

Research

The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadians

When COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic in March, the federal and provincial governments initiated several public health measures including physical distancing, travel restrictions and the closure of businesses and schools to help



mitigate the risks created by the virus. Studies are now beginning to reveal the negative effects of the pandemic on the mental health of Canadians.

Data from *Statistics Canada* (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200624/dq200624b-eng.htm?CMP=mstatcan>) reveals the impact of the pandemic may be especially difficult for certain groups such as women, youth, those with physical health conditions and for individuals who were very or extremely concerned about family stress from confinement. The ability to meet financial obligations also had a significant impact on mental health with only 25% of Canadians reporting excellent or very good mental health if they were experiencing a major or moderate impact on their ability to meet financial obligations. In addition, individuals with a compromised immune system and those with diabetes or a chronic condition affecting their lungs, heart, or kidneys were also less likely to report better mental health.

A recent *study* (<https://www.express-scripts.ca/node/2469>) from Express Scripts also indicates an increase in prescription use of mental health drugs with a more than 10% increase in the number of claims for antidepressants between January and June 2020 compared to the same period last year. The data also suggests that there was an increase in new users for medications used to treat depression.

Research ([https://www.conferenceboard.ca/focus-areas/health/how-has-covid-19-impacted-canadians-mental-health?](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/focus-areas/health/how-has-covid-19-impacted-canadians-mental-health?utm_source=HEALTH&utm_medium=EMAIL&utm_campaign=RATB20JUL10&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTW1S)

[utm_source=HEALTH&utm_medium=EMAIL&utm_campaign=RATB20JUL10&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTW1S](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/focus-areas/health/how-has-covid-19-impacted-canadians-mental-health?utm_source=HEALTH&utm_medium=EMAIL&utm_campaign=RATB20JUL10&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTW1S) by the Conference Board of Canada and the Mental Health Commission of Canada suggest several things employers can do to help employees with mental health concerns. These include exploring the strategies employees are using to cope and knowing the pros and cons of these strategies to encourage healthier choices; promoting the use of psychological services and employee assistance programs; and helping to reduce stigma, isolation, and loneliness—especially with more people working remotely.

Impact: The pandemic has clearly taken a psychological toll on the health of Canadians which may in turn cause workforce absenteeism and presenteeism rates to rise. Drug plans may experience higher costs associated with the increased usage of prescription drugs for treating mental health conditions, and long-term disability plans may experience an increased incidence of claims in the latter half of 2020 and beyond.

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Actuaries' corner

Impact of the Canadian population's continuing demographic shift

On July 10, 2020, Statistics Canada released its *study* (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-520-x/91-520-x2019001-eng.pdf>) on population projections for Canada for the 50-year period from 2018 to 2068. The study developed various scenarios affecting projected