City of Vancouver

Renter Services Centre

Appendix – What We Heard

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1 Renter Focus Groups and Advisory Committee Meetings

1.1 Overview

Between September and December 2021, City of Vancouver staff partnered with community organizations to hold 14 focus groups to hear from renters on the following topics:

- Experiences as a renter, including challenges
- Experiences accessing support with rental housing
- Feedback on the Renter Services Centre

The purpose of the focus groups was to hear from renters from a range of communities that are disproportionately impacted by systemic and structural inequities when renting and accessing services and are not typically well-represented in general online surveys. The sessions were hosted virtually and in-person between September and December 2021. Some focus groups were facilitated by the City, with community organizations identifying and inviting participants, providing space or setting up zoom calls, and providing advice on how best to engage the people they were connected to. In some circumstances, community organizations chose to facilitate focus groups without the City being present, as a way to create a safe space for participants. All focus group participants were provided with honoraria to acknowledge their time and expertise.

In total, 96 renters participated in the focus groups. Figure 1 shows the community organization that hosted or facilitated each session and the dates and number of participants for each session.

In addition to focus groups, City staff met with members from the Renters Advisory Committee, the Persons with Disabilities Committee, as well as two workshops open to Advisory Committees, with a total of 24 participants. Members of these committees are primarily renters or spoke to their lived experience accessing services. Their feedback has been integrated with the focus group findings below.

Participants included people experiencing poverty or struggling to make ends meet; urban Indigenous peoples; people of colour and racialized peoples; newcomers, including immigrants, refugees, those with and without citizenship or permanent residence status such as temporary workers; people with first languages other than; LGBTQIA2S+ peoples and gender diverse peoples; people who use drugs and substances; people living with mental health challenges; neurodiverse persons; persons with disabilities; seniors; youth, including youth ‘aging out’ of government care; women, including women victims of gender-based violence; and parents and caregivers. There is diversity within these groups, and many face barriers as a result of multiple, intersecting characteristics and lived experiences.

Participants also had a range of living situations, including those living alone, with roommates, and with family members; living in apartments, basement suites, houses, and laneway homes; and living in housing operated by non-profit organizations, private landlords, SROs, transitional housing, and co-operatives. Some participants had experienced homelessness, either in the past or currently.

Figure 1 Focus Group Dates and Participants

Date	Community Organization	Number of Participants
September 21, 2021	Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House / Drive Youth Employment Services	6
September 30, 2021	South Vancouver Neighbourhood House	11
September 30, 2021	South Vancouver Neighbourhood House	12
October 1, 2021	Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS)	9
October 7, 2021	First United Church Advocacy	5
October 13, 2021	Renter Office	3
October 16, 2021	Rainbow Refugee Society	7
October 18, 2021	Collingwood Neighbourhood House – Families Branching Out Program	7
October 19, 2021	Aunt Leah's	8
October 22, 2021	Collingwood Neighbourhood House	5
November 17, 2021	Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	8
November 18 and 22, 2021	Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society	8
December 1, 2021	SRO Collaborative – Tenant Leadership	7
Total		**96**

1.2 Focus Group Findings

The focus group notes were reviewed, along with notes from the Advisory Committee workshops, and are summarized below by the topics that emerged.

Challenges Renters are Experiencing

- Lack of housing that is safe, affordable, and close to transit. Participants noted that individuals on Persons with Disabilities or Income Assistance faced particular affordability challenges. It was also highlighted that youth, Indigenous households, immigrants and refugees, and families with children face particular challenges finding appropriate housing.
- Housing that is unaffordable for local incomes. Participants noted that many require a roommate to afford housing in Vancouver, that families with children can't afford larger units, and that renters make trade-offs between housing and basic needs which compromises safety and comfort.
- Housing that is poorly maintained. Participants reported that some renters are forced to fix and pay for repairs on their own when landlords fail to.
- Renters live in housing that is unsafe because they can't afford to move. Participants reported issues such as feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood or with roommates or other building tenants.

- Insecure tenure, with renters reporting that they feel constantly scared that they will be asked or forced to move and that it is difficult to find quality housing for the long-term. Moving often can mean losing community connections or support services that are based in a particular neighbourhood or municipality. Renters may also move due to lack of repairs, conflict with their landlord or roommates, because they can no longer afford their current housing, eviction etc.
- Experiences of racism, especially anti-Indigenous racism, and discrimination because of disability, age, being on Income Assistance or Persons with Disabilities, and lack of employment.
- Individual barriers to securing housing, such as damaged credit records due to medical bills, job and income inconsistency, and lack of citizenship, PR, or visa documentation (e.g., for refugees).
- Many people are dealing with multiple issues at once and services are often not well set up for individual situations (e.g., trauma, escaping violence, understanding new environment).
- Experiences of poor treatment and conflict with landlords, service providers, and roommates. These experiences may be aggravated due to biases around ability, pets, age, personal circumstances, income level and assistance, race, and sexuality. Some examples of poor treatment can include verbal abuse and harassment, mishandling of rental agreements (e.g., lack of transparency in agreements, making adjustments or changes outside of agreement, not giving deposits back), roommates being behind on rent, discrimination and denial of housing.
- Feeling power imbalance as a renter which can negatively impact general feelings of confidence and well-being, and willingness to access services to help understand and assert their tenant rights.

We heard from participants that their past experiences limit their housing options. For example, landlords don't want to rent to them when they disclose that they had aged out of care or experienced homelessness.

Experiences Accessing Housing Services and Supports

- Interactions with kind and non-judgemental, efficient, and knowledgeable staff that were able to provide lots of information, help expedite processes, or otherwise provide accurate referrals for assistance
- Acknowledgement that there is limited staff capacity, and that staff also faces challenges in sourcing and connecting appropriate services with renters who need them; staff need to be set up for success
- Building community in the process of accessing services or support
- Having access to support workers, take-home information, and sliding scale payments for services to help reduce barriers
- Lack of services for individual barriers and circumstances – e.g., translation, mental health, lack of accessibility, etc.
- Long and complicated processes can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. This can deter people from trying to access the services they need, or lead them to give up in the process of accessing services
- Lack of information on resources available for renters or information that is difficult to access or make sense of
- Not meeting eligibility requirements for supports (e.g., income cut-offs for legal services, permanent residency requirements)
- Lack of staff capacity and expertise in connecting with right resources or supporting with particular challenges, including need for training in trauma-informed practice, cultural competency, service landscape, etc.

- Non-inclusive, non-accessible and discriminatory service related experiences or environments, resulting from treatment from staff or bureaucratic environments that are not culturally sensitive or able to provide the right language or personal supports needed; the pursuit and process of accessing services can be re-traumatizing
- Fear of repercussions from landlords when accessing services or pursuing rights

Types of Services Renters Need

- Coordinated services, including referrals to services as needed and wraparound supports such as mental health, employment services and food security programming
- Additional services for at-risk people such as support from social workers to help folks access the office, sign forms, view housing listings, and communicate with landlords
- Financial assistance including education on how to manage finances and access financial support/programs such as Rent Bank and income assistance
- Advocacy and legal support, including free or affordable legal advice, information on renter and landlord rights and responsibilities, understanding terms of tenancy agreements
- Help with housing search, including finding housing, avoiding scams, and avoiding unsafe landlords and conditions
- Services designed to support people moving in and/or out of residence (e.g., financial assistance, information on what to pack or how to access moving support); emotional supports, as moving is stressful both emotionally and physically; urgent responses with moves can be essential as many tenants are made to move within tight timing constraints (e.g., eviction)
- Access to services and materials that provide an overview of the service landscape, and how to find housing and complete a tenant agreement, etc.; this is especially important for newcomers or those that do not have full understanding of the housing and housing service context
- Services designed to reduce barriers to accessing services—trauma-informed service delivery, accessibility supports (e.g., for those who use wheelchairs or experience other disabilities; translation and non-technical language; access to resources such as computers; peer support workers; staff training in cultural competency)

We heard from participants who have had to move frequently because they can't find long term leases, or because they have had experiences of poor living conditions or conflict with landlords. Moving is not only expensive, but also disruptive to households.

Space and Service Delivery Considerations for Renter Services Centre

- For the proposed location, proximity to the Law Courts may be both a benefit and a deterrent to access. For some, the downtown location may be convenient because of other services they access, including at the Law Courts. However, for others who may have negative experience with the criminal justice system, the location may feel uncomfortable.
- Streamlined service delivery and communication across services, complementary services, connections between organizations
- Incorporating Indigenous cultural programming and the leadership of Elders to make the space more welcoming for Indigenous renters
- Potential to co-locate some key provincial services such as Income Assistance and BC Housing
- User-centered space and services, including friendly and knowledgeable staff to create a welcoming environment; empathy is needed to help people navigate resources; help navigating services landscape and access resources
- Careful consideration of what organizations are hosted in the space, and how they contribute to continuity in service delivery (to avoid gaps)
- Having an intake system to keep track of appointment scheduling, basic user information with notes such as around accessibility requirements or best way to contact, and progress of renter's file
- Accessible and inclusive design, including wheelchair accessibility and diverse needs
- Promotion of available services as many renters are unaware of what exists and how to access

We heard that service providers need to take time to build relationships and trust with those seeking support so a point of contact would be helpful at the Renter Services Centre. This is especially important for building trust with people who have had bad experiences trying to get help in the past.

2 Renter Survey

2.1 Overview

The City of Vancouver posted an online survey to gather feedback on the proposed Renter Services Centre on the City's online Shape Your City engagement portal, www.shapeyourcity.ca, from July 13 to September 30, 2021. The purpose of the survey was to better understand current renter service use, gaps in renter services, and feedback on the proposed Renter Services Centre.

The survey was professionally translated and made available in the top six languages spoken in Vancouver including English, Tagalog, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Punjabi. As well the Shape Your City survey platform contained an automatic translation tool hosted by Google Translate, enabling users to translate the survey into other languages.

The survey consisted of 24 non-mandatory questions, meaning that respondents were able to skip questions. The survey was shared on the City's online engagement platform, with targeted social media, including translated content, to reach Vancouver renters. Print ads were included in Chinese and Punjabi language media, and the West End Seniors' Network newsletter. As well, the survey was distributed through the City's relationships with non-profit organizations that provide services to renters. Several non-profit organizations also distributed paper copies of the survey to renters. Please note that due to the voluntary nature of the survey, the results cannot be generalized to all renters in Vancouver. This is because only those interested in the topic would have completed the survey. In addition, online surveys tend to underrepresent some demographics. This survey received a lower response rate from young adults, men, people of colour, renters who do not speak English at home, and immigrants who came to Canada less than 20 years ago. The City took proactive steps to address issues of representation through targeted focus groups (see Section 1).

The number of respondents for each question is shown in the figure title (e.g., N=587). Open-ended comments were reviewed and summarized by theme with the number of responses within each theme shown as a number in parentheses.

In total, 587 people responded to the survey. Results are organized into three sections:

1. Overview, including respondent demographics
2. Previous use of renter services
3. Feedback on the proposed Renter Services Centre

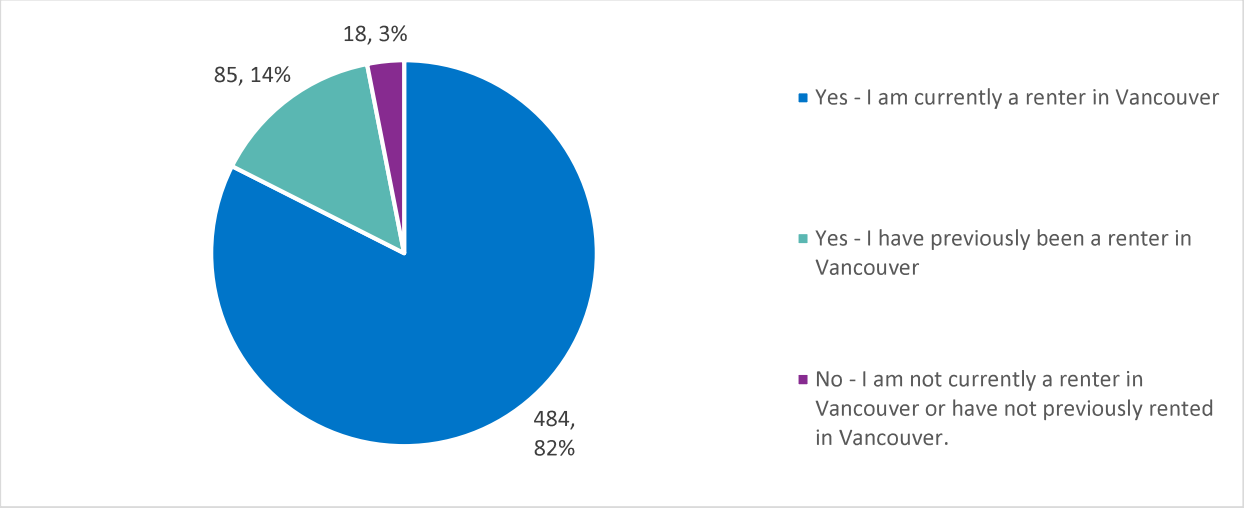
2.2 Demographics

This section summarizes the demographics of survey respondents and, where available, compares respondents to the overall population of renters in Vancouver as of the 2016 census.

2.2.1 Tenure and Housing Situation

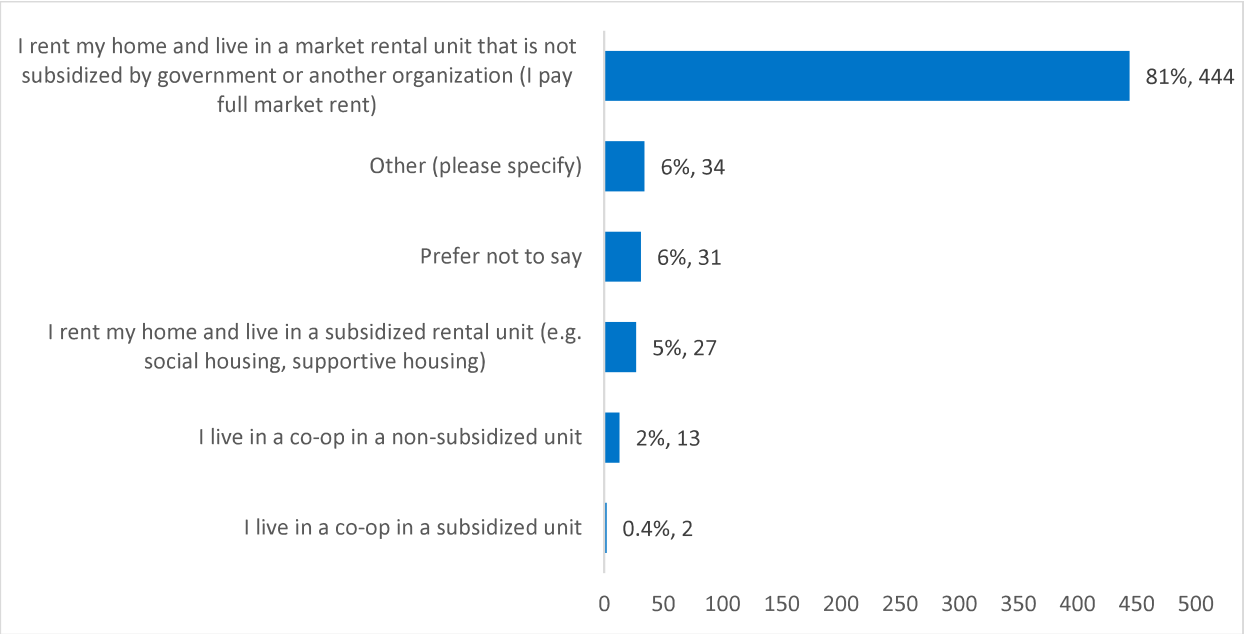
Respondents were asked if they are a renter in Vancouver and Figure 2 shows their responses. All responses were analyzed and are summarized below. Respondents who selected "No" to this question were taken to an ending page and did not fill out the rest of the survey.

Figure 2 “Are you a renter in Vancouver?” (N = 587)



Respondents were asked about their current housing situation (Figure 3). 81% of survey respondents rent their home and pay full market price to live in a rental unit. 12% of renter households live in housing that is subsidized, which may be non-market housing such as that operated by a non-profit, cooperative housing, and households accessing a rental supplement.

Figure 3 “What is your current housing situation where you live?” (N = 551)



2016 Census, Subsidized Housing

For comparison, 12% of Vancouver renter households lived in subsidized housing according to the census. Because of the high number of respondents who selected “other” and “prefer not to say”, it is unclear how reflective survey respondents are of renters who access subsidized housing.

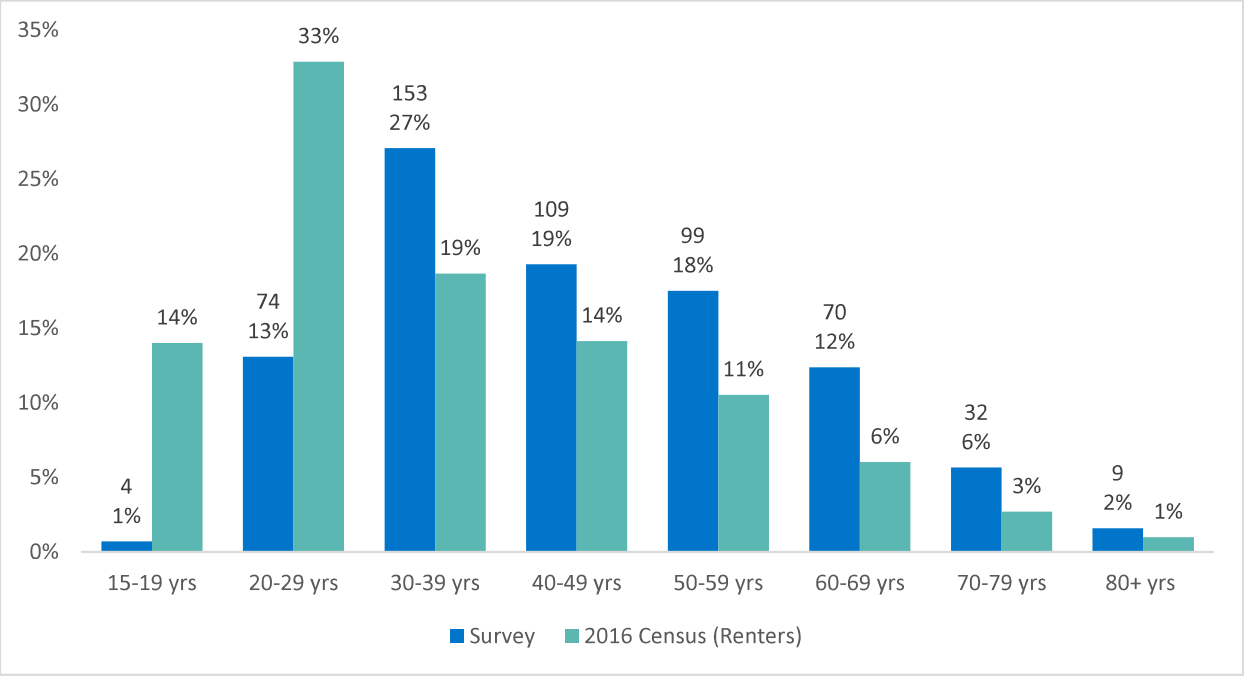
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" above reported the following responses:

- Own home[1] (23)
- BC Housing rental subsidy (e.g., SAFER) (4)
- Living with family (2)
- Left Vancouver due to high cost of housing (2)
- Converted school bus (1)
- Seniors' housing (1)
- Couchsurfing (1)

2.2.2 Age

Figure 4 shows the age distribution of respondents. The survey received a proportionally higher response from demographics over 30 years. Note that surveys often receive a lower response from youth and young adults and the City collected feedback from youth through the focus groups.

Figure 4 "What is your age?" (N = 565)

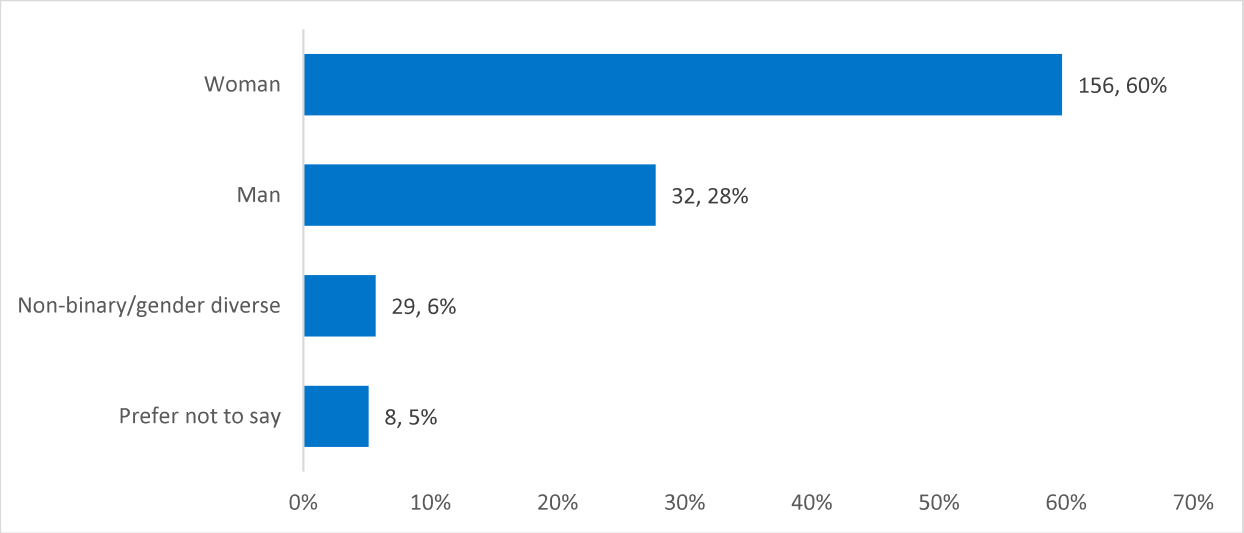


[1] Some respondents were individuals who previously rented in Vancouver.

2.2.3 Gender

Figure 5 shows the gender identities of respondents. In addition to the results in Figure 5, two respondents selected none of the above and identified as 'genderfluid queer' (1) and 'trans' (1).

Figure 5 "How would you describe your gender identity?" (N = 563)



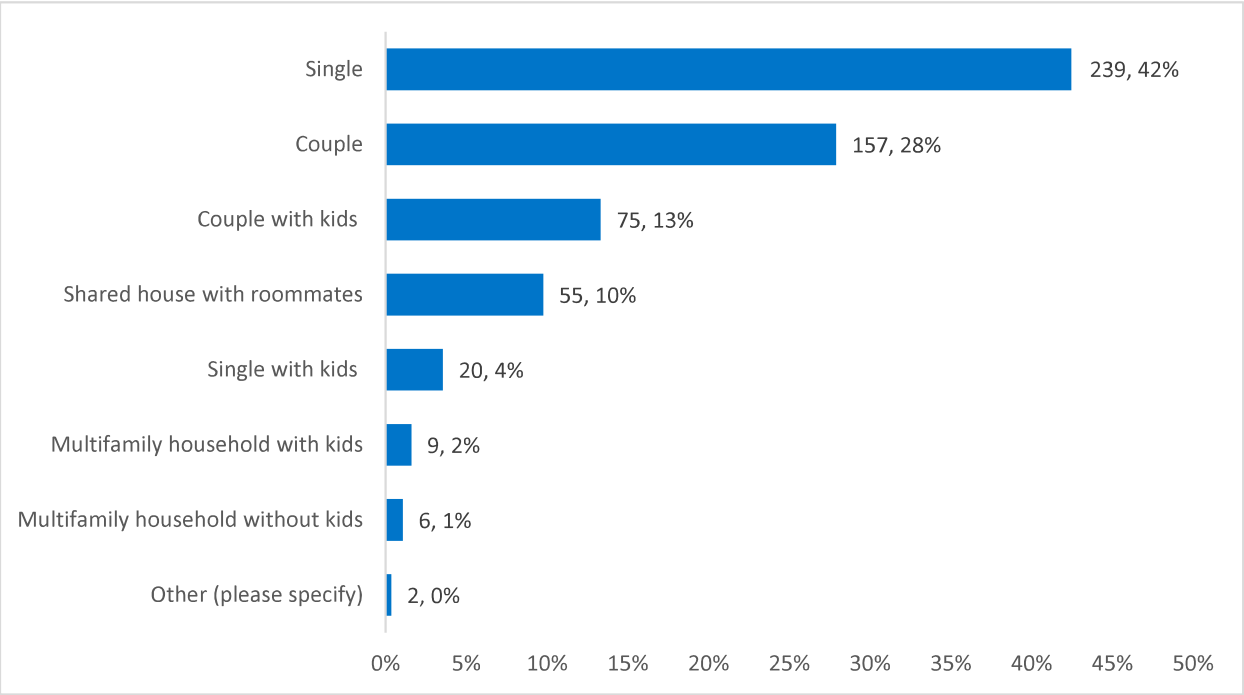
2016 Census, Gender

2016 Census data only provided a binary gender option for respondents (woman, man) and is therefore incomplete. For a general comparison, census data for the City of Vancouver shows that women make up 51% of the population, while men make up 49%. The survey had a high response rate from women, which is typical of surveys of this nature.

2.2.4 Household Types

Figure 6 shows respondents household types. The highest proportion of respondents identified as single (42%), followed by couples (28%), couples with kids (28%), shared house with roommates (10%), and single with kids (4%).

Figure 6 “How would you describe your household?” (N = 563)



2016 Census, Household Type

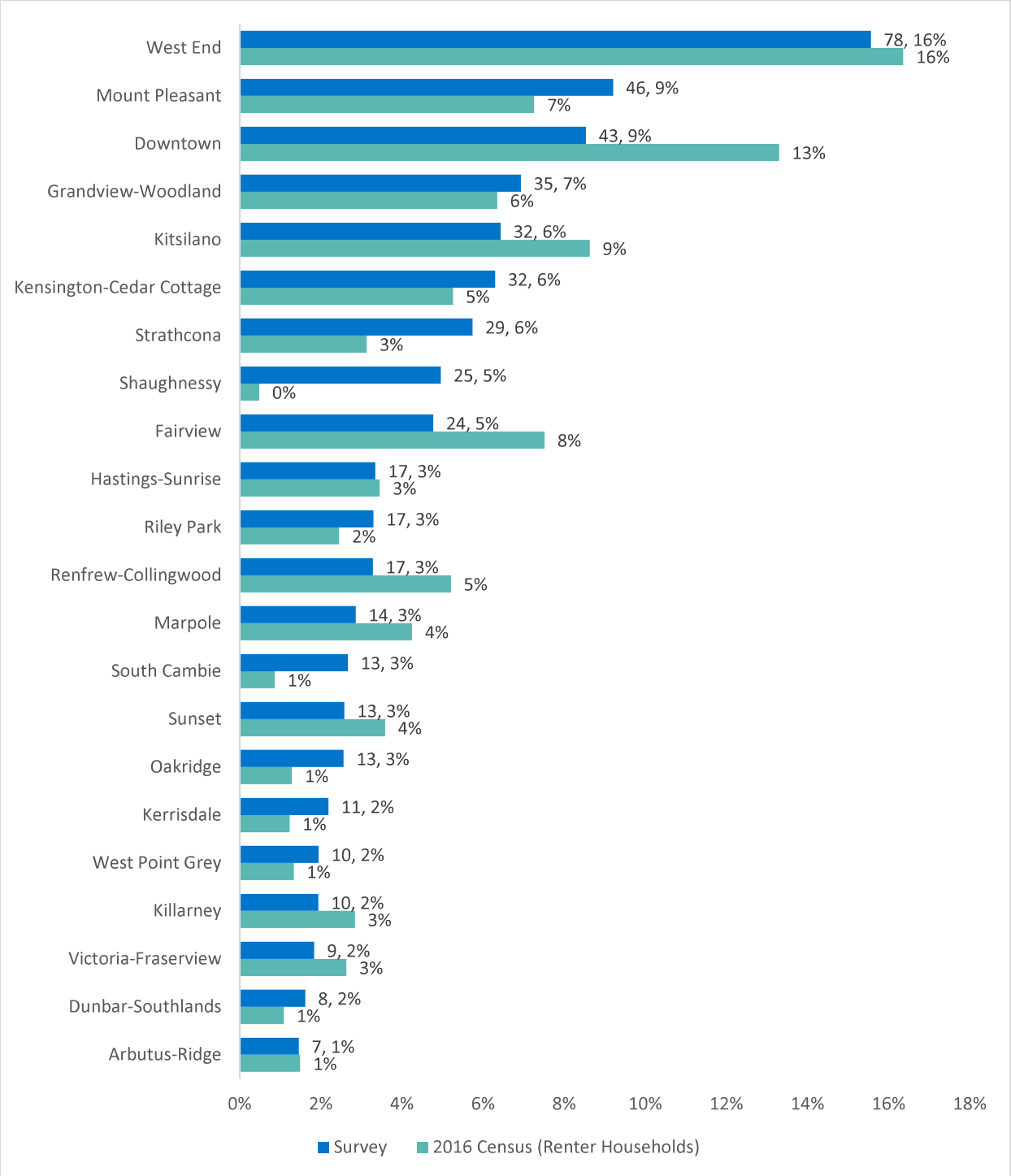
The survey was generally comparable with 2016 census figures for renter household type.

- **48% of renter households as single (non-census households, which is mostly individuals living alone, as well as those living with roommates)**
- **21% couples without children**
- **12% couples with children**
- **7% single parents with children.**
- **1% of renter households were multiple-family households.**

2.2.5 Neighbourhood

Figure 7 below shows the neighbourhood representation of survey respondents and comparison with renter households in the 2016 census. The survey generally had good representation of neighbourhoods. Downtown, Kitsilano and Fairview had somewhat lower response rates.

Figure 7 "If you have a fixed address, what Vancouver neighborhood do you live in?" (N = 557)



2.2.6 Indigenous Identity

Survey respondents were asked if they identified as Indigenous. 89% of respondents identify as non-Indigenous, 8% as Indigenous (Indigenous ancestry, Metis, or First Nations), and 4% preferred not to say.

Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Mixed ethnicity and Indigenous ancestry (3)
- Black Indigenous (2)
- Asian Indigenous (2)
- Northern Finnish Indigenous (1)
- Unknown Indigeneity (1)
- Canadian (1)

2016 Census, Indigenous Identity

4.1% of Vancouver renters identified as Indigenous in the 2016 census.

2.2.7 Racial Identity

Figure 8 below shows the distribution of respondents when asked about their racial identity. Respondents were able to choose multiple options. The majority of survey respondents identified as White (71%), followed by 9% who identified as East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese).

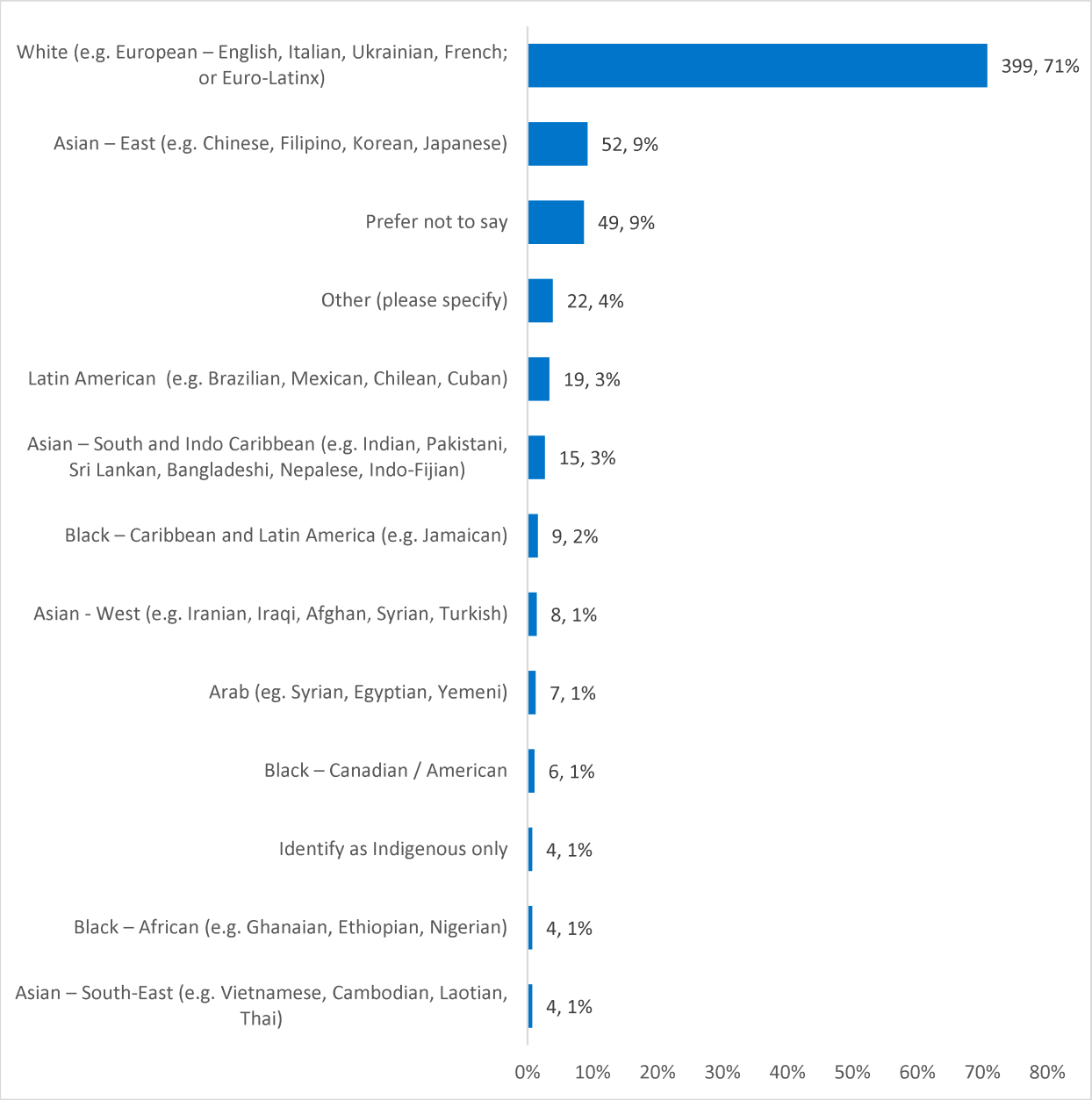
2016 Census, Racial Identity

- Not a visible minority: 60%
- Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese (East Asian): 23%
- South Asian: 5%
- Latin American: 3%
- Southeast Asian: 3%
- Black (not disaggregated): 2%
- West Asian: 2%
- Arab: 1%

Compared to the census, the racial identity of survey respondents is not representative of the community is a whole. The survey over-represented renters who are white, and had a particularly low response from East Asian residents.

These are shown for general comparison but cannot be directly compared with the survey data because the categories used in the census are different.

Figure 8 “In addition to your response to the previous question, which racial group(s) do you identify with? Select all that apply” (N = 564)



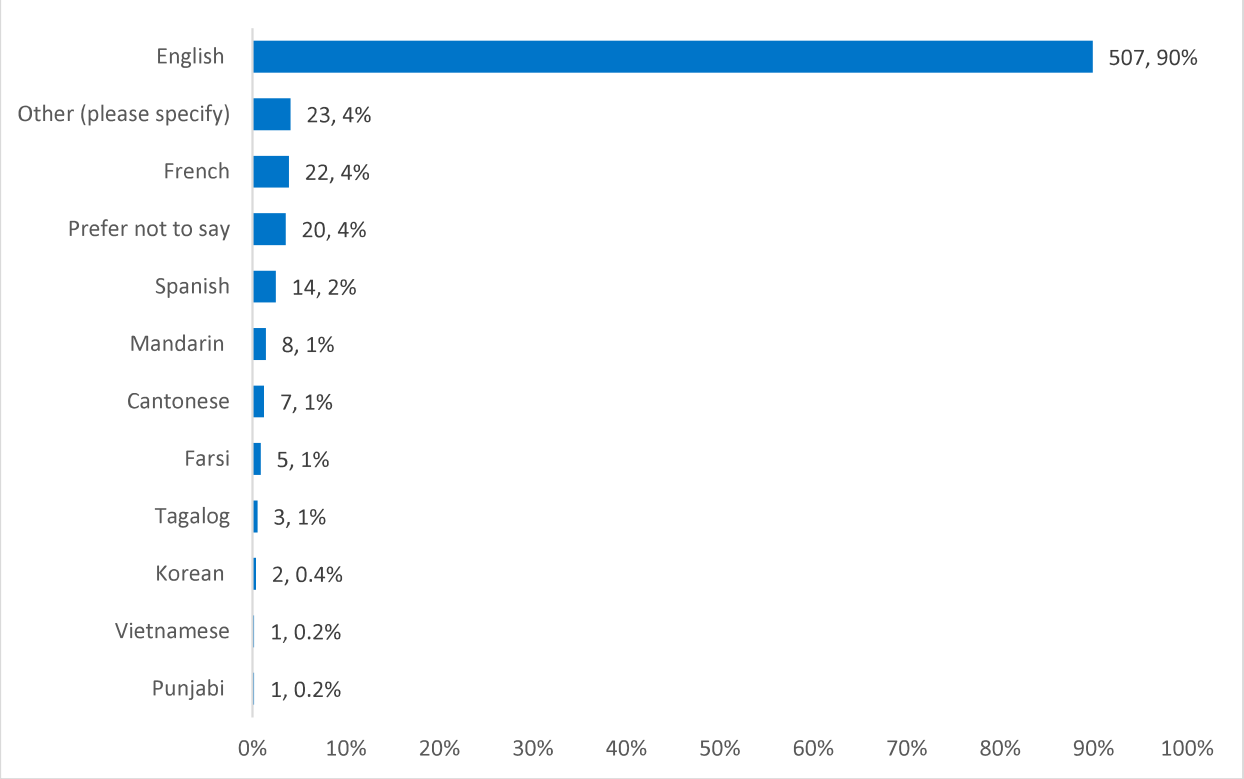
Respondents who selected “Other (please specify)” reported the following responses:

- Jewish (6)
- Mixed (5)
- Canadian (4)
- Slavic (2)
- Unknown/do not know (2)
- Taiwanese (1)

2.2.8 Language Most Often Spoken At Home

Respondents were asked what language they speak most often at home (Figure 9). 90% of survey respondents indicated that they spoke English often at home.

Figure 9 "What language do you speak most often at home? Select all that apply" (N = 564)



2016 Census, Language Most Often Spoken at Home

The 2016 census reported that 74% of renters spoke English at home, indicating that the survey did not have a strong reach into communities that speak other languages at home.

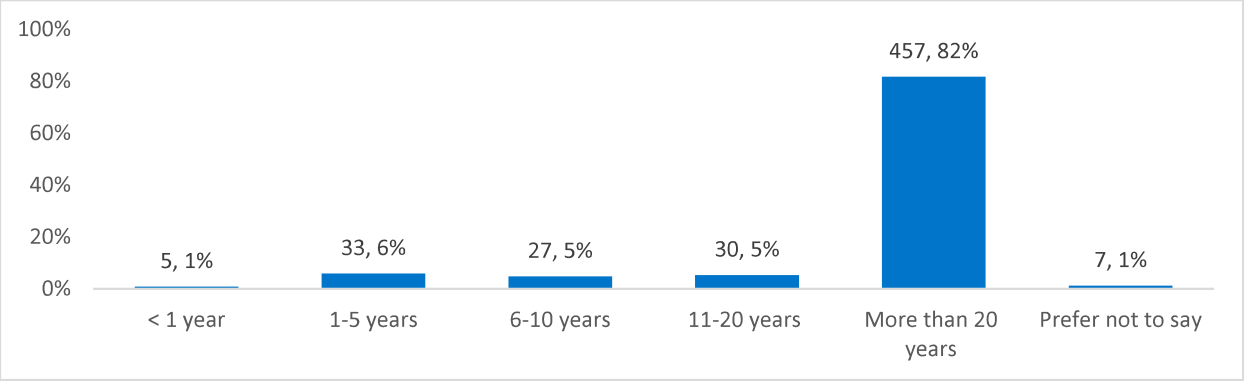
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Dutch (2)
- Arabic (2)
- German (2)
- Russian (2)
- Hindi (2)
- ASL (1)
- Cree (1)
- Greek (1)
- Hebrew (1)
- Urdu (1)
- Italian (1)

2.2.9 Length of Time in Canada

When asked how long survey respondents had been living in Canada, 82% reported that they have lived in Canada for more than 20 years (Figure 10).

Figure 10 "How many years have you lived in Canada?" (N = 559)



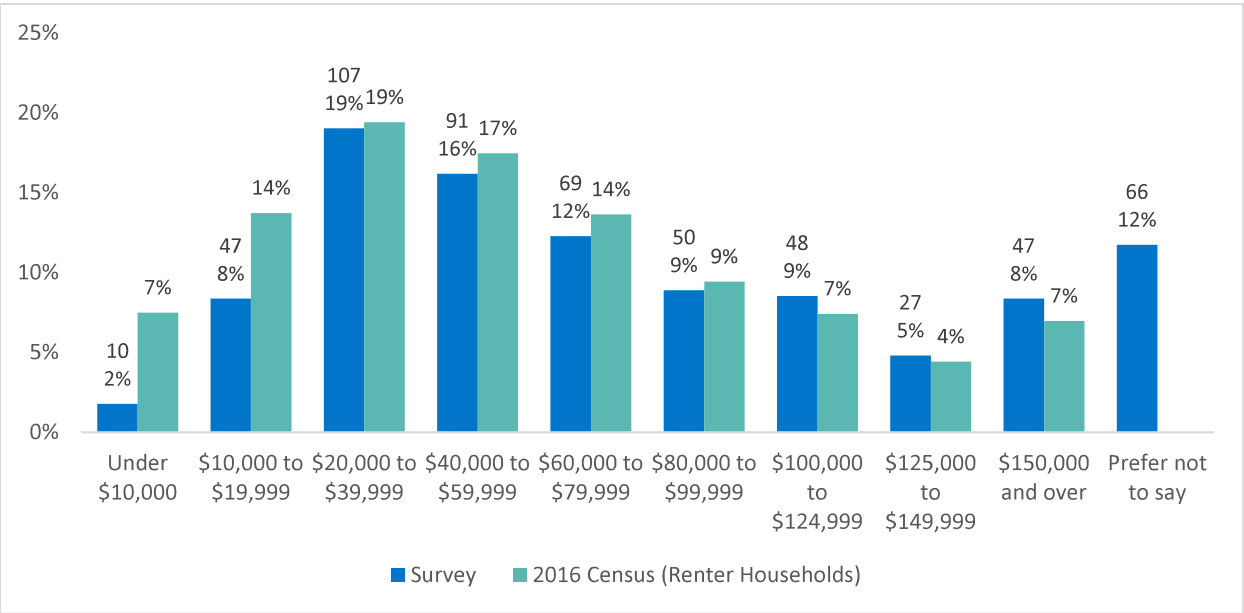
2016 Census, Immigration

The 2016 census reported that 61% of Vancouver renters were either non-immigrants or had migrated to Canada before 2001, indicating the survey did not have strong reach into renters who are more recent immigrants.

2.2.10 Household Income

Respondents were asked about their total household income (Figure 11). The survey had a good response rate from most income groups, though with a lower response rate from those earning very low incomes (under $20,000).

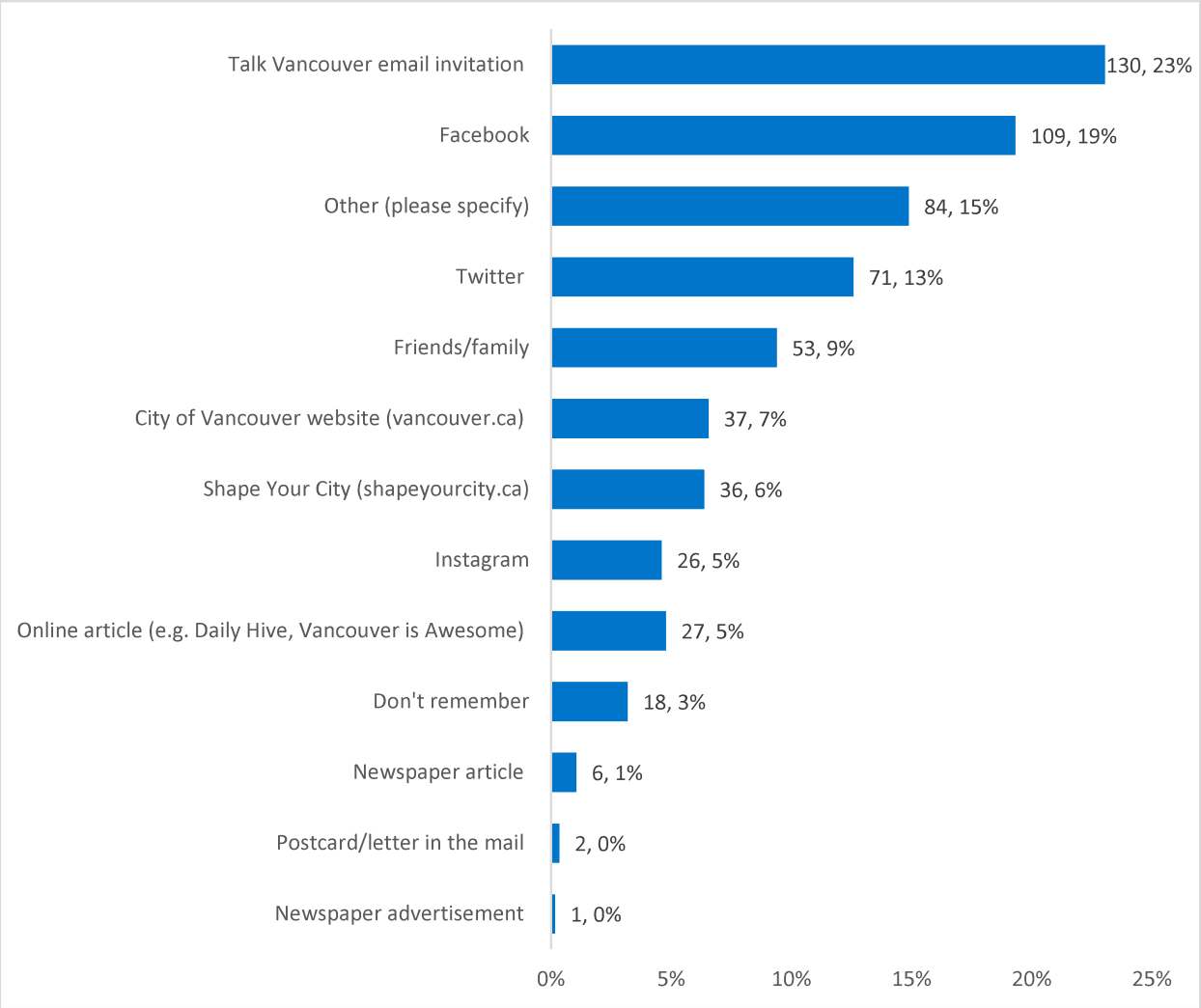
Figure 11 "Which of these best describes your total household income per year before taxes?" (N = 562)



2.2.11 Information on Survey

When asked how survey respondents heard about this survey, respondents identified a Talk Vancouver email invitation (21%) and Facebook (19%) as the top platforms as shown in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12 "How did you hear about this survey? Select all that apply" (N = 564)*



* "Poster" was also listed as an option but received no responses.

Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Mayor's emailing list (32)
- Notification from another organization (23)
- LinkedIn (16)
- Email (6)
- Work (3)
- Google alert (1)
- Phone call (1)
- Political party (1)
- Prefer not to say (1)

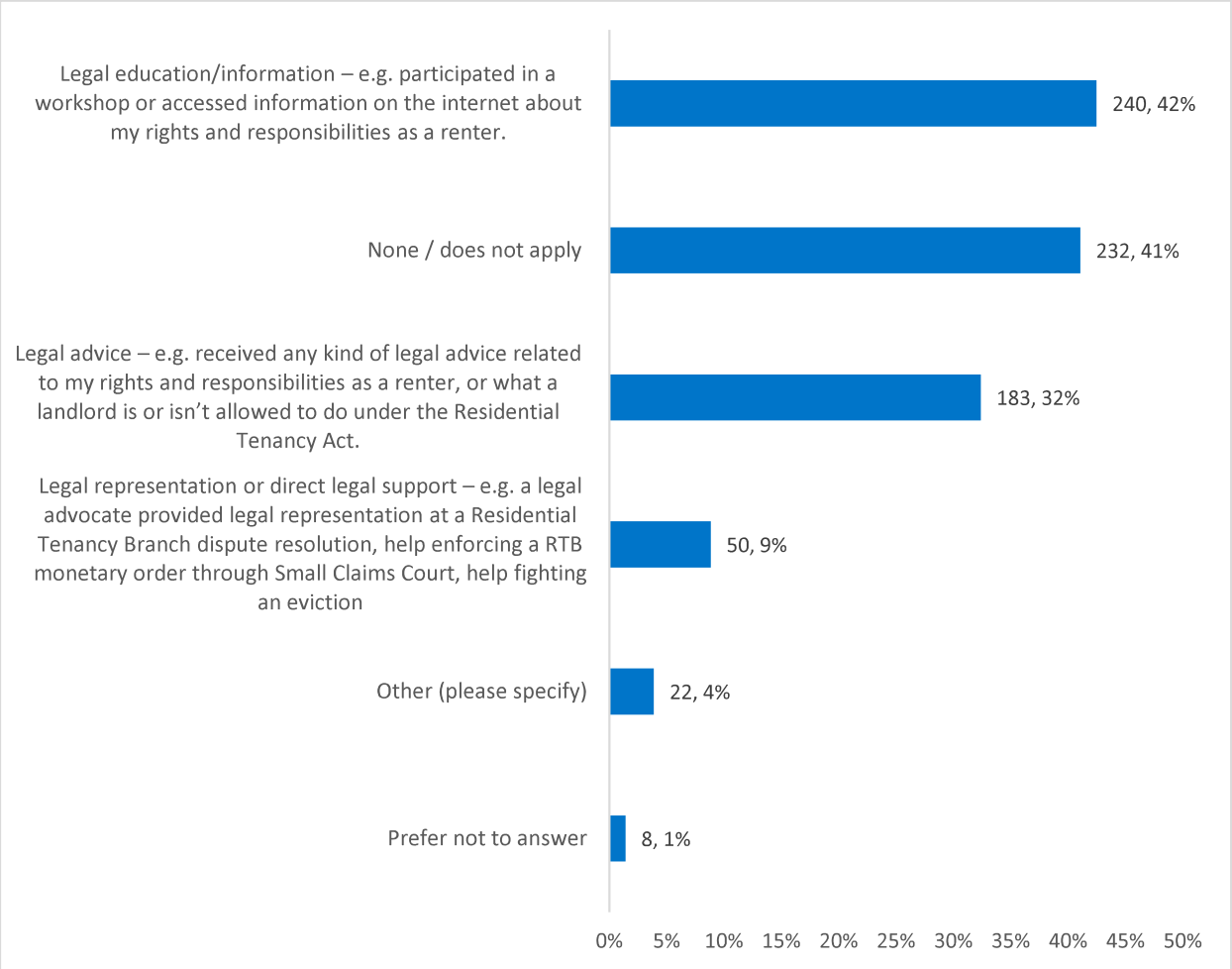
2.3 Previous Use of Renter Services

Respondents were asked about their previous use of renter services. For all types of services, a high number of respondents had selected "none / does not apply" indicating that they haven't accessed those types of services and / or did not need those types of services. This result is to be expected as renters typically engage with various services when they experience challenges with their rental situation.

2.3.1 Legal Services

Respondents were asked what types of legal services they had accessed and were able to select multiple options (Figure 13).

Figure 13 "Which of the following types of services have you accessed as a renter?" (N = 565)



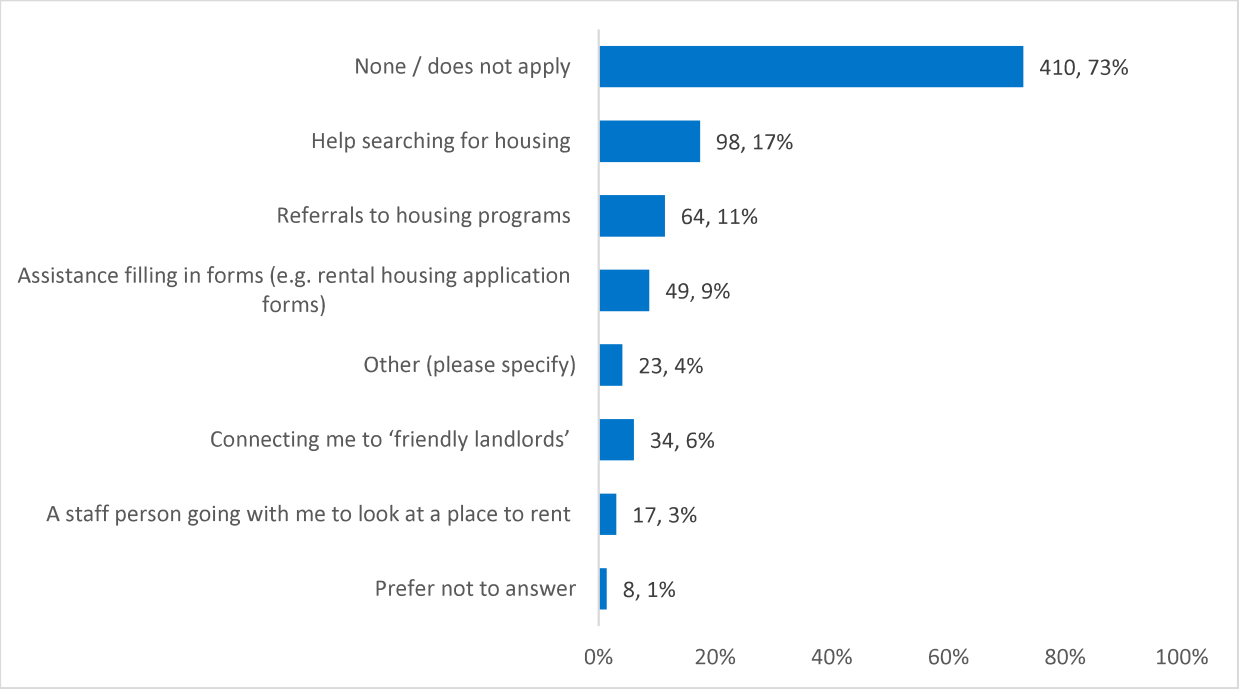
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Accessing services through the Residential Tenancies Branch (4)
- Tenant Resource and Advocacy Centre (3)
- Not being aware of existing services (3)
- Support from political party (3)
- Personal network (2)
- Direct action (2)
- Through local MLA branches (2)
- BC Housing (1)
- The Tenants Union (1)
- Pro bono services (1)

2.3.2 Assistance Finding Housing

Respondents were asked what types of services they had accessed to help them finding housing and were able to select multiple options (Figure 14).

Figure 14 "Which of the following services have you accessed to help you find housing?" (N = 563)



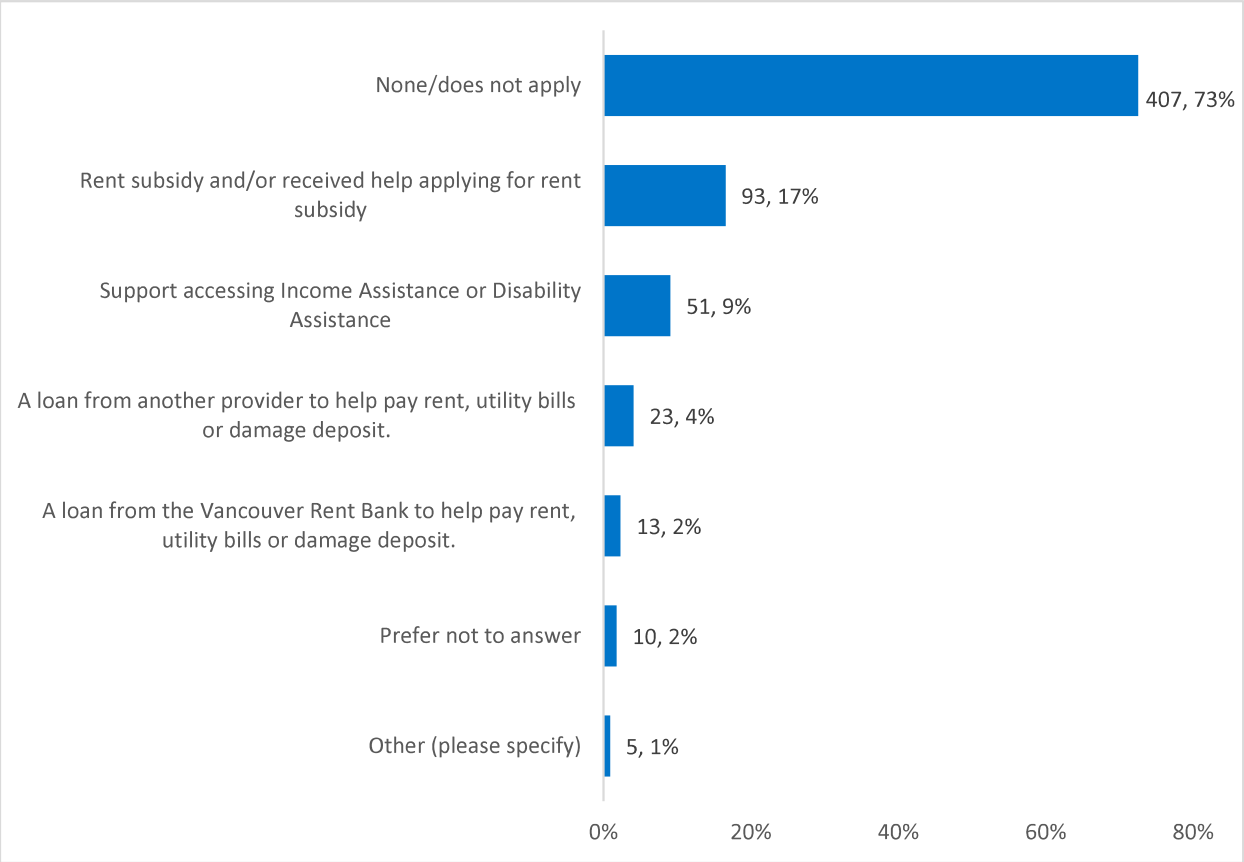
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Was unaware of services available (6)
- Accessing services to find inclusive, accessible and LGBTQ2S+ friendly housing (4)
- Using social media for support (4)
- Interacting with personal connections (e.g., friends/family) for support (3)
- Accessing broad ranges of services (3)
- Relocation (2)
- Legal (1)

2.3.3 Financial Support

Survey respondents were asked what types of financial services they have accessed to help with their rental housing and were able to select multiple options (Figure 15).

Figure 15 "Which financial services have you accessed to help you with your rental housing?" (N = 562)



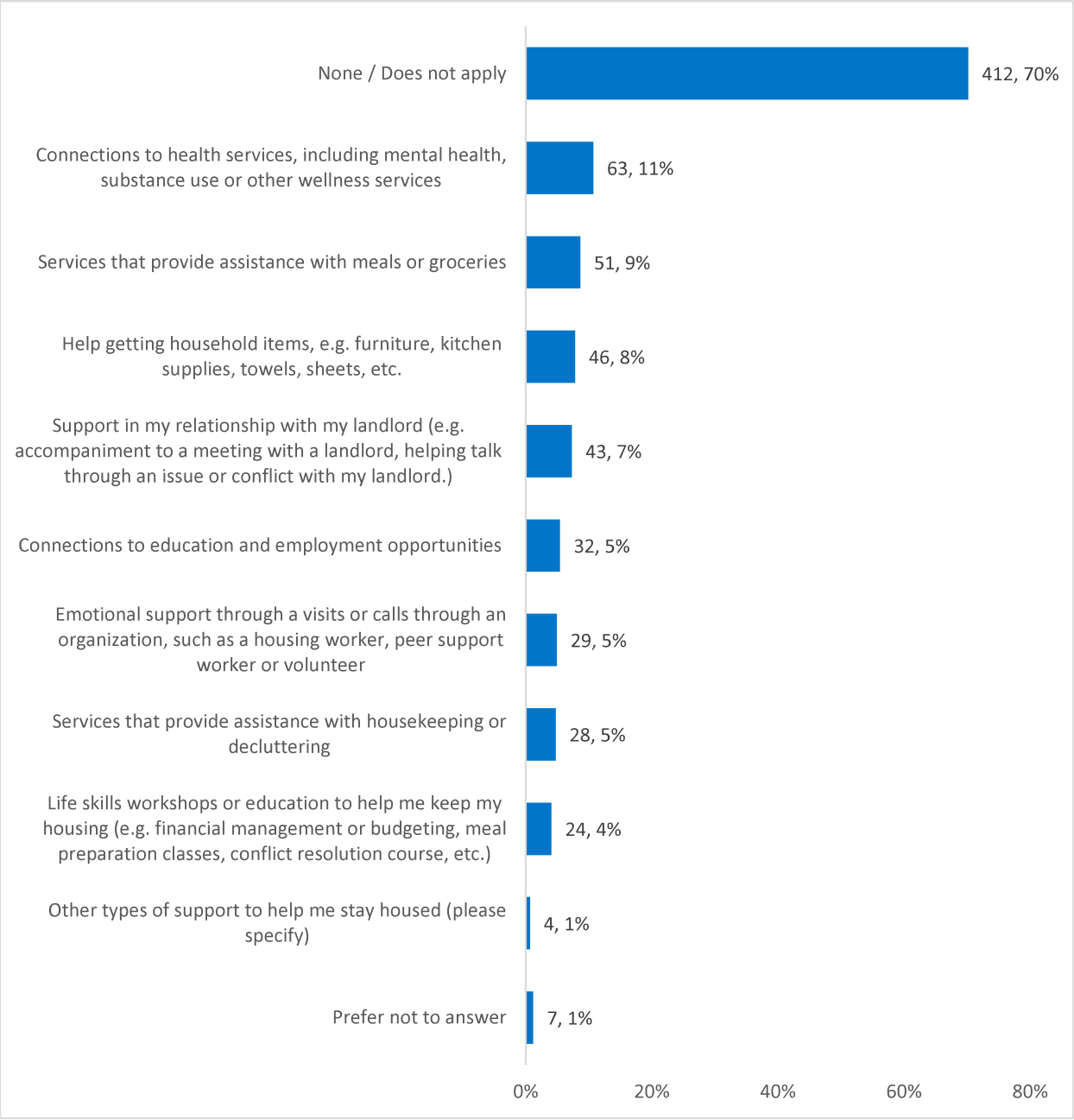
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Borrowing money from family (3)
- MLA office (1)
- Student loan (1)

2.3.4 Other Support Services

Survey respondents were asked what types of housing support services they have accessed to help keep or maintain their housing and were able to select multiple options (Figure 16).

Figure 16 "Which of the following housing support services have you accessed?" (N = 559)



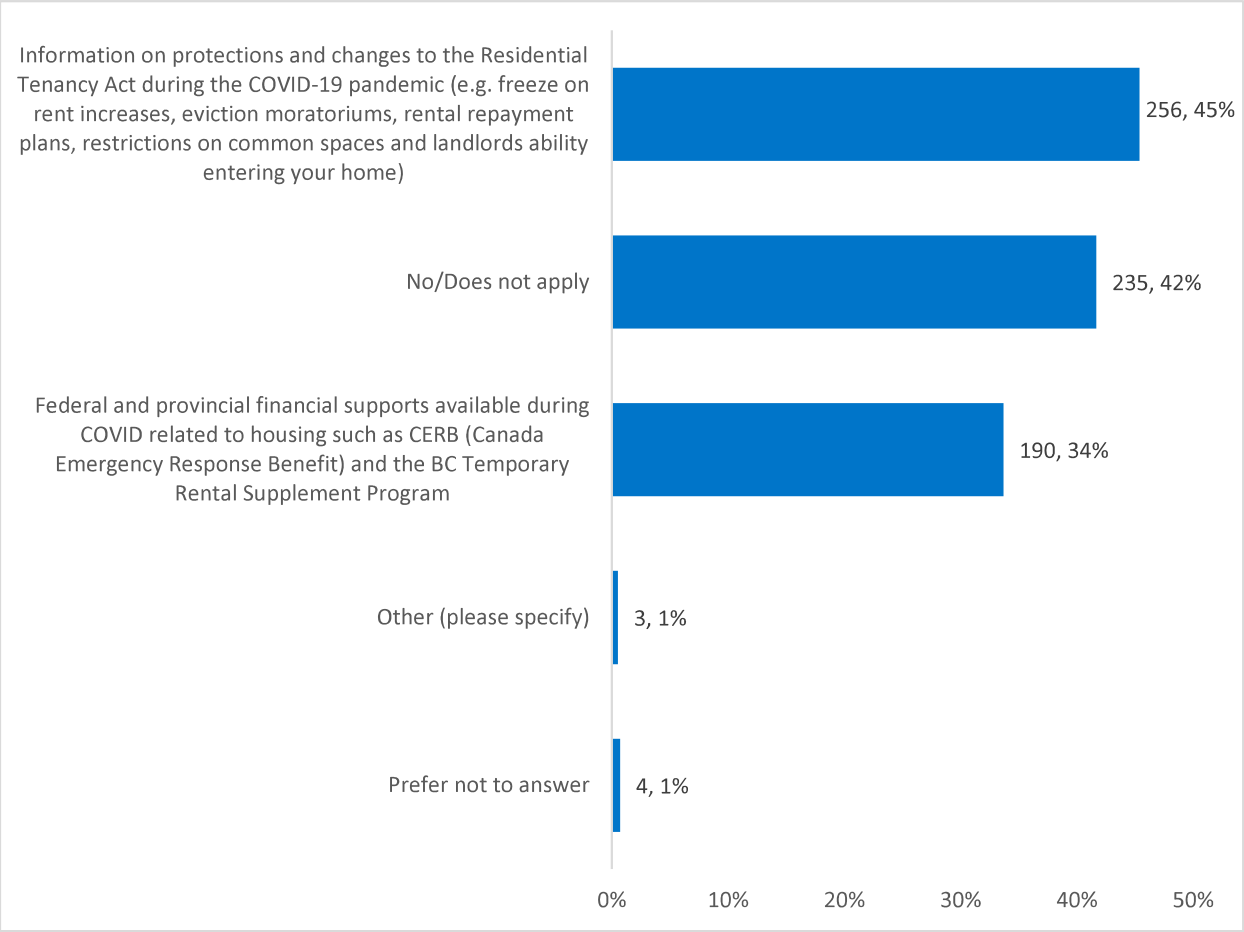
Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Support from friends and family (2)
- Support from community organization (1)
- Packing / moving (1)

2.3.5 Supports Related to COVID-19

Respondents were asked what types of COVID-19 related supports they had accessed related to renting and were able to select multiple options (Figure 17).

Figure 17 "Which services or supports related to renting have you accessed because of the COVID-19 pandemic?" (N = 564)



Respondents who selected "Other (please specify)" reported the following responses:

- Disability subsidy (3)

2.3.6 Barriers to Accessing Service

Survey respondents were asked to describe any barriers or challenges they have experienced in accessing services. 316 respondents provided comments. Responses are summarized by theme below with the number of comments on that theme shown in parentheses. Only themes mentioned three or more times are shown below.

- Lack of awareness of services / rights (57)
- No barriers / not applicable to me (40)
- Time / hassle involved accessing supports and services (waitlists, call times for BC Housing, onerous applications, etc.) (28)
- Lack of housing options / rent is too expensive (21)

- Lack of support related to the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) / difficult process to access the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) / bias against renters at RTB (19)
- Information for renters is complicated / unclear / inaccurate (16)
- Barriers due to disability (physical barriers, unsupportive staff, mental health, hard of hearing, PWD, lack of accessible housing (14)
- Unhelpful staff (rude, inconsistent information, can't actually help, profiling) (12)
- Hours don't work for schedule (12)
- Not eligible (e.g., citizenship / Permanent Residence status, income too high, credit check, not as vulnerable as others) (10)
- Lack of staff and resources at service providers and RTB (8)
- Cost of legal services (7)
- Lack of supports for seniors (7)
- Barriers due to refugee status, LGBTQ2+, racism (6)
- Fear of upsetting landlord (6)
- Lack of translation supports / cultural supports (6)
- Lack of internet access / computer knowledge (4)
- Rental history / credit history / employment status or history (4)
- Lack of supports for students / bias against young renters (3)
- Lack of supports finding housing / roommates (3)

2.3.7 What Helps with Service Access?

Respondents were asked what helped them access services when they needed them. 251 respondents provided comments, and these are summarized below. Note respondents talked about both what had helped them in the past and what they thought was needed for services to be more helpful.

- No supports needed / not applicable (41)
- What Helped in the Past?
    - Being connected with a supportive non-profit service provider (8)
    - Help from family / partner / friends (6)
    - Persistence, trying again and again (4)
    - Contacting BC Housing has been helpful (3)
    - Contacting MLA (3)
- What Would Make Services More Helpful?
    - Multiple forms of support are needed (in person, phone, online) (30)
    - Need to increase awareness of services (24)
    - Online information is needed - list of services, access by email, clear and easy to read (22)
    - Diverse, LGBTQ2+ friendly, compassionate, knowledgeable, and trained staff (e.g., trauma-informed, disability and mental health training) (12)
    - Need for increased hours of operation (11)
    - Access supports (e.g., multi-lingual services, child-minding, wheelchair accessibility,) (10)
    - More RTB support needed for renters (8)
    - Information - clear, easy to understand (7)

- Location (central, parking, near transit) (7)
- More supports needed (not specified) (6)
- More affordable housing needed, housing for people on Persons With Disabilities or Income Assistance, and for women fleeing violence (6)
- Not sure (5)
- Less paperwork (5)
- More resources needed for services to increase staff and supports (5)
- Clear eligibility information (3)
- Senior-friendly services (3)
- Access to an advocate (3)
- Affordable legal services (3)

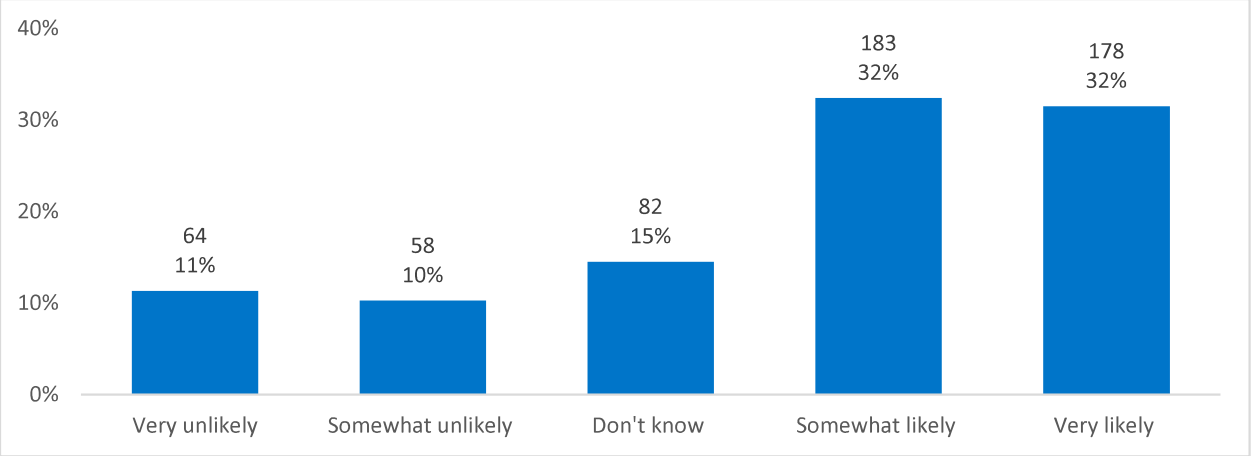
2.4 Feedback on Proposed Renter Services Centre

Respondents were asked a series of questions to collect feedback on the proposed Renter Services Centre.

2.4.1 Likelihood of Accessing Renter Services and Supports

Respondents were asked how likely they would be to access services and supports (Figure 18). 64% of respondents indicated they would be either very likely or somewhat likely to access services.

Figure 18 "If you were in need of support as a renter, how likely would you be to access services and supports at a Vancouver Renter Services Centre?" (N = 565)



Open-Ended Comments

Survey respondents were asked to provide any comments on their answer to the question above. In total, 273 comments were provided. Responses are summarized by theme below with the number of comments on that them shown in parentheses. Only themes mentioned three or more times are shown below.

<u>Location</u>

- Location should be in multiple places and / or convenient (73)
- Downtown is not easily accessible (e.g., due to parking, feeling lack of safety), and not necessarily close to people in need (6)

Services

- Virtual, online and phone access for help and information (38)
- Increase awareness of services available (10)
- Extended / flexible hours (10)
- Depends on services offered (8)
- Finding housing (5)
- Legal advice, tenant rights, advocacy (5)
- Specific situations (e.g., tenants in non-profit housing, in market rental, newcomers) (5)

Space

- Having a physical space that is accessible and welcoming to people (e.g., street front, human scale, approachable); being next to law courts, government building and business district is intimidating and unwelcoming for people (12)
- Must meet accessibility needs (9)
- Having a physical space for in-person conversations would be beneficial (6)
- Must be inclusive, friendly and welcoming to all people (e.g., LGBTQ2s+, IBPOC, newcomers) (6)

Staffing

- Adequate staff capacity (11)
- Staff need to be knowledgeable about various aspects of tenant needs (6)

Community Concerns Regarding the Renter Services Centre

- Prioritize systemic and housing market issues instead of Renter Services Centre (11)
- Renter services already exist and are supported by different levels of government (6)
- Do not waste capacity, resources and money on this (4)

2.4.2 Desired Services at Proposed Renter Services Centre

Survey respondents were asked to list up to three services that should be available at the Renter Services Centre. In total, 408 open-ended responses were provided. Some respondents listed more than three services, which were included in the analysis. Responses are summarized by theme below with the number of comments on that them shown in parentheses. Only themes mentioned three or more times are shown below.

1. Legal services (142)
2. General support for finding housing (62)
3. Education on tenant rights (63)
4. Practical resources (e.g., computers, internet access, phones, physical rooms) (48)
5. Dispute resolution / mediation specific to tenant-landlord disputes (43)
6. Legal advocacy (e.g., assistance with landlord disputes) (30)
7. Support filling out applications (35)
8. Access to knowledgeable peer support worker / navigator (30)
9. Landlord database (highlighting positive and negative reviews) (26)
10. Access to financial supports (e.g., rent bank, short-term financial assistance for rent relief) (23)
11. Financial advice and planning; information about financial supports (19)
12. Language translation services (18)

13. Referrals to service providers, organizations and programming that supports renters (e.g., legal, food, moving services, social services, government supports) (17)
14. Health services (14)
15. Eviction support (11)
16. Building maintenance (8)
17. Staff available to answer questions (8)
18. Support finding accessible housing (6)
19. Supports for newcomers (5)
20. Space for housing advocacy to address systems change (5)
21. Emergency services (e.g., for people experiencing sudden loss of job, risk of losing housing) (4)
22. Services to help determine eligibility for social housing and other supports (4)
23. Place to complain about housing situation (3)

2.4.3 Additional Feedback

Respondents were asked to share any additional feedback on how to design a Vancouver Renter Services Centre that would be welcoming and accessible. Responses are summarized by theme below with the number of comments on that theme shown in parentheses. Only themes mentioned three or more times are shown below.

Accessibility

- Accessibility is key; incorporate accessibility into building and space design, ensure staff are trained to be mindful and aware of accessibility concerns (48)

Location

- Location must be accessible for public transit; have storage for personal belongings; include parking (29)
- Hours should be available outside of regular working hours (24)
- Ensure there is broad and public awareness of this centre (7)

Environment

- Make the environment comfortable and inviting (e.g., add plants, nice lighting, universal washrooms, snacks available, calm ambiance, good seating etc.) (43)
- Environment feels safe and inclusive for all populations (31)
- The centre should be child and family friendly (10)

Staffing

- Staff cultural sensitivity training / awareness (including diversity representation in hired staff); staff should be compassionate and able to help translate materials and/or have translated materials available and/or help access language translation (14)
- There should be adequate staff capacity (including in person and remote) to help reduce wait times; enable people to make appointments (8)

Service Offerings

- Offer easy-to-use virtual support (phone lines, online chat/Q&A, good website) (28)
- Offer guides and resources in different formats for people to draw from and help themselves (18)

- Ensure renter information is confidential and secure (5)
- Programming that is interconnected and mutually supportive (4)
- Provide referral services (3)
- Have advocates available (3)
- Reduce / subsidize cost of services (3)

Opposition to the Renter Services Centre

- Renter services already exist and should not be replicated, the centre is outside the scope of the City's responsibilities (15)
- Direct resources towards systemic issues like the housing market and housing unaffordability (6)

3 Service Provider Interviews and Workshops

3.1 Overview

Between June and October 2021, City of Vancouver staff conducted 21 interviews and two sector-based workshops with local housing and social service organizations on the topic of the proposed Renter Services Centre. One of the sector-based workshops was with renter-serving non-profit organizations and the other was with member organizations of the Vancouver Immigration Partnership (a collaboration of organizations working to improve access to services for newcomers). In addition, interested organizations were able to attend a virtual tour of the proposed Renter Services Centre space at 900 Howe. The purpose of the interviews and workshops was to collect feedback on the proposed Renter Services Centre from organizations that provide services and supports to Vancouver residents who rent. A total of 38 organizations participated in either an interview or workshop, with some attending both.

Participating Organizations

1. Access Pro Bono
2. Atira Women's Resource Society
3. Aunt Leah's Place
4. Battered Women's Support Services
5. BC 211
6. Collingwood Neighbourhood House
7. Community Legal Assistance Society
8. Disability Alliance BC / The Right Fit
9. DTES Neighbourhood House
10. Family Services of Greater Vancouver
11. First United Church Advocacy
12. Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House / Drive Youth Employment Services
13. Gordon Neighbourhood House
14. Helping Spirit Lodge
15. ISS of BC
16. Kettle Society
17. Kinbrace Community Society
18. Kitsilano Neighbourhood House
19. Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
20. MOSAIC
21. Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
22. Network of Inner City Community Services Society / Vancouver Rent Bank
23. Rainbow Refugee
24. Senior Services Society of BC
25. South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
26. SRO Collaborative
27. Tenant Resources and Advisory Centre
28. UBC Law Students Legal Advice Program / UBC Indigenous Legal Clinic
29. United Way of the Lower Mainland
30. Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society
31. Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society
32. Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture
33. Vancouver Tenant's Union
34. Watari Counselling and Support Services
35. West End Seniors Network
36. Whole Way House
37. Yarrow Society

Participants were asked the following questions:

- Do you have any feedback, suggestions, or concerns regarding the proposed Renter Services Centre?
    - How could the proposed Renter Services Centre add value for renters, your organization or the broader sector?
    - What would we need to consider in order to reduce barriers and increase access?
    - Are there are any other concerns or suggestions that that you would like to discuss with us?
- How might your organization wish to participate in the Renter Services Centre?

Interview participants were also asked about general feedback and advice about engaging renters as part of this process. They were also asked whether their organization was interested in hosting a focus group with renters and

whether they could distribute the survey to renters connected to their organization. Organizations were also informed that a Project Advisory Committee would be set up in the fall.

Responses to these questions were reviewed and summarized by theme.

3.2 Interview Findings

3.2.1 Suggestions for the Proposed Renter Services Centre

Service Delivery Models

- Satellite office service provision – "Hub and Spoke Model"; having a part time spaces in the RCS and/or across different locations for staff from different organizations to alternate
- City-wide referral network connecting to Renter Services Centre

Types of Services

- Service providers with complementary mandates and service provision that contributes to continuity (avoiding gaps in services); avoid competing / overlapping services
- Supports geared for individual circumstances, e.g., those experiencing homelessness, IBPOC, women experiencing violence, youth, seniors, temporary foreign workers, international students
- Services to help find housing; including advice on how to avoid scams, fill out applications etc.
- Financial or income support services (e.g., Rent Bank; help with filing taxes; rent subsidy access)
- Affordable / free legal services (e.g., legal aid/advice, representation/advocacy, interpretation of legal documents)
- Peer support for persons who may require a service and additional supports (e.g., seniors / persons experiencing homelessness)
- Advocacy services to support the pursuit of tenant rights
- Outreach services to help reach people who may not be able to easily access services in-person but require in person support (e.g., SRO tenants, wheelchair users)
- Education on tenant rights
- Evictions support services
- Connections to health services (e.g., mental health and wellness)
- Help with writing applications for services
- Hoarding/ cleaning support

Service Delivery Considerations

- Wraparound services (e.g., poverty alleviation, counselling, education and training, employment, health etc.)
- Translation for renters who don't speak English
- Protection of renter confidentiality in space and resources (e.g., separate printers, sound proofing)
- Remote and in-person access to services
- One-on-one personal support to help navigate individuals' unique situations
- Implementation of City's "Access Without Fear" policy and provide services regardless of immigration status and uphold privacy of service recipients
- Discrete entries/exits to the centre

- Ability to prioritize urgency cases (e.g., people facing deadlines with the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB)
- Potentially rename the centre to more directly communicate the intention of the centre and what services are being offered
- The Renter Services Centre could support both renters and service providers with access to information on renters rights and services, as well as support with referrals

Ideas for Making Renter Services Centre Welcoming and Reduce Barriers

- Accessibility in physical design, programming, and location
- Create a welcoming, non-intimidating environment (e.g., greet people, "open-door policy")
- Offer refreshments (e.g., food and drink, bus tickets)
- Access to amenities (e.g., showers, computer lab)
- Child-friendly spaces
- Community transportation support to the Centre (e.g., HandyDART shuttle access)
- Separate areas for different users to reduce potential conflict
- Decolonization supported through ongoing Indigenous engagement, cultural safety training etc.
- Evening and/or weekend extended hours

Proposed Location Renter Services Centre

- Downtown, central location is valuable with access to transit and other nearby services
- Some expressed concern about downtown being a barrier from those that live far away, who have mobility issues, or who are driving and need parking
- Need to be close to transportation options (e.g., public transit, shuttle access)
- Concern that the location near the courts may be intimidating for some users who have had interactions with law enforcement or are concerned about their immigration status

3.2.2 Interest in Participating in Proposed Renter Services Centre

Seven organizations who were interviewed expressed interest in being a part of the Renter Services Centre and eleven saw value in co-locating services with mutual mandates and services that fill gaps. Eight supported having hot desks (short-term, bookable desk space) for organizations to access. Note that a formal Expression of Interest process was held by the City and those submissions will be used to gauge interest and demand.

Interviewees noted a few key questions about being involved in the proposed Renter Services Centre:

- Will there be resources available to help organizations operate (e.g., grants)?
- Will the City provide staffing resources to complement non-profit staff?
- What are the cost considerations for participating?

4 Project Advisory Committee

The Project Advisory Committee met three times over the course of the RSC Feasibility Study to provide advice and expertise on the development of the RSC, including reflecting on the results of community engagement. The Project Advisory Committee includes staff representatives from non-profit organizations, as well as individuals with lived experiences as renters in Vancouver:

Organizational members:

- Access Pro Bono, Heather Wojcik
- Battered Women's Support Services, Rosa Artega
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Suzanne Liddle
- Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS), Angela Emam
- Disability Alliance of BC, Jackie Nicklin
- Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House / Drive Youth Employment Services, Rosie Forth
- Individualized Funding Resource Centre Society, Chris Hofly
- MOSAIC, Mona Asmani
- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Claudine Matlo
- Rainbow Refugee, Garfield Hunter
- Senior Services Society of BC, Alison Silgardo
- South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, Huda Bolbolan
- Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC), Andrew Sakamoto
- Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society, Marlee Laval
- Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST), Jhevoi Melville
- Vancouver Tenant's Union, AJ Batalden
- Watari Counselling and Support Services, Ingrid Mendez

Individual members:

- Athena Roddick
- Alexandra O'Donaghey
- Cenen Bagnon
- Colin Ross
- Erica Masuskapoe
- Holley W.
- Tracey Rust

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