

A misty forest landscape with evergreen and deciduous trees in autumn colors. The scene is hazy and atmospheric, with a dark, semi-transparent band at the bottom containing white text.

Rural and Remote Alberta

2025 Alberta Provincial
Estimations and Service Needs
Estimation:
Community Report

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We Thank You.

This report and the information within were made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the coordinators who facilitated data collection in each of their communities, the front-line staff who administered surveys in each of their communities, and the residents in each community for their support, dedication, and commitment to this project.

Additionally, we would like to acknowledge that this project was funded in part by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.

Canada 

About this Report

In 2025, the Rural Development Network (RDN) partnered with 19 organizations representing 64 communities across Alberta to conduct the fourth iteration of a province-wide Housing and Service Needs Estimation.

This report outlines the overall results of the provincial estimation, highlighting the number of residents who are housing insecure and their experiences with housing insecurity. It is intended to support decision-making across organizations, funders, and government around housing insecurity by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs across rural and remote Alberta. It can also be used in communities for program planning and advocacy purposes related to housing insecurity, housing stock, and service needs.

Contact info@ruraldevelopment.ca for more information on Housing and Service Needs Estimations.

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Definitions: What Does “Homelessness” Mean?

Homelessness

According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2012), homelessness is the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

Further, Indigenous homelessness, more recently termed “houselessness,” considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. Indigenous houselessness is not only defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews, including: “individuals, families, and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identifies” (Thistle, 2017).

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant and stressful. The national definition of homelessness notes that individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations, including:

Unsheltered: Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation (e.g. living on sidewalks, squares, parks, vehicles, garages, etc.).

Emergency Sheltered: People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness as well as those staying in shelters due to family violence.

Provisionally Accommodated: People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g. couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people who are housed seasonally, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).

At Risk of Homelessness: People who are not yet homeless but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (e.g. people who are one rent payment missed from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.).

(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012).

In this report, we will use “housing insecure.” The term will be used to encompass the entire spectrum of homelessness, including unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness, as well as those experiencing Indigenous houselessness.



Introduction



Housing insecurity is a continued and increasing concern in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta and the entire country. When it comes to housing insecurity, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the visibility of unsheltered individuals experiencing housing insecurity in urban centres. The issue of housing insecurity in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its hidden nature. Recent data suggests that rural homelessness is prevalent at rates equivalent to or greater than urban per capita rates (Schiff et al., 2022).

In 2023, the Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation identified 2,429 survey respondents as experiencing housing insecurity. An additional 2,354 dependents under 18 and 2,537 adults reported living with housing insecure survey respondents, meaning there were at least 7,320 community members experiencing housing insecurity across the 21 participating communities in rural and remote Alberta (Rural Development Network, 2023). While some housing insecure respondents had experiences of being unsheltered or emergency-sheltered, the majority of housing insecure respondents were provisionally accommodated or at risk of homelessness, further speaking to the issue of visibility, or rather invisibility, of housing insecurity in rural and remote communities.

As rural, remote, and Indigenous communities continue to experience growth amidst a national housing and affordability crisis, it has become more apparent than ever that more evidence is required to support decision-making on housing insecurity, housing stock, and services across the province.

Recognizing this, RDN conducted the 2025 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation with 19 organizations representing roughly 64 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta in an attempt to better understand what housing insecurity looks like in each community and across the rural provincial landscape. Specifically, the purpose of this estimation is to:

1. Provide a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity in each participating community and across Alberta, including demographic information on who is experiencing housing insecurity and details on service use and gaps.
2. Help inform service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal policies, practices, and funding decisions on housing insecurity, housing stock, and support services.
3. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and all levels of government to address housing insecurity in each participating community and across Alberta.
4. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing housing insecurity in local, provincial, and federal responses to housing insecurity.

This is the fourth iteration of the Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation. It was also conducted in 2018, 2020, and 2023, with 20, 24, and 21 communities, respectively. Table 1 details participation in previous Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimations.

Table 1: Past Participation in Provincial Estimations

	Total # of Respondents	# of Housing Insecure Respondents	# of Housing Insecure Dependents and Additional Adults	Total # of Housing Insecure Community Members
2018	1,771	1,098	1,899	2,997
2020	1,893	908	1,729	2,637
2023	3,211	2,429	4,891	7,320

Participating Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Communities

- Athabasca
- Barrhead
- The Bow Valley
- Camrose
- County of Grande Prairie and the towns of Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, and Wembley
- Drayton Valley
- Driftpile Cree Nation
- Frog Lake First Nation
- Hinton
- Kneehill County
- Lac La Biche
- Lloydminster
- Peace River
- Rocky Mountain House
- St. Albert and Sturgeon County
- Taber
- The Tri-Municipal Region
- Westlock
- Whitecourt



Methodology



The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimation comes from the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Homelessness, published by the Rural Development Network (2022). RDN initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural housing insecurity. A lack of data limits the ability of rural communities to advocate for better resources for their residents.

The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective. It recognizes the difficulties of conducting standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas and instead uses a service-based population estimation approach, which allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs without adding additional strain to workloads and organizational capacities.

Please note: *As with a PiT count, this estimation is an undercount and represents only those individuals identified during the four-week period. The number of people experiencing housing insecurity is greater than presented in this report.*

Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide, RDN worked with communities and academics across Canada to develop a survey that reflected the contexts of rural and remote communities. The survey was developed following the definitions of homelessness proposed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and adopted by the federal government. However, the survey itself was advertised as a Housing and Service Needs survey. This is a result of feedback from multiple service providers who are committed to minimizing the stigma associated with homelessness, which could cause distress to their clients. By reframing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage all clients to participate, instead of targeting specific individuals.

To further minimize stigma throughout the survey, rather than asking respondents to identify themselves as homeless or housing insecure, they were asked whether they considered their living conditions secure or insecure and to indicate scenarios in a “select all that apply” question that determined their objective housing situation. Based on responses to the latter survey question, along with subsequent data analysis, RDN was able to determine which respondents were housing insecure. As shown in the results below, some individuals who did not consider themselves housing insecure qualify as such based on the national definitions of homelessness.

The same survey was used across all communities participating in the 2025 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation project, though each community’s survey was customized to meet their location parameters.

RDN worked with each community to develop a survey administration process to ensure the greatest participation level possible. In each community, surveys were advertised at service provider locations and online as an open SurveyMonkey link across the community. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of four weeks, from October 1 to October 31, 2025.

Before the survey period began, RDN conducted orientation and training sessions with staff from participating agencies. During the training, emphasis was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing participants' informed consent. During each training session, resources were provided to staff to improve their understanding of the project and increase comfort in administering the survey. Training and resources also included the various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, prioritizing the individual's reasons for visiting the service provider before offering the survey.

Important to note about the survey: to ensure the trust and anonymity of participants, each respondent was asked to give consent at the beginning of the survey and create a unique identifier. The unique identifier allowed RDN to maintain the integrity of the data without knowing respondent identities. The unique identifier was a combination of letters and numbers from a participant's name and birthdate.

Figure 1: Unique Identifier Question on Survey

Q1. Anonymous Unique Identifier (ex. John Smith, born on 15th November 1964)

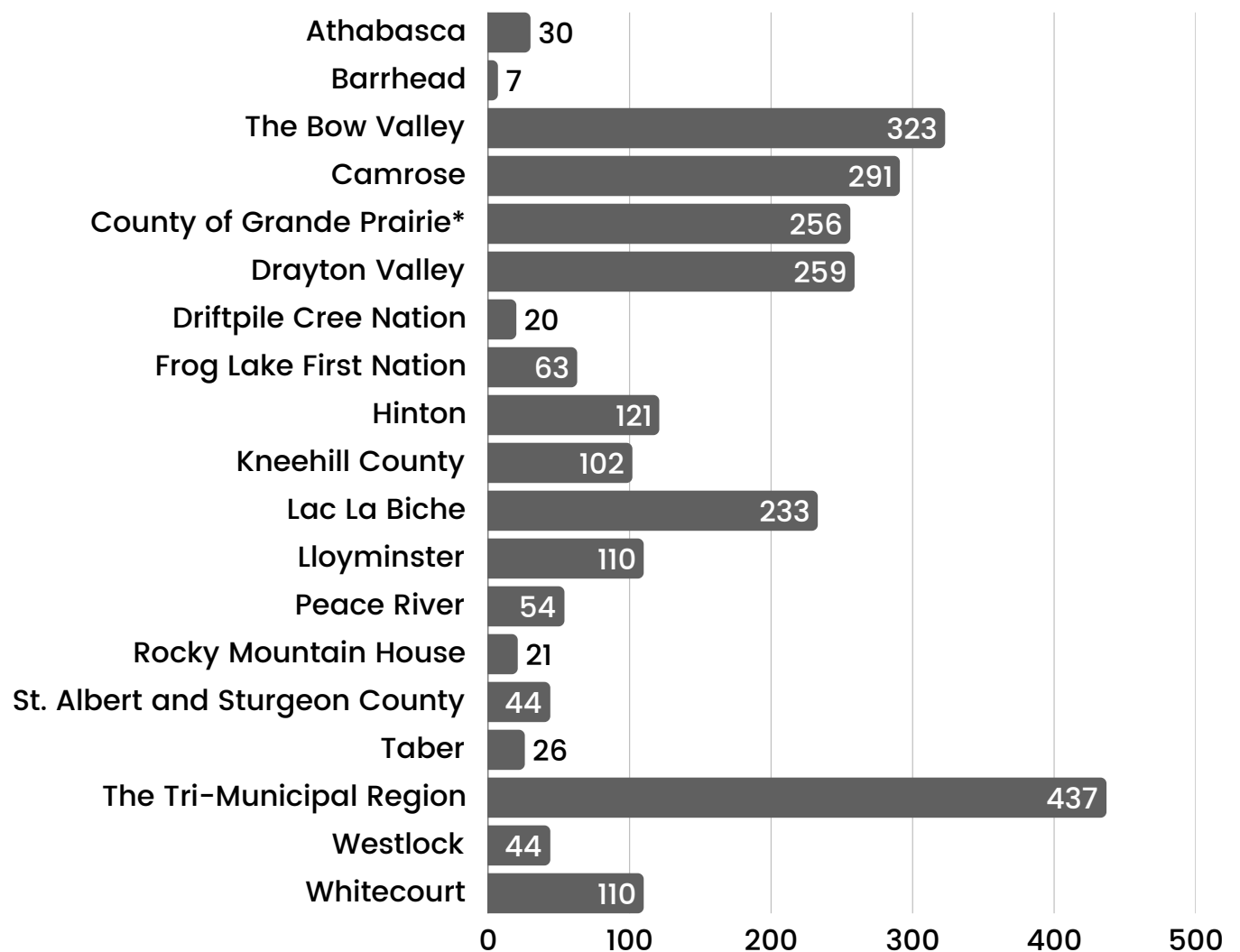
H	N	What are the last two letters of your FIRST name?
T	H	What are the last two letters of your LAST name?
1	5	What is the DAY you were born?
6	4	What are the last two numbers of the YEAR you were born?

3,363 survey responses were collected during the four weeks. Of the 3,363 surveys, 875 were excluded. Surveys were deemed unsuitable and excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Survey respondent(s) declined to give consent.
2. Survey respondent(s) declined to provide the unique identifier or provided improper unique identifier information (e.g., characters instead of numbers, etc.).
3. Survey respondent(s) submitted multiple surveys (determined based on unique identifier(s)).
4. Survey respondent(s) indicated they were located outside of community boundaries.
5. Survey respondent(s) did not complete enough questions to determine housing stability (e.g., abandoned the survey).

Based on this, 2,488 were deemed suitable for further analysis and will be the focus of the results outlined below.

Figure 2: Total Number of Respondents Per Community



*and the towns of Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, and Wembley:

Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase the accessibility of the survey, not all clients who were offered a survey chose to participate. Additionally, staff at participating service providers were informed that participants under 14 years old required guardian consent to participate in the survey. We recognize that this is inherently problematic and exclusionary, as most youth experiencing homelessness would not have a guardian to provide consent. However, to maintain survey ethics, this requirement complies with the Alberta College of Social Workers' Standards of Practice.

Additionally, the data does not represent all rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta as a whole; rather, it represents only those who accessed services in the 19 participating communities during the four-week enumeration period.

As a result, there remains a portion of people experiencing housing insecurity in rural and remote Alberta whose voices were not captured in this project. Therefore, while the trends and highlights discussed in this report are informative, it is always important to remember that this report presents a conservative picture of the housing and services needs.



Results and Analysis



Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey

Respondent Population Overview

Gender and Sexuality

74% (1804) of participants identified as women, 23% (570) as men, 1% (29) as gender non-conforming, 0% (5) as trans-women, 0% (2) as trans-men, and 0% (5) as unsure. Additionally, 1% (35) of respondents preferred not to answer.

82% (1988) of respondents identified as straight, 5% (126) as bisexual/pansexual, 2% (38) as asexual, 2% (37) as lesbian/gay, 1% (15) as Two-Spirit, and 0% (5) were unsure of their sexual orientation. Additionally, 0% (5) of respondents self-disclosed as "Queer," "Demisexual," "Celibate," and "Sapiosexual," and 8% (204) preferred not to answer.

Age

4% (11) of respondents were between the ages of 15 and 24, 42% (1051) were 25 to 44, 35% (875) were 45 to 65, and 18% (451) were 65 and older.

Household Makeup

6% (57) of respondents noted that they or someone in their home was pregnant, 27% (254) indicated they live in a multi-generational home, and 69% (684) were in single-parent households.

Time Spent in Care

9% (216) of respondents indicated they spent time in foster care, a youth group home, or in a youth/young adult agreement. 2% (40) preferred not to answer.

Immigration

77% (1896) of respondents were born in Canada, while 23% (552) immigrated to Canada. 3% (15) of respondents who immigrated to Canada have lived here for less than a year, while 78% (430) of respondents who immigrated to Canada have lived here for more than ten years.

Race and Indigenous Identity

84% (1901) of respondents identified as white, compared to 8% (199) of racially diverse respondents. 1% (24) of respondents self-disclosed as "½ Russian and Norwegian," "Indo European," "Irish Canadian," "Low German," "Mixed," and "Canadian" and 8% (170) preferred not to answer.

Further, 19% (461) of respondents self-identified as Indigenous, while 3% (62) preferred not to answer. Of those respondents who self-identified as Indigenous, 49% (228) identified as First Nations, 42% (194) as Métis, 1% (6) as Inuk, and 10% (45) as other Indigenous ancestry.

Veteran Status

6% (140) of total respondents indicated that they served in the Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), or emergency services. Of those, 26% (36) served in the Canadian Armed Forces, 15% (21) served in the RCMP, and 69% (96) served in emergency services.

Objective Housing Situation

As part of the survey, participants were asked: “Do you consider your housing situation unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?” Respondents were given the options “yes,” “no,” and “I’m not sure” to guide their responses.

Of the 2,488 survey respondents, 809 self-identified as housing insecure, 285 indicated “I’m not sure,” while 1,378 indicated they were housing secure, and 16 skipped the question. Using the national definitions of homelessness to guide further analysis, 1,762 survey respondents were identified as housing insecure and 726 as housing secure. An additional 1,394 dependents under 18 and 2,154 adults were reported as living with housing insecure survey respondents.

Tables 2 and 3 show breakdowns of respondents by housing security status and highlight the number of dependents and adults who reported sharing living conditions with housing insecure respondents.

Table 2: Breakdown of Respondent Housing Status

	# of Individuals
Housing Secure	726
Housing Insecure	1,762

Table 3: Breakdown of Dependents & Adults Sharing Insecure Housing Living Conditions

	# of Additional Individuals
Dependents	1,394
Adults	2,154

Based on survey results, there were at least 5,310¹ community members experiencing housing insecurity across the 19 participating rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

The top three reasons for housing insecurity across rural and remote Alberta, as reported by survey respondents, were:

1. High housing costs²
2. Health challenges³
3. Low vacancy rates⁴

Did you know...

While the rate of drug and alcohol use is higher among those who are unsheltered and emergency sheltered than the general population, research indicates that only 38% of people use alcohol, and even fewer (26%) use other types of drugs.

Substance use is only one of several factors that can put a person at risk of losing their housing. However, drugs and alcohol are never the sole cause of housing insecurity. In fact, in many cases, a person doesn't start using drugs until after they have become housing insecure, as the stress of trying to survive without permanent shelter can lead people to turn to alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism (Homeless Hub, 2024; Michaels House, n.d.)

¹ Unfortunately, as a result of technical difficulties when printing off paper surveys for the enumeration, one community was not able to capture self-identified or objective housing status through survey results. However, based on additional analysis of available survey data, RDN was able to determine that 54 unique respondents selected at least one statement to indicate an incident of housing insecurity. Those 54 housing insecure respondents shared living conditions with 98 dependents under 18 and 182 additional adults. As a result, there are likely at least 336 community members experiencing housing insecurity in this community, bringing the total number of community members experiencing housing insecurity across participating rural, remote, and Indigenous communities to 5,646.

² "My rent/mortgage is too high for my current income"

³ "Illness/medical condition," "Mental health concerns," "Mental disability," and/or "Physical disability"

⁴ "There is almost no vacancy/no rentals available"

Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey

Respondent Population Overview

Table 4: Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Population Overview Comparison by Housing Stability⁵

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
Number of Survey Respondents	726	1,762
Gender	Gender non-conforming: 1	Gender non-conforming: 28
	Man: 117	Man: 453
	Trans-man: 0	Trans-man: 2
	Trans-woman: 0	Trans-woman: 5
	Woman: 589	Woman: 1215
	Not sure: 0	Not sure: 5
Sexual Orientation	Asexual: 7	Asexual: 31
	Bisexual/Pansexual: 11	Bisexual/Pansexual: 115
	Lesbian/Gay: 4	Lesbian/Gay: 33
	Straight: 624	Straight: 1364
	Two-Spirit: 0	Two-Spirit: 15
	Not sure: 1	Not sure: 4
Age	0-14 years: 0	0-14 years: 0
	15-24 years: 14	15-24 years: 97
	25-44 years: 213	25-44 years: 838
	45-64 years: 284	45-64 years: 591
	65+ years: 215	65+ years: 236

⁵ This table does not include respondents who preferred not to answer or skipped demographic questions

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
Household Makeup	Pregnancy in household: 9	Pregnancy in household: 48
	Multi-generational household: 41	Multi-generational household: 231
	Single-parent household: 117	Single-parent household: 567
	Spent time in care: 12	Spent time in care: 204
Immigration Status	Born in Canada: 588	Born in Canada: 204
	Born outside of Canada: 128	Born outside of Canada: 424
Racial Identity	White: 632	White: 1269
	Racialized: 26	Racialized: 216
Indigenous Identity	First Nations: 15	First Nations: 213
	Métis: 38	Métis: 156
	Inuk: 0	Inuk: 6
	Other Indigenous ancestry: 5	Other Indigenous ancestry: 40
Served in Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, Emergency Services	Canadian Armed Forces: 12	Canadian Armed Forces: 24
	RCMP: 8	RCMP: 13
	Emergency Services: 28	Emergency Services: 68

Based on this survey population overview breakdown, we can determine the following:

- Respondents identifying as women were 2.7 times more likely than their male counterparts to be housing insecure.
- 90% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (excluding “don’t know” responses) were housing insecure.
- 84% of respondents living in a multi-generational household were housing insecure.
- 83% of respondents living in single parent households were housing insecure.
- 88% of Indigenous respondents were housing insecure.
- 94% of respondents who spent time in care were housing insecure.
- 59% of housing insecure respondents who spent time in care were Indigenous.
- 89% of racialized respondents were housing insecure.
- 69% of respondents who serve(d) in the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, and/or emergency services are housing insecure.

Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness Across Rural and Remote Alberta

Recognizing that the national definition of homelessness is complex, encompassing various housing situations across a continuum, it is important to better understand what housing insecurity looks like across rural and remote Alberta. This understanding can be achieved by exploring the experiences of the 1,762 housing insecure respondents.

To accurately place respondents along the spectrum of homelessness, a series of measures were used to understand their situations. These measures included their self-identified housing security response, calculated housing security, current housing situation, and the amenities they lack in their current situation.

Early in the survey, respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation and were able to choose all situations that applied to them from a variety of statements. Statements included, but were not limited to, “I slept in a vehicle,” “I slept in a hotel overnight because I had nowhere else to go,” “I live in supported or transitional housing,” and “I live in housing that needs major repairs.”

Respondents were able to select more than one statement. To accurately represent what housing insecurity might look like for respondents over a month, all responses have been included.

When reading this table, an important consideration is that people experiencing housing insecurity often fluctuate in and out of their situation. Someone who was unsheltered one night may have been emergency sheltered or provisionally accommodated the next. As a result, we have highlighted every incident of insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the complexities of housing insecurity across rural and remote Alberta. This means that more incidents of housing insecurity are reported in the table below than the number of housing insecure respondents.

Table 5: Respondents by Housing Situation on the Homelessness Spectrum

Place on the Homelessness Spectrum	# of Incidents
Unsheltered	362
Emergency Sheltered	183
Provisionally Accommodated	1,224
At Risk of Homelessness	2,128

The above table illustrates respondents' diverse experiences with housing insecurity in rural and remote Alberta, emphasizing that homelessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside.

Respondents identified as **at risk** reported:

- Difficulty paying their rent or mortgage,
- Spending more than 30% of their monthly income on housing,
- Living in overcrowded accommodations with not enough bedrooms for the number of people staying in the unit,
- Staying in a home needing major repairs (e.g., heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.), and/or
- Staying in a home with unsafe conditions (e.g., exposed wiring, no railing or banisters, physical hazards, etc.).

Respondents who indicated they experienced being **provisionally accommodated** noted:

- Staying in a hotel overnight because they had nowhere to go,
- Living in accommodations provided by their employer,
- Living in a home that is owned/rented out by a First Nations or Métis Settlement,
- Living in supported or transitional housing,
- Staying in an RV/trailer,
- Staying in a medical/detox facility,
- Staying in a jail/prison/remand centre,
- Staying with friends/family because they had nowhere else to go,
- Staying with a stranger because they had nowhere else to go,
- Staying in a home where they experienced violence because they had nowhere else to go, and/or
- Enduring unwanted sexual activity to have a place to stay.

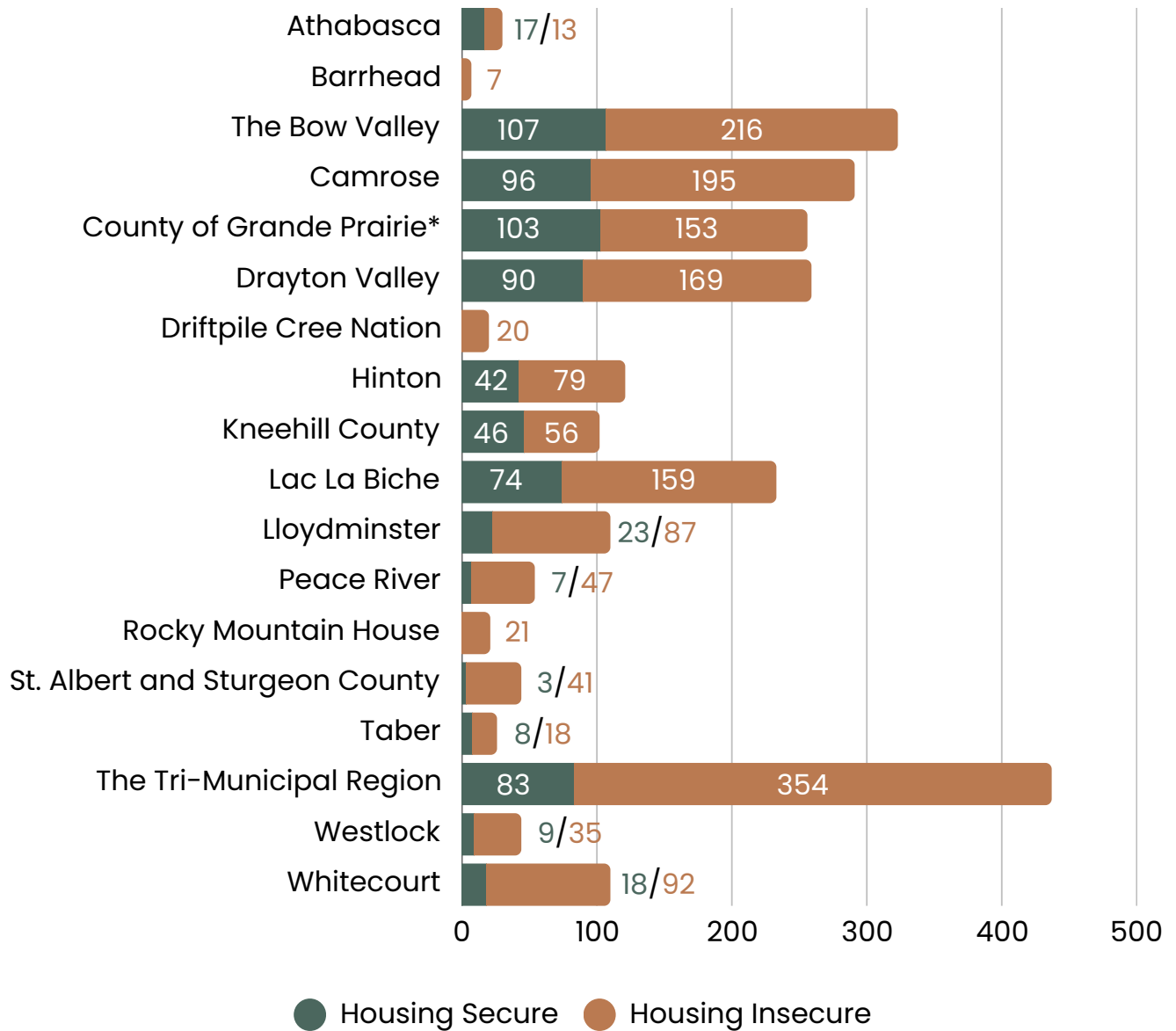
Respondents who had experiences of being **emergency sheltered or unsheltered** reported:

- Staying in an emergency shelter,
- Staying in domestic violence/women's shelters, and/or
- Staying in makeshift shelters such as a vehicle, tent, or shack.

Living Situation

Residents from across the province participated in the 2025 Housing and Service Needs survey. This is outlined in Figure 3, below.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Location



*and the towns of Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, and Wembley

Migration

16% (407) of all respondents, 70% (286) of which are housing insecure, have always lived in their current community. Interestingly, 41% (717) of housing insecure respondents have lived in their current community for over eight years.

Respondents were asked: *“What are the main reasons you came to this community? If you have always lived here, why have you chosen to stay in this community?”*

The top five reasons housing insecure respondents came to the area are:

- Family-related reasons (to be closer to family, to follow family, etc.)
- Employment-related reasons (look for work, work-related transfer, more work opportunities, etc.)
- For the lifestyle the community offers
- Housing-related reasons (to access affordable and appropriate housing, etc.)
- Access to services/supports

In comparison, the top five reasons housing insecure respondents stayed in the area are:

- Family-related reasons (to be closer to family, to follow family, etc.)
- The connection to culture, community, and traditions
- For the lifestyle the community offers
- Employment-related reasons (look for work, work-related transfer, more work opportunities, etc.)
- Housing-related reasons (to access affordable and appropriate housing, etc.)

Housing Situation and Missing Amenities

To better understand respondents' current living situations, they were asked to indicate if they rent or own their home (or if neither was true for them). 35% (585) of housing insecure respondents indicated that they owned their homes, 51% (865) indicated that they rented their homes, 12% (202) noted that they neither owned nor rented, and 2% (38) preferred not to answer. Comparatively, 84% (610) of housing secure respondents owned their homes, 11% (82) rented their homes, 3% (22) noted they neither owned nor rented, and 1% (10) preferred not to answer.

33% (574) of unique housing insecure respondents, whether they rented, owned, or were in a different situation entirely, indicated that they lacked specific amenities in their current housing situation, many of which are considered necessary for a secure living situation. At the time of the survey, 57% (326) did not have access to safe drinking water and 50% (285) of these respondents did not have fire protection (including fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, and a safe exit out of their space).

Table 6: Breakdown of Housing Insecure Respondents' Missing Amenities

Missing Amenities	# (%) of Respondents
Sufficient and affordable heating	326 (57%)
Safe drinking water	326 (57%)
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	285 (50%)
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	172 (30%)
Cooking facilities	149 (26%)
Electricity	143 (25%)
Refrigeration	140 (24%)

This breakdown highlights respondents who lacked basic amenities and is one way respondents' objective housing situation is calculated. Some respondents self-identified as housing secure but lacked amenities that would consider their housing situation stable according to the Canadian definitions of homelessness, including indoor plumbing/bathing facilities, sufficient and affordable heating, electricity, access to safe drinking water, and fire protection.

Experiences of Violence, Abuse, and Unwanted Sexual Activity Amongst Housing Insecure Respondents



10% (177) of housing insecure respondents indicated they were experiencing violence, abuse, and/or unwanted sexual activity at the time of the survey. Based on additional analysis, we know that:



- **69%** identified as women, **26%** as men, and **1%** preferred not to answer
- **80%** were straight, **6%** bisexual/pansexual, **4%** asexual, **2%** Two-Spirit, **1%** lesbian/gay, **1%** preferred to self-disclose, and **5%** preferred not to answer

Age Breakdown

15-24	11%
25-44	57%
45-64	28%
65+	5%

Indigenous Identity

- 42%** were Indigenous
- **29%** were First Nations
 - **8%** were Métis
 - **4%** other Indigenous ancestry
 - **1%** were Inuk



- **27%** were employed in some capacity at the time of the survey while **64%** were unemployed and **5%** were retired

Did you know...

People without permanent homes are more likely to experience physical violence and sexual assault than to be the ones committing a crime. While housing insecure residents do tend to have more interactions with the criminal justice system, it is usually because the actions related to their daily survival have been stigmatized and criminalized (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2024; Novac et. al, 2009).

Education, Employment, and Income

Education

Respondents indicated various education levels when responding to the question, “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?”

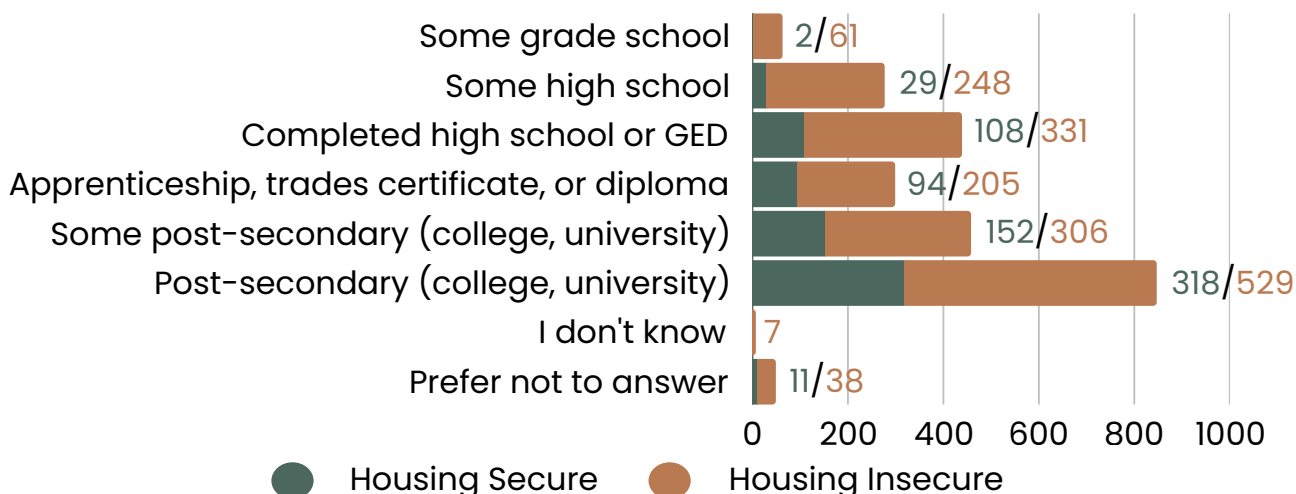
Across all 19 rural, remote, and Indigenous participating communities:

- 3% (63) of respondents had completed some grade school
- 11% (277) completed some high school
- 18% (439) completed high school or received their GED
- 12% (299) had an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma
- 19% (458) had some post-secondary (college, university)
- 35% (847) had a post-secondary degree (college, university)
- 0% (7) did not know their highest completed level of education

Additionally, 2% (49) respondents preferred not to answer.

Figure 4 provides a more detailed look at respondents' education levels.

Figure 4: Housing Secure and Housing Insecure Respondents' Education Levels



18% (309) of housing insecure respondents reported not completing high school or receiving their GED; 63% (195) of these respondents were not employed at the time of the survey, 52% (161) reported an annual household income of less than \$22,000 in the year prior to completing the survey, 41% (128) self-identified as Indigenous, and 28% (88) reported stays in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement.

Employment

49% (852) of housing insecure respondents were employed at the time of the survey, 12% (204) indicated they were retired, and 2% (31) preferred not to answer whether or not they were employed. Of employed housing insecure respondents:

- 63% (533) were full-time (e.g., more than 30hrs/week)
- 18% (156) were part-time (e.g., less than 30hrs/week)
- 6% (55) were self-employed
- 4% (35) were casual
- 2% (16) were on contract
- 1% (11) were seasonal

Additionally, 4% (36) of housing insecure respondents selected “other,” indicating that they worked multiple part-time jobs, full- and part-time jobs, were on medical leave, or were on maternity leave, and 1% (8) preferred not to answer.

In contrast, 60% (428) of housing secure respondents were employed at the time of the survey, 31% (222) indicated they were retired, and 1% (9) preferred not to answer whether or not they were employed. Of employed housing secure respondents:

- 76% (324) were full-time (e.g., more than 30hrs/week)
- 12% (53) were part-time (e.g., less than 30hrs/week)
- 7% (30) were self-employed
- 2% (9) were casual
- 1% (5) were on contract
- 0% (2) were seasonal

Additionally, 1% (3) of housing insecure respondents selected “other,” indicating that they worked multiple jobs, worked a job and were self-employed, or worked a part-time job and were on contract, and 0% (1) preferred not to answer.

Did you know...

People experiencing housing insecurity often spend most of their time and resources trying to improve their lives, which includes looking for work. But there are significant barriers when you are housing insecure - people who are unsheltered or emergency sheltered don't have a permanent address to provide prospective employers, don't have a place to shower, money to afford work-appropriate clothes, or access to a computer to apply for jobs.

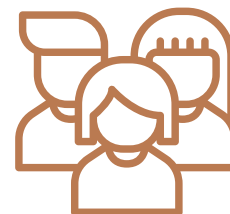
For residents experiencing housing insecurity who have jobs, research suggests that having a job is no longer enough. Residents with moderate income levels continue to struggle to secure affordable housing (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2024; Rural Development Network, 2023).

Unemployment Amongst Housing Insecure Respondents

42% (637) of housing insecure respondents were unemployed at the time of the survey. Based on additional analysis, we know that:

60% identified as women, **34%** as men, **2%** as gender non-conforming, and **2%** preferred not to answer

75% were straight, **6%** were bisexual/pansexual, **3%** were lesbian/gay, **3%** were asexual, **2%** were Two-Spirit, **0% (2)** were unsure of their sexual orientation, **0% (2)** preferred to self-disclose, and **9%** preferred not to answer



Age Breakdown

15-24	8%
25-44	48%
45-64	38%
65+	6%

Indigenous Identity

- 33%** were Indigenous
- **19%** were First Nations
 - **11%** were Métis
 - **3%** other Indigenous ancestry

Income

Housing insecure respondents were also asked to disclose their approximate household income for the previous year. Responses varied widely, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Housing Insecure Respondents Approximate Household Income in the Last 12 Months

Total Household Income in the Last 12 Months	# (%) of Respondents
Less than \$22,000	497 (29%)
Between \$22,001 and \$55,000	519 (30%)
Between \$55,001 and \$88,000	220 (13%)
Between \$88,001 and \$132,000 ⁶	191 (11%)

⁶ It is important to remember the spectrum of homelessness when considering income rates amongst housing insecure respondents. Someone who is experiencing domestic or family violence, for example, is considered housing insecure no matter their annual household income. Additionally, it is important to remember that people cycle through the spectrum of homelessness regularly and just because some reported an annual household income of \$88,001 or higher in 2024, for example, does not mean they were not experiencing housing insecurity in 2025 - this could have occurred as a result of job loss, a death in the family, increasing interest and utility rates, or any number of reasons.

More than \$132,001	117 (7%)
Prefer not to answer	161 (9%)

Despite 49% of housing insecure respondents being employed in some capacity at the time of the survey, 59% reported an annual household income of \$55,000 or less in the past year.

Interestingly, 13% (220) of housing insecure respondents reported a household annual income of between \$55,001 and \$88,000. This suggests that respondents who reported moderate income levels were experiencing housing insecurity, and again speaks to the spectrum of housing insecurity - respondents can and were making moderate income while unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and/or at risk of housing insecurity.

Further, 55% (970) of housing insecure respondents indicated they spent more than 30% of their household income on housing (e.g., rent or mortgage payments) in the 12 months prior to completing the survey.

Did you know...

Housing is considered affordable if it costs less than 30% of a household's before-tax income.

A researcher in Calgary examined the prices of residential properties near two affordable and transitional housing buildings and found no negative impact on residential property values. Researchers also observed a decrease in crime rates in the area (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2024).

Community Supports

To better understand service needs and gaps across rural and remote Alberta, respondents were asked: *“Which support services do you access and where do you most often access them?”*

Housing insecure respondents primarily accessed services in their community for:

- Basic needs supports (82%)
- Health and wellness services (50%)
- Financial services (38%)

In comparison, those housing insecure respondents accessing services outside of their community did so primarily for:

- Health and wellness services (55%)
- Legal services and supports (40%)
- Financial services (32%)

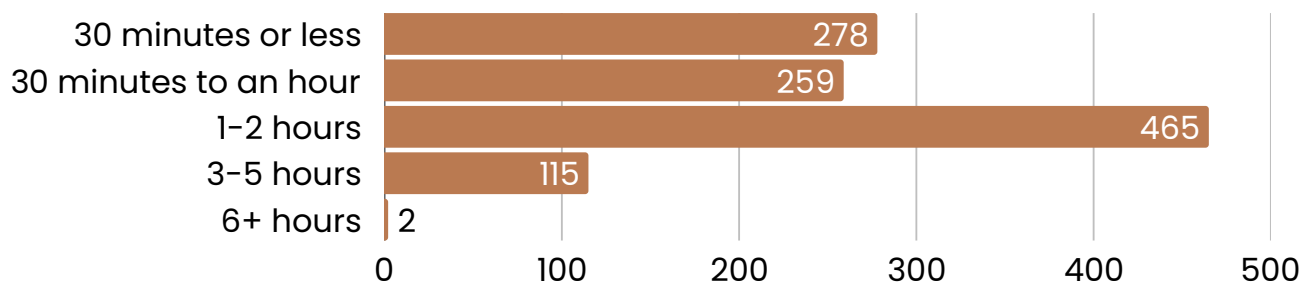
Table 8: Reasons Housing Insecure Respondents Accessed Support Services

Services Accessed	# (%) of Respondents who Primarily Accessed Services in their Community	# (%) of Respondents Primarily Accessed Services Outside of their Community
Basic needs (Food bank, clothing donations, public washrooms, etc.)	1019 (82%)	93 (16%)
Shelter (Emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, transitional housing, affordable housing, etc.)	318 (26%)	119 (21%)
Financial (Rental assistance, non-market housing, financial life skills training/education, etc.)	469 (38%)	185 (32%)
Crisis financial support (Eviction notices, utility shutoffs, damage deposits, etc.)	268 (22%)	149 (26%)
Family/Parenting (Child care, parental resources, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.)	385 (31%)	130 (23%)

Health and wellness (Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual or cultural well-being, etc.)	626 (50%)	316 (55%)
Legal (Separation/divorce/custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanour, etc.)	332 (27%)	229 (40%)

Distance to access services proved a significant barrier for respondents. 42% (465) of housing insecure respondents travelled between one and two hours to access them, as seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Distance Travelled by Housing Insecure Respondents for Services Outside of the Community



To access these services, 72% (1000) housing insecure respondents travelled by car or truck, 23% (315) relied on a family member or friend, 11% (148) took public transportation, 7% (93) took a taxi or ride-share service, 6% (82) had a service provider arrange a ride for them, and 2% (28) took an e-bus. Additionally, 3% (40) of housing insecure respondents indicated they hitchhiked to access services and 5% (74) biked, walked, or simply did not access services due to a lack of transportation.

It is important to consider that respondents who are unable to access supports and services are more likely to continue experiencing housing insecurity than those who can access the necessary supports and services to stabilize their housing situation.

Shelter Use

12% (203) of unique housing insecure respondents reported staying in a shelter in the past year. Among them:

- 73% (171) stayed in an emergency shelter.
- 31% (73) stayed in an extreme weather space or shelter.
- 21% (50) stayed in a women's/domestic violence shelter.
- 7% (16) stayed in a shelter but weren't sure what type of shelter it was.
- 15% (36) preferred not to indicate what type of shelter they accessed.

Additionally, 5% (83) of housing insecure respondents reported stays in transitional housing.

Importantly, 16% (286) of housing insecure respondents reported needing emergency shelter services at some point in the 12 months before completing the survey, but did not access them. Several reasons were provided for this, as outlined in Table 9.

The top three reasons respondents did not access shelter services when needed were because:

- The shelter was full
- There were no shelters in the area
- There were no pets allowed in the shelter

Table 9: Reasons Housing Insecure Respondents Did Not Access Shelter Services When Needed

Reason for Not Accessing Shelter Services	# (%) of Respondents
The shelter was full	92 (32%)
No shelters in my area	89 (31%)
No pets allowed	78 (27%)
The right kind of shelter wasn't available (for example, I needed a women's or family shelter where I could stay with my kid(s) and couldn't access one)	73 (26%)
I exceeded my stay at a shelter	8 (24%)
I didn't feel safe	70 (24%)
Lack of transportation	56 (20%)

I didn't meet the intake criteria to access the shelter	36 (13%)
Alcohol/substance use is not permitted on-site	33 (12%)
The shelter was too far away from my family and/or friends	28 (10%)
The shelter was unclean	24 (8%)
Lack of disability accommodations	18 (6%)
The shelter did not welcome me because of my gender identity	7 (2%)

“What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?”

To gain more insight into respondents’ perceptions of service provision in participating rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta they were asked: *“Does your community provide enough...accessible and affordable housing; access to food; addictions and mental health supports; employment services; free/accessible recreation/social opportunities; public transportation services; social services?”*

Table 10: Respondents’ Perceptions of Service Provision in their Communities

Does the Community Provide Enough:	Yes		No		Unsure	
	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
Accessible, affordable housing	84 (13%)	176 (11%)	379 (58%)	1174 (72%)	193 (29%)	280 (17%)
Access to food (Grocery stores, markets, food banks, etc.)	437 (67%)	1129 (69%)	131 (20%)	388 (24%)	86 (13%)	118 (7%)
Addictions and mental health supports (Counselling, treatment, post-treatment support, etc.)	148 (23%)	474 (30%)	243 (37%)	661 (41%)	258 (40%)	466 (29%)
Employment services (Resume writing, job searching, etc.)	250 (39%)	634 (40%)	107 (17%)	430 (27%)	288 (45%)	530 (33%)
Free/accessible recreation/social opportunities	341 (53%)	633 (39%)	173 (27%)	657 (41%)	134 (21%)	318 (20%)
Public transportation services	235 (36%)	578 (36%)	295 (45%)	801 (50%)	121 (19%)	236 (15%)
Social services (Libraries, emergency services, outreach programs, etc.)	408 (63%)	962 (60%)	113 (17%)	366 (23%)	131 (20%)	284 (18%)

Of note in Table 10 is the significant discrepancy in:

- The total number of respondents (both housing secure and insecure) who believed there was enough accessible and affordable housing (11%) versus those who believed more was needed (68%).
- The total number of respondents (both housing secure and insecure) who believed there were enough addictions and mental health services (28%) versus those who believed more services were needed (40%).
- The total number of respondents (both housing secure and insecure) who believed there was enough public transportation across Alberta (36%) versus the number of respondents who believed more public transportation was needed (48%).

Housing Insecurity in Rural and Remote Alberta: 2023–2025

Consistent and recurring data collection is critical in painting a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta. It is also necessary to better understand new and existing trends in housing insecurity across the province. The 2025 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation is the fourth iteration of provincial housing insecurity data collection. This provides an opportunity to highlight, compare, and contrast data trends over time, and specifically, between 2023 and 2025.⁷

Important to note while reading this section is that while we can compare and contrast trends at a high level, it is difficult to make specific comparisons, as only 10 of the 19 communities participated in both the 2023 and 2025 Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation.

In 2023, RDN partnered with 22 organizations representing roughly 45 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta to enumerate housing insecurity. In 2025, RDN partnered with 19 organizations representing 64 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across the province.

Table 11: Number of Survey Responses Across Estimations

Housing & Service Needs Estimation	# of Total Survey Respondents
2023	3,211
2025	2,488

Both the 2023 and 2025 iterations of the provincial estimation saw great regionalization, with many communities partnering to collect data across a region, county, or area. 2023 saw higher response rates than in 2025. This can be attributed to both an increased number of online surveys in one community in 2023 (potentially as a result of honoraria provided for survey completion)⁸ compared to 2025 and due to overall survey fatigue amongst community members. Anecdotally, in conversations with community coordinators and participating service provider locations, survey fatigue was a significant barrier to participation in the 2025 estimation. This could be attributed to the fact that 10 of the participating communities in this iteration of the estimation also participated in 2023. That being said, as shown in Table 12, rates of housing insecurity remain high.

⁷ For a more detailed comparison of trends from 2018–2023, see the [2023 Alberta Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project: Provincial Report](#)

⁸ In 2023, one community received 1,152 surveys, most of which were online surveys. In comparison, they received 353 surveys in 2025.

Table 12: Number of Housing Insecure Respondents Across Estimations

Housing & Service Needs Estimation	# (%) of Housing Insecure Respondents
2023	2,429 (75%)
2025	1,762 (71%)

There was a proportional increase in the number of additional adults⁹ sharing living conditions with housing insecure respondents in 2025 compared to 2023. As seen in Table 13, in 2023, there were 2,537 additional adults sharing living conditions with housing insecure respondents compared to 2,154 in 2025. Specifically, this suggests a 4% increase in the number of additional adults sharing living conditions with housing insecure respondents from 2023 to 2025.

Table 13: Number of Housing Insecure Dependents and Additional Adults Across Estimations

Housing & Service Needs Estimation	# of Dependents	# of Additional Adults
2023	2,354	2,537
2025	1,394	2,154

For this iteration of the Housing and Service Needs Estimation, respondents were asked to detail their household makeup, including whether or not they lived in a multigenerational home. 27% of respondents, 84% of whom were housing insecure, indicated that they lived in a multigenerational home. This data was not collected in 2023.

Increased rates of additional adults sharing living conditions with housing insecure respondents could also be attributed to increased housing costs and cost of living. According to the Economic Research Institute (2026), the cost of living in Alberta is 5% higher than the national average. Additionally, the Consumer Price Index (Statistics Canada, 2026) suggests significant increases in goods and services, mortgage rates, and rent prices, rising 19.9% between 2020 and 2025. Prices of groceries specifically have increased 5.7% since 2024, while rent prices have increased by 13.2% since 2024. Nationally, rent prices have increased 28.5% since 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2025).

⁹ Additional adults were categorized as partner/spouse, parents/spouse's parents, adult children (18+), extended family (including partner/spouse's family), co-workers, and roommates.

Interesting, while low wages was the number one reason for housing insecurity in 2023, high housing costs¹⁰ was the number one reason in 2025. This again speaks to increasing housing costs and cost of living. Health challenges¹¹ and low vacancy rates¹² were the next two biggest reasons for housing insecurity in 2025.

Additionally, the number one reason respondents accessed services in both 2023 and 2025 was for help with basic needs, including accessing food banks, clothing donations, public washrooms, etc.

Table 14: Reported Reasons for Accessing Services Across Estimations

Housing & Service Needs Estimation	Reported Reasons
2023	1. Basic Needs ¹³ 2. Health and Wellness ¹⁴ 3. Support Services ¹⁵
2025	1. Basic Needs ¹⁶ 2. Health and Wellness ¹⁷ 3. Financial ¹⁸

¹⁰ "My rent/mortgage is too high for my current income"

¹¹ "Illness/medical condition," "Mental health concerns", "Mental disability," and/or "Physical disability"

¹² "There is almost no vacancy/no rentals available"

¹³ Food, shelter, clothing, etc.

¹⁴ Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.

¹⁵ Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.

¹⁶ Food bank, clothing donations, public washrooms, etc.

¹⁷ Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual or cultural well-being, etc.

¹⁸ Rental assistance, non-market housing, financial life skills training/education, etc.



**Opportunities Moving
Forward**

In each of the community reports, RDN suggested opportunities communities should consider to address housing insecurity in their area. Based on community findings, the opportunities were identified as:

- Foster community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity,
- Increase awareness of, and access to, services, and
- Encourage sustainable housing growth in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta.

It is important to note here that while individual communities can work to action these recommendations, there is a larger role for municipal, provincial, and federal governments as well as industry and funders to play in addressing housing insecurity in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta.

Foster community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity.

Implementing a community engagement strategy is crucial to addressing housing insecurity. The purpose of implementing a community engagement strategy is to support community learning on issues related to housing insecurity. More specifically, it aims to inform residents about the spectrum of housing insecurity and the different experiences and realities of housing insecurity in their community. In addition, community conversations will aim to shift public perceptions of housing insecurity, ensuring that residents experiencing housing insecurity, and any projects specific to addressing housing insecurity, are met with understanding, empathy, and support.

Of the 2,488 survey respondents, only 809 self-identified as housing insecure. However, using the national definitions of homelessness and survey indicators, 1,762 respondents were identified as housing insecure. This means that 54% (953) of survey respondents did not know they were experiencing housing insecurity at the time of the survey and likely have not accessed social or housing services that could help improve their housing situation. A community engagement strategy would help increase residents' understanding of housing insecurity and make them aware of the current service offerings available to support and improve their housing situations.

Further, with at least 5,310 residents experiencing housing insecure living conditions, public perceptions of housing insecurity must be met with understanding and empathy to successfully address housing insecurity across all 19 participating rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta.

Recommendations:

- Calling for mandatory orientation and training for municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials around key issues of housing insecurity and understanding the housing continuum to better serve their constituents during their terms.
- Calling for leadership from all levels of government in promoting a better understanding of housing insecurity among constituents by highlighting the realities of housing insecurity, specifically through investing in research and community education programs.
- Calling for leadership from all levels of government in recognizing housing as a human right and emphasizing the importance of treating neighbours with respect and empathy, regardless of the race, gender, sexual orientation, or housing status.

Increase awareness of, and access to, services.

66% of housing insecure respondents indicated that they had to access health and wellness services (i.e., addictions supports, mental health supports and services, physical health care services, spiritual or cultural well-being services, etc.) outside of their community. Additionally 40% had to access legal services outside of their community. Further, of the housing insecure respondents who accessed services outside of their community, 42% had to travel between one and two hours to access services. While the majority travelled by car or truck, many had to rely on a family member or friend to transport them, walk, bike, hitchhike, catch a ride with a stranger to access services, or simply forgo accessing services.

Additionally, 40% of total respondents, both housing secure and insecure, indicated more addictions and mental health supports (counselling, treatment, post-treatment support, etc.) were needed in the community.

Also important to note is that 47% of housing insecure respondents were 45 years or older. With an aging housing insecure population, supports and services must be designed and offered specifically to reach older adults struggling with their housing situation. People experiencing housing insecurity age physiologically and psychologically at much higher rates than people who are housing secure. Most 45+ year-olds experiencing housing insecurity are considered seniors, as their physiological and psychological health match or surpass that of a 65+ year-old person who is housing secure; this is called “functionally geriatric” (Campbell et al., 2017; Demallie et al., 1997; Rota-Bartelink and Lipmann, 2007; McDonald et al., 2007). Moving forward, it is important to promote and increase awareness of current senior support services and to consider implementing new support services designed specifically for older adults experiencing housing insecurity.

Given this, efforts should be made to further identify service gaps in the community and address these gaps, either by offering new services or by better promoting the availability of current services that community members may not be aware of. Further, given that 90% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents, 89% of racialized respondents, and 88% of Indigenous respondents were housing insecure, it is important to consider whether services offered are inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Recommendations:

- Calling on all levels of government to support rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in conducting audits of service offerings with the intention of identifying and addressing service gaps.
- Calling on service providers and elected officials in participating communities to promote current programs and service offerings that support community members experiencing housing insecurity.
- Calling on service providers and all levels of government to promote existing seniors-specific programs and service offerings and conduct Age-Friendly Assessments. These assessments should review outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, respect and inclusion, social participation, civic participation, employment opportunities, communication and information, community support and health services to assess communities' age-friendliness and inform the development of Age-Friendly Action plans.
- Calling for mandatory training sessions for service providers focused on providing inclusive and culturally appropriate services. Additionally, calling on municipalities and service providers to consider partnering with local Indigenous organizations and First Nations and Métis Settlements to deliver culturally appropriate services and/or warm referrals and connections.
- Calling on all levels of government, service providers, and funders to explore opportunities in developing a model for more regionalized approaches to service delivery in rural and remote Alberta.
- Calling on all levels of government to invest additional dollars to support capacity building and the foundational steps in the implementation of coordinated access in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta and across Canada.
- Calling for provincial and federal support in developing and implementing a long-term transportation system in partnership with local, regional, provincial, and federal non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and industry leaders to support rural and remote constituents in travelling between communities.

Encourage sustainable housing growth in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta.

It is critical to highlight the need for accessible, affordable, adaptive, and appropriate housing projects to increase housing options across the 19 participating rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. As reported by respondents, the two main reasons for housing insecurity across communities were high housing costs and low vacancy rates. Additionally, 68% of respondents, both housing secure and housing insecure, believed there was not enough accessible and affordable housing in their community. Further, 25% of housing insecure respondents have moved between three and six times in the past 12 months while 9% of housing insecure respondents have moved more than six times in the past 12 months, suggesting a need for increased accessible and affordable housing to increase housing stability.

33% of housing insecure respondents indicated that they lack specific amenities in their current housing situation, many of which are considered necessary for a secure living situation. At the time of the survey, 57% did not have sufficient and affordable heating, 57% did not have safe drinking water, and 50% did not have adequate fire protection (including fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, and a safe exit out of their space).

12% of housing insecure respondents reported staying at an emergency shelter, extreme weather space, or women's/domestic violence shelter and 5% in transitional housing units in the past twelve months. Additionally, 21% of housing insecure respondents reported accessing shelter services outside of their community.

It is also important to consider that 16% of housing insecure respondents reported needing emergency shelter services at some point in the 12 months before completing the survey, but did not access them. The main reasons respondents did not access shelter services when they needed them were because the shelter was full, there were no shelters in the area, and/or there were no pets allowed in the shelter.

Recommendations:

- Calling on all levels of government to address the staggering number of rural, remote, and Indigenous Albertans living in housing without sufficient heating or access to safe drinking water.
- Calling on all levels of government, funders, and industry partners to support rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in collecting necessary housing data (e.g., housing needs and demands assessments) to better understand and address housing need.
- Calling on the provincial government to conduct an audit of emergency shelters¹⁹ in rural and remote Alberta, focusing on identifying current gaps in shelter services (e.g., lack of emergency shelters in certain regions, policies/criteria implemented by emergency shelters that excludes constituents from accessing one when needed,²⁰ disability accommodations, etc.) with the intention of supporting a more inclusive, accessible, and robust emergency shelter system across the province that expands beyond winter shelter beds and includes mandatory wraparound services.
- Calling on service providers and all levels of government to develop resources intended to address concerns and misconceptions around housing development. Specifically, resources should be focused on understanding the housing continuum, addressing NIMBYism, and the importance of investing in housing development to enhance community and economic development.
- Calling on all levels of government to promote and invest in the development of housing along the entire housing continuum, including emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing, and affordable housing accompanied by investment in critical wrap-around supports.
- Calling on the provincial government, in collaboration with municipalities, local service providers, and housing developers, to review current legislation to better support the development of more creative and diverse housing options.
- Calling on all levels of government to increase funding for rural and remote accessible and affordable housing projects, and in particular, pre-development/seed funding and sustainable operational funding.

¹⁹ In this report, emergency shelter refers to standard emergency shelters, emergency weather shelters (e.g., MAT shelters), and women's/domestic violence shelters

²⁰ Of respondents experiencing housing insecurity who did not access a shelter when they needed one, 27% of respondents indicated that the shelter's no-pet policy was a barrier.

Conclusions

Housing insecurity significantly and negatively impacts individuals and communities. Individuals experiencing housing insecurity are at a considerably higher risk of poor physical and mental health outcomes, increased risk of experiencing violence, and increased risk of losing their social support system. The longer someone experiences housing insecurity, the more difficult it is for them to stabilize their housing situation in the future. Research suggests that the average emergency shelter stay is 10 days but that as little as one night of being unsheltered or emergency sheltered can result in up to six months worth of service needs (Canadian Poverty Institute, 2022; Dionne et al., 2023; Homeless Hub, 2014; Infrastructure Canada, 2024).

From a community perspective, housing insecurity strains community resources, including health and wellness services, policing services, and social services. From an economic perspective, it is important to recognize that addressing housing insecurity benefits municipalities on many levels. Evidence-based research demonstrates that investing in people experiencing housing insecurity improves the local economy (Cruz, 2022, July 8; Griffiths, 2023, August 29). Improvement in the local economy increases job opportunities, which, in turn, increases population growth, which then increases housing demand. Essentially, addressing housing insecurity can create and increase community investment. Consequently, community investment increases community resiliency and sustainability. Additionally, recent Canadian research suggests that considerable investment into addressing housing insecurity, such as emergency shelter or affordable housing developments, reduces crime rates and increases property values (Cruz, 2022, July 8; Griffiths, 2023, August 29).

Most importantly, housing security is a fundamental human right and is essential to the wellbeing of an individual and to building a sustainable and complete community. Residents in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta and across Canada have the right to accessible and affordable housing that meets their needs. This report details the experiences of 1,762 housing insecure community members. Based on the results outlined above, RDN identified four key opportunities across the three stages of housing insecurity responses (prevention; emergency response; and housing, accommodation, and supports). These include addressing fostering community awareness of housing insecurity, increasing awareness of, and access to, services, and encouraging sustainable housing growth.

Successfully undertaking each of these opportunities can help address housing insecurity in each participating community and ultimately improve the quality of life for individuals and overall wellbeing of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across the province.

It is important to recognize that while there is ultimately a shared role in developing and implementing responses to housing insecurity, communities most often succeed in addressing housing insecurity with strong municipal or council support and leadership to champion these efforts. The support of local leadership in the form of meaningful policy action, as well as attractors of locally sponsored land and capital contributions, can encourage greater buy-in from community members and leverage partnerships and funding opportunities from external sources such as the provincial and federal government, private developers, and foundations. Recognizing that funding to address housing insecurity is limited and competitive, municipalities are well-positioned to play an important role in moving projects forward. Further, the provincial and federal government have a responsibility to support communities in addressing housing insecurity, through funding, data, resources, and policy decisions.

And lastly, the most critical consideration of all: residents experiencing housing insecurity have the right to be part of the solutions to address housing insecurity. It is critical to continue to engage residents experiencing housing insecurity in conversations and activities geared toward addressing housing insecurity. This means designing activities that allow housing insecure residents the opportunity to participate, along with intentionally seeking out feedback from housing insecure residents throughout the process. Their input will continue to provide incredible value in addressing housing insecurity in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta.

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