

Summary Research Report

Public Opinion Study for the Corporate Homelessness Plan

April 18, 2023

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Study Objectives and Methodology

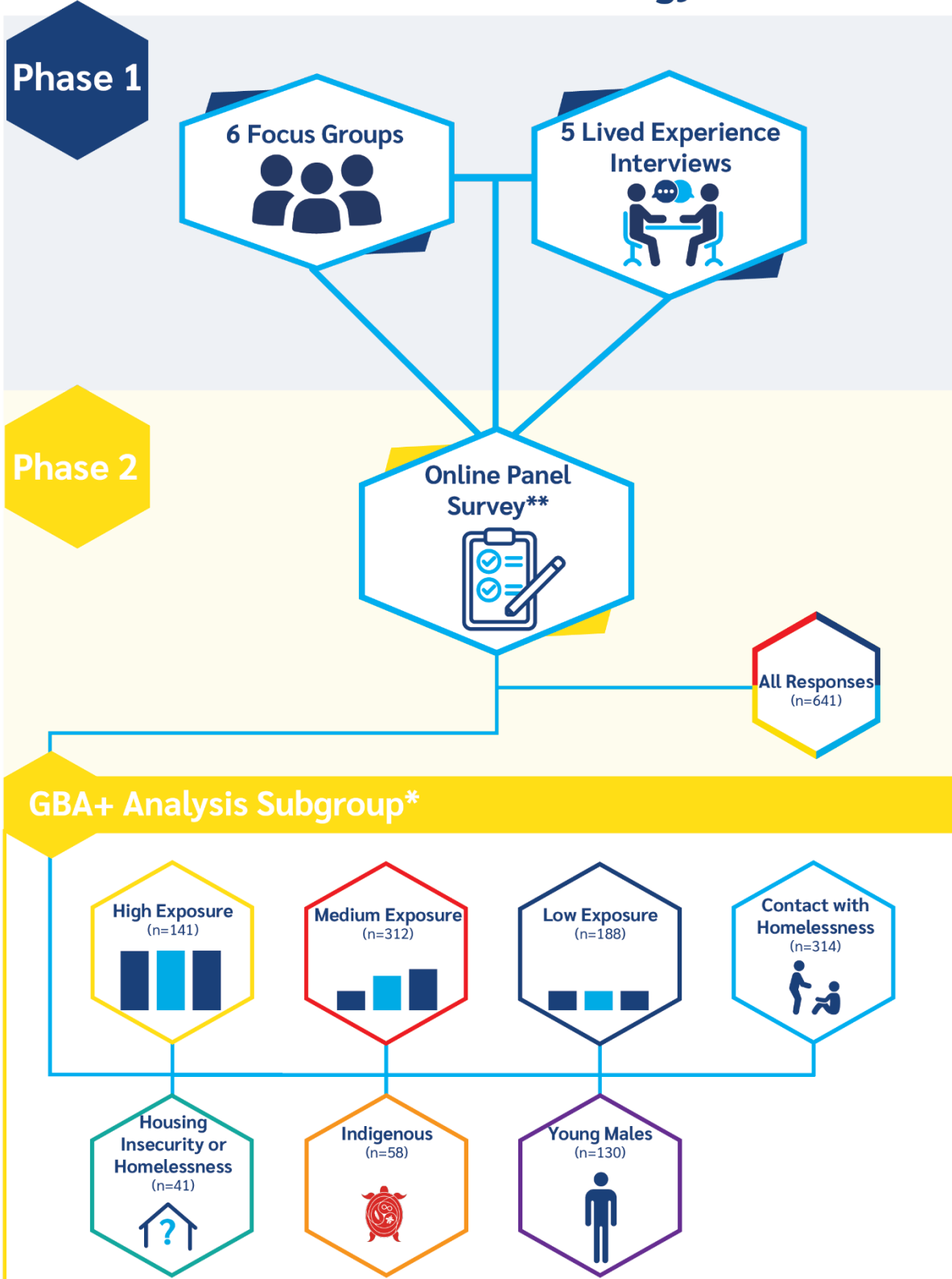
The City of Edmonton's (City) role in responding to homelessness has been heavily influenced by social, economic, and policy decisions over time. Historically, the City has primarily focused on increasing affordable housing supply through the provision of land and grants. When Edmonton first began to experience homelessness in the 1980s, the City worked with community partners and other orders of government as a convener and coordinator of homeless-serving programs and services. More recently, the City's role has expanded as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which increased housing insecurity and homelessness challenges in Edmonton.

While there is a Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness that includes strategies the City supports in a number of ways, the activities of the City in response to the increase and scope of homelessness are not currently captured in a single corporate strategy or plan. As a result, it is difficult to comprehensively evaluate the corporate work underway in relation to the City Plan target of eliminating chronic homelessness in Edmonton.

In order to better align and coordinate City homelessness initiatives, the City is developing a Corporate Homelessness Plan. As a part of the research to inform the Plan's development, the City of Edmonton contracted Pivotal Research, Inc. to undertake a Public Opinion Study on the City's role and response to addressing homelessness.

The objective of the study is to understand the public's attitude towards homelessness and the role and responsibility of the City in addressing it, including what they view as priority investment areas for municipal government and outcomes they would like to see the City work towards.

Research Methodology



* Full subgroup definitions available in Appendix. Subgroups are not mutually exclusive.

** Surveys conducted through online panel cannot be assigned a margin of error. With the sample size, the equivalent margin of error is calculated at 4%, 19 times out of 20.

Phase I: Qualitative

Qualitative research involved six (6) focus groups recruited to ensure diversity in GBA+ representation, including exposure to visible homelessness at the neighbourhood level. Five (5) Interviews with people with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity (as defined by Statistics Canada and CMHC) were also undertaken. Qualitative research was to obtain initial and in-depth understanding of perceptions and attitudes toward homelessness and desired City roles in addressing it.

Phase II: Quantitative

Qualitative findings aided the development of specific questions and options for responses in a survey. The survey was designed to quantify participants' attitudes and perceptions of homelessness and their preferences for the City of Edmonton's role and responsibility in addressing it. The survey was entirely quantitative, including multiple choice or agreement scale questions only.

Limitation

Attitudes, perceptions, and preferences for the involvement of other orders of government and/or community organizations were not captured or referenced in this study. The City of Edmonton is one of many organizations responsible for addressing homelessness and works to support partners in the homeless-serving system of care.

Overall and GBA+ Analysis

The survey was fielded to online panel Cint/Lucid, the make-up of which mirrors the demographic make-up of the population of Edmonton. All panel participants are recruited using double opt-in methodologies. Online panel surveys are not considered statistically representative. However, they are a widely accepted alternative due to the proliferation of online technologies, internet access and the diminishment of landlines. A total of 641 responses to the survey were used for data analysis, which would produce an equivalent margin of error of 4%, 19 times out of 20. Data was further broken into subgroups to ensure appropriate GBA+ analysis and understanding. (See Appendix for further details and definitions.)

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Executive Summary

Regardless of their exposure to visible homelessness, age, income, or neighbourhood they live or work in, Edmontonians want more to be done about homelessness. They are united in the perceptions:

More should be done to address homelessness in our city (Q11)	80%*
Regardless of the responsibility of other orders of government, the City of Edmonton should: Do more than it currently does to address homelessness (Q18)	73%*

*Q11: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your feelings toward homelessness using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don't Know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. [Statements randomized]; Top Two Box (Agree & Strongly Agree) reported Q18: (See page 15 of this report)
All responses data;
Total responses=641



Priority Activities to Address Homelessness

Survey participants were presented a simplified list of activities being undertaken by the City of Edmonton. Using this list of activities, Edmontonians were asked to rate the level of involvement desired from the City of Edmonton in those activities and to rank the importance of those activities to them. Using these data points as reference*, quantitative findings suggests that regardless of the responsibilities of other orders of government, Edmontonians express a preference for the City of Edmonton to:

1. Enhance security and outreach support in transit settings
2. Construct units of affordable housing
3. Coordinate homelessness response among homeless serving agencies, Alberta Health Services, and Provincial social services (including mental health and addiction services)
4. Provide safe shelter spaces all year round
5. Connect people in encampments to support
6. Implement shelter standards to improve accessibility and appropriateness of emergency shelters

In undertaking activities to address homelessness, qualitative findings highlighted the need for the City of Edmonton to undertake homelessness prevention activities to mitigate the need for emergency interventions. This perception is validated by quantitative findings in the above listing of priority activities for the City of Edmonton to undertake.

Lived Experience Interviews

A substantial portion of the information gathered in interviews with those with lived experience of housing insecurity or homelessness validated information gathered in focus groups. However, some key differences emerged in interviews, including:

- Greater focus on support programs, skills building and employment readiness
- Desire for accountability of programs and services
- Strong associations between high cost of living/affordability of housing and homelessness
- Critical attitude of police and/or fire as primary responders to homelessness

Method Overview

*See Priority Activities section of this document for further details on how this listing was determined

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Perceptions

In the focus groups and lived-experience interviews, participants were asked to share their perceptions about homelessness in Edmonton. Qualitative findings from the focus groups were used to develop a number of statements that captured the variety of views shared by participants. These statements were presented in the survey to understand the level of agreement survey participants had with these perceptions. Many qualitative participants associated homelessness with community safety concerns.

Survey participants' responses show they perceive homelessness as the cause of safety issues on transit (80%) and as the cause of safety issues in parks and other public spaces (76%). (Figure 1)

"I believe, that homelessness creates an issue around safety, for people around them...there is no control over behavior...maybe it's okay to pass by, but next second you don't know" (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

"...especially during non-peak hours, the LRT doesn't feel safe, there are too many of them ... hanging around" (Focus Group Participant)

Survey participants perceive that homelessness is resulting in more crime (76%), increased garbage, littering and public health hazards (80%), and more overdose deaths (76%). (Figure 1)

"having homeless people in neighbourhood tends to make it messy in long term" (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

"I had a couple of experiences ... cars have been rifled through and broken in to" (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

"...to steal from properties and sell valuables" (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

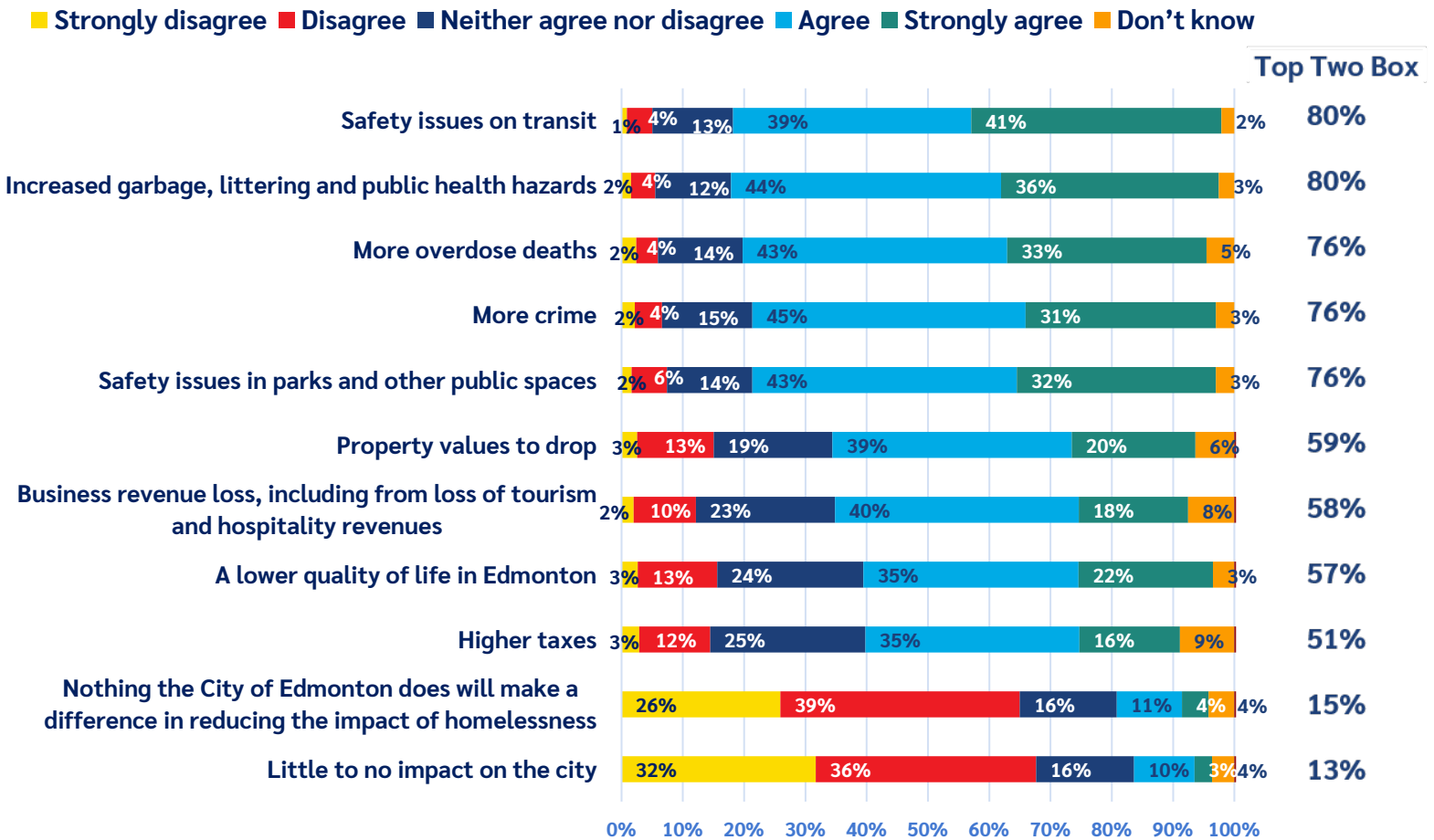
Survey participants perceive the impact of homelessness is lowering quality of life. (57%). They perceive homelessness as having an impact on business revenue (58%), including those from tourism and as the cause of lowered property values (59%) and raised property taxes (51%). (Figure 1)

- “...makes us look bad as a community, that city and community allows it to continue” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “I believe it impacts the budget and finances of the city because when there is a huge problem of homelessness, the city pays more to build and fund shelters or build and fund low-income housing” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “...offices moving out from downtown somewhere away because clients don't want to come to the city” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “...people don't want to move to this community to raise children” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

Figure 1: Perceptions of Impact of Homelessness in Edmonton

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about what you believe homelessness has caused, or will cause, in Edmonton using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don't know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q14)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Agree and Strongly Agree selections, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

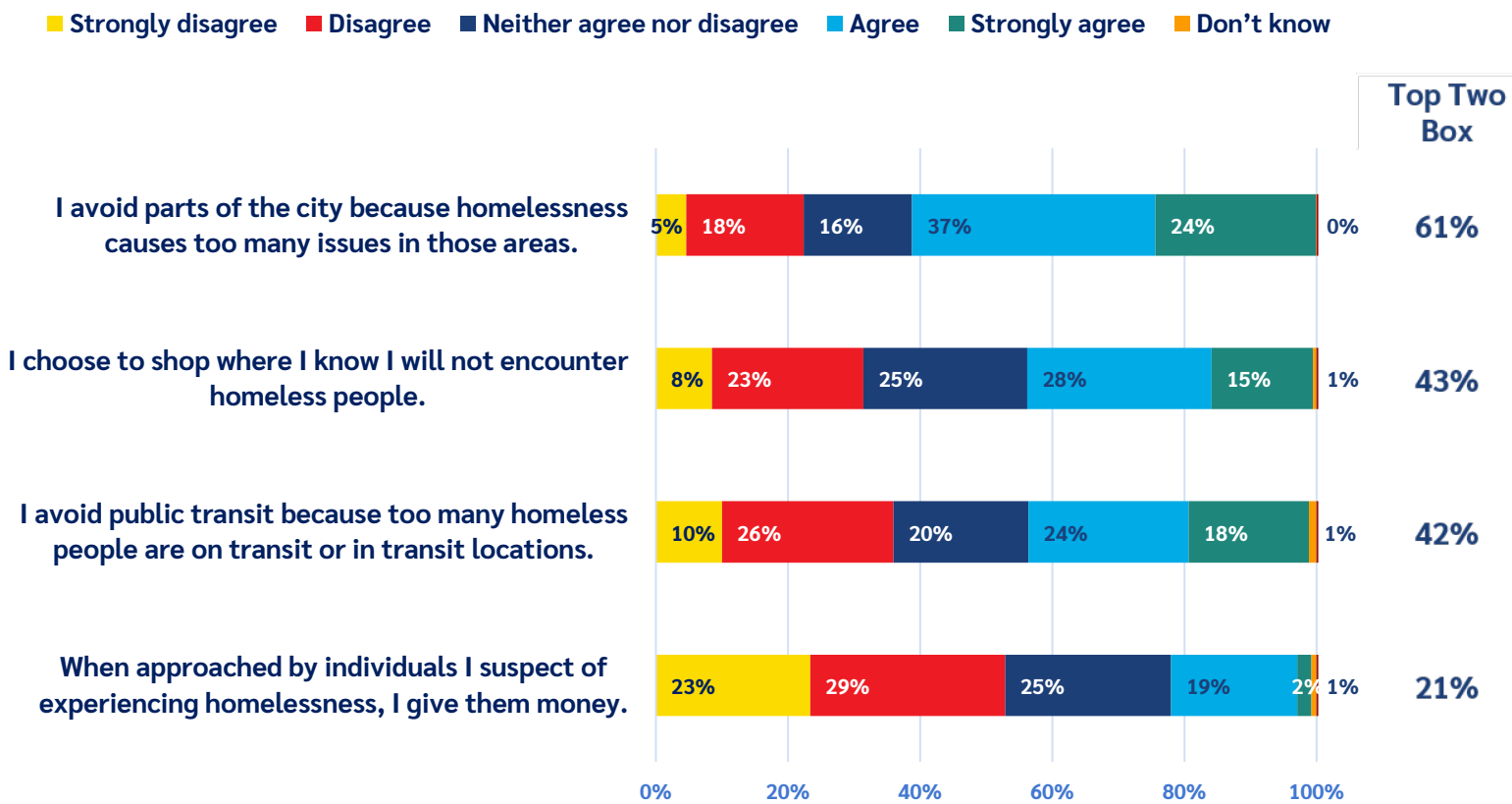


About two-thirds of survey participants suggest they avoid parts of the city because they perceive homelessness causes too many issues in those areas (61%). Two in five avoid public transit (42%) and/or businesses (43%) because they feel there are too many individuals experiencing homelessness in the vicinity. Only 1 in 5 survey participants say they give money when approached by individuals they suspect of experiencing homelessness (21%). (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Behaviours

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about how you deal with homelessness and homeless individuals in Edmonton using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don't Know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q12)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Agree and Strongly Agree selections, percentages may not sum due to rounding.



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Measures of Success

About 3 in 4 survey participants perceive an increased number of affordable and supportive housing units (75%), increased use of homelessness prevention programs (74%) and reduced incidence of people experiencing homelessness on the streets (73%) as signs of success in addressing homelessness. (Figure 3)

About two-thirds of survey participants perceive fewer encampments (69%), less visible homelessness downtown and other impacted areas of the city (66%), higher usage of emergency shelter spaces (64%), and fewer phone calls to emergency services to respond to homelessness issues (63%) as additional measures to signal success. (Figure 3)

*“Measure by the number of people who are able to get out of the provided housing and maintain employment”
(Lived Experience Interview Participant)*

Subgroup analysis indicates that Indigenous survey participants are significantly less likely to perceive reduced incidence of people experiencing homelessness on the streets (60%) and fewer encampments (52%) as measures of success. (Figure 4)

Figure 3: Measures of Success in Addressing Homelessness

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about what success in addressing homelessness would look like using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don't Know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q16)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Agree and Strongly Agree selections, percentages may not sum due to rounding.

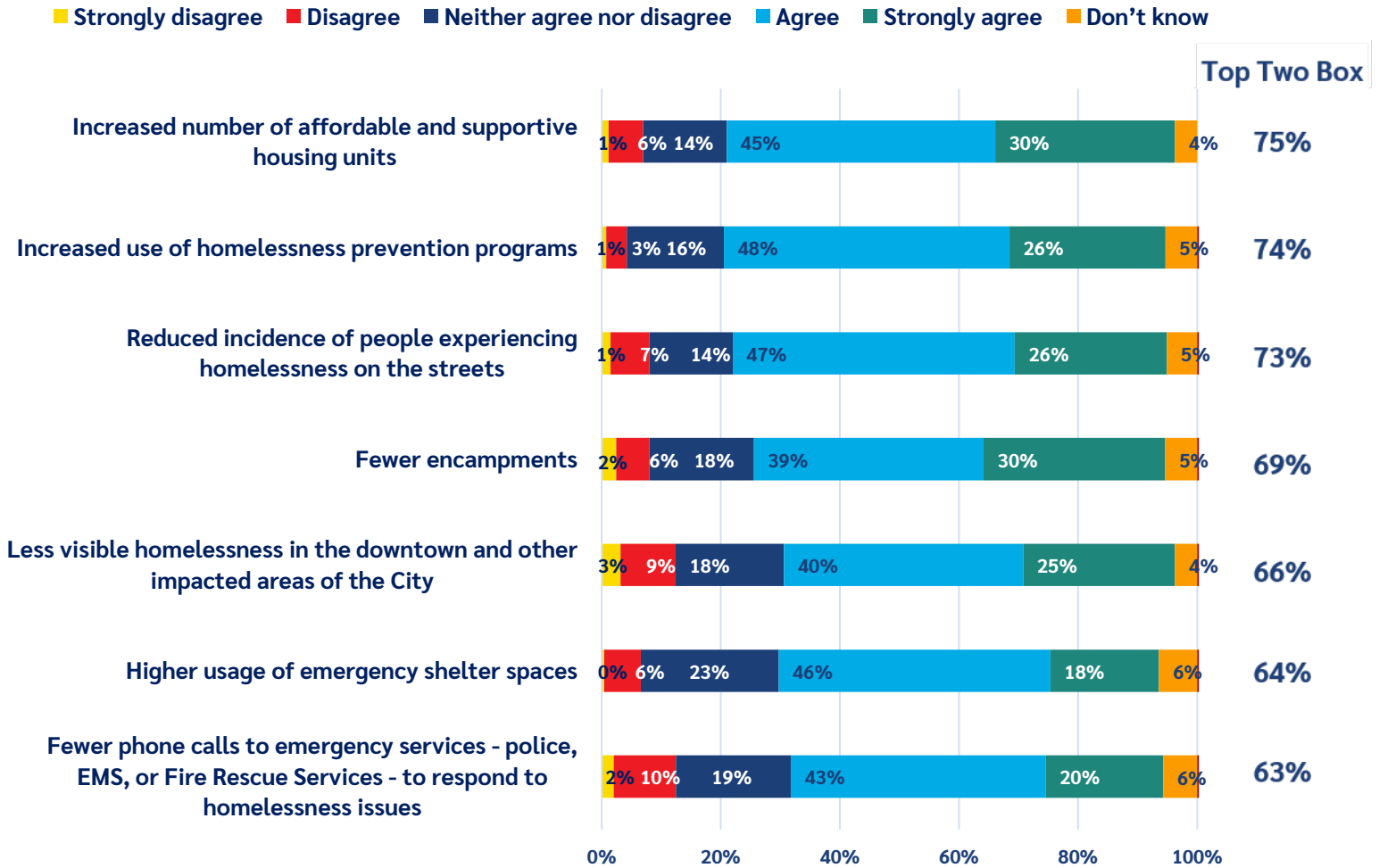
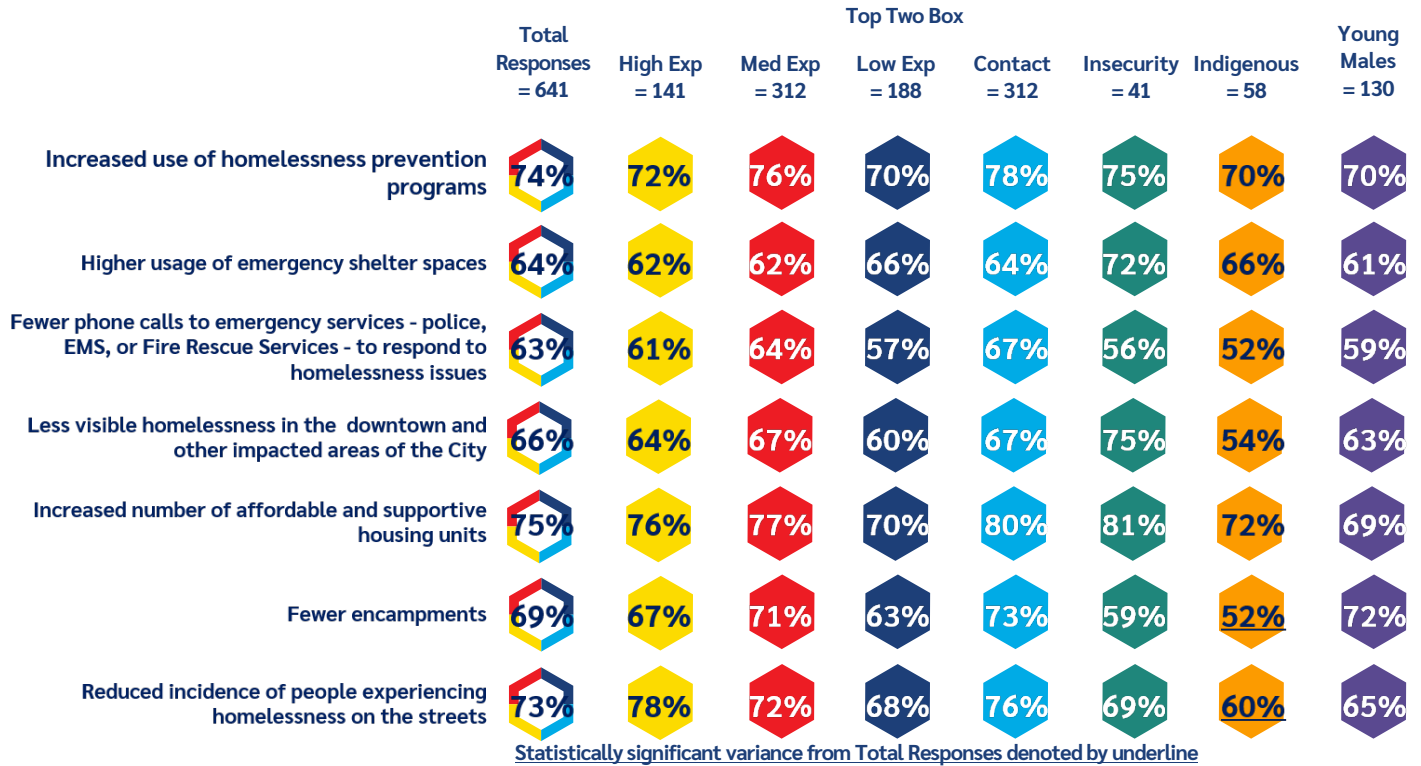


Figure 4: Subgroup Analysis – Measures of Success in Addressing Homelessness

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about what success in addressing homelessness would look like using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don't Know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q16)

Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Agree and Strongly Agree selections. Number of response totals for each grouping are noted below column headings.



5

Jurisdiction and Responsibility

Qualitative findings suggest perceptions of the City of Edmonton being responsible for addressing homelessness. Some qualitative participants identified other orders of government as being involved in specific issues of homelessness. Even with provided descriptions of responsibilities of other orders of government, most qualitative participants still believed the City to be primarily responsible.

Most qualitative participants expressed the desire for the City to undertake greater action on the issue(s). Many were surprised to learn that the provincial and federal governments were responsible at all, though were quick to make sense of this fact by associating knowledge that Edmonton is not the only city dealing with homelessness.

“...this is for the city to handle – these are our people, it’s our city” (Focus Group Participant)

“...if it’s a city problem, it should be municipal jurisdiction” (Focus Group Participant)

“I’m surprised, I never knew about federal and provincial governments being involved, I thought it’s just the City’s responsibility.” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)

Survey participants perceive all orders of government and community organizations to be responsible for addressing homelessness, with the City of Edmonton (81%) and the Provincial Government (78%) topping the list. (Figure 5)

After providing perceptions of responsibility, survey participants were asked their preference for the involvement of the City of Edmonton in addressing homelessness (Figure 6). Regardless of the responsibilities of other orders of government, about 3 in 4 survey participants indicate the City of Edmonton should do more than it currently does to address homelessness (73%).

Subgroup analysis shows Indigenous survey participants were significantly more likely to select “Don’t know/unsure” when asked about their preference for City of Edmonton involvement in addressing homelessness. (Figure 7)

- “more investment [by the City] is fine, but you can’t just blindly hand out money, it has to have more transparency, what we’ve been doing hasn’t been working” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “I wouldn’t want to keep investing in a sporadic program without evidence backing you.” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “...making sure that those agencies are doing a good job.” (Lived Experience Interview Participant)
- “No matter what we do, money’s being taken out of my pocket and I’m not doing great. I wouldn’t want to see my property taxes go up.” (Focus Group Participant)

Figure 5: Jurisdiction to Address Homelessness

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about who you believe is responsible for dealing with homelessness in Edmonton using a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. You can select Don’t Know if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q17)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Agree and Strongly Agree selections.

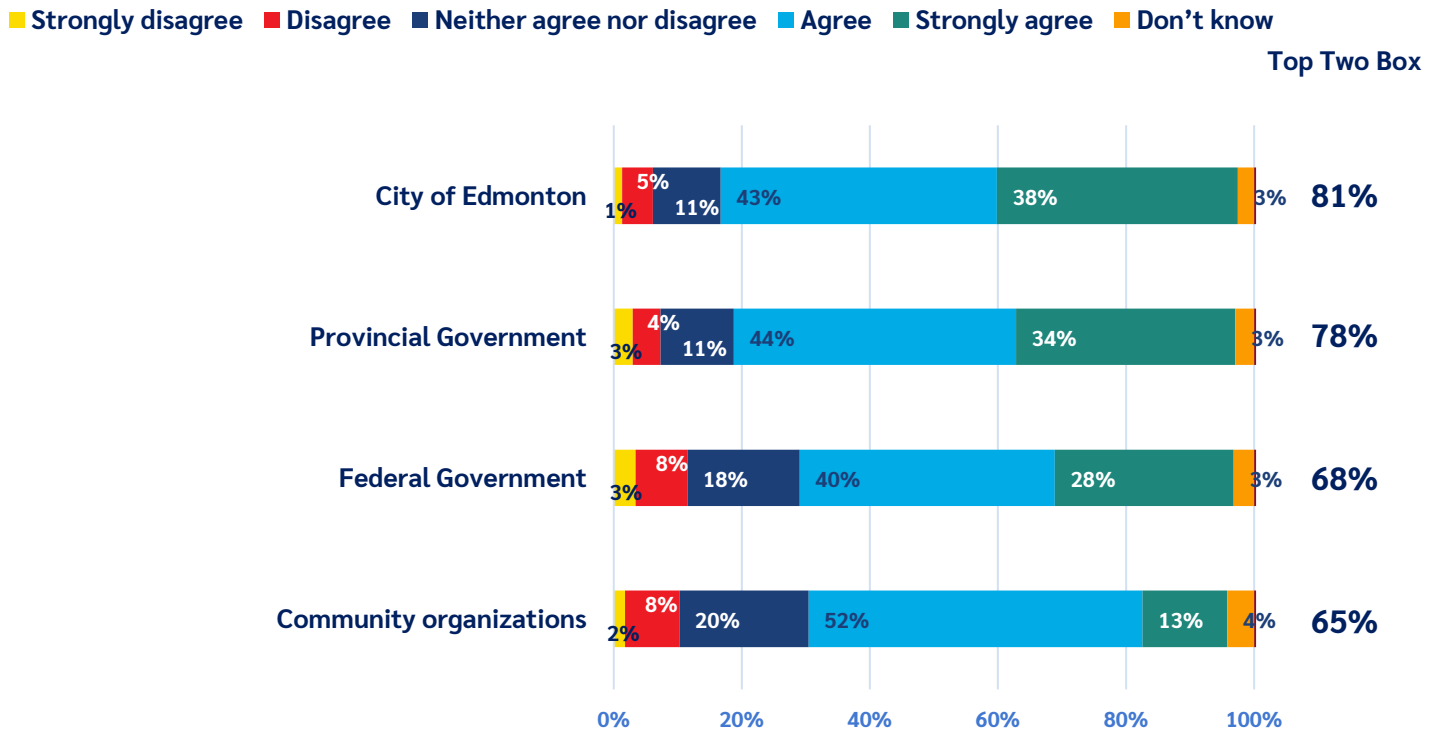
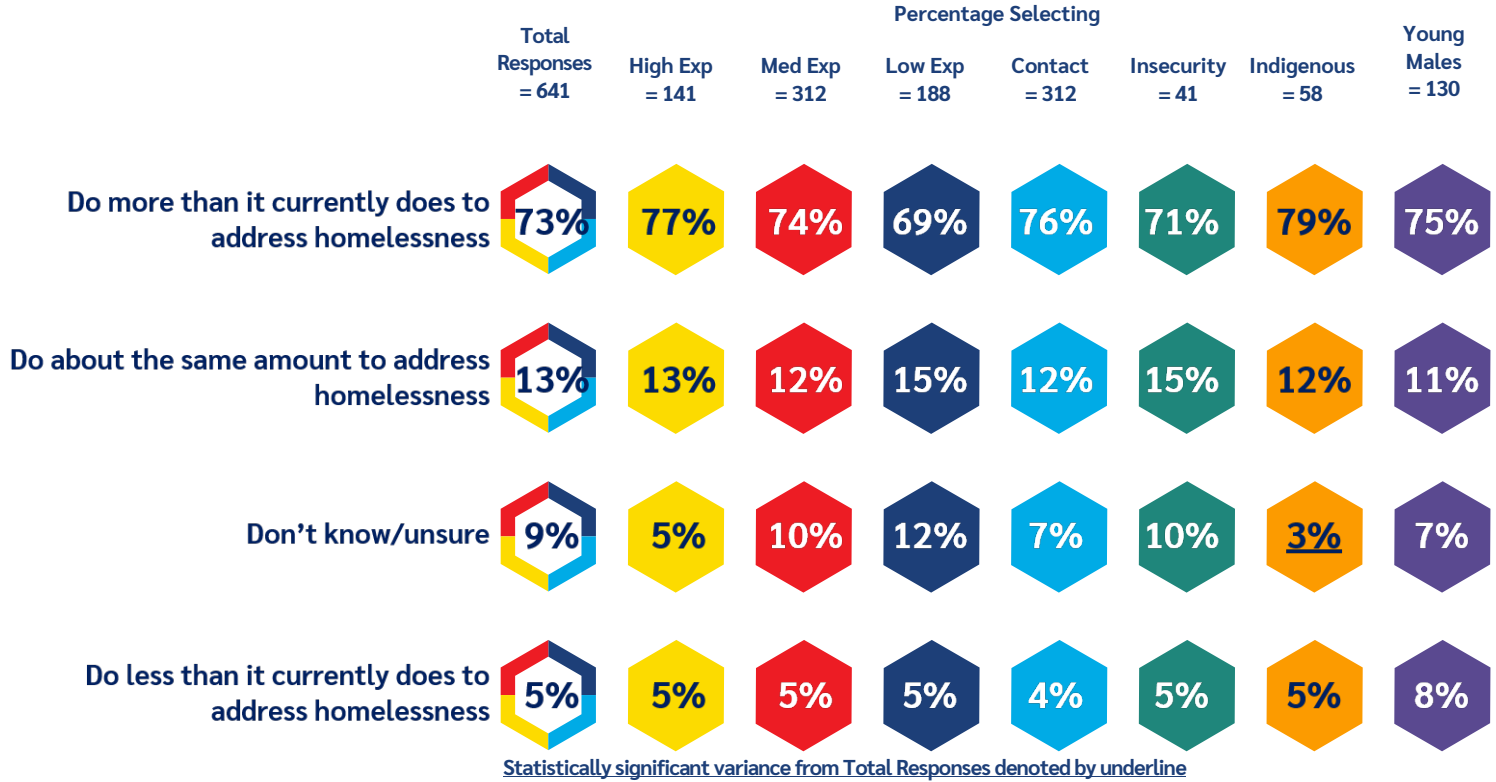


Figure 6: Desired Overall City of Edmonton Involvement in Addressing Homelessness, including Subgroup Analysis

Regardless of the responsibilities of other orders of government, the City of Edmonton should: (Q18)

Responses totals for each grouping are noted below column headings.



6

Priority Activities

Survey participants were presented with a simplified list of activities being undertaken by the City of Edmonton (See Table 1 in Appendix).

When asked to indicate the importance of activities presented, almost all survey participants indicated that all activities were at least somewhat important, with a majority indicating activities were important or extremely important. Top two box scores, representing the combined total of important and extremely important range from 57% to 78%. (Figure 7)

Statistical significance testing to determine above-average importance indicates survey participants perceive activities with the greatest importance to be:

1. Transit safety & outreach (78%)
2. Construct affordable housing (78%)
3. Year-round safe shelter (78%)
4. Coordinating response (77%)
5. Connecting to support (77%)
6. Shelter standards (76%)

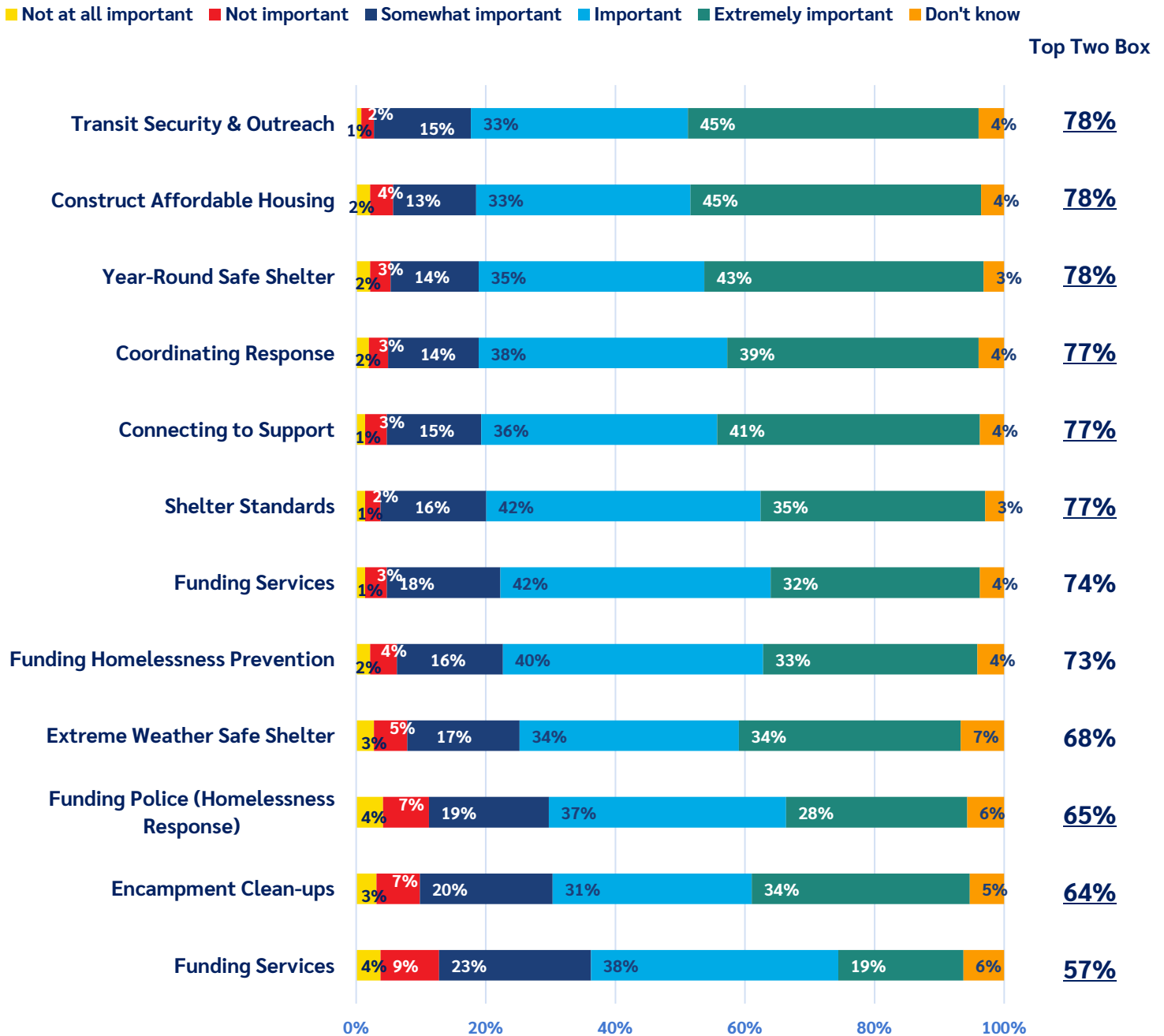
Using the same method to determine those activities with below average importance, survey participants perceive activities with lower importance to be:

1. Funding services (57%)
2. Encampment clean-ups (64%)
3. Funding Police (homelessness response) (65%)

Figure 7: Importance of City of Edmonton Activities to Address Homelessness

The following statements represent activities the City of Edmonton is involved in to address homelessness. For each of the following activities listed below, indicate your opinion of the importance of the activity using a scale from Not at all to Extremely important. You can select “Don’t know” if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q20) (See Table 1 in Appendix for full text of statements presented.)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for Important and Extremely Important selections, percentages may not sum due to rounding. Top Two Box values with statistically significant deviation from average (mean=72%) are denoted by underline.



When asked about desired level of involvement by the City of Edmonton in the listed activities (Table 1 in Appendix), almost all survey participants indicated that all activities listed should have at least the same amount or more involvement from the City. Top two box scores, representing the combined total of more and much more involvement selections on each activity range from 45% to 75%. (Figure 8)

Using statistical significance testing to determine those activities with above average scores, survey participants expressed the greatest desire for increased City Involvement in:

1. Transit safety and outreach (75%)
2. Construct affordable housing (69%)
3. Coordinate responses (69%)

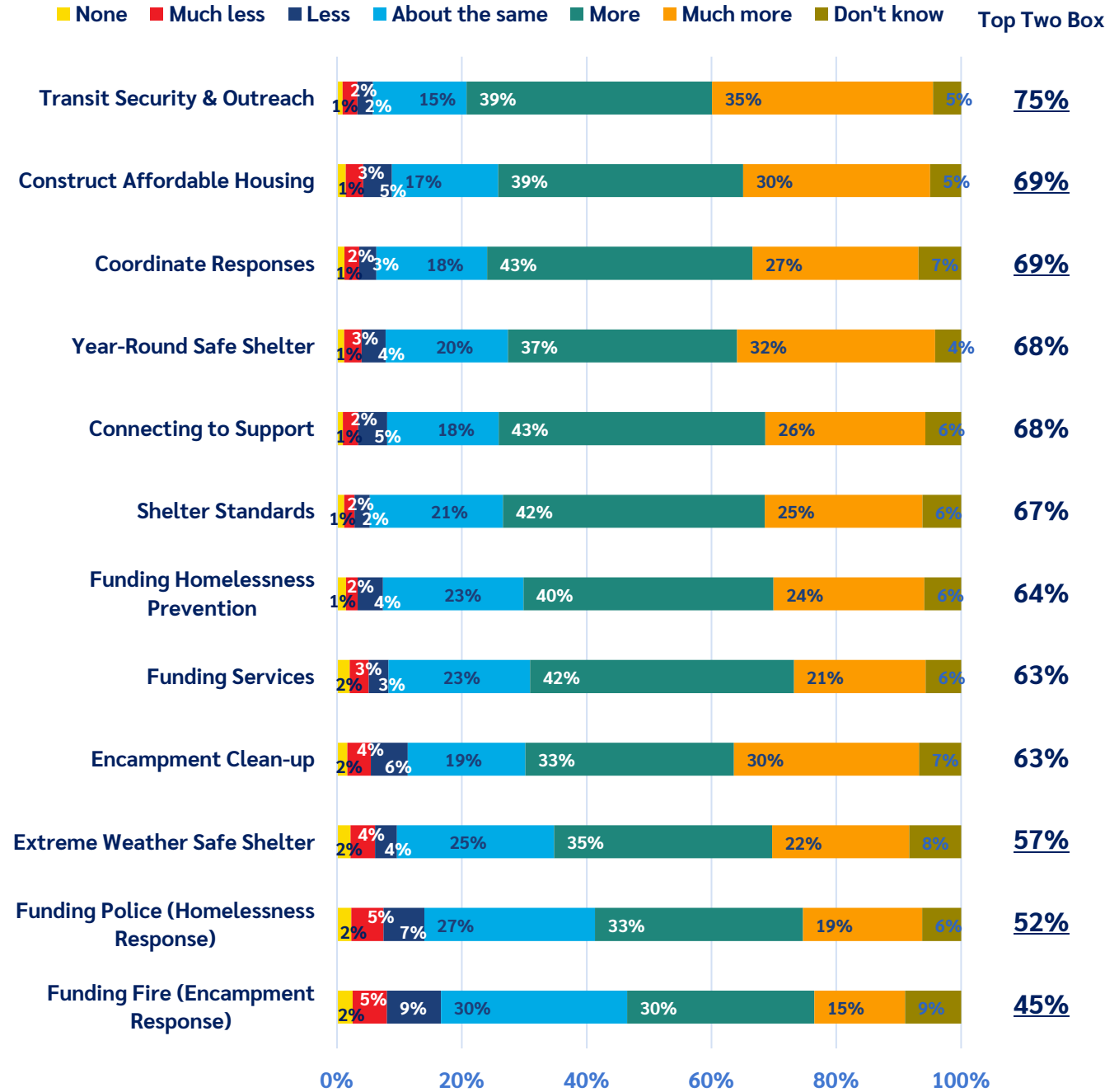
Using the same method to determine those activities with below average scores, survey participants expressed less desire for increased City involvement in:

1. Funding Fire (encampment response) (45%)
2. Funding Police (homelessness response) (52%)
3. Extreme weather safe shelter (57%)

Figure 8: Desired Involvement in City of Edmonton Activities

The following statements represent activities the City of Edmonton is involved in to address homelessness. For each of the following activities listed below, indicate the level of involvement you believe the City of Edmonton should have using a scale from None to Much more involvement. You can select “Don’t know” if you are not sure or do not understand what is being asked. (Q19) (See Table 1 in Appendix for full text of statements.)

Total responses=641 (All response data) Top Two Box percentages represent the combined total for More and Much more selections, percentages may not sum due to rounding. Top Two Box scores with statistically significant deviation from average (mean=65%) are denoted by underline.

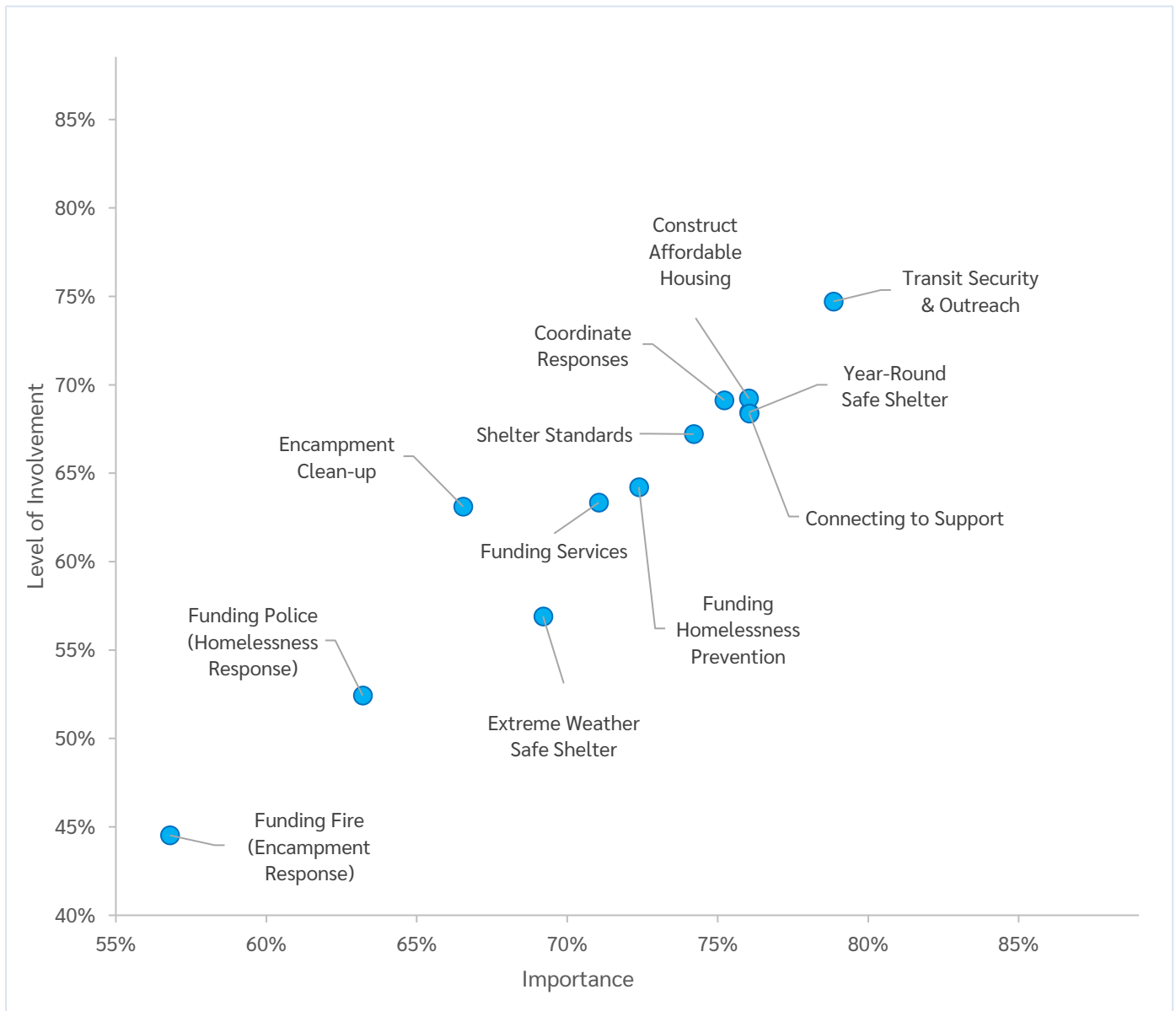


Using the data collected on perceived importance and desired involvement by the City, a picture of the priorities of survey participants emerges. As shown in Figure 9, survey participants indicate a preference for the prioritization of:

1. Transit security and outreach
2. Construct affordable housing
3. Coordinate responses
4. Year-round safe shelter
5. Connecting to support

Figure 9: Perceived Priority of City of Edmonton Activities to Address Homelessness

Full text of abbreviated labels see Table 1 in Appendix. Total responses = 641;(All response data) Coordinates for plotting the graph are (Importance Top Two Box, Involvement Top Two Box).



APPENDIX

Table 1: City of Edmonton Activities to Address Homelessness (Simplified)

City staff developed this simplified list based on the City's work responding to homelessness both before and during the pandemic. This list is not exhaustive and nearly all of these functions are undertaken in partnership with community organizations and other orders of government.

Abbreviation in Charts and Graphs	Full Statement as Presented to Survey Participants
Coordinate Responses	Coordinating homelessness response among homeless serving agencies, Alberta Health Services, and Provincial social services (including mental health and addiction services)
Year-Round Safe Shelter	Providing safe shelter spaces all year round
Extreme Weather Safe Shelter	Providing safe shelter spaces only during extreme weather events
Funding Intervention	Funding community organizations to deliver services to people experiencing homelessness
Shelter Standards	Implementing shelter standards to improve accessibility and appropriateness of emergency shelters
Construct Affordable Housing	Constructing units of affordable housing
Funding Prevention	Funding community partners to deliver services to those at-risk for experiencing homelessness, including eviction prevention programs
Connecting to Support	Connecting people in encampments to support
Transit Security & Outreach	Enhancing security and outreach support in transit settings
Encampment Clean-up	Removing and cleaning up encampments
Funding Police (Homelessness Response)	Funding police to provide emergency response to homeless people
Funding Fire (Encampment Response)	Funding fire services to respond to encampments

Subgroups Used in Analysis – Full Definitions

The subgroups used for survey data analysis were determined by GBA+ analysis, in order to better represent the opinions of those whose responses either represent those within the general public whose impact from homelessness may be different/exacerbated by circumstance and/or those who may be over-represented in experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, as defined by CMHC and Statistics Canada. The subgroups were determined using an internal 2022 encampment clean-up data set, a purpose-built listing of locations of community services, the draft point-in-time homeless count data, and the 2021 Census data for Edmonton city.

Note: Bolded portions of subgroup names represent abbreviations used in charts and graphs throughout report(s).

All Responses – this is the overall data, weighted to the demographic profile of Edmonton (city) from 2021 Census data for income, age and gender distribution to mitigate the effects of survey response recruitment tactics that oversampled specific demographics for the following subgroups. All statistical significance indicated by underlining is in relation to this weighted data, unless otherwise noted.

High Exposure – this subgroup was derived by assessing those neighbourhoods in Edmonton where a) encampment clean-ups occurred in 2022 and b) community services for those experiencing homelessness are located. If either of a) or b) was true, the neighbourhood was placed on the Exposure list. High Exposure is the subgroup of responses in which both the neighbourhood indicated for residence (Live) and for Work are found on the Exposure list.

Medium Exposure – this subgroup was derived using the same neighbourhoods Exposure list as High Exposure, where Medium Exposure is the subgroup of responses in which the neighbourhood indicated for only one of Live OR Work appears on the Exposure list.

Low Exposure – this subgroup was derived using the same neighbourhoods Exposure list as High and Medium Exposure, where Low Exposure is the subgroup of responses in which neither the neighbourhood indicated for Live or Work appears on the Exposure list.

Contact with homeless individuals in the prior 12 months – this subgroup was derived using the answers to question 15 in the survey instrument (See Appendix) and comprises all responses in which “I have come in contact with homeless individuals” was selected.

Personal Experience with Housing **Insecurity** or Homelessness – this subgroup was derived using the answers to question 15 in the survey instrument and comprises all responses in which **2 or more of** “I have, or have tried, to access a housing or rental benefit,” “I have been without a mailing address of my own,” “I have accessed an emergency shelter,” “I have accessed housing support programs,” “I have experienced mold, pests or other health hazards in my housing,” “My housing requires major repairs,” “I have changed housing as a result of loss of income,” “I have been forced to move by my landlord,” “I have lived in affordable or social housing,” “My housing costs have been more than 30% of my income, but less than 50% of my income,” “My housing costs have been more than 50% of my income,” and “I have lived in housing that was not suitable for my, or my households, needs” were selected. Provided selections were derived from Statistics Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation definitions of housing insecurity and homelessness.

Self-Identified **Indigenous** Respondents – this subgroup was derived using answer to the demographic question 10 and comprises all responses in which “Indigenous (as defined in Canada as First Nations, Métis or Inuit)” was selected.

Young Males – this subgroup was derived using answers to questions 1 & 9 in the survey instrument and comprises all responses in which “25-34 years” or “35-44 years” and “Male” were selected.

Qualitative Participant Profile

Of the 35 total participants, the following is the number of people selecting the response to the questions noted.

#	In which of the following age categories do you fall?
0	Less than 18 years of age
0	18-24 years
5	25-34 years
12	35-44 years
9	45-54 years
7	55-64 years
1	65-74 years
1	75 years or older

#	How long have you been living in Edmonton?
0	Less than 6 months
2	6 months – 1 year
4	1 year – 5 years
12	6-20 years
17	21 years or more

#	What is the highest level of education that you have attained?
0	Elementary/grade school graduate
8	High school graduate
11	College/technical school graduate
10	University undergraduate degree
5	Post-graduate (e.g., Masters, PhD)
1	Professional school graduate (e.g., medicine, dentistry, etc.)

#	In terms of employment (including self-employment), how would you describe yourself?
16	Employed full time (30 hours or more per week)
6	Employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)
1	Part time/ full time student
5	Unable to work / Not employed
3	Stay at home parent
3	Retired
1	Prefer not to answer

#	What gender do you identify as?
22	Female
13	Male
0	Transgender
0	Non-binary
0	Two-spirit
0	Another gender not listed above
0	Prefer not to say

#	What best describes your total household income before taxes?
2	Under \$20,000
3	\$20,000 to under \$29,999
4	\$30,000 to under \$39,999
4	\$40,000 to under \$49,999
3	\$50,000 to under \$59,999
5	\$60,000 to under \$74,999
3	\$75,000 to under \$99,999
4	\$100,000 to under \$149,999
6	\$150,000 or more
0	Prefer not to answer

#	Do you identify as any of the following? [Select all that apply]
6	Racialized minority
6	Persons with disabilities (A person with a disability has a long term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, developmental, or learning impairment that may impact daily functioning. This also includes people whose functional limitations have been accommodated in their current job or workplace)
1	Indigenous
2	New to Canada (less than 1 year)
1	LGBTQ2S+
18	None of the above
1	Prefer not to answer

Survey Participant Profile

%	What is your current employment status?
51%	Employed full time (30 hours or more per week)
14%	Employed part time (less than 30 hours per week)
5%	Homemaker
4%	Post-secondary student
1%	High school student
7%	Unemployed
4%	Permanently unable to work
15%	Retired
2%	Other
1%	Prefer not to answer

%	In which of the following age categories do you fall?
0%	Less than 16 years of age
11%	16-24 years
20%	25-34 years
24%	35-44 years
16%	45-54 years
13%	55-64 years
12%	65-74 years
4%	75 years or older
0%	Prefer not to answer

%	What gender do you identify as?
47%	Female
52%	Male
0%	Transgender
0%	Non-binary
0%	Two-spirit
0%	Another gender not listed above
0%	Prefer not to answer

%	What best describes your total household income before taxes?
8%	Under \$20,000
10%	\$20,000 to under \$29,999
8%	\$30,000 to under \$39,999
8%	\$40,000 to under \$49,999
8%	\$50,000 to under \$59,999
11%	\$60,000 to under \$74,999
14%	\$75,000 to under \$99,999
18%	\$100,000 to under \$149,999
13%	\$150,000 or more
3%	Prefer not to answer

%	Do you identify as any of the following? [Select all that apply]
19%	Racialized minority
14%	Persons with disabilities (A person with a disability has a long term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, developmental, or learning impairment that may impact daily functioning. This also includes people whose functional limitations have been accommodated in their current job or workplace)
8%	Indigenous (as defined in Canada as First Nations, Métis or Inuit)
1%	New to Canada (less than 1 year)
7%	LGBTQ2S+
56%	None of the above
2%	Prefer not to answer

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Pivotal Research is headquartered on the ancestral land of the Nêhiyawak (Cree), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Dene and Iyāhé Nakoda (Nakoda Sioux) in Treaty 6 Territory and Métis Region 4.