

# Nova Scotia ACORN

Halifax Tenant Survey

**62.5% OF RESPONDENTS  
HAVE HAD BED BUGS IN  
LAST 2 YEARS**

**32 % OF RESPONDENTS'  
UNITS LACK SUFFICIENT  
HEAT IN WINTER**

**87.5% OF RESPONDENTS  
HAVE PROPERTY  
STANDARDS LAW  
VIOLATIONS IN THEIR  
APARTMENTS**

**RESPONDENTS FEEL  
THREATENED WHEN  
COMPLAINING ABOUT  
THEIR BUILDING**



**ACORN  
CANADA**



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## INTRODUCTION

Nova Scotia ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent national organization of low and moderate income families with 2600 members across the region. ACORN has over 102,000 members in 22 neighbourhood chapters across Canada. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a wide membership base who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

In Halifax, 2011 statistics showed that 37% of households in Halifax were rented (STATCAN: <http://bit.ly/2jQTYRp>), a number which is continuing to grow in an increasing rental market. There have been some bylaw changes made by City Council in recent years aiming to improve rental housing conditions. However, as this report shows, there is much still to be done.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This survey was conducted from October 2016 – January 2017.

The survey was distributed to low and moderate income ACORN members and families across Halifax in order to measure the extent of the problem of substandard living conditions in Halifax's rental apartments.

Major deficiencies are evident in the homes of respondents, with 87.5% reporting property standards law violations in their apartments and 52.5% of respondents reporting problems getting repairs done in their building. 62.5% of respondents have had bed bugs in last 2 years

The survey also shows that although 60% of respondents had an issue with their landlord, only 7.5% had complained to the City or Province, with some indicating that they are unaware of their options and others believing that it is not worth their time. Some tenants reported feeling threatened when making complaints about their building. This highlights that more should be done to educate tenants about their rights and the support that the City or Province can offer to them when they are experiencing poor housing conditions. It is imperative that the rights of tenants are protected so that they are not living in fear of landlords while occupying substandard housing.

Ultimately, it is evident that tenants are being failed as they struggle with poor housing conditions and a lack of support to address the issues that they are experiencing. Landlord licensing would ensure that landlords are meeting acceptable housing standards, which would benefit both the tenant and the landlord, as tenant-landlord relations would be improved.

## **WHAT IS LANDLORD LICENSING?**

Currently, inspections of buildings are mainly complaint based. Complaint based inspections don't work for many reasons: tenants don't know to call 311, tenants don't know their rights, tenants are afraid of landlords and eviction, there are language barriers, or tenants eventually become unwilling to sacrifice their time and energy complaining when they fail to get results. Landlord licensing could make it so that there are annual inspections of all buildings in the City of Halifax and would make it so that landlords that fail these inspections would face large financial punishments from the City or Province. Buildings would have an annual inspection of common areas, boilers, elevators, and electrical systems. These inspections would also check if landlords are keeping up with cleaning, maintenance and pest control requirements.

## **METHODOLOGY**

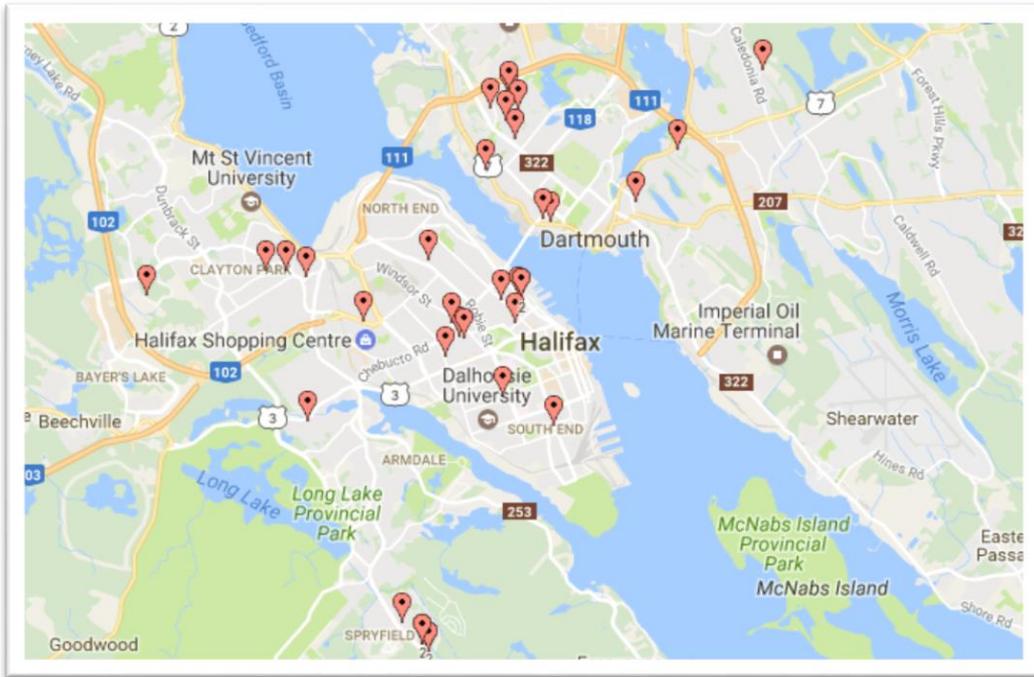
Nova Scotia ACORN's Halifax Tenant Survey was conducted between October 2016 – January 2017. 40 responses were received. The three principal areas that the survey addressed were:

- 1) What is the state of repair in the apartment building you live in?
- 2) What has been your experience getting repairs from your landlord?
- 3) What has been your experience getting help from the City or Province to get repairs?

The targeted demographic for respondents were low and moderate income ACORN members. The survey was sent out electronically through our membership lists. An important limitation of this survey that needs to be addressed is that the majority of respondents filled out the survey online. This may suggest that a large number of respondents to this survey have a home internet connection and therefore skew results towards a younger or more affluent respondents.

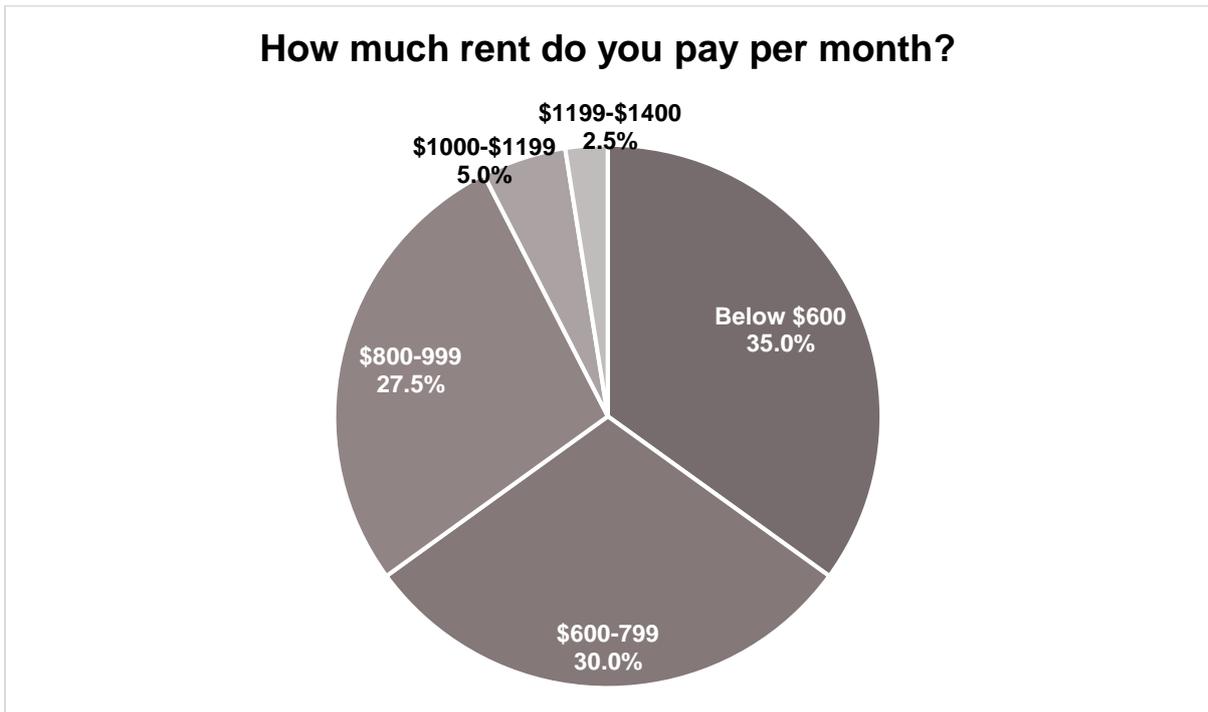
## **RESULTS**

40 tenants responded to our survey. Geographically, respondents were dispersed across Halifax, with the exact locations mapped overleaf:



### Rental Costs

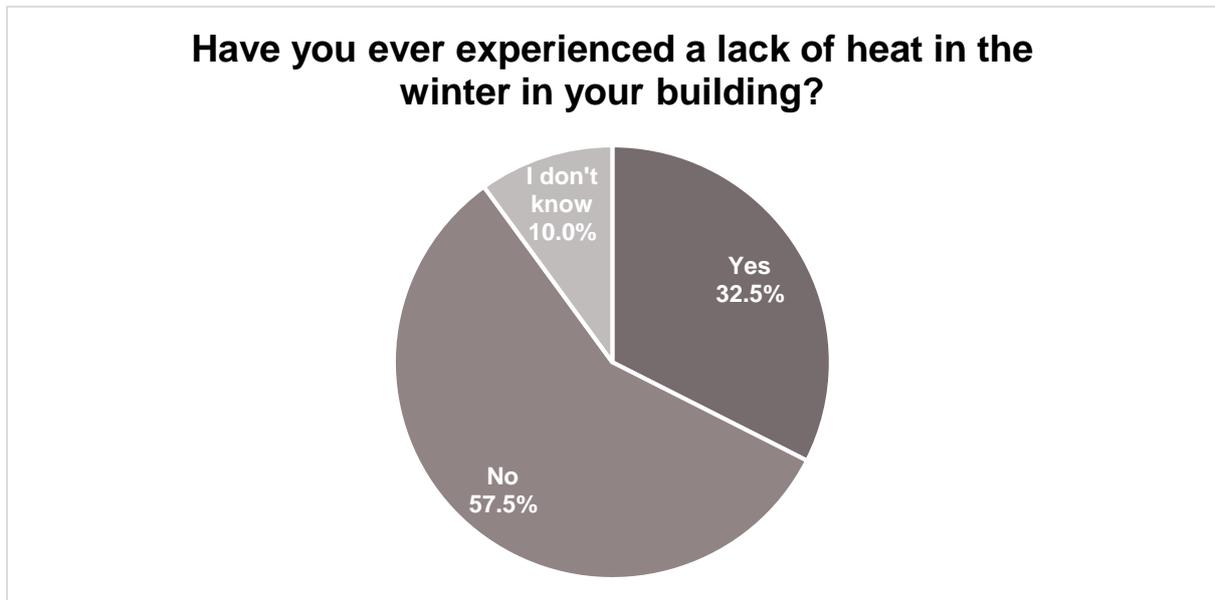
Rental costs varied across respondents, but overall, 92.5% paid under \$999. No respondents were fully subsidized.



The majority of respondents had a low to moderate annual income, with **62.5% earning less than \$30,000**. Of this figure, **47.5% earned \$10,000-\$20,000**. For this group, even rental costs of \$600 could equate to **72% of their income** (the average rental cost for Nova Scotia is \$947 - Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2jnNYjg>)

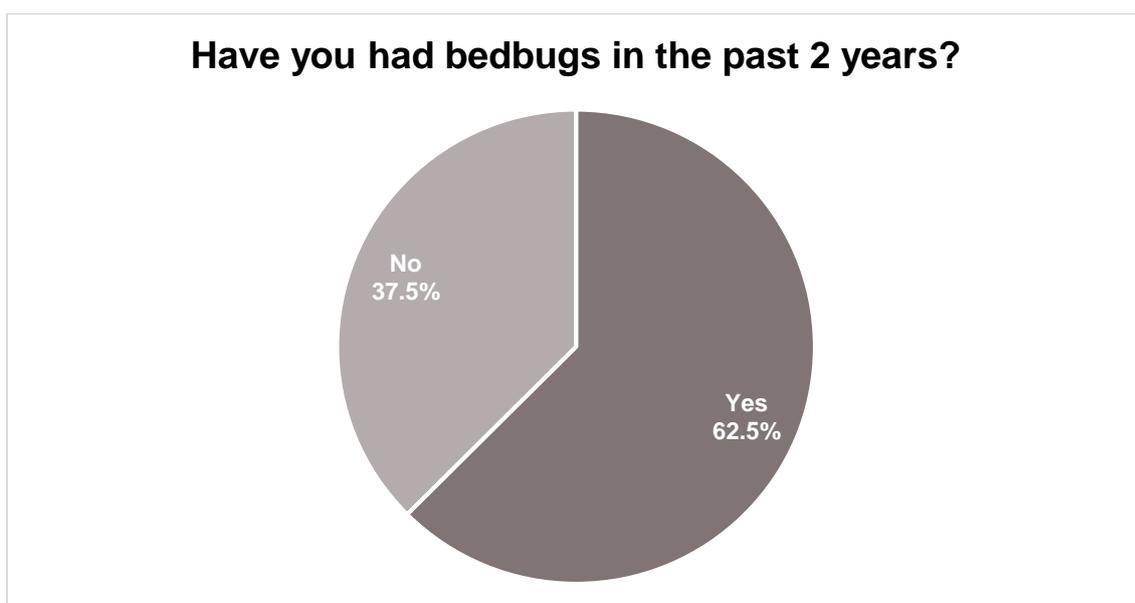
## Housing Conditions

A large number of units required repairs at the beginning of the tenancy, indicating that units were being rented in poor conditions. Tenants reported a high rate of property standards law violations in their apartments. In total **87.5% of respondents identified a violation**. The need for a policy change is evidenced by the poor conditions highlighted in this report.



*32% of tenants surveyed have experienced a lack of heat in their homes in winter.*

Tenants surveyed also reported issues with hot water, with a total of 25% respondents reporting issues. Tenants experienced problems such as their water being too hot and the temperature changing from hot to cold. **7% of respondents reported that they have to take cold showers.**



**62.5% of respondents surveyed have had bedbugs in the past two years.**

## Property Standard Violation Checklist

Drafty windows	42.5%
Holes or cracks on walls or ceiling	32.5%
Electrical sockets broken or don't work	30%
Water damage	27.5%
Mould	27.5%
Peeling paint on walls or ceiling	27.5%
Out of date appliances (fridge or stove)	25%
Floor is not smooth or is coming up	22.5%
Ventilation problems in bathroom or kitchen	22.5%
Unfinished repairs in my unit	22.5%
Too hot in summer	22.5%
Countertops damaged or broken	20%
Closet doors do not work properly	17.5%
Too cold in winter	15%
Leaky faucets	12.5%
Kitchen or closet shelves damaged or broken	12.5%
Balcony paint peeling	12.5%
Lights don't work properly	10%
Balcony door is broken	5%
Balcony has cracks or holes	5%
Lack of water pressure	5%
Appliances do not work, or don't work properly	5%
Cockroaches	0%
I have no issues in my suite	12.5%
Other	37.5%

**42.5% of respondents reported drafty windows and 32.5% reported holes or cracks in the walls or ceiling.**

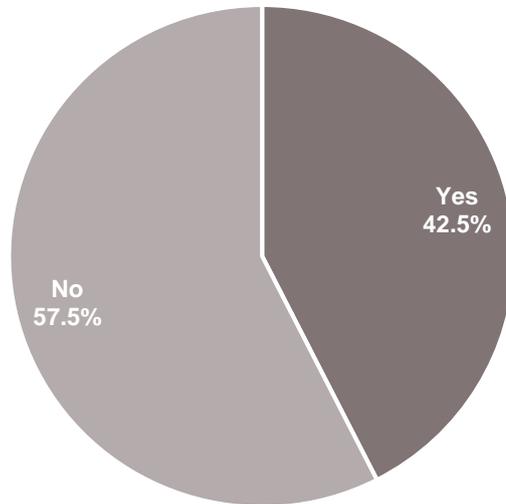
### Issues with Common Areas Checklist

Mice or rats in building	30%
Roaches or other bugs in building	25%
Parking area or driveway has potholes or cracked concrete	17.5%
Walkways/Sidewalks on apartment property have cracks/holes	17.5%
Lobby intercom/buzzer is broken	15%
Yard/outside areas are dirty or not kept clean	15%
Hallway lights are missing or broken	12.5%
Stairwells have garbage or are unclean	10%
Hallways walls and/or ceilings have holes or cracks	10%
Garbage chute is unclean or has bad odours	10%
Front door does not lock or is often unlocked	10%
Hallway or lobby carpets do not get cleaned	10%
Hallways ceilings have leaks or mould	7.5%
Elevators are dirty or are damaged	7.5%
Laundry room has leaks or mould	7.5%
Laundry room machines don't work	7.5%
Stairwells have faeces or urine	5%
Stairwells have peeling paint on ceiling or walls	5%
Stairwells have broken railings	5%
Outside walls or balconies of building have cracks/peeling paint	5%
Stairwell lights are missing or broken	2.5%
Parking garage walls or ceiling have cracks or holes	2.5%
Parking garage has leaks or mould	2.5%
Hallway walls and/or ceilings have peeling paint	2.5%
Laundry room has peeling paint on walls/ceiling	2.5%
Security cameras do not work	0%
Mice or rats in building	30%
I have no issues with the common areas of my building	30%
Roaches or other bugs in building	25%
Parking area or driveway has potholes or cracked concrete	17.5%
I have no issues with the common areas of my building	30%
Other	17.5%

**30% of respondents reported mice or rats in their building and 25% reported cockroaches or other bugs.**

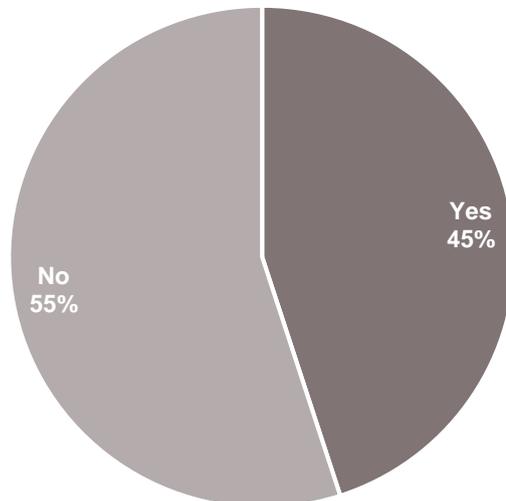
## Repairs

**When you moved into your unit were repairs needed?**



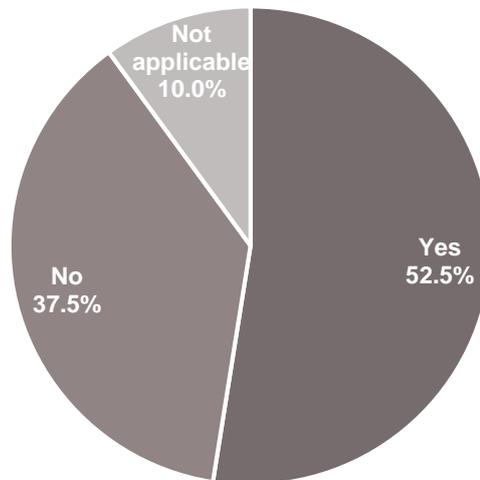
*42.5% of respondents reported that their unit needed repairs when they moved in.*

**Does your flooring need replacing due to regular wear and tear?**



*45% of respondents surveyed reported needing their flooring replaced.*

## Have you ever had problems getting repairs done in your building?

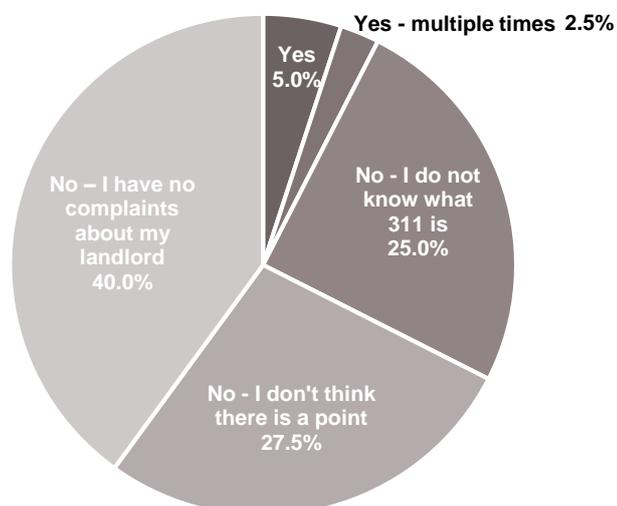


*52.5% of respondents surveyed reported problems getting repairs done in their building.*

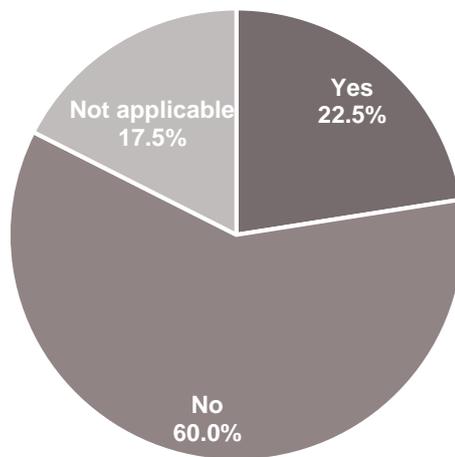
### Complaints to the City or Province

Although there is a complaint system for tenants in Halifax, respondents to the survey overwhelmingly reported that they do not make use of this system to complain about their landlord, with only 7.5% of respondents reporting that they have called 311 to report the violations in their apartments. There are a number of reasons that tenants do not make complaints. Nearly one third of those surveyed said they see no point in calling 311, despite being aware of their rights and the laws in place to protect them. 25% of respondents do not know what 311 is.

## Have you called 311 to file a complaint against your landlord?



## Do you feel threatened when making complaints about the building?



*Over 22% of respondents reported that they feel threatened when making complaints about their building.*

### Comments about Buildings

A number of respondents provided comments about their buildings revealing issues that they experienced with their units and landlords. Some of these comments include:

Our landlord does not fix issues in our building, does not give notice when coming over, and generally does not consider our comfort when imposing to fix things she wants to that we have not asked for.

It took months of complaining to have our landlord address a bathroom full of mould (ceiling was covered), the ceiling was partially collapsing, and tub paint was coming off & sticking in our feet.

Have complained about mould, rats, bedbugs. Was supposed to have new windows installed when I moved in 6 years ago. My daughter's bedroom window is so drafty and cold she cannot sleep in her bedroom during the winter. Floors are very creaky and soft to walk on, old carpet throughout that needs to be changed. Children and I have various lung, upper respiratory problems due to mould and carpets. Rent is increased every year. I have been told to move by doctors, however, because I am a recipient of income assistance and rent subsidy I am unable to do so. If I move my rent subsidy will be cut off and I was told that I am not allowed to reapply. The rent subsidy is for this apartment and does not transfer according to metro regional housing.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the Tenant Survey evidence the need for the City and Province to move forward on landlord licensing. A majority of respondents reported maintenance issues with their apartments, as well as issues having the repairs completed. Tenants indicated that they are either unaware of the options available to them, as they have not heard about the 311 phone line, or they are apprehensive about making complaints as they feel threatened.

ACORN members were happy to see a motion put forward by Halifax Regional Council to investigate landlord licensing, which proposes an initial stakeholder consultation. Now we would like to see our rights written into law. There needs to be proactive inspections for all apartment buildings with a component focused on tenant outreach and engagement. This can be achieved through landlord licensing, which will ensure landlords are held to account for poor housing conditions. Landlord licensing will protect tenants and allow their needs to be met.