Where Pride Meets the Prairies

2SLGBTQ+ Youth Community Needs Assessment for Grande Prairie, Alberta



Conducted by: *Northreach Society*
Funded by: *Women and Gender Equality Canada*
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Women and Gender Equality Canada
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Community Partners

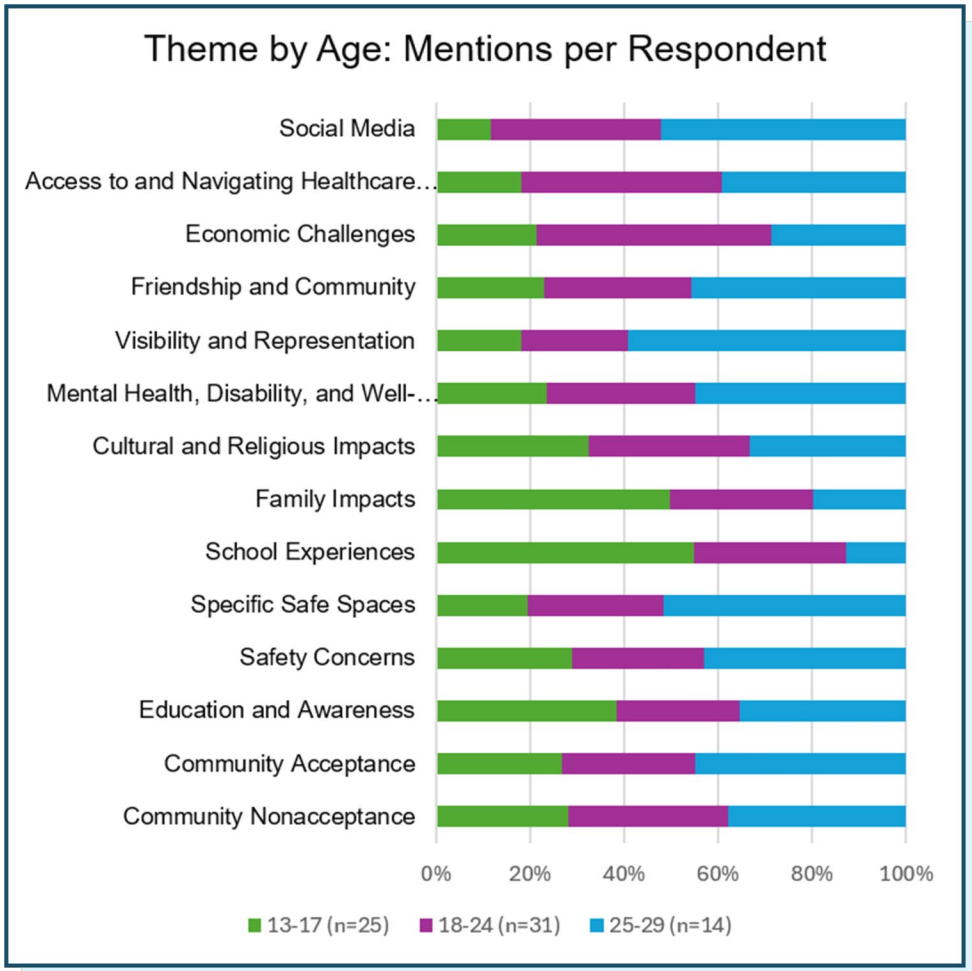
Kickstand Grande Prairie/Sunrise House, Grande Prairie Pride Society, GALAP, Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, Odyssey House, YMCA, John Howard Society and Tabono, Grande Prairie Family Education Society, Grande Prairie Public Library, Grande Prairie RCMP and Grande Prairie Police Services, Children and Family Services, Resource Centre for Suicide Prevention, Grande Prairie Public School Division, Peace Wapiti Public School Division, Grande Prairie Catholic School Division, St. Paul's United Church, Northwestern Polytechnic Student Association, Wapiti House, Western Alberta Regional Victim Serving Society Grande Prairie, Mountain Plains Community Services Society of the North, and Mental Health Therapists, who took the time to complete surveys, attend meetings, and respond to email requests.

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2SLGBTQ+ Youth Community Needs Assessment Executive Summary

Grande Prairie, Alberta | Conducted by Northreach Society | Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada | Sept 2026



Why This Matters

Grande Prairie is a young city with 20.8% children, 12.9% adolescents, 16.5% young adults (City of Grande Prairie, 2024), and its 2SLGBTQ+ youth have urgent, unmet needs. This needs assessment, led by youth, based in grounded theory and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), reveals a complex reality: community acceptance, friendship, hope, and resilience sustain youth, while gaps in belonging, safety, education, and resources create barriers that negatively impact their daily lives. Addressing these disparities will strengthen the entire community.

How We Listened

Youth collaborated to design, verify, and decide every theme in this report including how the data is presented.

Methods included:

40 points of youth engagement (focus groups, interviews, art-based submissions) + 50 valid survey responses (after removing fraudulent surveys) for 90 total points of engagement.

Service provider surveys (22 responses) to triangulate findings and 3 service provider meetings for toolkit creation input.

7 Working groups, 2 full day and 5 half day, where youth validated all data and themes *(including collaboration for online survey creation)*.

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Key Findings: The Youth Experience

All themes prioritized by youth, ordered by youth preference. Note: Theme totals reflect theme-level codes; mentions coded to sub-themes are reported at the sub-theme level and may sum to more than theme totals.

1. **Community Acceptance** (*678 mentions*)
   Visible allyship, Pride events, and safe spaces (e.g., Northreach's 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Group, Kickstand GP) are critical for wellbeing. Youth emphasize vocal allies (*100 mentions*) and listening to 2SLGBTQ+ voices (*100 mentions*).

2. **Friendship and Community** (*201 mentions*)
   Peer connections are vital lifelines for youth, offering safety, support, and access to resources. As one youth shares, *"I feel safest around other queer people."*

3. **Community Nonacceptance** (*684 mentions*)
   Youth face systemic barriers in Grande Prairie, including political conservative influence/oilfield/Northern culture (*176 mentions*), hatred, phobias, stigma, and fear (*166 mentions*), lack of compassion, empathy, and othering (*110 mentions),* lack of resources (*82 mentions*), double standards (*82 mentions*), and specific unsafe locations within Grande Prairie (*27 mentions*). Older youth (25–29) report the highest frequency (*11.14 mentions/respondent*).

4. **Safety Concerns** (*338 mentions*)
   Youth live in hypervigilance, citing assaults (*80 mentions*), unsafe spaces (*65 mentions*), and hiding identity (*51 mentions*). Social media (e.g., Grande Prairie Facebook groups) amplifies hostility.

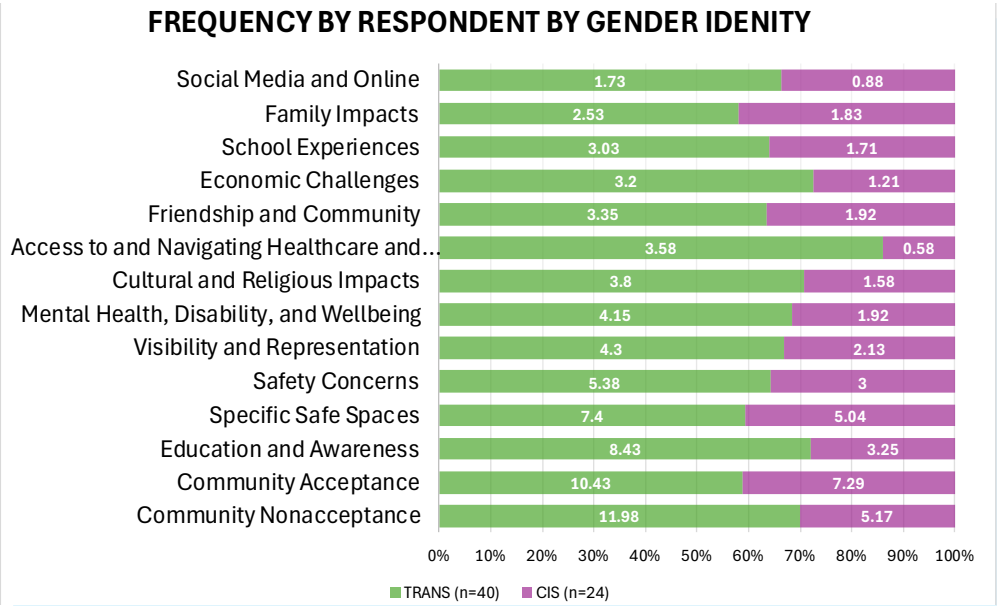
5. **Education and Awareness** (*477 mentions*)
   Misinformation (*166 mentions*) and lack of 2SLGBTQ+-specific knowledge (*103 mentions*) drive stigma. Youth call for school-based education, family workshops, and public awareness campaigns.

6. **Visibility and Representation** (*246 mentions*)
   Youth call for intentional visibility of resources, allies, and 2SLGBTQ+ people with a need for visibility (*173 mentions*). Performative allyship (*25 mentions)* was a concern; youth want action over symbols.

7. **Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing** (*241 theme-level mentions*)
   Youth face barriers to accessing and navigating healthcare and services (*171 mentions*) and economic instability (*167 mentions*). However, they also find strength in resiliency and hope (*34 mentions*) and the intersection of identity (*66 mentions*), while navigating their connection to Grande Prairie as home (*26 mentions*).

8. **Socialization** (Family, Religion, Culture) (*363 mentions*)
   Family (*160 mentions*) and cultural and religious impacts (*203 mentions*) shape youth experiences from rejection and shame to affirmation and healing. Youth highlight the need for culturally competent supports (e.g., Two-Spirit circles, Indigenous elders).

The Trans Experience in Grande Prairie



Transgender and gender-diverse youth discuss *every theme* more frequently than cisgender peers, revealing distinct and severe challenges:

- Medical underservice (e.g., no local gender-affirming care; referrals to Peace River or Edmonton).
- Minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and systemic marginalization.

Future research and programming must prioritize trans-specific, intersectional approaches.

What Youth Need You to Know

Priority Area	Action Items
Safety	Create a Community Safety Network; increase safe space visibility; advocate for inclusive policies.
Acceptance	Hold leaders accountable; promote visible allyship (e.g., ongoing Pride events, inclusive policies).
Education and Awareness	Advocate for inclusive school curricula; expand community workshops on 2SLGBTQ+ identities.
Visibility	Increase intentional visibility of resources; move beyond performative allyship.
Mental Health and Wellbeing	Improve access to affirming, intersectional supports; strengthen provider training.
Socialization	Develop family support programs; offer culturally appropriate resources.

A Call to Action

This assessment is a roadmap for change. By addressing these gaps, Grande Prairie can:

- Increase safety (address bullying, discrimination, nonacceptance).
- Save lives (expand mental health supports, suicide prevention, provide gender-affirming care).
- Build a stronger community where all youth thrive.

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Introduction

This 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Community Needs Assessment for Grande Prairie, Alberta, conducted by Northreach Society and funded through Women and Gender Equality Canada, is a critical step toward building community understanding and support for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the region. Youth, as defined in this assessment, span a broad age range from 13 to 29 years, with analysis focusing on three groups: 13–17, 18–24, and 25–29. Grande Prairie has a population of 70,385, with 20.8% children, 12.9% adolescents, and 16.5% young adults (City of Grande Prairie, 2024). Given the city's young demographic, addressing the needs identified in this assessment improves the quality of life for 2SLGBTQ+ community members, both now and in the future.

This is the first needs assessment of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie, offering a vital opportunity to generate much-needed knowledge for community members, service providers, parents, and stakeholders. With over a decade of experience supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including through our youth group, education program, Binder Buddies program with GALAP, and other partnerships with local organizations, Northreach Society is uniquely positioned to lead this work. The findings have the potential to drive



supportive, community-level change and ensure that the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth are recognized and addressed. Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth strengthens the community as a whole, fostering a more inclusive and thriving environment for everyone in Grande Prairie.

The needs assessment involved 90 points of data from youth over a 6-month period. Of these, 40 came from interviews, focus groups, and art-based submissions, while 50 came from verified surveys. The assessment also drew on 22 surveys from service providers, 7 youth working groups, and 3 service provider meetings. For further discussion on methods, see Appendix A.

Terms and Definitions

2SLGBTQ+

An umbrella term for a diverse group of people whose gender identities, gender expressions, or sexual orientations may include, but are not limited to, Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identities. The "+" acknowledges the evolving and inclusive nature of the community. The following gender identities and sexual orientations were explicitly stated by youth participants to describe themselves. This list is not a comprehensive list of all identities but covers those within this needs assessment. The use of 2SLGBTQ+ does not diminish the unique experiences of individuals with these specific identities.

Note on Usage

While this needs assessment uses 2SLGBTQ+ as an umbrella term for consistency, youth participants described themselves using a wide range of specific identities. This diversity demonstrates that the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Grande Prairie is not monolithic, and the use of an umbrella term does not diminish the unique challenges and needs of individuals with specific identities. Further research is warranted to explore these experiences through a more in-depth, identity-specific lens.

Gender Identities (As Stated by Youth)

- **Agender**: A lack of connection to gender or a neutral identity.
- **Cisgender**: A gender identity that aligns with the sex assigned at birth.
- **Genderfluid**: A gender identity that shifts or changes over time.
- **Gender Queer**: An identity that does not fit within traditional gender categories.
- **Intersex**: A term for individuals born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female.
- **Neutrois**: A neutral or null-gender identity, often associated with a desire for physical androgyny.
- **Nonbinary**: A gender identity that does not fit within the binary categories of man or woman.
- **Questioning/Unsure**: Individuals exploring or uncertain about their gender identity.
- **Transgender**: A gender identity where an individual's gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

- **Two-Spirit (2S)**: A culturally specific identity for some Indigenous peoples, encompassing spiritual, gender, sexual, and social roles beyond Western binary frameworks.

Sexual Orientations (As Stated by Youth)

- **Aromantic**: Little or no romantic attraction to others.
- **Asexual**: Little or no sexual attraction to others.
- **Bisexual**: Attraction to two or more genders.
- **Demisexual**: Sexual attraction only after forming a strong emotional connection.
- **Fluid**: A sexual orientation that is not fixed and may change over time.
- **Gay**: Attraction to people of the same gender.
- **Lesbian**: Attraction to women (often used by women, but also by non-binary individuals).
- **Pansexual**: Attraction to people regardless of gender.
- **Queer**: An umbrella term for sexual orientations that are not heterosexual.
- **Sapphic**: Attraction to women, often used by women and non-binary individuals

Research and Analytical Terms

- **Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)**: A required framework for this project, used to assess how identity factors (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation) intersect to shape experiences. This assessment primarily explored age, sexual orientation and gender, with race, ethnicity, and other factors noted as areas for future research (Government of Canada, 2024).
- **Grounded Theory**: A qualitative methodology where themes emerge from participant data rather than pre-existing hypotheses (Charmaz, 2014).
- **Knowledge Translation (KT)**: The process of sharing research findings in accessible, actionable ways to drive real-world change (McInroy et al., 2022).
- **Minority Stress**: A framework describing chronic stress faced by marginalized groups due to stigma and systemic barriers (Meyer, 2003).
- **Purposive Sampling with Snowballing**: A non-probability sampling method combining intentional selection of participants with continued network-based referrals.
- **Socialization**: The process of internalizing norms, values, and behaviors from families, cultures, religions, and communities.



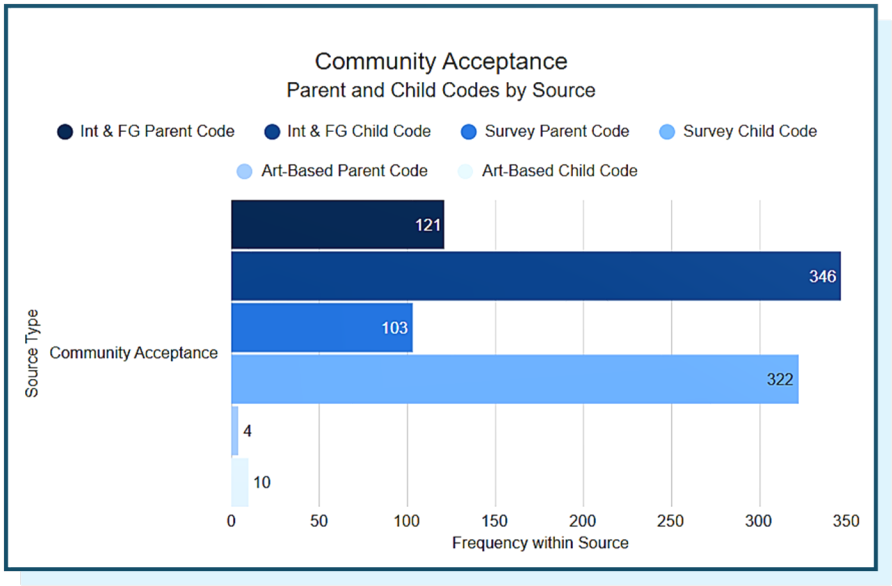
The Trans Experience in Grande Prairie

Disparities and the Limitations of the Umbrella

This needs assessment uses the umbrella term “2SLGBTQ+” to align with project requirements and examine shared experiences across sexual and gender diversities. However, the data reveals a critical pattern: trans respondents discuss every theme more frequently than their cisgender peers. This disparity underscores that while the umbrella term '2SLGBTQ+' is used here for alignment with project requirements, the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse youth are distinct and often more severe. Existing research indicates that despite an increase in transgender and gender diverse research, intersectional experiences based on geographical location, such as rural versus urban, are often lacking or overlooked (Ralston et al., 2025). Research also indicates it is difficult to capture transgender and gender diverse participation, as “transgender adolescents are a stigmatized and hidden population, which creates challenges for recruiting large sample sizes and maintaining the confidentiality and safety of these youth” (Salk et al., 2020, p. 3). However, this project’s participant demographics deviate from that recruitment challenge, as within this needs assessment there are more transgender and gender diverse participants than cisgender participants. One possible factor contributing to this higher participation may be the perceived urgency among Grande Prairie-based transgender and gender diverse youth to share their experiences during a period of heightened public and political discourse around gender identity, which Alberta is currently experiencing (Egale Canada, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

To fulfill the requirements of this needs assessment, transgender experiences are analyzed within the broader 2SLGBTQ+ framework. However, the data clearly demonstrates that transgender and gender diverse experiences in Grande Prairie warrant standalone research to fully understand the disproportionate impacts of minority stress (Meyer, 2003), gender minority stress and resilience (Testa et al., 2015), and systemic marginalization, such as being medically underserved as a community (Rose et al., 2025) and the significant mental health disparities experienced by transgender and gender diverse individuals (Ralston et al., 2025). This section addresses these disparities before examining the themes as a 2SLGBTQ+ collective. A key limitation of this report is the use of the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella, which may obscure critical differences between groups. Any future research should prioritize intersectional, transgender-specific analysis to better address the unique and compounded challenges faced by transgender youth in Grande Prairie.

Community Acceptance



Community acceptance is among the strongest recurring themes throughout the needs assessment, regardless of format, including focus groups, interviews, surveys, or art-based projects. This speaks to the profound impact community acceptance has on the 2SLGBTQ+ youth who participated in this process. Throughout the data collection, community acceptance emerged as a dominant parent code, coded 678 times. This theme can be further broken down into sub-themes, revealing its multifaceted nature: explicit affirmations of community acceptance (228 times), the role of established non-agency related groups (18 times), holding community leaders accountable (51 times), listening to 2SLGBTQ+ individuals (100 times), Pride events (90 times), and the presence of vocal allies (100 times).

What Does Community Acceptance Look Like for Youth?

For 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie, these themes and codes show up in their daily lives as a need to feel accepted and valued in this community. Youth talk about wanting the community to "*care about whether [they] can live or not*" and to "*care about the things your loved ones care about*." This means having a community that sees them, values their existence, and respects their identities. While this theme is prominent across all age groups, older youth (ages 25-29) emphasize it far more frequently (13.86 mentions per respondent, see Appendix A), particularly in discussions about *Pride Events* and *Holding Leaders Accountable*. This suggests that as youth grow older, their expectations for visibility, advocacy, and systemic change become more urgent, reflecting both cumulative experiences of exclusion and a deeper demand for structural support.

The presence of visible, vocal allies and the act of the community truly listening to 2SLGBTQ+ youth are two of the most prominent themes under community acceptance. Youth describe how visible and vocal allies create spaces where they feel safe, reduce the emotional labour of educating others and provide reassurance that someone will stand up for them if needed. These allies also show genuine interest in their identities, which makes a meaningful difference. For youth, community acceptance from allies is not just about visibility, but about listening, even when the conversations are challenging. This means correcting pronouns, addressing harmful behaviours and advocating for youth needs. When allies listen and act, youth express feeling heard and valued in ways that go beyond words.

Youth, while commenting on the positive experiences with vocal allies, also emphasize the need for an increase in allyship. To many, ally is an action, not a status. Being an ally means doing the work of understanding, deconstructing harmful narratives, and challenging the status quo.

We need more allies in other spaces that stand up against hate and end the ignorant narrative even when an LGBT person is not in the room. Allies or [people who] aren't necessarily part of the community need to join our fight to be considered real allies.

— Survey Response

Many youth emphasize how important Pride events are, not just for themselves but because they want to see "*straight allies show up*" and be visibly supportive. The impact of inclusivity in places like shopping centres, stores, churches, community centres, and the library is also clear. According to the youth, when these spaces display pride flags and welcoming signs, it makes a difference. These gestures, though small, build a sense of safety and inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie.

Youth also describe how interconnected everything feels in this Northern community. The way people and places show up has real effects on their lives.

I feel like with Grande Prairie, the culture is kind of like, where everybody is their unique self, but we're all kind of united in a way, we all live here, we all use the same services, and we all support each other. I've felt a lot of support from strangers, no matter what I look like or who I am, I felt that, like, where everybody just feels connected.

— Interview Response

Many youth, through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, highlight the importance of the current youth spaces in Grande Prairie. They especially value the 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Group hosted by Northreach Society, the drop-in space at Kickstand GP, the free Teen Pride Dance hosted by the Pride Society, Grande Prairie Live Theatre, and the Grande Prairie Public Library, to name a few. As one youth shares, *"being in queer youth group, these have helped me so much. Having access to the teen dance where drag performers come and perform, often they will share a story after their performance."*

Youth also recognize where Grande Prairie is creating spaces that reflect genuine community acceptance. They point to businesses like Card's Café, Wonderland Games, CULTure, and Second Chance Reads, again, to name a few, which go beyond displaying a pride flag. These spaces actively show support for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals by curating environments where youth feel safe and know staff would stand against discriminatory behaviour. Youth express that this kind of welcoming goes deeper than symbols; it is about creating spaces where they truly belong.



Community Board at Wonderland Games, taken by Participant

I went to [redacted place in Grande Prairie], and they were really, really chill. I like that place. They were really inclusive with, like, pride flags everywhere, there are multiple people who have, like, colored hair, people like me and I really feel that there's no judgment. You walk in. There are no odd looks and something, they see you and they see that you're a person, like, come in, that's really sweet. And that's all that you could ask for as a queer person.

— Interview Response (edited for clarity)

In addition to inclusive places and organizations, youth describe how natural friend groups and organically formed 2SLGBTQ+ groups develop within Grande Prairie. These groups are often volunteer led by community members and provide peer support, fostering connection and mutual aid. While these organically occurring groups contribute to a sense of belonging, they are specifically coded under community acceptance in this assessment because they also function as critical resources for youth, especially those who are new to the area or have not yet engaged with formal supports.

Youth also stress the importance of holding community leaders accountable as a key component of community acceptance. This includes government officials at all levels, leaders of community agencies, 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, workplaces and schools. For youth, accountability is not just about critique but about creating space for actionable change. It is about approaching this with a forward-looking mindset, believing that when leaders are held accountable and youth are given the platform to do so, real progress can be made. This distinction is important as it reflects youth's expectation that accountability will lead to tangible improvements in community acceptance.

Local organizations and leaders could better advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ youth by creating more inclusive programs, hosting awareness events, and publicly supporting 2SLGBTQ+ rights. Changes that would make

me feel more visible and supported include safe spaces for youth, representation in community initiatives, education about diverse identities, and leaders openly promoting acceptance and inclusion.

— Survey Response

What Service Providers Are Saying

Community Acceptance is the second most discussed theme among service providers in the 2SLGBTQ+ Service Provider Community Needs Assessment Survey. Their responses closely align with youth perspectives, particularly around the importance of active inclusion and the need for spaces that offer both safety and support. Service providers stress that acceptance must be demonstrated through visible actions, such as creating environments where youth feel genuinely welcomed and affirmed.

Providers also highlight the value of visible positive role models and community members who can inspire and validate youth experiences. They recognize the efforts of local organizations in Grande Prairie that are using their influence to create more supportive spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. While providers acknowledge ongoing gaps in services, they note the progress being made to expand safe spaces and improve access to resources for youth in the community.

I find that there are a lot more community resources being created to specifically help this demographic. There is a lot more support available to youth. More safe spaces are developing, and more kids are feeling like they can express themselves freely.

— Service Provider Response

Where service providers' insights differ from those of youth was in their broader view of community partnerships and collaboration. Providers offer a unique perspective on how agencies work together to deliver programming for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, as well as the immediate positive impacts they observe through client feedback. They also share firsthand accounts of youth engaging in self-advocacy and leadership when given the space and safety to do so.

These insights provide a deeper understanding of community acceptance from the perspective of those actively working to create it. Service providers often witness the outcomes of their efforts, such as increased youth participation in programming and the use of safe spaces, offering a view that youth participants themselves may not always see. Their observations highlight a meaningful connection that when youth feel accepted by their community, they are more likely to engage with the programs and safe spaces designed for them. This perspective underscores the importance of continued collaboration and the creation of environments where youth feel empowered to participate and advocate for their needs.

The 2SLGBTQ+ youth accessing services are engaged, consistent, and committed to their mental health journeys. They are appreciative of having safe spaces and adults to connect with.

— Service Provider Response

Literature Spotlight: Acceptance

Community acceptance stands out as a major theme in this Grande Prairie-based needs assessment, as youth consistently highlight it across all forms of data gathering, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and art-based projects. However, it is important to recognize that this idea of community acceptance and its counterpart, unacceptance (to be discussed later), is not unique to Grande Prairie.

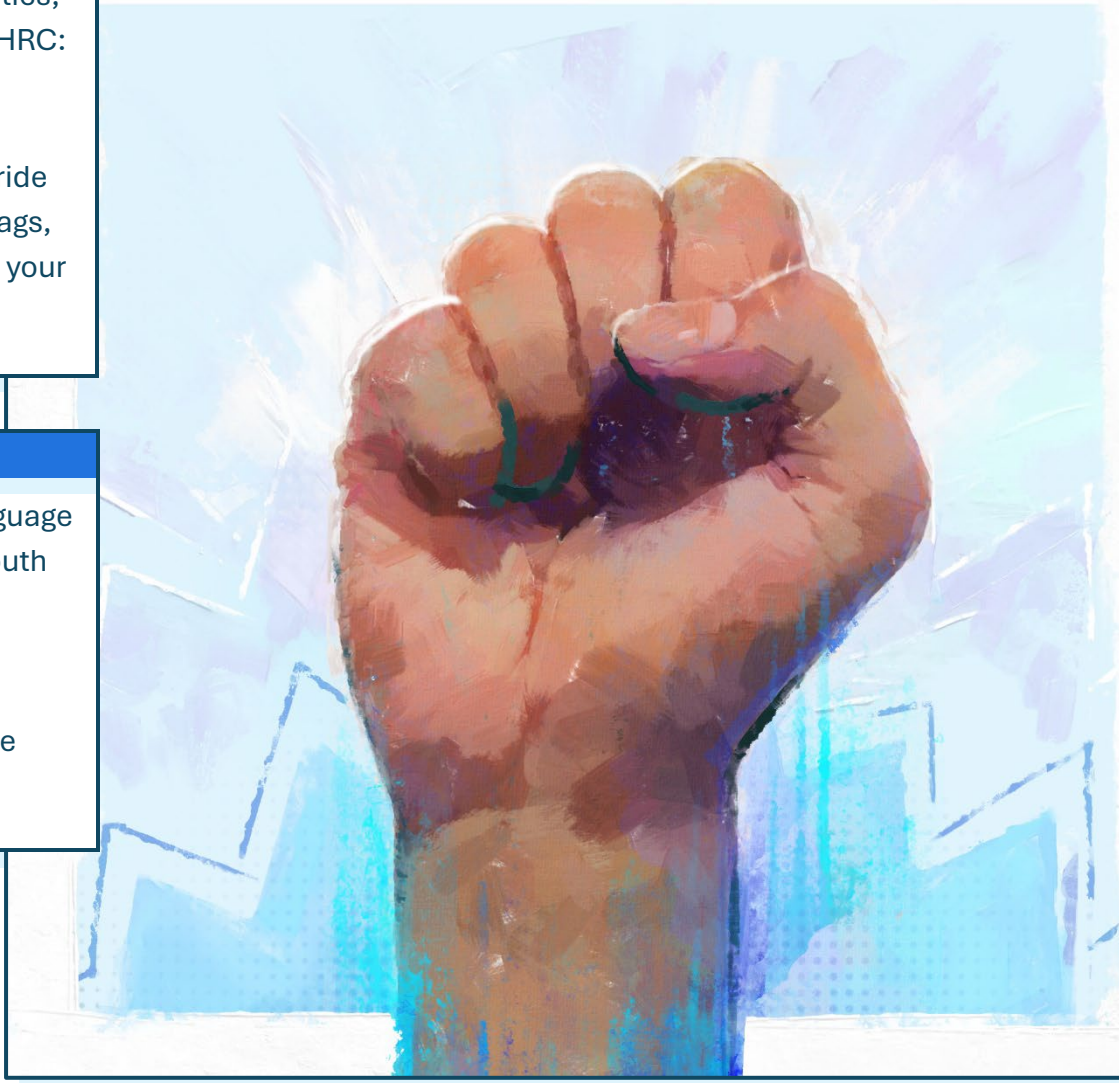
The literature consistently shows that supportive environments prioritizing 2SLGBTQ+ youth identities lead to lower suicidal ideation, suicide rates, less anxiety, depression, and other signs of psychological distress (Austin et al., 2021). Austin et al. (2021) highlight the

improved mental wellbeing for transgender youth based on proper pronoun use, the ability to dress in gender-affirming ways, and the opportunity to transition either socially or medically, all of which are rooted in acceptance. According to research conducted by The Trevor Project, “the simple act of affirming and using transgender and nonbinary youths’ pronouns reduces the youth’s chance of suicide by over 50%” (QueerDoc, 2021, para. 2), which illustrates the profound impact of what can easily be perceived by others as small actions on 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Another study conducted by The Trevor Project in 2019 concludes that 2SLGBTQ+ suicide attempt rates reduce by 40% from having a single affirming adult in their life (QueerDoc, 2021).

Stokl et al. (2024) reinforce this need for acceptance, be it within families, communities, or elsewhere, as a protective factor for 2SLGBTQ+ youth against their increased likelihood of experiencing adverse outcomes, not inherently because of their identities, but because of the systemic factors and discrimination they encounter. Existing community-based programs for 2SLGBTQ+ youth are critical in supporting them against identity-based adversity they may experience and to develop skills, characteristics, and other tools to build a sense of belonging and collective identity (Fredericks & Cesaroni, 2025).

The literature on this subject is extensive, but it importantly highlights the need to foster belonging for 2SLGBTQ+ youth through “supportive healthcare practitioners, families, schools, and communities” (Madireddy & Madireddy, 2022, p. 89). This underscores the importance of continuing to support programs and resources in Grande Prairie that enhance their wellbeing (Madireddy & Madireddy, 2022). This aligns with what both youth and service providers shared about community acceptance and its impact in Grande Prairie.

COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE



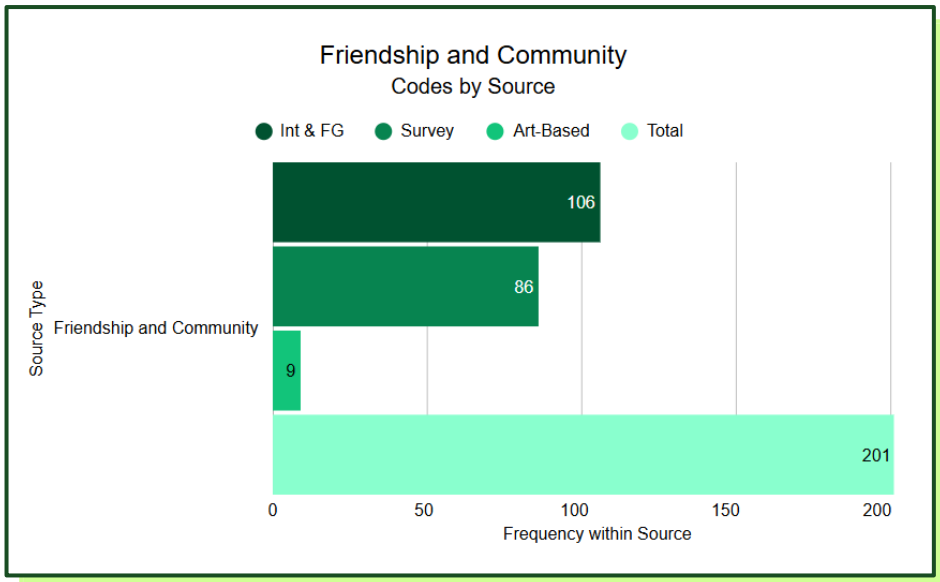
Action Items:

Be a Visible Ally

- Educate yourself on pronouns, gender identities, and affirming language using resources like HRC: Being an LGBTQ+ ally (https://reports.hrc.org/being-an-lgbtq-ally)
- Show up for 2SLGBTQ+ youth by attending Pride events, displaying ally symbols (e.g., pride flags, pins), and advocating for inclusive spaces in your workplace, school, or community.

Hold Leaders Accountable

- Challenge discriminatory behaviors and language in your community, even when 2SLGBTQ+ youth aren't present.
- Push for City Hall proclamations and visible, ongoing support.
- Encourage businesses to join Friends of Pride (Grande Prairie Pride Society)



Friendship and Community

Friendship and Community emerges as a significant theme during interviews, focus groups, surveys, and art-based submissions. Originally included under the parent code *Inclusion and Belonging*, this theme was elevated to its own standalone parent code during the final six working groups held to verify and refine the data. Youth participants strongly advocate for this change, emphasizing that the importance of friendship and community among 2SLGBTQ+ individuals cannot be overstated. The data supports their perspective: Friendship and Community is mentioned 201 times across all sources, making it the third most frequent theme in this needs assessment. For many of the youth, these connections are lifelines; friends and like-minded peers are often the ones who help them navigate dark times, offer acceptance when they feel lost, and create spaces where they finally belong. Unlike other themes, Friendship and Community does not include sub-themes. Its power lies in its simplicity: the profound impact of peer connections on youth resilience and belonging.

What Does Friendship and Community Look Like for Youth?

When asked about safe places, many youth naturally turn the conversation to their friends and other 2SLGBTQ+ peers. As one youth explains, *"I feel safest around other queer people, I supposed that's not really a place."* This sentiment reflects how youth discuss friendship and community, not just as social connections, but as critical sources of safety, support, and wellbeing. Some youth also emphasize the role of spaces mentioned in the *Community Acceptance* section, such as the 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Group or Pride events, as places where they could meet and build relationships with other 2SLGBTQ+ youth. These spaces seemingly do not just offer programming, as they create opportunities for the important friendships youth describe.

Being in queer youth group, these have helped me so much. Having access to the teen dance where drag performers come and perform, often they will share a story after their performance. Also being able to have that support by other queer youth who have had to go through similar things, it creates amazing friendships.

— Focus Group Response (edited for clarity)

For many participants, friendship and community is described as serving more than just social connections. They are vital sources of information and support. Youth repeatedly share that they rely on their peers to access critical resources, whether related to mental health, gender-affirming care, or local services in Grande Prairie. Some youth mention they do not know where to look for this information at all. Others describe how online searches and traditional channels often provide incomplete, outdated, or even misleading information. In these cases, friends and trusted community members become the go-to source for accurate, relevant, and reliable guidance. Whether navigating healthcare systems, connecting with affirming organizations, or simply finding spaces where they feel understood, youth emphasize that their peers are often the ones who point them in the right direction. This underscores how informal networks, built through friendship and shared experiences, play a key role in filling gaps where formal systems fall short. This "*word-of-mouth*" sharing of



Friendship bracelets made by participant.

information is also used within friend groups and 2SLGBTQ+ organic spaces to inform others where the safe and unsafe places in Grande Prairie are located. This is an informal channel where 2SLGBTQ+ youth look out for each other by providing feedback they may not be able to source anywhere else.

I mean, I've, I've said this before to other people, but Grande Prairie is a word-of-mouth town. Like, if you want to know something, you have to know someone who knows about it. Like, things don't get talked about online. They get talked about in conversations face to face, and that's how people find out about things. That's how people want to try things. Like, a lot of people here very much trust other people's word. Like, if I say something's good or something's bad, you're gonna believe me, and you're gonna go there, you're gonna tell everybody. They're like, 'Oh, I have a friend who said this place was horrible. Don't go there'.

— Focus Group Response (edited for clarity)

Social Media and Online Spaces was originally its own parent code but, much like *Friendship and Community*, was reclassified as a child code during the validation, verification, and refinement meetings with youth participants. This shift is largely due to the versatility of *social media and online spaces*, which fit within multiple parent codes depending on context. For example, in the context of *Friendship and Community*, youth highlight how these digital spaces serve as critical platforms for connection. They allow youth to build meaningful friendships and support networks with peers both inside and outside of Grande Prairie.

For many 2SLGBTQ+ youth, online spaces are described as more than just tools for communication. They are gateways to education and exposure. Youth describe discovering diverse gender and sexual identities through social media, gaining access to information and perspectives they might not have encountered otherwise. These platforms also provide a safe haven for self-expression, particularly for

youth who feel unsafe or unsupported in their real-life environments. Whether through private groups, forums, or social media communities, youth find spaces where they can explore their identities, share experiences, and receive validation from like-minded peers.

This dual role, both as an educational resource and as a refuge, makes social media and online spaces an integral part of how youth cultivate friendship and community. This is especially true in a Northern context where geographic isolation can limit in-person connections.

Sometimes very specific discord servers, like very specific discord communities that are not bad and are very, are generally very, very supportive. If you know, for example, I play this game, [redacted], and I'm in the [redacted] server, and everyone's so nice. And everyone gets a little pronoun pin on their profile, and you can just talk there and it's great. It's nice especially if you're like, especially when you're like, first coming out as trans or something like that, you want to try out a new name or new pronouns. No one has to look at you. You can talk to somebody. They see your profile. Your name is this, and your pronouns are this, and you that's your personality, and that's that. That's your persona for them. And that's really nice sometimes. And very, like, an asset to have.

— Interview Response

Friendship and Community emerges as an essential piece of 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiences in Grande Prairie; a truth reflected not only in the data but in the passion and frequency with which youth spoke about these connections. Through the iterative process of verification and refinement, where youth themselves reviewed and adjusted the codes, this theme gains its rightful prominence. The data further underscores its growing importance with age, mentioned 2.08 times per respondent by youth aged 13-17, rising to 2.84 for ages 18-24, and peaking at 4.14 for ages 25-29 (see: Appendix A). As one youth shares, "*the most supported I definitely feel is around my friends and my found family,*" a sentiment that captures how these relationships provide safety, validation, and belonging in ways that formal systems

often cannot. Youth explain that while these bonds form organically, they are strengthened and sustained by the broader ecosystem of community acceptance and professional supports. Spaces like the 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Group or affirming organizations do not replace the closeness of peer connections but amplify their impact, offering youth the resources and security to build and maintain the lifelines they rely on.

What Service Providers Are Saying

This is an area where the responses of service providers and youth participants differ. While youth emphasize the importance of friendship and community in their daily lives, service providers who completed the survey do not mention friendship explicitly. Friendship and Community is coded only five times across all service provider surveys, and even then, the references are indirect. Rather than explicitly stating the impact of friendship, providers focus on the need to give youth more spaces where they can connect openly and safely with other 2SLGBTQ+ peers.

This does not mean service providers fail to recognize how integral friendship is to 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie. Instead, it highlights a difference in concerns and perceptions of needs. While providers do not use the word "friendship," their focus on creating spaces for peer connection aligns with youth experiences, where friendships are central to safety, support, and belonging. It is also important to note that service providers only had the opportunity to complete a survey and did not participate in interviews. If given that opportunity, their statements about creating more safe spaces for youth to meet and connect with peers may have evolved into a more explicit discussion of friendship. That said, the emphasis on creating spaces for youth to gather does implicitly acknowledge the need for community and, by extension, the friendships that naturally develop within those spaces.

Over the last 5 years, I have seen more opportunities for youth to engage in LGBTQ+ related events, like pride events and weekly drop in events (through North Reach, kickstand, pride society, etc.)

— Service Provider Response

Literature Spotlight: Friendship and Community

The literature on the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the role of friendship and community is unsurprisingly extensive. As Dominguez and Wolfe (2025) state, "friendship is essential to well-being" (p. 1), which aligns with this needs assessment's emphasis on the theme, as youth consistently describe these connections as vital. Friendship is a distinct relationship, often characterized by mutuality, equality, and likeness, "the idea that people connect with others who are similar to themselves" (Boyer and Paz Galupo, 2018, p. 237). Dominguez and Wolfe (2025) argue that "chosen family," a concept echoed by several youth in this assessment, serves as a protective factor against the stress and daily impacts of marginalization. Friendships formed during periods of identity exploration and social change, when youth challenge norms and experience minority stress, are particularly critical (Boyer and Paz Galupo, 2018), reinforcing their role as lifelines for support.

The importance of identity-aligned friendships cannot be overstated. Research suggests that having even one friend who shares the same gender and or sexual identity can increase life satisfaction and reduce loneliness (Dominguez and Wolfe, 2025). Boyer and Paz Galupo (2018) further examine friendship patterns among transgender individuals, who, while often grouped under the broader 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella, face unique needs due to their gender identity and distinct forms of minority stress. Their findings highlight how identity, community affiliation, and shared experiences shape these friendships, emphasizing the need for affirming spaces where transgender youth can build meaningful connections, whether with cisgender peers, sexual minorities, or other transgender individuals, to improve overall well-being.

Singh et al. (2025) also acknowledge the heterogeneity within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, separating the experiences of LGB+ youth from transgender and gender diverse (TGD) youth in their study. While TGD youth face greater negative impacts, including intersectional

discrimination, bullying, and microaggressions, they still experience protective benefits from close friendships, such as reduced anxiety and improved coping (Singh et al., 2025). Their findings align with this needs assessment and the voices of youth and service providers, as Singh et al. (2025) state:

> *Avenues of support, such as online peer networks and trans specific community spaces, may offer valuable resources for TGD youth to develop these relationships, as many existing youth support avenues are not inclusive or affirming of trans identities, which can perpetuate stigma and exclusion. As a result, transgender youth may struggle to find safe and affirming environments where they can build meaningful relationships and receive the support they need. Given the significant impact of a close friendship observed in our study, it is crucial to expand opportunities for fostering supportive social connections that can serve as protective factors for TGD youth.* (p. 13–14)

In Northern Alberta, where geographic isolation and limited queer specific infrastructure can amplify these challenges, the need for intentional, affirming spaces becomes even more urgent. Friendship and community are proven to be essential as both protective factors and buffers for all 2SLGBTQ+ youth, even if the degree of support required varies. Therefore, creating inclusive environments, where youth feel safe to share their identities, values, and needs, is not just beneficial but necessary for their well-being.

FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Action Items:

Promote the Resource Guide Through Trusted Networks

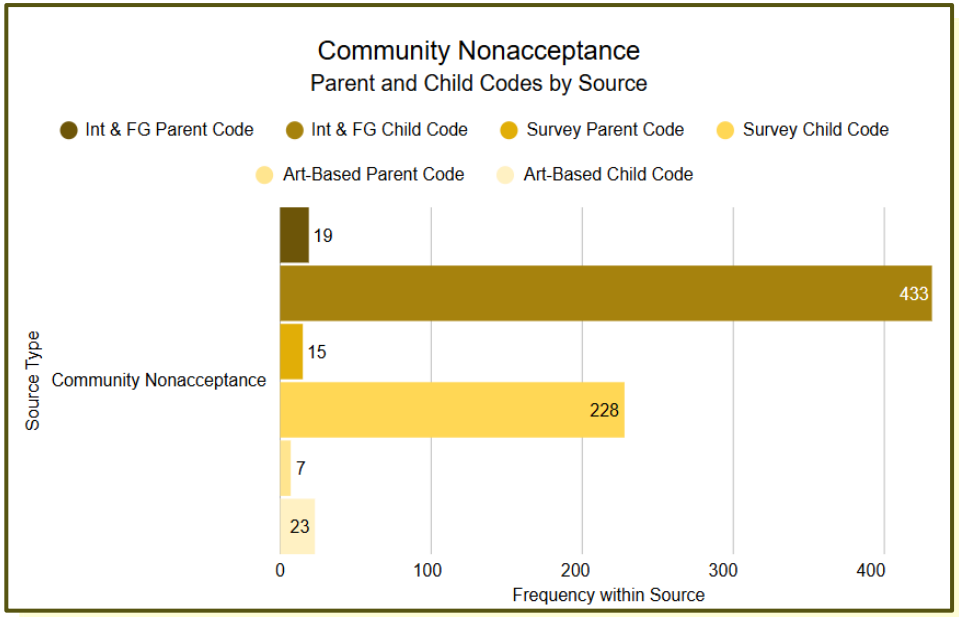
- Work with local 2SLGBTQ+ youth and organizations to share the Pride Society's resource guide through youth groups, online communities, and local events.
- Integrate the guide into youth programs, welcome packages, and intake processes so youth encounter it in the spaces they already use.

Build and Sustain Peer Connection

- Be a connector: introduce youth to peers, mentors, and affirming groups, know where groups meet, age limits, and restrictions.
- Host low-cost or free events (movie nights, art workshops, peer support circles) by partnering with organizations to cost-share.
- Address barriers: advocate for free/low-cost, accessible venues for youth groups.



Community Nonacceptance



Community nonacceptance emerges as the most frequent theme in this needs assessment, appearing more often than any other topic across youth contributions. Its dominance underscores the profound and pervasive impact of nonacceptance on 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie. A reality that, while unfortunate, aligns with the experiences youth share throughout this process. As the most coded parent theme (684 instances), community nonacceptance is complex and multifaceted. Its sub-themes reveal the many ways exclusion manifests: explicit moments of nonacceptance (41 times), double standards (82 times), hatred, phobias, stigma, and fear (166 times), lack of compassion, empathy, and othering (110 times), lack of resources (82 times), political conservative influence/oilfield and Northern culture (176 times), and specific unsafe locations in Grande Prairie (27 times). Unlike community acceptance, which often reflects isolated moments of support, community nonacceptance is reinforced by its sub-themes, as these interconnected experiences collectively shape a culture of marginalization for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

What Does Community Nonacceptance Look Like for Youth?

The most frequently mentioned sub theme within *Community Nonacceptance* is the *political conservative influence/oilfield and Northern culture* influence of Grande Prairie, a force youth describe as deeply shaping their experiences of exclusion. In their stories, this cultural context emerges as one of the most significant barriers to feeling accepted, safe, or valued in their community. Youth consistently express that the region's conservative values, amplified by Alberta's political climate and the dominant oilfield industry, often position them as "*the bad guy*" within rigid cisgender and heteronormative frameworks. Many share that these environments uphold traditional gender

binaries, leaving little room for their identities to be recognized or respected. While this assessment does not measure the broader political or industrial culture, youth perceive these forces as inseparable from their daily realities, describing how they reinforce stigma, silence, and systemic marginalization in Grande Prairie.

Starting at the top, having a premier who offered actual information instead of anecdote and conjecture sure would help. Because the person at the top is setting the foundation for everyone else, the situation feels quite dire. [...] I think it's safe to say that there isn't a single leader I actually trust to represent me. Well, maybe Janice [sic] Irwin, but that's a lonely light in a space filled with darkness.

— Survey Response (edited for clarity)

Community Nonacceptance is more pronounced with age, as reflected in the frequency of mentions per respondent. The 25-29 age group report the highest frequency of this theme at 11.14 mentions per respondent, compared to 10.00 for ages 18-24 and 8.32 for ages 13-17. This trend extends to related sub-themes such as *Lack of Resources* and *Political Conservative Influence/Oilfield/Northern Culture*, which also increase with age. Notably, *Double Standards* is mentioned less frequently by the oldest age group (0.64 mentions per respondent), compared to younger cohorts (1.52 for 13-17 and 1.06 for 18-24) (see: Appendix A). This pattern suggests that older youth participants are not only more exposed to systemic barriers but also more attuned to their root causes, such as cultural and political influences. Their focus on broader structural issues may reflect a shift from navigating interpersonal conflicts to confronting entrenched systems of exclusion. These insights underscore the need for interventions that address both immediate experiences of nonacceptance and the long-term cultural change required to create a truly inclusive community.

The second most mentioned theme within *Community Nonacceptance* is *hatred, phobias, stigma, and fear*. Originally coded as separate sub-themes, youth decided during the verification process that these concepts are deeply interconnected and should be grouped

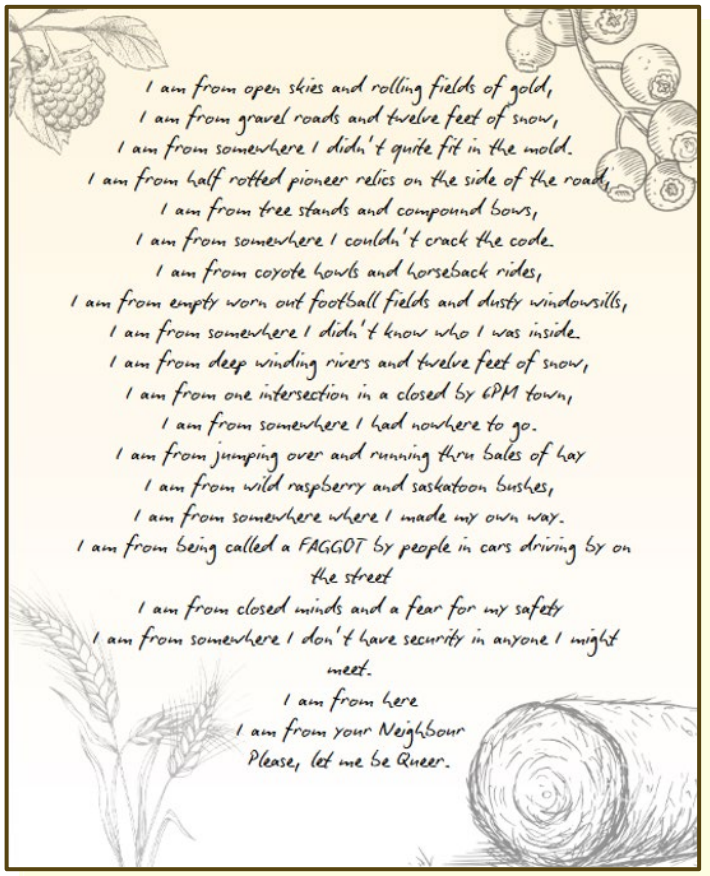
together. According to participants, these experiences are not only related but also reinforce one another, creating a cycle of exclusion. Youth also emphasize that these attitudes are fueled by the conservative political environment discussed earlier, with each of these themes intertwined to the point that one cannot exist without the others. Many youth participants describe what it feels like to experience homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia firsthand. They frame these as barriers to acceptance, asking, "*how can someone accept you if their hatred and phobia make them believe who you are and what you do is wrong*." For the youth participants, these forms of discrimination create significant obstacles to feeling included, supported, accepted, or even loved in their community.

I think it's a lot of things. A lot of the time, people were taught that anything outside the 'normal' was wrong, like severely wrong. That ties into religious beliefs too, where anything outside the norm was labeled as bad, really bad. And even if people were told it was wrong, they never took the time to understand it because it was just seen as that severely wrong. Another thing that doesn't help is the government's role, not just in Canada but especially in the U.S. What happens there gets publicized and influences things here. When governments, whether in the U.S. or even within Alberta, don't support LGBTQ+ people, it spreads the idea that we're the enemy. If people don't know any better and their government is attacking us, they assume we must be bad because they don't have the other side of the story. They don't know anyone in the community, and fearmongering makes it worse. So, they don't even want to consider another perspective because it would make them look bad.

— Interview Response (edited for clarity)

These two sub-themes are heavily connected to the third most appearing sub-theme, which is *lack of compassion, empathy, and the presence of "othering."* Originally coded as separate themes, youth participants in the verification process felt they were deeply interconnected and that separating them would weaken the overall narrative. Youth express that the lack of empathy and compassion they experience is inextricably linked to the hatred and political conservatism discussed earlier. They share that those who hold negative assumptions about their identities often cannot or will not see them as whole individuals with the same concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams as others in Grande Prairie.

This dynamic is central to the "*othering*" youth describe, where the absence of empathy and compassion for their identity-related struggles, compounded by a *lack of resources* and the presence of *specific unsafe spaces*, actively pushes them to the margins of Grande Prairie's broader community. For youth participants, these interconnected themes of hatred, political conservatism, "*othering*," and resource scarcity form a cycle that reinforces their exclusion and isolation. Many youth participants state they experience hateful comments, slurs, aggressive attitudes, and even physical assaults based on their perceived identity, particularly in specific locations within Grande Prairie they identify as unsafe. These *unsafe spaces* include *social media* spaces, such as the Grande Prairie Facebook groups, which is mentioned by all age groups. These *social media* spaces, unlike in *community acceptance* where *social media* creates connection, add to feelings of disconnect and isolation. Youth explain that this is not theoretical "*othering*" or "*lack of empathy and compassion*" but active hostility, often tied to where youth can and cannot safely exist in their community. The lack of affirming resources, such as supportive organizations, educated allies, or safe spaces, further worsens youth vulnerability.



Art-Based Submission from Youth

When these incidents occur, youth often state that they feel isolated and alone because they are left to defend themselves. Youth are placed in the difficult position of enduring the assaults, which will be further discussed under *Safety Concerns*, while also being expected to educate others about what is and is not appropriate behavior. In essence, these youth describe being placed in a position where they are expected to extend understanding, empathy, and space to others, including those with conservative views who do not return such kindness. This dynamic is a recurring theme in interviews, surveys, and focus groups, with youth highlighting the emotional labour of educating others while facing hostility and navigating a landscape of limited resources and unsafe environments.

I feel like it's from a lack of empathy, like not being able to understand people who have different experiences from you. So those kind of people only listen to people who have basically the same life that they do. And even then, if they still don't want to listen. They're like, a lot of time, it's like, "oh, why are you defending them? Are you gay?" Because they're trying to build that wall. Like, "no, you can't be right about this, so you must be like them." You know, "you can't be like me and think they're okay, because I don't think they're okay."

— Focus Group Response

This lack of returned kindness is also evident in the double standards youth describe under Community Nonacceptance. Many youth share that they face different expectations based on their gender or sexual identity, expectations they do not see applied to their cisgender, heterosexual peers. For example, youth describe being questioned on how they "*know they are gay*," a line of inquiry they never see directed at their straight peers. Similarly, they describe heightened scrutiny around gender expression when it defies traditional norms, as well as what some refer to as the "sexualization" of their identities and bodies. One youth shares, "*my girlfriend and I were asked for a threesome*

when we were just dancing at [redacted place]," an experience that highlights the double standard in how their relationships and bodies are treated compared to their peers.

This double standard extends to relationships, names, and pronouns, but it also includes how youth participants describe being seen as threats or predators simply because of their identity. Some youth explain that when others learn they are 2SLGBTQ+, they are suddenly treated as though they lack self-control or pose a danger to others. As one youth describes:

I've worked some places where they ask me not to talk about my relationship, and I've worked other places that have jokes about me like 'watch out ladies, she's a lesbian and she's going to get you.' Like, I'm gay, not an assaulter. It didn't feel very nice.

— Survey Response

Youth describe a clear shift in treatment where people readily accept nicknames, name changes for marriage, or the use of middle names for cisgender individuals, but when a name change relates to gender identity or when public displays of affection involve same-sex couples, suddenly the standards shift and respect becomes conditional or withdrawn.

What Service Providers Are Saying

Like the youth participants, community service providers who completed the survey also identify *Community Nonacceptance* as their most frequently coded theme. Their responses echo many of the same concerns raised by youth, including *projected hatred, phobias, lack of inclusivity, exclusion*, and *conservative beliefs or values*. Service providers emphasize that these systemic barriers not only impact youth directly but also hinder their ability to provide effective support. For many providers, these themes represent ongoing challenges in creating safe, affirming spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie, reinforcing the broader culture of nonacceptance that youth describe.

I see support in GP for Queer people and youth but I also see people getting more comfortable being bigots due to the political climate. It makes me question if we will stay in a semi safe place to be "out" in or if those homophobic voices will be made to feel like they can get louder. I hope after this election that the community is more aware of groups like the "Holy Shift" who are trying to promote hate under the guise of God.

— Service Provider Response

Where service providers differ in their observations of *Community Nonacceptance* is in their professional and organizational experiences. Many describe feeling isolated as service providers, particularly when navigating a divided landscape where some organizations and colleagues are supportive of 2SLGBTQ+ youth, while others are not supportive or actively resistant. Additionally, service providers frame their views on assaults, often referring to *bullying*, and parental rejection through a professional lens, emphasizing the larger implications for youth who experience these forms of exclusion. Their responses highlight how these systemic issues not only affect youth directly but also create barriers to providing consistent, affirming care within the community. One service provider highlights this "*bullying*" and the lack of response towards it by stating:

Systemic oppression perpetuated by both students and staff, shown through gender/sexuality based bullying and limited staff response. Lack of clear admin procedures around responding to gender/sexuality-based discrimination, although they exist for other types of bullying/discipline.

— Service Provider Response

For some community service providers, the issue of community nonacceptance presents a complex challenge. These providers support youth who experience exclusion while also facing discrimination themselves as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. As one provider notes, *"It's still difficult for 2SLGBTQ+ teens to feel safe enough in this community. For example, I was recently yelled at and called a [homophobic verbal assault] outside of [redacted business]."* This shared experience of discrimination highlights how 2SLGBTQ+ identifying providers and youth face overlapping struggles, emphasizing the need for systemic solutions that address safety, inclusion, and support for both groups.

The experiences of service providers show that *Community Nonacceptance* in Grande Prairie is systemic, affecting institutions, policies, and community spaces. Providers highlight how *conservative political climates, limited resources*, and *vocal opposition* create barriers to supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Many describe feeling *isolated*, especially when programs like drag story-times or GSAs face backlash, forcing them to reduce visibility for safety. As one provider notes, *"we have not had a drag storytime in two years because of all the backlash… the hate was so loud that for safety, we have not planned another."* Recent laws like Bill 27 and Bill 29 add to these challenges, further eroding understanding, safety, and trust. Their insights highlight the importance of community-wide efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and providers.

Literature Spotlight: Community Nonacceptance

This literature spotlight offers only a small snapshot of the extensive research on how community nonacceptance affects 2SLGBTQ+ youth and individuals. While not fully comprehensive, it is important to note that the findings of this needs assessment align with existing literature. Youth have described impacts on their mental health, sense of well-being, and, critically, their feelings of safety in Grande Prairie.

Maine et al. (2024) argue that anti-transgender rhetoric, driven by right-wing ideologies in Alberta, has fueled increased homophobia and transphobia across the province. Though rooted in the rejection of transgender and nonbinary identities, these effects ripple through the entire 2SLGBTQ+ community. Their research also highlights the real-world consequences of nonacceptance in sexual health education for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, particularly those who are transgender and nonbinary. Without inclusive education, youth face heightened safety risks,

unsafe relationships, disempowerment, and other negative outcomes. Conversely, when 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience inclusive school environments and curriculum, positive outcomes increase (Maine et al., 2024).

Minority stress is a key factor in understanding nonacceptance. It refers to the ongoing and compounded experiences of prejudice and social stress that marginalized groups face, both historically and in the present (Kingsbury & Findlay, 2024). Kingsbury and Findlay (2024) explain that:

> Compared with their counterparts, 2SLGBTQ+ youth more often experience negative interactions with peers, family members, and in broader social environments, which can harm their mental health. Social support from families and peers, however, can act as a protective factor. Beyond informal support, 2SLGBTQ+ youth also encounter barriers to formal mental health services—such as fear of discrimination, past negative experiences with providers, and supports that fail to meet their specific needs. (p. 13)

This aligns with what both youth and service providers shared in this needs assessment. These negative interactions, whether informal or formal, represent forms of community nonacceptance. They are stresses imposed on 2SLGBTQ+ youth without their control or ability to avoid them.

Egale's (2026) report on youth adds that 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience "higher rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers" (p. 6) and, further, that "trans youth in Canada report experiencing very high levels of sexual harassment, while over one third have faced physical violence or threats" (p. 6). Among other effects from this harassment, such as anxiety and poor mental health, is the increased feelings and experiences of social isolation (Egale, 2026), which directly connects to how 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie describe their experiences and the consequences of community nonacceptance. Through these actions, the community sends a message that these youth do not belong, regardless of their connection to Grande Prairie's culture and region. As a result, the burden of nonacceptance and its consequences, like mental health disparities, falls on the youth themselves (Kingsbury & Findlay, 2024).

COMMUNITY NONACCEPTANCE

Action Items:

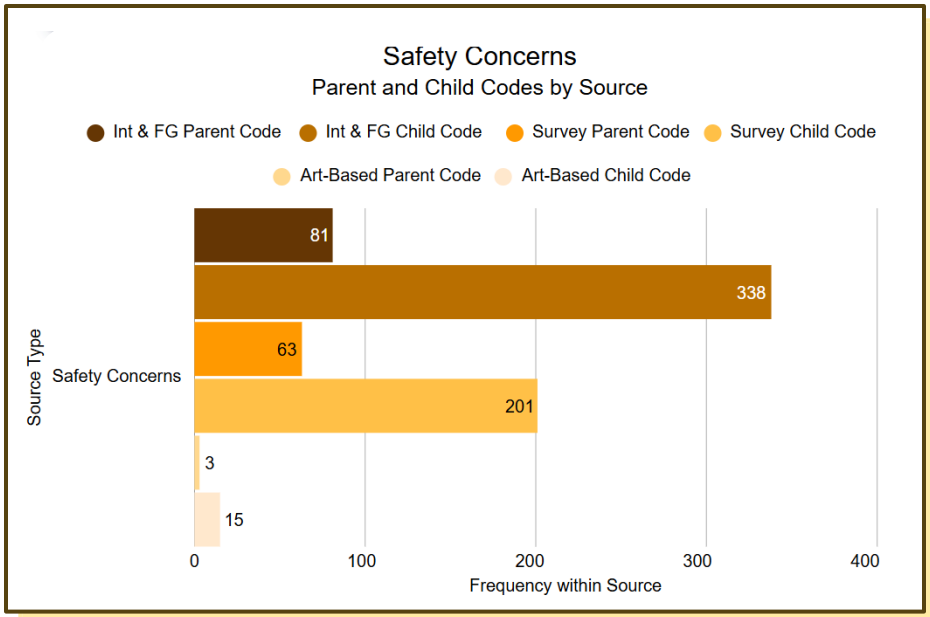
Build a Youth-Verified Safe Spaces Directory

- Partner with a local agency to add youth-verified businesses (e.g., Card's Café, Wonderland Games, CULTure, etc.) to a Safe Spaces list; Youth verify businesses based on inclusive policies, visible allyship, and staff support.
- Invite businesses to join by signing an inclusivity pledge and displaying a "Safe Space" decal.
- Share the updated directory through youth networks, social media, and community events; train staff at youth organizations to refer youth to safe businesses.

Challenge Nonacceptance Where It Happens

- Call out discrimination and harmful language in the moment, even when 2SLGBTQ+ youth aren't present.
- Stand with youth facing harassment or exclusion; be a witness, document incidents if safe, and connect youth to resources.





Safety Concerns

The *Safety concerns* code is raised 338 times across all data sources, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and art-based submissions. This theme appears in every type of data collected. Direct *safety concerns* are mentioned most often (81 times), followed closely by *assaults* (80 times). During the youth verification group analysis, microaggressions and full physical assaults became grouped together under the "*assaults*" code, as youth describe all of these experiences as forms of assault and feel they belong together. The next most common concerns are unsafe spaces (65 times), hiding identity (51 times), and future concerns (45 times). The least mentioned, though still significant, is the lack of visible allies (16). It is important to note that *safety concerns* are especially prevalent among youth aged 25 to 29 (6.5 mentions per respondent compared to 4.36 for 13-17 and 4.26 for 18-24). This age group highlights *hiding identity* and *unsafe spaces* more frequently than younger participants (see Appendix A).

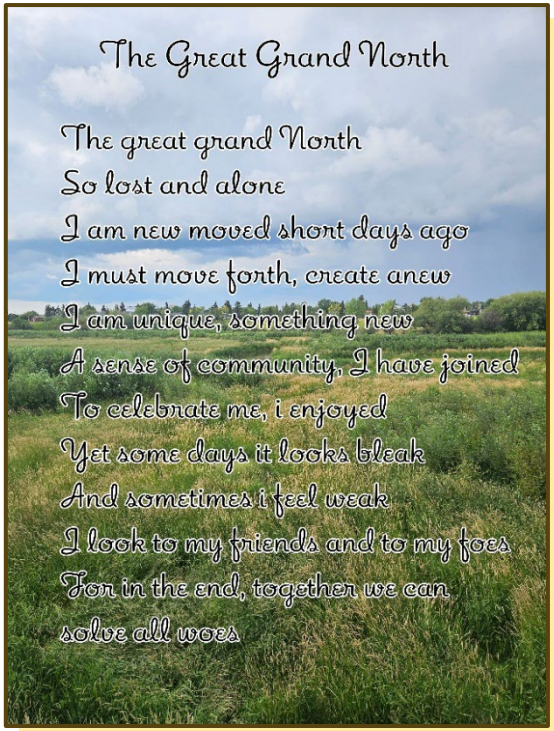
What do Safety Concerns Look Like for Youth?

Safety concerns are identified by youth as a distinct and urgent theme, separate from community nonacceptance. While nonacceptance fuels unsafe environments, safety concerns reflect the daily reality of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie. Youth describe living in a state of hypervigilance, constantly assessing the safety of people, places, and situations in ways their heterosexual and cisgender peers do not. For many participants, this vigilance is described as so routine that they often do not even realize they are doing it. Some youth share that they are so accustomed to violence and harassment directed at them that they no longer fully register these experiences. When asked to reflect on their first experiences with such treatment, many describe it as deeply painful and impactful, but over time, they are

forced to numb themselves to it simply to cope. As one youth explains, *"It's like a constant, dull anxiety. It's always there, like a voice saying, 'you can't do this, you can't do that."* This habituation does not lessen the toll. Instead, it highlights how deeply ingrained these safety concerns are in their daily lives.

People rip up LGBTQ+ posters and do tire burnouts on the rainbow crosswalk. Probably walking the streets I'd feel more comfortable hiding any visual identifiers of queer culture as to not get "hate crimed."

— Survey Respondent (on safety)



Art-Based Submission from Youth

Assaults, as defined in this assessment, encompass a spectrum of experiences ranging from microaggressions to full physical assaults. Youth frequently describe the relentless nature of microaggressions and the prevalence of overhearing hateful language, whether intentional or not. Some share instances where individuals use transphobic or homophobic language without realizing the identity of the 2SLGBTQ+ youth present. These incidents often leave youth feeling targeted, yet they are expected to respond with resilience or even humor to cope. For example, during a focus group, a youth recounts an incident where tomatoes were thrown at students perceived to be "*queer,*" accompanied by homophobic slurs and barking noises. While the story is shared with laughter, framing the aggressors as absurd, it underscores the emotional labor placed on 2SLGBTQ+ youth. They describe being forced to downplay or laugh off such harassment to avoid confrontation, even as they endure daily targeting in certain environments. This dynamic highlights the normalization of hostility they face and the burden of being the "*bigger person*" while navigating spaces where their safety and dignity are not guaranteed.

Unsafe spaces, hiding identity, and *future concerns* are central to the safety experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Youth describe these issues as deeply interconnected. Hiding identity often serves as a necessary safety measure in unsafe spaces, while also fueling worries about whether a safe future exists for them in their communities. Many youth tie these concerns to broader feelings about Alberta, describing the province as unwelcoming toward 2SLGBTQ+ identities. One youth shares, *"growing up in Alberta, I try to keep my head down and mouth shut and don't want to make a big deal about my gender identity,"* and another notes, *"I feel like I need to plan out my future, how to navigate this area without looking 'too queer' so I don't get harassed."* Another youth comments that there is "*not exactly the most accepting people in Grande Prairie.*" For most, hiding their identity is framed as self-preservation, a way to avoid harm in hostile environments. A smaller number of youth explain that they hide their identities not out of fear, but because they believe it is private information. These youth distinguish their choice as one of privacy rather than safety, though they represent a minority perspective among those who discuss *hiding identity*.

I experience homophobia in a much greater degree now that I am passing as a man. I often hear transphobic remarks on a daily basis from people who are unaware of my identity. It feels hopeless and scary at times to experience a large volume of people who are hateful and prejudiced.

— Survey Respondent (on safety concerns)

Social media adds another layer of safety concerns. Grande Prairie's public pages often feature anti-transgender rhetoric, targeting transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse individuals. Youth describe how these online spaces contribute to feelings of unsafety, making it impossible to know who in the community is truly safe. As one youth shares, *"when hatred is openly shared and rarely challenged on platforms meant to foster connection, we are left questioning who we can trust."* This digital hostility, normalized in local social media, impacts their mental health and self-esteem, reinforcing the real-world risks they face daily and leaving them uncertain about where they can find acceptance and safety.

These experiences show the daily realities for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie, where safety is often uncertain. Addressing these concerns will require changes in systems and communities, along with creating safer spaces both in person and online. Without action, the ongoing normalization of hostility and the weight of constant vigilance will remain part of their lives. This highlights the need for meaningful support and solutions.

What Service Providers Are Saying

Service providers in Grande Prairie observe that the current political climate, including recent legislative changes such as the Education Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 27), the Health Statuses Amendment Act, 2024 (Bill 26), and the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act (Bill 29), is heightening fears among 2SLGBTQ+ youth about their safety and acceptance. These concerns extend beyond transgender youth to the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community, as service providers note that the environment has created barriers to accessing support and safe spaces.

Service providers working in schools share that these legislative changes make it more difficult to support youth, particularly when school may be the only safe place for those without acceptance at home. Youth are reported to feel unheard and displaced, a sentiment that aligns with what youth themselves express in interviews and surveys. Additionally, service providers raise concerns about the safety of being vocal about 2SLGBTQ+ programming. While they acknowledge that vocal opposition to such programming is in the minority, the risk of targeted harassment or violence remains a serious concern. Some service providers recall specific local incidents, such as opposition to Drag Story Time at the Grande Prairie library or increased hatred toward transgender individuals following isolated criminal incidents, which contribute to a climate of fear.

I find the state of our Province to be a challenge. Kids don't feel safe; they don't always understand how these new laws are going to affect them. It's hard to know you have all these tools in your toolbox, but you're not allowed to use most of them. It's also hard to ask youth to even gain the courage to ask for help

if they know the path to help is full of barriers and not safe. Removing schools as a way to gather and connect it's much harder to reach kids and families that need this education.

— Service Provider Respondent

Service providers note concerns for safety around Bill 27 in particular and state that it is a barrier to safety in schools for youth who may not have acceptance at home and school is their safe place. Service providers who work in schools express feeling as though the bill disempowers them to help their students or youth they engage with, noting that youth are "*feeling unheard and displaced due to a lack of feeling accepted in school.*"

We are wanting to make this an inclusive space for all and if we become targeted by community members for our acceptance our facility could become an unsafe space. So, when we offer programs, we make the inclusion subtle e.g. naming adult programing for queer youth: [redacted]. We host another adult program for those who identify as transgender and they do not disclose the location. In Grande Prairie we have learnt from the library that reading with a queen caused huge disturbance and after that parent who is transgender harmed their child the transgender community has been a target for hate.

— Service Provider Respondent

These perspectives underscore the delicate balance service providers must strike between visibility and safety, as they work to support youth in an environment where political and social tensions directly impact their ability to provide inclusive and affirming care.

Literature Spotlight: Safety Concerns

Research on social inclusion and safety for 2SLGBTQ+ youth highlights the critical role that supportive environments, such as schools, play in fostering a sense of belonging and safety. Tan et al. (2025) noted that educational settings are key places of support, allowing for positive interactions that inform social inclusion. However, they also identified barriers to social inclusion, such as negative interactions with governmental policies and laws, which can limit these positive benefits. In the context of Grande Prairie, the three bills mentioned by needs assessment participants exemplify how such negative interactions can harm social inclusion and create safety concerns for youth.

De Pedro et al. (2018) further explored the effects of safety concerns, such as victimization and bullying, on 2SLGBTQ+ youth in school environments. Their findings indicate that unsafe environments lead to increased absenteeism, lower academic performance, lowered ambition, increased risk-taking behaviors, and higher rates of suicide. Conversely, affirming and safe schools that respect 2SLGBTQ+ identities act as protective factors, increasing safety for these youth. However, the current needs assessment reveals that both service providers and youth in Grande Prairie feel that recent legislation removes this sense of security and protection in schools. Safety for 2SLGBTQ+ youth involves supportive school staff, active GSAs, and representation within the curriculum (De Pedro et al., 2018), which is counter to what participants report is happening in Grande Prairie schools due to the new legislation.

This research suggests that the legislative changes intended to address youth safety in Alberta may, in fact, be harming already marginalized youth in the very spaces where they should feel safest. Maine et al. (2024) further this idea, noting that “the increase in anti-transgender rhetoric in the Canadian public toward [trans and nonbinary] individuals and inclusive education [have] contributed to more homophobia and transphobia in Alberta, Canada, and internationally” (p. 315). The experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth within this needs assessment are backed by research and are a cause for concern. While these examples are primarily within school systems, it is not unreasonable to assume that they have further safety implications in other aspects of youth life.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Action Items:

Create a Community Safety Network

- Partner with local organizations to establish a confidential reporting system for incidents of hate, harassment, or discrimination.
- Train staff to respond with trauma-informed care and connect youth to resources.

Increase Safe Space Visibility

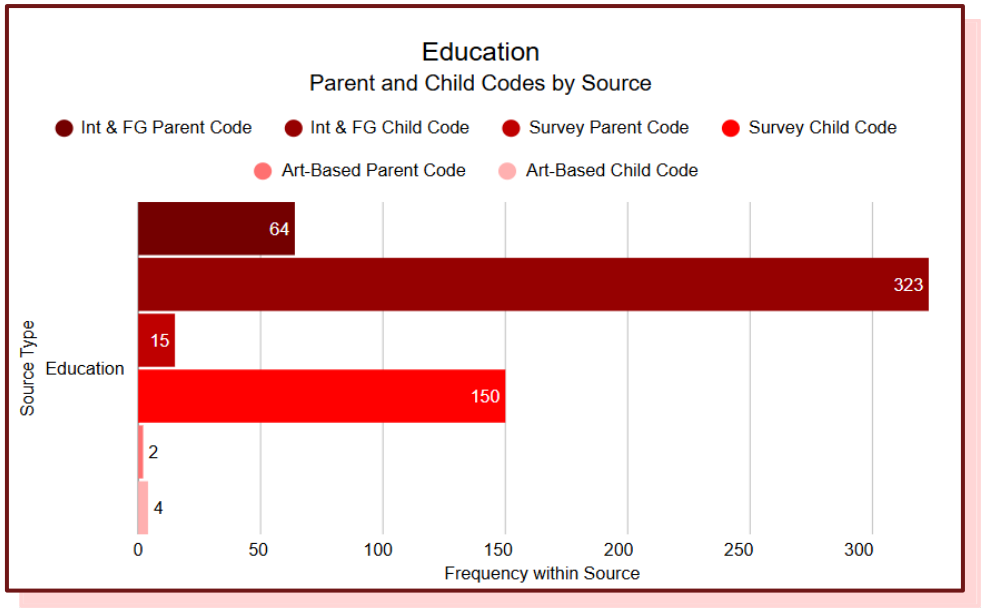
- Work with businesses and community centers to display subtle, recognizable symbols (e.g., QR codes, inclusive signage) to signal safety.
- Host workshops on de-escalation and allyship for organizations.

Advocate for Inclusive Policies

- Collaborate with school boards and City Council to address legislative gaps (e.g., Bill 27, Bill 29) that impact youth safety.
- Push for mandatory training for educators, police, and service providers on 2SLGBTQ+ issues.



Education and Awareness



Education emerges as a significant theme in the needs assessment, deeply connected to misinformation, education for parents, the general public, organizations, agencies, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth themselves. During the validation process with 2SLGBTQ+ youth participants, the theme of *Education and Awareness*, coded 477 times, was further divided into sub-themes: *2SLGBTQ+ Specific Knowledge* (103 times), *Broader Public Knowledge* (96 times), *Misinformation* (166 times), and *Family Education* (31 times). While *Education and Awareness* may not be the most frequently coded theme, the youth who participated in the verification and refinement process emphasize its profound impact on their daily lives. It is important to note that 13-17 (8.04 times per respondent) and 25-29 (7.43) mention *Education and Awareness* with more frequency than 18-24 (5.45).

What Does Education and Awareness Look Like for Youth?

The code misinformation emerges early in the needs assessment as a critical factor in this section. In the initial interviews and focus groups, it is the top coded theme. While its frequency shifts as more data is collected, it remains a persistent and undeniable theme. During one early focus group with youth aged 14–17, a participant comments that "*the theme of this conversation was misinformation is the root of a lot of things"* and further notes that in Grande Prairie, people often default to "*misunderstanding something and hating it"* rather than taking the time to learn about it. Some youth describe how people in their lives, such as parents, grandparents, and other close relatives, rely on unverified online sources like YouTube for information about 2SLGBTQ+ identities, directly impacting their daily lives. Youth participants also discuss how Grande Prairie's isolation, compared to larger cities like Edmonton, makes it easier for misinformation to spread and for the

unknown aspects of 2SLGBTQ+ identities to remain hidden. This lack of accurate education and the prevalence of misinformation often leave youth feeling isolated, which some describe as contributing to mental health challenges like anxiety or depression.

From my perspective, a lot of people don't know a lot about LGBT, especially up here up north, not in the big city like Edmonton or anything, because they weren't faced with it as much and a lot of people weren't open about it because of backlash, like even, even when I was in that small town, it was very noticeable because nobody knew what it was. Besides, on the internet, it was like the boogeyman from the internet, because they didn't know, they didn't understand. And anybody who actually was LGBT, they hid it because it was that ideology. Everybody was thinking, it's this bad thing. And obviously, if people were more going out or saying it, it would help it.

— Interview Respondent

Many youth describe how misinformation feels deeply tied to hatred and fear in their own lives. They connect this misinformation to broader influences, including the current administration in the United States and Alberta's legislative bills 26, 27, and 29. Youth explain that these governmental actions not only fuel misinformation but also reinforce a public perception that 2SLGBTQ+ identities and issues are inherently negative. This perception, they share, contributes to both the spread of misinformation and a broader lack of empathy toward 2SLGBTQ+ individuals and communities. Youth mention this misinformation impact, especially regarding legislative changes in Alberta, when discussing experiences within schools. Youth frequently express that while most adults feel inclusive in schools, they do not necessarily feel the same inclusivity from their peers. In fact, some participants share experiences such as food being thrown at them, being barked at, and slurs being used against them from classmates. The need for social media safety education is also tied to the broader issue of misinformation, as youth note that inaccurate or harmful content online often fills the gaps left by a lack of formal education.

They [general public] just assume it must be bad because the government is attacking [2SLGBTQ+], and they don't know anything otherwise, they don't know the people who are in the community, or anything, and especially because there's a lot of fear mongering attempts. So that doesn't help. So, they don't want to think about what the other side is like, because they [2SLGBTQ+ identities] look really bad.

— Interview Respondent

Youth participants describe the need for 2SLGBTQ+ specific education as a critical gap in their lives. Often, participants frame this as having access earlier in life would prevent low self-esteem, questions about self-worth, and the internalized belief that something is inherently wrong with them. Some participants share that the lack of education around 2SLGBTQ+ identities and issues leaves them feeling isolated, confused, or even traumatized, as they struggle to understand their own identities without guidance or representation. This lack of education is sometimes tied to religious upbringing or the dynamics of smaller communities in the region. Other times, it stems from a lack of access to inclusive resources or simply not knowing if such education exists. For example, youth describe growing up in environments where being queer is treated as an "*ideology*" rather than a natural part of human diversity. Others note that misinformation, fueled by political rhetoric, online spaces, or societal stigma, often fills the void where education should be, leaving them to navigate their identities alone or in secrecy. Schools are frequently cited as a critical space where education can improve, with youth calling for more inclusive curricula and support systems like GSAs.

My family was very religious and conservative, I was homeschooled and very sheltered to the point I didn't even know "gay" was an option until my mum accused me of being gay with my best friend at 15 or 14, like it was some terrible thing. That led me to repressing it so hard I secretly identified as Bi from 16 until this

year, at 29 where I have realized I was deep in comphet and not even attracted to men. That suppression of a huge component of my identity probably had a lot of traumatic impact that I will be unpacking for years to come.

— Survey Respondent

Along with *2SLGBTQ+ Specific Knowledge*, youth participants emphasize the need for *Broader Public Knowledge* and *Family Education*. They describe these as critical to increasing understanding and capacity for support among the general public, service providers, teachers, medical staff, parents, grandparents, siblings, and other key figures in their lives. Youth share that the education currently available for these groups is often lacking, leaving them to seek information elsewhere, sometimes resulting in exposure to what they describe as negative propaganda about 2SLGBTQ+ identities. Additionally, some youth highlight the need for education on social media safety, as many use social media to connect with other youth and learn about their identities but recognize the potential dangers of inaccurate information or predatory individuals on these platforms. For youth,



Art-Based Submission from Youth



SPECIAL EDITION

BREAKING NEWS * Daily Quote * BREAKING NEWS

THE REACH THAT REMAINS

This piece reflects what it feels like to be queer in Grande Prairie - Seen just enough to be judged, but not enough to be understood. The colour on the hand and face represent identity and pride, but also the parts of ourselves that we still have to hold at a distance for safety. In a city shaped by conservatism, where disrespect and dismissal are common, finding queer support is limited, inconsistent, or simply not there. The blurred figure behind the reaching hand mirrors how many of us exist here: present, trying, but often pushed to the background. This image captures the act of reaching forward anyway- searching for connection, community, and a space that hasn't fully arrived, yet remains worth reaching for.

education for the broader public is about fostering understanding to counteract misinformation and hatred, while family education is about equipping loved ones with the tools to provide meaningful support. One youth explains this as wishing "*families and communities better understood 2SLGBTQ+ identities, the challenges we face, and the importance of respect, inclusion, and using correct names and pronouns.*" Youth also emphasize the importance of educating allies, such as friends or teachers, to create safer and more supportive environments.

I would love for there to be increased access in the school system. I would love for, I know [reacted] doing it for a while, but actually spearheading GSAs in the school system, providing education nights for people who are curious and want to learn more. Like here's how to use pronouns properly. Here's why pronouns are important. Here's how you can be a safe person. For somebody who's coming out to you, and I do recognize that there's some of that, but I don't think there's enough. And I'm gonna talk about an example here recently in the Catholic school division, there was some talk amongst the superintendents about banning pride flags in the schools. I heard about that through my peers, not through any sort of organization. And so there are people with their boots on the ground doing the work that way, but I would love for there to be more advocacy from larger organizations and awareness of what's going on in our community, and accountability to our people in power.

— Interview Respondent

What Service Providers Are Saying

Service providers echo youth concerns about misinformation, noting how confusion and defensiveness often stem from a lack of understanding. They emphasize that fear of being labeled bigoted or homophobic prevents parents and grandparents from asking questions

about gender or sexuality, undermining communication and leaving youth feeling unacknowledged. Providers call for comprehensive education to address these gaps, including broader public knowledge, family education, and 2SLGBTQ+ specific education. Schools are highlighted as critical spaces for inclusive curricula, GSAs, and staff training, with providers stressing the need for stronger policies to protect youth from "*gender and sexuality-based bullying.*" Some providers note that they are witnessing 2SLGBTQ+ youth in schools "*feeling unheard and displaced due to a lack of feeling accepted in schools*", as well as an increase in anxiety. Providers tie this to the current legislative changes within Alberta. Regarding schools, some providers note that increasingly parents are calling schools to demand "*that teachers remove any pride flags or affirmative messaging from their classrooms*" and that some parents question hiring practices of 2SLGBTQ+ staff and express concern for their children around said staff without any reasonable grounds. These same service providers tie this to changes within Alberta as well as influence from American politics.

Working in schools there are limitations to the level of programming that can be provided due to provincial legislation. This makes it challenging to provide support to 2SLGBTQ+ youth and keep them safe.

— Service Provider Respondent

Service providers also highlight the need for trauma-informed and decolonizing approaches, as well as inclusive sex education for providers and for youth. They describe the importance of educating in safe spaces, mandatory training for staff on 2SLGBTQ+-related issues and addressing and learning about generational trauma's impact for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Pronoun education and visibility are key themes as well, with providers noting the positive impact of small gestures, like mentioning non-binary characters in conversation, on youth. As previously mentioned, inclusive sex education is seen as critical to preventing misinformation and addressing the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. This education is described as helping with prevention and with increasing protective factors for youth.

> *I think teaching about sex in an inclusive way helps youth to see themselves in real world situations. It helps them to feel recognized and cared about, which builds positive associations with sex and sexual health early on. It helps build good communication skills around sex and sexual health. Taking the time to building safe relationships with youth where they feel open to learning and sharing is an important aspect also. I think it's important for the facts and science to be shared through a 2SLGBTQIA+ lens to prevent misinformation. Applying this same lens is important when discussing healthy sex and relationships, as societal portrayals of queer relationships have often been misleading or limited. Domestic violence in queer relationships is a real and serious issue, often complicated by additional layers of secrecy or stigma.*
>
> *— Service Provider Respondent*

Finally, providers stress the need for parent and community education to bridge gaps in understanding. They call for more support for parents and caregivers, deeper engagement, and clearer promotion of educational resources so 2SLGBTQ+ youth can access the knowledge they need. As one provider reflects, *"children are beginning to naturally accept other students and not ostracize them if they do not fit the typical cis presentation; this still isn't as natural for their parents."* Many also emphasize the importance of organizations speaking up more boldly, noting that visibility and advocacy in education are key to building a truly inclusive community for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

Literature Spotlight: Education and Awareness

Fredericks and Cesaroni (2025) note the importance of education for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, specifically within community-based programs, as these programs give youth educational opportunities that they may not have access to within schools. This education includes health, healthy development, resources, gender and sexual diversity, and creates environments where youth receive education that makes

them feel supported and accepted, as opposed to victimized (Fredericks & Cesaroni, 2025). Beltrán et al. (2023) discuss the importance of this education for 2SLGBTQ+ youth from a specific decolonial lens where storytelling and unique educational opportunities, such as poetry analysis, foster "growth and nourishment among the young people who attend" (p. 6). Beltrán et al. explicitly discuss the impacts of this alternative decolonial storytelling and community-based education on 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous youth, and the improved health outcomes in reducing HIV risk behaviours from accessing this education. However, this idea of decolonial and culturally appropriate educational approaches can be applied beyond HIV risk behaviours to other areas where 2SLGBTQ+ youth are at an increased risk, such as suicidal ideation, homelessness, and mental health concerns.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Action Items:

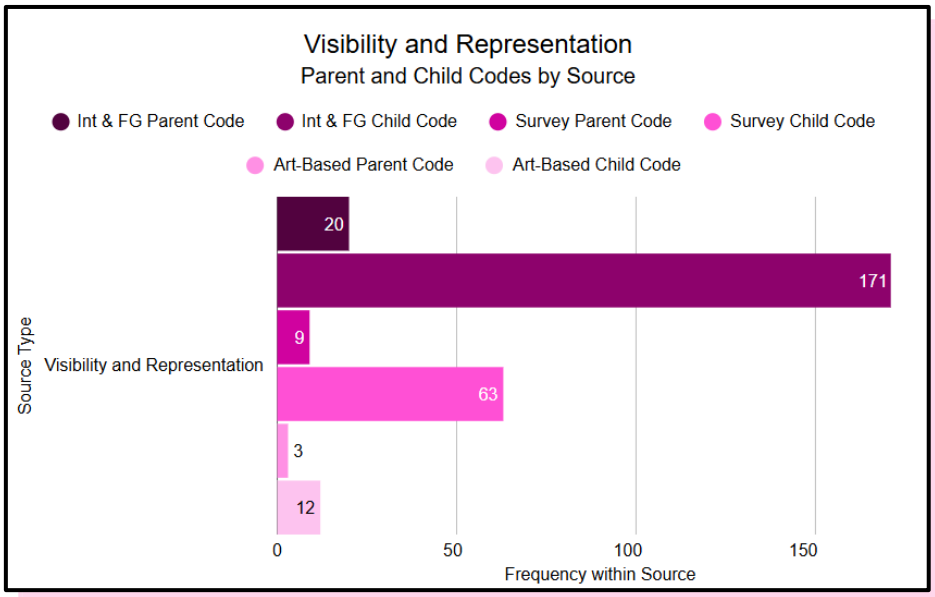
Expand Community-Based Education Programs

- Offer workshops, training, and resources in accessible community spaces and online; partner with local organizations to reach youth, families, and service providers.
- Create education for parents and families on supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth, build it into existing programs.

Strengthen Partnerships and Counter Legislative Barriers

- Engage schools, libraries, and other institutions open to inclusive programming; support educators and staff in creating affirming environments for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Collaborate with advocacy groups to counter harmful legislation (e.g., Bill 27, Bill 29) and develop adaptable materials that affirm 2SLGBTQ+ youth within current policies.





Visibility and Representation

Visibility and Representation is another theme that evolved during the working groups with youth. Originally labeled *Visibility and Belonging*, the youth who verified the data feel it is more appropriate to separate it as *Visibility and Representation*, while *Belonging* is now incorporated into *Community Acceptance* and *Friendship and Community*. *Visibility and Representation* is coded 246 times and contains the sub-themes *Need for Visibility* (173 times), *Performative Allyship* (25 times), *Queer Performative Behaviour* (10 times), and *Internal vs. External Perceptions* (6 times). The youth in the working groups note that while *Queer Performative Behaviour* and *Internal vs. External Perceptions* have low coding, they remain important to include as those themes have impact on the 2SLGBTQ+ youth community in Grande Prairie. It is important to note that while themes are discussed as a whole, *Visibility and Representation* is far more prevalent in the 25-29 age group (7.21 mentions per respondent) compared to 18-24 (2.77) and 13-17 (2.2). This difference is largely driven by the *Need for Visibility* theme, suggesting that 25-29-year-old youth are carrying the burden of a lack of visibility and feelings of being unseen.

What Does Visibility and Representation Look Like for Youth?

Visibility and Representation emerges in every data source as an important theme and one that the youth describe as co-occurring with other themes. This theme is tied to feelings of acceptance in Grande Prairie, as well as to education, support services, and healthcare, particularly through the sub-theme of *Need for Visibility*. Youth explain that increasing visibility of allyship, support for 2SLGBTQ+ identities, and 2SLGBTQ+ people themselves would enhance their feelings of safety, belonging, and trust in the broader community. As previously

noted, this theme is most prevalent among the 25-29 age group. While it cannot be stated that there is a direct correlation between this and the lack of programming for this age group in Grande Prairie, it is reasonable to assume a connection. Youth highlight that many 2SLGBTQ+ friendly spaces have age limits ending between 17-24, leaving those 25 and older with fewer options for free, safe spaces to gather and build friendships. This likely contributes to the feeling of a need for more visibility and representation. Additionally, the 25-29 age range also emphasizes *Holding Leaders Accountable, Unsafe Spaces, Hiding Identity, Need for a Pride Centre or Other New Inclusive Space*, *Friendship and Community*, and *Social Media Connection*. All of these are connected to a need for increased visibility and ways to build safety within Grande Prairie, potentially after the age cutoffs for other programs. Youth emphasize that additional spaces and advocating for better inclusion need to come from community leaders and that visibility needs to be intentional and explicit.

Local organizations and leaders could better advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ youth by creating more inclusive programs, hosting awareness events, and publicly supporting 2SLGBTQ+ rights. Changes that would make me feel more visible and supported include safe spaces for youth, representation in community initiatives, education about diverse identities, and leaders openly promoting acceptance and inclusion.

— Survey Respondent

The need for explicit and intentional strives for visibility and representation feeds into the second most coded sub-theme within this main theme: *Performative Allyship*. 2SLGBTQ+ youth participants who comment on the appearance of performative allyship express concerns that those who promote themselves as allies, whether individually, as an agency, or government organization, do so to a limit. This leaves the youth questioning whether those "*allies*" actually defend them in tough scenarios, such as speaking against government legislation even if the government funds your work or stepping in to challenge homophobic or transphobic comments in a public forum. Youth describe feeling unsupported by surface-level allyship, where actions like attending Pride events or displaying rainbow flags are not matched by meaningful advocacy or protection. Youth express that this disconnect leaves them feeling abandoned by those who claim to support them. As one participant notes, *"Pride isn't a party, Pride is a movement. And it feels like there could be a lot more things that are actually being done to help provide support for people, provide education for people, and not just the party."* Others emphasize the frustration of seeing allies remain silent or passive when faced with direct opposition, such as during protests, policy debates, or workplace discrimination. Youth state that they need allies to move beyond symbolic gestures and demonstrate consistent, courageous solidarity in both public and private spheres.



Art-Based Submission from Youth

I think a lot of allies or people who are in straight-passing relationships don't have compassion for how hard it is for people who are very visibly queer, and so they don't understand the importance of speaking up when they hear something wrong. If someone's being a little bit off-color, I think people need to be more comfortable shutting that down immediately and being like, 'That's not okay.' For example, [redacted] did the musical score for a movie that just came out, it was a small film at the college. The main

character was gay, and he kissed another boy. It wasn't even important to the story, but some people in the crowd very loudly went, 'Oh, eww.' [...] It was so strange and jarring. It brought me back to the reality of Grande Prairie. I don't know how to change the culture when it seems to be rapidly regressing in a right-wing direction."

— Interview Respondent

For both *Queer Performative Behaviour* and *Internal vs. External Perceptions*, youth feel these codes belong under *Visibility and Representation* as it is the lack of visibility that causes their occurrence. Youth participants who express these themes acknowledge that both *Queer Performative Behaviour*, feeling the pressure to act overtly and stereotypically queer, and *Internal vs. External Perceptions*, how one views their identity and self versus how others view them, are deeply connected to a lack of visibility. This lack of visibility allows for assumptions about identity but also increases the pressure on 2SLGBTQ+ youth to actively be "*visibly queer*", even if it puts their safety at risk. However, some youth describe their acknowledgment of their own performance of overtly "*queer*" identity as a positive reaction to no longer feeling the need to remain hidden and as a tool to affirm their identities in a world where visibility is often the only way to be seen at all. This duality of perspectives shows that, even within a needs assessment, 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie are not a homogeneous group.

We were so hidden and kind of suppressed and maybe even unaware of our own identities that we have kind of exploded out of the closet and almost gone, maybe not too far, but too far in being like, Hey, I'm here. I'm queer'.

And being very loud and very like, overcompensating seems unkind and not entirely accurate, but it's a kind of similar thing to that. So, I think I see people kind of almost overperform their queerness to kind of affirm their identities.

— Interview Respondent

Youth state this overperformance, while sometimes criticized, is itself a response to invisibility and a way to reclaim agency in spaces where 2SLGBTQ+ identities are otherwise erased or ignored.

Visibility and Representation impacts access to healthcare and services, as well as economic stability. As one youth shares, "*it's hard to trust a system that doesn't even see you. Like, if I can't find a doctor who understands me, how am I supposed to feel safe asking for help?*" Youth emphasize the importance of including these topics in both sections, but for brevity, further exploration of these systemic impacts will follow in *Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing*.

What Service Providers Are Saying

Service providers emphasize the critical need for increased visibility of resources and programs tailored to 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie. They note that many youth remain unaware of the services available to them, particularly in schools, where intentional advertising could bridge gaps in access. Providers stress that visibility is not just about promoting events but ensuring youth know where to turn for support, whether for mental health, social connection, or affirming spaces. A recurring concern among providers is the tension between visibility and safety in a community where conservative values often clash with inclusive initiatives. Some describe having to subtly frame or even hide programs to avoid backlash, as vocal opposition, though often a minority, creates an unsafe environment for both youth and providers. This dynamic forces organizations to navigate a delicate balance of advocating for visibility while protecting the youth they serve from potential harm.

We have not had a drag storytime in two years because of all the backlash we faced. There was an outstanding amount of support for the program, but the hate was so loud that for safety purposes we have not planned another.

— Service Provider Respondent

Providers also highlight the role of organizations in modeling vocal support for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. They acknowledge that while some agencies are stepping up, others remain hesitant to publicly advocate, fearing repercussions. This reluctance, providers note, sends a message to youth about whose voices and identities are truly valued in the community. They call for more collective action, emphasizing that visibility must be paired with tangible support, such as inclusive policies and trained staff, to create lasting change. Service providers express frustration when discussing this nuanced and complex topic of visibility versus hiding for protection and also acknowledge this is something that feels unique to Grande Prairie as the community is smaller and has fewer resources and more isolation.

The biggest challenge of Grande Prairie is that we are a large population that is too far isolated from other large populations. Larger populations are intrinsically more diverse. Grande Prairie does not have easy access to other Alberta cities leaving our people to struggle alone with the burgeoning diversity of our small city population.

— Service Provider Respondent

Finally, providers celebrate the resilience and activism of youth, who are increasingly demanding representation and driving change. They observe that youth are not only accessing available resources but also creating their own spaces through art, advocacy and peer

support to fill gaps in the system. This grassroots energy, providers note, is a testament to the strength of Grande Prairie's 2SLGBTQ+ community, even amid systemic barriers. Service providers note that more programs and resources for 2SLGBTQ+ youth are being created whether the visibility of those programs is apparent or not. However, providers also note there is a need for more visibility and representation with specific education for 2SLGBTQ+ youth including sexual health, safer sex practices, safer social media literacy and use, healthy boundaries, and healthy relationships.

I find that there are a lot more community resources being created to specifically help this demographic. There is a lot more support available to youth. More safe spaces are developing, and more kids are feeling like they can express themselves freely.

— Service Provider Respondent

Ultimately, regardless of the push and pull service providers feel regarding keeping programs hidden for safety or super visible to help youth find them, all providers agree that the programs that exist are crucial for Grande Prairie's 2SLGBTQ+ youth and express the need for an increase in programs. No service providers indicate that there are currently enough.

Literature Spotlight: Visibility and Representation

Logie et al. (2018) discuss the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and individuals living in Northern Canada and the impact the lack of visibility around 2SLGBTQ+ identities has on these individuals. In spaces where 2SLGBTQ+ individuals have less visibility, less access, and less representation in services, education, including sexual health services and safer sex education specific to same-sex relationships, there are profound negative impacts including higher risk for STIs/STBBIs and mental health concerns such as depression (Logie et al., 2018). Logie et al. (2018) highlight how structural barriers, such as heteronormativity in sexual health education and limited access to safer sex supplies for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, negatively impact the ability to practice safer sex or access affirming care. This lack of visibility and

representation reinforces shame, stigma, and hiding identities which further marginalizes 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in Northern communities (Logie et al., 2018).

In schools, visibility can take tangible forms. Egale's (2021) *Still in Every Class in Every School* report captures this through youth experiences:

> *The most common forms of 2SLGBTQ visibility were as follows:*
>
> - *Safe space/ally stickers (66% trans, 55% cisgender LGBQ, and 24% CH).*
> - *Posters/pictures (51% trans, 50% cisgender LGBQ, and 40% CH).*
> - *Books or videos (53% trans, 41% cisgender LGBQ, and 21% CH).*
> - *Displays of students' work (26% trans, 21% cisgender LGBQ, and 14% CH).*
>
> *Although less common, 13% of 2SLGBTQ students indicated that their school put on a musical/play/concert with a 2SLGBTQ theme, 19% commented that their school participated in a related human rights event, and 19% that their school took part in a related student-led conference or workshop.* (p. 99-100)

Egale (2021) discusses the various levels of visibility by grade and by type of school, and the inclusive practices of GSAs, 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia policies, and 2SLGBTQ+ visibility in schools as "effective resistance strategies" (p. 133) improving 2SLGBTQ+ students experiences in schools. While there are other areas, outside of education and schools, where visibility is important, such as healthcare services and community, using education and schools as one example underscores the critical role of visibility, a principle that extends to healthcare, community spaces, and other systems.

VISIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION

Action Items:

Increase Intentional Visibility

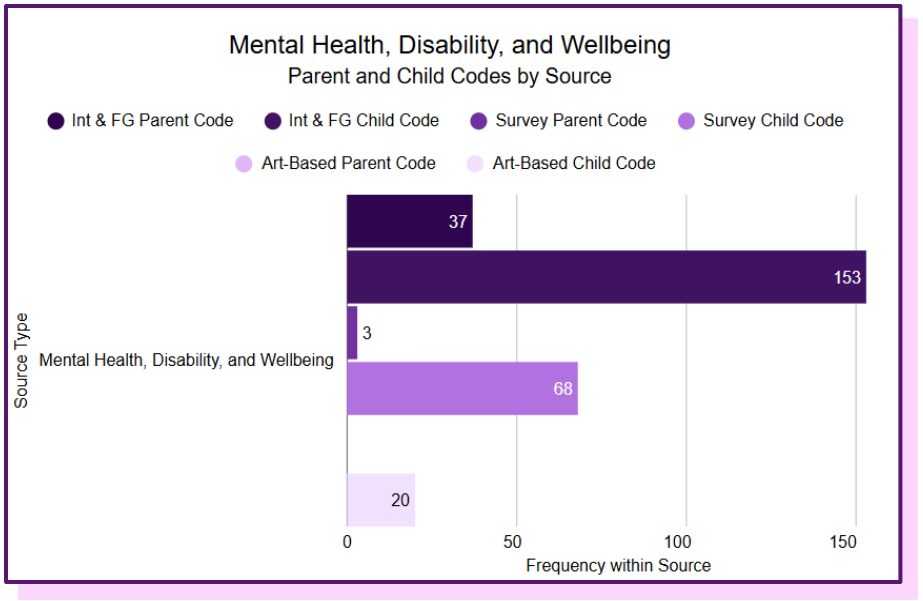
- Publicly promote 2SLGBTQ+ resources, programs, and supports where youth gather, schools, healthcare, and community spaces, with visible signage and directories.
- Develop age-inclusive programming, particularly for 25–29-year-olds who currently lack options.

Move Beyond Performative Allyship

- Advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ rights and challenge discriminatory policies or comments publicly.
- Hold leaders and organizations accountable for consistent, meaningful support; challenge surface-level symbols and discriminatory policies publicly.
- Ensure allyship is informed and actionable through education and training.



Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing



Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing is a large theme, and each theme can stand alone, however, the youth who verified the data felt its impact cuts across all spheres of their lives. Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing is coded 241 times, with sub-themes: Need for Supports (75 times), Intersection with Identity (66 times), Resiliency and Hope (34 times), and Grande Prairie as Home/Identifying with the Region (26 times). While this theme affects all participants, 25–29-year-olds had a higher mention per respondent rate (4.79) than 18-24 (3.39) and 13-17 (2.52), with the biggest differences existing in the *Intersection with Identity* and *Grande Prairie as Home* subthemes. Additionally, transgender and gender diverse respondents mention this theme at over double the rate (4.15) compared to their cisgender peers (1.92). This difference speaks to the different experiences of those who fit in this needs assessment based on age and gender identity.

What Does Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing Look Like for Youth?

Mental Health, as it appears in this needs assessment, is an extremely nuanced theme from youth discussing impacts, access, need for more supports, stereotypes, resiliency, and the connected nature of repeated experiences of community nonacceptance and how that influences mental health experiences. The *Need for Supports* theme is a dominant concern with youth often describing the significant barriers to accessing mental health supports and other social services in Grande Prairie. Youth either note the lack of services, the cost of services, or their difficulty navigating services as challenges. According to the youth participants, affordable or free options are extremely limited, and high demand makes even existing services difficult to access. Economic realities further compound these challenges, as many youth state they cannot afford private therapy, transportation, or other associated costs. As one participant notes, "*there are some, there's*

very few mental health supports that are, like, affordable or free in Grande Prairie, but they're so high in demand that it's so hard to even access them."

It's very overwhelming. Having to balance work, school, and life is so stressful and I feel like I am drowning. Resources for affordable or free mental health supports would help.

— Survey Respondent

Access to Healthcare and Social Services (171 times) is something youth feel impacts their mental health but is not solely tied to their 2SLGBTQ+ identities but to economic impacts. However, many youth participants feel there is a connection to their low income and their 2SLGBTQ+ identity. For example, one youth states "*those places [2SLGBTQ+ affirming] tend not to pay enough, like, not paid enough to live off of, or even if they do, the hours may not be great, because there are so many people working there*" while another adds, "*with that and finding two queer affirming jobs is not happening.*" Youth connect this low income and the economic impacts to their living arrangements as well, with youth often stating that being 2SLGBTQ+ adds another layer that they have to think about which also impacts their day-to-day life and mental health.

My experiences with housing have sometimes been challenging, especially finding places where I feel fully accepted and safe as a 2SLGBTQ+ youth. There can be discomfort or judgment from landlords or roommates. What would improve my experience is having more inclusive, affordable housing options, supportive landlords, and spaces that openly welcome diverse identities.

— Survey Respondent

Economic Challenges (167 times) and *Low Income* (61 times) became a critical point during the working sessions with the youth who were refining themes, however, the youth recognize this as a larger systemic issue which non-2SLGBTQ+ individuals also face. That said, youth state they are more likely to be impacted by economic challenges due to their 2SLGBTQ+ identities as finding safe jobs and places to live is harder when they are experiencing community nonacceptance. This is intricately linked to the struggle that some youth discuss. One youth states, "*I have been living on my own since I was 15, and finances have always been a struggle, more accessible resources for those living on their own at young ages are necessary.*" Youth often describe this as a compounding factor, as both low income and the lack of local resources contribute to negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing.



Art-Based Submission from Youth

My husband experienced SUCH trouble finding gender-affirming care here in Grande Prairie, to the point that he had to be referred to by his therapist to the closest family doctor that would prescribe him testosterone and was knowledgeable with trans healthcare all the way in Peace River. And every time he has to have a check-up or needs to be referred elsewhere, it's always either in Peace River or in Edmonton because there's NO resources in GP for him. We don't often have the ability to drive out to these places, so he's missing out on life-saving care because of the inaccessibility of trans medical care in this city.

— Survey Respondent

Youth state the *Intersection with Identity* creates additional layers of difficulty, particularly for youth who are neurodivergent or disabled. According to youth participants, systems often fail to account for these overlapping identities, leading to misdiagnosis, inappropriate care, or denial of services. One youth explains, "*I think in regard to, like disability... gender diverse people are the most likely to be autistic... I genuinely believe if I was a cisgender man doing the same behaviors that I did when I was a kid and a teenager, I would have been diagnosed with autism.*" *Intersection with Identity* is not limited to mental health challenges but includes other barriers to accessing current 2SLGBTQ+ spaces due to various disabilities, physical and otherwise, and what some youth describe as a lack of intersectional inclusion.

I do know a lot of disabled queer people find the needs aren't met because it's either one or the other. In medical care, they're generally misgendered. In queer spaces, it's often not accessible. Some of that is due to spaces accessible to queer groups being lower rent but less accessible. I'm thinking of some of those spaces, Cards [Café], bookstores like Beth's Books, and even the queer-inclusive library on the main stretch, many are in basements. So that kind of sucks. I'm not saying it's directly why I've limited trying to go to queer spaces, but it's definitely a barrier.

— Interview Participant

Despite expressing these systemic barriers and economic struggles, youth consistently highlight *Resiliency and Hope* as a key part of *Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing*. Youth participants state they find ways to cope and support each other, often creating their own safety nets when formal systems fail. While closely linked to *Community Acceptance* and *Friendship and Community*, youth describe this resiliency and hope as "*the only thing, I think, that is keeping us alive; we only have each other.*" Youth participants describe various ways of maintaining resiliency and hope, such as connecting with friends, spending time in nature, learning to ignore hate, and setting boundaries

for what they will and will not tolerate. However, it is important to note that the youth who discuss boundaries and learning to ignore hatred also discuss how this took time for them to learn, implying there is a struggle to get to this place of wellbeing.

I try not to focus on what they think. That's how I protect myself. Sometimes interactions leave a sour taste, but once the day's over, it's gone. I realized I was transgender at 13, so I had to develop that barrier. I know people who get severely affected, but when a slur is yelled, I'm fine, not because I'm okay with it, but because I know it's about them, not me. I navigate prejudice by being conscious of my safety, telling people where I'm going.

— Interview Participant

Youth discuss the push and pull between their 2SLGBTQ+ identity and their connection to Grande Prairie and Northern Alberta. Youth participants explain that this tension affects their mental health, as they identify with the region yet regularly receive messages that they do not belong. Grande Prairie is their home, and their 2SLGBTQ+ identity is equally central to their sense of self. The youth who mention this also cite it as a reason 2SLGBTQ+ youth leave Grande Prairie as the city feels unsafe. Even though it is home, and some of these same youth state they would like to stay or return, they ultimately feel unwelcomed. However, some note that while Grande Prairie feels unsafe, there are still people who are kind and stand up for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

It's Alberta, people burn out tires on the rainbow sidewalk and hold protest signs in pride month, some folks even do drive by slur shouting if you are visibly aligned with any LGBTQ+ aesthetic. The city feels

unsafe, but ultimately, it's the light that shines through the clouds, the kindness that can be seen even in such a place of hatred that makes this place special.

— Survey Respondent

Some participants who discuss this region and identify with it also recognize that leaving Grande Prairie would affect more than just themselves. This is important to note. Within this needs assessment, "youth" are defined as a broad age range up to 29 years old. Therefore, this age range includes those who have children and families, creating a complex relationship between this region, their own identity, and belonging and wellbeing.

What makes me stay is a really hard question. There are times when I don't want to stay, and if I could leave, I probably would. But this is where my roots are, my family, my kids. This is my home. I can't take my kids away from the community they know, even if it comes at the cost of living in more silence than I'm comfortable with.

— Interview Respondent

Mental Health, Disability, and Wellbeing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth participants is shaped by economic barriers, limited access to affirming care, and the tension between identifying with this region and experiencing nonacceptance. Youth consistently demonstrate resilience through peer support and self-created safety nets despite these systemic challenges. It is important to understand that the complexity of these experiences underscores the need for intersectional, community-wide efforts to better support 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

What Service Providers Are Saying

Service providers see similar trends as the youth in the needs assessment but view it from a systemic and organizational perspective. Service providers state they work with youth who express not being able to be open about their identities with many people, and that this impacts their mental health significantly. Service providers explain there are compounding factors such as an increased need for safe spaces, an increased need for programming that is mindful of cost and accessibility, a need for education and supports for parents and families struggling with acceptance, and a need for better mental health supports. They state this is especially true for 2SLGBTQ+ youth who struggle with depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-harm, largely due to factors which pertain to their identities. Service providers note that when more mental health programming is available for all youth, 2SLGBTQ+ youth benefit from both the programming itself and the increased empathy, communication skills, and sense of belonging such programs create. Service providers also see the direct benefit the supports have on youth.

Programming that supports mental health for all youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth benefit from this as they are at higher risk of negative mental health outcomes. Programming also supports development of empathy, communication skills, sense of belonging/community, which positively impacts 2SLGBTQ+ youth as well as other youth.

— Service Provider

Service providers also note that when services and programming are available for youth, the youth show up, are engaged, and want to openly participate. Service providers recognize the resilience and engagement of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who access services. They see youth who are committed to their mental health journeys and appreciate the safe spaces and supportive adults in their lives. This engagement includes learning about ways to support mental health and wellbeing for themselves and others. This noted engagement connects to the youth

reporting resiliency and hope but from a service provider perspective. However, service providers also highlight the lack of accessible resources, barriers to care, and the impact of community nonacceptance on the mental health and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Service providers face challenges in referring youth to appropriate services due to limited resources, funding constraints, and the transient nature of Grande Prairie's population.

Because Grande Prairie is considered a small community and much of the population is transient it is difficult to provide services and keep the programming consistent. Lack of funding is continually an issue.

— Service Provider

Service providers state the importance of community collaboration, including partnerships with schools, healthcare systems, and other organizations, to create a network of support for youth. They express concerns about political and legislative barriers, such as recent Alberta bills that create confusion, fear, and limitations on their ability to provide inclusive and affirming care. Some service providers state this confusion and fear disrupt their ability to support 2SLGBTQ+ youth, creating a potentially dangerous situation for those who do not have safety at home, which impacts youth mental health. Some service providers describe feeling unable to do their work appropriately and in a meaningful way, especially within schools, due to these challenges and barriers.

I find Grande Prairie to have a lot of very loud people who can voice anti-2SLGBTQ+ sentiments. This makes it hard for students to fully feel they can be themselves outside of our building or outside of their own homes.

— Service Provider

Ultimately, service providers underscore the need for increased visibility, funding, and systemic support to address the gaps in mental health, disability, and wellbeing services for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie.

Literature Spotlight: Mental Health, Disability, And Wellbeing

Desmeules-Trudel et al. (2023) argue that 2SLGBTQ+ people experience disparities in their access to mental health resources for a variety of reasons including navigating social tensions around 2SLGBTQ+ identities, deciding when and what they disclose to providers about their identity, and the additional labour required to access and navigate the mental health care system. Within Canada, 2SLGBTQ+ youth are known to have higher rates of suicide, higher rates of substance use, less access to community supports, and face an increasingly hostile political climate (Desmeules-Trudel et al., 2023). Kingsbury and Findlay (2024) report that in Canada "among 2SLGBTQ+ youth, more than half met criteria for any mental health or substance use disorder in the past 12 months (compared with 29% of cisgender heterosexual youth), and one in four had experienced suicidal ideation in the past year (compared with 5% of cisgender heterosexual youth)" (p. 17). It is important to understand that being 2SLGBTQ+ is not what puts these youth at risk, but instead it is "societal prejudice and systemic inequities present within health care and mental health care systems, as well as other social systems, [that] continue to marginalize queer, trans, and nonbinary people" (Desmeules-Trudel et al., 2023, p. 190). Additionally, it is important to recognize "half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid-20s" (Syan et al., 2021, p. 660), which means early access is crucial for youth, but "less than 20% access and receive appropriate treatment" (Syan et al., 2021, p. 660) and that is without considering how being 2SLGBTQ+ impacts that number.

The need for increased competencies among healthcare professionals who work with 2SLGBTQ+ youth is evident, and this is especially true for those who work with transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Rose et al. (2025) found that while 96% of primary healthcare providers in Saskatchewan reported confidence in providing *general* healthcare to transgender and gender-diverse patients, this confidence plummeted to 30% when addressing transition-related needs, a disparity that underscores critical gaps in provider training. While this study is based in Saskatchewan, Alberta is arguably similar as a prairie province. This lack of competency not only limits access to affirming care but also exacerbates mental health burdens for transgender and gender-diverse individuals, who already face systemic

barriers. Without targeted education for professionals, these gaps risk perpetuating cycles of exclusion, unmet needs, and poorer mental health outcomes for a population that requires both medical and psychosocial competency from service providers. As schools appear in the needs assessment as places which affect youth mental health, it is necessary to explore the impact schools can have. Moe et al. (2015) argue that school counselors require targeted training to address transgender-specific competencies, such as knowledge about gender transitioning, as standard training does not always account for transgender-specific needs, and without targeted education for professionals, these gaps risk perpetuating cycles of exclusion, unmet needs, and poorer mental health outcomes for a population that requires competency from service providers.

Kingsbury and Findlay (2024) note the limitation within their study and that there is an increased need to approach mental health from an intersectional lens, including how mental health is impacted by race, ethnicity, and disability, to name a few identity intersections. Within this needs assessment mental health, disability, and wellbeing are presented as one theme, as decided by the youth participants for brevity, though the youth recognize each one could be a stand-alone theme worthy of more dedicated research.

MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITY AND WELLBEING

Action Items:

Improve Access to Affirming Supports

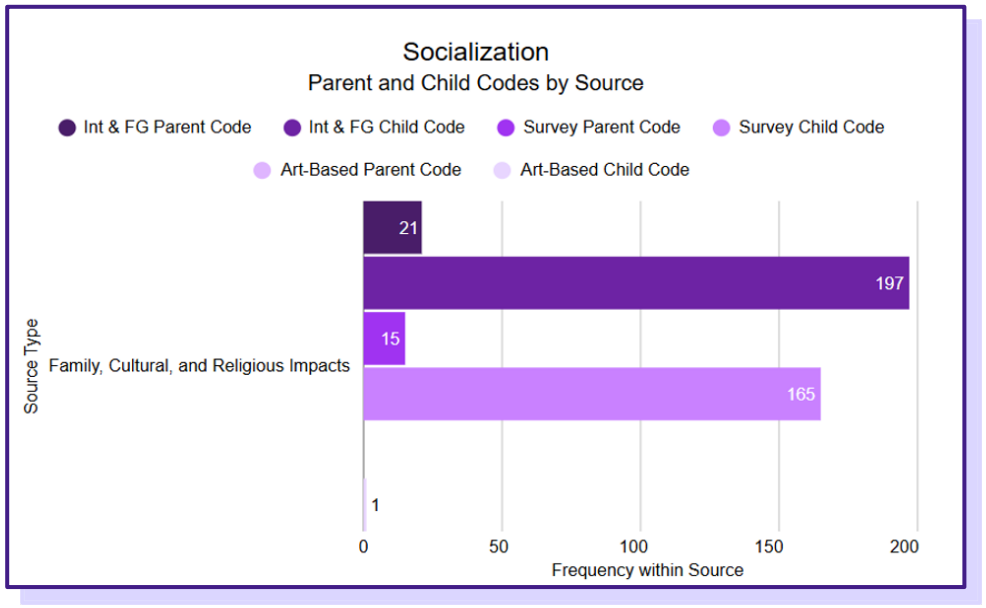
- Expand low-cost or free 2SLGBTQ+-affirming mental health services, screening for basic needs (housing, food, transportation) first.
- Address economic barriers, advocate for affordable transportation and healthcare so youth can actually reach supports.
- Develop peer-led support networks for youth, especially those with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Strengthen Provider Competency

- Mandate training on 2SLGBTQ+-specific, disability-inclusive, and intersectional competencies for healthcare and mental health providers.
- Advocate for policies requiring intersectional, disability-inclusive mental health supports.



Socialization (Family, Religion, Culture)



Socialization emerged as a theme during the verification and streamlining of data sessions with youth. It consists of three interconnected sub-themes: Family Impacts, Cultural Impacts, and Religious Impacts. Youth grouped these together because, while each has significant and distinct impacts, they are deeply personal and vary greatly depending on an individual's upbringing. This is what the youth termed "*socialization*." Though these themes were discussed and measured together, it is important to recognize their unique impacts and how they overlap and intersect. Within the needs assessment, *Family Impacts* (mentioned 160 times) was divided into *Positive Impacts* (76 times) and *Negative Impacts* (73 times) with the remainder coded at the theme level. *Cultural and Religious Impacts* (mentioned 203 times) included the sub-themes *Intersecting Identities* (50 times), *Moral Judgements* (55 times), *Global Influences* (28 times), *Leaving Religion and Community* (23 times), *Importance of Guidance from Culture* (18 times), and *Cultural Events* (4 times). For brevity, cultural and religious impacts were combined into one theme, encompassing diverse cultures, ethnicities, racialized experiences, and the influence of various religions on personal development.

What Does Socialization Look Like for Youth?

2SLGBTQ+ youth participants have varying experiences with religious impacts. While some find affirming churches and acceptance within their faith communities, the majority of youth who discuss religion describe not being accepted. Several share that they had to leave their communities or churches to freely express their gender or sexual identities. Many describe religion, particularly conservative or

fundamentalist interpretations, as a barrier to understanding their 2SLGBTQ+ identities. They explain that they are taught from an early age that 2SLGBTQ+ identities are wrong, and even then, only if they are taught about them at all. One youth describes this as "*a lot of oppression that caused suppression that caused confusion*," while others state that without this barrier, they would experience more internal acceptance and less struggle at an earlier age.

I remember being like eight and like praying to God every night, and like sobbing, and I was like, please don't send me to hell, because women are attractive and men are attractive.

— Focus Group Respondent

Youth who left religious communities, or whose families left, due to a lack of acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ identities describe the profound struggle of losing a community they had long relied on. Youth state that even when leaving was a choice, it was rarely simple or immediate. Many discuss grappling with the push and pull of belonging, wanting to stay connected to their faith or cultural communities while continuously receiving messages that their identities were wrong, sinful, or unwelcome. For some, the process is gradual, marked by years of internal conflict, suppression, and confusion. Youth describe a delay in self-acceptance and the emotional toll of losing not just a spiritual home but also the social networks and support systems tied to those communities. For others, the decision to leave was abrupt, sparked by direct rejection or harm, such as being outed, shamed, or excommunicated by family or religious leaders. Even in affirming spaces, like a Catholic high school that respects a student's name and pronouns, these positive experiences are often contrasted with rejection elsewhere, highlighting inconsistent acceptance. Whether gradual or sudden, the departure leaves many youth navigating grief, isolation, and the challenge of rebuilding a sense of safety and belonging in a world that is often described as hostile.

I was raised in the Mennonite Church, and then we left, after our view shifted, and then we just shifted to a Christian church. Then we left that one, and then we went to [another church]. It was like an hour commute and then my mom figured out she was gay, and then we left the church entirely. Then we were just kind of on our own, and I don't remember much of it, but according to my parents, it was really tough, because it was a lot of like, leaving, leaving a whole community like that. There's... no one says anything, but it's really, it's really hard, and you're looked at differently.

— Interview Respondent

For some 2SLGBTQ+ youth, culture is a source of rejection, particularly when traditional values clash with their identities. One youth shares the experience of asking their mother, "*would you rather me dead than gay*?" only to hear the answer: "*Yes, dead than gay and alive*." This youth describes asking their mother three times for clarification to make sure it was heard correctly, and it was. Youth state this kind of rejection leaves deep wounds, forcing them to navigate the pain of feeling unwanted by the very communities that shape them. However, cultural identity also provides a path to acceptance and healing for others. Many youth describe how connecting with their heritage helps them embrace their 2SLGBTQ+ identities. This connection happens through Indigenous ceremonies, cultural events, or community traditions. For Indigenous youth participants, connecting with Two-Spirit traditions and elders is described as not just affirming but transformative, offering a framework for understanding their identities beyond colonial or religious constraints. For these youth, culture is described as a foundation of resilience and identity ownership.

These two polarizing experiences with culture show how it can be either a protective factor or a source of harm, depending on the acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ identities within the cultural community. According to youth with positive cultural experiences, having spaces available for this connection is instrumental in their development. Youth highlight that this is why it is important for safe spaces to be

knowledgeable not only in 2SLGBTQ+ related issues but also in cultural competence, as these identities often intersect and cannot be separated from one another.

When I was a teenager, I always identified as Métis. It wasn't something I questioned; it was just who I was. As I learned more about Indigenous histories, my cousin came out as bisexual and Two-Spirit, which inspired me to explore cultural gender identities further. I was fortunate to interact with Two-Spirit elders at a summer camp. Hearing their experiences and learning about what it meant in the context of my own Cree Métis heritage was integral to figuring myself out. Before transitioning, I had put myself in a box to avoid being misgendered, dressing hyper-masculine as a survival tactic. But once I started medically transitioning at 17, I realized I didn't have to conform to that box. After years of hearing Two-Spirit people welcome me, it finally clicked: that was my identity.

— Interview Respondent

Family Impacts is divided into Positive and Negative experiences, with the codes very evenly distributed between the two themes. Youth express how important the influence of family can be on their feelings of acceptance and belonging. Few youth describe solely positive or solely negative experiences with family. The majority of the youth who discuss family had both positive and negative experiences to some extent. Whether it is a mostly unaccepting family with one safe family member or a mostly safe family with one unaccepting family member, the impacts of family cannot be minimized. As one youth explains, "*half of my family is very supportive of me as a person, which has helped me become the person I am today; the other half has made me realize that there are some hateful people*."

The youth who experience positive family impacts discuss how family members keep them safe, make them feel secure, and become the foundation they need to navigate a world where they encounter unacceptance. Youth with mostly accepting families state they feel lucky

to have their family members and discuss the natural protective buffer this creates for them. This support often allows them to explore their identities more freely, take risks in advocating for themselves, and develop resilience in the face of external challenges.

My family background has shaped my experiences by influencing how supported or understood I feel. Growing up in a family that values acceptance and respect made it easier to explore my identity, while families with less understanding sometimes made me feel isolated or cautious about being open.

— Survey Respondent

Conversely, youth who express having largely negative family impacts experience the opposite effects. They discuss how these experiences leave them feeling alone, isolated, and unprotected, often without guidance. In some cases, youth describe being on their own at an earlier age than average, forced to navigate adult systems without support. While the youth who experience solely negative impacts, without any positive ones, are in the minority, the effects of these negative family experiences are profound. Youth participants link these experiences to an increased risk of being unhoused, having lower income, and experiencing less security in general. The absence of even one accepting family member often means youth seek support elsewhere, if they can find it at all. Some participants describe how family rejection, particularly in conservative or religious households, leads to cycles of instability, where they



Art-Based Submission from Youth

struggle to access education, employment, or safe housing. As one youth shares, "*I was kicked out at 16 and had to move from BC to Alberta, but those experiences made me who I am today.*" Others explain that the emotional toll of rejection compounds the challenges they face in other areas of their lives, such as mental health or social connections. However, when family support is lacking, youth describe turning to friendships, mentors, or community spaces like Sunrise House or the Friendship Centre for affirmation. Even though youth experience family rejection, they do not let that stop them from seeking safety in community resources, highlighting the immense importance of these resources being available.

My immediate family has become accepting (after they realized that it wasn't a phase) but my extended family (immigrants with heavy religious background) don't know that I'm part of the gay community. They would disown me if they did. I kept it hidden for a while; because of that I wasn't able to express myself as much as my straight friends could.

— Survey Respondent

What Service Providers Are Saying

Service providers underscore that family dynamics are a pivotal factor in the well-being of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. They explain that rejection or lack of understanding within families often leads to instability, feelings of not belonging, and a range of negative impacts for youth. While youth may seek support elsewhere, Grande Prairie's limited availability of 2SLGBTQ+ specific services creates additional barriers. As one provider notes, "*It's difficult to refer youth to other organizations when we do not have the capacity to help them, because there aren't many queer-friendly places to send folks*." This gap in resources also extends to conflict resolution, as those offering support must have the competency to address 2SLGBTQ+ identity-related challenges effectively. Service providers recognize that strengthening family support systems and ensuring accessible, affirming resources are critical to fostering stability and belonging for youth.

I am seeing family conflict for 2SLGBTQ+ students due to differing beliefs (e.g. parents who reject/deny their child's 2SLGBTQ+ identity; parents who shame and/or abuse their child; parents who attempt to "convert" or convince their child that they are not 2SLGBTQ+). Professionally, there is an increasing fear of parent reactions to educational content that includes 2SLGBTQ+ characters and content.

— Service Provider

Service providers also emphasize the impact of cultural and religious contexts on youth wellbeing. Some describe how conservative or fundamentalist beliefs within families and communities create barriers to acceptance, while others note the positive role of cultural spaces, such as Indigenous ceremonies or affirming faith communities, in fostering resilience. Therefore, much like what is reported by the youth, service providers see the duality of culture and religion and how both impact 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Most service providers attribute the current climate of non-acceptance to political and legislative changes occurring both within and outside Canada, largely influenced by American discourse. Grande Prairie is noted as a space where this climate of non-acceptance thrives, seemingly influencing its culture. However, service providers also note that most people in Grande Prairie are accepting, but it is a loud minority creating the perception of a hostile climate. One provider reflects, "*The 2SLGBTQ+ experience in northern Alberta is intrinsically traumatic; we do not offer 2SLGBTQ+ group therapy at this time, but all services are suitable for the 2SLGBTQ+ community*." Statements like this from service providers show it is not just the youth seeing the complexity and nuance of Grande Prairie's own culture and relationship with its 2SLGBTQ+ citizens. Service providers are keenly aware of it as well. This duality underscores the need for culturally competent and intersectional approaches to support youth where they are.

I have been watching the wider community response to Pride events and other 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy for several years and have noticed a great deal of confusion and defensiveness from those who are not

informed or culturally conservative. I've heard multiple times from parents and grandparents that they are afraid to ask for clarification about gender or sexuality for fear of being labelled a bigot or homophobic. Just as frequently, I am hearing from 2SLGBTQ+ youth that they are not being acknowledged for who they are; pronouns and preferred names are being ignored, and youth feel like they are walking on eggshells. The biggest hurdle is the mutual fear of reactivity within a family unit, and this undermines effective communication between family members in a region with an insufficient number of family therapists.

— Service Provider

While culture is a part of socialization, service providers mention it less than youth do within the needs assessment. This could be due to the larger number of youth respondents compared to service providers. It could also be due to service providers focusing more on family dynamics and impacts, generally attributing family disagreement to conservative and/or religious belief systems. This does not mean service providers are not seeing cultural impacts, but for those who responded to this needs assessment, it carried less weight. It is important to note this needs assessment questionnaire for service providers came out during legislative changes which impact many respondents. Therefore, it makes sense that family dynamics would have more weight, as some could foresee family conflicts increasing.

Literature Spotlight: Socialization

Chiang et al. (2025) argue that existing studies on family impacts on 2SLGBTQ+ youth often focus on individual-level factors, such as parental responses to coming out or family connectedness. However, they emphasize that *"broader influences of family views, interactions, and beliefs in the childhood environment and their relationships with LGBTQ+ behavioral health outcomes in adulthood have been under-researched but may play important roles in understanding and improving LGBTQ+ behavioral health disparities"* (p. 3). Their research highlights how factors like hearing homophobic language, normalized homophobia in the home, and conservative political views within family structures negatively impact the behavioral and mental health of 2SLGBTQ+ youth (Chiang et al., 2025). Additionally, Chiang et al.

(2025) found that family conservatism and homophobic messages increase internalized homonegativity, which in turn leads to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and alcohol use. This underscores how family environments shape internalized homonegativity, which then affects youth well-being (Chiang et al., 2025). Desmeules-Trudel et al. (2023) similarly argue that family rejection is a factor which influences the mental health of younger 2SLGBTQ+ individuals resulting in both negative mental health and physical health outcomes, especially compared to cisgender-heterosexual youth.

Chiang et al. (2025) also note that having even one openly 2SLGBTQ+ individual within a family unit, such as a distant relative like an aunt or cousin, can serve as a protective factor. Youth may view this individual as a role model and seek psychological support and a sense of safety from them (Chiang et al., 2025). This highlights the importance of visible, affirming figures within family systems to mitigate the harmful effects of non-affirming environments (Chiang et al., 2025). Despite this importance of family acceptance and family influence, it is important to recognize that societal homophobia and heteronormativity will still negatively impact and continues to undermine the acceptance from family which may lead to youth still experiencing negative impacts (Logie et al., 2018).

SOCIALIZATION

Action Items:

Education and Support for Families

- Offer workshops for parents, caregivers, and families on affirming 2SLGBTQ+ youth, build into existing programs.
- Create peer support groups for youth navigating family or cultural rejection and connect them to affirming communities and resources.

Culturally Appropriate Resources

- Partner with Indigenous elders, affirming faith leaders, and cultural organizations to develop culturally competent supports.
- Fund culturally specific programs (e.g., Two-Spirit circles) and support informed, safe advocates within those communities.





Discussion and Implications

Interpretation

This needs assessment reveals a duality for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie: they experience both community acceptance (from friends, family, and supports) and community nonacceptance (through systemic barriers, unsafe spaces, and open hostility). Within this duality lies an opportunity for the community to amplify acceptance and address nonacceptance. Youth clearly identify three approaches to foster inclusion: greater visibility, action, and education. They see education as a tool to foster understanding at all levels, from individual families to the broader community.

Socialization also reflects a duality, as family, religion, and culture can act as both protective factors and sources of hardship. Education gaps and lack of visibility can further influence these dynamics. Expanding education for families, cultural centres, and religious communities could help bridge the gap between acceptance and nonacceptance. Economic instability affects 2SLGBTQ+ youth in multiple ways, including blocking access to healthcare and services, limiting participation in inclusive events, and forcing them into unsafe jobs or housing. While systemic change is needed, immediate steps could include educating employers on the benefits of inclusive spaces, increasing free community events, and advocating for funding to address barriers to healthcare and services, including gender-affirming care and mental health supports.

Transgender and gender-diverse youth experience all themes at a higher rate than their cisgender peers, mentioning every theme twice as often. Their active participation in this needs assessment, often a rarity based on the literature, suggests they needed an opportunity to be heard, seen, and valued. Grande Prairie is their home, and they are actively working to create belonging here. Additionally, the youth who participated in this needs assessment willingly shared their experiences, co-created the report, and identified their needs.

There is an opportunity to lean into this youth-led education and advocacy. Their voices deserve respect, engagement, and action. They know what is needed to make Grande Prairie more inclusive for all citizens.

Implications

Transgender and gender-diverse supports must be prioritized in Grande Prairie. As they experience the highest marginalization within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, targeted support is critical. Safe spaces need to be expanded for all 2SLGBTQ+ youth, particularly for those aged 25–29, who often report less access. Economic barriers to supports, such as safe spaces or programs, must be addressed through partnerships, employment opportunities, education, and advocacy. There is a clear need for expanded 2SLGBTQ+ education programs to address gaps in knowledge among families, employers, service providers, and healthcare professionals. Agencies can also leverage their connections to strengthen existing peer support groups.

Increased funding for intersectional, youth-led programs is essential. Policymakers have a responsibility to advocate for inclusive policies in schools, healthcare, and workplaces, and to publicly affirm their support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. This needs assessment demonstrates sufficient need for a local 2SLGBTQ+ centre to provide healthcare services, referrals, counselling, education, and community programming.

Strengths

This needs assessment is youth-centered through its design, verification processes, and youth-led decisions on which themes to highlight and how to present the findings. Youth not only shaped the methodology but also verified all data and themes, ensuring the results authentically reflect their experiences. Triangulation with service provider voices further validated and strengthened the understanding of what 2SLGBTQ+ youth face in Grande Prairie. The assessment is grounded in Grounded Theory and GBA+, which allowed youth experiences to organically build and refine the process and outcomes. This approach also centered the most marginalized voices, particularly transgender and gender-diverse youth, whose input was critical to shaping the findings. Multiple data collection methods, including focus groups, interviews, art-based submissions, and surveys, ensured a rich and diverse dataset.

Limitations

The sample may underrepresent rural youth, homeless youth, or those facing intersectional marginalization due to participation barriers. As a one-time snapshot, the findings may shift with changes in politics, culture, or environment. Self-reported data may also underrepresent sensitive topics. The broad age range (13–29) may obscure nuances between age groups and experiences under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella. Additionally, this assessment did not explore racialized identities. These limitations highlight the need for further research in Grande Prairie.

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APPENDIX A: Methods

Study Design

This community-based needs assessment employed a qualitative-dominant design, supplemented by basic demographic data collection to contextualize participant experiences. The study was based in grounded theory to allow themes to emerge organically from the data and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) was used in analysis to ensure an intersectional lens. Data was collected through youth interviews, focus groups, surveys (open-ended responses), art-based submissions, working groups, and a service provider survey. All data was verified by youth, and the final themes were decided by youth participants. The survey for youth was designed in collaboration with youth participants to ensure questions asked aligned with the initial data from focus groups and interviews. The Knowledge Translation (KT) framework guided the dissemination of findings to ensure practical, community-driven solutions. The findings were shared early with youth and service provider participants for verification, validity, and to inform the creation of a Grande Prairie-specific toolkit.

Participants

Youth Participants: 2SLGBTQ+ youth (ages 13–29) were recruited through community partnerships, social media (Facebook and Instagram), and word-of-mouth. Youth contributed via interviews, focus groups, an online survey, art-based submissions, and working groups.

- **Age Groups:** Focus groups were stratified into three age ranges: 14–17, 18–24, and 25–29 to facilitate age-appropriate discussions.
- **Diversity:** Participants represented diverse cultural, ethnic, racialized, religious, and gender identity backgrounds.

Service Providers: Local service providers were invited to complete a survey to provide insights into systemic barriers, gaps in services, and youth needs.

- **Diversity:** Service providers ranged from providing services to ages 12 and under, 13-17, 18-24, 25-29, and 30+. Additionally, service providers were from Education and School System, Mental Health Support and/or Education, STBBI Services, Social Work, City Services, Enforcement Services, Child Intervention, Youth Services (Non-profit), Indigenous-Based Services.

Materials or Apparatus

Data Collection Tools

- **Recording and Transcription:**
  - Otter.ai for automatic transcription of audio recordings for focus groups, interviews, and working groups.
- **Survey Platforms:**
  - SurveyMonkey for youth surveys (used for its security features to prevent fraudulent responses).
  - Microsoft Forms used for the service provider survey and Registration for Focus Groups/Interviews but switched to SurveyMonkey after the public Registration Form (publicly shared online) received fraudulent responses. SurveyMonkey provided additional protection against spam and invalid submissions.
  - Youth survey was shared online; using verification questions and IP addresses to ensure valid responses. The survey received 229 responses; a total of 179 responses were removed leaving 50 valid responses.
  - Service provider survey was not publicly shared; distributed through purposive sampling with snowballing through known community partners and verified service providers. 22 responses received.

Participant Materials

- **Consent Forms:**
  - Written informed consent forms (digital and paper) for youth (ages 14–29) and service providers.
  - Mature minor assessment forms available for participants under 18 unable to obtain parental consent.
- **Honorariums:**
  - $50 gift cards (e.g., Visa, local businesses) for focus group and interview participants.
  - Entry into a draw for 1 of 10 $200 gift card for survey respondents.
  - $100 gift cards for working groups, plus $40 grocery gift card in recognition of barriers to participation.
  - $100 for art submissions to honour time and effort.
  - Self-care kits available for all working groups, including service provider meetings.
  - Food and drinks available for meetings, interviews, and focus groups.
- **Support Resources:**
  - Printed brochure of 2SLGBTQ+-affirming mental health providers, crisis lines, and community supports for all youth participants.

Art-Based and Creative Submission Materials

- **Art Supplies:**
  - Paper, markers, colored pencils, or camera available as needed/requested for art-based submissions (e.g., photovoice, drawings, poetry).
- **Storage:**
  - Secure physical storage for art submissions.
  - Encrypted digital storage for audio recordings and transcribed data.

Coding and Analysis Tools

- **Software:**
  - Dedoose for tracking all media (e.g., interviews, art, focus groups) and coding qualitative data.
  - Microsoft Excel for tracking demographic and themes (normalizing frequency of response per demographic).
  - SurveyMonkey for collection and analyzing of youth quantitative (demographic) information.
  - Microsoft Excel for organizing all quantitative survey data (demographics).

Knowledge Translation and Dissemination Tools

- **Digital Storytelling:**
  - Canva for designing infographics, social media posts, and digital reports.
  - Digital storytelling to be completed using Canva by youth for social media posts.
- **Presentation Materials:**
  - Projector and screen or SmartTV for community engagement sessions.
  - Poster boards or digital slides for public presentations.
- **Toolkit Development:**
  - Microsoft Word for drafting the toolkit and reports.
  - Graphic design tools (e.g., Canva or Microsoft Excel) for visual elements in the toolkit and infographics.

Promotional and Recruitment Materials

- **Social media:**
  - Facebook and Instagram for sharing recruitment posts, updates, graphics, and survey links.

- **Community Partners:**
  - Collaborated with local organizations to distribute posters, QR codes, and referral to assessment.
- **Posters and Flyers**:
  - Canva-designed posters with QR codes linking to the SurveyMonkey surveys and contact information. Distributed electronically and physically throughout Grande Prairie.

Ethical and Safety Materials

- **Mental Health Resources:**
  - Printed and digital lists of local 2SLGBTQ+-affirming counselors, therapists, and crisis hotlines.
- **Safety Protocols:**
  - Confidentiality agreements for transcription services; secure data storage protocols. Participants informed how data is collected and stored.

Procedure

Community Engagement and Recruitment

- Partnered with local 2SLGBTQ+ and youth serving organizations and service providers to introduce the study and distribute recruitment materials (e.g., Canva posters, QR codes, social media posts).
- Established a partnership with a 2SLGBTQ+-affirming mental health provider (Buffy MacIntosh from Theragen Counselling and Consulting) to ensure participant safety and access to support resources.

Focus Groups

- Conducted semi-structured focus groups (max 6 participants) in safe, familiar spaces, stratified by age (14–17, 18–24, 25–29; 13-year-olds excluded due to ethical considerations).
- Obtained written informed consent, recorded discussions, and provided honorariums ($50 gift cards) and refreshments.

Interviews

- Held one-on-one interviews for youth participants.
- Obtained informed consent, recorded sessions, and provided honorariums ($50 gift cards) and refreshments.

- Invited new youth participants to ensure broad representation.

Survey Design and Distribution

- Developed a 25-question survey (demographic and open-ended) based on focus group data.
- Reviewed by youth participants for feedback.
- Distributed online via SurveyMonkey (Facebook, Instagram, QR posters).
- Survey available online for 3-month period.
- All ages (13-29) included for survey as it was low-risk engagement.

Data Analysis and Validation

- Coded data using initial and focused coding (grounded theory) with Dedoose software.
- Triangulated youth data with service provider survey responses.
- Validated themes through multiple and ongoing youth working groups.
- Working groups completed informed consent, recorded sessions, provided honorariums ($100 gift cards/$40 grocery cards), refreshments provided.

Knowledge Translation

- Created Version 1 (V1) draft report based on youth meetings from February to March.
    - Microsoft Word used for report.
    - Vibe by Mistral AI used as editing tool; Canva used for infographic and demographics
    - Microsoft Excel used for demographics.
- Developed Version 2 (V2) final report, with youth contractor for design, art, and editing, included infographic summary, and standalone toolkit full and short versions.
- To disseminate findings via digital storytelling (social media, videos, infographics), reports available on website, through youth engagement session (privately held) and a community engagement session (publicly held).

Data Collection

Qualitative Data

- Focus groups and interviews (audio-recorded via digital recorders, transcribed using Otter.ai).
- Art-based submissions (e.g., drawings, poetry, photovoice).
- Working group discussions (thematic validation).
- Surveys (open ended) collected via SurveyMonkey (youth) and Microsoft Forms (service providers).
- Triangulation: Cross-checked youth data with service provider survey responses.

Quantitative Data

- Surveys (demographics) collected via SurveyMonkey (youth) and Microsoft Forms (service providers).
- Optional collection survey for demographics for interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

- Used Dedoose for initial and focused coding of qualitative data.
- Identified themes through coding frequency and comparing data.

GBA+ Lens

- Analyzed intersections of gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, and other identity factors.

Triangulation

- Validated findings by comparing youth and service provider data.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

- Written consent obtained for all participants.

- Parental consent for minor participants unless unsafe to do so; mature minor assessment available for youth unable to obtain parental consent.
- Surveys accessible to youth as young as 13 (no direct interaction; low risk).

Confidentiality

- Data anonymized; identifiers removed to protect privacy.
- Followed FOIP (Alberta) and Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) guidelines.

Mental Health Supports

- Lead analyst trained in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), registered social worker with the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW), Mental Health First Aid.
- Partnerships with 2SLGBTQ+-affirming mental health providers (partnership with Buffy MacIntosh from Theragen Counselling and Consulting) and community agencies for participant referrals.

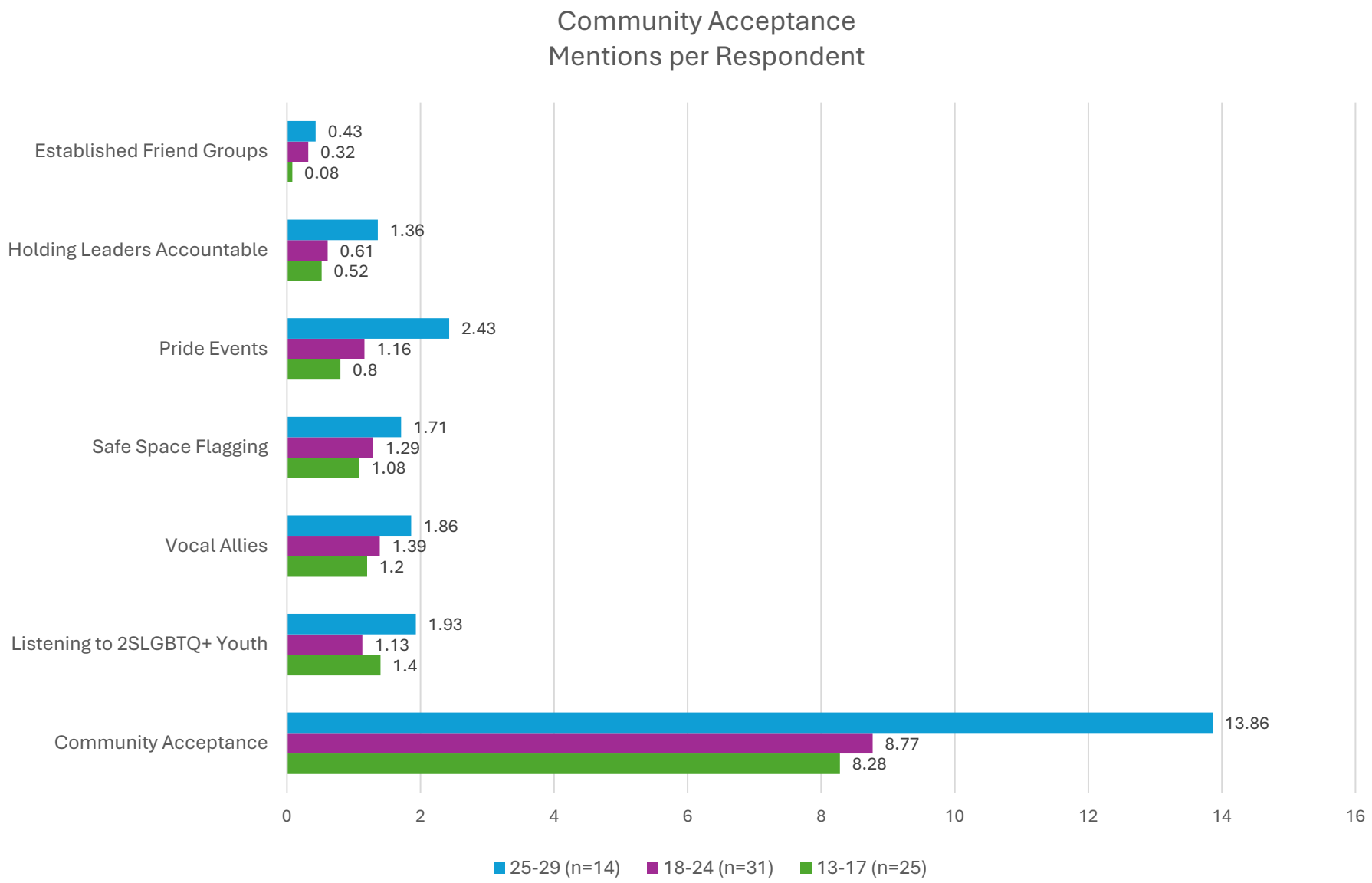
Honorariums

- $50 gift cards for focus groups/interviews; $200 draw for surveys; $100 for art-based submissions, $100 for working groups, $40 grocery for working groups. Honorarium amounts based on research and ethical guidelines.
- Food and drinks provided for interviews, focus groups, and working groups.
- Clarified that withdrawal would not affect compensation.

Minor Participants

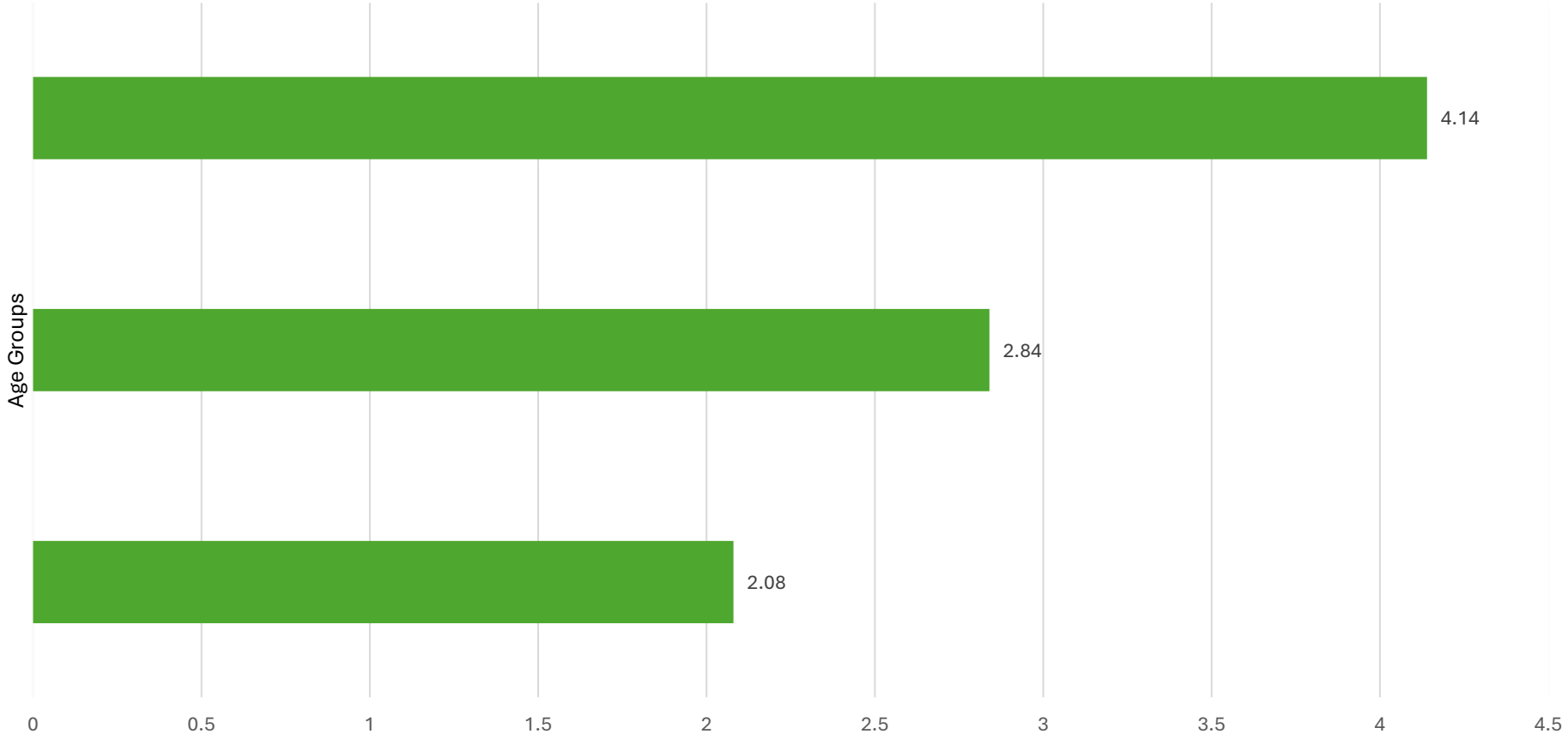
- 14–17-year-olds: Required parental consent unless safety concerns existed (evaluated via mature minor assessments).
- 13-year-olds: Accessed surveys only (no direct interaction; low risk).

APPENDIX B: Themes by Age and Mentions per Respondent



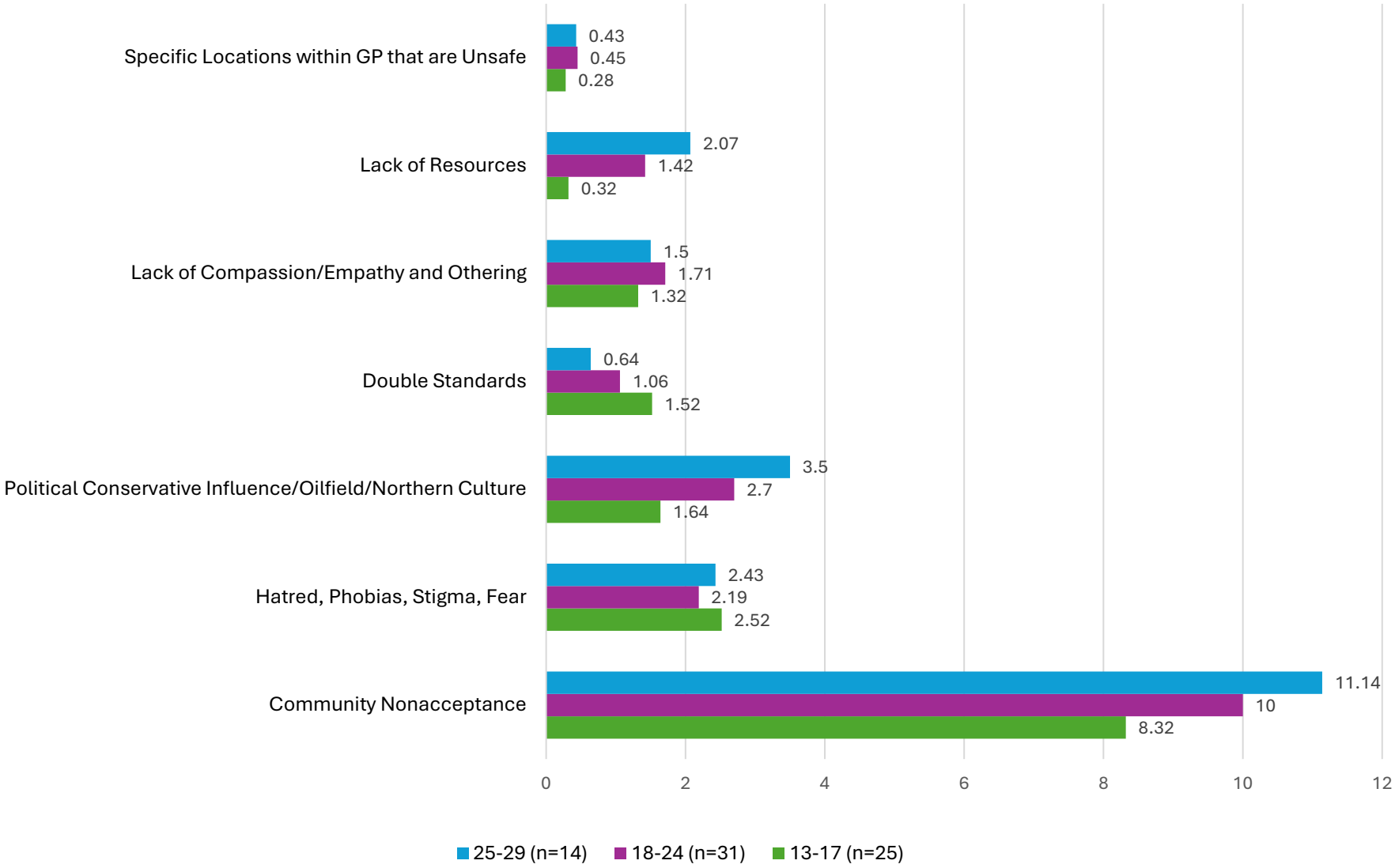
Friendship and Community

Mentions per Respondent

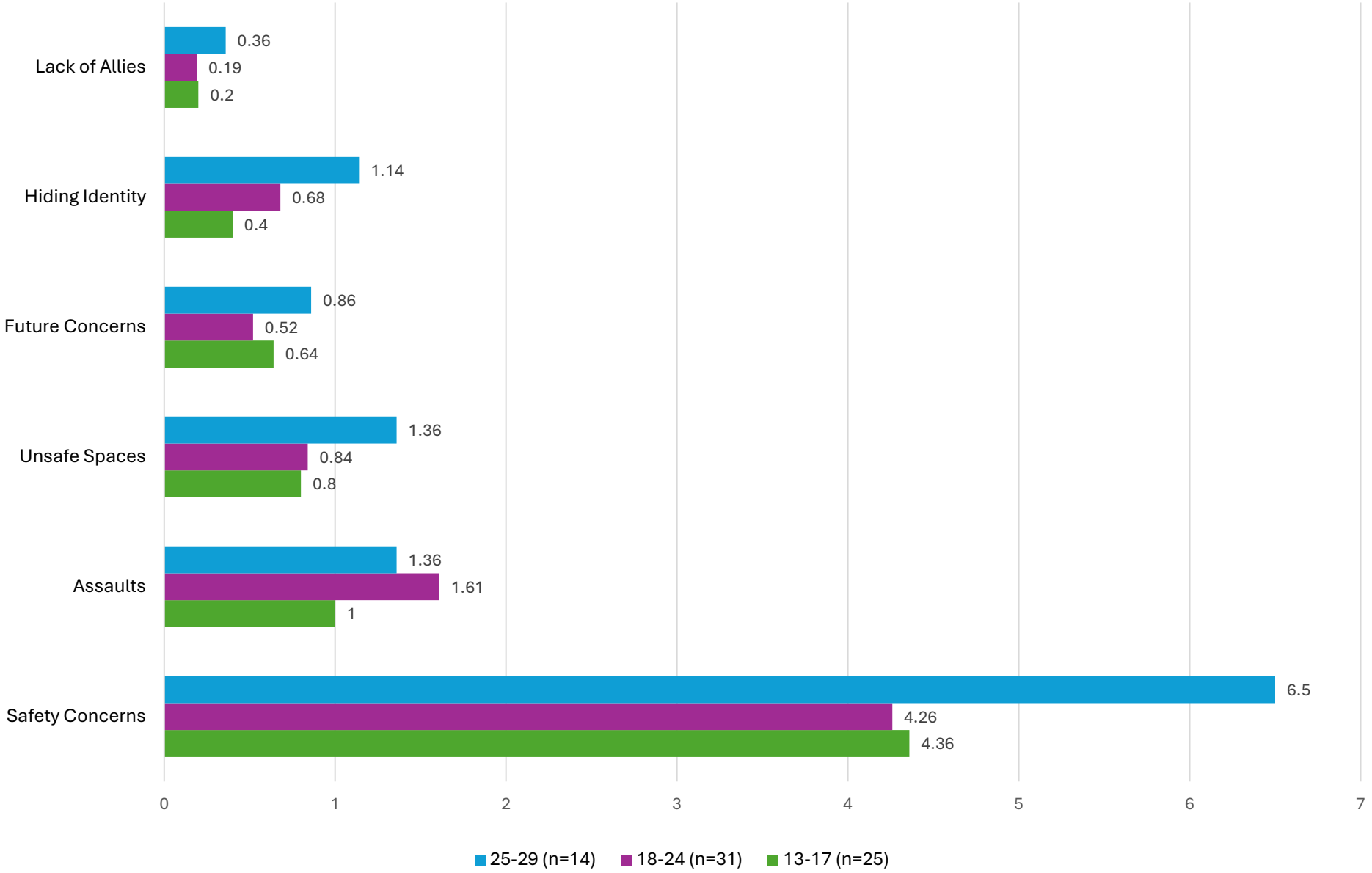


Due to no child codes, Friendship and Community is arranged by Age Group.

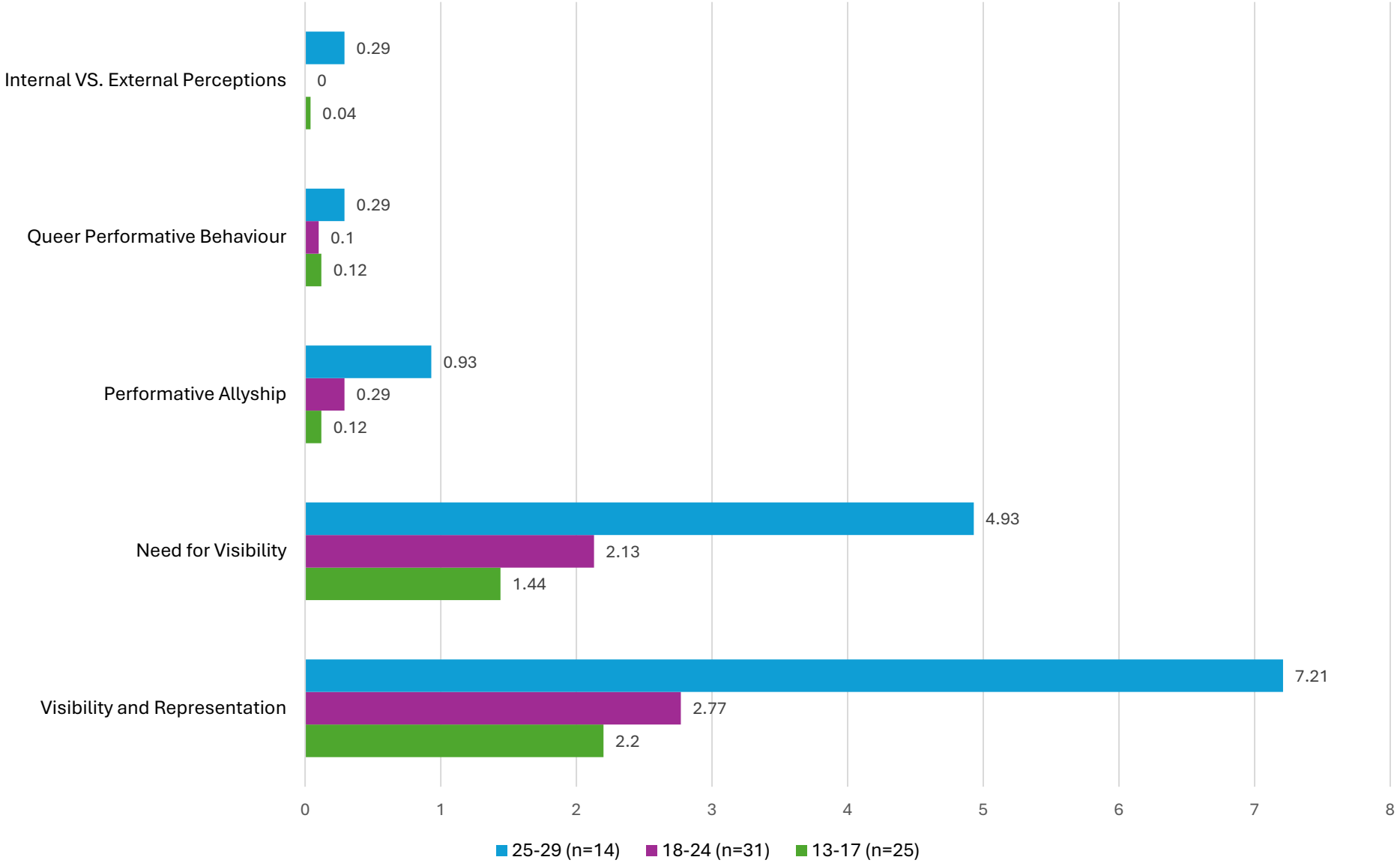
Community Nonacceptance
Mentions per Respondent



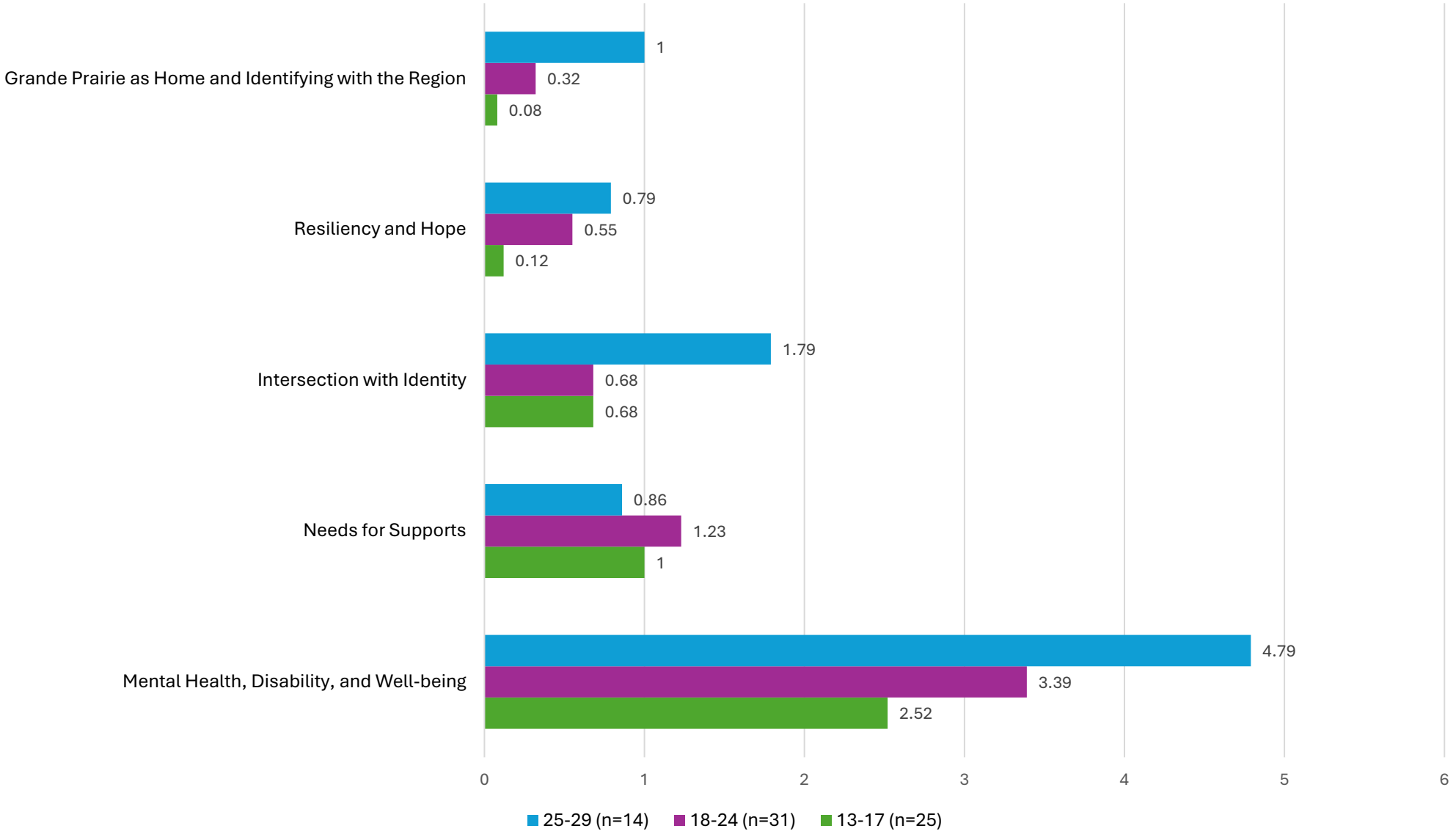
Safety Concerns
Mentions per Respondent



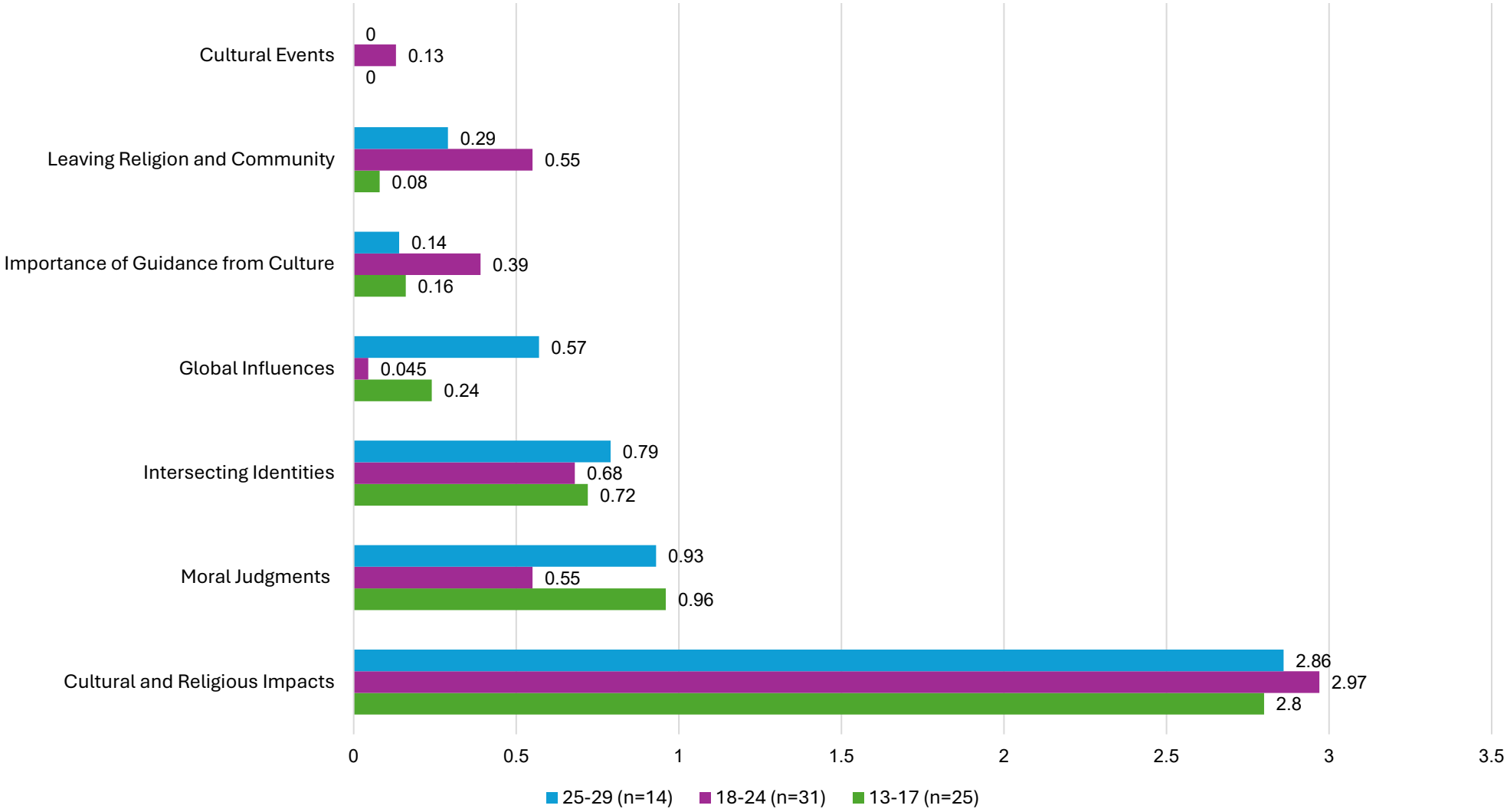
Visibility and Representation
Mentions per Respondent

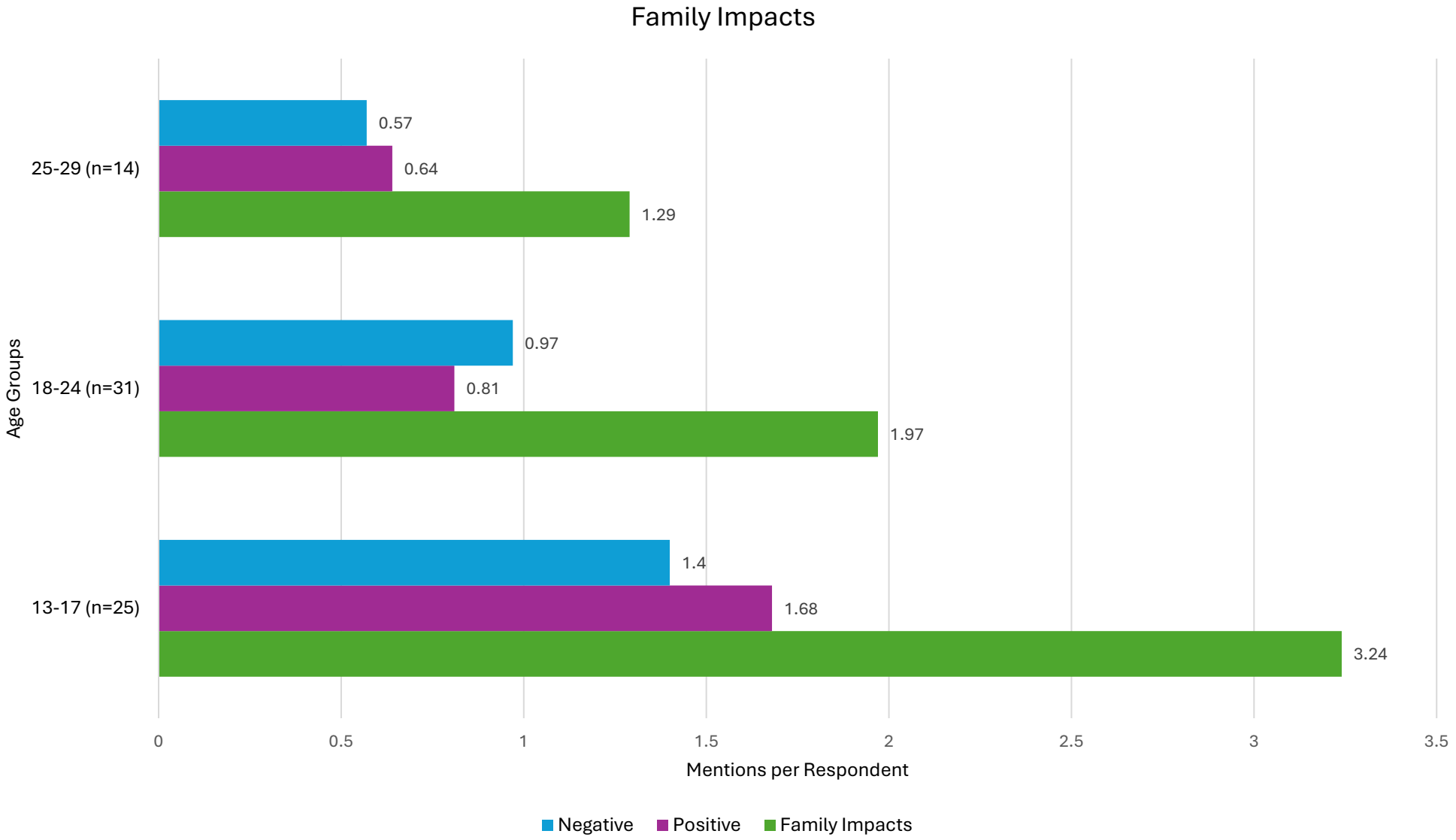


Mental Health, Disability, and Well-being
Mentions per Respondent



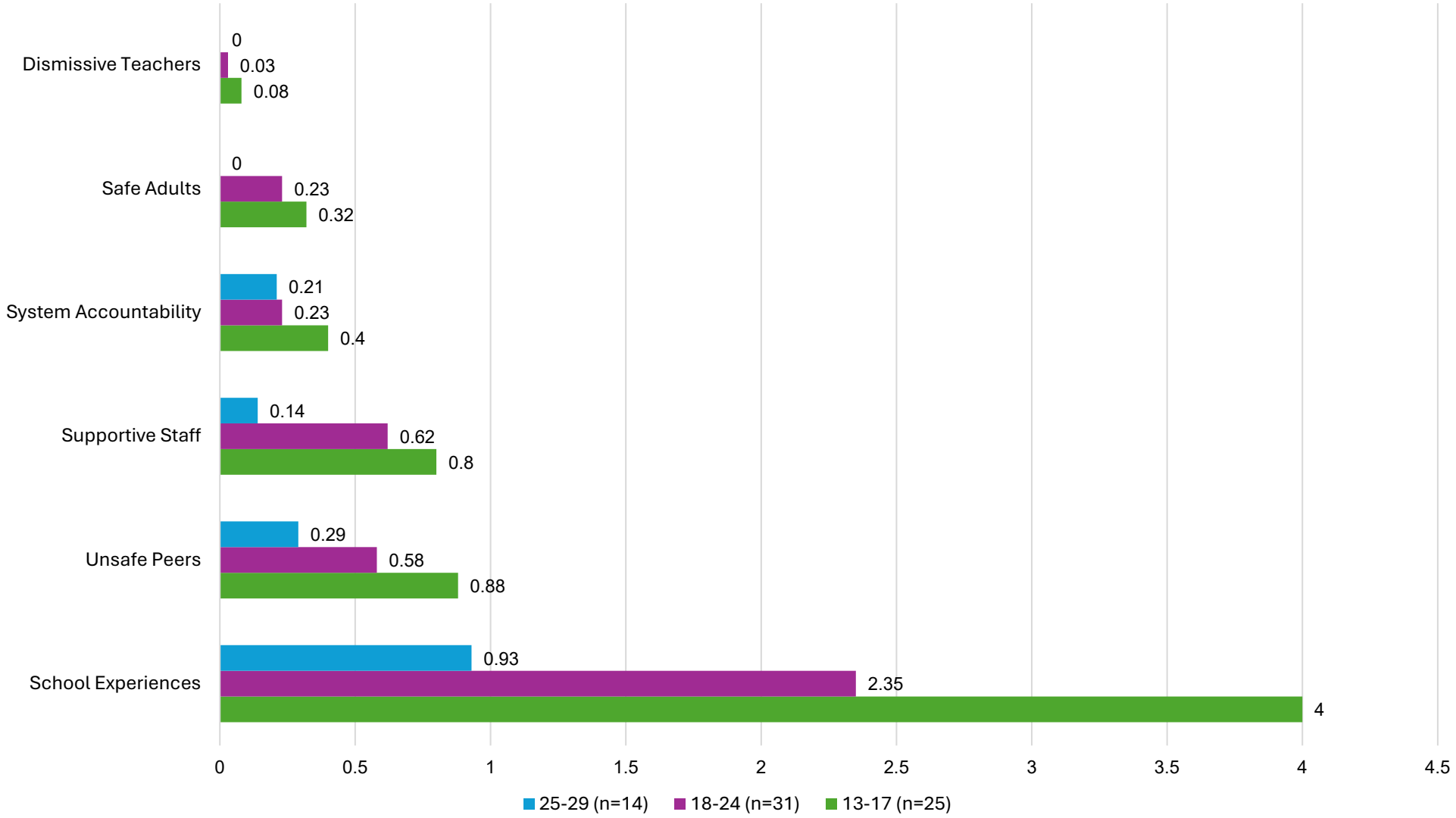
Cultural and Religious Impacts
Mentions per Respondent





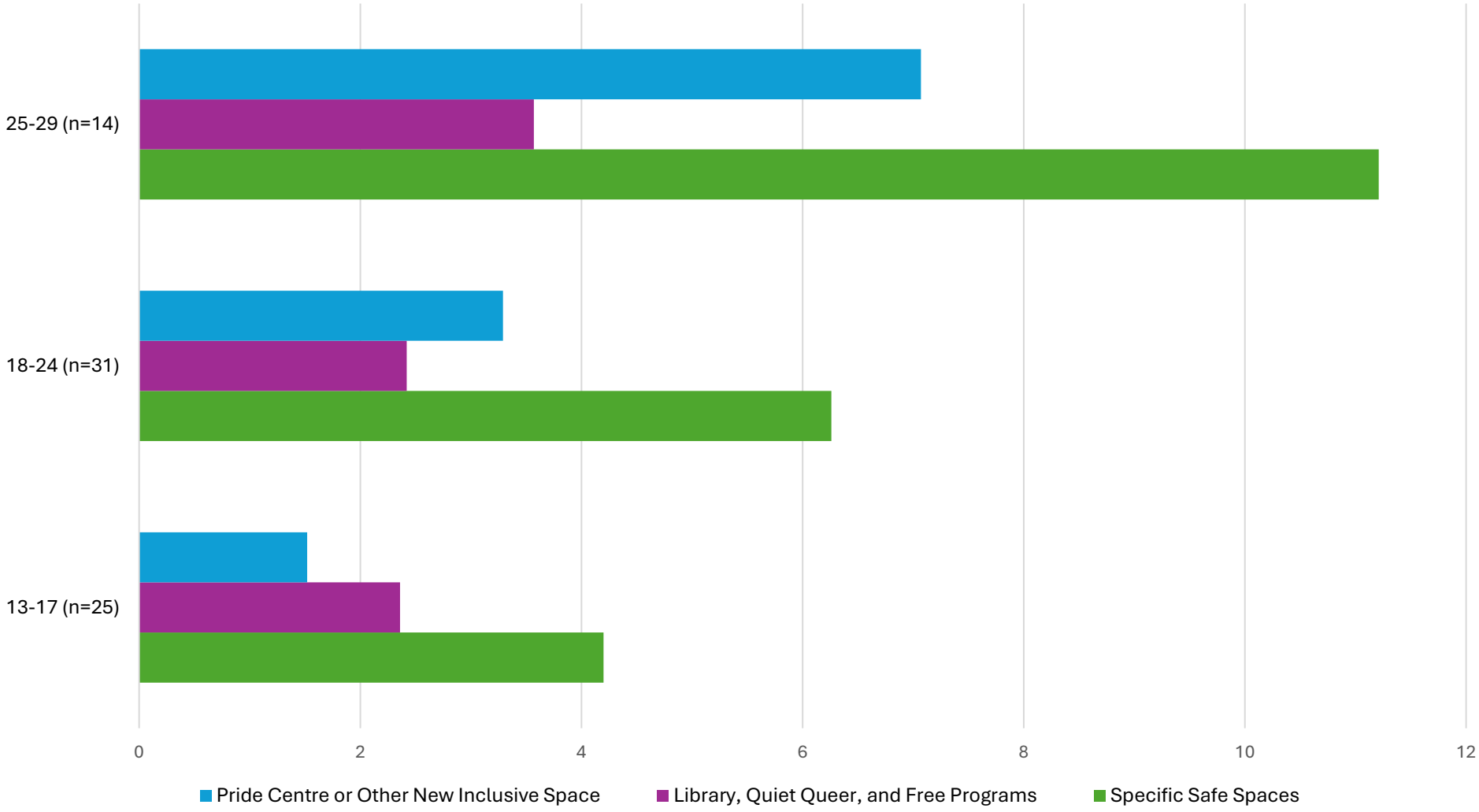
Due to fewer child codes, Family Impacts is arranged by age group, not by theme.

School Experiences
Mentions per Respondent

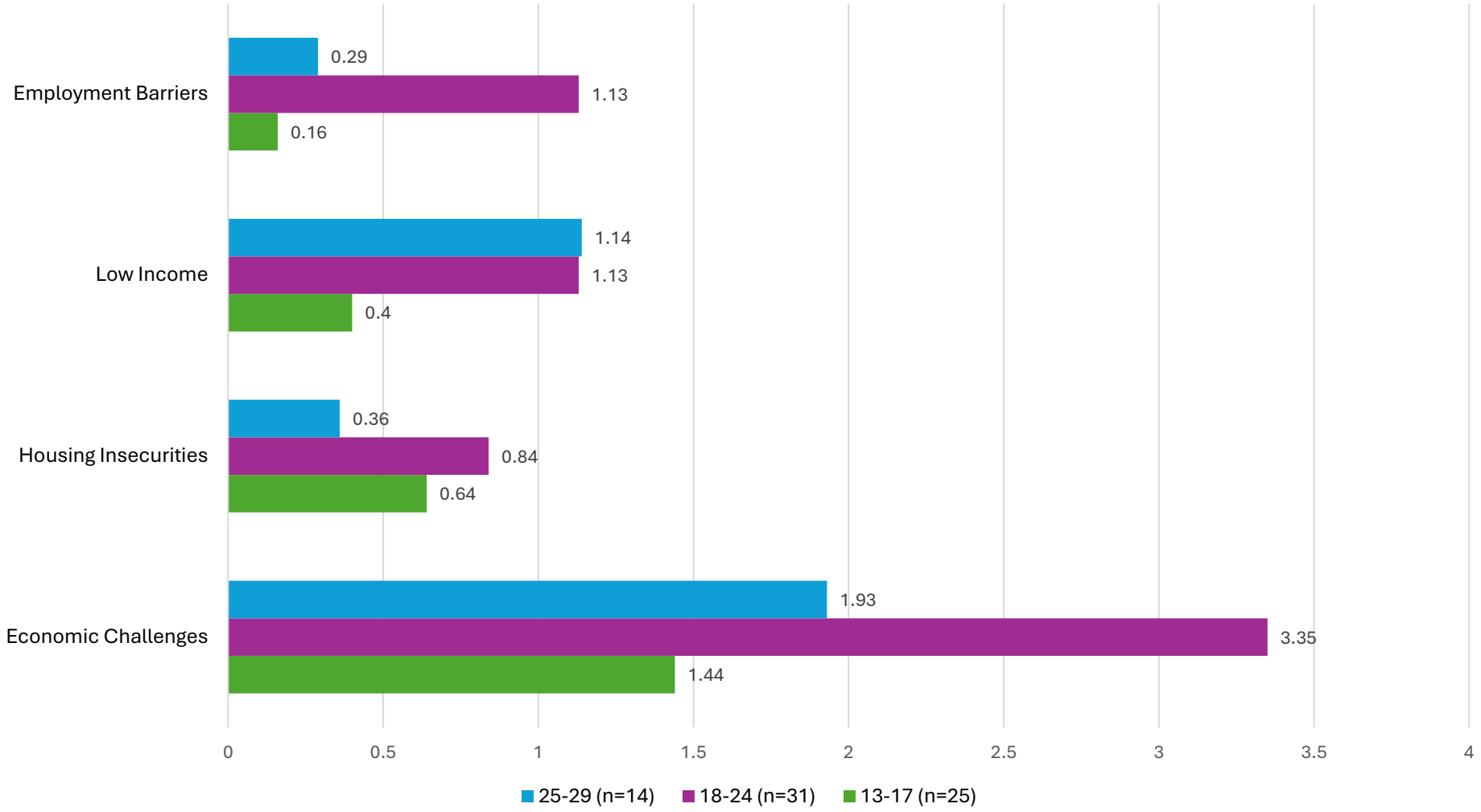


Due to fewer child codes, Specific Safe Spaces is arranged by age group, not by theme.

Specific Safe Spaces
Mentions per Respondent

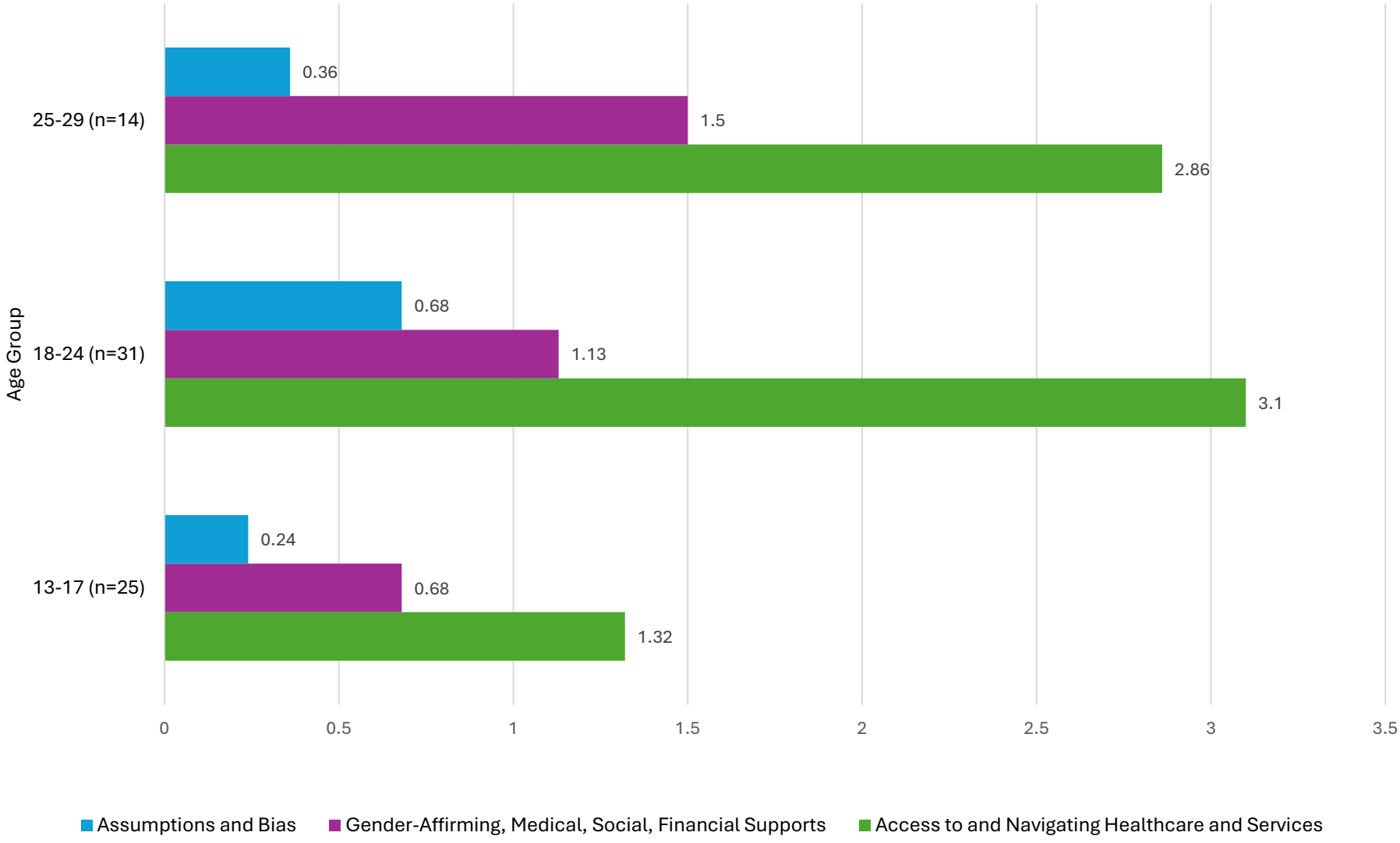


Economic Challenges
Mentions per Respondent



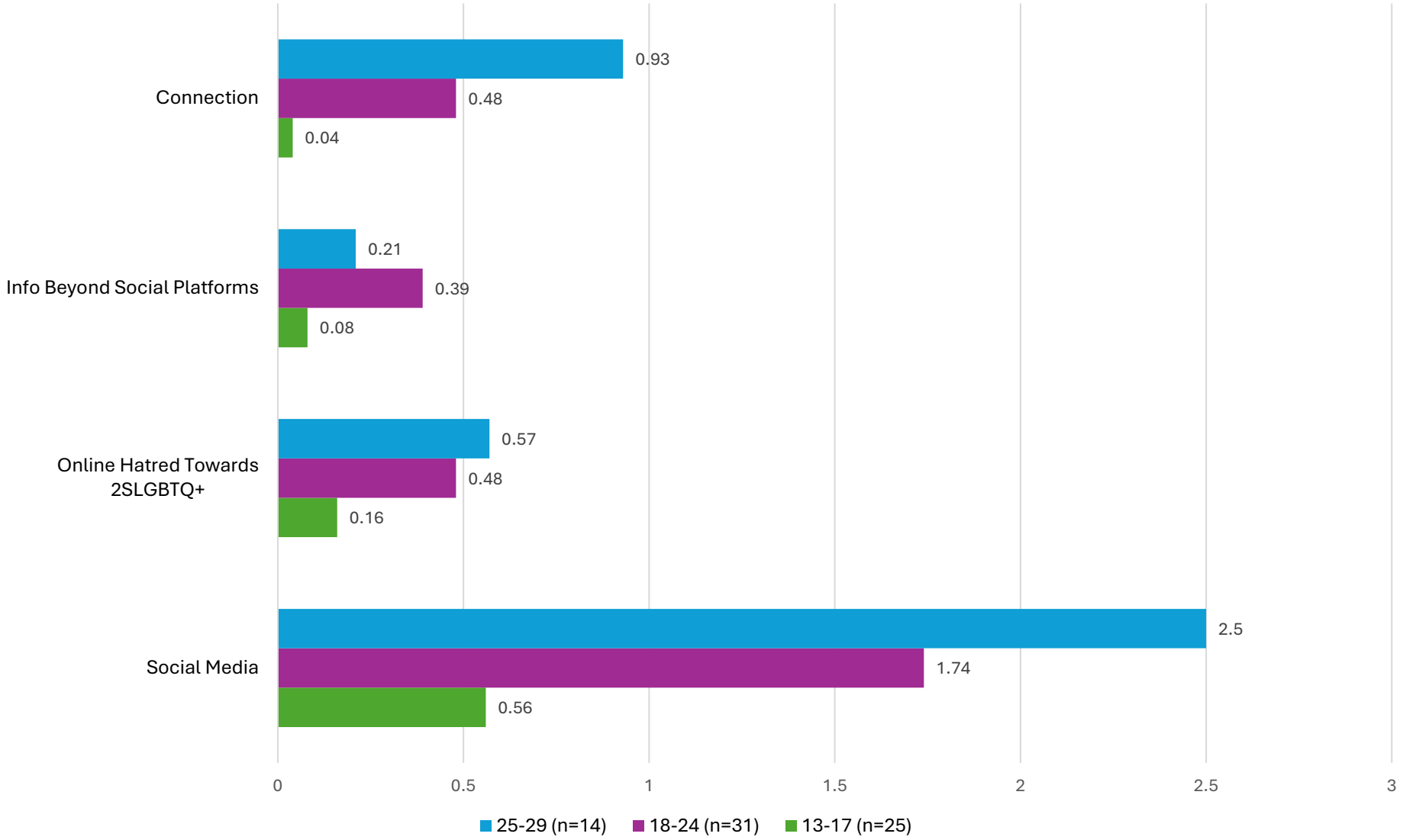
Access to and Navigating Healthcare and Services

Mentions Per Respondent

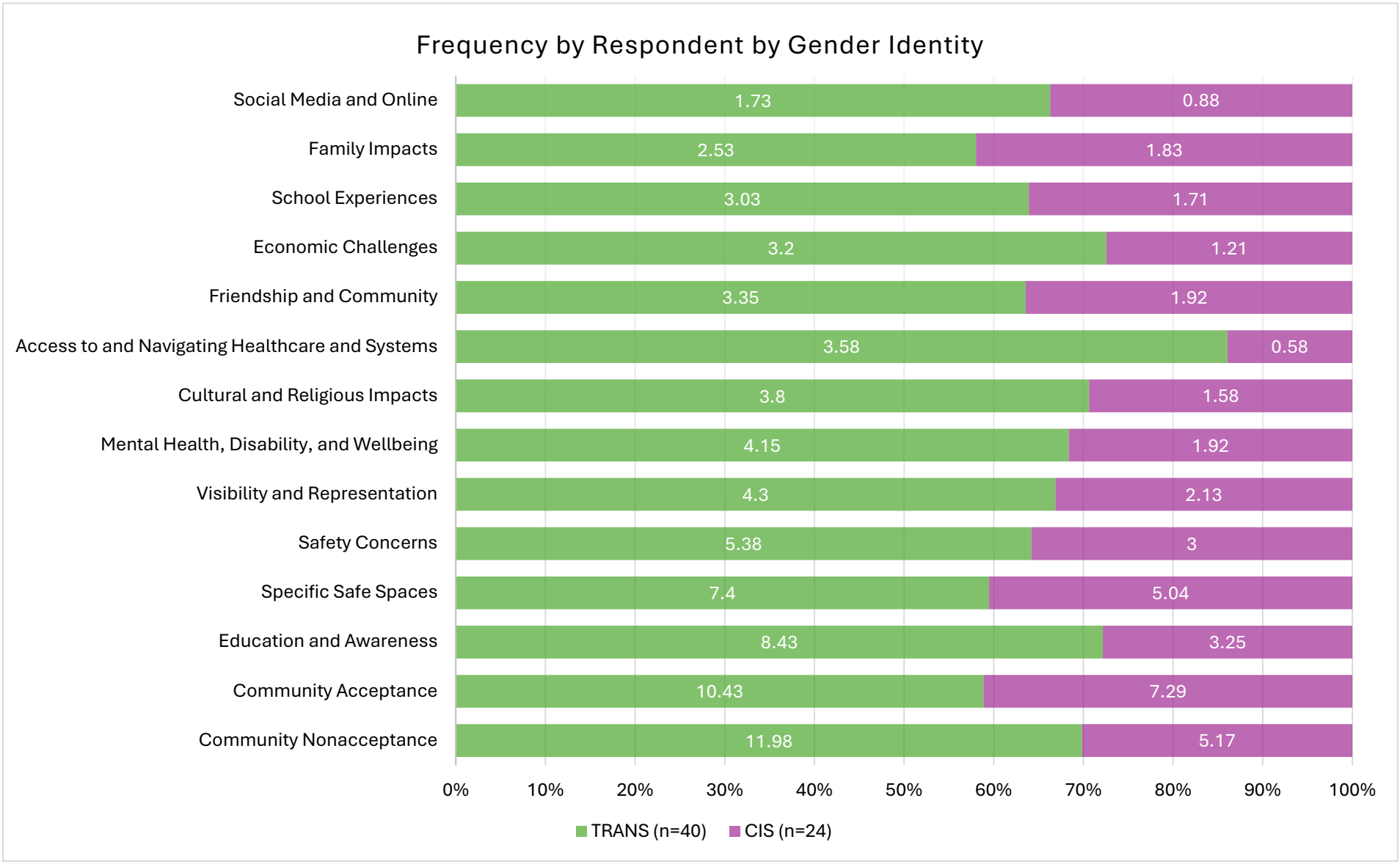


Due to fewer child codes, Access to and Navigating Healthcare and Systems is arranged by age group, not by theme.

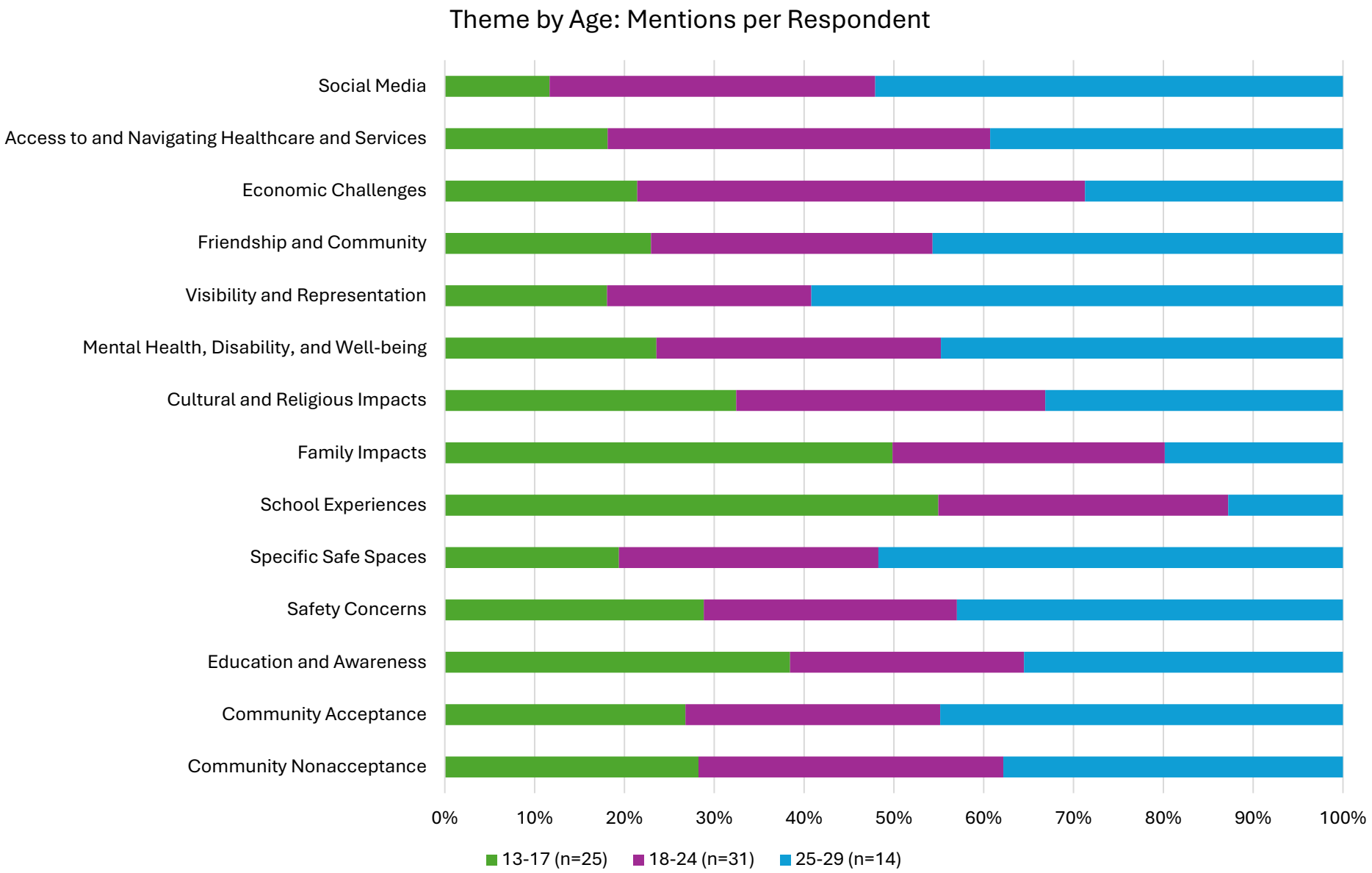
Social Media
Mentions per Respondent



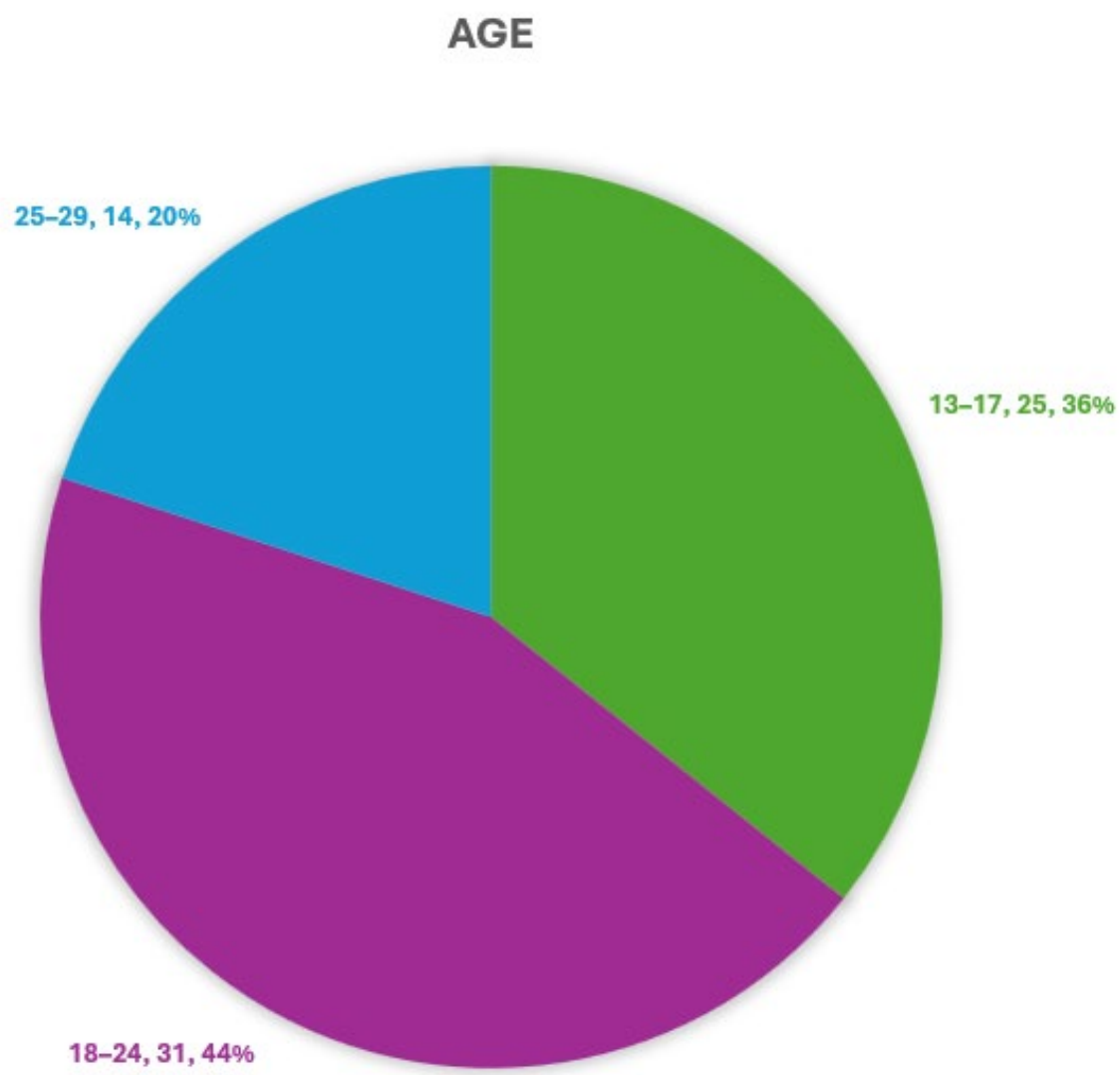
APPENDIX C: Frequency by Respondent by Gender Identity



APPENDIX D: Mentions per Respondent by Age

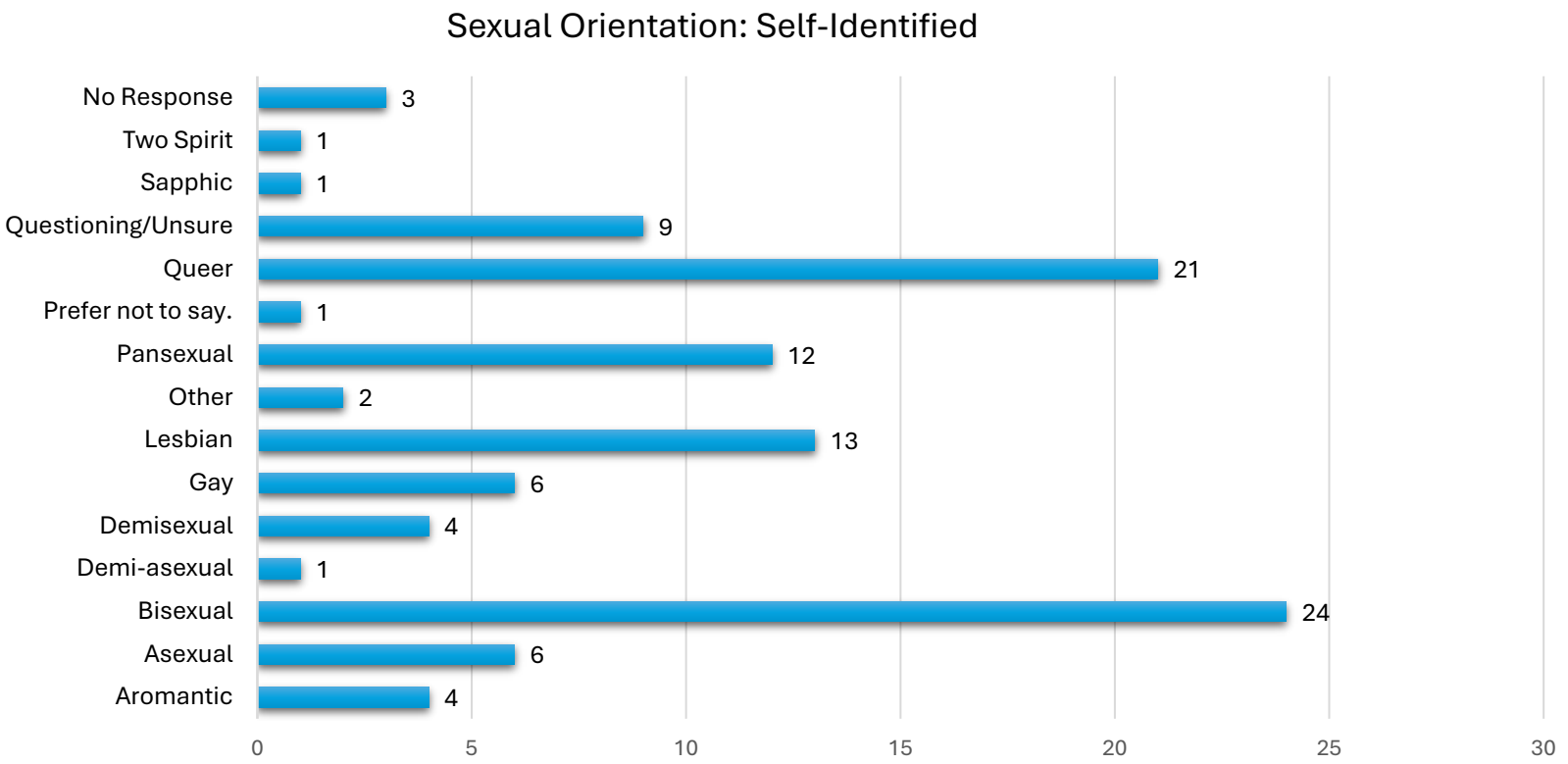


APPENDIX E: Age of Respondents



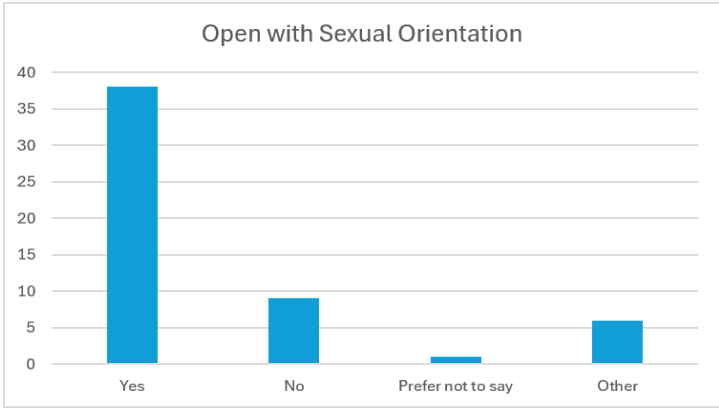
Age	Count
13	3
14	4
15	3
16	6
17	9
18	12
19	5
20	1
21	4
22	6
23	1
24	2
25	1
27	2
28	2
29	9

APPENDIX F: Sexual Orientation of Respondents



Other Responses for openness:

1. With some people yes with others no
2. Depends on who I'm with
3. Occasionally. I'm not dating a woman anymore, so I don't really tell people I'm bi or into women
4. It doesn't come up much since its a personal thing, but its Alberta so I gotta be careful who I mention it around.
5. Yes, unless it seems like it would actively threaten my safety, then I avoid the topic.
6. other: AFAB and AMAB therefore perceived as straight

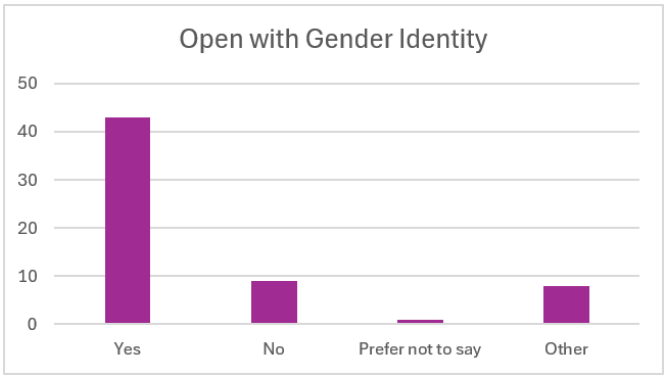


APPENDIX G: Gender Identity of Respondents

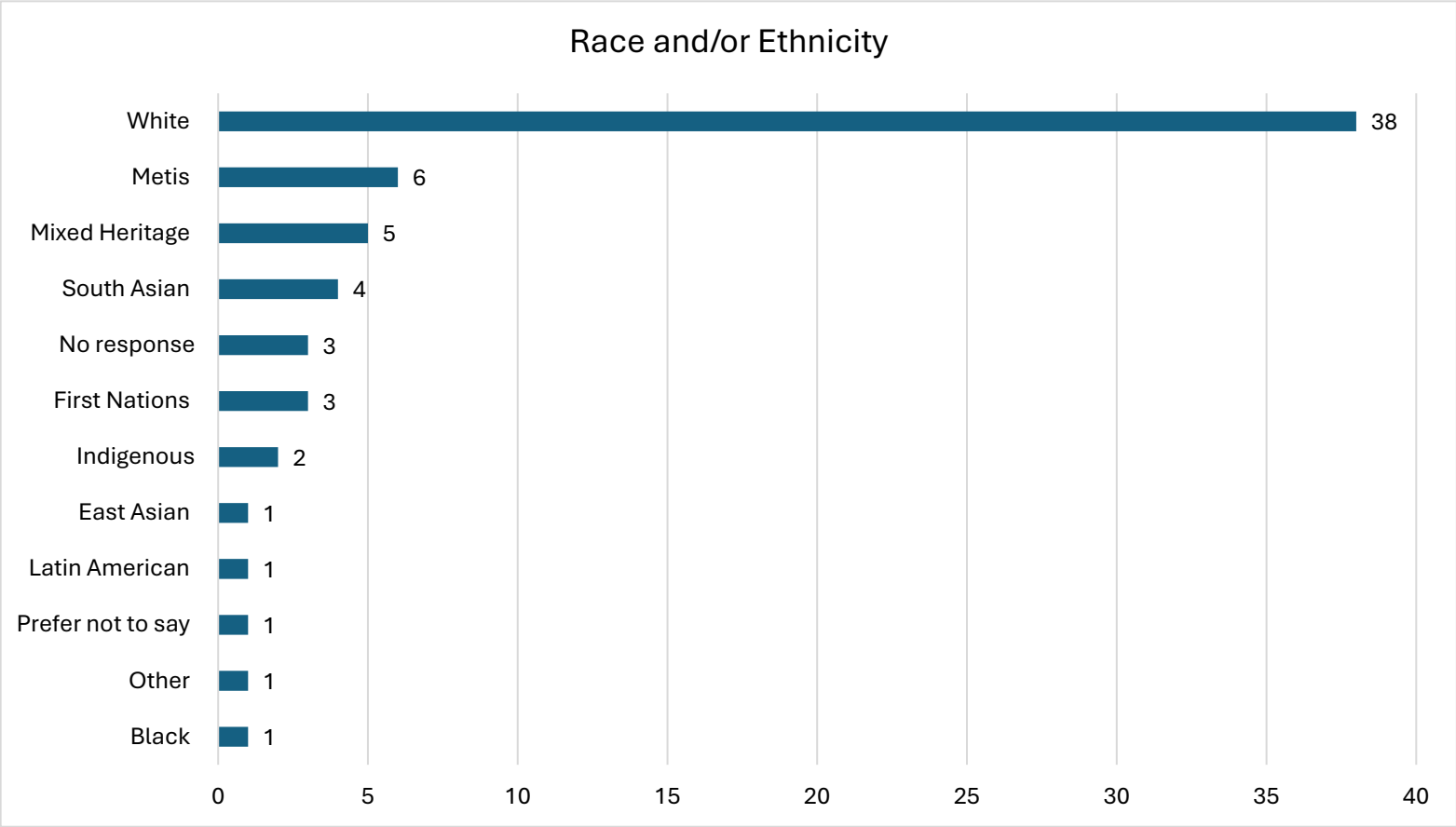


Other Responses for openness:

1. Open to some friends and family, and not to less open family
2. Yes, to people I know will accept me (Less than 10 of the people close to me). No, to people that I know will not.
3. Open as a man, but not trans. Open as nonbinary if people ask
4. Depends on who I'm with
5. I did at one point before going back into the closet
6. I pass so I don't typically out myself on a daily occurrence, but most people in my circles know I'm trans
7. Other: openly a man but not openly trans to all preferred
8. Other: I'm passing but typically do not disclose

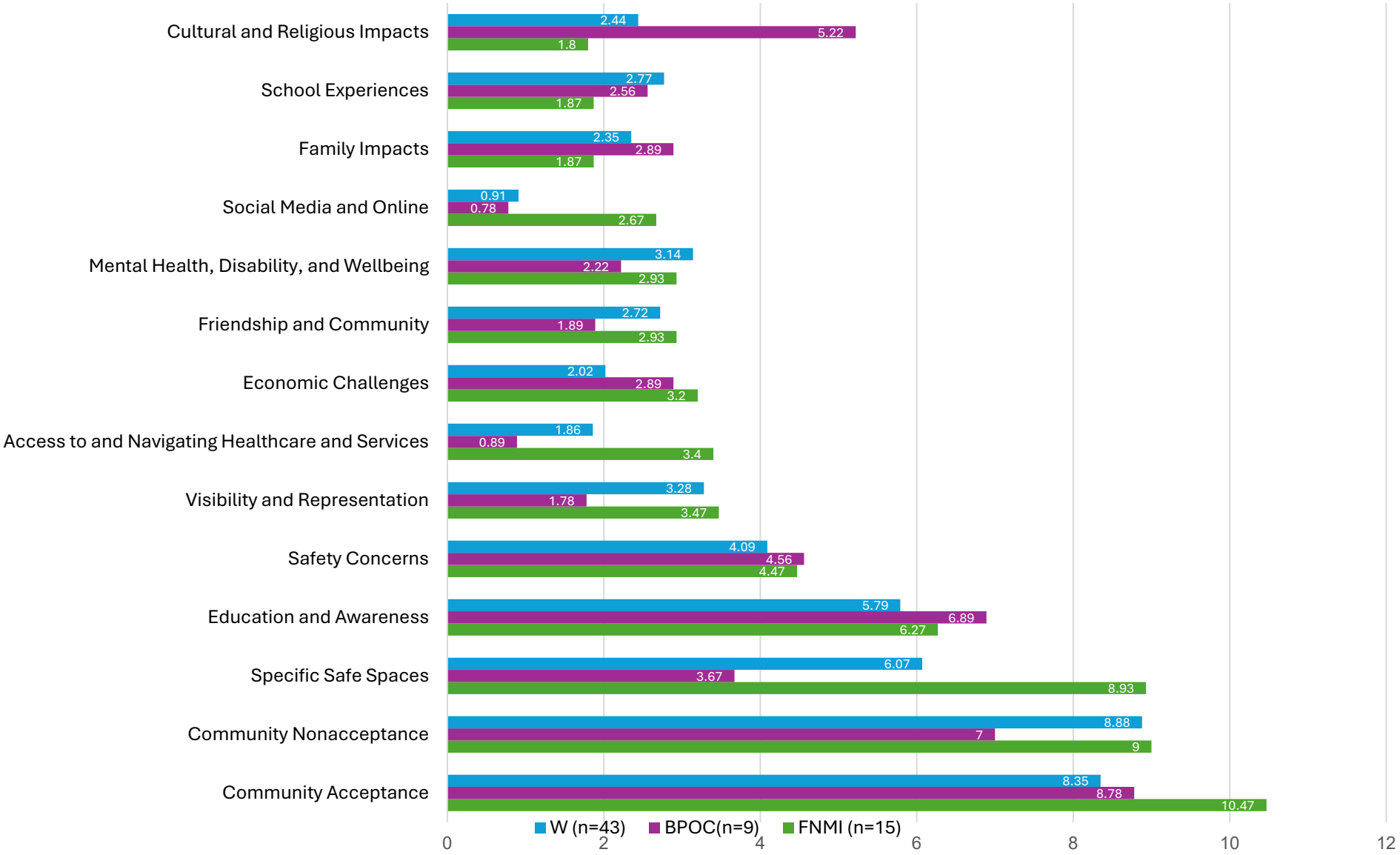


APPENDIX H: Race and/or Ethnicity

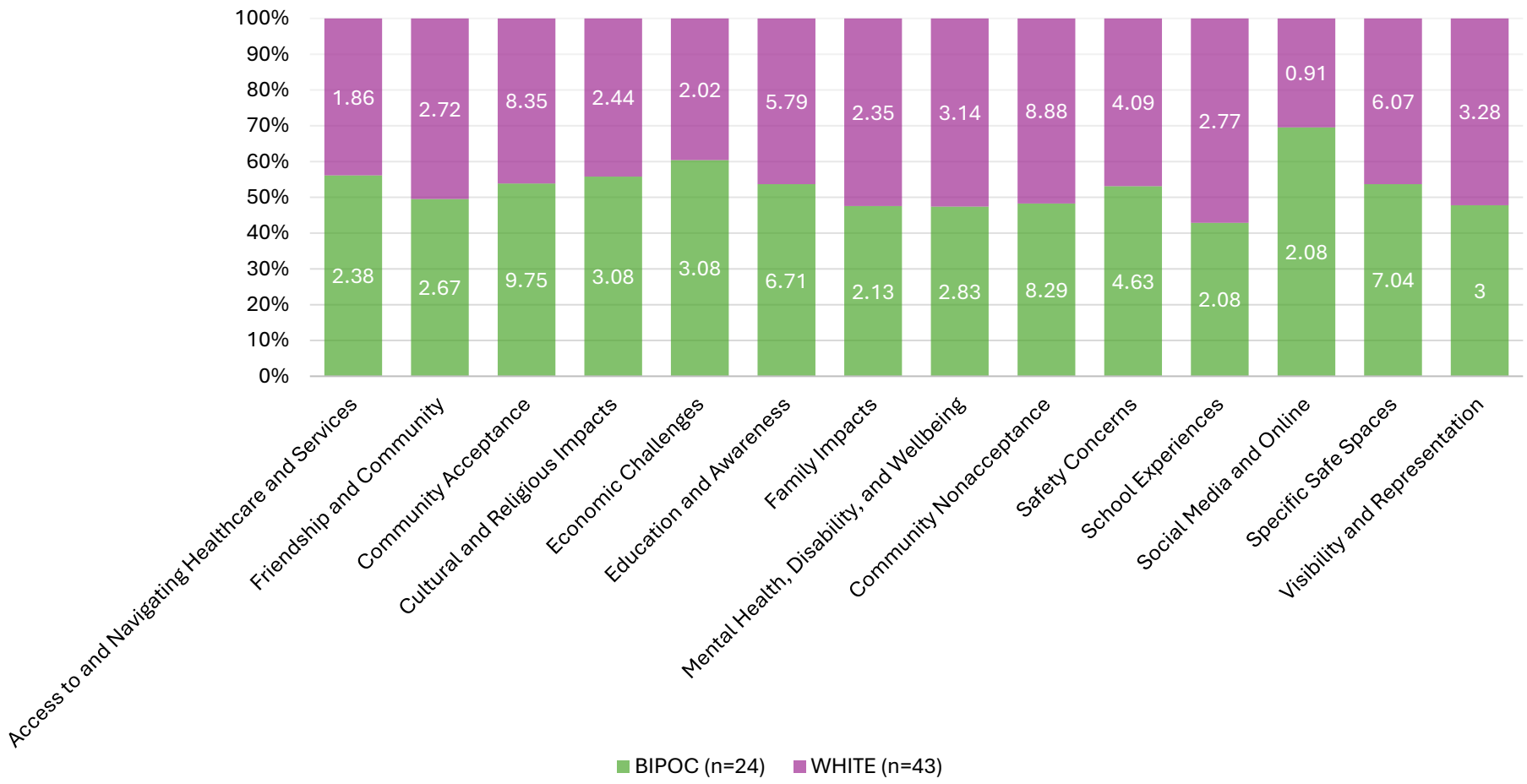


Note: Racial and ethnic identity data were self-reported by 52 participants. Not all participants in the study provided this information. Further research is recommended to better understand the racial and ethnic diversity of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Grande Prairie.

Frequency of Mentions by Racial and/or Ethnic Identity

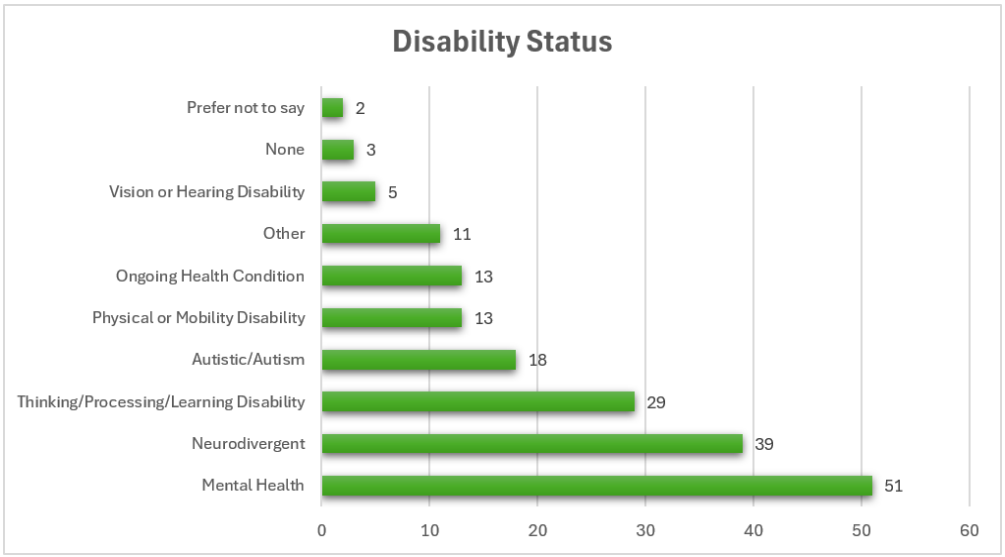


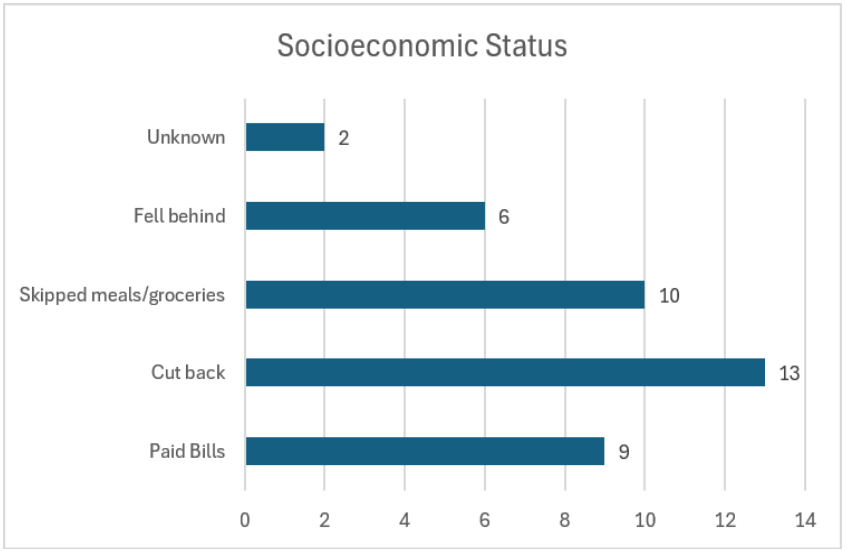
Experiences by Racialization

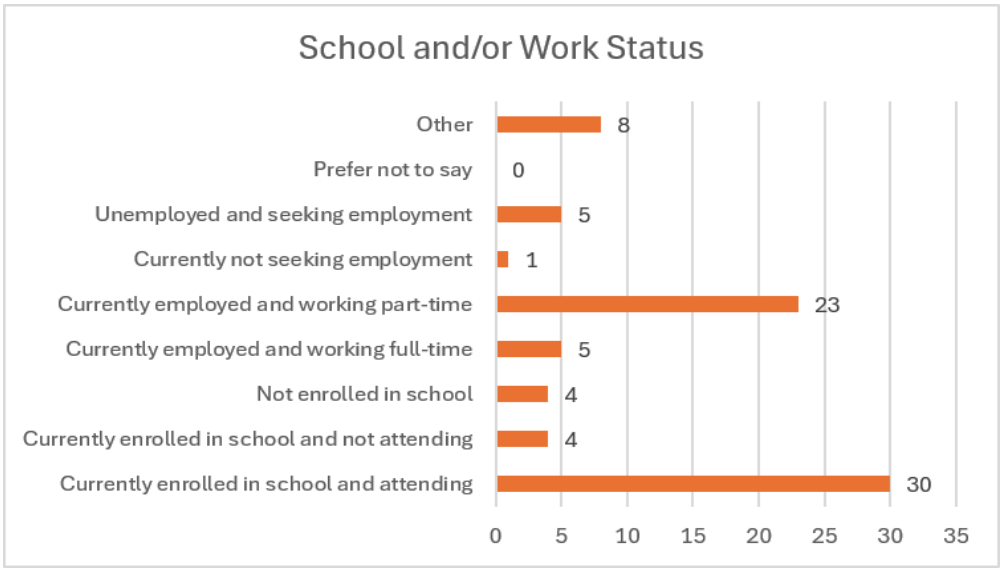


Note: This graph is included following GBA+ principles. Society functions with white culture as the default and dominant norm, reflecting systemic inequities rooted in colonial history. It aggregates BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) experiences against white respondents. While not the base of this needs assessment, BIPOC 2SLGBTQ+ youth more frequently mentioned social media, specific safe spaces, access to healthcare/social services, and economic challenges, potentially due to intersectional compounding pressures. The previous graph in this appendix section breaks down responses by White, BIPOC, and FNMI to highlight distinct patterns within racialized groups. Both perspectives provide a comprehensive view of how racialization intersects with 2SLGBTQ+ experiences and warrant further research.

APPENDIX I: Disability, School/Work, and Socioeconomic Context







Note: All data were self-reported. Socioeconomic data were collected from interviews and focus groups (n=20). School and work data were collected via SurveyMonkey (n=50) and reflect a youth-driven decision to frame questions this way during survey development. Disability data were combined from both sources (n=70). Participants could select multiple categories, and not all disclosed this information. These supplementary data provide important context for understanding the themes in this needs assessment.