



BrainBuzz

camh

November 2020

Please enjoy new research highlights and successes in this month's BrainBuzz. We're always looking for feedback — reach out to our team at any time to express ideas or to ask questions. Looking forward to sharing more exciting developments at our meeting next week.

Bruce Pollock
VP Research, CAMH



The Garron family makes \$15-million gift supporting brain imaging at CAMH

CAMH was honoured to announce earlier this week a \$15-million gift from the Garron family that will help revolutionize mental health research through brain imaging.

"We are extremely grateful to count the Garron family among our growing community of mental health champions. Gifts like this will support targeted research that will enhance our understanding of the brain chemistry underlying mental illness," said Dr. Catherine Zahn, CAMH President and CEO. "Investing in research is critical to improving care and developing new treatments for the patients of tomorrow."

CAMH is home to one of the only imaging labs worldwide focusing solely on mental health research. The state-of-the-art imaging facilities enable researchers to probe the brain to better understand brain health and to advance mental health treatments.

While CAMH scientists have already made great progress in areas such as finding links between inflammation and depression and identifying new treatments for Alzheimer's disease, the Garron family's donation will help accelerate this important work.

"Our family is proud to invest in brain imaging at CAMH," said Myron Garron. "The human brain is the final frontier, and imaging will help us get more people the right diagnosis and treatment so they can recover from mental illness."

In recognition of the Garron family's visionary support, a medical imaging suite for positron emission tomography (PET) at CAMH will be named the Garron Family PET Imaging Suite, and the Intergenerational Wellness Building located at 80 Workman Way will be renamed the Garron Family Building.

"We are at a crucial time to better understand the brain. This generous investment will drive Canada's capacity for breakthroughs in new and tremendously exciting ways," said [Dr. Neil Vasdev](#), Director of [CAMH's Brain Health Imaging Centre](#). "The critical resources provided by the generosity of the Garron family will be used to advance CAMH as a leader in brain imaging. We will now be able to translate innovative tools for early and accurate diagnosis, and new treatment options for mental health much faster."

Pandemic adversely affecting mental health of women and people with children



A mental health gender gap that was forged early in the COVID-19 pandemic has been reinforced, according to the latest survey by CAMH in collaboration with global research technology company Delvinia.

The survey of 1,003 adults, conducted between September 18 and 22, as elementary and high schools were reopening, reveals that women had higher levels of anxiety and loneliness than men, and parents of

children under 18 had higher levels of depression compared to adults without children in this age group.

“There is concern that added stressors related to children returning to school may be reflected in the finding,” said [Dr. Hayley Hamilton](#), Senior Scientist in the [Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH](#). “More research is needed, and more supports are required for these populations.”

Key findings

- Nearly one-quarter of women (24.3 per cent) indicated experiencing moderate to severe anxiety, significantly higher than the 17.9 per cent found among men. The same gender gap was evident in reports of loneliness (23.3 per cent for women and 17.3 per cent for men).
- Overall, parents with children under 18 living in the home were more likely to report feeling depressed (29.1 per cent) than adults without children (18.9 per cent).
- There was a significant increase among both men and women reporting fear about getting COVID-19, with one-quarter (25.8 per cent) saying they were worried, compared to 20.3 per cent in the last survey, conducted in the summer.
- Heavy episodic drinking remained a concern, with 28.5 per cent of men and 22.6 per cent of women reporting binge drinking.
- One in five adult Canadians (20.3 per cent) reported seeking professional help for mental health concerns as a way of coping with the pandemic at least once during the week preceding the survey.

“Many Canadians are actively seeking mental health supports,” said CAMH psychiatrist Dr. David Gratzer. “While it is encouraging that so many struggling with their mental health are seeking help, it is also a reminder of the need to further support and expand care – particularly virtual care – to meet the increasing demand.”

CAMH has implemented an ambitious set of policy and procedure changes to increase access to virtual care to treat patients wherever they are during COVID-19. In February, the last full month before the pandemic was declared, fewer than 400 patient sessions were conducted online. By the end of May, that number had exceeded 5,000.

Coping strategies during the pandemic

For the first time since the national surveys began in May, participants were also asked what kind of activities they were doing to help them cope with the pandemic. The top three were spending time outdoors (93.5 per cent), connecting socially with friends or family online or on the phone (92 per cent) and carving out time to relax (93.1 per cent).

More than four in five Canadians (82.1 per cent) indicated connecting socially with friends or family in person was a key coping strategy. “This is not surprising given the benefits of social support, but is of concern as case counts across the country rise,” added [Dr. Tara Elton-Marshall](#), Independent Scientist in the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH. “Canadians need to continue to find alternate coping strategies and other ways to engage with friends and families remotely to avoid potentially spreading the virus.”

“We recognize that the analysis of the data by CAMH researchers continues to find that women and those with children are most affected by mental health issues as a result of COVID-19,” said Adam Froman, Founder and CEO of Delvinia. “These insights are being derived from the data we have collected for this study, and are providing a variety of organizations valuable insight to continue to address the mental health crisis caused by the pandemic. This is why it has been so important for us to make all the research data available for free through Methodify by Delvinia. Having access to this kind of data allows CAMH and other mental health organizations to develop the programs and tools needed to help those who are suffering.”

Survey methodology

The series is made possible by a collaboration with Methodify by Delvinia, an automated research platform that connects organizations to real people to gain actionable data and insights. Results are based on responses from 1,003 English-speaking Canadians ages 18 and older via an online survey of the Asking Canadians web panel, reflecting a distribution of age, gender, and region. The survey was conducted between September 18 and 22, 2020. It will be redeployed in the coming weeks as the pandemic continues.

An interactive dashboard highlighting key survey findings is updated after each subsequent survey, and can be viewed at camh.ca/covid19dashboard. Visit camh.ca/covid-19 for a variety of other resources, including tips, coping strategies and resources regarding mental health and substance use during the pandemic.

Understanding the mental health needs of direct support professionals during COVID-19

Owing to a significant increase in work-related stress brought about by the pandemic, and numerous concerns about workplace challenges, one-quarter of

direct support professionals (DSPs) who work with people with developmental disabilities report experiencing moderate-to-severe distress, suggesting that more needs to be done to support these often invisible workers. These are among the findings of a province-wide mental health survey of 868 DSPs conducted in July 2020 by the [Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre at CAMH](#). Based on the survey results, the centre is releasing a new report calling for additional support for DSPs, who often find themselves on the front lines of pandemic care, but often do not have the same systematic supports as frontline health workers in medical settings.

A crucial health role

Direct support professionals play a crucial role in the health of people with developmental disabilities, often supporting their integration into community living or assisting them in daily living activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people with developmental disabilities — who account for approximately one per cent or 147,000 Ontarians — have become more vulnerable due to compounded physical and mental health factors that put them at greater risk of contracting the virus and experiencing health complications. This is further exacerbated by the higher likelihood of residing in congregate living settings.

“We know from demographic information that people who live in group homes, or in places where they’re unable to properly socially distance, have worse health outcomes during COVID-19. In general, people with developmental disabilities are [nearly four times more likely to die prematurely](#), so it’s easy to see how this can become a bigger issue during the pandemic,” says [Dr. Yona Lunsky](#), Director of the Azrieli Centre and Senior Scientist at CAMH.



Dr. Yona Lunsky

“We don’t often talk about developmental disabilities, and we don’t really talk about the staff who work with people with developmental disabilities. This is an invisible workforce, but they are essential — and it’s important that we don’t forget about these people as

health care workers. While this is not a health care sector, the physical and mental wellbeing of people with developmental disabilities is very much a health issue, especially during the pandemic.”

The survey findings paint a picture of workers who faced increasingly difficult workplace circumstances since the onset of the pandemic, including increased aggression and increased mental health concerns among their clients. DSPs also reported increasing levels of work stress, loss of employment due to tighter restrictions, inconsistent levels of infection control and increased anxiety over contracting and spreading the virus.

“With COVID-19 thrust upon us, we have once again demonstrated the resilience, tenacity and expertise of this group of professionals,” says Michelle Brooks, Executive Director of [The Participation House Project in Durham Region](#), and Chairperson of [The Provincial Network on Developmental Services](#).

“Through collaboration, due diligence and tireless effort, we competently responded to and mitigated the risks associated with this global pandemic. However, I fear this ongoing over-extension and continued shortfall in investment by government will result in significant mental health challenges within our workforce and our broader community who relies upon us.”

Essential workers

“This is a highly resilient group, but let’s not assume that they can continue operating under significant stress as we move into this second wave, without giving them the support they need. Their mental health impacts the people they support, and the mental health of the people they support impacts them,” adds Dr. Lunskey. “At some point earlier this spring, they were recognized as essential workers, and that meant something to them. They will continue to be essential in the work that they do moving forward, and we can’t forget this.”

The report also proposes ways to better support these essential workers, offering a number of suggestions on how employers and policymakers could implement changes in policy and practice to boost mental health, increase recognition and improve safety among staff.

Read the [report summarizing study results](#).

Get In Touch!

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