



# MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19:

## What Adults and Caregivers are Experiencing and What They Can Do

### The Bottom Line

COVID-19 has shown that caregivers, especially women and those living in the Prairie provinces, are at high risk for diminished mental health. Checking in on caregivers' mental health will ensure that they do not suffer in silence. Youth in their care will also benefit when caregivers are coping well.

### Caregiver and Adult Mental Health During COVID-19

During the pandemic, Canadian adults and caregivers have expressed increased anxiety, depression, and overall lower perceived mental health; increased stress and higher rates of worry in families; and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Self-isolation and financial stress have also worsened pre-existing mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and PTSD.

In a Canadian study conducted in April 2020, 30-43% of mothers reported depression and/or anxiety since the outbreak of COVID-19 as compared to 9-18% of mothers before the outbreak. Of the provinces surveyed in a December 2020 study on the mental health of Canadians, both Manitoba and Saskatchewan reported the highest increase of depression (21%) and highest increase of anxiety (27%) and Alberta reported the second highest increase of depression (17%) and third highest increase of anxiety (22%) since the onset of COVID-19. The rise in anxiety and depression for Saskatchewan and Manitoba are expected to continuously remain the highest reported rates should social isolation continue. In Canada, women, younger Canadians, healthcare workers, and parents with young children living in the home are reporting COVID-19 to have a greater impact on their mental health.

Factors contributing to continuously decreasing mental health are social isolation; increased mood changes since the onset of winter; economic downturn; daily Coronavirus news; and a significant decrease in the accessibility of mental health services. Negative mental health may be intensified for caregivers due to the increased pressures and responsibilities since the onset of COVID-19. Caregivers are faced with the challenge of dealing with their own mental health during this time, as well as ensuring the safety, happiness, and wellbeing of the child/dren. They must adapt to the changes in their own lives while adapting to the changes in lives of the children they care for. Many caregivers reported experiencing stress before COVID-19. These added conditions and responsibilities have amplified this stress.

## Possible Responses

- Be kind to your mind: Talk regularly about your feelings with someone who will listen. Do little things that you enjoy, such as scrapbooking, journaling, reading, yoga, or having a bath.
- Be kind to your body: Exercise often, stay hydrated, rest when needed, and eat regularly. Carve out times to relax.
- Balance: Work toward balancing out the stress of the situation with positive relationships. Be flexible and fix imbalances as they occur.
- Lower expectations: Caregivers are not expected to tackle all new responsibilities flawlessly. This has been a new learning experience for everyone. Reduce any pressure placed on you. Ask for and accept help from others.
- Set an example: Children and youth will be looking to the caring adults in their lives for guidance on how to handle the stress and anxiety stemming from COVID-19. Maintain healthy outlets and self-care and in so doing model desirable behaviours.
- Spend time outside. During COVID-19, many daily responsibilities may take place inside of the home if a caregiver is alternating their children between remote and in-person learning and working from home themselves. Some studies have shown spending time outside to be one of the most consistent ways to improve mental health.



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