

## POLL #5 IN MHRC'S NATIONAL 13-POLL SERIES

**Canadians report highest levels of anxiety & depression to date, with depression significantly higher than during height of COVID's first wave**

Toronto, February 25, 2021 – Canadians cite their highest levels of anxiety (25%) and depression (17%) to date, covering both self-reported and diagnosed anxiety and depression. This means that the proportion of Canadians who have reported their level of depression as high has increased by 70% since the height of COVID's first wave.

These are among the key findings of a fifth poll by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) in an ongoing series of polls on "Mental Health in Crisis: How COVID-19 Is Impacting Canadians." Partnership with Health Canada has enabled MHRC to continue collecting data into March 2022. The poll captures Canadians' perceptions of their levels of anxiety and depression in order to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health.

Data will be collected every six to eight weeks; data for MHRC's sixth poll will be collected in mid-March.

"Anxiety and depression were the most prevalent mental health concerns before COVID-19. MHRC's latest poll is telling us that that now over 1,800,000 adult Canadians – parents, siblings, friends, colleagues – have all four negative indicators that MHRC is using to measure mental health. It's important to identify those at risk of COVID's mental health impacts since they will need more resources and supports going forward," says Dr. David Dozois, MHRC Board Member and National Spokesperson, and Professor of Psychology and Director of the Clinical Psychology Graduate Program at Western University.

Other major findings of MHRC's study include:

- 6% of the population – or more than 1.8 million Canadians ages 18 and older – have all four negative indicators, based on a composite index, that this polling uses to track mental health. The indicators are: rated high in anxiety and depression, showing moderate to severe mental health symptoms, low management of stress and low resiliency. Younger and female Canadians are over-represented in this group.
- Being outside is the best activity to support positive mental health, with two-fifths of Canadians indicating a positive impact on mental health even during the winter months. The impact is significantly more positive than physical activity (21%) and a number of indoor activities including reading (30%) and entertainment (25%).

- The economy is again having a negative impact on mental health, countering the signs of improvement noted in Poll 4. And more than one-half of Canadians are worried about making ends meet, a considerable increase since before the pandemic.
- Social isolation is now the leading self-reported stressor having a negative impact on mental health, increasing again in Poll 5.
- Younger Canadians, ages 18 to 34, are the group who tend to be the most vulnerable to a decline in mental health. This group reports a higher incidence of anxiety and depression and are more likely to be scored as severe on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) and experience symptoms on a daily basis. Also, the economic decline, ability to make ends meet financially and social isolation are disproportionately having a negative impact on this group's mental health. They are also less likely to be optimistic about their ability to recover and are less likely to be receiving treatment.

“The growing number of Canadians reporting anxiety and depression requires increased collaboration among stakeholders in the mental health landscape within provinces and across Canada. With Health Canada's support, we are able to continue collecting strong, current, comprehensive data and then analyzing and delivering it to stakeholders within weeks, with the goal of strengthening and expanding existing services to address the growing health needs of Canadians,” says Akela Peoples, CEO of MHRC.

### ABOUT THE STUDY:

The poll was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 3,005 adult Canadians, including an oversample of 500 surveys with residents of Saskatchewan. The poll was conducted from February 1 to 8, 2021. This is the fifth poll of this study; results of earlier polls are compared when applicable. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points; they are weighted based on age, gender and region to be representative of the Canadian population.