

Vaccines for Older Adults: A Societal Safeguard

Executive Summary:

As healthcare professionals, we recognize that vaccines are not only a cornerstone of disease prevention but also among the most powerful tools in global health. Each year, immunization prevents millions of deaths, reduces health care costs, and strengthens community well-being by preventing the spread of vaccine-preventable disease. Vaccines save lives, prevent the reemergence of eradicated diseases, and strengthen economies by minimizing disease-related costs, thereby keeping individuals healthy and productive.

However, vaccine hesitancy among older adults is a growing concern in the United States. Misinformation and disinformation have eroded public trust, particularly during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. As trusted health care professionals, Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association (GAPNA) members have both the opportunity and the responsibility to restore confidence, counter misinformation, and promote evidence-based vaccination practices. We commit to communicating clearly and compassionately, providing information in accessible formats, and involving caregivers when appropriate. Our goal is to reduce confusion and empower informed decision-making.

This position statement outlines GAPNA's commitment to advancing vaccine confidence, access, and equity among older adults.

GAPNA Position Statement:

GAPNA affirms that vaccines are a societal safeguard and a critical component of healthy aging. Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) play a pivotal role in promoting immunization, building trust, and ensuring equitable access for all older adults.

1. **Leadership and Advocacy:** APNs are uniquely positioned to counter false narratives through education, public awareness initiatives, position statements, and evidence-based communication while remaining empathetic and culturally humble (Wilson et al., 2015).

POSITION STATEMENT

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2. **Countering Misinformation with Empathy:** APNs are uniquely situated to counter false narratives through education, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based communication, engaging with empathy and cultural humility. APNs counter false narratives through education, public awareness initiatives, and position statements while remaining empathetic and culturally humble (Wilson et al., 2015).
3. **Collaborative Public Health Engagement:** APNs recognize their collective responsibility to promote evidence-based immunization practices, counter misinformation, and advocate for equitable vaccine access. This commitment is strengthened by empowering health care professionals with accurate information and fostering public trust to advance immunization education and delivery systems.
4. **Respectful Dialogue and Community Partnership:** APNs promote respectful, open dialogue with vaccine-hesitant and vaccine-resistant individuals, creating space for personal narratives that foster understanding and address ambivalence. Partnerships with religious, civic, and community leaders strengthen outreach, trust, and equitable vaccine distribution. APNs encourage open dialogue with vaccine-hesitant and vaccine-resistant individuals respectfully and effectively, creating space for personal narratives to better understand and address ambivalence (Wagner et al., 2022).
5. **Equity and Inclusion in Research and Practice:** APNs advocate for inclusion of vulnerable and historically marginalized populations—such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), HIV/AIDS population as well as immunocompromised, pregnant, and lactating individuals.
6. **Integration into Routine Care:** Vaccination should be a routine component of preventive care for older adults. APNs consistently assess vaccination status during clinical encounters and ensure that patients receive education and recommended immunizations. GAPNA supports healthy aging by aligning immunization guidance with the evidence-based Age-Friendly Health Systems 4Ms Framework across settings of care: (1) What Matters, knowing and aligning care with health outcome goals and care preferences; (2) Medication, using Age-Friendly medication that does not interfere with What Matters to the older adult, Mentation, or Mobility; (3) Mentation, preventing, identifying, treating, and managing dementia, depression,

and delirium; and (4) Mobility, ensuring older adults move safely every day to maintain function and do What Matters.

Applying the 4Ms Framework with education and informed decision making, vaccination care remains safe, person-centered, and aligned with each individual’s priorities and goals (IHI, 2026).

7. **Commitment to Public Health:** GAPNA calls on all members to reaffirm their commitment to immunization as a foundational public health strategy, one that safeguards individuals and society as a whole.
8. **Commitment to Shared-decision Making “What matters to the individual”:** Shared decision-making about vaccination for older adults involves open discussions between patients and healthcare providers to align medical recommendations with individual values, preferences, and health goals.
9. **Health Care Workforce Immunization Responsibility:** GAPNA affirms that all health care workers in regular patient contact have a professional responsibility to remain appropriately immunized to protect the health and safety of older adults (Centers for Disease Control, 2024). Immunization practices should be guided by the best available scientific evidence and recommendations developed through established expert review processes within the medical and public health communities. Health care workforce immunization is a critical patient safety measure that preserves health system capacity, reduces the risk of preventable disease transmission, and models evidence-based practice within clinical and community settings.
10. **Leadership in Long-Term Care Immunization Programs:** GAPNA calls on APNs practicing in long-term care and post-acute care settings to actively lead organizational immunization initiatives for residents and staff. APNs play a central role in education, prescribing, vaccine administration, and quality improvement efforts that strengthen immunization coverage and reduce the burden of vaccine-preventable disease among this high-risk population. Through this leadership, APNs help create safer care environments and improve health outcomes for residents, families, and communities.

POSITION STATEMENT

CARE • CONTINUITY • CONNECTION

This position statement reflects GAPNA's dedication to ensuring that every older adult receives care that is safe, respectful, and aligned with their priorities.

Background:

Current research demonstrates that vaccinations have saved over 154 million lives since 1974 (Shattock et al., 2024). Yet older adults in the United States remain undervaccinated, resulting in increased infection, hospitalization, functional decline, and mortality (Pangilinan et al., 2025). The financial burden of undervaccination is substantial, with estimated costs of \$378 billion over 10 years and \$1.3 trillion over 30 years, primarily from pneumococcal disease and influenza (Talbird et al., 2021).

Vaccine hesitancy is a multifactorial and complex phenomenon influenced by environmental, personal, societal, safety, and vaccine-related factors (Fuller et al., 2024; Goje & Kapoor, 2024; Montero et al., 2025). Addressing hesitancy through accurate information, accessible services, and culturally competent communication strengthens both individual and community resilience, especially when providers partner with community leadership in outreach efforts (Wagner et al., 2022). Inclusion and collaboration in research and community outreach are essential to rebuilding trust and resilience in public health (Commonwealth Fund Commission on a National Public Health System, 2022).

Vaccines not only protect against disease but also promote community resilience by reducing morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs while sustaining independence and functional ability in older adults. Reasons for vaccine hesitancy are varied and multifactorial. Community resilience can be enhanced by addressing hesitancy or delay, ensuring access to recommended vaccinations, and providing accurate information.

This position statement reflects GAPNA's unwavering dedication to ensuring that every older adult receives care that is safe, respectful, evidence-based, and aligned with their priorities.

Implications and Call to Action:

The evolving landscape of vaccine hesitancy, health misinformation, and disparities in immunization access presents significant implications for the health and well-being of older adults. Failure to address these challenges threatens individual health outcomes, community resilience, and the sustainability of the health care system. GAPNA

POSITION STATEMENT

CARE • CONTINUITY • CONNECTION

members are uniquely positioned to lead solutions that restore public trust, strengthen vaccine confidence, and promote equitable immunization practices across care settings.

GAPNA calls upon its members and all health care stakeholders to:

- **Lead vaccine education and advocacy efforts** within clinical practice, professional organizations, and policy arenas to advance evidence-based immunization strategies for older adults.
- **Integrate immunization assessment and counseling** as a standard component of all preventive and primary care encounters.
- **Strengthen interdisciplinary and community partnerships** with public health agencies, long-term care organizations, community leaders, and faith-based groups to expand vaccine outreach and access.
- **Address vaccine hesitancy with cultural humility**, empathy, and tailored communication that respects individual values and lived experiences.
- **Champion equity in vaccine research, education, and delivery**, ensuring that historically marginalized and medically vulnerable populations are included and protected.
- **Advocate for supportive policies and resources** that enhance workforce capacity, expand vaccine access, and sustain public health infrastructure.

Through collective leadership, scholarship, advocacy, and clinical excellence, GAPNA will continue to safeguard the health of older adults and strengthen the communities they serve. Vaccination is not merely a clinical intervention. It is a moral and societal obligation to protect current and future generations.

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POSITION STATEMENT

CARE • CONTINUITY • CONNECTION

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POSITION STATEMENT

CARE • CONTINUITY • CONNECTION

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