

# Canadian Social Survey: Energy use

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Temperature extremes in Canada, including intense heat and cold weather events, inevitably affect energy consumption among Canadian households, which need proper heating and cooling systems for individuals and families to live safely and comfortably in their homes. However, in the face of rising energy prices, not all Canadian households are able to adequately heat and cool their dwellings, resulting in possible increased risk of climate-related morbidity and even death. In 2023, 14% of Canadian households reported that they kept their dwelling at an unsafe or uncomfortable temperature for at least 1 month in the past 12 months because of unaffordable heating or cooling costs.

Released today, new data from the ninth cycle of the Canadian Social Survey shed light on energy use and household energy expenditures. They also present the challenges Canadians face to pay their energy bills, including reducing or forgoing expenses of basic household necessities and seeking medical attention for cold- or heat-related issues in the home.

## Oil, gas and electric are the most common forms of heating Canadian households

Apart from the impact on households' cost and comfort, the types of energy sources used to heat and cool homes have broader environmental implications. More energy-efficient systems can help reduce [residential greenhouse gas emissions](#), bringing Canada closer to the sustainable development goal of [net zero emissions by 2050](#).

While various options exist for heating homes, the most energy efficient option is also the least common. In 2023, 7% of all Canadian households used heat pumps in the past 12 months, which are considered the most energy-efficient heating sources (more efficient than furnaces and boilers). Higher income households were more likely to report using heat pumps; about 9% of households in the highest income quintile used this method compared with 5% of homes in the lowest income quintile.

The type of heating equipment used is directly tied to income. Among households with higher income, oil and natural gas heating equipment were the most common. For example, 56% of households in the highest income quintile heated their homes with oil or gas, compared with 28% of households in the lowest income quintile.

Electric heating was the most common source reported by the lowest-income households, with 47% of them having used this type of heating system. This likely reflects their higher likelihood of living in apartments, relative to higher income households. In 2023, 62% of households living in low-rise homes and 41% of those in high-rise homes relied on electric forms of heating in the past 12 months, compared with 23% of households in single-detached homes.

Similarly, renters (52%) more often reported electric forms of heating than homeowners (27%). Renters (17%) were also six times as likely as homeowners (3%) to be unsure about the type of energy used to heat their homes.

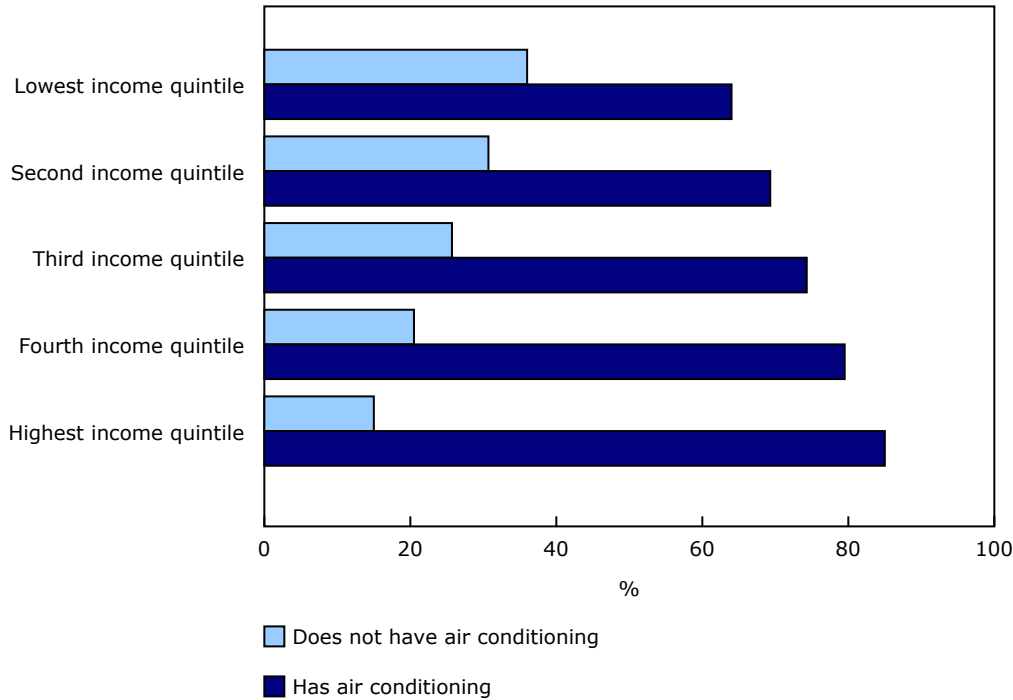
## About one-quarter of Canadian homes do not have air conditioning or cooling equipment

The absence of cooling equipment in the home can lead to dangerous living conditions and has been linked to an increased risk of [heat-related morbidity and mortality](#). This risk is not distributed equally across Canadian households.

In 2023, just over one-quarter (26%) of households went without air conditioning or some other type of cooling equipment in the past 12 months. This proportion ranged from a low of 15% among households in the highest income quintile to 36% among those in the lowest income quintile. The households most likely to go without air conditioning lived in low-rise apartments (38%) and high-rise apartments (33%).



**Chart 1**  
**Presence of air conditioning or other cooling equipment in the home in past year, by income quintile**



Source(s): Canadian Social Survey, second quarter, 2023 (5354).

### High energy prices force some Canadian households to delay or skip an energy bill payment

In 2023, 3% of Canadian households reported receiving a disconnection, shut off or non-delivery notice with respect to their energy bill in the past 12 months. A larger share (1 in 10 households) reported that they had been late or unable to pay their energy bills in the past 12 months due to high energy prices. The gap was especially apparent between the highest income quintile, at 4%, and all other income quintiles, each at around 10%.

### Overall, one in seven Canadian households cut back on basic needs to pay their energy bill

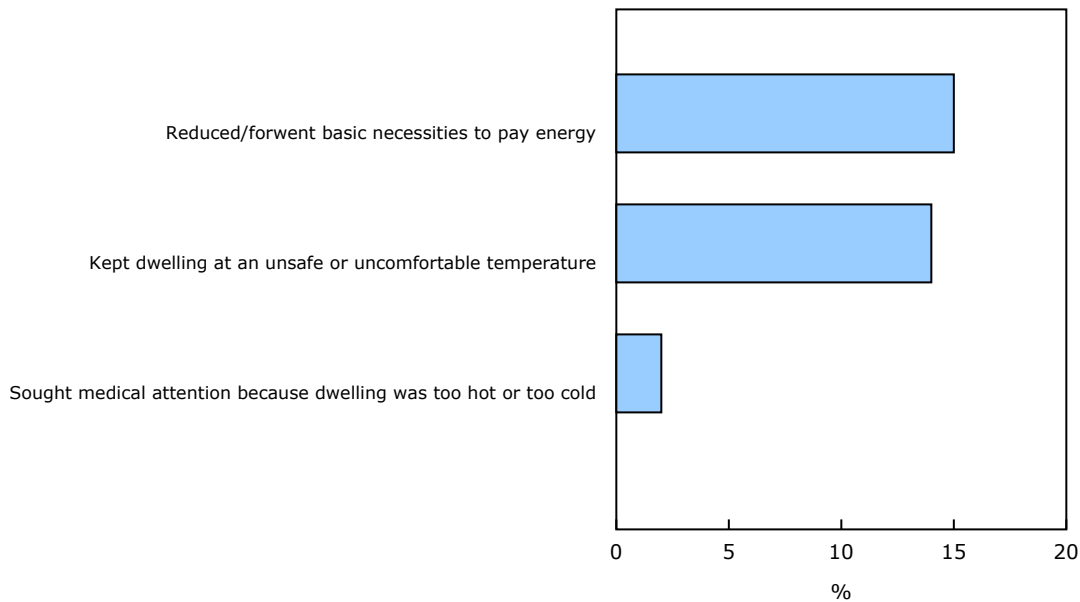
In 2023, about one in seven Canadian households (15%) had to reduce or forgo expenses for basic necessities, such as food and medicine, for at least 1 month in the past 12 months in order to pay an energy bill. Almost 8% of households reported doing this for at least three months.

While cutting back on or eliminating basic needs was more prevalent among households in the lowest income quintile, where almost one in five households had to forgo basic needs, it was also a reality for middle-income households (second, third and fourth quintiles). Around 16% of middle-income households reported cutting back on basic needs to pay for energy bills. Although much less common, some households in the highest income quintile (8%) also made budget cuts to food or medicine to cover the cost of their energy bills.

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## Chart 2 Household challenges due to heating and cooling costs

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Source(s): Canadian Social Survey, second quarter, 2023 (5354).

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Across all incomes, lone parent families (27%) were the most at risk of cutting back on basic needs to pay for their energy bills. They were more than 1.5 times as likely to face this situation than couples with children (16%) and over 3 times as likely as couples without children (8%).

### Lower-income households more likely to keep their dwellings at an unsafe or uncomfortable temperature

The inability to pay for basic necessities is not the only challenge Canadian households face due to rising energy costs; some households may not be able to adequately heat or cool their home as well. In 2023, about 14% of Canadian households reported that they had to keep their dwelling at an unsafe or uncomfortable temperature for at least 1 month in the past 12 months because of unaffordable heating or cooling costs. This was more often the case for the lowest-income households, 18% of whom had trouble keeping their home heated or cooled, which is about double the proportion of households in the highest income quintile (10%). Further, 2% of Canadian households reported not heating or cooling their dwelling, and this was fairly consistent across income groups.

The health consequences of unsafe indoor temperatures can be immediate. About 2% of Canadian households reported that someone in their home needed medical attention because their home was either too hot or too cold. While this situation is relatively rare, it was more prevalent for lower-income households, at 2.6%, compared with the highest income households, at 0.7%.

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### Note to readers

*This release uses the most recent wave of the Canadian Social Survey (CSS): Quality of Life and Energy Use, collected from April 21 to June 4, 2023. The CSS collects information from individuals and families on quality of life, energy use and household energy expenditures. Results from the survey will help decision makers develop programs and policies to better serve Canadians.*

*The CSS aims to better understand social issues rapidly by conducting surveys on different topics every three months. Statistics Canada would like to thank all Canadians who took the time to answer the questions.*

*In this release, the term "Canadians" refers to residents of Canada, regardless of citizenship status.*

*Household income was measured by asking: What is your best estimate of your total household income by all household members, from all sources, before taxes and deductions, during the year ending December 31, 2022?*

*For more information, refer to the Statistics Canada survey information page: [Canadian Social Survey \(CSS\)](#).*

### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5354](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).