



## ISSUE BRIEF

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# THE ELECTORAL IMPACT OF RACIAL RECKONING: THE IMPLICATIONS OF CANDIDATES' SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS ON VOTER ENGAGEMENT IN DETROIT

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DETROIT METRO AREA  
COMMUNITIES STUDY

## OVERVIEW

This report is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from the most recent survey of the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) and supported by the Center for Racial Justice. The survey was fielded between June 16, 2022, and Aug. 26, 2022, and captures the views of a representative sample of 2,339 Detroit residents. The report highlights Detroiters' plans to vote in the 2022 midterm elections, attitudes among eligible voters toward a reparations policy for Black Americans, and how candidates' stances on reparations may impact voter behavior in the upcoming election. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of the City of Detroit.

[See full results from DMACS surveys here.](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Voting has long been considered a pillar of political engagement in a democratic society and one strategy among many in the fight for racial justice. However, an [increasingly polarized America](#), alongside a [rise in inequality](#) and [voter suppression](#), stands to threaten beliefs about electoral politics as an effective tool for racial justice. A closer alignment between voter preferences and the policies promoted by candidates might strengthen political trust, increase voter turnout, and in the long run, reduce racial inequality.

In this report, reparations are defined as [some form of payment to Black Americans to counter the impact of slavery and discriminatory policies](#).<sup>1</sup> Our analysis finds most Detroiters intend to vote in the upcoming election, but those who are uncertain about voting, or unlikely to vote, may be motivated to turn out this November by a candidate's support for reparations. Young Black residents were particularly likely to say they would be more likely to vote as a result of a candidate's support for reparations.

Altogether these descriptive findings highlight important connections between voting behavior and support for a reparations policy in the upcoming November election, and more broadly, a general desire for reparations in some form. Given that Detroit is one of the most populous parts of Michigan, their priorities are critical to the outcomes of not only local races, but various state and federal electoral outcomes as well.

## KEY FINDINGS

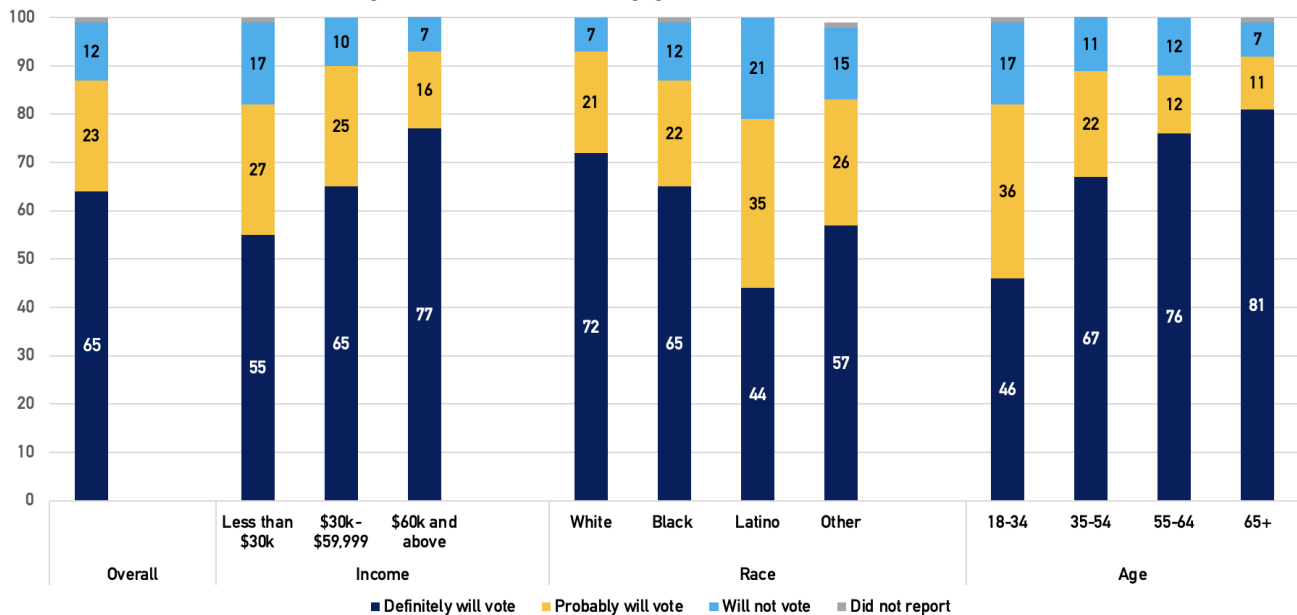
- A majority of eligible voters in Detroit (65%) intend to vote in the upcoming election. However, over one third of eligible voters (35%) are not sure about voting.
- There is broad support in Detroit for reparations for Black Americans in Detroit. Sixty-three percent of Detroiters would support a reparations policy for Black Americans.
- A candidate's support for reparations would mobilize voters - many of whom are currently on the fence about voting. thirty seven percent of Detroiters who said they would **not vote** in the upcoming election reported that a candidate's support for reparations would make them more likely to vote. More than half of Detroiters (52%) who said they would **probably vote** said a candidate's support for reparations would make them more likely to vote.
- Young voters are particularly likely to be motivated to participate in the upcoming elections by candidate support for reparations. Forty-nine percent of Detroiters between the ages of 18 and 34 said they would be **more likely** to vote if a candidate spoke out in support of reparations.



## MOST DETROITERS PLAN TO VOTE IN THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS, BUT NEARLY ONE THIRD MAY NOT<sup>2</sup>

- When Detroiters were asked how likely they are to vote in the November elections, the majority (65%) of eligible residents said they would **definitely** vote. More than two out of 10 Detroiters (23%) said they would **probably** vote. Twelve percent of Detroiters said they would probably or definitely **not** vote.<sup>3</sup>
- Higher-income Detroiters are more likely to say they will **definitely** vote compared to Detroiters with lower incomes.
  - Roughly three out of four (77%) higher-income Detroiters – those with an annual household income above \$60,000 – said they would **definitely** vote in the November election, compared to 65% of middle-income Detroiters (annual household income between \$30,000 and \$60,000) and 55% of lower-income Detroiters (annual household income less than \$30,000).
  - Twenty-seven percent of lower-income Detroiters express some uncertainty regarding their voting plans this November, compared to 25% of middle-income Detroiters and 16% of lower-income Detroiters.
- Ninety-three percent of White Detroiters and 87% of Black Detroiters say they will **definitely** or **probably** vote, compared to 79% of Latino Detroiters and 83% of those who identify as some other race.<sup>4</sup>
- As age increases, Detroiters are more likely to say that they will definitely vote in the November election. The youngest Detroiters are the most uncertain about voting in the upcoming election.
  - Detroiters 65 years and older are the most likely to say they will **definitely** vote (81%) and the least likely to say they will not vote in the November election (7%). By contrast, 17% of Detroiters between the ages of 18 and 34 said they would not vote in the November election.
  - Thirty-six percent of Detroiters between the ages of 18 and 34 said they would **probably** vote in the November election.

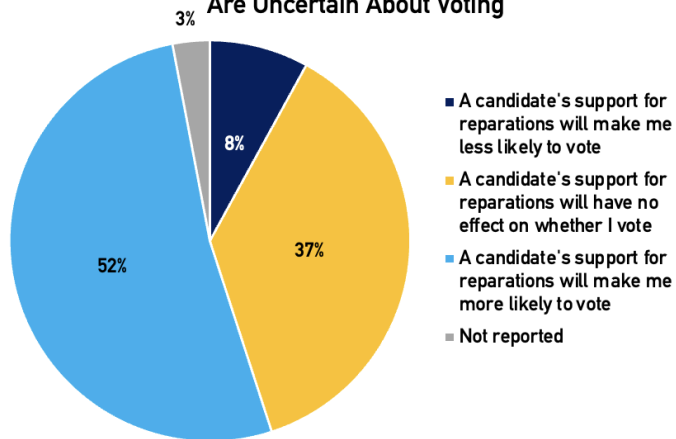
Figure 1: Detroiters' Voter Engagement in the November Election





## UNLIKELY AND UNCERTAIN VOTERS MIGHT BE SWAYED BY A CANDIDATE'S SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS

Figure 2: Implications of Candidate's Support for Reparations on Voter Engagement, Among Detroiters Who Are Uncertain About Voting

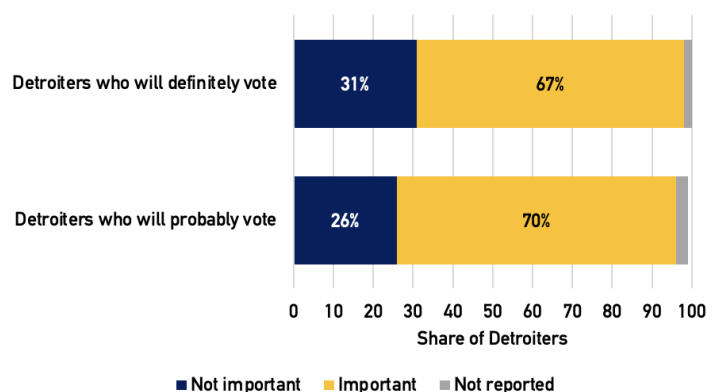


- Overall, a majority of Detroiters (63%) support reparations for Black Americans. An additional 22% of Detroiters neither oppose nor support reparations, and 13% of Detroit residents oppose reparations.<sup>5</sup>
- Thirty-seven percent of Detroiters who said they would not vote in the upcoming election reported that a candidate's support for reparations would make them more likely to vote.
- Amongst Detroiters who said they would probably vote, more than half (52%) said that a candidate's support for reparations would make them more likely to vote. By contrast, 37% of this group said a candidate's support for

reparations would have no effect on their likelihood of voting.

- Eight percent of Detroiters who said they would **probably** vote said a candidate's support for reparations would make them less likely to vote.
- In addition to affecting who may vote in the upcoming elections, a reparations policy may also shape **whom voters support**. The majority of Detroiters who said they will **definitely** or **probably** vote in the upcoming election said a reparations policy was an important factor in **whom** they will vote for.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Two-thirds (67%) of Detroiters who said they would **definitely** vote said a candidate's support for reparations would shape how they voted. A significantly smaller share of Detroiters who said they would **definitely** vote (31%) said a candidate's support for reparations is not important to how they would vote.<sup>8</sup>
- Seven out of 10 Detroiters who said they would **probably** vote in the upcoming election said a candidate's support for reparations is important to how they would vote (70%). This is significantly higher than the share of Detroiters who said they would **definitely** vote in the upcoming election.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 3: The Importance of a Candidate's Support for Reparations on *Who* Detroiters Will Vote For



## A CANDIDATE'S SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS WOULD MOTIVATE MANY YOUNG DETROITERS TO VOTE, ESPECIALLY YOUNG BLACK DETROITERS

- When asked whether a candidate's support for reparations would affect Detroit residents' likelihood of voting, young Detroiters (18-34) were particularly likely to say it would make them **more likely** to vote (49%). A similar share of Detroiters between the ages of 35-54 said a reparations policy would make them **more likely** to head to the polls (48%). Thirty-six percent of Detroiters between the ages of 55 and 64 say a candidate's support for reparations would make them **more likely** to vote, compared to 31% of Detroiters 65 or older.
- When considering variation in attitudes among Black Detroiters, young Black Detroiters (59%) tend to say a candidate's support for a reparations policy would make them **more likely** to vote, compared to 53% of Black Detroiters between 35-54, 35% of Black Detroiters between 55-64, and 34% of Black Detroiters 65 or older.
- Older Black Detroiters (those aged 55-64 and 65 or older) are more likely to say a candidate's support for reparations for Black Americans would have **no effect** on their likelihood of voting, compared to younger Black Detroiters. Almost half of Black Detroiters between 55-64 say a candidate's support for reparations would not affect their likelihood of voting (60%), while similarly, 60% of Black Detroiters over the age of 65 hold this view as well.

Figure 4: Implications of Candidate's Support for Reparations on Voter Engagement Among Detroiters, by Age

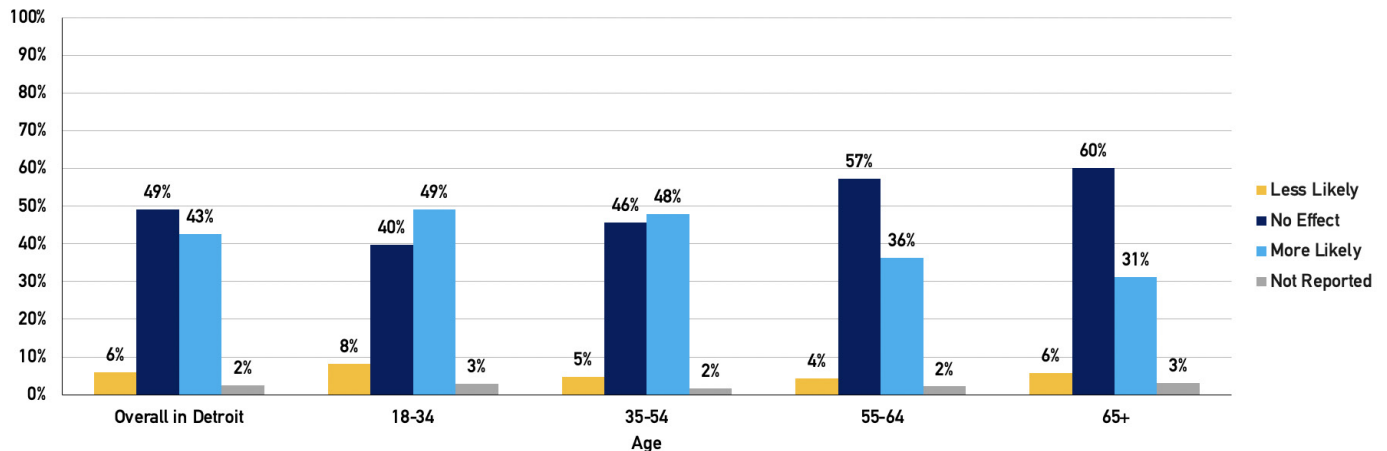
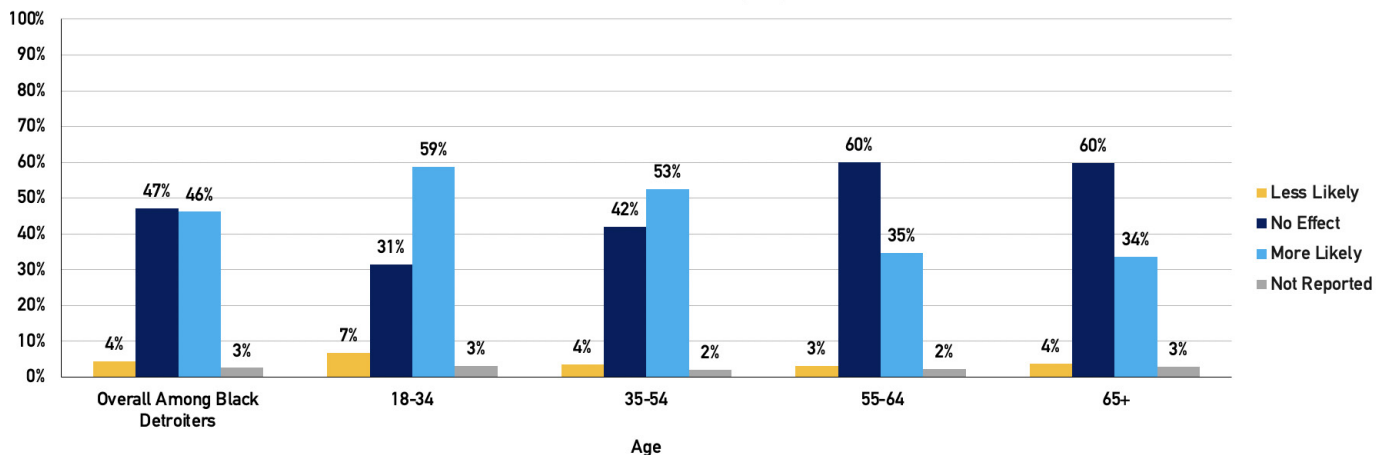


Figure 5: Implications of Candidate's Support for Reparations on Voter Engagement Among Black Detroiters, by Age



## MORE THAN ONE QUARTER OF WHITE DETROITERS SAY A CANDIDATE'S SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS WOULD MAKE THEM 'MORE LIKELY' TO TURN OUT TO VOTE

- The majority of White Detroiters say a candidate's support for a reparations policy would have no effect on their likelihood of voting (61%). Twenty-six percent say that it

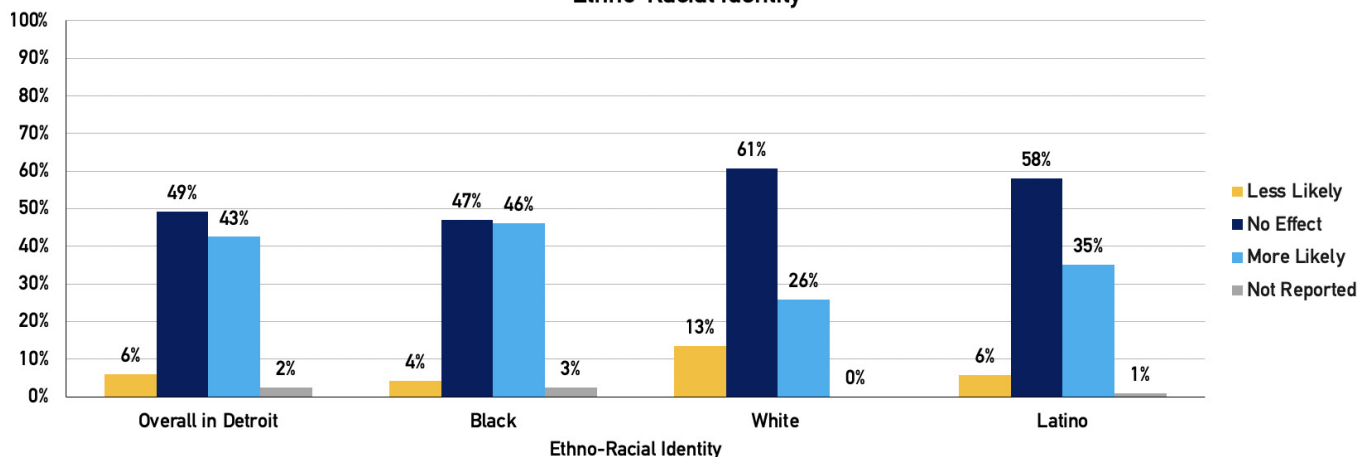
would make them more likely to vote, while 13% say that it would make them less likely to vote.

## ONE IN THREE LATINO DETROITERS SAY A CANDIDATE'S SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS WOULD MAKE THEM MORE LIKELY TO HEAD TO THE POLLS

- The majority of Latino Detroiters say a candidate's support for reparations would have **no effect** on their likelihood of voting (58%). One in three Detroiters say a candidate's

support for a reparations policy would make them **more likely** to vote (35%), compared to 6% of those who say it would make them **less likely** to vote.

Figure 6: Implications of Candidate's Support for Reparations on Voter Engagement, by Ethno-Racial Identity



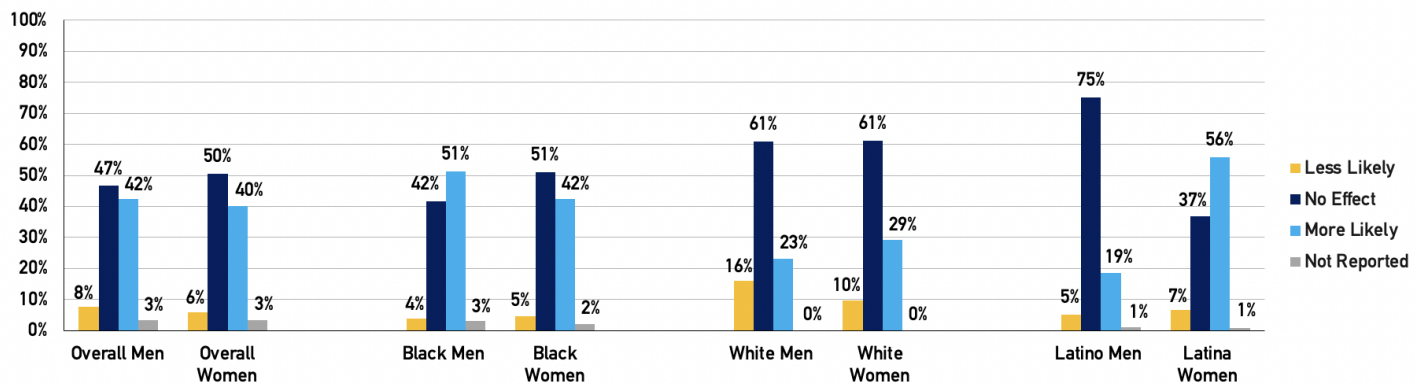
## CANDIDATE SUPPORT FOR REPARATIONS MOTIVATES WOMEN AND MEN DIFFERENTLY AMONG BLACK, WHITE AND LATINO DETROITERS

- Overall in Detroit, there were similar patterns in men's and women's responses to how a candidate's support for reparations would affect their likelihood to turn out to vote. Forty seven percent of men overall said it would make them **more likely** to turn out to vote, compared to 40% of women

overall. Forty seven percent of men overall said a candidate's support for reparations would have **no effect** on their likelihood of voting, compared to 50% of women overall.

- Black men (51%) were more likely than Black women (42%) to say a candidate's support for reparations would make them **more likely** to turn out to vote.
- White women (29%) were more likely than White men (23%) to say a candidate's support for reparations would make them **more likely** to turn out to vote.
- Latina women (56%) were more likely than Latino men (19%) to say a candidate's support for reparations would make them **more likely** to turn out to vote.
- The majority of Latino men (75%) said a candidate's support for reparations would have **no effect** on their likelihood to vote, compared to 37% of Latina women.

**Figure 7: Implications of Candidate's Support for Reparations on Voter Engagement Among Detroiters, by Ethno-Racial Identity and Gender**



## ENDNOTES

- 1 In this survey, reparations are defined as [some form of payment to Black Americans to counter the impact of slavery and discriminatory policies](#). The definition employed here is one of many. There are ongoing debates about what constitutes the most effective reparations policy—who an eligible beneficiary is, whether the policy is best administered at the federal or local level, whether private and non-profit institutions should also foot the bill, and whether the payment should come in the form of a cash transfer, some other financial asset, or as incentives that make access to education, homeownership, and entrepreneurship easier for Black Americans, alongside a variety of other implementation questions. For more resources on the call for reparations and debates about designing a reparations policy, see [Why reparations are needed to close the racial wealth gap](#), [Why we need reparations for Black Americans](#), and Darity Jr. and Mullen's (2020) [From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century](#).
- 2 All findings refer to eligible voters in Detroit. Respondents who reported that they were ineligible to vote are excluded from this analysis. Detroiters who said they probably or definitely would not vote are collapsed into the single category "Will not vote."
- 3 One percent of Detroiters did not report their plans to vote in the midterm elections.
- 4 Detroiters who self-identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are categorized in the "Latino" category in this report. Detroiters who self-identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, or a racial category not listed in the survey, are collapsed into the "Other" race category. Data on racial categories is reported only for populations for whom we have more than 100 respondents.
- 5 Two percent of Detroiters did not report their views on reparations. On all charts, these groups are represented in the "Not Reported" category.
- 6 Respondents who said that a candidate's level of support for reparations was not at all important or not very important to who they would vote for are collapsed into a single category labeled "Not important" and respondents who said that a candidate's level of support for reparations was somewhat or very important to who they would vote for are collapsed into a single category labeled "Important."
- 7 This survey asked Detroiters how important a candidate's support for reparations is in their consideration of whom they will vote for in the upcoming election. However, our data do not reveal whether a candidate's support for reparations would make the respondent vote **for** or **against** a candidate. However, the majority of Detroiters (63%) support reparations for Black Americans.
- 8 Two percent of Detroiters who would definitely vote in the midterms did not report the importance of a candidate's support for reparations on who they might vote for.
- 9 Three percent of Detroiters who said they would probably vote did not report the importance of a candidate's support for reparations on who they might vote for.

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(MICEAL) (NIH grant 1 OT2 HL 156812). For more on Michigan CEAL, please visit [www.michiganceal.org](http://www.michiganceal.org).



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**Learn more at [www.detroitssurvey.umich.edu](http://www.detroitssurvey.umich.edu)**

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