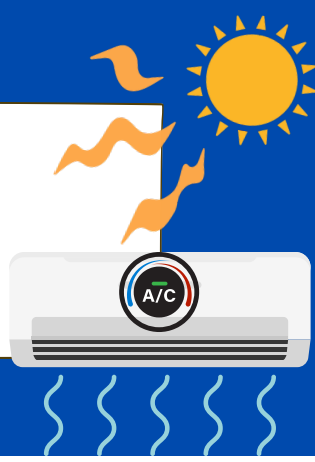


# A Report to the Dwight Community<sup>1</sup>



The Dwight Urban Heat Study conducted focus groups and a survey among Dwight residents about how they experience summer heat and potential solutions. The goal was to uncover insights from residents that will help the community keep cool in the summer through neighborhood improvements and new policies and programs.

## The problem of summer urban heat

Summer heat is worsened by climate change and can cause health problems. Heat exposure can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke and can aggravate chronic conditions like asthma. It can also trigger severe health events like heart attack or kidney failure. Cities are hotter than surrounding areas due to the absence of green space and because buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb heat. Within cities, low-income Black and Brown communities are often the hottest. These communities face challenges to keeping cool due to poverty, lack of investment, and historical racist housing policies.

## Study background

This study of longer-term Dwight residents consisted of five focus groups with 36 total participants and a survey of 270 respondents. The study addressed the following questions:

**What neighborhood cooling solutions would community members like to see?**

**How important a concern is hot weather for Dwight residents?**

**How does home AC affect how Dwight residents experience heat?**

**What health effects from heat do Dwight residents experience?**

**Where do Dwight residents go to stay cool?**

**How are Dwight residents exposed to heat and what are barriers to staying cool?**



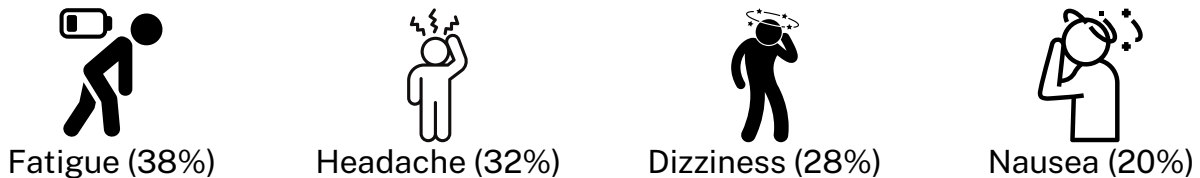
<sup>1</sup> The study was conducted by collaborators from the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health, the Yale Urban Design Workshop, and the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE), and it was funded by Yale Planetary Solutions.

## Hot weather as a concern for Dwight residents

More than 75% of survey participants shared that hot weather is an extremely or very important concern for themselves and for the neighborhood. These responses show that New Haven policymakers should prioritize supporting community efforts to address summer heat in Dwight.

## Health effects of heat experienced by Dwight residents

Study participants recognized that people with preexisting medical conditions, older adults, children, individuals experiencing menopause, and people who are unhoused are especially vulnerable to heat. Overall, 70% of survey participants shared they experience at least one symptom on hot days, such as:



In addition to physical health impacts, focus group participants described experiencing mental health effects of heat, such as feelings of violence, aggression, anxiety, and exhaustion.



## How Dwight residents are exposed to heat and challenges to staying cool

The following are the most common ways Dwight community members are exposed to heat:

Source of heat exposure	% of survey respondents	Focus group quote
Home gets very hot	47%	<i>“I go to my girlfriend house ‘cause she’s got an AC in the living room. And she’s got an AC in the bedroom.”</i>
Working outdoors or in a hot indoor environment	21%	<i>“Pretty much you just gotta bear the heat,”</i>
Need to walk outdoors	21%	<i>“[Elderly people] can barely walk and they have to walk slow in that heat.”</i>
Need to wait at a bus stop	19%	<i>“...most of the bus stops are not shaded...and then you...doing at least 45 minutes to 30 in direct sunlight.”</i>

Focus group participants identified barriers to staying cool:

- Scarce trees and shade: *“Dwight feels hotter because it’s less trees...”*
- Living on the upper floor: *“It’s just so hot up there... that plays a factor.”*
- Being unhoused: *“I just walk, walk... Walk and stay dehydrated. Know my safe zone.”*
- Being a renter: *“When I asked for one [air conditioning from my landlord], they gave me a box fan.”*

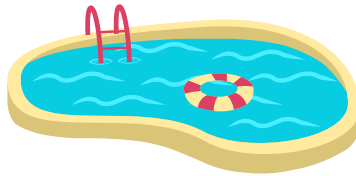
Not having air conditioning (AC) and the cost of running AC were also raised as barriers (see below).

## Where Dwight residents go to stay cool

One-third of survey participants said they always or often leave their home to stay cool when it is hot outside, with another third sometimes leaving their home. The most common places they reported going are:



Park (28%)



Swimming pool (21%)



Library/museum (19%)

Focus group participants also highlighted air-conditioned buses, homes of friends and family, and neighborhood stores with AC as cooling destinations.

## How home AC affects Dwight residents’ experiences with heat

40% of survey participants reported not having AC at home, and even residents with AC described concerns:



It costs too much (30%)



It doesn’t cool down my home enough (22%)

The high cost of AC was also emphasized by focus group participants: *“You have to pay [the] bill then you have no choice 'cause, uh, you're gonna do anything... to keep yourself comfortable. But it shouldn't be a burden...”*

The survey showed that people without AC at home were much more likely to report:<sup>2</sup>

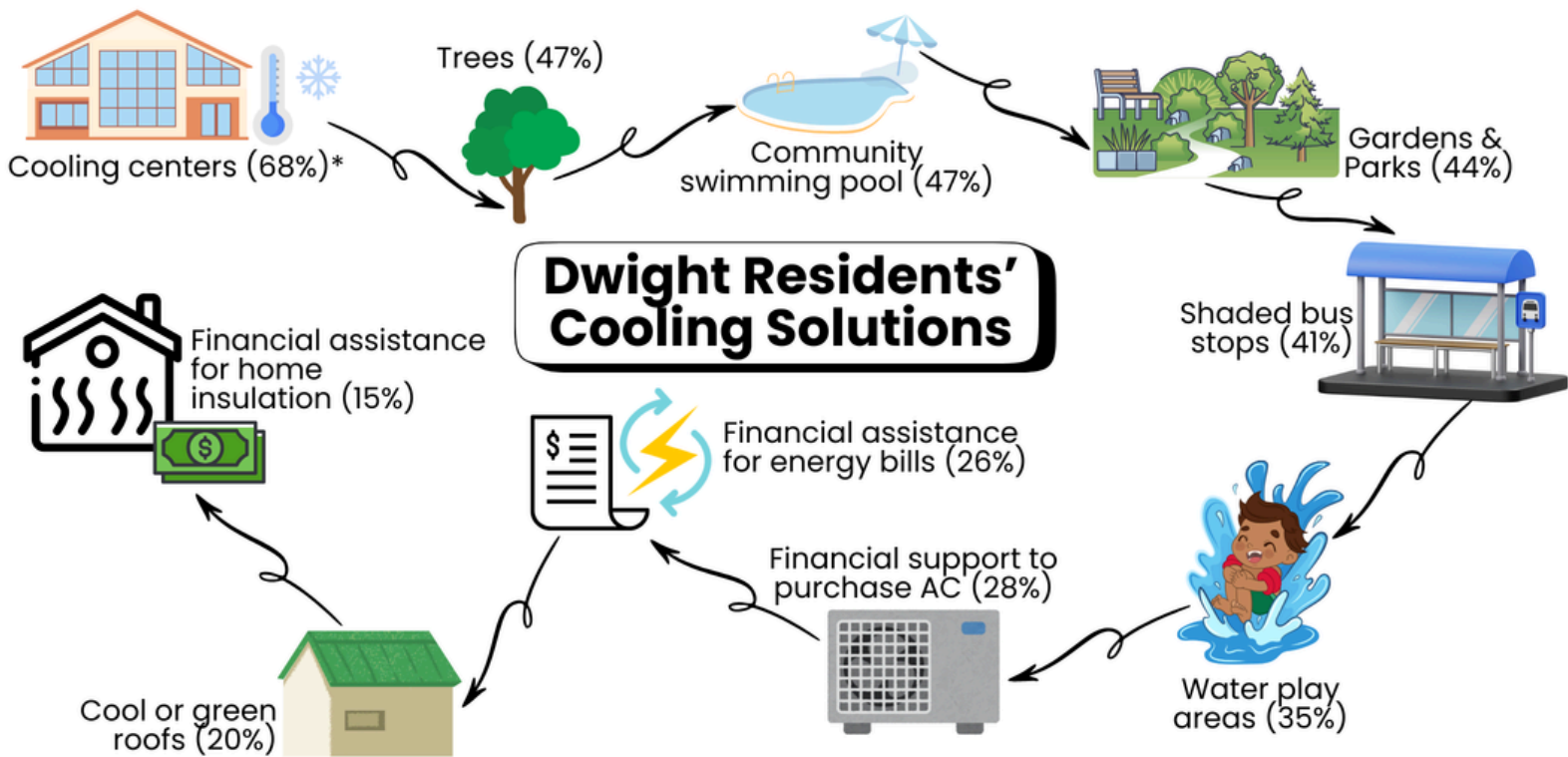
- Hot weather as an extremely or very important personal concern
- Experiencing symptoms on hot days
- Feeling too hot at home during hot weather
- Leaving home to stay cool
- Lack of confidence in being able to find a cool place to get out of the heat

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, survey participants without home AC (compared to survey participants with AC) were: 2.0 times more likely to report hot weather as an extremely or very important personal concern; 2.4 times more likely to always or often experience symptoms on hot days; 4.0 times more likely to always or often feel too hot at home when it is hot outside; 3.3 times more likely to always or often leave home to stay cool when it is hot outside; and 57% less confident in being able to find a cool place to get out of the heat.

## Dwight cooling solutions supported by study participants

From survey participants:



\* On extremely hot days, the City of New Haven opens cooling centers – free air-conditioned facilities that provide a cool place to stay. There are currently no cooling centers in Dwight. However, more than two-thirds of survey respondents said they would use a cooling center in Dwight if one were available. Support for a cooling center in Dwight was echoed by focus group participants: “A community center that’s close by... Something... five minutes away...”.

Focus group participants also emphasized the importance of collective action and supporting community members who are more vulnerable to heat:

- “...instead of fighting one another, people gotta come together and fight for what they want.”
- “The kids and the elderly... They the ones that really need it the most...”

### Conclusion

Hot weather is an important concern for Dwight residents, who identified many sensible cooling solutions. Making these solutions a reality in Dwight will require funding from the state and city, innovative policies, incentives for landlords to provide affordable cooling, and meaningful engagement of the community.