

2SLGBTQ+ Peoples' Experiences of Homelessness in Toronto: Analysis of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment Survey

City of Toronto, Toronto Shelter and Support Services

&

Dr. Alex Abramovich and the 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Health and Homelessness Research Team,
Institute for Mental Health Policy Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health



LGBTQ₂S YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA



35,000 - 40,000

YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS
ACROSS CANADA



25-40%

8,750- 16,000 IDENTIFY AS
LGBTQ₂S

**LGBTQ₂S YOUTH EXPERIENCE
HOMELESSNESS AT YOUNGER AGES
(UNDER 16 YEARS OLD)**

“ The whole reason I became homeless was because I came out. ”

Stevie, 16-years-old



The impacts of COVID-19 on 2SLGBTQ+ youth at-risk of, and experiencing, homelessness

Abramovich, et al. (2022)

WHY?



**IDENTITY-BASED FAMILY
CONFLICT RESULTING
FROM A YOUNG PERSON
COMING OUT**

**AS LGBTQ2S IS THE MOST
FREQUENTLY CITED
REASON THAT LGBTQ2S
YOUTH EXPERIENCE
HOMELESSNESS**

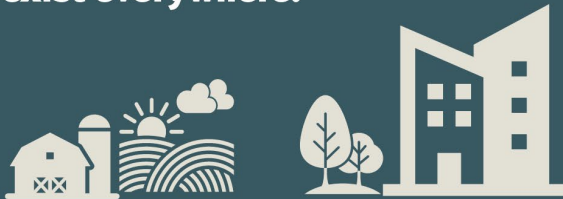
ADDITIONAL FACTORS:

- Exiting public systems
- Racism
- Unstable employment
- Poverty

**Indigenous LGBTQ youth
and LGBTQ youth of colour
experience homelessness
at disproportionate rates**

**THIS IS NOT A
“BIG CITY PROBLEM”**

**LGBTQ2S youth and young adults
exist everywhere.**



A STANDARDIZED MODEL OF CARE IS NECESSARY:



**Creating safe, affirming,
and consistently supportive
environments for LGBTQ2S youth
across the country will allow youth
to know what to expect when they
access services and ensures that
they see themselves reflected in
all aspects of a program.**

LGBTQ₂S YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE OFTEN UNSAFE.

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS:



Forced to choose between unsafe situations, due to homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia.



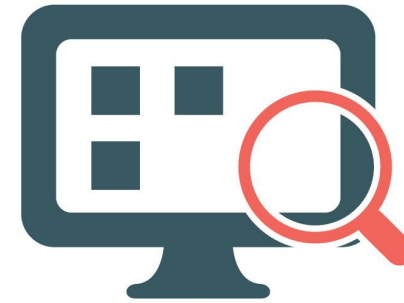
Transgender women of colour face the highest rates of discrimination and violence.



Increased risk of depression, anxiety, suicidality, PTSD, and substance misuse.

“Almost all LGBTQ people going into shelters have a fear of them because it isn’t a matter of if it’s dangerous, but just how dangerous it will be. It is horrible to live in that fear every day.”

— M, 21 years old



DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, SURVEYS & INTAKE FORMS OFTEN DO NOT INCLUDE LGBTQ₂S IDENTITIES.

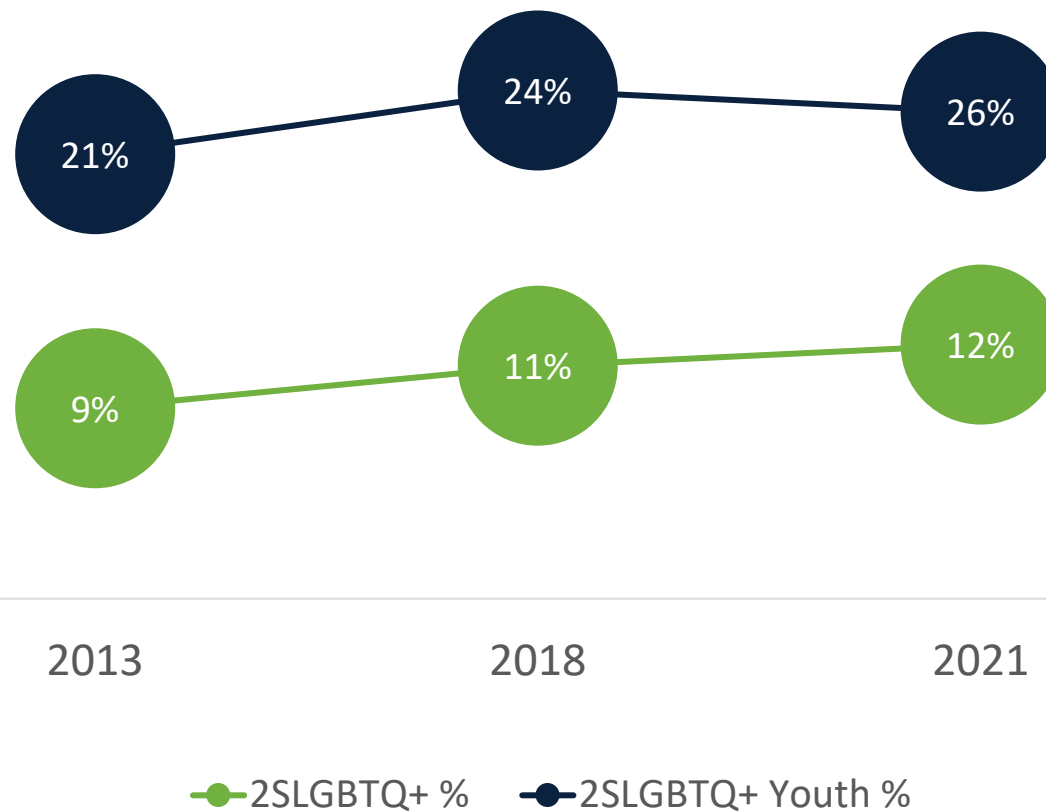
Street Needs Assessment 2021 Overview

- The City of Toronto's fifth Street Needs Assessment (SNA) was held in April, 2021
- The SNA is a point-in time count and needs assessment survey of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto led by Toronto Shelter and Support Services in collaboration with community partners in the homelessness and allied sectors
- The SNA provides a better understanding of trends and the needs and experiences of different groups
- SNA is a direct input into Toronto Shelter and Support Services' Homelessness Solutions Service Plan
- We spoke with **294** people experiencing homelessness who identified as 2SLGBTQ+ staying outdoors, in City-administered shelters, and provincially-administered Violence Against Women shelters (out of a total of 2,629 people we spoke with)

Key Findings Among 2SLGBTQ+ Respondents

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth are consistently overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness
- 64% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents identified as racialized
- 2SLGBTQ+ youth reported lower rates of chronic homelessness, while seniors reported significantly higher rates
- Respondents were more likely to first experience homelessness at a younger age and have experiences with foster care
- Significant mental health challenges, particularly among youth, and frequent interactions with the health care system
- Conflict with parent/guardian was a leading reason for housing loss among 2SLGBTQ+ youth
- Increased income and housing affordability are key supports to help end homelessness

2SLGBTQ+ youth are consistently overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness

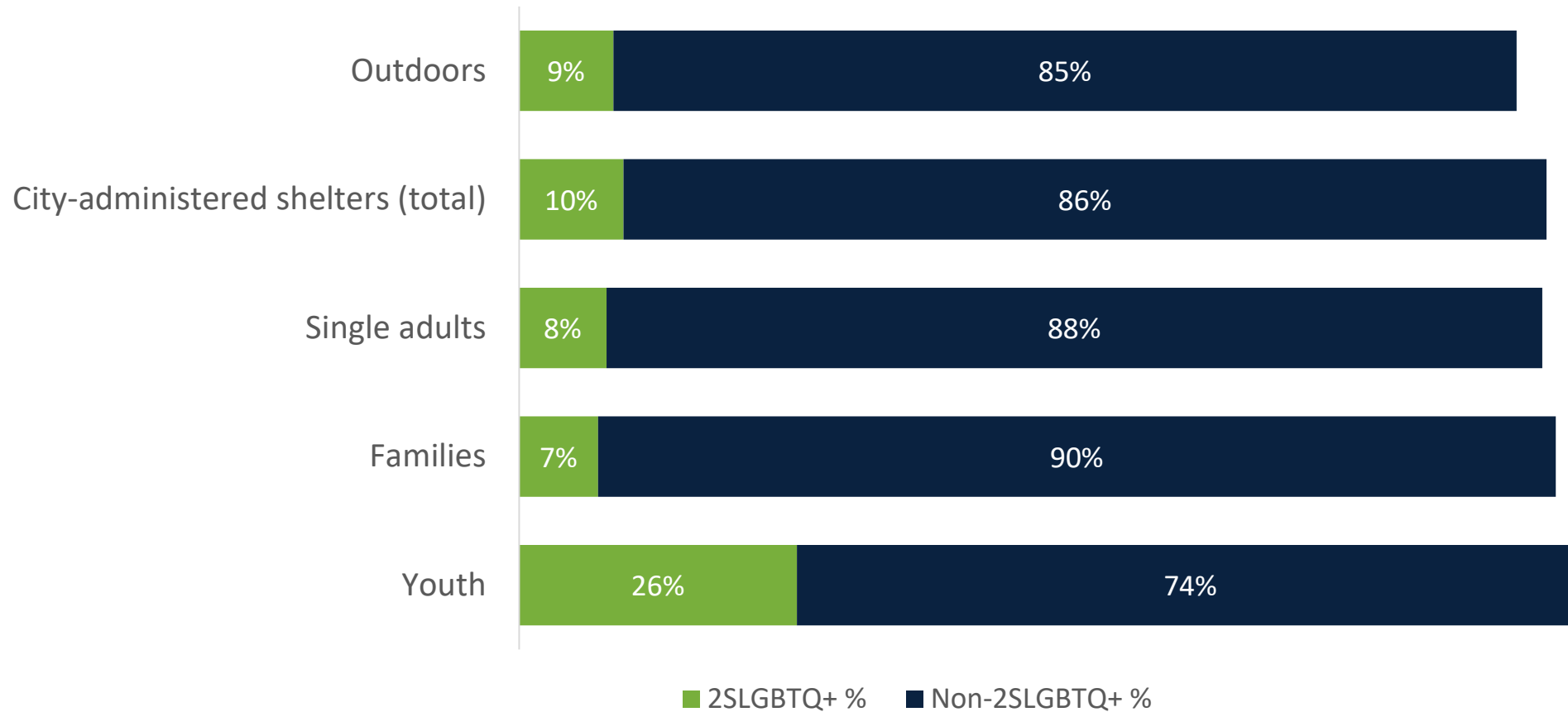


These numbers are likely an underestimate of the extent. Some 2SLGBTQ+ participants may choose not to identify themselves for reasons of safety or comfort.

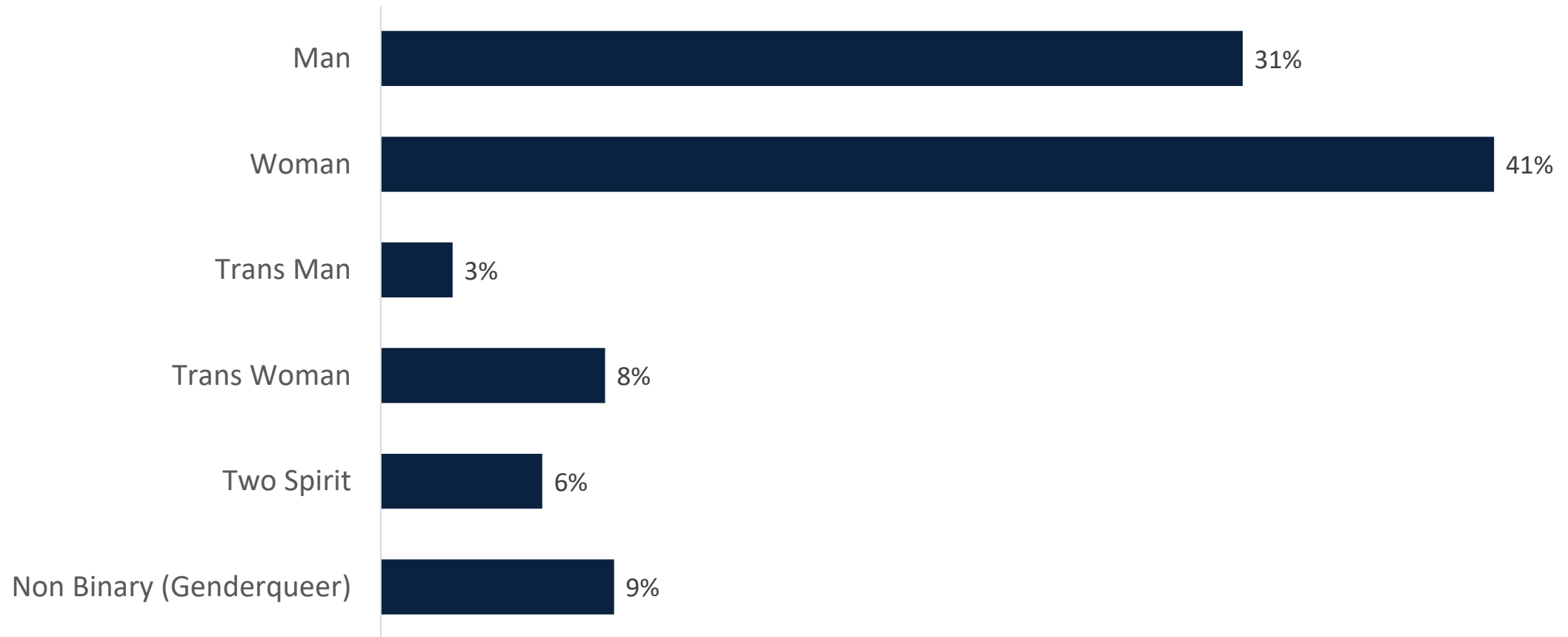


Profile of 2SLGBTQ+ People Experiencing Homelessness

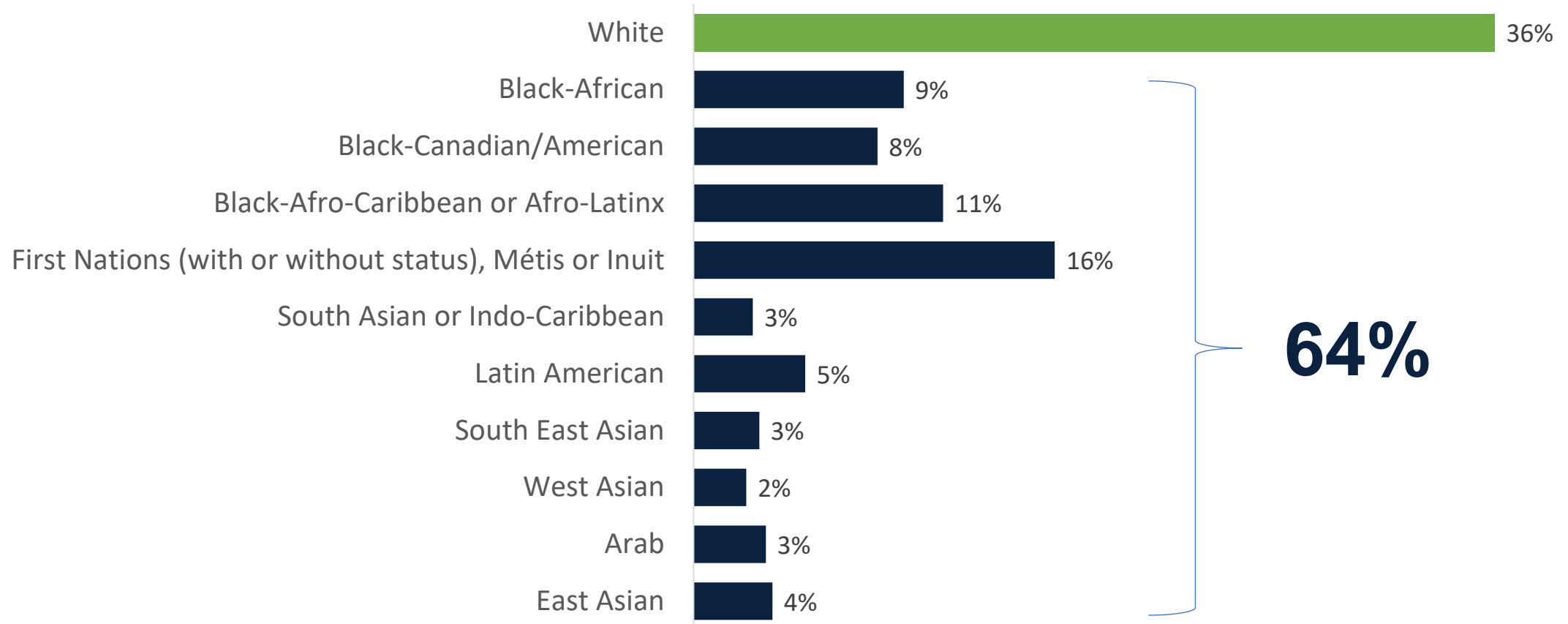
26% of youth experiencing homelessness identified as 2SLGBTQ+



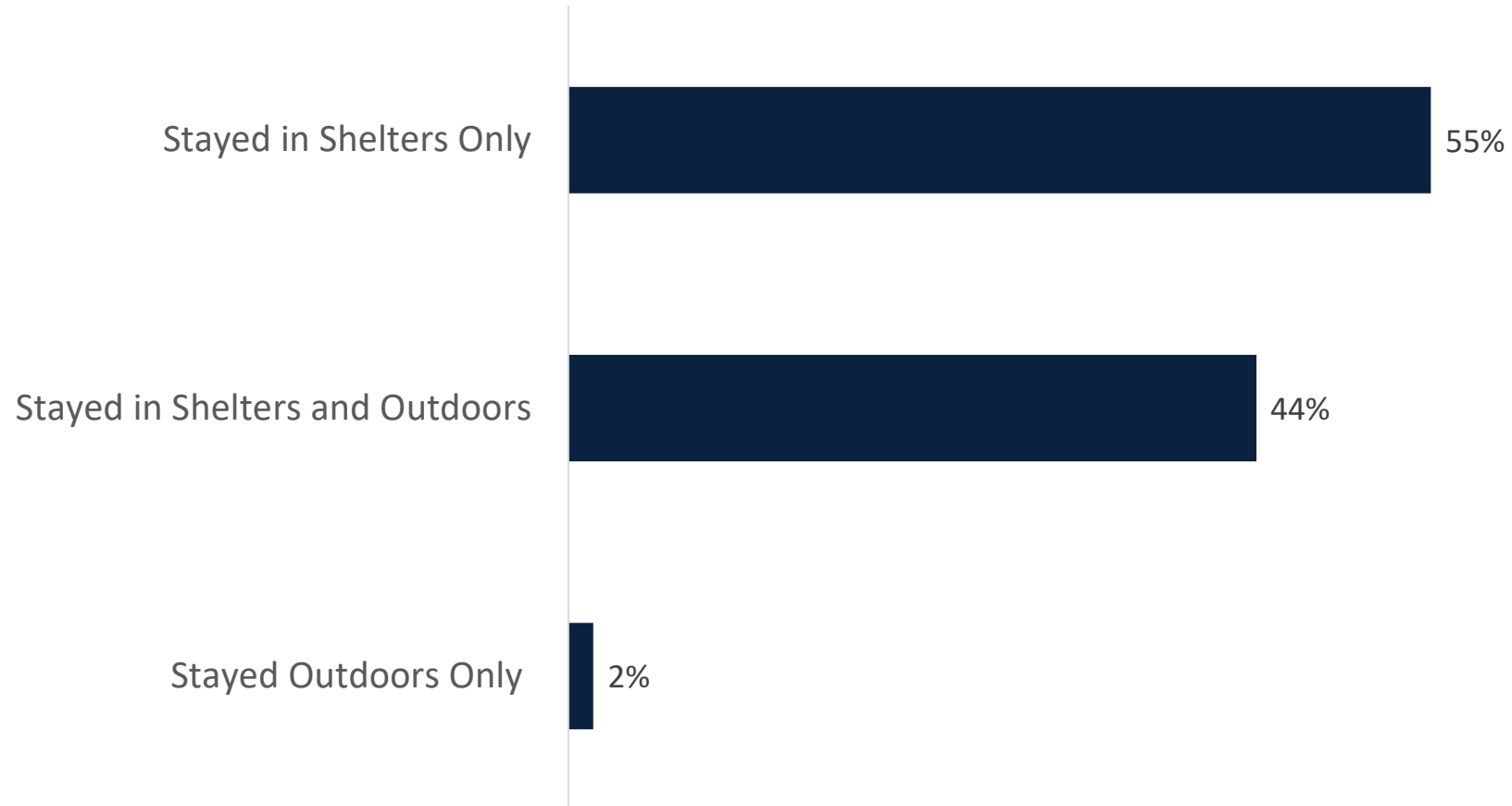
Greater gender diversity among 2SLGBTQ+ respondents



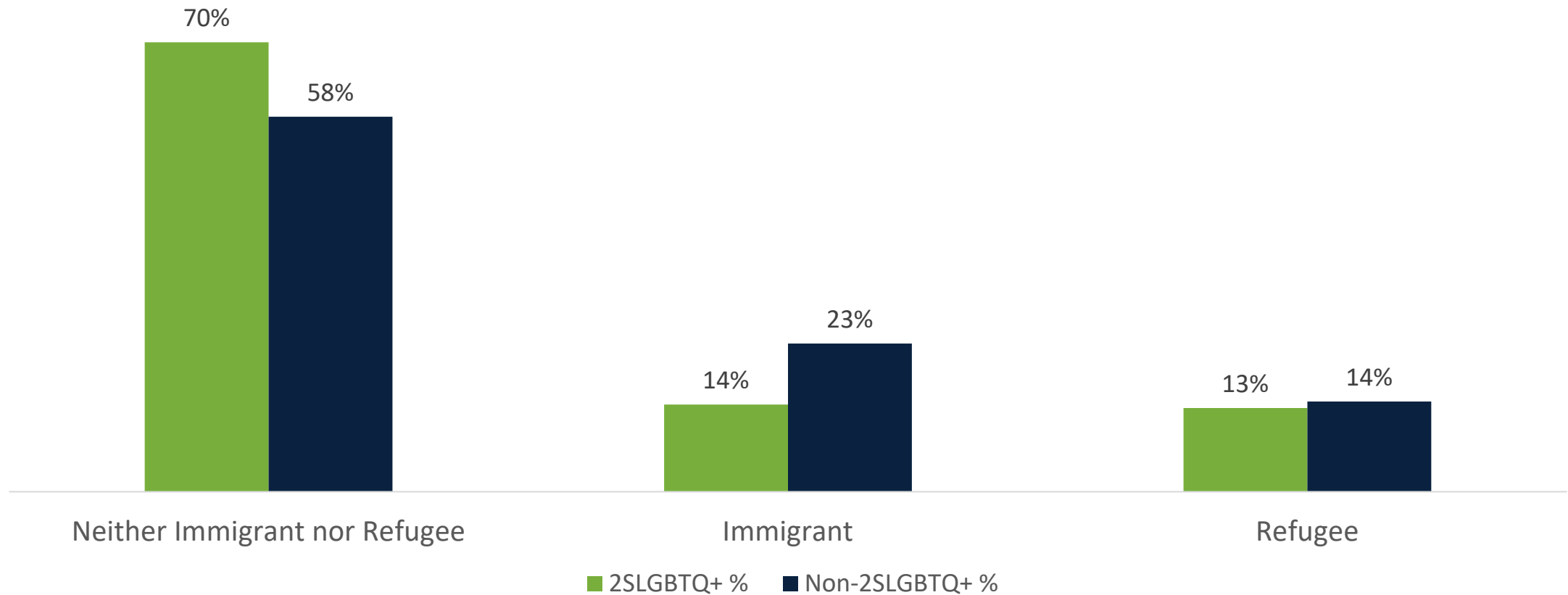
Almost two-thirds of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness are members of racialized groups



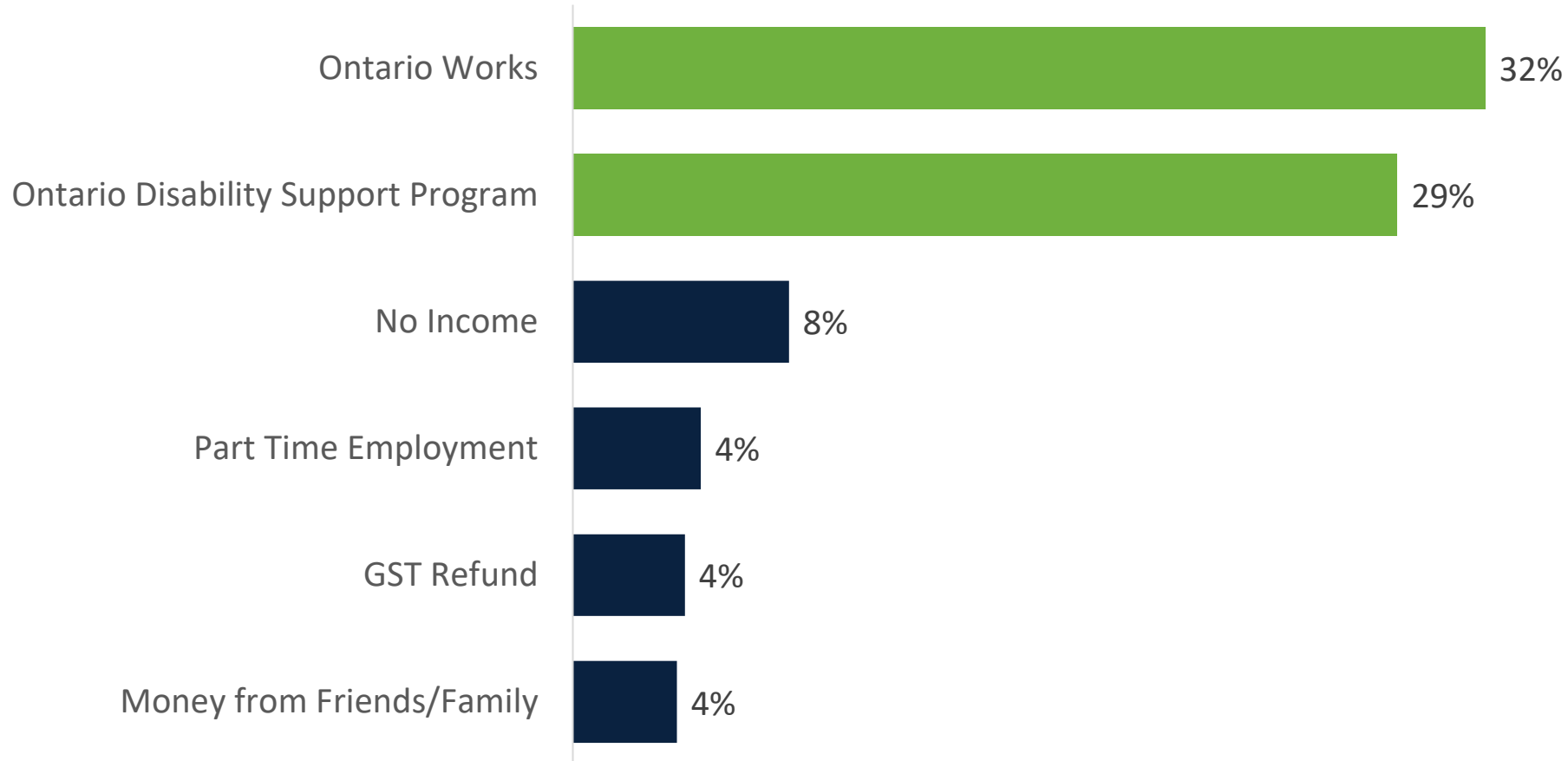
Nearly half of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness moved between indoor and outdoor locations in the past year



Majority of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness were born in Canada



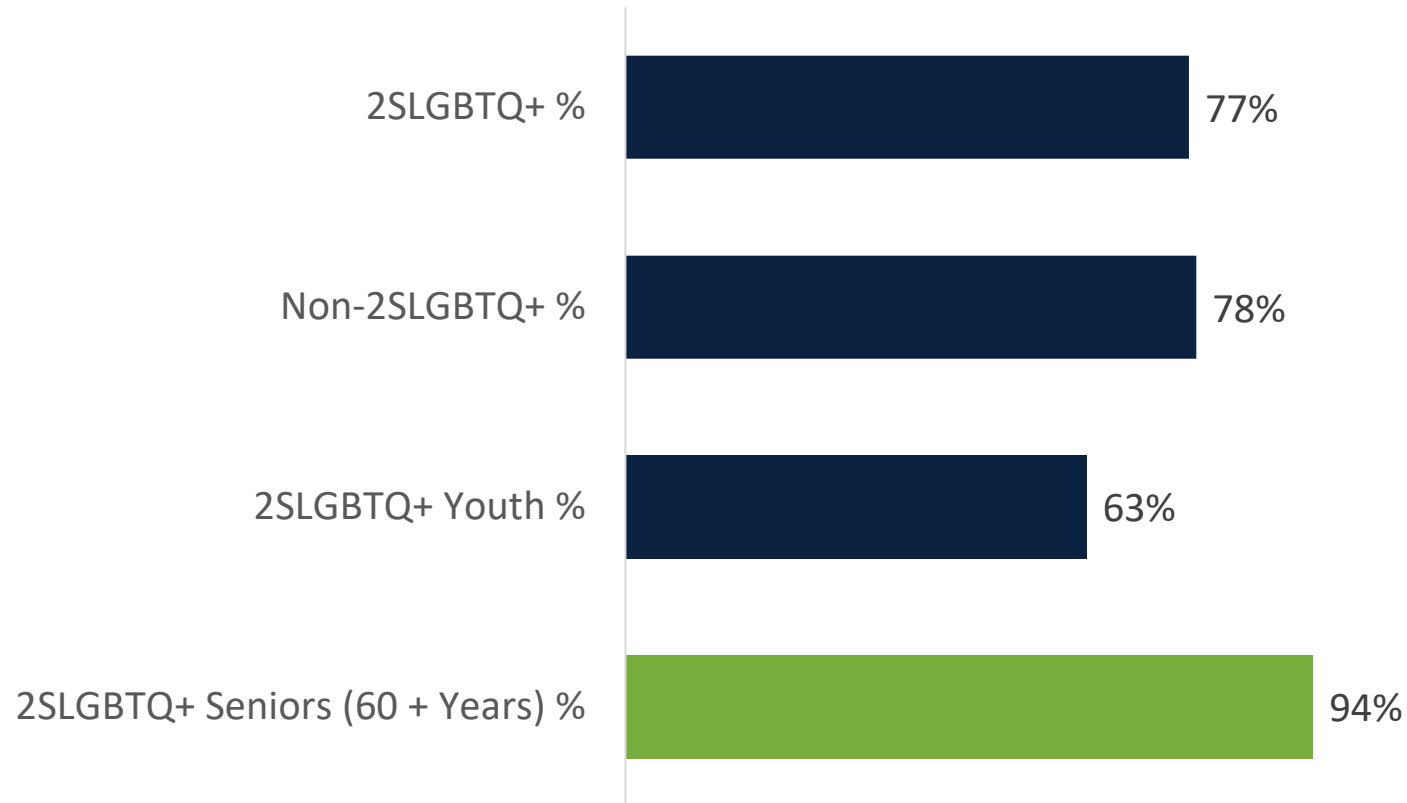
Over 60% of 2SLGBTQ+ people reported social assistance as their primary source of income



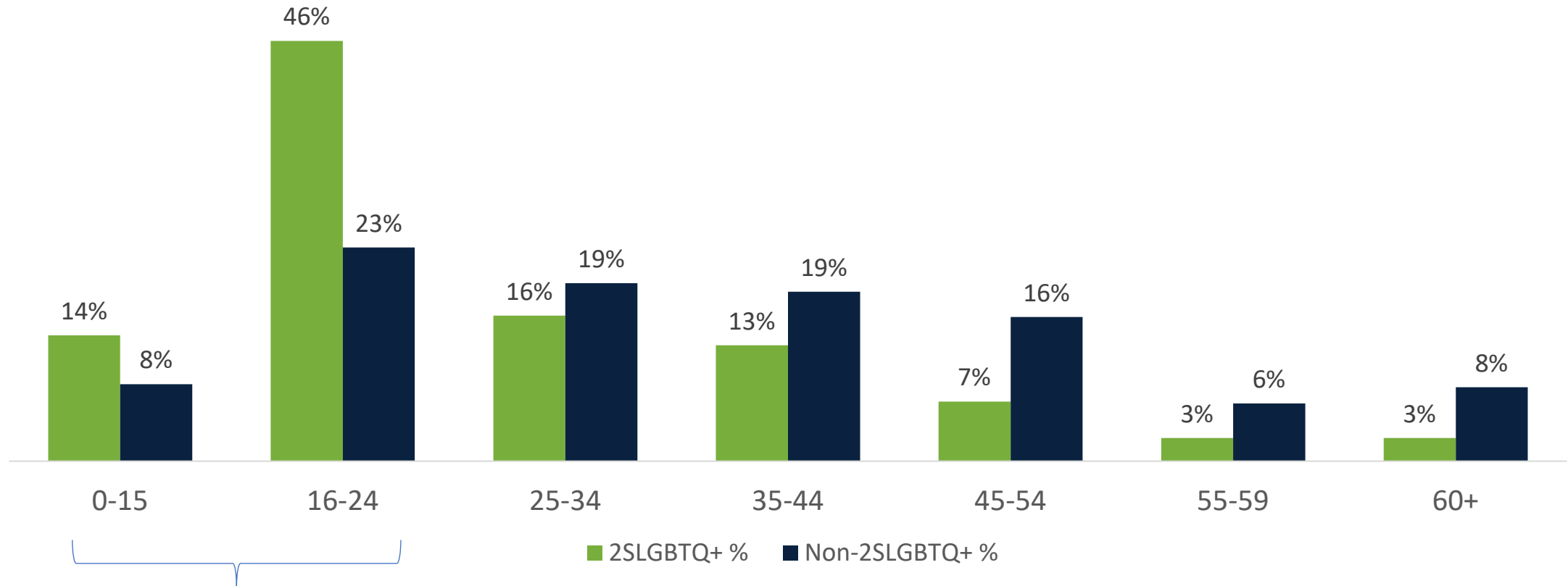


Homeless Histories of 2SLGBTQ+ Respondents

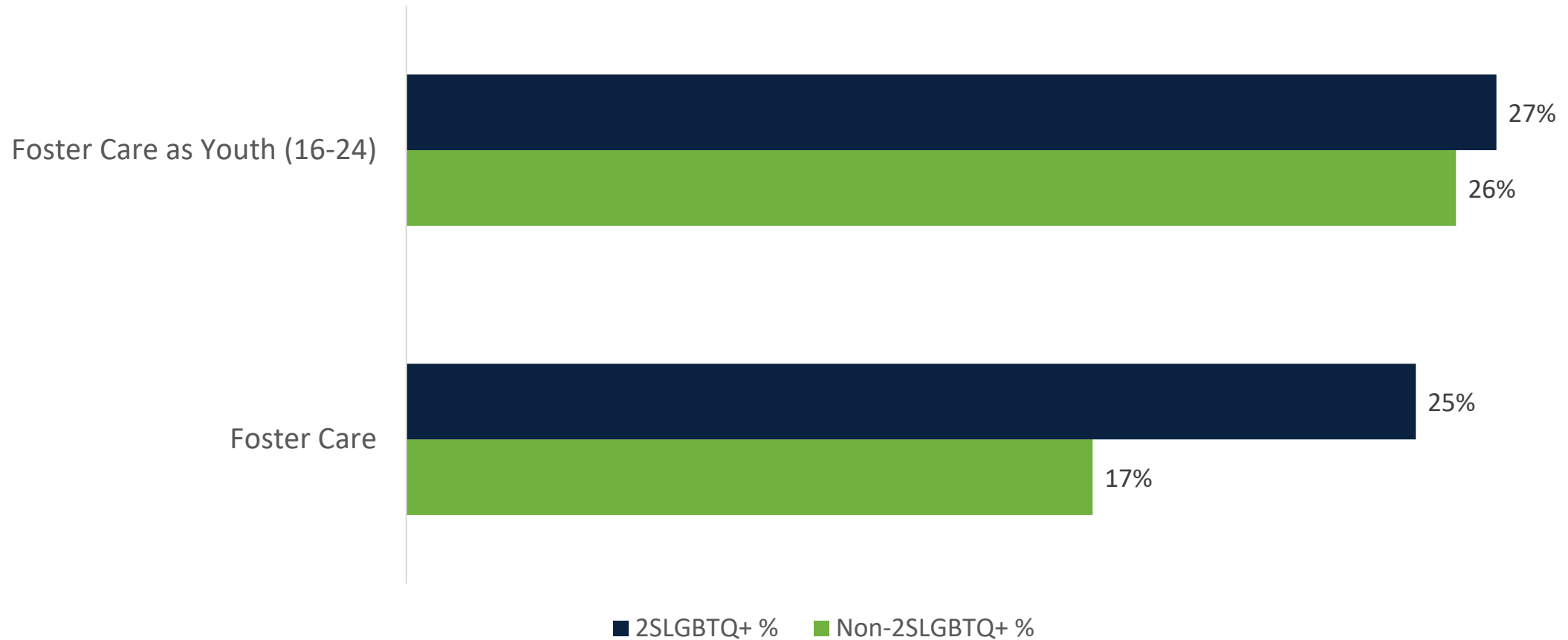
Over three-quarters of 2SLGBTQ+ people surveyed were chronically homeless; high rates of chronic homelessness among 2SLGBTQ+ seniors



60% of 2SLGBTQ+ people surveyed first experienced homelessness as youth (under 25 years)



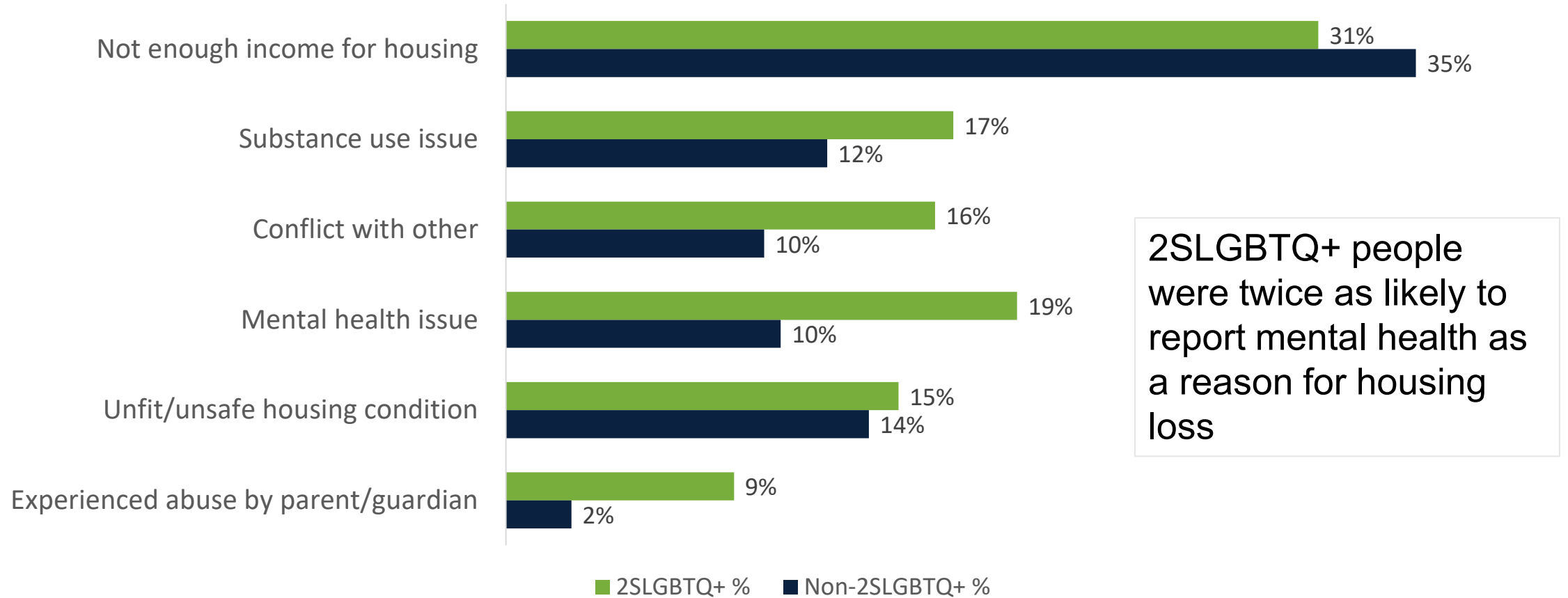
One quarter of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness had previously been in foster care, kin care, or a youth group home



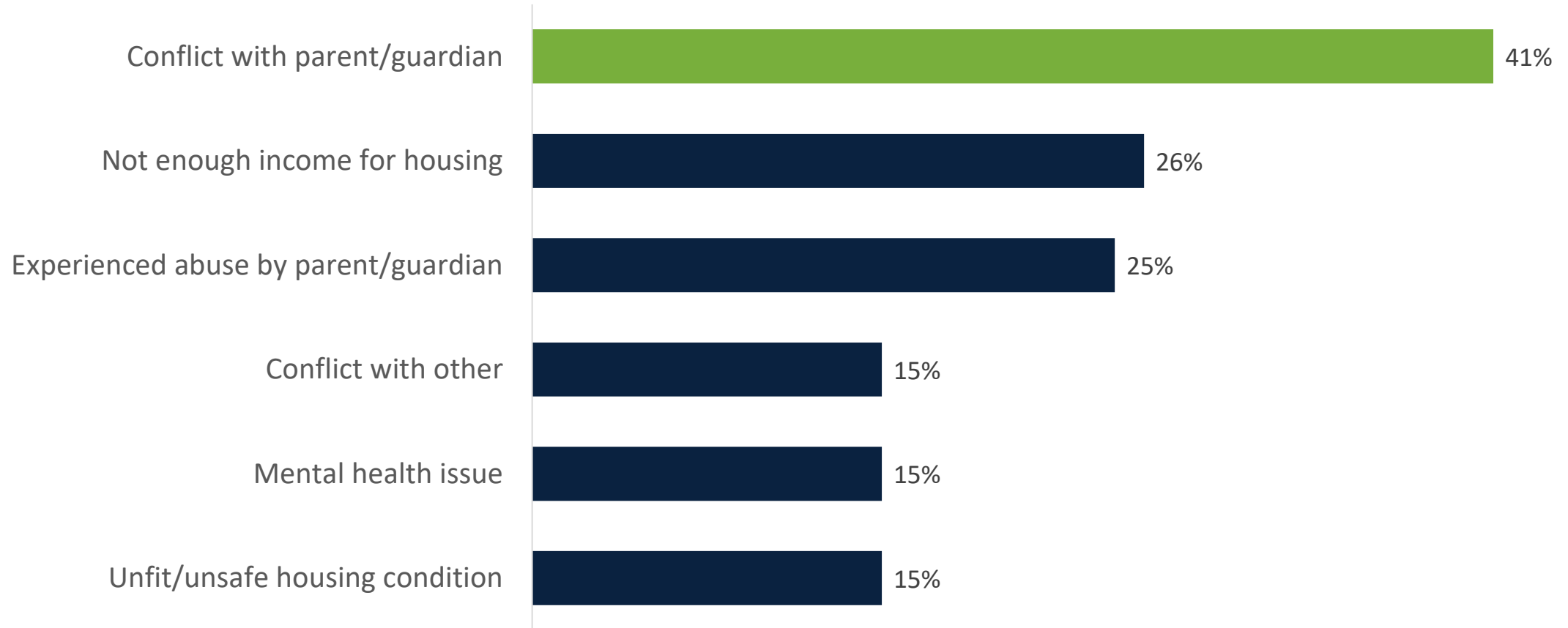


Service Needs of 2SLGBTQ+ People Experiencing Homelessness

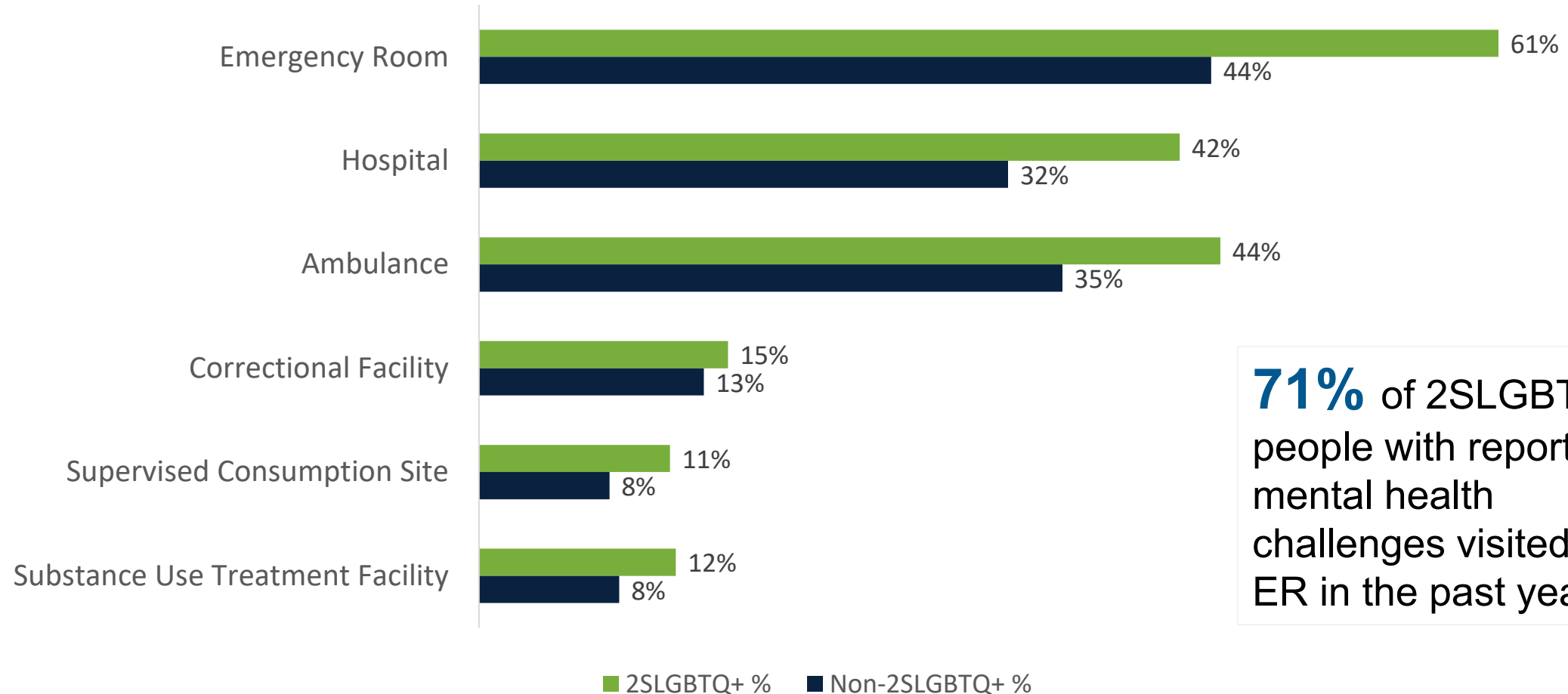
Not enough income for housing was the leading reason for homelessness among 2SLGBTQ+ respondents



Conflict with parent/guardian was the leading reason for homelessness for 2SLGBTQ+ youth

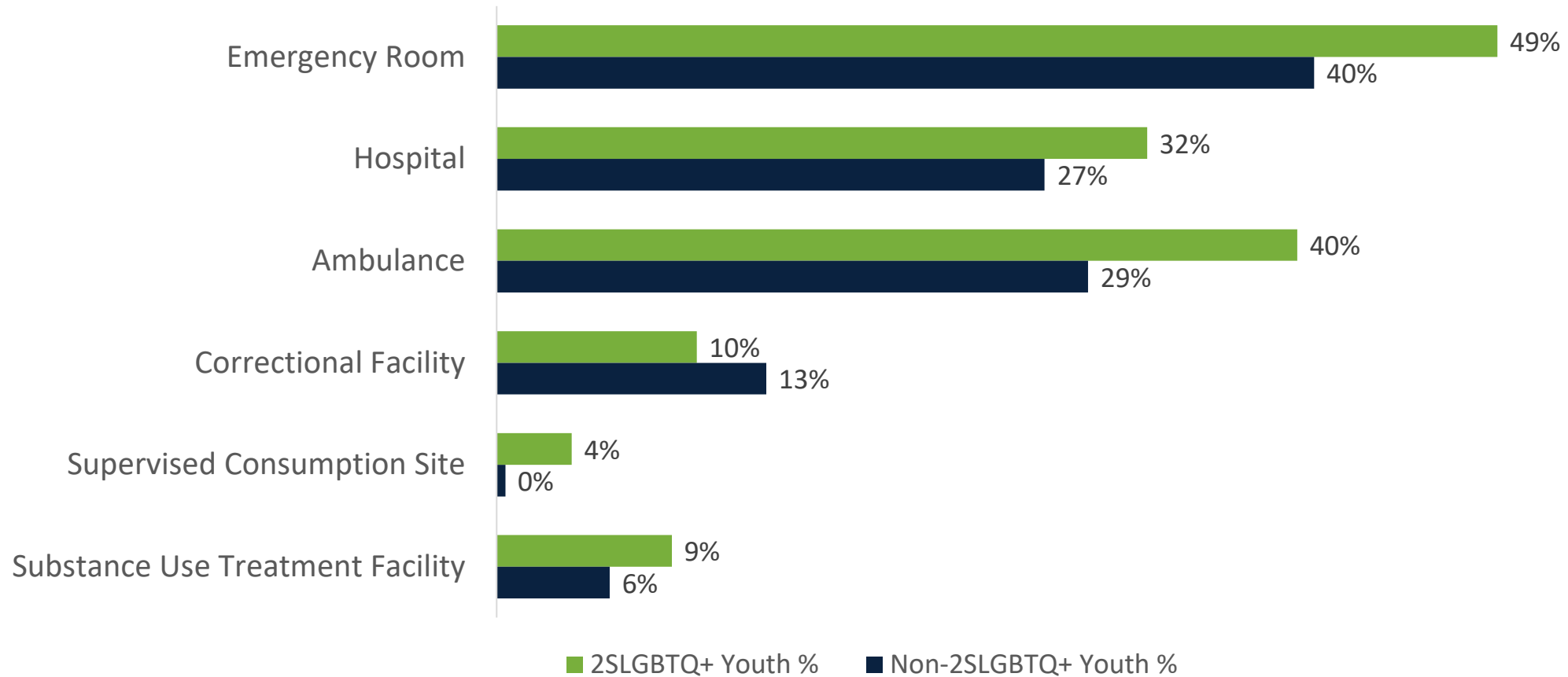


2SLGBTQ+ people reported more frequent interactions with acute health care services in the past year



71% of 2SLGBTQ+ people with reported mental health challenges visited the ER in the past year

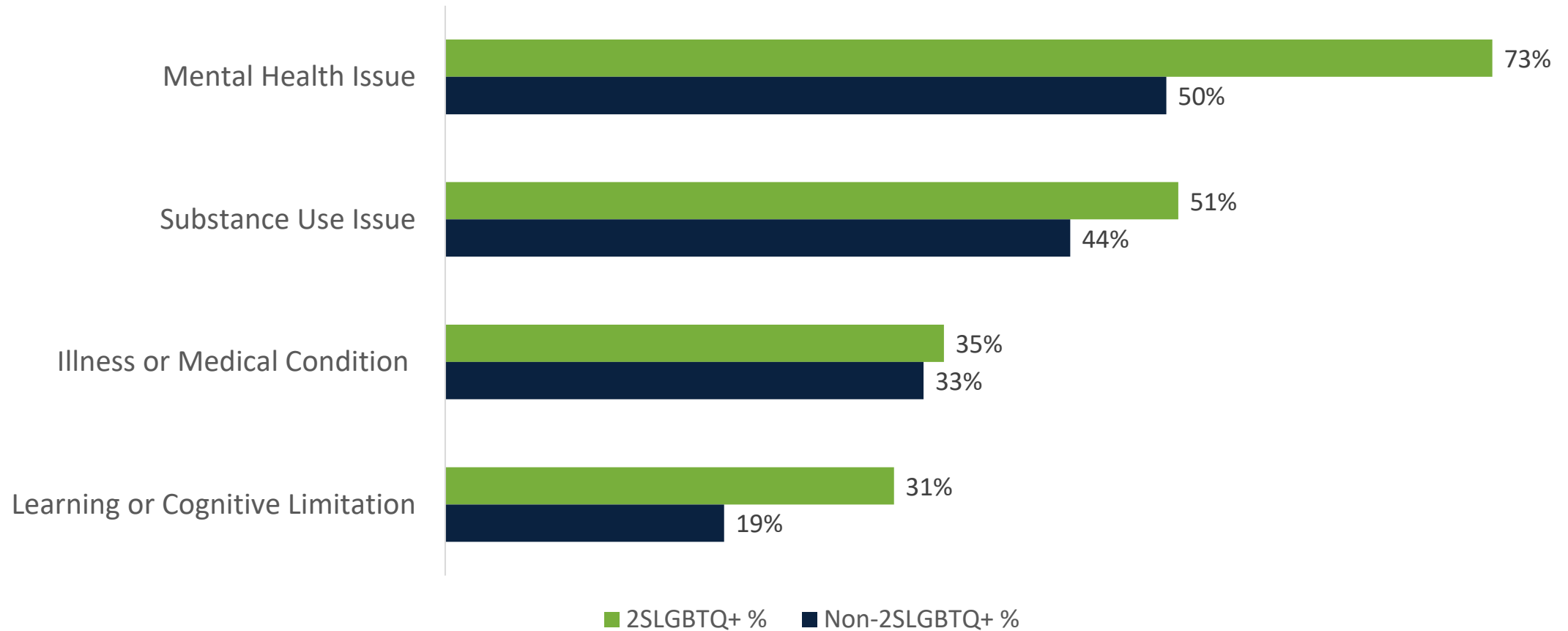
2SLGBTQ+ youth reported more frequent interactions with the health care system in the past year



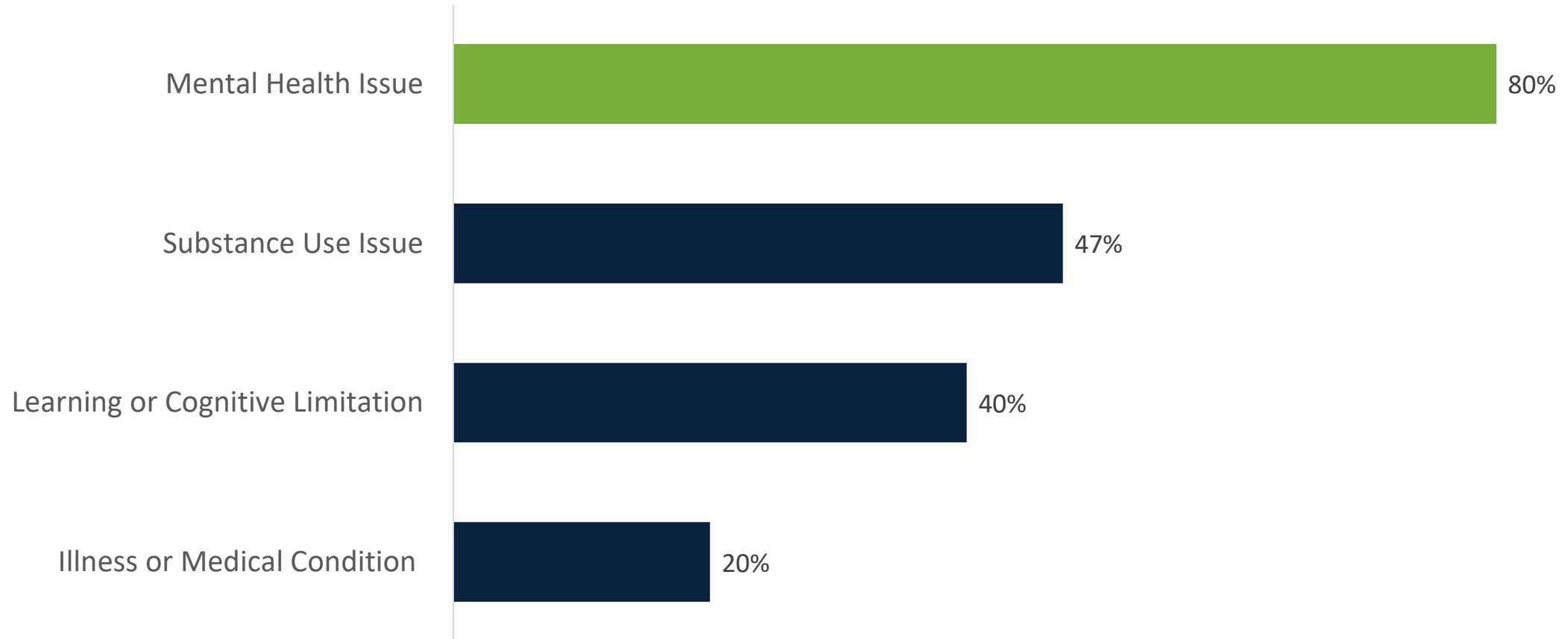


Health Challenges and Needs of 2SLGBTQ+ People Experiencing Homelessness

Almost three quarters of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness reported mental health challenges

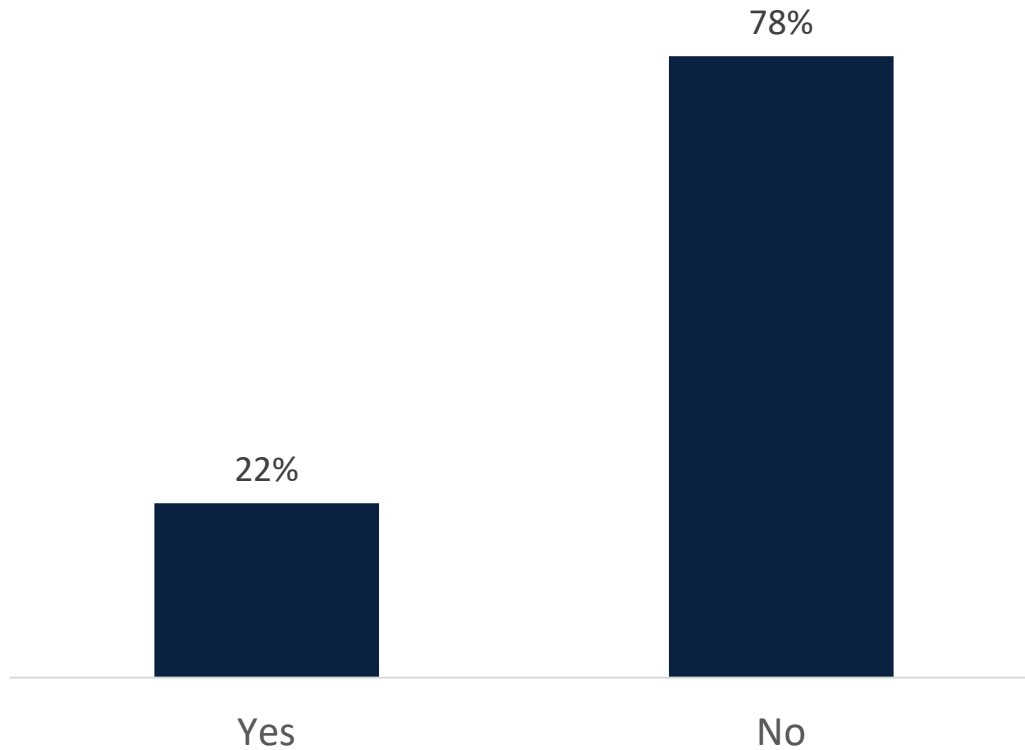


80% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth reported mental health challenges

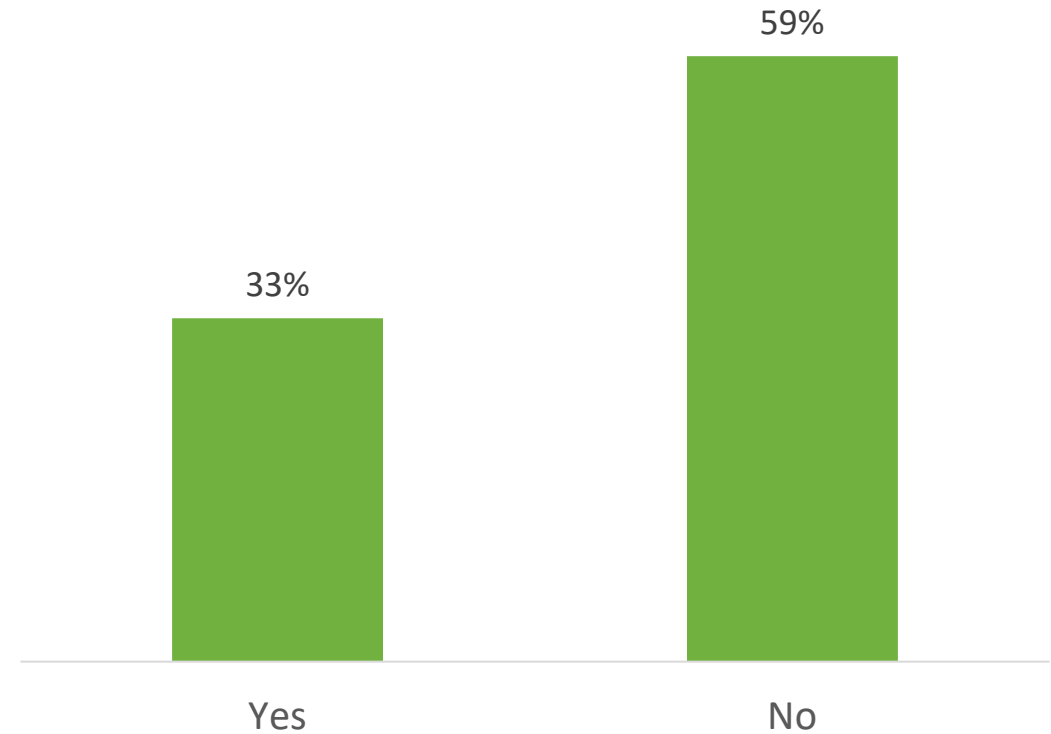


2SLGBTQ+ people are experiencing gaps in access to treatment for substance use

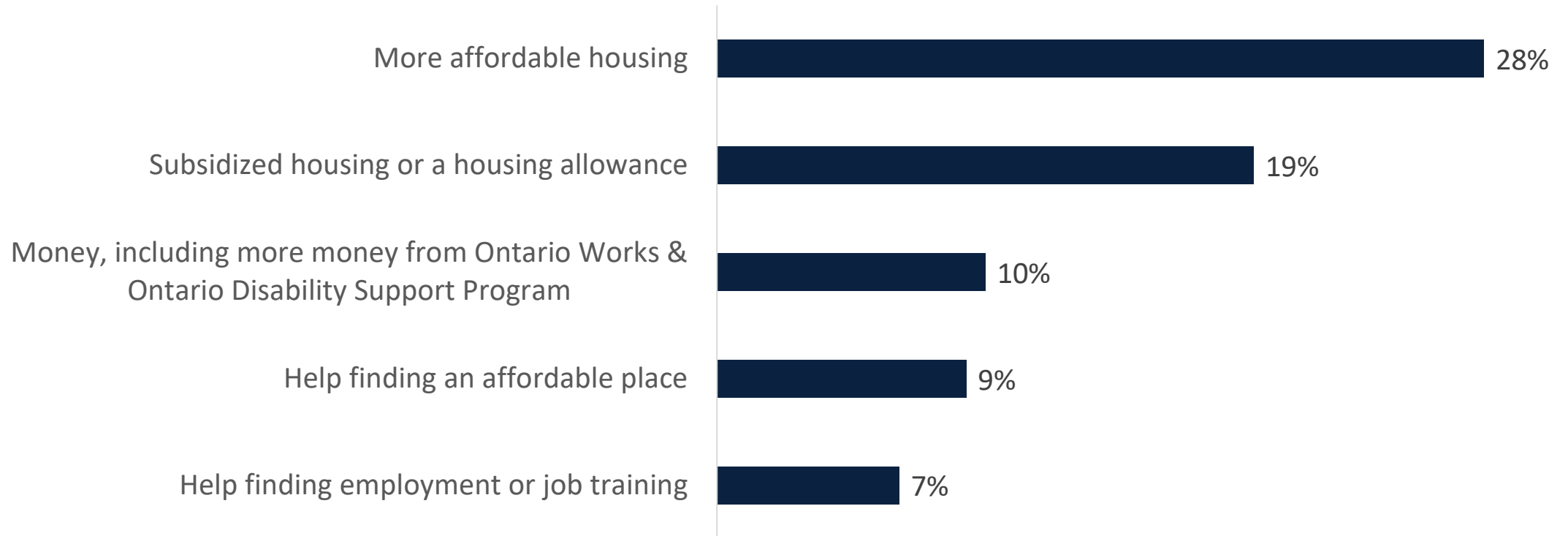
Currently Receiving Treatment for Substance Use



Interest in Accessing Treatment for Substance Use



Increased income and housing affordability were identified as the most important services to help find housing among 2SLGBTQ+ respondents



Sexual orientation and gender identity questions have been refined over time

	2006 & 2009	2013	2018	2021
Gender	Would you identify as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Transgender/Transsexual • Other (Specify) 	Would you identify as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Transgender/Transsexual • Other (Specify) 	What gender do you identify with? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male/Man • Female/Woman • Trans female/Trans woman • Trans male/Trans man • Two-spirit • Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming • Not listed (specify) 	What gender do you identify with? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male/Man • Female/Woman • Trans female/Trans woman • Trans male/Trans man • Two-spirit • Non-binary (genderqueer) • Not listed (specify)
Sexual Orientation	Not asked	Not asked	How do you describe your sexual orientation, for example straight, gay, lesbian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight/Heterosexual • Gay • Lesbian • Bisexual • Two-spirit • Questioning • Queer • Not listed (specify) 	How do you describe your sexual orientation, for example straight, gay, lesbian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight/Heterosexual • Gay • Lesbian • Bisexual • Two-spirit • Pansexual • Asexual • Questioning • Queer • Not listed (specify)
2SLGBTQ+ Community	Not asked	Do you identify as part of the Gay, Lesbian, Queer, Two-Spirited or Bisexual community?	No specific question – derived variable	Do you identify as LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, 2-spirit, + refers to sexual and gender diverse identities not represented in the acronym)?

For More Information



Creating LGBTQ2S Inclusive, Affirming, and Safe PiT Counts

Dr. Alex Abramovich (2019)

canadian
observatory on
homelessness

camh

More information can be found here:

Abramovich A, Marshall M, Webb C, Elkington N, Stark RK, Pang N, et al. (2024) Identifying 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness using Point-in-Time counts: Evidence from the 2021 Toronto Street Needs Assessment survey.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298252>

Read these reports here:

<http://www.toronto.ca/housingresearch>

<http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/creating-lgbtq2s-inclusive-affirming-and-safe-pit-counts>