

## **Many Manitobans worry COVID will never go away**

*New research shows chronic stress taking toll on individuals and organizations*

**Winnipeg, Manitoba - March 1, 2022** – Far from feeling the pandemic is over, many people across the prairies are stressed about what's next, with 68% worried about new variants and 62% worried about COVID-19 becoming “endemic” and circulating in the population for years to come. Two years of pandemic-related stressors, including grief and trauma, are likely to lead to significant long-term mental health effects on both our population and the frontline mental health providers caring for them. This according to Round 4 of the *Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 on Mental Health* national monitoring survey by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in partnership with UBC researchers, and CMHA's *Running on empty: how community mental health organizations have fared on the frontlines of COVID-19*, both released today.

“We're seeing the signs of chronic stress on the population,” says Margaret Eaton, National CEO of CMHA. “Unfortunately, community mental health organizations have drawn on shallow reserves to meet people's mental health needs during COVID, and now they're running on empty. It's time to check the engine light on our mental health system.”

The chronic stress of dealing with the pandemic is taking its toll, making basic decisions harder, sapping our energy and leaving people plain tired or burnt out. Over a third (40%) of Manitobans are stressed or worried about coping with uncertainty.

“We're seeing big differences—or inequities—in how different groups of people are affected by the pandemic. This is dividing our society into haves and have-nots when it comes to mental health and illness,” says lead researcher Emily Jenkins, a professor of nursing at UBC who studies mental health and substance use. “The pandemic has made it impossible to ignore the longstanding service gaps and systemic barriers in our systems.”

Nearly half of those surveyed (42%) say their mental health has declined since the onset of the pandemic and this spikes in vulnerable groups such as those who are unemployed due to COVID-19 (57%), had a pre-existing mental health condition (54%), identify as LGBTQ2+ (49%), are students (47%) or have a disability (44%). Over a third (36%) of Manitobans are worried about the compounding effects of climate change on top of COVID-19 and nine per cent have had recent thoughts or feelings of suicide.

Millions of Canadians who cannot get the mental health help they need due to long wait lists or high costs, rely on free mental health and addictions services and supports provided by the not-for-profit sector, but these organizations are strained to breaking.

On the ground here in Manitoba, staff working within our education sector, in particular, are facing rates of mental and emotional burnout that are 20% higher than across Canada as a whole. Now, more than ever, it is vitally important that the entire education workforce receives the mental health supports and resources they so desperately need.

Across Canada almost one in five (17%) Canadians felt they needed help with their mental health during the pandemic but didn't receive it because: they didn't know how or where to get it (36%), couldn't afford to pay (36%), couldn't get access (29%) or because insurance didn't cover it (19%).

“Improving Canadians’ mental health is about more than just increasing access to care,” says Anne Gadermann, co-lead researcher and professor at the School of Population and Public Health, UBC. “We need to address the root causes of mental health inequities through promotion and prevention, in addition to treatment.”

In *Running on Empty*, CMHA calls on the federal government to better fund, support and integrate community mental health services within the healthcare system and: establish long-term and stable federal funding for key programs, services and supports in the community mental health sector; invest in mental health promotion and mental illness prevention programs and strategies; publicly fund community-based counseling and psychotherapy; and invest in housing, income supports and food security.

“During these challenging times, CMHA is here to support the mental health of all Manitobans,” says Marion Cooper, CEO of CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg. “The impact of constant change and uncertainty has had its toll-- both during the height of the pandemic and now, as restrictions begin to lessen. CMHA with its programs and services are here to connect people across Manitoba with the services they need to support their resilience and recovery.”

### **Getting help**

If you or someone you love is struggling, please [contact your local CMHA](#) or 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) or dial 911.

### **About the survey**

The survey was dispatched by Maru/Matchbox from Nov. 29 – Dec. 7, 2021, to a representative sample of 3,030 people ages 18 and up living in Canada. The fourth round of this national monitoring survey was made possible by generous support from Co-operators. To access a complete summary of the findings, please click [here](#).

### **About the report**

The report uses in-depth interviews across all provinces and the Yukon territory to outline how community mental health organizations have been impacted by and responded to the pandemic. The research was made possible by generous support from Co-operators. To access the complete report, please click [here](#).

### **About CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg**

CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg promotes the mental health and well-being of all people in Manitoban through and supports the resilience and recovery of individuals experiencing mental illness.

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