



# Mental Health During COVID-19 Outbreak: Poll #4 of 13 in a Series (Mid-December Data Collection)

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December 2020

# Methodology

**Methodology:** This online survey was conducted among a sample of 2,761 adult Canadians, including an oversample of 500 surveys with residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. This was the fourth poll of this study (see below). Results between the polls are compared where applicable.

**Weighting:** National results have been weighted by the most current census data in terms of gender, age, & region to ensure the total sample is representative of the population as a whole

Region	Number of Interviews	Margin of error	Number of Interviews	Margin of error	Number of Interviews	Margin of error	Number of Interviews	Margin of error
	Poll One April 22 to 28, 2020		Poll Two August 21 to 31, 2020		Poll Three October 22 to 28, 2020		Poll Four December 10 to 18, 2020	
<b>National</b>	<b>1,803</b>	<b>±2.3%</b>	<b>4,010</b>	<b>±1.5%</b>	<b>2,004</b>	<b>±2.2%</b>	<b>2761</b>	<b>±1.9%</b>
<b>British Columbia</b>	251	±6.2%	275	±5.9%	271	±6.0%	270	±6.0%
<b>Alberta</b>	252	±6.2%	273	±5.9%	270	±6.0%	271	±6.0%
<b>Prairies</b>	200	±6.9%	701	±3.7%	231	±6.5%	250	±6.2%
<b>Ontario</b>	701	±3.7%	826	±3.4%	801	±3.5%	803	±3.5%
<b>Quebec</b>	300	±5.6%	394	±4.9%	356	±5.2%	359	±5.2%
<b>Atlantic Canada</b>	99	±9.8%	1541	±2.5%	75	±11.3%	808	±3.5%

**Table 1. Poll Sample Size, Margin of Error and Field Dates, Overall and by Province**

## Summary of Major Findings

- We found the **highest rate yet in the number of people indicating a high level of anxiety (23%) and depression (15%)** - above the rates at the peak of the 1<sup>st</sup> wave.
- **Frontline healthcare workers report high levels of anxiety, high levels of a diagnosis of anxiety**, as well as high levels of accessing treatment for anxiety and high levels of resiliency in overcoming those challenges.
- **75% of Canadians indicate they would be getting the vaccine.** Those who are more concerned or will not get the vaccine indicate a higher degree of anxiety and depression overall.
- **Social isolation and working from home are having more of a negative impact** on mental health as the pandemic continues and guidelines restricting movement are in place.
- Since COVID **Canadians feel they are not handling stress and aspects of their mental health as well as before COVID**, but most are optimistic that they will recover once the pandemic is over. **65% of Canadians indicate they remain highly resilient to challenges like COVID-19.**





## Key Findings

- Anxiety and depression remain high
- Fear of contracting virus continues to negatively impact mental health
- Positive mental health supports continue to be less impactful

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# Anxiety and depression remains high

- **The COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions led to an increase in both anxiety and depression and as time continues, this has not lessened.** In Poll 1, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety quadrupled while depression doubled following the start of the outbreak and has not moved in a significant way since. That said, in Poll 4, we had the highest number of people reporting high anxiety and especially depression since this our first poll. This is likely a result of both Covid19 stress and expected mood changes with the onset of winter.
- **Anticipated levels** of anxiety and depression if the lockdown continues another two months remain stable. While in Poll 3 at the beginning of the second wave, anticipated levels of anxiety and depression showed a small increase, the levels decreased slightly in Poll 4 and are again at Poll 2 levels.
- **Levels of anxiety and depression are serious.** The majority of Canadians who report high levels of anxiety and/or depression are likely to be classified as moderate to severe on the Kessler Scale.
- Adding to mental health concerns, over half of Canadians felt they handled stress, anxiety and depression well before the pandemic and this is now down to only a third who say that they handle stress well since the onset of the pandemic.
- A majority of Canadians diagnosed with a mood disorder are receiving some form of treatment. Prescription medication is the **most common treatment** reported (by over half). And over one-quarter are receiving therapy administered by a professional.
- **Months into the pandemic Canadians are still not accessing mental health supports at the same rate as before the pandemic.** Not only are they less likely to be getting in-person support from a mental health professional, they are also less likely to be speaking to their family doctor.

# Fear of contracting virus continues to negatively impact mental health

- In Poll 1, a **third of Canadians** reported that they fear that they may catch COVID was having a negative impact on mental health. In Poll 2 this increased slightly to **two fifths** and remains stable through to Poll 4.
- Canadians remain more concerned about family members, with half reporting that the concern for family continues to have a negative impact on their mental health.
- **Social isolation** continues to have a negative impact on mental health for half of Canadians, increasing slightly in Poll 4 (+3) to become a leading negative impact on mental health.
- Poll 2 saw a deterioration of social support through family and friends. This Poll shows that these levels have remained stable – while there has not been a further decline, positive impacts of communication with family and friends has not returned to Poll 1 levels.
- The **negative impact of the economic downturn decreased slightly** in Poll 4 (-3, 41%). Fewer Canadians say that concern about paying bills (-4, 27%) is having a negative affect on mental health and even those who have lost their job do not find it as stressful (-7, 47%).
- However, **working from home is now having far more of a negative impact on mental health** than in previous Polls. A third of Canadians working from home say it is stressful, up from a fifth.

# Positive mental health supports continue to be less impactful

- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, Canadians reported that physical activity and engaging in reading and entertainment was having a positive impact on their mental health. By Poll 2, **the positive aspects of these activities had declined**, and continue at the same levels in Poll 4.
- **The negativity of daily news about coronavirus has continued its upward trend**, with the number who say it has a negative impact on their mental health increasing by a total of +9 (to 45%) since Poll 1.
- **Canadians continue to follow the rules and regulations required to limit the spread of the virus**, with three-quarters saying they monitor the guidelines and do what is expected. Of those who do not, most say they monitor the guidelines, but do what they think is reasonable.





## Results in Detail

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# Anxiety and Depression in the COVID-19 Outbreak

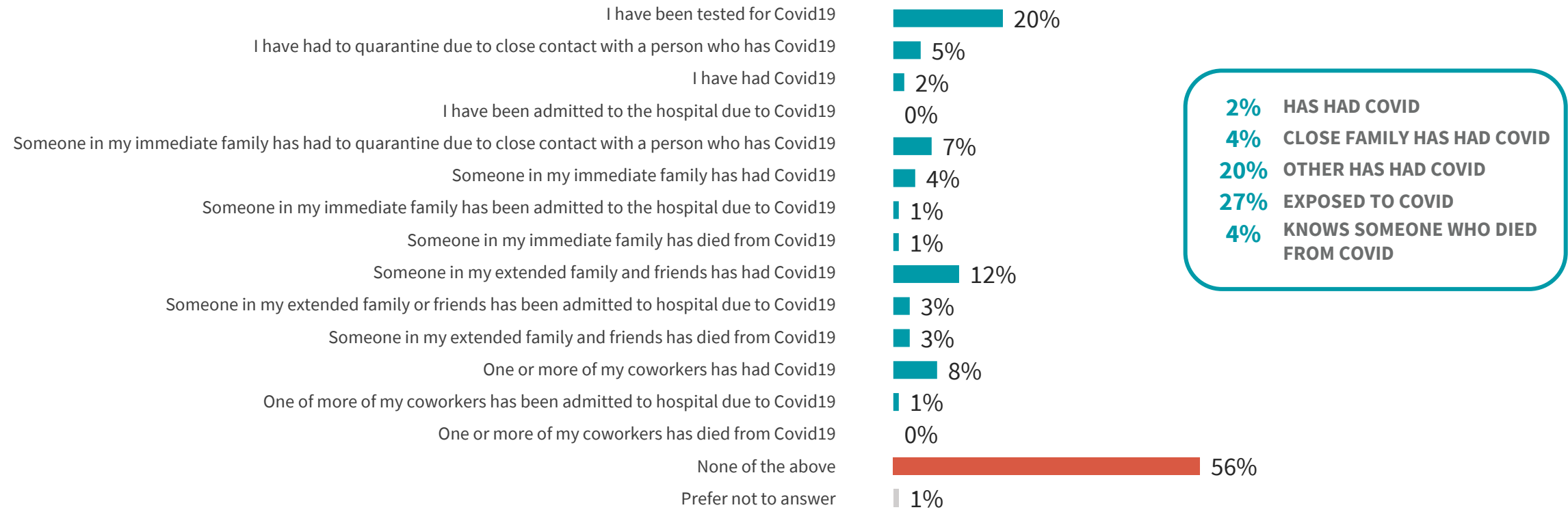
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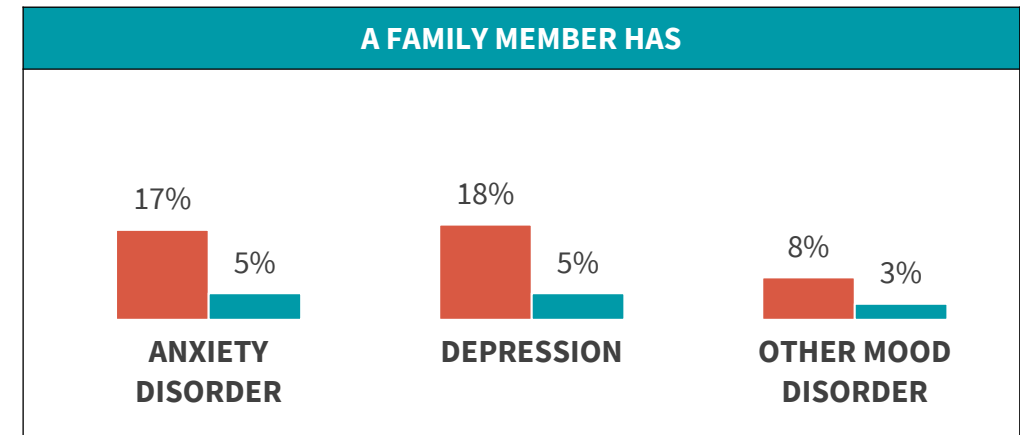
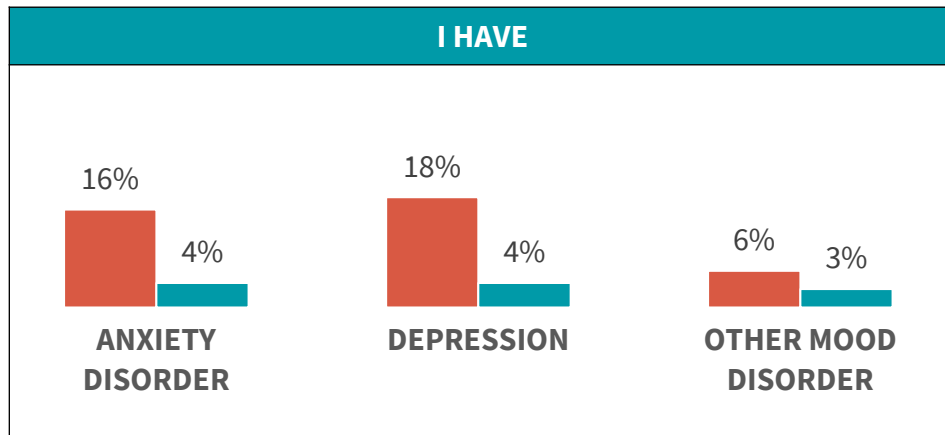
# COVID-19 exposure in the Canadian population

- Just over half of Canadians (56%) have not been exposed or connected to someone infected with COVID-19 and just over a quarter (27%) have been exposed to COVID because someone close to them has contracted the illness.
- Younger Canadians (18 to 34) are more likely to have been affected by COVID-19 (53%), compared to 46% of 35-54 year olds and 35% of those 55 and older.



# One in four Canadians has been diagnosed with anxiety or depression (1/2)

- Over a fifth of Canadians have dealt with a personal or family diagnosis of anxiety (20% personal, 22% family) or depression (22% personal, 23% family).
- Other mood disorders are less common, with 9% having a personal diagnosis, and 11% a diagnosis in their family.
- In total, a third of Canadians are diagnosed with anxiety (32%) or depression (34%) either themselves or in their family, and 17% with another mood disorder.



Base: (Total N=2,761)

A1. Have you ever, either before the Covid-19 outbreak or since it, received a diagnosis from a healthcare professional stating that you are affected by any of the following:



# Younger Canadians and frontline healthcare workers among most vulnerable to mood disorders (2/2)

- Canadians most likely to be diagnosed with **anxiety**:
  - Females (37% vs. 26% of males)
  - Younger (18-34: 41%; 35-54: 36%) compared to older (55+: 22%)
  - Parents with children in the home (0-8 years: 42%; 9-17: 41%; None: 29%)
  - Atlantic provinces (37%); and Ontario (35%)
  - Frontline healthcare workers (47%)
- Canadians most likely to be diagnosed with **depression**:
  - Females (38% vs. 30% of males)
  - Younger (18-34: 41%) compared to older (55+: 28%)
  - Parents with children under 9 years in the home (39% vs. 33% with no children)
  - Atlantic provinces (39%); MB/SK (41%) and Ontario (38%)

TOTAL YES (Individuals + Family members)	
32%	ANXIETY
34%	DEPRESSION
17%	OTHER

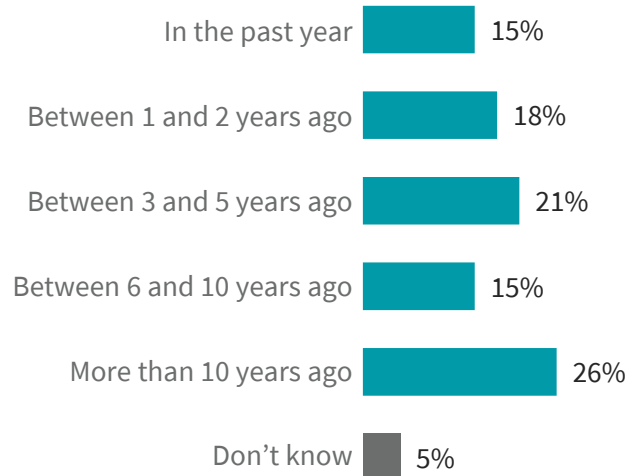
Base: (Total N=2,761)

A1. Have you ever, either before the Covid-19 outbreak or since it, received a diagnosis from a healthcare professional stating that you are affected by any of the following:

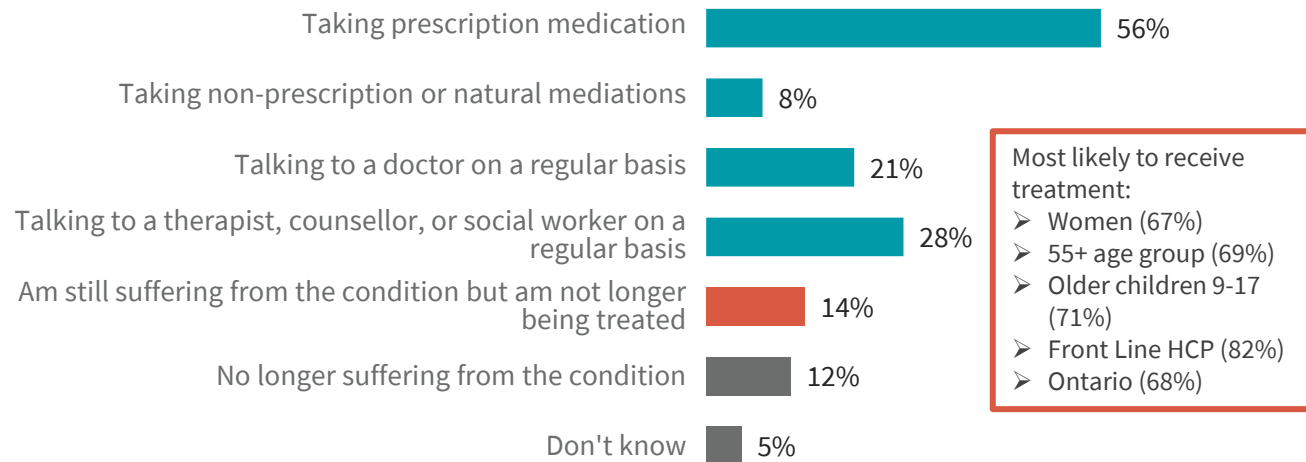
# Majority of Canadians with a mood disorder receive treatment; prescription medications most common

- **One third (33%)** of those who received a mental health diagnosis before Covid-19 received it in the past two years, with 15% receiving it in the past year.
- **Two-thirds (64%)** of those who have had a personal or family diagnosis are doing something to treat the condition, with prescription medication being most common (56%), and over one-quarter (28%) talking to a therapist. Canadians with benefits are significantly more likely to see a therapist (30% vs. 25%) – Benefits do not impact other forms of treatment.

## LENGTH OF TIME SINCE DIAGNOSIS



## TREATING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS: 64% Receiving treatment

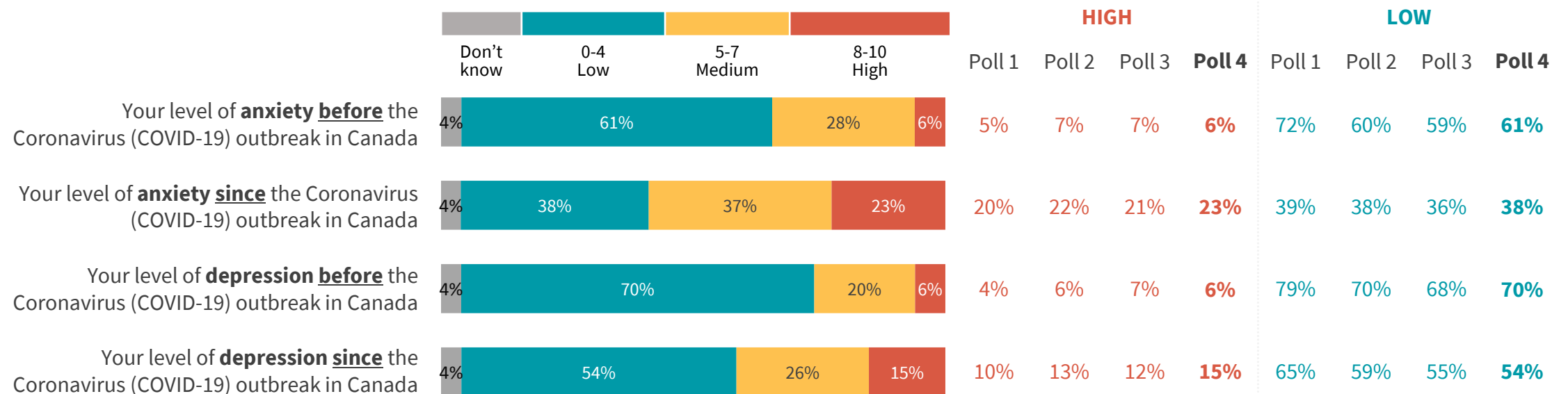


**A1C.** When did you/your family member receive the latest diagnosis of anxiety, depression or another mood disorder? Base: (Those who received diagnosis before COVID-19 n=1,019)

**A1D.** What, if anything, are you/your family member currently doing to treat the anxiety, depression or other mood disorder? (Base: Those who have received a diagnosis n=1,192)

# Anxiety levels continue to be four times as high as pre-outbreak levels

- Levels of anxiety and depression are not lessening as the pandemic continues, with levels being slightly higher than seen since the start.
- Similar to Poll 1, the proportion of Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety is four times pre COVID levels with a **quarter (23%) reporting that they have high anxiety**, up from 6% before the outbreak.
- The proportion of Canadians reporting high depression doubled following the COVID outbreak (from 4% to 10%) and by Poll 4 has increased to 15%, now more than double pre COVID estimates (6%).





# Frontline healthcare workers, younger Canadians and parents among the most vulnerable since COVID

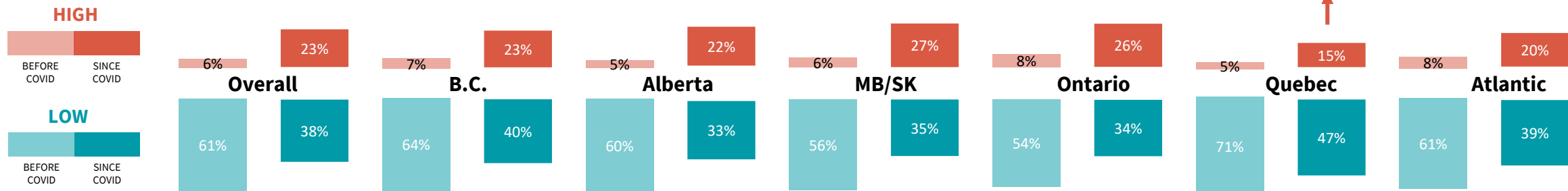
- Canadians most likely to rate **anxiety** high (8-10) since COVID:
  - Females (28% vs. 16% of males)
  - Younger (18-34: 30%; 35-54: 27%) compared to older (55+: 14%)
  - Parents with children in the home (0-8 years: 27%; 9-17: 31%) vs. none (21%)
  - Atlantic provinces (28%); Ontario (26%); and MB/SK (27%)
  - Front-line Healthcare workers (28%)
  - People who have been exposed to COVID (31% - even more so than people who have had a family member (26%) or someone else they know (25%) with COVID)
- Canadians most likely to rate **depression** high (8-10) since COVID:
  - Females (17% vs. 13% of males)
  - Younger (18-34: 20%; 35-54: 19%) compared to older (55+: 9%)
  - Parents with children in the home (under 9 years: 18%; 9-17: 25% vs. 14% with no children)
  - MB/SK (21%); and Alberta (17%)
  - Front-line Healthcare workers (22%)
  - Those who have been exposed to COVID (20% compared to those for whom COVID has had no impact (13%)).

Base: (Total N=2,761)

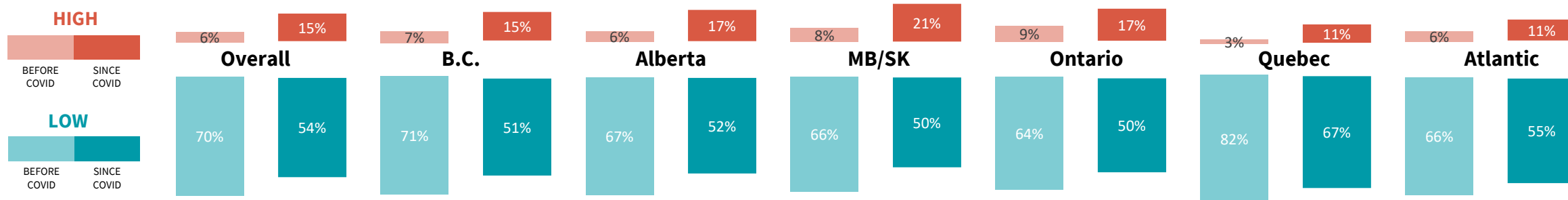
**A1.** Have you ever, either before the Covid-19 outbreak or since it, received a diagnosis from a healthcare professional stating that you are affected by any of the following:

# Levels of anxiety and depression since COVID-19 are similar across the country

## ANXIETY DISORDER



## DEPRESSION



# Two-thirds of Canadians reporting high depression/ anxiety levels as moderate or severe using the Kessler 10

- Two-thirds (62%) who rated their anxiety or depression high since COVID (rated 8-10) are likely to have a moderate (22%) or severe (40%) mental health disorder, while two-fifths are likely to have a mild (18%) or no (19%) mental health disorder.
- Among those who rate their anxiety or depression as moderate (rated 5-7), more than one-quarter (28%) are likely to have a moderate (14%) or severe (14%) mental health condition, while 21% are likely to have a mild mental health disorder and half are likely to have no mental health disorder (51%).
- Those who tend to monitor and follow COVID restrictions are more likely to have no mental disorder (44% vs. 37% who do what they feel is right), while those who do what they feel is right are more likely to have severe mental disorder (27% vs. 20% who follow).

Psychological Distress 1-5 Point Scale Items	(All/Most)	(None/Little)
Tired out for no good reason	29%	41%
Nervous	21%	43%
That everything was an effort	21%	53%
Depressed	19%	55%
Restless or fidgety	18%	55%
Hopeless	16%	64%
Worthless	14%	70%
So restless you could not sit still	10%	74%
So sad that nothing could cheer you up	10%	71%
So nervous that nothing could calm you down	8%	76%

## Mental Health Score (among Canadians with high anxiety or depression since COVID)

Poll 4	Poll 3	Poll 2	
19%	18%	21%	Likely to have <b>no mental</b> health disorder (<20)
18%	19%	16%	Likely to have a <b>mild</b> mental disorder (20-24)
22%	26%	21%	Likely to have <b>moderate</b> mental disorder (25-29)
40%	36%	42%	Likely to have <b>severe</b> mental disorder (30-50)



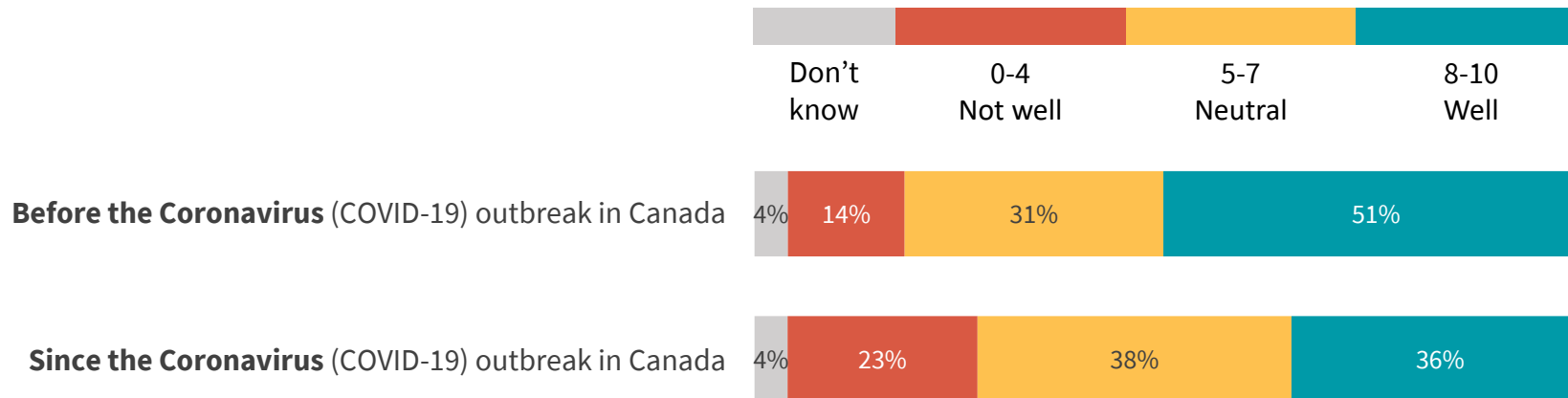
## Specific groups notably impacted by lockdown

- Following the outbreak, just over one-fifth (22%) of Canadians expected their anxiety levels (8-10) to be high after two months of isolation. Several months into the pandemic this decreased to 14% and **remains at this level in the current Poll (15%)**.
- The proportion who expect to have a high level of depression **remains on par with other polls at 14%**.
- Canadians **aged below 55** (18-34: 21%; 35-54: 19%; vs. 55+: 9%) are significantly more likely to have an expectation of increased anxiety if they must isolate for another two months. And younger Canadians (18-34) are also more likely to anticipate higher rates of depression (18-34: 23%; 35-54: 17%; 55+: 8%).
- **Canadians with children anticipate increased anxiety** (all parents with children 21%; vs. adults with no children 13%) **and depression** (parents with children (younger) 19% to (older) 20%; vs. adults with no children 14%).
- Those **who do not monitor guidelines or do what they think best** are more likely to anticipate higher anxiety (23% and 20% vs. 13% of those who do follow).
- While Frontline Healthcare workers were more likely to feel their anxiety and depression would increase in Poll 3, this was not the case in Poll 4, where results are similar to that of the general population (anxiety 18%, depression 19%). This suggests healthcare workers were anxious in anticipation of the growing 2<sup>nd</sup> wave.

# COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the management of stress/mental health

- Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, half (51%) of Canadians say they were doing well and managing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.
- Following the outbreak, the proportion of Canadians who say they are doing well and managing their mental health dropped to just over a third (36%) with close to a quarter (23%) reporting they are not doing well.

## MANAGED FEELINGS OF STRESS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION



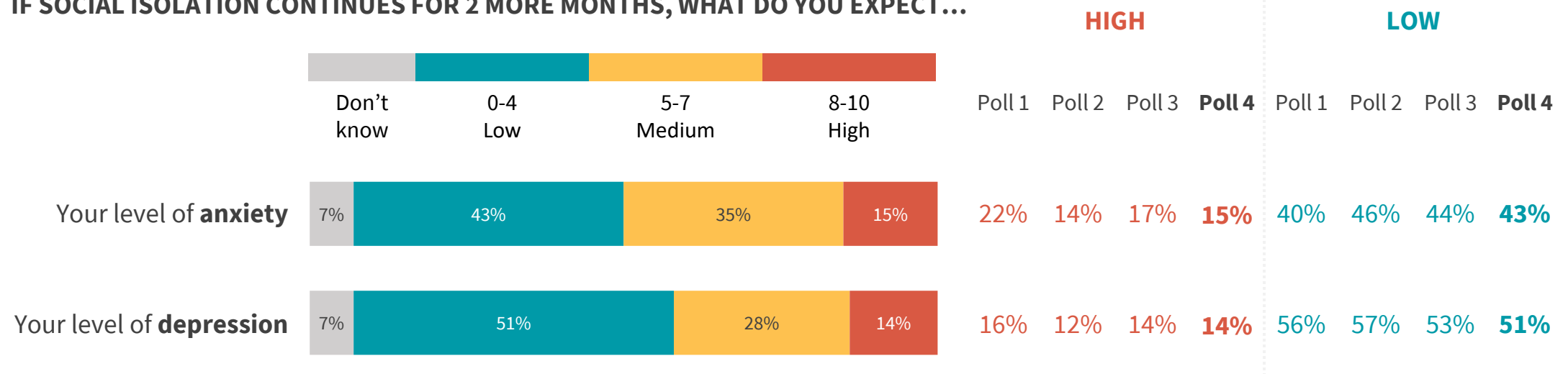
Most likely to handle stress well since COVID:

- Men (38% vs. 33% women)
- 55+ age group (49%)
- No children (38%)
- Front Line HC (35%)
- Have had no contact with COVID (self or someone they know) (40%).

# Canadians remain optimistic about their mental health if guidelines remain in place

- Following the COVID outbreak (Poll 1), a fifth (22%) of Canadians anticipated increased anxiety. By Poll 2 this dropped to 14% and remains at this level in Poll 4 (15%).
- Estimates of depression remains steady across all polls with 14% anticipating increased depression in Poll 4.

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

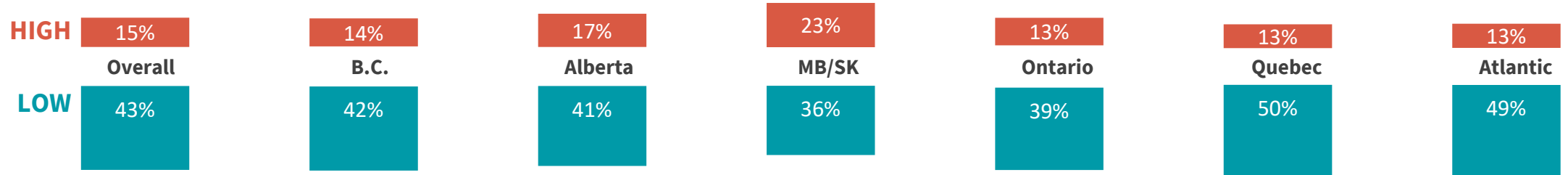


A2D. And, using the scale below... if COVID-19 – and the associated government guidelines and laws (ex. social distancing, social bubbles/circles, masks, quarantines, etc.) – remains in your province for 2 more months... what do you expect the following to be? Base: (Total N=2,761)

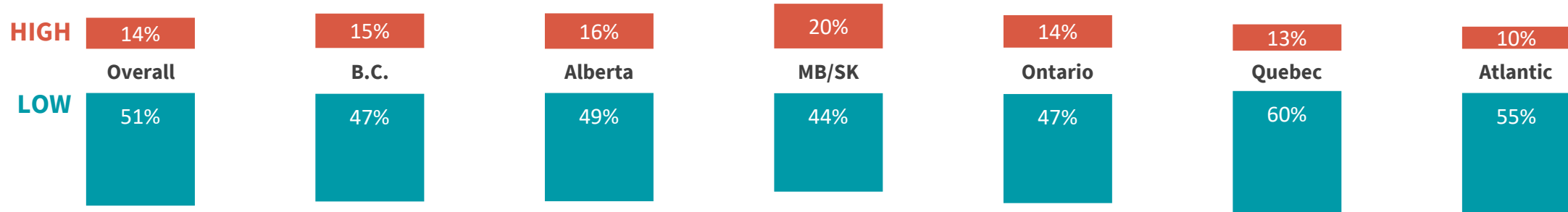
# MB/SK expect highest levels of anxiety and depression if social isolation continues



## ANXIETY DISORDER



## DEPRESSION



A2D. 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=2,761)



# What Is Impacting Mental Health

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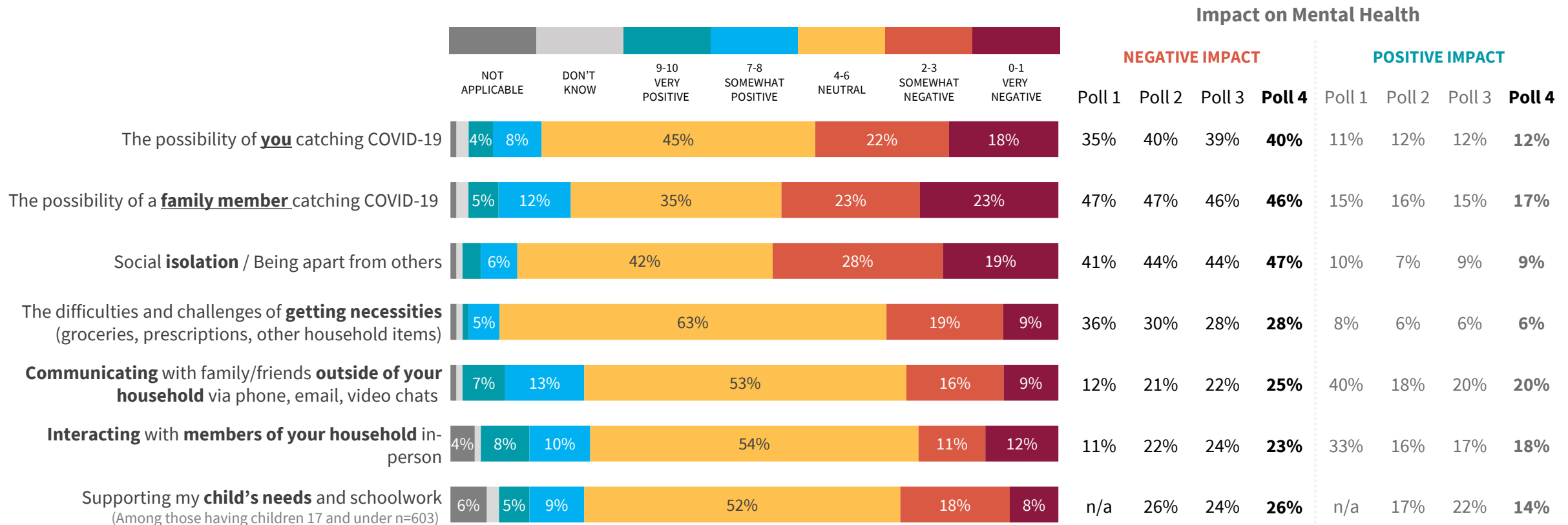
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# Fear of the spread of COVID-19 continues to have a negative impact on mental health

- **Two-fifths (40%) of Canadians say concerns about contracting COVID-19 is having a negative impact on their mental health** while close to half (46%) remain concerned about family members contracting COVID-19. Results are on par with Poll 3 findings.
- 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 Poll 2 saw an increase in **the negative impact of these interactions**. In Poll 4 just over one quarter (25%) say communication with those outside the home is having a negative impact, a small increase of 3%. And similarly, a quarter say that communication within the home is having a negative impact, similar to Poll 3.
- **Social isolation is now one of the leading stressors on mental health** with close to half (47%) reporting a negative impact, an increase of 3% since Poll 3 and 6% since the first Poll, a trend worth monitoring.
- In Poll 4, those who do not monitor guidelines closely but do what they think best are less concerned about themselves or a family members catching COVID (30% and 41%, respectively) than those who follow guidelines (43% and 48%). And this group is more likely to say that social isolation is having a negative impact (55% vs. 46% of guideline followers).
- Overall **women are more likely to say the pandemic is having a negative impact** including: Catching COVID (44%), a family member catching COVID (55%), social isolation(52%), and buying necessities (31%).

# In addition to the spread of COVID, social isolation is a leading factor in poor mental health

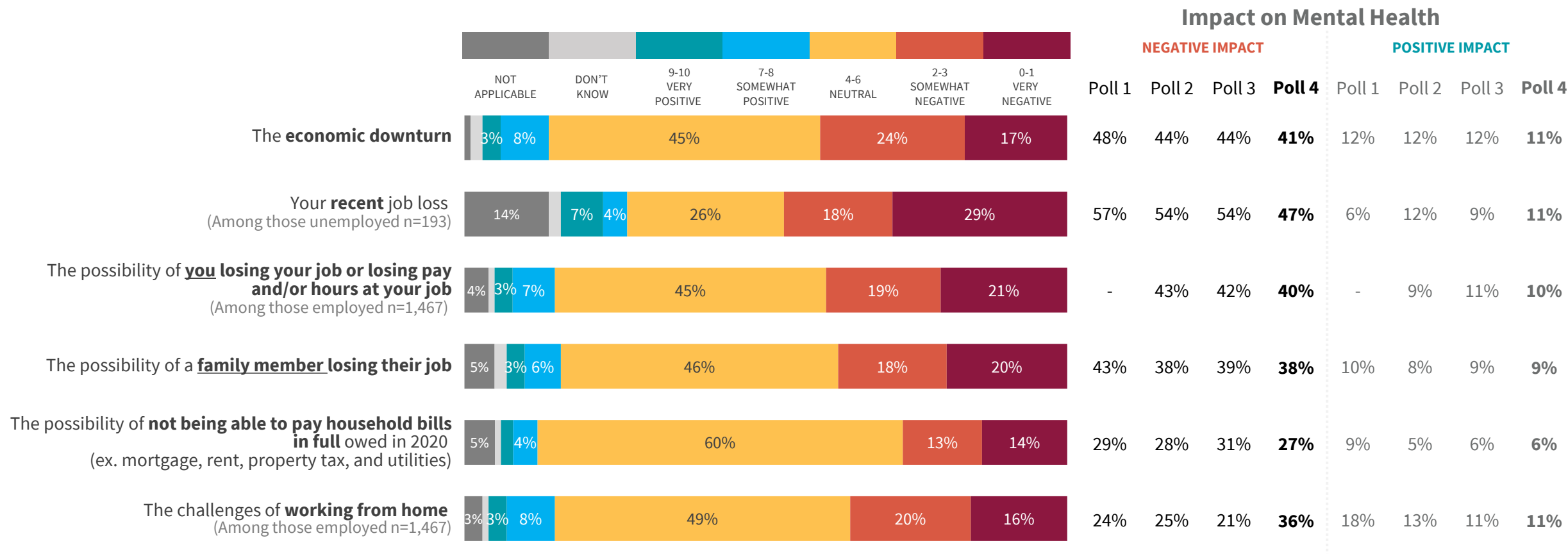


A3A. During the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any:  
Base: (Total N=2,761)

# Despite improvement, economic downturn and job loss continue to have a negative impact on mental health for many Canadians

- The negative impact of the financial situation decreased slightly between Poll 1 and 2. In Poll 4, the negative impact lessened slightly again across multiple economically related indicators.
- Two-fifths (41%) continue to feel that the economic downturn has had a negative impact on their mental health, down slightly (-3) since Poll 3. And less than half (47%) of unemployed Canadians say job loss is having a negative impact (down by -7 since Poll 3).
- The possibility of catching Covid19 (40%) or having a family member catch Covid19 (38%) is having a significantly negative impact on mental health. These findings have been consistent across all of our polls.
- The possibility of not being able to pay bills is having slightly less of a negative impact (27%, -4) compared with Poll 3 and is more in-line with the findings from Poll 1 and 2.
- The **negative impact on mental health as a result of working from home increased significantly** in Poll 4 to over a third (36%), up from a fifth (21%) in Poll 3.

# The challenge of working from home is having more of a negative impact on mental health as pandemic continues



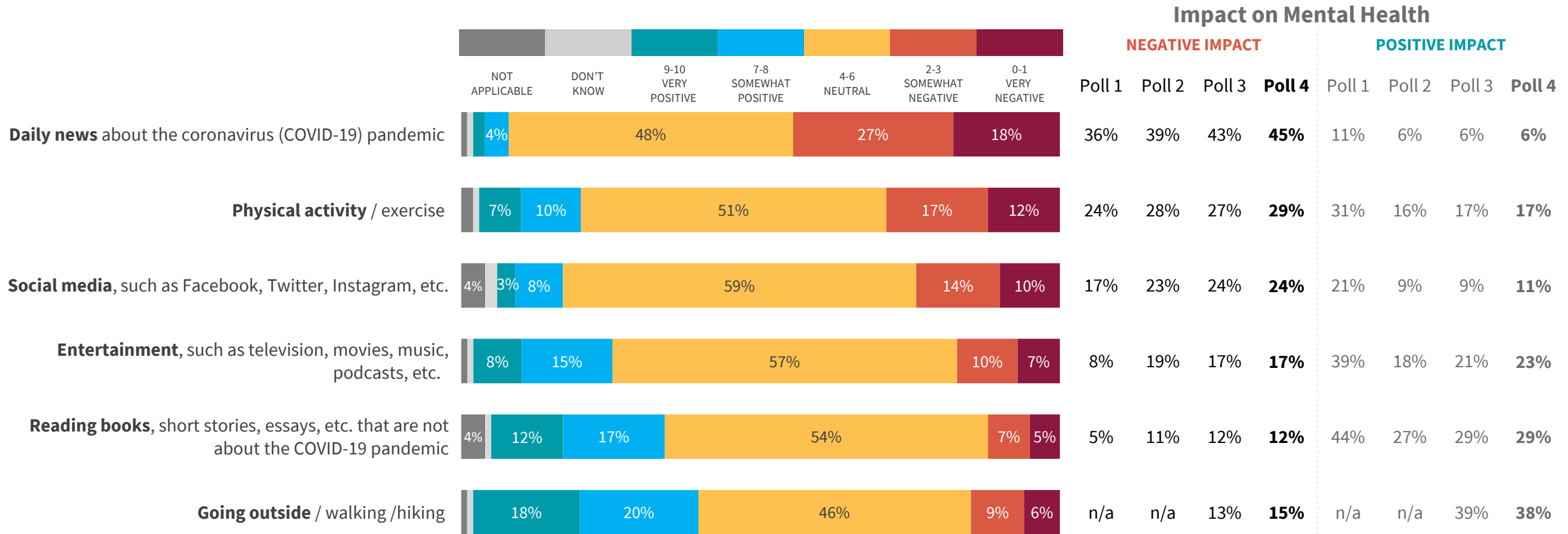
A3A. During the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Canada, please rate each of the following in terms of the impact they are currently having on your mental health, if any:  
Base: (Total N=2,761)

# Daily news about the pandemic continues to have a negative impact on mental health for many Canadians

- **Daily news about COVID continues to be the activity with the most negative impact on mental health** (45%, +2), and since Poll 1 has increased by +9 (from 36%).
- The activities initially considered to be positive for mental health in Poll 1 turned into a negative influence by Poll 2, including physical activity, social media, entertainment, and books are relatively stable in Poll 4. Physical activity and social media were having more of a negative impact than positive impact on mental health.
- **Going outside continues to have more of a positive (38%) impact on mental health compared with other activities – only 15% say going out has a negative impact.** This is similar to Poll 3 findings.



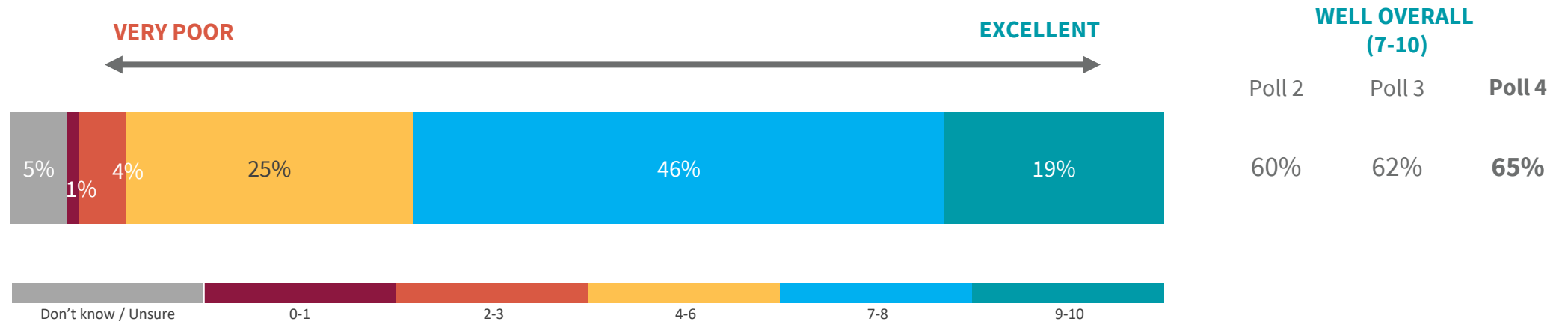
# The positive impact of activities on mental health remains stable after a large decline in August



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=2,761)

# Most Canadians feel confident about their ability to recover from challenges

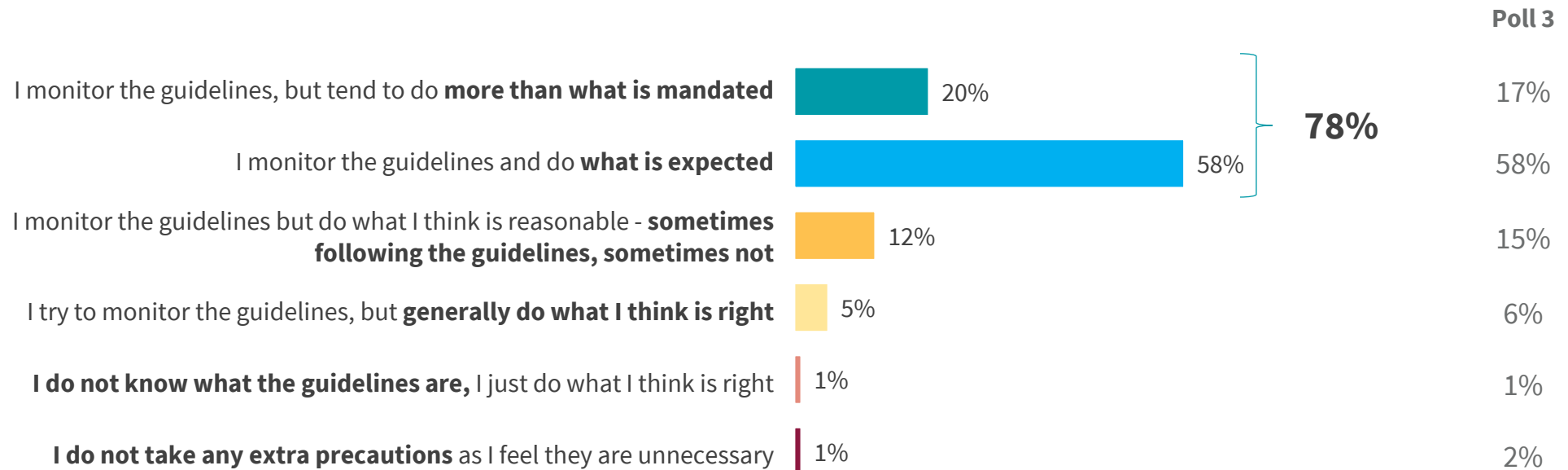
- While three-fifths of Canadians feel somewhat confident about their ability to bounce back from the challenges in life (65% rate this 7 to 10, when 10 means excellent), less than one-fifth are feeling very confident (19% rating this a 9 or 10). Since Poll 2, confidence is up by +5, a small but significant increase.
- Younger Canadians below 55 years are not as positive about their ability to bounce back from the challenges presented by COVID as older Canadians (18-34: 50%; 35-54: 64%; 55+: 46%).



A3B. Thinking about challenges and unexpected troubles that you have faced in your life... Overall, how would you rate your ability to manage and bounce back from these challenges and unexpected troubles? Base: (Total N=2,761)

# Canadians indicate they are in compliance with the government's COVID-19 guidelines

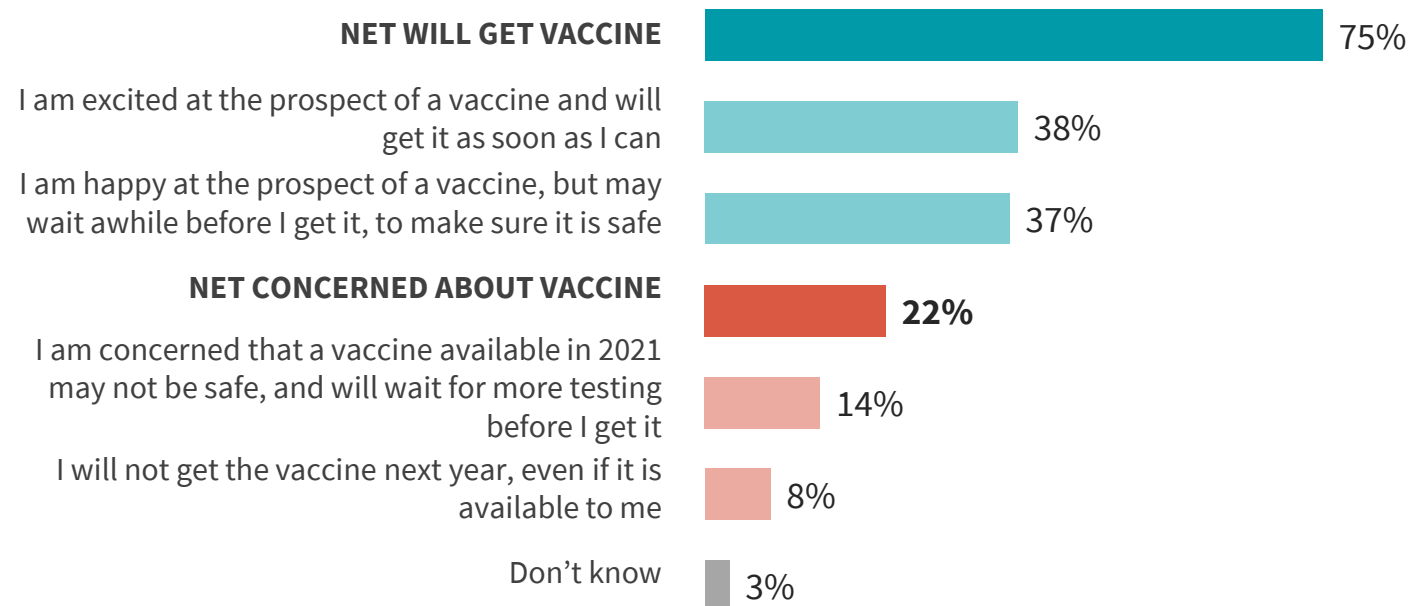
- While the majority of Canadians from across the country report they are following the guidelines, compliance is highest in the Atlantic region (84%) and Manitoba/ Saskatchewan (83%).
- Also more likely to follow guidelines: Older Canadians 55+ (18 to 34: 67%; 35-54: 78%; 55+: 86%); and women (81% vs. 75% of men).



A5. Which of the following best describes how you are complying with government COVID-19 guidelines and laws (ex. social distancing, social bubbles/circles, masks, quarantines, etc.) in your area? Base: (Total N=2,761)

# Three-quarters of Canadians are happy about the vaccine

- Three-quarters of Canadians are happy about the vaccine, but only 38% plan to get it as soon as possible. 37% are happy but may wait awhile to ensure it is safe. Conversely, one-fifth are hesitant about the vaccine, with 14% wanting more testing before they get it and 8% not planning on getting it in 2021.
- More than four-fifths (81%) of those 55 and older will get the vaccine, with 45% saying they will get it as soon as it is available. By comparison, 69% of those 18-34 plan to get the vaccine (32% as soon as available) but 25% are concerned about it (compared to 17% of those 55 and older).
- Those who report high levels of anxiety or depression (rated 9-10) are more likely to be concerned about the vaccine (26% and 27% respectively).



A6: Which of the following best describes your feelings about a potential vaccine that may be available to Canadians in 2021?  
Base: (Total N=2,761)



# Effect of COVID in the Workplace

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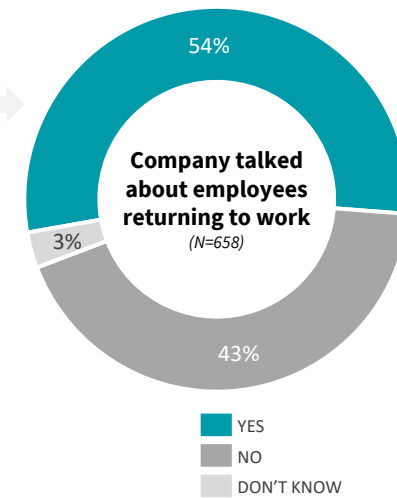
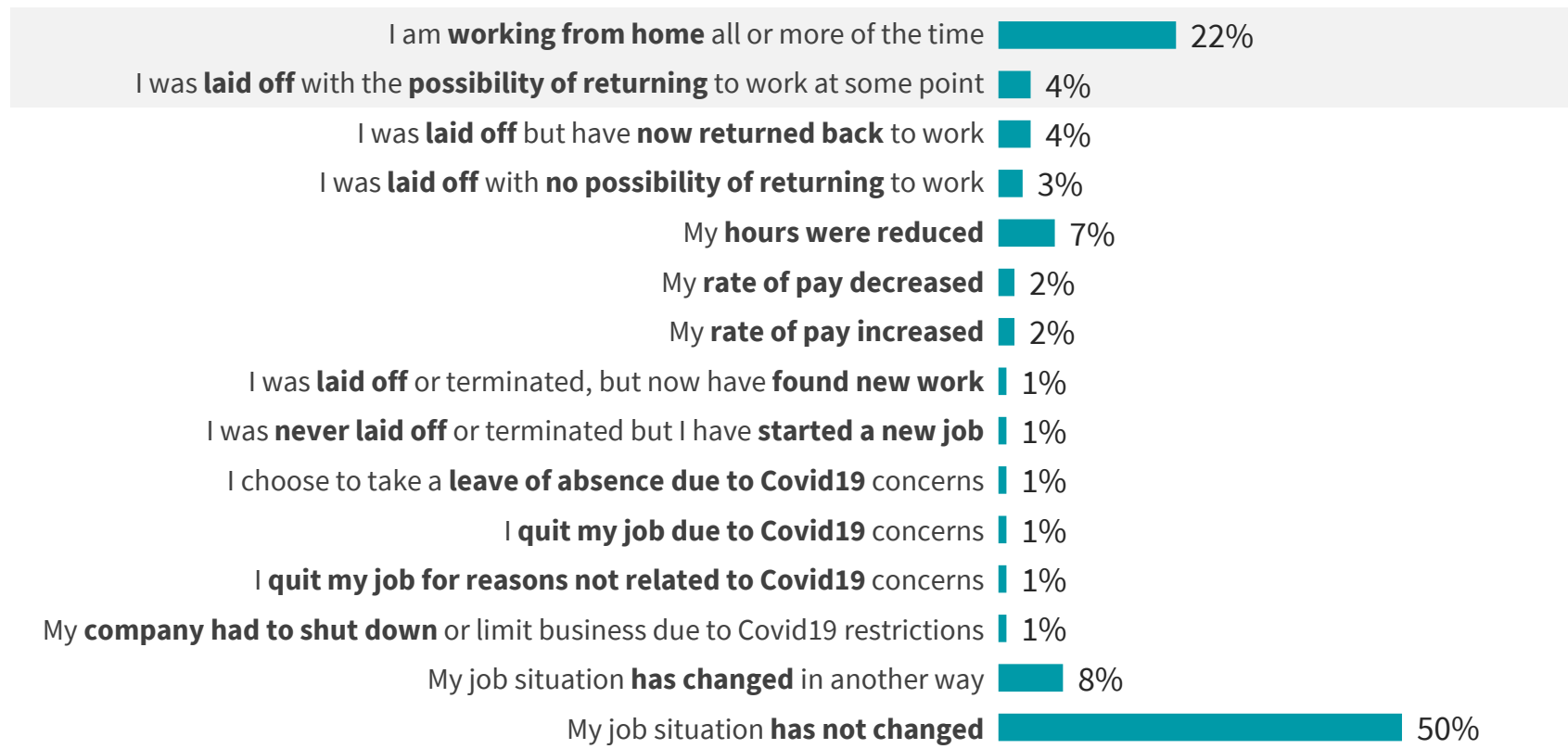
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# Half of Canadians report a change in their job during the pandemic

- Half (50%) of Canadians say their job situation has not changed and a fifth (22%) report they now work from home.
- Men are more likely to be working from home than women (25% vs. 20%), as are those living in urban centres (24% vs. 10% rural).
- Just over half (54%) of Canadians working from home say their company has talked to them about returning to work.



SCR10. Has your employment situation been changed as a result of the Covid19 pandemic? Base: (Total N=2,761)

SCR11. Has your company talk to you about employees returning to work? (Those working from home or laid off with possibility of going back to work N=688)

Further analysis on the impact of COVID in the workplace  
will follow via our partnership with  
**Queen's University and Workplace Strategies for Mental Health**



Workplace Strategies  
for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life



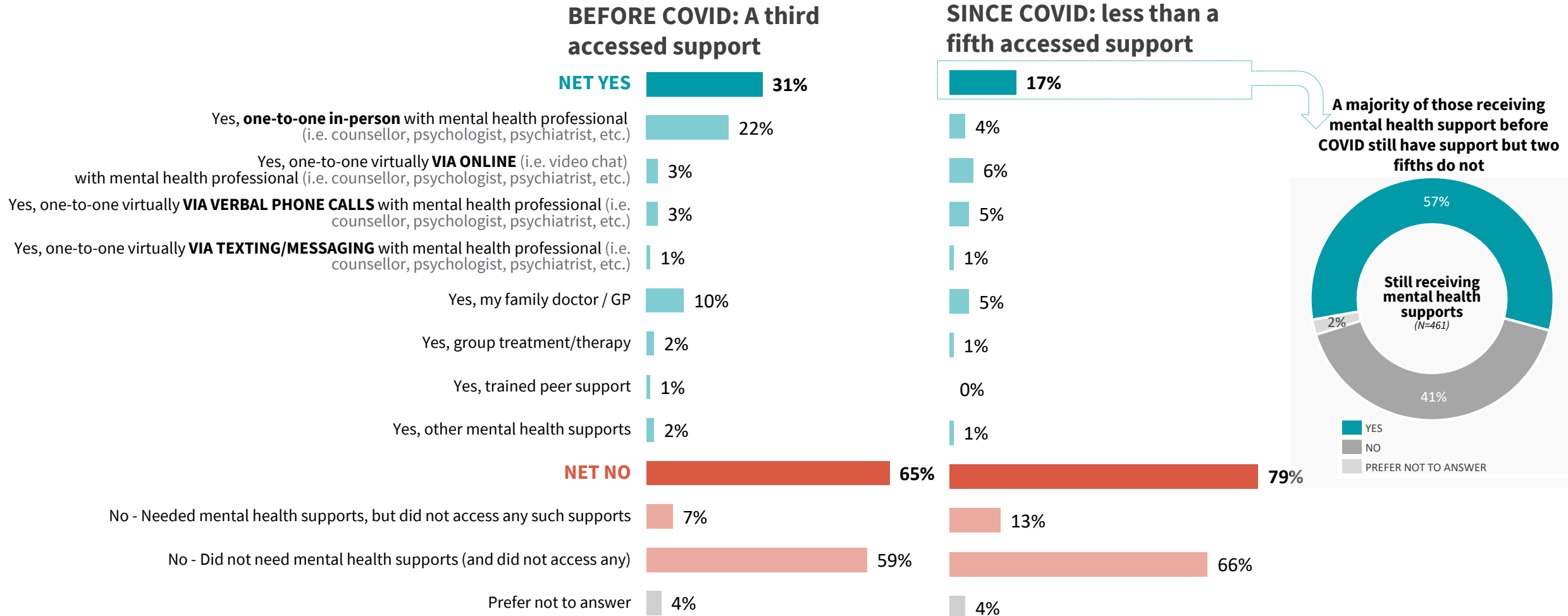
# Accessing Mental Health Supports

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



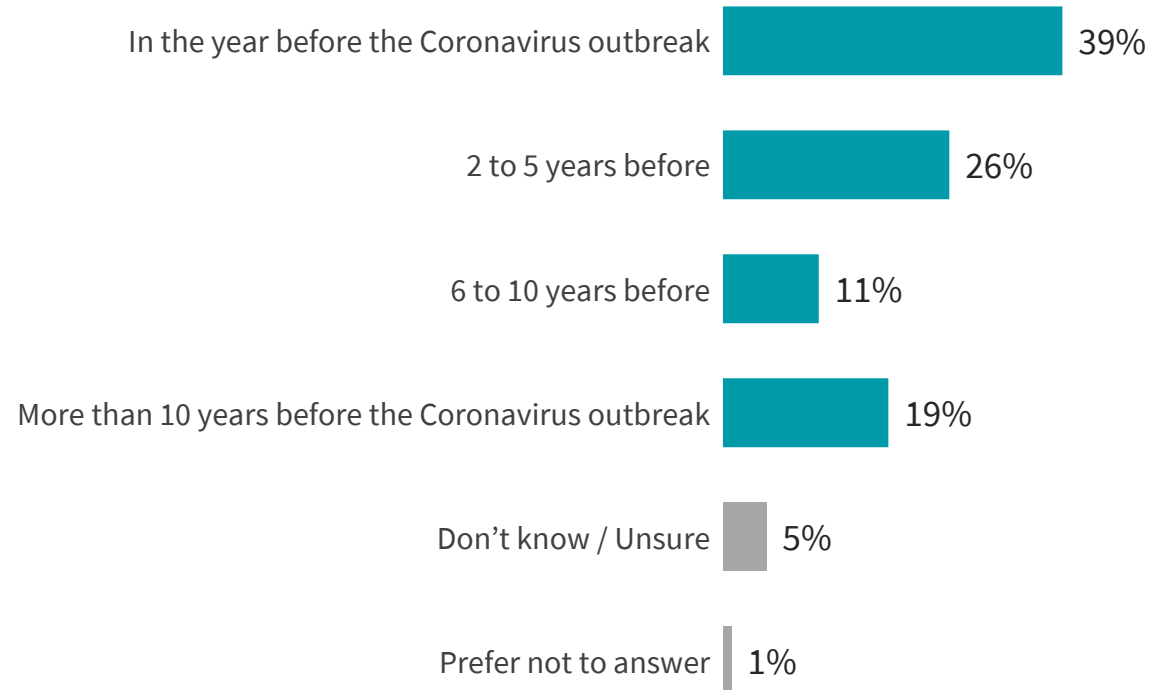
**B11.** BEFORE the outbreak of Coronavirus in Canada, have you ever had mental health support from any health care professionals? (Total N=2,761)

**B13.** SINCE the outbreak of the Coronavirus in Canada, have you had any support from any mental health professionals? (Total: N=2,761)

**B14.** Are you currently still receiving these mental health supports? (Total: N=461)

# A third of Canadians had mental health support prior to COVID, a majority within the last five years

**31%**  
Had mental health support







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

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