

Rural VIP No. 23: Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The twenty-third survey for the members of the Rural Voice Information Panel (Rural VIP) was sent out on January 6, 2022 to 217 members.

Residents from smaller communities may experience higher mental health stigma than those from larger communities, which may cause them to be less likely to seek help. If a rural resident does seek help, they often find that their community lacks, or has insufficient, mental health services. Alternatively, rural residents may not know what supports are available and where to find them. As a result, health-care crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can be particularly devastating for rural communities and can lead to untreated stress, anxiety, and depression among rural residents.

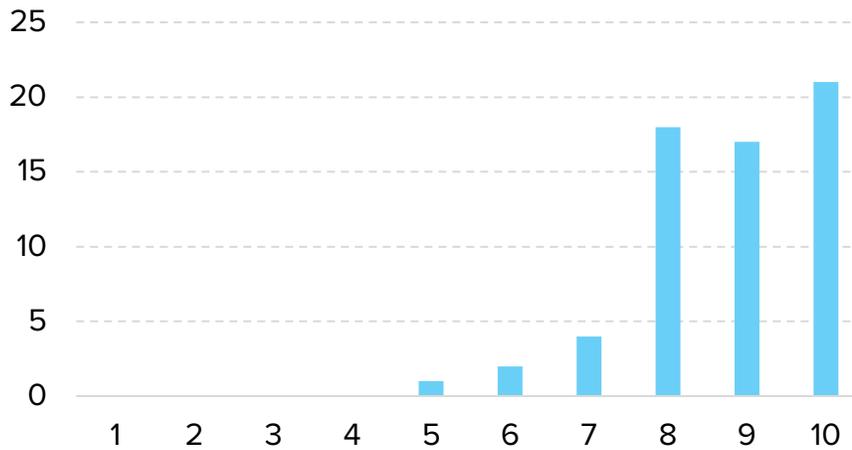
This month, RhPAP asked participants about how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has affected their mental health and the mental health of their community members. This document provides a summary of the responses.

Key Learnings

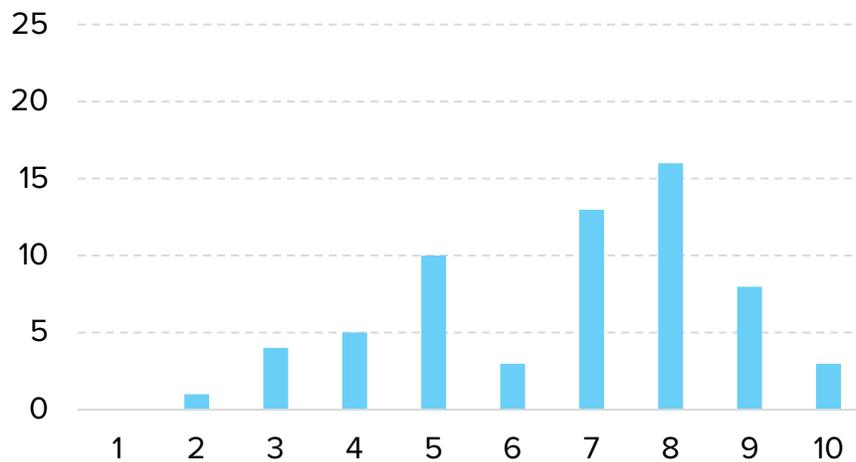


- **Q1-2:** Using a self-reported 10-point scale, respondents indicated that their mental health dropped an average of two points during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Q3-4:** Restrictions against gathering with family and friends have had the largest negative impact on the mental health of respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, having fewer social commitments has also had the largest positive impact on their mental health.
- **Q6:** Most respondents (86 per cent) believe that the mental health of their community members has become poorer since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the poorest and 10 being the best, how would you rate your mental health before the COVID-19 pandemic began (before March 2020)?

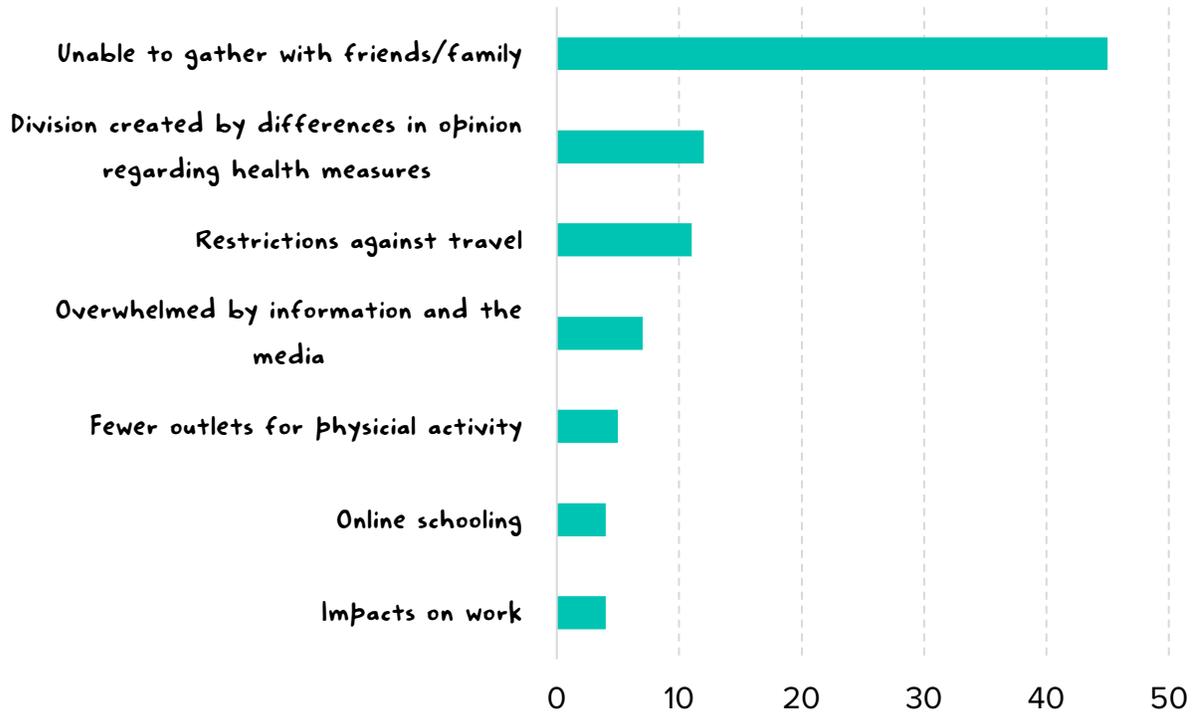


2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the poorest and 10 being the best, how would you rate your mental health now?

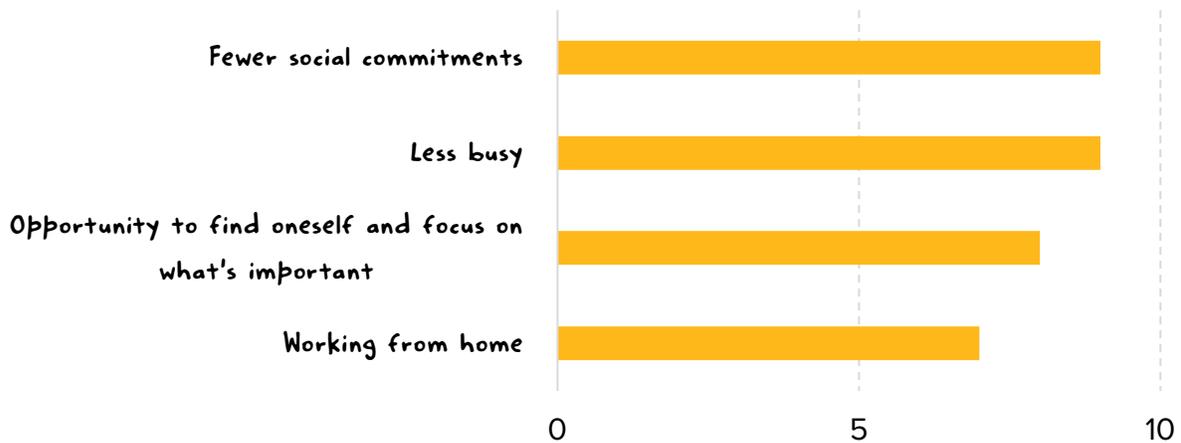


- The average mental health ranking was 9 before the COVID-19 pandemic. The ranking has now dropped 2 points for an average ranking of 7.
- Only 5% of respondents have indicated that their mental health is better now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. What aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic has had the largest negative impact on your life (ie. restrictions preventing gathering with family, online schooling for children)?



4. What aspect, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic has had the largest positive impact on your life (ie. working from home, fewer social commitments)?



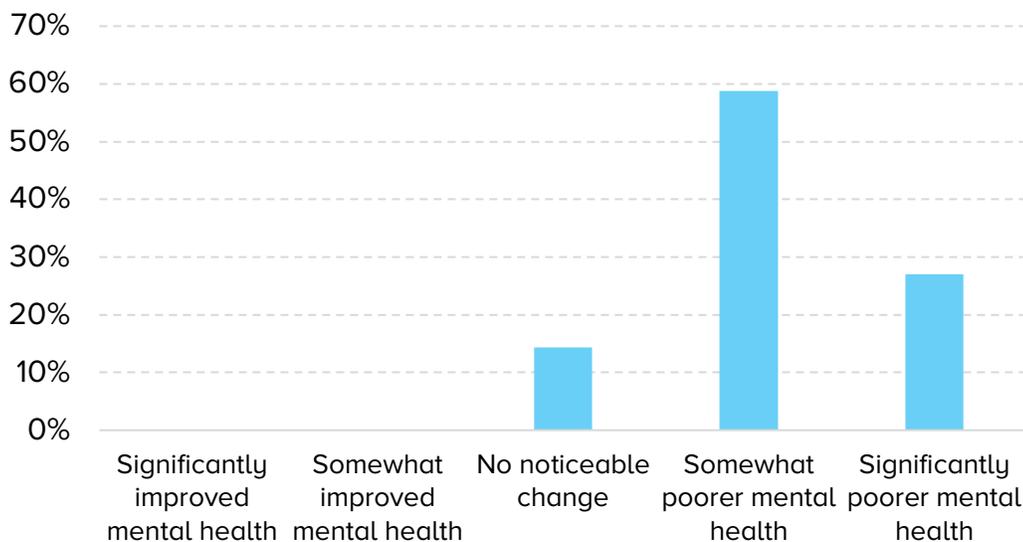
5. What activities or resources, if any, have you been using to manage your mental health during the pandemic?

What you said:



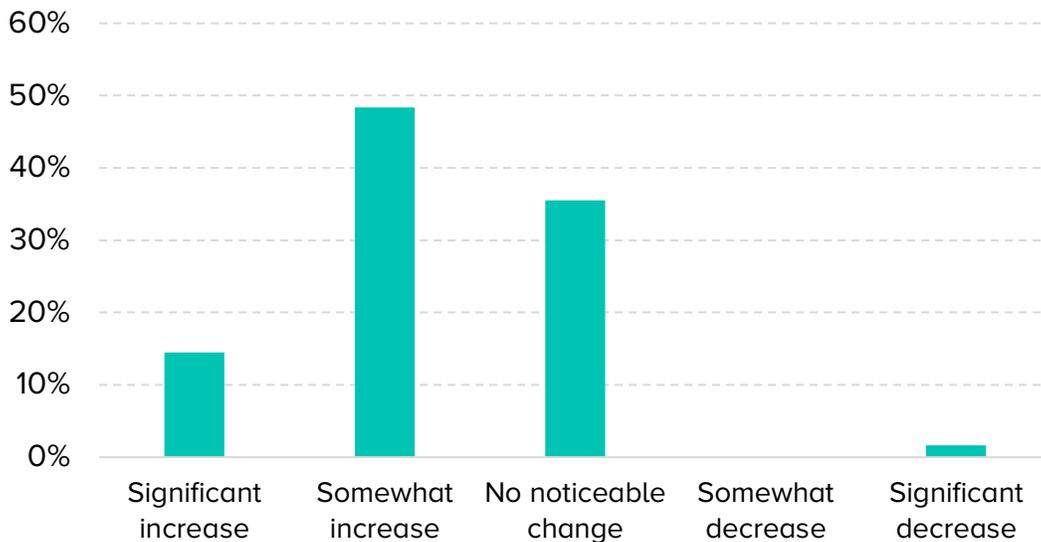
- “I have a hobby that I am passionate about, my wife has a different hobby that she is passionate about. These give us our personal spaces and something to talk about while we are together 24/7.”
- “Started therapy and more contact with family through calls, texts, social media.”
- “I do yoga and try to walk every day.”
- “Diving into projects that normally are put on hold, such as decluttering, setting up estate/wills, home improvement...”
- “Thank goodness for gardening in the spring and summer. Nightly meditations - a breathing one to help slow down the day and prepare for sleep.”

6. Have you noticed a change in mental health amongst members of your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?





7. Have you noticed a change in alcohol or drug use amongst members of your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?



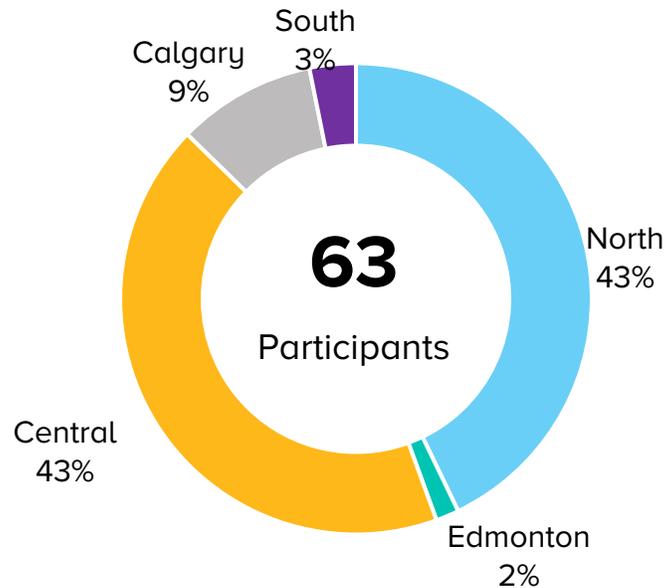
8. What does your community offer for mental health supports?

What you said:



- “Access to Mental Health practitioners in our hospital, FCSS [Family and Community Support Services] volunteers and programs. A number of self-help organizations i.e. AA; private wellness practitioners like yoga, personal trainers, massage therapists, etc.”
- “There are drop-in addictions counselling services and services for a family therapist can be accessed.”
- “Some assistance through the hospital and public health.”
- “Our PCN has therapists and AHS offers mental health support. There are also private mental health supports.”
- “Limited access locally. Only available through phone or video conference. Expected to travel for in person if that is an option.”

9. In which AHS (Alberta Health Services) zone do you live?



** Totals may not add due to rounding*

What will we do with this feedback?

Your responses will help us understand the impact of COVID-19 on mental health in rural communities, and what resources are available to support rural residents with their mental health concerns.

RhPAP shares learnings and feedback from the Rural VIP with health-care leaders, including Alberta Health, and the RhPAP Board of Directors, who represent the following organizations: Alberta Health Services, Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

To view the results of past Rural VIP surveys, click [here](#).

Questions about RhPAP's Rural Voice Information Panel?

Email us at ruralVIP@rhpap.ca