

## National Issue Summary

# Mental Health in Canada

JANUARY 2026

United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC) has developed National Issue Summaries on key issue areas of national concern that are central to our network's mission. They summarize available data and research to provide an overview of the issue and how the United Way Centraides (UWCs) are investing in community supports and solutions.

### What mental health means

Mental health refers to a person's state of psychological and emotional well-being.<sup>1</sup> It includes a person's emotions, thoughts, feelings, sense of connection to others, and ability to manage life stressors.<sup>2</sup>

### Who experiences mental health challenges

- Anyone can experience mental health challenges, particularly youth, older adults, people living with chronic physical health conditions and those experiencing addiction.
- Some populations are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges, including Indigenous peoples, Black people, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, those living in rural and remote communities, and low-income households.
- While the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders is higher among women<sup>3</sup>, and women are more likely to attempt suicide, men account for more suicide deaths.<sup>4</sup>

### The facts about the mental health crisis in Canada

- During their lifetime, 1 in 3 people - more than 9 million people - will be affected by a mental illness.<sup>5</sup> 1 in 5 experience a mental illness in any given year.<sup>6</sup>
- The mental health crisis is being intensified by parallel cost of living, housing, food insecurity, addiction and substance use crises.
- Approximately 1 in 7 (15%) of people use health services for a mental illness every year.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. 2020. [About Mental Health](#).

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. July 19, 2021. [Fast Facts About Mental Health and Mental Illness](#).

<sup>3</sup> CAMH. n.d. [Mental Illness and Addiction](#).

<sup>4</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada. June 7, 2022. [Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Men](#).

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. October 8, 2020. [Mental Illness in Canada — Data Blog](#).

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Psychological Association. 2024. [Psychology Works' Fact Sheet](#).

<sup>7</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. October 8, 2020. [Mental Illness in Canada](#).

## Addressing the mental health crisis is urgent

- An increasing number of people are experiencing poor mental health: 29% of adults report experiencing a mental health condition in 2023, compared to 20% in 2016.<sup>8</sup>
- Mental health needs are going unmet. In 2022, of the 18.3% of people 15 and up who met diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety, or substance use disorder, over half (51.2%) had not talked to a health professional about their mental health this year.<sup>9</sup>
- The cost of the mental health crisis is estimated at \$50 billion a year in healthcare costs, lost productivity, and reduced quality of life.<sup>10</sup>

## What everyone needs to know about the mental health crisis

- Physical and mental health are fundamentally linked. With proper supports, people can and do recover from mental illness.
- Reducing poverty is key to promoting mental health. There is a significant relationship between mental illness and poverty, as people living with a mental illness often live in chronic poverty, and poverty is a risk factor for poor mental health.<sup>11</sup>
- Every dollar spent on mental health returns \$4-\$10 to the economy.<sup>12</sup> Increasing access to treatment for depression and anxiety could boost the economy by \$49.6 billion a year.<sup>13</sup>

### UWCs are building communities where everyone's mental health matters

Across Canada, UWCs are addressing mental health, focusing on four areas:

- **Investing** in non-profit and charitable organizations to create lasting change through prevention programs, non-clinical mental health services and enhancing service navigation.
- **Building capacity** by implementing training and workshops, community conversations and film screenings that create strong, effective organizations that have the skills and resources to achieve positive mental health outcomes.
- **Leading collaborative efforts** that bring many partners to work collaboratively on solutions to improve mental health and wellness including service hubs, online and phone mental health tools and community-wide responses.
- **Driving system change** by advocating for policy change, consulting on local, provincial, and national tables, and raising public awareness about issues related to mental health.

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. March 21, 2024. [Canadians increasingly report poor mental health, cite growing economic concerns as a contributing factor](#).

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. September 22, 2023. [Mental Disorders and Access to Mental Health Care](#).

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. 2022. [A Federal Plan for Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health](#).

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (Ontario). 2007. [Poverty and Mental Illness](#).

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. October 8, 2022. [Making Mental Health Part of Canada's Universal Health Care System](#).

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. 2022. [A Federal Plan for Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health](#).