

## Accessibility: A source of future anxiety and a significant consideration for Canadian consumers today

*Seven-in-ten Canadians say universal accessibility should be the goal for newly constructed buildings*

**January 22, 2018** – As Canada's population grows older, millions of Canadians find themselves worrying about decreased mobility, vision and hearing and the impact it may have on their own lives or the lives of loved ones.

A new study from the Angus Reid Institute, conducted in partnership with the [Rick Hansen Foundation](#), finds more than two-thirds of Canadians expressing concern that someone in their lives will face such challenges over the next decade or so.

Currently, approximately three-in-ten say that accessibility is a consideration for them when they're thinking about which places they will go to and which they will avoid within their communities.

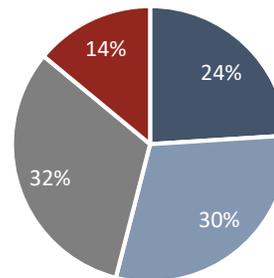
This evidently creates a significant consideration for businesses and service providers in planning accessibility infrastructure. Canadians voice widespread support for universal accessibility policy, particularly when it comes to new construction of buildings and homes.

It's an issue Canadians anticipate will have a growing presence in their lives in the coming years. Roughly the same two-thirds who voice concern about a family member facing decreased mobility, vision, or hearing in the future say they have the same concern about themselves.

### More Key Findings:

- Approximately one-quarter of Canadians (24%) self-identify as having a mobility, vision or hearing disability or challenge; further, 47 per cent say they spend time with or help someone who is dealing with these difficulties.
- Three-in-ten (28%) 35-54-year-olds say they anticipate mobility, vision or hearing challenges arising in the next five to 10 years. This rises to 32 per cent among those ages 55 and older

**Four groups based on relationship to disability/physical challenges**



■ Directly Affected ■ Affiliated ■ Concerned ■ Unaffected

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 14 – 20, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,800 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- One-in-five Canadians (21%) say that knowing a business in their community was certified as accessible would lead them to support that business more often
- Canadians can be grouped into four distinct categories based on their experiences with – and concern about disabilities and challenges affecting their vision, hearing and mobility. The four groups are: The Directly Affected (24% of the general population), Affiliated (30%), Concerned (32%), and Unaffected (14%). Each has a unique relationship to each of the issues canvassed in this survey

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### **Part 1: Experiences with disability**

#### **The current landscape**

The Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians if they have what they consider to be a physical disability. Importantly, this offered respondents the opportunity to say they have a disability outright, or to say that they have mobility, vision or hearing challenges that make their day-to-day life more challenging, while not identifying it as a 'disability'.

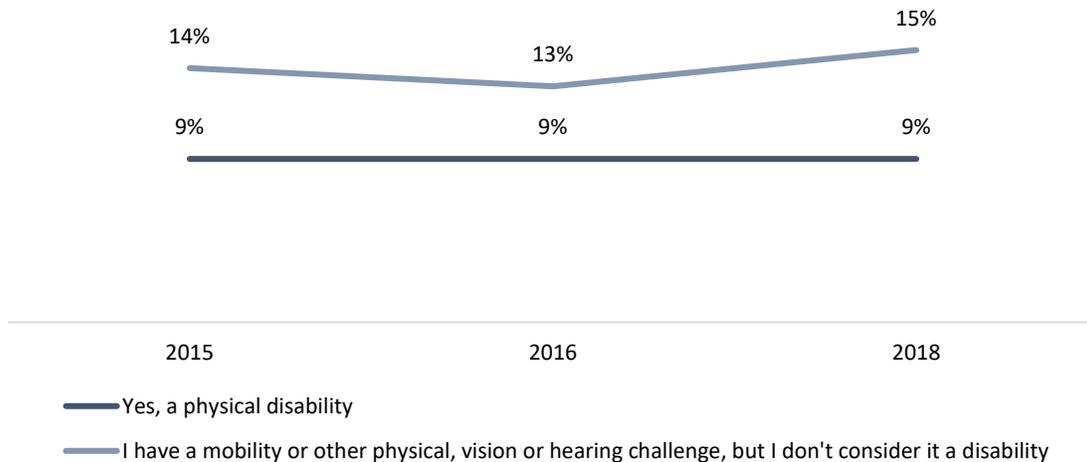
Overall, one-in-ten (9%) say they have a disability, while another 15 per cent state they have challenges.

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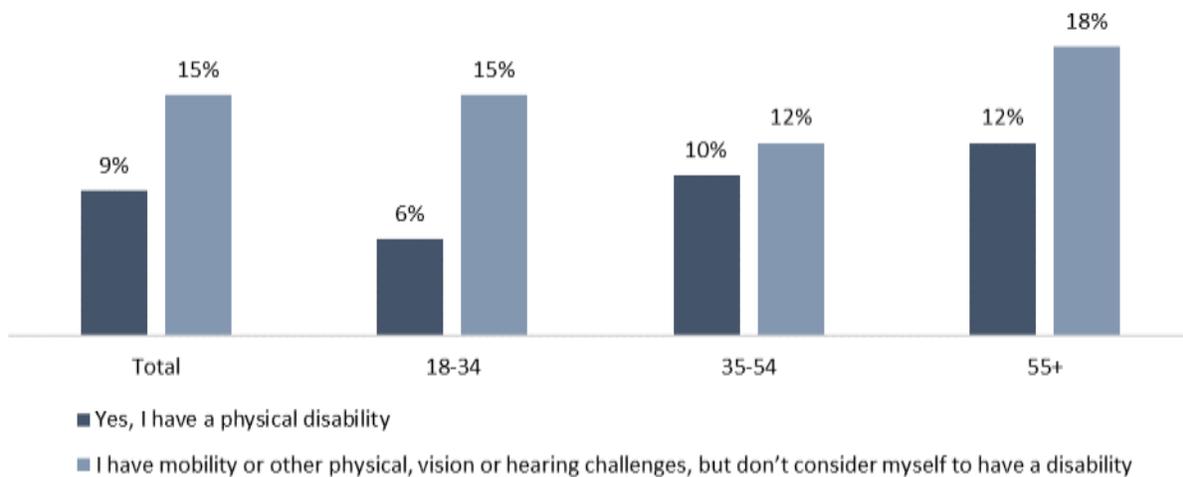
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**Do you have what you consider to be a "physical disability"?**



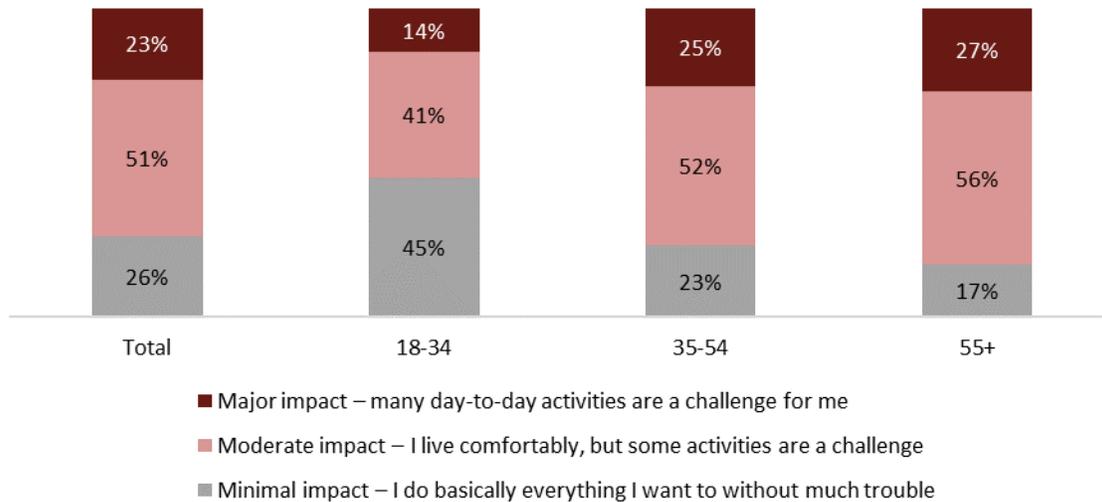
As one might predict, these proportions grow with age:

**Do you have what you consider to be a "physical disability"?**



The relevance of age on this issue is further illuminated when respondents are asked about the impact of the physical challenges they face. Younger Canadians, those between the age of 18 and 34, are much more likely to say that the difficulties they face are minimal, while one-quarter of their older compatriots say their physical challenges are a major hindrance. These issues include chronic pain, difficulty walking, arthritis and more. ([View comprehensive tables for more here](#))

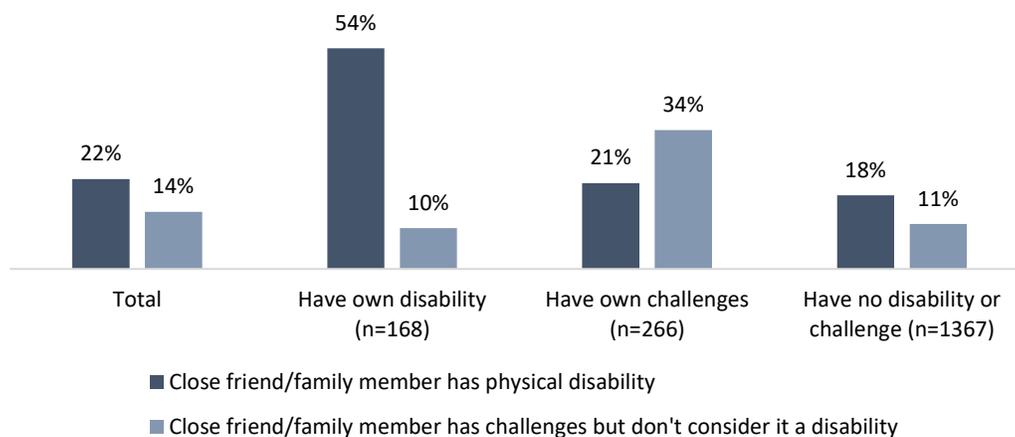
**Thinking about your own physical challenges or disability, what kind of an impact would you say this has on your own life and day-to-day activities?**



While this individual element is important to know, it is also worth considering the full scope of mobility, vision and hearing challenges in Canada. More than a third of Canadians (36%) have close friends or family members who face these difficulties.

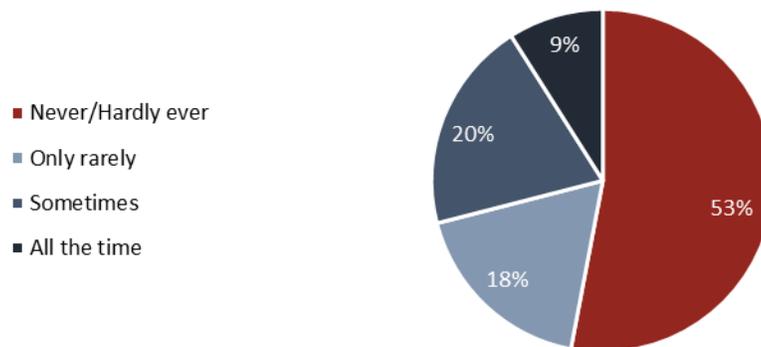
Further, those who identify as having a disability are more likely to have family or close friends who do as well. Overall, 22 per cent of Canadians say someone close to them has a physical disability – this rises to 54 per cent among those who have their own disability – as shown in the graph below:

**And, do any of your family members or close friends have a physical disability?**



This translates into three-in-ten Canadians who say they have a relationship with someone who has mobility, vision or hearing challenges or a disability, and another one-in-five who say they “rarely” see someone who fits this criteria.

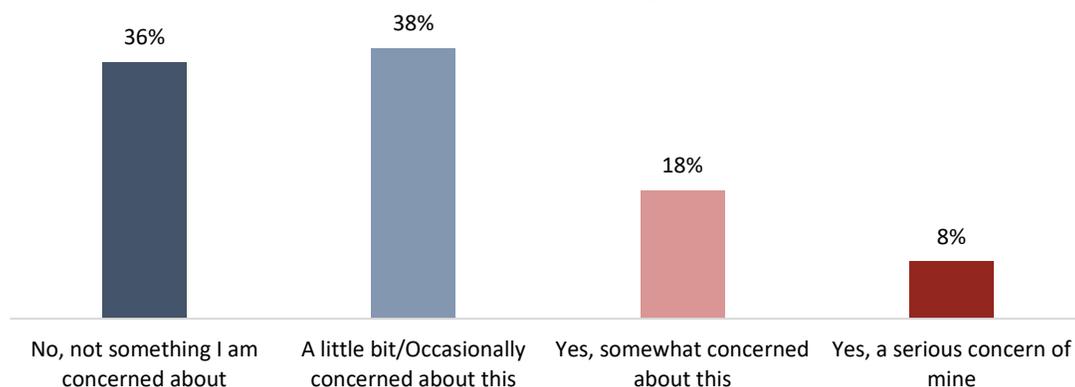
**Currently, how often, if ever, do you spend time with, help, or provide care for someone who has a physical disability or other mobility, hearing or vision challenge?**



**Concern for the future**

Accessibility may matter to everyone, but it is not necessarily something Canadians think about on a day-to-day basis. Thus, respondents were asked to consider how accessibility concerns might enter their lives, if at all, in the future. Overall, two-thirds of Canadians are at least a little concerned about this in the coming years:

**Thinking about the future, say 5 to 10 years from now, are you concerned that you yourself may face new or worsening disability/mobility issues?**

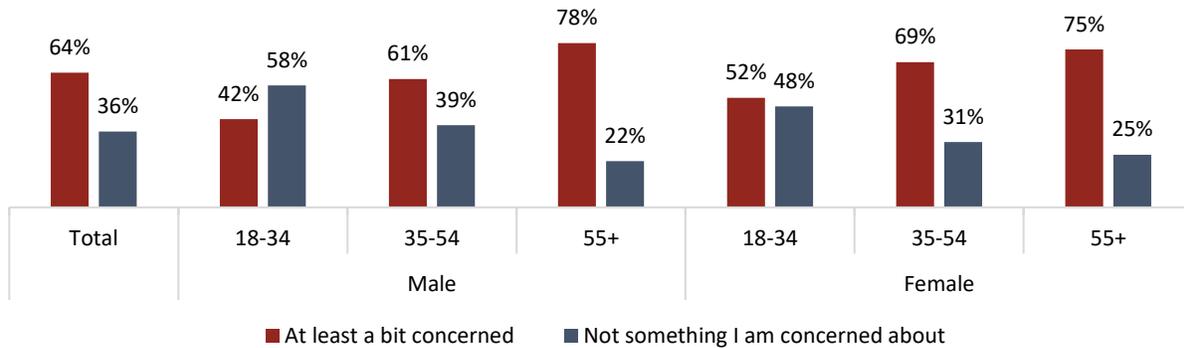


Younger people are less likely to express concern about facing mobility challenges in the next few years, with young men especially inclined to see themselves as invulnerable:

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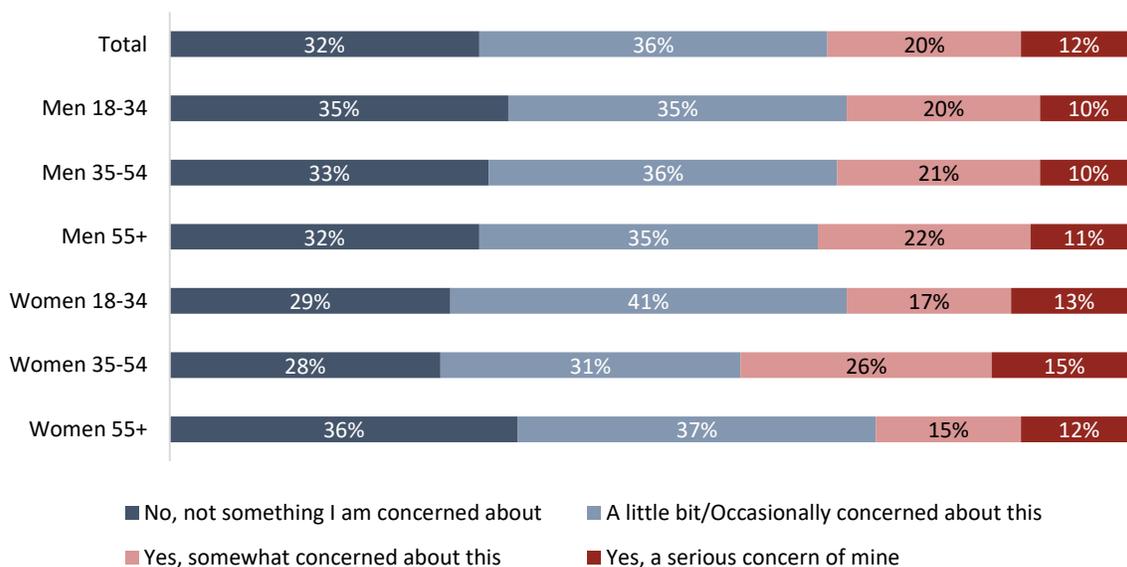
**Thinking about the future, say 5 to 10 years from now -- are you concerned that you yourself may face new or worsening disability/mobility issues?**



Similar numbers of Canadians express concern that someone else in their life may face increased mobility challenges or other physical disabilities in the coming years, with close to seven-in-ten (68%) at least “a bit” concerned.

Women between the ages of 35 and 54, who often find themselves in caretaker roles for aging parents, are especially likely to say they are either somewhat or seriously concerned about this, as seen in the graph that follows. It’s worth noting, however, that roughly equal numbers across age and gender groups express at least “a bit” of concern about close friends or family members facing decreased mobility in the near future.

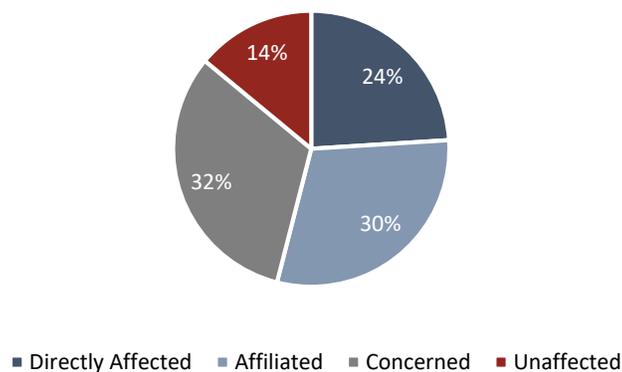
**Is that a concern you have about a family member or close friend -- that someone close to you may face new or worsening disability/mobility challenges in the future?**



### Four groups based on experience

Utilizing the data from these questions about Canadians' relationship to mobility, vision and hearing disability and physical challenges, the Angus Reid Institute constructed four groups. For the methodology used to separate respondents please see the end of this report. The four groups are the Directly Affected (24% of the population), the Affiliated (30%), the Concerned (32%), and the Unaffected (14%).

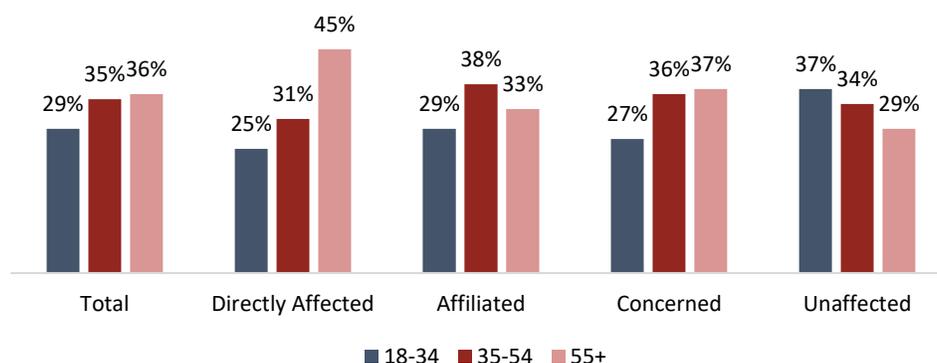
**Four groups based on relationship to disability/physical challenges**



The Directly Affected are those who are dealing with a mobility, vision or hearing disability or physical challenge themselves. The affiliated, on the other hand, are those who do not have an issue personally, but have a close friend or family member who does. The third group, the Concerned, fit neither of these first two criteria, but are concerned about how these issues will affect them in the next five to 10 years. The final group, the Unaffected, are the 14 per cent of Canadians who say they have no relationships and no concerns when it comes to disability issues.

The age distribution shows that all generations are affected. Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger Canadians are more likely to be Unaffected, while older ones are more likely to be Directly Affected:

**Age distribution for each group**

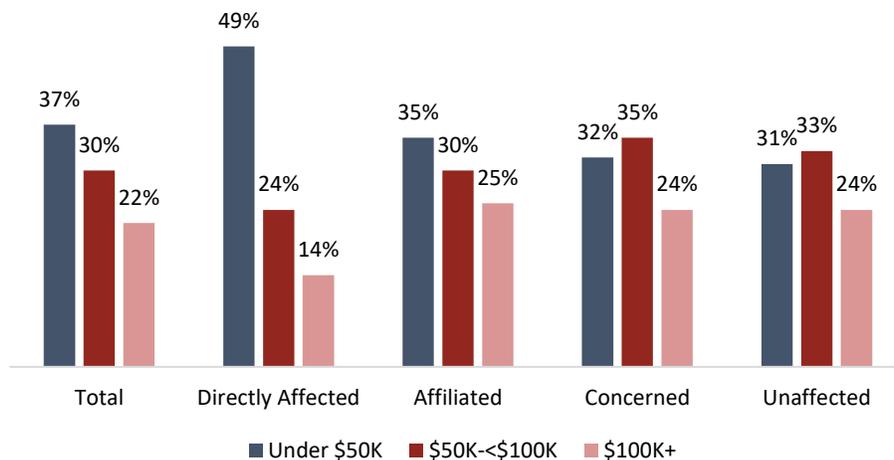


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Notably, the Directly Affected are significantly more likely to have household incomes of below \$50K, while the three additional groups share a similar income distribution:

Household income for each group



## Part 2: Accessibility and the built environment

### How accessible are our spaces?

Many Canadians take for granted the ability to access any building, event or service anytime they want. This is not the case for those dealing with mobility, vision or hearing challenges - even temporary ones. Indeed, one-in-five Canadians say they often or sometimes run into temporary accessibility challenges, whether these be injuries, carrying heavy luggage or items, or navigating life with a stroller.

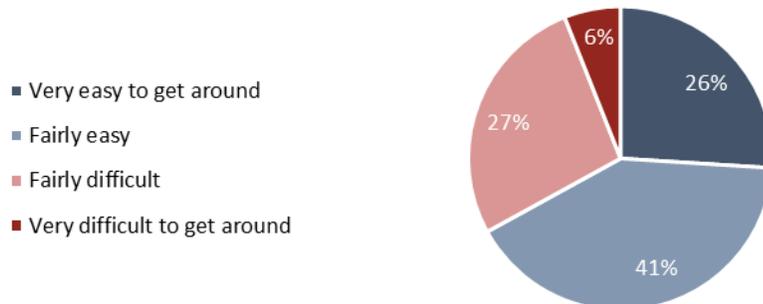
Respondents were asked to consider some of these same challenges and imagine the experience of trying to get around parts of their community. How do homes, restaurants, public buildings and other built environments measure up when it comes to accessibility?

Notably, a significant number of Canadians, one-in-three (33%) say their own homes would present difficulty to a person with a mobility, vision or hearing challenge.

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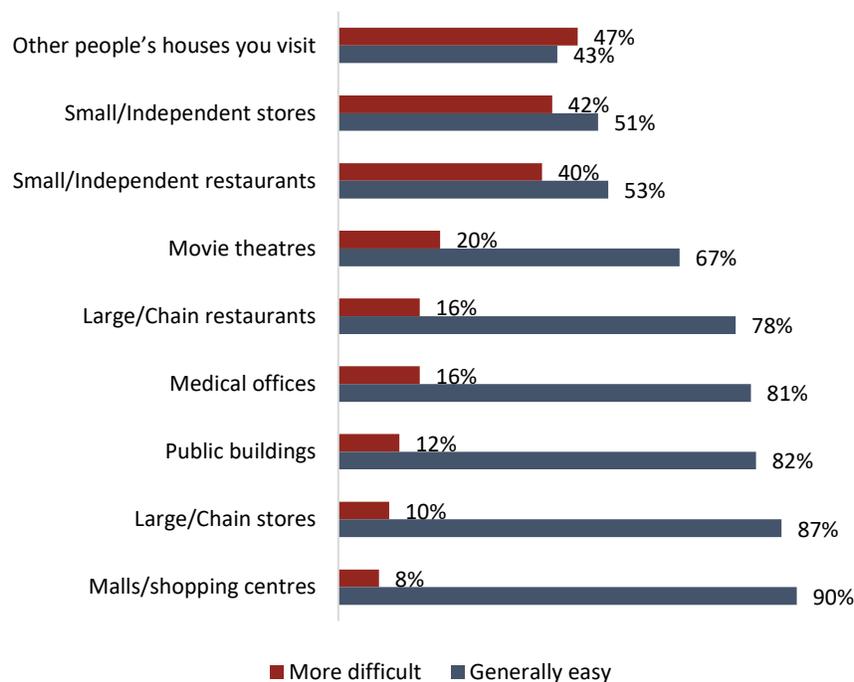
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**Generally speaking, would you say your own current home is:**



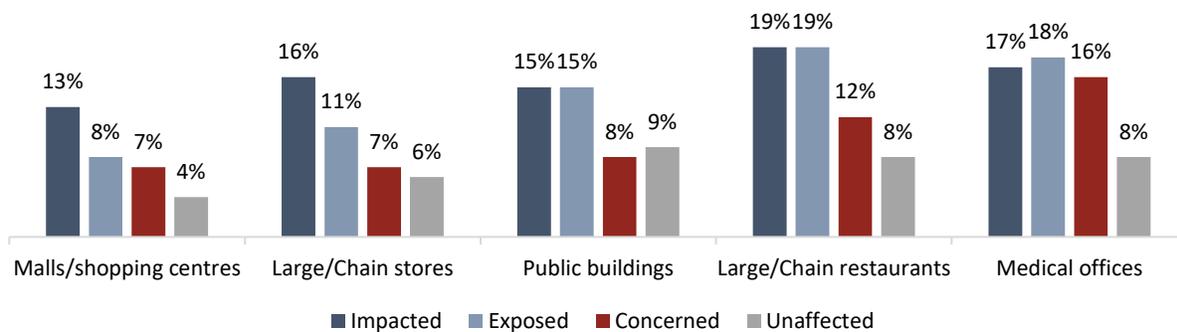
When considering the broader community, large chain stores, malls, medical office and public buildings are perceived as easier to navigate. Smaller, more independent stores, restaurants and other people’s homes, are seen as having more barriers to access.

**Thinking about each of the following types of places in your community, would you say each is generally easy or difficult for people to get into/move around in?**

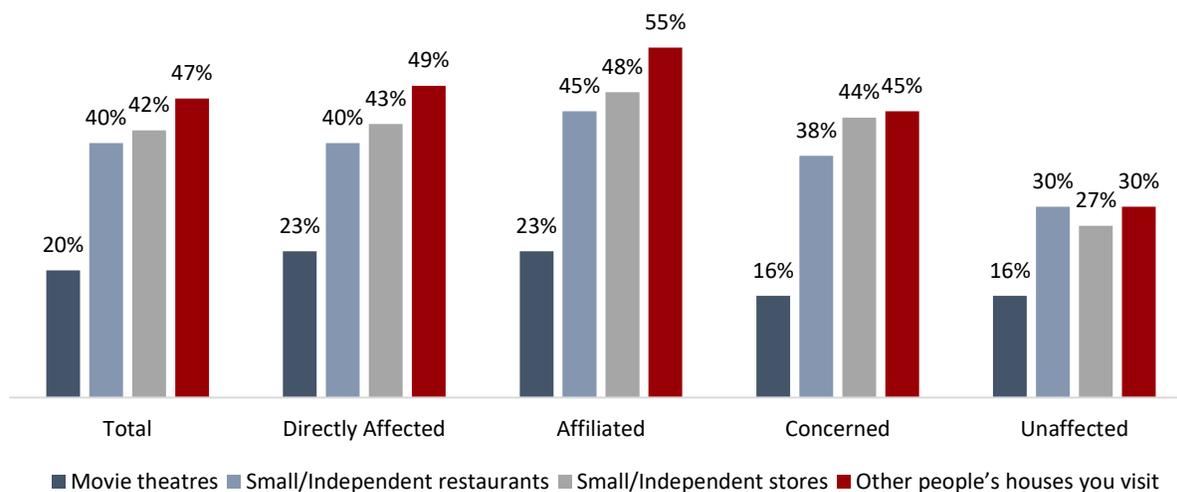


Here, Canadians who are more closely acquainted with disability are also more likely to perceive these areas as posing accessibility challenges. The Unaffected are noticeably less concerned on each:

**Percentage who say each is 'Difficult' to get around in their community**



**Percentage who say each is 'Difficult' to get around in their community**



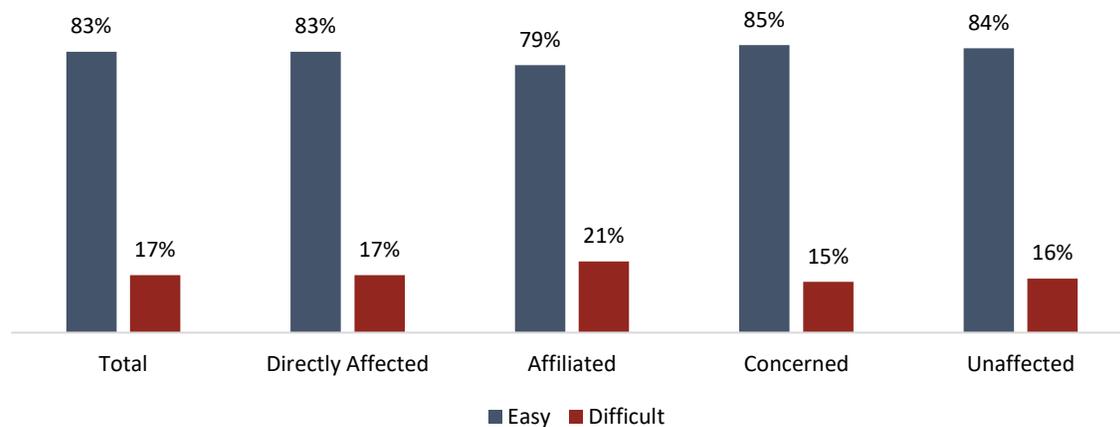
And what about those places where many Canadians spend the bulk of their time outside of the home? Among those who currently work or go to school, approximately four-in-five say buildings are easy for anyone to access. This ratio holds across the four groups, though it's worth noting that the question was only asked of those who are currently working or going to school. Anyone with challenges significant

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enough to prevent working or seeking education outside the home may have a different perspective on the accessibility of a typical school or workplace.

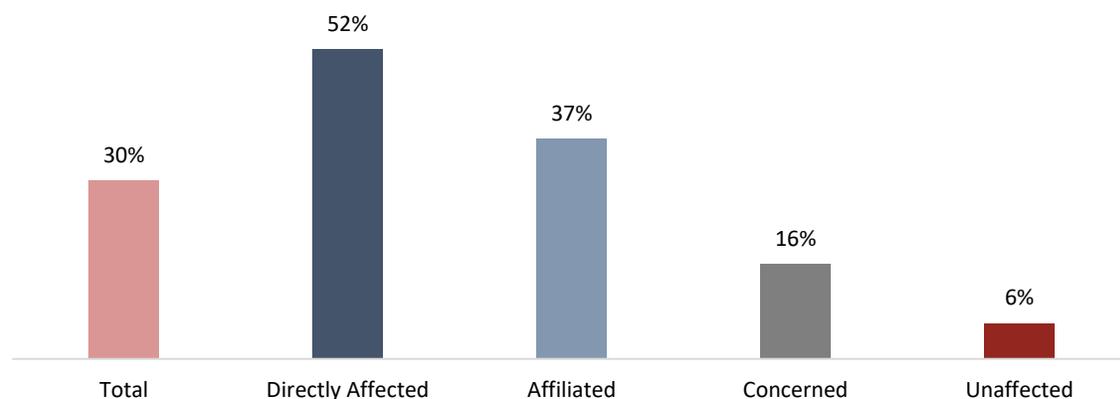
**Thinking about the building or space you work/go to school in, would you say it's generally easy or difficult for people to get into/move around in?  
(Asked of those currently working, n=1109)**



**Main challenges of inaccessible spaces**

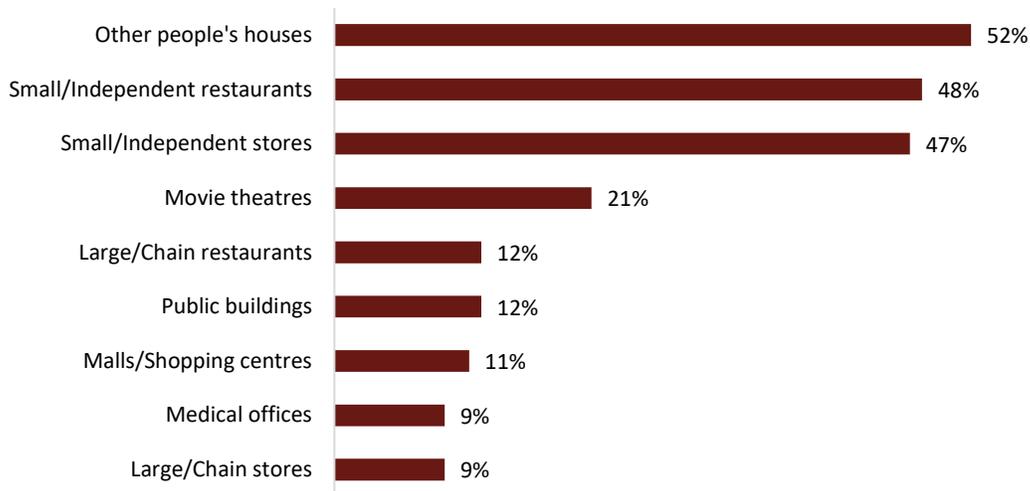
Overall, three-in-ten Canadians – the equivalent of roughly 9 million adults – say that accessibility is a consideration for them when they're thinking about which places they will go to and which they will avoid. This creates a significant consideration for the businesses and service providers in planning accessibility infrastructure:

**Does accessibility come into consideration when you're thinking about which specific places you'll go to and which ones you will try to avoid?  
(Those who responded 'yes')**



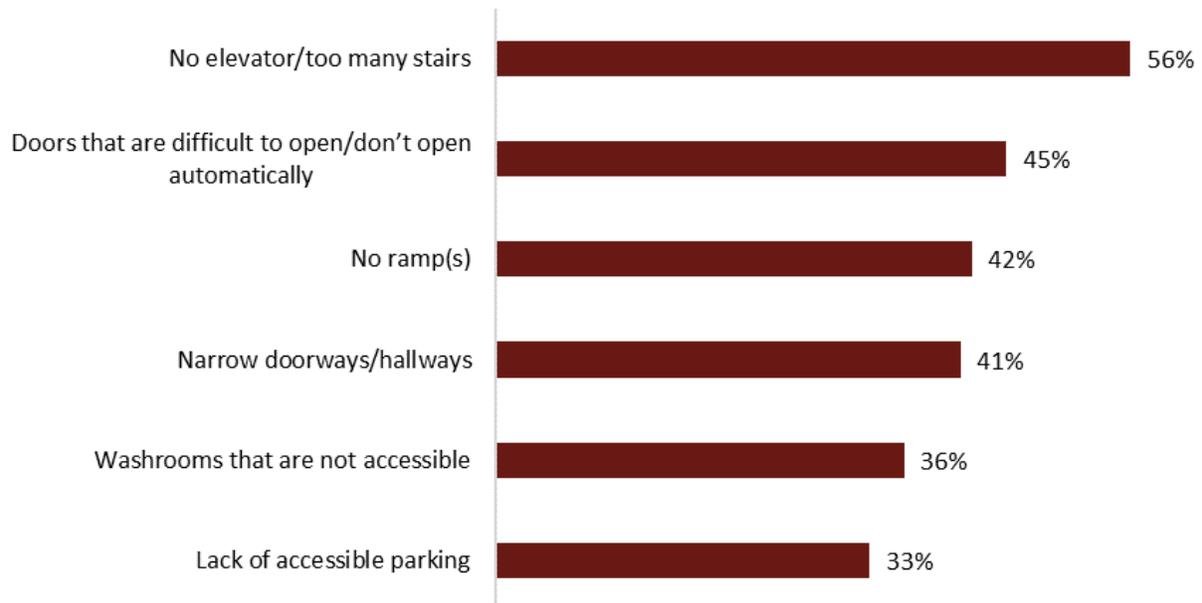
This is apparently a consideration even for homeowners whose friends may view their property as inaccessible. Indeed, when those who say accessibility is a concern are asked which buildings or areas they avoid, other people's houses tops the list, with small businesses close behind:

**Which types of places do you find you have to try to avoid due to lack of accessibility? Among those who avoid specific places (n=531)**



This data also offer a window into what can be done to address these problems. The most common issues cited by those who avoid certain places are seen in the following graph:

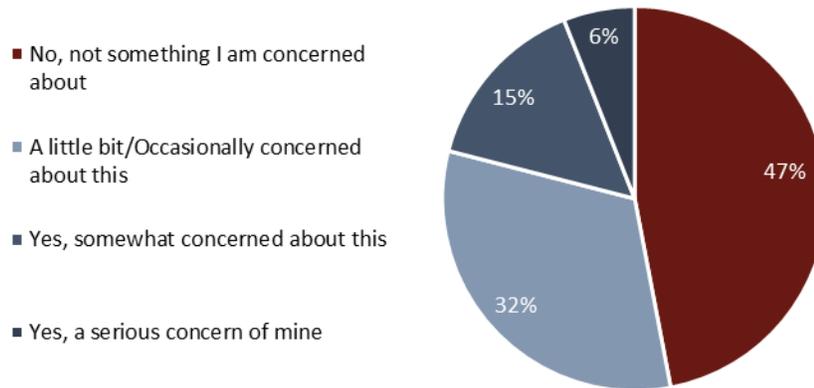
**What types of challenges do those places present that make them difficult to access? Among those who avoid specific places (n=531)**



**Future challenges anticipated**

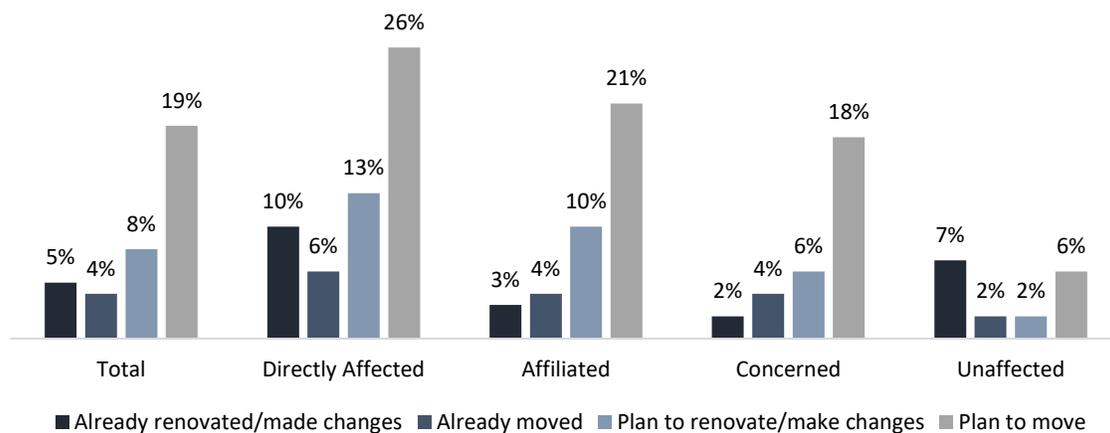
While one-in-three Canadians (33%) currently say they have issues getting around their own home, a full majority say that they are anticipating challenges moving around at home in decades to come. Asked to look 10 to 15 years down the road, more than half say they are at least occasionally concerned about what their mobility may look like for themselves and their family:

**Let's say 10 or 15 years down the road – are you concerned about your current home's accessibility or suitability for yourself and your family as you age?**



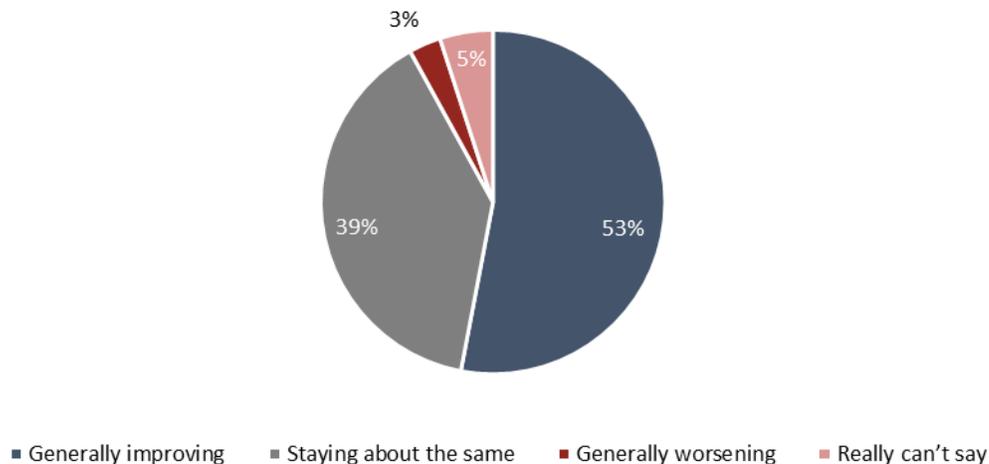
Many are taking proactive measures to get ahead of any potential problem. In fact, close to four-in-ten (37%) say they have already made changes or plan to, in anticipation of future accessibility challenges. The Directly Affected are more likely to have done each of these actions than the three other groups:

**Have you made or planned any changes to where you live because of future mobility/accessibility issues?**



While future anxiety is evidently held by a significant number of Canadians, it is also worth noting that slightly more than half say that they see accessibility being continually improved in their communities. Some 53 per cent say their community is making incremental progress, though a substantial proportion say they have not been seeing much improvement (39%):

Overall, do you think the accessibility of places like these in your community is generally improving, worsening, or staying about the same?



### Part 3: The policy environment

#### Low awareness of current accessibility rules

Currently, Canadian accessibility standards vary from city to city and province to province. Because of this, the survey asked respondents to share their familiarity with the rules in place where they live.

Most Canadians know relatively little about accessibility standards in their city or town. Only one-in-ten (10%) say they are “quite familiar” with the regulations where they live, and fully four-in-ten (40%) say they know only that such rules exist.

Interestingly, this lack of familiarity extends across the four experience groups relatively evenly. Those who have a mobility, vision or hearing disability or physical challenge themselves are not markedly more likely to profess a deep knowledge of local accessibility standards than those in the Unaffected group:

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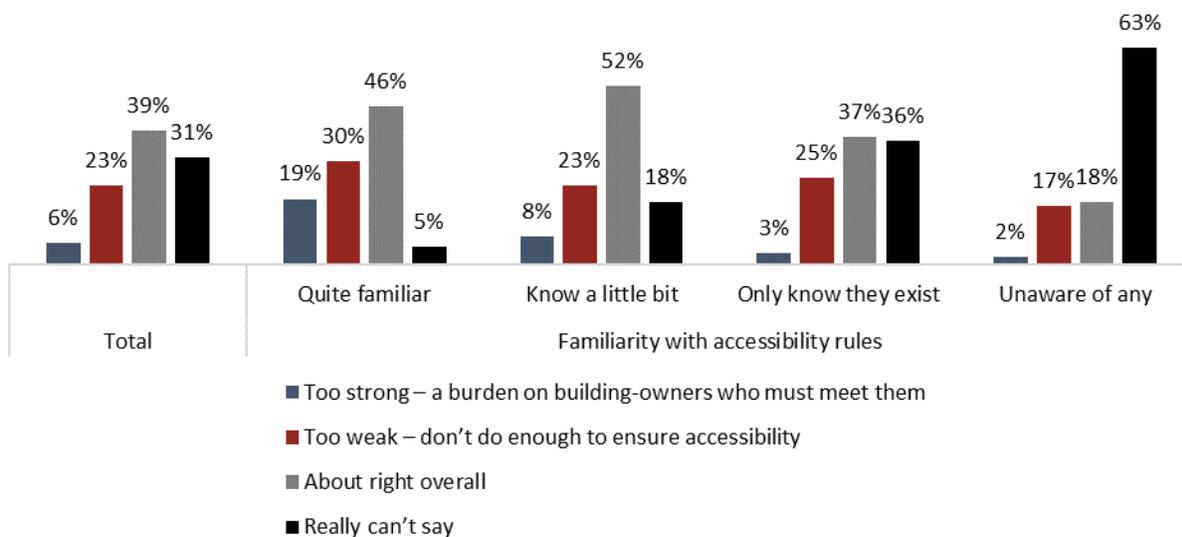
**Thinking about the accessibility standards where you live, how much would you say you know them?**



Perhaps as a result of this lack of familiarity with local accessibility standards, Canadians tend to see such rules in their communities as “about right overall” (39%) or are unsure about what rating they would give (31%).

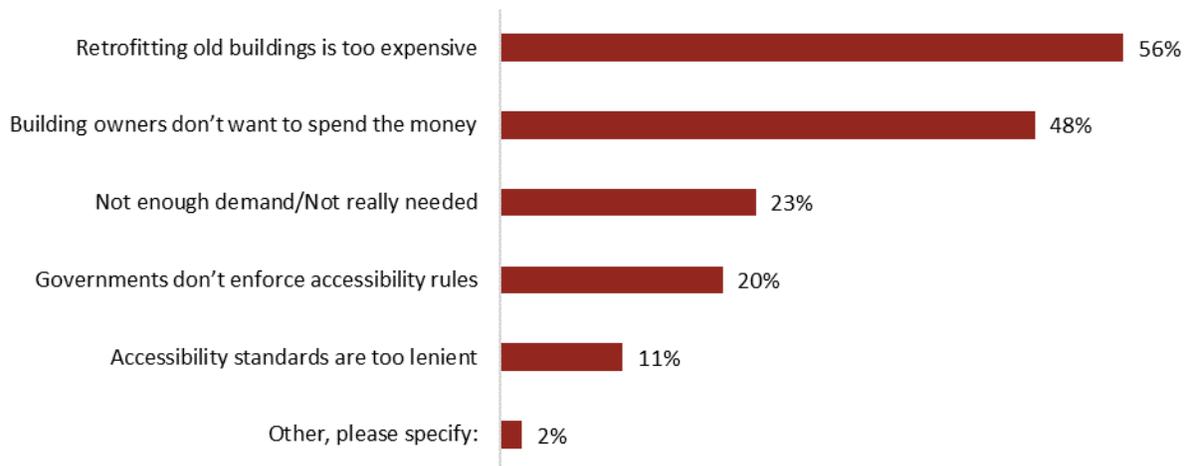
A large driver of opinion on accessibility regulations where one lives is knowledge of the regulations in question, as seen in the graph that follows.

**Would you say these standards in your community are ...**



In general, Canadians view a lack of accessibility in the built environment more as a product of cost concerns than as the result of lax regulation or enforcement:

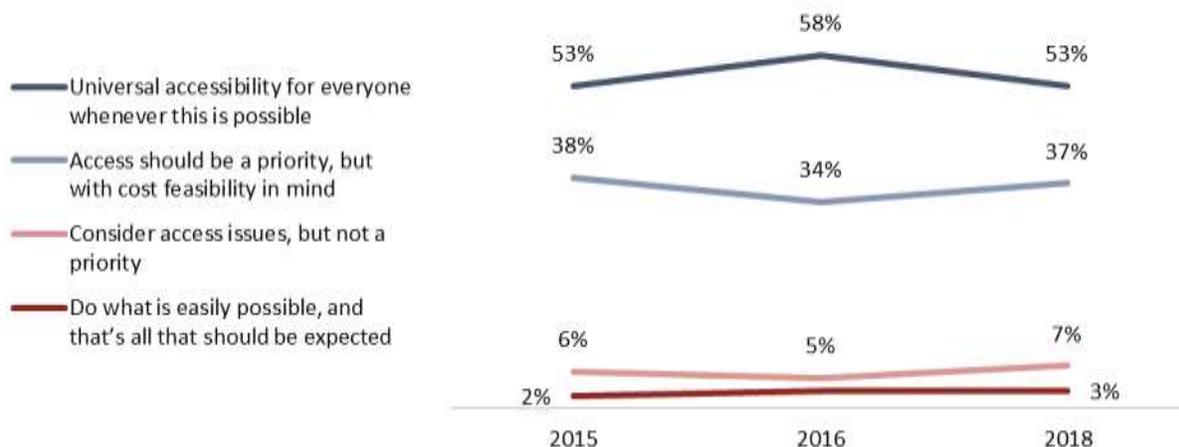
**When buildings aren't very accessible and pose barriers to people with a physical disability, what do you think are the most common reasons for that?  
(Choose up to 2)**



**Universal access, uniform standards**

Since ARI and RHF first asked in 2015, Canadians have consistently said their country should be aiming for universal accessibility whenever possible.

**What is your overall view about the level of accessibility that should exist in Canada today?**

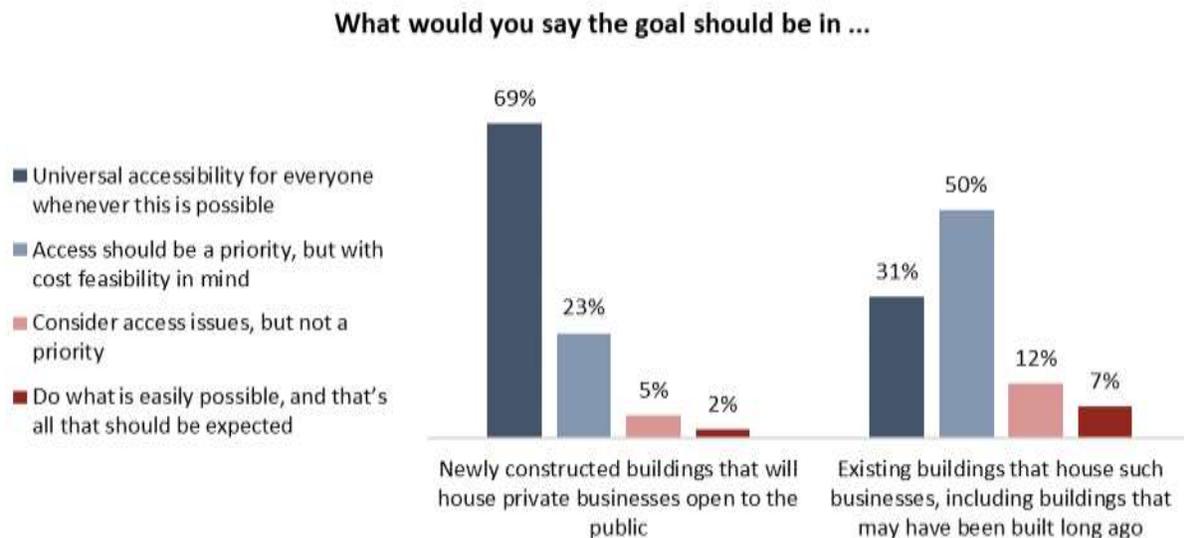


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Researchers included a follow-up question in this 2018 survey, asking respondents to use the same scale to describe the level of accessibility that should be the goal for new construction versus existing buildings.

As might be expected, significantly larger numbers say universal access should be required in new buildings, while fewer say this about existing spaces that may have been built a long time ago:

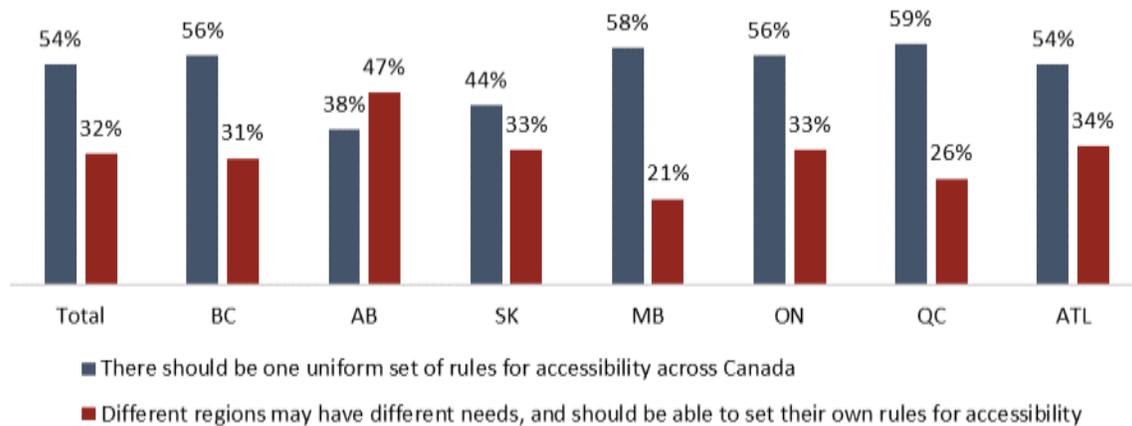


The desire for universality going forward can be seen in responses to another question from this survey, this one about accessibility legislation and whether there should be a uniform standard for accessibility across Canada.

Slightly more than half of Canadians (54%) say there should be “one uniform set of rules for accessibility across Canada,” while roughly one-in-three (32%) say “different regions may have different needs and should be able to set their own rules for accessibility. The rest (13%) are unsure.

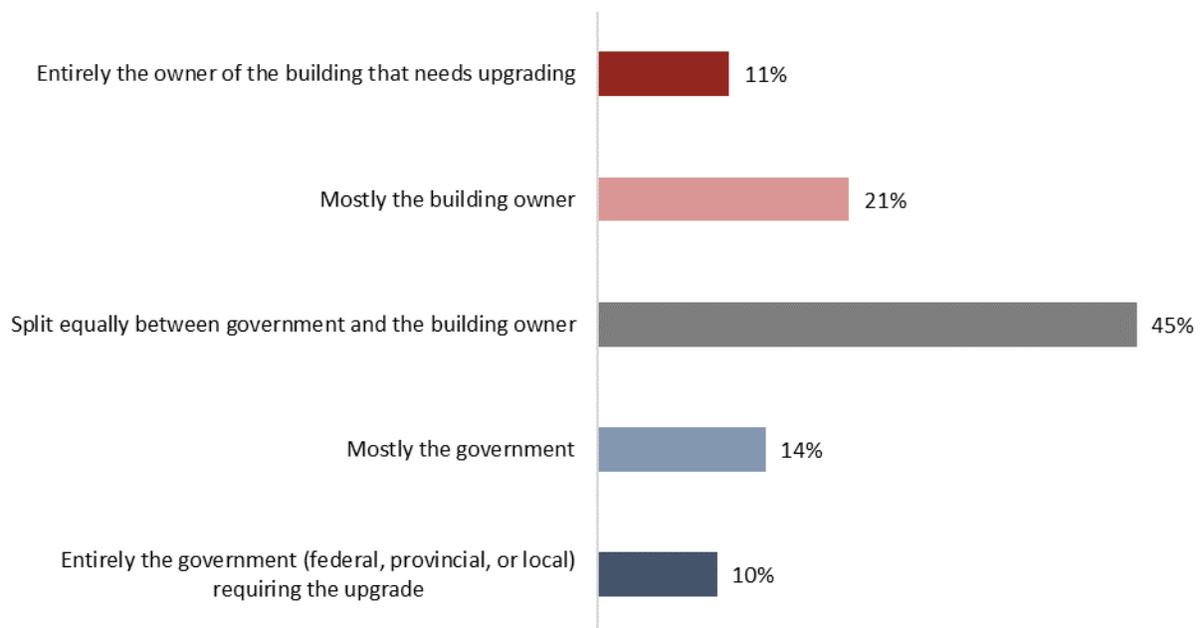
There were some significant regional response differences to this question, specifically between Alberta – where more people place themselves on the local control side of this question – and other provinces:

**Which of the following statements is closer to your own view when it comes to accessibility regulations?**



Regarding accessibility-related upgrades for existing buildings, Canadians were of the opinion that if government mandates the upgrade then it should help pay the cost. Nearly half (45%) say governments and building owners should split the financial burden of renovation evenly, while only one-in-ten (11%) would place the onus completely on building owners:

**When a building is inaccessible and needs to be renovated to meet accessibility regulations, who should be responsible for the cost of the renovation?**



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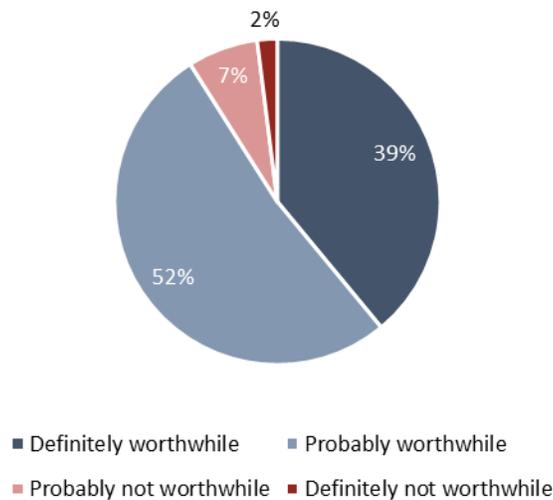
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**Accessibility certification seen as worthwhile**

As was [the case in 2016](#), when the Angus Reid Institute assessed Canadian opinions regarding the creation of a program in Canada similar to [LEED](#) – the U.S.-based Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system that rates buildings based on their energy efficiency and environmental sustainability – for accessibility, Canadians overwhelmingly see a certification program like this as “worthwhile”.

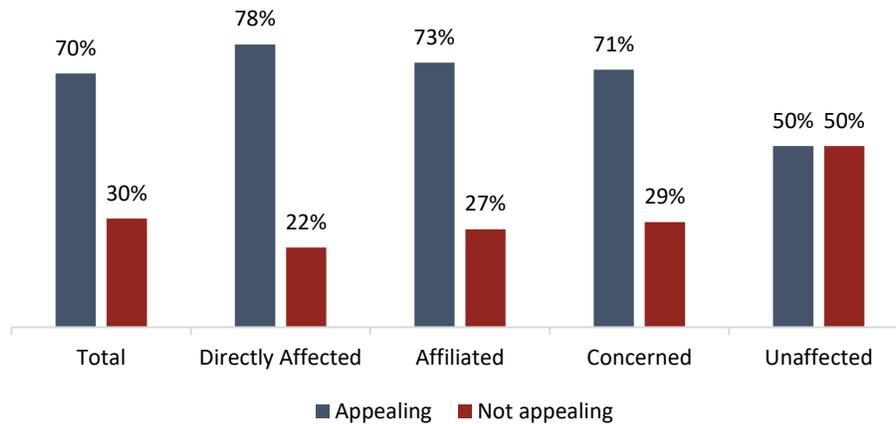
This year, Canadians were asked specifically about [the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification](#) (RHFAC). While just 16 per cent say they are aware of the program currently, the idea is viewed positively by nearly all respondents. Nine-in-ten Canadians (91%) say the program would be worthwhile:

**Would you say the RHFAC program is:**



Further, large numbers say they would find a certified accessible home “appealing” if they were looking for a new place to live. The comfort of knowing that their new home is given RHFAC approval is evidently appealing to three of the four groups, based on their mindset toward accessibility. More than seven-in-ten from the Directly Affected, Affiliated and Concerned say this, while the Unaffected are split evenly:

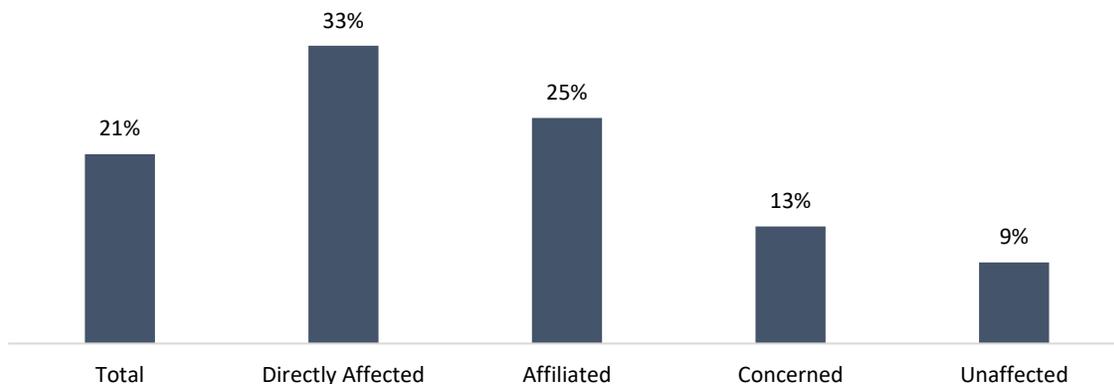
**How appealing would it be that the new building you moved into were certified as accessible?**



Overall, one-in-five (21%) also say that this accessibility certification would impact their shopping habits. This group says that if they knew a business in their community had been certified as accessible, they would try to give more of their business to that store. The proportion saying this rises to one-in-three (33%) among the Directly Affected:

**Suppose you knew that a business in your community had been certified as accessible. Would this have any impact on your dealings with this business?**

**Percentage who say, "Yes, I would try to give them more of my business"**



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public*

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*administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

***For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).***  
***For detailed results by the four groups, [click here](#).***

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