



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Michael Cooper, Vice-President, MHRC
PHONE: 416-894-5553
EMAIL: mcooper@mhrc.ca

-Poll 10 in our Series-

As Omicron began to spike, there was little reaction in mental health indicators. They remain stable, but improvement came to a halt.

Toronto, January 24, 2022 – Mental Health Research Canada completed its 10th wave in its ongoing collection of mental health indicators of Canadians since the pandemic began. This collection, ending December 22nd, represented a period where Omicron cases were doubling every 2 to 3 days but no lockdowns were yet in place. Despite this oncoming wave of a new variant, self-reported anxiety and depression remained stable, there was little to no movement in negative mental health indicators related to fear of catching COVID-19, and Canadian’s overall concern about COVID-19 increased only marginally from 66% to 70%.

“We expected that the apparent oncoming wave of Omicron would have had a larger impact on the mental health of Canadians. That said, previous waves of data collection have shown the largest influencers on overall mental health are lockdowns. High case counts tend to be a lagging driver, showing influence on mental health indicators only when case counts are already out of control”, says Michael Cooper, Vice President of MHRC.

The percent of Canadians specifically concerned about Omicron was 65% - similar to the number of Canadians who have expressed overall concern about ongoing threats of COVID-19. This concern continued to show major differences between vaccinated and unvaccinated populations – with the vaccinated population expressing concern at a rate of 69%, and the unvaccinated population at a rate of 24%. And while nearly half of Canadians indicated Omicron was having a negative impact, this group seems to be correlated with those who were already indicating negative mental health impacts due to COVID-19 overall.

Additional findings included:

- Of the healthcare professionals who rated their anxiety and depression as high, a full 50% of those are exhibiting symptoms of severe psychological distress. This helped contribute to our highest finding since the onset of the pandemic on the

Kessler Psychological Distress scale, with 44% of people who indicate high anxiety or depression showing signs of severe distress.

- There were no differences in mental health indicators of parents of vaccinated children compared to parents of unvaccinated children. The only variance was the age of parents; older parents indicate being far more likely to have their children vaccinated against COVID-19.
- A previously noted gap in self-reported depression between vaccinated and unvaccinated populations has shrunk to the point it is no longer statistically significant.
- Those with mental health diagnosis (or their caregivers) believe the priority for mental health investments should be addressing COVID-19 mental health challenges, followed closely by addressing stigma, preventative mental health, suicide and child/youth mental health.
- Self-reported levels of high anxiety and depression remained stable. (24% anxiety, 15% depression)
- With all schools in person across Canada at the time of data collection and the holiday break starting, supporting children's needs and schoolwork became a non-factor in mental health indicators for parents.

These and other key findings are featured in both the summary and full report of the survey "Mental Health in Crisis: How COVID-19 Is Impacting Canadians" released today by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) and available at www.mhrc.ca.

MHRC's poll has been designed to capture Canadians' reported perception of their level of anxiety and depression, and to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health through the pandemic. This report includes data from the 10th in a series of 12 polls as part of a multi-year effort to track the mental health challenges of COVID-19.

"MHRC's national poll indicates that Canadians experience a range of pandemic-related mental health outcomes. Data-driven initiatives like this polling reflect the genuine experience of Canadians, which is useful for policy-makers across the country" says 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.

Available for interview is Dr. David Dozois. Dr. Dozois participated in the design of the survey and is a Board Member at Mental Health Research Canada.

For interview requests, please contact Michael Cooper, Vice-President, at 416-894-5553 or mcooper@mhrc.ca.

ABOUT THE POLL

This study was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 3,701 adult Canadians and was conducted between December 13th to 22nd, 2021. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within ± 1.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. 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.