

# Vaccine acceptance

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## Policy position recommendation

1. High COVID-19 vaccination rates are critical to the control of the pandemic. Public health programs need to identify and address barriers to accessing vaccines and address the root causes of vaccine hesitancy.
2. It is important to engage meaningfully with diverse populations, particularly those that experience structural vulnerabilities, seeking to foster trust and to understand and address barriers and concerns.
3. The CMA calls on all levels of government and employers to implement strategies that decrease barriers to accessing vaccine and increase vaccine acceptance. The CMA recognizes that the history of inequities within the health care system impacts trust, therefore approaches that seek to understand root causes of hesitancy are critical. Removing barriers to immunization include paid leave for immunization and potential side effects, offering immunizations in workplaces.
4. The CMA recognizes the important role of primary care in achieving high vaccination rates by addressing vaccine hesitancy and supporting vaccine rollout.

## A. Background

- The WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) Working Group on Vaccine Hesitancy defines it as the "delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccination despite availability of vaccination services. Vaccine hesitancy is complex and context specific, varying across time, place, and vaccines. It is influenced by factors such as complacency, convenience and confidence" <sup>1</sup> as well as calculation and collective responsibility.

- Vaccine hesitancy occurs over a continuum and includes “individuals with various degrees of concerns about vaccination who may refuse some vaccines, but agree to others, delay vaccination or accept vaccination although feeling ambivalent about doing so.”<sup>2</sup>
- A vaccine denier refers to someone at the extreme end of the hesitancy continuum; one who has a very negative attitude towards vaccines and is not open to listen to what the scientific evidence says. It is important to note that deniers are a small but very vocal minority and adept at using social media to convey their beliefs and information.<sup>3</sup>
- Some of the leading concerns involve vaccine safety and effectiveness.
- There is a higher rate of vaccine hesitancy and diminished trust among certain equity-relevant groups (including Indigenous, Black and low-income communities) that are in part rooted in historic and continuing experiences of systematic discrimination and experimentation in health care and government.

## **B. Strategies to Increase Vaccine Uptake**

- There are various frameworks that support the development of programs to address hesitancy.<sup>4, 5</sup>
- Vaccine programs must first address barriers to access and then focus on the key target group which is those who are hesitant to receive the vaccine, even when there is access. Targeted and community-based/-led education and vaccination programs have been shown to be more effective than widespread public education campaigns and programs alone.<sup>4</sup>
- There is limited evidence about the effectiveness of strategies that include prizes or giveaways, such as lotteries. If employed, such strategies need to be attentive to whether they are contributing to further mistrust.
- Governments and employers must be attentive to the potential impact approaches such as mandatory immunization or vaccine certificates may have on vaccine acceptance.
- Motivational interviewing is a method that can be used by health care providers to encourage vaccine uptake with their patients. It constitutes a respectful and empathetic discussion with patients, parents and caregivers, seeking to understand attitudes and behaviours and address concerns. In the context of immunization, motivational interviewing aims to provide information about vaccines at the individual’s level of knowledge, with respectful acceptance of their beliefs.<sup>5</sup>
- Public health information about the vaccine itself will often not be sufficient; the inclusion in public messaging of strong personal stories that people can relate to can be a powerful tool.

- Trust is vital in overcoming hesitancy and a recommendation from a health provider is one of the most important factors in the decision-making process about whether to receive a vaccine.

### C. Rationale

- Vaccine hesitancy is a continuing challenge that needs to be understood and addressed.
- The rise of variants and the need to have high vaccine coverage amplify greatly the need to encourage as many of those eligible to be vaccinated to do so as soon as possible through equitable and evidence informed strategies.

Approved by the CMA Board of Directors August 2021

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<sup>1</sup> MacDonald NE, SAGE Working Group on Vaccine Hesitancy. Vaccine hesitancy: Definition, scope and determinants. *Vaccine*. 2015 Aug 14;33(34):4161-4. Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264410X15005009?via%3Dihub> (accessed 2021 Jul 30).

<sup>2</sup> Dubé È, Farrands A, Lemaitre T et al. Overview of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, vaccine hesitancy and vaccine acceptance among mothers of infants in Quebec, Canada. *Hum Vaccin Immunother*. 2019;15(1):113-120. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21645515.2018.1509647> (accessed 2021 Jul 30).

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). How to respond to vocal vaccine deniers in public. Geneva: WHO; 2016. Available: <https://tinyurl.com/2cvp87kb> (accessed 2021 Jul 30).

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald NE, Comeau J, Dubé È et al. Royal society of Canada COVID-19 report: Enhancing COVID-19 vaccine acceptance in Canada. *FACETS* 2021 July 22;6:1184-1246. Available: <https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/full/10.1139/facets-2021-0037> (accessed 2021 Jul 30).

<sup>5</sup> Gagneur A. Motivational interviewing: A powerful tool to address vaccine hesitancy. *Can Commun Dis Rep* 2020;46(4):93–7. Available: <https://tinyurl.com/2rbcsx77> (accessed 2021 Jul 30).