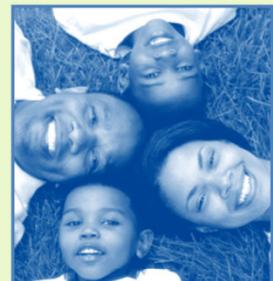
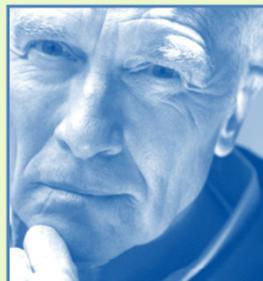
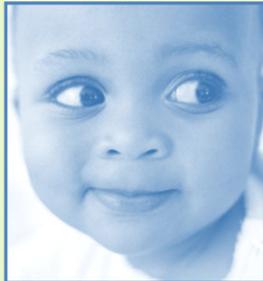


“Not just a roof over our heads”

Exploring the State of Rental Housing in Edmonton One Year Later



(A follow up to the report “A Roof Over their Heads” and the 2007 Renters’ Listening Forums)

“My current housing does not meet my needs because it is not stable and not long term. We need a place to call HOME, not just a roof over our heads.”

September 2008

Not Just a Roof Over our Heads and its companion report, *It's Time to Step Up*, are available for free download at www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca.

Hard copies including the full appendix and companion report can be ordered for the price of \$10.00 plus shipping per copy. Please contact the Edmonton Social Planning Council or visit our website to order.

Author

Anette Kinley is the Research and Communications Assistant of the Edmonton Social Planning Council and the principal author of this report.

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Suite 37, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 1C5
Tel: (780) 423-2031
Fax: (780) 425-6244
Email: info@edmontonsocialplanning.ca
Website: www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca



The Edmonton Social Planning Council is a member agency of
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Executive Summary

The Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) conducted a survey of renters in the Edmonton area from April 16 to May 31, 2008. The survey was created as a follow up to the Renters' Listening Forums held in May 2007 in response to the rental housing crisis at the time. The intention of the Edmonton Renters' Survey was to explore how the rental housing situation has changed over the past year. A diverse group of 727 renters responded to the survey; their responses provided detailed insights, both quantitative and qualitative, into the eight questions derived from some of the key issues identified at the 2007 forums.

Background

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) data reveals some of the pressures renters have been facing in the last few years. Average rental rates increased 30% from 2005 to 2007 – a rate nearly 4 times faster than inflation. At the same time, family incomes have not been keeping pace with rent increases; accumulated increases in median family income from 2000 to 2006 covered just two-fifths of the rent increase in the typical 2-bedroom unit.

These financial pressures are compounded by plummeting rental vacancy rates, which dropped to 1.2 percent in 2006. The vacancy rate recovered to 3.4 percent in 2008, in part due to an increased supply of privately-rented condominium units, which tend to have higher than average monthly rents. Finally, while the condo supply has been increasing, rental unit construction starts have fallen consistently; in combination with condominium conversions, this has a negative impact on the supply of affordable rental units.

Results

Question 1: Are people's rental situations better, worse or the same?

Fifty-eight percent of renters who responded to the survey report that their housing situation has become worse over the past year. The reasons they identify for this fall into three broad categories:

- Increased difficulty affording the costs of housing and basic needs;
- Reduced stability of housing and lack of control to change the situation; and,
- Decline in housing quality and value for rent dollars paid.

Question 2: Have rents continued to go up? How much?

Over four out of five renters (82%) report that their rent has increased over the past year. Renters report that their rents have increased an average of \$195.00 per month. Those who reported the amount of their rent at the start and end of the past year have experienced an average 30 percent increase.

Our analysis of the reported rent increases revealed that renters whose initial rent is lowest are being hit with substantially higher increases than those whose initial rent is in the higher ranges. The renters paying \$499.00 per month or less at the start of the year received an average increase of 60 percent (\$240.00 per month); those paying \$1000.00 per month or more have experienced an 18 percent increase (\$205.00 per month), on average.

Questions 3 & 4: Do people feel their rents are affordable? Do their rents limit their ability to meet their other basic needs?

Sixty-one percent of renters who responded to the survey indicate that their rent is not affordable for them. Of those reporting unaffordable rents, ninety-five percent indicate that rent increases have limited their ability to meet their other basic needs (food, clothing, utilities, etc.).

Question 5: Do people feel at risk of losing their housing?

Just under two-fifths of renters (38%) report that they have felt at risk of losing their housing over the past year; seven percent (51 renters) report that they had lost their housing.

Twelve renters experienced homelessness at some point in the past year, eight of whom were still homeless at the time of the survey.

Question 6: Do renters feel that their housing meets their needs?

Seventy percent of renters feel that their housing generally meets their needs. However, the results vary when broken down into nine specific physical and service needs.

Almost two-thirds of renters (64%) report that their rental buildings are inadequately maintained; over half feel that their building and neighbourhood are not safe (51% and 54%, respectively). While 76 percent of renters report having good access to shopping, only 53% report having good access to health care.

Question 7: Renters' Recommendations

Renters offered a variety of ideas on how to ensure that all Edmontonians are adequately housed. The recommendations offered can be classified under the following twelve categories:

1. Government regulation of rental rates (*346 comments*);
2. Increased supply of affordable housing (*201 comments*);
3. Landlord regulation, accountability and transparency (*80 comments*);
4. Government financial and other assistance (*63 comments*);
5. Limit on condominium conversion and construction (*30 comments*);
6. Improved household incomes (*25 comments*);
7. Greater government awareness and action (*24 comments*);
8. Tax-based solutions (*20 comments*);
9. Improved city planning (*18 comments*);
10. Homeless shelters and facilities (*15 comments*);
11. Improved community safety (*13 comments*); and,
12. Control of utility costs (*8 comments*).

Question 8: Do renters want another chance to speak out?

Seventy-six percent of renters who responded to the survey feel that renters need more opportunities to voice their concerns about the challenges they are facing. More importantly, they want their ideas to be heard and acted upon; sixty-six renters comment that they feel decision-makers either do not care about or are unwilling to listen to renters' issues.

Note: The Edmonton Social Planning Council's response to the Edmonton Renters' Survey results is presented in the companion report, *"It's Time to Step Up": Recommendations to Address Rental Housing Issues in Edmonton*.

Introduction

In May 2007, the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) held two Renters' Listening Forums in partnership with City Councillors Michael Phair and Dave Thiele. The forums drew over 200 participants who shared their experiences and insights into the unprecedented rent increases and apartment shortages taking place at the time. The ESPC summarized the stories and ideas brought forth at the forums in our *A Roof over their Heads* report, which we presented to all City Councillors and Edmonton MLAs.

Since the release of the report in June 2007, renters' issues have faded from the headlines. The reduced attention did not signal the end of increasing rents and low availability, however. Data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) indicates that average rent prices continue to rise in 2008. Vacancy rates have only improved slightly. (See the *Background* section starting on page 5 for more details.)

These rental market trends made the ESPC suspect that housing continues to be a burden for renters, despite the decreased media focus on the issue. To find out, we conducted an exploratory survey of renters in the Edmonton area. The survey results are the basis of this report.

Survey Methodology

The Edmonton Renters' Survey was intended to provide insight into some of the issues renters are facing. It was not designed to produce scientific data. The results do, however, reflect the realities of many renters in Edmonton. (See *Appendix A* to view a copy of the survey.)

The two-page survey was composed of eight questions derived from the key issues identified in *A Roof over their Heads*. The questions covered five main themes: 1) the change in rents and general rental situation over the past year, 2) perceived affordability of rent and the impact on meeting other basic needs, 3) perceived or actual risk of losing housing, 4) needs met, or unmet, by housing condition and location, and 5) renters' proposed solutions to rental issues and ideas for action.

We did not include any questions related to personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, household size, community, etc.). This was a deliberate decision intended to encourage participation by preserving anonymity and keeping the survey as short as possible. Since this was an exploratory survey not intended to produce data for specific population groups, the importance of personal information was secondary to the rest of the information gathered.

Distribution

The Edmonton Renters' Survey was distributed widely in a mail-in format and was also published on the ESPC website. The survey officially ran from April 16 to May 31, 2008, though mailed-in surveys were accepted beyond the deadline, until July 18, 2008.

Paper copies of the survey were distributed with an introductory letter, which included a link to the online version, and an addressed envelope (without postage). To encourage participation, the ESPC entered all participants into a draw for a \$50 gift card to the grocery store of their choice.¹

On April 16, 2008, ESPC staff delivered approximately 300 copies of the survey to six rental townhouse complexes throughout Edmonton: 130 surveys were distributed in the South (Holyrood and Empire Park/Pleasantview areas), 80 in the North (Spruce Avenue and Killarney areas), and 90 in the West (Elmwood and Britannia Youngstown areas). The complexes were chosen based on their locations and the use of accessible private mailboxes. Surveys were dropped off randomly at each complex.

¹ Respondents were asked for basic contact information for the purposes of the draw. All contact information provided was removed from the survey responses prior to analysis to ensure confidentiality.

ESPC staff also disseminated notices with a link to the online survey through their professional networks, including the Edmonton and Area Food Security Network, Urban Core Support Network, and the Strategic Alliance on Low Income Issues, to name a few. Through these networks, copies of surveys were independently distributed to clients in select Capital Health offices, parents of some inner city public school students, and inner city community agencies. Notices were also sent to Student Association representatives at the University of Alberta, MacEwan College, NAIT, Concordia University, and Kings University College.

In addition, the Edmonton Public Library circulated 160 surveys and over 650 information leaflets to its 16 branches around the city. The survey was also featured in the media, with articles in the *Edmonton Sun*, *See Magazine*, and the *Edmonton Journal*. The Edmonton Social Planning Council also featured the survey prominently on our website.

Response Rate

We received 727 responses from Edmonton renters, an overwhelming response for what was essentially an exploratory exercise to gather feedback. The majority of responses (88%, N=727) were gathered through the online survey form. The remainder (12%, N=727) were received by mail or fax.

Through their written comments, some renters disclosed information about their personal characteristics (shown in Table 1 below). While not representative of the survey respondents as a group, or Edmonton renters in general, these characteristics demonstrate the diversity of the people who filled out the survey.

Table 1: Characteristics Voluntarily Disclosed by Renters who Completed the Survey²

Characteristic	Number
Students, current or recently graduated	61
Recently moved to Edmonton	31
Receiving rent subsidies or living in non-market housing, currently or previously	26
Single parents	25
Seniors	18
People with disabilities, respondent or family member	17
Homeless, currently or previously	12
Unemployed, currently or recently, respondent or family member	7
Receiving government income supports, currently or previously	6
Youth recently moved away from home	5

² As discussed on page 2, the survey did not include any questions related to personal characteristics. The numbers reported in Table 1 were tallied based on renters’ written comments.

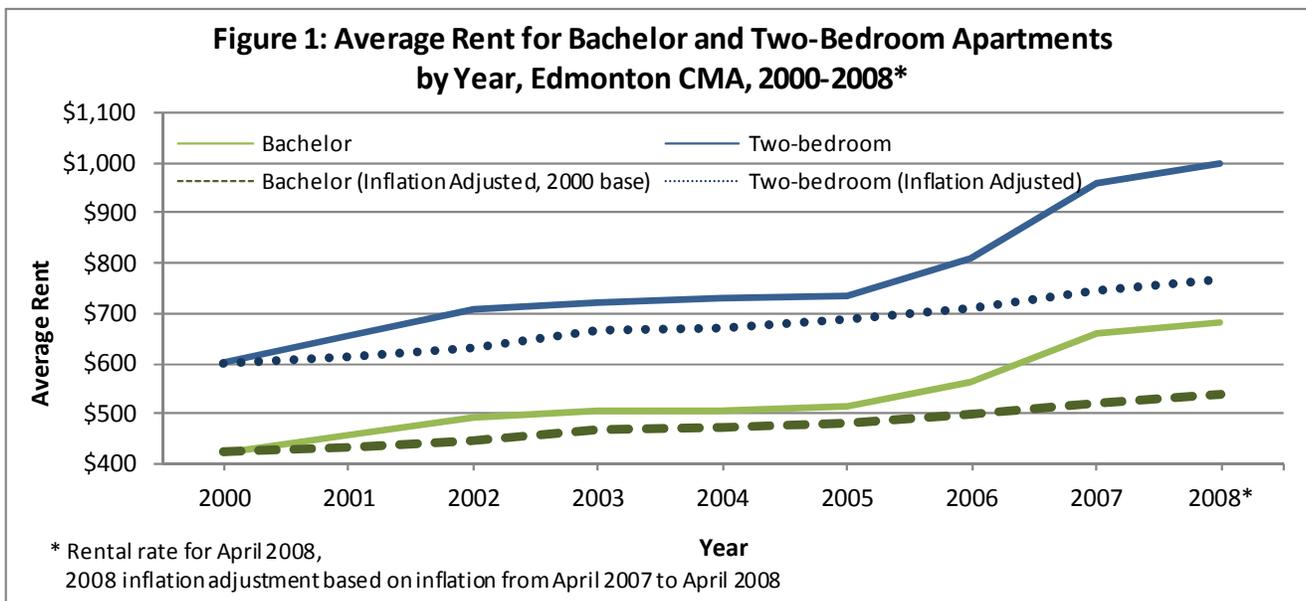
Background

Some of the key factors interacting to create the tight rental market and higher pressure on renters include rapidly increasing rent prices, stagnant incomes, and declining rental vacancy rates. The following data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)^{3,4} and Statistics Canada⁵ shed light on these trends.

Rising Rents

The average rent for all types of rental units increased approximately 30% on average from 2005 to 2007. The CMHC has forecast an additional 7% increase in 2008. These increases were considerably higher than Edmonton's inflation rate in recent years (2006: 3.1%, 2007: 4.8%).⁶

Figure 1 below shows that the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment rose from \$601 in 2000 to \$1,000 in April 2008. If the rental rates had kept pace with inflation, the average rent for a two-bedroom in 2007 would have been \$742.⁷ That is a difference of over \$200 per month, or \$2,400 per year! Similarly, bachelor suites would have cost around \$1,600 less per year in 2007 if rental rates had risen by inflation only.



Stagnant Incomes

One of the major trends that has made rent increases a problem for renters is the stagnation of incomes. As shown in Figure 2 on the next page, accumulated rent increases outpaced income increases for Edmonton families⁸ from 2000 to 2006. Accumulated increases in median family income over that time covered just two-fifths (42%) of the increases in the average 2-bedroom rental rate.

³ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (May 2008). *Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights*.

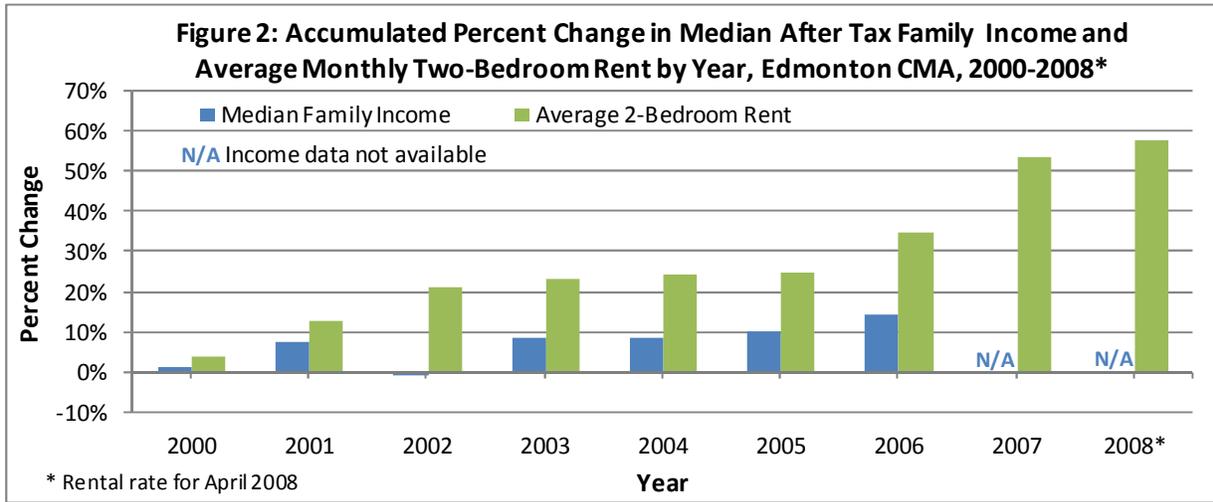
⁴ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2007). *Housing Market Indicators, Edmonton, 1990-2006*. Retrieved July 24, 2008 from: http://cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob07/data/data_001.cfm

⁵ Statistics Canada. (2008). *Income Trends in Canada 1976-2006*. Retrieved August 19, 2008 from: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/13F0022XIE/13F0022XIE2006000.htm>

⁶ Statistics Canada. *Consumer Price Index, by city*. Retrieved August 26, 2008 from: <http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/econ45a.htm>

⁷ Inflation adjusted rental rates were calculated using the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Inflation Calculator, available at: <http://cupe.ca/cpicalculator.php>

⁸ Includes unattached individuals (people living alone, living with unrelated individuals or living with relatives but not in a husband-wife or parent-unmarried child (including guardianship-child) relationship).⁵

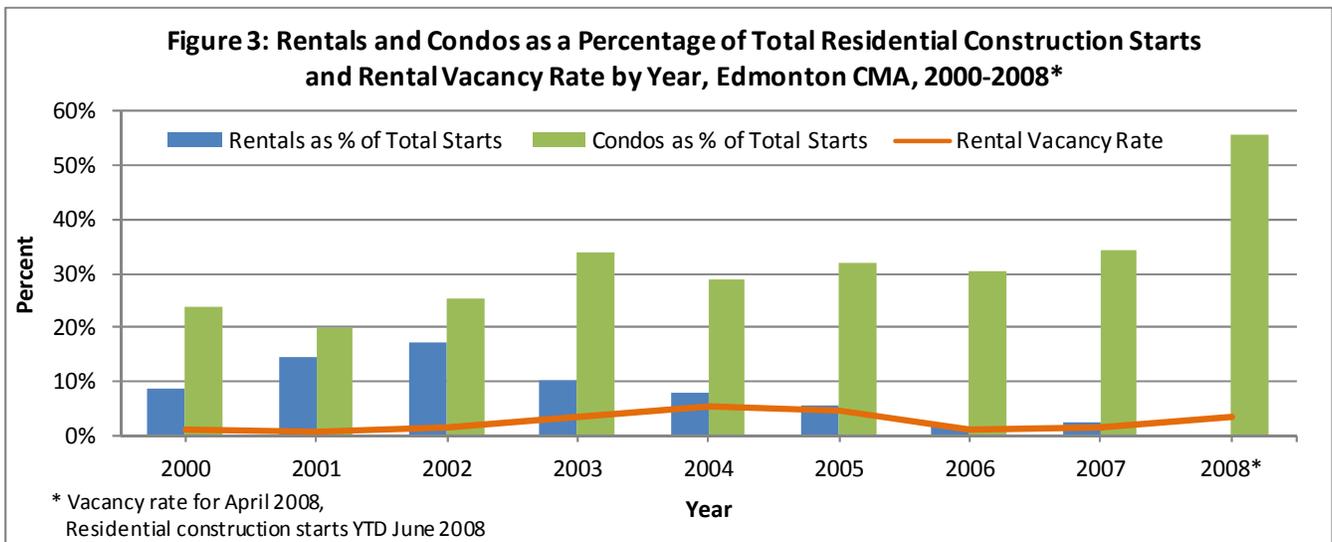


Low Vacancy Rates

Apartment vacancy rates dropped from 4.5 percent in 2005 to 1.2 percent in 2006, with a recovery in April 2008 to 3.4 percent. Some of the factors contributing to low vacancy rates include: 1) a population increase resulting from the job creation of the economic boom, 2) a large number of rental units being converted to condominiums for sale (in response to rising residential sale prices), and 3) the declining rate of rental unit construction.

Figure 3 below shows that during the previous period of low vacancy rates in Edmonton, 1998 to 2002, construction of rental housing increased. The most recent vacancy rate drop, however, has not been accompanied by a rental construction increase. On the contrary, rental unit construction has declined fairly consistently since 2003. As of June this year, construction had started on just 8 rental units.⁹ Rental construction has been dwarfed by condominium production – 2,299 condos had been started as of June 2008, which is 28,738 percent more condo than rental construction this year.

While the CHMC reports that the number of condos being rented out by owners is increasing¹⁰ – part of the reason the vacancy rate has risen in 2008 – condo rentals are not a viable solution for many renters. This is mainly due to the fact that average rental rates for condo rental units are even higher than the average rents reported above.¹⁰



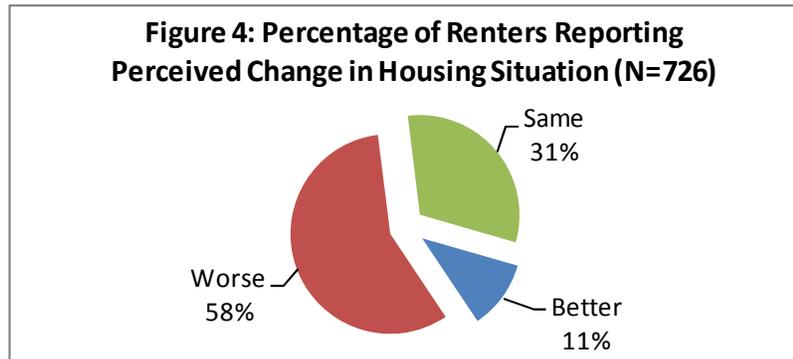
⁹ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (July 2008). *Rental Construction Digest: Edmonton*.

¹⁰ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (November 2007). *Rental Market Report: Edmonton CMA*.

Survey Results

Question 1: Are Renter's Situations Better, Worse or the Same?

As shown in Figure 4, the majority of renters¹¹ (58%, N=726) report that their housing situation has become worse over the past year.



Five times more renters report their housing situation is getting worse than report it is getting better. Housing pressures have become so high that 25 renters made comments that they are considering leaving the city, province or country – some have already done so (5 comments).

(See Appendix D, Table 19 for comments related to moving out of Edmonton.)

Why are things Worse?

The renters' experience in the aftermath of Alberta's economic boom can be generally defined by a lack of stability and control. There are a variety of factors that create worse conditions for renters. Those identified by renters through our survey are divided into three general categories:

- Increased difficulty affording the costs of housing and basic needs;
- Reduced stability of housing and lack of control to change the situation; and,
- Decline in housing quality and value for rent dollars paid.

1. Increased Difficulty Affording the Costs of Housing & Basic Needs

- **Rent Increasing to Limit of Affordability & Beyond**
The large majority of renters reporting that their situation has become worse (N=378, 91%) also report rent increases over the past year (see Figure 5, page 10). Rents have increased faster than the inflation rate, and it appears that those paying the lowest rents are being hit the hardest. (See Figures 8 and 9, page 14)

"We need to stay here to finish our education, otherwise we would have moved away 2 years ago (when it started getting really bad)... I will be leaving Edmonton as fast as I get my degree."

"I am pregnant and will have to move as this building is adult only building. I have no idea where to go that I can afford to support myself and a child on a student stipend, daycare, etc. ... I may simply leave the program and go home to Manitoba."

"My wages have not increased and are not likely to increase in the next couple of years. I am making less than \$200.00 more a cheque than I was in 1988... something is definitely wrong with this picture. I have an education... and work hard, however, cannot get ahead and the housing crisis does not help."

"I didn't lose my home but... the increase in rent makes [it] very tight to pay for every thing else that is needed for our family."

¹¹ When the term "renters" is used in reference to the results of the Edmonton Renters' Survey, it refers to the renters who responded to the survey, not to all renters in Edmonton.

- **Rent is not increasing in isolation**

Eighty percent of renters (N=578) indicate that increasing rents are impacting their ability to afford other basic needs – thirty-one percent (N=223) report that basic needs are always a concern. (See Figure 10, page 16)

- **Living independently is becoming less attainable**

Ninety respondents comment that they need to share their housing to be able to afford rent. Not all sharing renters indicate that this is a negative situation; however, some feel that it is highly undesirable (12 comments).

Sharing accommodations may be perceived as a more common solution for young people (like students, for example). However, this is not always the case. Fifteen renters mention parents moving in with children, adult family members moving in together, multiple generations sharing a home, etc.

(See Appendix D, Table 20 for comments related to sharing housing.)

- **Lack of Security to Deal with Changes**

Twenty-one renters comment that their situations are fragile or insecure, in particular if they were to experience unexpected events (rent increases, loss of work, illness, etc.), personal changes (loss of partner, pregnancy, etc.), or new costs associated with work or school.

(See Appendix D Table 21 for comments related to lack of security.)

2. Reduced Stability of Housing & Lack of Control to Change Situation

- **The risk of losing housing is real for many renters**

Thirty-eight percent of renters (N=272) who completed the survey report that they have felt at risk of losing their housing over the past year; seven percent (N=51) did lose their housing. (See Figure 12, page 20)

- **Finding a decent and affordable place to live is difficult**

Eighty-one renters comment that finding affordable, decent housing is difficult. Their comments center primarily on general shortage of available places and their poor condition or high cost. This means that it takes a great deal of time and effort to find a (possibly) suitable place. Some renters report having to search for extended periods of time – between one and six months – before finding accommodation (19 comments).

Renters with specific needs, such as families with children or people with pets, face even greater challenges considering the prevalence of adult-only and pet-restricted units. Finding adequate housing is even more challenging for seniors and people with disabilities; comments from these individuals indicate that there is a severe lack of accessible housing for people with physical limitations.

“My sister moved in with me so that we could both afford to live... I am 45 years old and she is 48 years old.”

“Rent is so sky high that one is FORCED, and I mean FORCED to find a roommate.”

“My husband died this February so I now have about half the income and am terrified of a significant rental increase similar to that which we had last November.”

“If something were to happen (i.e. I get hurt or sick and can't work), we would be in big trouble.”

“I'm still in my apartment, and looking for another place. It's been almost two months, and I can't find anything better for me.”

“I'm now on welfare income due to physical problems keeping me from working, finding a living place within the financial guidelines is next to impossible. And what I could afford is worse than any slum housing I've ever seen... And I looked for 2 months to get that. Simply robbery. Shameful.”

(See Appendix D, Tables 22 and 23 for comments related to the difficulty of finding decent, affordable housing.)

- **Many cannot move to improve their situation**

Twenty-eight renters comment that the lack of affordable alternatives and the actual costs of moving prevent them from moving out of an undesirable or unaffordable unit. Other reasons cited as “trapping” people include lease characteristics (including income or credit checks, required yearly leases, and differential pricing for yearly and monthly leases – See page 12), pet restrictions and the inability to access subsidies.

(See Appendix D Table 25 for comments related to barriers to moving.)

“Even if I could find a bigger, safer, less expensive place, I cannot afford to move...”

“I would like to move to a nicer apartment in a quieter area but cannot afford it as rents are insanely high and haven't dropped even though I see a lot more for rent signs.”

3. Decline in Housing Quality & Value for Rent Dollars Paid

- **Housing Quality and Maintenance is becoming a Luxury**

Approximately two-thirds of renters (N=468) report that their rental housing is not well maintained by their landlord or unit owner. (See Figure 13, page 22) We received 210 comments from renters related to inadequate building maintenance. There is a strong sense that many renters are not getting any additional value for the inflated prices they are paying; for some the value is markedly decreasing. It appears that living in a clean, well-maintained building is becoming a luxury reserved for those who can afford higher-end rent prices.

(See page 22 for more results on housing quality and maintenance)

“My rent increased by 40% last December, when my lease was up. In order not to move in the middle of winter, I had to sign another annual lease. I was not allowed to rent by the month, or sign a shorter lease.”

- **Poor/Decreased Safety**

Many renters also express concern regarding the declining safety of their buildings and communities (90 comments). As with maintenance, renting in a safe community (or a safe building) is increasingly out of reach for renters with low or modest incomes.

(See page 23 for more results on safety)

“The landlord increased our rent, but simple requests like painting and fixing the bathroom have not been done after being told it would probably be done since I rented the apartment in Sept. 2006.”

Why are things the Same or Better?

The thirty-one percent of renters (N=228) who reported the housing situation being “the same” over the past year give the following reasons:

- Living in the same unit, or a unit of similar quality (20 comments)
- Paying the same rent (5 comments)

Four other comments indicate that renters in “the same” situation may still be struggling with affordability.

Renters who report a “better” housing situation (N=81, 11%) give the following reasons for their assessment:

- Moved to a new unit with better features, location or quality (21 comments)
- Moved to a more affordable unit (8 comments)

“The place that I did find after a lot of hard work is fairly cheap, and spacious, but it is not very safe.”

“The building that I moved into recently is much nicer than my old building but it costs a lot more.”

“Our rent has stayed the same so far, hopefully it remains that way.”

- Moved out on their own (independence) (5 comments)

(See Appendix D, Tables 26 and 27 for comments related to “same” or “better” housing situations.)

A few of the people who report a “same” or “better” housing situation comment that they are in subsidized housing or receiving rent subsidies (3 comments). Renters’ comments indicate that subsidies do offer some protection from market conditions. However this is not always the case; some “subsidized” renters continue to experience increases, while others notice that subsidies are not keeping up with inflation.

(See Appendix F, Table 35 for comments related to subsidies)

Forty-six renters comment that their “good” situation (lower than normal rent, well maintained unit) is due to having a “good landlord,” or just plain “good luck.” These comments are another indication that getting good quality, affordable housing is increasingly beyond the control of renters.

(See Appendix D, Table 27 for comments related to luck.)

“I have rented a house for the past 5 years in west Edmonton. We are happy there. The neighbourhood is great.”

“I have been living in Capital Regional Housing for 3 years, and although not my ideal situation, it has stayed relatively unchanged.”

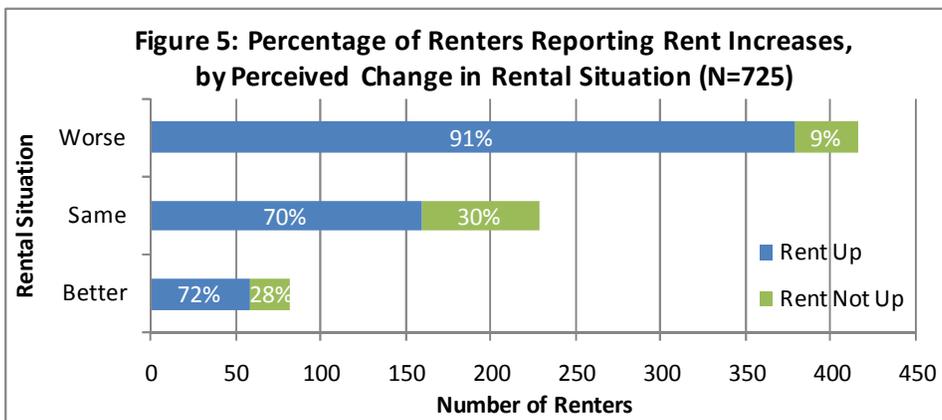
“Rent subsidies are actually falling behind in relation to the market value of rent.”

Relating People’s Situations to their Rent Prices

The comments made by renters show that rent price is not the only factor that determines renters’ perceptions of their situations. However, Figure 5 below shows that there is a strong relationship between price and renters’ perceptions of their housing situation.

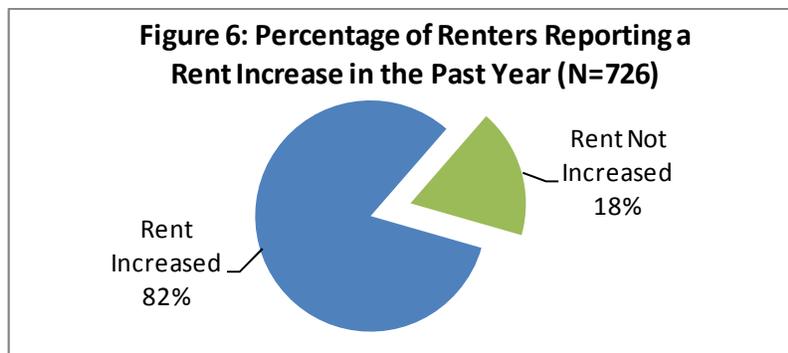
The large majority of renters who report “worse” conditions have experienced a rent increase over the past year (N=378, 91%). Smaller proportions of renters who report “same” or “better” situations have also experienced rent increases (N=159, 70% and N=58, 72%, respectively).

“I was lucky enough when I moved to find landlords that are good people, who provide quality housing, and manage to make a profit without gouging. There are many people out there who aren't as fortunate.”



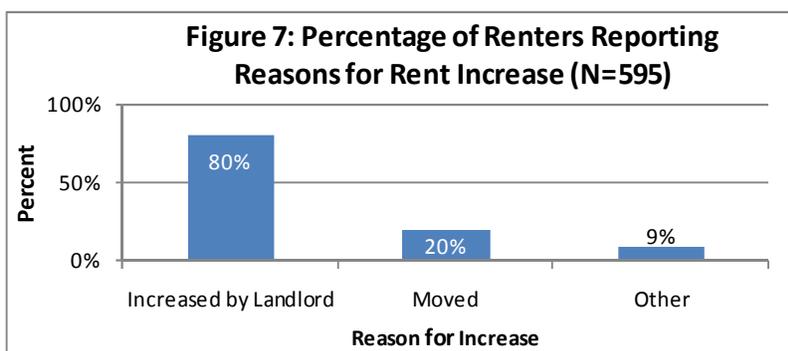
Question 2: Have Rents Continued to Go Up? How Much?

As shown in Figure 6, more than four out of five renters (N=595, 82%) report receiving a rent increase over the past year.



Why Did Rents Go Up?

The majority of renters who have experienced rent increases (N=476, 80%) report that the increase was initiated by their landlord. However, as shown in Figure 7, 20 percent (N=118) indicate that their rent increased as a result of moving to a unit with higher rent, and 9 percent (N=53) report that other factors are at play.¹²



The comments given by renters offer additional insight into the reasons for the rent increases experienced:

1. Reasons Given by Landlords to Justify Increases

- **Utilities**

Some renters told us that their rental cost increases are related to utilities (53 comments). Forty-seven renters report that their utilities are charged separately; this was a recent change for around half of them (22 comments).

(See Appendix E, Table 30 for comments related to utilities)

"I don't know WHY the rent went up. I'm afraid to ask my landlord in case I jeopardize our relationship."

"The only reason my rent stayed the same is because I moved in on June 1, 2007 and they could not raise my rent because I had been here less than a year. But everyone in my apartments did, and mine will on June 2008. New reports stat that I can have another 14% added on top of what it was already going to go up too. There goes the money from my promotion."

"Property [managers] are taking advantage of the "Alberta Boom" & with all the new people coming to AB & apartment availability low, they have increased rental fees knowing people need a place to live. Long time residents like myself have been gouged & there is nothing we can do about it."

"While my rent may be less, it is offset by the high utilities that are now not included with the rent."

"I think the increase was reasonable considering the fact that my utilities are included in my rent and the gas increase alone is probably more than what he asked for."

¹² The total is greater than 100 percent because renters were allowed to select multiple answers to this question.

- **Keeping up with the market**

Thirty-five renters comment that, according to their landlord, rent increases are a response to the price inflation happening in the housing and rental market.

- **Maintenance costs**

A number of renters were told that their rent increases are due to rising costs for maintenance (17 comments). This reason doesn't ring true for many renters, who feel that the maintenance claimed isn't actually being carried out. (See page 22 for more details.)

- **Property taxes & fees**

Other renters were told that costs like taxes, insurance and condo fees (for those renting condos) are increasing (17 comments).

- **Yearly Increase Allowed**

Some renters feel that their rents rose in response to the changes to landlord-tenant legislation effective April 24, 2007, that restricted rental rate increases to once per year (13 comments).¹³ For some, scheduled increases were raised even further due to the new restriction (6 comments).

- **New Landlord**

Some renters note that their rent increased after their building was sold to a new owner (9 comments).

- **Lease**

There are also a few renters who feel their increase is related to the renewal of their lease, whether the increase is written into the original lease or not (8 comments).

A number of renters indicate that landlords are offering differential pricing for lease agreements: higher rates for monthly leases, lower for yearly (11 comments). This has the effect of "trapping" people into yearly leases and making it difficult to move into an alternative place that's more affordable, as they would face penalties for breaking the year-long lease.

(See Appendix E, Table 29 for more comments on leases)

- **No Reason Given**

Seven renters comment that they feel that their landlords raised rents without offering any justification to tenants.

2. Moved to new unit

Twenty percent (N=118) of renters report that their rent increases are a result of moving to a new rental unit. Based on renters' comments, the increase in cost may be due to the renter moving to a larger unit, no longer sharing rent with roommates, or moving to Edmonton from

"When I asked the landlord representative why rent was increasing I was told that it was to remain competitive in today's market. In my mind that makes no sense."

"They claim it's for "building maintenance" which we haven't seen any changes in the building. They should be saving over time - not jacking up the prices... and [the increases] should be at inflation or a bit higher."

"Originally we were scheduled for a \$50 rent increase effective July 1/07, but when the gov't brought in the once a year only, that increase was cancelled and we were given a \$150 increase."

"These people know they can just keep raising the rent and... getting us to sign contracts... they will raise the rent on you if you do not sign a contract. And then they have you if you sign a contract...if you decide to leave before the contract is up...then you pay dearly for it."

"My rent has doubled since I moved into my apartment with no justification from the management."

¹³ Service Alberta. (May 2, 2007). *Changes to landlord-tenant legislation to help stabilize rental market*. Retrieved August 21, 2008 from: <http://alberta.ca/acn/200705/213854E1A71DE-F46F-168C-6BA08DED47794A49.html>

another region with lower rents.

3. Other

Some other reasons for increases that renters cite include: being a first time renter, losing a rent subsidy, or facing an adjustment to rents-geared-to-income due to increased income. There may be other reasons that renters are not reporting.

(See Appendix E, Table 28 for comments on reasons for rent increases.)

Other Costs of Living

Some renters also express concern over rising costs in other areas, including:

- Transportation & Parking (21 comments)
- Food (11 comments)
- Childcare & School (6 comments)
- Clothing & Laundry (5 comments)
- Health Costs (3 comments)

(See Appendix E, Table 30 for comments on other costs of living.)

How Much Did Rent Increase?

Renters responding to the survey have experienced an average \$195.00 per month rent increase. Their increases range from a low of \$10.00 per month to a high of \$800.00 per month.

In addition, thirty-four renters comment that they have received two or more substantial increases over the past few years.

(See Appendix E, Table 31 for comments on multiple rent increases)

Renters reporting the dollar amount of their rent at the start and end of the past year (N=451, 62%) have experienced an average 30 percent increase over the year.

As shown in Table 2 below, the survey results are relatively consistent with 2007-08 Canada Mortgage and Housing (CMHC) data. The increases renters have reported in the survey are slightly higher than the Edmonton averages.

Table 2: Average Dollar and Percentage Increases, Edmonton Renters' Survey versus Edmonton CMA Data^{14,15}

Average Increase	Renters' Survey	CMA 2007	CMA 2008 (Apr)
Dollars	\$195	\$150	\$42
Percentage	30%	19%	4%

"Rent is according to my income, any raise I receive, my rent will increase so there is no getting ahead. My rent has increased 2 times in one year."

"Higher rent, higher gas, higher food - means less take home pay."

"My rent is affordable right now but with the cost of EVERYTHING going up... I'm not sure if I will be able to manage if the rent goes up again this year."

"We live in two bed room [with] 3 children. [We] have to pay 700 for day care/month... [plus] 600-700/month for two [children in] after school care."

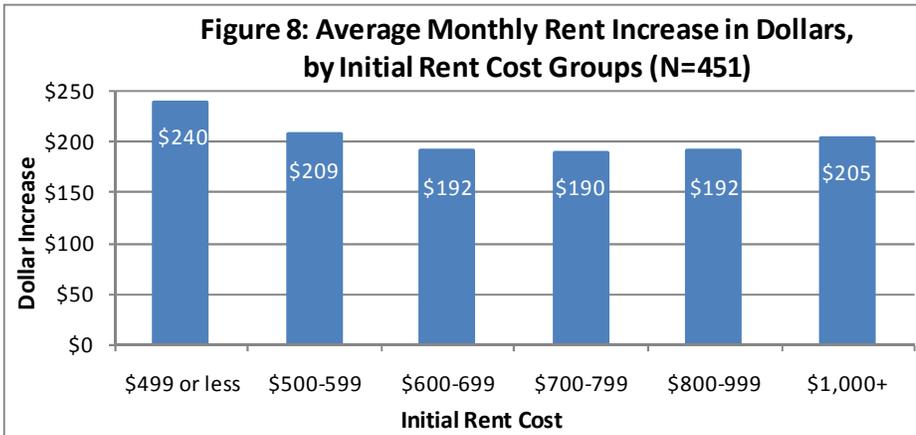
"When we started renting here our rent was 825. The next year at our renewal date the year long lease term was raised to 885. This year they have raised the rent to 985 AND have decided to make you pay for our own heating."

¹⁴ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (May 2008). *Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights*.

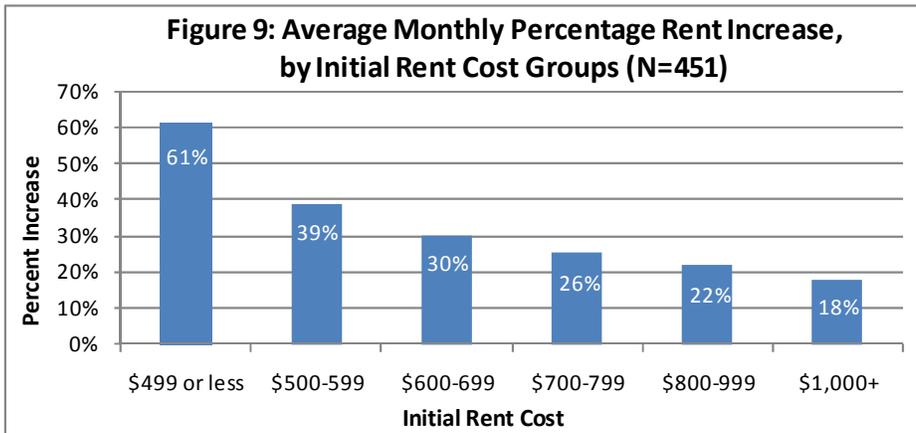
¹⁵ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2007). *Housing Market Indicators, Edmonton, 1990-2006*. Retrieved July 24, 2008 from: http://cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob07/data/data_001.cfm

Rent Increase Distribution

To determine how rent increases have been distributed across the rental market, we divided renters into six groups based on their initial rent cost.¹⁶ We then compared the rent increases across these groups. As shown in Figures 8 and 9 below, we found through this analysis that those paying the lowest rents initially are facing the largest increases, both in dollar and percentage terms.



As shown in Figure 9 below, renters paying less than \$500 per month initially have faced an average 60% increase. In contrast, those paying rents of \$1,000 or more initially experience an average 18% increase - less than one-third the increase of the lowest group. This skewed distribution of rent increases suggests that renters with the lowest rents are being hit the hardest by rent increases.



Regardless of the inequities in the reported rent increases, it is clear that renters in all of the groups face average increases considerably higher than the 2007 inflation rate (4.8%)¹⁷.

“How much is enough? Next year my rent will be \$1094, then \$1244, then \$1394. Retirement looks pretty dismal.”

“20% rental increase effective this summer... I realize \$700 is still lower than the market average. It still doesn't make a 20% rental increase easier to deal with.”

“In less than 14 months my rent has gone from \$600.00 to \$850.00.”

“The increase was \$150.00 for the year, but this year I expect the same increase as there is no guidelines for landlords to follow. With no rent control the landlords can charge as much as they can, being a senior my income isn't increasing on this level.”

“I have heard that rent is going up 30% per month again - this is too high.”

¹⁶ Each group contained a minimum of 40 renters. (See Appendix C, Table 15)

¹⁷ Calculated percentage difference between 2007 and 2006 Consumer Price Index for Edmonton. Statistics Canada. (2008). *Consumer Price Index, by city*. Retrieved September 5, 2008 from: <http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/econ45a.htm>

The Increases Continue...

Many renters who filled out our survey comment that they are anticipating another increase in the coming year (*65 comments*). Thirty-seven renters indicate that an increase has already been announced by their landlord, while the rest are simply expecting it to happen (*29 comments*).

(See Appendix E, Table 32 for comments on future increases.)

Renters' expectations of further rent increases are well-founded. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has forecast that rents will continue to increase throughout 2008.¹⁸

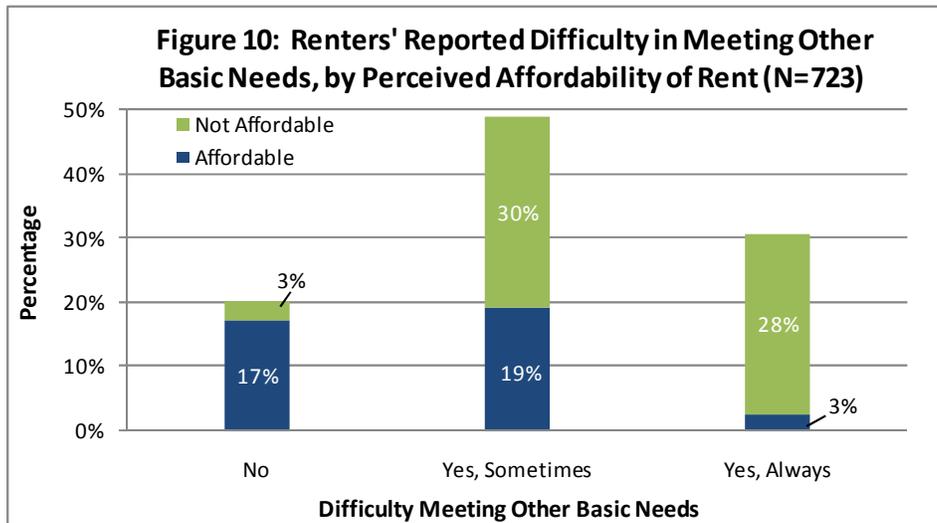
"Rent increased after 1 year but no guarantee it will not keep on rising."

"We were just given the notice of the increase last week, effective August 1, 2008. Over 18% increase is not what you should be dealing with when the whole building is for seniors who have fixed incomes."

¹⁸ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (November 2007). *Rental Market Report: Edmonton CMA*.

Questions 3 & 4: Do People Feel their Rents are Affordable? Do their Rents Limit their Ability to Meet their Other Basic Needs?

As shown in Figure 10 below, most renters (N=439, 61%) indicate that their current rent price is not affordable for them.



The majority of renters who feel their rent is not affordable report that rent increases either sometimes or always limit their ability to meet other basic needs - like food, clothing, utilities, etc. (N=418, 95%).

Impact of Income on Affordability

Over 100 renters offer comments regarding their income; most indicate that their incomes are not keeping up with increasing costs of living (65 comments), or that their rent takes a large portion of their income (51 comments). These comments suggest that income is an important factor in determining the affordability of rental rates.

Thirty-three renters on fixed incomes comment that they are also impacted by stagnant incomes, due to government income support allowances failing to keep up with inflation. Comments made by single renters suggest that they are being hit hard, as well (15 comments).

Some renters also report that they (or a family member) lacked regular employment at some point in the last year, which put a strain on household finances (13 comments).

(See Appendix E, Table 33 for comments related to income.)

“Rents are far too high and wages have not gone up the same so rents become unaffordable.”

“I have seen my rent increase from 750/month to 1000/mth in a 24 month span. That is 15% compounded per year. And there is talk about another increase next year. That will compound to 52% over 36 months. Increase in pay during this same time, compounded, 10%. Yes, definitely falling behind the 8 ball, and keep on falling with no end in sight.”

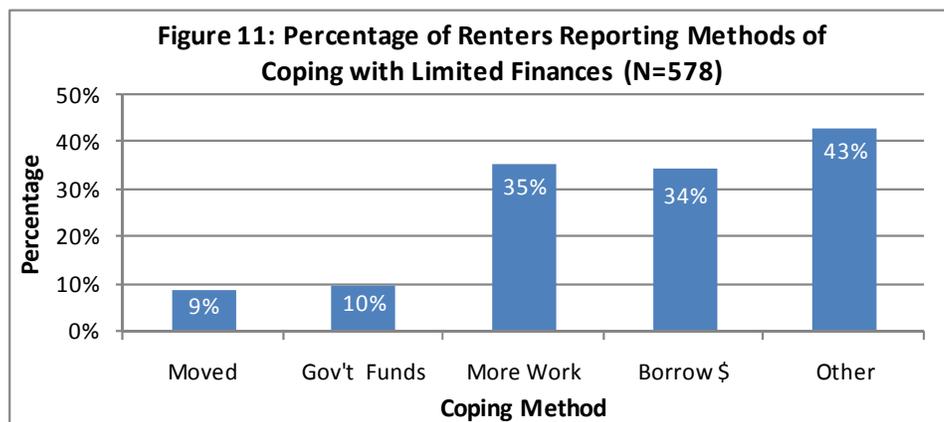
“I am a hardworking woman on my own. I need a break. It costs me just as much to live as it would if I had a partner.”

“I am on a permanent disability and my disability payments are not indexed to the cost of living.”

“In the last year I have graduated university, been promoted, and have received a raise. If this had not been the case, I would have great difficulty paying my rent and affording the necessities of life.”

Coping with a Tight Financial Situation

Renters report a number of ways they cope with their decreased ability to meet their basic needs. As shown in Figure 11 below, some coping methods are used much more frequently than others. Many renters take on more work or borrow money from family or friends (N=205, 35% and N=199, 34%, respectively). Fewer apply for government support or move to a cheaper rental unit (N=57, 10% and N=50, 9%, respectively). However, most renters reported “other” coping methods (N=249, 43%), including: “going without,” delaying bill payment, incurring debt, using savings, or accessing non-governmental support services.¹⁹



Comments made by renters shed light on some of the details and reasoning behind the numbers in Figure 11:

- ### Taking on Additional Work

Thirty-five percent of renters (N=205) report taking on additional work in order to make ends meet. Fifty-five renters include comments regarding having to take on multiple part-time, full-time or self-employment jobs (included students and pensioners taking on work). Thirteen renters also mention working overtime hours when possible to boost their income. There is a strong concern from many renters on how this increased work load is affecting their quality of life (25 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 37 for comments related to additional work.)

- ### Borrowing from Family or Friends

Borrowing money from family or friends is the third most common method indicated by renters (N=199, 34%). Comments from renters show support is not limited to financial assistance. Family and friends may also help by providing meals or offering shelter either in the short term or at a lower rental rate. Some comments also indicate that this type of borrowing is not limited to young people, but includes adults with kids and decent paying jobs (8 comments).

“Many people move to AB to “get ahead” and this is extremely difficult with the cost of living. CMHC states that people should pay only 30% of their income toward housing- I think this is untrue for many living in Edmonton. A larger number of people are becoming the “working poor” because so much of their wage is needed for housing costs.”

“Trying to afford to balance full-time school, 30 hour weeks at work, and the cost of living in Edmonton is costing us quality of life.”

“I have to work from 7 am to 9 pm so I can save enough money to buy food and pay rent.”

“I have two university degrees and am forced to work a full-time and part-time job in order to have any quality of life.”

“[I] was short on rent a few times, and had to borrow from friends temporarily until my paycheck would clear.”

“I have been going to my parent’s house at least four times a week to eat dinner with them as I can not afford to buy a lot of groceries on my own.”

¹⁹ The total is greater than 100 percent because renters were allowed to select multiple answers to this question.

(See Appendix F, Table 36 for comments related to borrowing.)

- **Applying for Government Funds**

One-tenth (N=57, 10%) of renters report applying for government support to supplement their incomes. The following types of supports were mentioned by renters:

- **Rent subsidies / social housing:** The most common type of government support that renters mention is housing subsidies (16 comments). Waiting lists for subsidized rental units is a concern for some renters; six renters mentioned that they were waiting for a subsidized unit or a rent subsidy at the time of this survey. One person mentions using the Homeless & Eviction Prevention Fund.²⁰
- **Student loans:** Seven renters mention receiving or applying for student loans. Three student renters indicate that loan amounts may not always be enough to cover all living costs on top of school expenses.
- **Income Support:** A few renters mention government income supports (3 comments). The ability to afford rent and other basic needs on the income provided is a concern for these individuals.
- **Child Tax Credit:** One renter mentioned receiving the Child Tax Credit.

A number of renters mention being ineligible for government support, often because they have too much income or savings to be eligible (14 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 35 and 36 for comments related to government support.)

- **Moving to a Less Expensive Rental Unit**

Less than one-tenth (N=50, 9%) of renters report moving as a method of improving their ability to meet their basic needs. Given renters' comments regarding the difficulty of finding decent, affordable places to rent (see page 8), it is not a surprise that so few people use this coping method. Even if a renter could move, there is no guarantee that the rent for their new unit will not increase in the future.

- **Other**

Many renters (N=249, 43%) report using coping methods other than those listed on the survey. The following five categories are based on renters' comments:

"I am struggling and it would be so wonderful to get some help with the rent so I can focus on my children and my special needs son."

"... The rent has gone up but my complex is non-profit and has subsidies for low-income renters so my subsidy has enabled me to pay less rent."

"I'm a 19 year old living on my own, in school but working for the summer. The grant I got from the government for school only covers my rent & I still have to pay for power, groceries, gas & other basic needs."

"... I fall through the cracks - "too young" - 61; not sick enough yet (but on CPP disability); and too much money for subsidies (my income is just over the limit for subsidized housing)."

"I had applied for government assistance for rent and was denied because I was told I made \$200/mth too much."

²⁰ The Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund is a Government of Alberta program "designed to provide short-term assistance to prevent Albertans from becoming homeless and to help individuals and families stabilize their shelter arrangements." More information is available at: <http://employment.alberta.ca/>

- **Cost Control/Going Without:** Renters report limiting their costs for leisure/recreation (28 comments), food (17), clothing (13), transportation (12), utilities (4), and health care (4). Renters typically mention cutting costs in multiple areas. Thirteen renters mention keeping to strict budgets. Even more note that they simply “do without” (26 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 38 for sample comments.)

- **Late Payment of Bills:** Eighteen renters indicate that increasing rental costs have made it difficult to pay bills on time. Some delay paying other bills, or pay less than the full amount, to ensure that rent is paid, for example (11 comments). Others mention becoming consistently behind in rent payments (7 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 39 for sample comments.)

- **Debt:** Some renters mention having to rely on consumer debt (including credit cards, lines of credit, payday loans and other debt) to pay the rent and basic needs (17 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 40 for sample comments.)

- **Using/Sacrificing Savings:** A number of renters comment on the struggle to put aside savings (especially towards purchasing a home) after paying for basic necessities (11 comments). Some even mention having to use the savings they had in order to pay for their basics (5 comments). Many comment that their prospects for owning a home are becoming more and more remote as a result of the current economic conditions (17 comments).

(See Appendix F, Table 41 for sample comments.)

- **Accessing Non-Governmental Support Services:** A small number of renters indicate that they have used the services of community organizations to help them meet their basic needs (10 comments). The types of services that they mention include Edmonton’s Food Bank, shelters/transitional housing, as well as clothing, health and church programs.

(See Appendix F, Table 42 for sample comments.)

“Our bills are paid consistently late (most are due around the beginning of the month) because we do not have money to pay them at that time. ... \$250 increase is completely unmanageable. We needed to rely on credit cards, late payments for utilities, etc.”

“I have been struggling non stop, I try to save up for a down payment on a house, but with no success, as every time I get a raise my rent increases.”

“This is still new to me, as we just got the [rent increase] notice, but I can say I was not able to save 325.00 a month from my pensions in the past, so I know that an increase of that size is going to rapidly eat my small savings.”

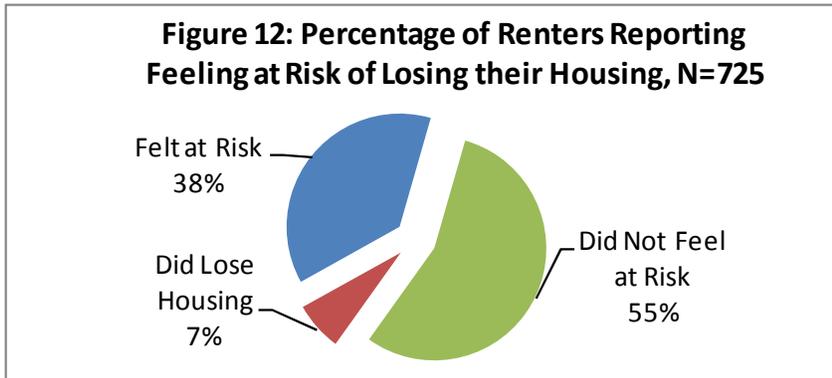
“This has been the hardest time for our family. I have had to use the food bank and [ask] for help from my church more often than I have ever needed.”

“I no longer attend support group on the other end of town for parents of children with autism. ... My husband is losing health coverage, may have to decide between medications.”

“Well, basically I don't always buy the things I need. Sure, rent is affordable, in that I make just enough to pay it and not starve to death.”

Question 5: Do People Feel at Risk of Losing their Housing?

Around two in five (N=272, 38%) renters report that they have felt at risk of losing their rental housing over the past year. Seven percent of renters (N=51) report that they did lose their housing at some point. One-third of those renters (N=29, 29%) report that they were not able to find a new place to rent long-term after they lost their housing.



Risk of Being Forced to Move

We received 118 comments related to the risk of renters losing their housing. Sixty-six renters mention that they have actually been forced to leave a rental unit at some point in the past (or know someone who did), while forty-seven feel that they are at risk of being forced to leave their current unit. The most common causes of loss (or feelings of risk) are:

- **Condo conversion or building redevelopment or sale**
Twenty-six renters mention being forced to move, and eighteen feel at risk of losing their housing, for this reason. The trend towards condo conversions, or the sale of buildings for profit, has destabilized many renters' housing situation.
- **Rents rising beyond renters' means**
Some renters mention that they were forced to move due to rent increases (27 comments); sixteen feel that they may be forced to move in the future if rent increases continue. Finding a new unit may not be an option for all renters, however; as discussed on pages 8 and 9, the limited supply of decent, affordable rental units and the actual costs of moving are a barrier to some renters impacted by rental rate increases.
- **Eviction**
Six renters mention that they have been evicted in the past year. One of the main reasons cited for eviction was the inability to keep up with increased rent payments. More renters feel at risk of eviction, noting that small "infractions" or complaints about conditions might result in an eviction notice (13 comments).

"Over the last few years the cost of living in this city has put me in a cycle of poverty that I am finding it difficult to get out of. Constant rent, utility, and energy price increases are out of control and completely unjustified."

"I've watched a friend go through great stress recently when her long-term apartment went condo and she had to find a new place. I was horrified at how little control she had over her life and basic needs."

"... I will have to move out of my 3 bed apt to a 2bd in order to afford to live on my wage while I have 3 children and myself to house without any child support. ... I am frustrated and feeling hopeless at the options available to me right now."

"Many people do not have the security to confront their landlord. The response tends to be 'if you don't like it, go somewhere else'. There is a genuine fear of being evicted... Given the demand for housing, the landlord will have minimal difficulty filling the open space."

- **Safety or health concerns**

Seven renters comment that they were forced to move in response to health or safety risks arising from the condition of their building or community.

(See Appendix G, Table 43 for comments related to risk of losing rental housing)

"I was living in a dilapidated basement suite... and began to get sick from the mold. I managed to scrape together enough for a damage deposit and moved. Not because I could afford to, but because I had to."

Homelessness

A few people indicate that their situation is at the point where they are, or could be, at risk of becoming homeless *(6 comments)*. A few renters also comment that they know families that became homeless *(3 comments)*.

Twelve renters mention that they have experienced homelessness at some point over the past year; eight of the people are now homeless, and four are currently housed. Some of the renters who experienced homelessness mention that the following factors led to their situation:

- Sale of rental condominium *(2 comments)*
- Being a newcomer to the city *(2 comments)*
- Increasing rents *(1 comment)*

"[In] March/07 my condo was being sold [and I] had 90 days to vacate, during this no one would rent to me because at the time I was a student single mother. Became homeless June /07. Kids taken by child welfare Sept/07. Got [a] place Dec/07. Still fighting to get [my kids] back."

Some of the renters who feel at risk of homelessness also cite loss of work *(2 comments)* or poor health of a household member *(1 comment)* as causes that could push them into homelessness.

Even when they do not feel personally at risk of homelessness, some renters express genuine concern that such an extreme level of insecurity could exist given the current economic prosperity *(5 comments)*.

(See Appendix G, Table 44 for comments related to homelessness.)

"[My] condo was sold. We were homeless for 5.5 months due to low income, because I am on medical disability."

"I am 55 and still single parenting a high school age child. If I were to get sick or lose my job, we would be homeless immediately."

"That people live in homeless shelters and go to work every day at jobs that desperately need to be filled is horrifying. These people at least should be housed in some fashion. Never mind the people who have more serious problems."

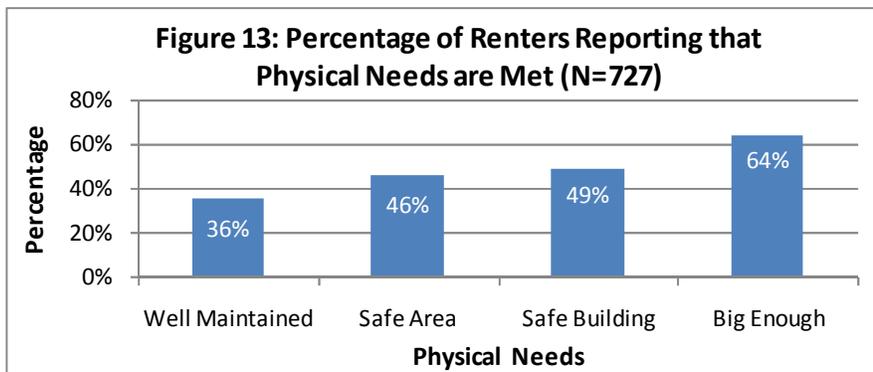
Question 6: Do Renters Feel that their Housing Meets their Needs?

In order to go beyond the issues of housing affordability and stability, we asked renters how well the location and characteristics of their rental units meet their needs.

The majority of renters (N=506, 70%) indicate that they feel their needs are generally met. However, when the results are broken down for the nine specific needs listed in the survey (physical needs: rental unit size, unit/building safety, area safety, building maintenance; and service needs: access to shopping, public transportation, schools, health care and child care) it becomes clear that not all renters' needs are satisfied equally.

Physical Needs

The first group of needs in the survey related to the physical condition of rental housing (encompassing features and condition of unit, building/grounds, and neighbourhood).



As shown in Figure 13 above, renters' specific physical needs are not being met equally. Of the four physical needs, adequate maintenance is the need most often unmet.

- **Building and Unit Maintenance**

The physical need most lacking in rental properties is adequate maintenance; approximately two-thirds of renters (N=466, 64%) indicated that their building and/or unit are not adequately maintained by their landlords.

There were a huge number of comments related to housing condition.

- **Poor Maintenance, Poor Value:** Many renters indicate that their rental units are not being maintained adequately or in a timely manner (132 comments). There is a high level of frustration that rents are going up while maintenance is slow or non-existent. There is a general sense that renters are getting poor value for their money.

"My current housing does not meet my needs because it is not stable and not long term. We need a place to call HOME, not just a roof over our heads."

"We live in a nice suite but management doesn't keep up the premises and takes forever to make repairs. We feel we aren't getting what we're paying for."

"Our rent has increased, yet we can't seem to get any maintenance done around our building. Sidewalks aren't shoveled or, if they are, they are only minimally done. ... I have lived in this building for over 20 years and I am tired of not having any recourse to force the management to be responsible to care for the building that has become my home."

"I had to move right in the middle of the housing crisis last June. As a result I am paying way too much and getting less for what I am paying for. I am going to move again and I hope that I can find better accommodations this time around."

- **Cleanliness:** Thirty-three renters comment on the general lack of cleanliness of their rental units/buildings. Problems range from insect and rodent infestations, to dampness leading to mould, to general dirtiness (20, 6 and 6 comments, respectively). It appears that some landlords are slow to respond to these issues as well (9 comments).
- **Other Needs:** Some renters also report that other needs aren't being met, including: adequate facilities for tenants (e.g. laundry, hot water, heating, visitor parking, etc.) and privacy. (14 comments)
- **Landlord Behaviour:** Some renters also report that landlords are not following the Landlord-Tenant Act (in particular, the 24 hour notice of entry requirement), and are sometimes overstepping their boundaries (closely monitoring tenants' activities, visitors, etc.). (9 comments)

Renters' comments reflect the belief that affordable rental housing is more likely to be of low quality. A number of renters living in poor conditions feel that they can not expect to be able to afford a rental unit in better condition (14 comments). Others indicate that confronting their landlords or asking for repairs could result in further rent increases or eviction (12 comments).

(See Appendix E, Table 24 for comments related to maintenance.)

- **Safety**

Over half of renters report that their rental unit and building are not safe (N=370, 51%). Fifty-four percent (N=392) feel that the area surrounding their building is not safe.

Some of the primary safety concerns that renters raise include drug activity, break-ins and theft, and violence (16, 15 and 6 comments, respectively). While some renters indicate that they feel safe in their neighbourhoods (8 comments), others feel that their neighbourhoods are deteriorating (7 comments). A couple of renters also mention concerns for physical safety because of inadequate facilities and poor building maintenance (2 comments).

(See Appendix E, Table 25 for comments related to safety.)

- **Size**

Approximately one-third of renters (N=263, 36%) report that their current accommodations are too small for their needs.

Renters' comments indicate that some people are being forced to downsize in order to afford rent. Some families are living in units with fewer bedrooms than needed (12 comments). Single renters also mention having to share small units with roommates, despite not having enough bedrooms or adequate living space (3 comments).

(See Appendix E, Table 26 for comments related to size.)

"We have a mouse problem as well as annual damage from "ice damming" in the roof during the winter. The landlord has yet to successfully deal with either issue, even though we've been there 7 years."

"... the owner of the building came into town a few months back and demanded to enter each apartment without prior notice (if no one entered, he just let himself in with his key) to look for repairs that needed to be done... People were walked in on while they were sleeping/changing/showering with no apology."

"We had to constantly phone the caretaker or RCMP to clear the hallways & stairwells of people smoking drugs and drinking."

"[My] housing... is not in a very nice neighbourhood. I do not feel safe here but have no choice as better neighbourhoods have rent that is too high. I can barely afford what I have as it is."

"There are two adults and one 13 year-old son living here in a one-bedroom apartment."

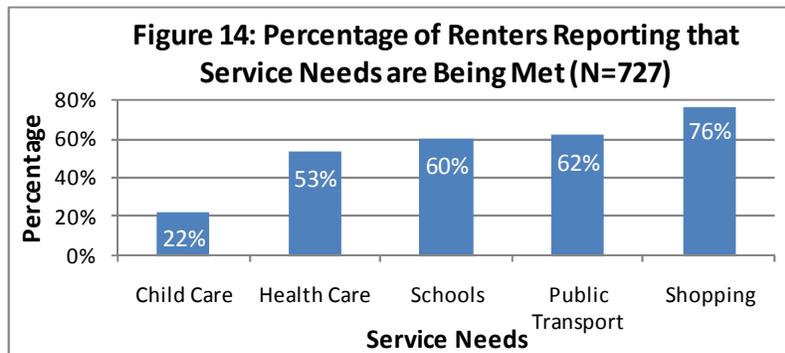
As shown in Table 3 below, the majority (N=603, 83%) of renters do not have all four specific physical needs met. About one in seven renters (N=113, 16%) indicate that none of their physical needs are met.

Table 3: Number and Percentage of Renters, by Number of Specific Physical Needs Reported as Being Met (N=727)

Number of Needs Met	Number of Renters	Percentage of Renters
0 of 4 needs	113	16%
1 need	205	28%
2 needs	151	21%
3 needs	134	18%
4 of 4 needs	124	17%
Total	727	100%

Service Needs

The second group of needs in the survey relates to renters’ ease of access to basic services, including shopping, public transportation, health care, schools and child care.



Similar to physical needs, certain service needs are met more often than others, as shown in Figure 14 above. Of the five service needs, child care is the need least often met, while shopping is the need met most often.

- **Childcare**

Childcare is the least accessible service need which renters identify; only one-fifth of renters indicate that they have good access to childcare (N=160, 22%). While this reflects the overall lack of childcare spaces in the city, it is also a result of the fact that some renters do not require childcare. (Twenty-one renters report that they do not need childcare.)

- **Healthcare**

Just over half of renters (N=387, 53%) indicate that they have good access to health care.

The most common concerns are the distance from clinics or hospital and the lack of physicians accepting new patients (3 and 2 comments, respectively). A couple of renters indicate that they do not use or need

“We are reluctant to request maintenance in case it affects our rent or tenancy.”

“I had no choice, I had to put up with these conditions or otherwise I would have been on the streets with my kids.”

“It is an awesome location downtown and close to many amenities. It is an excellent apartment for my roommate and I, it just costs a lot more than we wish it would.”

“We live within walking distance of a shopping centre, a hospital, school and church.”

“There is on site childcare, although I do not know of their vacancy rates.”

“There are not a lot of daycares in the area and the nearby school was just closed.”

“Though there are many doctors’ offices, none of them are accepting patients. The closest hospitals are only accessible by car.”

health care (2 comments).

- **Schools**

Three in five renters (N=432, 60%) indicate that they do not have good access to schools. Similar to childcare, some renters do not require access to schools (10 comments). Based on renters' comments, poor access may be related to the distance from schools or the closure of schools in the community (1 and 1 comment, respectively).

- **Public Transportation**

Over three-fifths of renters (N=448, 62%) indicate that they have good access to public transportation.

Some renters comment that despite having access, it is inconvenient or inefficient in getting them where they need to go (18 comments). Some renters also comment that access to the goods and services they need requires a vehicle (3 comments).

- **Shopping**

Over three-fourths of renters (N=552, 76%) indicate that they have good access to shopping. Some renters with poor access comment that shopping is not within walking distance of their home (3 comments).

(See Appendix H, Table 48 for comments related to service needs.)

Other Needs

As shown in Table 4 below, some renters mention the importance of access to needs and amenities that were not specified in our survey. The most common "other" need that renters identify is convenient access to work.

Table 4: Other Needs Identified by Renters

Ideas	# Comments
Convenient access to work	6
Family needs/ family-friendly communities	5
Disability needs/ accessibility	3
Access to recreation	2
Neighbourhood connections/ relationships	2
Accommodation of pets	1

(See Appendix H, Table 49 for comments related to other needs.)

"We are across the street from one of our children's schools and within walking distance of the other."

"Public transportation is a problem everywhere. The area of town I live in is inconvenient for travel to work."

"Shopping (food, clothes, etc.) is within walking distance (approximately 1 - 4 blocks)."

"We [moved to "rural Alberta" and] now live a fair distance from the schools, and shopping, but this is the price of what had to be done to afford to have a safe place to live and one that is affordable, and so that we were not homeless."

"I chose to live here because of proximity to my work, so that I can walk. I work extra time on weekends and do not wish to drive."

"I need to live in this neighborhood, close to my senior/disabled parents. Unfortunately this neighborhood is 'desirable' and so it's expensive."

"We need a handicapped accessible suite as my son is in a wheelchair and cannot go upstairs where the bedrooms are. Thus, his "bedroom" is 1/2 the living room."

Question 7: Renters' Recommendations

When asked for ideas on how to solve the problems they face, renters offer a wide variety of solutions, both conventional and creative. Renters' recommendations are listed below in order of prominence.

1. Rent Stability

With the exception of two renters who expressly do not support rent control, a large number of renters propose government action to reduce or stabilize rents as a solution to the rental crisis (346 comments). Renters offer a few different types of action that could be taken:

- **Rent control**

The idea with the most support is for government to legislate restrictions on how much landlords can increase rents (219 comments). While most renters mention rent controls in a general way, a number of renters offer more specific mechanisms.

- **Percentage Maximum Increase**

Some renters suggest that rent increases be limited to a certain percentage per year, whether it be a fixed percentage increase or linked to a variable index - inflation or average wage, for example (29 comments).

- **Rent based on Income**

Following the comments on the failure of incomes to keep up with rent increases, a number of renters suggest that rents should be somehow linked to incomes (14 comments).

- **Rent Guidelines Based on Building Characteristics**

There is some support for adjusting rental rates based on the features of the rental building or unit (e.g. size, age, amenities, etc.) (12 comments).

- **Dollar Maximum Increase**

A few renters wrote comments suggesting that a dollar amount be set for maximum increases (4 comments).

Some renters also note that some groups in particular would benefit from rent controls (13 comments), including: students, low-income earners, seniors, and modest-income earners.

- **Rent Reduction**

A number of renters suggest the outright reduction of rents to more affordable levels (68 comments).

(See Appendix I, Table 50 for ideas related to rent control.)

"I would welcome rent controls and am sure that the city could find a way for landlords to still make profit, while renters can afford to put a roof over their heads."

"Alberta desperately needs rent controls. The provincial government is failing us."

"I like the idea of landlords only being able to increase rent once per year, with some cap on % increase allowable."

"Rent indices need to be more in line with income."

"Rent should be based on a point system: 1 bedroom = 10 points, 2 bedrooms = 15 points, etc. Ceiling fan +1 point, hardwood floors +1 point, anything extra to the suite, +1 point. For every x amount of points you may increase the rent by a certain amount. If the Landlord doesn't increase the value of the suite, then rent cannot be increased."

"RENT CONTROL!! Every year rent goes up by hundreds of dollars... It's hard for students and seniors who are on FIXED INCOMES to be able to deal with their rent going from \$300/month up to \$600/month..."

"LOWER THE RENTS so everyone can live and pay all their bills."

2. Build More Affordable Rental Housing

The second most common suggestion is to increase the supply of affordable housing (201 comments).

- **Build More**

Most renters who support increasing the supply of housing propose that greater investments be made into affordable residential construction projects (81 comments).

As with rent control, some renters mention certain groups as being in particular need of affordable housing (37 comments), including: students, low- and modest-income earners, people with disabilities, seniors and single individuals.

- **Increase Supply of Non-Market Housing**

Some renters suggest funding additional units of subsidized housing and supporting alternative housing projects, like non-profit developments and housing co-operatives (39 comments).

- **More Apartments than Condos**

Some renters are more specific in suggesting that more modest, purpose-built²¹ rental apartments should be constructed to counter the trend towards building high-end condominiums (18 comments).

- **Redevelop Existing Old or Empty Buildings**

Rather than having to increase the supply of affordable rental properties by constructing new buildings, sixteen renters identify potential buildings (e.g. hotels, schools, hospitals, office buildings) for redevelopment into rental apartments.

- **Provide Incentives to Developers**

Some renters suggest that providing incentives to developers to build more affordable rental units is a viable option (9 comments).

- **Support Other Housing Programs**

Twenty-one renters state that increased support for programs like Habitat for Humanity or council housing²², for example, would help to meet some of the need for housing.

A number of renters also recognize the importance of location in building affordable rental accommodation (17 comments). Some renters specifically note that rental buildings should not be concentrated in a few select areas, but dispersed throughout the city (5 comments).

(See Appendix I, Table 51 for ideas related to affordable housing.)

“As well, building more affordable housing, and not just for single parents or people on assisted living. But those of us who have a decent job but still cannot afford to rent a place!”

“... Affordable and adaptable housing for people with physical challenges is in DIRE need!”

“In addition, the federal and provincial governments should provide funding for affordable housing that desperately needs to be built.”

“There has to be more houses that are affordable, at this time there many new buildings under construction but it seems they are doing it to sale. There should be buildings which are built in the purpose of renting.”

“They could do like they did in the 60's - pay developers to build housing with reasonable rents that revert back to the developers after 25 years.”

“Provide affordable housing - but not concentrated in one area...”

²¹ Buildings constructed for residential rental purposes.

²² Council housing “is a form of public or social housing in the United Kingdom. Council houses were built and operated by local councils to supply uncrowded, well built homes on secure tenancies at affordable (below market) rents to the local population.” (Wikipedia. (2008). *Council house*. Retrieved August 27, 2008 from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_house)

3. Landlord Regulation, Accountability & Transparency

Based on renters' comments regarding the decline in rental housing quality and the inadequate justification of some rent increases (see pages 9 and 11), there is a sense that some landlords are taking advantage of current market conditions to the detriment of their tenants. Eighty renters respond to these conditions by expressing support for various forms of landlord regulation, including:

- **Enforcement of Renter Rights**
Some renters express concern over the lack of protection from landlord abuses (excessive rent increases, neglect of maintenance and safety responsibilities, violation of Landlord-Tenant Act, etc.) (33 comments). Five renters suggest the formation of an authoritative venue for renters to register complaints that will lead to action.
- **Regulation and Enforcement of Safety and Maintenance Standards**
As discussed on pages 22 and 23, most renters report that their rental housing is inadequately maintained and unsafe. As a result of these conditions, regulated and enforced standards for maintenance and safety are an attractive solution to some renters (22 comments).
- **Lease Characteristics**
Eleven renters offer suggestions related to leases, including: reducing damage deposit fees (for all renters, including those with pets), favouring long term leases to increase stability, and eliminating differential pricing between yearly and month-to-month leases.
- **Building Characteristics**
Seven renters comment that certain features should be made standard at all rental buildings, including: a security system, adequate parking for residents and visitors, concrete construction regardless of size, etc. One renter also suggest placing restrictions on the number of rental units designated as adult only as a measure to open up the rental market more to families and young people.
- **Transparency and Justification of Rent Increases**
Some renters propose putting a system in place that requires landlords raising rental rates above a certain limit to justify the increases they are proposing (7 comments). The idea behind this is to ensure that rent increases are transparent and based on actual cost increases, rather than gouging to increase profit margins. Another suggestion is to require landlords to make their financial statements public to their tenants (1 comment).

(See Appendix I, Table 52 for ideas related to landlord regulation.)

"... the situation seems to be more than just rent costs, it also has to do with the abilities of the Rental acts for proper enforcement of renters rights, as it is it is failing miserably and designed more for the landlord than it is for the renter."

"I think if a landlord is going to increase rent, they can, but they have to be required to invest X% of the new income in building improvements and/or new buildings. Right now, some property management firms are making a few extra million dollars and it is just pure profit for them, they are not re-investing in the city."

"The damage deposit should be half of first months rent rather than same as first months rent."

"I think that if I'm paying the money, my building should be clean and secure. I think every apartment building should have a camera system in the lobby/vestibule and common laundry areas."

"[We need] some guidelines for how MUCH a landlord can raise rent in a 365 day period. If they need to go over the % increase, going in front of a board with justified reasons for the increase could allow them to raise it more. Accountability!"

4. Government Assistance

Fifty-four renters recommend that government provide more assistance to renters, given the fact that recent increases in housing prices are unmanageable for many.

- **Expand Rent Subsidies**

Twenty-seven renters suggest opening eligibility for subsidies to a greater range of people. Renters' comments indicate that it is not only "low-income" renters who are having difficulties making ends meet. Some renters in modest-income families note that they are facing particular difficulties, as they do not qualify for all of the supports offered (2 comments).

- **Invest More in Social Programs & Supports**

Some renters propose that government make greater investments into social supports (14 comments), including: raising income supports to better reflect actual cost of living, providing more assistance for meeting basic needs (food, transportation, child care, etc.), and increasing investments in community programs.

- **Home Ownership Assistance**

A number of renters encourage government to provide assistance for renters to move from renting to home ownership (e.g. grants for down payments, rent-to-own programs, etc.) (13 comments).

Apart from financial assistance, six renters suggest that additional resources be provided to make it easier for renters to find housing options (such as a central housing registry, a roommate search database, or personal assistance).

One renter comments that existing programs should be better advertised to make all who are eligible aware of the support available to them.

(See Appendix I, Table 53 and 54 for ideas related to government assistance.)

5. Limit on Condominium Construction and Conversion

Following the trend towards condominium conversion, many renters are concerned that these developments will continue to reduce the supply of affordable rental housing (30 comments).

- **Limit Condo Conversions**

Some renters propose putting a limit on the number of condo conversions that are allowed every year, while others want conversions to stop all together (28 comments).

- **Limit Condo Construction**

Two renters feel that condominium construction should be limited or stopped altogether.

(See Appendix I, Table 55 for ideas related to condominiums.)

"Direct subsidy from government to keep rental no more than 30% of income Introduce rent subsidies for those who can't afford to rent."

"More subsidies for low-mid income people."

"Make it easier for low to middle income families (especially single parents) to own their own homes... Develop programs for renters to become home owners."

"Government support needs to accurately reflect the current cost of living."

"More communication re: newspaper/TV/radio. There are others in my building who have NO idea about subsidies, subsidized housing, etc."

"Rental unit to condo conversion is wrong and will be long term problem. Rental unit should stay as a rental. If condos are in demand build new condos."

"Reverse the trend toward condominiums. Do not allow condominiums to be built."

6. Improving Incomes

A number of renters support a variety of ways to increase renters' incomes, thereby making them better able to afford rent increases (25 comments).

- **Increase Incomes**

Some renters indicate that incomes should somehow be raised, whether by encouraging employers to give yearly cost-of-living increases based on inflation, or increasing the minimum wage, for example (13 comments). One renter mentions implementing living wage legislation.

- **Restructure Requirements for Income Supports**

Six renters suggest that the income limits for income supports, rent subsidies or subsidized housing should be raised to include modest-income families who are struggling.

- **More Work**

A few renters feel that people should be encouraged to get work, as there are many employment opportunities available (5 comments).

(See Appendix I, Table 56 for ideas related to improving incomes.)

7. Government Awareness & Action

There is a sense among some renters that the government's attention and action on the rental housing issue is limited (24 comments). It is perceived that in order for real change to occur, they must know the reality of the situation and commit to act on it.

- **Increased Attention to the Issue**

Some renters believe that politicians need to be exposed to the conditions that renters are dealing with (12 comments). There is a sense that they do not understand the realities of the situation.

- **Action Needed**

Six renters feel that it is the government's responsibility to listen to the concerns of its people and take action.

- **Prioritize People**

A few renters note that government needs to put the needs of people ahead of the needs of business (3 comments).

- **Change Government**

Three renters say that a change in government is needed in order to effect change.

(See Appendix I, Table 57 for ideas related to government awareness.)

"...plus encourage the business/employer sector to give appropriate cost of living increases so the middle income earner is not struggling!"

"I only make 33,000.00/yr (gross) and am constantly told that I should be able to live off of that by government employees. The guidelines that determine eligibility for subsidized programs need to be adjusted to reflect the reality of living in Edmonton and the cost of living."

"We need a Housing Minister and city council members that take a SERIOUS interest in the cost of housing for low to middle income people."

"I think MLA's should get out of their offices and go to where people are living so they truly understand what we're dealing with."

"I do hope that the government will take our concerns and come up with the best idea for this situation."

"Our leaders just do not care for the social well-being of its citizens. Time and again you see decisions made in favour of business and the people struggle just to get by. This is criminal."

8. Tax Solutions

Some renters feel that solutions to some rental issues could be solved through the tax system (20 comments).

- **Tax Credits/Deductions**

- **For Landlords/Homeowners:** Seven renters propose that government offer tax credits as an incentive for landlords to keep rents low, or to encourage homeowners to rent rooms in their home.
- **For Renters:** Six renters suggest offering income tax credits on a portion of rent paid to compensate for stagnant incomes.
- **For Builders:** One renter advises offering tax incentives for building affordable rental units.

- **Decrease Tax**

A few renters recommend decreasing taxes to increase disposable income and encourage the construction of low-cost rental units (3 comments).

- **Other Tax Programs**

Two renters offer ideas of other tax programs that would increase the disposable income of certain groups, e.g. working family tax credit.

(See Appendix I, Table 58 for ideas related to tax solutions.)

9. City Planning

Eighteen renters comment that improved city planning would help to alleviate some of the problems related the rental situation.

- **Improved Transit Access and Service**

Some renters believe that greater investments should be made into transit to ensure that all rental housing has easy and regular access to public transit (8 comments).

- **Plan for Sustainable Growth**

Eight renters feel that the city should concentrate on planning and redeveloping communities to reduce urban sprawl (increase housing density), increase the diversity of housing options (price ranges) and improve access to basic needs and services within the community.

Two renters highlight the need for the levels of government to take leadership on the issue and co-operate to find creative and sustainable solutions.

(See Appendix I, Table 59 for ideas related to city planning.)

“Tax rebates for renters, similar to what Manitoba does for renters.”

“Create tax incentives [based on] people per square foot of housing. For example, ... Any home with less than 600 sq ft per resident should be considered for a tax break. The exact square footage would have to be determined... but the idea would be to encourage people with large homes to rent out available space.”

“A tax wherein the funds are given to shelters and subsidized housing.”

“Government should invest on transportation services. Affordable areas are minimally served or not at all served by buses.”

“Stop the urban sprawl... Ensure infill is appropriate to the neighbourhood and that the neighbourhood has sufficient amenities for all the people, not just the new ones.”

“Ensure all government agencies work in collaboration (as otherwise it may be difficult for people in need to access appropriate support/resources).”

10. Homeless Shelters and Facilities

Apart from offering solutions directly related to alleviating rental housing pressures, some renters offer suggestions on accommodating the city's increasing homeless population (15 comments).

Most comments relate to providing more shelter space and public facilities for the homeless, as well as transitional/emergency housing and assistance finding housing.

(See Appendix I, Table 60 for ideas related to homelessness.)

11. Community Safety

Thirteen renters propose solutions to the safety concerns related to their housing. Their suggestions include increasing efforts at reducing crime, adding police presence in high-risk neighbourhoods, and making the justice system more effective.

(See Appendix I, Table 61 for ideas related to safety.)

12. Control of Utility Costs

As discussed on page 11, fifty-three renters mention utilities as a basic cost that has increased substantially. The most common suggestions in response to these increases are to either re-regulate utilities or require that utilities are included in rent (8 comments). A few renters also suggest creating more "green" rental housing in order to reduce utility costs for both owners and renters (3 comments).

(See Appendix I, Table 62 for ideas related to utilities.)

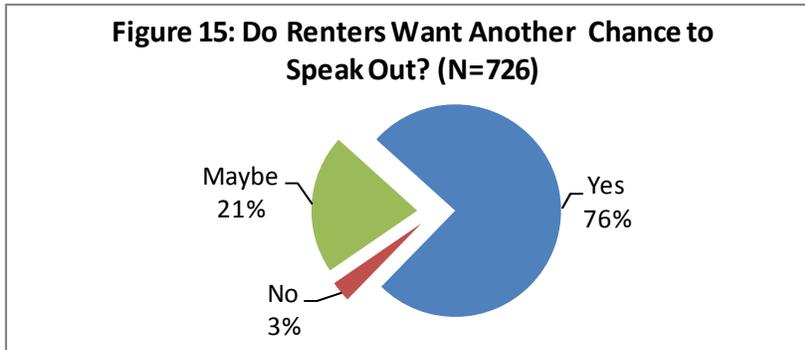
"Also, more beds in shelters and more programs to help people get off the streets. Having homeless people in the city is shameful at any time, but especially when we're in an economic 'boom'."

"Shelter is one thing, but I feel that safety is a key in making you feel like you have a place called home."

"...there is no regulation for excluding heat from rent and sub-metering. It should be something to be looked at in the future. Many landlords abuse the current situation collecting a large amount of profits by separating charges from rent and increasing various fees."

Question 8: Do Renters Want Another Chance to Speak Out?

As shown in Figure 17 below, the majority of renters (N=549, 76%) indicate that renters need a venue to voice their concerns about the challenges they face, and have their ideas heard and acted upon.



Renters offer a variety of idea on ways of making sure that renters' voices are considered and heard by decision-makers. As shown in Table 5 below, the most common idea is to hold a public forum on the issue.

Table 5: Renters Ideas on Drawing Attention to Rental Housing Issues

Ideas	# Comments
Holding a Public Forum/Meeting	93
Conducting Surveys	54
Holding Protests or Signing Petitions	35
Collaboration between Government and Agencies	28
Media Campaigns/ Communication	25
On-line Forums	12
Greater Renter Representation	9
Referendum on Rent Control/ Voting for Renter-Friendly Parties	9
Information Sharing	6
Other Research/ Topics	3
Everyone Working Together	3

(See Appendix J, Table 64 for comments.)

One of the messages that came out of renters' responses to this question is that while renters feel that they need a chance to be heard, decision-makers appear not to care or to be willing to listen (66 comments).

(See Appendix J, Table 65 for sample comments.)

"Have round table or town-hall meetings where people can express their concerns and not just tenants, but landlords and building owners too. Maybe there would be ways for both tenants and landlords to work together to cut down on cost on the upkeep of the buildings i.e. cleaning the building, small repairs, etc."

"The results of surveys, such as this, MUST be taken seriously."

"I don't think that renters should give this issue a rest. I think that we need to be in everyone's faces to actually get anything accomplished."

"Do whatever you can to let the leaders of government know that we feel let down and abandoned. Tell them it is time to step up and help the citizens of Edmonton. We are entitled to be able to have affordable housing. Letting property speculators control the housing market is just plain wrong."

"... I would also like to see more information / programs on how people can be helped to purchase their own home and not worry about rent increases."

"Please try to do something to help us to make the housing in Edmonton affordable to the low income families."