

BEAT THE HEAT!



Toronto ACORN Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	3
EXTREME HEAT	4
TORONTO ACORN SURVEY	5
MEMBER TESTIMONIALS	13
ACORN'S DEMANDS	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate crisis specifically impacts low- and moderate-income and other vulnerable tenants. For years, tenants have been raising the alarm on unsafe conditions in rental housing during the hot summer months.

Currently, there are no laws provincially or municipally requiring cooler temperatures or that indoor temperatures do not exceed a maximum temperature. There are also very limited measures to ensure that initiatives to make existing multi-residential apartment buildings more energy efficient protect tenants.

The climate crisis will mean heat events will continue to increase in intensity, duration, and frequency. And it is well documented that those disproportionately affected by heat related deaths and illnesses are seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income, racialized and tenant communities.

This report provides an overview on the impact of extreme heat, what other jurisdictions are doing, testimonials from ACORN members, the results from our extreme heat tenant survey and demands for the City of Toronto. The city has the power to ensure rental housing is safe during heat events. ACORN will be working with its allies to demand the city move quickly to pass local legislation.

Key findings from Toronto ACORN survey:

- 77% of tenants said that they are impacted by extreme heat.
- More than a third (36%) of the tenants don't have access to air conditioning (AC) or cooler temperatures in their units.
- Among those who don't have access to AC, cost emerged as a major reason. Close to a quarter of tenants said that they took it out because the landlord threatened them for eviction, extra fees etc.
- Around a quarter of respondents pay extra to access AC.
- Around 74% of tenants said that their children and other dependents are very impacted by extreme heat.
- Close to 40% tenants stated that they were asked to pay extra fees to keep their ACs.

ACORN's demands

- The city must develop and implement a maximum heat bylaw for rental housing.
- Provide free energy efficient air conditioners (Heat/ Cooling pumps) for low income community members, prioritising tenants with utilities outside their rent.
- Track heat-related deaths and illnesses.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is having catastrophic impacts on communities. Low-and-moderate income and other vulnerable tenants are bearing a disproportionate impact of the climate crisis.

Climate crisis is linked to the housing crisis. Toronto is getting hotter and residents that live in rental housing are struggling to keep cool. The climate crisis will result in more and longer heat events in Toronto, increasing the risk of heat related death and illnesses for vulnerable community members. Instead of recognizing the threat of extreme heat and providing safe housing, many Toronto landlords are restricting or preventing altogether a tenant's ability to keep cool.

During ACORN community meetings, tenants have been sounding the alarm in recent years of landlords imposing new rules around AC use and other barriers such as cost. Access to cooling is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.

Furthermore, any climate action plan will not be successful if it doesn't address the issue of energy inefficiency in existing buildings. But as cities do that, it is critical to ensure that there are tenant protections built into such measures to ensure that rents are not increased and tenants are not evicted.

WHAT IS ACORN?

ACORN Canada or Association of Communities for Reform Now is a multi-issue, mass-based community and tenant union of low-to-moderate income people. The purpose of the union is to give power to people so that they can have their voices heard at the highest levels of the country. With chapters across the region, province, and across the country, ACORN is able to be both a local-based union winning local campaigns, as well as a large organization combining forces to fight for policy changes at the national level.

Toronto ACORN started in 2004 and has grown to six chapters across the city since then.



EXTREME HEAT

HEAT RELATED RISKS

Extreme heat is associated with a number of health impacts ranging from heat stress to heat stroke or more serious effects, such as cardiovascular-related disease and/or death. Everyone is vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat, but certain groups of people are more at risk than others. Low-and-moderate income people are more likely to have little or no access to air conditioning and are more likely to live in areas with fewer parks and shaded outdoor areas (Ontario Human Rights Commission).

EXISTING RULES - CITY & PROVINCE

The city of Toronto considers a heat event when there is a forecast of two or more consecutive days with daytime maximum temperatures of 31°C or warmer, together with nighttime minimum temperatures of 20°C or warmer or when there is a forecast of two or more consecutive days with humidex values expected to reach 40 or higher.

Toronto has a Heat Relief Strategy. More information is available here: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/8f1c-Heat-Relief-Strategy-2023finalAODA.pdf>

The city of Toronto requires all landlords to provide heat to a minimum air temperature of 21 degrees Celsius from September 15 to June 1. But there is no such requirement for cooler temperatures to be maintained in summers. More information about the bylaw and how it works is available here: https://www.torontotenants.org/heat_vital_services#:~:text=City%20of%20Toronto%20bylaws%20require,be%20kept%20at%2021%20degrees

In Ontario, under the Residential Tenancies Act, tenants must have access to vital services such as heat, hot and cold water, and electricity. Currently, the regulations do not include air conditioning as a vital service.

A few months back, the province introduced a slew of measures as part of Bill 97, one of which relates to air conditioning. There is a large and legitimate concern that when the regulations of Bill 97 are finalised, they will allow landlords to gouge tenants who have air conditioning by increasing their rent based on the energy star rating of their unit or in some cases, just an estimate. This potential new rent increase is not subject to the annual guideline that's capped at 2.5%.



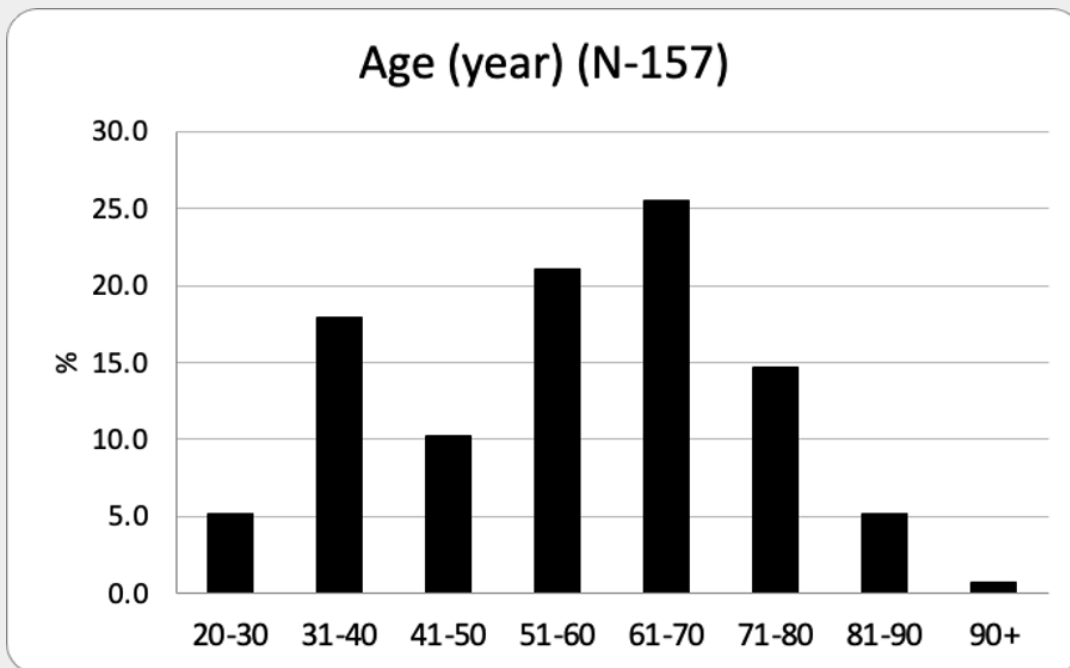
TORONTO ACORN SURVEY



Toronto ACORN conducted a survey in 2023. The survey was sent to all Toronto ACORN members and contacts that exist in ACORN's database. A total of 157 people responded to the survey. All the respondents reported as tenants. This section discusses the main findings of the survey.

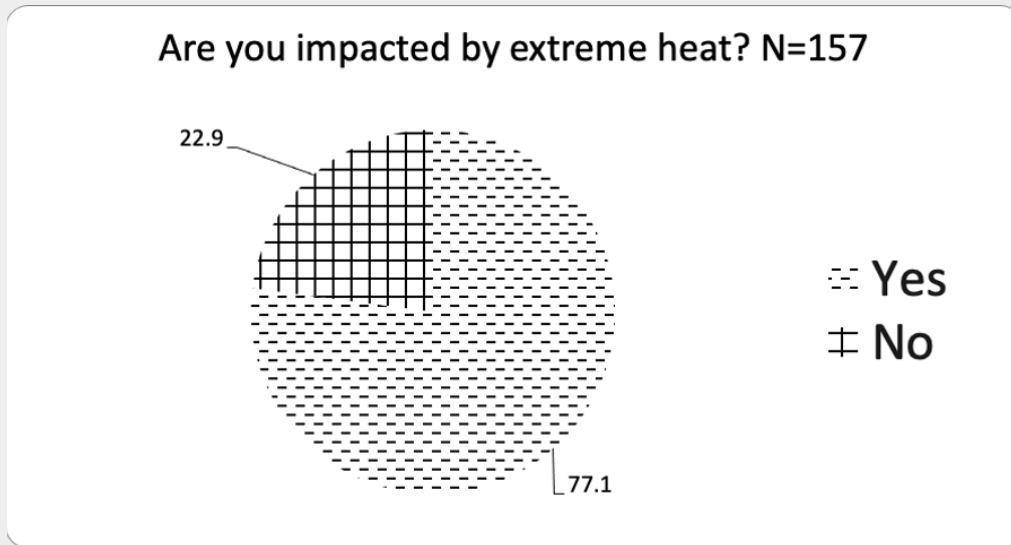
1) Age

Almost half of the respondents are in the age group of 31-60 years. Slightly more than a quarter of respondents are in the age group 61 and 70 years. Around 15% are between the ages 71-80 years and a few are 81 years and above.



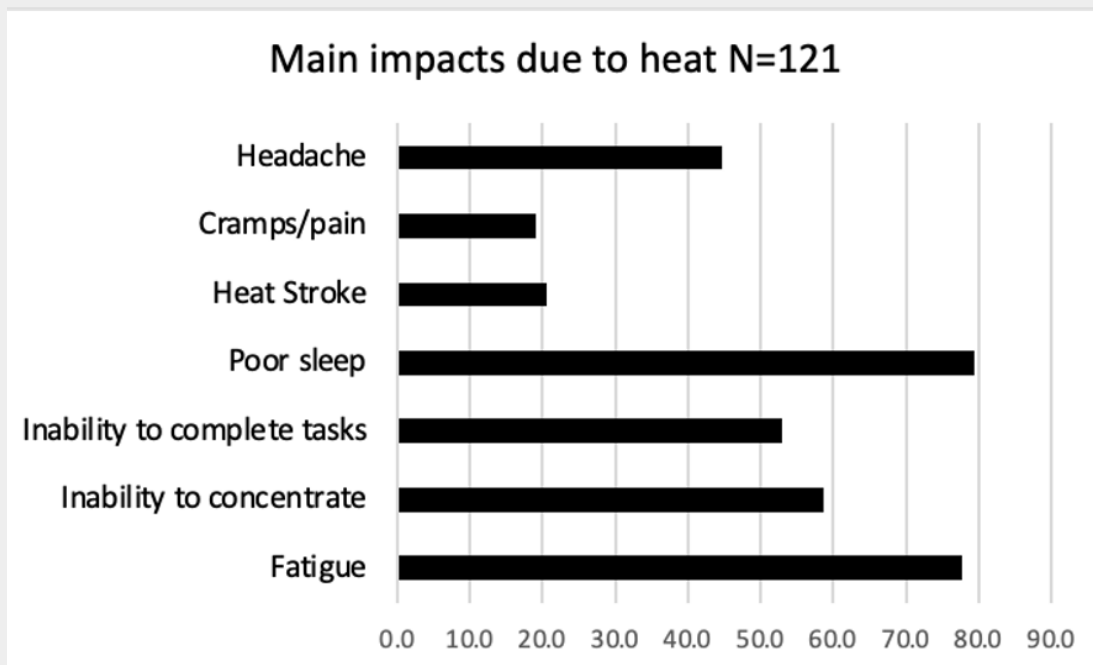
2) Impacted by extreme heat

A vast majority of tenants said that they are impacted by extreme heat.



3) Kinds of impact borne by the tenants

Tenants were provided a list from which they could choose the main impacts due to extreme heat. The main impacts reported by tenants included poor sleep, fatigue, headache, inability to concentrate and inability to complete tasks.



4) Access to air conditioning

More than a third (36%) of the tenants don't have access to air conditioning or cooler temperatures in their units.

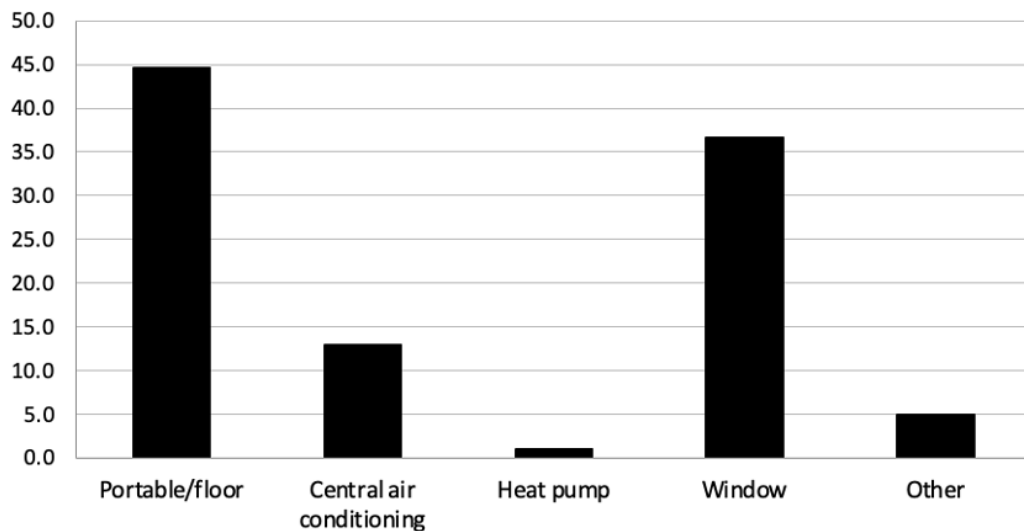
Do you have access to air conditioning in your home? N=157



5) Type of air conditioning unit

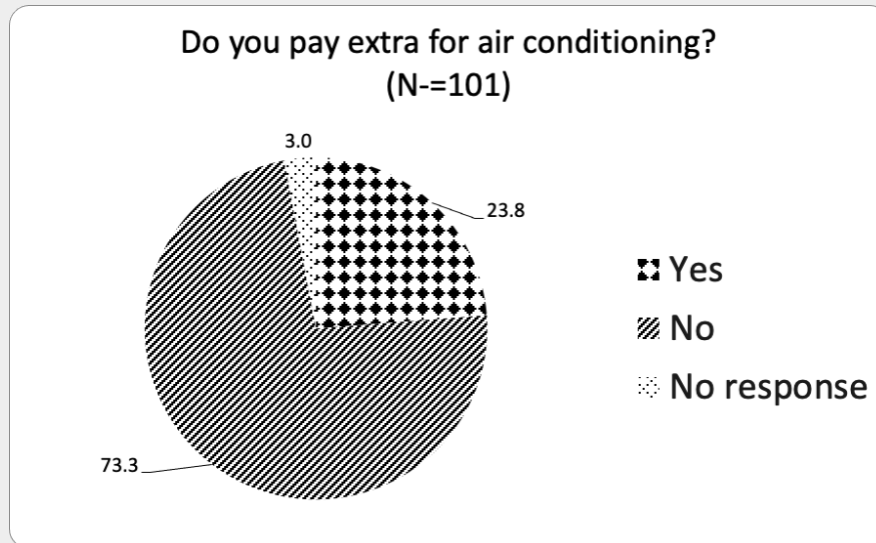
Close to half of the tenants have portable/floor air conditioning units closely followed by 37% of tenants with window air conditioning units. Only 13% of tenants have central air conditioning. One tenant has a heat pump.

What type of air conditioning unit do you have? N=101



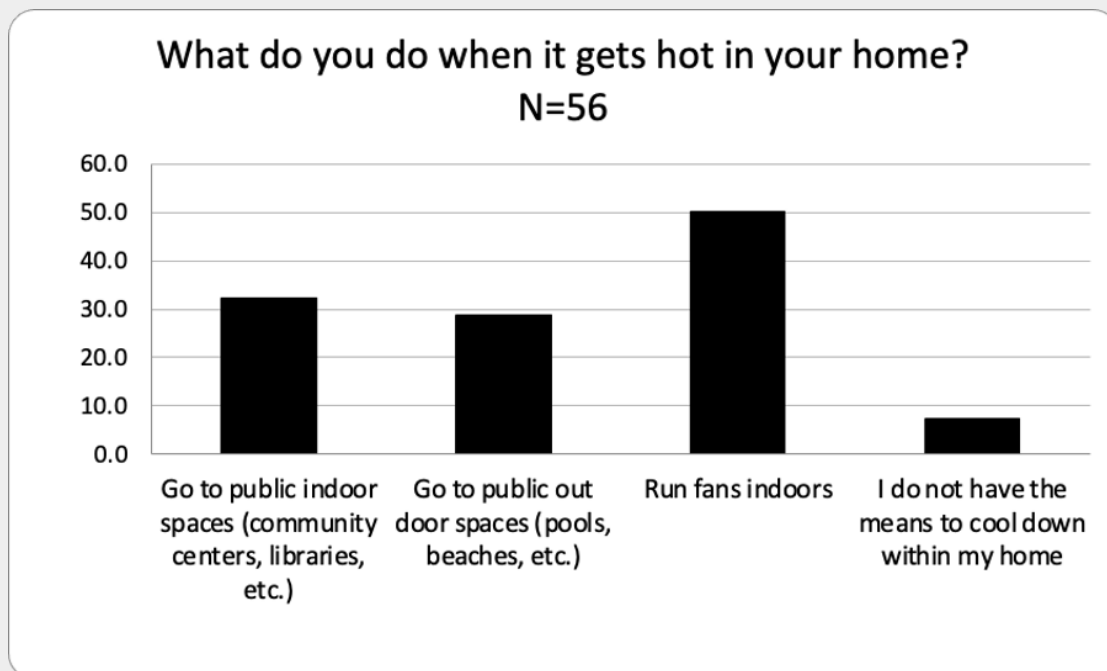
6) Paying extra for air conditioning

Around a quarter of respondents pay extra to access air conditioning. More than half of tenants pay anywhere between \$50-100 as extra fees while 30% of tenants pay \$101-200 in extra fee.



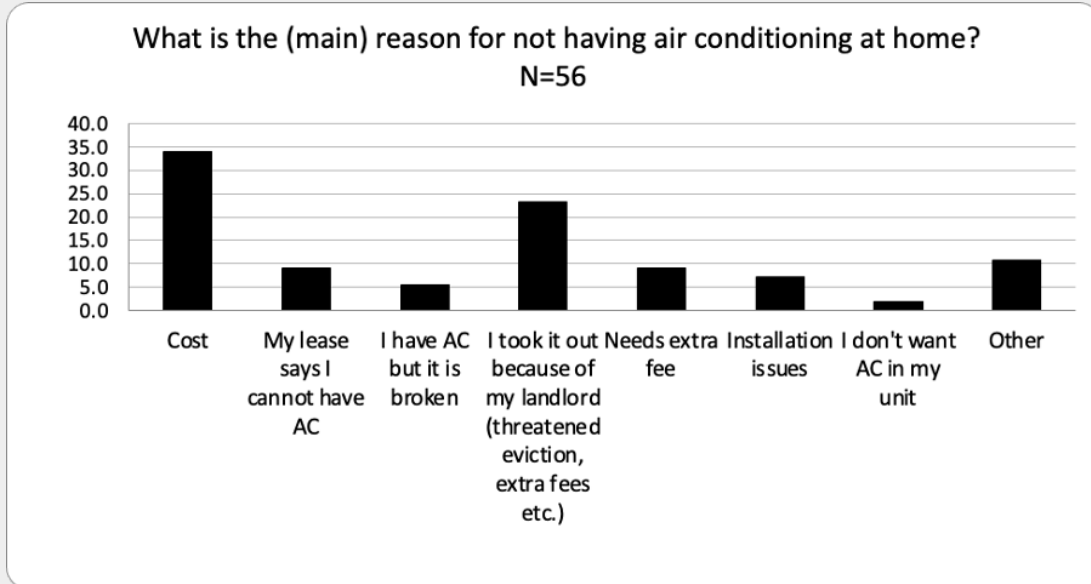
7) Coping with heat

Most tenants run fans in their units to cope with heat. A third of tenants either go to public indoor spaces or outdoor spaces to cope with heat.



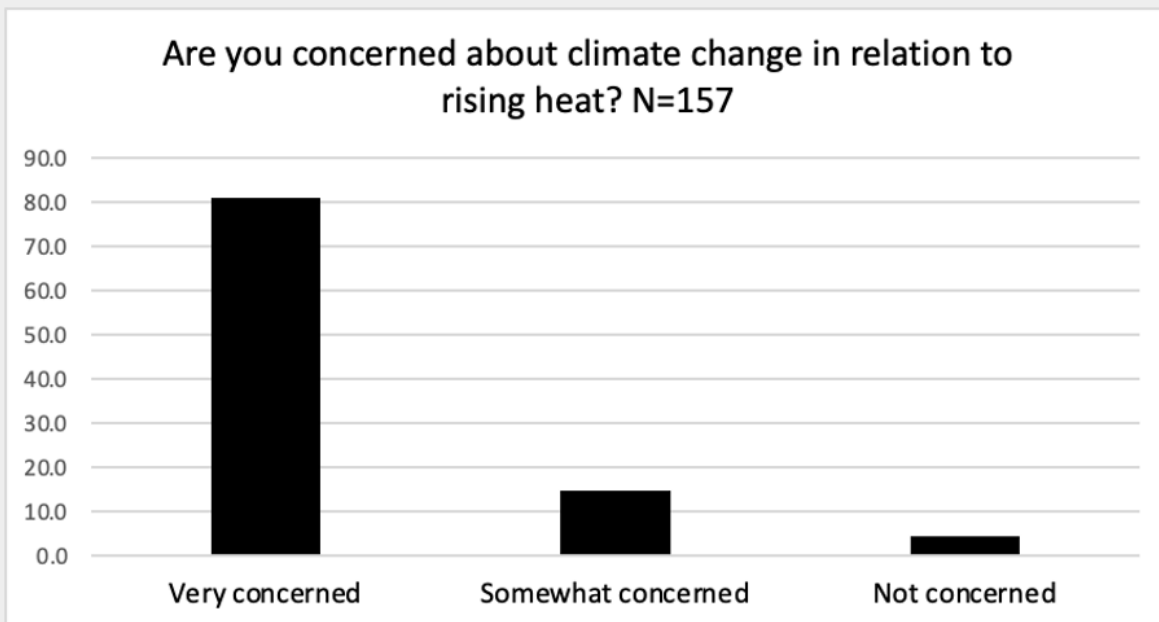
8) Main reason for not having air conditioning

Cost emerged as a major reason for those who said that they do not have air conditioning. Close to a quarter of tenants said that they took it out because the landlord threatened them for eviction, extra fees etc.



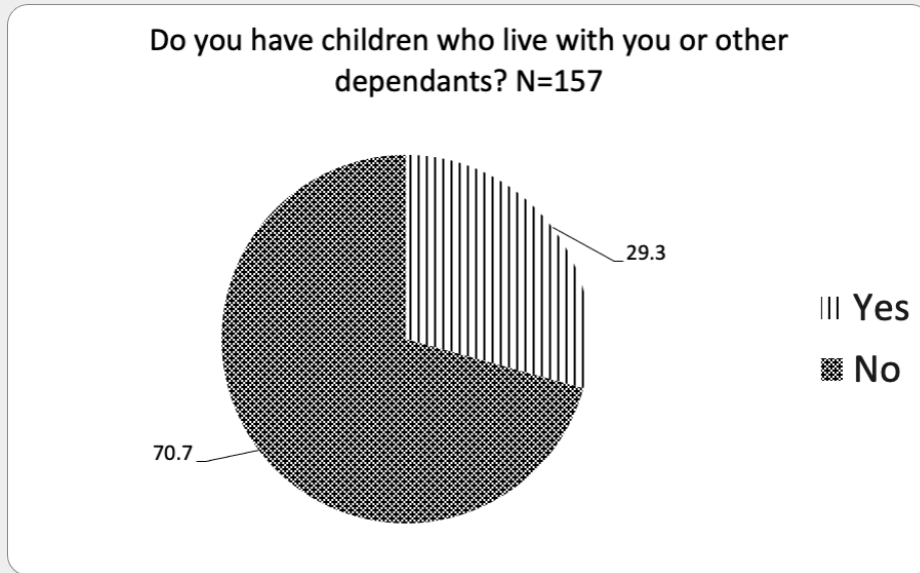
9) Concern about climate change

81% of tenants are very concerned about climate change.



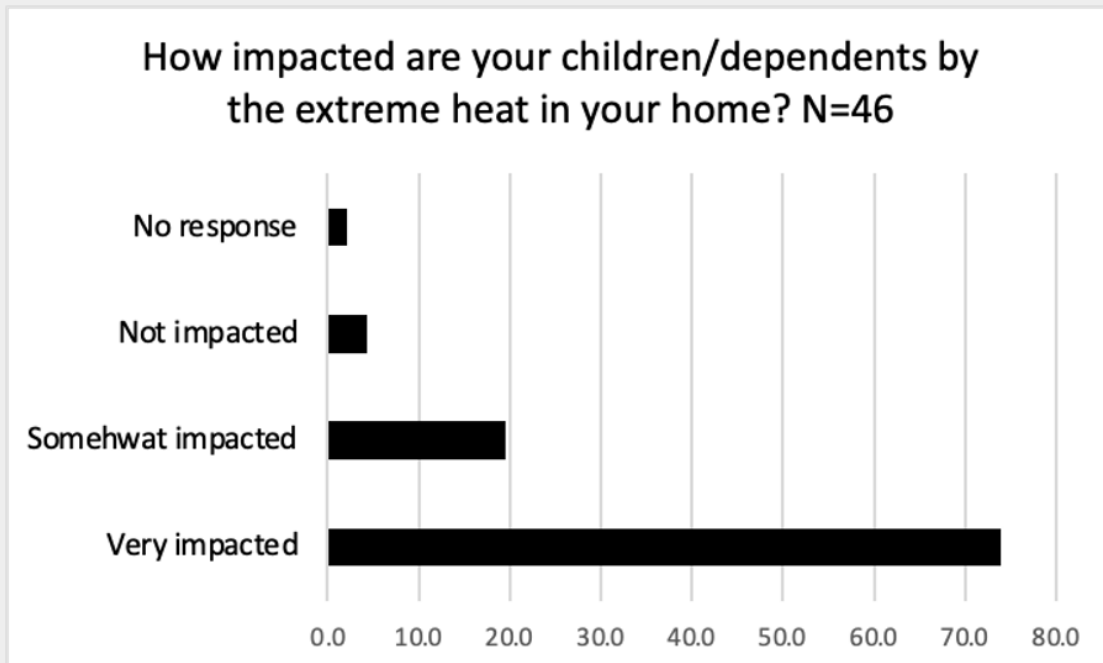
10) Having children/dependents

Around 30% of tenants have children or other dependents who live with them.



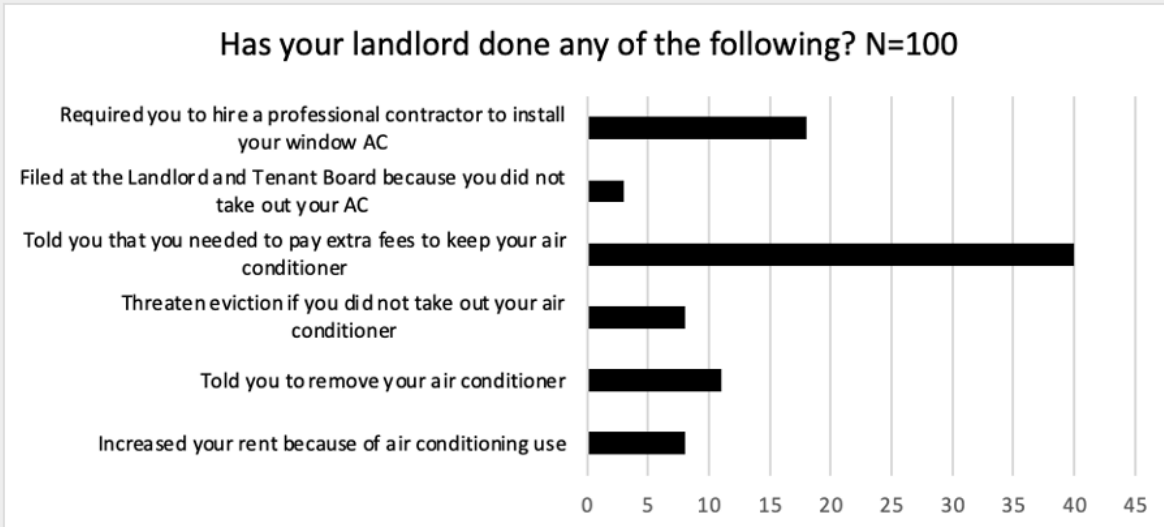
11) Extent of extreme heat impact on children and other dependents

Around 74% of tenants said that their children and other dependents are very impacted by extreme heat.



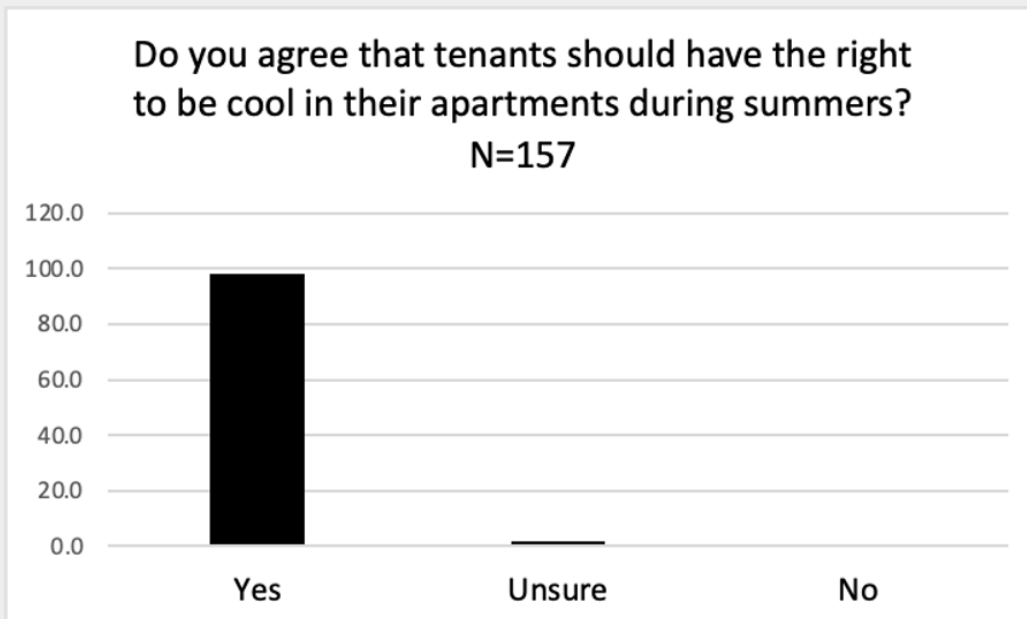
12) Actions by landlord to discourage access to air conditioning

Close to 40% tenants stated that they were asked to pay extra fees to keep their air conditioning. Some mentioned that the landlord required them to hire a professional contractor to install their window air conditioners. A few were asked to remove their air conditioners or were told that their rent will go up because of using AC.



13) Right to be cool during summers

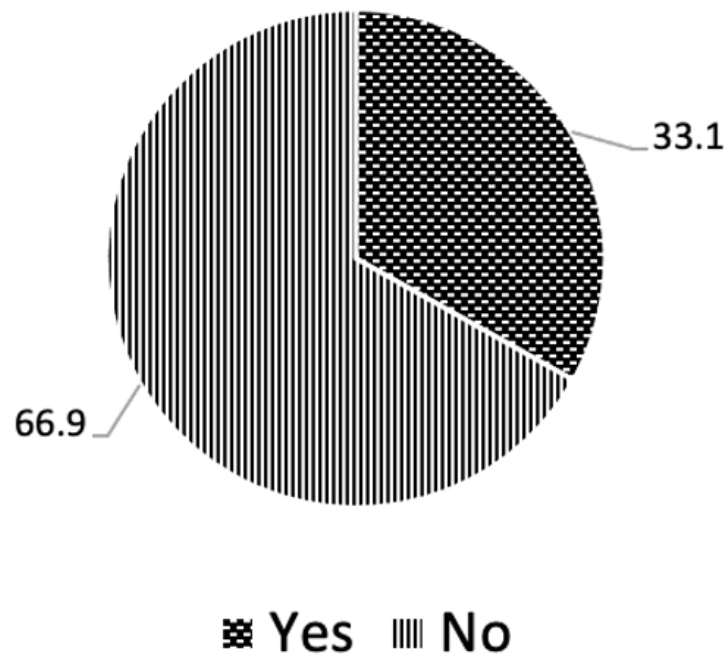
Almost all the tenants who responded to the survey agree that tenants should have the right to be cool in their apartments during summers.



14) Knowledge about tenant rights in accessing cool temperatures

Almost a third of tenants are not aware of their rights with respect to air conditioning use in their city/province.

Do you know your rights as a tenant as it pertains to air conditioning use in apartments in your city/province?



MEMBER TESTIMONIALS



LAURA

My landlord has multiple properties. I recently got to know that one of her properties has central air conditioning.

I got an AC to use only in my bedroom to cool the entire place which is totally impossible. I blocked my window in the bedroom to fit the AC but now because of that there is no light in the bedroom. We have a fan in the hallway so that some cool air can be circulated. My landlord is not saying anything yet about my using the AC but who knows.

I live in a house which is subletted to multiple families. I am on the ground floor. Heat is becoming crazy, it creates a lot of issues. I have two children, an 18 year old girl and a 14 year old boy. Children cannot concentrate on doing homework. My son's bedroom is so hot, it's impossible for him to concentrate. I want the government to ensure that everyone has access to air conditioning.

BERNADETTE

It's getting hotter than ever before. Windows are not enough to bring in any breeze. Right now, I have flat windows, so I need an air conditioner. It's impossible to live without the AC, a fan is not adequate. It's too hot and the heat persists for far too long. Seniors who have heart conditions, it's hard for them. You don't get proper sleep because of this, day to day living gets affected.

I am constantly exhausted, have no energy. I have been here in this unit for more than 52 years. I live paycheque to paycheque, currently surviving on ODSP. I am almost a senior.

The layout of an apartment is very important to funnel the wind. I had an AC but it developed mould. Wattage of ACs needs 1200 units and more and my apartment can only take 800 units or less. There is old wiring.

The landlord will have to renovate me if I ask for an AC. I am paying less than the market rent. Current rate for a 3 BHK is \$2,400 and we are paying \$1,052 since we were grandfathered in. My mum, 86 years old, stays with me. It's taking a toll on her, all she does is sleep.

VIVIANNE

I get tired real fast. I am 62 years old, although I don't sound that old but I am. However, when the heat strikes, I get a headache, get very tired. The landlords don't care about renters. These buildings need to have AC, we have to accept what we have. I have been living here since 2018.

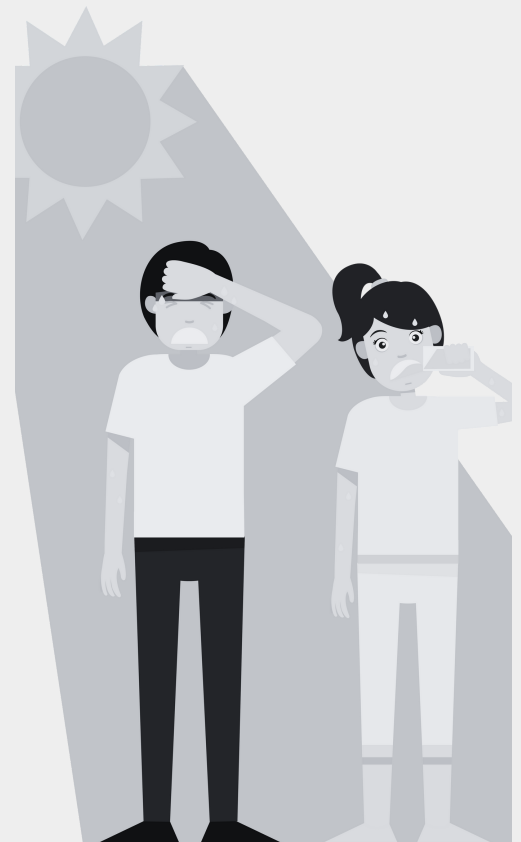
Earlier I was in a basement unit, the landlord took care of me. But in my current unit, its bad. My landlord told me I can install an AC but I have to pay for it and also pay the hydro. The rent just keeps going up, how will I afford an AC? The government must compel these landlords to give appropriate service to the tenants.

ANONYMOUS

We never had an AC,we moved into this apartment 2 years back. Summers are pretty bad now, my daughter has COPD, I have asthma. I was told recently by my doctor that I am also COPD borderline. It gets very hot. We can't afford an AC, the cost is crazy. My daughter is in the living room, the fan broke there a few days back. She tried putting it together, but it snapped. She can't sleep without a fan. My husband couldn't sleep because my daughter had breathing problems.

I have asked my landlord about AC, but no response. Heat is not a priority for them. My brother who lives with us as well has severe depression, he can't tolerate extreme heat and cold.

I am 53 years old, on ODSP. Rents are going up so much, grocery costs are too high.



ACORN'S DEMANDS

1. THE CITY OF TORONTO NEEDS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A MAXIMUM HEAT BYLAW FOR RENTAL HOUSING.

- The bylaw needs to apply to all rental housing (all densities, market and social housing). 26 degrees has been recognized by other jurisdictions as a maximum indoor temperature but development of the bylaw should include consultation with tenant, housing organizations and health professionals to determine the maximum temperature.
- There should be a financial penalty for landlords who fail to comply with the maximum heat bylaw.

2. FREE ENERGY EFFICIENT AIR CONDITIONERS (HEAT/ COOLING PUMPS) FOR LOW INCOME COMMUNITY MEMBERS, PRIORITISING TENANTS WITH UTILITIES OUTSIDE THEIR RENT.

The survey clearly shows the reason for many tenants not having access to air conditioning is the cost or extra fees that landlords expect tenants to pay. We need the city to provide energy efficient air conditioning such as by way of installing heat pumps which are known to not exacerbate climate change.

3. THE CITY OF TORONTO NEEDS TO TRACK HEAT-RELATED DEATHS AND ILLNESS.

To better understand the extent of the problem and to demonstrate the urgent need for local action on extreme heat, we need better information. There needs to be recording heat related deaths.





CONTACT US

715B DANFORTH AVE. TORONTO, ON M4J 1L2
416-461-9233
TORONTOADMIN@ACORNCANADA.ORG