

June 07, 2021

VIA EMAIL

To: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau,
P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Patricia Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health

The Honourable Mary Ng, P.C., M.P.
Minister of International Trade

The Honourable Karina Gould, P.C., M.P.
Minister of International Development

The Honourable Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Hajdu, Minister Ng, Minister Gould, and Minister Garneau,

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) urge your government to sign on to the India and South Africa proposal to waive intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines under the World Trade Organization (WTO) *Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)*.

We appreciate that the Canadian government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to date to expand access to vaccines in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs), but we need to do more. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing global inequities in access to COVID-19 medicines and vaccines. Vaccine equity is a fundamental issue of morality, ethics and human rights and should be non-negotiable, instead we are confronted with grotesque inequity in the roll out of the vaccines. The world, including Canada, needs to go further and quicker to save lives.

The global inequities are clear. Despite high income countries accounting for only 13% of the world's population, 85% of doses have gone into the arms of those in high and upper middle-income countries, compared to only 0.3% to those in low-income countries.¹ Clearly, the unprecedented rapid and global scientific progress has been made at the expense of LMICs. Despite the federal government's recent commitment to double its funding contributions to the COVAX alliance, Canada, along with the United Kingdom, are the only G7 countries to draw vaccines from COVAX, which is a fund intended to provide access to LMICs. They are also the only G7 countries not currently donating doses to the fund.

We have been hearing from our colleagues in India where student nurses, most of whom have **not** been vaccinated, are being redeployed to the COVID-19 frontline. At the same time, we have the situation where, in richer countries, young, not at high-risk people, are being vaccinated. Student nurses on the frontline should be taking priority. India is far from the only country suffering the fall-out from this gross inequity. ICN's national nursing

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>

associations across the globe report a similar situation with many nurses in Africa and Latin America still not vaccinated.

India and South Africa have been advocating since October 2020 to the WTO for an intellectual property waiver to enable patent free, widespread manufacturing of COVID-19 medicines and vaccines. With partnerships and shared technology, any facility in the world with capacity will be able to produce medicines and vaccines, such as those in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Intellectual property laws were not designed for a global pandemic.

Finally, waiving COVID-19 patents can also help to control and combat COVID-19 in Canada and strengthen protection in our borders. Many low- and middle-income countries will accelerate their vaccination efforts, achieving higher rates of herd immunity. With more people vaccinated globally, there will be less transmission of the virus due to international travel.

The World Health Organization's Director General, Dr. Ghebreyesus, has described the United States backing of the waiver as a "historic and monumental moment in the fight against COVID-19." This is a potential game-changer which can save millions of lives.

The longer this global pandemic persists, the greater the devastation, both in lives lost, and in socio economic fallouts. Combating the pandemic is about how **all** countries respond, including Canada. It is a global shared accountability that values each and every human life as equal and indispensable.

We hope we can count on you to sign on to the proposed waiver.

Sincerely,



Tim Guest, M.B.A., B.Sc.N., RN
President
Canadian Nurses Association



Lisa Little, RN, BNSc, MHS, FACN
Board of Directors
International Council of Nurses