Alberta Rural Development Network

2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

Peace River
Community Report

May 2019

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The Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness
is avalable for download in English and French at **www.ardn.ca**

For more information about the 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project
please contact **info@ardn.ca**

Updated May 31, 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.

Peace River'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 Peace River's Estimation Count:

Métis Nation of Alberta - Region 6
Peace River Aboriginal Interagency
Peace River FCSS
Peace Regional Outreach
Peace River RCMP
Peace River Soup Kitchen
Peace River Women's Shelter
Picnic in the Park
Providing and Ensuring Access to a Caring Environment (PEACE)
Sagitawa Friendship Society
Salvation Army
Stepping Up - North Peace Society for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
WJS 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 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 Peace River between September 10th and October 10th, 2018. Most surveys were collected via personal interviews between the lead coordinator and respondents, where the coordinator visited partner agencies to conduct surveys. The lead coordinator for Peace River's Estimation Count was Providing and Ensuring Access to a Caring Environment (PEACE).

The primary data collected in Peace River's count indicated the following:
- Out of 45 survey respondents, 39 felt that their housing situation was unstable, that they could easily lose their housing, or were unsure whether their housing was stable;
- Half of respondents experiencing unstable housing have always lived in Peace River;

- 100% of all unstably housed respondents were born in Canada (n=38);
- The most common support services needed by all survey respondents were "Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry)", "Health & Wellness Support", 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 Peace River; 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 Peace River, 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 likely 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 Peace River;
- Provide any interpretations of the data contained herein;
- Make any recommendations for policy changes or actions to be taken in Peace River as a result of this data;
- Make any stake/claim about government policies, corporate actions, or externalities in Peace River;
- Make any inferences or generalizations about the population of Peace River.

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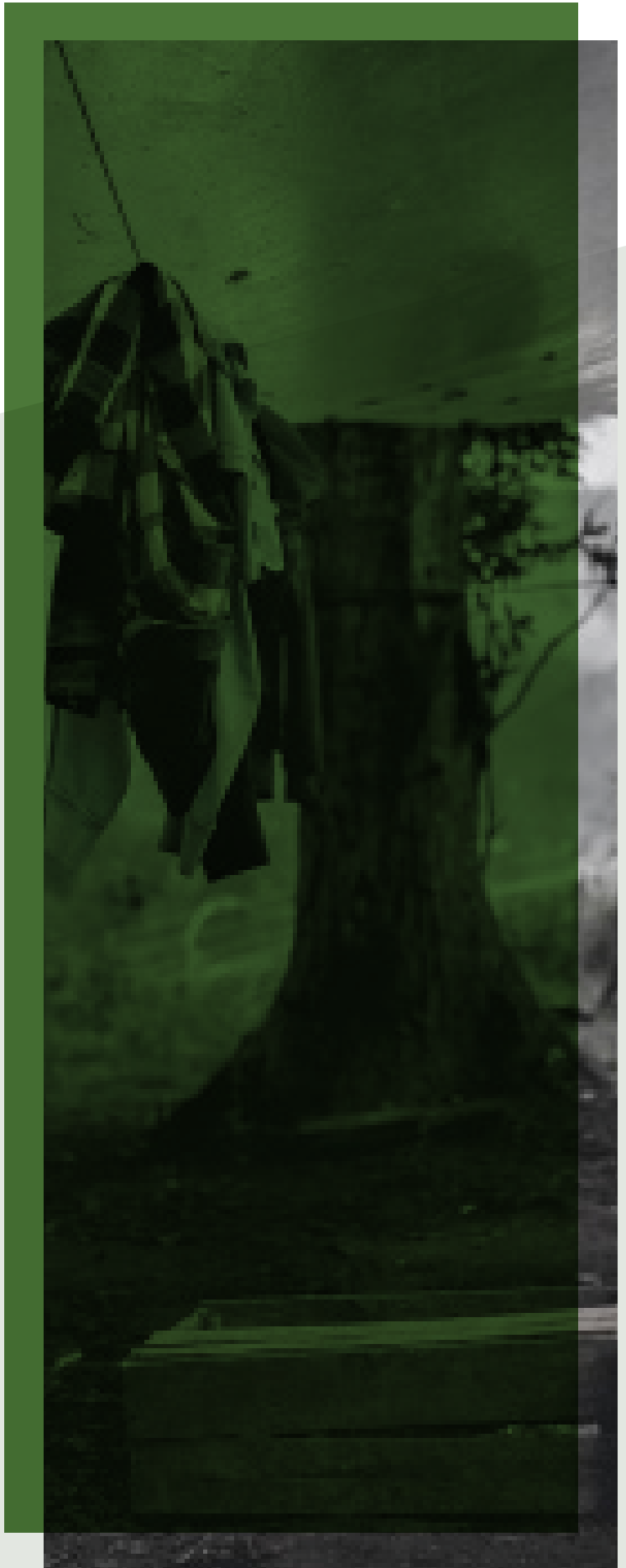
Not every person who entered a participating service agency may have consented to the survey (and therefore, not every participating agency may have been able to gather completed surveys); not every individual requiring help may have entered a participating service agency during the 30-day collection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

SUPPORT SERVICES

All individuals who took the survey (n=45), 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. Three 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	35
Health & Wellness Support	24
Financial Support	22
Support Services (accessing government programs, accessing technology)	16
Family/Parenting Support	12
Transportation Support	10
Legal Support	8
Domestic Violence Support	7
Prefer Not To Answer	3

The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Basic Needs" (35), "Health & Wellness Support" (24), and "Financial Support" (22).

◼ COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Housing Stability

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 45. Of those, a total of 39 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: 18 responses for "Low

45
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

39
UNSTABLY HOUSED RESPONDENTS

Income"; 17 for "Mental Health"; 15 for "Addiction/ Substance Abuse"; 13 for "Job Loss", and 12 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: 16 for "Mental Health, Inadequate
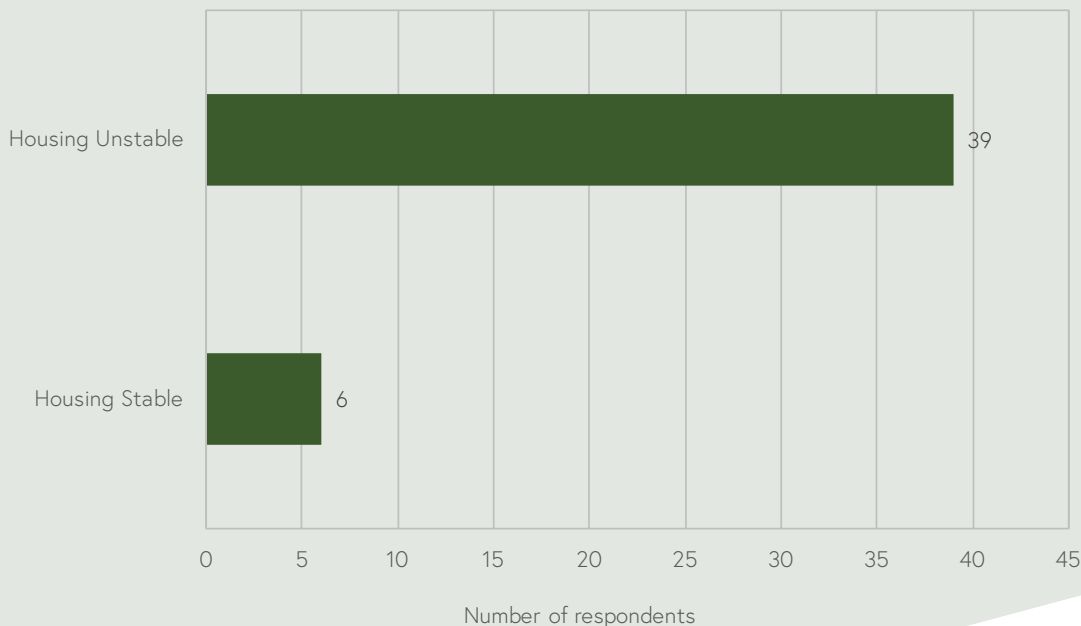

Figure 1: A total of 39 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=45).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by Peace River 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	18
Mental Health	17
Addiction/Substance Use	15
Job Loss	13
Conflict	12
Inadequate Housing	11
Illness/Medical Condition	9
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	8
Transportation	6
Abuse	2
Other	1

Housing, and/or Transportation" (42.1%, see note), seven for "Conflict" (18.4%), and four each for "Addiction/Substance Use" and "Low Income" (10.5% each)

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, 21 (54%) identified as men, and 18 (46%) identified as women.

Sexual Orientation

TThe reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (page 9). Of the survey respondents, 37 identified as straight, one

54% of unstably housed respondents identified as men

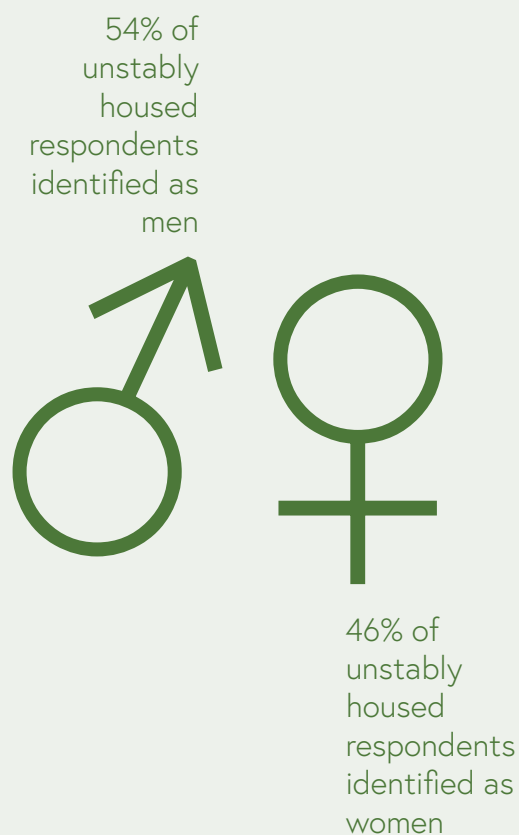46% of unstably housed respondents identified as women

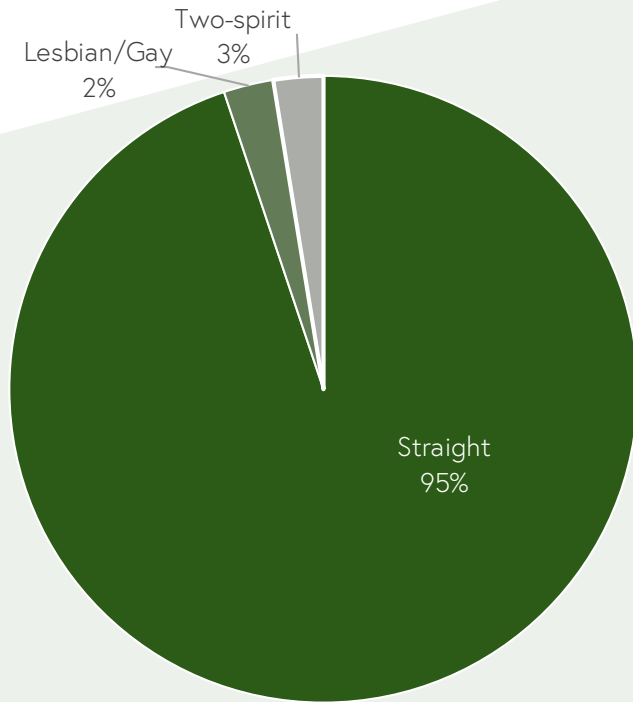Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=39).

Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=39).

identified as lesbian or gay, and one identified as two-spirit.

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 38 and the median age was 39.

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[4].

Migration Status and Ethnicity
Out of all housing-unstable respondents, 38 were born in Canada and one provided no response. These results are shown in **Figure 5** (page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, 16 identified as Caucasian, 21 as Indigenous (nine Métis and 12 First Nations), one responded "prefer not to answer", and one gave no response (**Figure 6**, Page 10).
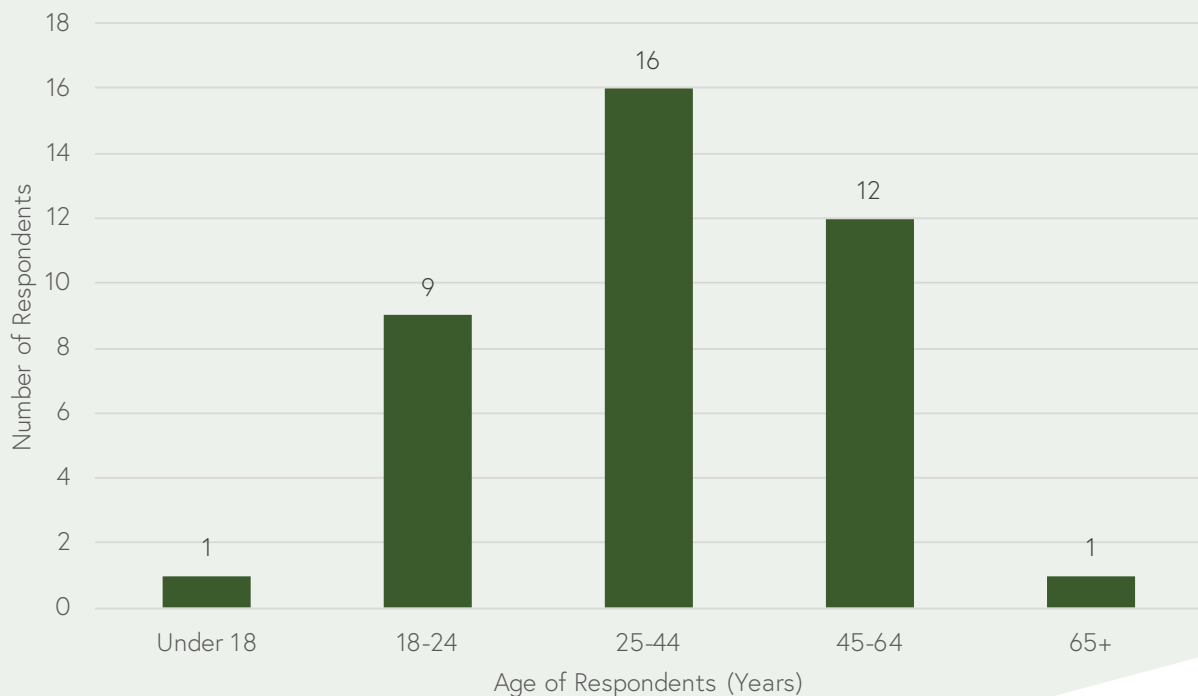

Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=39).

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, 38 were Canadian citizens and one respondent gave no response.

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). Twenty respondents reported that they have always lived in the community, 18 had moved to the community at some point (eight have lived in the community for under a year and 10 have lived in the community for over a year) and one responded with "prefer not to answer".

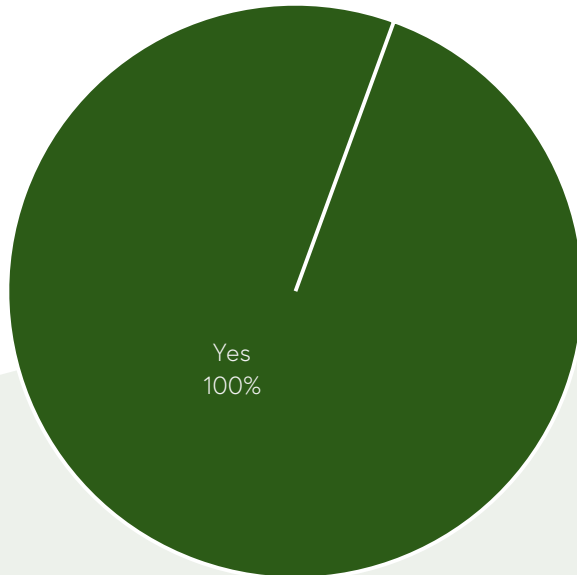
Figure 5 (above): unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"? (n=38).

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

Accommodations in the past week (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Apartment/House	18
Someone Else's Place	9
Sidewalks, Squares, Parks, or Makeshift Shelter	7
Camping	4
Vehicles	3
Other Accommodations	1
Abandoned Building	1

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. Of
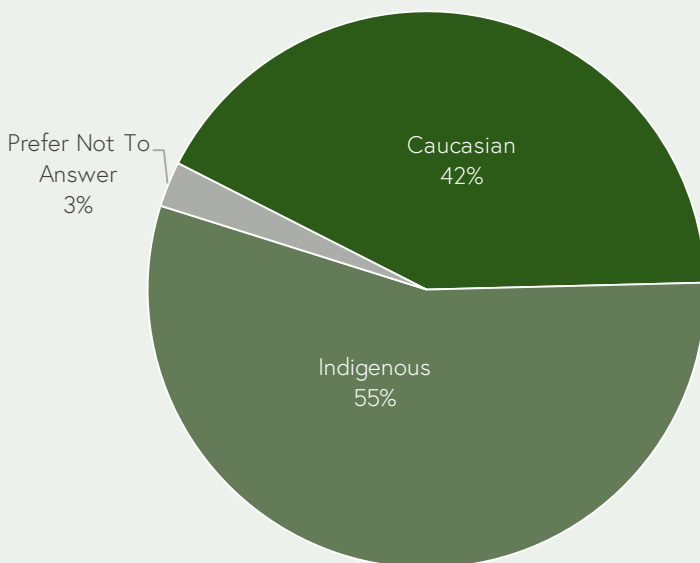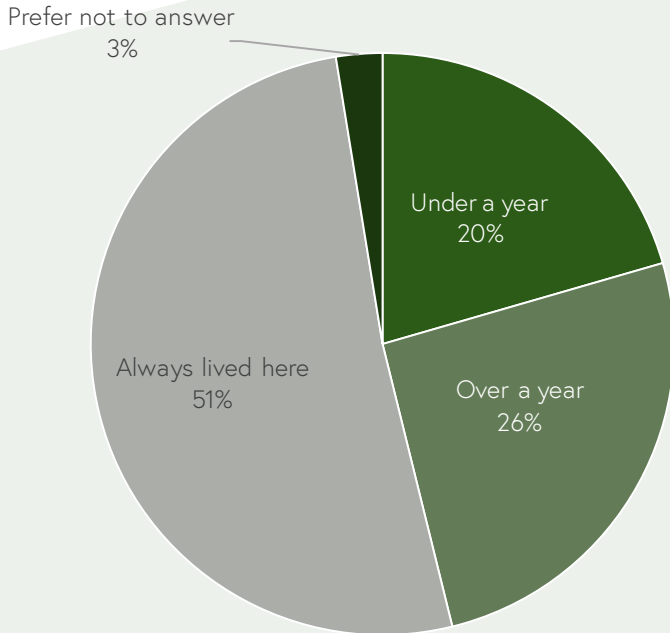

Figure 6: Of respondents born in Canada, 42% identified as Caucasian, 55% as Indigenous, and 3% gave no response (n=39).

respondents who had moved in the past year, six had moved 1-2 times, five had moved 3-5 times, 18 responded "Not Applicable", and 10 gave no response.

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=39).

If respondents had lived somewhere else in the past year, two moved from another residence within the community, eight came from another community in the province, one from another province, and one responded with "prefer not to answer".

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=10), there were a total of 25 adults staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 2.50. There were also a total of 20 children staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of children sharing respondents' living situation was 1.67.

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.

Two unstably-housed respondents answered "yes" to the question "are you or anyone in your household pregnant?".
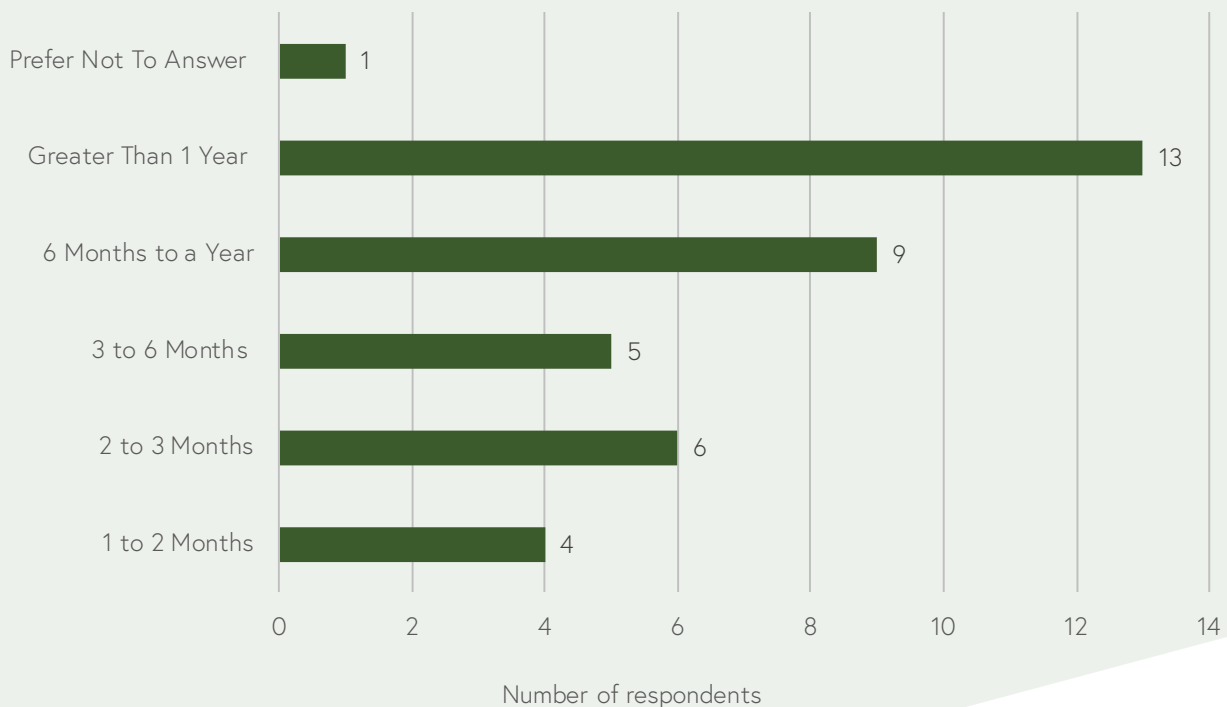

Number of respondents

Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=38).

Shelter Use

Respondents were asked if they had spent time in an emergency shelter in the past year. Four individuals responded to this question, and one 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), and all three who had said they didn't access shelter services gave "No Shelters in my Area" as their reason.
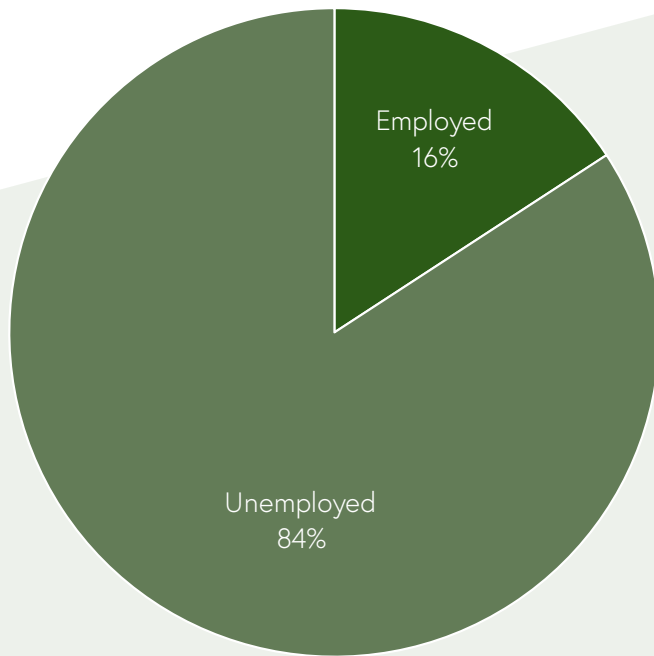
EMPLOYMENT

The employment status of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 9**. Out of 38 individuals who responded to the question, 6 were employed and 32 were unemployed. For those who were employed, four were employed full-time and two were employed part-time. 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=38).

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

Current Employment Sector	Responses
Retail/Personal Services Sector	2
Hospitality/Food and Beverage Sector	2
Human Services Sector	2

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

Sources of Income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
No Source of Income	11
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	9
Employment	6
Money From Family/Friends	4
Other Sources	4
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	3
Alimony/Child Support	3
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	2
Both Senior And Non Senior Related Benefits	2
Non Senior Related Benefits: Prefer Not To Answer	2
Prefer Not To Answer	1
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension (CPP)	1
Senior Related Benefits: Old Age Security (OAS)	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Workers Compensation	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Prefer Not To Answer	1
Senior Related Benefits: Old Age Security (OAS)	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Workers Compensation	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 relevance (respondents answered no, prefer not to answer, or gave no response), 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 Peace River'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=39). Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Peace River ranked highly amongst the 20 participating communities for both men (57.1%) and women (38.9%) reporting that they had always lived in the community. For women particularly, 100% of female respondents were born in Canada, the highest for this statistic amongst the communities.

Regarding reasons for housing instability, Peace River ranked highly in the following areas: men who reported Mental Health as at least one reason for their housing instability (52.4%) and women who reported an Illness or Medical Condition as a reason for their housing instability (27.8%). Peace River also ranked highly for both men (19.1%) and women (16.7%, highest) for respondents reporting that they had used "Sidewalks, Squares, Parks, or Makeshift Shelter" to stay in during the week prior to taking the survey. Peace River was also highest amongst the communities for women reporting alimony/child support as at least one source of income (16.7%).

In regards to support services needed, Peace River ranked highly for both men (85.7%) and women (88.9%) who reported visiting a service

agency looking for support with basic needs (ie. food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry). Men also frequently were looking for support with Family/Parenting (19.1%) and women for support with Health/Wellness (61.1%). Finally, Peace River ranked highest amongst the 20 communities for proportion of female respondents who were visiting a service agency for support due to domestic violence (27.8%).

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 Peace River from September 10th to October 10th, 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 45 survey respondents, 39 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 Peace River.

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 Peace River.

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 Peace River and across, 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.

The Alberta Rural Development Network would like to thank Providing and Ensuring Access to a Caring Environment (PEACE) and all community partners in Peace River 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

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 (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 7 (Main Reasons):** *Data percentages were minorly corrected for primary reasons for unstable housing due to discovery of a survey formatting error.*
- **Page 8 (Note):** *Note was added to explain the aforementioned survey formatting error.*
- **Page 10 (Duration of Residency):** *Data was changed to distinguish between respondents who have lived in the community for more than a year and less than a year. Original: "18 people have moved to the community at some point".*
- **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 39 to 18.*
- **Page 13 (Military or Emergency Services):** *wording was clarified.*

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