



Soundcheck: **A Survey on Mental Health in the Canadian Music Industry**

A Study by Revelios [Mental Health Works]

Research Team

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Massive gratitude to our community partners Unison and SOCAN for helping launch the survey and continuing to share our communications to maximize participation, awareness, and drive meaningful change.

Revelios [Mental Health Works] reconnaît les deux langues officielles du Canada. Le rapport complet et final, dont la publication est prévue pour le début de l'année 2026, sera disponible en anglais et en français.

Revelios [Mental Health Works] recognizes both official languages in Canada. The full and final report, set to be released in early 2026, will be available in both English and French.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the participants who shared their voices in this survey. Without them, we could not present this urgent data that sheds light on the mental health crisis in the Canadian music industry.



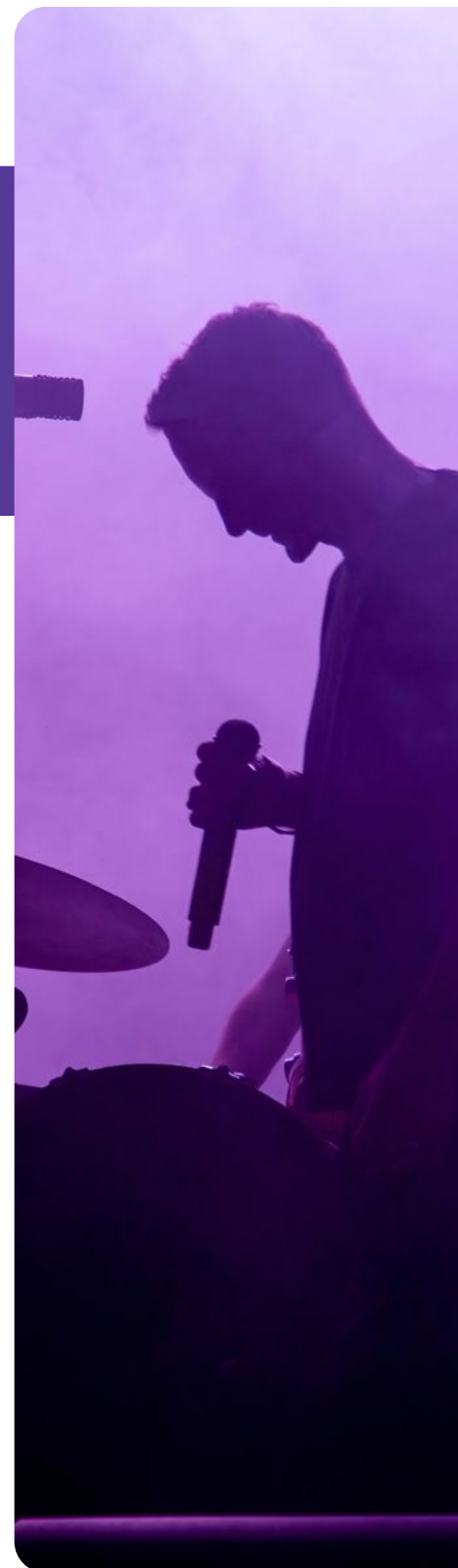
Background

The Canadian music industry is a dynamic cultural force that shapes society and influences our collective identity. Yet, behind the spotlight, many individuals face significant mental health challenges, grappling with the pressures of fame, performance expectations, and industry demands.

Recognizing these issues, *Soundcheck* survey was launched. *Soundcheck* seeks to gather national feedback at scale to generate meaningful insights, with the goal of driving positive change and promoting mental well-being across the sector.

The rationale for this study emerged from the growing awareness of mental health struggles within the music industry. While the Canadian sector holds immense cultural and economic significance, its professional community faces a notable gap in support. Most existing research about mental health in the music industry has been conducted in the U.S. (e.g., MusiCares, 2021, 2023), UK (e.g., Help Musicians, 2014+), Australia (e.g., Support Act, 2022), and France (e.g., CURA, 2019, 2022), leaving a critical void in Canadian-focused data. This initiative aims to address that gap, fostering a healthier, more supportive environment where Canadian musicians and industry professionals can thrive creatively and emotionally. At the same time, we are experiencing an unprecedented “polycrisis” (Morin, 1993; Tooze, 2023), where the lingering effects of COVID-19, along with concurrent political, economic, and environmental challenges, are exacerbating stress and overwhelm in an industry already struggling with sub-optimal mental health.

In April 2024, the Toronto-based mental health consultancy Revelios [Mental Health Works] initiated this effort in collaboration with strategic community partners Unison and SOCAN, launching a novel public and anonymous online survey in September. By December 20, 2024, the project achieved its first milestone with a robust sample size for preliminary analysis and reporting. The survey will remain open until September 30, 2025, gathering more feedback. Additional qualitative research is planned for 2025-2026 (Phase 2). The official publication of full and final study results is planned for Q1 2026.



Literature Review

A Q1 2024 literature review highlights a significant gap in mental health research within the Canadian music industry. Existing studies like ECMA (2018), Crowded Out (2020), Closing the Gap (2022), and Enablers and Barriers (2023) have touched on industry issues, but only ECMA specifically addressed mental health. Shenton (2023) outlines the history of mental health research in music, from early work on healthcare access for blues musicians to more recent studies on work stress, vulnerabilities, and systemic issues like racial inequality. His work, alongside that of other international researchers, reflects a growing recognition of mental health challenges in the industry and the need for targeted interventions.

A 2019 U.K. study revealed significantly higher mental health concerns in the technical backstage industry compared to the general population, citing stigma, limited resources, and lack of access as key barriers. This is echoed by Truman's 2021 findings on backstage crews during the pandemic. To address these gaps and ensure inclusivity, *Soundcheck* aims to contribute to the literature by examining the Canadian music industry as a workplace, considering various roles and factors impacting mental health, such as leadership and workplace health and safety.



Research Methodology

Phase 1 of the *Soundcheck* study uses a feedback-at-scale approach through a multiple-choice, mixed methods survey that includes open-text options to collect qualitative data. The rationale for this design was to gather as much feedback as possible while ensuring the survey was short enough to drive a meaningful completion rate. Diverse perspectives and stakeholders were incorporated into the survey design to mitigate biases, with the goal of robust participant selection and data integrity.

Survey Design

- The survey was available in English and French.
- The survey consisted of Likert-scale multiple choice questions, binary Yes/No questions, “select all that apply” checkboxes, and open text fields where respondents could share more. The survey was divided into Part 1 and Part 2. Respondents could close the survey at the end of Part 1 or choose to continue.
- Part 1 included demographics, mental health, work environment, biopsychosocial factors, and financial stress. Part 2 focused on leadership and workplace topics. The survey was designed this way to capture as much information as possible while mitigating drop-out rates for longer surveys.
- Respondents were invited to share their email addresses to be included in follow-up/later-stage research activities.



Soundcheck Preliminary Results Report (May 2025)

Data Collection: Data were collected anonymously via surveys distributed electronically (newsletter, email) and through social media. The experience management platform, Qualtrics, was used to collect, analyze, and organize the data. Python and Excel were also used during analysis.

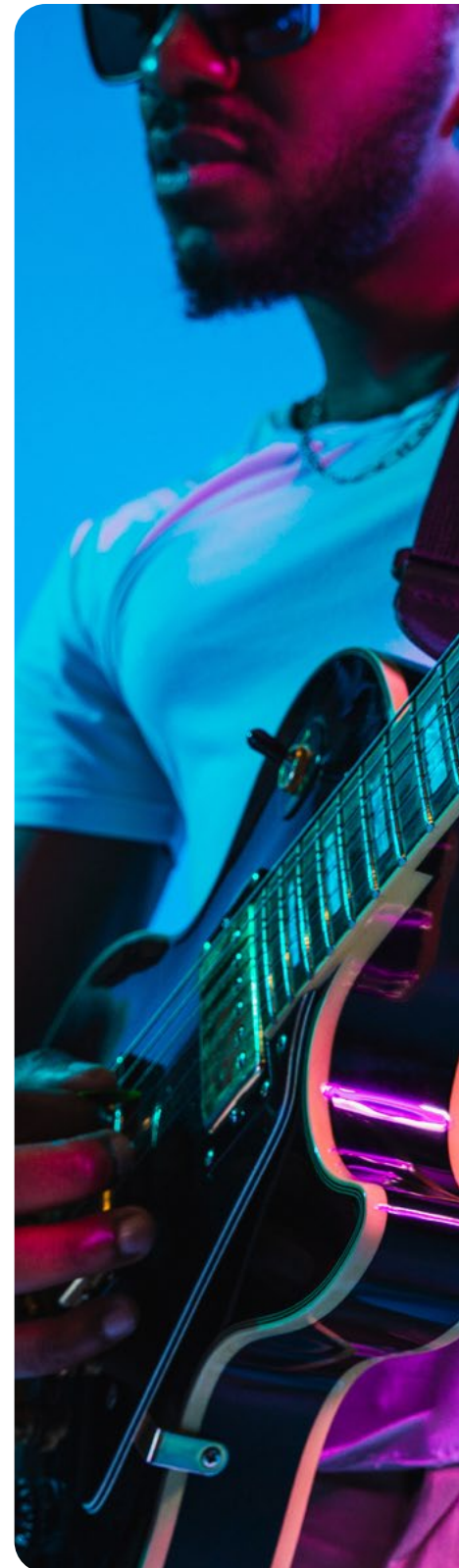
Analysis Techniques: The research employed causal-comparative and correlation analysis with a preliminary reporting sample size of 804 participants, using stratified or cluster sampling to differentiate among demographic and functional role/job groups. Data was organized by question with raw numbers and percentages.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical priorities included participant consent and anonymity.

Reliability and Validity: The study used a customized Likert-scale questionnaire to collect reliable data and applied various statistical methods (t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation analysis) to examine key workplace factors across different demographics and job roles. The self-reported nature of data introduces biases such as social desirability, recall bias, and incomplete or distorted memories, limiting the ability to capture objective data fully. These factors affect reliability and generalizability, as individual interpretations and incomplete responses compromise the data's validity and consistency. Follow-up exploration is required.

The preliminary results (data cut December 20, 2024) of this study are signals to be added to the existing and emerging literature. Respondents did not answer all questions. Part 1 response rate ranged from n=804 to n=274; Part 2 – about workplace and leadership had fewer respondents – on average 300 – not surprising given the length of the survey and the option to close after Part 1.

The preliminary findings aim to engage more participants, gather more feedback, and inspire further inquiry by linking theoretical insights with practical applications to industry dynamics. Qualitative follow-ups, like interviews and focus groups, are planned for Phase 2. More than 200 survey respondents have noted interest in participating. The margin of error at a 95% confidence level for this survey is approximately +/- 3.46%.



Preliminary Results

December 20, 2024; (n=804)

Demographics

Demographics refer to the statistical characteristics of a population, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income. Demographic information helps identify potential biopsychosocial factors of mental health.

This survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible, connecting with subject matter experts, organizations, research, and anecdotal feedback/requests.

Therefore, answer options for gender, sexual orientation, race, genre, and role were designed to be robust, inclusive, and concise.



Key findings include:

- Most respondents were white (81%), heterosexual (67%), gender-normative (79%)
- Although the survey is available in both English and French, most respondents were English-speaking (94%); only 4% (n=27) identified as primarily French speaking.
- 80% of respondents were primarily based in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Although the survey is available in French, only 6% respondents were from Québec, and 1% from New Brunswick.
- 53% reported an annual income below \$50,000; 21% between \$50,000-75,000
- 82% reported some level of university education.
- 51% of respondents were between 26-45 years old.
- Roles included artists/performers (54%), technical crew (4%), salaried employees (18%), independent entrepreneurs (9%), teachers (4%), and other self-described roles (11%).



Compared to other studies (within and outside Canada), this is one of the few (if not only) studies to invite all members, regardless of role, to participate in the survey for a holistic perspective.

Notably, there was limited participation from Québec and Francophone communities, signaling a need for more inclusive outreach.

There was a notable gap in respondents from minority groups, potentially signalling a lack of trust in the survey sponsors, apathy and feedback fatigue, or limited outreach to specific communities. Until we get more representation from marginalized communities, we will never have an accurate look at the cross-sectional experience of mental health in the Canadian music industry. That being said, this researcher will not exclude small data from insights and discussion, as is common practice through statistical significance calculations (Welles, 2014).

Although all music genres were represented, 679 respondents identified a primary genre, with most representation from pop, rock, folk, indie, alternative, country, and jazz genres.

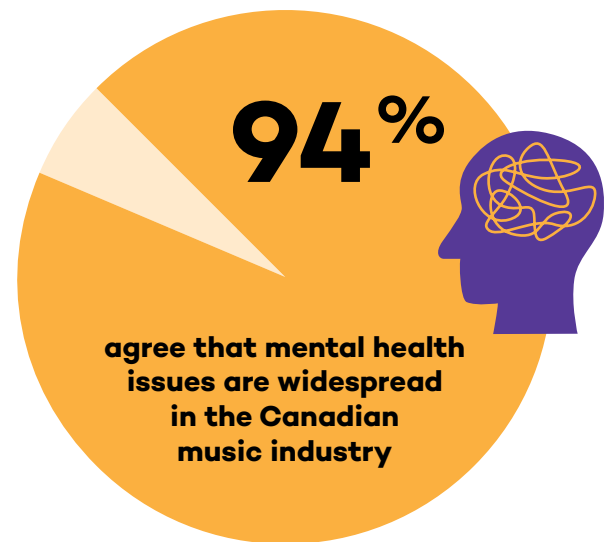
Mental Health

Mental health and well-being encompass a state of emotional, psychological, and social balance where individuals can cope with stress, build meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities effectively.

Findings

Prevalence: 94% agreed that mental health issues are prevalent in the Canadian music industry, with 86% personally experiencing challenges and 95% witnessing them.

Education and Tools: While 74% believed they had tools to support mental health, 85% wanted to learn more about managing their mental health and 95% about supporting peers.



Suicidal Ideation Is of Notable Concern

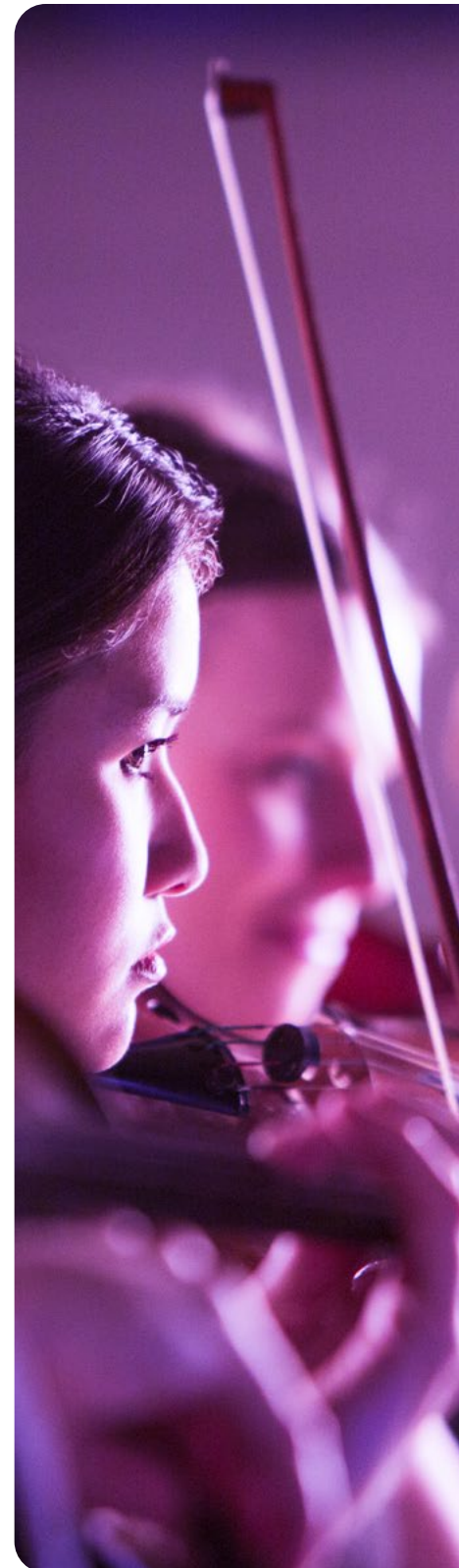
The results are based on three questions:

1. Have you ever felt that life wasn't worth living? **Yes=52%**
2. Have you ever wished you were dead? **Yes=42%**
3. Have you ever thought about taking your own life? **Yes=42%**



Suicidal Ideation (continued)

- Questions about suicide planning or attempt were not included, nor were suicidal thoughts specific to “in past year”. These queries are subject to follow up research.
- Thoughts of suicide (over lifetime) = 12% in general Canadian population
- Compared to other Canadian music industry data...
 - ECMA survey (2018, n=50) found 20% reported such thoughts “in the past month”. Additionally, 26% of survey respondents reported lifetime suicide attempts, contrasting sharply with Atlantic Canada’s rates (PEI lowest at 5.8 per 100,000, New Brunswick highest at 13.9 per 100,000). (Statistics Canada & Health Canada, 2016).
- Elsewhere...
 - In the U.K., musicians, actors, and entertainers were among the highest-risk occupational groups, with a suicide rate for males in culture, media, and sport occupations being 20% higher than average and for females 69% higher. (Musgrave, 2025). Similarly, U.S. data shows that the ‘Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media’ category had the highest female suicide rate across occupations in multiple years, and male musicians had the third-highest rate among major occupation groups.



Mental Health Symptoms and Diagnoses

50% respondents answered ‘yes’ to the statement “I have been diagnosed with a mental health condition”.

“Yes, I have been diagnosed and not treated”	7%
“Yes, I have been diagnosed and unsuccessfully treated”	12%
“Yes, I have been diagnosed and effectively treated”	31%
“No”	50%

Although 50% of respondents reported no experience with a mental health *diagnosis*, most respondents reported experiencing mental health *symptoms*.

Top Mental Health Symptoms (without de facto diagnosis):

Anxiety	84%
Fatigue	74%
Sleep disturbances	72%
Persistent sadness	70%
Worthlessness or guilt	66%

These answers signal common sub-clinical mental health stress/distress or undiagnosed anxiety and depression.

18.3% general Canadian population met criteria for mood, anxiety or substance use disorder (in previous year), so this is significantly higher.

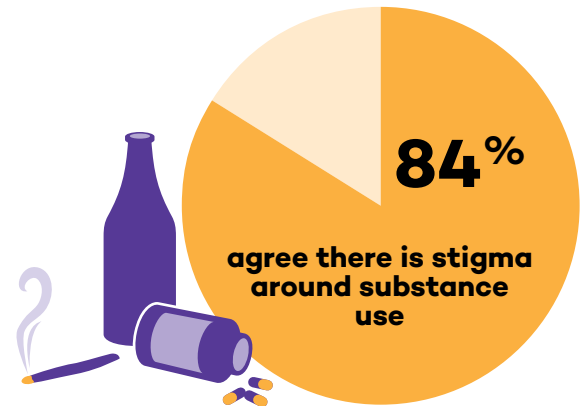


Substance Use

84% agree there is a **stigma** associated with having a substance use challenge (addiction, dependency, etc.).

58% agree there is a **stigma** associated with **not** using substances, e.g., abstinence, sobriety, being in recovery, or living a substance-free lifestyle.

The two ‘stigma’ data points highlight the pervasive nature of stigma related to substance use, whether it involves the use or non-use of substances. Stigma regarding substance use makes it harder to talk about it, get help for it, and create healthier relationships with substances in the workplace (Government of Canada, 2020).



The work environment of the music industry often includes pervasive alcohol availability, use as compensation and stress relief, and an alcohol-centric ecosystem (parties, bars, festivals, weddings). Alcohol use in the context of work shows some age-related differences.

Respondents share a variety of reasons why they use substances:

Socializing/Networking	41%
Coping with stress	38%
Other	15%
I think it enhances creativity	14%
Peer pressure	7%
N/A – I don’t use substances in the context of work	35%

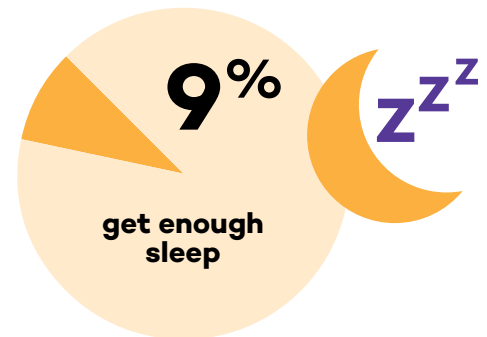
These data points suggest that a combination of social, emotional, and personal factors drives substance use.

Biological/Physical/Social Factors

A dynamic interplay of biological factors like genetics and neurochemistry, physical factors like health and environment, and social factors including relationships, culture, and socioeconomic conditions shapes mental health and well-being. It is critical to recognize that none of these factors exist in isolation (Engel, 1977; Bolton, 2023) and that improvements or detriments in one area will affect other areas.

Biological/Physical Factors

- Only 9% report getting enough sleep to perform at their best.
- Almost 60% somewhat agree that they get enough exercise, social interaction, and good nutrition to perform at their best. No cohort ‘strongly agrees’ that they meet their basic biological needs of rest, physical activity, good nutrition, and positive social interactions.



Many respondents report experiencing chronic health conditions that impact daily life. Respondents were asked to “Select all that apply”. Top five selected chronic conditions:

Neurodiverse (ADHD, autism, dyslexia)	41%
Other	24%
Arthritis	22%
Mobility (walking, standing, climbing stairs)	21%
Auto-immune	19%

It is critical to note that these are self-reported and not validated with clinical diagnosis. Autoimmune is notably lower in the cis-men population, aligning with other research data (Goulmamine et al., 2024). “Other” included a broad range of cited conditions. Neurodiversity is interesting as it likely includes a mix of clinical diagnosis and self-diagnosis (Foster & Ellis, 2024; Lewis, 2016b). It’s important to note the common concomitant nature of ADHD and anxiety and depression (Katzman, 2017) as well as the pervasive self-diagnosing of neurodiverse identification (Harrison, 2023; Fellowes, 2023). For example, prevalence of ADHD in general adult population is 4-6% (CADDAC, 2025) but self-reported in this study is closer to 35%. In international literature, there are references to higher prevalence rates within the music industry and there is anecdotal evidence that some people predisposed to these conditions gravitate to the industry and further education would be helpful (AFEM, 2023).



Social Factors Impacting Mental Health

Generally, responses regarding sexism, racism, ageism, bullying, and harassment were distributed evenly across the disagree/agree spectrum. However, notable differences emerged when considering specific demographic groups.

It's important to note that the number of responses from non-white and gender-diverse individuals was too small to allow for reliable statistical analysis. However, research suggests that these smaller datasets often represent the experiences of marginalized groups (Welles, 2014). Therefore, focusing on the experiences of these outliers is crucial for driving meaningful change.

Key Social Differences

Sexism

- Women and non-binary individuals largely agreed (both strongly and somewhat) that they experience sexism directly related to their gender.
- Men largely disagreed (both strongly and somewhat) with this statement.

Racism

- White and Latino respondents were the only groups where a majority “strongly disagreed” that racism impacts their mental health.

Ageism

- “Somewhat agree” was the most common response across all age groups regarding ageism affecting mental health.
- The 26-35-year-old group was the only one with a significant number of “strongly disagree” responses.

Harassment

- Harassment experiences were markedly higher for women and non-white respondents.

Bullying

- Bullying experiences were reported across demographics.

The final report will include comparison to the general Canadian population, other Canadian music industry data, and international music industry data.

Working Environment

Findings reveal systemic issues in workplace practices and culture:

- 81% felt the work environment was not conducive to good mental health.
- 94% believed the industry could do more to address challenges.
- 10% strongly agreed that people in charge at work put measures in place to support mental health and well-being.
- 68% cited stigma around seeking mental health support.
- 96% agreed that mental health education is critical, yet 81% had no training.

The **modern music industry** has transformed through digital streaming, social media, indie production technology, diverse revenue streams, increased data analytics, rapidly developing AI usage, and easier global reach. Additionally, music industry professionals are living through a time of poly-crisis: the long-tail of the COVID-19 pandemic, and concurrent political, economic, and environmental crises. And, this is added to the pre-existing, historical stress, overwhelm, and tenuous mental health of industry workers.

- 83% say the all-on/all-off nature of work negatively impacts mental health
- Most respondents say the modern ways of working (described above) make it difficult for them to do their best work (59%), sustain their work (62%), and support their mental health (77%).
- Only 19% agree that creating online content is easy. This correlates with the statement “What makes you great at your music job doesn’t necessarily translate into skill/aptitude for digital content creation, marketing, engagement, software acquisition and management, etc.” (Crowded Out, 2020)
- 84% of respondents don’t believe Canadians can break into international markets easily
- Only 3% of respondents strongly agree that Canadian radio effectively represents Canadian musicians.
- 66% of respondents agree that Canadian music festivals effectively include many Canadian music professionals (although there are variations in reporting by race).



A 2020 Music Canada (Crowded Out) study revealed that while the majority of professional musicians primarily perform within their local or provincial spheres, a significant proportion also engage in international performances, with approximately 43% reporting appearances in the United States, 28% in Europe, and 19% in the United Kingdom. The current and developing geopolitical climate will likely further negatively impact the ability for outside-Canada work (Mullen, 2025).

Furthermore, the same study indicated the critical importance of live performance for Canadian professional musicians, with 85% stating that their ability to earn a livelihood would be severely compromised without the opportunity to perform live. This precarious situation is further exacerbated by the closure of small to medium-sized venues and broader economic challenges that negatively impact businesses across the music industry, affecting not only musicians but also a wide range of related occupations and peripheral sectors such as restaurants and bars

Financial Stress

- 79% reported financial stress directly impacting their mental health.
- Only 6% felt a sense of job security (no demographic differences, slightly skewed to White)

As previously mentioned in demographics, 53% reported an annual income below \$50,000; 21% between \$50,000-75,000. There is a known relationship between financial stress and sub-optimal mental health (Ruy & Fan, 2023).



Leadership

Some may wonder why this section was included in a mental health survey. Research in other sectors confirms that leadership plays a critical role in mental health and well-being (Wu et al., 2021; Coates & Howe, 2015). Without exploring the daily experience of power dynamics (functional or symbolic) in the workplace, we will not have an accurate account. Also, it is critical that we start viewing the music industry as a workplace and apply the rigor and proven theories of human-centred leadership, workplace health and safety (including psychological safety), and organizational culture to this experience (Harrison, 2022). A literature review concludes that research to date has not investigated this aspect of the music industry working environment and this will hopefully fill the gap and encourage others to continue the research.

- 81% agreed that interactions with leaders or persons in power impact well-being.
- Only 24% had participated in any leadership training (any sector).

Respondents were asked, based on past and present work experiences; to **select five (5) ways leaders/person-in-power can support well-being**. This is the aggregate data (n=303):

Recognition and appreciation	71%
Promote healthy culture	68%
Flexible work policies	67%
Lead by example	63%
Communication and transparency	60%

Respondents were asked, based on past and present work experiences; to **select five (5) ways leaders/person-in-power can hurt well-being**. This is the aggregate data (n=301):

Poor communication	68%
Lack of recognition	58%
Micromanagement	57%
Ignoring workload	56%
unclear expectations/ambiguity	55%
Ignoring work/life balance	55%





Respondents were asked to select their **top five most helpful characteristics of a good leader/person in power** from a list of ten. This is the aggregate data (n=305):

Effective Communication	90%
Empathy	81%
Recognition	71%
Integrity	69%
Promoting healthy culture	68%
Flexible work policies	67%

Respondents were asked to select their **top five most harmful characteristics of a poor leader/person in power** from a list of ten. This is the aggregate data (n=303):

Lack of/Poor communication	74%
Unethical behaviour	73%
Lack of recognition	58%
Micromanagement	57%
Ignoring workload	56%

Discussion

The Canadian music industry stands out for its cultural diversity, creative collaboration, and robust support systems. Canada's multicultural landscape infuses its music with a rich blend of influences, from Indigenous traditions to global sounds, creating a unique and inclusive artistic identity. Government-backed initiatives like FACTOR and arts councils play a vital role in enabling artists to push creative boundaries, fostering an ecosystem where experimentation and innovation thrive.

However, the industry isn't without its challenges. Canada's proximity to the United States—the largest and most influential music market—creates opportunities and obstacles. While the allure of breaking into this market is strong, 84% of respondents don't believe Canadians can break into international markets easily, highlighting the significant barriers Canadian music industry professionals face. Work visa restrictions and the sheer volume of competition exacerbate these challenges, making it a difficult endeavour for many.

Domestically, Canada's vast geography adds to the complexity of touring, and the relatively small local market drives many artists to seek international opportunities. Furthermore, only 3% of respondents strongly agree that Canadian radio effectively represents Canadian musicians, underscoring a lack of strong domestic support in key promotional avenues. On a more positive note, 66% of respondents agree that Canadian music festivals effectively include many Canadian music professionals, though there are notable variations in reporting by race.

The preliminary findings reveal pervasive mental health challenges in the Canadian music industry, driven by systemic, cultural, and demographic factors. While 94% of respondents acknowledged the prevalence of mental health issues, alarming rates of distress, including 52% feeling life was not worth living, highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions. Marginalized groups disproportionately face higher challenges, emphasizing the need for inclusive outreach and support. Financial stress (79%) and job insecurity (94%) further exacerbate mental health risks, reflecting the precarious nature of work in the industry. The stigma surrounding both substance use (84%) and abstinence (58%) reveals a polarized environment, requiring education and cultural shifts to promote healthier coping mechanisms and work environments.





Workplace culture and leadership also emerged as critical areas for reform. With 81% of respondents perceiving their work environments as detrimental to mental health and only 10% citing strong leadership support, systemic change is imperative. Supportive leadership behaviours like effective communication and empathy are essential, while harmful practices, such as poor communication, micromanagement, and unethical behaviour, remain barriers to well-being. Addressing foundational needs, including better sleep, nutrition, and social connection, alongside systemic reforms to promote equity, representation, and job stability, will be key to fostering a healthier, more sustainable music industry.



Benchmarking this data to the general population in Canada and other countries' music industry professionals, topline reviews paint a concerning picture. More information will be included in the final report (scheduled for Q1 2026).

To date, the industry remains resilient, with creators and stakeholders collaborating to amplify Canadian talent on the global stage. We must ensure our industry community's well-being if we want to continue contributing at this level and keeping this critical cultural industry alive.

Limitations and Considerations

The self-reported nature of this data introduces biases such as social desirability, recall bias, and incomplete or distorted memories, limiting the ability to capture objective data fully. These factors affect reliability and generalizability, as individual interpretations and incomplete responses compromise the data's validity and consistency. Follow-up exploration is required.

The preliminary results of this study are signals for further investigation.

Respondents did not answer all questions. Response rates ranged from n=804 to n=274.



Recommendations

A comprehensive set of recommendations will be provided in the final report, scheduled for release in early 2026.



Next Steps

Revelios [Mental Health Works] will continue collecting online survey data until September 30, 2025.

A comprehensive set of recommendations will be provided in the final report, scheduled for release in early 2026.

Actions for Right Now:

1. If you are a Canadian music industry worker, and you haven't yet participated in the *Soundcheck* survey, please contribute your feedback **before September 30, 2025**. Visit www.revelios.com/soundcheck — It's 100% confidential and anonymous.
2. Share these preliminary findings with your government officials—write, call, or email.
3. Raise awareness by sharing your voice on social media, with your colleagues, and within your leadership circles. Follow and tag [@reveliosmentalhealth](https://twitter.com/reveliosmentalhealth).

For more information, visit: www.revelios.com

Prochaines étapes

Revelios [La santé mentale à l'œuvre] poursuivra la collecte des données du sondage en ligne jusqu'au 30 septembre 2025.

Un ensemble complet de recommandations sera présenté dans le rapport final, dont la publication est prévue au début de l'année 2026.

Actions à poser dès maintenant :

1. Si vous travaillez dans l'industrie musicale canadienne et que vous n'avez pas encore participé au sondage Soundcheck, merci de faire entendre votre voix **d'ici le 30 septembre 2025**.
2. Rendez-vous sur www.revelios.com/soundcheck — c'est 100 % confidentiel et anonyme.
3. Partagez ces résultats préliminaires avec vos représentants gouvernementaux — par écrit, par téléphone ou par courriel.

Sensibilisez votre entourage en partageant votre point de vue sur les réseaux sociaux, avec vos collègues et dans vos cercles de leadership. Suivez et identifiez [@reveliosmentalhealth](https://twitter.com/reveliosmentalhealth).

Pour en savoir plus, visitez : www.revelios.com



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