

**Poll #2 in an ongoing series:  
No reduction in numbers of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety & depression at end of first wave of pandemic**

Toronto, October 1, 2020 – The number of Canadians expressing high levels of anxiety and depression remained steady despite the reduction in restrictions in the summer. This is among the key findings of a new survey released today by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC), a national organization that is committed to advancing impact-focused research in mental health.

MHRC launched the survey “Mental Health in Crisis: How COVID-19 Is Impacting Canadians,” to capture Canadians’ perceptions of their levels of anxiety and depression, and to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health. MHRC will also be doing follow-up surveys to track the evolution of mental health issues during the pandemic. Our next data collection period will be in mid-October to track the effects of the second wave of the pandemic.

“MHRC is collaborating extensively with stakeholders federally and provincially as we develop this important work. We are pleased to play a role in providing information to Canadians during the pandemic. This information will be key to helping us all get through the coming months,” says Akela Peoples, CEO of MHRC.

The survey’s other major findings include:

- Teachers (K-12) are experiencing high levels of anxiety: The number of teachers with high levels of anxiety has increased by 500% as compared to pre-COVID levels (5% vs 25%). They are also pessimistic about their levels of anxiety for the next two months. The fear of contracting the virus (44%) and social isolation (50%) is having an outsized negative effect on their mental health.
- Despite the reduction in lockdown restrictions and in new COVID cases between April and August, high levels of anxiety and depression remained steady across Canada (anxiety: 20% of the population in April and 22% in August; depression: 10% of the population in April and 13% in August).
- Nearly two-thirds of Canadians who indicated a high level of anxiety or depression would be classified as having a moderate to severe level of psychological distress as indicated by Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). From among those in the severe category, the highest were men and people living alone.

- The activities cited by Canadians as having the most positive impact on mental health previously are no longer effective. Interaction with family members and entertainment are now having either a neutral or a negative effect on mental health. This may indicate that the effect of positive activities is not long-lasting if the underlying cause of stress is not dealt with.
- Prescription medication is reported by Canadians to be the most common treatment for mental health: 60% of people who indicate a mood or mental disorder diagnosis use prescription medication, with only one-fifth of this group receiving counselling or psychotherapy from a professional.
- Nearly one-half of all people who accessed mental health services before the pandemic are no longer accessing services (32% before, 17% after) due to a significant reduction in access to family doctors and in-person one-to-one mental health services.

“We have deep concerns about the trends we are seeing. But we also believe that Canadians are showing strength and common purpose in meeting the COVID-19 challenge. Governments are working together and most Canadians report following public health advice. Resources are available, such as Wellness Together Canada which is supported by the federal government and many other partners, and we encourage people to use them. We believe strongly that data from this poll, and from future polls, will inform stakeholders across Canada in addressing this growing challenge,” says John Trainor, Chair of MHRC’s Board of Directors and Adjunct faculty member, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto.

A full report of the survey is posted on MHRC’s website ([www.mhrc.ca](http://www.mhrc.ca)).

Available for interview is Dr. David Dozois, member of MHRC’s Board of Directors and Professor of Psychology and Director of the Clinical Psychology Graduate Program at Western University. Dr. Dozois participated in the design and structure of the survey.

For interview requests, please contact Barbara Kelly, Director of Communications, at 647-408-9499 or [barbarak@mhrc.ca](mailto:barbarak@mhrc.ca).

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### ABOUT THE SURVEY:

This study was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 4,010 adult Canadians and was conducted between August 21 and 31, 2020. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within  $\pm 1.5$  percentage

points. Oversampling occurred in four provinces to allow for provincial research organizations to build samples for additional analysis. Results have been weighted based on age, gender and region to be representative of the Canadian population.

### ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH CANADA:

Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) is a national, charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of the **1 in 5 Canadians living with mental illness**, as well as their families, caregivers and communities. We advance evidence-based mental health knowledge that is problem-solving and applicable in the real world.

### QUICK FACTS:

- MHRC has co-funded grants to advance digital solutions for child and youth mental health in Ontario and other provinces, as well as the first-ever national Mental Health Innovation Prize.
- MHRC is co-funding a multi-province research initiative that will advance evidence-based solutions to mitigate the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on children, youth and families.
- MHRC is co-funding Canada-wide studentships for master-level students to support and develop the next generation of mental health researchers.
- MHRC is co-funding the Canadian component of a global analysis of mental health research funding, coordinated by the International Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders.
- MHRC funded 10 diverse research projects, ranging from psychosis to anxiety to maternal health, from 2016 to 2019.
- MHRC evolved from a provincial organization, the Ontario Mental Health Foundation, which advanced leading-edge mental health research for 55 years.