

# EATING DISORDERS FACTS AND STATISTICS

## WHO IS AFFECTED BY EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders affect people of all ages, genders, socioeconomic classes, racial backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities.

- Eating disorders are among the most common chronic illnesses affecting adolescent girls (1)
- While these illnesses disproportionately affect girls and women, approximately 1 in 4 people with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, and 1 in 3 with binge eating disorder are boys and men (2)
- Research has shown that approximately between 5% and 8% of pregnant people meet the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder (3)
- In a large study of adults seeking eating disorder treatment, 17% of the participants were 40 years of age or older (4)
- Community-based studies indicate that over 3% of women ages 60 and older are living with an eating disorder (5, 6)
- Studies have shown that between 14% and 42% of men with eating disorders are gay or bisexual and that, contrary to a common perception, lesbians and bisexual women are as likely as heterosexual women to be affected by eating disorders (7, 8)
- In a national survey, nearly 11% of transgender men and 8% of transgender women reported living with a diagnosed eating disorder (9)
- Population-based surveys indicate that prevalence rates of eating disorders are similar across levels of socioeconomic status (10)
- Research suggests that eating disorders are at least as prevalent among Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities compared to white populations in North America (11, 12)
- Eating disorders can develop in people never exposed to media images of thin bodies – cases of anorexia nervosa in people with congenital blindness have been documented (13)

## HOW MANY PEOPLE IN CANADA ARE AFFECTED BY EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders are a significant public health issue in Canada.

- Findings from the last Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health indicate that in 2012, over 113 000 individuals ages 15 and older were living with an eating disorder diagnosed by a health professional (14)
- International research indicates that the point prevalence of eating disorders ranges from 2.2% to 4.6% – and many of those affected do not seek or receive care specific to their illness (2)
- At any given time, an estimated 908,000 to 1,900,000 people in Canada have symptoms sufficient for an eating disorder diagnosis (2, 15)

## HOW CAN YOU IDENTIFY SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER?

You can't tell whether or not someone has an eating disorder just by looking at them. People of all body types experience eating disorders. Similarly, you can't rely on an affected person's size or weight to identify which type of eating disorder they have.

- A study of adolescents presenting at a specialized eating disorder clinic found that 17% of those with atypical anorexia nervosa were “overweight” or “obese” according to their body mass index (16)
- A large study involving population-based surveys conducted in multiple countries found that 25% of individuals who had lived with binge eating disorder in the past 12 months had a body mass index within the “normal” weight range (17)

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