



2023

# EXTREME HEAT & CLIMATE JUSTICE

# REPORT

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# Executive Summary

The Canadian Climate Institute projected that the costs of heat-related deaths and reduced quality of life from extreme heat in Canada would range from \$3 billion to \$3.9 billion per year by mid-century.

Extreme heat is getting worse in intensity and frequency all over the world. The extreme heat incident in BC in 2021 which led to the loss of more than 600 lives is a stark reminder of the urgent need for action.

The impacts on low- and moderate and other vulnerable tenants are especially acute. 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 limited measures to ensure that existing multi-residential apartment buildings are made more energy efficient and also protects tenants' security of tenure and affordable housing. Federal action is needed to ensure buildings are upgraded while protecting affordability and avoiding any evictions.

Worsening climate crisis means 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 illness are seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income, racialized and tenant communities.

This report covers the findings of a national survey ACORN conducted to understand the impact of extreme heat on tenants. The survey was sent to ACORN members and contacts nationally and was responded by 465 tenants. It also highlights some of the measures the federal and municipal governments urgently need to take to protect tenants from extreme heat.

# Key Findings

- A vast majority of tenants i.e. 79% said that they are impacted by extreme heat.
- 44% of tenants do not have access to cool temperatures at home.
- Of those who do have access to air conditioning (AC), slightly more than a quarter of tenants pay extra for AC.
- Among those who do not have access to AC, close to half of the tenants cannot afford to have it in their units. A few cannot have it installed because their lease doesn't allow it or they had to take it out because their landlord threatened eviction, charged extra fees etc.
- Again, among those who do not have access to air conditioning, 85% of tenants use fans to cope with heat, 32% of people go to public indoor or outdoor spaces and 20% use public outdoor spaces.
- 65% of tenants said that their dependents are very impacted by extreme heat.
- 80% of tenants are extremely concerned about rising heat.

# Policy Recommendations

## **Local:**

Cities must develop and implement a maximum heat bylaw for rental housing. Improvements to the city's tree canopy especially in low- and moderate-income tenant communities.

Track heat-related deaths and illnesses.

## **All Levels of Government**

Provide free energy efficient air conditioners (Heat/ Cooling pumps) for low income community members, prioritising tenants with utilities outside their rent.

## **Federal Government**

All green infrastructure retrofit partnerships and agreements from the Canada Infrastructure Bank or CMHC must include:

- Affordability and anti-eviction covenants.
- Signed agreements from the landlord made transparent to the tenants in the building.
- Rent controls
- Formal tenant participation where independent tenant unions existing in the community and building receive resources to support tenants participating.
- Perform a Benefit Scan so that unique potential local benefits (environmental, labour, community, tenant) are identified and included in the funding agreement.

# Introduction

## 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. We build power to hold the government and corporations accountable. With chapters across the country, ACORN is able to be both a local-based union winning local campaigns, as well as a national community union bringing members together from across the country to fight for national campaigns. ACORN started in 2004 and has since grown to 24 chapters in 10 cities with more than 168,000 members across the country.

## The Issue

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. This worsening climate crisis is leading to many changes including extreme heat. Many cities across Canada are experiencing extreme weather events with increasing intensity and frequency. As per a report by the Canadian Climate Institute (2023), many parts of the country will see a substantial increase in the number of days where heat can harm people, communities, and the economy. For example, under a medium-warming scenario, southern Ontario will see a near doubling in the number of days over 30° C per year by mid-century.

In Whitehorse the number of days over 30° C are projected to increase from one day every decade, to two days every year by mid-century—a 20-fold increase.

The deadly heat wave of BC in 2021 is a stark reminder of the impact of extreme heat especially on vulnerable populations. As per the report by BC Coroners Service (2022),

- Most deaths occurred indoors.
- Heat related deaths were higher among persons with chronic illness.
- 67% of people who died were 70 years and above.
- Most people who died had inadequate cooling systems.
- People who died were in socially or materially deprived neighbourhoods.

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

ACORN members have been sounding the alarm in recent years of landlords imposing new, often illegal, rules around air conditioning use and other barriers such as cost. With changing temperatures, access to cooling is a necessity.

## Lack of max heat bylaws in the cities

While there are bylaws across several cities to ensure a minimum temperature during winters, there is no mandate to keep units cool during summers. This is having a devastating impact on the tenants.

## Lack of measures to protect tenants in retrofit financing at the federal level

Climate action plans federally and locally have started to recognise that existing buildings contribute a substantial portion of greenhouse gas emissions but they often lack any tools to ensure that measures the cities/national governments will adopt to make these buildings more energy efficient will also have tools to protect tenants.

For example: Avenue Living, a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), which recently received \$150 million from Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB), which comes under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Communities. As per the website of CIB, “the CIB and Avenue Living Asset Management (Avenue Living) have signed a partnership agreement. Together, the CIB and Avenue Living will commit \$150 million towards sustainable retrofit projects in low-density residential buildings across Western Canada”.

At the same time, the REIT raised the rents of low- and moderate-income tenants by upwards of \$500. The impact of this increase is huge as Avenue Living owns and manages more than 14,400 apartments and townhomes in 20+ regions across Canada’s provinces.

ACORN’s research clearly shows that retrofits of low-income housing can potentially result in the co-benefits of carbon reduction, energy efficiency, and costs savings, as well as positive health outcomes.

However, as Canada moves towards achieving its net zero emissions, the measures can have adverse consequences if they don’t include tenant protections.

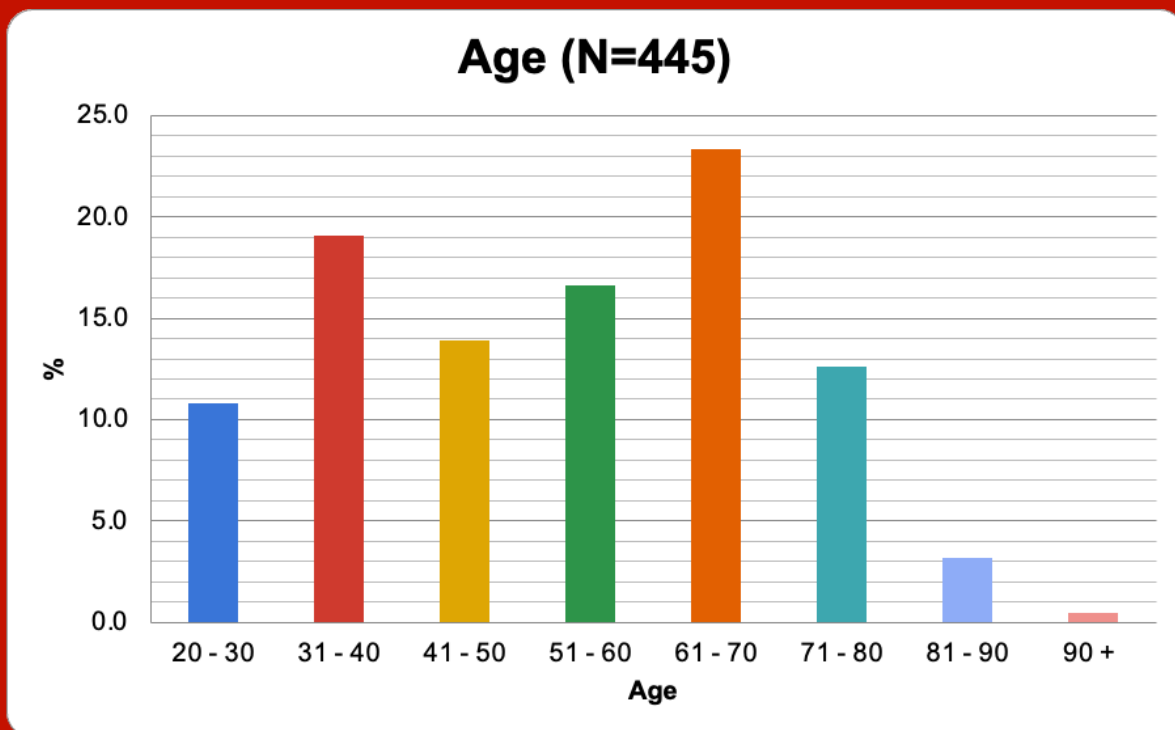


# ACORN's Extreme Heat Survey

ACORN reached out to our members nationally to understand the impact of extreme heat. The online survey was sent to all the contacts and members ACORN has nationally. This section covers the key findings of the survey based on a total of 445 responses from tenants.

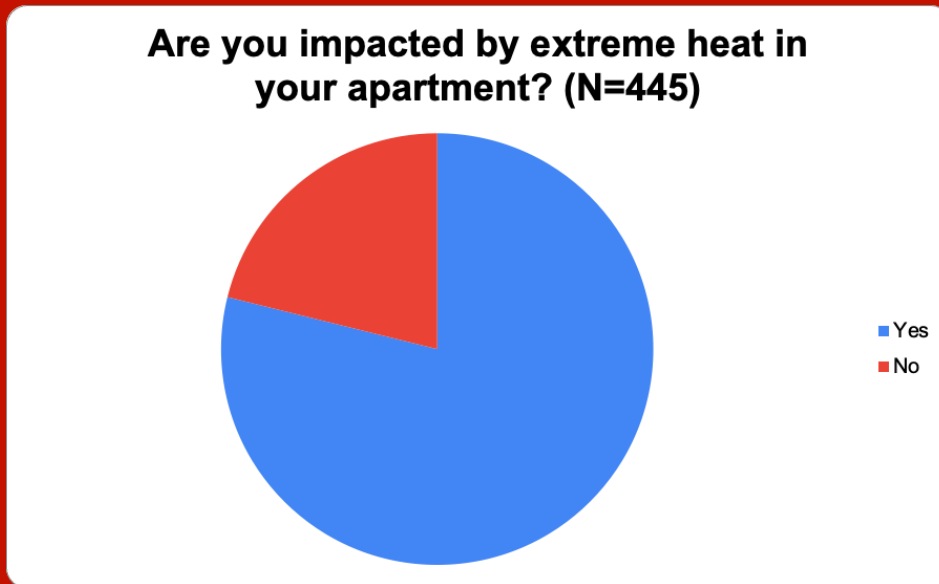
## 1) Age

Almost half of the tenants are between the ages of 30 and 60 years. More than a third of respondents are between the ages 60 and 80 years. Very few respondents reported their ages 81 years and above.



## 2) Impacted by extreme heat

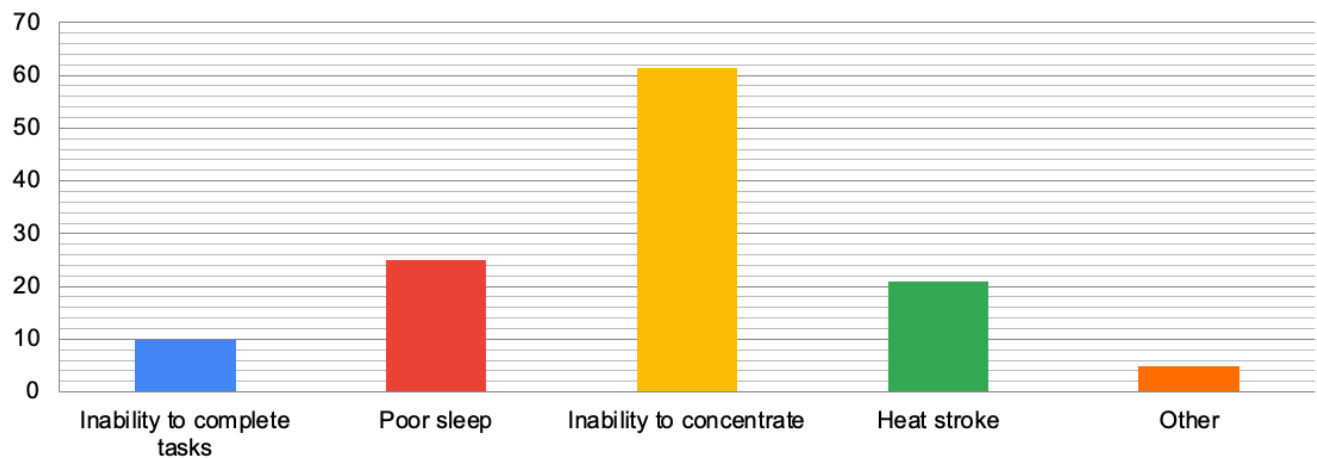
A vast majority of tenants i.e. 79% said that they are impacted by extreme heat.



## 3) Impacts of extreme heat

Some of the key impacts reported by tenants due to extreme heat included inability to concentrate (61%), lack of sleep (25%) and heat stroke (21%).

### Impacts of Extreme Heat (N=364)

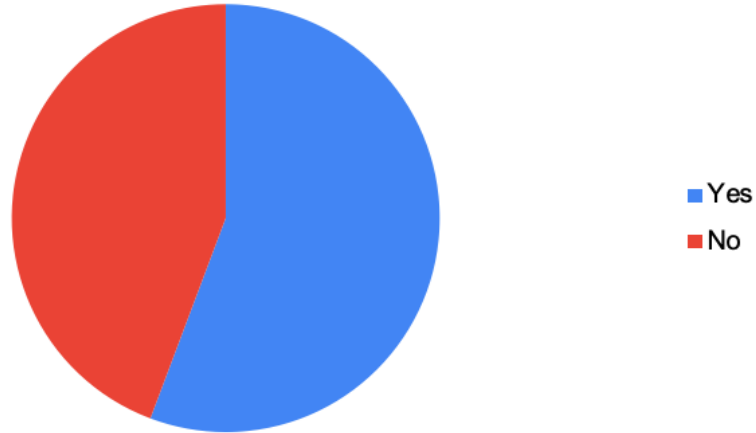




#### 4) Access to air conditioning

44.3% of tenants do not have access to cool temperatures at home.

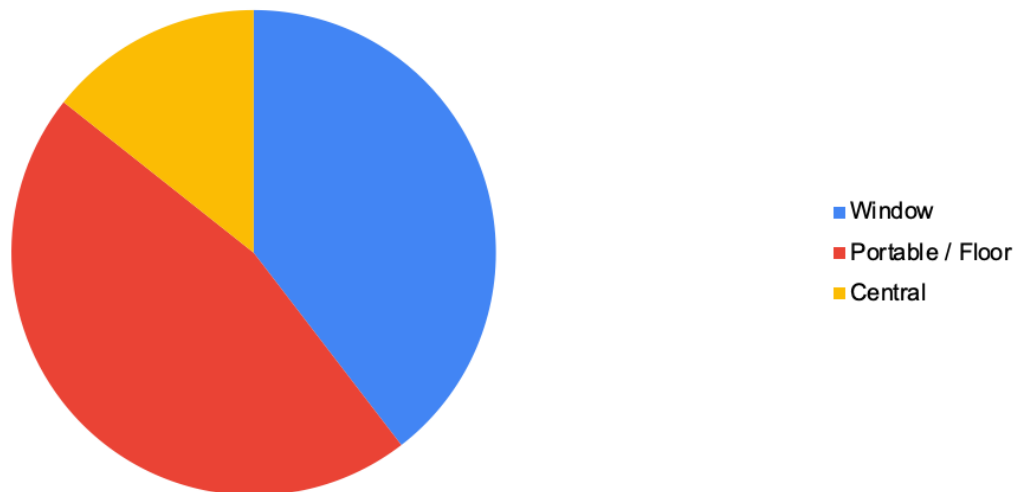
### Access to Air Conditioning (N=445)



#### 5) Type of air conditioning unit

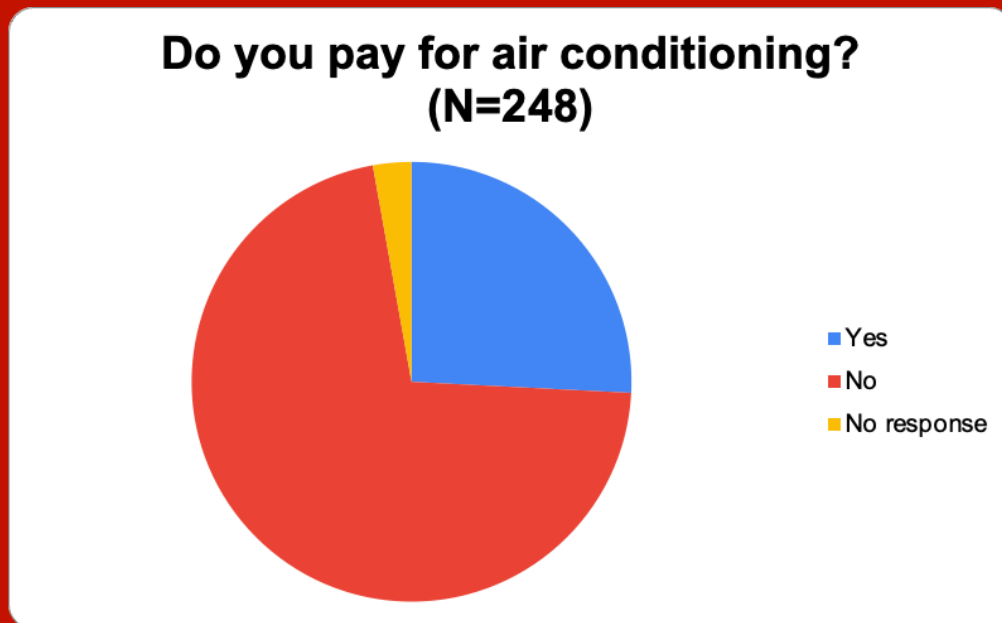
Of those who have access to AC, 46% of tenants have a portable AC followed by 40% who have a window AC unit. Some have central air conditioning in their building.

### Type of Air Conditioning Unit (N=230)



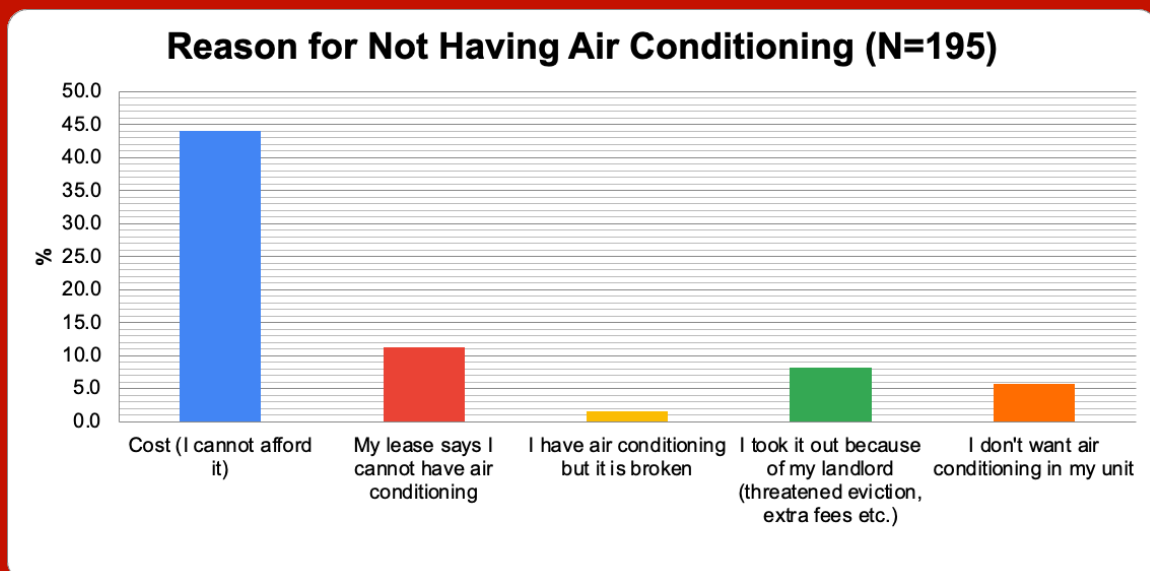
## 6) Payment for air conditioning

Slightly more than a quarter of tenants pay extra for air conditioning.



## 7) Reason for not having air conditioning

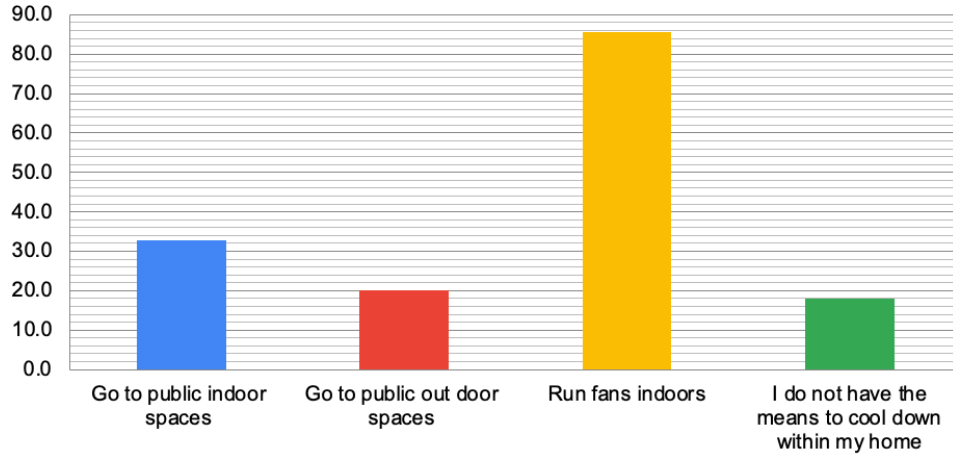
Among those who do not have access to air conditioning, close to half of the tenants cannot afford to have it in their units. A few cannot have it installed because their lease doesn't allow it or they had to take it out because their landlord threatened eviction, charged extra fees etc.



## 8) Coping with heat

Close to 86% of tenants use fans to cope with heat, 33% of people go to public indoor and 20% use public outdoor spaces.

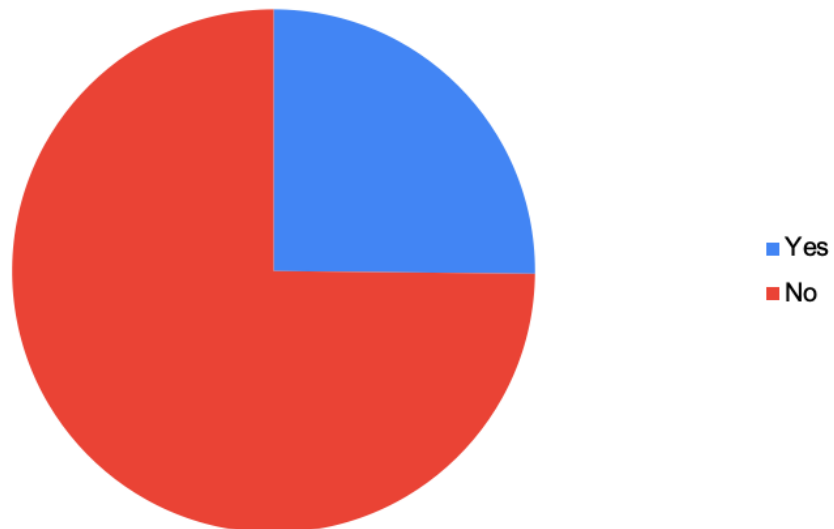
### What Do You Do When It gets Hot (N=195)



## 9) Dependents

A quarter of tenants have dependents such as children or seniors.

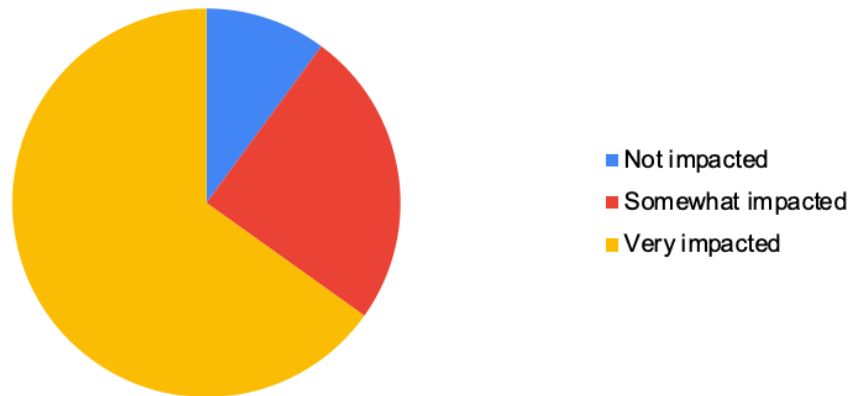
### Do you have dependents? N=445



## 10) Impact on dependants

63% of tenants who have dependents said that their dependents are very impacted by extreme heat.

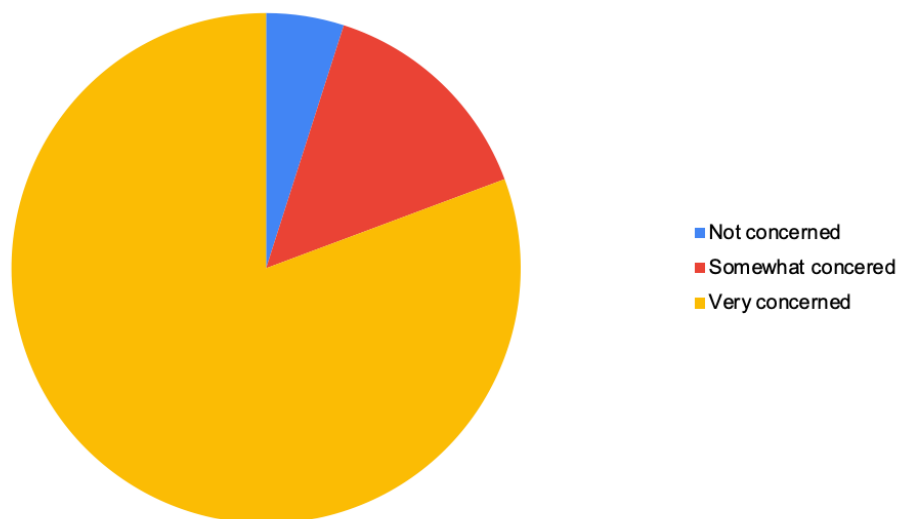
### How impacted are your dependents? (N=112)



## 11) Climate change

81% of tenants are very concerned about the rising heat due to climate change.

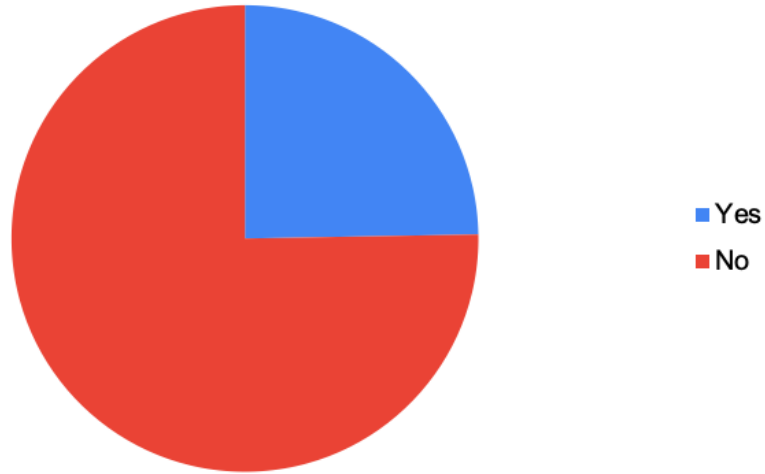
### Are you concerned about rising heat from climate change? N=445



## 12) Rights as a tenant

75% of tenants are not aware of their rights as a tenant as it pertains to air conditioning use in apartments in their province/city.

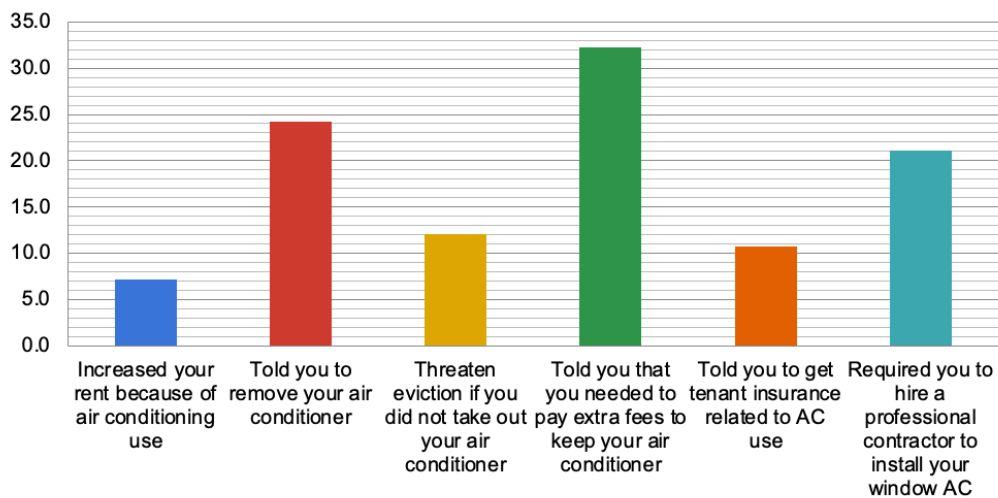
### Do you know your rights? N=445



## 13) Actions taken by the landlord

32% of landlords told tenants that they need to pay extra fees to keep their air conditioners, 24% of landlords told tenants to remove the AC.

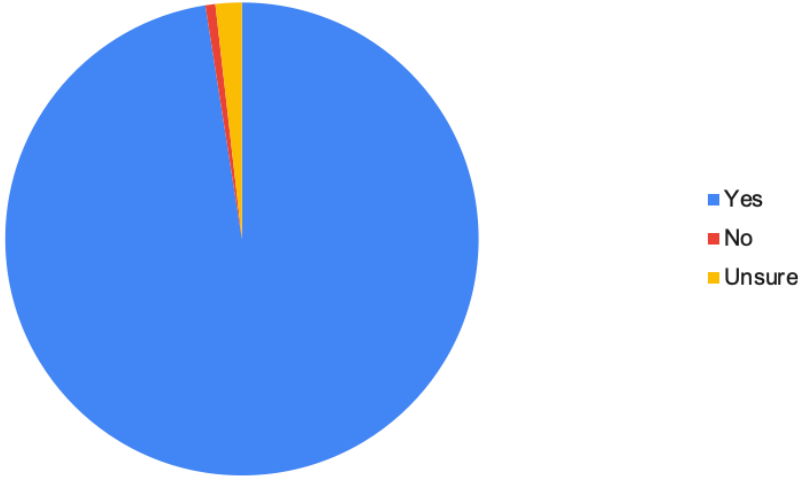
### Actions Taken by Landlord (N=223)



**14) Right to have cool apartments during summer**

98% of tenants feel that they should have the right to cool apartments during summer.

**Should Tenants Have the Right to Cool Apartments in the Summer? (N=445)**



# Member testimonials



## **ANDREA, BURNABY**

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I live with a roommate in a nanny suite, at the back of the landlord's house. It was sweltering in the heat, the night is hotter. The fan doesn't help, it just blows hot air. It's very uncomfortable, it's very hard to sleep. Always pouring sweat, fatigue, some heart palpitations. I tried to keep well hydrated, had to go a couple of times to the cooling centres, underground parking lots to stay cool. You can't sleep in the cooling spaces, you can just sit there for a few hours and you can't take your dog there. I had to send my dog for boarding. It's not good. In extreme temperatures, it made me more stiff as I have arthritis, I could hear a click sound from my fingers. My landlord was okay with the AC but I just can't afford it. I am on disability and I get \$1,300, my rent is \$1000.. I would probably have to buy an AC on my credit card and not wait for the government to do this.

My family member is 85 years old, there are no windows, no ventilation, he is trying to get an AC from the government.

## **SANDRA, CALGARY**

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For us, during summers, the landlord didn't adjust the thermostat, so it was very hot like 30 degrees. I went to the landlord to say that it's too hot because we couldn't adjust our own heat in the unit. Nothing changed. I went again, called up the company's emergency number and they finally shut off the furnace. The only way for me to cope with the heat was to blackout my room using curtains and constantly checking if it's getting cold so I can open my windows and curtains, it was isolating.

Since the time Avenue living took over our building, people's rent has been raised by \$735 a month. Given the rent gouging, how can people afford an AC? My rent comes due in January, we paid just ahead when Avenue living took over. There are fewer places that take dogs. It's going to be very difficult for me to find something given my health issues and the dog.

I am very concerned about people when they age, the quality of life people will have. I would get up at 3:30-4 am in the morning to take the dog for a walk because it gets hot in the day and then come back and try and sleep for sometime till such time it is still cold. I have a little AC unit but it jacks up the electricity bill, my hydro is separate. Using AC only at night in a room led to twice the bill I pay. I am trying to save for other things.

## **BERNADETTE, TORONTO**

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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. South facing, more heat. Curtains closed,

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 renovict 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.

## **SHELLEY, FREDERICTON**

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I developed multiple chemical sensitivity which changed my life. From a perfectly normal work life, this changed to me staying at home and not being able to work. My health got worse when COVID hit. I got COVID which affected my heart and now I can't live without air conditioning. I have a friend whose son has a rare health condition. Multiple doctors have said that they need AC but because they live in a unit owned by New Brunswick Housing, they can't have an AC. NB Housing doesn't allow its residents to install ACs. Regardless of whether the person has a health condition, they wouldn't allow it. So many tenants have been evicted just for this reason. I have lived in public housing on provincial assistance for about a year and a half and fortunately could move out because I got help from family and friends. This isn't fair especially for persons with disabilities. New Brunswick has the lowest amount of social assistance at \$760 per month. Today, a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,400. On top of that, there is no rent control! We are seeing extreme changes in the weather, New Brunswick is becoming hotter and therefore policies need to change too.





# ACORN's Demands

ACORN members demand the following actions to tackle the issue of climate and housing crisis:

## Local:

Cities must develop and implement a maximum heat bylaw for rental housing.

- Improvements to the city's tree canopy especially in low- and moderate-income tenant communities.
- Track heat-related deaths and illnesses.

## All levels of government:

- Provide free energy efficient air conditioners (Heat/ Cooling pumps) for low income community members, prioritising tenants with utilities outside their rent.

## Federal government:

- All green infrastructure retrofit partnerships and agreements from the CIB or CMHC must include:
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  - Rent controls
  - Formal tenant participation where independent tenant unions existing in the community and building receive resources to support tenants participating.
  - Perform a Benefit Scan so that unique potential local benefits (environmental, labour, community, tenant) are identified and included in the funding agreement.

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Canada Infrastructure Bank

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