

February 25, 2021

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Health  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Hajdu,

On behalf of the undersigned health charities, we would like to thank you and your department for your diligence and dedication working alongside many partners throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We write to you today requesting your leadership in ensuring that all high-risk and vulnerable populations are prioritized for early access to COVID-19 vaccines under current provincial and territorial immunization strategies ahead of the general population.

Many entities have called for the prioritization of high-risk and vulnerable populations in vaccine rollout, including Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Thoracic Society, the United Kingdom's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunization and the U.S. Centre for Disease Control. According to these expert groups, high-risk and vulnerable populations include: those of advanced age, frontline health workers and those whose work contributes to the COVID-19 response, **people at high-risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19**, those most likely to transmit COVID-19 to those at high-risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, workers contributing to the maintenance of other essential services for the functioning of society, and people whose living and/or working conditions put them at elevated risk of infection and where infection could have disproportionate consequences, including Indigenous communities.<sup>i</sup> Our organizations support this broad definition of priority populations and a health equity approach, which we understand to include those living with certain chronic conditions.

Despite the above noted guidance, most provincial and territorial immunization plans across the country do not list people living with certain chronic conditions who are at high-risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 as a population to be prioritized for vaccination, along with other high-risk groups ahead of the general population. **We urgently ask that you raise this concern with your fellow health ministers at the provincial and territorial levels** and also request that the provinces/territories follow the recently updated guidance for the vaccination prioritization put forward by NACI on February 16, 2021.<sup>ii</sup>

It is our understanding that NACI is planning to further nuance the list of underlying conditions that should be prioritized for vaccination in its guidance from February 16, 2021. To that end we urge NACI to move forward quickly with this work and we also strongly encourage Health Canada/PHAC to reflect NACI's recommendations in its policies, documents, advice to provinces/territories and public materials.

Our organizations have strived to be supportive partners in Canada's response to COVID-19. At the outset of this pandemic, our organizations pivoted quickly to promote public health guidance and provide other support and resources to meet the increased needs of people living with our respective conditions and their caregivers. We now must respond to ensure they are prioritized for vaccinations, along with other high-risk populations ahead of the general population.

As your government focuses on vaccinating the country, we will continue to use our communications channels to remind Canadians to stay vigilant and follow public health measures and to promote and encourage mass vaccination.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tammy Moore  
CEO  
ALS Society of Canada



Trish Barbato  
President and CEO  
Arthritis Society



Vanessa Foran  
President and CEO  
Asthma Canada



Andrea Seale  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canadian Cancer Society



Terry Dean  
President and CEO  
Canadian Lung Association



Laura Syron  
President & CEO  
Diabetes Canada



Doug Earle  
President & CEO  
Fighting Blindness Canada



Doug Roth  
CEO  
Heart & Stroke



Kate Murray  
CEO and President  
MitoCanada



Pamela Valentine  
President and CEO  
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada



Stacey Lintern  
CEO  
Muscular Dystrophy Canada



Famida Jiwa  
President and CEO  
Osteoporosis Canada



Elisabeth Baugh  
CEO  
Ovarian Cancer Canada

Cc: Dr. Theresa Tam (Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada and Federal Co-Chair, Public Health Network Council); Dr. Howard Njoo (Deputy Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada); Dr. Stephen Lucas (Deputy Minister, Health Canada); Dr. Caroline Quach (Chair, NACI); Dr. Saqib Shahab (Public Health Network Council Provincial/Territorial Co-Chair); Sabina Saini (Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister of Health)

<sup>i</sup> Key populations for early COVID-19 immunization: preliminary guidance for policy. Shainoor J. Ismail, Linlu Zhao, Matthew C. Tunis, Shelley L. Deeks and Caroline Quach; for the National Advisory Committee on Immunization CMAJ November 30, 2020 192 (48) E1620-E1632; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.202353>

<sup>ii</sup> Government of Canada. Guidance on the prioritization of key populations for COVID-19 immunization. Updated February 16, 2021. [https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/guidance-prioritization-key-populations-covid-19-vaccination.html?hq\\_e=el&hq\\_m=2177670&hq\\_l=1&hq\\_v=134654be9a](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/guidance-prioritization-key-populations-covid-19-vaccination.html?hq_e=el&hq_m=2177670&hq_l=1&hq_v=134654be9a)