

Healthy Buildings, Healthy Lives:

U.S. Perspectives on
Healthy Buildings







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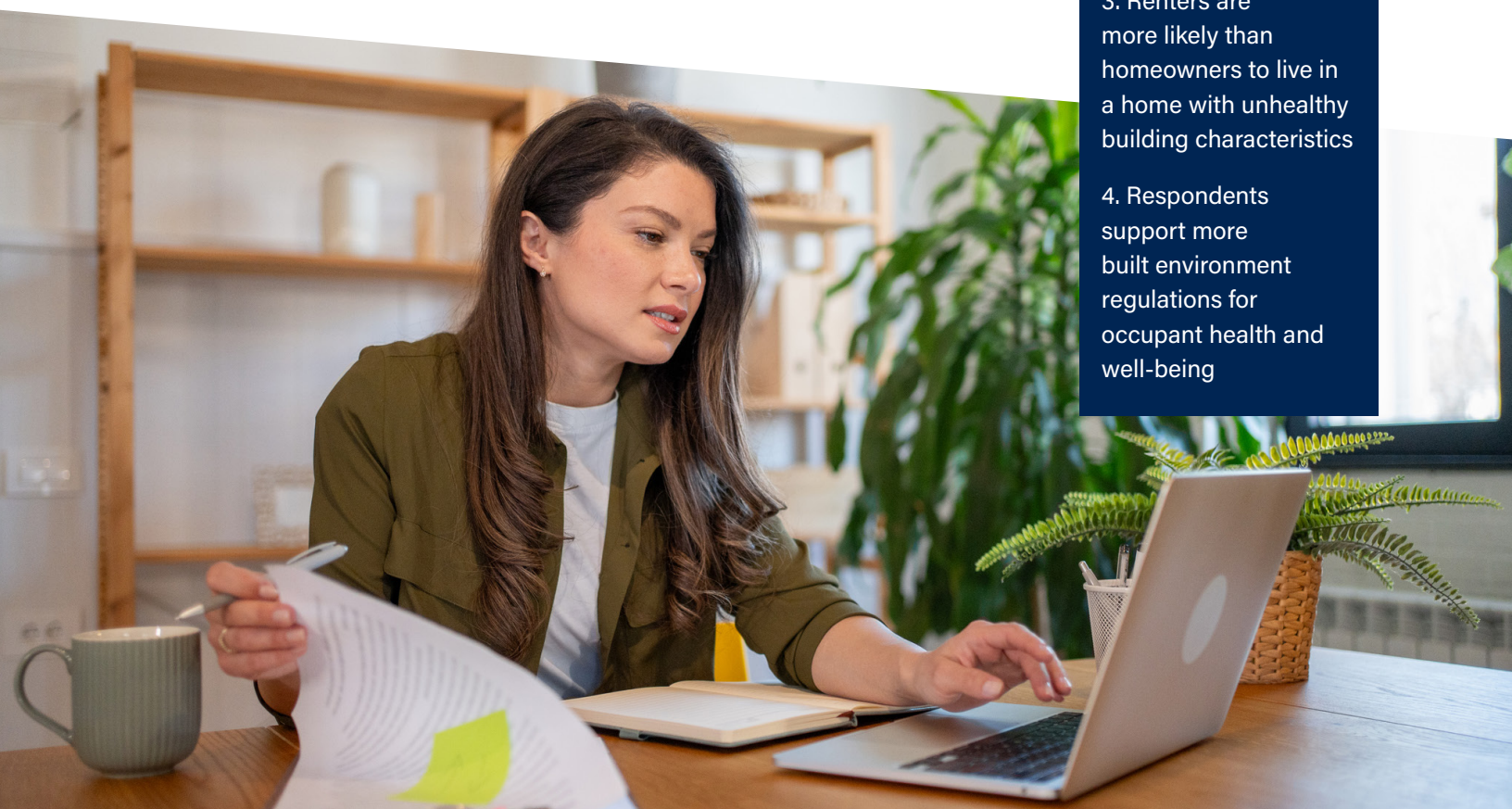
Because Americans spend up to 90% of their time indoors, building conditions such as ventilation, thermal comfort, and indoor air quality profoundly affect physical and mental health. As the climate changes and extreme weather events become more common, it becomes increasingly important that our buildings protect our health and well-being.

There are several active efforts to better define what constitutes a healthy building in the US, such as the National Center for Healthy Housing's [Principles of a Healthy Home](#) and [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health 9 Foundations of a Healthy Building](#). The purpose of this report is to contribute to the American healthy buildings movement by replicating the [Citizen's Survey: Healthy Buildings, Healthy Lives](#) report that assessed European perspectives on building health in 2025.

Buildings exist at the nexus of the energy system, climate resilience, and public health. Collecting self-reported perceptions of building health across the US provides a springboard for policymakers, public health professionals, and climate advocates to identify challenges in the building sector and collaborate on solutions to make buildings more climate responsive while promoting positive health outcomes. This report distills insights on American experiences and perspectives on building health collected by online survey and explores differences in occupant experiences across multiple regions and demographic factors, such as income and homeownership types.

Key findings on US Perceptions of Healthy Buildings

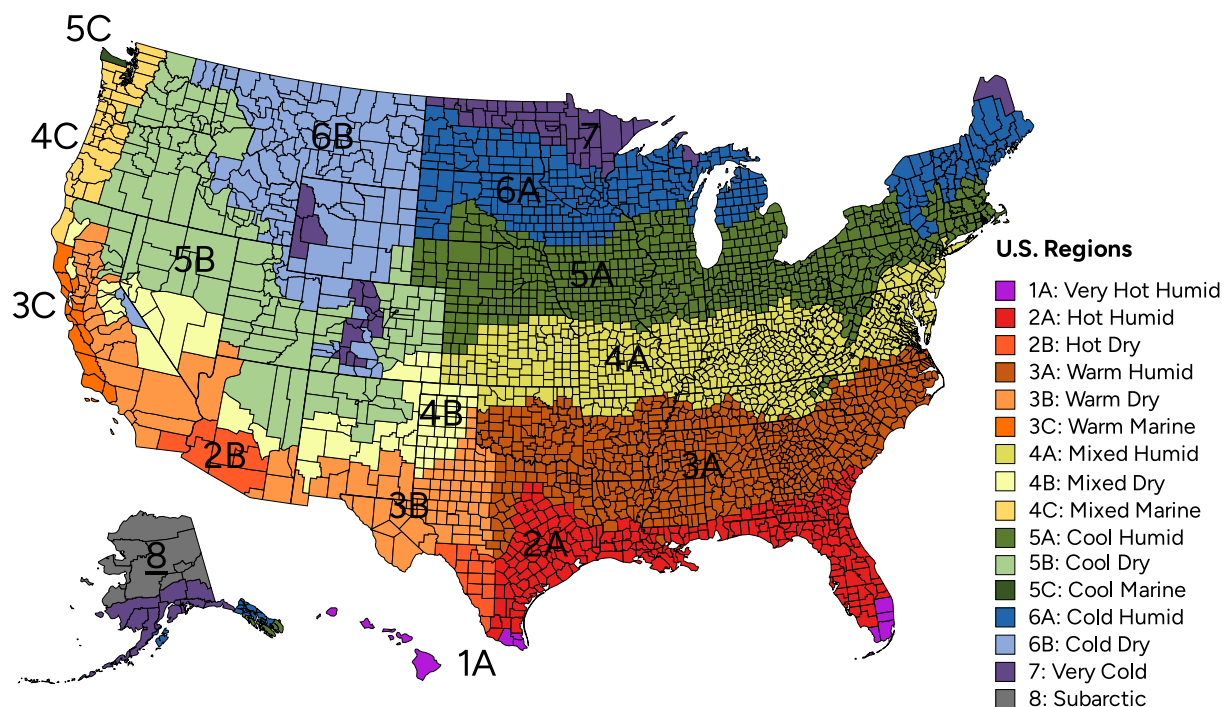
1. Respondents define healthy buildings differently based on personal experience and previous knowledge
2. Respondents with lower incomes are more likely to connect negative health impacts to negative characteristics of buildings
3. Renters are more likely than homeowners to live in a home with unhealthy building characteristics
4. Respondents support more built environment regulations for occupant health and well-being



Methodology

This report is a collaborative effort between the Institute for Market Transformation, VELUX, and YouGov®. The survey combines the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health 9 Foundations of Healthy Building](#) and the [National Center for Healthy Housing](#) to define healthy buildings; it also mirrors questions used in the European Citizen's Survey: Healthy, Buildings Healthy Lives developed by Building Performance Institute Europe and VELUX. IMT used YouGov's® online survey platform to attract approximately 1,000 participants across the U.S. during the summer of 2026. Income categories were defined in accordance with the [2024 U.S. Census thresholds for national household median income](#). Respondent geographic information was converted from Designated Market Area to International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) climate zones using the [ArcGIS 2017 Designated Market Area](#) data layer within Esri's 2017 updated Demographics and ArcGIS the [DOE Climate Zone](#) authoritative data layer, maintained by the Houston Advanced Research Center.

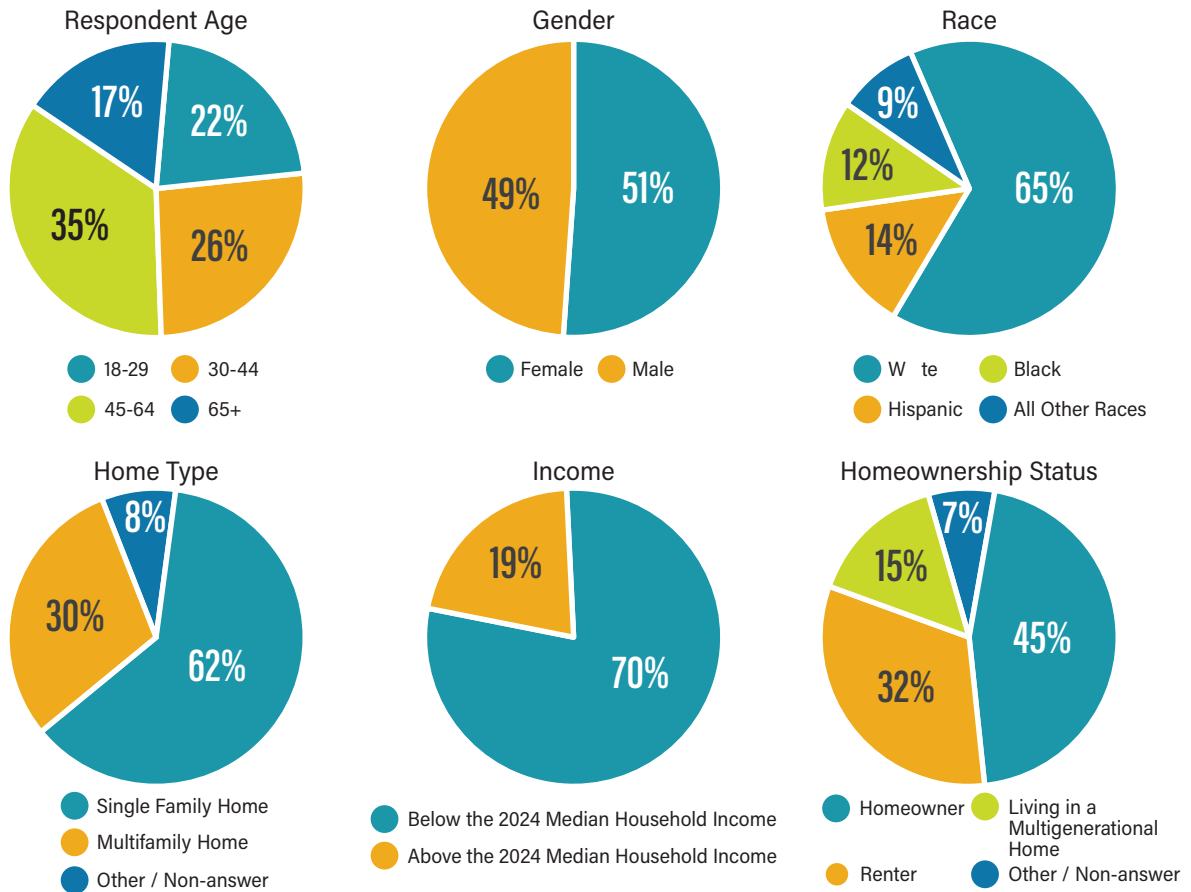
Geographic Scope



The survey recorded responses from 1,023 adults across 7 climate zones (zone 1-7) and 50 states.

Image Source: <https://basc.pnnl.gov/building-assemblies>

Survey Demographics



Notes:

- Respondent ages are within 10% of US national averages for adults 18-65+ (Source: US Census)
- Homeownership status is slightly higher than national averages for renters (63%) and lower for homeownership (28%) (Source: Federal Reserve)
- Race is within 10% of national population averages for White, Hispanic, and Black (Source: US Census)
- Approximately 10% of respondents did not provide household income



Definitions of a Healthy Building

This report combines [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health's 9 Foundations of a Healthy Building](#) and the [National Centers for Healthy Housing](#) definitions of healthy buildings. Elements of a healthy building under this combined definition include: affordability, ventilation, air quality, thermal health, moisture, dust and pests, safety and security, water quality, noise, and lighting and views.

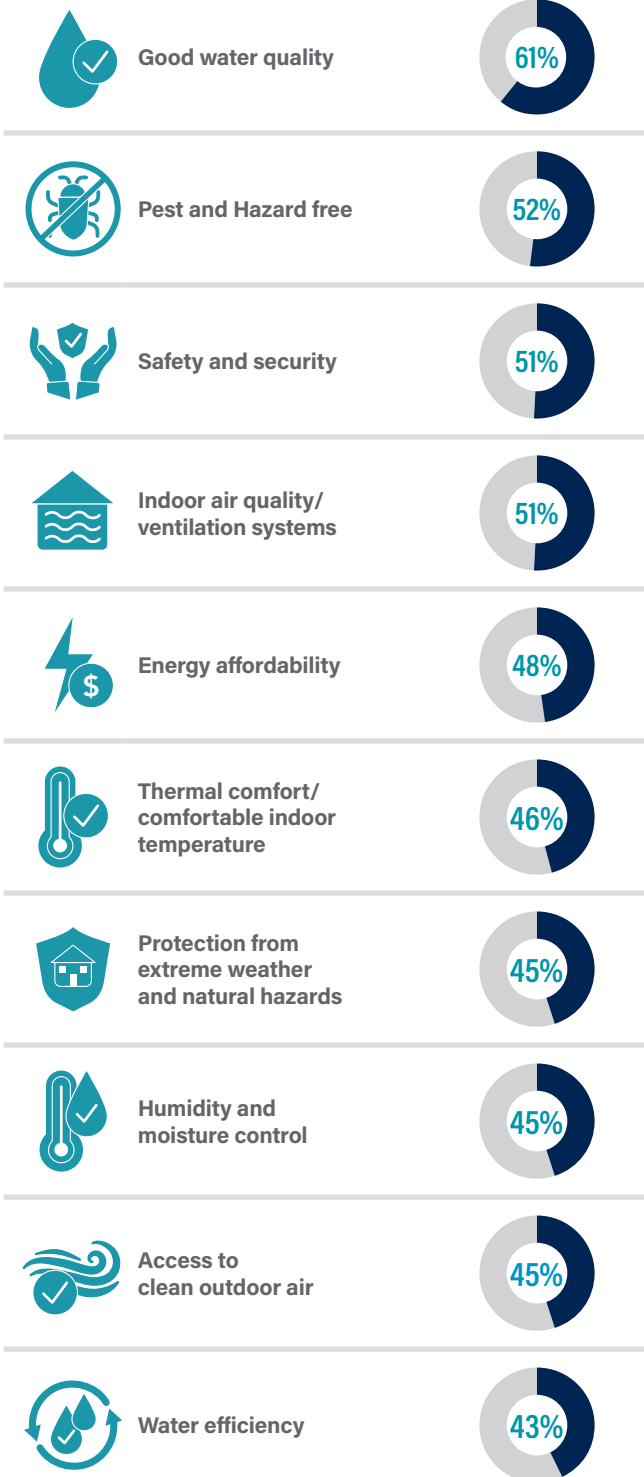
Key Trends

Respondents define building health differently based on personal experience and previous knowledge

Respondents are more likely to identify building health characteristics with things they can see, touch, or feel. Regardless of whether respondents are familiar with the term "building health," the top factors that people associate with that phrase are: **water quality, pest/hazards, safety/security, and IAQ/ventilation**. Water quality may be top of mind right now because of related media attention around the impact of data centers on water quality; similarly IAQ/ventilation attention could relate to the unprecedented wildfire smoke that impacted much of the Midwest and East Coast over the summer.

Top Factors Associated with a Healthy Building

Percentage of Respondents



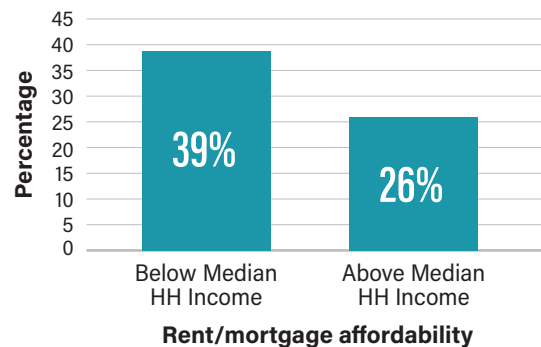
Respondents familiar with the term “building health,” are **55%-70% more likely** to associate “invisible” or “intangible” factors such as carbon emissions or environmentally-friendly building materials—with building health vs. respondents unfamiliar with the term. This indicates a gap in building health knowledge and an opportunity for public education.

Respondents below the median income are **50% more likely** than respondents above the median income to associate rent/mortgage affordability with building health. This highlights a connection between housing costs and perceived health and an opportunity to explore how housing stability affects health outcomes.

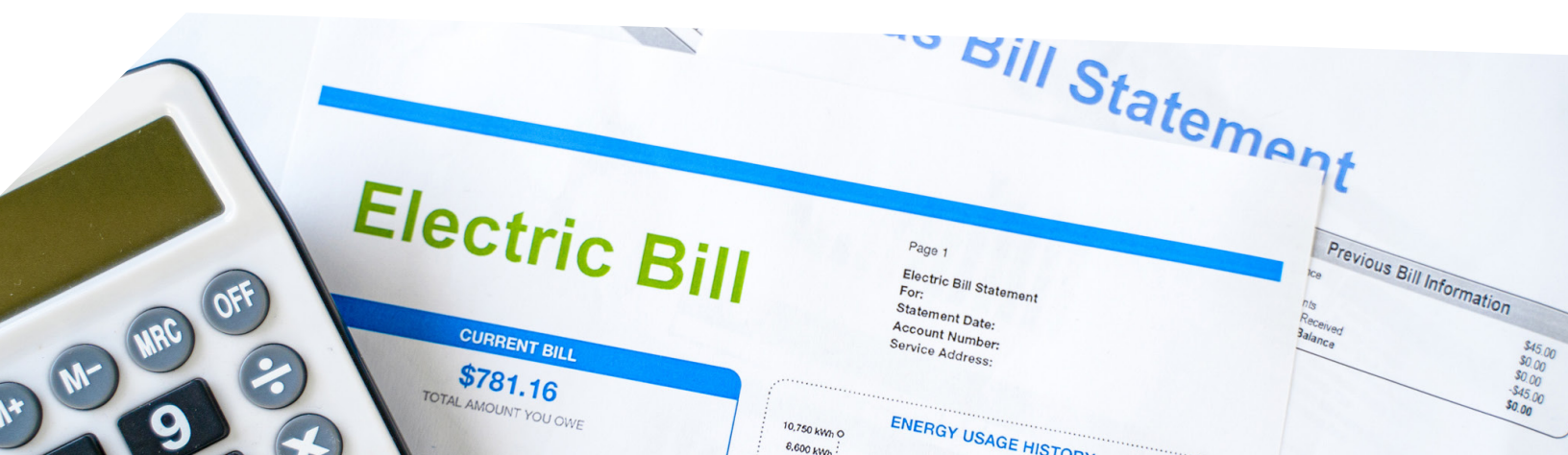
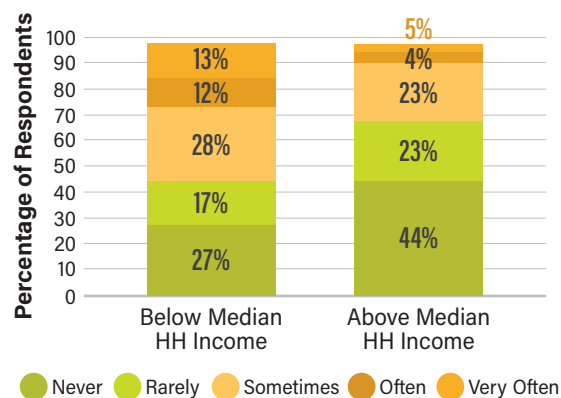
Respondents with lower incomes are more likely to connect negative health impacts to negative characteristics of buildings

According to [Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#), thermal comfort, or the ability for a building to stay at a comfortable temperature throughout the day, is foundational for a healthy building. In this survey, respondents below the household median income are approximately **3x more likely** than individuals with above-median income to select that they “often or very often” delayed or minimized heating or cooling in the past 12 months because of cost.

Percentage of Respondents in the Income Category Selecting Affordability as a Factor

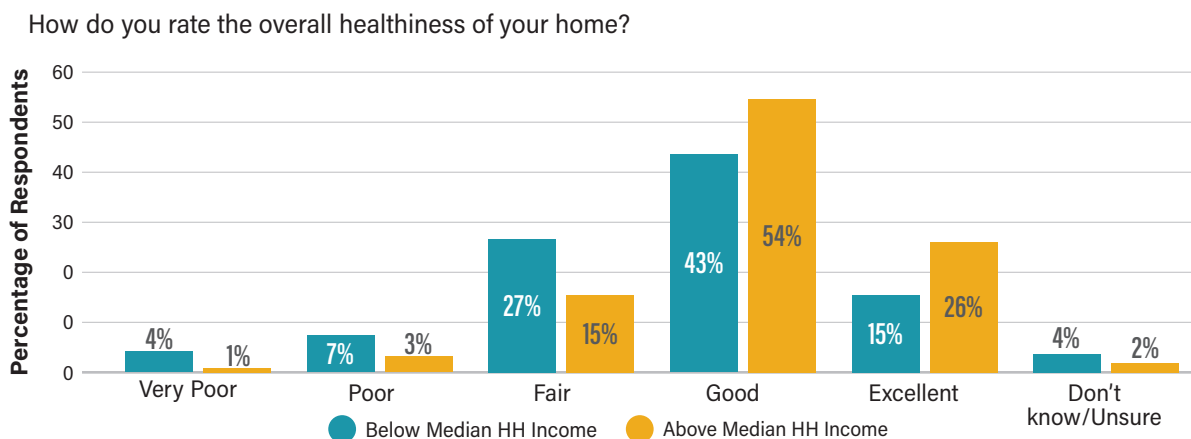


How often have you delayed or minimized using heating or cooling because of cost in the past 12 months?



Minimizing or delaying heating and cooling likely affected respondents' experiences of household thermal comfort. For example, low-income respondents are **2.6x more likely** to report excessive cold and **3.4x more likely** to report overheating in their homes compared to respondents above the household median income.

Respondents below the household median income are also **48% more likely** to report that their physical or mental health conditions, or the physical or mental health conditions of someone in their household, are linked to or worsened by indoor conditions.

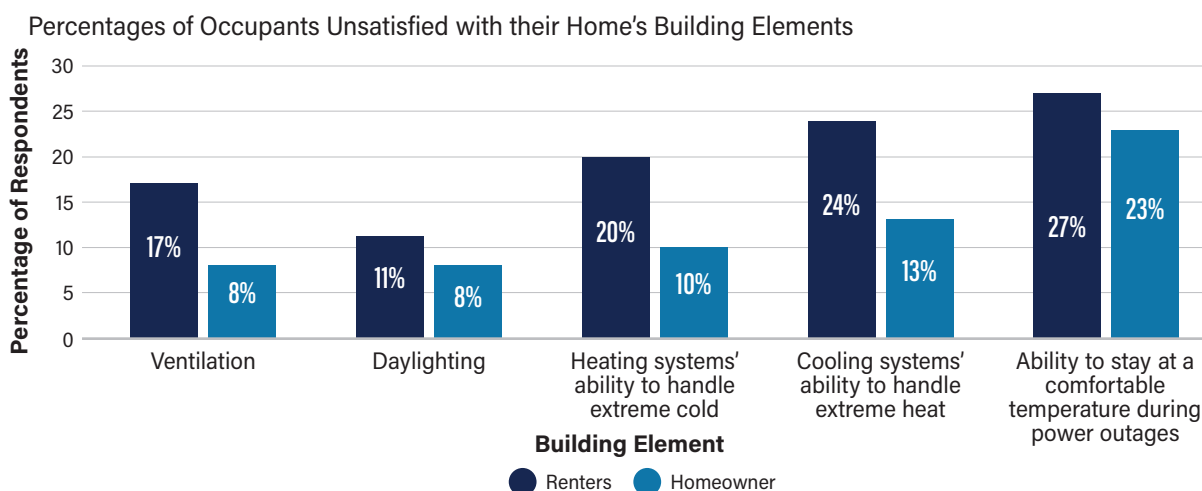


Overall, respondents below the median income are **3x more likely** to rate their homes as lower compared to respondents above the median income, on a scale of overall healthiness. While this survey is focused on perceptions of health, this could provide policymakers with insight about where to direct resources to support healthy buildings policies or programs.



Renters are more likely than homeowners to report living in a home with unhealthy building characteristics

Indoor air quality, ventilation, and thermal health are all part of the definition of a healthy home. Renters more often reported being “Not satisfied at all” or “Dissatisfied” with ventilation, daylighting, heating systems, cooling systems, and general thermal temperature compared to homeowners. These are all characteristics that fall within the concept of indoor environmental quality and may be building components that renters have less direct control over than homeowners.



Renters are also:

4.7X

more likely to report a **lack of safety and security**

3.3X

more likely to report **unaffordable housing costs**

2.5X

more likely to report a **lack of natural lighting or views of the outdoors**

2X

more likely to report **excessive outdoor noise**

1.75X

more likely to report **mold**

Respondents support more regulations for occupant health and well-being

Shifting our built environment to promote positive health outcomes requires public support for policy interventions, paired with financial incentives. Although many Americans oppose regulation for private property, this survey shows that, across income levels, Americans do support regulations and incentives aimed at promoting building health.

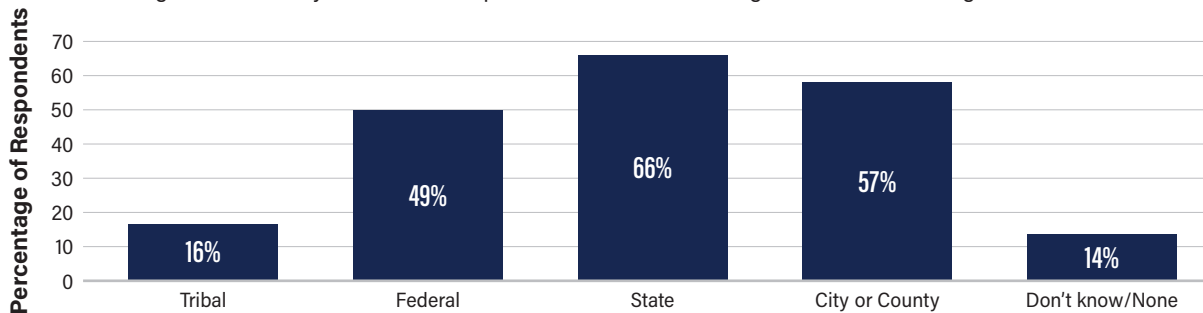
6/10 respondents support more regulations on how buildings are designed and maintained to ensure they support health and well-being with homes being the most popular building respondents would like to see covered by regulations

7/10 respondents support their city or state government prioritizing additional incentives or funding for healthier building renovations

Respondents support additional incentives to some extent at all government levels, with state incentives being the most popular.



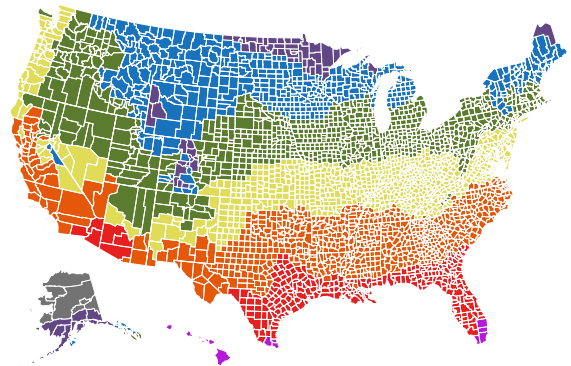
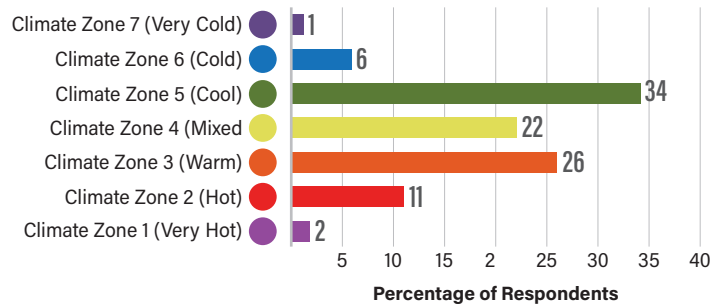
Which level of government do you think should prioritize incentives/funding for healthier buildings?



Geographic Variations

Across climate zones respondents largely associate similar factors with healthy buildings

Percentage of Respondents by Climate Zone



What factors do you associate with a healthy building?

RESPONDENTS

FACTORS	All Respondents	Climate Zone 1 (Very Hot)	Climate Zone 2 (Hot)	Climate Zone 3 (Warm)	Climate Zone 4 (Mixed)	Climate Zone 5 (Cool)	Climate Zone 6 (Cold)	Climate Zone 7 (Very Cold)
1st Factor	Good water quality	Good water quality	Good water quality	Good water quality	Good water quality	Good water quality	Good water quality	Protection from extreme weather and natural hazards
2nd Factor	Pest and hazard free	Water efficiency	Indoor air quality/ventilation systems	Pest and hazard free	Indoor air quality/ventilation systems	Indoor air quality/ventilation systems	Pest and hazard free	Indoor air quality/ventilation systems
3rd Factor	Safety and security	Safety and security	Safety and security	Safety and security	Pest and hazard free	Safety and security	Energy affordability	Good water quality
4th Factor	Indoor air quality/ventilation systems	Daylighting	Pest and hazard free	Energy affordability	Humidity and moisture control	Pest and hazard free	Humidity and moisture control	Building design that encourages a healthy lifestyle

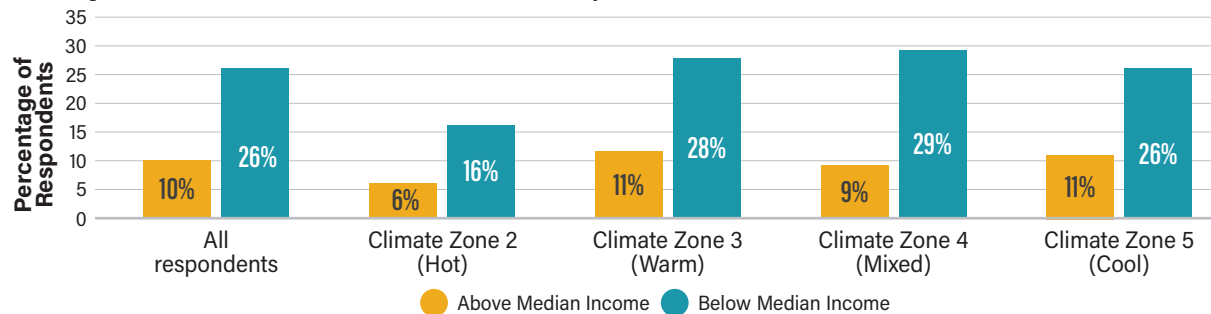
Good water quality, lack of pests/hazards, safety/security, and IAQ/ventilation are the most common factors Americans associate with building health. Other factors such as humidity/moisture control and energy affordability also appear as top factors in multiple climate zones.



Across climate zones, households below the median income report greater challenges maintaining thermal comfort

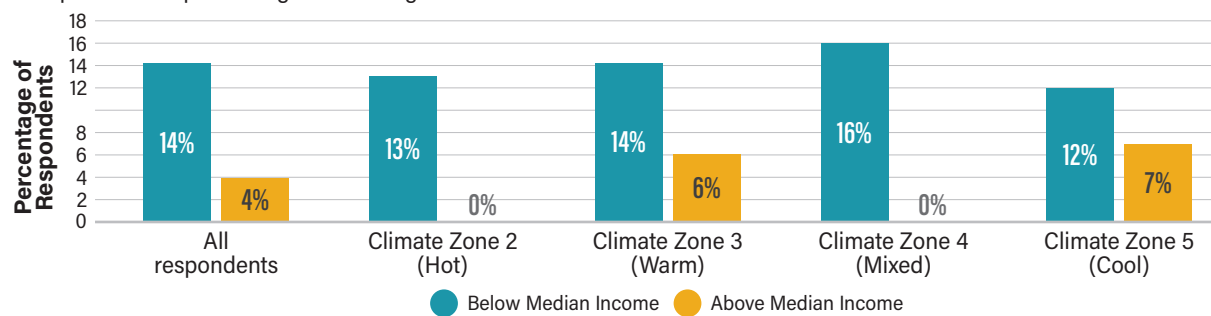
Note: Climate Zones 1, 6, and 7 were removed due to low sample size.

Percentage of Respondents Who Have Delayed or Minimized Using Heating or Cooling Because of Cost in the Past 12 Months: Often/Very often



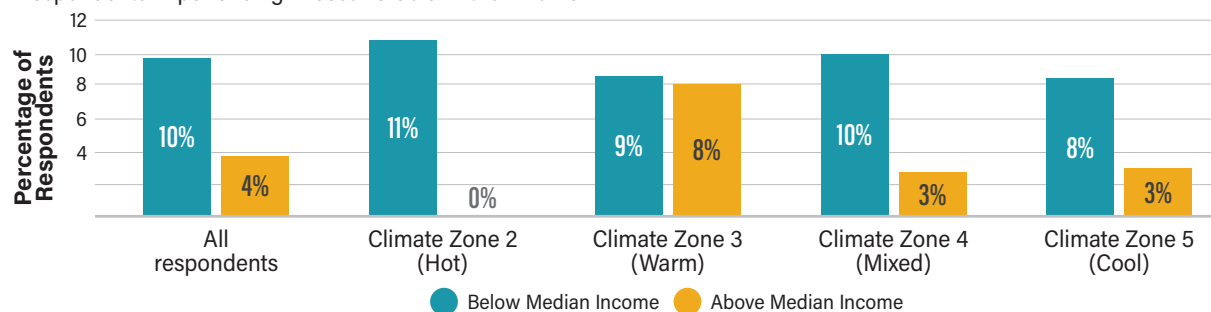
Low-income respondents from mixed climate zones experience the highest rate of “often or very often” delaying or minimizing heating or cooling because of cost. Low-income respondents from mixed climate zones are **3.15X more likely** than high-income respondents to delay or minimize heating or cooling.

Respondents Experiencing Overheating in their Home



Low-income respondents from mixed climate zones also experience the highest rate of excessive overheating in their homes.

Respondents Experiencing Excessive Cold in their Home



Low-income respondents from hot climate zones experience the highest rate of excessive cold in their homes.

Across climate zones, respondents overwhelmingly support investment in healthy building features. Respondents in mixed climates report the most financial constraints and also the most support for the investment

Note: Climate Zones 1, 6, and 7 were removed due to low sample size.

Mixed climates are:

3%

more likely than
hot climates

20%

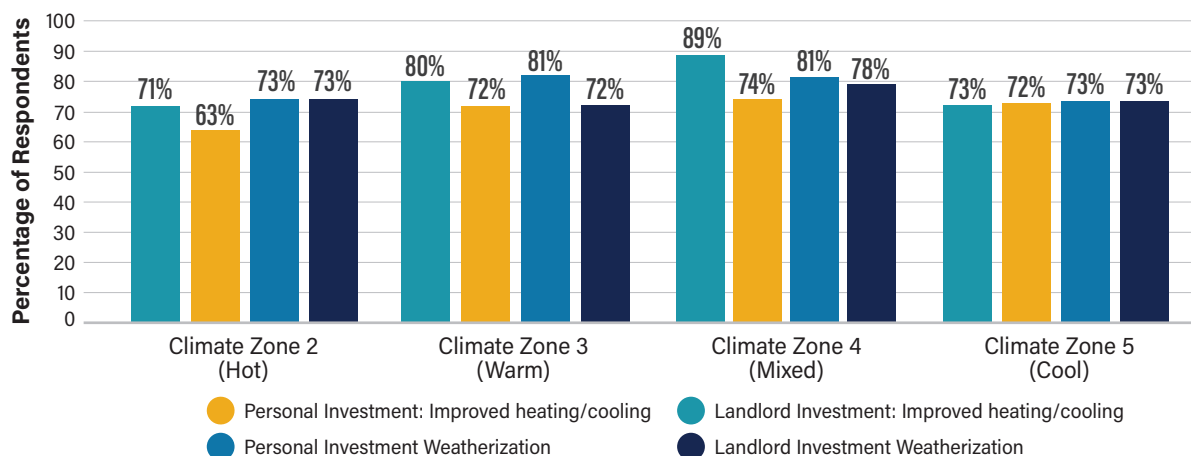
more likely than
warm climates

25%

more likely than
cool climates

to express financial constraints as a barrier for improving the indoor environment of their home

Percentage of Respondents that Support/Strongly Support Investment in Healthy Building Features



Next Steps

A core element of IMT's mission to advance high-performing buildings is ensuring human health and well-being. Addressing complex health and safety, comfort, and affordability challenges in both new and existing buildings will require a mix of policy solutions and targeted program supports, and we are committed to developing and implementing these alongside our partners in government, the private sector, and communities across the country.



