

Bulk of CERB payments went to city dwellers

The pandemic money trail: Data shows emergency fund disparities between Canada's urban and rural areas

JORDAN PRESS OTTAWA

Kelly Ernst recalls standing on sidewalks, waving to needy families in Calgary's northeast as they opened their doors to pick up food hampers.

Mr. Ernst, vice-president for vulnerable populations at Calgary's Centre for Newcomers, said

the memory speaks to how COVID-19 hurt the community, socially and economically.

Mr. Ernst said the Skyview Ranch neighbourhood is one of the most diverse in the country, with a high proportion of visible minorities and newcomers. Residents are often employed in precarious retail jobs or in warehouses, Mr. Ernst said. Others

work at the city's airport or in the municipal transit system, both of which were also affected by the pandemic. "Some of the first people to be laid off during the downturn were people in these precarious jobs," Mr. Ernst said.

Almost seven in every 10 residents over the age of 15 in Skyview Ranch received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit in the ini-

tial month that the pandemic aid was available, one of the highest concentrations among more than 1,600 neighbourhoods The Canadian Press analyzed.

Federal data, obtained through the Access to Information Act, offers the most detailed picture yet of where billions of dollars in emergency aid went last year.

■ CERB, A15

\$82 billion

AMOUNT PAID OUT BY CERB TO 8.9 MILLION PEOPLE FROM MARCH TO OCTOBER

Canadian-led coalition condemns hostage diplomacy

NATHAN VANDERKLIPPE ASIA CORRESPONDENT BEIJING

Nearly 800 days after Chinese authorities seized Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, the Canadian government has secured the support of 57 other countries for a joint condemnation of hostage diplomacy, though without any promises to act against countries that arrest foreign citizens as a diplomatic tool.

Canada's closest allies joined with Caribbean and African countries, the Kremlin's adversaries and the European Union in signing a declaration against arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations. Such arrests endanger the travel and trade that are fundamental to the global economy, they said.

The declaration is "trying to put pressure on countries that do it, and to tell them that this is totally unacceptable and that there are eventually going to be consequences to countries that ignore that," Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau said Monday. He avoided invoking China directly, though Ottawa has regularly accused Beijing of arbitrarily detaining Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor, who have been incarcerated while China demands the release of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou.

The declaration is a first step, Mr. Garneau said, pointing as a hopeful example to the Canadian-led campaign that eventually led to an international treaty against land mines. But a quarter-century after the conclusion of that treaty, China, Russia and the United States have yet to sign on. Similarly, China, Russia and Iran - all accused of hostage diplomacy - have not signed the declaration.

Washington has, however, given its formal support, and "the fact that so many countries are endorsing this declaration is a sign of its strength," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Human beings, he said, "are not bargaining chips."

■ COALITION, A15

[FOLIO]



HOW BRITAIN BECAME AN UNLIKELY LEADER IN VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

U.K. task force forged key partnerships with drug makers

PAUL WALDIE EUROPE CORRESPONDENT LONDON

Britain's COVID-19 vaccination program has been envied around the world, with the country already reaching its first target of vaccinating everyone over the age of 70, most front-line health care workers and all elderly care home residents.

That's just over 15 million people in total - or close to one quarter of the population - and the figure is rising by around 440,000 a day. It's an impressive result that has put Britain at the forefront of the global vaccination race.

So how did Britain do it? How did a country where almost everything else has gone wrong during the pandemic - from delayed

lockdowns to a botched testing program and soaring infection rates - get it right on vaccines?

Much of the credit goes to Kate Bingham, a no-nonsense venture capitalist who knew little about vaccines and even less about government procurement when Prime Minister Boris Johnson asked her to lead a vaccine task force last May. Together with a group of business people, scientists and bureaucrats, Ms. Bingham devised a novel strategy that gave Britain a crucial head start early in the pandemic.

While many countries, including Canada, were scrambling to come up with a vaccine program last spring, Ms. Bingham's group had already zeroed in on the most promising vaccine candidates and offered to help drug companies with clinical trials and production.

■ BRITAIN, A8

Health care workers prepare doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine at a centre set up at Chester Racecourse, in Chester, England, on Monday. OLI SCARFF/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



RICARDO MORAES/REUTERS

BRAZIL

CANCELLED CARNIVALS EXACT AN ECONOMIC TOLL

With at least 20 celebrations postponed, country stands to lose \$1.5-billion ■ A3

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Anthony Fauci wins \$1-million Israeli prize for 'defending science' ■ A2

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Company works to develop vaccine that fights all types of coronavirus ■ A3

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799 DAYS THAT MICHAEL KOVRIG AND MICHAEL SPAVOR HAVE BEEN JAILED IN CHINA

tgam.ca/jailed-canadians

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The quest for an all-in-one coronavirus vaccine

Scientists began work on a shot last year that would also target MERS, SARS – and as COVID-19 variants pop up, the idea is gaining traction

IVAN SEMENIUK
SCIENCE REPORTER

As COVID-19 was beginning its deadly trek around the globe last year, scientists at biopharmaceutical company VBI Vaccines were asking themselves a key question: Can a vaccine be created to deal with more than one kind of coronavirus?

The company, which is headquartered in Cambridge, Mass., and has its research operations in Ottawa, then began to develop a vaccine that would work against COVID-19 – in addition to SARS and MERS, the previous two coronavirus outbreaks, which began in 2002 and 2012, respectively. Last August, VBI's Ottawa-based subsidiary, Variation Biotechnologies Inc., received a \$56-million funding boost from the federal government to advance its program.

Now, after settling into a position well behind front-runners such as Pfizer and Moderna, VBI's

approach is getting renewed attention – from media and investors alike – because of coronavirus variants that are springing up all over the world.

“In a matter of only four weeks, we've seen these variants cause a huge instability in the whole vaccine rollout ... and in confidence about a return to normalcy,” said Jeff Baxter, VBI's chief executive officer, in an interview with The Globe and Mail.

The company's “multivalent” vaccine – the term for a vaccine that works against multiple viruses – will not be ready for human trials until later this year, Mr. Baxter said. In the meantime, VBI is planning to start trials by the end of March on a vaccine that is specifically tailored to COVID-19.

Both vaccines aim to deliver protection in the form of an enveloped virus-like particle. The particle consists of a protein core wrapped in a lipid envelope, from which copies of the coronavirus spike protein protrude. The design mimics the structure of the virus and is meant to trigger the immune system in a similar way.

In the case of the multivalent vaccine, the particle sports an array of different spike proteins that correspond to SARS, MERS and COVID-19. Studies with lab animals suggest it can generate an immune response against all

three, as well as against a type of seasonal coronavirus that is not explicitly a target of the multivalent vaccine.

Other vaccine-makers are similarly wondering how to cope with the fact that COVID-19 may be better at overcoming the immunological barriers erected against it than many scientists initially expected.

With new variants of COVID-19 emerging at a relatively rapid rate, Mr. Baxter said his company is considering whether the same strategy can be adapted to making a broad-spectrum vaccine that is effective against a range of coronaviruses – including some that have yet to surface in the human population. “It's a question of whether we can make the goal posts wider,” Mr. Baxter said.

Other vaccine-makers are similarly wondering how to cope with the fact that COVID-19 may be better at overcoming the immunological barriers erected against it than many scientists initially expected. That could lead to new formulations of existing vaccines to serve as booster doses

or to a continuing regimen of shots that might be needed if COVID-19 continues to shift and never completely disappears.

“Right now almost all groups making vaccines – including us – are giving serious consideration to, or have already started to work on, variant or multivalent candidates,” said Brian Ward, co-director of McGill University's vaccine study centre and medical officer at Medicago, the Quebec-based company that was the first in Canada to begin human trials of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Last month, Adagio Therapeutics, based in Waltham, Mass., reported a development that could point the way forward. A study published in the journal Science shows that an antibody developed by the company can lock onto a portion of the spike protein common to a family of coronaviruses, which includes the one that causes COVID-19. A vaccine that can stimulate the production of such an antibody might work as a “pan-vaccine” – in other words, not just killing a few birds with one stone, but an entire flock.

But there are reasons to be skeptical that either a multivalent or pan-vaccine can succeed in the near term, said virologist Arinjay Banerjee, who is setting up a new lab to study the diversity

and origin of bat-borne coronaviruses at VIDO-Intervac, an infectious disease research institute based at the University of Saskatchewan.

“Variants appear in days and spread within weeks,” Dr. Banerjee said, a timeline that outpaces even the most accelerated vaccine programs. And even if a pan-vaccine could anticipate variants that don't yet exist, how would its efficacy be tested in a clinical trial?

In spite of these hurdles, the quest for a pan-coronavirus vaccine needs to start now, said Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, Calif. Last week, Dr. Topol and immunologist Dennis Burton wrote a commentary in the journal Nature calling for global investment to support the effort, in the range of \$100-million to \$200-million over a number of years.

Notwithstanding the new variants, Dr. Topol said, a coronavirus such as COVID-19 is still far less adept at outwitting the human immune system than influenza or HIV, so it makes an ideal starting point for a pan-vaccine research program. “It kind of has a flashing sign on it saying, ‘You can crush me,’” he said. “The hope is that we can spawn a dedicated consortium of academics, companies and governments that get behind this.”



Bate-bola revellers perform in a suburb in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday despite carnival celebrations being cancelled because of the coronavirus. RICARDO MORAES/REUTERS

‘Everything is paralyzed’: Brazilian states taxing carnival deals blow to culture, economy

RAPHAEL TSAVKKO GARCIA
SAO PAULO

As Brazil exceeds 230,000 COVID-19-related deaths, at least 20 Brazilian states have cancelled their carnival celebrations. In some cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, the party means more than just a celebration. It's a fundamental part of local identity and an important source of income for communities and countless businesses.

Although it officially lasts a few days – this year it would have been celebrated between Feb. 12 and 17 – the party takes place all month long in several parts of the country. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, samba schools are active throughout the year with rehearsals, special lunches and other activities. The process of creating and manufacturing costumes and floats for the parades also lasts year-round.

The first consequence of cancellation is “the paralysis of a productive chain that involves thousands of people who work directly or indirectly with carnival, whether in [samba] schools, in blocos [street parties], making costumes and making floats, concerts, the musicians, the shops that make and sell the costumes, even the hotels, bars and restaurants,” explains Anderson Baltar, a journalist with Radio Arquibancada, an online radio broadcast specializing in carnival.

According to estimates by the National Confederation of Commerce, the Brazilian economy could lose about US\$1.5-billion with the cancellations. The most visible and world-famous event of the Brazilian carnival, the parade of the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro, was to occur on Feb. 14 and 15. It had already been postponed by Liesa, the Independent League of Samba Schools, in September because of the pandemic. The plan was to think of a smaller event with a date to be set later.

element for us to understand how the city of Rio de Janeiro was and is a constantly disputed territory,” says Luiz Antonio Simas, a writer, historian and one of the greatest authorities on carnival. Rio itself, “is a city formed by several cities, an intense and fruitful relationship, but at the same time it is a tense one” in regards to social classes and races.

Carnival plays the role of meeting point between different sectors of the city. The samba schools, which emerged in the first half of the 20th century, “presuppose the formation of a community identity,” Mr. Simas adds.

Fabio Fabato, a journalist and researcher of carnival, says there is a common misperception that carnival is only a party. In reality, there is an entire industry that depends on this popular cultural event – an industry that has been “abandoned and decimated.”

“So we have workers going hungry, we have unemployed people, and the samba schools themselves historically didn't know how to exist without the direct support of the public power, they don't have a form of sustaining themselves,” Mr. Fabato says.

In Rio alone, he adds, last year's carnival injected the equivalent of \$825-million into the economy. Now, “everything is paralyzed.”

This is the first time that Rio de Janeiro will not celebrate carnival in more than 100 years. Only in 1912 was the celebration officially postponed, after the death of the diplomat Jose Paranhos, the Baron of Rio Branco, an important figure in Brazilian politics. (The population ended up celebrating the carnival twice, first during the traditional period and again on the date chosen by the government.)

But attempts have been made to cancel the carnival a few times. “In 1842 the attempt was to postpone carnival until the middle of the year, under the allegation of an environment minister at the time that there were many health problems in February,” says Anto-

nio Spirito Santo, a musician and expert in the history of samba. “It did not work.” The previous attempt to cancel the samba school parades took place in 1943, when then-president Getulio Vargas declared a state of war. The parades still ended up happening.

Today, “the economic repercussion is devastating,” journalist Aydano Motta says.

Both carnival and New Year's Eve festivities are fundamental for Rio's tourism, he adds. “The city is on the outskirts of the world and is unable to take off in a sustainable way in the tourism sector. It has poor services, so it depends on these two large events to sustain the hotel industry and even the informal economy, such as the peddler who sells beer in the blocos and in school rehearsals.”

The city council has been trying to avoid a tragedy through the offer of economic help, but Mr. Fabato considers the initiative too little, too late.

Mr. Motta agrees: “Over the course of 2020, solidarity actions have distributed basic food baskets to these professionals – but that is not enough, given the situation.” People involved in the carnival industry have been experiencing difficulties for some time and many samba schools have completely halted activities. Only the Estacao Primeira de Mangueira, one of the most traditional samba schools, kept an online calendar of events during the carnival period.

“People who depend on the carnival are starting to work on other activities,” Mr. Baltar says. “Will these people come back after everything is normal? It's not that simple. There is a break in the production chain that shows the fragility of the carnival industry.”

With the cancellation of the parade, “there is no alternative for survival until 2022,” Mr. Motta says.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Racialized adults should be vaccination priority, new guidance suggests

MAAN ALHMIDI OTTAWA

Adults from racialized communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic should be prioritized for shots in the second stage of the vaccination campaign, says new guidance from Canada's national advisory committee on immunization.

The advice also would see all essential workers who can't do their jobs from home moved into the second stage, instead of focusing on health workers with lower-risk jobs.

The second stage is expected to start this spring after provinces get COVID-19 vaccines into the arms of all the staff and residents of long-term care homes, adults 70 or older, frontline health workers and adults in Indigenous communities.

The committee added a third stage to its immunization recommendations that includes people between 16 and 59 years old with underlying conditions, those who are between 50 and 59 years old with no underlying conditions, and health workers and essential workers who didn't receive shots in previous rounds.

The new recommendations prioritize racialized adults from groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic ahead of some older non-racialized people. “This is a big move in the right direction,” says Akwatu Khenti, who teaches at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health and is a special adviser to the City of Toronto Targeted COVID Equity Action Plan. He says he was “as surprised as everyone else” to see the news, but says it is “very welcome and very appreciated.”

There is “no ambiguity” in the data: This virus is hitting racialized communities hardest, Prof. Khenti says, adding that in Toronto, 79 per cent of hospitalizations are of racialized persons. Torontonians of African and Caribbean descent currently experience the highest COVID-19 rates in the city, making up 26 per cent of total cases.

Another reason to prioritize racialized communities is that they have been falling behind during the vaccine rollout in both Britain and the United States, says Ananya Tina Banerjee, who teaches public health at both the University of Toronto and at McGill University in Montreal. Prof. Banerjee says that white Britons are twice as likely to have received the vaccine as their Black, Asian and biracial counterparts. White Americans are meanwhile being vaccinated at rates of up to three times higher than Black Americans, early data from the 23 states that are reporting racial and ethnic data on vaccinations show.

Both Prof. Banerjee and Prof. Khenti are concerned about the backlash this announcement may engender. Prof. Khenti has already, in the hours since it was made, begun receiving hate mail. He cautions this does not mean Black people are going to be jumping the queue. “Your vulnerability is what really moves you to the front.”

Prof. Banerjee adds that those who are most vulnerable, who are required to work outside the home, who live in crowded houses need to be vaccinated first. “That's just the reality,” she says. “Those who are able to work from home can afford to wait a little longer.”

The experience of the U.S. and Britain has also shown that public-health officials should consider setting up “pop-up vaccine clinics” in “trusted access points,” such as temples, mosques and workplaces, Prof. Banerjee adds. This can help ensure the most vulnerable and isolated members – those who may lack English or digital literacy skills – are being reached. To Prof. Banerjee, Monday's announcement highlights the “power” of collecting race-based data and how it can lead to solutions. “There was so much backlash to doing this in Ontario, but it's really shown that by doing this we can avoid pitfalls and ensure that those who need the vaccine most are prioritized.”

The new federal vaccination guidance comes as COVID-19 vaccination efforts are expected to get a big boost this week. The Public Health Agency of Canada says it expects Pfizer and BioNTech to deliver more than 400,000 doses of their COVID-19 vaccine this week and about 450,000 doses each week until April.

THE CANADIAN PRESS, WITH REPORTS FROM NANCY MACDONALD

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