

**Click/Hear Quick Take:**

# **ACCESS TO COOLING SURVEY**

September 2022



**Daily Bread**  
Food Bank

In a new, quick-take survey, as heat waves are increasing, Daily Bread Food Bank asked clients to share their experiences coping with summer heat. The results show that they are facing disproportionate difficulties with accessing cooling.

Over the course of this past summer, temperatures climbed [above 30 degrees Celsius](#) on 16 days, while evening temperatures did not drop below 20 to bring relief. The humidex reached over 40 degrees Celsius on several of those days. In a typical year, Toronto sees a dozen heat warnings, defined as consecutive days of daytime temperatures over 31 degrees Celsius and nighttime temperatures over 20 degrees. Researchers at the University of Toronto are predicting we could see closer to 30 such days by the end of the decade.

**Access to cooling**

40% of respondents do not have air conditioners at home. This is disproportionately low in comparison with the overall population; 85% of Toronto residents have portable or central air conditioning at home ([Statistics Canada, 2019](#)).

Respondents were more than 2.5 times as likely to not have any air conditioning at all compared to the general population in Toronto. They were also about half as likely to have central air conditioning and twice as likely to have portable air conditioning.

| <i>Do you have air conditioning in your home?</i> | <b>% Click/Hear respondents</b> | <b>% Households in Toronto<sup>1</sup></b> |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Have air conditioning                             | 60                              | 85   |
| Have central air conditioning                     | 34                              | 73   |
| Have portable air conditioning                    | 26                              | 12   |
| Have neither; rely on other forms of cooling      | 40                              | 15   |

85% reported they face some barrier in cooling their homes. Access and cost were two of the largest challenges.

When asked to identify the top barriers to keeping their homes cool, clients identified:

1. Not having air conditioning
2. Not being able to afford it
3. Fans which don't cool their homes enough

16% of respondents use fans and open windows to cool their homes.

Even those who have air conditioning described challenges. Those relying on portable air conditioners said only parts of their homes were cool enough to be comfortable.

The importance of access to cooling was identified through their comments:

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 38-10-0019-01 Air conditioners](#)

*"I bought my window air conditioner 21 years ago shortly after I moved into this apt. I worry that it will stop working & I now cannot afford to pay to buy & install (requires acrylic cut to size, etc.) a new air conditioner. I have a heart condition & really need working AC."*

Another client described the financial and bureaucratic difficulties faced while on social assistance:

*"I am on ODSP. I used my a/c so much in the last two years that it wouldn't start this year. My doctor sent a letter to ODSP in turn they submit it to the City of Toronto. The City of TO only gives a/c money every 4 YEARS...with global warming happening...what a joke for us on assistance."*

In the survey clients were asked to give further details about access to cooling in their comments. Comments included:

- *"I live in a basement. The temperature is not so hot in there but gets exhausting sometimes as there is no air flow given the vent is too small."*
- *"The air conditioning causes sickness to us so we can't really use that. We don't have a balcony or any normally opening windows or door that let in fresh air. The flat where we live is like a big oven in the summertime."*
- *"I was getting a bill under \$50 until the summer months when it went to \$150."*

Low incomes aggravated respondents' ability to cope with the heat. Both the cost of units and their installation proved a barrier to some. Others identified the challenge of installing air conditioning in rental units where air conditioners may be prohibited by landlords.

*"I had to buy a portable air conditioner after window units weren't allowed in my building any longer. It was a very expensive purchase, which is why I only have one for the living room. I tried to get some financial aid from ODSP, but they will only help if it is purchased after June, after it may be too hot and when the items are most expensive. You should be able to purchase one at any time of year if you meet their medical requirements."*

## **Comfort**

Clients were also asked to rate how comfortable their home was during a heat wave.

A number reported they were satisfied with their home cooling. Asked to rate their overall comfort, 37% said they were satisfied with their level of comfort (<7/10).

40% of survey respondents reported being uncomfortable at home during heat waves (>4/10).

*"I am extremely fortunate to be in a building with full A/C throughout the building. My last apartment, I was not so fortunate though. So, I do know what it is like to be stuck in the sweltering heat."*

## **Health**

[Age, poor physical health \(respiratory, cardiovascular, and cerebrovascular\) and poor mental health \(anxiety and depression\)](#) place populations at more risk of climate change-related health hazards. 30%

of those asked reported having symptoms of heat stress (exhaustion, sleeping problems, and concentration problems). A quarter of participants also reported an inability to complete daily tasks.

10% of participants reported a heat-related illness or the worsening of a pre-existing health condition. *"I was sweating profusely and had to change clothes several times in a day."*

### **Policy implications**

Still, the policy challenge of rising temperatures remains.

[Longer heat waves](#) and higher temperatures are particularly challenging for low-income people. With climate change, access to cooling one's home has become an essential argument. The [coroner's review of the 600 deaths during the 2021 heat wave in British Columbia](#) found that most people who died did not have adequate cooling in their homes.

The "[urban heat island](#)" effect can also have a substantial impact on exterior temperatures. University of Toronto researchers have identified a number of Toronto neighbourhoods where high temperatures and climate vulnerability may put residents at disproportionate risk. The identified communities include Parkdale, Humber River-Black Creek, and the Jane and Finch area — all places with a high portion of low-income residents.

As a result, some advocates are calling for maximum temperature regulations in Ontario. In August 2022, the Ontario Human Rights Commission [recommended](#) including air conditioning in provincial legislation as a vital service in line with heat, hot and cold water, electricity, and fuel.

This Rights-Based Approach is core to Daily Bread's mission, recognizing that access to sufficient resources is required to lead a dignified life.

In this August 2022 pilot of the new client panel program *Click/Hear*, 70 food bank users were surveyed.

*This report is part of Daily Bread's Advocacy Strategy, amplifying opportunities for active participation by people with lived experience in our advocacy work. Daily Bread uses a Rights-Based Approach that recognizes people as experts in their own lives and active participants in social change. The new Click/Hear monthly panel will amplify the voices of the people using food banks, asking about key, topical issues in their day-to-day lives.*