

Press Release

Policy failures in adult vaccination in long term care settings?

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Toronto, Ontario - The International Federation on Ageing is pleased to be releasing the findings of the *Improving Adult Vaccination Policy in Long Term Care Settings* project. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted in the most brutal way the risk of serious complications and even death that residents in long term care (LTC) setting experience from vaccine-preventable diseases. The tragic and sometimes unnecessary loss of life in these settings reinforces the need for specific vaccination policies in these settings as an essential component of a life course approach to immunization. This is ground breaking study is intended to deliver critical baseline data on vaccination policies to help inform technical guidelines as well as governmental and civil society dialogue and policy actions to protect the health and promote the functional ability of residents.

A systematic review of government websites, peer-reviewed articles, and grey literature included that from national peak organizations was used to gather and validate data on the extent to which LTC and vaccination is included within national aged care plans, national immunization programs (NIPs), and prioritized among national peak organizations across nineteen countries. The countries studied, selected in consultation with colleagues from the World Health Organization (WHO) are Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, the United States (US), Australia, China, South Korea, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom (UK), Bhutan, India, Thailand, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kenya, and South Africa and provide representation from all six WHO regions.

Despite the existence of aged care plans and policies in all 19 countries, immunization policies were scarce. Immunization was absent from 80% of national aged care strategies and was only evident in Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Thailand. About two-thirds (68%) of the countries studied referenced long-term care facilities (LTCFs) in their national/provincial aged care plans, however, there were fewer countries where legislation, regulations, and policies governed the standards and delivery of services within these facilities. No countries studied included specific guidelines for LTCFs in their national immunization plan or aged care strategies and no national peak organizations across any of the countries advocated for or provided explicit vaccination recommendations for long term care residents.

Recommendations from the study focus on the fundamental lack of governmental attention to routine adult immunization policies and practices in one of the most vulnerable populations within society.

1. Call on governments to ensure the meaningful inclusion of immunization in LTCFs within regional and provincial/state aged care strategies and plans
2. Call on National Immunisation Technical Advisory Groups to universally recognize residents in LTCFs as a population at high risk of serious and life-altering complications from VPDs
3. Call on civil society organizations (patient and advocacy organizations representing older people) to advocate for and act as vaccine champions for residents of LTCFs

Improving Adult Vaccination Policy in Long Term Care Settings is a study that shines a powerful and painful light on the gaps in vaccination policies in LTCFs. There is an urgent need to reform current vaccination policy to reflect the increased risk to VPDs that LTC residents have, as a mechanism to protect their right to health, independence, and functional ability.

To learn more about the *Improving Adult Vaccination Policy in Long Term Care Settings* project visit:
<https://www.vaccines4life.com/improving-adult-vaccination-policy-in-long-term-care-settings/>