

# Participants with long-term conditions and disabilities report that the pandemic is taking a toll on their mental and physical health

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A recent crowdsourcing survey found that over half of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities reported that their mental health was worse than before the pandemic. Almost half also reported that their overall health was worse than before the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a wide range of challenges for Canadians. In particular, those living with long-term conditions and disabilities may experience increased difficulty navigating this new environment. To collect information on their experiences, Statistics Canada conducted a crowdsourcing survey from June 23 to July 6, 2020. Respondents were asked a series of questions on their employment status, health and economic circumstances during the pandemic. Unlike data from other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected using a probability-based sampling design. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings, and no inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results. Previous analysis examined the [employment and income impacts of COVID-19](#) on people living with long-term conditions and disabilities.

A new infographic available today focuses on self-reported health, unmet needs for services and therapies, and difficulties meeting certain financial obligations and essential needs among participants aged 15 and older living with long-term conditions and disabilities.

An article titled "[The changes in health and well-being of Canadians with long-term conditions or disabilities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," also released today, examines the health trends of participants in the context of the pandemic. This article further explores the health and well-being of participants with long-term health conditions and disabilities before and during the pandemic, by type of difficulty they experience, gender, age and visible minority status.

## Nearly half of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities report fair or poor overall health

Participants with long-term conditions and disabilities were asked to report their general health and mental health status during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost one-fifth (19%) reported that their health was excellent or very good, and over one-third (35%) reported good health. At the same time, nearly half of participants (45%) reported that their health was fair or poor, and close to half (48%) reported that their overall health status was worse than before the pandemic.

## Over half of participants report that their mental health is worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic

A recent study found that [challenges related to COVID-19](#), such as following physical distancing measures, losing a job or caring for family members, can lead to an increase in loneliness, stress and anxiety. Moreover, the study also found that the COVID-19 pandemic can have a greater impact on vulnerable groups, particularly on their mental health.

A previous report on the [mental health of Canadians during the pandemic](#) found that about one-quarter (24%) of participants reported fair or poor mental health. In contrast, over half (55%) of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities in this recent crowdsourcing initiative reported their mental health status since the start of the



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pandemic as fair or poor. About one-fifth (18%) of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities reported excellent or very good mental health, and another 27% reported good mental health. Over half (57%) of participants reported that their mental health was worse than before the pandemic.

## Over three-quarters of participants report unmet needs for therapies and services

At the beginning of the pandemic, restrictions resulted in limited availability or changes in service delivery for many health services and supports. The loss of or limited access to these services could have a negative impact on the overall health and well-being of people with long-term conditions and disabilities.

In fact, over three-quarters (77%) of participants who needed at least one therapy or service for their condition did not receive it because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the most commonly reported unmet needs were related to regular medical or dental treatments or appointments for issues unrelated to COVID-19 (51%) and physiotherapy, massage therapy or chiropractic treatments (37%). In addition, almost 1 in 10 participants (8%) reported that they required testing or medical attention for COVID-19 but were unable to receive it because of their condition.

## Over half of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities whose household income decreased struggle to meet food and grocery needs

A previous release on the [impacts of COVID-19](#) indicated that many participants with long-term conditions and disabilities have experienced employment and income changes during the pandemic, such as a temporary or permanent job loss, reduced hours, or reliance on non-employment income. Results also showed that the ability of many participants with long-term conditions and disabilities to meet financial obligations or essential needs has been affected. The reported overall impact in these areas varied by gender. Female participants (60%) were more likely than male participants (56%) to report an impact on their ability to meet their financial obligations and essential needs.

Participants with long-term conditions and disabilities felt the most impact on their ability to meet their food and grocery needs, as well as their personal protective equipment needs. Among those who reported that their overall monthly household income had decreased, over half (54%) reported an impact on their ability to meet their food and grocery needs. The pandemic has sparked increased demand for personal protective equipment, and many participants experienced difficulties obtaining some. Over one-third (38%) of participants with long-term conditions and disabilities reported an impact on their ability to meet their needs for personal protective equipment, such as hand sanitizer or face masks.

### Note to readers

*Data in this release are from Statistics Canada's crowdsourcing initiative Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians. The crowdsourcing questionnaire collects data on the current economic and social situation, as well as on people's physical and mental health, to assess the needs of communities and implement suitable support measures during and after the pandemic. This alternative method of collecting information can be used to supplement data obtained from more traditional sources, particularly because of its relatively low implementation cost and ability to increase the granularity of data in a timely manner.*

*Caution should be used when interpreting the results because of the collection method and the population of interest. The questionnaire was offered in only one collection mode—participants were asked to complete an electronic questionnaire. The overall accessibility of the questionnaire was reduced as it was not available in other formats, such as American Sign Language or Quebec Sign Language, Braille, or audio, and it was not available to those without access to a computer or the Internet. Proxy interviews were encouraged, to allow family members or caregivers to respond on behalf of a person with a long-term condition or disability.*

*To identify those with a long-term condition or disability, participants in this crowdsourcing initiative were asked whether they had difficulties from a list of six different areas, and then whether they identified as a person with a disability. This analysis includes respondents who reported a difficulty and self-identified as a person with a disability, those who reported no specific difficulty but identified as a person with a disability, and those who reported a difficulty but did not identify as a person with a disability. This differs from the method used by Statistics Canada for the Canadian Survey on Disability, which uses the Disability Screening Questionnaire to identify people with a disability and calculate the official rates of disability across Canada.*

Among the participants, 21% indicated they had a sensory difficulty, 38% reported a physical difficulty, 25% indicated they had a cognitive difficulty, 48% reported a mental health-related difficulty, and 57% indicated they had some other health problem or condition. Respondents could select more than one difficulty type.

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5323](#).**

The infographic "[How are Canadians with long-term conditions and disabilities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?](#)" is now available as part of the *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)* series.

The study "[The changes in health and well-being of Canadians with long-term conditions or disabilities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)" is now available as part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada (45280001)*.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).

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