



Improving Vaccine Access for All People Without Permanent Residency Status and Migrants Living in Newfoundland and Labrador – An Open Letter to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

April 26, 2021

To:

Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, Chief Medical Officer of Health
The Honourable Andrew Furey, Premier of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
The Honourable John Haggie, Minister of Health and Community Services
The Honourable Gerry Byrne, Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

We applaud the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for making the COVID-19 vaccines available to all people, including “individuals who are new to Canada and may not have established access to healthcare.” This decision aligns with the recommendations offered by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and is consistent with the federal vaccination schedule. As stated on the provincial website, vaccines will now be available for migrant workers, just as they have been with other vulnerable populations in the province who reside in condensed accommodations.

While the decision is laudable, a number of information-related barriers continue to impede the ability of migrant workers with temporary status, refugee claimants, and others with precarious citizenship status in accessing the COVID-19 vaccine. Ensuring these groups have barrier-free access to vaccines in all municipalities, from city to rural communities, is a crucial step toward collective recovery. We acknowledge that the NL COVID-19 website will be an important and key resource for many. But inconsistent messaging, coupled with conflicting information on the ground can discourage those requiring the vaccine from attaining it.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp relief the realities and impacts of social and economic disparity. It has exacerbated and capitalized on pre-existing inequalities generated by pervasive systemic discrimination, unevenly distributing the burdens associated with the disease amongst society’s most vulnerable - including migrants without permanent residency status. Indeed, these essential members of our community have, over the course of the last 13 months, worked on the frontlines of care, food production and distribution, and sanitation - right across the country. And yet, they continue to be particularly at risk for infection and acute illness in a context that affords them little protection and access to health care.

We call on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to further their commitment to ensuring full access to vaccines for migrants by clearly stating that **no one will be required or compelled to present proof of health coverage or residency status in the province when seeking a vaccine.** This will protect the health and well-being of all people across Newfoundland and Labrador, as it will help facilitate and expedite a more effective and equitable vaccine rollout.

The Anti-Racism Coalition Newfoundland and Labrador (ARC-NL) and our community partners are concerned by the lack of clear messaging and absence of specific plans behind this promise to include migrants in the vaccine roll-out. Based on our experience and conversations with migrant communities, we know that migrants (including international students) often find themselves ineligible for MCP on the basis of citizenship status, employment, or other document complexities. Simply put, there are too many people in our province with precarious access to healthcare, largely due to their precarious citizenship status.

We know that you are all keenly aware that individuals and communities who face multiple barriers to healthcare, such as precarious citizenship, language discrimination, disability, homelessness, income precarity, and sexism are made more vulnerable without clear and specific details regarding the roll out of vaccines. Migrants face these multiple barriers as well and need to be centred in decisions related to the roll out of Covid-19 vaccines and other public health initiatives.

We fear that people with precarious status and/or no healthcare coverage will not be able to access vaccinations.

We ask:

1. That our provincial government provides a clear statement on its website that clarifies the inclusion of all migrants residing in Newfoundland and Labrador (regardless of legal status) in the vaccine roll-out schedule. Here, not unlike what was proposed by the *“Migration + Mobility: Nova Scotia Migration Research Forum, ‘Open Letter: Meaningful Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Migrants with Precarious Status,’”* we also would like to encourage you to adapt the language from the Government of Manitoba website:

The vaccine will be made available, free of cost, for anyone who resides in Newfoundland and Labrador, regardless of their immigration and/or residency status. This includes refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependent children of temporary residents, temporary foreign workers, undocumented residents, and residents with lapsed legal status.

This commitment should also be communicated in accessible ways to our migrant populations through relevant community organizations via pamphlets, posters, and other non-digital material.

2. That phase 2 of the 'priority groups' chart on the website explicitly include temporary foreign workers *and* undocumented residents in the language, such that the current sentence reads "staff, residents, and essential visitors at congregate living settings, *including migrant workers, undocumented residents, or residents with lapsed documentation*".
3. That all staff involved with the roll out of vaccines be instructed to explicitly advise those who attend vaccine sites that they are *not* required to present an MCP card in order to receive a vaccine.
4. That provisions are made to migrants to access the vaccine at health care clinics *which are known and accessible to them*, and that at vaccination sites, translators and translated materials are available.
5. Recognizing that literacy is not universal in our province, all frontline workers and translators must be prepared to read aloud any forms that require signatures from people getting vaccinated.
6. That the province ensures that there will be no interference or involvement of, or information-sharing with, other governmental bodies (e.g. Canadian Border Services) during the process of accessing a vaccine. This will be indicated on the province's website and clearly communicated through organizations that do direct outreach with migrants.
7. That all migrant residents who face multiple barriers to healthcare, including precarious citizenship, language discrimination, disability, homelessness, income precarity, various forms of sexism (including transsexism) are centred in key decisions related to the roll out of COVID-19 vaccines and other related public health initiatives.
8. That the key decision-makers in the vaccine roll out, along with the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth, and Skills, commit to meeting with the Anti-racism Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador to discuss this letter and to address/improve healthcare access for migrants in NL.

We, the undersigned, ask the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to redress these barriers to an otherwise sound and universal public health policy by guaranteeing that those in the province with precarious legal and residency status have meaningful access to the COVID-19 vaccine, and moving forward, that equitable access to healthcare for all migrants regardless of their immigration status is ensured.

Addressing Islamophobia in NL (AI-NL)
Anti-Racism Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARC-NL)
Black Lives Matter NL
Canadian Federation of Students NL (CFS-NL)
Common Front NL
Fight for \$15 and Fairness NL
Graduate Students' Union (GSU)
Memorial University of Newfoundland Students' Union (MUNSU)
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission
Migrant Students United Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter (MSU-NL)
NL Sexual Assault & Crisis Prevention Centre
Planned Parenthood Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre
Registered Nurses' Union NL
Social Justice Co-op NL
St. John's Status of Women Council
The Quilted Collective
YWCA St. John's

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