

Our world. Made better. Through mental health research.



Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) is a national, charitable organization that is dedicated to advancing new and existing mental health knowledge to better the lives of Canadians.

A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER: Growth and Evolution in a Global Pandemic

There has never been a more important time in Canada and around the world for mental health and mental health research. Despite COVID-19's challenges, one good thing may come from these difficult times: mental health is finally out in front and more of a priority than ever before. With varying degrees of shutdowns, isolation measures and stay-at-home orders across the country, all Canadians are now talking about their mental health.

MHRC has had an extraordinarily busy and productive year. It has been a time of growth, building national awareness and defining our value proposition on the national stage. In the following pages you will learn about our important national polling work supported by Health Canada, related partnerships with many provinces, our co-funded research activities and our commitment to early-career researchers.

We have defined ourselves as having a strong focus on being collaborative, nimble and committed to meaningful partnerships. We build bridges between academia and service delivery to advance evidence-based, outcomes-focused solutions in mental health. We are proud of our staff team and grateful for the strategic leadership and expertise of our Board of Directors: both have paved the way for the successful execution of our many important activities this year.

At the core of our work are always the priorities and perspectives of people with lived and living experience. We are committed to ensuring that the knowledge we generate and share is relevant and important to them—our most important stakeholders.

CEO

Chair, Board of Directors

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OUR NIMBLE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Envisioned and launched a 12-part series of national polls on the impact of COVID-19:

- Created the largest, most comprehensive dataset on COVID-19's impact on the mental health of Canadians.
- Collaborated with 40+ organizations and government departments on poll content.
- Over 16,000 Canadians have participated.
- Rapid release of findings to ensure current, relevant data: three weeks from "poll in market" to release of report.
- Received funding from Health Canada.
- Data being analyzed by stakeholders Canada-wide to inform path through the pandemic and recovery.
- Data available at no cost; searchable on our website by age, gender, region, poll.

Created and led a multi-province research call on the impact of COVID-19:

- Supported local efforts/priorities related to COVID-19's impact on the mental health of children, youth and families, including children with support needs, vulnerable and remote populations.
- Partnered with British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland/Labrador, Ontario and Saskatchewan.
- Local researchers (partnered with local community agencies) are eligible to apply to ensure meeting each jurisdiction's unique mental health needs.
- Rapid application and review process to ensure local researchers could quickly focus on the impact of COVID-19.

Focused on team engagement and well-being

Supported each other through these unknown and very challenging times. Effectively transitioned to fully virtual workplace, including virtual board and committee meetings. Continually focused on individualized impacts of working in the pandemic, customized solutions, and remained sensitive to each other's personalized needs and challenges.

In the midst of a pandemic and very challenging times, we found like-minded partners to collaborate with, some of whom include:

*Canada Life · Canadian Nurses Association
Government of British Columbia: Ministry of Children and Family Development
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador · Guarding Minds at Work · Health Canada
Institute for Advancements in Mental Health
Memorial University: Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research
Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research · Mitacs · Moving for Mental Health
New Brunswick Health Research Foundation · Newport Wealth Management
Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child & Youth Mental Health
Pollara Strategic Insights · Queen's University · Research Nova Scotia
St. Thomas University · Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation · Stepped Care Solutions
University of New Brunswick · University of Saskatchewan · Wellness Together Canada
The Working Mind · Workplace Strategies for Mental Health*

Partnered with Mitacs to build the pipeline in mental health research

Awarded studentships in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, including an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous peoples

LARGEST, MOST COMPREHENSIVE DATA COLLECTION on the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadians

In March 2020, MHRC anticipated a looming need for comprehensive mental health data, and quickly pivoted to launch a national polling initiative: **Mental Health in Crisis: How COVID-19 Is Impacting Canadians**. We captured Canadians' perceptions of their levels of anxiety and depression to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health. Thanks to **Health Canada**, we will continue to track the mental health of Canadians during the pandemic as well as the recovery period.

In our first poll, we established an important baseline of recollected pre-pandemic mental health, and since then, have tracked levels through the first and second waves over the course of five polls over a year.

Anxiety and depression were the most prevalent mental health concerns. Our data looks at the demographics of Canadians at risk of mental health impacts, which is vital to help identify supports needed going forward.

We will conduct seven more polls through to March 2022; we will continue to collect and analyze data, sharing our findings in a report released every six to eight weeks. Our data will also be made available to the research community and integrated into MHRC's free, easy-to-use, online **COVID Data Portal**.

Unlocking mental health data for everyone to access for free

Need info on COVID's impact on Canadians? Search by:

**AGE
GENDER
REGION
POLL**

SEARCH NOW!

www.mhrc.ca/covid-data-portal

KEY FINDINGS OF FIVE NATIONAL POLLS

Frontline healthcare workers/nurses

Frontline healthcare workers have consistently reported higher levels of anxiety and depression, along with higher rates of diagnosis of these disorders, with nurses as the primary employment category contributing to this increase. Nurses indicate more mental health issues around fear of the virus, fear of spreading the virus and supporting their families during the pandemic.

Parents with children in the household

Parents (especially those with children age 9 or younger) indicated significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression, primarily driven by higher levels among mothers compared to fathers.

Differences in gender

Women have been indicating higher levels of anxiety and depression since the beginning of the pandemic across demographics. When we applied the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) we noted a significant number of men in the most severe category of demonstrating symptoms of mental distress, consistent with pre-pandemic findings that men are more likely to ignore mental health until it is severely impacted.

Younger Canadians (ages 18 to 34)

Younger respondents have consistently shown higher levels of anxiety and depression, primarily due to economic concerns. Individuals who have precarious employment also show higher levels of negative mental health. We also noted differences in resiliency and stress management.

Seniors (ages 65 and older)

Seniors have reported significantly better mental health—before and during the pandemic—although our data is not tracking a significant sample in long-term care homes.

Variance between waves of the pandemic

Mental health did not degrade during the lull in cases between COVID-19's first and second waves, but it also did not improve despite lower case counts and fewer lockdowns. When comparing provinces, we noted weak correlations between high case counts and negative mental health, and stronger correlations between the onset of lockdowns and negative mental health.

The media coverage on the findings of our national polling series has been extensive: mentions in **53 articles online and in print**, including two front-page stories with *The Star*; **18 spots on radio and TV**; and additional story pickups from affiliates associated with national news organizations (CTV, CBC and Global). Tens of thousands of Canadians have read or heard of the work we do on behalf of all Canadians.

MHRC in the News

LAUNCHED A MULTI-PROVINCE COVID-19 RESEARCH CALL

MHRC partnered with organizations across Canada to advance outcomes-focused research that would help address the unique mental health needs of children, youth and families in local jurisdictions. We are proud to highlight some of the awarded research projects.



SASKATCHEWAN

SEE US, HEAR US — Tracking children, youth & families in Saskatchewan coping with mental health during the first year of COVID-19

MHRC and the [Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation](#) have awarded a \$50K research grant to **Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine**, professor of Community Health and Epidemiology at the University of Saskatchewan, and **Dr. Tamara Hinz**, child and adolescent psychiatrist with Saskatchewan Health Authority.

The researchers are leading a study that will look at the incidence of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among children and youth in Saskatchewan, the effect of these conditions on children and youth, and their ability to cope.

The study will also look at whether children, youth and their families can get the help they need and whether they were satisfied with the mental health services they've received since the onset of the pandemic.

The investigators and their team will conduct online and telephone surveys and outreach to communities through family resource centres and local agencies in Saskatchewan to collect data from to 800 diverse families in Saskatchewan at three different times between February and July 2021, to track changes over the course of the pandemic and school year.

The goal of this study is to provide useful data to enhance mental health services to children and youth, and support families in Saskatchewan.

ONTARIO

Enhancing and evaluating a wellness program for Oneida youth that combines Indigenous healing with Western practices

MHRC and the [Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health](#), through a \$100,000 research grant, are supporting the advancement and evaluation of the existing wellness program "Coming of Age" – or Lona' tshistanet (which means firekeepers). The lead investigators are **Dr. Jason Brown**, Western University; **Dr. Dan Ashbourne**, London Family Court Clinic; and **Kahawani Doxtator**, Indigenous Consultant, London Family Court Clinic.

Indigenous communities sometimes have limited access to physical and mental health resources and internet-based services, and the onset of COVID-19 has further reduced that access, adding further health risk.

The pilot program, set up in collaboration with the local community, will include family groups and leverage land-based healing practices rooted in the Haudenosaunee culture to improve the spiritual connectedness and mental well-being of Oneida youth. Each participant, paired with an older mentor within the community, will participate in 12 mental wellness skill-learning workshops that combine traditional Indigenous healing practices with evidence-based therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy practices and dialectical behaviour therapy.

The wellness program will culminate in a five-day summer camp during which participants will share what they have learned and be trained on mentoring others.





NEW BRUNSWICK

A unique virtual support program led by and for LGBTQ+ youth that focuses on resilience and inter-generational knowledge sharing

MHRC and the **New Brunswick Health Research Foundation** awarded \$50K to lead Investigators **Dr. Erin Fredericks**, St. Thomas University, and **Nathan Thompson**, Block House Counselling & Psychotherapy Services, to help support the development of a virtual mental health support program for LGBTQ+ youth. Their rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, self-harm and suicidal ideation are significantly higher for this group than for youth overall, and the rates for transgender and non-binary youth are even higher.

The program will enable LGBTQ+ youth to connect with and learn from elders within the LGBTQ+ community to build a stronger sense of community, provide supports that will help the youth through this pandemic and strengthen their resiliency, and see themselves as a resilient group of people who have lived through previous difficult times that include the AIDS epidemic.

Unlike similar programs, this virtual program will be developed, implemented and evaluated by LGBTQ+ youth, with support and guidance from the research team. The intergenerational knowledge gleaned from LGBTQ+ community elders who lived through the AIDS epidemic via focus groups, interviews and surveys will inform the mental health support program, but LGBTQ+ youth will be the decision-makers.

Going forward, the program will also include a feedback form to ensure the program continues to reflect and serve the needs of generations of LGBTQ+ youth.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

MHRC partnered with the B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research on a \$50K research grant, and applications closed at the end of February. Applications are under review; the winning project/lead investigators will be announced in summer 2021.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

A new partnership facilitates knowledge sharing on the impact of COVID-19 on child, youth, and family mental health

MHRC's partnership with **Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research (NLCAHR) at Memorial University** will facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing on the impact of the pandemic on child, youth, and family mental health. The NLCAHR team will synthesize results from our funded COVID-19 research into a comprehensive report in an effort to help inform policymakers and other stakeholders across Canada. They will also be conducting a scoping review of COVID-19 related research to examine the results in the context of intergenerational families in Newfoundland and Labrador to help inform the province as it enters its recovery phase.

Our grant selection process is unique —
praised by partner organizations and applicants alike!

MHRC, in collaboration with co-funding partners, uses a unique process to determine which project is funded:

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- **Regular, fulsome and authentic engagement with people with living/lived experience:** the people who most benefit from the work are integrated throughout the workplan, from ensuring the need and relevance of the work through to its completion, evaluation and application.
- **Bridging research and practice:** two co-principal investigators, one in academia and one in a community setting.
- **High potential for impact:** extensive plans for knowledge-sharing must ensure that research knowledge shared, contextualized and used to better the lives of Canadians.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- **Highly diverse perspectives:** our assessment teams include people with lived experience, researchers, community leaders, subject matter experts and others who can assess the work from different perspectives to determine its usefulness.
- **Stepped, personalized process:** individual and group assessment process to score and determine finalists, who respond to questions and engage in zoom interviews to present their work, address gaps and respond to possible conditions for funding.

GRANT MILESTONES

- **Grant milestones are established:** when they are met, staggered funding is awarded. Knowledge-sharing and submission of the final report close the process.

MHRC funds Canadian component of global study on mental health research funding: report of findings released

The International Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders coordinated a study of mental health research funding worldwide. MHRC funded the Canadian component of this study, which examines how much is being spent, which areas are being supported, and how much is going into different types of research.

The key findings for Canada in the report, *The Inequities of Mental Health Research Funding**, are:

- Mental health research grants in Canada are some of the smallest in the world, with a median value of \$52,000 US. This grant size is 10x smaller than in the United States, and smaller than in low-middle income countries.
- Canadian mental health research funding has not increased over the past 5 years.
- Mental health research in Canada receives 3x less funding than would be expected due to its morbidity burden.
- Over 98% of mental health research funding in Canada is awarded by governmental and public funders.
- Research into depression receives the most funding (9%), followed by substance use (8.6%) and autism (6.8%).
- Basic research receives the majority (55%) of mental health research funding in Canada, followed by applied research (33%) and translational research (12%).

**Report by Eva Woelbert, Rory White, Kierstin Lundell-Smith, Jonathan Grant, Danielle Kemmer*

Commitment to fund three years of studentships to support researchers in mental health in Canada

MHRC has partnered with Mitacs (www.mitacs.ca) to award studentships to postsecondary students (university master's level or college postgraduates) who are conducting research in mental health across Canada. Thanks to \$75,000 from Mitacs, each \$15,000 studentship is a six-month, part-time internship that aims to build not only bridges between research and practice, but also the pipeline of researchers in mental health.

We are pleased to announce the recipients of our 2020-2021 Studentships and their research projects:

- **Gustavo Betini:** Assessing the mental health impact of COVID-19 on Canadians: A longitudinal study
- **Nikki Rose Hunter-Porter:** Exploring mental wellness services by and for Indigenous peoples in British Columbia
- **Chelsey Masson:** Co-creation of a comprehensive support pathway for the learning and mental health needs of youth in care
- **Genevieve Proulx:** In Their Shoes: Maternal Experiences of Single-Parent Outaouais Women
- **Indira Riadi:** Digital interventions to improve social connectedness and mental wellbeing of vulnerable older adults during COVID-19 and beyond

We are proud to partner with MHRC. Our partnership will connect Saskatchewan researchers to a national network of those working to advance innovative research and evidence-based solutions to improve the lives of the people of not only Saskatchewan, but also all of Canada.

PATRICK ODNOKON
CEO, SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH
RESEARCH FOUNDATION

2020-2021 YEAR AT A GLANCE

\$965,000
to mental health
research

\$832,500 committed research grants + \$132,500 indirectly through partners

1186%



social
media
audience

Fundraising target
exceeded by more
than **300%**



& at least
1100 new donors



7
studentships
awarded



14
new formal
partnerships

12

current grants
supporting impact-
focused research



13 583



respondents to our
COVID-19 & mental
health poll

2



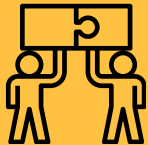
new websites
launched in
French & English

5

provincial partners
& new federal funding
for COVID-19

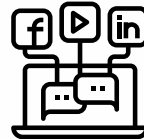


more than
130



Stakeholders
engaged

669%



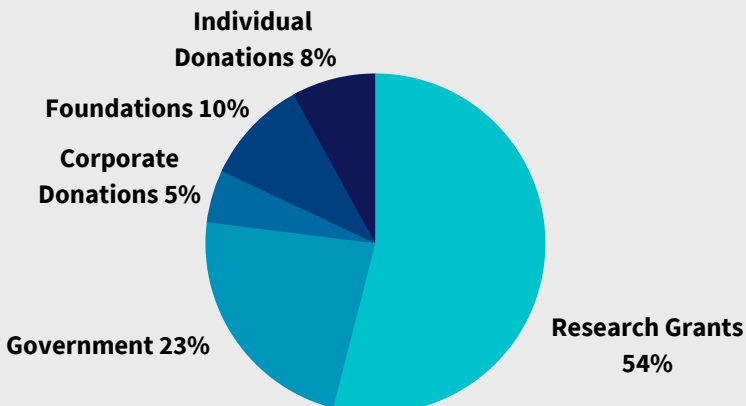
↑ social media
engagement

MEDIA RECOGNITION

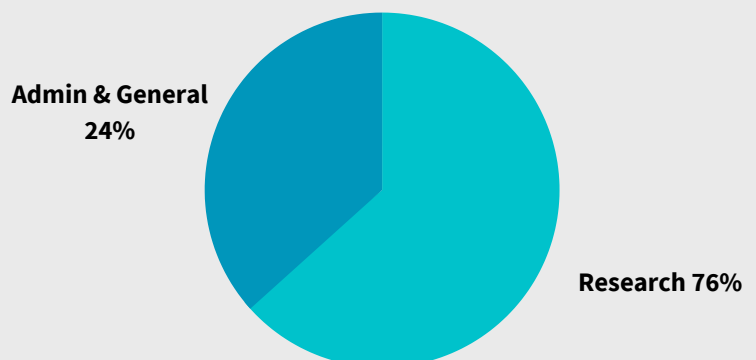
53 online/print
(2 front page)
18 radio/TV



REVENUE*



EXPENSES



*does not include investment revenues

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Your increasing support fuels our activities and deepens our impact in the lives of Canadians.

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- Golden47 Apparel
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- Moving for Mental Health/Race Roster (supported by many generous donor/participants)
- Newport Wealth Management
- Queen's University
- Stepped Care Solutions
- United Way Centraide

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