

# THE WAY WE LIVE

## EDMONTON'S PEOPLE PLAN

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The Quality of Life Needs & Priorities of Edmontonians  
Facing Social & Economic Barriers

Prepared by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

For the City of Edmonton, Community Services Department

November 30, 2009



# Executive Summary

The City of Edmonton is currently working on a 10-year plan – called *The Way We Live* – which will guide future development and improvement of services and programs that contribute to our health, safety and well being. As part of this process, the City contracted the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) to gather input into the plan from disadvantaged Edmontonians – those who face social, economic, cultural barriers to a good quality of life.

The ESPC hosted seven focused discussion groups in partnership with community agencies that serve disadvantaged Edmontonians, including seniors, youths, mental health clients, immigrants, and homeless or low-income Edmontonians. The ESPC also conducted a quality of life survey, which asked people to rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, a variety of components of quality of life.

Based on the results of the discussion groups and the survey, the following four areas have been identified as priorities for the improvement of the quality of life of disadvantaged Edmontonians:

- **Housing**

Housing is a dominant issue for the discussion group participants. Primary concerns include: the physical condition and quality of housing, the availability and affordability of housing, and issues surrounding emergency housing for the homeless.

The City could take action on this issue by taking measures to increase the supply of quality, affordable housing. Increasing the requirements for affordable units in new housing developments and redevelopments is one alternative.

- **Transportation**

Participants are concerned about Edmonton's transit service and roads. The adequacy and efficiency of transit service is the dominant concern in this category.

The City could take action on this issue by improving the route coverage, hours of operation and affordability of public transit. Disabled Edmontonians would also like to see improvements to the availability and affordability of DATS service.

- **Affordability**

Aside from housing and transportation affordability, the cost of recreation and educational opportunities are a barrier to participation for low income Edmontonians.

The City could address these issues by expanding the low income leisure access pass. Access to affordable educational opportunities, child care and after-school care could also be improved.

- **Safety**

Participants' are particularly concerned about the safety of their neighbourhoods and safety issues related to drug use.

The City could take action on this issue by expanding community-based safety initiatives and improving police presence with more foot patrols.

We would like to recognize that while all of the feedback received through this study is important and valuable, the City may not incorporate all issues or potential solutions identified. This is particularly true for the issues which are outside of its political jurisdiction. While the City cannot necessarily enact solutions to these problems directly, it is still in a position to advocate for its citizens with regards to these issues. The ultimate authority for implementing programs and policies rests with City Council.

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# Introduction

## Background

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The City of Edmonton is currently working on a 10-year plan – called *The Way We Live* – which will guide future development and improvement of services and programs that contribute to our health, safety and well being.

The planning process for *The Way We Live* has included research to determine the values and priorities of Edmonton residents, the results of which are summarized in the report entitled *Who We Are*. Based on the values and priorities identified, the City has identified seven key areas that contribute to quality of life in Edmonton. These categories are:

- Connectedness
- Safety
- Affordability
- Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure
- Parks & Open Space
- Arts, Culture & Heritage
- Attractiveness

The City of Edmonton is also conducting a broad-based consultation process to gather more information regarding the priorities of Edmontonians and their ideas regarding how quality of life in Edmonton can be improved. This feedback will be used to develop the 10-year plan.

## Purpose

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The purpose of this research project was to gather input from disadvantaged Edmontonians – those who face social, economic, cultural barriers to a good quality of life. These groups typically face barriers to participation in public consultation processes such as those being held by the City for *The Way We Live*. For this reason, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) was contracted by the City to gather feedback from these hard-to-reach residents. Through its work on issues of poverty and low income, the ESPC has developed strong connections with the non-profit sector in Edmonton, particularly with agencies that serve Edmontonians facing barriers.

This report uses the categories of focus already established in order to increase the ease of capturing the needs of vulnerable Edmontonians within the established framework of the plan for the City. Additional categories of focus were added as necessary to effectively communicate participant feedback.

## Use of the Results

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The results of this research have been delivered to the City of Edmonton. The staff of the Community Services department will be responsible for reviewing the information presented in the report and incorporating it into The Way We Live plan. We would like to recognize that while all of the feedback received through this study is important and valuable, the City may not incorporate all issues or potential solutions identified. This is particularly true for the issues which are outside of its political jurisdiction. While the City cannot necessarily enact solutions to these problems directly, it is still in a position to advocate for its citizens with regards to these issues. The ultimate authority for implementing programs and policies rests with City Council.

The comments and potential solutions presented in this report represent the opinions of the survey respondents and discussion group participants; they do not reflect the official position of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

## Methodology

In order to ensure that this study reached a broad cross-section of Edmontonians facing barriers as well as captured detail-rich information on their quality of life, the ESPC chose to conduct both a survey and focused discussion group sessions. The ESPC would like to thank all of the Edmontonians who filled out the survey and participated in the focused discussion groups. We would also like to thank our discussion group facilitators and host agencies, as well as the many Edmonton agencies that assisted us in distributing the quality of life survey.

### Focused Discussion Groups

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Seven focused discussion groups were conducted in partnership with Edmonton community agencies whose clients represent disadvantaged or vulnerable populations within the City. Participant groups included seniors, youths, mental health clients, immigrants, and homeless or low-income Edmontonians (see Appendix A for a list and description of discussion groups). Host agencies extended invitations to twenty of their clients and organized the venue for each focused discussion group; a total of 129 people participated in the discussion sessions.

The group facilitator led a discussion of issues important to quality of life in Edmonton (see Appendix A for a list of facilitators; Appendix B for the agenda of focused discussion groups). After participants worked as a group to highlight key issues from among the concerns raised in their discussion, informal voting was carried out to rank priorities. As time permitted within the two-hour schedule, participants were then invited to offer solutions to some of the problems they had brought up (see Appendix B for the discussion group agenda, and Appendix C for a complete record of focused discussion group discussions).

Several major concerns and solutions discussed fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction. While facilitators did their best to steer conversation towards municipal issues, participants did not always have the ability to distinguish which level of government is responsible for their most pressing concerns.

### Quality of Life Survey

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The ESPC designed a survey to measure how disadvantaged Edmontonians rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, a variety of components of quality of life. The quality of life components used in the survey were based upon the broad categories used by the City in its consultation process for The Way We Live (see Introduction, page 1). (A copy of the survey is available in Appendix D.)

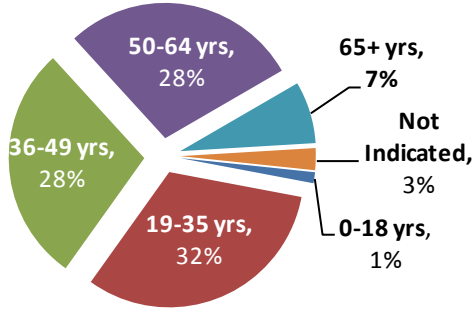
The Quality of Life Survey was conducted from Thursday, October 22 to Friday, November 20, 2009; it was distributed in both paper and electronic form through the ESPC website and Edmonton agencies who work with Edmontonians facing social, economic and cultural barriers. 229 Edmontonians responded to the survey both online and by mail.

Focused discussion group participants were invited to complete the Quality of Life Survey as well. Because the majority of participants took the survey with them to complete at a later time, the number of surveys completed by focused discussion group participants cannot be determined.

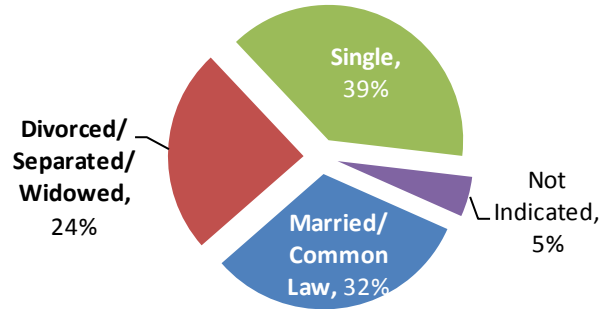
**Demographics**

Two-thirds of respondents (62%) are female and approximately one third (36%) are male; one respondent was transgender. The majority of respondents are between the ages of 19 and 64 years (Chart 1). Most respondents (39%) are single (Chart 2).

**Chart 1: Age Group**



**Chart 2: Marital Status**

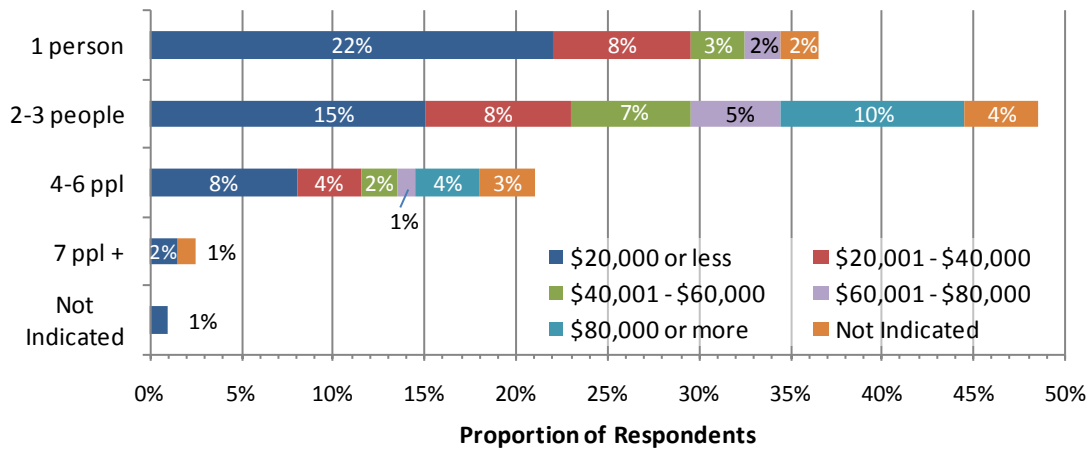


**Household Characteristics**

The largest proportion of respondents (45.2%) live in households of 2 to 3 people; just over one third (35%) live alone. Seventeen people living alone indicate that they live in a group home, a shelter, or transitional housing. Of those who do not live alone, two-fifths (39%) live with a spouse or partner; over one-third (36%) live with one or more children; one-in-ten (9%) live with friends; 8% live with other family; and, 3% live with their parents.

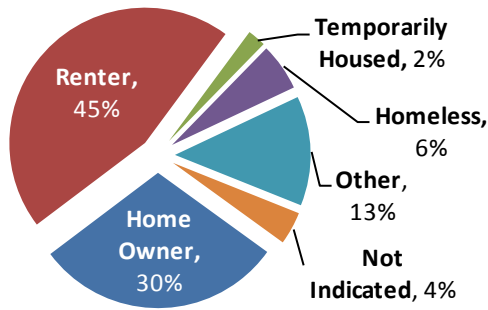
Just under half of respondents (46.5%) report a household income of \$20,000 or less; one in five (19.3%) earned between \$20,001 and \$40,000 (Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Household Size & Income**

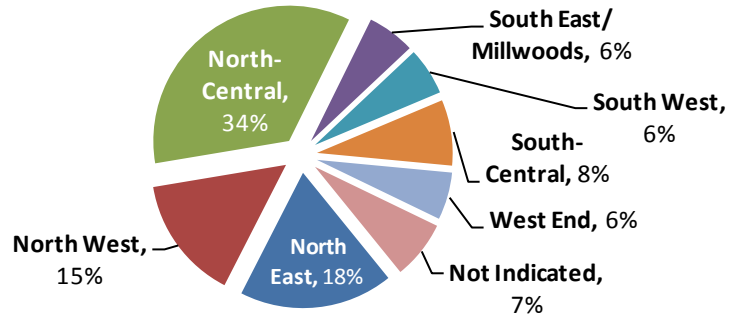


Most respondents (45%) are renters; six percent are homeless (Chart 4). Two in three (68%) of respondents live on the North side of Edmonton, one fifth (19%) live on the South side, and, six percent live in the West End (Chart 5).

**Chart 4: Housing Situation**



**Chart 5: Area of Residence**



***Aboriginal People & Immigrants***

28% of respondents (63 individuals) report having Aboriginal ancestry. Just four survey respondents are recent immigrants; one additional respondent identified as a landed immigrant.<sup>1</sup> This underrepresentation of the immigrant community is unfortunate. However, the focused discussion group at the Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants provided good insight into the needs and concerns of Edmonton immigrants (Refer to page 36 & Appendix C).

***Health***

Over half (55%) of respondents report having good or very good health; 15% report having poor or very poor health.

***A Note on the Calculation of the Quality of Life Rating Results***

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, 22 quality of life elements. To determine the priority of each element the importance and satisfaction ranking were averaged and the results were plotted on a graph. The overall average importance and overall average satisfaction for all 22 elements was calculated to determine the priority of each element in relation to the others (see Chart 7 on page 4 for an example).

The satisfaction rating results are also presented for each of the 22 quality of life elements. The results have been condensed from a scale of 1 to 10 into three categories: unsatisfied (ratings 1-4), neutral (ratings 5-6), and satisfied (ratings 7-10).

***Qualitative Survey Comments***

Some survey respondents wrote answers to the open-ended questions in the survey (Appendix D). A summary of all qualitative responses is provided in Appendix E.

<sup>1</sup> This underrepresentation of recent immigrants is likely in part a language barrier issue, as the survey was only available in English. It is also possible that immigrants who have lived in Canada for longer than 5 years did not identify themselves. The ESPC made multiple attempts to reach this population through its partner agencies who work with Edmonton’s immigrant community.

# Top Priorities

Based on the results of both the survey and the focused discussion groups, we have identified the following four top priority areas:

## Housing

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Aside from the affordability aspect of housing, this issue is not included in the City's key quality of life categories (see page 1). However, because housing was a prominent theme in all of the focused discussion sessions, we have chosen to highlight it as a distinct quality of life issue in this report. The primary concerns related to housing include: the physical condition and quality of housing, the availability and affordability of housing, and issues surrounding emergency housing for the homeless. (See page 8 for a detailed review of the housing-related concerns of Edmontonians facing barriers.)

## Transportation

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Transportation is a key issue for disadvantaged Edmontonians. Both the survey respondents and discussion group participants are concerned about the City's transit service and roads. The adequacy and efficiency of transit service is the dominant concern in this category. (See pages 11 and 14 for a detailed review the transportation concerns of Edmontonians facing barriers.)

## Affordability

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Affordability is another key issue for Edmontonians facing social and economic barriers. Aside from concerns with housing and transportation affordability, the cost of recreation and educational opportunities are a barrier to participation for low income Edmontonians. Income supports are a key issue related to affordability. (See page 14 for a detailed review of the affordability concerns of disadvantaged Edmontonians.)

## Safety

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Safety is also a dominant concern for Edmontonians facing barriers. In particular, people are concerned about the safety of their neighbourhoods and safety issues related to drug use. (See page 18 for a detailed review of the safety concerns of disadvantaged Edmontonians.)

The priorities raised by survey respondents and discussion group participants are slightly different.<sup>2</sup> For example, discussion group participants identified active lifestyle, public health and leisure issues as a primary area of concern, while the survey results identify this category as a key strength of life in Edmonton. To view the breakdown of top priorities identified through the survey and discussions, see pages 6 and 8.

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<sup>2</sup> This difference is likely a result of the structured nature of the survey, which limited and focused the respondents' answers to the categories included in the survey. The discussion groups were more loosely structured and allowed for sharing and creative discussion, allowing participants to identify concerns and ideas outside of the structure used in the survey.

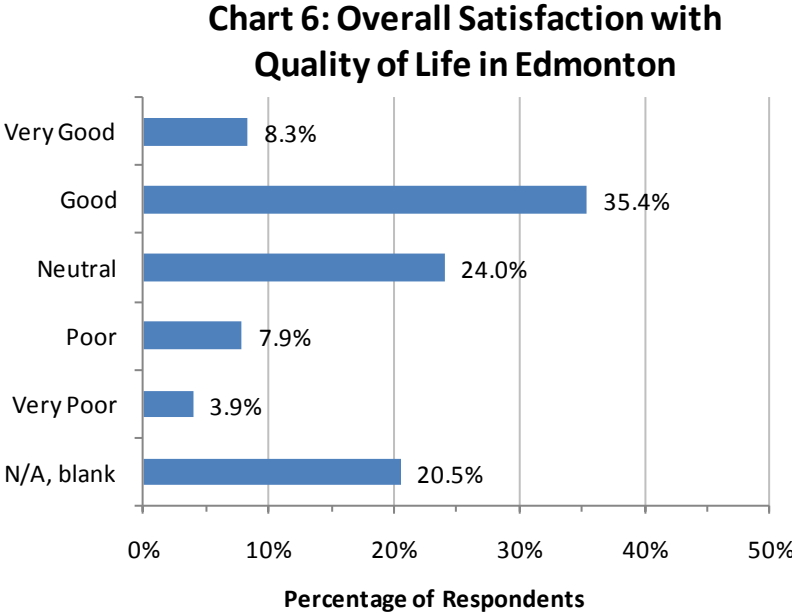


# Survey & Focused Discussion Results

## Overall Results

### Survey

On average, survey respondents rated their overall quality of life in Edmonton at 6.4 on a scale of 1 to 10. As shown in Chart 6, the majority of respondents (59.4%) rated their quality of life as either good or average (neutral). Over one in ten (11.8%) rated their quality of life as poor or very poor. One in five (20.5%) of respondent did not rate their overall quality of life.



**Note:** Respondents were asked to rate their quality of life on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = Very Poor; 10 = Very Good). The result in the above chart we calculated by combining results of the 10 ratings into 5 groups of two (e.g. ratings 1 and 2 = Very Poor).

Based on survey respondents’ ratings of the importance of – and their satisfaction with – each of the 22 quality of life elements included in the survey (see Appendix D), the following categories have been identified as key primary areas of improvement (Chart 7):

- Affordability;
- Safety; and,
- Transportation.

Other categories identified as secondary areas of improvement include:

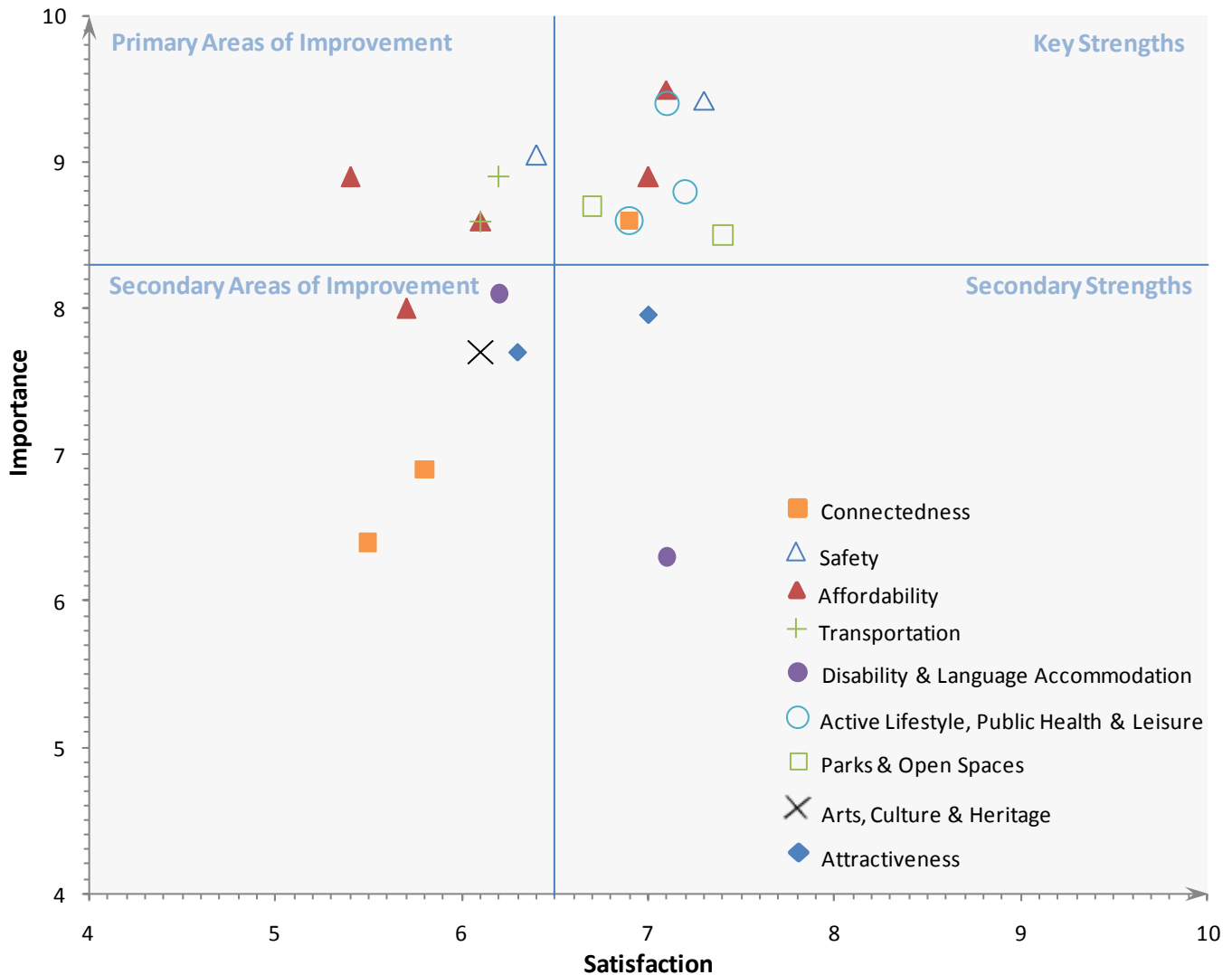
- Connectedness;
- Disability & Language Accommodation;
- Arts, Culture & Heritage; and,
- Attractiveness.

Categories that clearly fall within the key strengths of life in Edmonton include:

- Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure; and,
- Parks & Open Spaces.

A more detailed breakdown of each of the major categories is provided in the following sections (pages 9 to 36).

**Chart 7: Overall Importance versus Satisfaction**



**Note:** The quadrant axes for this chart, and throughout the report, are set at 6.5 (average satisfaction rating) and 8.3 (average importance rating).<sup>3</sup>

**Scale:** 1 = Not important / Very unsatisfied and 10 = Very important / Very satisfied

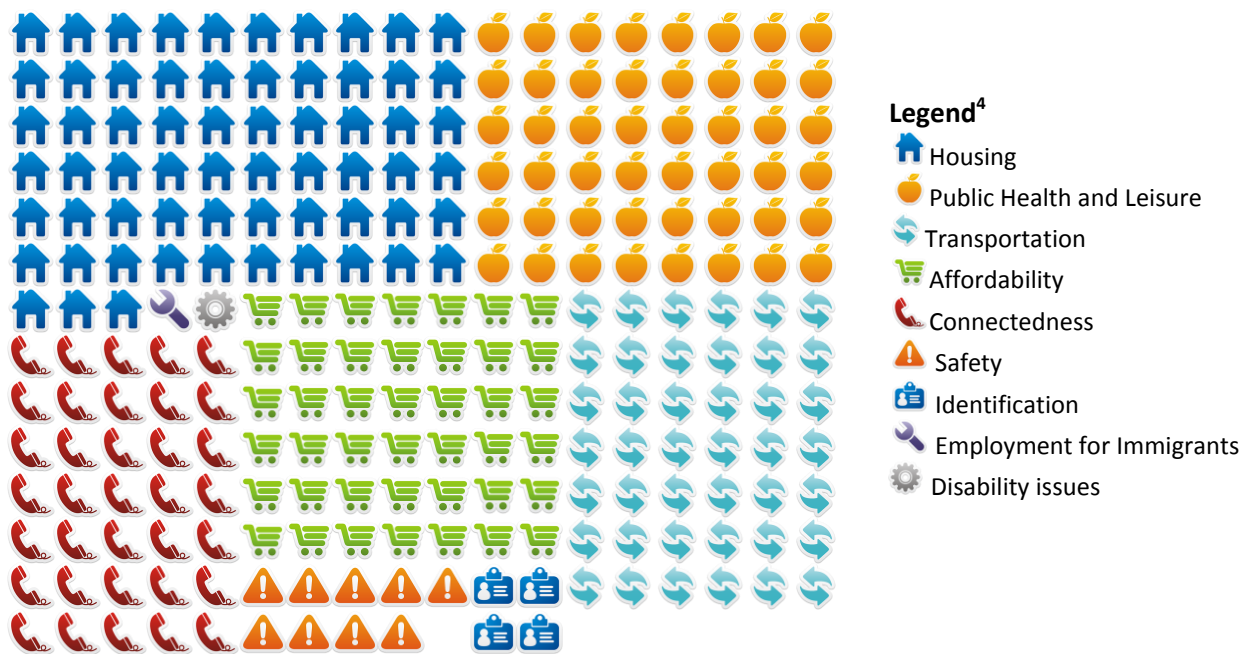
<sup>3</sup> The quadrant method adapted from method used in City of Edmonton 2009 Citizen Satisfaction Survey.

## Focused Discussions

While the focused discussion groups brought together seven very different groups of Edmontonians, several issues were prioritized by all groups consistently. Housing and transportation themes stood out most prominently in all discussions. Following this, concerns related to affordability, safety, and health and recreation were strong. All focused discussion groups raised issues surrounding connectedness and the availability of services in the community; while the same connectedness priorities were not highlighted across many groups, unique priorities fell within this common theme area.

Figure 1 provides a representation of high priorities chosen by the seven focused discussion groups. Each group was asked to choose priority issues that arose in their discussion. They were then asked to rank these priorities by vote. For the purposes of this illustration, priorities which received votes from less than half of a group’s participants were discarded.

**Figure 1: Focused Discussion Group Priorities**



Some groups gave high priority to more than one issue within a theme area; they may have decided to keep affordable childcare and affordability of food and clothing as separate priorities, for example. Symbols are used to depict the product of the number of priorities in a theme area and the number of groups who chose priorities in that theme area.

In order to depict the relative priority of each issue, we have multiplied the number of priorities identified in a category by the number of groups which identified priorities in the category. For example, nine priorities related to housing were brought up across seven groups; sixty-three houses are portrayed on the illustration. Three groups each prioritized one safety issue, for a total of three priorities. Nine safety symbols are represented. For a complete list of the priorities used to compile this illustration, refer to Appendix F.

<sup>4</sup> Graphics obtained under the conditions of a Free License from <http://dryicons.com/>

## Housing

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Housing is not one of the original quality of life categories identified by the City (see page 1); the issue of housing is only represented in the City's affordability category. However, because housing was a dominant issue in all of the focused discussion sessions, we have chosen to highlight it as a distinct category in this report.

### *Focused Discussion Comments*

Housing was the only issue prioritized by every focused discussion group. Discussion covered both emergency housing options (shelters) and low income housing. Many housing concerns which fall outside municipal jurisdiction were also expressed.

#### ***Housing Concerns: Municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Cost of housing**  
Many participants are concerned about the cost of housing in Edmonton. Particular issues identified by the discussion groups include: the cost of home maintenance; and, the expense of damage deposits for renters, which can be a significant barrier to getting housing.
- **Accessibility of housing**  
Participants indicated that there is a lack of affordable housing for single people, youth, and seniors. Others noted that there are few affordable housing options for pet owners.
- **Quality of Housing**  
Some discussion group participants are concerned that affordable housing units are often poor quality and susceptible to infestations (e.g. bed bugs).
- **Emergency housing**  
Participants suggest that there are barriers to accessing emergency housing for certain groups, such as families and abused men. They are also concerned that there are no shelters in the city with 24 hour access; this is a barrier for people working night shifts.
- **Flexible Housing Options**  
Some participants are concerned regarding the lack of options for people who choose to camp rather than live in shelters.

#### ***Housing Concerns: Non-Municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Accessibility of housing**  
Participants who have experienced homelessness indicated that security checks are a barrier to securing subsidized units through Capital Region Housing; it is difficult to maintain a clean record living on the street.
- **Access to affordable housing**  
Participants are concerned about the long wait time to get into housing and the inadequate number of low income housing units being constructed. They are also concerned that the funding designated to homelessness has been used up.
- **Housing Affordability**  
Participants are concerned about the lack of restrictions on the dollar amount of rent increases.

- **Tenant Rights/Landlord Responsibilities**

Participants are concerned that tenants are inadequately protected by landlord-tenant legislation; some feel at risk of being evicted or taken advantage of by their landlords. Participants in the seniors' discussion group, in particular, expressed anxiety about abusive landlords and the difficulty of getting repairs done in their rental units.

## *Proposed Solutions*

### ***Housing Solutions: Municipal Jurisdiction***

Participants offered a variety of solutions to some of the housing problems which fall under municipal jurisdiction:

- Increase the supply of designated low income housing units. This could be done by offering incentives to developers.
- Improve building regulations to help increase quality of affordable housing units.
- Explore the use of churches both for temporary night time shelter and daytime drop-in throughout the City.
- Reorganize the current Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board to create separate offices for landlords and tenants so that tenants can access a support system focused on their needs.
- Designate areas of the city (e.g. empty lots) for camping, with water and restroom services provided, for people who prefer to live this way.
- Use empty lots to set up inexpensive housing units similar to the barrack-style portable units used in logging camps.

### ***Housing Solutions: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

The following proposed solutions relate to housing concerns which fall outside of municipal jurisdiction:

- Create more government assistance programs, such as rent supplements or home ownership programs. Re-instate the Homelessness and Eviction Prevention fund.
- Improve the quality and conditions of emergency shelters.
- Create more emergency housing for groups that do not have easy access to current facilities, including: youth; abused men and their children; and, families.
- Improve rent control legislation; participants suggested limiting annual increases to a certain percentage.
- Increase the frequency and effectiveness of health inspections of affordable housing units.

# Transportation

## Survey Results

Survey respondents identified transportation issues as a primary area of improvement (Chart 8).

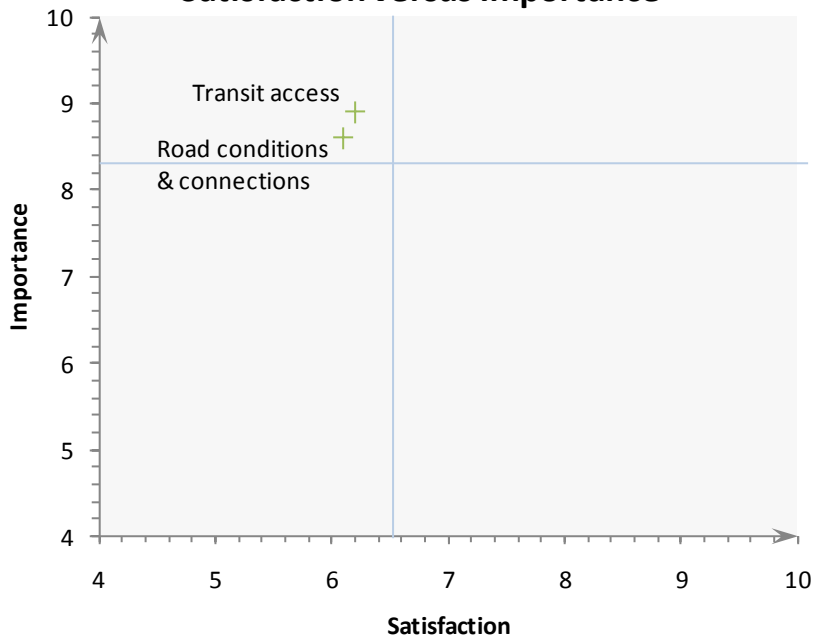
### 1) Access to Public Transit

Nearly one half of respondents (48.9%) indicated that they are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with Edmonton’s public transit system (Chart 9).

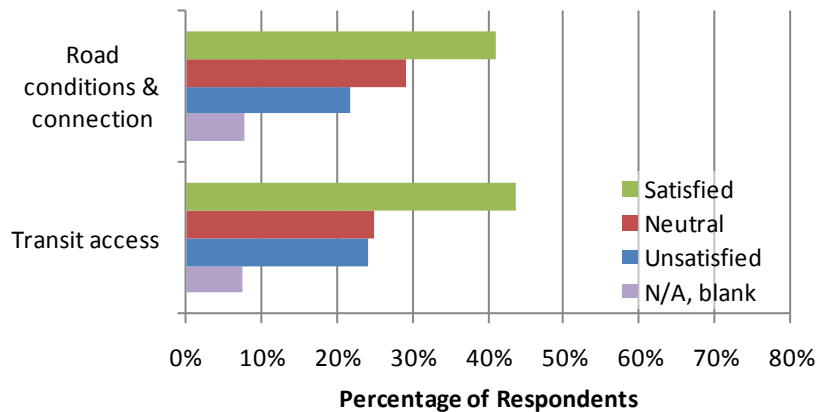
### 2) Road Conditions & Connections

Over one in two (51.1%) survey respondents indicated that they are less than satisfied with Edmonton’s road system (Chart 9).

### Chart 8: Transportation, Satisfaction versus Importance



### Chart 9: Satisfaction with Transportation



## **Survey Comments**

Forty-three written survey responses discuss transportation issues that are important to or reduce quality of life. Public transit is the primary theme in this category; inadequate public transit creates problems for Edmontonians who rely on this system. Residents would like extended service hours, more frequent route schedules, wider route coverage, and an expansion of the LRT system. Respondents also mentioned that courtesy from transit operators and safety on all transit vehicles is important.

Poor road conditions including unsafe traffic, congestion, and poor road maintenance, make driving difficult. The availability of parking is a problem, especially downtown. Several respondents raised concerns over Edmonton's lack of low income transportation options, including inadequate bike paths. Others feel that poor road signage makes it difficult for them to get around the City.

## ***Focused Discussion Comments***

Transportation was ranked as a high priority issue by six of the seven discussion groups. Discussion of transportation focused mostly on public transit but also dealt with road safety and parking. Concerns identified by participants include:

- **Transit schedules**  
Participants indicated that transit schedules do not always meet their needs. Lack of 24 hour service (in particular for people working night shifts) and weekend bus service are particular concerns.
- **Transit coverage**  
Participants are concerned that public transit does not serve a number of areas they need access to, in particular for those who work in industrial parks and outlying communities (such as Nisku). In addition, those who do not drive (e.g. seniors) have difficulty accessing areas with big box retailers. Some participants indicated that bus connections to certain parts of the city lead to long travel times, or that wait times are too long in some neighbourhoods.
- **Transit security**  
Participants who use transit are concerned about safety on the buses and LRT, as well as at transit centres.
- **Transit information services**  
Some participants indicated that transit schedules can be difficult to interpret, and are not always accurate.
- **Transit personnel**  
Some participants are concerned that transit operators are inconsistent in their quality of service to customers; this was a particular concern for seniors.
- **Transit affordability**  
Some participants indicated that the cost of public transit is unaffordable. It should be noted, however, that affordability was not the main concern related to public transit. Rather, participants were mainly concerned with quality and extent of transit service. (For more feedback on transit affordability from the survey and focused discussion groups, see "Affordability" on page 14.)
- **DATS**  
Participants who use the DATS system indicate that the system does not always meet their needs. In particular, they are concerned about overloaded DATS vehicle schedules; long wait times for service; and, the inability to use AISH ETS passes for DATS service. They are also concerned that companions required by DATS passengers (e.g. for medical appointments) cannot travel for free.

- **Bus services for schools**  
Some participants indicated that bus service to schools for older students is inadequate.
- **Road maintenance**  
Participants are concerned about the condition of Edmonton's roads and the consistency of winter road cleaning across the City.
- **Parking**  
Discussion participants are concerned about the expense of parking and the difficulty of finding spots in the downtown core. They also indicated that there is a lack of handicapped parking at City and government buildings, and that these spaces are not well patrolled.
- **Road signs**  
Some participants feel that there are not enough street name signs, and that the current signs are too small or hidden by other objects.
- **Road safety**  
Discussion participants indicated that they feel less safe driving in the City now, and are concerned that road development has not kept up with the volume of traffic and expansion of the City.
- **Pedestrian safety**  
Participants are concerned about the safety of pedestrians; bikers on the sidewalks and short street crossing times were given as particular issues.
- **Taxi services**  
Some participants indicated that wait times for cabs are long late at night or during the winter.

### *Proposed Solutions*

Twenty-six survey respondents suggested ways that transportation issues could be resolved. A number of solutions were also proposed in the focused discussion groups.

#### ***Transportation Solutions: Municipal Jurisdiction***

- Create a low income bus pass, and a low income DATS pass. Make it easier to find places to buy all types of bus passes.
- Expand the LRT system and the geographic coverage of bus routes.
- Offer 24-hour service on key routes, and increase frequency night service by using smaller buses.
- DATS-specific suggestions include: implementing the Dial-a-bus system; and, using smaller vehicles to allow for a larger fleet.
- Improve security on the LRT.
- Install benches at all bus stops.
- Provide bus services for all schools, not just the youngest children.
- Provide funding for service agencies to drive clients to places with limited public transit access.
- Improve road conditions through measures to decrease congestion and expedite snow removal.
- Increase the number of bike paths throughout the City, and provide bike racks on all buses.

#### ***Transportation Solutions: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

Some participants suggested that Greyhound bus service should be maintained so people can travel to communities outside Edmonton.



## Affordability

### Survey Results

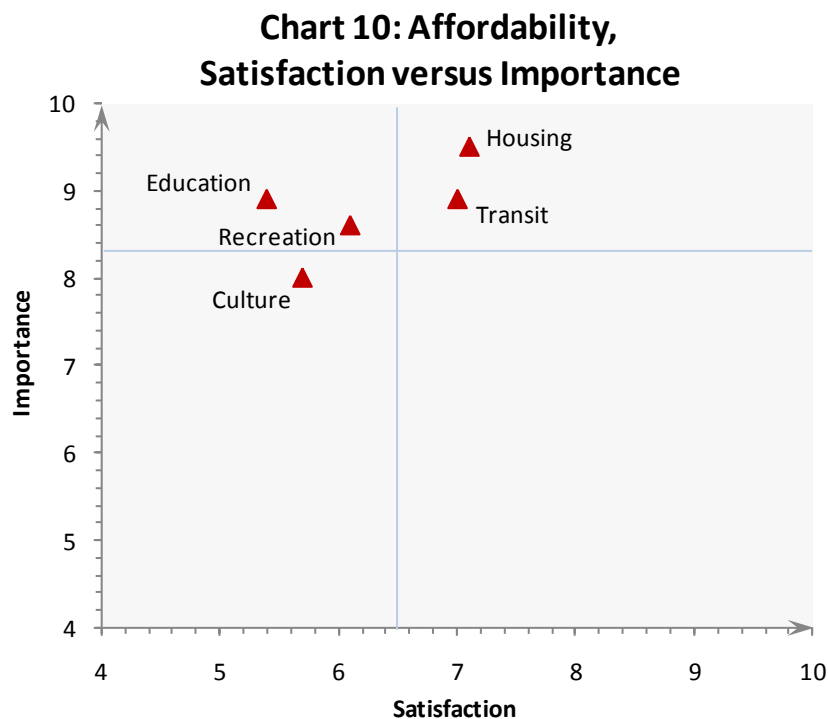
The category of affordability represents both strengths and weaknesses of quality of life in Edmonton. Two quality of life elements related to affordability are rated as key strengths (Chart 10):

1) **Affordability of Housing**

Affordable housing is rated as the most important element of quality of life by survey respondents (Chart 7). Over half (57.2%) of respondents are satisfied with their ability to afford their housing (Chart 11). However, one in five respondents (22.3%) are clearly concerned with the poor affordability of their shelter. Housing affordability was given greater priority by the discussion groups (see page 8).

2) **Affordability of Transit**

Over sixty percent of respondents were satisfied with the affordability of transit<sup>5</sup> (Chart 11). However, many expressed a concern regarding the effectiveness of transit service (see page 11). The prioritization of transit service over affordability is consistent between the survey and the discussion groups.



Two other affordability factors are rated as primary areas for improvement (Chart 10):

1) **Affordability of Education**

Over half (56.3%) of respondents are either unsatisfied or neutral about the affordability of educational opportunities in Edmonton (Chart 11).

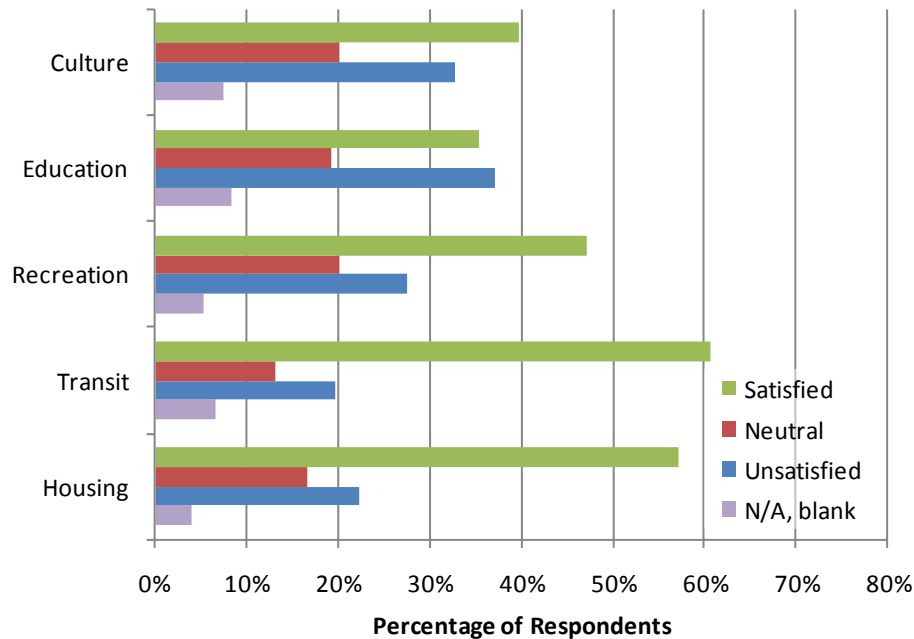
<sup>5</sup> Survey respondents were asked to rate how affordable they felt transit was for them (see Appendix B). As such, the results cannot be interpreted as a rating of satisfaction with the cost of transit. For example, a person may be able to afford to pay the fare, but may still feel that the cost of service is too expensive.

## 2) Affordability of Recreation

Just under one half of respondents (47.6%) indicate that they are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with the affordability of recreation in Edmonton (Chart 11).

The affordability of cultural events and festivals is a secondary area for improvement (Chart 10). Over one in two respondents (52.8%) are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with the affordability of cultural events and festivals in the City (Chart 11); the cost of such events can be a significant barrier to participation.

**Chart 11: Satisfaction with Affordability**



### **Survey Comments**

Seventy-eight written survey responses comment on how quality of life in Edmonton is directly related to affordability. Participants feel strongly that living essentials such as food, clothing, childcare, and utilities must be affordable. Seventeen respondents stated that their quality of life is reduced by a lack of affordable housing. Income supports must match living expenses in order to make life affordable. There are not enough employment options that provide Edmontonians with an adequate income, especially if they are supporting a family. High costs of transportation, health benefits, education, recreation, entertainment, and education make life unaffordable.

### **Focused Discussion Comments**

Issues related to affordability were prioritized by four of the seven groups. The remaining three groups discussed affordability in relation to these other topic areas but did not directly prioritize affordability. Discussion of the affordability of life in Edmonton raised concerns related to income and employment and touched on other issue areas including transportation, housing, recreation, and education.

### **Affordability Concerns: Municipal Jurisdiction**

- **Living Essentials**

Participants stated that clothing, transit, and other essentials are unaffordable, and items which are required by some (for example, disability aids) are too expensive.

- **Communication services**  
Participants are concerned about rising prices of phone services, including payphones. They noted that it is difficult to find working public telephones.
- **Recreation**  
There are not enough recreation dollars for youth, and sports are too pricey to play. More affordable organized recreation would mean less youth crime.
- **Financial education**  
Participants who are low-income requested help learning how to manage their money.
- **Housing**  
Affordable housing is needed, and in safer areas of the City.

### ***Affordability Concerns: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Living essentials**  
Participants described the challenge of finding healthy, inexpensive food. Also, the cost of a drivers license or other ID (which is necessary for accessing other services) is prohibitive.
- **Establishing credit**  
Getting bank accounts and cell phones is difficult without good credit. Participants report that they have to resort to places like Money Mart, where money is lost to service charges.
- **Minimum wage**  
Participants are concerned that Alberta's minimum wage is not high enough to maintain a decent quality of life.
- **Clawbacks**  
Clawbacks on child tax credit and maintenance payments are a concern for some vulnerable Edmontonians.
- **Income Supports**  
Many people do not receive income support; they are not eligible for EI, Social Services, or other supports. Newly arrived immigrants described a need for more financial support. Participants also felt there are too many inconsistencies among different types of income supplements. Many income supports (including maternity leave) do not provide enough to live on, and it is necessary to have access to other services in order to survive. Returning to work even part-time can lead to the loss of a portion of one's income supplement.
- **Education**  
Both adults and children would like more affordable education options. Student financing is too low for upgrading or getting an education, and school fees and lunch fees take too much out of the monthly budget. Parents have to pay for extra-curricular learning outside of what the school provides; while some inner city schools do a good job of finding resources to cover these fees and activities, not all schools are able.
- **Employment Concerns**  
Participants described a large gap between cost of living and income. Minimum wage is not enough to live on considering current living expenses. With regards to job-finding services, it is too hard to meet the requirements of existing programs, and not enough programs exist. Discussion group participants feel that a focus on job-specific skills would make this type of program more useful.

In addition, existing programs focus on full-time work, not part-time work, and do not have leeway for people who are unable to work full-time or even part-time on a regular basis.

Participants are concerned about the availability of jobs, especially for Edmontonians not able to participate in infrastructure-related jobs (trades, manual labour). It is difficult to find clerical or office work; more jobs should be created for people who lack education, training, or experience. It was felt that some employers discriminate in hiring on the basis of age, ethnicity, and experience.

It is difficult to find work that allows people to spend time with their family, or that adapts to physical or health-related limitations. Employment programs often do not cater to individuals with these needs.

- **Housing**

Participants expressed that housing-related expenses such as damage deposit and utilities are too expensive.

## *Solutions*

Thirty-seven survey respondents described factors that would make life more affordable. A number of solutions were also proposed in the focused discussion groups.

### ***Affordability Solutions: Municipal Jurisdiction***

- Provide affordable arts, culture, and recreation opportunities. (See “Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure Solutions: Municipal Jurisdiction” on page 23 for related suggestions.)
- Encourage developers to build affordable housing in a variety of areas around the city.

### ***Affordability Solutions: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Living Essentials**

Make the food voucher system more accessible, and provide more hot lunch programs in schools. Expand access to free or low-cost childcare throughout the City.

- **Income Supports**

Adjust income supports frequently to cost of living so that relative income does not decline. Provide funds from social assistance so that costs match housing and education expenses.

- **Housing**

Seventeen survey respondents called specifically for safer, affordable housing options, especially for families. They would like better rent control and more purpose-built affordable housing. (See “Housing”, page 8, for more solutions related to housing affordability.)

- **Employment Opportunities**

Low-income or unemployed Edmontonians would like to have sweat equity opportunities that would provide money and/or necessary goods and services, including housing. It was also suggested that economic development could create more opportunities. Industries to process raw resources locally would create new jobs.

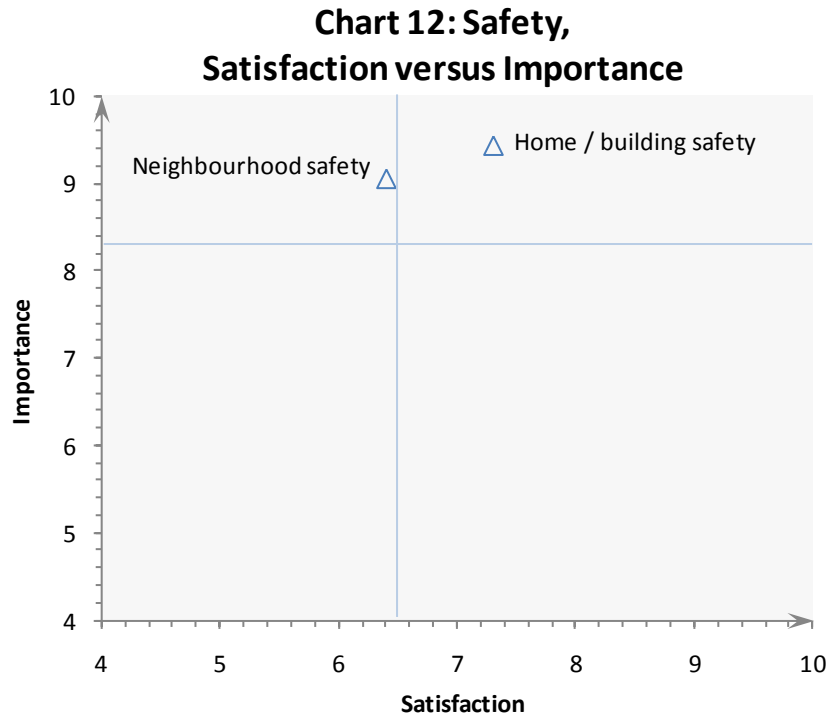
- **Employment Options for Youth**

Youth would like employment opportunities that enable them to sustain themselves without the aid of extra support services. Employers could be educated about what youth have to offer them, and work experience programs could help youth gain valuable skills.

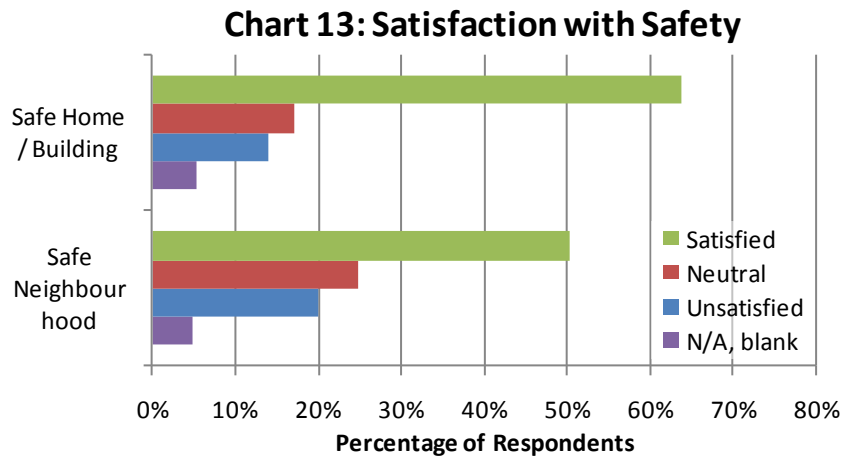
## Safety

### Survey Results

Respondents rated neighbourhood safety as a primary area requiring improvement (Chart 12). Half of respondents were less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with the safety of their neighbourhoods (Chart 13).



Safety within the homes or buildings people live in is rated as a key strength of life in Edmonton (Chart 12). Two-thirds of respondents (63.8%) are satisfied with their sense of safety at home (Chart 13).



## **Survey Comments**

Seventy-two written survey responses related safety to quality of life in Edmonton. Respondents feel that police presence (regular, visible patrols; quick response times) in their neighbourhoods and the downtown area is crucial but currently insufficient. They value neighbourhood safety, especially for children and seniors. Not all citizens feel safe in their neighbourhoods; this is especially a concern at night. Within “safe” neighbourhoods, not all respondents feel safe within their buildings, due to both crime and building maintenance. Eradication of crime and drug use is very important; prostitution, gangs and drug use are currently a problem. Transit safety and response time of emergency services are also an issue.

## **Focused Discussion Comments**

- **Road safety**

Participants expressed many concerns about road safety and called for more speed bumps; more enforcement of speed limits in neighbourhoods, school zones, and playgrounds; and lower speed limits in some of these areas. Related to this, parents are concerned about road and sidewalk safety for children walking to school.

- **Neighbourhood safety**

In many parts of Edmonton, participants feel that it is not safe to walk around after dark because of drug dealers and gang activity. Participants also feel unsafe due to panhandlers in areas of the City.

A lack of safety for vulnerable residents may lead to isolation. Some seniors are scared to go outside; they do not have a sense of security or safety on the streets, especially after dark.

- **Public transit safety**

Many residents feel that public transit safety, whether riding transit or waiting at bus stops and transit centres, is very low. Concerns were voiced regarding people loitering, eating, and sleeping around bus shelters. One participant remarked that he had been a police officer in Edmonton for 30 years but does not feel safe at some transit centres.

- **Police presence**

Many participants feel there is not an adequate police presence on the streets, especially at night. They believe it is most effective to have foot or bicycle patrols in the downtown area. There is concern that police cover large areas and are spread too thin, and response times are too slow as a result. There is also a need for more neighbourhood police stations which are open longer hours.

Participants expressed different experiences with accountability of police and security officials. Some participants described discrimination in policing and police misconduct. Young people feel that police and security guards have poor attitudes towards them. Homeless residents reported that security personnel in public places keep an unfair close eye on homeless people.

- **Contacting Emergency Services**

Payphones do not work in some areas or are impossible to find. This is a problem for contacting emergency services. Long wait times for buses or taxis do not help; it can take a long time to get out of an unsafe area or situation.

- **Safe retreats for gang-involved citizens**

There are no safe retreats for gang-involved citizens in the community. They may be denied help by existing service providers because of the threat they pose.

## *Solutions*

The following suggestions for improving the safety of Edmonton and its neighbourhoods were received from focused discussion group participants and survey respondents:

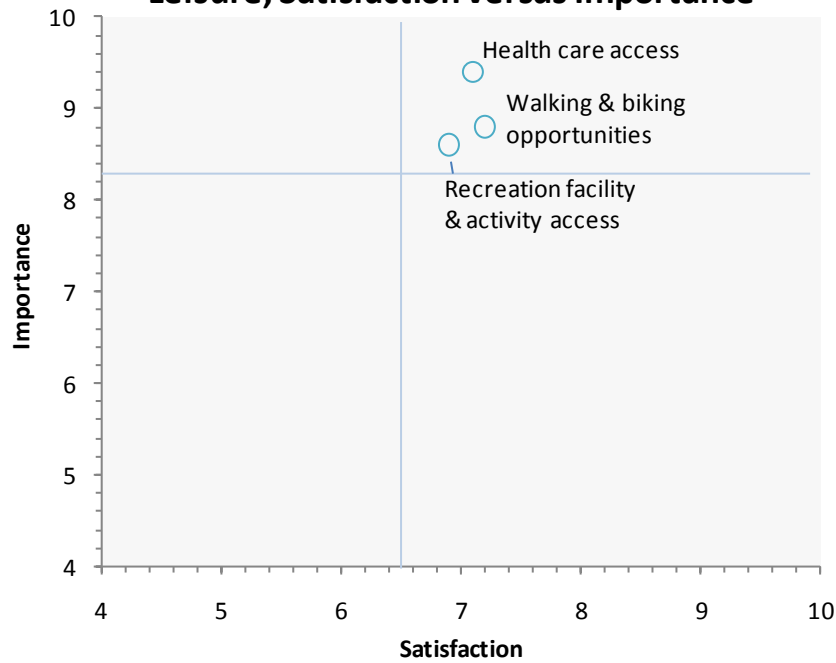
- **Road safety, Children's safety**  
Increase police patrols in school zones; lower speed limits in school zones and neighbourhoods.
- **Downtown safety**  
Develop a better strategy to address panhandling that is both mindful of the concerns of those being panhandled and those who are panhandling. Provide security for people who spend most of their time on the streets by creating a friendly police presence.
- **Police presence**  
Increase foot patrols in the downtown area.
- **Neighbourhood Safety**  
Increase police presence in neighbourhoods; improve safety on walking trails.
- **Police accountability**  
Increase measures which provide transparency of police actions to the public. One participant suggested video equipment to record police actions.
- **Crime Reduction**  
Institute a drug abuse hotline as a means of letting Edmontonians help law enforcement address drug issues.
- **Preventative measures for women in unsafe situations**  
Create more safe havens for women and children. Provide transportation for abused women to reach emergency housing and for them and their families to continue accessing other necessary services or places of employment/education.
- **Safe retreats for gang-involved citizens**  
Create places for families, women and children leaving gangs.

## Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure

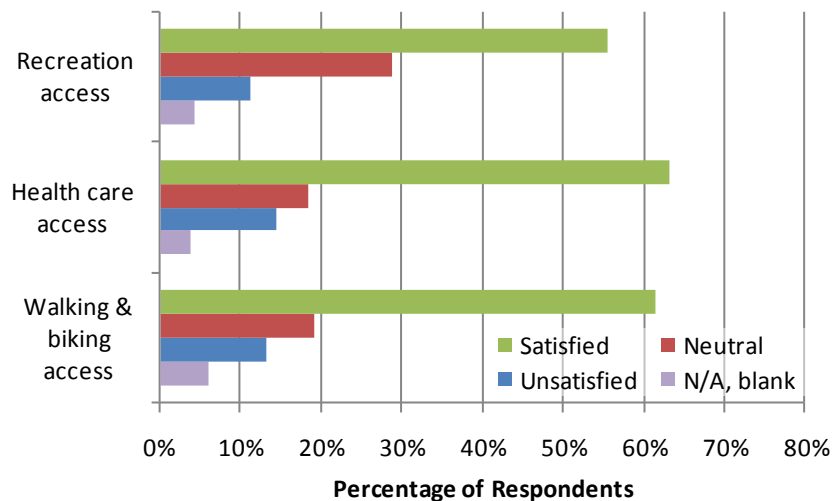
### Survey Results

The survey results place the active lifestyle, public health and leisure category clearly as a key strength of the quality of life in Edmonton (Chart 14). Two out of three respondents (61.6%) are satisfied with their ability to walk and bike in their neighbourhoods; two-thirds of respondents (63.3%) are satisfied with the level of access to health care services available to them; and, over half of respondents (55.5%) are satisfied with the accessibility of recreation facilities and activities in Edmonton (Chart 15).

**Chart 14: Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure, Satisfaction versus Importance**



**Chart 15: Satisfaction with Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure**





### ***Survey Comments***

Thirty-eight written survey responses cited issues related to active lifestyles or public health and leisure. Participants are concerned about the availability of family doctors and wait times for specialists. Their quality of life is reduced by the affordability of health benefits, the geographic coverage of medical clinics and family doctors, and the quality of medical service. Several respondents commented that addictions services are an important factor for their quality of life.

Responses indicate that there are not enough leisure activities for both children and adults. Respondents are concerned about a lack of low-cost recreation activities and feel that the Leisure Access Program is not accessible to all who need it.

### ***Focused Discussion Comments***

Health concerns voiced by participants focused on the availability of community health facilities and personal health services. While many of these are non-municipal issues, the City may be in a position to advocate on behalf of its citizens and to provide support for citizens who face some of these difficulties.

While many participants praised the recreation facilities in Edmonton, concerns about existing facilities remain.

### ***Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure Concerns: Municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Public Health**  
Participants are concerned about public sanitation facilities, including showers, laundry services, and 24 hour public toilet access at all times of day.  
Public health education is also a concern. There is a need for general awareness about cleanliness in public recreation facilities, and for education programs to inform young people about how to live healthily.
- **Community leisure and recreation**  
More low-cost leisure activities are needed, especially for children and teens. There is a high cost for leisure activities and education outside the traditional system – horse riding, music lessons, etc. Not all parents can afford this, but these activities may be as important to career preparation as the regular education system.

### ***Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure Concerns: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

- **Ease of access to health services**  
Participants described that there are no public health clinics in some geographic areas. They are also concerned that finding a family doctor is very difficult; doctors quit, retire, or die, and it is hard to find a new one. Long waits for specialists (psychiatrists, ultrasounds, etc) make some services difficult to access. At-risk youth report that they tend to go untreated rather than trying to navigate the health system; obtaining sick notes is a particular frustration. Some groups (seniors, new immigrants) have greater difficulty accessing and paying for health services. Several participants expressed that they would like to see more support within the mainstream health system for alternative healthcare.
- **Mental Health Services**  
There is a need for better mental health services. Participants explained that depression is common but often dealt with through work, addictions, or other means. A listening ear to help put things in perspective is as important as services for physical health concerns.

Some participants believe mental health emergency services do not exist, and described long waits for mental health emergencies at the hospital.

Bed closures at Alberta Hospital concern participants. One participant reported witnessing similar closures in Montreal; patients fell through the cracks and many ended up on the street.

More mental health advocacy is needed. Currently, participants feel too much stigma against mental health clients: the public always views the “sick” side of mental health clients, not the “healthy” side.

- **Addictions Services**

Addictions are a source of many problems. It is hard to keep clean while living on the street; participants described being “caught in a revolving door”. One participant believed that better addictions services would decrease the number of homeless people. Wait time for treatment programs is much too long. In addition, better financial support for those receiving treatment for addictions is needed, especially for new parents and families. At present it is necessary to lie to receive income supports while in residential treatment.

## *Solutions*

Twenty-two survey respondents named services or programs that would improve their lives with regards to active lifestyles or public health and leisure. Several suggestions were also provided in the focused discussion groups.

### ***Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure Solutions: Municipal Jurisdiction***

- Public washrooms available 24 hours for use by the general public and homeless Edmontonians.
- Create more school lunch programs as a means of educating children on healthy eating and helping parents who do not have the ability to pack healthy lunches.
- **Recreation Facilities**  
Provide more affordable or free recreation opportunities through community leagues and City facilities. Upgrade current swimming facilities and increase public swim times.
- Expand access to the Leisure Access pass program.

### ***Active Lifestyle, Public Health & Leisure Solutions: Non-municipal Jurisdiction***

- Increase availability of family doctors.
- Create more addictions treatment centres.
- **Mental Health Services**  
Provide more services for mental health clients of all ages. Provide skilled professionals to do individual mental health assessments, develop integrated plans, and provide counselling services.

Address stigma against people with mental health challenges: CMHA training for professionals or the general public about how to deal with mental health issues is good but not widespread enough. Training should be compulsory for police, security guards, people in emergency response positions, and health care workers.

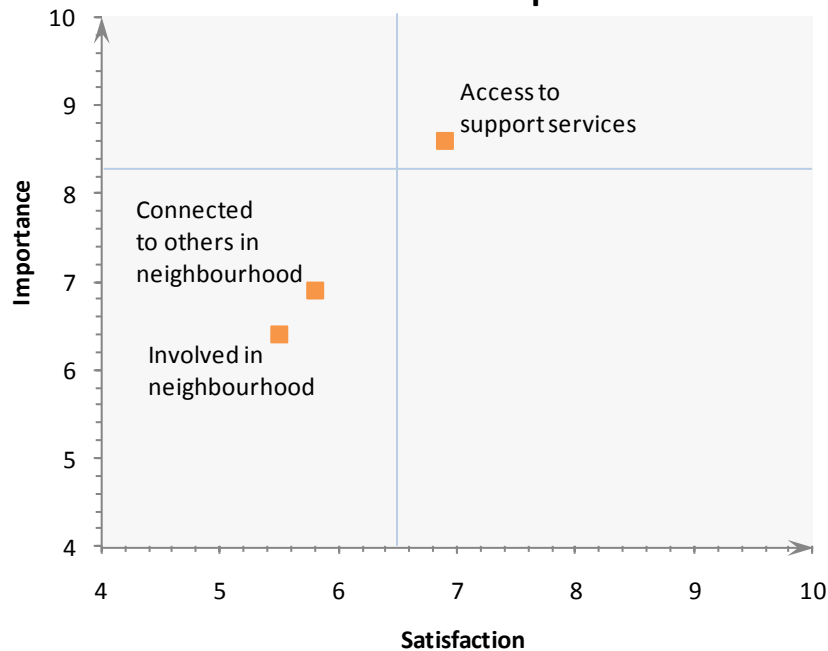
## Connectedness

### Survey Results

Two of the quality of life elements related to connectedness are rated as secondary areas of improvement (Chart 8):

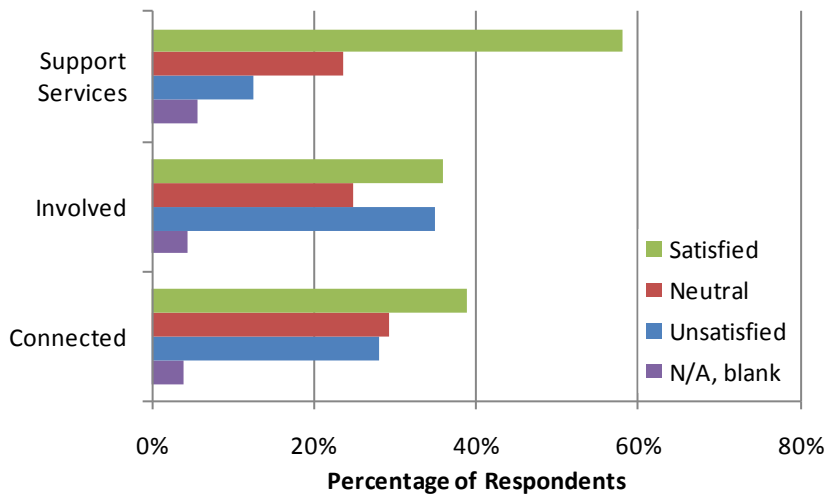
- 1) **Connectedness to others in the community / neighbourhood**  
More than half (57.2%) of respondents are unsatisfied or “neutral” regarding their connectedness to others in their neighbourhood (Chart 9).
- 2) **Involvement in the community / neighbourhood**  
Nearly two out of three respondents (59.8%) are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with their level of involvement in their neighbourhoods (Chart 9).

**Chart 16: Connectedness,  
Satisfaction versus Importance**



Access to support services is rated as a key strength of life in Edmonton (Chart 8). Well over half of respondents (58.1%) reported being satisfied with their ability to access support services they require (Chart 9).

**Chart 17: Satisfaction with Connectedness**



**Survey Comments**

Sixty-seven written survey responses related connectedness to quality of life in Edmonton. Inclusion, respectfulness, and the overall friendliness of Edmontonians make this city a good place to live. Having family and friends in the City is an important part of this. However, some respondents feel that discrimination, exclusion, and negative public attitudes are a problem in Edmonton. They value having opportunities to be involved in the community and more specifically within their neighbourhoods, and they feel it is important to support locally based businesses – they would like more opportunities for this type of involvement.

The availability of a wide variety of programs and services for marginalized Edmontonians is a huge asset. Respondents do not feel that they have adequate access to information about these services, or that there are enough community services for single parents, children, the homeless, and the mentally ill. Geographically, urban sprawl, neighbourhood stereotyping, and uneven distribution of service providers make people feel less connected. Participants like being connected to their government and want to see transparency and accountability from all levels of government.

**Focused Discussion Comments**

Because each group brought up different aspects of connectedness, the issues discussed do not overlap but rather highlight the interests of each demographic represented. (Information regarding the demographic represented in each discussion group is available on page 35 or Appendix A.)

The **iHuman** group was composed entirely of youth; participants highlighted the need for connections between youth and services related to housing, recreation, and health. Connectedness was also discussed in terms of the ability of young people to access income support services and to participate in the community on an equal level with citizens who have reached the age of majority. Discrimination and racism were voiced as major obstacles to young people feeling connected to the communities they live in.

Participants in the **Bissell Centre** group discussed the connections between services offered by emergency housing and daytime programs. Presently, daytime services and night time shelters do not coordinate their service hours, and clients are literally left “out in the cold” for several hours each day. Some participants brought up the concept of a 24-hour drop-in facility such as one offered in Calgary.

The discussion group at the **Canadian Mental Health Association** noted the value of services such as the Community Leagues, 211, and the Police Commission. They feel more connected to their community because these services are offered and give them a chance to be involved. It was mentioned that Edmonton is an easier place for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community to exist than many other parts of the country. Participants also voiced concerns about discrimination against native, low income and homeless populations within the City.

Connectedness for women present at the **Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton** discussion would be improved if they had better access to resources that would help their families, and if they had more advocates to speak for them and to teach them how to speak up on their own behalf.

The **Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants** focused discussion group was hosted by a service provider on the south side of Edmonton. Connectedness for this group of Edmontonians would be improved if more services, employment options, and transit routes were located south of the river. Participants voiced desires for empowerment; they want residents to be active in their own communities.

Seniors at the **Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton** discussion spoke at great length about how connectedness in their communities is dependent on the availability of programs that help them get out and meet other people. They stated that having volunteer opportunities which allow them to interact with people and improve the lives of others has a direct impact on their own quality of life.

Participants at **The Candora Society** discussion expressed a desire for more resource centres that can help them connect with the services available to them. They also mentioned several services they feel are lacking in Edmonton. These include support systems for abused men or single parent fathers, and better supports for abused women and their children.

## *Solutions*

Thirty-seven survey respondents described ways that their feeling of connectedness could be improved. The various issues discussed in the focused discussion groups also provided a wide range of solutions.

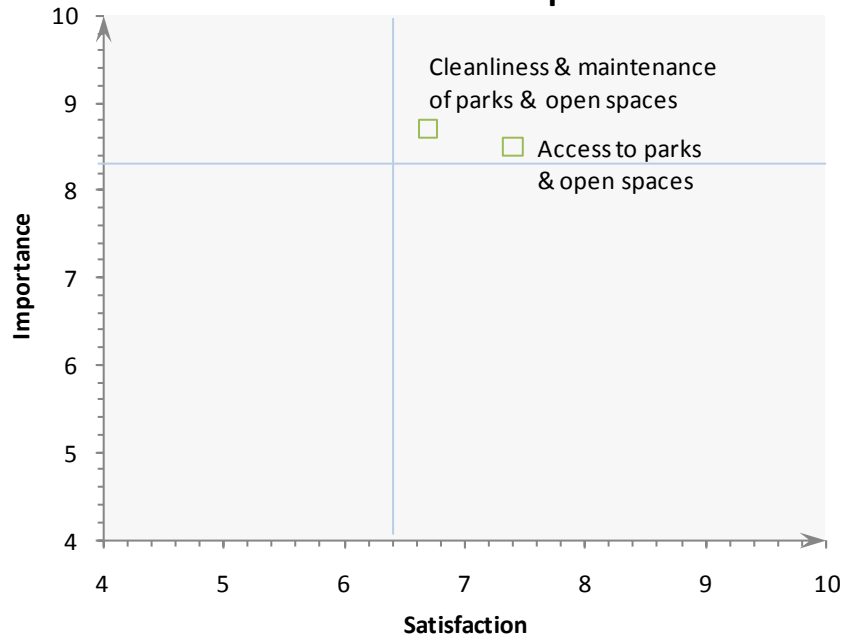
- **Supports and services**
  - Improve access to the food bank.
  - Provide more advocates and support workers.
  - Improve systems for obtaining ID.
  - Provide more programs for families, single parents, children, and youths.
  - Create a 24-hour drop-in facility.
- **Access to Information:** Improve access to information regarding community activities, religious groups, employment opportunities, and services.
- **Community Involvement:** Provide opportunities to become involved in their communities and connect with other Edmontonians. Create mentorship opportunities to connect seniors and youths.
- **Connecting with Cultural Communities:** Facilities and programs for learning about Aboriginal culture and language would help this proportion of the population connect to their own community and feel supported by the City.
- **Connections with Government:** Establish better relationships between Councillors and the communities they represent.

## Parks & Open Spaces

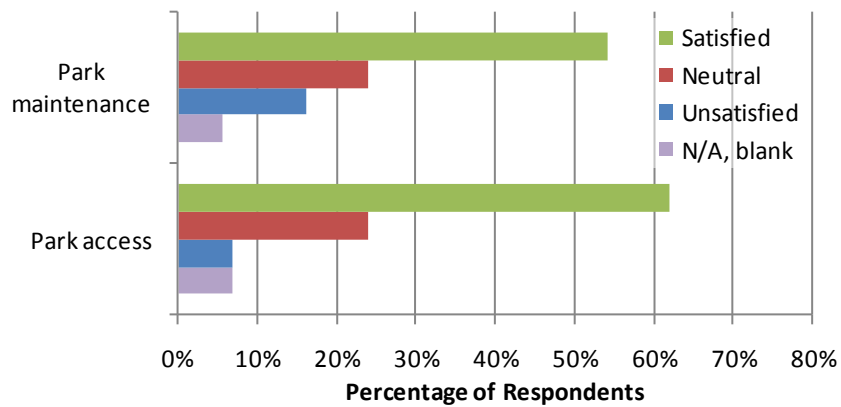
### Survey Results

Survey respondents rate Edmonton’s parks and open spaces as a key strength of the quality of life in Edmonton (Chart 18). Two-thirds (62.0%) of respondents are satisfied with their access to parks and opens spaces, and over half (54.1%) are satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of parks and spaces in their area (Chart 19).

**Chart 18: Parks & Open Spaces, Satisfaction versus Importance**



**Chart 19: Satisfaction with Parks & Open Spaces**



### ***Survey Comments***

Eight written survey responses commented on parks and open spaces. Edmonton's system of walking paths is valued as an important component of the active lifestyles of its citizens. Having green neighbourhoods and clean parks is important. Participants are concerned the City does not have adequate policies in place to maintain green space. They are also concerned about the poor upkeep of open spaces and parks in their neighbourhoods.

### ***Focused Discussion Comments***

Participants in the focused discussion groups touched briefly on the City's green spaces. Green space generates oxygen and provides a place to get closer to nature. Having free access to green space is crucial; Edmonton's trail system is especially valuable.

Participants were concerned about pressure on green areas to be converted, especially downtown. Some felt that green space in the City is not well distributed. Some space that has been used as open green space in the downtown area was originally designated as commercial and is now being returned to these purposes.

Community gardens were mentioned as a key asset for Edmonton.

### ***Solutions***

No survey respondents gave suggestions related to parks and open spaces.

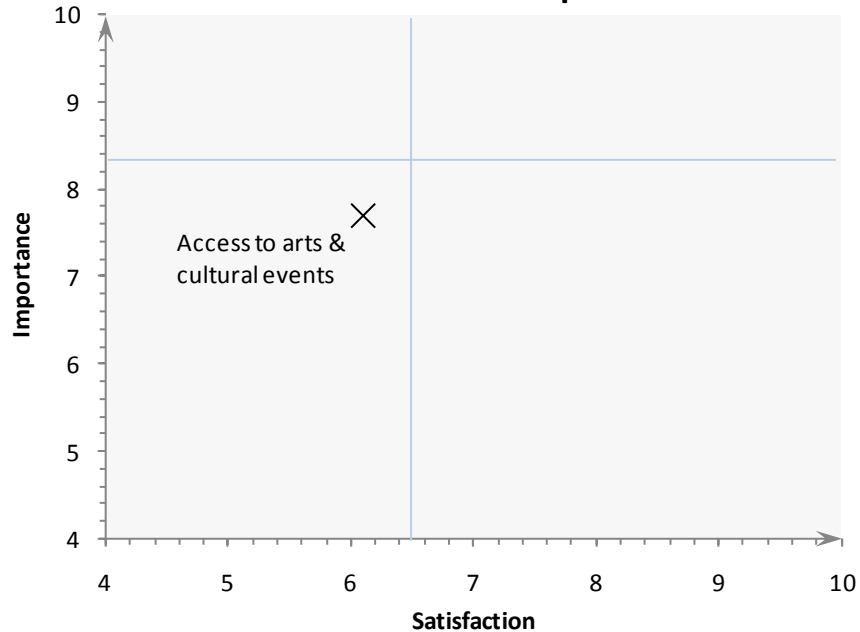
The focused discussion participants suggested that the City create more user-friendly recycling. The Strathcona County recycling system, which includes curbside collection of organics and recyclable materials in reusable bins, was identified by participants as a successful example to follow.

## Arts, Culture & Heritage

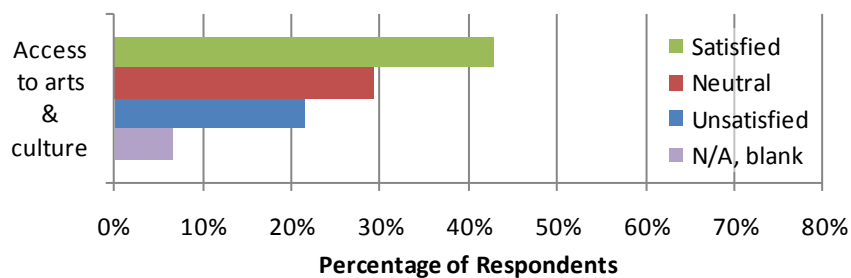
### Survey Results

Arts, culture and heritage is ranked as a secondary area of improvement, based on the survey results (Chart 20). Half of respondents (50.7%) indicate that they are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with their access to arts and cultural events (Chart 21).

**Chart 20: Arts, Culture & Heritage, Satisfaction versus Importance**



**Chart 21: Satisfaction with Arts, Culture & Heritage**



### Survey Comments

Seven written survey responses discussed issues related to arts, culture and heritage. Participants enjoy being able to attend cultural events, although many find these opportunities unaffordable. They value having historically rich neighbourhoods and giving recognition to indigenous Aboriginal cultures.



### *Focused Discussion Comments*

With regards to arts and cultural events, participants felt that opportunities to connect with other Edmontonians through cultural programs are valuable but currently too expensive. One participant mentioned that the art program at the Mustard Seed is an important part of his life; he would like the opportunity to participate in similar programs on a more regular basis.

Participants believe that the City's cultural diversity is important. It is helpful to have educational programs about other cultures. More learning opportunities specifically about Aboriginal heritage are needed, especially related to Aboriginal languages.

### *Solutions*

Two survey respondents suggested that more affordable arts and culture events would improve quality of life. Arts and culture solutions were not prioritized in the focused discussion groups; participants felt they had more pressing issues to resolve.

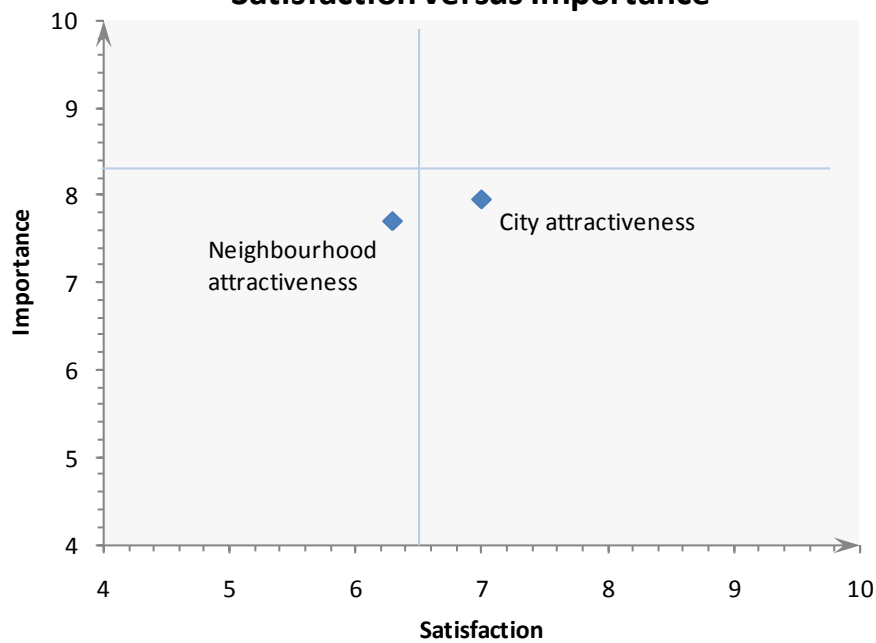
## Attractiveness

### Survey Results

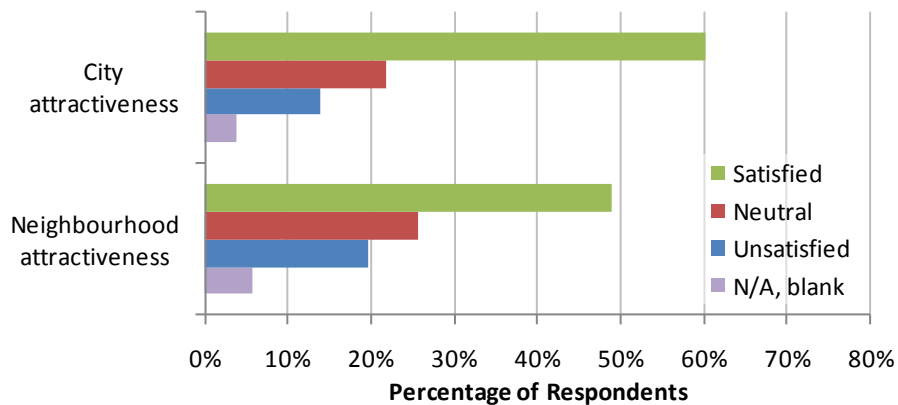
Issues of attractiveness are of secondary importance to survey respondents (Chart 22). Respondents rated city attractiveness as a secondary strength of life in Edmonton; two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the attractiveness of the City (Chart 23).

Neighbourhood attractiveness is identified as a secondary area of improvement; over one-third of respondents (35.8%) are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with the attractiveness of their neighbourhoods (Chart 23).

**Chart 22: Attractiveness, Satisfaction versus Importance**



**Chart 23: Satisfaction with Attractiveness**



### ***Survey Comments***

Twenty-six written survey responses mentioned the attractiveness of Edmonton in relation to quality of life. Participants value the cleanliness of Edmonton's air, water, and parks. Cleanliness is a problem in some neighbourhoods; residents are unhappy that some of the only affordable housing options are located in these less-attractive neighbourhoods.

Respondents believe that environmentally friendly policies make the City a better place to live. They are concerned about how city planning related to urban sprawl, zoning in residential areas, and preservation of green space is making Edmonton less attractive. The City would be more attractive if greater density and mixed use planning were encouraged.

Spaces for public art are important, but graffiti and obtrusive billboards make the City less attractive.

### ***Focused Discussion Comments***

Attractiveness did not come up directly as a topic in any of the seven focused discussion groups.

### ***Solutions***

Eight survey respondents recommended ways Edmonton could be made more attractive:

- Invest in keeping things clean by hiring more street sweepers.
- Provide rebates for environmentally friendly programs.
- Create integrated policies for greener spaces and programs.
- Encourage urban agriculture.
- Create incentives tied to revitalization of the urban core.

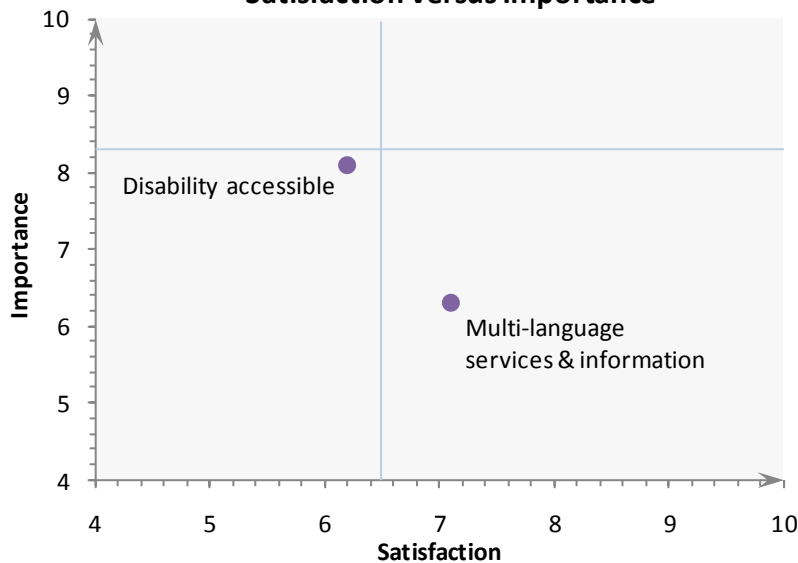
## Disability & Language Accommodation

### Survey Results

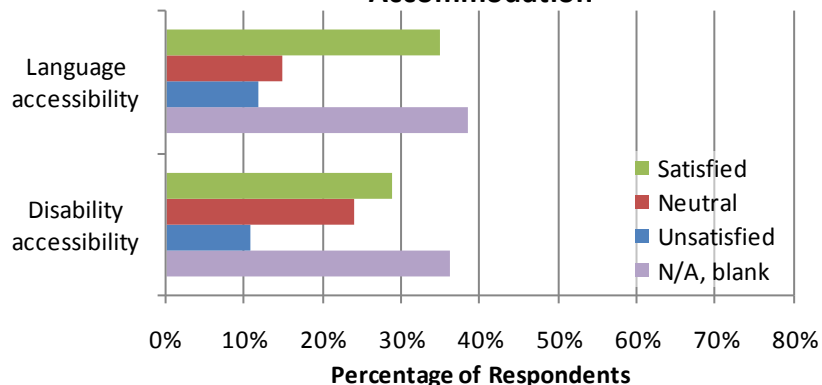
The survey results indicate that disability accessible facilities and services are rated as a secondary area for improvement (Chart 24). One-in-three survey respondents indicated that they were either unsatisfied or “neutral” with the accessibility of services and facilities in Edmonton (Chart 25). It is important to note that nearly two out of five respondents are excluded from this rating.<sup>6</sup>

Respondents rated the availability of services and information in multiple languages as a secondary strength of life in Edmonton (Chart 24). Over one of four (26.6%) respondents indicated that they are less than satisfied (unsatisfied or neutral) with language accessibility in Edmonton (Chart 25).<sup>6</sup>

**Chart 24: Disability & Language Accommodation, Satisfaction versus Importance**



**Chart 25: Satisfaction with Disability & Language Accommodation**



<sup>6</sup> Many respondents indicated that this issue was not applicable to them. In addition, the data has been cleaned so that the data of respondents who rated the importance of the issue but indicated “N/A” for satisfaction (or left it blank), or vice versa, has been excluded. The issues of language and disability may not apply to a number of the people who rated their importance and satisfaction. Therefore, the results for disability and language accommodation should be interpreted with some caution.

## ***Survey Comments***

Thirteen written survey responses highlight disabilities or language issues related to quality of life. Respondents are glad to see acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities. However, they are concerned by the affordability and availability of disability services and worry about how bed closures at Alberta Hospital will reduce quality of life even further. Some reported that their quality of life is reduced by stigma against mental health clients from medical specialists as well as the general public.

Language barriers are an issue; they limit the employment opportunities of many new immigrants and create difficulties for immigrants who need to access the health care system.

## ***Focused Discussion Comments***

Disability and language barriers were not a direct topic of conversation in any of the discussion groups. Even participants at the Canadian Mental Health Association focussed discussion did not concentrate on disability issues; these participants felt they had more important issues to bring up. However, much of their discussion of other themes was framed by their experience as persons living with mental health disabilities. Similarly, participants at the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton did not focus on any disability issues they might have, but mobility and vision limitations (while not explicitly referred to) of themselves and their friends were implied as factors which informed their opinions.

Disability-related concerns have been outlined elsewhere in this report, as they were discussed in reference to other major themes. For more information on these concerns, please refer to the appropriate sections of this document:

- Concerns about DATS service and handicapped parking (see “DATS” and “Parking” on page 12).
- Affordability of disability aids (see “Living Essentials” on page 15).
- Lack of flexible employment for persons with disabilities (see “Employment Concerns” on page 16).
- Lack of adequate mental health services and supports (see “Mental Health Services” on pages 22 and 23).
- Poor road signs make navigation difficult for those with vision impairment (see “Road Signs” on page 13). (Note: while participants did not refer explicitly to vision impairment in reference to the readability and pervasiveness of road signs, it was implied that poor road signage makes navigation even greater for those with this disability.)
- Provide opportunities to learn Aboriginal languages (see “Focused Discussion Comments” on page 30).

## ***Solutions***

Seven survey respondents offered solutions for the problems of Edmontonians facing disability or language barriers:

- Provide more supports and services for persons with chronic diseases or disabilities.
- Residents with mental health conditions would benefit from more counselling, advocates, and other services.
- Make 311 services available in other languages, especially Sinhala and Tamil.

## Unique Concerns from Each Group

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Each focused discussion group presented the opportunity to receive feedback from the clients of a specific service provider (see Appendix A for a complete description of each group of participants). As a result, every group concentrated on several issues pertinent to the demographic represented in addition to broader overlapping themes. While these unique concerns may not have been shared by other groups they deserve mention.

### **iHuman**

Participants were at-risk youth in the approximate age range of 12 to 24; approximately half were aboriginal, and the other half represented minority groups. Because this group was composed entirely of youths, every issue dealt with had a focus on youth-specific concerns; for example, youth housing, affordability of recreation activities for youth, and accessibility of the health care system for young people.

Problems related to obtaining ID were discussed. Having proper ID is essential for accessing services, but fees and complicated application procedures can make it difficult for youth to obtain.

### **The Bissell Centre**

This focus group included clients from The Bissell Centre's Drop-In and Family Programs, including First Nations, Inuit, Caucasians, immigrants, new Alberta residents, and native Albertans. Most were homeless or newly-housed; many mentioned struggles with addictions. Major issues for this group of participants were the availability of free childcare services and the existence of adequate addictions treatment programs.

Participants in this group were very concerned about ID. Participants were upset that it is mandatory for them to have government-issued ID in order to access some services, but it is also necessary for them to pay for this ID. There is a lack of good information on how to obtain proper ID.

### **Canadian Mental Health Association**

All participants in this group make use of programs and services offered by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Approximately half the participants of this focus group were seniors; the majority live alone. None seemed to have consistent employment. Participants in this group voiced many concerns related to mental health: availability of mental health services, and stigma against mental health from the community and health professionals. It was suggested that training for dealing with mental health clients should be compulsory for individuals working in certain sectors of society.

### **Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton**

This group was composed entirely of women at some point in the process of establishing permanent housing. Many referred to health or addictions difficulties; most have families. Approximately one-third are First Nations. Many of the participants raised concerns about family issues. They voiced a need for more family supports in the form of subsidized daycare and family housing. Parents whose children have been taken away from them need more resources while trying to obtain custody as well more support programs for keeping their family together once children have been returned to their parents. They noted that parents cannot always afford to raise their own children, but while the government would pay someone else to take care of the child if it was taken away from the home, government will not give the same funds to parents who need money to properly raise their children.

These women expressed some frustration about ID issues. Programs set up to help them obtain official ID cannot help them if they have fines, which need to be paid off before they can apply for ID. The process of obtaining ID presents too many financial barriers.

This group brought up the issue of support services for people exiting gangs. Participants highlighted the fact that many people in this situation are denied services.

### **Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants**

Participants in this group were immigrants from a wide variety of regions. Some were newly arrived (within the last six months) while others have become more established in the city. Participants voiced many concerns about childcare. It is extremely difficult for recent immigrants who need to go back to school for upgrading to find affordable care for their children. This is compounded by the fact that many of them do not have family or other support networks in the City to fall back on.

The strongest concern was employment for immigrants and proper recognition of foreign credentials. All participants made reference to high credentials and experience in their country of origin, but expressed difficulty finding employment in Canada. Discussion of these issues raised the following concerns:

- *More job opportunities for new immigrants are needed;* people with Canadian experience and education usually get priority.
- *Credentials are not recognized.* People who have a lot of experience in their field are not recognized for their professional ability. Their previous experience and certification is not recognized properly, and the process for getting “into the system” is too slow. If people need to get another education, they are wasting government money by taking government loans to get another degree, as well as losing years of their lives. Canada takes assets from other countries but does not honour credentials once immigrants arrive.
- *Expectations and reality are different.* One participant related coming to Canada with the status of “skilled worker” on her visa and discovering that this does not transfer into recognition of credentials once arriving in Canada. What people are told by Canada in the immigration process before coming is not what happens once they get here. Immigrants expect the systems and programs in Canada to be more eager to receive them than they turn out to be.

### **Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton**

All participants were retired seniors who make use of the programs and services provided by SAGE. None had major mobility issues, although some expressed concerns on behalf of friends with reduced mobility.

No additional issues were unique to this group, aside from the connectedness issues discussed above (page 25).

### **The Candora Society**

Participants were low-income residents in northeast Edmonton, both First Nations and Caucasian. They included parents, seniors, single and married adults, and teenagers.

No additional issues were unique to this group, aside from the connectedness issues discussed above (page 25).

## Conclusion & Priority Solutions

This study captures the key needs, priorities and ideas of a diverse cross-section of Edmontonians who face social, economic and cultural barriers to a good quality of life. The priorities identified through the survey and focused discussion groups are as diverse as the groups themselves. However, four major themes stand out as areas in which improved City of Edmonton facilities and services would have a significant impact on the quality of life of disadvantaged Edmontonians. These areas are: housing, transportation, affordability and safety.

Discussion group participants and survey respondents identified the following as key solutions which would have the greatest impact on the quality of life of Edmontonians facing barriers:

### Housing

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Implement measures to increase the supply of quality, affordable housing in the City. This could be done by increasing the proportion of affordable housing units required for new housing developments and redevelopments (currently 5%). In addition, ensure that affordable housing is located throughout the City, not just in the inner city.

### Transportation

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Improve the route coverage, hours of operation and affordability of public transit. Affordability could be improved by creating a low income transit pass. In addition, improvement of DATS service would make a big difference for Edmontonians facing mobility barriers. The affordability of DATS would also be improved by including to access DATS services in the AISH transit pass.

### Affordability

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Expand the low income leisure access pass, both in terms of eligibility (increased income threshold) and program inclusion. (There is also potential for the leisure access pass to be linked to the low income transit pass.) Improve access to educational opportunities for low income residents, in particular job skills training programs. Improve access to affordable child care and after-school care around the City.

### Safety

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Expand community-based safety initiatives (e.g. Neighbourhood Empowerment Teams). Improve police presence in the downtown area and central neighbourhoods by increasing the number of officers on foot patrol, rather than focusing on cruiser patrols.

There are many other potential solutions that research participants identified, which are included in the results of each of the quality of life categories. We encourage the City to review and consider all of these ideas. We chose to highlight key solutions because they are likely to have the greatest positive impact for the most people.

The insights of disadvantaged Edmontonians obtained through both the survey and focused discussion groups should form an integral part of The Way We Live Plan. We hope that the City will give careful consideration to all of the issues identified by our research participants.