



# ATHABASCA

2023 Alberta Provincial Housing  
& Service Needs Estimation

COMMUNITY REPORT



**ATHABASCA CARES**  
Community Housing Society

Prepared By:  
Rural Development Network  
(780)-964-2736  
11443 - 143 Street, NW  
Edmonton, AB

# Acknowledgements

RDN's physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and is home to many Métis and Inuit Peoples. As a national organization, we also acknowledge that RDN staff and the communities we support, live, gather, and organize across Turtle Island.

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples are experiencing homelessness at disproportionately high rates compared to non-Indigenous people in Canada. Unlike the common, colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not simply defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully understood as a loss or breakdown of relationships between individuals, families, and/or communities and their land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities. RDN recognizes the ways in which settler relationships to both the land and the Peoples of this land have been broken and misused, causing and contributing to Indigenous homelessness. We also recognize the ways in which our presence on this land continues to uphold colonialism and reproduces dispossession and violence for Indigenous people, further perpetuating experiences of Indigenous homelessness.

In an ongoing effort to support Indigenous communities in addressing issues of housing, homelessness, and service needs, we are committed to working to decolonize homelessness research and advocate to funders for Indigenous self-determination in the housing and social sectors.

We share this acknowledgement to reaffirm our responsibility and commitment to reconciliation.

We also recognize that this land acknowledgement is just that, an acknowledgement; it is but one step in our journey. We commit to working to uphold the conditions of the treaties that govern this land.





## We thank you.

This report and the information within were made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front-line staff at participating service agencies:

- Family & Community Support Services (FCSS)
- Athabasca Native Friendship Centre
- Aspen Primary Care Network - Athabasca
- Village of Boyle
- Athabasca Cares Community Housing Society

and the residents in Athabasca for their support, dedication, and commitment to this project.

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program:



Canada



## About this Report

In 2023, the Rural Development Network (RDN) partnered with 22 organizations representing 45 communities across Alberta to conduct the third iteration of the provincial-wide housing and service needs estimation.

This report outlines Athabasca's results within the provincial estimation, highlighting the number of residents who are housing insecure and their experiences with homelessness. This report is complemented by the [Alberta Provincial Report](#), which highlights the combined results of all 45 communities across the province.

This report is intended to support decision-making across organizations, funders, and multiple levels of government around housing and homelessness by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs in Athabasca. It can also be used and referred to in the community for program and advocacy purposes related to housing, homelessness, and service needs.

Contact [info@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:info@ruraldevelopment.ca) for more information on Housing and Service Needs Estimations.



# Table of Contents

What does "Homelessness" mean?	1
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Limitations	8
Results & Analysis	9
Objective Housing Situation	9
Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Athabasca	10
Athabasca Population Overview	12
Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview	14
Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey Respondent Population Overview	16
Education, Employment, and Income Sources	19
Living Situation	23
Community Supports	27
Insights on Community Spaces	35
“What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?”	38
What Does Homelessness Look Like in Athabasca?	41
Opportunities Moving Forward	42
References	44

# Definitions

## What Does Homelessness Mean?

### **Homelessness**


According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2012), homelessness is the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

Further, Indigenous homelessness considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. It is defined as a "human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing...Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews" (Thistle, 2017).

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful, and distressing. The national definition of homelessness notes that individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations, including:

**Unsheltered:** Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation (e.g. living on sidewalks, squares, parks, vehicles, garages, etc.).

**Emergency Sheltered:** People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness as well as those staying in shelters due to family violence.



**Provisionally Accommodated:** People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g. couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people who are housed seasonally, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).

**At Risk of Homelessness:** People who are not yet homeless but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (e.g. people who are one rent payment missed from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.).

*(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, 2012).*

**Insecure Housing:** For this report, the term housing insecure, or insecure housing, will be used to encompass the entire spectrum of homelessness which includes unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness.



# Introduction

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the “visibility” of individuals experiencing homelessness in urban centres. The issue of homelessness in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its “hidden” nature. Further, recent data suggests that rural homelessness is prevalent at rates equivalent to or greater than urban per capita rates (Schiff, et al., 2022).

Recognizing this, RDN conducted the 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation with 22 organizations representing 45 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta in an attempt to better understand what homelessness looks like in each community and across the rural provincial landscape. Specifically, the purpose of this estimation is to:

1. Develop a contextually relevant process for local service providers to engage and collect informed data with those who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.
2. Provide a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity and homelessness in Alberta, including demographic information on who is experiencing homelessness and which services are being accessed, and which services are missing.
3. Help inform service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal policies, practices, and funding decisions on homelessness, housing, and support services.
4. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
5. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing homelessness in the solutions to end homelessness.

This is the third iteration of the Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation; it was also conducted in 2018 and 2020 with 20 and 24 communities, respectively. Athabasca was one of the 20 communities that participated in the 2018 estimation, where they surveyed 22 community members, 15 of which were determined to be housing insecure.



# Methodology

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimation comes from the [Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness](#), published by the Rural Development Network. 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. A lack of data limits the ability of rural communities like Athabasca to advocate for better resources for their residents.

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. It instead uses a service-based population estimation approach, which allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs without adding additional strain to workloads and organizational capacities.

Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide, RDN worked with communities and academics across Canada to develop a survey that reflected rural and remote community contexts. The survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definitions of homelessness. However, the survey itself was advertised as a Housing and Service Needs survey; this is a result of feedback from multiple service providers who are committed to minimizing the stigma associated with homelessness 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.

To further minimize stigma throughout the survey, rather than asking respondents to identify themselves as homeless or housing insecure, they were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure or insecure and to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing situation. Based on responses to the latter survey question along with subsequent data analysis, RDN was able to determine which respondents were housing-unstable. As shown in

the results, below, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be homeless or at risk of homelessness actually qualify based on the national definitions of homelessness.

The same survey was used across all communities participating in the 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation project, with one exception; each community's survey was customized to meet their location parameters. Figure 1 showcases Athabasca's location parameters.

## Figure 1: Athabasca's Location Question on Survey

Q2. Where do you currently live (or which community do you live closest to)?

- Athabasca
- Colinton
- Grassland
- Boyle
- I am not sure
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer
- Rochester
- Perryvale
- Donatville
- Ellscott

RDN worked with Athabasca to develop a survey administration process that would ensure the greatest level of participation possible. For Athabasca, surveys were advertised at service provider locations and online as an open Survey Monkey link across the community. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of four weeks: from March 1 to March 31, 2023.

Before the survey period began, RDN conducted orientation and training sessions with staff from participating agencies. During the training, emphasis was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and

securing participants' informed consent. During each training session, resources were provided to staff to improve their understanding of the project and increase comfort in administering the survey. Training and resources also included the various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra importance on meeting the individual's reasons for visiting the agency before offering the survey.

Important to note about the survey; to ensure the trust and anonymity of participants, each respondent was asked to give consent at the beginning of the survey and create a unique identifier. The unique identifier allows RDN to maintain the integrity of the data without knowing respondent identities. The unique identifier is a combination of letters and numbers from a participant's name and birthdate.

## Figure 2: Unique Identifier Question on Survey

Q1. Anonymous Unique Identifier (ex. John Smith, born on 15th November 1964)

H	N	What are the last two letters of your FIRST name?
T	H	What are the last two letters of your LAST name?
1	5	What is the DAY you were born?
6	4	What are the last two numbers of the YEAR you were born?

Athabasca collected 165 survey responses during the four weeks. Of the 165 surveys, 52 were excluded. Surveys were deemed unsuitable and excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Survey respondent(s) declined to give consent.
2. Survey respondent(s) declined to provide the unique identifier or provided improper unique identifier information (i.e. characters instead of numbers, etc.).
3. Survey respondent(s) submitted multiple surveys (determined based on unique identifier(s)).

Based on this, 113 were determined to be suitable for further analysis and will be the focus of the results outlined below.





## Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase the accessibility of the survey, not all clients who were offered a survey chose to participate. Additionally, staff at participating agencies were informed that participants under the age of 14 years old required guardian consent to participate in the survey. While this is inherently problematic and exclusionary, as most youth experiencing homelessness would not have a guardian present to provide consent, to maintain survey ethics, this requirement is in compliance with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Worth noting here is that not everyone who filled out the survey responded to every question.

As a result, there remains a portion of people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity whose voices and lived experiences were not captured in this project. Therefore, while the trends, highlights, and recommendations made are very informative, it is important to remember that this report presents a conservative picture of the housing and services needs in Athabasca.

# Results & Analysis

## Objective Housing Situation

As part of the survey, participants were asked the following question: *“Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?”* Respondents were given the options “yes,” “no,” and “I’m not sure” to guide their responses. Of the 113 survey respondents, 28 self-identified as housing insecure and 17 indicated “I’m not sure.” Through further analysis, it was determined that 69 survey respondents are housing insecure according to the national definitions of homelessness. An additional 56 dependents and 86 adults reported as living with housing insecure survey respondents. Therefore, based on survey results, there are at least 211 community members experiencing housing insecurity in Athabasca.

The top three reasons for housing insecurity in Athabasca, as reported by survey respondents, are:

1. Low wages
2. Inability to afford rent/mortgage payments
3. Increasing rent costs



## Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Athabasca

Recognizing that the national definition of homelessness is complex, encompassing various housing situations across a continuum, it is important to better understand what housing insecurity looks like in Athabasca. This can be achieved by exploring the experiences of the 69 housing insecure respondents.

To accurately place respondents along the spectrum of homelessness, a series of measures were used to understand their situations, including their self-identified housing stability response, their calculated housing stability, their current housing situation, the amenities they lack in their current home, and others. Early in the survey, respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation and were able to choose all situations that applied to them from a variety of statements that ranged from “I own the house I am currently in” to “I lived in supportive housing” to “I slept in a public space” and more. To accurately present what a journey of housing insecurity might look like for respondents over a month, we have included all responses, as respondents were able to select more than one statement.

An important thing to consider when reading this table is that people experiencing housing insecurity often fluctuate in and out of their situation; therefore, someone who was unsheltered one night might have been emergency sheltered or provisionally accommodated the next. As a result, we have highlighted every incident of insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the journey of housing insecurity in Athabasca.



**Table 1: Respondents by Housing Situation in the Homelessness Spectrum**

<b>Place on the Homelessness Spectrum</b>	<b># of Respondents in Each Category</b>
Unsheltered	8
Emergency Sheltered	5
Provisionally Accommodated	37
At-Risk of Homelessness	98

This table demonstrates the diversity of respondents' experiences with housing insecurity in Athabasca and outlines that homelessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside. Respondents that have been identified as "At Risk of Homelessness" emphasized their difficulty in being able to afford their rent/mortgage and/or have stayed in a home with unsafe conditions such as physical construction hazards, no windows, no electricity, etc. A few respondents are also living in overcrowded accommodations where there are not enough bedrooms for the number of people staying there.

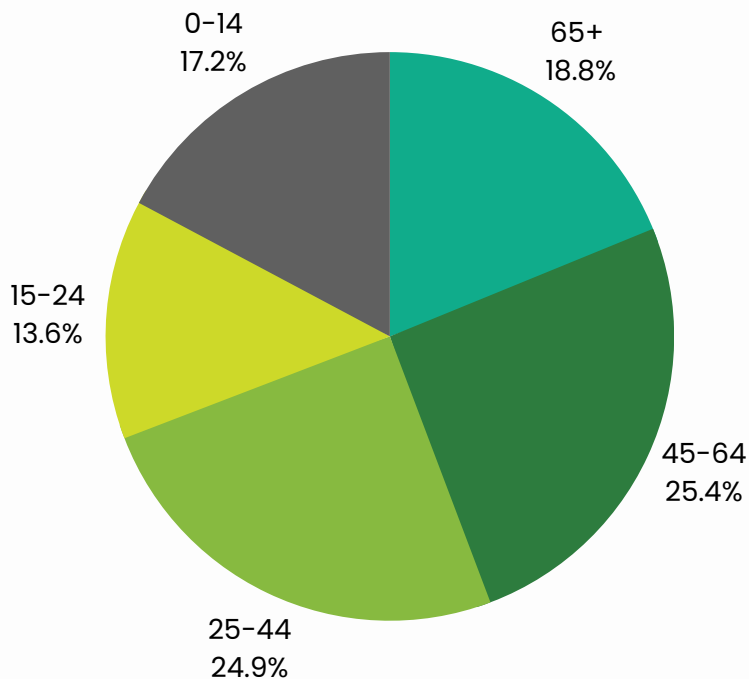
Respondents who indicated they experienced being provisionally accommodated noted stays in medical/detox facilities and/or a jail/prison/remand centre. Some respondents also indicated staying in a home unwillingly because they have nowhere else to go, staying with a stranger because they had nowhere else to go, and/or enduring violence because they had nowhere else to go.

## Athabasca Population Overview


According to Alberta's Regional Dashboard (Government of Alberta, n.d.), the Town of Athabasca covers an 18.6 square km geographical land base with a total population size of 2,815; making up 0.06% of Alberta's total population. The surrounding Athabasca County is home to another 7,663 people.

52.7% (1,483) of the population is reported as female, while 47.3% (1,332) reported as male.

**Figure 3: Athabasca Population Age Breakdown (2022)**



The average age of the population is 43 years in the Town of Athabasca.



According to Statistics Canada (2021) Census numbers, 10% (255) of the population immigrated to Canada, and 12.4% (315) of the population identified as a visible minority. Further, 13.9% (355) of Athabasca's population identified as Indigenous; 27% (95) of whom are First Nations, 65% (230) of whom are Métis, and 4% (15) of whom noted multiple Indigenous ancestries.

The 2021 Census also reports that the Town of Athabasca has 1,155 private households with an average of 2.3 people per household. Of the 1,155 private households, 58% (670) are owned, while 42% (485) are rented, with the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom dwelling listed as \$912. Additionally, 81.8% (945) of occupied private dwellings are houses and 17.3% (200) of occupied private dwellings are apartments. Single-family houses make up 46.2% of all private dwellings in the area. Further, 29.9% (345) of households report one or more of the following:

- Spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs,
- That their dwelling is “not suitable”; and/or,
- That their dwelling has “major repair needs.”

The median after-tax income is \$38,400 for individuals and \$71,500 for households in the Town of Athabasca. According to the Economic Research Institute (2023), the cost of living in the Town of Athabasca is 7% higher than the national average and 1% higher than the provincial average for Alberta.

## Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview

113 community members responded to the Athabasca survey; 66% (75) identified as female, 28% (32) as male, and 1% (1) as gender non-conforming. 1% (1) of respondents were unsure of their gender identity and 4% (4) preferred not to answer. Additionally, 86% (96) of respondents identified as straight, 4% (5) as bisexual/pansexual, and 2% (2) as asexual. 3% (3) were unsure of their sexual orientation and 5% (6) preferred not to answer.

Of the 113 respondents, 5% (6) are between the ages of 0-19; we know from their unique identifier, which asks for their birth year, as well as our ethical standards on the age of consent when administering the survey that this respondent is between 14-18 years old. Additionally, 37% (41) are between the ages of 20-39, 41% (46) are between 40-59, and 17% (19) are 60 years or older.

94% (106) of respondents were born in Canada (Turtle Island), while 5% (6) immigrated to Canada and 1% (1) preferred not to answer.

81% (91) of respondents are white, while 8% (9) of respondents self-identified as racialized. An additional 4% (5) of respondents noted their racial identity was not listed in the options provided and 7% (8) of respondents preferred not to answer. Additionally, 12% (13) of respondents self-identified as Indigenous and 4% (4) preferred not to answer; 46% (6) as First Nations and 54% (7) as Métis.

8% (9) of respondents stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement in the past and 1% (1) preferred not to answer.

Lastly, in terms of demographics, respondents were asked to indicate if they have ever served in the Canadian Armed Forces/Foreign Military Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or Foreign Police Service, or local or foreign Emergency Services (EMS, Police, Fire Department). Of the 113 survey respondents,

% (1) were in the Canadian Armed Forces or Foreign Military Service, 1% (1) were in the RCMP or Foreign Police Service, 4% (4) were in local or foreign Emergency Services, and 3% (3) preferred not to answer.




## Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey Respondent Population Overview

Table 2: Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Population Overview Comparison by Housing Stability

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
<b># of Survey Respondents</b>	44	69
<b>Gender</b>	Male: 13	Male: 19
	Female: 30	Female: 45
	Trans-male: 0	Trans-male: 0
	Trans-female: 0	Trans-female: 0
	Gender non-conforming: 0	Gender non-conforming: 1
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 1
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Straight: 38	Straight: 58
	Gay/Lesbian: 0	Gay/Lesbian: 0
	Bisexual/Pansexual: 2	Bisexual/Pansexual: 3
	Asexual: 1	Asexual: 1
	Two-spirit: 0	Two-spirit: 0
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 3

<b>Age</b>	0 - 19 years: 0	0 - 19 years: 6
	20 - 39 years: 9	20 - 39 years: 32
	40 - 59 years: 23	40 - 59 years: 23
	60+: 12	60+: 7
<b>Immigration Status</b>	Born in Canada: 43	Born in Canada: 63
	Born outside of Canada: 1	Born outside of Canada: 5
<b>Racial Identity</b>	White: 36	White: 55
	Visible minority: 1	Visible minority: 8
<b>Indigenous Identity</b>	First Nations: 1	First Nations: 5
	Métis: 3	Métis: 4
	Inuit: 0	Inuit: 0
	Other Indigenous ancestry: 0	Other Indigenous ancestry: 0
<b>Time in Foster Care, Youth Group Home, or Youth/Young Adult Agreement</b>	Spent time in care: 3	Spent time in care: 6
<b>Served in Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, Emergency Services</b>	Canadian Armed Forces: 1	Canadian Armed Forces: 0
	RCMP: 1	RCMP: 0
	Emergency Services: 2	Emergency Services: 2



Based on this survey population overview breakdown, we can determine the following:

- Respondents identifying as female are 2.4x more likely than their male counterparts to be housing insecure
- 100% of youth respondents (ages 14-19) are housing insecure
- 67% of respondents who spent time in care are housing insecure

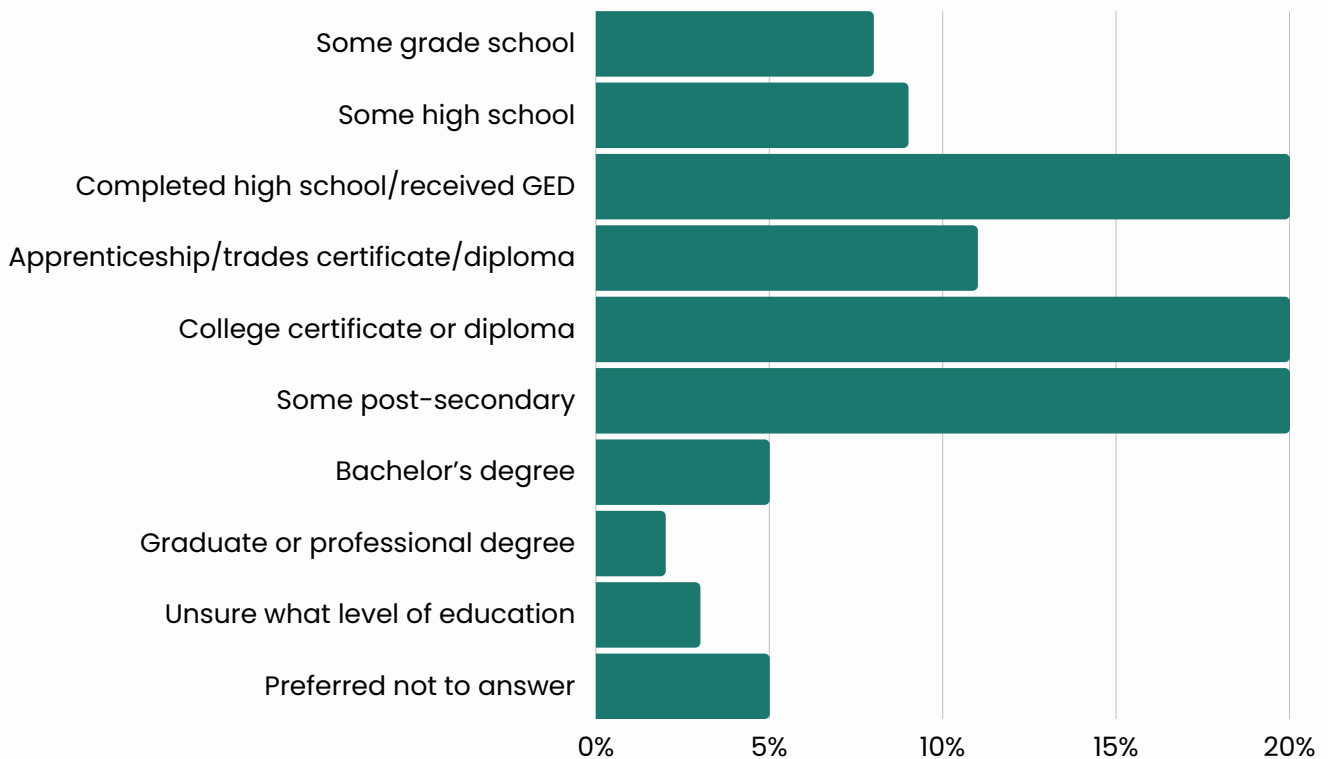
*\*Note that the rest of the reported results and analysis will focus on housing insecure respondents unless otherwise indicated.*




## Education, Employment, and Income Sources

Respondents indicated various education levels when responding to “*What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?*” 8% (5) of respondents have completed some grade school, 9% (6) have completed some high school, 20% (13) have completed high school or received their GED, 11% (7) have an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma, 20% (13) have a college certificate or diploma, 20% (13) have some post-secondary, 5% (3) have a Bachelor’s degree, 2% (1) have a graduate/professional degree, and 3% (2) are unsure what level of education they have. 5% (3) of respondents preferred not to answer. This can be seen in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Respondents’ Education Levels Breakdown**





Additionally, 65% (43) of respondents are employed and 5% (3) preferred not to answer; 58% (25) of those employed are full-time, 28% (12) are part-time, 7% (3) are casual, and 7% (3) indicated “other.”

Recognizing that many respondents are not full-time employed, we asked them, “*What are your sources of income?*” Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply from the following list of options: *Job-related* (e.g. employment, partner/spouse’s income, alimony/child support, etc.), *Government-related* (e.g. Seniors Benefits, Veterans’ Benefits, Disability Benefits, Employment Insurance, Student loans, etc.), *Tax-related* (e.g. child and family tax benefits, GST refunds, etc.), or *Informal* (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, money from family and friends, etc.).

Respondents noted 76 times that they receive job-related income, 15 times that they receive government-related income, 23 times that they receive tax-related income, and 15 times that they receive informal income. Additionally, respondents noted nine times that they have other sources of income including credit card loans, and twice that they preferred not to answer.

Further, respondents were asked to disclose their approximate household income for the previous year. Responses varied widely, as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3: Respondents Approximate Household Income in 2022**

<b>Total Household Income in 2022</b>	<b># of Respondents Per Income Level</b>
\$30,000 or less	23 (35%)
Between \$30,001 and \$49,999	11 (17%)
Between \$50,000 and \$69,999	7 (11%)
Between \$70,000 and \$89,999	4 (6%)
Between \$90,000 and \$109,999	5 (8%)
More than \$110,000	3 (5%)
Prefer not to answer	13 (20%)

This can be broken down further to understand household income level by housing security status, as seen in Table 4.

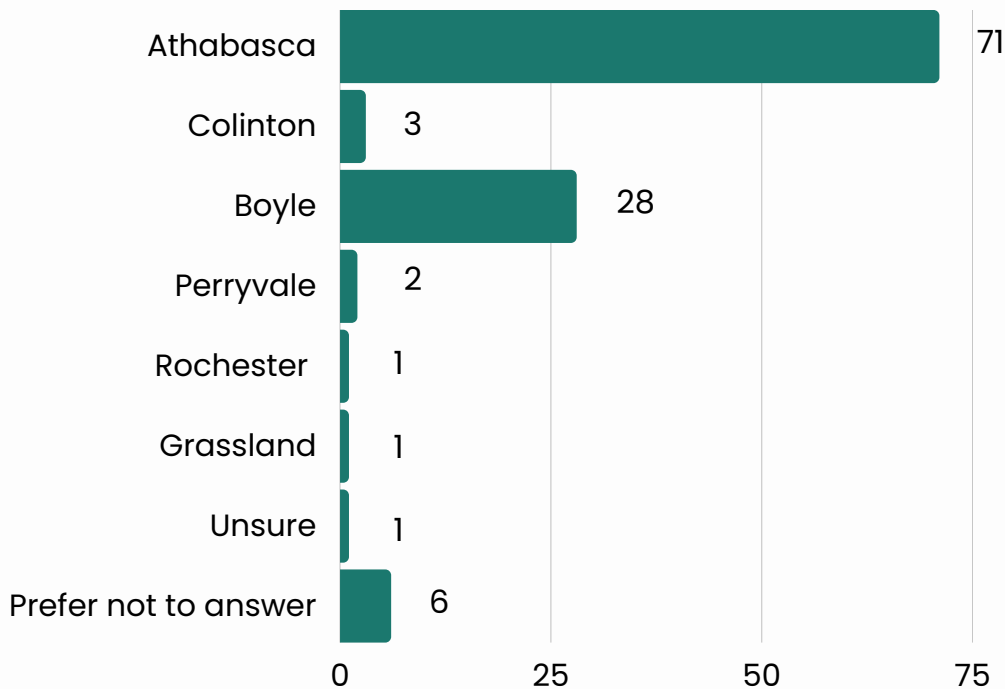
**Table 4: Respondents' Household Income in 2022 by Housing Status**

<b>Total Household Income in 2022</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents Per Income Level</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents Per Income Level</b>
\$30,000 or less	0	23 (35%)
Between \$30,001 and \$49,999	1 (3%)	11 (17%)
Between \$50,000 and \$69,999	2 (5%)	7 (11%)
Between \$70,000 and \$89,999	5 (14%)	4 (6%)
Between \$90,000 and \$109,999	4 (11%)	5 (8%)
More than \$110,000	11 (30%)	3 (5%)
Prefer not to answer	14 (38%)	13 (20%)

## Living Situation

Residents from across Athabasca responded to the survey, as can be seen in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Breakdown of All Survey Respondents by Location**



To better understand respondents' current living situations, respondents were asked to indicate if they rent or own their home (or if neither is true for them). 25% (17) of housing insecure respondents indicated that they own their homes, 58% (40) indicated that they rent their homes, 14% (10) noted that they neither own nor rent, and 3% (2) preferred not to answer. Comparatively, 89% (39) of housing secure respondents owned their homes, 7% (3) rented their homes, and 5% (2) preferred not to answer.

Further, respondents were asked, “If you pay rent or a mortgage, how much do you pay per month?” Of the responses, rent and mortgage prices varied.

**Table 5: Rent or Mortgage Costs per Month by Housing Status**

<b>Rent/Mortgage Cost</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs</b>
Less than \$500	1 (2%)	4 (6%)
Between \$500 to \$999	6 (14%)	22 (32%)
Between \$1000 to \$1499	5 (11%)	22 (32%)
Between \$1500 to \$1999	7 (16%)	10 (15%)
Over \$2000	9 (20%)	2 (3%)
I don't pay rent or a mortgage	13 (30%)	2 (3%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (7%)	4 (6%)

Among housing insecure respondents, whether they rent, own, or are in a different situation entirely, 22% (15) do not have sufficient and affordable heating and 12% (8) do not have electricity.

**Table 6: Breakdown of Respondents' Missing Amenities**

<b>Missing Amenities</b>	<b># of Respondents Missing Amenities</b>
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	7 (10%)
Sufficient and affordable heating	15 (22%)
Safe drinking water	6 (9%)
Refrigeration	8 (12%)
Electricity (or equivalent - i.e. solar power)	8 (12%)
Cooking facilities	8 (12%)
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	15 (22%)

This breakdown highlighted respondents who lack basic amenities and is one of the ways in which respondents' objective housing situation is calculated. Some respondents self-identified as housing stable but lacked amenities that would consider their housing situation stable according to the Canadian definition of homelessness, including indoor plumbing, heat, electricity, and access to safe drinking water.

21% (23) of all respondents, 78% (18) of which are housing insecure, have always lived in Athabasca. Of the housing insecure respondents who were not born there, 31% (21) have lived in the area for more than eight years. Respondents who are

not from Athabasca were also asked to indicate why they came to this community. The top three reasons respondents came to the area are:

- 1.To be closer to family (38%)
- 2.To start a job (15%)
- 3.To look for work (12%)

Other reasons people moved to Athabasca include the lifestyle the community offers (10%), to find housing (11%), fear for safety/fleeing from violence (4%), to attend school (4%), and to access services/supports (1%). 5% of respondents indicated "other."





## Community Supports

To better understand service needs and gaps in Athabasca, respondents were asked: “Which support services do you access?” The main reasons all respondents access support services are to help with health and wellness (31%), basic needs (20%), and financial (9%).

**Table 7: Reasons Why Respondents Access Support Services**

<b>Services Accessed</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>
<b>Basic Needs</b> - Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	0	18 (24%)
<b>COVID-19</b> - PPE, information, supports	0	7 (9%)
<b>Crisis Financial Support</b> - Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	0	3 (4%)

<p><b>Family/Parenting -</b> Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.</p>	<p>1 (8%)</p>	<p>5 (7%)</p>
<p><b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>8 (11%)</p>
<p><b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.</p>	<p>9 (69%)</p>	<p>18 (24%)</p>
<p><b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce/custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.</p>	<p>3 (23%)</p>	<p>2 (3%)</p>

<b>Support Services</b> - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	0	7 (9%)
<b>Transportation</b> - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	0	5 (7%)

To further understand respondents' abilities to access the necessary support services, we asked: "Which of these services were you able to access in your community?" and "Which of these services did you have to access in another community?" followed by, "If applicable, how long did you travel to access these services (one-way)?"

Respondents were most likely to access basic needs and health and wellness services in Athabasca, while health and wellness services were most accessed outside the community, as seen in Table 8.

**Table 8: Services Accessed by Housing Insecure Respondents by Location**

<b>Services Accessed in the Community</b>	<b># of Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>	<b>Services Accessed Outside of the Community</b>	<b># of Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>
<b>Basic Needs -</b> Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	24 (15%)	<b>Basic Needs -</b> Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	14 (11%)
<b>COVID-19 -</b> PPE, information, supports	11 (7%)	<b>COVID-19 -</b> PPE, information, supports	13 (11%)
<b>Crisis Financial Support -</b> Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	13 (8%)	<b>Crisis Financial Support -</b> Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	9 (7%)
<b>Family/Parenting -</b> Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	15 (10%)	<b>Family/Parenting -</b> Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	10 (8%)

<b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	14 (9%)	<b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	13 (11%)
<b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	21 (13%)	<b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	17 (14%)
<b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce /custody, wills/estates, employment/ labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	14 (9%)	<b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce/ custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	13 (11%)

<b>Support Services -</b> Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	13 (8%)	<b>Support Services -</b> Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	11 (9%)
<b>Transportation -</b> Access to basic services/education /employment, medical transportation	15 (10%)	<b>Transportation -</b> Access to basic services/education/ employment, medical transportation	11 (9%)

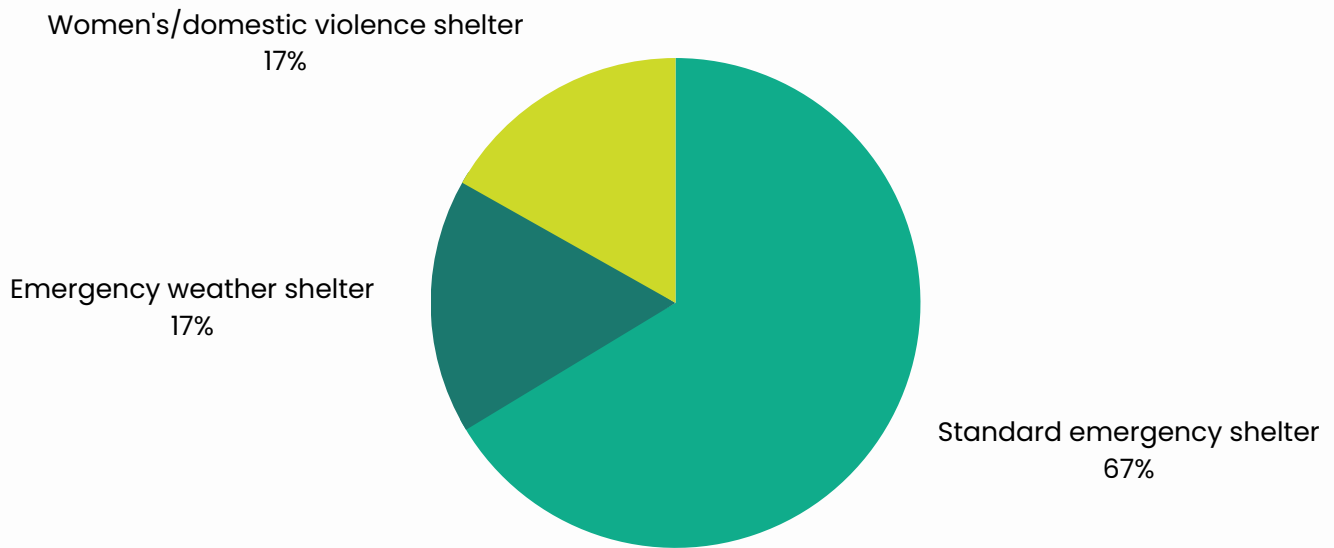
Respondents noted travelling an average of an hour and twenty minutes one-way to access services. Time and distance to access services outside of the community is a barrier for some respondents; while 44% of respondents travel by vehicle to get to these services, 31% rely on family members or friends, 10% rely on public transit or e-bus, taxis and/or a service agency staff arranging a ride for them, and 10% resort to hitchhiking to access services.

What's important to consider is that respondents who are unable to access the necessary support will continue to experience housing insecurity at much higher rates than those respondents who can access the support needed to stabilize their housing situation.

7% (5) of respondents accessed an emergency shelter in the past 12 months and 3% (2) preferred not to answer; 67% (4) accessed a standard emergency shelter, 17% (1) accessed an emergency weather shelter, and 17% (1) accessed a women's/domestic violence shelter. One of these respondents reported staying

in more than one type of emergency shelter. 4% (3) of respondents also indicated staying in transitional housing.

## Figure 6: Emergency Shelter Use



Of the respondents who needed shelter services but did not access them, several reasons were provided as to why, as outlined in Table 9. The top three reasons why respondents did not access shelter services when they needed them were because there was no transportation to get to the shelter, they didn't feel safe, and there were no shelters in the area.

**Table 9: Reasons Respondents Did Not Access Shelter Services When Needed**

<b>Reason for Not Accessing Shelter Services</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>
The right kind of shelter wasn't available (for example, I needed a women's shelter and couldn't access one)	2 (8%)
The shelter was full	1 (4%)
There was no shelter in my area	4 (15%)
I didn't meet the intake criteria to access the shelter	0
I didn't feel safe	5 (19%)
The shelter was unclean	3 (12%)
The shelter did not welcome me because of my gender identity	0
Alcohol/substance use is not permitted on site	1 (4%)
Lack of disability accommodations	0
Lack of transportation	6 (23%)
No pets allowed	2 (8%)
Isolation from social support (family, partner, friends, etc.)	1 (4%)
Prefer not to answer	0





## Insights on Community Spaces

Wanting to ensure the respondents had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the community, they were asked; *"What are two things you love about the community and what are two things you don't love about the community?"*

In analyzing responses across both housing secure and housing insecure respondents about what they love about Athabasca, two themes emerged: a sense of community and parks and recreation.

Sense of Community: Respondents spoke often of their love for how small and rural the community is with many respondents indicating a love for the quiet, peaceful, and relaxed atmosphere they feel in Athabasca. They also love and appreciate how beautiful the community is and how it acts as a central location and "hub" for Alberta. Respondents also spoke to the "feel" of the community, mainly attributing that to the people in the community. They love how family-friendly the community is and how friendly, welcoming, and caring people are in Athabasca.

Parks and Recreation: Respondents repeatedly highlighted their love for Athabasca's beautiful landscape. Many emphasized the community's riverfront and proximity to lakes, parks, and green spaces as something they love. Others spoke of the beauty in Athabasca's wilderness landscape. Additionally, respondents noted the many recreation and sporting activities they enjoy in the community, including camping, boating, and quading. Several respondents also noted their love for how easy it is to stay active in Athabasca.

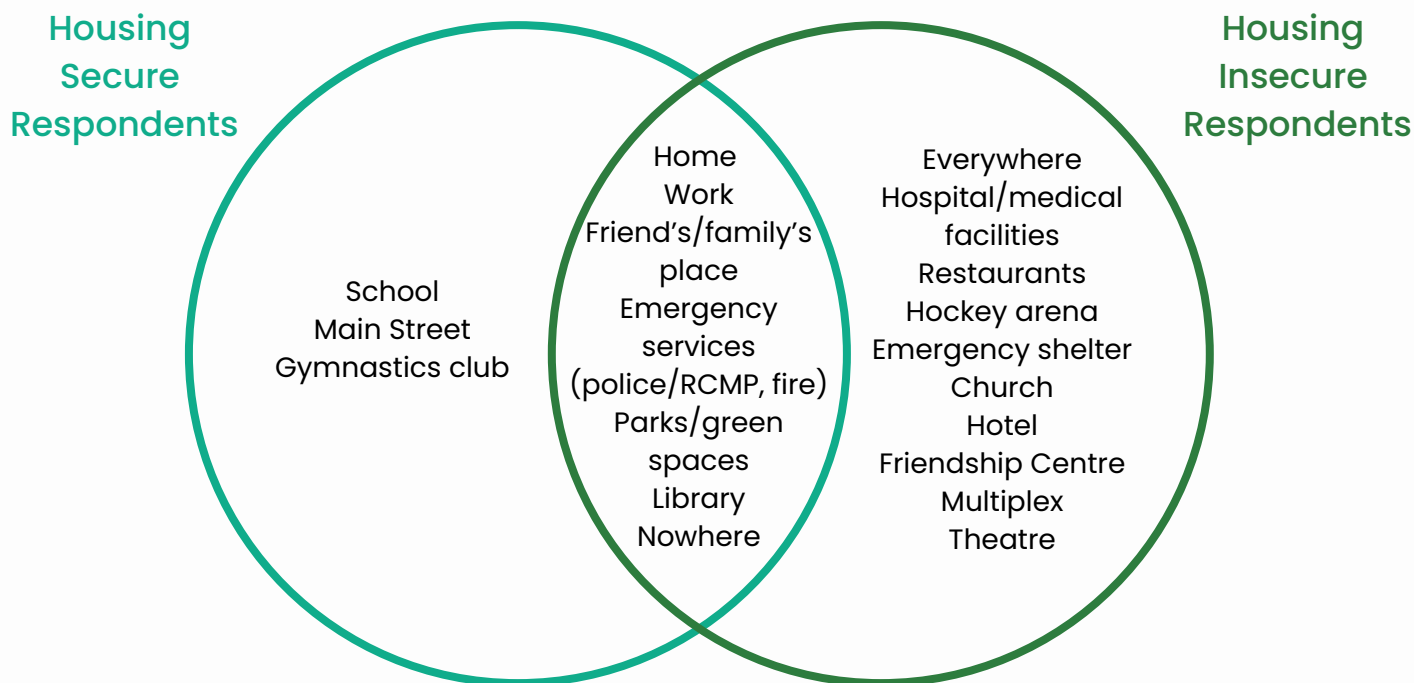
In contrast, when discussing the things they don't love about the community, respondents spoke mostly of a lack of services within the community.

Lack of Services: Respondents indicated a lack of services as a concern in

Athabasca. Many noted a lack of food options, both in terms of restaurants and a food bank, while others spoke to a lack of medical, mental health, and 2SLGBTQIA+ services. Respondents also listed a lack of affordable and accessible housing and a lack of police presence as frustrations. Additionally, most respondents highlighted a lack of functional and maintained transportation services and infrastructure. Several respondents indicated that many sidewalks lacked street lights and that in the winter snow removal was poor on both sidewalks and roads. Similarly, respondents expressed frustration with a lack of public transportation options in Athabasca.

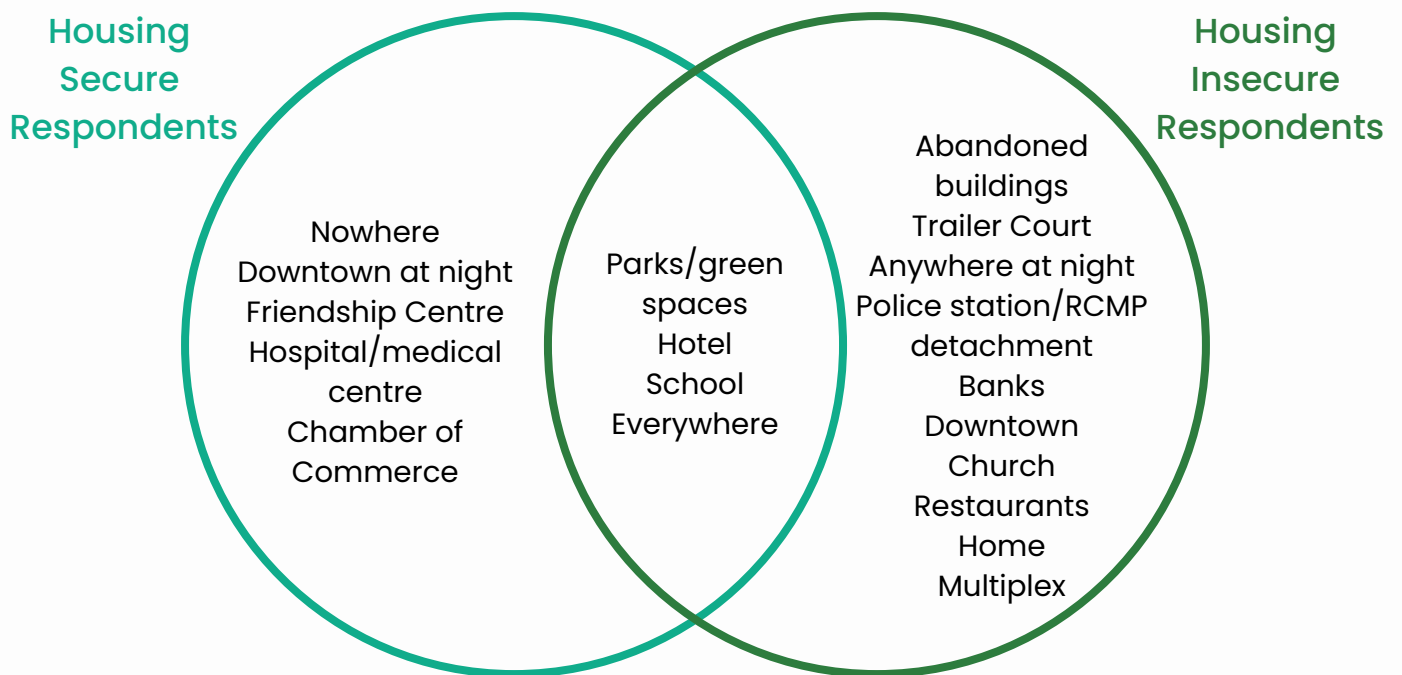
Respondents were also asked, "What are two places that make you feel safe in the community and what are two places that make you feel unsafe in the community?" Figure 7 highlights the spaces where respondents feel safe.

**Figure 7: Venn Diagram of Safe Spaces Responses by Housing Status**



In comparison, Figure 8 highlights spaces where housing secure and housing insecure respondents felt unsafe.

**Figure 8: Venn Diagram of Unsafe Spaces Responses by Housing Status**



## “What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?”

Respondents, both housing secure and housing insecure, outlined many things they would like to see more of in the community. Upon further analysis, they can be categorized into two main themes: housing and services. These themes seem to align with respondents' answers to a previous question they were asked: *“Does Athabasca provide enough...employment opportunities; free/accessible recreational and social opportunities; social services; accessible and affordable housing; public transportation; access to food?”*

**Table 10: Respondents' Perceptions of Athabasca's Provision of Services**

<b>Does the Community Provide Enough:</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Believe the Community Provides Enough...</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Believe the Community Does Not Provide Enough...</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Aren't Sure if the Community Provides Enough...</b>
Employment opportunities	14 (14%)	66 (68%)	17 (18%)
Free/accessible recreational and social opportunities	24 (23%)	59 (61%)	14 (15%)
Social services	50 (52%)	29 (30%)	17 (18%)

Accessible & affordable housing	15 (15%)	62 (63%)	21 (21%)
Public transportation	11 (11%)	79 (81%)	7 (7%)
Access to food (grocery stores, markets, food banks, etc.)	66 (69%)	23 (22%)	8 (8%)

Of note in Table 10 is the significant discrepancy in respondents who believe there is enough accessible and affordable housing in Athabasca (15%) versus the number of respondents who believe more accessible and affordable housing is needed (63%) and the number of respondents who believe there is enough public transportation (11%) versus the number of respondents who believe more is needed (81%).

Housing: Most respondents indicated a need for more accessible and affordable housing in the community. Specifically, respondents noted that income-based rental units would greatly support housing insecure community members. Many respondents also suggested that houses deemed inadequate should be upgraded; one respondent specifically stated that there are several inadequate houses in Athabasca without access to safe drinking water. In addition, respondents highlighted that new housing developments should be built close to services so that community members without a car are able to access them.

Services: Respondents outlined several services they would like to see more of in Athabasca. Some noted wanting more supports for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, and others are interested in bringing the food bank back to the community. Most respondents specifically emphasized the need for addiction services and mental health supports, including introducing safe injection sites to

the community. Some emphasized a need for Indigenous awareness training among current service providers. Lastly, almost all respondents also indicated the need for public transportation services in Athabasca for them to access and enjoy the current supports, services, and recreation opportunities available to them.

Upon further analysis, an overall satisfaction score was generated to better understand respondents' perceptions of service provision in the community. It was determined that housing secure respondents are 34% satisfied, while housing insecure respondents are only 31% satisfied with service provision in Athabasca. What's important to note here is that the satisfaction rates calculated above speak to the lack of available services in the area rather than satisfaction with currently available services in the community.



## What Does Homelessness Look Like in Athabasca?

In a report that is composed of mainly quantitative data, it can be easy to overlook the humanity behind the numbers reported. 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 Athabasca, this is a woman between 20–39 who has lived in the community for more than eight years. She rents her home with her partner/spouse for between \$1,000 and \$1,499 per month. She is currently employed full-time but notes spending more than 30% of her monthly income on housing. The home she is renting is in need of major repairs and does not have fire protection.

The true diversity of respondents is illustrated in the Results & Analysis section, but this highlights what someone experiencing housing insecurity might look like in Athabasca.






# Opportunities Moving Forward

Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN has identified three opportunities to support housing insecure respondents moving forward. They are:

**1. Increase community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity and homelessness.** Community conversations around housing insecurity should have two goals: First, to broaden the general community's understanding of and empathetic reaction to community members experiencing housing insecurity, and second, to help general community members understand the various experiences of housing insecurity in Athabasca. Of the 69 survey respondents who were identified as housing insecure, only 28 self-identified as housing insecure. It is possible then, that the 41 respondents who believe they are housing secure have never accessed supports that could help improve their current housing situation. Facilitating community conversations on housing insecurity and homelessness will help to ensure more people better understand their current housing status and at the same time, will hopefully encourage the community to show empathy and understanding towards housing insecure respondents. Considering 22% of respondents do not have sufficient heating and 12% do not have electricity in their current housing situation, community conversations should also include sharing information and resources on human rights, tenant rights, homeowner rights, and any available opportunities for crisis financial support.

**2. Conduct a gap analysis and audit of service offerings in Athabasca.** Respondents indicated several services they would like to see in Athabasca from basic needs and shelter to health services. Further, housing secure respondents are 34% satisfied and housing insecure respondents are only 31% satisfied with the current provision of services in the community. Given the number of service gaps identified by residents of Athabasca, it is critical to audit the availability of services in the community. If these services currently exist in the community, consider why respondents identified the service(s) as a gap. This might mean rethinking certain services, increasing access to these services, and/or looking for





ways to better promote these services to increase awareness across the community. Conducting a gap analysis and audit of services in the community and surrounding areas will help identify where new services are needed versus where increased awareness of currently available services is needed.

**3. Consider public transportation options in Athabasca.** Respondents indicated a lack of transportation as prohibitive to accessing housing, services, recreation opportunities, and shelter in the community. To ensure respondents can get the support they need to stabilize their housing situation, whether that be access to medical or mental health support, accessing the employment centre, obtaining a job, or even finding housing, accessible transportation is crucial. Public transportation is often very difficult to provide in rural communities, due to lack of infrastructure and costs associated with operations. Consider creative and/or alternative options to public transportation such as car share programs, taxi credits, volunteer ride share programs, or other options to ensure community members, specifically housing insecure community members, can get around the community.

## References

- Abedin, Z. (2022). *Step-by-step guide to estimating rural homelessness, 2nd Ed.* Rural Development Network. <https://www.ruraldevelopment.ca/publications/step-by-step-guide-to-estimating-homelessness>
- Economic Research Institute. (2023). Cost of Living Data in Athabasca, Alberta, Canada. <https://www.erieri.com/cost-of-living/canada/alberta/athabasca>
- 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.
- Government of Alberta. (n.d.). Athabasca. Alberta Regional Dashboard. Retrieved April 26, 2023 from <https://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/athabasca/#/>
- Schiff, R., Wilkinson, A., Kelford, T., Pelletier, S., & Waegemakers Schiff, J. (2022). Counting the undercounted: Enumerating rural homelessness in Canada. *International Journal on Homelessness*, 3(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2022.2.14633>
- Statistics Canada. (2021). Census profile, 2021 Census of Population. Athabasca, Town (T) [census subdivision], Alberta. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfmLang=E&SearchText=athabasca&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&DGUIDlist=2021A00054813048&HEADERlist=2,30,20,23,9,7,11,19,13>
- Thistle, J. (2017). *Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.



Rural Development Network  
(780)-964-2736  
11443 - 143 Street, NW  
Edmonton, AB