

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ADULT INFLUENZA VACCINATION

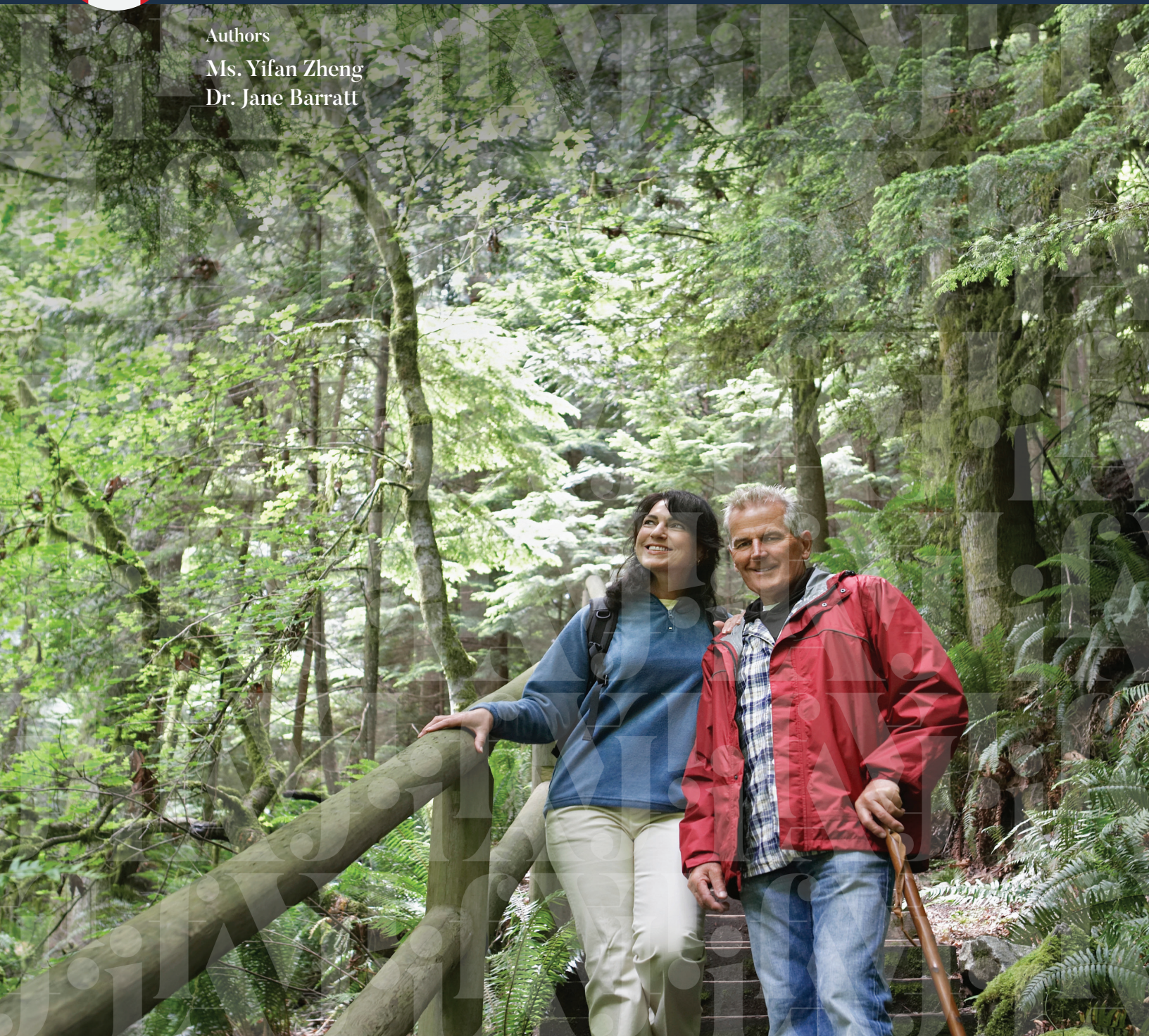


Campaign Overview: Canada

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Executive Summary

A National Immunization Plan in Canada comprising a national vaccination registry, a single immunization schedule and harmonized delivery and access to vaccines is yet to be realised despite decades of calls to action from public health officials and patient and advocacy groups.

Although vaccine recommendations are made at the national level, decisions regarding the introduction of new vaccines into publicly funded programs are primarily a provincial/territorial responsibility. Currently, Canada's 12 provinces and territories have provided free influenza vaccine for persons aged 65 years and over and people with severe chronic conditions with the exception of Quebec which provide free influenza vaccine starting at age 75 and over.

At the national level, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) drives an impressive influenza communication campaign through messages to the general public via various channels including the governmental website, video and digital tools as well as hard copy materials such as leaflets and booklets.

Public communication on influenza and the importance of vaccination is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments in Canada and public health authorities. In broad terms the federal government has set out a coordinated communication strategy calling on and guiding jurisdictions to work together to arouse public attention on influenza.

Civil society (patient organizations, advocacy groups and professional associations) are actively and constantly engaged in campaigns to deliver consistent and complementary communication that meet the specific needs of at-risk populations. A notable example of good practice is the campaign from Immunize Canada showcasing good practice in influenza vaccination communication.

Demographic Details

Canada, in 2018 had an estimated population of 37.9 million with 17.4% (6.4 million) aged 65 years and over.¹ The nation's population is projected to continue ageing. By 2050, nearly one in four (25.9%) Canadians will be 65 years and over, while those 0–14 years of age are estimated to comprise only 14.9% of the total population.²

Alongside the marked demographic shift toward population ageing, the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is increasing. In 2016, 226,200 Canadians died from NCDs representing 88% of all deaths. Cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes collectively accounted for 35% of total deaths.³ Apart from reducing healthy years, NCDs have a significant financial toll with 67% of health care costs expended on chronic diseases every year.⁴

Context

In Canada, the typical influenza season is from November to April.⁵ From 1 September 2018 to 20 July 2019, 48,694 laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza were confirmed, with some 29% reported in adults 65 years and older. Even though vaccination is the most effective way to protect older adults and those living with NCDs against influenza, 30% of those aged 65 years and over and 57% of chronic disease patients 18 to 64 years were not vaccinated in the 2018–2019 influenza season.⁶

Canada has a national immunization strategy which set national targets for immunization (80% influenza vaccination for adults aged 65 and over), but this does not lend itself to a funded national plan. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), an advisory body to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), recommends the national immunization schedule.⁷ Provinces and territories have the authority to determine the most appropriate schedule for their region based on NACI recommendations, and evidence within the local situation. Therefore, publicly funded influenza vaccination programs vary from province/territory to province.⁸

The PHAC with the mission of promoting and protecting health of Canadians, through the Centre

for Immunization and Respiratory Infectious Diseases (CIRID), leads the national influenza awareness campaign by providing public messages to support informed decision making on vaccination. Campaign messages are disseminated via posters, websites, videos, booklets, social media and press releases.

Civil society including patient networks and advocacy organizations also contribute to the campaigns with targeted messages to at-risk populations via various pipelines.

Government Campaign

Leaflet

The seasonal influenza pocket guide published by PHAC summarises the NACI recommendations on vaccination. The guide serves as a quick reference tool for both consumers and health care professionals in making decisions about who should be vaccinated and when, with what vaccines.⁹

Figure 1: Leaflet



NACI recommends that everyone aged 6 months and older is immunised, especially those at highest risk of influenza-related complications and hospitalization including pregnant women, adults aged 65 years and older, indigenous people, nursing home residents, children 6-59 months and patients living with chronic health conditions such as cardiac or pulmonary disorders, diabetes, cancer, renal disease and other immune compromising conditions.

Web page

The PHAC website is a credible source of information on influenza and vaccination, including symptoms, the contagious period, possible complications, transmission, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, the at-risk populations, when and who should be vaccinated, as well as vaccine safety and effectiveness.¹⁰

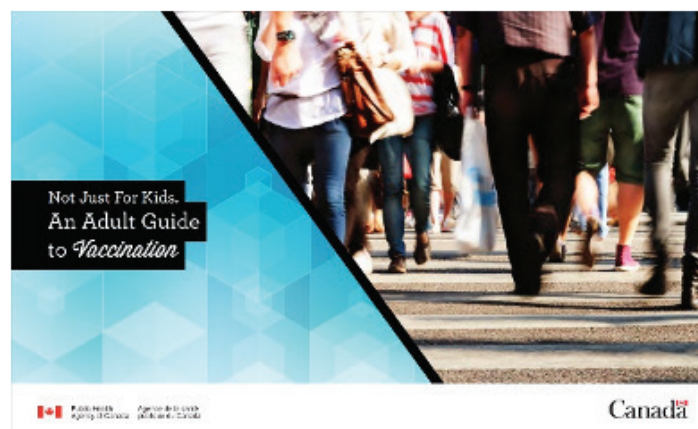
PHAC, through a dedicated web page “Vaccination for Adults”, stresses the value of adult vaccination and recommends the annual vaccination to not only prevent the infection but also to avoid spread of disease.¹¹

Booklet

“Not just for kids: An adult guide to vaccination” is a booklet developed by the PHAC to raise awareness of the importance of adults being vaccinated against several infectious diseases and most importantly to dispel the myth that immunisation is only for children.¹²

The guide begins with a general introduction to vaccines: the mechanism of action, benefits, safety,

Figure 2: Booklet



production, vaccine preventable diseases (VPD), instructions for consumers and then outlines recommended vaccinations for pregnant women, older adults, and travellers respectively.

Posters

Posters were developed under the auspices of the PHAC to encourage the prevention of influenza prevention.^{13,14}

Catchphrases such as “Stop the spread of the flu” and “Some risks are worth it, the flu is not” calls for personal responsibility in hand washing, covering the mouth when coughing and sneezing, and doing less outdoor activities when ill. The increased risk of serious complications from the flu for adults aged 65 years and over is a key message.

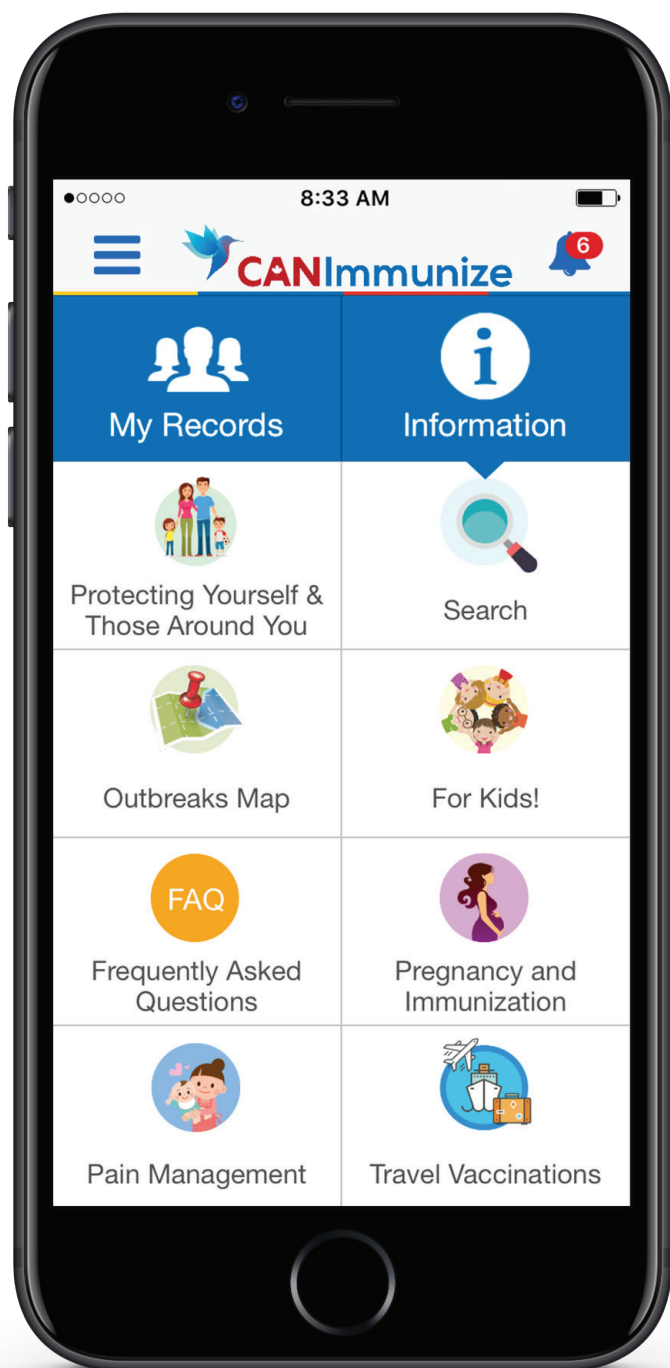
Figure 3: Poster



Videos

An animated video produce by PHAC that aims to raise awareness of influenza vaccination¹⁵ illustrates how the influenza virus transfers from person to person through daily interactions, the speed of transmission and highlights that older adults are at a higher risk for infection and flu-related complications.

Figure 4: CANImmunize App



Digital tool

“CANImmunize” is an “app” lead in development by Dr. Kumanan Wilson, a specialist in General Internal Medicine, at The Ottawa Hospital. The app is built as a portable source of information on VPD and schedules by province and territory.¹⁶

Underpinning the information on the app is the importance of vaccination throughout life but there are some key messages directed to those most at-risk namely people aged 65 years and over, and those with chronic diseases including heart, liver, kidney, blood disorders, diabetes, severe obesity, asthma and chronic lung disease, neurological disorders, cancer or other immune compromising conditions.

Non-government Organizations

Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada reports through various communication channels such as blogs the severe impact of influenza and also the protective effects of influenza vaccination for people living with cardiovascular disease (CVD). Key messages are that influenza considerably increases the risk of heart attack or stroke for those at-risk or diagnosed with heart disease.¹⁷¹⁸

The Foundation featured through a Facebook Live chat in 2017 Dr. Udel, a cardiologist and clinician scientist at Women’s College Hospital and the Peter Munk Cardiac in Toronto who talked about the increased risk of cardiovascular events after contracting the flu infection and the benefit of the vaccine for people living with CVDs.¹⁹ The presentation was followed by an interactive session to address concerns from audiences regarding influenza vaccination.

Canadian Lung Association

The Canadian Lung Association informs its members and their family about the relationship between influenza and chronic lung diseases through online information, with special attention to the fact that influenza can exacerbate lung diseases like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).^{20,21,22}

The Association describes the impact of influenza infection to those with asthma referring to colds, the flu and other viruses as ‘asthma induces.’ To avoid ‘catching viruses’ recommendations include ‘get the flu shot’ together with protective actions such as “wash your hands properly and follow other germ-fighting tips.

CARP

Campaign

CARP, formerly the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, has an annual education and awareness raising campaign to ‘fight influenza.’ Across several months leading up to and through the winter months CARP uses a variety of mediums such as webinars, face to face expert meetings with members in each province, radio and television interviews and community announcements to ensure that Canadian seniors can make an informed decision about whether to be vaccinated / or not.

Each campaign is underpinned with key messages directed to adults 65 years and over, their family and other relatives and also those with chronic conditions.²³

A unique component in the 2018 campaign included a powerful video featuring real-life stories from Canadians directly affected by the flu. Audiences better understand the dangers and risks associated with the debilitating virus through vivid expressions of their journeys.²⁵

Expert panel

CARP uses expert panels each year as a way to share up to date information on the current influenza season. Routinely the voices of the most trusted professionals include general practitioners,

representatives from senior associations, pharmacists and various service providers discuss how influenza can exacerbate medical conditions, lead to a loss of independence and cost families and the State if those at-risk are not vaccinated.²⁴

Blogs and Video

CARP is a strong advocate helping to influence federal and provincial adult vaccination policy. One such effort was in the form of a blog calling on provinces to fund high-dose (enhanced) flu vaccine for Canadians aged 65 years and over given the fact that this vaccine is scientifically proven to be 24% more effective in those aged 65 – 74 years and 32% more effective in those 75 years and over.²⁵

Various videos are created in a continuous education and awareness program on adult vaccination. As an example, Dr. Janet McElhaney, a geriatrician at Health Sciences North, Ontario presented on the vulnerability of seniors to flu-related death and hospitalization; and the value of offering enhanced protection against influenza through high-dose flu vaccine for older adults.²⁶

Immunize Canada

Driven by its goal of control, elimination, eradication of VPD Immunize Canada has an annual influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia immunization awareness campaign supported with resources that are available online for free and customized use.²⁷ The 2019-2020 campaign was rolled out under the catchphrase “Lower Your Flu Risk”.

Canadians have a rich source of information on the website of Immunize Canada on what they need to know about VPD and the recommended vaccines across life course which is further amplified through the message “Immunizations are not just for kids! It is important for adults to stay up to date on their immunizations”.²⁸

Immunize Canada has also developed two charts effectively summarizing information on the publicly funded influenza vaccines by province and eligible groups.²⁹ The chart serves as a handy reference to residents of various provinces on the available vaccines and target populations.

Posters

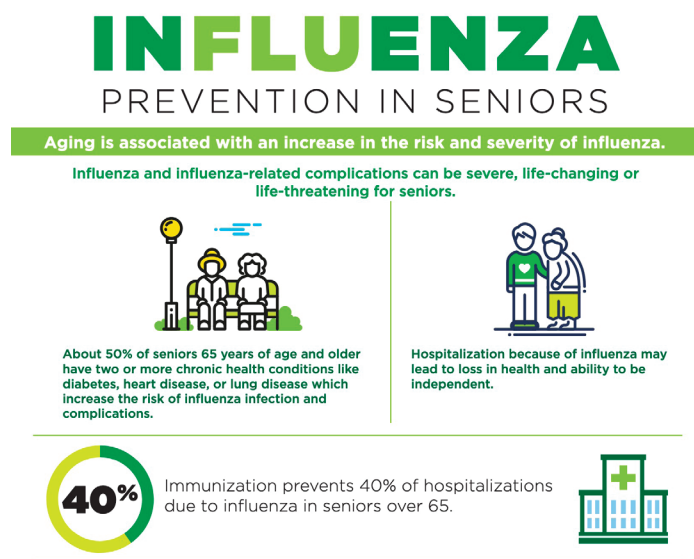
A series of posters developed by Immunize Canada are used to encourage people at-risk of influenza-related complications to be vaccinated.²⁸ The sample poster “Lower your flu risk” is intended for older Canadians and their caregivers to be active in influenza vaccination.

Infographics

The risk of influenza to various vulnerable groups, including children, people with asthma and seniors, is visually presented in a series of infographics.

Each infographic has clear targeted messages, evidence about the impact of the infectious disease and facts about where vaccines can be obtained during what period.²⁸

Figure 5: Infographic



Fact sheets

“Fact sheets” are another medium to educate the general public about influenza and influenza vaccination.²⁸ The question and answer fact sheets from Immunize Canada explain in non-scientific ways the importance of vaccination and why in particular the most vulnerable groups must make an informed decision

Social media

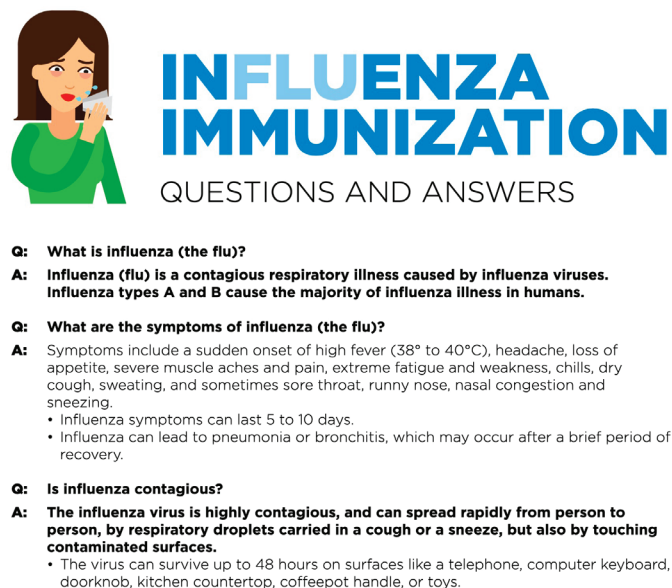
Text messages, along with images, regarding influenza vaccination are regularly disseminated via the social media portals of Immunize Canada. #FluShot and #GetImmunized are the main hashtags.

Press release













Immunize Canada restates in its press releases the serious outcome of influenza and the live-saving effect of vaccination for at-risk populations.³⁰

For example, the article “Age or chronic conditions make the flu even more dangerous” draws attention to the seriousness of influenza and calls on readers to be vaccinated as the single best way to protecting themselves against an infection that can seriously incapacitate or even kill them.

Figure 6: Fact sheet



Status of National Influenza Vaccination Campaign

Comprehensive policies and programs	Influenza vaccination is recommended by government and advisory bodies for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic diseases	
	Influenza vaccination is funded under the National Immunization Program (NIP) and administered through the state program for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic disease	
Clear communication strategy	Published context-specific communication strategy and action plan which defines communication goals, target audiences, expected roles of partner organizations, communication tools and timeline	
Well-defined audience	Universal message distributed to undifferentiated populations (general audiences regardless of age and underlying health condition)	
	Dedicated and tailored information for specific at-risk audience	
Multiple tools and channels	Online communication such as web content, digital technology, social media, online publications, email	
	Messages are disseminated offline by TV, radio, printout (e.g. leaflet, poster, brochure, outdoor ads)	
	Interactive communication including individual consultation, street campaign and face-to-face mobilization	
Realistic timeline	Timely flu season alert and vaccination reminder	
	National/regional events scheduled for intensive awareness campaign such as national vaccination day/week/month	
Regular updates of information	Information is updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent evidence and policy, such as recommending newly licensed vaccines for specific recipient	
Engagement and support of civil society	Communication on influenza by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups	

 Well-developed
  Partially developed
  Not yet developed / No evidence

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