

# We need to mend this fractured trust

FIONA SMAILL AND MATTHEW MILLER

Despite having one of the most advanced public health systems in the world, Canada has quietly found itself mired in a major public health crisis: diseases we once controlled — and others we eliminated altogether — are back.

The most visible example is measles. Long considered a benchmark of vaccination success, measles was declared eliminated in Canada in 1998. Recently, that status was revoked after a sustained spike in cases and a decline in vaccine uptake. While this recent reversal made headlines, it is far from the only concerning health trend in Canada, and signals a deeper crack in our approach to public health.

Indeed, we're seeing similar patterns with other preventable diseases and outcomes. For example, seasonal influenza continues to hospitalize thousands of Canadians each year, despite the availability of flu shots that are particularly effective at preventing severe illness. But measles remains the clearest warning sign: in the year preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada had 29 confirmed measles cases. Last year, we reported 5,081.

There is no doubt that the pandemic rattled a long-standing social trust in science, government, and public health — but it's important to acknowledge why.

The pandemic was not just a public health crisis; it was a profoundly human one. Fear, isolation and rapidly changing information created a high-anxiety climate. Canadians were asked to make personal health decisions in real-time, often with incomplete or conflicting information and under immense social pressure. Compounding this was the misapplication of medical advice to advance partisan agendas.

But the fractured trust between Canada's health institutions and some of the people they serve cannot be repaired through shame or frustration. Instead, we need to rethink how we develop vaccines and therapeutics — maintaining rigorous safety standards while integrating community voices early, and communicating new science in accessible and transparent ways.

At McMaster University, through an innovation accelerator called NexusHealth, we're doing exactly that. With experts Zhou Xing and Brian Lichty, a team of staff and students, and hundreds of community members, we are co-developing a next-generation vaccine platform that reimagines immunization.

This platform is entirely needle-free — and pain-free, too. Using a personal inhalation device called a nebulizer, individuals breathe the vaccine directly into their lungs and upper airways, where respiratory viruses typically enter the body. This generates a special type of protection called mucosal immunity, which can provide a stronger, longer-lasting, and more localized response than traditional injections.

Nebulizers are not a new technology. They have been used for many years to deliver inhaled medicines to individuals with lung conditions, like asthma. Ours was adapted to deliver vaccines — initially to prevent tuberculosis, and, more recently, COVID-19.

AeroVax, our COVID-19 vaccine, has successfully completed Phase 1 clinical testing and is now advancing through a Phase 2 study led out of McMaster, with additional sites in Halifax and Ottawa. This progress has been made possible by the enthusiastic community members who have volunteered to participate.

Participants are not just helping us answer questions about safety and effectiveness. Their experience tells us much more — about comfort, concerns, preferences, and what drew them to the trial in the first place. Learning from our community members allows us to design a vaccine and a vaccination experience that reflects the realities of the communities that it is meant to protect, and not the assumptions of the health system delivering it.

There is still more work to be done. Our trials are ongoing, and a third — and much larger — round will commence shortly after. Continued participation from curious Canadians will be essential to helping this new vaccine deliver on its promise.

To us, this is about more than advancing a new type of vaccine. It's about confronting a quiet truth that has become deafeningly loud since the pandemic: trust matters, and without it, our health systems falter.

Make no mistake: the challenge posed by resurgent disease is not a just scientific one. Most of our existing vaccines work exceptionally well. This problem is also societal — and so, the solutions must be societal as well. Next-generation vaccines must be grounded in lived experience and designed through community partnership. Because, in the end, vaccines don't save lives — vaccinations do.

FIONA SMAILL IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS, PATHOLOGY AND MOLECULAR MEDICINE AT MCMASTER UNIVERSITY. MATTHEW MILLER IS DIRECTOR OF THE M.G. DEGROOTE INSTITUTE FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASE RESEARCH AT MCMASTER AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEXUSHEALTH.



THOMAS FROESE

Commenting on the relationship between reading and sleep, Thomas Froese writes to "never underestimate the power of a dad in our global village of storytellers."

## Learning about the meaning of life in your pyjamas



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

So I was walking the dog with another dog walker and he told me how his daughter puts her boyfriend to sleep by reading to him.

Go on, I said, so he did. This father, Tim, told me about his daughter's bedtime reading habits. And his. When Tim goes down, he reads, falls asleep, wakes hours later, like clockwork, then reads again — always a different book of a different genre, which gets him sleeping the rest of the night.

This is the relationship between reading and sleep, an interesting one considering we just passed World Book Day on Thursday, and considering how students can doze off in high school English pretty well any day.

I read at night like I sip a glass of merlot. Or hot milk. Slowly. Then I'm easily out. My current night companion — moved to my bedside table from the downstairs bookshelves with the African painting — is "Fifth Business" by Robertson Davies.

It was Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian prophet of media, who said the medium is the message. He's right. So I won't sleep with my phone. My wife would have thoughts on this. Besides, the ongoing message from my phone is that

all hope is lost, so why bother waking up in the morning?

Years ago, let's say before the plow was invented, reading could go a mile deep in meaning, but just an inch wide in reach. After Gutenberg's printing press, that became an inch deep of meaning and a mile wide of reach. Digitization now offers us a hairbreadth of meaning and 10,000 miles of reach. I told Tim. He agreed.

Which is to say that two aging guys walking their dogs can still offer the world a thing or two. I then talked about my son, the bright aerospace engineering student who was never really a reader. He recently told me, "Dad, you were right."

I thought I'd misheard my dear boy. Then he shared he's now enjoying books. I'd apparently once told him this would eventually happen, that he shouldn't worry. At Christmas he even asked for Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov."

This leads to Karen Rodriguez, of the helpful platform Literary Fancy, and her recent thoughts on Russian literature being tremendous therapy. Your therapist, for \$150 or so, might get you talking about your childhood or your self-destructive patterns. But for \$22.99, Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" will tell you that so-called happiness isn't really the point anyway. Meaning is. And you can learn this in your pyjamas.

So Jonathan, my son, you now know the truth of a good book. Karen (thanks again) says that the

family systems theory in "The Brothers Karamazov" is, in fact, the best of Russian literary therapy. (Not that a good traditional therapist can be of help when needed.)

I didn't read much Russian literature to my kids. But when the boy and his sisters were young, at pyjama time, I did read aloud. One starting place is the Chronicles of Narnia series. Then find all the Newbery Medal winners. Lois Lowry's "The Giver," about a dystopian society that ends pain — along with joy and other rather essential human feelings — comes to mind.

During school runs in Africa, we drove more than an hour to get the three bambinos to their international school by 8 a.m. So at sunrise, we'd sometimes already be listening to audiobooks. Mum. Dad. Remember this. In the car, you have a captive audience.

Last thought. Ask Harvard University's Elisabeth Duursma about her research showing that reading fathers, or father figures, often impact children more than reading mothers. Mothers tend to emphasize a story's facts and details. Fathers tend to enact and elaborate.

So both mum and dad are needed and complementary. But never underestimate the power of a dad in our global village of storytellers. It's not a bad thought to go to sleep with. Here. In Africa. Or anywhere, really.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

## Hamilton's roadways are the launch pad for Canadian trade

STEPHEN LASKOWSKI

Hamiltonians often look at the Port of Hamilton and see ships, but if you look closer, you'll see the start of a journey that spans the continent.

In the world of modern trade, ships and trucks are inseparable partners. Whether it's food destined for grocery shelves in Western Canada or Hamilton steel for automotive plants in the U.S. Midwest, that journey begins right here on local roads.

This is the reality of trade: eventually, it moves by truck. That means to keep the country's engine running, we need road systems that match our economic ambition.

The Port of Hamilton is critical to the international supply chain, which means trucks need to be able to move in and out of the area efficiently. However, due to the City of Hamilton realigning municipal truck routes, trucks cannot use the 403 to access the port from the west.

Instead, carriers are forced to travel the long way over the Burlington Skyway and can only access the ports from the east.

Why are we making trucks take a longer, less efficient path? It doesn't just hurt the bottom line; it adds travel time and increases



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

The Port of Hamilton is critical to the international supply chain, which means trucks need to be able to move in and out of the area efficiently, writes Stephen Laskowski.

greenhouse gas emissions in our own backyard.

Instead, we must prioritize the links between the port, the QEW, and Highway 403 to streamline the path to global markets.

This isn't just a local logistics issue. When we improve the local road connectivity, we are securing the "first mile" of a trade route that ends at the Gordie Howe International Bridge or the Highway 11/7 corridor, the vital artery to Western

Canada. A bottleneck at the Port of Hamilton is an invisible tax added to a consumer in Thunder Bay or a factory in Detroit.

We are seeing a rare alignment of vision at the highest levels of government.

Premier Doug Ford and Prime Minister Mark Carney recently signed a landmark \$8.8-billion infrastructure partnership. It is critical that this "Build Canada" spirit reaches the pavement here in Hamilton.

We need both the province and the federal government to prioritize trade-enabling infrastructure that supports our professional drivers and protects our supply chains from being choked by aging road designs.

Hamilton is the anchor of the Great Lakes. By investing in the road systems that connect our port to our highways, we aren't just moving freight; we are protecting thousands of local jobs and ensuring Hamilton remains the essential starting-point for the products that build our country.

Let's stop talking about where trucks can't go and start building the roads that connect Lake Ontario to the rest of the world. STEPHEN LASKOWSKI IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE ONTARIO TRUCKING ASSOCIATION.