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The Canadian Armed Forces Occupant Survey 2023

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Research objectives

The Canadian Forces Housing Agency (CFHA), an agency within the Department of National Defence (DND), has been the operator and maintainer of the DND portfolio of housing since its creation in 1996. This portfolio is comprised of roughly 12,000 residential housing units (RHU), which are available to Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members in 27 different locations throughout Canada.

CFHA's Customer Service Program is responsible for the overall management and continuous improvement of services provided to occupants of DND housing at CAF Bases and Wings across Canada. To meet this obligation, the Customer Service Program must have a clear understanding of their customers' needs and whether those needs are being met. Feedback and input from CFHA customers is therefore, collected on a regular basis, through the administration of the CAF Occupant Survey previously conducted in 2005, 2014, 2017 and 2020. The Customer Service Program identified the need to have the Occupant Survey re-administered, to collect current customer feedback.

The objective of this research is to measure satisfaction with CFHA services via an online survey. The methodology transitioned from a telephone survey to an online platform byway of a dual-mode survey conducted in 2020. By re-administering the Occupant Survey periodically, key performance indicators are able to be evaluated over time. In addition, the 2023 survey included some updated items.

The findings from the research will be used by CFHA to:

- Assess CFHA customer satisfaction with services provided;
- Track key indicators of the Customer Service Program's performance since 2020;
- Identify areas for improvement in CFHA customer service; and
- Report on departmental performance.

Methodology

The research consisted of an online survey conducted with occupants¹ of DND housing. The online survey was conducted during the period January 18 to February 2, 2023. In a departure from previous years, when sampling was required to keep down the cost of a telephone survey, the approach taken in 2023 was an attempted census of occupants. A master list of 10,046 CFHA occupant households in Canada was drawn and records without e-mails and duplicate e-mails were removed. This left a contact list of 9,724 records and over 2,300 responded. Environics removed several cases where respondents answered only the initial screening questions but no substantive questions, in total 2,241 completed the survey.

As questions were not mandatory, in this report each question is analysed on the base of those responding to it. The base of people answering any question is shown as follows: n=###

¹ For the purpose of this survey, "occupant" includes both CAF members and spouses/partners.

A more detailed description of the methodology used to conduct this study is presented at the back of this report (Appendix A), along with a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix B).

The cost of the contracted portion of this research was \$59,974.75 (HST included).

Key findings

The results of this survey indicate CFHA has managed to weather the ongoing challenges of providing service delivery during the protracted COVID-19 pandemic period. Occupants' satisfaction with their housing, as well as their views about CFHA's services and communications, have for the most part maintained the baseline position established by the previous online survey, which was conducted in 2020 in the period immediately prior to the pandemic.

Condition of the RHU remains key to how occupants feel about their RHU and the CFHA's service in general. Being responsive to requests, providing regular and appropriate communications and following up on issues reinforces that CFHA cares about the well being of the occupants of DND housing.

The following summarizes the key findings of the 2023 research:

Experience and satisfaction with DND housing

- Seven in ten occupants (70%) are at least somewhat satisfied with their current RHU, comparable to 2020 (73%). Occupants who are very satisfied with their current RHU largely attribute this to some aspect of their property (81%, basically unchanged) or the location (31%, up 5 points). Dissatisfaction continues to be linked to the condition of the RHU (83%) or because of repair/maintenance issues (58%); one-third (33%) would prefer something different: more storage, more bathrooms, a garage or basement.
- Strong satisfaction with most housing attributes has generally held steady since 2020, including proximity to base (80%), neighbourhood/community (47%), and access to amenities (46%). Strong satisfaction with affordability has increased slightly (43%, up from 38%), while safety/security had dipped (54%, down from 59%).
- A gap analysis indicates that *housing condition, privacy and energy efficiency* remain priority areas for improvement (i.e., housing attributes that are of relative importance to occupants, but with which they are least satisfied). *Affordability of rent* also falls into this category, but this may be beyond CFHA's ability to control.
- Affordability remains the top reason given (without prompting) for choosing to live in DND housing, with seven in ten (70%, up from 64%) indicating this. Two-thirds (68%, similar to 70%) mention something related to the location, mainly its proximity to the base/wing (50%). One-third (35%) indicate there was no other choice/limited alternatives, and one-quarter say it was convenient to not have to search for housing.
- Three-quarters (75%) of occupants would be at least somewhat likely to recommend DND housing to another CAF member, slightly down from 2020 (80%); the proportion very likely to do so has remained stable (32% vs. 30%).

Experience and satisfaction with CFHA services

- The proportion of occupants who rate the CFHA's customer service as excellent (22%, down 4 points from 2020) or good (26%, down 3 points) has declined somewhat; while another quarter (26%) say it is

acceptable. One-quarter (25%, marginally up from 21%) say its service is poor (16%) or very poor (9%). Occupants remain mainly positive about CFHA's response times.

- When asked about what they like and dislike about the CFHA services, the same key factors continue to be mentioned: the timeliness of response, the quality of repairs, and the attitude of the staff.
- Majorities rate friendliness/courtesy and responding promptly to inquiries and requests as excellent or good, but fewer than half give a positive rating to other aspects. There has been a drop in the proportion indicating the CFHA is excellent at carrying out maintenance and repairs (19%, down from 24%)
- Seven in ten (69%, down from 75% in 2020) indicate they had a minor repair (65%, unchanged from 66%) or major renovation (17%, down from 26%) in the past year. Those who had **minor repairs** are generally satisfied with the service received, with three-quarters or more being at least somewhat satisfied with each of four service aspects, as are at least six in who had **major renovations**. In both cases, satisfaction is highest that the contractor arrived when promised, and lowest for the quality of the work.
- Over eight in ten (83%, comparable to 84% in 2020) occupants are aware of, and over half (56%, up from 50%) have used, the after-hours emergency service. Over half (52%, down marginally from 57%) are very satisfied with the call centre staff, and seven in ten (70%, unchanged from 69%) are very satisfied with their emergency services contractor.
- Six in ten (62%, basically unchanged from 2020) occupants are familiar with how to report complaints or concerns about the housing service. Among those familiar, seven percent have used this service, and four in ten are satisfied to some extent with how it was handled, while a slim majority were left at least somewhat unsatisfied, generally similar to 2020.

CFHA communications

- Eight in ten (79%) occupants are at least somewhat familiar with the CFHA Occupant Handbook, and slightly more than this (84%) recall receiving some type of communication from CFHA in the past year (up from seven in ten in 2020), with almost three-quarters (73%) saying it was a newsletter and over half (56%) saying they saw notices or advisories. E-mail remains the preferred way to get both critical and general information.
- Just under two in ten (18%) moved into an RHU in the past year and remember receiving a Digital Welcome Kit, and almost all of these (92%) say it was helpful to them. Eight in ten (81%) express at least some interest in a Digital Exit Kit to help them transition out of their current RHU when the time comes.
- Six percent are aware of the CFHA's twitter account, and two-thirds (66%, up slightly from 60%) have visited the CFHA website, most often for general information (47%) or for contact information (40%).
- Sixteen percent are aware of the new Services to Occupants section of the website and six in ten (62%) of those aware have used it to submit an online form, most often a repair or maintenance request (38%), an application for DND housing (25%) or submitting an Extended Absence from the RHU form (25%). Nine in ten (90%) who have submitted a form were satisfied to some extent with the process, and most of these (56%) are very satisfied.
- Half of occupants (51%) say CFHA's communications efforts are excellent or good (unchanged from 2020), and a further third (34%) say they are acceptable.
- Of a list of specific types of information about DND housing, two-thirds (66%) express interest in receiving advance notice of work to be done to their RHU, over six in ten would like to see information on rent

changes (63%), and just under six in ten would want to know when requested repairs will be done (57%), information about urgent issues (56%), or future RHU development details (55%).

Quality of life

- Just under four in ten (37%) occupants with other household members say well-being is the main reason they choose DND housing, and close to half (45%) say it is an important reason, if not the main one. These results are very consistent with the online survey of 2020.
- Majorities of occupants continue to indicate the distances between home and regular destinations (e.g. work, recreation, shopping, and their child's school or day-care) are reasonable.
- As before, majorities of all occupants continue to indicate the distances between home and regular destinations like work, recreation, shopping, and their child's school or day-care, are reasonable.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

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Brenda Sharpe
Senior Research Associate, Corporate and Public Affairs
Environics Research
brenda.sharpe@environics.ca
(613) 699-6886

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For more information, contact DND at por-rop@forces.gc.ca