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NEWS RELEASE

National Shingles Awareness Week: A Preventable Pain Too Many Older Canadians Still Suffer

TORONTO, Monday, February 24 — Each year, over 90,000 Canadians aged 50 and older develop shingles, a painful condition that can lead to lasting complications, including chronic nerve pain and vision loss. Despite the availability of an effective vaccine, only 39% of eligible Canadians have received at least one dose, leaving thousands unnecessarily vulnerable to this preventable disease.

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is urging all Canadians aged 50 and older to protect themselves through vaccination. The Shingrix vaccine, recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), offers strong protection against shingles and its complications, yet cost remains a significant barrier for many older adults. While some provinces and territories cover the cost for certain populations, access remains inconsistent across Canada.

“Shingles is not just a rash—it can cause severe, lasting pain and other serious complications and has negatively impacted the quality of life of too many older Canadians,” said Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Health Policy Research of the NIA. “We know that vaccination is the best way to prevent shingles, yet too many older Canadians remain unprotected. Expanding public coverage for the shingles vaccine is a critical step toward ensuring that all older adults can benefit from this highly effective vaccine.”

A Costly Disease for Individuals and the Health Care System

Shingles doesn't just impact those who contract it—it's also a major burden on Canada's health care system, costing \$68 million annually. These costs come from doctor visits, hospitalizations, and treatments for complications that could largely be avoided through vaccination.

Yet, access to the shingles vaccine varies widely across the country, with coverage only being provided by a number of jurisdictions and government initiatives for certain older adults and high-risk populations. In many regions, the shingles vaccine is not publicly

funded, requiring individuals to pay out-of-pocket costs ranging from approximately \$150 to \$190 per dose. In an [NIA report](#), the cost of the vaccine was the most common reason cited why Canadians aged 50 and older did not receive the vaccine. Addressing financial barriers to vaccination is crucial in mitigating these preventable costs and protecting the health of older Canadians.

“Access to the shingles vaccine should not depend on where someone lives or whether they can afford it,” said Alyssa Brierley, Executive Director of the NIA. “No one should have to suffer from shingles when we have a safe, effective vaccine readily available. This National Shingles Awareness Week, we are calling on policy and decision makers to expand public funding for shingles vaccination and make it accessible to all Canadians aged 50 and older.”

Canadians aged 50 and older are encouraged to speak with their health care providers about getting vaccinated against shingles. Those who have already received the vaccine are urged to encourage family, friends, and community members to do the same. The NIA is also calling for policy changes that will make shingles vaccination free and accessible to adults 50 years and older.

For more information visit [the NIA's Guide to Vaccines for Older Canadians](#).

About The National Institute on Ageing

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) improves the lives of older adults and the systems that support them by convening stakeholders, conducting research, advancing policy solutions and practice innovations, sharing information and shifting attitudes. Our vision is a Canada where older adults feel valued, included, supported, and better prepared to age with confidence.

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