

**Alberta, Atlantic Canada and Ontario report highest increase in anxiety and depression levels since COVID-19, says newly released report of findings of Mental Health Research Canada survey**

Toronto, May 19, 2020 – Alberta, Atlantic Canada and Ontario report increased levels of anxiety and depression that are the highest in Canada, while Quebec reports the lowest increase in both anxiety and depression levels. For those Canadians recently unemployed, 57% cite the negative impact of job loss on their mental health.

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](http://www.mhrc.ca).

MHRC’s survey has been designed to capture Canadians’ perception of their level of anxiety and depression, and to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health. This inaugural survey is part of a year-long effort to track the COVID-19 mental health crisis.

“We are committed to advancing impact-focused research to help Canadians achieve better mental health, especially through this pandemic. To inform stakeholders, governments and other partners in the sector, MHRC has committed to producing a series of surveys over the next year,” says Akela Peoples, CEO of MHRC.

In addition to the quadrupling of high levels of anxiety and doubling of high levels of depression reported earlier in the survey’s initial findings, MHRC’s survey shows:

- Residents of Alberta report the largest increase in high anxiety levels (+20%), while residents of Ontario (+17%), Atlantic Canada (+16%) and BC (+15%) report a similar increase, and Quebec residents report the smallest increase (+10%). Similarly, high depression levels increase the most among residents in Atlantic Canada (+12%), followed by Ontario and Alberta (+8% each), and least among Quebec residents (+2%).
- 28% of Canadians have indicated an increase in the consumption of alcohol per week since the onset of COVID-19, but feel the impact on their mental health is relatively neutral at this point.
- Canadians with children younger than age 18 note a higher positive impact on their mental health from in-person interactions with family members in their household (41%) than those without children in their household (30%), despite an increase in non-physical conflict (36% and 23%, respectively).

- Urban residents report feeling significantly more supported by their employers in their mental health needs (before COVID-19: 51%; since: 53%) than rural residents (28%; and 34%, respectively).
- 57% of recently unemployed Canadians report their mental health is negatively impacted by job loss.
- The next highest concern for employed Canadians is the economic downturn (48%), followed by having a family member lose their job (43%), losing work hours or pay (42%) and being laid off (38%).

“What our survey tells us is that COVID-19 is impacting the mental health of Canadians in notably different ways, and that Canada’s recovery will require solid data to inform policy-making and effective services and programs for Canadians,” says John Trainor, Chair of MHRC’s Board of Directors and Adjunct faculty member, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto.

The survey was conducted in both official languages by Pollara Strategic Insights for MHRC from April 22 to April 28, and engaged 1,803 Canadians 18 years of age or older and all provinces and territories.

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).

-30-

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

This study was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 1,803 adult Canadians and was conducted between April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within  $\pm 2.3$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Results have been weighted based on age, gender and region to be representative of the Canadian population.



## MEDIA RELEASE

### 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 evolved from a provincial organization, Ontario Mental Health Foundation, which advanced leading-edge mental health research for 55 years.
- MHRC co-funded the first-ever national Mental Health Innovation Prize, and is currently co-funding three grants to advance digital solutions for child and youth mental health for application in multiple provinces.
- MHRC funded 10 diverse research projects, ranging from psychosis to anxiety to maternal health, from 2016 to 2019.
- 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.