

THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT MUST NOW IMPLEMENT AN HPV SCREENING PROGRAM THAT FOLLOWS THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF INESSS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Montreal, January 31st, 2022 – January is dedicated to raising awareness about cervical cancer. HPV can cause cervical cancer, and over **75%** of the population will have at least one type of HPV in their lifetime. HPV Global Action and the Quebec Cancer Coalition are joining forces to call on the government to optimize their cervical screening practices to better prevent cervical cancer for the **4,147,605** people in Quebec with a cervix. While a much more effective option exists; the HPV test, the government persists in using the Pap test which has an error rate of up to 40%. By improving the screening process, Quebec would contribute to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) goal of being on the path, by 2030, to eliminating cervical cancer. By combining HPV vaccination programs, with an effective cervical screening program due in part to accompanied letters of invitations, result recalls and follow-up letters to those eligible, cervical cancer could be the first cancer in the world to be eliminated.

Replacing the Pap test with the HPV test: more accurate detection of the virus to better prevent cancer cases

Current screening in Quebec is based on the use of the Pap test for those eligible, but there is currently no equitable way for people to know when to get screened for cervical cancer. Aimed at detecting abnormalities, the Pap test (invented in the 1920s), does not directly diagnose HPV, a multi-strain virus that is largely responsible for cervical cancer cases. The Pap test is only 60% effective and is subject to human error. However, there is a more accurate test at our disposal; the HPV test that identifies high-risk strains of the virus with an accuracy of 96.1%. Even though it is highly effective and that its use has been recommended since 2017 by the *Institut national d'excellence en santé et en services sociaux* (INESSS), the HPV test is slow to replace the Pap test in Quebec. The higher cost of the HPV test seems to be an obstacle to its deployment, despite the fact that it is more valuable given its much higher accuracy than the Pap test and its less frequent use, thus making it more profitable in the long term. INESSS has just published recommendations for the implementation of the Human papillomavirus (HPV) test as a primary cervical screening test. We conquer with INESSS' recommendations and respectfully request they now be implemented in combination with letters of invitations for those eligible without further delay.

Promising Solutions Based on Existing Models

Quebec already has an innovative model for cancer screening with its *Quebec Breast Cancer Screening Program* (PQDCS) that has proven successful in recent years, in part because of the letter of invitation sent out inviting those eligible in Quebec to participate in this program bi-annually. The government could therefore seize the

opportunity to create a similar program for cervical screening. Considering that only 50% of people who die from cervical cancer have had regular cervical screening, a letter of invitation to get screened, which has proven effective in other countries, should be applied in Quebec to ensure the success of a comprehensive cervical screening program.

Quotes

"After a decade of normal Pap test results and procedures related to my reproductive health after giving birth to my daughter in 2019, it was a devastating shock for my husband and I to be diagnosed with cervical cancer. I had to see several doctors and persevere to get a diagnosis because I knew something was wrong. In addition to living this waking nightmare that is cancer, I felt a lot of confusion and injustice. I still wonder how this could have gone unnoticed so many times. After completing cancer treatments almost two years ago, I am still recovering. My latest results revealed no signs of the disease and now my main goal is to share my story to make sure no one else has to go through what I went through."

– [Natasha Lam](#), Cervical Cancer Thriver

"It is incomprehensible that we are still using the Pap test which is a 20th-century tool, especially when we have access to the HPV test that provides 21st-century technology detecting high-risk strains of the virus with precision. The cervical screening strategy in Quebec must absolutely be modernized so that patients can be taken care of quickly to avoid the development of cancers in women and people with a cervix that have been neglected because of healthcare rationing during the COVID-19 pandemic, this in addition to the hundreds of thousands who do not have a family doctor or nurse to do the HPV test."

– [Dr. Marc Steben](#), Family Physician and Co-President, HPV Global Action

For more information: <https://hpvglobalaction.org/hpv-info/>

About HPV Global Action

Founded in 2006, HPV Global Action raises awareness of sex-positive inclusive sexual and reproductive health through the implementation of comprehensive programs, while emphasizing HPV and its potential consequences. We empower culturally and ideologically diverse communities across the globe through the dissemination of critical, evidence-based knowledge. We bring together provincial/territorial, federal, and global leaders to provide solutions on best practices and policies on HPV prevention, cervical screening and access to treatment.



[HPV Global Action](#)

About the Quebec Cancer Coalition

[The Quebec Cancer Coalition](#) was created in 2001 to give a strong voice to people affected by cancer. It is a group of more than 65 non-profit organizations representing all types and phases of cancer, from all regions of Quebec, aiming to improve the health care system in Quebec and advocates for people affected by cancer. For nearly 20 years, its members have shared the vision of a healthier Quebec and a system centred on patients, survivors/thrivers, and caregivers.



[Quebec Cancer Coalition](#)

Source: [HPV Global Action](#)

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