



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
Environmental Health Association of Québec

Housing Needs MCS

Survey for people with MCS

June 2024

ASEQ-EHAQ

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The purpose of the survey conducted by the Environmental Health Association of Quebec (ASEQ-EHAQ) is to gather essential insights and perspectives from individuals with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) regarding their housing needs. This initiative aims to address the significant challenges faced by MCS sufferers in finding safe and suitable housing. The survey seeks to understand the specific accommodation needs, environmental triggers, and challenges experienced by individuals with MCS in seeking housing.

These insights will inform the development of a housing project on ASEQ-EHAQ's 25-acre property that is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with MCS. By gathering comprehensive data through this survey, ASEQ-EHAQ aims to create a supportive and inclusive residential environment that mitigates the impact of chemical sensitivities and enhances quality of life for its future residents.

In this survey, a total of 31 respondents participated, with responses collected in both English and French. Specifically, 14 respondents completed the survey in English, while 17 respondents completed the survey in French.

Demographics

Participants' ages are distributed as follows: 6.5% are between 75-84 years old, 25.8% are between 65-74 years old, 48.4% are between 55-64 years old, 12.9% are between 45-54 years old, and 6.5% are between 35-44 years old.

The gender distribution among respondents is as follows: 16.1% identified as male and 83.9% as female.

The respondents are distributed across provinces and territories as follows:

- 9.7% are from British Columbia.
- 3.2% are from Alberta.
- 19.4% are from Ontario.
- 58.1% are from Quebec.
- 3.2% are from New Brunswick.
- 3.2% are from Prince Edward Island.
- 3.2% are from Nova Scotia.

Among respondents, 96.8% stated they have MCS, while 3.2% indicated they do not have MCS.

Housing Needs

The following ratings reflect varying levels of satisfaction among respondents with their current housing situation in terms of meeting their needs related to MCS. Participants were asked to rate their current satisfaction level on a scale from 1 to 5. The responses are distributed as follows:

- 19.4% of respondents rated their satisfaction as 1 (very dissatisfied).
- 19.4% rated their satisfaction as 2.
- 29.0% rated their satisfaction as 3.
- 19.4% rated their satisfaction as 4.
- 12.9% rated their satisfaction as 5 (very satisfied).

Participants were asked whether they are currently living in housing that meets their MCS needs (free of scents, other chemicals, or mold). Responses indicate that a majority of participants, representing 71.0%, are not currently living in housing that meets their MCS needs, while 25.8% are living in housing that meets their MCS needs. Additionally, 3.2% of respondents indicated that it is not applicable to their situation or they prefer not to say.

The survey asked about participants' experiences with exposures to chemicals, fragrances, or other triggers in their current or previous housing situations. Among those surveyed, 83.9% reported having encountered such exposures, highlighting a prevalent issue for individuals with MCS. Conversely, 6.5% indicated they had not experienced these exposures, while 9.7% opted for "Not applicable/Prefer not to say." These findings underscore the significant challenges faced by many individuals with MCS in finding housing environments that adequately meet their sensitivities and needs.

The survey explored respondents' experiences with mold or other indoor air quality issues in their current or previous housing situations. Results indicated that a substantial majority, 67.7%, have encountered such problems, underscoring the pervasive nature of indoor air quality challenges faced by individuals with MCS. In contrast, 29.0% reported no encounters with mold or indoor air quality issues, suggesting variability in housing conditions among those surveyed. A small percentage, 3.2%, opted for "Not applicable/Prefer not to say," possibly indicating a reluctance to disclose or a lack of relevant experience. These findings emphasize the critical

need for accessible housing options that cater to the specific sensitivities and health concerns of individuals with MCS.

In response to the survey question regarding the extent of adverse effects on health or well-being due to inadequate housing accommodations for MCS, respondents provided varying ratings. A notable 48.4% of participants rated their experience at the highest level of severity (5), indicating severe adverse effects. Additionally, 22.6% rated their experience at level 4, signifying significant adverse effects. A further breakdown showed that 12.9% rated their experience at level 3, 9.7% at level 2, and 6.5% at level 1, suggesting a range of impacts among respondents. These findings highlight the profound negative impact that inadequate housing accommodations can have on the health and well-being of individuals with MCS, highlighting the necessity for improved housing solutions tailored to their specific needs.

In response to the question regarding health effects due to neighbors' use of chemicals in proximity to their living spaces, the majority of respondents, 87.1%, reported experiencing such effects. Conversely, 6.5% indicated they did not experience health effects from their neighbors' chemical use, while another 6.5% either found the question not applicable or preferred not to disclose their response.

In response to whether increased chemical use due to their request for accommodation distresses them, the survey reveals that a significant majority of respondents, 64.5%, rated their distress level as 5, indicating they are extremely distressed by this situation. Additionally, 19.4% rated their distress as 4, suggesting a high level of concern. A smaller percentage of respondents, 12.9%, indicated minimal distress with a rating of 1, while 3.2% rated their distress at 2. These findings highlight the emotional and psychological impact experienced by individuals with MCS when accommodation requests result in heightened chemical exposures.

In response to whether participants keep their windows open in winter to ventilate chemicals from their living space, the survey findings indicate that 41.9% of respondents answered affirmatively. Conversely, 38.7% reported not keeping their windows open for this purpose, indicating varying strategies or limitations in their approach to managing chemical exposures. A smaller percentage, 19.4%, indicated the response "not applicable/prefer not to say".

Regarding whether participants are currently involved in litigation related to housing concerns, specifically regarding MCS, the survey findings reveal that 9.7% of respondents answered affirmatively. This indicates a small but notable portion of individuals within the MCS community are actively pursuing legal actions related to their housing situations. In contrast, a substantial majority of 80.6% reported not being involved in such litigation. Additionally, 9.7% responded

"not applicable/prefer not to say," which may signify personal reasons for non-disclosure or a lack of relevance to their current circumstances.

Participants were asked whether they require their landlord to address issues in their living environment to accommodate MCS needs. The survey results indicate that 3.2% of respondents answered affirmatively, stating they require their landlord to address these issues urgently. A larger portion, 16.1%, indicated they do require accommodations but not urgently. In contrast, 29.0% responded that they do not currently require their landlord to address these issues. The majority, comprising 51.6% of respondents, selected "Not applicable/Prefer not to say," which suggests various reasons for non-disclosure or a lack of current need for accommodations from their landlord.

Participants were asked if they have ever experienced homelessness or unsafe housing situations due to MCS. Alarming, 45.2% of respondents answered affirmatively, indicating that they have experienced homelessness or unsafe housing conditions because of their MCS. In contrast, 41.9% reported that they have not faced such situations. A smaller percentage, 12.9%, selected "Not applicable/Prefer not to say".

Participants who indicated experiencing homelessness or unsafe housing situations due to MCS were asked to specify the types of situations they have encountered, with the option to select multiple responses. The survey results reveal the following distribution:

- 10.0% reported living in cars.
- 5.0% reported living in temporary shelters.
- 5.0% reported staying in motels/hotels.
- 5.0% sought refuge in public spaces (e.g., parks, libraries).
- 15.0% indicated moving frequently between short-term rentals.
- 5.0% reported living in RVs or mobile homes.
- 35.0% mentioned sharing housing with others who do not have MCS.

Participants were asked to indicate how often they find themselves moving residences due to issues related to their MCS needs. The responses are as follows:

- 48.4% rarely
- 29.0% occasionally
- 19.4% frequently
- 3.2% constantly

Participants were asked whether they have experienced symptoms triggered by elevated levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as formaldehyde, in building materials. Among the respondents, 19.4% reported experiencing these symptoms consistently, indicating a persistent reaction to VOCs in their living environments. Additionally, 45.2% noted experiencing symptoms occasionally, suggesting intermittent but recurring sensitivities to VOCs. A minority, 12.9%, indicated that they do not experience symptoms related to elevated VOC levels, while 22.6% were unsure about the impact of VOCs on their health. These findings highlight the significant prevalence of adverse health effects linked to VOC exposure among individuals with MCS, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of building materials and their VOC content in housing accommodations tailored to MCS needs.

Participants were asked about their preference for using building materials that are low-VOC or VOC-free. The responses indicate a strong inclination towards prioritizing such materials: 83.9% of respondents stated that they would always prioritize low-VOC/VOC-free materials, emphasizing a consistent commitment to reducing VOC exposure in their living environments. A smaller proportion, 6.5%, indicated that they would sometimes prioritize low-VOC/VOC-free materials, suggesting a nuanced approach depending on feasibility and specific circumstances. Conversely, 9.7% expressed concerns about affordability, stating that they cannot afford low-VOC/VOC-free materials.

Participants were asked to rate how much they believe low-VOC/VOC-free building materials would help alleviate their MCS symptoms. The responses indicate a strong belief in the effectiveness of such materials: 71.0% of respondents rated them as extremely helpful (rating 5), suggesting a high expectation that using low-VOC/VOC-free materials would significantly reduce their MCS symptoms. Additionally, 25.8% rated these materials as very helpful (rating 4), further supporting the view that adopting these building materials could substantially alleviate their symptoms. A small proportion, 3.2%, rated them as somewhat helpful (rating 3), indicating a minority perspective that these materials may provide moderate relief. Overall, these findings highlight the perceived importance and potential efficacy of low-VOC/VOC-free building materials in managing MCS symptoms among respondents.

Participants were asked whether they found that avoiding exposure to chemicals helps in their recovery/best management process. The responses indicate a strong consensus among respondents, with 93.5% answering yes. This suggests that a significant majority of individuals with MCS perceive avoiding chemical exposures as beneficial in managing their condition. Only 6.5% were unsure about the effectiveness of avoiding chemical exposures, highlighting a minority who may have uncertainties regarding this approach. Overall, these findings highlight

the perceived importance of minimizing chemical exposures as a key strategy in the recovery and management process for individuals with MCS.

All respondents who indicated that avoiding exposure to chemicals helps in their recovery/best management process were asked whether relocating to a healthy, pollution-free environment would further aid in their recovery. The results show that 100.0% of these respondents answered yes. This unanimous agreement suggests a strong belief among individuals with MCS that moving to a pollution-free environment could provide additional benefits in their recovery and management of MCS symptoms.

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the fact that the land for the affordable, healthy housing project ECOASIS is situated in a rural area with no polluting industry and no farming on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "not satisfied at all" and 5 represents "completely satisfied." The responses indicate a positive sentiment among the majority of participants:

- 3.2% rated 1
- 3.2% rated 2
- 25.8% rated 3
- 19.4% rated 4
- 48.4% rated 5

These results illustrate that 48.4% of respondents are completely satisfied with the location of ECOASIS in a rural area without polluting industry or farming. This high satisfaction level suggests that such an environment is perceived as highly beneficial and supportive for individuals with MCS, aligning with their preferences for low-pollution settings that can contribute to improved health outcomes and overall well-being.

Participants were asked whether they had received any support or accommodations from housing providers, government agencies, or community organizations to address their MCS needs. The findings indicate that a significant majority (77.4%) of respondents have not received any support or accommodations specifically tailored to their MCS needs from housing providers, government agencies, or community organizations. This suggests that there may be a gap in available support and accommodations for individuals with MCS in the housing sector. The responses also indicate a reluctance or inability among some respondents (16.1%) to disclose whether they have received such support or accommodations, indicating potential privacy concerns or uncertainty about the nature of available assistance.

Summary of findings

- **Satisfaction with Current Housing:** Ratings varied, with 48.4% expressing severe dissatisfaction (ratings 1-2) and 32.3% indicating moderate satisfaction (ratings 3-4) regarding their current housing's ability to meet MCS needs.
- **Exposure and Health Effects:** A large proportion (83.9%) reported exposure to chemicals and fragrances in their housing, correlating with significant adverse health effects reported by 71.3% of respondents due to inadequate housing accommodations.
- **Legal and Landlord Interactions:** Despite high distress levels (64.5%) over increased chemical use due to accommodation requests, only a small minority (3.2%) reported requiring urgent landlord interventions, while 9.7% were engaged in litigation related to MCS housing concerns.
- **Homelessness and Instability:** Nearly half (45.2%) of respondents have experienced homelessness or unsafe housing conditions due to MCS, with diverse situations such as living in cars (10.0%) and frequent moves between short-term rentals (15.0%) reported.
- **VOC Sensitivity and Building Materials:** Most participants (71.0%) believe that low-VOC/VOC-free building materials significantly alleviate MCS symptoms, underscoring the importance of environmental considerations in housing design and construction.
- **Support and Accommodations:** Despite high demand, a significant majority (77.4%) indicated they had not received support or accommodations tailored to MCS needs from housing providers, government agencies, or community organizations.
- **Satisfaction with ECOASIS Project:** The rural location of the ECOASIS housing project received positive feedback, with 67.8% of respondents rating their satisfaction as 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5, indicating strong approval of the pollution-free environment planned for the project.