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Approaching Anniversary of Pandemic, COVID-19 Continues to Disproportionately Impact Finances, Mental Health of Young and Unemployed Canadians

More Canadians on Screens and Fewer Getting Outside as Coronavirus Restrictions Remain

Toronto, ON, March 11th, 2021 – If we think back to March 11th, 2020, the coronavirus was only just becoming a concern for many Canadians. Ipsos polling at the time showed that only 4% of Canadians felt COVID-19 posed a *very high threat* to them personally, with the majority (61%) indicating the coronavirus was merely a *low* or *very low* threat. But one year after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, we're still grappling with the fallout.

In a new poll conducted exclusively for Global News, Ipsos asked Canadians to reflect on how their lives have changed over the past year.

Screen Time is Up, Outdoor Time is Down as Mental Health Concerns Persist

With video meetings, online school, and virtual workouts becoming the norm, it is unsurprising that a majority of Canadians (60%) say their screen time has increased. With restrictions on outdoor gatherings being implemented across the country, the cancellation of sports leagues and closure of recreation facilities, 43% of Canadians state they have spent less time outdoors over the past year.

This increase in screen time and reduction in outdoor activities has had both a mental and physical toll for Canadians. A third (34%) say their physical health has worsened over the past year, while four in ten (43%) indicate their mental health has deteriorated since the start of the pandemic.

While any decline in mental and physical wellness is cause for concern, the data show that young Canadians are struggling more than older generations. Those aged 18-34 are significantly more likely to say their mental health has worsened (57% vs 43% 35-54, 32% 55+), while seniors (aged 55+) are more likely to say there has been no change (65% vs. 45% 35-54, 29% 18-34).

Financial Situation Worse for Many, but Especially Young and Unemployed Canadians

The coronavirus pandemic has also impacted Canadians' pocketbooks, in addition to their mental and physical wellness. A third (35%) indicate their overall financial situation has worsened over the past year or that their savings for emergencies or large expenditures has diminished (29%). Furthermore, Canadians are divided on whether COVID-19 has had a net positive, or negative, impact on their finances: 50% agree that as a result of reduced expenditures during COVID-19, they've been saving more money, while precisely 50% disagree.

However, the generational differences in how Canadians are coping are stark. Young Canadians are more likely to say that their financial situation has worsened over the past year (42% vs. 37% 35-54, 29% 55+), while seniors steadfastly to indicate no change in their financial standing (58% vs. 47% 35-54, 37% 18-34).

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One third of Canadians feeling their finances have worsened over the past year is bad enough, but the outlook darkens further when considering the effect of the pandemic on unemployed Canadians. Those who are unemployed are not only significantly more likely to say that their overall financial situation has worsened this past year (54% vs. 38% employed, 27% other), or that their savings have diminished (45% unemployed vs. 29% employed, 24% other) but they are more likely to highlight the toll the pandemic has taken on their mental health with 65% stating their mental wellbeing has worsened over the past year (vs. 46% employed, 32% other).

Take-Out Increases as Indoor Dining Disallowed

Perhaps a result of restrictions that have closed indoor dining, a quarter of Canadians (26%) indicate have turned to takeout and are ordering in food more frequently than they did last year. While ordering in is a fairly innocuous way to ease the challenges of the pandemic, some Canadians are partaking in less healthy coping mechanisms.

Perhaps in light of the mental, physical, and financial hardships of the pandemic, some Canadians are turning to various means to cope: one in ten (12%) Canadians say their cannabis consumption has increased over the past year, while 7% say they are using cigarettes more, and 16% are consuming more alcohol.

Over the last year, since the pandemic began, would you say the following has increased/improved or decreased/worsened?

| | Increased/ Improved | No change | Decreased/ Worsened | Not applicable |
|--|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| The amount of time spent looking at a screen | 60% | 35% | 4% | 1% |
| Your frequency of ordering takeout food | 26% | 40% | 25% | 10% |
| The amount of time you spend outdoors | 17% | 38% | 43% | 2% |
| The amount of alcohol you consume | 16% | 50% | 9% | 24% |
| Your savings for emergencies or large expenditures | 16% | 50% | 29% | 6% |
| Your overall financial situation | 15% | 49% | 35% | 2% |
| Cannabis/marijuana consumption | 12% | 24% | 3% | 61% |
| The quality/amount of sleep you typically get | 12% | 58% | 29% | 1% |
| Your physical health | 10% | 54% | 34% | 2% |
| Your mental health | 7% | 48% | 43% | 2% |
| Cigarette use | 7% | 22% | 3% | 67% |



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Older Canadians Floating While Younger Generations Flounder During Pandemic

While generational divides were present pre-pandemic, the gap between generations has widened in many ways over the past year, pointing to challenges that young Canadians will be forced to grapple with long after the pandemic is seen as being behind us.

What many think of as the “adjustments” or “impacts” of the pandemic, are being disproportionately felt amongst the younger generation. Seniors are significantly more likely to say that they have seen no change in their screen time (41%, 39% 35-54 vs. 22% 18-34), physical health (67% vs. 49% 35-54, 43% 18-34), sleep habits (68% vs. 55% 35-54, 48% 18-34), or savings (58% vs. 49% 35-54, 40% 18-34).

Contrastingly, those aged 18-34 are floundering: they are more likely to be spending less time outdoors (49% vs. 37% 35-54, 44% 55+), having more screen time (72% vs. 54% 35-54, 56% 55+), and be consuming more alcohol (21% vs. 18% 35-54, 11% 55+). This suggests that although many see a light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccine rollout, the challenges of the pandemic may endure beyond vaccination.



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About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between March 2-3, 2021, on behalf of Global News. For this survey, a sample of 1,000 Canadians aged 18+ was interviewed online. Quotas and weighting were employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to census parameters. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadians aged 18+ been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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