

# The Mental Health Index by LifeWorks™

Canada | December 2021



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# The top 5 things your need to know | December 2021

## 1. After some improvement from January to August 2021, there has been a modest decline in mental health

- From a low of -11.8 for the mental health index score in December of 2020 to a pandemic high of -9.7, the current score is -10.2, which represents a high level of mental health risk.
- The worst subs-scores at this point are for depression, optimism, and isolation.
- The strongest sub-score is for financial risk, which represents an improvement in the level of emergency savings compared to 2019.
- A sharp decline in mental health in Newfoundland and Labrador in Dec 2021 brings it closer to the other Canadian provinces.

## 2. Nearly one-third of working Canadians say that the flexibility they want is the ability to step away from work to attend to personal issues

- 29% want to be able to step away from work to attend to personal issues.
- 26% say that flexibility in the hours of work is most important to them.
- 24% say that location of work is most important.

## 3. Employees indicate that full flexibility for everyone would work best for their work team

- 38% want full flexibility, which gives each employee choice in the how, when, and where they work.
- 17% want everyone together at the worksite.
- 15% want everyone fully remote.
- 8% believe that the best approach for their team is to have everyone together at the worksite 2-3 days a week.

## 4. Employees indicate a slight decrease in collaboration

- 52% indicate a high level of collaboration before the pandemic, compared to 48% since the pandemic began.
- 17% indicate very poor collaboration before the pandemic, compared to 20 % since the pandemic began.

## 5. Half of Canadians believe their CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing

- 50% believe that their organization's CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing.
- 59% say that HR policies at their organization support employee wellbeing.
- 27% are not concerned about the career impact of a mental health issue.

**#1**  
type of  
flexibility

being able to step away  
from work when needed

**38%**

believe full flexibility  
for their team is best

**50%**

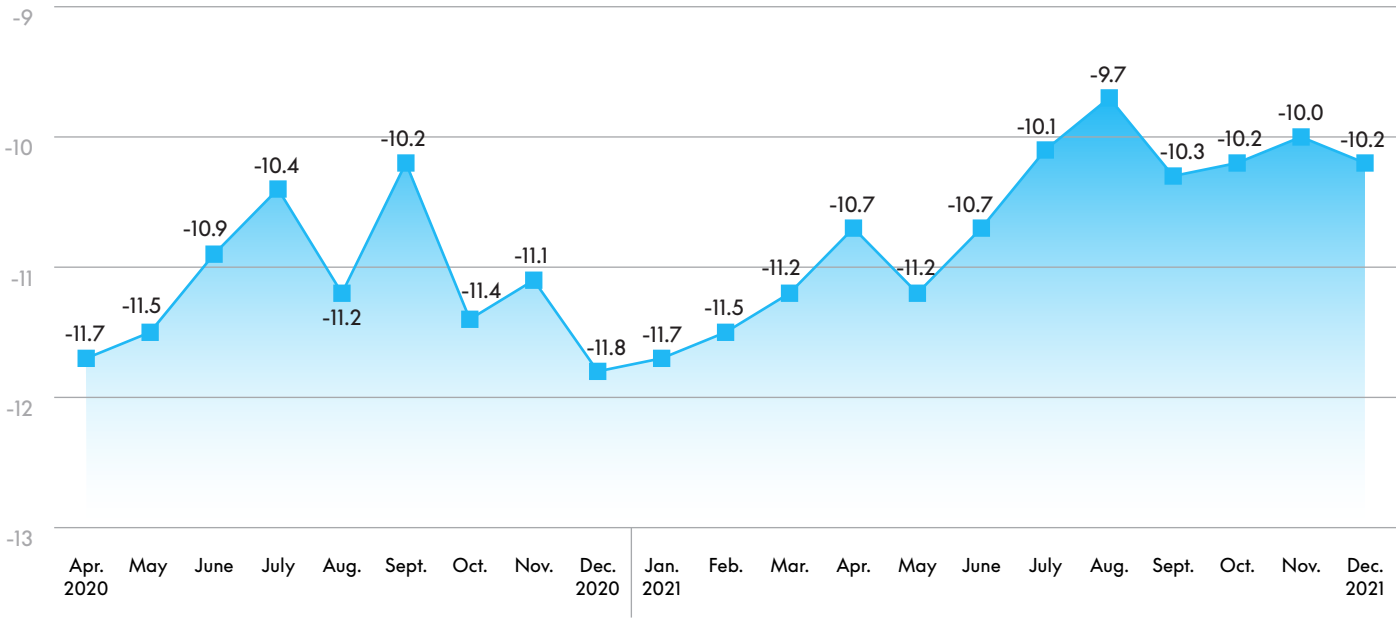
believe their CEO  
genuinely cares about  
employee wellbeing

**27%**

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# The Mental Health Index™

The Mental Health Index™ (MHI) is a measure of deviation from the benchmark<sup>1</sup> of mental health and risk. **The overall Mental Health Index for December 2021 is -10.2 points.** A 10-point decrease from the pre-COVID-19 benchmark reflects a population whose mental health is similar to the most distressed four per cent of the benchmark population.



MHI Current Month  
December 2021

-10.2

November 2021

-10.0

<sup>1</sup> The benchmark reflects data collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

# Mental Health Index™ sub-scores

The lowest Mental Health Index™ sub-score is for the risk measure of depression (-11.8), followed by optimism (-10.9), isolation (-10.8), anxiety (-10.5), work productivity (-10.5), and general psychological health (-3.5). The best sub-score, and the only measure above the historical benchmark continues to be financial risk (3.9).

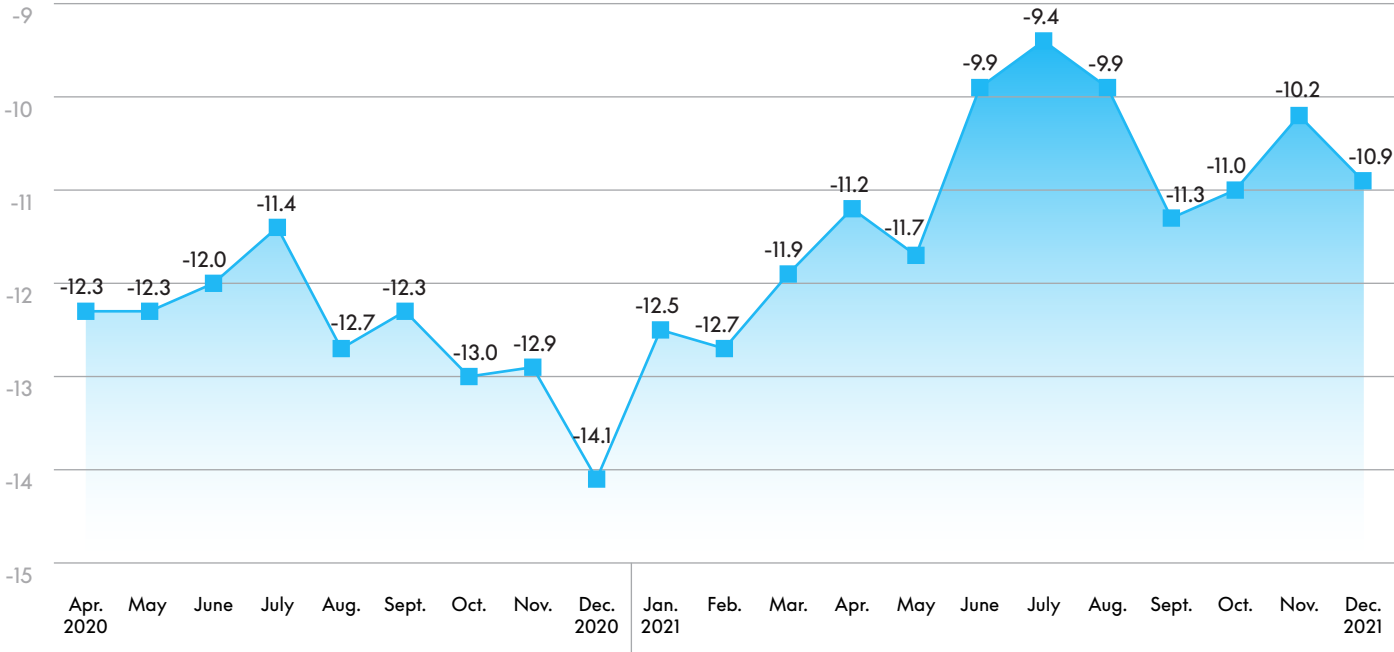
- Optimism, isolation, and general psychological health sub-scores have declined compared to November 2021.
- The financial risk sub-score remains unchanged from the prior month and continues to be the strongest of all sub-scores, at nearly four points above the pre-2020 benchmark.

Mental Health Index™ Sub-scores <sup>2</sup> 2021	December	November
Depression	-11.8	-12.0
Optimism	-10.9	-10.2
Isolation	-10.8	-10.5
Anxiety	-10.5	-10.8
Work productivity	-10.5	-10.7
Psychological health	-3.5	-3.2
Financial risk	3.9	3.9

2 The demographic breakdown of sub-scores is available upon request.

# Optimism

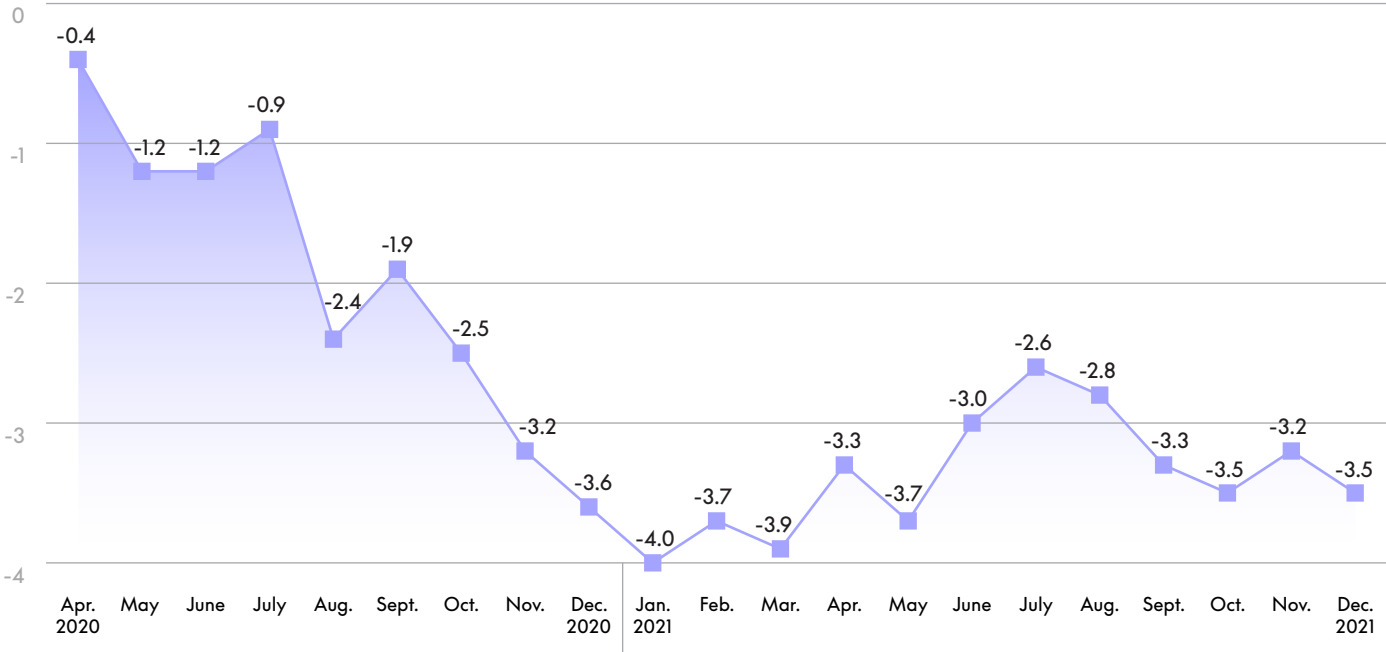
Since April 2020, optimism sub-scores have remained significantly below the benchmark. Despite some months of modest improvement, including a peak in July 2020, there was a general decline to a low point in December 2020 (-14.1). Since December, the optimism sub-score has improved, reaching a high of -9.4 in July 2021. Following two months of declines in August and September, the optimism sub-score improved in November but has declined again in December to nearly 11 points below the pre-2020 benchmark.



# General psychological health

The psychological health sub-score assesses individuals' self-perception of their overall level of psychological health.

From the launch of the MHI in April 2020 to January 2021, the general psychological health of Canadians declined to a low of four points below the pre-2020 benchmark. Since January 2021, sub-scores have fluctuated modestly. After three months of decline from August through October 2021, the psychological health score improved slightly in November but has declined again in December to -3.5.

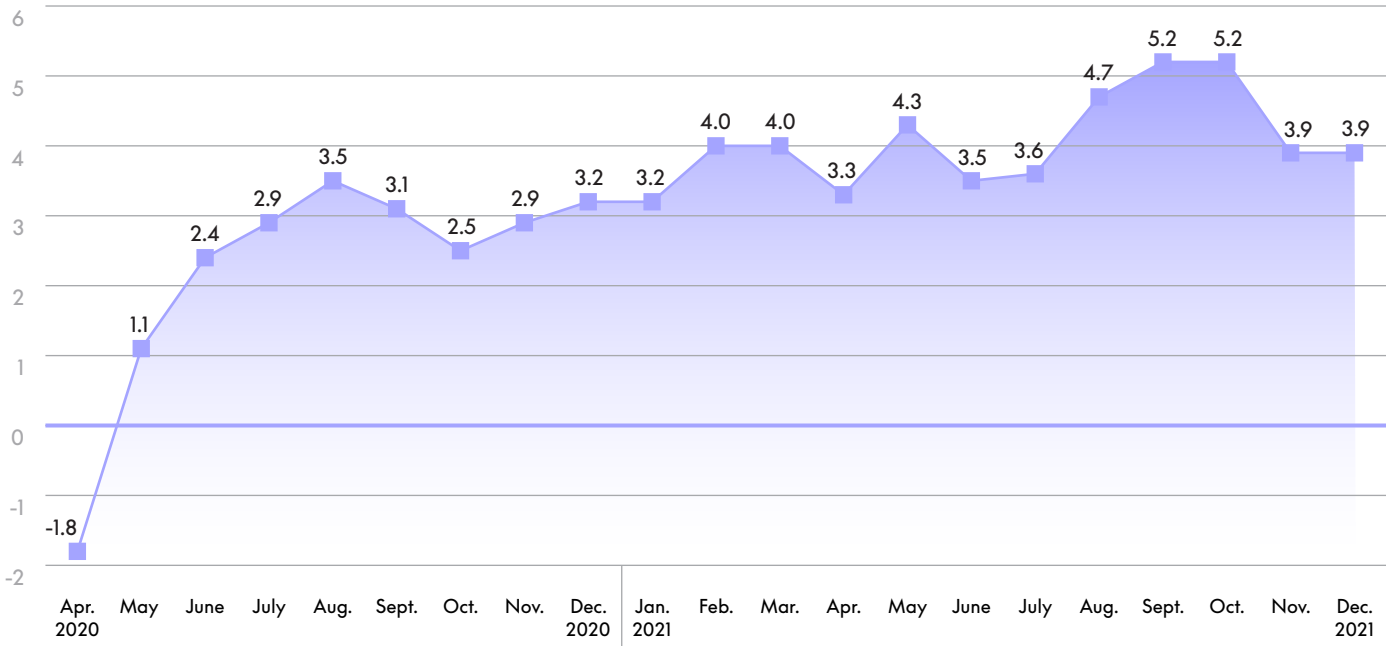


# Financial risk

The financial risk sub-score measures the level of individuals' emergency savings.

The financial risk sub-score has shown general improvement since the launch of the MHI in April 2020.

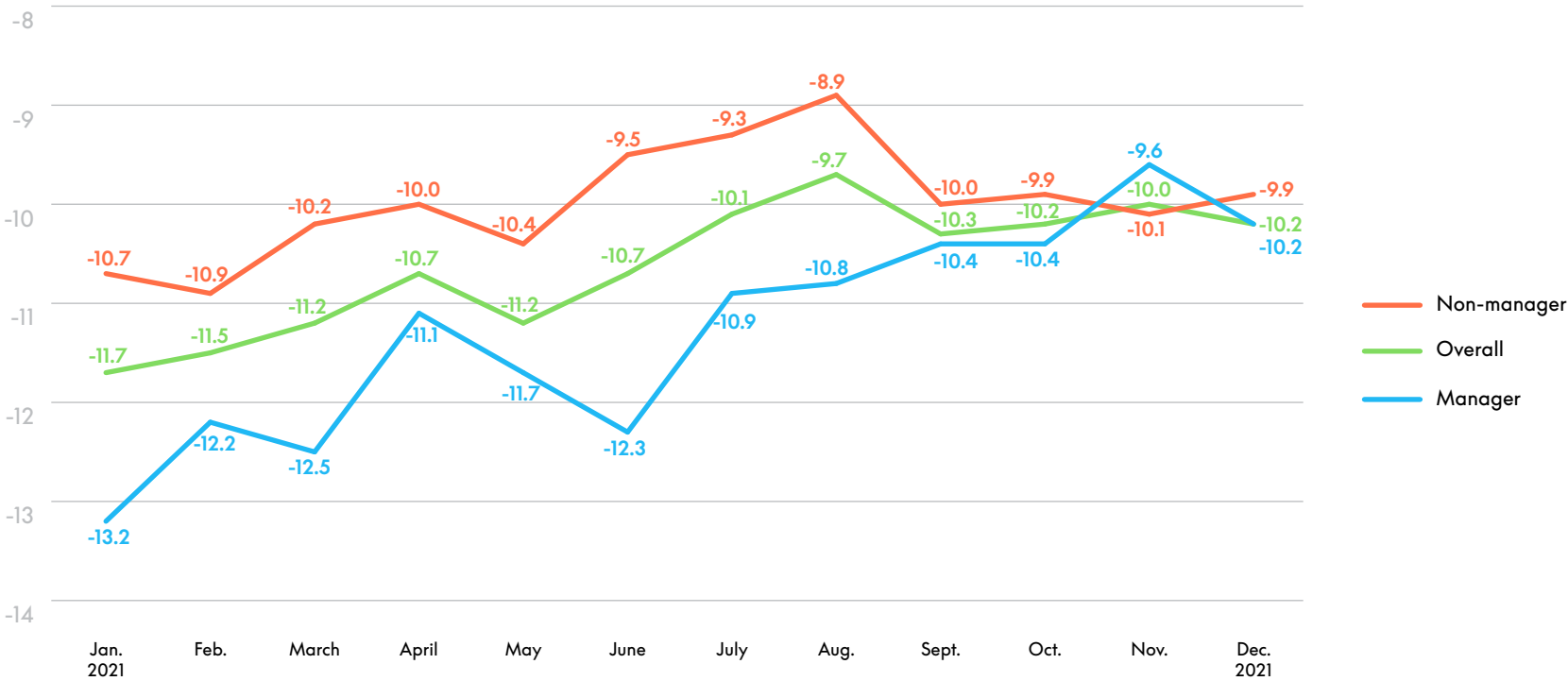
In December 2021, the financial risk sub-score of Canadians remains the same as the prior month. At nearly four points above the pre-2020 benchmark, financial risk continues to be the strongest of all mental health sub-scores.





# Managers compared to non-managers

Since January 2021, the mental health scores of managers have been lower than non-managers and lower than the overall Canadian average. Non-managers have consistently higher mental health scores than the overall Canadian population. In November, the trend reversed wherein the mental health score of managers improved to a level above non-managers and the overall Canadian average. In December, the mental health score of managers has declined to a score equal to the national average (-10.2) and lower than that of non-managers (-9.9).



## Demographics

- Since the launch of the MHI, women have had significantly lower mental health scores than men. In December 2021, the mental health score of women is -11.8 compared to -8.6 for men.
- In each of the past 21 months, mental health scores improve with age.
- Differences in mental health scores between those with and without children have been reported since the launch of the Index in April 2020. Nearly two years later, this pattern continues with a lower score for those with at least one child (-11.5) compared to those without children (-9.6).

## Employment

- Overall, four per cent of respondents are unemployed<sup>3</sup> and 10 per cent report reduced hours or reduced salary.
- Individuals reporting reduced salary compared to the prior month have the lowest mental health score (-23.9), followed by those reporting fewer hours (-22.1), and those not currently employed (-15.1).
- Managers have a lower mental health score (-10.2) than non-managers (-9.9).
- Individuals who are self-employed have the highest mental health score (-5.2).
- Respondents working for companies with 51-100 employees have the lowest mental health score (-13.2).

## Emergency savings

- Those without emergency savings continue to experience a lower mental health score (-32.0) than the overall group (-10.2). Individuals with emergency savings have a mental health score of -0.6.

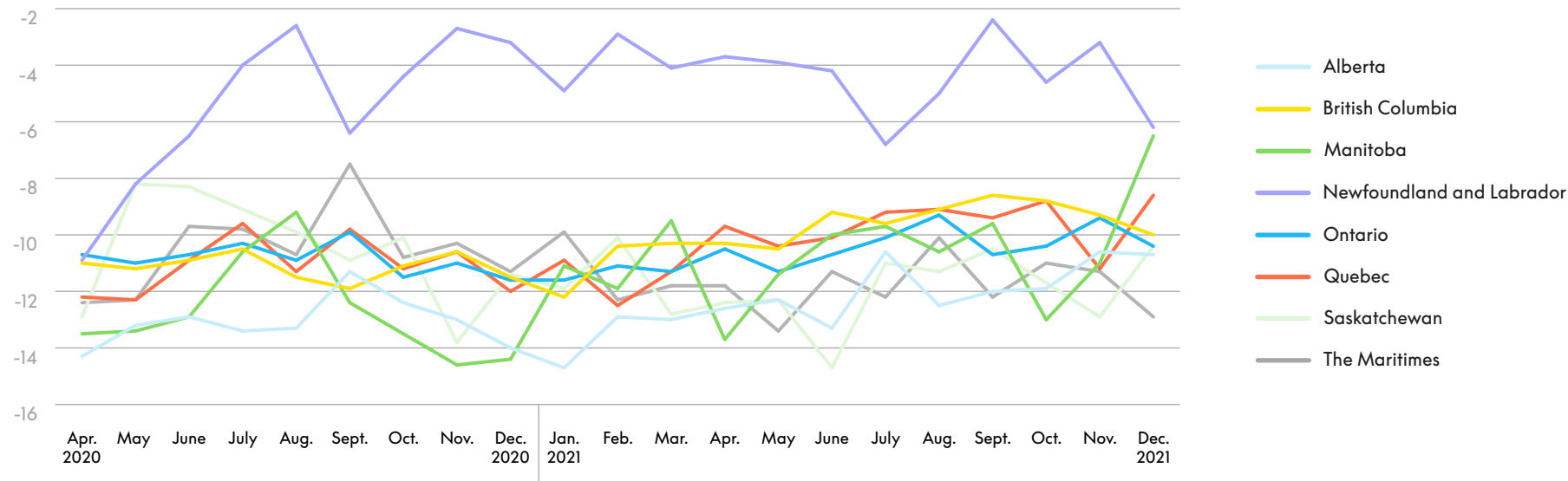
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3 MHI respondents who have been employed in the past six months are included in the poll.

# Mental Health Index™ (provincial)

Since April 2020, provincial mental health scores have fluctuated. Except for Newfoundland and Labrador, the fluctuation patterns for the provinces were similar through July 2021. In December 2021 there is a significant difference between The Maritimes' score of -12.9 and Newfoundland and Labrador's score of -6.2.

- Despite a three-point decline from the prior month, the mental health score in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be the most favourable mental health score (-6.2).
- The Maritimes saw the greatest decline in mental health with a 1.6-point decrease from November to December to 13 points below the pre-2020 benchmark.
- The most improved mental health score in October is in Manitoba (-6.5) with a nearly five-point improvement over November 2021.



Employment status	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	-8.5	-8.6
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	-22.1	-21.4
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	-23.9	-20.1
Not currently employed	-15.1	-13.0
Age group	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Age 20-29	-21.3	-20.2
Age 30-39	-15.6	-14.8
Age 40-49	-11.7	-12.3
Age 50-59	-7.4	-7.7
Age 60-69	-3.6	-3.2
Number of children	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
No children in household	-9.6	-9.4
1 child	-11.6	-11.5
2 children	-11.4	-11.5
3 children or more	-11.3	-11.3

Province	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Alberta	-10.7	-10.6
British Columbia	-10.0	-9.3
Manitoba	-6.5	-11.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	-6.2	-3.2
The Maritimes	-12.9	-11.3
Quebec	-8.6	-11.2
Ontario	-10.4	-9.4
Saskatchewan	-10.4	-12.9
Gender	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Men	-8.6	-7.8
Women	-11.8	-12.3
Household income	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
<\$30K/annum	-18.5	-17.4
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-15.5	-14.8
\$60K to <\$100K	-10.2	-11.0
\$100K to <\$150K	-7.5	-7.3
\$150K or more	-2.4	-2.4

Employer size	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Self-employed/sole proprietor	-5.2	-8.2
2-50 employees	-10.8	-9.6
51-100 employees	-13.2	-13.5
101-500 employees	-11.9	-10.4
501-1,000 employees	-11.4	-11.7
1,001-5,000 employees	-9.0	-9.2
5,001-10,000 employees	-9.8	-8.1
More than 10,000 employees	-8.8	-9.1
Manager	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Manager	-10.2	-9.6
Non-manager	-9.9	-10.1

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:

Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses

# Mental Health Index™ (industry)

Full-time post-secondary students continue to have the lowest mental health score (-25.5). This score is significantly lower than the next lowest scores: individuals employed in Information and Cultural Industries (-16.7), and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (-13.3).

Individuals employed in the Automotive Industry (-5.3), Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction (-5.4), and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (-5.7) have the highest mental health scores this month.

Individuals employed in Real Estate, Rental and Leasing, Wholesale Trade, and Other services (except Public Administration) have seen the greatest improvement in mental health since last month.

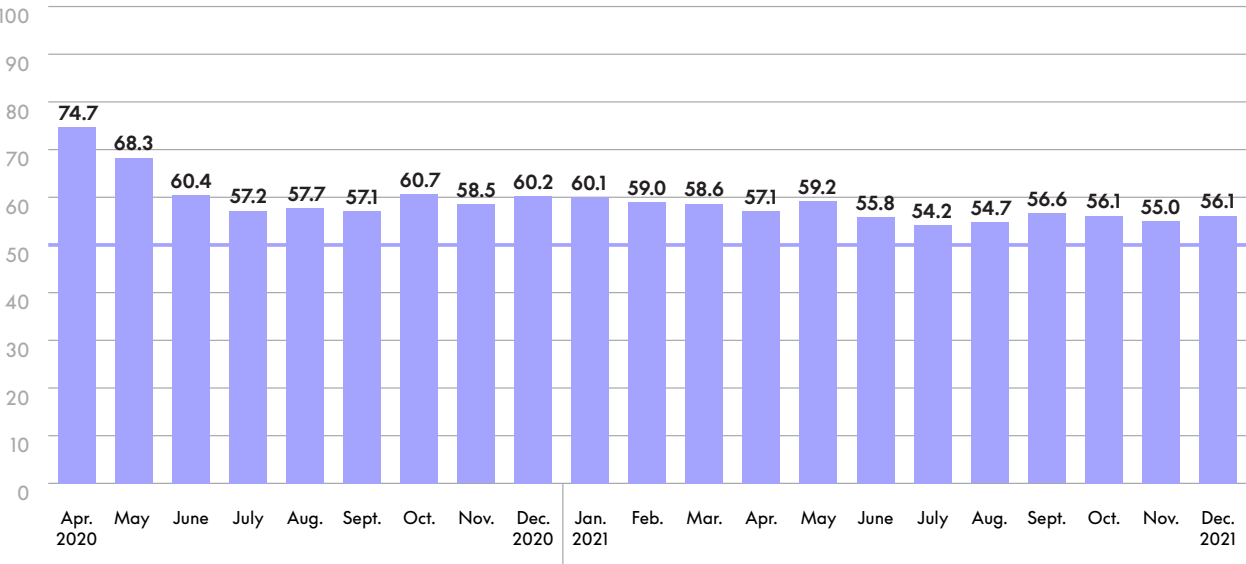
Changes from the prior month are shown in the table.

Industry	December 2021	November 2021	Change
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	-7.7	-11.7	4.0
Wholesale Trade	-10.4	-13.4	3.0
Other services (except Public Administration)	-8.1	-11.0	2.9
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	-5.7	-8.3	2.5
Automotive Industry	-5.3	-7.8	2.5
Public Administration	-8.8	-10.7	1.8
Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction	-5.4	-7.0	1.6
Transportation and Warehousing	-6.7	-8.1	1.4
Finance and Insurance	-10.4	-11.7	1.3
Construction	-9.0	-9.7	0.7
Full-time student	-25.5	-25.6	0.1
Educational Services	-9.4	-9.1	-0.3
Other	-13.1	-11.6	-1.5
Health Care and Social Assistance	-12.6	-11.1	-1.5
Accommodation and Food Services	-11.7	-9.8	-1.9
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	-10.4	-8.5	-1.9
Retail Trade	-10.9	-8.8	-2.0
Manufacturing	-10.3	-8.3	-2.1
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-13.3	-11.1	-2.2
Utilities	-13.2	-9.1	-4.1
Information and Cultural Industries	-16.7	-7.3	-9.4

# The Mental Stress Change score

The Mental Stress Change score (MStressChg) is a measure of the level of reported mental stress compared to the prior month. **The Mental Stress Change score for December 2021 is 56.1.** This reflects a net increase in mental stress compared to the prior month.

The current score indicates that 20 per cent of the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with eight per cent experiencing less. A continued increase in mental stress since April 2020 indicates a significant accumulation of strain in the Canadian population.



- ▲ More mental stress
- 50 = No change from prior month
- ▼ Less mental stress

MStressChg  
Current Month—  
December 2021

56.1

MStressChg  
November 2021

55.0

# Mental Stress Change (percentages)

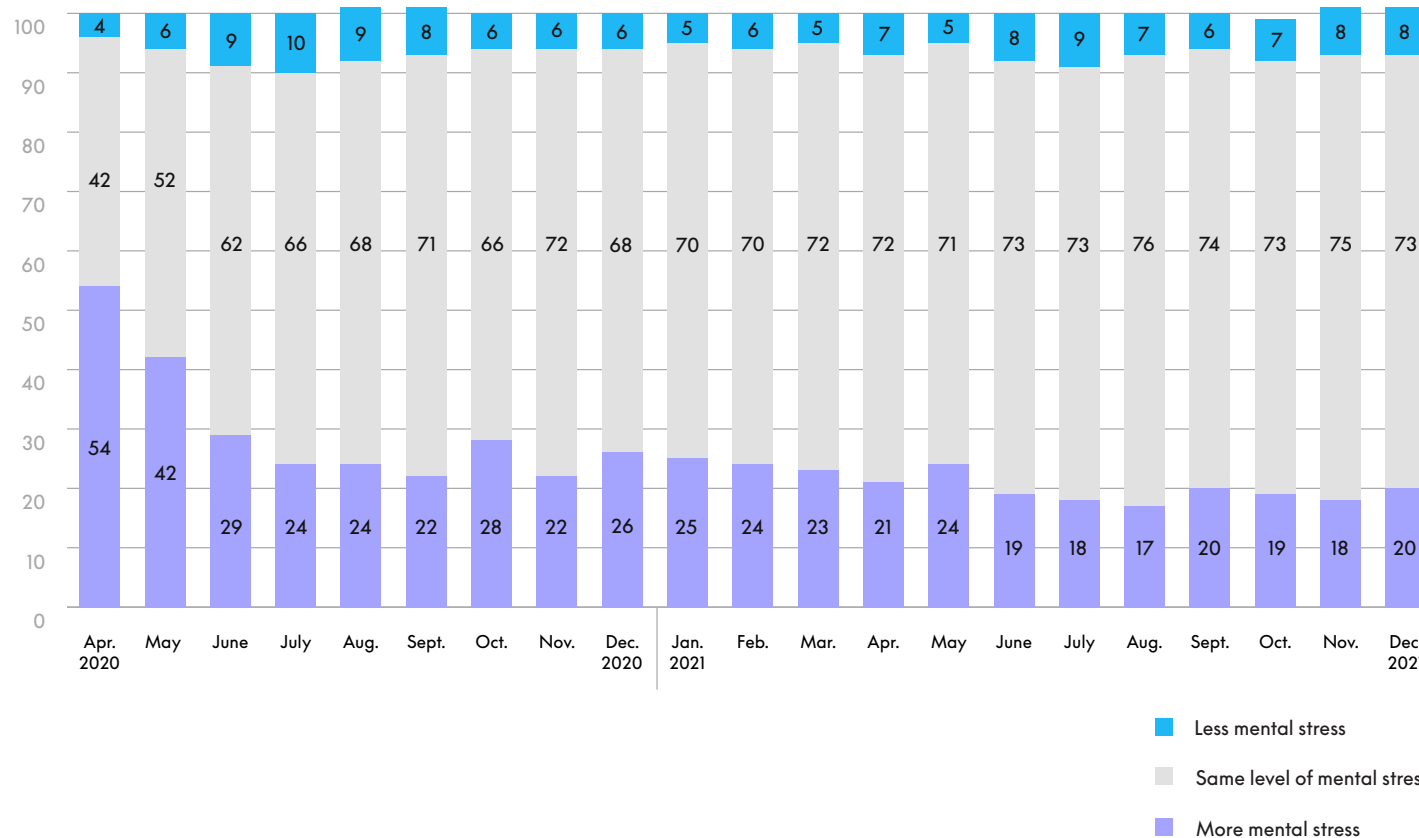
Mental Stress Change tracks stress changes each month.

The percentages of those experiencing more stress, the same level of stress, and less stress for each month of the survey are shown in the graph.

For nearly two years, the percentage of those experiencing more mental stress than the previous month has steadily decreased; however, the data showing this decline is too insignificant to lower the overall Mental Stress Change score to below 50 (the level at which stress is lower than the previous month). As the proportion of individuals reporting the same level of stress or more stress than the previous month continues to outweigh the proportion reporting less mental stress, the population will continue to feel the effects of significantly increased stress and will not be able to reach a more sustainable and healthy level of stress.

In April 2020, 54 per cent of individuals reported an increase in mental stress. The number of respondents reporting increased month-over-month mental stress is 20 per cent in December 2021, while 73 per cent of respondents report the same level of mental stress and eight per cent report a decrease in mental stress.

**Mental Stress Change by month**



## Demographics

- Since the launch of the MHI in April 2020, younger people have experienced a greater increase in mental stress month over month compared to older respondents.
- Since April 2020, women have had larger increases in mental stress compared to men. In December 2021, the mental stress change score for women is 57.2 compared to 55.0 for men.

## Geography

- The greatest increase in month-over-month stress is for respondents living in Saskatchewan (58.3), followed by Alberta (58.1), the Maritimes (57.5), and Ontario (56.7).
- Respondents living in the provinces where the increase in mental stress was less, still had significant increases, including Newfoundland and Labrador (54.5), British Columbia (54.4), Quebec (54.1), and Manitoba (50.4).

## Employment

- The greatest increase in mental stress is seen in employed people with reduced salary (71.2), followed by employed people with reduced hours (62.5), unemployed people (55.8), and employed people with no change to salary or hours (55.1).
- Managers have a greater increase in mental stress (57.1) than non-managers (55.5).



Employment status	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	55.1	54.1
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	62.5	63.1
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	71.2	67.9
Not currently employed	55.8	51.8
Age group	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Age 20-29	62.4	57.5
Age 30-39	59.0	58.7
Age 40-49	55.3	56.1
Age 50-59	54.3	53.8
Age 60-69	54.9	51.4
Number of children	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
No children in household	55.4	53.9
1 child	58.4	58.4
2 children	56.5	55.8
3 children or more	56.1	58.1

Province	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Alberta	58.1	56.7
British Columbia	54.4	53.8
Manitoba	50.4	54.2
Newfoundland and Labrador	54.5	48.0
The Maritimes	57.5	54.5
Quebec	54.1	51.6
Ontario	56.7	56.1
Saskatchewan	58.3	58.4
Gender	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Men	55.0	53.5
Women	57.2	56.6
Household income	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
<\$30K/annum	56.6	55.3
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	58.0	56.4
\$60K to <\$100K	55.3	54.8
\$100K to <\$150K	57.1	55.4
\$150K or more	53.5	52.6

Employer size	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Self-employed/sole proprietor	52.9	55.5
2-50 employees	55.7	53.6
51-100 employees	53.3	53.7
101-500 employees	56.7	54.9
501-1,000 employees	58.5	55.9
1,001-5,000 employees	57.5	55.6
5,001-10,000 employees	59.3	57.1
More than 10,000 employees	55.9	56.0
Manager	Dec. 2021	Nov. 2021
Manager	57.1	55.0
Non-manager	55.5	55.1

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:

Specific cross-correlational and custom analyses

# The Mental Stress Change (industry)

In December 2021, individuals employed in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting report less mental stress compared to the prior month (48.6). A score of 50 means that the proportion of the population experiencing more stress is balanced by the proportion experiencing less stress. A score below 50 indicates that the group is experiencing less stress than the prior month.

Individuals working in Information and Cultural Industries have the most significant increase in mental stress (65.1), followed by individuals employed in Health Care and Social Assistance (60.6), and Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction (59.4).

Mental Stress changes from the last two months are shown in the table.

Industry	December 2021	November 2021
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	48.6	53.0
Construction	50.4	53.9
Automotive Industry	52.4	52.9
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	52.5	56.4
Other services (except Public Administration)	52.7	51.7
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	53.6	56.5
Accommodation and Food Services	54.1	55.3
Public Administration	55.2	58.6
Other	55.4	52.0
Transportation and Warehousing	55.5	50.0
Manufacturing	55.6	54.0
Wholesale Trade	56.3	56.4
Educational Services	56.4	56.0
Finance and Insurance	56.8	56.8
Retail Trade	56.9	53.4
Utilities	57.7	55.3
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	58.2	57.6
Full-time student	58.3	54.0
Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction	59.4	54.5
Health Care and Social Assistance	60.6	57.4
Information and Cultural Industries	65.1	56.4

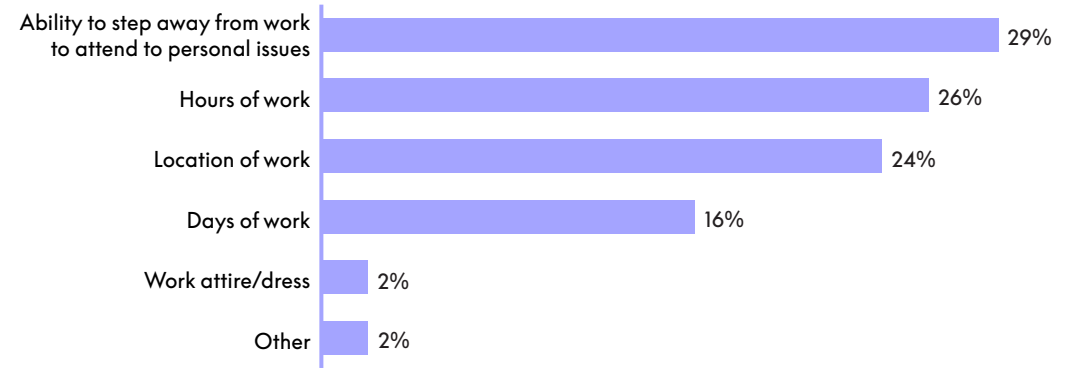
# Spotlight

## Flexibility at work

Canadians were asked about the type of flexibility that is most important to them at work.

- Nearly one-third (29 per cent) report that the ability to step away from work to attend to personal issues is the most important type of flexibility, followed by 26 per cent reporting that hours of work is the most important, and 24 per cent reporting that the location of work is the most important type of flexibility at work.
- Canadians under the age of 40 are nearly twice as likely as those 50 and over to indicate that days of work is the most important type of flexibility at work.

### Most important type of flexibility at work

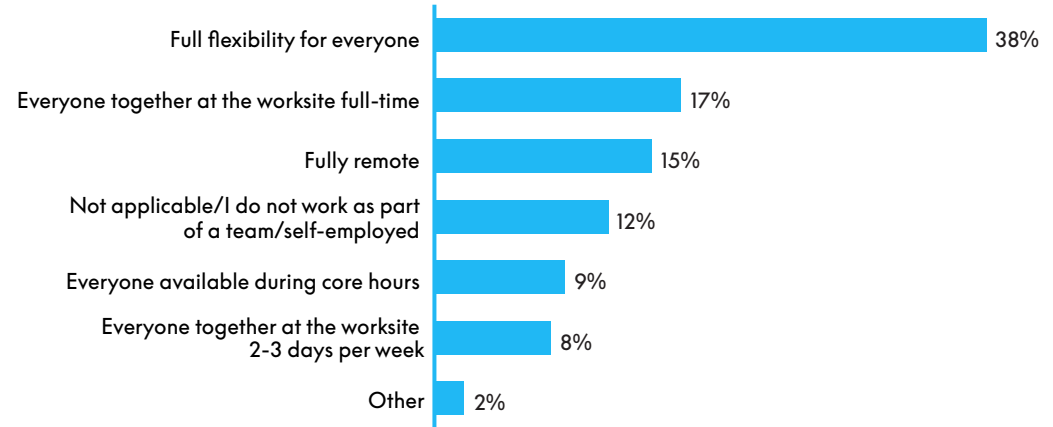


# Teamwork

Canadians were asked which model would work best for their team.

- Nearly two in five (38 per cent) report that full flexibility for everyone (days, hours, and location) would work best for their team.
- Seventeen per cent report that having everyone together at the worksite full-time is the best, followed by 15 per cent reporting a fully remote team would work best.
- Unionized employees are nearly 50 per cent more likely than non-union employees to indicate that having everyone together at the worksite full-time is the best for their team.
- Managers are 50 per cent more likely than non-managers to report having everyone available during core hours as the best for their team.
- Canadians under the age of 40 are twice as likely as those 50 and over to indicate that everyone working fully remotely is the best for their team.

## Which model would work best for your team?

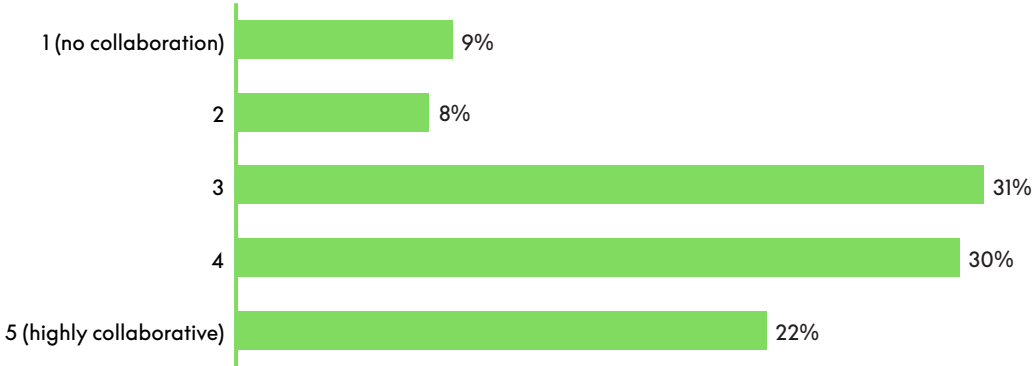


# Collaboration

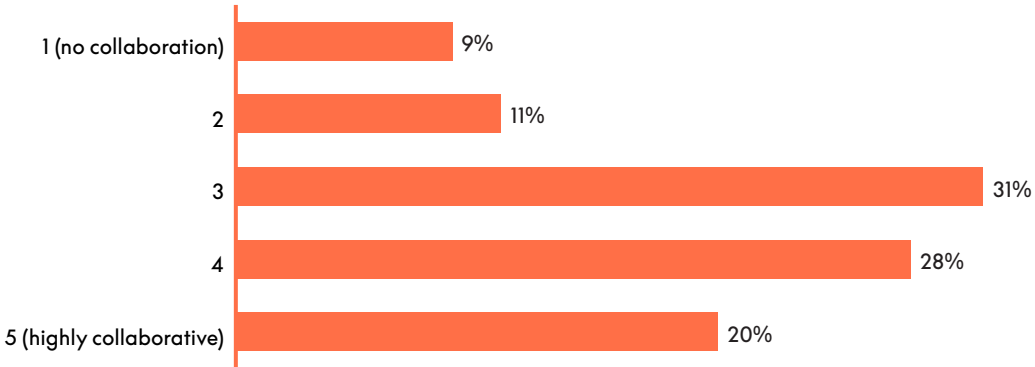
Canadians were asked to rate collaboration/teamwork before the pandemic and since the pandemic began.

- More than half (52 per cent) report high collaboration (a rating of four or five on a five-point scale) before the pandemic compared to 48 per cent since the pandemic began. Both groups have higher mental health scores than those reporting poor collaboration.
- Seventeen per cent report poor collaboration (a rating of one or two) before the pandemic compared to 20 per cent since the pandemic began. Both groups reporting poor collaboration have the lowest mental health scores.

Collaboration/teamwork rating pre-pandemic



Collaboration/teamwork rating since the pandemic began



## Support for employee wellbeing

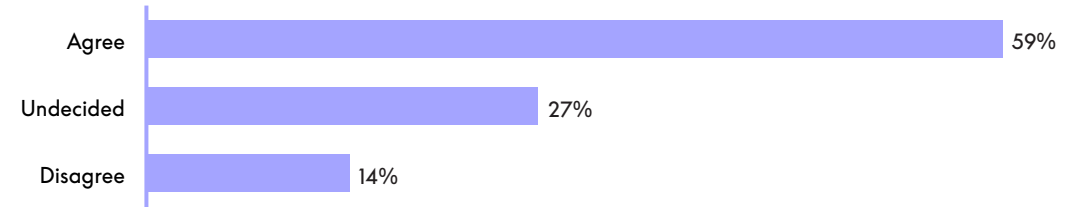
Canadians were asked whether the HR policies at their organization support employee wellbeing.

- Nearly three in five (59 per cent) agree that HR policies at their organization support employee wellbeing, and this group has the most favourable mental health score (-5.7).
- Those who disagree that HR policies at their organization support employee wellbeing have the lowest mental health score (-20.0).

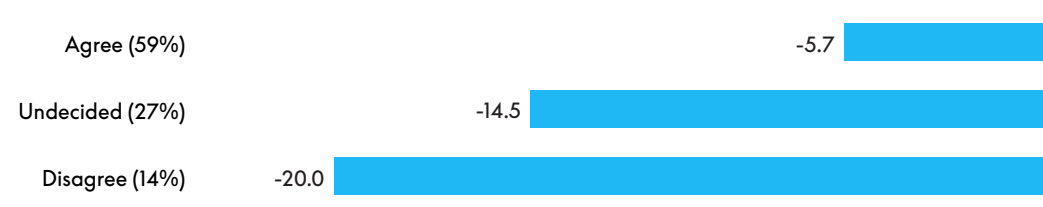
Canadians were asked whether they believe that the CEO of their organization genuinely cares about employee wellbeing.

- Half (50 per cent) agree that their organization's CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing, and this group has the most favourable mental health score (-4.9).
- Nearly one in five (18 per cent) do not believe that their organization's CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing and this group has the lowest mental health score (-19.3).
- Managers are more than 30 per cent more likely than non-managers to agree that the CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing.

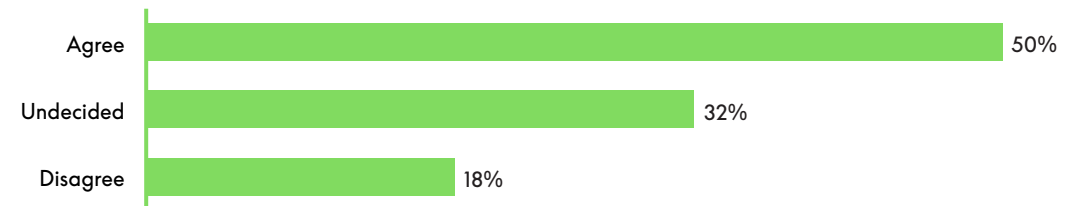
### HR policies at my organization support employee wellbeing



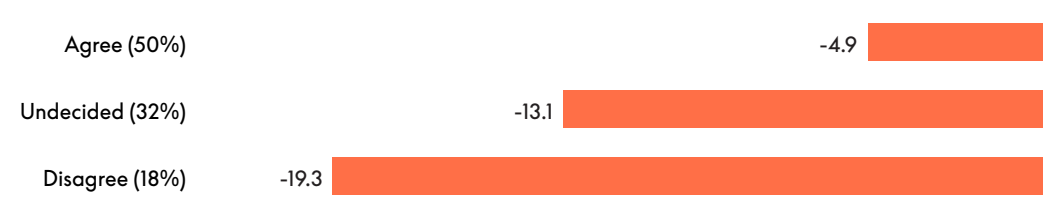
### MHI score by HR policies at my organization support employee wellbeing



### My organization's CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing



### MHI score by my organization's CEO genuinely cares about employee wellbeing

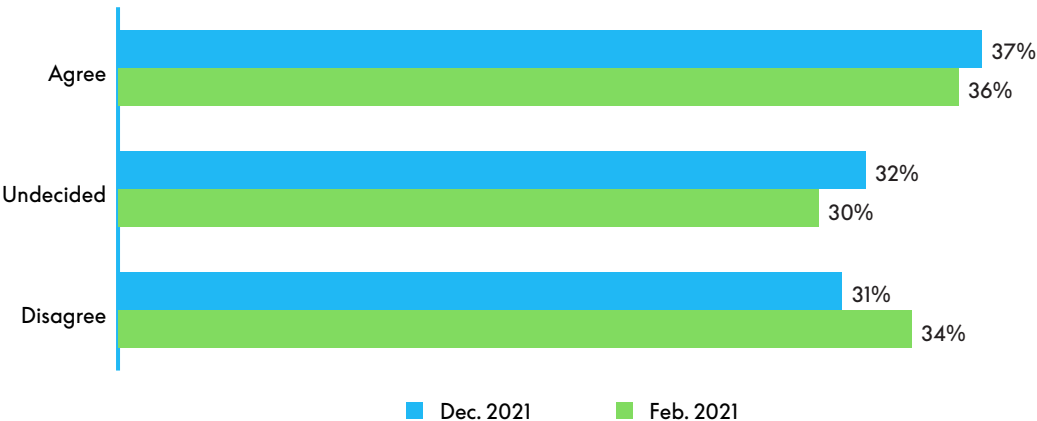


# Mental health stigma

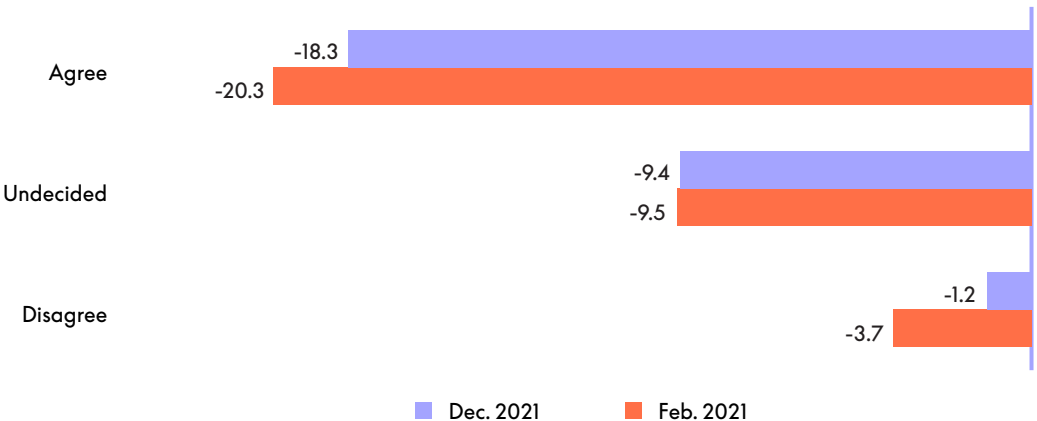
## Self-stigma

- In February 2021 and December 2021, Canadians were asked whether they would feel negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue.
- In December 2021, more than one-third (37 per cent) would feel negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue, nearly the same proportion (36 per cent) reported in February 2021. The mental health score of those who would feel negatively about themselves is significantly lower (-18.3), than the national average (-10.2).
  - Overall, the mental health scores among each group of respondents are more favourable in December 2021 compared to February 2021.
  - Canadians under the age of 40 are nearly 50 per cent more likely than those 50 and over to feel negatively about themselves if they had a mental health issue.

I would feel negatively about myself if I had a mental health issue



MHI score by I would feel negatively about myself if I had a mental health issue

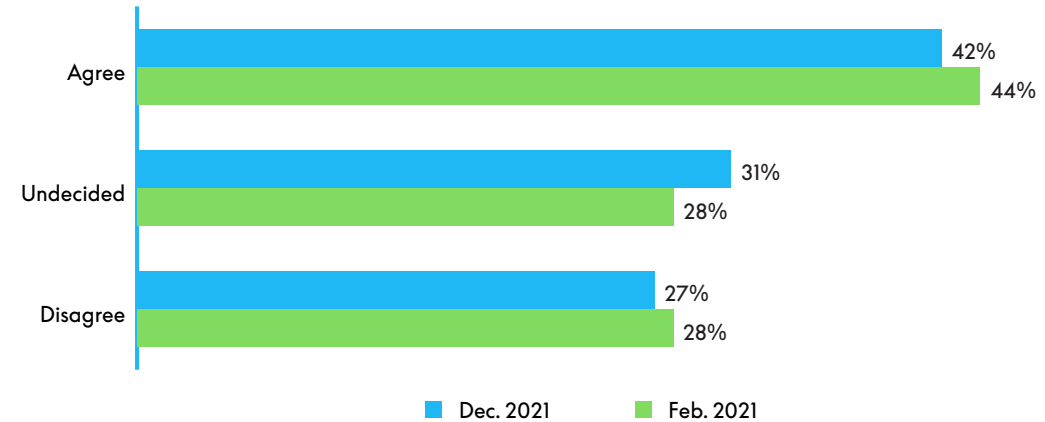


## Career impact

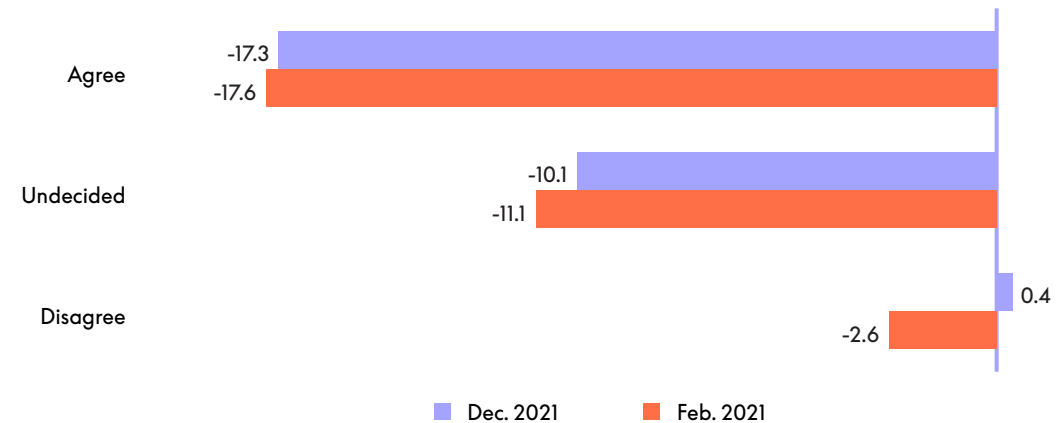
In February 2021 and December 2021, Canadians were asked whether they would be concerned that their career options would be limited if they had a mental health issue, and their workplace was aware.

- In December 2021, more than two in five (42 per cent) believe that their career options would be limited if they had a mental health issue and their workplace was aware, a slightly lower proportion than reported (44 per cent) in February 2021. The mental health score of those who would be concerned about career impact is significantly lower (-17.3), than the national average (-10.2).
- Overall, the mental health scores among each group of respondents are more favourable in December 2021 compared to February 2021.
- Canadians under the age of 40 are nearly 35 per cent more likely than those 50 and over to believe that their career options would be limited if they had a mental health issue, and their workplace was aware.

### My career options would be limited if I had a mental health issue, and my workplace was aware



### MHI score by my career options would be limited if I had a mental health issue, and my workplace was aware





# Overview of the Mental Health Index by LifeWorks™

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 each geography compared to benchmarks collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The increases and decreases in the MHI are intended to predict cost and productivity risks and inform the need for investment in mental health support by business and government.

## The Mental Health Index™ report has three 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.

## Methodology

Data for this report is collected through an online survey of 3,000 people who live in Canada and are currently employed or who were employed within the prior six months. Participants are selected to be representative of the age, gender, industry, and geographic distribution in Canada. The same respondents

take part each month to remove a sampling bias. Respondents are asked to consider the prior two weeks when answering each question. The Mental Health Index™ has been published monthly since April 2020. Benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Data for the current report was collected between December 3 and 14, 2021.

## 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. Everyone's scores are added and then divided by a 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 comprises data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was a period of relative social stability and steady economic growth. **The change compared 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 score reflects a comparison of 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 and scores below 50 reflect a decrease in mental stress.** The range is from zero to 100. A succession of scores over 50, month over month, reflects high risk.

## 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@lifeworks.com](mailto:MHI@lifeworks.com)



## About LifeWorks

LifeWorks is a world leader in providing digital and in-person solutions that support the total wellbeing of individuals. We deliver a personalized continuum of care that helps our clients improve the lives of their people and by doing so, improve their business.

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