

# COVID-19 Impact of Working from Home on Mental Health



A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact  
August 25, 2020

## The Issue:

Following the March 13, 2020 U.S. national emergency declaration concerning COVID-19, Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued stay-at-home orders to slow and contain the spread of the coronavirus on March 20, 2020.<sup>1</sup> As a result of physical distancing, large numbers of non-essential employees have started working from home. Individuals working and sheltering at home for extended periods face challenges of social isolation and loneliness, which can result in increased risks of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance use.<sup>2</sup>

### Employment statistics

- As of May 2020, roughly 68% of employed U.S. workers were working remotely all or part of the time.<sup>11</sup>
- In June 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate was 11.1%, (~ 17.8 million unemployed persons).<sup>12</sup>
- In May 2020, the unemployment rate in Texas was 13%, compared to 3.4% in May 2019.<sup>13</sup>
- Between March and July 2020, 2.8 million Texans filed unemployment claims.<sup>14</sup>

## Mental Health Implications of Working from Home:

- In April 2020, nearly half of U.S. adults (45%) reported anxiety, fear, and stress compared to 33% in 2018, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>
- Severe economic uncertainty resulting from decreased work hours, furloughs, and unemployment has increased the risk of mental health issues and substance use disorders.<sup>3</sup>
- An April 2020 poll about COVID-19 and mental health found that:
  - 52% of Americans feared job loss,
  - 45% worried about income loss due to workplace closure or reduced hours, and
  - 59% worried about long-term negative impacts on their investments.<sup>4</sup>
- Many workers are also dealing with the demands of parenting, helping their children with distance learning, and/or caring for an elderly parent while maintaining a feasible work-from-home schedule.<sup>5</sup>
- Mental health disorder rates are likely to increase over time given that sustained COVID-19 pandemic stressors may result in years-long mental health impacts.<sup>3</sup>

## Recommendations:

- Use data to monitor mental health and psychological symptoms (i.e., anxiety), neuropsychiatric disorders, and mortality (i.e., suicide).<sup>6</sup>
- Increase access to mental health services via telehealth during COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Explore equitable approaches to deliver mental health care (e.g., phone appointments, integration of behavioral and primary care, routine check-ins with community outreach organizations).<sup>8,9</sup>
- Consider extending access to affordable mental health services for individuals who are under- or uninsured<sup>2</sup> (e.g., increase insurance coverage; fund community mental health centers; incentivize pro bono care).



- Communicate self-care best practices to constituents. In addition to normalizing mental health care and reducing stigma, self-care recommendations from the CDC include taking breaks from the news, making time to relax, taking care of [mental](#) and [emotional health](#), taking care of physical health, including eating [nutritious well-balanced meals](#), [exercising regularly](#), and [getting enough sleep](#); and connecting with others while following [physical distancing guidelines](#).<sup>10</sup>

## **Summary:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented mental health challenges for individuals. Stay-at-home orders, physical distancing, health concerns, and economic strain have all contributed to increased risk of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide. Mental health needs must be addressed as the pandemic continues.

### **State and National Mental Health Resources:**

- [2-1-1 Texas](#): a program of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission that connects Texas citizens to health and human services programs.
- [Texas Suicide & Crisis Hotlines](#): provides crisis hotlines by city, county, and service areas in Texas.
- [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#): provides substance abuse and mental health resources in Texas
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): provides free confidential support to people in distress, crisis resources, and best practices for individuals.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#): national organization dedicated to helping Americans affected by mental illness.

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