Alberta Rural Development Network

Alberta
Rural
Development
Network

2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

County of Grande Prairie
Community Report

May 2019

Canada

The Alberta Rural Development Network recognizes that the 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project took place on the traditional territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8.

County of Grande Prairie's Estimation Count occurred on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral home of the Cree, Dene, as well as the Métis. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose footsteps have marked these territories for centuries. The ARDN also recognizes the direct connection between homelessness and colonization[1], and it is our hope that this project provides one small step towards righting wrongs.

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES

The following communities participated in the 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project:

Athabasca County
Banff and Canmore
Camrose
County of Grande Prairie
Drayton Valley
Drumheller
Fort Macleod
Grande Cache
Greenview
Hinton
Jasper
Kainai First Nation
Lacombe
Okotoks
Lac La Biche
Peace River
Ponoka
Strathmore
Tri-Region (Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Parkland County)
Wetaskiwin

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The following local organizations participated in Grande Prairie' Estimation Count:

Alberta Supports Grande Prairie
Beaverlodge Family and Community Support Services
City of Grande Prairie, Community Social Development
County of Grande Prairie FCSS
Grande Prairie Family Education Society
Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter
HIV North Society
Odyssey House
R. Work Group
Rotary House
Seniors Outreach
Sexsmith and Area Food Bank
Sexsmith FCSS
Society for Support to Pregnant and Parenting Teens
United Way Emergency Fund
Wellington Resource Centre
Wembley Family and Community Support Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) led a province-wide effort to estimate homelessness in rural communities in Alberta. Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Rural Homelessness Estimation Project (RHEP) is an initiative which facilitated homelessness data collection in 20 communities across rural Alberta over a three-month period in fall 2018.

This initiative utilized the methodology outlined in ARDN's "Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness"[2] whereby surveys are administered at local and regional social service agencies to gather information on the following:

- Housing instability
- Employment
- Income
- Family demographics
- Services accessed

Lead project partners connected with local service agencies in their communities to coordinate the dates for their local count. Service agencies were instructed to invite individuals who visited their agency to fill out a 28-question survey during a consecutive 30-day period.

The participating 20 communities were provided with both an online and paper version of the survey. In either format, the survey could be completed directly by the respondent or with the assistance of a staff member.

Over the months prior to the collection period, service providers were trained on the objectives, needs, and overall goal of the project, which was to collect information on housing and service needs from individuals accessing local services. Emphasis during training was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing their informed consent.

Data from paper surveys was input into the online platform by the local lead project coordinator and was compiled, reviewed, and consolidated by ARDN along with survey results collected online. Duplicates were removed (using the Unique Identifier, as per the Step-by-Step Guide methodology) and data analysis and integrity measures were performed by ARDN analysts who then compiled, reviewed, and consolidated these results to produce the final community findings outlined in this report.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This report consists of an overview of the primary data collected through social service agencies in the County of Grande Prairie from September 17th to October 17th, 2018. The lead coordinator for the County of Grande Prairie's Estimation Count was the County of Grande Prairie Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

The primary data collected in the County of Grande Prairie's count indicated the following:
- 57 people felt their housing situation was unstable, that they could easily lose their housing, or were unsure whether their housing was stable;
- The majority of respondents who identified as housing-unstable were born in Canada (93%), identified as Caucasian (56%), and had resided in the County of Grande Prairie area for more than a year (56%);
- 32% of respondents who were housing-unstable (n=56) were employed;

- The most common support services needed by all survey respondents (both stably and unstably housed) were "Basic Needs (such as food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry services)", "Support Services (accessing government programs, accessing technology)", and "Financial Support".

As per the Step-by-Step Guide, this survey used the Canadian definition of homelessness as defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness[3]. However, to encourage client participation, the survey was advertised as a way to better understand the housing and support needs and challenges faced by community members in the County of Grande Prairie; use of the term "homelessness" was minimized due to the associated stigma, and the questions within the survey focused on respondents' "unstable housing" conditions. Unstable housing, as defined in this iteration of the project, is when a person experiences *"difficulty paying rent, spending a major portion of the household income on housing, having frequent moves, living in overcrowded conditions, or doubling up with friends and relatives"*. By re-framing the focus of the survey, this project attempted to decrease stigma, increase community members' willingness to participate, and collect quality data that stays true to the estimation's purpose.

It is important to reiterate that the aim of the project was not solely to identify the scope of homelessness and housing instability in the County of Grande Prairie, but to better understand the support services potentially required to address these issues. Through the collection of direct input from individuals who access social services, a baseline depiction of the local situation can be established.

Despite this, the following data is count data. While there is possibly a small error in responses due to data entry or user error, there are no significance values, p-values, tests, or inferential statistics of any sort within this report. It is therefore not ARDN's intention with this report to:

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

It is the responsibility of the individual community and local community partners to draw their own conclusions and interpretations based on this data and determine how to best utilize it. ARDN assumes no responsibility or liability for any changes, decisions, or actions made as a result of the interpretation of data outlined in this report.

Due to rounding and exclusion of non-responses, data presented throughout this report may not add up precisely to the totals provided and percentages may not precisely reflect the absolute figures. Additionally, some questions from the survey are not included within this report due to low response rates. A copy of the actual paper survey used in this project can be found at **www.ardn.ca/publications/2018-rhep-survey**.

LIMITATIONS

In this pilot study, respondents self-identified as to whether they considered their housing situation as unstable or whether they felt they could easily lose their housing. Because of the stigma associated with the term "homelessness" and the relativity of the term "housing instability", many individuals may not self-

identify under either term, even though they meet the defined criteria. Therefore, individuals who may meet the Canadian definition of homelessness may have nevertheless reported their housing situation as stable (and vice versa).

Not every person who entered a participating service agency may have consented to the survey (and therefore, not every participating agency may have been able to gather completed surveys); not every individual requiring help may have entered a participating service agency during the 30-day collection period; and not every service agency in the County of Grande Prairie may have participated. As a result, this report presents a conservative estimate of The County of Grande Prairie's situation with regards to homelessness, housing instability, and community service needs.

SUPPORT SERVICES

All individuals who took the survey (n=71), including those who said they had stable housing, were asked which issues they were seeking assistance for when they came into the service agency. The support services that all respondents reported as needing the most can be seen in **Table 1** (below) and multiple responses were possible. Nine respondents chose "prefer not to answer".

Table 1: Respondents were asked "what general areas or issues are you here to get support with?".

General Support Services Needed (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support	50
Support Services (accessing government programs, accessing tech)	37
Financial Support	29
Health & Wellness Support	28
Family/Parenting Support	21
Transportation Support	17
Prefer Not To Answer	9
Domestic Violence Support	8
Legal Support	5
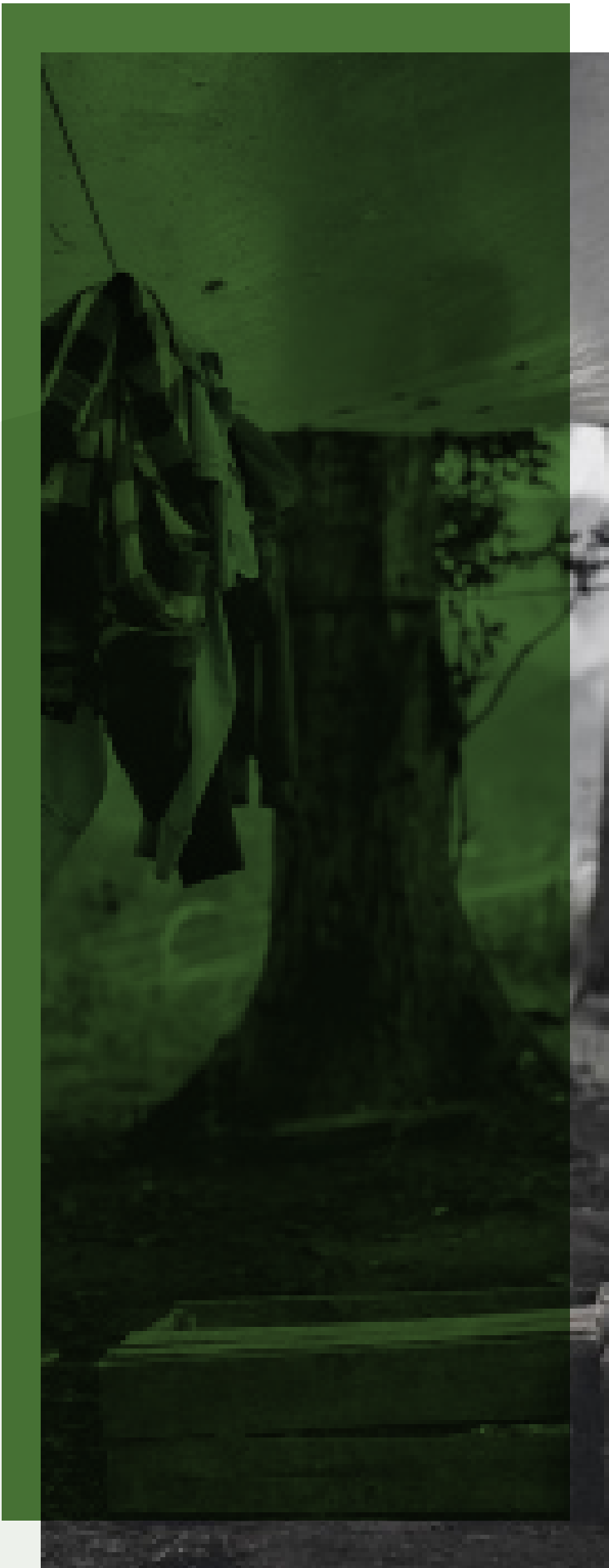
The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Basic Needs Support" (50), "Support Services" (37), and "Financial Support" (29).

� COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Housing Stability

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 71. Of those, a total of 57 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" and are therefore considered housing-unstable individuals (**Figure 1**). All the results that follow in this report include data solely from respondents who reported their housing situation to be unstable. This was done to both capture information from individuals facing homelessness, and better understand demand on local service agencies.

Reasons for Housing Instability

The reasons given for why individuals felt their housing was unstable can be seen in **Table 2** (page 8). Respondents had the option to give multiple answers if necessary. The top five most common responses for why they felt their housing was unstable were as follows: 38 responses for "Low Income"; 23 for "Unable to Pay Rent or Mortgage";

71

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

57

UNSTABLY HOUSED RESPONDENTS

18 for "Job Loss"; 15 for "Mental Health", and 14 for "Conflict".

When respondents were asked to give their primary reason that they thought their housing was unstable (one reason only), the most common responses were: 20 (39.2%) for "Low Income"; 6 (11.8%) for "Job Loss"; and 4 (7.8%) each for "Addiction/Substance Use" and "Unable to Pay Rent/Mortgage".
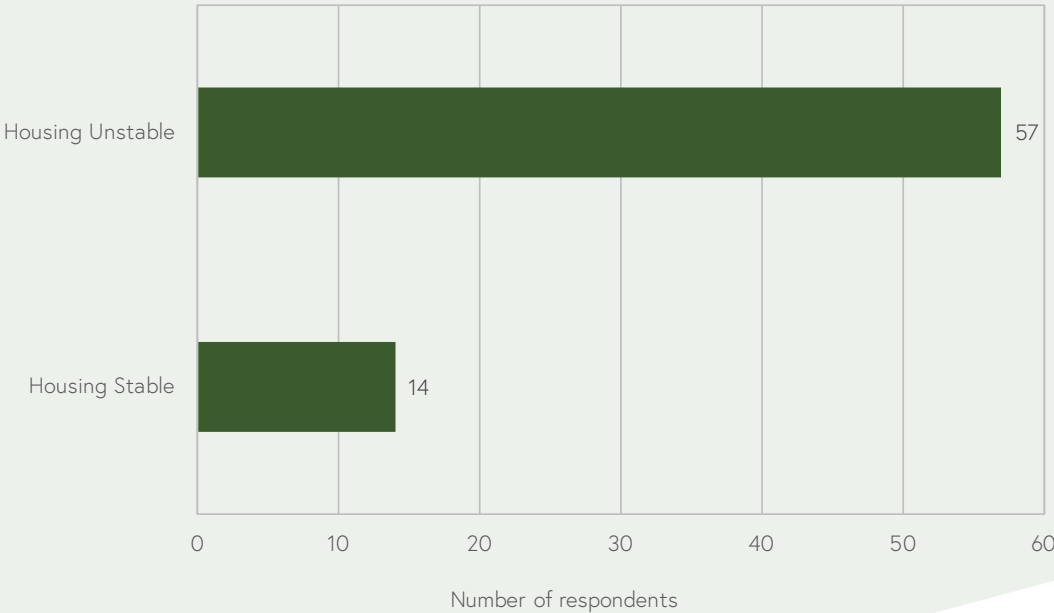

Figure 1: A total of 57 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=71).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by the County of Grande Prairie respondents as to why they felt their housing was unstable. Respondents were able to give more than one response. Other options that received zero responses are not shown.

Reasons for Unstable Housing Status (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Low Income	38
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	23
Job Loss	18
Mental Health	15
Conflict	14
Inadequate Housing	12
Transportation	12
Illness/Medical Condition	10
Addiction/Substance Use	7
Abuse	6
Other	5

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

The reported gender identities of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 2**. Of the survey respondents, 15 (26.3%) identified as men, 41 (71.9%) identified as women, and 1 (1.8%) person identified as non-binary.

Sexual Orientation

The reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (page 9). Of the survey respondents, 52 identified as straight, three as bisexual, and two responded "Prefer Not to Answer".

Age of Respondents

The age demographics of respondents with unstable housing can be seen in **Figure 4** (page 9). The average age of individuals facing unstable housing was 44 and the median age was 43.

26.3% of unstably housed respondents identified as men

1.8% of unstably housed respondents identified as non-binary

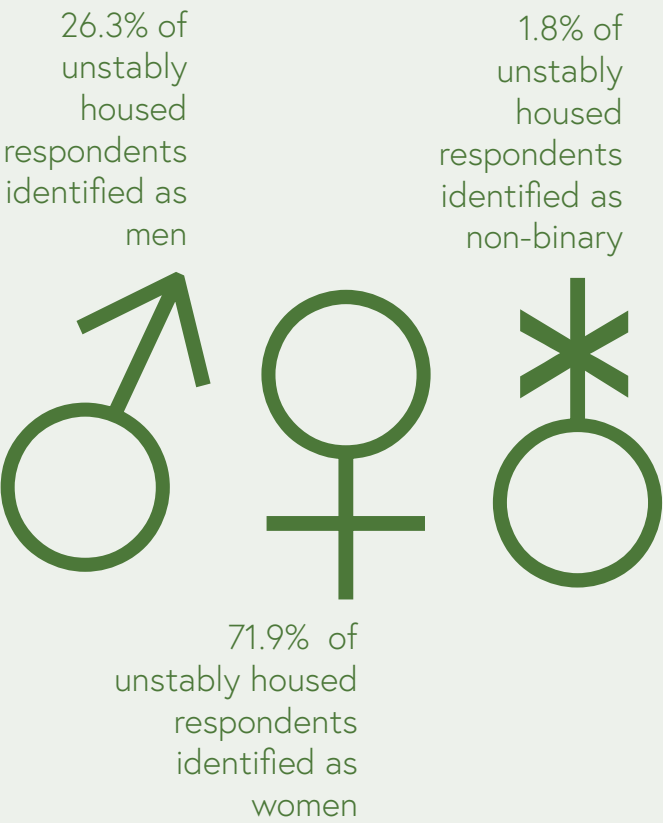71.9% of unstably housed respondents identified as women

Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=57).
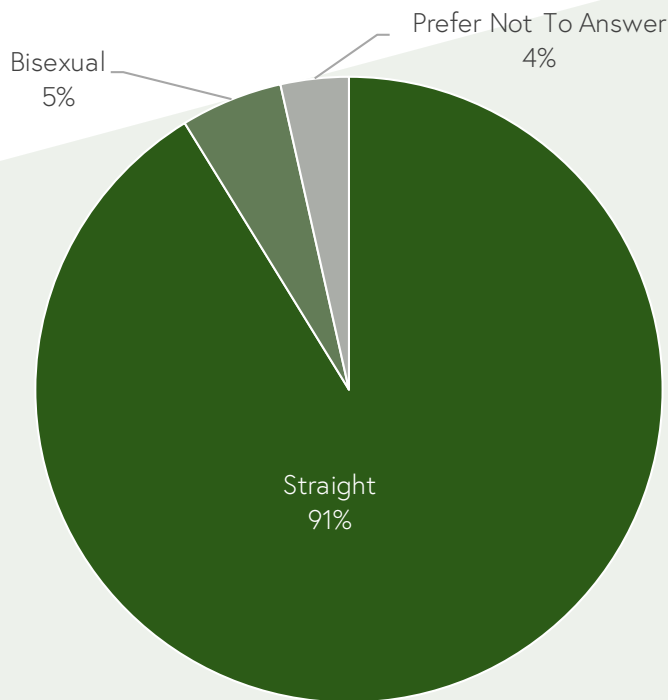
Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=57).

Migration Status and Ethnicity

Out of all housing-unstable respondents, 53 were born in Canada and four were not born in Canada. These results are shown in **Figure 5** (page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, 29 identified as Caucasian, 16 as Indigenous (six Métis and 10 First Nations), seven responded "Prefer Not to Answer", and one gave no response (**Figure 6,** Page 10).

Of respondents who had immigrated to Canada at some point (n=4), two people arrived as either an immigrant or as a refugee, and two respondents arrived as temporary foreign workers.

Of respondents currently facing unstable housing, 55 were Canadian citizens and two respondents gave no response.
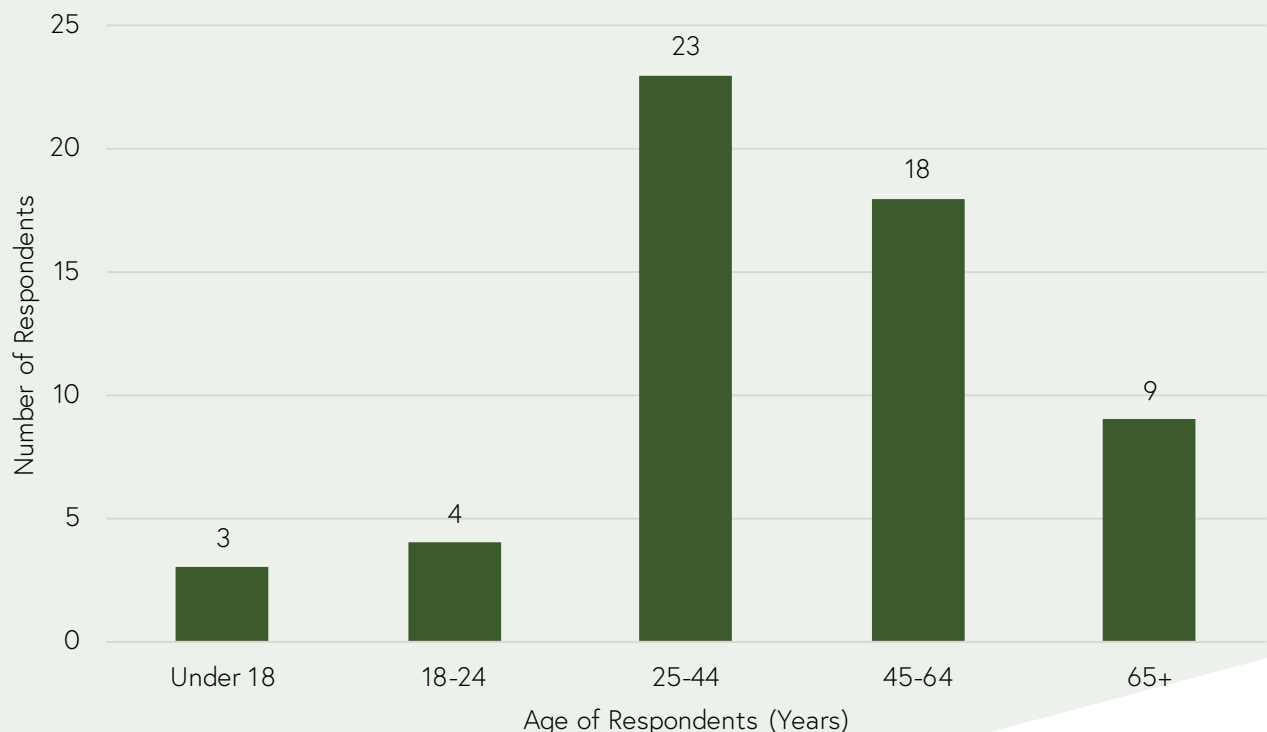

Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=57).

RECENT LIVING SITUATION

Duration of residency

The duration of time that respondents had lived in the community can be seen in **Figure 7** (page 11). Eight respondents reported that they have always
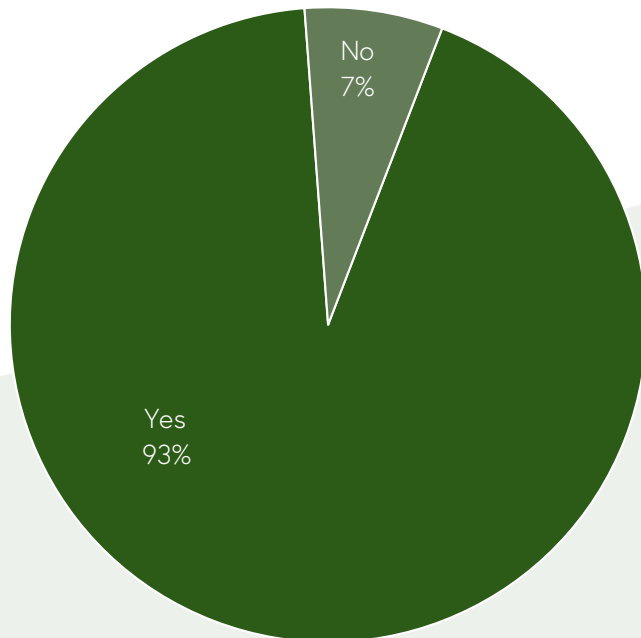
Figure 5 (above): Unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"? (n=57).
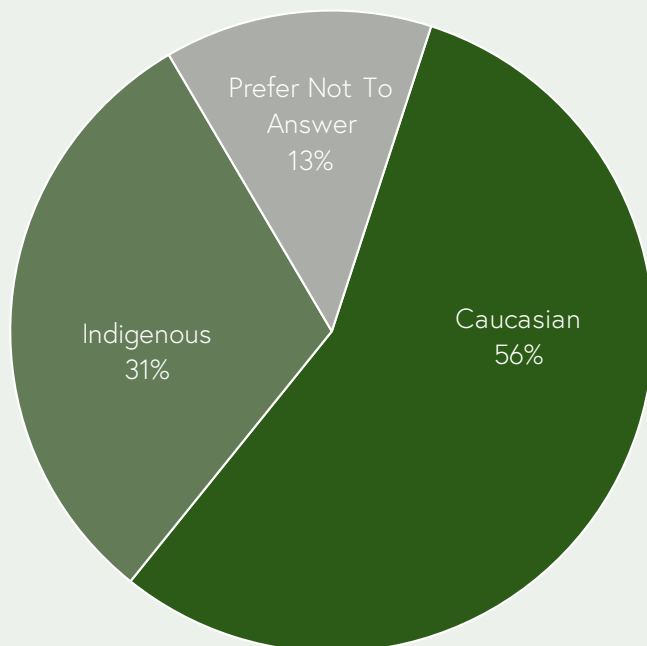
Figure 6 (above): Of respondents born in Canada, 56% identified as Caucasian, 31% as Indigenous, and 19% responded with "prefer not to answer" (n=52).

lived in the community, 32 lived in the community for over a year, 15 respondents have lived in the community for under a year, and two responded with "Prefer Not to Answer".

Accommodations

Respondents were asked about their most recent living situations. Respondents' most commonly reported living situations for the week prior to taking the survey can be seen in **Table 3** (below). The duration of time that respondents reported living in their current living situation can be seen in **Figure 8** (page 11).

Table 3: Respondents were asked about their accommodations within the past week.

Accommodations in the past week (multiple responses possible)	Responses
Apartment/House	36
Shelter Services	11
Someone Else's Place	7
Camping	4
Motel/Hotel	4
Sidewalks, Squares, Parks, or Makeshift Shelter	2
Transitional Housing	1
Prefer Not To Answer	1
Abandoned Building	1

Respondents were asked about the number of times they had moved in the past year; frequent moves can be an indicator of instability and insecurity. Nine respondents have not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 11 had moved 1-2 times, eight had moved 3-5 times, one had moved 10 or more times, 10 responded "Not Applicable", one responded "Prefer Not to Answer", and 17 gave no response.

If respondents had lived somewhere else in the past year, three moved from another residence within the community, 11 came from another community in the province, four from another province, three from another residence in the community, and 1 indicated "Other" residence.
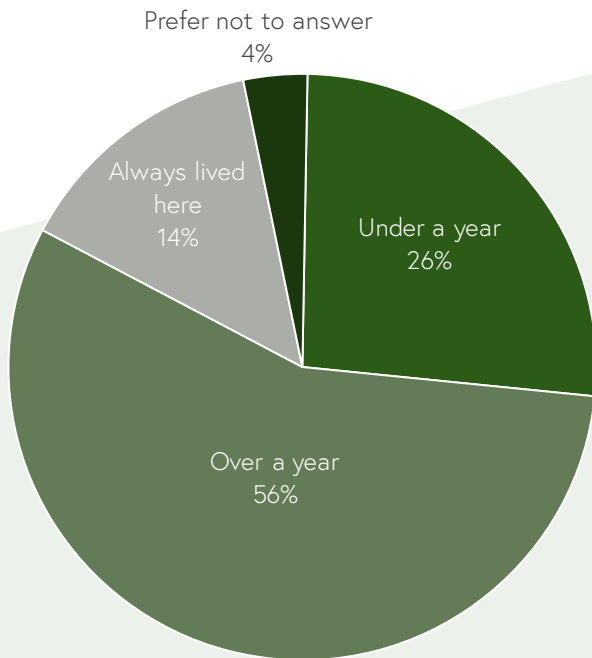
Figure 7: Respondents were asked about their current living situations. The figure above contains the response for the question "how long have you lived within the community?" (n=57).

Who's Staying with You

Some respondents reported that they had other people sharing their living situation with them. Of collected housing-unstable survey responses (n=57), there were a total of 19 adults staying with

unstably-housed respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 1.19. There were also a total of 49 children staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of children sharing respondents' living situation was 2.04.

It is important to note that these individuals cannot be confirmed to be experiencing housing instability, and these numbers are just an indication that they share the same living situation or household as the survey respondent.

No unstably-housed respondents answered "Yes" to the question "are you or anyone in your household pregnant?".

Shelter Use

Respondents were asked if they had spent time in an emergency shelter in the past year. Thirty individuals responded to this question, and 12 answered "yes" to accessing shelter services in the past year. Subsequently, if they had answered "no", respondents were asked about possible reasons for not utilizing emergency shelter(s). One said that shelters are full, one said there were no shelters
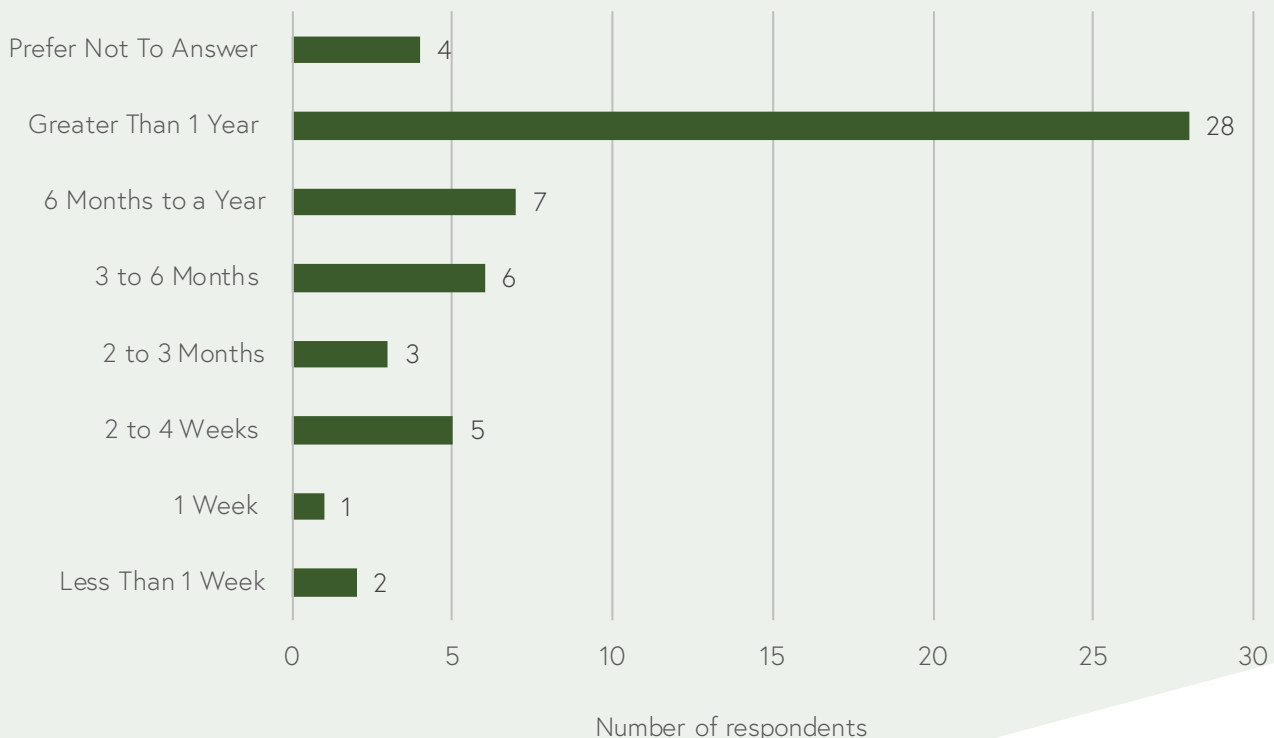

Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=56).

in their area, three said that they did not need shelters, one stated "Other" as a reason, 12 said the question was Not Applicable, three selected "Prefer Not to Answer", and the rest chose not to respond.

Note: *due to a technical error, the shelter use question was not included on the online version of the survey (for all 20 communities that took part in the survey); therefore, data was only collected for respondents who filled out the paper version of the survey. As a result, this question was asked of a smaller subset of housing-unstable survey respondents and the data is therefore incomplete.*

EMPLOYMENT

The employment status of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 9**. Out of 56 individuals who responded to the question, 18 were employed and 38 were unemployed. For those who were employed, six were employed full-time, eight were employed part-time, two were casual workers, one stated "Other", and two responded "Prefer Not to Answer". The sector that people were currently employed in can be seen in **Table 4** (below).

Figure 9 (above): Respondents were asked whether they're currently employed (n=56).

Table 4: Respondents who reported being employed were asked which sector they were employed in.

Current Employment Sector	Responses
Retail/Personal Services Sector	5
Other Sector	4
Hospitality/Food and Beverage Sector	3
Oil and Gas Sector	2
Forestry Sector	1

Table 5: Respondents were asked to identify their current sources of income.

Sources of income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Employment	18
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	13
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	11
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension (CPP)	8
Senior Related Benefits: Old Age Security (OAS)	7
Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Seniors Benefits (ASB)	7
Senior Related Benefits: Guaranteed Income Supplements (GIS)	6
Other Sources	5
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	5
Non Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	4
No Source of Income	4
Non Senior Related Benefits: Employment Insurance	4
Money From Family/Friends	3
Alimony/Child Support	2
Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	2
Prefer Not To Answer	2
Non Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD)	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Private Disability Insurance	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Workers Compensation	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Private Disability Insurance	1

Military or Emergency Services

Respondents were asked whether they had ever served in the Canadian military or any emergency services. Due to the lack of responses to the question (n=0), this dataset was not reported on.

Sources of Income

Finally, respondents were asked to identify what sources of income they had, with multiple responses if applicable. The top responses for the community can be seen in **Table 5**.

UNIQUE FINDINGS

We compared the County of Grande Prairie's data to the overall data from the other 19 communities that participated in the Rural Homelessness Estimation Project. This section describes unique data findings that are outliers in comparison to other communities. All findings in this section are based only on housing-unstable respondents (n=57). Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Amongst the 20 communities, the County of Grande Prairie had the highest percentage of men who responded in the following areas: men who reported being unable to pay their rent or mortgage as at least one reason for their housing instability (60.0%) and men who reported camping as where they were staying in the past week (20.0%). The County of Grande Prairie also ranked highly for men who reported Disability as at least one reason for their housing instability (46.7% of men), and men who reported benefits as at least one source of income (60.0%). All male respondents also reported being Canadian citizens.

Finally, the County of Grande Prairie ranked highly amongst the communities for both men (53.3%) and women (65.9%) who were visiting a service agency looking for Support Services (ie. help with government forms or accessing government programs, access to technology, etc).

CONCLUSION

The 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project was a pilot project aimed at investigating rural

and remote homelessness in 20 rural communities across Alberta. It represents the first coordinated effort to quantitatively estimate homelessness outside the seven major cities across the province. Its intent was to provide baseline data for further investigation into the issue of rural and remote homelessness in Alberta.

This report provides a summary of primary data collected by service agencies in the County of Grande Prairie from September 17th to October 17th, 2018. It is a snapshot of the living situation of individuals who accessed services in the community and reported that they were experiencing housing instability.

From a total of 71 survey respondents, 57 people reported that they felt that they could easily lose their housing or that they were uncertain whether their housing situation was stable. Given the reasons outlined at the beginning of this report, there are likely more individuals who met the Canadian definition of homelessness or who are struggling with housing instability and homelessness in the County of Grande Prairie.

It is important to reiterate that the information herein is intended to be presented as objectively as possible, without interpretation or recommendations from the ARDN. The intention of this report is to provide means for agencies within the community — who are most familiar with their local needs and realities — to determine their community's potential needs, as well as what concrete responses or additional research may be necessary to prevent or reduce homelessness and housing instability in the County of Grande Prairie.

What has been made clear from the study is that rural and remote housing instability and homelessness exists in all 20 rural communities that were investigated, a finding that supports previous qualitative research indicating that it is widespread across Alberta[5]. More research on rural and remote homelessness, in both the County of Grande Prairie and across Alberta, is warranted to better understand the issues unique to individual municipalities and areas, as well as commonalities shared, in order to inform best practices and local solutions. Given that it was the first such count of its kind (as well as the first large-scale utilization of the methodology described in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness), many lessons were learned and the results from this pilot study will help shape and improve future counts.

ENDNOTES

1) **Thistle, J.** (2017.) *Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada.* Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

2) **Abedin, Z**. (2017). Step-by-Step Guide to Estimate Rural Homelessness (1st ed.). Retrieved from https://www.ardn.ca/estimation-guide/step-by-step-guide-to-estimate-rural-homelessness-english

3) **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.

4) **Alberta College of Social Workers.** (2015). Guidelines on the Management of Consent and Confidentiality When Working with Minors. Retrieved from http://acsw.in1touch.org/uploaded/web/NEWS_GUIDELINES_ConsentwithMinors.pdf

5) **Schiff, J. W.; Schiff, R.; Turner, A.** (2016). Rural Homelessness in Western Canada: Lessons Learned from Diverse Communities. Social Inclusion. (4)4, 73-85. doi: 10.17645/si.v4i4.633

CORRECTIONS

- **Page 4 (Executive Summary):** *The number of total questions in the survey has been corrected to 28. It was incorrectly given as 25.*
- **Page 7 (Main Reasons):** *Data percentages were minorly corrected for primary reasons for unstable housing due to discovery of a survey formatting error.*
- **Page 7 (Figure 1):** *Figure caption has been changed to reflect the exact question wording "do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?".*
- **Page 9 (Migration Status and Ethnicity):** *Took out respondents who answered "Not Applicable".*
- **Page 9 (Migration Status and Ethnicity):** *the dataset on respondents identifying as immigrants and/or refugees have been corrected to reflect a formatting error in the paper survey where "immigrant" and "refugee" were not separate options.*
- **Page 10 (Accommodations):** *Due to an issue with data calculation automation, number of respondents who stayed at an apartment/house within the last week has been corrected from 57 to 36.*
- **Page 13 (Unique Findings):** *rounding error for dataset on men who were visiting a service agency looking for Support Services; corrected 60% to 53.3%.*

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