

# Examining Poverty In Surrey

## A Series of Fact Sheets

May 2023



surrey poverty  
reduction coalition

Surrey is located the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Semiahma (Semiahmoo), Kwantlen, sq'écíyaʔt təməx<sup>w</sup> (Katzie), k<sup>w</sup>ik<sup>w</sup>əł əm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, and s'cəwaθenaʔt təməx (Tsawwassen) Nations.



## Using These Fact Sheets

The information we have presented in these fact sheets is derived from the 2021 Canadian Census. When identifying rates of poverty, we have used Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT), a commonly used, internationally comparable measure of low income. Using the LIM-AT definition, a household is considered to be low income if its after-tax income is less than half of the median after-tax income of all households in Canada.

Please note that there may be issues with the accuracy and completeness of Census data, including underreporting, which can affect the validity of poverty estimates we have presented here.

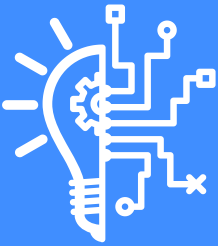
Income data from the 2021 Census may also be influenced by income earned through a federal or provincial COVID-19 response program, such as the Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB). People may have recorded an increase in income because of they received CERB; however, their income may have declined after the CERB program ended, after the Census was over.

# Examining Poverty in Surrey



**Poverty negatively affects health, well-being, and quality of life in strong, resilient communities.**

It is a complex issue with multiple definitions, rooted in structural, environmental, and social determinants of health.



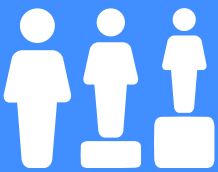
**Poverty is about more than income.**

Poverty is multidimensional, and is caused by complex interconnected social, economic, and political factors. It presents a barrier for people to make decisions that shape their lives. Poverty can be experienced in many ways, including through social isolation and 'spiritual poverty' - the loss of meaning or purpose in one's life. Therefore, economic definitions alone are not reliable to achieve a comprehensive understanding of poverty.



**All people have a human right to live free of poverty, with dignity and the ability to fully participate in society.**

Poverty affects people's ability to access health care, housing, food and safe water, education, employment, and to vote. This leads to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break unless root causes of poverty are considered.



**Rates of poverty are linked to social inequities.**

Equity is the fair distribution of power, opportunities, and resources to meet the needs of all people, regardless of age, ability, gender, race, culture, or background. Social inequities lie at the root of poverty, so efforts to reduce or eliminate poverty need to acknowledge and address inequities – within and among communities.



**Some groups are more likely to experience poverty than others.**

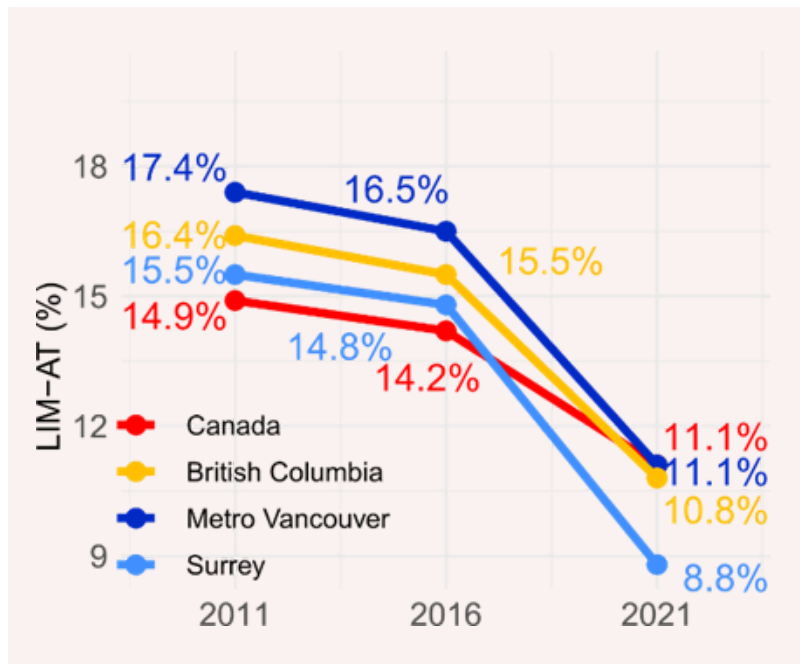
In these fact sheets, we've described some aspects of poverty in Surrey: who is experiencing it, where in Surrey poverty is occurring, and trends over time.

# Poverty in Surrey

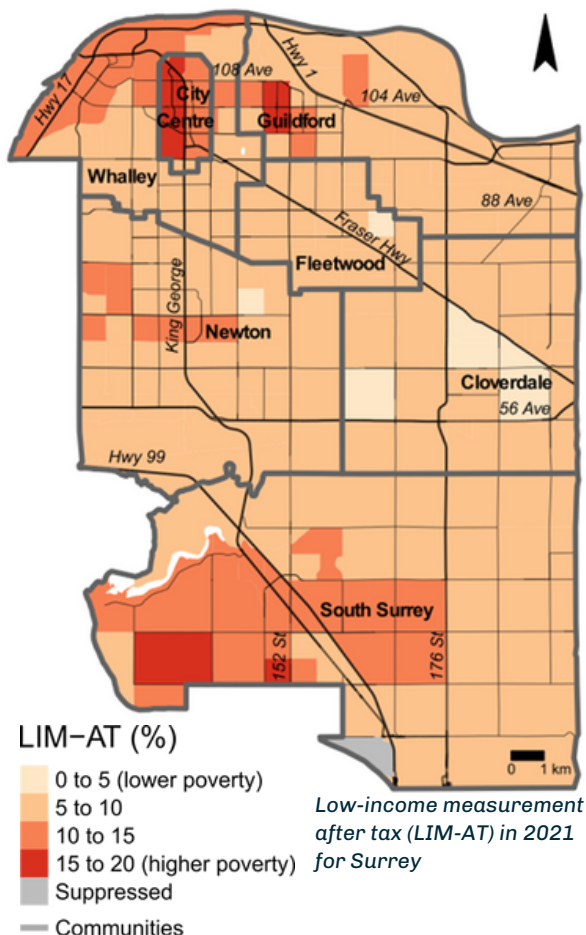
While poverty rates in Surrey are declining, almost 50,000 people in Surrey are experiencing poverty.

Poverty rates across Canada, BC, Metro Vancouver, and Surrey have dropped since 2016. In Surrey, poverty rates have decreased more than in Metro Vancouver or in BC.

The proportion of people experiencing poverty in Surrey fell by 6.7 percentage points between 2011 and 2021. Nationally, there was a 3.8 percentage point decrease over time, a 5.6 percentage point decrease at the provincial level, and a 6.3 percentage point decrease across Metro Vancouver.



Trend for poverty from 2011 to 2016. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2011, 2016, and 2021).



Poverty in Surrey is not limited to one area of the city.

There are **higher concentrations (up to 15-20%)** of people experiencing poverty in certain neighbourhoods, such as in some parts of City Centre, Guildford, and South Surrey.

However, in many areas of the city, including areas often thought of as more affluent neighbourhoods, some people are experiencing poverty -- this is called **"hidden poverty"**.

# Poverty Among Children and Youth

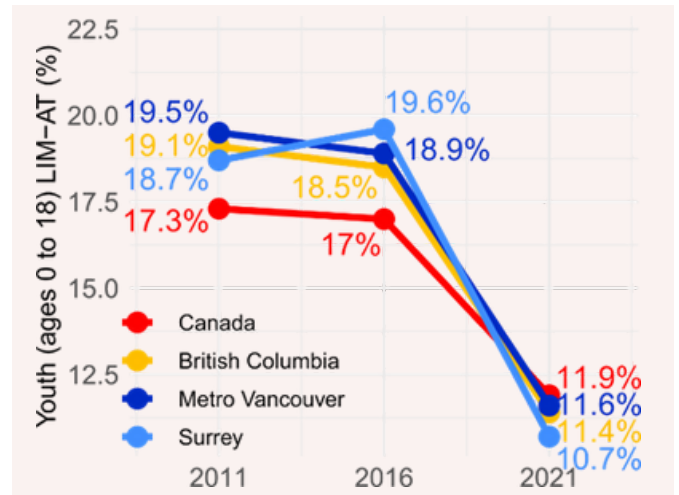
Living in poverty as a child or youth can have lifelong consequences. **People who grow up in poverty experience worse outcomes than those from wealthier families in virtually every dimension** - from long-term physical and mental health to pursuing education, to success in the job market. It is essential that poverty reduction efforts include targeted support for children, youth, and families.

**Poverty among children and youth in Surrey dropped to 10.7% in 2021; however, more than 20,000 children and youth in Surrey are experiencing poverty. The rate is significantly higher in single-parent households.**

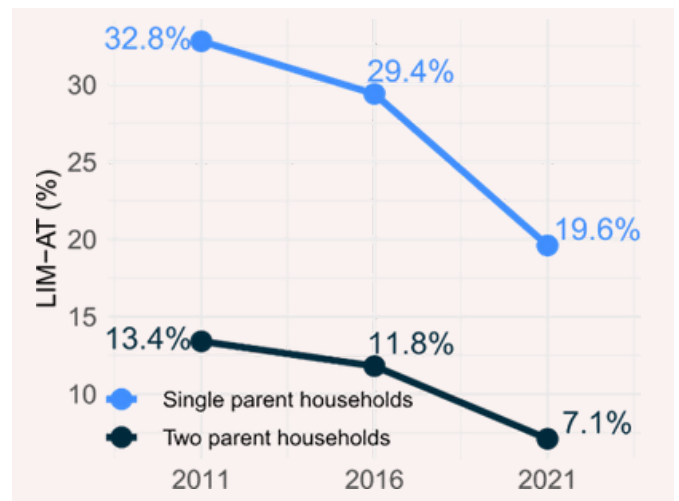
Since 2011, the proportion of children and youth living in poverty has decreased in Metro Vancouver, BC, across Canada, and in Surrey.

Single-parent households in Metro Vancouver have higher rates of child and youth poverty (19.6%) than two-parent households (7.1%). In both household types, poverty rates are decreasing. Child and youth poverty rates are decreasing more rapidly for single-parent households.

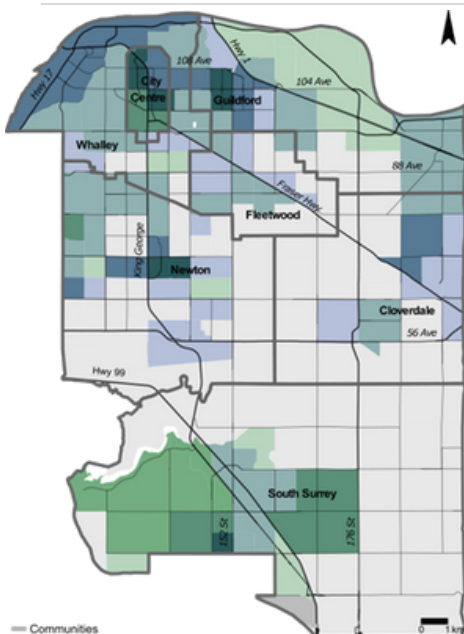
**Despite the decrease, poverty continues to affect children and youth in Surrey.**



Youth Poverty (ages 0 to 17). Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2011, 2016, and 2021).



LIM-AT for single parent households in Metro Vancouver. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021)

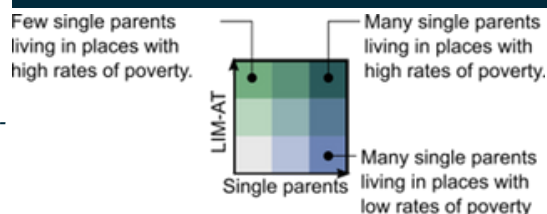


Prevalence of single-parent households and LIM-AT for Metro Vancouver in Surrey. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021).

**Poverty among children and youth is present in most areas of the city.**

The prevalence of child and youth poverty in single-parent households (between 20-30% of households) is generally concentrated in Whalley, City Centre, and parts of Guildford.

This map shows the spatial patterns of single parents (shaded in blue), overlaid with spatial patterns of people living in poverty (shaded in green). Areas in dark green, dark blue, and dark turquoise highlight places with many single parents and high rates of poverty.



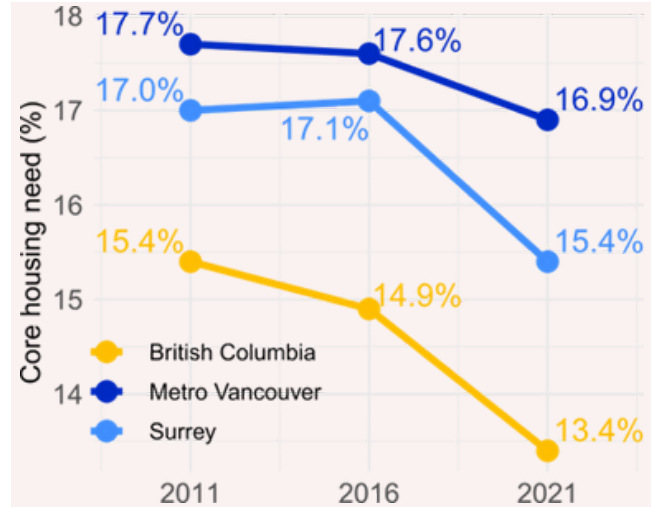
# Housing

If a household spends 30%+ of pre-tax income on housing that is inadequate, unaffordable, or unsuitable, then this household is in core housing need. **27,705 households in Surrey (15.6%) experienced core housing need in 2021.**

## Fewer households experienced core housing need in 2021 than before.

Core housing need determines if a household can afford suitable and adequate housing in their community. There has been a slight downward trend in the number of households experiencing core housing need in BC, Metro Vancouver, and Surrey. More households in Surrey experience core housing need compared to the provincial average.

The percentage of households in core housing need rarely exceeds 20% of households in a neighbourhood.



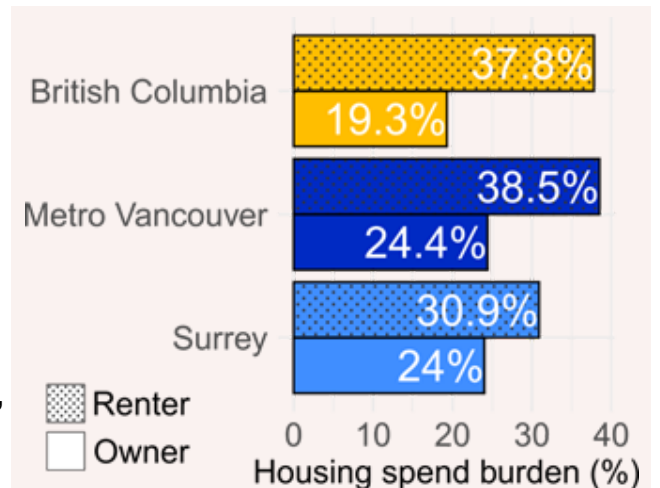
Timeline of core housing need for all households 2011 - 2021. Core housing need by tenure (owner or renter) is not available for 2011 or 2016. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2011, 2016, and 2021).

## Renters experience core housing need more often than homeowners.

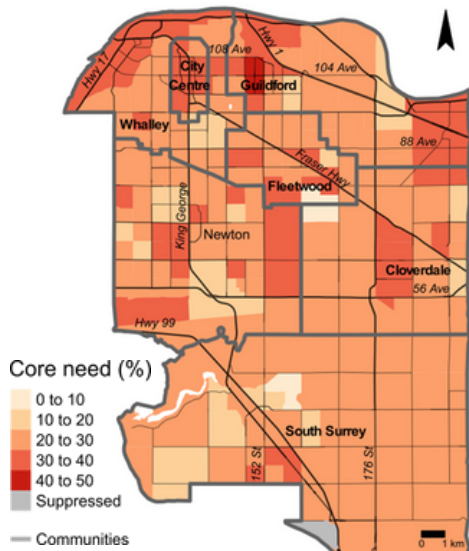
15,611 (56%) of the 27,705 Surrey households experiencing core housing need are renters.

## Core housing need is more widespread for renters than homeowners.

The map below looks only at renter households: this map shows that across most areas of the city, 20%+ of households who rent are in core housing need, and in some areas, this percentage is between 40-50% of households who rent.



Housing spend burden by tenure (owner or renter) in Surrey in 2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021).



Core housing need for census tracts in 2021 for renter households. Source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population.

## Renters experience more housing spend burden.

Many people experience housing spend burden related to shelter costs (meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing and utilities). Provincially, regionally, and municipally, a higher percentage of renters' experience housing spend burden than homeowners (as per graph above).

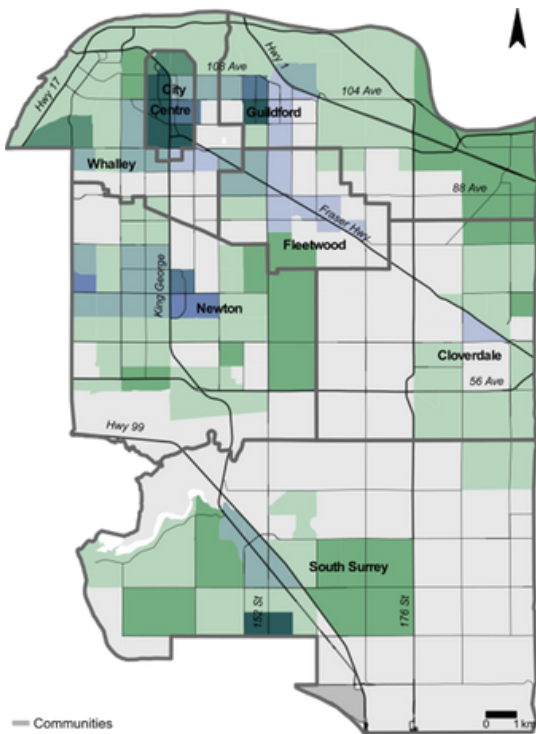
**In Surrey, 48,210 (26%, ~ 1/4) households experience this burden. Nearly 31% of renter households are burdened by shelter costs. Only 24% of homeowner households face the same challenge.**

# Transportation and Housing Burden for Renters

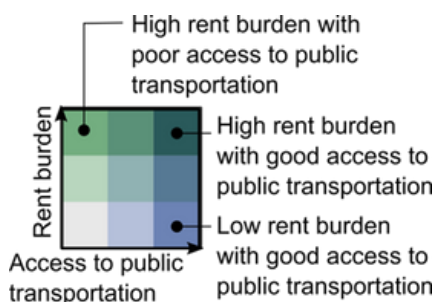
Comprehensive and easily accessible public transit allows for access to jobs, education, and services. **Access to public transportation is important for people experiencing poverty because it can provide affordable and reliable transportation to work, school, medical appointments, grocery stores, and other essential destinations.** People experiencing poverty often struggle to find transportation options that are affordable, reliable, and convenient.

**Public transportation access is more than 1km away for people in most areas of Surrey.**

One way to measure access to public transit is to use the Statistics Canada 'Proximity to Public Transit Measure', which assigns a score based on the closeness of public transit service within 1 km walking distance. **In most areas of Surrey, people have to walk or wheel 1 kilometre or more to access a public transit stop or station.**



Shelter cost for renters and access to public transportation. Bright green areas highlight places where many households are spending more than 30% of their income on rent with poor access to public transportation. Source: Statistics Canada Proximity Measure (2021)



**A few areas have good access to public transit but rent and utilities are unaffordable for some.**

Ease of access to public transportation is highest in City Centre in areas close to SkyTrain stations. **These areas are also characterized with some of the highest shelter cost burden for renters in the city** (defined as people who spend more than 30% of their income on housing and utilities).

**Areas with good transit but high rent costs are shaded in dark green on the map.**

**Some areas are characterized by high rent and utilities burden, but transit access varies across the city.**

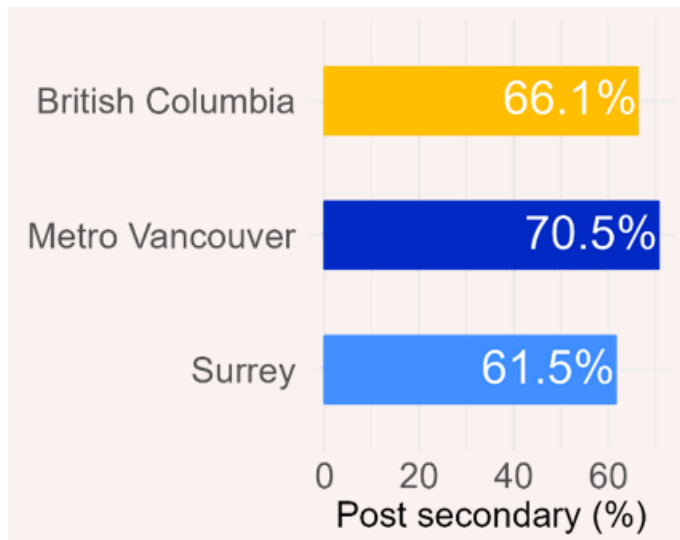
**Areas in bright green represent areas where rent burden is high and public transit access is poor.** Areas shaded in medium green are areas that have high rent burden and medium access to public transit (i.e., some people have to walk/wheel more than 1km to access while others do not).

**Rent and utilities are unaffordable in most of Surrey and access to public transportation is poor.**

Most of the city is shaded in light green. These areas of the city have a medium level of rent burden, meaning that these areas are slightly more affordable than other areas in the city but that there are still many renters who are paying more than 30% of their income on shelter costs. **Unlike the central areas of Surrey, these areas are characterized with poor access to transportation.**

# Education and Poverty

Post-secondary education (e.g., an apprenticeship or trade, diploma, and/or degree) can allow people to earn a higher income and improve their quality of life by acquiring new skills and providing opportunities.

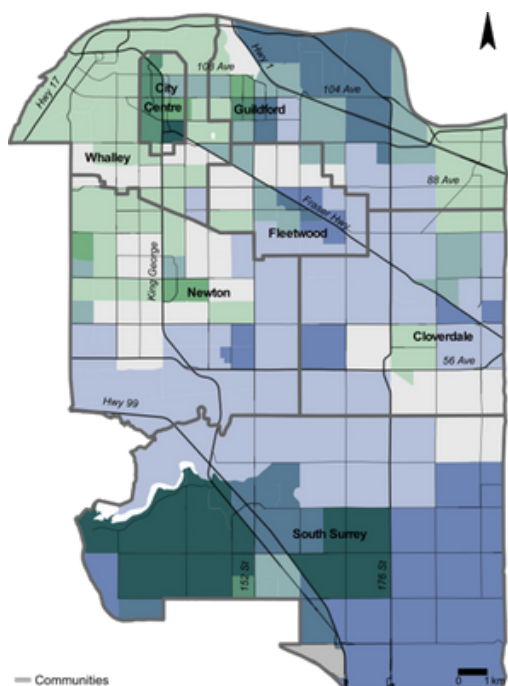


Population with post-secondary education in 2021. Source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population.

Fewer people in Surrey have attained post-secondary education (61.5%) compared to Metro Vancouver (70.5%) and the province (66.1%). About 1 in 10 people (10.8%) in Surrey did not finish high school and about 1 in 4 (27.7%) completed high school but did not pursue any further education.

## Highest level of education achieved for the population of Surrey

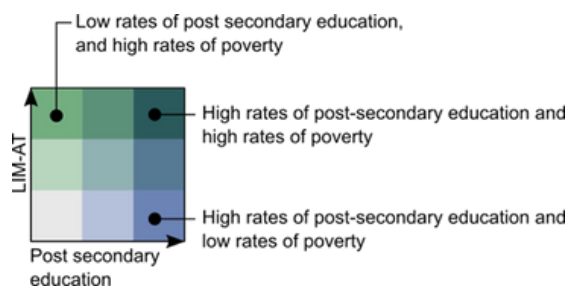
Highest level	No certificate, degree, or diploma		High school		Post-Secondary	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
British Columbia	216,660	8.0	694,785	25.8	178,0415	66.1
Metro Vancouver	98,700	6.6	339,580	22.8	1,048,860	70.5
Surrey	32,975	10.8	84,370	27.7	187,610	61.5



## Poverty and level of education vary across the city.

There are areas of the city with low rates of post-secondary education and high rates of people experiencing poverty. These areas are located mostly in north Surrey.

**There is, however, a large area in South Surrey where there are higher levels of poverty but also a high level of people with post-secondary education.**



Population with post-secondary education and LIM-AT in 2021. Areas in bright green have high rates of poverty and low rates of post-secondary education. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021)

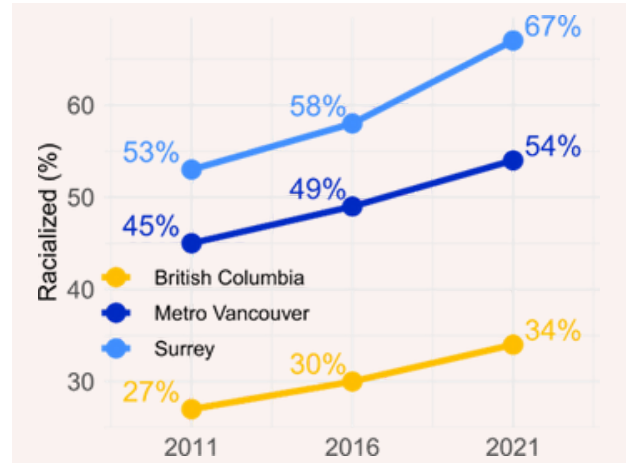


# Racialized Individuals\*

The residents of Surrey are very diverse in terms of race.

Racialized people make up 67% of the population of Surrey, much higher than the Metro Vancouver average, and almost double the proportion for BC.

The number of racialized people living in Surrey has increased substantially, from 54% in 2011 to 67% in 2021.

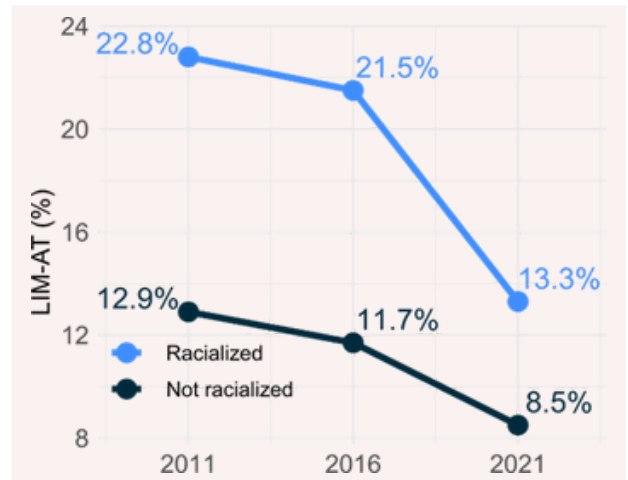


Change in Racialized Population 2011-2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of the Population

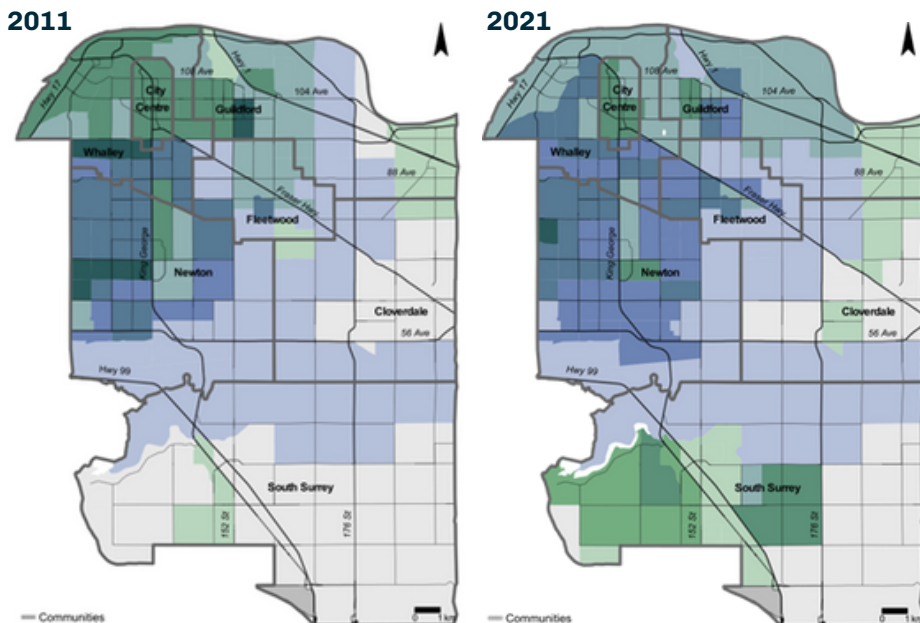
More racialized people experience poverty than non-racialized people.

The rate of poverty among racialized people in Metro Vancouver has decreased since 2011, but it is still higher than for non-racialized people.

While it is possible for anyone to experience poverty, systemic racism plays a significant role in creating disadvantaged conditions and barriers for racialized people.



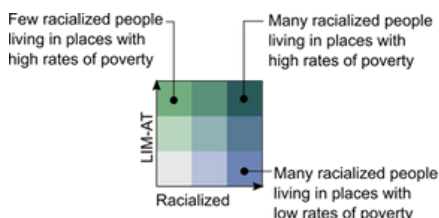
Proportion of racialized and non-racialized people experiencing poverty in Metro Vancouver from 2011 to 2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of the Population



Racialized population in Surrey and LIM-AT in 2011 and 2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of the Population

Poverty is decreasing in some neighbourhoods with many racialized residents.

This map shows the spatial patterns of racialized populations (shaded in blue), overlaid with spatial patterns of people living in poverty (shaded in green). The areas in dark green are where many racialized people are living in places with high rates of poverty.



\*To identify racialized populations, Statistics Canada uses the term 'visible minority'. The Government of Canada defines visible minorities as persons, other than Indigenous peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The term has been rightly criticized as outdated and harmful, in part because it downplays the diversity of racialized communities and assumes whiteness as the norm.

# Newcomers

**With one of the fastest-growing newcomer populations in BC, Surrey's needs are complex and unique.**

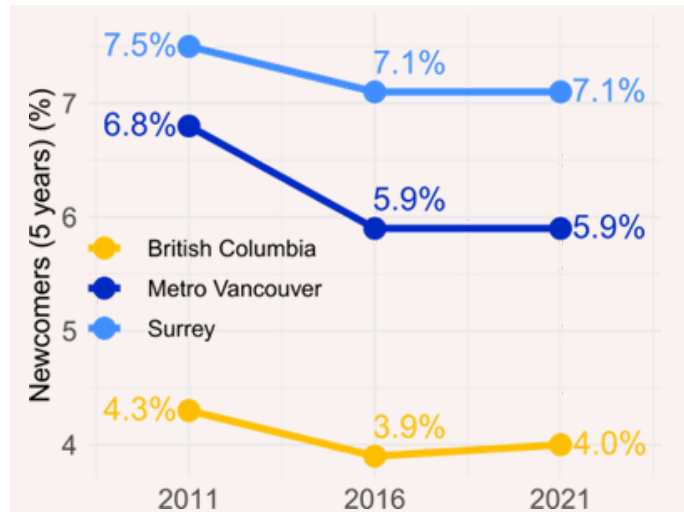
**Surrey is a city of diverse voices and experiences.**

In 2021, immigrants made up 45% of Surrey's population, meaning that nearly half of people in Surrey were born in another country.

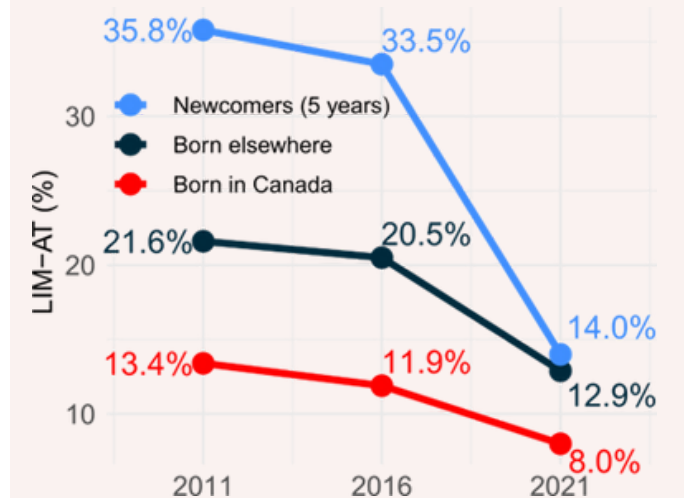
The number of immigrants settling in Surrey continues to grow. In the last 5 years, Surrey grew by 50,435 overall, and 80% of that growth, or nearly 40,000 people, were recent immigrants to Canada. That is about 22 new newcomers every day!

**In Metro Vancouver, the rate of poverty among recent immigrants has decreased since 2016.**

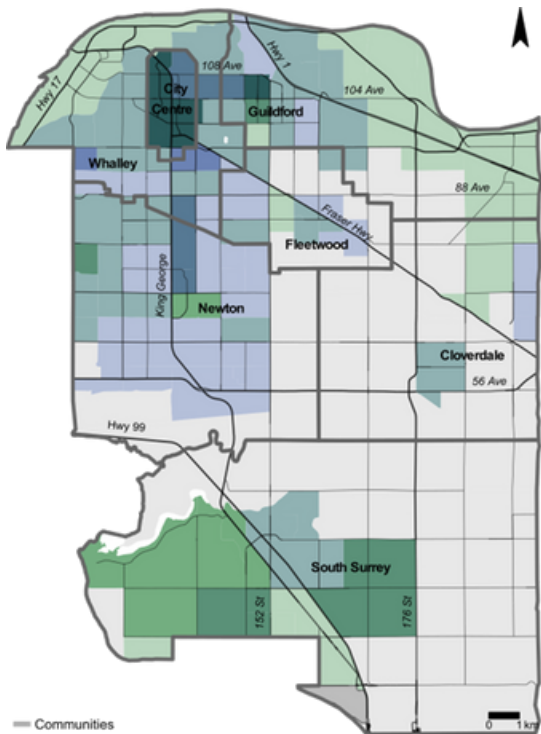
Poverty rates have decreased the most among people who arrived in Metro Vancouver in the last 5 years.



Population of immigrants 2011 to 2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2011, 2016, and 2021).



Immigrants and non-immigrants below LIM-AT in Metro Vancouver (CMA) 2011 to 2021. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2011, 2016, and 2021).



Newcomers in 2021 in Surrey as a proportion of the population and LIM-AT. Source Statistics Canada (2021).

**Newcomers live in all areas of Surrey.**

Recent immigrants (those living in Canada for less than 5 years) tend to settle in north Surrey, particularly City Centre, Whalley, Guildford and Newton. The map shows where recent immigrants have settled in the city overlaid with poverty rates. Areas in dark green have high rates of poverty and higher proportion of newcomers.



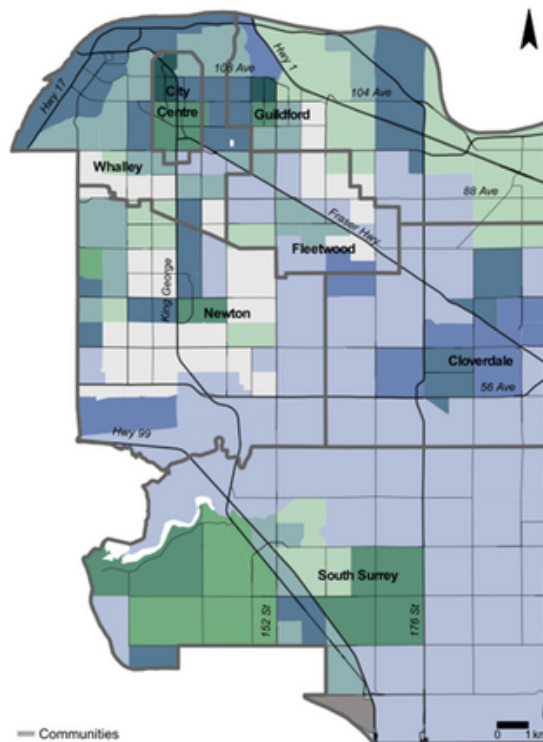
# Indigenous Peoples\*

**There are more than 12,000 Indigenous people living in Surrey.**

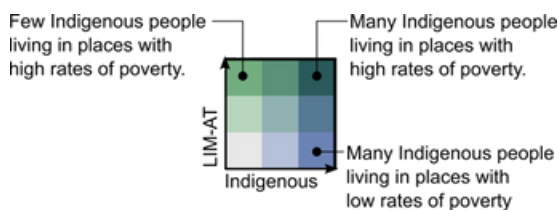
Indigenous people live in many areas within Surrey, with Whalley, Cloverdale and Newton being home to the largest share of Indigenous people – 25.1% of all Indigenous residents live in Whalley, 20.9% live in Cloverdale and 20.6% live in Newton.

**Poverty rates among Indigenous people in Surrey are decreasing, but more Indigenous people still experience poverty than compared to non-Indigenous people.**

Poverty rates among Indigenous people in Surrey (and in BC as a whole) have decreased since 2011, but poverty rates among Indigenous people are still higher than rates among non-Indigenous people.



Indigenous population in 2021 and LIM-AT in Surrey. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021).



Proportion of the population in households with income below LIM-AT by Indigenous identity for British Columbia.

In Surrey, the share of Indigenous individuals classified as low-income (11.9%) is lower than the share of Indigenous people who are low-income in Vancouver, Victoria, or BC overall, but still higher than the percentage of non-Indigenous low-income population in Surrey (8.7%).

**For Indigenous peoples, poverty is rooted in colonialism.**

The forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands, the impacts of residential school experiences, the Sixties Scoop, and other colonial policies lie at the root of high rates of poverty among Indigenous peoples in Canada. Those factors are made worse by ongoing attitudes of racism, discrimination and stereotyping that make it challenging to break the cycle of poverty.

\* Indigenous identity refers to whether the person identified with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. This includes those who identify as First Nations (North American Indian), Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit), and/or those who report being Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada), and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band.

## Examining Poverty in Surrey

**Overall, according to the data we have offered in these fact sheets, it appears that poverty in Surrey is decreasing over time. However, the data has some important limitations.**

Data like this can tell a powerful story and can help make systemic inequities in our society more visible, which can lead to positive change. But the data presented here provides only one way to learn and think about poverty. Census data, like that we have presented here, focuses on income, rather than other dimensions of poverty, such as access to transportation, education, healthcare, and social services.

It also does not accurately capture poverty among some populations, such as those who are unhoused. These groups may be underrepresented in Census data, leading to an incomplete picture of poverty.

In addition, these statistics and analysis represent only part of the story. These factsheets are based exclusively on quantitative data, and that select focus limits our ability to truly understand what is happening in Surrey. The exclusive use of statistics like these forces our attention on the numbers and data and can draw our attention away from the daily struggles that people who are living in poverty experience every day. Data-based initiatives can also risk our disconnection from the root causes of poverty and social inequities.

To truly understand how people came to live in poverty, how best to support them, and how to build systems to ensure a future in which no one in our society lives with poverty, we need to listen and learn from people from marginalized communities and ensure that their voices are heard. This is more than engagement - it means putting relationships first and following the lead of the community.

**Every person has the right to a safe, stable home and income that can allow them to thrive. Continuing to learn about who and where people are experiencing poverty in Surrey is one part of a challenging, complex journey to get there.**



These fact sheets were prepared by [LevelUp Planning Collaborative](#), a multidisciplinary consulting group, and [REACH-Cities](#), a research program from Simon Fraser University’s Faculty of Health Sciences [Cities, Health and Active Transportation Research Lab](#).

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The project was completed on behalf of the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition and the City of Surrey. Funding was provided by BC Healthy Communities through the PlanH program.

