

August 2026

2026 Beverage Container Depot Exit Interview Survey

Survey conducted for Beverage Container Management Board (BCMB) by PRA Inc.



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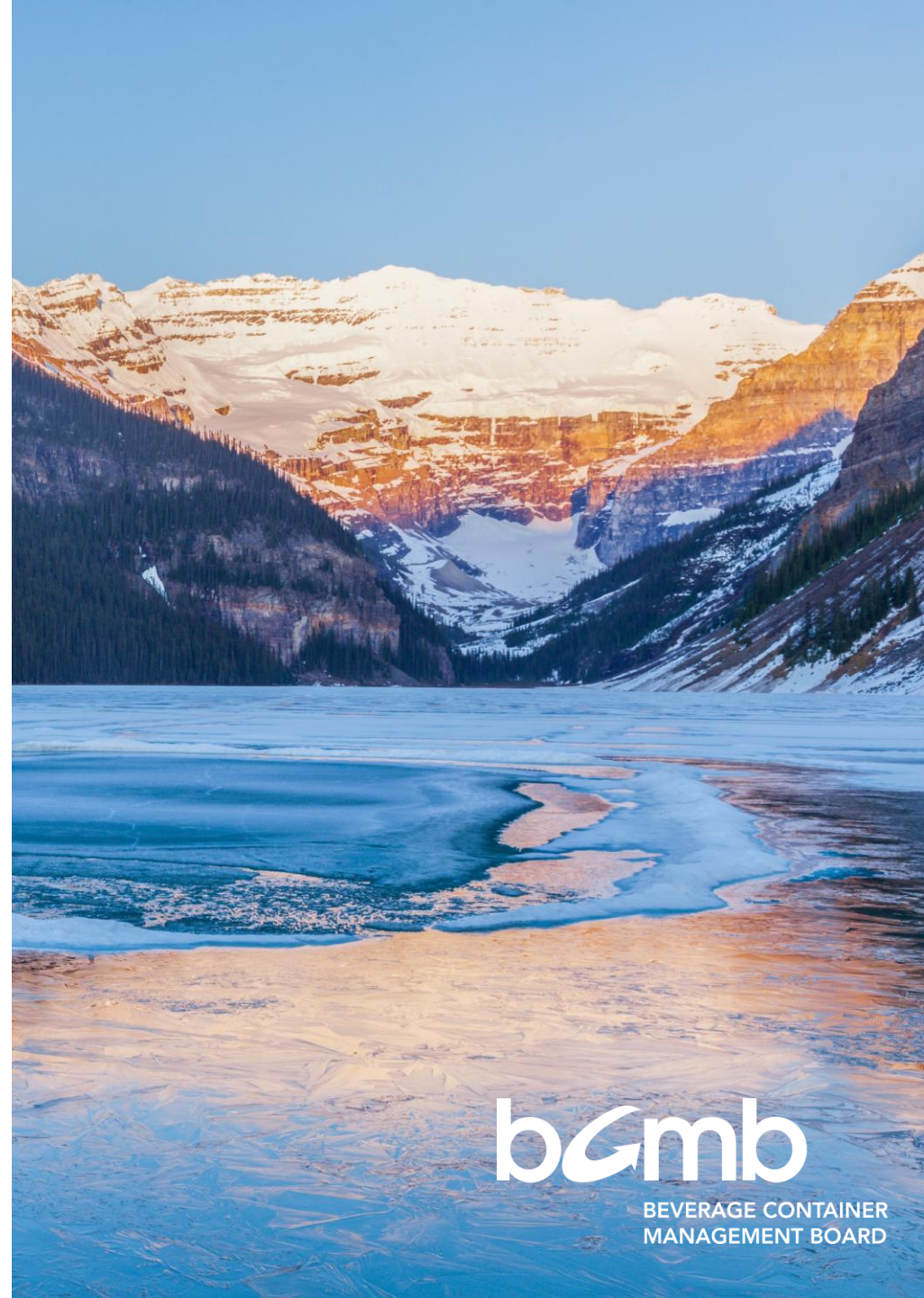
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INTRODUCTION

BCMB conducts bi-annual surveys to measure Albertans' recycling habits and level of satisfaction with bottle depots and the province's beverage container recycling system. Survey data helps BCMB better understand Albertans' recycling behaviours, their experience with bottle depots, and their awareness of Alberta's beverage container recycling system.

In 2026, BCMB engaged PRA to conduct the Depot Exit Interview Survey, using a refreshed set of questions designed to highlight the evolution and progress of Alberta's beverage container recycling system. As the system regulator, BCMB closely monitors system performance to identify areas of success, and opportunities for improvements.

This year, these survey results indicate that Alberta's deposit return system continues to meet the needs of most customers who use it.



METHODOLOGY

- BCMB invited 30 bottle depots across central and northern Alberta to participate in the 2026 Depot Exit Interview Survey, including depots located within 500 kilometres of Edmonton.
- 500 surveys (35%) were collected from Urban Classified Depots, 540 (38%) from Metro Classified Depots and 385 (27%) from Rural Classified Depots for a combined total of 1,425 conducted surveys.
- The survey was conducted both in-person directly at a depot, or online through survey cards supplied by depot employees. All participating depots were supplied with survey cards to hand out to customers (each with a unique survey link). All online participants received the option to enter a random draw for a \$500 cash prize for completing the survey.
- On-site interviewers were scheduled to visit each participating depot once throughout the fielding period; however, if a depot achieved the target number of completions through online surveys, an in-person session was not conducted. Interviewers provided customers with electronic tablets for self-completion of the survey and respondents were given the option of entering the \$500 draw or receiving a \$10 e-gift card of their choice.
- The survey ran from May 20 to July 20, 2026. The target of 60 completed surveys was reached at 15 of the 30 depots and at least 30 completed surveys were achieved at another nine (9) depots. In total, the study resulted in 1,425 completed surveys across all participating depots.

REPORTING NOTES

- All results in this report are presented out of the total n-size (2026, n=1,425; 2024, n=1,123; 2023, n=1,456; 2022, n=1,292; 2021, n=1,357) unless otherwise stated.
- Comparisons to previous years are provided where possible, however, it should be noted that some previous years' surveys were conducted using different methodological approaches. Furthermore, the selected regional area in which participating depots are located is often rotated. For these reasons, year-to-year comparisons should be analyzed with caution.
 - 2021: Online surveys; province-wide.
 - 2022: Online surveys; province-wide.
 - 2023: Mix of online and in-person surveys; Edmonton (and northern) region.
 - 2024: In-person surveys; Calgary region.
 - 2026: Mix of online and in-person surveys; Edmonton (and northern) region.
- Percentages in tables and graphs may not always sum to 100% due to rounding or due to multiple options available for selection.
- In some charts, values of 2% or less are not shown in order to increase readability.
- All differences between groups have a p-value of less than .01 unless otherwise stated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Knowledge and System Awareness

- Approximately half of customers surveyed were aware that the province's 200+ bottle depots are regulated, with a little over half stating that it makes a difference to them that Bottle Depots are regulated.
- When asked what the term "Circular Economy" means, the most common response was keeping materials in use for as long as possible followed by, keeping resources and materials in the economy and out of the environment.

2. Depot Experience

- The survey found strong customer satisfaction with the current depot experience, as more than eight in ten respondents did not identify specific improvements for the depot they visited.
- Approximately seven in ten customers reported spending 10 minutes or less in a depot. Among those who were at the depot for 10 minutes or less, 88% say they were satisfied with the total time spent at the depot.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. Recycling Behavior and Depot Usage

- Those who visited rural depots were more likely than those at urban or metro locations to say they chose to visit the depot because it was the closest one to home.
- Overall, 91% depot customers were satisfied with their recent depot visit, with three in four customers saying they were very satisfied. These results are slightly higher when compared to previous years.
- Nearly half (49%) of respondents return beverage containers to a depot at least once per month, while 40% say that they visit a few times per year.

4. System Improvements and Future Enhancements

- Respondents were generally receptive to additional collection options, with seven in ten indicating they would be likely to use a self-service return option if a depot was not available in their area, including nearly one-third who would be very likely to do so.
- Eight in ten respondents are in favour of placing a deposit on more types of containers so that they can be recycled at a depot, which is similar to 78% the previous year.



SURVEY FINDINGS

Knowledge & System Awareness

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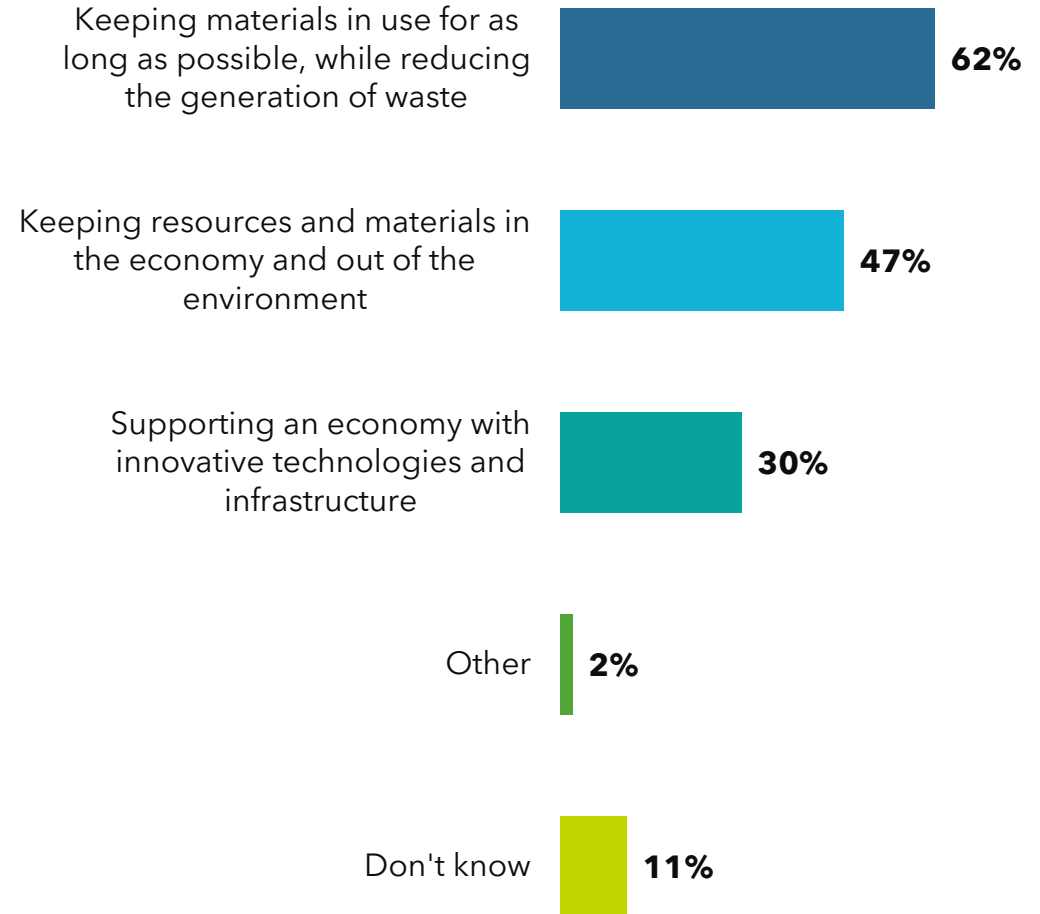
Circular Economy

When customers were asked what “circular economy” means to them, the most common response was “keeping materials in use for as long as possible”, followed by “keeping resources and materials in the economy and out of the environment.”

The findings suggest Albertans most often associate circularity with extending the life of materials and reducing waste.

Demographic insights:

- 71% of customers (specifically between the age of 17 - 29) mentioned that “Circular Economy” means keeping materials in use for as long as possible, while reducing the generation of waste.
- Approximately 13% of customers aged 45 to 64 responded “don’t know.”



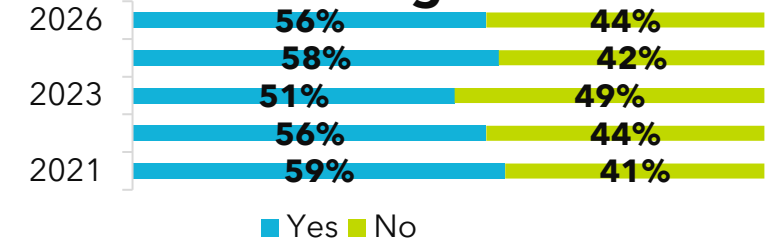
Alberta Depot Regulations

- Awareness of depot regulations was 56%, consistent with results from the previous two survey cycles.
- When asked whether it matters that bottle depots are regulated, 52% of respondents answered yes. Over the past five years, an average of 57% have said that depot regulation matters to them.
- Awareness of container eligibility remains high. Approximately two-thirds of respondents were aware that only beverage containers purchased in Alberta can be returned to an Alberta bottle depot for a refund.

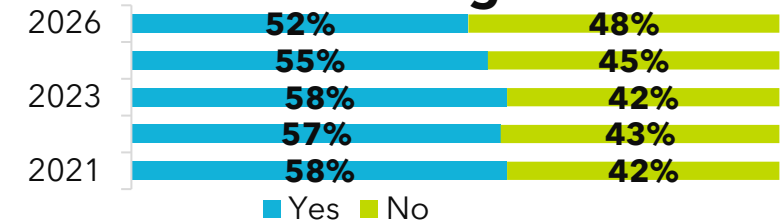
Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in metro areas were more likely than those at urban or rural locations to say that it makes a difference to them whether depots are regulated or not.
- Customers aged 30 to 64 reported highest overall awareness of that only registered containers purchased in Alberta can be returned to an Alberta Depot at an average of 69%.

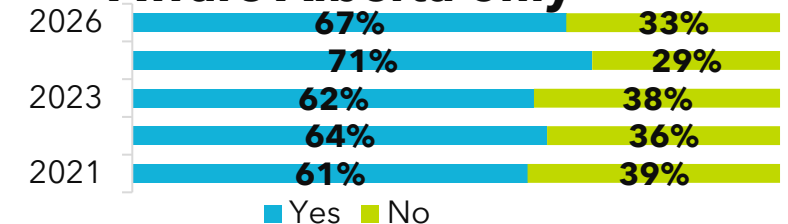
Aware of regulations



Care about regulations



Aware Alberta only



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Q25: Before this survey, did you know that all bottle depots in Alberta are regulated?

Q26: Does it make a difference to you whether or not bottle depots are regulated?

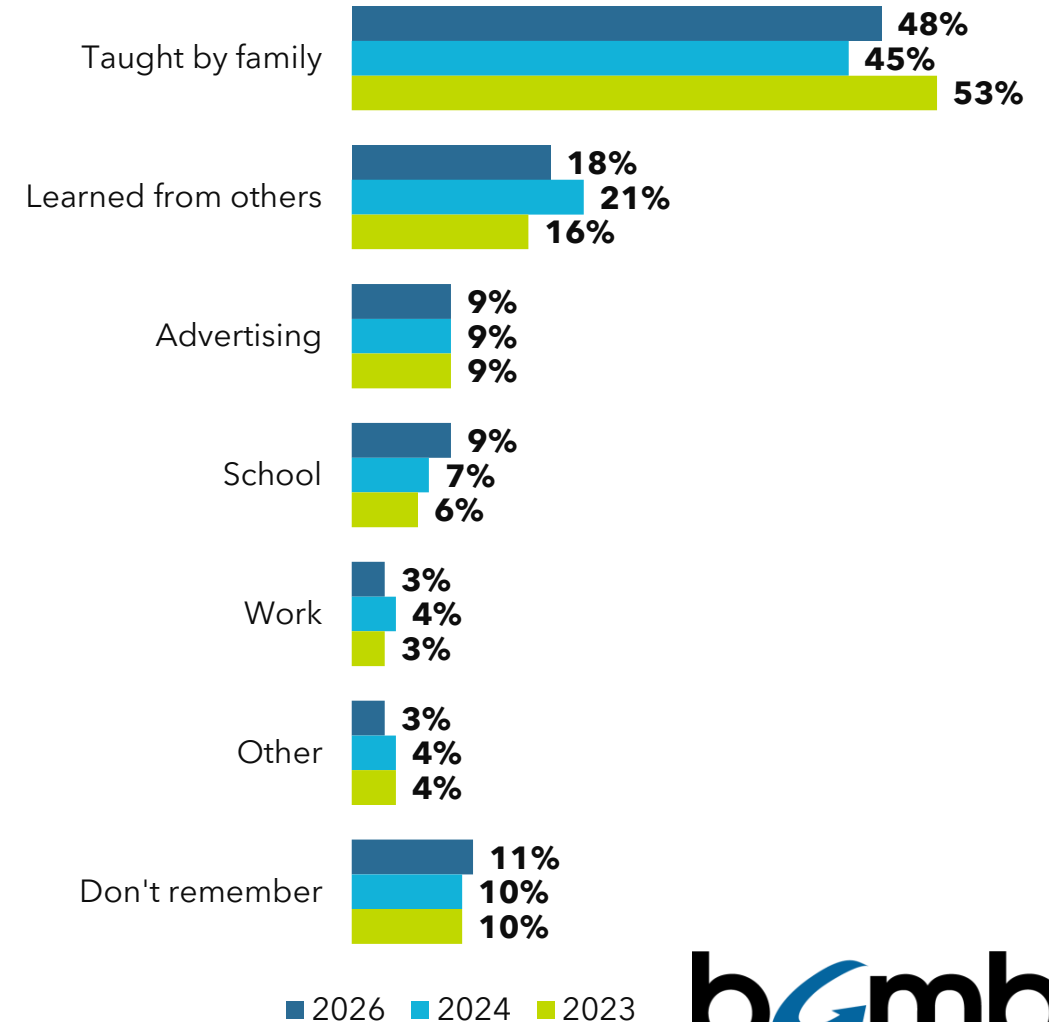
Q27: Before this survey, were you aware that only registered beverage containers purchased in Alberta are eligible to be returned to an Alberta bottle depot for a refund?

Knowledge of Recycling Depots

When customers were asked how they first learned to return beverage containers for a refund, just under half said they were taught by family, while 18% learned from others. These results underscore the importance of family, community, and word-of-mouth in shaping recycling behaviours.

Demographic insights:

- The younger a customer is, the more likely they are to say that they were taught by family to take containers back to a depot.
- Customers aged 45 and older are more likely to have learned from advertising than younger customers. (45 to 64 reported 10% and 65 and older reported 17%).
- Those who visited depots in urban areas are more likely to say they were taught by family, while those in metro areas were more likely to say they learned by suggestions from others or advertising they saw.



SURVEY FINDINGS

Depot Experience

Time Spent at a Depot

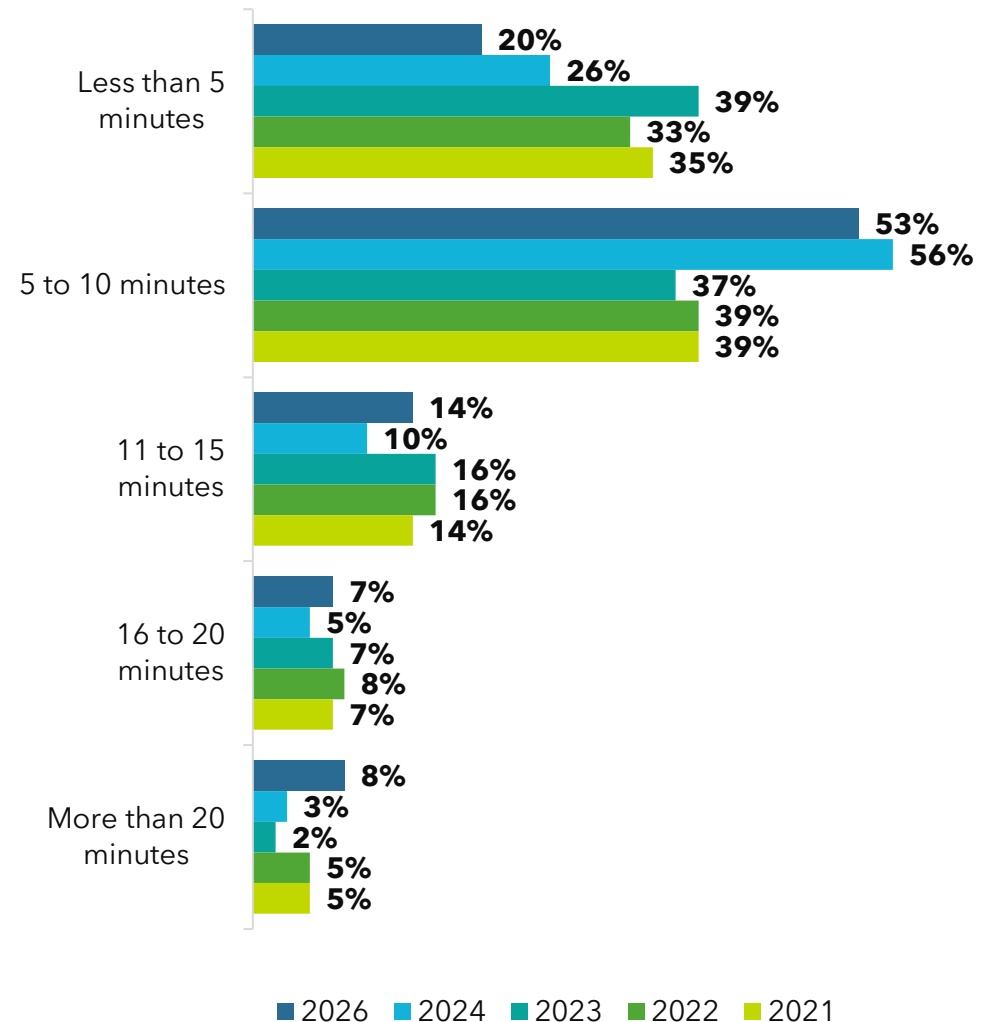
- Over seven in ten customers say they spent 10 minutes or less at the depot during their recent visit, including 20% who visited for less than five minutes.

The proportion visiting for less than five minutes is down from 26% last year, while the proportion visiting for more than 20 minutes increased from 3% to 8%.

- In 2026, the average time spent at a depot was 11 minutes. Most customers completed their return in 10 minutes or less, although visit times were somewhat longer than in recent survey years.

Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in urban areas were more likely than those at metro or rural locations to say that their visit took more than 10 minutes.



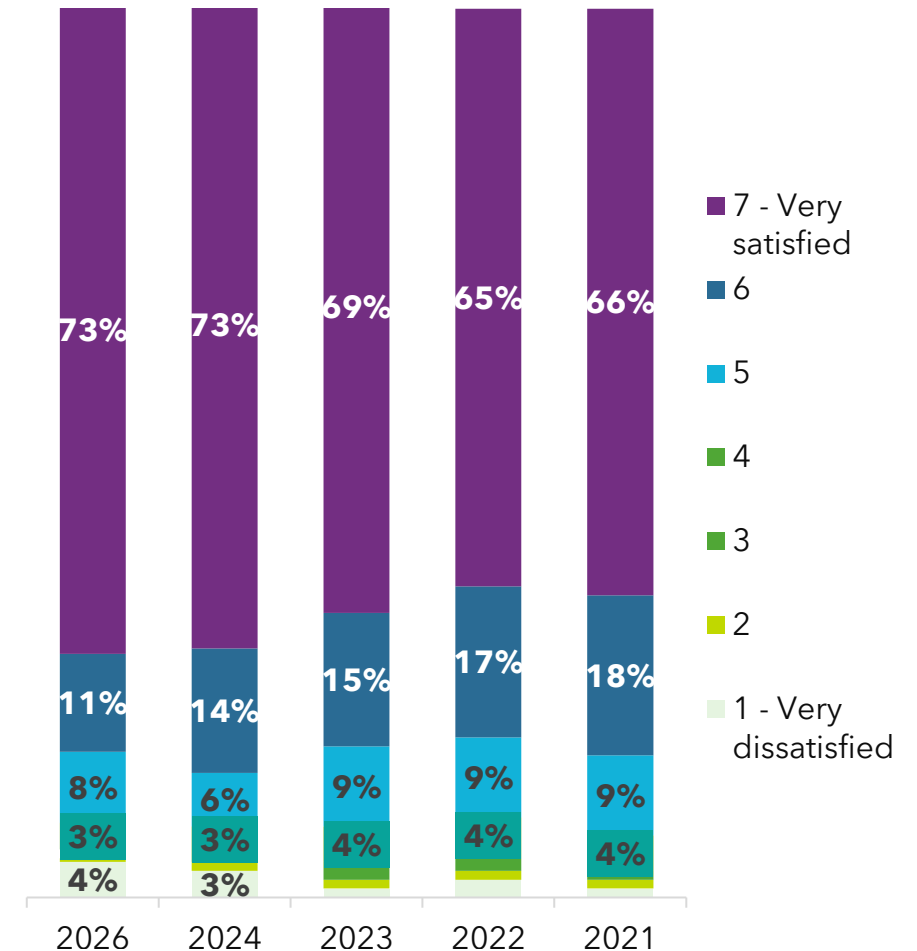
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Time Spent at a Depot

- Generally, depot customers were satisfied with the amount of time they spent at the depot. These results are similar to previous years.
- Wait times remain a key driver of customer satisfaction. Customers who spent less than five minutes at a depot reported 90% satisfaction with their visit time, compared with 64% among those who spent more than 15 minutes at the depot.
- Among those who were at the depot for 10 minutes or less, 88% say they were satisfied with the total time spent at the depot. This suggests that convenience and efficient service remain important considerations as the system continues to evolve.

Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in rural areas were more likely than those at urban or metro locations to say they were satisfied with the amount of time they spent at the depot.



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Q3. Using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 7 is very satisfied, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of time you spent in the depot, from the time you entered the depot to the time you received your refund?

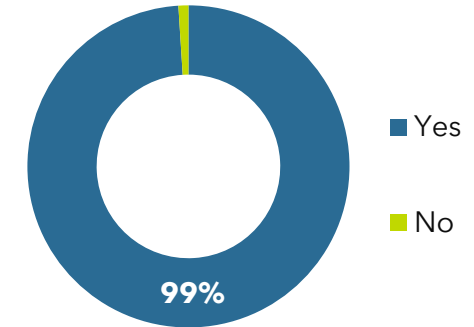
Receiving Payment

- Under BCMB's Depot By-law, customers are entitled to have their deposit refunded when they return eligible beverage containers. Survey results indicate this expectation is being met, with virtually all respondents reporting they received payment on the same day as their return. Of the 1,425 customers surveyed, only 13 reported otherwise. The survey did not examine the reasons for those responses.
- The majority of customers received cash payments, while just under one third received ATM tickets. Two received payment by e-transfer. Two customers did not expect to receive payment, and one did not know.
- Out of 1,425 surveys, six costumers exiting the depots reported to donating their deposit or a portion of their deposit to a charity.

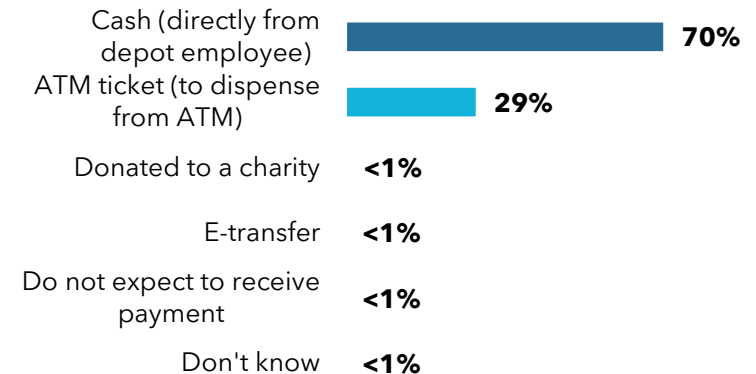
Demographic insights:

- Customers who visited depots in rural areas were much more likely than those who visited urban or metro depots to receive cash payments.

Received payment same day



Type of Same-Day Payment



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Q5. Did you receive a refund payment for your returned beverage containers today?

Q7. What type of payment did you / do you expect to receive?

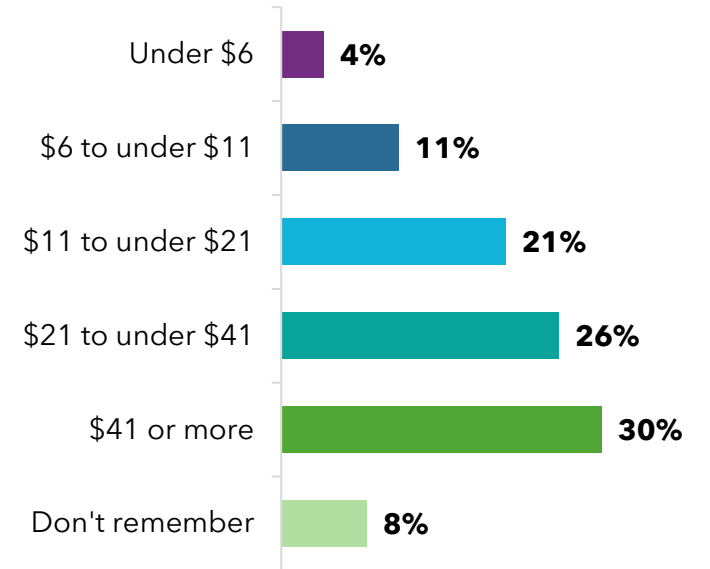
Return Amount and Accuracy

- The majority of depot customers received a refund somewhere between \$11 and \$41, with nearly one-third receiving a refund of \$41 or more.
- Similar to previous years, nearly all depot customers claim that their received refund amount was accurate. In 2026, 30 respondents (2%) claimed their refund was less than it should have been, while 15 (1%) believe they received too much.
- The reported average refund amount in 2026 was \$40.08.

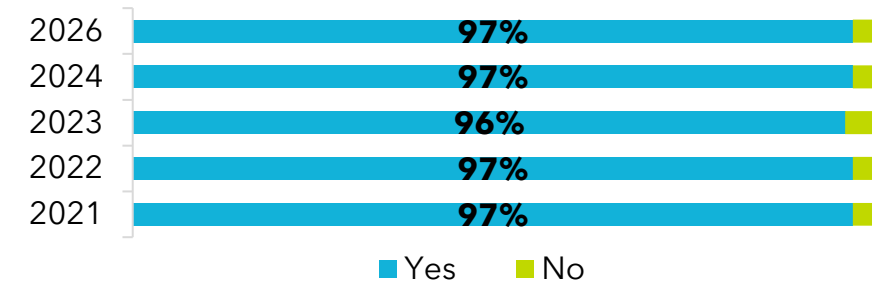
Demographic insights:

- Generally, customers 65 and older and those living in an apartment or condo were more likely to have received a smaller refund.
- Customers who visited depots in rural areas received a higher refund than those who visited urban or metro depots.

Refund amount



Accurate refund



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Q8. How much did you receive for a refund during this visit?*

Q9. Do you believe your refund was accurate?*

SURVEY FINDINGS

Recycling Behaviors & Depot Usage



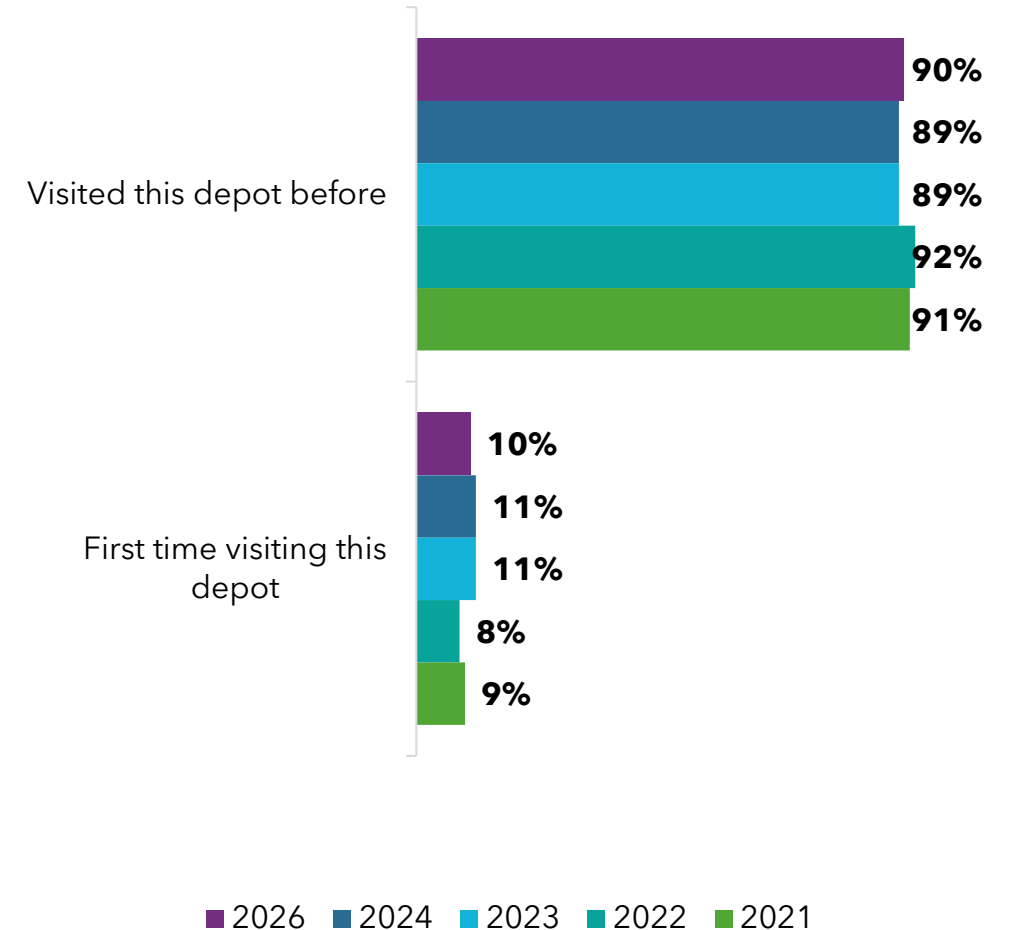
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Returning and Destination Depot Visits

Similar to results from previous years, the majority of customers visited a depot that they had been to before.

Demographic insights:

- As customers get older, they become increasingly likely to return to the same depot, with first-time visits becoming less common among older age groups.
- Returning to a depot was otherwise consistent across gender, dwelling type, and depot classification.

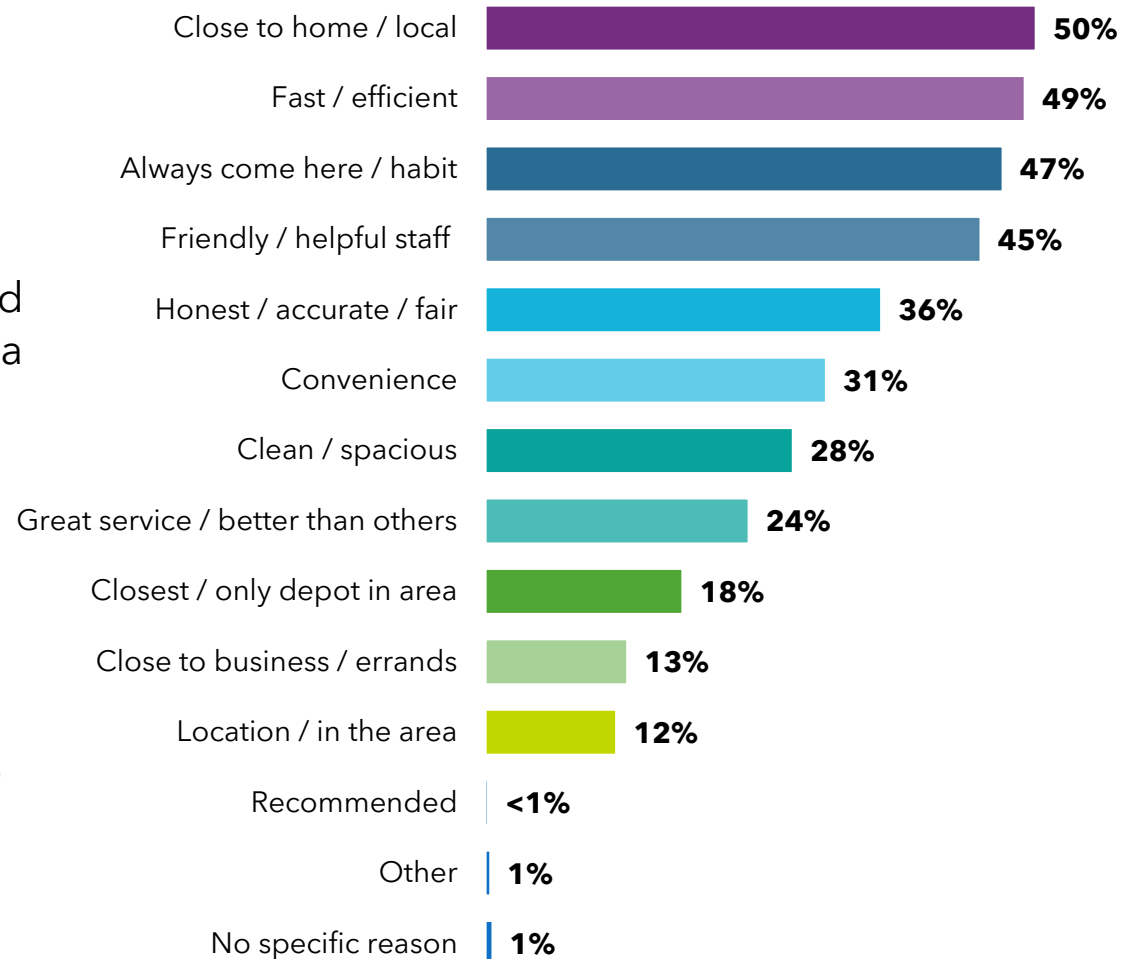


Reason for Visit

- Convenience remains a key factor in depot choice, with customers most often selecting a depot because it was close to home or offered fast and efficient service
- While location and efficiency were important factors, many customers also valued consistency and service. Nearly half said they always visit the same depot, and 45% cited good staff as a reason for choosing that location. The findings suggest that convenience and positive service experiences are both important to customers, regardless of how containers are collected and processed.

Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in rural areas were more likely than those at urban or metro locations to say they chose to visit the depot because it was the closest one to home.
- Customers 65 and older were most likely to say they chose to visit the depot because it was fast/efficient.



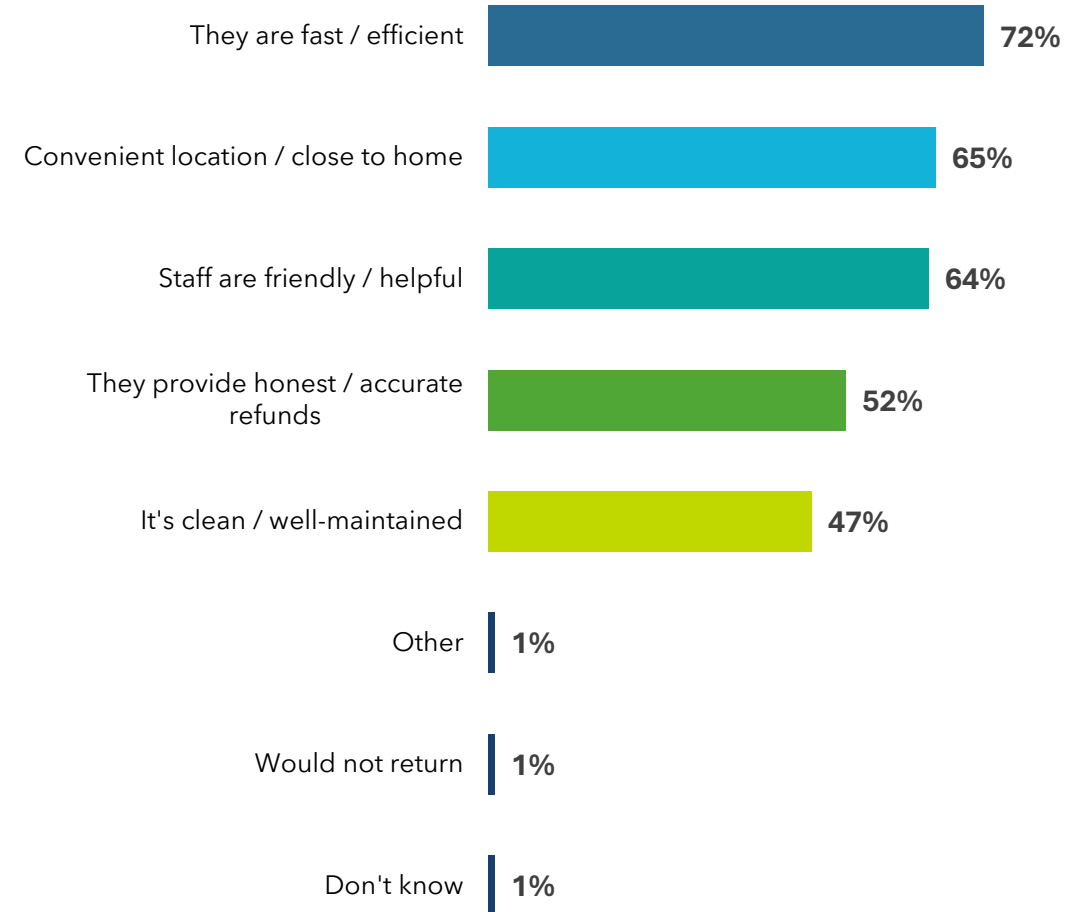
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Reason for Returning

- Customers most often cited fast and efficient service, convenient locations, and friendly, helpful staff as reasons they would return to a depot. Rural customers were particularly likely to value friendly and helpful staff. As Alberta's beverage container recycling system evolves, the findings suggest customers value both convenience and positive service experiences.

Demographic insights:

- Customers who visited a rural depot were more likely to say they chose to visit the depot because they have friendly and/or helpful staff.



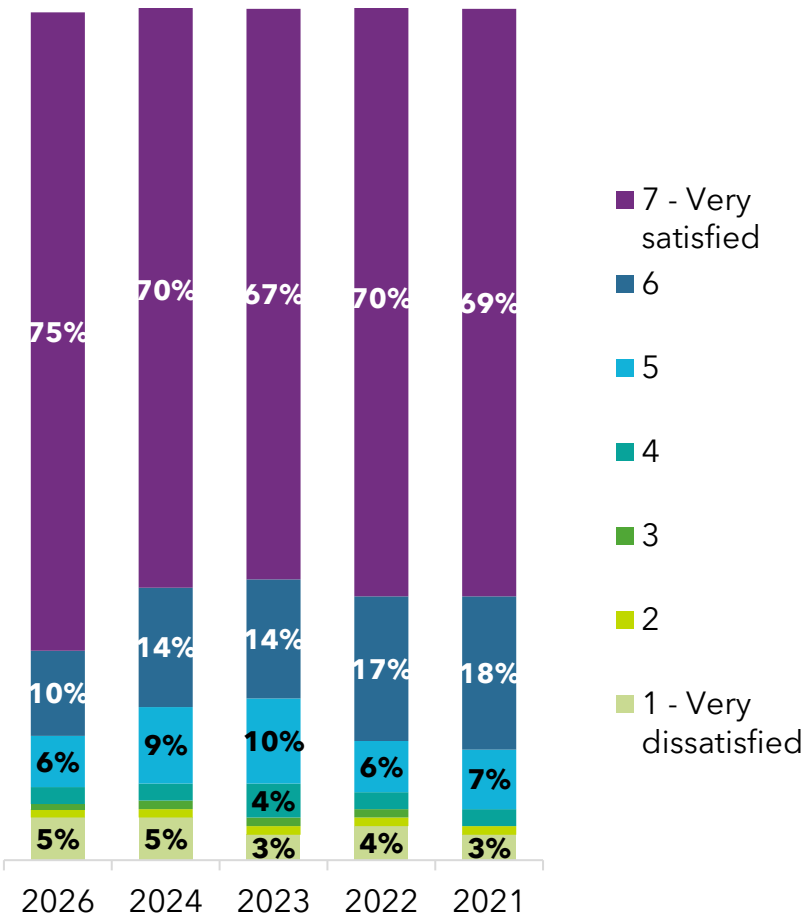
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Overall Satisfaction with a Depot

- Overall, 91% depot customers were satisfied with their recent depot visit, with three out of four customers saying they were very satisfied. These results are slightly up from previous years.
- Satisfaction with time spent at the depot appears to be highly correlated with overall satisfaction, as 94% of those satisfied with their time spent at the depot were also satisfied with their overall visit. In comparison, only 14% of those dissatisfied with their time spent at the depot were still satisfied with their overall visit.

Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in rural areas were more likely than those at urban or metro locations to say they were satisfied with the overall experience at the depot.
- Customers 65 and older were more likely to be dissatisfied with their overall experience than those younger.



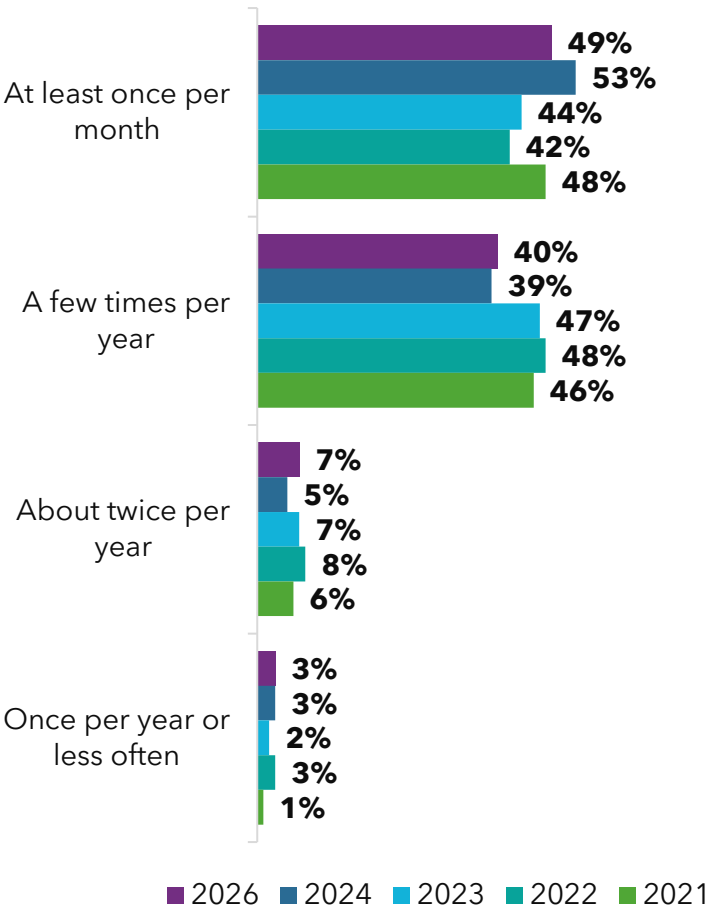
Q2. Using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 7 is very satisfied, how would you rate your overall experience at this depot today?

Frequency of Depot Visits

- Roughly half (49%) of respondents said that they visit a bottle depot to return beverage containers at least once per month, while 40% say that they visit a few times per year.
- Customers are less likely to have visited at least once a month than in 2024.

Demographic insights:

- Customers living in an apartment or condo were more likely to return empty beverage containers at least once per month.
- Customers returning to urban and metro depots were also more likely to return empty beverage containers at least once per month.



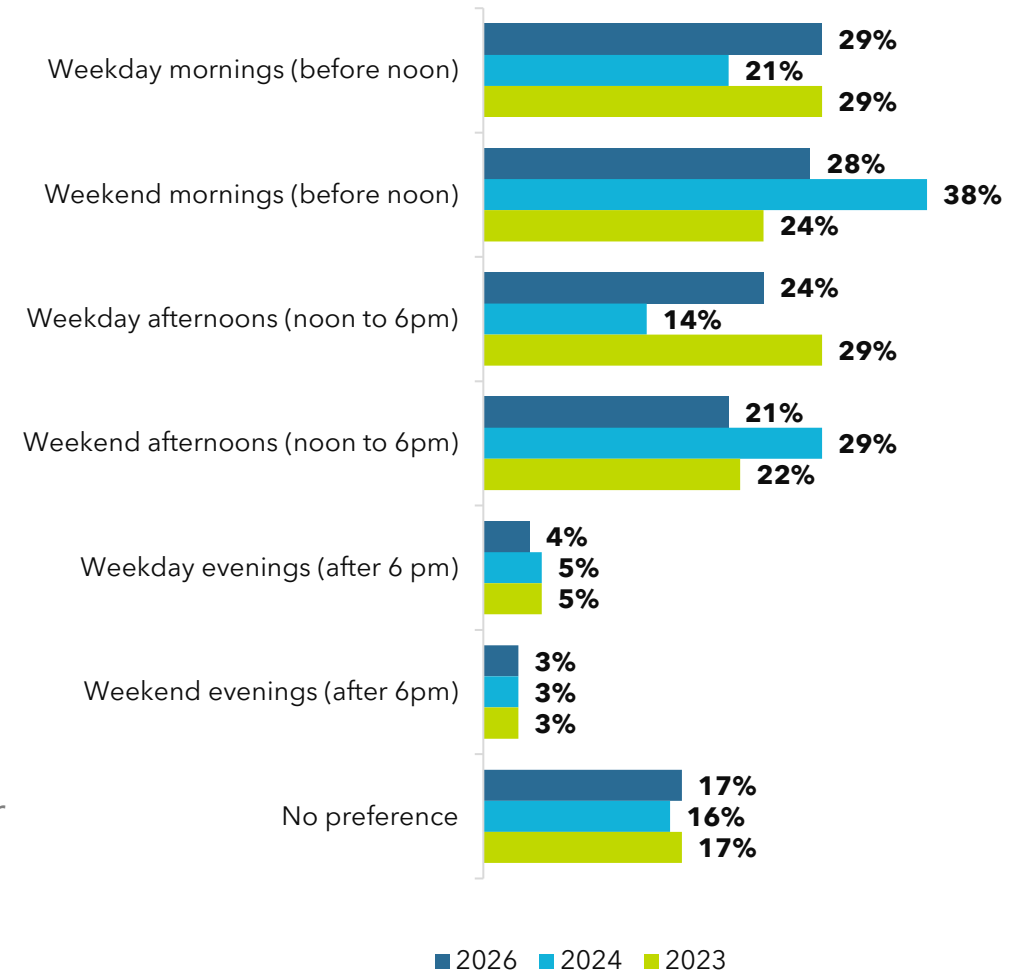
Q14: About how often do you return empty beverage containers to be bottle depot in a typical year?

Preferred time for Depot Visits

- The most common times respondents say they prefer visiting a depot is in the mornings, either on a weekday or over the weekend.
- There is very little preference in visiting in *the evening*, regardless of the day of the week, however, this is likely because many depots are not open during this time.

Demographic insights:

- Those under 65 were more likely to say their preferred time to visit was weekend mornings or afternoons, while those 65 and over were more likely to prefer weekday mornings.
- Metro depot customers were more likely than urban or rural customers to prefer weekend mornings and less likely to prefer weekday mornings or afternoons.
- Men were more likely to say their preferred time to visit was weekend mornings compared to women.



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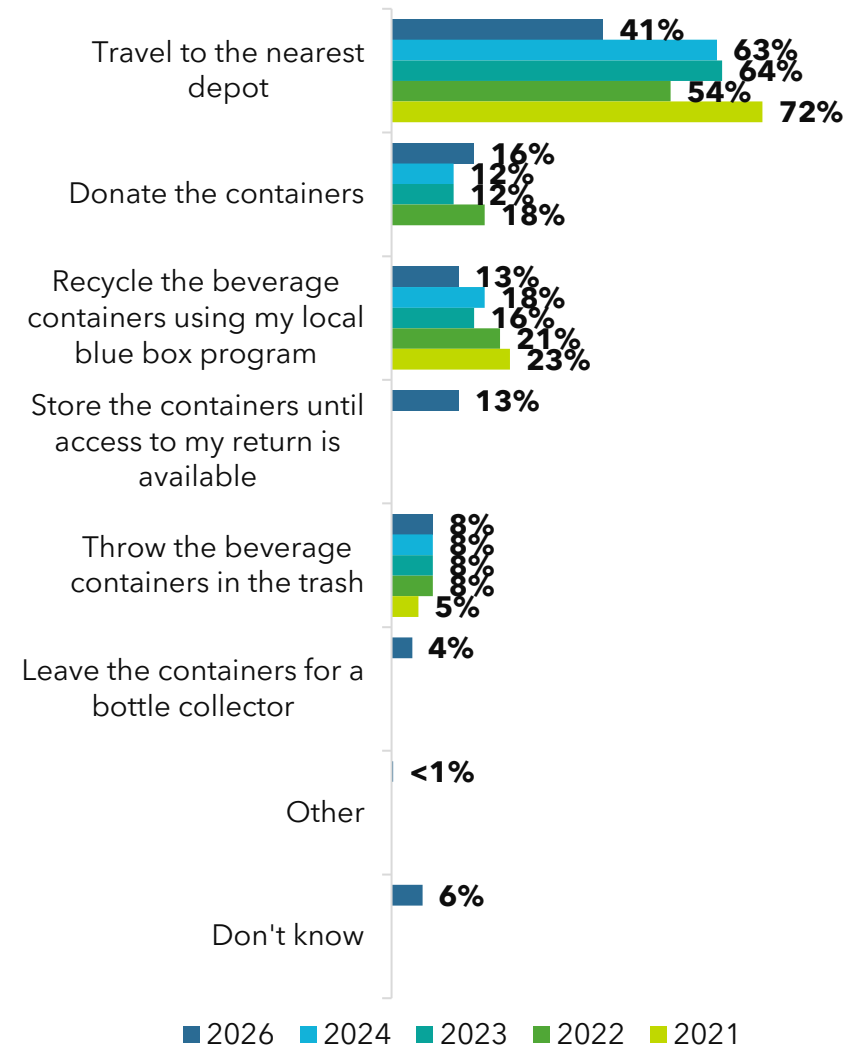
Willingness to travel to Depots

- Four in ten respondents say that they would be willing to travel to the nearest depot to return beverage containers if there were no recycling depots nearby. Comparatively, just 8% of respondents would throw them in the trash, highlighting Albertans' strong commitment to recycling and recovering beverage containers.
 - Data for 2026 has unique comparisons to previous survey cycles as answers such as store containers, leaving containers for bottle collector and don't know where added as options for survey participants.
- Still, the proportion willing to travel to the nearest depot declined compared with previous survey years; many respondents indicated they would seek alternatives to disposal, including storing containers until access to a return option becomes available. The findings also suggest a continued willingness among Albertans to recycle rather than discard beverage containers.

Demographic insights:

- Rural depot customers were more likely to be willing to travel to the nearest depot to return their beverage containers than urban or metro customers. The findings suggest customer expectations around convenience may vary by region, with urban and metro customers placing greater importance on nearby and accessible return options.

Disposal of containers



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Q28: If you did not have a depot in your local community, or a close neighboring community and there were not beverage container collection services available in your area, what would you most likely do with your recyclable beverage containers?

SURVEY FINDINGS

System Improvement and Future Enhancements



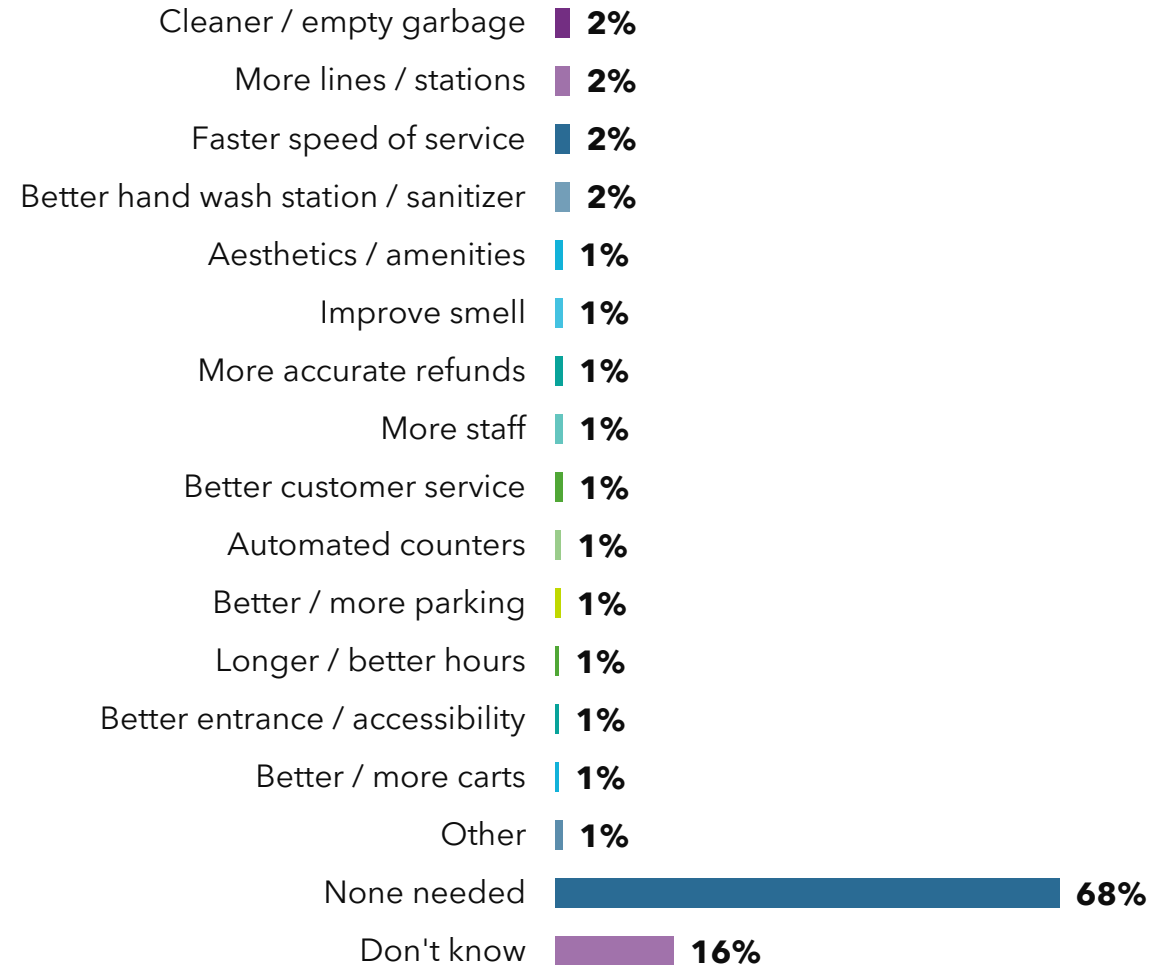
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Suggestions for Improvement

- The survey found strong satisfaction with customers' most recent depot experience, with more than eight in ten respondents unable to identify a specific improvement for the depot they visited. The findings reflect the strong foundation of Alberta's long-established depot network while also providing a benchmark against which future improvements can be measured.
- Among those who provided a suggestion, the most common improvements were cleaner/empty garbage, more lines/stations, faster speed of service, and better hand wash station/sanitizer (each suggested by 2% of customers).

Demographic insights:

- Those who visited depots in rural areas were more likely than those at urban or metro locations to suggest that there were no improvements needed.



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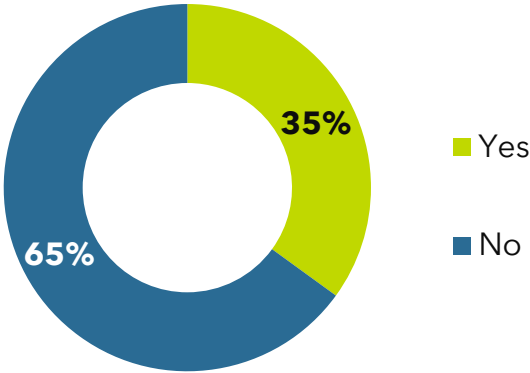
Issues with Returns

- Understanding container eligibility remains important. More than one-third of respondents reported attempting to return a container that could not be accepted in the past year.
- 87% said they received an explanation from depot staff, most often because the container was not an eligible container type.
 - The most common reason was that the container was not an eligible container type (77%).

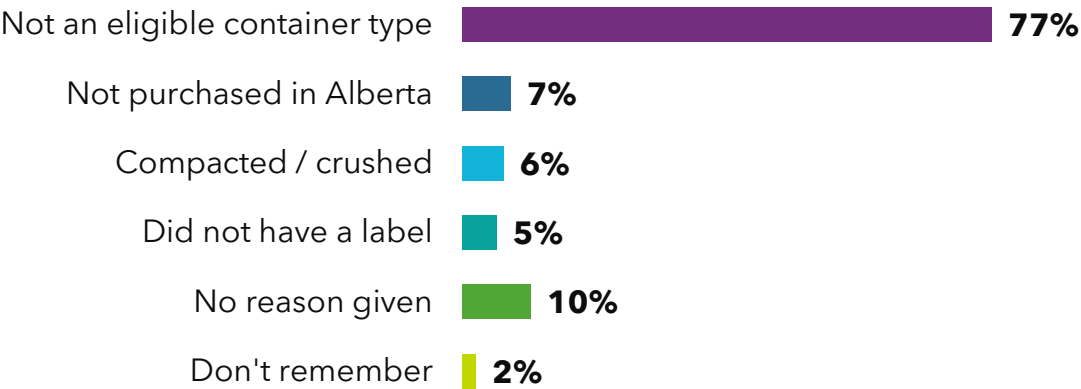
Demographic insights:

- There were no significant differences across demographic groups, respondents aged 18 to 29 were slightly more likely to report attempting to return a container that was not accepted.

Unaccepted returns in past year



Reason given



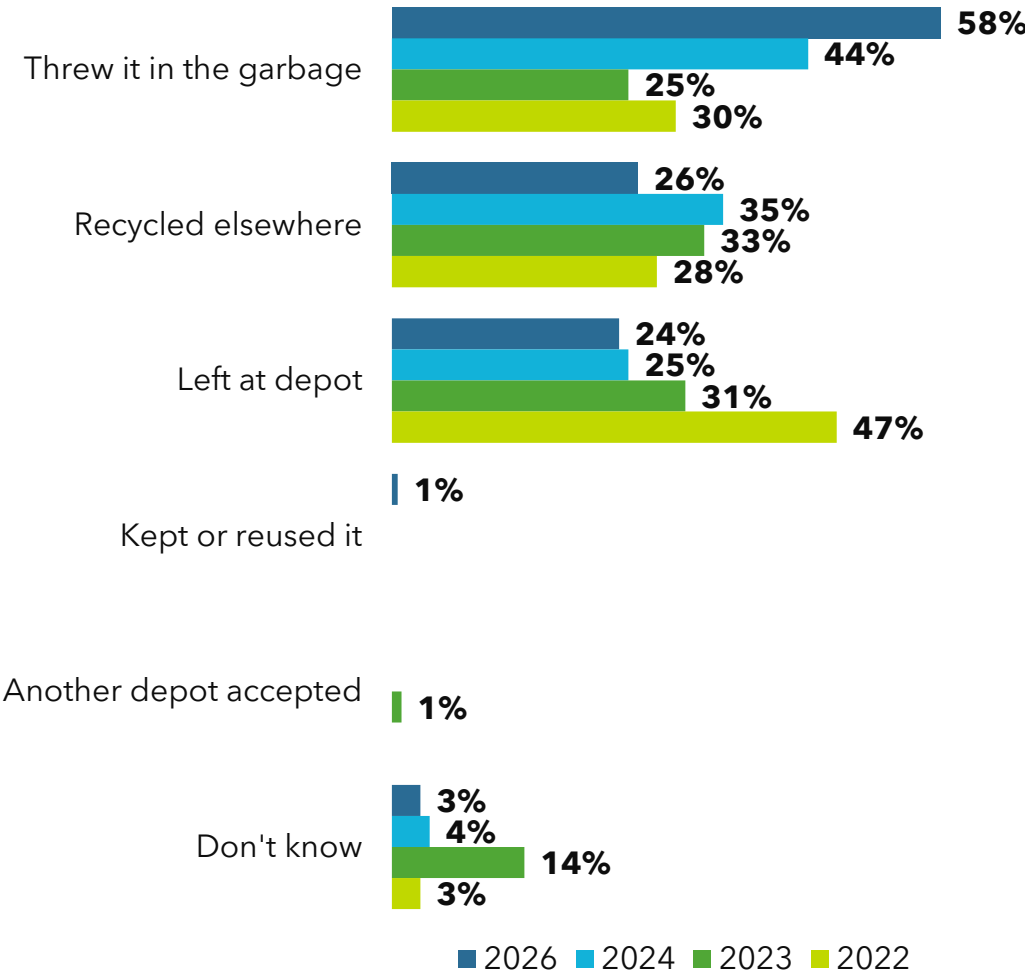
*Q22. In the past year, have you brought back a container to a depot that the depot worker would not accept?
Q23. Did the depot worker explain why they could not accept the container?**

Disposing of Non-refunded Containers

- In 2026, of those who brought back a container that was not accepted, 58% of respondents threw it in the garbage, 26% recycled it elsewhere, and 24% left it at the depot.
- There are some changes in results from the previous year, most notably, an increase in respondents who threw it in the garbage.

Demographic insights:

- Customers 18-29 were least likely to recycle the container elsewhere.



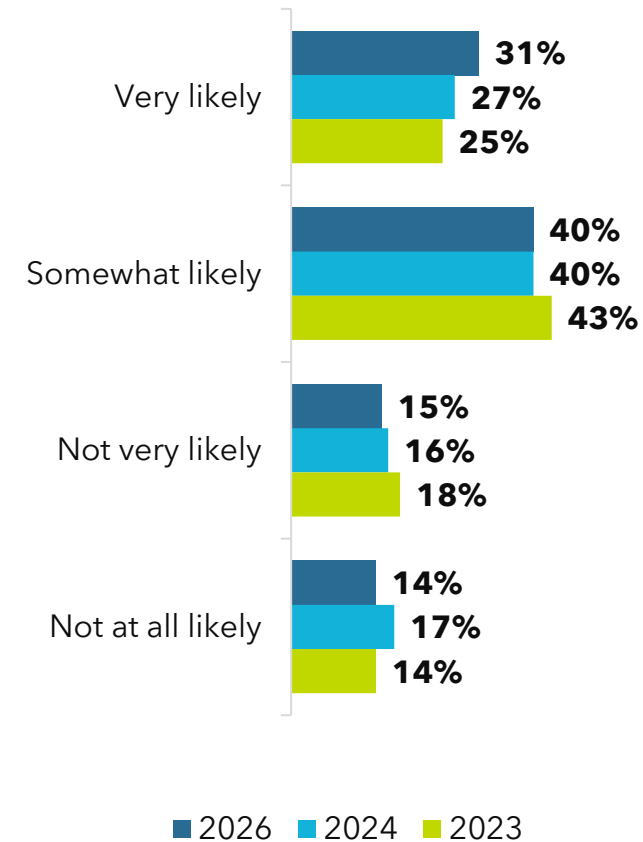
Q24: What did you (or plan to) do with the container(s) the depot would not accept?

Likelihood of using automated Collection Station

- Overall, respondents appear to be in favour of using self-serve automated collection stations to return beverage containers if there were no depots in their area.
- Seven in ten say they would be likely to use an unmanned automated collection station, including just under one-third who say they would be very likely.

Demographic insights:

- Customers 65 and older were less likely to say they would use an unmanned automated collection station to return beverage containers than those under 65.



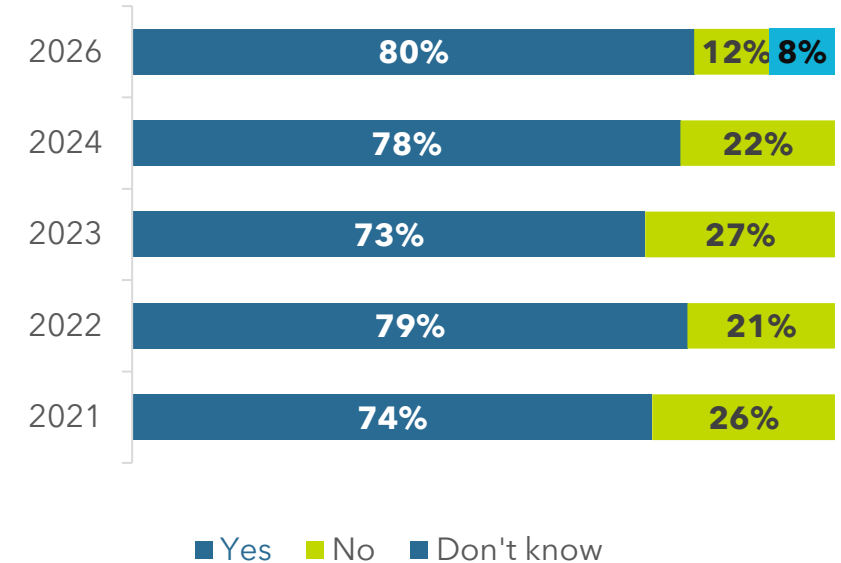
Q29: Similarly, if you did not have access to a bottle depot near you, how willing would be to use an unmanned automated, collection station to return your beverage containers (for example, a self-serve collection point where you can return containers and receive you refund immediately)?

Preference for Expanded Eligibility

- 80% of recent depot customers are in favour of placing a deposit on more types of containers so that they can be recycled at a depot, which is slightly higher when compared to the 78% the previous year.

Demographic insights:

- Customers 13 to 17 were less likely to say they would support placing a deposit on more types of containers compared to those 18 and older.



Q30: Would you support placing a deposit on more types of containers (such as cooking oil or windshield fluid), so they could be returned to a depot for refund and recycling?

SURVEY FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Costumers Surveyed

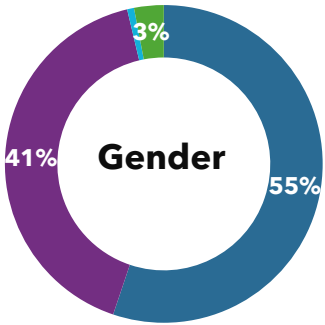


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Who We Heard From

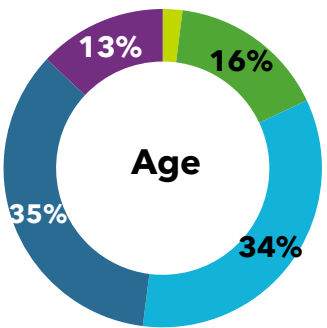
n= 1,425

55% male



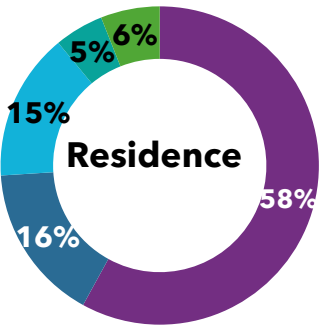
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- No response

35% 45 to 64



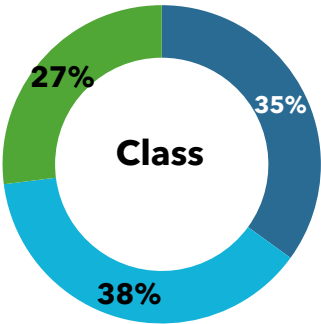
- 13 to 17
- 18 to 29
- 30 to 44
- 45 to 64
- 65 and older
- No response

58% single-family home



- Single-family detached house
- Multi-family home
- Apartment or condo
- Other
- No response

38% metro



- Urban
- Metro
- Rural
- No response



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Q31: What describes your primary residence?
Q32: What gender do you most closely identify with?



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Enhancing tomorrow, for Alberta.

