

# Grief & Bereavement Literacy Series

*Understanding Grief in Canada: A Canadian  
Grief Alliance Perspective*

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Presenters: Paul Adams and Marney Thompson

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BY  
Pallium Canada



*The BC Centre for Palliative Care  
is the provincial hub partner of the  
Palliative Care ECHO Project in British  
Columbia*



The BC Centre for Palliative Care, works with partners across the land colonially known as British Columbia. The work we do occurs on the territories of many distinct First Nations. We are grateful to all the First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands and waters around us for all time.

We recognize that all of you joining us online may be participating from traditional territories of other Indigenous peoples. From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home.

# The Palliative Care ECHO Project

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is a 5-year national initiative to cultivate communities of practice and establish continuous professional development among health care providers across Canada who care for patients with life-limiting illness.

**Stay connected:** [www.echopalliative.com](http://www.echopalliative.com)

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is supported by a financial contribution from Health Canada.

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# Introductions

## Presenters

### **Marney Thompson, MA, RCC-ACS**

Executive Member, Canadian Grief Alliance

Director of Bereavement Services, Victoria Hospice

Victoria, British Columbia

### **Paul Adams**

Co-Chair, Canadian Grief Alliance

Ottawa, Ontario

# Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

*Recognize the aims and efforts of the Canadian Grief Alliance (CGA)*

*Understand the needs and concerns of grieving Canadians*

*Identify the top needed actions reported in the CGA National Action Plan*

# Poll

Rate your current knowledge level on today's topic

# Canadian Grief Alliance

***The CGA is a coalition of grief and bereavement leaders and over 170 leading health organizations convened by Canadian Virtual Hospice.***

- Advocating for a National Grief Strategy since May 2020.
- \$1M from Health Canada to develop grief literacy resources and a National Action Plan.

## OUR PURPOSE

- To respond to pandemic-related and affected grief.
- To improve access to grief resources and services.
  - To advance grief literacy.



# What is Grief Literacy?

‘Grief literacy’ is defined as “increasing grief knowledge” in order to enable the general public and professionals to identify grief more readily, to seek out relevant information, and to adopt appropriate supports.

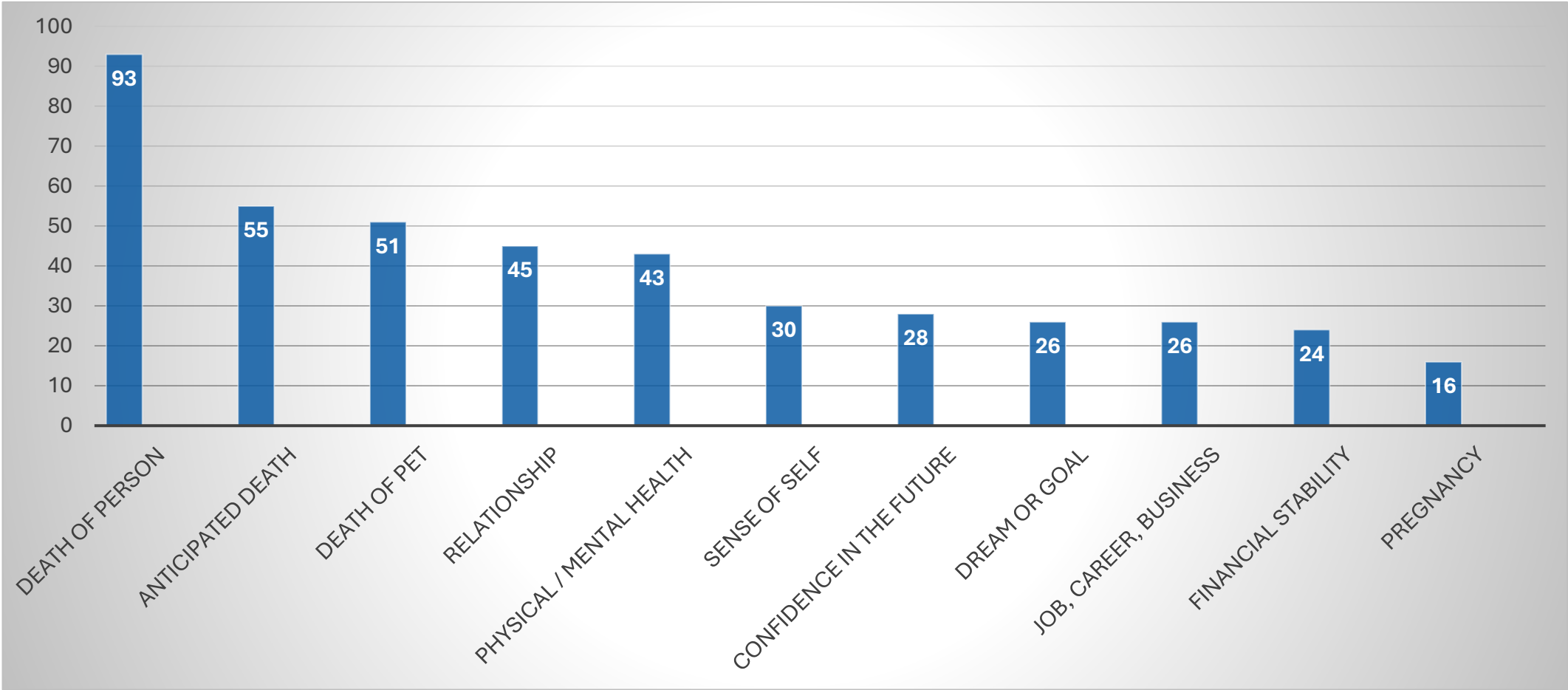
Breen et al., 2022

# Findings from the National Grief Survey

**3,874** people from every province and territory in Canada shared their experiences of grief and loss.

- 50% of people don't feel well supported in their grief
- 53% felt their grief wasn't well recognized
- 91% identified being asked about their loss was helpful

# Sources of Grief



# Additional Findings

## Sources of Support

- 97% received some support from their family
- Support from family, friends, grief counsellors and support groups = more helpful than telephone helplines and employment assistance programs.

## Support for grieving men

- 35% of men found their family physician unhelpful compared with 19% of women;
- 48% of men found a hospice grief program unhelpful, compared with 11% of women.

# In Their Own Words...

- “Ask me about how my son lived, not how he died.”
- “Ask me how I am doing with my grief, even if it has been a while.”
- “How isolating [grief] is, how devastating it is, how people you think will be there for you are not.”
- “The second year losing my husband was so much harder than the first.”

# 5 Takeaways

- 1) People want a dialogue on grief
- 2) There is a disconnect between what people need and how others respond.
- 3) People want more grief support.
- 4) One size does not fit all
- 5) Non-death loss and grief is significant but less supported and understood.

# Professional / Provider Consultations

We consulted with grief leaders, professionals and organizations providing grief services or support.

- 12 Provincial and Territorial consultations held with 90 total attendees
- 23 organization-specific consultations with 184 attendees
- 23 one-on-one conversations

Canadian  
Association of Social  
Workers

BIPOC Healing and Wellness Centre

Coalition of Community  
Health and Resource  
Centre of Ottawa

Elders and Knowledge Carriers Circle

Mom's Stop the Harm

Canadian Cancer Society

Funeral Associations

## Organizations consulted

Canadian Resource Centre  
for Victims of Crime

PAIL Network

Ottawa Ethno-Cultural Seniors Network

Canadian Palliative Care  
Nurses Association

Centre for Research and  
Innovation for Black Survivors of  
Homicide Victims

Canadian Alliance of Grieving Children

RQSPAL

End of Life Doula Association



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# Professional Consultations – Key Themes

- Expand public education to enable people to understand their own grief and help others
  - Start teaching grief literacy in schools
  - Normalize conversations around death and dying
- Improve access to grief supports
  - Particularly services in underserved regions and populations
  - Expanded funding
  - Specific services for children and youth
- Increase education, training, and support for healthcare professionals and frontline workers.

# Grief Chats Q&A

Free webinar series where grief specialists respond to questions on grief and loss.

30 Webinars since 2023:

- 15 Regular Grief Chats
- 6 Special topic Grief Chats
- 3 Professional Grief Chats
- 6 French Grief Chats



Canadian Grief Alliance presents...

## Grief Chats Q&A

Free Webinar and Facebook Live event

**Second Monday every month**  
8:30 pm ET

**SPEAKERS:**



**Marney Thompson, MA**  
Victoria Hospice  
Bereavement Services



**Maxxine Rattner, PhD, RSW**  
Canadian Grief Alliance

 Health Canada  Santé Canada

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[virtualhospice.ca](http://virtualhospice.ca)

# Grief Chats Stats

- So far over 1600 people have attended a Grief Chats webinar
- Monthly registrations range between 61 - 639
- Attendance ranges between 19-240
  - ✓ 96% found the webinars extremely, very or somewhat useful
  - ✓ 94% found the webinars provided strategies that they could apply in their real life
  - ✓ 98% said they'd attend a future Grief Chats webinar
  - ✓ 97% said they'd recommend the webinars to others

# Grief Chats Themes

The questions we've received fall into these general categories:

1. **WHO** – about the **unique/personal** nature/context of the loss (IE spouse, drug toxicity, disenfranchised)

*“Because my father was abusive, everyone assumes that I’m happy he died, but I’m actually very sad and angry. I don’t know what to do.”*

2. **WHAT** – about the **normal/OK** experience of grief (IE emotions, thoughts, relationships, beliefs, body)

*“I’m in such a fog all of the time. I even forget where going sometimes when I’m driving. Will my brain ever work normally again?”*

# Grief Chats Themes cont.

The questions we've received fall into these general categories:

## 3. **HOW** – about the **best/optimal** way to grieve (IE self, activities, life)

*“I try to be strong and generally keep busy, but some days I struggle to even leave my house. Is this normal?”*

## 4. **WHEN** – about the **expected** duration of grief (IE ongoing, stuck, move on)

*“My friends think I should be over it by now, but I still have really sad days. When will the sadness end?”*

*“I don't feel ready to have another pet and I'm not sure that I ever will be. My husband says we need to move on. How much time should I wait?”*

# National Action Plan for Grief

1. Canada is far behind countries such as Australia, Ireland and the UK in terms of research, networks, and public and professional literacy
2. We need to begin building the infrastructure to support grief work
3. We need to build community-based efforts to elevate grief literacy and support





# Grief is...

... not something to "get over" or "fix".

... a natural response to any loss – a person, a relationship, security, hope, or others.

... messy and it doesn't have a timeline.

... felt and expressed in many different ways.

... something you live with and it changes over time.

**Grief needs to be recognized, honoured, and supported.**



# Ideas to support someone who is grieving

**Acknowledge. Show up. Check in.**

## Acknowledge:

### The loss

*"I'm sorry this happened to you."*

### The grief

*"I won't pretend to know what you're going through or how you feel, but I'm here for you."*

## Support:

### Offer to spend time together

*"Would you like some company? We could go for a walk."*

### Support how they need to grieve

*"Whatever you're feeling is alright. I'm here even if you don't know what you need."*

### Be specific with offers of help

*"Can I walk your dog? Bring you dinner? Mow your lawn?"*

### Keep checking in

*"Just letting you know I'm thinking of you."*

### Know the importance of small gestures

*"You're welcome to join us for dinner if you're feeling up to it."*

### Show you care, follow their lead, and listen

*"If you would like to talk, I'm here to listen."*

### Don't let discomfort stop you

*"We don't have to talk. We can just be together."*



# Join the National Grief Network

With a focus on networking, education, advocacy and collaboration, this is an opportunity for people working in grief or grief-intersecting roles to share knowledge & resources, promote events & activities, and support each other as we work to improve grief literacy in Canada.

Meetings are 1 hour, held quarterly.



Use the QR code to join the mailing list



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# Thank you

on behalf of the

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# Poll

Has your knowledge level on today's topic increased because of this session?