

## National Issue Summary

# Youth Mental Health in Canada

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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 youth mental health means

Mental health is a state of psychological and emotional well-being.<sup>1</sup> It is "a necessary resource for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health."<sup>2</sup> A mental health problem or illness refers to a specific mental health condition as diagnosed by a medical professional. In the context of youth mental health, youth are typically considered 12-25 years old.<sup>3</sup>

### Who experiences mental health challenges as a youth

- Any young person can be affected by mental health challenges. Approximately 1.2 million children and youth are affected by mental illness and, by age 25, approximately 20% of youth develop a mental illness.<sup>4</sup>
- Almost 1 in 4 Indigenous youth have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (24.3%).<sup>5</sup> Compared to the national average, the rate of suicide is 5-7 times higher for First Nations youth living on reserve and 5-25 times higher for Inuit youth.
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide<sup>6</sup> and more likely to report depression symptoms (41%), anxiety symptoms (60%), suicidal ideation (29%), increased alcohol use (29%), and increased cannabis use (22%) compared to non-2SLGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>7</sup>

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

- Youth are experiencing an increase in hospitalizations for mental health and substance use, and the number of youth on waiting lists for services more than doubled from 2017 to 2020 from 12,000 to 28,000.<sup>8</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. 2020. [About Mental Health](#).

<sup>3</sup> Lopresti, D. 2022. [Youth and Mental Health in Canada](#).

<sup>4</sup> Youth Mental Health Canada. January 1, 2019. [Youth Mental Health Reality](#).

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. December 1, 2021. [Indigenous Youth in Canada](#).

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. June 15, 2022. [2SLGBTQIA+ Housing Needs and Challenges](#).

<sup>7</sup> Leger, Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and Mental Health Commission of Canada. 2022. [Mental Health and Substance Use During COVID-19](#).

<sup>8</sup> Children's Mental Health Ontario. 2020. [Children's Mental Health](#).

- Youth experience fragmented services. When youth turn 18, they must turn to adult services, which adds barriers, as youth must start a new search for care, and may experience long wait times.<sup>9</sup>
- Research has found that more time spent using social media is linked to lower mental health among youth.<sup>10</sup>

## Addressing the youth mental health crisis is urgent

- Mood and anxiety disorders are becoming more prevalent. The proportion of youth aged 15-24 meeting diagnostic criteria for a mood or anxiety disorder has increased for youth, particularly female youth, over the past 10 years (2012 to 2022).<sup>11</sup>
- Suicide has remained the second leading cause of death of youth aged 15-24 for at least 21 years, from 2000 to 2021. In 2021, approximately 1 in 5 deaths (20.4%) of youth aged 15-24 were due to suicide.<sup>12</sup>
- Not investing in mental health is costly. The cost of mental illness is estimated at over \$50 billion each year. It is estimated that every dollar spent on mental health returns \$4-\$10 to the economy.<sup>13</sup>

## What everyone needs to know about youth mental health

- The youth mental health crisis is growing at an alarming rate. Youth face unprecedented mental health challenges that add a new level of complexity to the typical struggles of childhood and adolescence.<sup>14</sup>
- Youth can't get the mental health help they need. In Canada, 3 in 4 children can't access care because it is unavailable or not covered by public health insurance.<sup>15</sup>
- All youth deserve access to mental health care. A survey by the Canadian Mental Health Association found that 87% of people want universal mental health care.<sup>16</sup>

## UWCs are building communities where youth mental health matters

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

- **Funding** nonprofit and charitable organizations to implement programs and initiatives that create measurable and lasting change to improve youth mental health.
- **Building capacity** by providing organizations and communities with the training and support they need to be effective, efficient, and sustainable as they work to address youth mental health.
- **Leading collaborative multi-partner initiatives** to work collaboratively on solutions to improve youth mental health and wellness.
- **Advocating for policy change**, consulting on local, provincial, and national tables, and raising public awareness about issues related to youth mental health.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. 2023. [Canadians Short on Access to Care for Mental Health and Substance Use](#).

<sup>10</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. 2023. [Mental Health and Problematic Social Media Use in Canadian Adolescents](#).

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. 2023. ["Mental Disorders and Access to Mental Health Care."](#)

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada. 2023. ["Leading Causes of Death, Total Population, by Age Group."](#)

<sup>13</sup> CAMH. n.d. [Mental Illness and Addiction](#).

<sup>14</sup> RBC Dominion Securities Inc. August 10, 2023. [The Urgent Need to Address the Youth Mental Health Landscape](#).

<sup>15</sup> Young Canadians Roundtable on Health. 2023. [It Is Time to Call a Code for the Healthcare Crisis](#).

<sup>16</sup> Dangerfield, K. May 1, 2023. [Most Canadians Want Universal Mental Health Care](#).