



CanCOVID Speaker Series

Event Summary



CIHR's COVID-19 and Mental Health Research Initiative: Supporting Mental Health and Substance Use Responses to COVID-19

Speaker

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Objective

To offer a summary of the Speaker Series presentation on 'CIHR's COVID-19 and Mental Health Research Initiative: Supporting the Mental Health and Substance Use Responses to COVID-19.' The aim of this talk was to provide an overview of the [COVID-19 and Mental Health \(CMH\) Initiative](#), which was developed in partnership with several CIHR institutes, in addition to Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). It has three funding streams, including knowledge synthesis, guidance documents for people who use drugs, and operating grants related to substance use service needs. The knowledge synthesis stream developed under CMH identified eight priority groups, viewed to be at significant risk of mental health challenges due to COVID. The resulting data is targeted at researchers, health care providers, policy makers, and the general population.

Key Messages

- Children, youth and families, people with pre-existing difficulties, disabilities and chronic illnesses were most impacted. Social nets have been particularly beneficial. There is a need for evidence to guide remote mental health care services.
- Among the general population, data demonstrated a decrease in suicidal behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, among certain groups there is a higher risk of negative mental health outcomes. There is also a need to consider racial and socioeconomic inequities in access to mental health care and services, inequities which existed prior to, and were exacerbated by the pandemic.
- There is an urgent need for an increase in research into strategies to effectively manage mental health aimed at women healthcare workers. Caregivers require at least as much support as those they are caring for.
- The opioid crisis was exacerbated by the pandemic, in part due to a disruption in services for people who use drugs. Stigma around mental health has improved, while stigma around substance use has not. This is impacting substance users' willingness to access care services.

Implications/Next Steps

- Virtual interventions may be effective for individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions. More research is needed into social connections among older adults, where access to technology and technical literacy pose barriers to virtual interventions.
- As future strategies to combat mental health challenges are being developed, it is important that interventions do not continue to perpetuate inequalities, through ensuring access to virtual care for low socio-economic populations and services to match varied population needs. Gender and trauma informed care are necessary for the future delivery of care.

[Click here to view the recording of this event.](#)