



2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

Ponoka
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

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.

Ponoka'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 colonization¹, 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
Ponoka
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 Ponoka's Estimation Count:

Ponoka Family and Community Support Services
Primary Care Network
Rimoka Housing Foundation
Wolf Creek School Division

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 Ponoka between October 15th and November 15th, 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 Ponoka's Estimation Count was Ponoka Family and Community Support Services.

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

- Out of 15 survey respondents, 14 felt that their housing situation was unstable, that they could easily lose their housing, or were unsure whether their housing was stable;
- 21% of respondents who were housing-unstable (n=14) were employed;

- The most common support services needed by all survey respondents (both stably and unstably housed) were "Health & Wellness Support", "Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support", and "Transportation Support".

As per the Step-by-Step Guide, this survey used the Canadian definition of homelessness as defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness³. 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 Ponoka; 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 Ponoka, 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 Ponoka;
- Provide any interpretations of the data contained herein;
- Make any recommendations for policy changes or actions to be taken in Ponoka as a result of this data;
- Make any stake/claim about government policies, corporate actions, or externalities in Ponoka;
- Make any inferences or generalizations about the population of Ponoka.

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).

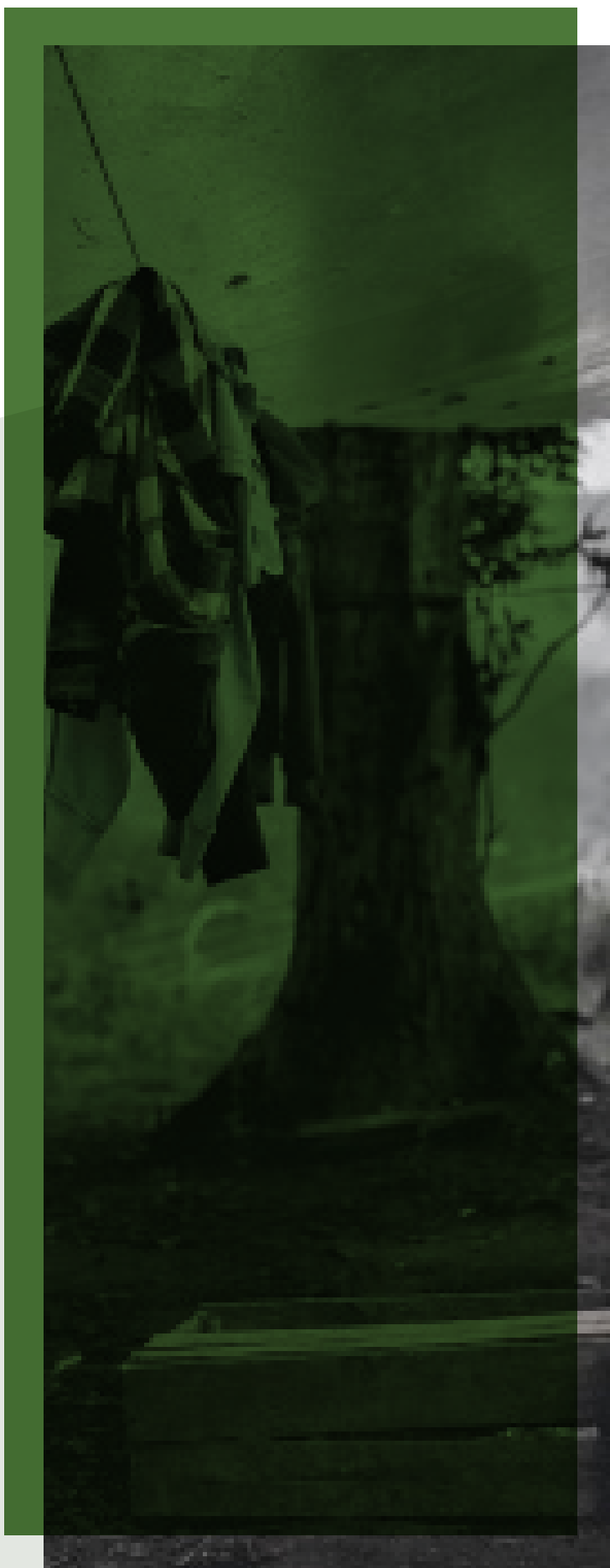
Not every person who entered a participating service agency may have consented to the survey (and therefore, not every participating agency may have been able to gather completed surveys); not every individual requiring help may have entered a participating service agency during the 30-day collection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

SUPPORT SERVICES

All individuals who took the survey (n=15), 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.

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	12
Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support	8
Transportation Support	8
Financial Support	7
Legal Support	5
Family/Parenting Support	3
Support Services (accessing government services, accessing technology, etc.)	3
Domestic Violence Support	2



The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Health & Wellness Support" (12), "Transportation Support" (8), and "Basic Needs Support" (8).

COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Housing Stability

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 15. Of those, a total of 14 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: 12 responses for "Low Income"; seven for "Addiction/Substance Use"; four



for "Mental Health"; four for "Inadequate Housing"; and three 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: seven (53.8%) for "Low Income", ten (23.1%, see note) for "Mental Health, Inadequate Housing, and/or Transportation", and two (15.4%) for "Job Loss".

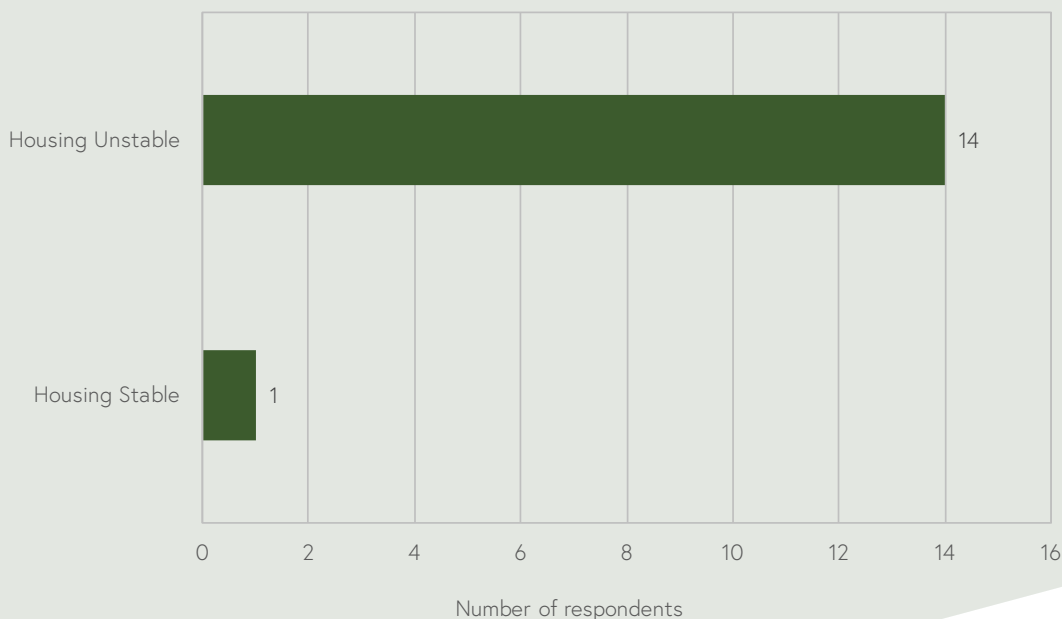


Figure 1: A total of 14 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=15).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by Ponoka 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	12
Addiction/Substance Use	7
Inadequate Housing	4
Mental Health	4
Conflict	3
Disability	3
Transportation	2
Illness/Medical Condition	2
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	2
Job Loss	2
Abuse	1
Incarceration	1

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, 12 (85.7%) identified as men, and two (14.3%) identified as women.

Sexual Orientation

The reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (page 9). Of the survey respondents, all 14 identified as straight.

Age of Respondents

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

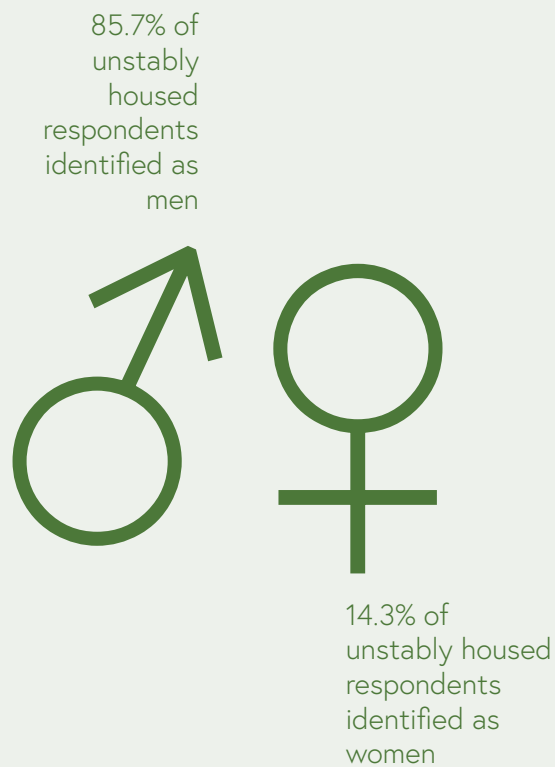


Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=14).

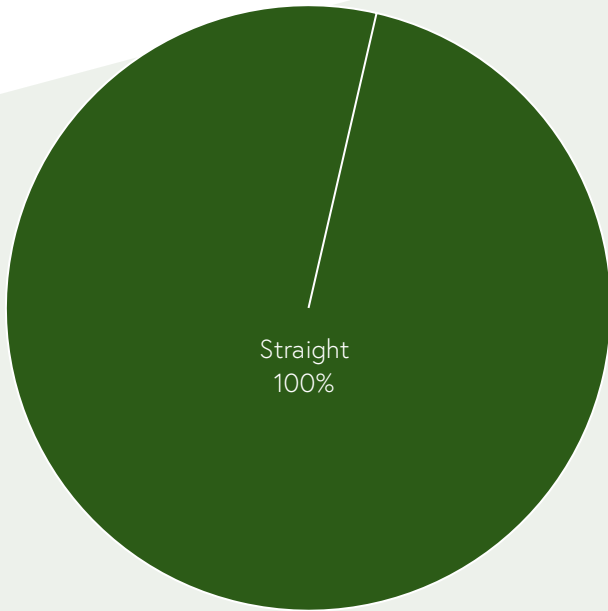


Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=14).

age of individuals facing unstable housing was 46 and the median age was 45.

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 Workers⁴.

Migration Status and Ethnicity

Out of all housing-unstable respondents, all 14 were born in Canada. These results are shown in **Figure 5** (page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, 10 identified as Caucasian, and four as Indigenous (First Nations) (**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, all 14 were Canadian citizens.

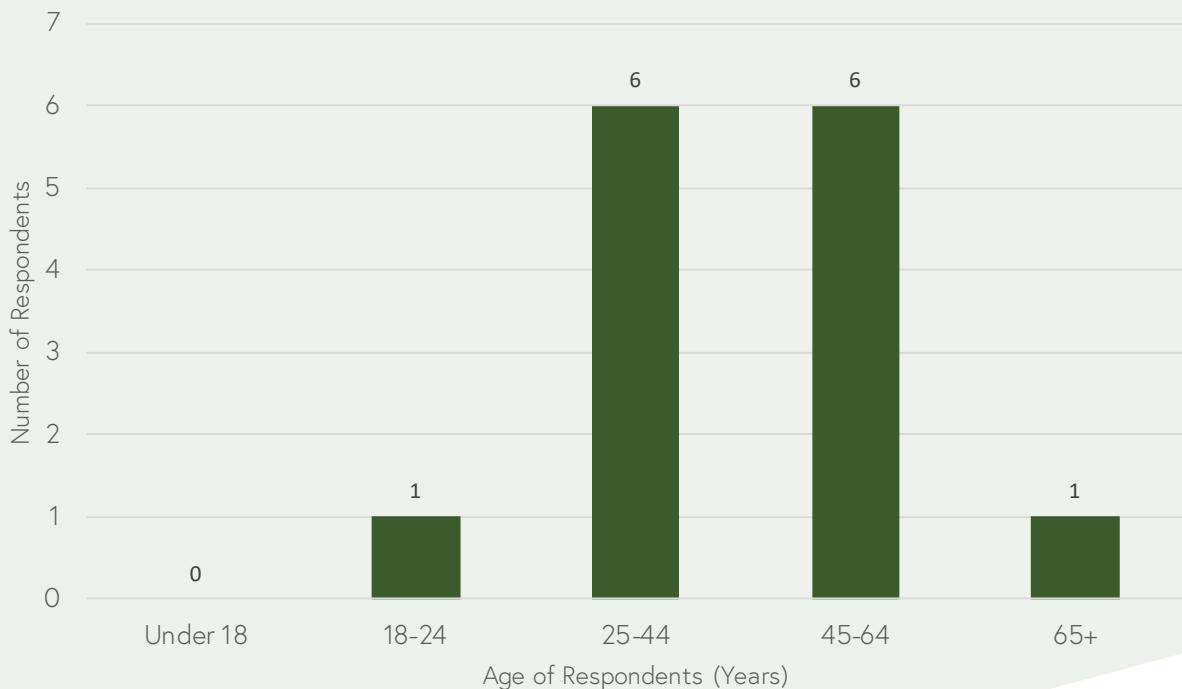


Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=14).

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). Five respondents reported that they have always lived in the community, eight have lived in the community for more than a year, and one has lived in the community for under a year.

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
Someone Else's Place	6
Apartment/House	4
Motel/Hotel	2
Prefer Not To Answer	1
Camping	1
Hospital	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. One respondent had not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, two had moved 3-5 times, five responded "Not Applicable", and six gave no response.

For respondents who had lived somewhere else in the past year, two moved from another community in the province.

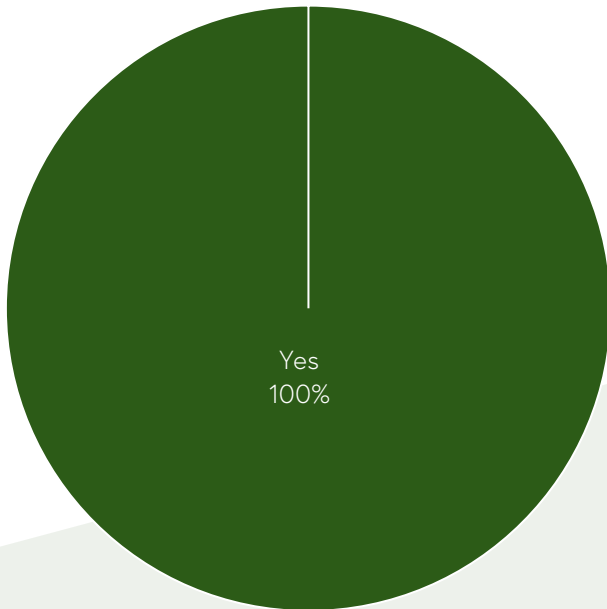


Figure 5 (above): unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"?

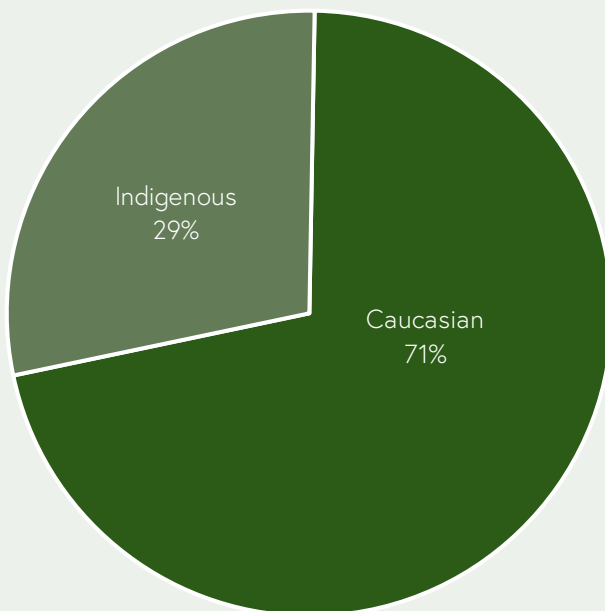


Figure 6: Of respondents born in Canada, 71% identified as Caucasian, and 29% identified as Indigenous (n=14).

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=14), there were a total of nine adults staying with unstably-housed respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 2.25. There was one child staying with unstably-housed respondents.

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

Finally, respondents were asked if they had spent time in an emergency shelter in the past year. Five individuals responded to this question, and two respondents answered "yes" to accessing shelter services in the past year. Subsequently, if

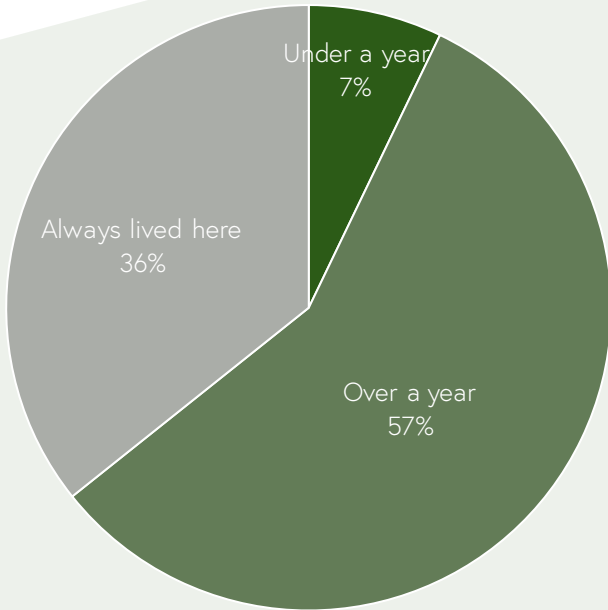


Figure 7: Respondents were asked about their current living situations. The figure above contains the response for the question "how long have you lived within the community?" (n=14).

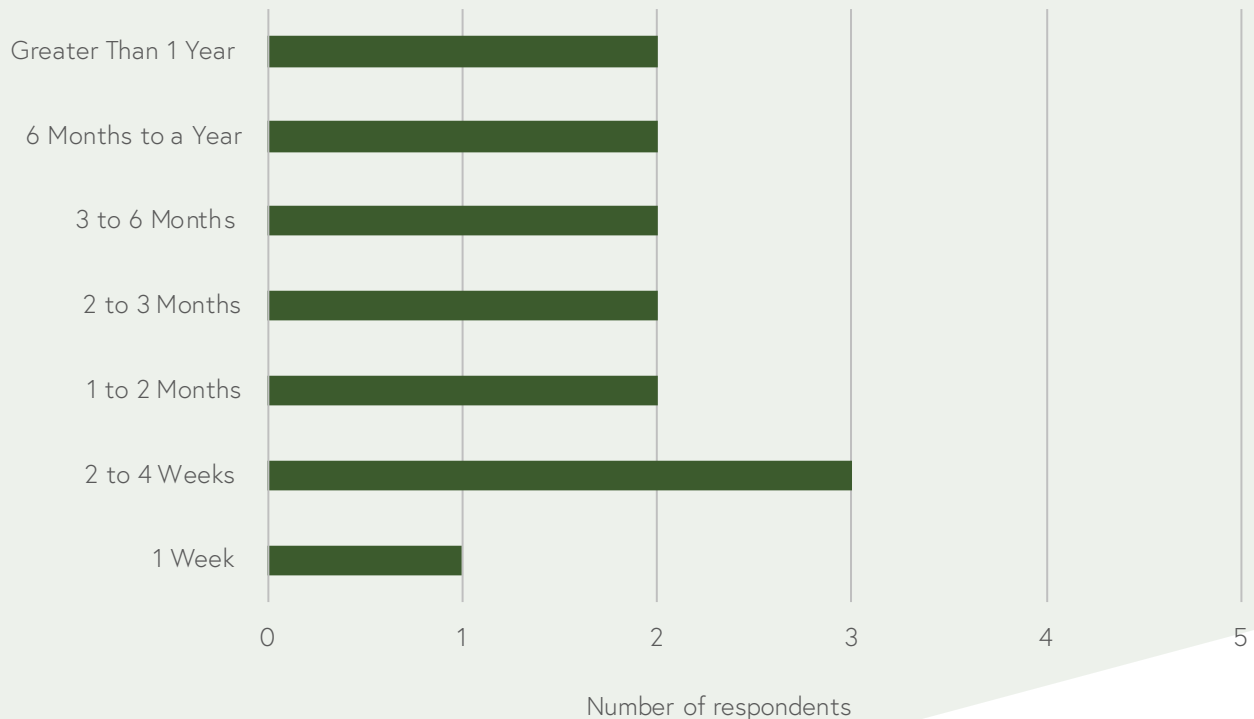


Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=14).

they had answered "no", respondents were asked about possible reasons for not utilizing emergency shelter(s). No respondent provided a reason for not using shelter services.

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 14 individuals who responded to the question, three were employed and 11 were unemployed. For those who were employed, one respondent was employed full-time, one was employed part-time, and one was a casual worker. The sector that people were currently employed in can be seen in **Table 4** (below).

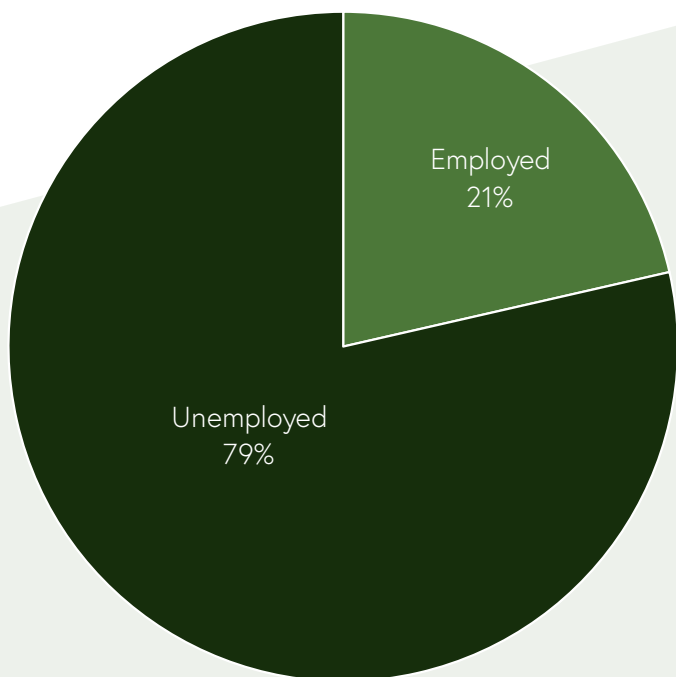


Table 4: Respondents who reported being employed were asked which sector they were employed in.

Current Employment Sector	Responses
Other Sector	3

Military or Emergency Services

Respondents were asked whether they had ever served in the Canadian military or any emergency services. As all respondents answered either "no" or "prefer not to answer", 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** (page 13).

Figure 9 (above): Respondents were asked whether they're currently employed (n=14).



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

Sources of Income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	4
Other Sources	3
Employment	3
Non Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	3
No Source of Income	2
Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	2
Social Enterprise	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD)	1

UNIQUE FINDINGS

We compared Ponoka'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=14). Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth. (Note: as there were only 2 female respondents to the survey, certain data have not been included here that may have been identifying).

Ponoka ranked the highest amongst the 20 communities for both men reporting that Low Income was at least one reason for their housing instability (83.3%), and men reporting that Addiction/Substance Use as at least one reason for their housing instability (58.3%).

The community also ranked the highest for men reporting that they were visiting service agencies for assistance with Health and Wellness (91.7%); it also ranked highly for men looking for help with Transportation (50.0%) and Legal Services (33.3%). As well, Ponoka ranked highly for men reporting that non-senior related benefits was at least one source of income (50.0%).

Both female respondents reported Low Income as at least one reason for their housing instability, and both reported that at least one reason they were visiting service agencies was for support with Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry).

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 Ponoka from October 15th to November 15th, 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.

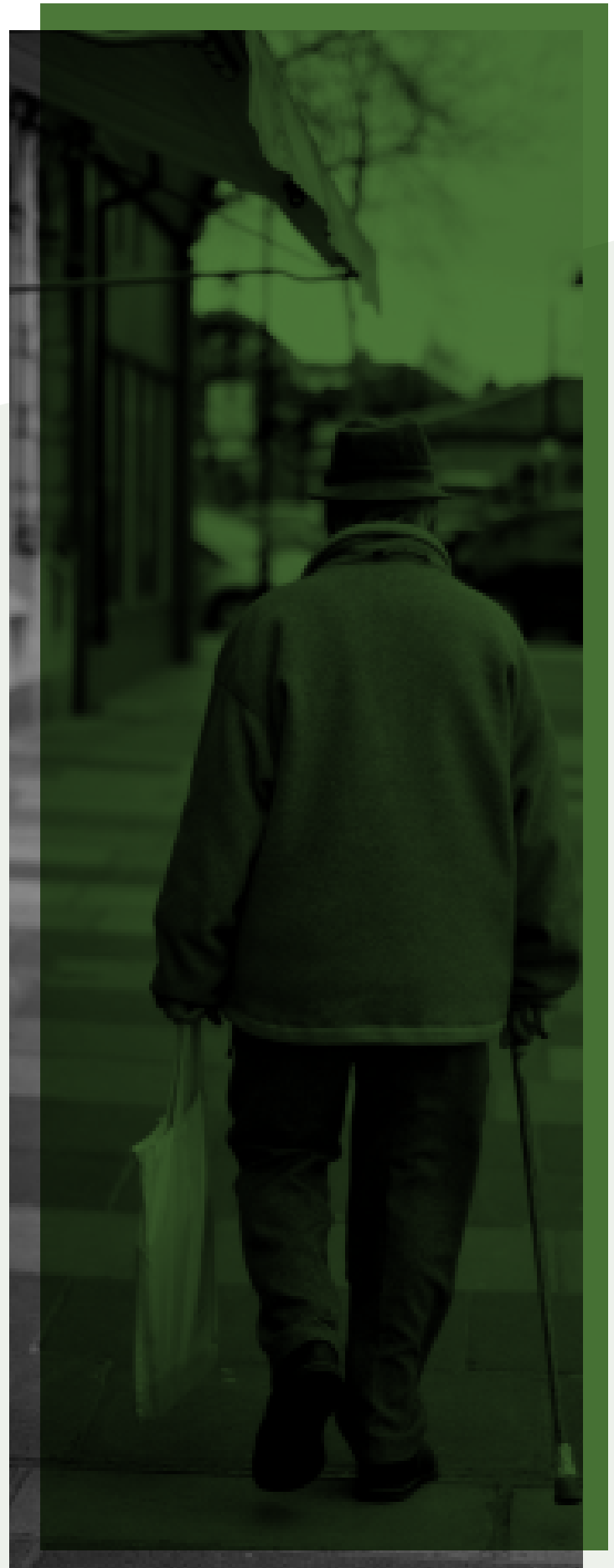
From a total of 15 survey respondents, 14 people reported that they felt that they could easily lose their housing or that they were uncertain whether their housing situation was stable. Given the reasons outlined at the beginning of this report, there are likely more individuals who met the Canadian definition of homelessness or who are struggling with housing instability and homelessness in Ponoka.

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 Ponoka.

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 Alberta⁵. More research on rural and remote homelessness, in both Ponoka 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 Ponoka Family and Community Support Services and all community partners in Ponoka 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.



A photograph of a forest with a green armchair in the foreground, overlaid with a green gradient. The armchair is a plush, dark green recliner with a footrest, positioned on a dirt path in a forest of tall, thin trees. The lighting is soft, suggesting a shaded forest environment. The green gradient is a semi-transparent overlay that covers the entire image, with a darker shade at the bottom and a lighter shade at the top.

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 Inclu-



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