

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Toronto, with a network of white lines and colored dots (blue, orange, pink, green) overlaid on the image. The dots are connected by thin white lines, forming a web-like structure. The background shows a dense urban landscape with various buildings and trees under a cloudy sky.

CONNECTION, ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING

A Report from the 2022 Social Capital in Canada Study

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Introduction

Communities across Canada have an interest in measuring the well-being of their citizens. Often this is done using economic measures of employment, income and inequality. There are also statistics reporting on incidences of crime, of homeless or of disease (most recently focusing on cases of COVID-19). As indispensable as these measures are, they still miss some of the key ingredients of inclusive, healthy and vibrant communities.

The concept of social capital widens the lens to include measures that assess whether people feel included in, connected to and supported by the communities in which they live. “Social capital” is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks, and the extent to which there is trust and reciprocity within a community and among individuals. It is the essential “lubricant” that makes it possible for societies to function, and for people to get along with one another. There is ample empirical evidence showing that high levels of such reciprocity, trust and connection are key to making communities productive, healthy and safe.

The Social Capital in Canada 2022 Study addresses these dimensions of well-being by focusing on the extent to which Canadians feel included in, connected to and supported by the communities in which they live.

The study is based on a survey of a representative sample of 2,001 Canadians age 18 and over in all provinces, conducted online between June 15 and 27, 2022. It was commissioned by Community Foundations of Canada and conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research. This national survey was conducted in parallel with the **[2022 Toronto Social Capital Study](#)**, which in turn was built upon **[a previous Toronto study](#)** conducted in 2018.

This report presents the results of the survey as they relate to the themes of social connection, civic engagement and well-being. Results to additional survey questions are available online at **www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/connection-engagement-and-well-being**. The results for many of the survey questions have been combined to create several indexes covering the major dimensions of social capital, such as trust, connection and engagement. Other indexes, using established measures, cover life satisfaction, well-being and discrimination. The indexes provide a concise measure that can show how social capital, life satisfaction, well-being and experiences of discrimination differ across a range of groups within the population, or relate to other perceptions or experiences.¹

¹ Each index is scored from “0” (lowest possible score) to “10” (highest possible score). The well-being index uses the Personal Wellbeing Index available from the Australian Centre on Quality of Life (see <https://www.acqol.com.au/index>). The discrimination index uses the Williams Everyday Discrimination scale developed by David R. Williams (see <https://scholar.harvard.edu/davidrwilliams/node/32397>). More information on how the indexes are calculated is available online at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/toronto-social-capital-study-2022>.

Summary of Key Findings

This report presents the survey's main findings as they relate to the themes of belonging and social connection, community engagement, and well-being. Together, these findings highlight two major challenges facing communities across Canada.

The first is the connection between economic insecurity and social isolation. Many people in our communities can count on a network of family members, close friends and other friends, at least some of whom live close by. But not everyone is that well-connected. Some may have few close family or friends, or do not have any who live in the same city or community as they do. The key finding, however, is that the extent of these connections to family, friends and even neighbours consistently varies by income and employment status. Simply put, those with higher incomes or who are employed have access to a larger network of family and friends than those with lower incomes or who are unemployed. The same pattern holds when it comes to feelings of community belonging, and of having other people to depend on in times of need: those who are less economically secure are less likely to feel they belong or are supported by others in their community. The stark reality, then, is that the more economically vulnerable a person is in Canada, the less well-connected they are to family, friends and neighbours. This greater sense of isolation compounds the economic challenges facing individuals and families living with low incomes in our communities.

The second challenge is the decline in community engagement. Today, adults in Canada are less likely than they were a decade ago to participate in groups or associations, to volunteer, or to donate to charities. Some of these changes may be reinforcing one another: for instance, the decline in charitable giving is steeper among those who do not also volunteer. Undoubtedly, some of these changes stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, many people had still not resumed the community activities that were interrupted by the pandemic. However, a comparison with earlier surveys also points to longer-term changes, as some forms of community engagement may have been on the decline even before the pandemic took hold.

These trends in engagement affect the resources (both financial resources and people power) that communities have at their disposal to help those in need. Those with less economic security are less well-connected and require more support from their neighbours, from community organizations and from governments. But with fewer citizens volunteering or making charitable donations, many community agencies themselves are feeling stretched. These findings highlight the need for organizations across the country to focus their efforts on rebuilding relationships, reconnecting citizens and strengthening the social networks that underpin the health and vibrancy of our communities.

Acknowledgements

This report is written by Andrew Parkin (Environics Institute for Survey Research) and Steven Ayer (Common Good Strategies). The authors would like to thank Community Foundations of Canada for commissioning the national survey and this report and for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts, and the Toronto Foundation and its Toronto city partners for leading the parallel 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study. They would also like to thank Elemental Data Collection for conducting the fieldwork for the national survey. Finally, thank you to the 2,001 Canadians who took the time to complete the survey, and for sharing their perspectives and experiences.

More information on how the indexes are calculated is available online at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/toronto-social-capital-study-2022>.



Belonging and Social Connection



CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURS

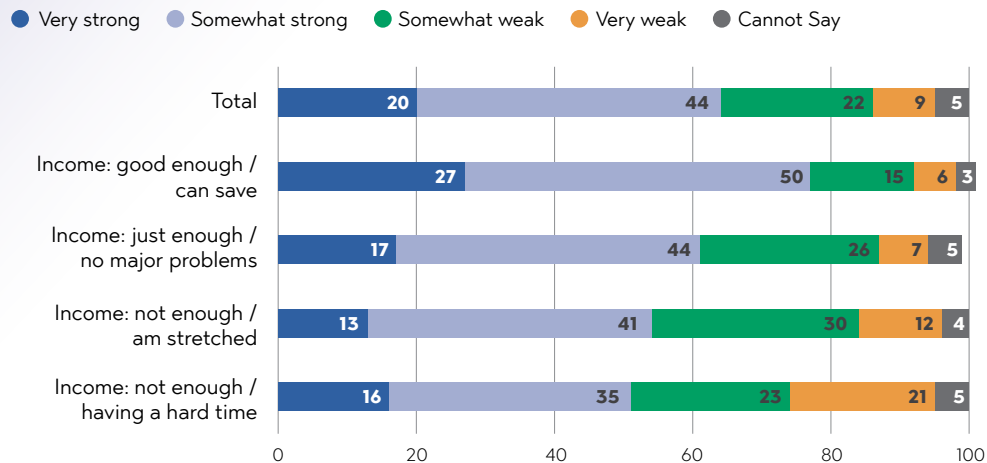
People with lower incomes are much less likely than their higher income counterparts to feel a sense of belonging to their local community, or to feel their neighbours are helpful and can be trusted.

One of the main elements of community well-being is the extent to which people feel connected to their neighbourhood and neighbours.

Overall, one in five adults in Canada (20%) say they have a very strong sense of belonging to their local community; an additional 44 percent say this sense of belonging is somewhat strong. People are twice as likely to say they have a very or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their local community (63%) as they are to say that their sense of belonging is very or somewhat weak (31%).

The sense of community belonging is slightly higher in Atlantic Canada (68%) and Quebec (68%), compared to Ontario (62%) and the West (61%). But the more striking difference is among income groups. **Those with higher incomes are much more likely than those with lower incomes to have a strong sense of belonging to their local community.**

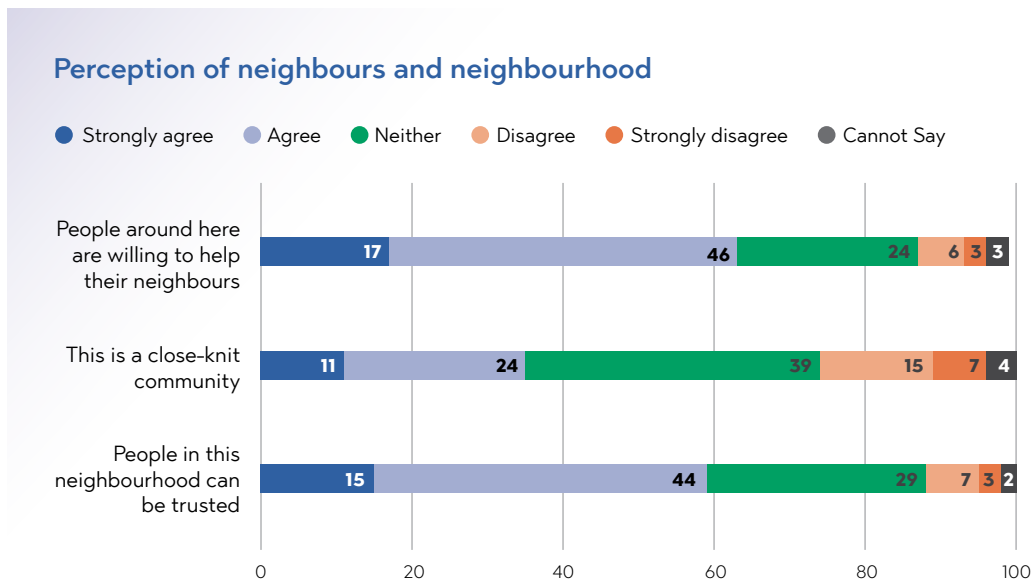
Sense of belonging to local community, by adequacy of household income



Q2. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?

About three in five also agree that people around where they live are willing to help their neighbours (63%) and can be trusted (59%). In these cases, very few (about one in ten) disagree, while the remainder take a neutral position or do not say.

Fewer people (35%) agree that their community is a close-knit one, but only 23 percent disagree. In this case, a plurality (39%) neither agrees nor disagrees (an additional 4% do not say).



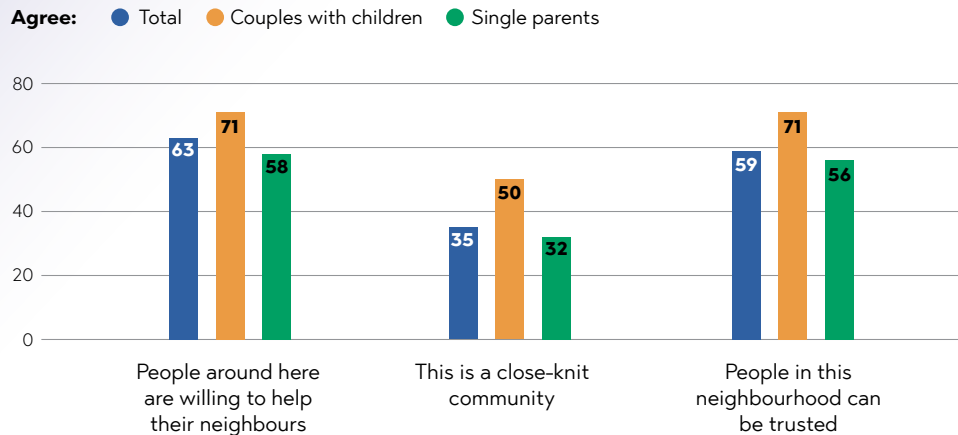
Q7. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the people who live in your neighbourhood...

As with the question about community belonging, answers to these questions about neighbours and neighbourhood vary considerably by income. Those who say their household income is less than enough are much more likely to disagree that their neighbours are helpful or can be trusted, or that they live in a close-knit neighbourhood. The same is true of those who are unemployed, compared to those who are employed.

Once again, it is a person's economic situation, and not which part of the country they live in, that is more important in explaining differences in the extent of trust in and connection to neighbours.

There are some other differences as well. Those age 60 and older are more likely than their younger counterparts to agree that their neighbours are helpful and can be trusted. And while agreement on these questions is much higher than average for those living in two-parent families, this is not the case for single parents.

Agreement with statements about neighbours and neighbourhood, by family type



Q7. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the people who live in your neighbourhood...

CONNECTION TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

People with higher incomes or who are employed have access to a larger network of family and friends than those with lower incomes or who are unemployed.

Most people have social networks made up of a mix of family and friends they feel close to, as well as other friends.

- 58% have between one and five relatives they feel close to (whom they feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on their mind, or call on for help). A smaller proportion (32%) have more than six of these types of relations, and eight percent have none.
- 63% have between one and five friends they feel close to (whom they feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on their mind, or call on for help). A smaller proportion (22%) have more than six of these types of friends, and 12 percent have none.
- 35% have between one and five other friends (in addition to their close friends), and an even greater proportion (40%) have more than six of these types of friends. However, 18 percent have no other friends in addition to their close friends.

In most cases, the family and friends that people have live close by. For instance, among those who have at least one close relative, 73 percent say that at least one of these close relatives lives in the same city or local community as they do. In the case of those with at least one close friend, 80 percent say that at least one of those close friends lives in the same city or region as they do.

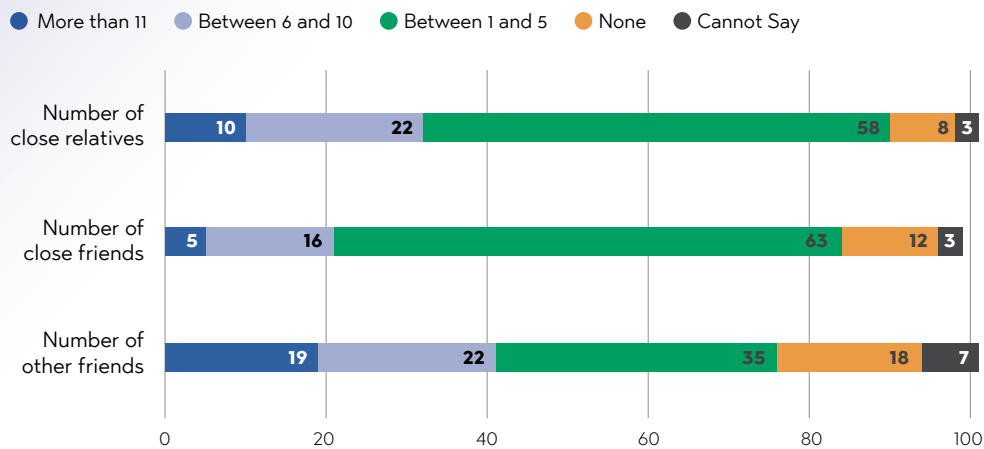
At the same time, this means that a significant minority of people do not have a close family member nearby, or do not have a close friend nearby. Specifically, combining this question about the location of close friends and close relatives with the earlier question about the number of close relatives and friends:

- 32 percent of people either have no close relatives, or no close relatives living in the same city or local community as they do;

- 29 percent either have no close friends, or have no close friends living in the same city or region as they do.

As with connection to community and neighbours, connection to family and friends varies by income and employment status. Those with higher incomes or who are employed have access to a larger network of family and friends than those with lower incomes or who are unemployed.

Number of relatives and friends

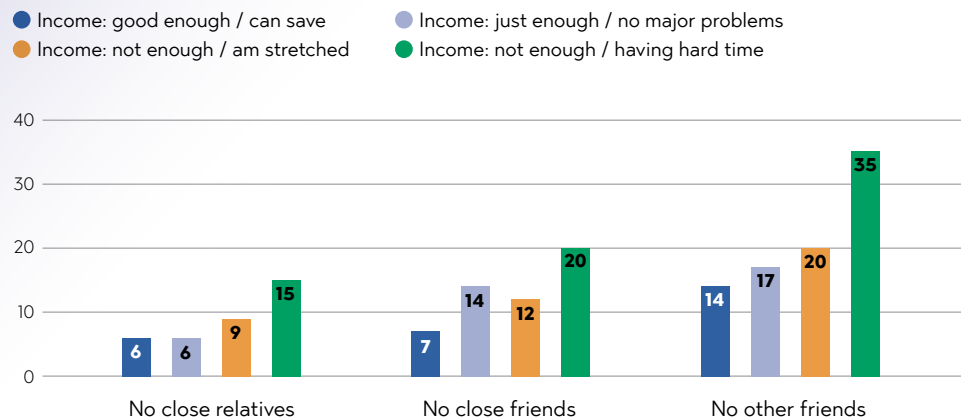


Q14. How many relatives do you have who you feel close to (that is who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)?

Q16. How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives but who you can feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)?

Q19. Not counting your close friends or relatives, how many other friends do you have?

Proportion with no relatives or friends, by adequacy of household income



Q14. How many relatives do you have who you feel close to (that is who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)?

Q16. How many close friends do you have (that is, people who are not your relatives but who you can feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help)?

Q19. Not counting your close friends or relatives, how many other friends do you have?

To further explore this issue, it is possible to combine responses to the questions about close relatives and close friends into a single measure of social connection. Based on this combined measure, 14 percent of adults can be said to have few close family or friends, 43 percent have some, 25 percent have many, and 13 percent have very many close family or friends.²

There are only very minor variations in this pattern by region (Atlantic Canadians (19%) are slightly more likely than average to have very many close family or friends). But variations by income and indicators of well-being are much more important. For instance:

- Those who say their household incomes are not enough for them and that they are having a hard time

(25%) are two-and-a-half times more likely to have few close family or friends than are those who describe their incomes as good enough (10%).

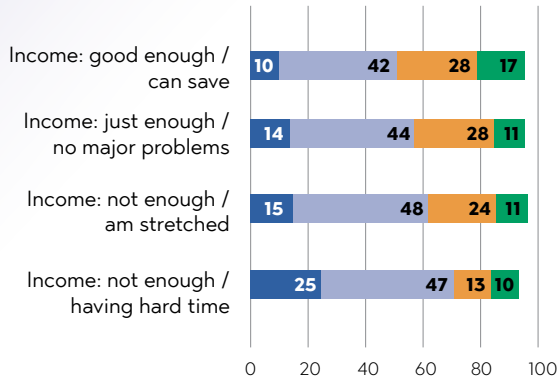
- Those who are unemployed (21%) are almost twice as likely to have few close family or friends compared to those who are working full-time (12%).
- **Those who say their mental health is fair or poor (23%) are more than twice as likely to have few close family or friends than are those who describe their mental health as excellent or very good (9%).** **There is also a difference between those who say their physical health is fair or poor (20%) and those who describe their physical health as excellent or very good (11%).**

² Details of how this measure is calculated are available online at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/connection-engagement-and-well-being>.

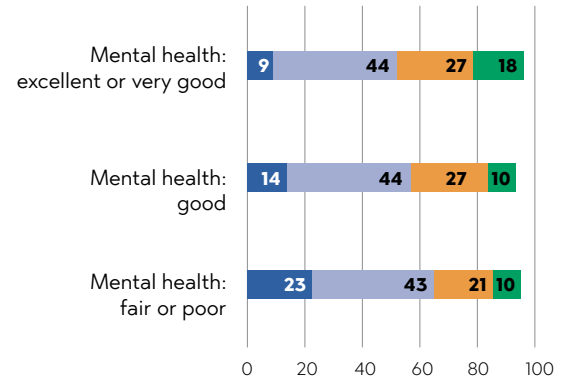
Social connections (number of close relatives and friends)

● Few close family or friends ● Some close family or friends ● Many close family or friends ● Very many close family or friends

By adequacy of household income



By self-reported mental health



What is perhaps most striking, however, is the strong relationship between social connection, on the one hand, and other measures of well-being and social capital, on the other. Those with few close family or friends, for instance, have much lower scores on indexes of life satisfaction and well-being. They are half as likely as those with very many close family or friends to say they always or often feel they have

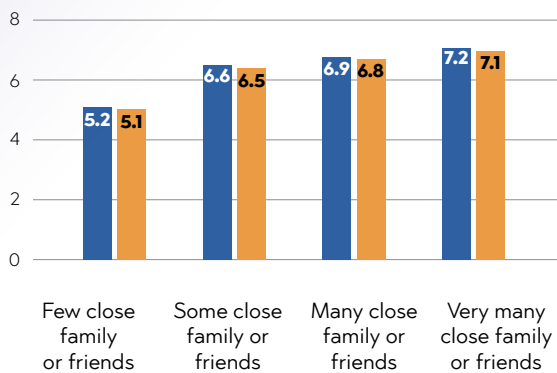
something to look forward to in life, or that they are able to bounce back quickly after hard times.

Finally, they are much more likely to have low scores on the survey's indexes of social trust and social engagement, meaning that those who have fewer connections with family and friends are also less trusting of others in their community, and participate to a lesser extent in community activities.

Measures of well-being, by social connectedness

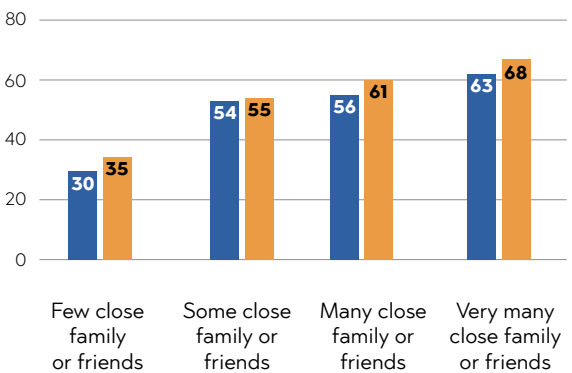
Well-being index scores (indexes of 0 to 10)

● Life satisfaction score (index of 0 to 10)
● Well-being score (index of 0 to 10)



Outlook on life in general (%)

● Always or often have something to look forward to in life
● Always or often able to bounce back quickly after hard times



These findings clarify why patterns of social connection matter. While it may be the case that some individuals are happier with fewer close contacts, on average, this is not the case. On the whole, people with narrower social circles have lower levels of life

satisfaction, well-being, community engagement and social trust than those with wider ones. This illustrates why connections with family and friends matter not only to individuals, but also to the vitality of the communities in which they live.

TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

People with low incomes, single parents, those with a disability and those who are unemployed are all more dissatisfied than average with how often they communicate with close friends and relatives.

Most adults in Canada are in touch with their close friends and relatives on at least a monthly basis.

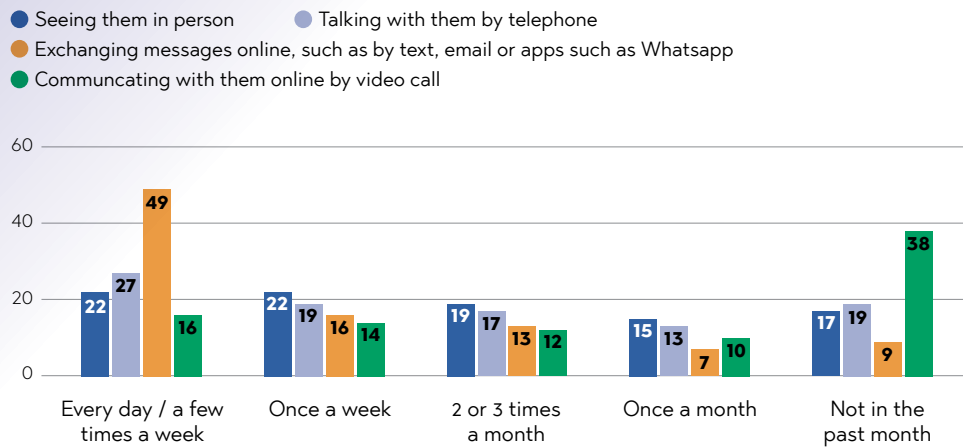
The most common way in which people communicate with their close friends and relatives is online. One in two (49%) communicate with close friends and relatives by email or text at least a few times a week, compared to 27 percent who communicate this frequently by phone, 22 percent who see close friends and relatives this frequently in person, and 16 percent who connect this frequently with close friends and relatives by video call.³ While younger adults are especially likely to communicate with friends and relatives online, it is notable that they are more likely than their older counterparts to communicate frequently by any means – including seeing people in person.

Fewer than one in five haven't seen any of their close friends and relatives in person in the past month, or haven't spoken to any of them on the telephone in the same period. Even fewer – about one in ten – haven't been in touch by email or text message with any of their close friends and relatives in the past month.

Most people (66%) are also satisfied with how often they communicate with their close friends and relatives; specifically, 18 percent are very satisfied, and 48 percent are somewhat satisfied. This compares to 23 percent who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and only nine percent who are somewhat or very dissatisfied. While younger adults communicate with close friends and relatives more frequently than their older counterparts, they are actually less satisfied with this frequency – presumably because they would like to see and talk with friends even more often than they do.

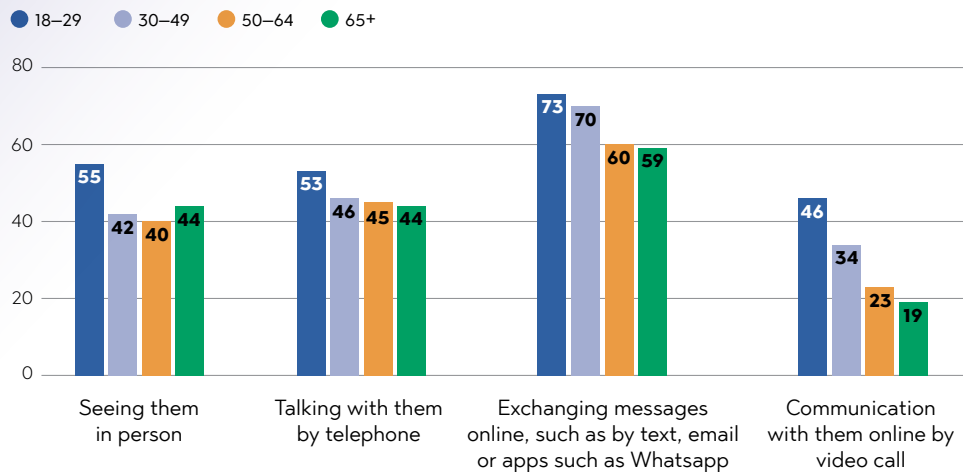
³ This greater use of online communication is not associated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; the same pattern was evident in the findings from the 2018 Toronto Social Capital Study that preceded the pandemic.

Frequency of communication with close friends and relatives, by method



Q22. And in the past month, how often did you see or communicate with any of your close friends and relatives in terms of: Seeing them in person

Communication with close friends and relatives at least once a week, by age group



Q22. And in the past month, how often did you see or communicate with any of your close friends and relatives in terms of: Seeing them in person

Dissatisfaction with how often communication with close friends and relatives occurs is also higher than average among those who say their household incomes are not enough for them and that they are having a hard time (22%), among single parents (17%), among those with a disability that always or often limits daily activity (15%), and among those who are unemployed (15%).

Finally, those with larger networks of close friends and relatives are much more likely to be satisfied with how frequently they communicate with them. Satisfaction is lower for those with few (43%) close family or friends, but much higher for those with some (69%), many (76%), and very many (73%) close family or friends.

HAVING PEOPLE TO DEPEND ON

People with lower incomes, with poor physical or mental health or with a disability, single parents and those experiencing discrimination are all less likely to feel that they have people they can depend on to help them when they really need it.

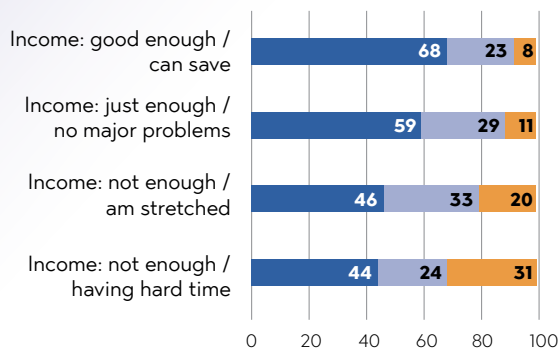
In addition to counting the number of family and friends people say they are connected to, the survey asked about how often people feel that they have someone they can depend on to help them when they really need it. Overall, a majority (58%) says they always or often feel that they have people they can depend on, and an additional 27 percent say they sometimes feel this way. But just over one in ten (13%) rarely or never feel that they do.

The proportion that says that they rarely or never have people they can depend on to help them when they really need it, however, is much higher among those with lower incomes. It increases from eight percent for those who say their household income is good enough and they can save from it, to 31 percent for those who say their incomes are not enough for them and that they are having a hard time.

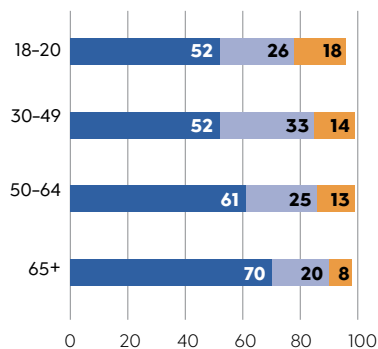
Having people to depend on when you really need it

● Always often ● Sometimes ● Rarely or never

By adequacy of household income



By age group



Q39E. Thinking about your life in general, how often would you say you: Have people you can depend on to help you when you really need it?

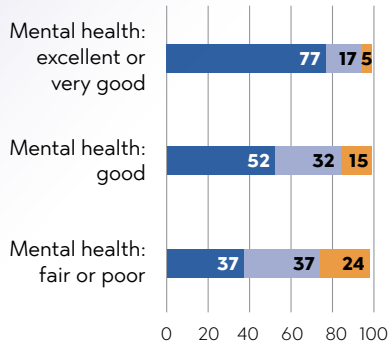
The proportion that rarely or never feels they have people to depend on to help them when they really need it also declines steadily with age. This proportion is more than twice as high among younger adults (between the ages of 18 and 29) (18%) than those age 65 and older (8%).

Other population groups that are more likely than average to say that they rarely or never have people they can depend on include those with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity (22%), and single parents (21%).

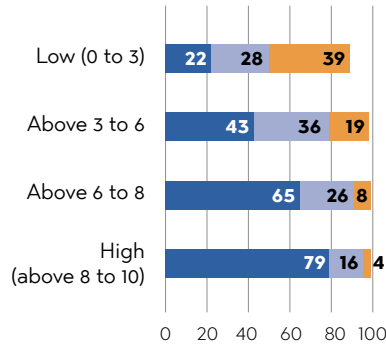
Having people to depend on when you really need it

● Always often ● Sometimes ● Rarely or never

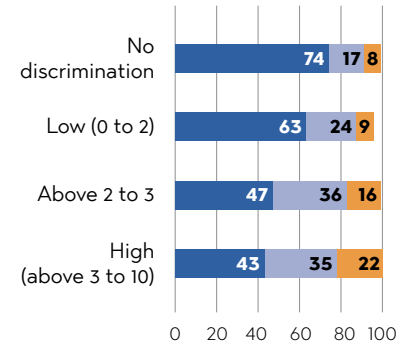
By self-reported mental health



By well-being index scores



By discrimination index scores



Q39E. Thinking about your life in general, how often would you say you: Have people you can depend on to help you when you really need it?

Finally, there is a very strong relationship between both well-being and experiences of discrimination, on the one hand, and having people to depend on, on the other hand.

This index applies to discrimination based on a variety of grounds, including race, religion, gender, age, disability, appearance and sexual orientation.

- People who report poor physical and mental health are much more likely than those reporting good health to say they rarely or never have people they can depend on when they really need it.
- The feeling of not having people to depend on also rises significantly as scores on the survey’s index of well-being decline (indicating poorer well-being), and as scores on the index of discrimination go up (indicating more frequent experiences of discrimination).⁴

The stark reality, then, is that the more vulnerable a person is in Canada, the less likely they are to feel that they have people close to them on whom they can rely for help.

Those with lower incomes, those in poor physical or mental health or who have a disability, those raising children on their own and those experiencing discrimination are all less likely to feel they have people they can depend on to help them when they really need it.

⁴ This index takes into account the frequency of 10 different experiences of discrimination or mistreatment. The 10 experiences are: being treated with less courtesy than other people are; being treated with less respect than other people are; receiving poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores; people acting as if they think you are not smart; people acting as if they are afraid of you; people acting as if they think you are dishonest; people acting as if they’re better than you are; being called names or insulted; being threatened or harassed; and being followed around in stores. This discrimination may be based on any grounds, including race, religion, gender, age, disability, appearance and sexual orientation.

CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY

Different forms of social isolation compound one another: those with smaller networks of close relatives and friends are also less likely than average to access community spaces or join community organizations.

As mentioned, those with few close family or friends are much more likely to have low scores on the survey's measures of community engagement. This suggests that different forms of social isolation compound one another. On average, those with smaller networks of close relatives and friends are also less likely than average to access community spaces or join community organizations.

For instance, 72 percent of those with few close family or friends do not participate in any of the 10 types of groups mentioned in the survey (such as professional associations, sports organizations, cultural groups or political groups), compared to 65 percent of those with some, 37 percent of those with many, and 36 percent of those with very many close family or friends. Similarly, only 15 percent of those with few close family or friends have volunteered in the past 12 months, compared to 22 percent of those with some, 32 percent of those with many, and 43 percent of those with very many close family or friends. Those with few close family or friends are also less likely to have used a public library or even an outdoor park in the past six months.

This relationship between connections to relatives and friends, on the one hand, and connection to community, on the other, may not be surprising; one form of social connection may naturally open doors to others. But it is worth emphasizing that, on average, those with smaller networks of close relatives and friends are not finding greater connection by engaging more within the wider community. This means that those responsible for community groups and activities need to take more deliberate steps to engage with those who do not have the benefit of larger social networks.

Changes in social connectedness from 2013 to 2022

There is evidence to suggest that the extent of Canadians' social connections has declined.

In 2013, many of the same questions about social networks were asked by Statistics Canada as part of the General Social Survey (GSS).⁵ A comparison between the two surveys shows several significant changes:

- The proportion of adults reporting having no friends has doubled between 2013 and 2022, from six percent to 12 percent.
- The proportion reporting six or more close relatives declined from 43 percent to 32 percent.
- The proportion that has six or more close friends declined from 36 percent to 22 percent.
- The proportion that has six or more other friends also declined, from 79 percent to 40 percent.
- The proportion of people who know many or most of their neighbours declined by 10 percentage points, from 42 percent to 32 percent.
- The proportion of people with a very strong sense of belonging to their local community dropped by 12 percentage points.

The methods of the Social Capital in Canada Study and the GSS differ, which means differences between the results of the two studies should be interpreted cautiously. While it is possible that some of these changes are a result of the different methodologies of the two surveys, some change at least likely resulted from the pandemic, as well as other longer-term social changes.

5 There are a variety of differences in how the surveys were conducted, though we made best efforts to make them comparable, when possible. In addition to somewhat different collection and weighting strategies, there were also some differences in how the questions were asked. In the 2013 General Social Survey, people indicated exactly how many friends they have. In the 2022 survey, people selected from several ranges. In the 2013 version, respondents were prompted that other friends can also refer to acquaintances, while this was not the case in the 2022 version that was completed online.



SUMMARY

These findings serve to broaden perspectives on the consequences of low income. Poverty is typically framed in economic terms – and understandably so – as an absence of the financial resources needed to purchase adequate housing, food and other necessities. But this frame can now be widened to include consequences related to social isolation and community engagement and belonging. Those with lower incomes have smaller networks of close relatives and friends and fewer people to depend on to help them.

This, in turn, is associated with weaker feelings of community belonging, lower levels of social trust, and less engagement in community activities. Simply put, people who are most in need have less access to support from friends and family, as well as from the community.



Community Engagement



Another dimension of community well-being encompasses how people engage with groups outside of their family and friendship networks. A community's social vitality depends on community engagement, including behaviours such as donating and volunteering; participating in political life; and being active in sports, religion and other groups.

CHARITABLE DONATIONS

A majority of people report donating to charities in the previous 12 months. However, donation rates have declined since 2013, particularly among those aged 25 to 54. This decline represents a long-term challenge to the charitable sector.

A majority of people (56%) say they made a charitable donation in the past 12 months.

Donation rates are higher among certain groups:

- People with \$100,000 or more in annual household income are considerably more likely to donate (63%) than those who have incomes below \$30,000 (44%).
- Donation rates are much higher among older people, with more than three-quarters of those aged 65 and older donating (76%) versus fewer than half of those aged 25 to 34 (46%).
- Donation rates are also higher than average for religiously active people (72%) versus those who are not religiously active (51%).⁶

Donation rates are slightly higher in Alberta (59%) and Quebec (59%) compared to British Columbia (51%). But these regional differences are much less substantial than those based on age or income.

The proportion of people saying they donated in the previous 12 months is lower than that measured by Statistics Canada in 2013 (75%). This downward trend is corroborated by data from income tax filings. Canadians can claim their charitable contributions on their tax returns and receive a tax deduction from the government. Data from these tax files suggest that the donation rate has been falling almost every year between 2013 and 2022. The decline in donation rates on tax returns accelerated from 2020 to 2021.⁷

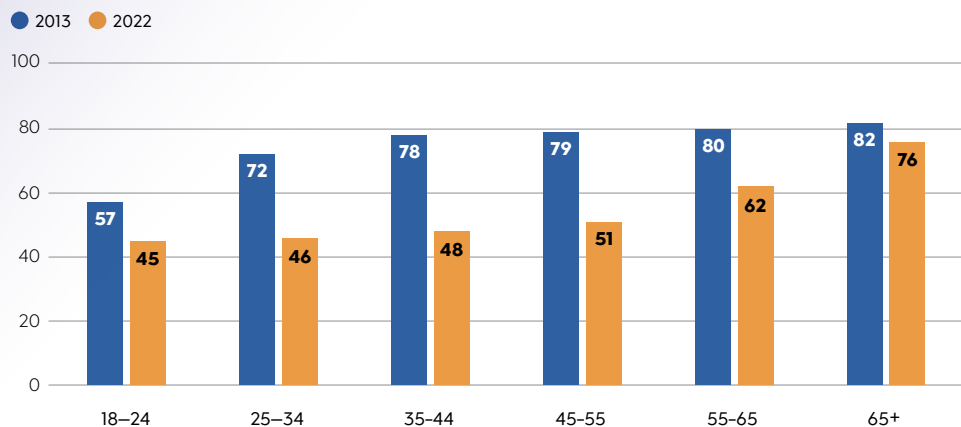
6 In this study, people who are religiously active are defined as those who identify with a particular religion and who say they participate in religious activities at least once a month.

7 Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0130-0: Summary of Charitable Donors.

While comparisons between surveys should be interpreted cautiously as survey methods differ, the 19-percentage point drop in the proportion of Canadians making charitable donation nonetheless stands as a warning signal for the charitable sector. Such a drop translates to six million fewer annual donors. The tax filing data pointing to a gradual loss of donors each year suggests that this trend is not just a temporary side effect of the pandemic.

Declining donations do not appear to be concentrated among those with lower incomes. Among those making \$100,000 or more per year in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars,⁸ the donation rate has declined by 19 percentage points since 2013 – which is the same as the overall decline observed. This is not to say that the increase in housing costs, inflation or other financial factors do not make it especially hard for those with lower incomes to afford to make charitable donations. But affordability challenges affecting those with low incomes is itself not the primary driver of the decrease in the donation rate.

Made charitable donations in past year, by age



Q31. In the past 12 months, did you donate money or goods to any organization or charity?

Note: 2013 data is from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) which asked the exact same question in a similar national survey. In our survey, the lowest age bracket is from 18 to 24, while the lowest age bracket is from 15 to 24 in the GSS.

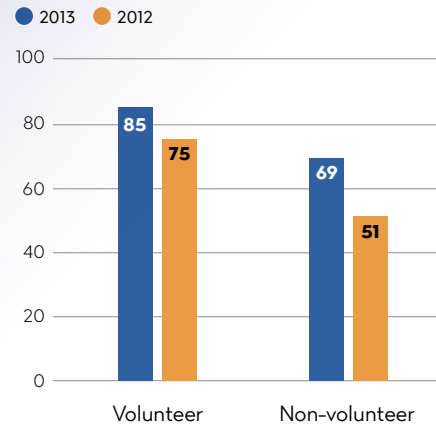
⁸ Everyone with income of \$80,000 or above in 2013 was compared to everyone with income of \$100,000 or above in 2022. An annual household income of \$80,000 in 2013 corresponds to an annual household income of about \$95,713 in 2022, so the totals are not perfect comparisons.

Donation rates have declined among all age groups, but the relative decline was smallest among those age 18 to 24 and those 65 and older.

- People age 65 years and older continue to have the highest donation rates, and this age group also saw the smallest drop in donations since 2013 (82% to 76%, representing a 6-percentage point decline).
- For those aged 18 to 24,⁹ the donation rate dropped by 12 percentage points, from 57 percent to 45 percent.
- But looking at those age 25 to 54, the donation rate dropped between 26 percentage points to 30 percentage points.

Ten years ago, being aged 25 to 34 was associated with considerably higher donation rates than being aged 18 to 24, but this is no longer true. We are no longer finding any significant pattern of youth becoming increasingly likely to donate as they age.

Made charitable donations in past year, by volunteer status



Q29. *In the past 12 months did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?*

The decline in donations is also linked to declines in other forms of community engagement. For example, the donation rate dropped by 10 percentage points among those who volunteered but by 18 percentage points among those who did not volunteer. Declines in donating are therefore linked to the decrease in the volunteer rate discussed in the following section.

⁹ The age category in the General Social Survey spanned from 15 to 24 years old, whereas in the 2022 survey, the youngest age group covered the range of 18 to 24 years.

VOLUNTEERING

About one in four people volunteered in the past 12 months, a significant decline from 2013. The decline in volunteerism is most pronounced among women, and those age 35 and older, and those who are not religiously active. On a positive note, young people continue to have the highest rates of volunteering.

About one in four people (24%) report volunteering for any organization in the past 12 months in 2022.

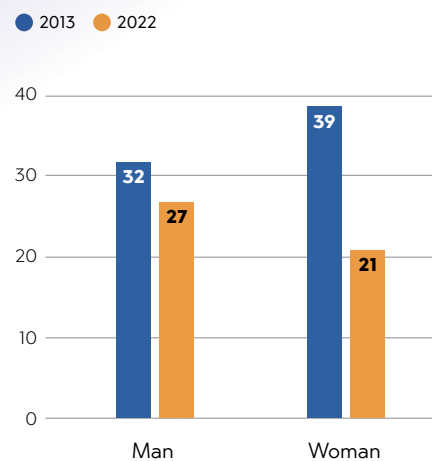
Rates of volunteerism are higher among religiously active people (51%), those aged 18 to 24 (35%) and 25 to 34 (28%), those that have a disability that occasionally limits their activities (34%), have a university education (32%), who are racialized (31%), and those with annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more (30%).

As noted earlier, volunteering also increases as the size of a person's social networks increases. Volunteering is a way to make friends and deepen relationships, but the more connections you have, the more likely you'll be asked to volunteer.

There are significant variations in volunteering across regions, with higher rates in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (30%), Alberta (28%) and Ontario (25%) than Quebec (19%) and Atlantic Canada (19%).

As with donations, volunteering rates are much lower than a decade ago. A volunteer rate of 24 percent in 2022 represents a decline of 12 percentage points from 2013, when 36 percent of people reported volunteering.

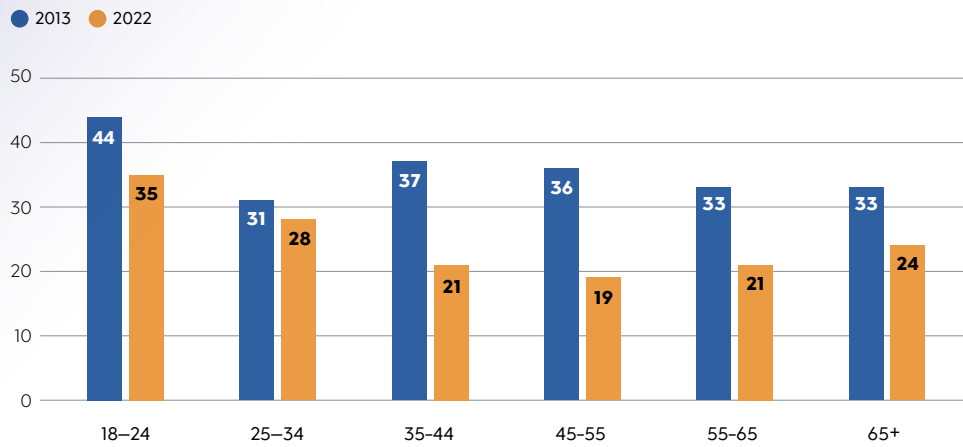
Volunteered in past year, by gender



Q29. In the past 12 months did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?

Volunteering rates fell more among women than men. Among men, the rate of volunteerism declined by five percentage points (27% in 2022, down from 32% in 2013). Among women, the rate of volunteerism declined by 18 percentage points (21% in 2022, down from 39% in 2013). This pattern mirrors the greater decline in participation among women but not men, to be discussed in the following section.

Volunteered in past year, by age



Note: In our survey, the lowest age bracket is from 18 to 24, while the lowest age bracket is from 15 to 24 in the 2013 sample.

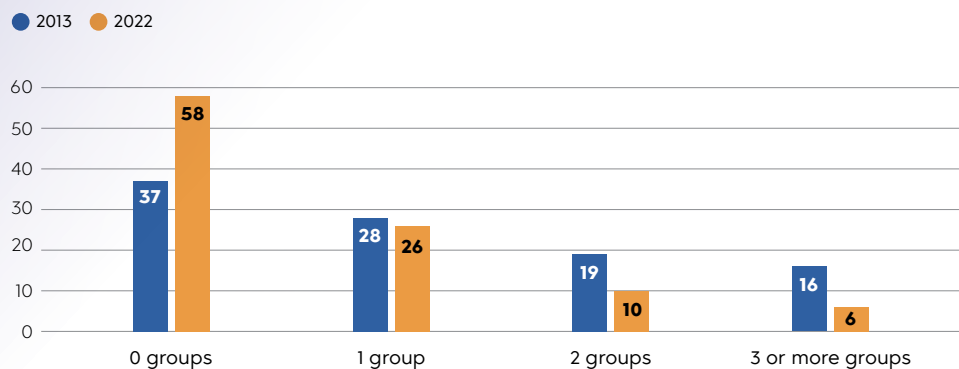
Volunteering was unchanged between 2013 and 2022, at 57 percent, among those who participated in religious activities at least once a week. However, among those who never attended religious activities or services, the volunteer rate was lower, and also declined, from 27 percent in 2013 to 15 percent in 2022.

Volunteerism has dropped among all age groups, but the drop has been especially pronounced for people aged 35 to 54. However, the youngest people continue to volunteer at the highest levels.

MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Membership and participation in groups and associations has declined: in 2022, only 42 percent of people report participating in any group within the last 12 months, down from 63 percent in 2013. Sports and recreation organizations; unions and professional associations; and cultural, education and hobby organizations led the decline.

Number of groups involved in as member or participant



Note: The 2013 survey asked about 11 groups and the 2022 survey asked about 10 groups. All calculations are based on the same set of 10 groups asked about in the 2022 survey.

About six in ten people (58%) are not members or did not participate within the last 12 months in any of the 10 types of groups or organizations asked about in the 2022 survey. This is up 21 percentage points from Statistics Canada's 2013 study (37%).

Much of this decline in participation is likely a result of the pandemic, as many group activities were suspended, and people did not always feel safe participating.¹⁰ As regular activities resumed throughout 2022, some people may still not have felt comfortable participating, and many others may have lost the habit of participating.¹¹

¹⁰ This interpretation is supported by the finding that the 2018 Toronto Social Capital study found almost no decline in participation versus what Statistics Canada found for Toronto in 2013, though they noted that sports and recreation participation had declined slightly. (Toronto Social Capital Study 2018, <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/toronto-social-capital-project>).

¹¹ Note that overall participation in groups did not appear to be declining prior to the pandemic, with some exceptions for specific types of participation. National studies by Statistics Canada in 2003, 2008 and 2013 found that participation was higher in 2013 than 2003 (Turcotte, 2015).

The drop in the average number of groups respondents participated in was just as stark, from 1.21 in 2013 to 0.67 in 2022. More than one in three people participated in two or more groups in 2013 (35%), but that fell to about one in six (16%) in 2022.

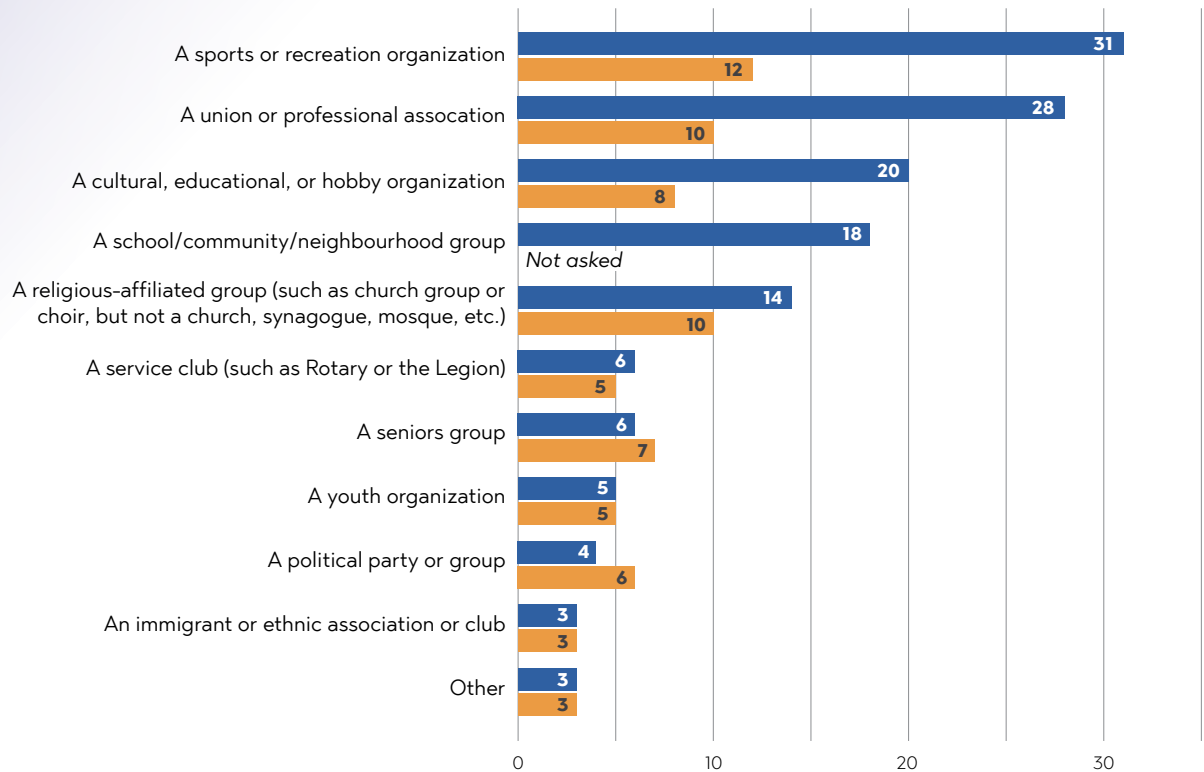
People are most likely to have participated in sports and recreational organizations (12%); religious-affiliated groups (10%); unions or professional associations (10%); and cultural, educational or hobby organizations (8%).

However, all of these types of groups have seen significant declines in participation since 2013.

Participation in sports and recreation organizations; unions and professional associations; and cultural, education and hobby organizations has declined by about 60 to 65 percent between 2013 and 2022. Since participation is still quite low in 2022, it may be a long road to recovery for some organizations.

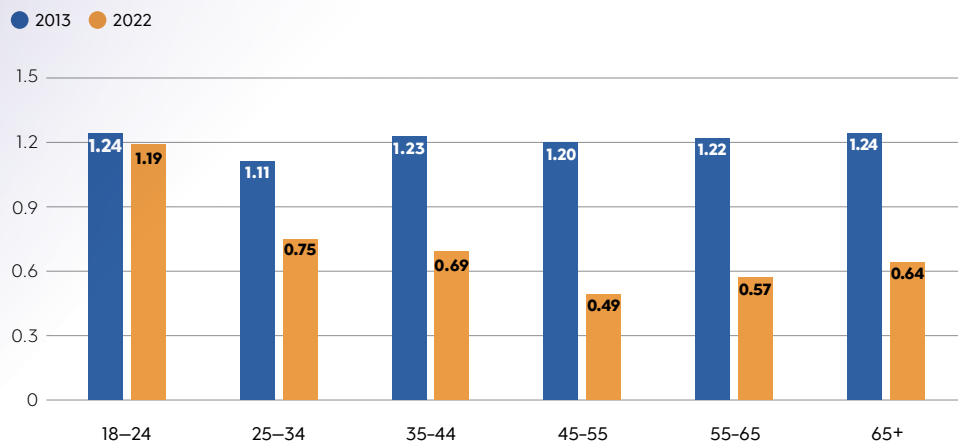
Membership and participation by type of group

● 2013 ● 2022



Q25. In the past 12 months, were you a member or participant in ...?

Average number of groups involved in as member or participant, by age



Participation declined much less in the case of many groups that people were less likely to be involved with in 2013. This includes almost no change in participation in service clubs (6% in 2013 to 5% in 2022), seniors' groups (6% to 7%), youth organizations (5% in both years), political parties or groups (4% to 6%), and immigrant or ethnic associations or clubs (3% in both years).

The average number of groups that people aged 18 to 24 are participating in has changed very little (1.24 in 2013 compared to 1.19 in 2022), though the comparison is imperfect as the 2013 survey includes 15- to 17-year-olds in this younger age group. But participation has clearly changed for people aged 35 and older: they are participating in about half the number of groups today compared to 2013.

The fact that participation rates for people aged 35 to 44 dropped almost as much as for those aged 65 and older suggests that other factors beyond personal health and safety concerns contribute to the decline.

In 2013, there were no differences between men and women in the average number of groups they participated in (an average of 1.19 for men and 1.22 for women), while there were significant differences in 2022 (0.80 for men and 0.54 for women).

In 2022, the major differences were that women were less likely to participate in no activities (63% of women and 52% of men), while men were more likely to participate in two or more activities (20% versus 12%). Men were more likely than women to participate in political parties or groups (8% versus 3%), sports and recreation organizations (8% versus 3%), service clubs (7% versus 3%), and immigrant/ethnic associations and clubs (5% versus 2%).

Racialized people were more likely than those who identified as white to participate in at least one type of group (55% versus 39%). This extended to almost all groups, except for seniors' groups, where the participation rate was about the same. The gap was particularly pronounced in immigrant/ethnic groups (9% versus 1%), religious-affiliated groups (17% versus 9%), cultural organizations (12% versus 7%), a political party or group (8% versus 5%) and youth groups (7% versus 4%).



SUMMARY

The survey findings show a significant drop in donations, volunteering and group participation between 2013 and 2022. Some of these declines are due to the fact that, in 2022, some people had still not returned to the activities that were interrupted by the pandemic. However, a comparison with earlier surveys also suggested some forms of community engagement may have been on the decline even before the pandemic took hold. This lack of engagement, combined with the drop off in connections to friends and community outlined in the previous section, paints a picture of a society where it has become more difficult to develop and maintain social connections and relationships.



Well-being



WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

People with lower incomes or who are unemployed, single parents, those living with a disability, and those experiencing more frequent discrimination are among those more likely to report poor mental health and well-being. Younger women also stand out as reporting worse mental health and well-being than other groups.

Well-being

Our health, outlook on life and economic security were all severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the Social Capital in Canada Study, conducted more than two years into the pandemic, finds that adults in Canada, on average, tend to express satisfaction with their lives in general. When asked to gauge how satisfied there are with their life as a whole right now, about six in ten (59%) place themselves in the top four spots on the scale, indicating relatively high satisfaction, compared to 12 percent who indicate low satisfaction, placing themselves in the bottom four spots.

The pattern is broadly similar in the case of the survey's index of well-being, which combines answers to seven different questions.¹² In this case, 63 percent have an index score above six (on a scale of 0 to 10), indicating relatively high well-being, compared to nine percent who indicate low well-being by scoring between zero and three.

The average score on the index of well-being is 6.4 out of 10. This average, however, varies considerably among different groups.¹³ Since the index includes measures of satisfaction with both standard of living and health, scores are (not surprisingly) lower for those with lower incomes, less employment security, poorer physical and mental health, or a disability. But there are other differences of note.

- Well-being is slightly higher than average in Quebec (a score of 6.6 out of 10).
- Well-being is also higher than average for immigrants (6.7).
- Well-being declines as scores on the survey's index of discrimination increase. Those more likely to experience discrimination, as measured by this index, include racialized people, women, younger people, people with a disability, those who practice a non-Christian religion, and those who are homosexual or bisexual.

¹² The seven individual questions cover satisfaction with: standard of living; health; achievement in life; personal relationships; safety; feeling part of the community and future security.

¹³ The remainder of this discussion will focus on the index of well-being, but the patterns for life satisfaction are very similar.

Well-being scores range from 7.4 among those with a discrimination index score of zero (meaning they report none of the 10 experiences of discrimination mentioned), to 5.7 for those with a discrimination index score above three (indicating more frequent experiences of discrimination).¹⁴

- Among family types, well-being index scores are highest for those living as part of a couple with children (7.0) and lowest for single parents (5.8).
- Men (6.6) report better well-being than women (6.2).

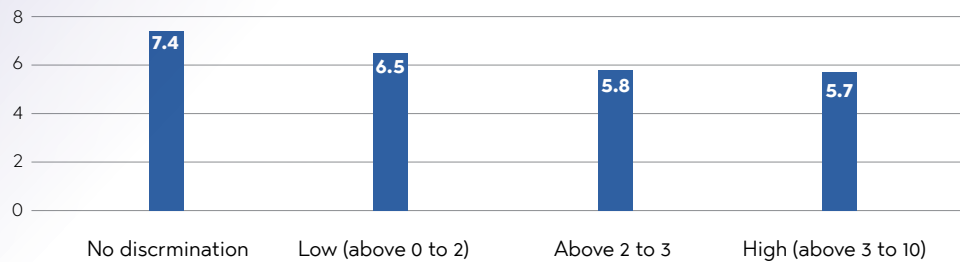
- Well-being increases with age (despite the inclusion in the index of an item related to health), with scores ranging from 6.1 for those age 18 to 29, to 7.0 for those age 65 and older.

The combination of age and gender is especially notable: well-being scores are lowest for young women (age 18-29) (5.9). This illustrates the importance of taking an intersectional approach to well-being that considers the compounding effects of factors such as age, gender, race, and income.

Well-being index scores, by experience of discrimination

By discrimination index scores

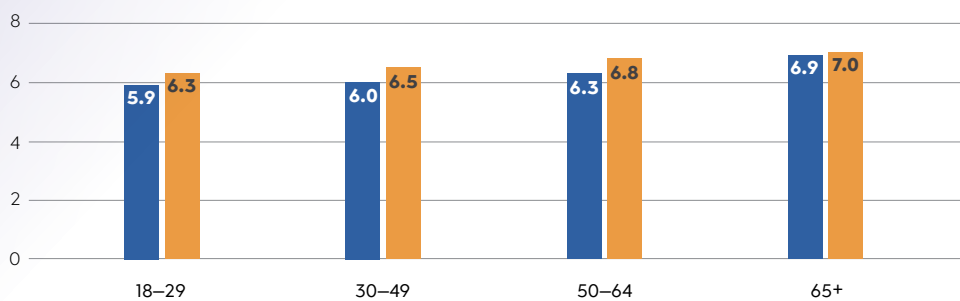
● Well-being index score (scale 0 to 10)



Well-being index scores, by age and gender

Well-being index scores (indexes of 0 to 10)

● Women ● Men



14 For more about this index, see note 4.

Mental health

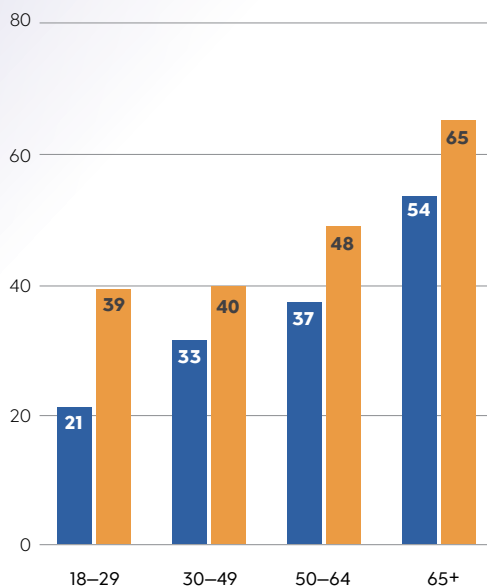
This pattern also appears when focusing more specifically on mental health. Overall, 41 percent of adults in Canada say their mental health is excellent or very good, 31 percent say it is good, and 26 percent say it is only fair or poor. The proportion rating their mental health as fair or poor, however, is higher among women (30%) than men (22%); and higher among younger adults compared to their older counterparts. But the combination of age and gender shows that women age 18 to 29 (42%) are the most likely to say their mental health is fair or poor.

Poor mental health is also more commonly reported among those with lower incomes or who are unemployed, those who are single (including single parents) rather than living as a couple, those living with a disability, and those experiencing more frequent discrimination.

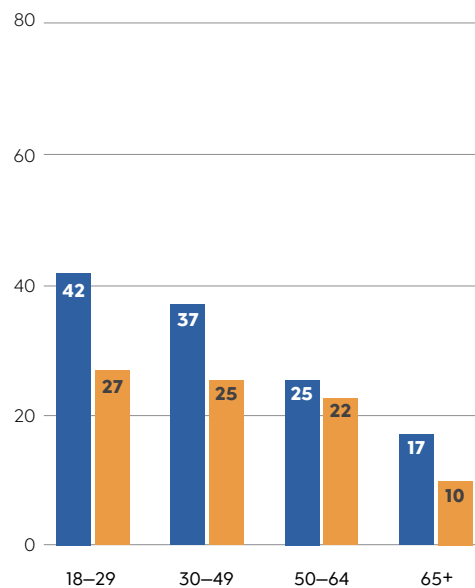
Mental health, by age and gender

● Women ● Men

Excellent or very good



Fair or poor



Q37. In general, would you say your *mental health* is...

Changes in well-being from 2013 to 2022

Statistics Canada's 2013 Survey on Social Identity suggests that life satisfaction in Canada has declined since 2013. The average life satisfaction index score was 7.9 out of 10 in 2013, compared to 6.6 out of 10 in 2022. About one in six (16%) placed themselves between zero and four on the scale in 2022, compared to only four percent in 2013. Only 18 percent placed themselves at nine or 10 on the scale in 2022, compared to 37 percent in 2013.

Similarly, four times as many Canadians indicated that their mental health was fair or poor (26%) in 2022 than in 2013 (6%). The proportion saying their mental health is poor increased from only one percent to eight percent.

While some of this change may have occurred before the onset of the pandemic, there is no doubt that the pandemic itself had significant negative impact on the well-being of Canadians.

INCOME AND FOOD SECURITY

A significant number of adults in Canada have difficulty making ends meet, and almost one in four say that at some point in the last 12 months, they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food. The incidence of income and food insecurity is considerably higher than average among those with a disability and single parents.

Income security

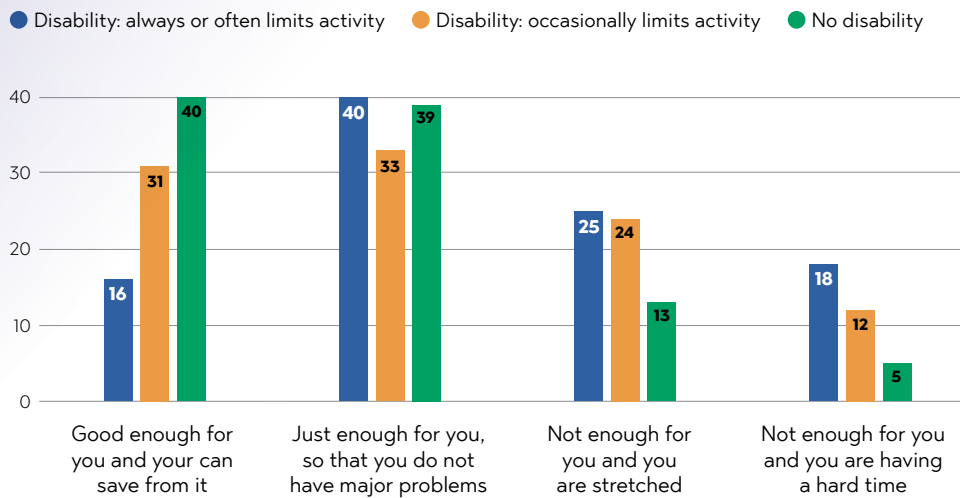
The 2022 survey asks not only about the annual amount of a person's household income, but also their sense of how adequate that income is. As people's needs vary depending on their circumstances, such as where they live and what stage of life they're at, the second question provides a helpful indication of the degree of financial strain their household is currently experiencing.

One in three (33%) adults describe their household income as "good enough" (and they can save from it), and 37 percent say it is "just enough" (and that they do not have a major problems). But one in four (26%) say their income is "not enough," and that either they are stretched (17%) or having a hard time (9%).

People living with a disability are much more likely than average to say their income is not enough. Among those with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity, 43 percent say they are stretched or having a hard time, compared to 35 percent among those with disability that only occasionally limits their activity, and 18 percent among those with no disability.

Low income (in terms of the assessment that household income is “not enough”) is also more common for women (31%) compared to men (21%), and is even more prevalent for women living in households with children under the age of 19 (37%). It is also more common among single-parent families (41%) than in the case of people living as part of a couple with children (25%).¹⁵

Adequacy of income, by experience of disability



Q59. Which of the following best describes your total household income at the present time. Would you say it is...

15 The proportion is even higher for women who are single parents with children (50%), but the sample size for this group is very small (97), so this result should be treated with caution.

FOOD SECURITY

A significant proportion of adults in Canada also have difficulty affording food on a consistent basis. Almost one in four (23%) say that at some point in the last 12 months, they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food.

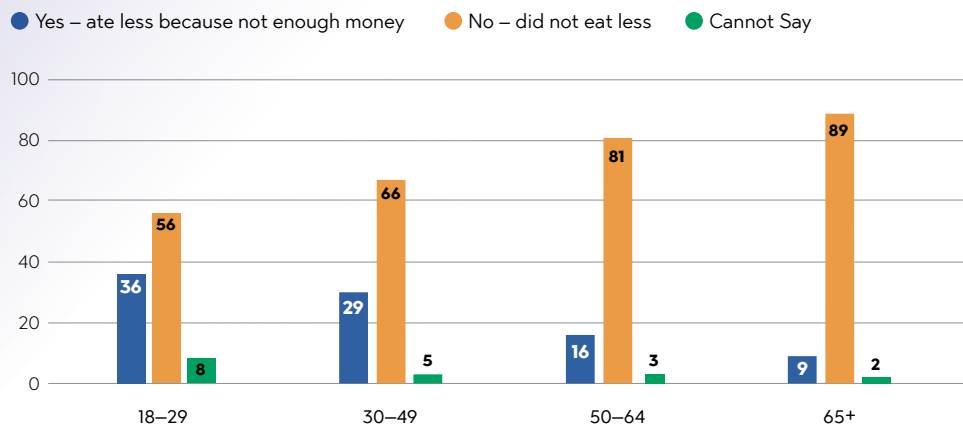
Naturally, the proportion facing food insecurity is much higher among those with lower incomes: the proportion that says they could not always afford the food they needed reaches 51 percent among those who say their household income is “not enough.” But other population groups are also disproportionately affected.

- Among those with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity, 33 percent say that at some point in the last 12 months, they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food; this proportion reaches

38 percent among those with a disability that only occasionally limits their activity, but is only 14 percent among those with no disability.

- The incidence of food insecurity is considerably higher than average among single parents (39%).
- The incidence of food insecurity is higher for younger adults and declines with age: 36 percent of those age 18 to 29 say that at some point in the last 12 months, they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food, compared to nine percent of those age 65 and older.

Food insecurity, by age group



Q75. *In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?*



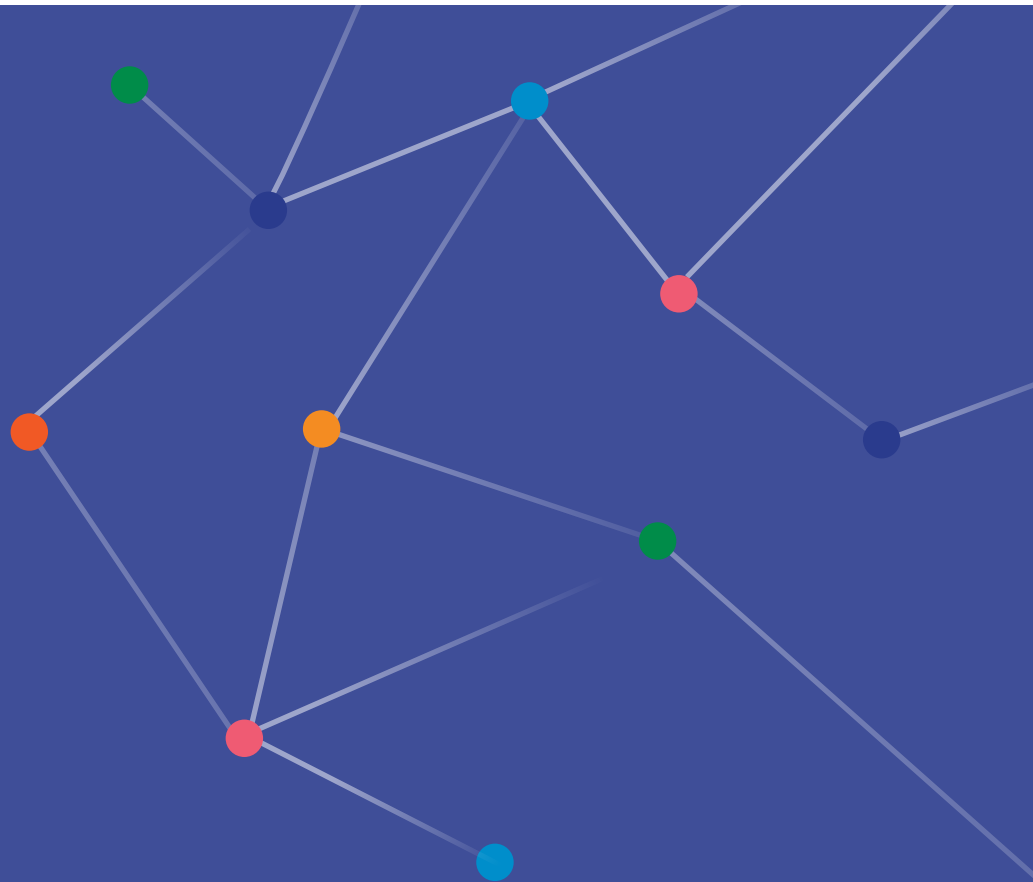
SUMMARY

Even after living through more than two years of a global pandemic, many people feel financially secure, healthy and satisfied with their lives. But certain groups clearly and consistently face greater challenges. Those with a disability, for instance, report not only lower overall well-being, but also poorer mental health, and less income and food security. The same is true of single parents. Women report poorer well-being and mental health than men, as do younger adults relative to their older counterparts. And it is younger women, in particular, who are faring worse on these measures.

Naturally, those with lower incomes face greater financial challenges, but they also report poorer well-being and mental health. As noted earlier in this report, poverty must be addressed not only in economic terms, but in terms of social connectedness and, relatedly, health and well-being.

People benefit from better health and well-being, and from improved income and food security, but so does the wider community. There is a strong relationship between well-being and income security, for instance, and the survey's measures of belonging, social trust and community engagement. Trust in neighbours and community institutions, and participation in community activities, increase as well-being improves and income rises.

Addressing issues associated with poverty, poor health and social exclusion strengthens communities by revitalizing the bonds of social trust and engagement that help to make institutions and societies work.



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For more details about the 2022 Social Capital in Canada Study see www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/connection-engagement-and-well-being.

For more information about the Toronto Social Capital Study 2022 see www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/toronto-social-capital-study-2022.