



STATE OF REPAIR 2024

Ottawa ACORN Tenant Survey & Platform



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INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Ottawa ACORN launched our first ‘State of Repair’ report. The report compiled survey results from low-moderate income tenant households on their experiences accessing repairs from their landlords. Out of the 165 respondents, approximately 80% reported problems in their unit ranging from mold, cockroaches and bedbugs to problems with heat and hot water.

Later that year, after countless tenant meetings, phone calls, doors knocked on, new tenant leaders, media coverage, ACORN meetings with city councillors and consultations with City Staff, the City of Ottawa announced the beginning of their Rental Accommodations Study. Ottawa ACORN members actively engaged tenants to have their voices heard in the study to influence systemic change. ACORN tenant leaders advocated for a landlord licensing or registration system modelled off Toronto’s RentSafe program. At the same time, we never stopped organizing tenants to work together with their neighbours to secure immediate repairs in their building.

As a result of the study, the City developed the new Rental Housing Property Management By-Law, which came into effect in August 2021. The City hired outside consultants to lead the Rental Accommodations Study and despite their recommendation of a landlord licensing pilot project, councillors ultimately voted against it. While there may have been several factors contributing to this outcome, persistent and often misleading advocacy by landlord lobbyists was certainly one of them. Nonetheless, some of ACORN members’ recommendations for stronger tenant protections were incorporated into the new by-law.

Significant changes were made such as: requiring landlords to provide tenants with basic information on their rights, mandatory timelines for

repairs, and requirements for pest management and capital maintenance plans.

However, years later tenants repeatedly share concerns about the enforcement of the by-law as they continue to have issues with their housing. At the time of its passing the City committed to evaluating the by-law in 3 years. For these reasons, Ottawa ACORN conducted a series of tenant workshops and a second survey on the state of repair in Ottawa's rental housing. Our goal is to determine the by-law's impact and what improvements in tenants' rights are needed.

WHAT IS ACORN

ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) Canada is a multi-issue, membership-based community union of low- and moderate-income people. We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved by building community power for change. We have 177,000+ members organized into 30 neighbourhood chapters in 10 regions across 6 provinces. ACORN members are low- and moderate income tenants who are bearing the brunt of the housing crisis.



SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over 70% of respondents rented from a private corporation.**
- 41.7% live in a high rise of more than 10 stories.
- \$750/month is considered affordable for those with incomes of \$30,000/year:
 - 39% of respondents earn \$30,000 or less.
 - Excluding tenants who had subsidized rents, only 7.3% of respondents were paying less than \$800/month in rent.
 - 53.8% of respondents are paying more than \$1400/month in rent .
- **Over 90% of respondents said they have problems in their unit.**
 - In 2024, 90.8% said they have issues in their unit, compared to 82.4% in 2017. That's an almost 10% increase.
 - In 2017, 37% of respondents had no issues with the common areas of their buildings, in 2024 this has dropped by 20% to only 19.70%.
- **26.2% of respondents report seeing cockroaches in their building.**
- 54.9% of respondents required repairs at the beginning of tenancy, indicating that units were being rented in poor condition.
- **39.7% of respondents had experienced a lack of heat in the winter.** In 2017, only 32.1% had responded yes to this question.
- Nearly 30% indicated having problems with hot water.
- 24.4% said they had very old appliances that have regular problems or don't work at all.
- **43.7% say their unit is too hot in the summer compared to just 26.1% who responded the same in 2017. That's a nearly 18% increase.**
- 23.4% say it's too cold in the winter compared to 19.4% in 2017.
- 23.4% have water damage compared to 17.6% in 2017.
- **Nearly 60% of respondent said they don't trust their landlord to put their tenants interest first.**

- The City’s by-law requires landlords to respond to urgent service requests within 24 hours and non-urgent requests require a response within 7 days. **Over 50% of respondents said their landlord only sometimes or never responds to service requests within these timeframes.**
- Of the 38 tenants that did make a complaint to By-Law, 16 said it was never resolved.
- The City now requires landlords re-inspect for pests 15-30 days after doing pest control treatment. Nearly 40% of respondents said their unit was never re-inspected.
- **Only 7.8% of tenants described the ‘Rental Housing Property Management By-Law’ as effective or very effective.**

METHODOLOGY



Ottawa ACORN’s Tenant Survey was conducted between July 2023 - March 2024. 295 responses were received. Similar to the 2017 survey, 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?

In addition, the survey also asked respondents for their input on the

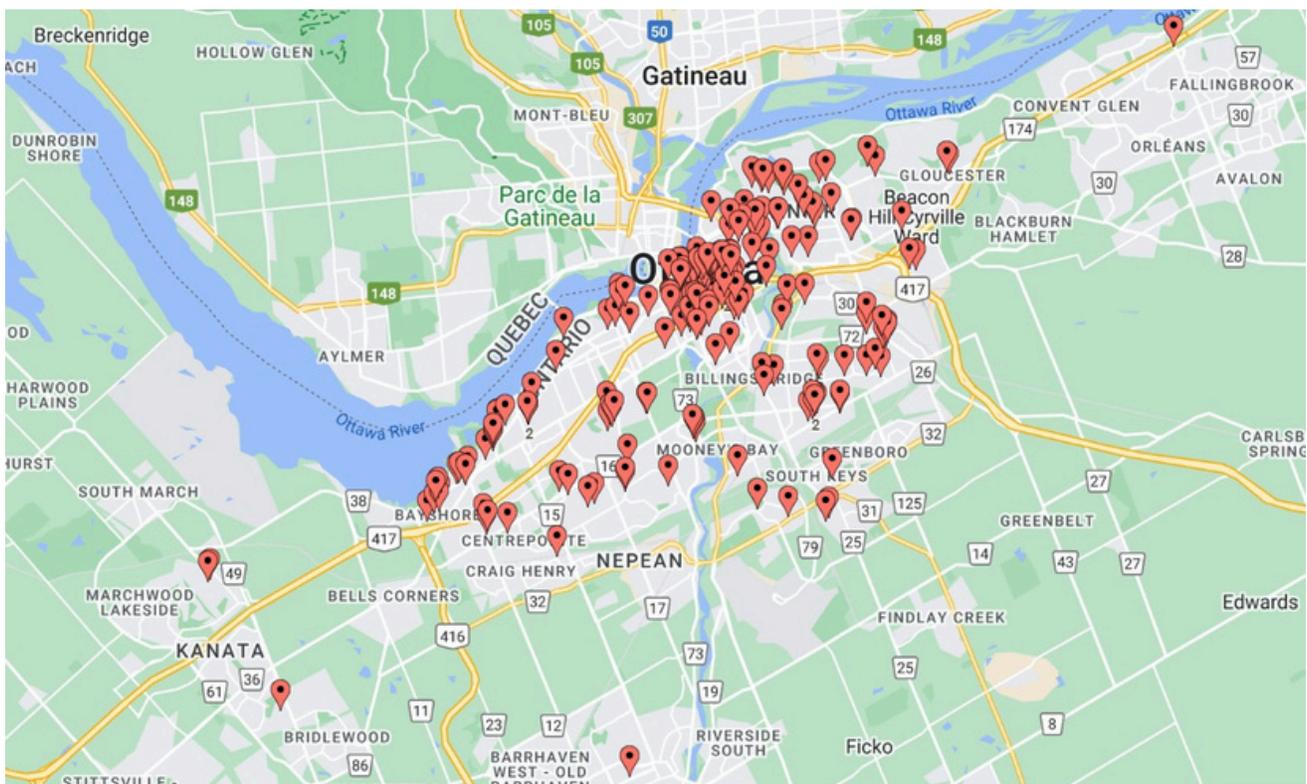
effectiveness of the Rental Housing Property Management By-Law.

The targeted demographic for respondents were low and moderate income tenants and ACORN members. The survey was promoted through:

- Doorknocking in apartment buildings
- Tenant Rights Workshops
- ACORN chapter meetings
- Phone calls to ACORN's existing tenant contacts
- Emails to our membership list
- Social media
- Elected official's newsletters
- Community organizations sharing with their networks

TENANT SURVEY RESULTS

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

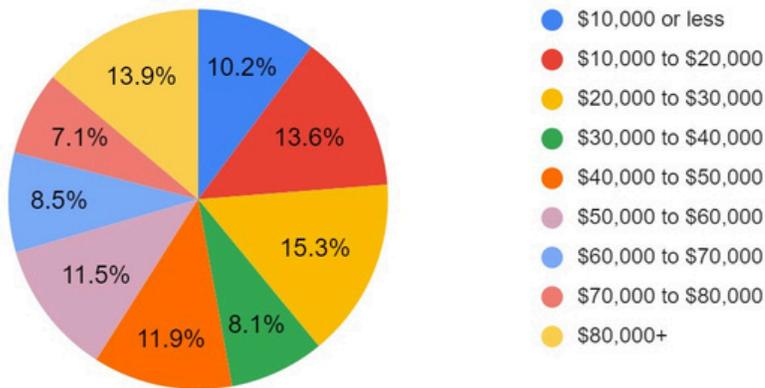


Demographics

Income and employment

What is your annual income?

295 Responses



- 39% of respondents made less than \$30,000 a year
- 59% made less than \$50,000 a year
- 40% worked full-time while 12.5% worked part-time
- 16% were retired
- 10.5% were receiving social assistance

Age

- The largest age category was 26-35, representing 35.5% of respondents
- 14% were 18-25, 15% were 36-45, 9% were 46-55
- 26.5% are over the age of 55

Languages

- Almost all respondents spoke English
- 32.6% also spoke French
- 15.6% spoke a language other than English or French

Disability, race and gender

- 30% of respondents identified having a disability
- 22% identified as racialized or as a visible minority
- 61.5% of respondents were women
- Nearly 8% said they are trans or non-binary

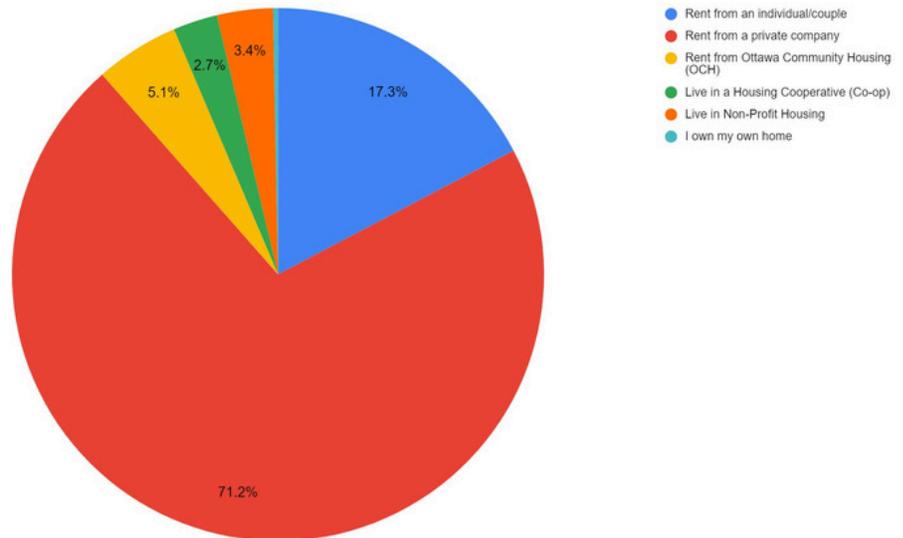
Citizenship

- Almost 80% are Canadian-born citizens
- Just under 11% are Canadian citizens by naturalization immigration
- Roughly 7% are permanent residents
- The remaining respondents are refugees or have a student/work visa

Housing Type

- 41.7% live in a high rise of more than 10 stories
- 14.6% live in a mid-rise of 5-9 stories
- 20% live in a low rise of 1-4 stories
- The majority of respondents (over 70%) rent from a private corporation

Do you rent or own your home?
295 Responses



Rent

- Only 3.1% of respondents had subsidized rent
- \$750/month is considered affordable for those with incomes of \$30,000/year

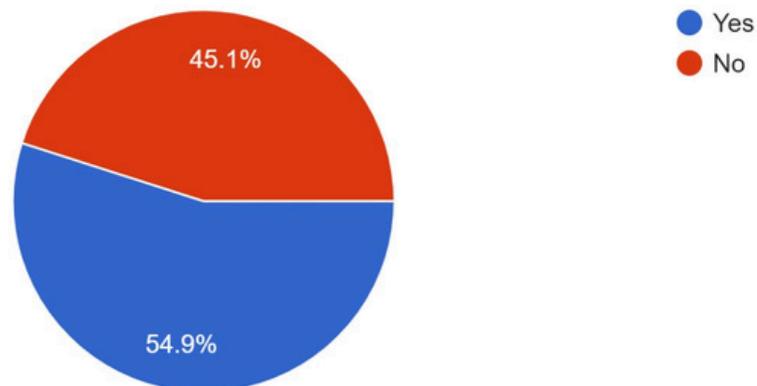
Reminder that 39% of respondents earn \$30,000 or less. Yet only 7.3% of respondents without a subsidy were paying less than \$800/month in rent.

- 53.8% of respondents are paying more than \$1,400/month in rent. To afford this rent a tenant must earn \$56,000/year. Approximately 29.5% of respondents earned at least this much.
- Nearly 11% are paying more than \$2,000/month in rent

Disrepair

When you moved into your unit were repairs needed?

295 responses

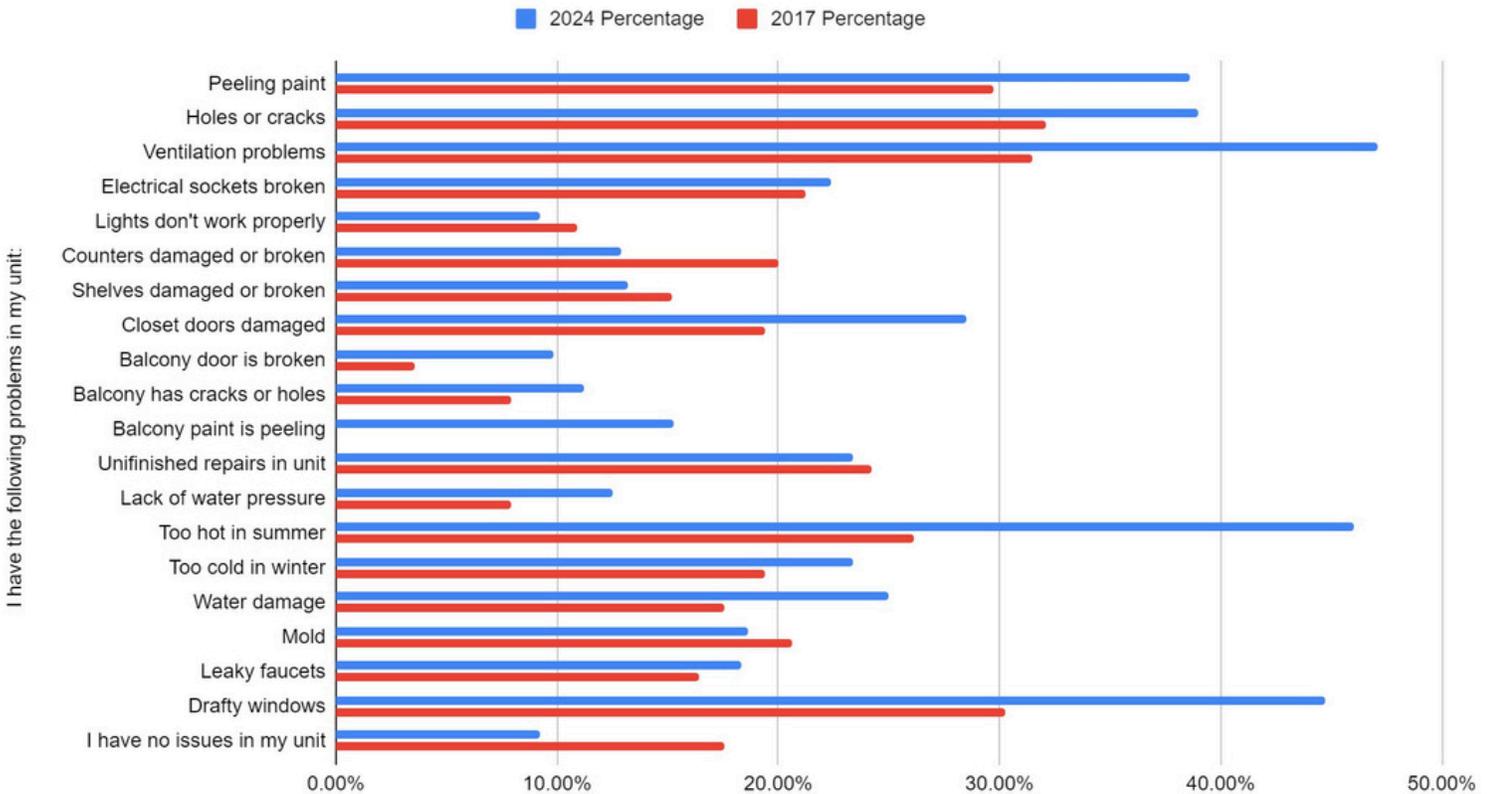


The majority (54.9%) of respondents indicated that their unit required repairs at the beginning of the tenancy, indicating that units are being rented in poor conditions. This is nearly identical to our 2017 survey (53%).



- 24.4% said they have very old appliances that have problems or don't work at all
- 23.6% said their elevators are often out of order
- 16.2% feel that their elevators are unsafe
- Almost 15% have been trapped in the elevator in the past 2 years

In-unit issues comparison from 2017-2024

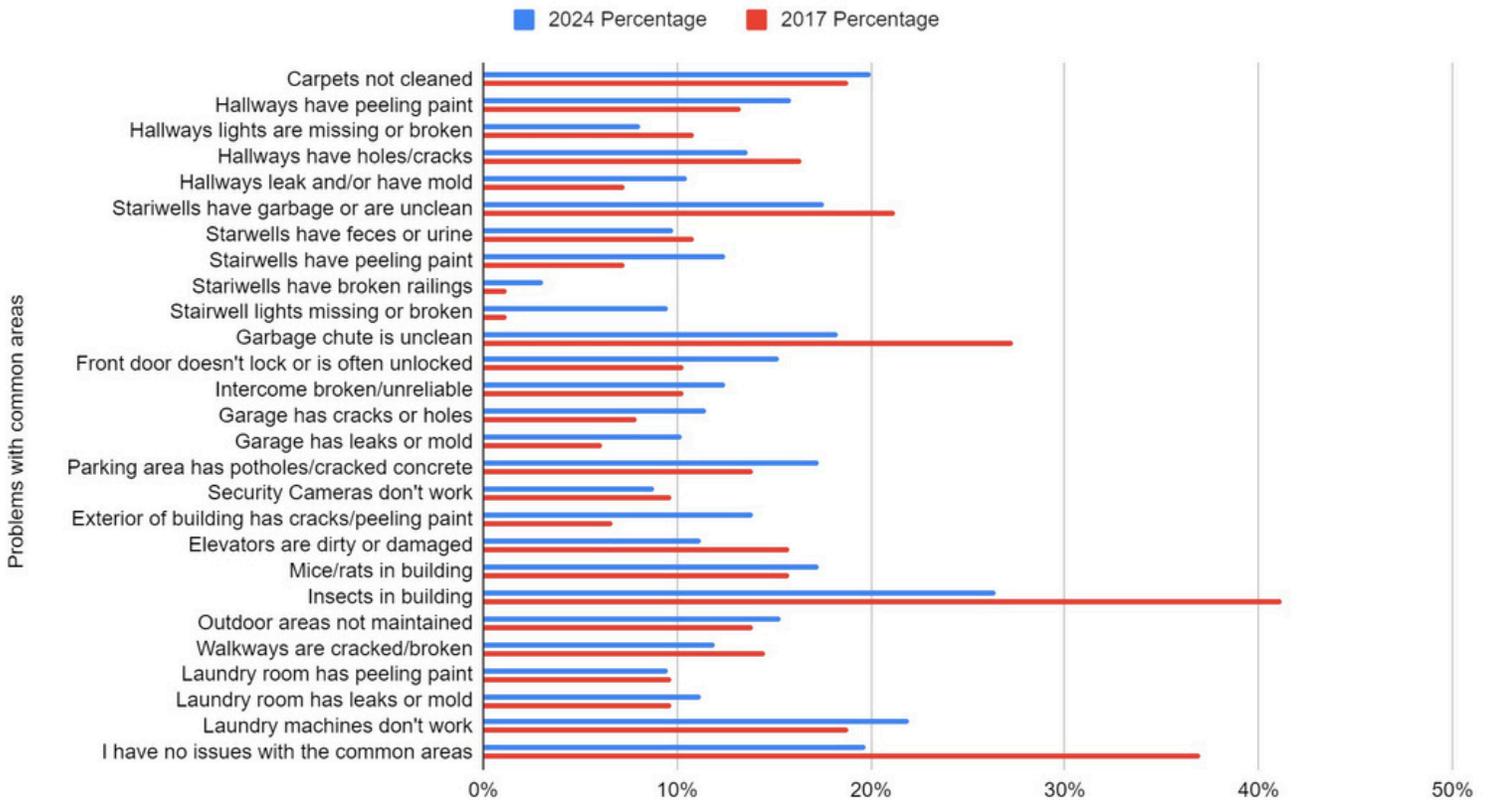


Key Statistics

- 47.10% in 2024 are experiencing ventilation problems, compared to 31.50% in 2017
- 46% say their unit is too hot in the summer compared to just 26.1% who responded the same in 2017. That's a nearly 20% increase.
- 23.4% say it's too cold in the winter compared to 19.4% in 2017
- 25% have water damage compared to 17.6% in 2017
- 44.70% live with drafty windows in 2024 compared to 30.30% in 2017
- 12.55% experience a consistent lack of water pressure in 2024, where as in 2017 it was 7.90%

In 2024, 90.8% said they have issues in their unit, compared to 82.4% in 2017. That's an almost 10% increase. In most cases, in-unit issues have risen since 2017.

Common area issues comparison from 2017-2024



Key Statistics

- 10.50% reported hallways having ongoing leaks and/or mold issues in 2024 compared to 7.30% in 2017
- 9.50% reported stairwells having missing or broken lights in 2024 compared to only 1.20% in 2017
- 15.25% have a front door that doesn't lock or is often unlocked in 2024, compared to 10.30% in 2017
- 10.20% have a garage or parking space with leaks and/or mold, compared to 6.10% in 2017
- 13.90% of respondents live in a building whose exterior is cracked and/or peeling in 2024 compared to 6.70% in 2017

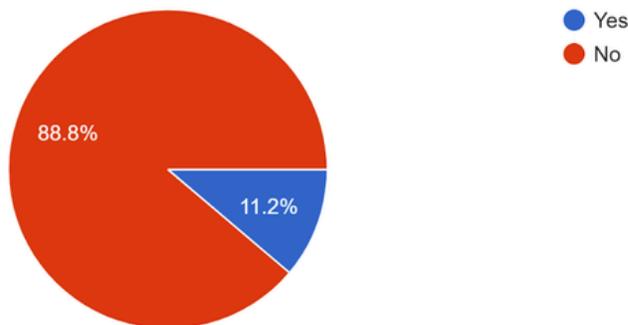
In 2017, 37% of respondents had no issues with the common areas of their buildings. In 2024, this has dropped to only 19.70%. Similarly to in-unit issues, problems in common areas have worsened overall since 2017 with a few exceptions.

Pests

- 26.2% of respondents report seeing cockroaches in their building
- Over 20% of respondents reported seeing cockroaches at least every month:
 - 7.4% see cockroaches daily
 - 4.8% see cockroaches weekly
 - 8.7% see cockroaches monthly

Have you had bedbugs in the past 2 years?

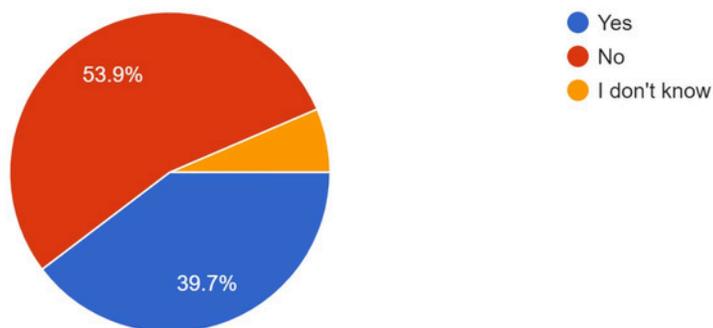
295 responses



Vital Services

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

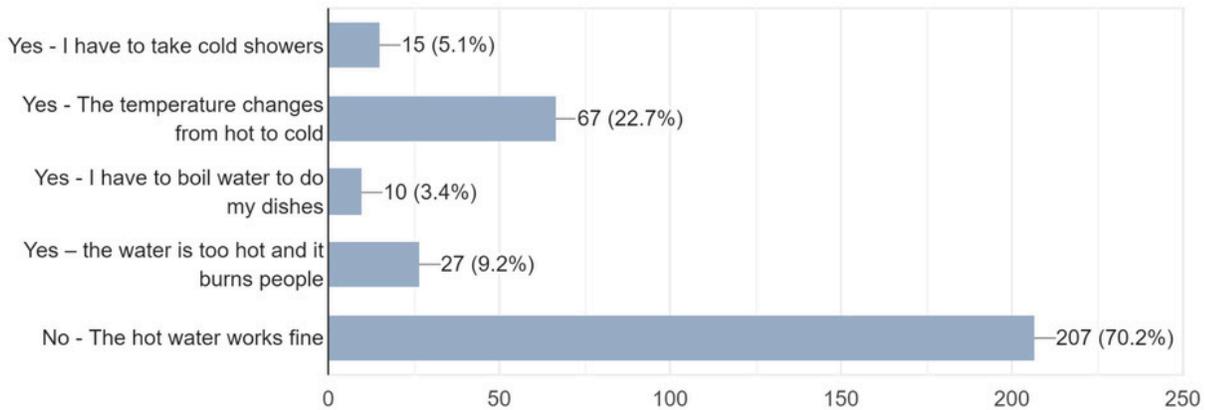
295 responses



Nearly 40% of respondents have experienced a lack of heat in the winter compared to 32% in 2017.

Do you have problems with hot water? (Check all that apply)

295 responses



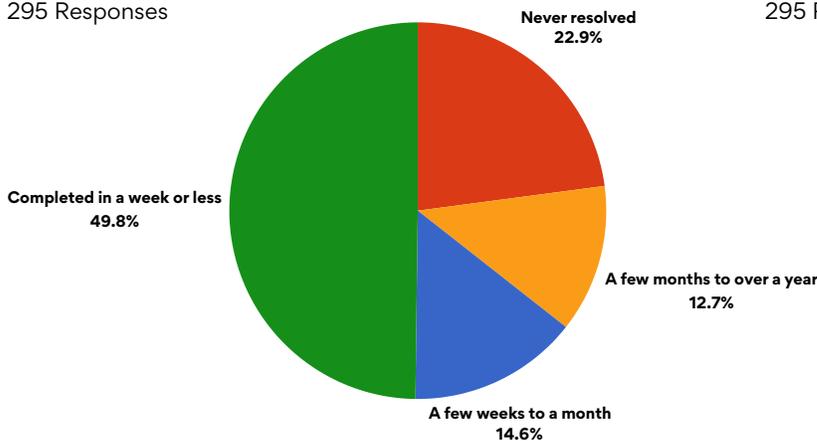
- Almost 30% indicated having problems with hot water

Getting Repairs

- 90% of tenants had requested repairs from their landlord
- Almost 1/4 said their maintenance complaint had never been resolved

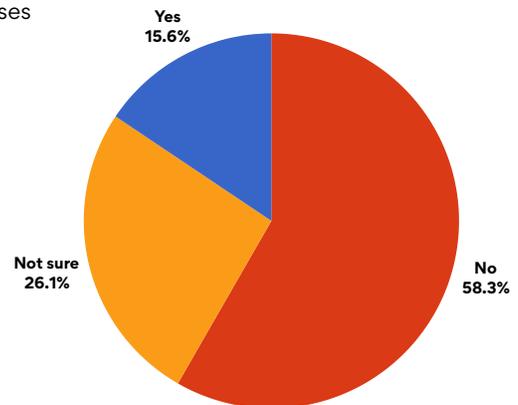
How long did it take for your maintenance complaint to be resolved?

295 Responses



Do you trust your landlord to put the interest of tenants first?

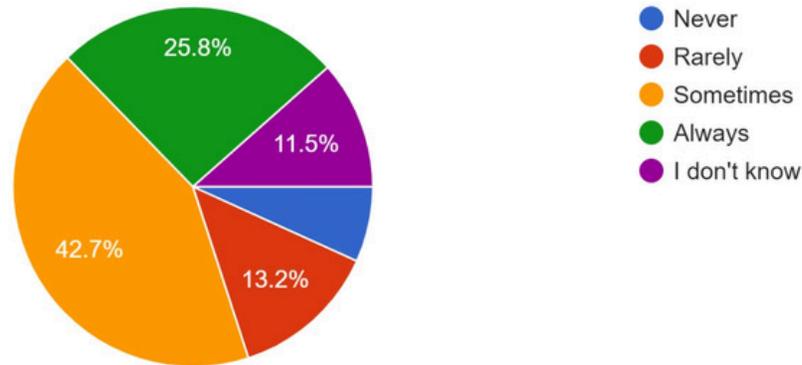
295 Responses



Nearly 60% of respondents said they do not trust their landlord to put their tenants' interests first.

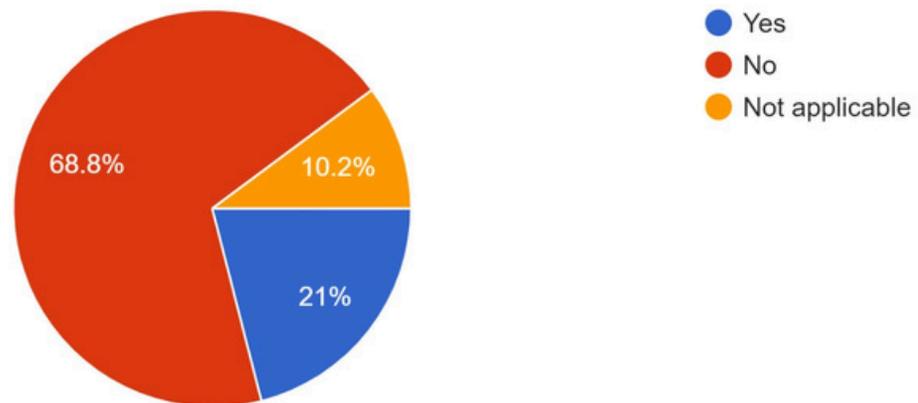
- 29.5% of survey respondents said they do not believe building management treats them fairly compared to 20.6% in 2017
- 33.2% don't believe management behaves professionally. This is up from 27.3% in 2017.

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



Do you feel threatened when making complaints about the building?

295 responses



Roughly the same percentage of tenants feel threatened when making complaints about their building in 2024 vs 2017. In 2017, 23% respondents felt threatened making complaints.

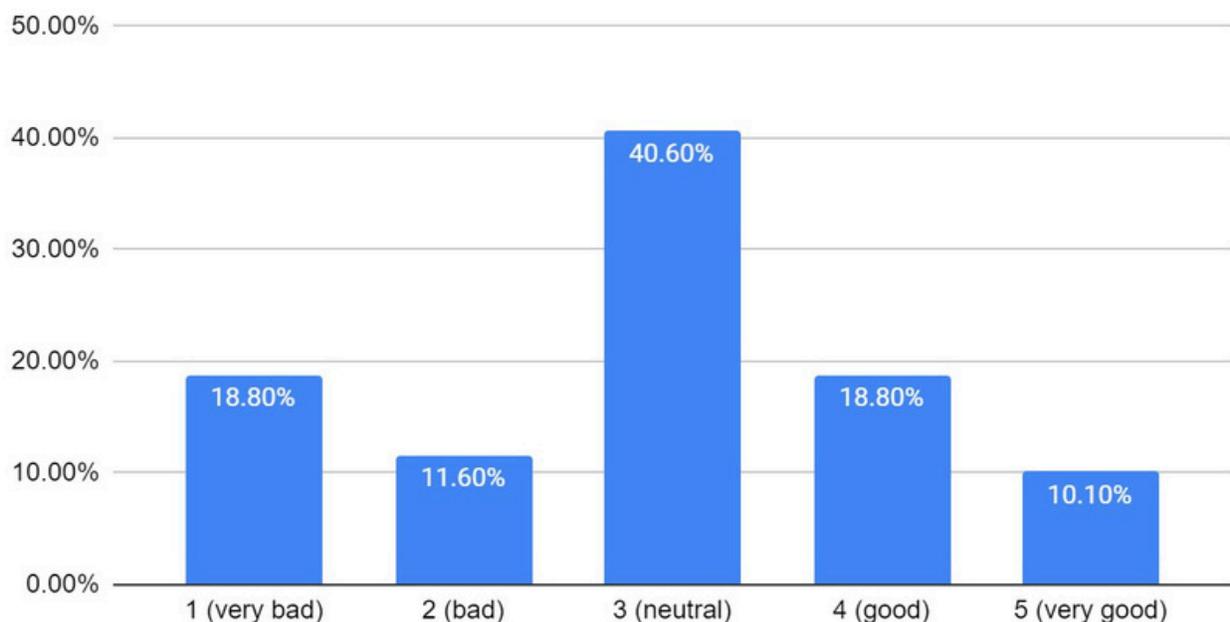
Experience with 311/By-Law

- 11.9% of respondents had called By-Law to make a complaint against their landlord/building compared to 21.3% in 2017
- 20% didn't know what 311 was or that they could make a complaint to the City. This is similar to 2017 responses (21.8%)
- 9.2% said they wouldn't make a complaint because they were scared of retaliation from their landlord and another 19.7% didn't think there was any point in reporting

Of the 38 tenants that did make a complaint to By-Law, here is how long respondents said it took for their complaint to be resolved:

- 16 said it has never been resolved (42.1%)
- 1 said it was more than a year (2.6%)
- 3 said it took 6 months to a year (7.9%)
- 6 said it took a few weeks to a month (15.9%)
- 4 said it took one week (10.5%)
- 4 said it took a few days (10.5%)
- 4 said within 24 hours it was resolved (10.5%)

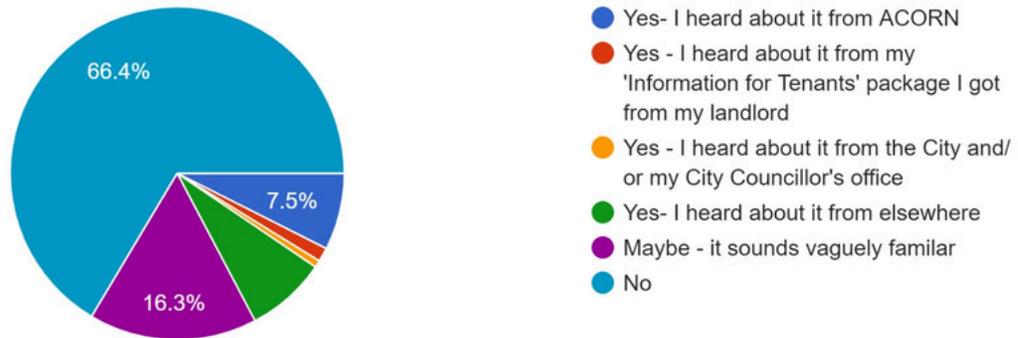
Rate your experience with 311/By-Law in resolving your complaint against your landlord



Rental Housing Property Management By-Law

Before completing this survey, had you ever heard of the 'Rental Housing Property Management By-Law'?

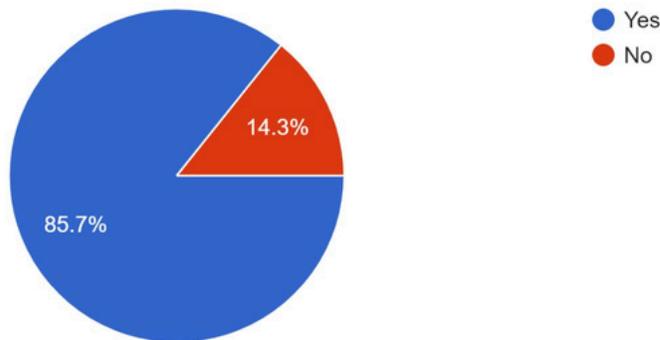
295 responses



The following are questions to determine if tenants' landlords are following the requirements of the by-law.

I have up-to-date contact information for my landlord or property manager, including mailing address, telephone number, and at least one method of electronic text communication

294 responses



The by-law requires landlords to provide methods to make service requests that are verbal, in writing and my electronic text:

- 31% of respondents could only make service requests using one or two of these methods
- 5 respondents had no way to contact their landlord for repairs

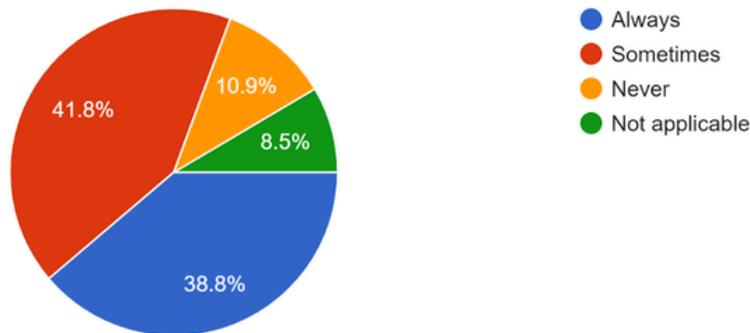
Landlords are required to give tenants a copy of their service request if asked for by the tenant. Of those who asked for a copy, 36.4% said their landlord refused.

Most tenants are not aware of their new protections under the by-law:

- For example, 55.8% did not know that landlords are now required to respond to urgent requests within 24 hours and non-urgent requests within 7 days.

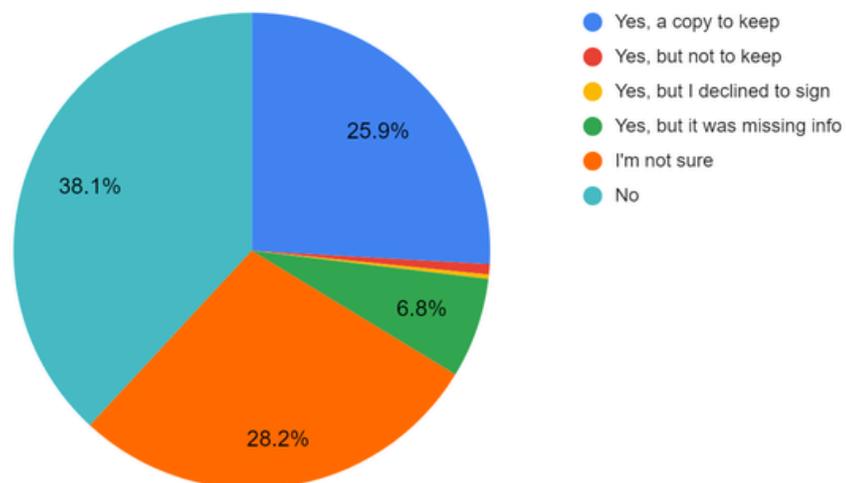
My landlord responds to service requests within these timeframes:

294 responses



Over 50% of respondents said their landlord only sometimes or never responds within these timeframes.

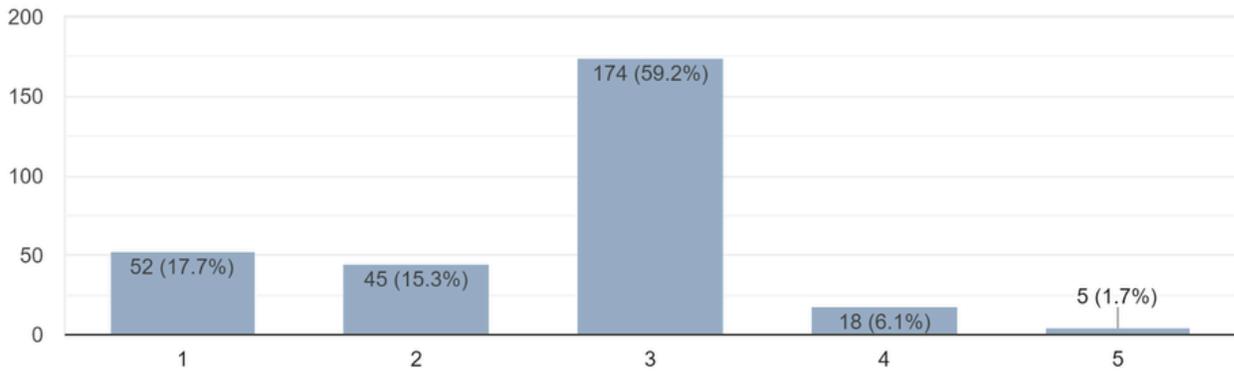
Received an 'Information for Tenants' document



- Almost 40% of respondents had not received an 'Information for Tenants' document despite being a requirement of the by-law. This document is meant to be signed by the tenant and a copy is provided to them.

How effective do you think the 'Rental Housing Property Management By-Law' is?

294 responses

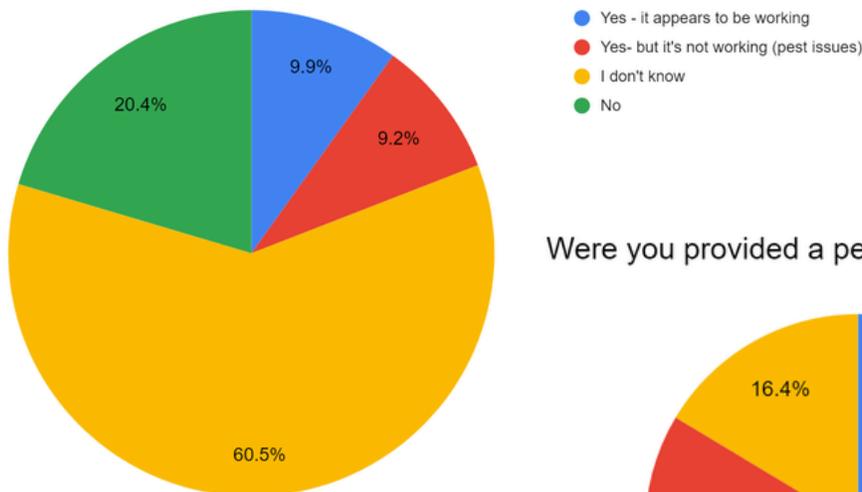


Only 7.8% of tenants described the 'Rental Housing Property Management By-Law' as effective or very effective.

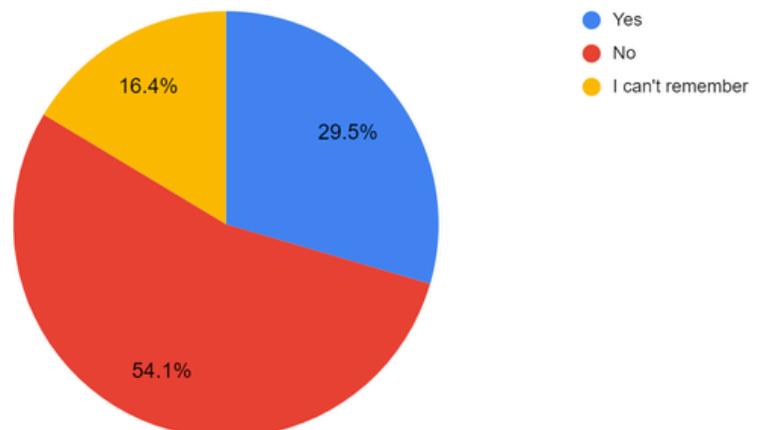
Pest Control

The following are questions to determine if tenants' landlords are following the pest control requirements of the by-law.

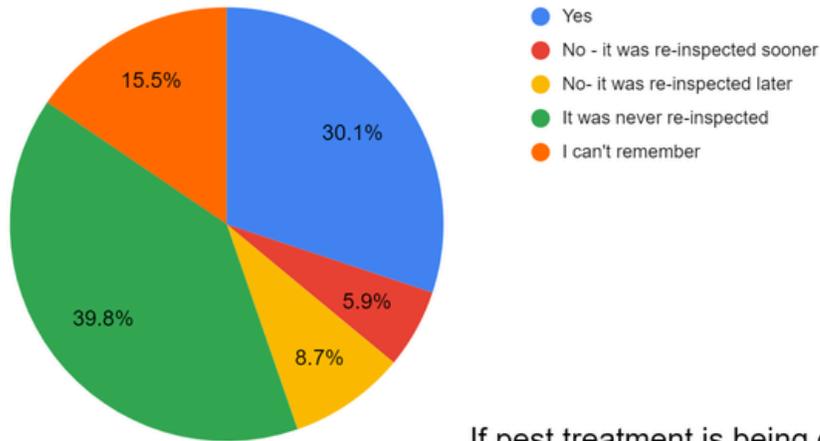
Do you know if your landlord has an Integrated Pest Management Plan?



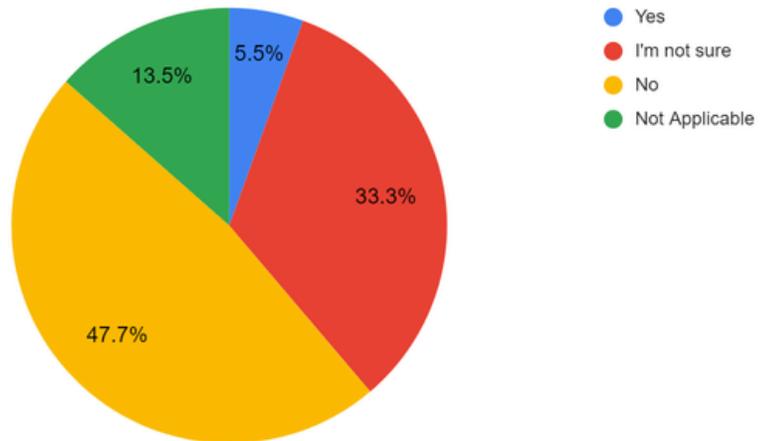
Were you provided a pest treatment plan prior to treatment of your unit?



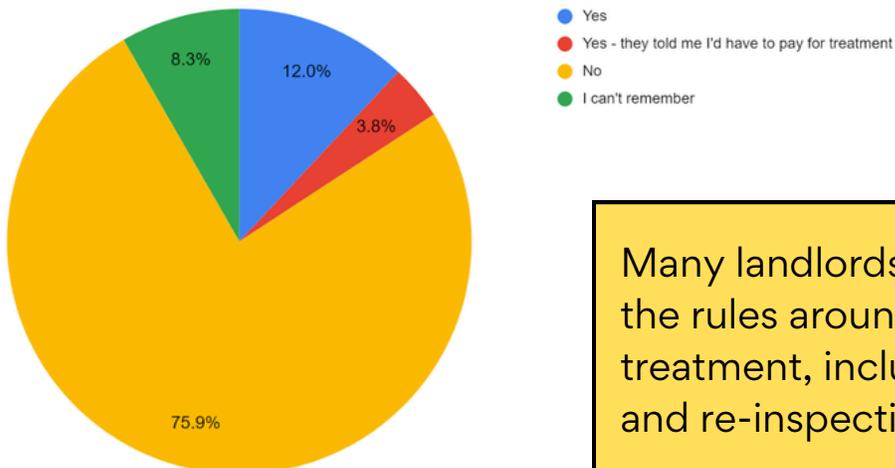
After receiving in-unit pest-treatment, was the areas re-inspected 15-30 days later?



If pest treatment is being done in common areas, has a treatment plan been posted?



Has your landlord refused to do pest treatment after a reported infestation?



Many landlords are not following the rules around pest control treatment, including notification and re-inspection requirements.

Social and Economic Factors

Tenants' experiences often differ based on social and economic factors like class, disability, citizenship, race, gender and more. Preliminary analysis comparing responses from these subsets of data show significant differences. Some highlights are listed below.

- 38.63% of tenants who earned \$20,000 - \$30,000 a year said that their appliances were functional but old and prone to problems. 36.66% of respondents who were not Canadian-born citizens responded similarly. This is compared to just 24.39% of respondents overall.
- Overall, 31.06% of respondents felt that building management treated them unfairly. However, this increases to 43.33% for tenants who were not born in Canada.
- Across all responses, 21.48% of tenants who answered the survey felt threatened when making complaints about the building. Significant differences in responses were noted in the following subsets:
 - 32.43% of tenants earning \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year
 - 34.61% of tenants who identified having a disability
 - 5.12% of tenants who earned more than \$80,000 a year
- 40.68% of tenants overall had experienced a lack of heat in the winter but this jumped to over half for respondents who made less than \$10,000 a year (51.72%).
- Across all responses, 60.87% of tenants reported poor cooling in their unit compared to approximately 72% of respondents earning less than \$30,000 a year.

Tenants who are lower income, have a disability and/or were not born in Canada are more likely to experience issues accessing safe and livable housing.

TENANT TESTIMONIES



We moved in Sept 2021 and immediately we couldn't use our washroom. Then when minor fixes were made we still couldn't use the bathtub for anything other than showers as well as still had leaky pipes in the ceiling. Major repairs began but water was shut off for 4+ hours almost every week plus 8 hours for city construction outside - so alternating between two shutoffs was difficult. Bikes were stolen outside and management refused to create a bike space inside despite there being space available. They replied to my concerns that they couldn't do that, and if they could, they would charge us, announcing to my roommates and I that rent would go up an undisclosed amount. Roommates asked for window repairs as well. The last window and repair person used duct tape to seal a draft.



I currently have mold in my unit that I noticed when I moved in but was told it was dirt and after 2 years it has spread and become more obvious and dangerous but they are saying they will only fix where it has spread, not the source I noticed over two years ago.



They're not dealing with any substantial issues or cleaning frequently enough but rather adding superficial items so it LOOKS more attractive like the exterior cladding which took a full year of disruptions. Now they're using that as an excuse to up our rent 5.5% for 2024.

MUNICIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfortunately, the Rental Housing Property Management By-Law has done little to improve tenants' housing conditions. This is supported by the results of Ottawa ACORN's latest tenant survey and is consistent with our experience working with tenants across the city. The City of Ottawa can and should do more to ensure every tenant has access to safe and healthy homes.

Specifically, Ottawa ACORN is calling for the following changes at the municipal level:

1. ***Landlord licensing or registration***

The City should implement a landlord licensing or registration program to proactively enforce property standards issues similar to RentSafeTO in Toronto. This would include:

- Property owners to be given a list of minimum property standards that they are required to meet in addition to mechanisms to ensure property standards are met and maintained
- City of Ottawa to have access to detailed information regarding the property owner's contact information, property description, and building insurance
- Service disruptions and cleaning schedules be posted in common areas
- Pro-active inspections and re-inspection programs for landlords who fail to comply. In Toronto, the frequency of inspections is every 1 to 3 years. This is dependent on the building's grade, which it is assigned after an initial inspection.
- Colour-coded signs based on the building's grade to be displayed in the lobby/entrance similar to restaurants.

- Escalating financial penalties for property owners that are non-compliant.
- If the landlord refuses to comply, the City will undertake the work at the property owner's expense.
- Landlords with outstanding work orders or multiple violations must be posted online and in the property's common areas.
- The program should be actively promoted by the City, along with information on tenants' rights and resources, and include tenant stakeholder groups such as ACORN.
- Property owners to pay an annual, per unit fee for cost recovery and administration of licensing or registration program, annual inspection, enforcement of non-compliance, tenant outreach and communications.
- City-owned corporations (e.g. Ottawa Community Housing) and non-profits would not be subject to fee, however, would still need to comply with the program.

2. Online database of property standards complaints

In 2019, Ottawa City Council directed city staff to create an online searchable database of property standards complaints made to the City. This is important and necessary information for tenants. While landlords often require credit checks, proof of employment, and references in order to evaluate a tenants' ability to pay rent, nothing similar exists for tenants to determine whether a future landlord properly maintains the building.

In 2024, this online database is still not complete - ACORN members urge the City to follow through on this commitment to tenants.

3. Rent escrow account

A municipal rent escrow account would allow tenants to pay their rent to the City when their landlord isn't doing repairs. If the landlord completes the necessary repairs, the City pays the landlord. If the landlord refuses to do the repairs, money paid into the rent escrow account can be used by the City to complete the repairs themselves.

4. *Improving access to heating/cooling*

With the climate crisis worsening, it is no wonder one of the most common issues tenants reported in their units/buildings was access to proper heating and cooling. As extreme heat and cold can lead to serious health concerns, even death, it is imperative that the City take immediate actions such as:

- Providing free heat/cooling pumps and energy efficient air conditioners for low income renters, prioritizing tenants with utilities outside their rent.
- Passing a maximum heat bylaw to ensure units in rental buildings do not reach more than 26 degrees celsius. However, a maximum temperature should be determined in consultation with tenant organizations, experts and other stakeholders.
- Protect tenants in emergency cases of infrastructure failures during power outages to ensure tenants still have running water and access to elevators.
- Direct local public health authorities to track heat-related deaths, illnesses and emergency room visits.
- Implement emergency measures such as:
 - Mandate temporary cooling spaces that are air conditioned in all apartment buildings.
 - Equip public and community spaces such as public libraries, schools and community centres in the most impacted communities during extreme and prolonged heat waves.
 - Make transit free on extreme heat days to allow for mobile cooling and easier travel for those suffering to access cooling spaces.
- Improvements to the city's tree canopy and access to green space in low- and moderate- income tenant communities.

5. *Anti renovation by-law*

Ontario's current system of vacancy decontrol allows landlords to increase rents with no limit once a unit becomes vacant. This creates a financial incentive for landlords to push out long term tenants, flip the unit and raise the rent. This is called a renovation. One common tactic used by landlords to renovict a tenant is to neglect repairs until the current tenant gets fed up and moves out. Many Ontario cities are now taking steps to curtail renovations.

Ottawa ACORN is calling on the City to pass a by-law similar to Hamilton that includes:

- Requiring a landlord to apply for a city renovation licence within seven days of issuing an N13 eviction notice to a tenant
- Onlying approve the licence application if the landlord has already secured all building permits and provides an engineer's report confirming vacancy is necessary.
- The landlord provides temporary accommodations that are similar to their current unit or a rental top up until the tenant can return after renovations at the same rent
- Landlord must allow the tenant to return to their unit at the same rate they were paying before the work was done
- Tenants are provided with information on their rights and entitlements during this process
- The city issues daily fines for non-compliance

6. *Rental replacement by-law*

In some cases, developers will purposefully neglect maintenance to justify demolishing the building and replacing it with luxury rentals or condos. This was the case during the two rounds of mass evictions in Herongate in 2016 and 2018 which displaced 500+ low-income and working class families.

In 2022, the City directed staff to investigate a rental replacement by-law in Ottawa. This work has since stalled while other cities - Oakville, Hamilton, Brampton - have either passed by-laws or are taking steps towards one.

A rental replacement by-law would:

- In the case of demolition, replace lost affordable housing and offer it back to tenants at the same rent and number of bedrooms
- Ensure tenants had the right to return after construction at the same rent and number of bedrooms
- Provide temporary accommodations or rental top ups
- Provide moving cost assistance

Both a renoviction by-law and a rental replacement by-law remove the financial motive for landlords to neglect repairs.

7. Tenant Defense Fund

The City of Ottawa should follow the lead of cities like Toronto and Hamilton by creating a Tenant Defense Fund program run by an existing non-profit legal group with expertise in tenants rights, that would include:

- Assistance for tenant groups to file T6's and rent abatement applications over neglected maintenance.
- Assistance for tenant groups to file T2's over landlords' harassment
- Assistance for tenant groups to do tenant outreach and education
- Support for the creation of a tenant hotline
- Assistance for tenant groups to dispute Above-Guideline-Increases in rent (AGIs)
- Assistance for tenant groups to challenge a demoviction or renoviction (N13)
- Assistance for tenant groups to challenge N12s, N5s and N11s as they are increasingly being used as tactics to renovict tenants

8. *Tenant engagement and education program*

Ottawa ACORN is calling for a proactive education program to inform tenants about their rights/resources when:

- A building changes ownership
- Reports from community members or tenant groups of “buy outs” or N13 notices
- When the City receives a building permit application for a multi residential property
- Properties that trigger tenant education should also be visited by by-law staff to ensure property standards are being enforced, recognizing that landlords who are seeking to displace tenants are likely not maintaining units, common areas or grounds.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the condition of Ottawa’s rental units have worsened over the past 5 years. While the City’s ‘Rental Housing Property Management By-Law’ adds new rules for landlords such as timelines for repairs, mandatory re-inspection after pest control treatments and several others, compliance is weak and units continue to fall into disrepair. ACORN believes the reasons for this are structural. For example, loopholes in Ontario’s existing rent control laws create a financial incentive for landlords to push out long-term tenants, and ignoring basic maintenance and repairs is an easy way to do that.

Moreover, tenants are not reporting issues to the City for a variety of reasons whether that be dis-trust/belief in the system, limited time, language barriers, fear of retaliation, and/or not knowing they can. A complaint-based approach alone will not address these barriers. This is why proactive enforcement is necessary and the City must step in to support tenants’ right to safe and healthy homes.

TENANT RESOURCES

ACORN is a community tenant union. We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved by building community power for change. **Get in touch if you're interested in starting a tenant union in your building or want to advocate for tenant rights across the city!**

Website: www.acorncanada.org

Email: otacorncentre@acorncanada.org

Phone: (613) 746-5999 ext 2

@OttawaACORN on facebook, instagram & twitter (X)

Legal resources and information on tenant rights:

- Tenants rights across the province/country: <https://getorganized.acorncanada.org/know-your-rights/>
- City of Ottawa's 'Tenant Rights and Responsibilities' page: <https://ottawa.ca/en/living-ottawa/rental-housing/tenants-rights-and-responsibilities>
- Action Logement and Housing Help offer free housing loss prevention services to low-and-moderate income people in Ottawa: <https://www.action-logement.ca/en/action-housing/> and <https://www.action-logement.ca/en/housing-help/>
- Community Legal Services of Ottawa provides free legal services for tenants with low income, living in Ottawa: <https://www.clsottawa.ca/>
- Landlord and Tenant Board– This tribunal resolves disputes between landlords and tenants. You can also call to ask questions about your rights: <https://tribunalsontario.ca/lrb/>
- Pro Bono Ontario helps Ontarians who need a lawyer and can't afford one: <https://www.probonoontario.org/housing/>