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In this month's BrainBuzz, we celebrate international women's day by highlighting social media messages from Women & Girls in Science day last month. Also, you'll find the results of CIHR's Fall 2020 project grant competition, and the breadth and depth of work that CAMH scientists are leading to better understand and treat mental illness across the lifespan. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or feedback at any time.

Aristotle Voineskos  
VP Research, CAMH



**CIHR IRSC**

 Canadian Institutes Institut de recherche of Health Research en santé du Canada

### CAMH researchers receive 7 new CIHR grants

In the most recent major funding competition from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), 7 CAMH studies received funding. CAMH's total funding from the CIHR Project Grant Fall 2020 competition is **\$3 997 678**. Read about the CAMH researchers and their new projects in this Twitter thread:

<https://twitter.com/CAMHResearch/status/1367883740702150657>.

### Half of cannabis users increased consumption during first wave of COVID-19



## **National survey has public policy implications, CAMH authors state**

A persistent and concerning trend emerged across Canada during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: about half of Canadians who used cannabis in the past week increased their consumption. This according to CAMH-led study just published in the Journal of Addiction Medicine.

"We know that regular use of cannabis leads to greater health problems, addiction and other mental health disorders," said senior author Dr. [Tara Elton-Marshall](#), Independent Scientist, Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH. "Seeing a sustained increase in cannabis use during the first wave of the pandemic is a concern."

The study consisted of three surveys during the early months of the pandemic in May and June of 2020. Survey participants from across Canada were selected from a pool of over one million people maintained by the research technology and consumer data collection company Delvinia. Participants in each survey were asked if they had used cannabis during the previous week. Those who used cannabis in the past week were also asked if their cannabis use was higher or lower than it was prior to the start of the pandemic.

Averaged over the three surveys, just over half (52 per cent) of those who had consumed cannabis in the previous week said that they were consuming it more than they were before the pandemic.

The study authors speculate that cannabis use among cannabis users may have increased after the pandemic began for a variety of reasons, including social isolation, boredom, changes in daily routines and additional stress and anxiety about the future. The groups with the greatest risk for increased cannabis use included Canadians under 50, people with lower rates of post-secondary education, residents of Ontario and people who were worried about the impact of the pandemic on their finances.

The study authors recommend that Canadians follow Canada's Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines , which were led by Dr. Benedikt Fischer at CAMH in advance of legalization. The number one recommendation to reduce the harms associated with cannabis use is to abstain. For those who do use cannabis, the guidelines recommend people do not smoke cannabis, use products with lower THC percentages and limit their cannabis use to occasional use.

But according to the study, the median usage rate for Canadians who admitted to using cannabis during the

first wave of the pandemic was about four days a week.

According to co-author Dr. Sameer Imtiaz, Project Scientist at CAMH, the longer this trend towards increased cannabis use among cannabis users continues, the greater the potential harms.

"With this sustained increase in cannabis use among cannabis users found in every wave of the survey, the worry is that Canadians are developing consumption habits that may result in dependence," said Dr. Imtiaz. "We know the usage rate has gone up, so we know the harms associated with it have the potential to increase as well. Understanding cannabis use patterns during the pandemic is imperative for clinical practitioners and public health authorities throughout Canada."

The authors recommend public policy measures be implemented to address this increase in cannabis use, including:

- Public guidance about cannabis use moderation and prevention.
- Policy measures to address the consequences of increased cannabis use.
- Continued monitoring of the cannabis use of Canadians during and after the pandemic.

"This study is an important contribution to our overall understanding of changes in substance use patterns for all drugs since the pandemic began," said CAMH Chief of Addictions Dr. Leslie Buckley. "We already knew from our pandemic mental health and substance use national survey series that there has also been a consistently high national rate of binge drinking since the pandemic began. The better we understand how COVID-19 is impacting substance use in Canada, the more effective our public policy measures to reduce the harms associated with increased use can be."

Visit [camh.ca/covid19](http://camh.ca/covid19) for a variety of other resources, including tips, coping strategies and resources regarding mental health and substance use during the pandemic. In support of the response to COVID-19, Delvinia is providing free access to all survey data via its Methodify platform for the public to explore, download and use within their organizations. This can be accessed at <http://www.delvinia.com/camh-coronavirus-mental-health/>.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

# Women & Girls in Science

Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021

#WomenInScience

## International Day of Women and Girls in Science

On Thursday, February 11, CAMH celebrated the **International Day of Women and Girls in Science** with a focus on empowering girls to become involved in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) at an early age.

According to UN data, less than 30 per cent of researchers worldwide are women, and only around 30 per cent of all female students select STEM-related fields in higher education.

To help amplify their voices, we asked female-identifying scientists at CAMH to create messages of encouragement to their younger selves. We shared those messages of empowerment and solidarity on our various social channels. Please click on the slideshow in this [link](#) to see some of the **inspiring quotes from our CAMH women in science**.



### Buzz-worthy News

An interview with [Dr. Ishrat Husain](#) on research into psychedelic drugs for use in mental health, and the need for continued research in controlled environments before wider clinical use.

<https://twitter.com/CAMHnews/status/1365014526706466819>

Dr. Brianne Redquest awarded 2021 Sterling Clarren FASD Research Award! She is conducting research on strategies to reduce stress in caregivers of people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.

<https://twitter.com/CanFASD/status/1364614855987191808>

Dr. Grace Jacobs, PhD student in the Brain Health

Imaging Centre and Kimel Family Translational Imaging-Genetics Lab, is a recipient of the 2021 UoT Student Leadership Award! <https://twitter.com/CAMHResearch/status/1362398030863990788>

[Dr. Joanna Henderson](#) (Director of the Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health) spoke to the Globe and Mail about providing tips for teens to cope with the ongoing pandemic - see full article [here](#).

CAMH researcher, [Dr. Daniel Buchman](#), honoured as inaugural Fellow in Compassion and Artificial Intelligence by AMS Healthcare. Daniel's work seeks to understand how AI language can influence mental health & addiction stigma among clinicians.

<https://twitter.com/CAMHResearch/status/1354148439941140480>.

**Get In Touch!**

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