

# THE NCS™

## The National Community Survey™

### Los Alamos County, NM

*Community Livability Report  
2020*



POWERED BY POLCO

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NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

# About The NCS™

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Los Alamos County. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions considering ten central facets of a community:

- Economy
- Mobility
- Community Design
- Utilities
- Safety
- Natural Environment
- Parks and Recreation
- Health and Wellness
- Education, Arts and Culture
- Inclusivity and Engagement



The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 600 residents of Los Alamos County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents and the response rate for the 2020 survey was 36%. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.

# Overview of Results

## Residents enjoy a high quality of life and feel safe in their community.

At least 8 in 10 survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in Los Alamos County and the County as a place to live; a similar percentage reported that they would recommend living in Los Alamos County to someone who asks and plan to remain in the County for the next five years. These ratings were all on par with ratings given in other communities across the nation.

Safety is a contributing factor to the community's livability and Los Alamos County residents reported strong feelings of safety and high evaluations of safety-related services. Nearly all residents gave positive evaluations of their overall feeling of safety, and similar percentages reported feeling very or somewhat safe in the County's downtown/commercial area during the day as well as from property or violent crime; each of these ratings were higher than the national comparisons. Not surprisingly, at least 85% of respondents gave excellent or good marks to police services, crime prevention, ambulance or emergency medical services, fire services and fire prevention and education. Each of these aforementioned services were rated similar to the national averages with the exception of crime prevention, which was higher.

## While Los Alamos County's economy is strong, residents are concerned about the cost of living and the impacts of COVID-19 on their economic future.

Ratings of Los Alamos County's overall economic health were positive, with 7 in 10 respondents offering high ratings than were similar to the national comparisons. Further, the County as a place to work was rated higher than the national comparison (with 8 in 10 offering positive ratings) and employment opportunities were seen as positive by one-third of respondents (similar to national comparison).

Amidst these strong ratings, aspects of the economy related to cost of living and housing affordability were rated positively by fewer than 20% of respondents and lower than the national comparisons). Further, the economic outlook of Los Alamos County residents is lower than the 5-year national average with only 13% feeling the economy will have a positive impact on their income (although impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic should be taken into consideration).

Residents were very supportive of the local government changing policies and ordinances to help support restaurants and retailers during the pandemic. Use of vacant lots for outdoor dining, creating parklets or small areas on street for retails, changing zoning requirements for food trucks, and selling liquor on to-go orders was supported by at least three-fourths of survey respondents.

More than two-thirds of the residents surveyed supported the use of public health measures such as mandatory temperature checks and face masks enforcement to help control the spread of the virus and keep the economy open.

## **Residents appreciate their neighborhoods and public places where they spend time, but feel the community is lacking areas of economic development and growth.**

About 9 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live and 7 in 10 gave positive ratings to public places where they want to spend time, both ratings that were higher than those given in communities across the nation. Alternately, fewer than half gave positive ratings to economic development, shopping opportunities and the quality and variety of business and service establishments in Los Alamos County.

Further, only 3 in 10 or fewer gave positive ratings to well-planned residential and commercial growth and the overall quality of new development; each of these aspects of community design were rated lower than the national comparisons.

## **The COVID-19 pandemic is having the strongest impacts on residents' mental health.**

While COVID-19 is a physical health risk, its impacts are also felt in the areas of emotional and economic health of households across the country. When asked about their household's biggest COVID-19 related problems, residents expressed the largest amount of concern over a variety of emotional health issues. Not knowing when pandemic will end, isolation, anxiety and boredom were the most common problems reported in the survey. Physical health and economic factors affected a significantly smaller proportion of households at the time the surveys were completed.

## **Los Alamos residents give high scores to the natural environment in their community.**

Nearly all (95%) of survey respondents rated the overall quality of the natural environment as excellent or good in Los Alamos County; a rating above the national benchmark. Water resources, air quality and the preservation of natural areas also received very strong quality ratings with more than 80% of residents providing positive ratings. These scores also exceeded the national norm.

# Facets of Livability

Ratings of importance were compared to ratings of quality to help guide County staff and officials with decisions on future resource allocation and strategic planning areas. When competition for limited resources demands that efficiencies or cutbacks be instituted, it is wise not only to know what facets are deemed most important to residents’ quality of life, but which among the most important are perceived to be of relatively lower quality in your community. It is these facets of community livability – more important facets perceived as being of lower quality – to which attention needs to be paid first.

		QUALITY		
		LOWER	SIMILAR	HIGHER
IMPORTANCE	HIGHER			
	SIMILAR		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• Community Design</li> <li>• Utilities</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation</li> <li>• Health and Wellness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Environment</li> </ul>
	LOWER		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education, Arts and Culture</li> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Inclusivity and Engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1: QUALITY OF FACETS OF LIVABILITY- SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall economic health of Los Alamos County	↔	70%
Overall quality of the transportation system in Los Alamos County	↔	84%
Overall design or layout of Los Alamos County's residential and commercial areas	↔	55%
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Los Alamos County	↔	73%
Overall feeling of safety in Los Alamos County	↑	97%
Overall quality of natural environment in Los Alamos County	↑	95%
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	87%
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Los Alamos County	↔	78%
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↔	70%
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↔	64%

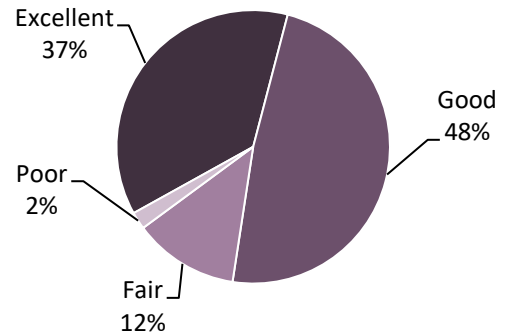
**FIGURE 2: IMPORTANCE OF FACETS OF LIVABILITY- SUMMARY**

Percent essential or very important	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall economic health of Los Alamos County	↔	90%
Overall quality of the transportation system in Los Alamos County	↓	67%
Overall design or layout of Los Alamos County's residential and commercial areas	↔	73%
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Los Alamos County	↔	84%
Overall feeling of safety in Los Alamos County	↓↓	73%
Overall quality of natural environment in Los Alamos County	↔	80%
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	74%
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Los Alamos County	↔	75%
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↓	70%
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↓↓	63%

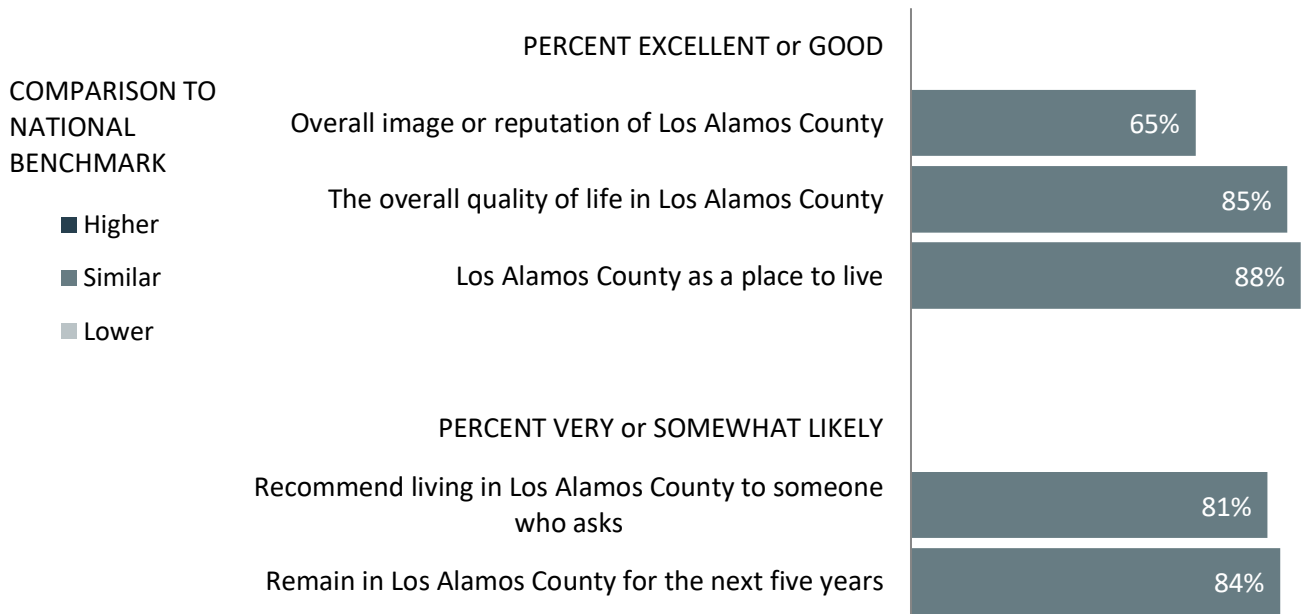
# Quality of Life

*Measuring community livability starts with assessing the quality of life of those who live there, and ensuring that the community is attractive, accessible, and welcoming to all.*

## OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY



**FIGURE 3: QUALITY OF LIFE IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY**



**FIGURE 4: QUALITY OF LIFE IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall image or reputation of Los Alamos County	↔	65%
The overall quality of life in Los Alamos County	↔	85%
Los Alamos County as a place to live	↔	88%

**FIGURE 5: RECOMMEND LOS ALAMOS COUNTY - SUMMARY**

Percent very or somewhat likely	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Recommend living in Los Alamos County to someone who asks	↔	81%
Remain in Los Alamos County for the next five years	↔	84%

**Legend**

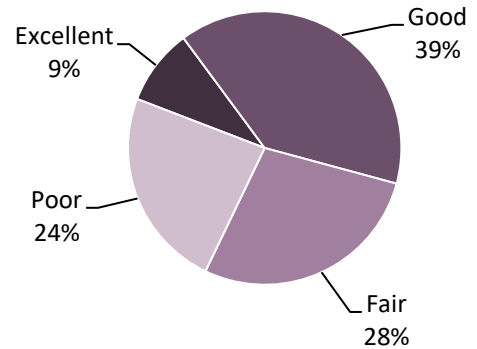
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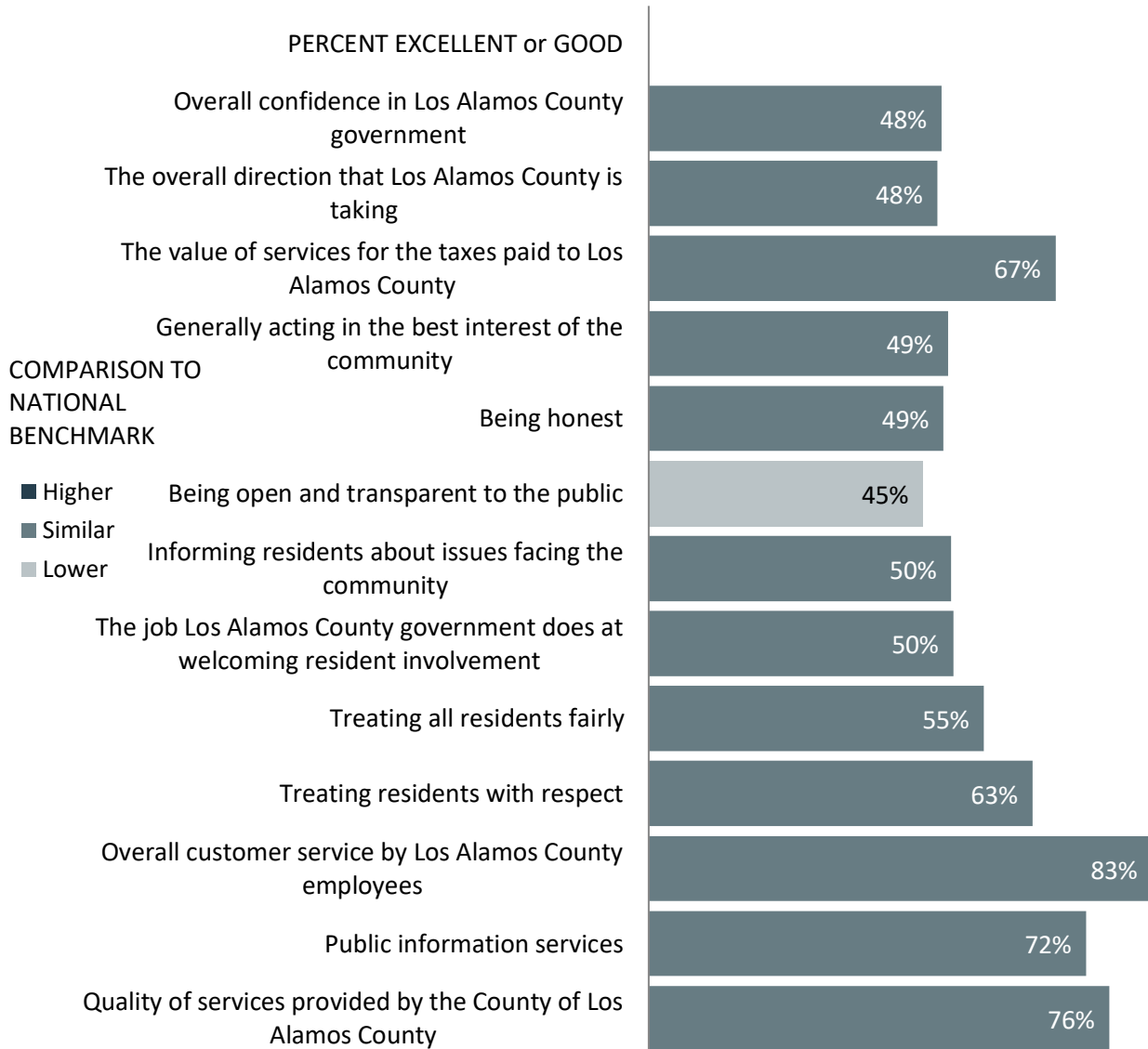
# Governance

*Strong local governments produce results that meet the needs of residents while making the best use of available resources, and are responsive to the present and future needs of the community as a whole.*

**OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY GOVERNMENT**



**FIGURE 6: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SERVICES**



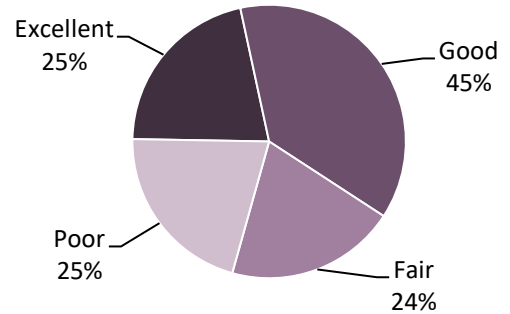
**FIGURE 7: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SERVICES - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall confidence in Los Alamos County government	↔	48%
The overall direction that Los Alamos County is taking	↔	48%
The value of services for the taxes paid to Los Alamos County	↔	67%
Generally acting in the best interest of the community	↔	49%
Being honest	↔	49%
Being open and transparent to the public	↓	45%
Informing residents about issues facing the community	↔	50%
The job Los Alamos County government does at welcoming resident involvement	↔	50%
Treating all residents fairly	↔	55%
Treating residents with respect	↔	63%
Overall customer service by Los Alamos County employees	↔	83%
Public information services	↔	72%
Quality of services provided by Los Alamos County	↔	76%

# Economy

*Local governments work together with private and nonprofit businesses, and with the community at large, to foster sustainable growth, create jobs, and promote a thriving local economy.*

OVERALL ECONOMIC HEALTH OF LOS ALAMOS COUNTY



*What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months?*

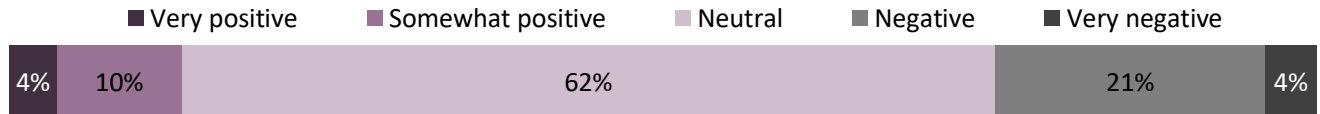
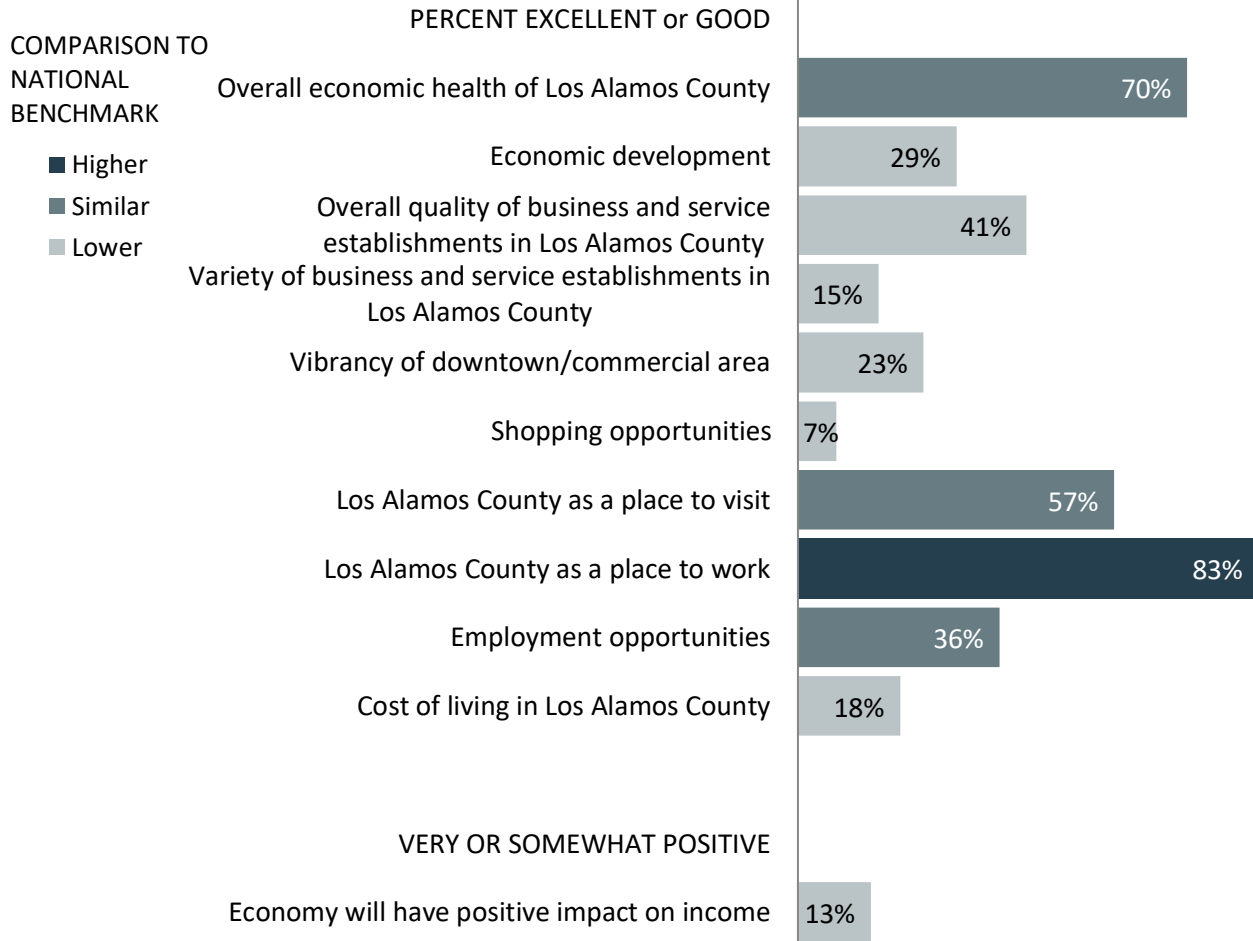


FIGURE 8: ECONOMIC HEALTH



**FIGURE 9: ECONOMIC HEALTH - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall economic health of Los Alamos County	↔	70%
Economic development	↓	29%
Overall quality of business and service establishments in Los Alamos County	↓	41%
Variety of business and service establishments in Los Alamos County	↓↓	15%
Vibrancy of downtown/commercial area	↓	23%
Shopping opportunities	↓↓	7%
Los Alamos County as a place to visit	↔	57%
Los Alamos County as a place to work	↑	83%
Employment opportunities	↔	36%
Cost of living in Los Alamos County	↓	18%

**FIGURE 10: ECONOMIC IMPACT - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent very or somewhat positive</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Economy will have positive impact on income	↓	13%

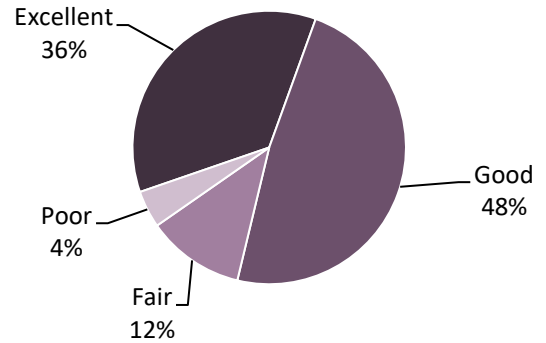
**FIGURE 11: HOUSING COST - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent for whom housing costs are NOT 30% or more of household income</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
NOT experiencing housing costs stress	↑	83%

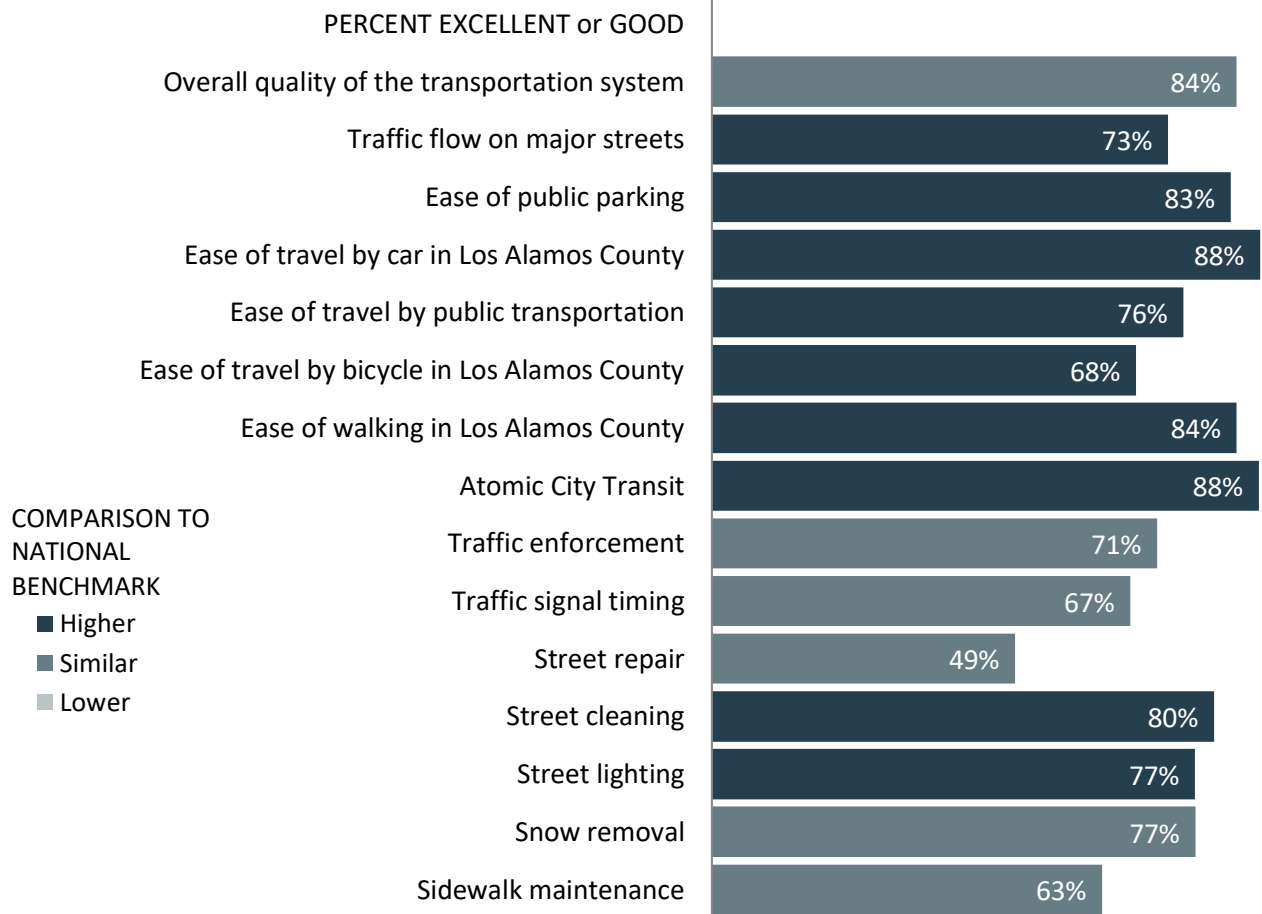
# Mobility

*The ease with which residents can move about their communities, whether for commuting, leisure, or recreation, plays a major role in the quality of life for all who live, work and play in the community.*

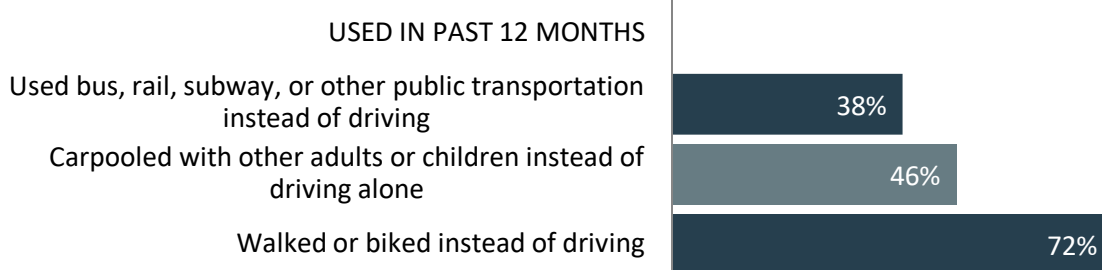
## OVERALL QUALITY OF THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY



**FIGURE 12: MOBILITY IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY**



**FIGURE 13: USE OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION MODES**



**FIGURE 14: MOBILITY IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall quality of the transportation system in Los Alamos County	↔	84%
Traffic flow on major streets	↑	73%
Ease of travel by car in Los Alamos County	↑	88%
Ease of travel by public transportation in Los Alamos County	↑↑	76%
Ease of travel by bicycle in Los Alamos County	↑	68%
Ease of walking in Los Alamos County	↑	84%
Ease of public parking	↑↑	83%
Atomic City Transit	↑↑	88%
Traffic enforcement	↔	71%
Traffic signal timing	↔	67%
Street repair	↔	49%
Street cleaning	↑	80%
Street lighting	↑	77%
Snow removal	↔	77%
Sidewalk maintenance	↔	63%

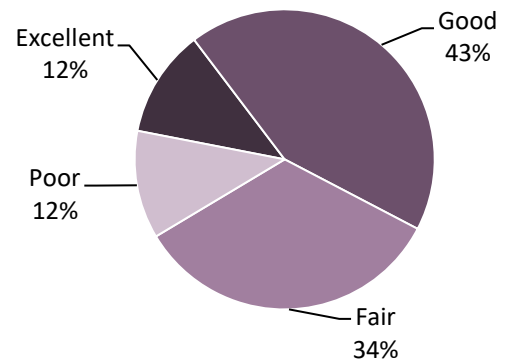
**FIGURE 15: USE OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION MODES - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent who did this in past 12 months</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Used bus, rail, subway, or other public transportation instead of driving	↑	38%
Carpooled with other adults or children instead of driving alone	↔	46%
Walked or biked instead of driving	↑	72%

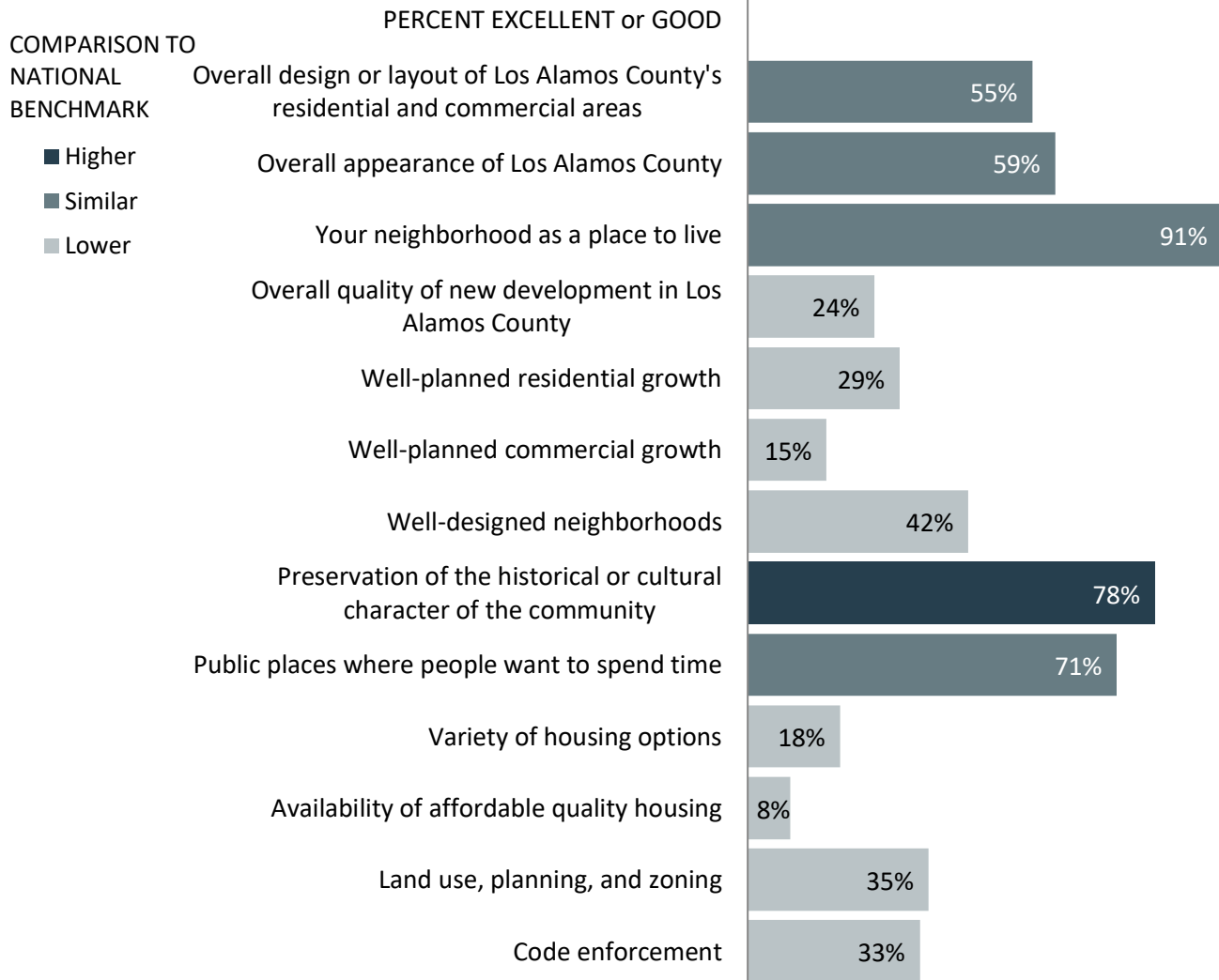
# Community Design

*A well-designed community enhances the quality of life for its residents by encouraging smart land use and zoning, ensuring that affordable housing is accessible to all, and providing access to parks and other green spaces.*

**OVERALL DESIGN OR LAYOUT OF LOS ALAMOS COUNTY'S RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS**



**FIGURE 16: COMMUNITY DESIGN**



**FIGURE 17: COMMUNITY DESIGN - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall design or layout of Los Alamos County's residential and commercial areas	↔	55%
Overall appearance of Los Alamos County	↔	59%
Your neighborhood as a place to live	↔	91%
Overall quality of new development in Los Alamos County	↓↓	24%
Well-planned residential growth	↓	29%
Well-planned commercial growth	↓↓	15%
Well-designed neighborhoods	↓	42%
Preservation of the historical or cultural character of the community	↑	78%
Public places where people want to spend time	↔	71%
Variety of housing options	↓↓	18%
Availability of affordable quality housing	↓↓	8%
Land use, planning, and zoning	↓	35%
Code enforcement	↓	33%



# Utilities

Services such as water, gas, electricity, and internet access play a vital role in ensuring the physical and economic health and well-being of the communities they serve.

## OVERALL QUALITY OF THE UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY

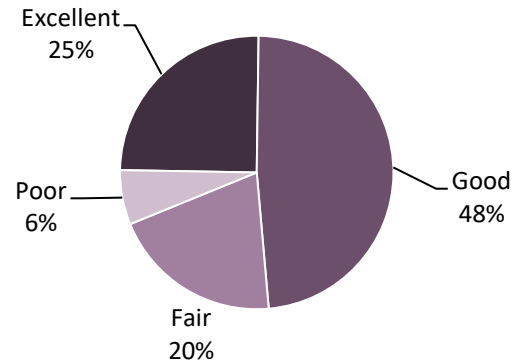


FIGURE 18: UTILITES

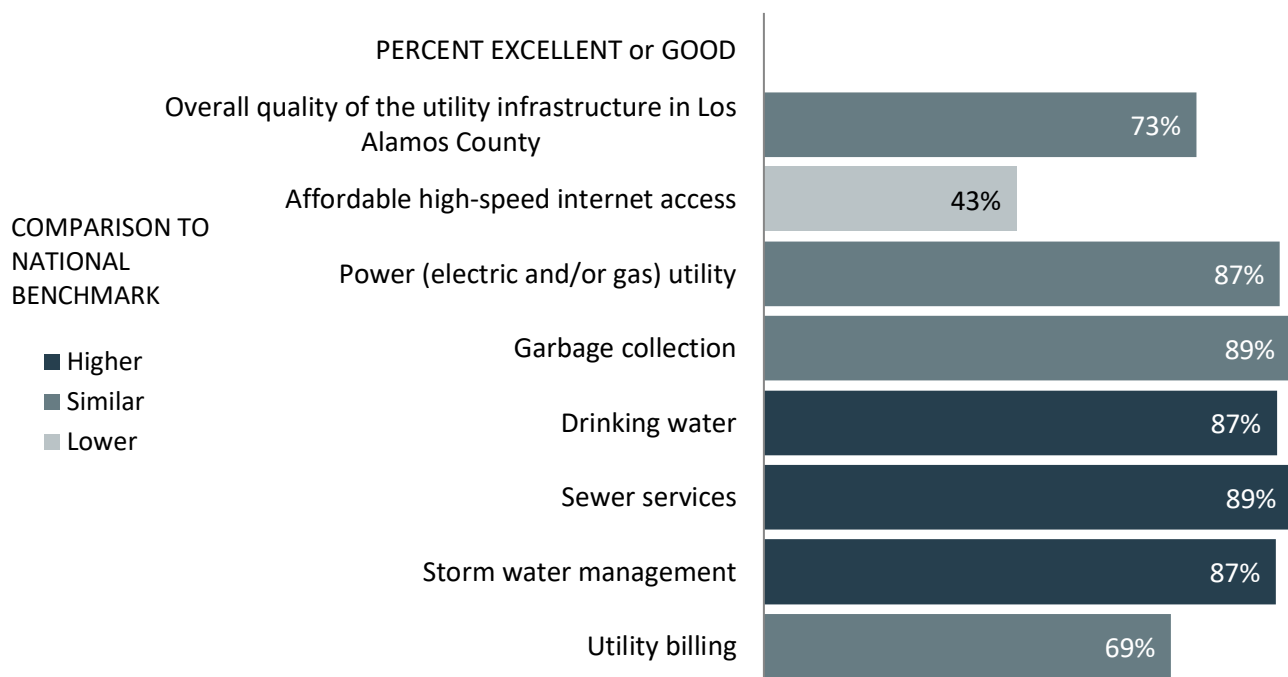


FIGURE 19: UTILITES - SUMMARY

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Los Alamos County	↔	73%
Affordable high-speed internet access	↓	43%
Power (electric and/or gas) utility	↔	87%
Garbage collection	↔	89%
Drinking water	↑	87%
Sewer services	↑	89%
Storm water management	↑	87%
Utility billing	↔	69%

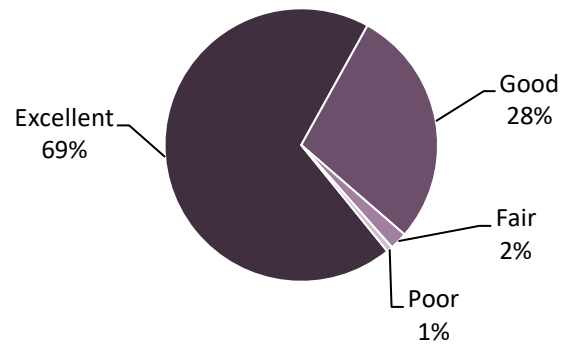
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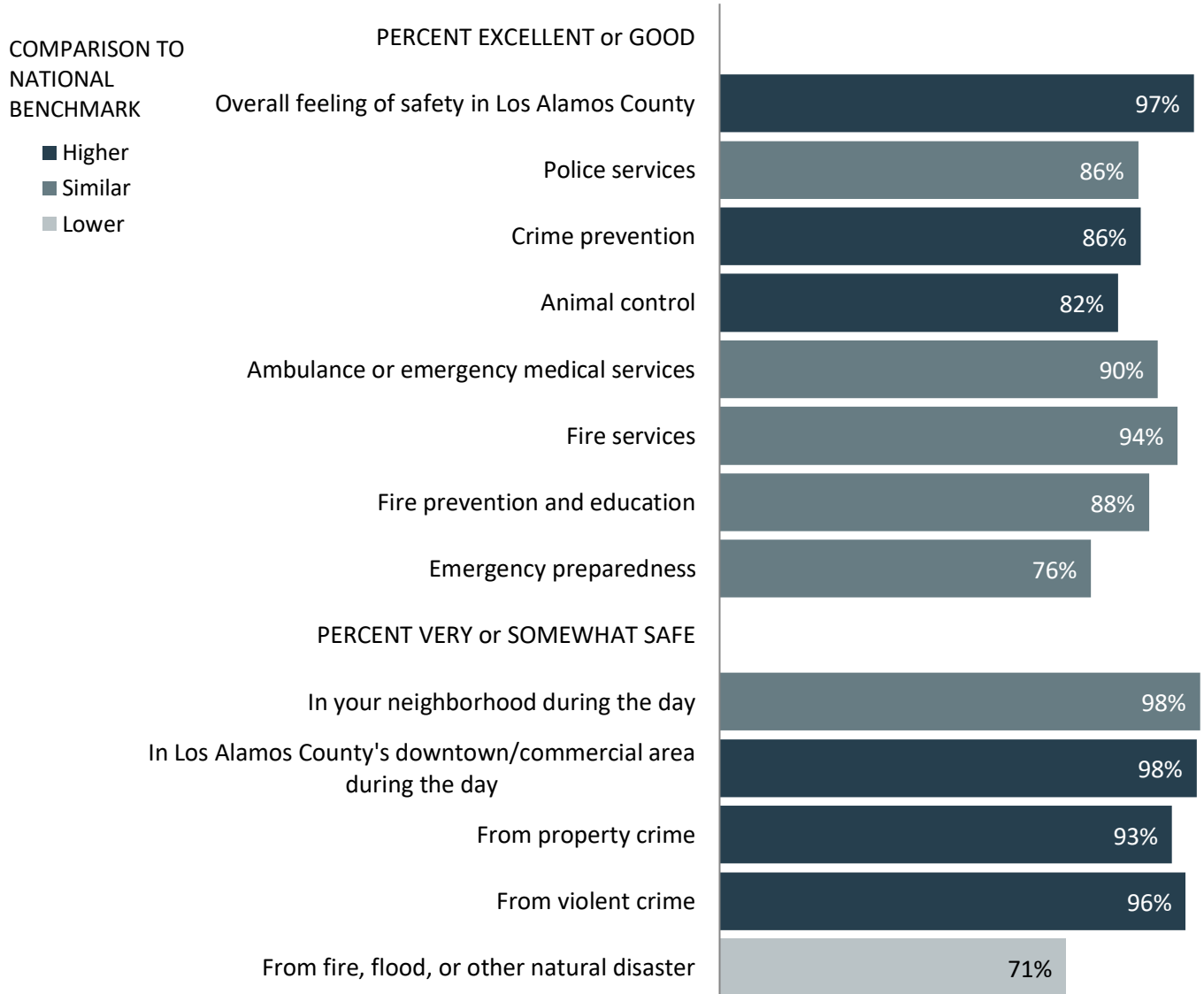
# Safety

*Public safety is often the most important task facing local governments. All residents should feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods and in the greater community, and providing robust Safety-related services is essential to residents' quality of life.*

## OVERALL FEELING OF SAFETY IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY



**FIGURE 20: SAFETY IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY**



**FIGURE 21: SAFETY-RELATED SERVICES - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall feeling of safety in Los Alamos County	↑	97%
Police services	↔	86%
Crime prevention	↑	86%
Animal control	↑	82%
Ambulance or emergency medical services	↔	90%
Fire services	↔	94%
Fire prevention and education	↔	88%
Emergency preparedness	↔	76%

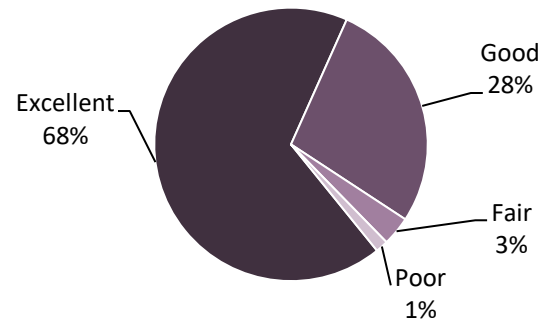
**FIGURE 22: FEELINGS OF SAFETY- SUMMARY**

<b>Percent who feel very or somewhat safe</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
In your neighborhood during the day	↔	98%
In Los Alamos County's downtown/commercial area during the day	↑	98%
From property crime	↑	93%
From violent crime	↑	96%
From fire, flood, or other natural disaster	↓	71%

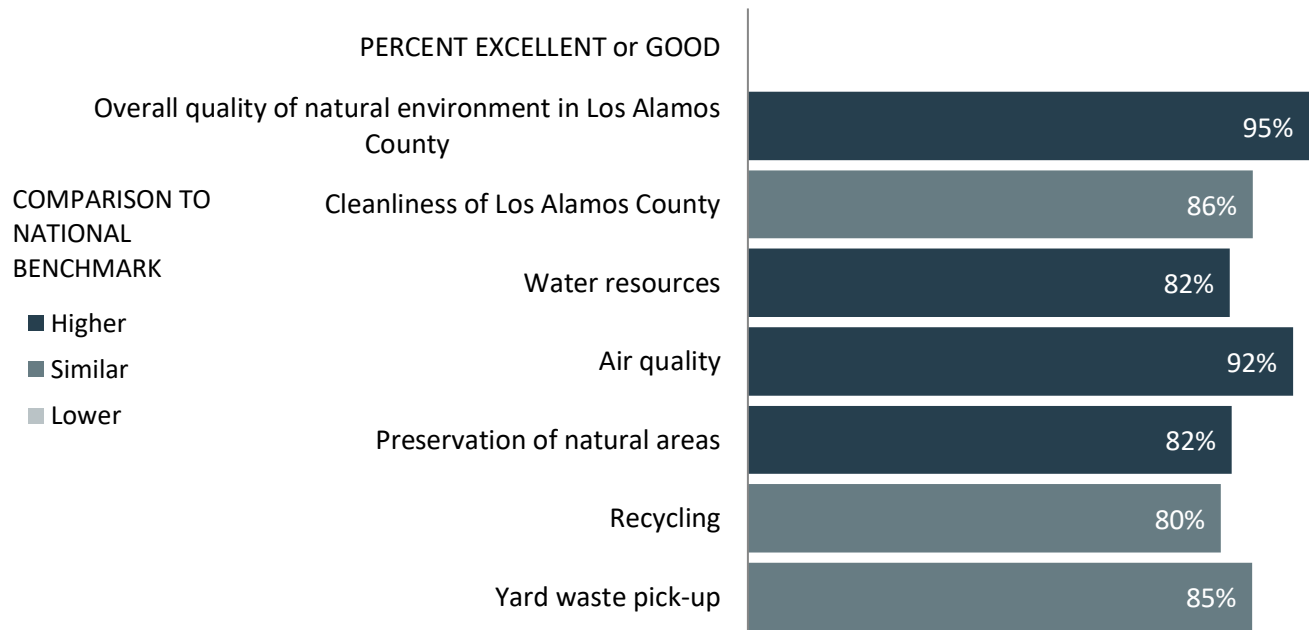
# Natural Environment

*The natural environment plays a vital role in the health and well-being of residents. The natural spaces in which residents live and experience their communities has a direct and profound effect on quality of life.*

## OVERALL QUALITY OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY



**FIGURE 23: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**



**FIGURE 24: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of natural environment in Los Alamos County	↑	95%
Cleanliness of Los Alamos County	↔	86%
Water resources	↑	82%
Air quality	↑	92%
Preservation of natural areas	↑	82%
Recycling	↔	80%
Yard waste pick-up	↔	85%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher    ↑ Higher    ↔ Similar    ↓ Lower    ↓↓ Much lower    \* Not available

# Parks and Recreation

*"There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment."*  
 - National Recreation and Park Association

OVERALL QUALITY OF PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY

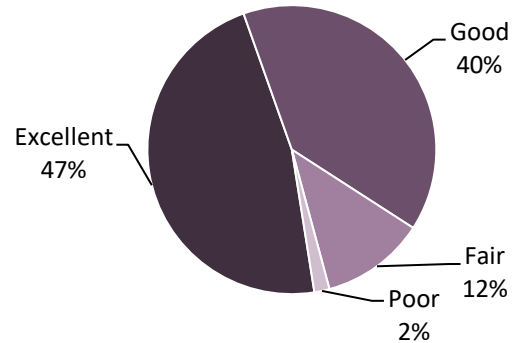


FIGURE 25: PARKS AND RECREATION



FIGURE 26: PARKS AND RECREATION - SUMMARY

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	87%
Availability of paths and walking trails	↑	86%
County parks	↔	87%
Recreational opportunities	↔	58%
Recreation programs or classes	↔	70%
Recreation centers or facilities	↔	70%
Fitness opportunities	↔	80%

Legend

↑↑ Much higher    ↑ Higher    ↔ Similar    ↓ Lower    ↓↓ Much lower    \* Not available

# Health and Wellness

*The characteristics of and amenities available in the communities in which people live has a direct impact on the health and wellness of residents, and thus, on their quality of life overall.*

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS OPPORTUNITIES IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY

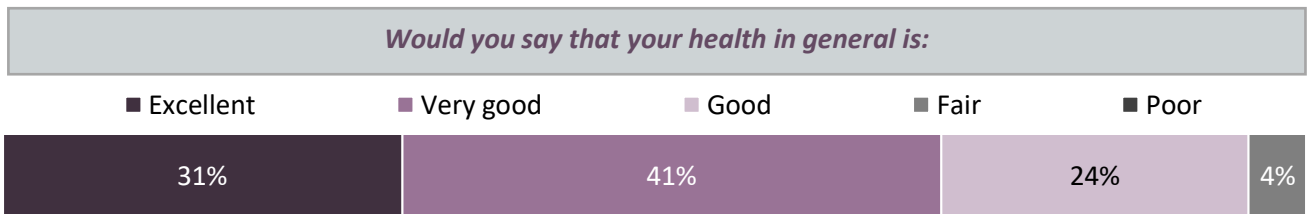
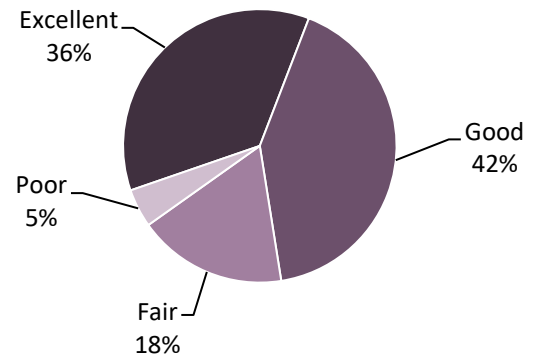


FIGURE 27: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

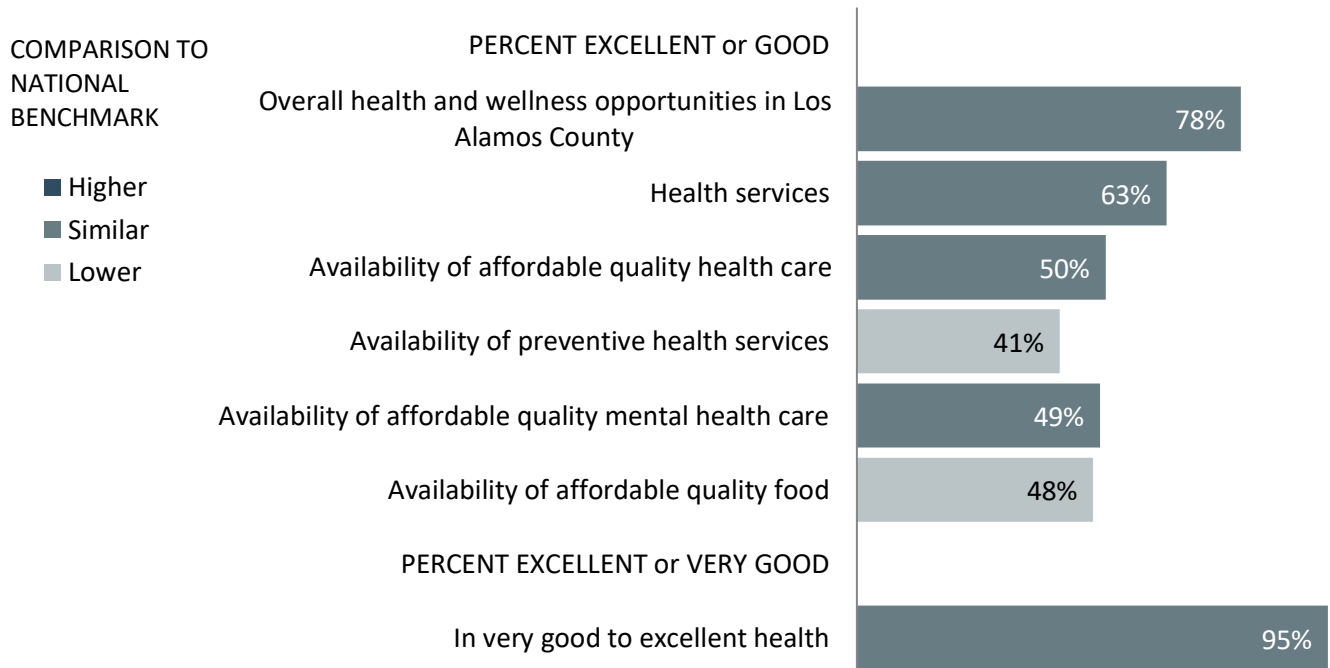


FIGURE 28: HEALTH AND WELLNESS - SUMMARY

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Los Alamos County	↔	78%
Health services	↔	63%
Availability of affordable quality health care	↔	50%
Availability of preventive health services	↓	41%
Availability of affordable quality mental health care	↔	49%
Availability of affordable quality food	↓	48%

**FIGURE 29: PERSONAL HEALTH - SUMMARY**

	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
In very good to excellent health	↔	95%

# Education, Arts, and Culture

*Participation in the arts, in educational opportunities, and in cultural activities is linked to increased civic engagement, greater social tolerance, and enhanced enjoyment of the local community.*

OVERALL OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND THE ARTS IN LOS ALAMOS COUNTY

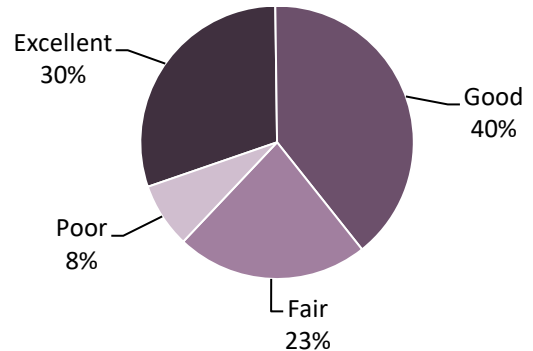
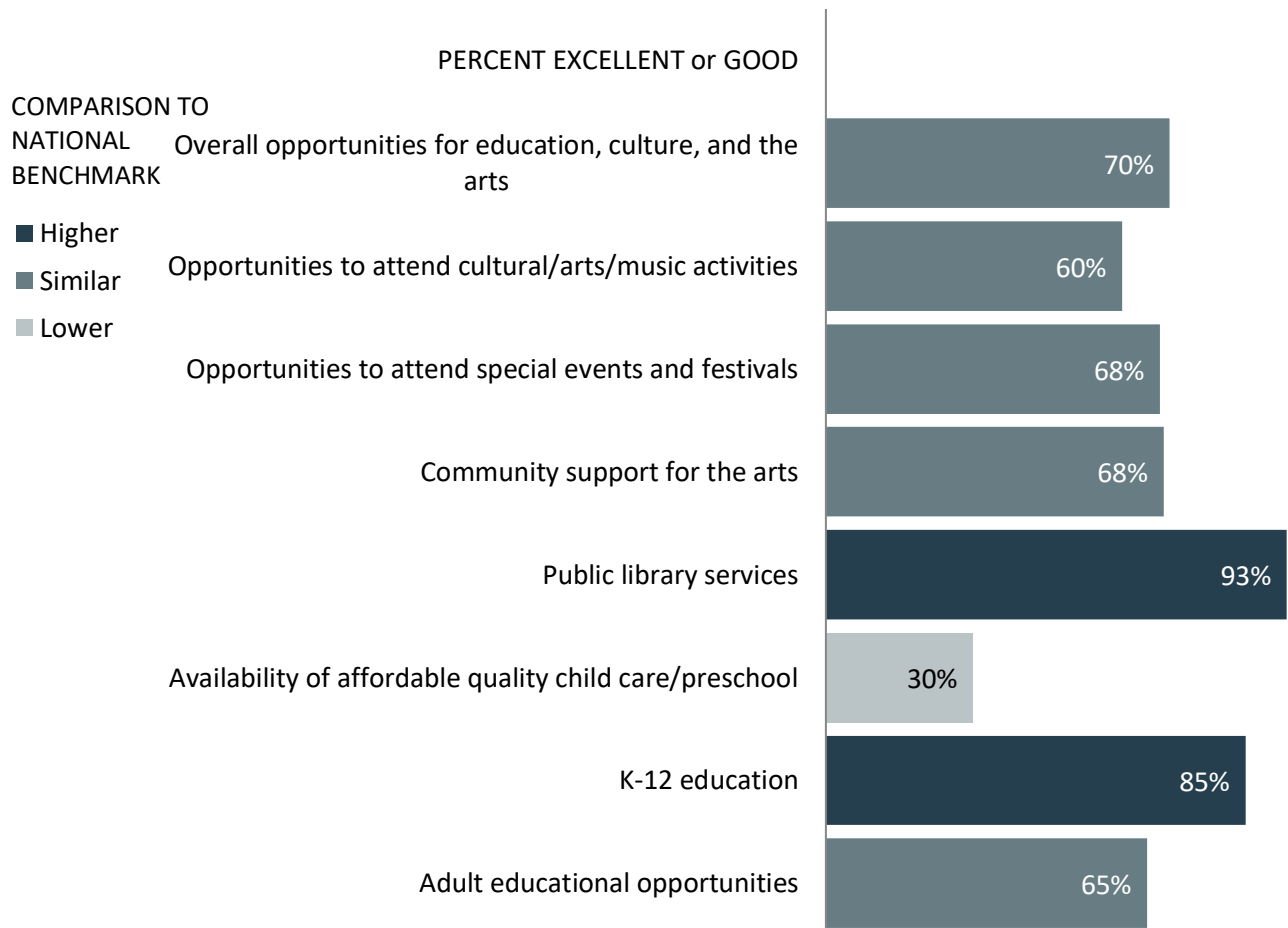


FIGURE 30: EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE





**FIGURE 31: EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE - SUMMARY**

<b>Percent excellent or good</b>	<b>Comparison to benchmark</b>	<b>2020 rating</b>
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↔	70%
Opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities	↔	60%
Opportunities to attend special events and festivals	↔	68%
Community support for the arts	↔	68%
Public library services	↑	93%
Availability of affordable quality child care/preschool	↓	30%
K-12 education	↑	85%
Adult educational opportunities	↔	65%

# Inclusivity and Engagement

*Inclusivity refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging; residents who feel invited to participate within their communities feel more included, involved, and engaged than those who do not.*

RESIDENTS' CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

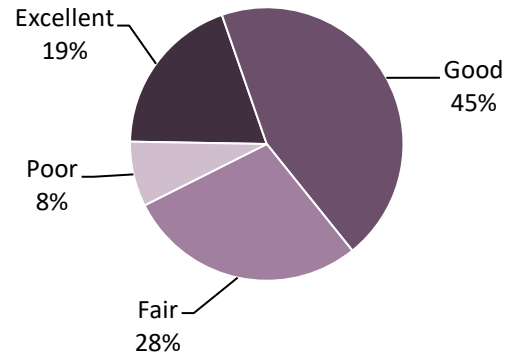
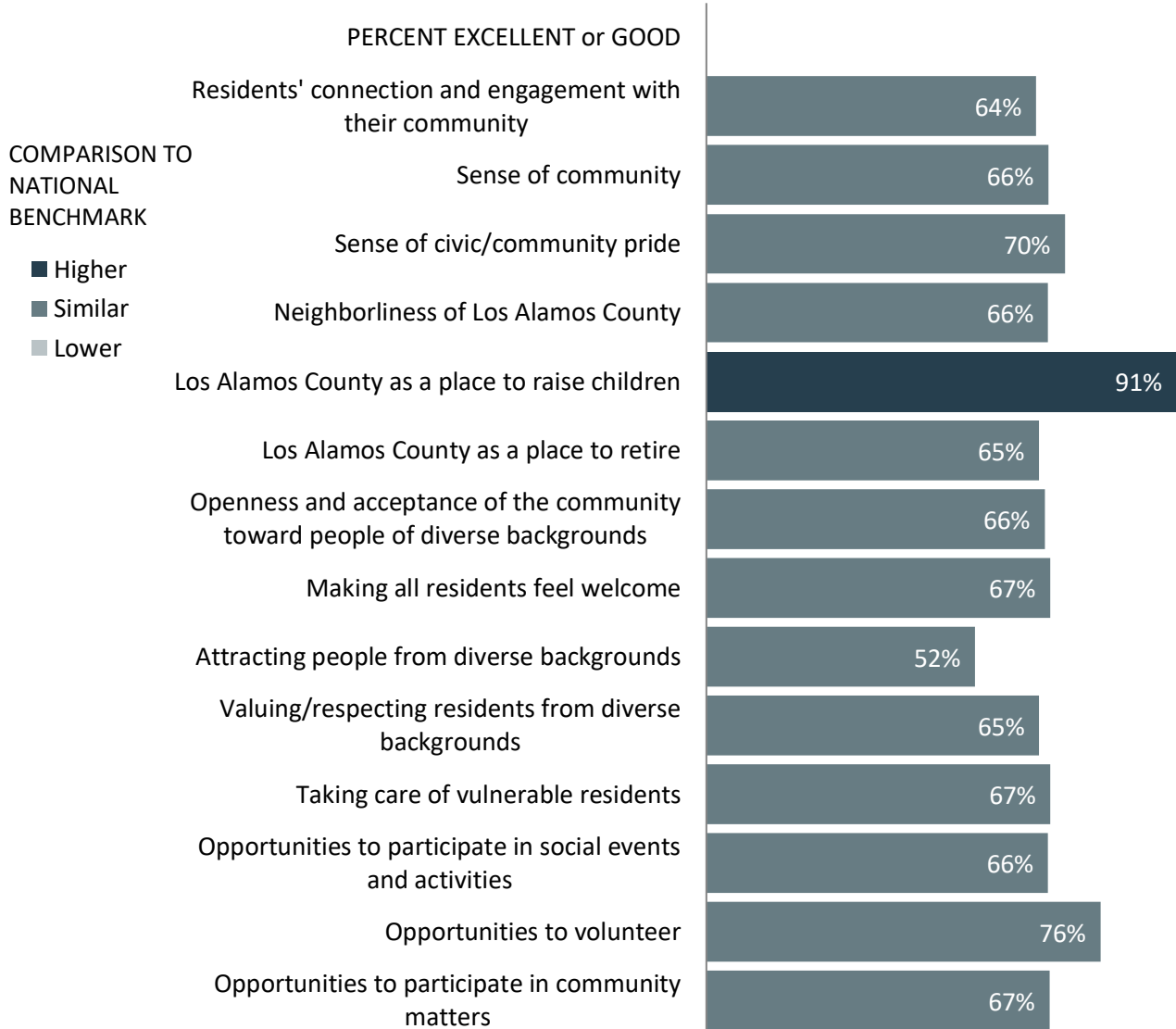


FIGURE 32: INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT



**FIGURE 33: INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↔	64%
Sense of community	↔	66%
Sense of civic/community pride	↔	70%
Neighborliness of Los Alamos County	↔	66%
Los Alamos County as a place to raise children	↑	91%
Los Alamos County as a place to retire	↔	65%
Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds	↔	66%
Making all residents feel welcome	↔	67%
Attracting people from diverse backgrounds	↔	52%
Valuing/respecting residents from diverse backgrounds	↔	65%
Taking care of vulnerable residents	↔	67%
Opportunities to participate in social events and activities	↔	66%
Opportunities to volunteer	↔	76%
Opportunities to participate in community matters	↔	67%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

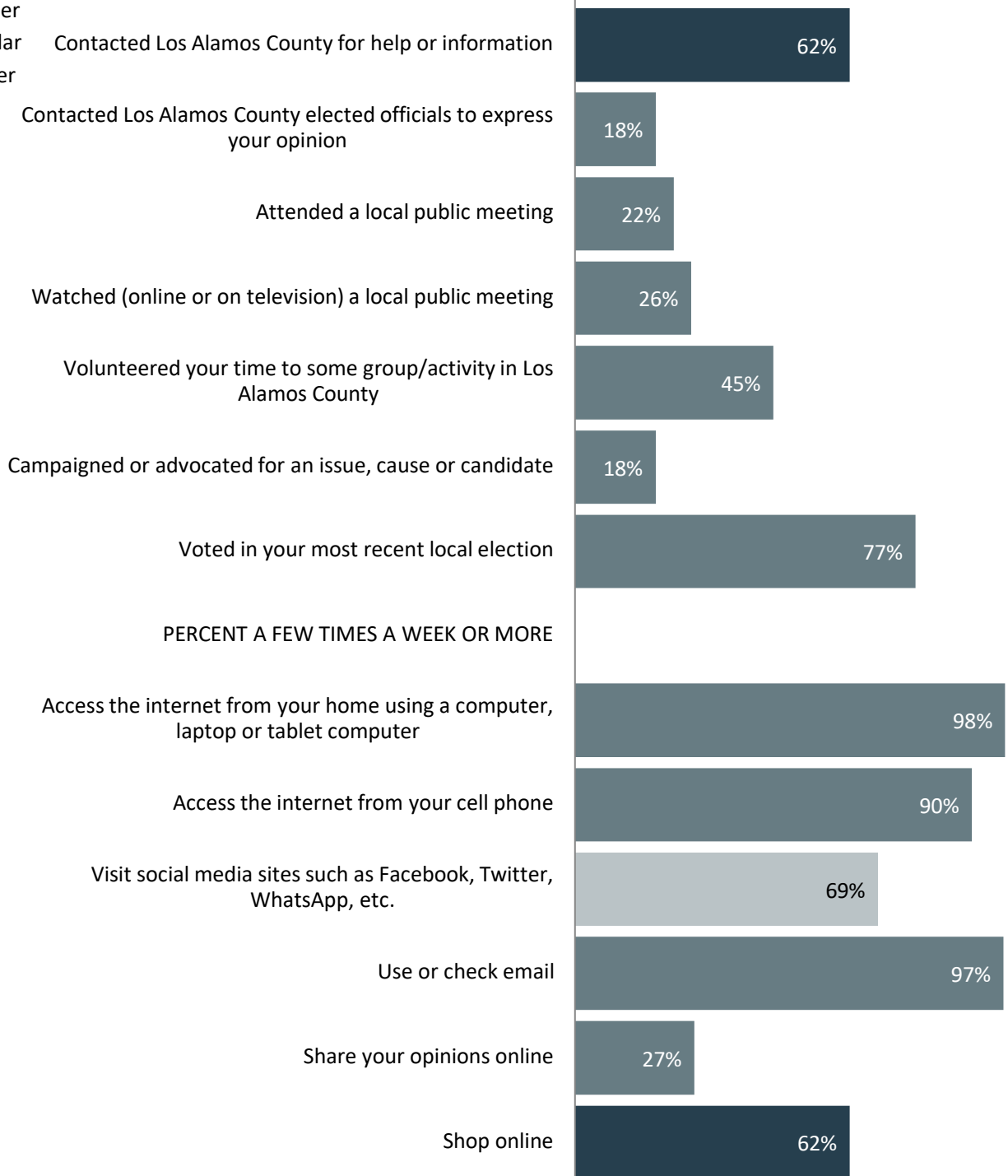
\* Not available

**FIGURE 34: RESIDENTS' PARTICIPATION LEVELS**

COMPARISON TO  
NATIONAL  
BENCHMARK

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

PERCENT YES IN LAST 12 MONTHS



**FIGURE 35: RESIDENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN LAST 12 MONTHS- SUMMARY**

Percent who had done each in last 12 months	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Contacted Los Alamos County for help or information	↑	62%
Contacted Los Alamos County elected officials to express your opinion	↔	18%
Attended a local public meeting	↔	22%
Watched (online or on television) a local public meeting	↔	26%
Volunteered your time to some group/activity in Los Alamos County	↔	45%
Campaigned or advocated for an issue, cause or candidate	↔	18%
Voted in your most recent local election	↔	77%

**FIGURE 36: RESIDENTS’ GENERAL USE OF TECHNOLOGY- SUMMARY**

Percent who report doing each at least a few times a week	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Access the internet from your home using a computer, laptop or tablet computer	↔	98%
Access the internet from your cell phone	↔	90%
Visit social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.	↓	69%
Use or check email	↔	97%
Share your opinions online	↔	27%
Shop online	↑	62%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher      ↑ Higher      ↔ Similar      ↓ Lower      ↓↓ Much lower      \* Not available

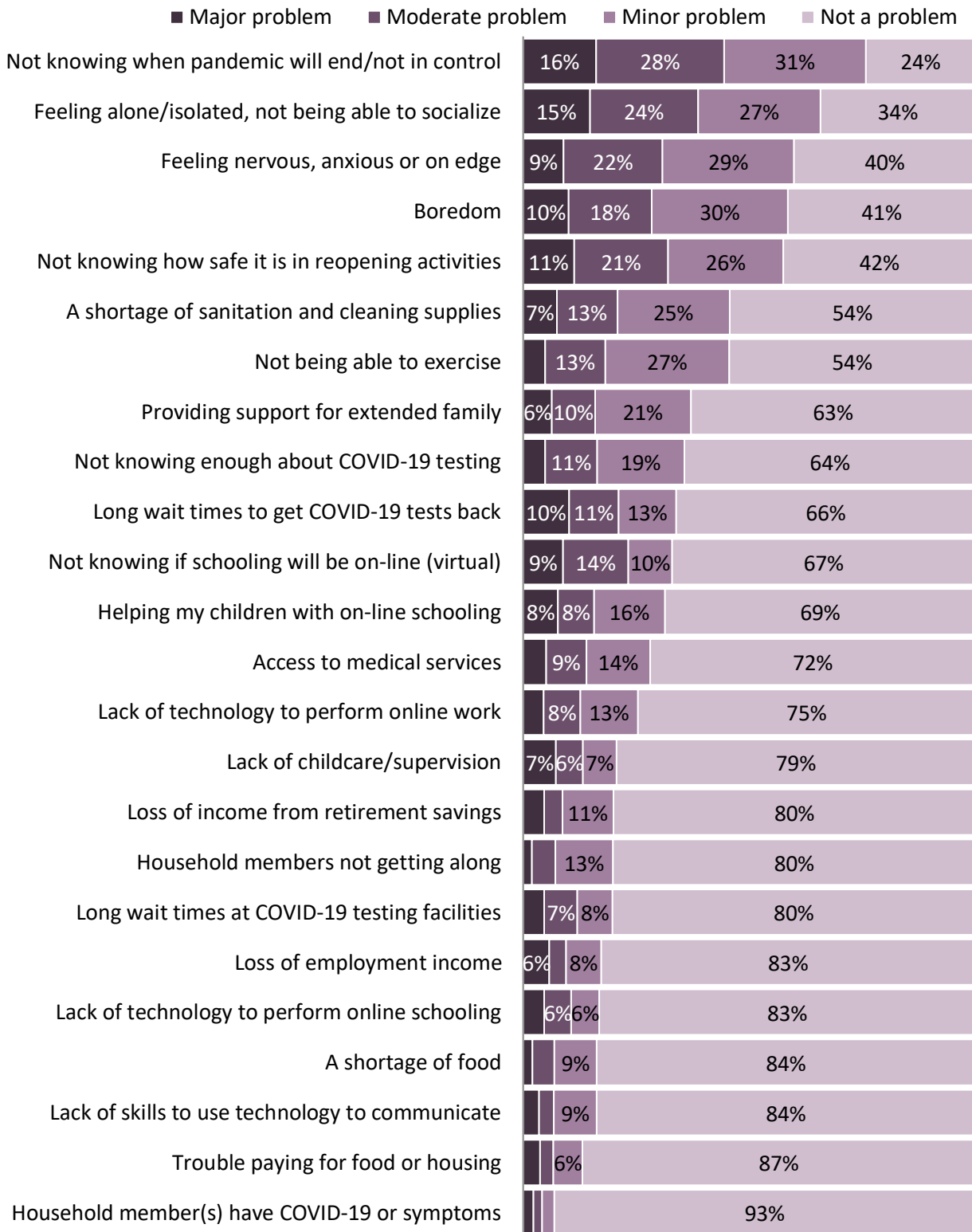
# Special Topics: COVID-19

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed by Congress to protect the American people from the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Through the CARES Act, State, Local, and Tribal governments receive financial assistance to help navigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

While the standard questions from The NCS provide significant information to evaluate COVID-19 impacts on Los Alamos County, additional questions were included in the survey to dig deeper into resident opinions on community reopening and their preferences for managing the local government revenue loss caused by the pandemic.

**FIGURE 37: CURRENT HOUSEHOLD PROBLEMS RELATED TO COVID-19**

*We know the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging in many ways. Please rate how much of a problem, if at all, the following are for your household CURRENTLY:*



Some item wording was truncated due to limitations in chart size. For full wording, please see Complete Survey Responses in *The NCS Technical Appendices* report under separate cover.

**FIGURE 38: SUPPORT FOR CHANGES TO BUSINESS OPERATIONS DUE TO COVID-19**

*How much do you support or oppose the following changes to policies and zoning regulations that will allow businesses to operate differently in the post-COVID-19 recovery:*

