

A photograph of a family hiking on a paved trail in a forest. A woman in a black jacket and orange backpack is on the left, a small child in a red jacket is in the middle, and a man in a blue patterned jacket and grey pants is on the right, using trekking poles. The trail is wet and surrounded by dense green foliage and trees.

The NEW Experience Economy:

The Intersection of Arts, Culture, Sports & Recreation in a
Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Environment

Phase 5 Results
April 2021

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Meet the supporters behind the work.

This initiative is being funded by leaders who see an opportunity to support organizations which bring remarkable experiences to life in communities across Alberta. **We thank them for their generous support.**



Background & Purpose

The overarching purpose of this work is to give leaders of community sports, recreation, arts & culture, professional sports, active living, heritage, tourism or hospitality sectors relevant facts about where we are right now and to continue building recovery solutions that enable organizations in these important sectors to adapt and thrive.

Now a full year into the pandemic, restrictions are shifting again along with the availability of experiences for Albertans. The fifth round of research focuses on the following:



Monitoring key attitudes, consumer mindset, measures of comfort and risk;



Capture a deeper understanding of how interests and priorities are shifting;



Explore consumer expectations or financial support and monetizing experiences; and,



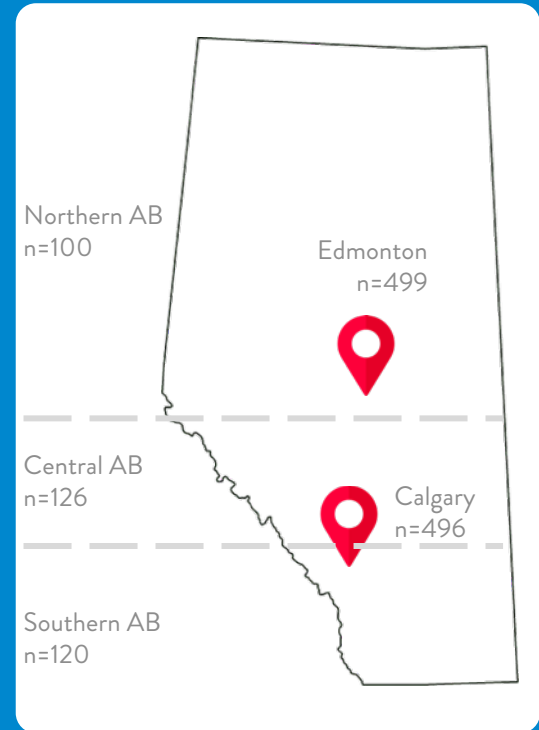
Understand how attitudes towards vaccines might impact behaviours and engagement.

Overview of Research Process:

The research process is designed to run in regular intervals over the course of one year (a total of six phases) to assist organizations in planning effectively over the long term.

Results presented represent the findings from Phase 5. All phases follow the same methodology.

- Online (longitudinal) survey with Alberta residents, aged 18 years and older.
- Respondents were recruited through a partnership with Angus Reid Forum.
- Regional quotas were applied to ensure the sampling was representative of Alberta's population.
- Supplemental surveys were conducted with residents of Calgary and Edmonton.
- A total of 1,346 Albertans participated in this third phase of research. Responses include 1,035 regionally balanced core sample, plus supplemental (booster) responses for Calgary and Edmonton.
- The longitudinal survey includes 81% of respondents retained from phase 3 (19% of respondents new for phase 5).
- Data collection occurred between March 5 to March 22, 2021.
- Statistical weighting was used to further ensure the integrity of the final data set. Results were weighted (based on the most recent census data) to more accurately reflect the age and gender distributions of each region.

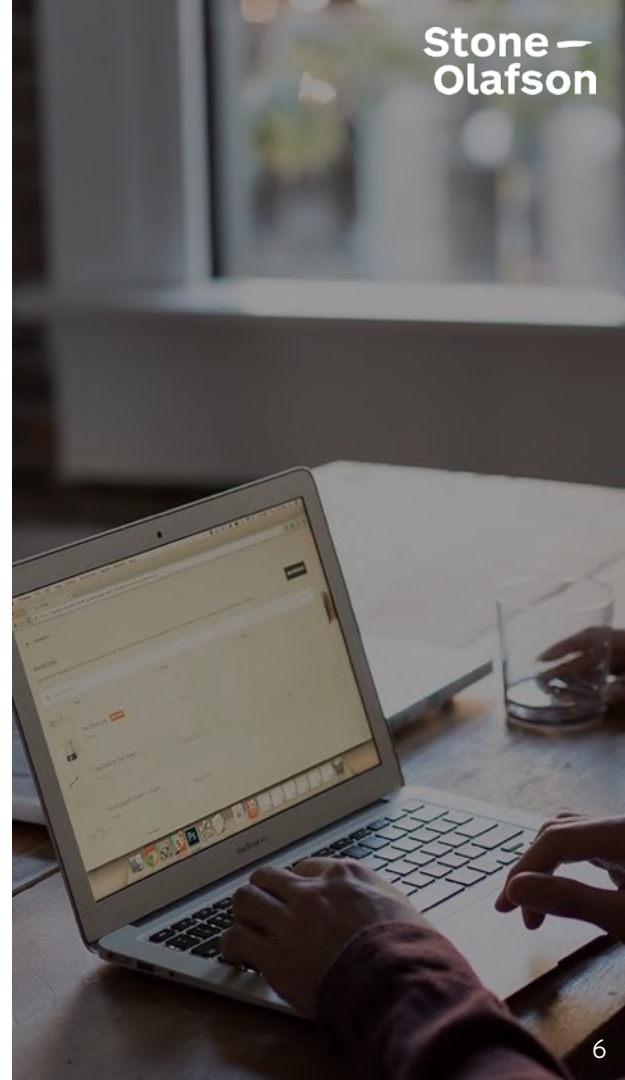


Additional Notes on Reading the Report

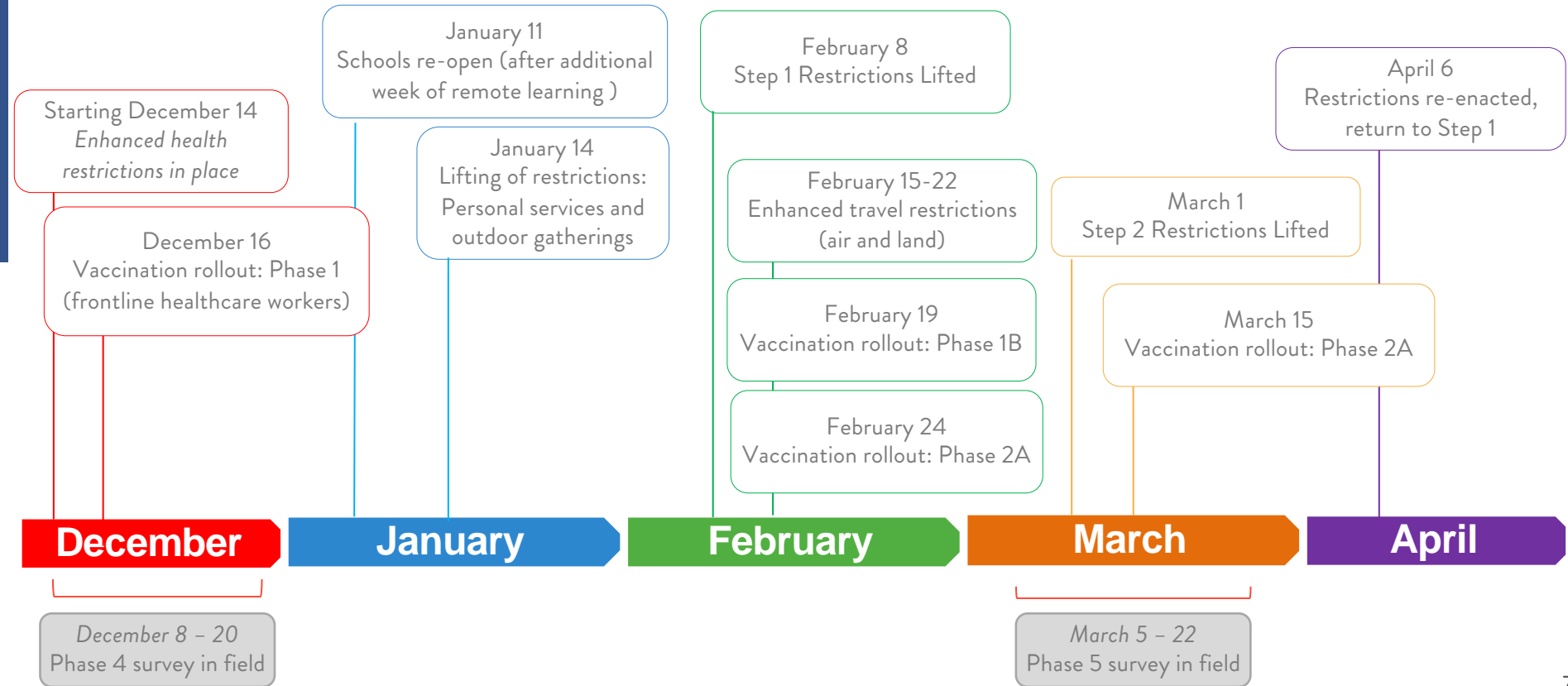
Numbers presented have been rounded and sums may not correspond exactly to numbers in the detailed data tables made available.

Throughout the report, arrows are used to indicate a statistically significant results (up or down).

Due to the inclusion of online, non-random sampling, a standard margin of error is not calculated for the results. However, an *approximate* rate of reliability typically associated with an overall sample of this size would be +/- 2.7%, 19 times out of 20.

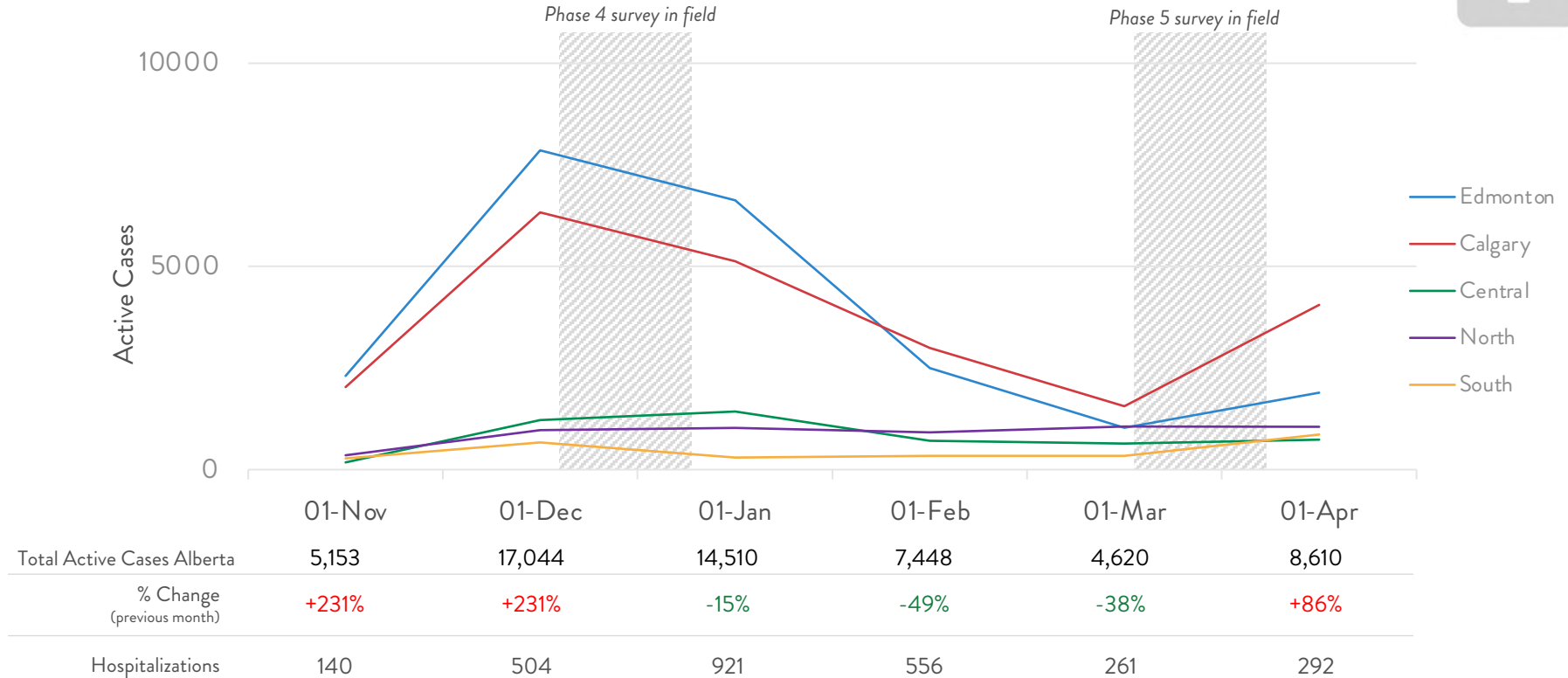


Mapping the progression of COVID-19 in Alberta



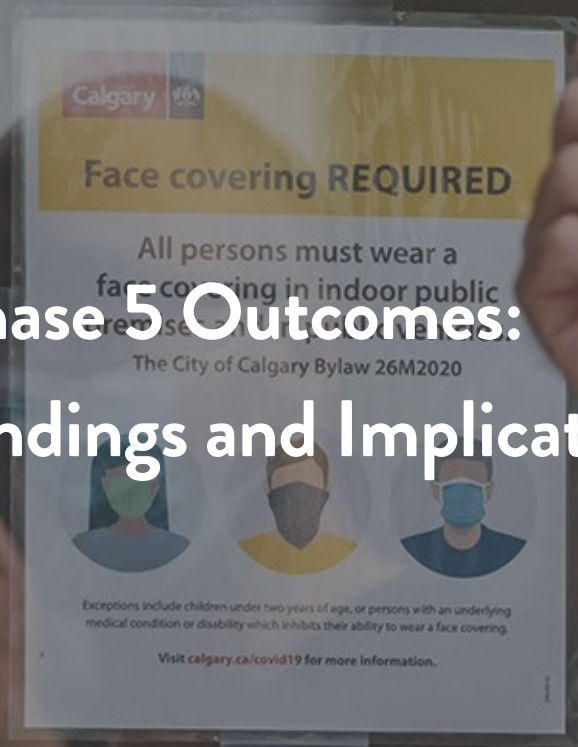


COVID Contexts: By the Numbers



Phase 5 Outcomes:

Findings and Implications for Alberta Organizations



1.

Comfort has predictably shifted again

In the previous phase, rising case numbers and increased restrictions impacted comfort in a negative way. This has shifted yet again as case numbers have fallen and restrictions lifted since January. While there is a growing polarization where Albertans are more likely to put themselves at opposite ends of the scale, patterns are generally becoming more predictable in relation to cases and restrictions. There is a cadence to the psychology of Albertans emerging where we can start to understand what people need and what they'll do based on the news cycle.

Understanding the basic comfort levels of Albertans is more crucial than ever for organizations at this stage of the pandemic because if you overlook how your audience is feeling, you are not positioned to respond to them with appropriate messaging, programs, or even measures to make them feel safe.

Why does this matter? Albertans are continuing to pay attention to restrictions, hospitalizations, and vaccinations which impact comfort levels. At this stage of the pandemic, a successful vaccine rollout appears to be the most critical tool to increase comfort and while this is well outside the control of most organizations, it is a stark reminder of the necessity of paying close attention to your audience or risk being caught flat-footed when the tides shift again. Tuning communications and programming to align with the mindset of your audience will be crucial to successful engagement.

2.

Our psychological mindset reflects a pent-up demand

This is a confused market right now. Pinpointing exactly how Albertans are feeling in an effort to respond to them is no easy task. While emotions are still primarily negative, they do not all reflect the same sentiment. Feelings of frustration, exhaustion and impatience reflect a pent-up demand to get going, which is very distinct from more hostile feelings like anger alone or more despondent emotions like sadness or worry.

Audiences are being pulled in different directions which also changes depending on the news cycle. This is psychological whiplash in many respects.

Why does this matter? The ongoing tension between case numbers/following the rules and a strong desire to get going is contributing to emotional conditions of the market. Understanding this tension provides some clues about what organizations can do next.

- First, knowing consumer sentiment reflects a pent-up demand, organizations **MUST** capitalize and continue their planning to be ready to offer experiences on short notice, even if it feels precariously unproductive. Be ready to go.
- Second, recognize how your messaging and programming choices will land with an audience who is feeling this way. Reassuring, positive and productive approaches are likely to resonate more than ones that feed into the negative emotions, challenge audiences or reinforce impatience.

3.

The banana bread phase is getting stale

The habits of Albertans have changed, much of it forced by restrictions and limited availability of activities. And while many Albertans have discovered new things to do (47% say a good thing to come out of this pandemic is finding new things to do), interests have not shifted at the same rate as behaviours.

Why is that? The activities that Albertans used to do pre-pandemic were filling a need and these needs haven't gone away. Over one year into the pandemic, the appeal of “pandemic trends” such as baking, zoom calls and other new hobbies may not have same appeal as they did last spring because audiences are through with filling time. There is greater clarity of what we like and what we are eager to get back to. And while this does not mean that Albertans will quickly abandon all new ways of doing things, there is an obvious fatigue that comes with being restricted in what you can do.

Why does this matter? A clear outcome of the pandemic is providing people more flexibility in choosing what they do and how they do it. Remember, Albertans are experience pursuers more than fans of any type of art-form, entertainment or sport. Self-directed activities allow for quicker gratification, less commitment, are easy to do, and meet health restrictions. These are likely here to stay but at some point, audiences will also want the full experiences provided as well. There will need to be room for both. One way to do this is to start thinking about alternative models of program delivery over the long term (in the way that cable companies have had to adjust to the emergence of streaming platforms).

4.

The desire for flexibility extends to financial support

Audiences have accelerated their desire for innovation and flexibility in pursuit of experiences. Pre-pandemic, we already saw a distinct move in this direction, towards more self-directed activities and options that offered unique/different experiences. This is not necessarily a pandemic outcome, but the trend has been accelerated by the pandemic and related uncertainty. Therefore, it is critical that organizations stop asking “what can we do to counteract this trend”, but instead, ask themselves how they can adapt and grow into this trend.

The same principles apply to financial support. Over half of Albertans are willing to support an organization financially without a full guarantee of the experience but do not want to be forced. (Remember, they are getting impatient with restrictions or rules.) How they wish to do so needs to provide them flexibility and ownership.

Why does this matter? Just as you consider how to adapt your offerings for program delivery to be more flexible, offer flexibility in support options.

- Gift cards have an obvious flexibility but feel safe and secure.
- Donations are an altruistic version of support that also allows for audiences to support organizations on their own terms. Consider this as a payment option for some programs.
- As audiences seek flexibility and innovation there is likely less demand for seasons passes or subscriptions. Alternative models of support that enable their desires for increased flexibility may need to be explored

5.

Prolonged events highlight how we prioritize differently.

A crisis will always challenge what we prioritize as important. Because this pandemic is unique in its duration and its breadth of impact, priorities have shifted from from a more global/broader perspective to one that is intensely personal. This includes a renewed focus on family and self (health, mental wellbeing, etc.) over politics, the economy, discovering new interests, etc.

While it is unlikely people would ever de-prioritize family and wellbeing completely, there has never been a need to worry about them to the same degree and organizations need to tap into this. The fitness world has already done so on the physical side (think Peloton and immersive digital experiences focused on wellness) but all organizations in the experience economy should think about how to respond to a renewed focus on family, health, and wellbeing for their benefit.

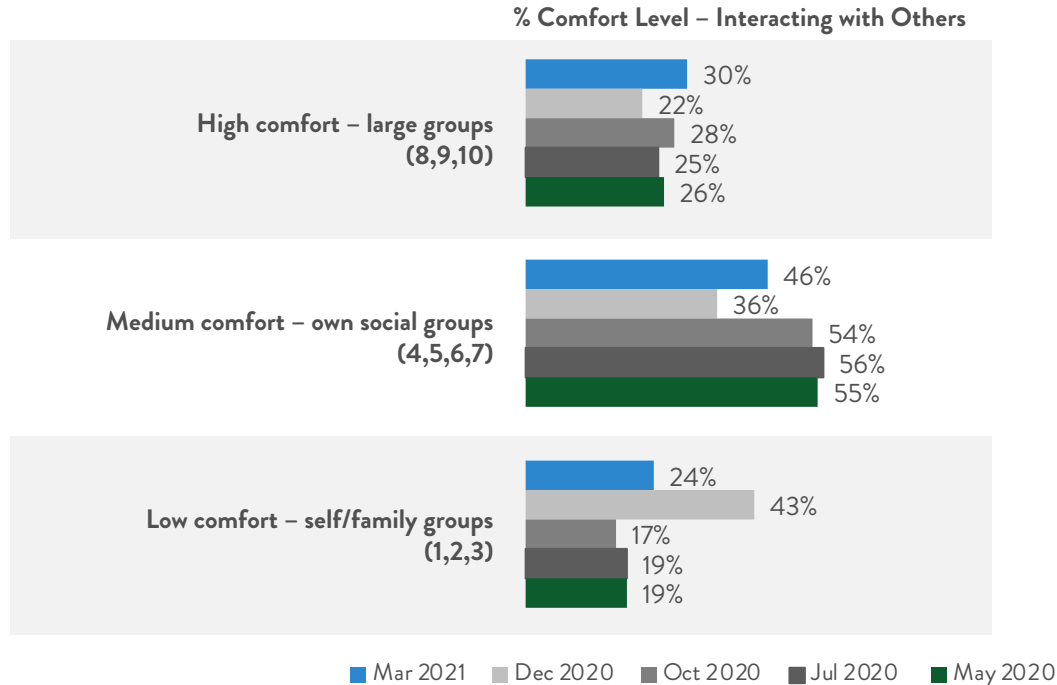
Why does this matter? As you appeal to the motivations of Albertans to re-engage, consider elevating the messages focused on care and wellbeing as these are rising in priority. Consider how to design experiences and deliver content that highlights these themes. This applies to all corners of the experience economy given the impact on intellectual, emotional and physical well-being.

A photograph of a man and a woman in an indoor setting, both wearing light blue surgical face masks. The man, on the left, is looking towards the camera. The woman, on the right, is looking at the man and has her right hand resting on his left shoulder. The background is a blurred interior space with large windows. The text "Comfort levels, risk tolerance, and consumer mindset" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

Comfort levels, risk tolerance, and consumer mindset

Comfort levels have started to show polarization

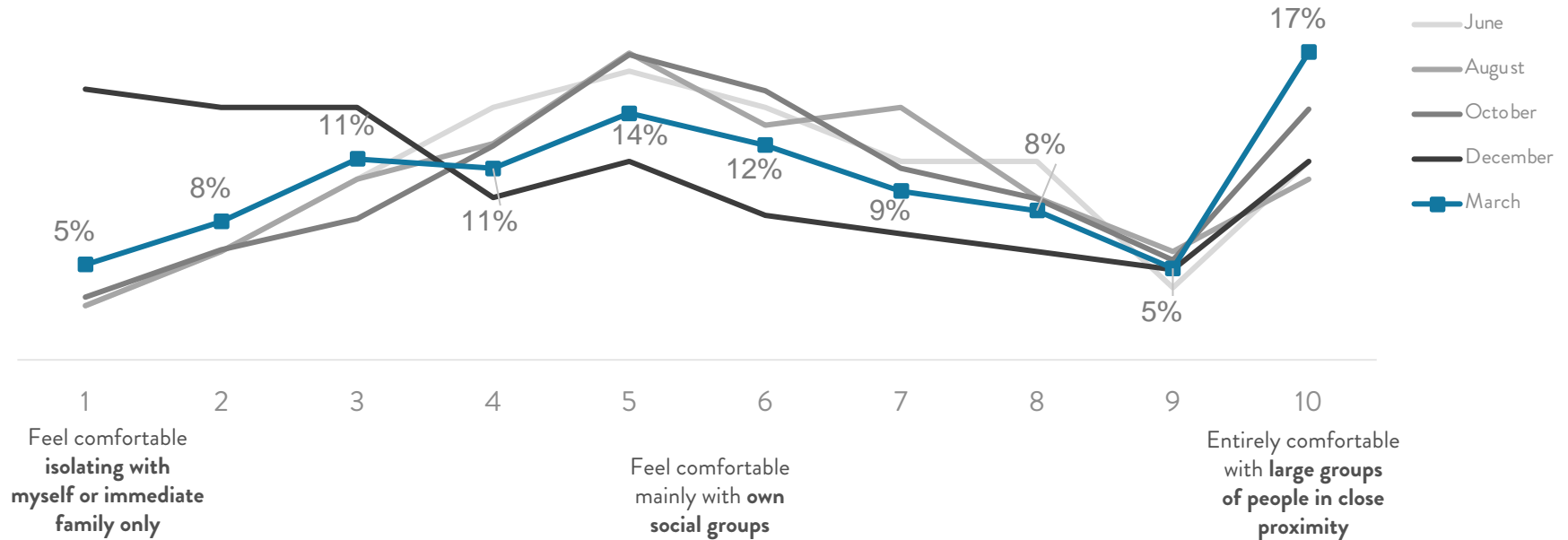
In Phase 4, rising case numbers impacted comfort in a negative way with Albertans feeling more uneasy around groups of people. That trend has been somewhat reversed as case numbers soften. However, there is a growing polarization with fewer Albertans sitting in the middle group.



As Albertans start to re-connect with the community, everyone has a different comfort level in terms of interacting with others. Based on how you feel today, how comfortable are you with reintegrating or re-connecting with your community? *Base: Main sample (n=1035).*

Shifts in comfort track with case numbers and levels of restrictions

% Comfort level – Interacting with Others



As Albertans start to re-connect with the community, everyone has a different comfort level in terms of interacting with others. Based on how you feel today, how comfortable are you with reintegrating or re-connecting with your community?

Base: Main sample (n=1035)

Comfort continues to show differences on a regional basis

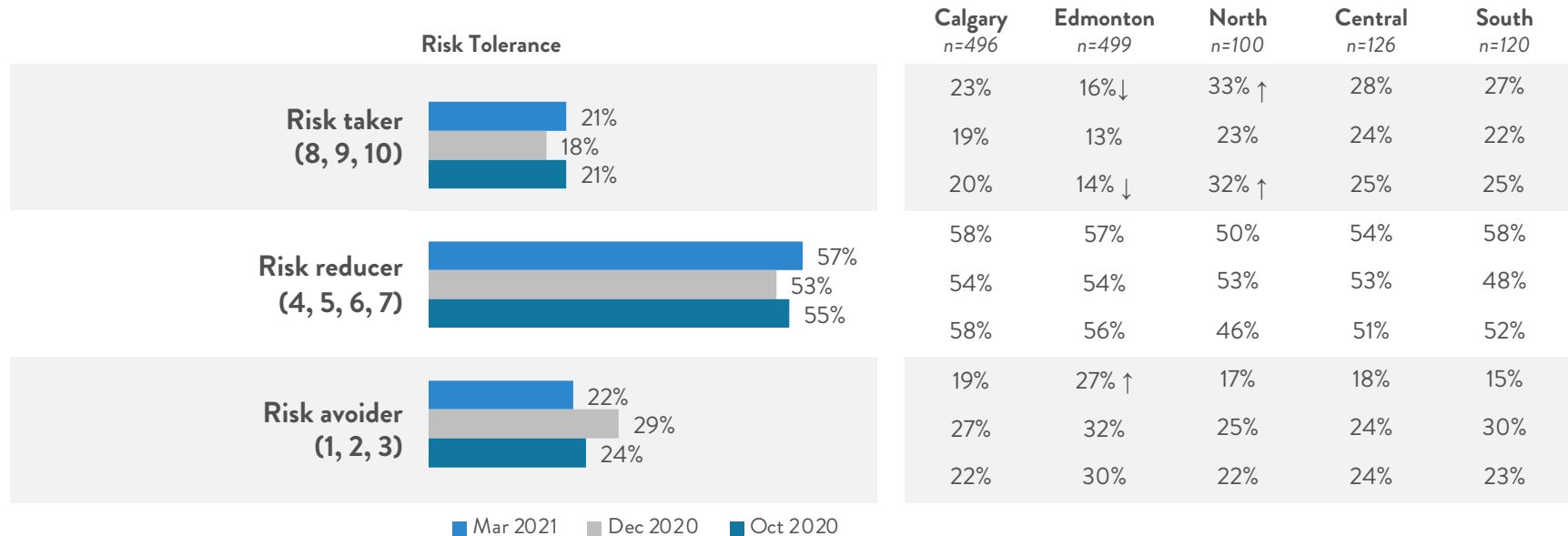
While comfort has increased in Calgary compared to the previous wave, rural regions continue to have much higher comfort levels overall.

% Comfort Level – Interacting with Others		Mar 2021	Dec 2020	Oct 2020	Jul 2020	May 2020
Calgary	High Comfort	33%	26%	22%	25%	21%
	Medium Comfort	44%	55%	58%	56%	37%
	Low Comfort	24%	19%	21%	19%	42%
Edmonton	High Comfort	24%	19% ↓	19%	23%	16%
	Medium Comfort	49%	58%	58%	58%	37%
	Low Comfort	27%	22%	24%	19%	47%
North	High Comfort	44% ↑	42% ↑	33%	39% ↑	29%
	Medium Comfort	39%	45%	58%	42% ↓	44%
	Low Comfort	17%	13%	9%	19%	26% ↓
Central	High Comfort	35%	38%	26%	30%	29%
	Medium Comfort	44%	51%	59%	57%	36%
	Low Comfort	21%	11%	15%	13%	35%
South	High Comfort	40%	30%	30%	30%	27%
	Medium Comfort	47%	54%	55%	51%	34%
	Low Comfort	14% ↓	16%	15%	19%	39%

As Albertans start to re-connect with the community, everyone has a different comfort level in terms of interacting with others. Based on how you feel today, how comfortable are you with reintegrating or re-connecting with your community? Base: Main sample (n=1035). Note: Calgary + Edmonton include supplemental sample

But risk tolerance remains stable

The majority of Albertans continue to fall into the risk reducer category, across all regions of the provinces. Despite comfort shifting as case numbers move, there is still a desire and willingness to participate if activities align with tolerance for risk (and restrictions allow).

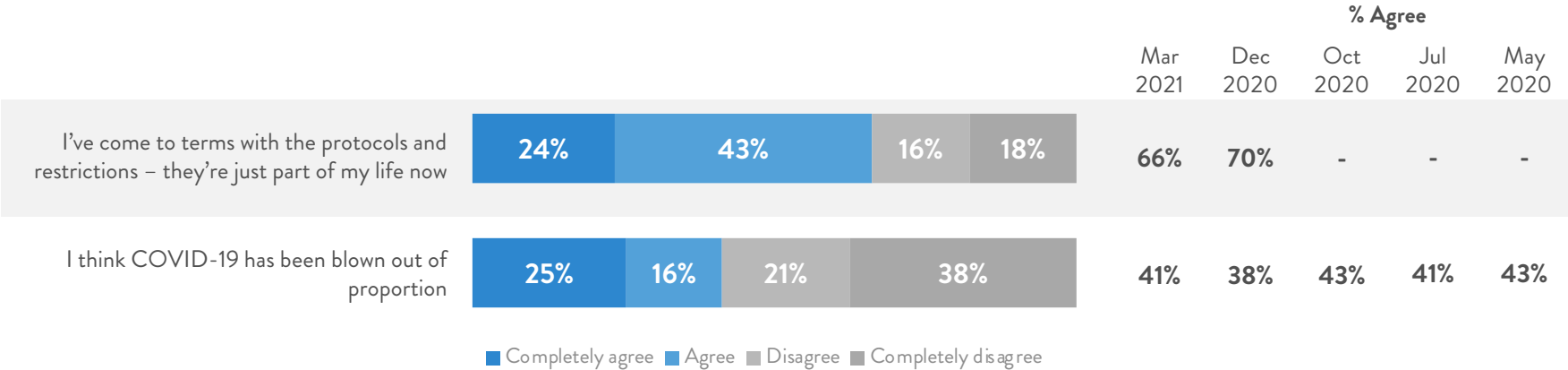


AVERAGE RISK TOLERANCE: In general, how would you consider your individual level of risk tolerance in day-to-day life? How would you rate your risk of disease with respect to COVID-19? Now thinking about the activities you participate in and value most, how would you assess their overall importance?

Base: Main sample (n=1035). Note: Calgary + Edmonton include supplemental sample

The proportion of those who feel COVID has been blown out of proportion has remained stable

And alongside, a larger proportion feels the protocols and restrictions are just woven into their life now



Vaccines remain the most important tool to increasing comfort

At this stage of the pandemic, a successful rollout of vaccines appears to be the most critical tool for Albertans to feel comfortable resuming activities, a sentiment that is fairly consistent across the province (but softer in North and South regions).

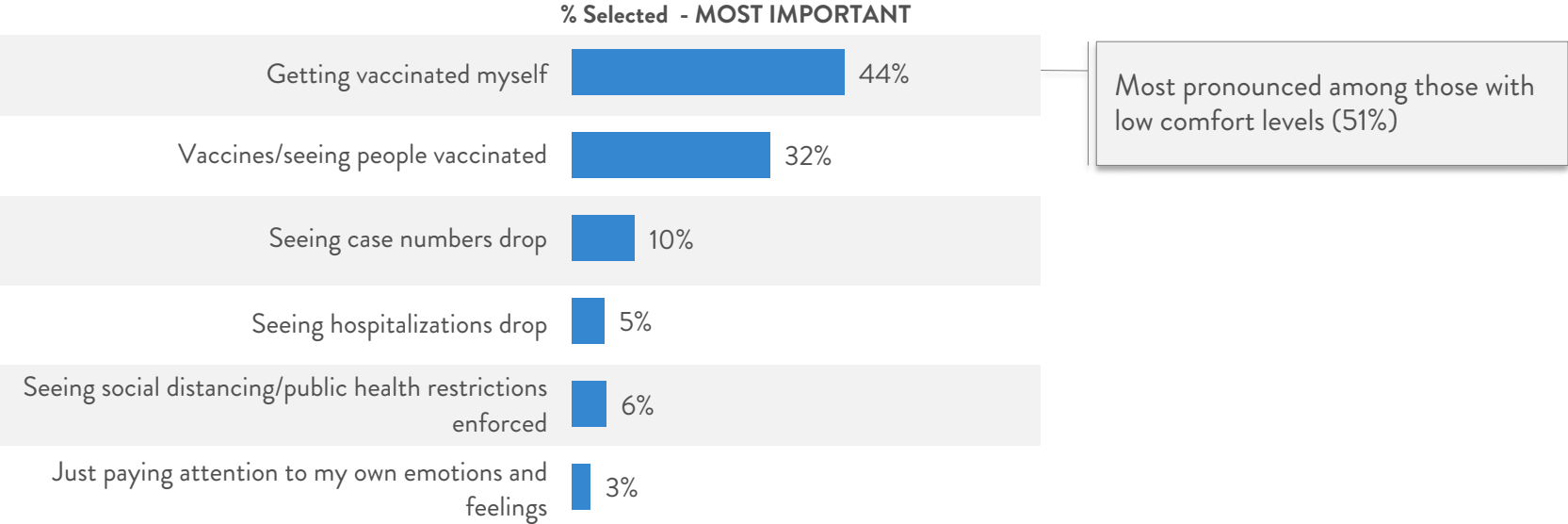
% Selected		Calgary n=489	Edmonton n=476	North n=100	Central n=130	South n=120
NET: Vaccines	<div><div></div></div> 70%	73%	75%	52% ↓	66%	59% ↓
Vaccines/seeing people vaccinated	<div><div></div></div> 65%	67%	70%	49% ↓	60%	52% ↓
Getting vaccinated myself	<div><div></div></div> 60%	60%	65%	39% ↓	55%	55%
NET: Statistics	<div><div></div></div> 65%	64%	69%	54% ↓	62%	57%
Seeing case numbers drop	<div><div></div></div> 55%	57%	59%	47%	51%	46%
Seeing hospitalizations drop	<div><div></div></div> 48%	47%	55%	38%	45%	45%
Seeing social distancing/public health restrictions enforced	<div><div></div></div> 37%	40%	44%	23% ↓	30%	27% ↓
Just paying attention to my own emotions and feelings	<div><div></div></div> 17%	18%	17%	26% ↑	18%	20%
None of these	<div><div></div></div> 17%	14%	13%	27% ↑	21%	26% ↑

A lot has changed over the course of the last year, including our understanding of what will ease uncertainty around COVID-19. Which of the following is important for you to feel more comfortable resuming regular activities?

Base: Main sample (n=1035).

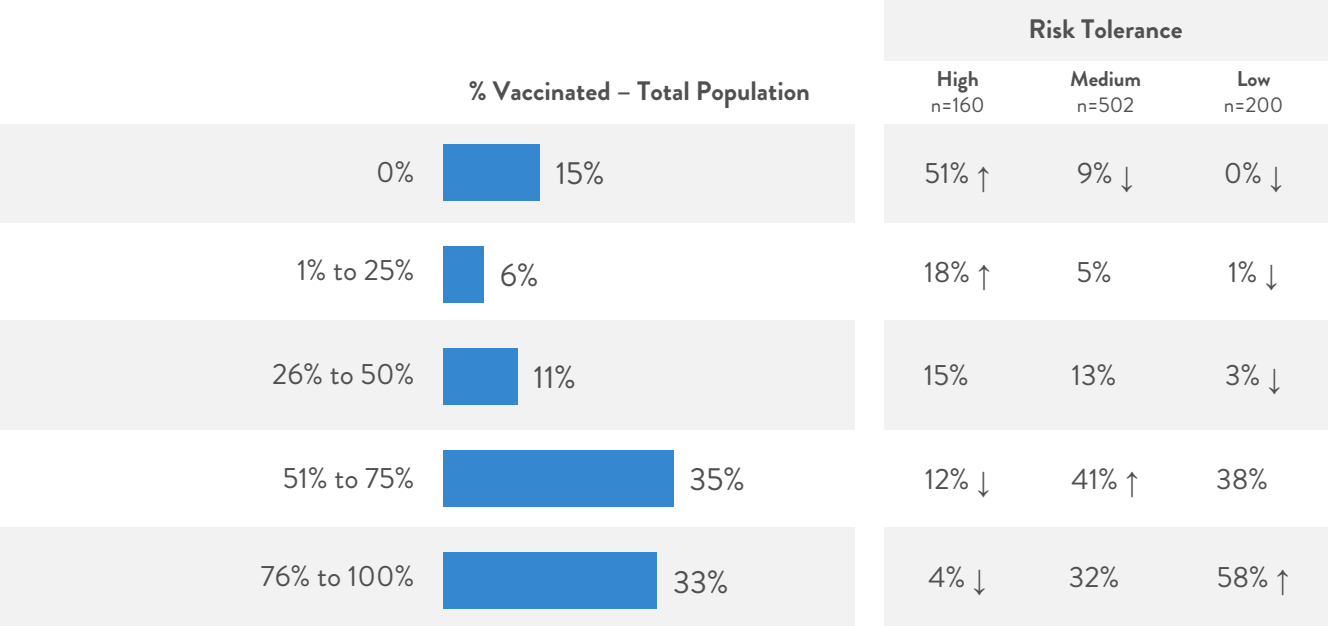
And despite the appetite for community wide vaccinations, many Albertans will feel most comfortable when they are vaccinated themselves

The sheer duration of this pandemic has meant that many Albertans have shifted their focus inward and have a renewed focus on how to care for themselves (and their immediate family).



The public's understanding of vaccination rates varies but aligns with risk profiles

Majority of Albertans say they need to see over half population vaccinated to be completely comfortable again. This varies by risk tolerance and includes a small group who say this doesn't matter.



While understanding of successful vaccine numbers and proportions can be limited in the general population, this can be a useful guide for organizations to align customer expectations with public health targets.

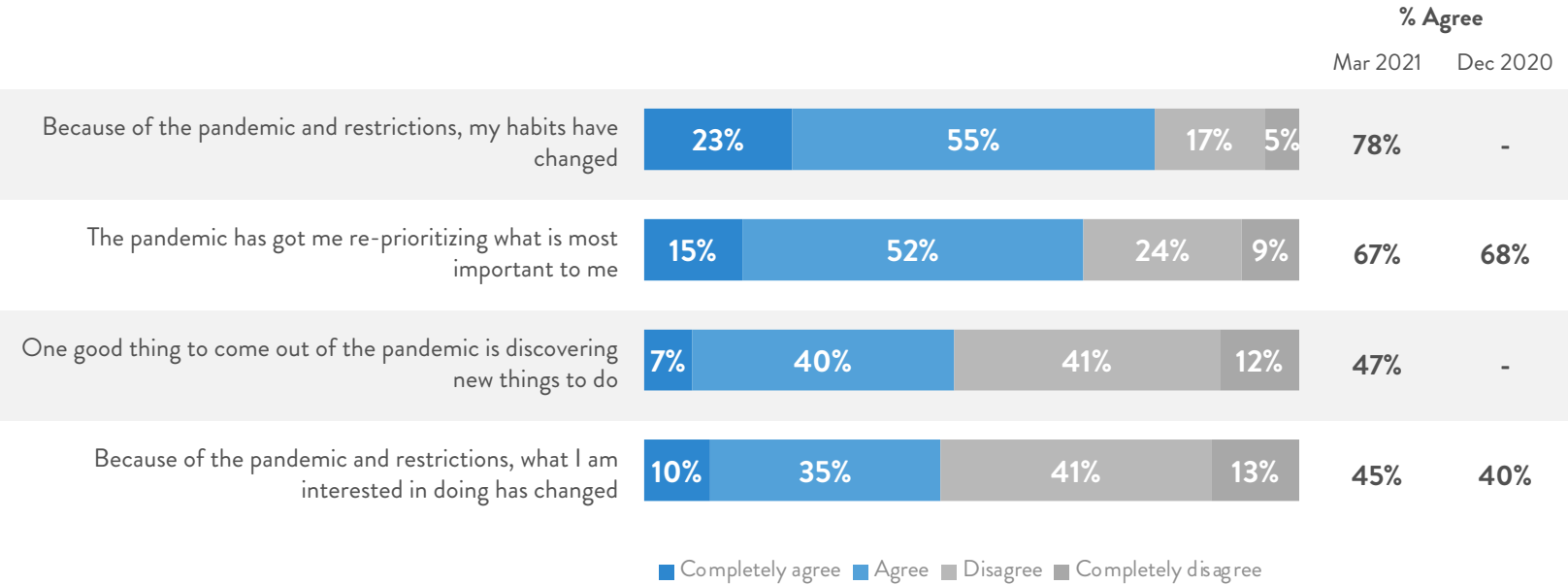
About what proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated in order for you to be completely comfortable engaging in public events and activities again? Please provide your best estimate.
Base: Main Sample, Vaccine to feel comfortable (n=862)

An aerial photograph of a green soccer field. Numerous empty, light-colored folding chairs are arranged in a grid-like pattern across the grass. The chairs are spaced out, with some rows being more densely packed than others. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the field. The text "How have interests and priorities shifted?" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

How have interests and priorities shifted?

The pandemic has forced a change in habits and behaviours, even if interests have not shifted as dramatically

Much of the shift in habits has been mandated by restrictions in activities – for some, that means an opportunity to discover new interests but for others, it may mean a more temporary shift until old activities can resume.



Below are a few statements about the pandemic, please review and tell us if you agree or disagree with each one.
 Base: Main sample (n=1035)

Differences in attitudes are sharpened by risk profile

Those with a higher risk tolerance have not been forced to shift their habits as intensely and therefore it hasn't forced a shift a strong change in interests. This group has a greater desire to return to old activities. Regionally, habits have shifted most drastically in urban centres.

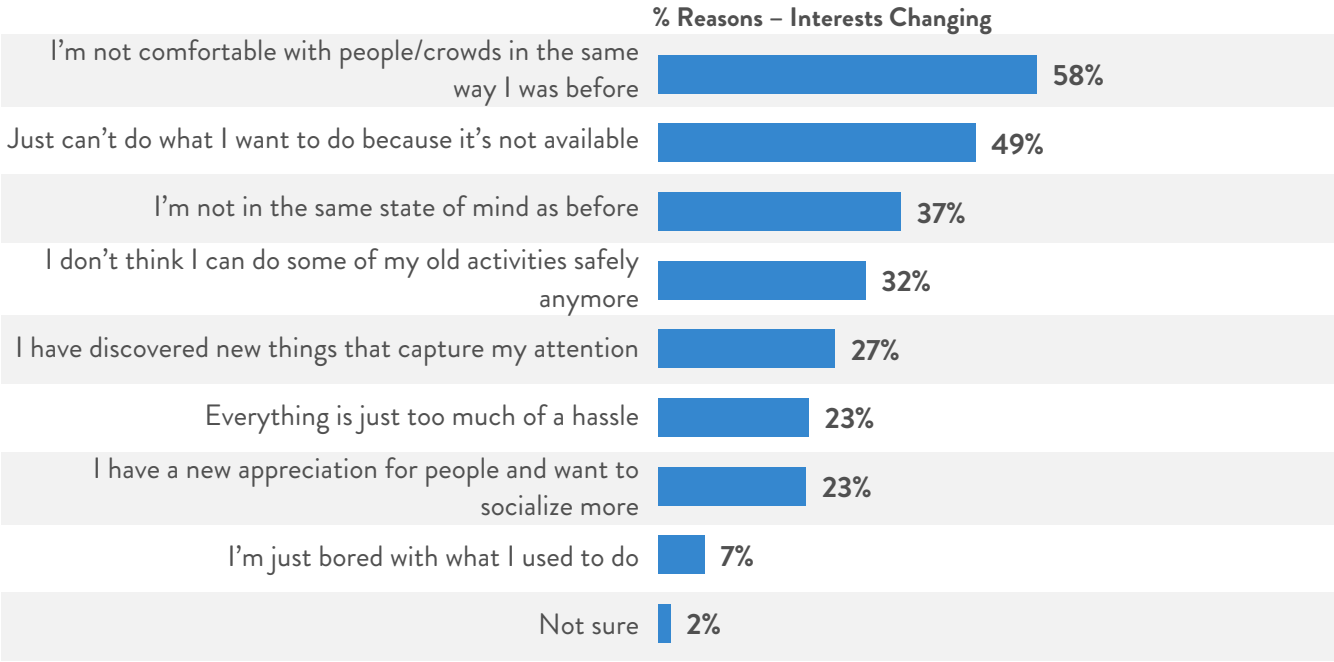
	% Agree	Total Alberta	Risk Tolerance			Region				
			High n=223	Medium n=596	Low n=216	Calgary n=496	Edmonton n=499	North n=100	Central n=130	South n=120
Because of the pandemic and restrictions, my habits have changed		78%	55% ↓	82% ↑	90% ↑	81%	82%	63% ↓	70% ↓	65% ↓
The pandemic has got me re-prioritizing what is most important to me		67%	39% ↓	70% ↑	87% ↑	70%	69%	51% ↓	70%	58% ↓
One good thing to come out of the pandemic is discovering new things to do		47%	24% ↓	51% ↑	60% ↑	47%	51%	41%	47%	47%
Because of the pandemic and restrictions, what I am interested in doing has changed		45%	20% ↓	48%	64% ↑	45%	51%	35%	43%	37%

Below are a few statements about the pandemic, please review and tell us if you agree or disagree with each one.

Base: Main sample (n=1035)

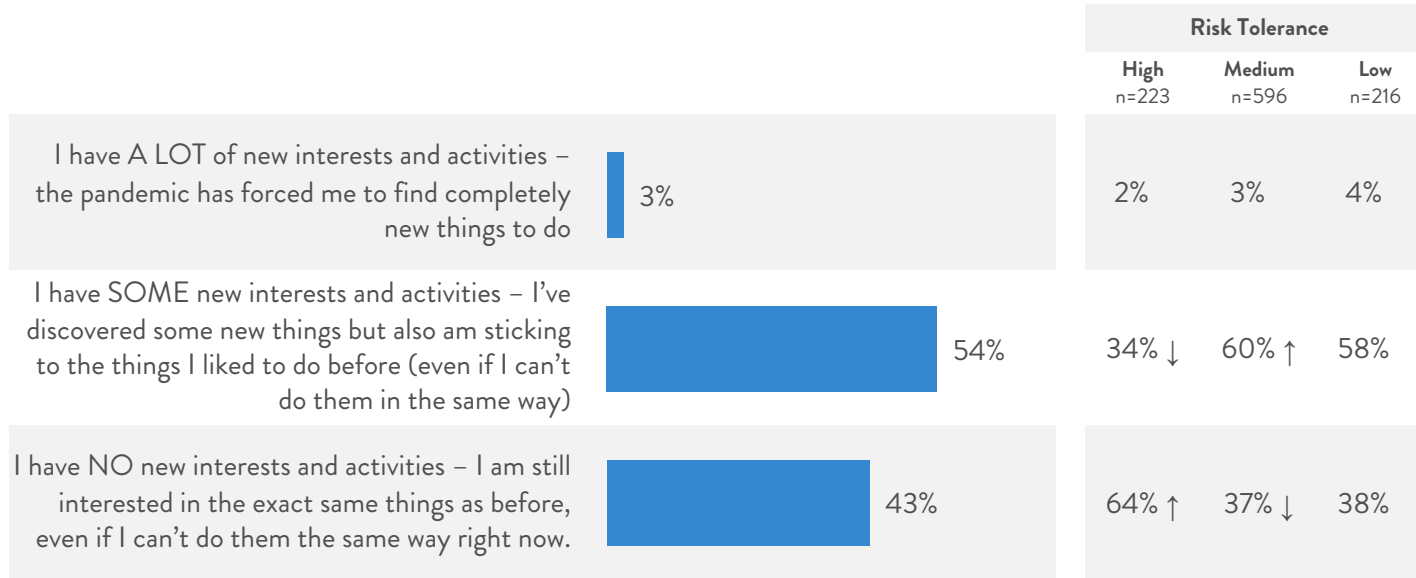
The primary reasons for changing interests are comfort and availability

Habits are changing more readily than interests themselves – but for those who have discovered something new, it is primarily related to comfort levels or availability. This might suggest that even as new things are discovered, much of it might be temporary until conditions shift to remedy these concerns.



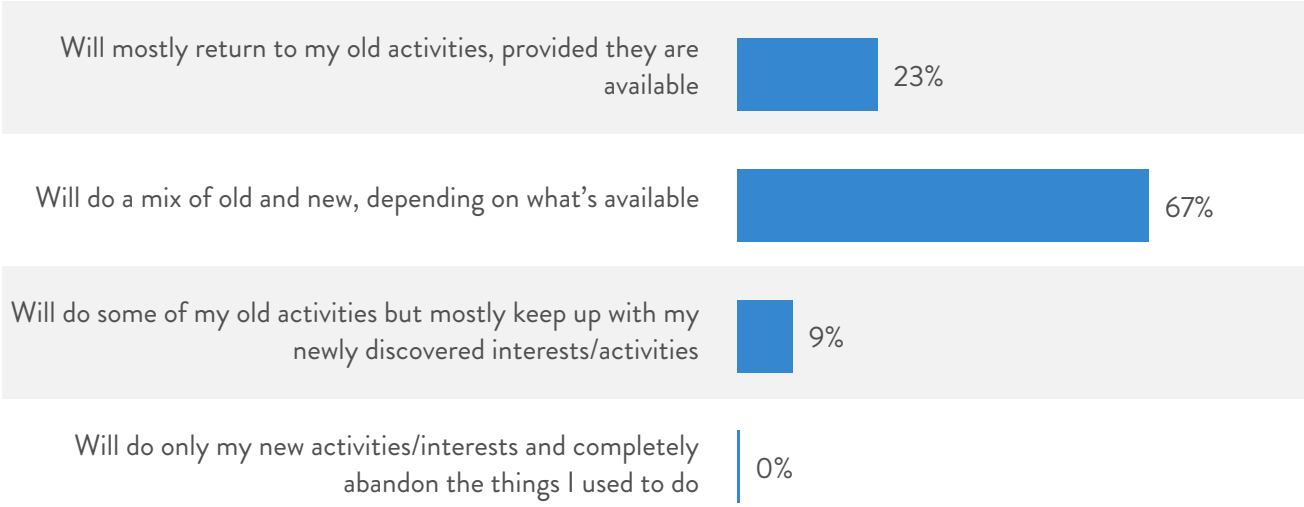
And very few have shifted away completely from old interests

Risk takers are the group already more likely to have shifted their habits but also most likely to have a stronger preference for the things they used to. The sentiment is a bit more mixed for the rest of Albertans.



Most Albertans anticipate approaching activities in the future with a mix of old and new

The majority of Albertans have indicated they will stick with some of their newly discovered interests but the degree to which they do that will vary depending on what's available and in what form. In a broader sense, Albertans simply have a yearning to get going.



Priorities for Albertans focus on family and personal well-being

Despite a community-first mentality for much of the pandemic, it is also clear that Albertans are also prioritizing what's right in front of them. Health, well-being and self-care have emerged as most important, aside from family, while more broad based issues (giving back, economy, global issues) appear less important.



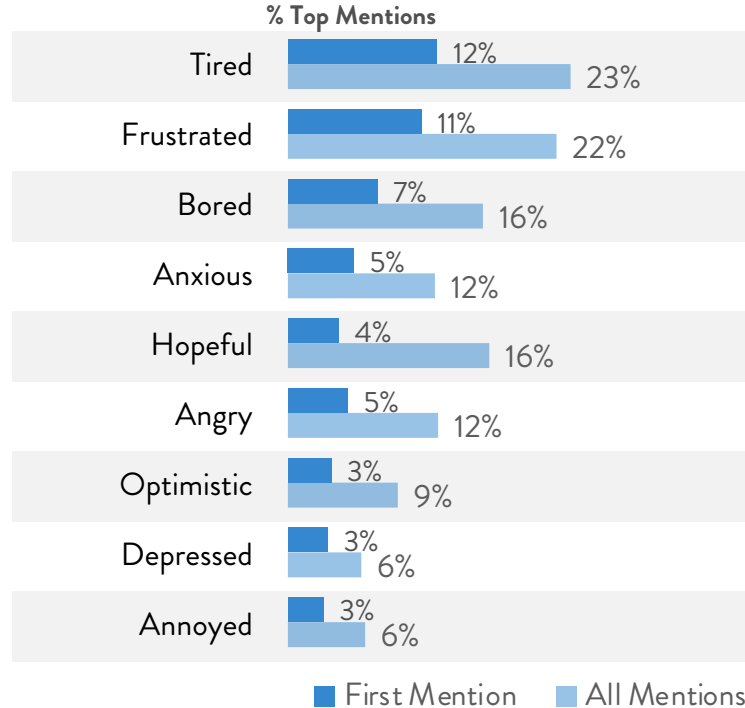
You said you find yourself re-prioritizing what is most important to you. What is more important to you now than it was this time last year, before the pandemic?
Please select up to three items Base: Re-prioritizing (n=690)

How are attitudes and emotions impacting behaviours?



The range of emotions experienced by Albertans is vast

Understanding the emotional mindset of Albertans remains a useful tool for organizations to understand as this greatly influences motivations to re-engage and offers opportunities to address in messaging. After a full year of the pandemic, it is not surprising that the range of emotions felt by Albertans is complex and vast.

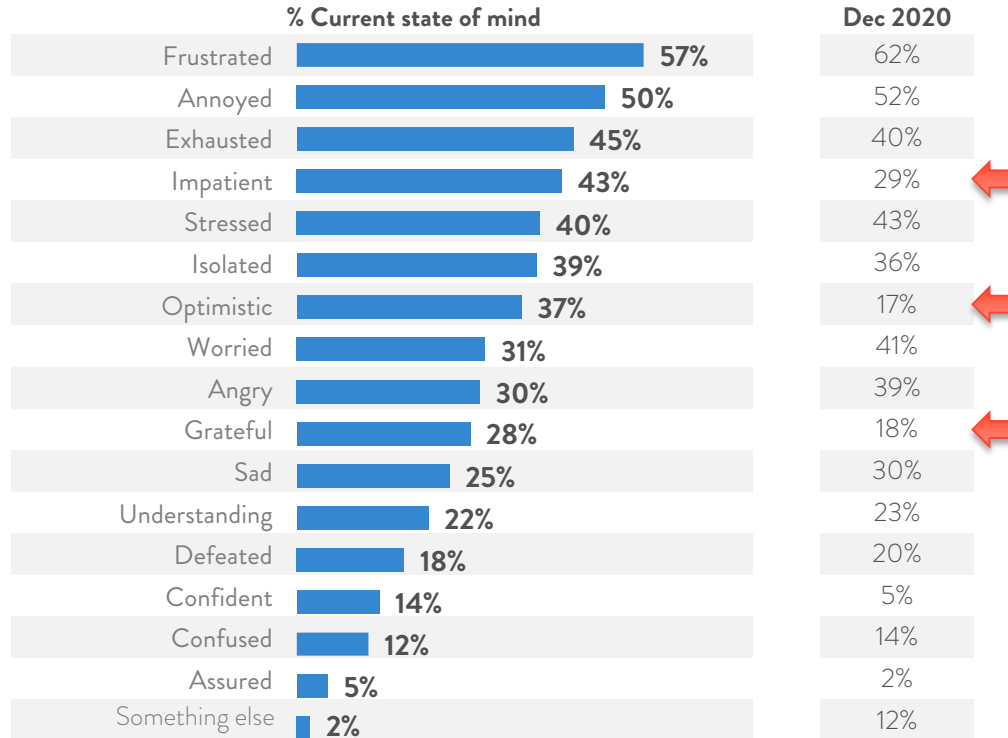


What else?

Lonely
Happy
Impatient
Isolated
Disappointed
Worried
Content
Sad
Calm
Grateful
Exited
Restless

But while negative emotions continue to be most prominent, there is a precarious optimism

As restrictions have shifted yet again, the shift in mindset also sharpens – Albertans are feeling less worried and angry than before. A sense of gratitude and optimism is also growing.



The difference between negative emotions is important: frustration, annoyance and impatience are reactions to being restricted/reflect a pent-up demand. Anger and defeated are more hostile.

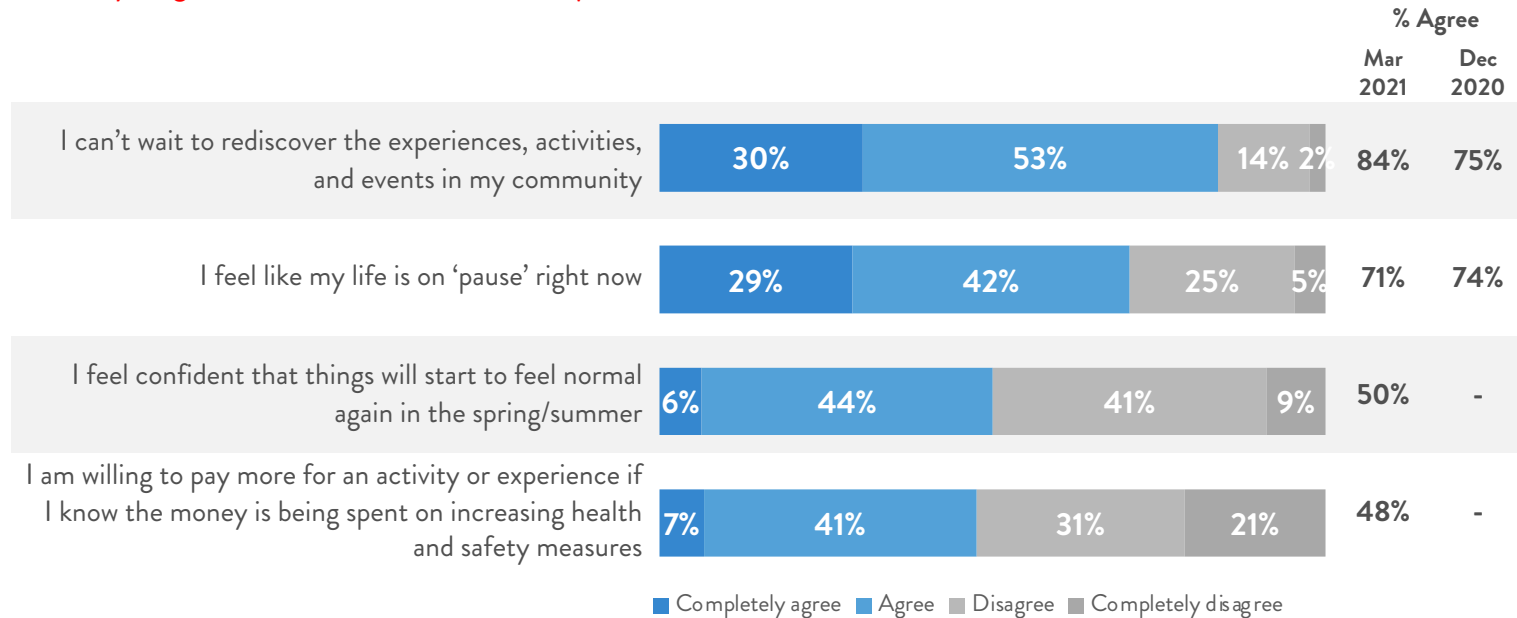
As the pandemic progresses things change – case numbers go up and down, protocols become more strict or less. What words best describe how you are feeling right now?

Please select all that apply.

Base: Main sample (n=1035)

And the desire to rediscover is only growing, though uncertainty around when we will feel “normal” is still evident

While the desire to rediscover and reconnect is evident, the degree to which Albertans actually participate will hinge on external factors more than anything – comfort levels, vaccine rates and public health restrictions.



What does risk profile tell us about attitudes?

Risk takers are more optimistic that things will normalize again soon (and have a higher pent-up desire to re-engage) but are also less willing to pay for increasing health/safety measures.

	% Agree	Total Alberta	Risk Tolerance			Region				
			High n=223	Medium n=596	Low n=216	Calgary n=496	Edmonton n=499	North n=100	Central n=130	South n=120
I can't wait to rediscover the experiences, activities, and events in my community		84%	90% ↑	85%	74% ↓	84%	82%	86%	87%	88%
I feel like my life is on 'pause' right now		71%	72%	72%	66%	72%	76%	62%	68%	63%
I feel confident that things will start to feel normal again in the spring/summer		50%	57%	53%	36% ↓	52%	45%	49%	55%	57%
I am willing to pay more for an activity or experience if I know the money is being spent on increasing health and safety measures		48%	14% ↓	53% ↑	66% ↑	46%	52%	39%	47%	41%

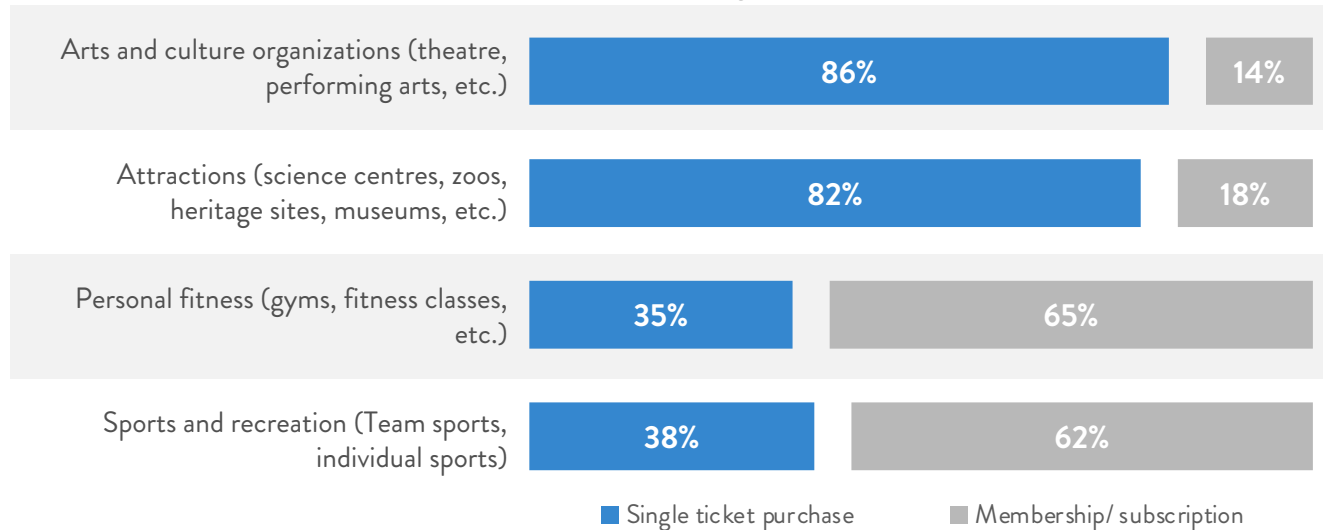


Opportunities for financial support

Arts and attraction goers tend to prefer single ticket purchases while sports and fitness participants are more willing to demonstrate commitment

Preferences by experience will also reflect typical patterns (where a gym membership is more common than a theatre subscription) but this can be a useful guide for organizations too understand consumer expectations.

% Preferred (Among those who participate)



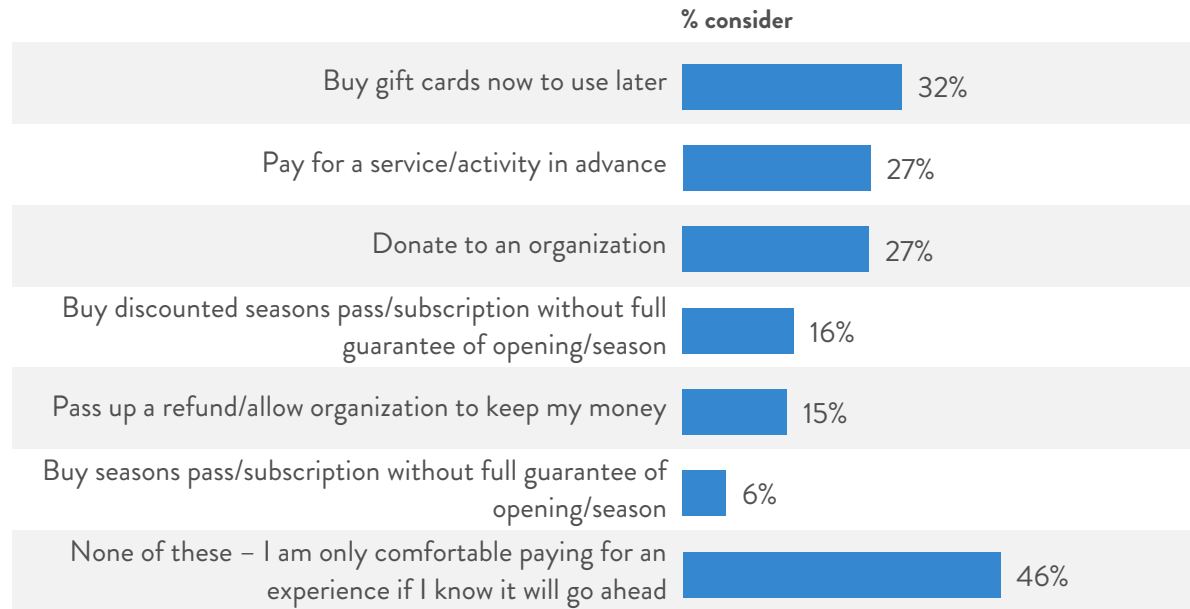
Single tickets reflect a desire to participate on with flexibility and with a self-directed approach.

When organizations are able to offer experiences again, which of the following commitments would you be willing to make in terms of support?

Base: Among those who participate in these experiences (n=varies)

What will Albertans consider in terms of financial support to organizations?

Previous research tells us that robust cancellation and refund policies are still required for transparency but among the preferred methods of financial support that Albertans are willing to consider, most have an inherent flexibility to them – customers can pay or utilize on their own terms.

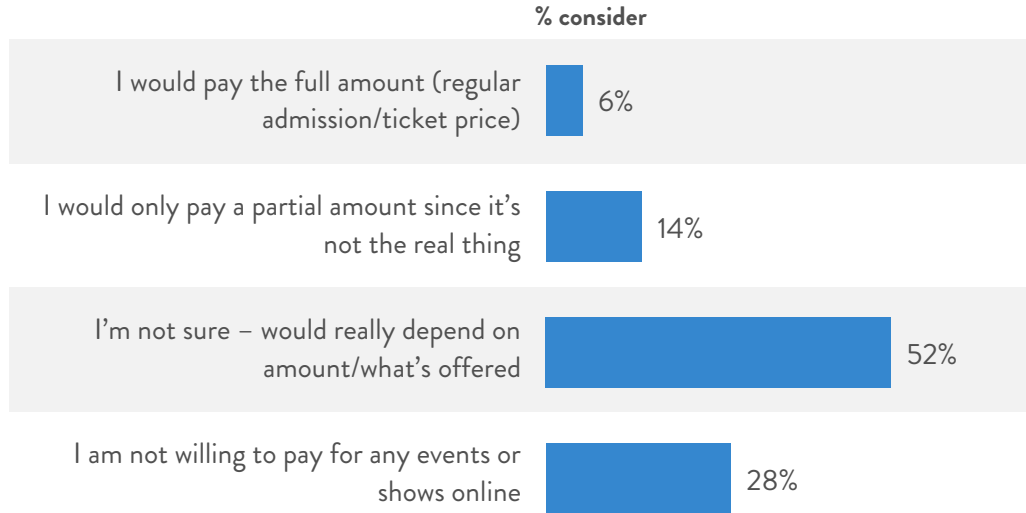


Consideration for support varies most significantly by age: younger Albertans (under 35) show a higher willingness to support in advance/without full guarantee.

Right now, there is a real challenge for organizations and businesses who are trying to offer experiences in limited form but also remain financially viable. Which of the following would you consider doing to support organizations? Please select all that apply. Base: Main Sample (n=1035)

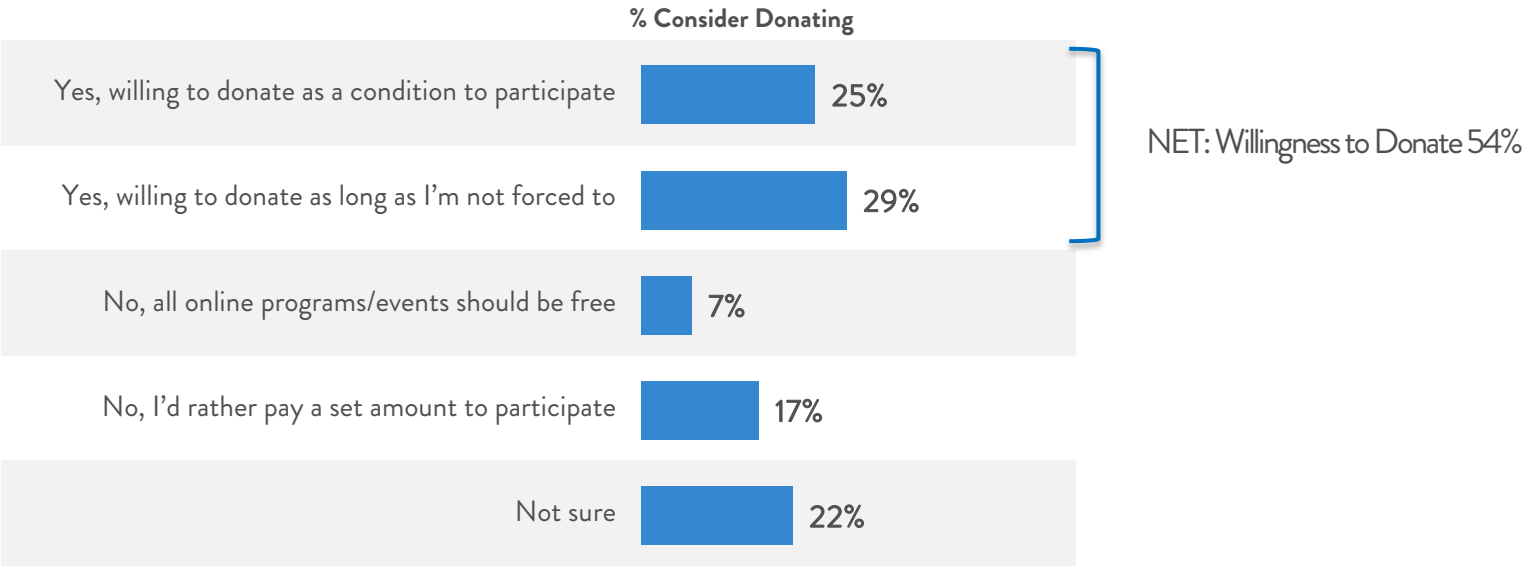
Willingness to pay for online events hinges on the offer

Enough has been gleaned about digital experiences to understand that most consumers have an expectation of unique or value-add from an online event – this is likely what is driving the uncertainty around willingness to pay (although it is apparent that among those willing to pay, few expect to pay full amount.)



Willingness to donate for support of online events has appeal for about half of Albertans

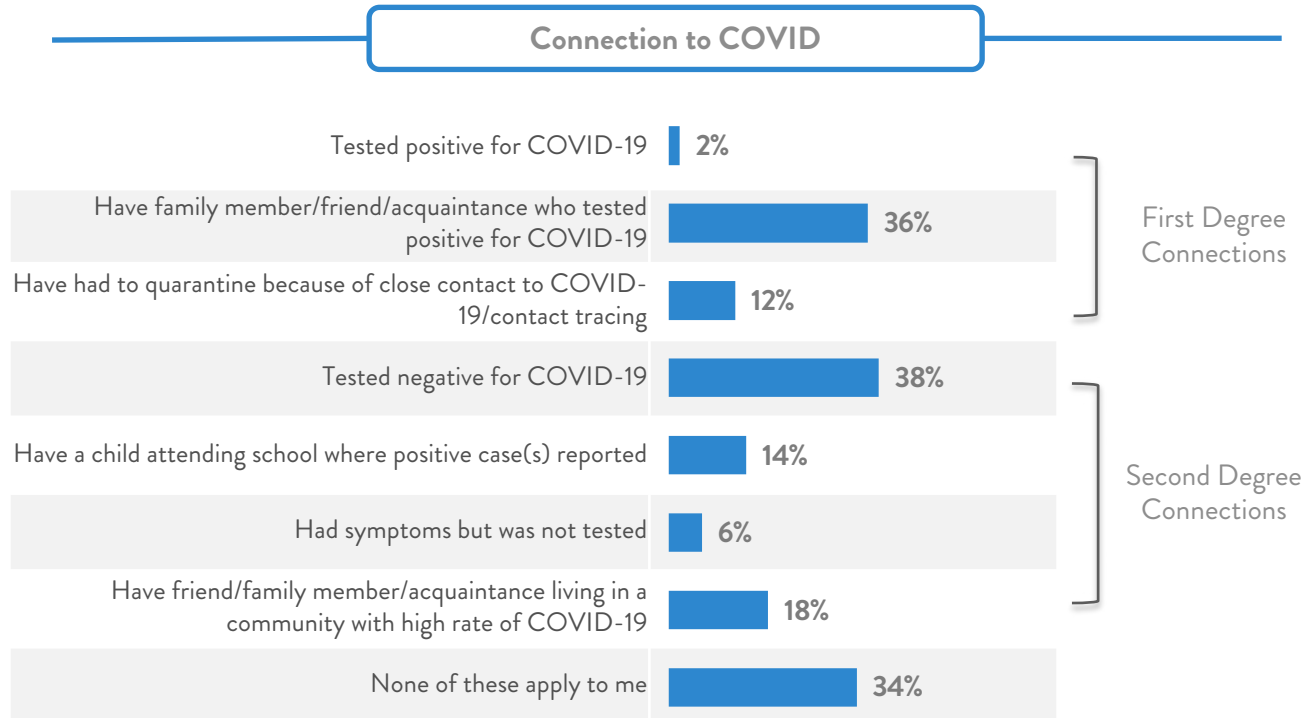
Among those who would consider donating, more would prefer the flexibility and courtesy of donation as a choice rather than a condition. Again, this reflects the desire for choice - not being forced to donate allows the audience to pay on their own terms.



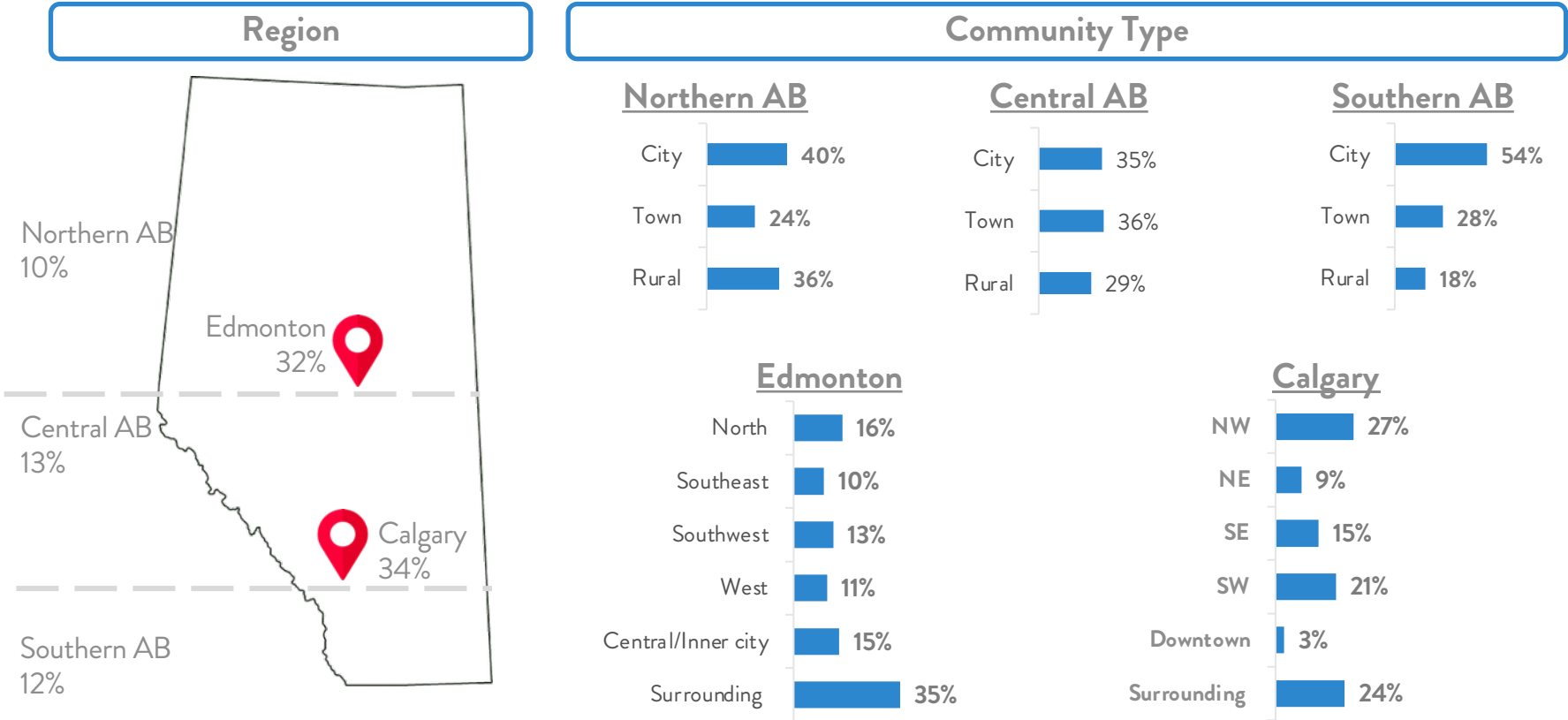
Respondent Profile

Profile of Key Characteristics:

As would be expected, higher first degree connections over time.



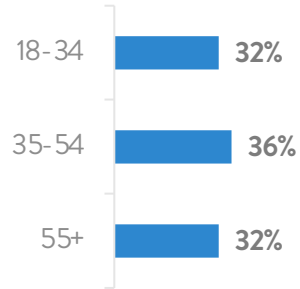
Who we heard from



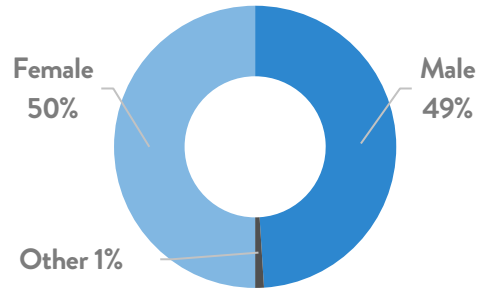
Base: Main sample (n=1035). Note: Calgary + Edmonton include supplemental sample

Who we heard from

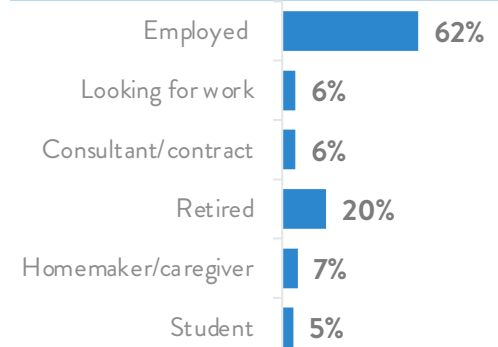
Age



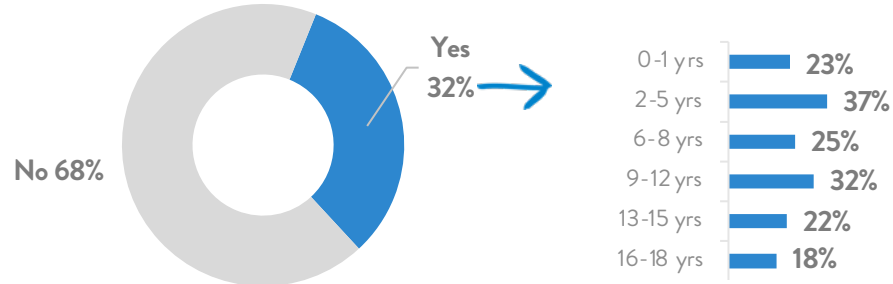
Gender



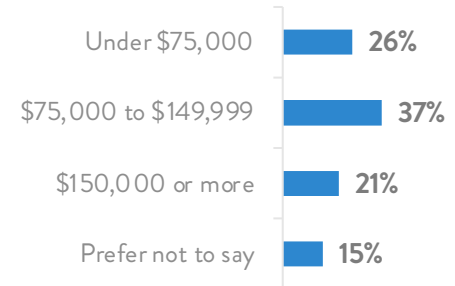
Employment



Children in the Household



Household Income



**Stone —
Olafson**

Understanding people. It's what we do.