

DATE: May 6, 2021

FILE: 5040-01

TO: Chair and Directors
Regional District Board

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Regional Poverty Assessment and Reduction Preliminary Findings

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Comox Valley Regional District Board on the Poverty Assessment and Reduction project; present public engagement findings and highlight next steps.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is provided for information.

Executive Summary

- The poverty assessment and reduction project is being undertaken as a regional initiative involving each member municipality and the electoral areas. Key partners on the project are the K'ómoks First Nation, the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, the Comox Valley Social Planning Society and the Comox Valley Community Health Network.
- The project is intended to build on the findings of the 2019 Childcare Inventory(ies) and the 2020 Regional Housing Needs Assessment, as well as the ongoing work of myriad social serving community organizations.
- Targeted engagement as well as broad public engagement are central to the project. Surveys, interviews, self-guided discussion groups, and small sharing circles have provided rich qualitative data about the experiences of poverty in the Comox Valley. The summary of engagement to date is attached to this report (Appendix A) and will be detailed in a presentation by our consultant, Urban Matters, at the May 11, 2021 board meeting.
- The final engagement effort is a Game Changers workshop, scheduled for May 19, 2021. The workshop is intended as a report back to project participants and a springboard for next steps in taking action to reduce poverty in the Comox Valley. Invitations have been sent to project participants, service providers, and key individuals involved in the work of poverty reduction in the community.

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Government Partners and Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Village of Cumberland	✓
Town of Comox	✓
City of Courtenay	✓
K'ómoks First Nation	✓
Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness	✓
Comox Valley Community Health Network	✓
Comox Valley Social Planning Society	✓

Attachments: Appendix A – Draft Poverty Assessment and Reduction Engagement Summary



Poverty Reduction Assessment & Strategy

**“What We Heard” – An Engagement
Summary Report**

Comox Valley Regional District

April 2021



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge that this work took place on the unceded traditional territory of the K’òmoks First Nation.

The CVRD and project team would also like to thank the individuals and organizations who shared their experiences and stories that will undoubtedly shape this plan. A special thanks to the community champions on the project steering committee for making introductions and regional connections to service providers and community voices.

WHAT IS A POVERTY REDUCTION ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY?

The regional Poverty Assessment and Reduction Strategy project is a partnership between the City of Courtenay, Comox Valley Regional District, K’ómoks First Nation, Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland, as well as community partners including the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, Comox Valley Community Health Network, and the Comox Valley Social Planning Society.

This project builds upon insights gathered through the Comox Valley Regional Housing Needs Assessment and Comox Valley Child Care Action Plan, as well as efforts of local service providers and organizations.

The engagement feedback collected will help to develop an action plan to reduce poverty in the Comox Valley by 25% over the next four years.

PROJECT PHASES



THE 7 FOCUS AREAS

The following seven Focus Areas, adapted from the province’s [TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), were carefully selected by the CVRD and community partners. The resulting strategy will focus on each of these areas and recommend actions to improve outcomes and reduce poverty across the region.

HOUSING

Access to housing is a basic human right and is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Having secure access to safe, affordable and adequate housing is necessary in supporting individuals to have a healthy standard of living.

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Families experiencing poverty face heightened vulnerabilities as they are unable to access a range of essential services and growth opportunities that are necessary for the healthy development of their family.

LIVEABLE INCOME

Financial empowerment is essential in reducing poverty so that people can access opportunities to earn sustainable livelihoods that are sufficient to meet their basic needs and allow them to participate in society.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Social supports are necessary to empower people who experience poverty to have opportunities to improve their standard of living and break free from cycles of poverty.

FOOD SECURITY

The ability to access a quality diet is essential to a person’s growth and development. People experiencing poverty face food insecurity; a lack of resources may limit secure access to an adequate quality diet to meet their nutritional needs.

SAFE, AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION

People experiencing poverty rely on public transit and active modes of transportation. Access to safe, affordable and reliable transportation provides people the opportunity to remain mobile, meet their essential needs, participate in society and pursue employment opportunities.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

The advancement of socially inclusion and social equity creates free, fair and just access to resources and opportunities for all people to participate in society.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The following is a list of communications and engagement objectives for this project:

- Build broader community awareness of poverty through storytelling from those with lived/living experience to reduce fear, bust myths and increase empathy.
- Ensure broad awareness of, and inclusive participation in, the engagement process as measured through demographics collected during engagement activities.
- Ensure participants are equipped with the information they need to provide informed input and know how their input was used in the decision-making process as measured through input on information needs/gaps and the information/engagement report provided to them.
- Establish and strengthen trusted relationships with stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples, and community members by being accountable and transparent in all communications and interactions as measured through input from stakeholders.
- Build credibility for the project and its findings.

Engagement Opportunities

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES



213
participants

9
participants

13
interviews

COMMUNITY SURVEY

An online community survey was launched on Connect CVRD on January 18, 2021 and was open for three weeks. A total of 216 community members responded to the survey across the Comox Valley Regional District, with most respondents residing in Courtenay. A full survey report and analysis can be found in **Appendix A**.

SHARING CIRCLES

Sharing circles were developed to engage with those who have living or lived experience. The project team conducted two sharing circles with a group of parents and a group of individuals who self identified as being from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Honorariums were provided to those who shared their stories and experiences. All sharing circles were held virtually. Although yet to occur at the time of this report, the project team will report back to each of the groups to ensure that the summary of the information was accurately portrayed and to share how the project has progressed since their first sharing circle.

For each of the sessions, the project team framed the conversation around the challenges and impacts related to each of the seven focus areas for this strategy: Housing, Families, Children and Youth, Liveable Income, Social Supports, Food Security, Safe, Affordable Transportation and Social Inclusion (e.g. access for all ages and abilities). A full list of sharing circle questions can be found in **Appendix C**.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

To dive deeper into the experiences of service providers who work with individuals who may experience poverty, the project team conducted 13 interviews with 14 community representatives. The interview questions were consistent among participants and focused on gaps and opportunities within their respective sectors. A full list of interview questions can be found in **Appendix B**.



SELF-GUIDED TOOL KIT

An online self-guided tool kit was developed to help existing coalitions or groups participate in a self-facilitated session during a regular monthly meeting, for example. These organizations were encouraged to select a minimum of two focus areas to guide their discussion. The questions for each focus area followed a similar framework that aimed to identify barriers and uncover solutions. In total, six self-guided tool kit sessions were conducted with participation from over 30 organizations and 68 participants.

GAME CHANGER WORKSHOP

To be completed in early May 2021, this workshop will bring together key “game changers” within the CVRD for a virtual workshop. Here, the project team will map out key actions to reduce poverty in the region. Information gathered will serve as the basis for defining priority action areas. The gamechangers workshop will touch upon the ideas identified through the Tamarack Institute Gamechangers Approach to Poverty Reduction.

What We Heard

COMMUNITY SURVEY

*The online community survey received 216 responses from across the CVRD with most responses coming from the City of Courtenay. Questions were asked with regards to meeting basic needs, housing, transportation, community and social supports, and food security. All survey questions and results can be found in **Appendix A**.*

DRAFT

SHARING CIRCLES

The online sharing circles provided a forum for engaging with those who have living or lived experience with poverty – and some who work with equity priority groups¹. The project team had the honour of hearing deep, experiential stories with 9 individuals. The two hour, conversation-based sharing circles touched on each of the seven focus areas. Engagement questions focused on the day-to-day experience, challenges and resulting impacts of poverty. The framework for the sharing circle engagement questions can be found in **Appendix C**.

Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
Housing	<p>Low-income, subsidized housing is not available (ie. demand is greater than supply).</p> <p>Affordable housing for families experiencing poverty is not available to provide a space for children to grow and develop in a healthy and safe environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mold and deprecate housing. • Unaffordable housing. • No space for privacy among siblings. • Limited pet- friendly options. <p>Lack of transparency in allocation of low-income social housing. The waitlists are not publicly available and no information is released on how housing is assigned.</p> <p>Newer developments are not affordable and are not oriented to meet family needs.</p>	<p>People experiencing poverty are living in unsafe and unhealthy housing due to lack of affordable options.</p> <p>Lack of suitable housing options for families increase mental health challenges and impacts child wellbeing.</p> <p>Non-binary people who are facing homelessness do not have access to safe shelter options.</p>	<p><i>“Lower income housing is very hard to get into and I have been told its almost unlikely I will get housed. If I don’t have a drug addiction or a disability, I won’t be able to get into the low income housing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Condos are only being built that are one and two bedrooms. That is not helping families who have boys and girls who require their separate space. There hasn’t been any affordable three-bedrooms unit built.</i></p> <p><i>“As my children are growing up there is not enough space for them. There is huge waitlists for three bedrooms and there is nothing in the community.</i></p> <p><i>“The newer developments are not family oriented or affordable. Many of the developments are out of the main areas and with lack of transportation puts people at risk of isolation. The housing out</i></p>

¹ Equity priority groups refers to individuals and populations who are collectively being under-served, mis-served or disadvantaged by policies, procedures and programs. These groups face barriers that impact their ability to participate in a society equally.

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Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
	<p>Lack of safe housing options for queer people 2SLGBTQIA+, particularly in shelters and long-term residential care facilities.</p>		<p><i>of town is often run down and people don't want to challenge landlords because they don't have any other options.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is mold in all the buildings but we have nowhere else to go. If we go anywhere else we are treated like scum.”</i></p> <p><i>“People have to go towards unsafe areas to access housing and even there the prices are being increased.”</i></p> <p><i>“There need to be lot more subsidies attached for working or non-working individuals.”</i></p> <p><i>“Once you get a job, you cannot easily transition to a nicer home because you need time to build a safety net. You can't rely on welfare because in the long-term it cannot help get successful.”</i></p>
<p>Families, Children and Youth</p>	<p>Food Security is a challenge. Families experiencing poverty are unable to provide their children with healthy foods.</p> <p>Families who do not have access to private transportation are unable to access food banks and support services. Families who are not connected to Healthy Families or Family Services food delivery program are also not able to gain access to food banks.</p> <p>Child care is largely out of reach for families experiencing poverty. Mothers with young children who are looking to enter the</p>	<p>The health and wellbeing of families is overall compromised as they struggle to meet the needs of their families.</p> <p>1. Mothers noted having compromised mental health that impacts their relationships with their children and creates continuous household stress.</p>	<p><i>“I am getting insomnia as I wake up at 2 am. I get grouchy and I get snappy with my children. It makes you stressed out about money and will my job going to come back? What happens if I get sick? How will I afford to stay home for two weeks? Who will look after my children?”</i></p> <p><i>“The children are not able to get outside and have social connections.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is hard to establish a trustful social bubble given COVID and have someone whom you can bring into your home.”</i></p>

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	<p>workforce face barriers to their entry because there are no affordable, safe child care options available.</p> <p>The child care subsidy allowance does not cover the limited child care options available in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families need employment to cover the cost of child care but they cannot participate in employment or access educational opportunities if they do not have childcare. Families using child care subsidies are unable to find care for children with special needs. <p>Lack of employment opportunities. Mothers with young children face multiple barriers in participating in stable employment. Meanwhile, there is a shortage of adequate job opportunities for young mothers. Most jobs for women are in the care sector, where wages are low.</p> <p>Housing. Families with low incomes are being compelled to live in inadequate, unaffordable and unsuitable housing that has implications on health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Compromised mental health. Families experiencing poverty have significant mental health challenges and yet they face a lack</p>	<p>Families are constantly living in a fear of losing employment, housing or getting sick.</p> <p>Lack of resources to meet their basic needs leads to mothers having to decide between their household needs and attending to their own health.</p> <p>Lack of child care options and lack of secure, well-paying jobs for women continues to keep families in poverty.</p>	<p><i>“It is hard to find free counselling and they won’t be able to attend to you. Every time you go to a new counsellor and repeating your story. They also won’t offer services unless you are in high need.”</i></p> <p><i>“I know of a mum in my complex who has young children including twins and she doesn’t have the option to be a part of Healthy Families and she does not have a car. She is unable to go to the food bank and hence I pick up items for her from the food bank.”</i></p> <p><i>“As I have to get my car repaired, I had to decide on that as it is essential for my family or do I get my tooth fixed. So I have to live with the pain in my tooth.”</i></p> <p><i>“I moved back to the Valley so that I could have support for child care as I am lucky that my family is able to look after my children while I attend school.”</i></p> <p><i>“As I went through the Pacific Care Directory looking for childcare it was very stressful – there are not available places.”</i></p> <p><i>“My daughter was sent away from two facilities because she was too much energy and they don’t want to look after her for the small amount.”</i></p>

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	<p>available services and supports to meet needs of primary caregivers who are experiencing stressful situations.</p> <p>Accessing higher education is extremely hard for families. There are considerable barriers for people experiencing poverty to be able to access higher education to unlock more employment opportunities. Advanced school is expensive and enrollment in school leads to removal of benefits.</p> <p>Social assistance eligibility is not comprehensive. Families who are still low income but do not meet program eligibility criteria are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of poverty who are unable to meet their basic needs due to high cost of living.</p> <p>Non-binary children face hostility and may be kicked out of their homes when they declare their gender identity. They do not have social supports and services to help them during transitional moments in their lives.</p>		<p><i>“Mental Health conversations can be challenging when children are around and as primary caregiver it can become a challenge in having the safe space to have this conversation.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are too many people and not enough jobs.”</i></p> <p><i>“The jobs that many mothers may want to do are not well paying.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am struggling to put myself through schooling as a single mother to two children so that I can my ticket as a journeyman Electrician. However even with the training there are only four employment opportunities in the community so I may have to move from here, but I moved here so that I could get help from my mum for childcare.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are not enough work from home opportunities available to support mothers to work from home. The resource centers do not have enough opportunities for those.”</i></p> <p><i>“Child care also does not pay enough for young mothers to be able to remain employed and have child care for their own children.”</i></p> <p><i>“In-home child care opportunities are not available as child care is not being allowed in rental units.”</i></p>

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Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
			<p><i>“Now that I am 30 years old and I have an income of \$2000, I don’t qualify for the funding even though I am still low income and though I was in foster care my entire life. I am in the grey areas of the eligibility and I don’t get the support that I need to meet my family’s needs and be able to access opportunities to enhance my lifestyle.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have found it so hard to be able to get to school so that I can get the skills to find secure employment. I went to school and so I lost my benefits. I had to get my car repaired which is critical for me to go to school and get essential supplies for my family. So, my mum had to get a line of credit pay to support me in paying rent.”</i></p>
<p>Food Security</p>	<p>Food security is a challenge for individuals and families experiencing poverty who are unable to access healthy foods.</p> <p>Seasonally, it also becomes a challenge in accessing foods because there is no farmers’ market in the winter. In the summer, the farmers’ market program provides access to fresh fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>Social services agencies are having to carry out deliveries to provide people with food.</p> <p>Families who don’t have access to private transportation are unable to access food banks and support services. Anyone who is</p>	<p>People are facing food insecurity and have poor diets that leads to poor health and development outcomes.</p> <p>The impacts of hunger at a young age are far-reaching into adulthood.</p>	

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	<p>not connected to Healthy Families is also not able to gain access to food banks.</p> <p>Limited hours of food banks restrict working individuals from accessing services.</p> <p>Discrimination towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people creates barriers for people in accessing food supports (sometimes offered by religious organizations).</p>		
<p>Accessible and Affordable Transportation</p>	<p>Lack of transportation connectivity and reliability. There is no bus route near food bank and other services. For families, this becomes a challenge to transport food with their children at their sides.</p> <p>Car maintenance and insurance is unaffordable for families. Some are able to have a car, but cannot afford repairs and maintenance – which reduces an individual’s ability to pay for other needs.</p> <p>Transit system is unsafe. The buses are not reliable and lack of connectivity and safety provisions creates risk of harm towards women, 2SLGBTQIA+, children and seniors.</p> <p>Lack of snow removal in residential areas and inner streets presents barriers for people to remain mobile who do not have a car.</p>	<p>People are unable to access critical supports and services, including doctors and food banks, that are needed to deal with challenges associated with poverty.</p> <p>Lack of transportation options leads to people being unable to meet their needs that impacts their overall health and wellbeing.</p> <p>People are unable to participate easily in social and economic opportunities due to limited availability of public transit options. This a significant</p>	<p><i>“As a young woman with children, there are people who feel no hesitation to approach women and this makes me feel unsafe.”</i></p> <p><i>“After moving here from a big city like Toronto where I didn’t feel unsafe, over here I notice that after 8 everything shuts down. It’s almost eery to step out in the dark.”</i></p> <p><i>“There have been home invasions, thefts and car breakins. There is a big homeless population and mental health issues. There have been attacks on children and on animals.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need more security cameras that work around town.”</i></p> <p><i>“When it snowed I did not go out for a week with my child when it snowed because the sidewalks were not cleared. I was walking on main road with my children. My car needed repairs so I had to walk but the roads were not cleared.”</i></p>

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Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
	<p>Young mothers face barriers in obtaining a driver’s license due to a lack of child care supports to take lessons and tests.</p>	<p>barrier and risk for people seeking to carry out shift work.</p> <p>Limited safety provisions increases safety concerns for vulnerable populations while travelling alone through the region, especially women.</p> <p>Inconsistent snow removal services in residential areas and in inner streets leaves vulnerable populations, such as women, seniors and children stranded and isolated in addition to being cut off from social services. Walking on streets during snow can lead to falls and injuries.</p>	<p><i>“There is a lack of affordable car financing options. The options are over \$300 years and the insurance rates are through the roof that presents barriers for young mothers.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have been hearing of more benefits or opportunities but it does not happen necessarily and it can be discouraging not knowing what can happen.”</i></p>
Liveable Incomes	<p>Income assistance allocations are not sufficient to cover basic needs for people experiencing poverty.</p> <p>Income assistance benefits cease too quickly after accessing basic employment creating prolonged vulnerability as individuals need more time to access better housing and build an emergency fund in case of job loss.</p>	<p>People experiencing poverty are not able to meet their basic needs as income assistance is not sufficient to cover cost of living.</p>	<p><i>“In the provincial income assistance, the shelter amount allocated is \$600 which is not reasonable for a mom with 2 kids. So, you have to tap into the support allocation to cover the shelter costs.”</i></p> <p><i>“I lost my job during the pandemic and I was pregnant. I got a letter I may have to pay back CERB but they mentioned I did not qualify for</i></p>

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Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
	<p>New mothers facing financial hardship need greater income assistance during a child’s infancy as they do not qualify for EI or maternity are unable to find employment with infants at home due to lack of affordable child care options.</p> <p>Child Tax Benefit is helpful but it has limitations for financial planning as it can be unstable for families with custody issues and for some it has been cancelled.</p> <p>Child care Subsidy is not enough to cover child care fees.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria for income supports is often not comprehensive and does not account for the cost of essential goods and services required to maintain a basic lifestyle. The criteria also does not account for the added challenges faced by families who are slightly above the eligibility criteria who continue to face housing insecurity and compromised health and wellbeing because of impacts related to poverty.</p>	<p>People experiencing poverty continue face barriers in accessing employment and other opportunities to enhance their standard of living due to insufficient income assistance.</p> <p>Income assistance eligibility criteria is too restrictive for people who are slightly above poverty measures but are still unable to have a healthy standard of living.</p>	<p><i>caregiving benefit because my childcare is not closed. They mentioned I would have to look for work actively but that is not possible because I am new mother. “I wish there was somewhere to go where I could go to get help.” I was not able to get maternity or employment insurance. I also do not know how to work out my taxes with so many changes. I am also worried that I may have to owe money to CRA. This is keeping me up at night and impacting my mental health.”</i></p> <p><i>“Your income may lead you not qualify for income supports. When you are coming out of poverty you do not go into a linear income path where you have stable and secure.”</i></p> <p><i>“These programs and policies decisions are being made by people who do not have experience with poverty.”</i></p>
Social Supports	<p>The design of social supports programming creates barriers for people who are forced to prove they are in “need.” The interactions with service providers can result in trauma and humiliation due to negative stereotypes held for people experiencing poverty and those who</p>	<p>Stigma and discrimination that prevents people from equity priority groups from accessing</p>	<p><i>“We went to Victoria to access services because we would have a better experience that is unlike the discrimination we face for being queer in our own community”</i></p>

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Priority Area	Gaps	Impacts	Quotes
	<p>have added marginalized identities such as being 2SLGBTQIA+.</p> <p>Conservative attitudes and biases against 2SLGBTQIA+ people leads to discrimination and denies queer people access to housing, food banks, and social supports.</p> <p>Lack of gender sensitivity among social support staff and medical practitioners results in 2SLGBTQIA+ receiving poor service or having to access services in other communities.</p>	<p>supports in the community.</p> <p>The basic needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ who are experiencing poverty remain unmet due to strong conservative mindsets and biases.</p>	
<p>Social Inclusion</p>	<p>Non-binary children face discrimination and bullying in schools, despite existing policies.</p> <p>Discrimination related to transphobia and racism denies equity priority groups the opportunities to access housing, long-term care, and other social supports.</p> <p>Religious organizations offering services display discriminatory attitude and behaviour towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people who approach them for accessing social supports such as food banks.</p> <p>There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of queer history – among the queer and non-queer community.</p> <p>Some businesses display pride-flag stickers as performative pieces as these spaces are often not safe for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.</p>	<p>2SLGBTQIA+ people face limited employment opportunities due to discrimination and safety concerns.</p> <p>Racialized communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ people face additional barriers related to discrimination that limit their access to social supports and to establish community connections.</p>	

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

To better understand the experience of poverty and the social serving organizations who service to support those in need, 13 interviews were conducted with representatives who provide services within each of the seven focus areas. What follows, is a summary of the challenges, impacts and suggested actions that emerged through conversation. The interview questions can be found in **Appendix C**.

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
HOUSING		
<p>Often more males than females served at emergency housing locations. While the average age is 35 years and above, younger clients often have higher needs.</p> <p>There are high rents and lack of affordable housing. Housing First is required to move people forward.</p> <p>Lack of liveable incomes for people requiring assistance: \$375 for the shelter portion of income supports makes it difficult to rent. People with disabilities must dip into their support money which would be for food, to cover housing and other costs.</p> <p>Food insecurity is being caused from lack of affordable housing and high cost of living.</p>	<p>People who experience homelessness do not have references to support them in accessing housing.</p> <p>Difficult to find housing for people who require supports to live independently. Lack of supportive housing.</p> <p>People experiencing homelessness and having complex needs such as mental illness and addictions issues fall through the cracks and are unable to get services.</p> <p>There is lots of stigma attached to people experiencing homelessness and/or poverty.</p>	<p>Create affordable housing, including supportive housing.</p> <p>Continue funding for the mat program to support programming for hardest to house population.</p> <p>Continue to support the Warming Centre.</p> <p>Acknowledging the opioid overdose crisis and reducing barriers for people with complex needs to get the supports they need.</p> <p>Consider ways to prioritize and fast track poverty reduction initiatives.</p> <p>Leverage the OCP process to envision the future and identify initiatives that benefit community health.</p> <p>Encourage the diversification of housing stock and incentivize housing.</p>

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COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>Mental health and addiction are common challenges; lots of stigma around mental health.</p> <p>Working professionals often face challenges in finding housing that is affordable.</p> <p>Lack of affordable housing is resulting in more people moving to smaller communities from urban centres, which drives up housing prices in rural areas.</p>	<p>Food banks can only be accessed once a month and it can be difficult for people to manage food the rest of the time.</p> <p>COVID-19 constrains staff resources and reduces the ability to deliver some aspects of programming.</p> <p>Funding is a barrier to consistent service delivery. It is difficult to retain staff due to the wages and the level of support they are required to provide.</p>	<p>Address baseline infrastructure challenges that are related to poverty such as access to clean drinking water across all communities.</p> <p>Invest in infrastructure and increase bus services as there is low usage right now.</p>

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
FAMILIES, CHILDREN & YOUTH		
<p>Childhood vulnerabilities are linked to poverty, housing challenges and food insecurity.</p> <p>Youth who age out of funding programs face challenges in accessing supports and services.</p> <p>Children experiencing poverty or living in rural areas face challenges in accessing internet and technology to take advantage of online learning.</p> <p>Young adults between the ages of 18-20 face challenges in accessing adult services relative to adults who have years of challenges related to substance use and housing who are higher trauma priority.</p> <p>Transportation: Vulnerable families lack access to transportation which presents barriers for them in accessing services.</p> <p>Substance Use: Many families experience substance use and misuse.</p>	<p>Funding is related to a limited mandate but there is a capacity for schools to do much more in terms of poverty reduction in the community.</p> <p>There is a coordination gap within the school system to bring together programming for families. They have access to families, resources and a desire to affect change, but there is lack of coordination to get the schools involved in initiatives.</p> <p>Schools have the potential to become distribution areas for public transit. Kids Start program has a waitlist as it has funding constraints. There is a need for this type of mentorship program where volunteers reach out to families and take children to conduct activities in the community.</p> <p>In outreach supports for young adults, it is difficult to access services because they are not trauma priority for mental health and substance use services and supports that have long waitlists.</p>	<p>Municipalities can take a systems-level approach to identify where to invest resources and supports in addressing challenges such as transportation and food security.</p> <p>Include the School District in the response to addressing social challenges.</p> <p>Support development of community social service hubs that are in proximity of schools.</p> <p>Encourage strong partnership and collaboration among community organizations and partners to streamline social service delivery.</p> <p>Consider the Neighbourhood House approach to increasing supports in remote, hard-to-reach areas. Encourage neighbourhood animation and interaction as a municipal delivery model to identify needs, address challenges and deliver programs.</p> <p>Support community agencies to collaborate in establishing a centralized service hub where they can provide an umbrella of services to the community.</p>

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COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>Domestic Violence: Many of the pregnant women and women participating in programming for families experience intimate partner violence, which are not conducive to a healthy home environment for child growth and wellbeing.</p> <p>Social Isolation: Women and families in rural areas are socially isolated and have no connection to services.</p> <p>Mental Health: Significant concern for women and families who are vulnerable; mental health has profound impacts on the resilience of the families. Women often lack self-confidence and self-esteem and are unable to see they are in unhealthy relationships.</p> <p>Child care: There is a complete lack of preschool and daycare services for families looking for support. Even if families can apply for subsidies, there are no facilities with available spaces.</p>	<p>Newcomer families looking for employment and language supports face barriers in accessing services.</p> <p>There are no consistent data measures in place to evaluate child poverty and vulnerability in the region.</p> <p>Lack of awareness among families that can leverage supports to enhance child development outcomes.</p> <p>Lack of awareness of where to access services.</p> <p>Limited transportation presents barriers for families to access services.</p> <p>Limited physical space for growing organizations to deliver more / additional services.</p>	<p>Invest in a functional local transportation system to support the mobility of families and connect them with food banks and social supports.</p> <p>Carry out initiatives to advance food security in the region.</p>

“Comox school is sitting there abandoned doing nothing. As a pilot for a proposed integrative development it could hit housing, shared office space, it could be daycare, adult education outlier, recreation (the school has a gym). The school district isn’t going to initiate the development – somebody has to come to us.”

“Right now we have groups planning childcare, housing, mental health, food security - all in their own circles and silos - and often duplicating school district/ municipal/ provincial agency and their contractors/ non profits.”

“We are all competing for the same pots of money. There is no money for prevention programs and then we get vulnerable children who are in heightened situations. We have not received an increase in funding for 20 years.”

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
SOCIAL SUPPORTS		
<p>Seniors do not have liveable incomes.</p> <p>Transportation is not accessible, flexible or consistent to seniors.</p> <p>Lack of employment opportunities exist for people suffering from mental health and substance use challenges.</p> <p>Access to mental health services and treatments for severe mental illnesses is a challenge.</p> <p>Seniors experiencing substance use challenges and homelessness are unable to access housing.</p>	<p>Lack of awareness among community members of available services.</p> <p>Funding is not regularly available and dependent on grants.</p> <p>Funding-constraints lead to waitlists and denial of service.</p> <p>Program design for low-barrier employment has constraints that creates challenges for people seeking opportunities.</p>	<p>There is need for coordination and collaboration among all levels of government to create liveable income supports.</p> <p>Programming for education and social inclusion for seniors – there is ageism against seniors that limits social and economic opportunities.</p> <p>Housing for seniors and senior women that is safe, has supports and is in central locations to ensure inclusion and access to opportunities.</p> <p>Fuel economic activity to create jobs for employment in the community.</p> <p>Support collaboration and integration of services.</p>

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
FOOD SECURITY		
<p>Food security, housing and poverty are interlinked.</p> <p>Community members with income barriers (including families) have challenges in accessing healthy foods.</p> <p>Greater emphasis on housing compared to food, which leads people to get by with whatever is available. There is a nutritional deficiency in the community.</p> <p>People who are not housed are not able to access programming.</p> <p>People without access to internet and digital device are unable to access services.</p> <p>Higher hydro bills in winter months means that many may face greater food insecurity.</p>	<p>Limited funding as programs have grant-dependent constraints.</p> <p>Rising cost of food constrains programming.</p> <p>COVID-19 has presented a barrier in running a community kitchen as organizations were unable to access partner kitchens.</p> <p>Small volunteer run organization comprising of mostly seniors who are largely only able to support families facing one-off emergency situations in accessing food, which is not sustainable.</p> <p>Difficult to manage food deliveries on the islands.</p> <p>There is not enough interaction of people from different income groups to understand each other’s struggles.</p>	<p>Support in establishing a physical food hub that can facilitate meal preparation, storage, and distribution.</p> <p>Leverage public spaces to increase food production such as in the Exhibition Grounds.</p> <p>Advocate for guaranteed liveable income.</p> <p>Housing needs to be addressed to increase the community’s capacity to have nutritional security.</p> <p>Support community gardens as it can be an effective way to encourage mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Increase mental health services and programming as issues continue to rise related to physical, mental, emotional health.</p> <p>Encourage a recycling program that supports vulnerable people to make money but by accessing recyclables in a safe manner that does not require dumpster diving. Similar to a free library, recyclables can be dropped off in safe spaces.</p> <p>Think of climate change and how to support a healthy environment through social service delivery.</p>

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
SOCIAL INCLUSION		
<p>People are often unaware and uncomfortable in engaging with persons with disabilities and hence make no effort to engage with them. If there is a shy, introverted or experiencing poverty as a person with disabilities is further kept from engaging in social inclusion.</p> <p>Housing: There are a lack of affordable and accessible housing units for persons with disabilities who are experiencing poverty.</p> <p>Transportation: There is handy dart but it has limited service as it is not offered on Sundays and weekends.</p> <p>Food Security: Persons with disabilities who are poor cannot afford to eat well which is a further reduction in their health.</p> <p>Liveable Incomes: Persons with disabilities are not given enough money to live a healthy lifestyle.</p>	<p>Programs are often volunteer-run organizations and there is lack of funding to formally advance this work in the community.</p> <p>The committee is led by aging seniors who have limited capacity and there is a challenge in finding younger people to take on this work.</p> <p>Community planners and developers are not approaching design solutions from a lens of accessibility, inclusion and equity.</p> <p>The building code is restrictive and limits adequate provisions to facilitate design that is accessible for people with mobility aids. This reduces the enforcement capacity of city planners to secure accessible design features for new developments.</p> <p>Delivering information and undergoing advocacy efforts via volunteer organizations is unsustainable.</p>	<p>Invest in creating free public transit.</p> <p>Develop more co-op and affordable housing to address homelessness.</p> <p>Advocate to implement universal basic income of \$2000.</p> <p>Consider programs such as the Ministry of Loneliness (England) to address issues with social isolation and loneliness.</p> <p>Volunteerism is a wonderful institution, but it is problematic to have volunteers work without compensation, especially when the volunteers are having difficulties in making needs meet.</p> <p>Undertake an OCP review to plan and implement solutions for the future with regards to transportation, housing, and climate change.</p> <p>Community planning needs to create cohesive and inclusive spaces and not segregate and isolate seniors into old age homes and create excluded spaces for children and child care</p>

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<p>Emergency shelters are limited and there is need for more services to be delivered in safe and inclusive spaces.</p> <p>Lack of awareness among community members of creating social inclusion.</p> <p>There are language barriers in accessing social supports and there is need for more culturally competent services.</p> <p>Trans adults and youth face discrimination and bullying in the workplace and schools and there is a lack of supports they can access.</p> <p>A significant number of homeless in our community have had a brain injury.</p> <p>Housing is a huge challenge and there is none affordable for people on pensions. People with disabilities face barriers in accessing housing and landlords are reluctant to rent to them.</p> <p>Living income is a real struggle and people with a brain injury cannot retain employment.</p> <p>Social inclusion is difficult with COVID-19.</p> <p>Employers are not equipped to hire persons with disabilities.</p>	<p>There is trans misogyny among social service providers that creates gaps between services and what people need. This presents significant barriers for trans people experiencing homelessness to access shelters.</p> <p>Funding is a challenge as it limits one-to-one services and overall supports that an organization can provide.</p> <p>Housing is limited and there are waitlists. It is hard to get a reference for people who suffer from a brain injury for housing. It is also difficult for them to share a room with another person.</p> <p>Food bank has limited items and it is difficult to accommodate people with brain injuries and disabilities.</p> <p>Supportive housing is not available for people who require supports to be able to live on their own.</p> <p>Many clients don't meet the income thresholds and then are not able to access supports.</p> <p>People are not able to advocate for themselves if they do not know the available supports.</p>	<p>Continue to support positive initiatives such as Lush Valley, the Coalition to End Homelessness, Community Health Network, Connect Warming Centre.</p> <p>Address bullying for 2SLGBTQIA+ in schools; anti-bullying education should be required in schools and in the community.</p> <p>Create more shelter beds for 2SLGBTQIA+ populations experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>Integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion lens into planning and program development.</p> <p>Create affordable housing. Also develop more supportive housing units.</p> <p>Advocate for increasing a liveable income.</p> <p>Training and education required for employers to create inclusive workplaces.</p> <p>Build awareness for planning for the needs of people with disabilities in community planning and program development.</p> <p>Local governments can guide strategic collaboration and bring all community partners to the planning table.</p>

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COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>Transition is problematic for people requiring supports; youth with disabilities lose supports as soon as they leave school system and turn 19; seniors are further challenged as they transition to retirement and old age supports.</p> <p>Social inclusion and safety are huge concerns for people with disabilities. They are getting by without community supports such as using an ATM or taking the bus. It takes a long time to learn and when things changed rapidly under COVID, people with disabilities face many barriers.</p> <p>Newcomers face barriers to their social inclusion in the community.</p> <p>Lack of capacity in the community to support newcomers to able to participate in the community.</p> <p>Lack of language supports in social service delivery impacts all poverty reduction priority areas.</p> <p>Limited technological literacy serves as barrier for people to access services and participate in the digital society. Newcomers also cannot afford computers and training. This isolates people further.</p>	<p>Increasing trend of newcomers finding homes in rural communities, yet funding for newcomer support is concentrated in the larger, urban centres.</p> <p>There is limited service uptake by newcomers who self-identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.</p> <p>Newcomers who speak English may not consider seeking support initially but who face challenges in navigating the system in the long run and then come for support.</p> <p>There is a lack of awareness of the broader social service umbrella. Some organizations will try to serve newcomers rather than referring to our available services.</p> <p>There is a lack of a clear understanding of the role played and the scope of services provided by settlement agencies.</p> <p>There is a reluctance to collaborate across organizations on crosscutting issues because of fear of encroachment on resources. This leads to duplication of efforts and wastage of resources.</p>	<p>Support formalization of strategic partnerships among community organizations to consolidate initiatives. They can pool resources and collaborate to effectively to deliver on legacy community projects, such as to advance anti-racism programming. This could also lead to data sharing, survey administration to integrate service delivery and knowledge production.</p> <p>Support organizations to integrate language diversity across services.</p> <p>Build capacity in people to access and use technology to participate in society.</p>

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES	SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>Lack of affordable housing is a challenge and people cannot even afford insurance and cars.</p> <p>Racism is a barrier that limits the inclusion of newcomers and racialized people into society. Since COVID-19 there has been a surge in anti-racism.</p> <p>Racism impacts a person’s employability due low cultural competence in the community, workplace and among newcomers. This lack of cultural understanding leads to microaggressions and conflict in the workplace. Employers become hesitant to hire newcomers.</p>		

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

- CV Transition Society
- Connect Warming Centre
- Island Health
- John Howard Society
- Board of Education
- CV Children’s Daycare Society
- CV Family Services
- Better At Home
- Lush Valley Food Action Society
- St. Vincent De Paul
- Comox Valley Accessibility Committee
- CV Pride Society
- CV Head Injury & Beaufort Society
- Immigrant Welcome Centre

AREAS OF SERVICE

The organizations interviewed provide the following service areas for the region:

- Emergency transitional housing
- Meals, clothing, survival gear and life skill building to people in need of shelter
- Rental supports for families, women and children fleeing violence
- Support and guide good land use planning to enhance outcomes of social determinants of health.
- Support for housing grants and applications
- Social supports and housing for youth and adults suffering from mental health, substance use and addictions challenges.
- Supportive outreach and youth housing, youth justice and transitional programming, substance use programming, counselling, parent teen mediation, mental health outreach and KidsStart.
- Education, learning and development and social supports to children and youth across the region.
- Universal breakfast and meal programs to children who are facing food insecurities, community garden
- Not-for-profit child care services
- Community navigation services to connect pregnant women and families with young children to social supports and resources
- First point of contact for families to access food banks, mental health, and child care supports
- Non-medical services at reduced rates (meal delivery, cheap transportation etc.)
- Partner with local organizations to provide anyone facing food insecurity with dignified access to healthy foods through food delivery and hot meal programs
- Support local food production, harvesting and community engagement with vulnerable populations
- Advocacy and representation for persons with disabilities through making overtures to government, raising awareness, and conducting accessibility assessments
- Advocacy and education on the inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ population and increase awareness of the costs of gender discrimination
- Counselling for people with low-incomes and intellectual disabilities with resources and supports
- Settlement services to newcomers including employment and language training and social supports such as housing, income supports, family services, mental health

SELF-GUIDED TOOL KIT

The online self-guided tool kit engaged in solutions thinking with 6 coalitions representing over 30 organizations and 68 individual participants. A consistent line of questioning was developed for each Focus Area that systematically unpacked ideas, barriers and iterated on solutions following the, “How Might We...” engagement method. The specific questions for each of the focus areas can be found in **Appendix B**.

HOUSING

Organizations Represented: Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society, Comox Valley Social Planning Society, North Island College Nursing Dept, Comox Valley Family Services, Habitat for Humanity North Island, Comox Valley Community Foundation, Island Health Mental Health and Substance Use, Division of Family Practices/Island Health, Community Action Team, Wachiy Friendship Center, L’arche Comox Valley, St. George’s United Church, Glacierview Lodge, Salvation Army Family Services, Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society, Early Years Collaborative, Comox Valley Transition Society, Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (28 attendees)



How might we provide better supports and services for those who need assistance in acquiring housing?

- Build a diverse supply of affordable housing
- Regulate rental prices through policy tools
- Increase coordination among housing agencies to support applicants in accessing opportunities for housing
- Establish a local information hub to support coordinated access
- Increase awareness among renters of their rights and available resources, such as Rent Smart.
- Offer concurrent supports while they are searching for housing
- Streamline process to facilitate faster residential development of affordable housing
- Build capacity and resilience among front line and outreach workers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and Opioid Overdose Crisis
- Increase access to emergency mental health supports
- Deliver cultural diversity and inclusion training for staff



Why is this important?

- Housing is foundational to community health
- Housing reduces despair and trauma
- Housing builds community connections
- Supports people in breaking away from poverty
- Housing keeps families together

**What’s stopping us or preventing us from providing better supports and services for those who need assistance in acquiring housing?**

- Lack of housing stock
- Cost of housing is so high that affordable housing is also not affordable
- Limited coordination of efforts among local governments
- Limited partnerships between private developers and public agencies
- Limited funding for providing regular and consistent supports for smaller town projects
- Lack of living wage and housing supports for people needing support, such as those seeking income and disability assistance.
- Sustained funding for providing the supports

**What are some ideas or solutions you see that can provide better supports and services for those who need assistance in acquiring housing?**

- Develop a localized information hub with all social supports information
- Establish community navigators for elders and those dealing with anxiety to talk with landlords and housing agencies
- Reduce barriers in accessing and maintaining housing, for example through build capacity programming for renters to interview with landlords
- Encourage homeowners to convert short-term rentals into more long-term rental units through implementing programming similar to Dawn to Dawn model
- Develop supportive housing options for people with mental health illnesses and brain injuries
- Deliver diversity and inclusion training for frontline workers and landlords
- Offer mobile crisis outreach response teams, especially for weekends and after hours. Consider the example of CAHOOTS from Eugene Police Department in Oregon
- Increase diverse housing stock, including more studio apartments
- Increase rental supplements for people of income or disability assistance.

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Organizations Represented: Today N Tomorrow Learning Society, CV Early Years Collaborative, Childcare Planning Committee, CV Children and Youth Matter Collective 6 attendees



How might we better support families, children and/or youth who live in poverty to better access opportunities and services needed for their healthy growth and development?

Child care lens

- Create more quality child care spaces offering flexible drop-in, low-cost and free child care options
- Increase wages and opportunities for child care operators and workers to operate facilities
- Regulate unregistered, unmonitored child care currently, patch work childcare
- Increase awareness of child care options for parents
- Increase advocacy for child care resources in the region

Children and youth mental health lens

- Offer mental health services for parents and children as the mental health impacts of poverty are severe for families facing food security and struggling for childcare, mental health and recreation services
- Increase availability of critical services across each community, in particular in rural areas
- Improve transportation to make services accessible for those who rely on active forms of transportation
- Offer accessible outdoor spaces and activities for children and family to promote better health outcomes
- Zoom is a challenging platform for most – consider viable alternatives
- Outreach to families in the form of food, services, mental health, financial literacy, parenting programs



Why is this important?

Child care lens

- Free and affordable child care will increase household incomes and support families to afford more and better food and participate in the community and access employment

Children and youth mental health lens

- Poor mental health impacts children and prevents them from reaching their potential
- Poor health and disease are likely to occur with food insecurity and poverty

- Reliable quality child care can offer a safe and nurturing environment for children to grow and thrive with a solid foundation
- A healthy child equals a healthy adult.



What’s stopping or preventing families, children and/or youth from accessing opportunities and services needed for their healthy growth and development?

- Lack of critical services and supports to lift families out of poverty
- Lack of affordable housing, child care and mental health services
- High cost of housing pushes families to remote areas where they become more isolated and cut off from services



What are some ideas or solutions that could support families, children and/or youth who live in poverty to better access opportunities and services needed for their healthy growth and development.

- Community schools are great resources that may present opportunities to establish long-term funding collaborations with local not-for-profits that are already doing great things
- Flexible and free child care operating hours to accommodate shift workers
- Develop local support service and child care hubs
- Increase services across the communities in the region
- Work with employers to offer child care and supports for families
- Engage with people with lived experience to identify their barriers and needs

LIVEABLE INCOMES

Organizations Represented: Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society, Comox Valley Social Planning Society, North Island College Nursing Dept, Comox Valley Family Services, Habitat for Humanity North Island, Comox Valley Community Foundation, Island Health Mental Health and Substance Use, Division of Family Practices/Island Health, Community Action Team, Wachiy Friendship Center, L’arche Comox Valley, St. George’s United Church, Glacierview Lodge, Salvation Army Family Services, Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society, Early Years Collaborative, Comox Valley Transition Society, Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (28 attendees)



How might we improve financial security for individuals in the CVRD? Think about things like, employment opportunities, training or rental subsidies, for example. Currently, the 2019 living wage for the Comox Valley is \$15.97/hr based on a family of four.

- Advocate for liveable wage at the senior government level
- Increase financial literacy
- Increase rental subsidies and rent banks, similar to those by John Howard Society in Nanaimo
- Forgivable loans (student)
- Rent banks
- Reduce overall cost of living (rent, utilities, food, etc.)
- Develop more housing supports
- Increase benefit allocations for people on income or disability assistance
- Create more jobs offering liveable wages with extended health benefits and sick time; recognize employers who already provide liveable wages
- Increase access to affordable housing and child care
- Offer micro-finance options, similar to Grameen Bank model
- Review of provincial and federal tax rates
- Work with senior levels of government to invest in social enterprises
- Offer training for vulnerable individuals such as through building cooking skills through involvement in soup kitchens and food banks



Why is this important?

- Liveable income is needed to access housing
- High cost of living creates displacement and loss of diversity in community population
- Supports people in breaking cycle of intergenerational poverty
- Reflects a commitment to basic human dignity and increases self esteem and securities
- Increases community morale
- Reduces community crime
- Increases disposable income to spent on other services: mental health, substance use services, and hospital etc.
- Encourages local consumption and fuels economic activity for the community
- People with money tend to make and have healthier choices

**What’s stopping or preventing us from improving financial security for individuals in the CVRD?**

- Capitalism and high cost of living
- Barriers in accessing financial institutions
- Need for more payday loan companies
- Systems problem
- Lack of economic growth limiting job creation
- Limited access to affordable childcare
- Jurisdictional limitations of organizations and public agencies and competition for the same resources
- Apathy from the business community towards supporting people experiencing poverty
- Stigma attached to providing income assistance as those in need are considered as not deserving because they did not work to earn the income
- Lack of political will at all levels of government to enact legislation to create liveable incomes
- Lack of collaboration and deference of responsibility between different levels of government

**What are some ideas or solutions you see to improving financial security for individuals in the CVRD?**

- Advocate for liveable incomes to senior levels of government
- Provide non-predatory payday loans
- Increase public education on financial literacy in schools
- Address the issue of landlords who take advantage of their tenants
- Develop diverse supply of affordable housing, e.g. social, supportive and co-op housing, market rentals
- Advocate for rights of people who are experiencing poverty
- Create more affordable and accessible child care options
- Reduce barriers for new market entrants to start small businesses
- Implement rent banks to help support people through unemployment
- Increasing housing allowance within income benefits
- Offer more rental subsidies
- Increase awareness of the scale of the issue
- Reduce stigma and discrimination attached to homelessness, poverty, and providing income assistance
- Enhance regulation of employers through update employment legislation; establish practices to make business licenses and non-profit funding contingent on appropriate wage and shift levels for employees
- Implement different models of companies such as workers cooperatives
- Ask businesses to consider offering employee housing when they come to the community
- Create a community guide for people new to the community to support them in understanding community demographics, having information on accessing services, liveable wages, food bank usage, etc. (this could be done through local realtors or Welcome Wagon)
- Create a municipal housing authority

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Organizations Represented: Elders Take Action (13 attendees)



How might we enhance or provide access to social supports in the CVRD?

- Increase public awareness of community networks of existing resources through regular communications (newsletters)
- Provide manageable grants for elders and family caregivers needing connections and supports
- Improve public transport for elders
- Create community navigators to support elders in navigating the health care and other social systems



Why is this important?

- Awareness of availability of services and supports can enhance living standards
- Strengthening local social serving organizations supports people living in poverty with access to foods and shelter



What’s stopping or preventing us from enhancing or providing access to social supports in the CVRD?

- Lack of community connection and awareness of resources and needs
- Barriers in accessing social supports due to design and delivery of programs can be demoralizing; for example, online EI applications are inaccessible to those people who have no computers or who lack computer literacy
- Funding criteria can be difficult to access grants



What are some ideas or solutions you see to enhancing or providing access to social supports in the CVRD?

- An elders-driven community navigators team to support people in navigating health care and other social systems
- Deliver public education on available supports and services
- Promote neighbourhood inclusion through encouraging programming and messaging to establish community connectors and neighbourhood supports
- Establish advocacy and empowerment teams to accompany vulnerable elders in voices their needs

FOOD SECURITY

Organizations Represented: Lush Valley Food Action Society, CV Community Health Network, Cumberland Community School Society, Farm to Cafeteria, CV Food Policy Council 6 attendees



Thinking about the Food Security Continuum, how might we create a food system that alleviates food insecurities for individuals in the CVRD?

- Invest in short-term relief strategies such as the Good Food Box program, healthy local food hamper delivery (serving all who need it) and the Hot Meal program
- Offer options for home delivery to increase access
- Reframe the issue as nutritional security and not about filling bellies as it is important to get quality, healthy, whole food for people experiencing poverty
- Reduce stigma attached with accessing services; the design and eligibility criteria of programs needs to be altered to offer services with dignity, for example as a ‘Good Food Organization’ we are beholden to certain principles that eliminate the requirement for people to prove they are in need
- Increase input from people with lived experience to give input into the program
- Build capacity among organizations to provide services through increasing resources and community food assets such as: coolers, tools, delivery vehicles, kitchens, gardens, land for local food sales, community gardens, seed library, workshops, food hub, food processors, spaces for eating together etc.
- Invest in systems redesign strategies; if housing/ cost of living was less expensive, food-security wouldn’t be such an issue
- Policy changes that support lower costs for new farmers and food growers- including more affordable housing
- Ensure fishing licenses are not all taken by business that ship fish/seafood out of our community
- Build capacity in the Food Policy Council to deal with issues at a systems level
- CVRD may consider a service like the Coalition to End Homelessness to provide more capacity to focus on systems-level change
- Increasing awareness of ‘healthy and resilient food system’ as the continuum image is quite simple and does not identify government responsibility
- The culture of food is missing in the continuum; we need to celebrate growing, preparing and eating food together as part of poverty reduction.
- Build food skills and increase access to land to grow food

**Why is this important?**

- Food is a basic human need
- Good nutrition is important for health and well-being that helps prevent chronic illness that affects healthcare system
- Engagement with food systems (gardening for example) promotes better overall physical and mental health as it can reduce stress, anxiety and promote community connection
- Advance Reconciliation through addressing with the colonial legacy of agriculture
- Local food production is needed for long term food security

**What's stopping or preventing us from creating a better food system that alleviates food insecurities for individuals in the CVRD?**

- Funding gaps are a limitation to real change that takes time and consistent support in the long-run
- Lack of access to land and secure tenure for new growers creates barriers for new market entrants
- Bureaucracy can create barriers in shifting government and bringing policy change
- Food security cannot be addressed through a charitable model of food banks as this is limiting and dehumanizes people living in poverty expecting them to survive on cheap, processed foods

**What are some ideas or solutions you see to creating a better food system that alleviates food insecurities for individuals in the CVRD?**

- Advocate for universal basic income for individuals
- Develop more affordable housing
- Support with aggregation and distribution of local food
- Increase access to public and private land for community growing and new local farmers, for example through bylaws for urban agriculture and lease of public land for food growing
- Deliver more public education and outreach on local food growing
- Develop a local food hub for food rescue
- Prioritization of local food as a community asset
- Create stable markets and liveable wages for local farmers through creating markets in long term care, social housing, hospitals, schools and other institutions with local food procurement
- Facilitate a more generative local economy and decrease food miles
- Develop a strategy to advance actions related to creating food security in the region
- Look at building community food assets that provide quality food programming
- Engage people in community growing through participating in community gardens and capacity

- Embed shared economy values into local economy to reflect the interconnected impacts of good built environment, financial security, social, cultural and ecological wellbeing on community health

building programming to learn to cook food and get access to quality local food.

- Increase Indigenous food sovereignty and restoration of traditional food lands
- Support Indigenous communities in boat purchase and have access to fish and seafood

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Organizations Represented: Social Planning Society, Regional District, City of Courtenay, School District 71, Employment Services, Salvation Army, City of Courtenay Councilors, L’Arche (15 attendees), Elders Take Action (13 attendees)



How can we remove barriers and discrimination that prevent equity priority groups* from participating in political, economic and social life?

- Integrate accessibility into the design of the built environment to remove physical barriers to movement for those with mobility challenges, such as through ramps on buildings, separate spaces on roads, sidewalk improvements, etc.
- Encourage people to get connected in their neighborhoods with equity priority groups
- Support for equity priority group individuals to run for public office
- Organizational review at all levels to find what structures keep people out
- Demonstration of equity, diversity, and inclusion by local governments
- Advance inclusion into all processes



Why is this important?

- Lack of inclusion of diverse people in community development process marginalizes groups and creates gaps in service delivery
- Social inclusion enhances quality of life for all through creating community connection and reduces isolation
- Address misconceptions and reduce bias



What’s stopping or preventing us from removing barriers and discrimination that prevent equity priority groups from participating in political, economic and social life?

- Lack of awareness of needs of marginalized groups
- Limited action and lack of ability to develop relationships with people in equity priority groups or organizations
- Unable to look beyond our own prejudices and biases
- Limitation of regulatory framework in creating accessible spaces and access, e.g. building codes
- Funding through grants creates a challenge in developing consistent long-term programming



What are some ideas or solutions you see to removing barriers and discrimination that prevent equity priority groups from participating in political, economic and social life?

- Evaluate all financial transactions through impacts on economic, social, environmental factors.
- Integrate an intersectional feminist and accessibility for policy development to develop equitable and inclusive solutions
- Amplify voices of marginalized groups at decision making tables
- Promote programs of “neighbourhood connectors” to encourage inclusion at the neighbourhood level. For example, encourage neighbourhood relationships that can support individuals in getting groceries, repairing broken doorsteps
- Create a process to enhance social connections between privileged and equity priority groups
- Change language to be more respectful of older adults. Use the term “elders” to reflect their role and contribution in building neighbourhoods

CONSIDERING THE 7 FOCUS AREAS – Have we missed anything?

Self-Guided Tool Kit participants were also asked to consider the seven key focus areas for the project and to provide feedback on the seven that were selected. We heard that:

Mental Health is a significant area of concern when addressing the impacts of poverty. People experiencing poverty live high stress lifestyles in trying to meet their basic needs in addition to being subjected to in varying degrees of racism and discrimination and dealing with the burdens of disability, intergenerational trauma of poverty and colonization based on the multiple identities held by a person.

GAME CHANGER WORKSHOP

This stakeholder workshop is scheduled to occur in May 2021.

DRAFT

Appendices

Comox Valley Regional Poverty Reduction Assessment & Strategy Community Survey Summary Report

March 2021

As part of the Comox Valley Regional Poverty Reduction Assessment and Strategy, community members within the region were invited to participate in a survey to help local governments and community organizations better understand current and future needs across the Comox Valley. The survey was available online for three weeks starting January 18th and was promoted through social media and other regional marketing and communications channels. **In total, 216 responses were received.**

Through qualitative and quantitative feedback, this survey aimed to understand the challenges and impacts related to poverty in relation to seven focus areas:

- Housing
- Families, Children and Youth
- Liveable Income
- Social Supports
- Food Security
- Accessible and Affordable Transportation
- Social Inclusion

It should be noted that community input was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is an important context to consider for the final strategy.

Highlights

The survey responses highlighted barriers and challenges experienced by community members within the CVRD who may or may not experience poverty.

Based on the survey results, the top gaps in the local network that have an impact on the health and wellbeing of low-income earners include:

- Limited access to mental health, substance use and addictions services and supports
- Inaccessible local transportation system
- Lack of affordable housing options, including emergency shelter and supportive housing
- Lack of secure employment opportunities
- Lack of child care and supports for children and youth
- Barriers in accessing healthy foods

Survey Analysis

The survey results were analyzed according to the type of question posed:

Multiple Choice Questions (Select One)

For the questions where answer choices were provided, the sum of the responses for each answer choice was divided by the total number of responses for that question to provide a percentage. All multiple choice questions and answers are displayed in the form of a graph.

Multiple Choice Questions (Select All That Apply)

For these questions where respondents could select an answer from more than one answer choice, the sum of the responses for each answer choice was divided by the total number of survey respondents who answered that question to provide a percentage. All multiple choice questions and answers are displayed in the form of a graph.

Open-Ended Questions & 'Other, Please Specify' Responses

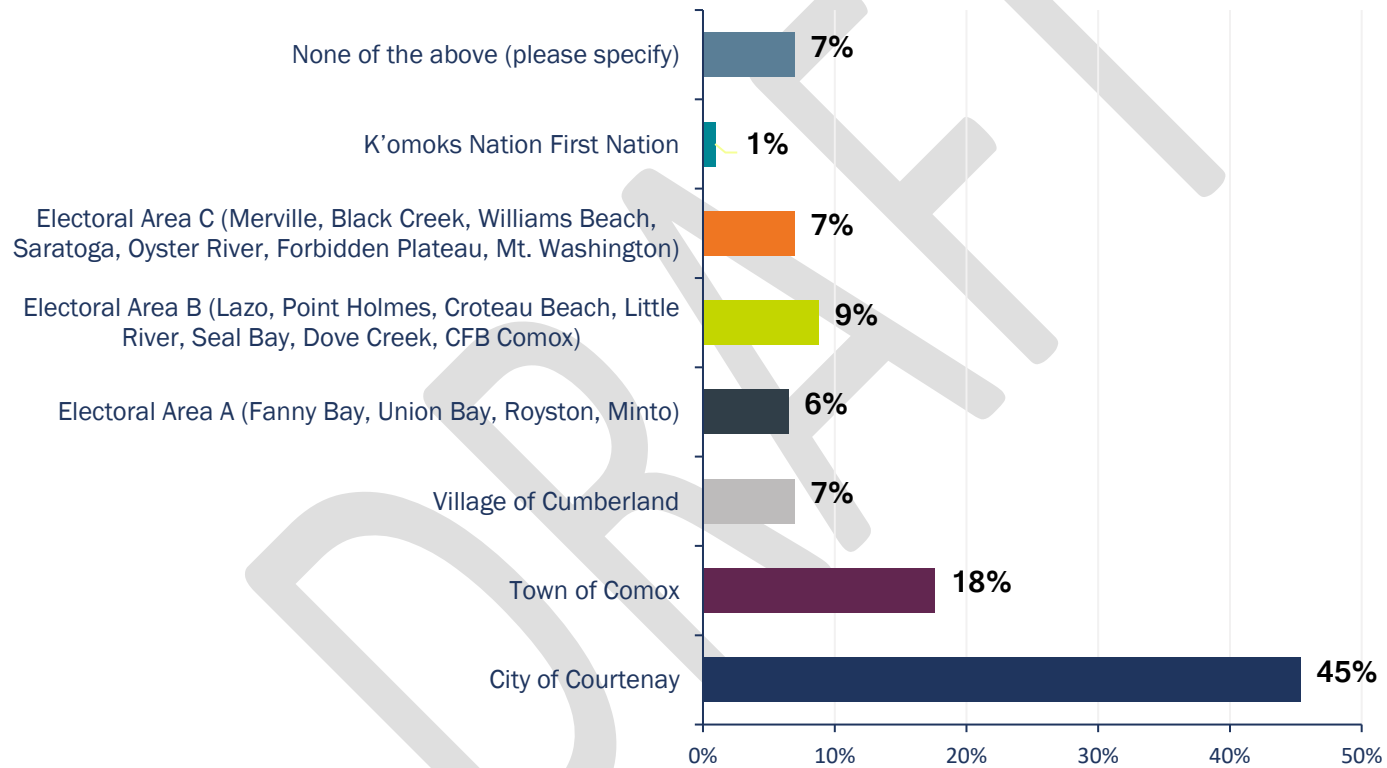
For the open-ended questions where answer choices were not provided, where possible, responses were categorized into themes that emerged. After each response was categorized, the number of responses that correlated to each theme was reported adjacent to that theme.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents were asked the following demographic questions to capture who participated in the survey. Based on the results, most respondents (45%) live in the City of Courtenay, with several living in the surrounding areas (Figure 1.1). The respondents were predominantly female (Figure 1.3) and between the ages of 45 and 74 years (Figure 1.2). There were only a few responses (5%) from people who identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1:1: Which community do you live in? (n=216)



Most of the respondents (57%) live in households with two adults (Figure 1.6) and almost 30% had children under the age of 18 years living with them (Figure 1.7). Many respondents (26%) live in households with only one adult (Figure 1.6), who may have experience managing single incomes to meet household needs.

Almost 16% (Figure 1.6) of the respondents have more than three adults living in one household. This may be indicative of the high cost of living that compels adult children to live at home with their parents due to a lack of affordable housing.

While most respondents were employed (51%, Figure 1.5), more than 30% had yearly household incomes equal to or less than \$20,000 (Figure 1.8) and almost 19% of the respondents indicated having experience living in poverty (Figure 1.9).

These demographics indicate that the respondents hold a diverse range of experiences who can provide deep insights into the community's experience with poverty and its related challenges and impacts.

Figure 1:2: What is your age? (n=216)

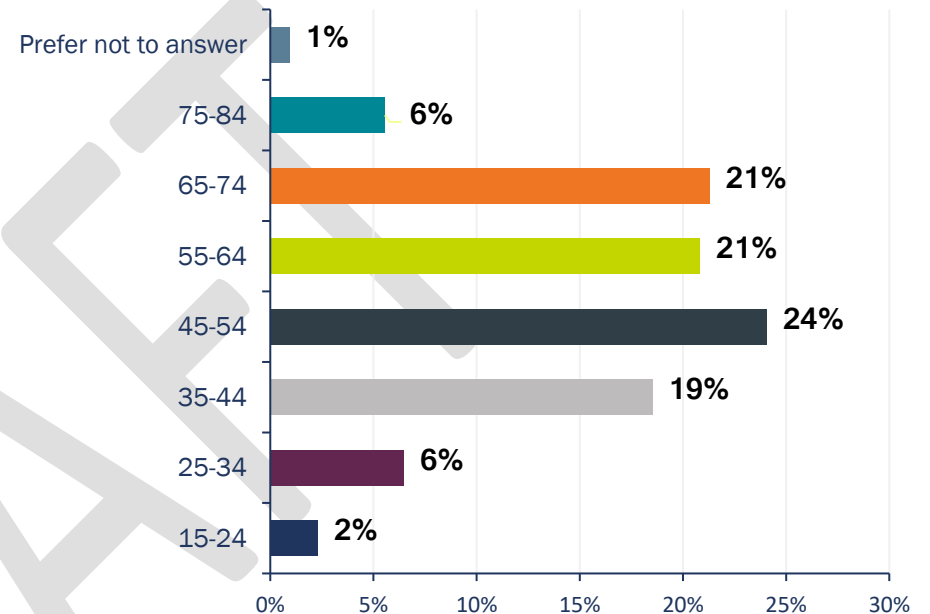


Figure 1:3: Which gender do you identify as? (n=213)

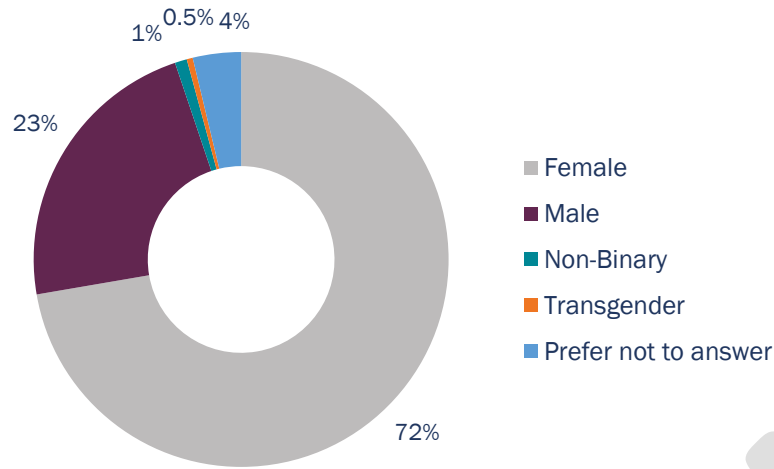


Figure 1:5: What is your employment status? (n=216)

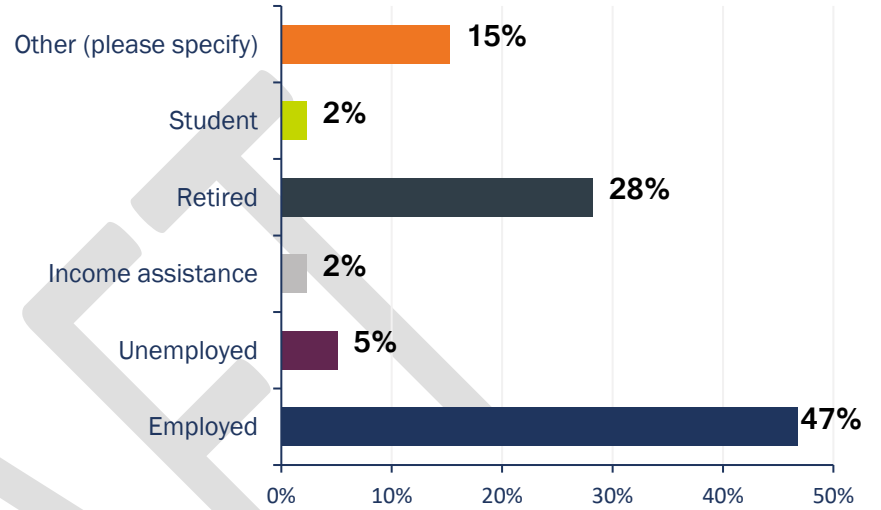


Figure 1:4: Do you identify as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit? (n=212)

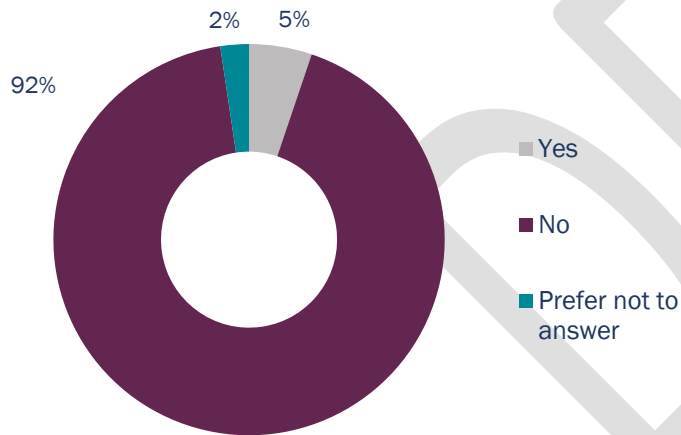


Figure 1:6: How many adults live in your household? (n=216)

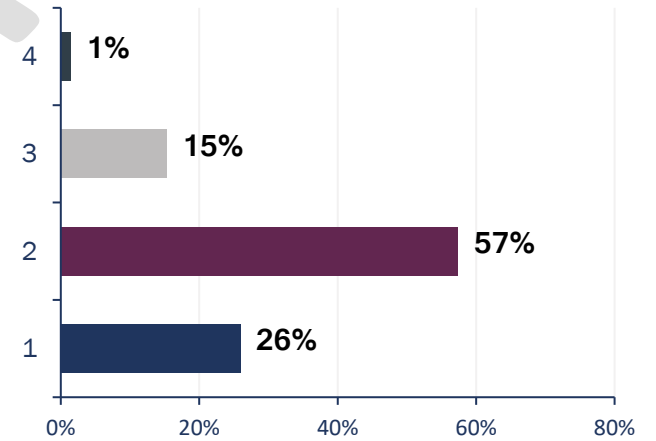


Figure 1:7: How many children live in your household? (n=210)

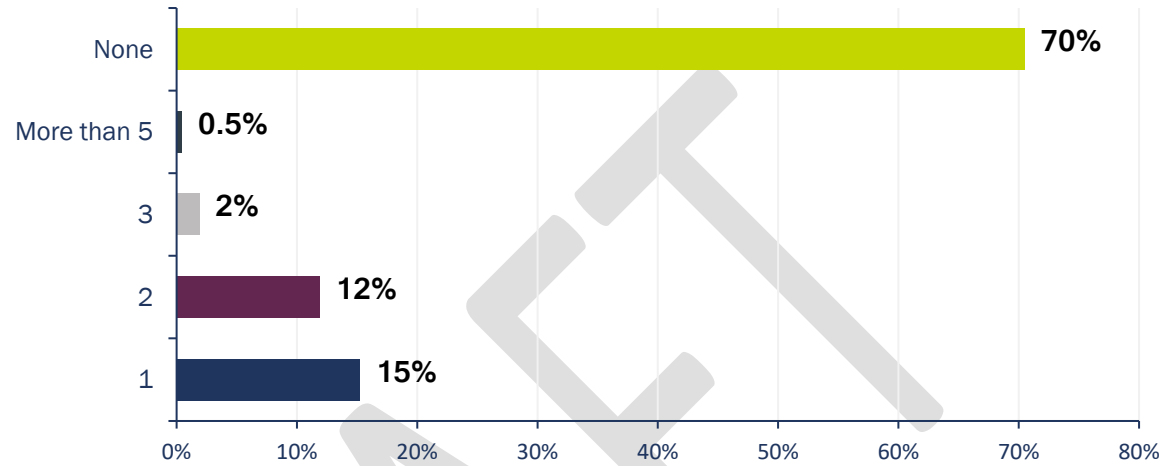
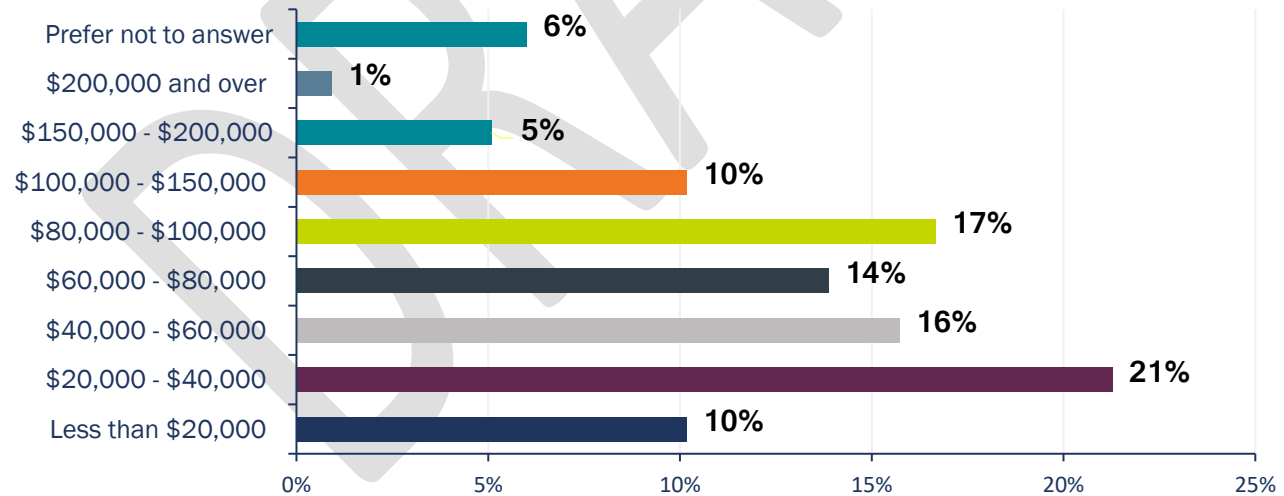


Figure 1:8: What is your household's yearly income? (n=216)



The Experience of Poverty

When asked if a respondent considered themselves to be living in poverty, 19% indicated that they did, while 11% were unsure (Figure 1.9).

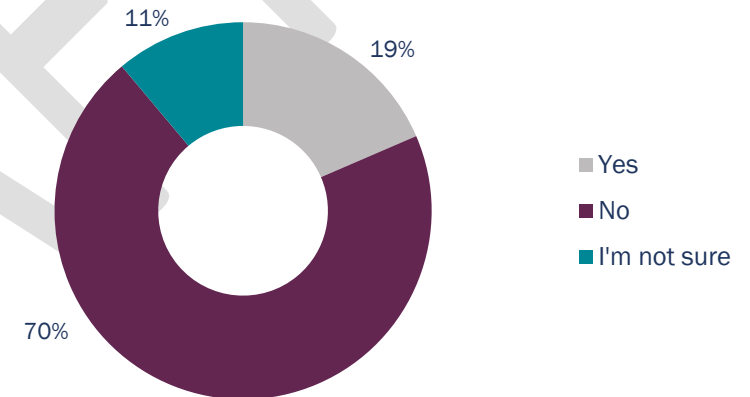
Respondents were asked to further elaborate on their experiences and the following themes¹ emerged from 40 responses:

- The rising cost of living creates severe challenges for low-income households. This increases food insecurity, poor physical and mental health, and continuously puts individuals who experience poverty at risk of homelessness.
- Households that experience poverty expressed challenges in meeting their needs while living on income and disability assistance; these supports are insufficient to cover the cost of living in the region.
- Poverty reduces the ability of individuals to access extended health services, live in healthy spaces, access educational opportunities, engage in recreation and are subjected to recurring household indebtedness and live in unsafe relationships to maintain access to housing.
- Persons with disabilities, women, young children, seniors, people of colour and Indigenous people living in poverty

face heightened vulnerabilities and risk of homelessness, food insecurity and gender-based violence.

- In addition to individuals who live below the poverty line, those individuals who are relatively low-income but above the poverty line also face significant challenges in meeting their needs but are unable to access the resources and supports necessary to meet their needs.

Figure 1.9: Do you consider yourself to be living in poverty? (n=216)



¹Despite the commonalities outlined on the health and wellbeing of community members experiencing poverty, it should be recognized that the individual impacts of poverty on households vary and are unique to each household's circumstance. This question elicited a variety of stories and responses. As such, the following themes emerged.

Impact Stories

“When you are on the low end of the households yearly income threshold it’s hard because you can’t qualify for any help but you also can’t live the quality of life of someone that makes \$40,000. Rent eats up 3/4 of our income. As soon as we save for something we end up having to spend it on a repair or financial need rather than a memory to build our families spirits. We have no spare money for pleasure. And we definitely have not put any money towards our retirement lately.”

“I am on provincial disability, not a lot to "live" on. For many years I have lived in fear of losing my home. I own it but if the strata fees go up any more I may not be able to afford to stay here. I am not alone. Everything has gone up. I find myself as I know many others do, staying in a relationship that may not be good or having roommates/borders that you wouldn't normally choose to have just to stay afloat. This is daily living in fear and if they move out with no notice or wreck the place I would be that much further behind. It's a scary situation.”

“I do not have enough money to eat nutritionally, to pay for needed dental work or eye exam, or to buy clothes, in particular, a warm winter coat.”

“It is hard for us to pay all our bills and give our son what he needs and wants. We can only afford to live in a small one bedroom plus open den (my wife and I sleep in the den. We cannot afford to pay rent for small house. Even if I could somehow save up \$200k I still could not afford a mortgage on a place here in the Valley.”

“My rent totaled every year is more than my year income, I spend all of my child support and child tax just on rent.”

“My household expenses such as mortgage and food, car insurance, and gas, hydro, telephone, household repairs and medication take 95% of my income. One adult works, 2 jobs part time & only can afford her car insurance and gas with her wages. There are 2 adults (including myself) living with disabilities, that have no resources in our community to assist. Therefore, we must pay people to come in and clean, pay for our meals to be pre-cooked or get takeout, and pay for someone to help us shop, and assist with pet care. The pets help us cope emotionally with day-day struggles. I honestly don’t know where I’m supposed to keep getting the money from to pay for increased taxes, increased costs of food and medically needed assistance, on disability income. And, we make more than most families, because I get a disability pension from work, not ministry money. The health care resources do not exist for children with disabilities, who are grown. My kids will never be able to afford an apt, so, I must keep paying for the house, to avoid my adult children being homeless. We are basically camping in our house, no lights on, minimal heat, and use of power because my hydro doubled in the last 3 years. I don’t know how this is going to get any better fit us. We make enough money to pay for the housing, but there’s nothing left over at the end of the month. Something always needs fixing, or repairs, or updating. I don’t want to live this way; we can’t even afford cable. Now, we are additionally struggling with mental health problems. It never seems to end.”

Section 1 MEETING MY NEEDS

Respondents were asked a series of questions to better understand the challenges they experience in meeting their basic needs.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) indicated that they sometimes, often, and almost always face challenges each month (Figure 2.1).

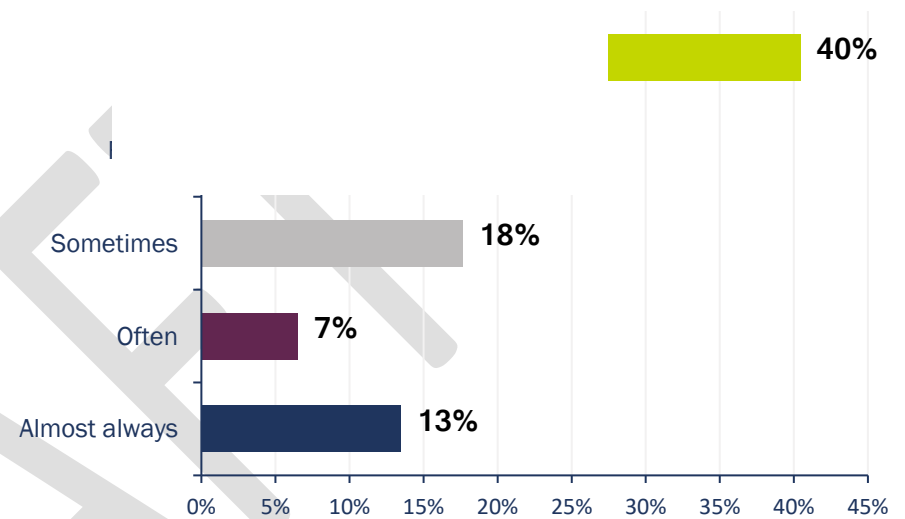
The top barriers (Figure 2.2) include:

- high cost of living (43%)
- housing unaffordability (21%)
- lack of social connection² (17%)

Additional barriers that should also be noted are:

- lack of a living wage (14%)
- mental health challenges (11%)
- access to accessible and affordable transportation (10%)
- access to employment (8%)

Figure 2.1: I face challenges meeting my needs: (n=215)



² This survey was conducted in February 2021 when British Columbians were under strict social distancing restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of social isolation may have been heightened during this time.

Figure 2:2: What are the greatest barriers you face to accessing your daily needs? (Select top 3) (n=215)

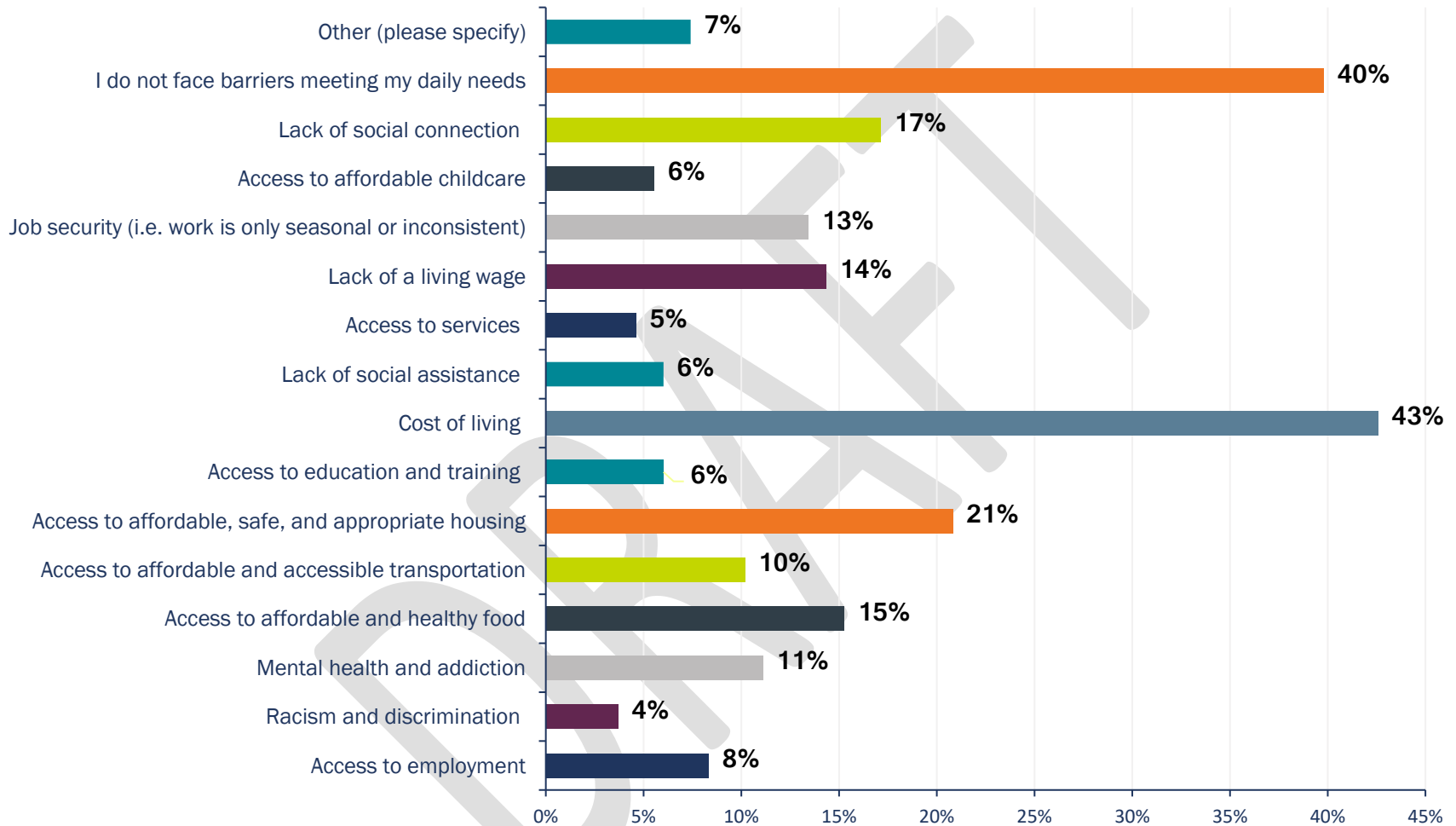
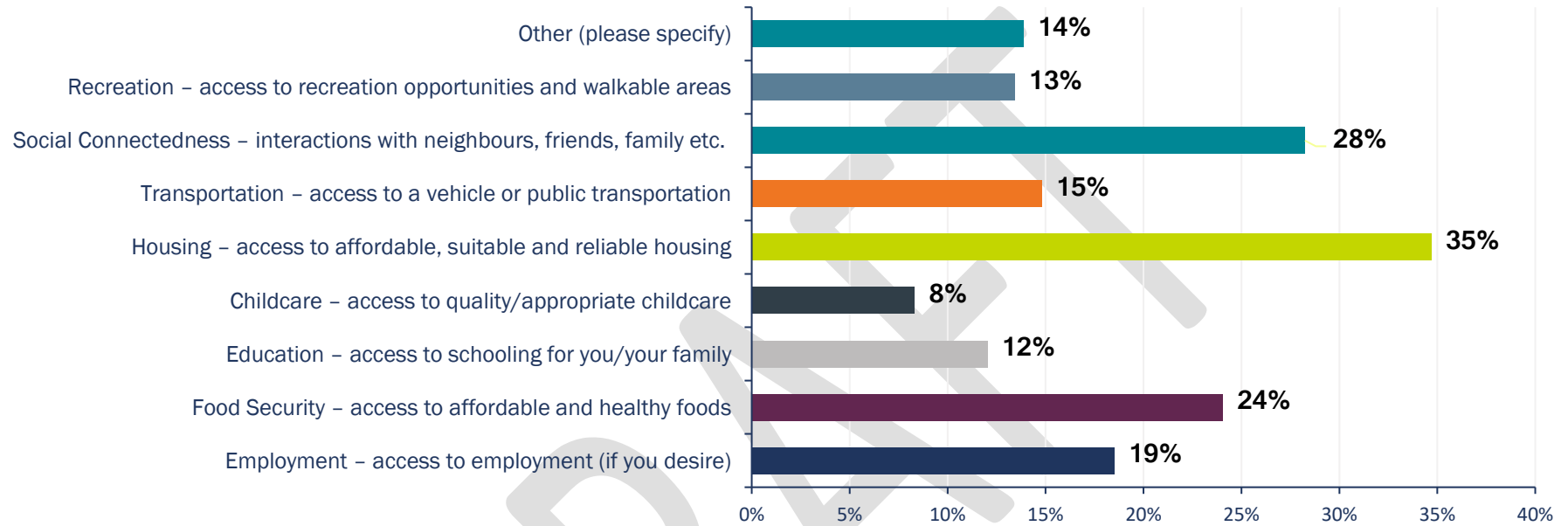


Figure 2:3: Select the areas where you currently have negative experiences / there are challenges in you / your families' lives. (select all that apply) (n=156)



Respondents were asked to indicate the areas where they had negative experiences or that posed challenges for them and their family. Figure 2.3 highlights the areas where respondents have faced challenges and further supports the results from Figure 2.2:

- housing (35%)
- social connectedness (28%)
- food security (24%)
- employment (19%)
- transportation (15%)

One-time Unexpected Costs

Figure 2.4 highlights the financial vulnerabilities of the respondents; almost 40% indicated not having enough money to cover one-time unexpected costs (in a month), without impacting their regular monthly expenses.

This information signifies a significant risk of episodic poverty in the community that can lead to greater indebtedness, poor health and prolonged poverty. Furthermore, more than 30% of the respondents indicated having less than a \$1000 to cover these unexpected expenses (Figure 2.5). In a car dependent community (Figure 4.1), costs related to car repair and maintenance are likely and expenses such as these can be a significant threat to the health and prosperity of individuals and families trying to escape poverty.

Figure 2:4: Do you have enough money to cover one-time unexpected costs (e.g. car repair, medical bill, etc.) in a month without feeling that it impacts your ability to pay your other monthly expenses (e.g. housing, food, transportation, etc.)? (n=213)

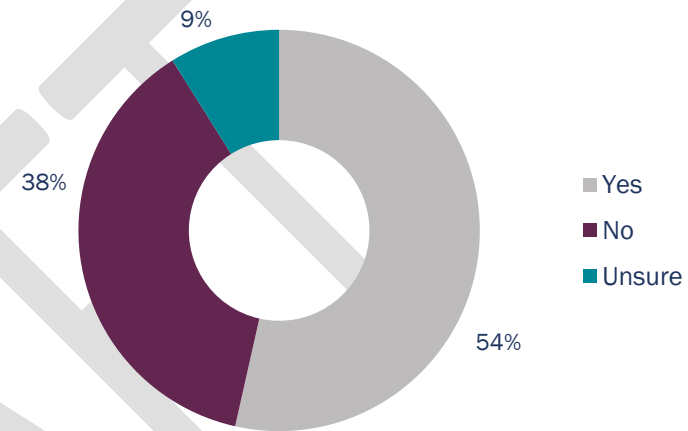
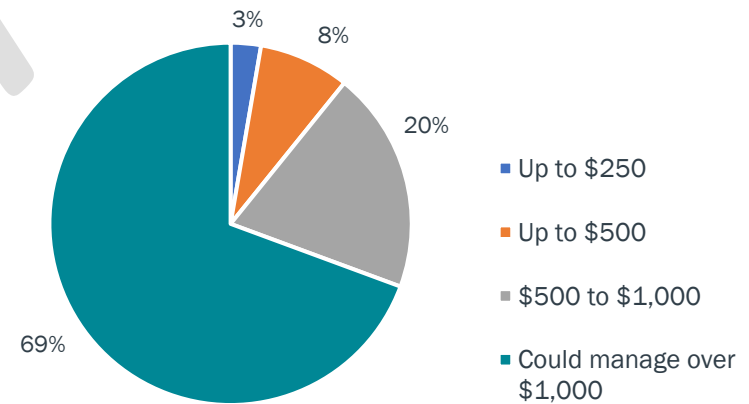


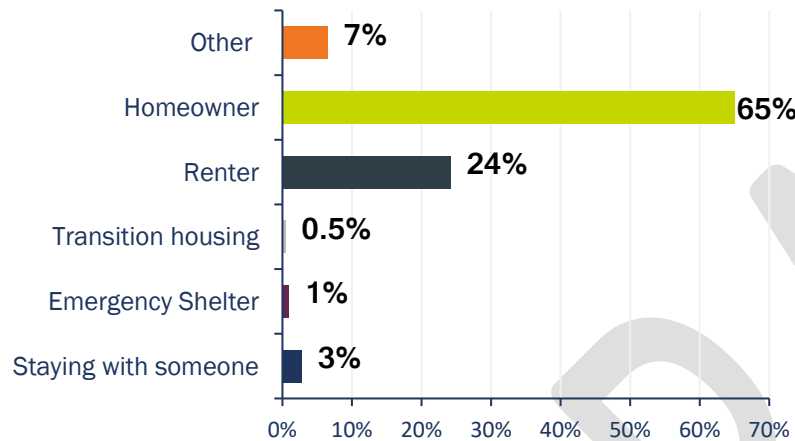
Figure 2:5: If yes, select up to which amount applies. (n=111)



Section 2 HOUSING

Access to housing is a basic human right and is a key determinant of health and wellbeing. Having secure access to safe, affordable and adequate housing is necessary to support individuals to have a healthy standard of living.

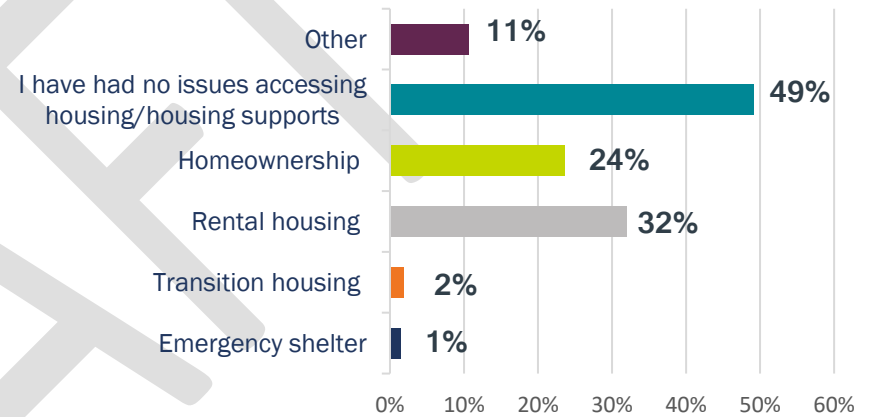
Figure 3.1: What is your current housing status? (n=215)



Housing Status

Sixty-five percent (65%) of survey respondents indicated that they were homeowners, while 24% indicated that they were renters (Figure 3.1). It could be assumed that because respondents were predominantly mature adults over the age of 45 years (Figure 1.2), they may have been able to become owners prior to the rise of housing unaffordability in the region.

Figure 3.2: While living in the Comox Valley I have struggled to access the following types of housing/housing supports: (n=203)



Access to Housing & Housing Supports

Despite most respondents being homeowners, almost 60% indicated they had difficulty in accessing housing or housing supports in the community (Figure 3.2). Furthermore, 16% indicated they were not able to find programs for people facing or at risk of homelessness (Figure 3.3). Barriers to accessing housing supports increases the risk of people continuously facing housing insecurity, living in unsafe conditions and remaining at risk of homelessness.

Most of the survey respondents (52%) indicated they are not involved in activities in their neighbourhoods that promote neighbours meeting neighbours, while 33% indicated that they were involved in activities that promote social connection within their neighbourhood (Figure 3.4).

Respondents elaborated on how they participate:

- living multi-family residential complexes presents opportunities to leverage common spaces
- strata meetings
- group activities to engage and establish connections with neighbours

Figure 3:3: I have found programs that support individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk for homelessness to be available when I have needed them. (n=214)

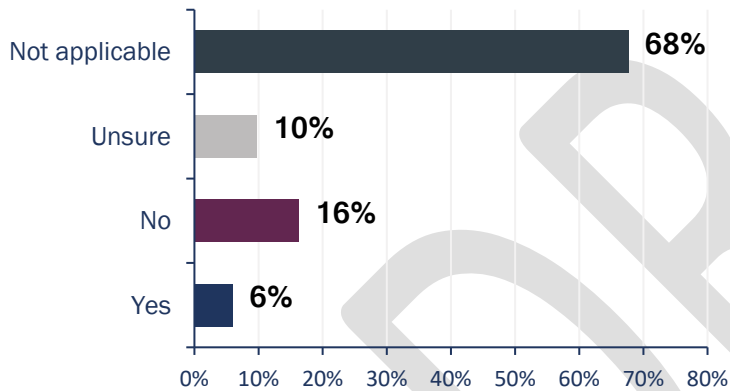
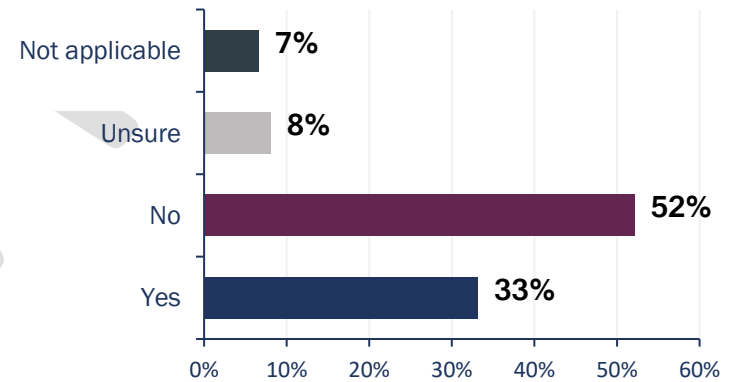


Figure 3:4: If you have access to housing, are you involved in any activities or events in your neighbourhood (formal or informal) that promote neighbours meeting neighbours? (n=211)



General comments regarding housing and housing services in the community:

Respondents were asked to provide general comments and suggestions related to housing in the community. There is a need for affordable housing options for equity priority groups who face heightened vulnerabilities due to the high cost of housing. These groups include low-income earners, seniors, women, children and LGBTQIA+, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous and racialized communities.

Based on the responses, there are several actions local governments can take to address housing challenges, such as leveraging policies to create subsidies or regulating the housing among available building stock to create more affordable options and in diverse housing types.

The general comments and suggestions provided by the respondents generated the following themes:

- Lack of affordable housing options creates housing insecurity, particularly among renters, which can force people to overspend on housing, face food insecurity and choose housing that is unsafe and inadequate for household needs (*12 comments*)
- Seniors and persons with disabilities face significant challenges in finding accessible and affordable homes due to the high cost of newer developments (*4 comments*)
- Supportive housing is needed to support individuals who are experiencing homelessness and who require additional supports for challenges related to mental illness and addiction (*2 comments*)
- A need to build more residential developments in rural areas; modular homes and pod houses offer opportunities to create more affordable housing options (*1 comment*)

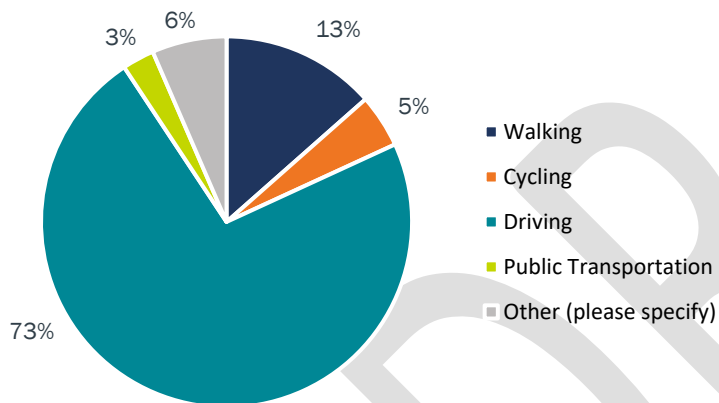
“We need to look at community planning and bylaws that prevent shared housing by individual homeowners who might well have spare bedrooms that could be rented to single individuals or couples who need a place to live, eat, and relax until they can find an affordable

Section 3 TRANSPORTATION

People experiencing poverty rely on public transit and active modes of transportation. Access to safe, affordable and reliable transportation provides people the opportunity to remain mobile, meet their essential needs, participate in society and pursue employment opportunities.

Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents depend on driving to get around in the region (Figure 4.1). The high dependence on driving may be a result of gaps within the local transportation system as indicated through (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.1: What is your main mode of transportation? (n=215)



SIDEWALKS

The majority of the respondents found sidewalks and pathways to be inadequate and present mobility barriers in the CVRD. While 16% indicated that they had no sidewalks, 13% reported that “most” and 36% indicated that “some” presented safety

challenges (Figure 4.2). Well over half (69%) of respondents shared that sidewalks in the regions are not accessible or partially accessible (Figure 4.3).

These findings highlight the challenges for people experiencing poverty who are less likely to be able to afford a private vehicle and would have to rely on the local transportation system to get around.

Figure 4.2: I find that the sidewalks and pedestrian pathways in my community are designed to support walkability and pedestrian safety. (n=213)

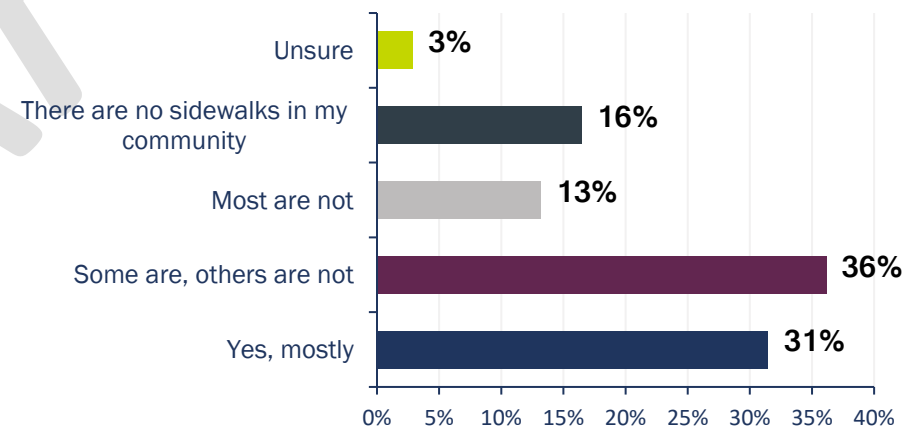
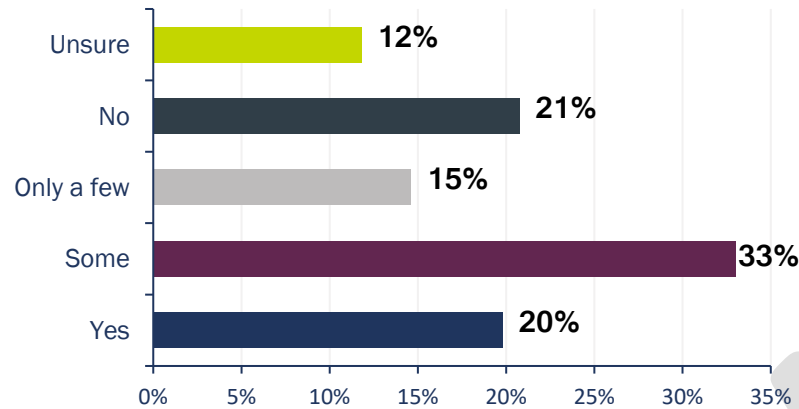


Figure 4:3: I find that sidewalks and pedestrian pathways in my community are designed to be accessible and accommodate mobility aids such as wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, and scooters. (n=212)



Respondents were also asked to elaborate on the challenges they experience related to walkability and accessibility in the transportation system. From the comments received the following themes emerged:

- Lack of sidewalks and/or non-continuous sidewalks (29 comments)
- Lack of pedestrian safety. This includes lack of road demarcations, inadequate speed controls, inadequate crosswalks, lack of shoulders, no shading from sun in extreme weather, lack of streetlights (27 comments)

- Poor maintenance and inaccessible routes. This includes dilapidated roads and sidewalks, roads, natural debris on sidewalks, uneven pavement, uncleared snow, lack of benches, lack of accessible design features (12 comments)
- Lack of provisions for cyclists (3 comments)

The current network of sidewalks and roads is inadequate in facilitating safe and accessible mobility across the community and poses significant risk of injury and death for pedestrians and cyclists. The lack of accessible transportation options amplifies vulnerabilities for people with mobility challenges, such as persons with disabilities and parents with young children, that restricts their participation in society.

“Accessibility challenges in public spaces such as lack of accessible public washrooms present barriers for persons with disabilities in participating in social activities.”

PUBLIC TRANSIT

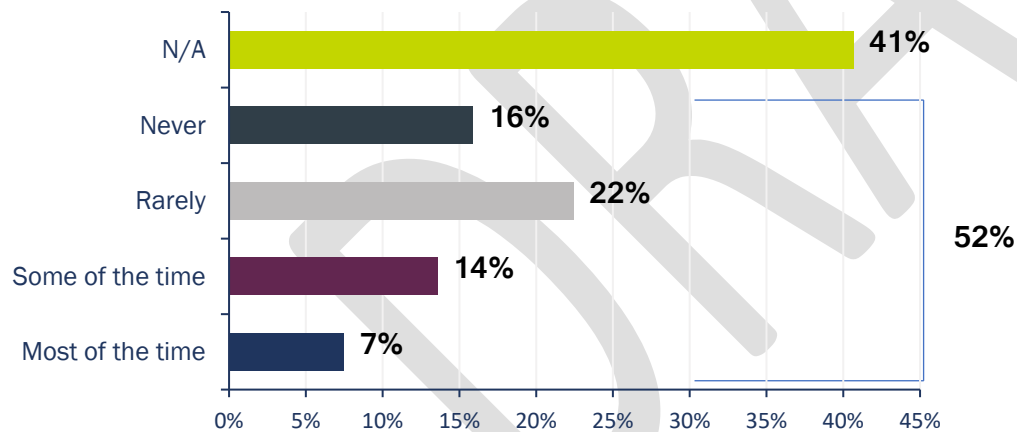
Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents indicated the public transit system is insufficient to meet their transportation needs. In addition, 41% indicated this question is not applicable, which may highlight the limited use of the public transit system due to the challenges noted.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on the challenges they experience related to the public transit system. From the comments received the following themes emerged:

- Infrequent service and lack of connectivity, which includes limited service at extended hours, limited stops, lack of connectivity between areas (53 comments)
- Lack of accessible transportation options for seniors and persons with disabilities (8 comments)

The transportation-related challenges noted throughout the survey highlights the barriers that limit opportunities to pursue employment, educational, and social opportunities for people who do not have a private car. Limited reliability, service hours, and connectivity to remote and rural areas further isolates people in those areas restricting their participation in society.

Figure 4:4: The public transit system in my community meets my transportation needs. (n=214)



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents do not perceive the community to be bicycle friendly (Figure 4.5). Accessibility and connectivity of the transportation system is important as 27% of the respondents indicated they use active forms of transportation because they cannot afford a car (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4:5: My community is bicycle friendly. (n=214)

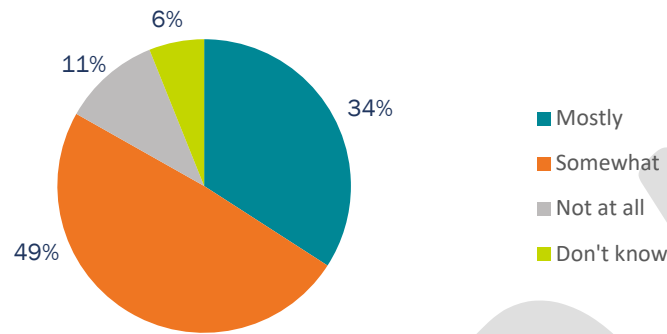
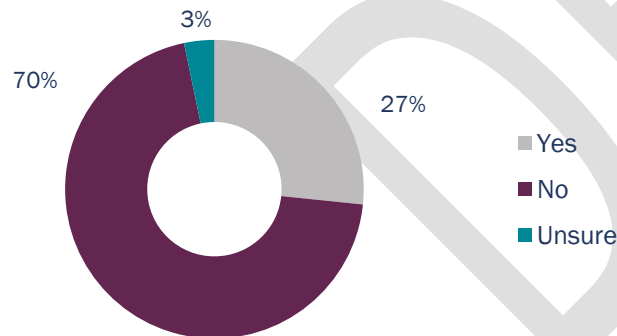


Figure 4:6: Do you ever use active forms of transportation (i.e. walking and cycling) because you cannot afford to access a vehicle? (n=214)



Transportation is a major area of concern among the community and requires a prioritized action as it can significantly address barriers in reducing poverty in the community.

General Comments Related to Transportation

The respondents were asked to provide general comments and suggestions related to transportation in the community. Based on the comments received the following themes emerged:

- More transit service connections to schools (20 comments)
- More accessible and affordable transportation (13 comments)
- Increase bike lanes (12 comments)
- More bus connectivity to non-serviced location (10 comments)
- Support walkability and pedestrian safety in the community; development of trails, walkways and routes that support active forms of transformation (9 comments)
- Increase frequency of bus service and at extended hours and during weekends (9 comments)
- Better traffic control; better speed controls, stop signs, bridges to ease traffic congestion and improve drivability across the community (7 comments)
- Increase accessible parking spaces (2 comments)
- Car-share programs (1 comment)

Section 4 COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Community and social supports are necessary to empower people who experience poverty to have opportunities to improve their standard of living and break free from cycles of poverty.

CHILD CARE

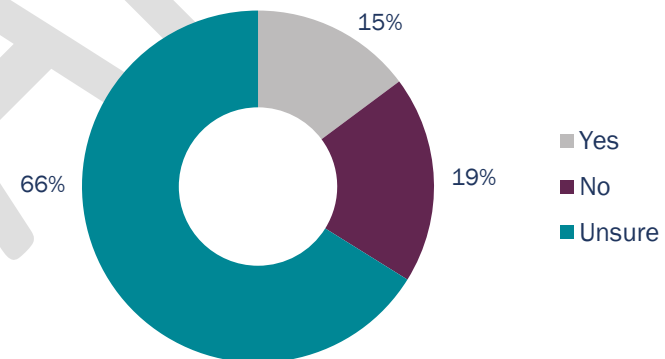
Child care is an essential service that is key to creating equitable economic opportunities. Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents indicated that they were unsure if child care is affordable, while 19% indicated that child care was unaffordable (Figure 5.1). The majority of respondents that were “unsure” may reflect the demographic profile of the respondents (older adults, who may not need child care (Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.7).

Respondents were asked to elaborate on the challenges they face related to child care. Based on the comments, the following themes emerged:

- Lack of affordable child care (10 comments)
- Long waitlists and lack of childcare options (5 comments)
- Lack of flexible child care options (2 comments)
- Limited supports for children with special needs (1 comment)

Affordability and accessibility of child care is a significant barrier for low-income households and single parents trying to escape poverty. The lack of affordable child care options also challenges families in securing safe and developmentally appropriate options.

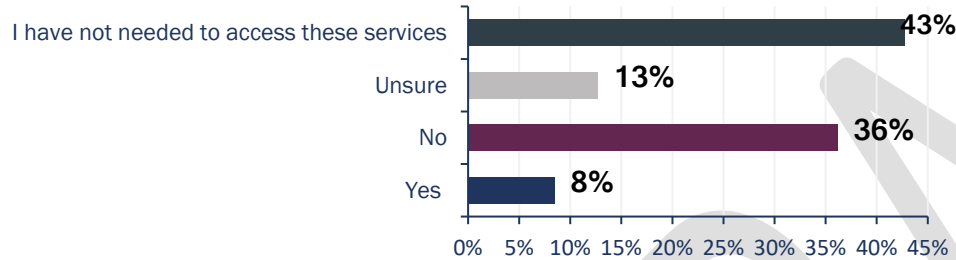
Figure 5.1: Child care is accessible and affordable for my family.(n=189)



RECREATION

Forty-eight percent (48%) of the respondents indicated using discounted recreation passes or not being able to afford recreational and sports programs (Figure 5.2). Increasing access to recreational and sports programs for people experiencing poverty can have significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and families within the region.

Figure 5:2: Recreational and sports programs are affordable and accessible to myself and my family. (n=193)



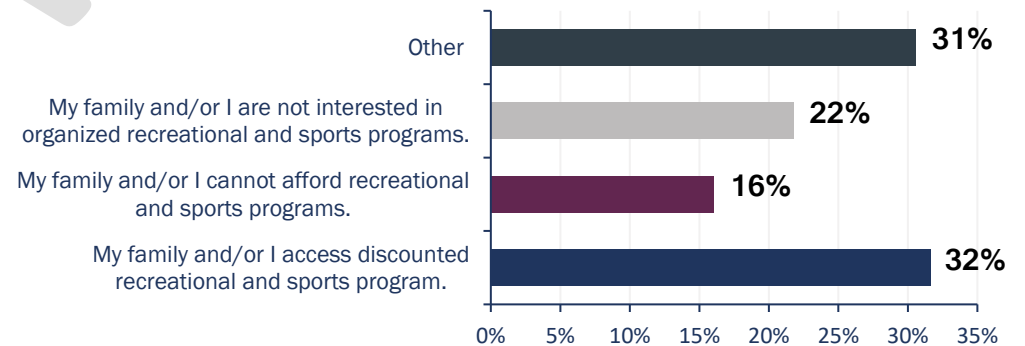
- Community-level availability of a vast range of affordable and accessible mental health and substance use supports and services (27 comments)
- Mental health and substance use supports and services for youth and young adults (11 comments)
- Increased information on accessing mental health supports (3 comments)
- Supportive housing and mental health supports for people experiencing mental illness and homelessness (1 comment)

“I don’t have time. Parents fleeing abuse are having to act like social workers to navigate system and find community supports and services for their children and family. It takes an enormous amount of work and effort when you are also struggling with mental health issues ... possibly for both the parent, children, and family. I am also helping my children’s friends and their family members obtain support from the community for their mental health struggles.”

MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION SUPPORTS

Poverty has significant impacts on the mental health of individuals. Thirty-six (36%) percent indicated there are not adequate supports for mental health supports and addiction within the community (Figure 5.3). Access to timely mental supports is essential as delays further amplify health impact. The respondents were asked to elaborate on challenges related to mental health supports. Based on the comments received, the following themes emerged:

Figure 5:3: I have found that there are adequate supports for mental health and/or addiction issues in my community when I have needed them. (n=213)

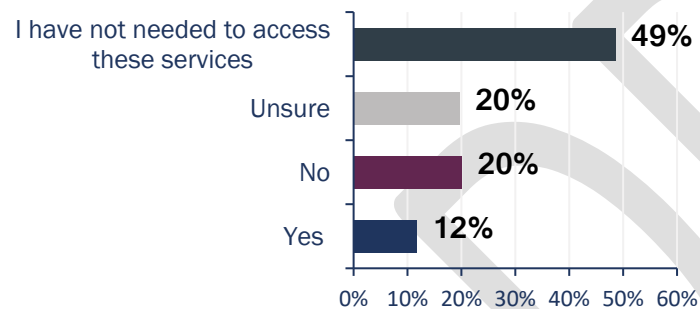


EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS TRAINING

Based on the survey results, 40% of the participants indicated they either are unsure or do not find that there are adequate supports and programs for employment and life skills training the community (Figure 5.4).

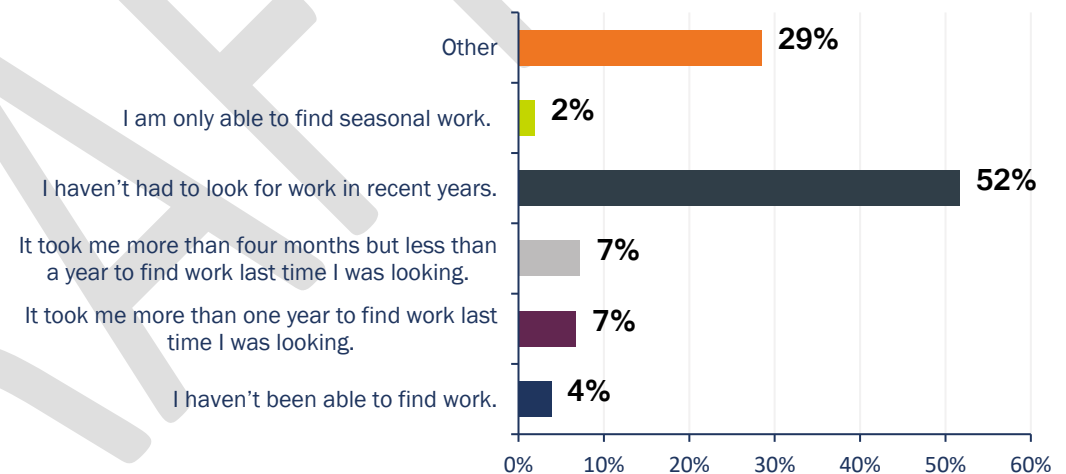
Removing barriers to employment training is necessary to support individuals in securing employment opportunities. Older adults, people with disabilities, and those who experience mental health and substance use challenges face significant barriers in accessing training and then finding appropriate employment opportunities that meet their needs.

Figure 5.4: I have found that there are adequate supports and programs for employment and life skills training when I have needed them (n=214)



Based on the survey responses, for those community members who are actively looking for employment, it may take an extended period to become employed. Half of the respondents indicated they did not have to look for work in recent years and the remaining half of indicated some form of barrier or challenge in finding employment (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Do you find it easy to find work in your community all year round? (n=207)

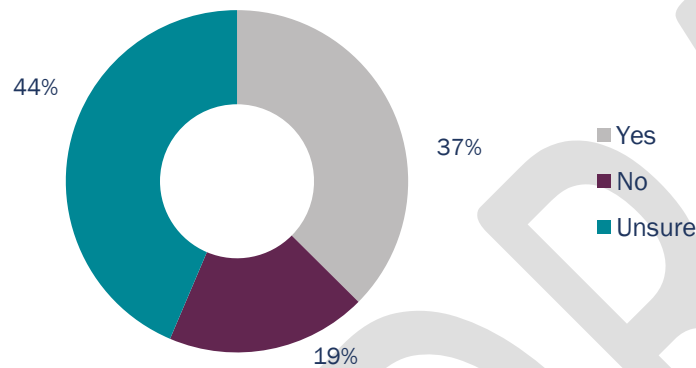


“Work BC's programs support average people with average needs. People with disabilities are technically served however not by people trained to serve them. Their needs are not met, and they fall through the cracks.”

SOCIAL PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Finding information on social programs and services may be a challenge in the CVRD as 19% of respondents indicated it is not easy to find information and 44% of the respondents indicated of being unsure (Figure 5.6). Awareness of social programming is important in increasing outreach and uptake of social supports that are key to address barriers and challenges to escape poverty.

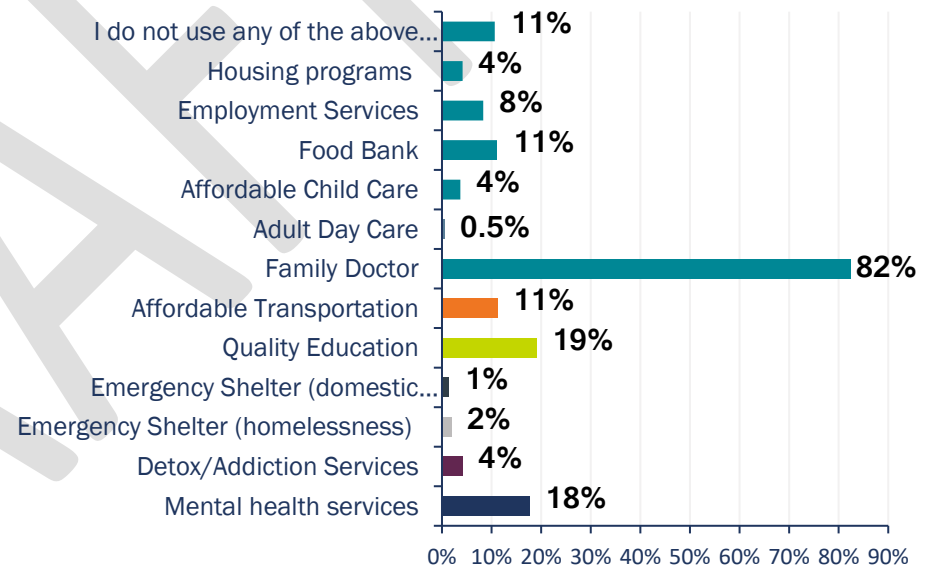
Figure 5:6: It is easy to find information about social programs and services available in my community. (n=211)



Based on the survey responses there was limited use of social services among the respondents. The most prevalent support accessed by 82% of the respondents is family doctor (Figure 5.7). Each of the other social supports were used by less than 20% of the respondents and included:

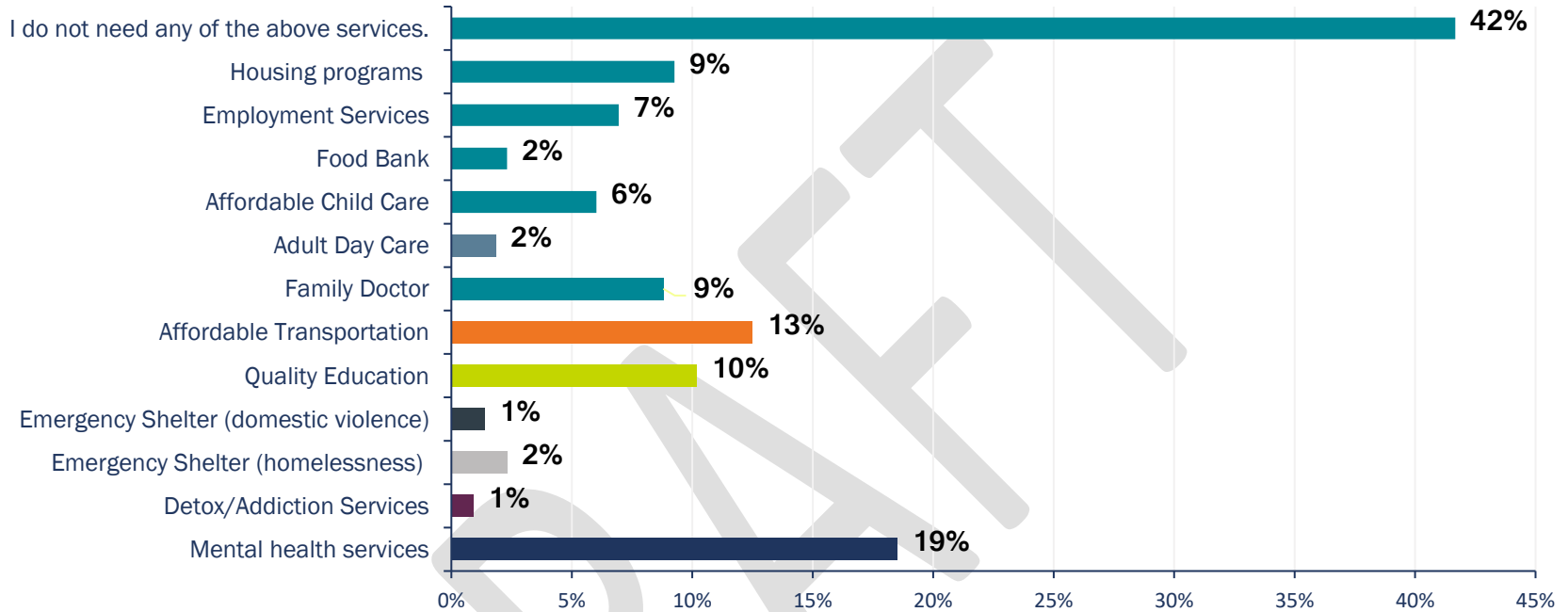
- accessing quality education (19%)
- mental health services (18%)
- affordable transportation (11%)
- use of food banks (11%)

Figure 5:7: I access the following services in my community. (Select all that apply) (n=214)



This is low use of social services is important to note as almost 30% of the respondents indicated they either experienced poverty or were “unsure” (Figure 1.9).

Figure 5:8: I need, but am not able to access the following services in my community (select all that apply): (n=167)



There are a range of social supports *needed* in the community as indicated by those who were not able to access services when they needed them (Figure 5.8). The top social services currently needed are:

- mental health services (19%)
- need affordable transportation (13%)
- access to quality education (10%)
- need housing programs (9%)
- family doctor (9%)

It is also important to note that only 6% of the respondents indicated they need access to child care, whereas the need for child care in the community may be much higher as only 30% of the respondents indicated they had children living with them (Figure 1.9).

General Comments Related to Community and Social Supports

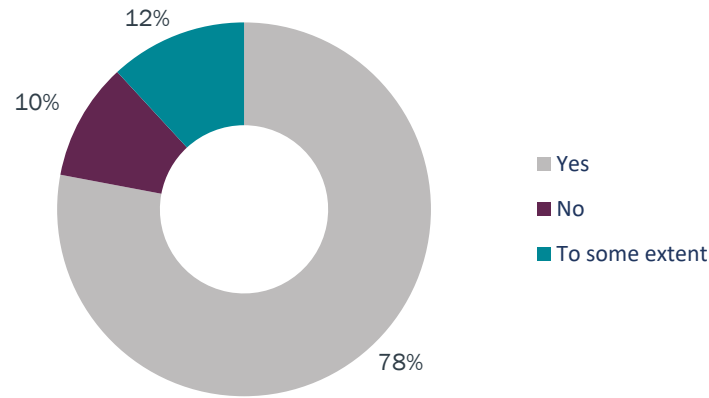
The survey respondents were asked to provide general comments and suggestions in relation to community supports. Based on the comments received, the following themes emerged

- Increase supply of affordable housing and supportive housing (31 comments)
- Streamline social services and expand social supports and services into remote and rural areas communities to reduce barriers for people in accessing services within their own communities (7 comments)
- Reduce stigma attached to homelessness and poverty (7 comments)
- Increase affordable and accessible mental health, substance use and addiction services and supports for families and youth (6 comments)
- Improve transportation system to support people with mobility challenges and increase access to services and employment opportunities (2 comments)
- Improve accessibility in the design of services and infrastructure across the region (2 comments)
- Increase access to food banks and healthy foods in remote and rural areas of the region (2 comments)
- Address racism subjected to Indigenous people and racialized communities and increase awareness of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2 comments)
- Enhance educational supports and mentorships for vulnerable youth (2 comments)
- Increase access to extended health benefits (dental, physio, optometry etc.) (2 comments)
- Offer supports in paying utilities and retrofitting housing (1 comments)
- Increase availability of affordable, safe, and flexible childcare options (1 comments)
- Stimulate economic activity to create more jobs offering adequate wages and benefits (1 comments)

“My recent experiences living in deep poverty have made me look at the community I have lived in for many years in a much different way - I simply no longer feel part of and connected to the community. The things I took for granted - going to gym, going to the theatre or occasionally going out

“This happened for me well before the pandemic, though my greatest hope during this time is that other people will begin to experience and understand how the poorest and most vulnerable among live ALL THE TIME. If you are a middle-class professional, most of the community

Figure 5.9: Do you think a guaranteed income would help to prevent poverty and better support community members to meet their needs? (n=111)



Guaranteed Income

Based on the survey responses, a guaranteed income was perceived as a positive poverty reduction action. Ninety (90%) of the respondents agreed a guaranteed income would entirely or to some extent prevent poverty and better support community members to meet their needs (Figure 5.9).

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Section 5 FOOD SECURITY

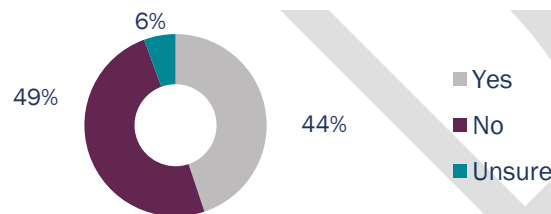
The ability to access a quality diet is essential to a person’s growth and development. People experiencing poverty face food insecurity; a lack of resources may limit secure access to an adequate quality diet to meet their nutritional needs.

Almost 20% of the survey respondents face some challenge in accessing nutritious foods all year round. For individuals experiencing poverty or those who have low-incomes, access to healthy foods is a significant challenge.

The respondents were asked to elaborate on the challenges related to food security. Based on the comments received, the following themes emerged:

- Lack of affordability of locally grown or fresh, healthy foods (15 comments)
- Inability to grow fresh fruits and vegetables during colder months (4 comments)
- Poor transportation options presents challenges in accessing food banks (2 comments)
- Food banks are not able to provide fresh, perishable foods (1 comments)

Figure 6:1: Do you have access to nutritious foods all year round? (n=213)



Based on the survey responses, affordability of healthy food options is a significant challenge. Among the survey respondents, 46% indicated spending more than a quarter of their monthly income on food and almost 7% spend more than half their income on food (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6:2: On average how much of your monthly budget do you spend on food? (n=210)

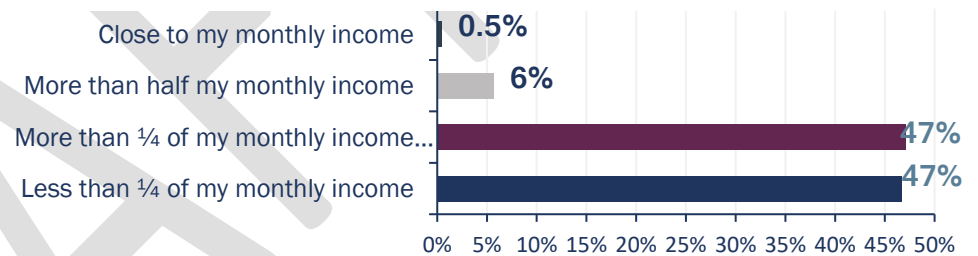
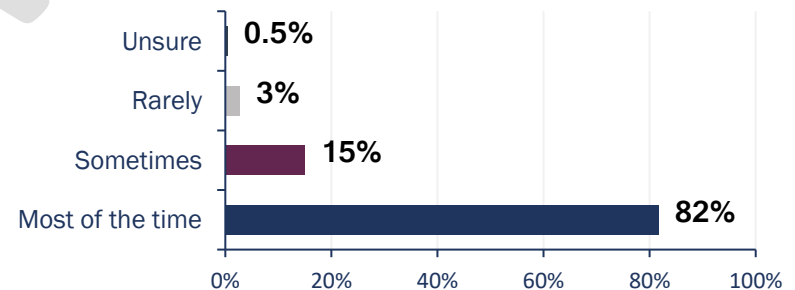
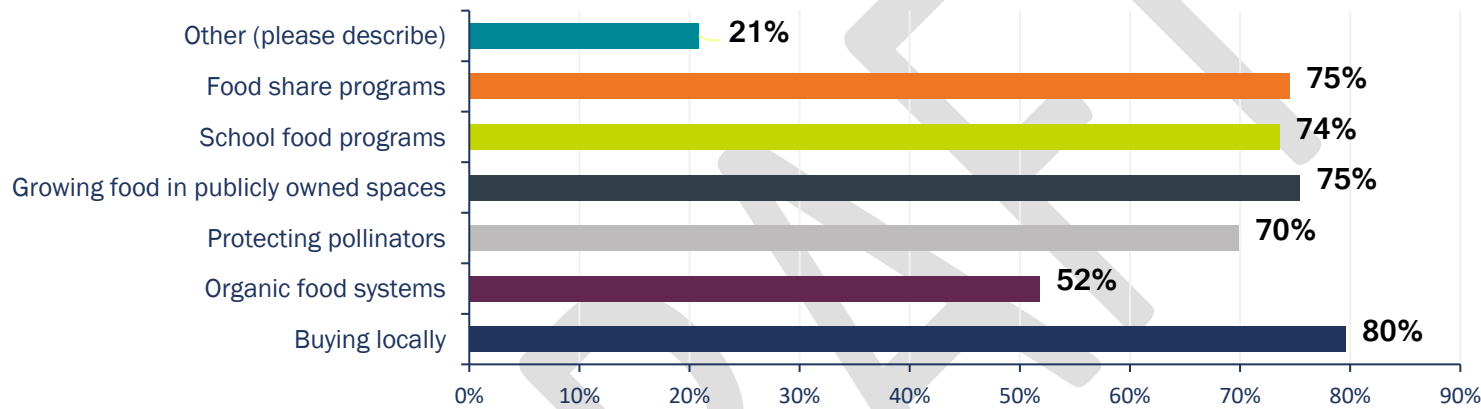


Figure 6:3: Have you ever had to choose between healthy foods or other household costs? (n=214)



The unaffordability of healthy foods is a common challenge shared by the survey respondents as 45% indicated having to choose between healthy foods and other household costs (Figure 6.3). The most common household costs that impact a person’s ability to purchase healthy foods include: housing, utilities, insurance, gas, and emergency expenses.

Figure 6.4: What activities would you encourage your local government to implement to achieve a sustainable local food system? Select all that apply. (n=209)



Role of Local Government in Food Security

The respondents indicated strong support for local government initiatives to achieve a sustainable local food system. Buying locally is supported by 80% of the respondents and 75% of the respondents support growing food in public spaces and support for food share programs (Figure 6.4).

The survey respondents were asked to provide general comments and suggestion related to food security initiatives. Based on the comments received, the following themes emerged:

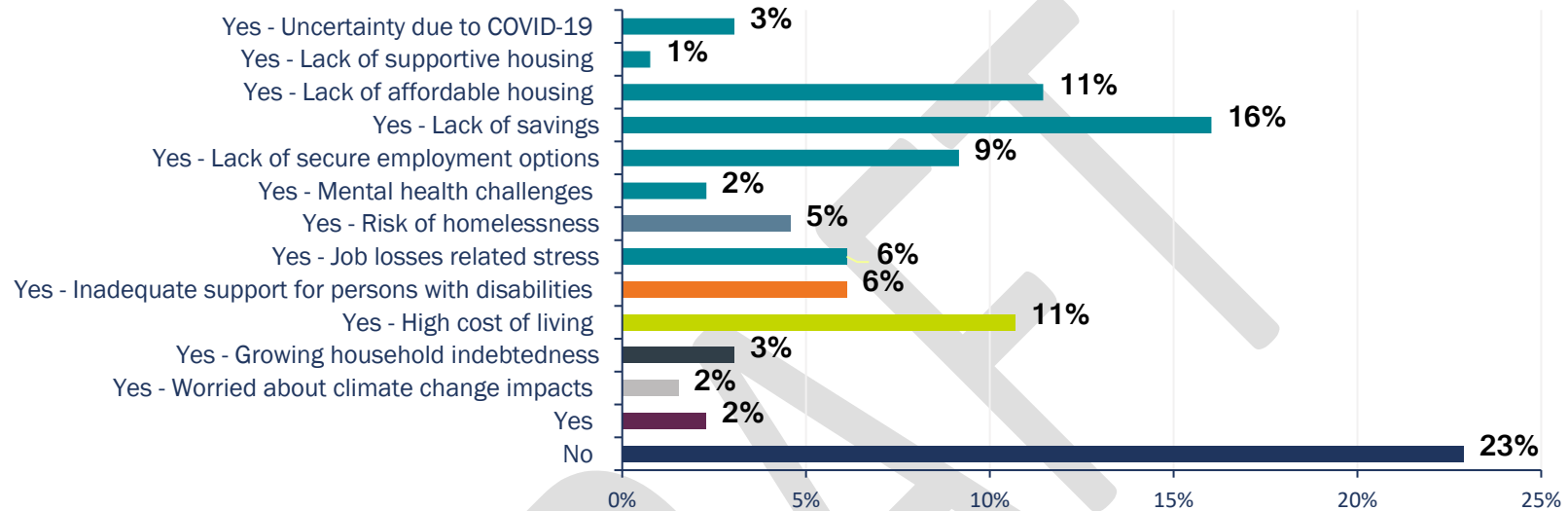
- Prioritizing development of community gardens and planting of fruit trees and crops in available public spaces (8 comments)

- Increase supports for local farmers and local food markets to remain operational all year-round (7 comments)
- Encouraging gardening through providing seedlings and education (5 comments)
- Increase community and school meal programs (4 comments)
- Establish food banks in rural and remote areas, such as Fanny Bay (2 comments)
- Create partnerships between local businesses and food banks to limit food waste (1 comments)
- Create a food hub for local food distribution, processing, selling (market), food literacy classes, knowledge exchange (1 comments)
- Address housing challenges to increase disposable incomes (1 comments)
- Reduce transportation gaps that reduce access to local food system (1 comments)

“While I am not against food share programs, school food programs, food banks, or hot meal programs, these do not represent food security - they are charity. If everyone in the community cannot shop at the venue of their choice, when they choose, and find what they need, we have food insecurity - and we have seen it grow by leaps and bounds in the Comox Valley over the last 3 decades in particular. Food bank clients, for example, were in the past mainly those on fixed incomes, but now working people represent a greater and greater share of those needing help. Charity should be a stop-gap measure, not a way of life.”

Section 6 SURVEY CLOSING

Figure 7.1: Do you worry about your financial security now and in to the future? If yes, please tell us why: (n=167)



Financial Security

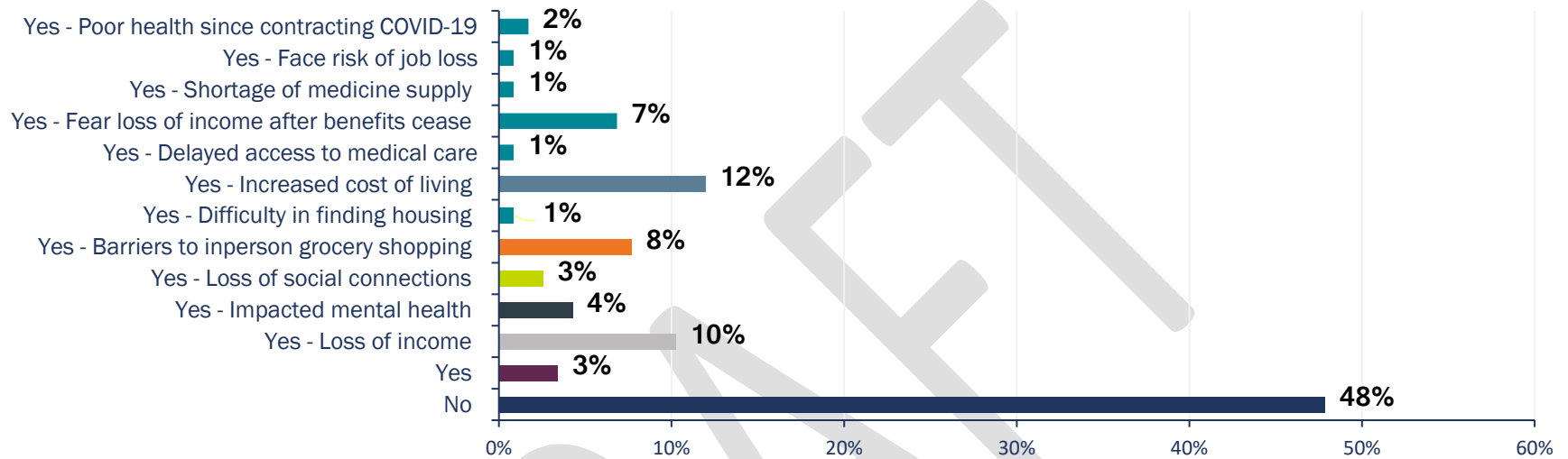
In this open-ended question, respondents shared that they experience some sense of financial *insecurity*. This may be linked the lack of affordable housing and secure employment options, leading to a fear of homelessness. Only 23% of the respondents indicated they felt financially secure now and into the future (Figure 7.1).

Among the reasons identified for financial insecurity, the lack of savings and high cost of living further increased household

indebtedness It should be noted that the underlying reasons for financial insecurity are *connected*, which exacerbates the vulnerability of low-income earners and increases risk of homelessness and poor health. Other items to note:

- The lack of savings impacts people’s ability to withstand unforeseen emergencies, plan for retirement and pursue economic and social opportunities to grow and thrive.
- Mental health challenges increase risk of illness and job loss and lack of affordable mental health supports further exacerbates the challenges.

Figure 7.2: Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your financial security or impacted your ability to meet your daily needs (i.e. accessing food, shelter, clothing)? If yes, please tell us more: (n=150)



Financial Security & COVID-19

More than 50% of the respondents indicated being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in some way (Figure 7.2). COVID-19 has likely heightened vulnerabilities and amplified challenges experienced by people living in poverty. The long-term impacts of the pandemic are still to be understood and may increase the challenges for people in poverty to meet their basic needs. The social and economic instability associated with the pandemic has the potential to further plunge more individuals and households into poverty.

To note, respondents highlighted the impacts of altered shopping habits due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The preference to limit in-person shopping and visiting multiple stores increases the cost of groceries as people are having to pay for deliveries and are not able to purchase from multiple locations where they can have savings. There is also a fear of the future when COVID-19 financial relief benefits cease as these have helped low-income earners, seniors, and person with disabilities increase their access to healthy foods and to manage costs.

7.3 Final Thoughts from Respondents

The survey ended with an open-ended question where respondents had the opportunity to provide final comments or suggestions for alleviating poverty in the Comox Valley. A total of 75 comments were received. The following themes emerged:

- **Affordable housing.** There is a strong emphasis on the development of more affordable housing options across the housing continuum, including emergency and supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness, and challenges related to mental illness and substance use and addictions. (20 comments)
- **Guaranteed liveable incomes.** The rising cost of living reduces the effectiveness of financial assistance to support people in meeting their needs. Increasing the allocations of financial assistance programs to provide a guaranteed, liveable income may support poverty reduction in the region. (16 comments)
- **Prioritize poverty reduction.** To create real change, prioritization of actions and resources is needed to reduce barriers related to poverty for community members. (10 comments)
- **Access to mental health services.** The impacts of poverty are the most pronounced on the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. There is a clear need for more affordable and accessible services to support people with low-incomes in accessing timely supports for mental health, substance use and addictions challenges. (8 comments)
- **Reduce cost of living.** The high cost of living reduces the capacity of households to meet their basic needs, resulting in food insecurity and poor health. Actions are needed to directly increase access to healthy foods and address transportation gaps that limit access to services. Supports are also needed to reduce other households costs for low-income earners to increase access to utilities, data coverage, and extended health supports. (4 comments)
- **Create secure employment options and support people in gaining employment.** The availability of secure equitable, employment opportunities offering good wages and benefits are needed to support individuals to overcome challenges associated with poverty. People experiencing poverty also face significant barriers in gaining the skills, education, and experience to access more secure employment options. (4 comments)
- **Prioritize supports for children and youth.** Children and youth in low-income households need enhanced opportunities for their healthy development and growth. Availability of accessible and affordable child care options are also essential to reduce barriers to the economic participation of women, single parents, and low-income households. (4 comments)
- **Support social serving organizations.** The CVRD can enhance access to the available social services and supports in the region through supporting and collaborating with social serving organizations to reduce any barriers they face in service delivery. (4 comments)

- **Integrate accessibility across community network of social supports and services.** Accessibility considerations are to be prioritized across the design and delivery of programs, services and supports in the community to reduce barriers to participation for persons with disabilities. (2 comments)
- **Reduce stigma associated with poverty reduction.** It is important to address the stigma attached to people experiencing poverty to build support for poverty reduction initiatives. (2 comments)

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APPENDIX B – STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CVRD POVERTY ASSESSMENT & REDUCTION STRATEGY

Length: 30-45 minutes virtual/phone interviews (up to 60 minutes for group interviews)

Format: Participants respond to questions examining challenges within the focus areas that best related to their organization's experiences.

Regional Context: The CVRD is implementing its Regional Growth Strategy and seeks to identify potential actions in the seven focus areas that can be undertaken to reduce the burden of poverty in the CVRD.

The focus areas of the Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- Housing
- Families, Children and Youth
- Liveable Incomes
- Food Security
- Social Supports
- Affordable, Accessible Transportation
- Social Inclusion

Engagement Goal: Understand the experiences of community organizations in supporting priority equity groups in improving their standards of living and escaping poverty.

Note: Equity priority groups refers to individuals and populations who are collectively being under-served, mis-served or disadvantaged by policies, procedures and programs. These groups face barriers that impact their ability to participate in a society equally.

1. Organization Name:
2. Please briefly describe your role in your organization.
3. Which demographics best represent the clientele you serve?
4. Which focus areas of the CVRD Poverty Reduction Strategy relate most to your organization's mission?
5. In relation to your focus areas, what are the most pressing challenges facing the community in relation to each priority area?
6. What supports/services are available through your organization to address these challenges?
 - a. How effective are these services in meeting your clients' needs and? (or)
 - b. How effective are these social supports in increasing the standard of living across the CVRD?
7. Who is left out from accessing these supports?
 - a. What are the challenges or barriers that limit outreach to these groups?
 - b. What are the impacts of this exclusion?
 - c. What challenges does your organization face in delivering supports/services?
8. What are some immediate gaps that exist within the social service system that allow for these issues to persist?
9. What are some examples of successful programs/services in the community or elsewhere?
 - a. What contributed to the success of these initiatives?
 - b. For the ideas from elsewhere, what would it take to implement them here? (financial, organization lead, etc)
10. What opportunities or potential actions could be created to improve the availability and effectiveness of social supports/services
11. What role do you think local governments and the Comox Valley Regional District play in reducing poverty in the community?
 - a. Are they playing some of this role currently?
 - b. What immediate contributions do you think they could make to help reduce poverty?

APPENDIX C – SHARING CIRCLE QUESTIONS

COMOX VALLEY POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

Length: 1.5 - 2 Hours

Format: Participants select and respond to the priority area that most resonates with their experiences.

Regional Context: The Sharing Circle is an opportunity to support the Comox Valley Regional District in the gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges and experiences of people living poverty to identify potential actions in the seven priority areas that can be undertaken to reduce the burden of poverty in the region.

The priority areas of the Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- Housing
- Families, Children and Youth
- Liveable Incomes
- Food Security
- Affordable and Accessible Transportation
- Social Supports
- Social Inclusion

Engagement Goal: Understand the needs and challenges experienced by equity priority groups in earning sustainable livelihoods and maintaining a healthy standard of living to reduce poverty in the CVRD.

Approach For Questioning in Sharing Circle

Understand the Challenges:

- What is happening?
- What is the impact of the challenge?
- What is holding the challenge in place?

Identify the Impact Gaps:

- What is missing that could close the gap between the challenge and the solution?
- Where are the opportunities for collective impact?

Identify Potential Solutions: (In Round 2)

- What models are already being tried?
- What's working and not working?
- What resources are available? {are there opportunities or strengths within the community that can be leveraged}

NOTE: The term “equity priority groups” is used to refer to the demographics of the sharing circles who represent people with lived experience of poverty and facing social inequities.

HOUSING

Housing is an essential basic human need and is a critical social determinant of health and wellbeing. Develop and understanding of how housing challenges are experienced by people living in poverty. Identify the barriers faced by people trying to meet their basic housing needs. What are the impacts on individual health and wellbeing, and community poverty?

Challenges

1. What are some day-to-day concerns or challenges you experience in terms of housing?

Probing Questions:

Do you believe your current housing situation meets your housing needs?

What barriers do you face in accessing housing that meets your needs?

2. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?

Impacts

1. How do these housing challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How does your current housing experience impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. What role do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity play in a person's experience with housing?

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Child poverty and vulnerability is a major concern in the region. To support the healthy development of children, a variety of needs are to be met such as food, water, shelter, clothing, security, safety, green space, and opportunities to play and learn. Identify barriers faced by families in supporting the healthy growth of their family. What are ongoing impacts?

Challenges

1. What are some day-to-day concerns or challenges you experience in terms of supporting your family's healthy growth/development?

Probing Questions:

Do you believe your family is able to fulfill its household needs to support the healthy growth of all family members? Do children and youth have equal opportunities to learn, grow and pursue their interests?

2. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. What role do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity play in a family's experience of these challenges?

LIVEABLE INCOMES

Income supports serves as a critical social safety net to provide vulnerable people with a basic income to support them in meeting some of their basic needs. A liveable income offers support by providing enough to pay for housing, childcare or eldercare, nutritious food, use transportation, continue learning, cover emergencies and participate in the community. Develop an understanding of the experience of people who access income supports. Identify any barriers or gaps in accessing income supports. What are the long-term impacts?

Challenges

1. What are some day-to-day concerns or challenges you experience in relation to attaining a liveable income?
2. In what ways has income support helped you improve your standard of living?
3. What gaps exist within the system of income supports that limit your ability to improve your standard of living?
4. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. How role do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity play in a person's experience of earning a liveable income?

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Social supports are essential to supporting vulnerable people in enhancing their health and wellbeing. Social supports refer to a range of supports to maintain a basic standard of living, including housing, food banks, meal programs, counselling, employment training, transit passes, mental health and addictions programs. Develop an understanding of the experience of people who access social supports. Identify any barriers or gaps in accessing supports. What are the long-term impacts?

Challenges

1. What are some day-to-day concerns or challenges you experience in relation to social supports?
Probing Question:
What forms of social supports are available to you?
2. In what ways have social supports helped you improve your standard of living?
3. What gaps exist within the current system of social supports that limit your ability to improve your standard of living?
4. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. How role do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity play in a person's experience of accessing social supports?

FOOD SECURITY

The ability to access and consume an adequate quality diet is essential to a person's health and wellbeing. Develop an understanding of the experience of people who are facing food insecurity and identify barriers limiting their access to food? What are the long-term impacts?

Challenges

1. What is your day-to-day experience in providing food for yourself and your family?

Probing Question:

Do you have secure/regular access to a variety of healthy foods to meet your nutritional needs?

2. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?
3. What forms of supports have you relied upon to deal with these challenges? How effective have they been in supporting your access to food?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. How do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity impact the way in which person or family experiences these challenges?

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

People living in poverty rely on public and active transportation to meet their needs and participate in society. Develop an understanding of the transportation related challenges and barriers for vulnerable people. What are the long-term impacts?

Challenges

1. What is your day-to-day experience using multiple modes of transportation?

Probing Questions:

What forms of transportation do you rely upon?

Do you believe you are able to travel within the CVRD independently, safely, and reliably?

2. What do you believe is causing some of these challenges?
3. Have you observed/experienced any positive changes in the transportation infrastructure/system that has improved your travel experience?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your day-to-day life?
2. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
3. How do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity impact the way in which a person experiences these challenges?

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion is central to addressing inequities and provide just, fair opportunities for people to participate in society to advance their standard of living and break from a cycle of poverty. Develop an understanding of the experience of people living in poverty related to social inclusion. Identify any barriers faced by vulnerable people in developing a sense of belonging and accessing opportunities in the community.

Challenges

1. In your day-to-day life, please describe the different ways in which you participate in the community?
Social participation: attending the recreation centres, volunteering, attending a faith based service, celebrating cultural events, playing in a sports team, joining a book club, being part of a learning program.

Economic participation: employment, operating a business.
Political participation: engaging in political surveys, joining townhall meetings, writing letters to and/or interacting with the electing officials.
2. What community spaces and connections are important to you? What value do they add to your life?
 - a. Are there other community spaces and interactions that may add value to your life?
3. What are some barriers or challenges you experience in terms of accessing community spaces, establishing connections, or in participating in the community in any way?
4. If facing barriers to your participation, what do you believe is causing some of these challenges to persist?

Impacts

1. How do these challenges impact your overall health and wellbeing?
2. How do age, gender, abilities, and ethnicity impact the way in which people experience social inclusion?