



Okotoks

2020 Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project

Community Report

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About This Report

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

The Rural Development Network recognizes that the 2020 Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project took place on the traditional territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8.

The Town of Okotoks and Surrounding Areas’ Estimation Count occurred on Treaty 7 territory, the ancestral home of the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut’ina First Nation, the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations), as well as the Métis. The RDN also recognizes the direct connection between homelessness and colonization¹, and it is our hope that this project provides one small step towards righting wrongs.

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Okotoks and Surrounding Areas Food Bank

Rowan House Emergency Women's Shelter

Salvation Army (High River)

Turner Valley FCSS

Westwinds Communities

This report and the information within was made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front line staff at participating service agencies across the Town of Okotoks and Surrounding Areas for their tireless efforts during this challenging time.

Executive Summary

In November 2020, service agencies within Okotoks and surrounding areas participated in a large-scale effort to estimate housing and service needs across 24 rural communities in the province.

Funded by Reaching Home, the Government of Canada's official homelessness strategy, the Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project (Estimations' Project) was led by the Rural Development Network following the methodology outlined in the "Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness".

This project was an opportunity to better understand the needs of existing residents, as well as complement and improve official data for Okotoks and Surrounding Areas. This year's estimations' project built on robust refinements from the pioneer project in 2018 that allowed service agencies to better connect and listen to the needs of Okotoks and Surrounding Areas' residents. Collecting data during this period -where physical access to local establishments have been severely limited/affected by a global pandemic - offers a unique opportunity to examine how residents' needs are exacerbated during a time of crisis.

Okotoks Family Resource Centre connected with Okotoks and Surrounding Areas' local community organizations to prepare and coordinate their local count. Service agencies were instructed to invite individuals who visited their agency during a consecutive 30-day period to fill out a 30-question survey.

Surveys were intended to gather a holistic view of the interlocking needs that affect an individual's ability to access/maintain safe, stable housing, which

includes their ability to access proper services and resources within the community.

Okotoks and Surrounding Areas' data was collected through paper and online surveys, where respondents had the choice to complete the survey by themselves, with assistance from staff, or on their own time with the use of online access codes. Collected surveys were examined and analyzed for duplicates and errors by RDN analysts to ensure data integrity and validity. Data was then compiled, reviewed, and consolidated in the final findings outlined in this report.

Out of 70 people surveyed, 29 (41.4%) were found to be living in situations defined as homeless or 'housing-insecure'.

An additional 26 dependents were reported to share these living conditions, along with 20 adults. In total, there are 75 individuals within Okotoks and Surrounding Areas that are either living in insecure housing conditions or sharing these conditions with respondents.

The most common factors affecting respondents' current living situation were: lack of money, unaffordable rent or mortgage, struggles due to physical disabilities, medical conditions, and conflict.

This report breaks down the places of residence, services needed, demographics, housing, employment, and income sources of those experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. This report also provides a qualitative sample of feedback from those most vulnerable within the community

“In many instances, there are discrepancies between what people need or want, what service providers can offer and what the provincial or local governments can afford or support as best practices.”

-Marybeth Shinn,
International Homelessness:
Policy, Socio-Cultural, and Individual Perspectives³

Definitions

“Homelessness describes the **situation** of an individual, family or community **without** stable, safe, permanent, appropriate **housing, or the immediate** prospect, means and **ability of acquiring it.**

It is the **result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of** affordable and appropriate **housing,** the individual/household’s **financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges,** and/or **racism and discrimination.**

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.”

-Canadian Definition of Homelessness,
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness⁴

Q11. Thinking about your living situation **this past month**, which of these statements apply to you? (Check all that apply)

- I own the house I'm currently in
- I rent the apartment I'm currently in
- I live in accommodations provided by my employer
- I live in a house that is owned by/rented out by the Band
- I share a house/apartment with roommates
- I live in a house/apartment that I share with family/dependents
- I find it difficult to pay rent and I feel like I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing
- I live in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.)
- There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house I'm in
- I lived in supported housing (e.g. Housing First)
- I stayed in a medical/detox/rehabilitation facility
- I slept in a friend's/family's house because I had no other place to stay
- I stayed in a jail / prison/ remand centre
- I stayed at a women's / domestic violence shelter
- I stayed with someone I didn't know because I had no other place to stay
- I slept in a shelter
- I slept in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or shack
- I slept in a public space (sidewalks, park benches, bus shelter etc.)

Figure 1: table used in 2020 questionnaire to determine respondents' housing security. Refer to Appendix A for full questionnaire.

The accompanying typology² identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

Provisionally Accommodated

People who are homeless whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including interim (or transitional) housing, people living temporarily with others (couch surfing), or living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.

At Risk of Homelessness

People who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

Emergency Sheltered

Staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are homeless

Unsheltered

Living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation

Background

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation due to the “visibility” of individuals experiencing homelessness. The issue of homelessness within rural and remote areas is far less understood or even acknowledged by the wider public because of its “hidden” nature. Individuals experiencing housing insecurity in rural and remote communities are more likely to couch surf, live in overcrowded housing, or own/rent housing that may need major repairs—often leveraging the relationships around them in for support.

RDN initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural homelessness. This limits the ability of rural communities to advocate for better resources for their residents in greatest need. The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective, and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas.

This tool allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs and has been instrumental in helping rural communities gather credible evidence on homelessness to subsequently improve the kind of services offered within the community.

Methodology & Data Collection

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimate is a modified version of that found in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, published by the Rural Development Network. Methods

for estimating homelessness and housing insecurity in urban centres are not suited to rural and remote ones. Conducting traditional Point-in-Time counts over larger swaths of service area is not always feasible for already under-staffed/-resourced community agencies. This inability to participate in PiT counts translates to no data, which translates into no need within the community. When there's no tangible data, rural and remote communities can't advocate to address service gaps or for an increase in funding.

The model used in this project allows for a variety of service agencies to offer questionnaires to clients in places they already visit and know. This approach leverages existing infrastructure (service agencies such as FCSS, libraries, Friendship Centres, churches, food banks etc.) within the community as opposed to devoting resources to scour the town core for visibly unsheltered individuals. Due to the sensitivity and the associated stigma surrounding homelessness and housing issues, this method relies on the relationships that service providers have established and cultivated over time with their clients to ensure respondents feel comfortable and safe at all times during the survey process.

The current survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definition of homelessness. However, rather than using the term "homelessness", the survey was advertised as a better way to understand the housing and support services needed within the community. This builds off feedback from multiple service providers that are committed to minimizing stigma that could cause distress to their clients. By re-framing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage all clients to participate, instead of pointedly targeting certain individuals.

In relation to stigma, previous findings suggest that clients are often reluctant to label themselves as homeless or housing-insecure. For this project, respondents were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure, AND to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing

situation. Subsequent data analysis would determine – based on responses to the latter survey question – which respondents were housing-insecure. As we see in the results, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be either homeless or at-risk actually qualify based on national definitions of homelessness. The majority of the report focuses on the responses of individuals who were living in objectively housing-insecure conditions.

Insecure Housing is when a person experiences difficulty paying rent, spends a major portion of the household income on housing, frequently moves, lives in overcrowded conditions, or doubles up with friends and relatives.

Before the survey period began, RDN provided orientation and training sessions to the Lead Coordinator, and staff at the participating agencies. Emphasis during training was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing their informed consent. During these training sessions, resources were provided to improve outreach for both community members and potential agency partners, while promoting the benefits of understanding the need of clients. Training also covered various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra consideration for meeting individuals' reasons for visiting the service agency before offering the survey.

This report consists of an overview of the primary data collected through social service agencies in Okotoks and Surrounding Areas from November 1st to the 31st 2020. The lead organization for the project was the Okotoks' Family Resource Centre. After recruitment of participating agencies, the Rural Development Network provided virtual training for those who would be delivering the survey. Two versions of the survey were provided for distribution: a paper version which could be filled out on location, and an online version which could be filled out on location or accessed with an access code later on.

Regardless of the version of survey completed (paper or online) respondents were each assigned a unique ID. This ID is composed of initials derived from respondents' name and birthdate, scrambled in a certain order to maintain confidentiality. This ensures that if the respondent took the same survey at a later date, the data would show further need by the individual without inflating the number of respondents.

The data found in this report is survey data. There are no significance values, p-values, tests, or inferential statistics of any sort within this report. It is therefore not RDN's intention with this report to:

- Guarantee that the data provides a complete or all-encompassing depiction of housing instability and service needs within the region;
- Provide any interpretations of the data contained herein;
- Make any recommendations for policy changes or actions to be taken as a result of this data;
- Make any stake/claim about government policies, corporate actions, or externalities.

However, we encourage individual community members and local community leaders to use this data to inform their own conclusions and policies, and to determine how to best make use of this information. RDN assumes no responsibility or liability for any changes, decisions, or actions made as a result of the interpretation of data outlined in this report.

A note about youth participation: service agencies were instructed to limit survey administration to individuals 14 years of age or older. In compliance with the consent and confidentiality guidelines of the Alberta College of Social Workers, individuals under 14 years of age were required to secure guardian's approval prior to participation.

Finally, it's important to note that due to exclusion of non-responses and skipped questions, subtotals and percentages may not exactly reflect absolute totals. A copy of the actual paper survey used in this project can be found at ruraldevelopment.ca.

Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase accessibility of the survey, not all clients who entered participating agencies chose to take the survey. The survey was voluntary, and accessing services was not contingent on their participation. There remains a portion of clients whose voices were not captured.

Additionally, not every individual requiring help may have entered a participating service agency during the designated 30-day collection period, despite advertising efforts leading up to the survey. Some service agencies may not have been able to fully participate, given the urgency of the services they provide and the length of time required to complete the survey. As a result, although trends and highlights of the data are very informative, this report presents a conservative picture of the service needs and housing insecurity in the community as a whole.

Survey Results

Across participating agencies, 70 people were surveyed. Of those, 8 completed paper surveys, and 62 were referred to an online survey. A copy of the survey questions used can be found on ruraldevelopment.ca.

Support Services

The results in this section are reported for all respondents who completed a survey, regardless of their housing security. This is to capture the overall needs of clients in the area for services from locations that participated in the Estimation.

All survey respondents (n=70) were asked about where they most often sought services, and what kind of services they needed most often during their visits to local service providers.

Figure 1 shows the responses, weighted by frequency, to the question “In which community do you most often seek services? Primarily respondents sought services in Okotoks, however many of the surrounding communities were included.



Figure 1 – Word Cloud of the community in which respondents most often sought help from service agencies.

Taking into account the nature of interlocking needs, respondents were able to provide multiple responses (see Table 1).

Table 1 Main reason(s) for visiting the office today	# of respondents
Basic Needs	22
Support services	18
Financial	17
Health and wellness	16
Not listed	13
Prefer not to answer	10
Crisis financial support	5
COVID-19 assistance	5
Family/parenting	3
Transportation needs	2
Legal	1

Table 1 - Table of reasons for respondents' visit to the service agency (multiple responses possible).

Of the options provided, the top three types of support services sought by survey respondents were "Basic Needs Support" (22), "Support Services" (18), and "Financial Support" (17).

Respondents were then asked to identify the primary reason for their visit in an open field response. Due to the freeform structure of the question, answers were varied but the most common keywords are listed in Figure 2.

When asked about the perceived socio-economic opportunities available within the community, most respondents felt that the community did not provide enough employment opportunities, recreation and social opportunities, and affordable housing (Table 2).



Figure 2 - Word Cloud of the most common responses to the “Primary Reason” for visiting the service agency

Does the community provide enough:	Yes	No	Not Sure
Employment Opportunities?	20	31	18
Free or Accessible Recreation and Social Opportunities?	21	32	17
Sufficient Social Services?	19	17	32
Accessible Affordable Housing?	10	49	10

Table 2 - Respondents answer the question: “does our community provide enough of the following opportunities?”

Housing Needs

When respondents were asked whether they considered their “housing situation to be unstable or felt they could easily lose their housing”, 32 (45.7%) of all respondents replied ‘Yes’ (Figure 3).

Following this question, respondents were asked to identify the current living situation(s) that have applied to them in the past month (Table 3). Respondents were asked to select all options that apply. The options themselves represent a range of physical living situations, from secure to insecure. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, any option in Table 3 listed from “I find it difficult to pay rent and I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing” to the bottom of the list constitutes housing insecurity and homelessness.

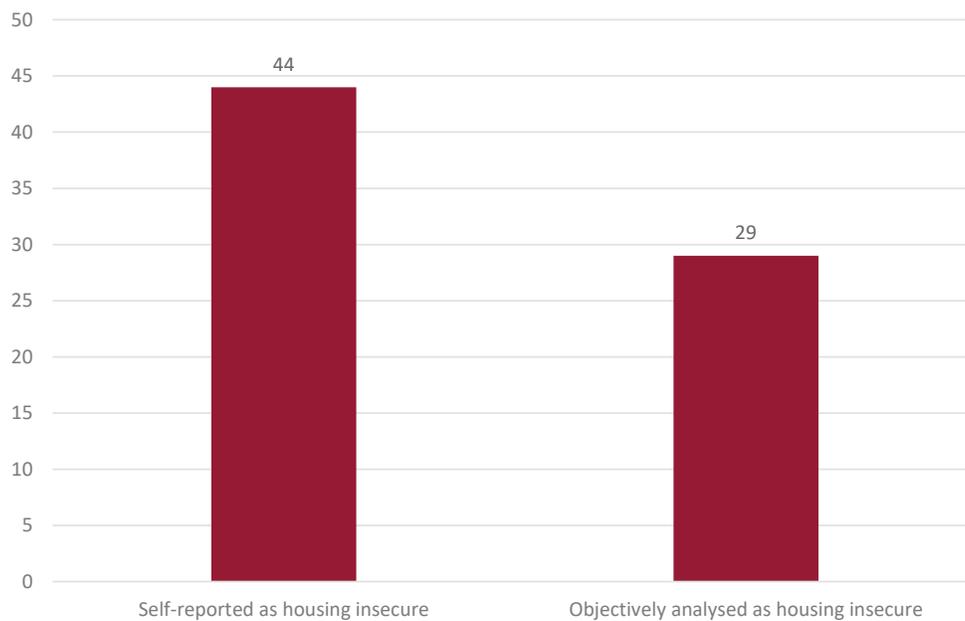


Figure 3 - Respondents who feel their housing is unstable/insecure vs. respondents who objectively fit living conditions that constitute insecure housing under COH¹.

After analysis, there are approximately **29 respondents (41.4% of total)** whose housing conditions are considered to be insecure and/or absent. These respondents are reported as ‘objectively housing-insecure’, and make up the primary source of data for the remainder of the report.

Interestingly, there was 1 respondent who self-reported that their housing situation is secure in fact objectively live in an insecure housing situation. This could be due to a variety of factors, including being unaware of how the term

¹ Some respondents who believed they were living in insecure housing conditions also identified with living situations that constitute insecure housing as defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Thus, there may be some overlap between these two indicators as shown in Figure 3.

Table 3 – Current living situation. “Which of these statements apply to you (thinking about the past month)?”

I own the house I'm currently in	23
I rent the apartment I'm currently in	29
I live in accommodations provided by my employer	1
I live in a house that is owned/rented out by the Band	0
I share a house/apartment with roommates	5
I live in a house/apartment that I with family/dependents	16
I find it difficult to pay rent and I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing	26
I live in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.)	6
There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house I'm in	2
I live in supported housing (e.g. Housing First)	0
I stayed in a medical/detox/rehabilitation facility	0
I slept in a friend's/family house because I had no other place to stay	4
I stayed in a jail/prison/remand centre	0
I stayed at a women's/domestic violence shelter	0
I stayed with someone I didn't know because I had no other place to stay	1
I slept in a shelter	1
I slept in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or shack	1
I slept in a public space (sidewalks, park benches, bus shelter, etc.)	1

is defined, or possibly a shame or stigma towards homelessness and housing insecurity

Finally, respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current living arrangements. Their responses can be seen in Figure 4.

Of all surveyed respondents, 4 (5.7%) responded stated they had once stayed or are currently staying in foster care or youth group home.

Reasons for Housing Insecurity

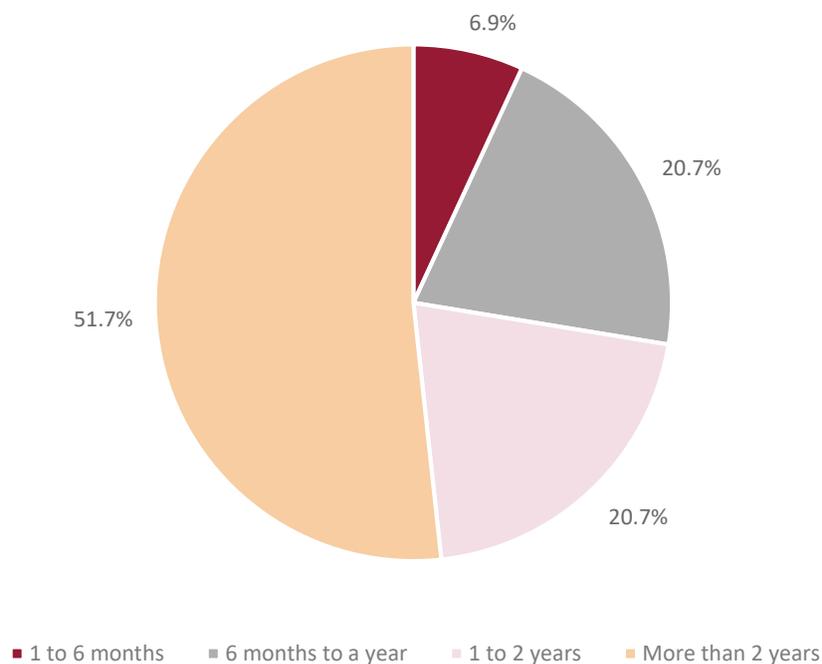


Figure 4 - Respondents answer the question “how long have you been staying in your current living arrangements?” Other possible options with no responses: Less than a month and prefer not to answer.

After identifying the respondents who were found to be without housing, or living in insecure housing situations, we asked whether any of the following options was/were a contributing factor(s) (Table 4).

Respondents who were found to be objectively housing insecure, identified

Table 4 - "Why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?"	Self-reported housing insecure	Objectively housing insecure
I don't make enough money	24	17
I can't afford rent/mortgage payments	16	11
Physical disability	12	10
Illness/Medical condition	7	5
Conflict	6	4
I lost my job	6	4
Mental health issues	7	3
My house needs major repairs (mould, etc.)	3	3
COVID-19-related	6	3
My rent went up	3	3
Mental disability	2	2
Relationships	3	1
Addictions/Substance use	1	1
Lack of Transportation	1	1
Domestic/Family violence	3	1
Prefer not to answer	3	1
Spouse/Partner lost their job	1	1
Family rejection	1	0

Table 4 - Respondents answer the question "why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?"; Other options with no responses were: Does not apply to me, Abuse, Racism/Discrimination, I was in jail/prison

the following reasons as main contributing factors to their living situations: 17 responses for “I don’t make enough money”; 11 for “I can’t afford rent/mortgage payments”; 10 for “Physical disability”; 5 for “Illness/Medical condition”, and 4 for “Conflict”.

Respondents were then asked in an open field question to identify the main factor that affected their housing insecurity, whether from the list they had seen previously, or from their own experience. While most of the responses can be seen under the Qualitative Data section of this report, the most common responses can be found below:

Demographics

“Finances-
**Rent is 58% of
my income”**

**“If I lose my subsidy,
me and my
children will not be
able to afford rent
and end up on the
streets.”**

***“My rent is 77% of
my after tax pay, if
any of my bills go
up, I will be unable
to meet rent.”***

“Single parent, low
income.”

“I am getting
older and **may
not be able to
live here at
some point.”**

*“It is quickly becoming more
difficult for me to manage the
home, financially and physically
but can’t afford to sell and buy a
more suitable house.*

The following sections of ‘Demographics’, ‘Household Makeup’, ‘Shelter Services’, ‘Community Residency’, and ‘Employment and Income Sources’ report results from those respondents who were found to be housing-insecure (n=29).

Age, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Respondents were asked about their current age. The median age of individuals experiencing housing insecurity was 52.

The reported gender of both housing-secure and insecure respondents can be seen in Figure 5. Due to low response rates for some possible answers, this figure uses “Gender Diverse” to account for the following responses in the survey: Two-Spirit, Trans Male/Trans Man, Trans Female/Trans Woman, Non-binary, and Identity Not Listed. This is to avoid the use of identifying information due to low numbers.

The reported sexual orientation of respondents can be seen in Figure 6.



Figure 5 - Respondents answer the question “how do you describe your gender identity?”

Ethnicity and Migration Status

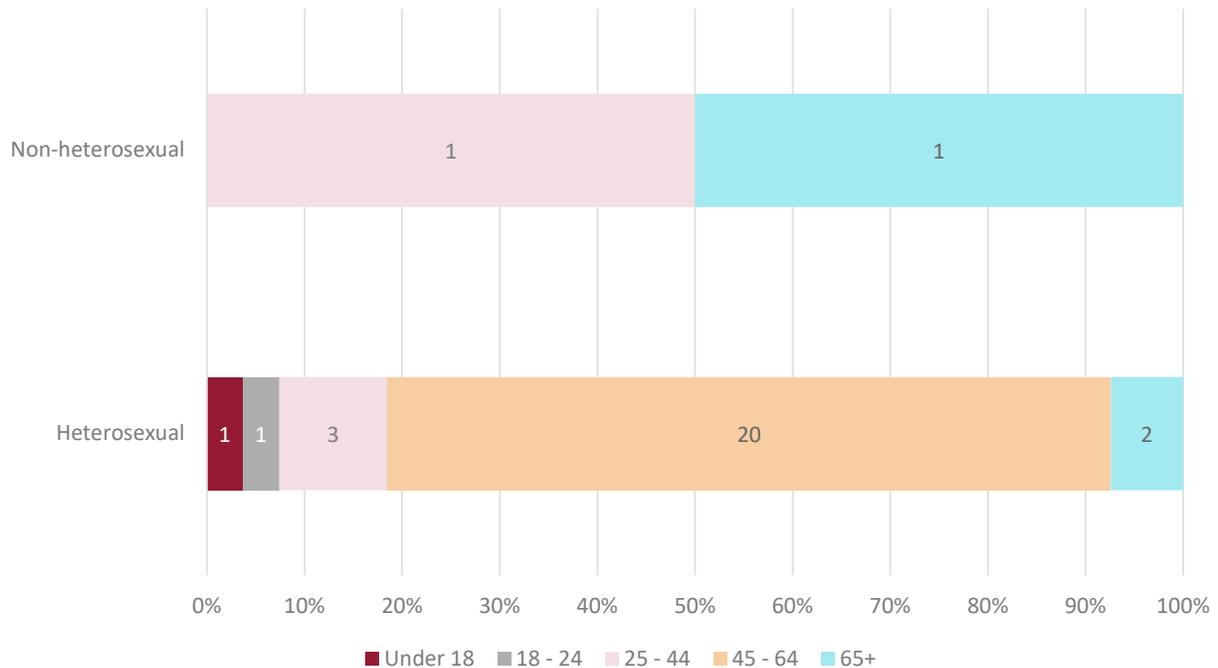


Figure 6 - Respondents answer the question “how do you describe your sexual orientation?”

Of housing-insecure respondents surveyed, 24 identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, 1 as Hispanic/Latino, 3 as Indigenous, and 1 identified with other ethnicities. Of those respondents that identified as Indigenous, 2 identified as First Nations, and 1 as Métis, (Figure 7).

The majority (86.2%) of respondents experiencing housing-insecurity were born in Canada. 4 indicated that they migrated to Canada at some point, including 2 who indicated they came as a Landed Immigrant and 3 as a Permanent Resident.

The majority (93.1%) are Canadian Citizens, as shown in Figure 8.

Education

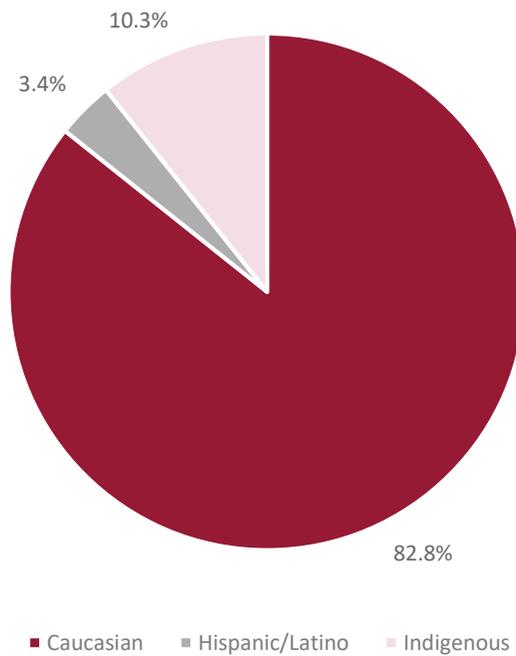


Figure 7 - Respondents answer the question “what ethnicity do you identify with?”; Other possible answers with no responses: African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Prefer not to answer

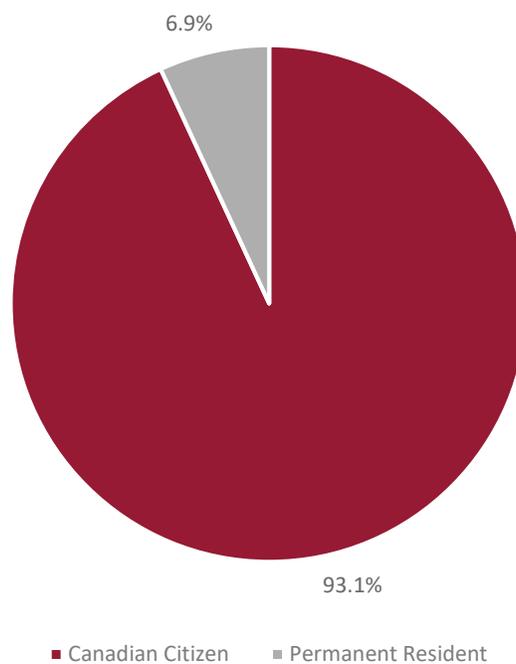


Figure 8 - Respondents answer the question “what is your current migration status?”; Other possible options with no responses: Economic Migrant Worker, Landed Immigrant, Student Visa, Refugee/Claimant, Temporary Foreign Worker, Prefer not to answer.

Of all survey respondents, the majority (27.1%) indicated that the highest level of education they've completed is a College certificate or diploma. This is closely followed by 21.4% respondents who obtained a High school diploma or GED, and those who obtained a Post-secondary degree (21.4%). Detailed responses can be seen in Table 5.

Household Makeup

Table 5 – “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?”	# of respondents
College certificate or diploma	19
High school diploma or GED	15
Post-secondary degree (bachelor’s)	15
Some grade school	6
Apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma	4
Some post-secondary	4
Graduate/Professional Degree (Master’s, PhD, MD, JD, etc.)	4
Prefer not to answer	3

Table 5 - Respondents answer the question “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?”; Other possible options with no responses: Some high school, Don’t know, No formal education.

The survey included questions regarding household or family members who are currently sharing accommodations with each respondent.

No housing-insecure respondents reported that either they or someone in their household was pregnant, and 12 said that they were currently a single-parent household. 48.3% of housing-insecure respondents were living with dependents under the age of 18. Of those, 3 had one dependent, 7 had two, 3 had three, and 1 responded “other”, for a total of at least 26 dependents

sharing living conditions with those living in housing-insecure conditions.

For respondents that listed out the number of dependents staying with them, 5.3% of listed dependents were between 0 and 4 years of age, 10.5% were between 5 and 9, 52.6% were between 10 and 14, and 31.6% were between 15 and 17. There was less boys (31.6%) than girls (68.4%).

Some housing-insecure respondents reported that they had other adults living with them. The total number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 20, an average of 1 per respondent. The relationships of these cohabitants can be found in Figure 9.

Shelter Services

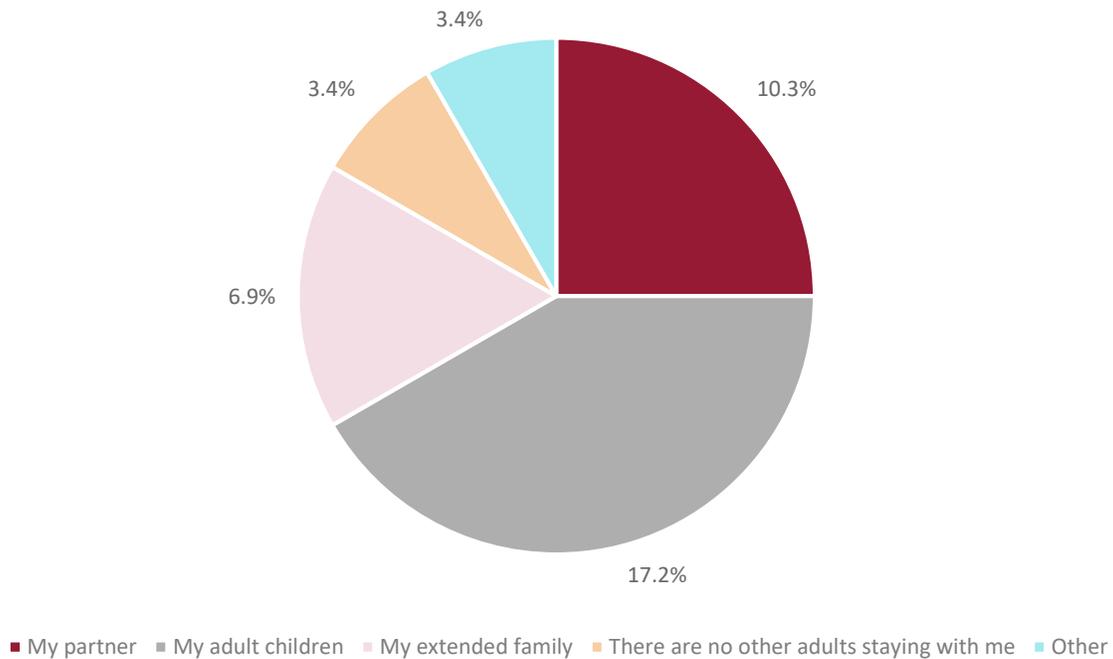


Figure 9 - Co-habitant relationships to housing-insecure respondents; Other possible options with no responses: My parent(s), My co-workers, Prefer not to answer

Of respondents experiencing housing insecurity, no one reported accessing a shelter within the past year. Of respondents who needed a shelter but did not access shelter services within the past year, the following reasons were provided: Table 5.

Community Residency

Table 6. "If you needed a shelter in the past year and didn't access one, what were the reasons?"	# of respondents
I didn't need shelter services	25
Reason not listed	2
No shelters in my area	1
I didn't feel safe	1
Lack of transportation	1
Health concerns (bed bugs, dirty, etc.)	1
No pets allowed	1

Table 6 - Respondents answer the question "If you needed a shelter in the past year and didn't access one, what were the reasons?"; Other possible answers with no responses: Prefer not to answer, The shelter was full, Separation from family member/partner, Lack of disability accommodations, Hours of operation

Respondents were asked to indicate where they currently reside. Figure 10 displays those responses, weighted by frequency.

Respondents were asked about how long they have been part of the



Figure 10 - Word Cloud of responses to “where do you currently reside?”

community. 3.4% of respondents facing housing insecurity reported that they have always lived in the community (Figure 11).

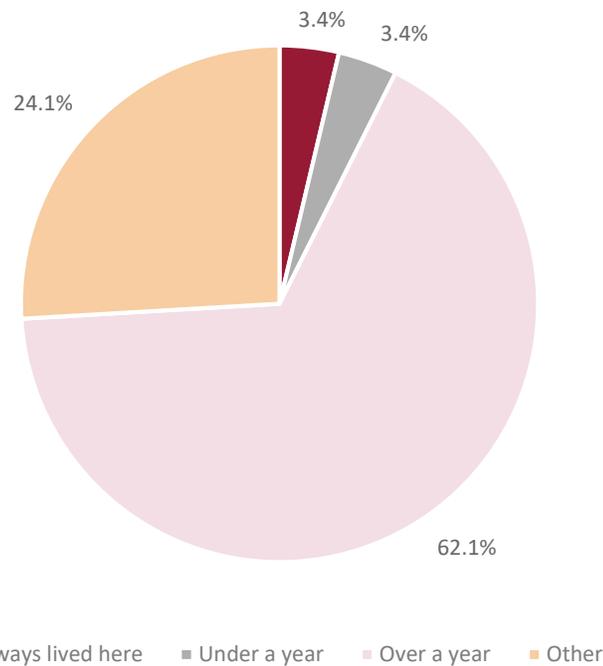


Figure 11 - Respondents answer the question “How long have you lived in this community?”; Other possible options with no responses: Prefer not to answer.

Of those who moved to the community at some point, Table 7 describes the primary reasons for the move.

Table 7 – “What is the main reason you came to this community?”	# of respondents
To find housing	9
Other	8
Fear for safety	3
To access services/supports	3
To look for work	2
My family moved here	2
To start a job	2
To access emergency shelters	1
To attend school	1
Prefer not to answer	1

Table 7 - Respondents answer the question “what is the main reason you came to this community?”; Other possible answers with no responses: To visit family/friends, COVID-19 treatment or supports, To move in with spouse/partner, Environmental displacement (flooding, wildfire, lack of clean drinking water, etc.)

Of those who had moved to the community at some point, Figure 12 describes where they had resided previously.

Respondents were asked about the number of times they had moved in the past year; frequent moves can be an indicator of insecurity and precarious housing. 48.3% of those facing housing insecurity have not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 10.3% had moved 1-2 times and 3.4% moved 3-6 times, (Figure 13).

Respondents were also asked if they would have stayed in their previous community if they had better access to services or programs. 21.4% of respondents said “Yes”, while 35.7% said “No”.

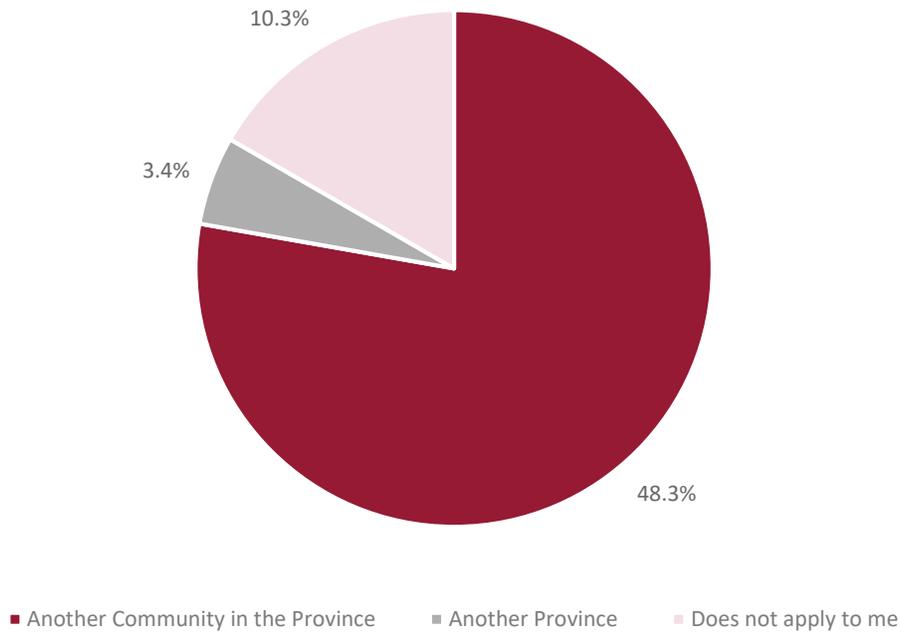


Figure 12 - Respondents answer the question “Where did you live before you came to this community?”; Other possible options with no responses: A Métis Settlement, an Inuit community.

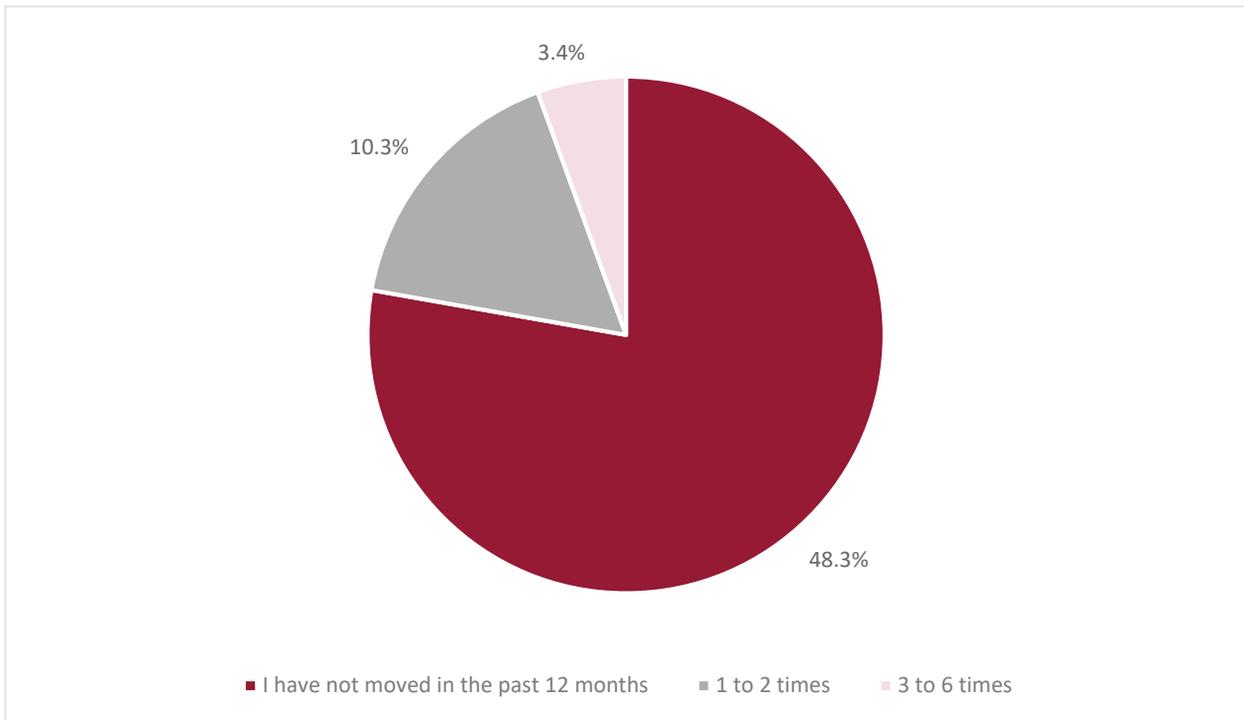


Figure 13 - Respondents answer the question “How many times have you moved in the past 12 months?” Other possible options with no responses: More than 6 times, Prefer not to answer, Does not apply to me, Other

Employment And Income Sources

Of respondents who are experiencing housing insecurity, 37.9% reported being employed in some capacity. 27.3% of those employed were working full-time and 9.1% part-time. These respondents reported being employed in the following industries (Table 8).

Table 8 – If employed, “which area do you work in?”	# of respondents
Not Listed	3
Retail/Personal Services	1
Food and Beverage/Restaurant	1

Table 9 - Respondents answer the question “What are your sources of income?”; Other possible answers with no responses were: Health, Tourism, Human/Social Services, Prefer not to answer, Education, Technology, Oil and Gas, Agriculture, Finance, Forestry, Hunting/Trapping, Marketing

Military/Emergency Service

Out of all respondents experiencing housing insecurity, no one identified as veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces, had served in Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), or had served in Emergency Services.

Sources of Income

Identifying sources of income can provide a better snapshot to the personal situations of respondents needing increased supports. For employed individuals, it can also provide insight into the disparity between wages and costs-of-living in the community.

11 people facing housing-insecurity reported employment as their main source of income. Sources of income varied though, and respondents were encouraged to select all that apply as shown below (Table 9).

Table 9 - "What are your sources of income?"	# of respondents
GST refunds	13
Employment	11
Child and Family Tax Benefits	10
Disability Benefits	9
Not Listed	5
Seniors Benefits (CPP, OAS, GIS, etc.)	4
My partner/spouse's income	4
Income assistance	3
Informal income (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, etc.)	2
Alimony/Child Support	2
Money from family and friends	2
Employment Insurance	2
Prefer not to answer	1

Table 9 - Respondents answer the question "What are your sources of income?"; Other possible answers with no responses were: Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB), Student Loans, Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Veteran's Benefits

Qualitative Findings

To compliment the large amount of quantitative data encompassed in this report, we also included some of the qualitative findings that respondents included in their surveys. In addition to respondents providing answers to multiple-choice questions, some parts of the survey collected responses, to allow respondents to provide additional information.

When asked to provide the main reason why respondents find themselves to be homeless or at-risk, we received the following unique replies:

- Apartment is for sale, i could get kicked out
- Because my aunt doesn't like me but took me in so i wasn't homeless, and constantly threatens to kick me out
- Bills
- Cost
- Covid 19 illness, loss of job and income
- Covid-19 virus i have lost clients who were nurses who are afraid of the virus
- Economy
- Experience
- Financial situation
- Finances-rent is 58% of income
- Financial instability
- Government of alberta has the housing subsidy program i'm on up for review and i am not sure if they are going to keep it or cut program. If i lose my subsidy i will not be able to afford rent and be homeless.
- Health/inability to work
- I am getting older, and may not be able to live here at some point
- I don't make enough money
- I don't make enough money and rent is too high
- If i lost my hone it would likely be because i would be unable to make

mortgage payments

- If the building were to sell from current owners
- If the landlord will decide to move back to her own property, we will need to move out and find another place to rent
- Injury means i am currently on disability
- Insufficient income currently
- It is quickly becoming more difficult for me to manage the home, financially and physically but can't afford to sell and buy a more suitable house.
- Landlord wants to sell ,and then won't be able to afford rent
- My rent has gone up to \$900 a month
- My rent is 77% of my monthly after tax pay, if any of my bills go up, i will be unable to meet rent.
- No job
- Owner selling the house
- Rent payments
- Single parent low income
- Single parent/low income wo child support
- Sold home, can't find suitable rental on aish
- The fact that come january i might lose my subsidy because of all the government changes. If i lose my subsidy me and my children will not be able to afford the rent and end up on the streets
- Unstable relationship

What does homelessness look like?

In a report that is ostensibly composed of data and graphs, it is possible to overlook the humanity behind the numbers. Using the most common responses from the survey, we were able to compile a profile of a “typical” respondent facing housing insecurity.

In the case of Okotoks and Surrounding Areas, this turns out to be a woman, in her early 40s, who has lived in the community for five to ten years. She finds it difficult to pay rent and feels like she spends more than a third of her monthly income on housing. She notes the housing she has needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.). She is unemployed, and there is a ~48% chance she has at least one dependent that she needs to look after.

The true diversity of the respondents is of course illustrated in the Survey Results section, but this serves to highlight what someone in-need might look like within Okotoks and Surrounding Areas.

Exploring Next Steps

This report refrains from offering concrete recommendations for Okotoks and Surrounding Areas because in-depth dialogue between RDN, decision-makers, and administrators within the locale have not informed the findings within this report. It is the goal of the report to support decision-making at all levels by providing a credible, evidence-based document that can be used and referred to in the community. In the past, local organizations and governments have used information gathered using the methods outlined in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness to explore new programs and initiate new collaborations, such as:

- Establish an overnight shelter
- Grow awareness within communities about homelessness and housing instability
- Highlight the need for an affordable housing project and other economic development strategies
- Increase dialogue with neighbouring communities and First Nations' groups
- Start a an emergency winter mat program in the community
- Start the development of a coordinated community response programs

Conclusion

This report provides a summary of primary data collected by service agencies in Okotoks and Surrounding Areas from November 1st to the 31st. It is an overview of the needs and factors that affect housing security for individuals who accessed services during the survey period.

This project was coordinated in the midst of a global pandemic where in-person services offered by organizations has been severely reduced. Okotoks and Surrounding Areas' participation represents a unique set of data that

provides insight into the resiliency and strength of individuals even in times of crisis.

This project confirms that housing insecurity exists in rural and remote communities, presenting concrete data from respondents in 26 participating communities. This supports previous qualitative research which examined the pervasiveness of housing issues across the province.

The intention of this report is to provide means for agencies and leadership to determine their community's needs, as well as the necessary responses and potential avenues to prevent or reduce homelessness and housing instability in Okotoks and Surrounding Areas.

Disclaimer

The data and information in the data set provided here are intended for use by persons possessing technical skill and knowledge in data management and analysis. While the data is provided in good faith and to the best of RDN's knowledge, RDN does not commit to it being updated.

While every effort is made to ensure data quality and integrity, the data is provided "as is". The accuracy of any external user's statistical analysis and any reported findings are not the responsibility of RDN. Nothing arising from the data should be taken to constitute RDN's professional advice or as a formal recommendation.

Endnotes

- 1 Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.
- 2 Gaetz, S.; Donaldson, J.; Richter, T.; & Gulliver, T (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press
- 3 Shinn, M. (2007). International Homelessness: Policy, Socio-Cultural, and Individual Perspectives. *Journal of Social Issues* 63(3): 657–677.
- 4 Gaetz, S.; Barr, C.; Friesen, A.; Harris, B.; Hill, C.; Kovacs-Burns, K.; Pauly, B.; Pearce, B.; Turner, A.; Marsolais, A. (2012) Canadian Definition of Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press



April 2021

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