

Mental Health and Substance Use During COVID-19

Summary Report 6:

Spotlight On 2SLGBTQ+ Communities in Canada

Conducted by Leger for the
Canadian Centre on Substance Use
and Addiction and the Mental Health
Commission of Canada



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.

Leger

October 13 – November 2, 2020 (Time 1)
November 19 – December 11, 2020 (Time 2)
January 15 – January 25, 2021 (Time 3)
March 1 – March 14, 2021 (Time 4)
May 17 – May 28, 2021 (Time 5)
July 5 – July 18, 2021 (Time 6)
August 31 – September 13, 2021 (Time 7)

Support Resources

This report contains information that may cause distress. Should you need any support, please contact any of the following resources:

Crisis Services Canada

Telephone: 1-833-456-4566

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Telephone: 1-800-463-2338

Wellness Together Canada

Adults: Text WELLNESS to 741741

Front Line Workers: Text FRONTLINE to 741741

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

Telephone: 1-855-242-3310

Quebec Digital Suicide Prevention Service (Service numérique québécois de prévention du suicide)

TEXT: 1-855-957-5353

Kids Help Phone

Telephone: 1-800-668-6868

Support for Black youth: RiseUp,
text RISE to 686868 (youth) and 741741 (adults)

Trans LifeLine

Telephone: 1-877-330-6366

LGBT YouthLine

Call: 1-800-268-9688

Text: 647-694-4275

Live Chat: <https://www.youthline.ca/>

Black Youth Helpline

Telephone: 1-833-294-8650

Strongest Families Institute

Telephone: 1-866-470-7111

Key Findings

- About 1 in 4 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report excellent/very good mental health during the pandemic.
 - Rates are lower for 2SLGBTQ+ youth (13%), 2SLGBTQ+ low-income (9%), and Black, East/Southeast Asian, and South Asian 2SLGBTQ+ respondents (about 20%).
- Almost half (46%) of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms in September 2021.
- About 30% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who consume alcohol report consuming more, and about 20% who use cannabis report using more since the start of the pandemic.
- Only half (48%) of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report being able to cope with pandemic stress, with lower rates among 2SLGBTQ+ youth (42%) and Black 2SLGBTQ+ respondents (35%).
- 30% of all 2SLGBTQ+ respondents and 40% of all 2SLGBTQ+ youth report accessing virtual mental health services since the start of the pandemic; fewer report accessing in-person services.
- Access to treatment for substance use is far lower, particularly for youth (7% of all 2SLGBTQ+ respondents and 5% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth).
- 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report finances as the top barrier to accessing mental health and substance use services, and report facing more barriers than non-2SLGBTQ+ respondents in accessing mental health services.
- These findings highlight the importance of continued investment in culturally safe mental health and substance use supports and environments for 2SLGBTQ+ communities, building capacity and competency, and addressing barriers to access.

It is important to balance the findings with an understanding that 2SLGBTQ+ communities are strong, hopeful, accepting, and inclusive.

Context, Objective, and Acknowledgements

Context

It has been two years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since October 2020, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) have been tracking the relationship between mental health and substance use through a series of bimonthly polls. Concerns about catching the virus, feelings of isolation and hopelessness, financial concerns, job insecurity, the trauma of losing a loved one, or a combination of these and other stressors, have affected us all. However, not everyone has been impacted equally.

2SLGBTQ+ communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to increases in social, political, and economic inequities.¹ Although several surveys have been conducted to assess the impact of the pandemic on 2SLGBTQ+ communities, there is still a lack of evidence about its effect on mental health and substance use specifically.²

Objective

This report contributes to existing knowledge by providing a deeper analysis of the impact of the pandemic on 2SLGBTQ+ communities in Canada, in the areas of mental health, substance use, sources of stress and coping, and treatment services.

Acknowledgments

The MHCC and CCSA operate primarily on the unceded traditional territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, whose presence here reaches back to time immemorial. We are privileged to benefit from their long history of welcoming many nations to this beautiful territory. We would like to thank Egale Canada's Research Department and the MHCC's Youth Council for their important and valued contributions to this report.

1. Egale Canada, & INNOVATIVE Research Group. (2020, April 6). *National survey results: The impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI2S community*. <https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/covid19-impact-report/>
2. Prokopenko, E., & Kevinsc, C. (2020, Dec. 15). *Vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 among LGBTQ2+ Canadians*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00075-eng.htm>

Profile of 2SLGBTQ+ Communities in Canada

1 million people identify as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.



30% or just under one-third of youth (15-24) identify as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

0.33% of people (15+) identify as transgender or non-binary.



Statistics Canada. (2021, June 15). A statistical portrait of Canada's diverse LGBTQ2+ communities.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210615/dq210615a-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. (2022, April 27). Canada is the first country to provide census data on transgender and non-binary people. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/dq220427b-eng.htm>

2SLGBTQ+ Language

This language page facilitates a shared understanding around some of the ways people responding to the poll choose to self-identify and describe their gender and sexual orientation. The language used in this report is fluid, can change over time, and is not mutually exclusive. Members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities differ and there are many other identities and genders not listed here. See [The 519's Glossary](#) for more information.³

Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Gender	Definition
Two-Spirit	A translated pan-Indigenous term coined by Indigenous LGBTQ+ leaders in 1991 to describe Indigenous people with diverse gender identities, expressions and roles, and/or diverse sexual orientations. People who identify as Two-Spirit may also reclaim traditions related to third or fourth genders; thus, the term holds multiple meanings. Two-Spirit people presence reaches back to time immemorial, but colonization and racism have impacted it by attempting to erase this way of being. It is a way to describe one's self yet also a community organizing strategy; that is, a way to organize diversity, facilitate connections, and reconnect with pre-colonial traditional languages, ways, and cultures. ⁴
Queer	A person who identifies outside of socially and culturally defined norms, genders, and sexualities. This identity has been reclaimed and is sometimes used as an umbrella term for the 2SLBGTQ+ community.
Lesbian	A term used by women, transgender, non-binary, asexual, and aromantic people to describe their sexual orientation.
Gay	An umbrella identity used by men, women, transgender, non-binary, asexual, and aromantic people to describe their sexual orientation.
Bisexual	A person who is attracted to people of more than one gender.
Transgender	An umbrella term but also used by a persons whose gender identity differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.
Non-Binary	Someone who identifies outside the gender binary of man/woman. It is used by people who can be both, neither, in-between, and/or who do not define their gender through binary classifications.
Cisgender	Someone who's gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

3. Also see the [2SLGBTQ+ Language Card](#) from Re:searching for LGBTQ2S+ Health's Building Competence, Building Capacity: 2SLGBTQ+ Competent Trauma-Informed Care project.

4. Pruden, H., & Salway, T. (2020, October). *Meet the methods series: "What and who is Two-Spirit" in health research*. Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Institute of Gender and Health. https://www.bcapop.ca/resources/Documents/HCPPP%20Portal%20Documents/igh_two_spirit-en.pdf

Methodology

Study Population

- Residents of Canada, aged 16 and older, who signed up to complete an online survey via Leger's online panel, LEO. (See final slides for sample details.)

Data Collection

- The current document includes cross-sectional findings collected over the following seven time periods:
 - T1: October 13 - November 2, 2020 ($n = 2,502$)
 - T2: November 19 - December 11, 2020 ($n = 1,507$)
 - T3: January 15 - January 25, 2021 ($n = 1,502$)
 - T4: March 1 - March 14, 2021 ($n = 1,524$)
 - T5: May 17 - May 28, 2021 ($n = 1,519$)
 - T6: July 5 - July 18, 2021 ($n = 1,543$)
 - T7: August 31 - September 13, 2021 ($n = 1,548$)

Statistical Analysis

- As a non-random online survey, a margin of error is technically not reported.
- If the data were collected through a random sample, the margin of error for T1 would be, Canada ($n = 2,502$) $\pm 2.0\%$, 19 times out of 20. For T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, and T7, the margin of error would be, Canada ($n = \sim 1,500$) $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20.
- While the sample has been weighted according to age, gender, and region, using data from the 2016 census, it is not fully representative of the population living in Canada, and caution should be exercised when comparing results with other surveys.
- The numbers presented have been rounded to the nearest whole number. However, raw values were used to calculate the sums presented and may therefore not correspond to the manual addition of these numbers.
- Findings were not reported for sample sizes less than 10.
- The report does not include statistical significance test results and does not provide a measure for the strength of relationships and comparisons.

2SLGBTQ+ Sample and Limitations

- The survey collected 2SLGBTQ+ identity data and did not disaggregate by identity.
- Some individuals with diverse identities, gender, and/or sexual orientation do not identify as part of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and are not included within this report.
- In keeping with [Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession\(OCAP®\)](#) principles, the report does not provide any survey results related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis respondents but does provide aggregated survey results for Two-Spirit respondents.
- The sample size of 2SLGBTQ+ low-income, ethnoracialized, and older adult respondents is very small and needed to be pooled across waves, which makes it difficult to interpret the results.

	T1 (Oct./ Nov. 2020)	T2 (Nov./ Dec. 2020)	T3 (Jan. 2021)	T4 (March 2021)	T5 (May 2021)	T6 (July 2021)	T7 (Aug./ Sept. 2021)	Pooled T3- T7 (Jan – May 2021)	Pooled T1- T7 (Oct./ Nov. 2020 – Aug./Sept. 2021)
Weighted n=	2,502	1,507	1,502	1,524	1,519	1,543	1,548	7,636	11,645
2SLGBTQ+ <i>Do you consider yourself part of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities (e.g., Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer)? YES</i>	11% (n = 294)	10% (n = 167)	11% (n = 169)	11% (n = 172)	11% (n = 164)	13% (n = 198)	10% (n = 153)	11% (n = 855)	11% (n = 1,317)

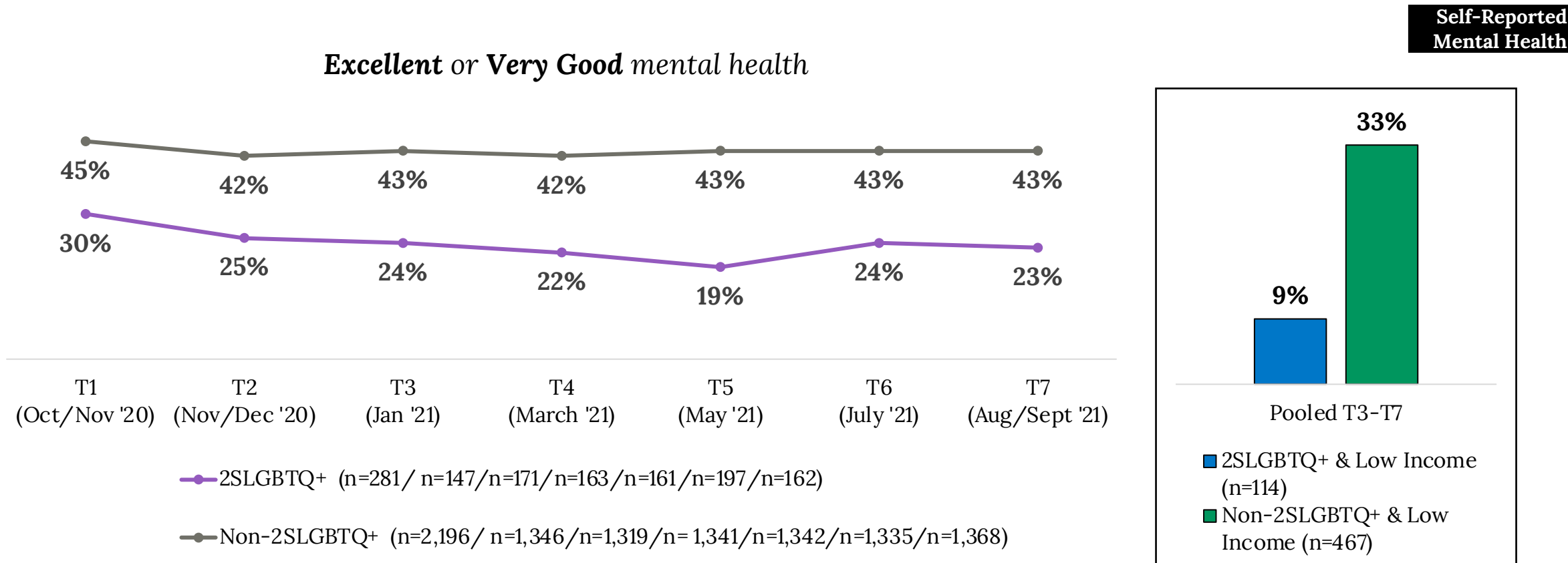


Detailed Results

Spotlight 1: Mental Health

About 1 in 4 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report excellent or very good mental health

9% of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with low income report excellent or very good mental health



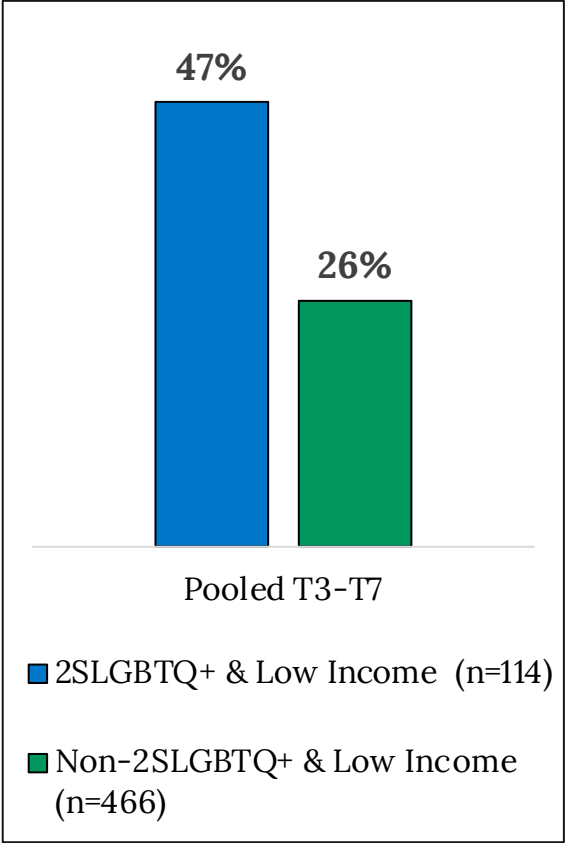
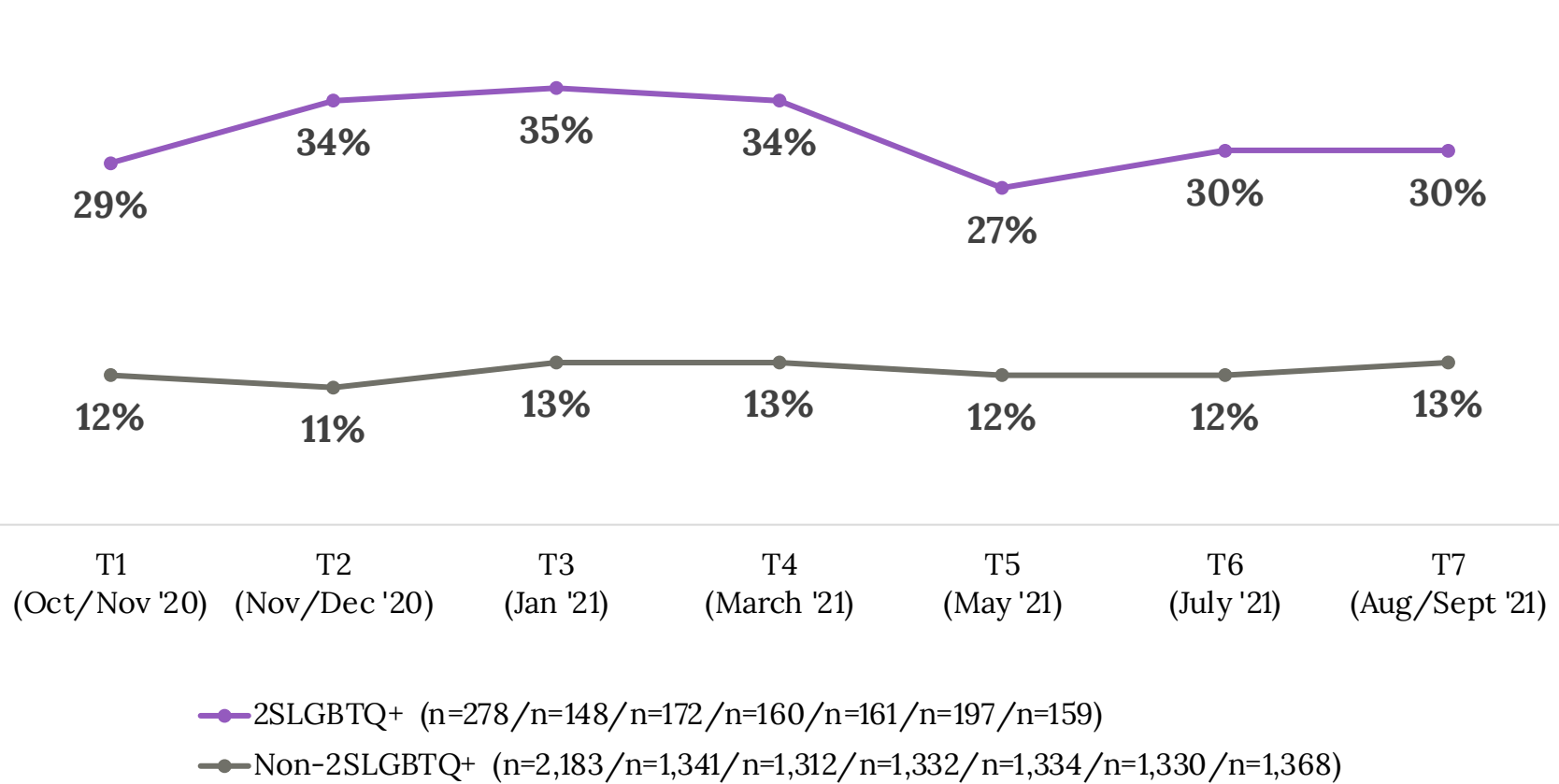
According to [Statistics Canada](#) data from 2018, only 34% of people who identify as transgender reported excellent, very good, or good mental health, compared with 88% of cisgender people.

Moderately severe and severe symptoms of depression were three times more common among 2SLGBTQ+ respondents in September 2021

47% of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with low income report moderate and severe depression symptoms

Depression
Symptoms
(PHQ-9)

Moderately Severe, Severe depression symptoms

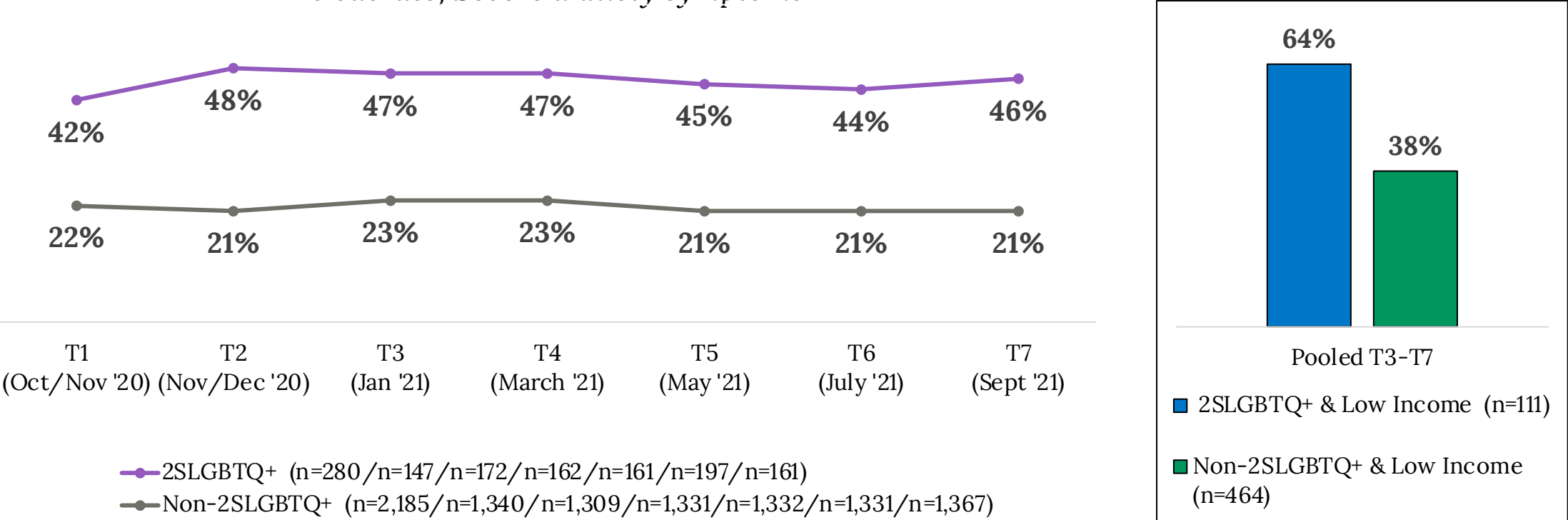


Almost half of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported moderate or severe anxiety symptoms in September 2021

64% of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with low income report moderate or severe anxiety symptoms

Anxiety
Symptoms
(GAD-7)

Moderate, Severe anxiety symptoms



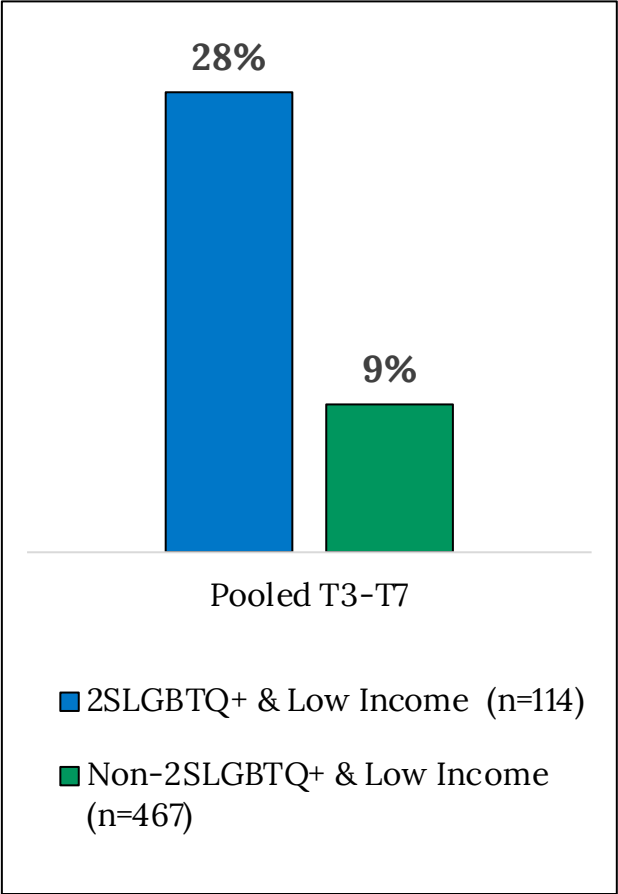
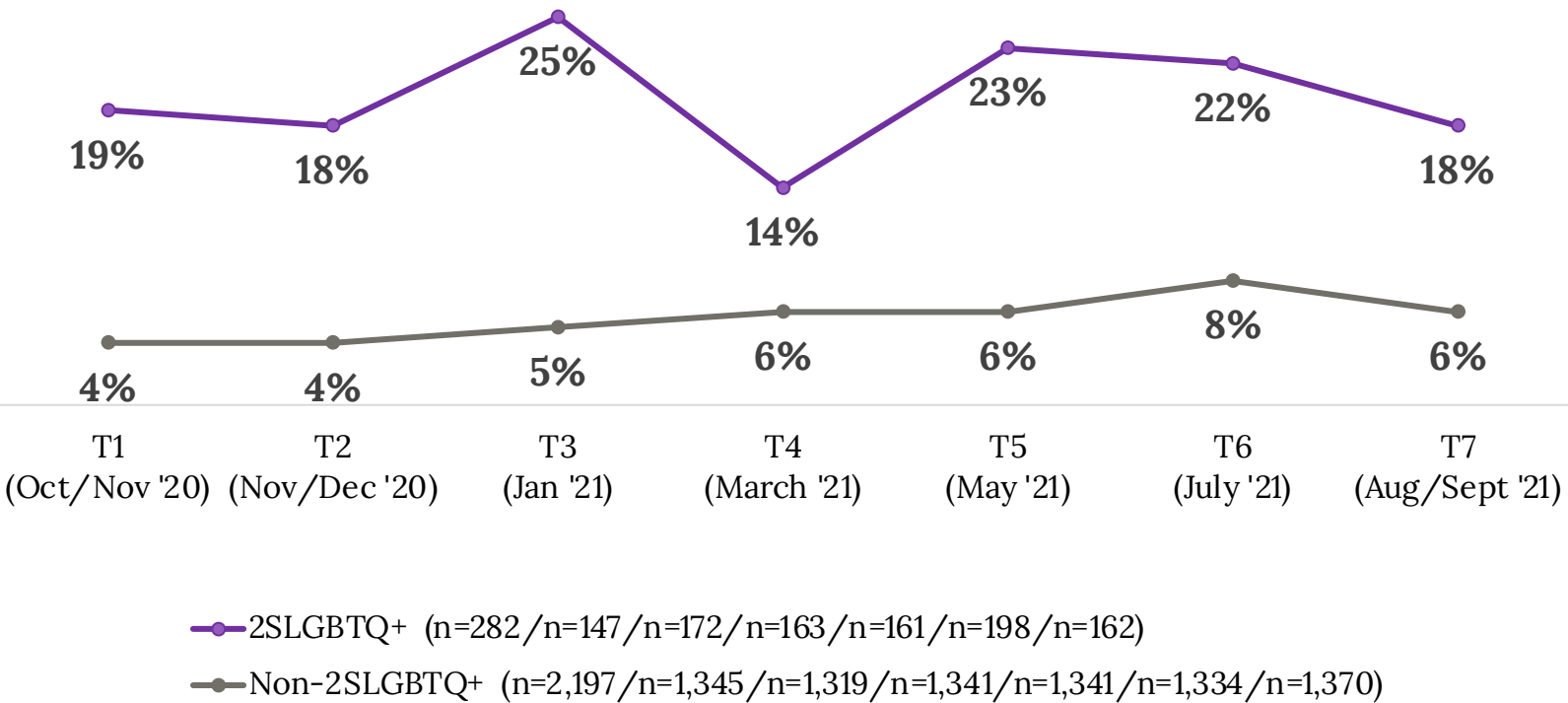
[Mental Health Research Canada](#) reported in June 2021 levels of anxiety and depression during COVID-19 increased significantly (at a disproportionate rate) for people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ compared to the national average.

Contemplating suicide since the beginning of the pandemic was 3 times as common for 2SLGBTQ+ respondents in September 2021

This rate is even higher for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with low income

Suicidal
Ideation

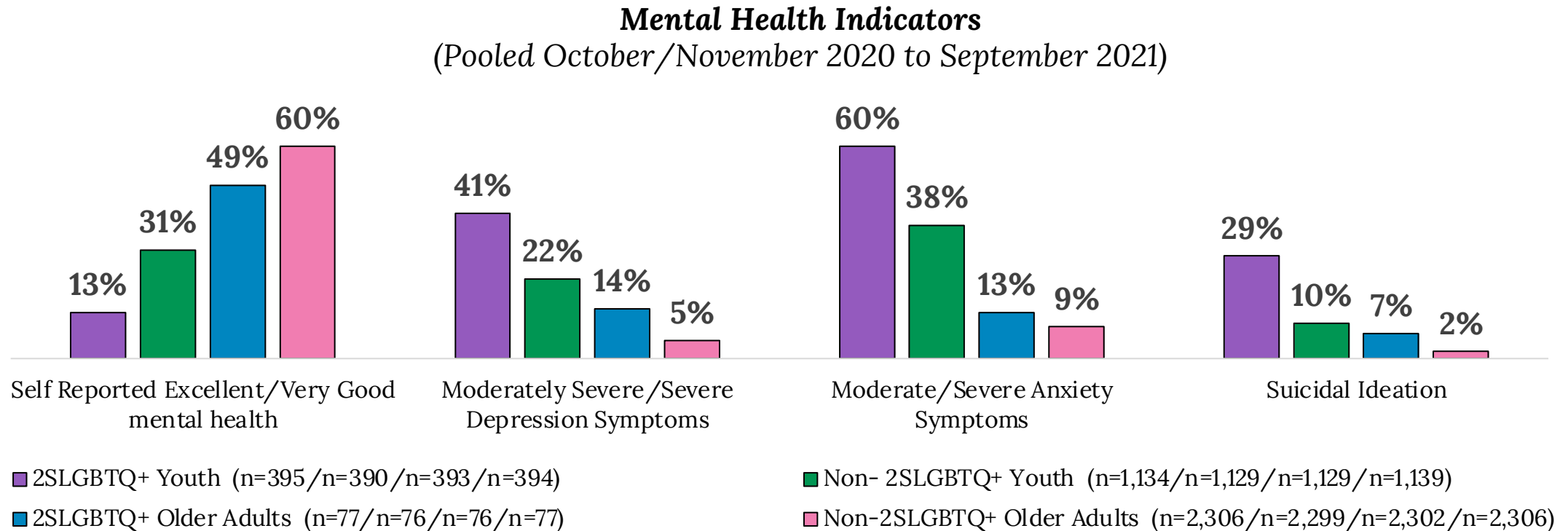
Seriously contemplated suicide since March 2020



2SLGBTQ+ youth report more mental health concerns, with 3 of 5 reporting moderate and severe anxiety symptoms

Half (49%) of 2SLGBTQ+ older adults report excellent or very good mental health

Mental
Health
Indicators



Research from the [United Kingdom](#) and the [United States](#) suggests LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to report poorer mental health and less likely to report hope for the future during the pandemic. Researchers attributed this to more instability and social isolation brought on by pandemic-related public health measures as well as more experiences of discrimination.



Detailed Results

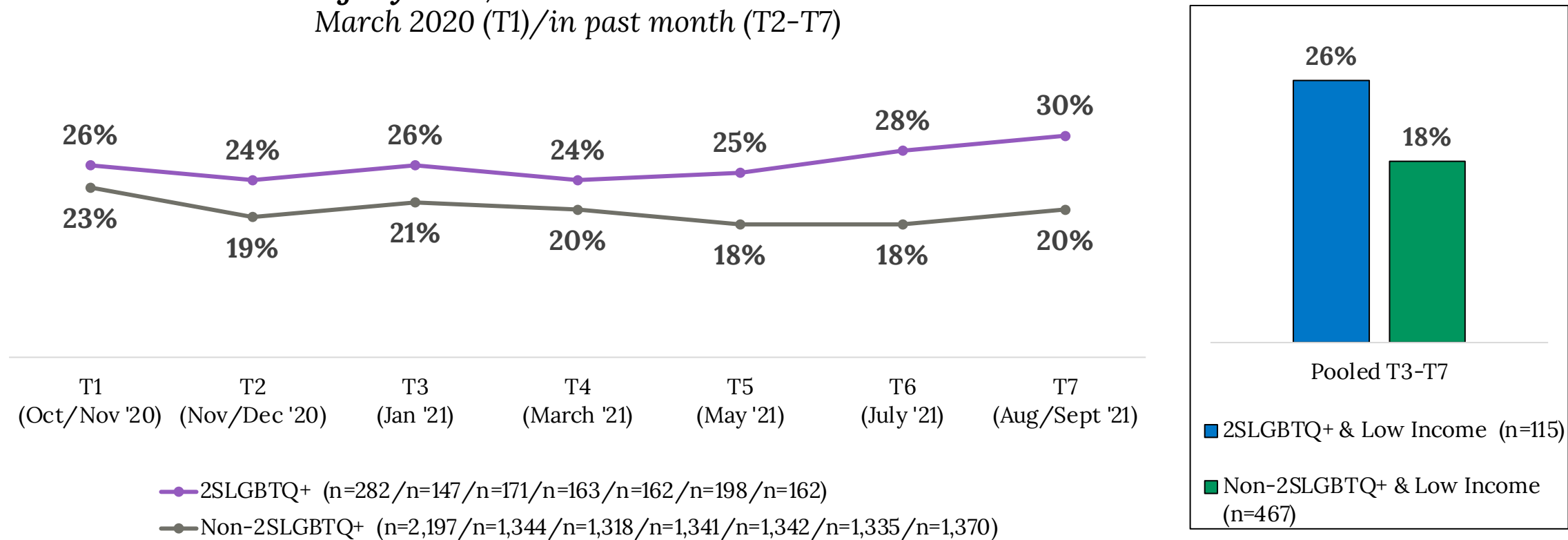
Spotlight 2:
Alcohol and Cannabis Use

About 1 in 4 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who consume alcohol report increased consumption

2SLGBTQ+ respondents with low income also report increased consumption

Change in
Alcohol Use

Slightly More, Far More alcohol use since
March 2020 (T1)/in past month (T2-T7)

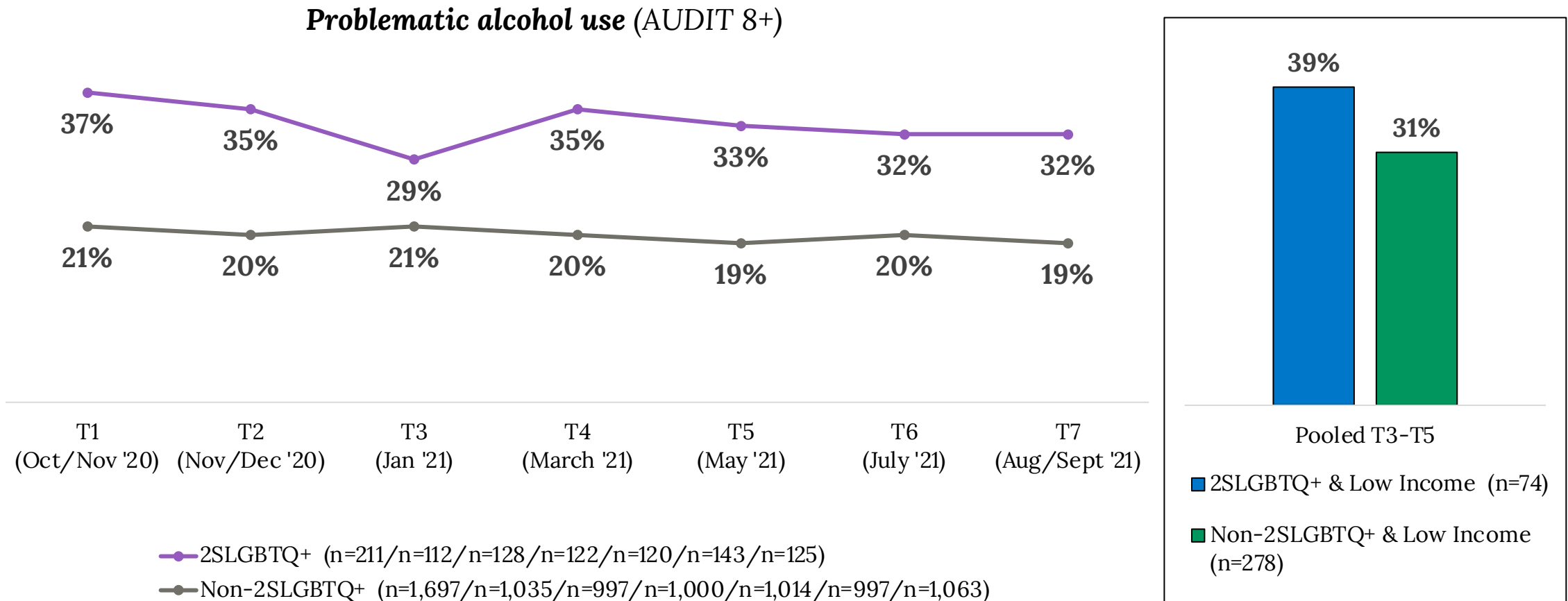


Q22r14: Drinking alcohol (beverages/drinks): Have you engaged in the following activities more or less since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020) [T1]? During the past month [T2-T7]?

About 1 in 3 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who consume alcohol report problematic alcohol consumption

2 in 5 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with low income report problematic alcohol consumption*

Problematic Alcohol
Use (AUDIT)

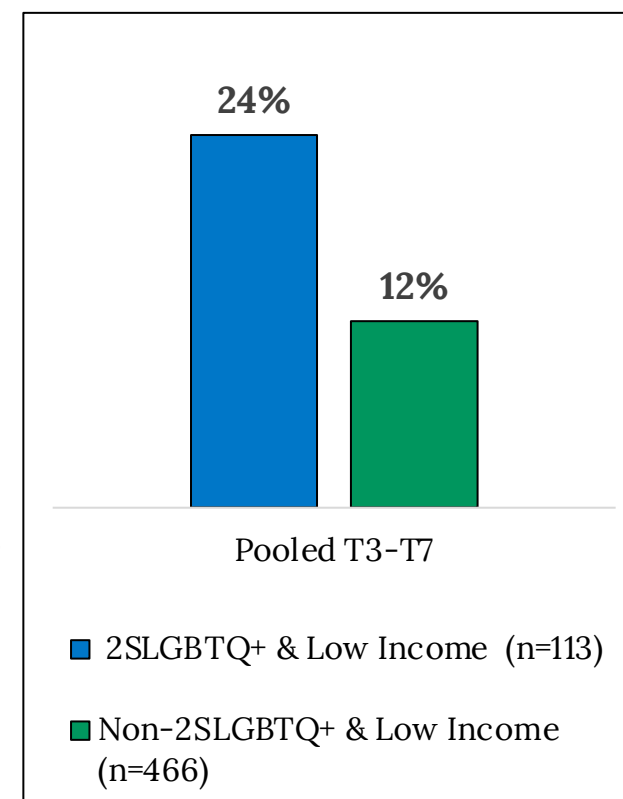
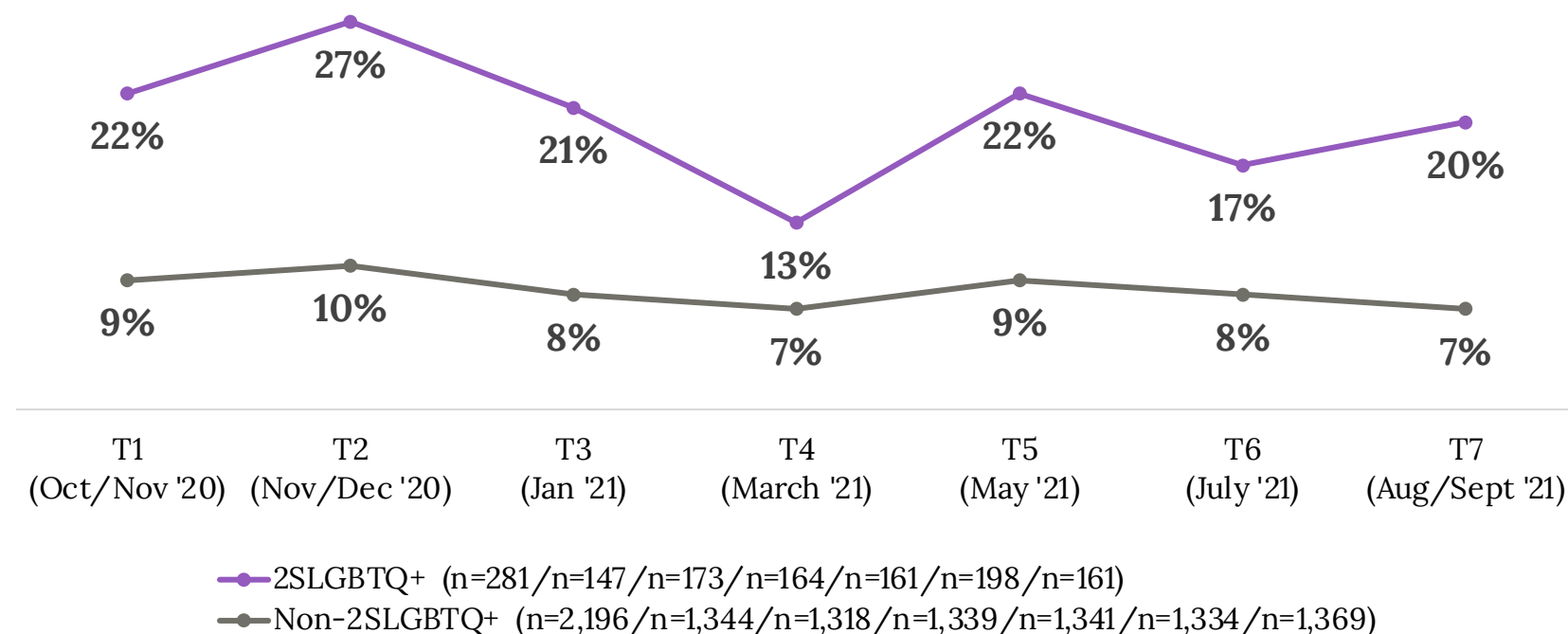


About 1 in 5 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who use cannabis report increased use

2SLGBTQ+ respondents with low-income also report increased use

Change in
Cannabis Use

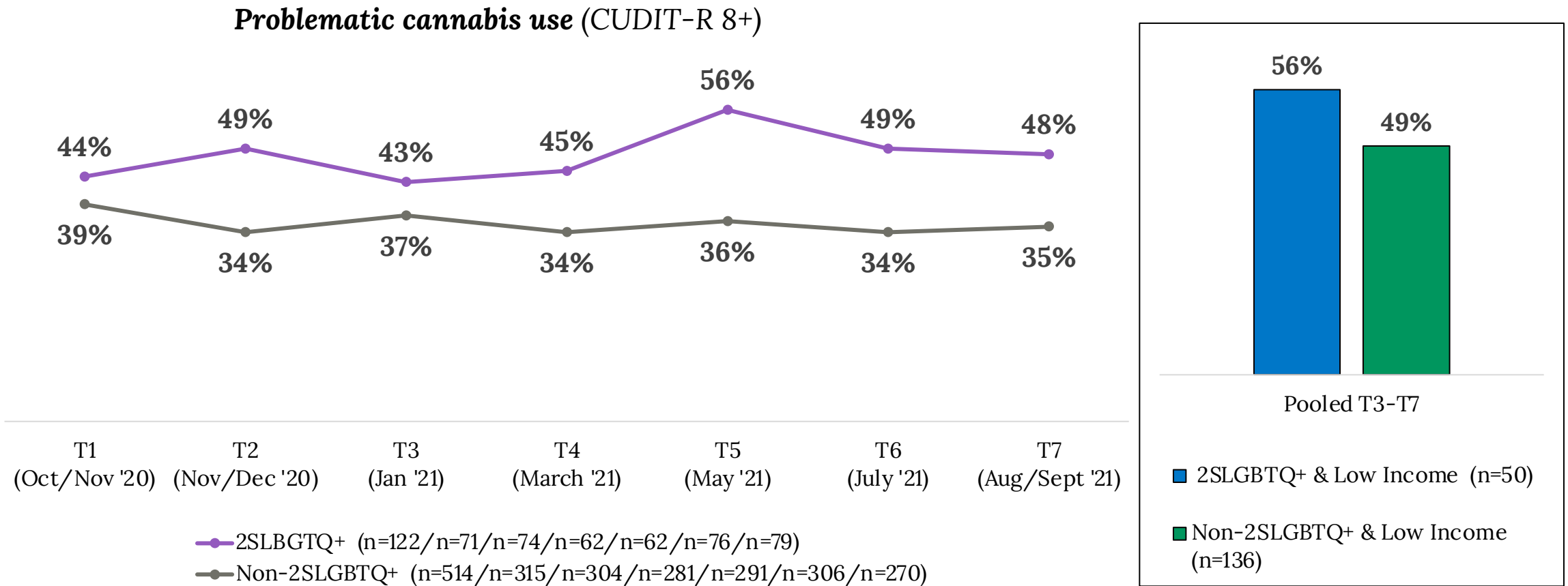
Slightly More, Far More cannabis use since March 2020
(T1)/in the past month (T2-T7)



About 1 in 2 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who use cannabis report problematic use

*More than half of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents with low income report problematic cannabis use**

Problematic Cannabis Use (CUDIT-R)



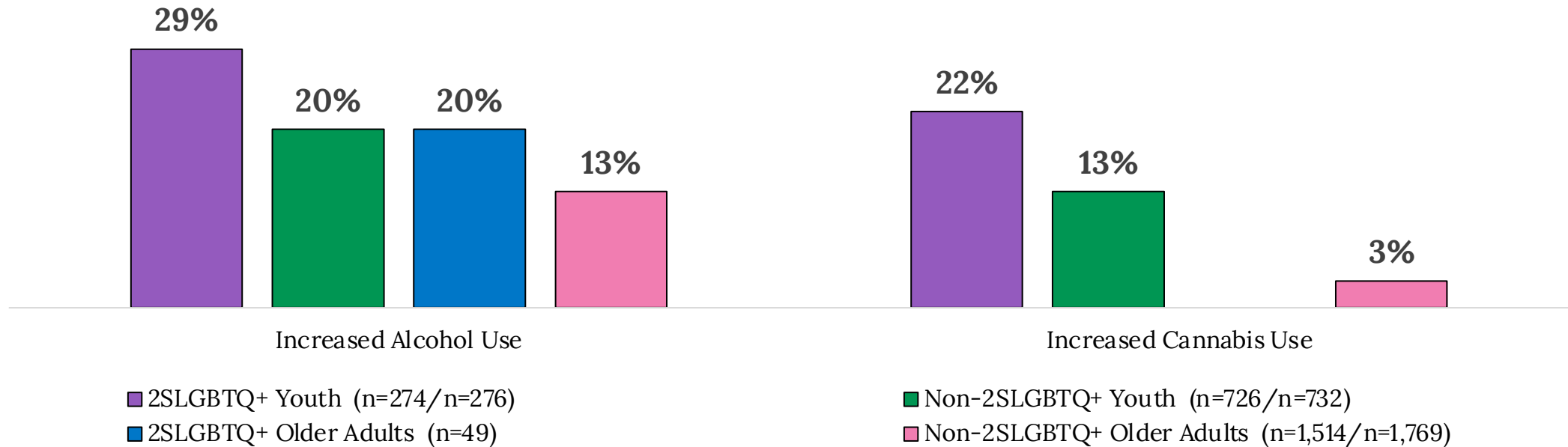
Q38: CUDIT-R (Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test-Revised) Score.*CCSA (2022) refers to problematic cannabis use as a pattern of use that might affect a person's health and safety and increases the risk of other problems related to cannabis use.

About 1 in 3 2SLGBTQ+ youth who consume alcohol report increased consumption

About 1 in 5 2SLGBTQ+ older adults who consume alcohol also report increased consumption

Substance
Use
Indicators

Substance Use Indicators
(Pooled January 2021 to September 2021)



[Research from Canada](#) prior to the pandemic (2020), suggests that 2SLGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk for problematic substance use, particularly cannabis use that can impact quality of life.

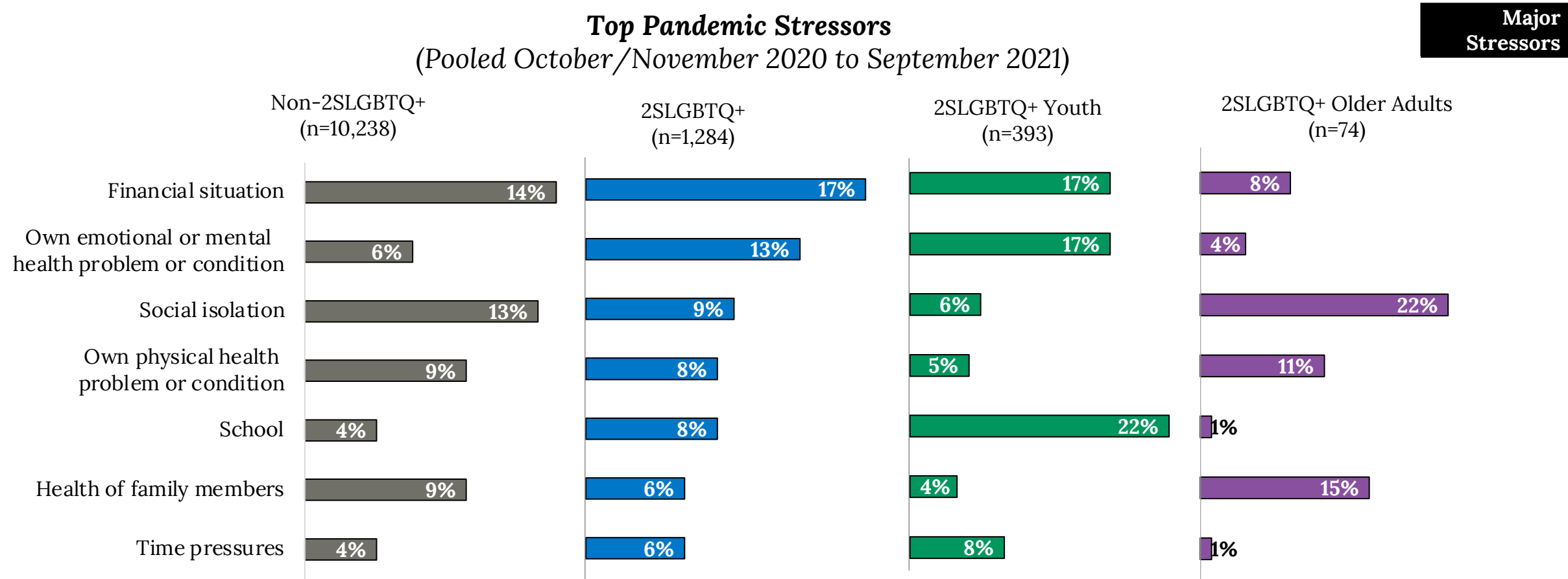



Detailed Results

Spotlight 3: Coping and Stress

In addition to finances, 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report mental health problems as major pandemic stressors

2SLGBTQ+ youth and older adults report school and social isolation as top stressors



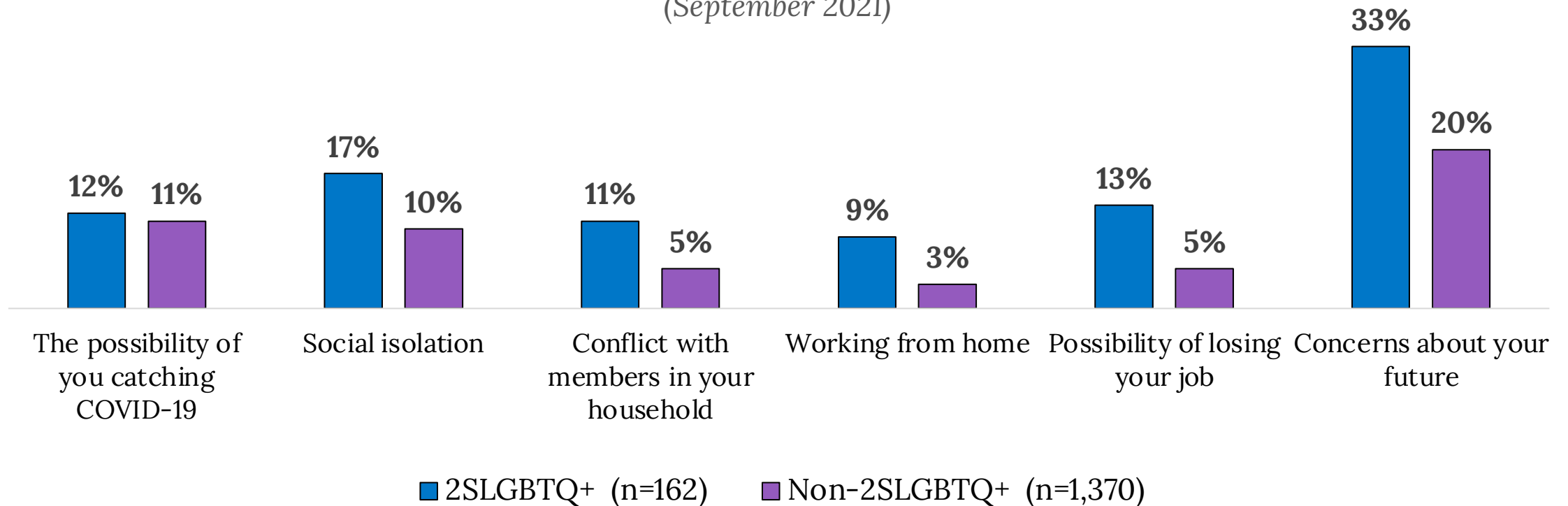
 [Egale Canada](#) reports that Canada’s LGBTQI2S community continues to be disproportionately impacted financially by COVID-19 and [Statistics Canada](#) reports that LGBTQ2+ Canadians may be more economically vulnerable during the pandemic.

2SLGBTQ+ respondents report high stress from concern about the future and social isolation

About 1 in 10 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report a lot of stress from household conflict

A Lot – of Stress [in the past month]
(September 2021)

Major
Stressors

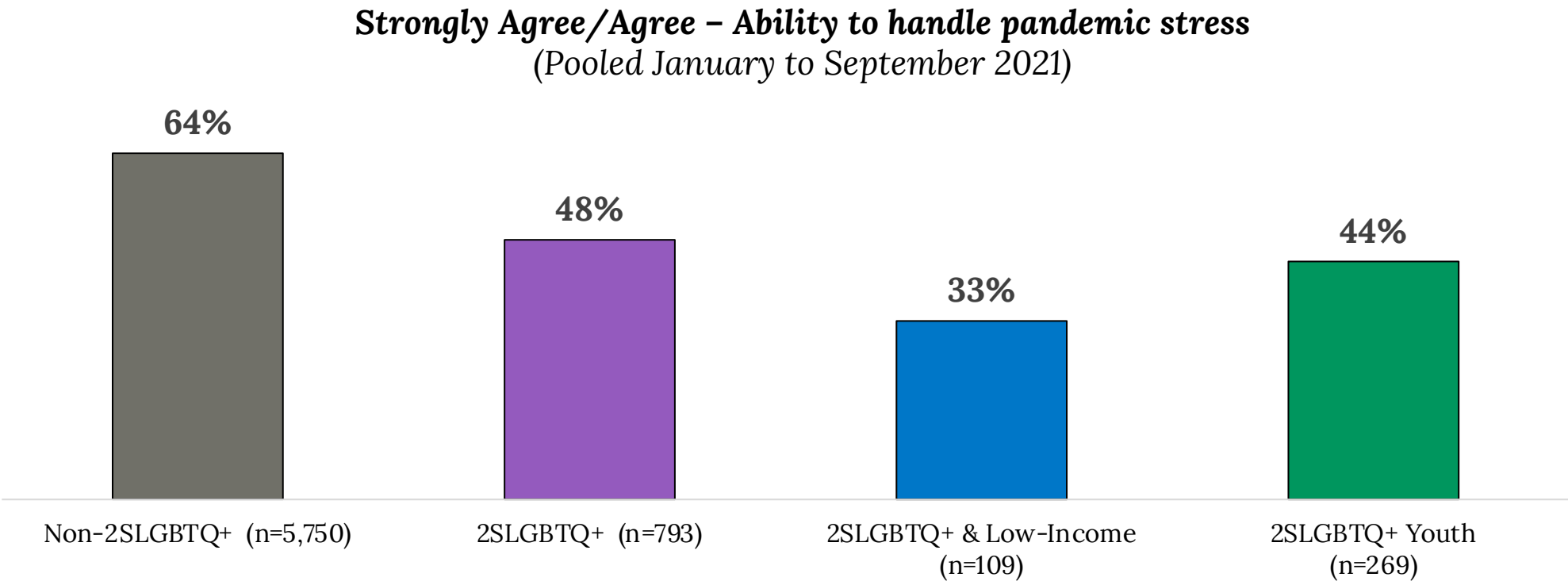



According to a December 2020 [Trans PULSE Canada survey](#), 6.9% of trans and non-binary respondents said that the pandemic has led to changes in their living situations that meant living with someone who is unsupportive of their gender.

Half of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents say they are able to cope with pandemic stress

2SLGBTQ+ youth and individuals with low income are less likely to say they are able to handle pandemic stress

Ability to Handle Stress



 [Research from the United States](#) suggests the pandemic has disproportionately impacted people from marginalized communities by further intensifying pre-existing inequalities and interpersonal and systemic discrimination.



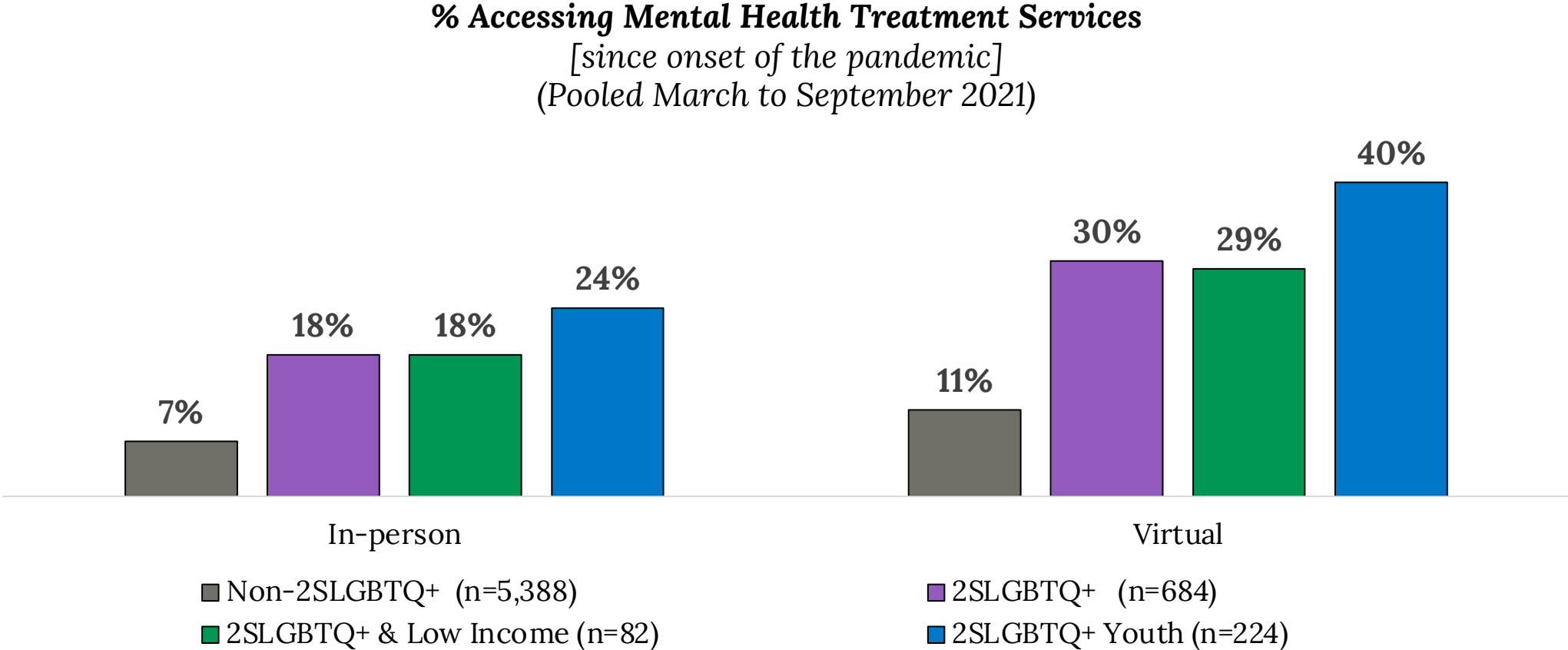
Detailed Results

Spotlight 4: Access to Treatment

30% of all 2SLGBTQ+ respondents accessed virtual mental health services during the pandemic

More 2SLGBTQ+ youth accessed virtual mental health services compared to other respondents

Mental Health
– Access to
Treatment

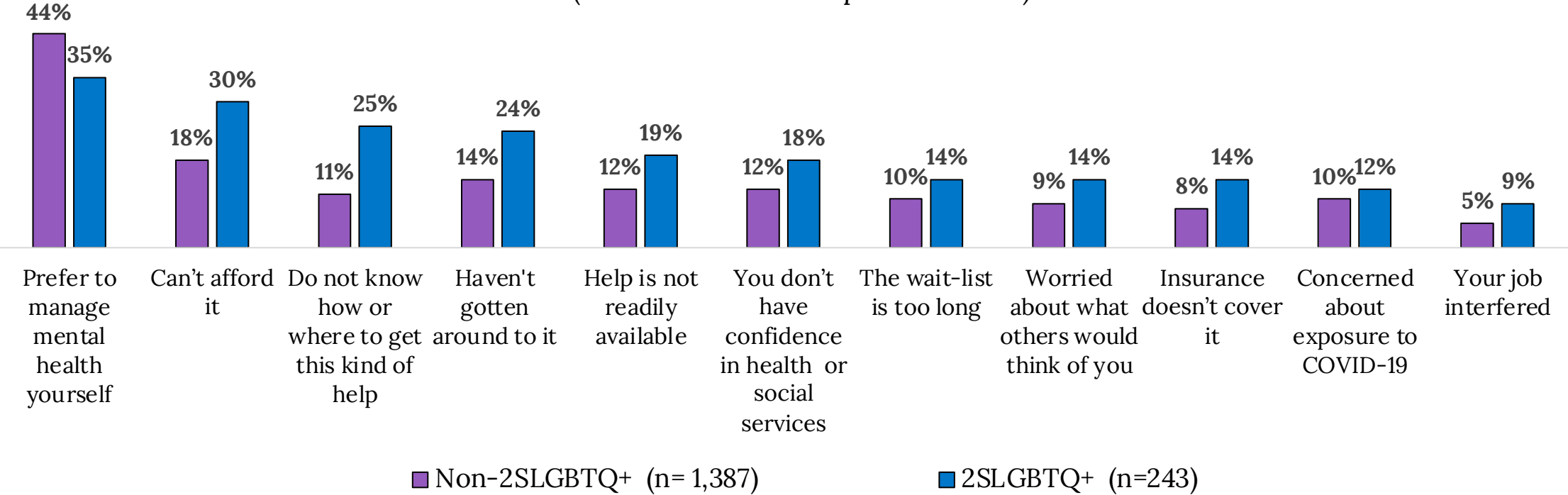


2SLGBTQ+ respondents face greater barriers in accessing mental health services

The top barriers are finances and not knowing where to get help

Mental Health -
Barriers

Top Mental Health Access Barriers
(Pooled March to September 2021)



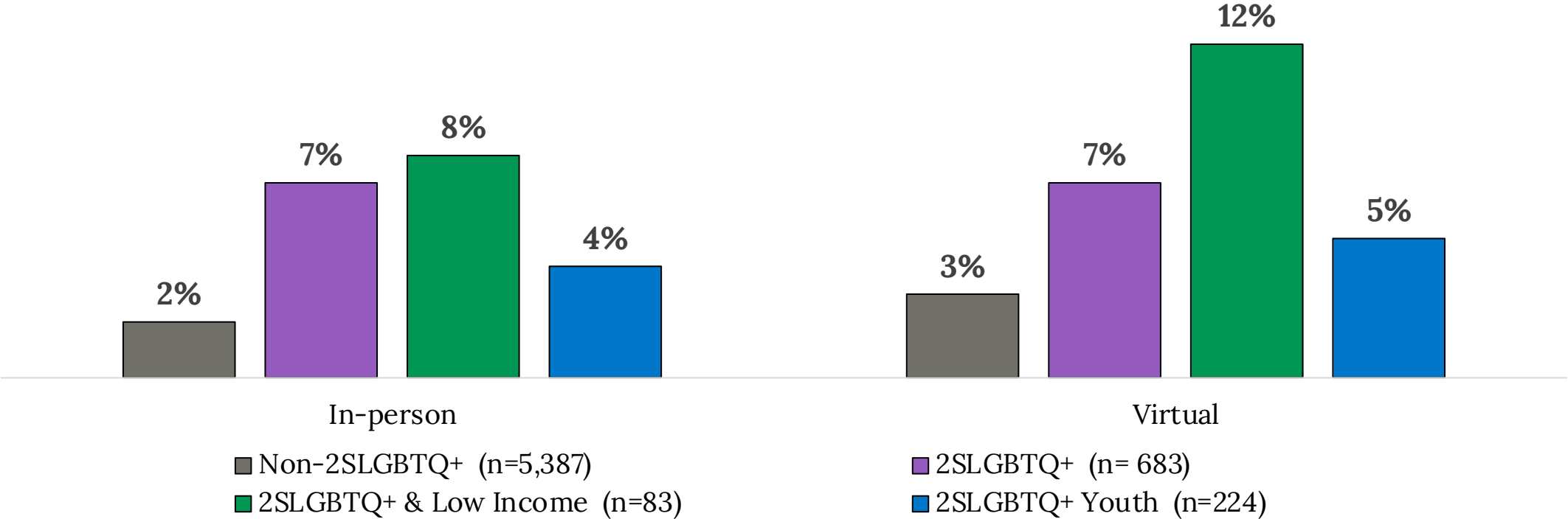
According to [Statistics Canada](#), gender-diverse individuals were almost three times more likely than males to report that they had experienced discrimination during the pandemic.

7% of all 2SLGBTQ+ respondents accessed virtual or in-person substance use services during the pandemic

5% of all 2SLGBTQ+ youth have accessed virtual substance use services

Substance Use
– Access to
Treatment

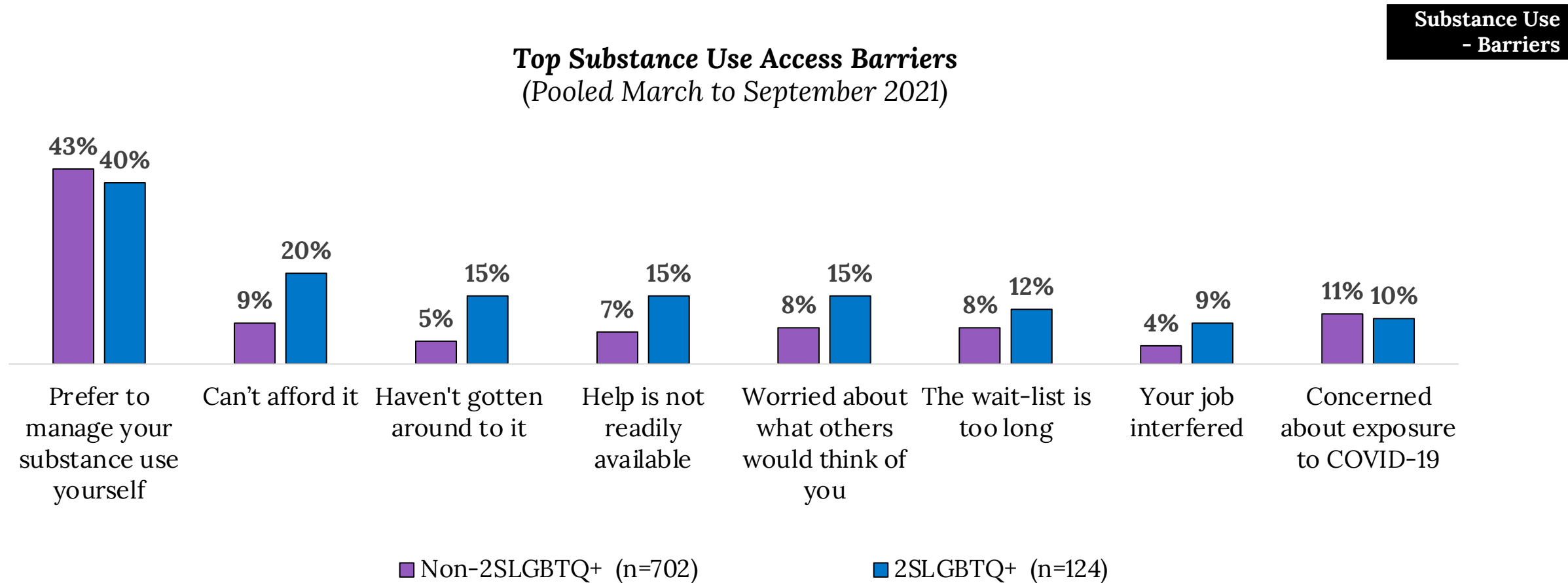
% Accessing Substance Use Treatment Services
[since onset of the pandemic]
(Pooled March to September 2021)



Q46A/Q48A: Since the onset of COVID-19 (March 2020), did you access in-person/virtual (e.g., online or via telephone) treatment services for substance use or substance use disorder?

2SLGBTQ+ respondents report finances as the top barrier to accessing formal treatment services

2SLGBTQ+ respondents prefer to manage their substance use themselves





Detailed Results

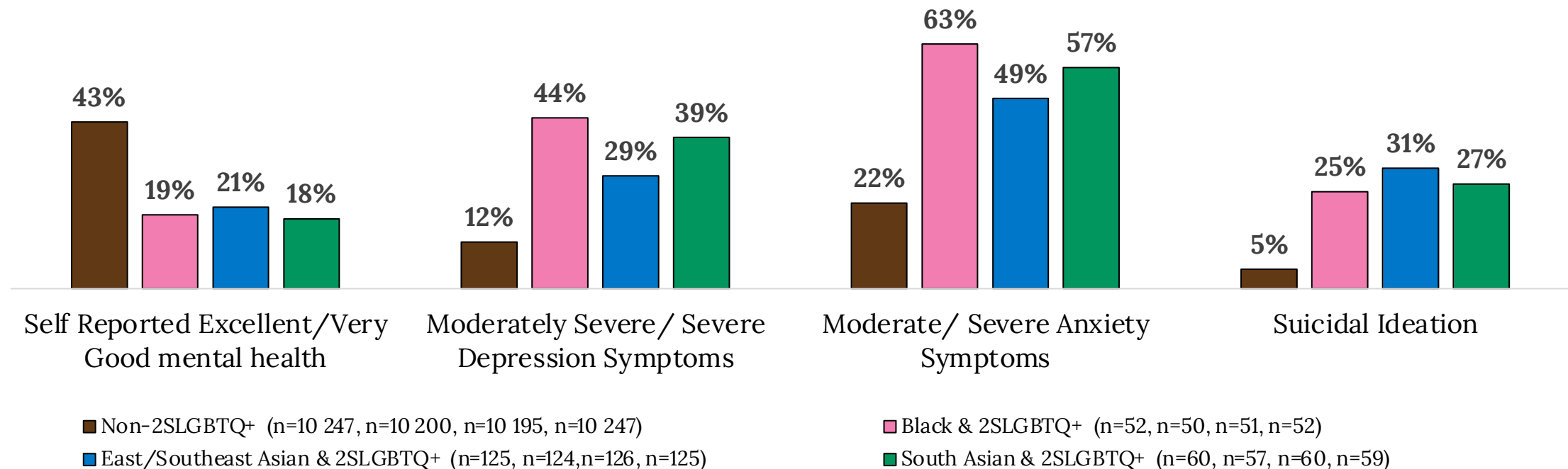
Spotlight 5: 2SLGBTQ+
Ethnoracialized Populations

1 in 5 ethnoracialized 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report excellent or very good mental health

Suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression symptoms are higher for ethnoracialized 2SLGBTQ+ respondents

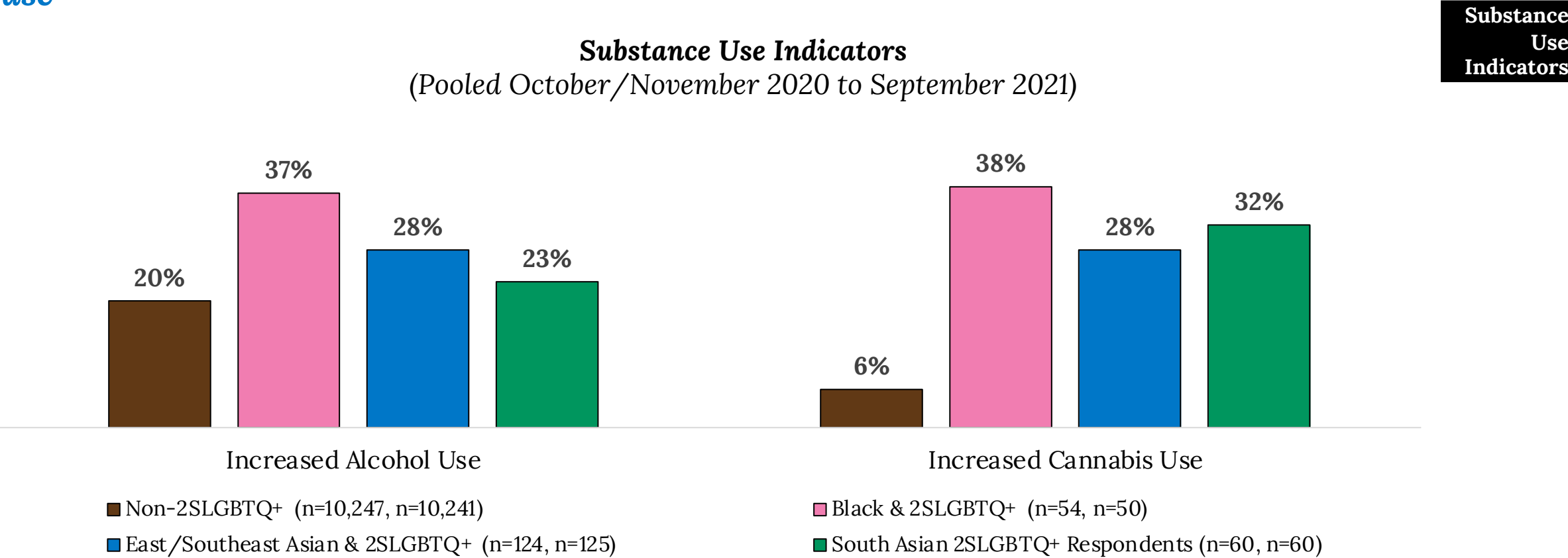
Mental
Health
Indicators

Mental Health Indicators
(Pooled October/November 2020 to September 2021)



More ethnoracialized 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who consume alcohol and use cannabis report increased consumption and use

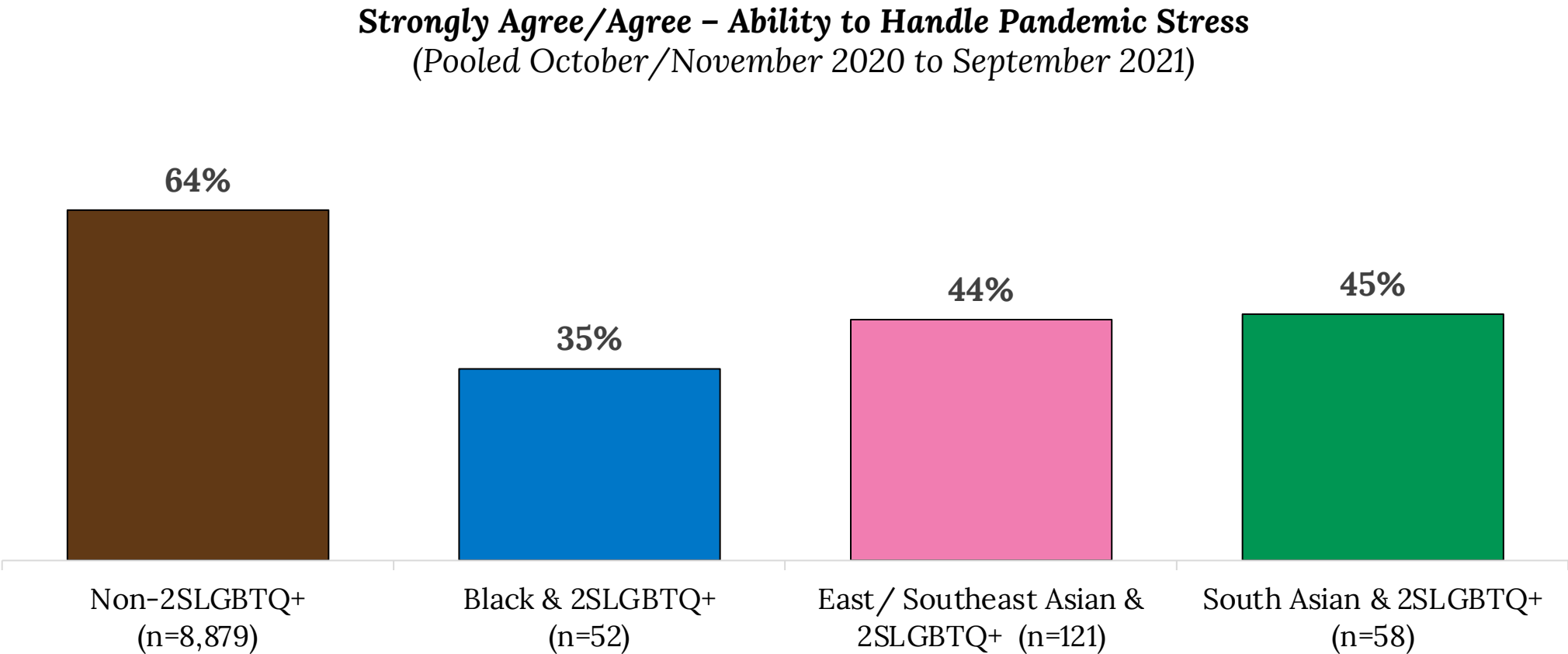
28% of East/Southeast Asian 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report increased cannabis and alcohol use



Q22r14: Drinking alcohol (beverages/drinks): Have you engaged in the following activities more or less since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020) [T1]?/ During the past month [T2-T7]? Q22r15: Consuming cannabis: Have you engaged in the following activities more or less since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020) [T1]? During the past month, have you engaged in more or less of the following activities [T2-T7]? 32

About 2 in 5 East/Southeast Asian, and South Asian 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report an ability to handle pandemic stress

35% of Black 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report an ability to cope with pandemic stress

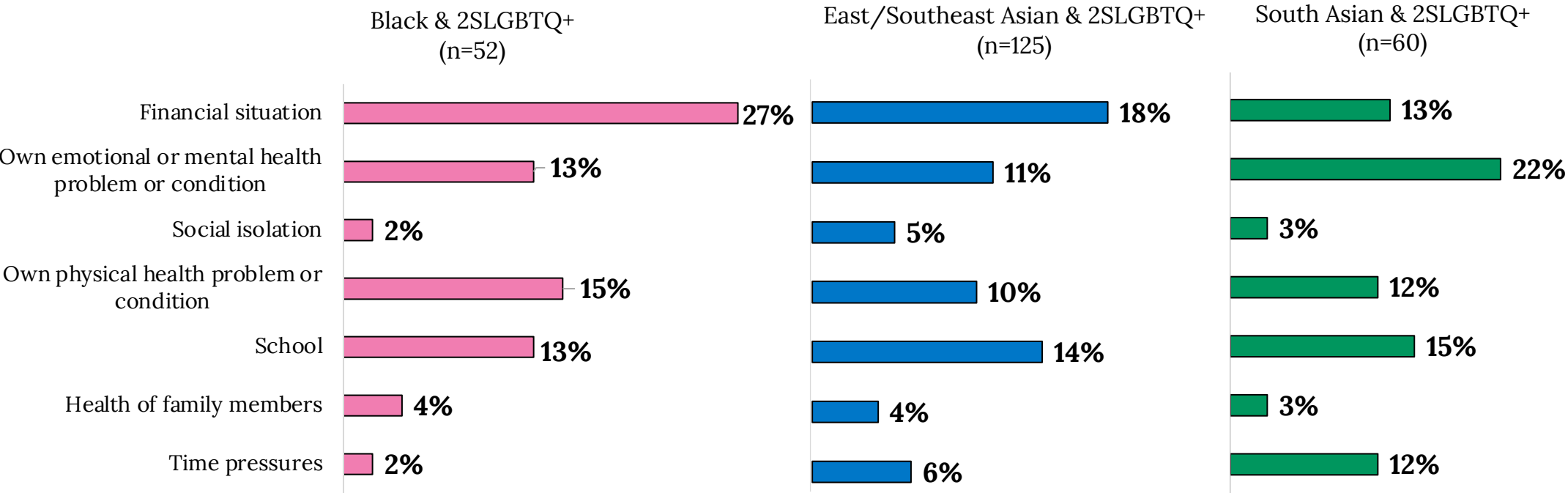



Ability to
Handle Stress

Ethnoracialized 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report their financial situation and own emotional or mental health problem or condition as top pandemic stressors.

Major Stressors

Top Pandemic Stressors
(Pooled October/November 2020 to September 2021)



 A survey from [the Human Rights Campaign Foundation](#) found that, in the United States, Black LGBTQ respondents reported disproportionate impacts from COVID-19 on finances and increased unemployment in August 2020.

Respondent Profile



RESPONDENT PROFILE – (1/2)

	T1 (Oct./ Nov. '20)	T2 (Nov./ Dec. '20)	T3 (Jan. '21)	T4 (Mar. '21)	T5 (May '21)	T6 (July '21)	T7 (Aug./ Sept. '21)
n =	2,502	1,507	1,502	1,524	1,519	1,543	1,548
Gender	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Women	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Men	48	47	48	48	47	47	47
Transgender, Non-binary, and Gender-queer		1	1	1	2	2	2
Age							
16 to 24	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
25 to 39	25	24	24	24	25	23	24
40 to 64	42	42	42	42	41	43	42
65+	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
2SLGBTQ+							
Yes	11	10	11	11	11	13	10
No	88	89	88	88	88	86	89

	T1 (Oct./ Nov. '20)	T2 (Nov./ Dec. '20)	T3 (Jan. '21)	T4 (Mar. '21)	T5 (May '21)	T6 (July '21)	T7 (Aug./ Sept. '21)
n =	2,502	1,507	1,502	1,524	1,519	1,543	1,548
Region	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
British Columbia	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
Alberta	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Saskatchewan	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Manitoba	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Ontario	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
Quebec	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
Atlantic	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Canadian Status							
Canadian citizens by birth / Non- immigrants	79	79	77	79	80	80	80
Canadian by naturalization	13	13	15	12	12	12	13
Permanent resident	6	6	6	8	6	6	6
No status	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

RESPONDENT PROFILE – (2/2)

	T1 (Oct./ Nov. '20)	T2 (Nov./ Dec. '20)	T3 (Jan. '21)	T4 (Mar. '21)	T5 (May '21)	T6 (July '21)	T7 (Sept. '21)
n =	2,502	1,507	1,502	1,524	1,519	1,543	1,548
Ethnicity	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
White	77	76	78	77	77	77	78
East/Southeast Asian	8	8	7	8	10	9	8
Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
South Asian	5	5	4	5	4	4	5
Black	2	4	2	2	2	2	3
Middle Eastern	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Latinx	1	2	2	1	2	2	1
Canadian / French Canadian (Non-specified)	1	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	<1
Income	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Less than \$35K	21	19	-	-	-	-	-
\$35K to \$75K	30	31	-	-	-	-	-
\$75K to \$100K	16	16	-	-	-	-	-
\$100K and over	24	23	-	-	-	-	-

	T1 (Oct./ Nov. '20)	T2 (Nov./ Dec. '20)	T3 (Jan. '21)	T4 (Mar. '21)	T5 (May '21)	T6 (Jul '21)	T7 (Sept. '21)
n =	2,502	1,507	1,502	1,524	1,519	1,543	1,548
Education	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Less than a high school diploma	3	3	3	5	3	3	4
High school degree or equivalent	18	21	19	21	19	17	20
Some college, no degree	31	29	30	28	27	29	26
Bachelor's degree	31	31	32	30	32	31	31
Master's degree	8	7	8	9	10	10	10
Professional degree	6	6	7	6	6	6	7
Doctorate	1	2	1	1	2	2	2
Employment	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Employed	46	45	46	45	48	49	46
Unemployed prior to COVID-19	5	4	4	5	3	4	4
Unemployed since COVID-19	5	5	6	5	5	4	3
Student	10	10	9	9	8	8	10
Retired	24	26	25	24	24	24	25
Self-employed	5	6	6	6	6	5	7
Unable to work	4	4	4	4	4	5	4