

# Saskatchewan Seniors Association Inc.

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## RE: Shingles Vaccine coverage for Seniors

I am writing on behalf of the Saskatchewan Seniors Association Incorporated (SSAI), which represents over 3,000 seniors across the province. We urge the Government of Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Health to make the Shingles vaccine available at no charge to seniors aged 50 and older in Saskatchewan. This request is based on the severe and devastating impact of shingles on older adults and the importance of ensuring that seniors have access to this life-improving vaccine.

Shingles is a painful and debilitating disease that disproportionately affects seniors, particularly those over 50. The risk of developing shingles and its complications, including postherpetic neuralgia, increases with age. This condition not only causes immense discomfort but also significantly disrupts the daily lives of those who suffer from it. Seniors with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable. Given this, it is crucial to remove any financial barriers to access, ensuring all seniors in Saskatchewan can obtain the vaccine.

Several facts highlight the urgency of this issue:

- **Stress and Age:** Stress, which often increases with age due to life events such as the loss of loved ones, is a known factor in the development of shingles.
- **Cognitive Decline:** A Harvard Gazette study has indicated that shingles may elevate the risk of cognitive decline, an early symptom of dementia, among those affected.
- **Mental Health:** Shingles can cause significant anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, particularly when severe pain is involved. This is in line with the national focus on improving mental health for all Canadians.
- **Social Isolation:** The pain from shingles often leads seniors to isolate themselves, further worsening their mental health and physical well-being.

Additionally, the *State of Public Health in Canada 2024* report emphasizes that reducing barriers to vaccination, such as cost, can significantly improve access, especially for populations facing inequities. It also highlights that vaccinations not only protect against disease but can help preserve seniors' independence and reduce strain on the healthcare system.

The cost of the Shingles vaccine, which ranges from \$150 to \$200 per dose, is prohibitive for many seniors, who often must prioritize other expenses such as housing, food, and medications. This financial burden leaves many seniors vulnerable to the disease and its consequences. By providing the vaccine free of charge, we would alleviate this burden and significantly improve the health and well-being of Saskatchewan's seniors.

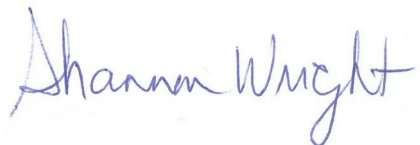
Other jurisdictions, such as Ontario and British Columbia, have already taken steps to address this issue. Ontario provides the Shingles vaccine free of charge to seniors, and in British Columbia, the First Nations Health Authority covers the cost of the vaccine for First Nations elders. It is time for Saskatchewan to follow suit, ensuring that seniors have equal access to this crucial vaccine.

Research shows that the Shingrix vaccine significantly reduces the risk of developing shingles and its severity, with a 4-12 times decreased risk for those who are vaccinated. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends that all individuals aged 50 and older receive the two-dose Shingrix vaccine, which is proven to be highly effective for at least four years.

We strongly urge the Government of Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Health to make the Shingles vaccine available free of charge to all seniors aged 50 and older. This would be a vital step in improving the health of our province's senior population and ensuring they can live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter. We would welcome a response at your earliest convenience and are happy to provide any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,



Shannon Wright, Secretary/Treasurer  
Saskatchewan Seniors' Association Inc.