

Opinions in BC on Mental Health and Substance Use

SURVEY RESULTS FOR RELEASE | CMHA BC

Wednesday, October 14, 2026

54%

say more care and supports would make the biggest difference in improving mental health and substance use in their community

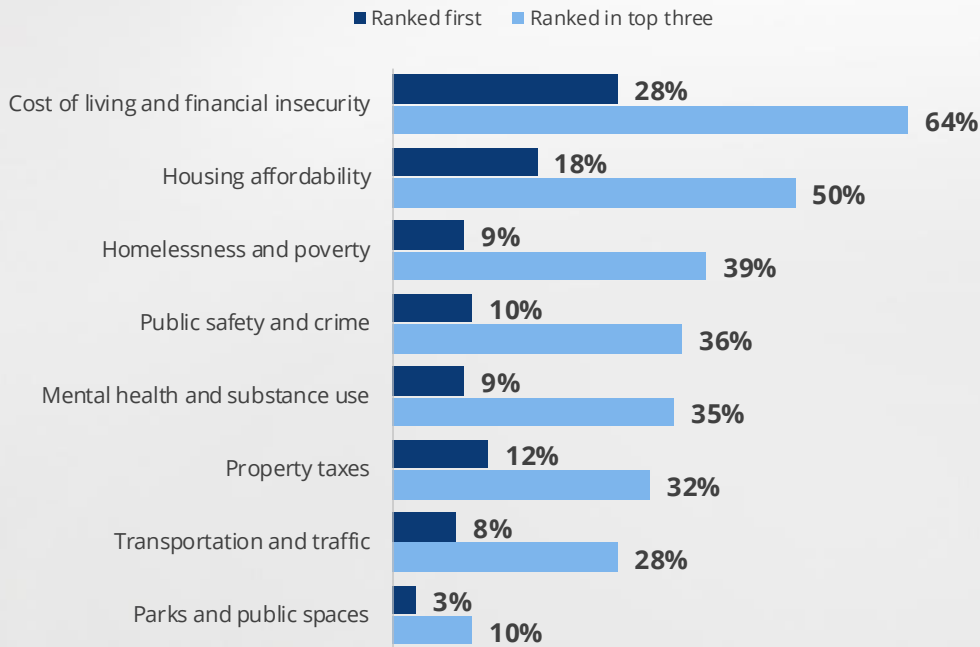
Key Findings

- **A top community challenge:** 35% name mental health and substance use among the three biggest challenges facing their community, alongside cost of living (64%), housing affordability (50%), homelessness and poverty (39%) and public safety (36%).
- **First response is care:** asked in their own words what would make the biggest difference, 54% give an answer about more care and supports, led by more and easier access to treatment and services (31%).
- **A stronger system:** 88% agree a stronger mental health system means people can get help in their communities before they reach a crisis.
- **Prevention:** 85% agree safer communities are ones where people have access to housing, care and treatment before a crisis; 82% say waiting until someone is in crisis is too late.
- **Voluntary access first:** 81% agree governments need to make sure people who want help can get voluntary treatment when they need it.
- **Local action:** nearly nine in ten (89%) say it is important for municipal governments to act, ahead of the October 17 municipal elections.

Community challenges: mental health and substance use is top-three for 35% of British Columbians

3

BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY



WHAT STANDS OUT

- 35% name mental health and substance use in their top three; 9% rank it first.
- It is named most often in the Interior and North (41%) and on Vancouver Island (37%).
- Women are more likely to name it (41% under 50, 40% aged 50 and over) than men (28% and 29%).
- Lived experience matters: 44% of those with a mental health challenge of their own name it, compared to 23% of those with no experience.

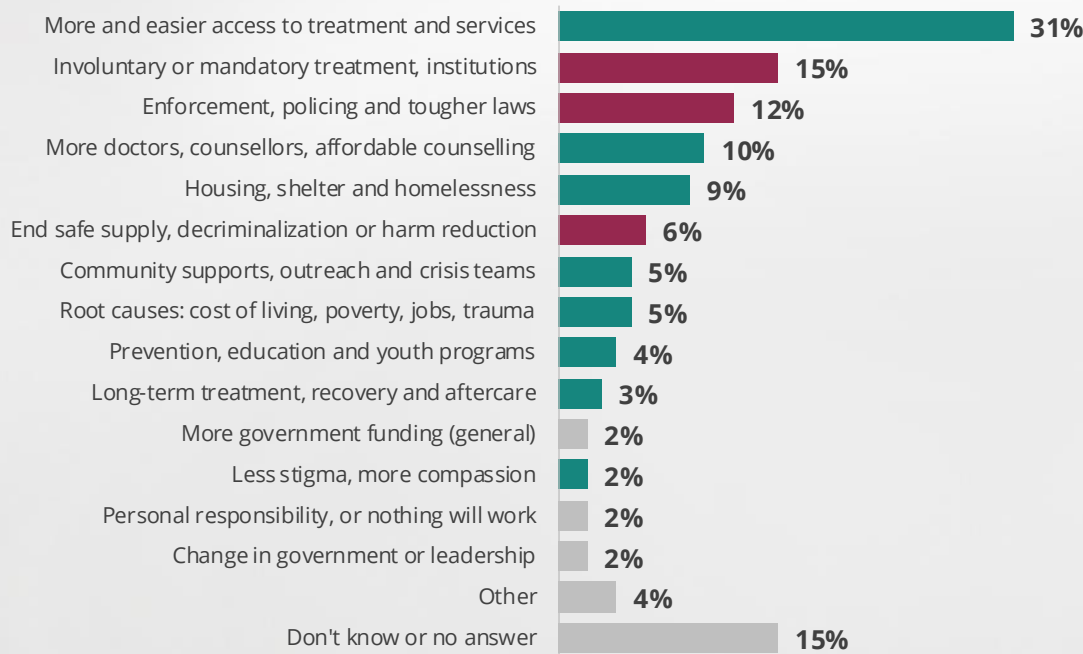


Thinking about your community, which three of the following do you consider the biggest challenges facing your community today?
Base: online respondents (n=2,509), fielded September 23 to 30, 2026.

In their own words: 54% say more care and supports would make the biggest difference

4

WHAT WOULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE (OPEN-ENDED, CODED)



54%

Care and supports
(net)

30%

Compulsion and
enforcement (net)

- More and easier access to treatment and services is the most common answer (31%), twice the share of any other theme.
- 48% give only care answers, 24% only compulsion or enforcement answers and 6% both; 15% gave no answer.
- Lived experience: 67% of those with a mental health challenge of their own give a care answer, compared to 40% of those with no experience.



In a few words, what do you think would make the biggest difference in improving mental health and substance use in your community? Open-ended, coded by Pollara, multiple themes allowed. Themes that round to under 2% are not shown.

Base: online respondents (n=2,509), fielded September 23 to 30, 2026. Teal = care and supports; plum = compulsion and enforcement.

Community safety and care: prevention and voluntary access first above 80% agreement

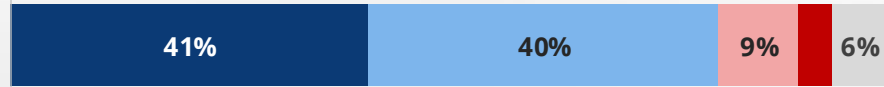
5

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

Safer communities are communities where people have access to housing, mental health care, substance use treatment and other supports before they reach a crisis



Waiting until someone is in crisis is too late. Investing in housing, mental health care and community supports can prevent crises and make communities safer



Before expanding involuntary treatment, governments need to make sure people who want help can actually get voluntary mental health and substance use treatment when they need it



A stronger mental health system means people can get help in their communities before they reach a crisis with community organizations working alongside primary care, hospitals and other health services to provide the right support at the right time



- 81% agree voluntary access must come first; 44% strongly.
- Lived experience strengthens the view: 57% of those with a mental health challenge of their own strongly agree voluntary access must come first, compared to 32% of those with no experience.

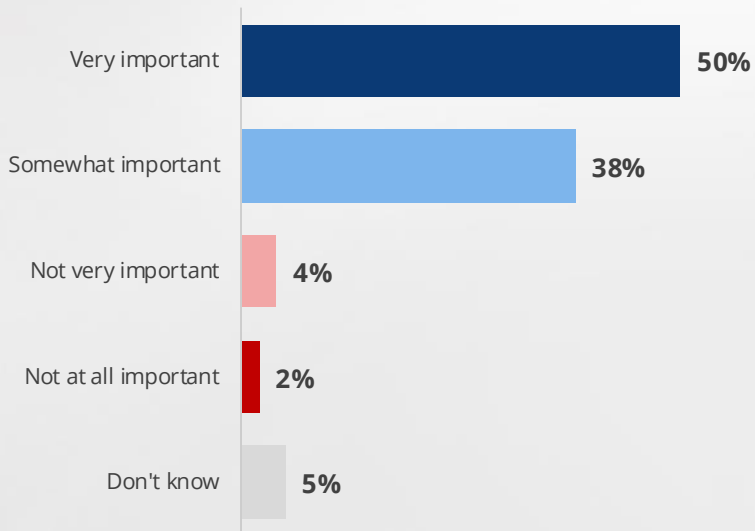


Below are some different things people might say about mental health, substance use and community safety. To what extent do you agree or disagree? Full statement wording as shown in the survey.
Base: online respondents (n=2,509), fielded September 23 to 30, 2026.

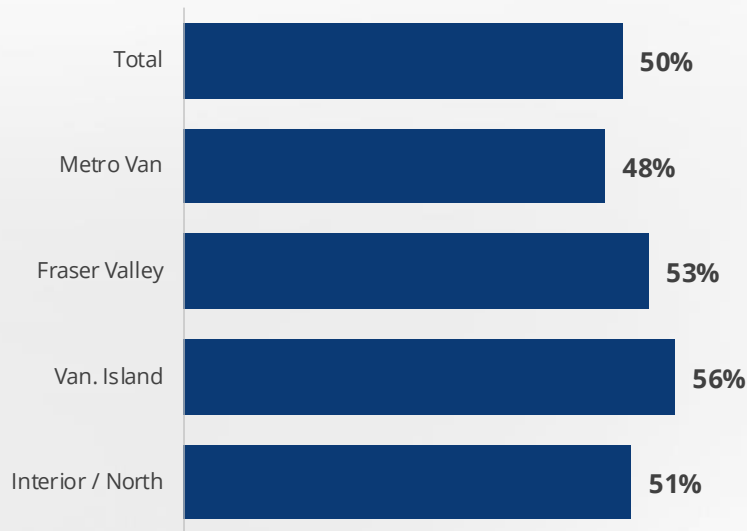
Municipalities: nearly nine in ten say it is important that local governments act

6

IMPORTANCE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS ACTING



VERY IMPORTANT, BY REGION



- Lived experience raises the stakes: 60% of those with a mental health challenge of their own say municipal action is very important, compared to 38% of those with no experience.

Q Mental health, health care and substance use services are primarily the responsibility of the provincial government, but municipalities also deal with related issues in their communities. How important do you think it is for municipal governments to take action?
Base: online respondents (n=2,509), fielded September 23 to 30, 2026. Fraser Valley (n=158) is a small base.

Methodology

7

Sample	Questions for CMHA BC were asked of the online sample of <i>The Western Canadian Perspective Syndicate</i> survey: n=2,509 BC adults (18+).
Field dates	September 23 to 30, 2026.
Weighting	Weighted by region, gender and age based on most recent census results.
Reliability	Online panels cannot be assigned a margin of error. A probability sample of n=2,509 would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0%, 19 times out of 20; larger for subgroups.
Open end	Answers to "what would make the biggest difference" were coded into themes by Pollara. An answer could receive more than one theme. A second, independent coding of all 2,509 answers produced the same results within one to two points.

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