



# ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey

How hotter days affect people on lowest incomes first, worst and hardest

# Acknowledgement

ACOSS respectfully acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians of the lands on which our Sydney office is based, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We extend our respect to all First Peoples across these lands and recognise their continuing connection to Country, community and culture. ACOSS recognises the rights of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to self-determination and we support their right to have a Voice to Parliament.

ACOSS would like to thank all the people who took the time to complete our Heat Survey. We thank them for sharing with us their experiences of dealing with hot temperatures in their homes, the impact of heat on their health and the daily struggles of dealing with increasing energy bills while trying to keep cool. We dedicate this report to them and call on Australian Governments to act on these findings and recommendations.

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## Key findings

*"I have recorded indoor temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius. It is usually 10 degrees hotter inside than outside in the evenings and opening up the windows and doors is pointless, unless there's a good breeze. ... There is no point having [rental] standards and regulations when they aren't enforced."*- Claire, who receives the Disability Support Pension (Western Australia)

Exposure to heat is a threat to people's health, with more people dying in Australia from heatwaves than all other extreme weather events combined.<sup>i</sup> The Australian climate is becoming hotter with climate change, and those on the lowest incomes are impacted first, worst, and longest. Lack of access to energy efficient homes is considered a primary factor. To track exactly how rising temperatures are affecting people on low incomes, ACOSS conducted a public, online Heat Survey in January 2023.

The survey findings clearly show that high heat has negative impacts for people on low incomes, seriously affecting their mental and physical health, productivity and capacity to conduct essential activities. People surveyed reported that:

1. They struggle to keep their homes cool in summer (62.1%).
2. They avoid certain activities due to the heat (97%).
3. Many face mobility, cost and other barriers to leaving their homes for cooler places (43.1%).
4. High temperatures negatively impact on their physical and mental health, making them unwell (89.4%) and, for many, the heat seriously aggravates existing chronic health conditions or disabilities.
5. They find it increasingly difficult to pay their energy bills, which affects their capacity to cool their homes (83.2%).
6. High energy bills are also forcing many people to go without essentials like food or medical care (63.4%) and to go into debt or to increase their debt (67.8%).

While most of the people surveyed are currently in housing, for people experiencing homelessness, extremes of temperature present more severe health risks from exposure and threats to life itself.

The findings from the ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey are consistent with findings from the Sweltering Cities' 2021 and 2022 Summer Survey Reports.<sup>ii</sup> This indicates ongoing and significant challenges, year after year, for many people on low incomes in dealing with extremes of temperature (e.g. days above 35 degrees). This is even during the relatively "cool" summers related to the La Nina climate pattern the country has experienced over the past three years.

This is an untenable situation and many people surveyed called on governments to do more to help them cope with high heat. Governments need to mandate minimum energy efficiency standards in rental properties and invest in a retrofit program to improve the energy efficiency of low-income housing (e.g. public and social housing, low-income home owners and private rental), electrify and, where possible, be powered by renewables. This would significantly cut energy bills and create healthier homes. It would deliver physical and mental health

benefits to those most in need, reducing poverty and emissions, and generate jobs nationwide. The Commonwealth Government should also immediately lift income support to improve the capacity of people on low incomes to manage energy bills.

### **Summary Recommendations**

1. Commonwealth, state and territory governments co-invest to retrofit low-income housing to improve their energy efficiency, be all electric and be powered by renewables where possible - starting with public and community housing as a priority, which typically house people experiencing the most significant poverty and disadvantage.
2. State and territory governments mandate minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental properties, as part of broader standards for what constitutes healthy and habitable rental housing.
3. The Commonwealth Government funds or incentivises access to funds to support low-income homeowners to access energy efficiency audits and upgrades, electrify their homes and install solar PV.
4. The Commonwealth Government immediately lifts income support to improve the capacity of people on low incomes to manage energy bills, including increasing Jobseeker, Youth Allowances and other income support payments to at least \$73 a day, indexing payments to wages as well as CPI, and increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
5. The Commonwealth Government provides short-term (up to 12 months) payments of up to \$2,000 per person experiencing unmanageable energy debt. The Commonwealth Government also works with retailers to provide additional relief to those customers with debts greater than \$2,000 and to help customers reduce their bills going forward.
6. State and territory governments undertake energy concessions reform appropriate to their jurisdictions to better meet people's energy needs and changing circumstances.
7. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework include an initiative to examine the impacts of heatwaves, improve data collection and identify and elevate solutions to reduce associated risks. Communities and community services are supported and resourced to adequately prepare for these disaster events and to have plans in place to build resilience and respond when these events occur.

# Introduction

*"The heat is unbearable. I am in a small cheap flat with no insulation. I have no aircon and even if I had, I could not afford the bills to run it. I am barely surviving on my current JobSeeker payment and only eat the most basic cheap food."* – Paul who receives JobSeeker (New South Wales)

The Australian summer is becoming hotter with climate change and people on the lowest incomes are impacted first, worst, and longest. We are seeing more frequent and prolonged heatwaves and more days over 50 degrees are predicted to increase. For people residing in remote areas and places like central and northern Australia, high temperatures are common, with daily temperatures reaching 35 degrees for more than half the year.

People on low incomes are vulnerable to high temperatures because they often live in homes that are poorly insulated with no or limited shading, no air-conditioning or fans to help cool indoor temperatures. Even if the home has air-conditioning and/or fans, with rising energy costs, people on low incomes can rarely afford to run them and are less likely to have rooftop solar.

Heatwaves are responsible for more deaths than all other extreme weather events combined, with an estimated 36,000 deaths associated with the heat between 2006 and 2017.<sup>iii</sup> Lack of access to energy efficient homes is considered a primary factor.

To track just how hotter days are affecting people on low incomes in their homes, ACOSS conducted a public, online Heat Survey in 2023. The data collected gives a valuable insight to the experiences of high heat on people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, and their activities. The survey also highlights how seriously poverty and energy debt reduces people's resilience and capacity to cope with debilitating hot weather.

# Methodology

The ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey was conducted online from 16 to 31 January 2023.

The Heat Survey questions were adapted from the Sweltering Cities Summer Surveys, previously conducted in 2020/21 and in 2021/22. The ACOSS Heat Survey questions explored four key areas (see Appendix 2 for the full list of questions):

- how people on low incomes experience high heat and their capacity to cool their homes
- what activities people engage in or avoid during hot weather to keep cool
- how high heat impacts on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing
- the impact of hot days on energy bills and actions people take to manage the cost of energy to keep cool.

We received 208 responses from people on low incomes, defined as receiving some form of income support (see Appendix 1 for a list of these supports, as well as other survey respondent demographics). Responses came from every Australian state and territory, providing us with good information as to how people are dealing with summer temperatures around the country. Private renters and people in public and social housing made up 72.1% of people surveyed.

The survey findings are set out below.

People who are homeless and sleeping rough are highly vulnerable and at extreme risk during extreme heat. We acknowledge that the Heat Survey and the recommendations that follow focused on people on low incomes in housing. Solutions are also needed to protect people experiencing homelessness from extreme heat. This includes a significant increase in the investment of affordable housing, increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance and a new national First Nations Housing Strategy.

# The experience of high heat for people on low incomes

Housing can protect people from the summer heat. Decent housing heats slowly and cools quickly and is affordable to do so. However, Australian housing, particularly older housing, is well known for having poor thermal performance in extremes of temperature. In fact, the average Australian home performs at 1.7 out of 10 possible stars for energy efficiency on NatHERS, the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme, compared to 7-star ratings now required for new housing.

Many people experiencing poverty and disadvantage are living in housing that is drafty or humid, poorly insulated and often cold in winter and hot in summer. This includes people in public and community housing, and renters who have less control over their housing conditions. These living conditions are clearly reflected in the responses people gave in the Heat Survey.

## Hotter days and poor performing homes are leading to sweltering homes that cannot be cooled

Of the 208 people on low incomes surveyed, 89% said their home gets very hot in summer, with people describing their interior temperatures as “unbearable”. More than 62% of people who reported their homes get very hot in summer are unable to cool them down.

*“Due to there not being any affordable rentals for a single person, I am currently living in someone’s shed. The extremes of heat and cold are hard to take. It is currently 24 degrees outside and yet it is 29 degrees inside the shed where I live. Can you imagine what it is like when its 35 degrees outside?” – Kathryn, who receives Jobseeker (South Australia)*

While 69.7% of people surveyed have air conditioning at home, almost all (94.5%) said they avoid using it because it is too expensive to run. Keeping the air conditioning off, despite the heat, is common for 63% of people surveyed and constant for 13.4%.

*“I can only lie on my bed with the fan on when it gets really hot, as I can't afford to run the reverse cycle air conditioning. ...The Government needs to build much more social housing, using all the latest energy efficient technology with solar panels. It should be a right for everyone to live like this, not just the wealthy.” – Lisa, who receives JobSeeker (South Australia)*

Some other people who have air conditioning spoke about it not functioning well or only being able to lower the temperature in one part of the home.



Many people surveyed who would like to have air-conditioning said they cannot get it because they rent (55.2%) or because they cannot afford it (37.9%).

These findings show that most people on low incomes who completed the survey struggle to cool their home on very hot days. This is even if they have air conditioning, either because it does not function efficiently, does not cool the entire home or because they cannot afford to run it.

## Hotter days and poor performing homes are leading to heat stress, ill-health and sleeplessness

Many people surveyed said that high temperatures lead to them experiencing heat stress and other negative impacts on their health and wellbeing.

Of the 208 people surveyed, most (89.4%) said they sometimes or always feel unwell because of high heat. Nearly a third of people (29.8%) said they had experienced heat stress sufficiently badly that they needed to consult a doctor or seek medical care. Elderly people and people with poor health or living with disability tend to be worse affected by heat stress.

*"Last year the aircon broke in December and the landlord didn't fix it till March. The house got to over 45 degrees internally, both my roommate and I ended up in hospital with heatstroke." – James, who receives JobSeeker (Western Australia)*

For people with chronic illness or disabilities, who represent a disproportionate cohort of those on the lowest incomes, high heat seriously aggravates their underlying conditions. Some people gave specific information about these effects. A few people also commented on the impact of high heat on their relationships with others in the home. The effects of high temperatures cited included:

- Aggravating underlying health conditions, such as: postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome; diabetes; high blood pressure
- Triggering flare ups for: asthma; autonomic dysfunction disorder; fibromyalgia; lupus; and eczema
- Affecting the physical and mental functioning for people on the autism spectrum
- Triggering seizures
- Increasing anxiety and depression
- Reducing productivity, especially for those working and studying at home, and increasing lethargy and social isolation
- Increasing irritability and increasing tensions in the home.

*"I have to cool my home despite how expensive it is because of my health problems. I have fibromyalgia, chronic migraine, and postural orthostatic*

*tachycardia syndrome. All of these are exponentially exacerbated by heat. The hotter it is, the worse my fatigue and weakness, the more frequent and persistent the migraine, and I am more likely to have heart rate spikes with blood pressure drops that can result in losing consciousness. When it is hot, I have to rest, otherwise it is legitimately dangerous.... I had an urgent organ removal surgery in November 2022. The heat in my house has been so bad despite the portable aircon and fans that I couldn't keep the keyholes clean and dry during healing. They got infected twice and I needed two lots of antibiotics. Now the scars are worse than they would have been because the wounds couldn't close while they weren't dry." - Claire, who receives the Disability Support Pension (Western Australia)*

*"My father, who I lived with, died just before Christmas. Now I am living by myself, I have to cover the entire energy bill myself and I am worried that I might not be able to do so. We don't have aircon in our rented home, only fans, because we can't afford to pay for aircon. On really hot days, I jump in the shower in a tank top and leggings and lie in wet clothes in front of the fan to lower my core temperature. I have to try and keep cool because I get very dizzy in the heat due to my diabetes and get heat stress."- Christine, who receives JobSeeker (Western Australia)*

*"Moving into this house, I did not have proper curtains, only the thin strip curtains so they do not keep the heat in in winter or the heat out in summer. I don't believe there is any insulation in the walls and it gets very cold in winter, and I did have a huge winter bill, so am too scared to use the aircon to keep it cool. If I do put it on, it will only be for a very short time when it is well over 30 degrees. Lucky the sea breeze has been saving me most days so far this summer. It is very hard to stay focused and study online."- Linda, who receives Austudy (Victoria)*

In addition, almost all the people surveyed (97.6%) said they sometimes or always have difficulty sleeping on very hot nights or during heatwaves because they cannot cool their home. Research shows that increasing temperatures globally are contributing to sleep deprivation, which is known to harm our physical and mental health and functioning.<sup>iv</sup>

These findings indicate that hot homes can be severely detrimental to people's physical and mental health and can aggravate underlying medical conditions and disabilities. Hot homes can impact on household members' productivity, particularly for those who work or study at home. The heat can also contribute to tensions between household members.

## People avoid exercise, socialising or getting essentials on hot days

Safety advice often recommends that people go somewhere cool during a heatwave to avoid the kinds of health impacts described above. Among the 208 people surveyed, a large percentage said they face barriers to leaving their

home in hot weather. For many, the cost of transport (39.9%) or lack of transport options (18.3%), or a lack of mobility (32.7%), prevent them seeking somewhere cooler outside the home.

We were also interested as to whether people change their behaviour when the temperature soars. Unsurprisingly, almost everyone (97%) said they limit their activities on very hot days. This includes avoiding recreational or social activities like:

- walking (82.7%)
- exercise (82%)
- gardening (76%)
- socialising (71%)
- cycling (45%).

People also spoke of avoiding important household activities or skipping appointments when it gets hot, such as:

- getting groceries or other essentials (57.2%)
- accessing government services, like Centrelink (33.2%)
- attending medical appointments (33.2%)
- other (9.6%).

## Increased energy costs are leading to financial stress

A compounding factor in the experience of hot weather for people on low incomes is the rising cost of energy. Rising energy bills are contributing to significant energy stress that many people on income support have been experiencing for years.

*"I have to choose between the things that I need, so I miss out on food or clothes, how often I feed my pets, how often I visit the doctor etc. With no bulk billing, I can only get a phone call with a GP only because I cannot afford to go there. It's very hard going. I would like to have a refrigerated cooler because with this weather swampiest do not work very well."* – Alison, who receives JobSeeker (Victoria)

*"I don't live, I merely struggle to survive. I manage (but only just) because I put money away for bills, but to do this I'm always going without, buying only mark downs and not very healthy food, going without other essentials, medicine etc. and trying not to use the air conditioner unless absolutely necessary."* - Casey, who receives JobSeeker (South Australia)

Of the 208 people surveyed, most (83.2%) said they have difficulty paying their energy bills.

*"My mother and I are both disabled but are only receiving Jobseeker payment. We have just finished paying off a gas bill that was over \$800 issued back in*

*August, on top of the \$300 or so we were billed for gas in November. We often go without meals because we both contribute to our enormous utility bills. ... I'd just like to be able to eat, be comfortable, have means for transport and not constantly in debt, without sacrificing one or multiple for the other. It's not my fault I am the way I am; why am I being made to live like a second-class citizen? Makes me feel like I'm not worthy of dignity." - Heath, who receives JobSeeker (South Australia)*

Consequently, many people surveyed said they go without essentials to be able to pay their energy bills. For example:

- 73.1% cut back further on fans and air conditioning
- 66.4% go without food or medicine
- 63.5% cut back on their use of lights
- 58.2% change how they cook, such as not using their oven, or do not cook at all
- 55.3% take fewer and/or shorter showers
- 34.6% stop having people over
- 3.4% turn off the fridge.

Many people surveyed have also engaged directly with their energy retailer to seek help with managing their energy bills:

- 26.9% have asked their retailer to go on or are already on a payment plan
- 19.2% have asked their retailer to go on or are already on a hardship plan.

Only 8.2% of the 208 people surveyed said they can afford their energy bill and have not changed their behaviour to manage energy costs.

Of great concern to ACOSS is that many people on low incomes are experiencing or at risk of energy debt. According to the AER Retail energy market performance updates in 2022, there are more than 270,000 people in energy debt. Energy debt averages have been increasing, with the number of people with energy debts of \$2500 or more increasing by 39% throughout 2022. The Heat Survey found 25% of the 208 people surveyed currently have an energy debt. For a further 42.8%, debt was imminent because they would not be able to afford their next energy bill.

*"It's very difficult for people on a low income to keep up with all these increases... I feel so bad for people who are on the JobSeeker payment, how on earth do they survive? I was on that payment prior to Disability Support Pension and it's impossible to survive. Now with huge rent hikes across the country things are getting more difficult." - Kay, who receives Disability Support Pension (Western Australia)*

*"For those of us on low and fixed income - my work is casual, on call, and supplemented with Jobseeker - we're left to the mercies of privatised energy providers and there's no assistance from escalating bills, which I'm unable to*

*pay off from one quarter to the next. Each new bill is stacked onto the last. Payment plans do nothing to short circuit the acute financial hardship or the poverty people are forced into. Energy insecurity must be seen as just part of an ecosystem of interacting precarious conditions.” – Martin, who receives JobSeeker (New South Wales)*

Findings from the Heat Survey demonstrate that the high cost of energy bills (which are continuing to rise) are compounding the energy stress that many people on income support have been experiencing for the last couple of years. Of the 208 people who responded to the survey, 83% have difficulty paying their energy bills; for 33% of this group of people, the challenge is constant. Because of this, during high temperatures, many people are choosing to cut back on the use of fans and air conditioning, among other appliances (including fridges), to keep their energy costs down.

## People want government action to reduce their energy bills and help them cope with high heat

We asked people completing the Heat Survey what government action they would like to see, if any, to help reduce their energy bills and cope with high temperatures in their homes. There was strong support among people who responded for governments to act now to address heat risks:

- 86.5% called for direct government investment to retrofit public and community housing with energy efficient electric features and rooftop solar.
- 85.1% called for minimum standards to be introduced for existing rental homes to use less energy and be cool in summer.
- 84.1% called for building standards that require new homes to use less energy and be cool in summer.
- 65.9% called for government funded no-interest loans for people on low incomes to purchase heat pumps/reverse-cycle air conditioners.
- 50% called for governments to provide cool places for people to go during heatwaves, such as public libraries and civic centres.

*“I wish there were minimum standards in rentals, like there are in workplaces. The coolest we can get the one room that contains the aircon, is 28°C. There is no insulation, we had to buy our own curtains because the ones that were there when we moved in were mouldy and didn't protect against the sun and heat.” – Esther, who receives JobSeeker and is renting from a real estate agency, (Victoria)*

*“The main thing the Government needs to do is increase energy concessions and make it easier for people to get the medical heating and cooling concession. I agree with funding to retrofit low-income homes too, but only for people on a*

*very low annual income (it seems too much is given to those who are somewhere in the middle, e.g. working but also receiving a part payment – this takes funding away from the people who can least afford things and they should be the number one priority when it comes to funding)." – Casey, who receives JobSeeker (South Australia)*

*"I'm unsure if I will be able to afford my next energy bill. I am fortunate to have solar hot water. After some heating problems, the real estate agent informed me that the hot water service would be replaced with an electric one. I was shocked when told that the landlord is not legally required to replace with the same type of unit. To replace my mostly free hot water with expensive electric would have caused great hardship & I would not have been able to pay the electricity bill. Thankfully this was avoided by appealing directly to the landlord. I think the Government should mandate that landlords ensure that rental homes meet a standard of insulation and affordable heating/cooling options including retrofitting older homes." – Cathie, who receives Disability Support Pension (NSW)*

## Where to from here?

The findings from the ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey highlight the toll on health and wellbeing for people on low incomes. This results from a combination of high temperatures, poor quality housing and socio-economic inequality. People worse affected are those with the least resources to keep their homes cool and protect the health of themselves and their families. People with pre-existing health conditions or living with disability are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illness. People who rent or are in public and community housing have very limited control over actions they can take to improve the thermal comfort of their home, such as installing air conditioning or fans. Moreover, rising energy prices are crippling people on low incomes and forcing many into increasing energy debt.

Australia will experience increasingly hotter summers and more heatwaves, as a result of climate change. The impacts for people on low incomes will be increasingly severe unless strong action is taken now. People who completed the Heat Survey spoke loudly and clearly about what they saw as priorities for government action. ACOSS supports these priorities and recommends the following actions for government.

### Key conclusions and recommendations

Public and community housing are home to people experiencing significant poverty and disadvantage, who can least afford high energy bills. An initial target of bringing every dwelling to at least five stars, electrified and adding renewables where possible, would make a significant reduction to energy bills and improve the health and wellbeing of tenants.

1. Commonwealth, state and territory governments co-invest to retrofit low-income housing to improve the energy efficiency to at least 5-star NatHERS rating, all electric and powered by renewables where possible, starting with public and community housing as a priority, which typically

house people experiencing the most significant poverty and disadvantage.

Private rentals house a significant proportion of community members on low incomes. Low-income private renters are experiencing significant housing and energy bill stress and do not have the choice or control to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Minimum mandatory rental standards are likely to be the most effective policy intervention to improve energy performance in rental homes.

2. State and territory governments urgently mandate minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental properties, as part of broader standards for what constitutes healthy and habitable rental housing, with the aim to legislate 'modelled performance' standards by 2025 in all jurisdictions, allowing 3 to 4 years for full compliance.

People who own their own homes but are on low-fixed incomes, have few resources to invest in measures that will help cool their home. Providing funds and incentives would reduce up-front costs and increase opportunities for people on low incomes to make and benefit from these investments.

3. The Commonwealth Government funds or incentivises access to funds to support low-income homeowners to access energy efficiency audits and upgrades, electrify their homes and install solar PV.

Current income support is insufficient to meet existing costs of living, rising inflation and energy bills.

4. The Commonwealth Government immediately lifts income support to improve the capacity of people on low incomes to manage energy bills, including increasing Jobseeker, Youth Allowances and other income support payments to at least \$73 a day, index payments to wages as well as CPI, and increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

With energy prices still set to increase in 2023, people on low incomes and with energy debt will struggle to afford their next energy bill, let alone be able to cool their homes in summer. People on low incomes are already depriving themselves of energy by not cooling homes, not cooking or using hot water, and going without food or medicines to afford their energy bills. These actions seriously affect their health and wellbeing.

5. The Commonwealth Government provides short-term (up to 12 months) payments of up to \$2,000 per person experiencing unmanageable energy debt. The Commonwealth Government also works with retailers to provide additional relief to those customers with debts greater than \$2,000 and help customers reduce their bills going forward.

Currently, energy concessions and annual rebates are not adequately meeting the needs of people on low incomes to assist them to afford their energy bills. The fixed concession amount means it does not respond to energy price changes, seasonal variations in energy use, or the energy performance of the

home. Those that are eligible are not getting it and some people who need it are not eligible.

6. State and territory governments undertake energy concessions reform appropriate to their jurisdictions to better meet people's energy needs and changing circumstances, including:
  - Shift to percentage-based concessions/rebates.
  - Expand eligibility to ensure people in need can access energy concessions.
  - Ensure people who are eligible to receive concessions/rebate do receive them.

Climate-induced disasters and extreme weather, like heatwaves, are only set to worsen and become more frequent, yet our disaster risk frameworks lack any focus on heat. Communities and community services need to be supported and resourced to adequately prepare for these events and to have plans in place to build resilience and respond when these events occur.

7. The NEMA and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework include an initiative to examine the impacts of heatwaves, improve data collection and identify and elevate solutions to reduce associated risks. Communities and community services are supported and resourced to adequately prepare for these events and to have plans in place to build resilience and respond when these events occur.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Survey respondent demographics

The ACOSS 2023 survey was based on the 2021-2022 and 2020-2021 Summer Community Surveys conducted by Sweltering Cities.

The survey was available online from 16<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023.

The questions cover how people experience heat at home, how extreme heat affects their health, what activities they take or avoid in order to cope with the heat, and what policies or local solutions they support to better deal with the heat.

Key survey respondent demographics are set out below.

Age:

| Age   | %    |
|-------|------|
| 18-24 | 1.0  |
| 25-34 | 5.8  |
| 35-49 | 14.6 |
| 50-64 | 42.7 |
| 65-79 | 29.1 |
| 80+   | 6.8  |

Gender:

| Gender                   | %    |
|--------------------------|------|
| Female                   | 71.6 |
| Male                     | 24.0 |
| Non-binary               | 2.0  |
| Prefer not to say        | 1.0  |
| Transgender <sup>5</sup> | 1.0  |

Location:

| State | %    |
|-------|------|
| NSW   | 26.3 |
| VIC   | 21.5 |
| QLD   | 21.0 |
| WA    | 12.6 |
| SA    | 12.2 |
| TAS   | 3.4  |
| ACT   | 2.4  |
| NT    | 0.5  |

Receipt of income support

| Receipt of income support  | %    |
|----------------------------|------|
| Disability Support Pension | 33.7 |

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Jobseeker Payment                            | 28.8 |
| Age Pension                                  | 27.9 |
| Carer's Allowance                            | 4.3  |
| Austudy                                      | 1.9  |
| Parenting Payment Single                     | 1.9  |
| Family tax                                   | 0.5  |
| Youth Allowance                              | 0.5  |
| Waiting for Centrelink to approve my pension | 0.5  |

Living situation:

| <b>Living situation</b>                                 | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|
| Renting from a real estate agency                       | 39.4     |
| Renting directly from a landlord                        | 8.2      |
| Own my own home/paying a mortgage                       | 25.5     |
| Renting in social housing (public or community housing) | 24.5     |
| No fixed address  | 2.4      |

## Appendix 2: Survey questions

Email

Postcode

### Cost of energy

*Do you have difficulty paying your energy bills?*

- Yes, always
- Yes, sometimes
- No

*How have you been managing the cost of energy bills? (select all options that apply to you)*

- I can afford my energy bill and so have not changed my behavior
- Cutting back further on the use of cooling
- Taking shorter or fewer hot showers
- Changing how I cook meals, like not using the oven
- Cutting back further on the use of lights
- Turning off the fridge
- Not having people over
- Have asked my retailer to go on a payment plan/already on a payment plan
- Have asked my retailer to go on a hardship plan/already on a hardship plan

*Do you go without other things like food, medicine to afford your energy bills?*

- Yes, always

- Yes, sometimes
- No

*Do you currently have an energy bill debt?*

- Yes
- No

*Will you go into energy debt because you won't be able to afford your next energy bill?*

- Yes
- No

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the impact of high energy prices for you?*

## Cooling your home

*What is the best way to describe your home in the summer?*

- It gets very hot and I can't cool it
- It gets really hot but I can and do cool it
- It's comfortable and I can cool it when it gets really hot

*Do you have air-conditioning at home?*

- Yes
- No
- Other

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of trying to keep your home cool in the summer?*

*Does anything prevent you from leaving the house to find a cooler location?  
(select all that apply)*

- I don't need to leave the house because I can cool it
- Cost of transport
- Lack of transport options
- Lack of mobility
- Other (tell us more)
- Are there activities you avoid on hot days? (select all that apply)
- No, I don't avoid any activities
- Walking
- Cycling
- Getting groceries/other essentials
- Accessing government services, like Centrelink
- Attending medical appointments
- Gardening
- Socialising

- Exercise
- Other (please specify)

*Is there anything you would like to tell us about how you change your behaviour to deal with the summer heat?*

## Health and wellbeing impacts

*Do you have trouble sleeping on very hot nights or during heatwaves?*

- Yes, always
- Yes, sometimes
- No
- Other

*Do you ever feel unwell because of the heat?*

- Yes, always
- Yes, sometimes
- No
- Other

*Have you ever been to a doctor or sought medical care because you felt unwell in the heat?*

- Yes
- No
- Other

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how you or other members of your household are impacted by the heat?*

## Final questions

*Is there more that governments should be doing to reduce energy bills and manage heat risk for residential homes? (select all that apply)*

- Nothing more governments should be doing
- Set building standards that require new homes to use less energy and be cool in summer
- Set minimum standards for existing rental homes to have measures to use less energy and be cool in summer
- Directly invest to retrofit low-income homes with energy efficient electric features and rooftop solar
- Provide no-interest loans for people to purchase heat pumps/reverse-cycle air conditioners
- Provide cool places for people to go during heatwaves
- Other (please specify)

*Is there anything else you would like to share?*

## Personal details

*Personal details: please only provide the information you feel comfortable sharing. The results of the survey will remain anonymous, and we will not disclose any of your personal information without your express consent.*

Name (optional)

Phone (optional)

Age

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-49
- 50-64
- 65-79
- 80+

Gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Are you currently receiving any of the following income support payments?

- Jobseeker Payment
- Youth Allowance
- Parenting Payment Single
- Disability Support Pension
- Age Pension
- Carer Payment
- I'm not receiving any form of income support
- Other

Which of the following best describes your living situation?

- Renting from a real estate agency
- Renting directly from a landlord
- Own my own home/paying a mortgage
- Renting in social housing (public or community housing)
- No fixed address

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> L Coates et al. 2014, 'Exploring 167 years of vulnerability: an examination of extreme heat events in Australia 1844–2010', in *Environmental Science & Policy*, vol. 42, pp. 33–44

<sup>ii</sup> Sweltering Cities 2020-21 Survey Report <https://swelteringcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/sweltering-cities-sydney-community-survey-report-20-21.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> 2021, 'We know that heat kills; accurately measuring these deaths will help us assess the impacts of climate change', ANU Institute for Climate Energy and Disaster Solutions, 25 February.

<https://iced.s.anu.edu.au/research/research-stories/we-know-heat-kills-accurately-measuring-these-deaths-will-help-us-assess#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMy%20research%20found%20that%20in,Australia%20for%20this%20time%20period.%E2%80%9D>

<sup>iv</sup> Minor K, Bjerre-Nielsen A, Svala Jonadottir S, Lehmann S, Obradovich N 2022, "Rising temperatures erode human sleep globally", *One Earth*, vol5, issue 5, pp. 534-549