



albertapatient
Your Voice Matters

Pediatric Health in Alberta

- COVID Impacts Tracking
- Pediatric Mental Health Tracking

March 2023

>> Study information

Research methodology

- Online survey fielded via the albertapatient online research panel
 - Field dates: March 8 - 21, 2023
 - Sample size: Have children at home n=527
- Results reflect a representative sample of patients in Alberta
- The sample has been weighted to reflect appropriate regional distributions of participants, according to Stats Canada census data.
- A random stratified sample of albertapatient.ca panelists were invited to complete the survey. For interpretation purposes, a probability sample of this size would yield a margin of error of +/- 4.3 percentage points 19 times out of 20 at a 95% confidence interval
 - Accuracy of sub-samples of the data decline based on sample size

This research was conducted with and for the albertapatient.ca online community, operated by the Alberta Medical Association and research partner ThinkHQ Public Affairs Inc.

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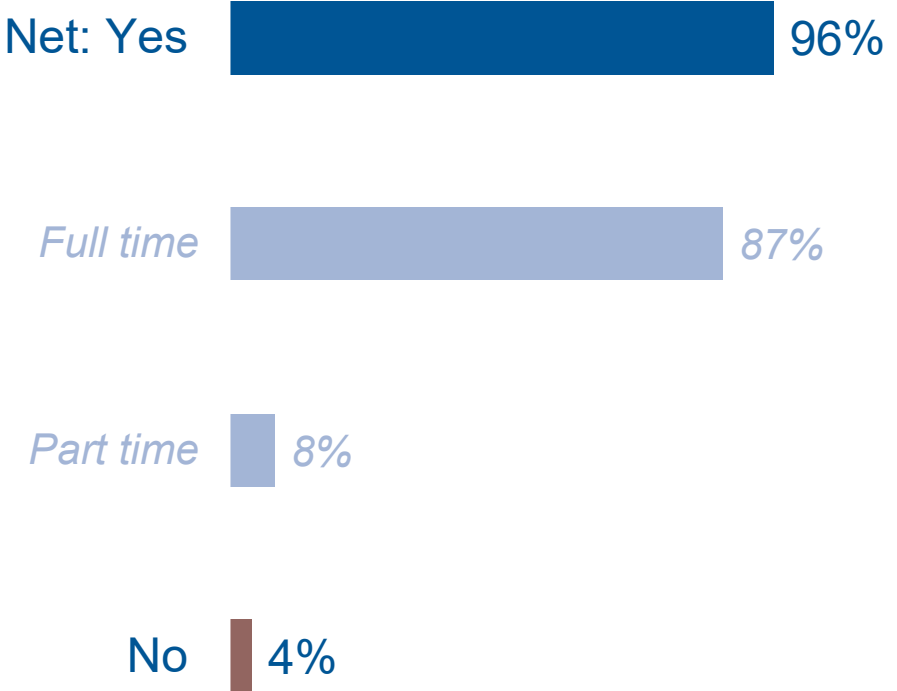
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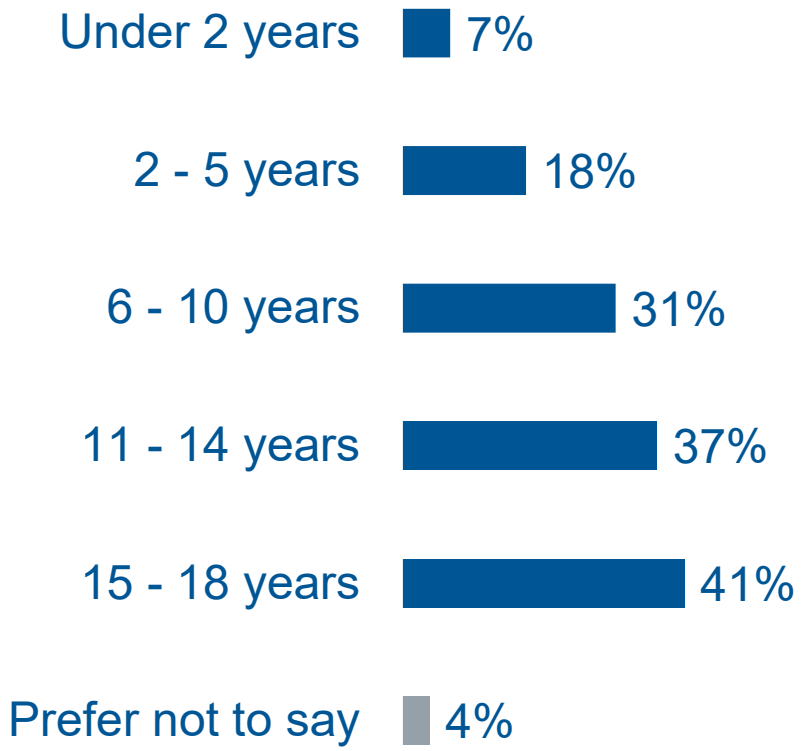
Please attribute any research findings to albertapatient.ca.

>> Profile: Respondent's With Children

Do your children currently reside with you?



What are the ages of your children?



Base: Have children at home (n=527)

Base: Have children at home (n=527) | MULTIPLE MENTIONS

COVID-19 Impacts on Alberta's Children

➤➤ COVID-19 Impacts on Alberta's Children

According to parents, COVID-19 and its response have had a significant and lingering impact on the well-being of their children.

Physical Health

In terms of physical health, over four-in-ten (42%) report a decline compared to pre-COVID, with 11% saying their child's physical health is "much worse" and 31% "somewhat worse" than before the pandemic.

These reports of negative physical impacts of COVID/COVID response are largely unchanged since our last check-up on this issue in Spring 2022.

- There is a notable increase in negative physical health associated with older age cohorts. Only three-in-ten (30%) of those with kids aged under 6 years old report deteriorations in physical health, climbing to over one-half (51%) among older teens
- Negative physical impacts from COVID are slightly more common in kids living outside of the two largest cities

Parents cite issues such as inactivity and inability to participate in sports and exercise as the primary drivers of negative physical health impacts on their children.

>> COVID-19 Impacts on Alberta's Children ... continued

Mental Health

Although easing modestly over the past year, negative mental health impacts on Alberta children remains troubling. Almost six-in-ten (59%) parents report that at least one child in their care has suffered from a deterioration in their mental health as a result of the pandemic, with one-quarter (25%) saying a child's mental health is "much worse" and 34% "somewhat worse". This represents a modest decline of 6 percentage-points in the incidence of pediatric mental health issues when compared to May 2022.

- Negative mental health consequences of the pandemic are directly related to a child's age, increasing notably among kids over the age of 10. For kids aged 6 to 10, almost six-in-ten (57%) have experienced some negative mental health impacts, rising to a startling 74% for those aged 15 or older. Indeed, nearly four-in-ten (37%) parents of older teens report their child's mental health as "much worse"
- Children living outside of the two largest cities show slightly higher levels of negative mental health impacts from the pandemic

Many parents report fear and anxiety among their children, post-COVID, along with depression and feelings of isolation lingering after the pandemic.

>> COVID Pandemic Impacts on Children's Physical and Mental Health

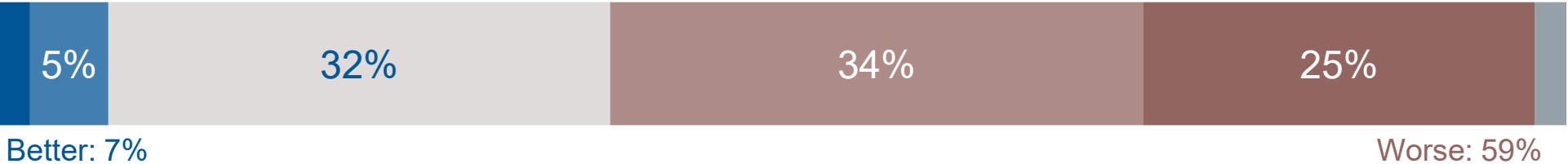
Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say the physical / mental health of your child / children is ...

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Prefer not to say

Physical health



Mental health



Base: Have children at home (n=527) | NET: Better minus worse



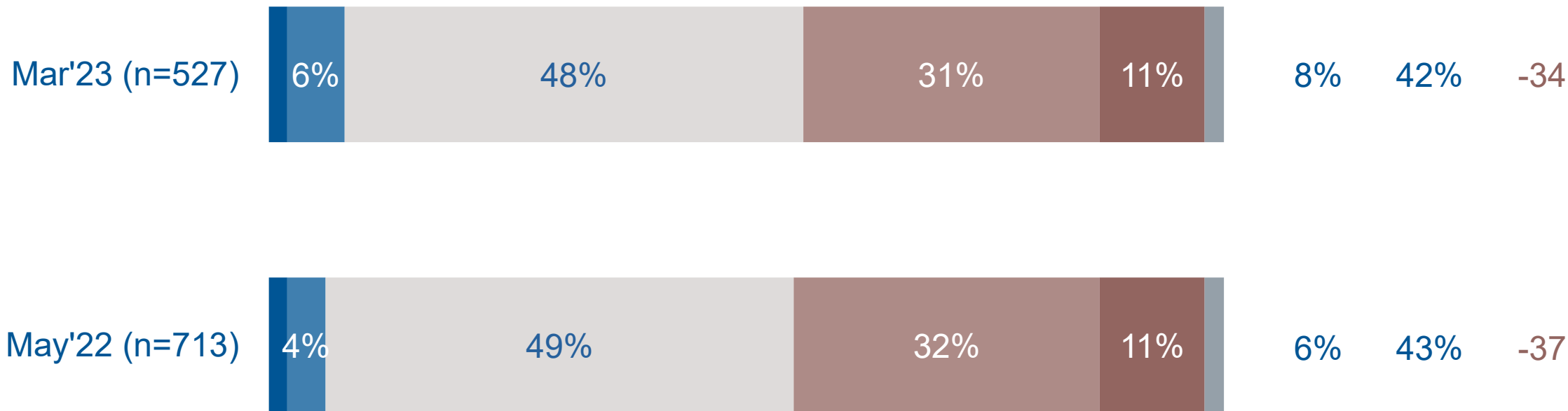
COVID Pandemic Impacts on Children’s Physical Health

Tracking

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say the physical health of your child / children is ...

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Prefer not to say

Better **Worse** **NET**



Base: Have children at home | NET: Better minus worse



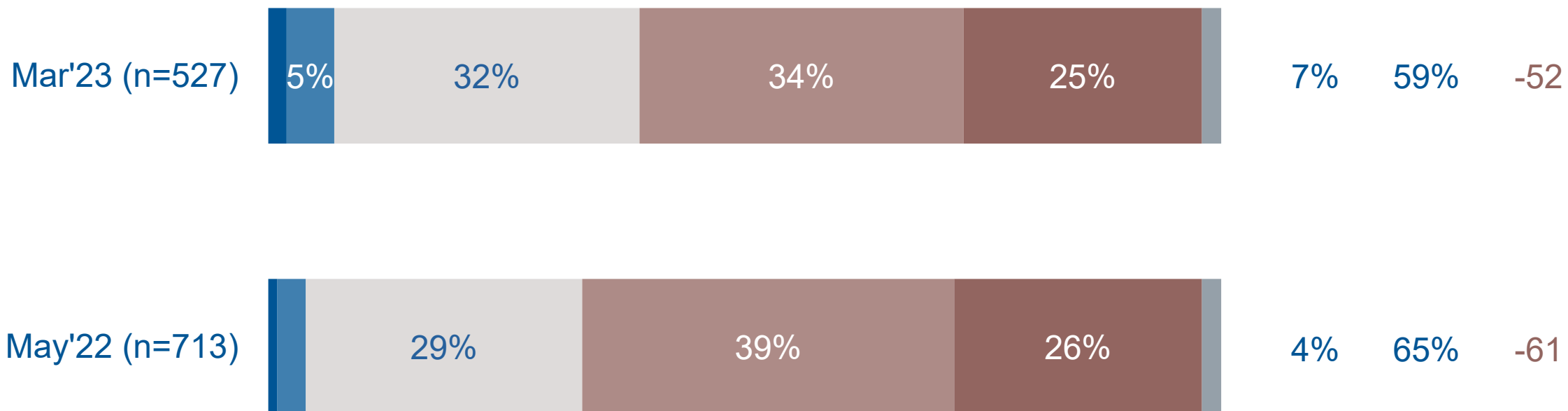
COVID Pandemic Impacts on Children's Mental Health

Tracking

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say the mental health of your child / children is ...

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Prefer not to say

Better **Worse** **NET**



Base: Have children at home | NET: Better minus worse

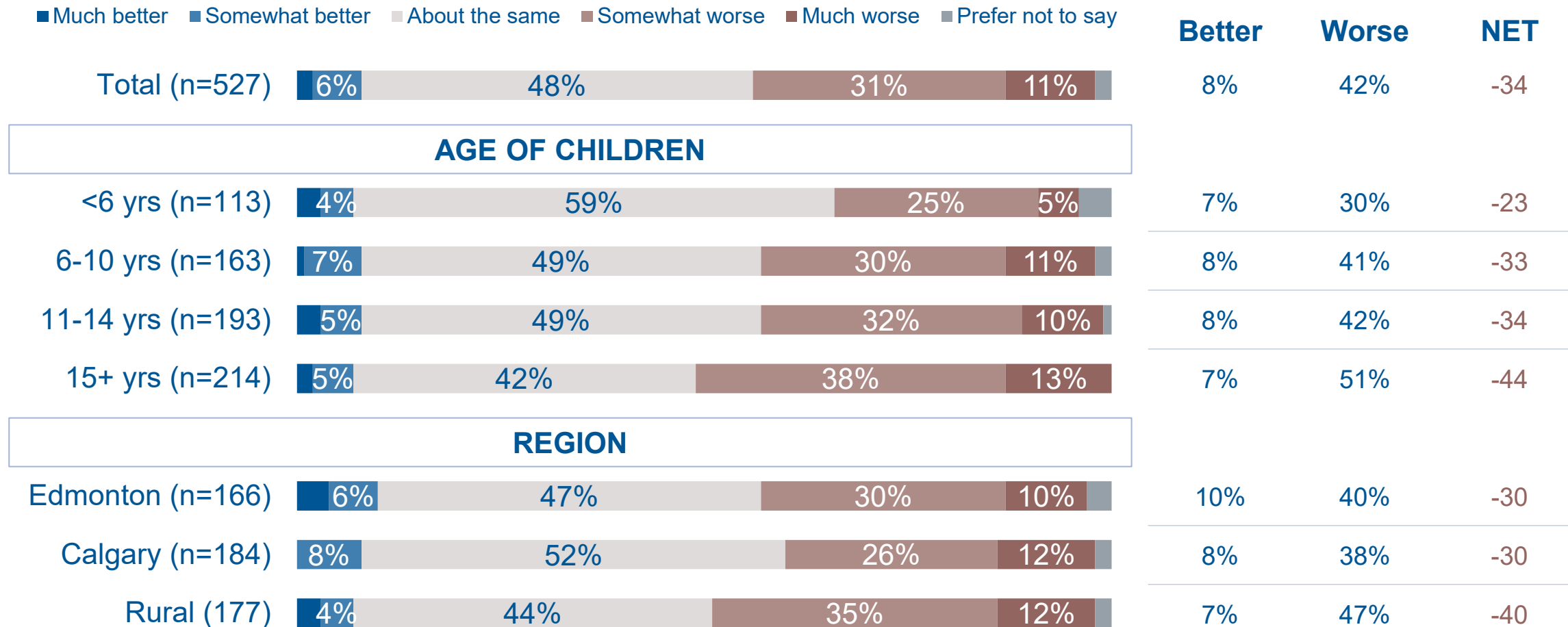


COVID Pandemic Impacts on Children’s Physical Health

By Age of Children and Region

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say the physical health of your child / children is ...

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Prefer not to say



Base: Have children at home | NET: Better minus worse

>> Sentiment: Reasons for Children's Worsened Physical Health

Why do you say that your children's physical health is worse now than before the pandemic?



42% say that their child or children's physical health is worse today

Base: Say children's physical health is worse today | Open-ended question: Voluntarily offered a comment

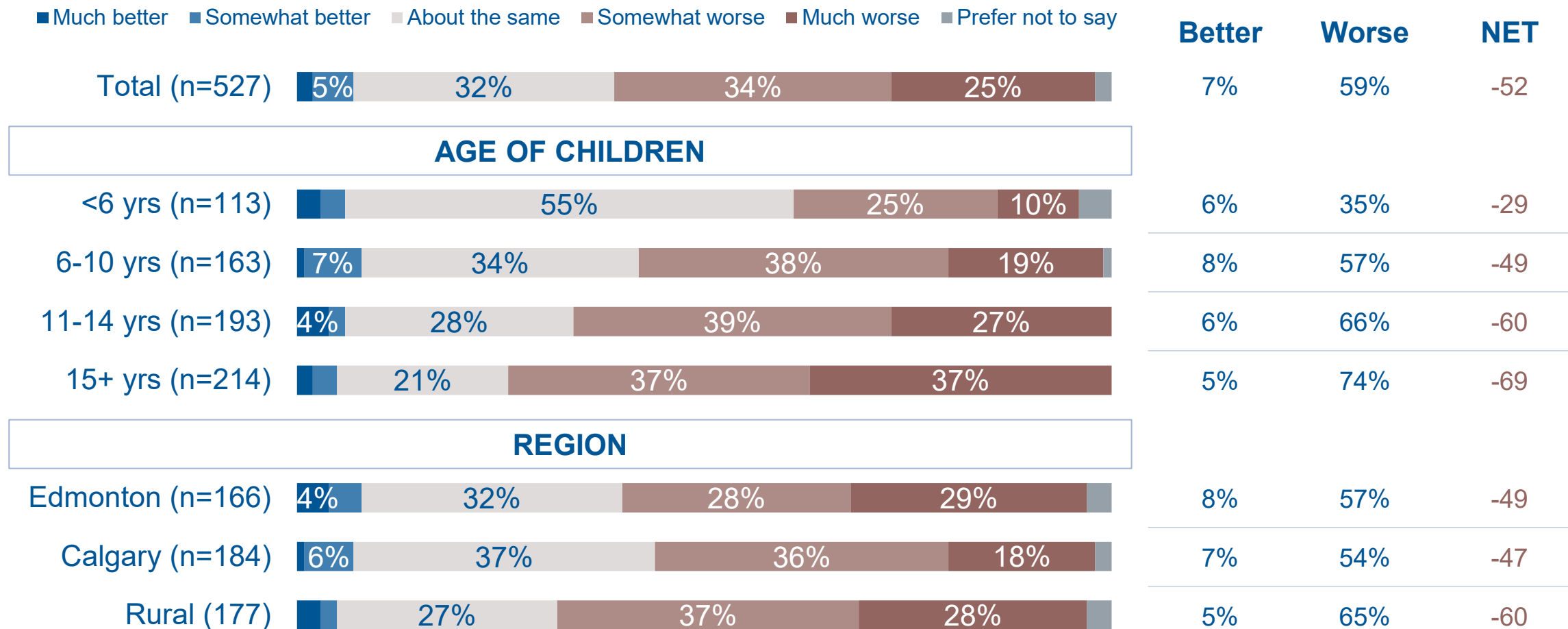


COVID Pandemic Impacts on Children's Mental Health

By Age of Children and Region

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say the mental health of your child / children is ...

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Prefer not to say



Base: Have children at home | NET: Better minus worse

Pediatric Mental Health



Pediatric Mental Health in Alberta

A Lingering and Persistent Epidemic

Fully 61% of Alberta parents interviewed report that at least one of their children are currently suffering from/diagnosed with a mental health concern. This incidence of pediatric mental health issues is statistically unchanged since the Spring of 2022 (58%).

- Incidence of pediatric mental health issues rises directly with age – fully 67% of parents with kids under the age of 6 report no concerns, compared to only 24% among those with children aged 15+

Chief among the issues noted are anxiety and panic disorders (36%), followed by ADHD (31%), depression (18%), and learning disorders (15%).

- Anxiety and depression increase directly with age, along with incidence of self-harm, substance abuse and gender identity concerns



Pediatric Mental Health in Alberta

A Lingering and Persistent Epidemic ... continued

Among those who report a child experiencing mental health concerns, six-in-ten (60%) report receiving or seeking care for the issue. Psychologists (41%) and family physicians (40%) and mental health counsellors/therapists (35%) are the most commonly mentioned care-givers, followed by pediatricians, and psychiatrists. Roughly one-in-ten parents report their child is on a waiting list for a referral to a therapist (12%) or a specialist physician (10%). These wait lists have eased somewhat over the past year.

The pandemic has amplified levels of mental health concerns among Alberta's children. Almost one-third (32%) report their child's concern pre-dated COVID (down 7-points from last year), while nearly four-in-ten (37%) say the concerns emerged after March 2020 (up 9-points), and 28% say issues arose both before and after the start of the pandemic.



Pediatric Mental Health in Alberta

Evaluating Pediatric Mental Health Services in Alberta

Parents with kids experiencing mental health concerns have a rather harsh appraisal for the resources available to them and their children. Fully 71% characterize the overall quality of Alberta's health care system in meeting their child's needs as "Bad", with over four-in-ten (43%) saying "Very bad". This compares to 17% who feel the system is at least doing a "Good job" helping with their child's mental health concerns.

Overall measures on this indicator are largely unchanged, year over year, although negative appraisals are now slightly more intense than May 2022.

Among the poorest rated attributes of care is the ease of navigating the system for mental health supports (66% negative), along with supports for parents/guardians of kids experiencing mental health concerns (63% negative), timely referrals to specialists and access to appointments once referred. Although still largely negative, there has been some modest improvement in parent ratings for access to therapists/counselors for their kids.



Pediatric Mental Health in Alberta

Evaluating Pediatric Mental Health Services in Alberta ... continued

Almost one-half (49%) of parents also do not believe the system is doing a good job with regard to collaboration and coordination of mental health professionals (49% rate as “Bad”), and 53% feel the coverage of care through insurance is lacking.

- When it comes to system coverage of the mental health supports children are receiving, one-quarter (25%) of parents report their kid’s care is publicly funded, 31% funded through private insurance and 43% a combination of public/private funding

When it comes to accessing on-line resources for pediatric mental health needs, parents remain divided – 35% say the system does a “Good job” vs. 36% “Bad job”, and 29% are unsure.

Although there has been a modest improvement in ratings over the past year, a majority of parents with kids suffering with mental health concerns (53%) feel the care for pediatric mental health in Alberta has declined in the past three years (26% feel it is “Much worse”).



Pediatric Mental Health in Alberta

Parent Feedback on Pediatric Mental Health Challenges & Priorities

According to their open-ended responses, the most significant challenges identified by parents of kids with mental health concerns is timeliness in the system/wait times (cited by 27%, up 6-points from last year), along with the lack of availability/access to health care professionals (23%), costs not covered by the system (22%) and quality-of-care concerns in a stretched system (22%).

Other concerns include the lack of programs and support, mentions specifically about the government and its priorities and navigational issues with the health care system (although this final concern has seen a notable drop in the past year – down 7 percentage-points).

When parents with kids suffering from mental health concerns are asked (open-ended) for their priorities for pediatric mental health in Alberta, over one-quarter (28%) say there needs to be more availability/access to care/professionals, followed by reducing financial barriers to care (16%), and timelier access (15%).

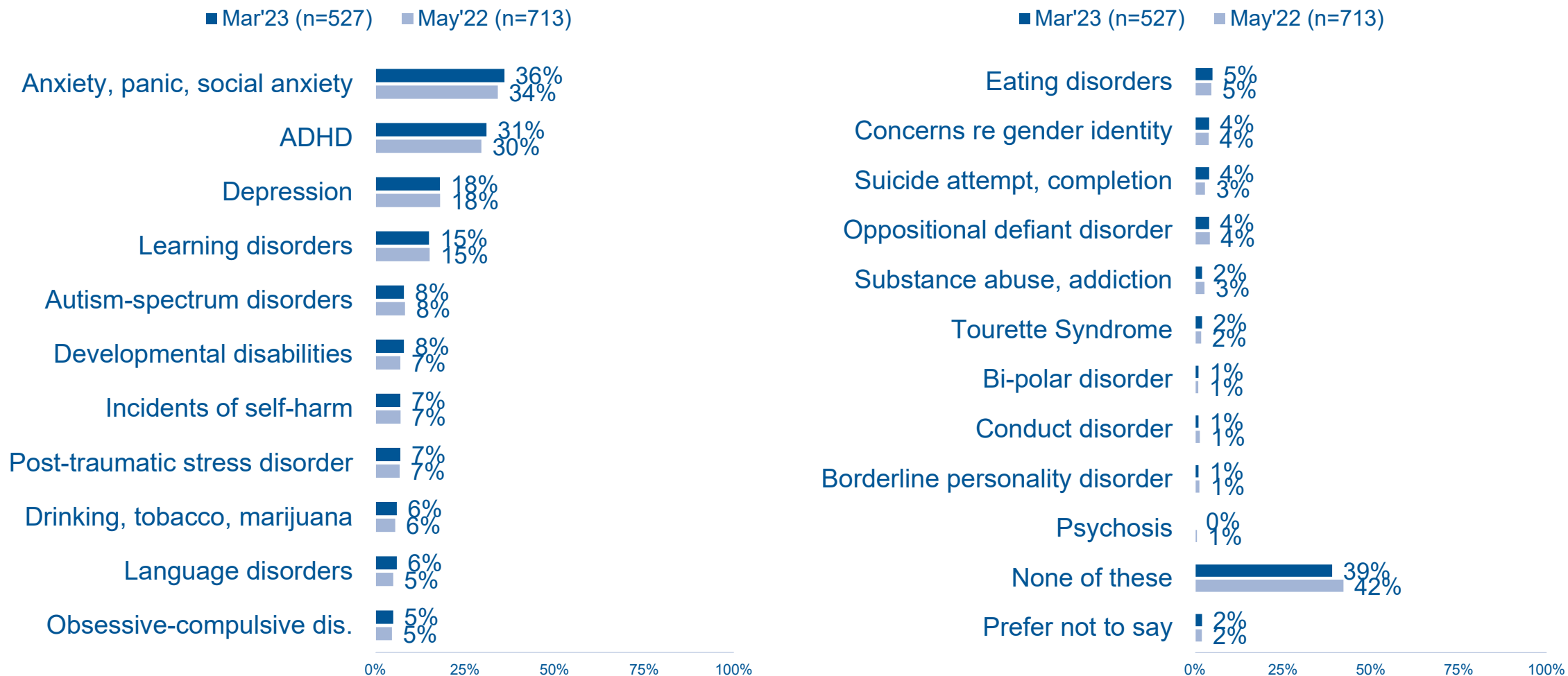
Other responses include: greater coverage of psychiatric care under system coverage, more staffing, more proactive diagnosis, school supports and greater supports for parents.



Children's Mental Health Profile

Tracking

Do any of the children in your care suffer from or have a diagnosis of any of the following?



Base: All respondents with children | MULTIPLE MENTIONS



Children's Mental Health Profile

By Age of Children

Do any of the children in your care suffer from or have a diagnosis of any of the following?

	Age of Children (Years)						Age of Children (Years)				
	Total (n=527)	<6 (n=113)	6-10 (n=163)	11-14 (n=193)	15+ (n=214)		Total (n=527)	<6 (n=113)	6-10 (n=163)	11-14 (n=193)	15+ (n=214)
Anxiety, panic	36%	16%	34%	46%	52%	Eating disorders	5%	1%	2%	3%	8%
ADHD	31%	14%	36%	35%	37%	Gender identity conc.	4%	2%	3%	4%	10%
Depression	18%	3%	11%	19%	35%	Suicidal	4%	0%	1%	3%	8%
Learning disorders	15%	5%	16%	19%	18%	ODD	4%	2%	5%	6%	4%
Autism-spectrum	8%	3%	9%	11%	10%	Substance addiction	2%	0%	2%	1%	5%
Develop. disabilities	8%	5%	10%	10%	10%	Tourette syndrome	2%	1%	1%	2%	4%
Self harm	7%	1%	4%	7%	14%	Bi-polar disorder	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%
PTSD	7%	2%	7%	6%	11%	Conduct disorder	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Drinking, marijuana ..	6%	1%	2%	5%	13%	Borderline person.	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Language disorders	6%	6%	10%	7%	3%	None of these	39%	67%	37%	33%	24%
OCD	5%	3%	5%	8%	9%	Prefer not to say	2%	4%	1%	1%	1%

Base: All respondents with children | MULTIPLE MENTIONS



Children's Mental Health Profile

By Region

Do any of the children in your care suffer from or have a diagnosis of any of the following?

	Region					Region			
	Total (n=527)	Calgary (n=184)	Edmonton (n=166)	Rural (n=177)		Total (n=527)	Calgary (n=184)	Edmonton (n=166)	Rural (n=177)
Anxiety, panic	36%	30%	37%	41%	Eating disorders	5%	6%	4%	4%
ADHD	31%	33%	28%	32%	Gender identity conc.	4%	4%	6%	4%
Depression	18%	15%	18%	22%	Suicidal	4%	6%	4%	1%
Learning disorders	15%	14%	16%	14%	ODD	4%	1%	5%	5%
Autism-spectrum	8%	10%	8%	7%	Substance addiction	2%	2%	1%	3%
Develop. disabilities	8%	7%	10%	7%	Tourette syndrome	2%	2%	3%	2%
Self harm	7%	7%	8%	6%	Bi-polar disorder	1%	1%	1%	1%
PTSD	7%	7%	9%	5%	Conduct disorder	1%	1%	1%	0%
Drinking, marijuana ..	6%	4%	8%	6%	Borderline person.	1%	1%	1%	0%
Language disorders	6%	5%	6%	6%	None of these	39%	41%	37%	39%
OCD	5%	5%	8%	4%	Prefer not to say	2%	1%	4%	2%

Base: All respondents with children | MULTIPLE MENTIONS

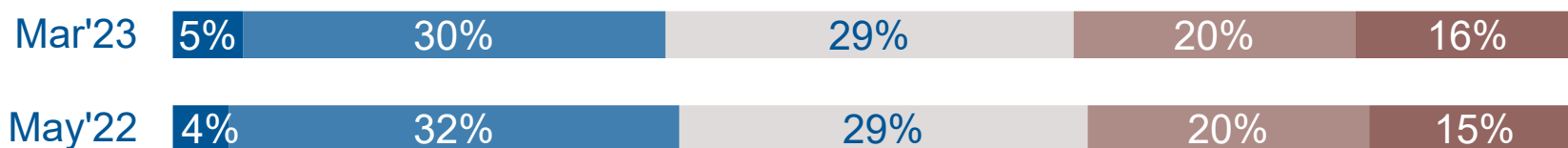


Children’s Mental Health Care – Attributes of Care Ratings Tracking

When it comes to accessing mental health care for your child / children today, how would you rate each of the following according to your experience?

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Unsure or NA ■ Bad ■ Very bad

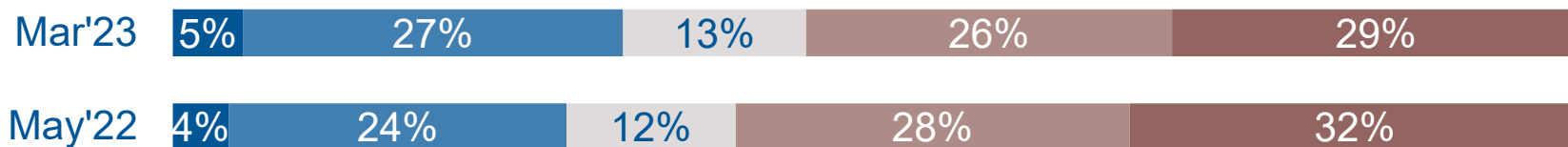
Finding on-line mental health resources



Total “Good” **Total “Bad”** **NET “Good”**

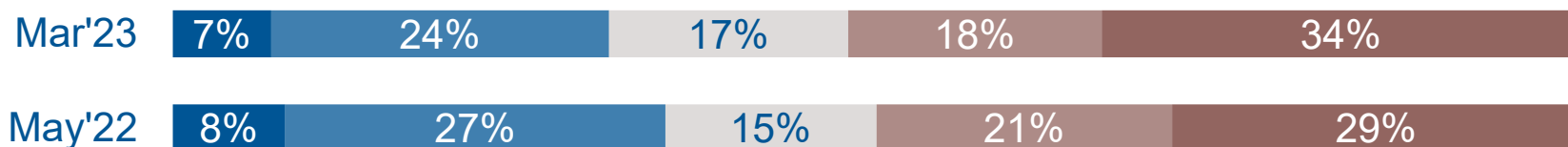
35% 36% -1
36% 35% +1

Access to therapists/counselors and other supportive care



32% 55% -23
28% 60% -32

Coverage of the costs of care through insurance



31% 52% -21
35% 50% -15

Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue – May'22 (n=398), Mar'23 (n=309) | NET “Good”: Good minus bad



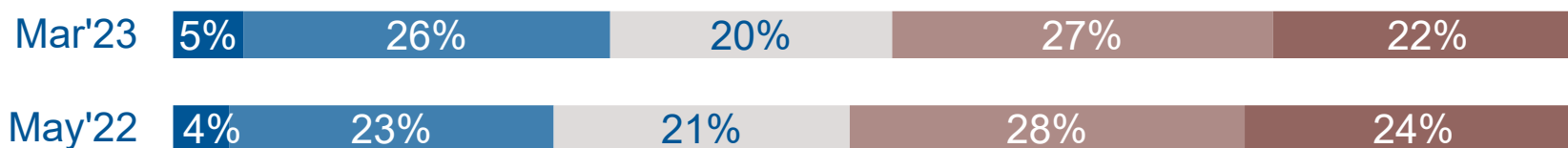
Children’s Mental Health Care – Attributes of Care Ratings

Tracking ... continued

When it comes to accessing mental health care for your child / children today, how would you rate each of the following according to your experience?

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Unsure or NA ■ Bad ■ Very bad

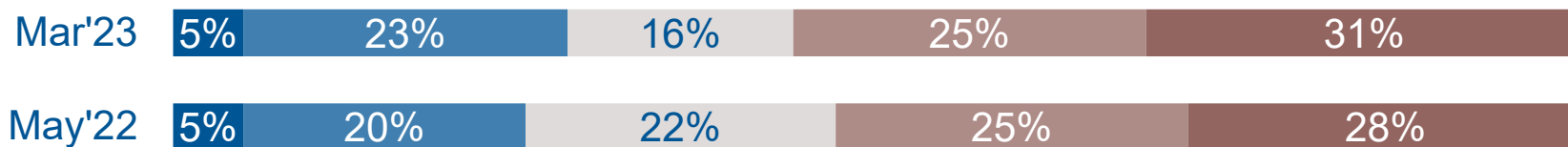
Collaboration/coordination between health professionals



Total “Good” Total “Bad” NET “Good”

31% 49% -18
27% 52% -25

Access to regular follow-up mental health care



28% 56% -28
25% 53% -28

Timely access to appointments with specialists (once referrals accepted)



26% 57% -31
20% 59% -39

Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue – May’22 (n=398), Mar’23 (n=309) | NET “Good”: Good minus bad



Children’s Mental Health Care – Attributes of Care Ratings

Tracking ... continued

When it comes to accessing mental health care for your child / children today, how would you rate each of the following according to your experience?

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Unsure or NA ■ Bad ■ Very bad

Timely referrals to specialists



Total “Good” Total “Bad” NET “Good”

25% 58% -33
18% 61% -43

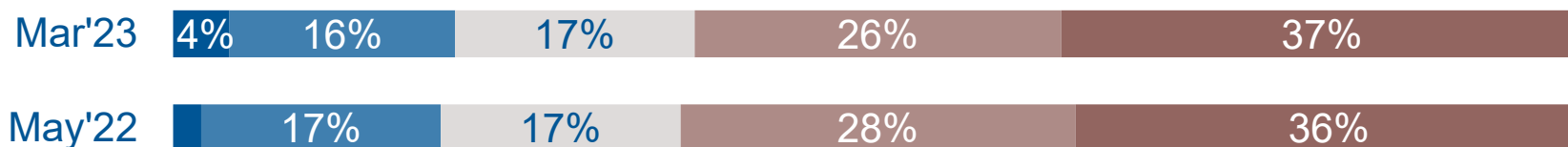
Ease of accessing initial care (if after March 2020)



23% 54% -31

May'22 Not trackable – added in 2023

Supports for you as a parent/guardian of child with mental health needs



20% 63% -43
19% 64% -45

Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue – May'22 (n=398), Mar'23 (n=309) | NET “Good”: Good minus bad



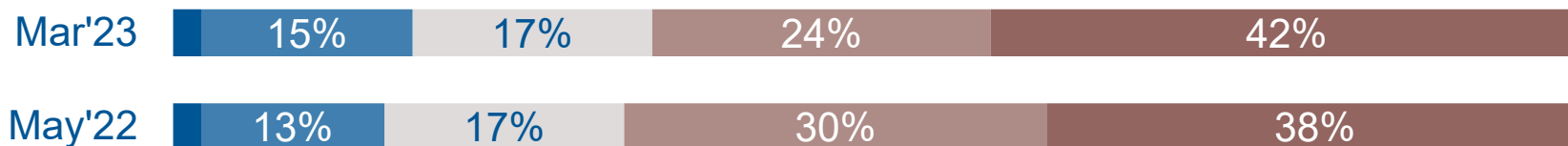
Children’s Mental Health Care – Attributes of Care Ratings

Tracking ... continued

When it comes to accessing mental health care for your child / children today, how would you rate each of the following according to your experience?

■ Very good ■ Good ■ Unsure or NA ■ Bad ■ Very bad

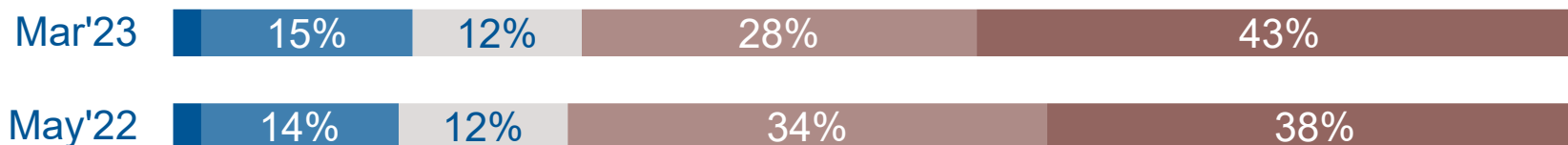
Ease of navigating different mental health supports/care



**Total
“Good”** **Total
“Bad”** **NET
“Good”**

17% 66% -49
15% 68% -53

Overall quality of Alberta’s health care system in meeting your child’s needs



17% 71% -54
16% 72% -56

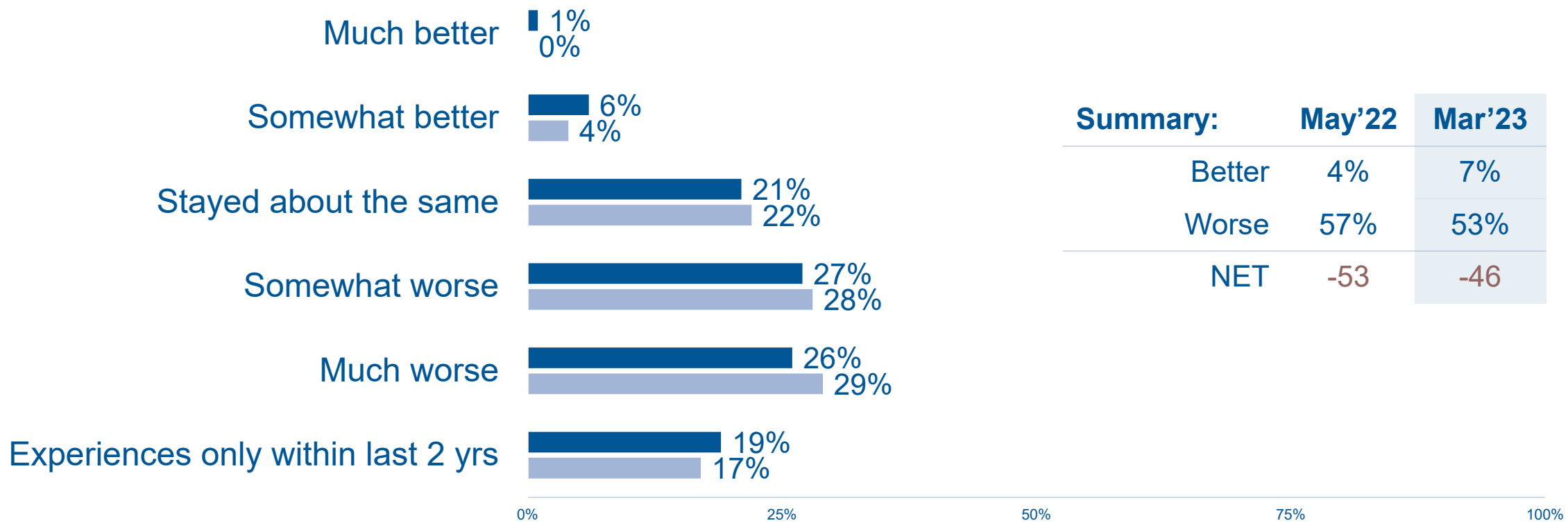
Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue – May’22 (n=398), Mar’23 (n=309) | NET “Good”: Good minus bad



Perceived Changes in Children’s Mental Health Supports Tracking

Based upon your experiences or impressions, compared to three years ago, do you think mental health care and supports for children in Alberta is better, worse or about the same as it was?

■ Mar'23 (n=309) ■ May'22 (n=398)



Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue | NET: Better minus worse

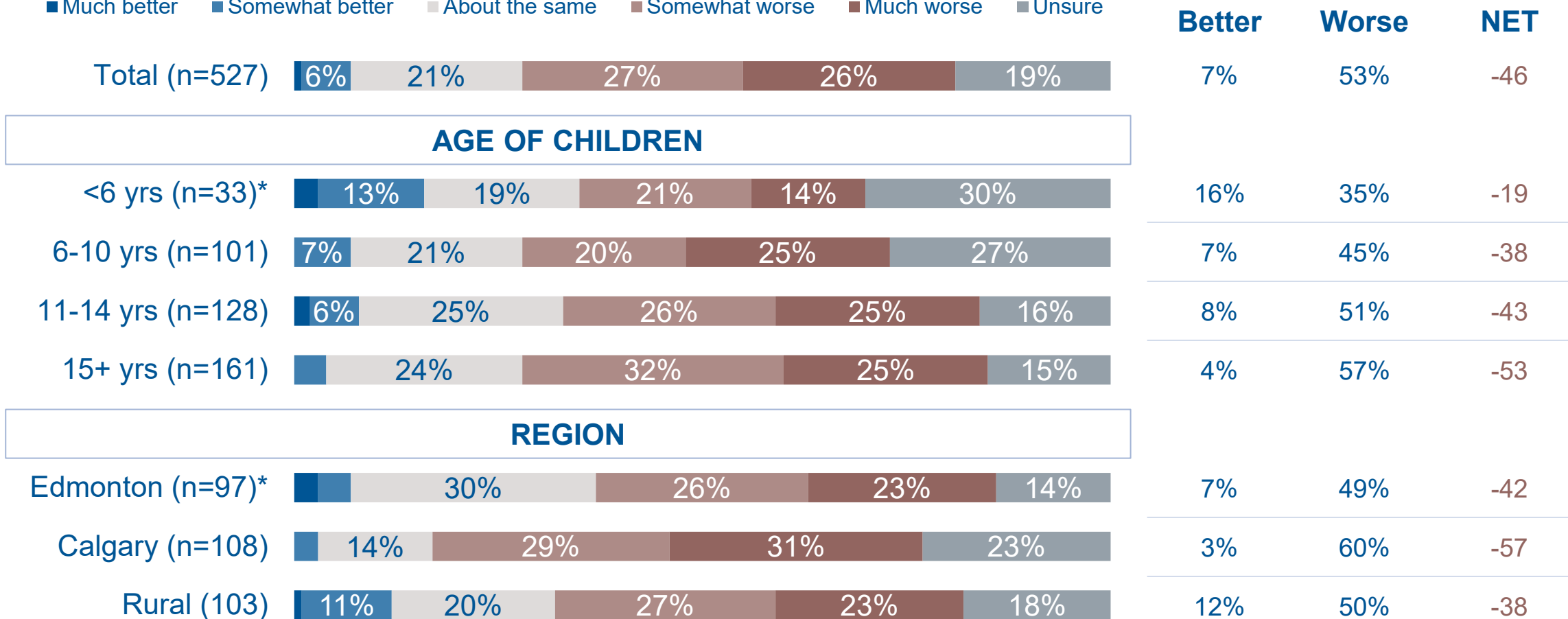


Perceived Changes in Children’s Mental Health Supports

By Age of Children and Region

Based upon your experiences or impressions, compared to two years ago, do you think mental health care and supports for children in Alberta is better, worse or about the same as it was?

■ Much better ■ Somewhat better ■ About the same ■ Somewhat worse ■ Much worse ■ Unsure



Base: Have children at home | NET: Better minus worse | *Caution: Small base size

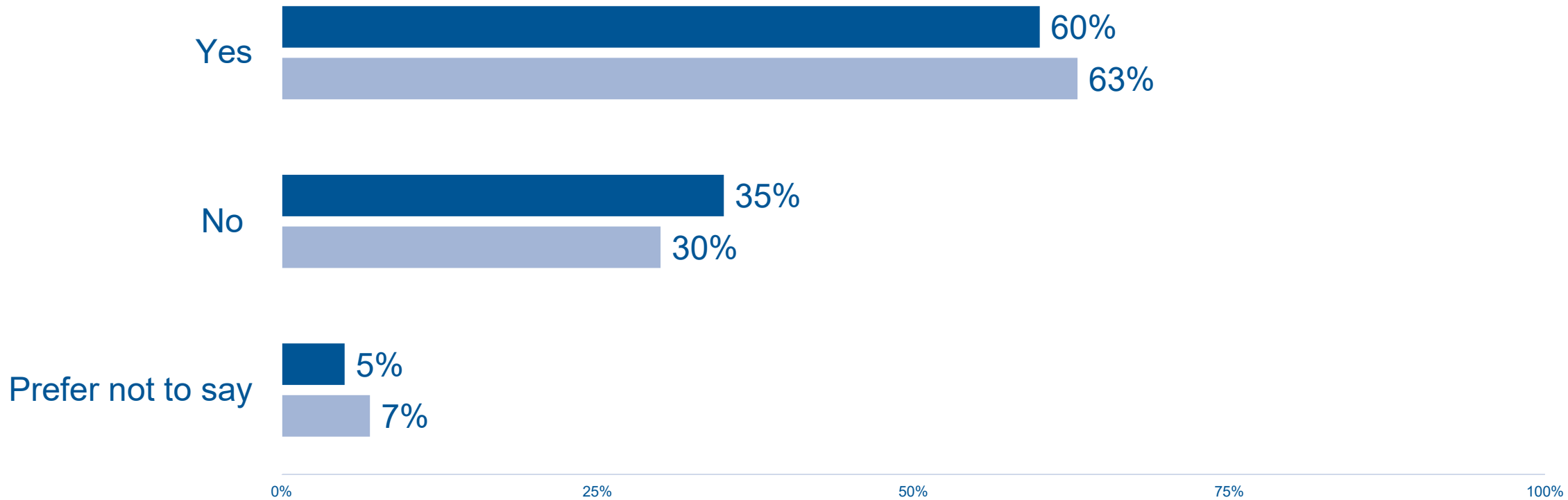


Children Receiving or Seeking Mental Health Supports

Tracking

Is your child / children currently receiving or are you seeking any medical or counselling support for their mental health concerns?

■ Mar'23 (n=309) ■ May'22 (n=398)



Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue



Types of Mental Health Supports Received

Tracking

Which of the following mental health supports is your child/children receiving for their concerns?

■ Mar'23 (n=186) ■ May'22 (n=251)



Base: Child is seeking mental health support | MULTIPLE MENTIONS | *Note: Added in 2023

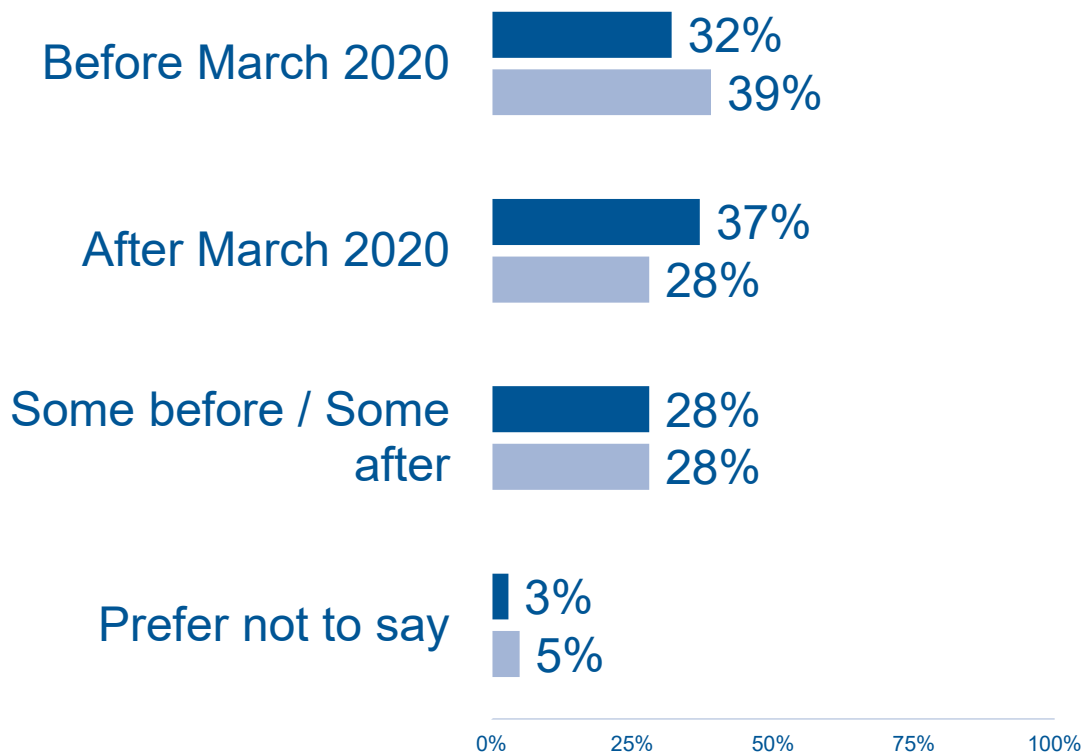


Diagnosis Timeline of Children's Mental Health Issues

By Age of Children

Did your child/children's mental health issues arise or get diagnosed prior to or after March 2020?

■ Mar'23 (n=309) ■ May'22 (n=398)



2023: Age of Children (Years)

<6 (n=33)*	6-10 (n=101)	11-14 (n=128)	15+ (n=161)
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Before March 2020	32%	37%	37%	26%
After March 2020	53%	39%	28%	36%
Some before / Some after	12%	21%	32%	33%
Prefer not to say	3%	3%	4%	4%

Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue | *Caution: Small base size

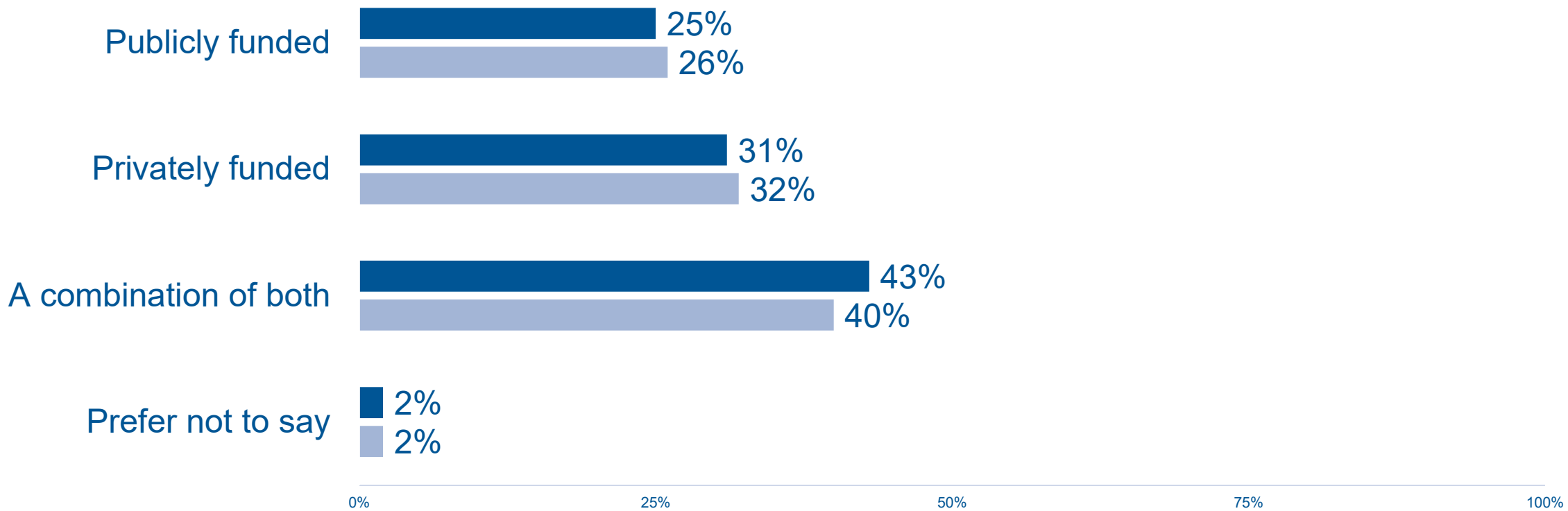


Types of Mental Health Supports Received

Tracking

Are the mental health services you've accessed or sought for your child/children's concerns publicly funded, privately funded or a combination of both?

■ Mar'23 (n=167) ■ May'22 (n=244)



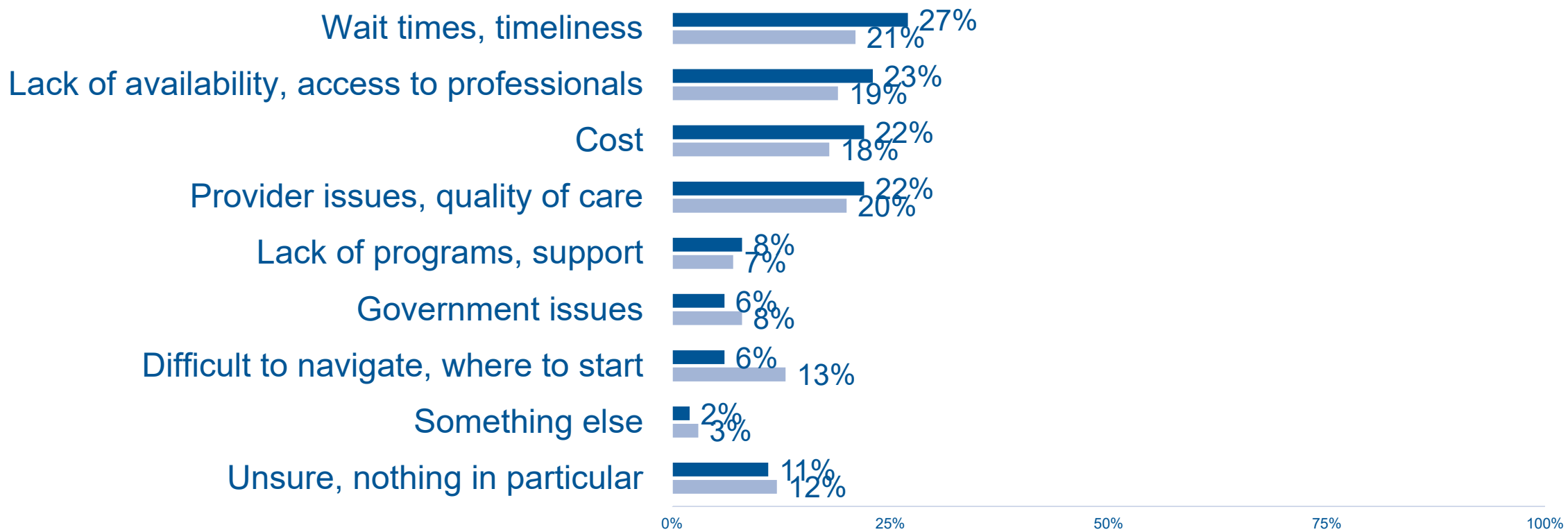
Base: Child is receiving mental health support



Sentiment: Challenges with Children’s Mental Health Care and Supports Tracking

What would you say are the most challenging things about getting care and supports for your child/children’s mental health needs in Alberta today?

■ Mar'23 (n=309) ■ May'22 (n=398)



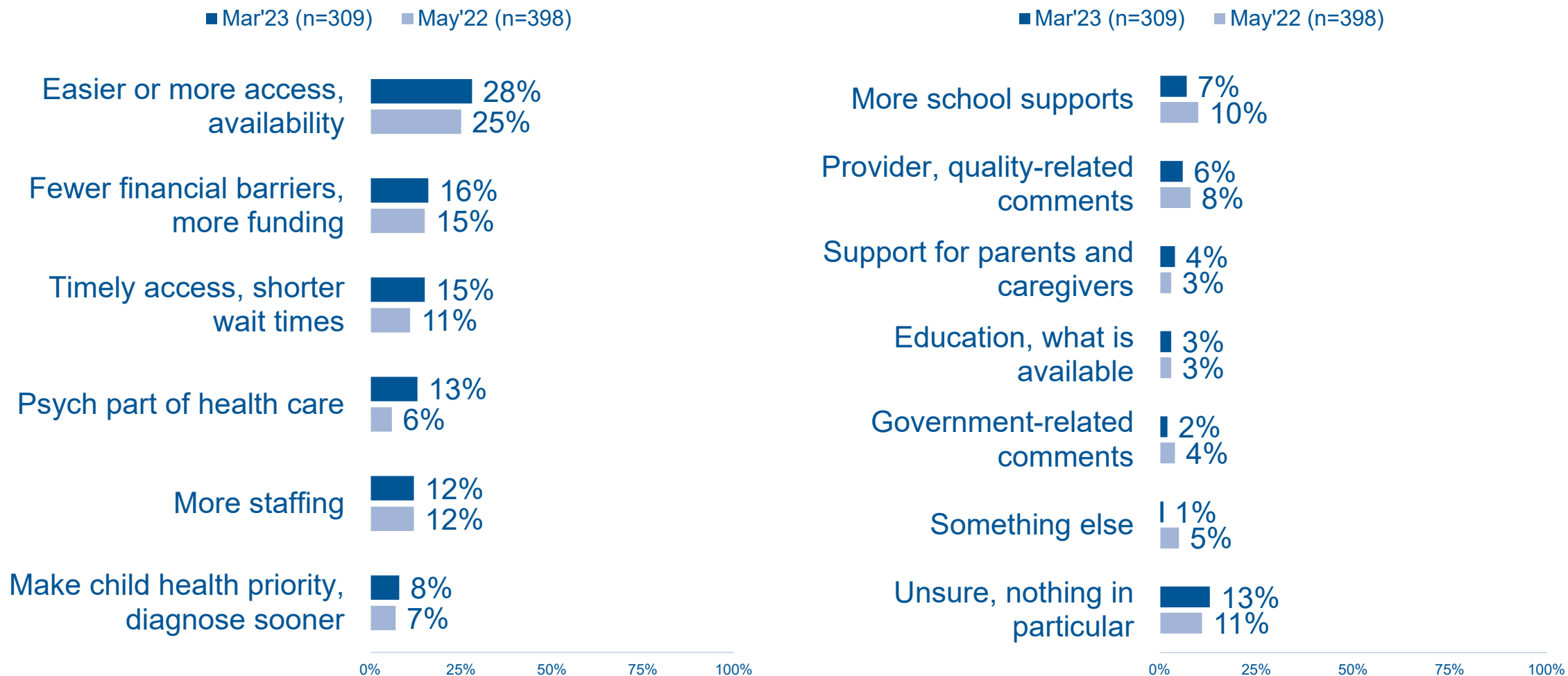
Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue | Open-ended question: Coded into common themes mentioned | MULTIPLE MENTIONS



Sentiment: Priorities for Children’s Mental Health in Alberta

Tracking

What are the most important priorities for Alberta’s health care system when it comes to improving care and supports for the mental health needs of children?



Base: Child has a diagnosed mental health issue | Open-ended question: Coded into common themes mentioned | MULTIPLE MENTIONS



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Your Voice Matters

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