

## ACOSS Summer Heat Survey 2024





## **Acknowledgements**

ACOSS respectfully acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work. 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 First Nations people to self-determination and we support the Uluru Statement From the Heart.

ACOSS would like to thank all the people who took the time to complete the 2024 Heat Survey. We thank them for sharing with us their challenging experiences of dealing with high 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 the report's findings and recommendations.

ACOSS acknowledges our partner in this year's survey – the First Nations Clean Energy Network (FNCEN). In partnering with the FNCEN and through the support of other First Nations organisations, we were able to extend the survey's reach to more First Nations people and gain a deeper insight to their experience of dealing with high temperatures in their homes.

We would also like to thank all the community sector and climate sector organisations that helped promote the Heat Survey to their communities and networks.

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### **Contents**

Acknowledgements 2
Contents 4
Key findings 5
Summary of ACOSS recommendations 9
Introduction 11
Methodolgy 13
Hot homes increase the vulnerability of people at risk
Hotter days and homes with poor energy performance of
Hot homes and ill-health, sleeplessness, loss of producti
People struggle to access cool spaces 25
Amid rising energy costs, hot homes contribute to finance
People call on governments to reduce energy bills and h
Spotlight on First Nations people's experiences 35
What has changed since 2023 and where to now?
Key conclusions and ACOSS recommendations 43
Appendices 47
Appendix A: Survey respondent demographics 47
Location 47
Age 47
Gender 48
Ethnic/cultural background 48
Disability or chronic illness 49
Living situation 49
Income support 50
Appendix B: Survey questions 51

15

create hot boxes that cannot be cooled		17
ivity and household tensions	21	

inancial stress 27 and help them cope with high heat 33

41

47

### **Key findings**

"Our home has no insulation. The windows don't have fly screens and we cannot leave them open due to insects and safety. The heat inside gives me frequent headaches and tiredness. I also have a child with disability who is affected by the heat. There is an air-con in the main living area but it's old and has not been serviced in a long time (and completely unaffordable to run). Cooling and heating are unaffordable especially because rental properties have aged/unmaintained utilities - my hot water system is 31 years old. Governments should not provide more taxpayer funded subsidies and concessions to landlords. Instead, set higher energy efficiency standards for housing. My home feels like a prison sometimes in summer."

– Anne, Victoria

Exposure to high heat is a major threat to human health. More people die in Australia from heatwaves than all other extreme events combined.<sup>1</sup> With climate change, Australia is becoming hotter. Very hot days and heatwaves are becoming more common. People experiencing financial and social disadvantage are worst impacted by these events. Those worst affected experience a combination of:

- homes with poor energy performance;
- high energy prices;
- low incomes; and
- health conditions.

To track the intersection between housing, energy costs, heat, and people experiencing financial and social disadvantage, ACOSS conducted a public, online Heat Survey over the summer months, from December 2023 to January 2024. We received 1007 responses from people across the country, including: 66.1% receiving income support; 19.2% in social housing; 36.1% in private rental; 6.4% First Nations respondents. Additionally, 62.7% reported they or someone in their household has a disability or chronic health condition.

The survey found the majority of 1007 people surveyed (80.4%) said their homes get too hot. This was often to do with being in homes with low energy efficiency (e.g., no insulation or shading, dark roofing, no eaves).

More than half (56.7%) could not cool their home because:

- they do not have air conditioners or fans, or have them but they are broken, or have them only in part of the home or they are ineffective in cooling the home; or
- if they had functioning air conditioners and or fans, they could not afford to run them.

People most likely to struggle to cool their homes were:

- people in social housing (78.3%) or private rental (65.7%) with limited control to modify their home or access working efficient air conditioners to better deal with extreme temperatures;
- people receiving income support (60.8%) with limited resources to modify their homes, afford air-conditioning or fans, or afford the running costs to cool their home; and
- First Nations people (71.9%), two thirds of whom were in social or private rental, and more than three-quarters of whom were receiving income support.

Exposure to high temperatures in the home has a range of serious negative impacts on household members. Respondents to the survey reported:

- Negative physical and mental health impacts, making them unwell (80.5% of all 1007 respondents; 94% of First Nations respondents). For many, the heat seriously aggravated existing chronic health conditions or disabilities.
- Having to seek medical attention for heat stress (14% of all respondents; 25% of First Nations respondents).
- Difficulty sleeping (94% of all respondents; 98% of First Nations respondents), reduced productivity for work and study, and raised tensions in the home.
- Avoiding everyday household activities due to the heat (like housework and cooking).

While medical and government advice often is to leave home to go to a cooler place during very hot weather, this is not always easy. Most people (90.5%) reported that they face mobility, cost and other barriers to doing so.

Many people reported challenges affording their energy bills which meant they couldn't cool their home and/or afford other essentials:

- 59.8% reported finding it increasingly difficult to pay their energy bills, which affected their capacity to cool their homes.
- Many reported that high energy bills made it difficult to pay for essentials like food (46.7%), medicine (41.4%) or housing (34%).

First Nations respondents were even more likely to be struggling to pay for essentials such as energy and other bills (86%), food (75%), medicine (63%) and housing (58%).

A quarter of all 1007 people surveyed (25.8%) were currently in energy debt with their retailer or believed they would go into energy debt because they could not afford their next energy bill. People receiving income support (69.4%) and First Nations people (55%) were more likely to say they had an energy debt or that they considered it to be imminent.

We note that while the people surveyed are currently housed, extremes of temperature present more severe health risks from exposure and threats to life itself to people living on the streets or sleeping rough.

Findings from the ACOSS 2024 Heat Survey raise similar concerns to the previous ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey Report and Sweltering Cities' 2021 and 2022 Summer Survey Reports. However, a hotter summer in 2023/24, coupled with rising costs for energy, housing, food and other essentials were reflected in people's comments. There was a clear level of distress amongst people surveyed about the growing challenge to reduce the impacts of heat while affording energy bills and avoiding – or compounding existing – energy debt.

For people experiencing financial and social disadvantage, especially those living with disability or a health condition, the situation of hot homes that cannot be cooled remains untenable, putting lives at risk. The situation facing First Nations people surveyed is much worse on almost every measure. Therefore, prioritising this report's recommendations for First Nations communities is essential.

Almost all 1007 people who completed the 2024 Heat Survey (96.5%) called on governments to do more to improve homes to be more resilient to extreme heat (and cold) and to support people to be able to afford energy bills and other essentials. Asked to rank which solutions were most important to help people on low incomes reduce energy bills and make their homes cooler in summer, respondents ranked them as follows (weighted ranking)<sup>2</sup>:

- 1. Set minimum energy performance standards for rental properties requiring landlords to install measures to reduce energy use and make the home cooler in summer; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, rooftop solar.
- 2. Increase the level of income support (e.g. JobSeeker) to enable people receiving it to be better able to afford energy bills and take other actions to keep cool and safe during extreme weather.
- 3. Fully fund public and community housing providers to retrofit homes to use less energy and be cool in summer; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 4. Increase energy concessions/rebates.
- 5. Provide subsidies to retrofit homes; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 6. Establish stronger building standards for new homes requiring them to use less energy and be cool in summer; e.g. Set at an energy efficiency rating of seven out of ten stars.
- 7. Provide no-interest loans to retrofit homes; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 8. Provide subsidies to remove gas appliances and install more efficient electric appliances.
- 9. Provide free-to-use cool places to go to during hot weather.

In the comments section, people also recommended governments: subsidise or fund installation of air conditioning for people living with disability, provide specialist energy efficient accommodation for people living with disability; provide green residential areas to reduce ambient heat; ban dark roofing; regain public ownership of energy utilities; and phase out fossil fuel projects to reduce their contribution to climate change.

Improving the energy performance and climate resilience of homes (energy efficiency, electrification and rooftop solar) will have significant and practical health, financial, social and environmental benefits to individuals and communities around the country, particularly for those experiencing financial and social disadvantage. It would also contribute to meeting emissions reduction targets and generate local jobs nationwide.

In addition, there is a consensus that direct government funding and financing of energy upgrades of low-income housing would build economies of scale and market capacity, reducing the costs for all housing upgrades.

Combined with raising income supports, and making energy more affordable, these measures would significantly reduce energy hardship, poverty and inequality, and improve physical and mental health outcomes for people. For First Nations communities, these initiatives would help Close the Gap on a range of measures.

"More help must be given to those who need it. It makes sense to insulate every government home and have solar panels to keep costs down. People on benefits must have their money increased and we must build homes for the homeless faster. It is criminal the way the system had been allowed to go. Too many rich people making decisions about things they have no idea about. Rich people and companies must pay more taxes, we have so many people in need, the gap between rich and poor is getting bigger."

– Julie, Queensland



## **Summary of ACOSS recommendations**

- 1. The Commonwealth Government establish a Special Purpose Funding Vehicle, with an initial injection of \$2 billion, topped up by other sources, to invest in deep and rapid energy performance measures (energy efficiency, electrification and rooftop solar), tailored across low-income housing tenure types - public housing, community housing, First Nations controlled housing, private rental and low-income owneroccupier (see recommendations 2, 3 and 4 below).
- 2. To improve the energy performance of social housing, the Commonwealth Government build on the existing \$300 million social housing upgrade funds to establish a 7-year program to fund energy performance and climate-resilience upgrades to **all** public housing, community housing and First Nations communitycontrolled housing by 2030. First Nations housing energy upgrades should be prioritised and the programs should be developed in partnership with First Nations communities.
- 3. To improve the energy performance of private rental properties, the following measures should be implemented.

a. State and territory governments implement scalable 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 standards by 2025 in all jurisdictions, providing 3-4 years for full compliance.

b. The Commonwealth Government amend tax laws so that capital works deductions for new or replacement appliances for rental properties are only available for accredited energy efficient and electric appliances.

c. The Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to establish incentive programs to private landlords, including through Environmental Upgrade Finance (EUF) instruments, to assist with access to low-cost finance and targeted subsidies (in exchange for caps in rent increases above CPI) alongside outreach measures and one-stop shops to support delivery.

- 4. To improve the energy performance of homes of low-income owner-occupiers, the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to establish programs, including through EUF instruments, to support home energy upgrades to all low-income owner-occupier home energy upgrades by 2030. Supports include free energy audits, subsidised upgrades, zero-interest loans, community outreach and one-stop-shops to support delivery.
- 5. State and territory governments undertake energy concessions reform appropriate to their jurisdictions to better meet people's energy needs and changing circumstances.
- 6. The Commonwealth Government remove the Small-Scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES) levy paid through electricity bills and instead covers the cost of the scheme via federal government budget.
- 7. The Commonwealth Government provide up to \$2,000 per person experiencing energy hardship with unmanageable energy debt and work with retailers to provide additional relief to those customers with debts greater than \$2,000 and help customers reduce their bills going forward.

- 8. The Commonwealth Government immediately raise income support payments to improve the capacity of people on low incomes to manage energy bills, including JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy and Special Benefit to at least \$78 a day, in line with the pension.
- 9. Governments fund the provision of and access to locally and culturally appropriate free-to-use cool spaces to go to during hot weather. Prioritising community run spaces where people already go to for services such as community centres, libraries, neighbourhood houses, and other local community services.
- 10. The Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments work collaboratively to prioritise a work program on heatwaves, which would include the examination of the impact of heatwaves on people and communities at risk, improve data collection, 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 support people most at risk to stay cool when these events occur.



### Introduction

"I live in Queensland housing and they have cut the trees in my yard which has greatly increased the temperature. I struggle to pay my power bills being on Disability Support Pension and I had to buy and professionally fit the air conditioner that I have. ... I get Centrelink loans to pay my power bill then that takes me six months to pay off. It also reduces my ability to pay for everyday essentials. I believe people who live in state housing are extremely vulnerable and cannot afford to do things to keep cool and the houses/flats are always the most basic with usually only ceiling fans and no solar panels to reduce power bills. The government should at least bring some measures in to assist such people."

– Bianca, Queensland

Summers are becoming hotter with climate change. In fact, the last nine years were the world's hottest on record, with 2023 being the hottest year to date.<sup>3</sup> Australia is experiencing more very hot days and heatwaves, and Bureau of Meteorology data forecasts more days where the national daily average is over 40 degrees.<sup>4</sup> For people in remote areas and places like central and northern Australia, high temperatures are already common and daily temperatures reach 35 degrees for over half the year.

Severely hot days and heatwaves affect people experiencing financial and social disadvantage worst because they have fewer resources and choices to protect themselves from extreme heat. This is an urgent and critical public health problem. Heatwaves cause more deaths than all other extreme weather events combined.<sup>5</sup> In Australia, there were an estimated 36,000 deaths associated with heat between 2006 and 2017.<sup>6</sup> A lack of access to energy-efficient homes is often a primary factor in these deaths.

People experiencing financial and social disadvantage are vulnerable to high temperatures because they often live in homes that are poorly insulated, with no or limited shading; and no air conditioning or fans to help cool indoor temperatures. Even if the home has air conditioning and/or fans, rising energy costs mean that people on low incomes often cannot afford to run them. They are also less likely to have rooftop solar, which would significantly reduce their energy bills.

Further, people in rental properties are not able to make changes in their home that could make them more liveable, healthy and safe. Minimum rental standards could address this problem by placing requirements on landlords to ensure their property protects tenants against heat or cold. For example, the ACT requires landlords to have ceiling insulation and Victoria is implementing minimal rental standards.

ACOSS conducted a public, online Heat Survey over the 2023-24 summer to explore the intersection between high temperatures, energy performance of homes, energy costs and income. The data is gathered to advocate for support for people experiencing financial and social disadvantage to secure cooler, healthier and more climate-resilient homes, putting people with the least at the centre of government policy and planning.

The survey gives us valuable insight into how severely high heat affects people's physical and mental health, their wellbeing and activity when they cannot cool their homes. The survey highlights how seriously poverty and poor energy-performing homes can reduce people's resilience and capacity to cope with debilitating hot weather.



## Methodology

The ACOSS Heat Survey was open from 1 December 2023 to 28 January 2024. It was made available online via the survey tool, TypeformTM.

ACOSS partnered with the First Nations Clean Energy Network (FNCEN) to promote the survey to First Nations people, particularly in regional and remote Australia. First Nations respondents made up 6.4% of the total responses, a higher percentage than for First Nations people within the total Australian population. This data is presented in the "Spotlight on First Nations people's experiences" section. The FNCEN will produce specific communications based on the data collected from First Nations respondents to the survey.

ACOSS sought to greatly increase the response rate and reach a wider pool of people than in previous surveys in terms of diversity of age, gender, cultural or ethnic background, living arrangements and geographic location. We sought to encompass a wider range of income support categories than included in previous years. The 2024 Heat Survey was promoted through ACOSS social media and websites, via the FNCEN and other First Nations organisations, Councils of Social Service, community sector and climate movement organisations, and online advertising. As a result, the survey received 1007 responses, significantly more than the 208 responses in 2023.

The survey focussed on people who are currently housed. The sample comprised:

- two-thirds of people receiving some form of income support;
- over a third in private rental, a third who are homeowners or paying a mortgage, and one-fifth in social housing;
- people from every Australian state and territory, the majority from New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia;
- all adult age categories;
- diverse genders, with the majority identifying as women or female;
- just over two-thirds of people were born in Australia and almost all speak English as the main language at home; this indicates an under-representation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse people in the sample;
- 64 First Nations people;
- nearly two-thirds of people had someone in the household living with a disability or chronic illness for at least 12 months prior to completing the survey
- small number of people in a precarious or temporary housing situation (e.g. couch surfing, staying with family or friends).

(See Appendix A: Survey respondent demographics.)

We recognise that people who are living on the streets or sleeping rough are highly vulnerable and at serious risk during extreme heat. While the 2024 Heat Survey and the recommendations that follow focus on people facing financial stress who have access to some form of housing (for example, staying with family or friends), we recognise that solutions are also needed for people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough, to protect them from extreme heat.

The 2024 Heat Survey questions were adapted from previous Sweltering Cities Summer Surveys, conducted in 2020/21 and in 2021/22, and the ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey. The questions covered five key areas:

- how people experience high heat in their home and their capacity to cool their home •
- how high heat affects their health
- actions people take or avoid to keep cool during hot weather
- the impact of heat on energy bills and financial stress, and actions taken to manage the cost of keeping cool
- the level of support for government policies to reduce energy bills and manage heat risk.

(See Appendix B: Survey questions.)

The survey findings are set out in the following pages, with the final section providing conclusions and recommendations for government action.







# Hot homes increase the vulnerability of people at risk

Housing is an important protection for people from extremes of summer heat (and winter cold). Decent housing heats slowly and cools quickly, and is affordable to do so.

Australian housing, particularly older housing stock, is well known for having poor thermal performance. The average existing Australian home performs at 1.7 out of ten possible stars for energy efficiency on the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS), compared to 7-star ratings now required for new housing. This means such homes heat quickly and are difficult to cool.

Many people experiencing financial and social disadvantage live in housing that is drafty or humid, poorly insulated, and often very cold in winter and very hot in summer. They may not have access to energy-efficient heating or cooling in their home. They do not have solar or home batteries to reduce energy bills. This includes people in public and community housing and people who rent, with limited control over their housing conditions.

These living conditions are clearly reflected in the responses people gave in the 2024 Heat Survey, as detailed in this report.

"The cheaper the dwelling, the worse the heat and cold. My rental unit faces the wrong way and my bedroom bakes in summer. There is no insulation. The heat is debilitating. At 73 years old, my energy is limited, and heat and humidity drain me. ... My energy bills are a constant worry."

- Joy, Queensland

"I don't have air-con and can't afford to run the fans I've got. ... I hate summer so much. I just wish to die. My kids are also miserable. All public housing should have air-con. People in public housing are treated like subhumans."

– Amy, Western Australia



## Hotter days and homes with poor energy performance create hot boxes that cannot be cooled

People variously described living in hot homes that they cannot cool as "awful", "unliveable", "miserable", "unbearable", "torture" and "a prison."

Of the 1007 people who completed the survey, most (80.4%) said their home gets too hot in the summer.

Over half the people surveyed (56.7%) said they struggle to cool their home.

At a state and Territory level, more than half of people in Western Australia (67.2%), Queensland (66.1%), Australian Capital Territory (64.3%) and New South Wales (55.0%) said their home gets too hot and they struggle to cool it. Nearly half of the people surveyed in Victoria (45.8%), South Australia (45.7%) and the Northern Territory (45.5%) also had this experience. Tasmania was the only jurisdiction where all people surveyed said either their home was comfortable, or they are able to cool it when hot.

Some groups were more likely to struggle to cool their home:

- people renting in social housing (78.3%)
- people receiving income support (60.8%)
- people renting directly from a real estate agency (68.6%) or landlord (56.7%).

People in social or private rental properties have very limited control to make changes to their home to make it more energy efficient and resistant to extreme temperatures. They have limited control to install insulation, draft proofing, shading, fans or air conditioners, regardless of whether or not they can afford these changes. Of the 558 people living in social housing or private rental, most (69.7%) said they struggle to cool their home.

"I rent and there is no air con. Though I have fans, that can't compete with high temps. My apartment is north-west facing at top of the block."

- Judith, New South Wales

People who indicated that they were in insecure housing (3%) also spoke of having limited control to cool their home when it gets too hot.



We asked people who are unable to cool their homes about their access to air conditioning and or fans. Their responses are presented below:



"My wife has terminal cancer, so we have bought fans to help her comfort. We have a good landlord, but if they agreed to air-condition the place, our rent would surely rise."

- Ivan, New South Wales

We note that quite a few people who completed the survey spoke about using portable air conditioning units. These can be very expensive to run, increasing the unaffordability of energy bills, which people may be unaware of when buying.

"We purchased another evaporative cooler in December 2023, to help cool the house down and I just got our electricity bill. It's gone from around \$600 (last year) to \$1000. An extra \$400 for one extra thing! We really need it, but we didn't think it'd cost that much to run."

- Liz, New South Wales

20

Overcrowding in a home is stressful to health and wellbeing and can raise household tensions. These impacts may be worsened during very hot days or heatwaves, especially for people who more sensitive to heat, such as people with disability or health conditions, older adults, infants and children. While most of the 1007 people surveyed considered their home was big enough for the number of people who regularly live there, 10% said their home was overcrowded.

These findings show that most of the people surveyed struggle to cool their home on very hot days. This struggle was more likely for First Nations people, people receiving income support and people in social or private rental. Even for people who have air conditioning and/or fans, most struggle to cool their homes because these appliances do not function efficiently, do not cool the entire home, or because they cost too much to run.





## Hot homes and ill-health, sleeplessness, loss of productivity and household tensions

Research from Australia and around the world shows that extreme heat has serious health impacts and contributes to more deaths than any other natural disaster.<sup>7</sup> Exposure to excessive heat has a range of physiological impacts. It can aggravate existing conditions and result in disability and premature death. People most at risk include people living with disabilities and/or with chronic illness, pregnant women, children, older adults, people on low incomes, and people living alone.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the 1007 people surveyed (80.5%) said they sometimes or always feel unwell when their home is hot. Several people also expressed their worries about how heat impacts the health of other family members in the home, including newborns, small children or partners with chronic conditions or disabilities.

Some people gave specific information about how their health is impacted when the temperature rises:

- headaches and migraines; heat rash; breathing problems; swelling of hands and feet; nose bleeds; dehydration; nausea and vomiting; dizziness; brain fog; and fatigue
- flare-ups in asthma; heart and vascular conditions; emphysema; diabetes; chronic fatigue; fibromyalgia; multiple sclerosis; hyperhidrosis; autoimmune conditions; dementia; arthritis; Parkinsons disease; and eczema
- · increasing anxiety and depression
- negative impacts on physical and mental functions for people on the autism spectrum.

"I suffer with headaches as a result of having past brain surgery and the heat makes it much, much worse."

- Leilani, ACT

"My autoimmune issues mean that I don't function in heat nor if cold. Have trouble regulating body temperature. Feel ill. Fatigued. Exhausted. Weight gain from being unable to exercise because of the heat."

- Anon, QLD

Some people were concerned about power failures and the subsequent implications for their health if they were unable to cool their home.

"I am very concerned about possible power outages on extremely hot days as the heat affects me severely."

- Jennifer, New South Wales



Of the 1007 people surveyed, 14.2% said they had experienced heat stress sufficiently badly in the 12 months before completing the survey that they needed to consult a doctor or seek medical care. People receiving income support (18.5%) were more likely to have sought medical attention for heat stress.

Of further concern, several people surveyed spoke about being unable to seek medical attention when they need it during hot weather due to: the cost of health care and or cost of travel to health services; health services being far away or difficult to get to, particularly if they live alone; and not having the time to seek medical care, particularly if they have caring duties.

Hot weather can also affect people's capacity to eat and sleep well. Several people mentioned a loss of appetite and or not wanting to cook when temperatures are high.

Almost all (94.2%) of the 1007 people surveyed said they sometimes or always have difficulty sleeping in their home on very hot nights or during heatwaves. Research shows that increasing temperatures globally contribute to sleep deprivation, which harms our physical and mental health and functioning.9

".. when it doesn't cool down at night I cannot sleep and when I do it is disturbed sleep as I am so sweaty and uncomfortable. Once I overheat my body can't cool down, I believe it is due to Fibromyalgia. .... I feel as though I lose months of my life as I am unable to do anything much when it's hot."

- Donna, Queensland

Several people spoke about the lack of sleep leaving them feel lethargic and unproductive at work or study. This was more so if they work or study from home.

"Fatigue issues from sleepless nights affect my job as a truck driver."

- Daniel, Victoria

"Heat makes my son lethargic and grumpy, which affects his schooling (he is home schooled). It also affects my ability to work from home."

- Emily, Victoria

"We all struggle. It impacts my ability to work and the kids' ability to study." - Andrew, Victoria Some people also commented on high temperatures creating household tensions and impacting on their relationships.

"My children don't sleep well so they become grumpy and that makes it a real drain on my feeling of self-worth."

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

- Stephen, New South Wales



# People struggle to access cool spaces

During very hot days and heatwaves, government and health advice recommend that people go somewhere cool to avoid the negative health impacts described above. However, not everyone finds it possible or easy to leave their home to find somewhere cooler. Cost of entry or transport, mobility issues, caring duties and limited availability of cooler places are some of the barriers identified.

Respondents spoke about personal barriers to leaving the home: having a disability that restricts their mobility (21.7%); the cost of transport (21.1%); or lacking transport options (14.1%). In the comments, people also identified: having mental health conditions (e.g. agoraphobia, anxiety); having physical health issues (e.g. immune compromised, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia); having caring duties; or concerns about exposure to heat on the street (if walking), on public transport or in their car which has no air conditioning.

"Autism can make going places more difficult. Me and my partner are both Autistic, we struggle a lot with heat as our bodies are not good at regulating temperature and the heat contributes to sensory overwhelm."

– Max, Victoria

People also spoke about the limited availability of cooler places to go to due to: cost of entry to places like cinemas or cafés (28.8%); having nowhere at all to go that is cooler (12.7%). In the comments, people also identified: there being no cool places to go with pets; limited opening hours for some places with public access (e.g. libraries); and there being no cool places to go to at night (i.e. to sleep). We note there may also be fewer cooler places to go in regional or remote locations than in urban areas, and fewer places in poorer urban areas than wealthier urban areas. People receiving income support were more likely to identify the cost of entry to places (32.2%) and the cost of transport (27.5%) as barriers to leaving their home to go somewhere cooler.

"We can't leave the house on hot days because of the cost of transport and cafes, and a lack of mobility. We are immunocompromised and there's a lack of places with adequate ventilation in our rental house."

- Gary, Victoria

Several people across the sample spoke about what they do to cool themselves down in their home. This included: taking cold showers; wearing wet clothes; lying in bed with a wet towel; using a spray bottle; sleeping in a cooler room of the home; and sitting outside at night.

"Literally everything. I have to lie down so I don't lose consciousness." – Claire, Western Australia



# Amid rising energy costs, hot homes contribute to financial stress

Compounding factors in the experience of hot weather for people under financial stress are the rising cost of energy and cost of living generally over the last couple of years. People surveyed described the rising cost of energy as "crippling", which many people receiving income support have been experiencing for years.

Most of the 1007 people surveyed said in the twelve months prior to completing the survey, they were struggling to pay for essentials like:

- energy and other bills (59.8%)
- food (46.7%)
- medicine (41.4%)
- housing (33.6%).

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, people receiving income support were more likely to be struggling to pay for food (56.0%), medicine (48.6%) and housing (36.5%); many were also struggling to pay for energy and other bills (56%).

Many people surveyed spoke of accessing food banks, going without food or medicines, avoiding using their car and restricting social activities to cut costs. The quotes below reflect these responses.

"We often skip meals or eat minimal and poor food, struggle with paying the mortgage and do without new shoes and clothes. We sell items to raise money." – Ang, New South Wales

Paying for energy is a critical concern for most people who completed the survey. Many are changing their behaviour to reduce their energy use and lower bills, although some people were clear they had already done all they can. The following quotes speak to desperate steps people are taking.

"We shower every 2nd or 3rd day now, and really make it fast. We buy more foods that cook quickly - sweet potato, pumpkin, and frozen peas."

- Ivan, New South Wales

"I cut back on all power usage even in heat wave conditions."

- Tina, New South Wales



"All extra money goes to the electricity bill. Quality of life has dropped dramatically. Vehicle registration has been put off in order to keep up payments to electric bill so it doesn't get cut off."

– Letitia, Queensland

"My power bill tripled at the same time as my usage dropped, I was very grateful for the govt. rebate on the next bill. But my welfare payment did not triple when my bill did, it is not keeping up with the price rise in essentials. There is nothing more that I can cut back on."

- Julie, New South Wales

Of the 1007 people surveyed:

- 46.4% are cutting back further on the use of lights
- 45.0% are cutting back further on the use of cooling
- 42.3% are changing how they cook meals, like not using the oven
- 39.9% are taking shorter or fewer hot showers
- 27.6% are not having people over
- 16.7% other, e.g. turning off appliances (e.g. fridge, dryer and hot water heater) or turning off the power altogether for periods of time.

The situation is particularly dire for some groups. Most of the 666 people receiving income support (88%) surveyed said they cannot afford their energy bill and have changed their behaviour to reduce their energy use.

The following quote give some insight into the dehumanising experience of cutting back on essentials just to afford energy bills.

"I've been disconnected before because I could not pay my energy bill. ... I will just be lying in a pool of sweat for the next few months, feeling grateful that at least I live in the South-West, which is cooler than Perth or further North and East."

– Alana, Western Australia

Some of the people surveyed have engaged directly with their energy retailer for help with paying their energy bills:

- 22.4% of people surveyed have asked their retailer to go on or are already on a payment plan (26% of people receiving income support).
- 14.6% of people surveyed have asked their retailer to go on or are already on a hardship plan (19% of people receiving income support).

Energy debt is a serious concern. A quarter of all 1007 people surveyed (25.8%) are currently in energy debt with their retailer or believe they will go into energy debt because they cannot afford their next energy bill. The situation is more likely for the people receiving income support cohort (69.4%). "I'm on a hardship payment plan that doesn't really help pay the debt off and the debt keeps getting larger with each gas reading..."

"We are on a payment plan with our energy provider but with increasing energy prices that debt is still growing." – Hayley, New South Wales

"We are hundreds of dollars in debt for electricity. I have no idea how we're ever going to pay it. We currently have no internet, my phone is about to be disconnected, we have no food and my next Centrelink payment will be immediately eaten up by paying rent and bills."

To get a fuller picture of energy debt, we also asked people whether they had taken other steps to raise funds to pay their energy bills. Of the 1007 people surveyed, some had already borrowed money from family/friends (23.4%), sold something to get cash (23.2%), and or borrowed money from an institution, like pay day loans or Afterpay (14.4%). People receiving income support were slightly more likely to have taken these steps. A few people mentioned using their Centrelink Advance Payments to pay energy bills, which they then struggle to pay back.

In some extreme cases, people have been disconnected because they cannot pay their energy bill. Across the 1007 respondents, 47 had been disconnected in the twelve months leading up to the survey. Of these, 41 had been disconnected because they could not pay their bill. The remaining six people had been disconnected because they ran out of credit on a prepaid meter. While most receive an electricity bill that they pay after their energy use, some people are on prepaid meters. People on prepaid meters pay for their electricity up front,like prepaid mobile phone credit. Theoretically, it means that the user can manage their energy use because they can pay as they go. In practice, this method of payment is extremely challenging as the electricity in the home cuts off automatically when the credit runs out. This has serious implications for keeping the lights, fridge (for food and medicines), fan or air conditioner, or life-saving medical equipment, like respirators, functioning dependably. For people living in remote areas, it can mean a long drive to the nearest town selling electricity credit. Many First Nations people living in remote areas are on prepaid meters, which are required by government policy rather than by choice of the resident.

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) Annual Retail Markets Report 2022-23<sup>10</sup> reported the proportion of residential customers with energy debt increased in 2022-23 compared with the previous year in all jurisdictions. Further, energy debt is currently at its highest level for the past five years. While average energy debt on entry to an energy retailer hardship program decreased in 2022-23 (AER suggests this is due to identifying customers in energy hardship earlier), once in a hardship program, customers' debt continued to rise.

Findings from the 2024 Heat Survey demonstrate that the high cost of energy is compounding the financial stress that many people receiving income support have been experiencing for the last couple of years. Many people who are not on income support are also feeling the financial strain of rising energy costs. **30** 

– Peter, Victoria

– Megan, Western Australia



"Being a low-income worker and a carer, it's a huge toll. The place I live in is always hot and costs me a fortune to try to keep cool."

Findings from the 2024 Heat Survey demonstrate that the high cost of energy bills is compounding the energy stress that many people receiving income support have been experiencing for the last couple of years. Of the 1007 people who responded to the survey, over half have difficulty paying their energy bills. Because of this, during high temperatures, many people are forced to cut back on the use of cooling and other appliances (including fridges), or going without essentials like food and medicine, to keep their energy costs down. Increasingly, people are facing energy debt.



– Mandy, Queensland

## People call on governments to reduce energy bills and help them cope with high heat

We asked people what government action they would like to see, if any, to help deal with the high cost of energy bills and high temperatures in their homes.

Almost all 1007 people who completed the 2024 Heat Survey (96.5%) called on governments to do more to improve homes to be more resilient to extreme heat (and cold) and support people to be able to afford energy bills and other essentials. Asked to rank which solutions were most important to help people on low incomes reduce energy bills and make their homes cooler in summer, respondents ranked them as follows (weighted ranking)<sup>11</sup>:

- 1. Set minimum energy performance standards for rental properties requiring landlords to install measures to reduce energy use and make the home cooler in summer; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, rooftop solar.
- 2. Increase the level of income support (e.g. JobSeeker) to enable people receiving it to be better able to afford energy bills and take other actions to keep cool and safe during extreme weather.
- 3. Fully fund public and community housing providers to retrofit homes to use less energy and be cool in summer; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 4. Increase energy concessions/rebates.
- 5. Provide subsidies to retrofit homes; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 6. Establish stronger building standards for new homes requiring them to use less energy and be cool in summer; e.g. Set at an energy efficiency rating of seven out of ten stars.
- 7. Provide no-interest loans to retrofit homes; e.g. Installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar.
- 8. Provide subsidies to remove gas appliances and install more efficient electric appliances.
- 9. Provide free-to-use cool places to go to during hot weather.

People in the comments section of the survey also recommended governments: subsidise or fund installation of air conditioning for people living with disability, provide specialist accommodation that is energy efficient for people living with disability; green residential areas to reduce ambient heat; ban dark roofing; regain public ownership of energy utilities; and phase out fossil fuel projects to reduce their contribution to climate change.

"Invest in energy efficient infrastructure/building specifically for homes in Australia and especially in northern Australia."

– Holly, Western Australia

"Retro fit ceiling fans into bedrooms of public housing and make it compulsory for landlords to provide working reverse-cycle air conditioning."

"Electricity needs to be more affordable. Whilst looking at cleaner energy, we need to be able to still afford electricity. It's discriminatory that owners can use solar but that's only put up the price for renters."

"Why doesn't every place have solar and insulation in the roof?"

"... everyone living on low income should receive extra income to cool their homes so they do not suffer heat stroke."

- Victoria, South Australia

- Anon, Queensland

- Mandy, Queensland

- Anon, Queensland



# Spotlight on First Nations people's experiences

Of the survey respondents, 6.4% identified as First Nations people. Of these respondents, two-thirds were in social or private rental, and more than three-quarters were receiving income support. The following section presents data collected for this group.

Almost all First Nations respondents said their homes get too hot (93.8%), and 72% struggle to cool their home, compared with 57% of all survey respondents

Of those who struggle to cool their home:

- 31% had no access to air conditioning or fans at all, compared with 20% of all respondents
- 5.5% had air conditioning and or fans but they were broken, 25.7% only have them in part of the home – so the rest of the dwelling stays hot – and 11.4% said they do not make a difference to the indoor temperature
- 15.6% have functioning air conditioning and or fans but cannot afford to run them.

"Nobody can afford \$150 per week electricity, and if we want to use that tiny air conditioning unit in the bedroom, and we all sit in that room together, that is what it costs. I cannot maintain that. That's why I couldn't afford food, and direct debits weren't being covered. Just horrible, horrible times. I wonder how much longer I can keep it up, honestly."

-Rachel, Northern Territory

First Nations respondents are very likely to report poor health outcomes from exposure to high temperatures in their home:

- 94% sometimes or always feeling unwell when their home is hot, compared with 8.5% of all respondents
- 25% had experienced heat stress sufficiently badly in the 12 months prior to completing the survey that they sought medical attention, compared with 14.2% of all respondents
- 98.4% said they sometimes or always have difficulty sleeping in their home on very hot nights or during heatwaves, compared with 94.2% of all respondents
- 21.9% said they experienced overcrowding in the home; overcrowding is stressful to health and wellbeing, particularly during very hot days or heatwaves.

"It gets too hot in my unit to the point where it affects my blood pressure. It drops too low and I black out."

- Casey, New South Wales



"Being a dept of housing house there is poor design and no insulation and not proper glass for windows and inadequate build. Also can't open the windows as they're too hard to open but Housing have done nothing to fix it. I have a disability and have significant medical issues that can very quickly turn life threatening. Heat is one of my triggers... Sick of not being able to function because of the heat."

– M, Western Australia

First Nations people report a range of barriers to leaving home to go somewhere cooler, with cost of entry to cooler places, restricted mobility and cost of transport each affecting over a third of people surveyed.



A high percentage of First Nations respondents are struggling to pay for essentials:



First Nations respondents are more likely to be cutting back on their energy use to afford bills:

Almost all First Nations respondents (94%) cannot afford their energy bill and have taken steps to reduce their energy use, compared to 83% of all respondents.



While disconnection only affected a small number of people overall in the survey, First Nations people represented over a guarter of those disconnected:

- there were 41 people who had been disconnected because they could not pay their energy bill; of these, 11 were First Nations people
- two of the six people who had been disconnected because they ran out of credit on their prepaid meter were First Nations people.

These results highlight that rise in cost of living and energy bills, living in homes with poor energy performance and living on a low income is making life incredibly difficult for many of the First Nations people surveyed, with serious health, financial and relationship implications:

"The energy costs on top of disability and medical costs is insane and then the costs of living are sky high."

The situation facing First Nations people in our survey was worse than for non-First Nations people on almost every measure. This shows that this group needs priority assistance to deal with heat in their homes and support around the cost of energy and energy debt. 40



- Steven, New South Wales

– M, Western Australia

# What has changed since 2023 and where to now?

The ACOSS 2024 Heat Survey findings are similar to those of the ACOSS 2023 Heat Survey. However, a hotter summer in 2023/24, coupled with rising costs for energy, housing, food and other essentials were reflected in people's comments. There was a clear level of distress amongst people surveyed about the growing challenge to reduce the impacts of heat, while being able to afford energy bills, and avoid getting into or increasing their existing energy debt.

The 2024 Heat Survey found that hot homes negatively and seriously affect people's physical and mental health, reduce sleep, lower productivity, reduce social connectedness and can raise tensions amongst household members.

People experiencing financial and social disadvantage who have the least resources are at most risk of heat-related impacts, and struggle to stay safe. People with pre-existing health conditions or living with disability are especially at risk of heat-related illness and incapacity. First Nations people are at heightened risk of heat-related impacts, from a range of factors including: being more likely to be living in social housing;more likely to experience overcrowding in the home; and more likely to be on a low income and in receipt of income support. Australian population data also indicate that First Nations people are more likely to be living with disability or chronic illness than non-First Nations people, which may make them more susceptible to heat-related health impacts.

The survey highlighted that people who rent or are in social housing have very limited options to improve the thermal comfort of their home. Even for people in social housing or private rental who have fans and or air conditioning, many of these appliances were insufficient to cool the home, or were broken or were too expensive to run (particularly if the home had unsealed doors and windows and lacked insulation and/or shading).

Trying to cool a home can lead to higher energy bills, forcing many people into increasing energy debt - with their retailer, family or friends, or via payday loans. The survey showed many people are being forced to cut back on their energy use and go without essentials (like food and medicine) just to be able to afford their energy bills.

As Australian summers become hotter, with more frequent and longer heatwaves, people experiencing financial and social disadvantage will experience worsening impacts of high temperatures in their homes. That is, unless governments intervene urgently and effectively to reduce emissions, improve the energy efficiency of low-income housing, address rising energy costs and raise the level of income support. People who completed the 2024 Heat Survey clearly identified what they saw as priority actions for government. ACOSS supports these priorities and recommends that Australian governments take the following actions.

![](_page_21_Picture_7.jpeg)

### **Key conclusions and ACOSS recommendations**

Most of the people who completed the ACOSS 2024 Heat Survey described their housing as too hot in summer and impossible or expensive to cool, creating significant financial stress and detrimental impacts on their health and wellbeing. Most lacked the finances, choice and control to make changes to the energy performance of their homes.

A recent report by ACOSS, Funding and Financing Energy Performance and Climate resilience of Low-income Housing,<sup>12</sup> found there is an urgent need to direct government investment to improving the energy performance of low-income housing, alongside enablers such as rating schemes, one-stop-shops and regulation. In addition to improving economic and health outcomes for residents, such actions would have added benefits of building economies of scale and market capacity to reduce costs for all housing upgrades. The report recommended the Commonwealth Government establish a fund to facilitate deep and rapid energy performance and climate-resilient upgrades for low-income housing (public, community, owner-occupier and private rental), which could be expanded to the broader residential sector if needed.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Commonwealth Government establish a Special Purpose Funding Vehicle, with an initial injection of \$2 billion, topped up by other sources, to invest in deep and rapid energy performance measures (energy efficiency, electrification and rooftop solar), tailored across low-income housing tenure types - public housing, community housing, First Nations controlled housing, private rental and low-income owner-occupier (see recommendations 2, 3 and 4 below).

In the ACOSS 2024 Heat Survey, over 80% of people in social housing struggle to cool their homes when they get too hot. The situation facing First Nations people surveyed, most of whom were in social housing, was much worse on almost every measure in this survey. The Commonwealth Government's \$300 million social housing upgrades fund announced in the 2023 Budget, to be matched by state and territory governments is very welcome and a good start, but will only support energy performance upgrades for 15% of social housing dwellings.

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Commonwealth Government build on the existing \$300 million social housing upgrade funds to establish a 7-year program to fund energy performance and climateresilience upgrades to all public housing, community housing and First Nations community-controlled housing by 2030. First Nations housing energy upgrades should be prioritised and the programs should be developed in partnership with First Nations communities.

Private rental properties house a significant proportion of people on low incomes. We saw in the survey that low-income private renters experience 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 the most effective policy intervention to improve energy performance in rental homes. Incentives will be needed alongside regulation to upgrade private rental properties.

#### **Recommendation 3**

To improve the energy performance of all private rental properties by 2035, the following measures should be implemented:

a. State and territory governments implement scalable 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 standards by 2025 in all jurisdictions, providing 3-4 years for full compliance.

b. The Commonwealth Government amend tax laws so that capital works deductions for new or replacement appliances for rental properties are only available for accredited energy efficient and electric appliances.

c. The Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to establish incentive programs to private landlords, including through Environmental Upgrade Finance (EUF) instruments, to assist with access to low-cost finance and targeted subsidies (in exchange for caps in rent increases above CPI) alongside outreach measures and one-stop shops to support delivery

By far the biggest group of low-income households are owner-occupiers, with approximately 1.1 million households that fall into the category. Most are likely to be people receiving an age pension who own or are paying off their home but have a very low fixed income. Additional financial support is required to overcome the need to pay upfront costs, reduce overall cost, and provide access to trusted and culturally appropriate information and trades.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to establish programs, including through EUFs instruments, to support low-income owner-occupier home energy upgrades by 2030. Supports include free energy audits, subsidised upgrades, zero-interest loans, community outreach and one-stop-shops to support delivery.

Energy concessions and annual rebates do not adequately meet the needs of people on low incomes to afford their energy bills. Use of the fixed concession amount does not respond to energy price changes, seasonal variations in energy use, or the energy performance of a home. Eligible people are not receiving it and some people who need it are not eligible.

#### **Recommendation 5**

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.

Reducing the costs of energy is imperative to enable people to afford to cool their home and not go without the basics to afford energy bills. The Small-Scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES), in place until 2030, subsidises the costs of installing smallscale renewable energy sources (such as rooftop solar and hot water heat pumps) to households which can afford and access them. The cost is currently recouped through business and household electricity bills as a portion of energy consumption, with GST being charged on top. The cost of the SRES is pushing up energy bills. People on low incomes contribute disproportionately more to the costs of the SRES, while wealthier households receive greater direct benefits.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Commonwealth Government remove the Small-Scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES) levy paid through electricity bills and instead covers the cost of the scheme via Federal government budget.

The survey showed people experiencing financial and social disadvantage are limiting their use of energy to afford bills. That is, limiting their use of air conditioning and fans, ovens, fridges, hot water and other appliances. They are also going without food or medicine, avoiding social activities and use of their car, if they have one. People also borrowed money from friends and families to pay the bills or borrowed money from an institution, like payday loans or Afterpay. Yet, more than a quarter of those surveyed already have or are facing an energy debt. The AER Annual Retail Markets Report 2022-23 shows that for people entering an energy retailer hardship program, their energy debt continues to increase. Direct assistance by government is needed before debt spirals out of control and becomes more unmanageable.

#### **Recommendation 7**

The Commonwealth Government provide up to \$2,000 per person experiencing energy hardship with unmanageable energy debt and work with retailers to provide additional relief to those customers with debts greater than \$2,000 and help customers reduce their bills going forward.

Many people surveyed did not have adequate income to pay their energy bills and other essentials. Australia's income support system should provide enough to cover the basics. Currently, our income support system is not working because social security payments such as JobSeeker remain grossly inadequate, while the cost of living, especially housing, energy and food prices, have risen dramatically. The Federal Government must build on the \$20 a week increase delivered in the 2023 Budget, and substantially lift base rates

of JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy, Special Benefit, Parenting Payment and Crisis Payment. These payments should be brought up to the same level as the pension, plus pension supplement.

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Commonwealth Government immediately raise income support payments to improve the capacity of people on low incomes to manage energy bills, including JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy and Special benefit to at least \$78 a day, in line with the pension.

Current government and medical advice is that people should leave home to go somewhere cooler during very hot days and heatwaves. While such places will not be accessible to everyone (e.g. people with mobility limitations), where they are available they can and do offer an important respite for people who are able to leave their home.

#### **Recommendation 9**

Governments fund the provision of and access to locally and culturally appropriate free-to-use cool spaces to go to during hot weather. Prioritising community run spaces where people already go to for services such as community centres, libraries, neighbourhood houses, and other local community services.

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.

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments work collaboratively to prioritise a work program on heatwaves, which would include the examination of the impact of heatwaves on people and communities at risk, 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 support people most at risk to stay cool when these events occur.

The situation for people experiencing homelessness is deteriorating with the cost-ofliving crisis and an insufficient supply of low-income housing right around the country. People experiencing homelessness need significant increased investment in accessible, climate resilient and affordable housing, an increase in income support, a boost to homelessness services and a new national First Nations Housing Strategy.

### **Appendices**

### Appendix A: Survey respondent demographics

### Location

State/Territory	Number	%
New South Wales	242	24
Queensland	224	22.2
Victoria	190	18.8
Western Australia	183	18.1
South Australia	114	11.3
ACT	14	1.4
Tasmania	11	1.1
Northern Territory	11	1.1
No fixed address	19	1.9
Total	1007	

#### Age

Gender	Number	%
18-24	27	2.7
23-34	90	8.9
35-49	227	22.5
50-64	344	34.2
65-79	279	27.7
80+	40	4.0
Total	1007	

#### Gender

Gender	Number	%
Woman or female	670	66.5
Man or male	275	27.3
Non-binary	30	3.0
Prefer not to say	23	2.3
I use a different term	9	0.9
Total	1007	

### Ethnic/cultural background

Origin of birth	Number	%
Born in Australia	714	70.9
Born overseas	195	19.4
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	64	6.4
Prefer not to say	34	3.4
Total	1007	

English as main language spoken in the home	Number	%
English as main language	982	97.5
Another language as main language	25	2.5
Total	1007	

### **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Survey respondent demographics**

#### **Disability or chronic illness**

Household member/s with a disability or chronic illness	Number	%
Have a disability or chronic illness	632	62.7
Do not have a disability or chronic illness	375	37.3
Total	1007	

#### Living situation

Living situation	Number	%
Own my home/paying a mortgage	340	33.8
Renting from real estate agency	274	27.2
Renting in social housing (public or community housing)	189	19.2
Renting directly from a landlord	90	8.9
Living with family or friends	52	5.2
Living in a retirement home/village	21	2.1
No fixed address	18	1.8
Living in a caravan/shed	7	0.7
House share/guesthouse	6	0.6
Renting in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander social housing	5	0.5
Other	5	0.5
Total	1007	

#### **Income support**

Receiving income support	Number	% of total respondents
Age Pension	197	19.6
Disability Support Pension	176	17.5
JobSeeker Payment	161	16.0
Carer Payment	73	7.3
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	57	5.7
Parenting Payment Single & Partnered	34	3.4
Family Tax Benefit/ Childcare subsidy	11	1.1
Austudy	8	0.8
Youth Allowance	7	0.7
AbStudy	6	0.8
Mobility allowance	3	0.3
Remote Area Allowance	0	0
Other	4	0.4

\*666 OF 1007 respondents indicated that they were in receipt of some form of income support, noting some respondents may be receiving multiple payments.

### **Appendices**

### **Appendix B: Survey question**

- 1. Name:
- 2. Email address:
- 3. Phone number:
- 4. Postcode:
- 5. In the summer is your home:
- Always comfortable, no need for cooling
- Mostly comfortable and I can cool it when I need to
- Too hot but I can and do cool it
- Too hot and I struggle to cool it
- 6. If you answered Yes to "Too hot and I struggle to cool it", why is that?
- I don't have any air-conditioning or fans
- I have air conditioning/fans but can't afford to run them
- I have air-conditioning/fans but they're broken
- I have air-conditioning/fans but they don't make a difference
- I only have air-conditioning in part of the house, so the rest of the home stays hot Other
- 7. Is there anything you would like to add about the challenges to keeping your home cool?
- 8. Does anything stop you leaving your home to find a cooler location (e.g. supermarket, library, community centre, home of family/friend)? Choose as many as you like
- I don't need to leave because my home doesn't need cooling in the summer
- Cost of transport
- Lack of transport options
- Lack of mobility
- Cost of entry (e.g. to cinema, café)
- Nowhere to go that's cooler •
- Other
- 9. Are there activities you avoid on hot days? Choose as many as you like
- No, I don't avoid any activities
- Getting groceries/other essentials
- Accessing government services (e.g. Road Traffic Authority)
- Attending medical appointments
- Exercise and/or walking pets
- Gardening
- Socialising

10. Is there anything you would like to add about how you deal with the summer heat?

11. Do you have trouble sleeping in your home on very hot nights or during heatwaves?

- No
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, always
- Other
- 12. Do you ever feel unwell at home because of the heat?
- No
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, always
- Other

- 13. In the last 12 months, have you been to a doctor or sought medical care because your home was too hot?
- No
- Yes, sometimes ٠
- Yes, always •
- Other •
- 14. Is there anything you would like to add about how you or others in your household are affected by the heat?
- 15. In the last 12 months, due to your financial situation, has there been a time when you struggled to: Choose as many as you like
- Buy food
- Buy medicine
- Pay for energy and other bills
- Pay for your housing
- No, I have had enough money to pay for these things
- Buy food
- Buy medicine
- Pay for energy and other bills
- Pay for your housing
- No, I have had enough money to pay for these things
- 16. How have you been managing the cost of energy bills? Choose as many as you like
- I can afford my energy bill and so have not changed my behaviour
- Changing how I cook meals, like not using the oven
- Cutting back further on the use of cooling
- Cutting back further on the use of lights
- Not having people over
- Taking shorter or fewer hot showers
- Turning off the fridge
- Sold something to get cash
- Borrowed money from family/friends
- Borrowed money from an institution (i.e. pay day loans, after pay)
- 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
- 17. Do you currently have an energy debt or will you go into energy debt because you can't afford your next energy bill?
- Yes
- No ٠
- 18. In the past 12 months, have you been disconnected because you could not pay your energy bill or ran out of credit on a prepaid meter?
- No
- Yes, disconnected because I could not pay my energy bill
- Yes, disconnected because I ran out of credit on a prepaid meter
- 19. Is there anything you would like to add about the impact of high energy prices for you?

51

- 20. Should governments be doing more to help reduce energy bills and manage heat risk for homes?
- Nothing more that governments should be doing
- Governments should do more
- 21. Please rank the following from 1-9, with 1 as most important and 9 as least important in helping people on low income reduce energy bills and make their homes cooler in summer:
- Provide no-interest loans to retrofit homes (e.g., installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar)
- Provide subsidies to retrofit homes (e.g. installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar)
- Fully fund public and community housing providers to retrofit homes to use less energy and be cool in summer (e.g. insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, hot water heat pumps, rooftop solar)
- Set minimum energy performance standards for rental properties requiring landlords to install measures to reduce energy use and make the home cooler in summer (e.g. installing insulation, reverse-cycle air conditioners, rooftop solar)
- Set stronger building standards for new homes requiring them to use less energy and be cool in summer (e.g. set at an energy efficiency rating of 7 out of 10 stars)
- Provide subsidies to remove gas appliances and install more efficient electric appliances
- Increase energy concessions/rebates
- Increase JobSeeker and related income support allowances
- Provide free-to-use cool places to go to during hot weather
- 22. Is there anything else you think governments should be doing to help reduce energy bills and manage heat risk for homes?

23. Is there anything else you would like to share about dealing with heat in your home? 24.Gender

- Woman or female
- Man or male
- Non-binary
- I use a different term
- Prefer not to answer

25.Age

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

26. Are you currently receiving any income support payments? Choose as many as you like

- AbStudy
- Age Pension
- Carer Payment
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance
- **Disability Support Pension**
- JobSeeker Payment
- Parenting Payment Single
- **Remote Area Allowance**
- Youth Allowance
- I'm not receiving any form of income support
- Other •
- 27. Ethnic/cultural background
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Born in Australia
- Born overseas
- Prefer not to say
- 28.1s English the main language spoken at home?
- Yes
- No
- 29.Do you or does someone in your household have a disability or chronic medical for at least 12 months?
- Yes
- No
- 30.What is your living situation?
- No fixed address
- Living in a caravan
- Living in a retirement home/village
- Renting in social housing (public or community housing)
- Renting in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander social housing
- Renting from a real estate agency
- Renting directly from a landlord
- Own my own home/paying a mortgage
- Living with family or friends
- Other
- 31. Does your home have enough space for the number of people who regularly live there?
- Enough space
- Overcrowded

### condition that restricts your/their everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last,

### **Endnotes**

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

2 The survey asked respondents to rank initiatives in order of priority. The analysis accorded each position with a weighting. Weights are applied in reverse. That is, the respondent's most preferred choice (which they rank as #1) has the largest weight of 9, and their least preferred choice (which they rank in the last position) has a weight of 1. The answer choice with the largest average ranking is the most preferred choice.

3 Copernicus Climate Change Service (2023) Global Climate Highlights 2023: Copernicus: 2023 is the hottest year on record, with global temperatures close to the 1.5°C limit. Available: https://bit.ly/3UVgv3I

4 Bureau of Meteorology, Australia's Changing Climate (webpage). Available: http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/australias-changing-climate.shtml

5 L Coates et al, op.cit.

6 ANU Institute for Climate Energy and Disaster Solutions (2021), We know that heat kills; accurately measuring these deaths will help us assess the impacts of climate change, 25 February. Available:

https://iceds.anu.edu.au/research/research-stories/we-know-heat-kills-accuratelymeasuring-these-deaths-will-help-us-assess.

7 World Health Organization (2018), Heat and Health. Available: https://www. who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-heat-and-health. World Health Organization Heatwaves. Available: https://www.who.int/health-topics/ heatwaves#tab=tab\_1

8 ibid

9 Minor K, Bjerre-Nielsen A, Jonasdottir SS, Lehmann S & Obradovich N (2022), 'Rising temperatures erode human sleep globally, One Earth, vol 5, issue 5, pp 534-549. Available: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332222002093

10 AER (2023), Annual retail markets report 2022–23 Available: https://www.aer.gov. au/system/files/2023-11/Annual%20Retail%20Market%20Report%202022-23%20-%20 30%20November%202023\_1.pdf

11 See Endnote 2

12 ACOSS (2024), Funding and Financing Energy performance and Climate-resileince retrofits for Low-income housing Available: https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/ uploads/2024/02/ACOSS-Report-Funding-and-Financing-Low-income-retrofits-January-2024-.pdf

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![](_page_29_Picture_0.jpeg)

![](_page_29_Picture_1.jpeg)

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