

Mental Health & Addiction in the context of COVID-19 and Climate Change



COVID-19 and Climate Change both have significant impacts on young people's mental health



COVID-19

Unintended effects of stay-at-home regulations on youth:

- Education disruptions
- Loss of access to health, support, rehabilitative services
- Fewer opportunity for physical exercise and play
- Loss of social interactions



Prolonged home confinement can be concerning in unsafe homes where domestic abuse and/or food insecurities can occur



Canadian youth who had sought mental health services pre-pandemic were more likely to experience severe mental health outcomes and thoughts of suicide

Youth report experiencing more fear, sadness, anger, and eco-anxiety regarding climate change than older counterparts

Indigenous youth are heavily impacted as changes in the environment & climate change are compounding stressors that challenge well-being and resilience

Climate Change

Direct effects

- Environmental degradation
- Extreme temperatures
- Population displacement
- Droughts & floods



Indirect effects

- Food insecurity
- Loss of cultural identity
- Breakdown of family & community support systems

Both effects can lead to anxiety, compounded stress, PTSD & increased rates of suicide

Social Constructs & Addiction

In the 1950s, heroin addiction arose as a symptom of social marginalization



Treatment during this time consisted of support on social factors:

Social Integration & Citizen Productiveness

Over time, recovery shifted more to prescription methods & created two forms of treatment:

Private sector treatment continued to address meaning & inclusion but with limited accessibility



Public funding treatment continues to use methadone prescription treatment that can worsen addiction and be dangerous for certain groups such as people without homes

What Can We Do?



Bouncing forward means rebuilding better

The dual impacts of COVID-19 and climate change on mental health should drive future development of services with an equity perspective

Collaborate with young voices and Indigenous youth to better understand impacts and develop recovery strategies

Advocate for addiction treatment to address underlying social determinants (e.g. housing, employment, family, & social inclusion)

Renewal of our social constructs should include environmental factors to address addiction, ecology, & biodiversity preservation

This information was presented on June 3rd, 2020 as a contribution to the series: "Learning and Relearning for Planetary Health" <https://learningforplaneta.wixsite.com/website/webinar-8>