

Increases in self-reported mental health issues, service use in Ontario

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The number of people diagnosed with psychiatric disorders in Ontario remained stable between 2002 and 2014, but the number of people self-reporting mental health issues and using mental health services has increased, according to a study in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"These findings may indicate that because of increased awareness and reduced stigma around [mental health issues](#), more people experiencing distress are seeking help," says Dr. Maria Chiu, a scientist with the Mental Health and Addictions Research Program, ICES and assistant professor, Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, University of Toronto, with coauthors.

The study included data on more than 260 000 Ontario residents who participated in Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey between 2002 and 2014. Self-reporting of fair or poor mental health status increased from 4.9% in 2003-2005 to 6.5% in 2011-2014, with a corresponding increase in use of mental health services from 7.2% to 12.8%.

"Self-reporting of physician-diagnosed [mood disorders](#) in the 2011-2014 period was more than one-and-a-half times higher than measured prevalence of major depression in 2012, which suggests that more people are saying they are depressed than are clinically measured," says Dr. Chiu

"While in the past people may have been suffering in silence, there are now more conversations about [mental illness](#) and people are seeking care," says Dr. Chiu. "Help-seeking is catching up with need."

However, the authors caution that increased use of mental health services could strain the health care system further, underscoring the need to improve access to care, especially for [lower-income](#) and other marginalized people.

A related [commentary](#) suggests Canada needs to look at international models and innovative approaches to scale up evidence-based psychotherapies to meet increased need.

"Patients with mental health concerns across the country know all too well that it is challenging to receive needed care, and they desire better access to care," writes Dr. David Gratzer, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the University of Toronto.

"There is no single solution to address the care gap that people with mental distress face in Canada. But by looking to international examples, exploring innovative approaches and making better use of existing resources, barriers to access are more likely to be successfully overcome," he writes.

Read a related article by research coauthor Dr. Paul Kurdyak, Physician-based availability of psychotherapy in Ontario: a population-based retrospective cohort study in CMAJ Open:

<http://cmajopen.ca/content/8/1/E105.full>

"Temporal trends in objectively measured and perceived [mental health](#) and use of [mental health services](#): a population-based study in Ontario, 2002-2014" is published March 30, 2020.

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