



# Pandemic continues to take toll on mental health in the Maritimes

Suzette Belliveau – Reporter, Samantha Long – Writer Published Friday, April 23, 2021 2:47 PM

HALIFAX -- As parts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick deal with COVID-19 outbreaks and tightened restrictions, many Maritimers say the past year has taken a toll on their mental health.

Health professionals say we must continue to support each other as we navigate through the pandemic together.

A new report by the HR company Morneau Shepel shows a decline in our wellbeing, with a negative mental health score among Canadians for 12th months in a row.

"I've been feeling a roller coaster of emotions. There is good days and bad days. I'm worried about how we're going to get through this phase of the pandemic," says Tammy Dunlop-Caya, a resident of Hatchet Lake, N.S.

Psychologist Dr. Simon Sherry says there's been a change in the psychological impacts of the pandemic throughout the past year.

"You now see people who are more defeated, and demoralized and depressed. Their motivation is at a low, their energy is in the garbage, and their affect is often quite flat," Sherry says. "So over time, this pandemic has ground us down from anxious, to a more depressive phase."

Many business owners say as they work to push forward. This is a challenging time for them, too.

"I think overall my general feeling right now is sadness and there's certainly an added level of stress." Says Lorelei Burgess, director at Oxford Learning in Bedford, N.S.

While Maritimers try to stay positive, many say worrying about the virus has become part of their new norm, and it's taking a toll.

"It's understandable, we need to keep each other safe, we need to get out ahead of this thing, but it's a bit disheartening," says Aron Spidle of Dartmouth.

For some, public safety is always top-of-mind.

"It's stressful going out to a store wondering if you're going to come in contact with the virus and it's really hard on a person mentally," says Robert Richardson in Elmsdale, N.S.

"I'm worried for friends and family that they might catch this where it's so rampant here in HRM now, but I'm trying to stay positive, that's all we can do," says Leslie Schnare Harnish in Sambro, N.S.

It's also about keeping busy.

"I really depend on those relationships outside of the house - my friends, my family - simple things like the hair salon makes such a difference on my mental health," says Holly Clarke of Middle Sackville, N.S. "Not being able to do those things, you can tailspin very quickly

Psychologist Dr. Dayna Lee-Baggley says it's important for us to recharge during these uncertain times.

"[It's] things like sleep, eating healthy food, physical activity, social connection, being in nature," says Lee-Baggley. "But there's also individual differences, so you're looking for things that kind of make you smile."

The key is to keep our mental health a top priority as we continue to navigate through the pandemic, with hopes of a strong finish together.

Health professionals say if you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health right now, don't be afraid to speak up or reach out, help is always available.

If you or someone you know is in crisis you can call the Canada Suicide Prevention Service at 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645.

Kids Help Phone can be reached by calling 1-800-668-6868, or by texting 68-68-68.