



2018 RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION PROJECT

Tri-Region (Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Parkland County)
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

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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.

The Tri-Region 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
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 the Tri-Region Estimation Count:

Alberta Parenting for the Future
Alberta Works
Bredin Institute
Native Counselling Services & Aboriginal Parent Link
Neighbourlink Parkland
Parkland Food Bank
Parkland County Libraries

- Duffield Public Library
- Entwistle Public Library
- Keephills Public Library
- Tomahawk Public Library

Primary Care Network Social Worker
Spruce Grove FCSS
Stony Plain FCSS
Wabamun 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"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 the Tri-Region area (Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County) between October 9th and November 9th, 2018. The Tri-Region also hosted a community supper during the 30-day window where residents could complete the survey. The lead coordinators for the Tri-Region Estimation Count was Stony Plain Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and Spruce Grove FCSS.

The primary data collected in the Tri-Region's count indicated the following:

- 142 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 (92%), identified

- as Caucasian (69%), and had resided in the Tri-Region area for more than a year (76%);
- 29% of respondents who were housing-unstable (n=137) 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 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 the Tri-Region; use of the term "homelessness" was minimized due to the associated stigma, and the questions within the survey focused on respondents' "unstable housing" conditions. Unstable housing, as defined in this iteration of the project, is when a person experiences **"difficulty paying rent, spending a major portion of the household income on housing, having frequent moves, living in overcrowded conditions, or doubling up with friends and relatives"**. By re-framing the focus of the survey, this project attempted to decrease stigma, increase community members' willingness to participate, and collect quality data that stays true to the estimation's purpose.

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

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

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

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.

In the event that totals and percentages don't reflect precise, absolute figures, it's due to exclusion of non-responses and skipped questions. Additionally, certain datasets had to be omitted from this final report due to insufficient responses. A copy of the actual paper survey used in this project can be found at www.ardn.ca/publications/2018-rhep-survey.

LIMITATIONS

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

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

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

SUPPORT SERVICES

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 264. The Support Services section of the survey was answered by all respondents (n=264), including respondents who felt their housing was stable. The support services that respondents reported as needing can be seen in **Table 1** 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
Basic Needs (food, shelter, medical, shower, laundry) Support	190
Financial Support	72
Health & Wellness Support	42
Support Services (accessing government programs, accessing technology)	40
Prefer Not To Answer	30
Transportation Support	28
Family/Parenting Support	26
Legal Support	17
Other Support	12
Domestic Violence Support	9



Thirty respondents chose "prefer not to answer".

The top three most common responses for support services required by survey respondents were "Basic Needs" (190), "Financial Support" (72), and "Health & Wellness Support" (42).

COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Housing Stability

Of the 264 respondents in the Tri-Region's count, a total of 142 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 to 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: 74 responses for "Low

264
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

142
UNSTABLY HOUSED RESPONDENTS

Income"; 37 for "Unable to Pay Rent/Mortgage"; 31 for "Job Loss"; 26 for "Conflict"; and 23 for "Illness/Medical Condition".

When respondents were asked to give the main reason that they thought their housing was unstable, the three most common responses were: 51 (41.5%) for "Low Income"; 17 (13.8%) for "Job Loss"; and 10 (8.1%) for "Illness/Medical Condition".

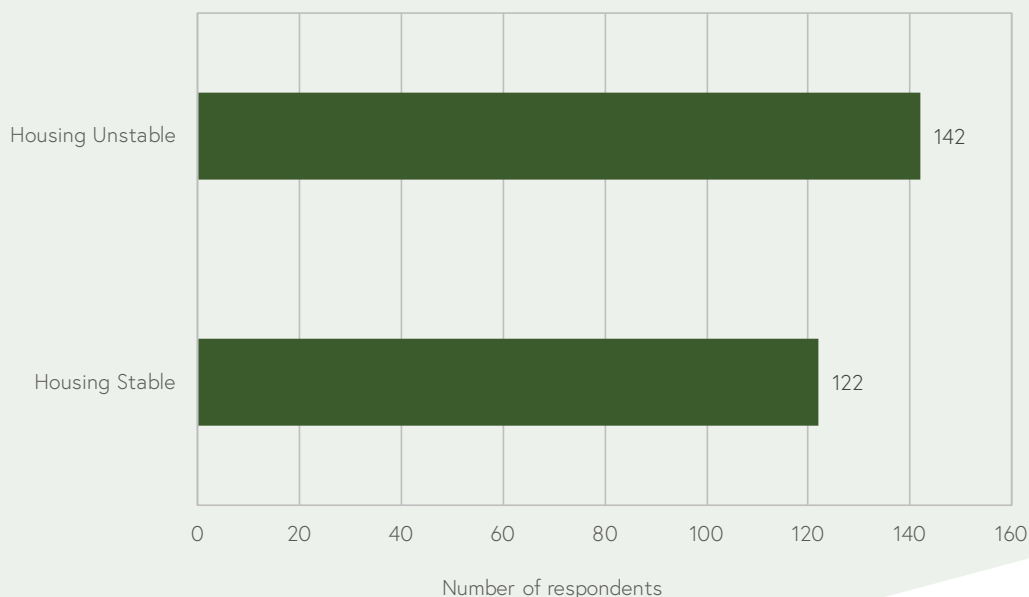


Figure 1: A total of 142 individuals answered "yes" or "not sure" to the question "Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?" (n=264).

Table 2: The most common reasons provided by Tri-Region 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	74
Unable To Pay Rent/Mortgage	37
Job Loss	31
Conflict	26
Illness/Medical Condition	23
Mental Health	13
Inadequate Housing	9
Transportation	9
Other	9
Addiction/Substance Use	8
Abuse	3

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

The reported gender identities of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 2**. Of the survey respondents, 47 (33%) identified as men, 85 (61%) identified as women, one (1%) identified as transgender, seven responded "prefer not to answer", and two gave no response.

Sexual Orientation

The reported sexual orientations of respondents can be seen in **Figure 3** (page 9). Of the survey respondents, 118 (84%) identified as straight, one (1%) identified as lesbian or gay, five (3%) as bisexual, one (1%) as "Other", 16 (11%) responded "prefer not to answer", and one gave no response.

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 46 and the median age was 47.

A note about youth participation: service agencies were instructed to limit survey administration to

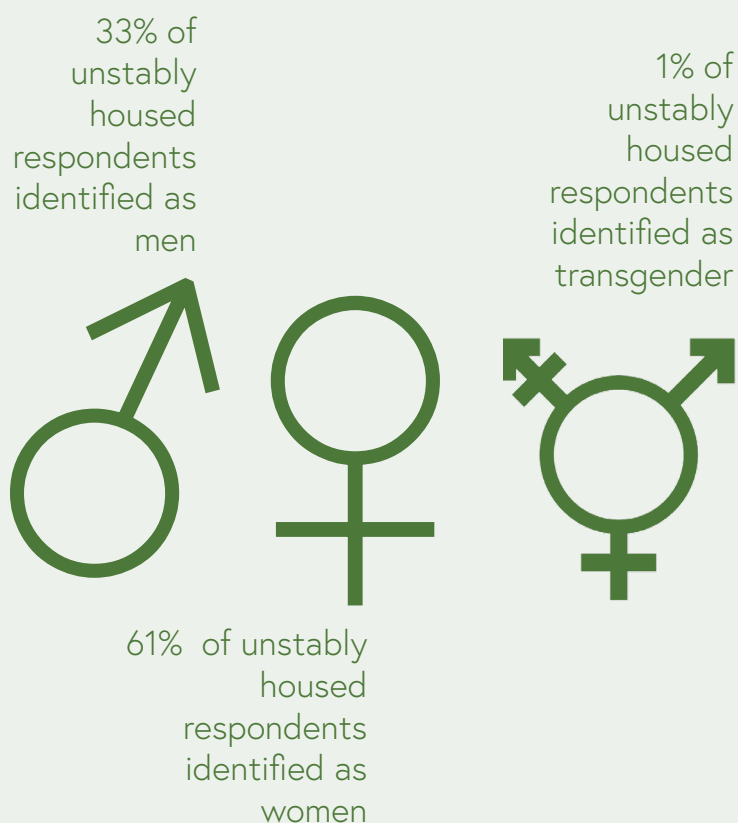


Figure 2: Gender identities of housing-unstable respondents (n=140).

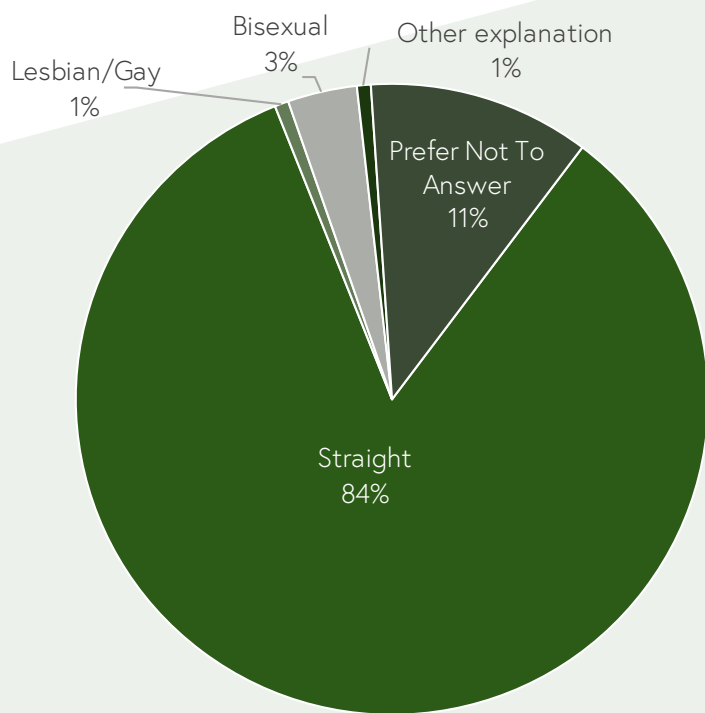


Figure 3: Sexual orientation of respondents who identified as housing-unstable (n=141).

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, 131 (92%) were born in Canada, ten (7%) were born outside of Canada, and one responded "prefer not to answer". These results are shown in **Figure 5** (Page 10).

Of those respondents who were born in Canada, 90 identified as Caucasian, 16 as Indigenous (nine Métis and seven First Nations), and 25 responded "prefer not to answer" (**Figure 6**, Page 10).

Of respondents who had immigrated to Canada at some point (n=10), five identified as either immigrants or refugees, three as other, and two responded "prefer not to answer".

Of respondents currently facing unstable housing, 135 were Canadian citizens, three were permanent residents, three had landed immigrant status, and one gave no response.

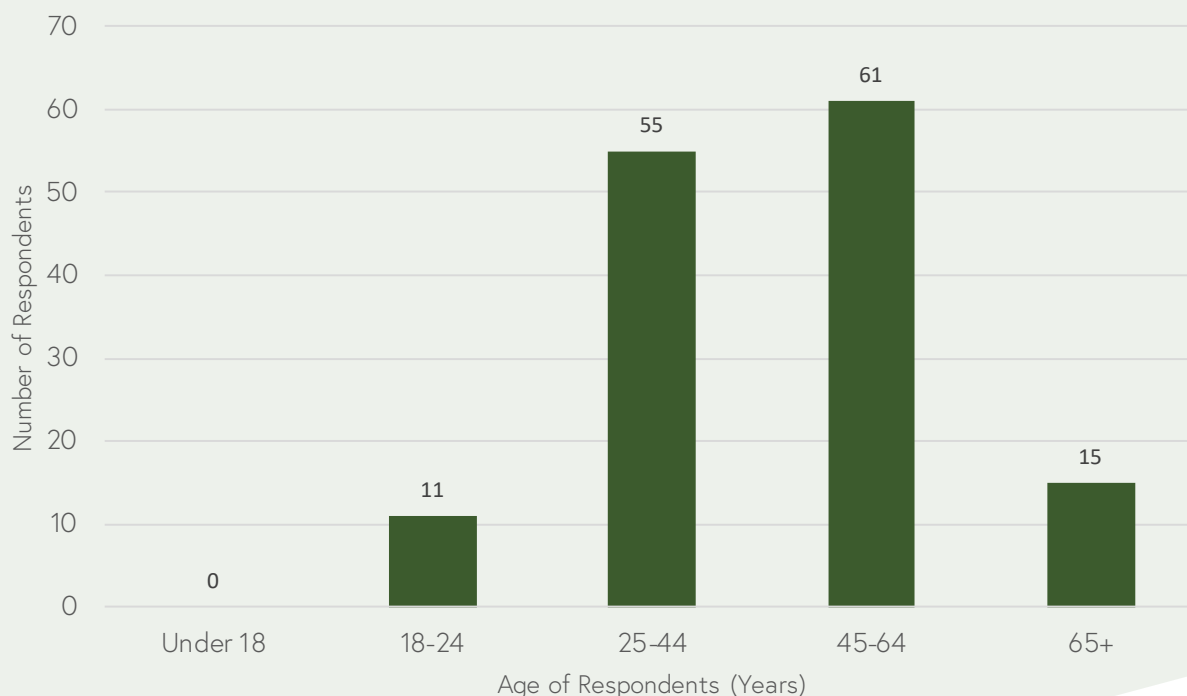


Figure 4: Age demographics of housing-unstable respondents (n=142).

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). Seventeen respondents reported that they have

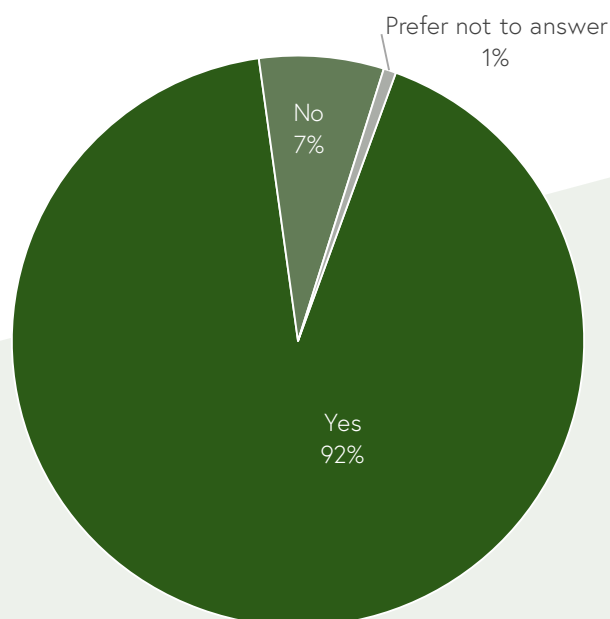


Figure 5 (above): Unstably-housed respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "were you born in Canada"? (n=142).

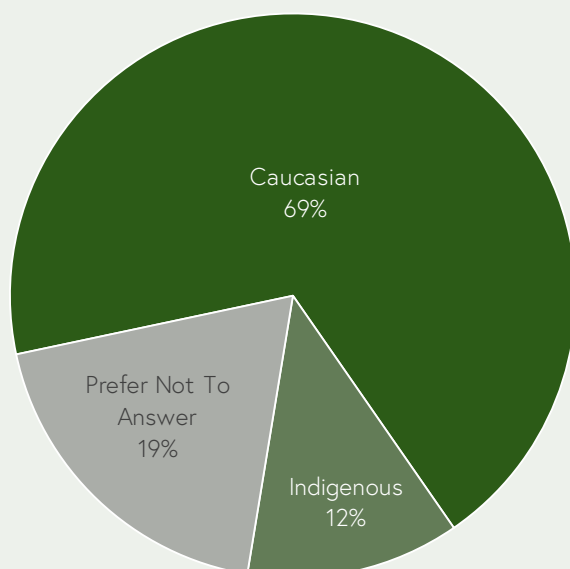


Figure 6 (above): Of respondents born in Canada, 69% identified as Caucasian, 12% as Indigenous, and 19% responded with "prefer not to answer" (n=131).

always lived in the community, 108 have lived in the community for more than a year, 16 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**. 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, as frequent moves can be an indicator of instability and insecurity. Two respondents had not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, ten had moved 1-2 times, two had moved 3-5 times, one had moved 10 or more times, 16 responded "Not Applicable", and 111 gave no response.

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

Accommodations in the past week (multiple responses possible)	Responses
Apartment/House	99
Someone Else's Place	15
Motel/Hotel	13
Prefer Not To Answer	10
Camping	6
Sidewalks, Squares, Parks, or Makeshift Shelter	2
Other Accommodations	1

For respondents who reported that they had lived somewhere else in the past year, two moved from another residence within the community, eight came from another community in the province, two from another province, one from another country, and one indicated "other" residence.

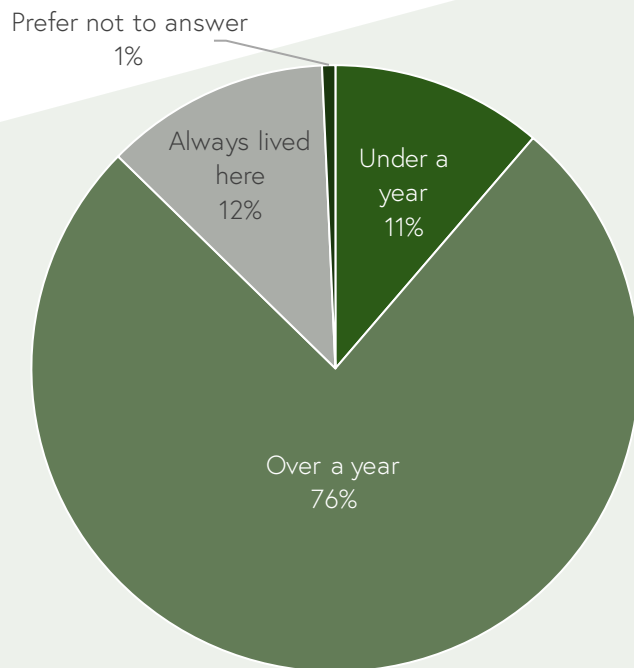


Figure 7: Respondents were asked about their current living situations. The figure above contains the response for the question "how long have you lived within the community?" (n=142).

Who's Staying with You

Some respondents reported that they had other people sharing their living situation with them. Of collected survey responses (n=142), there were a total of 114 adults staying with the respondents. The average number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 1.61. There were also a total of 151 children staying with unstably housed respondents. The average number of children sharing respondents' living situation was 2.16.

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?".

Shelter Use

Respondents were asked if they had spent time in an emergency shelter in the past year; out of the 86 individuals who responded to this question, the vast majority (96.5%) answered "no" to accessing

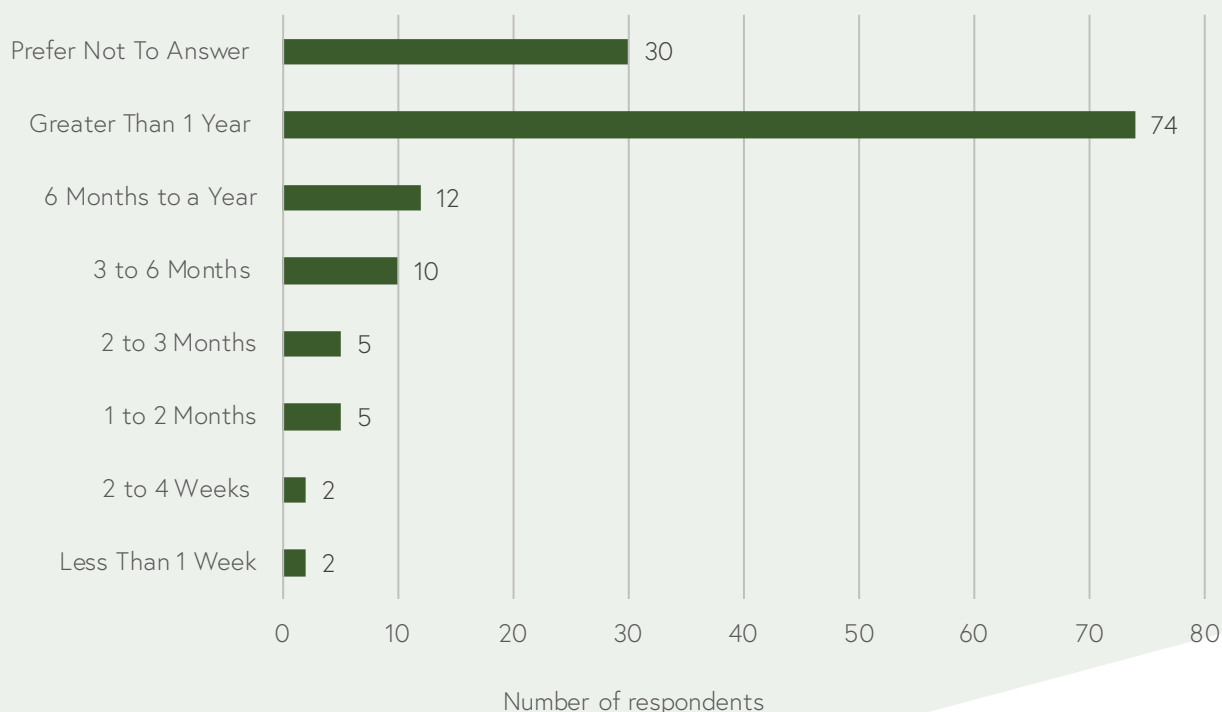


Figure 8: Respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current accommodations (n=140).

shelter services in the past year. Subsequently, if they had answered "no", they were asked about possible reasons for not utilizing emergency shelter(s). Due to low response rates for this question (n=5), this data was not included in this report.

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.

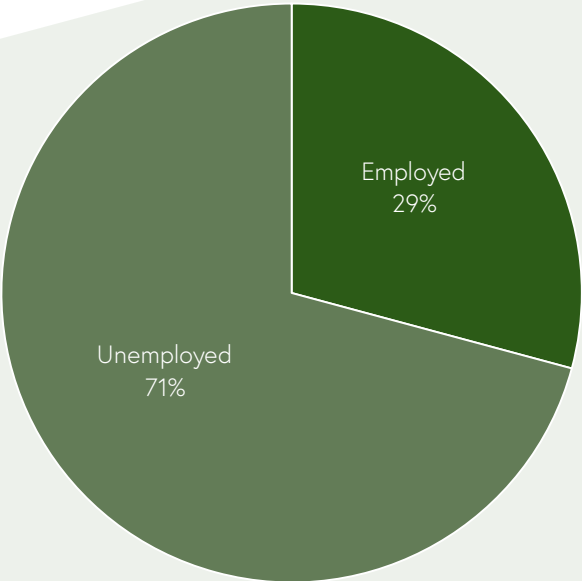


Figure 9 (above): Respondents were asked whether they're currently employed (n=137).

EMPLOYMENT

The employment status of housing-unstable individuals can be seen in **Figure 9**. Out of 137 individuals who responded to the question, 40 were employed and 97 were unemployed. For those who were employed, 17 were employed full-time, 14 were employed part-time, 3 were casual workers, and 11 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
Retail/Personal Services Sector	10
Hospitality/Food and Beverage Sector	7
Other Sector	4
Human Services Sector	3
Health Sector	3
Oil and Gas Sector	2
Finance Sector	1



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

Sources of income (Multiple Responses Possible)	Responses
Employment	36
Non Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Supports Benefits	22
Non Senior Related Benefits: AISH	19
No Source of Income	18
Non Senior Related Benefits: Child Tax Credit	18
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension (CPP)	15
Alimony/Child Support	14
Other Sources	12
Senior Related Benefits: Old Age Security (OAS)	11
Non Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD)	11
Senior Related Benefits: Alberta Seniors Benefits (ASB)	9
Prefer Not To Answer	6
Senior Related Benefits: Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD)	5
Non Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	4
Money From Family/Friends	4
Both Senior And Non Senior Related Benefits	4
Senior Related Benefits: Guaranteed Income Supplements (GIS)	3
Non Senior Related Benefits: Employment Insurance	2
Senior Related Benefits: Other Benefits	2
Non Senior Related Benefits: Private Disability Insurance	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Workers Compensation	1
Non Senior Related Benefits: Prefer Not To Answer	1

Military or Emergency Services

Twelve respondents reported that they had either been in the Canadian military or in an emergency service position (RCMP/police, EMS/paramedics, or firefighters). Of these, ten respondents had been in the military at some point (either active duty or veterans), while one currently or previously worked in emergency services, and one respondent chose "prefer not to answer".

Sources of Income

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

UNIQUE FINDINGS

We compared the Tri-Region'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. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

The Tri-Region, amongst the 20 participating communities, had the highest percentages of men (76.6%) and women (73.0%) who were not born in the community but have been here for two or more years.

The Tri-Region ranked highly for men with unstable housing who were working full-time (17.0%). It also had the highest percentage amongst the 20 communities of housing-unstable men who reported serving in the Canadian Military at some point (14.9%). The Tri-Region also ranked highly for men who reported illness or a medical condition as at least one reason for their housing instability (27.0% of men), and for men who reported senior-related benefits as at least one of their sources of income (17.0% of men).

For women, the Tri-Region ranked highly for women who reported alimony/child support as at least one source of income (16.5% of women). Finally, the Tri-Region ranked highly among the 20 communities for both women (8.2%) and men (4.3%) who felt

their housing was unstable and who were currently employed in the Retail/Personal Services sector.

CONCLUSION

The 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project was a pilot project aimed at investigating rural and remote homelessness in 20 rural communities across Alberta. It represents the first coordinated effort to quantitatively estimate homelessness outside the seven major cities across the province. Its intent was to provide baseline data for further investigation into the issue of rural and remote homelessness in Alberta.

This report provides a summary of primary data collected by service agencies in the Tri-Region area (Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County) from October 9 to November 9, 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 264 survey respondents, 142 people reported that they felt that they could easily lose their housing or that they were uncertain whether their housing situation was stable. Given the reasons outlined at the beginning of this report, there are likely more individuals who met the Canadian definition of homelessness or who are struggling with housing instability and homelessness in the Tri-Region area.

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

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 the Tri-Region area and across Alberta, is warranted to better understand the issues unique to individual municipalities and areas, as well as commonalities shared, in order to inform best practices and local solutions. Given that it was the first such count of its kind (as well as the first large-scale utilization of the methodology described in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness), many lessons were learned and the results from this pilot study will help shape and improve future counts.

The Alberta Rural Development Network would like to thank Stony Plain and Spruce Grove Family and Community Support Services and all community partners in the Tri-Region area 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.

Independent Report

Stony Plain FCSS and Spruce Grove FCSS also published an independent report using the same survey data in a document entitled 'Tri-Region Housing and Service Needs Estimate'. In this report, the organizations examined the responses from several respondents and made a determination - based on a respondent's described living situation - to include several additional individuals in the 'housing-unstable' category. The report identified "219 adults at risk of homelessness", an increase compared to this report. This discrepancy is due to a difference in methodology, and not an inaccuracy in either report.

Their report⁶ can be found at <https://www.sprucegrove.org/community/pathwayshome-spruce-groves-5-year-strategy-to-reduce-poverty-and-homelessness/tri-region-housing-and-service-needs-estimate/>

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.

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6) Spruce Grove and Stony Plain Family and Community Support Services. (2018). Tri-Region Housing and Service Needs Estimate 2018 Survey Results. Retrieved from <https://www.sprucegrove.org/community/pathwayshome-spruce-groves-5-year-strategy-to-reduce-poverty-and-homelessness/tri-region-housing-and-service-needs-estimate/>

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 4 (Methodology and Data Collection) and Page 14 (Conclusion):** *Spruce Grove Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) was added as a lead coordinator for the project.*
- **Page 5 (Methodology and Data Collection):** *N has been changed to 137 to reflect the number of total unstably housed respondents who answered the employment question. It was initially reporting the total number of respondents who identified as being currently employed.*
- **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 9 (Migration Status and Ethnicity):** *the dataset on respondents identifying as immigrants and/or refugees have been corrected to reflect a formatting error in the paper survey where "immigrant" and "refugee" were not separate options.*
- **Page 10 (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: "124 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 142 to 99.*
- **Page 13 (Unique Findings):** *rounding error was corrected from 77% to 76.6%.*

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