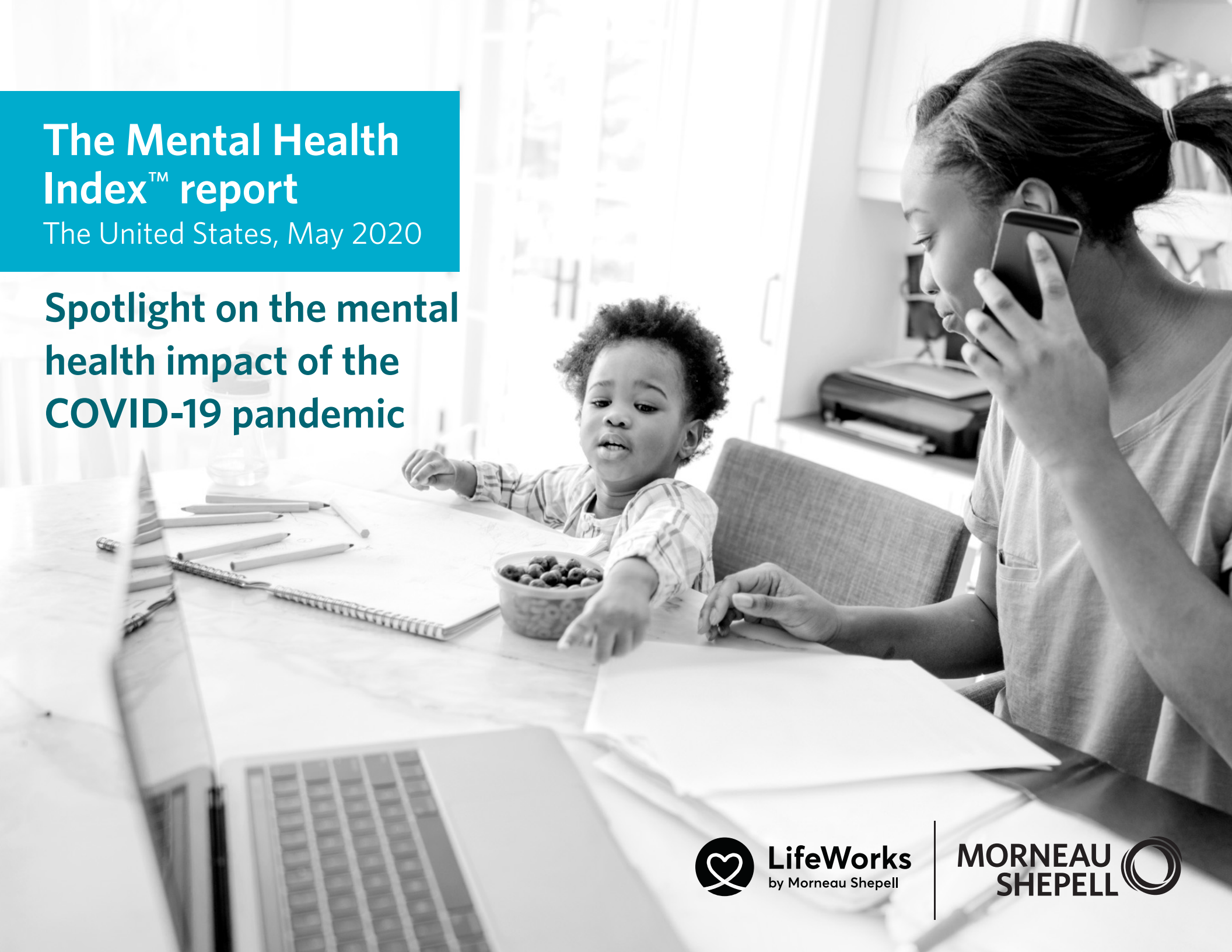


The Mental Health Index™ report

The United States, May 2020

Spotlight on the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



LifeWorks
by Morneau Shepell

**MORNEAU
SHEPELL** 



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Executive summary

May marks the third month that the United States has been in a national State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the month, the United States reported the lowest number of new coronavirus deaths and cases in the United States since the end of March. Key states continue to be especially hard hit by the pandemic with the highest reported cases in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois and California.

With the focus shifting to reopening and economic recovery, over half of US states have begun to reopen, or plan to do so soon, despite reports showing that most states fail to meet the “downward trajectory” of either confirmed cases or of the percentage of positive tests, as recommended by the federal government.¹ In over 50 percent of the states easing restrictions, case counts are trending upward, positive test results are rising, or both². As social distancing mandates are relaxed, Americans remain nervous about reopening with a majority of Americans opposing an easing of restrictions until the virus is contained.

While state leadership across the country has allowed businesses to reopen, a majority of consumers remain uncomfortable returning to stores, restaurants and movie theaters as case counts rise and COVID-19 deaths are projected to increase. The resulting and cumulative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Americans continues to have a negative impact on their mental health.

¹ Teneo, May 7, 2020 – Coronavirus update

² Teneo, May 7, 2020 – Coronavirus update



Mental Health Index™

The overall Mental Health Index™ for May 2020 is -6 points. This index represents the deviation from the benchmark of 75, where a negative score indicates poorer mental health relative to the benchmark, and a positive score indicates better mental health. The benchmark reflects mental health data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. A 6-point decrease from the COVID-19 benchmark³ reflects a population whose mental health is similar to twenty-fourth percentile of the benchmark. While the May 2020 Mental Health Index™ showed some improvement over the prior month, likely due to the shift in focus to reopening, the mental health status of Americans continues to be strained.

There were modest decreases in Mental Health Index™ sub-scores for anxiety (-9 points), depression (-8.1), optimism (-8.0), work productivity (-7.3) and isolation (5.7), when compared to the prior month. The most improved risk measure was anxiety (-11.6 to -9.0). There was relatively little change in general psychological health (2.5) however, this measure leads other sub-scores with the exception of financial. The financial score was above the benchmark value at 8 points, suggesting that Americans have likely started to take full stock of their savings as a result of this crisis. That said, those without emergency savings have experienced a significant decrease in mental health (-21.3) when compared to the overall group. As well, people with no emergency fund have uniformly low scores on the Mental Health Index™.

A change in hours or salary is reported by twenty-seven percent of individuals when compared to the prior month.⁴ A lower mental health index score is observed for individuals who are currently employed with reduced salary (-12.7), compared to individuals who are currently unemployed (-10.5). Among this group, females have a lower mental health index score (-15) when compared to males (-9.6). Individuals between 20 to 50 years of age have a more negative change in mental health. Further, individuals in lower income brackets (<\$60K per annum) report the greatest decrease in mental health. The financial and emotional impacts of a reduction in salary when compared to the previous month might explain the significant mental health decrease for this group in particular.

The overall Mental Health Index™ for May 2020 is -6 points

³ The raw score for the Mental Health Index benchmark is 75/100. The May 2020 score is 68/100.

⁴ Participants need to have been employed within the prior six months to be included.



The number of adults in the household has an impact on mental health. Households with five or more adults had a significant decline in mental health (-14.7) when compared to the prior month (-8.3). In April, this same group was on par with the average mental health score and while the average improved in May, this group declined. This may be attributed to the stress of multiple people working or learning from home and the increased risk of going out to work and potentially exposing others to infection. Individuals who report living alone showed no meaningful improvement and continue to have lower mental health scores (-9.3) than the average population (-6). The highest score across all household size categories is for individuals living in two adult homes (-4.2).

Individuals employed in Accommodation, Utilities, and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation have experienced a decline in mental health since last month, and have scores that are equivalent to the most distressed one percent of the population pre-2020. Individuals employed in Construction, Management, and Administration have had the greatest improvement in mental health since last month. The score for individuals in Health Care and Social Assistance also showed improvement (-6.1) when compared to the prior month (-8.6), and is aligned with the average. In spite of significant strain and risk, there is a great deal of social support for health care workers, which acts as a buffer for that strain. While an individual situation in Health Care may be extreme, the industry overall is faring somewhat better than expected.

Post-secondary students have been hit hard by the effects of the pandemic. They have had to adapt quickly to virtual learning and their academic futures remain uncertain. Further, worry about job prospects for graduates or near-graduates is high as unemployment rates climb across the country. The Mental Health score for students is -20.4, a decrease from an already low -19.9 in the prior month and significantly higher than the average of -6. Ongoing, specialized mental health and financial support is critical for this vulnerable group.

Individuals who have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) either directly or through their partner, have a better Mental Health Index™ score (-5.2) when compared to individuals without access (-7.6). This is an indication of the value of support, as the availability of EAP demonstrates support from the employer.



Mental Stress Change

The Mental Stress Change score for May 2020 is 64.4. This reflects a continued increase in mental stress compared to the prior month. While some increase in mental stress has been reported over the past three years, the current score indicates that more than half the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with a small proportion experiencing less. This is the second month in a row where the Mental Stress Change score reflects increased mental stress in the population overall. Considering geography, the greatest increase in stress month over month was for respondents living in the Northeast (67.5), followed by the West (64.9), the Midwest (64.4), and the South (61.9).

The greatest increase in mental stress is seen in employed people with reduced salary (70.3) when compared to last month and the lowest is among those employed with no change in hours/salary (62.3). Among this group, individuals in the 30 to 39 age category are feeling the largest increase in mental health stress (74.3). There is a significant increase in mental stress among households with three or more children. This may be the result of strain arising from lack of childcare, the pressure of online learning and work.

The Mental Stress Change scores for the sectors of Management of Companies and Enterprises, Public Administration, and Real Estate, Rental and Leasing are more favorable when compared to the prior month. The least favorable scores for the current month when compared with the prior month are in Accommodation and Construction. Further, the Mental Stress Change score for Health Care and Social Services is improved over the prior month (75.4 to 66.9).

There are a wide range of concerns and fears related to the pandemic. The most pervasive concern having an impact on mental health relates to the financial impact of the pandemic (33 percent), followed by the fear of a loved one passing away (26 percent), the fear of getting ill from COVID-19 (25 percent), and the uncertainty around how the virus will impact family and relationships (17 percent). A significant majority of individuals surveyed (67 percent) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic specifically has had a negative impact on their mental health. About half (44 percent) believe that although they feel this impact, they also feel that they will be able to cope; 23 percent indicate greater concern, with 11 percent indicating a very negative impact or crisis. Overall, the younger the individual, the greater the level of negative

While there are modest improvements in the Mental Health Index™ sub-scores when compared to the prior month, the overall score remains below benchmark



impact as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with children are also more likely than those without to have experienced a more negative impact.

Nearly all respondents (96 percent) indicate that they have had some personal disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At this point, the largest proportion of respondents (24 percent) believe that the disruption to them personally will be over in 2021 which is a change from the prior month, where the majority indicated that they felt the disruption would be over in June; 22 percent believe that it will be over by June 2020; 40 percent believe it will be over either July, August, or September 2020; and 10 percent believe it will be over either October, November, or December 2020. Those who believe that the personal disruption of the pandemic will last longer are more likely to have the greatest negative mental health impact as a result of the pandemic.

The two key drivers of the Mental Health Index™ remain financial risk and isolation.

Additional data and analyses

Demographic breakdown of sub-scores, and specific cross-correlational and custom analyses are available upon request. Benchmarking against the national results or any sub-group, is available upon request. Contact MHI@morneaushepell.com

The two key drivers of the Mental Health Index™ remain financial risk and isolation

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Overview of the Mental Health Index™

The mental health and wellbeing of a population is essential to overall health and work productivity. The Mental Health Index™ provides a measure of the current mental health status of employed adults in a given geography, compared to the benchmarks collected in the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the index are intended to predict cost and productivity risks, and inform the need for investment in mental health supports by business and government.

The Mental Health Index™ report has three main parts:

1. The overall Mental Health Index™ (MHI), which is a measure of change compared to the benchmark of mental health and risk.
2. A Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score, which measures the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.
3. A spotlight section that reflects the specific impact of current issues in the community: For the current and immediately foreseeable future, the measures in this section relate to the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collected through an online survey of 5000 residents of the United States

Methodology

The data for this report was collected through an online survey of 5,000 Americans who are living in the United States and are currently employed or who were employed within the prior six months. Participants were selected to be representative of the age, gender, industry and geographic distribution in the United States. The same respondents participate each month to remove sampling bias. The respondents were asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, starting in April 2020. The benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The data for the current report was collected between April 30 to May 11, 2020.



Calculations

To create the Mental Health Index™, the first step leverages a response scoring system turning individual responses to each question into a point value. Higher point values are associated with better mental health and less mental health risk. Each individual's scores are added and then divided by the total number of possible points to get a score out of 100. The raw score is the mathematical mean of the individual scores.

To demonstrate change, the current month's scores are then compared to the benchmark and the prior month. The benchmark is comprised of data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The change relative to the benchmark is the Mental Health Index™. A score of zero in the Mental Health Index™ reflects no change, positive scores reflect improvement, and negative scores reflect decline.**

A Mental Stress Change score is also reported given that increasing and prolonged mental stress is a potential contributor to changes in mental health. It is reported separately and is not part of the calculation of the Mental Health Index™. The Mental Stress Change score is (percentage reporting less mental stress + percentage reporting the same level of mental stress * 0.5) * -1 + 100. The data compares the current to the prior month. **A Mental Stress Change score of 50 reflects no change in mental stress from the prior month.** Scores above 50 reflect an increase in mental stress, scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress. The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores above 50, month over month, reflects high risk.



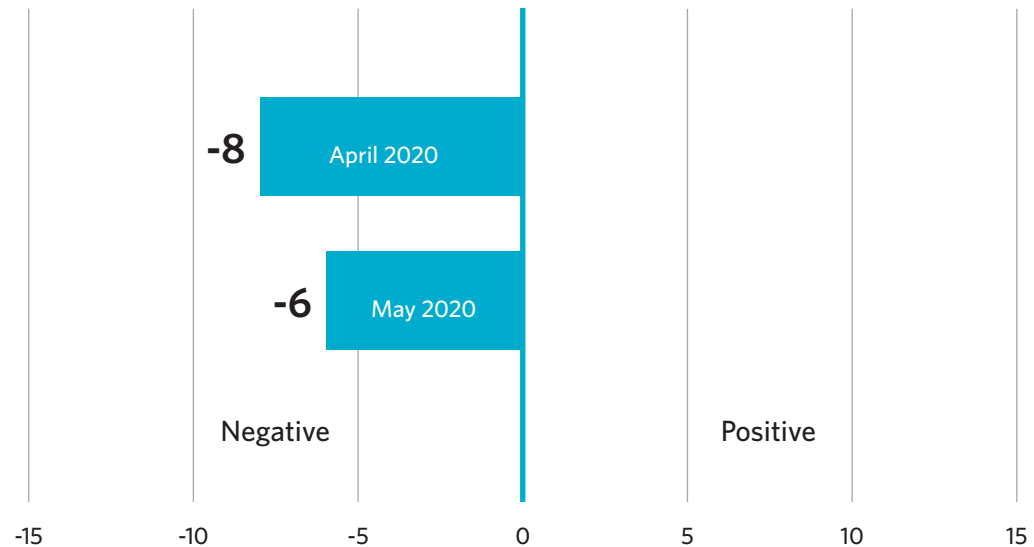
The Mental Health Index™

The Mental Health Index™ (MHI) is a measure of deviation from the benchmark⁵ of mental health and risk.

MHI

Current month May 2020	-6
Last month:	-8

Mental Health Index™ sub-scores ⁶	Current month	Last month
Anxiety	-9.0	-11.6
Depression	-8.1	-10.2
Optimism	-8.0	-8.9
Work productivity	-7.3	-8.7
Isolation	-5.7	-7.9
Psychological health	2.5	2.1
Financial risk	8.0	5.6



The overall Mental Health Index™ remains below the benchmark at -6. The current score is equivalent to the first percentile of the benchmark.

⁵ The benchmark reflects data collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

⁶ The demographic breakdown of sub-scores are available upon request.



Employment status ⁷	Current	Last month
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	-4.5	
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	-7.9	-7.5
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	-12.7	
Not currently employed	-10.5	-13.7
Age group	Current	Last month
Age 20-29	-14.4	-15.3
Age 30-39	-11.3	-12.8
Age 40-49	-8.5	-10.3
Age 50-59	-3.7	-5.6
Age 60-69	1.0	0.6
Number of children	Current	Last month
No children in household	-5.5	-7.0
1 child	-9.1	-11.0
2 children	-8.7	-11.0
3 children or more	-7.1	-9.6
Region	Current	Last month
Northeast	-7.3	-9.4
Midwest	-6.3	-7.7
South	-5.0	-7.0
West	-7.2	-8.5

⁷ The prior month's question asked whether the respondent was employed or not; additional employment qualifiers were added to the May 2020 survey.

Gender	Current	Last month
Male	-4.1	-6.1
Female	-8.2	-9.8
Income	Current	Last month
Household income <\$30K/annum	-13.6	-15.8
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-9.7	-10.5
\$60K to <\$100K	-5.8	-7.2
\$100K to \$150K	-3.7	-5.2
\$100K and over	0.2	-1.2
Number of adults in household	Current	Last month
One adult in household	-9.3	-9.9
2 adults	-4.2	-6.3
3 adults	-8.2	-9.5
4 adults	-6.9	-13.1
5 adults or more	-14.7	-8.3
EAP access	Current	Last month
Yes	-5.2	n/a
No	-7.6	n/a
I don't know	-5.0	n/a
EAP usage in 2020 for those with access	Current	Last month
Yes	-18.4	n/a
No	-3.4	n/a

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group. Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

Available upon request:

Industry scores, Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses



The Mental Health Index™ (industry)

The mental health of those in different industries can differ immensely depending upon market and cultural circumstances. The highest mental health scores are observed in Finance and Insurance (-3.3), Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (-3.6), and Real Estate, Rental and Leasing (-4). The lowest mental health scores are found among Students (-20.4), followed by individuals in Information and Cultural Industries (-14.2), and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (-13.9). Improvements from the prior month are shown in the table below:

Industry	May 2020 Mental Health Index™	April 2020 Mental Health Index™	Improvement
Management of Companies and Enterprises	-7.0	-12.7	5.7
Construction	-5.3	-8.9	3.6
Administrative and Support services	-7.6	-10.9	3.4
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	-7.1	-9.8	2.7
Public Administration	-4.2	-6.8	2.6
Health Care and Social Assistance	-6.1	-8.6	2.6
Food Services	-10.5	-12.9	2.3
Transportation and Warehousing	-4.6	-6.6	2.0
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	-4.0	-5.9	1.9
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	-3.6	-5.5	1.9
Retail Trade	-7.2	-9.1	1.8
Finance and Insurance	-3.3	-5.0	1.7
Other	-6.0	-7.3	1.3
Educational Services	-5.5	-6.6	1.1
Wholesale Trade	-9.0	-9.9	1.0
Other services (except Public Administration)	-6.3	-7.1	0.8
Information and Cultural Industries	-14.2	-15.0	0.8
Manufacturing	-6.0	-6.7	0.7
I am a student	-20.4	-19.9	-0.5
Accommodation	-10.5	-8.1	-2.4
Utilities	-10.0	-7.2	-2.8
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-13.9	-10.5	-3.5



The Mental Stress Change score

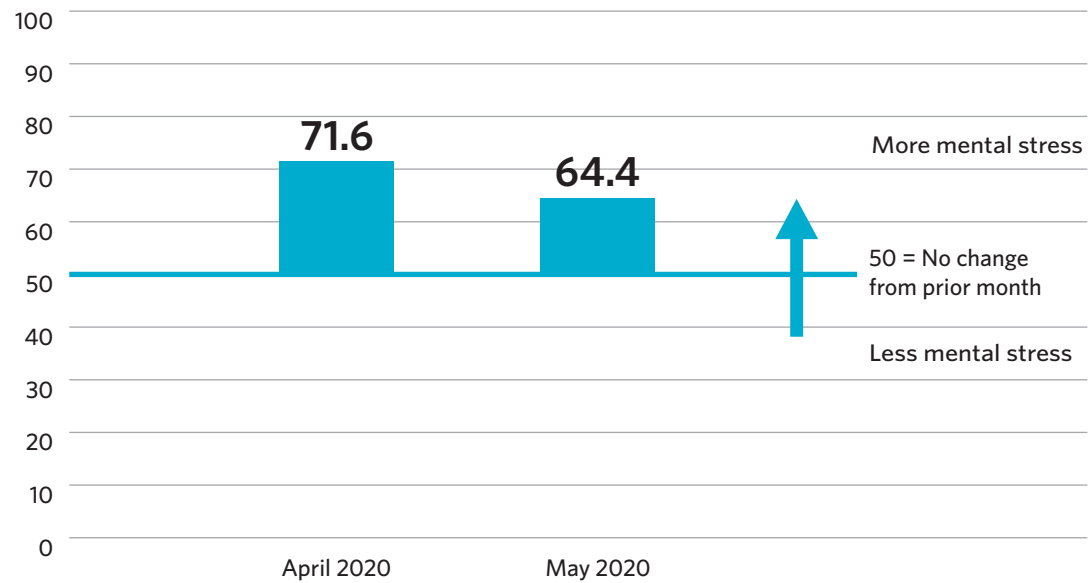
The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress, compared to the prior month.

Mental Stress Change

Current month April 2020	64.4
Last month:	71.6

The Mental Stress Change score for May 2020 is 64.4. This reflects a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month. While some increase in mental stress has been reported over the past three years, the current score indicates that more than half the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with a small proportion experiencing less. An increase in the Mental Stress Change in both April and May, indicates a significant accumulation of strain in the population.

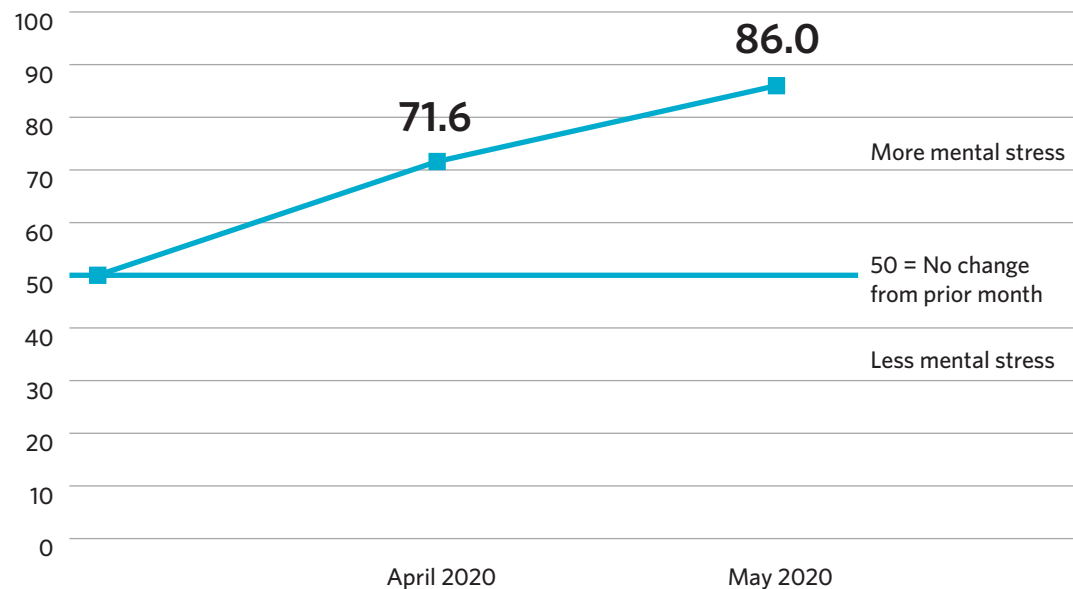
The Mental Stress Change score for May 2020 is 64.4. This reflects a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month.





The Mental Stress Change (cumulative)

The Mental Stress Change (MStressChg) score is a measure of the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. The change is rooted against a value of 50 implying no net mental stress change from the previous month, while values above 50 indicate a net increase in mental stress and values below 50 indicate a net decrease in mental stress. The graph below tracks the increases and decreases to account for the cumulative effect on mental stress.





Employment status ⁸	Current	Last Month
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	62.3	
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	67.9	71.3
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	70.3	
Not currently employed	66.7	74.9
Age group	Current	Last Month
Age 20-29	67.0	70.6
Age 30-39	65.9	73.1
Age 40-49	65.3	72.5
Age 50-59	64.2	72.1
Age 60-69	61.5	70.4
Number of children	Current	Last Month
No children in household	64.1	71.0
1 child	64.5	72.8
2 children	65.3	73.2
3 children or more	67.3	75.0
Region	Current	Last Month
Northeast	67.5	73.5
Midwest	64.4	71.1
South	61.9	71.1
West	64.9	71.2

⁸ The prior month's question asked whether the respondent was employed or not; additional employment qualifiers were added to the May 2020 survey.

Gender	Current	Last Month
Male	62.4	68.4
Female	66.1	74.5
Income	Current	Last Month
Household income <\$30K/annum	63.0	68.8
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	65.2	71.5
\$60K to <\$100K	65.3	73.3
\$100K to \$150K	63.6	70.4
\$100K and over	62.6	72.0
Number of adults in household	Current	Last Month
One adult in household	63.8	70.9
2 adults	64.1	72.0
3 adults	66.7	70.0
4 adults	65.4	75.1
5 adults or more	72.0	71.7
EAP access	Current	Last Month
Yes	64.8	n/a
No	64.8	n/a
I don't know	62.7	n/a
EAP usage in 2020 for those with access	Current	Last Month
Yes	69.0	n/a
No	64.2	n/a

Numbers highlighted in **orange** are the most negative scores in the group. Numbers highlighted in **green** are the least negative scores in the group.

Available upon request:

Industry scores, Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses



The Mental Stress Change (industry)

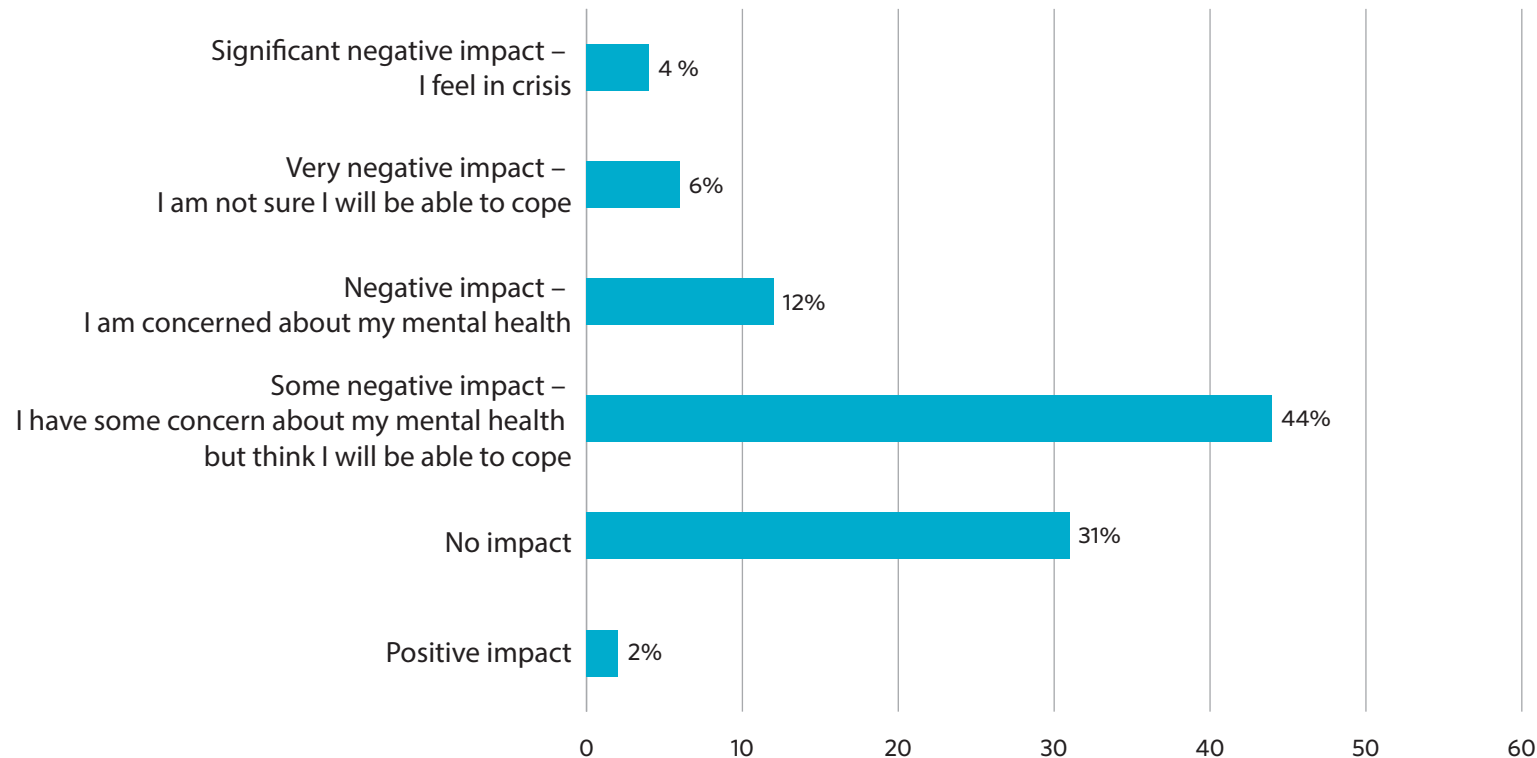
The mental health of those in different industries can differ immensely depending upon market and cultural circumstances. The most favorable mental stress changes are observed in Management of Companies and Businesses, with a significant 21.2-point improvement over the prior month. Favorable mental stress changes are also observed in Public Administration (58.5) and Real Estate, Rental and Leasing (65.2). The least favorable mental stress changes are found in Accommodation (72.1) and Construction (64). **Every industry has reported an increase in mental stress for two consecutive months.** Mental Stress changes from the last two months are shown in the table below:

Industry	May 2020 Mental Stress Change	April 2020 Mental Stress Change
Management of Companies and Enterprises	62.2	83.3
Public Administration	58.5	68.6
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	65.2	75.0
Administrative and Support services	60.8	69.7
Health Care and Social Assistance	66.9	75.4
Other services (except Public Administration)	65.2	73.4
Information and Cultural Industries	67.2	75.4
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	69.6	77.7
Manufacturing	64.3	72.1
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	65.5	73.0
I am a student	58.9	66.3
Retail Trade	64.1	71.4
Other	60.7	68.0
Finance and Insurance	62.6	69.4
Educational Services	66.4	73.1
Transportation and Warehousing	59.0	65.1
Wholesale Trade	65.3	70.3
Food Services	67.3	72.3
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	63.9	68.1
Utilities	60.6	60.7
Construction	64.0	63.8
Accommodation	72.1	69.2

With all scores being over 50, May is the second consecutive month with an increase in mental stress



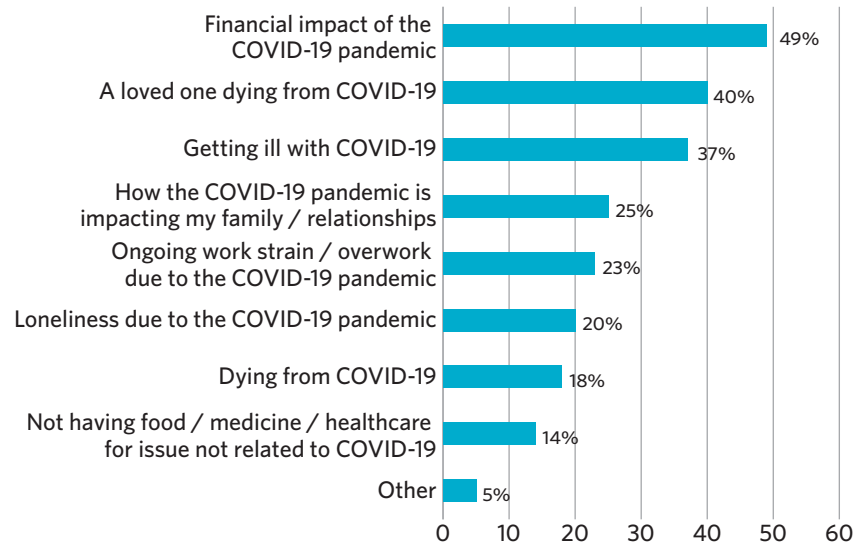
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



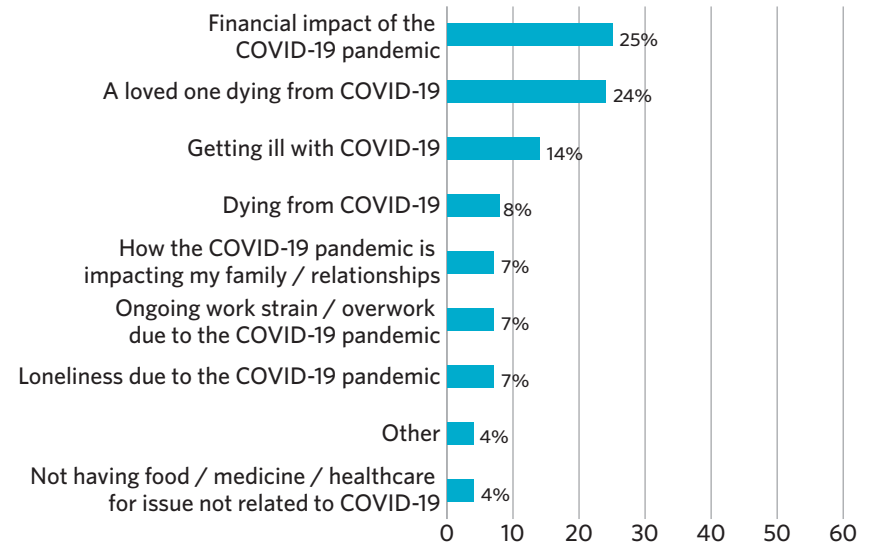
A significant majority (66 percent) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic specifically has had a negative impact on their mental health. About half (44 percent) continue to believe that although they feel a negative impact, they also feel that they will be able to cope; 22 percent indicate greater concern, with 10 percent indicating a very negative impact or crisis. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is high, there has been an increase over the prior month (23 to 31 percent) in the percentage of people who believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has had no impact on their mental health.



Contributors to the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (multiple selections)⁹



The single greatest contributor to the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (multiple selections)⁹

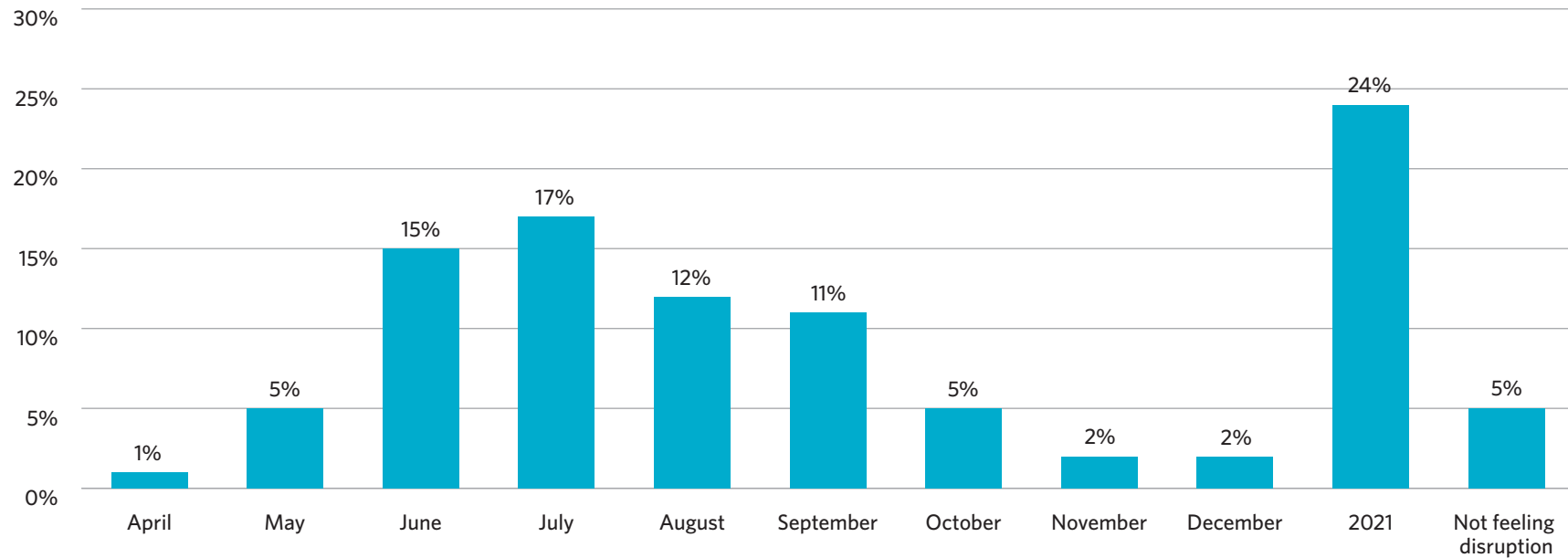


Where there was a mental health impact as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the top concerns affecting mental health remain unchanged compared to the prior month although the percentage of people reporting the top concerns has declined marginally, with the most significant drop relating to the financial impact of the pandemic and a loved one dying from COVID-19.

⁹ The charts reflect data from 3,350 people who made a selection.



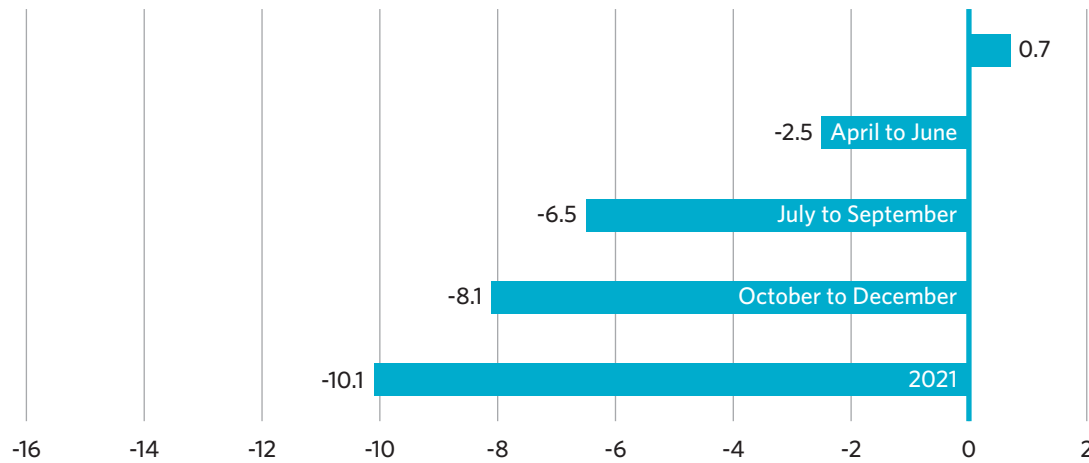
Belief: When the personal disruption from the pandemic will be over



There was a significant shift from the most commonly expected end to the disruption by the COVID-19 pandemic from June 2020 to 2021. In the prior month, 27 percent of individuals expected the disruption to be over in June 2020, but in the current month, only 15 percent of individuals believe June will be the end date. In the prior month, 10 percent of individuals expected a 2021 end to the disruption, but this figure has increased to 24 percent in the current month.



Mental Health Index™ by expected end of disruption



As of May 2020, the most prevalent belief is that the personal disruption, as a result of the pandemic, will last until 2021. The longer the disruption is believed to last, the more negative the Mental Health Index™ score.



Implications

The current scores for The Mental Health Index™ are a clear warning regarding the mental health impact of the pandemic. The index shows a significant decrease in the mental health of Americans. We also see a significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month and a definitive link to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the physical health risk of COVID-19 is the focus of much attention, the mental health impact requires similar attention and action. Well after the risk of infection reduces, the mental health impact may remain. This has implications for the quality of life of individuals, the stability of families, the risk of health and disability costs for organizations as well as the level of participation in the economy, which is a concern for government, given its impact on the speed of economic recovery.

To address this situation, action is required on at least three levels:

1. **Individuals** need to attend to the impact of the pandemic on their mental health. While some strain would be expected as a result of such a massive change, feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, or feeling stuck and unable to adapt, are clear warning signs requiring support from a trusted confidante or a counseling professional.
2. **Businesses** need to attend to the risk among employees. The Mental Health Index™ measures the mental health risk and status of the working population. The current scores suggest a risk to the longer-term wellbeing of employees, which may impact business productivity, health costs and disability absence. Businesses would do well to increase the focus on mental health through communication that increases the awareness of mental health warning signs, campaigns to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health support, and the promotion of health plans and public resources.
3. **Governments** need to attend to the mental health of the population. A population under strain is less likely to participate fully in the economy. The current focus on health and safety needs to expand to include a significant focus on mental health. This should include clear messages regarding coping strategies and the promotion of public resources.

The Mental Health Index™ is published monthly, and measures trends over time.

The full
MHI report
**Regional
Comparison**

For a comparison of MHI for Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, click the button.

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