

# Unintended consequences: Proof of Vaccine Challenges among International Students and Temporary Foreign Workers in Manitoba

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## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 continues to mutate and spread worldwide, threatening the health of billions of people. To date 1,511,212<sup>1</sup> Canadians have been sickened, 40,881<sup>2</sup> have been hospitalized, and 27,006<sup>1</sup> have lost their lives. For these reasons, all provincial and territorial governments have been implementing various strategies to encourage their citizens to accept a vaccination.

Increasingly, governments and businesses are requiring proof of vaccination for clients, patients, and students. These cards and apps function as “vaccine passports” even though most politicians are loathe to label them as such. A good example is Alberta, naming their passport a “restriction exemption” program<sup>12</sup>. The Canadian Medical Association recently announced its unequivocal support for the use of vaccine passports to ensure that citizens can start to return to normal activities in relative safety<sup>3</sup>.

Even though Manitoba provides the vaccine free to all persons residing in the province, there are people who have been systematically excluded from receiving proof of vaccination. In Manitoba, the two largest groups that are excluded from the right to obtain a Manitoba health card are international students and temporary workers. **In Manitoba, over 18,725 international students<sup>4</sup> and 15,000 temporary workers arrive each year.<sup>5</sup>** They are the largest groups affected by this policy.

Temporary workers, despite having the added challenges of finding time and transportation to attain the vaccine<sup>6</sup>, are now prevented from utilizing many services which they are eligible, despite being fully vaccinated. This is an infringement of their human rights as they are now being treated unequally.

International students experience similar barriers. As more provinces are implementing vaccine requirements, post-secondary institutions also implemented the vaccine requirements for students, staff and faculty<sup>7</sup>.

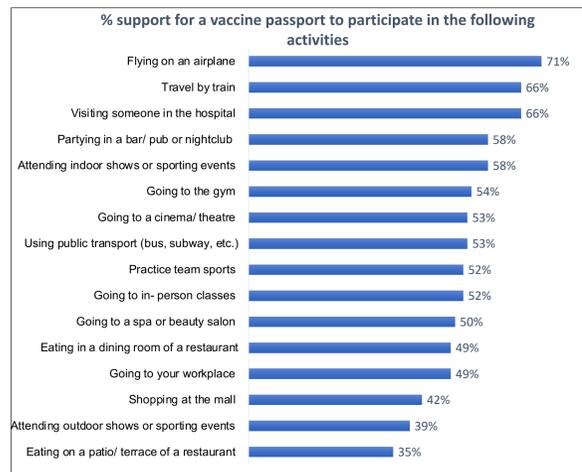
All post-secondary institutions welcome international students, and many stay permanently. International students who graduate from post-secondary institutions in Manitoba make up 37% of the those who successfully apply to the provincial nominee program and hold over 4,250 jobs in the province<sup>4</sup>. This is a concern for students who cannot obtain a Manitoba health card.

## OBJECTIVES

The vaccine passports have actively excluded two large groups of vaccinated people in Manitoba. This CIHR-funded research is part of a larger study that aims to address the inequality, discrimination, and refusal of service international students and temporary workers previously faced due to their ineligibility or inability to receive documentation for their vaccinations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Source: COVID-19 Impacts Research Team, ACS - Leger Marketing survey July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (N=1,529)

## METHODOLOGY

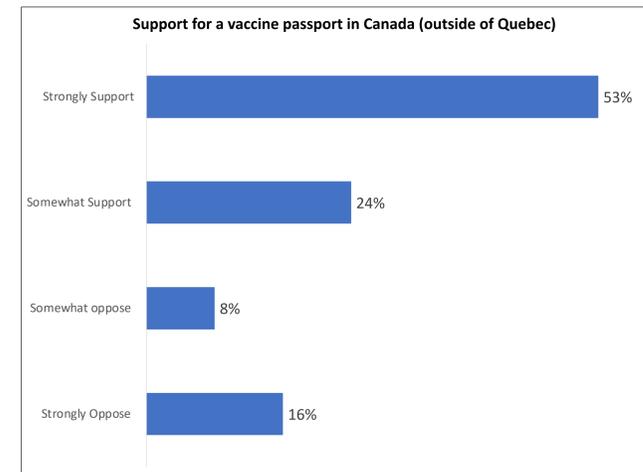
- Weekly online panel surveys of Canadians and Americans starting March 2020 (surveys ongoing)
- Larger, bimonthly omnibus surveys Canada, USA and Mexico
- N= 1,515 for Canadian population (83 weeks & ongoing)
- N= 1,515 for American population (83 weeks & ongoing)
- Participants were randomly selected
- Participants from hard- to- reach areas were added to the panel by utilizing targeted recruitment campaigns

## STATISTICS

*Since 2019, Manitoba admits 18,725 international students<sup>4</sup>, a number that continues to increase each year.*

*20.5% of the student population at the University of Manitoba are international students<sup>8</sup>.*

*Manitoba welcomes 15,000 temporary workers on average each year, 96% of whom settle in Manitoba permanently<sup>5</sup>.*



Source: COVID-19 Impacts Research Team, ACS - Leger Marketing survey August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (N=1,106)

## RESULTS

The results indicate that many Canadians support the requirement of vaccine passports to participate in various activities, with 52% of survey respondents agreeing with the vaccine requirement for attending in- person classes, and 49% agreeing with the vaccine requirement for workplaces.

The problem faced by the University of Manitoba and other post-secondary institutions in Canada is significant. Since international students and temporary workers cannot obtain a Manitoba health card, and therefore do not have access to vaccine passports, they must rely on immunization records which are not always accepted as proof of vaccination<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, information regarding the process of obtaining immunization records is difficult to access, and can be very complex, especially for newcomers. Newly arriving international students will have difficulties either proving they have been vaccinated and/or providing proof they have been vaccinated with Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna or Astra Zeneca (the only four approved vaccinations).

The absence of vaccination proof causes inequitable access and a denial of services towards those who are eligible for these services, which results in members of the groups experiencing greater discrimination and infringements upon their rights<sup>10</sup>. The issue further exacerbates the inequality and exclusion racialized groups already face when attempting to integrate into Canadian society.

## CONCLUSION

There is good news to share! Members of the research team, along with the Provincial Newcomer Vaccine Taskforce, were able to identify the problem to Manitoba Health. **As of August 30, 2021, every person who has been vaccinated<sup>11</sup> in Manitoba now has access to ‘proof of vaccination’<sup>11</sup>.** This is a good example of how social science data can be used to identify and resolve a social problem.

Our ongoing research reveals that there remains a strong support among Canadians for instituting nation-wide vaccine passports in order to access goods and services, although a strong minority, 23%, remain unconvinced of the utility of these measures.

By listening to the concerns voiced by community members, in tandem with understanding the opinions of the Canadian public, we were able to identify the problem, provide evidence and support a solution. As a result, members of the previously ineligible groups now can obtain proof of vaccine cards (digital or printed). As a result, the province will reduce the discrimination and exclusion individuals already experience upon their arrival to Manitoba.

Further research should continue focusing on ensuring international students and temporary workers are aware of their eligibility and can easily access resources to help with the process.

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