

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGEING Toronto Social Capital Study

FEBRUARY 2019

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BEFORE WE GET STARTED...POLL QUESTION

1. How familiar are you with the concept of social capital?

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

BEFORE WE GET STARTED...POLL QUESTION

2. Which age group would you guess has the highest social capital in Toronto?

18-24

25-29

30-39

40-54

55-64

65+

WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- The report, commissioned by the Toronto Foundation, and conducted by the Environics Institute, presents the results of a major research study about social capital in the city of Toronto.
- Social capital is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which there is trust and reciprocity within a community and among individuals.
- It is the essential “lubricant” that makes it possible for societies to function, and for people to get along peacefully even when they have little in common.

WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- The concept of social capital gained widespread attention in the past few decades through the work of noted American political scientist Robert Putnam and his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*.
- There is ample empirical evidence showing that high levels of such reciprocity, trust and connection are not simply “feel good” notions, but key ingredients to making communities productive, healthy and safe.

ABOUT THE STUDY

- The survey sampling of 3,200 Torontonians was designed to include a representative sample of residents (18 years of age and older).
- Additional steps were taken to increase the representation of individuals from several specific groups identified as important for this study (specifically, residents 65 years and older, and individuals who self-identify as Black, Chinese or South Asian, the three largest ethnic groups in the city).

ABOUT THE STUDY

- The NIA, with support from the LIFE Institute at Ryerson University, partnered on the project with the specific goal of better understanding the social standing of seniors in Toronto.
- The Age Friendly City movement has been growing in recent years, and new attention to issues of social isolation led to our need to better understand the connective social tissue that underlies the built environment and how people experience city life more broadly.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Creating an Index to track and compare Social Capital across the measures.

- The presentation of results is organized around four primary dimensions of social capital as informed by the research literature: social trust, social networks, civic connection, and neighbourhood support.
- For each dimension an “index score” was created to provide a concise measure for making comparisons across population subgroups (and over time when future surveys are conducted).
- Each index is scored from “0” (lowest possible score) to “10” (highest possible score).

DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

1. **Social Trust:** the sense of trust Torontonians have in one another and city institutions.
2. **Social Networks:** the strength of residents' informal and formal relationships.
3. **Civic Connection:** the extent to which people are civically engaged.
4. **Neighbourhood Support:** how citizens see their neighbourhoods as supporting the type of life and environment they want for themselves.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Social Trust

- Trust in other people and in institutions is one of the central dimensions of social capital, defined as the extent to which individuals trust (or distrust) others with whom they may have relationships and/or social interactions.
- For this reason, trust is among the most widely studied and validated aspects of social capital.

KEY FINDINGS

Social Trust

- Overall, social trust in Toronto is reasonably strong and comparable to that of Canadians in general.
- Across the city, general trust is highest among older Toronto residents, peaking at ages 55 and lowest for the 25–29 age group.
- It is similarly higher for people who identify as white and who have household incomes over \$100,000/year.
- Social trust appears to increase with age, wealth, and majority status.
- More work is being done to understand the differences between older people by income and race.

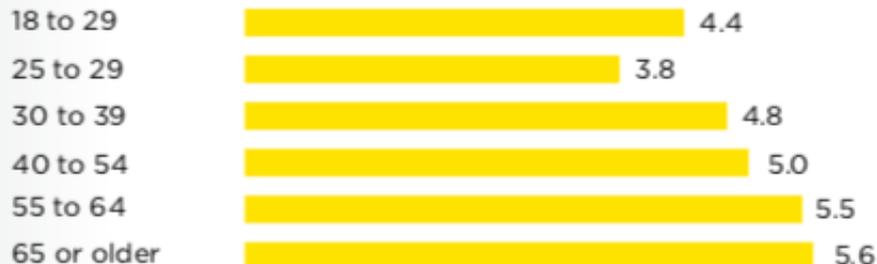
KEY FINDINGS

Social Trust

GENERAL TRUST

INDEX SCORES BY GROUP

AGE



HOUSEHOLD INCOME



RACE/CULTURE



KEY FINDINGS

Social Trust

- The most commonly-used question to measure general trust asks people which of two opposing statements is closest to their own view:
 - “overall, most people can be trusted” or “you cannot be too careful in dealing with people”
- A modest majority (55%) of Toronto residents agree with the positive statement “*overall, most people can be trusted*”, compared with four in ten (40%) who maintain instead that “*you cannot be too careful in dealing with people*” (the remaining 6% did not offer a response to this question).

KEY FINDINGS

Social Trust



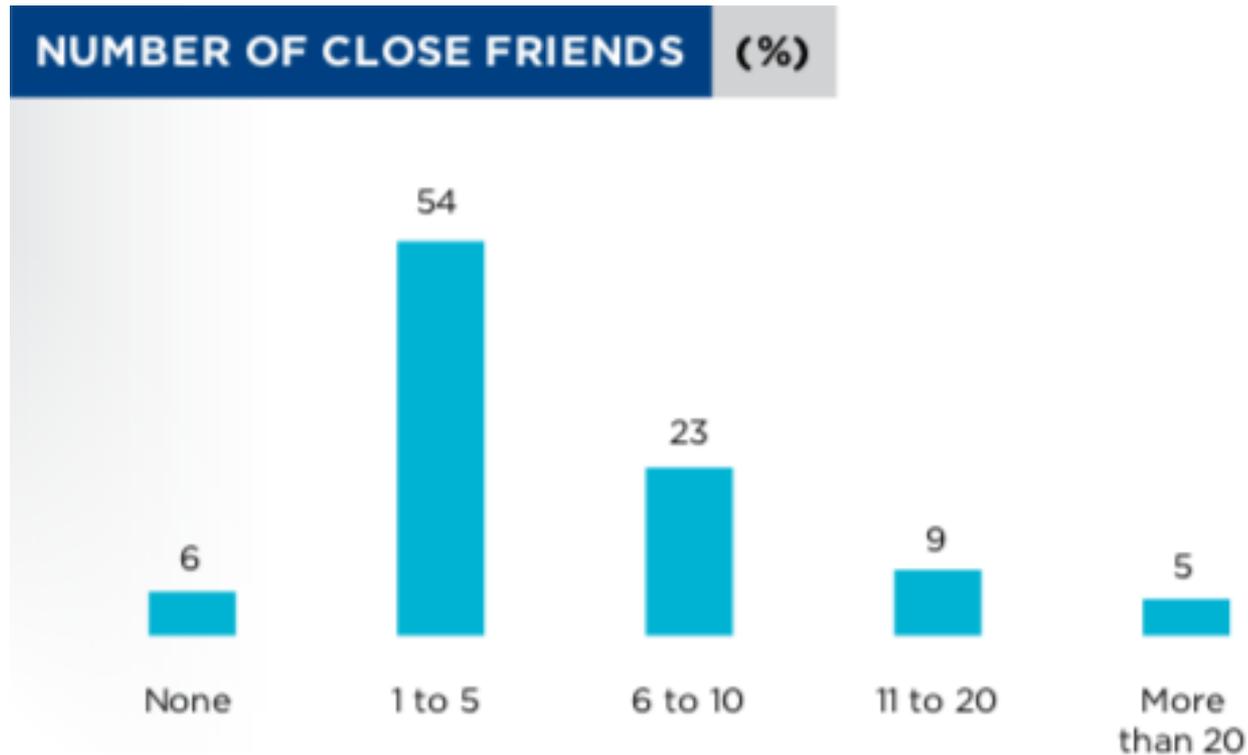
KEY FINDINGS

2. Social Networks

- Another essential dimension of social capital is the presence and quality of personal connections that individuals have with others through their social networks, including family and friends.
- Social ties play various roles in peoples' lives, fulfilling practical functions (helping out, making connections to valuable resources) and providing emotional support.
- The survey examined social networks, in terms of the extent to which Torontonians have family members and friends they can count on, and the type and frequency contact.

KEY FINDINGS

Social Networks

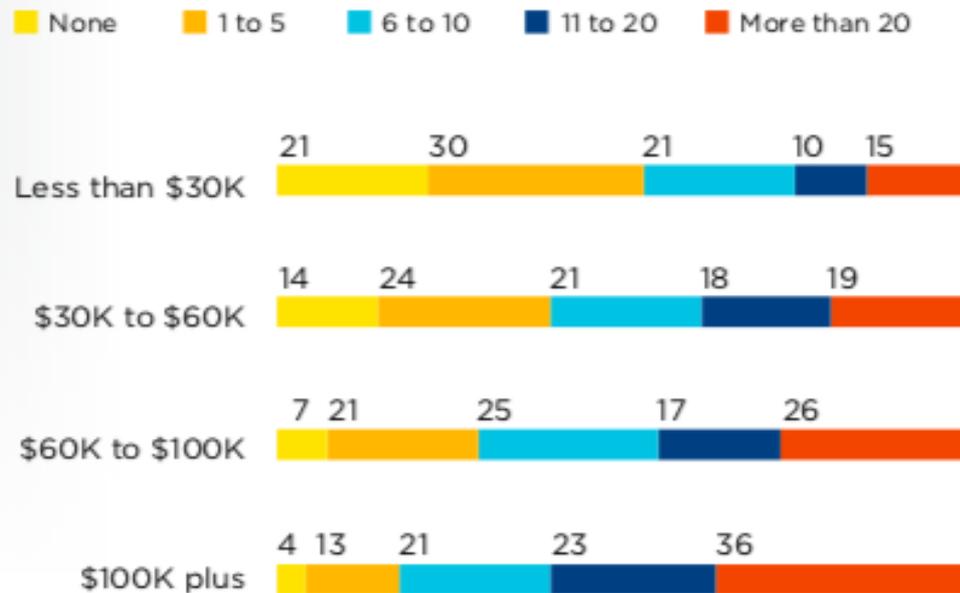


KEY FINDINGS

Social Networks

NUMBER OF OTHER FRIENDS (%)

By household income



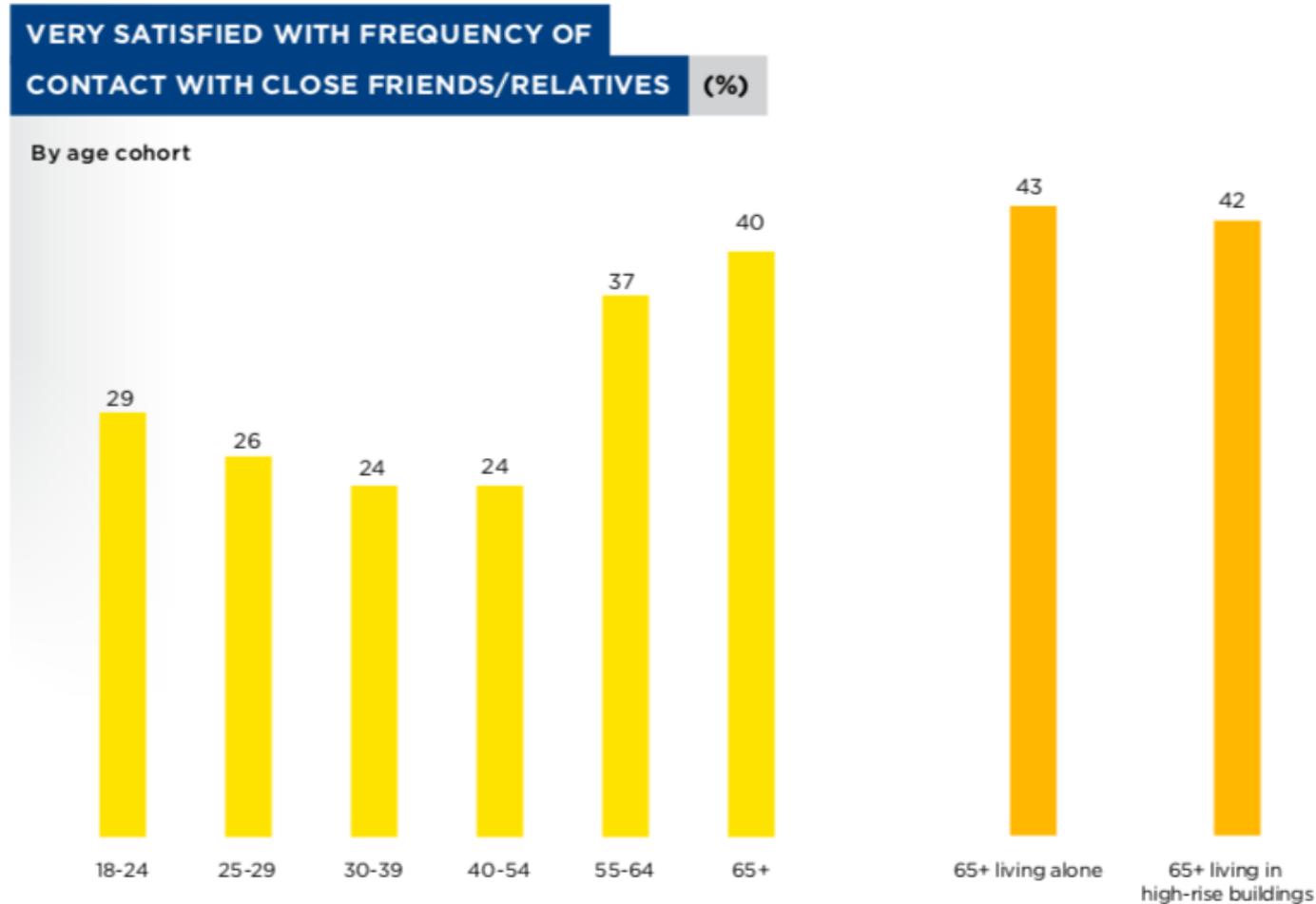
KEY FINDINGS

Social Networks

- As with social trust, social networks capital is linked to age, income and race/culture, but to a lesser degree.
- Once again, residents 55 and older have the highest social network scores (and this holds for those living alone and/or in high-rise buildings), while those 25 to 29 have the lowest score among age cohorts.
- Social network capital also increases more modestly by income (from 5.3 among those earning less than \$30K, to 6.2 among those earning \$100K or more), with the impact of income most evident among residents aged 25 to 29.

KEY FINDINGS

Social Networks



KEY FINDINGS

Social Networks

- Nine in ten (91%) Torontonians report having at least one family member or relative who they feel close to (e.g., feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on their mind, or can call for help).
- Six percent say they have no close relatives that fit this description.
- While loneliness and isolation are challenges for many seniors, across the city as a whole, residents aged 65 and over living alone and/or in highrise buildings are among the most satisfied with the frequency of contact with family and friends
- This group is more likely than others to say they are very satisfied with the frequency of contact, with very few (3% among all residents aged 65 plus) expressing dissatisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS

3. Civic Connection

- The third primary dimension of social capital encompasses the concept of community, or collective, social vitality – the extent to which people engage with others in groups and organizations, above and beyond their family and friendship networks.
- This was the focus of the work of noted American sociologist Robert Putnam, as highlighted in his seminal work *Bowling Alone*.

KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection

- City-wide, two-thirds (65%) of Torontonians reported to be a member or participant in at least one group, association or organization in the past 12 months.
- The most common types include a cultural, education, or hobby group (28%), a union or professional association (27%), a sports or recreational organization (26%) or a religious-affiliated group (20%).
- Much less common are groups that cater to a specific part of the population, such as seniors (10%).

KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection



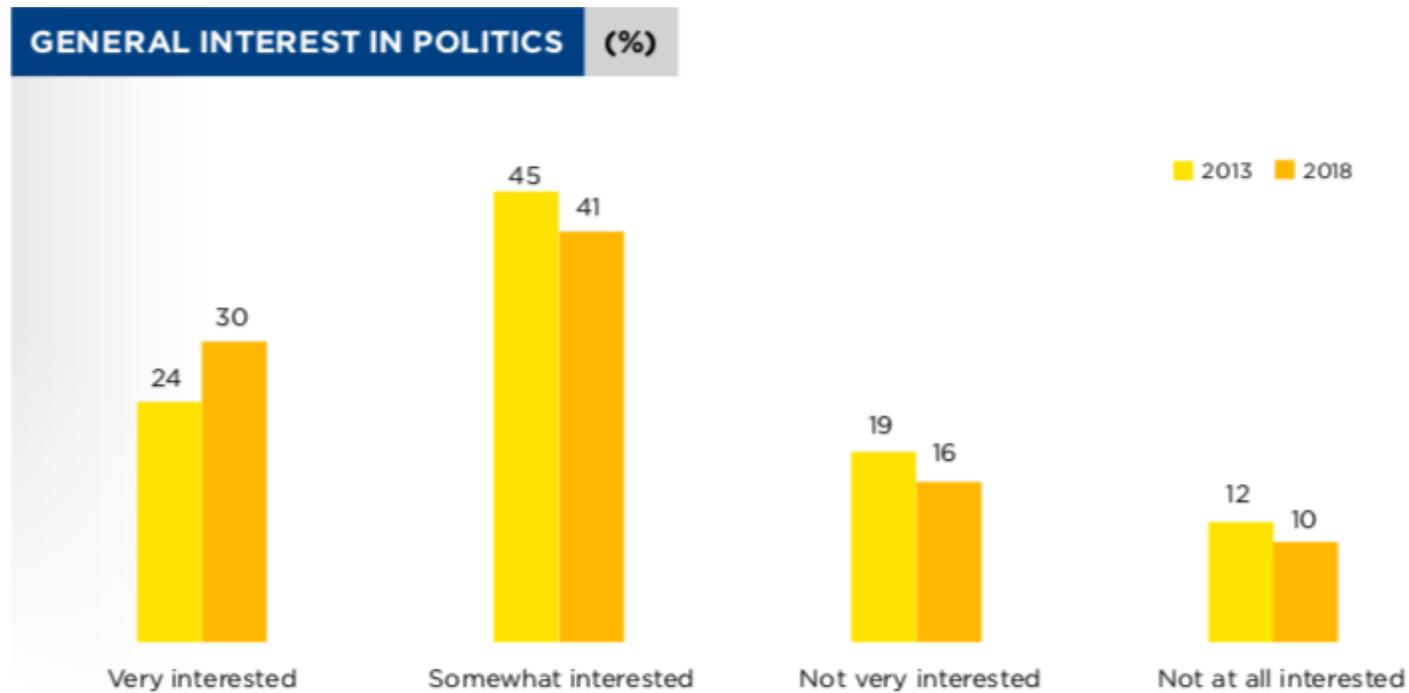
KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection

- Seven in ten Torontonians say they are very (30%) or somewhat (41%) interested in politics generally, compared with one in four who is not very (16%) or not at all (10%) interested.
- Comparisons with the 2013 GSS indicates that Torontonians expressed interest in politics generally has strengthened since five years ago (when 24% said they were very interested in politics).
- Across the city, strong interest in politics is most common among residents 65 years and over (42%), compared to (20%) for the 25–29 age group.

KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection



KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection

LEVEL OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT INDEX - BY GROUP

EDUCATION



GENERATION IN CANADA



RACE/CULTURE



KEY FINDINGS

Civic Connection

- Civic connection scores do not vary as noticeably across age groups, but are lowest among Torontonians 30 to 54 (3.9) and highest among those 55 and older (4.5).
- Notably, civic connection is only marginally lower among first generation Canadians (4.0) compared with those in the second (4.3) and third plus (4.4) generations, indicating that immigrants are no less likely than well-established citizens to become civically engaged in their community.

KEY FINDINGS

4. Neighbourhood Support

- In addition to the core social capital dimensions of social trust (which can be described as “cognitive”) and social networks and civic connection (which are “behavioural”), there is a fourth that encompasses how residents view the characteristics of their neighbourhood as supporting the type of environment and life they desire (this dimension can be classified as “ecological”).
- The survey addressed this aspect of social capital by asking Torontonians the extent to which they see their neighbourhood as having supportive characteristics, as well as an additional question about perceived social agency (none of these questions have been covered in previous research in Toronto, so no benchmark data are available).

KEY FINDINGS

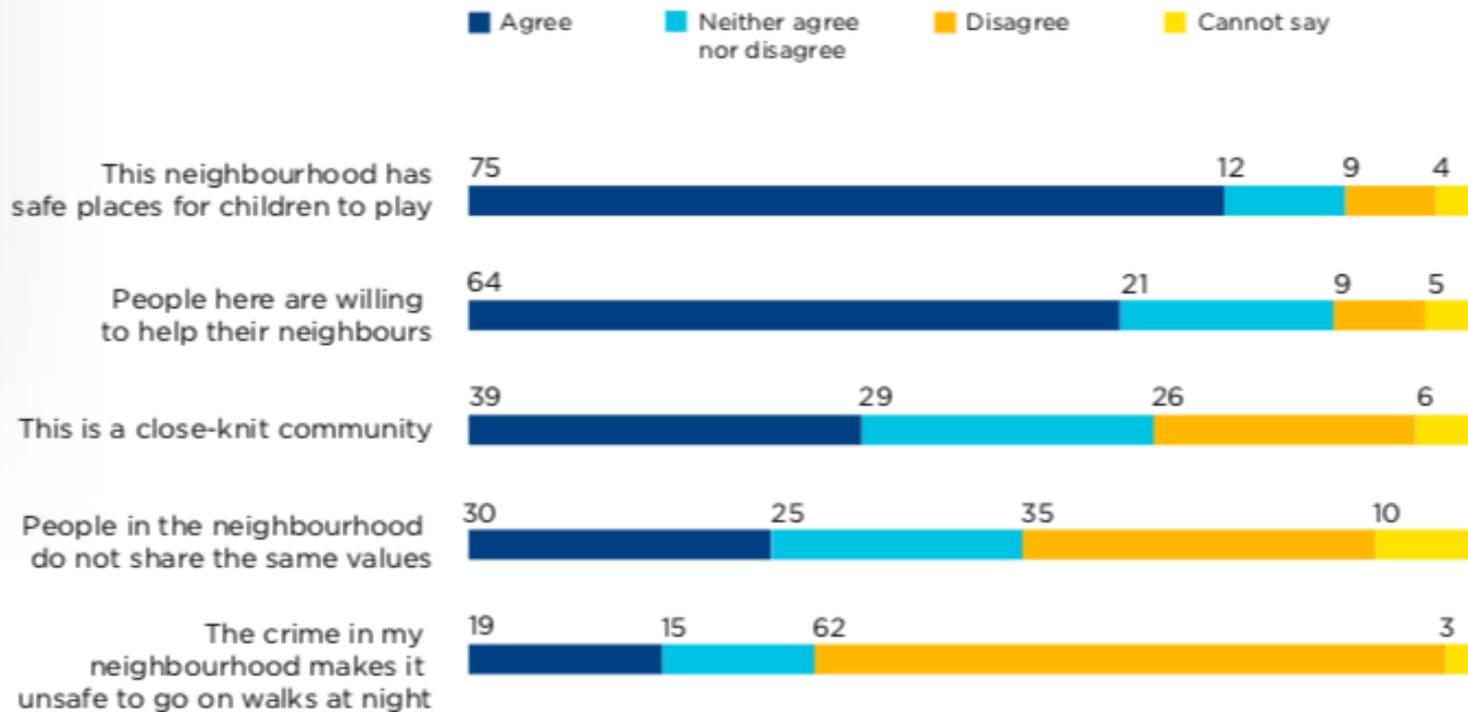
Neighbourhood Support

- Most Toronto residents share the belief that their neighbourhood is relatively safe from crime and violence.
- Three-quarters (75%) agree with this statement about their neighbourhood providing safe places for children to play; only one in ten (9%) disagrees.
- Across the city, a positive perspective about shared values in the neighbourhood is most prominent among residents in owned, detached homes, those who know their neighbours, residents 55 years and older (but much less so for seniors living alone or in high-rise buildings).

KEY FINDINGS

Neighbourhood Support

HOW YOU WOULD DESCRIBE YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD (%)



KEY FINDINGS

Neighbourhood Support

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Toronto residents agree that the statement *“People around here are willing to help their neighbours”* describes their neighbourhood, compared with one in ten (9%) who disagrees.
- Agreement is most widespread among Torontonians who live in detached homes, own their homes, have been in their neighbourhood for at least 10 years, and know most or many of their neighbours.

KEY FINDINGS

Neighbourhood Support

- Even more significant is age, with agreement expressed by 77 percent of residents aged 55 and older, compared with just 44 percent of those aged 25 to 29.
- Across the city, a positive perspective about shared values in the neighbourhood is most prominent among the same groups as identified above: residents in owned, detached homes, those who know their neighbours, residents 55 years and

NEXT STEPS

This study will make an important contribution to the future of Toronto in terms of:

- Providing all sectors with an empirical basis for reviewing and building policies, initiatives and investments that strengthen the city's social capital resources in ways that enhance the broader community
- Identifying new areas of opportunity for addressing challenges and supporting positive change

NEXT STEPS

- Raising awareness of the importance and benefits of social trust, reciprocity and community involvement, so these are given a greater priority
- Establishing a benchmark against which progress can be measured over time. Partners and other organizations can build upon this study through follow-up surveys that may focus on specific target populations and/or areas of the city.
- This research may also serve as the basis for similar studies in other cities across Ontario and Canada.

NEXT STEPS

- For the NIA, looking at cities through the lens of social capital provides yet another variable to consider in the context of age friendly cities and the growing concern of social isolation.
- As we continue work on city issues, we expect to more fully account for the social life of seniors.