

How sociable is life in multi-unit rental housing?

Results of 2020-21 Hey Neighbour Collective Resident Survey



Catalyst's Madrona building, Victoria

SFU Research Team, Hey Neighbour Collective

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Acknowledgements

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This project took place on the unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC) recognizes that colonialism isolates Indigenous Peoples intentionally and by design, by, for example, prohibiting cultural practices, separating communities, and weakening family and language ties. HNC recognizes these historic and ongoing inequities and systemic barriers to social connections and strives to be part of movements to correct them.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Summary of Findings.....	5
1. Introduction and Context	8
2. Methodology: Research design, data collection, and analysis.....	12
3. Results	20
Social Isolation.....	21
Loneliness	23
Social Connections	25
Perceived Health and Wellness	27
Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic	32
4. Discussion.....	36
5. Conclusion.....	40
6. References	41



Concert Properties building: Collingwood Village, Vancouver

Summary of Findings

This report provides results of the initial 2020-21 round of resident surveys completed by 619 residents of housing provided by Catalyst Community Developments Society, Brightside Community Homes Foundation, and Concert Properties in British Columbia. The surveys were administered by the Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC) and aimed to assess the state of social connectedness, social isolation, loneliness, and well-being, as well as the impact on residents of COVID-19.

Key Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Most survey respondents (64%) were the only adult in their household or lived in a single-person household.

More than half of survey respondents (54%) have lived more than 4 years in their building or community, while about one in five (18%) had lived there less than one year. 27% reported living there between 1-4 years.

36% of respondents live in rent-geared-to-income units. Among those who do not, a mere 18% pay 30% or less of their income on housing, the affordable housing threshold.

Talking to Neighbours

Half of respondents are willing to get to know their neighbours better, but one quarter are not. Those who have been in their home less than 4 years had 3.5 times higher odds of being interested in getting to know their neighbours better, compared to respondents who moved in more than 4 years earlier.

While 38% of respondents said they knew 1 or 2 of their neighbours well enough to ask for help, an equivalent number (40%) did not. The remaining 22% had more than 2 people in their network who they could call on for help (Concert only data).

Over one-third of respondents (35%) have conversations with neighbours several times per week and 20% have conversations every day. This compares with 8% of respondents who never have conversations with their neighbours.



Loneliness, Friends and Belonging

About half (51%) of respondents never or hardly ever feel lonely, but 30% of respondents feel lonely often or some of the time. Those who have conversations with their neighbours 2-3 times per month or less have 2.2 times higher odds of feeling lonely, compared to those who have conversations with their neighbours every day or a few times per week.

Nearly half of respondents (45%) report that residents in their building take care of one another, compared to 12% who disagree or strongly disagree with this.

Three-quarters (74%) of respondents feel a sense of welcome and belonging in their home community; 8% do not. There was no significant relationship between length of time in a dwelling and sense of belonging there.

26% of respondents report having no close friends at all and 16% report having no close relationships that provide a sense of emotional security and well-being. One third (35%) report having 1-3 close friends and a slightly greater share (39%) have more than 3 close friends.

Health and wellness

Overall, 44% of respondents reported very good or excellent mental or personal health and wellness. Respondents with more than 6 close friends have 2 times higher odds of reporting excellent or very good mental health/general health and wellness compared to those with 0-6 close friends.

More than half of respondents (53%) reported being very happy or happy currently, while 11% said they were unhappy or very unhappy. Respondents with fewer than 4 close friends have 3.6 times higher odds of reporting being very unhappy or unhappy.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

About one-third (30%) of respondents' employment was negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

About one-quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they had experienced some form of food insecurity since the onset of the pandemic. Accessing a variety of healthy food was the most frequent food insecurity issue, reported by 31% of respondents.



The majority of respondents (75%-54%) perceived no change to their safety (from theft, violence, or from contracting COVID-19) as a result of the new social distancing measures put in place in their buildings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is compared to only 15% who reported that they felt their safety from contracting COVID-19 had worsened.

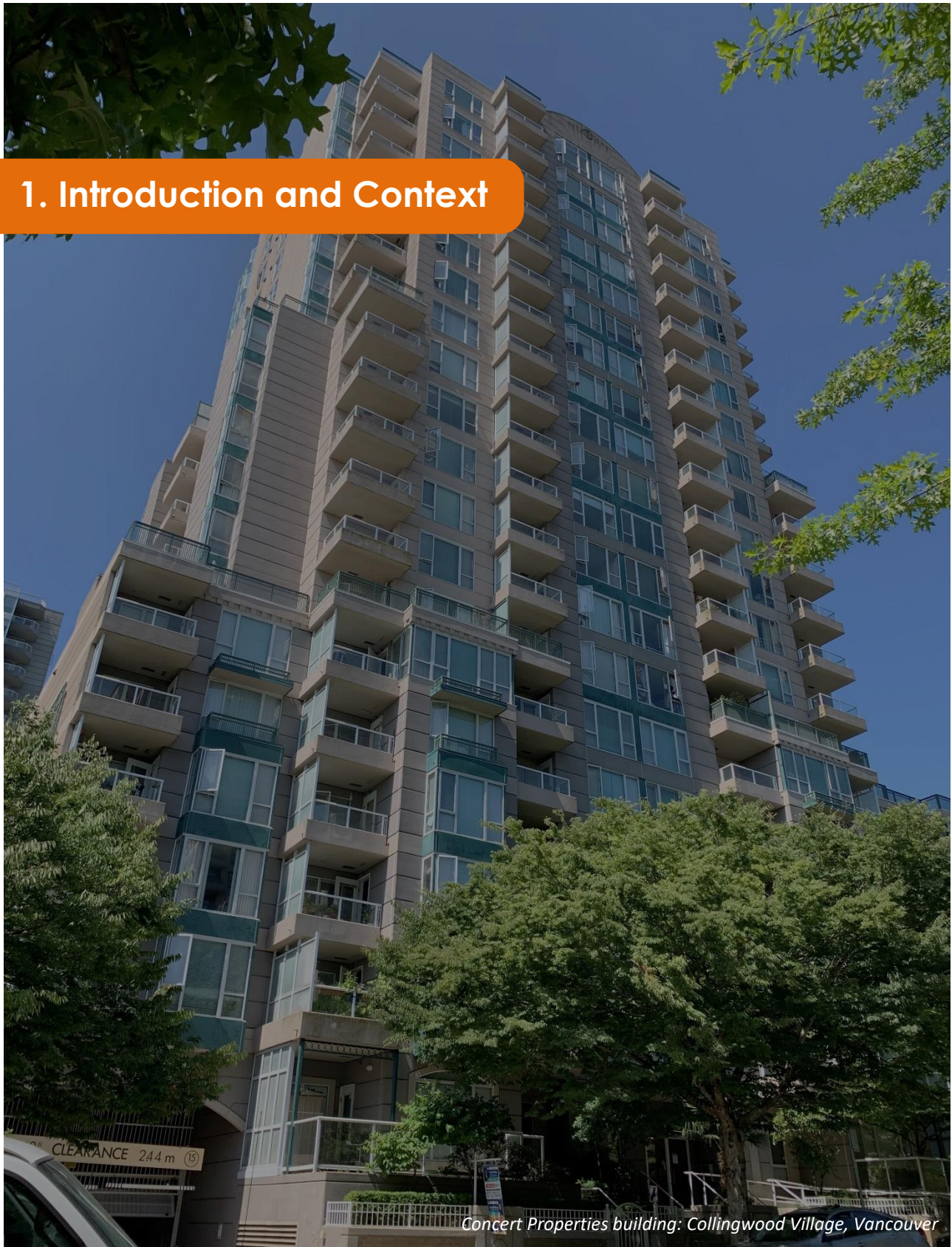
Measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 did improve the sense of safety from the virus for 26% of respondents.

37% said their physical or mental health have declined since the introduction of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Brightside building: Lion's View, Vancouver

1. Introduction and Context



Concert Properties building: Collingwood Village, Vancouver

How do you make it sociable? asks Richard Sennett in his *Ethics for the City*, reflecting on the challenge that has confronted urbanists since at least Roman times. The Hey Neighbour Collective, an action and research project formed in 2019, has been asking this question and seeking to mobilize understanding and effort to enhance social well-being in multi-unit residential buildings. Research is pointing to the ways in which sociability and neighbourliness are important predictors of health, well-being, resilience, and many other values. In communities across Canada, higher density living is growing in popularity due to economic necessity as well as by choice. These trends converge on the importance of enhancing the social qualities of home life in local and community policy and practices. One part of HNC's efforts to improve this scenario for renters, housing providers, and local advocates and planners is to take the pulse of residents themselves regarding key aspects of sociability at home. For further reading, please see: Angus Reid Institute, (2020); Gadais, (2021); Green, (2021); Holden et al., (2021); Keyes, (1998); Killam, (2020); Peavey, (2021); Prattley et al., (2020); Routasalo et al., (2006); Seifi et al., (2020); Suttie, (2021); Veazie et al., (2019); Wang, (2021).

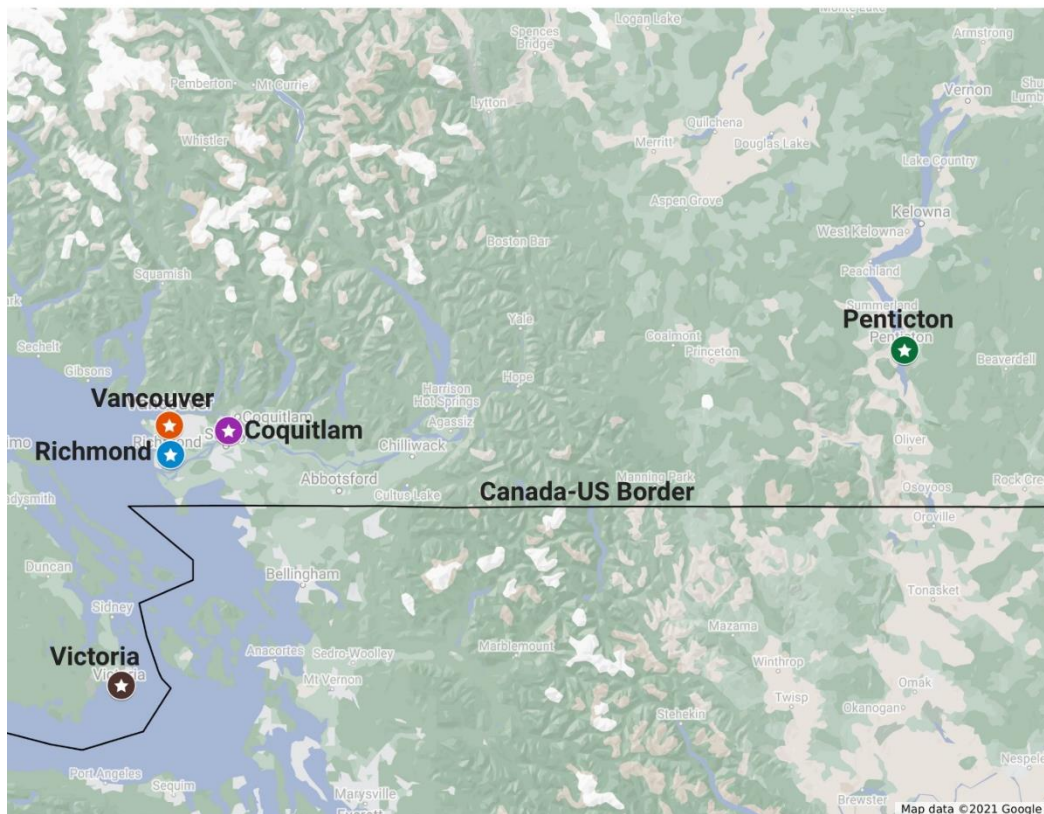
This report provides results of the initial 2020-21 round of resident surveys conducted by the Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC), to assess the state of social connectedness, social isolation, loneliness, and well-being, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on residents. Survey questionnaires were developed by HNC researchers and three housing provider partners, building upon existing resident surveys and related survey tools in use elsewhere in Canada (Hoar, 2018). The surveys were administered to three groups of residents living in housing provided by Catalyst Community Developments Society, Brightside Community Homes Foundation, and Concert Properties. The survey questionnaires differed for each housing provider but included four identical and four similar questions. Details of the survey design, as well as the results of this survey work from a combined 619 responses received are presented in this report. Table 1 provides contextual information about the three participating housing providers regarding the housing they offer, the average rent of housing units, and the total number of people surveyed. The target population in the HNC 2020-21 survey was residents of these 47 multi-unit rental buildings (2,857 housing units) in Vancouver, Victoria, Penticton, Richmond, and Coquitlam (Map 1).

Table 1: Hey Neighbour Collective 2020-2021 Survey Community Partners

Catalyst Community Developments Society	Non-profit housing developer/owner/operator offering low to middle income rental housing	Suite type & Rent per month Studio ~ 30%: Avg \$986 1-bedroom ~ 32%: Avg \$1,173 2-bedroom ~ 27%: Avg \$1,358 3 & 4-bedroom ~ 11%: Avg \$1,573	4 buildings: Total 182 households/units in buildings surveyed: Vancouver, Victoria, Penticton, Richmond
		Total Avg rent: \$1,211 per month	
Brightside Community Homes Foundation	Non-profit housing developer/owner/operator serving low to middle income seniors and other household types	Suite type & Rent per month Bachelor suite ~ 46%: min \$220 1-bedroom ~ 46% 2-bedroom ~ 5% 3 & 4-bedroom ~ 3%: max \$2,245 Accessible ~ 1%	26 buildings: Total 871 households/units in buildings surveyed: Vancouver
		*Total avg rent: \$672 per month	
Concert Properties	For profit, Canada-wide company offering market & below-market rental housing	Suite type & Rent per month Studio ~ 24%: \$1,165 1-bedroom ~ 43%: Avg \$1,376 2-bedroom ~ 27%: Avg \$1,704 3-bedroom ~ 7%: Avg \$1,613	17 buildings: Total 1,804 households/ units in buildings surveyed: Vancouver, Coquitlam, Victoria
		Total avg rent: \$1,444 per month	

* Some of the buildings have BC Housing operating agreements in effect, which affect the rent amounts.

British Columbia



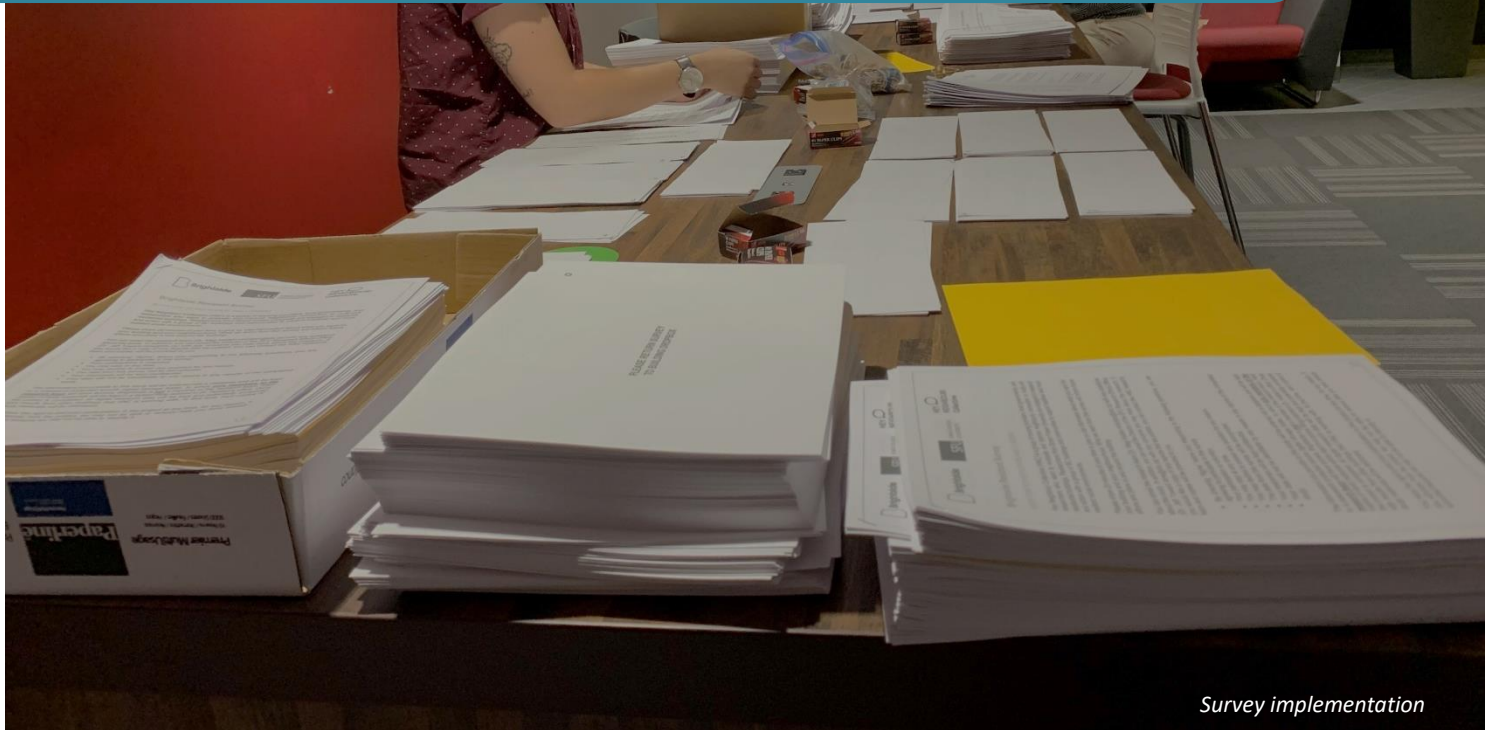
Map 1: Municipalities where the participating buildings are located in BC

The survey results reported here provide a baseline of resident community well-being for these households, including dimensions of well-being such as sense of belonging, loneliness, neighbourliness, social participation and safety. Also, due to the impacts of COVID-19 on these matters, we included questions about how the pandemic may have changed the sense of community and safety, employment, and food security for residents of multi-unit rental housing. The detailed survey results have been provided to each housing provider for planning and programming use. These baseline survey results can be used by our partners to inform well-being, sociability and neighbourliness programming. They can also be used as a basis for policy advice and recommendations, or to develop new rounds of research to track trends in sociability and well-being in multi-unit residential buildings.



Rivermark, Catalyst building, Richmond

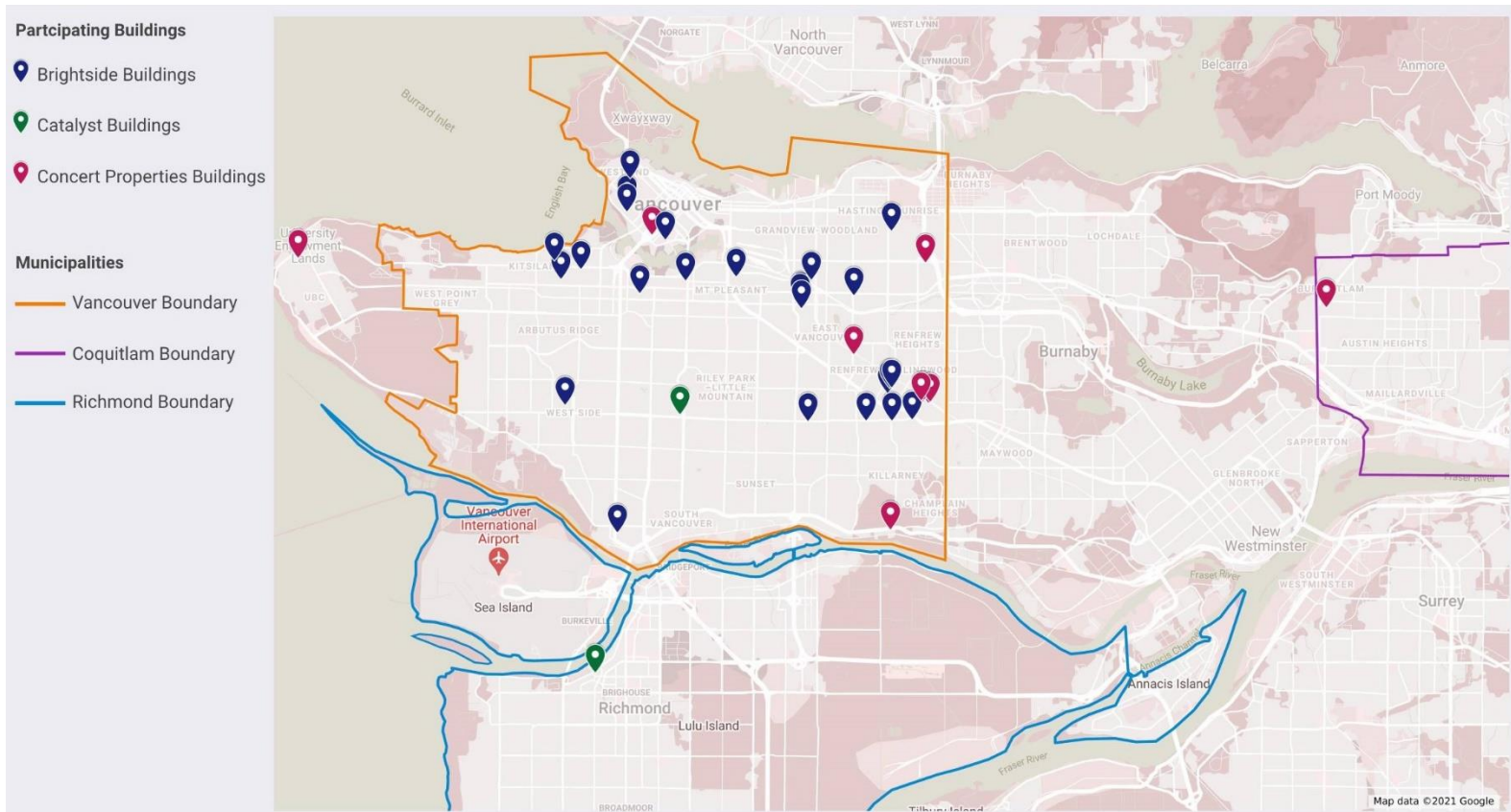
2. Methodology: Research design, data collection, and analysis



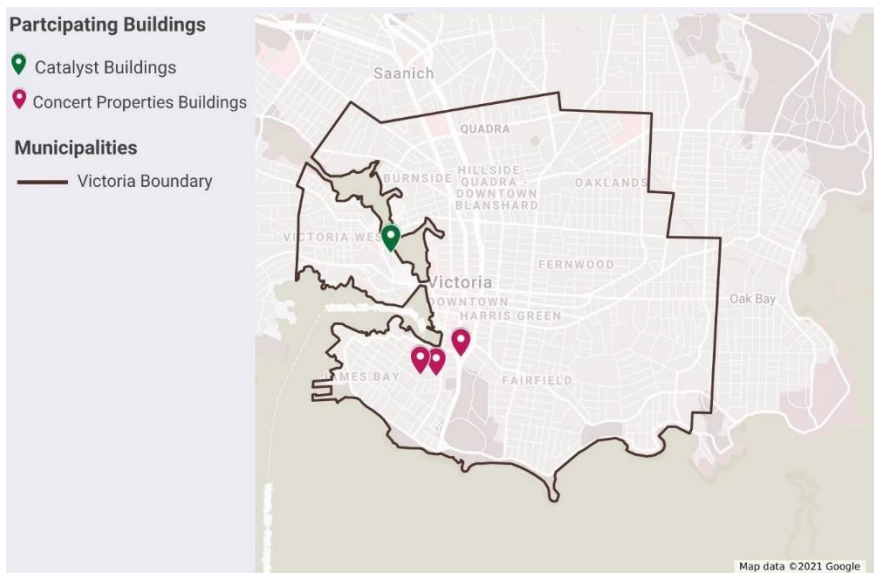
Survey implementation

The survey questionnaire development process entailed meetings between the research team and individual housing provider partners. This process was informed by our review and comparison of questions in a question bank drawn from the following related survey questionnaires: My Health My Community (2019); [Canadian Community Health Survey \(2016\)](#); [General Social Survey \(2013\)](#); [Toronto Social Capital Study \(2017\)](#); [Vancouver Foundation, Connect and Engage Survey \(2012\)](#) and [\(2017\)](#); Catalyst, Madrona Tenant Survey (2019); Brightside Resident Survey (2019); and Happy City-Concert Properties Survey (2019).

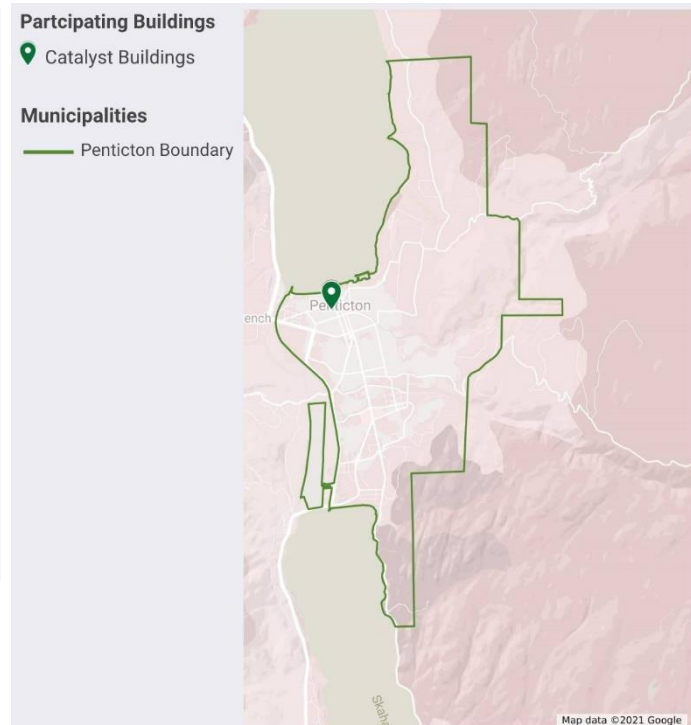
The survey was implemented during summer and fall 2020 for Catalyst and Brightside communities and in Spring 2021 for Concert properties. A survey was provided to a total of 2,857 tenants, one survey per household within the 47 partner buildings including 4 Catalyst, 26 Brightside, and 17 Concert Properties (Map 2, Map 3, Map 4).



Map 2: Participating buildings location map (Vancouver, Richmond, Coquitlam, BC)



Map 3: Participating buildings location map (Victoria, BC)



Map 4: Participating buildings location map (Penticton, BC)

The surveys could be completed online using SurveyMonkey. Interviewer-administered telephone calls were offered to Brightside and Catalyst communities. Additionally, due to limited access to computing and internet technology and residents without complete knowledge of English, surveys were offered within Brightside buildings in paper format in Chinese and Russian as well as English. Table 1 shows the methodology, procedure, and timeline for each housing partner.

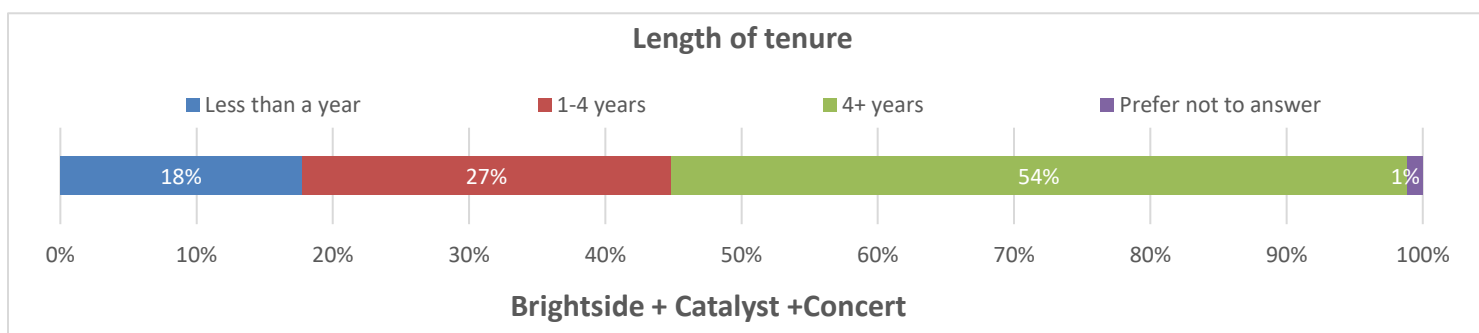
Table2: Resident Survey Process Overview

CATALYST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENTS SOCIETY: 46.7% RESPONSE RATE (N=85), 39 SURVEY QUESTIONS	
TARGET POPULATION	- 4 multi-unit below-market rental buildings (182 units) in Vancouver, Victoria, Richmond, Penticton Families, Young individuals, Seniors
SURVEY TOOL	- Online: 84 - Phone: 1
RECRUITMENT TOOL AND DRAW	- <u>Bazinga</u> online communication tool; Email notification; Posters on the building common area boards - \$50 gift card per building
SURVEY LANGUAGE	English: 85
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE	8 August to 26 September 2020
BRIGHTSIDE COMMUNITY HOMES FOUNDATION: 25.6% RESPONSE RATE (N=223), 47 SURVEY QUESTIONS	
TARGET POPULATION	- 26 multi-unit below-market rental buildings (871 units) in Vancouver - Over 1,000 residents: Seniors, Families, People with disabilities
SURVEY TOOL	- Paper: 219 - Online: 4
RECRUITMENT TOOL	- Door to door flyers; Posters on building bulletin boards
SURVEY LANGUAGE	- English: 210 - Russian: 1 - Chinese: 12
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE	11 August to November 2020
CONCERT PROPERTIES: 17.2% RESPONSE RATE (N=311), 28 SURVEY QUESTIONS	
TARGET POPULATION	- 17 multi-unit market rental buildings (1,804 units) in Vancouver, Victoria, Coquitlam Families, Young individuals, Seniors
SURVEY TOOL	- Online: 311
RECRUITMENT TOOL AND DRAW	- Email notification; Posters on building bulletin boards - \$100 gift card per building
SURVEY LANGUAGE	English: 311
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE	6 April to 30 April 2021

All the responses were entered into our database, The analysis was done in Excel and SPSS exported from SurveyMonkey. We integrated results where possible across the three partner surveys. This report presents the results of the survey questions on loneliness, social connections, social isolation, sense of belonging, self-assessed health and wellness and impacts of COVID-19 pandemic health measures on indicators including sense of community and safety, employment, and food security. Additionally, we present results of one unique question asked by each of the three partners.

We collected N=619 responses, including 85 responses from Catalyst, 223 from Brightside, and 311 from Concert Properties. The response rate was 21.7% overall and 46.7% for Catalyst, 25.6% for Brightside, and 17.2% for Concert. According to the survey data and discussions with the three housing providers, survey participants can be described as follows:

- **Household composition:** The majority of survey respondents **(64%) reported being the only adult** in their household **or to live in a single-person household** (those with pet(s) are included in this category). **32%** said they **do not live alone**, but **with family member(s) or roommate(s)**.
- **Length of tenure:** More than half of survey respondents **(54%)** have been living **more than 4 years in their building**. **27%** reported living there between **1 to 4 years** and **18%** lived there **less than a year**.

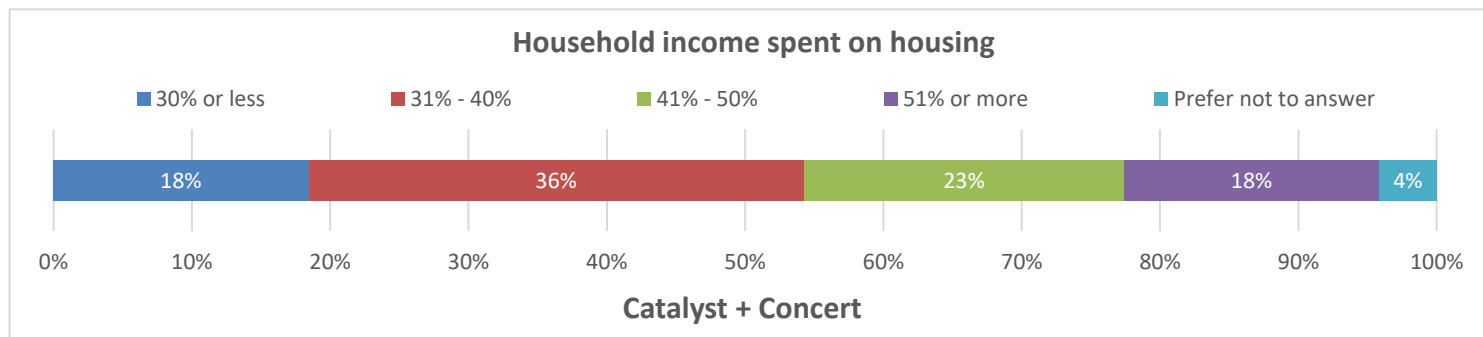


Note: Based on the survey question "How long have you been living in your building/community?" *(N=598, Missing=18)

- **Percentage of income spent on housing:** Brightside residents pay rent based upon an affordability formula and therefore were not asked this question. Respondents to this question from Catalyst or Concert properties communities mostly **(59%)** reported spending **31% to 50% of their income on housing**. While **18%** said that they **pay 30% or**

less on housing, the same percentage reported **spending 51% or more of their income on housing.**

The language used in this survey question was somewhat different for different housing providers, which might have affected results. The difference between the questions is that the first explicitly includes the cost of insurance and utilities in the cost of housing and the second specifies only pre-tax income (see the graph caption below).



Based on the survey question “How much do you spend on housing (rent, home insurance and utilities)?” or “What percentage of your pre-tax household income do you spend on housing (only rent, excluding any insurance and utilities)?” *(N=385, Missing=11)

Surveys overlapped but were not identical. The survey used with Catalyst buildings included 39 questions, the Brightside survey 47 questions, and the survey for Concert Properties 28 questions (see Appendices). Four identical and four similar questions were included across the three surveys. Also, eight questions were partially or entirely overlapping across at least two of the partners.

The relevant questions across the three surveys have been grouped for this comparative report into seven categories, five of which characterize different components of social well-being.

Table 3 outlines the questions and variables used for each component of social well-being:

social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence (Keyes, 1998). Social integration refers to one's social relationships with society and community members. Social acceptance is about trusting other individuals; it is the social

analogue to personal acceptance. Social contribution refers to a sense of one's social value and ability to contribute to the social setting. Social actualization is the potential and trajectory of the society in which one lives, and one's ability to actualize pro-social plans put in place.

Finally, social coherence is a measure of the extent to which one sees the world around them as making sense, being generally safe and trustworthy, and being able to take action when one has concerns (Keyes, 1998). For further reading on social well-being indicators and measurements please see: Committee on the Health and Medical Dimensions of Social Isolation

and Loneliness in Older Adults et al., (2020); Gierveld & Tilburg, (2006, 2010); Hughes et al., (2004); Larson, (1993); Shankar et al., (2011).

Table 3: Measures of social well-being in the survey, according to components of well-being

Question items and guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions that are identical across three partners Questions that are similar but not identical across three partners Questions that are similar or identical between 2 partners Questions that are distinct
1. Social integration
<p>Number of close friends</p> <p>Q. How many people do you consider as 'close friends'? (Concert)</p> <p>Q. How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives, but who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)? (Brightside, Catalyst)</p> <p>Number of neighbours you know</p> <p>Q. Would you say that you know...? (Catalyst)</p> <p>Q. How many neighbours do you know well enough to ask for assistance if the situation should arise? (Example: People living in your building/complex or those living in your block.) (Concert)</p> <p>Q. How many neighbours do you consider as 'friends'? (Concert)</p> <p>Frequency of conversations with neighbours</p> <p>Q. Approximately how often do you have conversations with your neighbours? This could be anything from "Hello, how are you?" to more significant chats. (Brightside, Catalyst, Concert)</p> <p>Household composition (living alone vs not living alone)</p> <p>Q. Who is in your household? (Please choose one) (Concert)</p> <p>Q. What is your household composition? (Brightside)</p> <p>Q. How many adults are in your household, including family members and roommates? (Catalyst)</p> <p>Perceived feelings of belonging</p> <p>Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: "I feel welcome in my building community and feel like I belong here." (Brightside, Catalyst, Concert)</p> <p>Direct loneliness - (negative language)</p> <p>Q. How often do you feel lonely? (Concert)</p> <p>Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: "I often feel lonely (left out, isolated from others, lacking companionship)" (Brightside, Catalyst)</p>
2. Social acceptance

How comfortable with close neighbours

Q. Would you feel comfortable asking your close neighbour: (Brightside, Catalyst)

Willingness to get to know neighbours better

Q. Would you like to get to know your neighbours better? (Brightside, Catalyst, Concert)

3. Social contribution

Close relationships

Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

"I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being." (Brightside, Catalyst)

"The tenants here take care of one another." (Brightside, Catalyst)

4. Social actualization

Participation in community engagement initiatives or events

Q. In the past year, which of the following Brightside programs have you participated in? (Select all that apply) (Brightside)

Q. Do you participate in the Community Works held at the building (food/clothing drives and charity donations)? (Concert)

Tenants actualize social plans

Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

"The tenants here take good care of their homes and the surrounding common spaces." (Brightside, Catalyst)

"The tenants here work together to solve conflicts." (Brightside, Catalyst)

5. Social coherence

Sense of safety

Q. Can you identify an area in your building that makes you feel unsafe? (Brightside, Catalyst)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

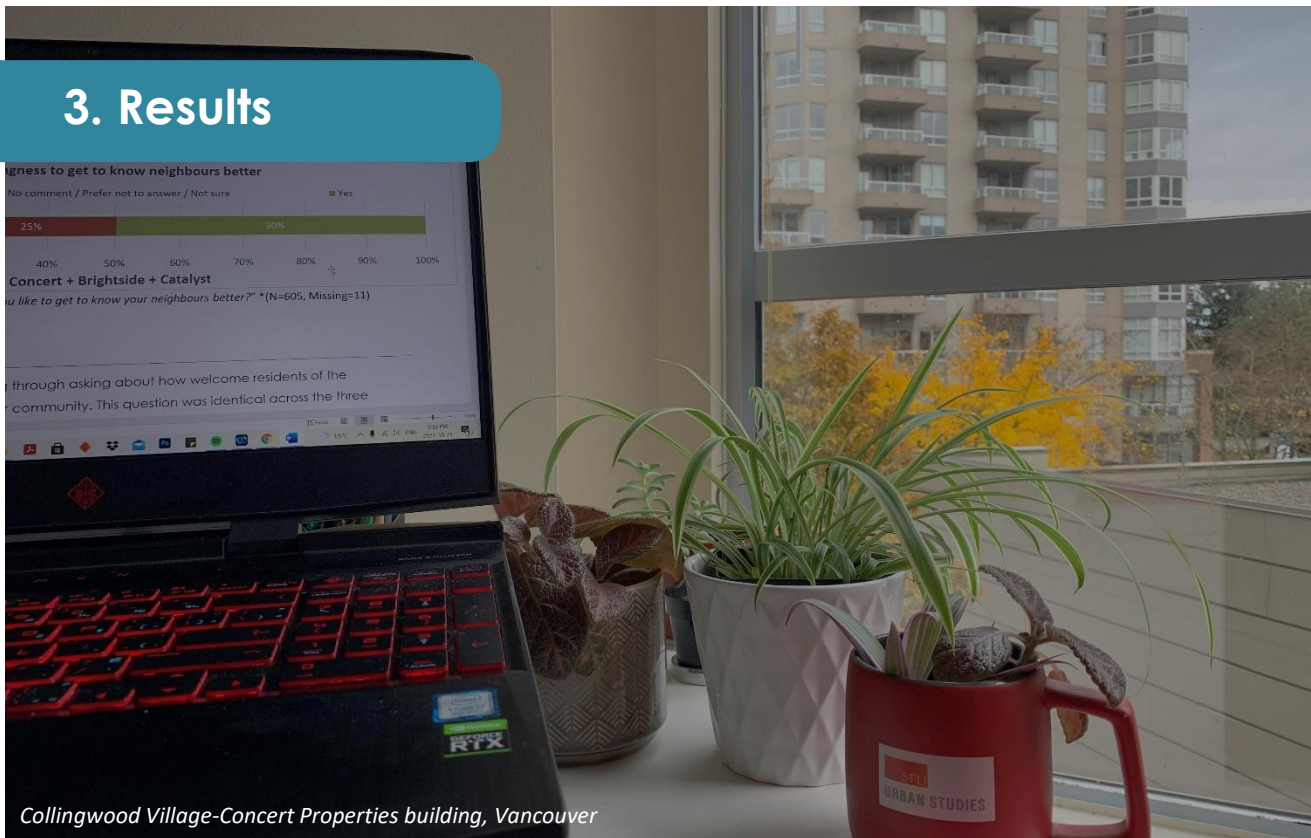
"I feel safe living in this building." (Brightside, Catalyst)

"I feel like my belongings are safe in this building." (Brightside, Catalyst)

Table 4: Other important survey sections and questions

Question items and guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions that are identical across three partners Questions that are similar but not identical across three partners Questions that are similar or identical between 2 partners Questions that are distinct
Self-assessed health and wellness
<p>Q. In general, how would you rate your own personal health and wellness? (Concert)</p> <p>Q. In general, would you say your mental health is...? (Catalyst, Brightside)</p> <p>Q. In general, would you say your physical health is...? (Catalyst, Brightside)</p> <p>Q. Please rate your happiness these days. (Catalyst, Brightside)</p> <p>Q. Do you feel living in a Concert building helps facilitate a healthy lifestyle? (Concert)</p> <p>Q. Do you currently use a mobility aid when you walk? (Brightside)</p>
Impacts of Covid-19
<p>Employment</p> <p>Q. Is your employment currently impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? (Concert, Catalyst)</p> <p>Sense of community and safety</p> <p>Q. Since the introduction of "social-distancing" measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how have each of the following changed for you? (Brightside, Catalyst, Concert)</p> <p>"My relationship with my neighbours"</p> <p>"Sense of community in my building"</p> <p>"My safety from theft or violence"</p> <p>"My safety from COVID-19"</p> <p>Physical and mental health</p> <p>Q. Since the introduction of "social distancing" measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how have each of the following changed for you? (Concert)</p> <p>"My mental health"</p> <p>"My physical health"</p> <p>Food security</p> <p>Q. Since March 2020, please tell us which of the following has happened to you and your household. (Brightside, Concert)</p> <p>Needs (rent and other necessities)</p> <p>Q. Does your household need help with your rent or other necessities in the short term, due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (If yes, please specify select all that apply and specify the value needed per month) (Catalyst)</p>

3. Results



Collingwood Village-Concert Properties building, Vancouver

Survey results including descriptive analysis and cross-tabulations of the interesting correlations for the congruent questions across the three surveys are provided. As discussed earlier, these report on the components of social well-being (Keyes, 1998). Here we present a breakdown of these components into their measurable variables that appear in the survey questions.

Accordingly, **social integration** variables include social isolation/connections, sense of belonging, quality of relationship with society/community, and loneliness (feelings of being part of society). **Social acceptance** variables comprised of feeling comfortable with others, trust, that others are capable of kindness, and that one is feeling good about their own personality. **Social contribution** is measured through notions of social responsibility and that one is a vital member of the community. **Social actualization** is the ability to actualize social plans and potential of society. Finally, **social coherence** is about coherence of the social world with safety and trust and recourse when feeling unsafe.

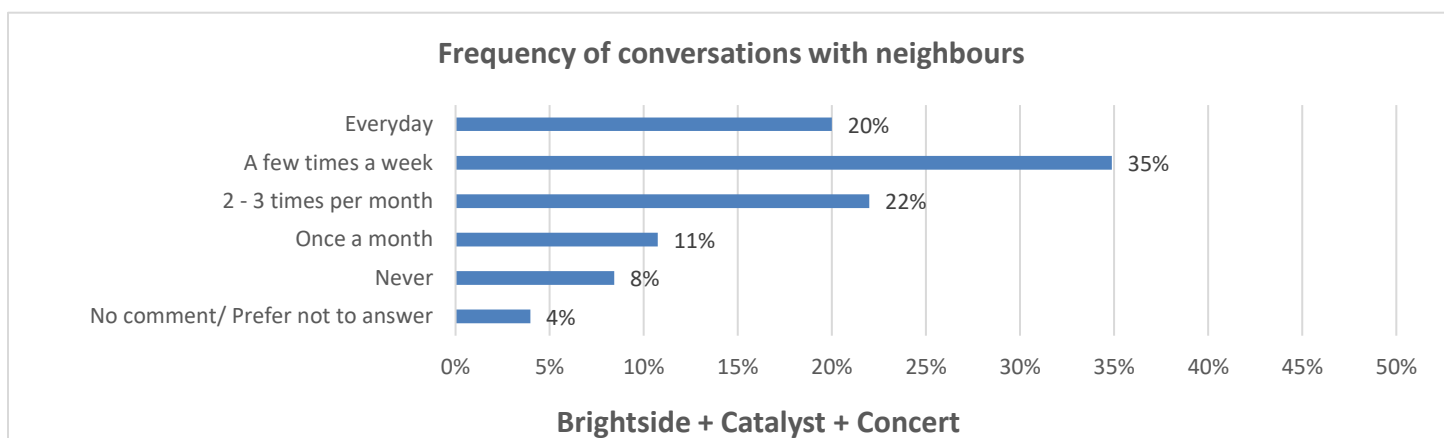
Below we present results on social isolation, loneliness, social connections, sense of belonging, and safety, self-assessed health and wellness, and impacts of COVID-19.

Social Isolation

• Frequency of conversations with neighbours (all sites)

One of the variables to measure levels of social isolation among residents of multi-unit rental housing asked how often they have conversations with their neighbours. This question speaks to the objective aspect of social relationships.

- **20%** reported having conversations with their neighbours **every day**. **A third** of respondents (**35%**) have conversations with their neighbours **a few times per week**.
- **33%** reported having conversations with their neighbours **1-3 times per month** and **8%** said they **never** do so.

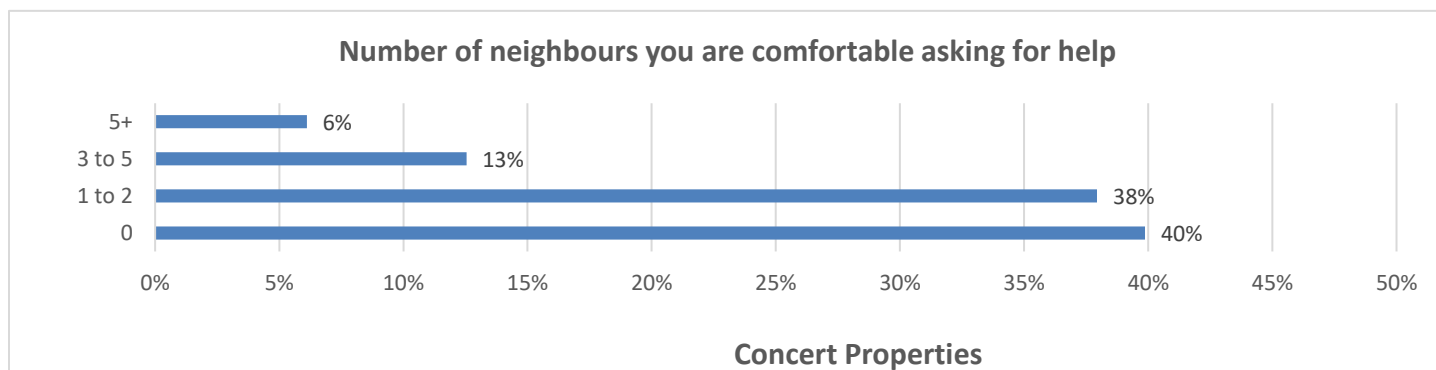


Note: Based on the survey question "Approximately how often do you have conversations with your neighbours? This could be anything from "Hello, how are you?" to more significant chats" *(N=605, Missing=11)

• Number of neighbours who are comfortable asking for help (Concert only)

To understand whether social isolation exists among residents of Concert Properties, we asked how many neighbours residents know well enough to ask for assistance.

- The majority of respondents (**78%**) reported knowing **2 or fewer** of their neighbours well enough to ask for assistance. Among these, **40%** reported knowing **none**.
- 19% said they know 3+ neighbours well enough to ask for help.
- 4% had no comment on this question.

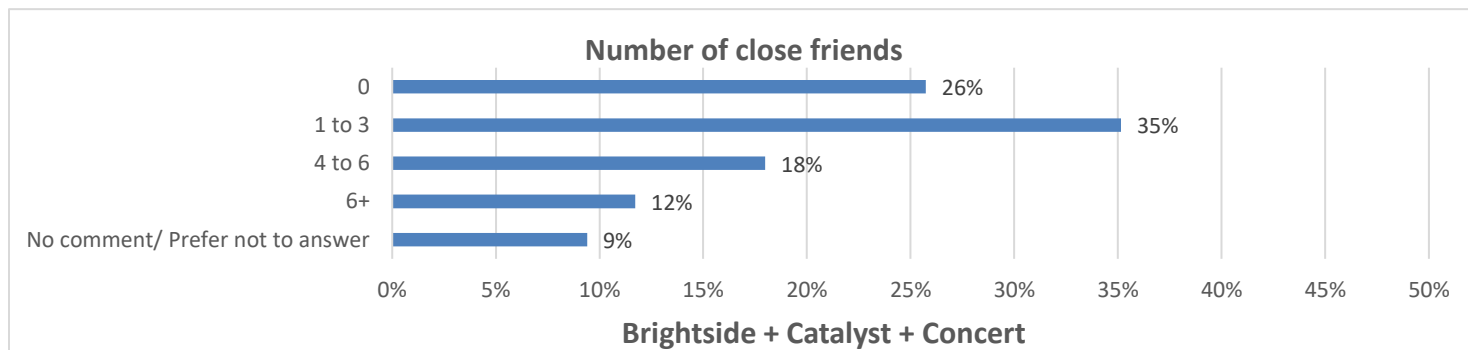


Note: Based on the survey question “How many neighbours do you know well enough to ask for assistance if the situation should arise? (Example: People living in your building/complex or those living on your block.)” *(N=311)

• Number of close friends (all sites)

Another variable for measuring levels of social isolation is number of close friends. Although a similar question was used across all three surveys, the language differed. This question was the same for Brightside and Catalyst communities, asking “How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives, but who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)”. The question asked in the Concert Properties survey was: “How many people do you consider as 'close friends'?” The responses showed some significant differences in terms of the number of respondents who reported having no friends. This might be due to the difference in language used. Taking this into consideration, for the purpose of this report, we have combined these responses below.

- While 26% of respondents reported having no close friends, many (35%) have 1 to 3 close friends.
- 30% reported having more than 4 close friends,



Note: Based on the survey question “How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives, but who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)?” OR “How many people do you consider as 'close friends'?” *(N=606, Missing=10)

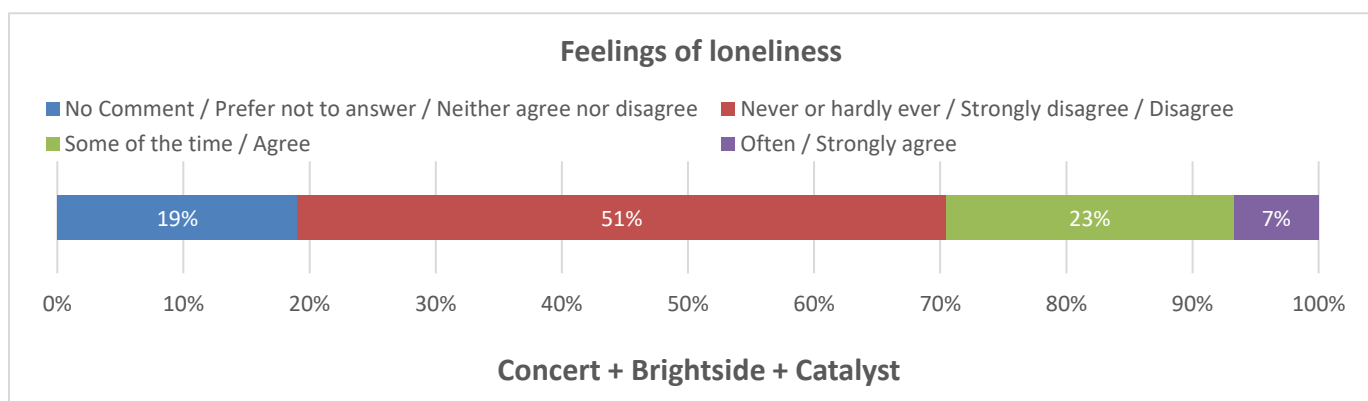
Loneliness

We measured loneliness using similar survey questions across all three partners. This question asks directly how often respondents feel lonely and to what degree. Furthermore, Brightside and Catalyst surveys had two more questions to indirectly measure loneliness.

- **Direct question on loneliness (all sites)**

This question was asked in all three surveys, using slightly different language. In one survey this question asks, “How often do you feel lonely?” and the responses ranged from never/hardly ever to often. The other type of question asks, “Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements” and provides the statement “I often feel lonely (left out, isolated from others, lacking companionship)”. The answer choices for this question are also scaled, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. We found it possible to integrate the results of these two types of questions to report on feelings of loneliness among all study participants. The results show that:

- While **23% agree that they feel lonely some of the time**, **7% reported that they feel lonely often**.
- **More than half** of the respondents **never or hardly ever feel lonely**.



Note: Based on the survey questions “How often do you feel lonely?” OR “Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: I often feel lonely (left out, isolated from others, lacking companionship).” * (N=582, Missing=34)

Residents who talk to neighbours are less likely to feel lonely

Those who have conversations with their neighbours 2-3 times per month or less have 2.2 times higher odds of feeling lonely some of the time or often, compared to those who have conversations with their neighbours every day or a few times per week.

	Lonely some of the time/often (n)	Lonely seldom/never (n)	Total (n)
Talk to neighbours 2+ times per week	76	186	262
Talk to neighbours 2-3 times per month or less	96	105	201

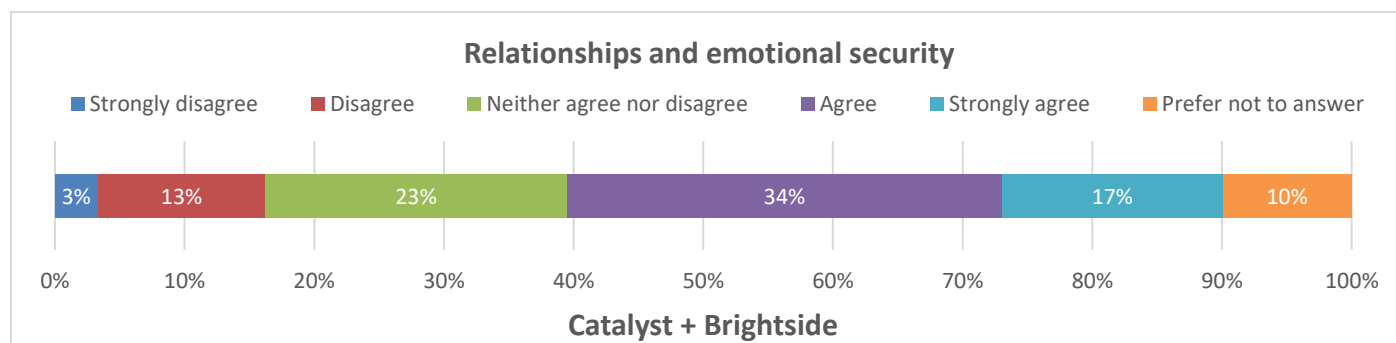
Those who have conversations with their neighbours every day or a few times per week have 2.2 times higher odds of feeling lonely seldom or never, compared to those who talk to neighbours less often.

Those who have fewer conversations with their neighbours have higher odds of feeling lonely.

• Close relationships (Catalyst and Brightside only)

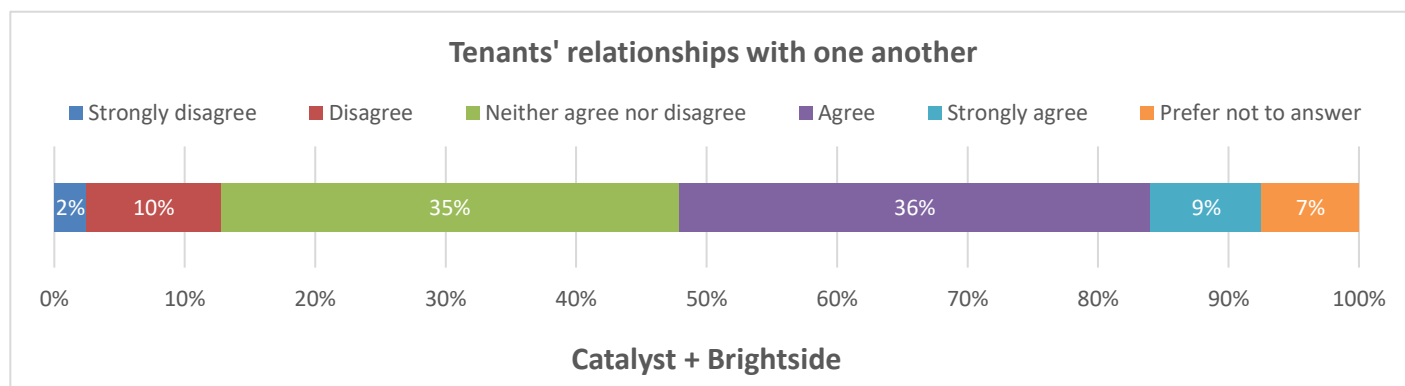
Another question that we used in Catalyst and Brightside questionnaires asked indirectly and using positive language about loneliness and its inverse. This included one question about close relationships that provide people with a sense of well-being and one asking whether neighbours take care of one another. The results indicate that:

- **16%** of respondents do not believe they **have close relationships that provide them with a sense of emotional security and well-being**. This is compared to **more than half** of the participants who **agree/strongly agree they have these kinds of relationships** in their lives.



Note: Based on the survey question "Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being." *(N=271, Missing=34)

- **12% disagree/strongly disagree that tenants take care of one another** in the building, compared to **45% who believe the opposite**.



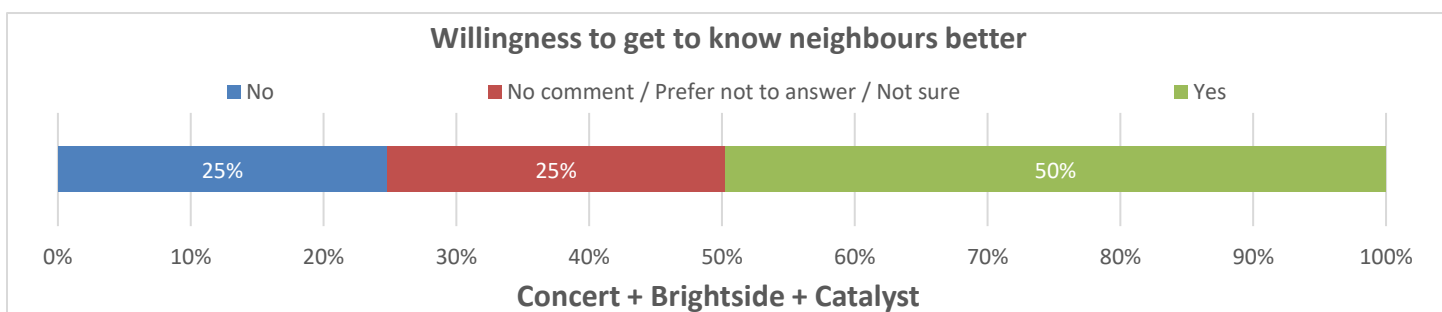
Note: Based on the survey question "Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The tenants here take care of one another." *(N=282, Missing=23)

Social Connections

- **Willingness to get to know neighbours better (all sites)**

To see how residents are interested in making connections with their neighbours and getting to know them better, we asked: "Would you like to get to know your neighbours better?" We offered a third answer choice (Not sure/prefer not to answer/no comment). According to the results:

- **Half of the respondents would like to get to know their neighbours better** and **a quarter reported they are not interested** in getting to know their neighbours better.
- **Preferring to maintain their privacy** was the **main reason for lack of interest in knowing their neighbours better**. Other reasons pointed to were **already spending enough time with neighbours, having a lot of friends and not having the time**.



Note: Based on the survey question "Would you like to get to know your neighbours better?" *(N=605, Missing=11)

Newcomers more interested in getting to know neighbours better

Respondents who have lived less than 4 years in their buildings have 3.5 times higher odds to be willing to get to know their neighbours better, compared to those who have lived there longer than 4 years.

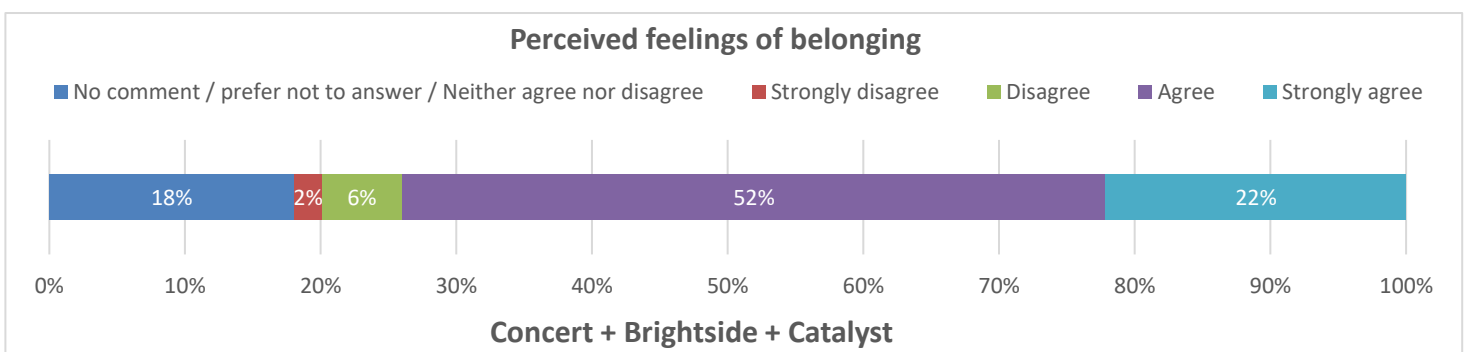
	Willing to get to know neighbours better (n)	Unwilling to get to know neighbours better (n)	Total (n)
<4 years living in their building	167	40	207
4+ years living in their building	124	104	228

Those who are newer to their building have higher odds of being willing to get to know their neighbours better.

• Sense of belonging (all sites)

We measured sense of belonging through asking about how welcome residents of the participating buildings feel in their community. This question was identical across the three partners. The results show that:

- **8%** of respondents **disagree or strongly disagree that they feel welcome and feel like they belong** where they live.
- About **three quarters (74%)** reported they feel welcome and have a sense of belonging in their communities.



Note: Based on the survey question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel welcome in my community and feel like I belong here." *(N=592, Missing=24)

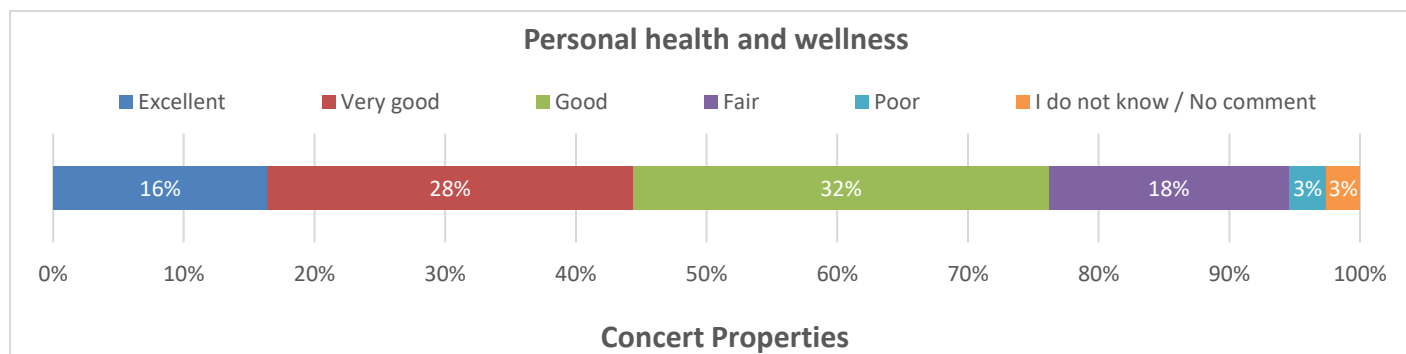
Perceived Health and Wellness

To measure the health and wellness of residents, the questions used in the three surveys were similar but used different language. Two of the surveys used identical questions to ask about mental and physical health independently. In the third survey, the question did not distinguish between physical and mental health. Therefore, we present these results separately.

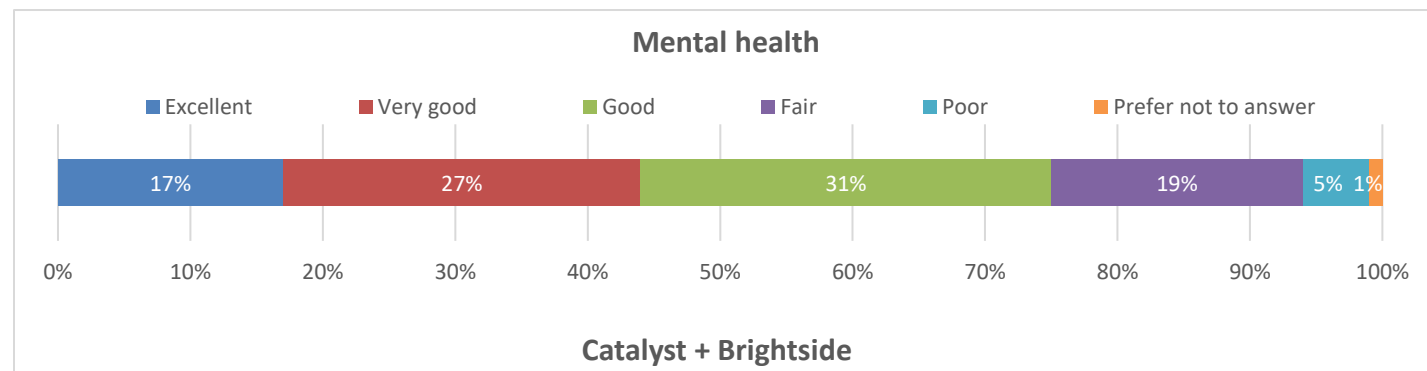
- Mental health, general health and wellness (all sites)**

Data from the mental health question asked of Catalyst and Brightside residents shows similar results to the personal health and wellness question responses among Concert tenants.

- 44%** of respondents reported their **mental health/personal health and wellness** as **excellent or very good**.
- About **23%** reported these conditions as **poor or fair**.



Note: Based on the survey question "In general, how would you rate your own personal health and wellness?" *(N=311)



Note: Based on the survey question "In general, would you say your mental health is ...?" *(N=293, Missing=12)

Residents reporting more friends also have better mental health/personal health and wellness

Respondents with fewer than 6 close friends have 3.7 higher odds of reporting fair or poor mental health/general health and wellness compared to those with 6+ close friends.

	Fair/poor mental health/personal health and wellness(n)	Excellent/very good/good mental health/personal health and wellness(n)	Total (n)
< 6 close friends	122	348	470
6+ close friends	6	64	70

Respondents with more than 6 friends have 2 times higher odds of reporting excellent or very good mental health/general health and wellness compared to those with fewer than 6 close friends.

	Excellent/very good mental health/personal health and wellness(n)	Good/fair/poor mental health/personal health and wellness(n)	Total (n)
< 6 close friends	199	271	470
6+ close friends	42	28	70

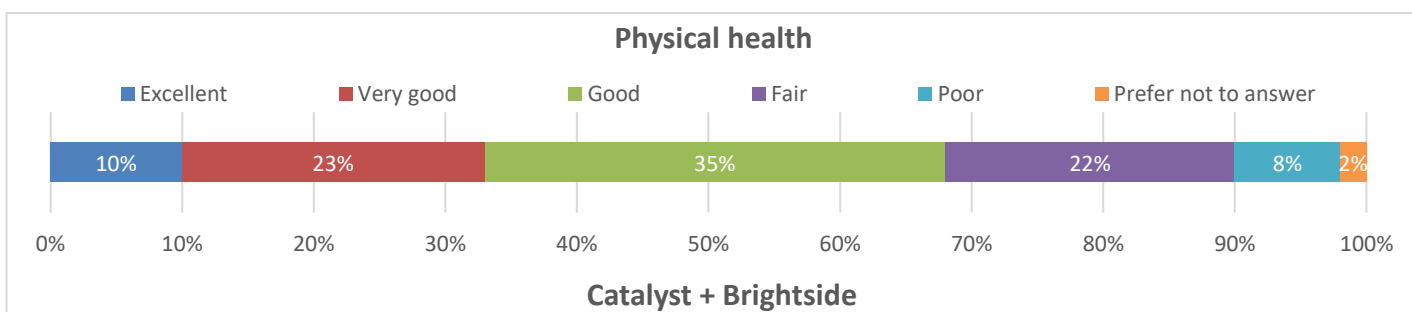
Respondents with more close friends have higher odds of reporting excellent or very good mental health and personal health and wellness.

Physical health (Brightside and Catalyst only)

The physical health question was only asked in Catalyst and Brightside surveys (N=290).

According to the results:

- **33%** reported **excellent or very good physical health** and **35%** reported **good physical health conditions**.
- **30%** reported these conditions as **fair or poor**.

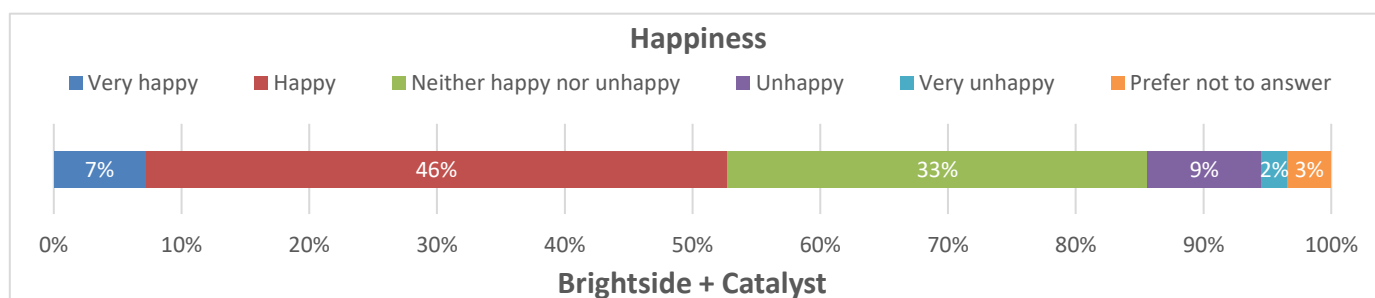


Note: Based on the survey question "In general, would you say your physical health is ...?" *(N=290, Missing=15)

• Self-rated happiness (Brightside and Catalyst only)

We asked people how they rate their happiness these days. This question was identical across the Brightside and Catalyst surveys.

- More than half of respondents (**53%**) reported being **very happy or happy** these days.
- **11%** reported being **unhappy or very unhappy**.



Note: Based on the survey question "Please rate your happiness these days." *(N=292, Missing=13)

Residents with more close friends are happier

Those with 4+ close friends have 3.4 times higher odds of reporting being very happy or happy compared to respondents with fewer than 4 close friends.

	Very happy/happy (n)	Unhappy/very unhappy/neutral (n)	Total (n)
< 4 close friends	55	78	133
4+ close friends	87	36	123

Respondents with less than 4 close friends have 3.6 times higher odds of self reporting as very unhappy or unhappy.

	Very unhappy/unhappy (n)	Happy/very happy/neutral (n)	Total (n)
< 4 close friends	21	112	133
4+ close friends	6	117	123

Respondents with more close friends had higher odds of reporting that they are very happy or happy.

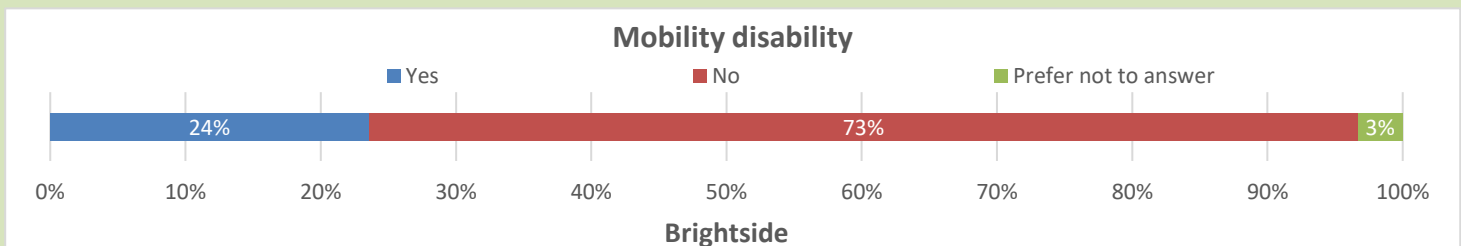
Brightside Community Homes Foundation: Mobility Aid Use



Brightside is a housing society that owns and operates multi-unit rental buildings in Vancouver. Brightside's mission is "to build resilient communities and provide safe and secure homes for those struggling to meet the demands of market housing." Residents include low-income seniors (70%), people with disabilities (20%), and families (10%). Because residents are diverse and at different stages of their lives, Brightside provides a wide range of unit types and accessibility features in their buildings. Brightside uses a community development approach, an annual resident survey, newsletters, and partnerships with other service organizations to meet their residents' needs, make them aware of resources that can help, and improve resident well-being and happiness.

One of the distinct questions in the Brightside 2020 survey related to residents' use of mobility aids. This is particularly important for Brightside to plan the programs, spaces, and infrastructures that are accessible for residents who are seniors and people with disabilities.

- **24% use a mobility aid, mostly a cane or walker.**



Note: Based on the survey question "Do you currently use a mobility aid when you walk?" *(N=212), (Missing=8)

Concert Properties: Living in a Concert building and healthy lifestyle

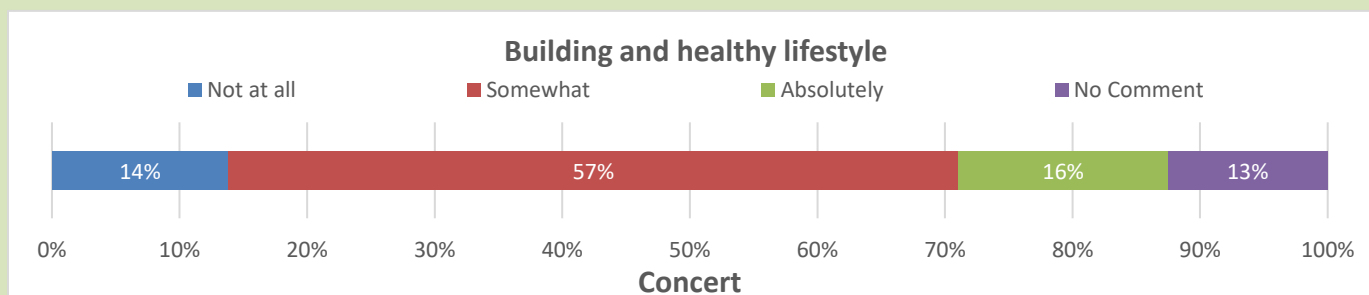


Collingwood Village, Concert properties building, Vancouver

Concert Properties develops and operates rental housing, condominiums, and seniors' active aging communities. Additionally, they develop commercial, industrial and infrastructure projects, and provide property management services across Canada. Concert Properties' mission is "to create places for residents and visitors to connect, build community and live healthy and purposeful lives." Concert is committed to sustainability principles and staffing includes a social sustainability coordinator who offers programs to enhance social sustainability in their buildings, including a [Resident Social Well-being Survey and Community Connectors program](#). Also, providing common and amenity spaces (e.g., gym, rooftop garden, lounge) as the extension of private living spaces and online virtual gatherings are all efforts to generate a sense of community, connections, and well-being among residents.

Concert's Resident Social Well-being Survey (2021) asked residents if Concert buildings facilitate a healthy lifestyle.

- The majority, **73%** of Concert Properties respondents, **reported that living in a Concert building somewhat or absolutely facilitates a healthy lifestyle. 14% said that it does not.**



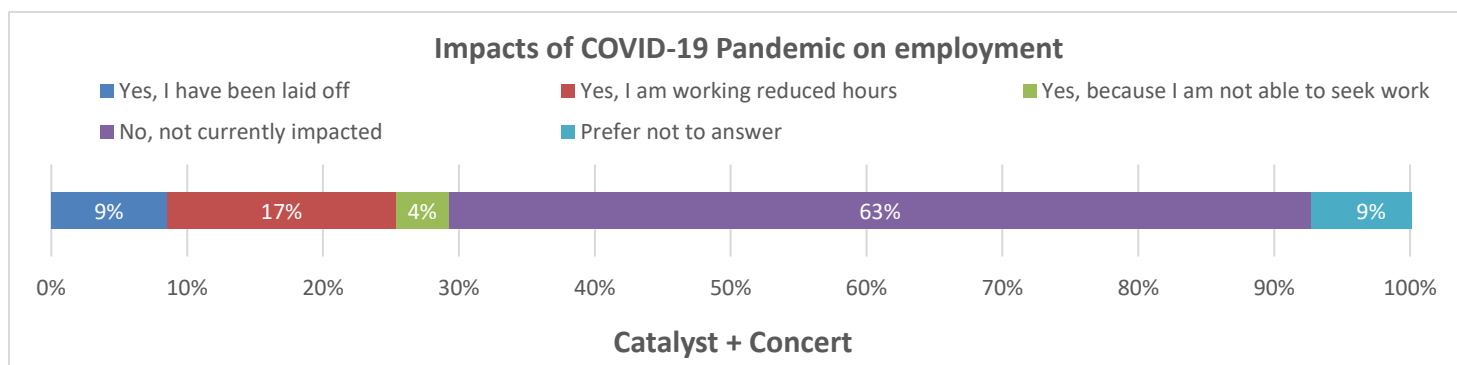
Note: Based on the survey question "Do you feel living in a Concert building helps facilitate a healthy lifestyle?" *(N=311)

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

• Employment (Concert and Catalyst only)

We asked residents of Catalyst and Concert properties if the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their employment. Given the high prevalence of Brightside residents not in the workforce, this question was not asked on that survey.

- **30%** of respondents reported their employment **has been impacted** whether through being **laid off (9%)**, **working reduced hours (17%)**, or because they are **not able to seek work (4%)**.
- **63%** said their employment **has not been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic**.



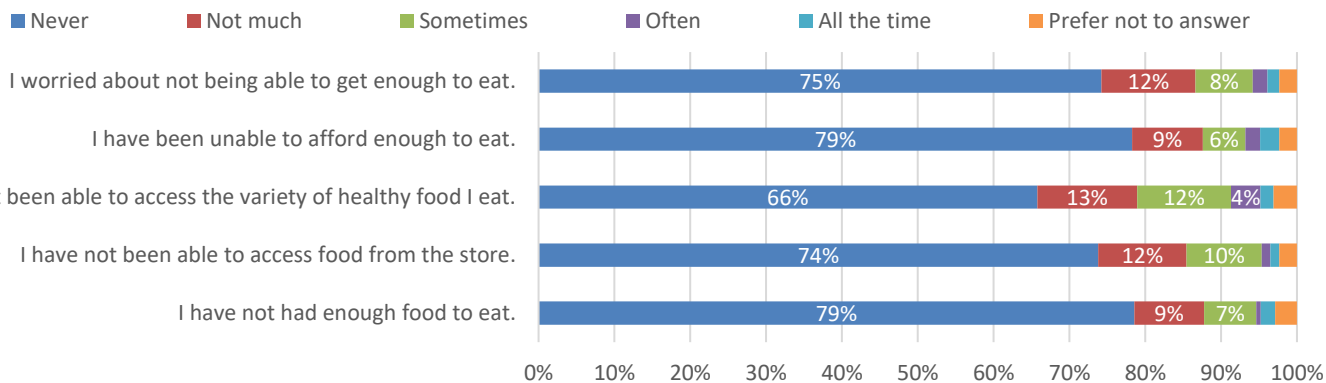
Note: Based on the survey question “Is your employment currently impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?” *(N=386, Missing=10)

• Food security (Brightside and Concert only)

To see whether residents have experienced food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked about a series of food insecure situations since March 2020. This question was consistent across Brightside and Concert Properties surveys. The results show that:

- On average, about **one quarter (24%)** of the respondents **experienced food insecurity** to some extent.
- **Not being able to access a variety of healthy food to eat** was the **most frequent issue**, reported by **31%**.

Food insecurity



Brightside + Concert

Note: Based on the survey question "Since March 2020, please tell us which of the following has happened to you and your household."
 *(N=252, Missing=6)



Community garden in Arbutus Court-Brightside building, Vancouver

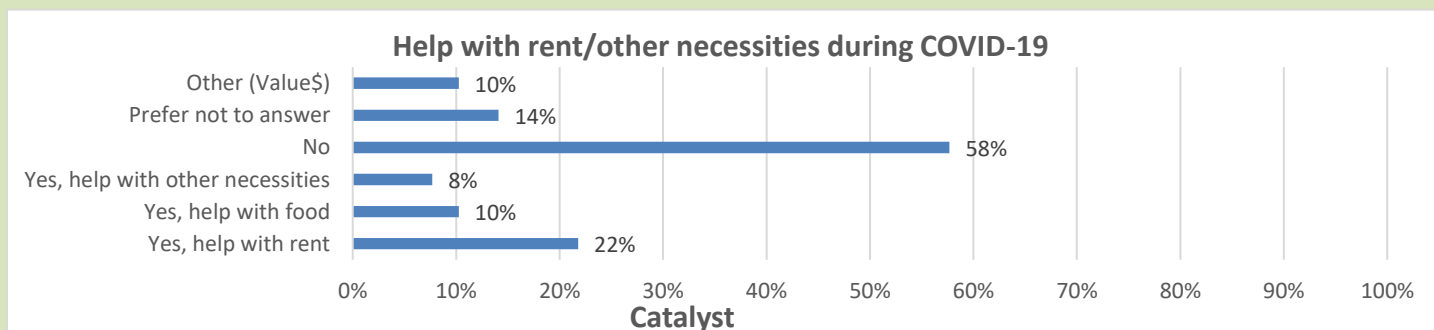
Catalyst Community Development: Help with rent/other necessities during COVID-19 pandemic



Catalyst is a non-profit real estate developer/owner/operator of multi-unit rental buildings in BC. Catalyst's mission is "to unlock the value of community assets to create vibrant, affordable, and inspiring places for people to live and work." They partner with other community organizations to provide low to middle-income housing (10%-40% below market) for families, individuals, and people with disabilities earning total household incomes between \$55,000 and \$100,000 annually. Catalyst conducts Town Hall meetings with residents, annual surveys, Community Connections programming, and other initiatives to enhance social well-being of residents.

To understand the needs of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the distinct questions in the Catalyst 2020 survey sought to determine whether tenants needed help with rent or other necessities during this time. Catalyst met this need by delaying and deferring rent and offering repayment plans.

- Many of the respondents **(58%) reported no need for help.**
- An average of **13% asked help with rent, food, or other necessities.** Those who requested **financial assistance** asked for **\$300-\$700 per month.**

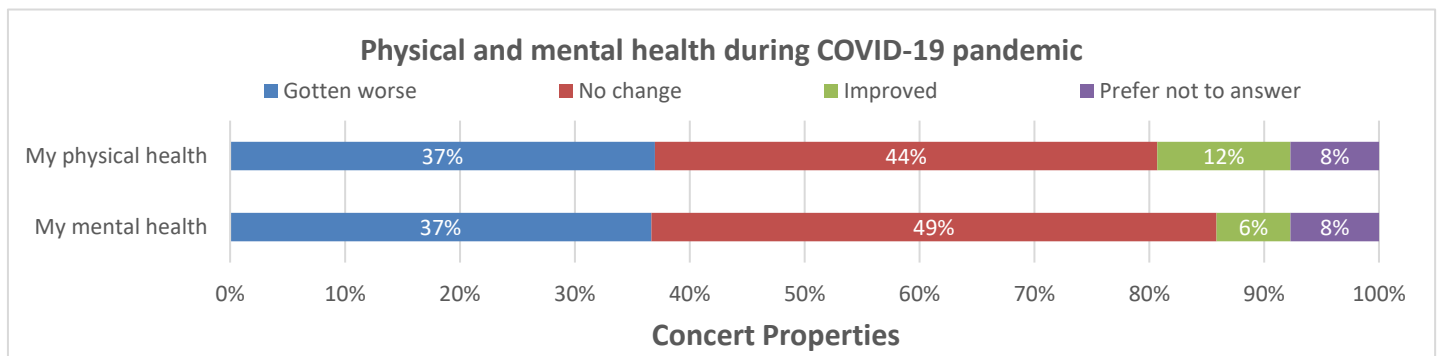


Note: Based on the survey question "Does your household need help with your rent or other necessities in the short term, due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (If yes, please select all that apply and specify the value needed per month)" *(N=78, Missing=7)

Physical and mental health during COVID-19 pandemic (Concert only)

Additionally, the Concert Properties survey asked how residents' physical and mental health have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The largest share, **44% for physical health** and **49% for mental health**, reported **no change** due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 37%** said their **physical and mental health** have **gotten worse** since the introduction of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 12%** reported their **physical health** has improved and **6%** said their **mental health** has improved.



Note: Based on the survey question "Since the introduction of 'social-distancing' measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how have each of the following changed for you?" *(N=311)



Catalyst's Madrona building, Victoria

4. Discussion



One of the Catalyst's Town Hall meetings with residents, January 2020

This discussion hones in on a few things that are striking about characteristics and answers of survey respondents. The dominant condition of housing unaffordability for survey respondents is noticeable. Amongst respondents of the buildings that do not offer rent-geared-to-income, only 18% pay rent that is at or below the housing affordability threshold of 30% of their income. The average rent level for these tenant households is \$1328 per month.

Also notable is that the majority of respondents (64%) live alone. More than half of respondents have frequent conversations with their neighbours and 41% make these connections less often. A nearly equal share of respondents know 1-2 of their neighbours well enough to ask for help when needed (38%), compared to those who do not (40%). One third of respondents (35%) report having 1-3 close friends, compared to 26% who report having no close friends. All of these indicators of the quantity of social connections show that numerous residents are socially connected while a significant minority are facing social isolation.

Although lack of social connections between neighbours is prevalent, half of respondents reported that they are willing to get to know their neighbours better. This is very hopeful for the prospect of building social connections among neighbours. On the other hand, one quarter are not willing to develop further relationships with their neighbours. The results also indicate that those who are newer (less than 4 years) in their building had 3.5 times higher odds of being willing to get to know their neighbours better. This observation shows the potential and appetite among newcomer and other residents to forge further connections with neighbours. More remains to be discovered about the characteristics that make some people ready to be better neighbours, and others, less so. Clearly, an opportunity exists for housing providers and their partners to prioritize facilitating new neighbourly connections for residents in a timely way after they move in.

Nearly a third of respondents (30%) feel lonely some of the time or more often. 16% of respondents report not having close relationships that provide them with a sense of emotional security and well-being. These results reveal that loneliness is a concern for a sizeable minority of residents. The crosstabulation results also show that those who have less frequent conversations with their neighbors (2-3 times per month or less) have 2.2 times higher odds of loneliness, compared to those who talk with their neighbours every day to a few times per week.

Nearly half of respondents (45%) report that residents in their building take care of one another, compared to 12% who disagree or strongly disagree with this. Three-quarters (74%) of respondents feel welcome and like they belong in their community, whereas 8% disagree or strongly disagree with this. The fact that we did not find a significant relationship between sense of belonging and length of tenure in the building was surprising and merits further research.

Overall, HNC results for self-rated mental health and wellness show that 44% of respondents reported excellent/very good mental health/general health and wellness and 23% reported these conditions as fair or poor. This result is comparable to results reported by Statistics Canada for Canada as a whole in a survey of mental health conducted between April and May 2020. These results indicate a significant decline in mental health and wellness compared to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2018, when 68% reported excellent/very good mental health conditions and only 8% reported these conditions as fair or poor (Statistics Canada, 2020a). One of our surveys asked specifically about mental health conditions currently compared to pre-pandemic; 37% reported worsening conditions.

Also, crosstabulated results show that social isolation indicators such as a small number of close friends correlate with lower self-reported wellness, mental health and happiness of respondents. Those with fewer close friends had higher odds of reporting poor or fair mental health and wellness conditions and feeling unhappy or very unhappy, compared to those with more close friends. Similarly, respondents with more close friends had higher odds of reporting their wellness conditions as excellent or very good and reported being very happy or happy.

About one-third of respondents (30%) reported that their employment has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than one quarter experienced food insecurity during this time, especially in terms of accessing a variety of healthy food. Respondents also reported changes in their sense of community and safety since the introduction of social distancing measures during the pandemic. Although the majority (an average of 67%) reported no change in these conditions, 15% said their safety from COVID-19 and from theft/violence has declined.

While 26% reported improvements in their safety from contracting COVID-19, only 5% said their safety from theft or violence had improved. The change in feelings of safety from theft or violence reported by survey participants is comparable to the results of the [May 2020 Canada-wide survey on perceptions of crime and personal safety during COVID-19](#) which asked Canadians about perceived changes in neighbourhood crime since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those results showed that participants in British Columbia (24%) were the most likely to feel that crime in their neighbourhood had increased since the pandemic, well above the national average of 11% (Statistics Canada, 2020b).

Limitations and directions for further research:

This report presents the results of a first wave of survey research. The conclusions we can draw from this initial wave are limited, but they do lay the groundwork and set a constructive tone for analysis of future waves of research into topics of neighbourliness and social connections within the Hey Neighbour Collective.

In order to meet the specific needs of each housing provider, this study employed three surveys with a few congruent and similar questions. This limited our potential to integrate results across all questions asked. Also, some similar questions that intended to report on the same indicators (e.g., number of close friends) were phrased differently in different questionnaires, which impacted the responses received. Therefore, we recommend further efforts to standardize the phrasing of survey research questions. In time, this standardization will assist the work of the Hey Neighbour Collective to: 1) test findings on these questions with a larger population, 2) enhance the validity and reliability of the results of research into the status and trends of sociability and neighbourliness in multi-unit residential buildings, and 3) enable more in-depth cross-variant analysis of results across different dimensions of difference within the survey responses.

In addition, we acknowledge the limitations inherent to survey research when the objective is to examine and understand well-being. More in-depth, qualitative engagement with tenants is necessary in order to complete the picture of sociability, neighbourliness, well-being and safety and related concepts, which are presented here briefly as aggregate survey responses.

Numerous of our partners have taken on this more deeply engaged work in a variety of ways. Our efforts to engage residents in telling their stories of social isolation and connections in their home communities during the COVID-19 pandemic via photovoice is also a case in point ([Hey Neighbour Collective, 2021](#)). Much more work like this is needed.

5. Conclusion

Social quality of life is an important aspect of well-being. Exploring the dimensions of importance in the living context of high-density rental housing is needed for better evaluation and stronger steps in policy development, interventions, and programming to improve the social lives of urban dwellers. This survey work represents an initial effort by HNC to bring together multi-unit housing and service providers in BC and coordinate the implementation and analysis of a resident survey that collects direct inputs from people living in this type of housing. This report provided a detailed description of the participating organizations, their buildings, the methodology employed to develop this research, and presented the results of the survey implemented in 2020 and early 2021. The questions presented in this report asked residents to report on their state of social isolation, social connection, loneliness, sense of belonging, health and wellness, and the impacts of COVID-19 on different aspects of their lives at home.

Survey results demonstrate that the large majority of these tenants are living in unaffordable situations and that most are also living alone. About a third of respondents has a good quantity of social connections at home, but nearly equal numbers lack these. Three quarters of respondents feel a sense of welcome and belonging in their building, but 40% do not know any of their neighbours well enough to ask for help when needed. More than half never or hardly ever feel lonely, but a third of respondents feel lonely at least some of the time. About half of respondents are willing to get to know their neighbours better, but about a quarter of respondents are not interested. Also, social isolation and connection indicators and quantity of relationships such as number of close friends and frequency of conversations with neighbours were correlated with resident social and mental well-being. Accordingly, those with more close friends were more likely to be happy and to report better health and wellness conditions. Those who had less frequent conversations with their neighbours had higher odds of feeling lonely.

We find that mental health has suffered since pre-pandemic times. Although the perceived safety from theft, violence and COVID-19 has remained mostly unchanged for respondents since the start of the pandemic, 15% reported these conditions have gotten worse. When comparing the percentage of respondents reporting worsening conditions compared to those reporting improvements, there was a decline in perceived safety from theft or violence and only 5% reported improvements.

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