



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Manitobans feel anxious and crave real connection, but say they're doing "fine"**

***For Mental Health Week, the Canadian Mental Health Association Manitoba and Winnipeg promotes social connection to protect mental health in these difficult times***

**WINNIPEG (MB.) May 4, 2020** – Most Manitobans rely on shortcuts to describe their emotional state—even during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to new data released today by the Canadian Mental Health Association (“CMHA”) in partnership with Maru/Matchbox, 73% of those asked “how are you?” rely on “I’m fine, thanks” to express how they’re doing, despite the fact that Manitobans are feeling more negative emotions than positive ones these days (65% negative vs. 35% positive). The data was released to mark Canada’s 69<sup>th</sup> annual Mental Health Week, which runs May 4-10, 2020.

Despite a pandemic-driven growth in video-conferencing and social media usage, Canadians are feeling more isolated than ever (up 8 points from 39% to 47% in less than one month) and crave real, meaningful connections. In fact, over two-thirds of Manitobans (68%) report they would like to experience more meaningful social interactions in their daily life.

“Most Canadians want more social connection, yet they’re reluctant to have the kind of honest, open conversations that build the connection they crave,” says Margaret Eaton, national CEO of CMHA. “In our society, it’s a cultural norm to ask people how they’re doing, but not to expect, nor provide, a truthful answer. This Mental Health Week, it’s time to get real about how we feel. It’s clear we need each other more than ever.”

Prior to the global pandemic, loneliness was already a major public health concern. People with weak or few social connections are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, anti-social behaviour and suicide.<sup>1</sup> And a lack of strong relationships has the same negative impact on life expectancy as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>2</sup>

Due to physical distancing measures, people are isolated in their homes, missing out on family events and in-person activities and it appears they’re feeling it. Half of Manitobans are feeling anxious (50%), and only 13% are feeling happy. As we face social distancing measures, it’s important to note that people don’t need to be close to feel close.

“During this time we have to be creative in how we make social connections. Reaching out through telephone or video calls, or other online meeting platforms are great ways to stay connected. It’s important to prioritize connecting with others and incorporating that into your every day. Taking an online course or finding an online support group can be great ways to connect with others and feel less isolated. Go for a walk in your community and say hi to neighbors or write a letter or email to a friend or family member you haven’t been in touch with for a while. The accumulation of all of the little connections won’t just feel good—it’s actually good for everyone’s mental health,” says Marion Cooper, Executive Director, CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg.

Strong social networks lead to better self-esteem, coping mechanisms and a sense of well-being, and reduce depression and distress by providing emotional support, companionship and opportunities for meaningful social engagement.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2940247/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3890922/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524\\_2006\\_Article\\_44.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524_2006_Article_44.pdf)

CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg has many live online courses for individuals to choose from to help support and manage the challenges of current day-to-day living. Please check into these at: <https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/events/>

The focus of this year's Mental Health Week is to promote social connection and the role it plays in good mental health. To get involved, you can:

- **Learn** more about your mental health and how to feel close even when we can't be at [mentalhealthweek.ca/yourmentalhealth](https://mentalhealthweek.ca/yourmentalhealth)
- **Share** your support on social media by downloading a toolkit at [mentalhealthweek.ca/toolkit](https://mentalhealthweek.ca/toolkit) and using hashtags #GetReal #MentalHealthWeek and #TogetherApart
- **Donate** to support CMHA mental health programs in Manitoba at <https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/connect/donate/>
- **Connect.** If you or someone you love is struggling, please [contact your local CMHA](#) to find out about virtual and phone-based support services there to help you. In Manitoba please contact the Service Navigation Hub to get connected to CMHA services across the province please call 204-775-6442, or email the [hub@cmhawpg.mb.ca](mailto:hub@cmhawpg.mb.ca) Visit the Government of Canada's [Wellness Together](#) portal. If you are in crisis, please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free in Canada (1-866-277-3553 in Quebec).

Mental Health Week was introduced by CMHA in 1951 and has since become a Canadian tradition. To learn more, please visit [www.mentalhealthweek.ca](http://www.mentalhealthweek.ca)

#### **About the Data**

CMHA partnered with Maru/Matchbox to conduct an online survey among a total of 1,507 Canadian adults on April 15, 2020. A probability sample of this size would have a margin of error of +/- 2.5%, nineteen times out of twenty. The sample was weighted to reflect the Canadian adult population according to the most recent Census data. Additional data was taken from Maru's ongoing, near-daily FEEL, BEHAVE, THINK COVID-19 tracking study. For more information, please go to [www.marureports.com/coronavirus](http://www.marureports.com/coronavirus)

#### **About the Canadian Mental Health Association**

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in more than 330 communities across every province and one territory, CMHA provides advocacy, programs and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. For more information, visit [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

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