

# SWELTERING CITIES



**SYDNEY SUMMER 2020-21 SURVEY REPORT**



# Introduction

Sweltering Cities works directly with communities impacted by extreme heat to secure cooler, more equitable and sustainable cities, with planning and policy that puts people at the centre. We want to ensure that extreme heat is understood as a serious public health issue by the majority of Australians; and action is taken at all levels – including urban planning, health and infrastructure policy – to reduce heat and increase community resilience.

The Sweltering Cities community survey shows us that hundreds of people across Sydney, from Camden to Riverstone to Emu Plains, are suffering in the extreme heat of summer. Temperatures across Sydney are projected to rise over the coming years due to climate change, but we don't have the policies, infrastructure or services to support the people in our hottest suburbs now, let alone in the future.

We must take effective and comprehensive action - from bus stops and local pools to renewable energy and urban planning - to support communities feeling the heat. The ideas that community members shared in the survey are where we should start.

**Emma Bacon**  
**Sweltering Cities Coordinator**

# Information on the Sweltering Cities Community Survey

**The Sweltering Cities community survey was launched in Western Sydney in December 2020 and closed in March 2021. Sweltering Cities collaborated with local community organisations, councils, individuals and action groups to reach highly affected, diverse communities. The purpose of the survey was to map the impacts of heat across Western Sydney, amplify powerful stories, connect with community members, and collect much needed and creative community ideas for managing heat.**

682 people from 168 postcodes in Sydney completed the survey. The survey was targeted to residents of Western, South West and North West Sydney and the vast majority of respondents are from those regions. The survey collected select demographic data, including age group, postcode, living situation, type of dwelling and occupation. Respondents aged from under 18 to over 80; the two largest age groups were aged 50-64 (29.5%) and 35-49 (27.2%).

The community survey was developed in consultation with sociologists, public health professionals, community members and environmental organisations. A test version was initially completed by 20 participants in order to identify data collection and comprehension issues, then updated and distributed widely. The online survey was hosted on Typeform and a physical version was available for distribution. The survey was covered in the media by [ABC Online](#), [Sydney Morning Herald twice](#), in [local media](#) and on Sydney radio.

Community surveys were also launched in Melbourne and Brisbane. There are plans for future editions of the community survey in order to capture longitudinal data.



# Executive Summary

Survey results show the vast majority of people suffer in the extreme heat of summer, think the way their suburb is built increases heat, and believe their political representatives should have policies on heat.

People described the significant impact on mental and physical health of sleeplessness during hot nights with words like: "lethargic", "unfocused", "listless", "tired" and "unmotivated".

When we asked what changes people might like to see in the community to help deal with the heat, the most common answer was more trees. Renewable energy, planning controls, better bus stops, public pools and cooler building materials for roads and homes were also popular.

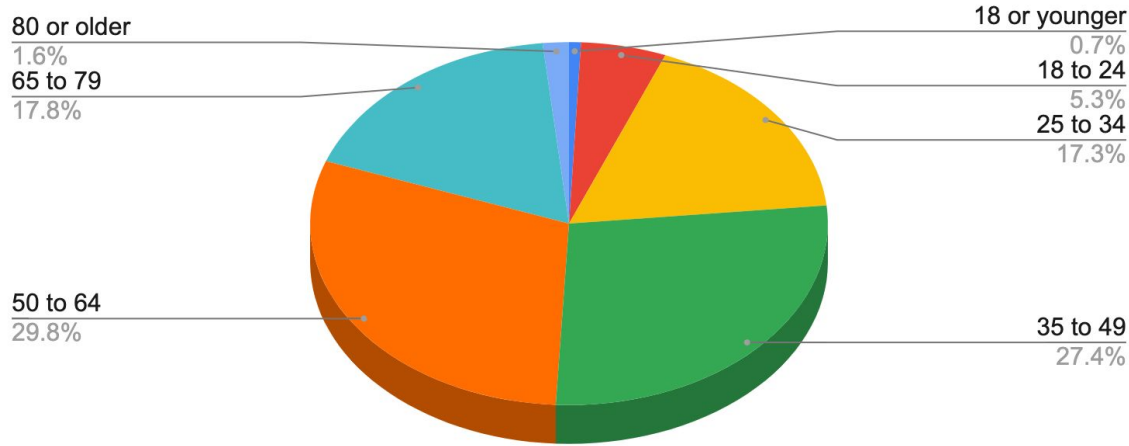
Over 400 people who did the survey said we could follow them up with more information or on how to be more involved.

Key statistics:

- 31% of people said that when it gets very hot they will leave the house to go to a cooler location
- 87.5% of people have trouble sleeping on hot nights or during heatwaves.
- 55% of people with air conditioning sometimes don't turn it on because of the cost.
- 31.4% of people said that they did not have access to information on how to be safe and well in heat waves.
- 92.5% of people said that politicians and political parties should have policies on heat.
- 95% of people think summers are going to get hotter.



# Demographics



**682** people from **168** postcodes in Sydney completed the survey.

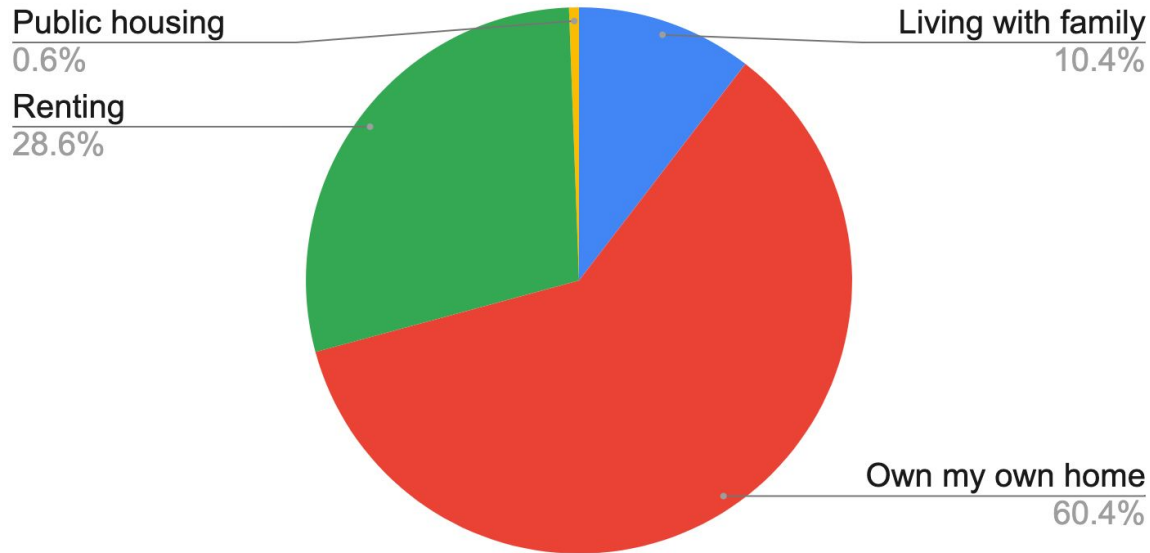
The suburbs with the most responses were **Penrith** and **Campbelltown**.

## Occupations include:

Student, nurse, teacher, church assistant, journalist, psychologist, homemaker, electrician, early childhood educator, librarian, lawyer, accountant, hair and makeup artist, occupational therapist, carer, bus driver, fire-fighter, engineer, and train driver.



# Housing



**76.2% of people said they live in a house and 19.2% of people said they live in an apartment.** The remainder of people said they live in another type of accommodation including townhouse, granny flat or duplex.

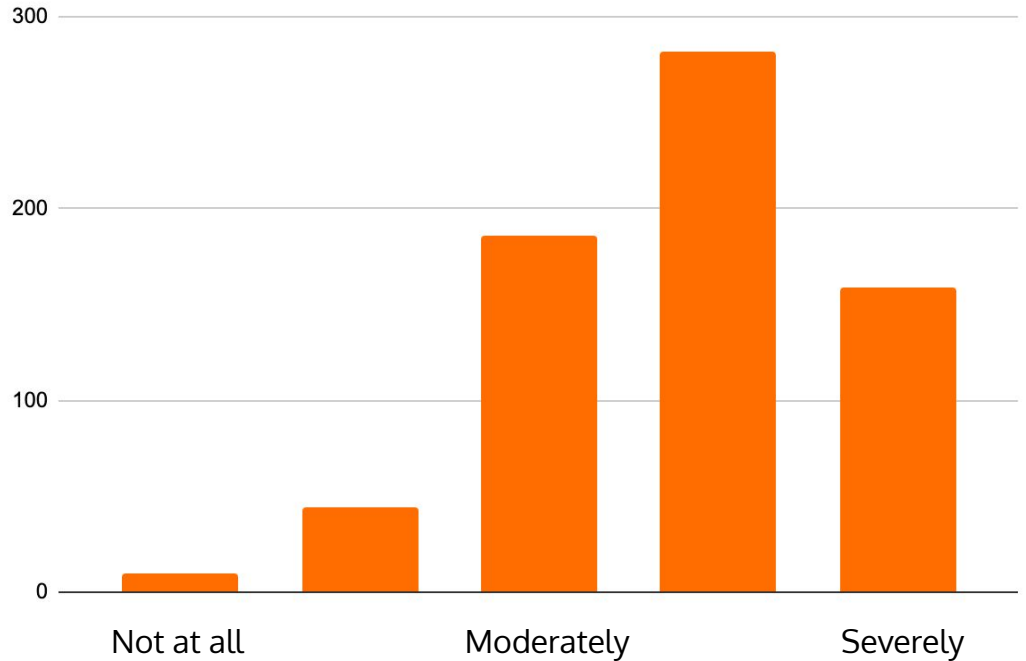


# Feeling the heat

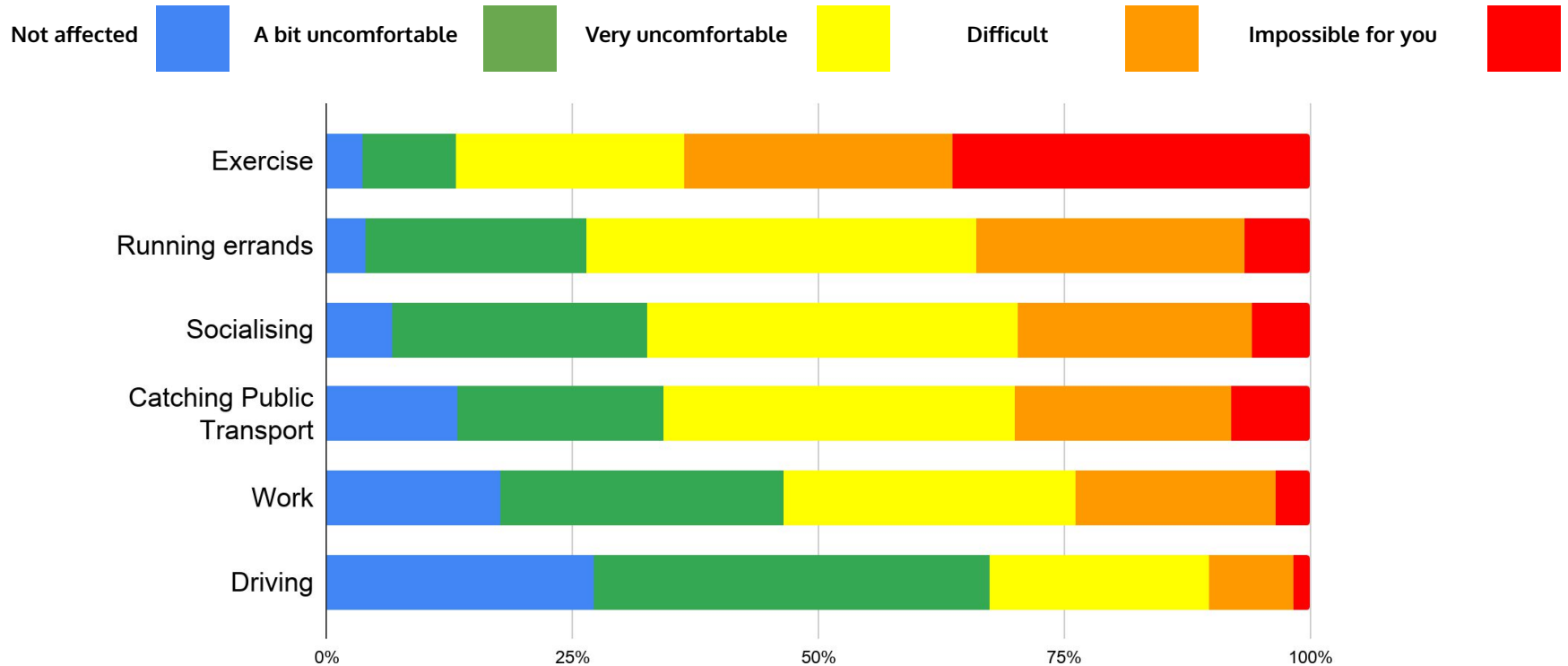
**87%** of people feel uncomfortable in the heat in Sydney.

**31%** of people said that when it gets very hot they will leave the house to go to a cooler location (eg. shopping centre, cinema, library).

How much does the heat negatively affect you?



# How does the heat affect these activities for you?





# 87.5% of people have trouble sleeping on hot nights or during heatwaves.

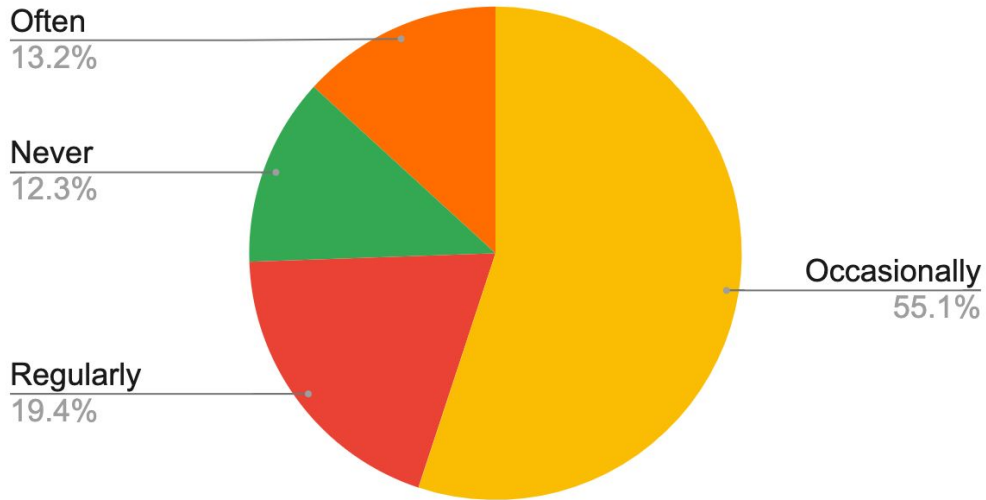
When we asked people to describe how sleeplessness impacts them the next day they said: "Tired", "Cranky", "Lethargic", "Poor concentration", "Unmotivated", "Dizzy", "Unproductive" and "Irritable".

Studies show that too little sleep puts us at risk of disease and chronic illness, and harms our physical and mental health. Elderly and low-income people are most affected.



# Health impact

Have you ever felt unwell during the very hot days of summer?



- 11.2% of people have been to a doctor or sought medical care because they felt unwell in the heat
- 23.5% of people have a health condition made worse by extreme heat





**“ Heat and sleep deprivation makes me light headed and contributes to balance issues. I have trouble concentrating and worry about how it affects my work. I fear I am more likely to have an accident. ”**

**Anne, Diversional Therapist Aged Care**



# **75% of people surveyed have air conditioning at home**

Of those people:

**78% worry about the cost of using their air conditioner.**

**54% said concerns about cost stops them from turning on their air conditioner.**



# 93 people who did the survey work outside

35% say that their work stops when it gets over a certain temperature

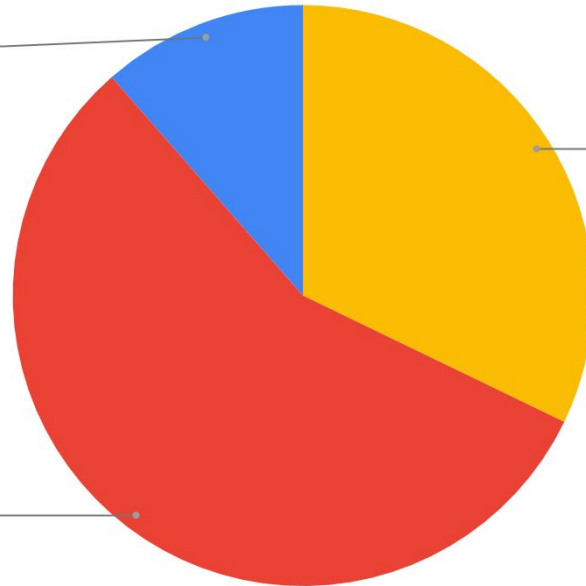
86% of people said that they would want their work to stop on extremely hot days

The International Labor Organisation (ILO) says that excessive heat creates occupational health risks and “restricts a worker’s physical functions and capabilities, work capacity and productivity”. People who do physical work outside are most affected, but manufacturing or factory workers can be impacted if the inside temperature is too high, and at very high temperatures even people who work desk jobs can be affected by ‘mental fog’. The ILO predicts that by 2030, 2.2% of total working hours worldwide will be lost to high temperatures.



# Do you think that the way your suburb is built:

Decreases heat  
11.5%



Doesn't make a difference  
32.2%

This result varies across Sydney - 63% of people in **South West Sydney** think that the way that their local area is built increases heat and 86.7% of people in **Penrith** think that the way their suburb is built increases heat.





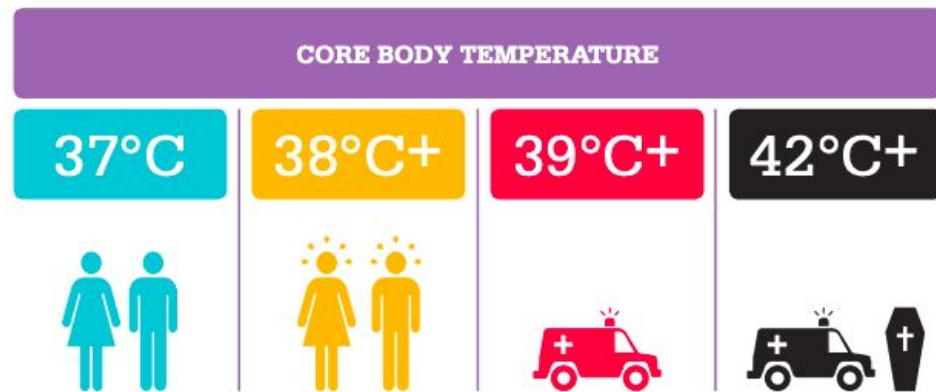
“ Most bus stops don't have shade, just seats. Why can't they build a small shelter? If you're waiting at the bus stop, you can see people are sweating and visibly getting tired within minutes. Then there's flow on effects; people are exhausted for the rest of the day. If the temperature is above thirty and you're waiting for the bus, anyone would get tired.

”

Harsha, Engineering student



**56% of people surveyed have either experienced heat stroke or know someone in Sydney who has.**



*Image source: Climate Commission 2011*





# Are there activities that you avoid during hot days?

*Answers included:*

"I try and avoid public transport and unnecessary errands."

"Exercise, gardening, going to the markets."

"Exercise, activities that require thinking."

"Leaving the house, outdoor activities, public transport, visiting family, socialising, sports."

"Anything outside."

"Taking my dog to the local dog park."

"Exercise, going outside unless on my way to somewhere with aircon."

"I avoid going out, doing any activities outside and if I have to go out, I feel very uncomfortable for hours after. No sports, shopping or socializing.."

"Limit playing outdoor basketball which limits our training sessions."

"Going for a walk, socialising with my family and friends outdoors."

"Taking my kids to the park."

"As I do not drive and have a child with Autism, leaving the house is not an option for us."

"Going outside. Exercising. Playing with the kids in the backyard or park."

"I just stay home. If I need to shop I would go first thing in the morning."

"Walking."

"Ironing, house cleaning, shopping unless essential."



**31.4% of people said that they did not have access to information on how to be safe and well during heat waves.**



# Are there changes you would like to see in the community to help you and others deal with the heat?

Answers included:

“**More tree cover** and green space, less tarmac.”

“Carbon emission tax.”

“**More renewable energy sources**, white roads, water refill stations.”

“Solar panels are a must. We never admit that the more concrete and asphalt we have and the more trees we cut down the hotter it gets. It’s not rocket science.”

“Way more trees, shade areas. **Houses built to better deal with the hot and cold.** More water play areas everywhere.”

“More trees and vegetation, places for people to go to be cool that don’t sell things instead of shopping centres, restaurants and clubs.”

“Shift to renewable energy, include **community housing as recipients of solar power government subsidy**, improve house designs to allow natural air to enter.”

“Increasing green cover. **Adequate cover at bus stops.**”

“Complete rethink of the building code; more street trees; shade sails for playgrounds; re-designed bus stops; gravel instead of bitumen; **solar panels for renters.**”

“A serious effort to address structural causes of warming. A rapid decrease in reliance on fossil fuels. Refillable water stations.”

“Heat Strategies from local councils, helping people who are disadvantaged to cope better, **make things fairer.**”

“More trees and green areas.”

“Action on climate change. But also, more activities for kids like **swimming pools** with parking and shade.”

“Shade at bus stops and traffic lights where pedestrians have to stand or sit with glass roofs.”

“Proper **planning for the benefit of residents** instead of business.”



**Do you think that  
politicians and  
political parties  
should have policies  
on heat?**





**“ My neighbourhood will not be liveable in another 10-20 years during the summer as the temperatures will be too high. It will be a financial and health disaster for all concerned - Government and citizens.**

**The only political party that will get my vote will be the party who actually takes climate change seriously and takes steps to prevent continued damage to our environment. ”**

Sandra, Nurse



**95%**

of people think summers are going to get hotter

**93.5%**

of people are concerned that climate change is going to make summers hotter

**86.2%**

of people think actions to reduce fossil fuel emissions will make a difference in how hot Sydney gets in the future



# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that we live, work and play on the land of the Traditional Owners including the Darug people. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the ongoing and historical violence of colonisation. Sovereignty was never ceded.

References

[Heatwaves: Hotter, Longer, More Often](#), Climate Council, 2014

[The Critical Decade: Climate Change and Health](#), Climate Commission, 2011

[Working on a warmer planet: the impact of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work](#), International Labour Organisation, 2019

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With thanks to:



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