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## PETERBOROUGH REGION

# Take care of your mental health during COVID-19 lockdown

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People experiencing issues with their mental, emotional and physical health are being asked to take care of themselves as the second COVID-19 pandemic lockdown continues.

Overall health is important to maintain during this time, according to Jack Veitch, manager of community engagement and education for the Canadian Mental Health Association's Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge office.

"We know surrounding yourself with important people, your family, your friends, your loved ones, your peers, people who are important to you is imperative for strong mental health," Veitch said.

Isolation is one of the worst things people can do to impact mental health, if it is already an issue, he said.

"When people feel those feelings of anxiety or depression that can be that natural impetuous to sort of drift away, to go back to (their) room, apartment, to (their) home and kind of lock my door," Veitch said.

The pandemic has altered people's daily routine, something that they used as a sense of purpose, he said.

"I am sure you see people like this in the community every day, the older gentleman that wakes up and drives down to Tim Hortons and he sits down, and he has a coffee every morning," Veitch said.

Interruption of such routines because of the lockdown can really interfere with people and their mental health because it negatively affects how they feel, he said.

"We have been trying to encourage people to find sort of new ways to find that purpose and that routine that is so beneficial to mental health," Veitch said.

Social isolation has many factors contributing to the breakdown of mental health, he said.

"It sort of perpetuates that cycle of low feeling, of anxiety. What we often encourage people to do is to get out and be active to have that sense of purpose or a sense of drive, have hobbies and interests," Veitch said.

Not all people are the same and need the same amount of interaction as others, he said.

"Some might say, I thrive in that sort of solitude, I prefer to have that private time," Veitch said. "I think that is perfectly normal and healthy for some for sure, but for others, that lack of socialization can have a really major impact on mood and health."

One group impacted more than others are older people, according to Elizabeth McCrillis, assistant professor of psychology and director at the Trent Centre for Aging and Society at Trent University.

“It is very important to highlight the vulnerabilities that older people experience and continue to experience in relation to the pandemic,” she said.

Physical distancing has been seen to have a considerable impact on social isolation for older people in rural areas like Peterborough and Peterborough County, she said.

“Where in person engagement pre-pandemic has been the norm,” she said. “It is also very important to highlight the resilience of people at the same time that we have seen throughout the pandemic.”

Older people tend to make up a vast majority of the volunteers in the Peterborough area, especially in Selwyn Township.

“We have been looking at older people, who tend to make up the vast majority of volunteers and when the pandemic happened, this obviously significantly impacted those that were able to volunteer,” McCrillis said.

“Volunteers were all of a sudden not able to get out in their community.”

Some older people have been able to overcome and persevere in their volunteer positions in these rural communities, she said.

“We heard stories of resiliency and adaptability to switching to online,” McCrillis said. “For some of those groups their productivity has been higher than ever and by productivity we mean their ability to give back.”

She said she didn’t want to play down the importance of social isolation and its outcomes when it comes to the impacts of it.

“Social isolation, for any demographic, including older people, can be very problematic,” McCrillis said. “It can contribute to pre-existing mental health conditions, for example, could be exacerbated, so there is significant challenges for that.”

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