

May 1, 2024 | Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Better Data, More Resources Needed to Address Gaps in Maternal Mental Health in Canada

OTTAWA, ON: A growing body of evidence is showing a concerning rise in the number of new mothers in Canada struggling with mental health conditions who may not be getting the help they need.

A variety of factors are playing a role, but ultimately more focused attention on the importance of maternal and perinatal mental health is needed to address key gaps in resources and data collection to fully recognize and address the scope of the problem in Canada.

May is recognized as Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month in Canada – a time dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of mental health support for new parents. This month, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) wishes to highlight that maternal and perinatal mental health is a constant and significant public health concern that can have devastating consequences for pregnant and postpartum mothers, their infants and their families.

Perinatal mental health issues are [under-diagnosed](#) and [under-treated](#) in Canada. But health providers lack a full understanding of exactly how many mothers are struggling, why they may not be accessing help and what resources are available – or not – across the country. This is due to a fragmented data collection system, ongoing stigma, privacy barriers and a lack of attention to this important issue in Canada.

The SOGC is urging the federal government to place a greater priority on perinatal mental health and to take a leadership role in getting provinces and territories to improve and standardize their maternal mental health and mortality data collection practices. Without better data, it is impossible to understand the prevalence of perinatal mental illness in Canada. A national approach to perinatal mental health – including provincial and territorial co-operation and strategies – would help to identify opportunities for prevention and intervention, to make accurate and effective decisions related to resources allocation, capacity, and healthcare delivery models.

The SOGC and its members are actively engaged in finding solutions and shining a light on this important public health issue. Later this year, the SOGC will release new clinical practice guidelines to provide guidance to all health care providers assisting new parents to better identify and refer perinatal mental illness and mood disorders.

This June, the SOGC is also hosting a [Summit on the Prevention of Maternal Mortality](#) to share vital information about activities across Canada focused on the prevention of maternal mortality – the most dire outcome associated with perinatal mental illness.

“Canada needs strong leadership, sustained commitment from all stakeholders, adequate resources and, most importantly, recognition of perinatal mental health as a priority. The lives and wellbeing of our mothers, children and families are at stake.” – Dr. Diane Francoeur, Chief Executive Officer of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

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