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# TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY 2022

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# TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY

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# Acknowledgements

This project took place on the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. While Indigenous communities in Toronto remain strong, vibrant and resilient, they need consistent, active and long-term support to address and overcome the impact of colonialism and systemic inequalities. Furthering Indigenous reconciliation and sovereignty are integral to achieving a more fair and just society where everyone can thrive.

The development of this report was itself an exercise in social capital, bringing together partners from across the private, public and charitable sectors. Research like this cannot be done in isolation, and Toronto Foundation is indebted to the partnership group and the dozens of individuals who helped shape this report. We are particularly grateful to the returning partners who contributed to the original 2018 Social Capital Study, along with the many new organizations who have come on board. They each brought unique insights and expertise, and, most importantly, hope to make effective use of the findings to further advance their respective missions.

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Metcalf Foundation  
MLSE Foundation  
Northcrest Developments  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
TAS  
United Way Greater Toronto  
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Atkinson Foundation  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
CivicAction  
Counselling Foundation of Canada  
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# Executive Summary

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic put communities around the world under tremendous stress. In the city of Toronto, the pandemic created widespread economic hardship, while limiting opportunities for residents to connect with family, friends, neighbours and organizations. This disruption was layered over pre-existing fault lines in the city, relating to economic inequality, racial discrimination and the marginalization of other groups, such as those with disabilities or who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

The concept of social capital is an invaluable tool used to explore how the city and its residents have fared in the wake of these events. Social capital refers to the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another. It is a key ingredient in making communities productive, healthy, inclusive and safe. Social capital can be seen as a resource that communities can draw upon to respond to crises (through collaboration and mutual support); at the same time, it is a resource that can be depleted, leaving communities less well-positioned to face what comes next.

Conducted more than two years after the start of the pandemic, the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study assesses whether the crisis brought the city's residents closer together or pushed them further apart. Its measures of social capital bring into focus the ways in which Torontonians connect with one another, the trust they have in one another and their shared institutions and the extent to which they feel supported by their neighbours and neighbourhoods.

The 2022 study of more than 4,000 Torontonians compares the situation in the city today with that of 2018, when the first such study was conducted.

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with the pandemic, the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study offers some reassurance. The vast majority of Torontonians have people in their lives with whom they feel at ease, can talk to or call on for help. The majority of Toronto residents also find their city to be safe and their neighbours to be helpful. Most Torontonians are members of at least one organization in their community and make donations to charity. And more than two years into the pandemic, levels of confidence in most local institutions—including the school system, city hall, local businesses and neighbourhood centres—remain unchanged.

At the same time, the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study clearly illustrates the toll the pandemic has taken. In the face of more limited opportunities to interact, Torontonians today report having fewer close family members and friends than in 2018 and are seeing their companions in person

less often. As a result, the proportion who are satisfied with how frequently they communicate with their close friends and relatives has also declined (especially among seniors).

Moreover, about one in 12 Torontonians now reports having no close family members they can call for help or talk to about what's on their mind, and a similar proportion say they have no close friends. In each case, this represents more than 200,000 people in the city who lack this form of social support. Those who are less connected in these ways include those who have lower incomes, those who are unemployed, those who have a disability and those who report poor mental health.

More striking changes have occurred in the area of community engagement. Torontonians in 2022 are less likely than in 2018 to be members of organizations, such as sports and recreation organizations, cultural organizations, and union and professional associations. This decline is most likely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many groups suspended their activities, while many members did not feel safe participating, even when activities resumed. What is not yet clear is whether and how quickly these forms of engagement will rebound.

Toronto residents are also less likely to have volunteered or donated money or goods to an organization or charity in 2022. The proportion of people who volunteered for any organization in the past 12 months declined by 12 percentage points between 2018 and 2022 (from 37 % to 25%). Similarly,

while 63% donated in the past 12 months, this represents a 12-point decline from 2018, when 75% reported making donations. This drop in the donation rate may be linked to the decline in in-person activities, as many individuals donate to organizations in whose activities they participate. Donation rates dropped more significantly between 2018 and 2022 among those who are less active in groups, but hardly changed for those who are most active.

These changes pose a serious challenge to the local nonprofit sector. A 12-point drop in donations represents about 300,000 fewer donors in Toronto, and a potential loss of more than \$180 million in donations in the city over the past year. The drop in volunteerism represents a potential loss of 36 million volunteer hours, or the equivalent of approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent positions. Again, it is not clear whether volunteering and donations rates will rebound as the pandemic recedes, or whether the change will prove longer lasting.

While local community organizations contend with these changes, the needs of the city's residents have grown more acute. The study finds that wellbeing in Toronto declined significantly between 2018 and 2022: Torontonians are less likely to report high life satisfaction, or good physical or mental health. Fewer Torontonians today than in 2018 say they always have something to look forward to in life, while the proportion who say they only sometimes, or rarely or never, have something to look forward to in life has increased. These declines generally were experienced by residents from all backgrounds.

Wellbeing, however, continues to vary significantly across the city. For instance, wellbeing improves noticeably as both income and age increase. The life satisfaction, overall wellbeing and mental health of younger adults in Toronto (and particularly younger women) remain much lower than average.

Meanwhile, one in four residents of the city says their income is not enough for them (either that they are stretched or that they are having a hard time), a higher proportion than in 2018. About one in five people in Toronto also reports that, at some point in the past 12 months, they had eaten less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food. Single parents, Black Torontonians, those with a disability and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ are all more likely to experience each of these forms of insecurity.

Changes with respect to social trust in the city are less consistent. On the one hand, there has been a significant drop in the proportion saying that most people can be trusted. In general, this drop is somewhat more pronounced among groups that were previously more trusting, including those with higher incomes, those with a university degree and those who identify as white. The proportion saying that people working together can make a big difference in solving problems facing the community has also declined. On the other hand, there has been less change in the trust of specific groups of people, including both similar types of people (such as family) and those who are different (in terms of language, ethnic background or political views).

Most Torontonians continue to express at least a medium level of trust in each of these groups, while only a minority have low trust.

These levels of trust or confidence continue to vary by age and socio-economic status, with younger and lower-income residents expressing much lower levels of trust and confidence. Black Torontonians also consistently express lower levels of social trust. Levels of trust and confidence are also often lower among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ and those who are between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone.

While trust and confidence in most specific groups and institutions in the city have changed little, if at all, there is one important exception: the police. The public's confidence in the police in Toronto has declined since 2018, and fewer residents think it is very likely that a police officer would return a lost wallet or purse containing \$200. Notably, this change is more pronounced among those who identify as white, than among Black Torontonians or other racialized groups. Confidence in the police remains lower among Black residents of the city, but the differences between views of white and Black Torontonians have narrowed.

This narrowing of the gap between white and Black Torontonians' impressions of the police is not the only encouraging sign of Torontonians bridging potential divides in the city. Known for its diversity, it is notable that Toronto is a city in which both non-immigrants and those who identify as white are more likely than average to express trust in people of different ethnic background, or who speak different languages.

More generally, one important finding of the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study is that the pandemic crisis did not pull the city's residents in opposite directions, at least in terms of the dimensions of social capital. Declines in social capital, measured by combining responses to several questions relating to social networks, civic engagement and social trust, tended to occur in every neighbourhood in the city and among Torontonians from all backgrounds (including young and old, men and women, high and low income, white and racialized, and immigrant and Canadian-born). This does not mean that in other ways, such as loss of employment or income, the pandemic did not affect some residents more than others. But the pandemic's disruptive impact on connections with friends, family, neighbours and organizations was felt more evenly.

In almost all cases, however, the inequalities in social capital that pre-existed the pandemic remain. The study shows that a number of groups in the city are particularly vulnerable: they have greater needs, but have less access to support from family and friends, are less likely to be connected to supportive organizations and have less access to services. Torontonians with lower incomes or who are unemployed are among those who stand out most consistently in this regard. Black residents of Toronto express lower than average levels of social trust, have experienced some of the largest declines in participation in community groups and are among those most likely to face income or food insecurity. Torontonians with a disability face greater economic insecurity than average, but also have access to less support from friends

and family. Those in the city who identify as LGBTQ2S+ are more likely than average to face economic insecurity, but have lower social trust and are less confident that local institutions will be there to support them. And the situation of youth, and particularly of female youth, regarding health and wellbeing—while not new—remains concerning.

The Toronto Social Capital Study is the product of the combined efforts of 17 of the city's leading community organizations. These organizations share an interest in understanding how the patterns of social connection, trust, engagement and support that hold the city together are changing. But each is also committed to using the study's findings to shape the services and programs they deliver to respond to the evolving needs of the city's residents. To that end, the conclusion of the report highlights a series of actions that can be taken in response to the findings, to guide the city as it moves forward.

The pandemic's impact is undoubtable, but, overall, social capital in Toronto continues to constitute a tremendous resource that can be tapped to help the city emerge stronger, healthier and more vibrant than ever. But such an outcome cannot be taken for granted. There are hundreds of thousands of more vulnerable citizens who currently cannot access the resources they need, not only in terms of financial resources or specific services, but also in terms of the resources of social connectedness, trust and support covered in this report. Whether they will participate fully in the city's recovery will depend on the actions that the city's individuals and organizations take next.



# Introduction

## BACKGROUND

This report presents the key findings of the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study. This study is the second comprehensive look at the wellbeing of Toronto residents viewed in terms of social networks, social trust, civic engagement and neighbourhood support.

There are a wide range of traditional indicators available to track the wellbeing of a community. Examples include economic measures of employment and unemployment, and of wealth, poverty and inequality. Education indicators cover graduation rates, as well as proficiency in key subjects such as reading, math and science. There are also statistics reporting on incidences of crime, homelessness or disease.

Increasingly, however, there is interest in widening the lens to include measures that assess whether people feel included in, connected to and supported by the communities in which they live. These dimensions of wellbeing are covered by the concept of social capital. Social capital is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which trust and reciprocity exist 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 peacefully, even when they may have little in common. There is ample empirical evidence showing that high levels of such reciprocity, trust and connection are key to making communities productive, healthy and safe.

In 2018, the first Toronto Social Capital Study broke new ground by exploring social trust, social networks, civic connection and neighbourhood support within the city. The study addressed questions such as: “To what extent do Torontonians feel connected to, and actively engage with, their neighbours and community organizations? How well do they trust others in their communities—those who are like themselves and those who are different?”

The 2018 findings were generally reassuring, while drawing attention to areas of concern. Overall, social capital in Toronto in most respects appeared solid. The majority of people surveyed trust other people (including those different from themselves), have a sense of belonging to their community, have family and friends they can rely on, give back to the community and are interested in politics. But the study also documented how the strength of social capital varies within the city by such characteristics as age, household income, race or culture and neighbourhood. In so doing, it helped identify new areas of focus for addressing challenges and supporting positive change.

The 2018 study was intended to establish benchmarks against which progress (or setbacks) could be measured over time. This means that the organizations that led the study always intended to revisit the issue in several years’ time. The need to reassess social capital in Toronto, however, was made all the more pressing by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

The pandemic constituted an unanticipated test of the strength of Toronto's social capital. The closure of businesses, schools and public venues not only led to losses of employment and income, but also impeded social connections. The disease itself, as well as its impact on income and on social interaction, increased demand for support from public institutions. The effectiveness of public health measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 was dependent in part on the public's trust, not just in governments, but also in friends and neighbours.

What remains unknown, more than two years later, is whether the experience of the pandemic brought the city's residents closer together or pulled them further apart. This question is especially important given the extent to which both the direct health risks posed by the virus, and the economic impacts of the measures to counter it, were unequally shared across population groups.

Despite the pandemic's overwhelming importance, it is not the only development since 2018 that has tested city residents. Many young families have faced affordability challenges stemming from rising housing costs, as well as high costs for services such as childcare. In 2020, the issue of anti-Black racism gained new prominence in the wake of the global public outcry when a white police officer murdered George Floyd, an African-American, with three other Minneapolis police officers facing charges for aiding and abetting the murder.

This event mobilized thousands of Toronto residents in solidarity, while drawing further attention to the extent of discrimination and violence experienced by racialized Torontonians. Other issues continue to defy the efforts of governments to address them, such as improving public transit infrastructure, alleviating the opioid addiction crisis and addressing homelessness. These and other developments may have affected the extent to which city residents feel connected to or supported by their community.

## THE 2022 TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY

Building on the foundation of the initial 2018 survey, a new Toronto Social Capital Study was conducted in the summer of 2022 to explore how things have evolved over time and to provide new details on the experiences of specific population groups. The 2022 survey repeated many of the questions asked in 2018, while adding several new ones to complete the picture of the state of social capital in the city. The original purpose of the research remains unchanged, but the new survey also serves as a means of broadening our understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Toronto residents.

The Toronto Social Capital Study is a partnership of leading civic organizations across the city. The research was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with Toronto Foundation, as well as Metcalf Foundation, MLSE Foundation, Northcrest Developments, Ontario Trillium Foundation, TAS, United Way Greater Toronto, the Wellesley Institute and YMCA of Greater Toronto. An additional group of collaborating partners helped support the launch of the report, including Atkinson Foundation, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, CivicAction, Counselling Foundation of Canada, Crosswalk Communities, Laidlaw Foundation and Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy.

The Toronto study was complemented by a national online survey of 2,001 Canadian adults commissioned by Community Foundations of Canada, using the same questions and measures of social capital.



Visit [torontofoundation.ca](https://torontofoundation.ca) to find additional information: related research, including national survey findings; highlights from interviews with community leaders; disaggregated data; fact sheets; and more.





# About the Survey

The 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study is based on a survey of 4,163 people in Toronto, aged 18 years and older, conducted during the summer of 2022. The survey was conducted in two parts. A core sample of 3,215 adults were surveyed between May 27 and August 3. An additional 948 residents in three specific regions of the city (the Greater Golden Mile, Rexdale and the Downsview area) were surveyed between August 5 and September 10.

The survey was conducted using a mix of methods, including accessing respondents from online survey panels and reaching respondents by telephone (landline and cellphone) or text message (through random dialing). Some respondents were identified as eligible through an interactive voice recording telephone pre-survey and then completed the survey by telephone with a live interviewer; a small number of respondents were identified by this pre-survey and chose to complete the survey online. The majority (75%) of the respondents completed the survey on a computer, tablet or smartphone, and the remainder (25%) spoke to a live interviewer over the phone.

The survey sample was selected to meet a number of specifications, including sample quotas by age, gender, educational attainment, racial identity and neighbourhood within Toronto. Details of the sample are on [page 12](#).

The survey samples for each of the city's three largest racialized groups—those identifying as South Asian, Chinese or Black—are large enough to allow results to be reported for each of these groups separately. Future research, led by or in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, and based on an appropriate sample of Indigenous respondents, should be conducted to explore the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous residents of the city.

The survey data is weighted by age, gender, educational attainment, immigration background (generation in Canada), racial identity and neighbourhood within Toronto, to ensure that survey results are representative of the actual population of the city. Because the data is weighted by neighbourhood within Toronto, and by these other criteria, the inclusion of the 948 additional respondents from the second part of the survey does not affect the survey's representativeness.

The survey was modelled on the 2018 study of 3,207 Torontonians, with the intention to ensure that the results of the two surveys are directly comparable. The 2018 survey also combined both online and telephone methods, but a greater proportion of respondents in 2018 completed the survey by telephone.

As was the case in 2018, the results for many of the 2022 survey questions have been combined to create several indexes covering the major dimensions of social capital. Each index is scored from “0” (lowest possible score) to “10” (highest possible score). The index scores provide a concise measure that can show how social capital is similar and different across a range of groups within the population. They are also useful for making comparisons over time, showing how social capital in the city has evolved since 2018.<sup>1</sup>

Two additional indexes, using established measures, were added in 2022. One combines seven separate questions about life satisfaction into an overall index of wellbeing, again scoring from “0” (lowest possible score) to “10” (highest possible score). The seven individual items cover: standard of living; health; achievement in life; personal relationships; safety; feeling part of the community; and future security. The second covers experiences of discrimination and is based on how often each of 10 separate types of microaggressions are experienced. In this index, scores range from “0” (none of the 10 items are ever experienced) to a maximum of “10” (each is experienced almost every day).<sup>2</sup>

## TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY 2022 SURVEY SAMPLE

Sample	2022 survey sample*			Census (%)**
	#	Unweighted %	Weighted %	
<b>Total</b>	4,163	100	100	100
<b>Male</b>	1,784	43	47	47
<b>Female</b>	2,363	57	52	52
<b>Age 18-34</b>	979	24	32	31
<b>Age 35-54</b>	1,326	32	35	33
<b>Age 55+</b>	1,858	45	33	36
<b>South Asian</b>	463	11	14	14
<b>Chinese</b>	359	9	11	11
<b>Black</b>	523	13	10	10
<b>Other racialized</b>	576	14	17	19
<b>White***</b>	2,174	52	46	46
<b>High school or less</b>	1,343	32	38	39
<b>Trades/college</b>	844	20	24	24
<b>University</b>	1,957	47	38	38

\*Categories may not add up to 100% due to non-responses or multiple responses.

\*\* Based on 2016 and 2021 census data or projections.

\*\*\* The category of “white” includes those who selected this response only. Other identity categories may include multiple responses.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The survey fieldwork in Toronto was conducted by the Environics Research Group. The study’s partners would like to thank John Otoo for leading the fieldwork, and Rohit Shah and Phil Straforelli for contributing to the preparation of the data files. We also thank Doug Norris of Environics Analytics for help with updating the demographic portrait of the city, and Keith Neuman of the Environics Institute for additional advice. Finally, thank you to the thousands of Torontonians and other Canadians who took the time to complete the surveys and share their perspectives and experiences.

<sup>1</sup> As the selection and wording of survey questions differ in some cases between the 2018 and 2022 questions, the indexes originally reported in 2018 are not always directly comparable to those reported here. For this reason, revised index scores were computed from the 2018 data using the same questions and formulas as in 2022. As a result, the 2018 index scores noted in this report may differ from those published in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The wellbeing 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/davidwilliams/node/32397>).



# About This Report

This report provides an overview of the key survey results (additional results will be explored in future publications). It explores how the primary dimensions of social capital (social trust, social networks, civic engagement and neighbourhood support) have evolved since 2018 and provides further details on the experiences of particular population groups. It also reports on how the wellbeing of Torontonians has changed between 2018 and 2022.

Additional analyses of particular topics of interest will be published in the coming months and made available at [torontofoundation.ca](https://torontofoundation.ca).

Additional information about the study, detailed survey results and further information about the social capital indexes are available online at [www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/](https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/) and [torontofoundation.ca](https://torontofoundation.ca).





# SOCIAL NETWORKS

While most Torontonians can count on a network of friends and family, the extent of these networks has changed since 2018: Torontonians are coming out of the pandemic connected to smaller groups of family and friends than they were going into it. They are also now seeing their companions in person less often. The frequency of in-person communication fell most for seniors; seniors also experienced the largest drop in satisfaction in how often they communicate with their close friends and relatives.

About one in 12 Torontonians reports having no close family members they can call for help or talk to about what's on their mind, and a similar proportion say they have no close friends. In each case, this represents more than 200,000 people in the city who lack this form of social support. Those who are less connected in these ways include those who have lower incomes, those who are unemployed, those who have a disability and those who report poor mental health.





## Key Findings

- A greater proportion of city residents today than in 2018 have between zero and five close relatives or close friends, and a smaller proportion have six or more (and the same is true in the case of the number of other friends).
- The proportion of Torontonians having in-person contact with close friends or relatives at least once a week fell between 2018 and 2022.
- Tools such as messaging apps or video calls provide ways of staying in touch with close friends and family members that are additional to, and not an alternative to, in-person meetings. Those who report regular in-person contact with their close friends and family are also more likely to communicate with them regularly by telephone or online.



One essential dimension of social capital is the presence and quality of personal connections that individuals have with others through their social networks, including both family and friends.

## **FRIENDS AND FAMILY: THE EXTENT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS**

The vast majority of Torontonians have people in their lives with whom they feel at ease, can talk to or call on for help. Nine in 10 (91%) have at least one close relative, and the same proportion (91%) have at least one close friend. In addition to these close relatives or friends, eight in 10 (82%) have at least one other friend.

In most cases, these close family members and friends live in the Toronto area. Seven in 10 Toronto residents have a close family member living in the same city; in the case of close friends, the proportion is eight in 10. One in two Toronto residents has a close friend who lives in the same neighbourhood as they do.

About one in 12 Torontonians (8%) reports having no close family members they can call for help or talk to about what's on their mind, and a similar proportion say they have no close friends. In each case, this represents more than 200,000 people in the city who lack this form of social support.

The proportion of Torontonians reporting having no close relatives, no close friends or no other friends is higher than average among certain groups, including those who have a disability that always or often limits their daily activity, those who have very low incomes, those who are unemployed and those who report poor mental health.

While most Torontonians can count on a network of friends and family, the extent of these networks has changed since 2018: Torontonians are coming out of the pandemic connected to smaller groups of family and friends than they were going into it. A greater proportion of city residents have between zero and five close relatives or close friends, and a smaller proportion have six or more (and the same is true in the case of the number of other friends).

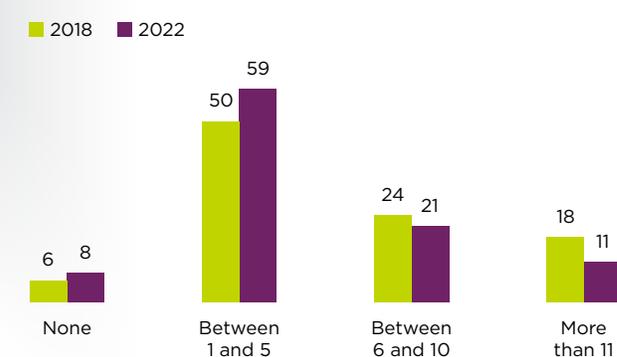
Between 2018 and 2022:

- the proportion with six or more close relatives fell from 42% to 32%, while the proportion with between zero and five increased from 56% to 66%;
- the proportion with six or more close friends fell from 37% to 28%, while the proportion with between zero and five increased from 60% to 71%;
- the proportion with six or more other friends fell from 65% to 52%, while the proportion with between zero and five increased from 31% to 44%.

These changes affected all age groups. In the case of the number of close relatives or friends, however, the changes are less pronounced among both younger and older Torontonians and more pronounced among those between the ages of 40 and 64.

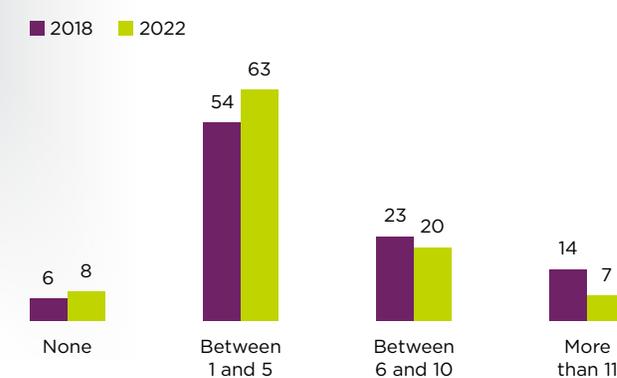
The experience of the pandemic, and the difficulties it created for socializing with friends and family, offers the most likely explanation for this tightening of the size of social networks. For more than two years, social interaction has been impeded by periodic restrictions on the size of social gatherings and by the limiting of occasions to meet existing friends, and to make new ones, at work or through leisure activities. People’s own cautionary behaviours to limit their possible exposure to the virus, especially as new waves of the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, also may have led them to minimize direct social contacts.

**NUMBER OF CLOSE RELATIVES (%)**



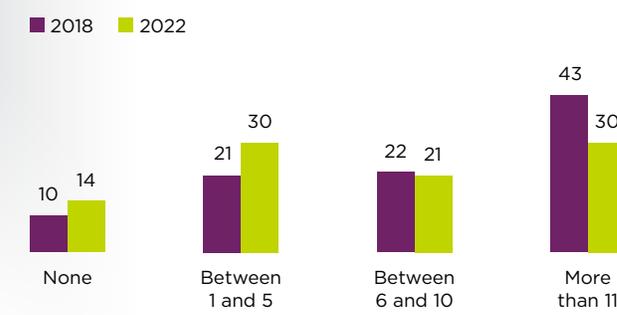
*Q14. “How many relatives do you have who you feel close to (that is, who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind or call on for help)?”*

**NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS (%)**



*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)?”*

**NUMBER OF OTHER FRIENDS (%)**



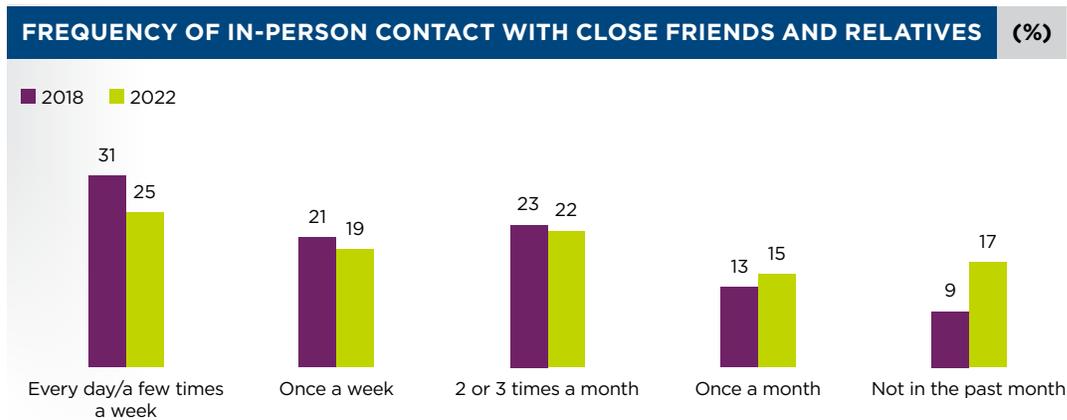
*Q19. “Not counting your close friends or relatives, how many other friends do you have?”*

# CONTACTS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Not only do Torontonians today report having fewer close family members and friends than in 2018, but they are also seeing these companions in person less often.

In 2018, 31% of Toronto residents said that, in the past month, they had seen close friends or relatives in person at least a few times a week. In 2022, the proportion is lower, at 25%.<sup>3</sup> The proportion having in-person contact with close friends or relatives at least once a week fell from 52% to 44%. Conversely, the proportion who hadn't seen their close friends or relatives in person at all during the past month nearly doubled, from 9% to 17%.

While the proportion of Torontonians seeing any close friends or relatives in person at least a few times a week in the past month declined by six points on average (from 31% to 25%), it fell by more than this among seniors (by 14 points, from 37% to 23%) and among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (by 12 points).



**Q22A.** “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?”

<sup>3</sup> This does not include family or friends living in the same household.

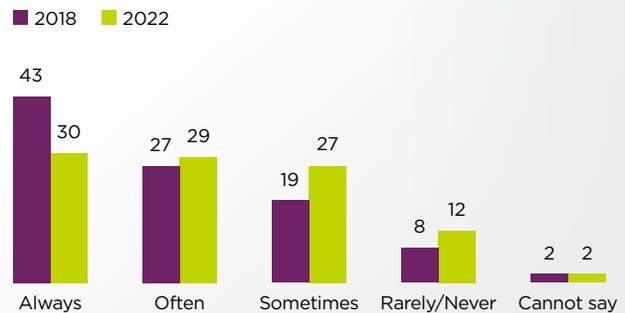
## HAVING PEOPLE TO DEPEND ON

Most Torontonians say they always or often feel they have people they can depend on to help them when they really need it. But the proportion with this reassurance has also declined. In 2018, 70% of city residents felt they always or often had someone to depend on, but this figure fell to 59% in 2022. Conversely, the proportion who feel they only sometimes, or rarely or never, have someone to depend on increased by 12 points, from 27% to 39%.

In 2022, men and women are equally likely to say they have someone to depend on. But differences emerge when we compare this to 2018. The percentage who say they always have someone to rely on declined by 17 points for women, to 32% in 2022, and eight points for men, to 29%.

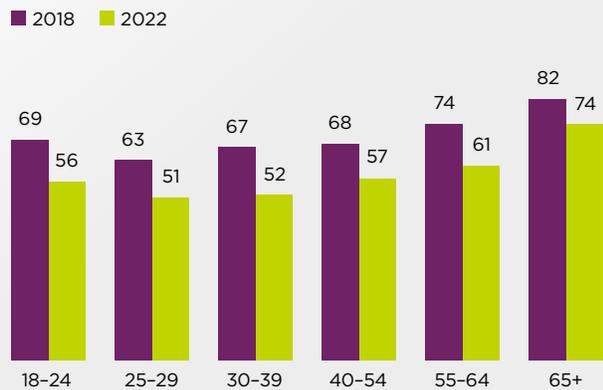
These beliefs shifted for each age category by similar amounts. But the starting points were lower among those who were young. Only about one in two (53%) of those under the age of 40 say they always or often have someone they can depend on, compared to 64% for those aged 40 and older.

### HAVE PEOPLE YOU CAN DEPEND ON TO HELP WHEN YOU REALLY NEED IT? (%)



### BY AGE

People who answered always or often (%)



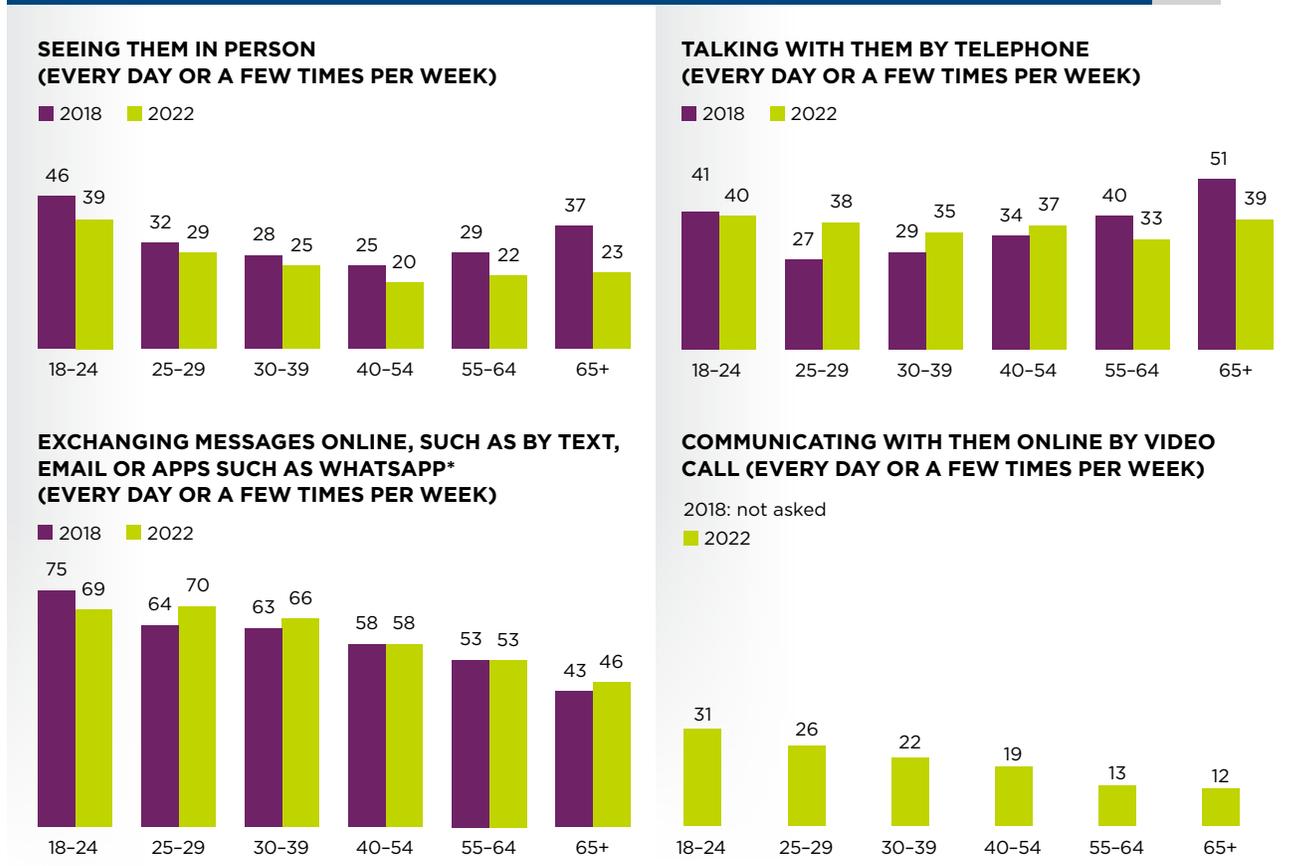
**Q39D.** "Thinking about your life in general, how often would you say you have people you can depend on to help you when you really need it?"

Communication by telephone or computer was already more frequent than in-person meetings in 2018, and this remains the case today. In 2022, 59% of Torontonians exchanged messages online with close friends or family either every day or a few times a week in the past month (through texts, emails or messaging apps), and 37% talked to them every day or a few times a week by telephone (this compares to 25% who are in contact this frequently in person). The respective numbers for online and telephone contact in 2018 were 57%, and 37%, indicating little change.<sup>4</sup> In addition, in 2022,

19% of Torontonians communicated with friends or relatives by video call every day or a few times a week.

While there was no change overall in the frequency of telephone or online communication, the pattern varies by age group. As is the case with in-person communication, the proportion of seniors talking with friends or relatives by telephone at least a few times a week fell (from 51% to 39%). Notably, the proportion of seniors communicating this regularly through online messages increased only slightly (from 43% to 46%).

**FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION WITH CLOSE FRIENDS AND RELATIVES, 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...”  
 \* In 2018: “Communicating with them online, such as by text, email or apps such as Whatsapp?”

<sup>4</sup> The wording of the question about online communication changed slightly between the two surveys. In 2018, the question mentioned “communicating with them online, such as by text, email or apps such as Whatsapp?” In 2022, this was changed to “exchanging messages online, such as by text, email or apps such as Whatsapp.” In 2022, communication by video calls was mentioned specifically in a separate question.

More generally, the survey finds that tools such as messaging apps or video calls provide ways of staying in touch with close friends and family members that are additional to, and not an alternative to, in-person meetings. Those who report regular in-person contact with their close friends and family are also more likely to communicate with them regularly by telephone or online.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, those who see friends and family in person less often than average generally do not compensate for this by phoning or emailing more often than average.

Finally, the drop in the number of friends and family members Torontonians are in touch with has not meant that social networks have become more homogenous. There has been no change since 2018 in the extent to which city residents socialize with friends from the same age group or of the sex as their own. And there has been a small increase in the proportion who say that about half or more of the friends with whom they have had contact in the past month belong to an ethnic group that is visibly different from their own (from 42% in 2018, to 47% in 2022). This increase is more pronounced among those who are third-generation or more in Canada (a nine-point increase, from 33% to 42%).<sup>6</sup>

## SATISFACTION WITH THE FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION

Along with the changes to the size of social networks and the frequency of in-person contact with friends and relatives, there was a decline in the extent to which Torontonians are satisfied with how often they communicate with their close friends and relatives. However, this decline is fairly modest. The proportion that says they are very satisfied with how often they communicate with their close friends and relatives fell from 29% in 2018 to 24% in 2022. The proportion that says they are either very or somewhat satisfied was virtually unchanged (73% in 2018, compared to 72% in 2022).

While remaining more satisfied than average, seniors experienced the largest decline in satisfaction between 2018 and 2022. The proportion of seniors who are very satisfied with how often they communicate with their close friends and relatives fell by 12 points, from 40% to 28%. In the case of seniors living alone, the drop was even larger (18 points, from 43% to 25%).

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<sup>5</sup> This pattern holds for Torontonians in all age groups, including seniors.

<sup>6</sup> In this report, “first-generation immigrant” refers to those born outside of Canada, “second-generation immigrant” refers to those born in Canada, but with at least one parent born outside of Canada, and “third-generation plus” refers to those born in Canada to Canada-born parents.

# THE SOCIAL NETWORK INDEX

The survey results relating to connections with family and friends (including the number and proximity of friends and relatives, and the frequency of contact) were combined to form a single index of social networks that provides the basis for identifying how this form of social capital varies across Toronto and how it has changed since 2018.

In 2022, the city-wide social networks index score is 5.48 (out of 10), which is lower than in 2018, when the score was 5.85, reflecting the changes in the number and frequency of connections to friends and family detailed in this section.

Social network index scores vary widely within the city, particularly by income. In 2022:

- index scores are higher for those who are better off, including those with annual household incomes of at least \$100,000 (5.81), who describe their income as “good enough” (5.80), who own their homes (5.61) or who are employed (5.57). They are lower for those with annual household incomes of \$30,000 or below (5.04), who

describe their income as “not enough” (5.10), who rent their homes (5.36) or who are unemployed (4.75);<sup>7</sup>

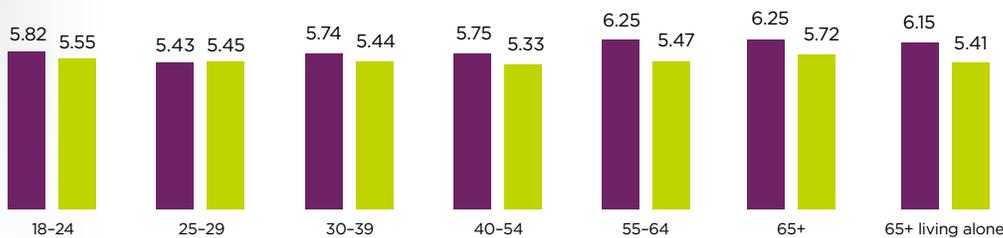
- index scores are also higher than average for those who identify as South Asian (5.72), for immigrants who have lived in Canada for 10 years or fewer (5.74), for seniors (5.72) and for those with a university degree (5.61);
- scores are also somewhat higher for women (5.55), compared to men (5.42), and for those with no disability (5.56), compared to those with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity (5.16).

Compared to 2018, social network index scores are lower across all areas of the city and among groups from all backgrounds. While index scores have fallen for all age groups, the decline is somewhat more pronounced for those aged 55 to 64 and for seniors living alone. Despite this change, the social network score for seniors living alone in the city of Toronto in 2022 is not significantly lower than average and is similar to that for residents in their late 20s and early 30s.

## SOCIAL NETWORKS INDEX: MEAN SCORES, BY AGE GROUP

Mean scores (on a scale of 0 to 10)

■ 2018 ■ 2022



<sup>7</sup> The description of income is based on the following question: “Which of the following best describes your total household income at the present time? Would you say it is: good enough for you and you can save from it; just enough for you, so that you do not have major problems; not enough for you and you are stretched; or not enough for you and you are having a hard time?”

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

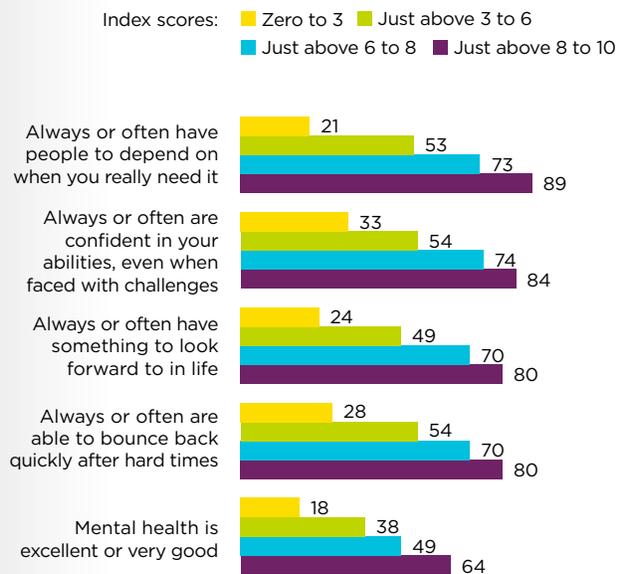
Not everyone seeks the same amount of social connections; some people are more gregarious or extroverted than others. But the Toronto Social Capital Study demonstrates that, on the whole, there is a very strong relationship between the extent of social networks and other indicators of wellbeing.

For instance, Torontonians with higher social network index scores report significantly better life satisfaction, mental health and overall wellbeing than those with lower scores. They are also more likely to say they feel they usually can bounce back quickly after hard times or have something to look forward to in life.

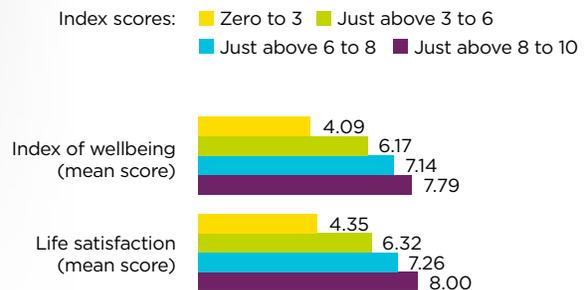
The survey does not show that stronger social connections cause these better outcomes. In fact, the reverse could be true: it could be that having better health or a more optimistic outlook also makes it easier to connect with family and friends. But the strength of the relationship between social networks and wellbeing nonetheless serves to underline the importance of measuring how social networks in the city are changing over time—particularly in the context of the effort to understand the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND OTHER INDICATORS OF WELLBEING (%)

### INDICATORS OF WELLBEING, BASED ON SOCIAL NETWORKS INDEX SCORES:



### INDEXES OF WELLBEING, BASED ON SOCIAL NETWORKS INDEX SCORES:





# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

No dimension of social capital has been as significantly affected by the pandemic as civic engagement.

Torontonians today are participating in or are members of far fewer groups than they were in 2018. Volunteering and donation rates also have dropped significantly, adding strain to a nonprofit sector that has been already struggling to keep up with demand during the pandemic.

These declines in civic engagement span age, income, racial identity and geography, with nearly all groups across the city reporting declines in civic engagement. Still, inequities persist, with the lowest

income and least educated residents the least likely to be engaged. And many of the declines are linked, with the largest declines in donations and volunteering occurring among those who participated in the least number of groups and memberships.

The key question going forward is, how quickly these measures of civic engagement will bounce back. Two and a half years into the pandemic, the declines are still dramatic. Many of the organizations that enable civic engagement are often stretched and not able to operate at full capacity, potentially making it harder for people to return to activities, even as interest returns to normal.

# Key Findings

- Participation in groups has decreased, with the average person participating in 1.0 groups in 2022, down from 1.6 in 2018. Participation declined most significantly in sports and recreation organizations, cultural organizations, and union and professional associations.
- Older Torontonians show the most substantial declines in group participation; group participation also declined twice as much for women as for men.
- The percentage of Torontonians donating to charities dropped by 12 percentage points, translating to a potential loss of more than 300,000 donors in Toronto.
- Declining participation is linked to the decline in donations, with donation rates dropping significantly among those with the lowest participation and barely at all among those with the highest participation.
- The rate of volunteering decreased to 25%, a 12-point drop from 2018.
- With the average person who volunteers contributing more than 100 hours per year, this may have resulted in about 36 million hours of lost volunteering, substantially contributing to service shortages for nonprofits around the city.
- Interest in politics decreased slightly among nearly every group in the city.

A second primary dimension of social capital encompasses the concept of community, or collective, social vitality—the extent to which people engage with others in groups and organizations, above and beyond their family and friendship networks. Civic engagement includes behaviours like donating and volunteering with charities and nonprofit organizations, engagement in political life and participating in organizations and groups like sports and recreation, religious, cultural, seniors’ or youth groups or unions.

## MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Most Torontonians (70%) have been a member of or have participated in some type of organization in the past 12 months. Toronto residents are most likely to have participated in sports or recreational organizations (18%); religious-affiliated groups (18%); cultural, educational or hobby organizations (17%); and unions or professional associations (16%).

Younger residents, men, those with children at home, those in larger households, those with more education and those with higher incomes all participated at higher rates than others. Those who were unemployed had strikingly lower participation.

Those who identify as having a disability that occasionally limits their ability to participate in day-to-day activities are more likely to participate in groups than either those with no disabilities or those with a disability

that always or often limits their day-to-day activities, driven by higher participation in cultural, education or hobby groups; youth organizations; political parties and groups; and seniors’ groups.

Participation in organizations declined significantly between 2018 and 2022:

- In 2022, Toronto residents are participating in an average of 1.0 groups each, down from 1.6 groups each in 2018.
- This decline was entirely driven by the decrease in the number of people participating in more than one group, which declined from 42% in 2018 to 18% in 2022.
- The percentage of people participating in no groups declined slightly (from 35% to 30%), indicating that some people who were not participating before the pandemic are participating now.<sup>8</sup>

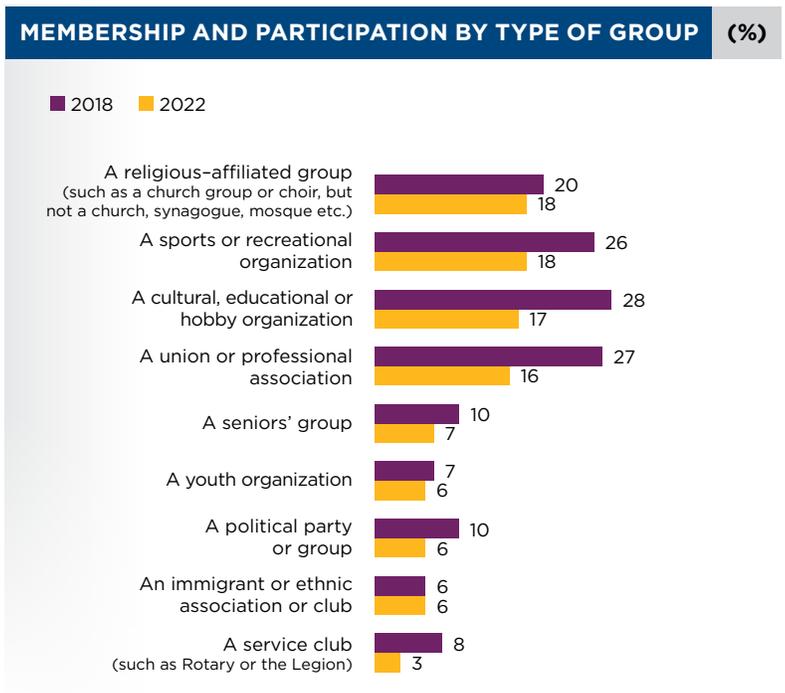
<sup>8</sup> A new series of questions on access to community facilities was added before this question in the 2022 survey, and this may also have reminded people about cultural or sports activities in which they had recently participated. This could partly explain the change.

The decline in participation in groups and associations is most likely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: either groups suspended their activities, or people did not feel safe participating. Even as many in-person meetings and events resumed over the course of 2022, some Torontonians may continue to feel wary, or they may simply have fallen out of the habit of participating.<sup>9</sup>

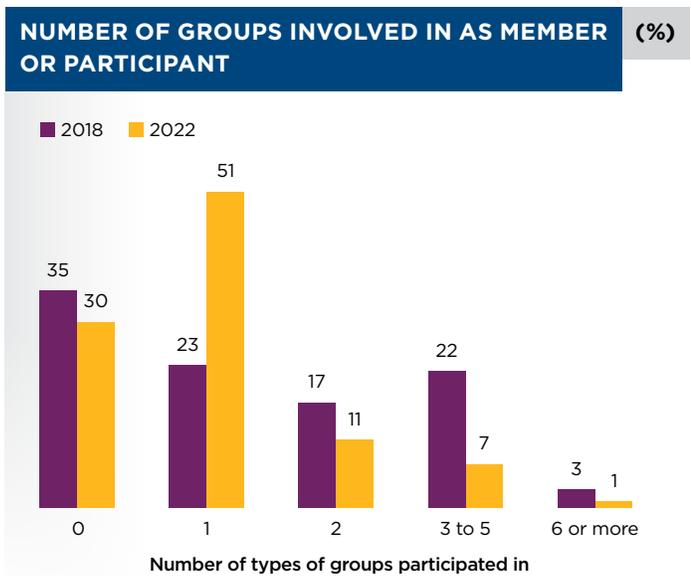
Participation in sports and recreation organizations; cultural, education and hobby organizations; and unions or professional associations all saw declines of at least eight percentage points.



In 2022, Toronto residents are participating in an average of 1.0 groups each, down from 1.6 groups each in 2018.



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



<sup>9</sup> 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 2018 Toronto Social Capital Study found that, when compared to Statistics Canada's results from 2013, participation in certain groups had declined, but overall there was no major shift in overall participation rates.

Turcotte, Martin. 2015. "Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey Civic Engagement and Political Participation in Canada." Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015006-eng.pdf?st=tBK-cRR1>.

In the case of sports and recreation organizations, participation fell by eight percentage points between 2018 and 2022 (from 26% to 18%). This follows an earlier decline from 33% in 2013 to 26% in 2018.<sup>10</sup> Participation in service clubs has also decreased substantially, from 8% of Toronto residents in 2018 to 3% in 2022. In the case of political parties or groups, participation dropped from 10% to 6%.

Participation in religious-affiliated groups, however, did not decline by as much (falling only two percentage points, from 20% in 2018 to 18% in 2022). This contrasts with the sharp decline in attendance at religious services. In 2018, 41% of respondents indicated they attended religious services at least once a month, but this fell to 23% in 2022.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that participation in religious-affiliated groups provided a substitute for religious services for those who were not able to attend such services due to the pandemic.

Immigrant or ethnic associations or clubs also showed no overall decline in participation (6% in both 2018 and 2022). And participation in these groups actually increased among new residents to the country. Among immigrants who have been in Canada for fewer than 10 years, 15% participated in one of these associations in 2022, up from 9% in 2018. This increase in participation, despite the challenges of the pandemic, highlights how important

these groups are to newcomers, particularly when other opportunities to connect with new friends and neighbours may not have been available.

Looking at different groups in the city, there were differences in how group participation changed across age, gender, racial identity, immigration status and religious participation.

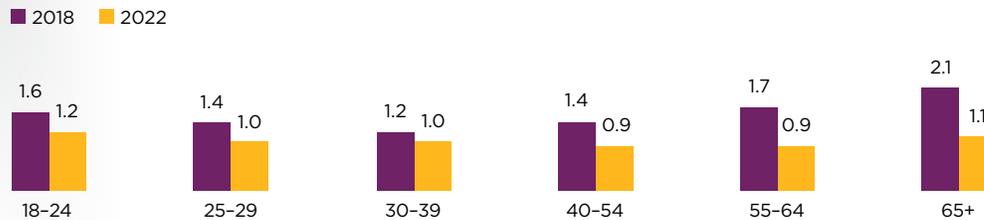
Among age groups, the biggest declines in group participation were among those aged 55 and older, many of whom may have had more health concerns about participating in in-person meetings during the pandemic. Those 65 and older are participating in almost half the number of groups that they were before the pandemic (an average of 2.1 groups in 2018 to 1.1 groups in 2022), while those aged 55 to 64 saw substantial declines as well (from an average of 1.7 groups in 2018 to 0.9 groups in 2022). Among those 55 and older, participation in sports or recreation organizations dropped by more than half (falling from 27% to 13% for those aged 55 to 64, and from 27% to 13% for those aged 65 and older).

In contrast, participation rates were relatively unchanged among those between the ages of 30 and 39. In fact, while this age group had the lowest levels of group involvement in 2018, they have average participation in 2022 (as participation rates for all other age groups declined more significantly). For this age group, people are participating in 1.0 groups in 2022 and participated in 1.2 in 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Participation in sports and recreation organizations declined between 2013 and 2018 in Toronto, even as overall participation remained constant. Toronto Foundation and The Environics Institute for Survey Research. 2018. Toronto Social Capital Study 2018. Toronto. <https://torontofoundation.ca/publications>.

<sup>11</sup> This is the case, even though the 2022 survey question asked about both in-person and online attendance.

### AVERAGE NUMBER OF GROUPS INVOLVED IN AS MEMBER OR PARTICIPANT, BY AGE



The decline in group participation is almost twice as large for women as men (women participated in an average of 0.9 groups in 2022, a decline of 0.8, while men participated in 1.1 groups in 2022, a decline of 0.4). In the case of sports and recreation organizations, men's participation changed very little between 2018 and 2022 (from 26% to 22%), while women's participation declined from 25% to 14%. Women also had significant declines in participation in religious groups (from 24% to 18%), compared to no significant change for men (from 16% to 18%). Women also had bigger declines than men for participation in political groups, seniors' groups, service groups, and unions and professional associations.

Racial identity was also connected to changing patterns of participation. Chinese residents of Toronto, who had the lowest rates of participation in 2018, saw little change in participation and are now participating at similar levels to others.

On the other hand, those who identify as white or Black saw substantial decreases in participation, participating in an average of 0.7 fewer groups in 2022 than 2018.<sup>12</sup>

For Black, South Asian and white residents, participation in sports and recreation organizations was a significant part of the decline (from 25% to 15% for Black residents, from 22% to 16% for South Asian residents and from 28% to 19% for white residents).

Participation in unions and professional associations declined more sharply among Black residents. In 2018, 31% of Black Torontonians reported participation in these associations, down to 15% in 2022, a drop of 16 percentage points (compared to an average decline of 11 percentage points).

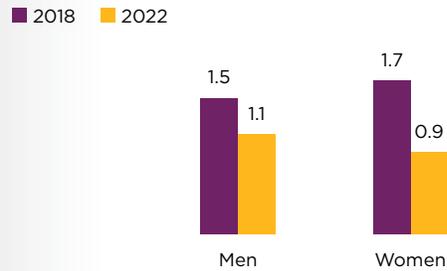
One other notable finding was that newcomers to Canada saw no significant change in their rates of participation in groups, while participation rates declined substantially for all established immigrants and for those who are second- or third-generation-plus in Canada.

<sup>12</sup> In this report, the category of "white" refers to those identifying with this group only; other categories include all those who identify with that group, including those who may also identify with others.

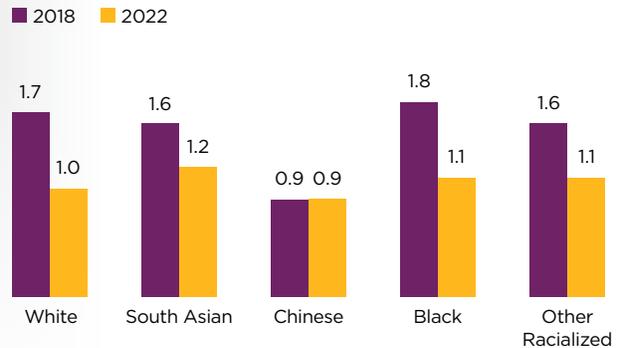
These declines in group participation are concerning, because group participation is associated with many other positive outcomes.<sup>13</sup> People who participate in groups have higher life satisfaction, more trust in society and others, have more people they can rely on and have broader social networks. A central question going forward is, whether and how quickly participation in these groups will recover. Many of these programs are operated by charitable and nonprofit organizations. But many nonprofits are currently operating at reduced capacity, limiting their programs (for a variety of reasons, including rising labour costs, declining revenues and a decline in volunteering). If nonprofit groups do not have the capacity to reopen or resume full operations, it may limit opportunities for Toronto residents to participate, even as concerns about the spread of COVID-19 subside.

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF GROUPS INVOLVED IN AS MEMBER OR PARTICIPANT**

**MEN AND WOMEN**



**BY RACIAL IDENTITY**



## CHARITABLE DONATIONS

A majority of Toronto residents (63%) donated money or goods to an organization or charity in the past 12 months. But this represents a 12 percentage point decline from 2018, when 75% reported making donations.

In 2018, the majority of Torontonians across all demographic groups and neighbourhoods donated to charity. In 2022, this was no longer the case. Among those under the age of 29, those aged 25 to 40 living alone and those who describe their income as not enough and that they were having a hard time, fewer than one in two made a donation in the past 12 months.

<sup>13</sup> This does not necessarily mean that group participation causes these outcomes; it could be that higher life satisfaction or wider social networks prompt people to participate in more groups.



In the past 12 months, 63% of Toronto residents donated money or goods to an organization or charity, down from 75% in 2018.

Donation rates rise with income: They are much higher among those with annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more (73%) than among those with incomes below \$30,000 (50%). However, the decline in donation rates occurred across all income categories (it fell by 13 percentage points among those in the highest income group, and by nine points among those in the lowest income group). Similarly, donation rates dropped by a similar extent among both those who describe their incomes as “good enough” and those who said their incomes were “not enough.”

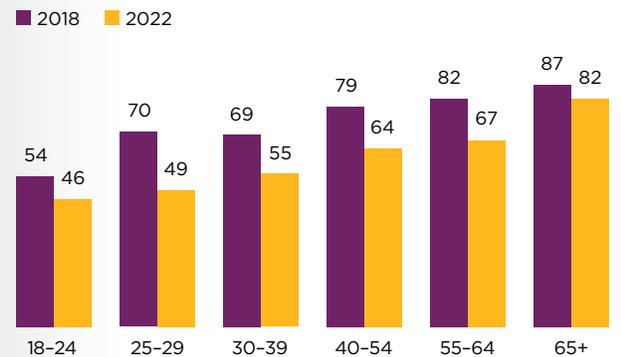
This substantial decline in donations among people with high incomes is of particular note, as it suggests that the overall decline cannot be attributed solely to increased financial strain among those in the community with lower incomes.

**MADE CHARITABLE DONATIONS IN PAST YEAR (%)**

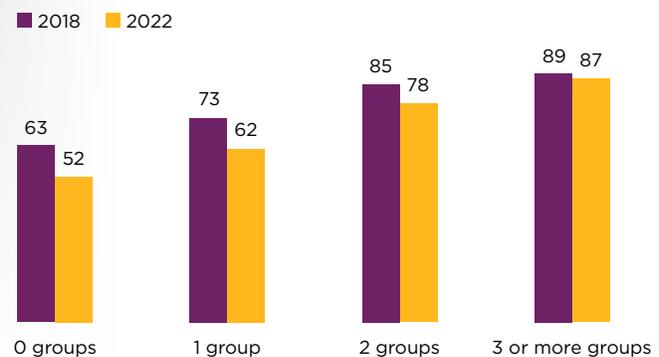
**BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME**



**BY AGE**



**BY NUMBER OF GROUPS MEMBER OF OR PARTICIPANT IN**



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

When looking at changing donation patterns by age, donations remained consistently high among those aged 65 and older (87% in 2018 and 82% in 2022), while the decline was most significant among those aged 25 to 29 (a drop of 21 points) and those aged 55 to 64 (a drop of 15 points). The decline in donations from younger Torontonians is concerning, as previous donation behaviour is one of the strongest predictors of future donations, suggesting a short-term decline in donations risks turning into a longer-term issue.<sup>14</sup>

The drop in the donation rate may be linked to the decline in participation in organizations (which are typically nonprofits and charities), as many individuals donate to organizations they are involved with. Donation rates dropped more significantly between 2018 and 2022 among those who are less active in groups. It fell by 11 points for those who participated in no groups; by 11 points for those who participated in one group, but seven points for those who participated in two groups; and by only two points for those who participated in three or more groups.

People who are actively religious (with a religious affiliation and attending services at least monthly) saw their donation rate drop by only five percentage points, while for those who are not religious, the donation rate dropped by 16 percentage points. This may mean that charities without a religious affiliation are experiencing the sharpest declines in donations.

## VOLUNTEERING

The percentage of people who report they volunteered for any organization in the past 12 months declined by 12 percentage points between 2018 and 2022, from 37% to 25%.<sup>15</sup> Many volunteer opportunities were suspended during the pandemic, while many Torontonians did not feel safe participating in activities for which they formerly volunteered.

Volunteer hours (among those who volunteer) similarly declined: the proportion who volunteered 15 hours a month or more dropped by eight percentage points. Accordingly, the proportion who volunteered between one and four hours per month increased by 10 points.

Volunteering is higher among newcomers, with 31% of immigrants who have lived in Canada for fewer than 10 years reporting that they volunteered, compared to 25% of those in the general population. People with disabilities also have particularly high rates of volunteering, especially those who reported that their disability occasionally limits their activities (33%), compared to 23% of those who said they had no activity limitations and 26% of those who said their disability always or often limits their activities.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, Lichang, Jane Allyn Piliavin, and Vaughn R.A. Call. 1999. "Giving Time, Money, and Blood: Similarities and Differences." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62 (3): 276-90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695864>.

<sup>15</sup> This is similar to the 38% decline in volunteer hours reported by charities in the 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, as reported in Toronto's Vital Signs Report 2021.

Volunteering is also higher among those with university degrees or with higher incomes. Volunteering is much lower among those with lower incomes or less education and among the unemployed (17%). Volunteer rates are almost identical for men and women (25% versus 26%, respectively), but higher among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (33%).

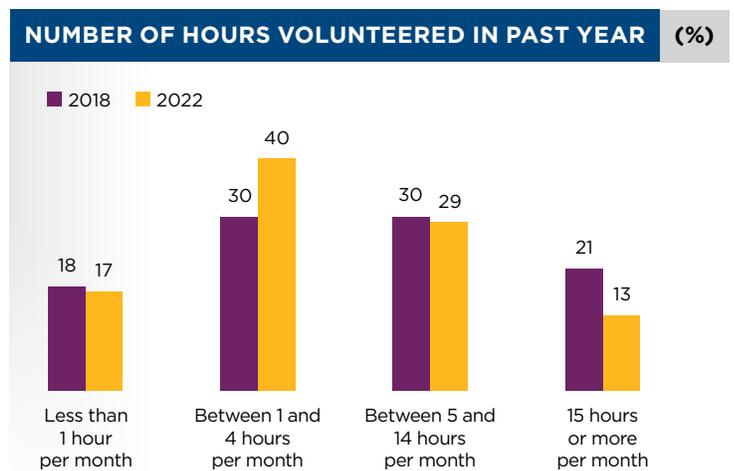
Volunteering rates differ across the city, with the highest rates in the downtown area (30%) and in the North and South Humber areas (31% and 28%, respectively). Volunteering rates were relatively low in the Weston-Jane-York areas (21%), in Scarborough-Agincourt (22%) and Scarborough-Ionview (20%).

The decline in volunteer rates occurred among Torontonians from all income groups, racial identities, age groups and genders. But the decline was particularly large among those aged 55 to 64, who volunteer at about half the rate in 2022 as in 2018 (22% versus 41%). In both 2018 and 2022, those under the age of 29 volunteered the most, though the gap has widened in 2022.

As is the case with donations, Toronto residents who are actively religious are less likely to report declining volunteering rates. Those who are actively religious saw volunteering rates decrease by eight percentage points (to 43%), while those who were not religious saw volunteering rates drop by 15 percentage points (to 20%).

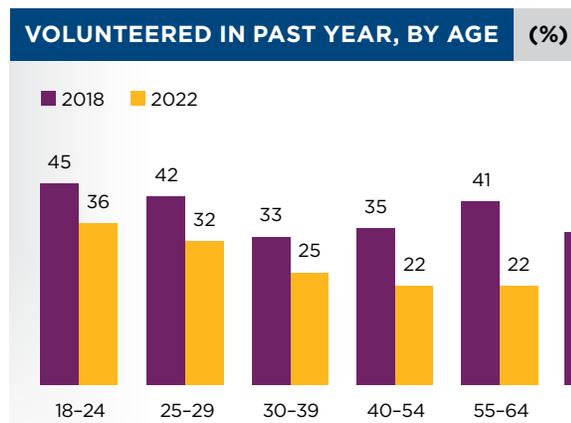


The percentage of people who report they volunteered for any organization in the past 12 months declined by 12 percentage points between 2018 and 2022, from 37% to 25%.



Subsample: Those who volunteered in past 12 months

**Q30.** “On average, about how many hours per month did you volunteer?” (If you volunteered for fewer than 12 months in past year, answer for months you have volunteered.)



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



## THE IMPLICATIONS OF DECLINING DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERING

The drop in the proportion of Toronto residents making donations is hitting charitable organizations harder, because the need for services and the cost of operating are in fact increasing, sometimes dramatically. In 2022, 73% of Toronto nonprofits reported increased demand for their services, while 80% have seen an increase in costs, according to the 2022 Ontario Nonprofit Network's survey of nonprofits.<sup>16</sup>

From the perspectives of nonprofits, the value and scale of the decline in donations for charities and nonprofit organizations have the potential to be staggering.

Both volunteering and giving decreased by 12 percentage points between 2018 and 2022, representing about 300,000 fewer donors and 300,000 fewer volunteers in Toronto, a city with about 2.5 million people over the age of 18, as of the 2021 Census.<sup>17</sup>

If the lost donors give at average levels for Ontarians,<sup>18</sup> this represents a potential loss of more than \$180 million in donations in Toronto in the previous 12 months.

If the lost volunteers are volunteering at average levels for Ontarians, at 122 hours per year,<sup>19</sup> this represents a potential loss of about 36 million volunteer hours or approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent positions.<sup>20</sup>

These levels of decline are a significant shortfall made only more challenging because of the rise in operating costs and increasing need for services.



<sup>16</sup> Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN). 2022. "State of the Ontario Nonprofit Survey Datasheet." 2022. <https://theonnc.ca/topics/policy-priorities/covid-19-resources/covid19-pandemic-surveys/>

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. 2022. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released September 21, 2022. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed October 6, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> In Ontario, the average annual donation was \$611 in 2018, while the median donation was \$170. (see Statistics Canada. Table 45-10-0031-01 Donor rate and average annual donations, by age group.)

<sup>19</sup> In Ontario, the average volunteer contributed 122 hours of formal volunteering in 2018. (see Statistics Canada. Table 45-10-0040-01 Volunteer rate and average annual volunteer hours, by definition of volunteering and gender.)

<sup>20</sup> Assuming the typical full-time position means about 1,800 hours worked per year.

Results from the Ontario Nonprofit Network's 2022 survey of nonprofits show similar findings.

In their study, 63% of nonprofits in Toronto report challenges due to a loss of volunteers, 56% have difficulty recruiting new volunteers, and 35% struggle to convince previous volunteers to return.

This and other challenges like declining donations and increasing costs have resulted in almost half of organizations (45%) scaling back programs or services, or increasing their wait lists (20% of nonprofits).

## NATIONAL FINDINGS

### National Rates of Volunteering and Donations

The 2022 figures for Toronto regarding charitable giving and donations are similar to those for Canada as a whole. The Canada-wide social capital survey conducted at the same time as the Toronto study finds that 24% of Canadians did volunteer work in the past 12 months, while 56% donated to an organization or charity. Volunteering is slightly more common in the Prairie provinces than in rest of the country; the likelihood of making donations, however, does not vary significantly by region. Overall, younger Canadians are more likely than their older counterparts to volunteer, but seniors are the most likely age group to make donations.

# POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

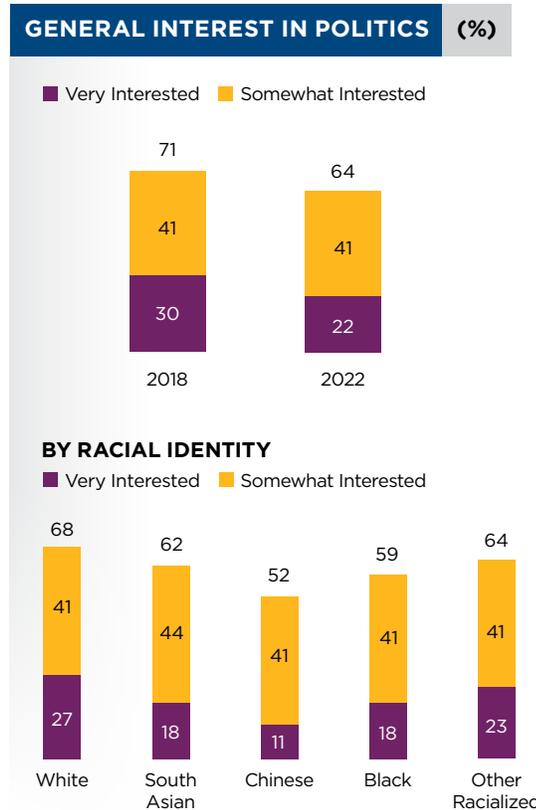
Most Torontonians express a general interest in politics, but as with the other measures relating to civic engagement, interest in politics has declined since 2018.

In 2022, 64% of Toronto residents said they are very or somewhat interested in politics, down seven percentage points from 2018. All of the decline was reported based on those who said they are very interested in politics (22% in 2022, down eight percentage points).

Interest in politics is strongly related to income, with 29% of those with annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more reporting they are very interested in politics, compared to 16% of those with incomes of below \$30,000.

Those reporting disabilities also expressed higher interest in politics: 65% of those who said their disabilities always limited their daily activities, and 72% of those who said their disabilities sometimes limited their daily activities, are very or somewhat interested, compared to 61% of those with no limitations.

Interest in politics also varies by geography, with those in Scarborough, Weston-Jane-York and Newtonbrook-Willowdale the least likely to report being very interested in politics (16% to 18%), and those living downtown, in Yorkdale and the Annex, the Danforth-Beach and North Toronto-Don Mills reporting the highest interest in politics (26% to 28%).



Q33. "Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics (e.g., international, national, provincial or municipal)?"

Racial identity is also related to interest in politics, with 27% of those who identify as white saying they have a strong interest in politics, compared to 18% of those who identify as racialized, including 18% of those who identify as Black, 18% of those who identify as South Asian, 11% of those who identify as Chinese and 23% of those who identify as another racialized group.

Those who have an interest in politics also show more confidence in government:

- 51% of those who are very interested in politics are at least somewhat confident that a government agency would help them if they fell on hard times, compared to 34% of those not at all interested; and
- 42% of those who are very interested in politics have a high degree of confidence (a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale) in city hall, compared to 30% of those who are not at all interested.

Interest in politics generally decreased relatively equally among all demographic groups and neighbourhoods between 2018 and 2022.

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INDEX

The survey results related to civic engagement (group participation, donations, volunteering and political interest) were combined to form an index that provides the basis for identifying how this form of social capital varies across Toronto and how it has changed since 2018.

In 2022, the city-wide civic engagement index score is 4.11 (out of 10), which is considerably lower than in 2018, when the score was 4.86, reflecting the reductions in donations, volunteering, group participation and political interest.

Civic engagement index scores vary widely within the city. In 2022:

- the highest index scores are for those who attended religious services regularly (5.13) and lower among those who were not religious (3.74);
- income was strongly associated with civic engagement scores, with those with annual household incomes of more than \$100,000 reporting high scores (4.63) and lower for those with less than \$30,000 in annual household income (3.46);
- scores increased continually with age, with the lowest scores for those between 18 and 24 years of age (3.88) and the highest with those aged 65+ (4.64);
- those with disabilities that sometimes limited their day-to-day activities had particularly high civic engagement (4.75), while those with no disabilities had lower than average scores (3.92) and those with disabilities that always or often limited their day-to-day activities had scores very close to the average (4.09);
- scores are also higher for men than women (4.29, versus 3.94 for women), for those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (4.35) and those with university degrees (4.61). Scores are lower for those aged 25 to 40 living alone (3.74), those who were unemployed (3.13) and those who identified as Chinese (3.55);
- compared to other indexes, there is more variation between neighbourhoods, with the highest scores in Humber North (4.38), North Toronto-Don Mills (4.40) and downtown (4.37), and lower scores in Weston-Jane-York (3.66) and Scarborough-Ionview (3.67).<sup>21</sup>

Compared to 2018, civic engagement scores decreased across age groups, but declined most for older Torontonians. Women also saw their civic engagement index decrease considerably more than men (a 1.0 decrease to 3.94, versus a 0.55 decrease for men to 4.29). Women had higher civic engagement in 2018 and lower civic engagement in 2022.

<sup>21</sup> For details on the neighbourhoods referred to in this report, see the Appendix.

Those who identify as white saw substantial decreases in their civic engagement index (down 1.43 to 4.25), as did those who identify as Black (down 1.24 to 4.02). Those who identify as Chinese saw their scores decline less (down 0.38 to 3.55), though, they still have the lowest civic engagement index score by racial identity. Other racialized residents also saw their scores decline (down 1.05 to 4.06), as did those who identify as South Asian (down 0.72 to 4.25).

Across neighbourhoods, generally the neighbourhoods with the highest civic engagement index in 2018 saw the biggest declines, compressing the differences between neighbourhoods. For example, Yorkdale and the Annex had the highest score in 2018, and their civic engagement index declined by 1.88 (to 4.08), while Scarborough-Ionview had the lowest score in 2018, and the civic engagement index declined by 0.99 (to 3.67).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While not everyone has the same interest and capacity to participate in a wide array of activities in society, the Social Capital Study shows that Torontonians with higher civic engagement report higher life satisfaction, broader social networks of friends and neighbours, more frequent social interaction and broadly a deeper and more satisfied connection with their community.

The survey cannot say the degree to which it is stronger civic engagement itself that causes some of these outcomes, but these differences outline why the sharp declines in civic engagement are of particular concern for wellbeing.

Beyond this, those who are civically engaged help contribute to the backbone of a strong society: they donate, they volunteer, they vote and they participate in groups and activities ranging from sports and recreation to cultural organizations, to professional associations, religious institutions and political groups.

Understanding how the pandemic has undermined civic engagement is critical to understanding the full impact of the crisis. It also provides an early warning as to the possible longer-term implications of the pandemic, especially if some of these attitudes and behaviours do not shift back to where they were before the pandemic.



# SOCIAL TRUST

Most Torontonians express at least some trust or confidence in different groups of people and different types of institutions. But levels of trust or confidence vary by age and socio-economic status, with younger and lower-income residents expressing much lower levels of trust and confidence. Black Torontonians also consistently express lower levels of social trust. Levels of trust and confidence are also often lower among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ and those who are between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone.

While levels of confidence in most local institutions are unchanged since 2018, the survey finds that levels of trust in others have fallen. Generally, those who were previously the most trusting experienced the most change, which means there is now less difference in the levels of social trust expressed by Torontonians from different backgrounds.



# Key Findings

- There has been a significant drop in the proportion saying that most people can be trusted. In general, this drop is somewhat more pronounced among groups that were previously more trusting, including those with higher incomes, those with a university degree and those who identify as white.
- In Toronto, trust in people of different ethnic backgrounds, or who speak different languages, is higher than average among both non-immigrants and those who identify as white.
- Engagement in politics is associated with more, rather than less, acceptance of those with different political views.
- Torontonians are just as likely to have a high degree of confidence in institutions such as neighbourhood centres, city hall, the school system and local businesses today as they were prior to the pandemic.
- The proportion of city residents expressing a high degree of confidence in the police has declined. Confidence in the police remains lower among Black residents of the city, but the differences between views of white and Black Torontonians have narrowed.
- In the wake of the pandemic, the proportion of Torontonians with a strong sense of belonging to their local community has declined. Those who previously had the strongest sense of belonging, such as those who are more active in their communities, experienced a sharper decline.

Another central dimension of social capital is social trust, defined as the extent to which individuals trust (or distrust) others whom they interact with or know. This section of the report focuses on questions relating to trust in other people (both in general and in terms of specific groups) and in institutions.

## GENERAL TRUST

General trust is the extent to which individuals trust other people overall. The most commonly used question to measure general trust asks people which of two opposing statements is closest to their own view. In 2022, two in five Toronto residents (42%) agree that “overall, most people can be trusted.” But somewhat more (53%) agree instead that “you cannot be too careful in dealing with people” (the remaining 5% choose neither statement).

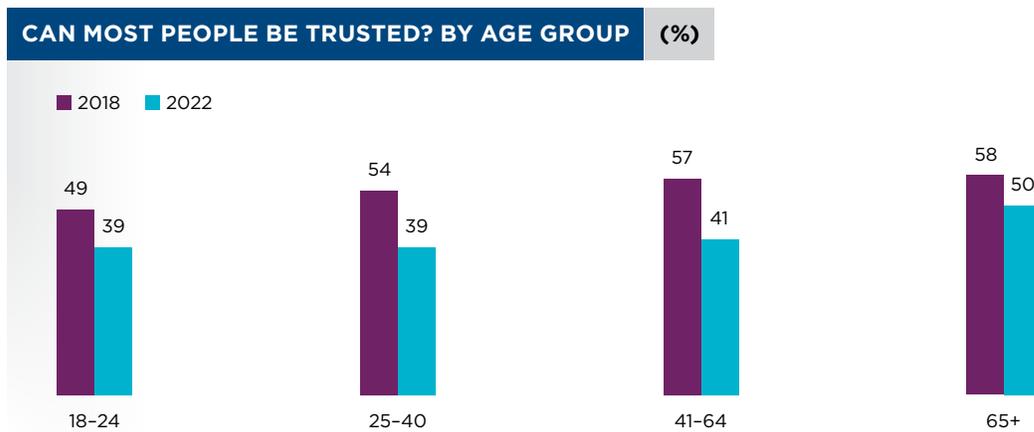
The proportion saying that most people can be trusted increases with both age and socio-economic status: it is higher than average for seniors, for those who own their homes, for those with higher incomes and for those with a university education. It is especially high among seniors living alone (53%). This proportion is much lower than average among second-generation immigrants (36%) and those who are unemployed (33%). The proportion saying that most people can be trusted also varies by racial identity: it is higher than average among those who identify as Chinese (48%) or as white (46%) and lower among those identifying as Black (27%).



**Q10.** “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?”

There has been a significant drop in the proportion saying that most people can be trusted, from 55% in 2018 to 42% in 2022. In general, this drop occurred among Torontonians of all backgrounds. In some cases, however, the drop is somewhat more pronounced among groups that were previously more trusting, including those with higher incomes and those who identify as white. As a result, there has been somewhat of a levelling out of the distribution of trust, as the gaps between those with more and less trust have narrowed.

There is one notable exception to this pattern. While seniors are more likely than average to express general trust in other people, their likelihood of agreeing that most people can be trusted fell by only eight percentage points (from 58% to 50%). This compares to a much larger drop of 16 points among those between the ages of 41 and 64. Perhaps remarkably, there was little change in trust among seniors living alone (a slight drop from 56% in 2018 to 53% in 2022). This contrasts with an 18-point drop from (from 57% to 39%) among those between the ages of 25 and 40, and who are living alone.

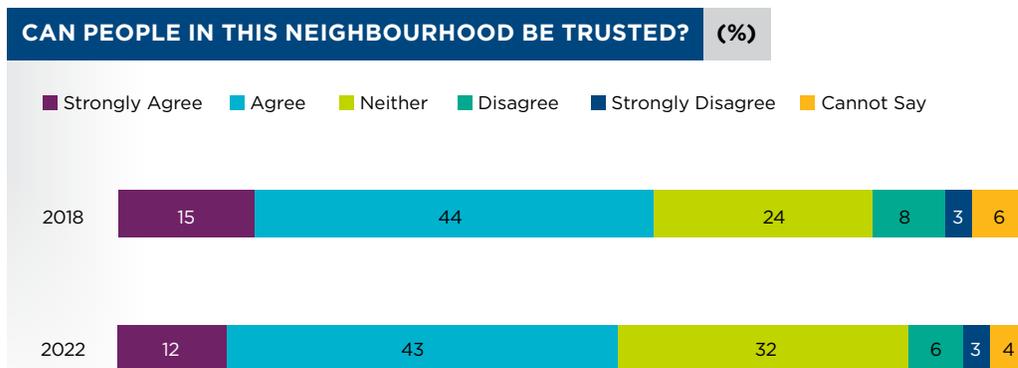


**Q10.** “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?”

A second question asks whether Toronto residents agree or disagree that “people in this neighbourhood can be trusted.” Overall, a slight majority agrees (55%), while one in three (32%) neither agrees nor disagrees, and 9% disagree (and an additional 4% do not offer an answer). Once again, trust increases with both age and socio-economic status: agreement is higher than average among those who own their homes, among those with higher incomes and among those with a university degree. Agreement is lower than average among those with lower socio-economic status, among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (48%) and among those between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone (45%). And as with general trust, agreement that people in this neighbourhood can be trusted varies by racial identity: in this case, it is higher than average for those who identify as South Asian (60%) and lower among Black Torontonians (47%).

Trust in people in one’s neighbourhood also varies across the city: it is higher than average in Humber-North (63%) and the Danforth-Beach (62%) area and lower than average in Weston-Jane-York (48%) and in the downtown area (46%).

Compared to 2018, agreement is down slightly (by four points, from 59%), while more neither agree nor disagree (up by eight points, from 24%). Disagreement is more or less unchanged (9% in 2022, compared to 11% in 2018). The level of agreement has declined more sharply among some groups with higher levels of trust, including those aged 55 and over (down 12 points) and those who identify as white (down eight points, compared to a small increase of two points among those who are racialized).



**Q7C.** “Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the people who live in your neighbourhood: people in this neighbourhood can be trusted.”

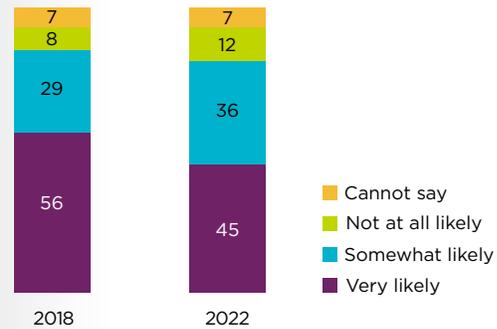
The survey also measures general trust by asking about people’s confidence in recovering a lost wallet or purse containing \$200 from each of several types of individuals: a police officer, a neighbour and a stranger. Among the three scenarios, Toronto residents are most likely to expect they would recover a lost wallet or purse if found by a police officer (45% say this is very likely, and 81% say it is very or somewhat likely). By comparison, 24% of Torontonians say it is very likely that a lost wallet or purse would be returned by someone who lives close by (though a majority (70%) say it is very or somewhat likely), and only 5% say a return from a stranger is very likely (38% say it would be very or somewhat likely).

Confidence in recovery has declined since 2018 in all these cases. The proportion saying it would be very likely that their lost wallet or purse would be returned fell:

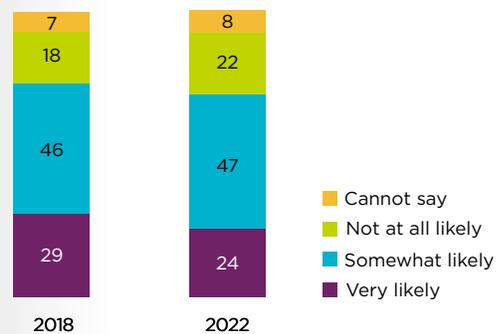
- by 11 points in the case of a police officer (from 56% in 2018 to 45% in 2022)
- by five points in the case of someone who lives close by (from 29% in 2018 to 24% in 2022)
- by two points in the case of a stranger (from 7% in 2018 to 5% in 2022, and the proportion saying this would be very or somewhat likely fell from 47% to 38%).

**HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT A LOST WALLET OR PURSE WOULD BE RETURNED? (%)**

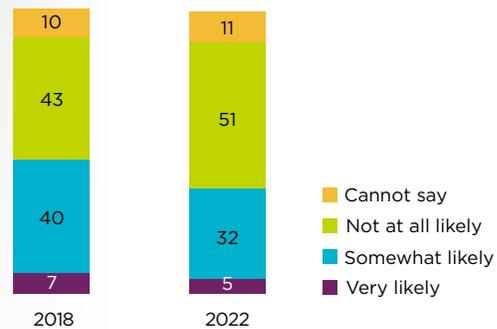
**BY A POLICE OFFICER**



**BY SOMEONE WHO LIVES CLOSE BY?**



**BY A STRANGER**



*Q11. "If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found..."*

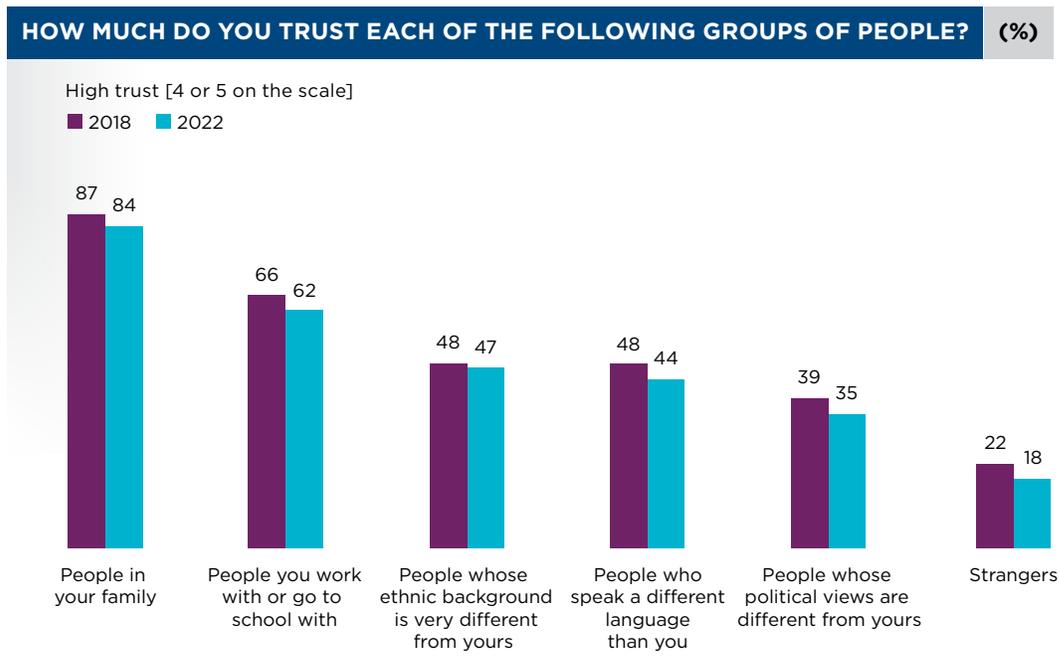
Once again, levels of trust have fallen more among some groups that were previously more trusting, such as older Torontonians and those who identify as white. As a result, gaps between higher and lower levels of trust have narrowed. For instance, in 2018, there was a 22-point difference between the proportion of seniors and the proportion of those aged 18 to 24 who said it was very likely that their lost wallet or purse would be returned by someone who lives close by; in 2022, there is only a two-point difference. Similarly, in 2018, there was a striking 25-point gap between the proportion of white and Black Torontonians who said it was very likely that their lost wallet or purse would be returned by a police officer; in 2022, this gap has been reduced to seven points.

## TRUST IN OTHER PEOPLE

The survey also assessed trust in different groups of people, including both similar types of people (such as family) and those who are different (in terms of language, ethnic background or political views):

- More than eight in 10 (84%) Toronto residents say they have a high level of trust in family members (measured as a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale).
- Roughly six in 10 have a similarly strong level of trust in people they work with or go to school with (62%).
- Just under one in two has a high level of trust in people whose ethnic background is very different from theirs (47%) and people who speak a different language than they do (44%). In each case, about one in three expresses a medium amount of trust (“3” on the scale), and only 9% and 10% respectively express low trust (“1” or “2” on the scale).
- Fewer express this high level of trust in people whose political views are different from theirs (35%) or in strangers (18%).

In these last two cases, however, most Torontonians express at least a medium level of trust (a score of “3” or higher on the scale), while only a minority have low trust. Seven in 10 have at least a medium level of trust in people with different political views, and only 16% have low trust. In the case of strangers, 56% have at least a medium level of trust, compared to 35% who have low trust.



**Q12.** “Using a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means “cannot be trusted at all” and 5 means “can be trusted a lot”), how much do you trust each of the following groups of people?”

In general, levels of trust in these specific groups of people tend to increase as both age and income increase. One important finding, in the context of Toronto’s diversity, is that residents who are not immigrants, as well as those who identify as white, are more likely than the city average to express trust in people of different ethnic backgrounds, or who speak different languages

Levels of trust in others have declined since 2018, though, in each case the change is very small (a drop of between one and four points in the proportion expressing a high level of trust). For example, the proportion with a high level of trust in the people they work or go to school with fell by four points (from 66% to 62%), as did the proportion with a high level of trust in people whose political views are different from their own (from 39% to 35%).



## DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL VIEWS

In recent years, the question has arisen as to whether Western democracies are becoming increasingly polarized along political lines, with greater distance between partisan groups and less willingness to compromise.

On the whole, however, Toronto residents are not particularly distrustful of people whose political views differ from their own. Only 35% express high trust in those with different political views, but a majority (71%) have at least some trust, and only 16% have low trust. High trust has declined since 2018, but only slightly (by four percentage points).

Trust in people with different political views increases with both age and income. Younger Torontonians (aged 18 to 24) are almost three times more likely than seniors to have low trust in those whose political views are different from their own (27%, compared to 10%). In fact, younger Torontonians are the only group in the city who are just as likely to express low trust as high trust in people with different political views.

A more encouraging finding is that, compared to those with less interest, Torontonians who are more interested in politics are much more likely to express high trust in those whose political views differ from their own. Those who are members of a political party or group are also more likely to express high trust than non-members. Engagement in politics, therefore, is associated with more, rather than less, acceptance of those with different political views.

### NATIONAL FINDINGS

A majority have at least some trust in people whose political views differ from their own—and this is true for Canada as whole, and not just Toronto, according to the national social capital survey that was conducted at the same time as the Toronto study. Canada-wide, only 14% have low trust in people whose political views differ from their own.

# CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

The survey also examined social trust by asking about confidence in nine institutions that serve and support local communities:

- Torontonians are most likely to express a high level of confidence (ratings of “4” or “5” on a five-point scale) in neighbourhood centres (59%), the police (56%) and local merchants and business people (56%).
- About one in two residents also has a high degree of confidence in charities or not-for-profit organizations (53%), the school system (50%) and the justice system and courts (46%).<sup>22</sup>
- Political institutions (either local city councillors (39%) or city hall (39%)) and the local media (37%) are less likely to elicit this degree of confidence.

Most Torontonians have at least a modest degree of confidence in each of these institutions, and only a minority have low confidence (“1” or “2” on the scale). About one in four has low confidence in the local media (25%), city hall (24%), the justice system and courts (23%) and local city councillors (23%).

## HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE DO YOU HAVE IN THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS? (%)



**Q13.** “Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “no confidence at all” and 5 means “a great deal of confidence”, how much confidence do you have in...”

<sup>22</sup> Note that high confidence in the school system is higher among those with children living in their household aged 18 or younger (57%) than it is among those with no children in their household (46%).

Confidence in local institutions varies considerably among population groups within the city. Most strikingly, confidence rises significantly with age. Younger Torontonians are particularly less likely to have a high degree of confidence in city hall, their local councillor, the police, the justice system and local business people. Confidence also rises with household income and educational attainment.

Confidence varies by immigrant background and racial identity, but the differences are not generally between non-immigrant or white Torontonians and all other groups. For instance, second-generation immigrants are less likely to have confidence in each of the local institutions mentioned than are either first-generation immigrants or those born in Canada to Canada-born parents. Confidence in the school system is higher among Torontonians who identify as either South Asian (57%) or Chinese (54%) and lower among those who identify as white (48%) or Black (45%). Confidence in the justice system is also higher than average among South Asian or Chinese Torontonians.

It is also notable that people with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity have somewhat lower confidence in institutions that might otherwise be expected to have a focus on accessibility, including local charities (eight points lower, compared to those with no disability), the school system (eight points lower), the justice system and courts (eight points lower) and neighbourhood centres (seven points lower).

Generally speaking, confidence in local institutions (including in the police and city hall) does not differ greatly across the city's neighbourhoods.

With one exception, confidence in local institutions is more or less unchanged from 2018. This means that Torontonians are just as likely to have a high degree of confidence in institutions such as neighbourhood centres, city hall, the school system and local businesses today as they had prior to the pandemic.

The one exception is the police: the proportion with high confidence in the police fell by nine points (from 65% to 56%), while the proportion with low confidence increased by seven points (from 11% to 18%) (though the police remain one of the most trusted institutions in the city).

# TORONTONIANS AND THE POLICE

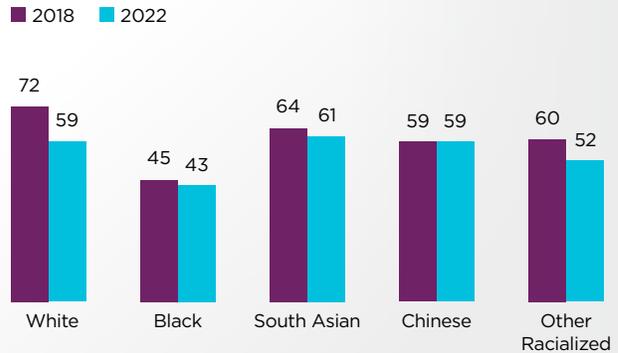
The COVID-19 pandemic is not the only development that has shaken the city since 2018. In 2020, the issue of anti-Black racism gained new prominence in the wake of the global public outcry when a white police officer murdered George Floyd, an African-American, with three other Minneapolis police officers facing charges for aiding and abetting the murder. This sparked anti-racism protests across the United States and around the world, including in Toronto. It also informed a wider public discussion of anti-Black racism and systemic racism, including recurring instances of police brutality against racial minorities.

In the wake of these events, the public's view of the police in Toronto has shifted. The proportion of city residents who think it is very likely that a police officer would return a lost wallet or purse containing \$200 fell from 56% in 2018, to 45% in 2022. The proportion expressing a high degree of confidence in the police fell from 65% to 56%.

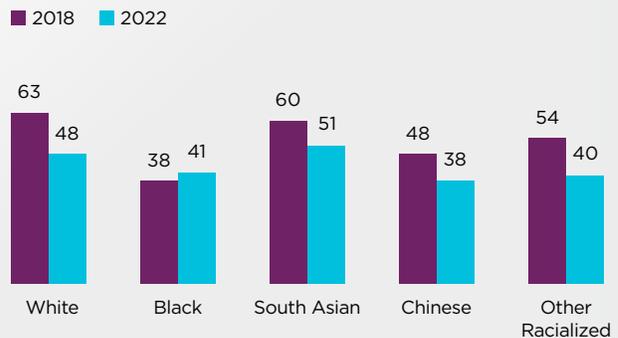
What is most notable is that this change is more pronounced among those who identify as white than among Black Torontonians or other racialized groups. Among the city's white residents, the expectation that a police officer would return a lost wallet or purse containing \$200 fell by 15 points, and high confidence in the police fell by 13 points. Confidence in the police remains lower among Black residents of the city. At the same time, the differences between views of white and Black Torontonians on these questions have narrowed.

## VIEWS OF THE POLICE, BY RACIAL IDENTITY (%)

### HIGH CONFIDENCE [4 OR 5 ON THE SCALE]



### VERY LIKELY WALLET RETURNED



**Q13A.** "Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means "no confidence at all" and 5 means "a great deal of confidence," how much confidence do you have in: the police?"

**Q11B.** "If you lost a wallet or purse that contained \$200, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found: By a police officer?"

The anti-Black racism movement, therefore, appears to have generated greater awareness among white Torontonians of the issue of discriminatory police practices.

# SENSE OF BELONGING

An additional dimension of social trust is the extent to which people feel they belong in the community in which they live. Most Torontonians express such a sense, with seven in 10 saying they either have a very strong (21%) or a somewhat strong (48%) sense of belonging to their local community.

As with other questions related to social trust, the sense of belonging varies significantly by age and income. Those aged 30 to 39 (63%) report the lowest sense of belonging, while those aged 65 and older (79%) report the highest. Sense of belonging is also higher among those who describe their income as “good enough” (78%) and is lower among those who say their income is “not enough” (59%).

Those who are actively religious have a higher sense of belonging (80%) than those who are not religious (63%).<sup>23</sup> It is lower than average among those with a disability that always or often limits their daily activities (66%), those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (61%) and those who are unemployed (56%). The sense of belonging is also lower than average for adults aged 25 to 40 who live alone (58%).

Sense of belonging does not vary substantially across the city, though it is a bit lower among those living downtown (65%) and higher among residents of the Danforth-Beach area of the city (76%).

Sense of belonging has declined somewhat since 2018. The proportion with a very strong sense of belonging decreased by seven points, from 28% to 21%. The proportion with either a very or somewhat strong sense of belonging, however, declined by only two points (from 72% to 70%), as more people reported a somewhat strong sense of belonging to their local community.

The decline is more pronounced among some groups that were more likely to express a very strong sense of belonging to their local community in 2018. This includes seniors (especially seniors living alone), those who know most or many of their neighbours and those with the highest civic engagement index scores. The effect of the pandemic, then, has been to narrow some of the differences between different population groups in the city, though, unfortunately, by eroding the stronger sense of belonging among some, such as those who are more active in their communities.

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<sup>23</sup> In this report, the term “actively religious” refers to those who have a religious affiliation and attend religious services at least once a month; “not religious” refers to those who do not have a religious affiliation.

# THE SOCIAL TRUST INDEX

As is the case with social networks, the results for the questions relating to social trust are combined into a single index that helps to demonstrate where social trust overall is most and least present within the city, and how social trust has changed since 2018.

The city-wide social trust index score is 4.61 (out of a possible 10), and this varies noticeably across some groups. It is much higher than average among seniors (including seniors living alone). It is also higher among men than women, and among those who are heterosexual than among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+. Social trust also varies according to socio-economic status: it is higher for those who own their homes, compared to those who rent, and rises as household income and educational attainment rise. It is higher for immigrants and third-generation-plus Torontonians, compared to those who are second-generation immigrants. Among the main racial groups in the city, social trust index cores are highest for those who identify as South Asian (4.84) and lowest for those who identify as Black (4.25).

As was the case in 2018, social trust is also strongly related to knowing one's neighbours (the social trust index score is 5.55 among those who know most or many of their neighbours, versus 4.23 for those who know few or none).

Finally, there are very strong relationships between social trust and the other indexes available from the survey covering social networks, civic engagement, wellbeing and discrimination. For instance, those reporting better wellbeing (scoring above eight on a wellbeing scale running from zero to 10) have a social trust index score of 6.15, compared to a score of 2.84 for those reporting worse wellbeing (scoring three or lower). Similarly, those reporting no discrimination (a score of zero on the discrimination scale) have an above average social trust index score of 5.53; this social trust index score then falls steadily as the scores on the index of discrimination rise (indicating more frequent experiences of discrimination). This is true for all forms of discrimination taken together, as well as for discrimination based on different grounds, such as race, gender and age.

Looking across all these differences, what stands out is that seniors, those who describe their incomes as being "good enough" and those who know most of their neighbours have some of the highest social trust index scores. Those who are unemployed, those who describe their incomes as being "not enough" and those who know none of their neighbours have some of the lowest scores. And social trust index scores are also comparatively low for those with lower measures of wellbeing and more frequent experiences of discrimination.

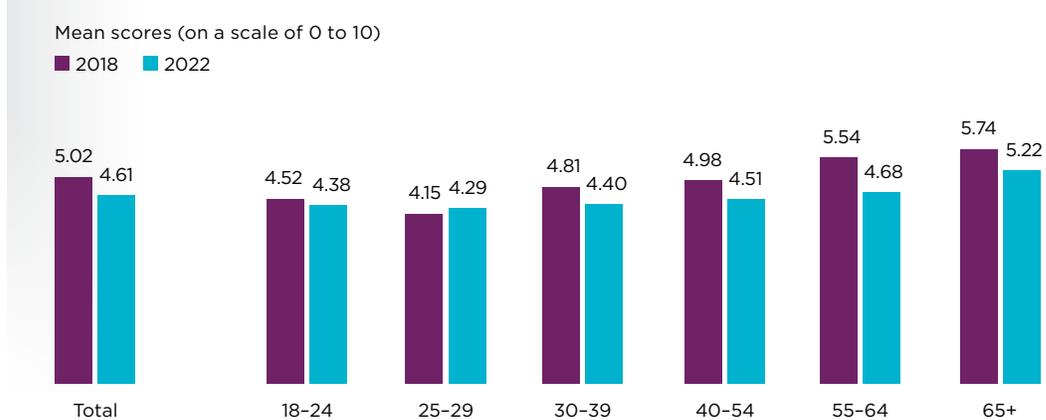
The social trust index score in 2022 (4.61) is lower than in 2018 (5.02), reflecting the decline in general trust and in trust in certain groups, notably the police. Compared to 2018, social trust is generally lower for Torontonians of all backgrounds. But there are some exceptions:

- The social trust index score was unchanged for those age 18 to 29, while it fell among those over the age of 30. As a result, the gap between the scores of younger and older Torontonians has narrowed.
- Social trust index scores fell among Torontonians from all racial backgrounds, except among those who identify as Chinese, for whom it rose slightly. In 2018, Chinese Torontonians had significantly lower scores than average, but in 2022 this is no longer the case.<sup>24</sup>
- The social trust index score did not change among those who know most of their neighbours, but fell significantly for those who know none of their neighbours.

- Finally, social trust fell in most parts of the city, but by less than average in Scarborough. In the Scarborough-Lonview neighbourhood in particular, the social trust score increased (the only neighbourhood where that is the case). In 2018, Torontonians living in Scarborough had significantly lower scores than average, but in 2022 this is no longer the case.

The overall decline in social trust notwithstanding, the finding that social trust fell among most groups in the city, and not just among some groups (and, in particular, not just among the most disadvantaged groups), is reassuring. To the extent that these changes are related to the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, they suggest that its outcome has not been a widening in the “trust gap” between more and less well-off Torontonians (even though these gaps still exist).

### SOCIAL TRUST INDEX: MEAN SCORES, BY AGE GROUP



<sup>24</sup> The index score in 2022 for Chinese Torontonians remains below average, but the difference is no longer statistically significant.



## SOCIAL TRUST IN CANADA

Scores on the index of social trust, which combines answers to several questions in the survey, are remarkably similar in the city of Toronto (4.61 on a scale of zero to 10) and in Canada as a whole (4.58), drawing the Canada result from the national social capital survey that was conducted in parallel to the Toronto study.

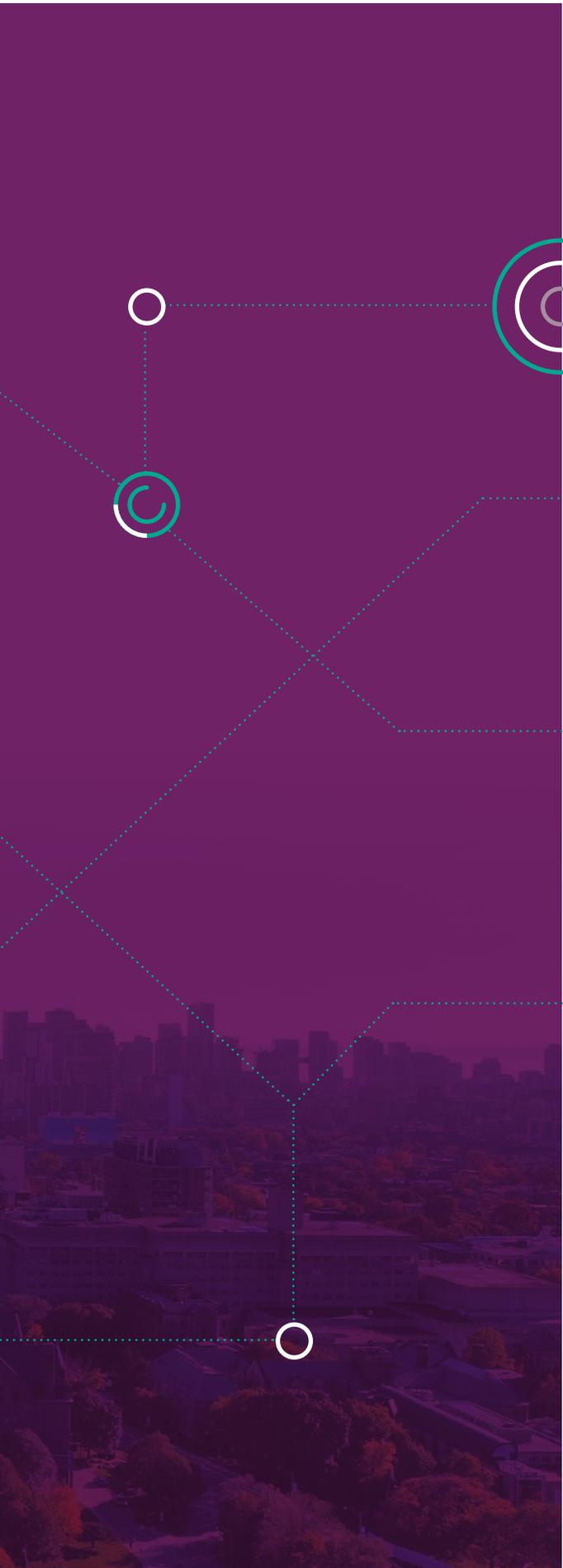
Social trust does vary somewhat across the country: generally speaking, it declines from east to west, from a high of 4.89 in Atlantic Canada, to a low of 4.33 in the West. Interestingly, this is roughly the range of variation across neighbourhoods within the city of Toronto (between Humber South (4.84) and Weston-Jane-York (4.35)). This suggests that there is as much variation within regions (including within the city of Toronto) as between regions.

In both Toronto and for Canada as a whole, however, other factors are more strongly related to social trust than geography. Both nationally and in the city, social trust increases with age (nationally, the scores for those aged 18 to 29 is 4.35, compared to 5.02 for seniors; the figures for Toronto are 4.33 and 5.22, respectively). And—again both nationally and in the city—the differences between those with more and less income insecurity are even more stark (varying nationally from 3.83 for those whose incomes are “not enough” to 5.31 for those whose incomes are “good enough,” with a similar range in Toronto between the two groups from 3.97 to 5.18). Both Canada-wide and in the city of Toronto, social trust index scores are especially low for those who are unemployed.



# NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT

Most Torontonians find their neighbourhoods to be safe and their neighbours to be helpful. But this sense of support is stronger among those who are better off. At the same time, fewer than one in two residents of the city are confident they would get help from a government agency or charitable organization in their community in the event that they fell on hard times. The expectation of help in hard times is stronger among those with more economic security, better wellbeing and strong social capital. Conversely, those in the city who are most vulnerable are the least certain that they will receive support when they need it.



## Key Findings

- Most Torontonians disagree that the crime in their neighbourhood makes it unsafe to go on walks at night. Seniors, including seniors living alone, are no more likely than average to feel their neighbourhoods are unsafe.
- The proportion saying that people working together can make a big difference in solving problems facing the community declined between 2018 and 2022. This decline occurred in every part of the city and among Torontonians from all backgrounds.
- Several groups stand out as having less confidence than average in receiving help from a government agency or a charitable organization in their community in the event they fell on hard times, including: those who describe their incomes as being “not enough” for them; those who are unemployed; those who are between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone; and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

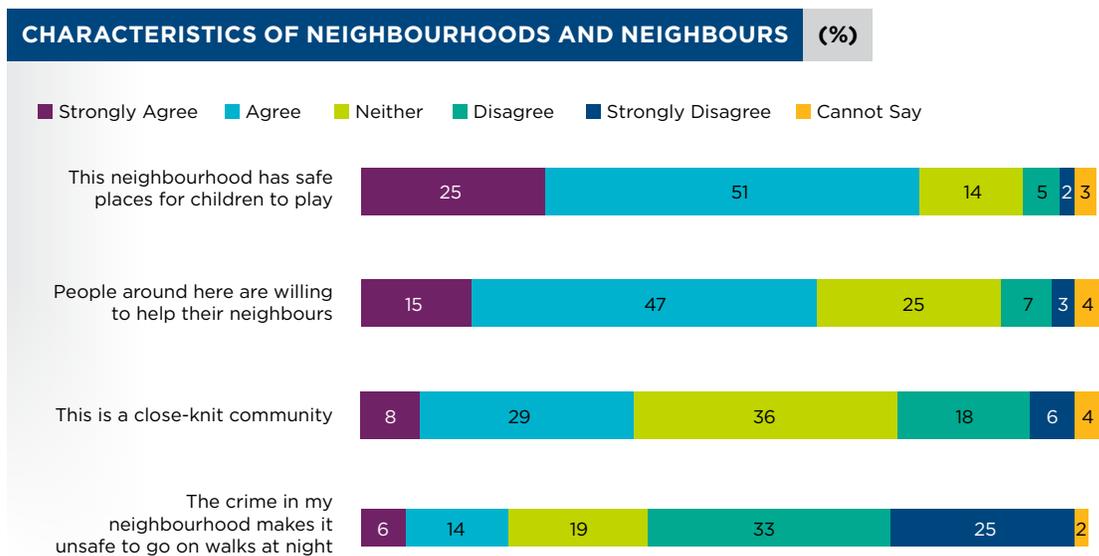


The Toronto Social Capital Study includes a fourth dimension of social capital that encompasses how supportive residents view their own neighbourhoods. The survey addresses this question by asking Torontonians the extent to which they see their neighbourhood (and their neighbours) as having supportive characteristics.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

The survey asks whether Toronto residents agree or disagree with each of several statements about their neighbourhoods and the people who live there. The results show that most people in the city find their neighbourhoods to be safe and their neighbours to be helpful:

- A large majority (76%) agree that “this neighbourhood has safe places for children to play,” and very few (8%) disagree (the remainder neither agree nor disagree, or do not provide a response).
- Most Torontonians (61%) agree that “people around here are willing to help their neighbours.” Only 10% disagree.
- Fewer (37%) agree that “this is a close-knit community.” About as many (36%) neither agree nor disagree, and 23% disagree.
- One in five (21%) agrees that “the crime in my neighbourhood makes it unsafe to go on walks at night,” while a majority (58%) disagrees.



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

Answers to these questions vary by neighbourhood: residents of the Danforth-Beach area and of Etobicoke (Humber North and Humber South) generally are more likely than average to see their neighbours as helpful, their communities as close-knit and their neighbourhoods as safe; residents of the downtown area are less likely to do so. Residents of the Weston-Jane-York area (35%) are the most likely to agree that crime in their neighbourhood makes it unsafe to go on walks at night.

But the scale of these differences is modest: in every part of the city, a majority agrees that “people around here are willing to help their neighbours,” while no more than about one in three agrees that “the crime in my neighbourhood makes it unsafe to go on walks at night.”

Opinions also vary in other ways. For instance, those with higher incomes, or who own their homes, generally find their neighbourhoods more supportive and safe than those with lower incomes or who rent. Torontonians who identify as South Asian are more likely than others to feel they live in a close-knit community and that people there are willing to help their neighbours.

At the same time, in some cases it is the absence of differences that stands out. Views on these questions, for instance, do not differ significantly between immigrants and non-immigrants or between men and women. Seniors, including seniors living alone, are no more likely than average to feel their neighbourhoods are unsafe at night.

Views on these questions have changed little since 2018. The proportion agreeing that “people around here are willing to help their neighbours” fell slightly from 64% to 61%, and levels of agreement with the other three questions have changed even less.

## LOCAL AGENCY

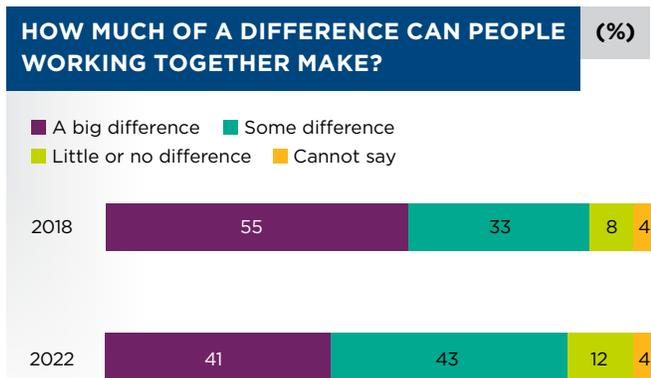
Another important aspect of neighbourhood support is a sense of local agency, in terms of confidence that people in the community can effectively address the issues that affect them. Two in five (41%) Toronto residents believe that people working together as a group can make a big difference in solving local problems. About as many (43%) say that people working together can make some difference, while far fewer (12%) feel that they can make little or no difference.

There is a broad similarity of views on this question among residents in different neighbourhoods and from different socio-economic backgrounds (though, younger Torontonians are slightly more likely than seniors to think that people working together can make a big difference).

There is one exception, however: the belief that people working together can make a big difference in solving problems facing the community varies considerably by racial identity. The proportion holding this view is below average among those who identify as Chinese (30%), about average among those who identify as white (38%) and above average among those who identify as South Asian (49%) or as Black (55%).

On this question, there has been significant change since 2018. The proportion saying that people working together can make a big difference in solving problems facing the community has declined by 14 points, from 55% to 41%. Compared to 2018, more Torontonians say that people working together can make some difference; the proportion saying that people working together can make little or no difference has increased slightly from 8% to 12%.

The drop in the proportion believing that people working together can make a big difference has occurred in every part of the city and among Torontonians from all backgrounds.<sup>25</sup>



**Q4.** “Thinking about problems in your community, how much of a difference do you believe people working together as a group can make in solving problems that you see?”

## SUPPORT IN HARD TIMES

To further explore the concept of neighbourhood support, the 2022 survey included a new question about who might provide help in the event of hard times. Most Torontonians (83%) are either very or somewhat confident that they would get help from their family or close friends, in the event they fell on hard times. Just under one in two expect they would get help from a charitable organization in their community (48%) or a government agency (46%), and somewhat fewer than that expect a religious institution would help them (42%).<sup>26</sup>

The degree of confidence in receiving help from each of these institutions varies considerably across the city’s population, however. Several groups stand out as having less confidence than average of receiving help in most or all four examples: those who describe their incomes as being “not enough” for them; those who are unemployed; those who are between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone; and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

<sup>25</sup> This means that the difference in perspective among racial groups in the city noted previously remains, as each group experienced a decline.

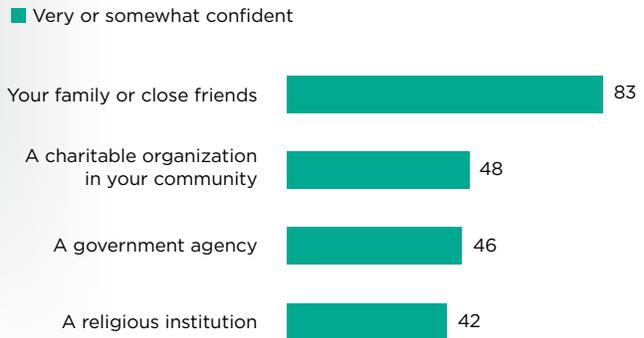
<sup>26</sup> Though this proportion is much higher (73%) among those who are actively religious.

Additionally, second-generation immigrants are less likely than first-generation immigrants or non-immigrants (third generation in Canada or more) to expect help from a government agency (40% of second-generation immigrants are very or somewhat confident they would get help from such an agency if they fell on hard times, compared to 50% of first-generation immigrants and 45% of third-generation-plus Canadians).

Expectations of support do not differ significantly between racialized and non-racialized Torontonians, except in the case of support from a religious institution: 34% of those who identify as white would expect help from a local church, temple or mosque if they fell on hard times, compared to 49% of those who are racialized and 57% specifically among those who are Black (reflecting different degrees of religiosity among these groups).

Finally, the expectation of support is strongly related to the other dimensions of wellbeing and social capital. For instance, those reporting poorer mental health or food insecurity are all less confident they would be helped by a government agency (or, to a slightly lesser extent, by a local charity) if they fell on hard times. The same is true of those with lower social capital index scores (covering social networks, civic engagement and social trust). These relationships may not be surprising, but they are worth emphasizing as a reminder that those in the city who are most vulnerable are the least certain that they will receive support when they need it.

**WHO WOULD HELP YOU IF YOU FELL ON HARD TIMES? (%)**



**Q76.** "If you were to fall on hard times, how much confidence do you have that the following people or agencies would be able to provide you the help you needed?"

**EXPECTATIONS OF SUPPORT (% very or somewhat confident)**

	Your family or close friends	A charitable organization in your community	A government agency	A religious institution, like a local church, temple or mosque
<b>Total</b>	83	48	46	42
<b>Income is "not enough"</b>	72	40	31	35
<b>Aged 25 and 40 who live alone</b>	81	40	34	30
<b>LGBTQ2S+</b>	76	48	36	30
<b>Unemployed</b>	71	45	38	38

**Q76.** "If you were to fall on hard times, how much confidence do you have that the following people or agencies would be able to provide you the help you needed?"



# WELLBEING

Wellbeing in Toronto declined significantly between 2018 and 2022. This decline generally was experienced among residents from all backgrounds. Wellbeing, however, continues to vary significantly across the city. For instance, wellbeing improves as both age and socio-economic status increase. The wellbeing of younger adults in Toronto (and particularly younger women) remains much lower than average.

Roughly one in four Torontonians reports that their income is not enough for them (either they are stretched, or are having a hard time), and one in five reports that, at some point in the past 12 months, they had eaten less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food. Single parents, Black Torontonians, those with a disability and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ are all more likely to experience each of these forms of insecurity.

## Key Findings

- Between 2018 and 2022, there was a considerable drop in Torontonians' overall life satisfaction.
- Torontonians are also less likely to report good physical or mental health in 2022 than they were in 2018.
- Fewer Torontonians in 2022, compared to 2018, say they always have something to look forward to in life. Conversely, the proportion who say they only sometimes, or rarely or never, have something to look forward to in life has increased.
- Torontonians who experience the most frequent discrimination have lower life satisfaction, poorer mental health and greater economic insecurity than those who experience less frequent or no discrimination.



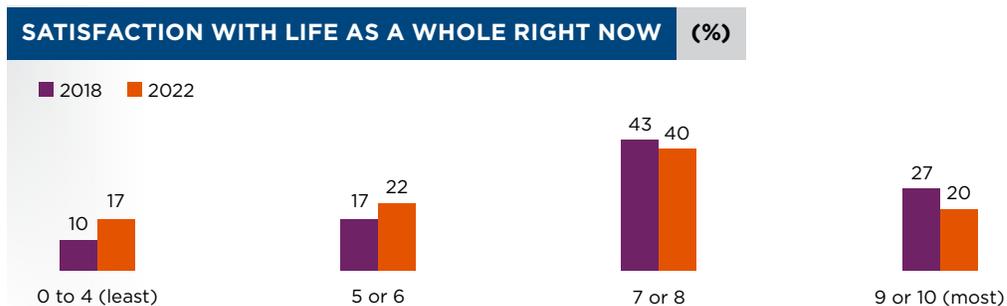
The Toronto Social Capital Study includes a number of measures of wellbeing, touching on issues such as life satisfaction, physical and mental health and outlook on the future. In the report from the 2018 survey, many of these were addressed in terms of their relationship to social capital (for instance, it was noted that higher social trust is linked with better health and life satisfaction). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it is important to document how these measures have changed since the original survey, quite apart from any relationship each may have to social capital. Doing so provides valuable information about how the city’s residents have been affected by the crisis.

## LIFE SATISFACTION

Between 2018 and 2022, there was a considerable drop in Torontonians’ overall life satisfaction (measured on an 11-point scale, from zero to 10):<sup>27</sup>

- The percentage of people with very high life satisfaction (“9” or “10” the scale) decreased by seven points between the two time periods, from 27% to 20%.
- The percentage of people who reported low life satisfaction (“6” or lower on the scale) increased from 27% to 39%.

Life satisfaction varies considerably across the population. Most notably, it increases as both age and socio-economic status increase. It is lower among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+, compared to those who are heterosexual; among those with a disability (that always or often limits daily activity), compared to those without; and among those born in Canada compared to immigrants. Between 2018 and 2022, however, life satisfaction (measured in terms of the mean score on the scale) fell for Torontonians from all backgrounds.



**Q35.** “Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘Very dissatisfied’ and 10 means ‘Very satisfied,’ how satisfied are you with your life as a whole right now?”

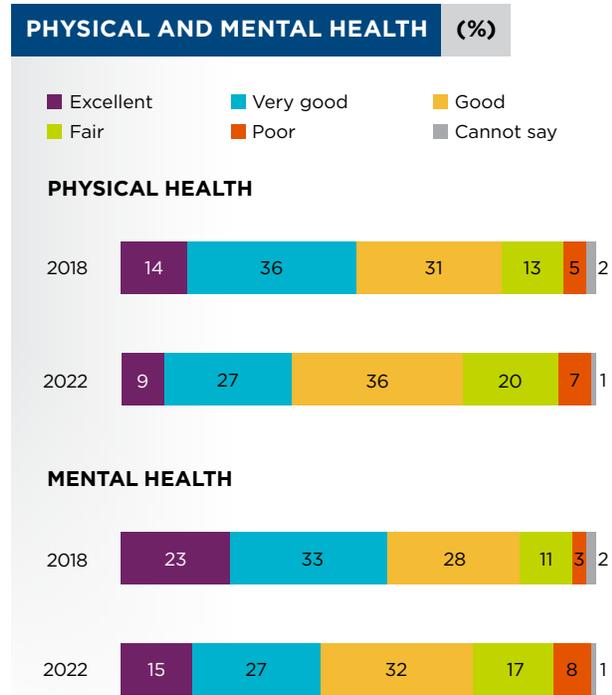
<sup>27</sup> In 2018, the scale started at one instead of zero. This does not significantly affect the comparison to 2022, as very few people place themselves at the lowest end of the scale.

# PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Torontonians are also less likely to report good physical or mental health in 2022 than they were in 2018:

- The proportion of residents who say their physical health is excellent or very good declined from one in two (50%) to just over one in three (36%), a drop of 14 points. The proportion saying their physical health is fair or poor increased by 10 points, from 17% to 27%.<sup>28</sup>
- The proportion of residents who say their mental health is excellent or very good declined by 15 points, from 57% to 42%, while the proportion who report fair or poor mental health almost doubled, from 14% to 26%.

Once again, these changes affected Torontonians from all backgrounds. The decline in the proportion who say their mental health is excellent or very good, however, was greater than average among those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (down 21 points), women (down 20 points) and people between the ages of 25 and 40 who live alone (down 18 points).



**Q36.** "In general, would you say your physical health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?" (2018: "your health")

**Q37.** "In general, would you say your mental health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?"

<sup>28</sup> In 2018, the survey question referred to "health" and not "physical health."



## A FOCUS ON YOUTH

How well are younger adults faring in the city of Toronto?

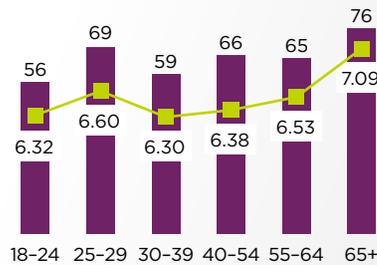
Older people can sometimes look on their younger counterparts with envy. Younger adults can be assumed to face fewer family or professional responsibilities and to have more opportunities to socialize and participate in recreational activities.

The reality, however, is that younger adults in Toronto (and in Canada as a whole) consistently score lower on a variety of measures of wellbeing. Life satisfaction is lower among Torontonians aged 18 to 24 and rises steadily with age. Younger adults in Toronto are also much more likely to report poorer mental health and are less likely to feel they have something to look forward to in life.

### INDEX OF WELLBEING, BY AGE GROUP AND GENDER (%)

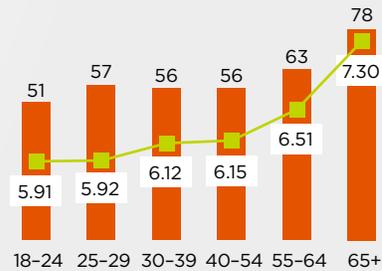
#### INDEX OF WELLBEING: MEN

■ Above 6 to 10    — Mean



#### INDEX OF WELLBEING: WOMEN

■ Above 6 to 10    — Mean

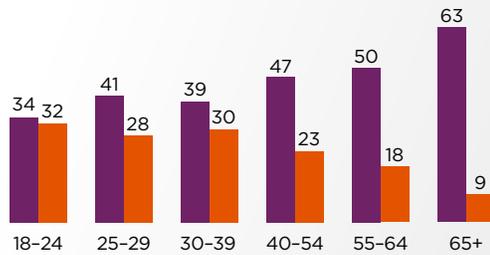


*Index calculated by combining responses to seven questions. Index range is zero to 10.*

**MENTAL HEALTH, BY AGE GROUP AND GENDER (%)**

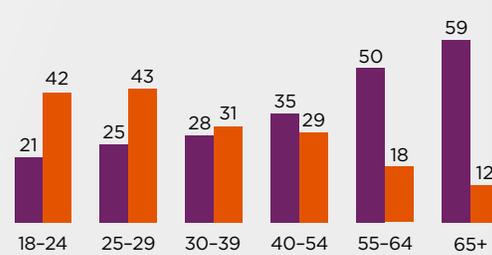
**MENTAL HEALTH: MEN**

■ Excellent or very good ■ Fair or poor



**MENTAL HEALTH: WOMEN**

■ Excellent or very good ■ Fair or poor



**Q37.** “In general, would you say your mental health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?”

In many cases, the situation is particularly alarming in the case of younger women. Women between the ages of 18 and 24 in Toronto have lower scores on the indexes of life satisfaction and wellbeing. And more than two in five women in this age group (42%) say their mental health is fair or poor.

Importantly, these patterns are not the result of the COVID-19 pandemic; they were evident in the 2018 Toronto Social Capital Study as well. Between 2018 and 2022, life satisfaction, wellbeing and mental health deteriorated for Torontonians of all age groups and for both men and women. But both prior to and following the pandemic, the wellbeing of younger adults in Toronto (and particularly younger women) was lower than average.

**NATIONAL FINDINGS**

These patterns also are not Toronto-specific, as the companion national survey on social capital shows they hold for Canada as a whole. Canada-wide, the proportion of younger women reporting their mental health is fair or poor is the same as in Toronto as a whole, at roughly two in five.



## SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DISABILITIES

The dimensions of social capital and measures of wellbeing covered in this report vary significantly according to a person's disability status, that is, whether they: have a disability that limits the amount or the kind of activity that they can do on a typical day; whether this disability limits them often or only occasionally; and whether this disability is a physical or a mental condition.<sup>29</sup>

Both life satisfaction and wellbeing are lower for Torontonians with disabilities than for those reporting no disability, particularly for those whose disability often or always limits their daily activity. Notably, however, these measures are lowest for those with a mental health condition: mean life satisfaction and wellbeing scores for this group are lower than for those with a physical disability that always limits their daily activity.

The relationship between disability and the dimensions of social capital is more complex. As expected, mean social network index scores are lower for those with a disability than for those without (particularly in the case of those with a physical disability that always limits their daily activity, and those with a mental health disability), reflecting greater difficulty in establishing and maintaining connections with family and friends. Social trust index scores differ less between those with and without a disability, with the exception that they are lower for those whose disability is related to a mental health condition. Mean civic

engagement scores, however, are higher for those with a disability than for those without, likely reflecting the fact that those with a disability are more likely to participate in organizations that offer connections, support or advocacy.

Finally, Torontonians with a disability are more likely than those without to face discrimination, as reflected in their higher mean scores on the survey's index of discrimination (indicating more frequent experiences of discrimination). Once again, it is those whose disability is related to a mental health condition that stand out, as they report the highest mean score on this index. Discrimination index scores are even higher for younger Torontonians with a disability and for racialized Torontonians with a disability.

These findings serve to highlight the greater vulnerability of Torontonians with disabilities (as they face, for instance, more discrimination while having fewer social connections), but they also serve to highlight the considerable variability of experiences among those with disabilities. Experiences vary significantly by type of disability, for instance. Type of disability, in turn, is linked to other factors such as age (with older Torontonians more likely to face a physical health condition, but younger Torontonians more likely to face a mental health condition). Subsequent reports from the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study will explore these findings in greater detail.

<sup>29</sup> Because the 2018 survey did not include questions about disabilities, it is not possible to report on how social capital and wellbeing for Torontonians with disabilities have changed over the past four years.

# INCOME ADEQUACY

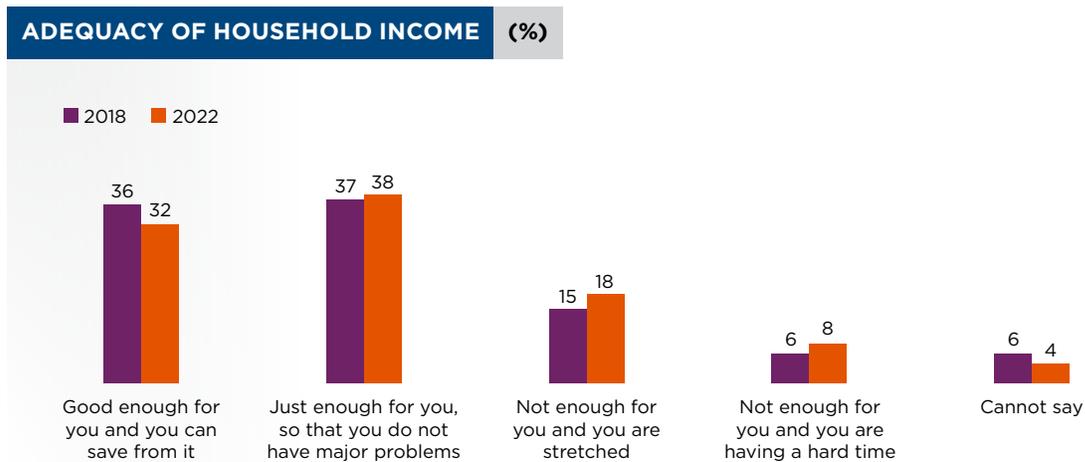
The Toronto Social Capital Study includes a measure of the perceived adequacy of income. One in four residents of the city (26%) says that their income is not enough for them (either that they are stretched or that they are having a hard time). This is a higher proportion than in 2018, when the proportion was 21%.

Naturally, the view that one’s income is not enough is more common among those with annual household incomes of below \$30,000 (46%). The proportion holding this view is also particularly high among those who are unemployed (51%), those who have a disability that always or often limits their daily activity (41%), among single parents (40%), those who rent their

homes (37%), those who identify as Black (37%) and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (34%).

The increase in the proportion saying their income is “not enough” was higher than average among those who rent their homes: in 2022, 37% of renters felt this way about their incomes, up six percentage points from 2018.

Other noticeable increases occurred among those who are unemployed (up 12 points, from 39% to 51%), and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (up 13 points, from 21% to 34%).



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

# FOOD SECURITY

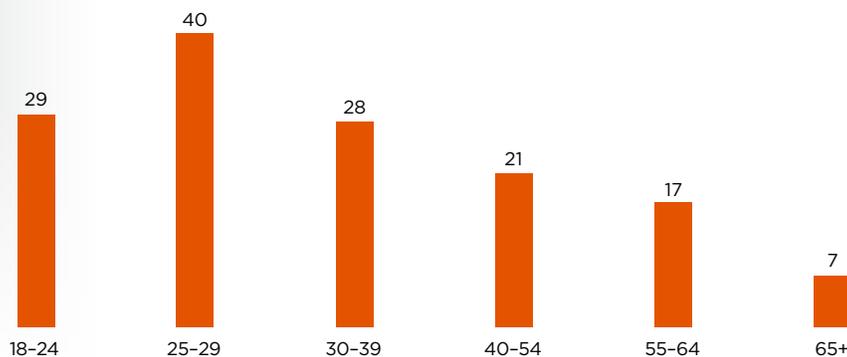
About one in five people in Toronto (22%) reports that, at some point in the past 12 months, they had eaten less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food.<sup>30</sup>

Almost half of those who said their income was “not enough” said that they had not been able to afford food at some point in the past year (49%). Food insecurity is also more common among a number of groups, including:

- youth, particularly those aged 25 to 29. Four in 10 respondents (40%) between the ages of 25 and 29 report they were food insecure, double the rate across other age categories (20%);
- those with disabilities, including 31% of those who reported their disabilities always or often limited their activities and 36% of those who said their disability occasionally limited their activities. This compares to only 16% of those who reported no activity limitations;
- racialized residents (25%), including 34% of those who identify as Black. This compares to 18% of those who identify as white;
- single parents (37%), who were also more likely than average to report food insecurity;
- those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (31%), compared to those who are heterosexual (21%).

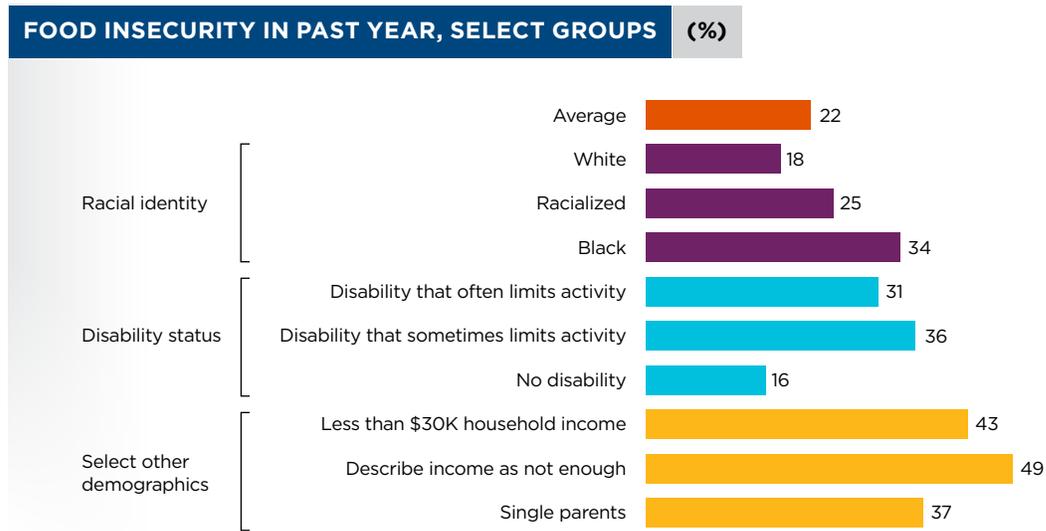
## FOOD INSECURITY IN PAST YEAR BY AGE (%)

Percentage who say they ate less than they should because of financial constraints in the last 12 months



**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?”

<sup>30</sup> This is almost identical to what Food Banks Canada found asking the same question nationally in spring 2022 (see <https://www.mainstreetresearch.ca/poll/food-insecurity-june-2022/> and <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/new-food-banks-canada-research-shows-7-million-canadians-report-going-hungry-833281882.html>). The question on food insecurity was not asked in 2018.

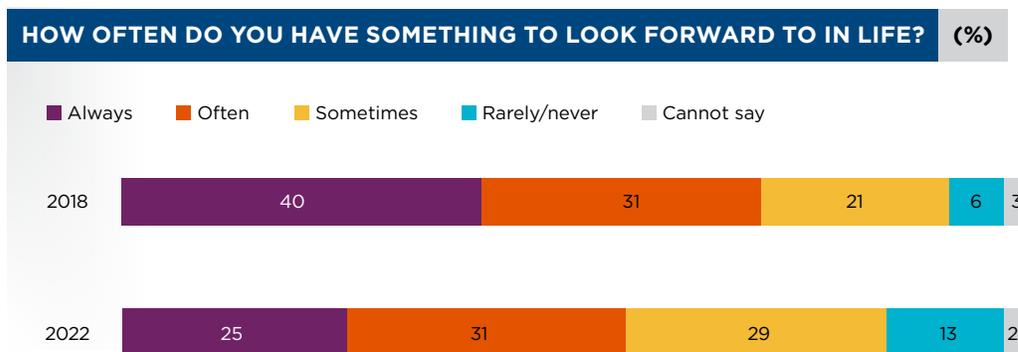


**Q75.** “In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money to buy food?”

## OUTLOOK ON LIFE

One of the most striking findings from the 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study is the decline in overall optimism among Toronto residents. In 2018, 40% of people in the city said they always have something to look forward to in life, and 71% said they felt this way always or often. Four years later, only 25% always feel they have something

to look forward to in life, and 56% say they feel this way always or often. Conversely, the proportion who say they only sometimes, or rarely or never, have something to look forward to in life has increased from 27% to 42%. This change in outlook occurred among Torontonians from all backgrounds.



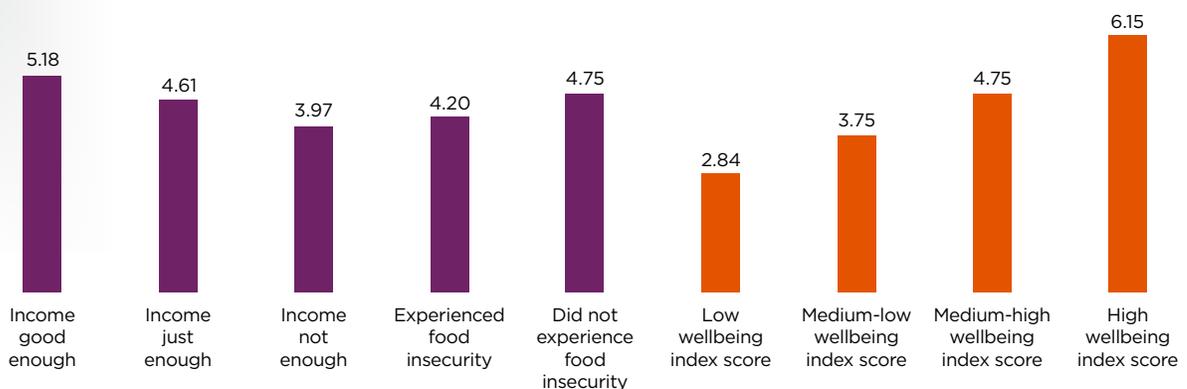
**Q39B.** “Thinking about your life in general, how often would you say you: Have something to look forward to in life?”

## WELLBEING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

As expected, these indicators of wellbeing and of income security are related to each of the major dimensions of social capital covered in this report. Scores on the indexes of social networks, social trust and civic engagement all increase as wellbeing or income security improve.

The relationship with social trust, however, is particularly noticeable: those with better wellbeing or more economic security have much higher social trust. This suggests a link between the declines in wellbeing and security between 2018 and 2022, and the decline in social trust that occurred over the same period.

INDEX OF SOCIAL TRUST (MEAN SCORES), BY CONDITION OF WELLBEING AND INCOME SECURITY (%)



## WELLBEING, ECONOMIC SECURITY AND DISCRIMINATION

One additional relationship worth noting is that between wellbeing and economic security, on the one hand, and discrimination, on the other. The measures of wellbeing and of economic security reported in this section are most positive for Torontonians who do not experience discrimination (with a score of zero on the discrimination scale) and become more negative as the scores on the discrimination scale rise (indicating more frequent

experiences of discrimination). In other words, Torontonians who experience the most frequent discrimination have lower life satisfaction, poorer mental health and less economic security than those who experience less frequent or no discrimination. This is true for all forms of discrimination taken together, as well as for discrimination based on different grounds, such as race, gender and age.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS





# Conclusion

The 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study provides an in-depth look at social networks, civic engagement, social trust and neighbourhood support within the city.



## The pandemic has curtailed social connection, civic engagement and wellbeing

Torontonians are coming out of the pandemic connected to fewer groups of family and friends than they were going into it. They are also less active in the city in terms of group membership, volunteering and charitable giving. At the same time, the wellbeing of many of the city's residents has declined. Torontonians in 2022 are almost twice as likely as they were in 2018 to say their mental health is fair or poor; they are also more likely to report low satisfaction with their lives in general and less likely to say they always feel like they have something to look forward to. One in five says their incomes are not enough (either that they are stretched or having a hard time) and more than one in five say that at some point in the past 12 months they had difficulty affording food, one of the most basic necessities of life.



## The most vulnerable Torontonians have less access to support

The declines in social capital since 2018 have affected Torontonians from all backgrounds. This should not deflect attention from the fact that a number of groups in the city remain particularly vulnerable: they have greater needs, but less access to services, support from family and friends, and are less likely to be connected to supportive organizations. Torontonians with lower incomes or who are unemployed are among those who stand out most consistently in this regard. Both social capital and wellbeing generally increase not only with income, but also with age. The situation of youth in the city, and particularly of young women, is therefore also a growing concern.



## Declining civic engagement adds to the challenge of recovery

No dimension of social capital has been as significantly affected by the pandemic as civic engagement. Declining participation in community organizations affects volunteering and charitable giving, as people are more likely to give time and money to the organizations in which they participate. And declines in volunteering and charitable giving in turn add to the pressures facing nonprofit organizations attempting to meet growing demand with fewer resources. The most vulnerable in the community are the most likely to feel the impact of these declines.



## Social capital in Toronto is a resource that can help drive recovery

While the pandemic has taken its toll, there are many encouraging signs. The vast majority of Torontonians have people in their lives with whom they feel at ease, can talk to or call on for help. The majority of Toronto residents also find their city to be safe and their neighbours to be helpful. Most Torontonians are members of at least one organization in their community and continue to make donations to charity. And more than two years into the pandemic, levels of confidence in most local institutions remain unchanged.

Moreover, in terms of social capital at least, the pandemic has not pushed the different groups in the city further apart. Declines in social trust, for instance, occurred across the city, but were somewhat more pronounced among those who were previously the most trusting. Ideally, gaps in trust and other dimensions of social capital should be narrowed by improving those with the least positive outlook. But the fact the weight of the changes did not fall mainly on the most vulnerable is nonetheless a positive outcome. This development creates an opportunity to rebuild together, strengthening the situation for all residents in the city rather than just waiting for those who are better off to rebound on their own.



## Recommendations for the Future

For more than two years, residents and governments have been called upon to “build back better,” rather than accepting a mere return to “normal.”

The 2022 Toronto Social Capital Study serves to direct attention beyond slogans, to what this might mean in practice. The partners to our study have collectively identified a range of priorities that can be adopted by various stakeholders in our city. What each of the actions has in common is that they address, in their own ways, the twin challenges of building connectedness and inclusivity within the city. In this regard, Toronto has considerable resources of social capital to draw upon. The engagement and trust people have with one another and their communities is the foundation upon which we can collectively develop a city that works better for everyone.



# 1

## PRIORITIES FOR DONORS AND FUNDERS:

- Reinvest in community and social service organizations that are addressing heightened needs with fewer resources. The likelihood of donating to charities fell among Torontonians from all income brackets. Those with income security can lead the way with increased supports.
- Support a combination of hyper-local organizations and networked organizations engaging across sectors to find collaborative solutions. Change happens at both levels.
- Focus philanthropic resources toward those organizations most in need of support and most attuned to local needs, particularly smaller, grassroots groups led by the communities they serve.
- Provide unrestricted, multi-year operating support, so that organizations can determine for themselves how best to deploy resources and with the confidence to plan long-term.
- Make transformational gifts to support systems-change efforts. The work is critical yet often underfunded in comparison to more direct services.

# 2

## PRIORITIES FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES:

- Recognize the broader role you play in creating and strengthening social networks, particularly for those most isolated. For some, the convening opportunities you provide may be at the centre of their social connections.
- Become an Ontario Living Wage employer to provide equitable employment.
- Identify and reduce barriers to online participation in programs and services. Without deliberate steps to overcome existing technology gaps, online communication tends to benefit those who are already the most connected in the community, not the most isolated.
- Invest in capital improvements to ensure safer working environments for those who want or need to be in-person.
- Build links through deliberate and consistent outreach to those most at risk of isolation, such as those who are unemployed and those with poor mental health.
- Prioritize improving youth mental health through increased awareness and expansion of programs, including preventative programs and services. Greater focus should also be placed on system developments, such as better coordination of services and supports, improved access and more culturally appropriate approaches.
- Reconnect Torontonians with local charitable organizations. Employers can encourage volunteering during work hours and matching employee donations.

# 3

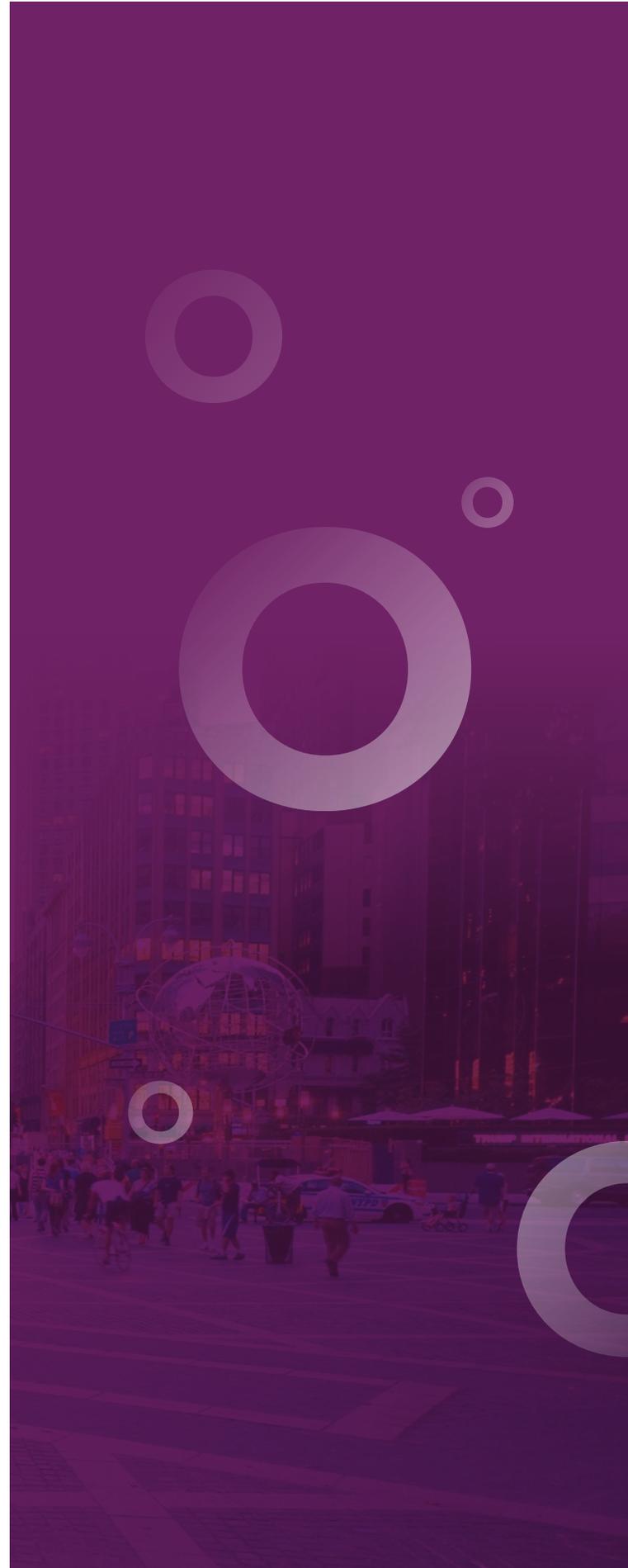
## PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS:

- Acknowledge and dismantle systemic racism within the police services that lead to low levels of trust in the institution. Such reforms must be informed by community advocates and particularly Black Torontonians, who hold the lowest trust.
- Develop strategies to enhance the low levels of public trust in local political institutions through consultations with groups that hold the lowest confidence, particularly younger residents.
- Invest in community infrastructure beyond the traditional physical assets to expand to spaces that bring people together: safe and accessible outdoor spaces and culturally appropriate and responsive neighbourhood and youth centres.
- Engage residents, especially lower-income residents, more meaningfully in neighbourhood planning processes, so they can influence decisions and benefit from the social, health and economic impacts of change processes.
- Target public transportation policies toward the needs of specific populations in the city who face greater barriers to mobility and connection. This means more frequent, flexible and affordable services for those who need them, particularly those with a disability, and for those with lower incomes and those who are unemployed. Public transportation policy should look beyond the need to get people to and from work or school, to building pathways to connect with community activities, including volunteering opportunities, and arts and cultural programs.

# 4

## PRIORITIES FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS:

- Join a group outside your typical social circle. Get involved in the wider community and strengthen the foundations of social capital.
- Attend local arts and sporting events. Those organizations are among the hardest hit by the pandemic and can often draw in a diverse cross-section of society.
- Donate as much as you can. Connect to a cause that is related to these findings. For example, organizations serving young people, especially women; LGBTQ2s+ and Black residents, as well as those supporting those who are under- and unemployed; and those living with disabilities.
- Support young adults as they seek to establish careers and families in an ever more challenging world.
- Learn about systemic forms of discrimination and consider your capacity to help generate more social capital for those historically with barriers to access. Experiences of discrimination affect the whole community, not just individuals, by sapping shared reserves of social capital. Working to eliminate all forms of discrimination is the *sine qua non* of building back better.





# Partner Insights

## “ Metcalf Foundation

“This latest Toronto Social Capital Study gives us a sense of a city both resilient and vulnerable. One particularly troubling finding is the diminished state of our nonprofit sector. These organizations contribute so much to the durability of our social capital, and, yet, their funding and support have decreased markedly over the last four years. How do we bolster these essential elements of our social fabric and ensure their continuing contributions to the success of our city?”



**Sandy Houston**  
*President & CEO*

## “ Ontario Trillium Foundation

The decline in social capital measures shows us how not being able to connect with one another throughout the pandemic impacted communities across the board. Together with the decline in social trust, this really tells us how important it will be to invest in restoring our connections and trust within communities in the coming years.”



**Gillian White**  
*Director, Measurement,  
Evaluation and Business  
Intelligence*

## “ MLSE Foundation

Salient to MLSE Foundation is the finding that young people are much more likely to report having fewer friends or no friends, compared to 2018. This reflects data from our 2022 Change the Game Research Study, revealing that the top barrier to youth engagement in sport or physical activity today is having no one to play with. Youth are alone, isolated and in need of highly engaging, evidence-based interventions like Sport for Development to build social competency and capital.”



**Marika Warner**  
*Director, Research  
and Evaluation*

## “ TAS

A third of Torontonians believe they are worse off than the prior generation, an increase of eight points in just four years. Together, we need to act now to forge a future in which Torontonians thrive. The TAS Impact Framework outlines how TAS is working to improve quality of life in our communities. We know we can't do it alone and look forward to collaborating with partners to help lead this urgent work.”



**Mazyar Mortazavi**  
President & CEO

## “ Wellesley Institute

We are less likely to thrive in a society where we see fewer people, trust fewer people and have less faith that working collectively can make a difference. Our society and our physical and mental health feed on social capital. If we want Toronto and Torontonians to flourish, we have to do more to rebuild the social capital that seems to have been lost to COVID-19.”



**Dr. Kwame McKenzie**  
CEO

## “ United Way Greater Toronto

While it's encouraging to see that social capital is still relatively strong, we've lost ground, and this has the greatest consequences for people impacted by systemic inequities. Strengthening a network of local support that can cut across those gaps and provide a bridge to social capital is central to United Way's mission. And that's why we're working to address fault lines, and encourage and support local engagement. The changes we need, for you, for me, for all of us across this region, to reach our collective potential, start with trust. And that's why social capital matters.”



**Daniele Zanotti**  
President & CEO

## “ YMCA of Greater Toronto

In reading the report, I was taken aback by the low levels of social connectivity and civic engagement. While people seem to have faith in their institutions, there is a sense that they are increasingly being asked to make it 'on their own.' At the YMCA GTA, we will double down on our efforts to help people and let them know that they are not alone. The two pillars of our strategic plan, boosting wellbeing and promoting equity, have never been more important to our community.”



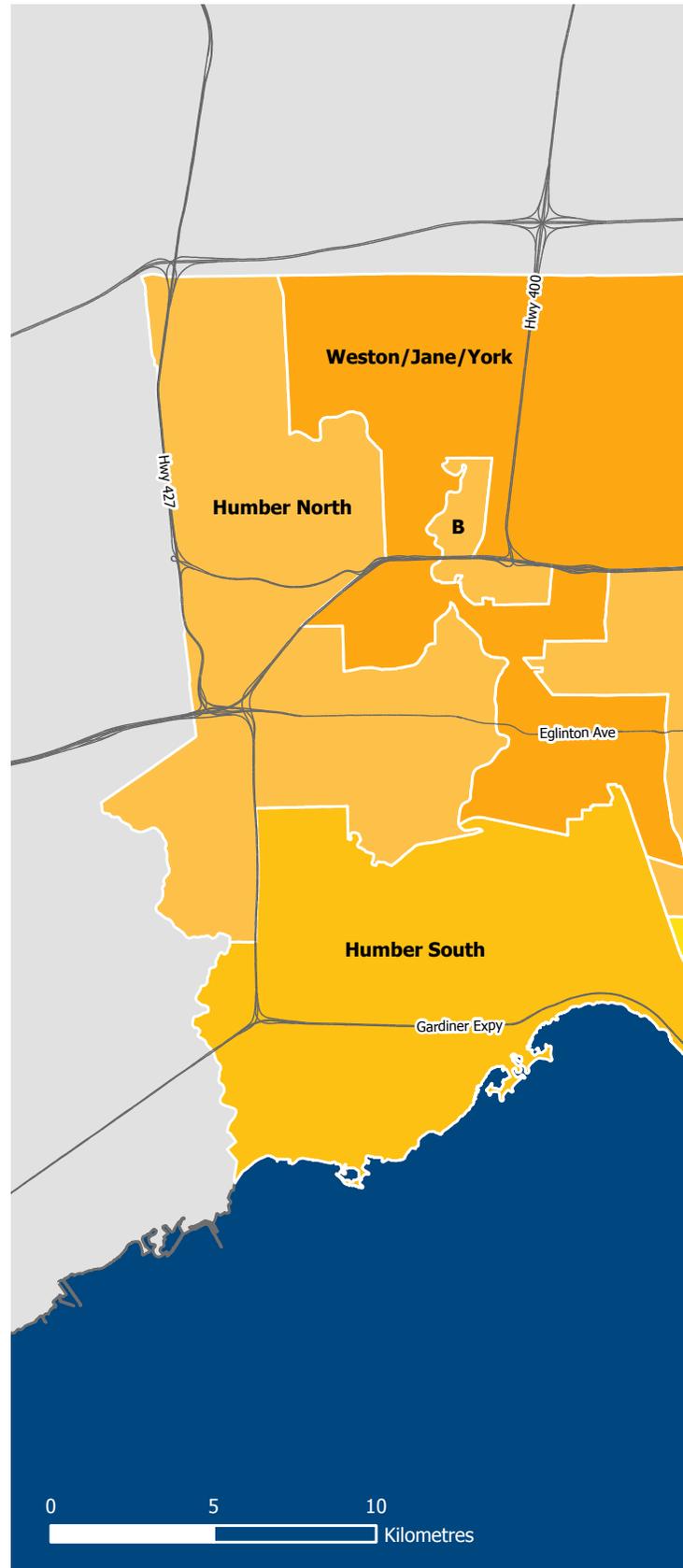
**Jamison Steeve**  
Chief Strategy Officer

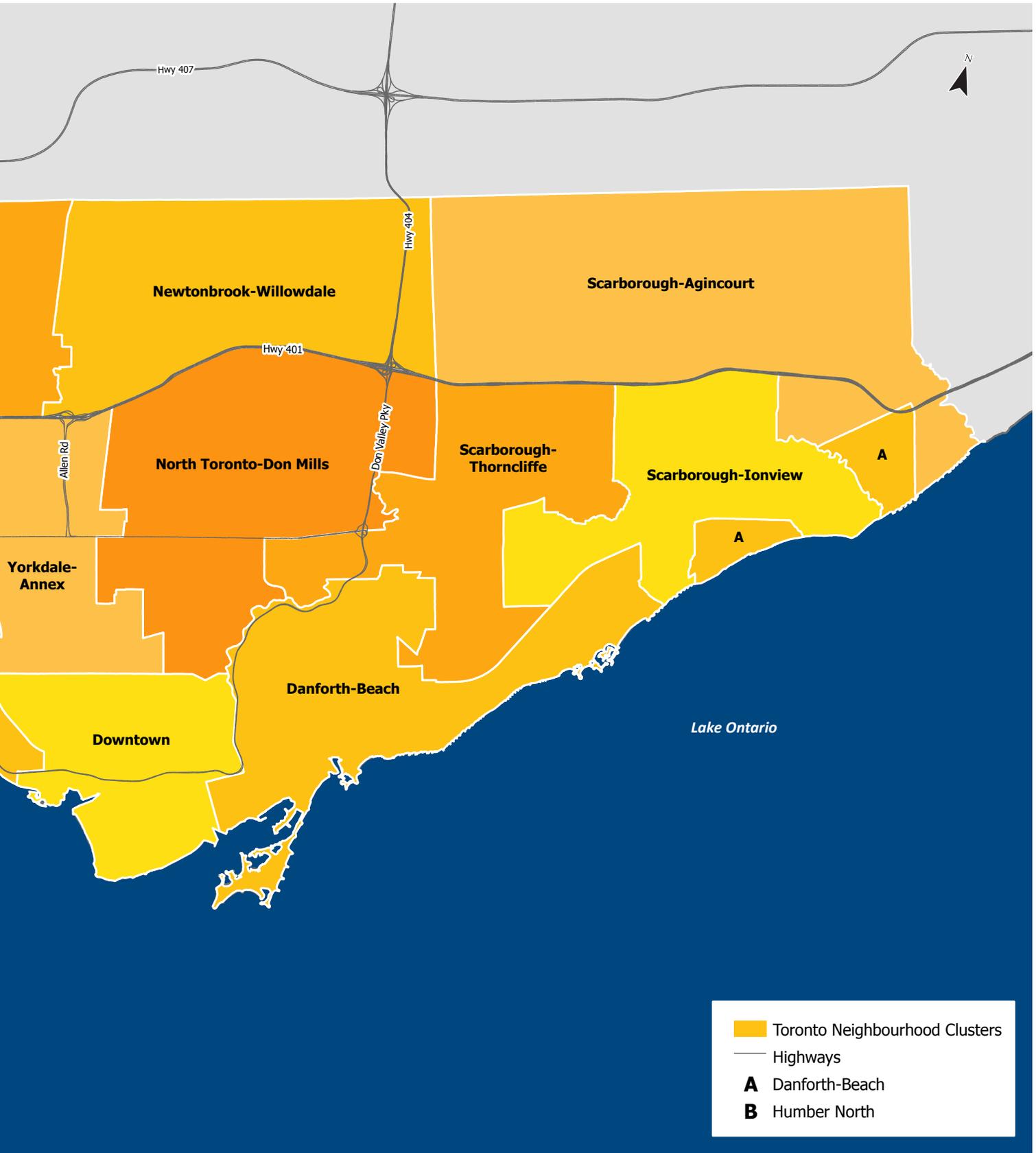
# Appendix: Neighbourhood Map

This map shows the names and boundaries of the 11 neighbourhood areas referred to in the report and the accompanying data tables. Each area is composed of a combination of the 140 city neighbourhoods, as defined by the City of Toronto. The 11 areas were formed by grouping neighbourhoods that are close to one another and demographically similar to one another; note that two areas include neighbourhoods that are not contiguous (identified by the letters A and B).

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