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\$2.8 million paid out so far by Vaccine Injury Support Program

A program designed to compensate Canadians for vaccine injuries has paid out \$2.779 million since it started accepting claims 19 months ago.

According to the Vaccine Injury Support Program (VISP) website, 50 of 1,299 claims submitted so far have been approved, with 18 rejected claims under appeal as of Dec. 1, 2022. Claims are approved when a medical review board determines a probable link between a recent Health Canada-authorized vaccine and "serious and permanent injury."

Lake Country, B.C.'s Ross Wightman was one of the first claimants approved by the VISP. The 41-year-old was hospitalized with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) - a rare and sometimes fatal condition that affects the nervous system - just after his first and only dose of an Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

"I'm told by the program that I'm the first person for everything related. So I'm the tip of the sword," he said.

The VISP covers Canadians who received a vaccine in Canada on or after Dec. 8, 2020, excluding those vaccinated in Quebec, where a provincial program exists.

More than 96 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Canada. Health experts note the risks associated with contracting COVID-19 far outweigh the risks of vaccination.

There have been more than 49,000 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Canada.

Claimants frustrated by delays Without giving an exact figure, Wightman said he's received close to



the maximum VISP payout possible of \$284,000 for pain and suffering. That means his claim, which was approved in May 2021, accounts for close to 10 per cent of the total money distributed by the program so far.

A major frustration, said Wightman, is the length of time VISP takes to process a claim.

"I know lots of people in the community that I talked to are in a similar boat and are still having trouble," said Wightman. "Some are being rejected for various reasons, and others are just simply waiting for any sort of payment or communication from VISP about where their case is at."

According to the VISP website, "timeliness for a determination of eligibility and support will depend on the nature and complexity of the claim."

Sumnerland, B.C.'s Julian Scholefield is also critical of the pace of VISP. The 45-year-old father of two relies on a wheelchair for mobility after he says he became paralyzed from the waist down, days after getting a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in July 2021.

Montreal, Canada - Canada has barred most non-citizens and foreign-owned companies from buying homes across the country, but experts question whether the ban alone will be able to fulfil Ottawa's goal of bringing down Canadian housing prices.

The new housing law, which went into effect on January 1, prohibits "the purchase of residential property by non-Canadians" for a two-year period.

The measure includes exemptions for permanent residents and refugees, among others. But home-buyers who violate the law can face thousands of dollars in fines, as part of the government's effort to "curb unproductive foreign ownership."

"Through this legislation, we're taking action to ensure that housing is owned by Canadians, for the benefit of everyone who lives in this country," Ahmed Hussein, Canada's minister of housing and diversity and inclusion, said in a statement last month.

Canadian legislators passed the prohibition in June of last year, in response to soaring housing costs in major cities across Canada.

Home prices had been increasing for years but reached new heights during the COVID-19 pandemic, spurred in part by low interest rates and higher disposable incomes.

Rents also have been on the rise, pricing many people out, especially in urban centres.

Thomas Davidoff, director of the Centre for Urban Economics and Real Estate at the University of British Columbia (UBC), said the new law will likely do little in Toronto and Vancouver, two of Canada's largest cities and most expensive real estate markets. Increased provincial taxes have already targeted foreign home-buying there, he said.

However, Davidoff told AJ Jazeera that reducing demand overall is expected to lead to lower prices, and

Why is Canada banning foreign homebuyers?

addressing housing for low- and middle-income people," said Penny Gurstein, director of the housing research collaborative UBC.

Gurstein told AJ Jazeera that while the government's foreign homebuyer prohibition sends "a message that there is concern about global capital coming into our housing market," it remains unclear what concrete effect it will have on prices.

Foreign owners only account for a small share of the Canadian real estate market. According to Statistics Canada, a government website, non-residents owned 2.2 percent of residential properties in Ontario and 3.1 percent in British Columbia in 2020. The percentages were 2.7 and 4.2 in the Toronto and Vancouver metropolitan areas, respectively.

So while some foreign capital is involved, Gurstein said other factors are at play, such as Canadian real-estate investors buying up properties. She added the government could do more to address the affordability problem by allocating more funds towards building co-ops and social and community housing.

In the meantime, steadily rising interest rates coupled with slowing demand have led prices to drop slightly, missing optimism.

But Gurstein said that, over the long term, a move away from the private sector will be critical. "We need to be thinking about housing as infrastructure, housing as a way to encourage other sectors of the economy and not just the real estate industry."

"Small segments of market" Davidoff of UBC's Centre for Urban

the ban could have an effect in Canadian cities that do not already impose high taxes on foreign real estate investments.

"If not a problem if there's foreign investment in the market. What is a problem [is] if there's empty houses that are tied-to-serve, vacation-type places," he said.

"If somebody from overseas wants to buy an apartment and rent it out to somebody who lives locally, that's not a problem. I think it's misguided to focus on the nationality of the owner rather than the use of the property."

Canada's housing market The prohibition on foreign ownership is one of several housing policies adopted by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government, which unveiled Canada's first-ever national housing strategy in 2017. The 10-year, multi-billion-dollar plan aims to help build new houses - including for low-income Canadians - and provide tax benefits and other incentives for new buyers.

Affordable housing was also part of last year's federal budget, with Trudeau saying new investments

will put home ownership in reach for more Canadians, protect renters and buyers, and expand Indigenous housing across the country.

The new law applies to properties with three units or less, as well as parts of semi-detached houses and condominiums that are located in and around "census metropolitan areas", which is where much of the concern around soaring costs has been in recent years.

In March 2021, the Canadian Real Estate Association said the national average cost of buying a home had reached a record of \$524,324 (\$716,828 Canadian dollars), a 31.6 percent increase from 2020. That leap was driven largely by property values in and around Vancouver and Toronto.

A month later, a Royal Bank of Canada poll found that 36 percent of non-homebuyers aged under 40 had given up hope of ever owning a property.

"People who can't get into the market are renting, but so much of their income is now having to be used for rent. We really need to be addressing that. We need to be

another long-term hurdle: zoning restrictions. Most land designated for housing in Canada is limited to the construction of single-family detached homes, which are unaffordable for most people, he said.

"And while the federal government doesn't directly control zoning, it certainly does have the power to say to provinces, 'You don't get any money for anything until you ban the practice among your municipalities of creating restrictive zoning,'" said Davidoff. "So that would be much more effective, certainly in the long run, than banning foreign buyers."

Yet, despite the complexity of Canada's housing problem, foreign investors have shouldered a great deal of public blame for the housing crisis. In Vancouver, reports of wealthy investors from mainland China buying luxury properties have spurred a backlash against the city's large Asian-Canadian population.

"What I like to say is, supporting a ban on foreign buyers doesn't make you a racist, but if you were a racist it's something you would like," Davidoff told AJ Jazeera.

Diana Mok, an associate professor at Western University in Ontario, told AJ Jazeera that by singling out "a culprit" - in this case, foreigners - the government is trying to show it is taking action to reduce housing costs.

"It's a small segment... that we can put a label on easily. Call them foreigners-not-us, them," she said.

Mok said she doubts the ban will stabilize prices in the long run. Focusing Gurstein, she said a wider approach should be taken to address housing affordability, including ensuring salaries keep up with increased living costs.

"Be creative in thinking about all sides of the problem," she advised, "and not just [that] one single measure will do the job."

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Canadians hope patience will pay off as home prices dip: 'It just takes time'

Andrew Hamilton and his wife bid farewell to their home in Toronto's Junction neighbourhood roughly a year and a half ago, when housing prices were soaring and finding new developments was difficult.

With no available homes meeting their needs or price range, the couple opted to temporarily use the equity they got from selling their house on a rental property in Etobicoke.

But they still have one eye on the market and are hoping the current cool-down will deepen enough for them to snag another home.

"Patience, I think, will pay off," said Hamilton.

His sentiments are common throughout the sector, especially with prospective buyers, who have lamented the torrid pace Canada's real estate market has moved in recent years.

But many feel 2023 may be the year their key changes. Prices have steadily declined since last spring, bidding wars are less frequent and concession fees are so and so the Bank of Canada's quick succession of interest rate hikes that have added hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to monthly mortgage payments.

"It just takes time," said Deepina Zangana, a Toronto Realtor with PSR Brokerage.

She expects buyers who delayed purchases will feel more comfortable this year as the changed housing market tapers.

"They're getting used to it," she said.

"People are saying that they don't have to go into bidding wars and put in unconditional offers. Now they have the freedom to put in conditional offers, so that's giving a lot of people a bit more confidence."

But there's at least one major change that could be on the horizon. Economists have been predicting 2023 will be the year Canada enters another recession, though it's unclear how severe the downturn will be.

Douglas Porter sees a 25 to 30 per cent chance Canada's economy will suffer a soft landing when inflation and interest rate hikes gently end, helping avoid a recession. There's a 50 per cent chance of a shallow downturn and a 20 to 25 per cent chance of something more serious.

"All of those have implications for the housing market," said the chief economist at BMO Capital Markets.

"Clearly, the less intense the hit to the economy, the better the news is for the housing market."

Even in current conditions, however, the housing market is one of the weakest parts of the economy, a phenomenon unbroken in years, if not decades.

His forecast predicts that by the time the current economic cycle is complete, home prices will have fallen by between 20 and 25 per cent from their peak, noting they have already dropped 10 per cent.

The Canadian Real Estate Association said last month that the actual national average home price was \$632,802 in November, a 12 per cent decline from the same month last year.

As prices tick down, Porter said the market sits in "suspended animation" with sellers wary of listing their properties because they won't fetch what neighbours did last year and buyers sitting on the sidelines waiting for better mortgage rates and inventory.

"Certainly, you don't want to jump in and buy when it looks as if prices can drop a whole lot more," Porter said.

The decreases seen so far have been

Climate change is forcing wildlife to move north - and they're bringing diseases with them

COVID-19 has shown us how quickly a new disease can spread, upending our lives. Even if it doesn't happen within our lifetimes, research suggests there will be another pandemic and it will likely happen through a disease that reaches humans from animals.

In Canada, the risk of diseases being passed from animals to humans is relatively low, but not zero. Based on existing trends, some scientists predict the rate of emergence of new diseases to triple over the next several decades due to increased interaction between humans and animals.

Invasive species - those that enter a new habitat and out-compete native wildlife - may also bring new diseases, which can be devastating.

With both native and invasive species often having no choice but to move through densely populated areas when searching for new habitats, there is a higher risk of those diseases being passed from animals to humans.

This is known as zoonosis. Zoonosis events can lead to outbreaks of novel diseases, such as SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Scientists have estimated there are over 10,000 viruses with the potential to infect humans and that are currently residing in animal hosts - and that doesn't include bacteria or other pathogens.

A recent paper published in the journal *Nature* shows climate change is increasing the risk of those viruses crossing the species barrier and infecting humans.

In other cases, known carriers of existing human diseases are being given the opportunity to move into new areas, increasing the risk of transmission.

Here in Canada, many native and invasive species can host and transmit diseases - one of many reasons scientists are wary of species expanding into new areas.

Enter the blacklegged tick, *Ixodes scapularis*, found across the eastern provinces, and its cousin the western blacklegged tick, *Ixodes pacificus*, found on the Pacific Coast.

Though not likely to cause a pandemic in Canada, they are the only known carriers of *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, which has been on the rise over the past decade.



They can carry a variety of other pathogens as well. Blacklegged ticks, also known as deer ticks, were once a rare sight across Canada. Today, they are found across large parts of Ontario and other provinces, and more during the year than ever before.

Catherine Bouchard, a veterinary epidemiologist with the Public Health Agency of Canada and adjunct professor at the University of Montreal, has seen this firsthand.

"Fifteen years ago... sampling for over six months per year, I would find maybe 1,000 ticks over a two-year period," said Bouchard, who works primarily in the Estrie region of Quebec. "Nowadays, when we go out there in the same region... within two months, we are getting 1,000 ticks."

This is the same trend seen across much of Canada, including Ontario, and Bouchard said it is expected to continue.

This has also led to a major increase in the number of cases of Lyme disease - an inflammatory disease that can start as a rash, headache, fever and chills, and develop into more serious issues like arthritis, long-lasting fatigue, and neurological and cognitive problems.

In order to transmit Lyme disease, a tick must remain attached for at least 24 hours, with the chance of transmission increasing significantly the longer it feeds, said Bouchard.

She added that although only about 20 per cent of ticks carry the disease-causing bacteria on average, it can be as high as 50 per cent in some areas.

Moving to new areas. These ticks are one of many species undergoing a range shift - moving north because of climate change.

"With key climate change drivers such as temperature but also precipitation... the weather that we are experiencing, that is changing, of course it has a direct impact on vector ticks," said Bouchard.

A range shift occurs when species are forced to move out of their typical homes and into new areas that can support them.

You can see an example of that in Ontario, where blacklegged tick populations have expanded since 2016. Every species has a niche - a specific set of environmental constraints that must be met for survival and to reproduce. These include temperature, humidity, precipitation and the presence or absence of certain other species.

Climate change has affected these factors in habitats around the world. As a result, many species' niches are less common or no longer exist within their historical range.

"Because of climate change, the conditions are changing throughout the range of all the species, and what was the region where they were having their optimum of abundance is shifting," said Marie-Josée Fortin, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Toronto.

"(Species) are finding that the location where they are too hot, or too dry or too humid for them, so they have to move."

Movement can be unpredictable, but generally, species tend to head toward cooler climates: toward the poles, to higher elevations or in the case of aquatic species, to lower depths.

These range shifts pose many challenges for individual species, ecosystems and even human communities.

Movement isn't always easy. For some species, like caribou or migratory birds, movement is a natural part of their lives.

"They are used to moving through large regions," Fortin said. "But other species, they cannot move that fast, right? They need to slowly acquire some new habitat along the way."

These discrepancies between species' abilities to move to new habitats can make range shifts difficult even for those that can move with relative ease.

Not only do species need to have the right climate - they also need their resources, food and other members of their species to survive, Fortin explained.

New areas also mean new competition with new species, including humans.

"If you think of species from northern Ontario that are at the southern range of their limit in North America, to move north, what they are faced with is an agricultural landscape, so there's not much habitat to colonize," said Fortin.

"They are competing with humans for the best habitat that they could use."

Even when trying to return land to its natural state by rehabilitating areas with native species, climate change is a big part of the conversation, said Tys Theyseneyer, head of natural lands at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) in Hamilton.

That's why more northern species, like hemlock trees, may not be part of planting efforts at the RBG in the future, even though they're native to the area.

"We're starting to think a little more about those slightly more southern plants as part of site restoration projects," said Theyseneyer.

"And at the same time, you're looking at, well, what are the trees that will march north into this area and be the foundation of the future forest?"

Range shifts can entail connections or extinctions.

For many species, the term "range shift" is a bit of a misnomer. Species at risk often face what is better described as a range contraction - where their southern range border moves faster than the northern one, causing its range to shrink.

This is also common for species that live on mountains. As the climate warms, their range shifts to a higher elevation, but eventually there is no mountain left to ascend.

Meanwhile, range shifts may drive other species to become invasive, harming other ecosystems they enter.

Indeed, invasive species, like blacklegged ticks, often enjoy range expansion as a result of climate change, as they gain more suitable habitat than they lose.

For many protected areas, removal of invasive species is top priority. Climate change is threatening to make that even more difficult.

Japan PM visit could highlight LNG needs, as Tokyo pushes away from Russia and China

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's first official visit to Canada will take place next week, as Tokyo looks to Canada to provide much-needed liquefied natural gas.

Japan takes over the rotating presidency of the Group of Seven this year and Kishida is embarking on a multi-country tour.

The G7 started as a forum for the world's largest economies to co-ordinate economic policy, but has broadened its role in recent years to take a key role in pushing Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

The group includes Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, plus the European Union.

Kishida is set to arrive Thursday in Ottawa from London before heading to Washington.

It will be the first Canadian visit by an Asian head of government since Ottawa launched its Indo-Pacific strategy last November, which called for closer ties with countries that can



counterbalance China's influence. Japan is similarly trying to pivot away from a reliance on China and Russia for electricity and fuel.

To that end, Kishida has created the position of a minister of state for international policy, said Kishida will likely seek a further commitment from Canada to sell liquefied natural gas, and mention an ongoing interest in hydrogen.

The country is so reliant on Russian fuel that G7 countries gave Japan an exemption on a measure that

caps the price of Russian oil below market rates, to avoid Japan facing the same scramble for energy that Europe undertook last year.

Trevor Kennedy, the Business Council of Canada vice-president for international policy, said Kishida will likely seek a further commitment from Canada to sell liquefied natural gas, and mention an ongoing interest in hydrogen.

"They're stuck in a situation where they're sourcing their LNG from Russia, and they don't have another option," said Kennedy, who has worked in Japan.

Japan and South Korea have invested in Canada's first LNG export terminal in Kitimat, B.C., which is set to come online in 2025.

Kennedy said both countries and Canadian firms are watching to see whether the terminal meets that timeline, given the delays other large energy projects in Canada have faced.

He said the energy sector, Tokyo and Seoul also want Ottawa to boost the LNG sector by expanding the terminal or launching more of them. Otherwise, Japan and South Korea will have to rely on gas from Russia, or ask faraway countries to send supplies through waters China is trying to control.

Last month, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly said Canada's goal is to be as close to South Korea and Japan as Ottawa is to Germany, France and the U.K.

Kennedy said it's an obvious decision, given the pair are democratic countries who share the same values. But he said it requires a sense of urgency.

"We need to be more deliberate about how we engage," he said.

"A lot of it is a mindset, and just understanding that there are our neighbours."

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