

# Whistler Young Adult Survey 2021



Communities that Care Whistler

*Lizi McLoughlin*

*With support from:*



**WHISTLER COMMUNITY  
SERVICES SOCIETY**

*"A Helping Hand Toward A Healthy Community"*

# Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge and deeply thank the 898 young adults in Whistler who shared their experiences with us in this survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, perspectives, and ideas with Communities that Care. We are extremely grateful that, during a difficult time, you chose to help us better understand the needs and experiences of young people in Whistler.

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Finally, we gratefully acknowledge that the land now known as Whistler lies in the shared, unceded territories of the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations. We're thankful to do this work on their land.

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# Executive Summary

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This survey is the first Young Adult Survey completed in Whistler since 2016. It coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular, an outbreak of COVID-19 among young adults in Whistler. As such, this data set provides a snapshot of a unique and difficult moment in the lives of young adults in Whistler.

The goal of the survey was to understand the experiences of young adults living in Whistler, and how those experiences have changed over the last 5 years. In addition, we hoped to understand how the pandemic has impacted many aspects of young adults' lives over the last year.

## Methodology

From January 15 - February 15, 2021 an online survey was made available to young adults aged 18-30 living and/or working in Whistler. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected on several themes:

- Demographic data
- Housing
- Employment
- Physical and sexual health
- Mental health
- Substance use
- Community connections

Prizes were offered as incentives for young adults to participate, with one prize winner drawn every day. 898 young adults responded to the survey, and after the data was cleaned, 809 sufficiently complete responses were analysed.

The data were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010, as well as manual coding of qualitative responses.

## Demographic Data

Respondents to the survey were largely representative of the young adult population in Whistler, when compared with 2016 census data.

### Age and education

Young adults aged 18-30 responded to the survey. Those aged 30 were overrepresented compared to census data, and over 80% of respondents were aged 23 or older. 39% of respondents had been in Whistler more than 3 years, while 33% had been here less than one year. 73% of respondents had at least some post-secondary education, a slight decrease since 2016.

### Nationality, race, and Immigration status

Almost half (49%) of respondents were Canadian, the majority from outside BC. A further 20% were from the UK, and 13% from Australia. 54% of respondents were Canadian citizens, while 15% had Permanent Resident status, and 29% were on temporary work permits. In total, respondents came from 36 different countries.

Respondents' racial identities were representative of the Whistler population based on census data. 87% were white, while 4% were Asian and 2% Indigenous. English was the most common first language (77%), while 4% spoke French as a mother tongue. A total of 21 other first languages were represented.

## Gender and sexual identity

Women were overrepresented in survey responses, with 53% of respondents identifying as cisgender women. 34% identified as cisgender male, with a small number identifying as transgender, non-binary, and Two-Spirit, respectively. 12% of respondents chose not to provide a response.

77% of respondents identified as straight, while 8% identified as asexual, and 8% as bisexual. A small number also identified as gay, queer, lesbian, and pansexual. Again, 12% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

## Mental Health

The data painted a concerning picture of young adult mental health in Whistler. Respondents reported high levels of anxiety (65%) and depression (51%) since living in Whistler. There are high levels of stress among young adults, with 46% saying their level of stress has been “poor” or “very poor” over the last month.

The pandemic has had a significant negative impact on mental health. 70% said their mental health had deteriorated since the beginning of the pandemic, and 71% said they had been stressed about the pandemic “somewhat” or “very” often over the last month. 31% reported feeling “sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks” due to the pandemic, and 4% seriously considered suicide. Aside from the pandemic, young adults are most worried about their future (68%) and their finances (52%).

Young adults expressed concerns about many lifestyle factors that contribute to poor mental health, including poor housing and affordability challenges living in Whistler. They also identified significant challenges related to the pandemic, in particular social isolation and anxiety related to working in frontline roles. Young adults were also concerned about access to affordable mental healthcare in Whistler, which they felt was lacking.

## Employment

There is some good news surrounding employment. Young adults are working slightly less than in 2016, with fewer young adults reporting they are working multiple jobs (15%), and fewer reporting working more than 40 hours per week (22%). Food and beverage, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and retail remain the sectors that employ the majority of young adults in Whistler.

Wages in Whistler have increased notably over the last 5 years, with 48% of respondents now earning over \$17/hr. However, the vast majority of young adults are still earning less than the living wage of \$21.22 for Whistler.<sup>1</sup> While most young adults (89%) have access to some additional benefits through work, only 31% have access to Extended Health benefits, and 25% receive tips.

The pandemic has had a major impact on employment among young adults. 62% of young adults collected pandemic-related benefits over the last year. 38% reported losing their job at some point in the last year, and 43% are now working less as a direct result of the pandemic.

Young adults identified needs for better wages that match living costs in Whistler, better access to benefits, and a need for more consistent hours. They also hoped for better recognition and professional development opportunities within their roles. Many young adults expressed concerns about the safety risks of working frontline tourism roles during the pandemic, along with worry about the instability of work in the sector as a result of the pandemic.

## Housing

Housing remains a major concern for young adults in Whistler. 54% of young adults are spending more than 30% of their before-tax income on housing costs, a level which is deemed to be unaffordable. As a result, 55% report feeling “somewhat” or “very” concerned about their housing costs.

Relatively few young adults are accessing WHA housing. 19% of respondents are on the waitlist for rental properties and 11% for purchase. Instead, 57% of respondents live in rented accommodation, with a further 30% in staff or employee housing. Very few young adults own their own property.

The majority of young adults in Whistler share a home with 1-4 other people, with 38% of respondents sharing a bedroom. Overall, 63% report being “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with their housing, while 24% are unsatisfied.

The biggest concerns related to housing were cost and stability. These issues appeared frequently among responses in this survey, demonstrating the links between housing and mental health and wellbeing. In addition, the pandemic has increased concerns about overcrowded housing and privacy.

## Physical and Sexual Health

Young adults painted a mixed picture of their physical health while in Whistler. Only 47% reported their physical health as “good” or “very good”. In comparison, in April 2020, 68.6% of Canadians reported their perceived health as good, very good, or excellent.<sup>2</sup> 47% had also accessed healthcare for an injury since living in Whistler, while 35% had taken a COVID-19 test. Cost of healthcare is a concern for 55% of young adults in Whistler, despite the fact that 96% have access to some form of insurance.

There is work to do on access to sexual healthcare in Whistler. Only 31% of respondents had received an STD test since living in Whistler, with a high diagnosis rate of 10% of respondents. Respondents commented on lack of access to sexual healthcare as a barrier to good healthcare in Whistler.

Young adults expressed high levels of concern about the lack of access to family doctors in Whistler, in addition to concerns about lack of sexual healthcare. Some young adults also reported negative experiences of care in Whistler, and increased barriers to care since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Substance Use

Despite restrictions on social gatherings, levels of substance use remain high among young adults in Whistler. 53% of respondents said they were concerned about the level of substance use they observe in Whistler.

Alcohol is by far the most commonly used substance, with 74% of respondents saying they used it at least once per week. Binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks on one occasion) is common, with 31% saying they have done so at least once per week over the last month. Given that this survey data was collected while there were limitations on indoor dining, events, and nightlife, it appears much of this binge drinking must be taking place at home or in public spaces.

Other substances are less frequently used, but there are still causes for concern. 7% report using cocaine at least once per week, and a further 13% once or twice per month. 10% of respondents had witnessed an overdose since living in Whistler, and 3% reported overdosing themselves.

There is a strong appetite among young adults for alternative, alcohol-free recreation activities. Knowledge of LUNA was relatively poor, with 56% unaware of events organized by LUNA (Late and

Unique Nighttime Alternatives). Respondents expressed interest in a range of alternative activities, including night skiing, outdoor concerts, drive-through movie nights, social and drop-in sports, and activities such as bowling and laser tag.

## Community Connections

Young adults have mixed feelings about their connection to the Whistler community. 40% agreed that they feel connected to the Whistler community, while 25% disagreed. More conclusively, 54% felt their sense of connection had decreased since the beginning of the pandemic. Only 57% of respondents agreed that Whistler is a welcoming community.

The greatest barriers to young adults feeling connected to the community were: affordability and lack of opportunity to “build a life” in Whistler; COVID restrictions; negative attitudes of other locals; and lack of community events.

Respondents also reported relatively poor knowledge of services and resources available in Whistler. Only 55% knew how to access mental health services, and 61% knew how to access sexual health services. Some of the greatest barriers were not knowing how to access support (34%), embarrassment (22%) and fear of not being taken seriously (22%). Young adults mostly access information about services through social media (70%), implying there is an opportunity for service providers to better reach young adults in this way.

## Recommendations and Opportunities

Regardless of the challenges outlined here, young adults are mostly happy to call Whistler home. 83% are somewhat or very satisfied with Whistler as a place to live, and 44% plan to stay for several years or longer.

However, there are major barriers to young adults settling in Whistler and feeling connected to the community. Chief among them are: lack of access to housing; affordability and low wages; lack of access to healthcare and mental health care; lack of opportunities to connect with the community; and a perception of over-emphasis on tourism at the expense of locals.

Young adults provided a range of suggestions for how Whistler could become a better place to live, related to the concerns listed in the previous paragraph. Throughout their responses, young adults expressed strong positive feelings about Whistler, while also a clear sense of frustration at the barriers they face to a sustainable lifestyle in the town. This report highlights the major challenges facing young adults in Whistler and identifies gaps that need to be filled in order for young adults to live sustainable and healthy lifestyles in our community.

# Introduction

Since 2006, Communities that Care Whistler has surveyed young adults to understand their experiences living in Whistler. The goal of these surveys is to understand the factors that influence the wellbeing of young adults in Whistler, including housing, employment, physical and mental health, substance use, and community connections.

This latest survey, carried out from January 15 - February 15, 2021, is the first survey since 2016. The Committee had been preparing the survey for 2020 but missed the prescribed time and opted to wait. As the pandemic wore on, survey questions were re-designed to explore the impact of the pandemic on all aspects of young adults' lives. Unexpectedly, the survey data collection coincided with what was at the time Whistler's largest outbreak of COVID cases since the beginning of the pandemic (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

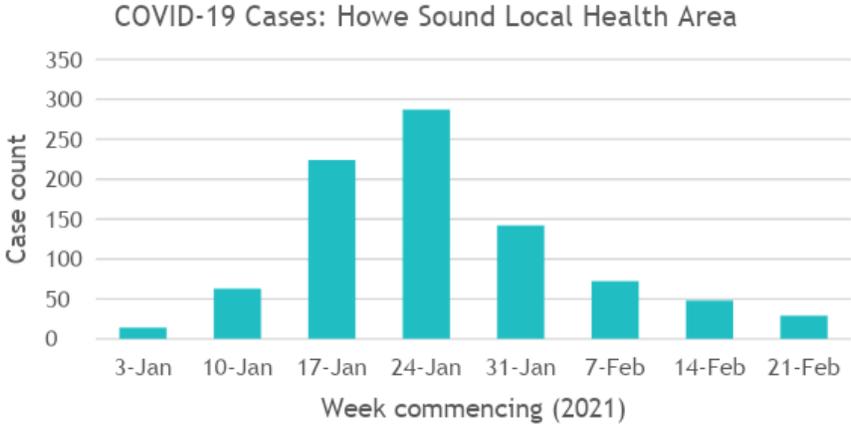


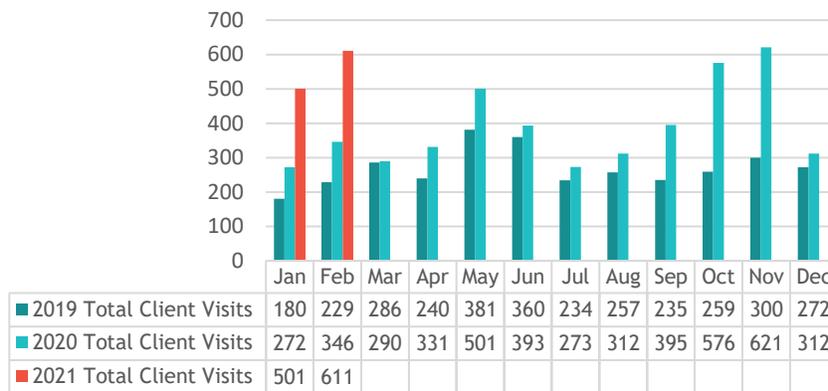
Figure 1 COVID-19 cases in the Howe Sound Local Health Area from January to February 2021

During this time, the vast majority of COVID cases in Whistler were among young adults working in frontline hospitality roles and living in shared accommodation.<sup>4</sup> In addition to those affected by illness, many more were required to self-isolate, quarantine, and stay home from work during this time. So, unintentionally, this survey captured a unique, stressful, and difficult time in the lives of Whistler's young adults.

To demonstrate the extent of the challenges facing young adults during this time, in January and February 2021, Whistler Community Services reported 1391 food bank visits, including 569 contactless deliveries for people self-isolating. For comparison, in 2018 the foodbank received 2773 visits in the entire year.<sup>5</sup>

During the same period, they received 1112 visits to their Outreach Workers, including 297 clients in crisis. Of those, the vast majority (870) were in their 20s and 30s. This compares to 618 total visits in the period January - February 2020 (an 80% increase), with 109 clients in crisis (172% increase).

## Visits to WCSS Outreach Workers, 2019-2021



*Figure 2 Visits to WCSS Outreach Workers, 2019-2021*

There were also restrictions on day-to-day life that were reflected in the responses to this survey. Restrictions on gathering with those outside your household were imposed in early November 2020 and remained in place throughout the period of data collection. Other restrictions, including bans on large gatherings, recommendations against non-local travel, and a two-week quarantine for international travellers were also in place.

As a result, the experiences reported here differ in many ways from past survey data. It is impossible to say how this data set would have differed had the pandemic not occurred. Nonetheless, the data brings to light important issues related to the needs of young adults in Whistler as we move towards recovery from the pandemic. Many of these impacts will continue to be felt long after the pandemic is over.

At the same time, many of the issues raised here will be familiar to the Whistler community. Challenges related to housing, living costs, and fair wages have not disappeared during the pandemic. This survey sought to understand both these ongoing challenges, the acute challenges caused by the pandemic, and the interplay of both.

# Methodology

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The goal of this survey was to describe the experience of young adults in Whistler, rather than to answer a specific hypothesis. The primary data for this report was collected via an online survey distributed to young adults (ages 18 - 30) living in Whistler, in the same way it was distributed in 2016. Previous survey data was collected via paper surveys.

In addition, supporting data from Statistics Canada, the BC CDC, Vital Signs Whistler, and Whistler Community Services Society were accessed to provide contextual and comparative data.

## Survey Design

The survey asked both quantitative and qualitative questions, which were based on the previous 2016 Young Adult Survey. Several changes were made, including:

- The addition of questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Updates to question design (e.g. addition of Likert scales)
- Removal of irrelevant or dated questions

In addition to collecting demographic data, the survey asked questions about six aspects of the young adults' lives:

- Housing
- Employment
- Physical and sexual health
- Mental health
- Substance use
- Community connections

Questions included forced-choice (i.e. asked to choose from a predetermined set of answers) and open-ended response questions. Respondents were able to opt out of answering any question.

## Survey Distribution

The survey was made available online (hosted on SurveyMonkey) from January 15 - February 15, 2021. It was promoted through paid and organic social media advertising, Pique Newsmagazine, employers, media coverage, community organizations including WCSS and LUNA.

## Incentives

To encourage participation, survey respondents were offered the chance to enter a daily prize draw upon completion of the survey. Participation in the draw was optional, and identifying data was collected separately from anonymous survey data.

Respondents who opted in were entered into a daily prize draw, drawn using a random number generator. Prizes including gift cards for local businesses were purchased by Communities That Care Whistler, or donated. All respondents were entered into a Grand Prize draw for a \$500 Whistler Blackcomb gift certificate on the final day of the survey.

## Data Analysis

898 responses were provided to the survey. The data was cleaned, and 89 responses were removed as they were deemed too incomplete to include in the final analysis.

The remaining 809 responses were exported, and the data analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010. In addition, qualitative data was analysed using manual inductive coding to identify themes among responses.

## Survey Limitations

Despite our best efforts to disseminate this survey widely, we recognize there are limitations and potential biases in the design, distribution, and data analysis of the survey. This survey asked questions about a range of personal experiences that respondents may not feel comfortable responding to accurately.

Data was collected only online, which may create barriers to participation. While SurveyMonkey meets accessibility standards, we recognize that an online survey may not always be accessible to those with disabilities. In addition, the survey was only made available in English, which could reduce participation from those for whom English is not their first language.

We also recognize that certain marginalized populations may be less likely to complete a survey of this kind. There are complex historical and sociocultural reasons why Indigenous people and people of colour may be underrepresented in the data here.

Finally, we recognize that in any qualitative data analysis, there is the possibility of bias in researcher coding of data. In order to obtain objectivity, quantitative data were collected to support the qualitative conclusions, peers reviewed the findings, with consideration and discussion of alternative explanations.

# Demographic Data

The following data offers a demographic picture of respondents to this survey. For the most part, they represented the Whistler young adult population, as understood through 2016 Census data<sup>6</sup>.

## Age

Respondents ranged in age from 18 - 30. Responses were skewed to the older end of the range, with 80% of respondents aged 23 or older. There was a significant over-representation of people aged 30 compared to other age groups. The same was true in the 2016 survey, although to a lesser extent. It is possible that some of these responses come from young adults who are older than 30 who still identify with the target audience of the survey.

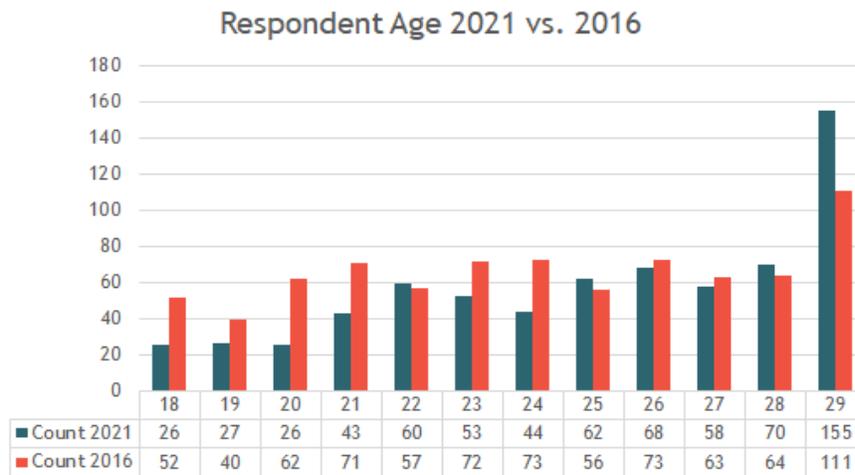


Figure 3 Age of survey respondents

## Time Spent in Whistler

The largest group of respondents had been in Whistler for three or more years (39%). This is in contrast to 2016, when the largest group (46%) of respondents said they had been here less than a year. In this survey, only 33% said they had been here less than a year. It is likely that these data have been affected by the pandemic and limitations on travel and working holiday visas.



Figure 4 How long respondents have lived in Whistler

## Place of Birth

49% of respondents were born in Canada, an increase from 38% in 2016. Of those, the majority (34%) were born outside BC, while only 4% were born in Whistler. There is likely a significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these data, as many Working Holiday Visa holders returned to their home countries in spring 2020. The Working Holiday Visa program was also put on hold and amended during 2020 due to the pandemic, likely reducing the number of young people moving to Whistler from abroad.

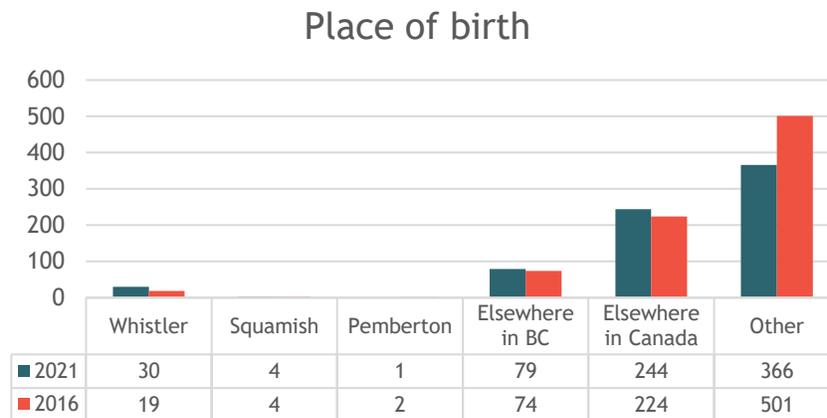


Figure 5 Respondents' place of birth

Outside of Canada, the most common place of birth was the UK (20%), an increase from 12% in 2016. Fewer respondents were born in Australia (13%) than in 2016 (20%). These changes are likely due in part to travel restrictions related to the pandemic. It became more difficult to secure working holiday visas, and countries like Australia had strict travel rules that discouraged international travel. In all, respondents represented 36 different countries of birth, as shown on the map below. This number is very similar to the data from 2016 (37 countries).

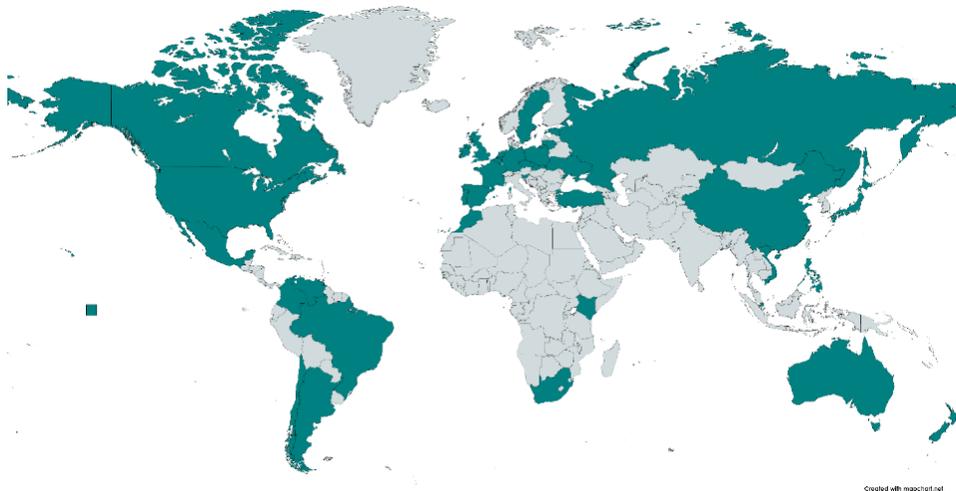


Figure 6 Map showing respondents' place of birth

## Immigration Status

54% of respondents were Canadian citizens, while a further 15% were Permanent Residents. 29% were temporary foreign workers, either through the Working Holiday program or other temporary work permits. A very small number identified other immigration statuses e.g. visitor visa or implied status.

## Gender and Sexual Identity

Women were overrepresented in survey responses, with 53% of respondents identifying as cisgender women. 34% identified as cisgender men, while fewer than 1% identified as transgender women, Two-Spirit, and non-binary, respectively. A relatively high number of respondents chose not to answer this question (12%)

	Count	%
Woman (cisgender)	431	53.28%
Man (cisgender)	271	33.50%
Woman (transgender)	1	0.12%
Two-Spirit	4	0.49%
Non-binary	4	0.49%
Prefer not to say	15	1.85%
No response	83	10.26%

Figure 7 Respondents' gender identities

The majority of respondents to the survey identified their sexual orientation as straight (77%). Also relatively common were asexual (8%) and bisexual (8%) orientations. A small number also identified as gay, lesbian, pansexual, and queer. Again, 12% of respondents opted not to answer this question. Overall, responses to this question represent a diverse range of sexual orientations among young adults in Whistler.

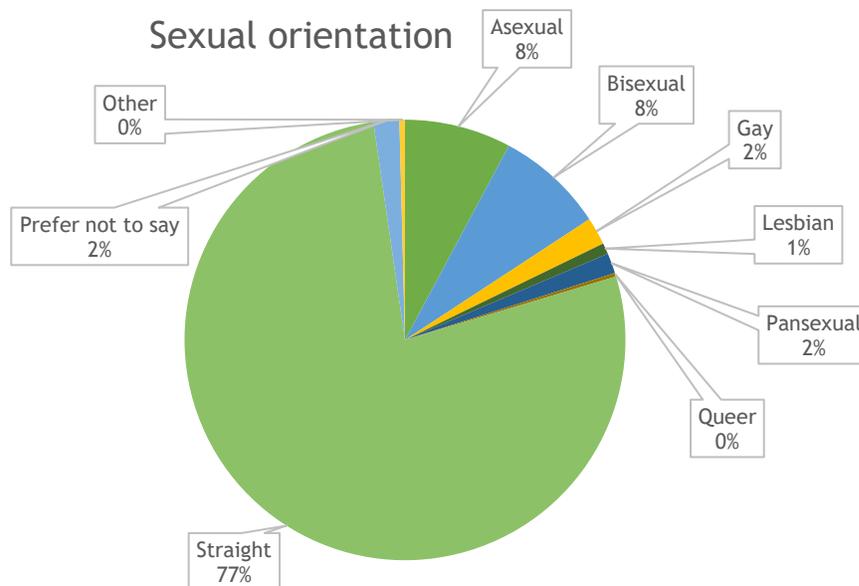


Figure 8 Respondents' sexual orientation

## Racial Identity

The majority of respondents to this survey were white (87%). The next most common racial identity was Asian, followed by Indigenous and Latin American. These data are very similar to 2016 Census data, with a slightly higher representation of Latin American identities, implying this survey captured a relatively accurate cross-section of the population of Whistler.

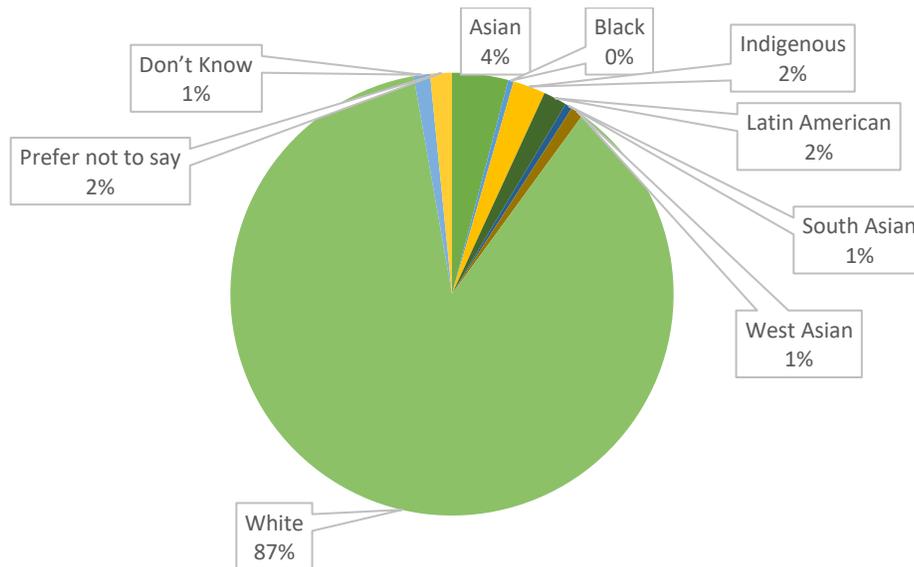


Figure 9 Respondents' racial identities

## Languages

77% of respondents spoke English as their first language, while 4% spoke French. This is in line with the 2016 Census data for Whistler, which found 4.7% of Whistler residents spoke French as their mother tongue<sup>7</sup>.

Beyond that, there were 21 mother tongues represented in the survey, the most common of which were German and Spanish. These data differ from the Whistler Vital Signs data from 2017, which found Japanese and Tagalog to be the most common languages after English and French<sup>8</sup>. This could imply that those languages are spoken less among the young adult population, or alternatively that there were limitations with this survey design that led to underrepresentation of those languages.

## Level of Education

As in 2016, the survey data continues to show that Whistler's young adult population is highly educated. 73% of respondents had attended some post-secondary education, with 48% having a Bachelor's degree or higher. The percentage of respondents with post-secondary education has decreased slightly since 2016, when 79% reported having post-secondary education. A slightly higher proportion than in 2016 indicated that they had not completed high school (2% vs. 0.05%).

Respondents' highest level of education

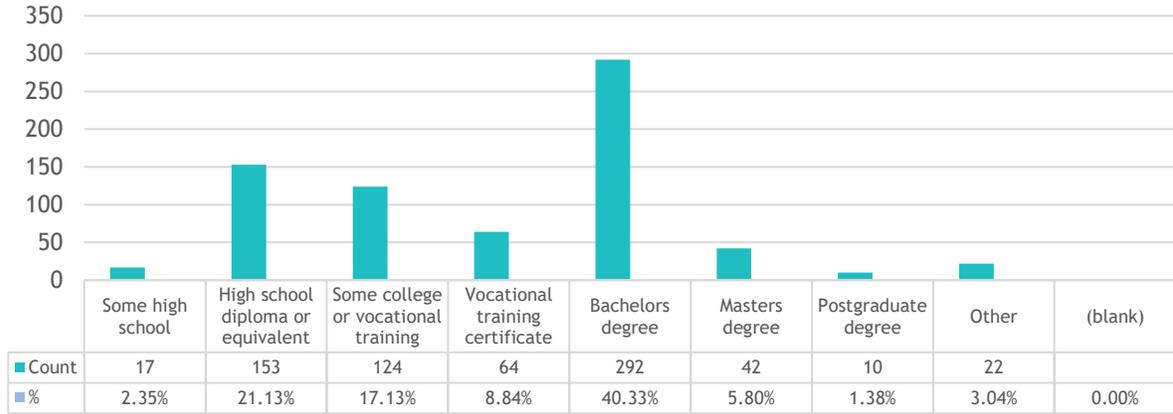


Figure 10 Respondents' highest level of education

# Mental Health

Of all the data collected in this survey, the findings relating to mental health were of greatest concern. It is clear that the pandemic has had a substantial impact on the mental health of young adults in Whistler. As such, we chose to present these findings first, to provide context for later sections of the report.

## Overall Mental Health

Respondents reported an alarming level of mental health concerns since living in Whistler, with 65% experiencing anxiety and 51% depression. For comparison, the Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that 8% of Canadian adults will experience depression<sup>9</sup> and 11% will experience anxiety in their lifetime<sup>10</sup>. This implies the rates of reported mental health concerns in Whistler are worryingly high and should be a cause for concern in our community.

### Since you have lived in Whistler, have you experienced:

Anxiety	65%
Depression	51%
Social anxiety	39%
Panic disorder	12%
OCD	12%

Figure 11 Prevalence of mental health concerns among young adults in Whistler

Respondents also reported high levels of stress, with 46% rating their level of stress as poor or very poor, and only 6% rating it as “very good”. This shows a significant increase in stress among young adults since 2016, when only 10% were experiencing “high” or “extreme” stress and 44% felt “low” or “no” stress.

The greatest cause of stress among young adults was the COVID-19 pandemic, with 71% saying they had felt stressed “fairly” or “very” often during the last month. The next most common causes of stress were “your future” (68%) and “your financial situation” (52%).

### Thinking about the last month, how would you rate your level of stress?

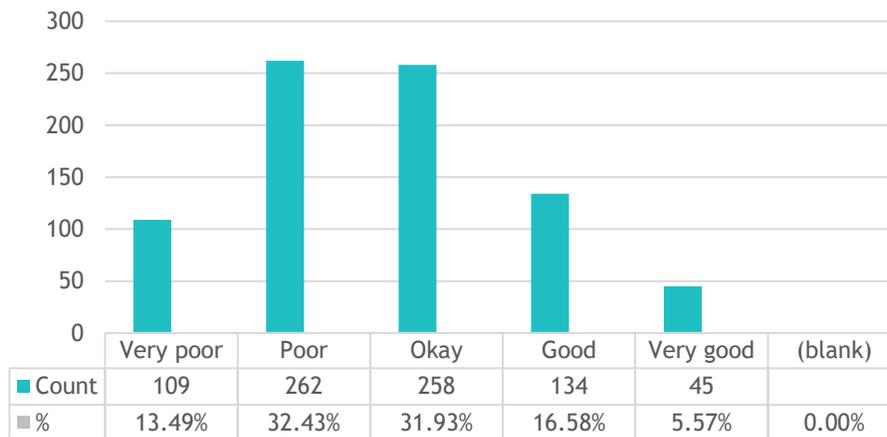


Figure 12 Respondents' self-rating of stress level over the last month

## How would you rate your usual stress level? - 2016

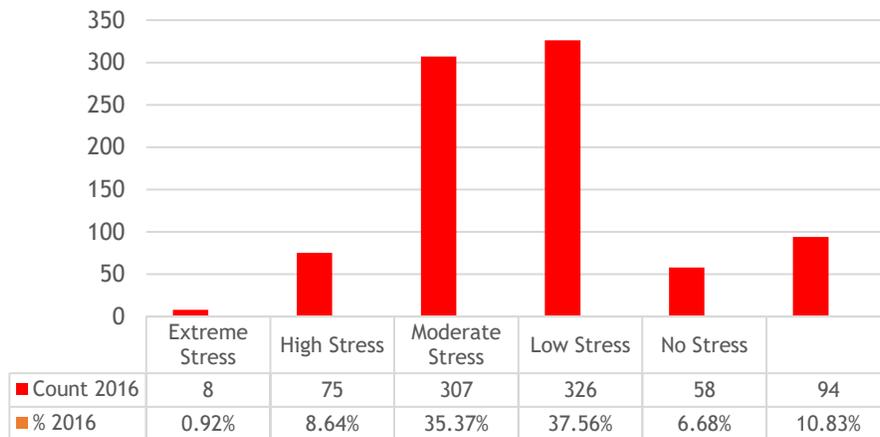


Figure 13 Respondents' self-rating of stress level in 2016

### In the last month, how often have you felt stressed about:

	<i>Fairly or very often</i>
<i>The COVID-19 pandemic</i>	71%
<i>Your future</i>	68%
<i>Your financial situation</i>	52%
<i>The climate crisis</i>	44%
<i>Your weight or appearance</i>	39%
<i>Other global events</i>	36%

Figure 14 Most common causes of stress among respondents

## Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health

The mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young adults is starkly demonstrated in this data. Only 30% of respondents rated their mental health as “good” or “very good”. Of the remaining respondents, 37% said “okay”, and 32% said “poor” or “very poor”.

In 2016, 77% of respondents rated their mental health as “good”, “very good” or “excellent”, with only 3% saying their mental health was “poor”. This is a dramatic contrast and suggests the COVID-19 pandemic was having a significant negative impact on young adult mental health during the time of data collection in 2021.

Thinking about the last month, how would you rate your overall mental health?

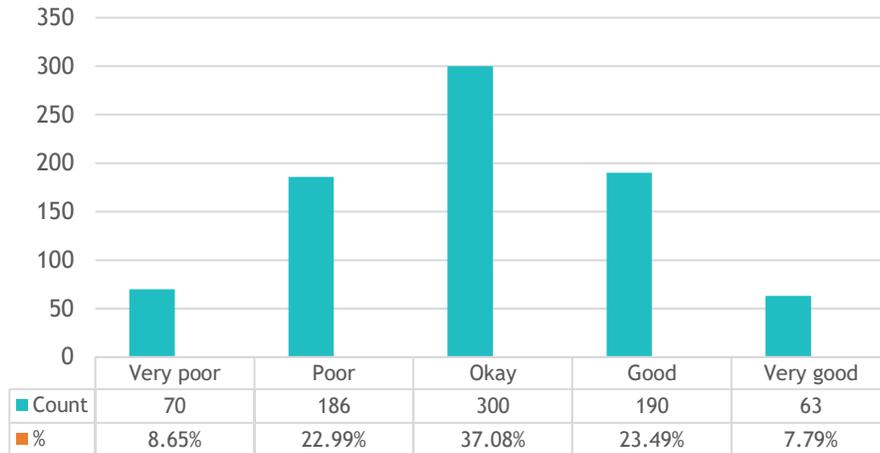


Figure 15 Respondents' self-rating of overall mental health, 2021

How would you rate your overall mental health - 2016?

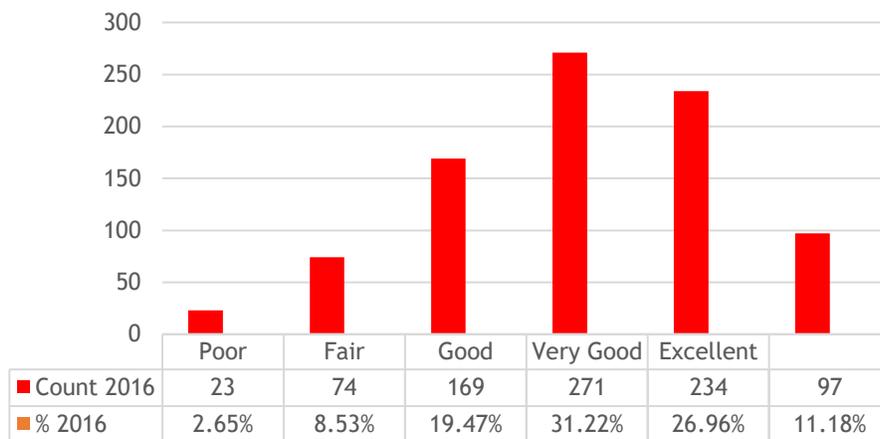


Figure 16 Respondents' self-rating of overall mental health, 2016

For comparison, across Canada mental health has declined since the onset of the pandemic. 46% of adults aged 25-34 reported “very good” or “excellent” mental health in July 2020, compared to 63% in 2019<sup>11</sup>.

70% of respondents said their mental health had “somewhat” or “significantly” deteriorated since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

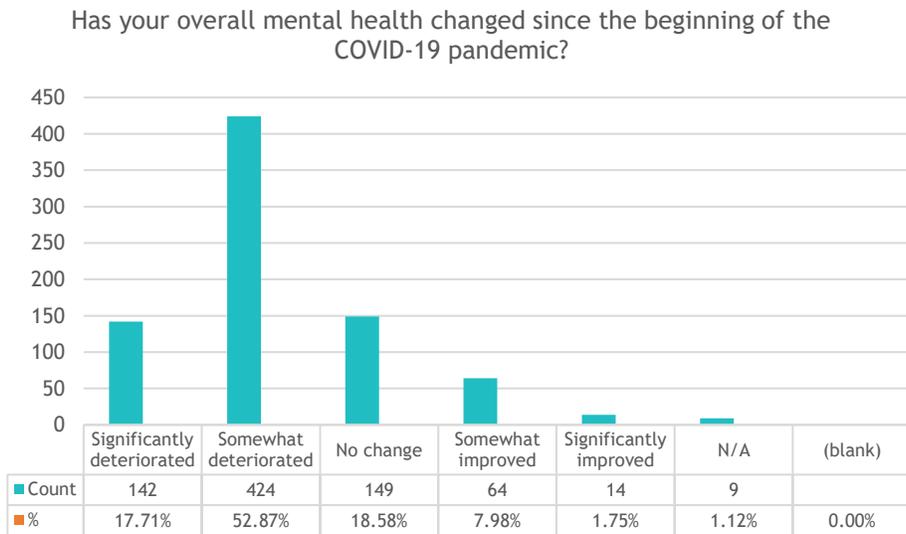
A worrying 31% said they had felt “sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row” because of COVID-19. A greater cause for concern is the 36 respondents (4%) who said they had seriously considered suicide because of the pandemic.

The pandemic is not, however, the only cause of stress for young adults in Whistler. The other most common responses were stress about the future (68%), their financial situation (52%), and the climate crisis (44%).

**Because of COVID-19, did you:**

<i>Feel sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row</i>	31%
<i>Seriously consider attempting suicide</i>	4%

*Figure 17 Mental health impacts of COVID-19 pandemic*



*Figure 18 Impact of COVID-19 on respondents' overall mental health*

## Concerns About Mental Health

132 respondents provided an answer to the question “do you have any other concerns about mental health in Whistler?”. Some of the most common themes that emerged included:

### Access to mental health care

Respondents were concerned about lack of access to specific mental health services, including counsellors and psychiatrists, as well as general access to healthcare including family doctors. Several also commented on the affordability of mental healthcare for those without Extended Health Benefits, with some indicating that they did not access care because of the prohibitive costs.

*“I would love therapy but cannot afford it. I am not a citizen or have PR so I am ineligible for many support services. It makes me feel hopeless.”*

At the same time, several respondents recognized the quality of some services available in Whistler. Whistler Community Services Society was highlighted several times for the support they provide to young adults. Some respondents felt these resources were well-communicated, while others felt they still lacked knowledge of what supports were available.

*“Although my mental health has taken a toll during the pandemic the services provided from the Whistler community centre were amazing and the staff are incredible!!”*

### Factors that contribute to mental health

Many respondents described the lifestyle factors that contributed to mental health issues in Whistler. They drew links between mental health challenges and unstable housing, high living costs, stressful employment, and high levels of uncertainty in their lives.

The sentiments of these responses are summed up in this quote from one respondent:

*“Affordable housing is mental health care. Transportation, jobs, not living 8 people to a 2 bed 1 bath is mental healthcare. Good wages, working conditions and not working 60+ hours a week to share said 2 bed is mental healthcare. Mental health care is not ONLY yoga + a phone number for a therapist that costs more than you make in a week.”*

*“I think due to stress of job security and seasonal jobs many people are feeling overwhelmed and at a loss for purpose.”*

### Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The final theme that emerged was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. Many respondents commented on how increased isolation and lack of social support has created mental health challenges during the last year. Some also commented on how the uncertainty and lack of ability to make plans was detrimental to mental health.

*“Knowing several people in isolation/quarantine, and having experienced it myself, I'm concerned about the mental state of people waiting on results or having to isolate with people that [sic] might not feel comfortable around.”*

Others reflected on the stress and anxiety of working in frontline tourism jobs during a pandemic, where young adults feel at risk of catching COVID-19 through their workplace. Some commented on the disparity between tourist behaviour and the limitations on socializing for locals, which have been damaging for mental health.

*“There’s a lot of people that come through whistler[sic] that seem very unconcerned with the impact they have on the area. We’re a tourist town, but our customers don’t seem to care about spreading the virus or being unnecessarily rude to people that live and work here.”*

Finally, some commented on how the pandemic has further restricted access to mental health care, or limited it to online provision only, which can be less effective.

*“Online resources are not the same as in person care for mental health. The ongoing pandemic has seriously hindered people’s ability for mental health care.”*

# Employment

The following data on employment in Whistler were collected during a volatile time in Whistler’s tourism industry. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a range of Public Health Orders were in place from March 2020 until this report was published which restricted tourist activities. These included, at various times, bans on international travel, restrictions on national and local travel, restrictions on indoor dining and alcohol service, and closures of restaurants and other non-essential businesses. Some of these orders were introduced on short notice and extended several times.

The cumulative impact of these Public Health Orders was significant for local businesses and employees. Many of the findings below will be heavily influenced by this unique set of quickly changing circumstances.

## Type of Employment

Fewer young adults are working multiple jobs than in 2016 (15% vs. 21%), and more are employed in just one role (76% vs. 65%), either part-time or full-time. Fewer people are choosing not to work (1% vs. 3%) and slightly more are seeking employment (5% vs 3%).



*Figure 19 Employment status (total % adds up to more than 100% as respondents could choose multiple options)*

It appears that, overall, young adults are working less than they were in 2016. Significantly fewer respondents reported working 40+ hrs/wk, although more than 1 in 5 young adults still works longer than a 40-hour week. Similarly, fewer respondents are working 31-40 hrs/wk, while more are working from 0-30 hrs/wk.

Hours worked per week, 2021 vs. 2016

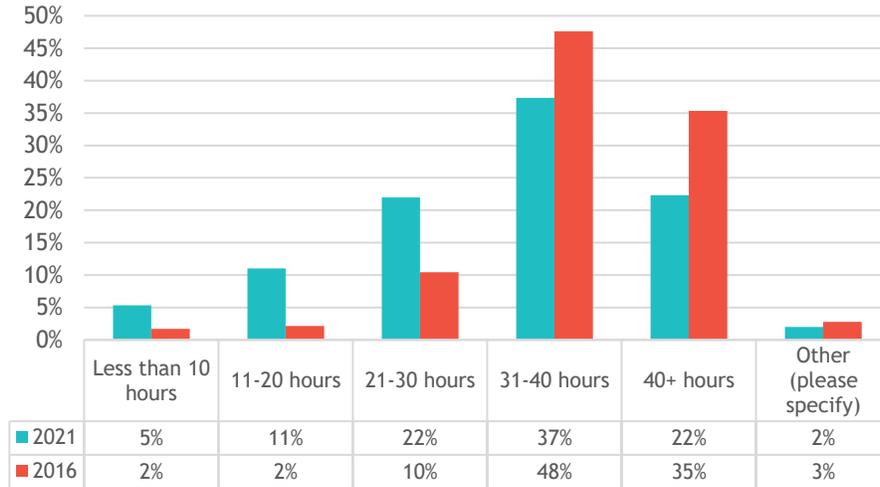


Figure 20 Hours of work per week by respondents in 2021 and 2016

The four most common jobs remain the same as in 2016: food & beverage, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and retail.

In contrast to previous years, 16% of respondents answered “other” to this question. While a number of these responses fall under traditional frontline tourism roles (e.g. lift operations, base area operations, rentals, guest services, ski patrol), many others are less expected, e.g. education, emergency services, healthcare, marketing, IT, non-profit, and transportation. Compared to the 2016 data, this implies a diversification of employment in Whistler and potentially more young people working in “professional” jobs than previously. Alternatively, it could imply that the survey reached a different demographic of young adults in 2021 compared to 2016, due to different methods of distribution and promotion. There could also be an impact due to COVID-19, as many businesses reduced their staff teams, and those with more stable, permanent jobs were more likely to maintain employment.

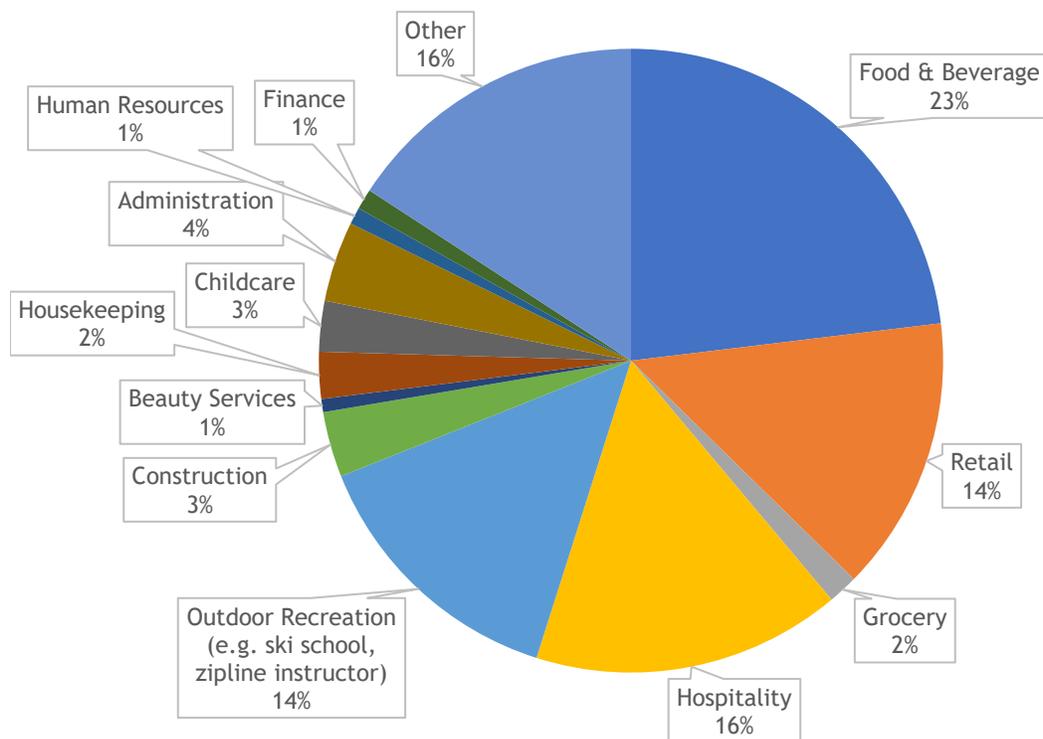


Figure 21 Respondents' industry of employment in Whistler

## Wages and Benefits

There has been a clear growth in wages in Whistler since 2016, when 56% of respondents were earning less than \$15/hr. Now, only 16% of respondents reported earning below the minimum wage of \$14.60. In 2016, only 24% reported earning over \$17/hr, a figure which has doubled to 48% in 2021. It is worth noting that between 2016 and 2021, the minimum wage in BC has increased from \$10.65/hr to \$14.60/hr.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of young adults in Whistler still earn less than the living wage of \$21.22/hr<sup>1</sup> for a 35-hour week (2019). Some of this wage growth is offset by inflation over the five-year period between surveys. This growth also does not consider the increasing cost of living in Whistler. Further, as noted above, a greater proportion of young adults were working outside of the tourism industry, which could be a factor in the reporting of higher wages.

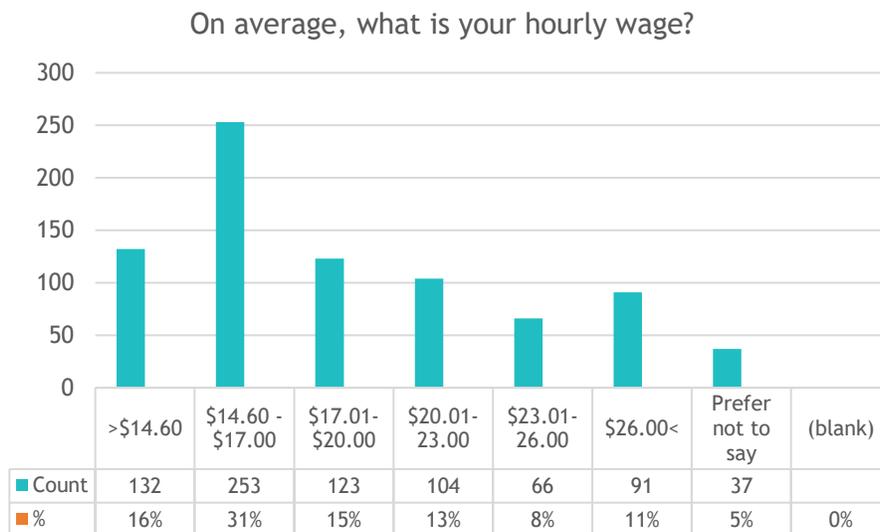


Figure 22 Respondents' average hourly wage

Food discounts	57%
Ski pass	51%
Retail discounts	43%
Access to housing	32%
Extended health benefits	31%
Activities discounts	27%
Wellness benefit	15%
RRSP contributions	14%
None	11%
Transportation discounts	7%
Pension	6%
Other	2%

Figure 23 Most common employee benefits provided to respondents

Most young adults have access to some benefits which reduce their cost of living or increase their total compensation package. However, 11% of respondents reported receiving no additional benefits at all. The most common discounts available to young adults were food discounts (57%), ski pass (51%), retail discounts (43%), access to housing (32%), and extended health benefits (31%).

Only 31% of respondents had access to extended health benefits through their employer, and only 14% received employer RRSP-matching contributions. Noticeably fewer respondents reported receiving tips than in 2016 (25% vs. 35%). It is possible that the reduction in those receiving tips reflects that fewer jobs were available in industries where tips are standard practices (e.g. food and beverage, ski instruction).

## COVID-19 Impacts on Employment

It is clear that COVID-19 had a significant impact on young adults' employment. 38% of respondents reported losing their job due to COVID-19. In addition, the majority (62%) - of respondents collected the Canada Emergency Recovery Benefit (CERB) or other COVID-19 related benefits at some point in 2020.

While the data shows that the majority of young adults have since found employment again, 43% reported a lasting reduction in their hours of work due to COVID-19, while a small number (6%) reported that they remained unemployed. It's worth noting that 1 in 10 young adults in Whistler is actually working *more* because of COVID-19.

Concerningly 38% of respondents reported reducing the size of their meals, or skipping meals, at least once per month because of COVID-19, including 7% doing so almost every day. This implies that the benefits available to young adults were not always sufficient to cover basic costs such as food.

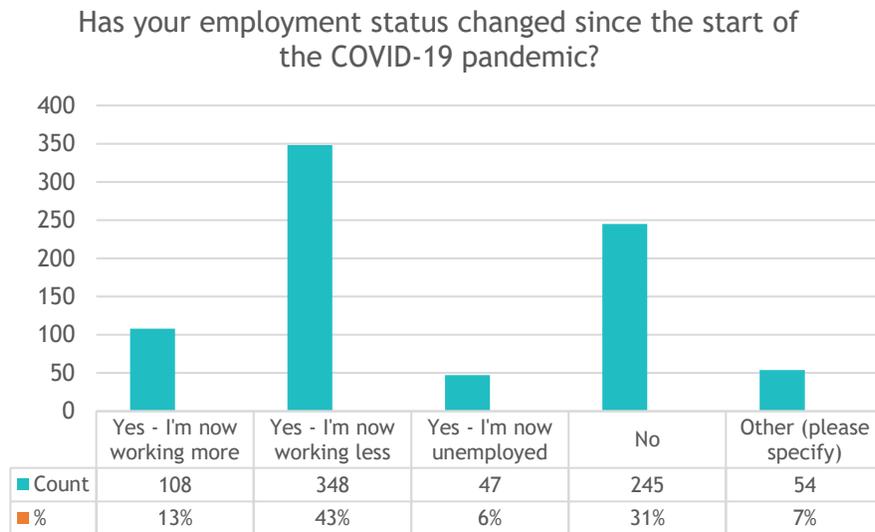


Figure 24 Respondents' change in employment status due to the COVID-19 pandemic

### Because of COVID-19, did you:

<i>Lose your job</i>	38%
<i>One or more people living in your home lost their job</i>	30%
<i>Had to move or change home</i>	26%
<i>Had to eat less food than you thought you should</i>	16%

Figure 25 Frequency of impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

## Job Satisfaction

The majority (58%) of young adults in Whistler are at least somewhat satisfied with their job, while 20% are not. The majority (52%) also agree that their employer takes a personal interest in them, while 24% do not. This compares unfavourably to 2016, when 13% felt their employer took “no interest”, 54% felt they took “some interest”, and 34% felt they took “a lot of interest”.

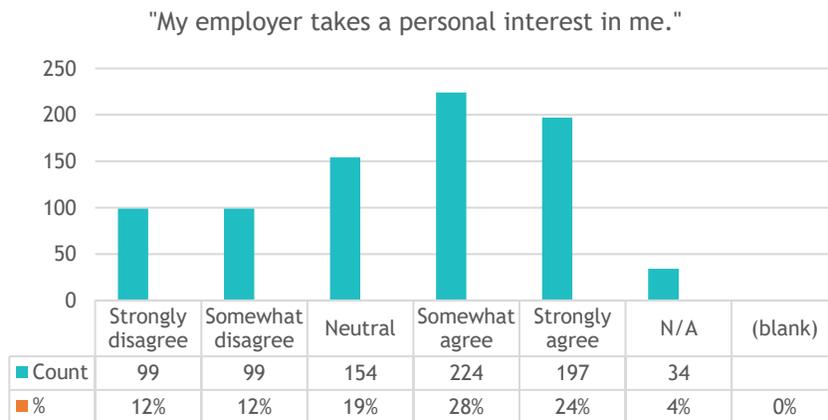


Figure 26 Agreement with the statement “My employer takes a personal interest in me.”



Figure 27 Agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my job.”

# Concerns about Employment

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431 respondents provided an answer to the open-ended question “what, if anything, would improve your job satisfaction?”. The most common responses fit into several themes:

## ***Better Wages, Benefits, and Hours***

An increased wage, or living wage, was the most common response to this question. Many respondents commented on needing a wage that met the high living costs in Whistler. Others also commented on needing access to benefits, in particular Extended Health Benefits, to improve their quality of life.

*“Planned[sic] raise to match inflation as Whistler gets more and more expensive every year but wages don't match.”*

*“A fair wage for the role I am conducting. Whistler is expensive but my wage does not reflect this. Most [sic] the workers, less those that get tips, scrape by, whilst surrounded by a lot of wealth.”*

Respondents also expressed a desire for better or more consistent hours. Some respondents needed more hours of work to meet these living costs, while others were working too many hours already in order to meet those costs. Many commented on the inconsistency of hours due to the pandemic, which makes it hard to financially plan.

*“A consistent and reliable source of hours and cash flow coming in.”*

Finally, some comments on this theme spoke to a desire for a better work-life balance, and in particular, time to ski or ride on the mountain.

## ***Recognition and Career Development***

Many respondents expressed a desire for greater recognition from their employer for their work. Several responses reflected a sense of frontline workers being far removed from management in larger companies. These sentiments appeared heightened by the increased stress and challenge of working in frontline roles during the pandemic. Many respondents commented that recognition did not have to be a big gesture, but that thanks and recognition are highly valued by young adults.

*“Upper management caring about the people on the ground level actually doing the hard work.”*

*“Never under estimate the power of being thanked by your employer. There's a common misconception that people only work for money. This is false. They also like to be recognized for what they've accomplished. This is where their motivation to go above & beyond comes in.”*

Respondents also expressed a clear desire for more professional development opportunities and opportunities for career progression. Several of these responses indicated a desire to progress in a company, but frustration at the lack of opportunities.

*“Time to personally developed[sic] and grow with the company, learn new skills and opportunities to move up in the system.”*

## COVID-19 Impacts on Employment

The final group of responses commented on the significant impact of COVID-19 on employment in Whistler. Some spoke to the challenge of quiet shifts and expressed a desire for more work and busier shifts. As noted above, others needed more consistent hours of work.

Others expressed safety concerns about going into work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a sense that they had no choice but to risk catching COVID-19 by working on the frontlines. Coupled with these were comments about the financial stress of having to self-isolate or quarantine and not being able to make money.

*“Most of the customers I come into contact with at the restaurant are unmasked non-essential travellers, who don’t seem to know/care about any of the health orders. I’m scared to go to work but I don’t want to lose my job.”*

*“If it was safe to be at work. I feel vulnerable working in a restaurant.”*

*“Sometimes I have a sore throat/ mild cough and feel very anxious about the financial implications of having to quarantine. I would like to have the financial security to take care of my health, both physically and mentally. I am very stressed and very tired.”*

Finally, some comments spoke to the loss of the social aspects of work during the pandemic. For example, a lack of staff gatherings and parties, or “cohorts” where staff work with only a limited number of others, has reduced young adults’ opportunities for social connection through work.

It should be noted that several people responded “nothing” to this question, implying a high level of job satisfaction. Some respondents also recognized that their employers were doing the best they could in a challenging situation.

# Housing

## Housing Affordability

Housing affordability remains a major concern for young adults in Whistler. It is worth noting that this survey took place during a time when real estate prices in Whistler were increasing rapidly, perhaps contributing to increase instability in the rental market in Whistler.

More than half (54%) of respondents reported that their housing is not affordable under the accepted definition (housing costs less than 30% of income). A corresponding 55% of respondents said they were “somewhat” or “very” concerned about their housing costs.

Is your current housing affordable (costs less than 30% of you income)?

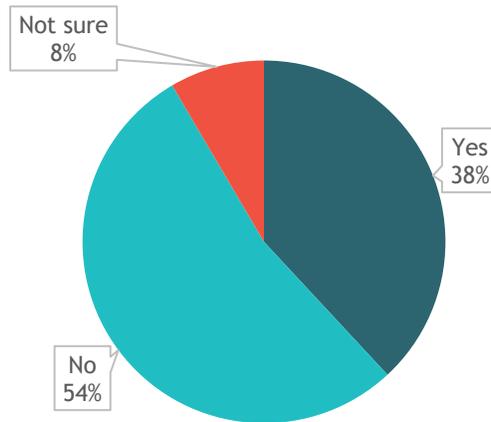


Figure 28 Housing affordability

To what extent are you concerned about your housing costs?

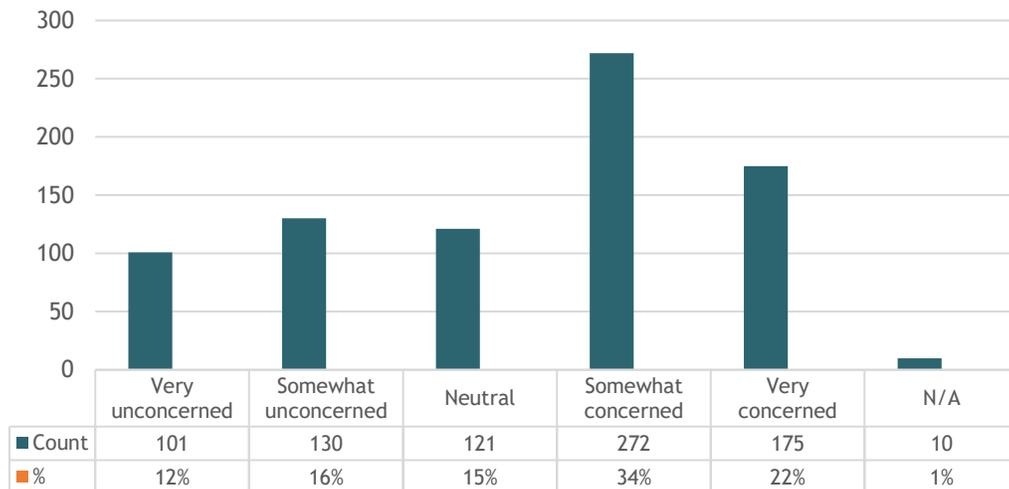


Figure 29 Respondents' level of concern about housing costs

## Whistler Housing Authority (WHA)

As of the end of 2020, the Whistler Housing Authority (WHA)<sup>†</sup> offers 2596 rental beds and 3993 ownership beds within Whistler. This includes 275 beds added since 2018 across four new developments. In total there are 1253 people on the WHA rental waitlist and 864 on the purchase waitlist.<sup>11</sup>

Only 16 (2%) respondents reported living in a WHA property which they owned. A further 23 (3%) reported living in a WHA rental. Given that 39% of respondents have lived in Whistler for four or more years, and a further 12% for 2-3 years, this cannot be attributed entirely to a transient, non-permanent workforce responding to the survey.

Similarly, only a minority of young adults surveyed are on the WHA waitlists: 151 (19%) on the rental waitlist and 89 (11%) on the purchase waitlist. Of those, the majority had been on each respective waitlist for less than 2 years. A small but significant number had been on each waitlist longer than 5 years.

It is worth noting that there are barriers that exist to young adults being on the WHA waitlists, including: the requirement to have Permanent Residency or Citizenship; the requirement to declare and continually update personal information; and the cost of maintaining a place on the WHA purchase waitlist.

Together, these data suggest that the vast majority of young adults in Whistler are not benefitting from WHA provision of affordable housing. Those who are facing the biggest economic challenges in Whistler are rarely benefitting from the stability and affordability of Whistler's large stock of WHA housing.

<sup>†</sup>More information on the Whistler Housing Authority can be found at <https://whistlerhousing.ca/>

## Quality and Type of Housing

Overall, respondents report a relatively high level of satisfaction with their current housing situation. 63% are “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with their housing, while 24% are unsatisfied.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your current housing situation?

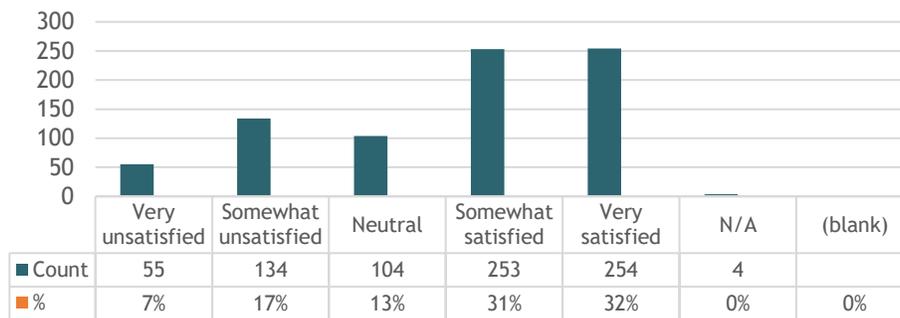


Figure 32 Respondents' level of satisfaction with their housing

Most respondents reside in relatively small dwellings. The most common size of dwelling was a 2-bedroom (40%), with only 7% living in houses with over 5 bedrooms. The vast majority of respondents (77%) live with 1-4 other people, while 11% live with 5-8 others. These data represent very little change since 2016.

What is the size of your current dwelling?

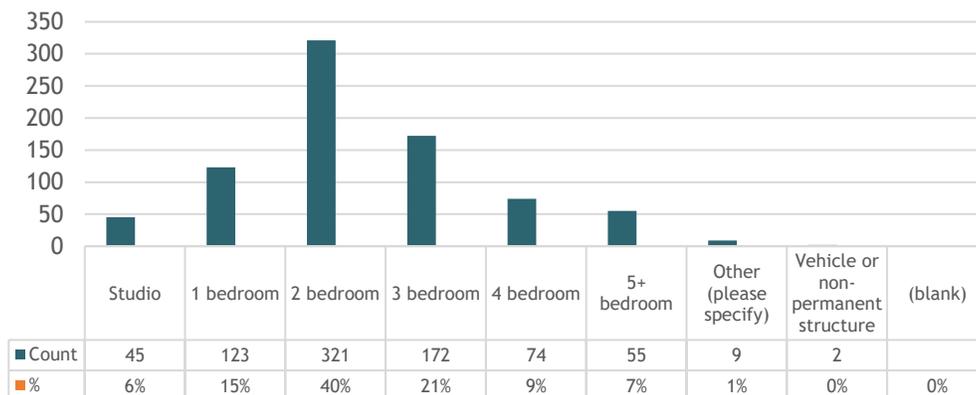
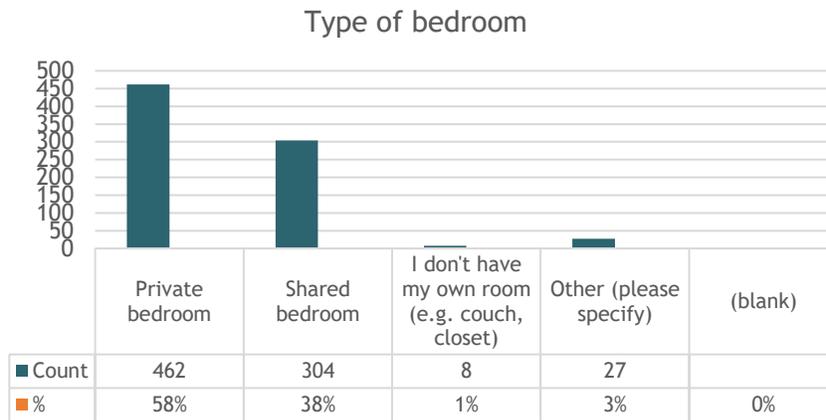


Figure 33 Size of respondents' dwellings

The most common housing situation was to rent a room in a shared property (36%) followed by employee housing (30%). Notably, only 5% of respondents were housed in WHA housing, including 3% in WHA rentals and 2% in WHA ownership properties.

Fewer respondents reported sharing a bedroom than in 2016 (38% vs. 51%), and 58% reported having their own bedroom. This could be related to the fact that Whistler Blackcomb HOUSE saw significantly lower occupancy in 2021 due to the pandemic (approx. 50%), and more young adults were housed in private bedrooms than in previous years due to COVID-19 precautions.



**Figure 34 Respondents' bedroom type**

<i>Rental (room in a shared property)</i>	36.0%
<i>Employee housing</i>	29.7%
<i>Rental (whole property)</i>	20.8%
<i>Your own property</i>	6.6%
<i>Other*</i>	4.2%
<i>Rental (WHA)</i>	2.8%
<i>Your own property (WHA)</i>	2%
<i>Airbnb/Short-term rental</i>	0.2%
<i>Couch surfing</i>	0.2%
<i>Vehicle</i>	0.2%
<i>Outdoors</i>	0.1%

**Figure 35 Type of property respondents live in**

\*Majority of other responses were with family or partner's family

## Housing Concerns

*Thinking about your dwelling, to what extent are you concerned about:*

	<i>Somewhat or very concerned</i>
<i>Housing costs</i>	55%
<i>Ability to self-isolate/quarantine</i>	45%
<i>Roommate attitudes to COVID-19</i>	30%
<i>Late night noise</i>	21%
<i>Roommate conflicts</i>	20%
<i>Maintenance and repair</i>	16%
<i>Drug or alcohol use</i>	14%
<i>Your personal safety at home</i>	13%
<i>Theft</i>	11%

*Figure 36 Respondents' main concerns about housing*

218 people provided a response to the open-ended question “are there any other concerns you have about your housing?”

### Affordability

Overwhelmingly, the most common responses related to housing affordability. In particular, many commented on the lack of affordable options for those who wish to stay in Whistler long-term. There was clearly a high level of concern with the affordability of housing compared to wages in Whistler.

*“My housing costs 100% of my income.”*

*“I live paycheck to paycheck to paycheck. Cost of the rental is almost 75% of my pay. Remaining 25% is for shared hydro and internet, my phone bill and food.”*

Other comments noted that the increased prices of WHA rental properties has made them unaffordable to many on middle incomes in Whistler.

*“Having to find a new rental if I get kicked. WHA rentals are too expensive for me now that I make a reasonable income.”*

### Housing Stability

Many other comments reflected respondents’ desire to stay in Whistler long-term, and the lack of options available to them. Several commented that they expected they would have to leave Whistler in the future due to lack of suitable housing.

*“Just lack of affordable options for people who are trying to stay permanently in Whistler. This would be the main reason if we ever decided to leave.”*

Many also commented on the stress of potentially losing their housing in future. Even those in housing they perceived to be stable currently, did not have confidence that it would remain that way. They expressed concern that they would not find suitable housing again. It is clear that housing stability causes a high level of stress for young adults in Whistler.

*“I have a partner, 2 dogs and a child. If my housing becomes unavailable, it’ll be impossible to find another place that would take us, let alone affordable. People here charge ridiculous amounts for rent for a tiny place. Trying to find suitable housing to raise a family here is next to impossible.”*

*“Security of my housing. I often feel the stress of thinking about if I was no longer able to stay in this rental and having to go through the process of finding another private room in Whistler.”*

## **COVID-19 Impacts on Housing**

Many respondents expressed concern about their housing in reference to COVID-19. These concerns included the challenges of self-isolating in small apartments and shared bedrooms. The theme of cramped housing emerged several times, and it was noted that the challenges of cramped housing have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

*“To[sic] small for the amount of people especially while isolating and not being able to leave the house to see others. Gets very lonely and cramped.”*

Others commented on the stress and isolation of only being able to see housemates rather than other friends during the last several months.

*“The worry about having to isolate because my housemates testing positive to COVID, again. It is mentally challenging.”*

Many commented on the mental health impacts of self-isolation. Some also expressed concern about their roommates’ attitudes to COVID-19 and the impact it would have on them if they were to catch COVID-19.

*“4 people in a very small two-bedroom apartment with covid existing. Constantly being concerned about having to isolate because of other peoples’ lack of following public health orders.”*

# Physical and Sexual Health

## Physical Health

Overall, respondents rated their physical health as better than their mental health, with 47% saying their physical was “good” or “very good” and only 17% saying it was “poor” or “very poor”.

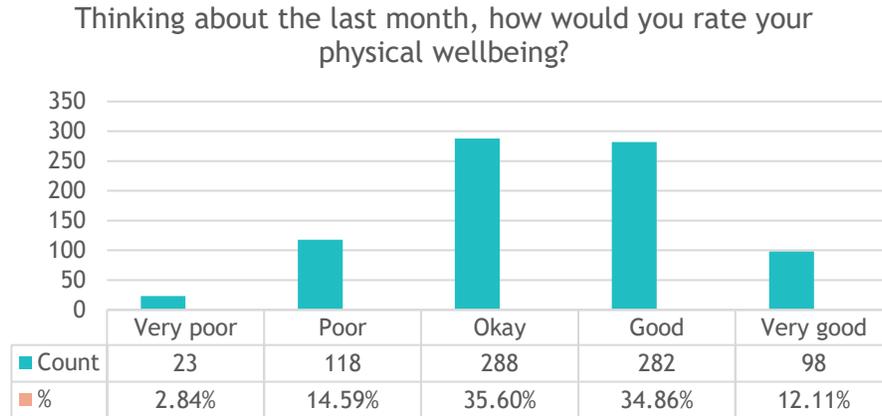


Figure 37 Respondents' self-rating of physical wellbeing

Nonetheless, nearly half (47%) reported accessing medical care for a physical injury since living in Whistler. The next most common reasons for accessing medical care were for a general check-up (35%), COVID-19 test (35%), and physical illness (34%).

### Reasons for accessing healthcare since living in Whistler:

	2021	2016
Trauma/emergency	-	24%
Physical injury	47%	-
General check up	35%	25%
COVID-19 test	35%	-
Physical illness	34%	29%
Prescription renewal	30%	17%
Sexual health concern	22%	-
Mental health concern	17%	-
Pre/post-natal care	3%	-

Figure 38 Most common reasons for accessing healthcare in Whistler in 2021 and 2016. Please note, additional response options were included in 2021.

## Sexual Health

The data demonstrated a gap between safe sex practices and access to sexual healthcare in Whistler. 58% of respondents reported having unprotected sex since living in Whistler, while only 31% reported accessing an STD test. There is a relatively high prevalence of STDs, with 10% of young adults reporting a diagnosis since they have lived in Whistler.

A further 4% reported experiencing an unplanned pregnancy since living in Whistler. It should be noted that unprotected sex may take place between young adults wishing to conceive.

**Since you've lived in Whistler, have you experienced:**

<i>Unprotected sex</i>	58%
<i>STD test</i>	31%
<i>STD diagnosis</i>	10%
<i>Unplanned pregnancy</i>	4%
<i>Pregnancy loss</i>	3%

Figure 39 Respondents' experience of sexual health concerns and pregnancy

## Sexual Harassment and Assault

Another cause for concern is the 134 respondents (17%) who reported experiencing sexual harassment since living in Whistler, and the 44 people (6%) who had experienced sexual assault. For comparison, 47 incidents of sexual assault were reported to the RCMP in Whistler and Pemberton in 2019 across all age groups<sup>12</sup>. In 2020, only 26 reports of sexual assault were made for the same region. While direct comparisons are not possible, this implies at least some sexual assault in Whistler is unreported and that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had an impact on either the prevalence of sexual assault in Whistler, or the frequency with which it is reported.

**Since you've lived in Whistler, have you experienced:**

<i>Sexual harassment</i>	17%
<i>Sexual assault</i>	6%

Figure 40 Respondents' experience of sexual harassment and assault

## Access to Healthcare

The vast majority of respondents (96%) had access to some medical insurance, with BC MSP the most common insurance (63%). However, fewer than half of respondents agreed that “if I need medical care in Whistler, cost is not a concern”. This implies there is a gap between available insurance coverage and the financial needs of young adults in Whistler when accessing healthcare.

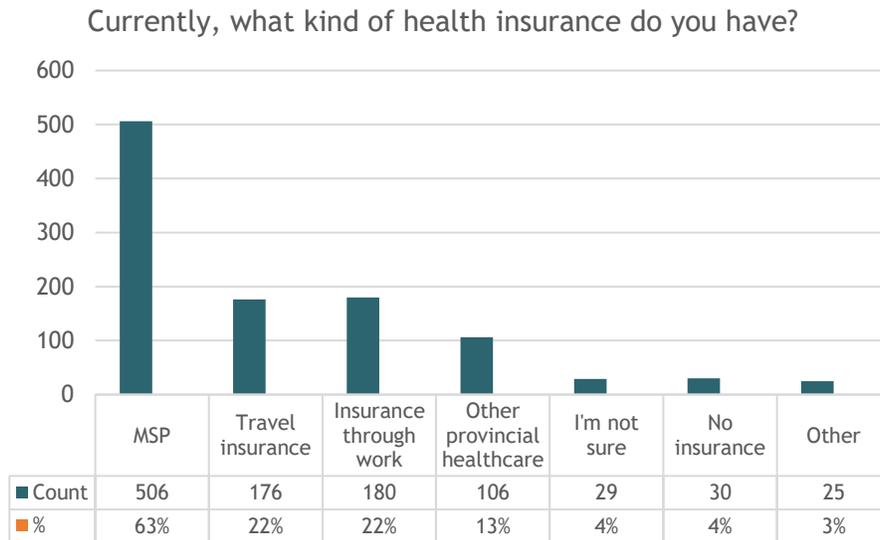


Figure 41 Respondent's access to health insurance

It does, however, appear that the cost of healthcare remains a concern for young adults in Whistler. Only 45% agreed that “cost is not a concern” if they need medical care in Whistler, while 40% disagreed. This is likely due in part to many young adults relying on travel insurance which requires out-of-pocket expenses. However, as 63% of young adults report having MSP, it implies that even a portion of those respondents find the cost of healthcare challenging.

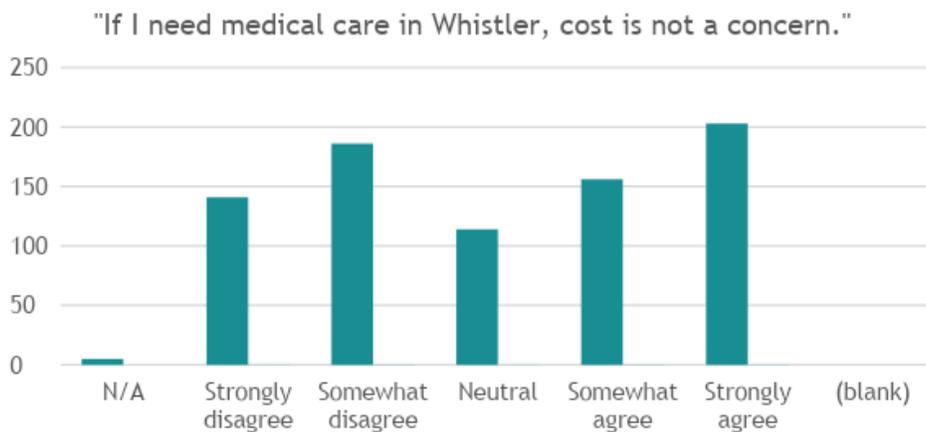


Figure 42 Respondents' level of concern about the cost of healthcare in Whistler

It does appear that young adults have strong support systems in Whistler: 83% agreed that “if I have an emergency in Whistler, I have someone I can call.” However, there is still a significant and concerning 17% of respondents who do not have someone to call in an emergency.

# Concerns about Healthcare in Whistler

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208 respondents provided an answer to the question “do you have any other concerns about access to healthcare in Whistler?” Their responses fell under three themes:

## Challenges Accessing Care

Many respondents commented on the difficulty of accessing healthcare in Whistler. Of particular concern was the lack of family doctors, especially since the closure of Coast Medical Centre in 2020. Several respondents expressed concern that they could not access regular check-ups or consistent care for long-term conditions.

*“Been trying to get a regular doctor for 5 years, only to be told no one’s accepting new patients.”*

*“I feel uneasy about not having access to a regular/family doctor. I have several ongoing prescriptions and medical issues that I constantly have to re-address with every doctor I see.”*

There were also several comments on lack of access for sexual health care and the limitations of the OPT clinic. Several respondents noted that they could not get access to pap smears due to the current limitations of the system in Whistler.

Several respondents also expressed concern about the cost of healthcare, particularly for those without MSP coverage. Some had challenges accessing MSP, while others were reliant on travel insurance but unsure if they would be able to pay premiums or up-front costs.

*“I wouldn’t be able to pay the upfront cost before being able to claim on my insurance.”*

*“Initial cost can be terrifying.”*

Alongside this, respondents expressed a need for Extended Health Benefits in order to access preventative medical care.

*“I believe more employers need to offer extended benefits especially for those who have been strong employees and with the company for a while now. I avoid things like dental and optical, naturopathy etc when it’s needed because of the added cost it’s unaffordable.”*

## Negative Experiences of Care

A small but significant number of respondents commented on negative experiences of care in Whistler. Some respondents expressed discomfort in accessing certain medical providers, or a sense that weren’t heard by their medical provider. These responses were often linked to the lack of choice in healthcare, as respondents felt they had no other options but to access care they weren’t comfortable with.

*“You can never get a Dr appointment and it’s very stressful trying to get an appointment. Town Plaza it’s[sic] always rushed, they don’t take the time to listen to you.”*

*“The doctor there is awful, he made me feel like my sickness wasn’t real and I swore to never go back there. It’s very frustrating that this problem isn’t being addressed and has lead[sic] to me putting off going to the doctor as I don’t know where to go.”*

## COVID-19 Barriers to Care

The final theme was on the additional barriers to care created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these comments reflected how certain services were unavailable during the pandemic, or harder to access. Others commented that while virtual care appointments have been beneficial, they are not suitable for all cases and sometimes face-to-face appointments are required.

*“It’s incredibly hard to get in to see a doctor. The telehealth system has been good, but sometimes you just need to go in in person and that can be near impossible here sometimes.”*

*“Not many health places are open to new clients due to COVID- for example I broke a tooth during lockdown and all dentists said they wouldn’t see me as it wasn’t an emergency and I wasn’t an existing client.”*

*“Unable to access regular services due to covid/lack of staff.”*

# Substance Use

Despite limitations on social gatherings, and restrictions on pubs, bars, and nightclubs, substance use is still common among young adults in Whistler. Alcohol is by far the most commonly used substance, with 74% of respondents saying they had drunk alcohol at least once a week for the last month.

Binge drinking (defined as having more than five drinks per night for a male, or four for a female) is also common. 31% of respondents reported binge drinking at least once per week over the last month, and a further 32% said they had binge drunk once or twice in the last month.

During the time when survey data was collected, restaurants and bars in BC were permitted only to serve alcohol to guests seated on tables of no more than six people, from within their household, and only until 10pm. This implies that at least some, if not a large proportion, of binge drinking is taking place in private homes or public spaces.

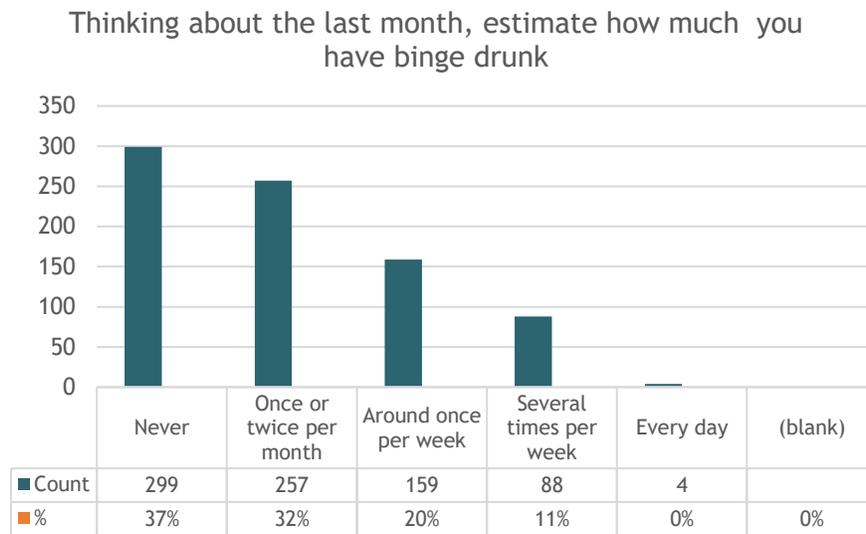


Figure 43 Rates of binge drinking among respondents

Cannabis is the second most commonly used substance, with 36% saying they used it at least once a week, followed by tobacco (16%). Other recreational drugs that are commonly associated with Whistler’s party scene are used less frequently. Cocaine use is the most common (7%), followed by magic mushrooms (2%) and MDMA (1%). 15% of respondents said they vaped, with only 7% reporting doing so most days.

Compared to 2016, reported use of all substances had increased. It is not clear however, whether this represents a true increase, or more accurate reporting of substance use. The 2016 survey data noted the limitations of self-reported substance use data, and it was recognized that data may have been under-reported. Of note is a significant increase in use of magic mushrooms “around once per month”: from 2% of respondents (2016) to 18% of respondents (2021).

In the last month, estimate how often you have used:

	2021		2016	
	At least once per week	Around once per month	At least once per week	Around once per month
Alcohol	74%	17%	68%	25%
Cannabis	36%	17%	19%	11%
Tobacco	16%	5%	13%	6%
Cocaine	7%	13%	2%	7%
Magic mushrooms	2%	18%	0%	2%
MDMA/ecstasy	1%	9%	1%	5%
Prescription drugs	1%	4%	1%	1%
Methamphetamine (speed)	1%	-		
Ketamine	1%	4%	0%	1%
LSD	-	3%	0%	4%

Figure 44 Prevalence of substance use among respondents

The majority of young adults in Whistler (53%) are concerned about the level of substance use in Whistler. Only 17% say they are not concerned.

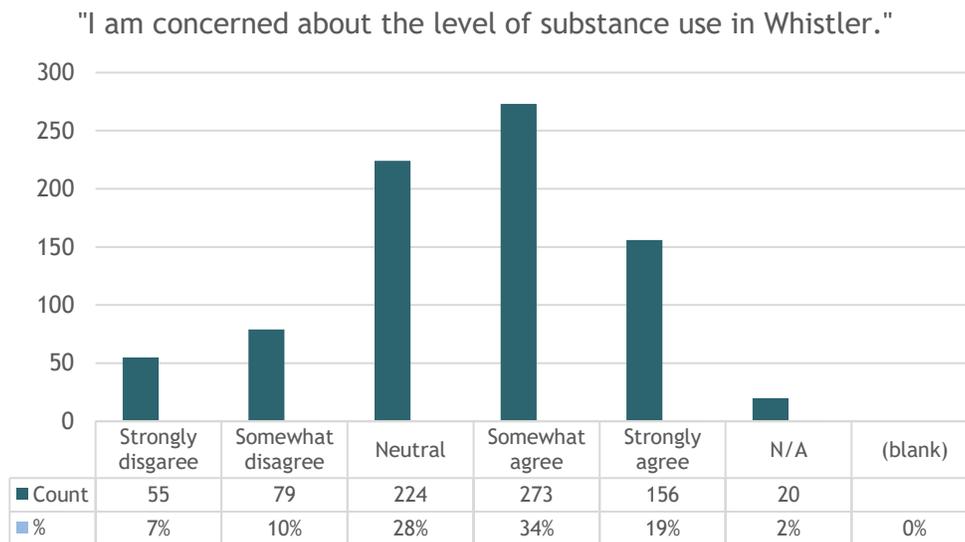


Figure 45 Respondents' level of concern about substance use in Whistler

They also report significant impacts of substance use on their lives. The most common areas of impact were finances, mental health, and physical health. 49% of respondents reported blacking out or losing memory at least once in the last year, and 41% had argued with someone while under the influence of substances.

The frequency of these behaviours appears to have increased somewhat since 2016, including an increase in operating a motor vehicle under the influence of substances. This could represent a true increase. It could also be the result of a different demographic of survey respondents in 2021, or more accurate self-reporting of behaviours.

Of great concern is that 10% of respondents said they had witnessed an overdose since living in Whistler, and 3% had overdosed themselves.

**2021: Thinking about the last year, have you done the following under the influence of substances:**

<i>Blacked out or lost memory</i>	49%
<i>Argued with someone</i>	42%
<i>Participated in a sport</i>	41%
<i>Gone to work</i>	24%
<i>Operated a motor vehicle</i>	15%
<i>Got into trouble at work</i>	5%
<i>Got into a physical fight</i>	4%

Figure 46 Behaviours under the influence of substances, 2021

**2016: Since you have been in Whistler, have you done each of the following behaviours while under the influence of alcohol or drugs?**

<i>Argued with someone</i>	30%
<i>Participated in a sport</i>	33%
<i>Operated a motor vehicle</i>	9%
<i>Got into trouble at work</i>	6%
<i>Got into a fight</i>	5%

Figure 47 Behaviours under the influence of substances, 2016

**Since you've lived in Whistler, have you ever:**

<i>Witnessed an overdose</i>	10%	79
<i>Overdosed on any substance</i>	3%	22
<i>Administered naloxone to treat an overdose</i>	2%	13

Figure 48 Respondents' experience of overdose in Whistler, 2021

In the last month, how often has substance use negatively affected your:

	<i>Fairly or very often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>
<i>Finances</i>	13%	19%
<i>Mental health</i>	12%	22%
<i>Physical health</i>	8%	20%
<i>Relationships</i>	7%	14%
<i>Hobbies</i>	7%	16%
<i>Work/studies</i>	5%	10%

Figure 49 Common impacts of substance use, 2021

## Alcohol-Free Recreation

The majority of respondents (56%) did not know that alcohol-free events were available through LUNA (Late and Unique Nighttime Alternatives)<sup>†</sup>. Only 12% of respondents had attended a LUNA event in the last year, and a further 30% were aware of LUNA's services, but had not attended.

When asked what alternative or alcohol-free events they would like to see, 215 respondents gave answers. Their responses were varied and creative and demonstrated a strong desire for more alcohol-free nighttime entertainment in Whistler.

The most common response by far was night skiing. Other very popular suggestions included: outdoor movie nights and drive-through movies; outdoor concerts and other live music; social sports like softball, dodgeball, volleyball, and basketball; a bowling alley; laser tag (with comments on the success of laser tag at the library); board games; and arts and crafts activities.

<sup>†</sup>More information about LUNA can be found at <https://lunawhistler.com/>

# Community Connections

## Connection to Whistler Community

Respondents gave mixed responses when asked how connected they felt to the Whistler community. Only 10% strongly agreed with the statement “I feel connected to the Whistler community”. 40% “somewhat” agreed, while 25% “somewhat” or “strongly” disagreed. These responses demonstrate a range of experiences and perspectives on connection to the Whistler community.

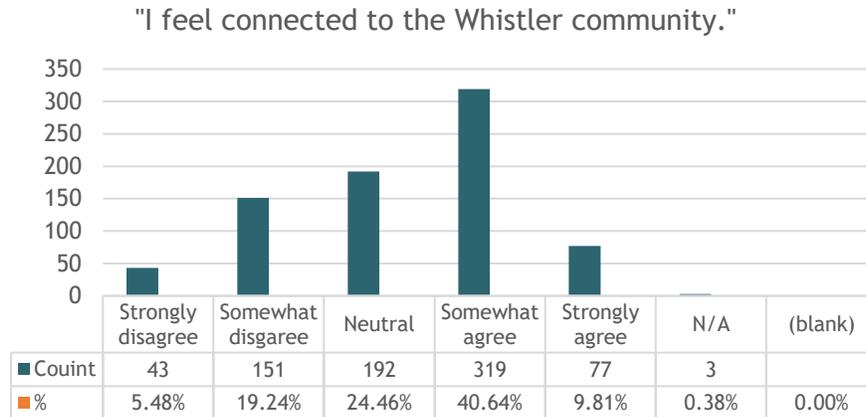


Figure 50 Respondents' sense of connection to the Whistler community

More conclusively, the majority of respondents felt their sense of connection had deteriorated since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 34% saying it had decreased “somewhat” and 20% “significantly.”

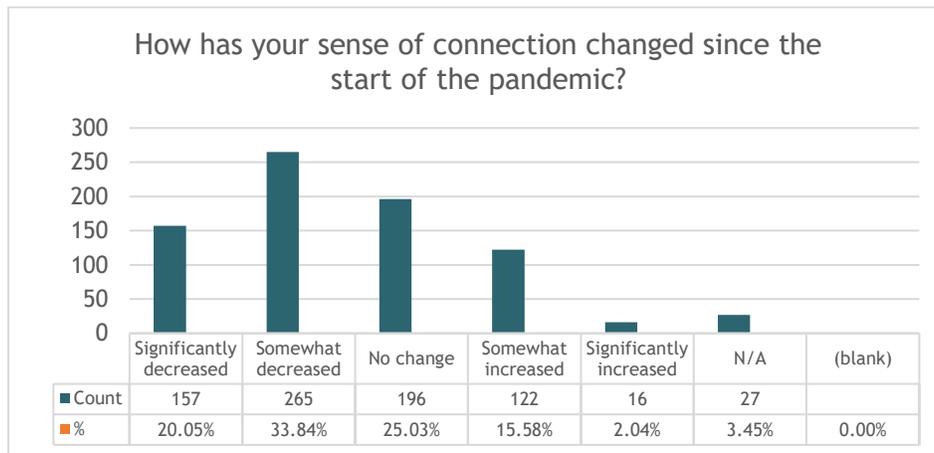


Figure 51 Change in sense of connection due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Overall, respondents found Whistler to be a welcoming community, with 57% “somewhat” or “strongly” agreeing that “Whistler is a welcoming community”. 18% disagreed with this statement, implying there is still work to be done to ensure all young adults feel welcome in Whistler.

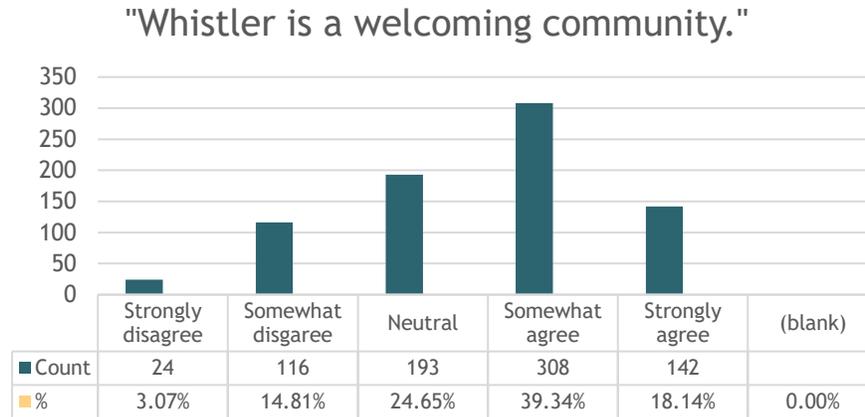


Figure 52 Level of agreement with the statement "Whistler is a welcoming community"

The survey found that work is a very important source of connection for young adults in Whistler. 79% said they had met some of the people they are most connected with at work. Other common ways to meet people were as housemates, through outdoor activities, and at social events. These responses have implications during the pandemic, where, as noted earlier, work provides less social interaction, and social events are not available.

**Thinking about your community in Whistler, how did you meet the people you feel most connected to?**

At work	79%
Housemates	49%
Through outdoor activities	43%
At social events/parties	31%
Through other hobbies	15%
Through community groups	8%
Other	7%

Figure 53 How respondents met those people they feel most connected to. Responses may not total 100% as respondents could choose multiple responses

When asked what would make them feel more connected to the Whistler community, 246 respondents gave an open-ended response. Responses were wide ranging and touched on many different aspects of life in Whistler at the current time.

## COVID-19 Restrictions

The most common response to this question related to the current restrictions on socializing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear this has been a challenge for young adults in Whistler, especially those who have not been here a long time.

*“No covid restrictions, having the right to see people other than housemates.”*

*“Being able to meet new people and hang out with friends again.”*

## Affordability and Sustainability

Many responses commented on the lack of affordability in Whistler as a barrier to connection to the community. These comments often related to the instability of housing, and a sense that young adults may not be able to remain in the community for long, which led to them feeling less connected.

*“I would feel like more of a part of the community if I knew I could afford to live here. I feel like a bystander, who knows if I’ll ever be able to live here long term, more or less a WHA lottery.”*

*“Being able to afford a place and get settle[sic] to built a life here.”*

*“Housing to be more affordable so friends you make can build a life here.”*

Several respondents also commented on the transient nature of Whistler’s population, and the challenges that poses for connection. They noted the interrelation of affordability and transience, with many comments suggesting that greater affordability would lead to less transience, and therefore more community connection.

*“Whistler needs to lower it’s housing costs so that it becomes less of a transient environment. Housing costs prevents people from staying long term and ensure that this community is only for the rich and the young who can only manage to live here for a year or two.”*

*“I think it’s just the amount of people coming and going that makes it hard to connect with people. If WB or other businesses made it their goal to have more employees for the long-term then it would be easier. Otherwise, everyone’s visas come to and[sic] end and they can’t apply for PR cause the place they work for won’t consider sponsoring.”*

## Attitudes to Seasonal Workers

A distinct subset of responses noted negative attitudes towards seasonal workers among long-term Whistler locals. Many comments reflected an impression of elitism among those who have lived here longer, and an unwelcoming attitude towards newcomers and seasonal workers.

*“As a seasonal worker I feel as though many locals are less welcoming, which is a bit unfair as Whistler heavily relies upon seasonal workers to run the economy.”*

*“Stop the elitism around what makes you a local, the “I’ve been here longer so I’m more local” talk. If you are contributing to the community in a positive way, no matter how small or for how long, you are a local.”*

Related comments spoke to negative experiences of the Whistler community online, in particular through the “Whistler Winter” Facebook page and a desire for change among that page.

*“If someone sorted out the whistler winter Facebook group. The negativity on that site is only getting worse.”*

*“Less trolls on social media (specifically the Whistler Winter/Summer Facebook page). It is a toxic place that is supposed to be helpful yet so called “locals” are very quick to throw in negative comments.”*

## **Community Events**

Finally, respondents expressed a desire for more in-person events to bring the community together, once permissible. In particular, respondents hoped for events specifically tailored to locals rather than tourists, that were affordable and community-centric.

*“Events that bring the community together (obviously not now but when the timing makes sense).”*

*“More open community events in general when the time allows. Bike groups in the summer, fundraisers for everyone to be part of, neighborhood block parties, free yoga in the park...”*

## Access to Community Resources

Young adults in Whistler have varying levels of familiarity with community resources. While the majority knew how to access help for physical health (74%), fewer knew how to access sexual health (61%) and mental health (51%) services. As is clear from earlier chapters, sexual health and mental health are areas of concern for many young adults in Whistler, so this gap in knowledge is concerning.

Despite the high profile of local food security programs over the last year, only 62% said they felt knowledgeable and confident accessing food security services in Whistler.

**Do you feel knowledgeable and confident in accessing services and resources in Whistler for:**

<i>Physical health</i>	74%
<i>Employment opportunities</i>	66%
<i>Food security</i>	62%
<i>Sexual health</i>	61%
<i>Mental health</i>	55%
<i>Volunteer opportunities</i>	49%
<i>Assault (including sexual assault) and harassment</i>	42%
<i>Suicide</i>	40%
<i>Housing</i>	37%

Figure 54 Respondents' comfort and knowledge accessing resources in Whistler

The greatest barrier to accessing services was that respondents “didn’t know where to get help” (34%). Not recognizing that they needed help (23%), embarrassment/guilt (22%), and fear of not being taken seriously (20%) were the next most common responses. This suggests there is still work to be done to ensure services in Whistler are accessible and safe for all young adults in Whistler, and that they have the knowledge to access those services.

Respondents mostly accessed information about community programs through social media (70%), their friends and coworkers (59%), and their employer (28%). These are potential avenues for service providers to explore to ensure young adults have access to the information they need about services in Whistler.

**What barriers have you faced to accessing services and resources in Whistler?**

<i>I don't know where to get help</i>	34%
<i>I didn't realize I needed help</i>	23%
<i>Embarrassment or guilt</i>	22%
<i>Fear of not being taken seriously</i>	20%
<i>I didn't realize I could get help</i>	15%
<i>Worry about what my family/friends would think</i>	13%
<i>Feeling mistrustful of service providers</i>	13%
<i>Transportation</i>	10%
<i>Worry about confidentiality</i>	10%
<i>I tried to get help but it didn't help</i>	7%

*Figure 55 Barriers to accessing resources in Whistler*

**How do you access information about community programs and events in Whistler?**

<i>Social media</i>	70%
<i>Through friends and coworkers</i>	59%
<i>Through my employer</i>	28%
<i>Websites</i>	27%
<i>Posters</i>	19%
<i>Email</i>	16%

*Figure 56 How respondents access information about community resources in Whistler*

# Final Impressions

Overall, young adults are satisfied with Whistler as a place to live, with 44% saying they are “somewhat” satisfied and 39% “very” satisfied. Despite the clear challenges articulated in this survey, young adults overall have positive impressions of Whistler as a place to live.

## Overall, how satisfied are you with Whistler as a place to live?

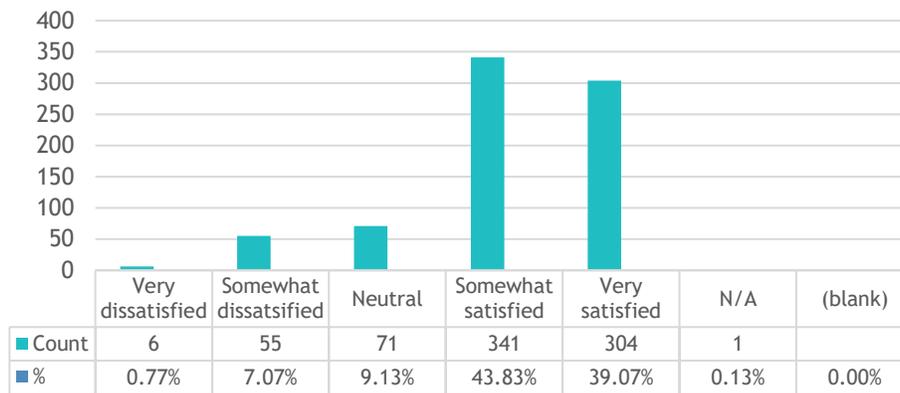


Figure 57 Satisfaction with Whistler as a place to live

44% of respondents planned to stay in Whistler for several years or longer, while 24% planned to stay less than one year. Nearly a quarter (23%) are undecided as yet.

## How long do you plan to live in Whistler?

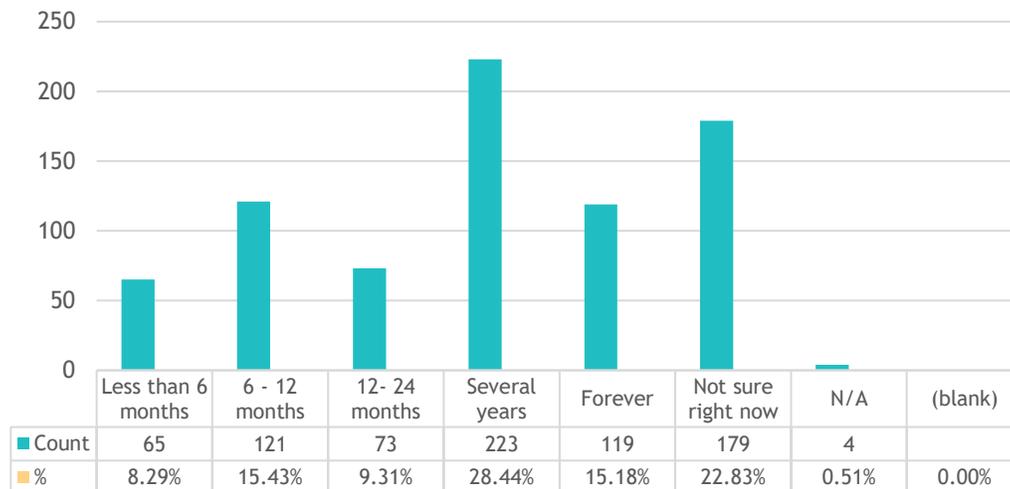


Figure 58 How long respondents plan to live in Whistler

# Opportunities for Improvement

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Despite their overall satisfaction with life in Whistler, respondents were vocal in response to the question “What, if anything would make Whistler a better place to live?” 418 respondents gave an answer to this open-ended question, which spanned a broad range of topics. Most are related to previous topics of discussion in this report.

## Solving the Housing Crisis

The most frequently cited recommendation was to find solutions to the housing crisis. Comments related to many aspects of housing including: affordability; stability; housing quality and maintenance; accountability for landlords; addressing overcrowded housing; and making WHA housing more affordable for frontline workers.

*“Accessible, affordable housing with accountable landlords.”*

*“Cheaper housing! I shouldn’t need to have 2 jobs just to be able to pay my rent and have more than 80% of my income be towards rent.”*

*“More access to WHA Housing/build more affordable housing.”*

*“Affordable housing (and not having to share bedrooms at over inflated prices). Dodgy landlords being held to account - making it accessible to report/educate tenants of their rights. I have heard plenty of horror stories of bad landlords.”*

The extent of the housing crisis comes as no surprise, but it is worth emphasising here, nonetheless. Many comments pointed to the fact that stable and affordable housing is fundamental to young adults’ chance of establishing a sustainable life in Whistler, and express frustration and disappointment that there are few options available.

*“Affordable housing. This is everything, this is the foundation you build your community upon. If no one can afford to live here or if you need to work 60 hours a week to live here, guess what??? Everyone is stressed and not happy and they leave after 12 months. Or they commute to Pemby and Squamish.”*

*“Housing, housing, housing. How can someone make a life without a home[?]”*

*“It just feels impossible to build a life here and I worry Whistler is going to lose a lot of great community members because of it. WHA is great but the list is so long that people just don’t see it as an option.”*

The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the urgency of addressing the housing crisis in Whistler. As we have seen, the majority of COVID-19 cases in Whistler have been among young adults living in shared housing and working in frontline roles.

*“This pandemic has proven that the housing here needs to be sorted. People like us living in cramped conditions put us even more at risk. We are literally living in each other’s pockets.”*

## Affordability and Living Wages

Affordability was frequently mentioned in responses to this question. Beyond affordable housing (discussed above), the next most commonly cited response was “affordable groceries”. In general, young adults commented on the high cost of living in Whistler, from housing to groceries to recreation.

Many also described a need for higher/living wages to meet the increased costs of living in Whistler. Some spoke of broader discounts for local staff on a wider range of items and experiences in Whistler.

*“Affordability; the people that form the backbone of the working community (mid level management) are forced to Pemberton or Squamish after a few years in town, it’s the only way to build a life.”*

*“Better paying jobs with min \$20/h salaries and cheaper housing. It’s impossible to survive here on min rate/hour.”*

*“Cheaper grocery’s[sic] so as staff we can be healthier and eat when we are hungry.”*

Free public transport was also a common recommendation, along with free or discounted parking in the village for staff. Several respondents requested improved, affordable public transport among the Sea to Sky Corridor. This links to better access to affordable groceries and other essentials and would also improve links for employment for the increasing number of young adults moving to Squamish and Pemberton.

*“Affordability - housing, food, recreational sports. Locals discounts/incentives for gyms, grocery, physical and mental health services.”*

Finally, several respondents commented on the wealth gap present in Whistler between frontline staff and tourists and second-homeowners.

## Investment in Locals

A common theme among many responses was a sense that decision-makers in Whistler place too much emphasis on the needs of tourists rather than locals. Responses reflected a sense that there was an imbalance in emphasis, and that the current approach is unsustainable. This was seen as a negative by respondents, and there was a sense in some responses that this trend has accelerated in recent years. Many responses questioned the endless growth of tourism in Whistler, and some suggested limits should be placed on this growth.

*“A stronger focus on the community and less on tourism to make it a more viable long-term home.”*

*“A sense that the community/local government cared about the community as much if not more than tourism, the only sense I get around town is that the local government only cares about generating more tourism not about the people required to run those activities/work in town.”*

*“Having people recognize how hard we work and that a lot of us in Whistler struggle. Start catering to the locals more vs the tourists all the time.”*

There is also a sense that young adults are looking for more sustainable and permanent opportunities within Whistler. Some comments showed a desire for more career and professional development opportunities within our community. Others hoped for less transience among the community as it became a more sustainable place to live. Here, again, access to healthcare was highlighted by many respondents as key to sustainable living in Whistler.

*“Affordability, work opportunities, better connections/making friends/circle. Feeling like living the dream is a true possibility!”*

*“More broad health services, more family doctors, opportunities to see doctors outside of Whistler.”*

*“Promote new business and give grants for YOUNG entrepreneurs (under 35) so there is opportunity for people to set up a real life here.”*

The desire for greater support and focus on serving locals has been amplified by the pandemic. Many responses demonstrated frustration that more was not done to discourage widespread tourism during the pandemic. These responses often reflected anxiety and fear among young adults who feel at risk of catching COVID-19 at work, and a sense that their needs weren't being heard or accommodated.

*“I wish, in the middle of this pandemic, Whistler could be stricter and refuse tourists in town. I understand this town survives only on tourism, but at what cost. I think the current situation we are in and the increase of Covid cases in the Howe Sound area is a good picture of the repercussions from the holidays.”*

*“If we were more careful with the amount of tourism coming in during the covid pandemic.”*

*“In times of Covid, feeling like residents are being listened to. Even if tourism needs to continue, acknowledging more of the local concerns rather than ignoring them and continuing to promote tourism.”*

*“I've lived in Whistler over 10 years and every year that goes by it feels like less of a community. Most people I talk to in town are frustrated with how much tourism is still happening and that no one seems to be doing anything to protect the community aside from suggesting guidelines that rarely get followed.”*

## Connection and Community

Finally, respondents hoped for a stronger sense of social connection and connection to the community. These comments were, again, amplified by the pandemic, with many simply hoping for an end to the restrictions on socializing that were in place at the time. When they are over, respondents hope for diverse, accessible opportunities to engage with each other and the community.

*“I was born and raised in Whistler (I am now 22), over the years I have seen the community become consumed with commercialism and the authenticity of Whistler has been reduced. The focus of Whistler has shifted on to international tourists who will spend money on an expensive vacation. There are hardly any opportunities any more which are low-cost and authentic for locals.”*

*“I have lived in Whistler my entire life. The town has served its purpose as an Olympic host. It is time for Whistler to push its identity and showcase the people that live here. Whistler's a very diverse place but it's not shown hiding behind the hotels and the après tables.”*

Some respondents suggested a reduction in party culture and substance use would be a benefit to the town. Others demonstrated a desire for places and ways to socialize that weren't related to alcohol.

*“And that drugs weren't so acceptable. I find it scary how open everyone is about it here and often feel judged or left out because I don't do drugs or smoke weed. I think it fuels the substance abuse issues here and just wish it wasn't so normal.”*

*“Less of a ‘party’ atmosphere, more sense of community[sic], connection even with people just passing through or staying for the season, engagement for short- or long-term residents so they care about what happens to the community.”*

*“More activities between drinking and high sport activities. Bowling, laser tag, mini golf, etc. More of a range for different levels. The escape rooms and axe throwing are wonderful very happy to see them join the community.”*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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The last year has been extremely challenging for young adults living in Whistler. They have faced high levels of unemployment and unstable work and continuously escalating housing costs and housing instability. They have also faced significant challenges due to the pandemic, including the risks of working frontline tourism roles, and of living in shared, overcrowded accommodation. Social isolation has also been a major challenge during this time.

As a result, the most concerning findings from this report were the high levels of mental health issues and stress among young adults in Whistler. This is a great cause for concern for our community, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to escalate in Whistler and across BC.

There is a clear need for better access to services for young adults in Whistler. Access to mental health services, sexual health services, and family practice stand out as high priorities. In addition, efforts are needed to improve young adults' understanding of the resources available, which could be achieved through greater investment in social media campaigns, as suggested by respondents.

Substance use and binge drinking remain common, despite restrictions on social gatherings and the closure of nightclub and bars. A concerning number of young adults have witnessed an overdose since living in Whistler, suggesting more work is needed to ensure young adults stay safe when using substances.

Progress has been made related to wages and work, but there is still much to be done. Sadly, increases in wages have not kept up with escalating costs, and the majority of young adults in Whistler still do not earn a living wage. Access to affordable housing, groceries, and living wages is critical for young adults' mental health and wellbeing in Whistler.

As ever, housing remains a major concern. Most young adults are spending too much on their housing costs, and as a result, housing costs are a major cause of stress among respondents. Further, the pandemic has exacerbated concerns about overcrowding and privacy in housing in Whistler. Too few young adults are accessing WHA housing, and very few own their own property.

Despite these significant challenges, young adults are satisfied to live in Whistler and in general express a desire to have the opportunity to build a sustainable life here. They identify affordability and housing as the biggest barriers to this sustainability, along with a desire for more opportunities to connect to the community and develop their careers.

The data contained in this report are a snapshot of a difficult time in Whistler. The challenges facing young adults are greater than ever, and some of them require urgent response: in particular, the significant decline in mental health over the last year and the ongoing housing crisis. In addressing these challenges, the community can support young adults to build sustainable lives and become permanent members of our community.

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