



What We Heard: Building Towards a Malahat Community Safety Plan

Malahat Nation

September 29, 2025



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Key Findings	4
01 Community Connection	4
Communication and Trust	5
Harassment, Bullying, and Conflict Resolution	7
Mental Health, Trauma, and Healing	8
Social Cohesion, Recreation, and Enjoyment of Public Space	8
02 Cultural Rootedness and Safety	9
Connection to Land, Food, Culture, and Identity	10
Cultural Safety and Sovereignty	10
Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing	11
03 Community Resilience, Protection, and Preparedness	11
Community Guardianship	12
Conflict De-Escalation and Security	12
Emergency Preparedness	13
Racism and the Impact of Settler Communities	14
Wildlife Safety	14
04 Sustainability and Healthy Infrastructure	15
Housing	15
Infrastructure	16
05 Thriving Community Services	17
Access to Services	17
Harm Reduction and Addictions	18
Integrated and Effective Systems	19
Youth Wellbeing and Development	20
Conclusion	20
Appendices	21
Appendix 1: Survey Findings	21

Introduction

This *What We Heard* report summarizes the key themes and insights shared by Malahat Nation members, staff, and leadership as part of the development process that will ultimately result in a Community Safety Plan. It reflects findings from a series of targeted engagements, including focus groups, a community-wide survey, and a community gathering.

This report aims to capture the voices and priorities of the Malahat community to inform the development of a Malahat Community Safety Plan. By documenting what was shared during engagements, this report provides transparency, accountability, and a strong foundation for the next steps.

Engagements were carried out between June and September 2025, including 6 focus groups, 2 interviews, and a community gathering, with a combined total of 67 participants. These included conversations with Malahat Nation staff, administrative leadership, Chief and Council, Malahat youth, and Malahat community members. A community survey was also conducted between July and September 2025 aimed at reflecting the voices and priorities of Malahat community members and helping guide future decisions around safety. The survey had 39 community responses and the quantitative findings are detailed in [Appendix 1](#), with text responses removed to protect anonymity. The quotations used throughout this report reflect the voices of participants in any of these engagements or the survey, though the source is not specified to further protect anonymity.

“To me, safety in a community means feeling secure and comfortable in your surroundings. It’s not just about avoiding crime, but also about knowing you can trust the people around you, having access to things like healthcare and clean water, and feeling included and respected. It’s about being able to live your daily life without fear, knowing your community has your back and is prepared for whatever might come.” – Engagement Participant

A holistic view of safety, one that includes physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing, guided both the engagement process and the analysis, from which a number of issues emerged. All contributions were reviewed, and key themes, concepts, and patterns were identified for qualitative analysis. The findings were organized into five overarching themes:

- **Community Connection:** Community members emphasized the importance of belonging, healing, and safe public spaces. Concerns were raised about bullying, harassment, and conflict, along with a deep desire for stronger communication and trust across all levels of the Nation.
- **Thriving Community Services:** Participants emphasized the need for trauma-informed and harm-reduction approaches, comprehensive supports, and improved systems that provide clarity of roles and responsibilities and better the effectiveness of all departments.
- **Sustainability and Healthy Infrastructure:** Safe housing, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship were identified as key components of long-term safety.

- **Community Resilience, Protection, and Preparedness:** Emergency readiness, wildlife risks, security, community guardianship, and the impact of settler communities were all raised as priorities.
- **Cultural Rootedness and Safety:** Participants shared that culture, language, land, and tradition are central to collective safety and expressed concerns around cultural safety, cultural sovereignty, and opportunities for intergenerational learning.



Figure 1: Aspects of Community Safety that emerged from engagements

These findings represent a holistic understanding of safety grounded in the voices and priorities of Malahat. These themes emerged directly from engagement data and reflect not only areas of concern, but also areas of strength, vision, and aspiration. Conceptualized in *Figure 1* as Connected, Thriving, Sustainable, Resilient, and Culturally Rooted Community, together these overarching themes paint a broad picture of what safety means in Malahat: not just the absence of harm, but the presence of belonging, trust, cultural vitality, strong infrastructure, effective systems, and collective wellbeing.

Key Findings

01 Community Connection

Throughout the engagement process, participants shared that community connection is foundational to safety and wellbeing. When people feel heard, respected, and connected, to each other, to Malahat Nation administration, and to Malahat leadership, they are more likely to

engage with services, support one another, and contribute to a shared sense of care. Community members highlighted that restoring trust, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and fostering a culture of mutual respect are essential for healing historical harms and building a stronger future together. This section explores key issues and priorities raised around communication, conflict resolution, mental health, and opportunities for connection.

Communication and Trust

Across engagements, participants emphasized that safety is not just about physical infrastructure or security; it is also about relationships, transparency, and communication. Many participants described challenges in the complex and sometimes misaligned relationship between three groups that are core to building safety: Malahat Nation members, the Nation's administration, and Chief and Council. For some, the absence of clear and respectful communication and trust made it difficult to raise concerns or feel invested in community processes. Because concerns related to communication and trust emerged in nearly every engagement and were closely tied to many other safety-related issues, this section is more detailed than others and includes extended participant quotations to reflect the depth of this theme.

Several community members described a desire for more opportunities to engage directly with Chief and Council, pointing to a sense of exclusion from decision-making:

- "I want leadership to do simple things like communicate, their delivery is poor which makes me resentful to bring up thoughts and concerns. I don't see any value in bringing concerns to leadership because it feels like I get brushed off."
- "It's important to have Chief and Council involvement. Frustrated that I keep venting and it doesn't reach the ears of Council."
- "The biggest issue is that Chief and Council do not engage with community and they are refusing to."
- "Members feel unheard and underrepresented by Chief and Council. We want Chief and Council to sit with members [and have] better communication with the public, [including] door to door engagements."
- "We need healthy leadership to have a healthy community... Leadership is the voice of the people and if they do not have a humbling approach they can not deliver on safety."

Nation staff also pointed to issues of transparency and accountability, particularly in how priorities and direction are communicated and acted upon:

- "There seems to be a lack of transparency from one conversation to the next. ... [a] lack of understanding and communication seems to hinder action."
- "[We need] transparent communication on how decisions are made."
- "Our direction from Council is: you meet with community for us—but community hate that and do not want to speak to us and are asking us where Chief and Council are. They

say very clearly they do not want to hear from us ... We understand where community is coming from and why they're frustrated."

Chief and Council explained that their role is to continue to show up and do the work to support community as a whole. Positive outcomes, like increased employment, will lead to increased trust:

- "[We're] not scared to jump into the protection of our community. We have shown this in the past. Will continue to do this. I hope our members remember this. We don't want to have to wait for something bad to happen to start action."
- "Right now, many of our members are working, and we have good employment levels."

Chief and Council further agreed that trust is foundational and explained that misperceptions of favouritism need to be quelled:

- "We are a small community, many members think only certain families are served"
- "We all have to trust each other. Some members will only go to certain council [members]. They don't trust all of us. We have to get to the point where people can bring anything to us."

Mistrust between community members and staff/administration was also raised as a significant issue. Some linked this to the Nation's rapid growth and an increase in non-member staff, while others referred to past incidents that have eroded public trust:

- "One thing that is misunderstood about us is that we are sitting around in the office and not doing any work. We need something to show the community of all the good work that we're doing. Having the community have a better understanding of what we do will help us for sure."
- "There is this perception of [administration] leadership not being Malahat. 'Are they controlling access because they are in that role of power?' The perception can be that the directors are using their power to create restrictions."
- "[There should be a] limit to how much staff can participate in meetings. Members feel suffocated by staff presence at meetings."
- "Staff have no investment in the community, it is just a job title to them."

At the same time, many staff members expressed a clear desire to rebuild relationships and trust with the community. Suggestions included more opportunities to engage with members, greater visibility in the community, and a consistent presence in the office:

- "[We] really need to build relationships with community members as staff and feel comfortable that we can share with community members that we're here to help, not just for the pay cheque. As staff we need to [...] make ourselves available to support the community."

- “I think a communication strategy that is built on community input, or how the community wants to meet us is needed. We have tried several different forums, but there isn't a whole lot of traction.”
- “I think that if I had more opportunities to be in the community at events etc. I can build further trust for community members.”
- “Consistency in the office has been showing positively in the community.”
- “I think physically being in the office definitely helps, if we're not present community members might get frustrated with the lack of help.”

Rebuilding trust across community members, staff, and Chief and Council will require consistent and transparent communication strategies that not only inform but also invite dialogue, demonstrate accountability, and reflect the Nation's shared values.

Harassment, Bullying, and Conflict Resolution

Some participants described experiences of bullying, lateral violence, and interpersonal conflict as barriers to safety and wellbeing in the community. Participants described how such issues can undermine both individual wellbeing and community trust, and shared frustration about the absence of clear mechanisms to address them. In some cases, these behaviours were reported within the workplace, but community-based incidents were also described.

In the community survey, 49% of respondents said bullying and lateral violence was an important aspect of safety. However, when asked if they had experienced or witnessed bullying, lateral violence, or harassment, most said it was rare (44%) or occasional (31%). This suggests a widespread recognition of the issue, even if it is not experienced at the same frequency by all respondents. One participant explained that bullying “is what makes me feel the most unsafe here,” referencing verbal abuse on the online Malahat community page.

Participants shared that when conflicts or interpersonal tensions are left unaddressed, this can lead to festering resentment and miscommunication. Some felt they could not speak openly about their experiences due to potential backlash. Staff expressed concerns about workplace dynamics, emphasizing the need for clearer procedures to mediate conflict, support those who come forward, and hold others accountable in a respectful and consistent manner.

This was often linked to issues raised in the previous section on [Communication and Trust](#). “All of us just want to be treated with respect and be in the know of what's going on in the community,” explained one participant. “There have been times where I understand why people are upset but also I don't want to get yelled at.” Staff who are also community members explained the unique challenges they face when working in a small community comprised of many close relations and complex community dynamics. Some asked for conflict resolution training and one asked for a specific training geared at First Nations people who live and work in their own communities. Community members and staff alike emphasized that, without addressing these issues, wider community cohesion is compromised.

Mental Health, Trauma, and Healing

Mental health and healing were repeatedly described as essential components of community safety. Participants noted that the impacts of intergenerational trauma, personal experiences of violence or loss, and the pressures of daily life all contribute to individual and collective wellbeing. Some connected safety to mental health in a holistic sense, emphasizing the importance of emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing alongside physical safety.

Participants also spoke about the need for spaces and supports that help individuals and families process grief, loss, and trauma. “We should have a group of people in the community to provide support for those who are struggling,” said one participant, suggesting that Elders could play a role in this. Existing supports were described as limited or underutilized. “The area we are lacking the most is having those counseling supports available,” explained a staff member. “A lot of the support we provide is available during working days which may not be suitable for everyone.” Mental health is a big concern, highlighted another, “but how do you get people to access services?”

Some noted that the Nation’s rapid development, while promising, has outpaced the community’s healing process. One person observed that “Malahat is moving forward at a faster pace than the healing of community,” a sentiment echoed by others who described feeling disconnected or unheard.

Others connected the lack of communication and trust to unresolved trauma, emphasizing that rebuilding relationships must be part of the healing journey. Staff in particular called for training in trauma-informed approaches and mental health response to ensure they could better support community members. Participants shared that healing does not just occur in formal services, but also in everyday interactions.

Overall, the message was clear: sustainable safety planning must include strategies that support mental health, address trauma, and create opportunities for individual and community healing.

Social Cohesion, Recreation, and Enjoyment of Public Space

Many participants emphasized that a strong sense of connection to one another is essential to feeling safe in community. When asked what makes them feel safe and supported on a day-to-day basis, the vast majority of respondents to the community survey (87%) selected ‘Family and Friends’. Safety, in this view, is about fostering spaces where people know and support one another, where families and communities gather freely, and where people of all ages feel a sense of belonging. “Everybody looking out for each other makes the reserve feel safe,” said one engagement participant.

Participants spoke to challenges around gathering safely in shared public space. Some pointed out that there is no youth or Elders centre where community members can drop in. “Members

have come forward saying they don't have anywhere to go for socializing,” said one participant. Another explained that having community spaces equipped with air conditioning would be a reprieve for people, particularly Elders, in the hot summer months. “I visited a member who is really struggling with the heat, and I offered to bring them somewhere, but we don't really have a space for that. I want to find somewhere to invite people to cool down and do activities.”

Some community members said the beach should be a safe gathering space for all youth, but many also noted that outdoor spaces like the beach and playground do not always feel safe due to settler traffic or public alcohol and drug use. “A lot of people are drinking down there in the boathouse, on the beach and the playground,” said one participant, arguing that spaces like the boathouse that are in poor condition “should be boarded up or taken down” to prevent loitering. “There should be no drinking at the playground or the new soccer pitch, the firepit, lacrosse box, or the beach,” said another community member. These activities discourage community use, particularly when it comes to families, children, and Elders. “Safety to me would be a community that all members could live happy daily ... without witnessing [an] intoxicated person walking through the community,” explained one community participant. Others said they see a big presence of alcohol around the community and that there were growing concerns around underage drinking.

Participants explained that significant community spaces are no longer used by kids and families due to safety concerns related to traffic or nearby settler towns. “We used to go to the Mill Bay suburb,” for example, said a community member. “It was an important part of my childhood. Now the kids have no connection to those lands. Anywhere Mill Bay road touches that is on the reserve is unsafe.” Another participant explained that they do not feel safe outside their own home because of speeding cars, drug dealers, outsiders passing through, and wildlife. These challenges are discussed further in the Sections on [Wildlife Safety](#), [Infrastructure](#) and [Racism and the Impact of Settler Communities](#).

When Lands are used, enjoyed, and respected collectively, they create a sense of shared ownership and pride that contributes to a safer community. Participants expressed a desire for better-designed public spaces and community-led safety measures to encourage positive use. They also called for stronger recreational programming and events that bring people together, foster a sense of unity, and allow both informal and formal relationships to flourish. Many emphasized that strengthening these ties is not only a protective factor against harm but also central to Malahat Nation's long-term wellbeing.

02 Cultural Rootedness and Safety

For many participants, safety is inseparable from culture, land, and identity. Cultural rootedness, expressed through community connection, language, intergenerational knowledge sharing, access to traditional territories, and more, was described not only as a protective factor but also as a source of healing, pride, and strength. At the same time, concerns were raised about the erosion of connection to land due to safety concerns and a desire for greater self-determination

over Malahat territory. These conversations emphasize that any meaningful vision for safety must be culturally grounded.

Connection to Land, Food, Culture, and Identity

Participants consistently emphasized that safety and wellness are deeply connected to land, culture, and identity. For many, being able to harvest, hunt, and gather traditional foods is a matter of cultural survival, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and community wellbeing.

Several community members highlighted concerns about safely accessing land due to increased settler presence and racism. “We might as well be an urban reserve,” shared one community member, referring to the impact from Mill Bay and Mill Bay road. “We face a lot of racism when we try to get out on the land,” said another. Participants described non-members accessing the boat launch and harvesting off of Malahat beaches, and explained that signage and fences were doing little to deter the issue. The loss of safe access to Malahat lands was described as a significant barrier to identity, culture, and overall safety. This may particularly affect women, girls, and other community members who face compounded discrimination. “Young women are “propositioned” by non-Indigenous men driving along the road, making them feel unsafe and unable to connect with the land and water,” explained a participant.

Access to land and waters goes hand in hand with the ability to hunt, fish, and harvest foods. Staff highlighted work to promote food sovereignty and access to healthy and culturally-preferred foods. In terms of food safety, and particularly concerns around microbial contamination and naturally occurring toxins in seafood, “fisheries staff do their best to inform community and keep foods safe for consumption, but it would be great to have a plan/protocol developed,” explained one participant. The development of a seafood testing lab is already underway, said staff members. Offering educational workshops around harvest safety would also promote food sovereignty and safety, said participants. Engagements also highlighted the important work being done by marine and fishing guardians in terms of data collection and surveying.

Cultural Safety and Sovereignty

Many participants emphasized the importance of cultural safety, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Participants called attention to the need for greater assertions of sovereignty amid increasing settler encroachment and the right to govern according to Malahat laws, protocols, and territorial authority. This came up in particular in relation to outside infringement on Malahat territory, as highlighted in the previous section and in the Section on [Racism and the Impact of Settler Communities](#). There was a strong desire for measures to better assert boundaries and self-determination over lands through increased signage, fences, and guardianship. This includes using more SENĆOŦEN and hul'q'umi'num' words.

Staff described some existing cultural safety trainings but said that this could be more consistent and ongoing across all departments. Community members also noted the importance of all staff being informed about Malahat history in a consistent manner.

Thanks to a Local Education Agreement with Cowichan Valley School District, Malahat has an education liaison who supports bridging between the schools and families. Participants emphasized that while this is helpful, more clarity around roles and services is needed.

Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing

Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening relationships between youth, Elders, and community members of all ages. The transmission of knowledge—from teachings and language to life skills—was described as vital to both personal and collective well-being.

Some explained that meaningful intergenerational exchange is currently limited by the absence of dedicated spaces and programs. The lack of a youth centre or Elders' centre was named, with many noting that without safe and welcoming places to gather, youth may feel disconnected from Elders, while Elders may feel isolated from the day-to-day life of the community. “[We] need Elder groups to sit in and start helping with the healing of the nation,” said one participant, adding that the community is full of youth and needs to foster a “caring feeling.” Another participant stressed that “we’re poor with Elders in our community” and highlighted the importance of knowledge exchange in general, explaining that “we have to take advantage of what everybody knows from how they were brought up. A lot of us were raised by our grandparents.”

Participants spoke about the need for youth to learn about who they are and where they come from and receive guidance from Elders. Some linked this directly to wellbeing, with one participant suggesting that there should be “a group of people in the community to provide support for those who are struggling... a grandmother figure, who can put their foot down and tell those in need what needs to be done.”

03 Community Resilience, Protection, and Preparedness

This section explores concerns related to emergency preparedness, local security, community surveillance and guardianship, and wildlife safety. Throughout engagements, participants shared a broad understanding of community safety that includes protection, preparation, and the ability to respond effectively to risks. Many also raised issues related to the impact of nearby settlers and systemic racism. Together, these findings reflect a desire for community-driven approaches that strengthen Malahat’s ability to respond to both internal and external challenges.

Community Guardianship

The role of Malahat Nation’s guardians and patrol staff emerged as a focal point in discussions around safety. Community member, staff, and guardian engagements reflected a range of experiences and expectations regarding guardianship in the community.

Many participants shared a desire for increased guardianship, patrols, and other forms of local oversight. Guardianship was often described as a valuable tool for prevention and protection, helping to bring security back into the hands of the community. Many noted that having trained, trusted community members visible in public spaces contributes to a sense of safety, particularly for Elders and children. “Our patrol, is there any way we can expand it on weekends to stop the drinking at the park and the beach?” asked one participant. “Just having someone around could be helpful ... some homeless people are around and some needles have been popping up at the park.” 27% of survey respondents said that guardians and patrol make them feel safer on a day-to-day basis. “I am glad we have patrol because 4 years ago I needed them,” shared one participant. “Extend security to Saturday” said another when asked what would have the greatest impact on safety in Malahat. Others said that while “police feel more intimidating,” guardians are able to handle situations with more nuance.

At the same time, a few participants raised concerns about perceived overreach, excessive patrolling, or a lack of clarity around roles. One participant described guardians and patrols as “stalking” and said it makes them feel overpatrolled and triggered. The tension between safety and surveillance extends to the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV), with some highlighting the importance of having a clear, effective, and transparent policy for CCTV use and access.

Engagements with guardians also highlighted important gaps, including a lack of clarity around incident protocols, roles and responsibilities, and gaps in communications, both internally and externally. For example, guardians did not always have access to Nation buildings for an adequate emergency response, were not always made aware of incidents or were made aware too late, and made reports that did not always reach Nation leadership. On the other hand, some staff said reports from guardians were not timely or consistent. Overall, clearer communication and a clear sense of roles and responsibilities is important to both emergency responses and everyday safety.

Conflict De-Escalation and Security

Community members and staff underscored the importance of having clear, proactive approaches to address conflict arising within the community or in interactions with outsiders. While some of this work may fall within the responsibilities of patrol and guardians, participants emphasized that a coordinated approach is needed across departments.

Some guardians expressed a desire for further training in conflict resolution and de-escalation. These skills are seen as essential when talking either to community members or outsiders trespassing on Malahat lands. “Sometimes we have to go down there and tell them the beach is

closed,” said one participant. “Having the skills to have an easy non-confrontational approach to handling any situation” would strengthen their ability to respond effectively, they said.

Participants also highlighted the need for internal protocols and clear communication when incidents occur. This includes developing policies to guide communications between guardians and staff leads when police or RCMP are called into the community to respond to an incident—as is described further in the following section.

Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness was identified as a key component of safety. Participants expressed that there is a need for clearer emergency response protocols across departments, including guidelines on who should be contacted, how information should be communicated during an incident, and what roles various staff and guardians are expected to play.

Ensuring consistency, accountability, and shared understanding across all programs and staff was emphasized. This includes having protocols for communications when police are on reserve, and clear guidance for when guardians observe or respond to incidents, especially in alerting relevant staff leads. Participants shared stories that highlighted this need. One explained that during a community event, the building alarms began blaring and nobody knew how to turn it off. While this particular incident was not a real emergency, participants pointed out that the incident highlighted an important gap: “It made me realize that there is a lack of resiliency in emergency response.” In another scenario, the RCMP were called to Malahat to respond to a community member with a gun threatening to hurt himself. Participants shared that they only became aware when a staff member taking lunch saw RCMP “running around with guns out.” While staff are working to build relationships, RCMP do not have a duty to inform Malahat Nation when they are present in the community. “One of the challenging things is that the Shawnigan Police Department is small so they call on the Duncan RCMP to come and they don’t have relationships with community so they aren’t going to be effectively communicating with us.” Nonetheless, Malahat can and should have protocols in place to go into lockdown when such an incident arises, said participants.

Community members offered possible steps forward, including more community meetings with RCMP and First Responders and regular safety workshops as a priority for safety-building. Some highlighted the need for a phone tree for emergency response. This is a pre-established, hierarchical system for quickly relaying messages across community. The initiator is responsible for contacting a small select group, each of them contacts a few more, and the chain reaction continues until all are notified.

Overall, participants shared that building a safe and resilient community will require clear emergency plans, staff training, and ongoing education for members so that everyone knows what to expect in the event of a crisis.

Racism and the Impact of Settler Communities

A core concern raised across all engagements was the growing impact of settler communities, particularly Mill Bay residents, suburban development, ferry traffic, and tourism, on the safety, freedom, and land access of Malahat community members. Many shared stories of being harassed, afraid, or otherwise made to feel like outsiders on their own territory,

Participants described how members attempting to access land were routinely met with racist hostility. “Mill Bay residents call the cops on us for us trying to use the Point,” said one participant. “We feel unsafe because Mill Bay residents harass us, call the cops on us, and the cops take their side against us.” Others noted that even when members were physically assaulted, “the RCMP were on the Mill Bay resident’s side” and that “RCMP always side with white people.” Another person said plainly: “we face a lot of racism when we try to get out on the land.”

This environment of hostility and entitlement has left many members feeling unsafe or even afraid to leave their homes. “Community members [are] developing agoraphobia because of traumatic experiences leaving the house,” shared one participant. Another added, “Some members [are] scared to leave their homes.” Others described fearing for their children and young people: “feel concerned about the safety of my girls, living by ferry traffic,” and “young women are ‘propositioned’ by non-Indigenous men driving along the road.”

As highlighted in the Section on [Connection to Land](#), this encroachment has also led to a growing disconnect between Malahat youth and their own land. “Some of our young people think it’s ‘Mill Bay,’ not our own land,” shared one participant. “The Point. Lots of kids on reserve have never been there, don’t go there. It’s like a glorified dog park now ... The people there [Mill Bay suburb] feel more entitled to that space than we do.” The loss of privacy, safety, and access to land was described as a profound violation of Malahat Nation sovereignty. Community members described a deep grief and disconnection: “We have been grieving as a community. We stay here, not venturing off. White people feel more of entitlement and right to be there than we do.”

Some members emphasized the need for stronger enforcement of boundaries, privacy from ferry and tourist traffic, and clearer policies around community access. The theme of settler incursion and systemic racism was not raised in isolation. Participants connected it to broader issues of land access, youth wellbeing, community healing, and the urgent need to assert Nation jurisdiction over territory, safety, and access

Wildlife Safety

Wildlife interactions were raised as a common safety concern within the community, with several participants noting recent sightings and close encounters. One person shared that “bear and cougar sightings can definitely hinder the feeling of safety in the community. The kiddos are scared.”

While sightings are often shared informally (“sometimes we post it on Facebook”), participants emphasized the need for stronger, more consistent safety protocols and education, especially in relation to prevention. Waste management emerged as a key issue. Improper disposal of garbage and unsecured bins near homes were described as a major attractant for animals.

The risks of poor wildlife response were also made clear. One participant recalled a past incident where a community member tried to help but “shot at a bear but he missed and shot its foot so it became aggressive instead.” Others reflected on the many layers of jurisdiction involved in responding to animal threats. “We’ve dealt with waste management, wildlife, aggressive wildlife, SPCA, RCMP,” revealing a need for coordinated, community-led approaches.

Guardians identified wildlife safety as a current and ongoing priority. Several staff and community members shared that new trainings and workshops were underway, including wildlife safety and invasive species management workshops. Participants expressed strong interest in continuing to build local capacity to prevent and respond to wildlife encounters, in ways that protect both people and animals, while strengthening self-determination over safety.

04 Sustainability and Healthy Infrastructure

Participants emphasized that long-term community safety is deeply connected to the condition and design of Malahat’s built and natural environments. While relationships and services form the foundation of safety, many pointed to the importance of adequate housing, well-lit roads and walkways, safe transportation infrastructure, and environmental protection. These physical and ecological dimensions of safety were often described as overlapping with other areas, such as mental wellbeing, mobility, and protection of lands and waters. This section summarizes community feedback related to housing and infrastructure.

Housing

Safe, stable housing was described by many participants as foundational to individual and collective wellbeing. For some, housing was described as the primary measure of whether the Nation is growing in a way that serves its people. Several community members shared a vision of bringing people home to Malahat, and felt that housing should be the Nation’s top infrastructure priority.

“Our priority is getting people back to the community,” said one participant. “We don’t want to continue building offices when we really want to be building homes to bring community members back.” Yet rapid population growth, including a high proportion of children and youth, were seen to be outpacing the current supply of homes. Participants noted that while the number of housing units has doubled over the past decade, this has not kept up with need, especially given the simultaneous expansion of staff and Nation administration.

At the same time, many expressed concern about housing policies and the handling of evictions. Community members and staff raised strong objections to practices that remove members from their homes, particularly where substance use or poverty are involved. Participants described these practices as inconsistent, counterproductive, and lacking clarity and communication. This leaves “so much room for mistrust to evolve,” shared one participant.

While others acknowledged the tension between wellness, housing quality, and policy enforcement, they emphasized the operational challenges of maintaining aging homes in poor condition, especially when homes fall into disrepair due to mental health or substance use struggles. At least two homes were condemned in the past year, with some described as unsafe even for staff entry. In this context, eviction was seen by some as the only viable path forward, though most agreed this should be avoided whenever possible. “The wellness of the people in the homes and the cleanliness of the homes is one of the biggest issues in terms of safety of occupants,” said one participant. At the same time, participants insisted that “housing is the number one piece of keeping people safe” and that “not having a home is worse for a child.”

Across the board, community members and staff alike called for more housing, more flexibility, and a more compassionate and consistent approach that centres care and avoids punitive approaches.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure was a central concern in conversations about safety, particularly in relation to roads, lighting, sidewalks, and recreational spaces. Many participants emphasized that safe infrastructure is essential for fostering a stronger sense of comfort, accessibility, and belonging in the community.

Road safety was repeatedly raised as an urgent priority. Community members expressed deep concern about speeding on local roads and the lack of traffic calming measures, especially in areas where children play or catch the school bus. One participant noted that they had lost family members to traffic accidents, and emphasized that “our kids should be able to bike around feeling safe.” Several community members called for speed bumps, paved roads, pedestrian walkways, biking infrastructure, and better signage, particularly along Jesken and Mill Bay Roads. These areas were described as dangerous due to poor visibility, lack of sidewalks, and high traffic volumes, especially when BC Ferry traffic backs up along Mill Bay Road, preventing members from getting home. The need for paved roads was associated with greater safety concerns since mud, rain, and snow can hinder emergency responses. “When an ambulance was needed it got stuck in the snow, and a fire truck had to help the ambulance put chains on,” shared one participant. Paved roads would further improve plowing in the winter and maintenance in the summer, explained a community member, arguing that despite the cost of paving, “if you are thinking about lifetime of maintenance, it will pay for itself over time.”

The absence of lighting was also frequently mentioned. Jesken Road was described as “very dark along our road at night and in the winter.” Members called for additional streetlights not

only to improve safety for pedestrians and drivers, but also to discourage unwanted activity and increase comfort when walking or playing outdoors in the evenings. Concerns about the condition and safety of playgrounds and recreational spaces were also shared. One participant recounted that “when I was working on the playground for the daycare, there [were] quite a bit of bumps on the grass, and the kids could hurt themselves.” Others pointed to drinking and unsafe behaviours at spaces like the beach, the boathouse, and newer recreational sites like the basketball court and lacrosse box. These were described as areas where people congregate and where empty alcohol containers are often left behind, making these places feel less safe and welcoming.

In terms of climate infrastructure, rising temperatures was raised as a growing concern. Participants worried about Elders living in homes without air conditioning, especially during summer heatwaves. Staff members said they wanted more community spaces where members could cool down during the summer months and community members called for “heat pumps for everybody” and designated cooling spaces for collective use.

Participants also emphasized that planning for infrastructure must be grounded in both safety and sovereignty. Some spoke about the impact of Mill Bay Road, which increases exposure to tourism, traffic, and outside harassment. Others linked these issues to longer-term conversations about land use and jurisdiction. Overall, participants consistently called for infrastructure investments that reflect the growing needs of the Nation and the community’s right to feel safe and at home on their own land.

05 Thriving Community Services

A safe community is one where services are not only available, but trusted, culturally grounded, and responsive to the needs of all members. Participants emphasized that safety must include access to necessary and culturally relevant supports, programs and services. Thriving community services are at the heart of a healthy, self-determined Nation. This section explores participant insights on how to strengthen services in four key areas: service accessibility, harm reduction and substance use health, government systems, and youth wellbeing and development.

Access to Services

Participants shared a wide range of experiences regarding access to services, pointing to both the strength of available resources and the significant challenges that remain in ensuring they are consistently accessed and trusted.

Malahat has “advocated for and received a lot of supports,” explained one participant, describing the community as “heavily resourced” with a daycare, youth group, before and after school programs, monthly access to a pediatrician, a nurse 3 days a week, a drop-in parents group, a drug and alcohol counselor, a 24/7 child response help line, and an upgrading program with Camosun College. Yet participants noted that service delivery does not always meet the

needs of all members. Some staff shared concerns about gaps in programming, particularly counselling, and the fact that youth services are more consistently available and accessed than supports for adults. Other participants noted that community members “don’t always feel comfortable coming into the office,” and that some members struggle to access services unless there has been some relationship built, which is difficult with frequent staff turnover. Issues with retention and burnout, especially in childcare and counselling roles, were identified as barriers to building long-term relationships. Others pointed to the absence of a dedicated on-staff counsellor, explaining that although counselling is available on certain days, walk-in services are no longer offered, and this creates access gaps.

Infrastructural issues compound these challenges. Some participants highlighted the lack of drop-in spaces like youth or Elder centres, and the limited social gathering space in current office buildings. Others noted barriers such as limited access to transportation, confusing application processes for services or funding, and issues with how the community receives information.

Harm Reduction and Addictions

Substance use and addiction emerged as a pressing concern in community conversations. In the community survey, 59% of respondents identified alcohol and substance use in Malahat as a safety concern, with participants noting both direct and indirect impacts on community wellbeing. Experiences ranged from underage drinking, public intoxication, and discarded alcohol containers in public spaces to deeper concerns about intergenerational trauma and ineffective policy.

Several participants described how the increased presence of fentanyl and cheap drugs in the area has deepened existing challenges. The use of alcohol and drugs in public areas like the beach, parks, and bus stops was raised repeatedly as a safety issue. Even when substance use is not physically threatening, it can make spaces feel unsafe. “I don’t always see alcohol and drug use as a direct physical safety threat, but it’s definitely a concern,” explained one participant, “Empty alcohol containers are often left around public areas like bus stops, parks, and the beach. That can make these spaces feel unsafe or uncomfortable, especially for kids and Elders. It’s also something many families don’t want their children exposed to. Even though some people might be joking around or trying to act friendly with kids while under the influence, they might not realize it’s not okay or normal for all families. It can send the wrong message and make people feel uneasy in spaces that should feel safe for everyone.”

Some participants noted growing concerns around underage drinking and concerns that staff and community members are afraid to report issues because Malahat is a small community. Many participants expressed frustration with inconsistent and punitive responses to substance use, especially within the housing policy. Several people raised concern that individuals who struggle with substance use challenges are “pushed to the side” or evicted without meaningful efforts to support them. Some noted that a previous community survey on alcohol use appeared to result in evictions. “Everyone that answered the survey contributed to policies,” one person

shared, “but the only result that we got from that was people being evicted if they weren't sober for 30 days to get treatment.” Community members stressed that this approach is not only unfair, it is also ineffective. The link between safe housing and the ability to heal was brought up many times. One person put it plainly: “Why build homes if we are going to kick people out of their homes?” Participants called for housing policies that reflect compassion and harm reduction, rather than punishment. “Give our people the opportunity to prove that they can survive and beat addiction,” said one participant. “Don't turn them away... [show] the younger generation the reality of how to help people.”

Integrated and Effective Systems

As Malahat's population and service offerings have expanded rapidly, many community members and staff emphasized the urgent need for more coordinated systems, clearer communication, and stronger internal trust across departments and with the wider community. What was once a small staff of about ten people has grown to over a hundred, and yet many organizational systems have not kept pace. With the creation of a business park came the establishment of an economic development team and a capital projects team. As these teams grew, there was an increasing need for support staff. “From an administration perspective, we definitely don't have enough HR, IT, and finance people,” explained one participant, “but from a community perspective, a lot of these employees are not seen as benefiting the community.” Participants described situations where unclear processes, inconsistent communication, and siloed decision-making have directly impacted safety and service delivery.

Guardians highlighted challenges responding to emergencies without adequate support, building access, or up-to-date communication protocols. Several described being contacted for incidents outside their scope, such as health-related concerns, while others described needing to physically run across the Nation to alert other teams of incidents in progress. Power outages, fire alarms, and even break-ins have occurred without clear response procedures. “We had a carbon monoxide and smoke alarm go off in the admin building and the fire department arrived,” said one participant. “There was no communication on who or if there was anyone in the building and we had to break the door down.” These experiences left staff feeling disempowered and keenly aware of gaps in protocol.

Participants also noted a lack of shared understanding around roles and responsibilities in emergency situations. Staff said they did not always know who was working late or where people were located, which made informal safety check-ins necessary but inconsistent. The lack of a reliable phone tree, incident reporting structure, or access to essential facilities was described as a major gap in organizational resilience. Some recounted submitting incident reports that never reached Chief and Council, or hearing conflicting versions of the same events. These communication breakdowns eroded trust within and between departments, leaving people unsure of whether policies were being implemented fairly or consistently.

At the same time, many expressed concern that rapid policy development, intended to bring structure, has instead created new barriers. Staff described confusion about which policies

apply across all departments and which are context-specific. Some felt constrained by rigid rules that prevented them from attending negotiations or events due to policies restricting overtime. Others questioned the distribution of resources across departments, suggesting that priorities set at the top do not always align with frontline realities. Ultimately, participants called for systems that reflect the size and complexity of today's Malahat Nation and are grounded in transparency, communication, and effectiveness.

Youth Wellbeing and Development

Many participants emphasized the importance of ensuring Malahat's young people feel safe, supported, and inspired to thrive. Youth programming, including the daycare, youth group, Canoe Club, and after-school activities, was widely seen as a strength within the community. Participants appreciated the Nation's education liaison and local education agreement with the Cowichan School District, describing these efforts as key to helping youth and families feel safe in school. Others raised concerns about the need for more recreational spaces and opportunities for youth to connect with the land. Several community members suggested that infrastructure like a swimming dock or a larger, more accessible soccer field could help youth stay active, connected, and safe.

At the same time, participants noted that while many resources exist, gaps remain in ensuring programs are consistently staffed. Participants called for greater consistency, transparency, and support systems to ensure youth can not only access programs, but also feel seen, heard, and empowered to shape their own paths. Whether through safer transportation options, improved school supports, or better recreational infrastructure, participants stressed the need to protect and uplift Malahat's next generation, especially given the Nation's growing population.

Conclusion

Engagement participants shared a relational and holistic vision of safety rooted in trust, transparency, and care. Calls for greater consistency, fairness, and transparent communication systems surfaced alongside concern for coordinated emergency responses, interdepartmental coordination, and youth wellbeing. At the heart of it all was a shared desire for safety systems that reflect the values, realities, and long-term needs of the Malahat Nation. The insights shared in this report will directly inform the development of a Community Safety Plan. This next phase

“Safety means protect our land, people. Watch over one another. [N]ot judge people. Help Elders” – Engagement Participant

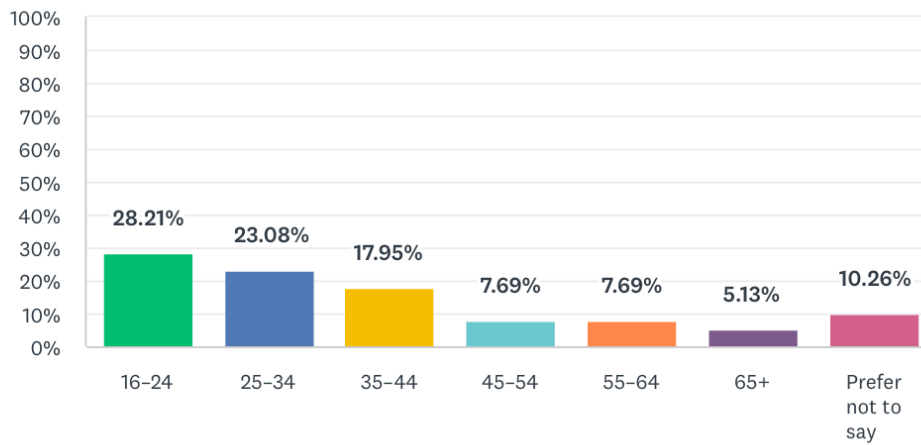
will focus on translating community priorities into actionable goals and concrete steps. The Community Safety Plan will include a clear vision, guiding principles, key actions, and an implementation roadmap. It will build on the themes and calls to action in this report, while identifying specific areas for improvement. As participants shared, safety means working towards a trusting and tight community and “protecting our land and people.” The Community Safety Plan will be a step toward making that vision a reality.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Findings

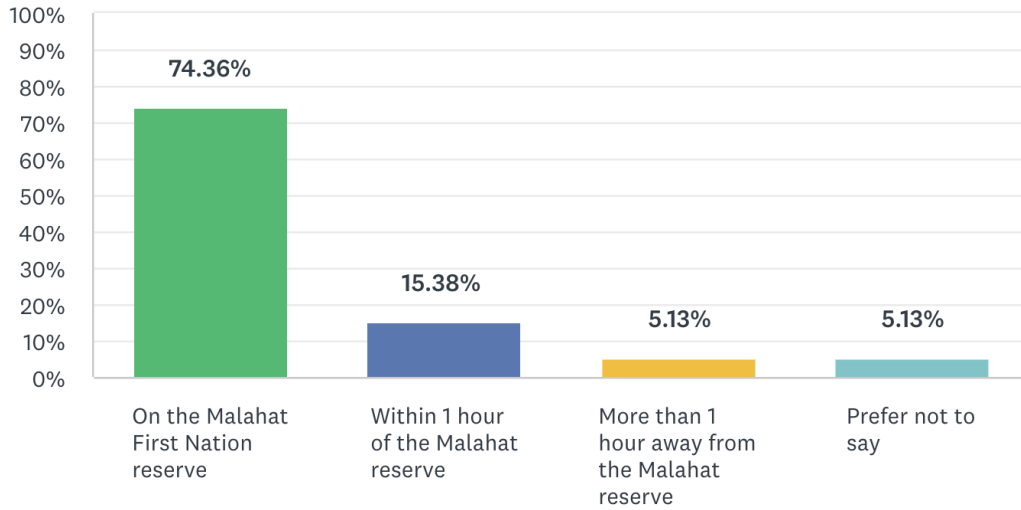
Note: While several written responses were gathered through the community survey and used to inform the above report, for the purpose of anonymity, text responses have been removed from this Appendix.

Q1: What is your age?



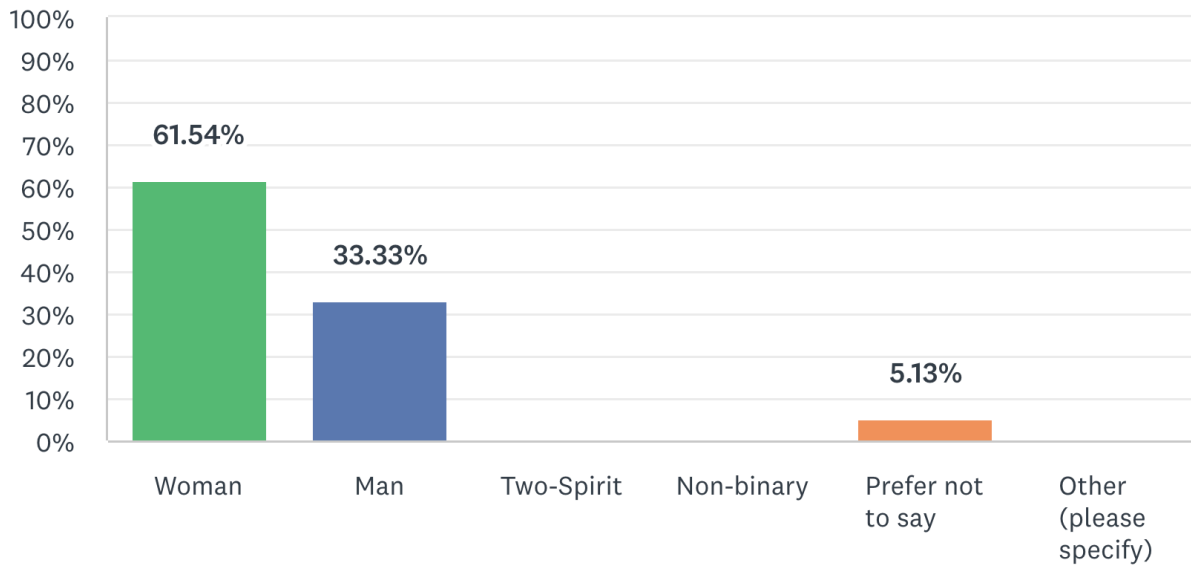
Answer Choices	Responses
16-24	28.21% (11)
25-34	23.08% (9)
35-44	17.95% (7)
45-54	7.69% (3)
55-64	7.69% (3)
65+	5.13% (2)
Prefer not to say	10.26% (4)
Total Respondents: 39	

Q2: Where do you currently live?



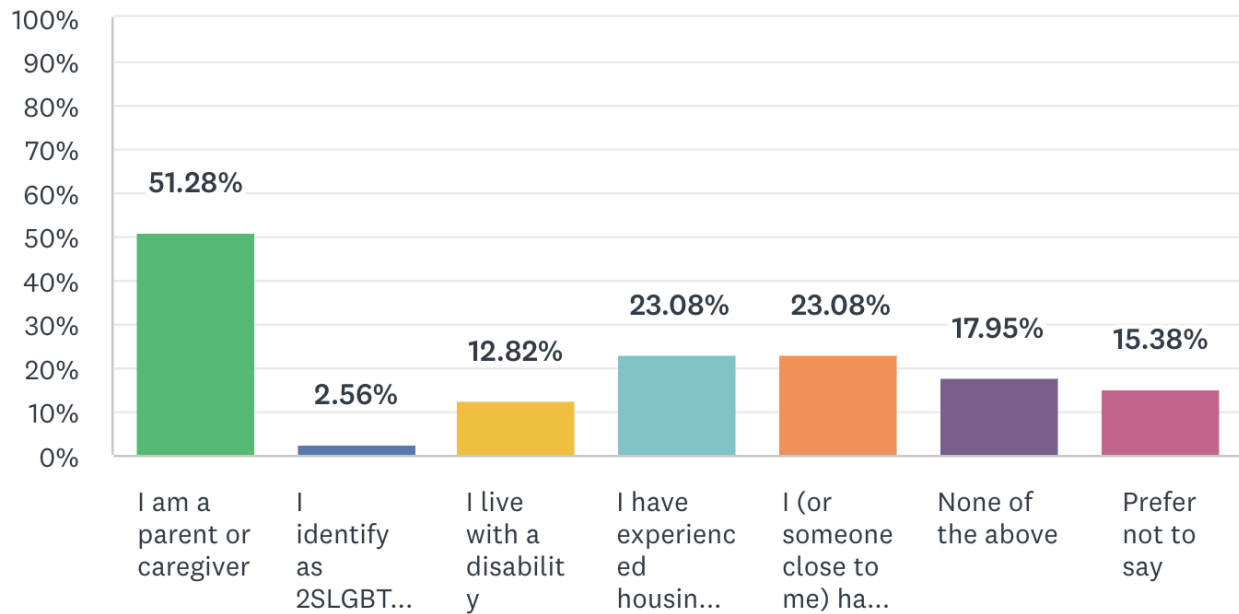
Answer Choices	Responses
On the Malahat First Nation reserve	74.36% (29)
Within 1 hour of the Malahat reserve	15.38% (6)
More than 1 hour away from the Malahat reserve	5.13% (2)
Prefer not to say	5.13% (2)
Total Respondents: 39	

Q3: How do you identify your gender? (Select all that apply)



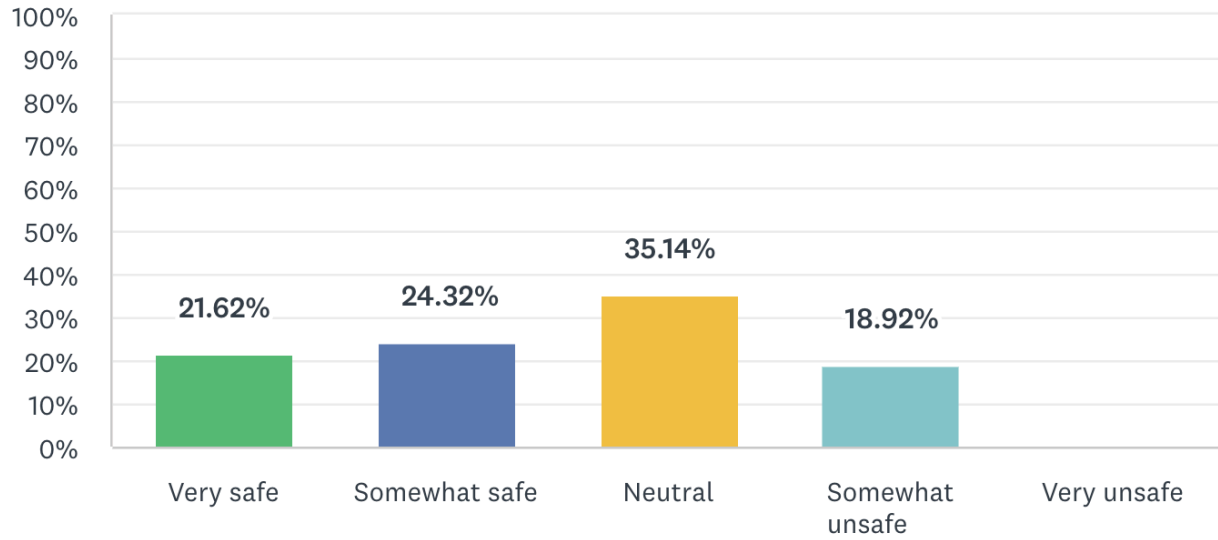
Answer Choices	Responses
Woman	61.54% (24)
Man	33.33% (13)
Two-Spirit	0.00% (0)
Non-binary	0.00% (0)
Prefer not to say	5.13% (2)
Other (please specify)	0.00% (0)
Total Respondents: 39	

Q4: Do any of the following apply to you? (Select all that apply)



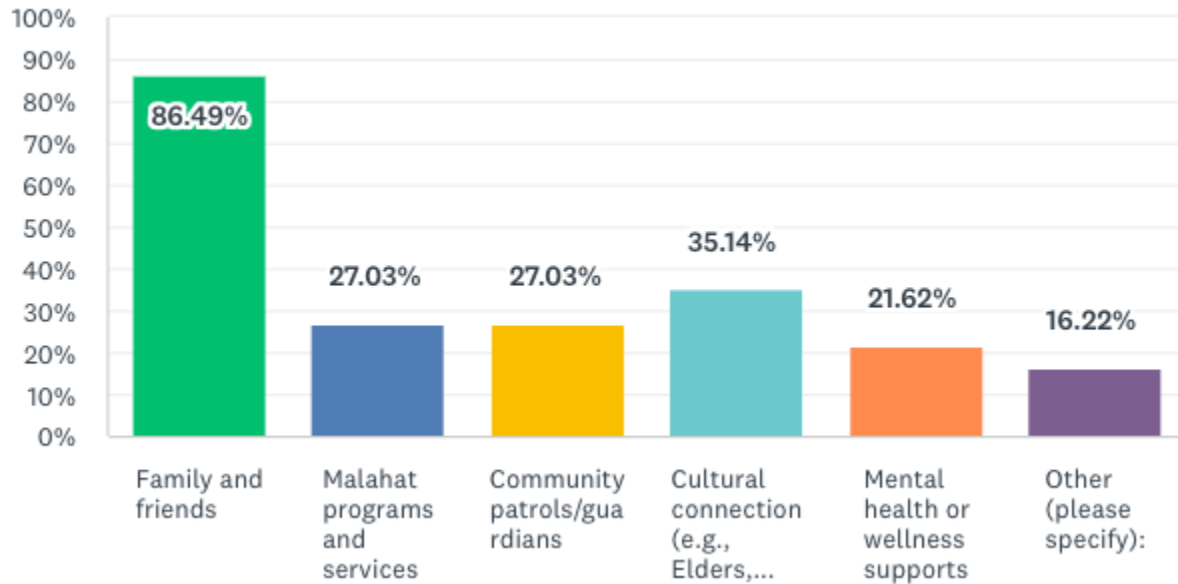
Answer Choices	Responses
I am a parent or caregiver	51.28% (20)
I identify as 2SLGBTQIA+	2.56% (1)
I live with a disability	12.82% (5)
I have experienced housing insecurity	23.08% (9)
I (or someone close to me) has experienced mental health or substance use challenges	23.08% (9)
None of the above	17.95% (7)
Prefer not to say	15.38% (6)
Total Respondents: 39	

Q6: How safe do you feel in your community overall?



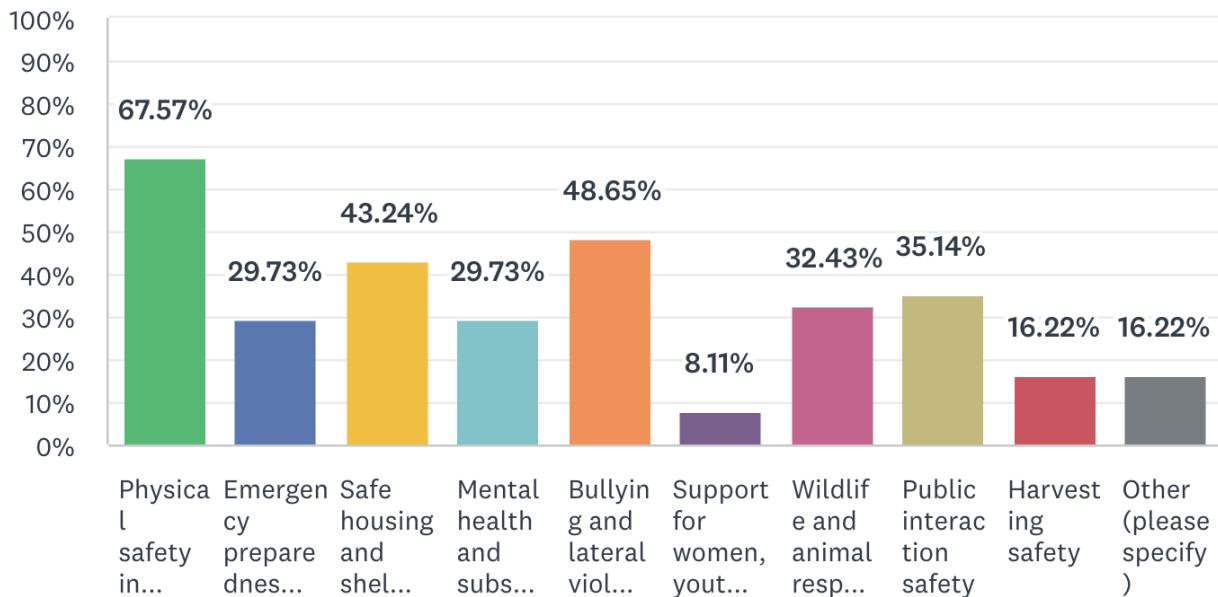
Answer Choices	Responses
Very safe	21.62% (8)
Somewhat safe	24.32% (9)
Neutral	35.14% (13)
Somewhat unsafe	18.92% (7)
Prefer not to say	0.00% (0)
Total Respondents: 37	

Q7: What helps you feel safe and supported in your day-to-day life?
(Select all that apply)



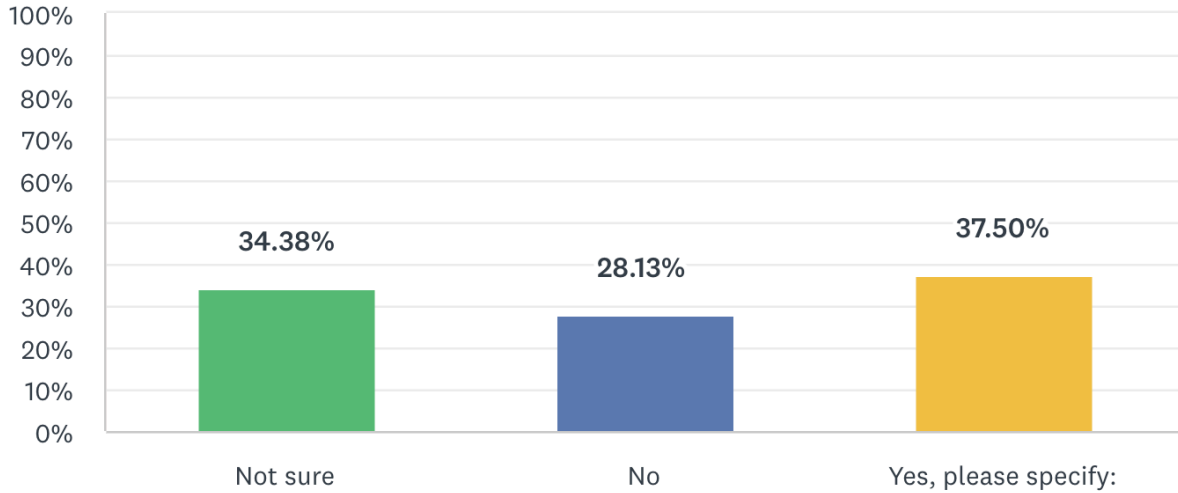
Answer Choices	Responses
Family and friends	86.49% (32)
Malahat programs and services	27.03% (10)
Community patrols/guardians	27.03% (10)
Cultural connection (e.g., Elders, teachings, language)	35.14% (13)
Mental health or wellness supports	21.62% (8)
Other (please specify):	16.22% (6)
Total Respondents: 37	

Q8: When thinking about safety, which of the following areas are most important to you? (Select up to four)



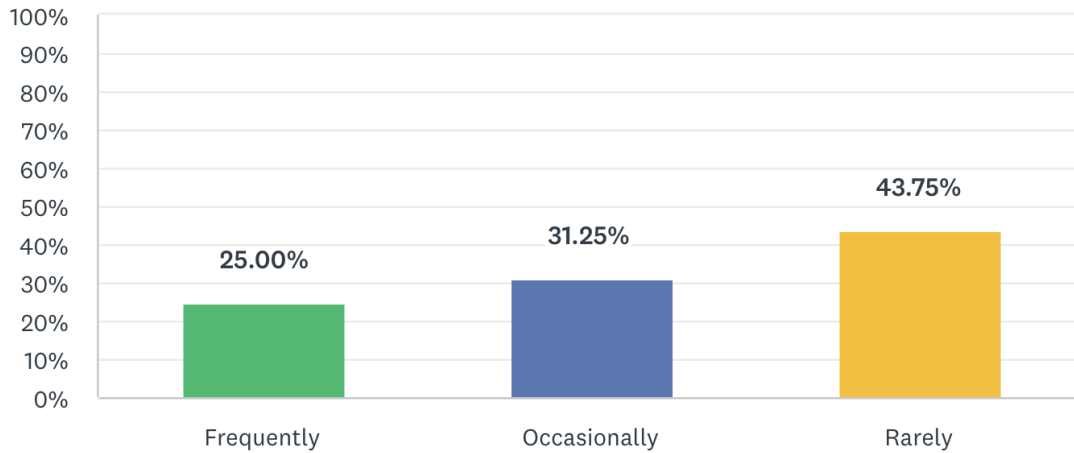
Answer Choices	Responses
Physical safety in public spaces (lighting, traffic, sidewalks)	67.57% (25)
Emergency preparedness and response	29.73% (11)
Safe housing and shelter options	43.24% (16)
Mental health and substance use (addictions) supports	29.73% (11)
Bullying and lateral violence	48.65% (18)
Support for women, youth, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other vulnerable groups	8.11% (3)
Wildlife and animal response	32.43% (12)
Public interaction safety	35.14% (13)
Harvesting safety	16.22% (6)
Other (please specify)	16.22% (6)
Total Respondents: 37	

Q9: Are there specific places in or around the community where you feel unsafe?



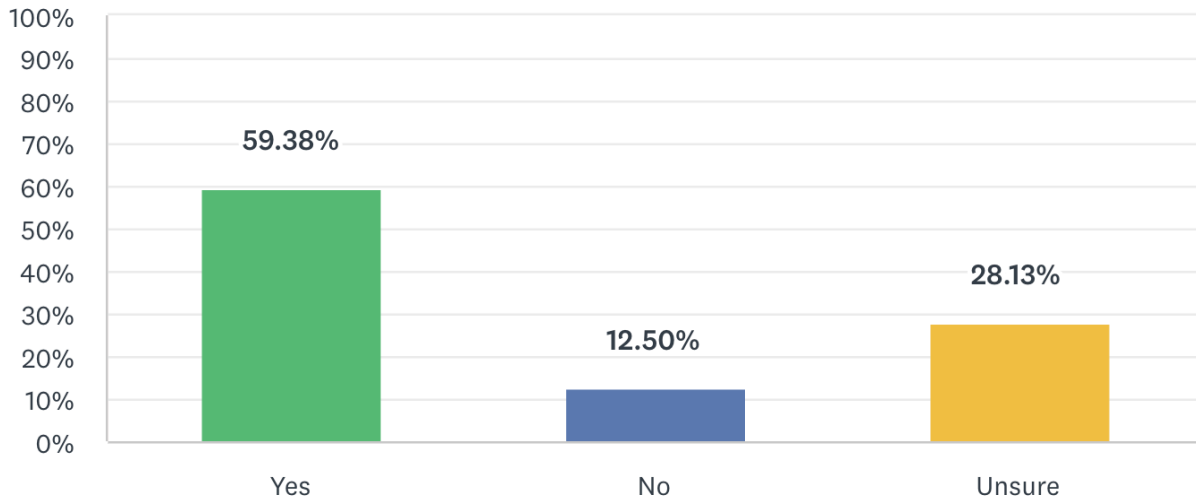
Answer Choices	Responses
Not sure	34.38% (11)
No	28.13% (9)
Yes, please specify:	37.50% (12)
Total Respondents: 32	

Q10: Have you ever experienced or witnessed any bullying, lateral violence, or harassment in the Malahat community?



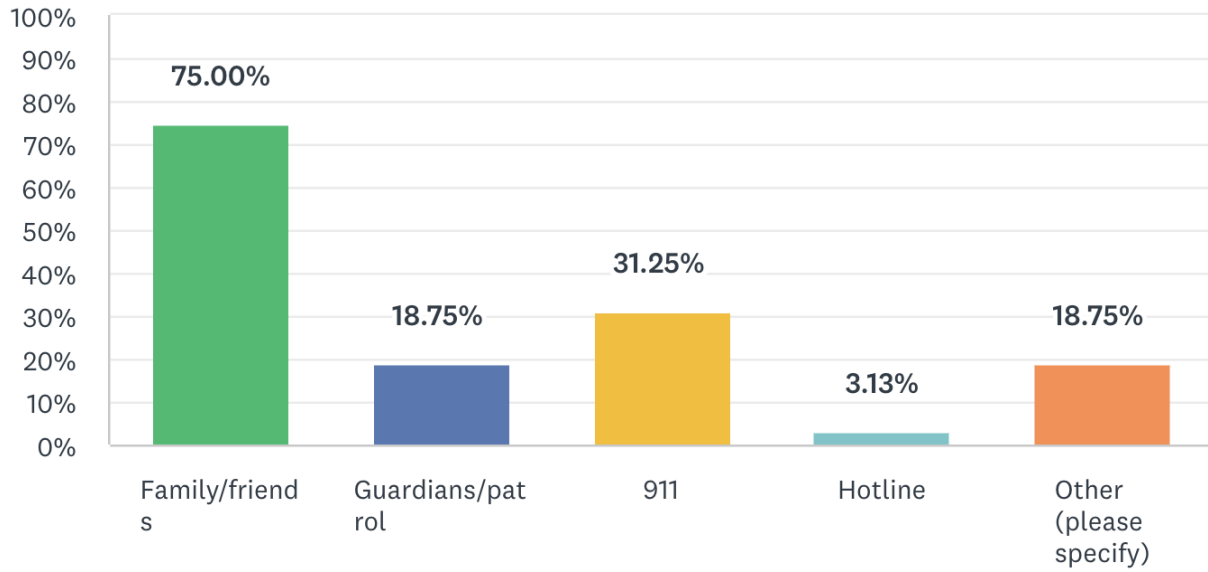
Answer Choices	Responses
Frequently	25.00% (8)
Occasionally	31.25% (10)
Rarely	43.75% (14)
Total Respondents: 32	

Q11: Do you feel that alcohol and drug misuse is a safety concern for the Malahat community?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	59.38% (19)
No	12.50% (4)
Unsure	28.13% (9)
Total Respondents: 32	

Q12: If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs support, who do you call? (Select all that apply)



Answer Choices	Responses
Family/friends	75.00% (24)
Guardians/Patrol	18.75% (6)
911	31.25% (10)
Hotline	3.13% (1)
Other (please specify)	18.75% (6)
Total Respondents: 32	