influenza vaccines can be administered and by whom, and engage private sector businesses and employers in this effort.

Reducing barriers to vaccination starts with meeting people where they are. Policies should reflect this reality, including allowing vaccines to be delivered in more settings, by more and different professionals, and allowing caregivers and care recipients to be vaccinated at the same time.

Communication



Develop wide-reaching and targeted education materials in which caregivers can recognize themselves.

Communication with and about caregivers must be nuanced and multiplatform—both high-tech and low-tech—while acknowledging and validating the central importance of caregivers to their families, the healthcare system, and society.

Powerful Quotes



“Caregivers can be trusted sources of information, but we live in a world of misinformation, often when it comes to vaccination. We are powerful voices, yet we are also vulnerable as caregivers.”

*Jane Barratt
Secretariat, International Federation on Ageing*

“People just have no idea how to access healthcare support. Not only was I not informed about the illness itself, but what role does healthcare system have? How do you navigate? How do you access? The truth is I didn’t even have time for that. If I had to go and have a flu shot, forget it. I would not have had time. There would have been something else I had to do.”

*Claire Webster
Founder, Caregiver Crosswalk and McGill University
Dementia Education Program*

“I know as a geriatrician, only having two chairs in a clinic room, for myself and my patient, isn’t going to cut it. I usually have 3 or 4. I often say that my older patients come with an entourage—family, friends, people who are advocating for them. But rarely do we ever think about them as being part of that dyad, part of that care aspect. I always make a point to ask how the caregiver is doing. Sadly, a lot of the time the response I get is people bursting into tears. Nobody ever asks, nobody thinks about what their health and wellness needs are. It reminds them that they need to be looking after themselves.”

*Dr. Samir Sinha
Director of Geriatrics, Sinai Health and University Health
Network Director of Health Policy Research, National
Institute on Ageing*

“Keeping people out of hospitals is what we need to accomplish, and one of the best ways to do that is to focus on influenza vaccinations for seniors at risk and caregivers at risk.”

Dr. Bob Bell
Former Deputy Minister of Health, Ontario

“There are lots of system costs we can think about. I’m hoping to focus on personal costs and two main messages to caregivers. One is to communicate to the caregiver that they’re protecting themselves and their ability to be the caregiver... The other piece is protecting themselves if they have underlying health conditions in particular. We’ve seen lots of cases of previously healthy people succumbing to influenza and certainly to COVID.”

Dr. Melissa Andrew
Professor, Dalhousie University

“Access is key for vaccine coverage. As we’ve seen during COVID-19, we need to make sure that people can get their flu vaccines not just in healthcare settings such as doctors’ offices, pharmacies, and long-term care, but also in workplaces and the communities. Our CanAge Vaccine Report shows clearly that access to flu vaccines depends on your province and in some cases, postal code.”

Laura Tamblyn Watts
President and CEO, CanAge

“From a policy perspective, I’d like us to be finding every opportunity to do two things—one, taking advantage of the progress we have made in recognizing caregivers as essential to our healthcare system, and two, recognizing that some older adults come in dyads. We would never separate mom and baby, but we have no qualms separating older couples in Canada.”

Dr. Allison McGeer
Infectious Disease Consultant, Sinai Health’s Mount Sinai Hospital



“Diversity of communication and engagement strategies is critical. This includes high- and low-tech outreach. We have leveraged technology so much during the pandemic, but we miss a whole group of caregivers if we rely solely on tech. Strategies like direct mail and collaborations with community health centers are key.”

Amy Coupal
CEO, Ontario Caregiver Association



About The Global Coalition On Aging

The Global Coalition on Aging aims to reshape how global leaders approach and prepare for the 21st century's profound shift in population aging. GCOA uniquely brings together global corporations across industry sectors with common strategic interests in aging populations, a comprehensive and systemic understanding of aging, and an optimistic view of its impact. Through research, public policy analysis, advocacy, and strategic communications, GCOA is advancing innovative solutions and working to ensure global aging is a path to health, productivity and economic growth.

For more information, visit
www.globalcoalitiononaging.com.

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