

# NATIONAL PHYSICIAN HEALTH SURVEY 2021



The 2021 National Physician Health Survey (NPHS) highlights the rate of burnout as high among physicians and medical residents. More than half of the respondents reported experiencing burnout, a proportion almost double (1.7 times) that recorded before the pandemic.

Physicians and medical learners from across Canada's provinces and territories completed the 2021 NPHS (n=4,121). Respondents completed an online survey in English or French with questions pertaining to several behavioural, occupational and psychological variables.

## Results

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the proportion of respondents who self-identified as "flourishing" in mental health has declined substantially (47% to 63%).

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the proportion of respondents screening positive for major depressive disorder has increased substantially (34% to 48%).

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the proportion of respondents reporting suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months has increased substantially (8% to 14%).

Respondents reporting burnout were 1.3 times more likely to report planning to reduce their work hours in the next 24 months (54% vs 42%).

Approximately half of the respondents indicated plans to modify or reduce their clinical hours in the next two years because of the health human resource crisis in Canada.

Physicians who reported low on professional fulfillment were 1.4 times more likely to report planning to reduce their work hours (52% vs 37%).

## Associations between three factors that were measured among physicians:

### BURNOUT

After fatigue, lack of professional fulfillment and other workplace factors (e.g., dissatisfaction with one's current job), feelings of moral distress and experiences of workplace bullying and harassment were most associated with burnout.

### PROFESSIONAL FULFILLMENT

Strong drivers of professional fulfillment include feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction with one's current job, and feelings of positive influence over other people's lives.

### LIKELIHOOD TO REDUCE HOURS

Low professional fulfillment was highly correlated with reported intentions to reduce hours, along with poor or marginal time for documentation, screening positive for major depressive disorder, and current job dissatisfaction.

## Next steps

The 2021 NPHS indicates the pandemic had a substantially negative impact on physicians' wellbeing, with reports of increased burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, depression, and moral distress. The Canadian healthcare system is under strain for many reasons including long wait times, ambulance offloading delays, staff shortages, and long-term care challenges; as such, urgent action is needed to support the wellbeing of physicians and other healthcare providers. Various organizations are taking steps to address the current challenges, including the Canadian Medical Association's (CMA) 20-year agile plan with **three pillars**:

**1. Health: A society where every individual has equal opportunities to be mentally and physically healthy.**

**2. Health system: A health system designed to promote health; and be sustainable, integrated and patient-partnered.**

**3. Health workforce: A medical culture that is safe, inclusive and health promoting.**

## Conclusions

The current study results align with prior research and emphasizing the substantial impact of workplace and cultural factors have on physician wellness. The results underscore key areas for future efforts, including research, programs, policies, and interventions focused on addressing burnout and enhancing professional fulfillment to support a sustainable health system. A pillar of the CMA's Impact 2040 strategy involves shaping a new medical culture rooted in equity and diversity, ultimately enhancing physicians' wellbeing and contributing to a healthier future for Canadians. See [CMA: Seizing the moment — Impact 2040 strategy](#).

