

# Quality of Life in Bellevue



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What makes a healthy, vibrant community? For most people, it's usually a combination of factors — some very tangible, like high-quality public services, restaurants and shops, beautiful parks and beaches, or good schools; some factors are part of a personal perception, such as feelings about safety, helping neighbors in need, or civic engagement. Residents who participated in the phone/online and consumer surveys rated their satisfaction with living in Bellevue. In many of the Community Conversations, participants commented about the quality of their lives here. Other departments in the city such as Planning and Community Development through its Neighborhood Outreach Program and 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.

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
- describes other efforts in the city that seek

to increase the city's livability during a time of enormous growth

- details what community issues are of most concern to residents.

## Perception of the Quality of Life in Bellevue

- Using a scale of 0 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), residents gave an average rating of 8.44 to describe the livability in Bellevue. This is the same rating as in 2013 (8.40). The percentage of residents who gave a scale rating of 9 or 10 was 49% this year, compared to 48% in 2013. Satisfaction was rated good (7 or 8) by 47% of residents in 2015 vs. 47% in 2013. This gave an overall satisfaction of 96%, the same as reported in 2013 (96%) and 2011 (98%).
- While there were no significant differences in average ratings, residents age 55 (52%) and older were significantly more likely to rate Bellevue as an excellent place to live when compared to residents age 18 to 34 (40%).
- There is a direct correlation between higher income and higher average ratings for the city of Bellevue—those with annual



Figure 1: Overall satisfaction with the City of Bellevue

household incomes of \$75,000 or more giving a significantly higher rating than all other groups (8.61 for \$75k+, 8.29 for \$50k to <\$75K, 8.17 for \$25k to <\$50k, 7.77 for <\$25K).

- Surveys conducted by the City for other purposes also found similar results. For example, in the 2014 Budget Survey, the majority of respondents (97%) said the quality of life in the city is good to excellent, and 97% rated the quality of their own neighborhood as “good” or “excellent”. In the 2015 Performance Survey, 98% of respondents said the quality of life exceeds or greatly exceeds their expectations, and 94% rated their neighborhood as either an “excellent” or “good” place to live.
- In the 2010 Parks Plan survey, virtually all Bellevue residents have a positive view of the quality of life in the City (98%). In fact, ratings are evenly divided between those that say the quality of life is “excellent” and those that give it a “good” rating. Nearly all Bellevue residents (97%) believe the parks and recreation opportunities in Bellevue positively affect the overall quality of life here; 67% say that these opportunities “greatly enhance” it.
- The Human Services consumer survey also asked respondents about satisfaction with living in the community. In 2015, nearly 90% of respondents to the consumer survey rated Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”, slightly more than the 88% who rated it as such in 2013. This is a large increase from prior years; between 1999-2005, only about 80% of respondents rated living in Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”.

## 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. In order to keep up these high standards, 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 9 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.

**Building Community:** The Neighbor Link 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. Since the program began, Outreach has sponsored over 250 neighborhood celebrations, raised over 2,000 pounds of food, and donated hundreds-of-dollars to charity.

Bellevue's Cultural Conversations is a partnership between diverse 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. The topics have included "Keeping our Kids Safe in our Community", "Going Green in Your Home and Neighborhood" and "Websites, Blogs and Social Media for Neighborhoods". 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.

### **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 (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 Advisory Committee spent more than a year soliciting public input to learn what is working and where there is room for improvement relative to the code downtown. The Committee is recommending about 25 code changes related top topics such as public open spaces, the pedestrian experience, building design and desirable amenities. The Planning Commission is expected to spend the remainder of 2015 reviewing and refining the recommendations, and transmit a package to the City Council in 2016.

### **Diversity Focus Group**

The Diversity Focus Group (DFG) is comprised of a group of concerned and involved community members that are committed to improving the relationship between the Bellevue Police Department (BPD) and the diverse community that makes up the great City of Bellevue. The Group does this by:

- Sharing ideas with the Chief of Police on how best to build bridges
- Offering a community perspective
- Promoting public awareness
- Educating the police
- Helping recruit diverse candidates for the Police Department

### **Perception of Safety in Neighborhoods and Downtown**

According to the 2014 Bellevue Police Department Annual Report, positive perceptions of safety by Bellevue residents in all areas have remained steady since 2011 with an increase between 2013 and 2014. In the 2014 City Performance Measures Survey Report, the West Bellevue and Wilburton neighborhoods are rated as the two safest in general. Wilburton is also rated as the safest neighborhood after dark. In 2014, 86% of survey respondents rated “walking alone in the downtown business area after dark” as very safe up from 81%

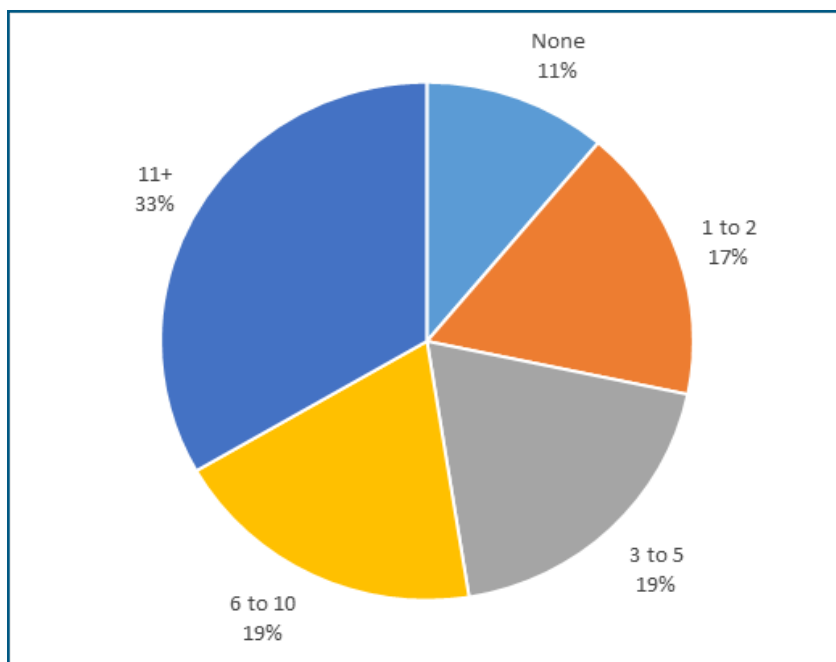
in 2013. In the same survey, in 2014, eight out of ten (81%) of residents who had contact with the police reported a positive experience. This remained similar to 2013 results.

### **Perception of Community Problem Areas in Bellevue**

In the phone/online survey, respondents rated 32 potential problem areas as to whether they felt these were problems for individuals and families in the community. A new “community issue” question was last added in 2005: People not knowing how to manage their personal finances. In 2011 two existing problem areas were expanded to more accurately capture the community’s concern: both “Crime and violence in the community” and “Shortage of recreation facilities or programs” were split into two questions. When interpreting 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 2, the majority of phone/online survey respondents in 2015 (52%) rated at least 5 of the 32 problems mentioned as moderate or major in the community. This is similar to 2013 results when 53% rated 5 or more moderate or major problems in the community. Thirty-three percent of respondents felt there were more than 11 moderate or major problems in their community, slightly lower than in 2013 when 29% said there were more than 11 problem areas. Overall, respondents identified an average of 8.1 issues as major or moderate problems for their community. This is similar to 2013 (7.9) and significantly lower than the 2011 average of 10.0 major/moderate problems. One can speculate that the improving economy had an effect on trend towards the perception of fewer community problems.

For 31 out of 32 potential problems, the majority (50% or more) indicate that the issue is either



**Figure 2: Number of Major/Moderate Problems Perceived in the Community in 2015**

not a problem at all, or only a minor problem in their community. The only exception to this is lack of affordable housing—68 percent say that this is a major (34%) or moderate (34%) problem which gathered the most major/moderate ratings. This is a significant increase when compared to the 51 percent received in 2013. Since 1999 lack of affordable housing has been ranked as the top problem within the first tier.

This is followed by *having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics of food, shelter and clothing* (40%), *lack of affordable child care* (40%), and *inadequate public transportation* (38%). Problems that involve education and violence gathered the lowest shares of major/moderate problem ratings: *illiteracy* (8%), *gang activities* (9%), *violence in the community* (10%), and *poor quality public education* (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

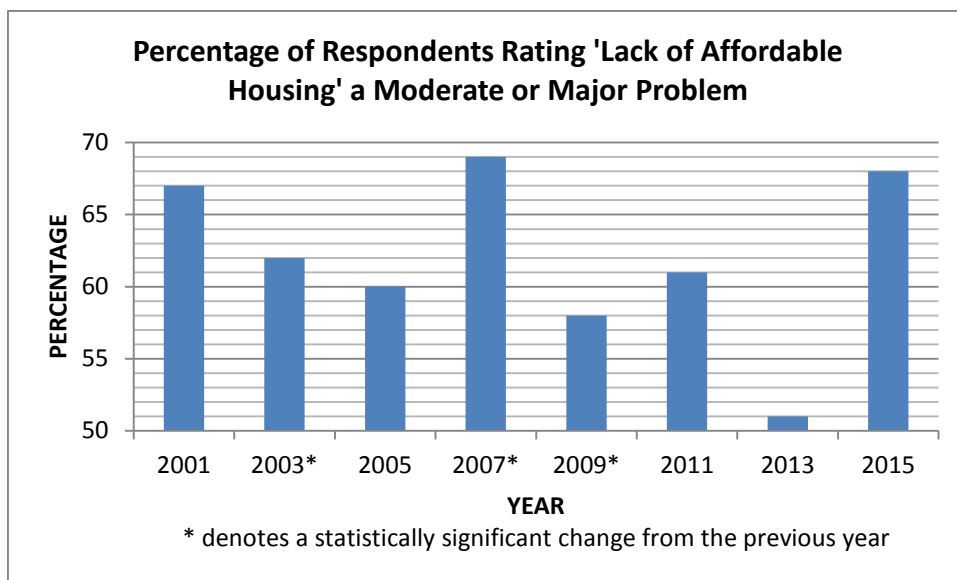
those that gathered less than a 20 percent share of these ratings.

This year nine issues were Top Tier problems:

- *Lack of affordable housing*—68% Total (34% Major / 34% Moderate)
- *Having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics of food, shelter, and clothing*—40% Total (13% Major / 28% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable childcare*—40% Total (12% Major / 28% Moderate)
- *Inadequate public transportation*—38% Total (13% Major / 25% Moderate)
- *People not knowing how to manage their personal finances*—35% Total (9% Major / 26% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable medical insurance*—35% Total (10% Major / 25% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable medical care*—35% Total (10% Major / 24% Moderate)
- *Lack of affordable dental care*—32% Total (11% Major / 21% Moderate)
- *Homelessness*—30% Total (7% Major / 23% Moderate)

Eight problems have placed in the Top Tier of problems in every survey for the last 10 years (since 2003). Seven of these relate to the affordability of living in Bellevue: *lack of affordable housing, people having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics, lack of affordable child care, lack of affordable medical insurance, people not knowing how to manage their personal finances, lack of affordable medical care, and lack of affordable dental care.*

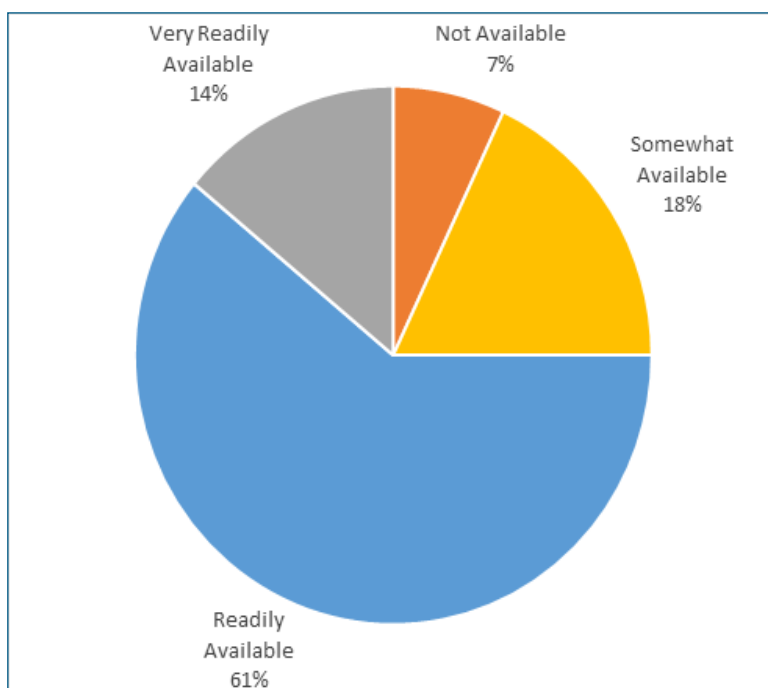
Historically, two other top tier community problems, *lack of affordable medical insurance* and *lack of affordable medical care*, have had as many as half or more of respondents rating them as major/moderate problems. However that trend began to change in 2013 and continued in 2015: *lack of affordable insurance* was rated as a major/moderate community problem by 41% of respondents in 2013 and dropped to 35% in 2015, for example. One can speculate that the news coverage of the improving economy, the



**Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents Rating Lack of Affordable Housing a Moderate/Major Problem**

passage of the Affordable Care Act, and/or the lower unemployment rate were all factors in respondents rating these problems lower in 2013 and in 2015.

Of the 32 community problems, 9 were considered not a problem or a minor problem by a majority of respondents. These included: domestic violence (73%); teens dropping out of school (77%); racial or ethnic discrimination



**Figure 4: Availability of Human Services Needs in Bellevue**

(81%); shortage of recreational facilities (81%), poor quality education K-12 (88%) and illiteracy (87%). (Note: A detailed table of community problem areas listed in descending order by rating and a trend chart showing ratings since 2003 is included in Appendix A.)

### Perception of Community Members' Accessibility to Services

As shown in Figure 4, the vast majority (74%), of the 2015 phone/online survey respondents, believes that people in their community have adequate access to services. This is not comparable to 2013 findings as the question changed from a "yes-no" response to a 0-10 rating scale.

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 – 24 comments
- Financial help – 21 comments
- Mental Health – 20 comments
- Lack of general info regarding services – 17 comments
- Housing – 16 comments
- Homeless shelters – 16 comments
- Employment – 16 comments

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

Based on 2015 phone/online survey findings, certain segments of the population tend to differ significantly in the average number of problem community issues that they rated as major or moderate problems. These include:

- Residents aged 55 and older (9.8) compared to 18-34 year olds (6.2) or 35-54 year olds (7.9).
- Households with incomes of less than \$25,000 (11.1) compared to those who earn \$25,000-\$50,000 (7.7), \$50,000-\$75,000 (8.8) and \$75,000 or more (7.4).
- Women (9.2 problems compared to 7.1 for men).
- Residents who receive public assistance (10.6 problems as compared to 8.0 for those who do not)
- Residents who have not recently immigrated to the US within the last ten years (8.4) compared to recent immigrants (6.4).
- Residents who are only white indicate more problems in their community (8.6) compared to non-white residents (6.9).

a 1 to 5 scale), in question wording and in the population segments presented year to year.

Figure 5 displays the mean score results for the current year in comparison to results obtained in 2011 and 2013. There are minor changes when compared to 2013.

- *Low income individuals* decreased slightly and is now on par with 2011 ratings
- Support for disabled individuals has decreased and is now back to 2011 ratings
- People of *diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds* has declined slightly and is now back to near 2011 ratings.

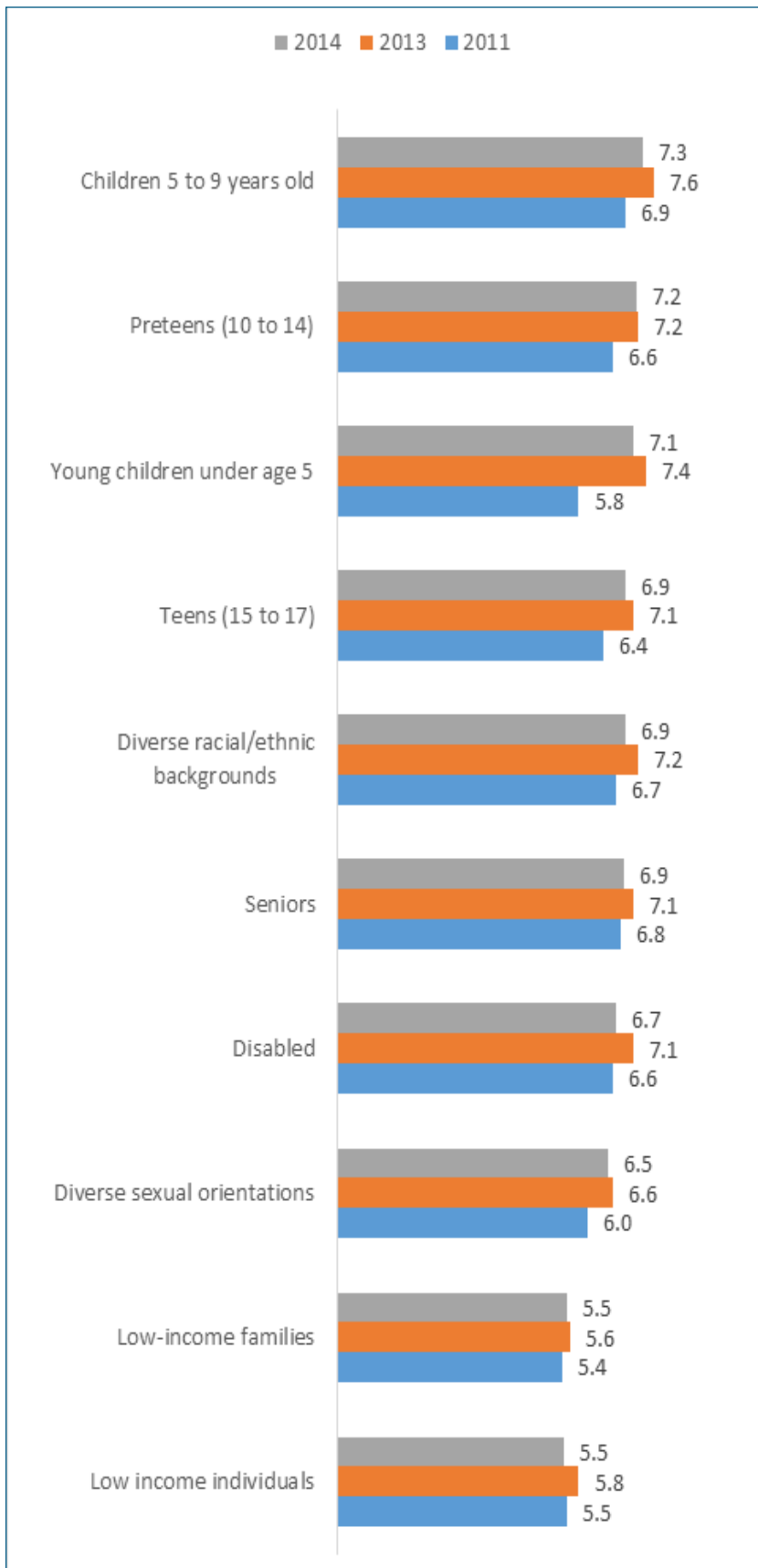
## Other Problem Areas Perceived to Exist in the Community

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%). Some of the top problems in 2015 listed by the 15% answering “yes” included affordable housing, access to public transportation, mental health issues, and social problems. Others less frequently mentioned were poverty, unemployment and job training and dental care.

## Community Support

All residents were asked to give scale ratings, ranging from 0 to 10, for the degree to which they feel the community supports the needs of certain segments of the population. The question series was first asked in 2009. It was carried over to the 2011 survey, with changes made in the size of the scale (it was originally





**Figure 5: Ratings for the degree of community support for certain segments of the population**