

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel anxious and crave real connection, but say they're doing "fine"**

***For Mental Health Week, the Canadian Mental Health Association - NL promotes social connection to protect mental health in these difficult times***

**ST. JOHN'S (NL) May 4, 2020** – Most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians rely on shortcuts to describe their emotional state—even during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to new data released today by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in partnership with Maru/Matchbox, 75 per cent of Atlantic Canadians who were asked “how are you?” rely on “I’m fine, thanks” to express how they’re doing, despite the fact that they are feeling more negative emotions than positive ones these days (61% negative vs. 39% positive). The data were released to mark Canada’s 69<sup>th</sup> annual Mental Health Week, which runs May 4-10, 2020.

Despite a pandemic-driven growth in video-conferencing and social media usage, Canadians are feeling more isolated than ever (up 12 points from 39% to 47% in less than one month) and crave real, meaningful connections. In fact, two-thirds of Atlantic Canadians (63%) report they would like to experience more meaningful social interactions in their daily life.

“Most Canadians want more social connection, yet they’re reluctant to have the kind of honest, open conversations that build the connection they crave,” says Margaret Eaton, National CEO of CMHA. “In our society, it’s a cultural norm to ask people how they’re doing, but not to expect, nor provide, a truthful answer. This Mental Health Week, it’s time to get real about how we feel. It’s clear we need each other more than ever.”

Prior to the global pandemic, loneliness was already a major public health concern. People with weak or few social connections are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, anti-social behaviour and suicide.<sup>1</sup> And a lack of strong relationships has the same negative impact on life expectancy as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>2</sup>

Due to physical distancing measures, people are isolated in their homes, missing out on family events and in-person activities and it appears they’re feeling it. Almost half of Atlantic Canadians are feeling anxious (48%), and only eight per cent are feeling happy. As we face social distancing measures, it’s important to note that people don’t need to be close to feel close.

“Research shows that social connection and social support are factors that protect and promote good mental health. It doesn’t just feel good to connect—it’s actually good for everyone’s mental health,” says CEO John Abbott, CMHA-NL.

Strong social networks lead to better self-esteem, coping mechanisms and a sense of well-being, and reduce depression and distress by providing emotional support, companionship and opportunities for meaningful social engagement.<sup>3</sup>

CMHA-NL is encouraging Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to get involved in the province’s Mental Health Week activities. While in-person events are not going ahead, the provincial CMHA division is hosting and promoting several mental health and wellness webinars and other

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3890922/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524\\_2006\\_Article\\_44.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524_2006_Article_44.pdf)

virtual events, including a public wellness discussion facilitated by CMHA-NL Western Regional Coordinator Tianna Butler.

Additionally, municipalities across the province are supporting mental health by proclaiming May 4 - 10, 2020 as Mental Health Week. Many are lighting landmarks and municipal buildings in green to show their support, while others are engaging in the week's #GetReal campaign on social media. A full list of activities can be found at <https://cmhanl.info/MHW2020>.

The focus of this year's Mental Health Week is to promote social connection and the role it plays in good mental health. To get involved, you can:

- **Learn** more about your mental health and how to feel close even when we can't be at [mentalhealthweek.ca/yourmentalhealth](https://mentalhealthweek.ca/yourmentalhealth)
- **Share** your support on social media by downloading a toolkit at [mentalhealthweek.ca/toolkit](https://mentalhealthweek.ca/toolkit) and using hashtags #GetReal #MentalHealthWeek and #TogetherApart
- **Donate** to support CMHA-NL's mental health programs and services at <https://cmhanl.ca/donate/>
- **Connect.** If you or someone you love is struggling, please [contact your local CMHA](#) to find out about virtual and phone-based support services there to help you. Or, visit the Government of Canada's [Wellness Together](#) portal. If you are in crisis, please call the Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-888-737-4668 toll-free.

Mental Health Week was introduced by CMHA in 1951 and has since become a Canadian tradition. To learn more, please visit [www.mentalhealthweek.ca](http://www.mentalhealthweek.ca)

-30-

### **About the Data**

CMHA partnered with Maru/Matchbox to conduct an online survey among a total of 1,507 Canadian adults on April 15, 2020. A probability sample of this size would have a margin of error of +/- 2.5%, nineteen times out of twenty. The sample was weighted to reflect the Canadian adult population according to the most recent Census data. Additional data was taken from Maru's ongoing, near-daily FEEL, BEHAVE, THINK COVID-19 tracking study. For more information, please go to [www.marureports.com/coronavirus](http://www.marureports.com/coronavirus)

### **About the Canadian Mental Health Association - NL Division**

Canadian Mental Health Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Division (CMHA-NL), is a provincial division of CMHA, the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health. CMHA-NL's mission is to facilitate access to the resources people require to maintain and improve mental health and community integration, build resilience, and support recovery from mental illness. CMHA-NL is a not-for-profit organization that serves the public through mental health education, training, and intensive case management programs, like the Justice Program.

### **For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

Sarah Cook  
Marketing and Communications Coordinator, CMHA-NL  
(t) 709-753-8550 ext. 104 (c) 709-743-0069  
[scook@cmhanl.ca](mailto:scook@cmhanl.ca)