



RURAL WELLBEING

Mental Health Factsheet



HIGHLIGHTS



- Calls to ConnexOntario increased for all community types between 2022-2023, but the increase was greater for rural communities.
- People aged 25-34 represented the highest proportion of callers to ConnexOntario in 2023.
- Alcohol use disorder was the top presenting issue for callers for urban and rural communities.

Overview

A person's mental health status is directly related to their overall wellbeing. Mental health can be influenced by social, psychological, and biological factors, including emotional skills, substance use, trauma, and genetics. Substance use can also lead to increased risk of chronic disease, including liver disease, respiratory disorders, certain cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and premature death. This factsheet provides an overview of mental health statistics for rural and urban communities in Ontario.

Data source:

Data were obtained from [ConnexOntario](#), which is a government agency that helps people navigate the health care system and improve access to services for mental health and substance use. The dataset included the number of calls received by ConnexOntario, along with the presenting issue (i.e., reason for calling), and the gender and age of the caller. People may call ConnexOntario on behalf of someone else, such as a family member or friend. Health care professionals may also call on behalf of a patient.

Note that the data presented here reflect self-reporting by callers to ConnexOntario and may not reflect actual instances of substance use or mental health disorders.

This factsheet presents information about mental health indicators from ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Explore the dashboard to view interactive maps and data visualizations.



Most of the calls received by ConnexOntario in 2023 were from urban communities (Table 1). The number of calls increased from 2022 to 2023 for all community types, however the increase was greater in rural communities.



In 2023, males made up 55% of callers in both rural and urban communities (Table 2). People aged 25-34 represented the largest proportion of callers, followed by people in the 35-44 age group (Table 3). Together, people aged 25-44 represented around half of all callers in 2023, even though people in this age group only make up 27% of the population in Ontario.

In 2023, alcohol use disorder was the top presenting issue for callers across both community types (Table 4). Compared to 2022, calls regarding alcohol use increased in 2023 for rural communities, but decreased in urban communities. The second most common issue for callers was stimulant use disorder in rural communities, but this issue ranked third for urban communities. Since 2022, calls regarding stimulant use increased by 8% in rural communities, but declined by 4% in urban communities. Calls pertaining to opioid use disorder decreased in urban communities, with a slight increase in rural communities. Anxiety disorder ranked 3rd for callers in rural communities, but 2nd in urban communities. Compared to 2022, calls regarding anxiety increased in both rural and urban areas. Although gambling disorder did not appear in the top 5 issues for urban or rural communities, calls about this issue increased by about 50% for both community types between 2022-2023.

Table 1. Summary of mental health statistics by community type.

Community Type	2021 Population	Number of calls to ConnexON in 2022	Number of calls to ConnexON in 2023	Change in number of calls 2022-23	Number of mental health and addictions facilities in 2023
Rural	2,430,261	8,875	9,646	9%	449
Urban	11,738,873	36,129	36,969	2%	746
Ontario	14,223,942	45,214	46,845	4%	1,205

Table 2. Proportion of callers by gender and community type in 2023.

Gender	Rural	Urban
Female	42%	42%
Male	55%	55%
Not Identified	2%	3%

Table 3. Proportion of callers by age group and community type in 2023.

Age groups	Rural	Urban
0-14	1%	1%
15-24	15%	18%
25-34	31%	33%
35-44	26%	22%
45-54	11%	12%
55-64	10%	7%
65+	3%	3%
Not Identified	2%	2%

Table 4. Comparison of top 10 presenting issues by community type in 2023.

Rank	Rural		Urban	
	Presenting issue	% of calls	Presenting Issue	% of calls
1	Alcohol Use Disorder	28%	Alcohol Use Disorder	23%
2	Stimulant Use Disorder	24%	Anxiety Disorder	15%
3	Anxiety Disorder	14%	Stimulant Use Disorder	16%
4	Opioid Use Disorder	16%	Depressive Disorders	15%
5	Depressive Disorders	13%	Opioid Use Disorder	8%
6	Trauma and Stressors	5%	Gambling Disorder	5%
7	Gambling Disorder	5%	Cannabis Use Disorder	8%
8	Cannabis Use Disorder	5%	Trauma and Stressors	5%
9	Personality Disorders	2%	Schizophrenia and Other	4%
10	Schizophrenia and Other	2%	Personality Disorders	2%

Definitions

Community: Census subdivisions, municipalities, and areas treated as municipal for statistical purposes, including unorganized territories and Indigenous reserves and settlements.

Community type: Categories of communities as Rural or Urban.

Rural: Any non-Indigenous municipality outside of census metropolitan areas.

Urban: Any non-Indigenous municipality within a [census metropolitan area](#).

See the [Indicator Definitions](#) website for more information.

Summary

This factsheet explored mental health by examining the number of calls received by ConnexOntario for help with accessing services for mental health and substance use. Of course, this information does not tell the whole story about how people are doing in communities across Ontario. However, it does shed light on some of the issues that people may be experiencing and could be useful in developing strategies for mental health supports, harm reduction, and rehabilitation programs. It could also be helpful for exploring options to improve household income, education levels, and social connection – all of which are social determinants of health that influence mental health status.

Detailed community data for mental health and social determinants of health can be found on the [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#).

Mental health of farmers

According to the 2021 National Survey of Farmer Mental Health in Canada, farmers reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, perceived stress, emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and alcohol use than the general population. In fact, 76 per cent of farmers reported moderate or high stress levels. Farmers may be more susceptible to mental health concerns due to the stresses and impacts of factors that are beyond their control such as weather, commodity and market pricing, trade policies, and outbreaks of crop or animal diseases.



Healthy farms need healthy farmers and farm workers. Agriculture Wellness Ontario offers mental health education, counselling services and enhanced community support to Ontario's agricultural community. The [Farmer Wellness Initiative](#) supports Ontario farmers, farm workers, and their families with free and unlimited mental health counselling. All mental health professionals on this line are either from an agricultural background themselves or have received agricultural literacy training to understand the unique stressors faced by this population. Call 1-866-267-6255 to go through intake and be connected to a counsellor; crisis support is available upon intake if identified as immediate risk.



This factsheet was prepared by Danielle Letang, Manager of Data Strategy for the Rural Ontario Institute. Questions about data sources and comments or feedback can be directed to facts@ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

This factsheet complements ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Factsheets provide insight and analysis of rural facts and trends featured in the dashboards.

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