



# 2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

Lac la Biche  
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 is 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.

Lac Lac Biche's Estimation Count occurred on Treaty 6 territory, the ancestral home of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, and Nakota Sioux, 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  
Greenville  
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 Lac la Biche's Estimation Count:*

Lac la Biche Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

## 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 Lac la Biche from October 1st to October 31st, 2018. The lead coordinator visited partner agencies and conducted survey interviews with the individuals accessing services. Additionally, the lead coordinator set up a mobile stop wherein individuals in LLB's downtown core were invited to take respite from the cold and take the survey. The lead coordinator for Lac la Biche's Estimation Count was Lac la Biche Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

The primary data collected in Lac la Biche's count indicated the following:

- 86 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 (99%), identified

- as Indigenous (91%), and had resided in Lac la Biche area for more than a year (46%);
- 21% of respondents who were housing-unstable (n=85) were employed;
- The most common support services needed by all survey respondents (both stably and unstably housed) were "Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry)", "Financial Support", and "Health & Wellness 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 Lac la Biche; 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 Lac la Biche, 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 Lac la Biche;
- Provide any interpretations of the data contained herein;
- Make any recommendations for policy changes or actions to be taken in Lac la Biche as a result of this data;
- Make any stake/claim about government policies, corporate actions, or externalities in Lac la Biche;
- Make any inferences or generalizations about the population of Lac la Biche.

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 Lac la Biche may have participated. As a result, this report presents a conservative estimate of Lac la Biche's situation with regards to homelessness, housing instability, and community service needs.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

All individuals who took the survey (n=88), including those who said they had stable housing, were asked which issues they were seeking assistance

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	69
Financial Support	52
Health & Wellness Support	43
Transportation Support	38
Support Services (accessing government programs, accessing technology)	24
Legal Support	15
Family/Parenting Support	12
Domestic Violence Support	7
Prefer Not To Answer	7



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. Seven respondents chose "prefer not to answer". The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Basic Needs Support" (69), "Financial Support" (52), and "Health & Wellness Support" (43).

## COMMUNITY FINDINGS

### Housing Stability

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 88. Of those, a total of 86 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

88  
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

86  
UNSTABLY HOUSED RESPONDENTS

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: 56 responses for "Low Income"; 42 for "Unable to Pay Rent or Mortgage"; 37 for "Inadequate Housing"; 17 for "Addiction/ Substance Use"; and 14 for "Job Loss".

When respondents were asked to give their primary reason that they thought their housing

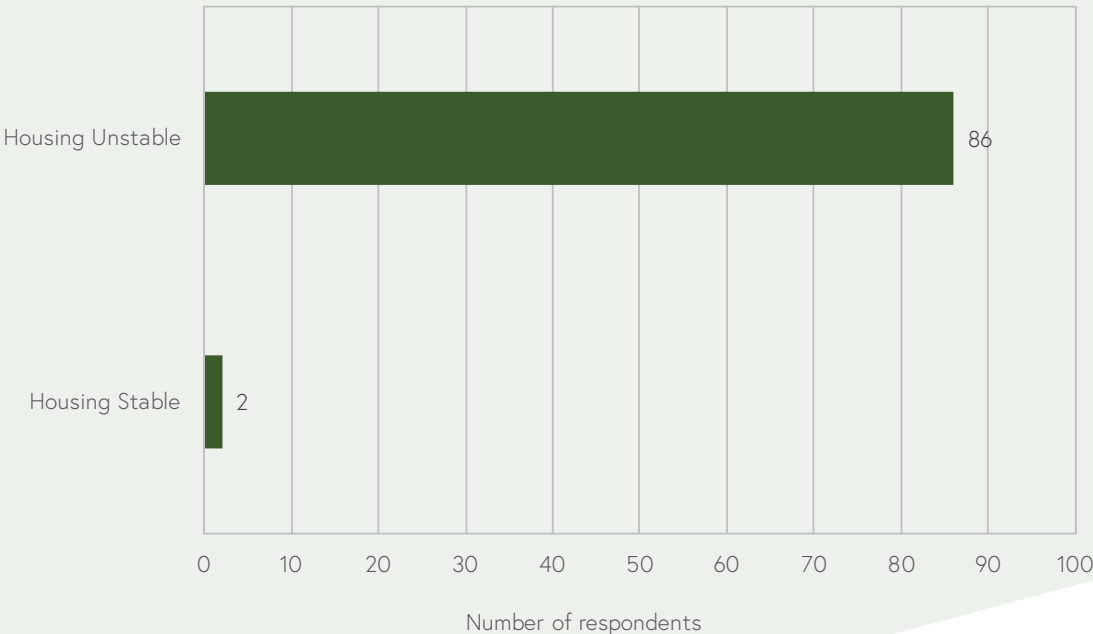


Figure 1: A total of 86 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=88).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by Lac la Biche 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	56
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	42
Inadequate Housing	37
Addiction/Substance Use	17
Job Loss	14
Conflict	12
Transportation	11
Other	8
Illness/Medical Condition	7
Abuse	7
Mental Health	6

was unstable (one reason only), the most common responses were: 36 (45.0%) for "Low Income", 12 (15.0%) for "Mental Health, Inadequate Housing, or Transportation", and nine (11.3%) for "Addiction/ Substance Use".

**Note:** Due to a formatting error in the paper survey, the options "Mental Health", "Inadequate Housing", and "Transportation" were listed together as a single option for the question "of the reasons previously stated, what is the main reason for being homeless or at-risk for losing your home". As a result, the aforementioned options cannot be reported on separately in this dataset.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Gender

The reported gender identities of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 2**. Of the survey respondents, 39 (45.3%) identified as men and 47 (54.7%) identified as women.

### Sexual Orientation

The reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (below). Of the survey respondents, 83 identified as straight, one (1.2%)

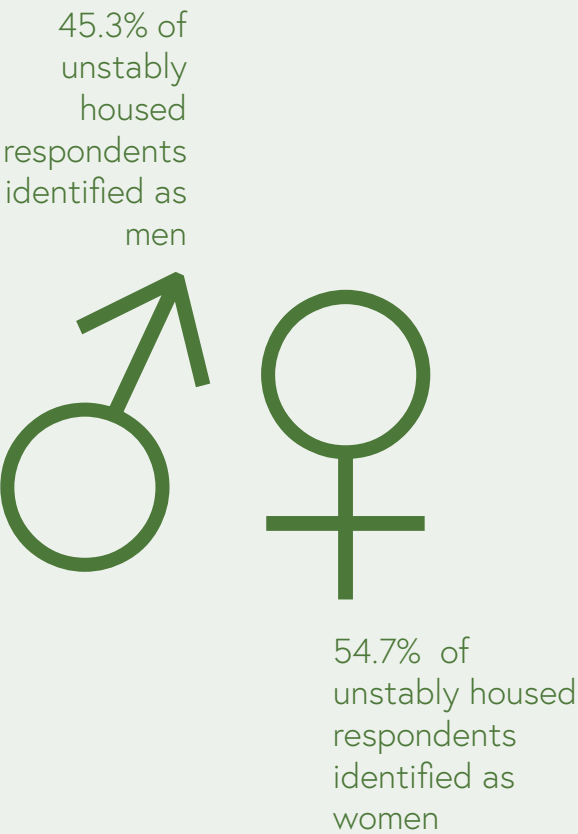


Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=86).



identified as lesbian or gay, one (1.2%) as two-spirit, and one (1.2%) responded "Prefer Not to Answer".

Age of Respondents

The age demographics of respondents with unstable housing can be seen in **Figure 4** (page 9, below). The

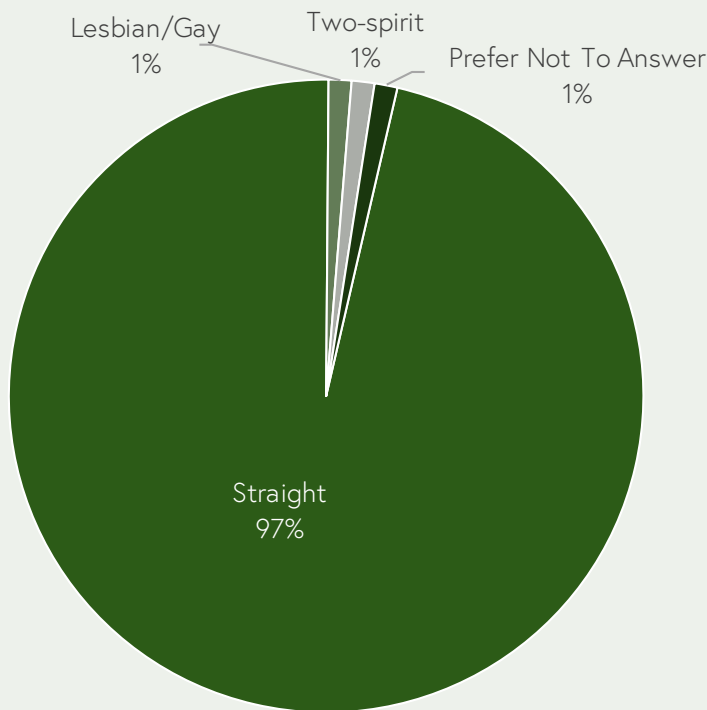


Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=86).

average age of individuals facing unstable housing was 42 and the median age was 40.

**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>.

Migration Status and Ethnicity

Out of all housing-unstable respondents, 85 were born in Canada and one selected "Prefer Not to Answer". These results are shown in **Figure 5** (page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, seven identified as Caucasian, 77 as Indigenous (54 Métis and 23 First Nations), and one responded "prefer not to answer" (**Figure 6**, Page 10).

Respondents were asked immigration-related questions, but due to lack of relevance (all respondents reported being born in Canada), this dataset was not reported on.

Of respondents currently facing unstable housing, 85 were Canadian citizens and one respondent gave no response.

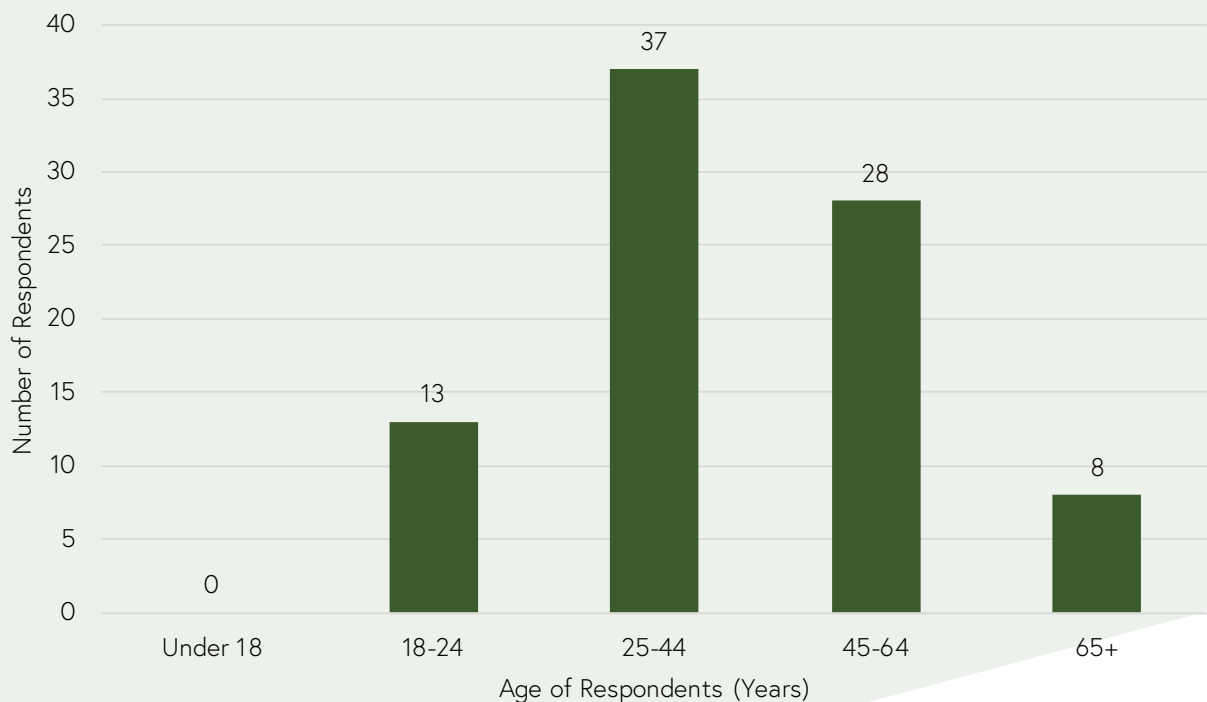


Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=86).

## 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). 38 respondents reported that they have always lived in the community, 39 had lived in the community

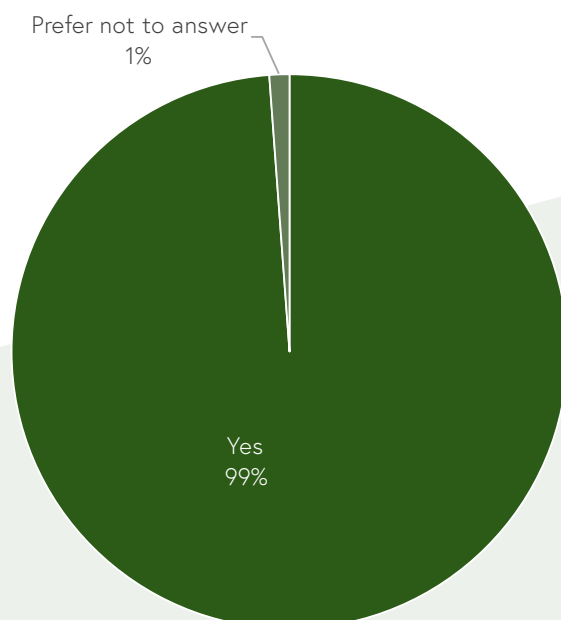


Figure 5 (above): Unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"? (n=86).

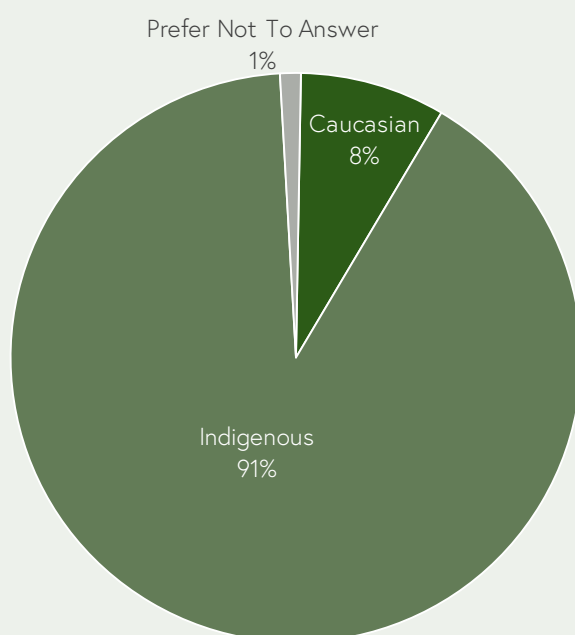


Figure 6 (above): Of respondents born in Canada, 91% identified as Indigenous, 8% identified as Caucasian, and 1% responded with "prefer not to answer" (n=85).

for more than one year, eight respondents had lived in the community for less than a year, and one 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).

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. Fourteen respondents had not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 21 had moved 1-2 times, five had moved 3-5 times, three had moved 3-5 times, four had moved more than 10 times, 37 responded "Not Applicable", and two provided no response.

If respondents had lived somewhere else in the past year, 14 moved from another community in the province, 12 from another residence at the community, and one from another province.

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

Accommodations in the past week (multiple responses possible)	Responses
Apartment/House	42
Someone Else's Place	27
Shelter Services	11
Other Accommodations	5
Prefer Not To Answer	3
Abandoned Building	2
Vehicles	2
Camping	2
Motel/Hotel	1
Hospital	1
Domestic Violence Shelter Services	1

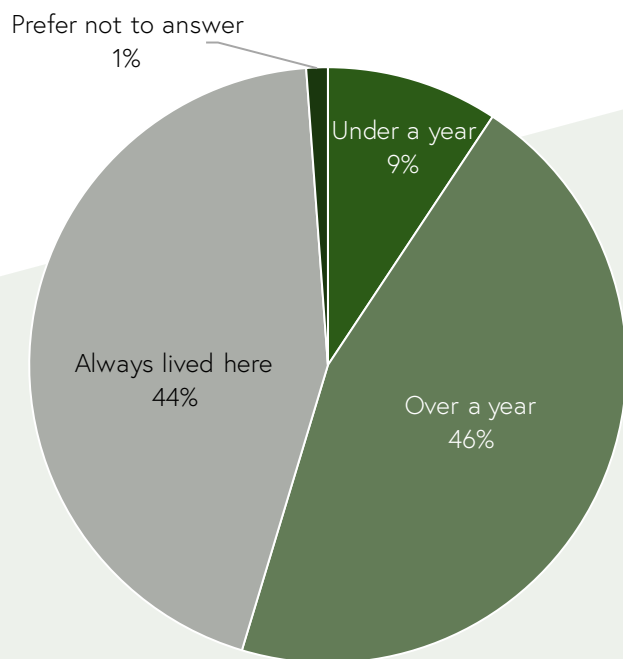


Figure 7: Respondents were asked about their current living situations. The figure above contains the response for the question "how long have you lived within the community?" (n=86).

## 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=86), there were a total of 109 adults staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 2.48. There were also a total of 68 children staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of children sharing respondents' living situation was 2.62.

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.

Three unstably-housed respondents 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. 84 individuals responded to this question, and 25 answered "yes" to accessing shelter services in the past year. One selected "Prefer Not to Answer". Subsequently, if they had answered "no", respondents were asked about possible

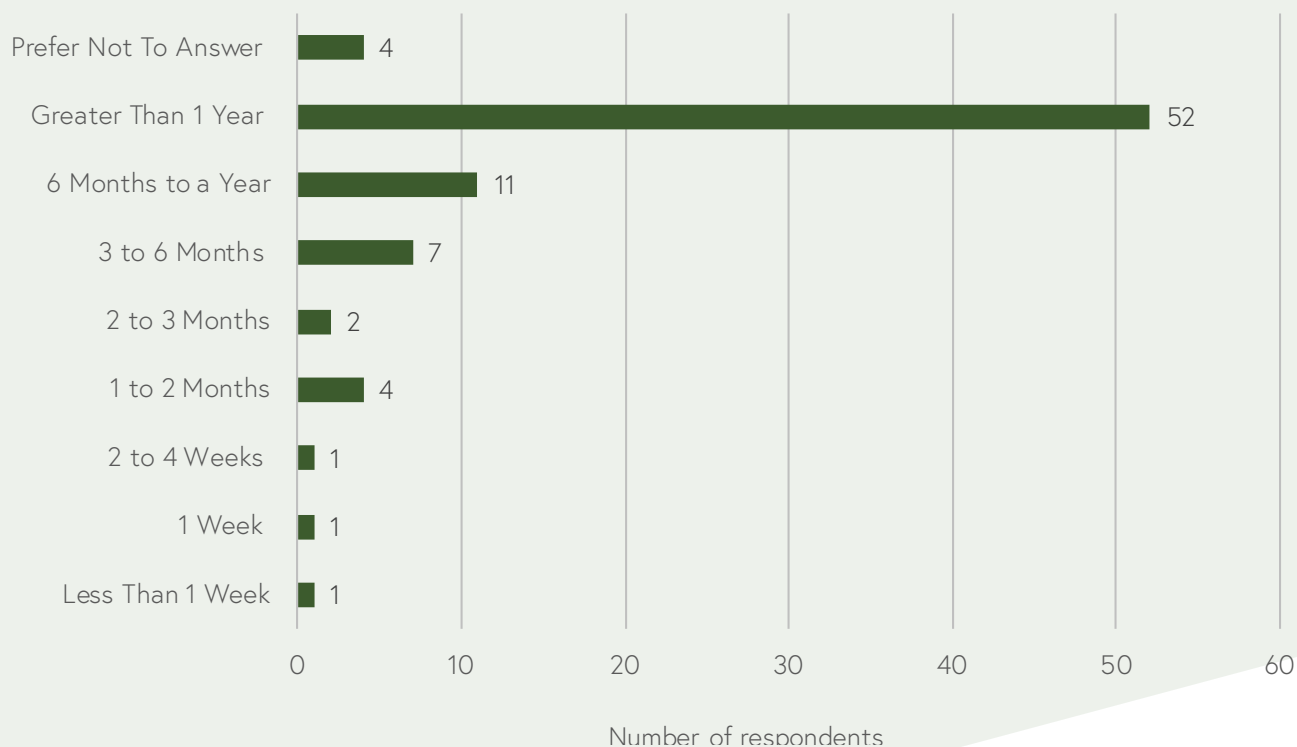


Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=86).

reasons for not utilizing emergency shelter(s). Two respondents said that shelters were not needed, one selected "Prefer Not to Answer", and the remaining respondents did not provide a response.

**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.

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

Current Employment Sector	Responses
Hospitality/Food and Beverage Sector	6
Other Sector	5
Retail/Personal Services Sector	3

## EMPLOYMENT

The employment status of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 9** (right). Out of 86 individuals who responded to the question, 18 were employed, 67 were unemployed, and one responded "Prefer Not to Answer". For those who were employed, 10 were employed full-time, six were employed part-time, one was employed casually, one selected "Other", and one selected "Prefer Not to Answer". The sector that people were currently employed in can be seen in **Table 4** (right).

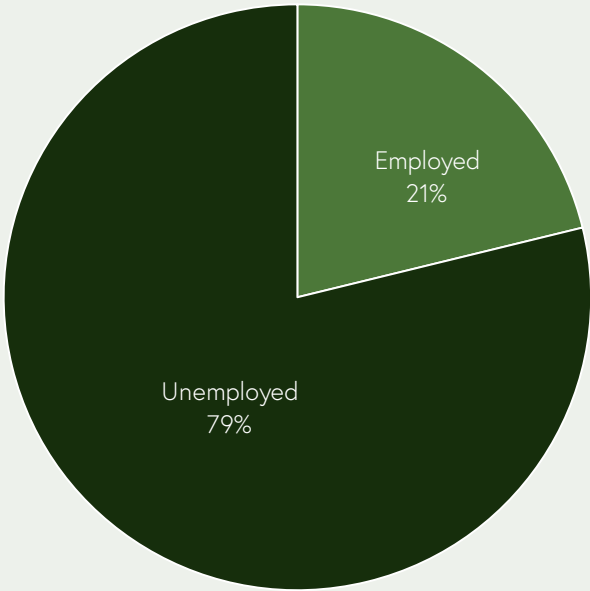


Figure 9 (above): Respondents were asked whether they're currently employed (n=86).

## Military or Emergency Services

Respondents were asked whether they had ever served in the Canadian military or any emergency services. All 86 unstably-housed respondents answered "no" or "prefer not to answer", therefore 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** (below).

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

Sources of income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
No Source of Income	25
Employment	16
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	8
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	7
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension (CPP)	7
Prefer Not To Answer	6
Non Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	5
Other Sources	5
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	5
Student Funding	3
Non Senior Related Benefits: Private Disability Insurance	2
Non Senior Related Benefits: Learners Benefit	1

## UNIQUE FINDINGS

We compared Lac La Biche'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=86). Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Lac La Biche was one of several communities where 100% of both male and female respondents were born in Canada. It ranked highest amongst the communities for women (91.5%) and highly for men (89.7%) for proportion of survey respondents who identified as Indigenous (First Nations or Métis).

Regarding reasons for housing instability, Lac La Biche ranked highest for men who reported inadequate housing as at least one reason for their housing instability (56.4%). The community ranked highly for men (53.9%) and women (48.9%) reporting that being unable to pay their rent or mortgage was a reason for their housing instability. As well, it also ranked highly for men reporting Low Income as at least one reason for their housing instability (69.2%).

Regarding living situations, Lac La Biche ranked highly for men who had always lived in the community (53.9%) and men who reported staying at someone else's place in the week prior to the survey (43.6%).

Regarding support services needed by housing-unstable individuals, Lac La Biche ranked highly for men visiting service agencies looking for Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) support (82.1%), and for women visiting agencies for Financial reasons (66.0%).

Finally, Lac La Biche ranked highly amongst the communities for men reporting that they had no sources of income (43.6%).

## 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 Lac la Biche from October 1 to October 31, 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 88 survey respondents, 86 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 Lac la Biche.

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 Lac la Biche.

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 Lac la Biche 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 Lac la Biche Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and the community members of Lac la Biche 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.

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