

# Report: Adult Vaccination, Respiratory Infections, and NCD Prevention in Super-Aging Japan

FEBRUARY 2026



## Background

Japan is widely recognized as the world's first super-aging society, meaning it was the first country where more than 20% of the population were aged 65 or older.<sup>1</sup> Its rapidly aging society faces dual challenges: the growing burden of vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases and the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Emerging evidence increasingly links severe respiratory infections—such as community-acquired pneumonia (CAP), influenza, and COVID-19—to heightened risks of developing or exacerbating NCDs, along with increased premature mortality. These findings elevate the importance of adult vaccines in both infectious disease control and chronic disease prevention. This has created an imperative to advance discussion on increasing the uptake of adult vaccines for Japan's aging population.

Approximately 75% of total deaths in Japan are due to non-communicable disease (NCDs), and treatment and management of such conditions account for roughly 85% of total medical and long-term care spend in the country.<sup>2,3</sup> While the average cost of healthcare rises as a person ages in the Japanese healthcare system, the cost of treating and managing those living with NCDs is greatly outpacing the cost of healthier older adults, and this in turn has led the cost of healthcare in Japan to exceed GDP growth since the turn of the century by approximately 50%.<sup>4</sup>

Respiratory infections such as influenza and COVID-19 remain a significant threat for healthy aging, particularly for older adults and all adults living with NCDs like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory conditions. A recent Japanese study found that influenza vaccination was associated with a significantly reduced risk of severe outcomes from influenza—specifically, among patients aged 65 and older, those who were vaccinated had a much lower rate of these severe outcomes compared to unvaccinated patients.<sup>5</sup> More recently, evidence is beginning to show that respiratory infections like influenza may spur on the development of chronic diseases, effectively, acting as an accelerator of aging.<sup>6</sup>

Japan faces unique challenges in protecting its rapidly aging population from vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases. In Japan, the national immunization policy distinguishes between vaccines for **“A-type” diseases**, which are recommended for all and nearly fully subsidized, and vaccines for **“B-type” diseases**, which include all adult immunizations and are only partially subsidized (typically about 30% of the cost). Uptake for B-type diseases vaccines remains low:

- » ~30% of older adults receive the pneumococcal vaccine.<sup>7</sup>
- » ~40% regularly receive seasonal influenza vaccines.<sup>8</sup>

These uptake metrics fall well below the World Health Organization’s target rate of 75% influenza vaccination coverage for older adults and people with chronic conditions.<sup>9,10</sup> There is no regular, systematic tracking of adult vaccines for B-type diseases. High out-of-pocket costs, insufficient public investment, limited public awareness, low prioritization among healthcare providers, and limitations in who can vaccinate and in which settings all contribute to the problem.

Economic analyses show that adult vaccines deliver a high return on investment—**19:1 over 10 years**—even without accounting for NCD prevention benefits.<sup>11,12</sup> Yet without structural reform and expanded access, Japan risks missing significant health and economic opportunities.

On July 23rd, 2025, the Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA) convened leading domestic and international NCD, vaccine, and health policy experts to debate and discuss ways that Japan can further promote adult immunization and recognize the value of adult vaccines for NCD prevention.

[This roundtable and report were funded by Pfizer.](#)

# Participants

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# Key Takeaways

## 1.

### Strong Evidence Linking Respiratory Infections to NCDs and Mortality

- » Severe infections like CAP accelerate or worsen chronic diseases and can significantly shorten life expectancy.
- » Adult vaccinations help prevent both immediate infectious illnesses and long-term health declines.



#### CALL TO ACTION

Infectious and Non-Infectious Disease Strategy groups should assess opportunities for shared budgeting of vaccines as both a preventive and management strategy for non-communicable disease.

## 2.

### Low Adult Vaccine Uptake Despite High ROI

- » Suboptimal coverage is attributed to cost-sharing requirements, voluntary status of B-type vaccines, which can be interpreted as a lack of belief in vaccines, lack of systematic tracking, and lack of clear recommendations from healthcare providers
- » The economic case for investment is strong, with substantial returns through reduced healthcare costs and improved population health.



#### CALL TO ACTION

Mandate inclusion of adult respiratory vaccines in national chronic disease management guidelines, ensuring integration across the healthcare system.

Launch targeted subsidy programs and public campaigns on adult vaccination for patients with NCDs, prioritizing coordination between infectious disease and chronic care teams.

## 3.

**Policy Gaps in Adult Immunization in Japan**

- » Current immunization framework does not prioritize adult vaccines.
- » No comprehensive national program exists, and most adult vaccines are not fully subsidized.
- » Experts propose expanding eligibility, increasing subsidies, integrating vaccines into routine care, and incentivizing healthcare workers.

**CALL TO ACTION**

Develop and implement a unified, comprehensive national framework for adult immunization, including sustainable funding for all recommended vaccines.

Introduce incentives (financial, professional) for providers who achieve higher vaccine coverage rates, and integrate vaccination into routine adult checkups.

## 4.

**Critical Role of Trusted Healthcare Providers**

- » Physician or pharmacist recommendations strongly drive patient uptake.
- » Structural and incentive gaps limit routine vaccine promotion, especially in rural regions and among frail older adults.
- » Proposed approaches include empowering doctors and pharmacists, local outreach campaigns, and leveraging community trust networks.



### CALL TO ACTION

Fund and equip doctors and pharmacy teams to proactively counsel about adult vaccines, with dedicated training, incentives, and outreach tools.

Expand cadre of approved vaccinators and vaccination sites to include pharmacies and other settings frequented by older adults

Expand local vaccination outreach by engaging trusted providers and supporting networks in rural and underserved communities.

## 5.

### Need for Japan-Specific Research and Tailored Advocacy

- » More evidence is needed on vaccine effectiveness for older and frail populations in Japan.
- » Messaging should align with themes of healthy aging, NCD prevention, and societal well-being.
- » Advocacy must address cultural attitudes toward prevention and reduce hesitancy.



### CALL TO ACTION

Fund national research on real-world vaccine effectiveness and uptake among older and frail Japanese populations.

Design advocacy campaigns with Japan-specific, age-appropriate messaging stressing healthy longevity and community well-being and conduct regular attitudinal surveys to shape outreach.

# 6.

## Alignment with Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS) and Public Health Priorities

- » JIHS has expressed recognition of vaccination as a key tool for aging societies, signaling emerging alignment with potential national reform efforts. Vaccination and infectious disease prevention have been indicated as top priorities within the country's Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, and healthy aging programs have also received prominent attention.<sup>13,14</sup>



### CALL TO ACTION

Establish a JIHS-led coordination platform for adult immunization policy, linking preventive vaccines to national goals for healthy aging and reduced NCD burden.

Support multi-stakeholder engagement—including government, providers, civil society—to guide reform and evaluate progress on adoption of comprehensive adult vaccine policies.

# Conclusion

Japan stands at a critical juncture in protecting its aging population from the compounded burdens of respiratory infections and NCDs. Strengthening adult vaccination policy is both a public health imperative and an economically sound investment. Achieving higher uptake will require coordinated action: expanding financial coverage, integrating vaccines into standard care pathways, empowering healthcare providers, and reshaping public messaging. With evidence showing that vaccines not only save lives but also prevent chronic disease progression, adult immunization should be embedded within Japan's broader healthy aging and public health strategies.

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## Global Coalition on Aging

GCOA represents a cross-section of global business including technology, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, home care, financial, transportation, and consumer sectors. We engage global institutions, policymakers, and the public to drive debate on, create, and promote innovative policies and actions to transform challenges associated with the aging of the global population into opportunities for social engagement, productivity and fiscal sustainability.

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