

Social Development Plan

What We Heard

REPORT



Social Infrastructure & Community Investments Department | December 2024



The City of Surrey respectfully acknowledges the traditional, unceded territories of Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, and Tsawwassen First Nations who have cared for these lands since time immemorial.

Acknowledgements

The contents of this What We Heard Report are only made possible through collaboration and dialogue with the community. We are grateful to the [Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition](#) (the advisory group for the Social Development Plan) as well as the community ambassadors who supported the engagement process (see details in How We Engaged [page 3](#)).

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Introduction

The City of Surrey Social Development Plan (Plan) will be a five-year plan, guided by a vision that **all Surrey residents have equitable opportunity to thrive**. It will provide strategic direction for the City's Housing and Social Development Division.

The purpose of the Plan is to:

- > Address and improve the social conditions impacting residents and communities in Surrey
- > Identify current social development priorities for the City of Surrey
- > Identify strategies and actions for the Housing and Social Development Division to implement over the next five years (2025-2029)
- > Clarify the role of the City of Surrey, in partnership and collaboration with community groups, social service organizations and other levels of government with respect to addressing social issues
- > Replace the current *2006 Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents*

About this Report

As a first step toward developing the Plan, the City of Surrey embarked on an engagement process between October 2023 to January 2024. The purpose of engagement was to hear directly from the Surrey community about what they consider are key social issues impacting the community. There was also an interest in understanding what spaces, services, programs or other supports are working well, as well as what could make a positive change and make things better.

This What We Heard Report shares community feedback and is structured as follows:

- > How we engaged
- > Who we heard from
- > What we heard by topic area including:
 - What is important about this topic
 - What is working well
 - What could make a positive change/make things better

Embedding an Equity Lens

The Social Development Plan is embedding equity in both the process (how the plan is created) and outcome (the final plan itself). Intersectional identities and contexts being considered include:

- Ability
- Age
- Gender identity
- Geography
- Household income
- Housing tenure
- Immigrant status
- Indigeneity
- Race and ethnic origin
- Refugee status
- Sexual orientation

The City of Surrey's Definition of Equity

To provide context to equity as it relates to this report and the Social Development Plan, the following definition of equity has been applied:

Equity is different from equality. Equality means treating everyone the same. Equity means considering everyone's different needs, experiences and obstacles.

In Surrey, equity is demonstrated through policies, programs and services that are fair, just and address systemic barriers so that all people can access the opportunities and resources they need to thrive.

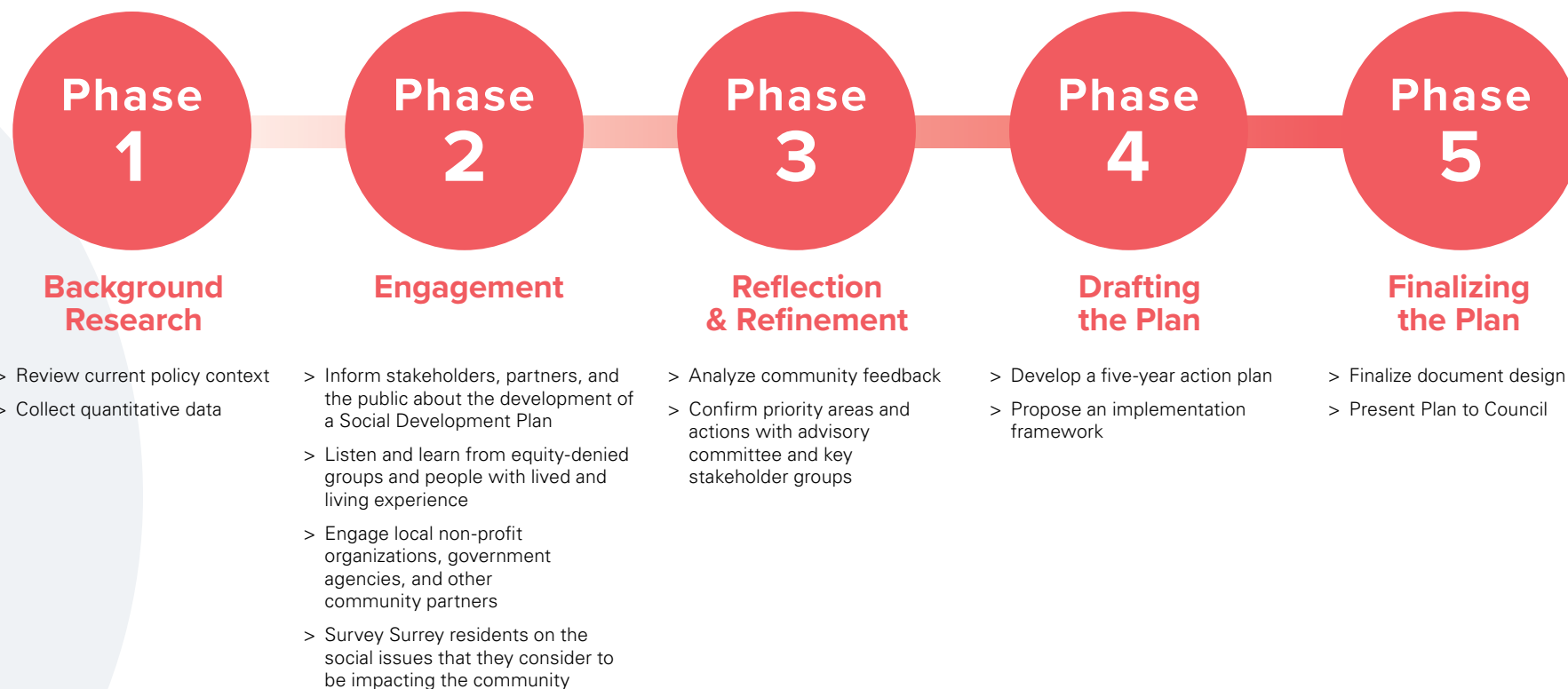


How We Engaged



Plan Development Process

Engagement is phase two of the Plan development process.



Engagement Activities

The engagement process used a series of different activities including an online survey, community ambassadors and in-person workshops. Each activity follows a similar set of engagement questions seeking community members' perspectives on a set of social issues pre-determined by the City of Surrey.

Survey

A survey was developed with engagement questions to understand the public's perception of social issues, level of importance of each topic, what is working well to address these social issues, and what could be done to improve efforts to address these social issues. The survey also included demographic questions to understand what population groups were providing input and whose perspectives may be missing. The intention was to create an easy to complete survey while gathering useful data to inform the Plan. The engagement questions were:

1. How important, on a scale of "very important" to "not at all important," are each of the following social topics: Accessibility, Belonging & Social Connectedness, Childcare, Food, Homelessness, Housing Affordability, Immigration, Settlement, & Integration, Mental Health, Poverty, Safety & Security, Substance Use & Addictions, Other?
 - Very important
 - Important
 - Neutral
 - Less important
 - Not at all important
 - Don't know
2. Which social topics should the City take immediate action on (select up to three)?
 - a. What specifically about this social priority is important? "(Why did you choose this social priority?)
 - b. What spaces, services, programs or other supports are working well?
 - c. What could make a positive change / make things better?
3. Optional demographic questions

Survey Distribution

Community members were invited to participate in the survey in the following ways:

Method	Description	Participants
CitySpeaks	CitySpeaks is the City’s online consultation system that sends surveys to a panel of pre-registered community members	1,075 (48% of total participants)
Community Ambassadors <i>(Learn more about the activity on the next page)</i>	Community Ambassadors distributed surveys within their networks, focusing outreach on demographics underrepresented through typical surveys and engagement methods, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 2SLGBTQIA+ people > Low-income individuals and families > Newcomers > People with disabilities > Racialized people 	722 (32%)
Community Partners	City staff presented to the following groups, who then shared the survey with their networks: Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition, Surrey Community Child Care Task Force, Surrey Age Friendly Network, Surrey Accessibility Leadership Team, Surrey Community Action Table, Surrey School District, Healthier Communities Partnership	259 (11%)
Youth Speak Up Forum	The survey was distributed to youth (between 13-18 years of age) that attended the City of Surrey’s Youth Speak Up Forum	108 (5%)
Website	The survey was linked on the City of Surrey Social Development webpage	58 (3%)
Community Pop-Ups	Pop-up events where community members could speak with City staff and complete the survey at a kiosk were held at five library location throughout Surrey: Guildford, City Centre, Newton, Cloverdale, and South Surrey	18 (1%)
Total participants		2,240

About the Community Ambassadors program

Community Ambassadors was an activity designed to engage residents who are often underrepresented in typical engagement approaches including but not limited to:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ people
- Low-income individuals and families
- Newcomers
- People with disabilities
- Racialized people

Thirteen Community Ambassadors were recruited, trained and supported to distribute the survey among their networks across Surrey. This included providing translation services, reaching community members through informal and online communication platforms, presenting or sharing information at community gatherings, and assisting those who faced barriers to participation, such as literacy, language or access to technology. The Community Ambassadors people have helped make our insights more rich, intersectional and reflective of Surrey's diverse community.



A GROUP PHOTO WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM.

Workshops and Conversations

Topic specific small group discussions were facilitated to get a deeper understanding of the following questions.

- a. What specifically about this social priority is important?
- b. What spaces, services, programs, or other supports are working well?
- c. What could make a positive change / make things better?

Topics discussed were selected by each community group.

Gathering	Description	Topics Covered	Participants
Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition Community Forum	Community members from across the social service sector in Surrey representing non-profit organizations, educational institutions, Fraser Health and government agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Belonging & Social Connectedness > Food > Mental Health > Poverty > Racism & Discrimination > Substance Use 	65
Youth Speak Up Forum	Youth age 13 – 18 years that attended the City of Surrey’s Youth Speak Up Forum participated in sessions facilitated by Surrey’s Leadership Youth Council and the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership’s Surrey Youth Newcomer Council .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Belonging & Social Connectedness > Discrimination > Mental health > Poverty > Substance use 	108
Seeds of Change and Black, African, Caribbean Advisory Committee Meetings	Seeds of Change Surrey is a collective impact initiative formed in 2015 to focus on food security issues in Surrey. The Seeds of Change network works toward addressing and challenging the systematic inequalities that exist in the food system. Members of the Seeds of Change and the Black, African and Caribbean Advisory Committee convened online and provided feedback on the topic of food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Food 	15
Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee Guide Group session	The Skookum Surrey Guide Group is an intergenerational group of urban Indigenous people in the City of Surrey that helps to inform the advocacy work of Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Accessibility > Belonging & Social Connectedness > Childcare > Food 	20
Black, African, Caribbean Advisory Committee	The Black, African, Caribbean Advisory Committee (BAC) members convened in person for a workshop facilitated by Fraser Health BAC member staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Belonging & Social Connectedness > Homelessness > Housing Affordability > Immigration, Settlement, & Integration > Poverty 	25
Total participants			233

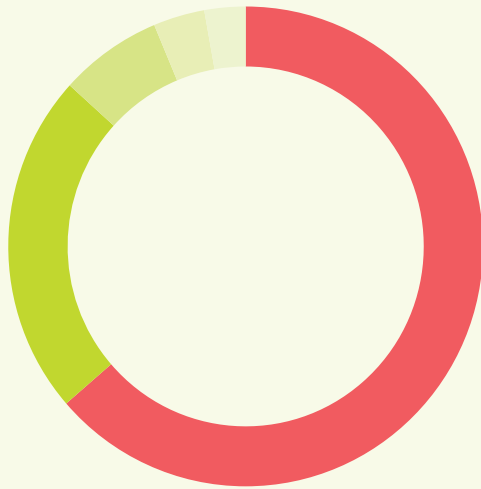
Who We Heard From

Survey respondents were asked a series of demographic questions to help understand who the City is hearing from in community. This information is important to help the City understand whose voices are being heard and who might be missing from the conversation. Comparisons to Census 2021 data is included where demographics are significantly different from the census information.



Connections to Surrey*

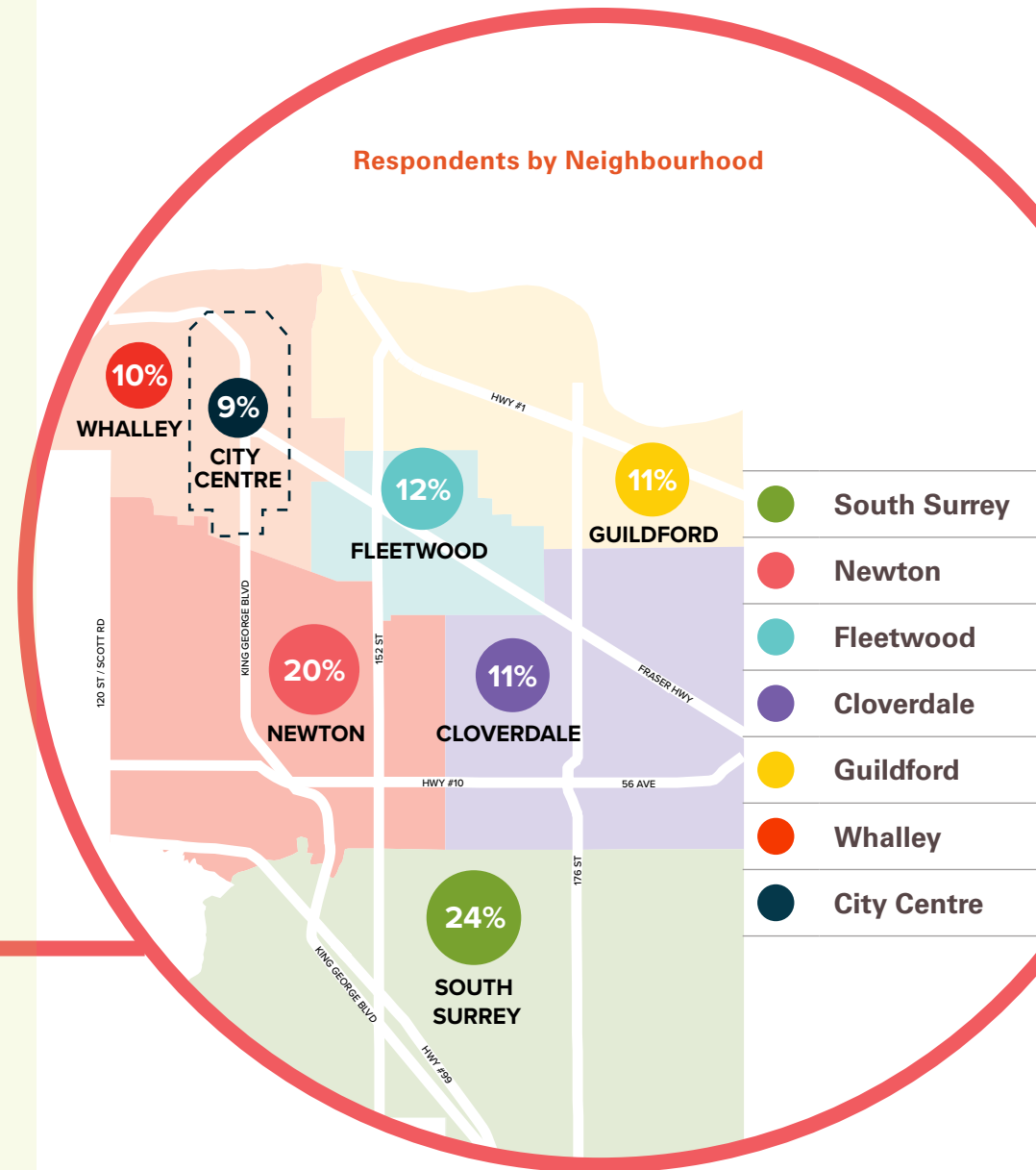
Survey respondents were asked about their connections to Surrey. Most respondents indicated that they either lived in Surrey (91% and/or work in Surrey (33%), and/or go to school in Surrey (10%).



● I live in Surrey	91%
● I work in Surrey	33%
● I go to school in Surrey	10%
● I own a business in Surrey	5%
● Other	4%

* People were able to select all responses that apply to them.

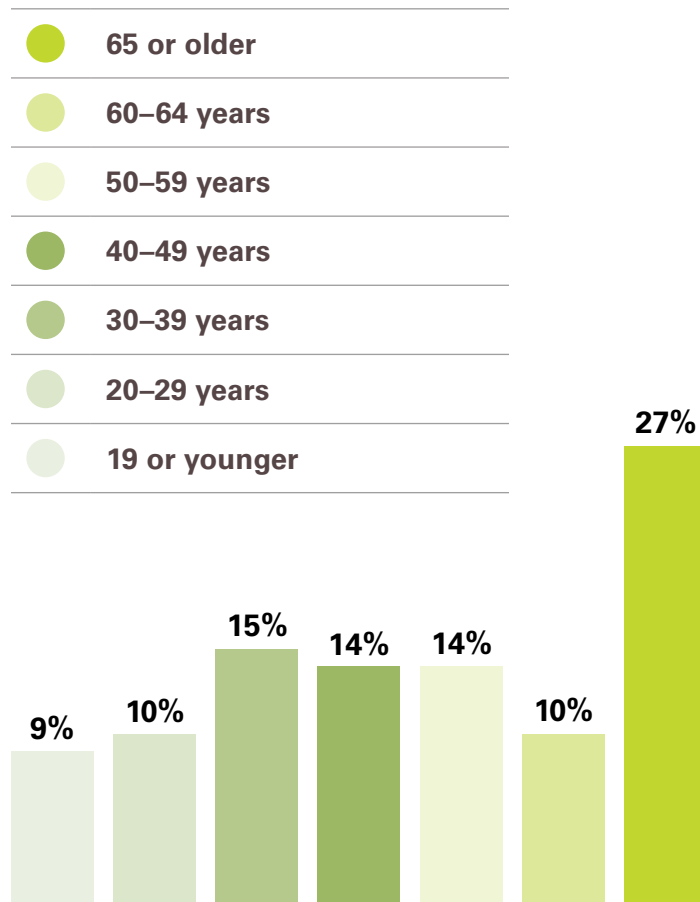
Respondents by Neighbourhood



Engagement participants closely resemble Census 2021 data on residential location by neighbourhood with the exception of South Surrey (8% above Census 2021 data) and Newton (8% below Census 2021 data).

Age

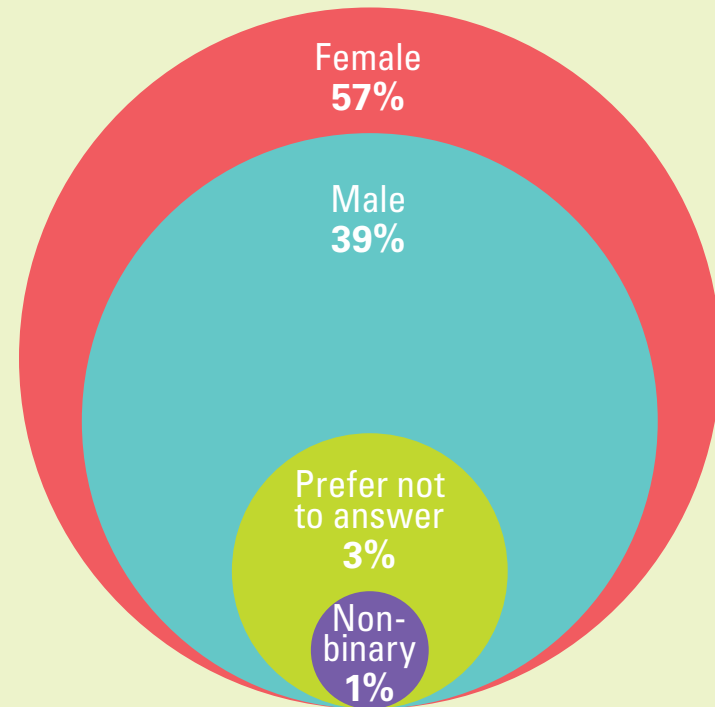
The largest age group that participated in the engagement process were people 65 years old or older (27%). Age groups 30 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years and 50 to 59 years were evenly engaged at 14–15% respectively.



The engagement process had overrepresentation from people aged 65 or older (12% over Census 2021 data).

Gender Identity

A majority of engagement participants identified as female (57%) with 39% identifying as male and 1% identifying as non-binary.

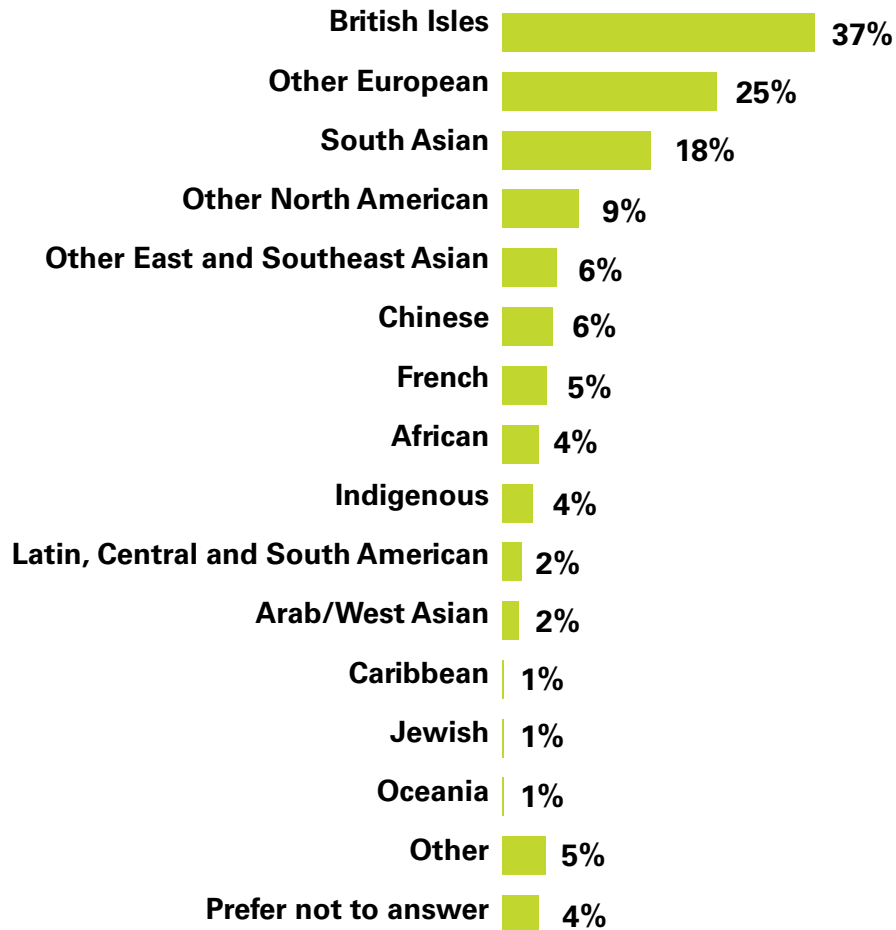


The gender distribution does not align with Census 2021 gender distribution where the women+¹ are 49.7% of the population and men+ are 50.3% of the population.

¹ Statistics Canada has updated their [reporting guidelines for gender](#). Women+ and men+ now include respondents that identify as transgender women and transgender men.

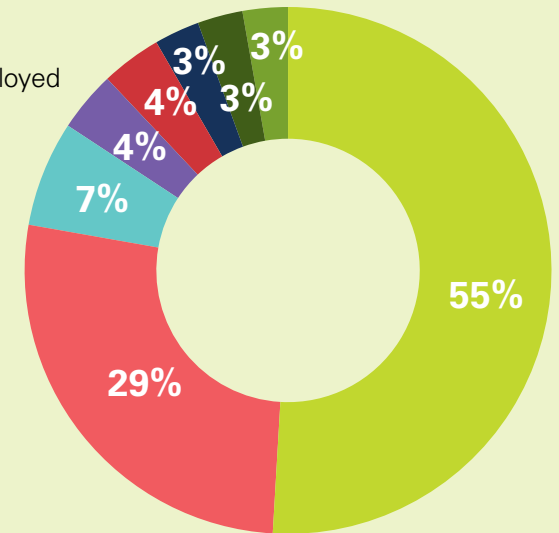
Ethnic and Cultural Origins²

A majority of respondents identified as from the British Isles (37%) or Other European origins (25%).

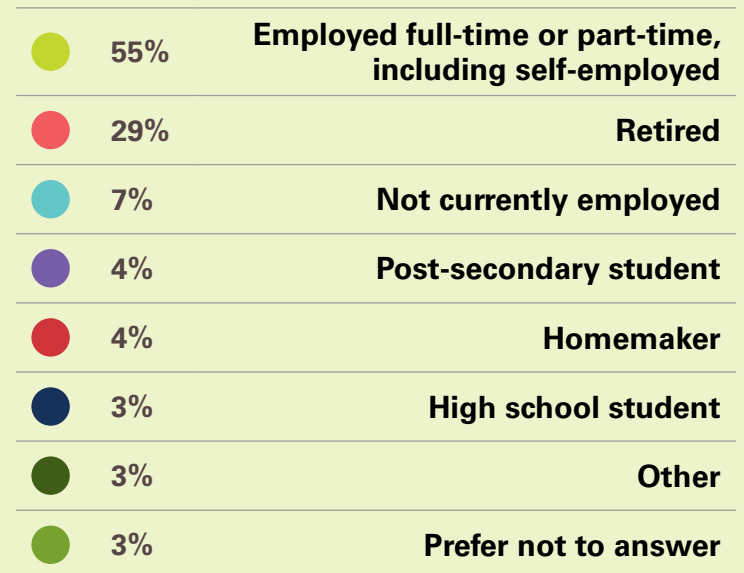


Employment Status

Over half of the respondents indicated that they were employed full-time or part-time (55%). Twenty-nine percent (29%) indicated they were retired, 7% indicated that they were not currently employed, and 7% indicated they were primarily a student.



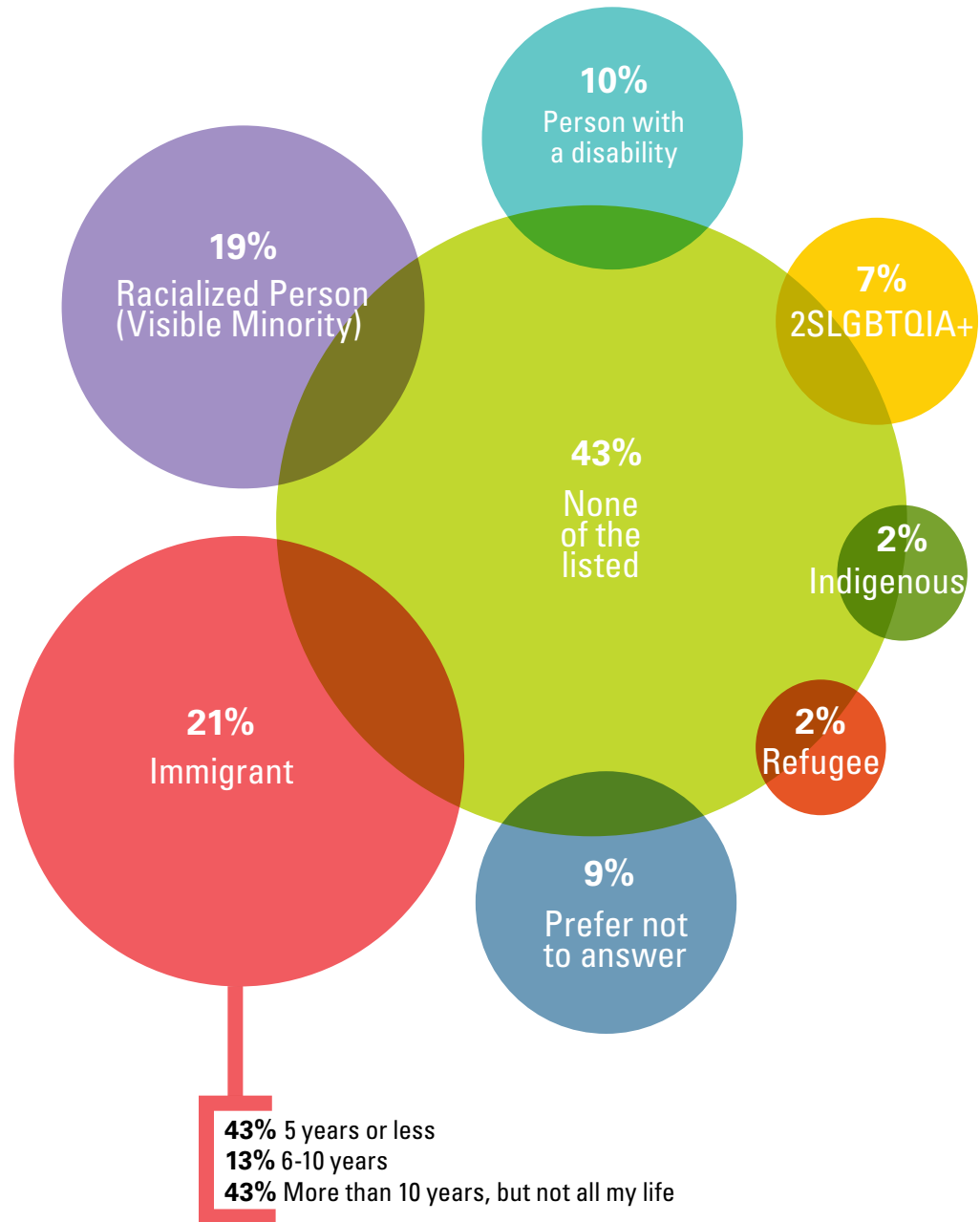
This data is similar to the Census data set on employment status (±5%).



² Cultural and ethnic origins are categorized different in Census data than in the engagement questions for this project. As a result, no comparison is made.

Equity-denied Demographic Groups³

Respondents were asked to indicate if they belong to specific population groups. Over half (57%) belonged to one or more of the groups shared here.⁴

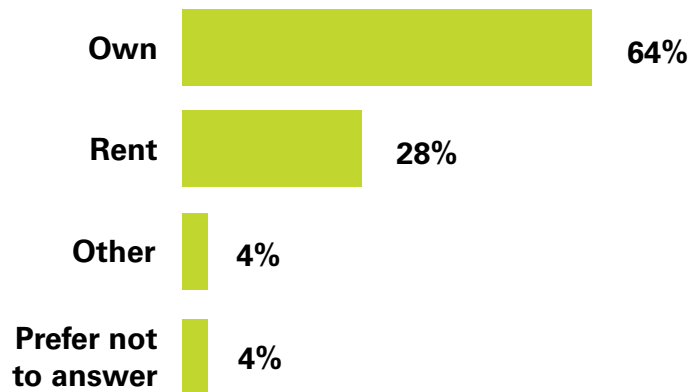


³ When the What We Heard [page 15](#) section refers to equity-denied groups, it refers to these demographic groups: 2SLGBTQIA+ people, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, racialized people, and refugees.

⁴ This is no comparable Census data set to this question so no comparison is made.

Housing Tenure

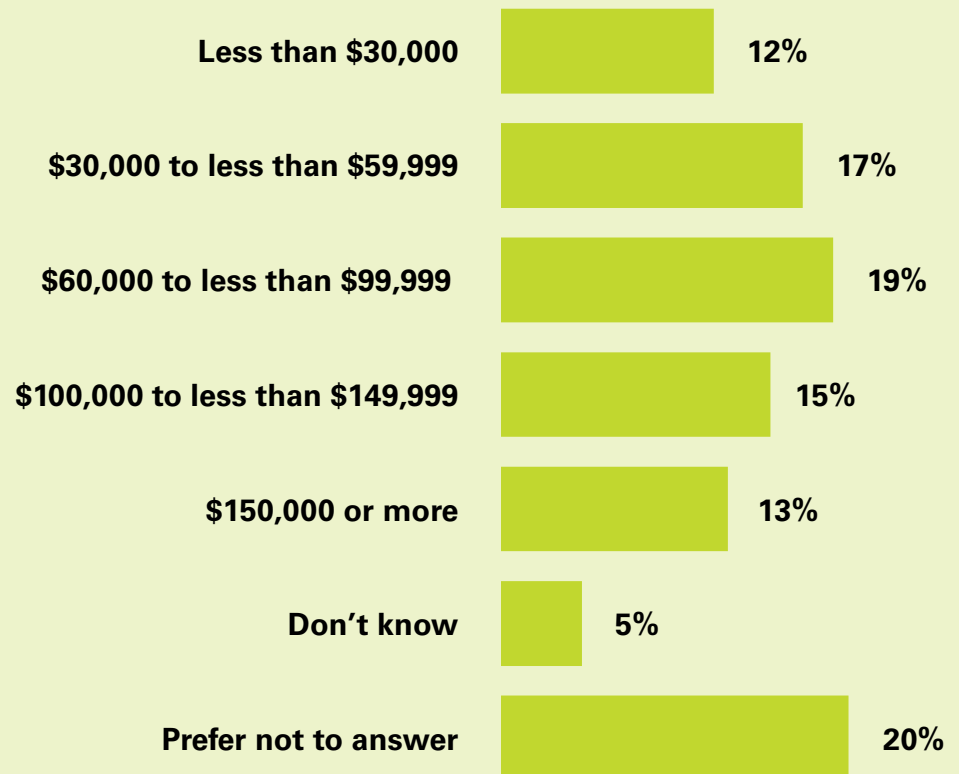
Housing tenure identifies whether a person owns or rents their primary living residence. Sixty-four percent (64%) of engagement respondents own their primary living residence while 28% rent.



This data is similar to the Census data set on housing tenure ($\pm 5\%$).

Household Income Before Tax

Twenty percent (20%) of the engagement participants opted not to disclose their household income. Of those who chose to disclose information, 19% of engagement participants indicated a household income between \$60,000 and \$99,999, 17% indicated they earn between \$30,000 and \$59,999, 15% indicated they earn between \$100,000 and \$149,999, 13% indicated they earn \$150,000 or more, and 12% indicated they earn less than \$30,000.



While a significant percentage of engagement participants did not disclose their household income, when comparing to Census 2021 data, the participant profile underrepresents all three income groups that earn \$60,000 and more (\$60,000 to less than \$99,999, \$100,000 to less than \$149,999, and \$150,000 or more).

What We Heard

Emerging Themes

Ranking Importance

Engagement participants were asked to identify their perceived level of importance and urgency for social topics in Surrey. From all responses, the following social topics rank as the top five.



Top five most important and urgent social topics:



When isolating feedback for specific equity-denied groups⁵, the five most important social topics per group emerged. Housing affordability continues to rank as the most important for all groups. Different from the overall priority setting findings, substance use and addictions, racism and discrimination, and immigration, settlement and integration were additional topic areas highly ranked for specific groups.

Top five social topics per equity-denied group					
People with disabilities	2SLGBTQIA+ people	Indigenous peoples ⁶	Racialized people	Immigrants	Refugees ⁷
Housing affordability	Housing affordability	Housing affordability	Housing and affordability	Housing affordability	Housing affordability
Mental health	Mental health	Homelessness	Safety and security	Safety and security	Food security
Homelessness	Homelessness	Mental health	Homelessness	Homelessness	Immigration, settlement and integration
Food security	Poverty	Poverty	Food security	Food security	Racism and discrimination
Safety and security	Substance use and addictions	Safety and security & substance use and addictions (tied)	Mental health	Mental health	Safety and security

⁵ See Who We Heard From [page 9](#) for more information.

⁶ Caution: Low base (n<35)

⁷ Caution: Low base (n<35)

When analyzing feedback by Surrey community (geographic area), the same five most important priorities emerged. Overall, housing affordability continues to be the top priority in all communities.

Top five social topics by Surrey community						
City Centre	Cloverdale	Fleetwood	Guildford	Newton	South Surrey	Whalley
Housing affordability	Housing affordability	Housing and affordability	Housing affordability	Housing affordability	Housing affordability	Housing affordability
Homelessness	Homelessness	Safety and security	Homelessness	Safety and security	Homelessness	Homelessness
Safety and security	Safety and security	Mental health	Food	Homelessness	Safety and security	Safety and security
Substance use and addictions	Mental health	Homelessness	Safety and security	Mental health	Mental health	Food
Mental health	Substance use and addictions	Food	Substance use and addictions	Food	Substance use and addictions	Mental health

Common themes across topic areas

While engagement participants were asked about several specific social issues, the following themes were heard:

- > Residents’ basic needs are not being met. The cost of living, particularly related to shelter and food, is not affordable relative to income and this disconnect only continues to rise. People shared that the lack of employment opportunities, limited access to skills and job training, a lack of financial literacy, and discrimination against equity-denied groups (such as Black community members and immigrants) are contributing factors to why basic needs not being met.
- > We heard that the following issues are “root” causes leading to compounding social issues:
 - Lack or limited access to appropriate and affordable housing
 - Poverty (including (including lack of access to adequate income and food insecurity)
 - Lack or limited access to mental health and access to health care
- > Social issues are intersectional and perspectives on social issues differ for different demographic groups. This means that actions moving forward need to consider socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions including ethnic origin, gender, disability, race, and sexual orientation.

Who in Surrey is working to address social issues?

We heard that the following groups are working well to address social issues in Surrey:

- > Local non-profit organizations that provide social services, programs and resources.
- > Faith-based organizations and places of worship that provide support related to social issues.
- > Surrey libraries and recreation centres are vital resources for social services and programs. They also provide avenues for youth, families and community members to participate in recreation, arts and culture, and social activities to reduce the prevalence of issues like mental illness, social isolation and exposure to crime.
- > Advocacy and representation through groups like the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee and the Black, African, and Caribbean Committee are helping the City of Surrey and local social service organizations factor lived experience in service and program decisions and design.

Takeaways on process and implementation

- > Community members should continue to be engaged in civic processes and have opportunities to influence on what decisions are made moving forward.
- > People with lived experience should have opportunities to inform and advise on topic-specific actions.
- > Collaboration with local non-profit social service organizations, other government agencies and other key stakeholders is essential to addressing social issues.

What We Heard: Accessibility

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > The design of spaces and places such as sidewalks, buildings, parks including the need to make them wheelchair, walker and stroller friendly
- > Public transportation including availability and options as well as improving service design for increased access (e.g., bus service, transit affordability, HandyDART services)
- > Road infrastructure including issues with traffic, limited parking and desire for dedicated bicycle lanes
- > Access to healthcare services including general practitioners and hospitals

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Ability to access basic amenities and services close to home
- > Consideration for people with non-visible disabilities (e.g., cognitive disabilities)
- > Accessible recreation programs and services (e.g., accessible times, more programs designed for people with disabilities)
- > Reducing financial barriers and supporting economic opportunities (e.g., employment opportunities, responding to needs of people on fixed income)
- > Reducing technological barriers (e.g., internet access, access tools, accessible websites and platforms)

What is working well?

- > Affordable childcare (we heard that childcare can be more affordable – see Childcare [page 23](#))
- > Day programs for people with disabilities and/or seniors
- > Library services and programs (e.g., programs offered in different languages, low-cost resources, location)
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Recreation centres (e.g., availability of an inclusion specialist, location)
- > School programs
- > Skookum Surrey
- > Support from family members
- > Transit options (e.g., buses with ramps, HandyDART, bus tickets)
- > Wide sidewalks, ramps, elevators

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Improve public transportation including expanding bus service areas, increasing rapid transit options, Handydart and school buses, and reducing costs
- > Improve building accessibility including advocating for mandatory accessibility requirements in the BC Building Code, ensuring all areas of schools are accessible, creating wheelchair accessible entrances with wider doors, and increasing ramp and elevator access.
- > Improve access to recreation programs including the removal of the [72-hour registration for City programs](#) and increasing the types and frequency of programs offered
- > Improve built infrastructure including reducing sidewalk obstructions, considering safety for pedestrians, clearer markings for curb drops and increase access and size of accessible parking spaces
- > Improve service navigation by providing information for newcomers and promoting available services and programs
- > Improve safety around construction sites and school zones
- > Increase participation of people with lived experience in planning and decision-making processes including improving outreach to Indigenous communities and increasing access to, and awareness of, City committees



As a Black, disabled, elderly woman with a language barrier, I feel like getting access to resources, transportation, medication, etc. are difficult for me... without the help of my daughter. I hope for a future where I can be independent with the support of my community.



All people have a right to belong and live full lives in their community. This includes physical accessibility, plain language, accessible language, addressing employment barriers, reducing the mindset of ableism.

What We Heard: Belonging & Social Connectedness

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Creating a sense of community including social connections to neighbours and shared activities
- > Addressing division and fostering cross-cultural connections
- > Addressing isolation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic
- > Linkage to racism and discrimination such as preventing discrimination, addressing internalized racism, and addressing the erasure, minimization, or making invisible of Black community members in Surrey

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Increased focus on newcomers integration activities/programming and addressing language barriers
- > Difficult to consider social connections when basic needs are not being met and are unaffordable
- > Public spaces play a role in belonging and connectedness such as shared, low-barrier places
- > Supports health and wellbeing such as having a sense of belonging helps with improved physical and mental health
- > Linkage to safety meaning lack of belonging and socialization can lead to feeling unsafe
- > Addressing how to improve belonging needs taking into consideration the city is large, and populations are spread out

What is working well?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > BC Housing programs > Community and recreation centre services and programs > Free social activities (e.g., Fusion Festival, farmers markets, arts and culture events, community gardening, bingo nights) > Indigenous programs in schools > Neighbour-initiated activities (e.g., block watch, social activities hosted at apartments and condominiums) > Non-profit programs promoting belonging and social connectedness | <p>(e.g., Options Community Services EMPOWER program, Semiahmoo House Society, Cloverdale Community Kitchen meals, BRELLA Community Services Society, UNITI, FRAFCA, Atira Women’s Resource Society, Skookum Surrey, the Legion, United Way)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Places of worship > Public parks (e.g., Kwantlen Park, Hawthorne Park, Bear Creek Park) > Simon Fraser University > Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee |
|--|--|

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increasing affordable and accessible options for community gatherings (i.e., activating public spaces; reducing costs to use community centre spaces and programs; more libraries, community centres and recreation centres; culturally specific spaces such as more Black community/gathering spaces and Indigenous community/gathering spaces)
- > Increase free local community events (e.g., events and activities in all neighbourhoods, community block parties, community farmers markets)
- > Increase affordable and accessible community programming (e.g., support community associations, increase communications and outreach, focus on intercultural programming, subsidize activities for low-income groups)
- > Create complete communities (e.g., walkable neighbourhoods with accessible amenities and communities)
- > Increase the recognition of diverse Black, African, and Caribbean community members (e.g., celebrate Black achievements in Surrey, share cultures including in schools, develop ancestral acknowledgements for public events, meaningfully engage and include Black lived experiences in municipal processes)



Social isolation affects marginalized people and seniors and contributes significantly to both mental and physical wellness.



When someone feels a sense of belonging and social connectedness, there are fewer barriers in their way to obtain services and have their needs met.

What We Heard: **Childcare**

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Affordability such as a need for more \$10 per day childcare facilities and government-subsidized childcare
- > Access (i.e., lack of available spaces, need for more flexible childcare hours, interest for more locations closer to home and places of employment)

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Quality of childcare (i.e., concerns regarding safety and unlicensed childcare, need for culturally-inclusive facilities, importance of learning and socialization)
- > Adequate training for childcare workers and early childhood educators
- > Economic impacts of childcare (i.e., available childcare enables parents, particularly women, to work outside of the home and generate income, and affordable childcare reduces the financial burden on families)

What is working well?

- > Before and after school care including the proximity of afterschool programs
- > Childcare benefits
- > Non-profit childcare providers
- > Recreation centres and library programs
- > Support from family members such as grandparents

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase affordable childcare options (i.e., more non-profit childcare options, advocate for more \$10 per day childcare, City-owned and/or operated childcare facilities)
- > Increase number of available childcare spaces by prioritizing the development of childcare facilities including childcare co-located with workplaces and before and after school care near elementary schools
- > Increase childcare benefits by advocating to other levels of government
- > Quality assurance for childcare spaces



Without high-quality, affordable & accessible not-for-profit early learning and childcare, parents have a hard time working or pursuing education. It is mostly moms who have to sacrifice their careers to stay home. Society is losing out.

What We Heard: Food

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Affordability meaning that food prices are too high
- > Access to nutritious food, consideration of diverse dietary needs, culturally appropriate and culturally preferred foods, and location and proximity of grocery stores
- > Food banks are in high demand, and the need for culturally appropriate food options, destigmatize need/use, and food programming
- > Local food production including interest in community gardens sustainable practices

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Relationship to health and wellbeing (i.e., nutritious food is essential for mental and physical health)
- > Addressing food waste
- > School food programs (i.e., the need for dignified and destigmatized approach to food programming)
- > Tiered food system (i.e., systems that introduce different ways to access food sources outside of the conventional grocery store)

What is working well?

- > Coupons and discounts at grocery stores
- > Education programs (we heard more is needed)
- > Employment in the food industry leading to access to food discounts / incentives though employers
- > Food banks
- > Information on where to access food support (e.g., City of Surrey's COSMOS maps, 2-1-1)
- > Local advocacy groups
- > Local food production
- > Local-based grocers and pantries such as affordable harvest boxes and community supported agriculture
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Partnerships between the business community and non-profit organizations such as food donations or financial support
- > School programs
- > Support from family members and friends
- > Supports from faith-based organizations
- > Too Good To Go app that provides discounted food options at local restaurants

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > A municipal Food Strategy or Food Charter to provide a systems-level approach for food production and to address food insecurity
- > Recognizing food is a human right (food is a fundamental need)
- > Reduce food waste including working with local retailers to donate near expiry or nonaesthetic foods
- > Increase access to affordable food including supporting:
 - non-profit grocery stores, new food banks, new community kitchens/fridges
 - support culturally preferred/appropriate food programming
 - school-based food programs for low-income families, universal school meal program
 - facilitate grocery vouchers or gift cards for low-income families
 - grocery price control advocacy
 - destigmatizing accessing food supports
 - fruit trees in public spaces
- > Support local sustainable food production including encouraging community farms or small-scale urban farms, expanded local farmers markets, promote local food production, preserve agricultural land reserve lands, job training for sustainable agriculture
- > Increase opportunities to garden including supporting the development of more community gardens, supporting the development of spaces to grow culturally significant plants, supporting a seed distribution / free seed library
- > Increase food and gardening awareness and education including supporting school-based gardening education programs for children, providing small-space gardening workshops, supporting knowledge sharing for Indigenous cultural food harvesting and preservation practices
- > Increase capacity for food security initiatives in Surrey including supporting the development of neighbourhood food security programs; involving collaboration with citizens and non-profit providers; supporting Seeds of Change; supporting the Black, African, and Caribbean Committee; supporting food security research and data collection



Every time I shop, I'm horrified at how much prices have gone up, even in the past month. As a senior my income will never go up as much as it needs to.



People can't afford to eat; our local food bank is overwhelmed and can't keep up with demand; this leads to fear and extreme anxiety--produces mental health concerns.

What We Heard: Homelessness

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Housing as a human right (everyone deserves a place to live, housing is a basic fundamental need)
- > Increasing prevalence in the community (i.e., more people are impacted or at risk, homelessness is more visible than before)
- > Improving access to homelessness services

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Relationship to employment (it is difficult to maintain a job without housing)
- > Relationship to substance use and addictions
- > Relationship to feeling of safety (homelessness is connected to increase of crime, negative impacts on businesses, reducing the appeal of public spaces)
- > Increase of housing supply is needed
- > Relationship to general high cost of living
- > Relationship to mental health and wellbeing

What is working well?

- > Affordable housing options (we heard some change is needed)
- > Food banks (we heard some change is needed – see Food [page 25](#))
- > Libraries, recreation centres, parks
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Outreach services and programs including the City's Street Smart program
- > Overdose prevention sites including harm reduction supplies (we heard some change is needed – see Substance Use & Addictions [page 41](#))
- > Police response (we heard some change is needed – see Safety & Security [page 39](#))
- > Shelters
- > Supports from faith-based organizations
- > Treatment/supportive recovery facilities that currently exist for mental health, substance use, detox and the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Program

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase affordable housing including implementing inclusionary zoning, incentivizing affordable rental housing developments, supporting the development of non-profit and co-op housing, advocacy to other levels of government on rent control, supporting “Housing First” initiatives, exploring creative housing solutions, improving housing development processes
- > Increase supportive and transitional housing including supporting the development of supportive housing with integrated health and employment supports and transition housing
- > Increase funding and prioritization by allocating more of the municipal budget to address homelessness, advocating to other levels of government for more funding, developing a strategic plan for homelessness, supporting the revival of the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, focusing on preventative measures including for youth, and supporting local non-profit organizations
- > Improve access to housing and services including increasing family support programs, improving system navigation and information sharing, including for newcomers, supporting anti-racism training for housing and service organizations, and increasing support for students looking for housing
- > Increase mental health and recovery supports including advocating for more low-barrier mental health services, advocating for youth mental health services, and supporting the development of supportive recovery / treatment facilities
- > Increase employment opportunities and income including supporting employment support and training programs, supporting job entry level job creation, and advocating for an increase in people with disabilities (PWD) and Old Age Security (OAS) support
- > Increase shelter spaces including supporting the development of new shelter spaces in all Surrey communities, supporting warming and cooling centres, and using civic facilities as emergency shelter spaces
- > Increase awareness and education including fostering compassion and empathy, supporting education about complex trauma, and addressing NIMBYism⁸.
- > Improve collaboration including working collaboratively with all levels of government, supporting non-profit collaboration, learning from successful initiatives elsewhere, and meaningfully engaging people with lived and living experience to understand their perspectives and respect their expertise



“ Without housing, it is nearly impossible to work, get an education, care for one’s own health.

“ Shelter is a basic need and the homeless, no matter how they ended up in their situation, are often stigmatized or discriminated against.

⁸[Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#) defines NIMBYism as: Opposition to the locating of something considered undesirable in one’s neighborhood.

What We Heard: Housing Affordability

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Affordability including that rental costs are increasing, housing is a cost burden, and mortgage interest rates are high
- > Displacement including that people are not able to rent or buy in Surrey, limited housing options lead to people getting evicted from housing situations or relocating away from Surrey and young people unable to afford rent or mortgage in Surrey
- > Housing supply, particularly the need for increased diversity of housing options including “Missing Middle” housing referring to housing stock such as townhomes, duplexes, row houses and mid-/low-rise apartments.

- > Issues with landlords (e.g. poor rental conditions, illegal suites, evictions)
- > Housing is a human right, everyone deserves a place to live

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Homelessness prevention and addressing root cause of housing insecurity
- > Inequities and intersectionality such as meeting the needs specific to racialized communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members
- > Housing programs and supports for newcomers

What is working well?

- > Affordable childcare
- > Affordable housing options
- > Community Living BC
- > Education supports and skills training programs
- > Family and community supports
- > Increased attention to building more housing
- > Libraries, parks
- > Non-profit programs and initiatives
- > Rental control and rent subsidies
- > Shelters
- > Supports from faith-based organizations

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increased affordable housing including prioritizing affordable, subsidized housing developments, co-op housing development, co-housing developments, supporting purpose-built rental developments through incentives and regulations, supporting creative housing solutions like “tiny homes” and micro-suites, leveraging City-owned lands for affordable housing developments, waiving Development Cost Charges for non-profit housing developments, advocating for greater rent subsidies to other government agencies
- > Improved zoning regulations by introducing inclusionary zoning, requiring minimum percentages of new units to be affordable rental housing, increasing zoning bylaw flexibility for greater density and encouraging secondary suites and coach houses, updating zoning bylaws to support flexible multi-family homes
- > Accelerate development processes by improving the processes related to development proposals, development permits, and building permits as well as exploring specific instances for expedited approvals
- > Increase collaboration with other government agencies for increased social housing in Surrey as well as supporting non-profit housing providers
- > Increase education and awareness about housing affordability issues in the city and enable diversity and inclusion resources and supports
- > Increase equity by better identifying, understanding and meeting the housing needs of equity-denied groups including intergenerational households, people living with disabilities, single-parent households and other socio-cultural considerations
- > Increase tenant protections including advocating to other government agencies on rental control between tenancies and exploring landlord licensing requirements for greater oversight and accountability
- > Reduce financialization of housing including restricting foreign buyers, tax absentee owners, advocacy to other government agencies to increase taxes for investors and companies with significant property holdings, restrict short term rentals, and prevent real estate purchases for investment purposes



Housing is a basic need, not a luxury, at this point people that have lived and work in Surrey for years are being priced out.



The lack of housing affordability is a root cause of many of the other issues like mental health, poverty, homelessness, safety and well being.

What We Heard: Immigration, Settlement & Integration

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Access to basic programs and services including improving access and knowledge of available resources including healthcare, housing, and employment options
- > Cultural awareness including ways to learn about cultural customs, norms, Surrey/Canadian systems, and integration considerations for immigrants and international newcomers
- > Addressing discrimination and racism for immigrants from landlords, employers, and neighbours

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Meeting basic needs and addressing high cost of living in Surrey such as housing, food security
- > Improving ways to make community connections
- > Supporting job matching and linking newcomers to employment opportunities
- > Linking newcomers with education opportunities
- > Access to culturally appropriate foods
- > Supports throughout the Permanent Residency process
- > Infrastructure improvements are required to support the City's growth such as increased school facilities, hospital facilities, road capacity, and transportation options

What is working well?

- > Black, African, Caribbean Advisory Committee
- > Cultural events (e.g., Fusion Festival)
- > Libraries
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Recreation and senior's centres
- > Settlement services and programs
- > Surrey First People's Guide for Newcomers

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase access to programs supporting newcomers including developing a Newcomers Hub, an information hotline for new immigrants, more settlement and integration programs and services including translation services, improving communications on available resources, supporting settlement service organizations, and increasing coordination between immigration and settlement organizations
- > Increase employment opportunities for immigrants including providing employment and skills training, advocating for the recognition of international certifications and education
- > Increase affordable housing and childcare for newcomers
- > Support cross cultural understanding, learning and connections
- > Increase understanding of newcomer perspectives and experiences by meaningfully engaging newcomers in municipal processes



More and more newcomers are settling in Surrey. We need to be prepared to welcome them and ensure they have access to jobs, education, healthcare and housing.

What We Heard: Mental Health

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Mental health and wellness is a basic need; it's essential for a good quality of life and basic functioning
- > Lack of resources including that existing mental health services and programs are inaccessible and have limited availability
- > Stigma around mental health and accessing supports

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Poor mental health impacts people at individual, family and community levels
- > Mental health issues are increasing and can impact anyone
- > Mental health as a root cause of many other issues like substance use, addictions, social isolation, homelessness, poverty, etc.
- > Culturally competent mental health care
- > The need for treatment facilities and long-term care

What is working well?

- > Child and youth mental health services
- > Counselling services such as personal therapy, group sessions, family counselling, Surrey Drug and Alcohol Clinic counselling (community indicated more is needed)
- > Day programs
- > Doctors and nurse practitioners
- > Drop-in centres
- > Faith-based communities
- > Family and community supports
- > Help line, front line workers and liaisons
- > Homeless outreach programs (e.g. Integrated Homelessness Action Response Team, Assertive Community Treatment, Intensive Case Management Team, Police Mental Health Outreach Team)
- > Affordable and supportive housing for people with mental health challenges
- > Insurance coverage
- > Libraries, parks and outdoor spaces
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Recreation and seniors centres
- > Surrey Mental Health Urgent Care Response Centre, Community Mental Health Centre

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase access to affordable mental health services including advocating to other government agencies for more affordable mental health counsellors, peer support groups, providing more paramedical programs like yoga, meditation and mindfulness classes, providing more mental health options with flexible hours, advocating to the provincial government for counselling to be covered by the Medical Services Plan, supporting the development of a Foundry site in South Surrey
- > Address the shortage of health practitioners, including advocating for and supporting more doctors and mental health nurses
- > Increase institutional care options by working collaboratively with community partners, other levels of government and Fraser Health Authority
- > Improve police response to mental health crises including increasing the [Car 67 program](#), partnering mental health care workers with police officers, and increasing mental health, social and cultural competency for police and bylaw officers
- > Increase early intervention by improving mental health awareness and programming in schools and increasing the number of school counselors
- > Increase education and awareness of mental health issues in the community including implementing mental health public awareness campaigns, hosting community dialogues about mental health, supporting culturally specific training and education for different communities and fostering a culture of compassion
- > Increase access to public spaces and events including increasing recreational and library programming and supporting free community events



This affects all people in every walk of life. Destigmatize the conversation around mental health as it affects us all.



There is an epidemic of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. The Healthcare system is not keeping up with demand, leaving people in dangerous situations.

What We Heard: Poverty

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Basic needs are not being met such as food, shelter, and childcare
- > Poverty is the root cause of other social issues such as substance use, housing, homelessness, mental health, domestic violence, and food security
- > Income precarity meaning that wages do not match cost of living, lack of job opportunities, and disability assistance is lacking

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Youth poverty including lack of considerations for youth aging out of care, generational poverty, and single parents
- > Intersectionality meaning that disproportionate poverty rates for specific demographics
- > Limited and lack of government supports including funding and subsidies

What is working well?

- > Affordable childcare (\$10 per day) (we heard that more is needed – see Childcare [page 23](#))
- > Affordable housing developments (we heard that more is needed – see Housing Affordability [page 29](#))
- > BC Rent bank
- > Black, African and Caribbean community connections with Black farmers, activism, and research projects
- > Community and family support
- > Community integration specialists (Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction)
- > Food banks
- > Government benefits including assistance for people with disabilities and other income supports (we heard that more is needed)
- > Libraries
- > Non-profit organizations
- > School food programs (e.g. backpack buddies, breakfast program)
- > Senior's programs
- > Settlement programs
- > Social housing and shelters (*we heard that more is needed* – see Homelessness [page 27](#))

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase affordable housing including supporting non-profit developers, advocacy to other government agencies of government on rent controls during tenant transitions, support purpose-built rentals, support culturally appropriate housing
- > Increase affordable transportation including providing bus passes for low-income individuals
- > Reduce income precarity including advocacy to other levels of government for universal basic income and increased minimum wage to match “living wage”⁹
- > Increase employment opportunities by supporting employment and training programs, promote equitable hiring practices, support local Black employees facing racism and inequities in the workplace
- > Reduce stigma associated with poverty programs and services
- > Increase affordable food services and options including expanding school programs such as Backpack Buddies or introducing a universal school meal program, supporting local food banks, and supporting culturally appropriate food programs
- > Increase advocacy capacity including advocating for more funding and supports from other levels of government and better understanding of the lived experience of equity-denied groups to provide relevant resources
- > Improve access to health care including supporting more affordable mental health services options
- > Supporting non-profit organizations by funding local non-profits, supporting collaboration and coordination across organizations and overall increased investment in social infrastructure
- > Increase financial literacy including financial literacy for youth
- > Increase affordable child care including supporting the development of non-profit child care facilities

⁹ [Living Wage for Families BC](#) indicate \$25.68 per hour is a livable wage in Metro Vancouver in 2023. Living wage is defined as the hourly pay rate that two working parents with two young children must earn to meet basic expenses like rent, childcare, food, transportation, etc.



We are turning our collective back on the growing number of people, including children, living below the poverty line. Every level of government has a responsibility to act—the divides are very sharp nowadays and this not only hurts those in poverty it harms our community overall.

What We Heard: Racism & Discrimination

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Education and awareness to reduce stigma and increase understanding such as unconscious bias training, and increasing understanding of history and lasting impacts of colonialism
- > Addressing cultural divides and isolation (i.e., public realm lacks inclusion and understanding of diverse perspectives, learning about diverse cultures and encouraging cultural connections, and increased cultural representation)
- > Related to inequities (i.e., lack of equal opportunities, lack of representation, lack of culturally competent supports, and violation of human rights)

- > Takes form in acts of microaggressions, disrespect, bullying, verbal and physical violence, shame, stigmatization

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Racism and discrimination are increasing in prevalence in the community
- > Communities experiencing racism and discrimination feel unsafe in Surrey
- > Related to access issues such as lack or limited access to health services, employment opportunities, and housing opportunities

What is working well?

- > Community and family support
- > Community groups (e.g. faith-based groups, Kenyan community sharing groups, community events)
- > Culturally appropriate services (we heard more is needed)
- > Educational campaigns and racism-free signage
- > Flexible statutory cultural day options at workplaces
- > Friendship centre, recreation centres, libraries
- > Mental health days as recognized sick days
- > Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction Indigenous liaisons
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Surrey school district initiatives including settlement services in schools and zero tolerance for violence policy
- > Surrey Together Against Racism – Community Intervention Program (run by MOSAIC)
- > The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee and Skookum Surrey

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase education and awareness about racism and discrimination including supporting anti-racism curriculum in schools, sharing stories of refugees and newcomers in Surrey, cultural competency, anti-racism, and gender diversity and sexual orientation training for organizations in collaboration with community members, and facilitating open and constructive community dialogues around racism and discrimination
- > Increase funding for Surrey organizations for cultural program and events
- > Increase culturally relevant programming including seniors programs and Black events and spaces
- > Prioritize equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation including developing an anti-racism policy for the municipality, increase diversity in City staff, creating opportunities for marginalized groups in municipal processes, increase transparency in employment processes



All other social topics are stalled if racism and discrimination are allowed to flourish. It's an urgent problem that needs addressing visibly and repeatedly by those in power.



As a visible minority myself, I notice that racism and discrimination happen often. People get hurt.

What We Heard: Safety & Security

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Violent crime meaning that the city feels unsafe due to the presence of guns and reports of physical assaults
- > Property crime such as vandalism and theft
- > Gender-based violence such as women experience verbal and physical harassment and assault
- > Policing meaning that enforcement, response and collaboration with social services is needed

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Presence of homelessness and substance use on streets increase feeling of a lack of safety and security
- > Bullying in schools reduce feelings of safety and security
- > Road and transportation safety meaning that there are concerns for pedestrian safety and feelings of lack of safety while taking public transit
- > Police transition needs to be resolved
- > Surrey's reputation meaning that there is a perception that Surrey is unsafe
- > Safety is foundational for individual and community well-being

What is working well?

- > Avoiding areas that feel unsafe
- > Block watch
- > Building community connections with neighbours
- > Bylaw staff
- > Community policing stations, police patrols (we also heard a change is needed)
- > Fraser Health
- > Infrastructure such as good lighting, walking paths and parks
- > Recreation centres and programs
- > School programs and after school programs

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Change judicial systems including advocating for stricter consequences (including increased consequences for repeat offenders) and prohibiting illicit drugs
- > Improve policing including gang intervention, stricter law enforcement, sensitivity training for police
- > Increase policing including more police staff and increase visibility in community
- > Increase community awareness of what resources and actions are available to improve safety and security, supporting collaboration between communities and safety organizations; provide clear information on how to report domestic violence; provide self-defence education and training
- > Support the development of housing for those experiencing homelessness
- > Improve public transportation including night buses
- > Increase mental health and addictions support
- > Improve infrastructure including lighting in parks, walkways and near public transit; increase bike lane infrastructure (including separated bike lanes); increase and maintain sidewalks and crosswalks; repair roads
- > Increase community safety programs including block watch programs and community policing
- > Increase youth engagement by providing accessible and affordable youth programs and anti-gang programs in schools
- > Resolve the police transition and finalize the police of jurisdiction



I want everyone to feel safe in my community. I don't like to worry about my safety when taking public transit or when I need to go to the grocery store.



As a female with two daughters (16 and 19), I don't feel safe walking alone at night, even in my own neighbourhood. When my eldest has an early shift, my husband gets up to walk her to her car on the street.

What We Heard: Substance Use & Addictions

What is important about this topic?

THEMES WE HEARD MOST:

- > Overdose deaths due to the opioid / toxic drug supply crisis
- > Stigma around getting help and understanding peoples' experiences with substance use and addictions
- > Support (i.e. people need help to overcome addiction)
- > Treatment including lack of access and availability and lack of funding to support treatment services

OTHER THEMES WE HEARD:

- > Disproportionate impacts, and early exposure to young people which then leads to increase vulnerability
- > Lack of overdose prevention including lack of mobile services and lack of safe supply
- > Impacts everyone negatively including individual, family and community levels
- > Linked to safety and security, mental health, housing and homelessness
- > Prevalence of needles including open drug use and safety concerns of having needles on streets

What is working well?

- > Access to harm reduction supplies
- > Community Action Table that includes people with lived and living experience
- > Community and family support
- > Faith-based groups
- > Libraries
- > Local services (e.g. Opioid Agonist Treatment, Overdose Prevention Services, Rapid Access Addiction Clinic at Creekside, Options Home Detox Program, drop-in centres, SafePoint, Street Smart)
- > Mobile supports and outreach
- > Non-profit organizations
- > Peer supports including peer support networks and peer users
- > Substance use and addictions support groups (e.g. Alcoholic Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, 12-step fellowship)
- > Supportive housing (e.g. Complex Care Housing)
- > Surrey Mobilization & Resiliency Table (SMART)

What could make a positive change/make things better?

- > Increase treatment opportunities including advocacy for more affordable, evidence-based treatment programs; increase access to safe, clean, and well-staffed rehabilitation beds and housing; and increase access to detox programs
- > Improve available services including trauma-informed social services; collaborations with mental health services and law enforcement; integration programs that include training and employment services; long term recovery programs with wrap-around supports; peer-led programs (such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous); family-oriented treatment programs
- > Increase safety of consumption including more accessible overdose prevention sites, safe supply programs and free drug testing
- > Increase housing options including supportive housing with integrated health services and transitional supporting recovery housing
- > Increase affordable recreation programs including for low-income youth and families
- > Increase education and awareness including awareness campaigns about prevention and destigmatization; telling stories of those with lived experiences; providing addictions education in schools; and providing clearer information on resources available
- > Increase lived experience engagement in policy and program development
- > Increase mental health supports including affordable counselling services and outreach



Addiction can impact every demographic in our community. On demand services are needed and waitlists need to be non-existent.



Substance use and addictions effects our youth a lot as we're growing up around it and it becomes more and more common.

Next Steps

This report represents the second of five phases to develop the Social Development Plan. The City of Surrey intends to work across departments and with key partners to draft the Plan including identifying priority areas and actions for implementation.



How We Will Use Community Input

The City of Surrey will consider engagement findings included in this report alongside a number of other considerations including parallel research and analysis such as:

- > Alignment with municipal, provincial and federal planning contexts and policies including the Official Community Plan and other City plans and strategies;
- > Identifying opportunities and synergies to address priority areas across municipal departments, ensuring that there is no duplication of effort between City departments; and
- > Identifying opportunities to work with, and support with local social services providers, community, and other government and/or public agencies to address social topics where the City's actions add value to the actions being taken by other partners.

Keep informed about next steps for the project at surrey.ca/socialplan





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