



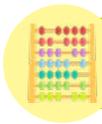
SNAPSHOT



COVID-19: Coping with Mental Health and Addiction Issues

As a result of the impacts of social isolation, loss of loved ones and economic downturn, experts predict a swell of mental health and addiction challenges. Canadians with mental illness or addiction may be among the hardest hit.

During physical distancing, supporting persons dealing with mental health and addiction issues can be difficult. In person services are more limited and service providers will rely on telephone or email to communicate with their clients. Helping clients maintain their resilience can be challenging as they deal with the threat of COVID-19, increased social isolation and changes to their routines and relationships. We must be fully mindful of how this crisis is amplifying the challenges and disadvantages faced by people living on the margins of society. ([CHRC 2020](#))



THE NUMBERS

In any given year, **1 in 5 Canadians** experience a mental illness or addiction problem. ([CAMH, 2008](#))

Young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorder than any other age group. ([Stats Can 82-624-X](#))

Canadians in the lowest income group are **3 to 4 times more likely** than those in the highest income group to report poor to fair mental health. ([CAMH, 2008](#))

Studies in various Canadian cities indicate that between **23% and 67%** of people who are experiencing homelessness report having a mental illness. ([CIHI, 2007](#))

Research shows that **more than 50%** of those seeking help for an addiction also have a mental illness, and **15-20%** of those seeking help from mental health services are also living with an addiction. ([Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2009](#))

COVID-19 is impacting the mental health and substance use of Canadians. **Twenty-five percent** of Canadians (aged 35-54) and **21%** of Canadians (aged 18-34) say they have increased the amount of alcohol they drink while spending more time at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. ([Nanos, 2020](#))

A study of Torontonians quarantined after SARS found a high prevalence of psychological distress. Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression were observed in **28.9% and 31.2%** of respondents, respectively. ([Emerg Infect. Dis., July 2004](#)) This could mean that **between 10 million and 11 million Canadians** could need these supports respectively post COVID.

COVID-19 disproportionately affects persons over the age of 60, women, racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, people with lower education levels and unemployed people. ([Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020](#) & [Toronto Public Health, 2020](#)). Many of these groups are at an increased risk of developing a mental health issue or addiction so it is critical that appropriate and targeted mental health and addiction responses be developed in partnership with these communities.





MOST IDENTIFIED SERVICE NEEDS FOR CLIENTS

Coaching on how to deal with isolation, accessing food and personal protective equipment

Increased social assistance rates

Medical referrals

Supportive housing

Clear information about to reduce the risk of COVID-19



RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 is disrupting everything. Familiar routines are no longer possible and the absence of a treatment for COVID-19 increases anxiety. We know demand for services will increase substantially. Many people who are already living with a mental illness or addiction will require additional support through the pandemic and into recovery in order to maintain their wellbeing. There will also be a whole new cohort of people who require support and services for mental health and addiction because of the economic decline and the ongoing public health restrictions. Our publicly funded mental health and addiction system needs to be in a position to respond to that increased demand.

If you are in an emergency, contact 911.

If you are over 18, in distress and looking for mental health and addiction services in your local community, contact ConnexOntario at connexontario.ca or 1-866-531-260.

If you are under 18 and looking for mental health services for yourself or your child/youth, visit cmho.org for a list of publicly funded services in your area.

Where possible, it is important to remember to take care of your well-being:

- Try to get enough sleep, eight hours per night if possible.
- Stick to your medication protocols and speak to your prescriber if you are running low.
- Eat as healthily as possible.
- Try to get outside and move your body, once a day.
- Practice mindfulness.
- Pay attention to your substance intake or any changes in problematic behaviours.
- Try to stay social virtually, which respects physical distancing.

