

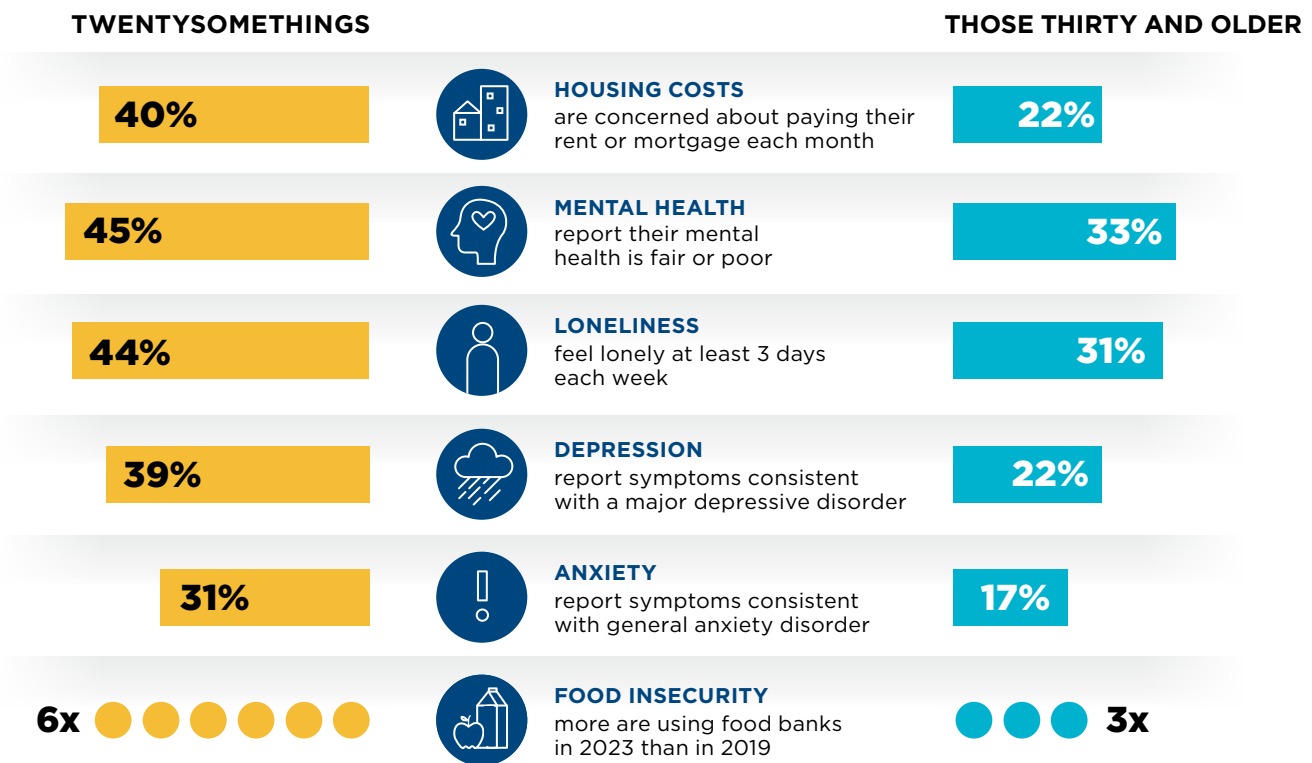
The Hidden Cohort:

WHY TWENTYSOMETHINGS WON'T BE FINE ON THEIR OWN

We all understand our twenties as a period in life when we transition from adolescence to adulthood and from dependence to independence. It has historically been a formative period of learning and exploration, when self-discovery comes from trial and error and higher levels of risk-taking and adventure are not just tolerated but encouraged.

This report highlights the disproportionate challenges faced by twentysomethings in Toronto and offers tips to employers, service providers and funders on how best to support this cohort to transition from surviving to thriving. Collective action now can mitigate the future fallout for twentysomethings while leveraging their unique skills and interests for everyone's benefit.

Twentysomethings are struggling more than before and more than those thirty and older¹



¹ Different sources used within this report have very slightly different age ranges, so please refer to the rest of the report for more detail, including sources and methodology.

More on Twentysomethings in Toronto

- ➔ **A large share of the population:** There are about 430,000 people aged 20 to 29 in the City of Toronto, or about one in seven residents²
- ➔ **A generation of renters:** 72% of households led by those aged 25 to 34 are renters³
- ➔ **Increasingly diverse:** 68% of the population aged 20 to 24 is racialized, compared to 56% of the entire population, and 41% of those aged 65 and older⁴

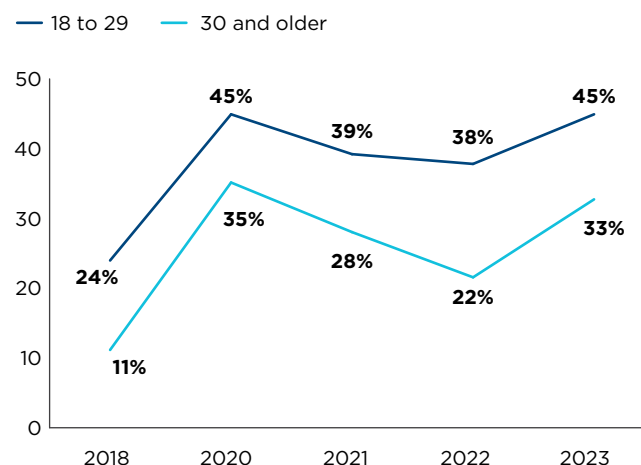
Not young, not old, twentysomethings are an under-studied group. This pivotal cohort aged 18 to 29 includes not only those pursuing higher education, but also those who enter the workforce directly after high school. Moreover, it includes individuals who choose to settle in the city upon completing their education. We aim to outline the most pressing challenges and point to the insufficient attention this group has faced in navigating the immense challenges of coming of age in today's Toronto.

The data is clear that this group faces serious challenges in managing the transition from youth to full adulthood. The issues fall into 3 categories: mental health; financial stability; and social connectedness.

Stand out rates of poor mental health

PERCENTAGE WITH FAIR OR POOR MENTAL HEALTH

City of Toronto



² Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0128-01 Marital status, age group and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions

³ Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0243-01 Housing indicators by tenure including presence of mortgage payments and subsidized housing and household type including census family structure off reserve: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions

⁴ Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0352-01 Visible minority by gender and age: Census divisions

Sources: 2018/2022 from Toronto Social Capital Surveys. 2020, 2021, and 2023 data shared with us from [The Survey on Employment and Skills](#), conducted by the Environics Institute in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute. The estimates for 18 to 29 year olds are based on very large sample sizes for 2018 and 2022 from the Toronto Social Capital Survey and smaller sample sizes in the remaining years. There were 82 respondents between 18 and 29 in 2020, 137 in 2021, and 299 in 2023.

The mental health crisis, particularly among youth and young adults has been one of the most covered aspects of the pandemic, and the reason is clear. Young adults aged 18 to 29 in Toronto are 12 percentage points more likely to self-identify as having poor mental health than Torontonians 30 years old and up.

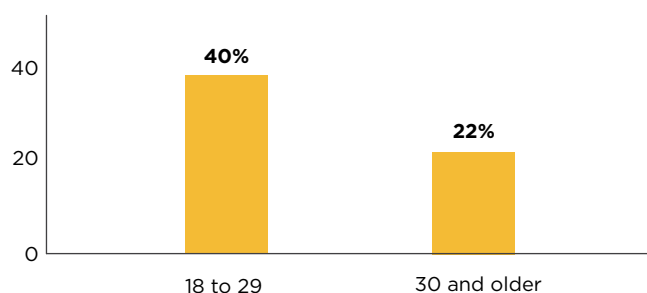
But as the pandemic has started to fade into the background, the enduring nature of the mental health crisis is becoming increasingly clear. In 2023, self-reported mental health was as bad as it was in 2020, after some progress in 2021 and 2022.

As of 2023, the severity of mental health symptoms for those 18 to 30 is also concerning for young people in Toronto, according to data provided by Mental Health Research Canada⁵, with:

- 39% reporting symptoms consistent with a major depressive disorder, as compared to 22% of those 30 plus.
- 31% reporting symptoms of general anxiety disorder, as compared to 17% of those aged 30 plus.

CONCERNS ABOUT PAYING RENT/MORTGAGE, 2023

City of Toronto



Those who scored at least eight out of ten on a 10-point scale with 10 being very concerned are shown in the chart.⁶

Sources: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis is by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC. This data combines data from multiple waves of the survey.

Staggering indicators of financial insecurity

For those aged 18 to 30, 40% indicated concern regarding their ability to pay rent/mortgage, almost double those aged 31 and older (22%) in 2023. Those 18 to 30 reporting concerns paying their rent or mortgage almost doubled (also from 22%) from 2022 to 2023 as inflation soared.

Mirroring this level of financial precarity, the number of clients accessing the Daily Bread Food Bank among those aged 18 to 29 increased six-fold from 2019 to 2023 versus three times for other age groups, according to data provided to us for this report.⁷

This increase in affordability challenges may be one of the key reasons for mental health deteriorating even years after the pandemic restrictions.

⁵ Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) from across their 2023 polls. Interpret the results for 18 to 29 year olds with caution as this represents 180 respondents. All analysis was conducted by the author and does not necessarily reflect the view of MHRC. Toronto refers to the City of Toronto in this analysis. Here, young people refer to those aged 18 to 30 in the original dataset. Anxiety and depression symptoms were scored using standard instruments for assessing anxiety and depression (the PHQ-9 and the GAD-7). Data is only shown for people who scored a 10 or higher on each scale, which is consistent with symptoms of a major depressive disorder or generalized anxiety disorder if these responses were given in a clinical setting in opposed to a public poll.

⁶ Respondents were asked: "How concerned are you about your rent/mortgage being paid each month?"

⁷ From 11,356 clients in 2019 to 68,408 clients in 2023 according to a data provided to us via a custom data request provided by Daily Bread Food Bank. This contrasts to an increase from 54,132 clients in 2019 to 172,378 clients as 2023 among all other age categories.

Challenges facing twentysomethings correlated with screen time

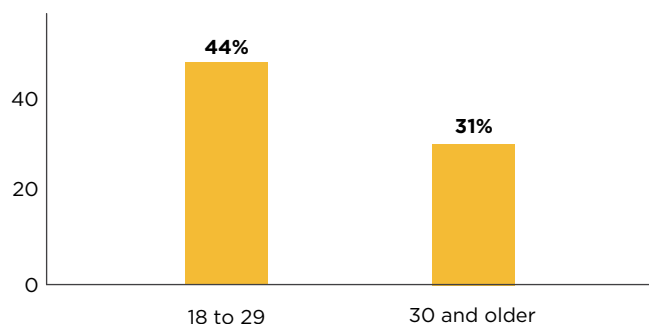
Screen time has surged during the pandemic, with more than one in four young Canadians (aged 16 to 34) spending six or more hours of their personal time on screens per day.

Among those 18 to 30 who use their screens the most for personal use, those using them for 6 or more hours a day were about twice as likely to report moderate or higher symptoms of depression (58% vs 32%) or anxiety (48% vs 23%).

We cannot know for sure how much people with depression are driven to using screens and how much excessive screen time has contributed to poor mental health, but it is a clear case that we need to provide people with high quality, affordable opportunities to engage in-person as part of any solutions to our current mental health crisis.

PERCENT FEELING LONELY AT LEAST 3 DAYS IN LAST WEEK, 2022/2023

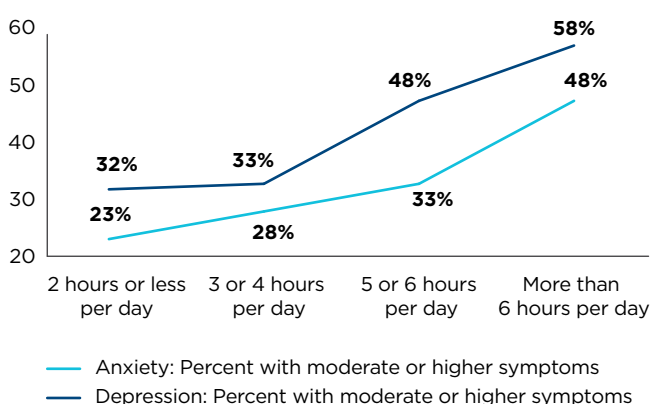
City of Toronto



Source: The [Survey on Employment and Skills](#), conducted by the Environics Institute in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute.

RATES OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION BY NUMBER OF HOURS OF SCREEN TIME PER DAY, 18-30

Canada, 2024



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis is by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.⁸

⁸ Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) using Poll 19 in 2024. All analyses were conducted by the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of MHRC. Anxiety and depression symptoms were scored using standard instruments for assessing anxiety and depression (the PHQ-9 and the GAD-7). Data is only shown for people who would be designated as having at least moderate symptoms on each of these scales (a score of 10 or higher on each instrument).

What twentysomethings want from work and what they can offer

The majority of those 18 to 29 wanted to work from home one day a week or less (50%) while the majority of those aged 30 or older (72%) wanted to work from home at least 2 to 3 days a week, according to data from the [Survey on Employment and Skills](#).

According to [RBC research](#), a significant majority of 15 to 29 year olds are confident in their skills to think critically (74%), collaborate (73%), problem-solve (70%) and be creative (65%) in the workplace. A [separate Ontario Creates study](#) found that 94% of those aged 18 to 30 wanted to work in jobs that allowed them to be creative.

And the same poll found that 18 to 30 year olds were more likely to rank making a positive impact as part of their definition of success than making a lot of money, with both in their top 5.

There's a strong desire among this cohort to innovate and create new solutions. These skills are essential for our success, but we must provide the opportunities necessary to cultivate them.

Conclusion: face-to-face matters a lot—at work and in life

There's perhaps no more formative time in life than the twenties. Whether in school, training, working or somewhere in between, these are transition

years. Important, life-shaping decisions are made, key relationships are established, confidence is built. None of this can happen on screen alone and, in fact, excessive screen time is detrimental.

It is our hope that this brief can spark employers, service providers and policymakers to develop targeted approaches to reaching and supporting this group. The issues facing twentysomethings are clear and they are alarming.

While the financial challenges faced by this generation are immense and complex, the isolation challenges are just as detrimental, but can potentially be addressed more nimbly. Some of the solutions need not be complex:

Supportive work environments:

- Offer high-quality in-person training opportunities
- Encourage in-person work, ensuring that experienced staff are actively involved and that necessary supports are in place to make these interactions worthwhile and enriching for younger workers
- Create robust mentoring programs with live interaction
- Enable live, facilitated networking just for fun
- Train managers to recognize and address mental health challenges in the workplace
- Provide greater access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) especially for contracted workers, many of whom are younger

Supportive communities:

- Deliver direct services in person as the default
- Invest in programs, events and charities that provide high-quality, affordable activities focused on the wellbeing and connection of young adults
- Implement programming that bridges art and artists with the workplace for live cultural and art-making experiences
- Develop and implement sports and recreation programs that encourage active, face-to-face participation
- Invest in making cities more pedestrian-friendly and develop engaging programs in parks frequented by young adults, fostering accessible and vibrant community spaces

Visit www.torontofoundation.ca/why-twentysomethings-wont-be-fine-on-their-own to find a list of community organizations supporting twentysomethings and their take on the issues.
