

Six in Ten Canadians Surveyed Have Little or No Sense of Community, New YMCA Research Reveals

YMCA Highlights Canadian Social Isolation and Offers Connection Through Community Programs

Cobourg, ON, September 17, 2024 - A new survey commissioned by YMCA Canada, conducted among Angus Reid Forum members, reveals that a staggering 60% of Canadians feel disconnected from their community, with 16% reporting they never feel a sense of community and 44% experiencing it only sometimes.

The survey, launched alongside the YMCA's first nationwide brand awareness campaign, highlights the state of social connections in Canada.

Combating Loneliness in a Fragmented Society

The survey revealed that feelings of disconnection are particularly acute among Canadians under 55, with 68% of 18 to 34-year-olds and 64% of 25 to 54-year-olds feeling a lack of belonging. The survey also uncovered solutions among those who feel a stronger sense of connection including;

- Spending less time on electronic devices
- Engaging in extracurricular activities that foster community involvement
- Interacting with others outside of work or school at least twice a week

"The YMCA has long been a trusted community partner," said Peter Dinsdale, President & CEO, YMCA Canada. "In cities and towns across Canada, the YMCA is a lifeline for many. YMCAs provide inclusive spaces and programs where people, regardless of background or income, can find community, build relationships, and shine. At a time when so many feel they don't always belong, the YMCA offers opportunities for people to make meaningful social connections."

Young People and Children Hit Hard by Isolation

What's more, nearly one-third of parents surveyed report that their children express feelings of isolation, and almost half (49%) say their kids rely more on online interactions than in-person ones. The YMCA offers tailored programs for youth and families focusing on real-world skills, physical activity, and social connections.

"At YMCA Northumberland, we are committed to creating inclusive spaces where people from all walks of life can come together and build lasting connections," said Eunice Kirkpatrick, President & CEO. "This research highlights the critical need for more opportunities to foster community and belonging across Northumberland, and we're proud to offer programs that help individuals and families find support, friendship, and a sense of purpose."

Income Inequality: A Challenge for Social Engagement

In addition to age and screen time, the survey reveals that income plays a significant role in Canadians' ability to maintain social connections. Among employed Canadians and students, 64% of those earning over \$100,000 annually report seeing people five to seven times a week, while 43% of Canadians interact with others outside of work or school only two days a week or less.

For lower-income Canadians, the struggle is even more pronounced. Only 28% of those earning below \$50,000 annually experience social interactions 5-7 times per week compared to 42% of higher earners. The YMCA's affordable programs, coupled with financial assistance, provide a crucial bridge for those facing economic barriers, ensuring everyone can engage with their community, regardless of their financial situation.

"Third Places" Offer Community

The survey highlights the value of "third places"—community spaces outside home or work. While 36% of Canadians report not having one, those who do have a "third place" report higher levels of belonging and connection to their community, with parks and outdoor spaces being the most popular. Even those without a "third place" recognize its importance:

- 91% say they help build strong communities
- 89% believe they boost well-being
- 85% feel they improve quality of life
- 84% agree they foster belonging

As winter approaches, YMCA Associations across the country aim to fill this gap, providing welcoming spaces for connection and mental and physical health.

To learn more about the national YMCA campaign, visit campaign2024.ymca.ca



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ABOUT YMCA NORTHUMBERLAND

As a charity, YMCA Northumberland provides vital community services that have a positive impact on pressing social issues—from chronic disease to unemployment, social isolation, poverty, inequality and more. The Strong Community Campaign helps countless children, teens, adults, and seniors in the community. YMCA Canada is one of the longest standing and largest charities nationally, with a presence in Canada since 1851 and now serving more than 2.1 million people annually across 1,700 program locations.

About the Survey

These findings are from a survey conducted by YMCA from August 29 to September 3, 2024, among a representative sample of 1,501 online Canadians who are members of the Angus Reid Forum. The survey was conducted in English and French. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/-2.53 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.