



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

New MHRC poll: Canadians appear to be rebounding from the mental health impact of COVID, but one-quarter of respondents are struggling more than ever.

Toronto, March 2022 – Mental Health Research Canada completed its 11th poll in its ongoing collection of Canadians' mental health since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This collection, ending February 22, 2022, represents a period where the impacts of the Omicron variant had begun to diminish, and the majority of eligible Canadians had received their COVID-19 vaccine booster.

“While our lives are returning to normal, we are in uncharted territory and Canadians' mental health still needs addressing. Determining who and how many of individuals will require interventions so they can recover, must be addressed”, says Akela Peoples, CEO of Mental Health Research Canada.

Key observations include:

- Anxiety levels have dropped since December 2021, indicating that the Omicron variant and correlated lockdowns had only a marginal impact on mental health, this could be due to the short length of each. Despite the recent improvement, self-rated anxiety and depression levels remain higher than the beginning of the pandemic with 23% of Canadians indicating high anxiety and 15% indicating high depression.
- One factor of this reduction in overall anxiety is that the concern around the continued threat of COVID-19 is at an all time low, with 59% of Canadians expressing concern. Furthermore, the negative mental health impacts of fear of catching COVID-19 have decreased to a level not seen since the pandemic began.
- In contrast, those who are still struggling with anxiety or depression are in worse shape – Many of those who are indicating high self-rated levels of anxiety and depression are also showing symptoms of moderate to severe psychological distress (45% of all respondents) through the Kessler 10 scale of psychological distress.

“The main driver of anxiety is uncertainty, and there remains a significant amount of uncertainty about what life looks like post-pandemic. It’s encouraging to see the positive trends, but we need to continue to monitor the unintended consequences of public health measures on mental health,” 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.

Additional findings included:

- Feelings of daily anger towards other were more prevalent among respondents who are unemployed (15%), students (12%), healthcare front line workers (11%), unvaccinated (17% vs. vaccinated 8%), and members of LGBTQ2S+ community (17%).
- People in Quebec indicated a significant lower ongoing concern around COVID-19, at 39% compared to 59% nationally (65% in Ontario).
- Unvaccinated Canadians are indicating some notable mental health differences – 57% of those self-reporting levels of anxiety or depression indicate symptoms of severe psychological distress (compared to 44% of vaccinated respondents). On the Kessler 10 clinical screener tests, 9% of unvaccinated Canadians indicate symptoms of severe depression or severe anxiety versus 4% for those who are vaccinated.
- Despite their imminent end across the country, proof of vaccinate mandates continue to have a net positive impact on mental health, with 41% indicating a positive impact, 16% a negative impact, and 38% no impact at all.
- Most Canadians (68%) want either some (48%) or all (20%) public health measure to remain in place for the primary reason that, “people are still being hospitalized or dying due to the virus”. The majority of those who want most or all of the restrictions to be lifted feel that “the virus is going to be around, so we need to learn to live with it” (76%). Those who want public health measures to stay have indicated higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who feel it is time that they are lifted

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 11th in a series of 12 polls as part of a multi-year effort to track the mental health challenges of COVID-19.

Available for interview is Dr. David Dozois. Dr. Dozois participated in the design of the survey.

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

-30-

ABOUT THE POLL

This study was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 3,512 adult Canadians and was conducted between February 15 to 22, 2022. 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.