

Brandon University researchers look at rural community mental health during pandemic

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BRANDON – Brandon University researchers are exploring the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of rural Manitobans. This new project will focus on two potentially vulnerable groups: older people and frontline health care professionals.

“Although everyone has been affected by Covid-19, rural communities and particular groups within those communities will be affected differently,” said Dr. Rachel Herron, the Canada Research Chair in Rural and Remote Mental Health, who is leading the project. “It is critical that we examine how these groups are experiencing Covid-19 as well as promising practices for supporting good mental health during this time.”

Members of the Brandon University Centre for Critical Studies of Rural Mental Health, including Drs. Herron (Geography and Environment), Breanna Lawrence (Education), Nancy Newall (Psychology), Doug Ramsey (Rural Development) and Candice Waddell (Psychiatric Nursing), have combined their expertise to develop research in response to rural community needs. The researchers plan to inform critical responses to the pandemic through monthly public bulletins sharing general findings and recommendations.

“This is exactly the style of collaborative and locally-focused research where Brandon University excels,” said Dr. Heather Duncan, Associate Vice-President of Research at BU. “These researchers are bringing together their expertise from many different fields to examine issues right here in Manitoba, and to search for solutions that may apply across the country.”

The research team is looking for older adults (aged 65 or older) living in rural Manitoban communities (less than 10,000 people) to participate in a one-hour telephone interview conducted by Dr. Herron or a research assistant. They have developed a separate survey for frontline health care workers who are currently working in rural communities or rural service centres outside of Winnipeg during Covid-19 to collect information about their experiences and needs.

The negative impacts of Covid-19 on older people have been well documented. While much attention during this global pandemic has been paid to the vulnerability of people aging in long-term care, there is less awareness of the supports needed and received by those who age at home.

In addition, rural frontline health care workers are unable to stay at home. They are essential agents in response to Covid-19, yet we know little about their access to resources and the supports available to them to continue their work and protect their mental health and wellbeing.

This research project is funded by the Canada Research Chair Program and has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee. Anyone interested in participating can find more information on the Centre website at [www.centreforruralmentalhealth.com](http://www.centreforruralmentalhealth.com), phone (431) 301-3032, or email Dr. Rachel Herron [herronr@brandonu.ca](mailto:herronr@brandonu.ca).

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