

Perinatal Mental Health in Canada

Issue:

Perinatal mental health refers to the range of disorders¹ a woman or birthing person² can face during pregnancy and in the year after giving birth. It is a critical issue affecting nearly 1 in 4 Canadian families.

<p>Prevalence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government of Canada’s 2018/2019 survey on Maternal Mental Health showed that an average of 23% of Canadian women experienced postpartum depression alone. • Rates are higher for marginalized people. Indigenous mothers are 20% more likely to suffer from prenatal and postpartum depression than their white counterparts. Black mothers rates of postpartum depression are 40% higher and they and are four times more at risk of maternal mortality than white mothers³. It is also believed that LGBTQ+ people experience higher rates of postpartum depression • 10% of fathers experience perinatal mental health issues. • Rates of self-reported perinatal depression and anxiety have doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic period. 	<p>Impact:</p> <p>Perinatal mental illness can have dire consequences across the family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women: Untreated perinatal mental health issues can lead to chronic depression. Suicide is the 4th leading cause of maternal death in Canada. • Families: Maternal mental health is the single greatest determinant of their child’s health over the life course. Perinatal mental illness negatively impacts parental-infant attachment and can impair the child’s cognitive and psychosocial development all the way into adulthood.
<p>Prevention:</p> <p>The risk factors of perinatal mental illness are well understood. Early intervention at the pregnancy stage can prevent the onset of postpartum depression and anxiety.</p>	<p>Access to Care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 1 in 5 women with perinatal mental health issues are currently accessing treatment. • A 2021 survey found that 95% of health care providers believe current perinatal mental health services are insufficient in Canada. <p>Treatment: With the right treatment and support, perinatal mental illness is curable. Low-intensity interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) are highly effective for mild to moderate issues. Medication and psychotherapy can resolve even the most severe cases.</p>

Our Organization:

Established in 2019, the Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative (CPMHC) is a not-for-profit organization working to improve perinatal mental health care in Canada. We are advocating for a National Perinatal Mental Health Strategy similar to what exists in the UK and Australia.

What We Wish to Explore/Understand:

Our objective for this telephone appointment is to gain a better appreciation of the public policy and political context surrounding our issue. Understanding how the government is thinking about maternal and infant health will inform our organization’s consideration of policy propositions that it might advance.

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¹ Depression, anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, psychosis

² The term “birthing persons” is inclusive of pregnant and postpartum trans people

³ Statistics are from the US as this race-based data is currently not collected in Canada