

New NIA Report Warns Shingles Remains a Costly, Overlooked Health Risk for Older Canadians

TORONTO, Tuesday, February 24 — As Canada marks **National Shingles Awareness Week**, the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is releasing a new report warning that shingles remains a largely overlooked yet preventable health risk for older Canadians. Shingles infections continue to cause unnecessary pain and long-term complications for individuals and avoidable strain on Canada's health care system.

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) strongly recommends the recombinant zoster vaccine for adults aged 50 and older, as well as immunocompromised adults aged 18 and older. Despite this recommendation, **fewer than four in ten Canadians** aged 50 and older reported having received at least one dose of the shingles vaccine.

The new report, [The Overlooked Issue of Shingles Infections in Older Canadians and How to Address It](#), estimates that **approximately 130,000 new shingles cases occur in Canada each year**. The report also estimates an annual health system impact of approximately **\$67–82 million**, driven primarily by the prevalence of shingles among adults aged 60 and older and its associated complications.

“Shingles is not just a short-term inconvenience. It can cause debilitating pain, a significant decline in quality of life and a loss of independence for older adults,” said Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Health Policy Research of the NIA. “What makes this especially concerning is that shingles is largely preventable.

Canada's shingles vaccine coverage landscape remains highly fragmented. Across 13 provinces and territories, only eight currently provide some form of publicly funded coverage for the recommended recombinant zoster vaccine. Just two, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador, offer age-based coverage for all adults aged 50 and older. For those without public or private coverage, the two-dose vaccine can cost **\$300–\$400 out of pocket**, creating a major barrier for many older Canadians.

“Where you live should not determine whether you're protected from a painful and preventable disease,” said Mark Hazelden, Interim Executive Director of the NIA. “Our report shows that inconsistent coverage, limited surveillance and low perceived risk are leaving too many older Canadians vulnerable.”

The report outlines eight evidence-informed policy and practice recommendations, including:

- Expanding **free shingles vaccination** to all populations recommended by NACI across every Canadian province and territory
- Improving **national surveillance and reporting** of shingles cases and vaccination rates
- Supporting **life-course vaccination schedules** that include older adults
- Strengthening **clinician education** and making vaccination easier to access through pharmacies and primary care
- Encouraging shingles vaccination alongside other vaccines, including **influenza and COVID-19 vaccines**, where appropriate.

Together, these measures would significantly improve prevention, reduce complications, and help ensure older Canadians can age with greater confidence and security.

Canadians aged 50 and older are encouraged to speak with their health care providers or pharmacists about shingles vaccination.

To learn which vaccinations are recommended and funded for older adults in each province and territory, visit the NIAs [NIA Vaccine One-Pagers](#).

About The National Institute on Ageing

Founded in 2016, the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is celebrating a decade of impact in our mission to improve the lives of older adults and the systems that support them. Over the past 10 years, the NIA has become Canada's leading voice on ageing policy — convening stakeholders, conducting research, advancing policy solutions and practice innovations, sharing information and shifting attitudes. Our vision remains clear: a Canada where older adults feel valued, included, supported and better prepared to age with confidence.

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