



# Mental Health During COVID-19 Outbreak Poll 2



September 2020

# Methodology

**Methodology:** On behalf of Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC), Pollara Strategic Insights conducted an online survey among a sample of 4,010 adult Canadians. This was the second poll of this study. The first poll was conducted in April 2020 among a sample of 1,803 Canadians. Results between the two polls will be compared where applicable.

**Weighting:** This survey included an over sample in several provinces to allow for more in-depth regional analysis. National results have been weighted by the most current census data in terms of gender, age and region to ensure the total sample is representative of the population as a whole

Sample Size, Margin of Error and Field Dates

Region	Poll One		Poll Two	
	Number of Interviews	Margin of error	Number of Interviews	Margin of error
	April 22 to 28, 2020		August 21 to 31, 2020	
British Columbia	251	±6.2%	275	±5.9%
Alberta	252	±6.2%	273	±5.9%
Prairies	200	±6.9%	701	±3.7%
Ontario	701	±3.7%	826	±3.4%
Quebec	300	±5.6%	394	±4.9%
Atlantic Canada	99	±9.8%	1541	±2.5%
<b>National</b>	<b>1,803</b>	<b>±2.3%</b>	<b>4,010</b>	<b>±1.5%</b>

**Provincial Samples:** The following provinces included additional samples for provincial-level analysis:

Province	Number of Interviews	Margin of error
Saskatchewan	576	±4.1%
New Brunswick	503	±4.4%
Nova Scotia	505	±4.4%
Newfoundland	500	±4.4%

# Summary of Major Findings

- *Teachers in K-12 education indicate a 500% increase (5% to 25%) in the number of people who indicate a high level of anxiety compared to pre-COVID levels.*
- *Despite the dramatic reduction in restrictions and cases of the virus between April and August 2020, there is no reduction in the level of people who have high levels of anxiety and depression. We will conduct this poll again in mid-October to assess if these levels will continue to rise with a potential second wave of the virus emerging.*
- *Nearly two-thirds of Canadians who indicated a high level of anxiety or depression would be classified as having a moderate to severe level of psychological distress (as diagnosed through the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)). Notably a higher number of men and people living alone were in the severe category.*
- *While some factors that were negatively affecting mental health have been reduced (notably economic related stresses), we see a dramatic reduction in the positive impact of many of the coping mechanisms used by Canadians, including spending time with family members, entertainment, physical exercise and interacting with friends.*
- *Prescription medication is by far the largest method that Canadians are using to manage mental health, with a full 60% of people who indicated a mood or mental disorder diagnosis indicating they were managing this way.*
- *Nearly one-half of all people who accessed mental health services before the pandemic are no longer accessing services (32% before, 17% after) due to a significant reduction in access to family doctors and in-person one-to-one mental health services.*



# Key Findings

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# Anxiety and depression have increased following the COVID-19 outbreak and remains high

- *Prior to COVID-19, 1 in 5 Canadians say they have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (20%) or depression (19%), while less than 1 in 10 (6%) say they are diagnosed with another mood disorder. In total, more than one-quarter of Canadians report that they have been diagnosed with a mood disorder. And close to one-half of Canadian families report having someone with a mental health diagnosis.*
- ***The COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions have lead to an increase in both anxiety and depression.*** *In Poll 1, following the COVID-19 outbreak, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety quadrupled while depression doubled. In Poll 2, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety remains at four times pre-COVID levels while twice as many still report that they are depressed.*
- *The proportion of Canadians anticipating higher levels of anxiety and depression if they experience another two months of lockdown has fallen in Poll 2. This may indicate that Canadians have adjusted to COVID restrictions, are responding to the loosening of the restrictions, or are feeling better about a decline in COVID cases through the spring and summer months.*
- ***Levels of anxiety and depression are serious.*** *More than one-half of the Canadians who report high levels of anxiety and/or depression would be classified as moderate to severe using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.*
- *Prescription medication is the most common treatment reported by Canadians diagnosed with a mood disorder. Only one-fifth are receiving talk therapy administered by a professional.*
- ***The COVID-19 outbreak has meant that many Canadians have lost access to mental health supports.*** *Access to counselling has declined by one-half, and uptake of online supports is very low. Canadians report that they are not even able to speak to their GP about their mental health since the outbreak.*

# As the COVID outbreak progresses, the fear of contracting the virus continues to negatively impact mental health while positive supports are eroding

- **COVID-19 and its potential spread continues to have a negative impact on the mental health of a plurality of Canadians.** In Poll 1, one-third of Canadians reported that their fear of catching COVID was having a negative impact on mental health. In Poll 2, the proportion has risen slightly to two-fifths of Canadians reporting a negative impact on mental health. Canadians remain most concerned about family members, with one-half reporting that their concern for family continues to have a negative impact on their mental health.
- Social support through family and friends is deteriorating as the outbreak continues. Following the outbreak, Canadians reported that communication with friends and family was having a positive impact on mental health. By Poll 2, however, significantly more Canadians report that communication with family and friends is now having a negative impact on mental health.
- The negative impact of the economic downturn on mental health may be lessening. Following the outbreak, the economic downturn and potential for job loss were having a negative impact on the mental health of many Canadians. In Poll 2, the proportion of Canadians reporting a negative impact has lessened slightly and is a trend worth monitoring.
- Activities that Canadians reported as having a positive impact on mental health are no longer providing support and are beginning to have a negative impact on mental health. Following the outbreak, Canadians reported that physical activity and engaging in reading and entertainment were positive. By Poll 2, Canadians report that these same activities are now negatively affecting their mental health.
- Daily news about coronavirus continues to negatively affect the mental health of a plurality of Canadians and has increased slightly in Poll 2, a trend worth monitoring.
- Some Canadians are continuing to use alcohol and cannabis to help them deal with the outbreak, with increased usage of both remaining steady compared to our Poll 1 results.
- **Canadians are following the rules and regulations required to limit the spread of the virus.** Very few Canadians report that they are not compliant with local COVID-19 restrictions.

# Teachers are having to deal with a great deal of anxiety, as the new school year begins

- *As the new school years start, K-12 teachers are having to deal with a significant increase in anxiety. While only 5% say their anxiety was high (rated 8-10) before the outbreak, it has increased to 25% reporting they have high levels of anxiety now. Their depression is similar to that of other Canadians, with 5% feeling they had high levels of depression before the outbreak, and 16% feeling the same now.*
- *Canadians in general feel they may get a break from the anxiety they are feeling if the social isolation continues. However, this is not the case for teachers. More than one-fifth (22%) feel their anxiety will be high if the social isolation continues (compared to 14% of the general population).*
- *While teachers, like other Canadians, are being impacted by many factors, they are more likely than other Canadians to feel concerned about contracting COVID-19 themselves (44%) and social isolation (50%) having a negative impact on their mental health.*





## Results in Detail

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# Anxiety and Depression in the COVID-19 Outbreak

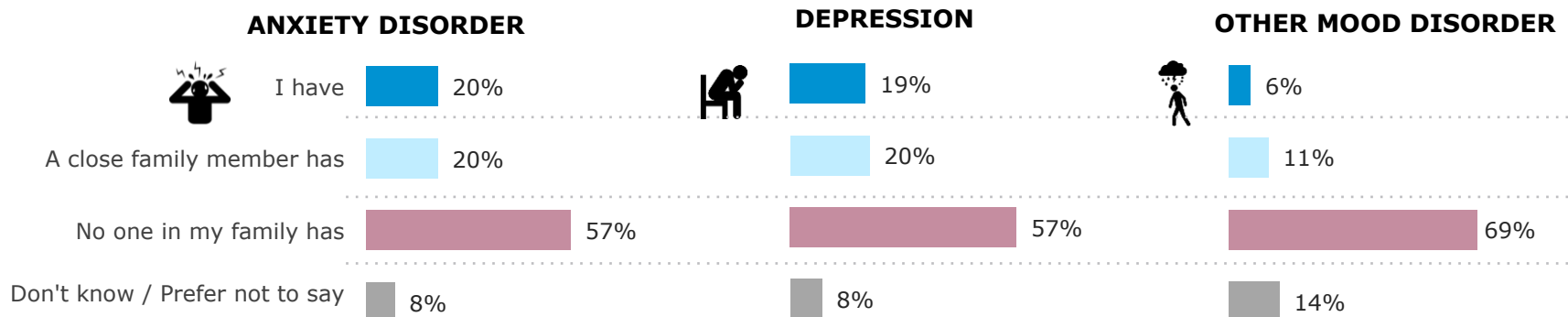
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# 1 in 5 Canadians have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression

- One-fifth of Canadians report that they have been diagnosed with anxiety (20%) and/or depression (19%). Only a few (6%) have been diagnosed with another type of mood disorder. In total, more than one-quarter (28%) of Canadians report a mental health diagnosis.
- One-fifth of Canadians report that someone in their family has been diagnosed with anxiety (20%) and/or depression (20%). And 1 in 10 (11%) report that someone in their family has been diagnosed with another type of mood disorder. In total, one-third (31%) of families report having someone with a mental health diagnosis.
- Co-morbidity of anxiety and depression is high, and Canadians diagnosed with either anxiety or depression are significantly likely to have both.



Canadians most likely to be diagnosed with anxiety:

- Females (23% vs. 15% of males)
- Younger (18-34: 23%; 35-54: 22%) compared to older (55+: 14%)
- Canadians living alone (24% vs. 18%)
- Atlantic province (24%)
- Teachers (26%); Healthcare frontline workers (25%)

Canadians most likely to be classified with depression:

- Females (23% vs. 15% of males)
- Younger (18-34: 21%; 35-54: 22%) compared to older (55+: 15%)
- Canadians living alone (25% vs. 18%)
- Atlantic (23%) or Alberta (24%)
- Teachers (16%); Healthcare frontline workers (22%)

**Total with mental health condition (anxiety, depression, other)**

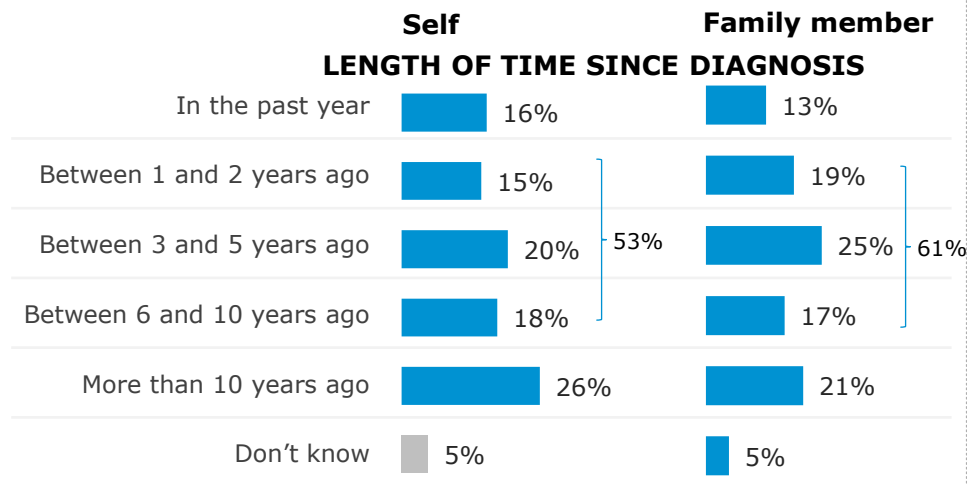
28%	Individuals
31%	Family member
48%	Individuals + family member

Base: (Total N=4,010)

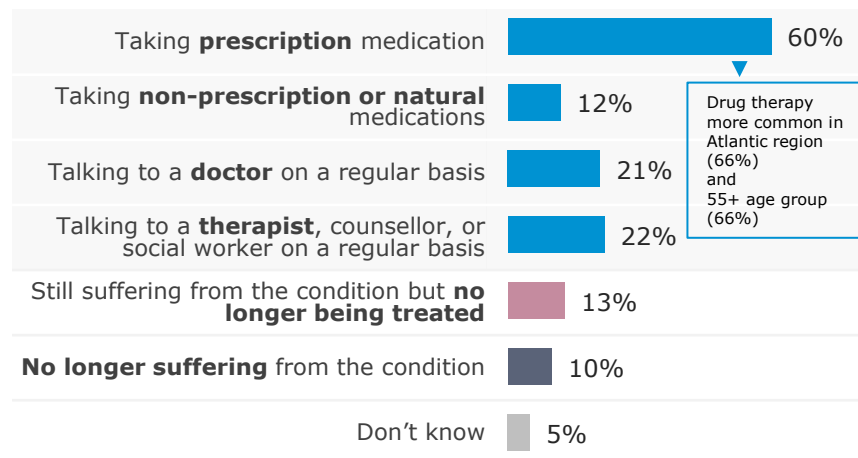
A1. Before the current coronavirus outbreak in Canada... have you or has a close family member ever received a diagnosis from a healthcare professional stating that you/they are affected by any of the following...

# Prescription medications are the most common form of treatment for mental health disorders

- More than one-half (53%) of those with a mental health diagnosis were diagnosed within the past ten years.
- The majority of Canadians diagnosed with a mental health condition are taking steps to treat it (71%), with most (60%) say they are taking a prescription medication. Only one-fifth are receiving counselling (22%) and/or speaking with their doctor on a regular basis (21%).
- **Talk therapy:** Canadians most likely to be seeing a therapist live in Alberta (28%; above average) or in an urban area (23% vs. 11% rural), are under 55 years (18-34: 26%; 35-54: 25%; 55+: 14%) and employed (25% vs. 11% unemployed). Teachers are likely to talk to therapists as well (40%).



## TREATING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS



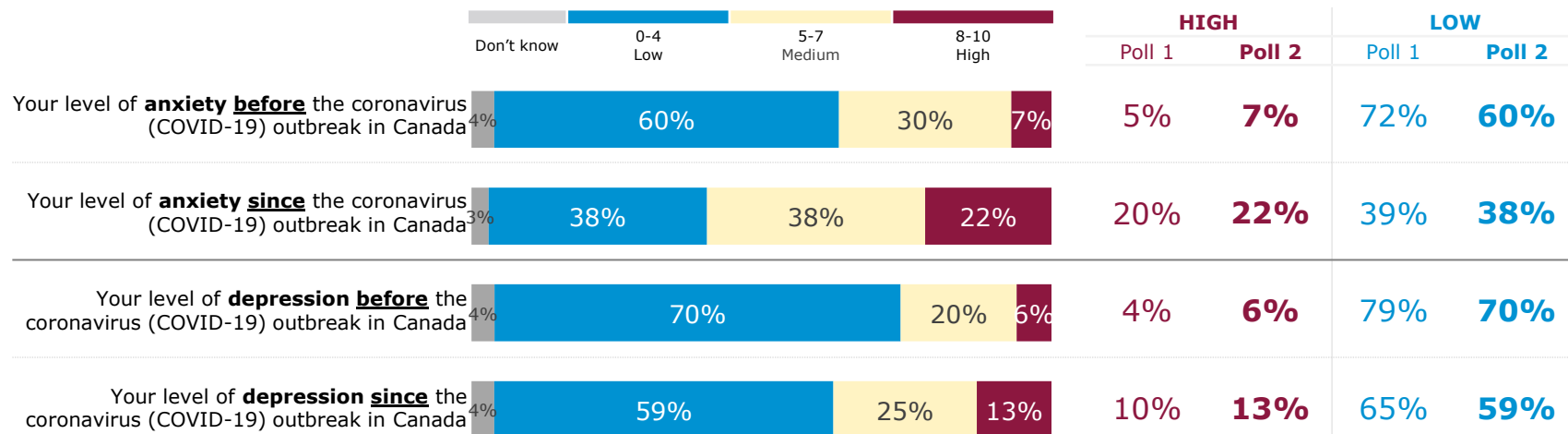
Base: (Those who received a diagnosis of anxiety, depression or another mood disorder N=1,962)

A1B. When did you/your family member receive the latest diagnosis of anxiety, depression or another mood disorder?

A1C. What, if anything, are you/your family member currently doing to treat the anxiety, depression or other mood disorder?

# Anxiety levels quadrupled following the COVID-19 outbreak and remain four times as high as pre outbreak levels

- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety increased (from 5% to 20%) and is still four times higher than before, with one-fifth (22%) saying their anxiety is high now, compared with only 7% prior to the outbreak.
- While few Canadians report a high level of depression, the proportion doubled following the COVID-19 outbreak and remains at this level with 1 in 10 (13%) Canadians reporting a high level, twice as many as before the outbreak (6%).
- **The removal of COVID-19 restrictions has not improved the rates of high levels of depression and anxiety, with levels being similar to that which was reported in April.**
- In looking at the anxiety level of teachers, 5% rated their anxiety before COVID at 8-10, but now 25% of teachers indicate a high (8-10) level of anxiety.
- **Post COVID anxiety (8-10):** Canadians with anxiety are more likely to be under 55 years old (18-34: 27%; 35-54: 25%; 55+: 16%) and to be women (27% vs. 15% of men).
- **Post COVID depression (8-10):** Canadians with depression are more likely to be under 55 years old (18-34: 17%; 35-54: 16%; 55+: 8%).

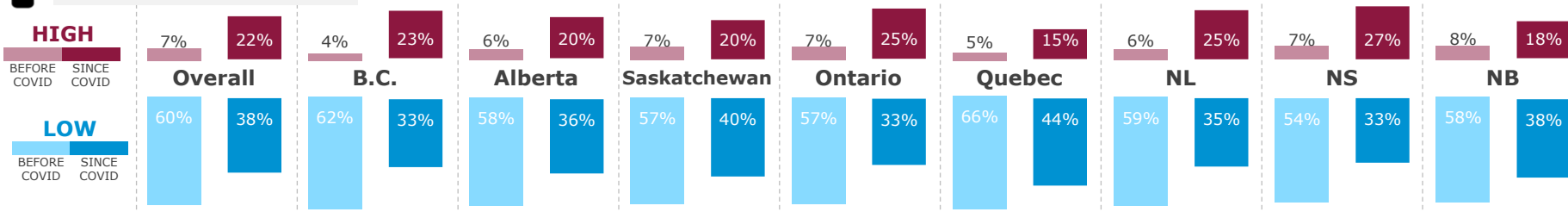


# Regionally, NS, NL and Ontario have the highest increase in anxiety levels since the COVID-19 outbreak

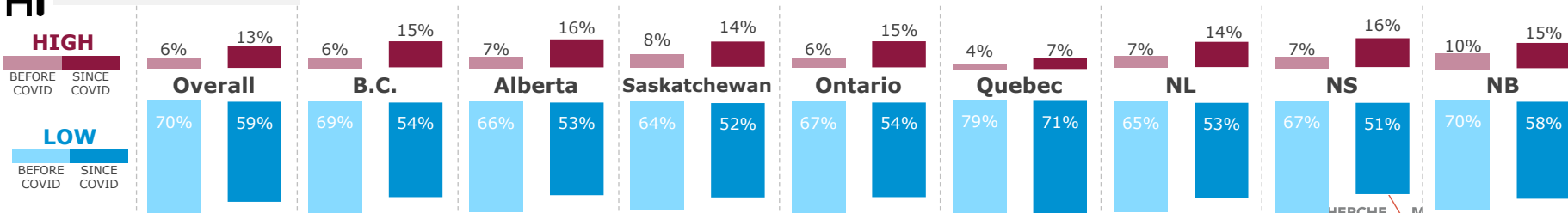
- Since the COVID-19 outbreak, high levels of anxiety are most prominent among NS, NL and ON residents.
- Likewise, high levels of depression are the most prominent in NS; the province sees one of highest increases in depression levels from pre to since-COVID (+9%). AB, BC and ON also see a similar (+9%) increase in depression levels from before the outbreak to now.



## ANXIETY DISORDER



## DEPRESSION



# Canadians with high levels of depression or anxiety are likely to be classified as moderate or severe using the Kessler 10 test

- A majority of Canadians who indicate that they have high levels of depression or anxiety since COVID-19 are likely to be classified as moderate (21%) to severe (42%), using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10).
- Only one-fifth (21%) of those who feel they have a high level of anxiety or depression are likely to be classified as having no mental health condition.

## Psychological Distress 1-5 Point Scale Items\*

	NONE OF THE TIME 1 point	A LITTLE OF THE TIME 2 points	SOME OF THE TIME 3 points	MOST OF THE TIME 4 points	ALL OF THE TIME 5 points	
					(All/Most)	(None/Little)
Tired out for no good reason					<b>44%</b>	<b>21%</b>
That everything was an effort					<b>41%</b>	<b>33%</b>
Nervous					<b>37%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Depressed					<b>33%</b>	<b>33%</b>
Restless or fidgety					<b>28%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Hopeless					<b>26%</b>	<b>45%</b>
Worthless					<b>25%</b>	<b>57%</b>
So sad that nothing could cheer you up					<b>20%</b>	<b>52%</b>
So restless you could not sit still					<b>14%</b>	<b>59%</b>
So nervous that nothing could calm you down					<b>13%</b>	<b>60%</b>



## Mental health score

<b>21%</b>	Likely to have <b>no mental</b> health disorder (10-20)
<b>16%</b>	Likely to have a <b>mild</b> mental disorder (20-24)
<b>21%</b>	Likely to have <b>moderate</b> mental disorder (25-29)
<b>42%</b>	Likely to have <b>severe</b> mental disorder (30-50)

Canadians most likely to be classified with a severe mental disorder include:

- Males (49% vs. 37% females)
- Younger (18-34: 52%) compared with older (35-54: 38%; 55+: 33%)
- Canadians living alone (56% vs. 37%)

A2B. In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel...: Base: (Those who have high levels of depression or anxiety since COVID N=350)

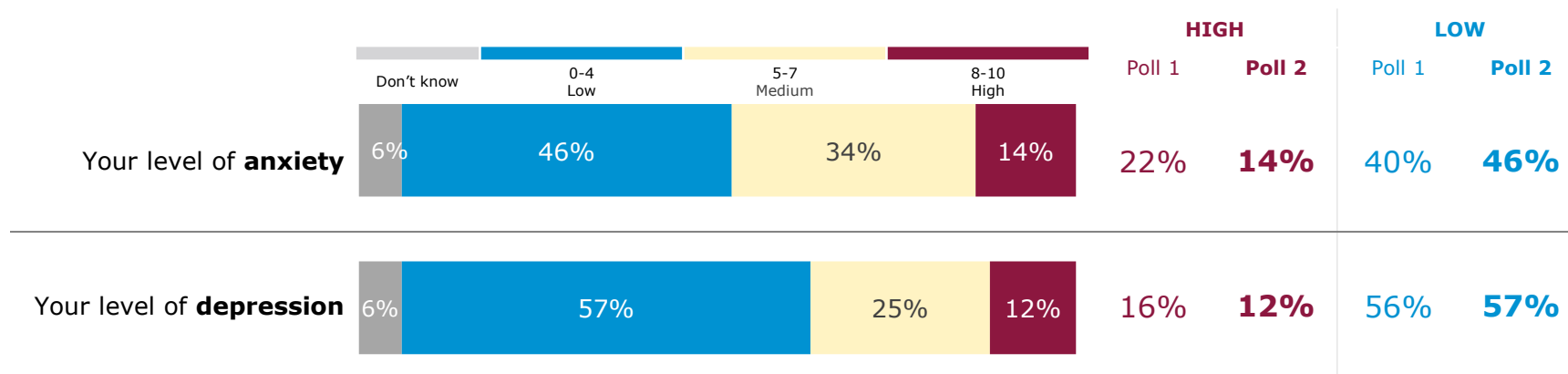
\* Based on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale – for full data see Appendix



# Canadians are now more optimistic about their mental health if isolation continues

- Following the outbreak, one-fifth (22%) of Canadians expected their anxiety levels to be high after two months of isolation. Several months into the pandemic, only 14% (a decrease of 8% from Poll 1) expect that after two more months of isolation their anxiety levels will be high.
- And only 1 in 10 Canadians (12%) expect to have high levels of depression if isolated for two more months, a small decrease of 4% since Poll 1.
- Canadians under 55 years old (18-34: 19%; 35-54: 16%; 55+: 10%) are more likely to have an expectation of increased anxiety if they must isolate for another two months.
- Teachers are more likely to feel their anxiety level will be high (rated 8-10) if the isolation last another 2 months (22%).

## IF SOCIAL ISOLATION CONTINUES FOR 2 MORE MONTHS, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT...

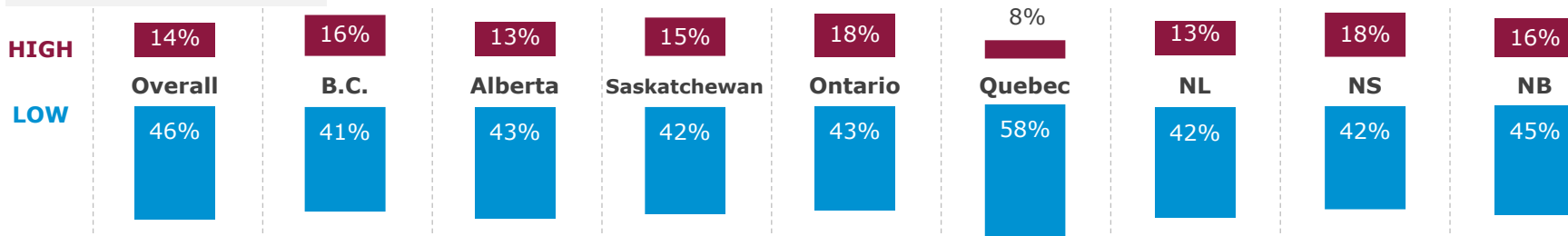


# Regionally, NS and ON residents are most likely to expect their anxiety and depression levels to be high if isolation measures continue for two more months

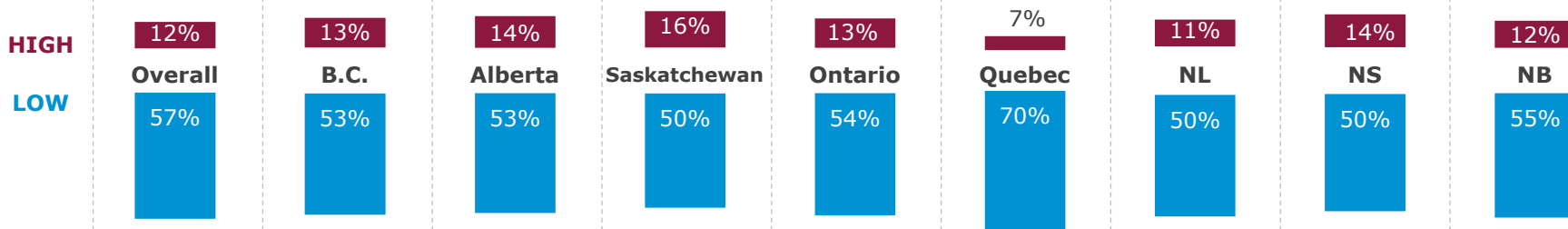
- NS and ON residents are most likely to expect that their anxiety levels will be high if there are two more months of isolation. When it comes to depression levels, SK, NS and Alberta residents expect high levels of depression if isolation measures were to continue for two more months. Quebecers are least likely to expect high levels of anxiety or depression.



## ANXIETY DISORDER



## DEPRESSION



A2C. And, using the scale below... if COVID-19 – and the associated government guidelines and laws (ex. social distancing, social bubbles/circles, masks, quarantines, etc.) – remains in your province for 2 more months... what do you expect the following to be? Base: (Total N=4,010)



# Impacts on Mental Health

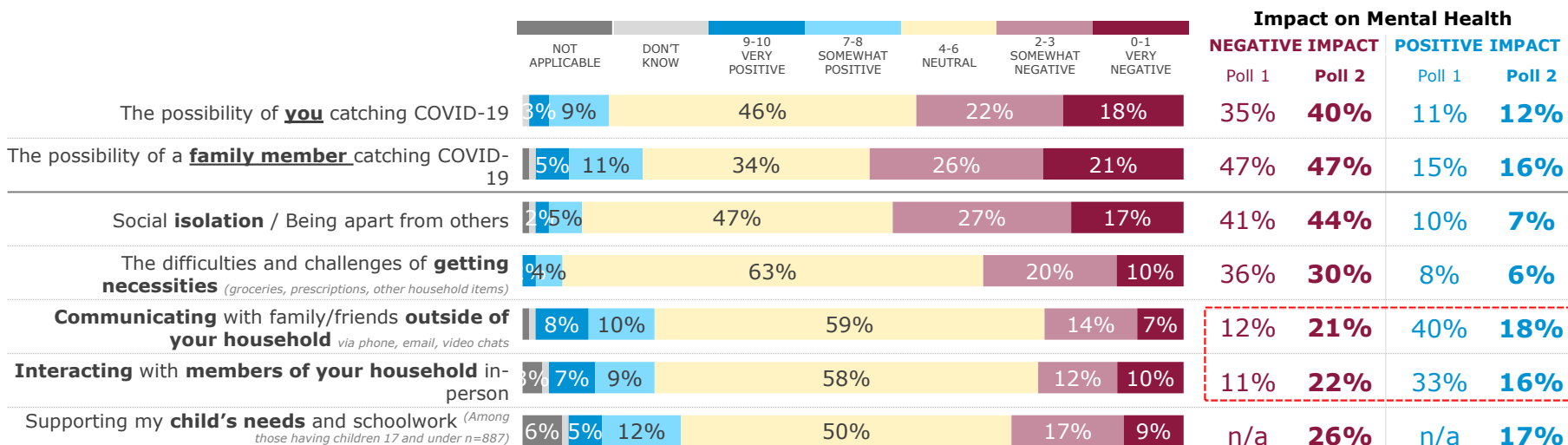
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# Fear of the spread of COVID-19 and social isolation continues to have a negative impact on mental health, while positive social supports are beginning to deteriorate

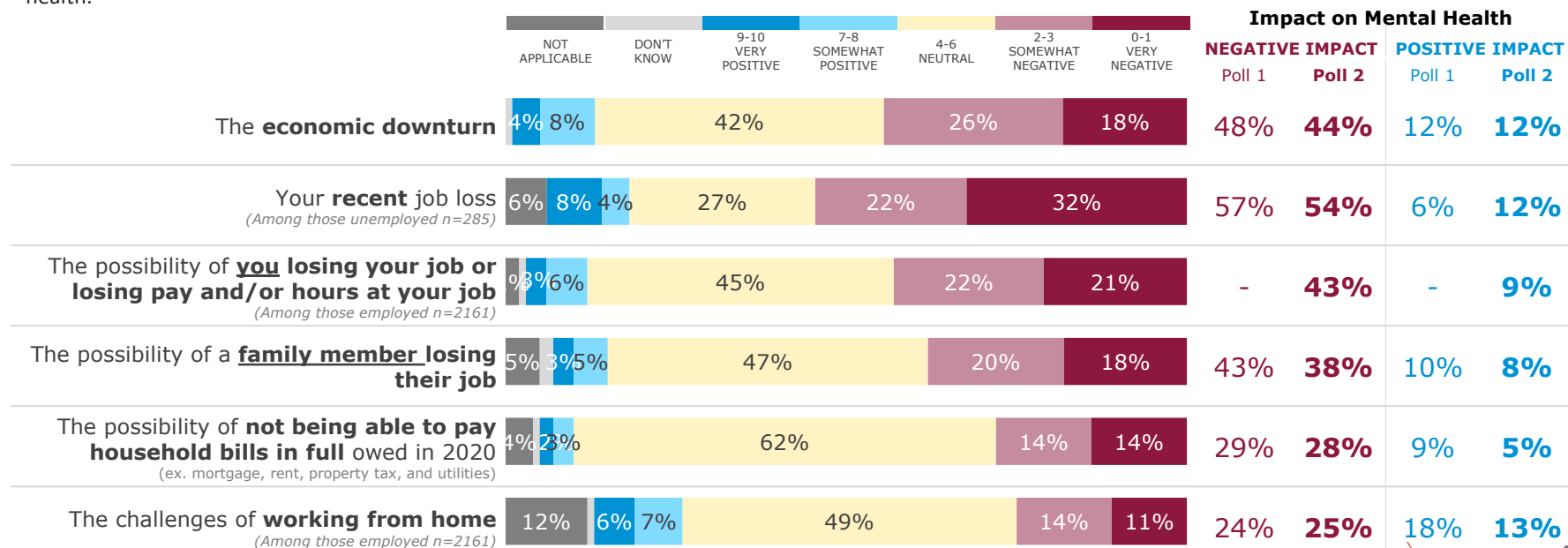
- Two-fifths (40%) of Canadians say concern about contracting COVID-19 is having a negative impact on their health (a marginal increase of 5%) while close to half (47%) remain concerned about a family member contracting COVID-19.
- In the early stages of the outbreak, Canadians reported that communication with friends/family outside and inside the home had a positive impact on mental health, but now one-fifth (21% and 22%, respectively) report such interactions as having a negative impact.
- The only indicator that is having less of a negative impact on mental health is the challenge of getting necessities (36% to 30%).
- One-half of the healthcare frontline workers are worried about catching COVID-19 (50%) and feel a much stronger negative impact on their mental health when it comes to supporting their child's needs and schoolwork (43%), interacting with family members (26%), and communicating with friends and family outside their home (31%).
- More than two-fifths (44%) of teachers are concerned about catching COVID-19 and one-half (50%) feel the negative impact of social isolation on their mental health.



A3A. During the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any: Base: (Total N=4,010)

# The economic downturn and job loss continue to have a negative impact on mental health for many Canadians but economic stress may be easing for some

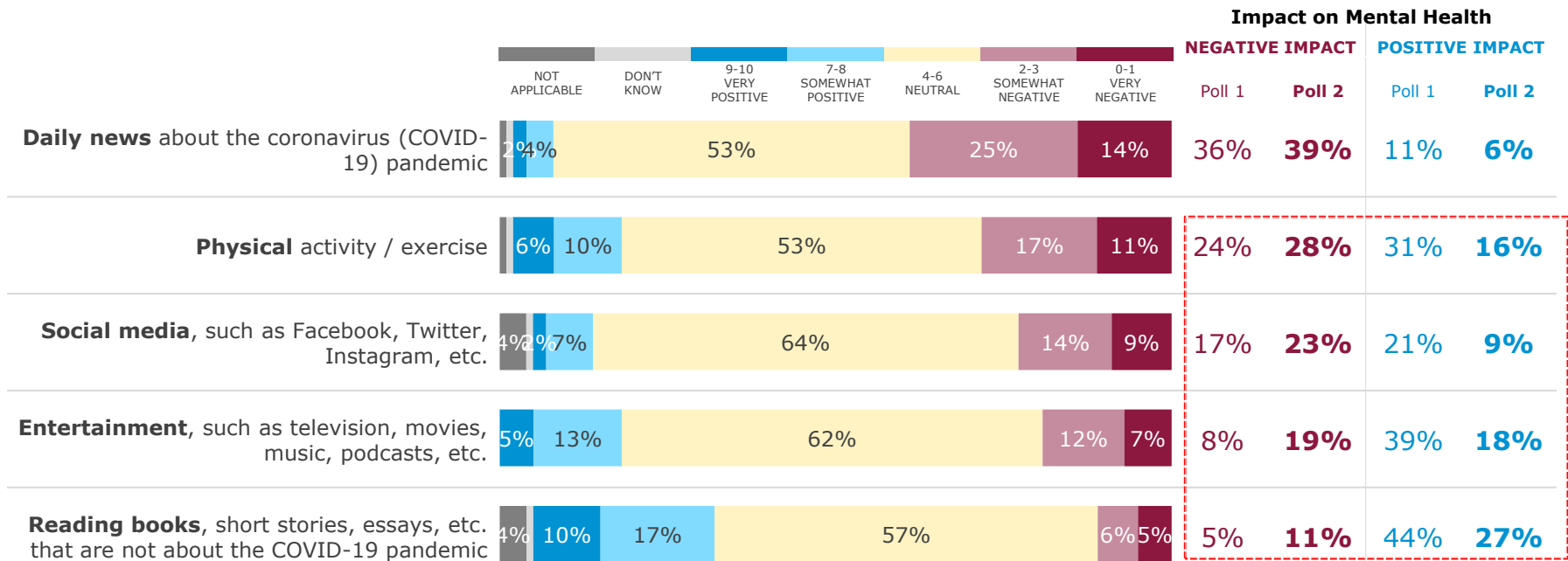
- Two-fifths (44%) of Canadians say that the economic downturn is having a negative impact on their mental health, a small decrease from Poll 1 (4%). Two-fifths (43%) also say that the possibility of a family member losing their job is affecting their mental health (a small decrease of 5%).
- More than half (54%) of those who experienced job loss continue to say that it is having an impact on their mental health (down by 3%).
- Similar to Poll 1, only a quarter of Canadians say that the possibility of not paying bills (28%) or working from home (25%) is having a negative impact on mental health.



A3A. During the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any:  
Base: (Total N=4,010)

# The positive impact of activities on mental health reported early in the outbreak is deteriorating as Canadians increasingly find these activities now have a negative impact

- Two-fifths (39%) of Canadians continue to say that daily news about the coronavirus is having a negative impact on their mental health, up by 3% since Poll 1.
- The initial positive impact of daily activities on mental health has shifted significantly since Poll 1 and the proportion of Canadians reporting that physical activity (+4 negative impact), social media (+6), entertainment (+11) or reading books (+6) as having a positive impact on mental health has decreased by half in Poll 2.

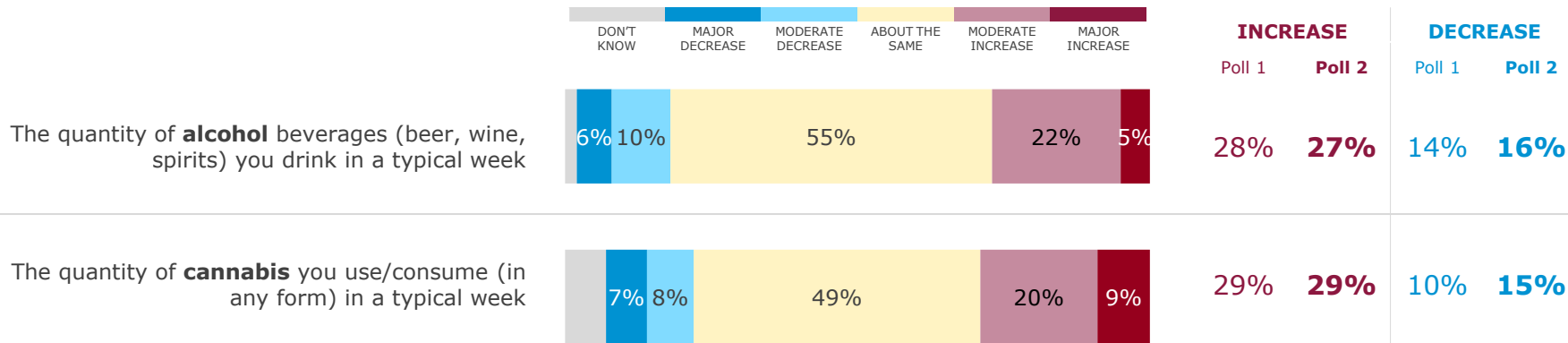


A3A. During the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any: Base: (Total N=4,010)



# The weekly increase in alcohol and cannabis consumption that followed the outbreak is remaining steady

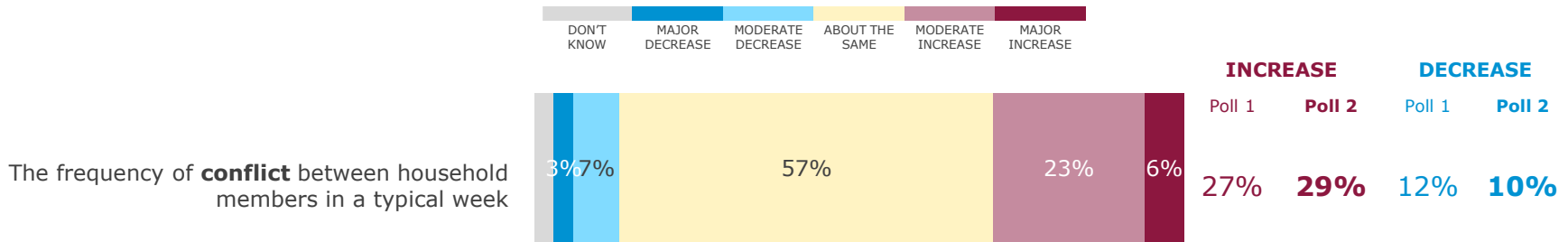
- One-quarter (27%) of Canadians who consume alcohol say their consumption has increased since the COVID-19 outbreak. This has remained steady since Poll 1 in April.
- While the proportion of respondents who indicated an increase in their cannabis consumption has remained steady compared to Poll 1, more people are now saying they have decreased this consumption compared to what was seen in April (15% vs. 10% in April).
- **Alcohol consumption:** Canadians under 55 years old (18-34: 31%; 35-54: 28%; 55+: 23%), employed (30% vs. 23%) and with children in the household (< 9 years: 37%; 9-17 years: 35%; none: 24%) are more likely to indicate increases in alcohol consumption.
- Indications of increased alcohol consumption are also more likely among those indicating higher levels of anxiety (7-8 rating: 35%; 9-10 rating: 40%) and depression (7-8 rating: 36%; 9-10 rating: 47%).
- Over one-third of teachers say their alcohol (36%) and cannabis (36%) consumption has increased since the outbreak.



A4. Since the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, have the following increased, decreased or stayed the same in your life? Base: (Total N=4,010)

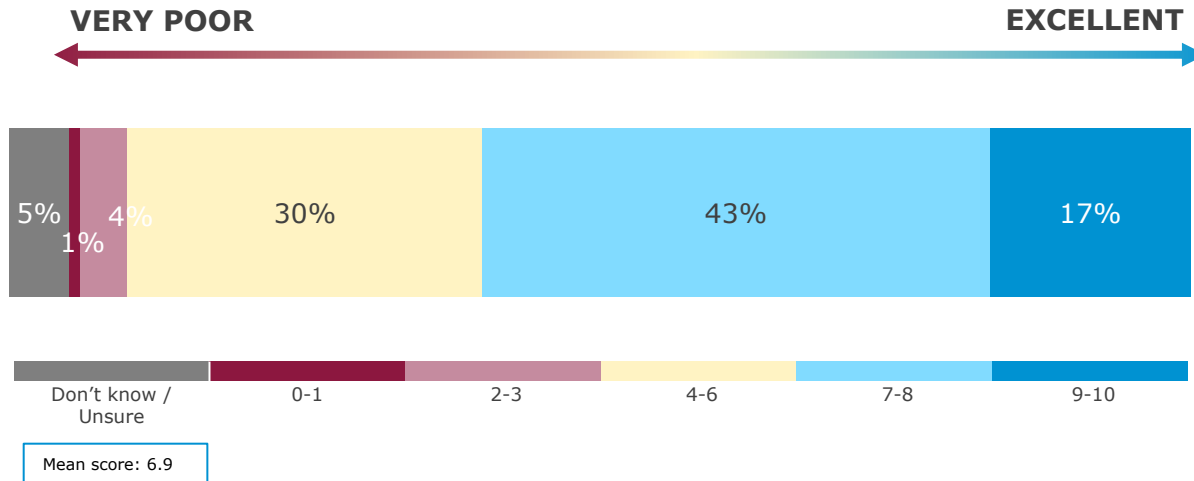
# The weekly increase in household conflict that followed the outbreak is remaining steady

- Almost 3 in 10 (29%) Canadians indicate an increase in the conflict between members of their household since the COVID-19 outbreak. This is similar to results seen in Poll 1 (27%).
- Canadians 18-34 years old (18-34: 39%; 35-54: 30%; 55+: 19%) and with children in the household (< 9 years: 35%; 9-17 years: 30%; none: 27%) are more likely to report increases in household conflict.
- As well, household conflict is more likely among those indicating higher levels of anxiety (7-8 rating: 38%; 9-10 rating: 57%) and depression (7-8 rating: 43%; 9-10 rating: 54%).



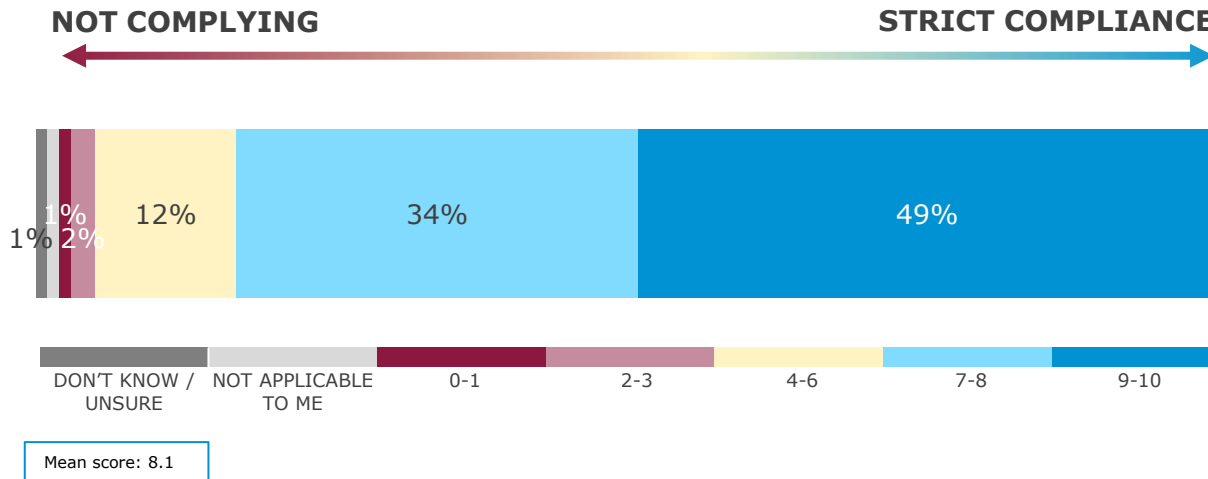
# Canadians are feeling somewhat confident about their ability to recover from the challenges presented by COVID-19

- While three-fifths of Canadians feel somewhat confident about their ability to bounce back from the challenges in life (60% rate this 7 to 10), less than one-fifth are feeling very confident (17% rating this a 9 or 10) and only 8% give their ability to do so a full 10 out of 10.
- Canadians in the Atlantic region (20% with a 9-10 rating – above average) and Quebec (23% with a 9-10 rating) are feeling most confident about their ability to bounce back, while those in Ontario (14% with a 9-10 rating) are feeling least confident.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of healthcare frontline workers feel at least somewhat confident in their ability to bounce back from difficulties, with one-fourth (25%) rating it as excellent.
- One-half (53%) of teachers feel they are able to bounce back from difficulties, but are more likely to score 7-8 (46%) than 9-10 (7%).



# Canadians are in compliance with the government's COVID-19 restrictions

- Most Canadians are complying with the government's guidelines and laws, with half (49%) indicating a strict level of compliance (9-10) and another third (34%) reporting a high level of compliance (7-8 on the scale). Very few (less than 5%) are not complying with restrictions.
- Women are more likely than men to indicate that they are compliant (mean of 8.3 compared with 7.9).\*
- Canadians in Ontario (7-8 rating: 30%; 9-10 rating: 55% - above average) and the Prairies (7-8 rating: 41%; 9-10 rating: 39%) are more likely to report that they are compliant compared with other regions and provinces.



A5. How well are you complying with government COVID-19 guidelines and laws (social distancing, social bubbles/circles, masks, quarantines, etc.) in your area?

\* Mean used because women more likely to rate 9-10 but men more likely to rate 7-8 | Base: (Total N=4,010)



# Mental Health Supports

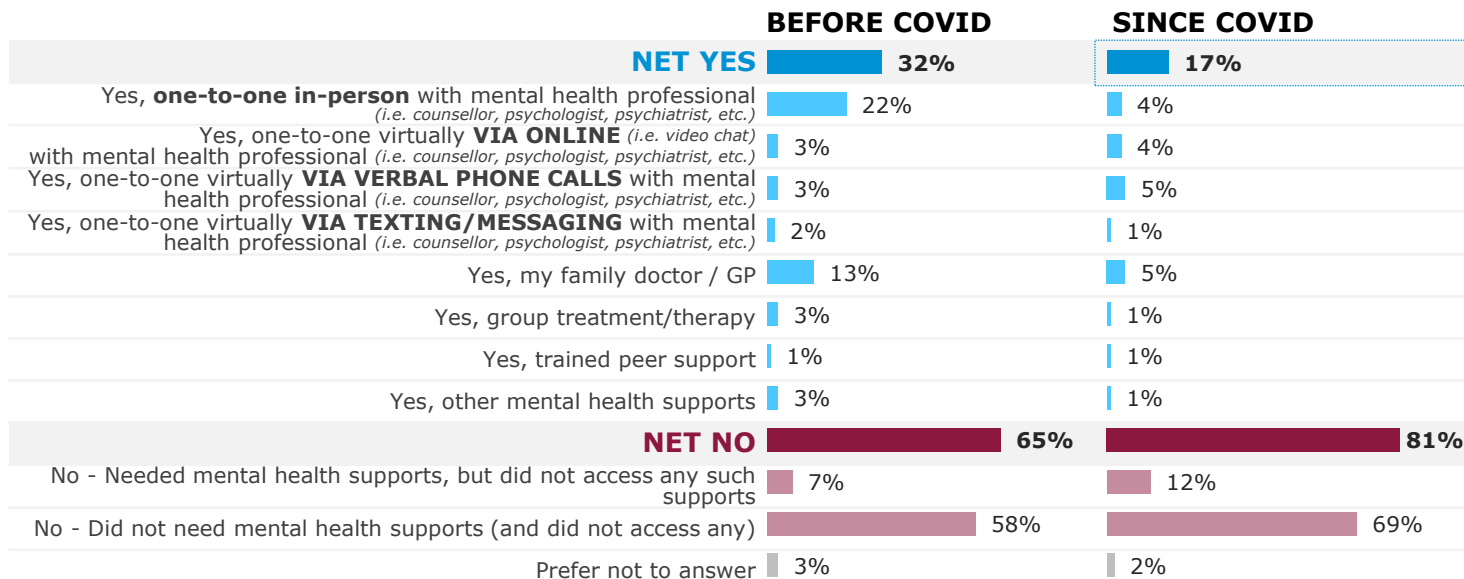
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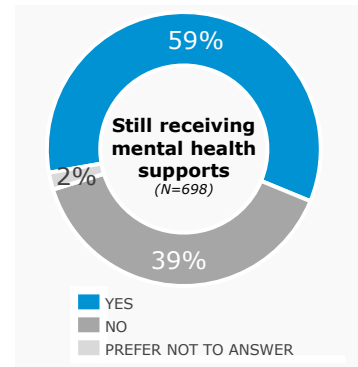
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# Since COVID-19, the number of Canadians accessing mental health supports has decreased significantly

- Before COVID-19, one-third (32%) of Canadians had mental health support from a healthcare professional. Since the outbreak, less than one-fifth (17%) are accessing these supports. While incidence of accessing support is higher among those reporting high levels of depression or anxiety since COVID-19, still less than one-half of this group have done so (high depression 43%, high anxiety 39%).
- Fewer Canadians have been able to access in-person supports since COVID (from 22% to only 4%) and few (less than 5%) are using online resources either before or after the outbreak.
- Before the outbreak, 39% of frontline healthcare workers accessed mental health supports, which has reduced to 32% since the outbreak. Among teachers as well the access to supports has reduced; 28% to 18% since the outbreak. However the extent of support received is higher than the average.



A majority of those receiving mental health support before COVID still have support but two-fifths do not



B1. BEFORE the outbreak of the coronavirus in Canada, have you ever had mental health support from any health care professionals? Base: (Total N=4,010)

B3. SINCE the outbreak of the coronavirus in Canada, have you had any support from any mental health professionals? Base: (Total N=4,010)

B4. Are you currently still receiving these mental health supports? Base: (Those who received mental health supports since COVID N=698)





**Lesli Martin, Vice President, Pollara**  
**Michael Cooper, Director, MHRC**

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