

Canadians give governments an ‘F’ in meeting their mental health and substance use health needs: CAMIMH Poll

- Significant majority unhappy with wait times and ability to access publicly funded mental health care services
- Low public confidence and satisfaction with governments on accessing and improving mental health care and substance use health services
- Not enough being done to evaluate if services are working

OTTAWA, January 18, 2024 — Federal and provincial governments are getting a resounding ‘F’ from Canadians when it comes to providing mental health and substance use health care services, according to the second annual National Report Card survey from the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH).

Finding and getting timely access to publicly funded mental health care services is important to 90 per cent of Canadians, while 83 per cent agree that provincial governments should hire more mental health care providers to improve access to care.

Yet, across the four report card categories of (1) access, (2) confidence, (3) satisfaction, and (4) effectiveness of publicly funded mental health services, Canadians gave federal and provincial governments a collective grade of ‘F’, representing a decline over last year’s grade of ‘D’. Similarly, governments were given a collective grade of ‘D’ when it comes to substance use health services.

“This report card tells us that all governments are not moving nearly fast enough nor making the necessary investments to improve timely access to mental health and substance use health services,” said Florence Budden, CAMIMH Co-Chair and a registered nurse. “Canadians are even more dissatisfied that our governments are woefully out of touch when it comes to meeting their mental health and substance use health needs and clearly, much more needs to be done.”

Mental health services receive failing grades across Canada CAMIMH 2nd Annual Report Card – Selected Findings

	Total Score	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NS	NB	NL
Access	F	F	D	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Public Confidence	D	D	D	F	D	D	F	F	D	D
Satisfaction	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	D
Effectiveness	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Total Mental Health Score	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	D	F

CAMIMH MEMBERS

- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention
- Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis
- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
- Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses
- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative
- Canadian Psychiatric Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Community Addictions Peer Support Association
- Medical Psychotherapy Association of Canada
- National Initiative for Eating Disorders
- National Network for Mental Health
- Schizophrenia Society of Canada
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada
- The College of Family Physicians Canada

Need for accelerated action and accountability

Compared to other developed countries like France and the United Kingdom, Canada has the lowest proportionate spending on mental health, leaving significant room to increase its public investments to improve and expand coverage for both mental health and substance use health care services. It also needs to introduce new federal legislation – a *Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care Parity Act* – that places the importance and value of mental health and substance use health services on an equal footing with physical health care.

“Without additional sustained government funding and system innovation, a national legislative framework, enhanced public accountability and data measurement, Canadians will not see the critical changes they need to have timely access to mental health and substance use health care services,” said Ellen Cohen, CAMIMH Co-Chair. “Our governments need to do more and act faster – failure cannot be an option.”

Substance use health services are vital

This year’s survey also included specific questions on substance use health services across the same four categories and again found that Canadians gave the government a collective poor grade of ‘D’. Notably, three-quarters of respondents feel that it is important for governments to support the healthcare workforce with education on substance use health (72 per cent), as is access to timely substance use health services (74 per cent).

“Historically, people with substance use health concerns have had no place to go except through a mental health door and then are often told they are in the wrong place,” said Anthony Esposti, CEO of CAPSA, a member of CAMIMH. “This report card reveals how services for people with substance use health concerns are lacking. Canadians deserve better and CAMIMH members are committed to working with governments to improve the lives of the people in Canada.”

Substance use health services receive poor grades across Canada

CAMIMH 2nd Annual Report Card – Selected Findings

	Total Score	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NS	NB	NL
Access	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	F	D	D
Public Confidence	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	F	D	D
Satisfaction	F	F	D	F	D	F	F	F	F	D
Effectiveness	F	F	D	F	F	F	F	F	F	D
Total Substance Use Health Score	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	F	D	D

For more detail on the results of the Report Card, please visit www.camimh.ca, or follow us on Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn.

About the survey

The poll was conducted by Mental Health Research Canada and Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 3,207 adult Canadians from November 1 to November 16, 2023. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within ± 1.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Results have been weighted based on age, gender and region to be representative of the Canadian population.

About CAMIMH

Established in 1998, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) is a member-driven alliance of 18 national mental health organizations comprised of healthcare providers and organizations representing persons with lived and living experience, their families and caregivers. CAMIMH's mandate is to ensure that mental health and substance use health is placed on the national agenda so that the people of Canada receive timely and appropriate access to care and support.

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