

# Community-informed behavioural science strategies to support COVID-19 vaccine booster doses in Ottawa priority neighbourhoods

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## Key messages

- The [OPTimise Platform](#) provides community-partnered behavioural science expertise to public health units
- Partnering with resident leaders in Ottawa neighbourhoods prioritised by Ottawa Public Health (OPH) with lower uptake of 3rd doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, we conducted behavioural science-informed interviews in Oct/Nov 2022 with 22 people in priority neighbourhoods (Bayshore-Belltown, Parkwood Hills, Herongate)
- We developed 7 behavioural science-informed strategies with community partners to address barriers to 3rd dose uptake expressed by Ottawans in priority neighborhoods to complement existing strategies

## Capability

- 1 Keep boosters on the radar by localising messaging and amplifying and diversifying existing OPH resources

“If you're not advertising, you're not giving the community that opportunity.”

## Opportunity

- 2 Continue to make it easier to get a booster dose for a diversity of life circumstances in Ottawa
- 3 Find windows of opportunity to normalize talking about COVID-19 again
- 4 Launch a vaccine buddy campaign
- 5 Create accessible and tailored materials to help people have conversations within their communities

“If everyone was talking about it [3rd dose], I would have gotten it by now.”

“Work with community partners. . . They're coming to us and engaging, not just sitting in a pavilion and waiting for us to come to them. A community partner is a familiar face at your door, not just a stranger.”

## Motivation

- 6 Update Ottawans about changing risk levels in their community and why and when it is important to get a booster dose
- 7 Providing social feedback on what other people are doing is important: use stories

“If I would be at risk, I would be inclined to go for it [3rd dose].”

See Supplemental File for strategy details, and page 2 for background.



## Background

While the WHO declared that the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a global public health emergency in May 2023, COVID-19 remains an ongoing health issue. The WHO recommends that countries ensure preparedness by maintaining efforts to increase COVID-19 vaccination coverage for people in high-risk groups and continuing to address vaccine acceptance and demand issues by working with communities to achieve inclusive risk communications, engagement and interventions adapted to local contexts.



Ottawa Public Health (OPH) emerged as a leading voice during the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting uptake of COVID-19 vaccines in communities across Ottawa. However, as of May 2023, only 58% of Ottawans have received the 3rd dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, which remains recommended by NACI for at-risk groups.

We set up the CIHR-funded [OPTimise Platform](#) to use behavioural science to identify strategies tailored to local lived experiences that public health units can draw on to complement vaccination efforts. We are behavioural scientists working with public health units and partnering with the communities they serve to identify what gets in the way and what supports the uptake of health-protective behaviours.

Making the decision and getting the 3rd dose of the COVID-19 vaccine can be helped by addressing specific, local barriers/enablers that affect Ottawans' **capability, opportunity and motivation** at particular points in time. The strategies for addressing each differ: For an Ottawaan already motivated to get the 3rd dose but who has not yet received it, addressing any capability and opportunity barriers may help, but addressing the same opportunity barriers may be less useful for another Ottawaan whose motivation to get vaccinated is lower. Here, we provide strategies, vetted by Ottawans to address capability, opportunity and motivation barriers to getting COVID-19 booster doses identified by Ottawans in priority neighbourhoods.

## What we did

<b>Identified where</b>	OPH prioritised neighbourhoods that might benefit from more insight to support decisions and uptake of the 3rd (booster) dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
<b>Built trusting community partnerships</b>	OPH connected us to community leaders in those neighbourhoods who, in turn, recommended 7 resident leaders living in the neighbourhoods to form our Community Advisory Group.
<b>Amplified multilingual local community views</b>	We conducted behavioural science-informed interviews with 22 community members (enabled by connections made by our resident leaders) in English, French, and Arabic about why they chose to get the 3rd dose or not.
<b>Leveraged the science of behaviour</b>	We used behavioural science tools to identify strategies best suited to address identified local barriers and enablers to booster uptake. These formed the basis for recommendations developed with resident leaders to complement strategies that OPH is using.

“Maybe go to the communities in person, community housing, especially those ones because it's hard for the old people who don't speak English, they can't go out. They may see something is happening and talk to each other and come out. These communities are tight knit.” Interviewee

## Platform future directions

The [OPTimise Platform](#) connects public health units to behavioural scientists committed to contributing behavioural science insights, informed by strong community-engaged partnerships, to provide an added resource to public health unit efforts in addressing barriers and enhancing enablers to public health & social measures to support the communities they serve.

Our engagement with communities is being independently evaluated by an external research team to continue to improve community partnerships.

## Acknowledgements

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# Supplemental File: Recommendation Details



Additional details of our behavioural science recommendations for strategies to increase uptake of 3rd/booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in priority communities in Ottawa.

## Capability

1

Keep boosters on the radar by localising messaging and amplifying and diversifying existing OPH resources



- Be selective with windows of opportunity to raise awareness (increase salience) ideally dates and events that are meaningful to local and priority communities rather than continuous messaging that risks losing attention (mitigate decreasing salience)
- Expand dissemination and awareness-raising of existing OPH resources and messaging to span additional online platforms, formats, and languages that are hyper-tailored to priority groups (e.g., local newsletters in multiple languages, QR codes)
- Boost local presence and dissemination: Distribute updated outreach and promotional materials in additional local venues such as public transit, apartment buildings, and workplaces
- Develop and make it easy to access a [decision support tool](#) to help people decide if getting the 3rd dose is right for them at a given point in the pandemic and keep tool updated to reflect current advice, especially when advice changes
- Celebrity cameos were impactful in early pandemic campaigns, but the novelty may have worn off. Instead, involve local people from priority groups who represent a range of relevant demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, vocation, family status) in promotional campaigns

## Opportunity

2

Continue to make it easier to get a booster dose for a diversity of life circumstances in Ottawa



- Address the confusion about who is eligible and when to get a booster dose at this point in the pandemic
- Continue using mobile and pop-up clinics and maximize attendance with popular, accessible locations and flexible hours, and where possible, expand to different locations within key neighbourhoods to address diminishing returns at existing locations
- Go to people instead of having them come to you: Consider reimplementing door-to-door campaigns offering in-home 3rd doses to residents of apartment buildings in priority areas
- Where possible, partner with trusted sources such as The Ottawa Hospital, doctors' offices, community centres, and pharmacies to send text message reminders when someone is due for a booster, as well as provide contact information of someone to have conversation with on the phone or in person if they have questions

3

Find windows of opportunity to normalize talking about COVID-19 again



- Consider using significant dates that are meaningful to the community to time a new campaign about what we have learned about COVID-19 and the vaccines since the start of the pandemic
- Remind Ottawans how far we have come, how we worked together, what we know now that we did not know before, and how the way we talk about COVID-19 and vaccines is different now
- Continue partnering with local organisations and leaders to include COVID-19 awareness and education alongside relevant cultural events or celebrations (e.g., Black History Month, Ramadan)
- Sponsor health & wellness events at popular locations in the community, with social & cultural aspects (e.g., food, music) and integrate COVID-19 conversations as part of these
- Identify spokespersons and leaders in the community to participate in and advise events in partnership with public health professionals
- At events, integrate casual conversations about COVID-19 vaccination with health professionals and community ambassadors to open the door to sharing info, resources and stories (see #3 and 7)



**Representation is key**

- Ensure that leaders involved in these campaigns are representative of members of the communities with whom they are working
- Including language, race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, and other sociodemographics

Strategy details continue on page 2 of this Supplemental File.

# Supplemental File: Recommendation Details (cont'd)



Additional details of our behavioural science recommendations for strategies to increase uptake of 3rd/booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in priority communities in Ottawa.

## Opportunity

### 4 Launch a vaccine buddy campaign



- Ask for trusted volunteers in residential areas, apartment buildings, and workplaces to be 'vaccine buddies' to help talk to people and/or provide transportation to clinics
- Set up intermediary individuals (e.g., superintendent) or contact emails/phone numbers to protect the identity of volunteers and allow them to disclose their personal contact information at their own discretion (e.g., to ensure that requestors live in the area and have positive intentions)

### EXAMPLE

#### Recruitment messages:

- "Do you have a car and/or some free time? Want to help protect your community against COVID-19?"
- "Do you need help booking your next dose, getting there, or simply deciding if it's right for you? Chat with so-and-so in your building/at your work or contact this number/email" (see #3)

### 5 Create accessible and tailored materials to help people have conversations within their communities



- Make sure people are aware of how they can influence the vaccination and health decisions made by their friends, family, neighbours, coworkers, patients, students, congregation, etc.
- Provide supportive tools and materials such as this [conversation guide](#)
- Share tips and tricks for common challenges that arise in conversations (e.g., others in your community/area/religion have found this helpful)
- Equip members of the community who are the trusted 'go-tos' in their social circle to respond to questions or concerns about the 3rd dose from their family or friends

### EXAMPLE

#### [Conversation guide](#) by Sheridan College:

- Topics include:
- Misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19
  - Getting the right information and verifying facts
  - Connecting and talking
  - Prebunking and debunking
  - Empathy and deep listening
  - Additional resources for conversations

## Motivation

### 6 Update Ottawans about changing risk levels and why and when it is important to get a booster dose



- Highlight the dynamic nature of COVID-19 risk levels and emphasize the importance of staying up to date on how much of a risk COVID-19 is to individuals and groups
- Create a way to clearly update people when the COVID-19 situation has changed, so they can reconsider how they are protecting themselves
- Commit to maintaining a regularly updated assessment of severity and susceptibility of Ottawans whenever a) a new variant emerges and b) when transmission signals are rising
- Align with clarification of key facts about variants, why booster doses are needed, long COVID, and the impact of repeated COVID-19 infections without vaccination
- Use examples of different types of people to provide relatable updates on how susceptible they are to different COVID-19 outcomes and how severe those outcomes could be, such as the example to the right

### EXAMPLE

- "This is Fatima [include image]. She is pregnant, so she has decided to get the 3rd dose to help protect herself and her baby against COVID-19."

### 7 Social feedback on what other people are doing is important: use stories



- Many Ottawans in the priority neighbourhoods have a sense that because no one in their community is talking about the 3rd dose, no one in their community is getting it. Where possible, circulate case examples and personal stories from community members to demonstrate that more people than they think in their community are going for their 3rd dose, even now
- Circulate stories like Ottawa Public Health's [COVID Stories](#) using various platforms (e.g., social media, newsletters, wellness clinics), formats (e.g., in-person, on-screen, online) and languages, and evaluate whether they are reaching enough members of priority communities
- Amplify stories from diverse community volunteers (e.g., leaders, residents, health care professionals) about their recent experiences with COVID-19/the 3rd dose and reason they got it
- Acknowledge and validate any fear and the importance of trusted sources alongside the presentation of statistical facts and positive personal stories (see #3 and 4)