Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Risk Strategy

Wildfire Perceptions Survey Results

edmonton.ca/**WildfireStrategy**
July 2025

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

The **wildland-urban interface (WUI)** - the area where human development meets undeveloped wildland vegetation - is expanding as Canadian municipalities continue to grow. This expansion increases the risk and potential damage caused by wildfire in urban areas.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Summary

This report shares the findings of the Wildfire Perceptions Survey from May 2025. The survey was designed for the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Wildfire Risk Strategy project in Urban Planning and Economy, and its results will be also included in this project's What We Heard reporting along with other engagement findings.

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility

Key insights from the survey's demographic groups are shared throughout this report in the *GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlights* to better understand different perspectives and experiences.

Please contact WildfireStrategy@edmonton.ca with any accessibility concerns.

Project Background

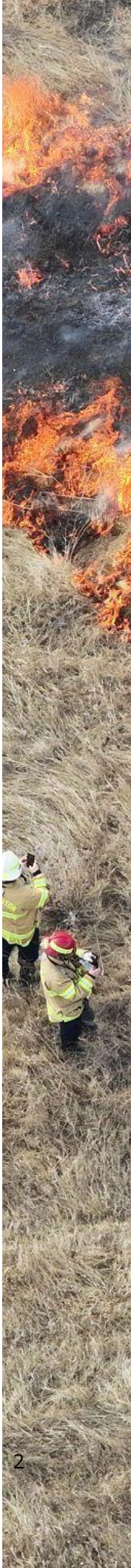
The **WUI Wildfire Risk Strategy** will be a centralized approach to improving the City's ability to prevent, mitigate, and respond to wildfires in the face of a changing climate. It will promote whole-of-society collaboration to address both immediate and long-term wildfire risks, ensuring sustainable development for the future. edmonton.ca/WildfireStrategy

SURVEY APPROACH

The survey was shared with the Edmonton Insight Community from **May 13 to 19, 2025** as one of three topics in a City Pulse survey. The other topics were about climate resilient homes and an infill housing research opportunity. It received **4,532 complete responses** (4,466 from Edmonton Insight Community who responded to the May 2025 email and 66 through the survey webpage).

How the Results Will be Used

The results will help shape engagement strategies for the project and recommendations about education and support that may be needed for wildfire risk management, and other related City initiatives. For the WUI Wildfire Risk Strategy, this survey falls within the **ADVISE** level of the spectrum: *The public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects, or services*.



SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents were asked questions about their **awareness of wildfire risk in Edmonton and wildfire mitigation strategies** in this Edmonton Insight Community survey from May 13 to 19, 2025.

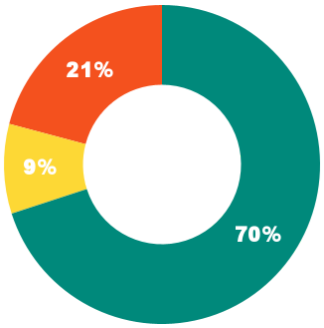
Overall, survey respondents are concerned about wildfire risk, and some have personally experienced a wildfire. They generally feel unprepared for the risk in Edmonton and unfamiliar with the City's and other agencies' work on wildfire mitigation. However, they understand mitigation measures, sharing a range of actions they are taking at home to prevent the ignition and spread of wildfires. Some are looking for more information on how to be better prepared, especially those in apartments and condominiums who feel that most mitigation measures do not apply to them. There is interest in more measures to regulate or change behaviours on fire pits and cigarette disposal. The most common concerns are about deadfall and unregulated fires, especially in the River Valley.

GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight - Demographics

- **Residence**: Almost all respondents live in Edmonton (99%). Most have lived in Edmonton for 10 or more years (91%). One third (33%) live in southwest Edmonton.
- **Housing Type**: 7 in 10 (71%) live in single detached houses. Homeowners made up most of the respondents (87%) compared to renters (11%).
- **Age**: The largest age group represented is ages 65 to 74, at about 1 in 4 (27%). 1 in 5 respondents have children or grandchildren living with them (20%).
- **Education, Employment, and Income**: More than half have either a certificate/diploma or Bachelor's degree (total of 57%) as their highest level of education. Most respondents are either employed full time (48%) or retired (34%). About half shared that their household income level is over $100,000 (47%).
- **Identity and Language**: Most respondents identify with none of the listed identity descriptors (61%), while 38% self-described as one of the equity-deserving groups listed. The most common primary language spoken was English (95%). The largest identity group of those listed was persons with disabilities, with 1 in 8 respondents identifying as persons with disabilities (12%).

Concern about Wildfire Risk

How concerned are you about the risk of a wildfire in Edmonton?



- **Concerned** (very or somewhat): 70%
- **Neutral**: 9%
- **Not concerned** (not at all or not very): 21%

4,532 responses

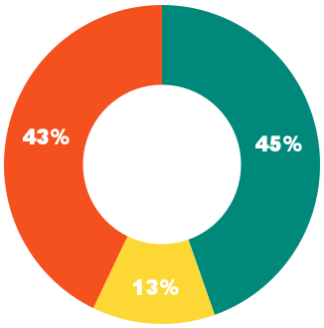
7 in 10 respondents are **concerned about the risk of a wildfire** in Edmonton (70%).

GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

- Women respondents (78%) are more concerned about wildfire risk than men (60%)
- Respondents identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ (78%) or as having a disability (75%) are more likely to be concerned about wildfire risk.

Perceived Likelihood of Wildfire

How likely do you think it is that a wildfire could impact your neighbourhood in the next 5 years?



- **Likely** (very or somewhat): 45%
- **Neutral**: 13%
- **Unlikely** (very or somewhat): 43%

4,532 responses

Opinions are mixed on how likely specific neighbourhoods might be impacted by a wildfire in the next five years. Just over 2 in 5 respondents (45%) think a wildfire is likely in their neighbourhood. A similar amount (43%), think a wildfire is unlikely in their neighbourhood.

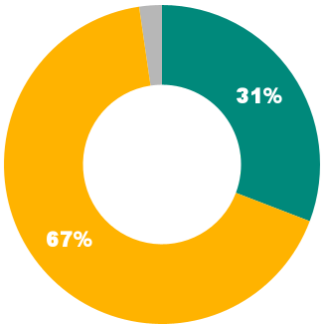
GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

- Women respondents (51%) are more likely than men (36%) to believe that a wildfire could impact their neighbourhood.

- Compared to those with other employment status, student respondents have the most uncertainty about whether a wildfire will impact their neighbourhood, with 31% feeling it is likely and 47% feeling it is unlikely.
- Racialized respondents (37%) are less likely to think that a wildfire could impact their neighbourhood than other groups.

Past Wildfire Experience

Have you experienced a wildfire in or near your community before?



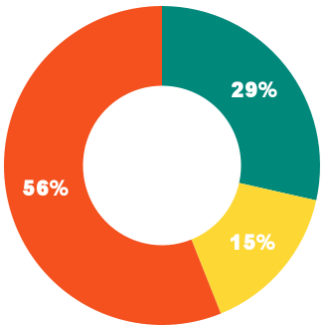
- **Yes** (in Edmonton or elsewhere): 31%
- **No**: 67%
- **Not sure**: 2%

4,532 responses

Just under **one-third of respondents have experienced a wildfire** (31%). 14% experienced a wildfire in Edmonton, and 17% experienced a wildfire somewhere else.

Preparedness for Wildfire Evacuation

How prepared do you personally feel for a potential wildfire evacuation?



- **Prepared** (very or somewhat): 29%
- **Neutral**: 15%
- **Unprepared** (very or somewhat): 56%

4,532 responses

Respondents overall are unprepared for a wildfire evacuation. Just 3 in 10 (29%) said they are prepared.

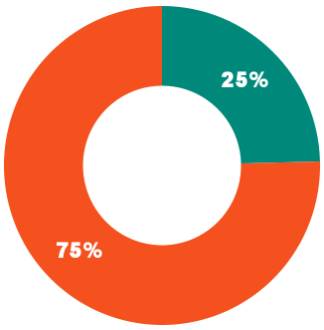
In the open-response survey question (see "Other Feedback" section), one of the most common responses was an interest in more information on wildfire preparedness and risk. Some said that completing this survey made them realize how little they know about this topic, and they would like to learn more.

GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

- Older respondents (32% among those 65+ and 33% among those 55-64) feel more prepared for wildfire evacuation than younger age groups (18% aged under 35).

Emergency Kit Ownership

Do you have an emergency kit at home that can last up to 72 hours?



Yes: 25%
No: 75%

4,532 responses

Survey respondents are **unlikely to have a 72-hour emergency kit**, with only 1 in 4 respondents saying that they have a kit (25%).

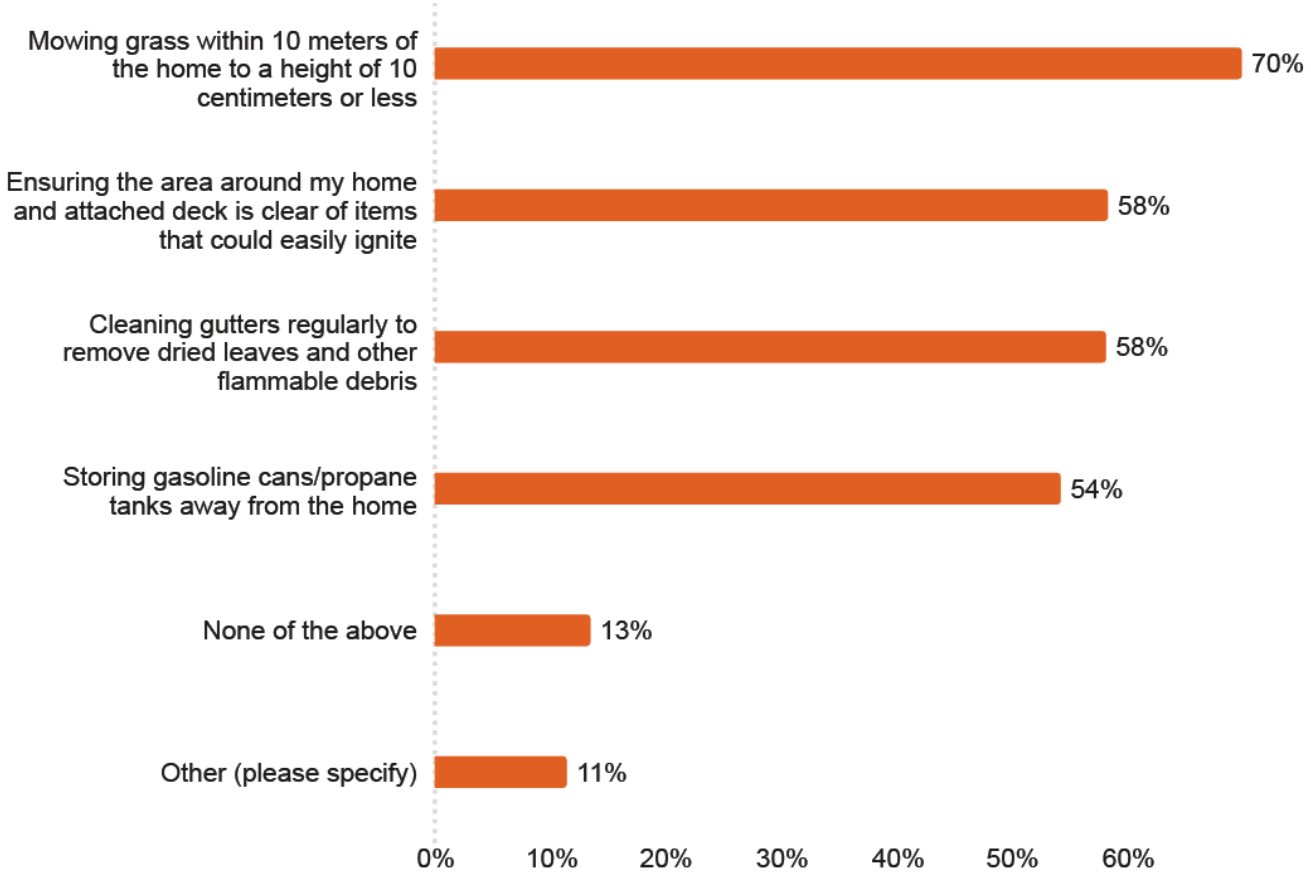
Many respondents shared feedback on emergency kits in the open-response survey question (see "Other Feedback" section). They asked for the City to provide information of what to include in a 72-hour emergency kit. Some said that they have now realized they should prepare one, and some shared that they cannot afford a kit.

GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

- Older respondents (25% among those 65+ and 29% among those 55-64) are more likely to have emergency kits at home compared to younger age groups (17% aged under 35).
- Men respondents (28%) are more likely to own an emergency kit than women (21%).

Practicing Wildfire Prevention Measures

Which of the following wildfire prevention measures, if any, do you currently practice at home? Select all that apply. (4,532 responses)



Most respondents practice some wildfire prevention measures:

- **7 in 10 mow their grass** within 10 metres of their home to the specified height (70%).
- About **6 in 10 clear the area around their home** and deck from easily-ignitable items (58%) and clean debris from gutters (also 58%).
- Just over **half of respondents store gasoline/propane away** from their home (54%).
- **1 in 8 do not practice any** of the measures (13%).

Respondents who shared feedback in the "other" field (516 comments) generally wrote about their specific situations or additional measures that were not listed:

- The most frequent comment was about **living in a condominium, high rise, apartment building, or seniors' complex**. Many of them said this means the options listed are not relevant to them.

Some said that they rent, so these are not their responsibilities. Of those who mentioned that they have landlords or building management, there was mixed feedback about whether their landlords or building management practice the listed wildfire prevention measures.

- Many comments were about **vegetation management, gutter cleaning and maintenance, and watering vegetation**. Respondents said they trim dead tree branches, clean up dead debris, and make sure that trees near the house are cut back. They spoke about watering grass and vegetation regularly to prevent dry conditions.
- Many respondents **follow safe fire practices** relating to barbecue equipment, smoking, fire pits, and fire ban awareness. Some shared that they avoid storing any flammable fuels on their property, like propane and gasoline.
- Other comments were mostly about using **non-flammable construction materials** and **resilient landscaping**, paying attention to **maintenance and cleanliness** on their properties, and having **sprinklers, water storage, rain barrels, and fire extinguishers**.

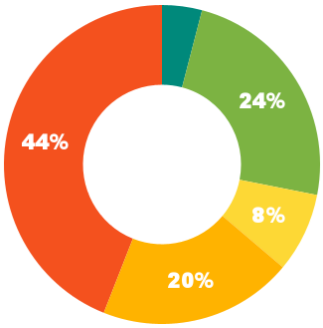
GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

+ Respondents who are more likely to say that they are <u>not</u> practicing any of the wildfire prevention measures include the following demographics:
    - Those who rent their home (42%) compared to those who own their home (10%)
    - Those who live in apartments (46%) compared to those living in all of the other dwelling types combined (totalling 28%, not including other/prefer not to answer)
    - Those under the age of 35 (27%) compared to other age categories
    - Those living in central Edmonton (24%) compared to each of the other regions (ranging from 9% to 14%)
    - Students (35%) compared to those who are employed (15%) or unemployed/retired (11%)
    - Those whose primary language is not English (25%) compared to those whose primary language is English (13%)
    - People who have lived in Edmonton for 10 years or more (13%) compared to those who have lived in Edmonton for either 3-10 years (22%) or less than 3 years (24%)
+ Respondents with household income levels over $150,000 are more likely to practice any of the measures (ranging from 57% to 66%) compared to those with income levels under $60,000 (ranging from 46% to 54%).

Familiarity with City or Agency Wildfire Preparedness Activities

How familiar are you with each of the following wildfire preparedness activities in Edmonton? (4,532 responses)

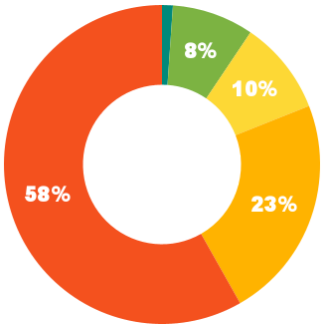
The City of Edmonton's 2025 prescribed fire event *(a planned, controlled fire in a specific area to remove dry vegetation that could contribute to wildfires)*



- **Very familiar**: 4%
- **Somewhat familiar**: 24%
- **Neutral**: 8%
- **Somewhat unfamiliar**: 20%
- **Very unfamiliar**: 44%

4,532 responses

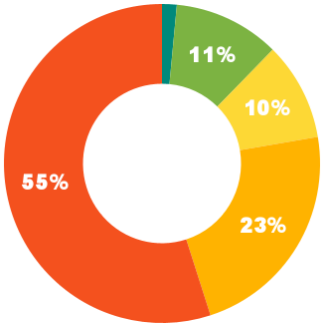
The City of Edmonton's developing Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Risk Strategy



- **Very familiar**: 1%
- **Somewhat familiar**: 8%
- **Neutral**: 10%
- **Somewhat unfamiliar**: 23%
- **Very unfamiliar**: 58%

4,532 responses

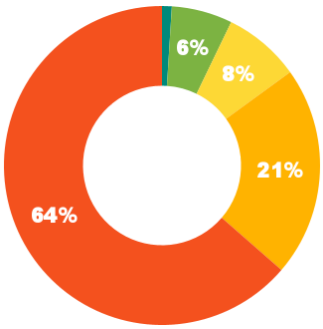
The City of Edmonton's Climate Resilience Planning and Development Action Plan *(An action plan to improve Edmonton's climate resilience. Action 6 is about new Zoning Bylaw regulations for high-risk wildfire areas.)*



- **Very familiar**: 2%
- **Somewhat familiar**: 11%
- **Neutral**: 10%
- **Somewhat unfamiliar**: 23%
- **Very unfamiliar**: 55%

4,532 responses

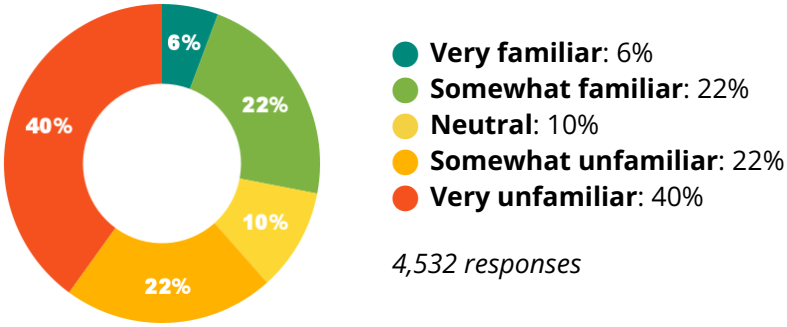
The City of Edmonton's Wildfire Prevention and Education website



- **Very familiar**: 1%
- **Somewhat familiar**: 6%
- **Neutral**: 8%
- **Somewhat unfamiliar**: 21%
- **Very unfamiliar**: 64%

4,532 responses

The FireSmart Alberta program



Survey respondents showed **low awareness of all five wildfire preparedness activities** they were asked about. Their familiarity with the programs (very familiar or somewhat familiar) is as follows:

1. The City of Edmonton's 2025 prescribed fire event (just over 28%, or 28.1%, are familiar)
2. The FireSmart Alberta program (28% are familiar)
3. The City of Edmonton's Climate Resilience Planning and Development Action Plan (12% are familiar)
4. The City of Edmonton's developing Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Risk Strategy (9% are familiar)
5. The City of Edmonton's Wildfire Prevention and Education website (7% are familiar)

GBA Plus Equity and Diversity Spotlight

- Respondents with household income levels over $150,000 (33%) are more likely to be familiar with the FireSmart Alberta program than those with income under $60,000 (20%).
- Respondents who have lived in Edmonton for 10 years or more (29%) are more likely to be familiar with the City of Edmonton's 2025 prescribed fire event, compared to those who have lived in Edmonton for either 3-10 years (21%) or less than 3 years (18%).

Other Feedback

1,337 respondents wrote comments when asked if there is anything else they would like to share about wildfire risk and preparedness in Edmonton.

Many respondents shared **concerns about management and maintenance of vegetation and fuel that could contribute to wildfires** *(301 comments).*

- Clearing out deadfall in River Valley and Ravine System
- Conflicts between naturalization and vegetation management, with the perception that the City is sending mixed messages
- The need for prescribed/controlled burns in key areas
- Concerns about garbage and poor vegetation management in neighbouring yards
- Interest in the City playing a more active role in maintaining vegetation, particularly in the River Valley and Ravine System
- Worries about dead trees left behind in the River Valley, and the potential for these dead trees to lead to a wildfire

"It's crucial that our strategies prioritize proactive fuel management and prevention within natural areas, rather than resorting to the removal of mature trees."

There is **strong interest in more education and information** on wildfire risk *(297 comments)*. Some respondents said that completing this survey made them realize how little they know about wildfire risk, preparedness, or programs *(38 comments)*.

"Education could go a long way in learning how to prevent the wildfires as well as being prepared when they happen."

- Providing educational materials in the mail
- Information for residents of multi-dwelling buildings
- Awareness on risks, prevention, and regulations
- Awareness on where the higher risk zones are for wildfires
- Improved communication about fire bans
- Connecting with Community Leagues to share information
- People living in multi-unit residential buildings are not sure how they can be prepared, and many feel that current strategies are aimed at people living in single-family homes

They frequently mentioned **specific regions of Edmonton where they feel there is a higher risk of wildfires** *(240 comments)*.

- River Valley was identified in a majority of these comments
- Natural areas like Mill Creek Ravine and Whitemud Creek Ravine
- The city perimeter, including Anthony Henday Drive *(there was recently a grassfire at this location prior to the survey launching)*
- Specific neighbourhoods and streets
- Comments flagging these specific areas were often accompanied with requests for maintenance or vegetation management of the areas identified

> *"My home backs onto the ravine in the Westridge area and there is significant amounts of deadfall, dry brush, etc throughout the ravine area near homes."*

One of the most common themes was concerns about the **higher risk of wildfires in areas where people experiencing homelessness might use fire** for cooking and warmth *(180 comments)*.

- Some recognized that social support and access to affordable housing must be part of this solution
- Others said that enforcement of fires in these areas is necessary
- Respondents said that these areas are often in the River Valley, where there is already a heightened risk of fire from vegetation
- Many reported personally seeing people making fires in the river valley and the concern they have that this could ignite vegetation

> *"Within the city my biggest concern with wildfires is encampments, even small ones, when fire or propane is used for cooking and/or warmth, and people [picnicking] or partying starting fires in wooded areas."*

Regulating or avoiding behaviours that can cause wildfires was a common suggestion *(174 comments)*.

- Fining people for improperly disposing of cigarettes and educating on the risk of this behaviour
- Enforcement of fire bans, and issuing fire bans more quickly
- Regulating wood-burning backyard fire pits (some felt they should be banned)
- Regulating fireworks and educating on the risks of fireworks
- Some felt that enforcement/regulation of these activities should be stronger and that it is critical to wildfire prevention
- Concern about ATVs being driven in grassy or wilderness areas

> *"I have concerns with neighbours that have open fire pits and who obviously do not follow the guidelines for such fire pits"*

Building materials and development trends were seen as either concerns or opportunities for wildfire risk mitigation *(41 comments on materials and 61 relating to development)*.

"Fire resistant building materials used in construction would better protect the city."

- Concern of increased density of housing developments and the use of vinyl siding, with feelings that both could lead to the rapid spread of fires
- Concern about the continued use of cedar shake roofing, with some saying that their Homeowners' Association requires cedar shake roofing
- Opportunities of fire-resistant building materials, like stucco and metal roofing
- Comments referencing building materials generally referred to siding and roofing

Other key themes also emerged:

"Living downtown I think my apartment building burning down is very very unlikely, but I think experiencing smoke from wildfires is almost certainly guaranteed."

- Perception that the risk of wildfire in Edmonton is low
- Recognition of the role of Edmonton Fire Rescue Services in addressing wildfires, and recognition that areas like the River Valley are challenging for fire trucks to access
- Concern about the health impacts of wildfire smoke, and interest in supports to manage the health risks of smoke inhalation
- Belief that arson is a main driver of wildfires
- Opposition to the connection between wildfires and climate change
- Concerns about difficulties for evacuation due to traffic, neighbourhood streets, and lack of supports for seniors, people with disabilities, and people without cars
- Involving Indigenous peoples in wildfire discussions
- Some are interested in greater collaboration with the provincial government on wildfire issues
- Most of those who feel wildfires are not due to climate change still recognize that arson and improperly-disposed cigarettes are leading to more wildfires
- Wondering if emergency alerts can be adapted for people with hearing disabilities

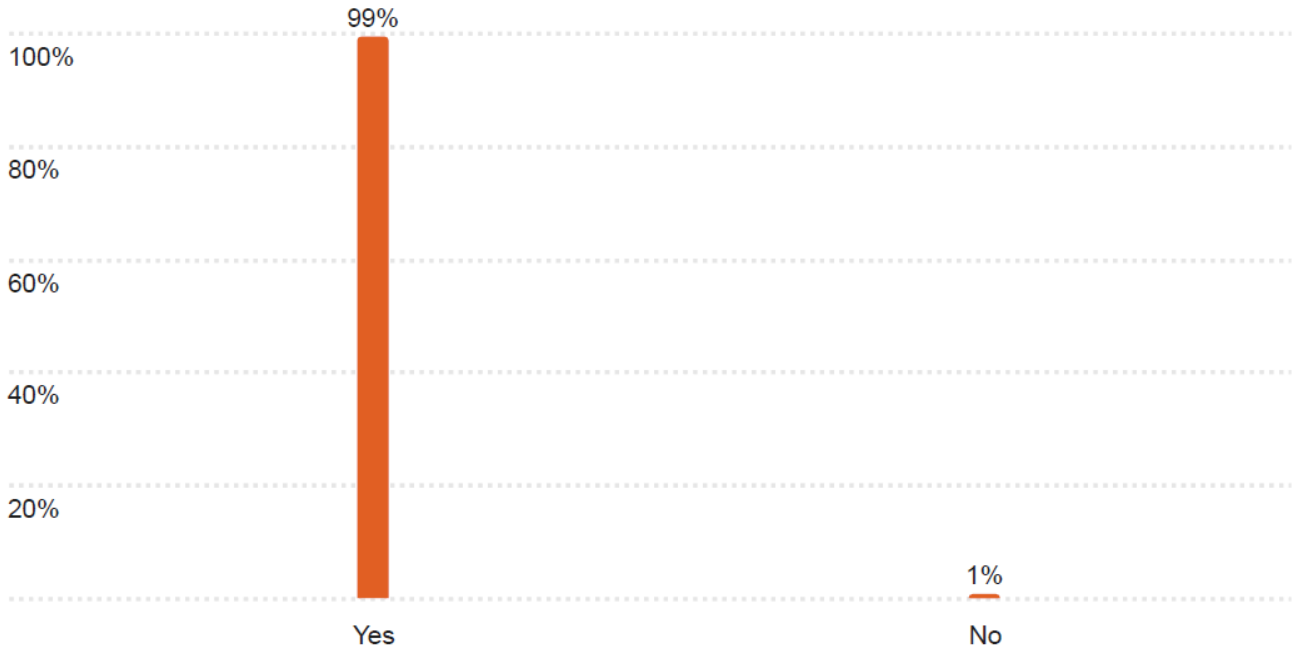
NEXT STEPS

- The results of this survey will help shape engagement strategies for WUI Wildfire Risk Strategy project and recommendations about education and support needed related to wildfires.
- The results may also inform other related City initiatives.
- More information on the WUI Wildfire Risk Strategy is available at edmonton.ca/WildfireStrategy

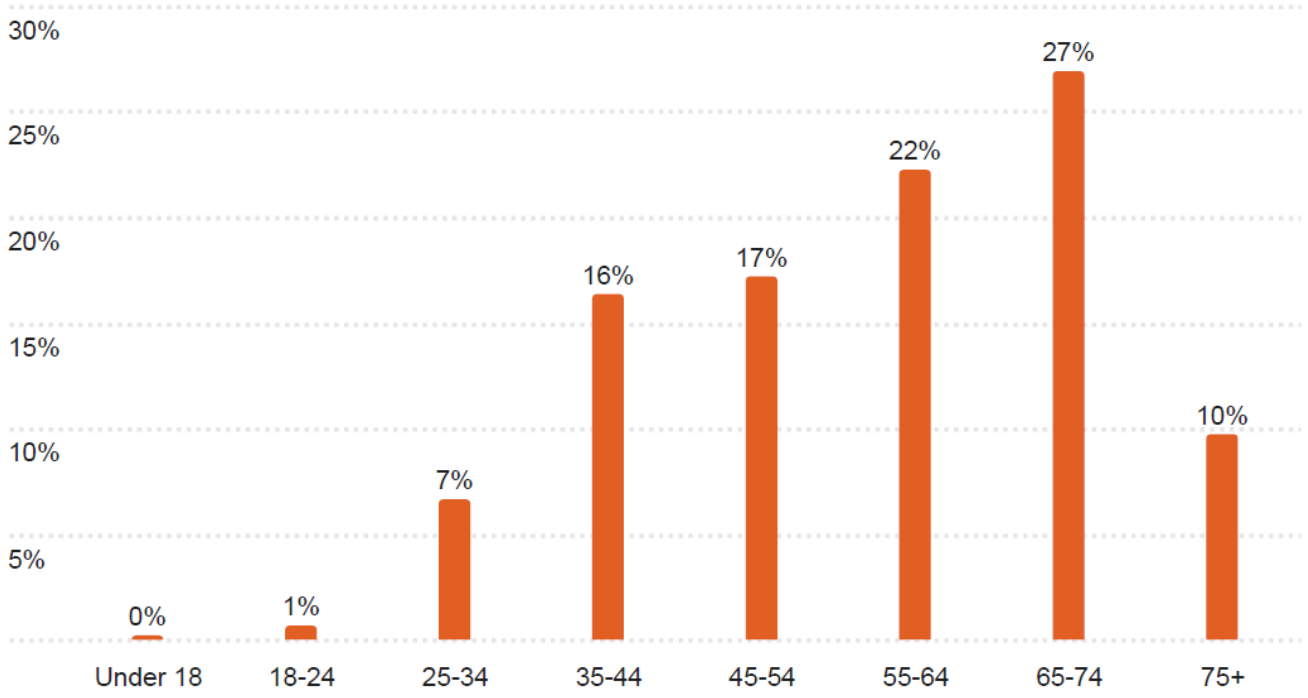
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey gathered detailed demographic information, including residence, housing type, age, education, employment, income, identity, and language, as indicated in the charts below. Options like "Other" or 'Prefer not to answer" gave respondents the opportunity to opt out or provide an alternative answer. Data was anonymized, and a privacy statement at the beginning of the survey identified the relevant privacy legislation and intended use of data.

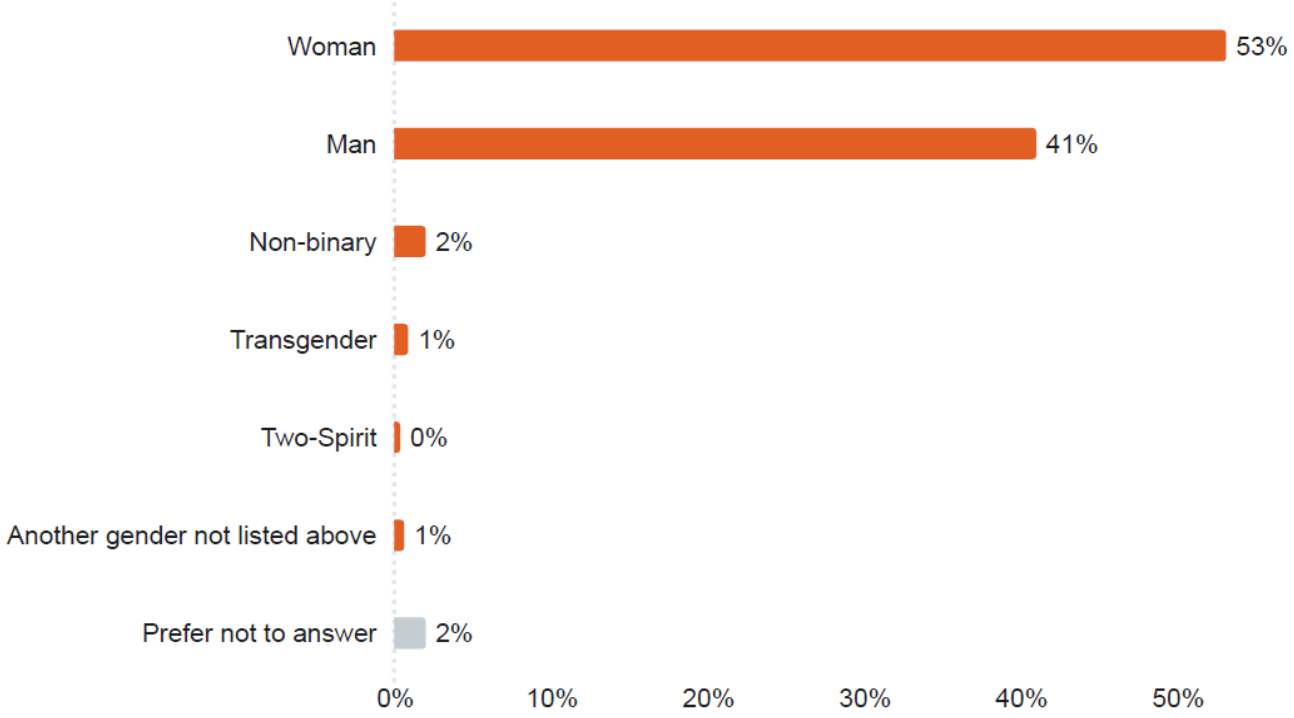
Living in Edmonton (4,532 responses)



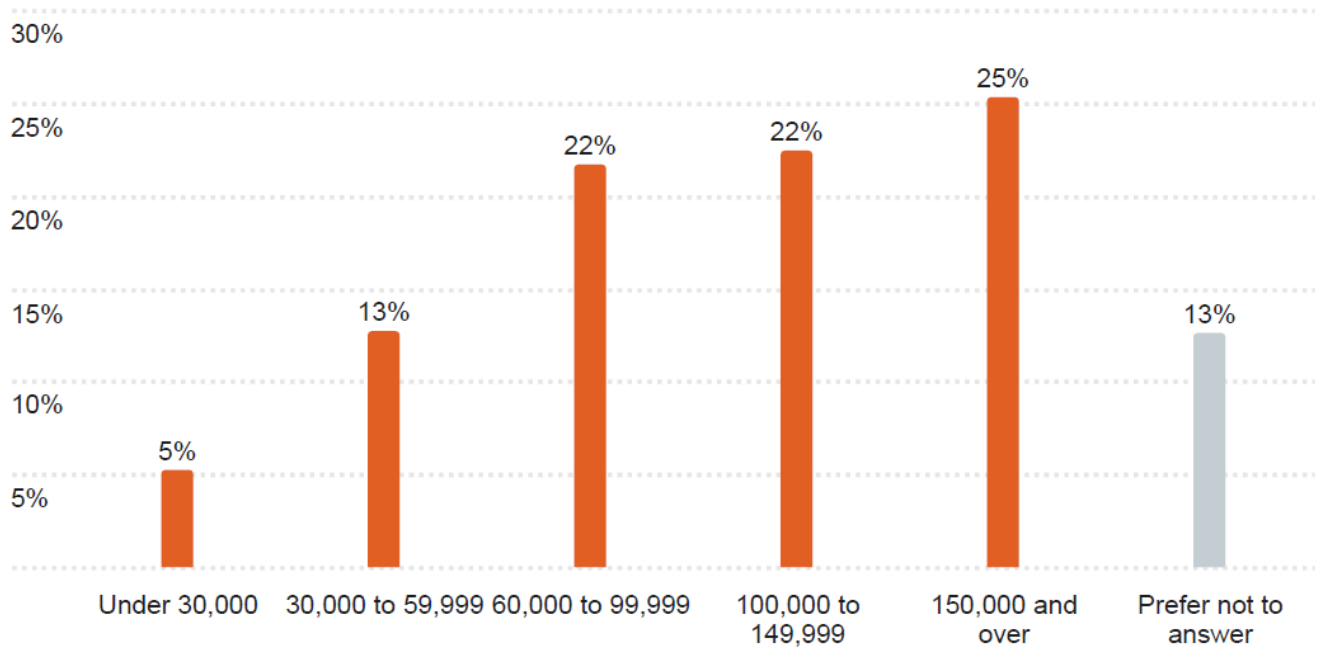
Age (4,532 responses)



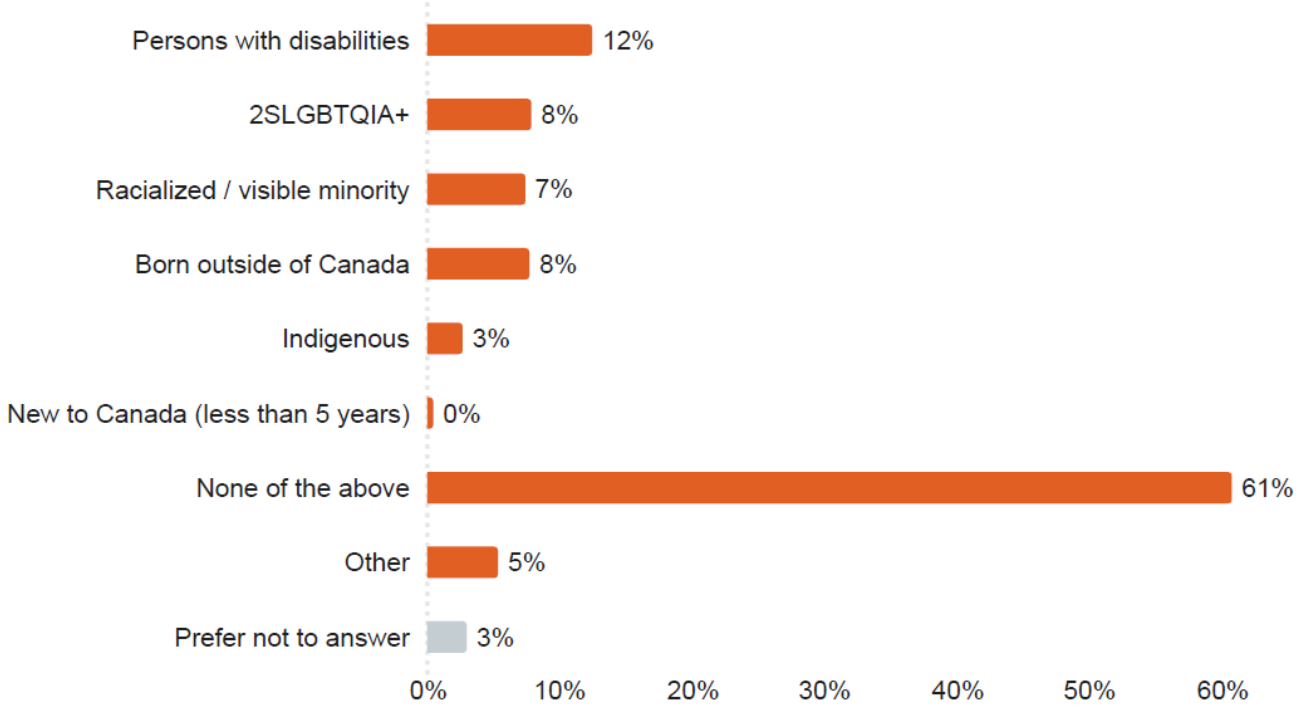
Gender (4,532 responses)



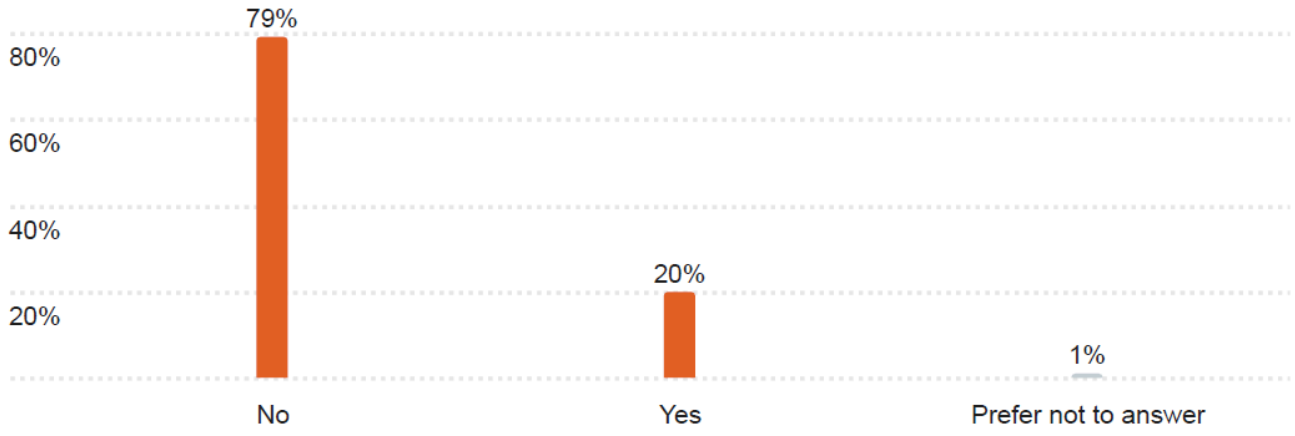
Income (4,532 responses)



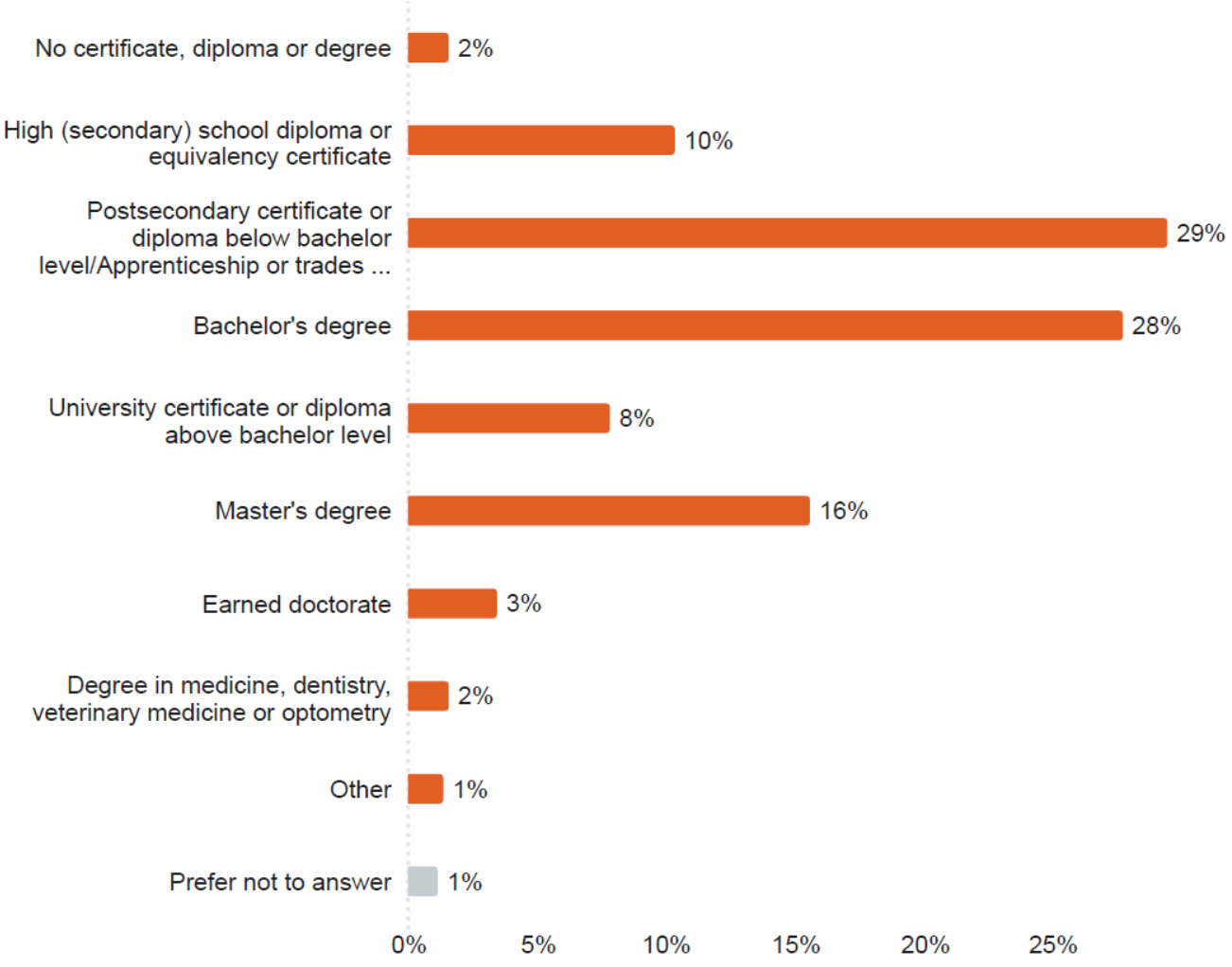
Identity (4,532 responses)



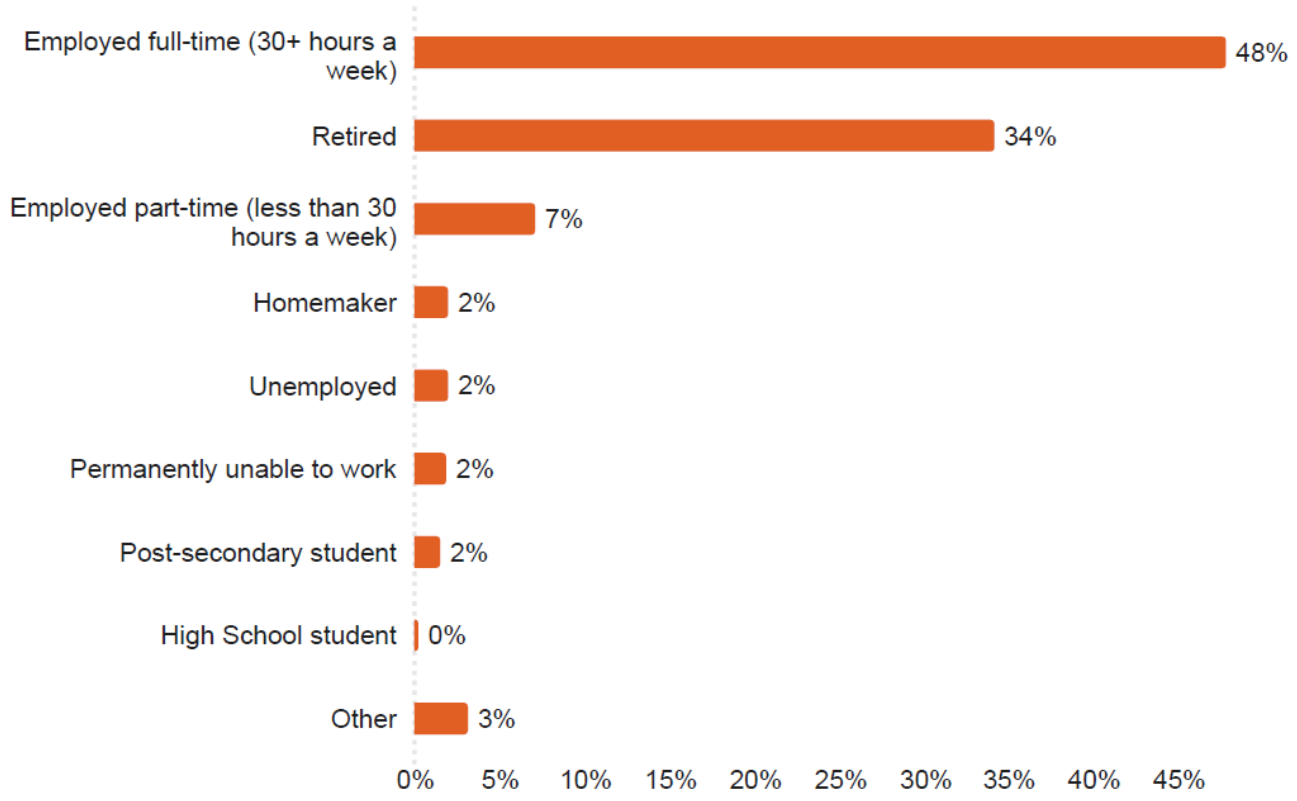
Children or Grandchildren at Home (4,532 responses)



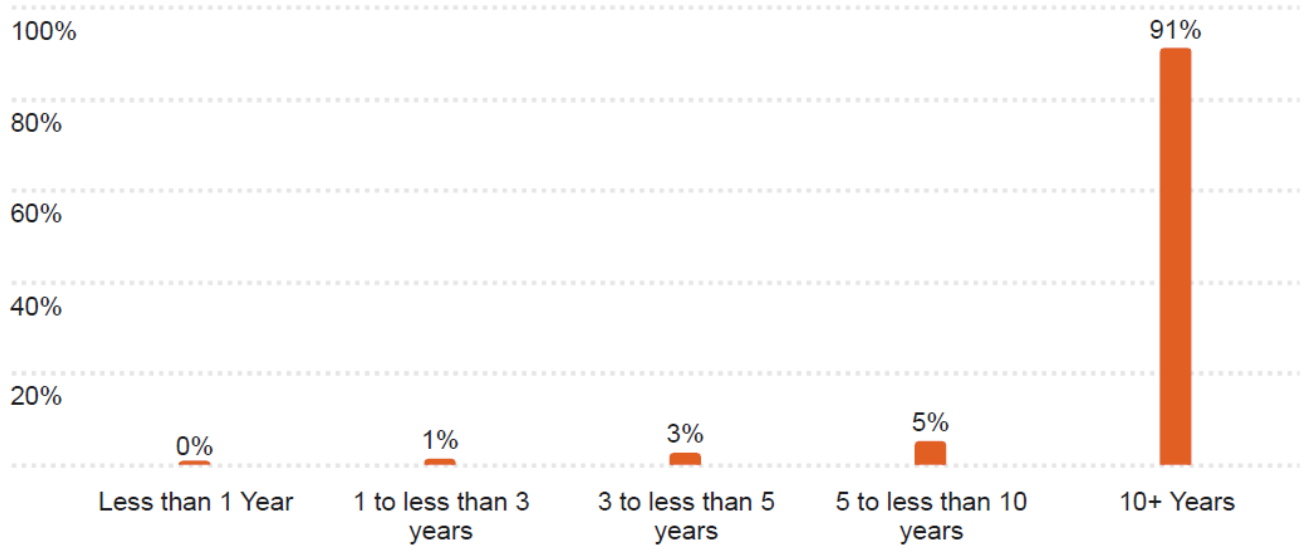
Highest Level of Education Completed (4,532 responses)



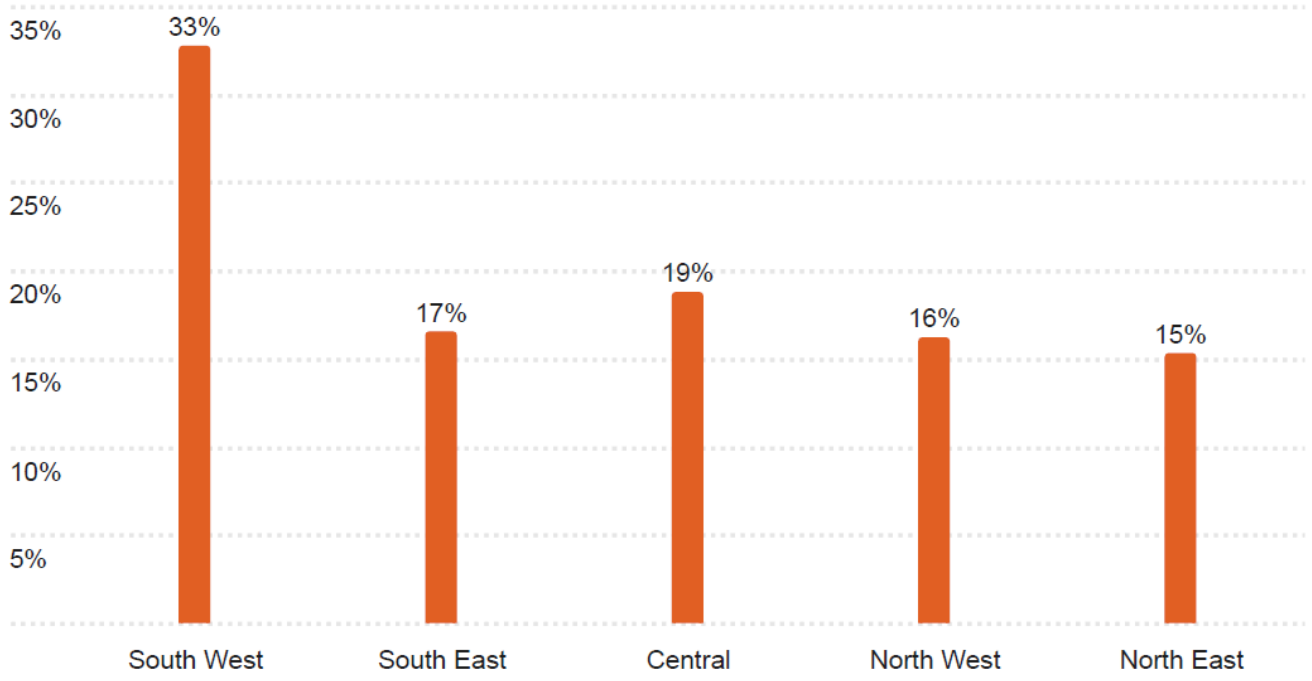
Employment Status (4,532 responses)



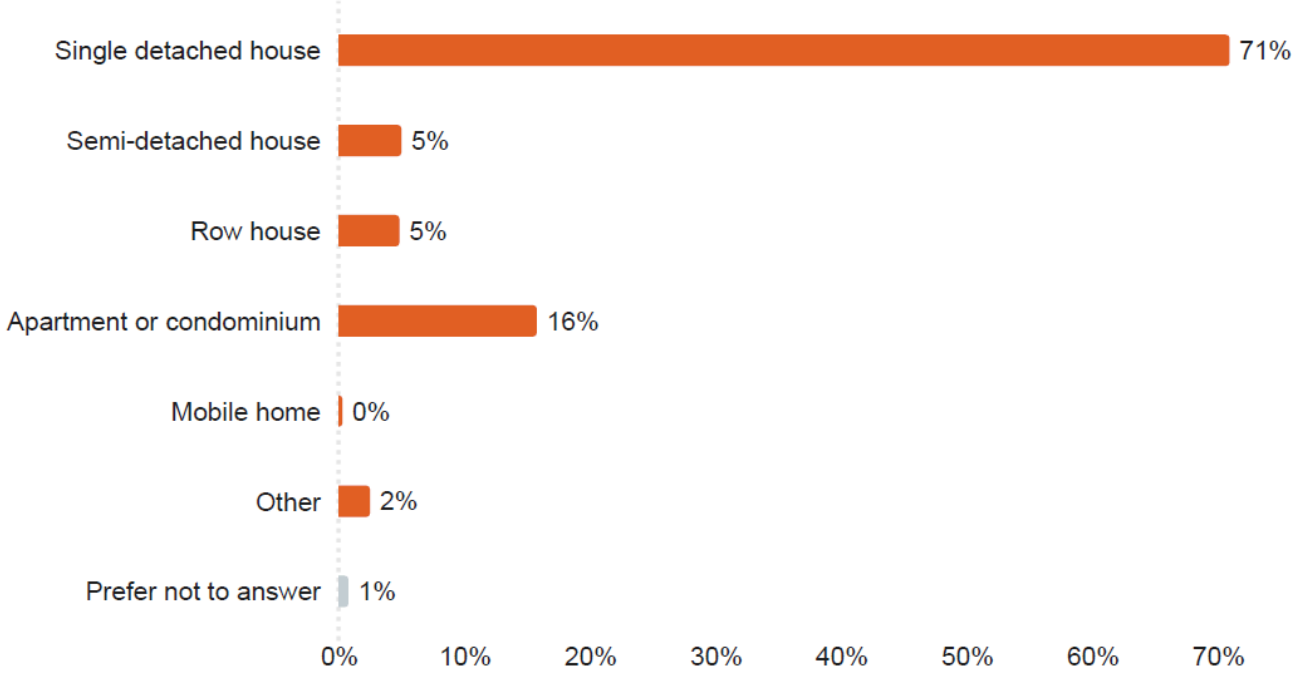
Years Lived in Edmonton (4,522 responses)



Region of Edmonton (4,519 responses)

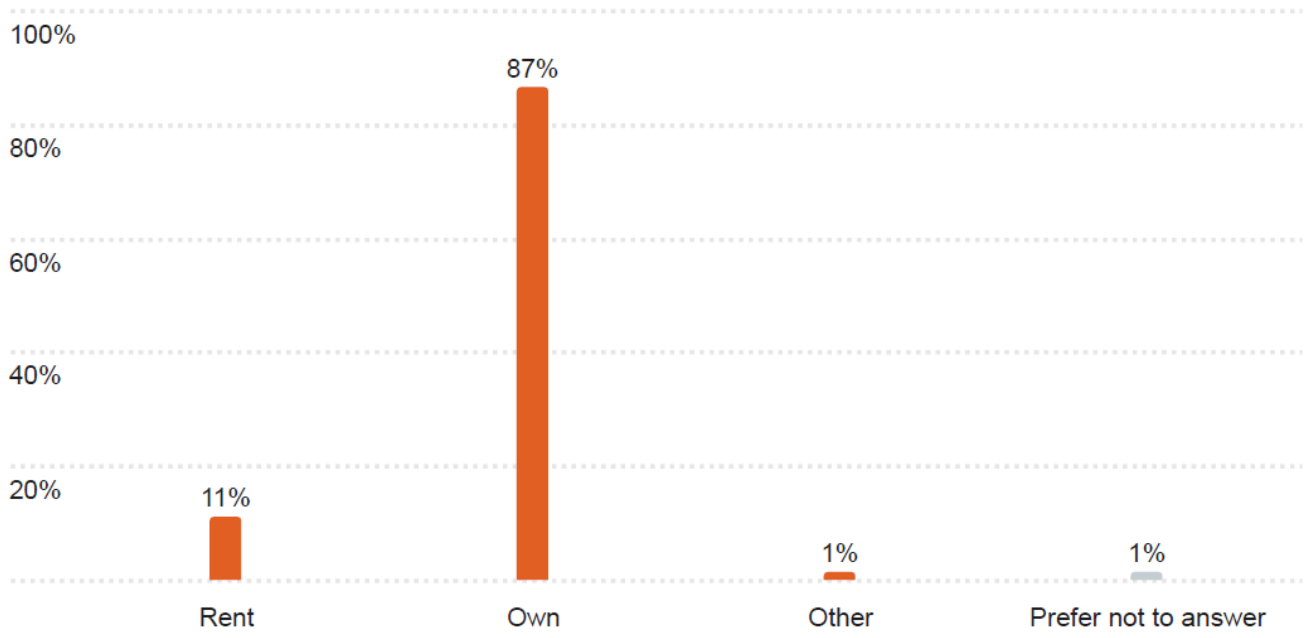
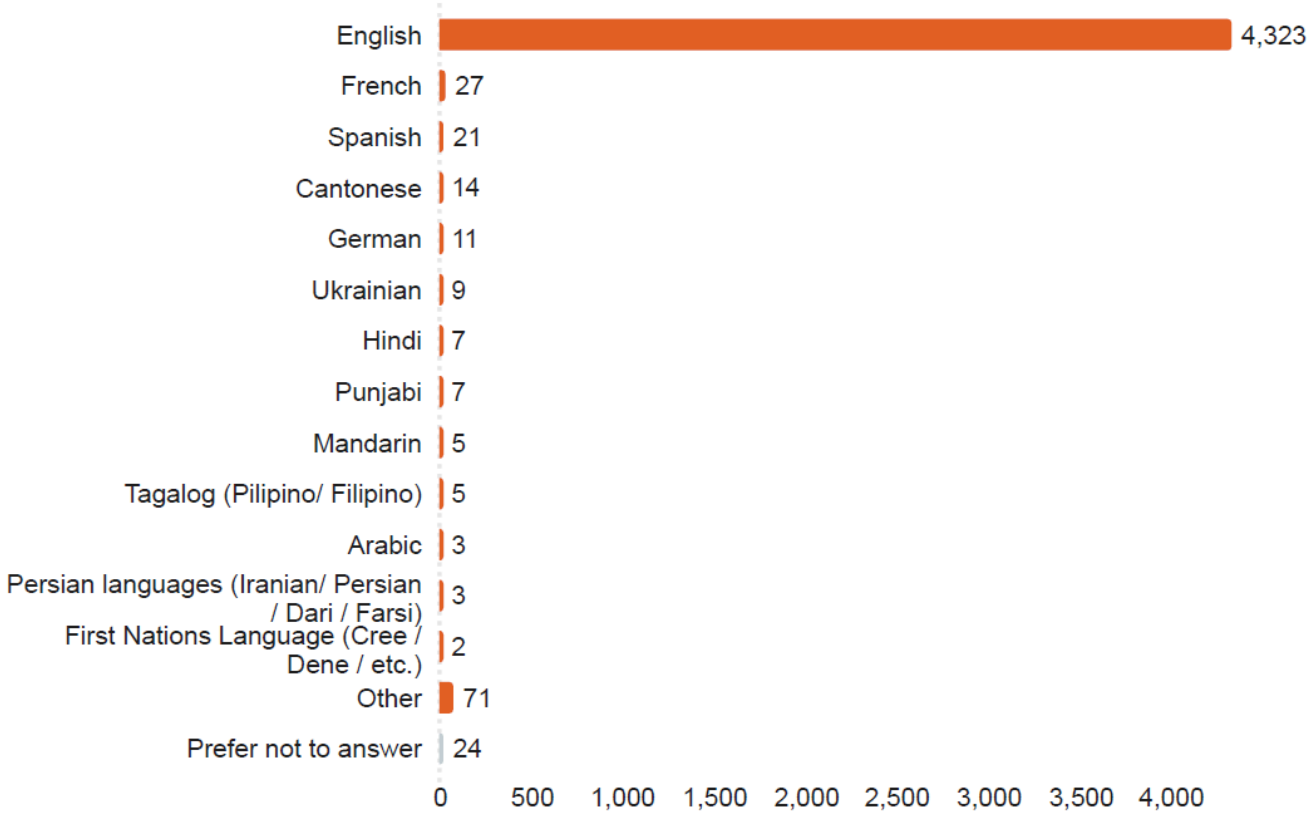


Dwelling Type (4,532 responses)



Note: Most of the "other" responses referred to dwelling types that would typically be described as row houses or semi-detached houses.

Renting or Owning Home (4,532 responses)



Primary Language (4,532 responses)