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**Climate Emergency - First Nations Climate Conversations  
Wurundjeri Country (Yarning Climate, Country and People in  
Darebin)**



Image taken from mural in Darebin , St Georges road, boundary of the Aboriginal Advancement league - A significant landmark reflecting the story of occupation and resistance.

## **Acknowledgments**

In writing this report I acknowledge the Traditional Owners (TOs) as custodians and would like to thank them for permission to work on Country. I would also like to thank the 'mob' (community) who shared their knowledge and stories that form the detail of this report.

Thank you also to Darebin Council for their commitment to working towards Climate Justice for First nations peoples.

## **Executive Summary**

People's stories presented in this report reflect a worldview that frames our planet as a "source of life " and through interviewees' eyes it was clear that the natural order had long been broken. The action of colonisation has deprived traditional owners of their custodial responsibilities to the country.

Interviewee experiences demonstrate that colonial western view (s) and the way that these inform the relationships with First Nations peoples and the use of natural resources constantly dominate their indigenous worldview and knowledge systems.

Yarning about climate evoked a range of complex and integrated responses driven by these world views and by every day experiences of climate change on physical and mental health, on disruptions to cultural practices and loss of connection to Country. In addition participants conveyed both anger and doubt that their views and knowledge could be respected and engaged, whilst also generously proposing a wide range of solutions for Council to respectfully work with TOs and local First Nations communities to address climate issues.....

For all participants, the key theme arising from the information collected was the importance of listening, self determination and access to resources; including land. Financial and rights to decision making and control.

## **Key recommendations**

**First nations people are centred in the design, planning and delivery of responses to address climate change.**

*Action:*

*Work is led by the Traditional Owners (TOs) alongside representatives from the community.*

**A whole country approach be taken.**

*Action:*

*Darebin Council in partnership with TO Groups, supports a wider collective approach within the Wurundjeri country by partnering with neighbouring councils and trusted Aboriginal organisations.*

*Darebin Council built systems that take into account indigenous knowledge systems as a guide to making decisions and in all planning processes.*

**Resourcing commitments to First nations peoples.**

*Action:*

*Funds to employ trusted first nations representatives be allocated to further develop and action the future strategy.*

*Funds be budgeted annually to resource future responses.*



Darebin Creek boundary between Darebin and Banyule City Council (north of bell st)

## **Introduction**

This report presents findings from 20 interviews with local First Nations communities from a diverse range of Countries, living in Darebin or who have a long continuing relationship with Darebin. Interviewees generously and warmly shared their feelings and views about climate change including the impacts they experience and their ideas on how best to support 'mob' and country. The best practice principles set out by the Lowitja Institute 2021, were adopted as a cultural guide for the interviews (yarning ) conducted.

(Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health - Discussion paper Nov 21)

First nations peoples in Australia face enduring health inequalities across all social and economic determinants of health when compared to non-Indigenous peoples. The known health gaps are a direct legacy of colonisation and subsequent policies, racism and the ongoing trauma experienced by First nations peoples. These impacts are exacerbated by the ongoing disconnection with traditional lands and denied the right to self-determination. (Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health - Discussion paper Nov 21)

Climate Change compounds these inequalities. The impact of climate change in Australia and mainstream society neglect caring for the country and do not value Aboriginal and Torres Strait ways of knowing, being and doing.

(Jesuit Social Services report to Darebin Council 2023)

Effective action on climate change is about Climate Justice and requires a commitment from Darebin Council and trusted stakeholders to the continuing consultation process and resourcing of solutions.

### **The purpose of this report:**

- Develop a deeper understanding by Council of the key areas of need to address vulnerability to the impacts of climate change for each of the participating communities, and of the barriers to effective engagement with priority community groups.
- Establish relationships to support future climate action and adaptation projects, including identifying opportunities for community-led climate-related projects and partnerships.
- Build strong relationships between communities and Council to inform future climate projects and the development of the Darebin Climate Emergency Plan.



## First nations communities in Darebin

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Darebin is one of the largest populations in all 31 of Melbourne's municipalities, with approximately 1,165 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Darebin.

More than 17 Aboriginal community controlled organisations are located within Darebin. Many have played, and continue to play, a key role in Aboriginal self-determination in Victoria, including the Aborigines Advancement League, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (Jesuit Social Services report to Darebin Council 2023)



Image taken from mural in Darebin , St Georges road, boundary of the Aboriginal Advancement league - A significant landmark reflecting the story of occupation and resistance.



Image of the Merri Creek in Thornbury south of Bell st.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative participatory action research approach has been taken. Semi-structured in-depth interviews that have focused on a narrative or yarning and storytelling format, where interviewees take the lead with interviewer prompts guiding conversations (yarning). Notes were taken throughout the yarns, and was visible to interviewee, to both provide transparency of the information being recorded and to seek confirmation on the accuracy of what is being recorded through reflection. Notes taken were shared with interviewees and reflected upon, including clarifying quotes and seeking permission to use the most relevant, and powerful quotes. This approach was adopted to support a culturally safe atmosphere, to ensure interviewee's kept control over the information being collected and documented.

Interviewees were purposely selected and invited to participate. Interviewees were selected to maximise diversity and to represent a wide as possible sample group across key family and tribal groups, those with long term roots in Darebin, newer and people less connected to Darebin. This was deliberate and designed to avoid the risk of a homogenous group of informants. The target group were engaged through trusted networks within the community, within and outside of organisations, including key organisations working in Darebin.

Interviews were guided by the following practices:

- yarning and storytelling followed the oral tradition of Indigenous cultures;
- yarns were only held with First Nations peoples and community was positioned centrally;
- Note taking was visible and used to ensure interviewee control and a tool to reflect upon;
- Conversations were framed by First Nations worldviews and within the context of colonised societies;
- Tensions that exist between the Indigenous and other worldviews were named as a strategy to avoid interviewees feeling pressured to report what they feel Council wants to hear;
- Interviewees are experts of their own lives and experiences, and are holders of knowledge;
- Recognising that relationship itself is central to yarning, and
- Recognition of community diversity.



Image taken from mural in Darebin , St Georges road, boundary of the Aboriginal Advancement league - A significant landmark reflecting the story of occupation and resistance.

## **Key Findings**

Notes taken during and after interviews have been collated and sorted into key themes. This section documents the knowledge that has been shared.

### **Feelings and Attitudes toward Climate Change**

**1- Anger** was a strong and recurrent theme. TO are angry that that non-First nations peoples continued to negatively impact the country.

*“I’m angry, at how we’ve been forced to live and how our lives and environment have been abused” (Yarn 11).*

*“[I am] pissed off, very pissed off – our peoples’ were disrespected” (Yarn 22).*

*“You know, I used to get down and punch on [fight] , I was so angry, but now I feel some hope...that more widely Australia is asking us” (Yarn 8).*

Interviewees reported feeling hopeful and thankful for being invited to participate in this consultation. The yarns by their very nature showed people’s generously, giving of their time and energy, and by doing so trust and respect were present in the relationship while yarning.

*“[You’re] kidding me, [I] feel shocked you’re asking [about my experience] [I am] surprised I guess - Thanks Brother, I’m thankful” (Yarn 2).*

*“Its good, about time, they [Council] got us involved” (Yarn 7).*

*“Its an opportunity to meet halfway - it’s about time” (Yarn 3 ).*

*"Its a bit good to be asked and honoured to know you want to know our ways"*  
(Yarn 4).

*"About time we got asked, Govt wants insights, sad its taken so long"* (Yarn 13).

*"Grateful it's happening, its never too late"* (Yarn 9)

**2- Tokenism and mistrust** were also strong themes that often-accompanied feelings of anger. Informants shared having been consulted, surveyed and questioned by many levels of government in the past and nothing coming of it.

*"Why now, This is our country, you should ask us first not last"* (Yarn 1).

*"Comes down to statistics, are they going to stick to their word - whats really going to change?"* (Yarn 6).

*"Will it really be listened to or matter? We don't usually matter"* (Yarn 14).

*"They've not done a lot [so far] but here's another chance, here's hoping, but I won't hold my breath"* (Yarn 9).

**3- Hopelessness, disempowerment and feeling flat or low** about inaction on climate change was a common theme, and often followed conversations on anger, and mistrust. Younger informants - those under 25 years of age, feeling flat and anxious about the future. Climate anxiety was talked about and impacts upon mental health. Informants over 35 years of age spoke based on previous experiences of mistrust and disempowerment leading to feelings of low mood.

*"I get down about the world, feel flat thinking; what have they done?"* (Yarn 6, informant under 25 years of age).

*"As a colonised person, I suffer every day, my sense of belonging is out of balance, I feel constantly under duress"* (Yarn 5, informant over 25 years of age).

*"Don't assume mob are good by looking at the outside, on the inside they may not be, support counselling for them"* (Yarn 9).

**4- Attitudes, thoughts and views on climate change** - 'You need to ask us' was a consistent theme often related to feelings of mistrust or disbelief. Throughout the yarns the need to consult with TOs was repeatedly raised in conversations. This theme cannot be overstated.

*"Listen to our mob, we are the best caretakers - we just take what's right for our families, not right for our pockets - we give back to mother earth"* (Yarn 5).



*If the people in power could just learn from the past, from what we know - we just might get there” (Yarn 7).*

*“Is this a tick the box, to hear what you want to hear?” (Yarn 1).*

**5- It’s for the next generation** was a consistent theme for many older interviewees. Stories of sacrifice and acceptance of their past struggles were shared alongside seeing the amazing possibilities and things that they felt the next generation could do:

*“The world’s climate is changing, - as I get older, I accept that it [change] takes time and it’s our next generation who will lead” (Yarn 9).*

*“I’m older now so I get what’s happened. I get my removal [from my family] was wrong and I lost, mob lost... but we look to the next generation. It’s them, they can speak up now. You mob, whitefella’s owe us, owe our country, our ancestors, everything.... [laughs] get on with it then” (Yarn 15).*

**6- Teaching and education** were emphasised as a need for the community. Two-way education was raised where mob are given relatable information on climate change, and for the Council to listen and learn about Indigenous knowledge from the mob.

*“We need to keep teaching our culture to the next generation, teach them how to be self-sufficient, to be safe and well in the environment” (Yarn 7).*

*“It’s a good time to get us involved, where the ones who know more about care for land, so we can educate them” (Yarn 2).*

**7- Future and generational thinking** was reflected throughout yarning. Reflection on the past, present and future were viewed as one knowing that is all interconnected. The following quote from an elder summarises this way of thinking”.

*“White people need to fix -take responsibility...to fix country - I mean to decolonise their minds, the world needs to decolonise, they need to understand they have a lot to learn. White people aren’t conscious of their behaviours, they are not present to the connections [to Country, to life force, spirit]” (Yarn 15)*

*“Given the time it took just to get an apology [to the Stolen Generation], how are we expected to see this [consultation] is true? Our mob knows how to look out for the country, there needs to be more acceptance of this. They should have a [paid] position on council that is for a TO. That’d be true self-determination” ( yarn 9)*

## **Current impacts of climate change**

**8- The interconnected impacts on country** were the dominant theme among yarns. Many issues were raised from cultural access to land, changing weather patterns, seasonal impacts on plant and wildlife, to food security, identity and spiritual and emotional wellbeing. The importance of spiritual and mindful connection to country and traditional lands as a source of life, wellbeing was highlighted. Many community people living in Darebin return to Country on and off.

*“We can’t access our traditional lands while their flooded or dried out waterways. We need to watch water use, ‘white people buy [do] not conserve’[and] care for country, even with food we need to not waste it. Need to rely less on money and share resources of land wisely” (Yarn 2).*

*“As the weathers changing, we can’t access our ceremonial grounds and places. For example, floods limit access to country and the farms have taken the river water therefore our communities can’t access their country [and] therefore can’t come together as a community on country” (Yarn 3).*

*“Interpretation of our stories is all messed up. For example: water and floods and rising water has flooded our burial grounds in the Torres Strait. When our country dies your taking our memories and stories” (Yarn 4).*

*“When our country can’t be accessed, we cross to others land / country [and] this causes great stress. If you look at urban - regional and far country views they are all different, it just depends how much we’ve been whitened in the process”(Yarn 4).*

*“On Country as a TO, we constantly run out of water, we’ve had conversations with the Environment Minister advising that we need to take care of Lake Condah, and the water should be returned not directed away” (Yarn 8).*

*“We can’t be well if Country is not well. The pandemic is a message to the world to wake up, look at the fish dying in the rivers up north, it’s [country] talking to us... The Country is crying” (Yarn 1).*

**9- Planning and development** was raised in some yarns with interviewees, noticing poor planning regulations in Darebin where there is ‘over’ development on green spaces, and the cost of waste management, high use and reliance on plastics.

*“The policies Council set up don’t align with our needs, for example you change the bin collection system, to reduce waste, but what do we do with big families? We have a build-up of waste at home, like dirty nappies. We have to choose*

*what to put out and store the rest at home, we have big families. You change the bins around, but it does nothing. You should deal with waste at the manufacturing end!” (Yarn 1).*

*“If you look at the environment, it’s all being concreted too much. I live near a green space [and]so [I] feel lucky, but I see so much development pouring more concrete driveways and paths... these should be slowed down... regulated, you’re smothering country!” (Yarn 14)*

**10- Heat impacts** were referred to with a level of acceptance that reflects it has been prevalent in people’s lives for some time.

*“Cousins are having seizures more... getting sicker as the heat increases, [we are] not used to it. [we are] trying to adapt – ‘why are they doing mother earth so much wrong” (yarn 3).*

*“If my family choose to live on Country in Mt Isa, the lands all being mined, the focus is the mine. It’s all interconnected, the land /Country, our health, our access to resources and livelihood. As the heat increases people are moving off-Country. Look at me in the city now.” (Yarn 7)*

*“It’s mum who struggles in the hot, her emphysema, can’t breathe or walk far in the heat “(Yarn 9).*

**11- Anxiety and mental health** were a strong theme, most notably for the younger mob but also for those who identified as having a disability. For the younger mob, they are concerned about the future and for others, with health or disabilities, it was being restricted to the house during severe weather.

*“I spoke with my colleagues at Uni, four of us discussed this question as I knew I was going to do the survey. We are all from different mobs but agreed we all become anxious when we think about the climate changing - when you google, it’s a thing: ‘Climate Anxiety’ , in young people, not knowing what the future holds, the uncertainty” (Yarn 7).*

*“The weather is so uncertain these days. When it flooded here, I was stuck at home for a day and night...cause of me disability, I need to get out and walk a lot , I go crazy in the head otherwise, I did when we got flooded in. For me brain bruz.” (Yarn 12 )*

**12- Housing** was a consistent theme for mob. Mob recognize that housing types do not always provide enough room for families moving about and notably as more mob are moving into the cities there is not enough housing.

*“One of my girls’ is homeless. I worry about her, she can’t settle and there’s no housing to help her out... her kids have been removed. It’s hard for her, I don’t know with this climate change if she’ll get worse, maybe she’ll die out there if it’s worse weather” (Yarn 11).*

*“Makes me think we’ll see more mob moving into town as there at risk in lakes from the sea rises, not now but soon enough. You can see the dunes washing away. You’re looking at more families moving in with mob, we’ll need housing options” (Yarn 12).*

**13- Food Security** was identified in several ways: affordability, access to good quality and supply related concerns.

*“If we could practice values around food, space and place , - don’t just cut trees down!, ( metaphor), we live culturally, what we need , we shared, our hunting grounds , our water ways, we traded and shared “ - The whites are busy out doing each other, they think big is better “(Yarn 6)*

*“Food security is a major issue for us, I see with the changed conditions and getting worse that the supply is lower and more expensive or not there. Food safety!” (Yarn 5)*

**14- Air Quality concerns** was discussed in relation to family members who experience respiratory conditions, particularly for those who also have chronic health conditions.

*“Kids are worrying for the elder /parent’s wellbeing, when things are bad (air quality). I worry” (Yarn 2).*

### **Protecting Mob and Healing Country**

#### **15- Listening and learning – Adopting our knowledge systems**

The need for Council to take the time to learn from and understand First Nations worldview was the most dominant theme while yarning and was framed in terms of supporting a model of community control that was respectful and privileged cultural Ways.

*“Listen, sit down with mob - and listen Consult us. Use trusted people to consult. Understand our knowledge, don’t make us the end of the conversation, the tick a box” (Yarn 1)*

*“Educate yourselves as to our way “ (Yarn 3).*

*“Build trust and relationships, then discuss the plan with the mob, nothing will work without trust in the plan and process” (Yarn 6).*

*“Listen and stay with us, trust us and let us lead. Self-determination, not hold the purse strings and judge us” (Yarn 12).*

*“Ask us more, sit more and listen, set up a mob-leadership panel and support us to drive the actions. We’ve been doing this well before you’ve come to ask, this ain’t new” (Yarn 11.)*

*“Consider all this in the context of the State Governments – Self-determination Policy, for First Nations” (Yarn 8).*

**16- Education and advocacy** were inter woven throughout the yarns, seeing it as a two-way learning, for the wider community to learn traditional ways and for mob to be educated climate change and how to be active in change. A strong recommendation was to resource young people to deliver the education alongside elders.

*“Council should go through ceremony, staff as well to get permission and understand obligations under lore to First Nations peoples and country” (Yarn 4).*

*“Cultural education to understand our worldview, not so white attitude to solutions” (Yarn 13).*

*“Resourcing, training and education, youth education in schools and talk about climate anxiety” (Yarn 7).*

*“Provide indigenous education, that culturally is relevant to mob” (Yarn 2).*

*“Don’t talk big words - talk straight up - or not at all” (Yarn 3).*

**17- Accountability** was discussed particularly the need for Council to follow through and know what is expected of them.

*“Set up measures that make council accountable for the outcomes, timeframes, Stop the colonial spirit and peoples deciding for us - this has to stop” (Yarn 5)*

**18- Resourcing** was a persistent theme, often couched in language that deliberately identified the land as stolen and mob being owed reparations.

*“Resource us and sit back and admire, we could change this climate change stuff” (Yarn 3).*

*“Provide land for this to happen and resources” (Yarn 5).*

*“Fund, activities, not just one off, but create budget lines for identified activities,*



*submission writing support” (Yarn 8).*

*“Mob just need the support with money and jobs to get on with things. Also give us back some country, we can care for it, grow and plant stuff, live our culture” (Yarn 10).*

**18- Building partnerships** was reflected as an opportunity, in the first instance with the TO Group and other local councils, ACCO's, Botanical gardens and Parks Victoria, and Farms.

*“Fund a identified position to drive and build partnerships and drive activities, guided by an indigenous committee, - not the same organisations either” (Yarn 4).*

*“Consider how or partner more widely with the likes of Park Victoria, Botanical gardens, garden groups etc” (Yarn 8).*

### **How Council can support Mob**

Council was viewed favourably as an ally throughout the yarning. Prior activities supported by Council and the DAC had built a history of good will and Aboriginal staff in Council holds trusted relationships in the community. For Council, moving forward this means ensuring that future relationships are with trusted community members.

In prioritising next steps, all but one of the mob identified the need to establish some form of a community group to lead actions. The community group must be community controlled adopt cultural governance principles, sets sound measurable outcomes that make both the council and the group accountable for the use of resources and actions. Reference here was made to ensuring that resources:

- went where they were needed;
- where aligned to community views;
- whole of community benefit;
- that trusted people were providing leadership;
- culture guides actions;
- consultation, education and advocacy are central and ongoing, and
- resources were on-going, not one off or period limited

## **Recommendations**

When it came to yarning about protecting mob and healing country, mob had very strong views about what needed to be done. They had three sets of recommendations: firstly, **Guiding principles**; secondly, **Solutions** and how they needed to be managed moving forward, and thirdly, suggested **changes to systems and structures**.

### **1 - Guiding Principles**

- Mob need to be included in the planning and ongoing management of climate change responses. Culturally 'right' ways to move forward need to be established and this will take resourcing.
- Responses need to be collaborative across service systems and include other cultural groups and the wider community.
- Governance structures are community -led, community governed and underpinned by the principles of self-determination and listening.
- Responses are underpinned by a cultural framework that is equally valued and works alongside council bureaucracy, and recognise that actions are relationship-based and are committed to as a forever action.
- Education, advocacy and a 'whole of mob' approach form a key practice and process principle.

### **2- Solutions**

- Establish a community medicinal and food supply garden.
- Fund solar and cooling for people in vulnerable housing
- Provide refugee and cool safe spaces in extreme heat.
- Suitable housing options
- Support a regional outreach team to support vulnerable at risk community.
- Support transport options for those at risk during extreme weather impacts
- Plant trees and grow green spaces that can be managed by Traditional owner groups, through partnerships like the Ranger program .
- More bush land.
- Establish the Ranger program in Darebin.

### **3- Structures and systems**

- Establish a First nations group to lead and provide ongoing guidance with TO permissions.

*"Create a TO and council partnership, give land back to mob and hand over care to*

*community” (Yarn 2)*

*“About time we sign for once, we have a part in our future, give us the say and sign us up to our ideas” (Yarn 13)*

- Establish a safe and fair governance structure that is determined by a First nations leadership group.

*“Principle needs to be developed that includes all the mob, like all purpose access – any person” (Yarn 8)*

- Build strong partnerships with TO group, departments in Council, neighbouring councils, Local government, Botanical gardens and ACCO's.
- Provide adequate resourcing as a continuing budget line.

*“We need to do this together, we need the resources and support, remember you stole everything “ (Yarn 11).*

- Council committed to the principles of self-determination and Community control.

*“Culture is our guide, greed is yours, Look to providing cultural practice into council ways, you know what I mean” (Yarn 10 ).*

- Listen, listen, listen.

*“First of all you need to check yourselves when you start yarning with us and not have us deal with your resistance and shit, listen and not be defensive all the time, [and] talk over u (Yarn 16).*

- Build Cross cultural opportunities with other cultural groups

*“We are about sharing, so build the inter cultural connections, recognise the mix of races - look to the strength of shared Knowledge “ (Yarn 14)*

## **Prioritised Solutions**

These solutions are presented in terms of the priorities shared by informants. Most Importantly:

1. Establish a TO partnership and a community controlled- committee representative of First nations community and Aboriginal controlled organisations.

2. Listen – create opportunities for Community to provide feedback to the community controlled committee.
3. Establish community medicine and produce gardens and return land for this Purpose.
4. Plant trees
5. Establish an outreach team to support at risk community members or during high-risk periods , this could be through existing Aboriginal controlled service partnerships.
6. Support an education program targeting young people with the aim to support their mental health and engage them in working with solutions.
7. Fund solar and air conditioning for those most at risk of impacts.
8. Further investigate suitable housing options and advocate to State and federal government for improved and more housing options.
9. Adopt a Ranger program.
10. Change planning laws to reduce impact of concrete and development by including the principle of 'caring for the country' in planning decisions. ( This principle would need to be investigated further)

## **Conclusion**

This report on community conversations, yarns, is one small step in supporting Darebin Council on a long journey walking together with First Nations peoples to build a climate justice strategy.

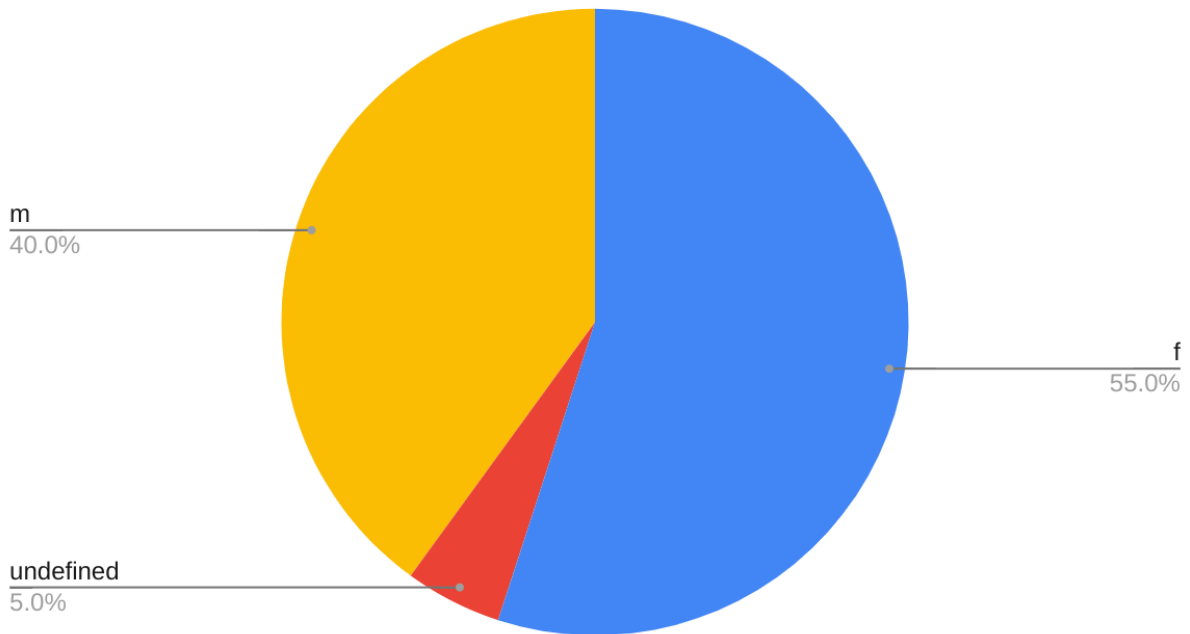
To the First Nations peoples who read this report, thankyou for your generous and open hearts.

For non-First Nations people, I say please take this opportunity to remind yourselves that walking together means being quiet, not speaking over others, and most importantly listening, listening some more, and continuing to listen.

## Demographic spread/map

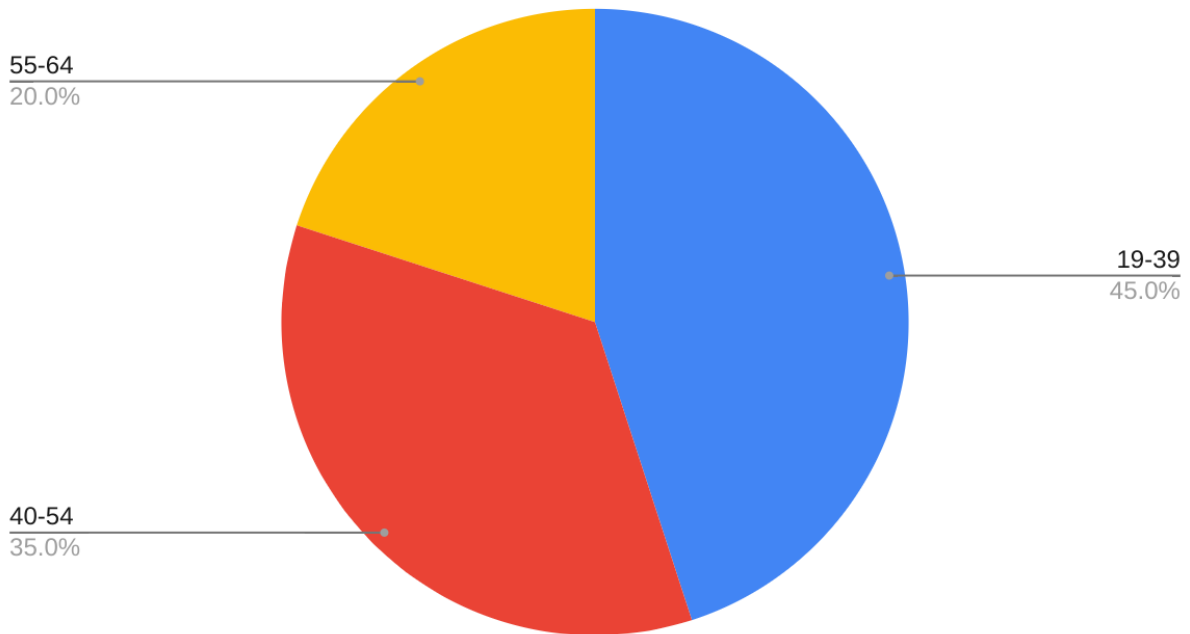
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### Age

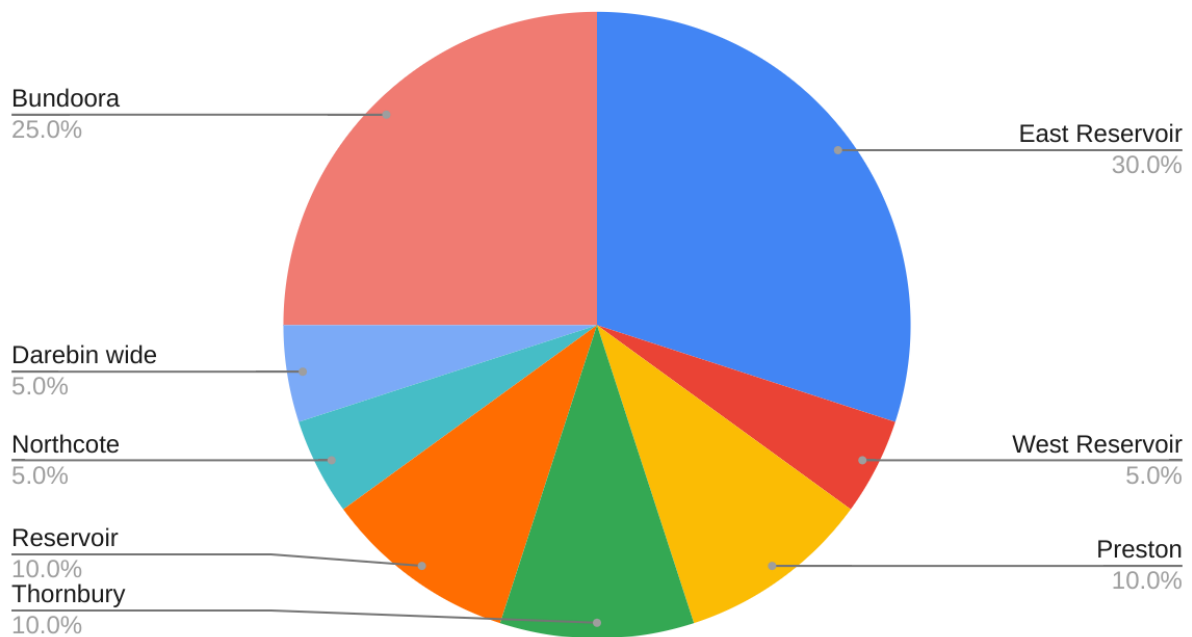
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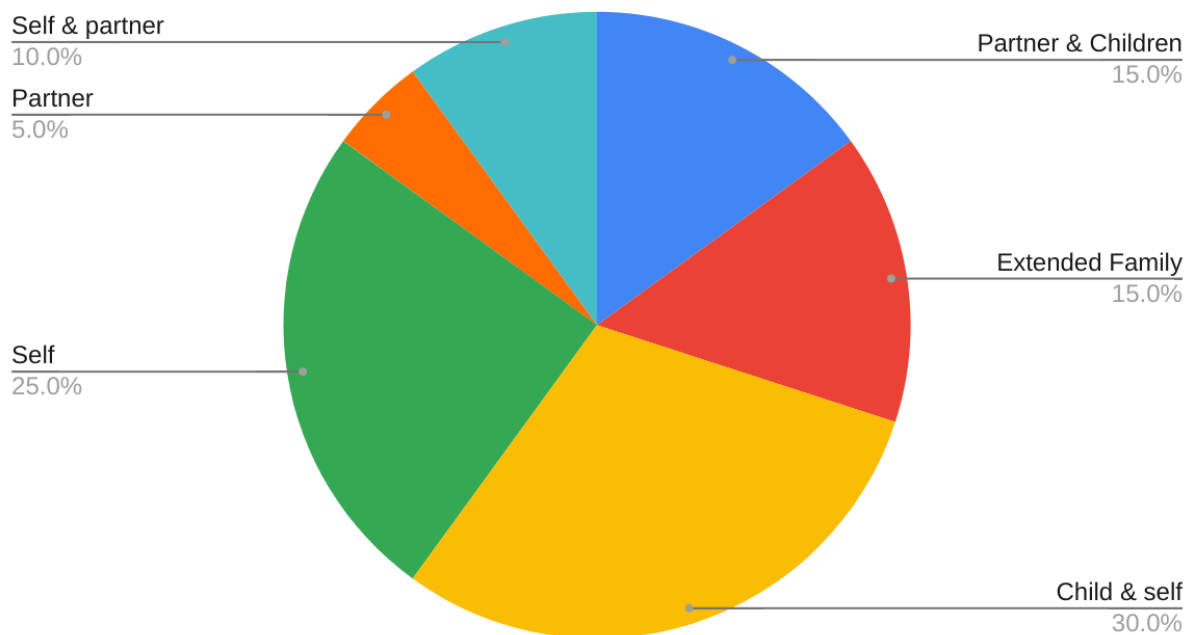
## Location

Count



## Living Arrangements

Count



## Housing

Count

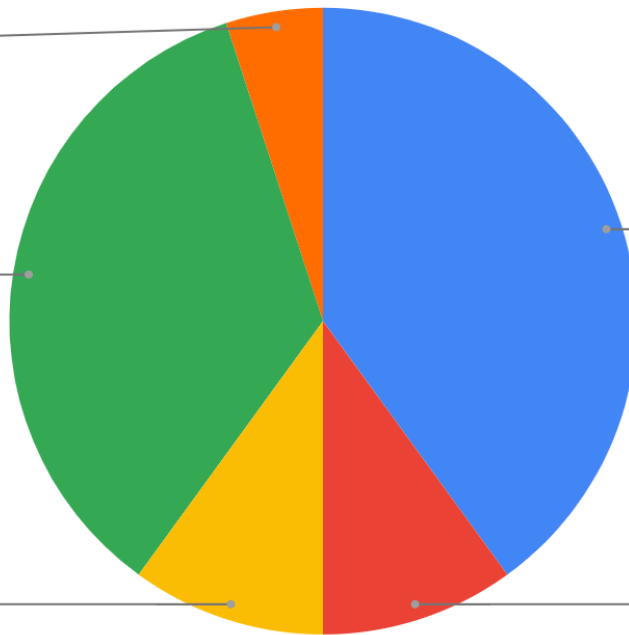
Own House  
5.0%

Public housing  
35.0%

Community housing  
10.0%

Private rental  
40.0%

Aboriginal housing  
10.0%

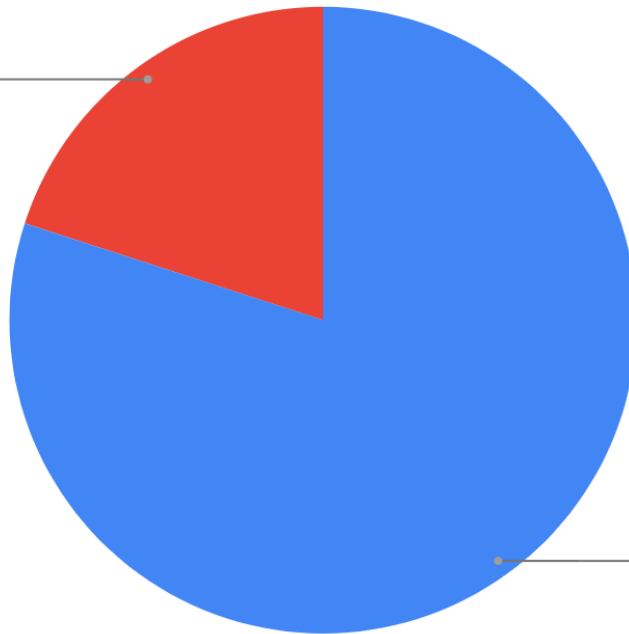


## Reliance on Public Transport

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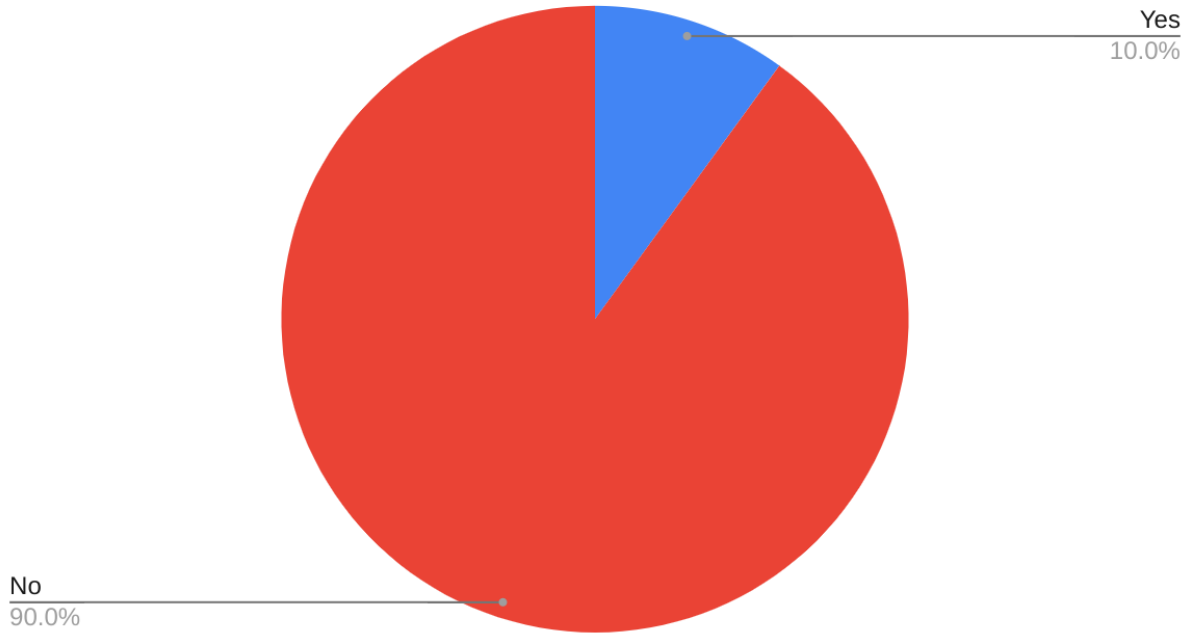
No  
20.0%

Yes  
80.0%



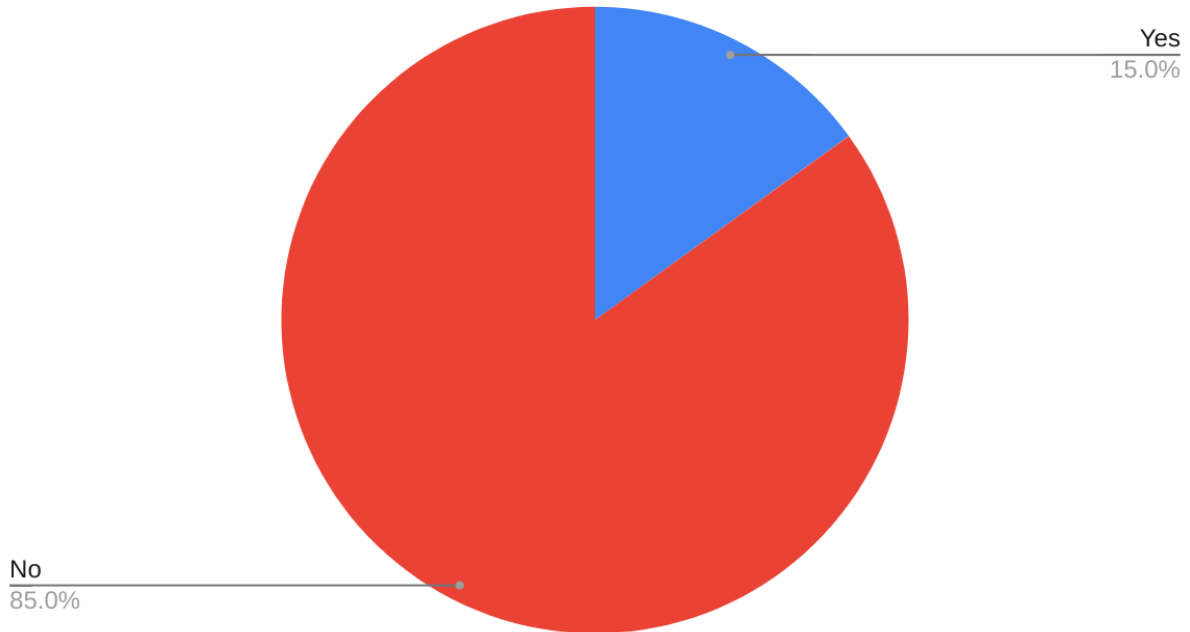
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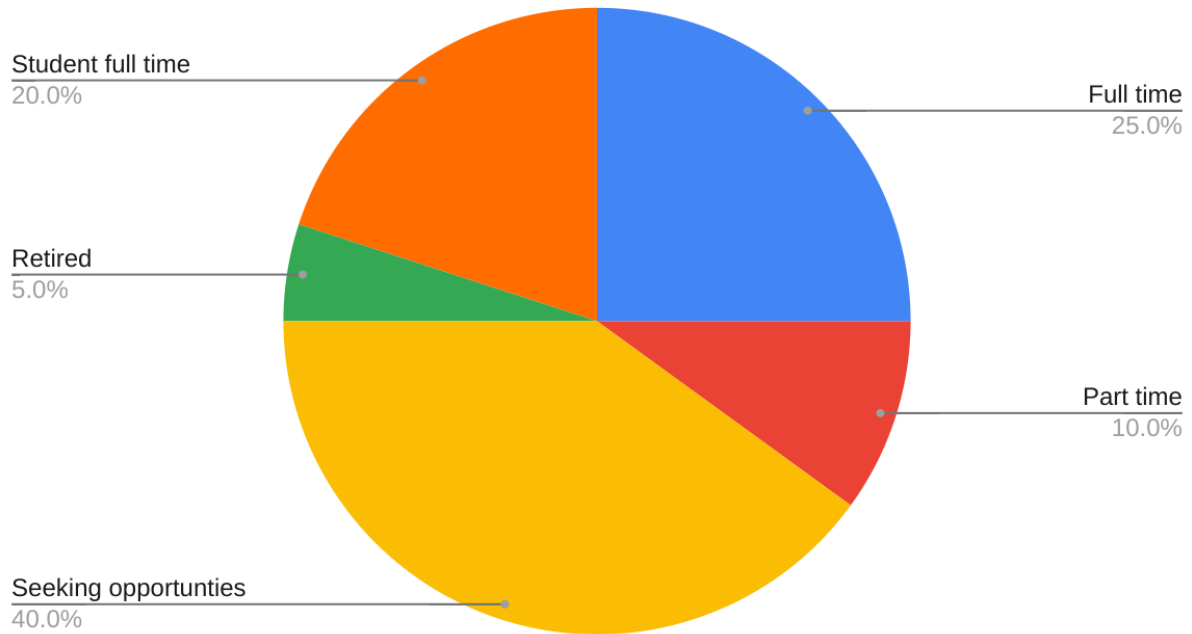
## Chronic Health Condition

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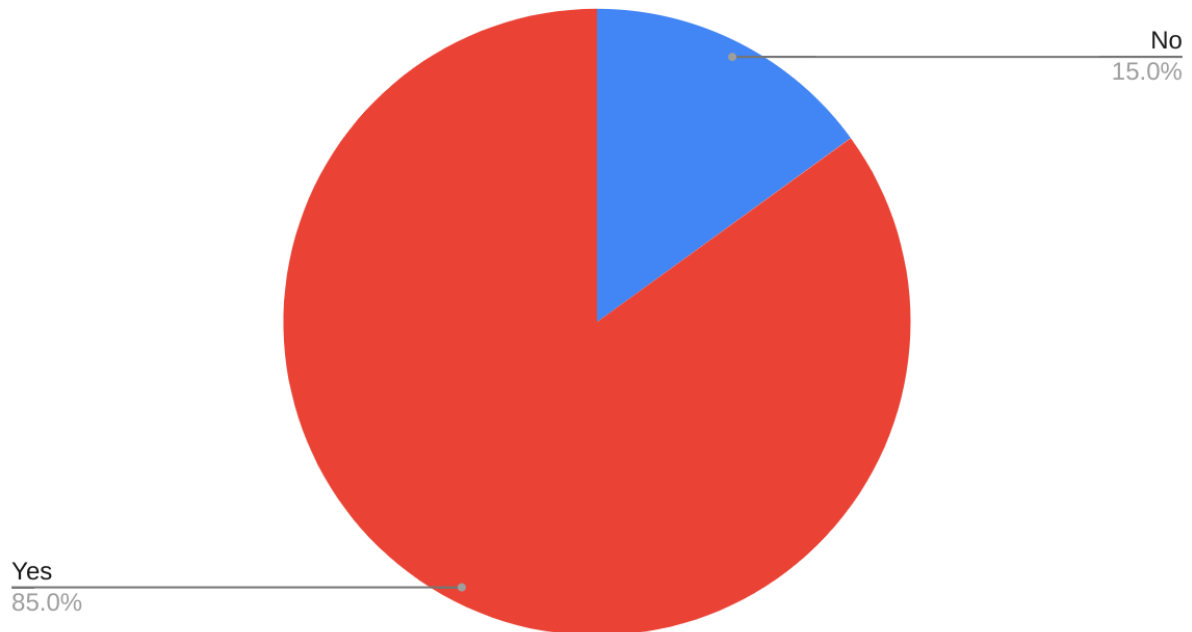
## Employment

Count



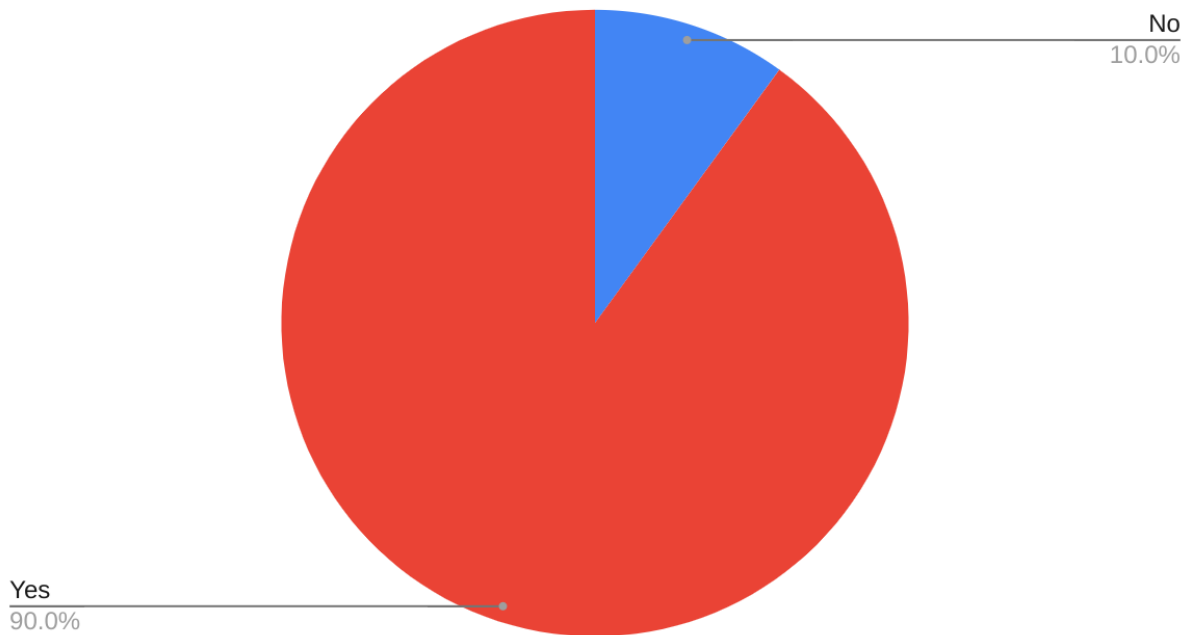
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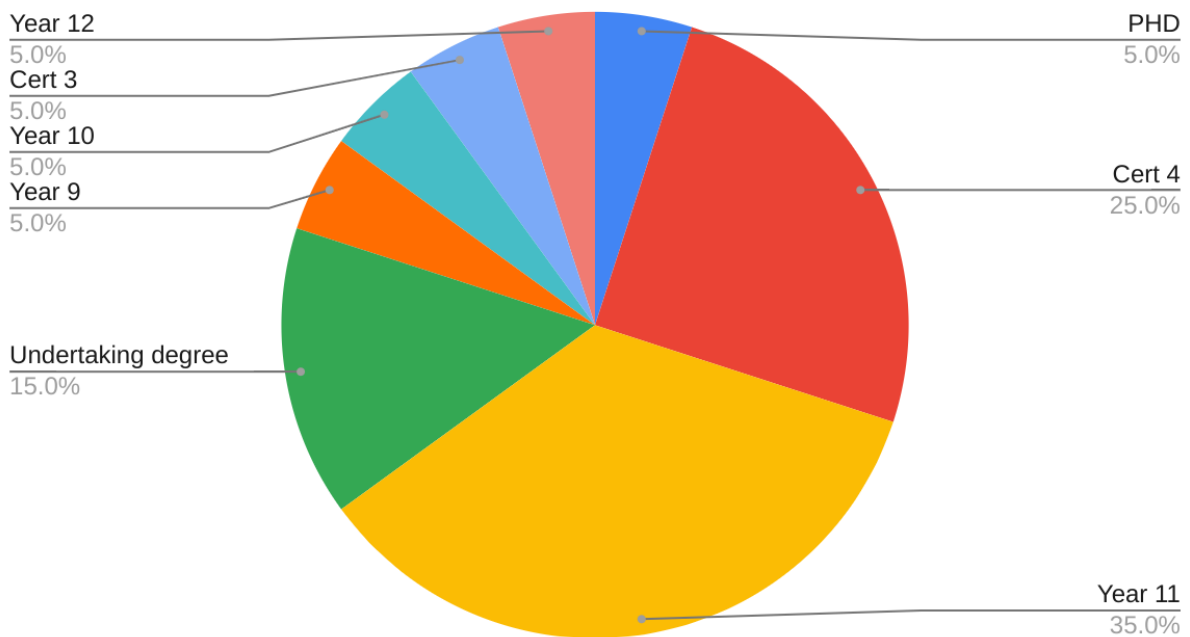
## Health Care card

Count



## Education level

Count





## Country of Origin

### Count

