

The background of the entire page is a photograph of string lights hanging from a structure, likely a patio or deck, during the "blue hour" of dusk. The lights are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect with soft, glowing circles of light against a darkening sky. The overall mood is calm and atmospheric.

ATLANTIC CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON **ENERGY AFFORDABILITY**

Faith Mambo
CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF NEW BRUNSWICK

ATLANTIC CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ENERGY AFFORDABILITY



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This report was produced with support from
Environment Funders Canada and the
European Climate Foundation.

August 2024

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01 Executive Summary

The *Atlantic Citizens' Assembly On Energy Affordability Report* focuses on the pressing issue of energy affordability in Canada, specifically focusing on Atlantic Canada. This report highlights the challenges faced by households in maintaining comfortable living conditions due to unaffordable heating and cooling costs, which can have detrimental effects on physical and mental health, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, this report emphasizes the need to transition to renewable energy to address energy inequalities and reduce the burden of high power bills on residents. The Assembly provided a platform for residents to voice their concerns and develop recommendations for ensuring affordable electricity for all. This report highlights the importance of a clear and uniform definition of energy poverty to enable targeted policies and efficient allocation of resources to those in need.



02 Introduction

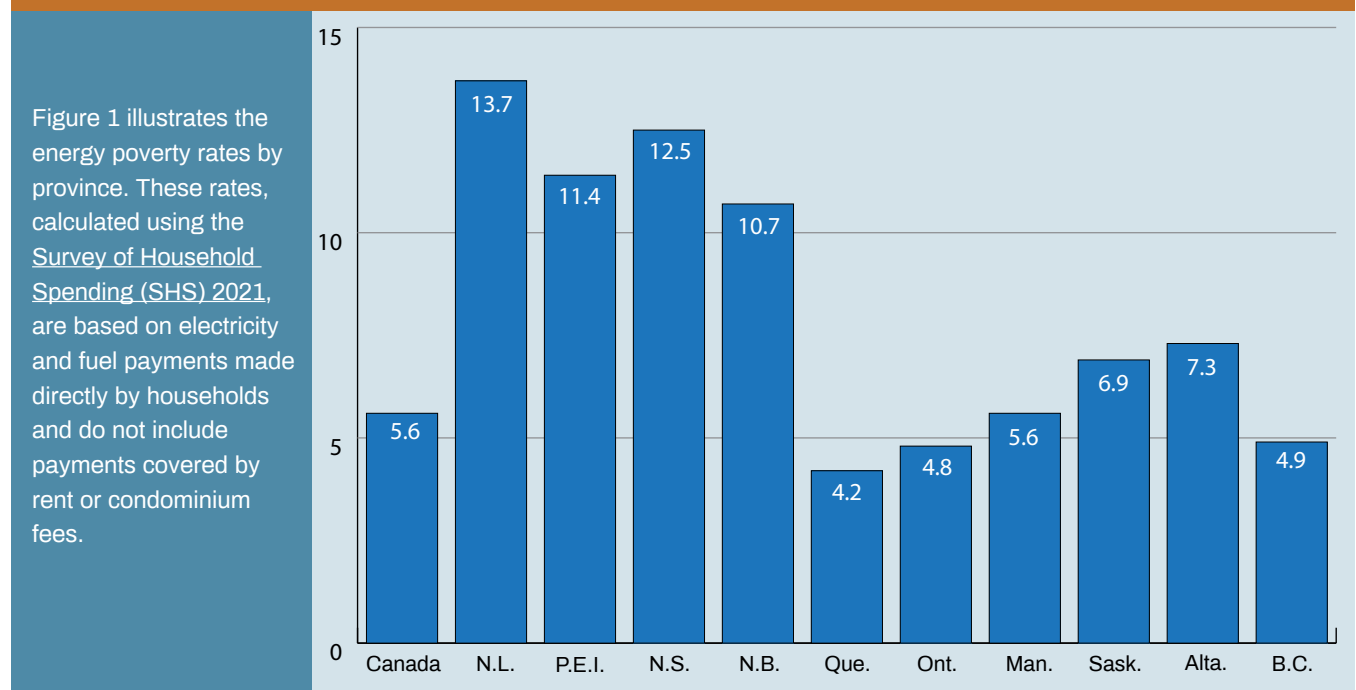
Canada is currently facing an [affordability crisis](#), particularly in the area of [energy](#). The effects of energy affordability are being increasingly felt across the country. Extreme temperatures, including [intense heat](#) and cold weather events, significantly affect energy consumption in Canadian households, which require effective heating and cooling systems to ensure safe and comfortable living conditions.

However, rising energy prices make it difficult for many households to afford adequate heating and cooling, leading to potential climate-related health risks. In 2023, [14 per cent of Canadian households](#) reported compromising on their living conditions due to unaffordable heating

or cooling costs and maintaining unsafe or uncomfortable temperatures for at least one month in the past year. Energy poverty is associated with various physical and mental health concerns, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as the elderly, single-parent households, and renters.

Atlantic Canada, in particular, has the [country's highest energy poverty](#) rates. This is due to several factors, including older, energy-inefficient homes and lower incomes. Many households are forced to make difficult choices between energy and other necessities, a concept known as 'heat or eat,' which significantly affects their quality of life.

Figure 1: The average provincial energy poverty rates of households spending 10% or more on electricity.



Research indicates that transitioning to a [clean electricity system could address energy inequalities and make energy more affordable for Canadians](#) due to [lower operational costs](#). Clean Energy Canada reports that [over 70 per cent of the Canadian population supports a robust Clean Electricity Regulation](#), with over 75 per cent support in Atlantic Canada.

Despite the enthusiasm for clean energy solutions in Atlantic Canada, the associated costs pose a significant burden on households, many of which already struggle with high power bills amid economic inflation. Equal access to affordable and renewable energy can alleviate these burdens, benefiting both Canadians and the environment and helping Canada meet its emission reduction targets.

Ensuring that no one is left behind during the clean energy transition is crucial. Atlantic Canada needs much more support to make households

more energy efficient, thereby reducing financial stress and poor health outcomes while also fighting climate change.

To better understand the energy context of households in Atlantic Canada, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick held an Atlantic Citizens' Assembly on Energy Affordability, similar to the one conducted in 2023 for [New Brunswick](#) residents. This project aimed to understand people's ongoing energy-cost burdens, the current electricity system, and desired outcomes for a clean electricity transition.

The Atlantic Citizens' Assembly provided a platform for residents to voice their concerns and develop recommendations to ensure affordable electricity for all. Participants shared their experiences and ideas on energy programs and policies that could help reform government policy and programs, ensuring an affordable transition to more energy-efficient homes.

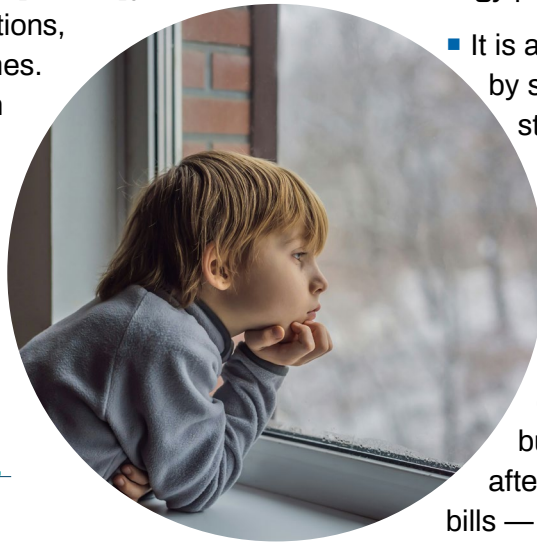


03 Background

Defining Energy Poverty

Energy poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that significantly impacts people's living conditions. However, Canada lacks a consistent or standardized definition of energy poverty. According to [Efficiency Canada \(2024\)](#), energy poverty occurs when a household cannot access sufficient energy to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures. This situation arises from a combination of low income, high energy costs, and poor housing conditions, such as energy-inefficient homes. Unaffordable energy costs can lead to utility disconnections, households enduring hardships due to reduced energy use (like maintaining low temperatures in winter), or making trade-offs between energy and other necessities, negatively affecting household well-being ([Statistics Canada, 2021](#)).

A clear and uniform definition of energy poverty is essential for Canada. An established definition would help policymakers create targeted and effective policies to address energy poverty and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently to those in need.



Measuring Energy Poverty

Measuring energy poverty is challenging due to its multifaceted nature. Several factors contribute to this complexity:

- It cannot be expressed with a single measure;
- There is no universally accepted understanding of what it means to be below the energy poverty line;
- It is a private condition that varies by season, location, and house structure;
- It is subjective based on personal needs and comfort.

Despite these challenges, energy affordability is critical to people's quality of life. A household's energy burden — the percentage of after-tax income spent on energy bills — is the key indicator of its energy affordability. Researchers, like the [Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners \(CUSP\)](#), define households with a [six per cent energy burden](#) or higher as experiencing energy poverty, while the Government of Canada uses 10 per cent or more as the baseline measurement for energy poverty.

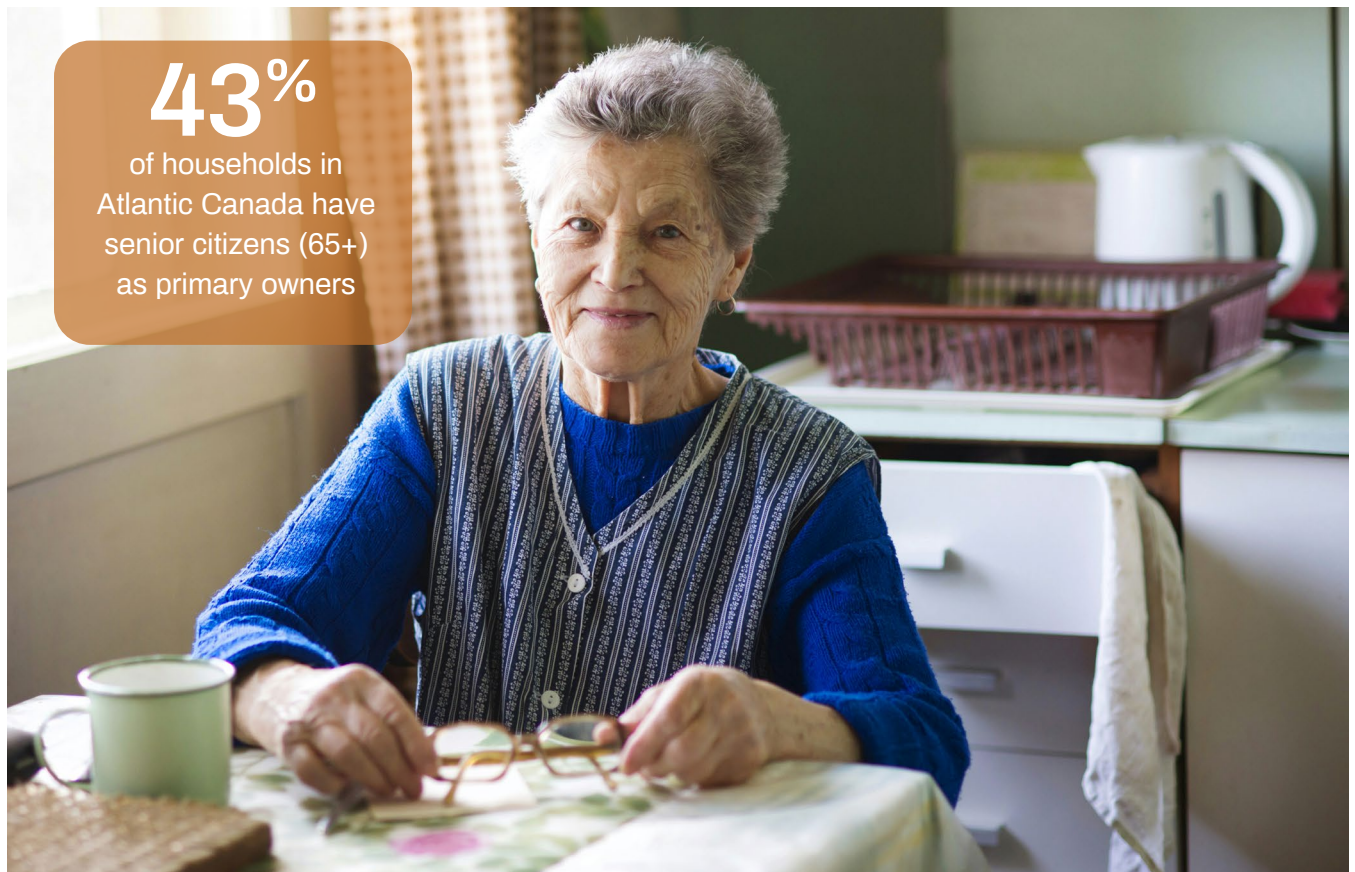
Energy Poverty in Atlantic Canada

According to the [2021 Canadian census](#), 822,000 households (5.6 per cent) were energy-poor. This was **more prevalent in Atlantic provinces**, with rates ranging from 10.7 per cent to 13.7 per cent, affecting 113,500 households. Among these households:

- 82 per cent are single-detached homes;
- 57 per cent are in urban areas;
- 43 per cent have senior citizens (65-plus) as primary owners;
- 38 per cent live in older dwellings (pre-1960);
- 23 per cent are individuals living alone;
- 18 per cent are renters.

Energy poverty affects low to middle-income households across various demographics, including single parents, new immigrants, racialized populations, individuals with disabilities, and seniors. These groups are especially prone to energy poverty due to [socioeconomic reasons](#) such as restricted access to resources and opportunities.

Likewise, [Atlantic Canada has higher energy poverty rates](#) due to several factors. Atlantic Canada has a lower average household income and a higher proportion of the population aged 65 and older. [Over 40 per cent of the population](#) in the Atlantic provinces lives in rural areas, where energy distribution is often more expensive. Also, residences are larger, resulting in higher heating costs.



43%
of households in
Atlantic Canada have
senior citizens (65+)
as primary owners

Table 1.

The high energy poverty rates (using both the six per cent and 10 per cent threshold of after-tax income) in Atlantic Canada compared with other provinces. Space heating accounts for two-thirds of total energy use in Atlantic Canada, and the region's average space heating expenses are the highest in the country.

Geography	Total Households	Median After-tax Income	Average Space Heating Energy Bill Prices	Energy Poor Households (6% threshold)	Energy Poverty Rates (6% threshold)	Number of Energy Poor Households (10% threshold)	Energy Poverty Rate (10% threshold)
Canada	15,122,544	\$68,400	\$1,430	2,570,605	17%	719,544	5%
N.L.	224,060	\$62,100	\$2,520	80,330	35%	30,676	14%
P.E.I.	67,874	\$62,500	\$1,315	17,040	25%	8,074	12%
N.S.	418,453	\$60,200	\$2,080	123,220	29%	43,750	10%
N.B.	336,878	\$60,000	\$2,109	94,265	27%	31,019	9%
Que.	3,708,809	\$61,400	\$1,201	489,675	13%	105,782	3%
Ont.	5,717,489	\$73,000	\$900	911,330	15%	242,836	4%
Man.	510,072	\$64,700	\$1,205	87,300	17%	27,052	5%
Sask.	445,262	\$68,200	\$1,269	107,800	24%	37,709	8%
Alta.	1,601,322	\$77,000	\$1,087	377,030	23%	89,787	6%
B.C.	2,092,325	\$68,500	\$938	272,815	13%	102,809	5%

Source: [Statistics Canada Survey of Household Spending, 2021](#)

Health Impacts of Energy Poverty

Households experiencing energy poverty are more susceptible to health risks, such as poor respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, due to excess winter and/or summer mortality if they live in low-quality housing. In order to save money on energy bills, [energy-poor households in energy-inefficient rental properties often underheat their interior spaces in the winter,](#)

which lowers their standard of living and quality of life. Energy poverty also leads to [emotional distress, frustration, fear, and social isolation, particularly among renters.](#)

In New Brunswick, [nearly 28 per cent of low-income renter households are in energy poverty, compared to 11.5 per cent of owner households](#) (based on a six per cent criterion).

Factors Contributing to Energy Poverty

Natural Resources Canada shows several factors that contribute to energy poverty.

These factors are divided into four categories: **economic**, **physical**, **policy**, and **behavioural**, as shown in Figure 2.

Addressing Energy Poverty

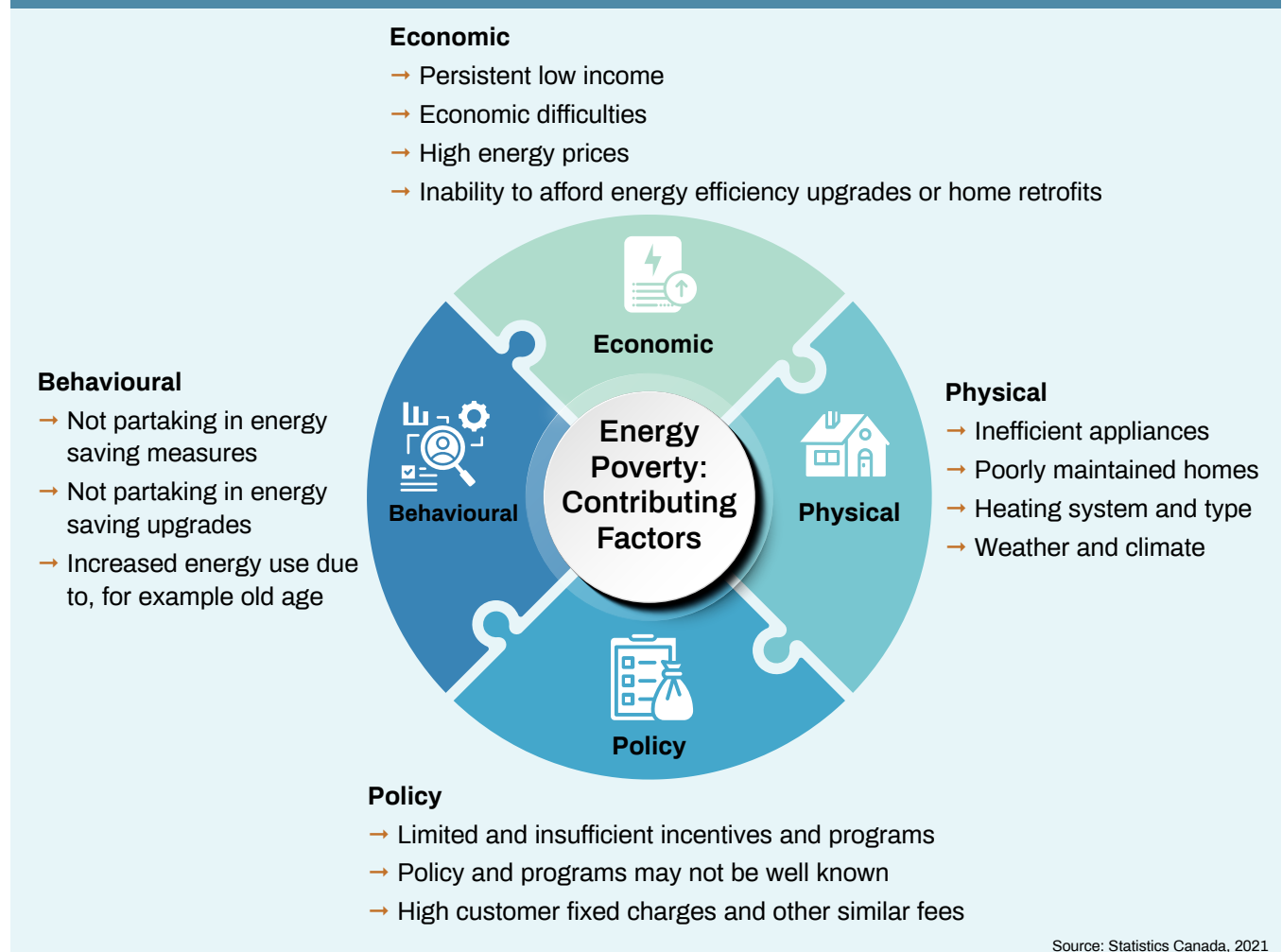
Addressing energy poverty involves a wide array of stakeholders, each with different levels of understanding of the issue, immediate objectives, necessities, available resources, and abilities to implement solutions. This complexity highlights

the importance of the Conservation Council's assembly of diverse individuals to share their stories and experiences.

Energy poverty can be mitigated by implementing targeted home energy efficiency measures. These measures vary by household but commonly include air tightening of windows and doors, insulation of walls and ceilings, and replacing old and inefficient heating systems and appliances.

A coordinated effort to improve energy efficiency will help reduce energy costs, improve living conditions, and address the health impacts of energy poverty.

Figure 2: Factors Contributing to Energy Poverty



04 Purpose

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick has observed that many households in New Brunswick and across Atlantic Canada struggle with high energy costs. Statistics show that [10-13 per cent of households in Atlantic Canada](#) are experiencing energy poverty. While transitioning to a net-zero carbon electricity grid is essential, it may lead to higher electricity bills, putting more people at risk of financial strain.

To address this, it is crucial to provide support to help residents reduce their energy consumption and costs. The Atlantic Citizens' Assembly aims to understand residents' experiences with energy affordability and to identify policy and program solutions that can have a positive impact on their households.



05 Method

The Conservation Council organized an online Citizens' Assembly across Atlantic Canada to address household energy affordability concerns. This platform allowed participants to discuss policy and program solutions that could improve energy affordability and combat energy poverty in the region.

Participants had to complete a preliminary survey to be considered for the Assembly. Those meeting the criteria were selected for a pre-event interview. Successful participants were then invited to the Citizens' Assembly. A post-event survey followed the Assembly. Each step is detailed below.

Preliminary Survey

Participants were recruited through social media, the Conservation Council's website, and email lists. Interested individuals from the four Atlantic provinces completed a 14-question preliminary survey to ensure a diverse group was selected. The goal was to have 24 participants, with six people from each province.

Survey questions included:

1. Age range
2. Pronouns
3. Province of residence in Atlantic Canada
4. Language preference
5. Access to a computer with a camera
6. Experience with Zoom
7. Education level
8. Employment with government or utility
9. Organization focused on energy affordability

10. Type of residence area (urban, suburban, rural)
11. Type of house (Apartment, Detached house, Prefabricated home, Other)
12. Primary heating method
13. Household income
14. Percentage of income spent on energy

Participants were prioritized if they:

- Paid their energy bills;
- Had a household income below \$75,000;
- Spent six per cent or more of their income on energy;
- Used alternative heating methods (oil, wood);
- Were single parents or women (due to previous underrepresentation).

Exclusions were based on:

- Lack of reliable internet;
- No experience with Zoom;
- Spending less than six per cent of income on energy.

To ensure broad participation and to minimize travel expenses, the assembly was conducted online using the Zoom platform. This approach required participants to have internet access and familiarity with Zoom. Additionally, the Conservation Council used the six per cent energy poverty threshold, focusing on households that spend six per cent or more of their after-tax income on energy bills.

One hundred and ninety-two people from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island registered to participate. The majority of these registrants completed a preliminary survey. Of these, 22 people registered through channels like word of mouth and newsletter advertisements from CCNB and partner organizations. The majority of registrants completed a preliminary survey.

Although many met the criteria for interviews, only 28 participants successfully met the criteria and agreed to be interviewed.

Pre-event Interview

The 28 selected individuals attended a pre-event interview via Zoom. These interviews ensured a diverse group representing Atlantic Canada. Participants could leave at any time or refuse to answer questions.

Interview questions included:

- 1. What made you interested in participating in the Atlantic Citizens' Assembly?*
- 2. When you hear the term 'energy poverty,' what do you think about, or how do you feel?*
- 3. Based on your survey results, you indicate that you spend X per cent of your monthly income on energy; tell me what that is like. Does this create hardship for you? (Are they heating their homes less to pay for food and rent?)*
- 4. Rates are increasing; for example, N.B. Power has increased by 9.8 per cent and may continue to increase has applied for a 13 per cent rate increase, amounting to about an additional \$200 per year for their customers. What impact would this rate increase have on you and your household?*

- 5. Have you used an energy efficiency incentive program, whether provincial or federal? Do you consider them accessible? Why?*
- 6. Do you trust that the province has your best interests in mind when establishing energy policies and programs?*
- 7. Do you trust that your utility/energy provider has your best interests in mind?*
- 8. Do you have any energy stories that you would like to share? e.g., heat or eat, cut off electricity,*
- 9. What do you see as the main barriers for low-income people to adopt renewables?*
- 10. What recommendations do you have to implement an energy-efficient and renewable upgrade program for low-income people?*
- 11. Do you still want to participate in the ACA May 3 and 4?*

After completing the interview and confirming they met the selection criteria, participants were invited to join the Citizens' Assembly. Out of 28 people interviewed, 17 could attend: Seven from Nova Scotia, six from New Brunswick, four from Newfoundland, and two from Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately, on the day of the event, one participant from New Brunswick was unable to attend due to internet connectivity issues.

Pre-Event Preparation

Before the Citizens' Assembly, participants received several emails containing meeting details and background resources to review for the Assembly discussions. Participants were also asked to sign a release form, consenting to be quoted and/or filmed for reports or other content.

Atlantic Citizens' Assembly Event

The Citizens' Assembly took place over 8.5 hours on Zoom, spread across two days. The first session, held in the evening, lasted two hours and focused on introductions and background information through expert presentations. Faith Mambo from the Conservation Council opened the event by discussing the work in context and the importance of the assembly. This was followed by presentations on energy efficiency and energy poverty by John Anderson and Nichola Taylor from [ACORN](#) and Abhilash Kantamneni from [Efficiency Canada](#). At the end of the first day, participants received an overview of the questions to be discussed the following day.

The second day was a full 6.5-hour session, including a one-hour break, and focused on participants' experiences and potential solutions for their households. Facilitated by Conservation Council staff, the event was largely driven by the participants.

The day began with focus groups in two breakout rooms, each with a similar set of questions. One group focused on electricity and efficiency policies, while the other discussed programs. Participants chose their preferred breakout room, resulting in 10 participants in the program group and 11 in the policy group. Unfortunately, two participants from P.E.I. could not attend, one due to illness.

Breakout Room 1 - Programs

- 1. What do you want decision-makers to know about your experiences with energy affordability and reliability? What is your lived experience?*
- 2. What do you feel is the most important efficiency upgrade needed in your home right now?*

- 3. What are your thoughts about the existing efficiency programs in your province? Do you feel that they are effective?*
 - a. How would you like to see these programs be changed or updated to be more accessible, more effective, or expand their reach?*
 - b. What barriers or challenges prevent more widespread adoption of energy efficiency upgrades in homes and buildings?*
- 4. Should programs focus on improving efficiency, transitioning away from fossil fuels, or directly subsidizing energy bills? Should a combination of these options be considered?*
- 5. Beyond financial assistance, what additional support services or resources would help households better manage and reduce their energy expenses?*
- 6. There are a number of complexities when it comes to improving energy efficiency and lowering energy costs for renters. What programs and/or support do you think would be most beneficial for renters who are responsible for paying for their energy?*
- 7. What kinds of programs would help to lower your transportation costs? Is there public transportation available to you? If you need to use a vehicle, what kinds of programs would allow you to reduce your consumption of fossil fuels for transportation?*

Breakout Room 2 - Policy and Regulations

- 1. What do you want policymakers to know about your experiences with energy affordability and reliability? What is your lived experience?*

2. *Energy rates are increasing. How would this increase impact you? What kind of added stress would this place on your household? How much are you willing to spend on electricity?*
3. *Based on the conversations that we had with you in your interviews, some of you distrust either the government or the utility when implementing policies related to energy. In your opinion, what is the role of government and the utility? What would these entities need to do to earn your trust in managing the energy portfolio?*
4. *How do you think the introduction of new energy providers or community/municipal Energy models could impact energy affordability and competition in the market? What factors should be considered when evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of introducing new providers?*
5. *The Clean Electricity Regulations will require the electricity grid to have net-zero electricity generation by 2035. This is in addition to the requirements to phase out coal-fired electricity generation by 2030. In recognition that this transition to a net-zero grid will be mandated, what are your fears? What forms of electricity generation do you feel should be used? Who should pay for the infrastructure required to make this transition?*
6. *One of the proposed solutions to facilitate the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation, improve electricity reliability, and lower energy costs is developing more interregional transmission (such as the previously known Atlantic Loop). Increased transmission would allow the Atlantic provinces to import more hydroelectric power from Quebec and may also facilitate Atlantic Canada and Quebec's increasing sales to the United States. How do you feel about this proposed solution? Would you feel more comfortable with in-province electricity generation or importing electricity?*

7. *How can we ensure that energy policies and regulations are transparent and accountable to the public? What measures should be in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these policies in addressing energy affordability issues?*

The Assembly concluded with the creation of a *Declaration Statement on Energy Affordability*, collaboratively developed and signed by participants.

Post-event Survey

Participants completed a short survey days after the Assembly, asking:

1. *Did you enjoy participating in the Atlantic Citizens' Assembly? (Yes, No, Somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.*
2. *Did you feel you have learned something from participating in the Citizen's assembly? (Yes, No, somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.*
3. *Do you feel your voice and concerns about energy affordability have been heard and recognized? (Yes, No, Somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.*
4. *We are dedicated to creating an effective and easy environment for everyone. Where could we improve to make other meetings like this more successful?*
5. *Would you like to be contacted as a participant to share your story on energy affordability in Atlantic Canada? (Yes, please contact me, No, thank you)*

This survey helped evaluate the Assembly's effectiveness and gather feedback for future events.

06 Results

Pre-event interview

The interviews provided valuable insights into the energy use and affordability challenges faced by Atlantic households. Out of the 28 people selected, 23 were interviewed, each spending 6 per cent or more of their after-tax income on energy bills.

Here are some key findings of the interviewed participants:

- **Energy Sources:** 64 per cent use electricity as their primary heating source, nine per cent use oil, five per cent use wood, and 23 per cent use a mix of energy sources.
- **Housing:** 70 per cent are homeowners, while 26 per cent rent their homes.

Figure 3. Primary Heating Systems used by Participants' Household

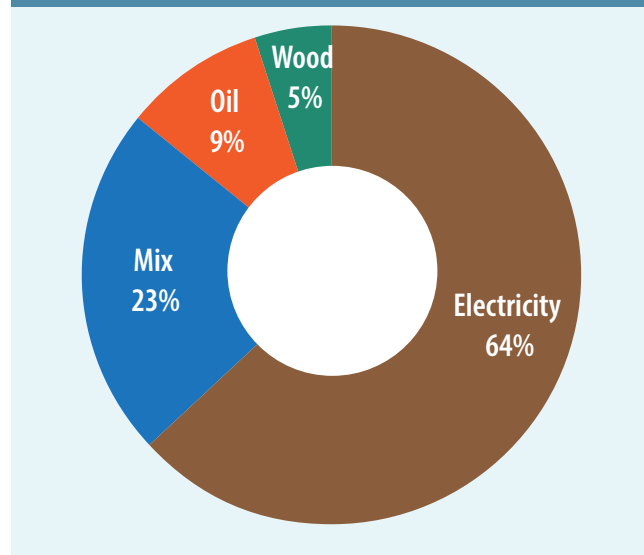
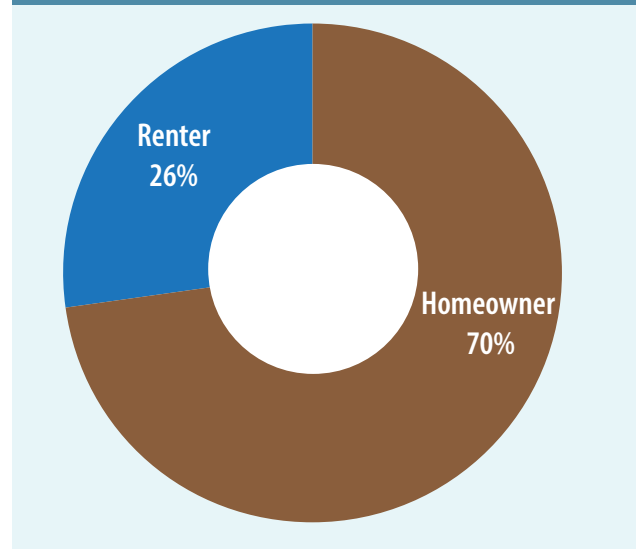


Figure 4. Housing Status of Participants



The following are the results of some of the interview questions:

Question 1: What made you interested in participating in the Atlantic Citizens' Assembly?

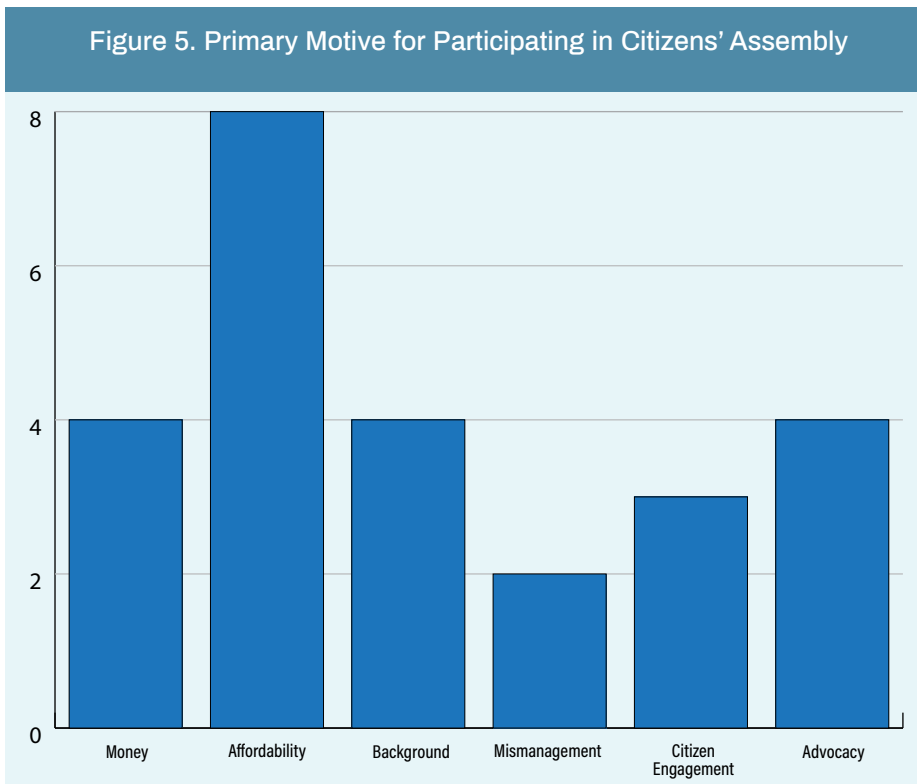
Participants' interests were categorized into six themes:

- **Money:** Learning how to lower electricity bills.
- **Affordability:** Frustration with rising energy costs and a desire to voice concerns.
- **Background:** Personal or professional interest in contributing what they know about energy.

- **Mismanagement:** Concerns about utility providers and government rate increases.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Interest in community and shared learning.
- **Advocacy:** Motivation to push for changes in energy affordability policies.

Participants were driven by firsthand financial struggles and the need for affordable energy solutions. They highlighted rising energy costs, inefficient housing, and heating issues.

Many wanted to advocate for better policies and programs while exploring ways to conserve energy.



“One participant mentioned, *“Housing should be a top priority, and along with housing is heat and lights. Rising costs set people up for failure.”*

Another said, *“I feel very passionate about this topic as a younger person who’s struggling financially.”*

Question 2: *When you hear the term ‘energy poverty,’ what do you think about, or how do you feel?*

Responses to this question fell into two main categories:

- **Affordability Concerns:** Many were worried about the high cost of energy and the tough choices they had to make between paying for energy and other necessities like food and medication.
- **Government Responsibility:** Concerns about government actions and the fear that things might get worse.

Participants shared their frustrations:

“

“It’s a frustrating feeling as a single mom. The government is not doing much to help people in my situation.”

“I’m always conscious of my power bills and feel helpless because I don’t qualify for any programs, and many aren’t geared towards renters.”

“There’s this sense of dread, and you ask yourself, will this ever stop? People in government set the ‘normal’ standards but give few incentives for those in need.”

Question 3: *Based on your survey results, you indicate that you spend X percent of your monthly income on energy; tell me what that is like. Does this create hardship for you?*

Participants expressed stress and helplessness, choosing between heating their homes and affording essentials like food and rent. The situation is particularly dire in rural areas.

“

“Canada being a developed country, we shouldn’t have to be stressed over things like this,” noted one participant.

Participants recounted using candles for heat or receiving aid from organizations like the Red Cross.

“Rent is going up, and it’s a problem. I had to move three times because landlords didn’t care,” one participant shared.

Another noted, *“I have experienced energy poverty to the point where the Red Cross came to my help.”*

Question 4: Rates are increasing; for example, NB Power has increased by 9.8%. What impact would this rate increase have on you and your household?

Participants were frustrated with limited support for those just above the poverty line or renting their homes. Rising energy costs worsen financial and mental health issues. Comments included:

“

“The bills that I currently have are necessary, so the increase will put me in a tight position.”

“I had to get a second job. I will have to make even bigger sacrifices.”

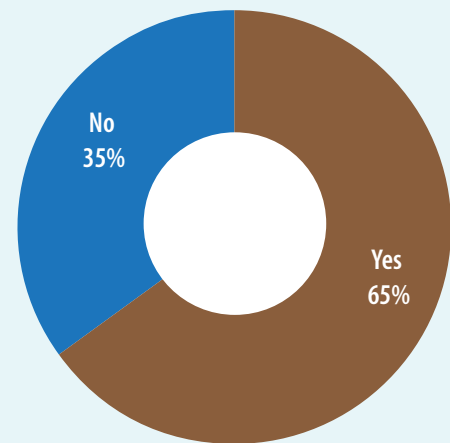
“I’m on a fixed income, so a lot of things will have to be cut back. We have already cut back on our lives, like vacations and dining out. It’s an added stress.”

Question 5: Have you used an energy efficiency incentive program, whether provincial or federal? Do you consider them accessible? Why?

Many felt these programs were more accessible to homeowners, leaving renters without options. Upfront costs and lack of awareness were significant barriers.

One participant noted, “Programs exist, but they are not well-advertised.” There was a majority consensus that upfront costs of programs limit accessibility to households already enduring energy poverty.

Figure 6. Do you think Energy Efficient Programs are Accessible?

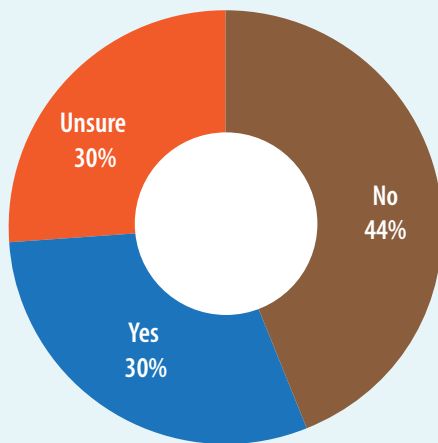


Many felt these programs were more accessible to homeowners, leaving renters without options.

Question 6: Do you trust that the province has your best interests in mind when establishing energy policies and programs?

Participants expressed distrust in government policies, feeling they favour businesses and the wealthy. They said accessibility issues and bureaucratic hurdles also hinder participation.

Figure 7. Do you trust the province has your best interests in mind when establishing energy policies and programs?



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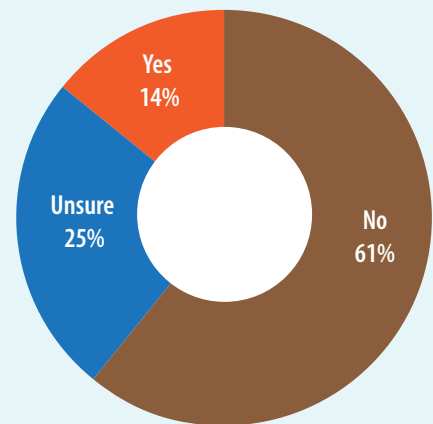
A participant said:

“What’s the point of making a program and making it very complicated and inaccessible? I feel like I’m always missing out on these programs. I make too much money on paper and still struggle with energy bills. A lot of decisions are made at higher levels by people not experiencing these situations. The programs are not enough to help.”

Question 7: Do you trust that your utility/energy provider has your best interests in mind?

Most participants mistrusted their utility providers, believing that utilities prioritize profits over customer welfare. They called for greater transparency, accountability, and consumer consideration.

Figure 8. Do you trust your energy providers has your best interests in mind when providing energy programs?



“

One participant noted,

“Every business has their profits first over the interests of affordability. Electric bills keep going up.”

Question 8: *Do you have any energy stories that you would like to share?*

Participants shared stories of difficult choices between heating and eating, electricity cut-offs, and the hardships faced in managing energy costs.

Question 9: *What do you see as the main barriers for low-income people to adopt renewables?*

The main barriers include high upfront costs, lack of knowledge, and distrust of government programs. Participants highlighted the need for better communication and support. One noted, “...you have to put a lot of money upfront and then get money back. No one knows about these programs unless someone else you know has applied.”

Question 10: *What recommendations do you have to implement an energy-efficient and renewable upgrade program for low-income people?*

Participants recommended making energy efficiency technologies more accessible and affordable for all.

Recommendations included:

1. Making programs more accessible to renters.
2. Reducing bureaucratic hurdles.
3. Offering incentives for reducing energy bills.
4. Aligning energy bills with the cost of living.



Citizens' Assembly Statement

The final result is a consensus statement on energy affordability, emphasizing trust, transparency, accountability, and ensuring accessible and affordable electricity for all Atlantic Canadians. Key recommendations include offering free energy audits, expanding energy efficiency programs, and implementing bulk-buy solar panel programs. This statement, included in the appendix, guides decision-making processes related to the electricity grid.

Successes

We asked participants to share their feedback about their experience from the recruiting stage to the event and post-event. Here's some of what they had to say;

Christopher Bruce (N.L.) shared his positive experience: *"The staff were all incredibly helpful, engaging, and accepting of a busy schedule. It was a positive and productive chat, and I feel lucky to have been a part of it. This type of grassroots consensus building should be a staple of energy development going forward in Atlantic Canada."*

Carol Pereira (N.B.) appreciated the organization and efficiency of the event: *"I found the entire assembly engagement very well put together, organized, efficient, and easy to communicate my concerns. I was pleasantly surprised how much I enjoyed participating in this project. I found it to be very engaging and relaxing. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity, and I know I will participate in future studies and projects."*

Michelle Young (N.L.) also expressed her satisfaction: *"I can honestly say the entire experience was wonderful. Very well planned and executed by facilitators/moderators. It was a surprisingly relaxing discussion given the topic. Everyone who engaged was respectful and offered so many suggestions. Time went very quickly! I would like to thank you and the Conservation Council of New Brunswick for hosting such an important discussion and would gladly participate in any future assemblies."*

Limitations

While the Citizens' Assembly was a success, we identified areas for improvement to make it more inclusive and effective. The term **'Citizens'** Assembly was sometimes misunderstood to mean only citizens could participate. For our next Assembly, we plan to call it a **'Residents'** or **'Peoples'** Assembly to encourage participation from a more diverse demographic.

One participant from a rural community experienced connectivity issues, which prevented them from joining the discussion effectively.

Our most significant challenge was recruiting participants from Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island. Despite our efforts, only four participants from these provinces attended the Assembly — all from Newfoundland and Labrador. Of the two selected participants from P.E.I., one was unable to attend due to illness, and the other did not show up.

We would also like to incorporate more Indigenous knowledge into the policies and program development and implementation that were discussed.

Post Survey Results

All attendees reported enjoying the event and having learned something from it. All participants also felt their voices and concerns were heard and recognized. Below are some comments left about the assembly.

Did you enjoy participating in the Atlantic Citizens' Assembly? (Yes, No, Somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.

"It was a very great event and significant in addressing energy poverty with a holistic approach."

"Yes, it was a safe and non-judgmental space."

"I received a great deal of new information and cost-saving suggestions."

Did you feel you have learned something from participating in the Citizen's assembly? (Yes, No, somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.

"Lots of helpful, interesting information was provided about policy and programs."

"I learned from the participant's experiences and knowledge."

"I love learning the concerns proposed solutions from other participants and facilitators."

Do you feel your voice and concerns about energy affordability have been heard and recognized? (Yes, No, Somewhat) Please give a brief explanation of your answer above.

"I'm glad to have my concerns heard and recorded."

"I truly appreciate that the declaration encompassed as many of the principles as possible while also removing some that weren't agreed upon. It didn't feel like I was being told I have to agree with everything or nothing, which often happens in this type of work."

"Was given lots of chances to share and ample time to brainstorm my thoughts before sharing as a group."

07 Discussion

The *Statement on Electricity Affordability* developed by the participants is a strong foundation for addressing energy issues in Atlantic Canada. Like the N.B. Citizens' Assembly on energy affordability, the participants of this assembly strongly believe that affordable electricity is crucial for quality of life, health, and safety. The statement summarizes the outcomes of their discussions.

Affordable and reliable electricity is especially important during harsh weather events. Adequate heating and cooling are essential for maintaining healthy physical and mental conditions and ensuring comfort at home.

The following is a summary of the discussions that contributed to the formulation of the *Atlantic Citizen Assembly Declaration Statement*.

Program recommendations

1. Energy Efficiency Programs

During our discussion, we emphasized several key programs essential for improving energy efficiency and accessibility in Atlantic Canada. The first point was the importance of **Energy Efficiency Programs**. One of the biggest challenges residents face is deciding which bills to prioritize. As the cost of living and energy prices rise, many people struggle with difficult tradeoffs such as 'heat or eat.'



Participants emphasized a few recommendations to help with cost-saving measures. There is a need for more effective programs that do not require significant upfront costs and that both middle- and low-income households can benefit from. Participants highlighted the need for free government-funded energy audits to help homeowners identify and implement energy-saving measures.

Additionally, providing interest-free loans and grants was deemed crucial to making energy-efficient home improvements more accessible, reducing the financial burden on homeowners. The group also stressed the necessity of offering incentives for landlords to upgrade properties without increasing rents, thereby ensuring tenants benefit from energy efficiency improvements. Finally, there was a strong consensus on promoting sustainable appliance programs to encourage the replacement of inefficient appliances, contributing to overall energy conservation and cost savings.

2. Renewable Energy Programs



The discussion also covered **Renewable Energy Programs**, focusing on initiatives that make renewable energy more affordable and accessible. Bulk-buy solar panel programs were highlighted as a cost-effective way for communities and provinces to invest in solar energy. Establishing a competitive buyback program was seen as an incentive for households to adopt renewable energy by allowing them to sell excess energy back to the grid. Community support initiatives were considered vital for providing resources and networking opportunities for renewable energy projects, fostering a collaborative approach to sustainability. Retrofitting older homes was also discussed, with an emphasis on prioritizing assistance for vulnerable populations to improve energy efficiency based on health and financial needs.

3. Transportation and Mobility Programs



The group highlighted the importance of **investing in and expanding public transit infrastructure**, especially in rural areas. Enhancing public transportation services, including bus routes and electric buses, was seen as essential to reduce reliance on personal vehicles and improve energy efficiency in transportation. Expanding rebates for electric and hybrid vehicles was also recommended to encourage the adoption of cleaner transportation options.

Additionally, there was a strong call for increased support for ride-share programs, particularly in rural areas with limited public transportation, to enhance accessibility and reduce transportation energy consumption. Supporting work-from-home initiatives was also discussed as a way to further reduce commuting energy use.

4. Energy Assistance Programs



Finally, there was a focus on **Energy Assistance Programs** designed to support vulnerable populations. Expanding eligibility and funding for energy efficiency improvements in residential and rental properties was considered crucial. There was a strong emphasis on developing targeted energy assistance programs for low-income individuals, seniors, and those with disabilities to address their specific needs. Forming community support groups to provide resources and information on energy efficiency was also seen as a valuable initiative. Additionally, promoting sustainable appliance programs to replace inefficient appliances and encouraging donations or trades was discussed as a way to support energy conservation efforts further.

Policy Recommendations

Our policy discussion centred on several key areas to enhance energy accessibility, transparency, and sustainability. The group stressed the importance of:

1. Accessibility and Affordability



There was a strong consensus on making electricity **universally accessible and affordable**. Participants argued that electricity should be tax-exempt, similar to basic groceries, to ensure affordability for all, especially for vulnerable groups like low-to-moderate-income households, seniors, and those with special needs. Ensuring equitable outcomes by treating all ratepayers fairly and requiring industries to pay their fair share was also highlighted. Additionally, exploring innovative funding options to finance sustainable energy systems was considered essential to ensure the financial burden of the net-zero transition is shared fairly.

2. Transparency and Accountability



There was a general agreement on the need for greater **transparency in utility operations**. Mandating the disclosure of real-time cost and resource data was seen as a way to promote honesty and accountability in utility management. Effective cost management by utilities before proposing rate increases was also emphasized. Regular and accessible reporting on key performance indicators was considered vital for maintaining accountability. Strengthening institutions like energy and utility boards was recommended to enhance overall transparency and accountability in the sector.

3. Progressive Policy Changes



The group also focused on the need for **Progressive Policy Changes** to avoid stagnation and ensure policies consider the social effects on Atlantic Canadians. Participants stressed the importance of utilities' long-term planning, prioritizing domestic rate reductions, and investing in energy efficiency technologies to achieve further cost savings. Regularly reviewing and revising policies based on citizens' social and economic needs was seen as crucial to ensure they remain relevant and effective. Reforming incentives, such as net metering and taxation policies, was also discussed as a way to encourage energy efficiency from generation to consumption.

4. Community and Environmental Engagement

There was an emphasis on the importance of **community and environmental engagement** in developing and implementing energy policies. It's crucial to engage directly and frequently with ratepayers and communities to assess and guide decision-making based on real-time impacts. There is also an urgent need to increase energy literacy through targeted education on energy management and cost-saving measures.



Support was shown for sustainable and decentralized energy options, including community-owned and Indigenous-owned projects, which is vital for promoting low-carbon energy generation. Additionally, creating an integrated electricity system to enhance reliability and support renewable energy sources was discussed as a key policy goal.

By addressing these concerns and implementing these recommendations, policies can be developed to ensure **affordable and accessible energy for all Atlantic Canadians**.

Please refer to the [Declaration Statement](#) in the Appendix section for the final policy and program recommendations.

08 Future research

This project has highlighted the critical need for further research on the experiences of individuals facing high energy-cost burdens in Atlantic Canada. There is significant potential for Atlantic-wide cooperation on energy and electricity affordability initiatives. Moving forward, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick aims to prioritize including diverse stakeholders in our events. We plan to involve representatives from the government, energy providers, landlords, Indigenous community leaders, and environmental non-governmental organizations.

This inclusive approach is intended to foster discussions about these critical community issues at higher levels of management and governance.

Additionally, we seek to collaborate with organizations from various provinces to strengthen relationships and ideas. This collaboration will also facilitate member recruitment, particularly in areas such as Newfoundland and Labrador and P.E.I., where attendance has been low. We believe that together, we can drive more impactful change.



09 Conclusion

Canada has set ambitious targets to reduce emissions by [40–45 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030](#) and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Buildings play a significant role in this effort, accounting for [27 per cent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions in 2021](#) and [13 per cent of Canada's total emissions from space and water heating](#). Given that most homes that will exist in 2050 have already been built, [conventional decarbonization strategies](#) focus on improving the building envelope, upgrading to more efficient appliances, and switching to low-carbon fuels. Building envelope improvements, such as adding insulation, upgrading windows and doors, and air sealing, are crucial for achieving significant energy efficiency gains.

However, [numerous barriers](#) hinder residential energy efficiency upgrades, including high upfront costs, competing priorities, low energy literacy, lack of awareness of co-benefits, split incentives between property owners and tenants, challenges in finding contractors, and disruptions of major work. Addressing these challenges is essential for Canada to meet its emissions reduction targets.

The *Atlantic Citizens' Assembly on Energy Affordability* has highlighted the urgent need

for effective and inclusive policies to combat energy poverty in Atlantic Canada. The assembly provided a platform for residents to share their experiences and proposed solutions to address high energy costs and improve energy efficiency. Participants expressed significant concerns about the transparency and fiscal management of local utility providers, highlighting the necessity for utilities to demonstrate financial competence before implementing rate increases. Key recommendations include offering free energy audits, expanding energy efficiency programs, implementing bulk-buy solar panel programs, and ensuring electricity is universally accessible and affordable.

The assembly's findings reveal a critical gap in support for renters and low-to-moderate-income households, who face significant barriers to accessing energy efficiency programs. Participants called for greater transparency and accountability from both government and utility providers, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in the decision-making process. The consensus statement developed by the assembly participants serves as a foundation for policy development, aiming to ensure affordable and reliable electricity for all Atlantic Canadians.

10 Appendix

Atlantic Citizens' Assembly on Energy Affordability Agenda

Online Zoom event | **Programs:** Two days (8.5 hours total, including breaks)

Friday, May 3 2024

6 - 6:10 p.m.

Welcome

6:10 - 6:45 p.m.

Introductions
(between members and participants)

6:45 - 7:00 p.m.

Conservation Council of New Brunswick – Faith
– Our work in context

7:00 - 7:15 p.m.

John and Nichola from ACORN

7:15 - 7:30 p.m.

Abhi from Efficiency Canada

7:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Brief for Saturday

Saturday, May 4 2024

9:30 - 9:45 a.m.

Welcome back (Moe)

9:45 - 10 a.m.

Recap from Friday and Instructions – Autumn

10 - 11:45 a.m.

Breakout

11:45 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Report back (Corey)

12 - 1 p.m.

Lunch Break

1 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

What we heard in the morning

1:15 - 2 p.m.

Creating consensus statement

2 - 2:15 p.m.

Break

2:15 - 3 p.m.

Creating consensus statement

3 - 3:30 p.m.

Overview of What We've Heard

3:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Conclusions and Thanks

DECLARATION

Atlantic Citizens Assembly on **Electricity Affordability**

WHEREAS **affordable electricity** is essential to our quality of life, health and safety, and is a necessity of modern society.



WE BELIEVE the following principles and goals should guide government decision-making about regional electricity systems and the operation of utilities across the Atlantic provinces:

- **Accessibility and Affordability:** Electricity, as an essential service, should be exempt from taxes, similar to basic groceries, and universally accessible and affordable for all. This is especially important for vulnerable groups, including low-to-moderate-income households, seniors and those with special needs.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Promote transparency and honesty in utility operations by mandating the disclosure of real-time cost and resource data. Utilities should manage costs effectively before proposing rate increases and demonstrate accountability through regular and accessible reporting on key performance indicators.
- **Progressive Policy Changes:** Commit to progressive policy changes, considering the social effects that policies have on Atlantic Canadians and avoiding stagnation in policy development.
- **Equitable Outcomes:** Ensure fair and balanced treatment for all ratepayers, with industries paying their fair share. Focus on reducing domestic rates rather than exporting energy for profit, and ensure revenues from rates support technologies that enhance energy efficiency.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage directly and frequently with ratepayers to assess the real-time impacts of decisions, using updated information to guide decision-making processes. This includes consulting with local and Indigenous communities in the development of energy projects.
- **Energy Literacy:** Increase energy literacy across Atlantic provinces with focused education on energy management and cost-saving measures.



WE BELIEVE that federal and provincial electricity strategies should be based on the following policies:


- **Funding and Support for Energy Transition:** Explore innovative funding options like electricity bonds to finance the transition to a sustainable energy system and ensure that the financial burden of the net-zero transition does not fall disproportionately on Canadians.
- **Long-term Planning and Energy Efficiency:** Ensure that utilities plan for the long term, prioritizing domestic rate reductions and using revenue from rates to advance technologies that improve energy efficiency for further cost savings to ratepayers.
- **Sustainable and Decentralized Energy Options:** Support the inclusion of cooperative, community-owned and Indigenous-owned energy projects. Promote low-carbon and sustainable energy generation and incorporate a mix of distributed energy sources and microgrids.
- **System Integration:** Create an integrated electricity system that enhances regional, national and international reliability, supporting renewable and non-polluting energy sources. Increase government cooperation to enhance renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Strengthen institutions like energy and utility boards for better accountability and transparency.
- **Incentive Reform and Efficiency:** Reform incentives, such as net metering and taxation policies, to encourage energy efficiency from generation to consumption.
- **Worker Transition Support:** Provide necessary training and support for workers transitioning to roles within the clean electricity system.
- **Work-From-Home Initiatives:** Support work-from-home policies and reintroduce programs similar to COVID rebates to facilitate remote work without financial penalties to employees.
- **Annual Policy Review:** Regularly review and revise energy policies and programs based on citizen' social and the economic needs and ensure industries contribute their fair share through a tiered system that considers the scale of business operations.



WE BELIEVE the following programs should be included in Atlantic Canada:

- **Interest-Free Loans and Grants:** Establish a program that offers interest-free loans and/or grants for energy-efficient home improvements to help homeowners manage upfront costs.
- **Free Energy Audits:** Require and offer government-funded residential energy audits to promote continuous energy efficiency improvements, providing homeowners with free audits to identify opportunities for energy-saving upgrades and personalized recommendations.
- **Energy Efficiency Programs:** Increase eligibility and funding for energy efficiency programs, targeting improvements in residential and rental properties.
- **Expanding Energy Efficiency Programs:** Expand and enhance electric vehicle, hybrid and EV charger rebates, including rebates for micro-electric vehicles like electric bikes and trikes.
- **Create Efficiency Incentives for Landlords:** Increase support for landlords to make timely energy-efficient upgrades without raising rents and enhance tenant rights to request such upgrades. Implement mandatory energy efficiency standards in rental properties and provide tax incentives or rebates for energy-efficient products and renewable energy investments.
- **Bulk-Buy Solar Panel Programs:** Implement and expand bulk-buy solar panel programs to allow not only communities but also entire provinces to purchase solar panels collectively, akin to how provinces procure electric school buses.
- **Competitive Buyback Program:** Establish a competitive buyback program for households to sell excess energy back to the grid.
- **Public Transit and Ride Share Expansion:** Invest in and expand public transit infrastructure and services, such as bus routes, shuttle services, park-and-ride facilities and electric buses, to reduce reliance on personal vehicles and enhance transportation-related energy efficiency. Additionally, incentives for ride-share and car-share programs should be added, with a focus on increasing accessibility in rural areas that have limited public transportation options, including the expansion of EV ride-share programs.

- **Community Support Initiatives:** Help form community support groups focused on energy efficiency and renewable energy, providing resources, information and networking opportunities.
- **Sustainable Appliance Programs:** Develop initiatives to replace inefficient appliances and encourage the donation or trade of old ones.
- **Energy Assistance Programs for Vulnerable Populations:** Develop targeted energy assistance programs for low-income individuals, newcomers, single-family homeowners, seniors and people with disabilities, particularly addressing the needs of those in regions without air conditioning.
- **Older Home Retrofitting:** Introduce a retrofit program for older homes to incorporate energy-efficient features, first assisting those most vulnerable based on health requirements and subsequently on financial need.


Katrina Hughes (May 10, 2024 16:09 ADT)


Katrina Hughes


Michelle Young (May 10, 2024 17:39 GMT-2.5)


Michelle Young




Abdul Ganiyu


Mark Fryer (May 10, 2024 15:12 ADT)


Mark Fryer


Bryanna Brown (May 10, 2024 13:28 EDT)

Bryanna Brown


Rhea Malatestinic (May 10, 2024 14:52 ADT)

Rhea Malatestinic


Tammy Perrin (May 10, 2024 14:02 ADT)

Tammy Perrin



John Reist


Jason Hat (May 11, 2024 17:32 GMT+1)

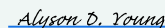
Jason Hat

Alexandra Macdonald


Alexandra Macdonald


Carol Pereira (May 10, 2024 14:19 ADT)

Carol Pereira


Alyson D. Young (May 10, 2024 13:17 ADT)


Alyson D. Young


Chris Bruce (May 14, 2024 06:51 GMT-2.5)

Chris Bruce


Amanda Doucet (May 10, 2024 20:26 ADT)

Amanda Doucet


Colleen Monk (May 10, 2024 15:36 ADT)

Colleen Monk


Kennedy Xavier (May 18, 2024 17:31 GMT+1)
KENNIE 03/10/2024