

submission to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on global vaccine equity

Recommendations:

1. That Canada allocate resources comprehensively across all Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) pillars.
2. That Canada immediately signify its explicit support for a temporary waiver of patent provisions, such that COVID-19 related patents need not be granted or enforced during the pandemic, as originally sought by South Africa and India.

introduction

With the Omicron wave dissipating and growing concerns over the war in Ukraine, high-income countries are rushing to declare that we have now entered a post-COVID era. Yet, the pandemic is far from over. The reality remains that [2.8 billion](#) people worldwide are completely unvaccinated and do not have access to tests or treatments. The risk of a rise in cases and the threat of dangerous new variants persists.

Two years into the pandemic, we now have the tools to bring the pandemic to an end, but vaccine apartheid and global inequality still stand in the way of ending the pandemic for every person, everywhere. Vaccination coverage varies starkly by country income level. As of 28 March 2022, [79%](#) of people in high income countries had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, compared with just [14%](#) in low-income countries. COVID-19 continues to kill thousands of people each day, with the coronavirus death toll being [four](#) times higher in lower-income countries than in rich nations.

From the earliest days of this global crisis, we have witnessed Canada call for solidarity, collaboration, and coordination with other global leaders to redress the grave direct and indirect consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, actions have not always followed words.

It must be recognized that the issue of vaccine equity and ending the pandemic everywhere is complex and nuanced. While in some regards Canada has performed well, it is lagging in comparison to G7 and G20 peers in other areas. In this briefing note we highlight Canada's role in supporting and undermining vaccine equity, and present recommendations for what Canada can do next to fully live up to commitments to end the pandemic and leave no one behind.

acknowledging Canada's achievements in the global response to the pandemic

Canada has shown clear political leadership by stepping up as an early supporter and investor of the [Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator](#) (ACT-A). Canada is only one of three G20 countries to have invested its [fair share](#) in ACT-A to date. By rapidly investing its fair share in the ACT-A with an estimated [CAD\\$1.4 billion](#) towards the global COVID-19 response in 2020 – 2021, Canada helped create much needed momentum for a coordinated response to the pandemic. Just earlier in April we were pleased to see Canada reaffirm its commitment to play a part in the global fight against COVID-19 in the federal budget, with CAD\$732 million in new resources, presumably for the ACT-Accelerator.

Canada is as a strong supporter of the COVAX Facility, with the former Minister of International Development, Honourable Karina Gould appointed as [Co-Chair of the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment Engagement Group](#). Minister Gould and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) were early champions that helped create momentum for safe and equitable access to vaccines for the 92 COVAX low-and-middle income countries.

It should also be celebrated that Canada is one of only four countries to cover the full ancillary costs for doses donated through COVAX, which helps ensure that the costs for syringes diluent, and safe disposal materials do not create an additional burden on low-and-middle income countries receiving the doses. Further, Canada played a key role to set up COVAX's dose sharing mechanism, the platform for countries committing to share doses via COVAX, with CAD\$10 million in initial seed funding for the design and implementation of the mechanism.

While we recognize Canada's achievements over these past two years, they are not enough for the challenges we collectively face now. Canada must build on its early champion role and do more to lead the way towards an end to the pandemic and equitable access to vaccines and other tools.

Canada should aim to allocate resources equitably across all ACT-A pillars

Although it is becoming abundantly [clear](#) that vaccines are useless without delivery systems, much of the focus in high-income countries has been on getting vaccine doses to countries in need with less consideration to whether they are [equipped](#) to distribute the vaccines. The Head of the Africa CDC recently went as far as [urging](#) COVID-19 vaccine donors to help ensure that the distribution of shots is better regulated so their use can be maximized, further to the point on under-resourced delivery capacity.

The ACT-Accelerator is comprised of pillars leading critical work to strengthen health systems around the world and to develop and equitably distribute vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic tools. Co-led by the Global Fund, the World Bank and WHO, with UNICEF, the ACT-A's Health

Systems & Response Connector (HSRC) pillar ensures all countries have the technical, operational, and financial resources needed to translate new COVID-19 tools into national response interventions to stop transmission and save lives. This includes the HSRC equipping health care workers with personal protective equipment (PPE), building laboratory capacity, strengthening supply chains, and supporting community-led responses.

We can be proud that Canada committed its fair share investment in the ACT-A in 2021. However, of the more than CAD\$1.3 billion promised that has been so far allocated, only [USD\\$79 million](#) went to implementing partners delivering on the mandate of health system strengthening. The tables below, drawn from the WHO's [commitment tracker](#), provide a snapshot of Canada's allocated investments in ACT-A to date across implementing organizations and pillars. Canada's investments in the vaccines pillar are currently great in comparison to investments in all other, equally important, pillars. And Canada's total investment in the vaccine pillar recently increased by [another CAD\\$220](#) on April 8th at GAVI's Break COVID Now Summit.

Table 1: Canada's ACT-A investments across pillars (as of April 1, 2022) in USD

Vaccines	Diagnostics	Therapeutics	Health Systems
589	77	220	79

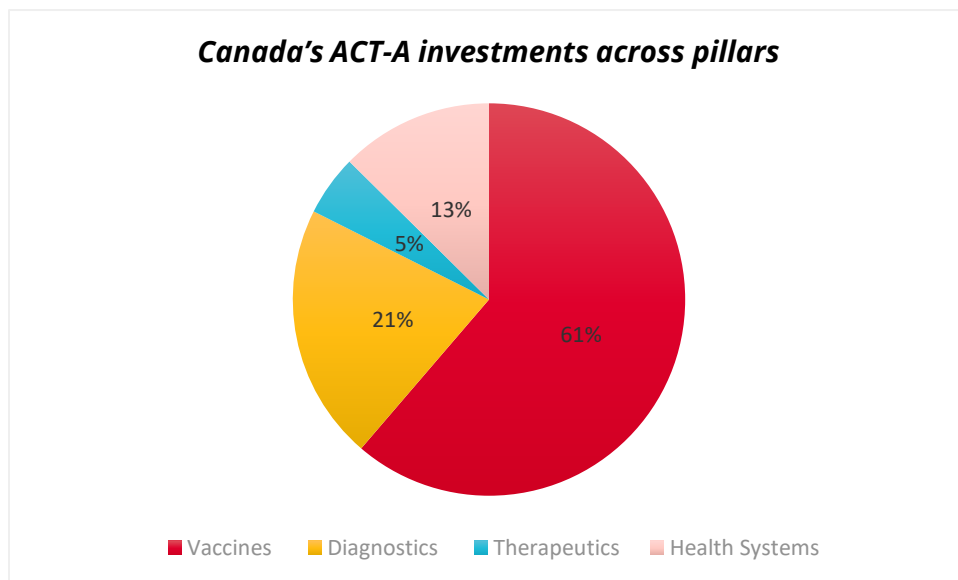


Table 2: Canada's ACT-A investments across implementing partners (as of April 1, 2022) in USD

CEPI	GAVI	Therapeutics Accelerator	Unitaid	FIND	Global Fund	WHO	UNICEF	GFF
66	470	-	29	27	104	132	198	-

Vaccines alone are not enough, and Canada must invest equitably and comprehensively across all pillars of ACT-A. Beyond vaccine procurement and roll out, the entire ACT-A mandate must be supported for a comprehensive and effective response to the pandemic. Additionally, targeted investments in implementing partners delivering on the mandates of the therapeutics, diagnostics, and health systems pillars such as the [Global Fund](#), [CEPI](#), the [Global Financing Facility](#), and [FIND](#), would yield impact for vaccine equity around the world.

The Global Fund in particular, is co-leading on two of four of the ACT-A pillars (diagnostics and the health system connector) and is also supporting procurement and distribution for the therapeutics pillar. As the primary channel for providing grant support to low-and-middle income countries for COVID-19 tests, treatments, Personal Protective Equipment, and critical elements of health system strengthening, Canada must urgently increase investment in the Global Fund.

Global health experts are warning that we must not be short-sighted in our approach to end the pandemic. We must recognize there is now a unique opportunity to make smart investments that offer unmatched potential to reorganize and strengthen overstretched health systems. Beyond supporting the direct response to COVID-19, such investments will pay off for years to come, helping with future pandemic prevention and responses.

Canada should signify its support for a temporary waiver of patent provisions, such that COVID-19 related patents need not be granted or enforced during the pandemic, as originally sought by South Africa and India.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on [Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights](#) (TRIPS) is the most comprehensive multilateral agreement on intellectual property (IP). It plays a central role in facilitating trade in knowledge and creativity, in resolving trade disputes over IP, and in assuring WTO members the latitude to achieve their domestic policy objectives.

South Africa and India applied at the WTO in October 2020 for a temporary intellectual property waiver on COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, diagnostics, and medical equipment. Though high-income countries such as the US, Germany, and New Zealand have now endorsed the proposal, it

has run up against stubborn opposition by self-interested brand-name pharmaceutical companies and other high-income countries, including Canada, which have not indicated support for the waiver yet.

After 18 months of talks on the waiver proposal, a document has been published proposing a compromise agreement negotiated by the United States, the European Union, South Africa and India (the QUAD). Though it is a small step forward, the compromise proposal from the QUAD countries has glaring flaws: it does not cover COVID tests or treatments; it excludes all of the intellectual property barriers to COVID medicine access, it leaves out entire countries and it could impose new barriers to production of generics. In the countries that initiated the TRIPS waiver, the QUAD text is viewed as inadequate by most civil society groups active in fighting for access to medicines.

Canada may come under pressure at the WTO to support this flawed and insufficient proposal, simply to create the appearance of consensus and positive momentum at the WTO. In line with the government's stated aim to work constructively to find a consensus-based solution at the WTO that would be acceptable to all member countries, Canada must take a different position and actively engage WTO members to get it right. We strongly encourage the government to make the following proposals for improving the waiver proposal from the QUAD countries:

1. The waiver should apply to all products needed to prevent, treat, and contain COVID-19, including vaccines, treatments, diagnostic tests, medical devices, and personal protective equipment.
2. The waiver should apply to all forms of intellectual property that are needed for production, including patents, trade secrets, data protection, manufacturing know-how, quality control protocols, equipment specifications and operating instructions.
3. The waiver should apply in all WTO member countries.
4. Conditions in the proposal that are more onerous than current WTO provisions should be removed. The waiver should ease rather than add to current rules.

Canada should step up and explicitly embrace the temporary removal of WTO-protected and enforced intellectual property rights on all COVID-19 tools, as well as actively engage WTO members to get any compromise proposal right. It's a must for an equitable response to COVID-19, for the world's ability to respond collectively and quickly to future pandemics, for the protection of public funds and interest of people over profits, and for global health solidarity.

conclusion

Achieving equitable access to vaccines everywhere requires a multifaceted, global approach, inclusive of financing the full mandate of the ACT-Accelerator, and temporarily waiving intellectual property rights on all COVID-19 tools. Canada must work collectively with the global

community to achieve global health solidarity and security, as well as an equitable distribution of all tools needed to end COVID everywhere.

Submitted by:

***Results Canada** is a nonprofit advocacy organization of passionate staff and volunteers committed to generating the political will to end extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries.*