

# The Mental Health Index™ report

Canada | April 2021



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# April 2021 highlights

## Key insight: Nearly half of Canadians feel the need for mental health support

More than one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the fatigue of ongoing restrictions as well as delays in vaccine shipments continue to strain the mental health of Canadians. Further, concerns about the voracity of the COVID-19 variants, especially among younger people, are fueling plans for lockdown measures in many parts of the country.

### Nearly half of Canadians feel the need for mental health support

- 45% of Canadians feel the need for mental health support
- Of those who have not taken action on mental health in spite of the need, 30% believe that affordable care is not available, while 29% report that they do not have energy to seek care, and 27% do not know which type of care is best for them
- 20% report a lack of available care or a long wait as a barrier to care. This group has the lowest mental health score
- 24% report having no time to focus on improving their mental health
- 67% use exercise to improve their mental health, followed by healthy eating (52%), and talking to friends (41%)
- Women are more likely than men to report a lack of energy to seek mental healthcare or discomfort sharing

## People believe the vaccine rollout as important to improving their outlook

- 31% report that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 would most improve their outlook for the future, and this group has the most favourable mental health score
- 24% report that the population reaching herd immunity would most improve their outlook, followed by 19% reporting no more restrictions of any kind

## Mental Health Index™ Sub-scores/trend

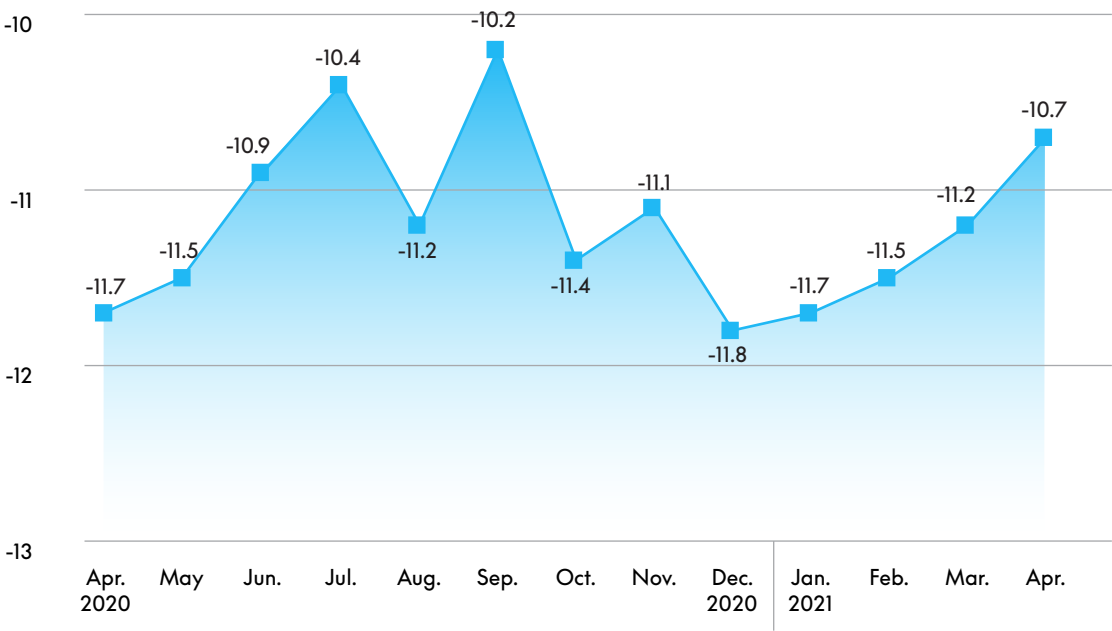
Depression	-12.5	▲
Work productivity	-11.8	▲
Anxiety	-11.6	▲
Isolation	-11.5	▲
Optimism	-11.2	▲
General psychological health	-3.3	▲
Financial risk	3.3	▼

\*arrows relate to the prior month

- For the eleventh consecutive month, full-time post-secondary students have the lowest mental health score. Full-time students also have the most significant increase in mental stress compared to the prior month
- In terms of the location of residence, the greatest increase in month-over-month stress is among people living in Alberta, followed by Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba
- People without emergency savings continue to experience a lower score in mental health (-24.0) than those with an emergency fund (-5.6)

# 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 April 2021 is -11 points. An 11-point decrease from the pre-COVID-19 benchmark reflects a population whose mental health is similar to the most distressed one per cent of the benchmark population.



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

MHI Current Month  
April 2021

-11

March 2021

-11

## Mental Health Index™ sub-scores

The lowest Mental Health Index™ sub-score is for the risk measure of depression (-12.5), followed by work productivity (-11.8), anxiety (-11.6), isolation (-11.5), optimism (-11.2), and general psychological health (-3.3). The risk measure with the best mental health score, and the only measure above the benchmark is financial risk (3.3).

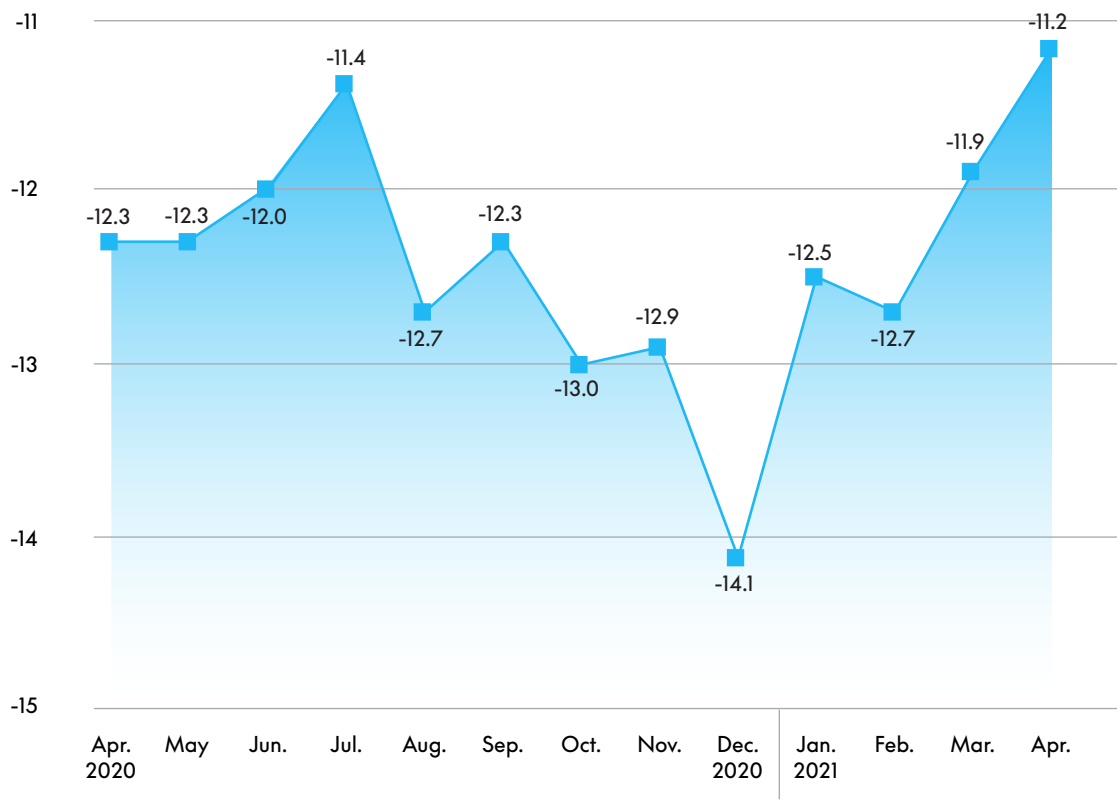
- Financial risk is the only score to have declined from the prior month.
- The anxiety score has the greatest improvement from the prior month, increasing 1.1 points, however, remains nearly 12-points below the benchmark.

Mental Health Index™ Sub-scores <sup>1</sup> 2021	April	March
Depression	-12.5	-13.1
Work productivity	-11.8	-12.2
Anxiety	-11.6	-12.7
Isolation	-11.5	-12.0
Optimism	-11.2	-11.9
General psychological health	-3.3	-3.9
Financial risk	3.3	4.0

<sup>1</sup> The demographic breakdown of sub-scores is available upon request.

# Optimism

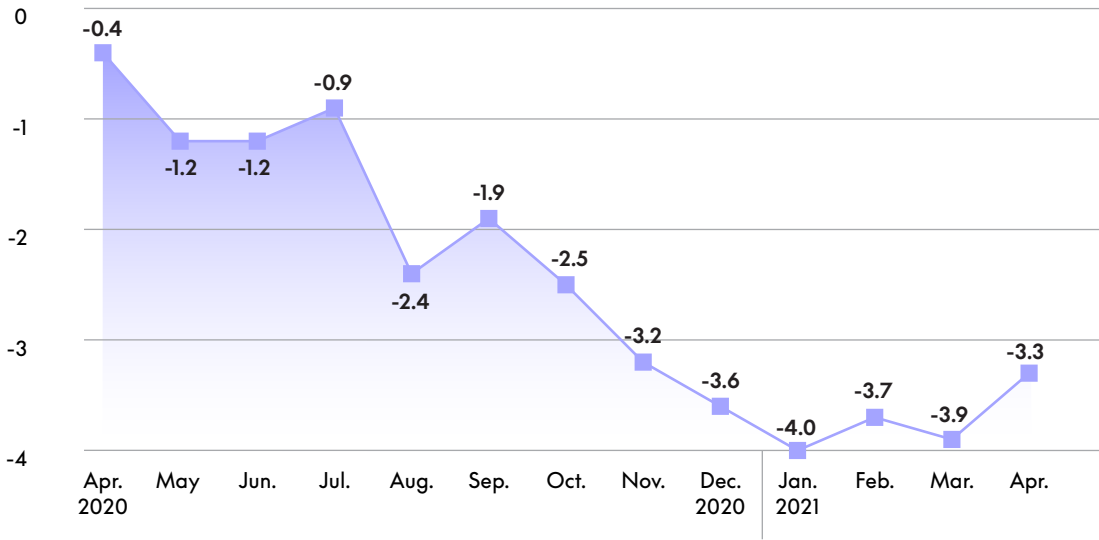
Optimism scores since April 2020 have remained significantly below the benchmark. Despite some months of modest improvement, including a peak in July (11.4), there was a general decline until December 2020 (-14.1). Since December, there has been an improvement in the optimism score, reaching a high of -11.2, in April 2021.



# General psychological health

General psychological health has been in decline since October 2020.

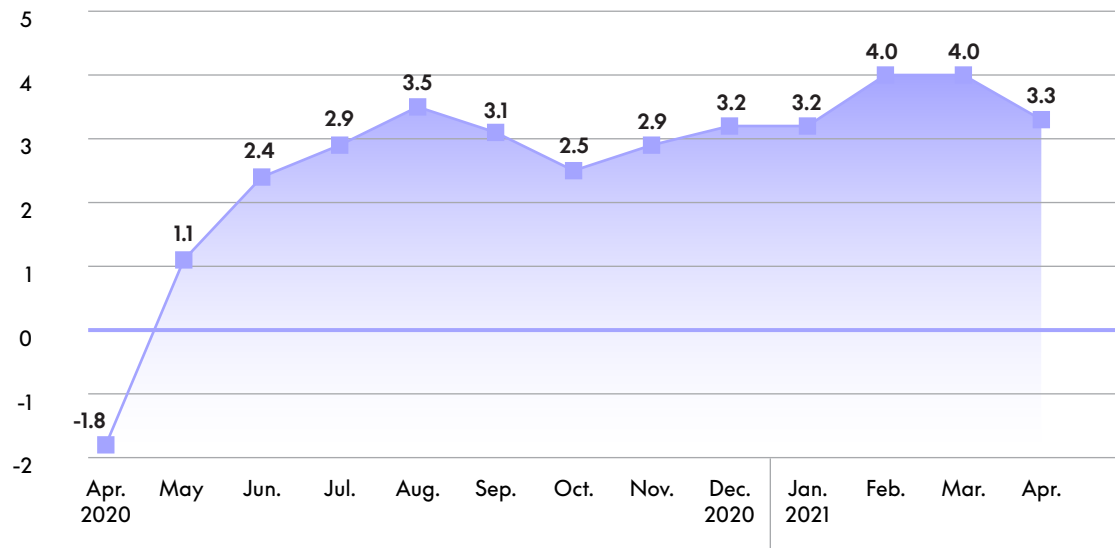
In April, a modest improvement is observed to -3.3.





# Financial risk

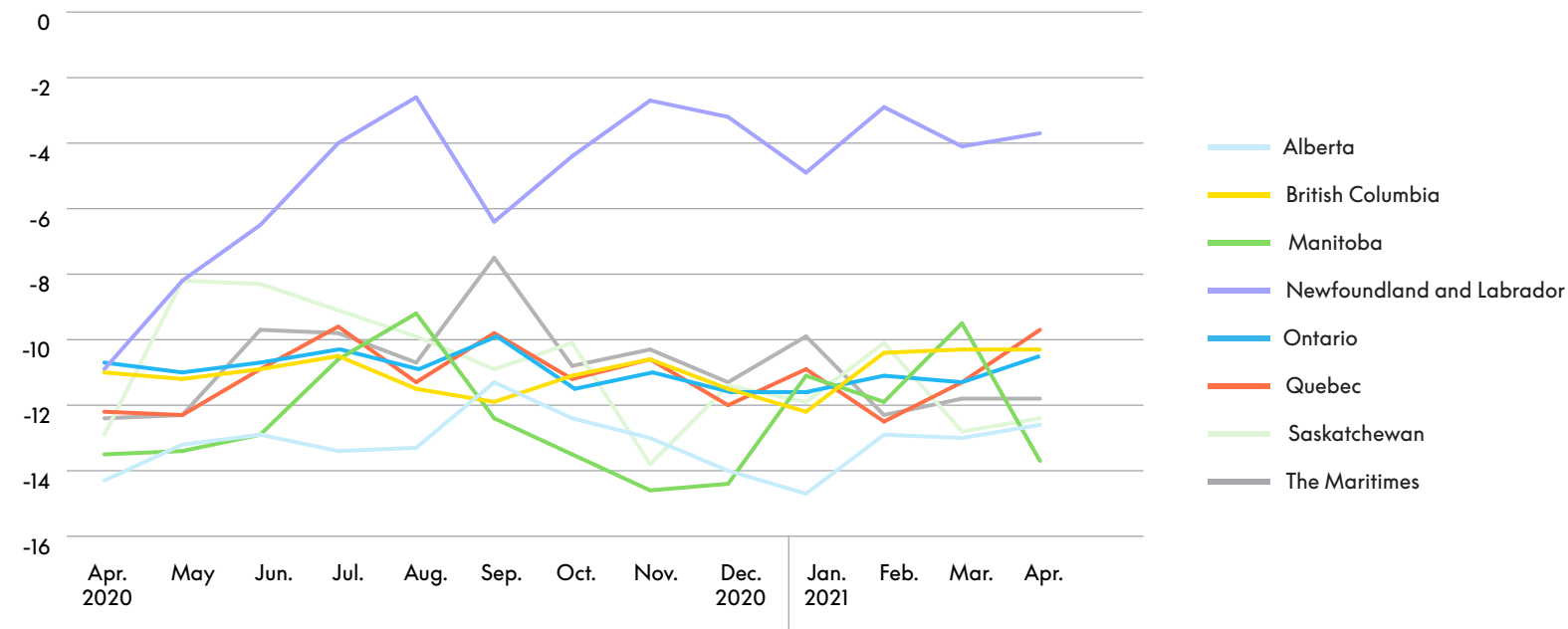
The financial risk score has improved 5.8 points from its lowest score (-1.8), at the start of the MHI, to its highest, 4.0, first recorded in February 2021. While there was a modest decline in the financial risk score in April, the score remains above pre-pandemic benchmark in April 2021 (3.3).



# Mental Health Index™ (provincial)

Provincial mental health scores showed general improvement between April and July 2020, with several regions showing declines from July to August. Since January 2021, scores have generally improved in most provinces.

- With a 0.4-point increase from the prior month, the mental health score in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be the strongest provincial score.
- Manitoba is the only province reporting a decrease in mental health with a 4.2-point decline from the prior month, resulting in the lowest provincial score (-13.7).



## Demographics

- Since the start of the MHI, we have found that women have significantly lower mental health scores than men. In April 2021, the mental health score of women is -12.3 compared to -9.1 for men.
- In thirteen consecutive months of MHI results, we have observed that mental health scores have improved with age.
- We have seen differences in mental scores between those with and without children since April 2020. More than one year later, this trend continues with a lower score for those with at least one child (-11.7) compared to those without children (-10.3).

## Employment

- Overall, five per cent of respondents are unemployed and fourteen per cent report reduced hours or reduced salary.
- Individuals reporting reduced hours compared to the prior month have the lowest mental health score (-17.7), followed by those not currently employed (-17.7), and those reporting reduced salary compared to the prior month (-16.6).
- Managers have a lower mental health score (-11.1) than non-managers (-10.0).
- Self-employed/sole proprietors have the highest mental health score (-6.7).
- Respondents who report working for companies with 51-100 employees have the lowest mental health score (-14.4).

## Emergency savings

- People without emergency savings continue to experience a lower score in mental health (-24.0) than the overall group. Individuals with an emergency fund have a mental health score of -5.6.

Employment status	April 2021	March 2021
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	-9.2	-9.5
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	-17.7	-18.1
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	-16.6	-22.3
Not currently employed	-17.2	-16.5
Age group	April 2021	March 2021
Age 20-29	-21.9	-21.6
Age 30-39	-16.0	-15.8
Age 40-49	-10.7	-12.2
Age 50-59	-7.4	-8.4
Age 60-69	-4.9	-4.6
Number of children	April 2021	March 2021
No children in household	-10.3	-10.4
1 child	-12.0	-14.2
2 children	-11.5	-12.9
3 children or more	-10.7	-8.6

Province	April 2021	March 2021
Alberta	-12.6	-13.0
British Columbia	-10.3	-10.3
Manitoba	-13.7	-9.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	-3.7	-4.1
The Maritimes	-11.8	-11.8
Quebec	-9.7	-11.3
Ontario	-10.5	-11.3
Saskatchewan	-12.4	-12.8
Gender	April 2021	March 2021
Men	-9.1	-9.4
Women	-12.3	-13.1
Income	April 2021	March 2021
Household income <\$30K/annum	-19.8	-21.9
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	-14.7	-14.8
\$60K to <\$100K	-11.8	-12.2
\$100K to <\$150K	-7.5	-8.7
\$150K or more	-2.8	-3.8

Employer size	April 2021	March 2021
Self-employed/sole proprietor	-6.7	-7.7
2-50 employees	-10.1	-10.4
51-100 employees	-14.4	-12.7
101-500 employees	-10.7	-13.0
501-1,000 employees	-13.3	-11.7
1,001-5,000 employees	-10.7	-11.1
5,001-10,000 employees	-9.8	-10.1
More than 10,000 employees	-9.0	-10.5
Manager	April 2021	March 2021
Manager	-11.1	-12.5
Non-manager	-10.0	-10.2

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)

For the eleventh consecutive month, full-time post-secondary students have the lowest mental health score (-26.1). This score continues to be significantly lower than the next lowest scores: individuals in Cultural Industries (-19.3), and those in Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (-15.0).

Individuals in Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction (-2.7), Automotive (-3.4), and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (-6.9) show the highest mental health scores this month.

Individuals in the Automotive industry, Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction, and Accommodation and Food Services show the greatest improvement in mental health since last month.

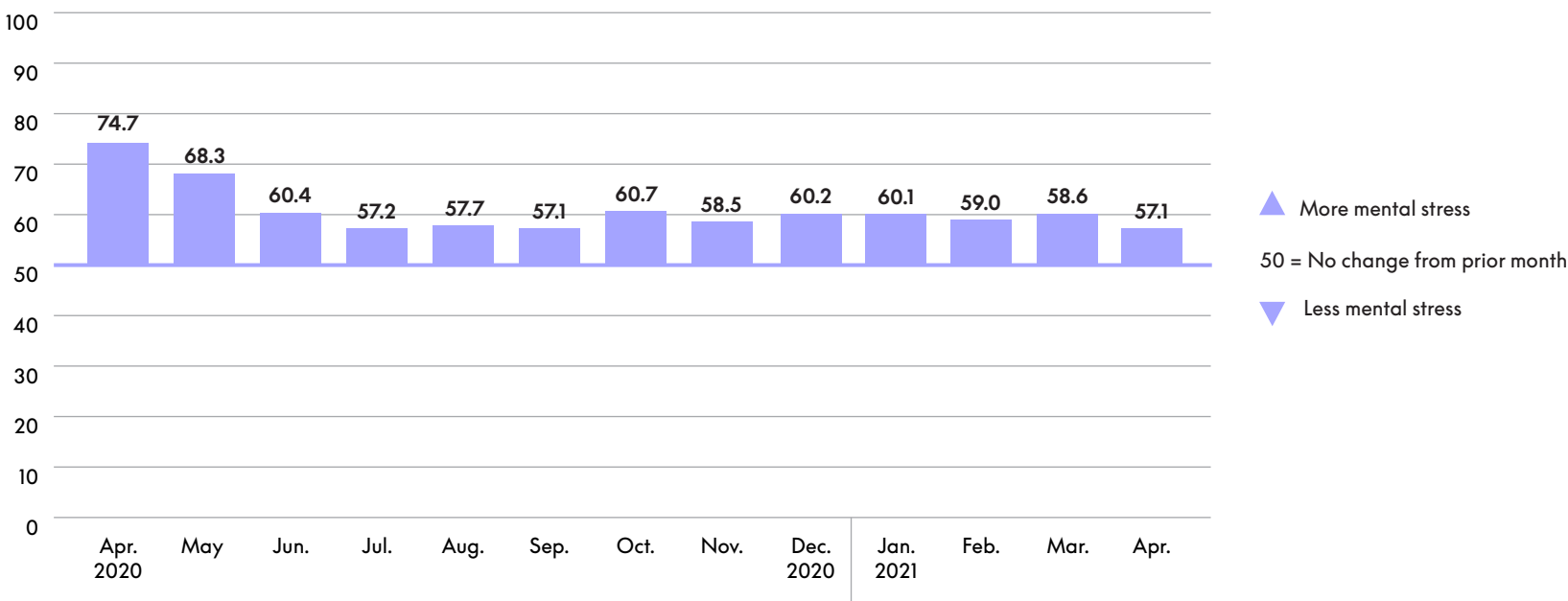
Changes from the prior month are shown in the table.

Industry	April 2021	March 2021	Change
Automotive Industry	-3.4	-12.9	9.5
Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction	-2.7	-6.3	3.6
Accommodation and Food Services	-12.9	-15.9	3.0
Manufacturing	-8.0	-10.3	2.3
Construction	-9.0	-10.8	1.9
Public Administration	-7.3	-9.1	1.8
Utilities	-12.7	-14.5	1.8
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	-6.9	-8.2	1.4
Educational Services	-11.7	-13.1	1.4
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	-9.3	-10.5	1.1
Transportation and Warehousing	-9.9	-10.6	0.7
Finance and Insurance	-12.2	-12.9	0.6
Retail Trade	-12.2	-12.4	0.2
Health Care and Social Assistance	-11.4	-11.5	0.1
Full-time student	-26.1	-25.8	-0.4
Wholesale Trade	-11.3	-10.9	-0.4
Other	-11.3	-9.8	-1.5
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	-9.7	-7.9	-1.8
Management of Companies and Enterprises	-14.4	-12.2	-2.2
Other services (except Public Administration)	-11.3	-8.9	-2.4
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	-15.0	-12.3	-2.7
Information and Cultural Industries	-19.3	-12.4	-6.9

# 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 April 2021 is 57.1.** This reflects a net increase in mental stress compared to the prior month.

The current score indicates that 21 per cent of the population is experiencing more mental stress compared to the prior month, with 7 per cent experiencing less. A continued increase in mental stress since April 2020 indicates a significant accumulation of strain in the Canadian population.



MStressChg Current  
Month—April 2021

57.1

MStressChg  
March 2021

58.6

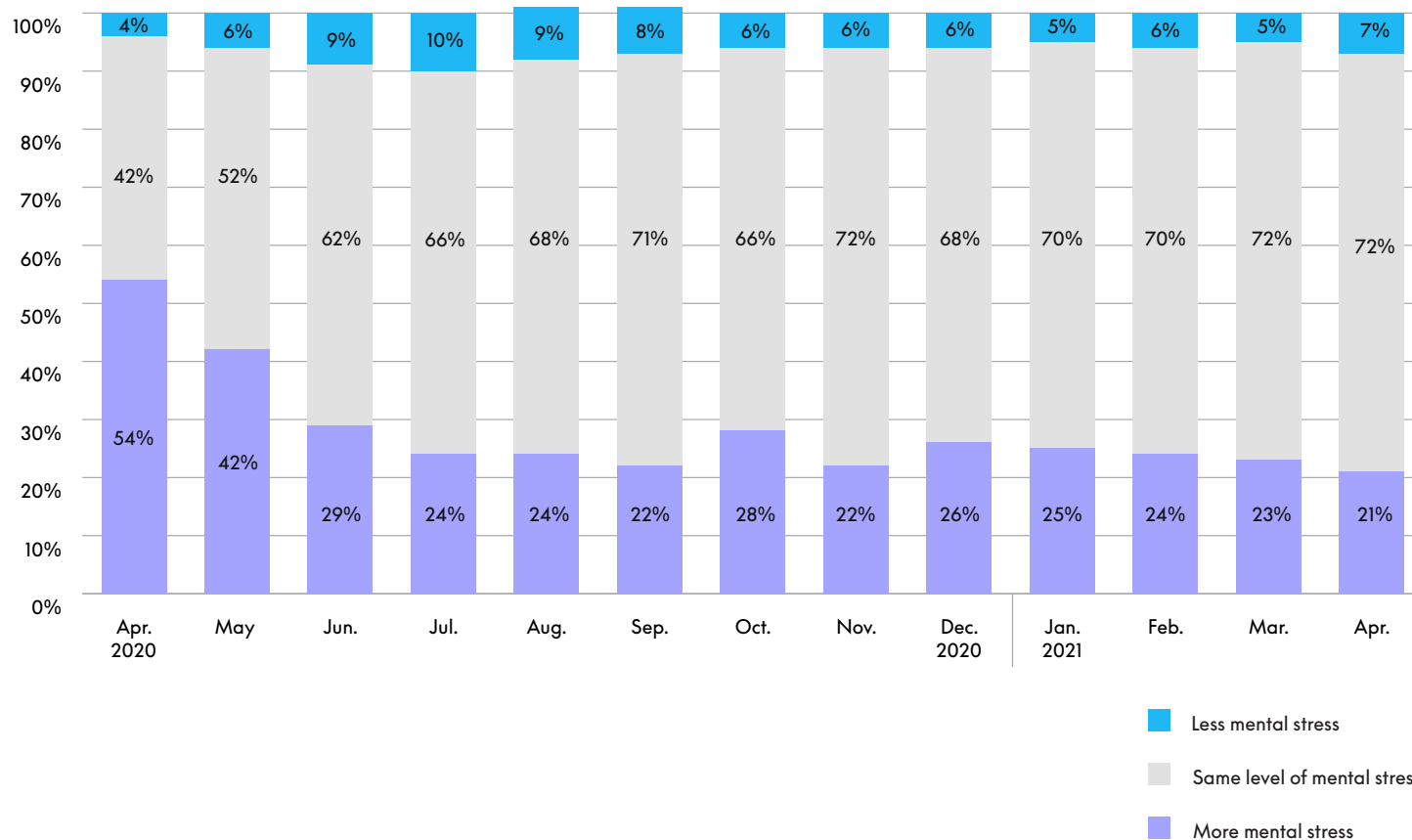
# Mental Stress Change (percentages)

Mental Stress Change tracks everyone's 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 more than one year, 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. While those reporting increased month-over-month mental stress decreased to 21 per cent in April 2021, 72 per cent of respondents report the same level of mental stress and only 7 per cent report a decrease in mental stress.

Mental Stress Change by month



## Demographics

- Since the start of the MHI, we have observed that younger people are experiencing a greater increase in mental stress compared to older respondents.
- We have also found that women have larger increases in mental stress than men. In April 2021, the mental stress change score of women is 58.6 compared to 55.6 for men.

## Geography

- The greatest increase in month-over-month stress is for respondents living in Alberta (60.1), followed by Ontario (58.0), British Columbia (57.8), and Manitoba (57.2).
- Even those living in provinces where the increase in mental stress was less still had significant increases including Saskatchewan (57.0), Quebec (55.0), and the Maritimes (53.2).
- Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province where the percentage of people with an increase in mental stress is equal to the percentage with a decrease in mental stress.

## Employment

- The greatest increase in mental stress is seen in employed people with reduced hours (60.3), followed by unemployed people (60.2) and employed people with no change to salary or hours (56.5).
- The greatest increase in mental stress is observed among managers (58.5) while non-managers have a more modest increase in mental stress (56.1).



Employment status	April 2021	March 2021
Employed (no change in hours/salary)	56.5	57.9
Employed (fewer hours compared to last month)	60.3	62.3
Employed (reduced salary compared to last month)	56.3	64.3
Not currently employed	60.2	57.2
Age group	April 2021	March 2021
Age 20-29	62.9	64.6
Age 30-39	60.1	61.1
Age 40-49	57.3	60.0
Age 50-59	54.8	57.0
Age 60-69	54.8	54.0
Number of children	April 2021	March 2021
No children in household	56.5	57.6
1 child	58.1	61.5
2 children	60.2	61.7
3 children or more	53.9	55.3

Province	April 2021	March 2021
Alberta	60.1	61.5
British Columbia	57.8	57.2
Manitoba	57.2	56.9
Newfoundland and Labrador	50.0	57.6
The Maritimes	53.2	56.0
Quebec	55.0	58.0
Ontario	58.0	59.3
Saskatchewan	57.0	56.8
Gender	April 2021	March 2021
Men	55.6	56.9
Women	58.6	60.3
Income	April 2021	March 2021
Household income <\$30K/annum	58.9	62.0
\$30K to <\$60K/annum	57.2	59.1
\$60K to <\$100K	56.9	58.6
\$100K to <\$150K	57.4	58.1
\$150K or more	57.3	57.7

Employer size	April 2021	March 2021
Self-employed/sole proprietor	54.1	58.0
2-50 employees	56.7	56.9
51-100 employees	57.5	58.6
101-500 employees	56.8	58.3
501-1,000 employees	61.9	62.8
1,001-5,000 employees	58.6	59.1
5,001-10,000 employees	57.0	60.2
More than 10,000 employees	55.1	57.8
Manager	April 2021	March 2021
Manager	58.5	61.0
Non-manager	56.1	57.4

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)

Mental Stress Change scores for individuals employed in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (50.0), Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction (50.0), reflects a stabilization of mental stress from month to month.

Full-time post-secondary students continue to have the most significant increase in mental stress (71.6), followed by individuals in Management of Companies and Enterprises (64.8), and Utilities (62.5).

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

Industry	April 2021	March 2021
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	50.0	56.1
Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction	50.0	55.9
Automotive Industry	51.3	55.9
Other services (except Public Administration)	52.5	53.0
Transportation and Warehousing	53.5	57.3
Construction	54.5	56.1
Public Administration	55.4	59.3
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	56.0	58.2
Retail Trade	56.1	59.3
Other	56.6	54.6
Accommodation and Food Services	56.8	59.0
Finance and Insurance	57.5	59.4
Manufacturing	57.6	56.5
Educational Services	58.2	62.9
Information and Cultural Industries	58.6	61.5
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	59.4	58.7
Health Care and Social Assistance	59.6	59.9
Wholesale Trade	60.2	62.2
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	61.1	56.7
Utilities	62.5	59.7
Management of Companies and Enterprises	64.8	62.0
Full-time student	71.6	64.9

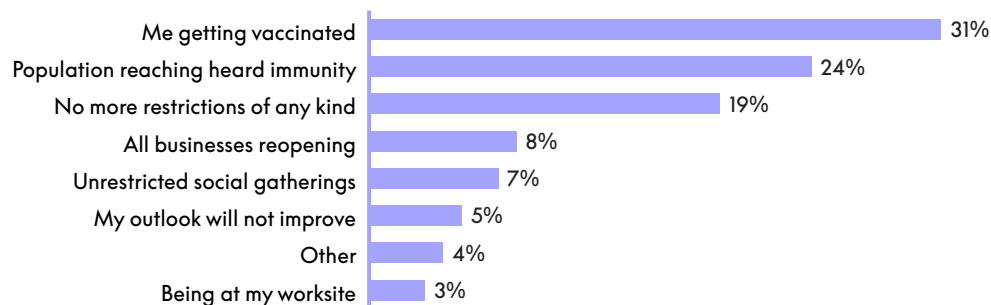
# Spotlight

## Future outlook

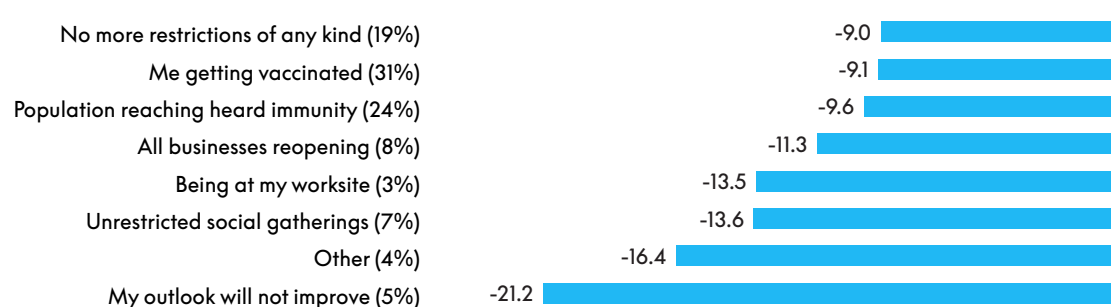
With vaccines continuing to roll-out across Canada, there is cause for optimism. Respondents were asked what would most improve their outlook for the future.

- Nearly one-third (31 per cent) report that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 would most improve their outlook for the future and this group has nearly the most favourable mental health score (-9.1).
- Almost one-quarter (24 per cent) report that the population reaching herd immunity would most improve their outlook, followed by those reporting no more restrictions of any kind (19 per cent).
- Employees working fewer hours or with reduced salary are 60 per cent more likely to report that businesses reopening would most improve their outlook.

## Event that would change my outlook for the future



## MHI score by event that would most improve my outlook for the future



# Supports and barriers to improving mental health

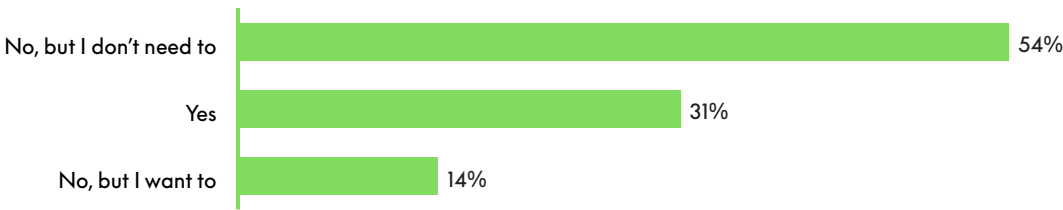
## Steps to improving mental health

In March 2021, we reported that that 44 per cent of Canadians were less likely to seek mental healthcare than prior to the pandemic or were undecided about accessing mental healthcare. This reluctance exists despite continued availability of mental healthcare.

Respondents were asked if they were taking steps to improve their mental health.

- Nearly one-third (31 per cent) have taken steps to improve their mental health, while another fourteen per cent have not taken steps but want to.
- The least favourable mental health scores are seen among the fourteen per cent who have not taken steps but want to (-26.3), followed by those who have taken steps to improve their mental health (-14.9).
- Individuals under 40 are nearly seventy per cent more likely than those over 60 to have taken steps to improve their mental health.

### Have you taken steps to improve your mental health?



### MHI score by whether or not respondents have taken steps to improve your mental health?

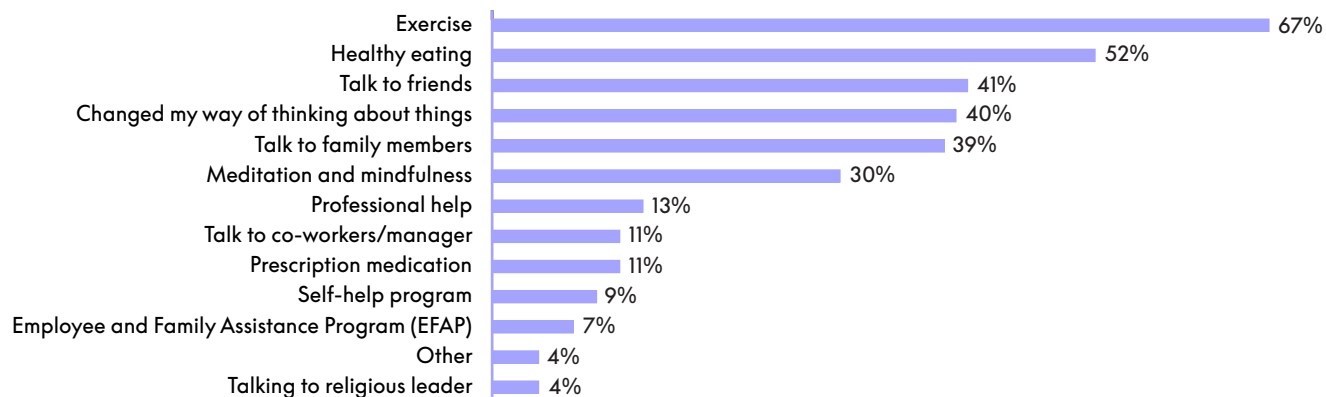


## Supports to improve mental health

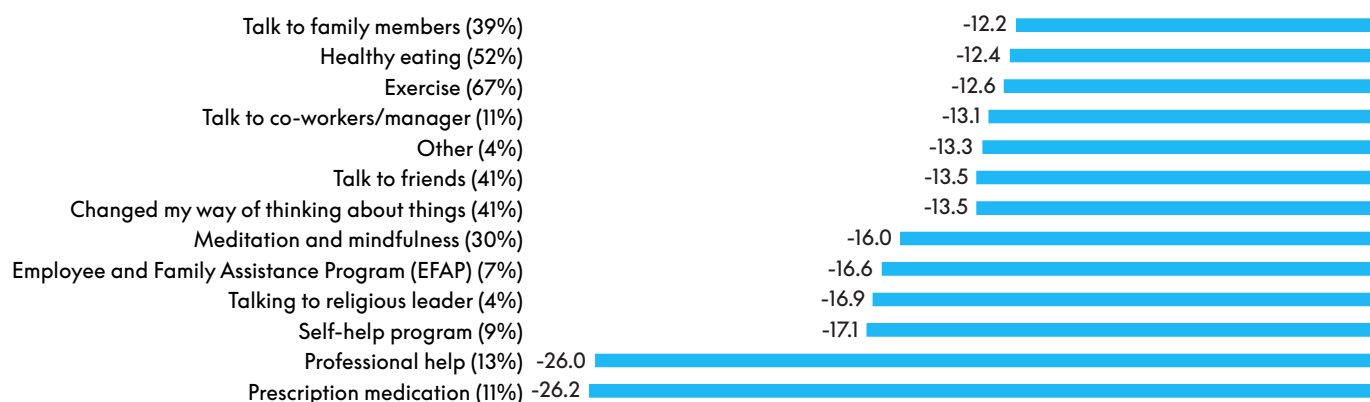
More than 30 per cent of people report taking steps to improve their mental health. Respondents were asked to select the supports that they have used to manage their mental health.

- More than two-thirds (67 per cent) of people use exercise to improve their mental health, followed by healthy eating (52 per cent), and talking to friends (41 per cent).
- The most favourable mental health scores are reported by people who talk to family members as a means of mental health support (-12.2), followed by those reporting healthy eating (-12.4), and those exercising (-12.6).
- Women are more than thirty per cent more likely than men to report talking to friends and family members for support.
- Employees with no change to hours or salary are more than fifty per cent more likely than those with reduced salary or fewer hours to rely on co-workers or their manager for mental health support.

## Supports to improve mental health



## MHI score by supports to improve mental health

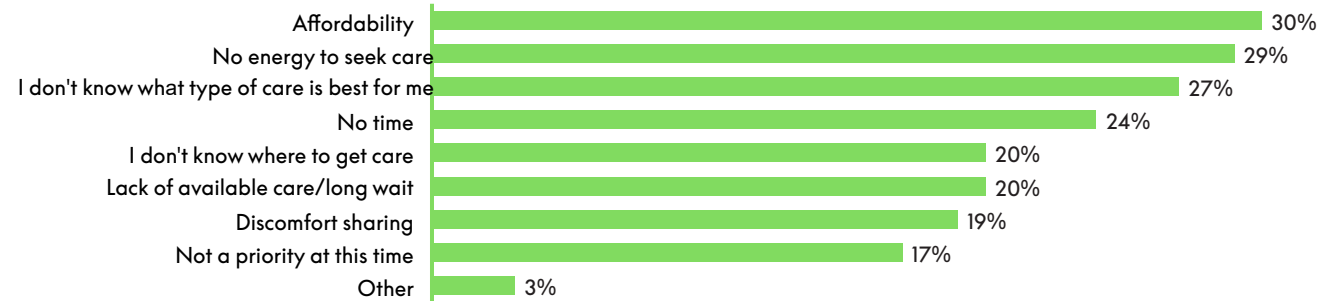


## Barriers to improving mental health

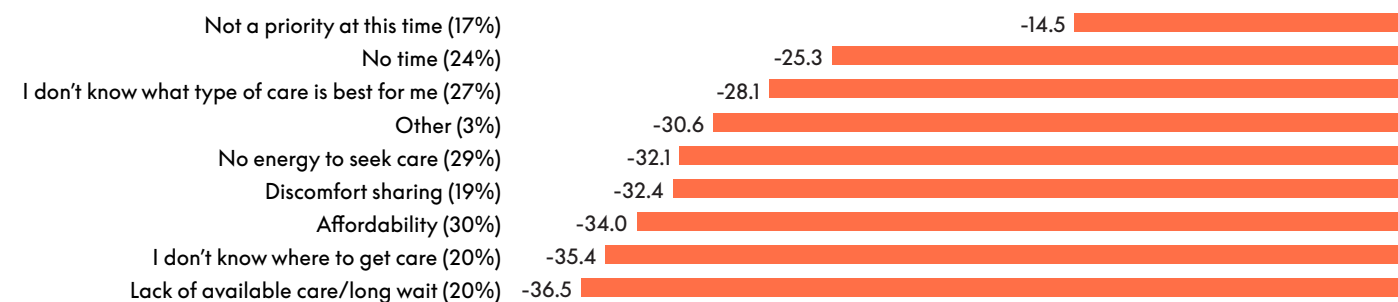
Fourteen per cent of people report that they have not taken steps to improve their mental health but would like to. We asked this group about barriers to mental health care.

- Thirty per cent believe that affordable care is not available, followed by twenty-nine per cent reporting that they do not have energy to seek care, and twenty-seven per cent not knowing which type of care is best for them.
- The lowest mental health scores are seen among twenty per cent of people reporting a lack of available care or a long wait (-36.5), followed by twenty per cent of people who do not know where to get care (-35.4), and thirty percent for whom affordability of care (-34.0) is a barrier.

## Barriers to improving mental health

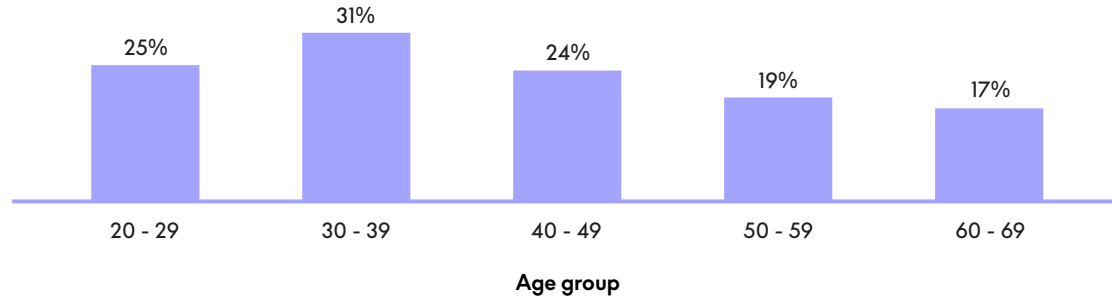


## MHI score barriers to improving mental health



Nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of people report having no time to focus on improving their mental health. Almost one-third (31 per cent) of people aged 30-39 report that they have no time, followed by one-quarter of people aged 20-29 and twenty-four per cent of people aged 40-49.

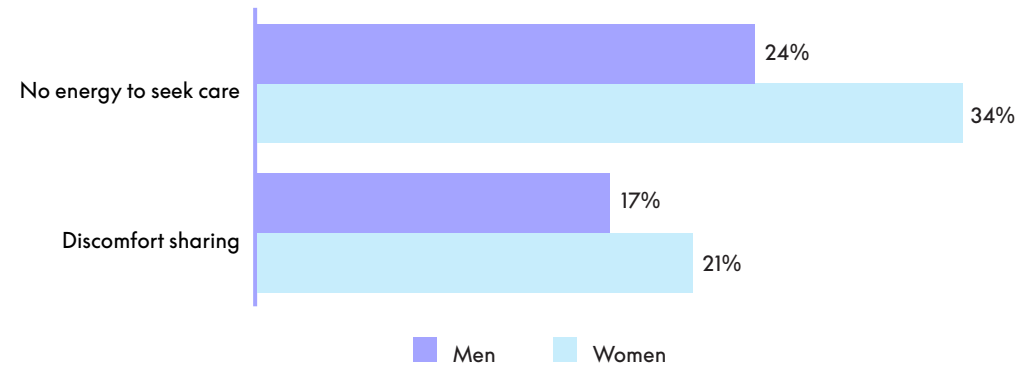
#### People reporting “no time” as a barrier to improving mental health



## Gender differences

- Nearly one-quarter of men and more than one-third of women report lacking energy to seek mental healthcare.
- Men without children are nearly twice as likely as men with children to report a lack of energy to improving their mental health.

### Key gender differences in reported barriers to improving mental health





# 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 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 Canadians who are living 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™ is published monthly starting in April 2020. Benchmark data was collected in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Data for the current report was collected between March 22 to April 2, 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 global leader in delivering technology-enabled solutions that help clients support the total wellbeing of their people and build organizational resiliency. By improving lives, we improve business. Our solutions span employee and family assistance, health and wellness, recognition, pension and benefits administration, retirement and financial consulting, actuarial and investment services. LifeWorks employs approximately 7,000 employees who work with some 24,000 client organizations that use our services in more than 160 countries. LifeWorks is a publicly traded company on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX: LWRK).

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