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Vulnerable and Hard-to-reach Populations COVID-19 Immunization Coverage Survey (VHCICS) 2024

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Public Health Agency of Canada

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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This report presents the methodological details for the *Vulnerable and Hard-to-reach Populations COVID-19 Immunization Coverage Survey (VHCICS) 2024* conducted by Advanis Inc. on behalf of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The survey was administered among 5,862 members of the adult Canadian general public, between January 11 and March 3, 2024.

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: Enquête sur la couverture vaccinale contre la COVID-19 auprès des populations vulnérables et difficiles à atteindre 2024

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Surveillance data suggests that vaccine coverage is uneven across Canada. Furthermore, results from existing surveillance tools suggest that some population subgroups are under-surveyed, which results in insufficient data regarding immunization status, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards vaccination within these specific groups. In turn, this hinders core immunization functions including COVID-19 vaccine surveillance, vaccine confidence, available data, policy, public health guidance, and knowledge mobilization activities.

In the effort of addressing COVID-19 coverage gaps relating to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) developed the *Vulnerable and Hard-to-reach Populations COVID-19 Immunization Coverage Survey* (VHCICS) surveillance tool. The study was first conducted in 2023.

The purpose of the 2024 VHCICS was to continue to provide information that is currently unavailable regarding COVID-19 immunization coverage and uptake in select vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations.

This surveillance tool is needed to continue to address data coverage gaps identified for these sub-populations and to inform public health vaccination programs and initiatives. It will also inform decisions on prioritizing investments and crucial information funneled through PHAC, as well as federal, provincial, territorial and private partners.

1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this surveillance project was to maintain a surveillance tool to gain a better understanding of COVID-19 coverage-related information in select vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations.

Specifically, this survey aimed to collect information on:

- COVID-19 immunization status
- Seasonal influenza immunization status
- Intent to get vaccinated for those not yet vaccinated against COVID-19
- Intent to get vaccinated against flu and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- Reasons for non-vaccination (including barriers)
- Knowledge, attitudes and beliefs toward COVID-19 vaccines
- Sources of information on COVID-19 vaccines accessed by respondents
- Socio-demographic characteristics that are linked to inequalities in vaccination uptake

The second survey objective was to document the socioeconomic, cognitive, and motivational factors associated with low uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine in eleven (11) vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in relation to a general population benchmark sample.

1.3 Methodology

Data collection started on January 11, 2024, and ended on March 3, 2024, and was conducted by Advanis.

The VHCICS contained a benchmark survey that was a probability-based survey of 1,009 Canadians aged 18 or older using Advanis' General Population Representative Sample (GPRS) sample in a multi-phase sampling approach. This approach involved collecting data from randomly selected sample units (GPRS), and then collecting more data from a randomly selected subsample¹.

Advanis then used the same core questions in the questionnaire administered to the general population to survey 11 specialized, vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, each with a couple of variations according to the target population. Overall, a sample of 5,862 Canadians aged 18 or older was reached using Advanis' GPRS sample. For the specialized groups, recruitment was completed using targeting information Advanis had on profile within the GPRS database to ensure quota minimums were met. Targeting was possible for those in groups A and B, but group C was based on natural fallout of the sample. The results can be extrapolated to general population and to the targeted A and B subpopulations.

The 11 specialized vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations included:

- **Group A:** Specialized populations aged 18 years and older
 - a) people with lower income (less than \$60k per year, per household);
 - b) people with lower education (high school or less); and
 - c) younger adults (aged 18-29 years).

- **Group B:** Specialized populations aged 18 years and older
 - a) urban Indigenous people;
 - b) visible minorities (including Indigenous);
 - c) recent immigrants (adults who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years); and
 - d) people living in rural or remote locations.

- **Group C:** Specialized populations aged 18 years and older
 - a) people who use drugs (i.e., illegal substances excluding alcohol, cannabis or tobacco);
 - b) health care workers (e.g., nurses, doctors, long-term care workers, volunteers);
 - c) industry workers in factory settings (e.g., manufacturing; agriculture, forestry, fishing, food processing; transportation and warehousing); and
 - d) transportation workers, specifically truck drivers.

Participants pulled from Advanis' GPRS sample were recruited for the most part by cell phone and were invited to participate in a Web survey, a small proportion were recruited using landlines (177). Those who agreed to participate received an email or SMS inviting them to take part in the survey.

Survey results were weighted by nested data obtained from Statistics Canada from the 2021 census. The weighting variables included status on gender, education, income, age, population center, visible minority, recent immigrant and Indigenous. The results for 2024 are based on responses from 5,862 Canadians

¹ Statistics Canada (2021). Statistics: Power from Data! – Probability Sampling – Multi-Phase Sampling Approach. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/edu/power-pouvoir/ch13/prob/5214899-eng.htm#a7>

across all provinces and territories. Recruitment ensured quotas were reached for key sub-populations to ensure statistical relevance and representativeness.

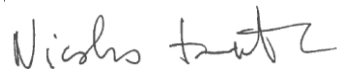
1.4 Contract Value

The contract value for this survey was \$296,072.43 (including HST).

1.5 Political Neutrality Requirement

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Advanis that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.



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