

Two Years of COVID-19: Half of Canadians say their mental health has worsened; women under 55 hit hardest

Physical health a challenge – all age-gender groups more likely to say it has worsened versus improved

March 11, 2022 – As Canadians hold onto hope that COVID-19 case totals will continue to trend downward, many are looking forward to a less stressful time in their lives.

What began as weeks of pandemic challenges turned into months of anxiety and fatigue and depression, and then years.

Indeed, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with the [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation](#) finds the period since March 2020 has taken a considerable toll on both the physical and mental health of Canadians – a trend that affects people across the spectrum of age, gender, education, and other demographic factors, but is worse among women than men

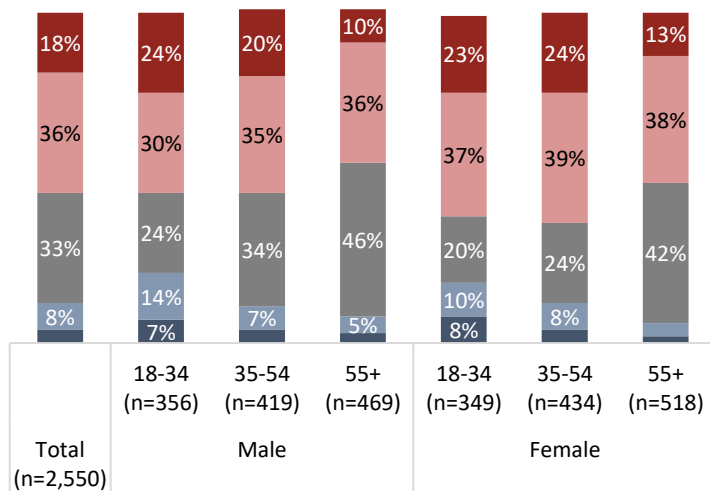
Overall, half of Canadians (54%) say their mental health has worsened over the past two years, while one-in-three say it has not changed greatly either way (33%) and one-in-eight (12%) say they feel better mentally now than when the pandemic began.

Women between the ages of 18 and 54 fare worst. Three-in-five 18- to 34-year-old women (60%) say their mental health has worsened, while 63 per cent of those 35 to 54 note the same.

Physically, the story is similar. With gyms periodically closed and Canadian winters keeping many indoors, most Canadians report that the pandemic has negatively impacted their physical health. Slightly higher numbers say their physical health has improved (17% physical versus 12% mental), led by three-in-ten younger men (29%) and one-quarter of younger women (24%). Nonetheless, at least 48 per cent of all age and gender combinations say their physical health has regressed since March 2020.

Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020:

Your mental health



- A lot better than two years ago
- A little better
- The same – no change
- A little worse
- A lot worse than two years ago

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 1 - 4, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 2,550 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2. percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

The survey was conducted in partnership with [CBC](#) and paid for jointly by ARI and CBC. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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While one-in-three Canadians continue to grapple with recent mental health woes, many are taking some solace out of their opportunity to reflect over these past two years. Four-in-five (81%) say that this has been an opportunity to take stock of what really matters in their life as they enter the next phase.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians over the age of 64 are most likely to say that their mental health was not impacted over the past two years. Fully half say this (51%) compared to 35 per cent of 55- to 64-year-olds – the next largest group saying so. Only 17 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds voice this opinion.
- Relationships with friends and family have endured strain as well over the past two years. Two-in-five (39%) say that overall, their relationships have worsened over this period, while 14 per cent say they have improved.
- For most Canadians, their relationship with their partner stayed the same (37%) or improved (21%). For one-in-five (19%), however, that relationship deteriorated.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX

Part One: The toll of two years

- **More than half say their mental health has worsened, women hit hardest**
- **Challenges felt across the country**
- **Physical health a significant challenge for older Canadians**
- **Romantic relationships fared relatively well; those with friends and family, not so much**

Part Two: Recent struggles for many, added perspective for most

- **A silver lining: Four-in-five say the pandemic's made them reflect on what's important**

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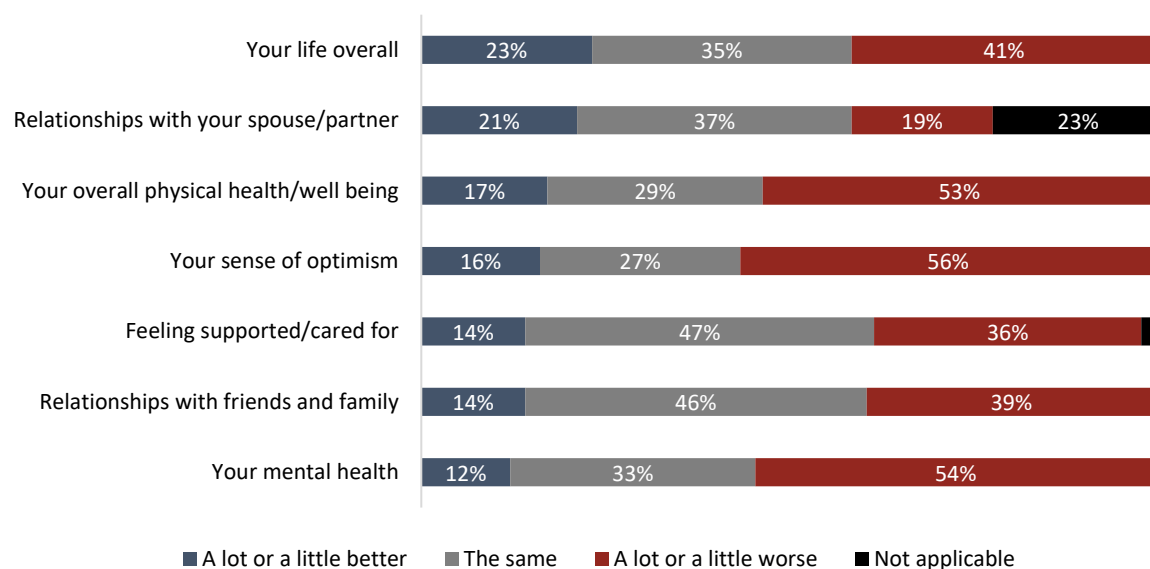
Part One: The toll of two years

It's been two years since the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. And it's been two years of lockdowns, physical distancing, job losses, school closures, shuttered fitness centres, delayed events, cancelled vacations, infection, and death.

Related: [COVID at Two: Vast majorities say the pandemic has pulled Canadians apart, brought out the worst in people](#)

Canadians who have been through all that were asked to assess the net effect of the last two years on their life overall, their physical well being, their sense of well being, their feeling of support, relationships with friends and family and their mental health. For each, more Canadians say it has worsened since March 2020 than has improved, especially when it comes to their mental health – more than half (54%) say that element of their life has deteriorated. On one matter – their relationship with their spouse or partner – Canadians are more split, with equal numbers saying it has improved as it has worsened.

**Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020:
(All respondents, n=2,550)**



More than half say their mental health has worsened, women hit hardest

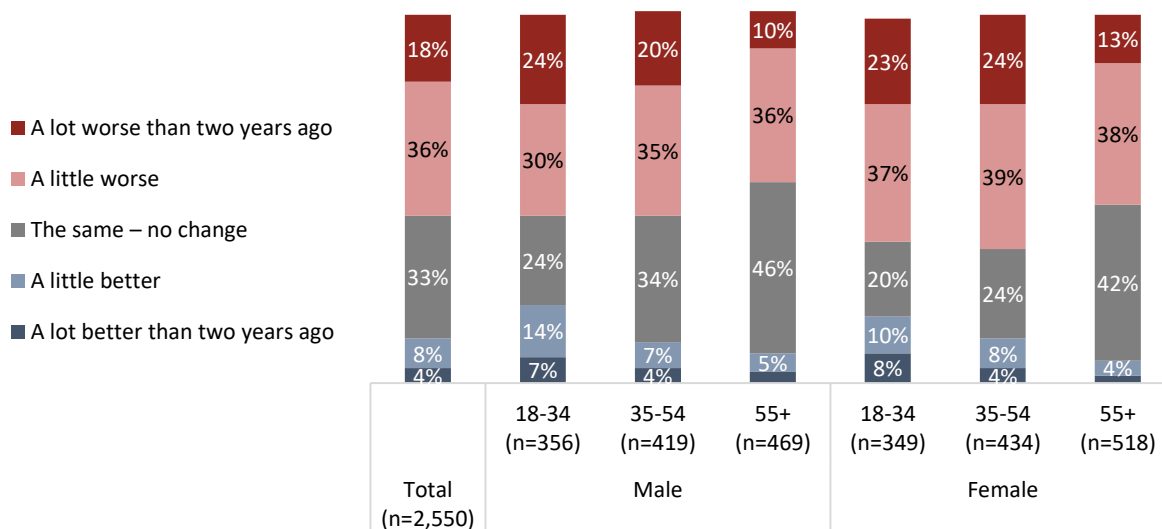
Mental health is a struggle for many across age and gender lines, but women aged 18- to 54-years-old are most likely to say it has worsened over the last two years. Three-in-five 18- to 34-year-old (60%) and 35- to 54-year-old (63%) women say their mental health is 'a little' or 'a lot' worse since March 2020. Men over the age of 54 are as likely to say it has stayed the same (46%) as declined (46%):

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Your mental health



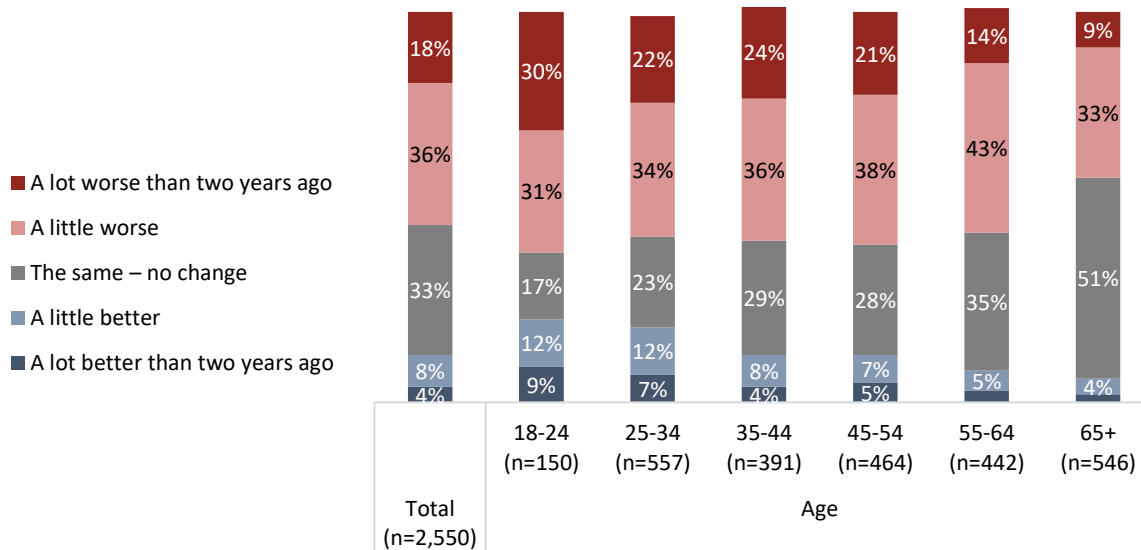
Older Canadians have been at higher risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection, but they are the most likely to also report faring no worse emotionally. Half 51% of Canadians of retirement age say this. Younger Canadians report bearing a larger mental burden; three-in-five 18- to 24-year-olds say their mental health has worsened in the intervening two years since the declaration of a global pandemic, including three-in-ten who say it's a lot worse:

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Your mental health



Challenges felt across the country

Worsening mental health is felt by more than half of the population in every region except Quebec. There, the highest proportion (39%) feel they've been trading water mentally over the last two years. Still, only a handful in every region say their mental health is in a better state than it was two years ago:

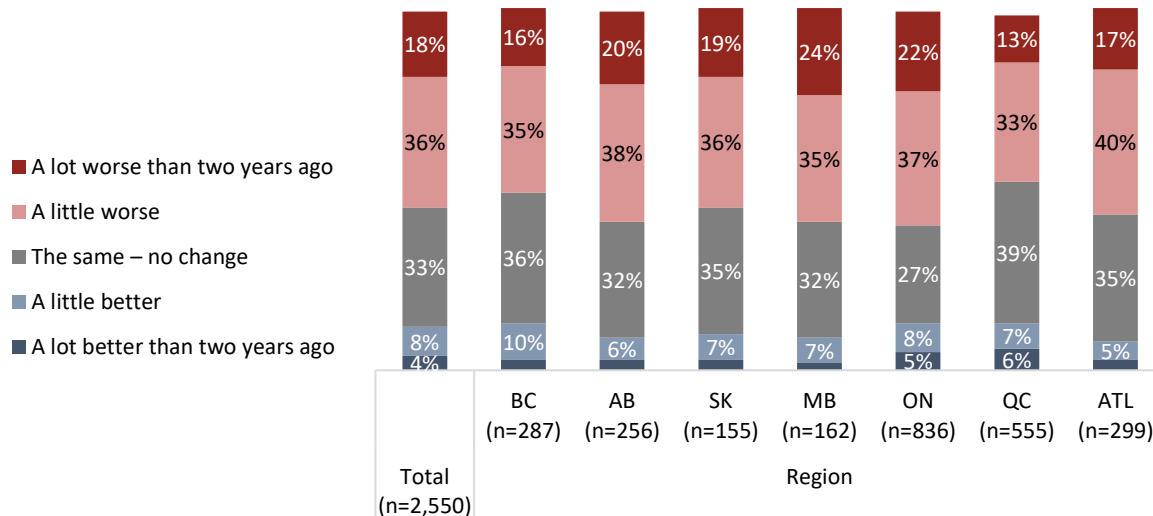
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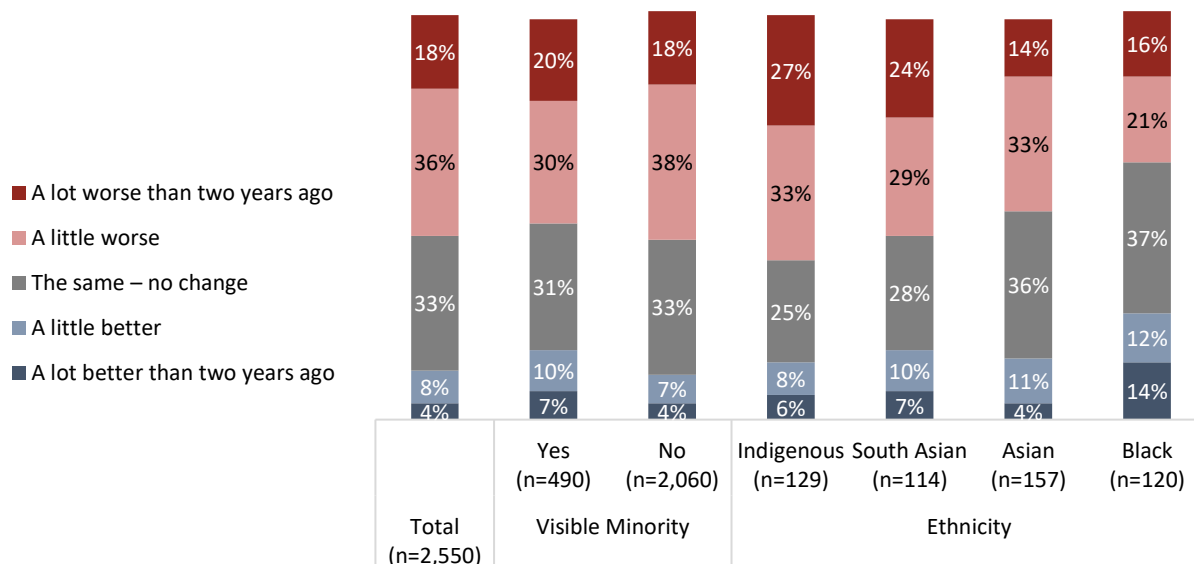
Your mental health



COVID-19 has not been the only major story in Canada since 2020. Last year, the tragic history of Canada’s residential schools grabbed headlines internationally when ground-penetrating radar confirmed as many as [200 unmarked graves at the former site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School](#). While visible minorities are more likely than those who don’t identify as such to say their mental health has improved in the last two years (17% vs. 11%), there is a significant difference across ethnic lines. Three-in-five respondents who identify as Indigenous say their mental health has worsened since March 2020, a higher proportion than other ethnic groups:

Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020:

Your mental health



Physical health a significant challenge for older Canadians

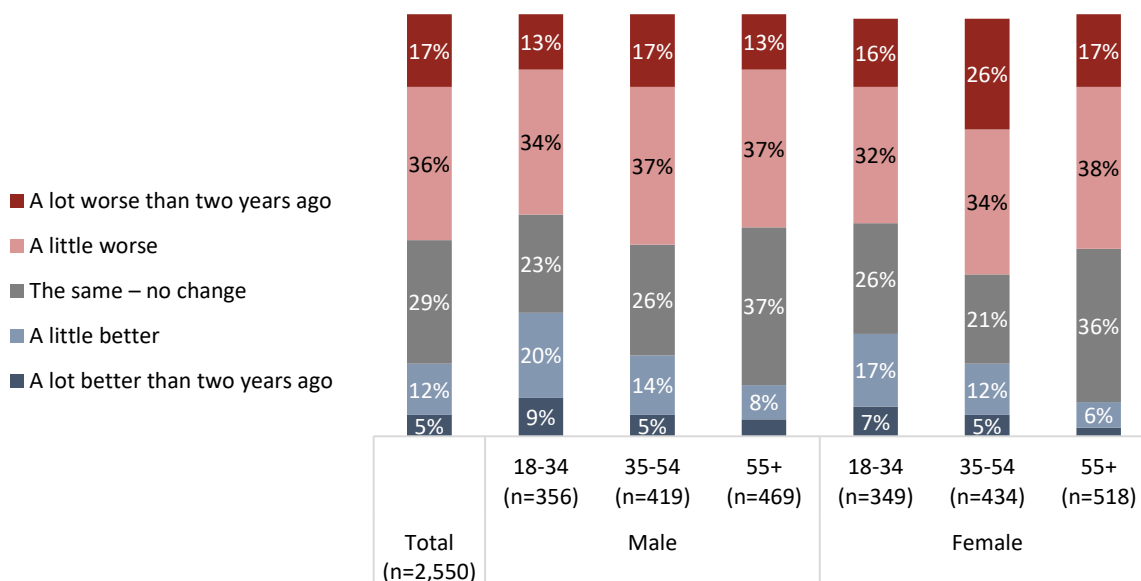
Gyms and fitness centres have frequently been subjected to public health restrictions across the country over the last two years. With that in mind, more than half (53%) of Canadians say their physical health has suffered since March 2020, while few have made improvements (17%). However, younger Canadians have been more successful than older ones at improving their overall physical well being. Three-in-ten men (29%) and one-quarter of women (24%) aged 18- to 34-years-old say they've made strides when it comes to their physical fitness, more than double and triple the number, respectively, of their counterparts over the age of 54:

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When it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020:

Your overall physical health/well being



Romantic relationships fared relatively well; those with friends and family, not so much

At times, restrictions severely limited Canadians outside household contacts, placing a greater importance on those within. Overall, a plurality (37%) say they've come out of the pandemic with as good of a relationship with their partner as they came into it with, while as many say the last two years improved their relationship with their spouse (21%) as worsened it (19%).

For other relationships, Canadians are more likely to say the pandemic damaged than bolstered them. Two-in-five (39%) say their relationships with other friends and family declined, more than the 14 per cent who say the opposite.

There are also more Canadians who feel their social support network has deteriorated than strengthened, especially among those who are 35- to 64-years-old.

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Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020
(Those who select 'better' minus those who select 'worse' shown)

	Total (n=2,550)	Age					
		18-24 (n=150)	25-34 (n=557)	35-44 (n=391)	45-54 (n=464)	55-64 (n=442)	65+ (n=546)
Relationships with your spouse/ partner	+2%	+5%	+14%	0%	-1%	-7%	-2%
Your life overall	-18%	-2%	+2%	-20%	-24%	-31%	-22%
Feeling supported/ cared for	-22%	-5%	-11%	-30%	-35%	-27%	-16%
Relationships with friends and family	-25%	-6%	-18%	-35%	-29%	-28%	-24%
Your overall physical health/ well being	-36%	-19%	-22%	-41%	-37%	-46%	-39%
Your sense of optimism	-40%	-30%	-33%	-49%	-39%	-51%	-35%
Your mental health	-42%	-40%	-36%	-48%	-47%	-49%	-36%

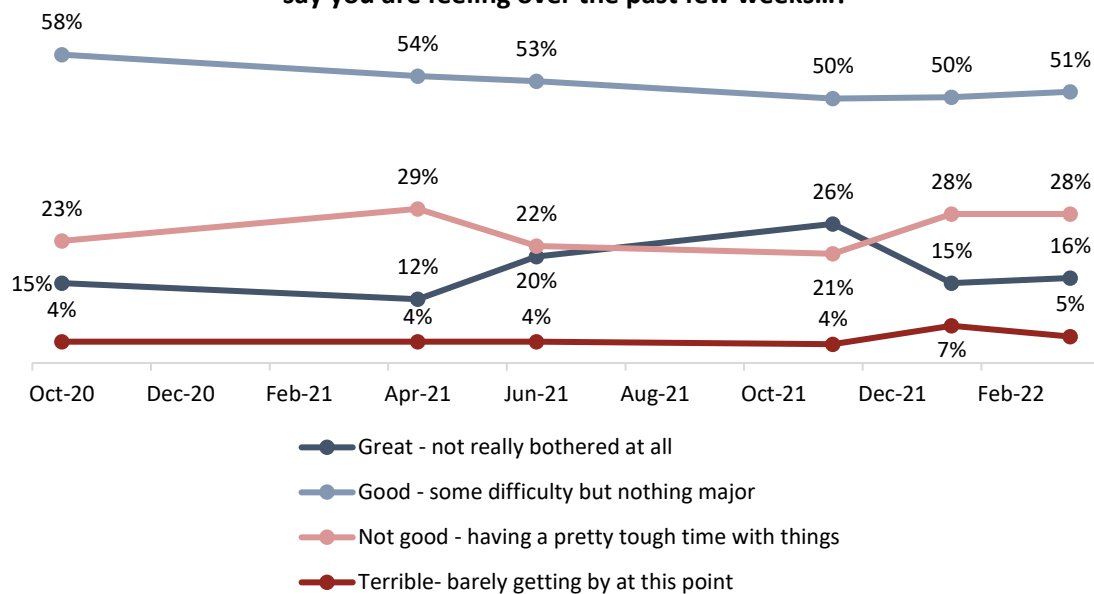
Part Two: Recent struggles for many, added perspective for most

In recent weeks, few (16%) Canadians report not being bothered at all when it comes to their mental health, while half (51%) say they're doing good with some minor difficulties. One-third (33%) are struggling more mentally, including one-in-20 who say they are barely getting by at this point. Despite the COVID-19 situation improving in the interim, this metric remains relatively unchanged since January. As well, there are more Canadians reporting feeling not good or terrible than in June or November last year, and as many who said the same in April, prior to widespread vaccination:

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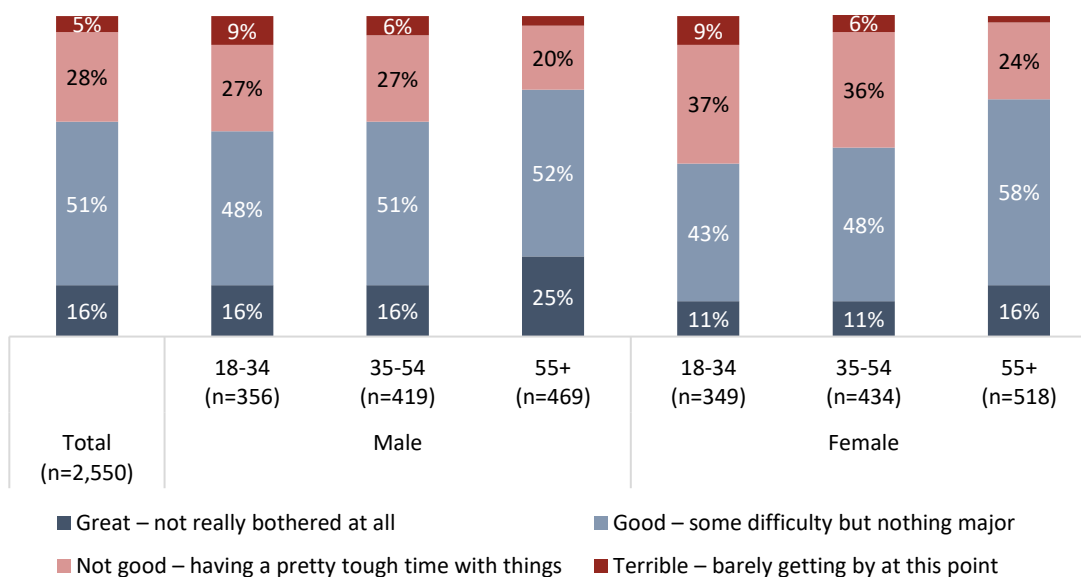
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Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...?



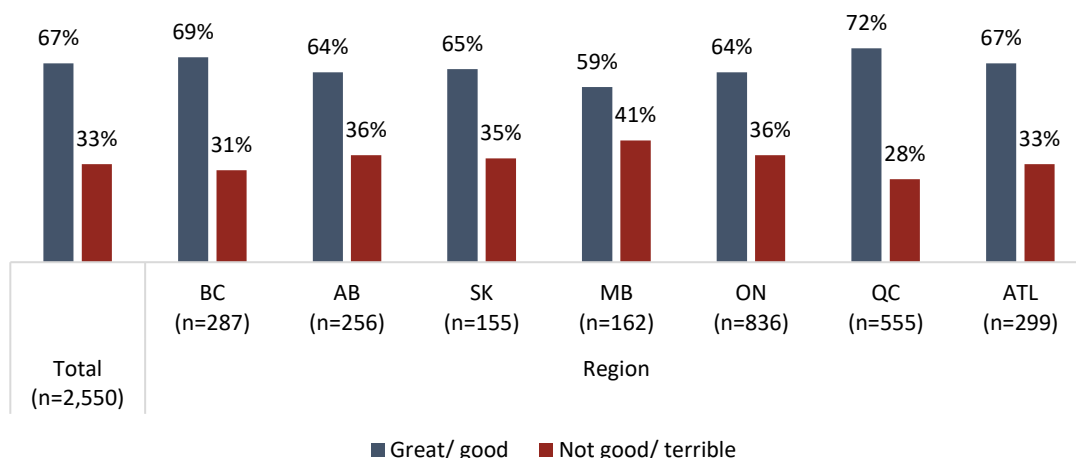
The mental health situation for women aged 18- to 54-years-old continues to be worse than for other demographics. More than two-in-five 18- to 34-year-old (46%) and 35- to 54-year-old (42%) women say they are doing not good or terrible over the past few weeks. Comparatively, one-quarter of men over the age of 54 say they are unbothered:

Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...?



Regionally, Quebecers report the best mental health. In Manitoba, two-in-five (41%) say they are having a tough time or are barely getting by:

Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...?



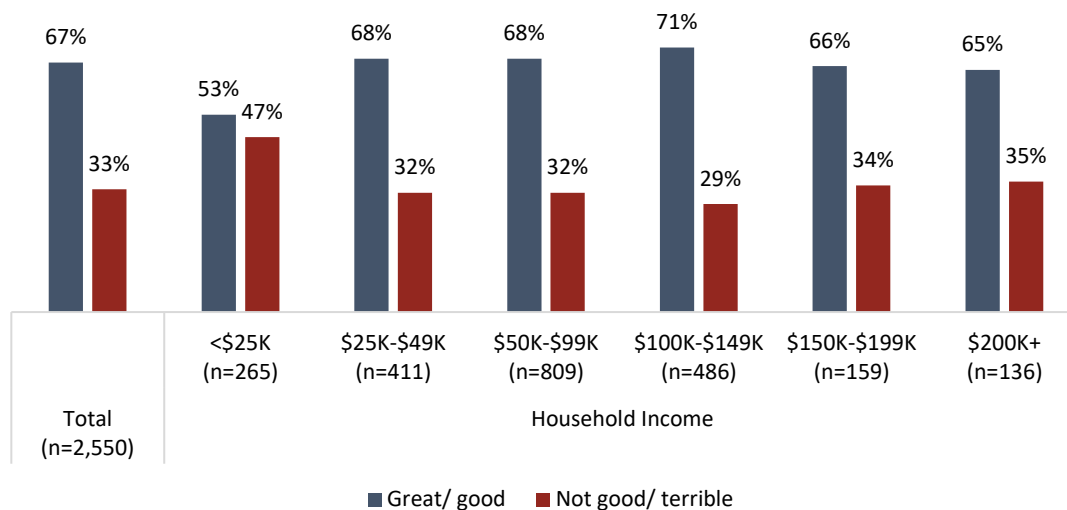
For lower income households, mental health has been a larger problem than for higher income ones in recent weeks. Approaching half (47%) in households earning less than \$25,000 annually say their mental

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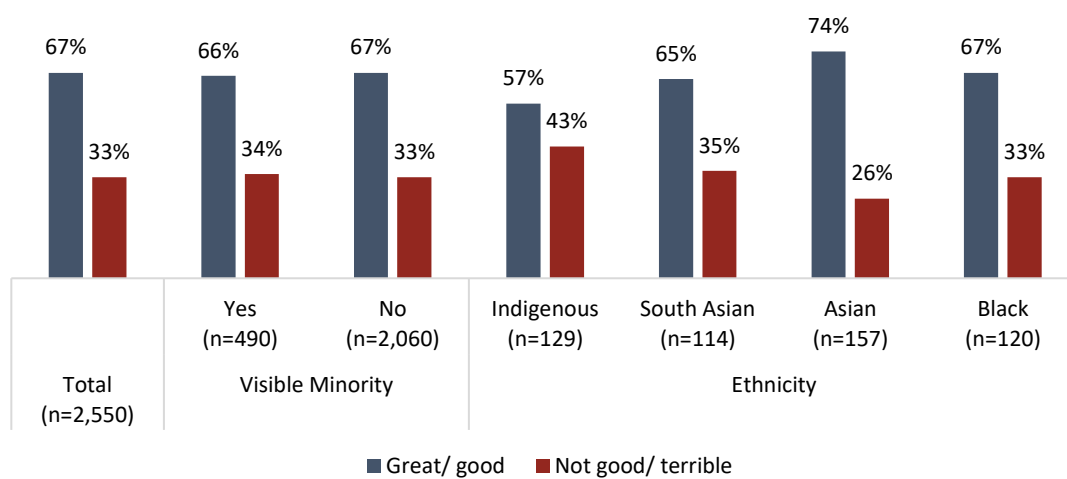
health is 'not good' or 'terrible'. While COVID-19 is one factor weighing on the minds of Canadians, the rising cost of living has also caused significant headaches.

Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...?



Overall, those who identify as visible minorities and those who don't report similar levels of positive and negative recent mental health. However, as shown above when it came to the last two years of mental health, respondents who identify as Indigenous are more likely to feel poor mental health than other ethnic groups:

Now thinking about how you feel personally when it comes to your mental health in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you say you are feeling over the past few weeks...?



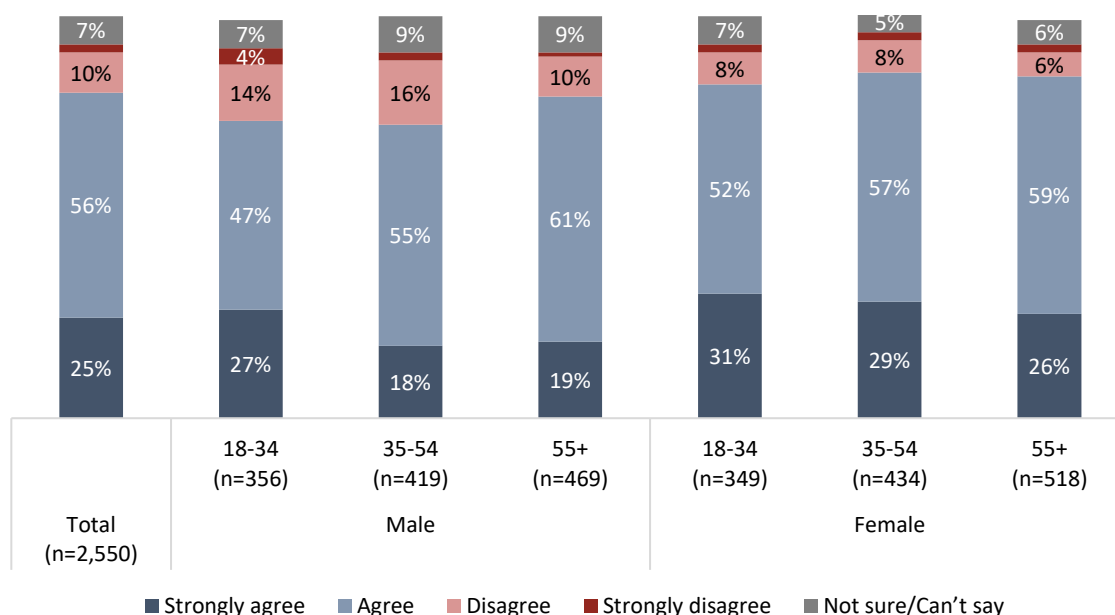
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A silver lining: Four-in-five say the pandemic's made them reflect on what's important

It's been a long, hard two years for Canadians. There's at least one positive aspect to the trials of the pandemic, however: many say it has forced them to realize what's important in their life. Four-in-five (81%) say the last two years have made them reflect on what is really important, a majority sentiment that's consistent across demographics and regions:

**Agree vs. disagree -
"It's made me reflect on what is really important"**



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by ethnicity, [click here](#).

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