



CMHA Mental Health Week - Fact Sheet

About Mental Health Week

- This year, CMHA Mental Health Week is being observed May 4-10, 2020.
- Every year since 1951, CMHA has hosted Mental Health Week in the first full week in May, making 2020 the 69th year.
- Mental Health Week is a Canadian tradition, with communities, schools and workplaces rallying to celebrate, protect and promote mental health.
- Visit www.mentalhealthweek.ca for info and tools about CMHA Mental Health Week.
- Connect on social media using the hashtags **#GetReal** and **#MentalHealthWeek**.

About the 2020 Mental Health Week campaign

- This year, the theme is 'social connection' and its importance for mental health. The campaign this year calls for us to **#GetReal about how we really feel**.
- This year's campaign is based on the insight that people in Canada commonly ask one another how we are but that it is also common not to provide – or expect – a truthful answer. Many of us say we're fine, even when we don't mean it. 'Fine' keeps us at arm's length from real social connections with others. Every time we just go through the motions, we miss a chance to connect with others in a meaningful way.
- Each year, 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness or mental health issue, but 5 in 5 Canadians has mental health—we all need social connection.

An epidemic of loneliness

- Even before there was COVID-19, loneliness and social isolation were already of major concern in our society.
- People with weak or few social connections are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, anti-social behaviour and suicidal behaviours.¹
- Lack of strong relationships affects the risk of mortality in a comparable way to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.²

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2940247/>

² Harvard Health Publishing. 2010. "The health benefits of strong relationships." *Harvard's Women's Health Watch*. Retrieved March 30, 2020, from https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/the-health-benefits-of-strong-relationships

- A 2017 Vancouver Foundation survey found that nearly a third of people aged 18-24 in the bustling city said that they felt lonely.³
- Research shows that loneliness is more keenly felt by people who belong to a visible minority, who are Indigenous, who have mobility challenges and who are LGBTQ-identifying.⁴

The importance of social connection

- Social inclusion and social integration have been identified by the WHO and the UN as important protective factors for good mental health.
- By providing emotional support, companionship and opportunities for meaningful social engagement, social networks have an influence on self-esteem, coping effectiveness, depression, distress and sense of well-being (Berkman & Glass, 2000).
- Social networks and social ties have a beneficial effect on mental health outcomes, including stress reactions, psychological well-being and symptoms of psychological distress including depression and anxiety (Kawachi & Berkman 2001).
- Studies show that having social connections and being civically engaged are associated with positive mental and physical health and well-being.⁵
- Research has shown that even having one good friend can save children from being lonely.⁶

Social connection in a time of social distancing

- Everyone needs emotional support, but it's even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some experts have argued that social distancing should actually be called *physical* distancing, because we actually need each other socially. Read more on this subject in a recent opinion piece in The Globe & Mail [here](#).
- Phone calls, video calls and other digital technologies offer excellent opportunities for connecting face-to-face, even when we can't be in the same room.
- The pandemic can bring us together in unexpected ways. Canada has been at the forefront of a campaign for *caremongering*, which has seen members of the community helping one another during these difficult times.
- Social connection can help us recover as a community. Socially connected communities simply respond better to crisis and disaster, and rebound better afterwards. (Aldrich, 2017; Banwell & Kingham 2015; Carpenter, 2013.)

³ <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/sites/all/themes/connengage/files/VF-Connect-Engage-report.pdf>

⁴ <http://angusreid.org/social-isolation-loneliness-canada/>

⁵ <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Social-Inclusion-Report.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/loneliness-what-it-is-how-it-makes-you-sick-and-how-to-cure-it-20170621-gwvikj.html>