

News Release

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REPORT PREDICTS INCREASED YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES RELATED TO COVID-19

VICTORIA – COVID-19 will have significant mental health consequences for B.C. children and youth, a report released today finds, concluding that the pandemic creates a critical need for government to invest in B.C.'s over-stretched and underfunded child and youth mental health services system.

COVID-19 and the Impact on Children's Mental Health, by Simon Fraser University's Children's Health Policy Centre and sponsored by the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), reviews several studies on mental health outcomes for children and youth after earlier pandemics and natural disasters. This research identifies the mental health challenges children and youth can be expected to experience during and after COVID-19, including anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression and behavioural problems. The report indicates that because untreated mental health problems can persist, even extending into adulthood if left untreated, supports for children and youth will significantly reduce future costs.

The report also finds that some children and youth may be disproportionately affected, including those with neuro-diverse needs, pre-existing mental health conditions, youth in foster care and those affected by adversities such as socioeconomic disadvantage and racism. It finds, as well, that COVID-19 may particularly affect Indigenous peoples, who disproportionately experience harms related to colonialism such as unsafe housing, lack of access to clean water and extreme food insecurity – conditions that the report recognizes as putting children's mental health at risk.

“This report underlines the importance of addressing mental health issues in the early stages,” says Representative for Children and Youth Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth. “The data indicates that children do well when their communities have more socioeconomic resources – for example, when they have social supports and when parents and caregivers are well supported. Clearly, community and family health play significant roles in child and youth mental health, and that is what we need to be supporting.”

Based on previous studies, the report warns that the mental health of parents and caregivers is another factor that can increase children's likelihood of developing symptoms. Economic losses due to the pandemic have also been widespread across Canada. Families who were in more precarious economic situations before COVID-19 are now facing many added difficulties,

according to Dr. Charlotte Waddell, director of the Children’s Health Policy Centre and report author.

“We found that children who experience socioeconomic inequalities are much more likely to develop emotional and behavioural concerns,” says Waddell. “The pandemic has the potential to amplify inequalities – in turn putting less advantaged children at even greater risk for mental health concerns.”

Charlesworth agrees and adds, “Funding and implementing enhanced mental health supports as part of B.C.’s pandemic recovery plan will help ensure that children and youth receive the assistance they need both during and after the pandemic.”

In addition to providing necessary prevention and treatment services and addressing underlying social disparities, the report recommends tracking child and youth mental health outcomes, to inform current and future services.

Waddell also points out that a great deal is known about interventions that can help. “The positive news here is that we know how to effectively prevent and treat all of the mental health problems that young people may go through during and after a pandemic like this — we just need to get better at adequately funding and supporting the delivery of these services.”

“With the right services and supports, children who experience mental health issues during and after disasters can recover and go on to do well,” says Waddell.

The report can be found [here](#).

Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth and Dr. Charlotte Waddell are available for joint interviews on Nov. 12.

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