

2021 budget failing Ontario's linguistic communities

Open Letter to MPPS

Friday, March 26, 2021

"The key to defeating COVID-19 is ensuring every person who wants a vaccine gets a vaccine. Working with partners — including the federal government and local public health units — to vaccinate the people of Ontario is the government's most urgent priority. "Nothing is more important."

- Ontario Budget, 2021: Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and our Economy

If nothing is more important than vaccinating the people of Ontario, why is there no plan, funding, or even mention of providing culturally sensitive, linguistically appropriate vaccine information in the budget? Why is there no plan to combat the vaccine misinformation that is circulating widely?

Governments at all levels realized, belatedly, that it was critical to communicate COVID-related information to Ontario's diverse linguistic communities in the languages and through the channels they are comfortable with. For a message to be credible and acted upon rather than simply transmitted, it must come from a trusted voice and in a mother tongue. This is especially true where it comes to building trust and comfort with the available vaccines.

On March 8, 2021, Ontario's Minister of Health, Christine Elliot, stated "*The communications are very important. They have been translated into a number of different languages. That information is available on the website.*" Yet it is a fact that most people, and particularly those who are less proficient in English or French, are not visiting government websites.

It has fallen to community organisations and grassroots groups, like Refugee613, the South Asian Health Network and others to take up this work and organise town halls, videos, and other resources to connect the province's linguistic communities with accurate information and opportunities to ask questions without judgement.

This is critical work; without sustained, supported campaigns and resources to combat vaccine misinformation and give people the chance to air and have addressed their concerns, uptake is going to be far lower than it needs to be.

If "nothing is more important" to the Ford government than ensuring as many Ontarians as possible get vaccinated, then it needs to dedicate funds to bring that information to the people, in the languages they are comfortable with and in formats that work for them - not just a translated document on a website.

We call on the Government of Ontario to connect with the many community groups doing this work already and ask what financial and logistical support they need to reach Ontario's linguistically diverse communities in a culturally sensitive and timely way.

Sincerely,

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Co-Organizer

The LAD Coalition

<https://www.languageadvocacyday.org/>

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