



# 2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

Fort Macleod  
Community Report

May 2019



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The Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness  
is available for download in English and French at [www.ardn.ca](http://www.ardn.ca)

For more information about the 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project

Canada 

**This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering 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 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.

Fort Macleod's 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. 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<sup>1</sup>, 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  
MD of 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 Fort Macleod's Estimation Count:*

Fort Macleod and District Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)  
Foothills Centre  
Fort Motel  
Queens Hotel

## 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"<sup>2</sup> 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 Fort Macleod from October 1st to 31st, 2018. The lead coordinator for Fort Macleod's Estimation Count was the Fort Macleod and District Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

The primary data collected in Fort Macleod's count indicated the following:

- 46 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 (96%), identified as Caucasian (57%), and had resided in Fort Macleod area for less than a year (55%);
- 17% of respondents who were housing-unstable (n=46) were employed;
- The most common support services needed by all survey respondents (both stably and unstably

housed) were "Health & Wellness Support", "Financial Support", and "Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support".

As per the Step-by-Step Guide, this survey used the Canadian definition of homelessness as defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness<sup>3</sup>. 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 Fort Macleod; 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 Fort Macleod, 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 Fort Macleod;
- Provide any interpretations of the data contained herein;
- Make any recommendations for policy changes or actions to be taken in Fort Macleod as a result of this data;
- Make any stake/claim about government policies, corporate actions, or externalities in Fort Macleod;
- Make any inferences or generalizations about the population of Fort Macleod.

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](http://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).

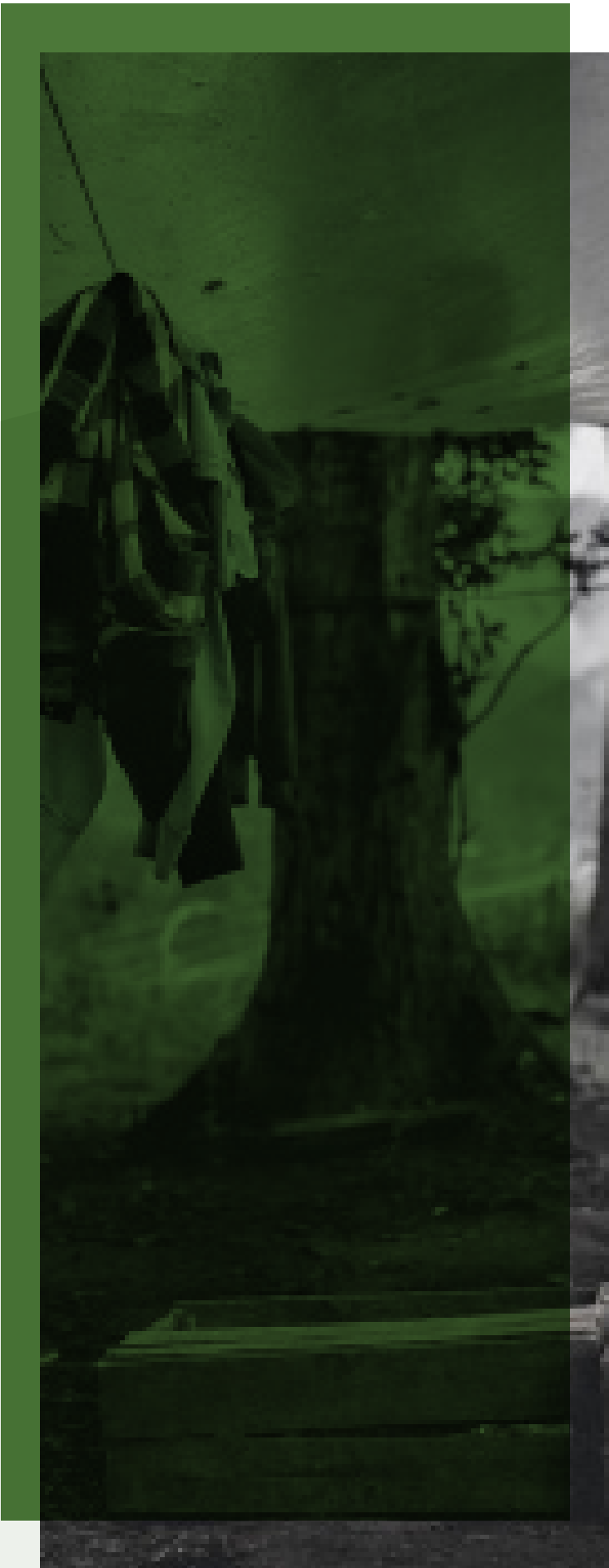
Not every person who entered a participating service agency may have consented to the survey (and therefore, not every participating agency may have been able to gather completed surveys); not every individual requiring help may have entered a participating service agency during the 30-day collection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

## SUPPORT SERVICES

All individuals who took the survey (n=57), 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. Two 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
Health & Wellness Support	38
Financial Support	36
Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support	32
Support Services (access to government programs, access to technology, etc.)	28
Transportation Support	24
Legal Support	15
Family/Parenting Support	10
Domestic Violence Support	8
Prefer Not To Answer	2
Other Support	1



The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Health & Wellness Support" (38), "Financial Support" (36), and "Basic Needs Support" (32).

COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Housing Stability

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 57. Of those, a total of 46 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: 24 responses for "Low Income"; 20 for "Addiction/Substance Use"; 16 for



"Unable to Pay Rent/Mortgage"; 13 for "Conflict"; and eight for "Job Loss".

When respondents were asked to give their primary reason that they thought their housing was unstable (one reason only), the most common responses were: 15 (34.1%) for "Low Income", 12 (27.3%) for "Addiction/Substance Use", and six (13.6%) for "Conflict".

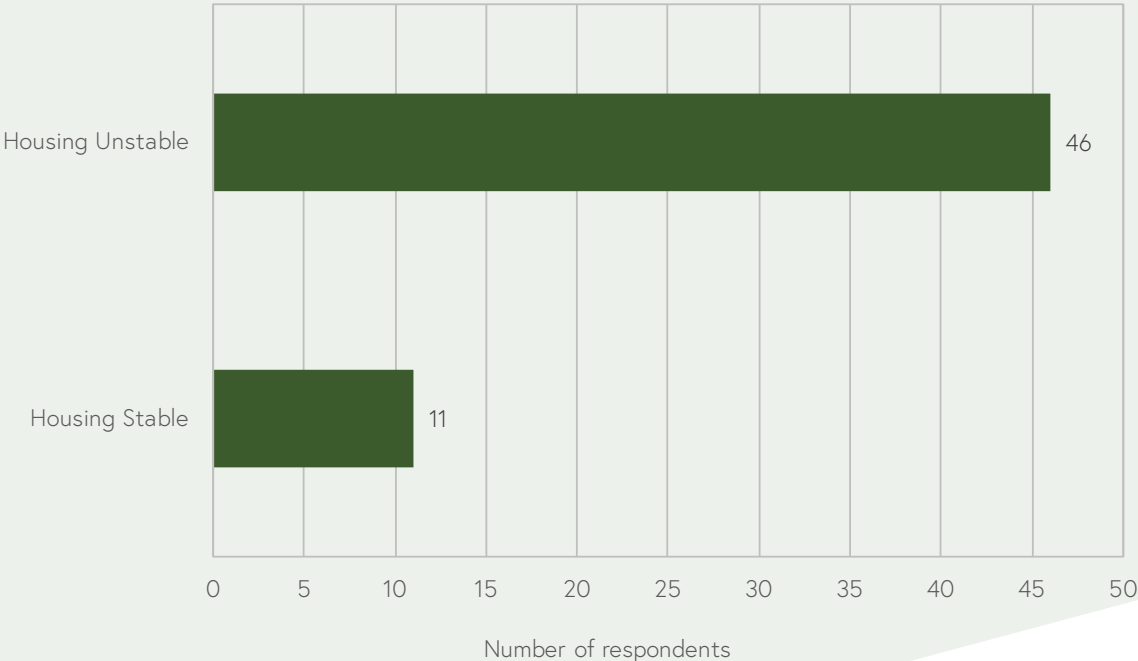


Figure 1: A total of 46 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=57).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by Fort Macleod 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	24
Addiction/Substance Use	20
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	16
Conflict	13
Job Loss	8
Disability	7
Mental Health	6
Illness/Medical Condition	6
Inadequate Housing	5
Other	3
Abuse	2
Transportation	2
Incarceration	1

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Gender

The reported gender identities of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 2**. Of the survey respondents, 29 (63.0%) identified as men, and 17 (37.0%) identified as women.

### Sexual Orientation

The reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (page 9). Of the survey respondents, 42 identified as straight, one identified as lesbian or gay, one identified 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 40.5.

**A note about youth participation:** service agencies were instructed to limit survey administration to individuals 14 years of age or older, as per the consent and confidentiality guidelines of the Alberta College of Social Workers<sup>4</sup>.

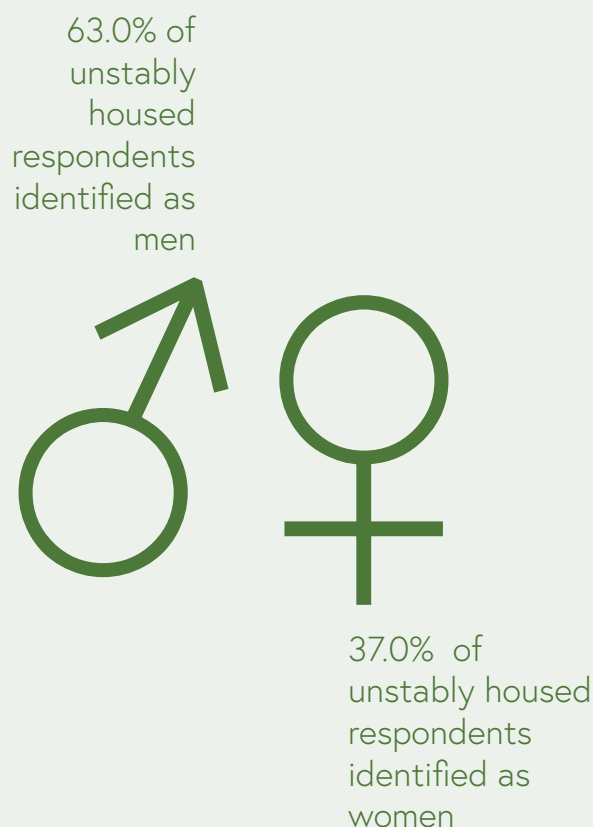


Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=46).



### Migration Status and Ethnicity

Out of all housing-unstable respondents, 44 were born in Canada and two were born outside of Canada. These results are shown in **Figure 5** (page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, 25 identified as Caucasian, 17 as Indigenous (two Métis, 14 First Nations), two responded "Prefer Not to Answer" (**Figure 6**, Page 10). *Note: one respondent's ethnicity has not been reported as it was potentially identifying.*

Of respondents who had come to Canada at some point (n=2), both arrived as either immigrants or as refugees.

Of respondents currently facing unstable housing, all 46 were Canadian citizens.

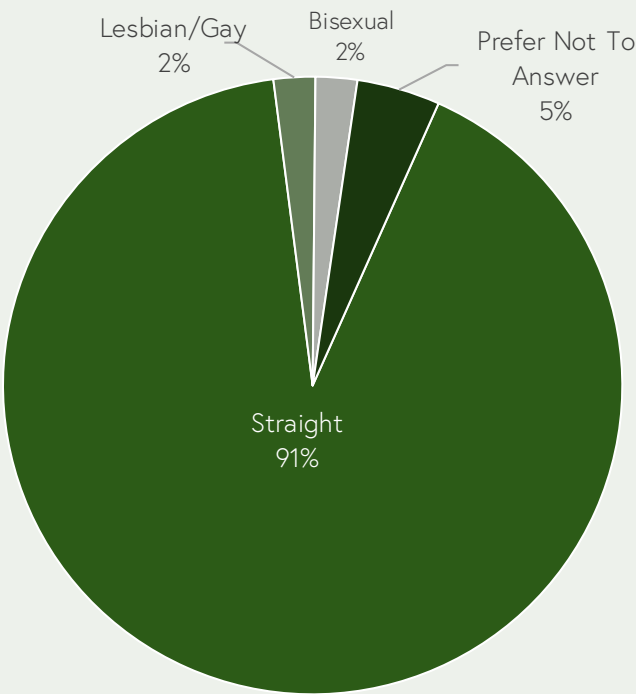


Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=46).

### 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). Two respondents reported that they have always lived in the community, 19 had lived in the community for more than a year, and 25 had lived in the community for less than a year.

#### Accommodations

Respondents were asked about their most recent living situations. Respondents' most commonly reported

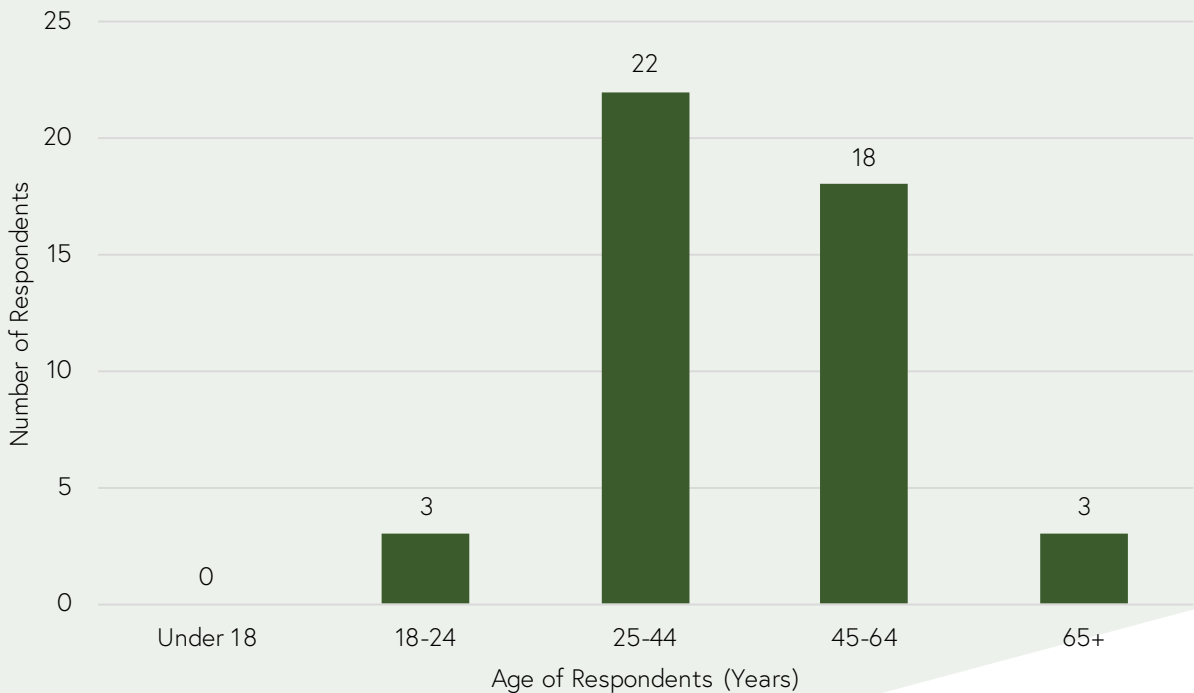


Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=46).

living situations for the week prior to taking the survey can be seen in **Table 3** (right). The duration of time that respondents reported living in their current living situation can be seen in **Figure 8** (page 11).

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. Five respondents have not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 19 had moved 1-2 times, nine had moved 3-5 times, two had moved 6-10 times, and 11 gave no response.

If respondents had lived somewhere else in the past year, three moved from another residence within the community, 23 came from another community in the province, four from another province, two from another country, and one selected "Prefer Not to Answer".

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

Accommodations in the past week (multiple responses possible)	Responses
Someone Else's Place	20
Apartment/House	13
Motel/Hotel	6
Camping	3
Vehicles	2
Other Accommodations	2
Transitional Housing	2
Shelter Services	1
Sidewalks, Squares, Parks, or Makeshift Shelter	1

### 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=46), there were a total of 24 adults staying with housing-unstable respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 1.85. There were also a total of 14 children staying with housing-unstable respondents. The average number of children sharing respondents' living situation was 1.75.

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.

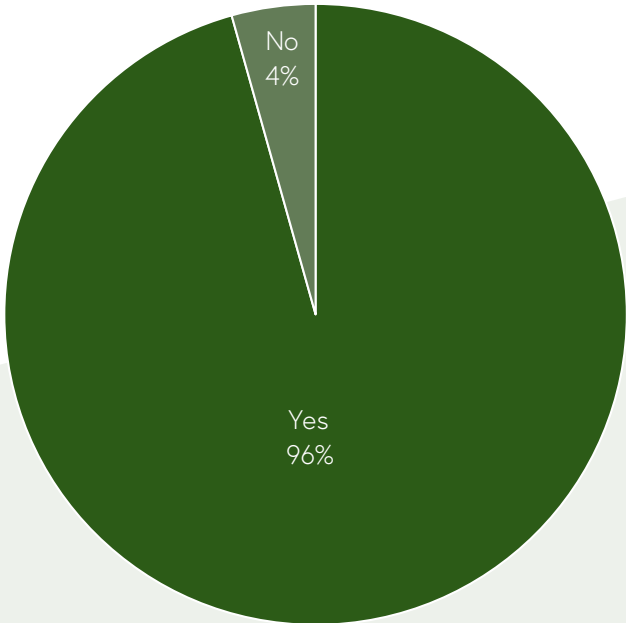


Figure 5 (above): Unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"? (n=46).

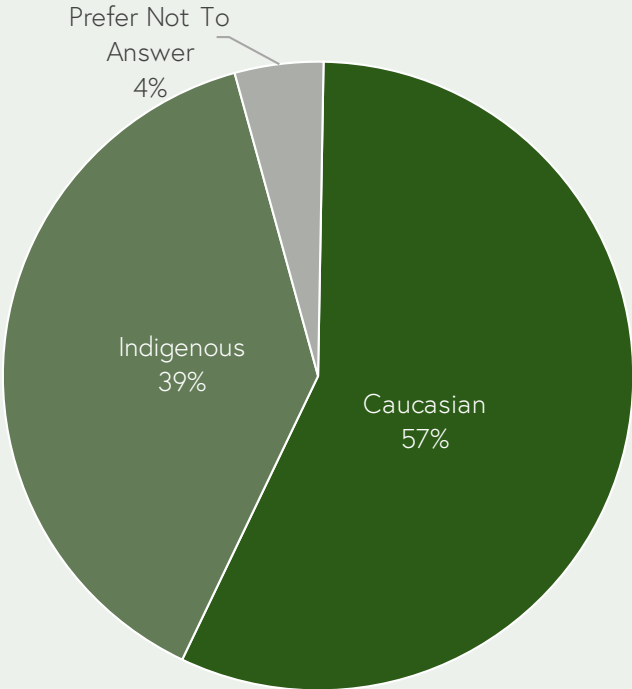


Figure 6 (above): Of respondents born in Canada, 57% identified as Caucasian, 39% as Indigenous, and 4% responded with "prefer not to answer" (n=44).

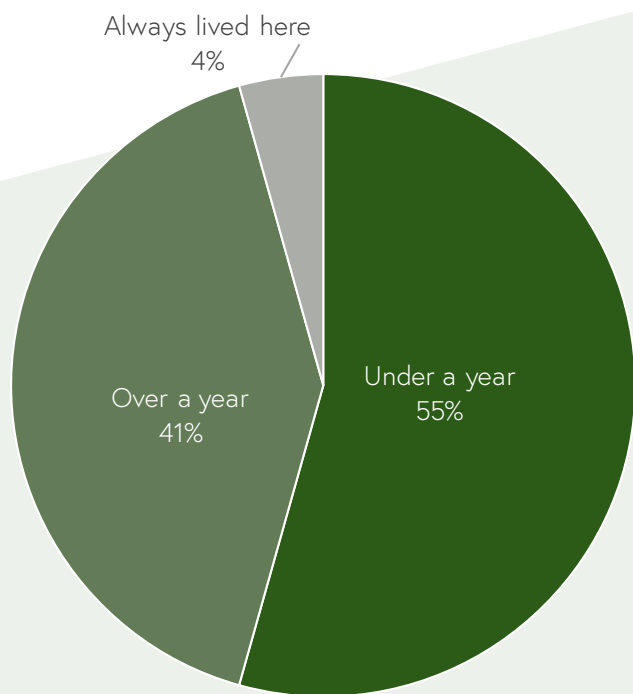


Figure 7: Respondents were asked about their current living situations. The figure above contains the response for the question "how long have you lived within the community?" (n=46).

One unstably-housed respondent answered "Yes" to the question "are you or anyone in your household pregnant?".

## Shelter Use

Finally, respondents were asked if they had spent time in an emergency shelter in the past year. 25 individuals responded to this question, and 11 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). All 14 respondents provided no response as to why they did not use shelters

**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.

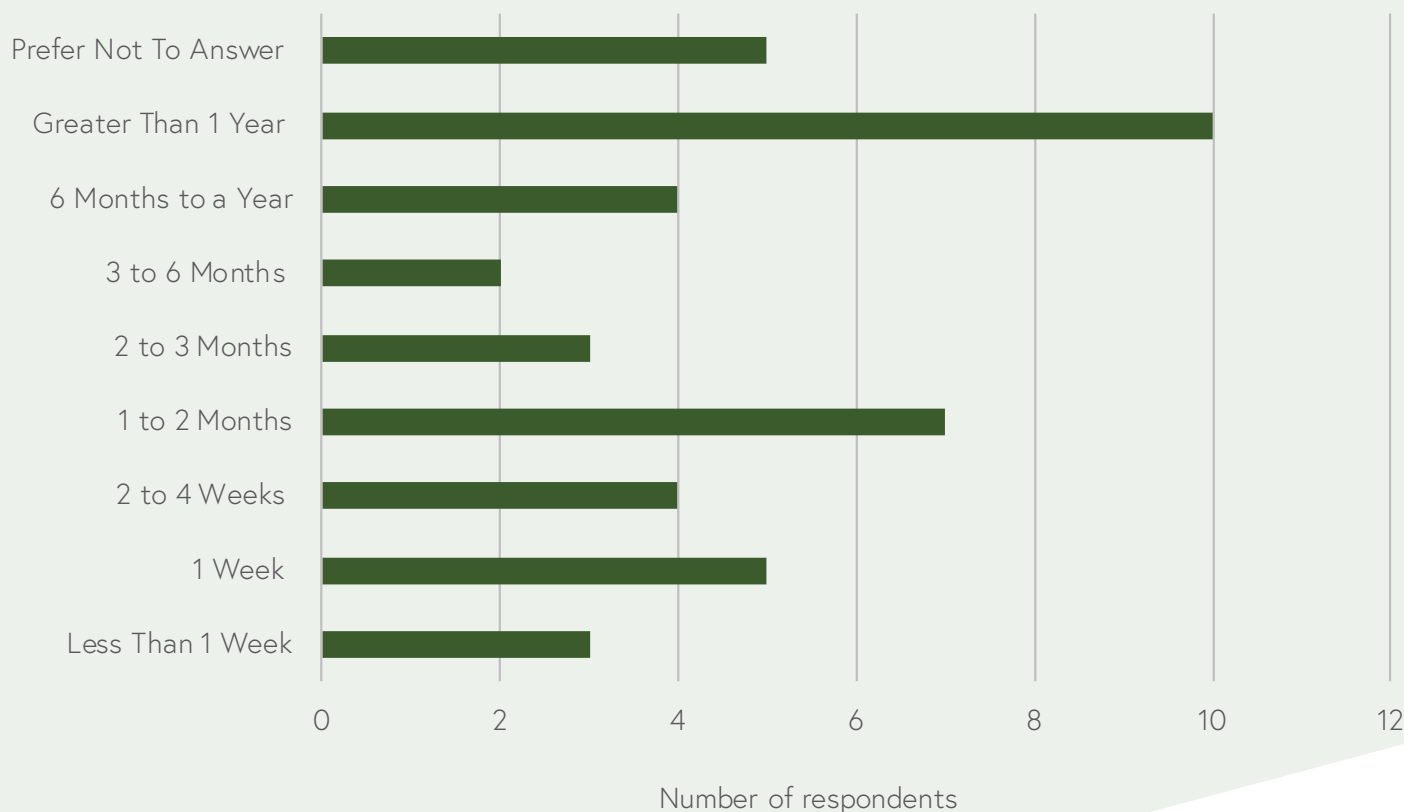


Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=43).

## EMPLOYMENT

The employment status of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 9**. Out of 46 individuals who responded to the question, eight were employed and 38 were unemployed. For those who were employed, five were employed full-time, one was employed part-time, one was a casual worker, and one responded "Prefer Not to Answer". The sector that people were currently employed in can be seen in **Table 4** (below).

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

Current Employment Sector	Responses
Hospitality/Food and Beverage Sector	3
Other Sector	2
Retail/Personal Services Sector	1

### Military or Emergency Services

Three respondents reported that they had either served in the Canadian military or in an emergency service position (RCMP/police, EMS/paramedics, or firefighters). Of these, all three respondents had been in the military at some point (either active duty or veterans).

## 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** (page 13).

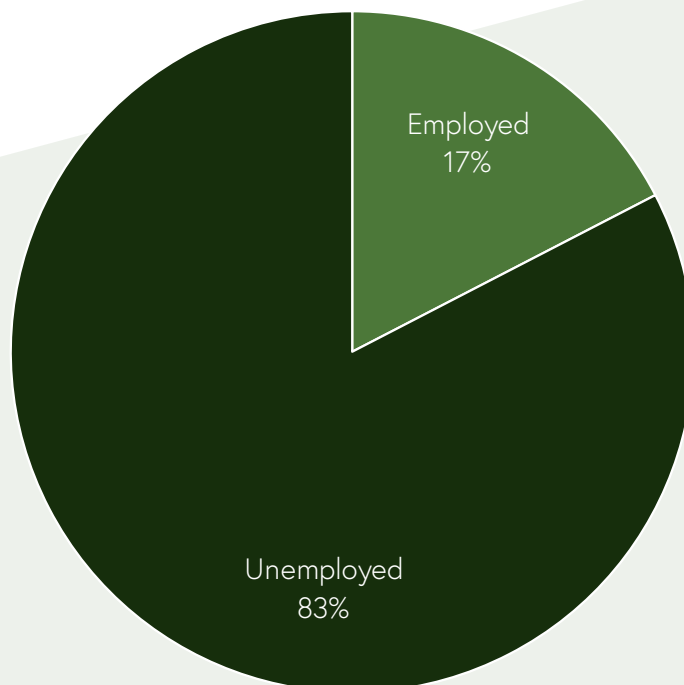


Figure 9 (above): Respondents were asked whether they're currently employed (n=46).



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

Sources of income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	15
Employment	8
No Source of Income	8
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	7
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension (CPP)	5
Other Sources	3
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	2
Money From Family/Friends	2
Non Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	2
Social Enterprise	1
Private Employment Pension	1
Both Senior And Non Senior Related Benefits	1

## UNIQUE FINDINGS

We compared Fort Macleod'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=46). Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Fort Macleod ranked the highest amongst the 20 communities for men who had reported staying at someone else's place in the previous week (51.7%), as well as for men reporting that they had spent

time in a shelter in the past year (31.0%). It also ranked highly for men reporting that they had lived somewhere else in Alberta prior to moving to the community (65.5%), and for women reporting Addiction/Substance Abuse as at least one reason for their housing instability (41.2%).

Regarding services respondents were seeking, Fort Macleod had the highest proportion of male respondents looking for support with legal services (41.4%); it also ranked highly for men seeking support for Financial reasons (72.4%), Health and Wellness (72.4%), and Support Services (ie. access to government forms and help navigating government programs, access to technology, etc., 62.1%).

Finally, Fort Macleod ranked highest for women reporting benefits as at least one source of income (82.4%). It also ranked highly for both men and women reporting that non-seniors related benefits were at least one source of income (51.7% of men, 64.7% of women); and specifically, Alberta Supports benefits (34.5% of men, 29.4% of women).

## 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 Fort Macleod from October 1st to October 31st, 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 57 survey respondents, 46 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 Fort Macleod.

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 Fort Macleod.

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<sup>5</sup>. More research on rural and remote homelessness, in both Fort Macleod and across the province, 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 in Alberta (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.

The Alberta Rural Development Network would like to thank Fort Macleod and District Family and Community Support Services and all community partners in Fort Macleod for their work on this pilot study, as well as the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) for their work coordinating the project.





## 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](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





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