

Well-Being and Quality of Life in Bellevue



WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN BELLEVUE

What conditions need to be present in a community so that everyone can reach their full potential and be able to fully contribute, “give back” to the community? This year residents who participated in the phone/online survey rated their satisfaction with living in Bellevue and also this year were asked a question rating their well-being. In many of the Community Conversations, participants commented about the high quality of their lives here. Other departments in the city such as Planning and Community Development through its Neighborhood Outreach Program, the Finance Department, through its Performance Measures and Budget surveys, and Parks and Community Services Department also ask residents their opinions about Bellevue’s livability and its health as a city. Uniformly residents give the City high marks.

This section of the Needs Update:

- summarizes key findings from the phone/online survey and qualitative information from other sources indicating how residents perceive Bellevue’s quality of life and their overall well being

- describes other efforts in the city that seek to increase the city’s livability during a time of enormous growth and increasing diversity
- details what community issues are of most concern to residents.

Residents’ Feelings of Overall Well-Being

A new question was introduced in 2017 to get an overall picture of residents’ feelings of well-being. The question text was: “Individual well-being includes your physical and mental or emotional health, your financial stability, and your social relationships. Well-being also includes having access to support systems to help with employment, education, community, and transportation. Keeping all of this in mind, how would you rate your overall well-being compared to one year ago? Use a scale from 0 to 10 where “0” means your well-being is “significantly worse than it was one year ago” and “10” means your well-being is “significantly better than it was one year ago”.



Figure 1: Overall satisfaction with the City of Bellevue | Source: 2017 Phone/Online Survey

Most residents (53%) stated that their overall well-being is roughly the same as it was one year ago and 43 percent stated that their well-being is either somewhat (24%) or significantly (20%) better than it was one year ago.

Percentages are generally similar across all demographic groups.

Understanding the Link Between the Need for Human Services and the Concept of Well-Being

The Frameworks Institute has conducted research on what resonates with people when making the case for the need for human services. Their research indicates that emphasizing the importance to society of supporting overall health and well-being for all, using the value of human potential, is more effective than describing those who need human services as vulnerable and struggling. Using the metaphor of constructing a house, they explain how well-being is built like a structure is built: every building needs a strong foundation and certain materials; building well-being requires community resources, social relationships and opportunities to thrive.¹ They also found that many people understand well-being as an individual attribute or attainment focusing on financial success and independence, and believe those who are not doing well do not have the motivation and will power to improve their lives. This notion makes it difficult for many to see that the environment and human systems also play a part in individual behaviors. Using the logic that the more you help people the more dependent they become, people may fail to see how support from the community and systems change can create a better community in which all members can thrive.²

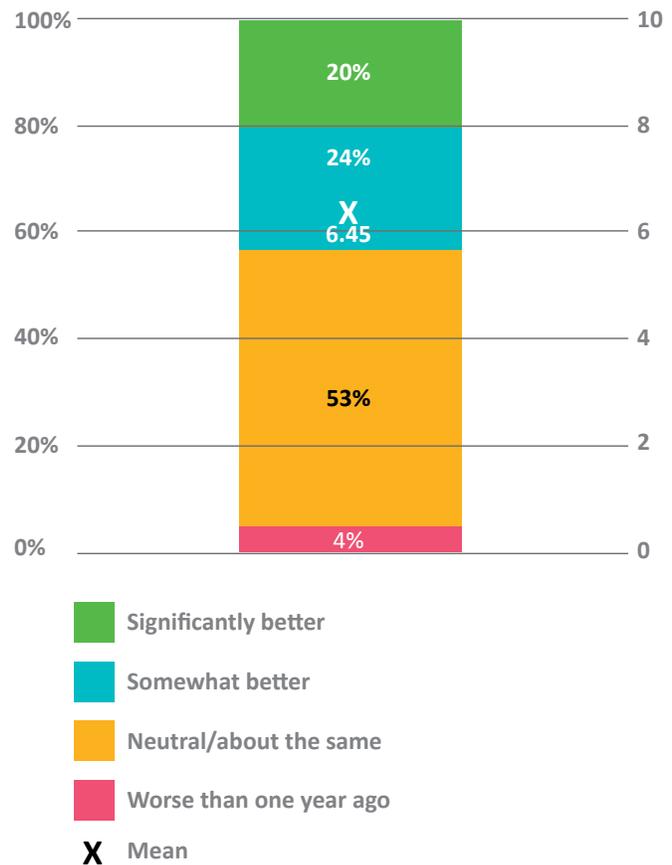


Figure 2: Overall Well-Being Compared to the Previous Year
Source: 2017 Phone/Online Survey

Perception of the Quality of Life in Bellevue

- Using a scale of 0 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), residents gave an average rating of 8.33 to describe the livability in Bellevue. This is slightly lower than the 2015 rating, but is not statistically significant. The percentage of residents who gave a scale rating of 9 or 10 was 47% this year, compared to 49% in 2015. Satisfaction was rated good (7 or 8) by 47% of residents in 2013 the same as 2015. This gave an overall satisfaction of 93%, the same as reported in 2015 (96%) and 2013 (96%).
- There were no significant differences in average ratings based on resident characteristics such as age, gender, income or household type.
- Surveys conducted by the City for other purposes also found similar results. For

example, in the 2016 Budget Survey, the majority of respondents (96%) said the quality of life in the city is good to excellent. In the 2017 Performance Survey, 95% of respondents said the quality of life meets or exceeds their expectations, and 94% rated their neighborhood as either an “excellent” or “good” place to live.

- In the 2016 Parks Plan survey, virtually all Bellevue residents have a positive view of the quality of life in the City (95%). In fact, ratings are fairly evenly divided between those that say that quality of life is “excellent” and those that give it a “good” rating. Nearly all Bellevue residents (95%) believe that parks and recreation opportunities in Bellevue positively affect the overall quality of life here: 65% say that these opportunities “greatly enhance” it.

Community Assets

Similar to other years, Bellevue residents identified some of the community’s assets in written comments on the consumer surveys and in the Community Conversations. These assets include:

- Diversity, especially in the Crossroads area
- Clean city, including streets and parks
- Safety, low crime rate
- Good social services
- Very good schools
- Community Centers
- Green environment
- Great place for families

Connectedness in Bellevue Communities

It is no surprise that Bellevue has won many awards for its excellence. For example, the National League of Cities issued Bellevue its Cultural Diversity Award in 2015 for adopting a plan to support its growing diversity. Livability.com ranked Bellevue number 14 in its Top 100 Best Places to Live, and 24/7 Wall Street in 2014 ranked Bellevue second among America’s 50

best cities in which to live. The City of Bellevue has a number of ongoing efforts to ensure that its residents have a voice in what they need in their communities in order to keep the quality of life as high as it is now. Some of these efforts are described below.

The City’s Neighborhood Outreach Program

Bellevue has 16 distinct neighborhood areas with unique histories, character and neighborhood amenities. Neighborhood Outreach works with neighborhood leaders and residents to build up the health, livability and community connections that make Bellevue such a great place to live. The City of Bellevue prioritizes strengthening the quality of life in our neighborhoods through our Neighborhood Outreach programming and services. A few examples include:

Neighborhood Liaisons: Sometimes it helps to have a connection with someone who knows the City, the neighborhoods and the community resources that are available. Neighborhood liaisons are assigned to each of the 16 unique neighborhood areas and provide assistance for resident questions, connection to available resources and support to help strengthen neighborhood associations and improve City responsiveness to neighborhood concerns.

Mini-City Hall: Since 1997, the Crossroads Mini City Hall (MCH) has become an information and service hub for east Bellevue residents. Located in the Crossroads Shopping Center, MCH is open six days a week with team of staff and volunteers who speak 10 languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean and Arabic. MCH provides information about city programs and services and partners with many non-profit organizations and public agencies to bring needed services to Bellevue residents in the areas of human services, employment, health care, interpretation and civic engagement.

In addition to providing information about City programs and services, MCH partners with non-

profits and public agencies. These partnerships bring needed services to Bellevue residents in the areas of human services, employment, health care, etc.

Building Community: The NeighborLink Program, which began in 2009, was designed to bring neighbors together in a spirit of community, service and celebration, encouraging and supporting neighborhood efforts that build healthy, lasting connections. Neighbors who know one another, are involved in their community and the city at large, and make a difference to improve the quality of life and safety for all of their residents. The NeighborLink Program provides support for neighborhood gatherings, including promotional banners, Mariner tickets, road closures and coordination with Bellevue Fire, Emergency Preparedness, and Bellevue Police for neighborhood safety.

Bellevue's Cultural Conversations is a partnership between a diverse group of women in the community and the City of Bellevue. It was initiated by women who had a desire to get better connected with their community and who wanted to enhance their knowledge and understanding of different cultural practices and world views. The group meets approximately every six weeks from September to May.

Neighborhood Improvements: The Neighborhood Match program partners with neighborhoods on enhancement projects such as entry signs, landscaping and art projects. Neighborhood Match provides matching grants up to \$10,000 for small-scale neighborhood improvements. Neighbors provide in-kind donations, cash, professional services, building materials, and volunteer labor. The Neighborhood Enhancement Program provides citywide investment for modest-sized community-driven neighborhood improvement projects. For the past 20 years, the Neighborhood Enhancement program has funded hundreds of local improvement projects in Bellevue neighborhoods that have beautified the city and enhanced its livability.

Neighborhood Forums: Throughout the year, Neighborhood Outreach provides workshops and forums to deepen our understanding and community conversation on the major issues that impact our lives. Each forum provides avenues to learn more and action steps that we can take to strengthen the health and vitality of our neighborhoods. Neighborhood Outreach also hosts semi-annual Neighborhood Leadership Gatherings to respond to emerging neighborhood concerns and identify neighborhood priorities.

Bellevue Essentials: This nine-week leadership class provides an overview of the inner workings of city government. Interactive classes cover Bellevue history, diversity, parks, neighborhoods, planning, finances, utilities, transportation and more. This onramp for emerging leaders helps develop leaders for broader public service and will provide knowledge, skills and community connections that are helpful for effective civic engagement.

Neighborhood Mediation: Need some help with a conflict? The Bellevue Mediation Program may be able to help you. Many people who work or live in the City of Bellevue call us to help them resolve their conflicts through a continuum of free and confidential services. Help can be provided with conflicts involving: Neighbors, Elders, Parents and Teens, Businesses and consumers, Groups and organizations, Foreclosure, Landlords and Tenants.

Downtown Livability Initiative

The Downtown Livability initiative is a targeted review of regulations that guide development and land use activity within Downtown Bellevue. As the City readies itself for upcoming development cycles, this will be the most extensive Code update since the adoption of the original Downtown Land Use Code in 1981. Begun in late 2012, the project included a 15-person Advisory Committee (a mix of City board and commission members and community representatives) to develop recommendations relating to topics

such as building height and form, desired public amenities, pedestrian circulation, public open space, parking, and allowed uses. The objectives are to: better achieve the vision for Downtown Bellevue as a vibrant, mixed-use center; enhance the pedestrian experience; improve the area as a residential setting; enhance identity and character; and integrate elements from the companion transportation plan update and East Link design work. Downtown Bellevue is becoming an exciting place to work, shop, visit, or call home. It is also very important to the entire City from a growth and development perspective. The Planning Commission held its last meeting on the Downtown Livability Initiative on May 24, 2017. The Planning Commission's land use code amendment package has been transmitted to City Council for their review.

Diversity Advantage Plan: Bellevue Welcomes the World. Our Diversity is Our Strength

The City of Bellevue recognizes our diversity as an asset; it provides our economy with a competitive advantage, enriches our culture, enhances our arts, broadens our educational experience and provides new leadership and perspective to help our community thrive. The city reflects an attractive and interesting mix of cultures and backgrounds which has profoundly shaped Bellevue's identity, bringing both opportunities and new gifts, to our diverse community.

Bellevue's Diversity Advantage Plan was formally adopted by City Council in 2014. The plan developed as a result of two years of gathering input through four open community forums, discussions with community leaders, a review of similar efforts in surrounding municipalities, and research on best practices informed the plan.

Some of the work accomplished in 2016-17 includes:

Building capacity through opportunity and shared leadership:

- Volunteer Bridge Pilot Program: participants from 16 countries took a four week course to learn about volunteerism in the U.S., what opportunities exist, and how they can get involved;
- Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network: BDAN is a community network that provides support and advice on ways to improve the city's ability to communicate, collaborate and better serve Bellevue's diverse communities.
- Diversity Liaisons is a cross-departmental team that serve as departmental resources in advancing the diversity initiative. They identify and develop programing and citywide events ensuring city staff are engaged and informed on issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Development & Training: Cultural Competence Foundational Trainings is required for all city staff and to date, 40% of full time staff have undergone training. Other trainings include implicit bias awareness and departmental visioning workshops on historical and institutional inequities. 33 city staff also attended a two-day training on Courageous Conversations on Race. Two trainings were sponsored for human services providers who serve Bellevue/East King County residents.

Community partnerships and events: The city continues to foster working relationships with organizations like Leadership Eastside and the Eastside Refugee and Immigrant Coalition. Notable community-partnered events include Welcoming Week activities, Martin Luther King Celebration, Bellevue College Power of One and LGBTQ Conference.

City-wide initiatives:

- The Talent Hiring Initiative, a partnership with Human Resources, enhances equitable city processes in its recruitment, hiring and

retention practices. This initiative includes the Supported Employment program, which provides employment opportunities for individuals living with a disability to work with a job coach and obtain employment with the city.

- The Procurement Diversity Inclusion program, a partnership with Finance, ensures inclusion and opportunity for small business enterprises (SBE) and Women and Minority business enterprises (MWBE) in city procurement and contracting.

Communication: Language Access

The city’s linguistic diversity and efforts to provide exceptional customer service required a variety of translation and interpretation tools and resources that are accessible for all staff to assist all customers. The city also installed hearing loop systems in Council chambers, Council conference room, and the Bellevue Youth Theatre. Additional plans for expansion to other facilities are underway.

Public Safety: Police and Fire have enhanced outreach to vulnerable populations. For emergency services, the Fire department has conducted extensive outreach and workshops called Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. BPD has developed community advisory boards for Latino/a, Black/African American, Asian Pacific Islander, Muslim, LGBTQIA, and interfaith communities. Both departments have also bolstered recruiting efforts to diverse populations to better match the communities they serve.

Economic Development: Various projects have been completed including signage in Chinese for Global Innovation Exchange (GIX), development of Startup425 for small business development services, and expansion of these workshops.

Perception of Safety in Neighborhoods and Downtown

According to the 2015 Bellevue Police Department Annual Report, keeping with the trend of previous years, responses shifted from “very safe” to simply “safe”-significantly for walking downtown during the day and walking alone in general. Very few respondents report feeling “unsafe” when walking alone in Bellevue during daylight hours. In the 2015 City Performance Measures Survey Report, Cougar Mountain/Lakemont, Downtown and Northwest Bellevue neighborhoods are rated as the safest in general. Cougar Mountain/ Lakemont is also rated as the safest neighborhood after dark. In 2015, 78% of survey respondents rated “walking alone in the downtown business area after dark” as very safe down from 86% in 2014. In the same survey, in 2015, eight out of ten (88%) of residents who had contact with the police reported a positive experience with half saying the contact was excellent. This was similar to 2014 results.

Perception of Community Problem Areas in Bellevue

In the phone/online survey, respondents rated 24 potential problem areas as to whether they felt these were problems for individuals and families in the community. When interpreting

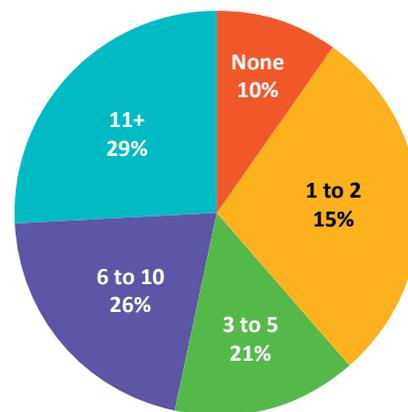


Figure 3: Number of Major/Moderate Problems Perceived in the Community in 2017
Source: 2017 Phone/Online Survey

these ratings it is important to note that these reflect people's perceptions and not necessarily actual prevalence of problems. A variety of factors (e.g. local or national media attention, positive or negative personal experiences) may affect respondents' ratings. Additionally, the term "your community" was not defined in the survey, and how respondents' interpretation of this phrase likely varied.

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of phone/online survey respondents in 2017 (54%) rated at least 5 of the 24 problems mentioned as moderate or major in the community. This is similar to 2015 results when 53% rated 5 or more moderate or major problems in the community. Twenty nine percent of respondents felt there were more than 11 moderate or major problems in their community the same as in 2015. Overall, respondents identified an average of 7.5 issues as major or moderate problems for their community. This is similar to 2015 (8.1) and significantly lower than the 2011 average of 10.0 major/moderate problems when the post-recession economy was still recovering.

For 23 out of 24 potential problems, the majority (50% or more) indicate that the issue is either not a problem at all, or only a minor problem in their community. The only exception to this is lack of affordable housing—77 percent say that this is a major (46%) or moderate (31%) problem that gathered the most major/moderate ratings. This is a significant increase when compared to the 68 percent received in 2015. Since 1999, lack of affordable housing has been ranked as the top problem within the first tier. Violence in the community gathered the lowest share of major/moderate ratings (15%) though this increased significantly compared to 2015 (10%).

Analysis of this year's results parallels analysis performed in previous years. The percentages of major/moderate problem ratings were divided into three levels of severity. Problems assigned to the Top Tier level were those that gathered at least 30 percent of all residents' major/moderate ratings, Second Tier problems achieved 20 percent up to

30 percent of major/moderate problem ratings and Third Tier were those that gathered less than a 20 percent share of these ratings.

This year twelve issues were Top Tier problems:

- *Lack of affordable housing*—77% Total (46% Major / 31% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable medical insurance*—45% Total (16% Major / 29% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable child care*—44% Total (16% Major / 27% Moderate)
- *Having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics*—44% Total (13% Major / 31% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable medical care*—42% Total (14% Major / 28% Moderate)
- *Inadequate public transportation*—39% Total (15% Major / 24% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable dental care*—36% Total (9% Major / 27% Moderate)
- *Homelessness*—34% Total (12% Major / 23% Moderate)
- *Drug abuse*—33% Total (10% Major / 23% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable legal services*—30% Total (7% Major / 23% Moderate)
- *Lack of money for basic services*—30% Total (7% Major / 23% Moderate)
- *Mental illness or emotional problems*—30% Total (8% Major / 21% Moderate)

Seven problems have placed in the Top Tier of problems in every survey since 2003. Six of the seven relate to the **affordability of living in Bellevue**: *lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable medical insurance, lack of affordable child care, having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics, lack of affordable medical care, and lack of affordable dental care.*

Of the 24 items considered in the survey, only two items had decreases of five points or more in the combined percentage of percentage of major/moderate problem ratings from the 2013 survey.

- *Unemployment*—down 7 percentage points from 2015 (20% from 27%)—significant decrease
- *People not speaking or understanding English well enough to function in society*—down 5 percentage points from 2015 (21% from 26%)

Nine of the 24 items considered in the survey had increases of five percentage points or more in the combined percentage of major/moderate problem ratings from the 2013 survey.

- *Lack of affordable medical insurance*—up 10 percentage points from 2015 (45% from 35%)—significant increase
- *Lack of affordable housing*—up 9 percentage points from 2015 (77% from 68%)—significant increase
- *Lack of affordable medical care*—up 7 percentage points from 2015 (42% from 35%)—significant increase
- *Lack of money for basic services*—up 7 percentage points from 2015 (30% from 23%)—significant increase
- *Racial or ethnic discrimination*—up 7 percentage points from 2015 (24% from 17%)—significant increase
- *Drug abuse*—up 7 percentage points from 2015 (33% from 26%)
- *Lack of affordable legal services*—up 5 percentage points from 2015 (30% from 25%)
- *Lack of services for elderly persons*—up 5 percentage points from 2015 (29% from 24%)
- *Violence in the community*—up 5 percentage points from 2015 (15% from 10%)

Historically, two other top tier community problems, *lack of affordable medical insurance* and

lack of affordable medical care, have had as many as half or more of respondents rating them as major/moderate problems. However that trend began to change in 2013 and continued in 2015: *lack of affordable insurance* was rated as a major/moderate community problem by 41% of respondents in 2013 and dropped to 35% in 2015. However, in 2017, ratings for those two problem areas increased. One can speculate that this increase may be due to the fact that medical premiums and deductibles have increased for some people who purchase insurance through the State Health Care Exchange if they don't have health insurance through an employer. With pending changes to federal health care laws, this will be an important trend to monitor over the next two years.

(Note: A detailed table of community problem areas listed in descending order by rating and a trend chart showing ratings since 2005 is included in Appendix A.)

Perception of Community Members' Accessibility to Services

As shown in Figure 5, the vast majority (71%), of the 2017 phone/online survey respondents, believes that people in their community have adequate access to services. This is comparable to 2015 findings.

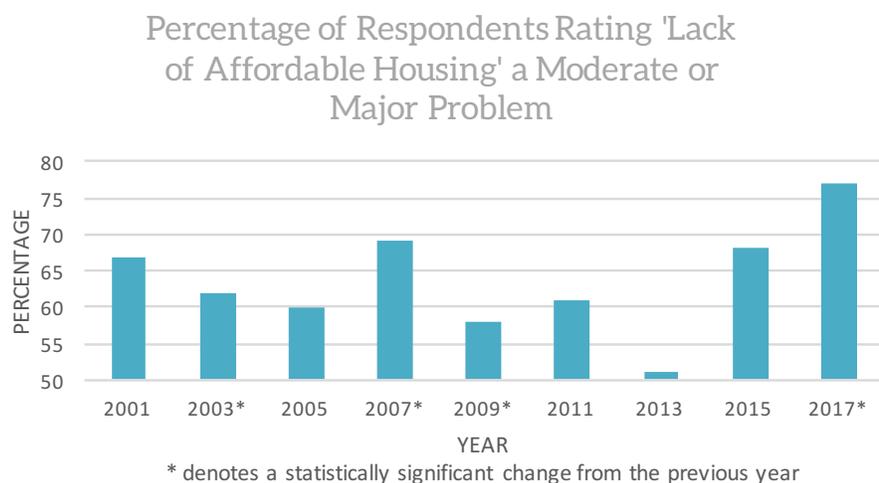


Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents Rating Lack of Affordable Housing a Moderate/Major Problem | Source: 2017 Phone/Online Survey

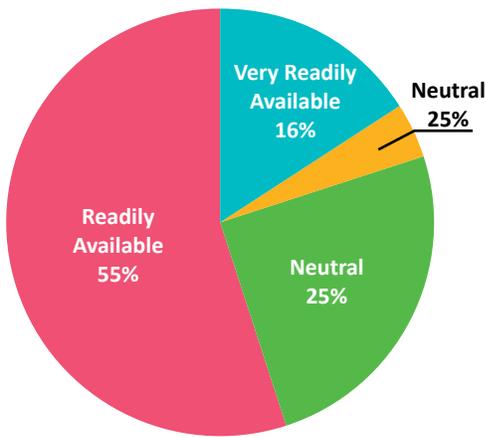


Figure 5: Availability of Human Services Needs in Bellevue | Source: 2017 Phone/Online Survey

The 7% of respondents indicating there is inadequate access were asked what services they believe people have difficulty accessing. The top mentions are listed below:

- Affordable housing – 21 comments
- Transportation-17 comments
- Health/dental care/insurance-15 comments
- Housing services-13 comments
- Counseling/mental health-12 comments
- Lack of information-9 comments
- Shelter for the homeless-9 comments
- Access to food-7 comments
- Recreational services-6 comments
- Drug/alcohol addiction-5 comments

Groups of Residents That Tend to Perceive More Problems in the Community

Overall, residents identified an average of 7.5 issues as major or moderate problems for their community. This similar to the 2015 average of 8.1 major/moderate problems.

Analysis of 2017 results found segments of residents who differed significantly from others

in the average number of community issues that they rated as major or moderate problems. The segments can be described in the following ways:

- **By Gender** – Females rated an average of 9.0 community issues as major or moderate problems, significantly more than males (5.9 problems).
- **By Age** – The older the residents, the more problems they rated as major or moderate problems.
 - Residents age 55 and older rated an average of 9.3 potential problems as major or moderate problems in their community, significantly more than residents age 18 to 34 (5.4 major/moderate problems) or those age 35 to 54 (7.5).
- **Length of time living in Bellevue** – Residents who have lived in Bellevue for 10 or more years have a significantly higher number of issues rated as major or moderate (8.9) when compared to those living in Bellevue for less than 10 years (6.0).
- **Race** – Residents who are white alone (non-Hispanic) indicated an average of 8.1 major/moderate problems in their community, whereas non-white residents or those of mixed race indicated an average of 6.5 major/moderate problems.
- **Primary language spoken at home** – Residents who primarily speak English at home indicated an average of 8.0 major/moderate problems in their community compared to 6.0 major/moderate problems for those who speak a language other than English at home.
- **By immigration Status** – Residents who have immigrated in the past 10 years indicated significantly fewer community problems than other residents—5.7 vs. 7.9 major/moderate problems, respectively.

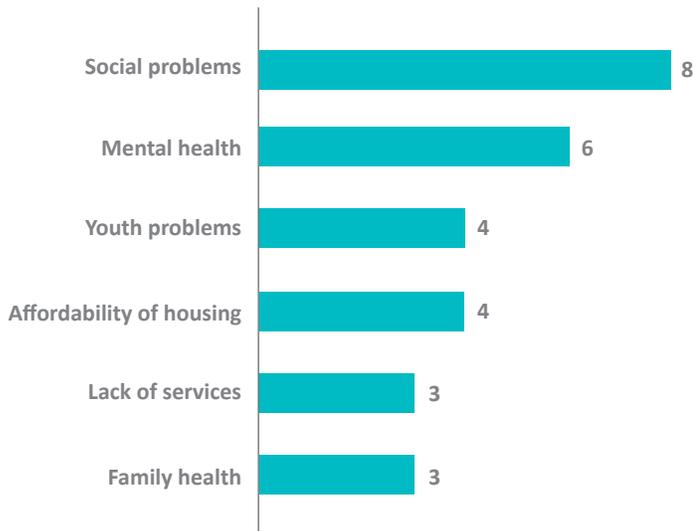


Figure 6: List of Other Unaddressed Human Services Issues

Other Problem Areas Perceived to Exist in the Community

Since 2001, an increasing number of respondents reported that there were no other problems in the community than those listed in the survey. In 2001, 73% reported that there were no other problems, and in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 roughly 80% stated this. When asked this same question in 2011, only 52% said there were no other problems, and 32% stated that they “didn’t know.” In 2013, 84% answered either “no” (35%) or they said they were “unsure” (49%). This trend continued in 2015 as well: 86% answered either “no” (77%) or “unsure”: (8%). In 2017, 90% of respondents answered either “no” (88%) or unsure (2%) to this question. Table 6 provides counts for the number of mentions each category of unaddressed human service issues.

Implications

- As data from the phone/online survey indicates, problems with affordability of living in Bellevue continues to be the top issue, probably driven in part to increasing rent and mortgage costs.

- The availability of adequate public transit continues to be a key problem in the community. Most of the top tier community problems are also household problems related to the cost of living-unaffordability of housing, childcare, dental insurance, medical care/insurance combined with the lack of jobs that pay enough for the basics. In other words, costs are going up while wages continue to stagnate.
- Interestingly, though there are a number of household and community problems listed by residents in the survey, most residents (53%) report on the question related to well-being that this is the same for them as last year and 44% stated that their well-being has improved. It is difficult to speculate why this occurred but perhaps the other amenities and advantages that are present in Bellevue mitigate the fact that the cost of living is a challenge.

“None of us can build a house alone. And we all know the challenges that come with owning a house, especially after a storm. People can be hit by storms, too, like graduating from college and looking for a job at the beginning of a recession. At some points in your life, you or someone you know will need human services for the sake of their well-being.”

— Ilsa Flanagan,
Reframing Initiative,
National Human Services Assembly

Endnotes

1. National Human Services Assembly, 2016.
2. “Handed to Them on a Plate”, Frameworks Institute, 2013.