



A Summary of Canadian's Access to Mental Health Care Pre and Post COVID-19

	National Sample	Margin of Error	Collection Date
Poll 2	4,010	±1.5%	August 21 to 31, 2020
Poll 3	2,004	±2.2%	October 22 to 28, 2020
Poll 4	2,761	±1.9%	December 10 to 18, 2020
Poll 5	3,005	±1.8%	February 1 to 8, 2021
Poll 6	4,005	±1.5%	April 20 to 28, 2021
Poll 7	4,010	±1.5%	June 7 to 13, 2021

MHRC is conducting work on a national polling project on the mental health of Canadians throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We are proud to partner with Health Canada to collect, analyze and present this data to be freely available to stakeholders in our community. The information in this report is from data gathered from polls 2 to 7 of our ongoing national 12-poll series.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Polls 2 to 7 were conducted between August 21 and June 13, 2021. From the nearly 20,000 respondents, we are able to understand whether Canadians are accessing professional mental health support in comparison to before COVID-19. We consider which barriers are preventing Canadians from accessing care and how they can begin to be alleviated. These polls found that the percentage Canadians accessing mental health care has increased since the onset of COVID-19 in comparison to those who accessed care in the year before the pandemic.

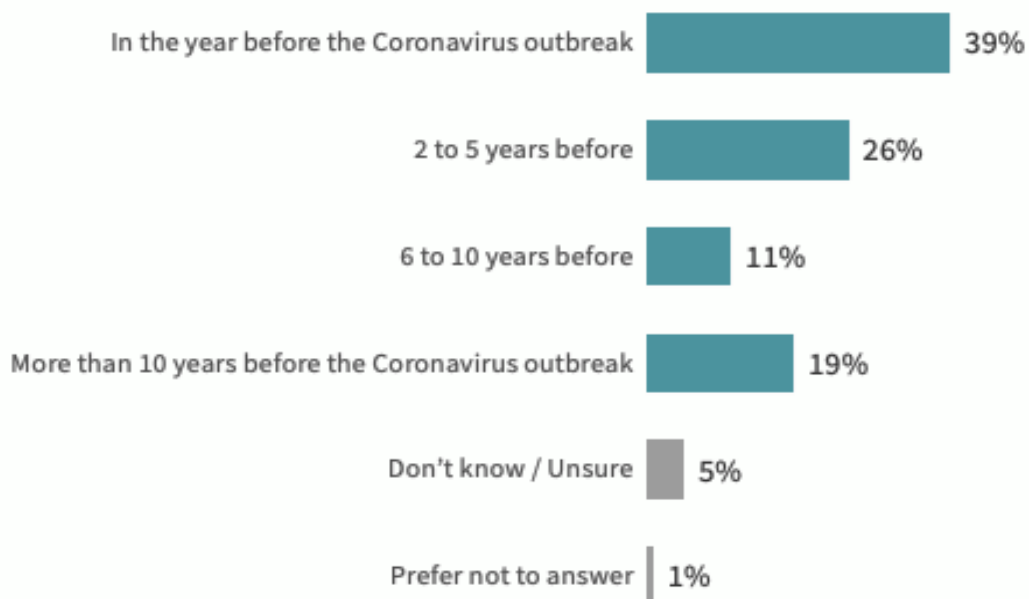
At the time of these polls, the preferred method of care for the general population, as well as those suffering from high levels of anxiety and depression, was one-to-one in-person support, similar to pre-COVID-19; on the other side, group activities and counselling were the least

popular option. The primary factor deterring Canadians from access virtual mental health support was in regard to issues of privacy, followed by fear of incurring some eventual, associated costs to the service. Diving deeper into the privacy question, we found this issue can be primarily addressed through user's ability to delete their accounts at any time.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE PRE AND POST COVID-19

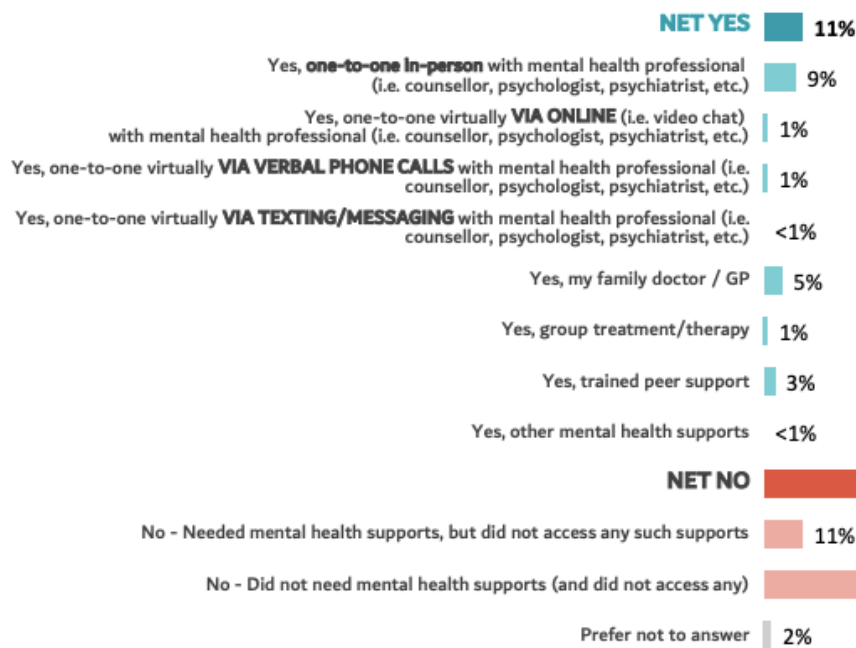
Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 32% of Canadians had accessed mental health care in their lifetime. Of that number, as seen through our fourth poll, 39% (of the 32%) did so in the year before the pandemic. These numbers show us that approximately 11% of the entire population, or four million Canadians, accessed mental health care in the year **prior** to the onset of the pandemic. In looking at the first year of Covid19, this number has increased to 18%, or approximately 6.5 million. Moving from 11% accessing service before COVID-19 to 18% now is a significant increase in the number of Canadians accessing service. Younger Canadian's are shown to be more likely to access professional mental health support at 48% between 18 and 34 years old, and 49% between 35 and 54 years old compared to 28% of Canadians above the age of 55.

Poll 4 – December 10-18, 2020

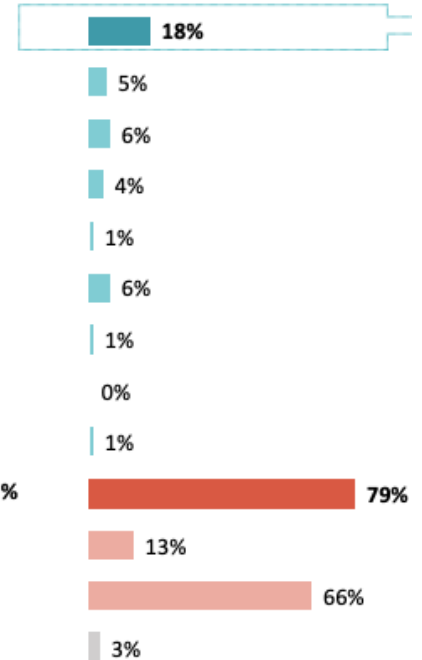


The number of Canadians who recognize their need for mental health care but have not accessed it has varied between 8% and 15% over our polls.

PEOPLE WHO ACCESSED SUPPORT IN THE YEAR BEFORE COVID-19



SINCE COVID-19: less than a fifth accessed support



Poll 6 – April 20-28, 2021

As was expected **one-to-one in person** care with a mental health professional has seen a decrease since the onset of COVID-19. The drop in use of this service has been supplemented by alternative methods of professional care, with the greatest increases seen in one-to-one virtual care via online resources (5%) and one-to-one virtual via verbal phone calls (3%). Other methods of mental health care have remained similar to levels in the year prior to the pandemic.

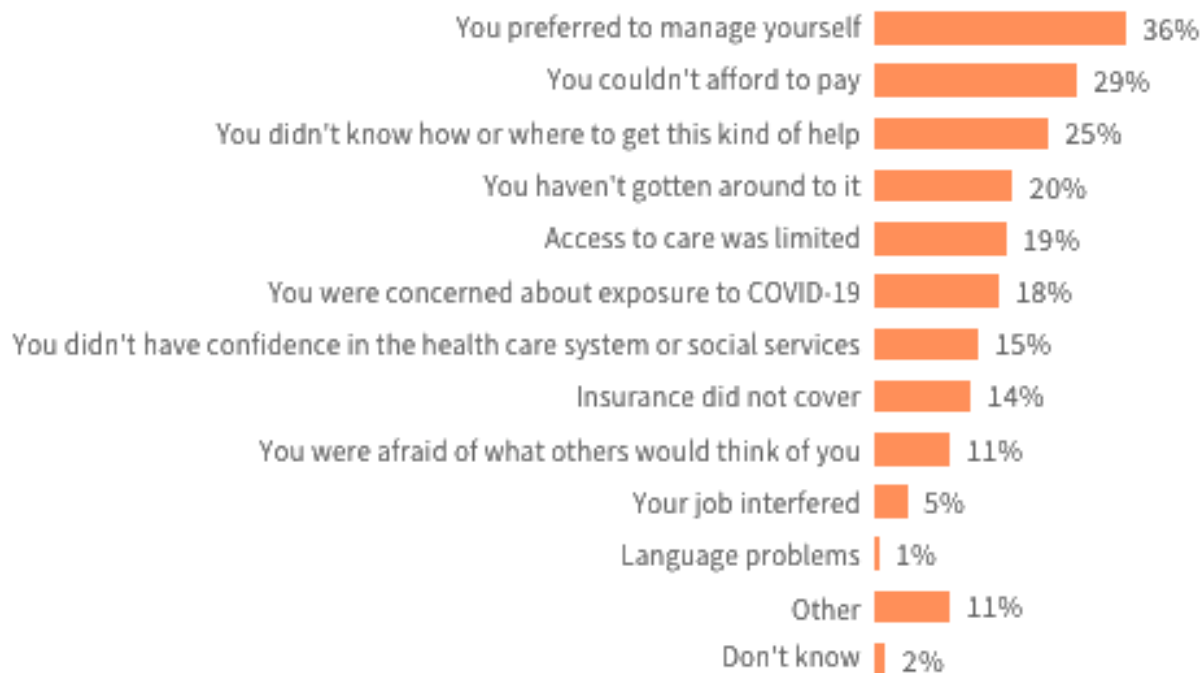
MENTAL HEALTH CARE SATISFACTION AND REASONS FOR NOT ACCESSING CARE

In Poll 7 we asked Canadians who have accessed mental health care in their lifetime whether or not they were satisfied with the professional care they received. Of the 801 responses we received, 78% reported that they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the care they have received. 18% indicated that they were not satisfied with the care they'd received in prior to the onset of the pandemic; these numbers have remained stable for those who have accessed care during COVID-19.

The primary reason for not accessing support pre-pandemic, "you prefer to manage yourself", has also remained fairly similar to that of post-pandemic (47% pre-COVID-19 and 39% post-COVID-19). Concern about exposure to the virus was a common response for those who chose not to access mental health care during the pandemic, with 31% of respondents indicating this as the main reason. Another notable change in pre and post pandemic reasons for not accessing mental health care is the decline in those who cited inability to pay for mental

health care (37% pre-COVID-19 vs. 16% post-COVID-19), this could be due to an increase in availability or awareness of affordable or free mental health resources. Interestingly, this reason has moved up the list once again to the number two reason for not accessing care, at 29% in our most recent poll, as shown below.

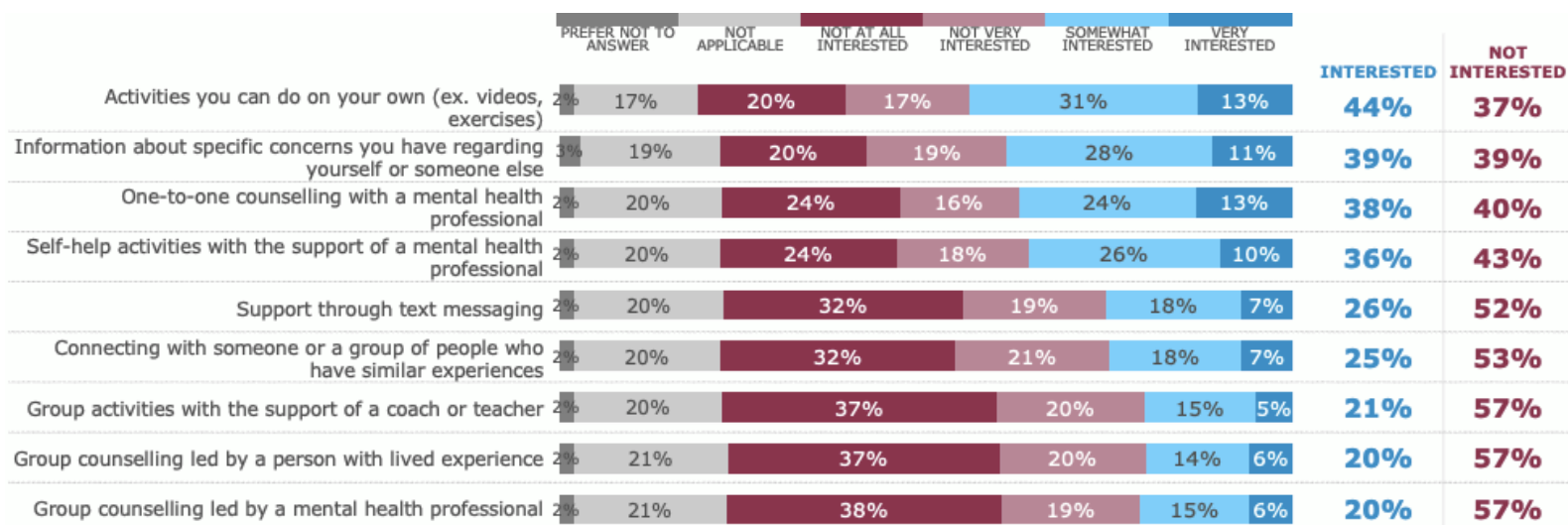
REASONS FOR NOT ACCESSING THE SUPPORT SINCE COVID-19



Poll 7 – June 7-13, 2021

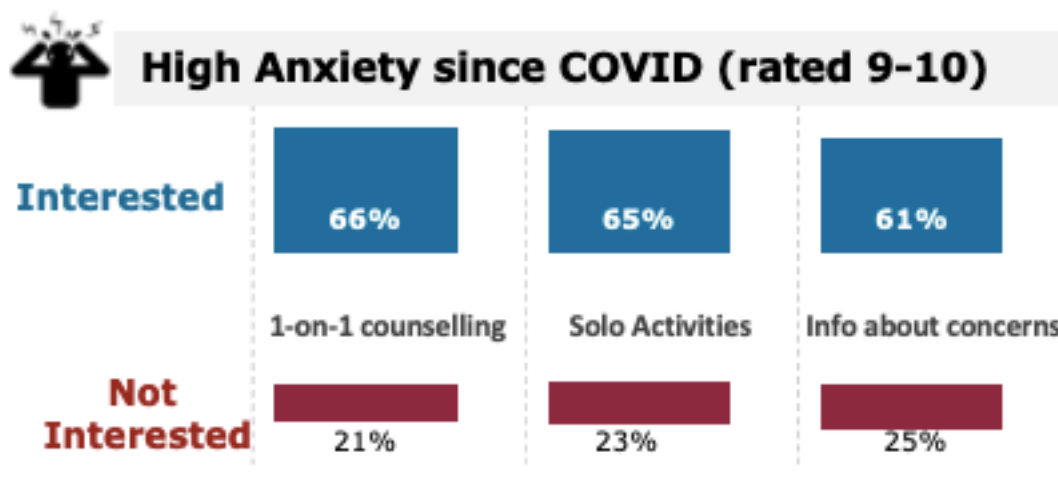
PREFERRED METHODS OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE

When looking at the entire sample of Canadians, whether or not they were currently accessing mental health care at the time of these polls, the highest level of interest was in activities that can be done on one's own at 44-46%, this is followed by access to general information about personal concerns at 38-40% over the 5 waves collected between August 21, 2020 and April 28, 2021. It is worth noting that many virtual platforms continue to expand efforts to get general information and self-directed resources to individuals – consistent with this finding. The popular activities amongst respondents were related to group activities led by either a person with lived experience or a mental health professional with between 56% and 59% reporting a lack of interest in these options. This is demonstrated in the graphic below.



Poll 2 - August 21 to 31, 2020

Of respondents who are suffering with anxiety or depression, the highest level of interest was in one-on-one support. 66% to 79% of Canadians with high-rated levels of anxiety prefer this option (as shown in the graph below), as do between 73% and 79% of those experiencing high levels of depression. Similar to the general population, respondents with high levels of anxiety or depression are least interested in group counselling or activities.



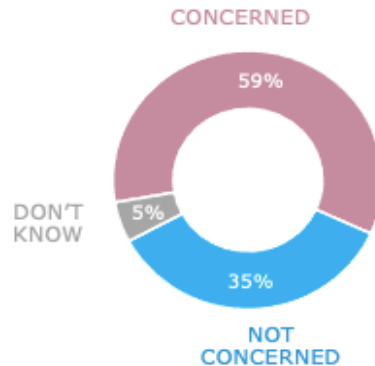
Poll 2 – August 21 to 31, 2020

BARRIERS TO VIRTUAL SUPPORT

The primary concerns for Canadians regarding virtual support relate to perceived issues of data privacy; this is in relation to health data as well as personal information. According to polls 3 and 4, between 56% and 59% of Canadians have concerns about the security and privacy of this

information. Poll 2 indicated that the potential of an eventual cost to services was a barrier to access for 16% of respondents.

Privacy Of Your Personal Information

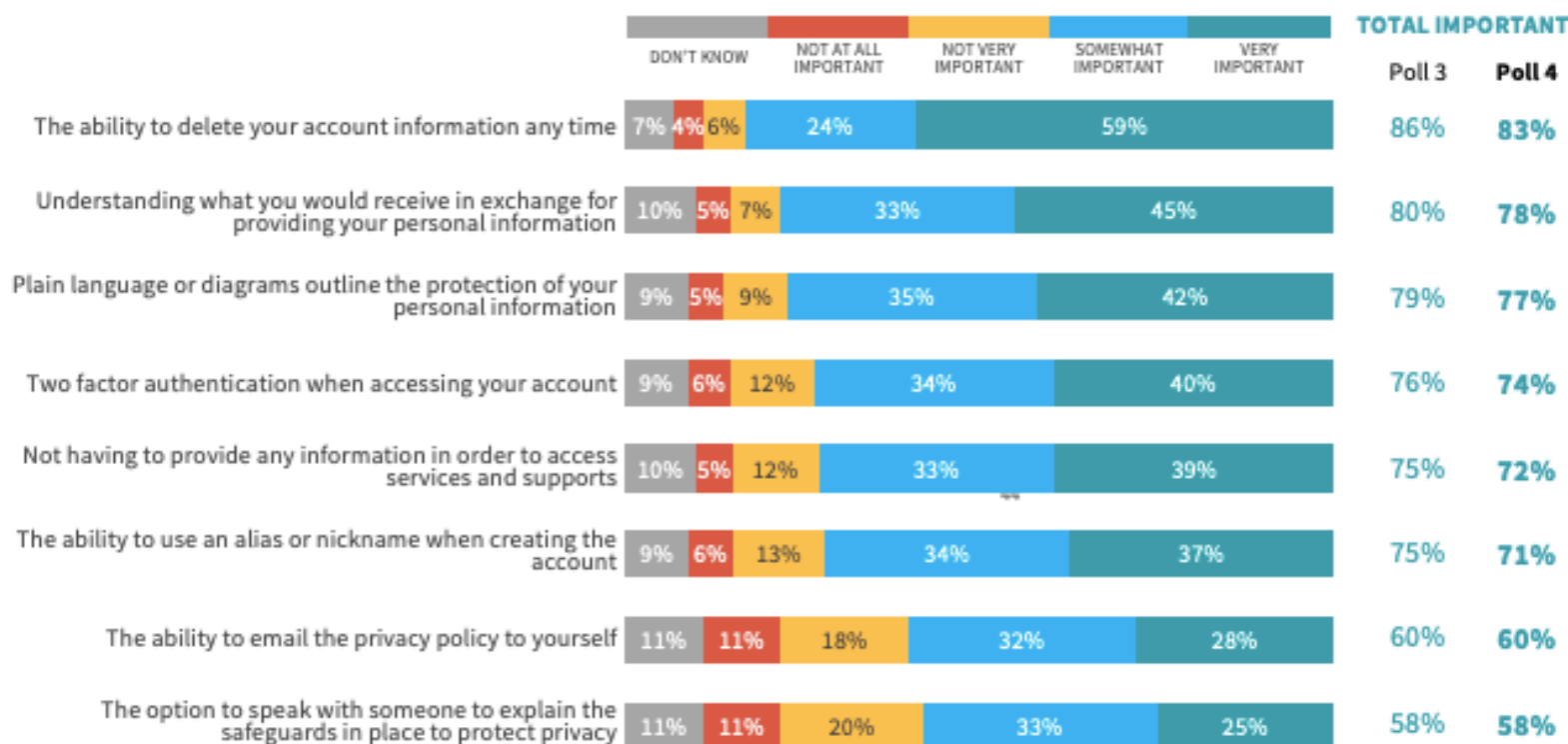


Poll 3 – October 22-28, 2021

There are numerous other factors affecting Canadian's ability or willingness to access virtual care, including discomfort of discussing mental health issues online (13%), the perceived stigma of obtaining mental health support (8%) and a lack of technical literacy (4%). The barrier that was of least concern to respondents was a lack of available technology (2%), though one must consider in the bias the exists due to our polls being an online format.

HOW THESE BARRIERS CAN BE ADDRESSED

An open-ended question in Poll 2 asked Canadians how these barriers could be addressed to most effectively ease privacy concerns surrounding virtual mental health care. Proper security and anonymity were the most common responses at approximately 9%. As seen in the graphic below, Polls 3 and 4 used the results of this open-ended question to gather additional insight into what can be done to alleviate privacy concerns and found that having the ability to delete account information at any time was a key measure at between 83% and 86% indicating it was somewhat or very important. A second way of addressing this barrier is to ensure that participants fully understand what would be received in exchange for providing personal information, with between 78% and 80% of respondents rating this measure as somewhat or very important.



Poll 4 – December 10-18, 2020

Thank you to **Pollara Strategic Insights** for their partnership in our national polling project evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadians. Full reports of our findings can be found at www.mhrc.ca.

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For more information about MHRC's national polling project, *How COVID-19 is Impacting Mental Health in Canada*, contact Brittany Saab at bsaab@mhrc.ca