

STATE OF REPAIR:

OTTAWA ACORN TENANT SURVEY

**85.5% OF RESPONDENTS
REPORTED PROBLEMS IN
THEIR UNITS**

**40% OF RESPONDENTS
REPORTED
COCKROACHES IN THEIR
BUILDING**

**32.1 % OF RESPONDENTS
EXPERIENCED LACK OF
HEAT IN WINTER**

**RESPONDENTS REPORTED
FEELING THREATENED
WHEN COMPLAINING
ABOUT THEIR BUILDING**



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INTRODUCTION

Ottawa ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent organization of low and moderate income families with 22,800 members across the city. ACORN Canada has over 102,000 members in 22 neighbourhood chapters across the country. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a wide membership base who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

This report shows that the municipal government needs to do more as tenants are living in substandard conditions without the necessary support to allow them to stand up to landlords and have their needs met. The Property Standards By-law has more procedural steps and delays than most by-laws in addition to any notice of violation being unenforceable. This is why Ottawa ACORN members want landlord licensing NOW!



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was conducted from December 2016 – March 2017. It was distributed to low and moderate income ACORN members and families across Ottawa and surrounding areas to measure the extent of the problem of substandard living conditions in the region's rental apartments.

Major deficiencies are evident in the homes of respondents, with 85.5% reporting having complained to their landlord about repairs needed in their units and 52.7% of respondents reporting problems getting repairs done in their building.

The survey also shows that although 82.4% of respondents had an issue with their unit, only 21.3% had complained to the City, with some indicating that they are unaware of their options and 28.5% believing that it is not worth their time. Some tenants reported feeling threatened when making complaints about their building. This highlights that more should be done to educate tenants about their rights and the support that the City can offer to them when they are experiencing poor housing conditions. It is imperative that the rights of tenants are protected so that they are not living in fear of landlords while occupying substandard housing.

It is evident that tenants are being failed as they struggle with poor housing conditions and a lack of support to address the issues that they are experiencing. Ottawa ACORN urges the municipal government to move forward with landlord licensing to ensure that landlords are meeting acceptable housing standards and that a system is in place to protect tenants living in properties where landlords do not adhere to these standards.



WHAT IS LANDLORD LICENSING?

Currently, inspections of buildings are complaint based. Complaint based inspections don't work for many reasons: tenants don't know to call 311, tenants don't know their rights, tenants are afraid of landlords and eviction, complaints are dropped once a new tenant moves in, there are language barriers, or tenants eventually become unwilling to sacrifice their time and energy complaining when they fail to get results. Landlord licensing could make it so that there are annual inspections of all buildings in the City of Ottawa, and would impose remedial actions and financial penalties on landlords that fail to comply with set requirements. This would ensure that tenants have a system that is proactive and landlords are keeping up with cleaning, maintenance and pest control. Landlords would be forced to comply with a list of requirements, including:

- Provide the City of Ottawa with contact information for the property;
- Provide the City with property descriptions including year property was built, year(s) property was renovated, type of construction, total number of floors, total number of units, and an estimate of occupied units;
- Provide the City with a copy of building insurance and other applicable insurance;
- Develop and maintain a capital repair plan for good long-term upkeep of buildings;
- Develop an indoor/outdoor maintenance plan including a pest management plan, ice/snow removal, heating systems and elevators, and objectives for ensuring maintenance plan is followed;
- Inform tenants in writing if garbage or waste is provided by the City or a private company;
- Provide information on common or shared systems including, but not limited to, heating/cooling, elevators, alarms, parking, laundry areas, amenities, windows, security, and sprinklers;
- Comply with safety standards for heating/gas/fuel systems and appliances, ensure good working conditions of systems and appliances;
- Ensure up-to-date fire and electrical safety plans and maintenance;
- Ensure regular elevator maintenance and repairs;
- Post service disruptions, notices, or work orders on a central board (e.g. lobby or building common area);
- Post schedule in public area for cleaning of indoors and outdoors common spaces;
- Ensure tenants have information on how to submit work orders to the landlord;
- Create a mandatory program to receive and follow up with tenant requests; and
- Conduct an annual walkabout of the property and inspection of all common areas

Ottawa ACORN members want the landlord licensing program to be mandatory for all landlords in the City of Ottawa owning property with three units or more. All information regarding the licensing program must be shared with tenants in writing, and easily accessible in print and online. The program should include:

- The development of a tenant stakeholder group, including ACORN members, to increase engagement and education;
- An application process for property owners that includes clear stipulations regarding the obligations of landlords;
- Clear guidelines that are actively promoted by the City on landlords' responsibilities to tenants and how tenants can access their rights;
- Landlords should receive a copy of minimum property standards that property owners must adhere to;
- Early identification of potential health and safety risks through inspections;
- Increased compliance with property standards through annual inspections by the City and re- inspection programs to be determined with consultation from City By-law;
- Program reporting and work orders for non-compliance posted on City of Ottawa website; and
- Financial penalties for property owners that are non-compliant with work orders and/or property standards that are systematic rather than discretionary.



METHODOLOGY

Ottawa ACORN's Tenant Survey was conducted between December 2016 – March 2017. 165 responses were received. The three principal areas that the survey addressed were:

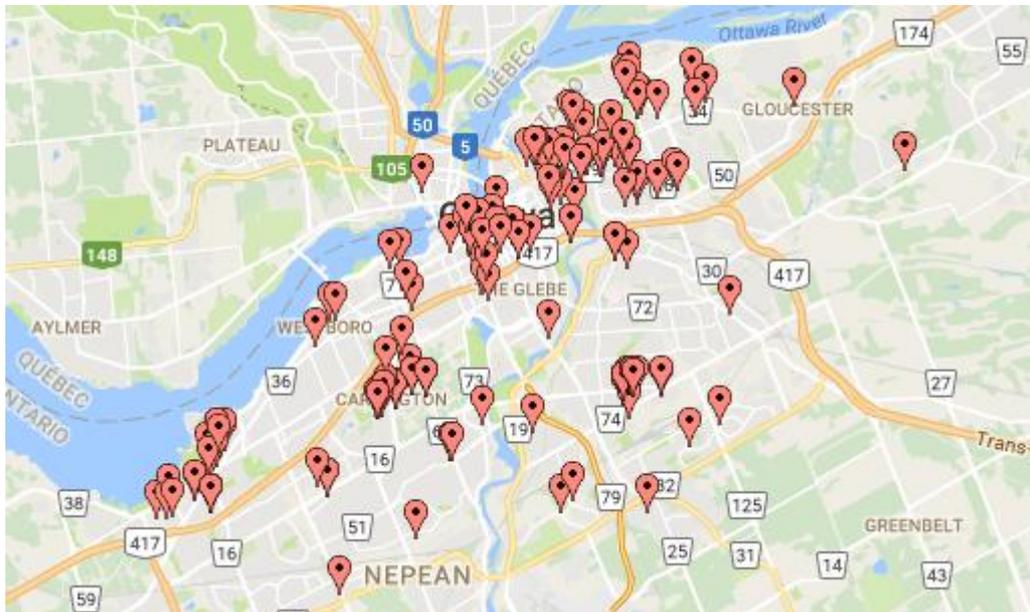
- 1) What is the state of repair in the apartment building you live in?
- 2) What has been your experience getting repairs done from your landlord?
- 3) What has been your experience getting help from the City to get repairs?

The targeted demographic for respondents were low and moderate income tenants and ACORN members. The survey was sent out electronically through our membership lists and social media platforms for tenants to complete online. One of our community allies, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), also assisted with outreach by distributing surveys to their clients. Finally, ACORN volunteers called members to complete the survey over the phone in addition to going door to door in low income buildings, reaching out to friends and neighbours and encouraging people to fill out surveys at local chapter meetings.



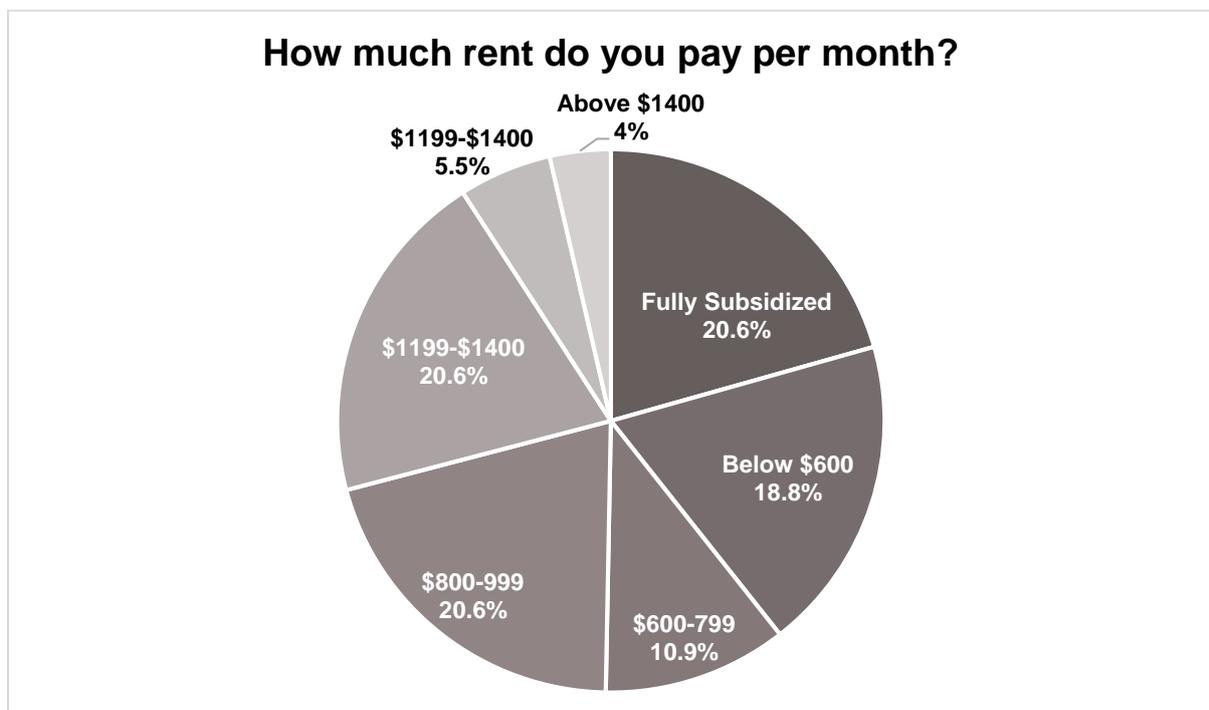
RESULTS

165 tenants responded to our survey. Geographically, respondents were dispersed across Ottawa and the surrounding areas, with the exact locations mapped below:



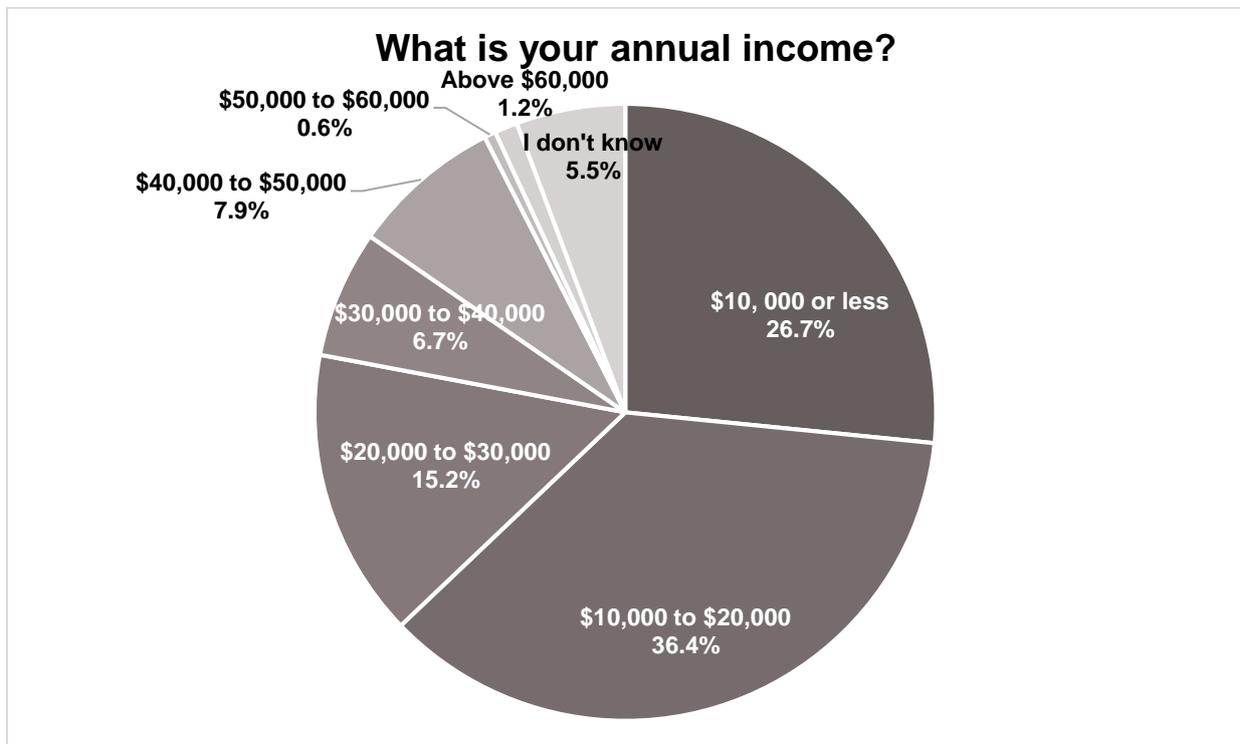
Rental Costs

Rental costs varied across respondents. Only 20.6% receive full subsidy and the majority pay more than \$800 per month.



Many respondents had a low to moderate annual income, with the majority **earning less than \$20,000**. Of this figure, **26.7% earned less than \$10,000**. For this group,

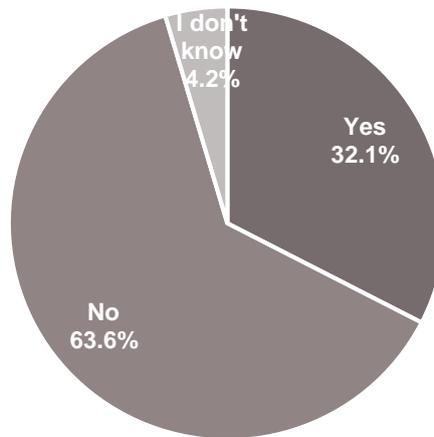
even rental costs of \$600 could equate to **72% of their income**, which is deeply concerning for Ottawa ACORN members as rental rates continue to rise.



Housing Conditions

The majority (53.9%) of respondents indicated that their unit required repairs at the beginning of the tenancy, indicating that units were being rented in poor conditions. Tenants reported a high rate of problems in their apartments. In total **82.4% of respondents identified repairs needed in their units**. The need for a policy change is evidenced by the poor conditions highlighted in this report. Issues such as a lack of heat, cockroaches and other bugs, ventilation problems, holes/cracks in walls and many other standard repairs that tenants are entitled to have addressed by landlords.

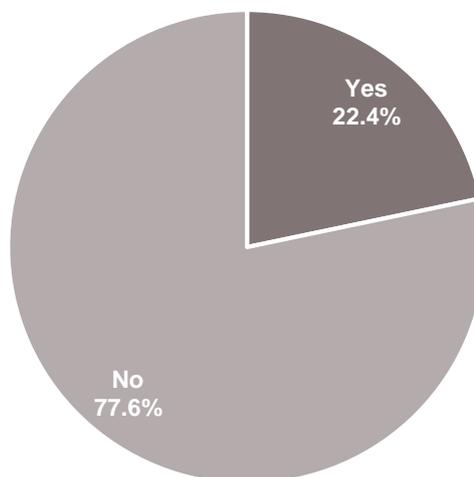
Have you ever experienced a lack of heat in the winter in your building?



32.1% of tenants surveyed have experienced a lack of heat in their homes in winter.

Tenants surveyed also reported issues with hot water, with a total of 23% respondents reporting issues. Tenants experienced problems such as their water being too hot and the temperature changing from hot to cold.

Have you had bedbugs in the past 2 years?



22.4% of respondents surveyed have had bedbugs in the past two years.

Issues with Unit Checklist

Cockroaches	34.5%
Holes or cracks on walls or ceiling	32.1%
Ventilation problems in bathroom or kitchen	31.5%
Drafty windows	30.3%
Peeling paint on walls or ceiling	29.7%
Too hot in summer	26.1%
Out of date appliances (fridge or stove)	26.1%
Unfinished repairs in my unit	24.2%
Electrical sockets broken or don't work	21.2%
Floor is not smooth or is coming up	21.1%
Mould	20.6%
Countertops damaged or broken	20%
Too cold in winter	19.4%
Closet doors do not work properly	19.4%
Water damage	17.6%
Leaky faucets	16.4%
Kitchen or closet shelves damaged or broken	15.2%
Appliances do not work, or don't work properly	14.5%
Lights don't work properly	10.9%
Balcony has cracks or holes	7.9%
Lack of water pressure	7.9%
Balcony paint peeling	7.4%
Balcony door is broken	3.6%
Other	21.2%
I have no issues in my suite	17.6%

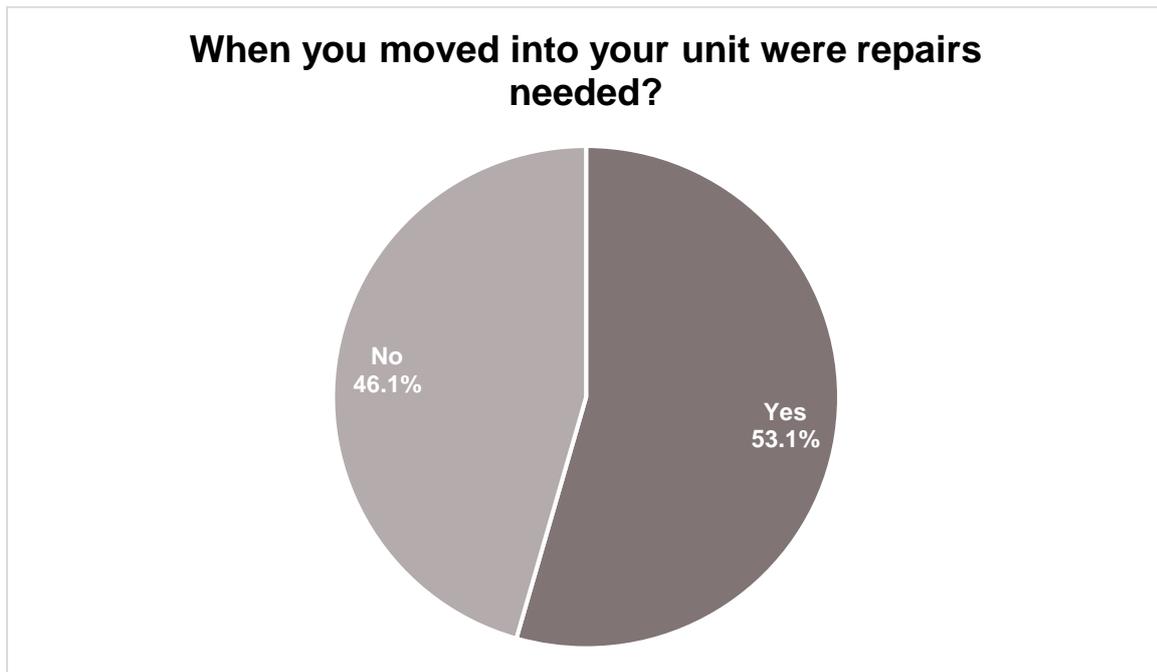
34.5% of respondents reported cockroaches in their unit and 31.5% reported ventilation problems in their bathroom or kitchen.

Issues with Common Areas Checklist

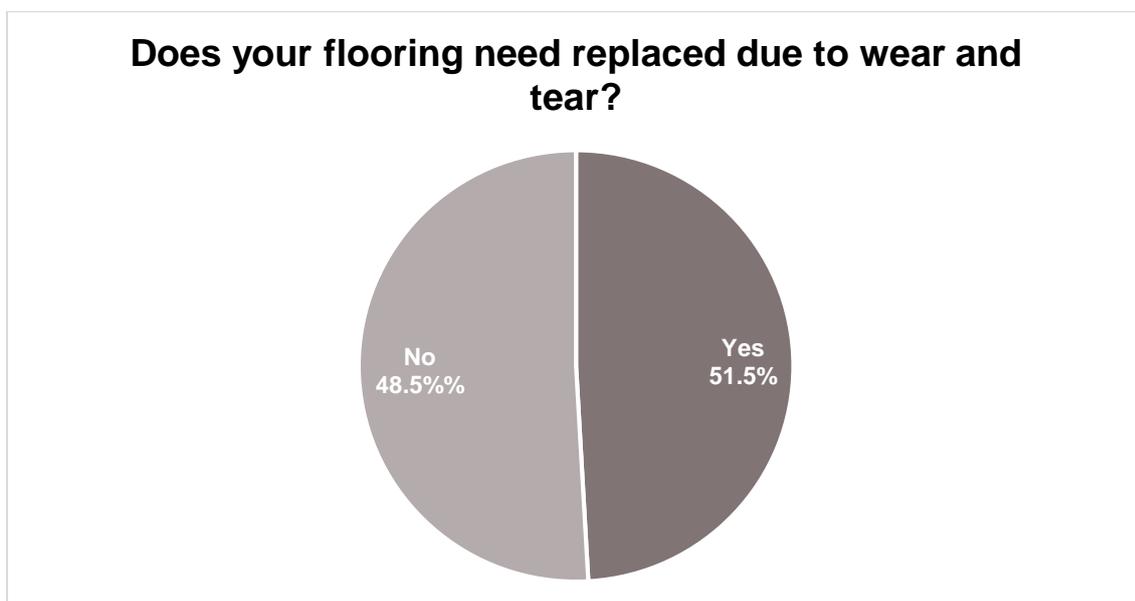
Roaches or other bugs in building	41.2%
Garbage chute is unclean or has bad odours	27.3%
Stairwells have garbage or are unclean	21.2%
Laundry room machines don't work	18.8%
Hallway or lobby carpets do not get cleaned	18.8%
Elevators are dirty or are damaged	15.8%
Hallway walls and/or ceilings have holes or cracks	16.4%
Mice or rats in building	15.8%
Walkways/Sidewalks on apartment property have cracks/holes	14.5%
Yard/outside areas are dirty or not kept clean	13.9%
Parking area or driveway has potholes or cracked concrete	13.9%
Hallway walls and/or ceilings have peeling paint	13.3%
Hallway lights are missing or broken	10.9%
Stairwells have faeces or urine	10.9%
Lobby intercom/buzzer is broken	10.3%
Front door does not lock or is often unlocked	10.3%
Security cameras do not work	9.7%
Laundry room has leaks or mould	9.7%
Laundry room has peeling paint on walls/ceiling	9.7%
Parking garage walls or ceiling have cracks or holes	7.9%
Hallway ceiling has leaks or mold	7.3%
Stairwells have peeling paint on ceiling or walls	7.3%
Outside walls or balconies of building have cracks/peeling paint	6.7%
Parking garage has leaks or mould	6.1%
Stairwell lights are missing or broken	1.2%
Stairwells have broken railings	1.2%
Other	18.8%
I have no issues with the common areas of my building	37%

41.2% of respondents reported cockroaches or other bugs in their building

Repairs

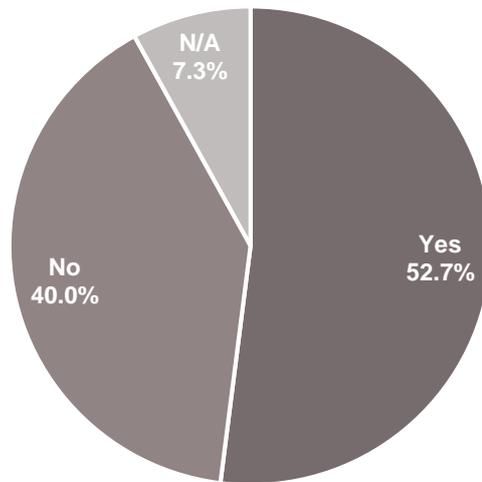


53.1% of respondents reported that their unit needed repairs when they moved in.



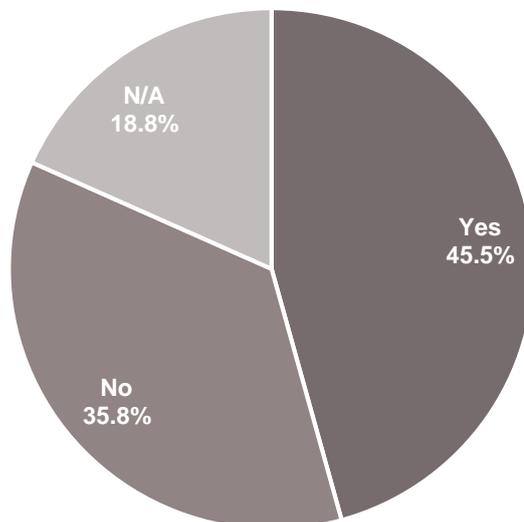
51.5% of respondents surveyed reported needing their flooring replaced.

Have you ever had problems getting repairs done in your building?



52.7% of respondents surveyed reported problems getting repairs done in their building.

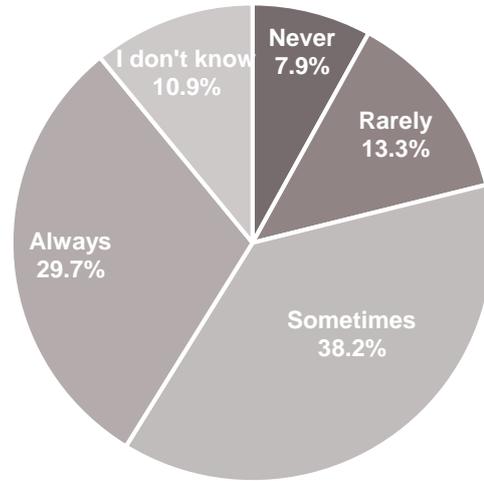
My work orders get done in a timely manner



35.8% of respondents' work orders do not get done in a timely manner.

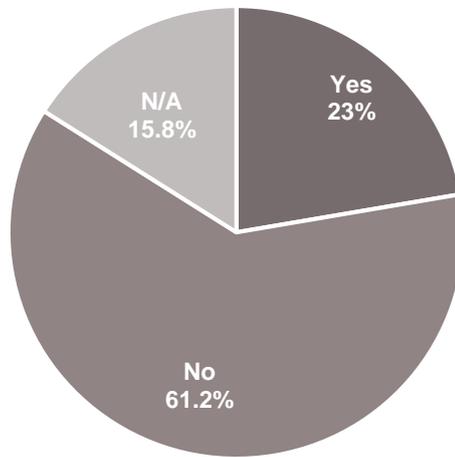
Of 64% of respondents who have a superintendent or building maintenance, **20.6%** feel that building management **does not treat them fairly** and **27.3%** believe that building management **does not act professionally**.

Maintenance workers, contractors, and/or repair people do quality work in the building



Only 29.7% of respondents felt that repairs carried out in their building were always quality work.

Do you feel threatened when making complaints about the building?

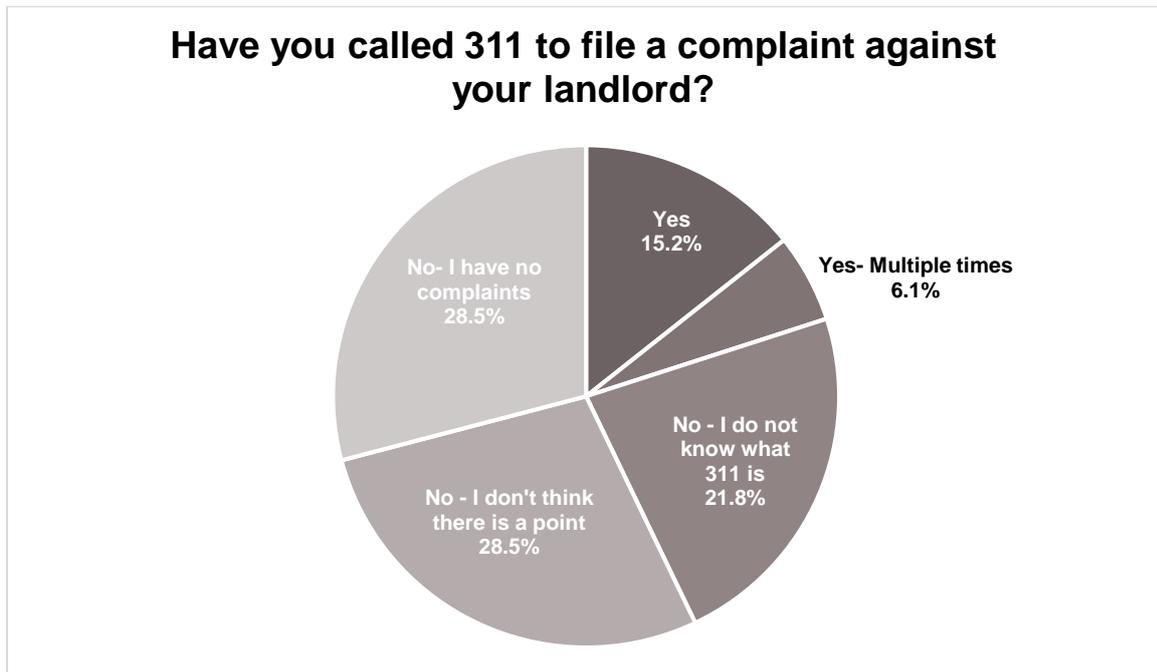


23% of respondents reported that they feel threatened when making complaints about their building.

Complaints to the City

21.3% of respondents reported using the 311 complaint system for tenants. However, there are several reasons that many tenants do not make complaints to

the City. Nearly one third of those surveyed said they see no point in calling 311. 21.8% of respondents did not know what 311 is.

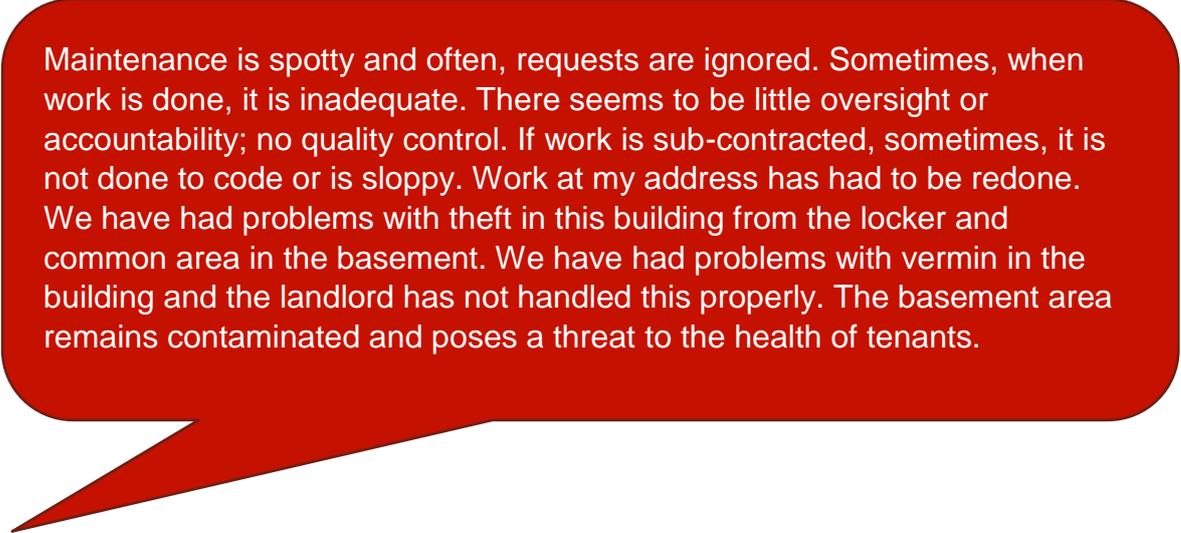


Comments about Buildings

Many respondents provided comments about their buildings, revealing issues that they experienced with their units and landlords. Some of these comments include:

There is only one garbage can in the front and it's rarely emptied, sometimes they don't do it before the weekend starts and then won't do it right away Monday and it's disgusting. There are cockroaches in the garbage room, many times I've seen them in the elevators and lobby. The side door often doesn't close or lock.

Infested with cockroaches, unpredictable elevator, hallway carpets are barely ever cleaned, not sure if they have ever been deep cleaned.



Maintenance is spotty and often, requests are ignored. Sometimes, when work is done, it is inadequate. There seems to be little oversight or accountability; no quality control. If work is sub-contracted, sometimes, it is not done to code or is sloppy. Work at my address has had to be redone. We have had problems with theft in this building from the locker and common area in the basement. We have had problems with vermin in the building and the landlord has not handled this properly. The basement area remains contaminated and poses a threat to the health of tenants.

Conclusion

The results of the Ottawa ACORN Tenant Survey evidence the need for the municipal government to move forward on landlord licensing. A majority of respondents reported maintenance issues with their apartments, as well as issues having the repairs completed. Many respondents reported that repairs were not completed to a quality standard or in a timely manner. Tenants indicated that they are either unaware of the options available to them, as they have not heard about the 311 phone line, or they are apprehensive about making complaints about their building as they feel threatened. This is indicative of the failings of the current system and highlights the necessity of landlord licensing – we need to give power back to tenants to ensure their needs are met and their housing meets an acceptable standard.