



News Release

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Lack of Vaccination Appointment and Immunization Record Systems Negatively Impacted Response to Disease Outbreak: Auditor General

(Toronto) Once COVID-19 vaccines became available in Ontario, it took the Province three months to begin operating a central booking system for vaccination appointments. Even after then, booking was decentralized and unco-ordinated, with many other booking systems in use across different public health units, pharmacies and hospitals. Ontarians with access to better technology and more time, often booked multiple appointments, resulting in many wasted, “no-show” appointments. That’s a key finding by Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2022 Annual Report*.

The audit also found that Ontario lacks a central registry to track the complete vaccination history for all Ontarians, limiting the ability to adapt to new outbreaks and emerging diseases. In a 2014 audit on immunization, the Ministry of Health told the Auditor General’s office that it would expand Panorama—Ontario’s existing vaccination registry—to cover vaccination records beyond those of school-aged children, but that registry was still incomplete six years later when COVID-19 emerged in Ontario. Instead, the Ministry built a brand-new system—COVaxON—at a cost of over \$144 million, to meet the need. Between 2010 and 2021, the Ministry had already spent about \$170 million on Panorama. As well, there was no law that required all vaccinators to report vaccinations to a vaccination registry until June 2021, more than 14 months after the pandemic was declared.

The Province’s “hotspot” strategy for vaccination distribution overlooked some “hotspot” communities, but instead prioritized some communities with lower risk. The Ministry of Health identified these “hotspots” with the advice of scientists, public health officials and the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force, but did not apply its chosen methodology consistently across all communities.

The report also notes a wide range of pay for the health professionals who administered the vaccines. There was a significant gap in the rate paid between doctors and nurses, and there were different rates paid depending on where the vaccinations were given. Primary care physicians were paid less for vaccinating in their offices than at mass vaccination clinics

As of August 14, 2022, about 82% of Ontarians aged five and over had two doses of vaccine, which ranks Ontario eighth of the 13 provinces and territories.

“Ontario had significant success in its vaccination program for the first two doses of COVID-19 vaccine,” said Lysyk. “Having a central booking system and a central immunization registry would position Ontario to better handle the response to future disease outbreaks.”

The audit report includes 11 recommendations for improvement.



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