



BrainBuzz

camh

December 2020

As I share this final issue of BrainBuzz in my role as VP Research, I extend my deepest thanks for your support, dedication and kindness over our time together. With the leadership of Dr. Aristotle Voineskos and the guidance of the Research Committee, I am confident that CAMH will continue to grow and thrive as a world-leading research centre. I look forward to CAMH's future accomplishments!

Bruce Pollock
VP Research, CAMH



CAMH once again ranked as top mental health research hospital in Canada

On December 11, 2020, Research Infosource released its rankings for [Canada's Top 40 Research Hospitals in 2020](#), and CAMH has again topped the list as the country's leading mental health research hospital.

CAMH placed 2nd in its category for hospital intensity, which analyses research spending as a percentage of total hospital spending. CAMH also ranked among the top four in its category for research intensity, the amount of research spending per researcher. Ranking 13th overall among Canada's top 40 research hospitals, CAMH has been rising steadily in recent years, illustrating an increased need, and more opportunities, for research in mental health.

"I'm very proud of our ranking this year among Canada's Top 40 Research Hospitals," said **Dr. Bruce Pollock**, VP Research. "In 2020, CAMH has reaffirmed its commitment to research despite the many challenges and setbacks presented by the global pandemic. Research—especially mental health research—is now more important than ever."

In 2020, CAMH scientists have engaged in many crucial areas of research advancing our understanding of the human brain, while also leading numerous studies on COVID-19 and its impacts on Canadians' mental health.

Below are a few ways CAMH research has contributed to the understanding of mental health this year:

- Recent [groundbreaking research led by CAMH scientists has discovered peptides that interact with proteins associated with post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#). There are currently no laboratory diagnostic tests for PTSD, and existing treatments have limited efficacy, but these findings provide hope for interventions to treat or even prevent PTSD.
- This year, CAMH researchers examined connections between suicide and mental illness. In a [recent study of 20 years of population data](#), researchers found that the suicide rate for people with schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD) is more than 20 times higher than the rate for the general population.
- In a series of national surveys, CAMH collaborated with research technology company Delvinia to [understand the mental health and substance use impacts of COVID-19 over time](#). The resulting data has provided valuable information about population health trends as the pandemic unfolded, while gaining us a better understanding of the mental health impacts of COVID-19.

[Check out the complete list of Canada's Top 40 Research Hospitals in 2020.](#)

[Read how CAMH did in last year's rankings.](#)



Suicidal ideation at record levels among Ontario students

CAMH population survey reveals pre-pandemic picture of youth mental health

Even before the pandemic began, Ontario students were experiencing the highest levels of suicidal ideation and serious psychological distress ever recorded, according to the latest [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey \(OSDUHS\) Mental Health and Well-Being Report](#) by CAMH. The data were collected between November 2018 and June 2019 among 14,142 students in grades 7 to 12. The OSDUHS is Canada's longest-running study of mental health and substance use among youth.

Suicidal ideation is currently the highest on record for this survey since CAMH began monitoring it in 2001. One in six students (16 per cent) had serious thoughts about suicide in the year preceding the survey. Serious psychological distress—which refers to symptoms of anxiety or depression—has also been rising steadily among Ontario students in Grades 7 to 12 since it was first monitored in 2013. One in five students (21 per cent) reported serious psychological distress, almost double the rate it was just six years prior.

“As concerning as these numbers are, they likely underestimate the degree of suicidal ideation and psychological distress currently experienced by Ontario students, because all the survey data predate the COVID-19 pandemic,” said [Dr. Hayley Hamilton](#), Senior Scientist in [CAMH's Institute for Mental Health Policy Research](#), and survey co-lead. “These data reinforce the urgent need to provide mental health supports to this cohort during this difficult time.”

Mental health care

Compounding the rising numbers in reports of poor mental health is a parallel increase in the percentage of students reporting unmet mental health needs. While more than one-quarter of students (27 per cent) engaged with a mental health professional at least

once during the previous year, more than one-third said that there was a time when they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem but did not know where to turn. Overall, the percentage of students reporting unmet needs for mental health support has spiked from 28 to 35 per cent in the past six years.

“Students are seeking help for their mental health at much higher rates than in the past, but many still don’t know how to seek support,” said [Dr. Joanna Henderson](#), Director of [The Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health](#) and Executive Director of [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario](#). “There are clearly unmet needs that need to be filled, and the need for more visibility of mental health services in schools and the community.”

Screen time and social media

By a variety of measures, students are spending more time in front of screens than ever before.

One in five students (21 per cent) spend five hours or more each day on social media sites, almost double the number from six years prior.

One-quarter of students (24 per cent) play video games on an almost-daily basis and one in seven (14 per cent) report symptoms of a video game problem, including disruption to family and school life.

When all electronic devices are factored in, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, computers and smart watches, more than one in three high school students (35 per cent) report spending five or more hours a day staring at screens in their spare time. This does not include any screen time devoted to school work or homework.

Physical activity

While more than half of students (58 per cent) rate their physical health as excellent or very good, only one in five (21 per cent) met the recommended daily physical activity guidelines (defined as at least one hour of moderate-to-vigorous activity per day). Almost two-thirds of students (63 per cent) report getting less than eight hours of sleep on a school night, a significant increase of students since 2015.

“We have seen serious increases in screen time among students in recent years, as well as decreases in sleep,” said survey co-lead [Dr. Tara Elton-Marshall](#), Independent Scientist in the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research. “There are real concerns about the implications of excessive amounts of time spent on social media, especially during the current pandemic when Canadian youth are even more engaged with screens. It is important to consider ways to reduce

recreational screen time and engage in alternate activities to boost well-being.”

Positive trends

The 2019 report also indicated some positive trends in youth behaviour. The self-reported rate of being bullied at school has fallen from 33 per cent to 23 per cent since 2003. In addition, the number of students reporting texting while driving has gone down from 36 per cent to 29 per cent in the past six years. Finally, the number of students reporting gambling activity of any kind has decreased significantly from 57 per cent to 31 per cent since 2003.

About OSDUHS

The Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH has conducted the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) every two years since 1977. The OSDUHS is the longest-running ongoing school survey of adolescents in Canada, and one of the longest-running in the world. This report describes the 2019 results for physical indicators, mental health indicators, bullying, gambling and related problems, video gaming and related problems, and other risk behaviours among Ontario students, and changes since 1991, where available. The [2019 OSDUHS Drug Use report](#) was released in February 2020. All data are based on self-reports derived from anonymous questionnaires completed in classrooms. The survey was administered by the Institute for Social Research at York University on CAMH’s behalf.

Awards and events: Recent highlights

[Dr. Rachel Tyndale](#), Senior Scientist and Head of the Pharmacogenetics Lab in CAMH’s Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute, has been named a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). In its [announcement](#), the AAAS praised Dr. Tyndale’s “outstanding contributions to understanding the role of drug metabolism in addiction and in particular, how genetic polymorphisms alter behaviors relevant to nicotine addiction.”



Dr. Bruce Pollock has been named the 2021 recipient of the [Mrazek Award in Psychiatric Pharmacogenomics](#) from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and APA Foundation, which recognizes an outstanding clinician in the field of pharmacogenomics.

[Dr. Tarek Rajji](#), Chief of the Adult Neurodevelopment and Geriatric Psychiatry Division at CAMH and Executive Director of the Toronto Dementia Research Alliance, has been named as a full member of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, the leading professional society in brain, behaviour and psychopharmacology research in the US.



KPMB Architects [has been recognized](#) with a 2020 Canadian Architect Award of Excellence for a vision for a future CAMH research centre that would locate the majority of CAMH's world-class research enterprise at the Queen Street site, as envisioned by [CAMH's Strategic Plan, One CAMH](#). With the announcement of KPMB's award, CAMH recently shared the vision of a new research building in a [CAMH article](#).

[CAMH's Cundill Centre for Child and Youth Depression](#) recently hosted Youth suicide prevention: Let's start the conversation, a free Facebook live event for parents and family members, featuring a panel discussion and Q&A session among youth, family members and Clinician Scientists [Dr. Darren Courtney](#)

and [Dr. Juveria Zaheer](#). The [video of the full event](#) is available to watch and share online.

Youth Suicide Prevention

Let's start the conversation



camh | Cundill Centre for Child and Youth Depression #CundillatCAMH

Get In Touch!

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Our street name has changed!

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