



# Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms

## Are lockdowns worth their cost?

A synopsis of lockdown harms in Canada

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## I. INTRODUCTION

How foolish it would be to lose a dollar on a horse race, then bet another dollar on the instant-replay. Yet, unless Canadians draw the right lessons from their lockdown experiences, that is what they risk. As Canada enters the 21<sup>st</sup> month of dealing with government restrictions on their *Charter* freedoms, it is of the utmost importance that we draw the right conclusions from the restrictions on our *Charter* freedoms to move, travel, associate, assemble and worship.

Other Justice Centre papers have addressed *Charter* violations<sup>1</sup> and why Covid need not be feared nearly as much as media and politicians suggest.<sup>2</sup> This paper is focused on lockdown harms: Are they worth their high cost?

It is possible that “lockdown will go down as one of the greatest peacetime policy failures in Canada’s history,” writes Douglas Allen, an economics professor at BC’s Simon Fraser University. In a paper<sup>3</sup> published in April 2021, Allen reviewed more than 80 Covid cost/benefit studies published in the previous 12 months. He concluded that many relied upon false assumptions that tended to over-estimate the benefits of lockdown and underestimate its costs. “As a result, most of the early cost/benefit studies arrived at conclusions that were refuted later by data, and which rendered their cost/benefit findings incorrect. Research done over the past six months has shown that lockdowns have had, at best, a marginal effect on the number of Covid deaths.... Using a cost/benefit method proposed by Professor Bryan Caplan,<sup>4</sup> and using two extreme assumptions of lockdown effectiveness, the cost/benefit ratio of lockdowns in terms of life-years saved is between 3.6–282.<sup>5</sup>”

This paper sets out a partial catalogue of the unintended consequences of Canada’s lockdown policies. All were costly. Some were deadly, with the full cost in lives yet to be determined. Wherever possible, we have drawn data from Statistics Canada and from provincial governments. We assume that Canada’s federal and provincial governments know what Statistics Canada knows, and are aware of the publicly available data on provincial government websites.

As has been the case throughout recorded history, there will always be viruses to contend with, and other pandemics. What Canadians cannot afford is another replay of what has been imposed on us these past 21 months, as citizens, as a nation or as a functioning economy. Lockdowns inflict serious harms on millions of people and cannot be accepted as a default template for disease control.

Yet, the government-and-media narrative assumes and promotes the notion that lockdowns are causing only minimal and manageable harm, and that such harm is outweighed by lockdown benefits. Unless this narrative is effectively challenged by facts and evidence, lockdowns will

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-12-03-Flying-Blind.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-04-27-Covid-in-Canada-nothing-much-to-fear-FINAL-June-28-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/~allen/LockdownReport.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Bryan Caplan is a professor at George Mason University  
<https://www.econlib.org/Covid-prevention-and-cost-benefit-analysis/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/~allen/LockdownReport.pdf>

become the default governmental response to every virus in the future, as permanent government policy. Now is the time to confront this narrative: These are the harms of lockdown.

## II. WE HAVE NOT LOCKED DOWN FOR PAST EPIDEMICS

Since the turn of the century, Canada has experienced SARS in 2003, H1N1 in 2009 and now Covid.<sup>6</sup> Every year there is also seasonal influenza that claims thousands of victims, mostly from the same demographics shown to be at risk from Covid: The elderly and the infirm. Nobody disputes that when hostile viruses appear, Canada's elected leaders can take effective, targeted measures to protect vulnerable people. This is especially so of those living in long-term care: During the past 18 months, they have proved to be the most vulnerable of all. However, shutting down large parts of the economy and forcing healthy citizens into isolation three times every two decades is not a sound disaster management plan; it is a formula for enduring distress.

True, there were no lockdowns in 2003 and 2009. However now that lockdowns (to varying degrees) have become the default public policy approach, it is concerning that when similar circumstances re-occur, there will be calls for restrictions and further infringements of Canadians' *Charter* freedoms to travel, gather, assemble and worship. In particular, opposition politicians can find political advantages in telling a citizenry now conditioned to be fearful that their governments should be locking them down as the best means to protect them; it's just too tempting for intellectual honesty to get in the way.

Yet, as the experience of similar U.S. states with differing lockdown strategies shows, the severity of restrictions has no discernable or identifiable impact on the Covid death toll.<sup>7</sup> People who argue that lockdowns play an important role in reducing Covid hospitalizations and deaths, and that economic damage is tolerable (or derived from the "voluntary" actions of people responding to their own risk assessments) typically ignore the vast and detailed canon of literature on lockdown harms.

This paper presents a selection from that canon. In the following pages, we examine the lockdown harms that have affected every corner of Canadian life, under the broad categories of:

- Economic and financial harm to all Canadians
- Physical harms to adults, especially the rising death toll from non-Covid causes, including those from delayed or cancelled surgeries, and delayed or cancelled diagnosis for cancer and other deadly diseases
- Mental health harms to adults (especially increased drug abuse)
- Physical, mental health and economic harms to children
- Other societal harms, including those consequent on loss of quality of life – the so-called 'simple pleasures.'

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<sup>6</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/6504203/outbreaks-in-canada/>

<sup>7</sup> A comparison of North and South Dakota is instructive. The states are similar in many important ways. Yet, although the north locked down and the south did not, their COVID outcomes were similar. Comparing the open Florida and Texas with locked down California and New York is also illuminating.

### III. ECONOMIC HARMS

#### Statistics Canada reports wealth destroyed and ‘untold grief.’

Lockdowns were, of course, an economic disaster for Canada. In an unusually evocative assessment, Canada’s Chief Statistician Anil Arora commented in March 2021 that the year 2020 had ‘inflicted untold grief’<sup>8</sup> on Canadians. Statisticians don’t usually talk like that. But two March reports from Statistics Canada revealed that it was simply the truth. During 2020, the Canadian economy experienced its sharpest annual decline in real gross domestic product since 1961.<sup>9</sup> In what can only be the result of COVID lockdowns, and despite some recovery in the fourth quarter, “real GDP (in 2020) shrank 5.4%.”<sup>10</sup>

In cash terms last year’s GDP reduction was worth about \$90 billion, or a little less than \$5,000 for every one of Canada’s 18.6 million labour force.<sup>11</sup> (While a reduction in GDP doesn’t inevitably translate into an equal reduction in income for all Canadians, and also conceding that average personal incomes vary across the country, it should be noted for comparison’s purposes that across Canada in 2019, the median average personal income of people who had any income at all, was \$37,800.)<sup>12</sup>

#### Jobs lost

To every working Canadian, her or his job is essential. Yet the main lockdown instrument was the enforced closure of businesses deemed non-essential by government officials, who personally suffered no loss of income from the measures they imposed on their fellow citizens. Across a wide swath of the Canadian economy, the effect was catastrophic. Lockdowns have inflicted severe harm on the retail, food, hospitality, travel, tourism, recreation and entertainment industries, to name just a few examples. Overall employment across the economy has not returned to pre-Covid levels.<sup>13</sup>

#### Shuttered storefronts mean livelihoods and life savings lost

It is often remarked, correctly, that small business is the backbone of Canada. It is equally true that every small business began as somebody’s dream, was nurtured by their hard work, was often financed by loans to get it off the ground, and then grew into the means by which many people, including owners and employees, became able to earn their living. For many Canadians, their small business is not only a means of earning a living; the business is also their retirement savings. In an economy that is not crippled by seemingly permanent lockdowns, a small business owner could look forward to selling her business, with the sale proceeds available to care for her and her loved one in old age. Lockdowns have killed this possibility for people who will never enjoy the public sector retirement benefits that await politicians, judges, university professors, teachers, social workers, government employees and other public sector workers.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm#a5>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210302/dq210302a-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7671568/canadian-economy-gdp/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/canada/employed-persons>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1110023901>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210205/t001a-eng.htm>

The harsh business climate caused by Canada's lockdown policies has driven more than 30,000 registered active businesses out of the marketplace. Summarising the situation at the end of February 2021 (the latest data available) Statistics Canada reported that while 'the number of active businesses continued on an upward trend, it remained below the pre-pandemic levels recorded in February 2020.'<sup>14</sup>

In their response to Covid, it was upon the owners of small businesses that Canada's federal and provincial governments have imposed the highest costs. Many of them were simply told to shutter their business and go home. Thus driven out of business, a lifetime of hard work was cancelled by the arbitrary stroke of a bureaucrat's pen. Others hung on, but barely. So much for Canadians being 'all in this together.' The businessman lost everything. The health bureaucrats still had their salaries, their benefits and their pensions.

### Picture life without restaurants

Many of these businesses were restaurants, often small, family-owned enterprises run by immigrant families. Astonishingly, the restaurant sector lost more jobs in the first six weeks of the pandemic than the entire Canadian economy during the 2008-2009 recession. "At the height of the pandemic, our industry lost over 800,000 jobs," says Todd Barclay, CEO of Restaurants Canada, the industry advocacy group. "No other sector is still experiencing such a shortfall. While all other industries have recovered about 90 per cent or more of their pandemic job losses, at least 25 per cent of the foodservice workforce has still not returned to work in the restaurant sector. There are still more than 316,000 fewer jobs in the foodservice sector than there were in February 2020." Restaurants Canada reports a staggering 10,000 restaurant closures from March 2020 to March 2021. "Before COVID, foodservice was the fastest-growing industry in Canada, generating \$93 billion in sales in 2019."

### Sent home to wait – the first wave

In a May 2020 report on the initial impacts of Covid lockdown measures on employment, Statistics Canada stated, "The employment losses from the COVID economic shutdown were unprecedented in their speed and depth. In just two months, employment fell to 15.7 per cent below pre-COVID February levels. By comparison, the 1981/1982 recession resulted in a total employment decline of 5.4 per cent (-612,000) over approximately 17 months."<sup>15</sup> Unemployment, which had typically fluctuated around 6%<sup>16</sup> reached a staggering 17.8% in April of 2020.<sup>17</sup> Despite rebounds to employment throughout the third and fourth quarters of 2020, employment in Canada has not returned to the pre-COVID levels of early 2020,<sup>18</sup> remaining at 8.1% as of the end of April 2021.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210528/dq210528c-eng.htm>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200508/dq200508a-eng.htm>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.google.com/search?q=Unemployment+Canada+2019&rlz=1C5CHFA\\_enCA710CA710&oq=Unemployment+Canada+2019&aqs=chrome..69i57j99l3j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=Unemployment+Canada+2019&rlz=1C5CHFA_enCA710CA710&oq=Unemployment+Canada+2019&aqs=chrome..69i57j99l3j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200508/dq200508a-eng.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210507/dq210507a-eng.htm>

## Sent home again – the second and third waves

The arrival of second and third waves of Covid in the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021 renewed the ‘untold grief’ for hundreds of thousands more Canadians. Statistics Canada reported in May 2021 that, “From February 2020 to April 2021, long-term unemployment increased in all major demographic groups, including core-aged men (+116,000; +223.2%) and women (+79,000; +176.6%). Among those aged 55 and older, long-term unemployment increased by 33,000 (+102.8%) for men and by 40,000 (+195.6%) for women.”<sup>20</sup> Employment declined in both full-time (-129,000; -0.8%) and part-time (-78,000; -2.3%) work, with the number of employed people working less than half their usual hours up 27.2% to 288,000. The number of Canadians unemployed for 27 weeks or more increased to 486,000.

## Inability to pay mortgage or rent

A study<sup>21</sup> of 7,434 parents from McMaster University found that four percent of parents reported an inability to pay their mortgage or rent during the first lockdown.

## Inability to pay bills

A study of 7,434 parents from McMaster University found that five percent of parents reported an inability to pay their bills or utilities during the first lockdown.

## On the brink of insolvency

According to one study from April of 2021 by MNP, more than half (53%) of Canadians were within \$200 of financial insolvency.<sup>22</sup> More than 30% of Canadians report already being insolvent, having no money at the end of the month to cover necessary payments.<sup>23</sup> Grant Bazian, president of MNP, stated, “The anxiety Canadians are feeling about making ends meet – or already being unable to do so – tells us we may eventually see an avalanche of households falling behind on payments or defaulting on loans, mortgages, car payments or credit cards.”<sup>24</sup>

## Running out of revenue

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce reported in March 2021<sup>25</sup> that more than half of Canadian businesses do not know how long they can continue at current revenue levels. Forty-two percent of small businesses are at their debt limit. Only 38 percent of businesses expect a continued ability to operate for 12 months or longer at current revenue levels.

Statistics Canada confirmed this: “During the fall [of 2020], almost 20% of businesses reported that they would be able to operate for less than six months at current revenue and expenditure levels, and 30% more were uncertain as to how long they could continue to operate.”<sup>26</sup> More

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210507/dq210507a-eng.htm>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/Covid-parents-1.5714412>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/half-of-canadians-within-200-of-not-being-able-to-cover-bills-debt-payments-survey-1.5379871>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/half-of-canadians-within-200-of-not-being-able-to-cover-bills-debt-payments-survey-1.5379871>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/half-of-canadians-within-200-of-not-being-able-to-cover-bills-debt-payments-survey-1.5379871>

<sup>25</sup> [https://chamber.ca/news/over-half-of-canadian-businesses-dont-know-how-long-they-can-continue-grim-numbers-from-the-most-recent-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1614960336.4281110763549804687500](https://chamber.ca/news/over-half-of-canadian-businesses-dont-know-how-long-they-can-continue-grim-numbers-from-the-most-recent-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions/?doing_wp_cron=1614960336.4281110763549804687500)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm>

than 6% reported that they would be able to operate for less than three months at current revenue and expenditure levels.<sup>27</sup> Further, 40% of businesses indicated that they could not take on additional debt.<sup>28</sup>

## IV. GOVERNMENT DEBT: BORROWING IT FORWARD

According to Statistics Canada, the Government of Canada's federal debt (accumulated deficit) increased significantly from pre-pandemic levels.<sup>29</sup> It thereby extended the nation's debt load from our children to our grandchildren.

In February of 2020, the federal debt was \$691 billion. In March of 2021, the federal debt was more than \$1,035 trillion.<sup>30</sup> That is, the Government of Canada accumulated more than \$350 billion of additional debt since the start of the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> This debt will rise even further by \$155 billion this year and by an additional \$60 billion in 2022-2023,<sup>32</sup> exceeding \$1.2 trillion. This is more than \$30,000 for every man, woman and child in Canada.

This federal debt does not include massive new debt that Canada's provinces are incurring, which must also be repaid – with interest – by our children and grandchildren. The Fraser Institute expects the combined 2020/2021 federal and provincial debt to equal 91.6% of the Canadian economy compared to 65.2% from the previous year.<sup>33</sup> The following table from the Fraser Institute represents the increase in federal and provincial debt since 2007.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1010000201&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=05&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20210501>

<sup>30</sup>

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1010000201&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=05&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20210501>

<sup>31</sup>

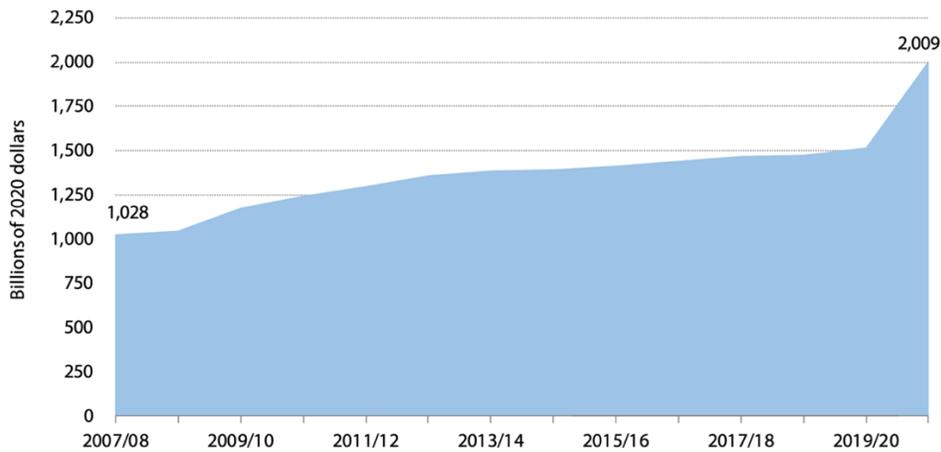
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1010000201&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2021&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=05&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=20210101%2C20210501>

<sup>32</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7768619/federal-budget-2021-liberals-Covid/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/growing-debt-burden-for-canadians-2021.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/growing-debt-burden-for-canadians-2021.pdf>

**Figure 1: Combined Federal and Provincial Net Debt (in billions of 2020 dollars), 2007/08 to 2020/21**



Finally, provincial net debt has increased significantly in 2020/2021 compared to 2007/2008.

The table on the next page represents the change in net debt in each province of Canada, from 2007/2008 to 2020/2021.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 1: Federal and Provincial Net Debt (in billions of 2020 dollars), 2007/08 Compared to 2020/21**

	Net Debt 2007/08	Net Debt 2020/21	Change (\$ billions)	Change (%)
BC	29.3	61.9	32.6	111.1%
AB	-43.0	63.5	106.5	247.4%
SK	7.2	14.8	7.5	104.6%
MB	13.0	27.7	14.7	113.3%
ON	196.6	398.0	201.4	102.5%
QC	153.1	189.4	36.3	23.7%
NB	8.7	14.1	5.4	62.0%
NS	14.9	16.8	1.9	12.9%
PEI	1.7	2.5	0.8	51.2%
NL	12.5	16.4	3.9	31.4%
FED	634.1	1,204.3	570.2	89.9%
FED + PROV	1028.1	2,009.3	981.2	95.4%

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/growing-debt-burden-for-canadians-2021.pdf>

## V. THE RISING DEATH TOLL FROM NON-COVID CAUSES

### Covid insufficient to account for Canadian excess deaths

The spread of Covid is not enough to account for a significant rise in ‘excess deaths’ during 2020, according to a March 2021 Statistics Canada report.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Canada’s statistical agency highlights the possibility that opioid use may account for much of the increase, along with a higher number of deaths from other causes – notably heart disease. This would be consistent with the Justice Centre’s predictions<sup>37</sup> last year that rising levels of despair, along with delayed diagnosis and surgeries, would be echoed later in elevated deaths from other causes. (See also cremation data, below.) Of the 309,000 Canadians who died in 2020, only 5% died with Covid, the other 95% from other causes.

Statistics Canada estimates that during 2020 there were 13,798<sup>38</sup> deaths above and beyond what would have been expected had there been no pandemic. In the early months of lockdowns, the weekly number of excess deaths and deaths caused by Covid were closely aligned and mostly affected older populations, suggesting that Covid itself was driving excess mortality in Canada.

Later in the year however, the number of excess deaths was higher than the number of deaths due to Covid. Statistics Canada commented, “...these deaths are affecting younger populations, suggesting that other factors, including possible indirect impacts of the pandemic, are now at play.”

## VI. PHYSICAL HEALTH HARMS FROM LOCKDOWNS - ADULTS

### Cremation data suggests lockdowns kill Ontarians on cancer-surgery wait list

Cremation data seems to confirm the above message: Deaths from COVID alone are insufficient to explain excess deaths in Ontario between January 2020 and April 2021. A report<sup>39</sup> from the Ontario COVID Science Advisory Table based on cremation records suggests that cancer and heart disease patients died and continue to die on the waiting lists, after surgeries were cancelled to release hospital beds for an expected surge of Covid patients.

The study<sup>40</sup> records a 12.8% increase in the number of Ontario deaths after lockdowns were imposed, compared to the expected numbers of deaths informed by previous years’ cremation data. During the first wave, from March to May 2020, confirmed Covid deaths accounted for 43.5% of the 3,505 excess deaths in the cremation records.<sup>41</sup> In the early part of the second wave,

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210310/dq210310c-eng.htm>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.jccf.ca/published\\_reports/flying-blind-governments-hasty-decisions-to-lock-down-canadians-while-damaging-public-health-and-the-economy/](https://www.jccf.ca/published_reports/flying-blind-governments-hasty-decisions-to-lock-down-canadians-while-damaging-public-health-and-the-economy/)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210310/dq210310c-eng.htm>

<sup>39</sup> <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/excess-mortality-in-ontario-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>40</sup> Approximately 70% of Ontarians are cremated.

<sup>41</sup> Authorities suggest that COVID cases were under-reported in the first wave, due to lack of testing. This would not apply to numbers from the second and third waves.

from August to December 2020, confirmed Covid deaths accounted for only 29% of the 3,812 excess deaths in the cremation records. Most recently, from January to March 2021, confirmed Covid deaths accounted for 73.1% of the 2,337 excess deaths in the cremation records, with 26.9% of excess deaths attributable to other causes.

The report notes that “...these excess deaths include COVID infections, as well as causes likely related to the pandemic but not due to COVID itself.... the subsequent increase in mortality due to non-COVID causes could reflect the impact of delays in care for conditions other than COVID, including cancer and cardiovascular care, in addition to other indirect effects of the pandemic, such as the increase in opioid-related deaths.”

The main causes of these extra deaths are likely cancer and cardiovascular disease as they are the two leading causes of death<sup>42</sup> in western countries. Dr. Peter Juni, scientific director of Ontario's COVID Science Advisory Table, comments that, “We know that if you have delayed care, that this negatively impacts the prognosis.”<sup>43</sup> A drop in trips to the ER during the pandemic over fears of contracting Covid could also be a factor in these excess deaths, depending on the condition, according to Juni.<sup>44</sup>

As of mid-April 2021, Ontario had a steadily-increasing surgery backlog of more than 257,000 cases.<sup>45</sup>

### Breast-cancer screenings fall off a cliff

During the first wave, Ontario Health reported a 97 percent decrease in mammograms,<sup>46</sup> an 88 percent decrease in pap tests and a 73 percent decrease in fecal tests. (Fecal tests are an early screening strategy meant to detect colon cancer.) At Toronto's Princess Margaret Cancer Centre alone, breast cancer diagnoses dropped between 20 and 30 percent<sup>47</sup> during all of 2020, with referrals dropping similarly as well.

Quebec reported 91,000 fewer mammograms<sup>48</sup> during the first wave as against the same period in 2019. According to a report from the Quebec Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, it is estimated that in Quebec 4,100 people went undiagnosed with cancer during the first wave.<sup>49</sup> Quebec also performed 74 percent fewer colorectal cancer screenings (fecal tests) and 66 percent fewer colonoscopies between April and December 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

In Alberta, the number of mammograms dropped 55 percent in 2020 as against 2019; the number of pap smears performed dropped 28 percent over the same period. Less screening means more advanced cancers which negatively impacts prognosis, according to the Canadian Cancer

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/26f50dbe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/26f50dbe-en#:~:text=Across%20OECD%20countries%2C%20heart%20attacks,from%20age%2050%20and%20above.>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/studies-reveal-the-unintended-consequences-of-delaying-surgeries-drop-in-er-visits-due-to-pandemic-1.6040758>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/studies-reveal-the-unintended-consequences-of-delaying-surgeries-drop-in-er-visits-due-to-pandemic-1.6040758>

<sup>45</sup> [https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections\\_2021.12.07\\_English-2.pdf](https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections_2021.12.07_English-2.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/cancer-tsunami-screening-delays-Covid-1.5844708>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/cancer-tsunami-screening-delays-Covid-1.5844708>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/cancer-diagnosis-backlog-Covid-quebec-1.5896297>

<sup>49</sup> <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2020/20-210-378W.pdf>

Society.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, a recent study published in the British Medical Journal found that every month cancer treatment is delayed increases the chance of death by around 10 percent.<sup>51</sup>

During the first wave, cancer diagnoses dropped<sup>52</sup> 23 percent in Alberta and 25 percent in British Columbia. Unless fewer people are actually getting cancer, it would seem that fewer diagnoses were the result of lockdown restrictions on the health care system.

### British health harms from delayed cancer diagnosis

Comparable indications come from Great Britain. Research<sup>53</sup> published in *The Lancet* indicates that since March 2020 when a national lockdown was introduced across the UK in response to the COVID pandemic, cancer screening had been suspended, routine diagnostic work deferred, and only urgent symptomatic cases prioritised for diagnostic intervention. Authors of the study estimate that as a result of delayed cancer diagnosis, there would be a 7.9 – 9.6% increase in the number of deaths due to breast cancer up to year 5 after diagnosis, corresponding to between 281 and 344 additional deaths.

For colorectal cancer, the estimate was 1445 to 1563 additional deaths, a 15.3–16.6% increase; for lung cancer, 1235 to 1372 additional deaths, a 4.8–5.3% increase; and for oesophageal cancer, 330 to 342 additional deaths, 5.8–6.0% increase, up to 5 years after diagnosis. For these four tumour types, these data correspond with 3291–3621 additional deaths across the scenarios within 5 years.

The total additional Years of Life Lost across these cancers is estimated to be between 59,204 to 63,229 years.

### Missed, canceled and delayed cancer treatments

A study<sup>54</sup> published by the British Journal of Surgery, estimated that 27,390 cancer surgeries were cancelled in Canada during the first wave alone. This important estimate pertains to the very real lives of our neighbours, friends and family. For example:

- Mandy Lancaster of London, Ontario had a double mastectomy booked for April 2020. However, in the week before her surgery, she was informed that only one mastectomy could be performed. Her second surgery was delayed until October 2020, forcing her into a humiliating, difficult and life-threatening position.<sup>55</sup>
- Margaret Sadowski's colon cancer surgery was delayed amongst thousands of surgeries cancelled in Ontario during the first wave.<sup>56</sup>
- Jasmine Yang of British Columbia died after her surgery to treat ovarian cancer was delayed during the first wave of the pandemic.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/cancer-tsunami-screening-delays-Covid-1.5844708>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/cancer-diagnosis-backlog-Covid-quebec-1.5896297>;

<https://www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/every-month-delayed-in-cancer-treatment-can-raise-risk-of-death-by-around-10/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/doctors-fear-an-impending-wave-of-cancer-patients-after-Covid-delays-1.5295867>

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(20\)30388-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(20)30388-0/fulltext)

<sup>54</sup> <https://bjssjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bjs.11746> (see Supplementary Table 9);

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/cancer-tsunami-screening-delays-Covid-1.5844708>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/05/17/after-weeks-of-waiting-fear-and-anxiety-this-womans-cancer-surgery-cancelled-when-covid-19-hit-is-finally-over.html>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/Covid-surgery-delay-unintended-consequences-1.5629360>

## Fear of seeking medical attention

Studies of excess deaths in Great Britain and several other non-Canadian jurisdictions show that, as in Ontario, Covid does not account for excess deaths. One of several such reports<sup>58</sup> concludes, “A substantial proportion of excess deaths observed during the current COVID pandemic are not attributed to COVID and may represent unrecognised deaths due to Covid, an excess of deaths due to other causes, or both. The impact of Covid on mortality and morbidity from other causes needs to be quantified and addressed in public health planning.”

Some potential causes of excess mortality<sup>59</sup> that are not directly related to infection with Covid include:

- Hesitancy to seek healthcare services
- Delays in access to healthcare
- Mental health issues related to social isolation

Several studies have shown a significant decline in the number of patients seeking emergency care for cardiac events during the pandemic, citing hesitancy or fear as the main cause. For example, Diane Van Keulen,<sup>60</sup> a lung cancer patient, is typical. For fear of catching the virus, she resisted seeking medical attention for three weeks after experiencing vastly increased discomfort and pain. After going to the hospital at the insistence of her husband, it was discovered that one of her tumours had tripled in size during those three weeks.

Such anecdotal reports are supported by data showing that Canadian emergency department volumes dropped by 50% during March and April of 2020.<sup>61</sup> Some of the excess mortality may also be a result of delayed or deferred surgical procedures.<sup>62</sup>

## Deaths of despair?

In Saskatchewan, overdose deaths increased by more than 200 percent in 2020, an estimated half of which are due to fentanyl.<sup>63</sup> The use of naloxone kits increased by 200 percent as well. Naloxone is an emergency overdose treatment. At the same time, the number of detox treatment beds in Saskatchewan was reduced from 209 to 110 because of social distancing requirements. Significant increases in overdose deaths are also reported in Alberta and British Columbia.

The Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario indicated<sup>64</sup> in early 2021 that drug deaths in Toronto increased by 67 percent in 2020 as compared to 2019. The number of emergency overdose calls increased 90 percent.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.21.20073114v3>

<sup>59</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2771761>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/doctors-fear-an-impending-wave-of-cancer-patients-after-Covid-delays-1.5295867>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/covid-19-resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-canadas-health-care-systems/overview-covid-19s-impact>

<sup>62</sup> <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/11/e043828>

<sup>63</sup> <https://thestarphoenix.com/news/saskatchewan/saskatchewans-overdose-death-rate-doubles-repeating-a-fatal-pattern>

<sup>64</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7608211/toronto-public-health-overdose-deaths/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/news/toronto-public-health-reports-record-number-of-overdose-deaths/>

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), more Canadians required hospital care for harms caused by substance abuse from March to September of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.<sup>66</sup> There were 81,000 hospital stays from March to September of 2020 compared to approximately 77,000 stays for the same period in 2019.<sup>67</sup> Whereas hospital stays for harms caused by substance abuse did not increase in the highest-income areas, hospital stays increased by as much as 14% in the lowest-income areas of Canada.<sup>68</sup>

The same CIHI report also notes that emergency department visits for opioid poisonings increased by 16%.<sup>69</sup> Christina Lawand, a senior researcher for CIHI, stated: “There are obviously additional pressures the pandemic is causing on mental health of Canadians that may be causing people to use more substances.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Statistics Canada, “[b]etween July and September 2020, 1,705 opioid overdose deaths were reported in Canada, representing the highest quarterly count since national surveillance began in 2016.”<sup>71</sup> In British Columbia alone, 1,716 people died in 2020 due to illicit drug use – a 74% increase from 2019.<sup>72</sup>

### In Alberta, increased substance use suspected as excess death rates lead Canada

“COVID continues to affect communities and families in Canada,” according to an updated (14 May 2021) report<sup>73</sup> from Statistics Canada. “Beyond deaths attributed to the disease itself, the pandemic could also have indirect consequences that increase or decrease the number of deaths as a result of various factors, including delayed medical procedures or increased substance use.”

Alberta’s excess death rates led Canada in the fall of 2020, a spike attributed to Covid and opioid overdoses, per new Statistics Canada data. About 8,700 Albertans died in the fall, 12 per cent more than would have been expected without Covid. That rate of excess death is more than twice what was logged in the spring<sup>74</sup> during the province’s first wave of novel coronavirus infections.

In total, nearly 29,000 Albertans died in 2020, compared to the expected 26,900 mortalities in the year — a difference of 2,078 deaths. In the same year, Alberta reported 1,212 deaths from Covid and 1,139 deaths from opioid overdoses.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/hospital-visits-for-substance-use-increased-during-the-first-months-of-the-pandemic>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/hospital-visits-for-substance-use-increased-during-the-first-months-of-the-pandemic>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/hospital-visits-for-substance-use-increased-during-the-first-months-of-the-pandemic>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/hospital-visits-for-substance-use-increased-during-the-first-months-of-the-pandemic>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/substance-use-hospitalization-pandemic-1.6015537>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/05/covid-19-focus-on-substance-use-and-stigma.html>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/2020-drug-overdose-deaths-bc-coroners-service-1.5910325>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210514/dq210514c-eng.htm>

<sup>74</sup> <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/alberta-had-hundreds-of-excess-deaths-as-covid-19-struck-province-stats-canada>

<sup>75</sup> <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/alberta-outpaced-canada-in-excess-deaths-in-fall-statcan>

## VII. MENTAL HEALTH HARMS FROM LOCKDOWNS - ADULTS

### General mental health harms

According to Statistics Canada, financial stresses resulting from lockdown measures have had a negative impact on sleep, mental health, and mood.<sup>76</sup> Further, “the proportion of adults reporting positive mental well-being was lower in studies conducted in 2020 compared with those conducted previous years.”<sup>77</sup> According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI,) only 32% of survey participants reported very good or excellent mental health in the fall of 2020, compared to 67% before lockdowns were imposed.<sup>78</sup> Further, whereas 72% of participants had reported high life satisfaction in 2018, only 40% had reported high life satisfaction during lockdowns pandemic.<sup>79</sup>

### The disproportionate impact of mental health harms

According to Statistics Canada, mental health harms have impacted some Canadians more severely than others: “[A]most 70% of gender-diverse participants responding to a Statistic’s Canada crowdsourcing survey in April and May 2020 reported fair or poor mental health, compared with 25.5% of female participants and 21.1% male participants.”<sup>80</sup> Further, the survey found that “[t]he proportion of gender-diverse participants who reported symptoms consistent with moderate/severe generalized anxiety disorder was double (61.8%) that of female participants (29.3%) and triple that of male participants (20.5%).”<sup>81</sup>

Among surveyed indigenous women, 48% reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe generalized anxiety disorder; 64% said that their mental health was “somewhat worse” or “much worse” since the start of physical distancing.<sup>82</sup>

Persons reporting long-term health conditions or disabilities reported declines in their general health and their mental health as a result of the pandemic.<sup>83</sup> Specifically, 48% of participants with long-term health conditions or disabilities stated that their health was “much worse” or “somewhat worse” since the start of the pandemic; 64% of participants with cognitive difficulties and 60% of those with mental health-related difficulties reported their health being “somewhat worse” or “much worse” since the start of the pandemic.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, a February 2021 study of pandemic experiences found that “more than half of Indigenous participants with a disability or long-term condition reported worsened health across disability types, including seeing, hearing, physical, cognitive, mental health-related or other health challenges or long-term conditions that are expected to last for six months or more.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/unintended-consequences-covid-19-self-harm-report-en.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/unintended-consequences-covid-19-self-harm-report-en.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

Those with greater need for in-person care or therapeutic support were most adversely affected by lockdown restrictions.<sup>86</sup>

### Suicidal ideation

According to research by the Canadian Mental Health Association, 6% were experiencing thoughts or feelings of suicide as a result of the pandemic, while only 2.5% of Canadians had reported such thoughts or feelings in 2019.<sup>87</sup> Some groups were more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts or feelings than others. The study found that suicidal thoughts or feelings were more common among the follow groups: 18% of those with pre-existing mental illness or mental health issues; 16% of indigenous people; 15% of those with disabilities; 14% of those who identify as LGBTQ+; and 9% of those with children under the age of 18.<sup>88</sup>

### Parent-child conflict

According to research by the Canadian Mental Health Association, parents have experienced increased conflict with their children as a result of physical distancing measures. Parents are reported to have had “more conflicts with their children (23%), [and to have been] yelling/shouting more (17%), disciplining their children more (17%), and using harsh words more often (11%).<sup>89</sup>

### Loneliness and isolation are bad for your health

According to a meta-analysis<sup>90</sup> co-authored by Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day or having alcohol-use disorder. She’s also found that loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity.

### Masks mask friendship

Laws mandating the wearing of face-masks take a huge toll on interpersonal communication, say researchers in a report<sup>91</sup> published by *Frontiers in Public Health*. “Facial expressions and gestures play a major role in facilitating interpersonal communication, comprehension, and the delivery of intended messages. As such, wearing face masks hindered the ability of seeing and understanding people’s expressions during conversations, and decreased the impact of communicated material.”

This report also cites “a shift in the communication paradigm when it comes to greetings and handshakes.” People have been obliged to adopt salutations that do not entail physical contact, such as the “peace sign,” the “hand on chest,” and the “namaste.” In addition, emphasis on personal spaces and social distancing markedly increased, with telecommunication witnessing a

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021003-eng.htm>

<sup>87</sup> <https://cmha.ca/news/warning-signs-more-canadians-thinking-about-suicide-during-pandemic>

<sup>89</sup> <https://cmha.ca/news/warning-signs-more-canadians-thinking-about-suicide-during-pandemic>

<sup>90</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691614568352>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.582191/full>

huge rise, as business meetings, conferences, and educational activities shifted to virtual communication via social applications, such as Zoom, Cisco Webex, Skype, and Microsoft Teams.

### The harms of lockdown-loneliness

Abundant research<sup>92</sup> suggests that supportive relationships can help relieve harmful stress, with physical and mental benefits that include resistance to viruses.<sup>93</sup> Yet ‘our five-month-old ride on the coronacoaster is fraying,’ wrote Katherine Ellison in the Washington Post last year,<sup>94</sup> and sometimes destroying, bonds that in simpler times might have helped carry us through. She quotes public health experts who say they’re worried the lockdowns and stay-at-home rules are aggravating a “loneliness epidemic” that was worrisome enough before the pandemic began.

### Virtual interactions are hard on the brain

The unprecedented explosion of video-conferencing in response to the pandemic has revealed that virtual interactions can be extremely hard on the brain. *National Geographic*<sup>95</sup> reports that people struggle with the loss of non-verbal conversational cues and increasingly experience such extreme exhaustion from the use of video-calling interfaces such as Zoom, Skype, Facetime and their competitors, that the condition has earned its own slang term, ‘Zoom fatigue.’ A typical video call impairs these ingrained abilities and requires sustained and intense attention to words instead. “For somebody who’s really dependent on those non-verbal cues, it can be a big drain not to have them,” says Andrew Franklin, an assistant professor of cyberpsychology at Virginia’s Norfolk State University. Prolonged eye contact has become the strongest facial cue readily available, and it can feel threatening or overly intimate if held too long.<sup>96</sup>

### Health harmed by staying indoors

Being forced to remain at home is a psychological challenge, writes Dr. Steven C. Hayes, in *Psychology Today*,<sup>97</sup> who claims that “being homebound is a challenge for our mental well-being.” Dr. Hayes says that many of our daily routines and habits are suddenly no longer feasible, because they require us to get outside and be with people. “We have to redesign our entire days to meet not only our financial and material needs, but also our psychological and emotional ones while maintaining our distance.... Feeling connected to other people goes beyond mere physical contact. Instead, it’s about being emotionally available for others, having people who are emotionally available to you, and knowing you share the same humanity and the same human experiences with billions of people all around the world.”

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<sup>92</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921311/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7345443/>

<sup>94</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/stress-from-the-pandemic-can-destroy-relationships-with-friends--even-families/2020/08/07/d95216f4-d665-11ea-aff6-220dd3a14741\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/stress-from-the-pandemic-can-destroy-relationships-with-friends--even-families/2020/08/07/d95216f4-d665-11ea-aff6-220dd3a14741_story.html)

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/coronavirus-zoom-fatigue-is-taxing-the-brain-here-is-why-that-happens>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/eye-contact-how-long-is-too-long/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/get-out-your-mind/202004/the-five-challenges-staying-home>

## Health harmed by lack of exercise

Lockdowns have created an environment that promotes reduced amounts of habitual physical activity, owing to legally enforced self-isolation and quarantine requirements, and reduced opportunities to remain physically active by the closures of gyms, swimming pools, recreational and sports facilities, and the prohibition on many team sports and individual sports, according to a report published by *Nature Reviews Rheumatology*.<sup>98</sup> Sustained physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour are typically associated with poor physical and mental health and increased disease-specific and all-cause mortality risk. Even brief periods of exposure to these behaviours can be deleterious.

## Alcohol abuse

According to a report from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), an analysis of survey data found that “increases in alcohol consumption among Canadian adults from the start of the COVID pandemic were associated with higher anxiety, feelings of loneliness, and/or depression”.<sup>99</sup> The same study found that 23.3% of respondents reported drinking more alcohol compared to before the pandemic, in contrast to only 11.8% who reported drinking less alcohol.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, according to a study<sup>101</sup> from McMaster University, 37.5 percent of parents surveyed reported drinking more during the first lockdown.

## The harmful impact of stress and boredom

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction reported similar findings: Nearly 20 percent of locked-down Canadians surveyed<sup>102</sup> by the Centre said they consumed more alcohol. Asked why, most said it had increased due to a lack of regular schedule (51%), boredom (49%), or stress (44%). Loneliness was cited by 19%. Women were more likely to cite stress (57%) as a reason for consuming more alcohol (32% of men cited this), while 54% of men cited boredom (cited by 44% of women).

## Prescribed opioids while waiting for lockdown-delayed surgery

In Alberta, Laura McNabb was prescribed opioids while waiting for a medically necessary hysterectomy to treat endometritis, which was scheduled January 13, 2021 and then canceled. As of the end of January 2021<sup>103</sup> she still had not received her surgery. At the very least, Ms. McNabb’s use of dangerous, addictive prescription opioids has been prolonged due to lockdowns.

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<sup>98</sup> Pinto, A.J., Dunstan, D.W., Owen, N. *et al.* Combating physical inactivity during the COVID pandemic. *Nat Rev Rheumatol* **16**, 347–348 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41584-020-0427-z>

<sup>99</sup> <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52034.html>

<sup>100</sup> <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52034.html>

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/Covid-parents-1.5714412>; <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210304/dq210304a-eng.htm>

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/CCSA-NANOS-Alcohol-Consumption-During-COVID-19-Report-2020-en.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7567258/alberta-surgeries-postponed-jan-10-2021/>

## Increased marijuana use

Statistics Canada found that while 12% of marijuana users reported decreased use during the second lockdown, 32 percent of users reported increased use.<sup>104</sup> Further, a study from McMaster University indicated that 87.5 percent of parents who use marijuana increased their consumption during the first lockdown.<sup>105</sup>

## Elevated feelings of isolation, fear and anxiety among substance users

People who use substances report a loss of social connection and supports since lockdowns were imposed, as well as an increase in isolation, fear and anxiety. Compared to the general population, they are more vulnerable to the health impacts of lockdowns and the hardships of physical distancing. Respondents to a survey conducted for the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction<sup>106</sup> report a higher level of concern associated with the drug supply, its quality, degree of contamination, potency and cost, and their ability to access it given physical distancing recommendations. Risks are amplified due to reduced access to a range of services, including treatment and harm reduction services.

Depression or anxiety is thought to have an impact on a person's life, with almost four-fifths of people (79%) believing this impact to be strong and 14% believing it has a slight impact. Only 4% feel that depression or anxiety would have no impact on a person's life.<sup>107</sup>

# **VIII. PHYSICAL HEALTH – YOUTH**

## Increased myopia in children

A study of 120,000 children in China<sup>108</sup> found that the incidence of myopia in children aged 6 increased from 5.7 percent in 2019 to 20 percent in 2020, a 350 percent increase. Experts believe this increase is related to lockdowns because children are focussing on near-field objects, such as cellphones, to the exclusion of distant objects such as those found outdoors.

## Disabled children miss ongoing treatment

According to the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control,<sup>109</sup> up to 80 percent of children with disabilities, including those with neurodevelopmental, mental, and behavioural health needs, rely heavily on school-based services which are inaccessible during school closures. It should be obvious that if ongoing treatment options are canceled for disabled children, those children will suffer because of it.

For example, eleven-year-old Cameron Craig is afflicted with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. He normally receives regular physiotherapy, occupational therapy, music therapy and

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<sup>104</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210304/dq210304a-eng.htm>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/Covid-parents-1.5714412>

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-07/CCSA-COVID-19-Impacts-on-People-Who-Use-Substances-Report-2020-en.pdf>

<sup>107</sup> <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/the-relationship-between-mental-health-mental-illness-and-chronic-physical-conditions/>

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/CMHA-Mental-health-factsheet.pdf>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/quarantine-myopia-study-examines-near-sightedness-among-children-1.5267900>

<sup>109</sup> [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public\\_health\\_COVID-19\\_reports/Impact\\_School\\_Closures\\_COVID-19.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public_health_COVID-19_reports/Impact_School_Closures_COVID-19.pdf)

massage therapy from school. As a result of missing these helps, Cameron is often in pain, his muscles are tight and his mood is much diminished.<sup>110</sup>

Eighteen-year-old Veronica St-Pierre has Angelman syndrome, a genetic disorder that causes delayed development, problems with speech and balance, and intellectual disability. Veronica normally receives regular occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy, all from her school. Most of all, Veronica suffers for lack of socialization as people with Angelman syndrome are often very sociable.<sup>111</sup>

### Reduced immunization in children and youths

Manitoba reported<sup>112</sup> that during March and April 2020, the administration of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccines dropped by 25 percent in children two and under as compared to the same period in 2019; children between ages two and 17 saw a drop of more than 60 percent. Similarly, the administration of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP) vaccines dropped by 21 percent over the same period for the two and under category; children between the ages of two and 17 saw a drop of 55 percent.

### Increased maltreatment injuries to infants

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario reports<sup>113</sup> that it saw an unprecedented number of child maltreatment injuries during the pandemic. Between September 2020 and January 2021, the number of children under one presenting with fractures and head trauma more than doubled compared to the same period the previous year.

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<sup>110</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/special-needs-kids-parents-Covid-1.5526044>

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/Covid-19-as-canadas-child-vaccination-rates-drop-due-to-lockdown-experts-fear-other-infectious-outbreaks>

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/cheo-ottawa-hospital-infant-injuries-1.5893345>  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/Covid-parents-1.5714412>

## **IX. MENTAL HEALTH HARMS – YOUTH**

### General mental health decline among children

Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children indicates that 70 percent of children experienced mental health decline during the first wave of the pandemic. Symptoms include increased depression, anxiety, and irritability. The researchers found that the biggest predictor of mental health problems was the degree of social isolation experienced. The research found that mental health symptoms that developed in the course of the first lockdown did not diminish during the interim period going into the second lockdown.

Not only this but during the second lockdown, 40 percent of children with no previous mental health issues saw a decline in mental health. Dr. Daphne Korczak, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the hospital stated<sup>114</sup> that “one of the biggest concerns that I’m hearing are parents (who) say this is changing who my child is, my child used to be a child who was very social and happy and eager to learn and now my child is timid and nervous when they come across new people and isn’t motivated to participate in school.”

### Suicide attempts among children

McMaster Children’s Hospital reports<sup>115</sup> a tripling of youth admitted for mental health support after a suicide attempt in a four-month period in 2020/2021 over the same period in 2019/2020. Not only this, but patients took longer stays in hospital because the attempted suicides were more serious. The hospital hypothesizes that factors such as isolation and boredom, limited or no school, family tension and lack of day-to-day structure may contribute to this problem.

### Isolation of children from their own parents and family members

A pamphlet released<sup>116</sup> by Peel Region Public Health in Ontario in February 2021 recommended that children should be isolated from parents if the child is sent home from school because an exposure occurred in the child’s cohort. Peel Region later stated that the directive was a mistake, and that it should have stated that one parent may isolate with the child at home during the mandatory 14-day isolation period. However, this still begs the question, what happens to children in the home who are not permitted any contact with at least one parent during that time?

In British Columbia, Jessica On’s six-year-old son developed symptoms of Covid after returning to school. She said<sup>117</sup> that it was really hard to keep him separated from the rest of the family, although Ms. On’s husband slept in the same room as their son. “We separated our couch, so he is on one side of the apartment, and we are on one side. The day that brought me to tears was when he stubbed his toe and he wanted a hug. I really wanted to hug him but I said, ‘I can’t buddy. I can’t right now. Distance hugs for now and only 10 days of this,’” she said.

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<sup>114</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/Covid-kids-not-ok-1.5898715>

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/pandemic-safety-measures-children-teen-health-impact-1.5953326>

<sup>116</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7669482/coronavirus-peel-region-student-isolation-policy/>

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/6-year-old-with-Covid-1.5898390>

## Increased psychosis among youths

McMaster Children's Hospital reports a doubling of the number of youths admitted with predominant symptoms of psychosis in a four-month period in 2020 into 2021 as compared to 2019/2020. The hospital hypothesizes that factors such as isolation and boredom, limited or no school, family tension and lack of day-to-day structure may contribute to this problem.<sup>118</sup>

## Increased substance abuse amongst youths

McMaster Children's Hospital in Ontario reports<sup>119</sup> that the number of youth admissions for substance abuse doubled in a four-month period in 2020 into 2021 as compared to the previous year. In particular, the hospital notes that opioid use has increased. The hospital hypothesizes that factors such as isolation and boredom, lack of social interactions, limited or no school, family tension and lack of day-to-day structure as causes.

## Increased eating disorders among youth

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario reports that, for the first time ever, it is considering transferring older youths in need of mental health care to adult hospitals. The hospital has nine mental health care beds set aside for eating disorders out of a total of 25 but now sees 18 to 22 minors seeking care for eating disorders. The hospital is dealing with an overall surge in mental health admissions of 150 percent.

McMaster Children's Hospital indicates that referrals to its Eating Disorders Program have increased by 90 percent in a four-month period in 2020/2021 over the same period in 2019/2020. The hospital hypothesizes that factors such as isolation and boredom, limited or no school, family tension and lack of day-to-day structure may contribute to this problem.

Ceilidh Chopowick, fifteen years old, discussed how the bulimia she suffers from increased in severity during the pandemic, and attributes this to lockdowns. She also struggles with motivation and some days simply remains in bed.<sup>120</sup>

## Ontario students locked out in lockdown

Ontario schools were closed for a total of 20 weeks from March 14, 2020 to May 15, 2021, the most of any province in Canada, according to a study<sup>121</sup> by academics at Wilfrid Laurier, Western and Ryerson universities and the University of Toronto. Drawing on research from Canada and internationally, the report draws a picture of children falling behind academically, struggling with their mental health, feeling isolated, losing social connections that help keep them engaged in school, and in some cases being less safe, since cases of abuse are often detected by teachers. Closures are said to have disproportionately affected students with lower

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/pandemic-safety-measures-children-teen-health-impact-1.5953326>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/pandemic-safety-measures-children-teen-health-impact-1.5953326>

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/cheo-ottawa-mental-health-children-1.6029936>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/pandemic-safety-measures-children-teen-health-impact-1.5953326>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/Covid-kids-not-ok-1.5898715>

<sup>121</sup> <https://Covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/Covid-19-and-education-disruption-in-ontario-emerging-evidence-on-impacts/>

socio-economic backgrounds, racialized children and youth, newcomers and students with disabilities. “The length of school closures impacts academic achievement and learning,” the report says. “There is widespread consensus from families, educators, and children themselves that students learn better in person than online, and that access to online learning is a challenge for many due to technical, economic, or other barriers.”

### Decreased quality of education for children and youths in B.C.

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control,<sup>122</sup> 76 percent of British Columbian families with school-aged children reported impaired learning during school closures.

### School is out, harm to children is in

The British Medical Journal (BMJ) reports<sup>123</sup> that school closures internationally have been implemented with insufficient evidence for the role of such closures in minimising COVID transmission, and insufficient consideration of the harms to children. The BMJ notes that for many children, education is their only way out of poverty. For others, school offers a safe haven away from a dangerous or chaotic home life. Learning loss, reduced social interaction, isolation, reduced physical activity, increased mental health problems, and potential for increased abuse, exploitation, and neglect have all been associated with school closures. Reduced future income and life expectancy are associated with less education. Children with special educational needs, or who are already disadvantaged, are at increased risk of harm.

Some 8.8 million schoolchildren in the UK have experienced severe disruption to their education, with prolonged school closures and national exams cancelled for two consecutive years. Yet the overall risk to children and young people from COVID is so small as to be practically non-existent. Further, immunocompromised children are threatened by harm from many sources, not just Covid. As has been demonstrated by open schools prior to lockdown closures in 2020, these students can be protected without shutting down schools. Studies are under way to gauge the effect of post-Covid syndrome among children.

## **X. ECONOMIC HARMS – YOUTH**

### Stealing childhoods, stealing futures

School closures occasioned by lockdown responses to COVID carry high social and economic costs, says UNESCO in a statement<sup>124</sup> on its COVID education response. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities not only within the education system, but in other aspects of children’s lives.

UNESCO cites interrupted learning, poor nutrition – many children and youth rely on free or discounted meals provided at schools – stressed teachers, and difficulties faced by parents unprepared for distance and home schooling. These difficulties are compounded by financial

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<sup>122</sup> [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public\\_health\\_COVID-19\\_reports/Impact\\_School\\_Closures\\_COVID-19.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public_health_COVID-19_reports/Impact_School_Closures_COVID-19.pdf) at page 13.

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n521>

<sup>124</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/Covid19/educationresponse/consequences>

pressures. To take care of their children, parents are likely to miss work when schools close, resulting in loss of income. This has a particularly negative effect on health-care workers who cannot work because of childcare obligations resulting from school closures. This means many medical professionals cannot be where they are needed, during a health crisis.

In the absence of alternative options, working parents often leave children alone when schools close. This can lead to risky behaviours, including increased influence of online peer pressure and substance abuse. Drop-out rates rise, high-stakes examinations are thrown into disarray and many children and youth miss out on the social contact essential to learning and development.

### Lockdown-induced child poverty

Prior to lockdowns, the poverty rate in the U.S. had been on a slow decline, but lockdowns have stalled – if not reversed – this progress. Among the hardest hit are children from low-income families, where school closures and the high cost of childcare forced previously employed parents to give up their jobs and income to care for their kids.

In the U.S. almost one child in five lives in poverty,<sup>125</sup> a percentage that is significantly higher than that of adults. Childhood poverty is linked to a higher incidence of accidents, chronic disease, and mental health issues, with effects that last not just throughout childhood but also throughout one's life and well into adulthood.

To begin with, school closures exacerbate food insecurity. For many low-income families, school is not only a place to learn but also a place to eat. Research<sup>126</sup> shows school lunch is linked to improved academic performance,<sup>127</sup> while food insecurity (including irregular or unhealthy diets) is linked<sup>128</sup> to lower educational achievement and significant risks to children's physical and mental health. An estimated 14% of households with children suffered from food insecurity in 2018, and that number is likely even greater today. Although Canadian numbers may vary, there is little basis for doubting that the impact of lockdowns on Canadian children differs from the harms suffered by American children.

### Rising poverty in Alberta

Since lockdowns were imposed, job losses and disruptions have increased the number of Alberta children living in poverty, reports the Toronto Star.<sup>129</sup> According to a report released by social advocacy groups in Edmonton, one Alberta child in six (160,000)<sup>130</sup> 'experiences the effects of childhood poverty.' Children in single-parent households are more likely to experience poverty, with almost 50% living below the 2018 low-income threshold. Lockdowns increased unemployment to a record high of 15.7% in June 2020. This increased food insecurity by 7%

<sup>125</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2766115>

<sup>126</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pam.22175>

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-security-in-the-united-states/>

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-resource-100518-093823>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/12/18/pandemic-is-increasing-child-poverty.html>

<sup>130</sup> <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/2020/02/10/alberta-child-poverty-report-op-ed/>

generally, and by 19.6% for households with children, according to the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

## **XI. Other societal harms**

### UNICEF warns of a generation lost to lockdowns

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is warning that many of the world’s children – despite being less at risk from the virus than any other age group – face instead the consequences of the lockdown intended to combat the virus: That is, the interruption of services essential to their wellbeing – school especially – and increasing poverty and inequality.<sup>131</sup> UNICEF reports that as of November 2020, 572 million students had been affected across 30 country-wide school closures, a third of enrolled students worldwide. Globally, the number of children living in multidimensional poverty because of lockdowns – without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or water – is estimated to have soared by 15%, or an additional 150 million children by mid-2020. Meanwhile, the agency says an estimated additional two million child deaths and 200,000 additional stillbirths could occur over a 12-month period due to severe interruptions to services, and rising malnutrition.<sup>132</sup>

### Lockdown-induced poverty worldwide

As a result of lockdowns, at least 142 million more children in developed countries were expected to be pushed into monetarily poor households by the end of 2020, says Forbes.<sup>133</sup> Citing a UNICEF forecast, Forbes says that families are losing their sources of revenue,<sup>134</sup> and the world economy is in a slump with more households going into monetary poverty. In the absence of any mitigation policies, the worldwide number of children living in poor families was expected to reach just over 725 million.

### Job loss entirely among below-average wage earners

According to CIBC Economics<sup>135</sup> in January 2021, *all* of the jobs lost during the lockdowns were amongst people earning less than \$27.81/hr. The average wage in Canada is roughly \$30 to \$31 an hour.

### Job recovery slower among Indigenous people after first lockdown

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<sup>131</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/reports/averting-lost-generation-Covid19-world-childrens-day-2020-brief>

<sup>132</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/resources/rapid-situation-tracking-Covid-19-socioeconomic-impacts-data-viz/>

<sup>133</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/Covid-19-and-children/>

<sup>134</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamhaseltine/2021/03/27/covid-19-has-exacerbated-child-poverty-forcing-a-long-overdue-policy-focus/?sh=1e132834740c>

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/job-losses-pandemic-lower-income-1.5922401> ; <https://economics.cibccm.com/cds?id=7737970b-204e-477f-8f4b-e0f643f60a3c&flag=E> ;

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb1/en/tv.action?pid=1410013401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=4.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2020&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2020&referencePeriods=20200101%2C20200101>

According to Statistics Canada,<sup>136</sup> year-over-year, the employment rate in June through August 2020 was down 6.9 points among Indigenous people and down 5.0 points among non-Indigenous people.

### Pervasive unemployment among women

As of March 4, 2021,<sup>137</sup> 500,000 women remain unemployed compared to pre-lockdown employment. Of those women, 100,000 have completely left the workforce, a rate ten times that of men.

### Food insecurity up by 39%

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) found<sup>138</sup> that 14.6 percent of households Canada-wide reported increased food insecurity during lockdowns as against 10.5 percent before lockdowns.

### Closure and reduced functioning of courts

Starting in March 2020, courts across Canada closed their doors and canceled most scheduled hearings and other proceedings. Many reopened only partially after shifting to virtual hearings. However, during the third wave, the Ontario Superior Court decided to defer as many matters as possible, even virtual hearings.<sup>139</sup>

### Spousal abuse up by at least 20%

In a survey<sup>140</sup> of 376 staff and volunteers at transition houses, shelters and other social agencies, 82% said that incidence of violence increased and got more frequent during the first lockdown. A September 2020 report<sup>141</sup> from the BCCDC states that preliminary federal reports indicate that domestic violence increased 20 to 30 percent in some areas.

### Lockdowns harm marriages

According to researchers at the University of Tennessee who authored a paper<sup>142</sup> titled ‘Infidelity in the Time of Covid,’ the increased stress brought on by lockdowns is putting marriages at risk. Data collected during the pandemic shows people in the U.S. are engaging in behaviors associated with a high likelihood of experiencing infidelity.

Covid lockdowns stretch relationships thin, say the authors.

- 1) The demands of work, home, children, and the extra precautions of cleaning, masking, and sanitizing – all in the compressed space of the home – cause habits that didn’t bother spouses previously to become nerve-wracking. Fights spring up about unimportant things.

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<sup>136</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00085-eng.pdf?st=xuoeIEXb>

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/longterm-female-unemployment-1.5935882>

<sup>138</sup> [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public\\_health\\_COVID-19\\_reports/Impact\\_School\\_Closures\\_COVID-19.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public_health_COVID-19_reports/Impact_School_Closures_COVID-19.pdf)

<sup>139</sup> [https://www.ontariocourts.ca/scj/notices-and-orders-Covid-19/notices-no-longer-in-effect/Covid-19-suspension-fam/;](https://www.ontariocourts.ca/scj/notices-and-orders-Covid-19/notices-no-longer-in-effect/Covid-19-suspension-fam/)

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-s-superior-court-of-justice-to-defer-cases-due-to-ongoing-covid-19-pandemic-1.5996534> .

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/national-survey-domestic-violence-end-violence-now-anova-1.5698028>

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/national-survey-domestic-violence-end-violence-now-anova-1.5698028>; [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public\\_health\\_COVID-19\\_reports/Impact\\_School\\_Closures\\_COVID-19.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Public_health_COVID-19_reports/Impact_School_Closures_COVID-19.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/famp.12576>

- 2) Spouses who are both working from home seek separateness in the little free time they have, often choosing to text or talk with friends in the evenings instead of spending time with their spouse. Marriage becomes a kind of roommate situation, more about the division of labor than about romantic evenings.

Neither spouse wants to leave the marriage but one or both are frustrated by the asexual partnership their marriage has become.

### Domestic Violence up 65%

According to the CBC, more instances of domestic violence had been reported in 2020 compared to 2019. Yvonne Harding, manager of resource development for Canada's Assaulted Women's Helpline, stated that her organization fielded 20,334 calls for domestic violence between October 1 and December 31 of 2020, compared to 12,352 over the same period in 2019.<sup>143</sup> Harding stated that "call volumes spiked almost immediately when swaths of Canada first locked down".<sup>144</sup> Further, according to data from 17 police forces in Canada, calls related to domestic disturbances rose by nearly 12% between March and June of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>145</sup>

### Online child and teen exploitation

Children and teens have spent more time online as a result of school and daycare closures and quarantine orders.<sup>146</sup> According to Public Safety Canada, "Law enforcement partners in Canada and abroad have all noticed increased online activity related to the sexual exploitation of children during the pandemic."<sup>147</sup>

### Unable to grieve together over lost loved ones

Those who have attended funerals know that the number of people who felt close enough to the deceased to want to attend her or his funeral can range from the dozens to the hundreds. People also attend funerals in order to support their family members and loved ones, even if the person attending the funeral did not know the deceased.

As Dr. Alan Wolfelt explains it<sup>148</sup>: "Rich in history and rife with symbolism, the funeral ceremony helps us acknowledge the reality of the death, gives testimony to the life of the deceased, encourages the expression of grief in a way consistent with the culture's values, provides support to mourners, allows for the embracing of faith and beliefs about life and death, and offers continuity and hope for the living." A funeral helps mourners to deal with the pain of the loss, to remember the person who died, to develop the necessary new self-identify, to search for meaning, to receive support from others, and to say good-bye.

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<sup>143</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/domestic-intimate-partner-violence-up-in-pandemic-1.5914344>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/domestic-intimate-partner-violence-up-in-pandemic-1.5914344>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/domestic-intimate-partner-violence-up-in-pandemic-1.5914344>

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/trnsprnc/brfng-mtrls/prlmntry-bndrs/20200831/022/index-en.aspx>

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/trnsprnc/brfng-mtrls/prlmntry-bndrs/20200831/022/index-en.aspx>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/funeral-ritual->

[important/#:~:text=Rich%20in%20history%20and%20rife%20with%20symbolism%2C%20the.and%20offers%20continuity%20and%20hope%20for%20the%20living](https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/funeral-ritual-important/#:~:text=Rich%20in%20history%20and%20rife%20with%20symbolism%2C%20the.and%20offers%20continuity%20and%20hope%20for%20the%20living)

Since lockdowns were imposed in March of 2020 and through to June of 2021, more than 375,000 Canadians have died of all causes. But millions of grieving family members and friends have been denied their sole opportunity to participate in a meaningful and essential ceremony. Assuming a low estimate of 50 people who would have attended a given funeral and noting that governments have often limited funeral attendance to only 10 people, this would amount to 40 people being excluded from each of the 375,000 funerals, for a total of 15 million Canadians who did not have their chance to say good-bye to a loved one or offer support to those who grieve. Even if the number of excluded grievers is significantly less than 15 million, the mental health damage inflicted on grieving Canadians is incalculable. The difficulty in measuring this harm (or even the outright impossibility of measuring this harm) does not diminish the reality of this harm.

For example,<sup>149</sup> Montreal-based writer Jess Goldman's grandparents both passed away within four days of each other. On the morning of her grandfather's funeral, Jess and fellow grieving family members prepared at home to attend the funeral. Moments before leaving, they received a call from the funeral director informing them that newly instituted lockdown rules prohibited them from attending in person. Sometimes, these regulations were applied in a manner that could have been a source of humour, were it not so lacking in humanity.

For a while in the spring of 2021, the Government of Alberta limited church service attendance to 15, except for a funeral in which case it was only ten attendees permitted.<sup>150</sup>

## **XII. LOCKDOWNS STEAL LIFE'S SIMPLE PLEASURES**

### Singing is good for you, but shut up and obey

Singing in a choir for just one hour boosts levels of immune proteins in people affected by cancer, reduces stress and improves mood, which in turn could have a positive impact on overall health, according to a study by Tenovus Cancer Care and the Royal College of Music. Published in *ecancermedicalscience*,<sup>151</sup> the research raises the possibility that singing in choir rehearsals could help to put people in the best possible position to receive treatment, maintain remission and support cancer patients.

The study tested 193 members of five different choirs. Results showed that singing for an hour was associated with significant reductions in stress hormones, such as cortisol, and increases in quantities of cytokines – proteins of the immune system – which can boost the body's ability to fight serious illness.

### It's good to get together

Lockdowns work on the principle of keeping people apart. What remains to be determined is the exact cost to people, and also to health institutions, of the harms arising from isolation. Socializing in-person (as opposed to phone, email, zoom, etc.) provides significant benefits to

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<sup>149</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/author/jess-goldman-1.5689932>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.connelly-mckinley.com/corona-virus-protocol/>

<sup>151</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/04/160404221004.htm>

physical and mental health. Lockdowns reduce the benefits that people receive from having an active social life:

1. **A longer life.** People with more social support tend to live longer than those who are more isolated, and this is true even after accounting for your overall level of health.
2. **Better physical health.** Social engagement is associated with a stronger immune system, especially for older adults, making them better able to fight off colds, the flu, and even some types of cancer.
3. **Better mental health.** Interacting with others boosts feelings of well-being and decreases feelings of depression. Research has shown that one sure way of improving your mood is to work on building social connections.

There is accumulating evidence<sup>152</sup> that socializing is good for one's brain health. People who connect with others generally perform better on tests of memory<sup>153</sup> and other cognitive skills. And, in the long run, people with active social lives are less likely to develop dementia than those who are more socially isolated.

### It's good to watch sports together

Watching sports with other people is good for your health. Lockdowns invariably involve restrictions on people meeting in their homes and on gathering at arenas, swimming pools and stadiums. What have we lost? “Bonding over sports—the highs and lows of the game—strengthens ties, helps us feel supported, and makes it easier for you to open up about personal things,” says Renee Clauselle, PsyD, who runs a private psychology practice in Long Island, NY.<sup>154</sup>

Rooting for the same team creates an immediate sense of family, says Daniel Wann, PhD, a Murray State University professor who has been studying the psychology of sports fans for over 20 years. “If you identify with a local team, you build an instant connection to others around you,” he says. And beyond the bonding aspects, watching sports can motivate you to pump up your own workouts.<sup>155</sup> But when politicians impose lockdowns, gymnasiums are usually the first businesses to be deemed “non-essential.”

### Playing sports is good for the corona generation

Lockdowns have been a disaster for many young children. With schools and sports facilities closed, and most team sports prohibited, kids are missing out on the physical activity they need for physical, mental and emotional development. Studies<sup>156</sup> in Germany have revealed that physical activity is part of the solution, not part of the problem. New studies have shown

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<sup>152</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15157849/>

<sup>153</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/memory>

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.prevention.com/life/a20436977/health-benefits-of-being-a-sports-fan/>

<sup>155</sup> <https://www.prevention.com/workouts/>

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/Covid-and-kids-lockdowns-have-harmed-childrens-health/a-57493736>

that movement and sport play a protective role. One recent study out of the United States, for instance, demonstrates “that physical inactivity is a key determinant for particularly serious cases of COVID.”

But is it really possible to make up for all the lost time? Researcher Alexander Woll says that the next studies undertaken will need to focus on the longer-term perspective: “Is there going to be a ‘corona generation?’ Or will deficiencies be evened out in the course of time? So far, we simply do not know.”

## CONCLUSION

The risk of harm from lockdowns was obvious and self-evident from the moment they were first imposed in March of 2020. They were fully validated later that year from many sources: For example, Dr. Ari Joffe an infectious disease expert and critical care doctor at Stollery Children’s Hospital (Edmonton) and the University of Alberta echoed from a medical background the same message offered from an economic perspective by Professor Allen who we cited in the Introduction: The harm caused by lockdown is much worse than COVID itself.

He told the Edmonton Journal,<sup>157</sup> “I’m truly worried the (lockdown) approach is going to devastate economies and the future for our children and our grandchildren.”

Dr. Joffe estimates that the cost of lockdowns in Canada is at least ten times higher than the benefit in terms of population health and well-being, “at least if you account for numerous variables such as economic recession, social isolation and impacts on life expectancy, education and the full gamut of health-care priorities.” Joffe, who has practised at the Stollery for 25 years, has written a review paper<sup>158</sup> on the impact of the lockdowns.

In any case, never before in recorded history has any country, society or civilization attempted to vanquish a virus by isolating – locking down – the healthy population. The response to COVID is thus a new experiment imposed on peoples across the globe. 21 months later, abundant evidence on predictable lockdown harms confirms that lockdowns have had, and are having, unintended and deadly serious consequences. Other nations should do as they see fit. However, such are the harms that attend these policies in Canada, that continued gross infringements on *Charter* freedoms by all levels of government were never justifiable: They cannot be further justified should new COVID variants emerge in the future, and governments be tempted to respond with a new round of lockdowns.

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<sup>157</sup> <https://edmontonjournal.com/opinion/columnists/david-staples-lockdowns-will-cause-10-times-more-harm-to-human-health-than-Covid-19-itself-says-infectious-disease-expert>

<sup>158</sup> <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202010.0330/v1>