



# Slave Lake Homelessness and Housing Needs Estimation

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Submitted by:

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# About This Report

This project is funded in by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness 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 Rural Development Network recognizes that the 2021 Homelessness and Housing Needs Estimation Project took place on the traditional territories of Treaty 8.

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## **Acknowledgements:**

The data within this report would not be possible without the concerted and dedicated efforts of the community leaders who coordinated survey delivery and outreach to the respondents, including community champions, volunteers, staff at service agencies, and town administration. Among these, RDN would like to make special acknowledgement to the members of the Slave Lake Homelessness Coalition, who have been integral to the project's success.

# Executive Summary

**Over a 30-day period in August and September 2021, community organizations in the Town of Slave Lake participated in a large-scale effort to estimate housing and homelessness needs**

Funded by Reaching Home, the Slave Lake Homelessness and Housing Needs Estimation Project was led by the Rural Development Network following the methodology outlined in the “Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness”.

This project was an opportunity to better understand the needs of existing residents, as well as complement and improve official data for Slave Lake and the surrounding area.. This project allowed service agencies to better connect and listen to the needs of Slave Lake. Collecting stories and data from vulnerable members of the community offers a unique opportunity to examine their needs.

Participating service agencies and independent volunteers were trained in survey delivery by RDN, and invited all individuals who accessed services during a consecutive 30-day period to fill out the 15 minute survey.

Surveys were intended to gather a holistic view of the interlocking needs that affect an individual’s ability to access/maintain safe, reliable housing, as well as their ability to access proper services and resources within the community.

Surveys collected within Slave Lake were either delivered as paper or online surveys. Respondents had the choice to complete the survey by themselves,



with assistance from staff on-location, or on their own time with the use of a link online . Collected surveys were examined and analyzed for duplicates and errors by RDN analysts to ensure data integrity and validity. Data was then compiled, reviewed, and consolidated in the final findings outlined in this report.

## **Out of 187 people surveyed, 55 were found to be living in situations defined as homeless or 'housing-insecure'.**

**An additional 34 dependents were reported to share these living conditions, along with 66 adults. In total, there are 155 individuals within Slave Lake that are either living in insecure housing conditions, or sharing these conditions with respondents.**

The most common factors affecting respondents' current living situations were: "I don't make enough money", "Unaffordable rent/mortgage payments", and "Mental health issues".

This report breaks down the places of residence, services needed, demographics, housing, employment, and income sources of those experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. This report also provides a qualitative sample of feedback from those most vulnerable within the community.

**“In many instances,  
there are discrepancies  
between what people  
need or want, what  
service providers can  
offer and what the  
provincial or local  
governments can afford  
or support as best  
practices.”**

–Marybeth Shinn,  
International Homelessness:  
Policy, Socio-Cultural, and Individual Perspectives

**“Homelessness** describes the **situation** of an individual, family or community **without** stable, safe, permanent, appropriate **housing, or the immediate** prospect, means and **ability of acquiring it.**

It is the **result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of** affordable and appropriate **housing**, the individual/household’s **financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges**, and/or **racism and discrimination.**

**Most people do not choose to be homeless**, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.”

–Canadian Definition of Homelessness,  
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

**Q11.** Thinking about your living situation **this past month**, which of these statements apply to you? *(Check all that apply)*

- ☐ I own the house I'm currently in
- ☐ I rent the apartment I'm currently in
- ☐ I live in accommodations provided by my employer
- ☐ I live in a house that is owned by/rented out by the Band
- ☐ I share a house/apartment with roommates
- ☐ I live in a house/apartment that I share with family/dependents
- ☐ I find it difficult to pay rent and I feel like I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing
- ☐ I live in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.)
- ☐ There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house I'm in
- ☐ I lived in supported housing (e.g. Housing First)
- ☐ I stayed in a medical/detox/rehabilitation facility
- ☐ I slept in a friend's/family's house because I had no other place to stay
- ☐ I stayed in a jail / prison/ remand centre
- ☐ I stayed at a women's / domestic violence shelter
- ☐ I stayed with someone I didn't know because I had no other place to stay
- ☐ I slept in a shelter
- ☐ I slept in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or shack
- ☐ I slept in a public space (sidewalks, park benches, bus shelter etc.)

*Figure 1: table used in the questionnaire to determine respondents' housing security.*

# Definitions

The accompanying typology identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

## At Risk of Homelessness

People who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

## Provisionally Accommodated

People who are homeless whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including interim (or transitional) housing, people living temporarily with others (couch surfing), or living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.

## Emergency Sheltered

Staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are homeless

## Unsheltered

Living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation

*See 'Homelessness Definitions' on page 43*

# Background

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation due to the “visibility” of individuals experiencing homelessness. The issue of homelessness within rural and remote areas is far less understood or even acknowledged by the wider public because of its “hidden” nature. Individuals experiencing housing insecurity in rural and remote communities are more likely to couch surf, live in overcrowded housing, or own/rent housing that may need major repairs—often leveraging the relationships around them in for support.

RDN initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural homelessness. This limits the ability of rural communities to advocate for better resources for their residents in greatest need. The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective, and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas.

This tool allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs and has been instrumental in helping rural communities gather credible evidence on homelessness to subsequently improve the kind of services offered within the community.

## Methodology & Data Collection

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimate is a modified version of that found in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, published by the Rural Development Network. Methods

for estimating homelessness and housing insecurity in urban centres are not suited to rural and remote ones. Conducting traditional Point-in-Time counts over larger swaths of service area is not always feasible for already under-staffed/-resourced community agencies. This inability to participate in PiT counts translates to no data, which translates into no need within the community. When there's no tangible data, rural and remote communities can't advocate to address service gaps or for an increase in funding.

The model used in this project allowed for a variety of community champions, volunteers, and service agencies to offer questionnaires to people (vulnerable or not) in frequently accessed locations. This approach leveraged existing infrastructure within the community. Due to the sensitivity and the associated stigma surrounding homelessness and housing issues, this method relied on the ensuring that the surveys are delivered to people regardless of their perceived housing security. This works to eliminate any potential bias, and allows for the results to be analyzed themselves to determine what the objective housing status truly is.

The current survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definition of homelessness. However, rather than using the term "homelessness", the survey often uses terms surrounding "housing security" as a better way to understand the housing and support services needed within the community. By re-framing the language of the survey, volunteers were able to encourage everyone to participate, instead of pointedly targeting certain individuals. The results as they appear in the report, however, still closely follow the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness definitions.

In relation to stigma, previous findings suggest that clients are often reluctant to label themselves as homeless or housing-insecure. For this project, respondents were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure, AND to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing situation. Subsequent data analysis would determine – based on responses

to the latter survey question – which respondents were housing-insecure. As we see in the results, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be either homeless or at-risk would actually be considered to be, based on national definitions of homelessness. The majority of the report focuses on the responses of individuals who were living in objectively insecure conditions.

**23 individuals who didn't consider their living situation to be **Housing Unstable** or **Homeless**, were in fact defined as such once their living situation was compared to Canadian Observatory on Homelessness definitions.**

Before the survey period began, RDN provided orientation and training sessions to the participating volunteers. Emphasis during training was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing their informed consent. During these training sessions, resources were provided to improve outreach for both community members and potential agency partners, while promoting the benefits of understanding the need of clients. Training also covered various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra consideration for meeting individuals' reasons for visiting the service agency before offering the survey.

This resulting report consists of an overview of the primary data collected in Slave Lake. Two versions of the survey were provided for distribution: a paper version which could be filled out on location, and an online version which could be filled out on location, or accessed with an access code later on.

Regardless of the version of survey completed (paper or online) respondents were each assigned a unique ID. This ID is composed of initials derived from respondents' name and birthdate, scrambled in a certain order to maintain confidentiality. This ensures both privacy and the integrity of the data. No participants were found to be completing the survey more than once, nor completing it online from outside of the Slave Lake area.

We encourage individual community members and local community leaders to use this data to inform their own conclusions and policies, and to determine how to best make use of this information. RDN assumes no responsibility or liability for any changes, decisions, or actions made as a result of the interpretation of data outlined in this report.

A note about youth participation: service agencies were instructed to limit survey administration to individuals 14 years of age or older. In compliance with the consent and confidentiality guidelines of the Alberta College of Social Workers, individuals under 14 years of age were required to secure guardian's approval prior to participation.

Finally, it's important to note that due to exclusion of non-responses and skipped questions, **subtotals and percentages may not exactly reflect absolute totals.** If responses shown appear at first to differ than displayed totals, that is due to non-responses found in the data.

A copy of the actual paper survey used in this project can be found at [ruraldevelopment.ca](http://ruraldevelopment.ca).



# Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase accessibility of the survey, not all clients who entered participating agencies chose to take the survey. The survey was voluntary, and accessing services was not contingent on their participation. **There remains a portion of known vulnerable individuals whose voices were not captured.** Trends and highlights of the data are very informative, this report presents a conservative picture of the service needs and housing insecurity in the community as a whole.

# Survey Results

In total, 187 people gave their informed consent to be surveyed. Of those, 44 completed paper surveys, and 143 were referred to an online survey. A copy of the survey questions used can be found on [ruraldevelopment.ca](http://ruraldevelopment.ca).

## Community Support Services – All Respondents

The results in this section are reported for all respondents who completed a survey, regardless of their later declaration of housing situation. This is to capture the overall needs of those in the area for services from organizations that participated in the project.

All survey respondents (n=187) were asked about where they most often sought services, and what kind of services they needed most often during their visits to local service providers. Figure 2 shows the responses, weighted by frequency, to the questions “Where do you currently reside?” and “In which community do you most often seek services?”



**Figure 2 –** Word Cloud of the community in which respondents said they reside (top) and most often sought services (bottom).

Table 1 illustrates what services people were seeking when they were offered the survey. Respondents were able to provide multiple responses (see Table 1).

Table 1. "What types of services do you seek in the community?"	# of respondents
Basic Needs	74
Health and Wellness	71
Financial	29
Family/Parenting	29
Legal	24
Not Listed	19
Support Services	15
Prefer not to Answer	10
COVID-19 Assistance	9
Crisis Financial Support	9
Transportation Needs	5
All of the Above	3

**Table 1 - Needed Services (multiple responses possible).**

Respondents were then asked to identify the primary reason for their visit in an open field response. Primarily we saw people accessing basic needs such as food/groceries, employment, and sometimes financial assistance. The full list of responses is available in the Qualitative Data section.

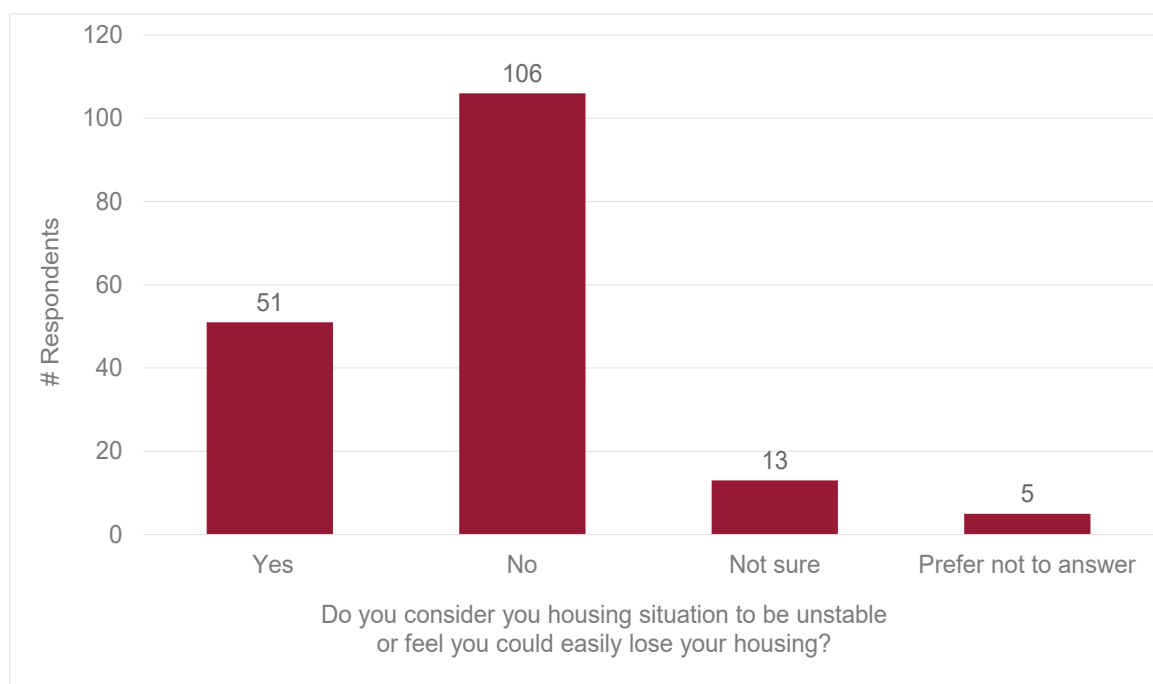
When asked about the perceived socio-economic opportunities available within the community, most felt that the community provided sufficient social services, but that it did not provide enough affordable housing, employment opportunities, or recreation and social opportunities. (Table 2).

Table 2. Does the community provide enough:	Yes	No	Not Sure
Employment Opportunities?	67	41	39
Free or Accessible Recreation and Social Opportunities?	46	71	27
Sufficient Social Services?	29	61	51
Accessible Affordable Housing?	12	102	30

**Table 2 -** Respondents’ answer the question: “does our community provide enough of the following opportunities?”

## Housing Needs – All Respondents

When all respondents (n=187) were asked whether they considered their “housing situation to be unstable or felt they could easily lose their housing”, 64 (34.2%) replied ‘Yes’ or ‘Not Sure’ (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 – Respondents who reported their housing to be unstable/insecure**

Following this question, respondents were asked to identify the current living situation(s) that have applied to them in the past month (Table 3). Respondents were asked to select all options that apply. The options themselves represent a range of physical living situations, from secure to insecure. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, any option in Table 3 listed starting from “I find it difficult to pay rent and I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing” to the bottom of the list constitutes housing insecurity and homelessness.

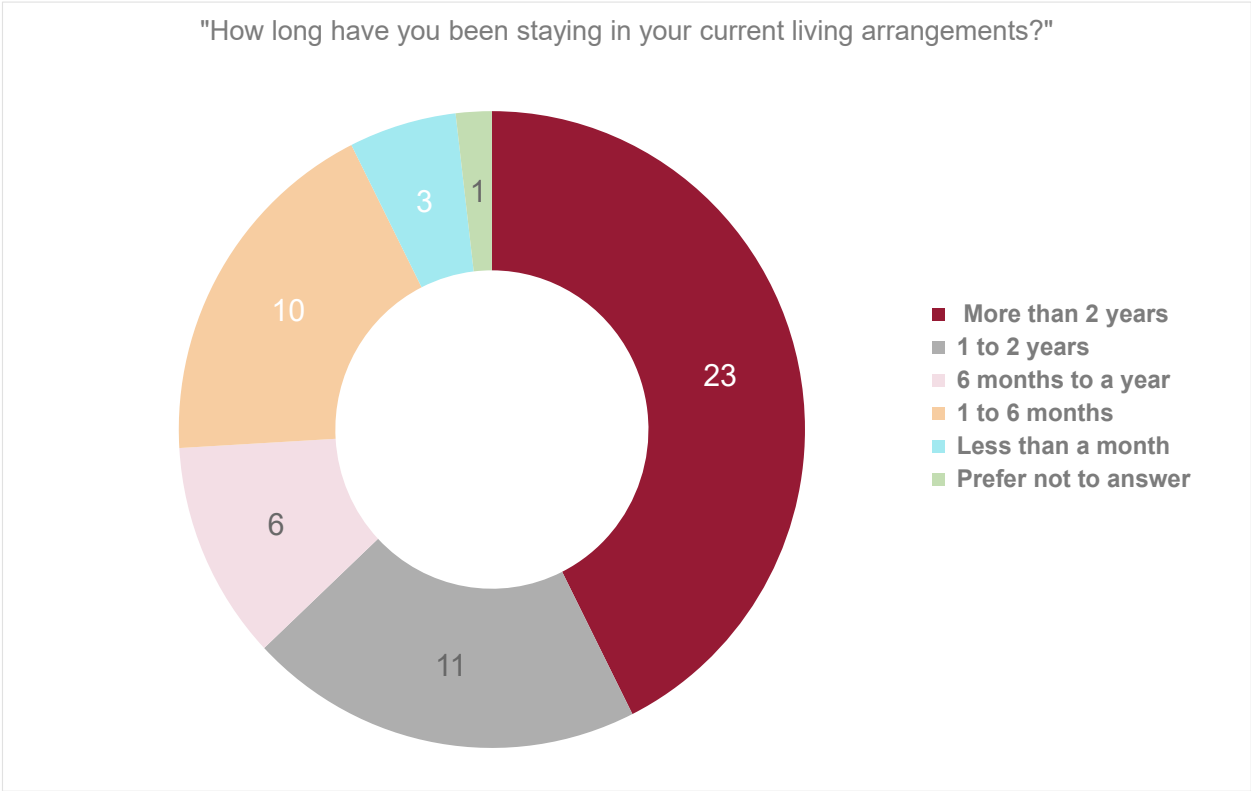
**Table 3. Current living situation. "Which of these statements apply to you (thinking about the past month)?"**

I own the house I'm currently in	<b>84</b>
I rent the apartment I'm currently in	<b>50</b>
I live in accommodations provided by my employer	<b>1</b>
I live in a house that is owned/rented out by the Indigenous governments	<b>2</b>
I live in a house rented out by the housing corporation	<b>5</b>
I share a house/apartment with roommates	<b>9</b>
I live in a house/apartment that I share with family/dependents	<b>33</b>
I find it difficult to pay rent and I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing	<b>35</b>
I live in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.)	<b>14</b>
There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house I'm in	<b>10</b>
I live in supported housing (e.g. Housing First)	<b>6</b>
I stayed in a medical/detox/rehabilitation facility	<b>2</b>
I slept in a friend's/family house because I had no other place to stay	<b>13</b>
I stayed in a jail/prison/remand centre	<b>1</b>
I stayed at a women's/domestic violence shelter	<b>2</b>
I stayed with someone I didn't know because I had no other place to stay	<b>4</b>
I slept in a shelter	<b>4</b>
I slept in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or shack	<b>11</b>
I slept in a public space (sidewalks, park benches, bus shelter etc).	<b>0</b>

After analysis, there are **55 respondents** whose housing conditions are considered to be objectively insecure and/or absent. These respondents are reported as ‘objectively housing-insecure’, and make up the primary source of data for the remainder of the report.

Interestingly, **51 respondents** who didn’t consider their housing situation to be insecure (Figure 3), were in fact objectively living in an insecure or homeless situation. This could be due to a variety of factors, including being unaware of how the term is defined, or possibly a shame or stigma towards homelessness and housing insecurity.

Finally, respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current living arrangements. Their responses can be seen in Figure 4.



**Figure 4 -** Respondents’ answer the question “how long have you been staying in your current living arrangements?”

## Reasons for Housing Insecurity

The following results have been analyzed from Housing Insecure respondents only. After identifying the respondents who were found to be without housing, or living in insecure housing situations, we asked whether any of the following options was/were a contributing factor(s), choosing all that apply (Table 4).

Respondents were then asked in an open field question to identify the main factor that affected their housing insecurity, whether from the list they had seen previously, or from their own experience. Those responses can be seen under the Qualitative Data section of this report, on page 32. Some selected responses appear below.

*"Currently on Mat leave from a great job but husband lost his job, hoping he will find employment soon."*

*"My rent is 1 of my 2 monthly pay checks. The place needs constant repairs. **My rent went up... again.**"*

**"If there is an incident in our bush camp, we could get shut down. Rent was too much. I lost work due to COVID."**

*"Family rejection, concern about if there is an incident at the camp, RCMP can shut it down."*

**"No such thing as low income housing."**



Table 4. "Why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?"	Housing Insecure Respondents
I don't make enough money	28
I can't afford rent/mortgage payments	25
Mental Health issues	12
My house needs major repairs (mould, etc.)	11
Illness/Medical condition	10
Addictions/Substance use	9
My rent went up	7
Conflict with Landlord, parent/guardian	7
Family rejection due to sexual orientation, gender identity	7
Don't qualify for income assistance	6
Domestic/Family Violence	6
I lost my job	5
Lack of transportation	5
COVID-19 related	5
Physical Disability	4
Racism/Discrimination	3
Spouse/Partner lost their job	1
I was in jail/prison	1
Prefer not to answer	0

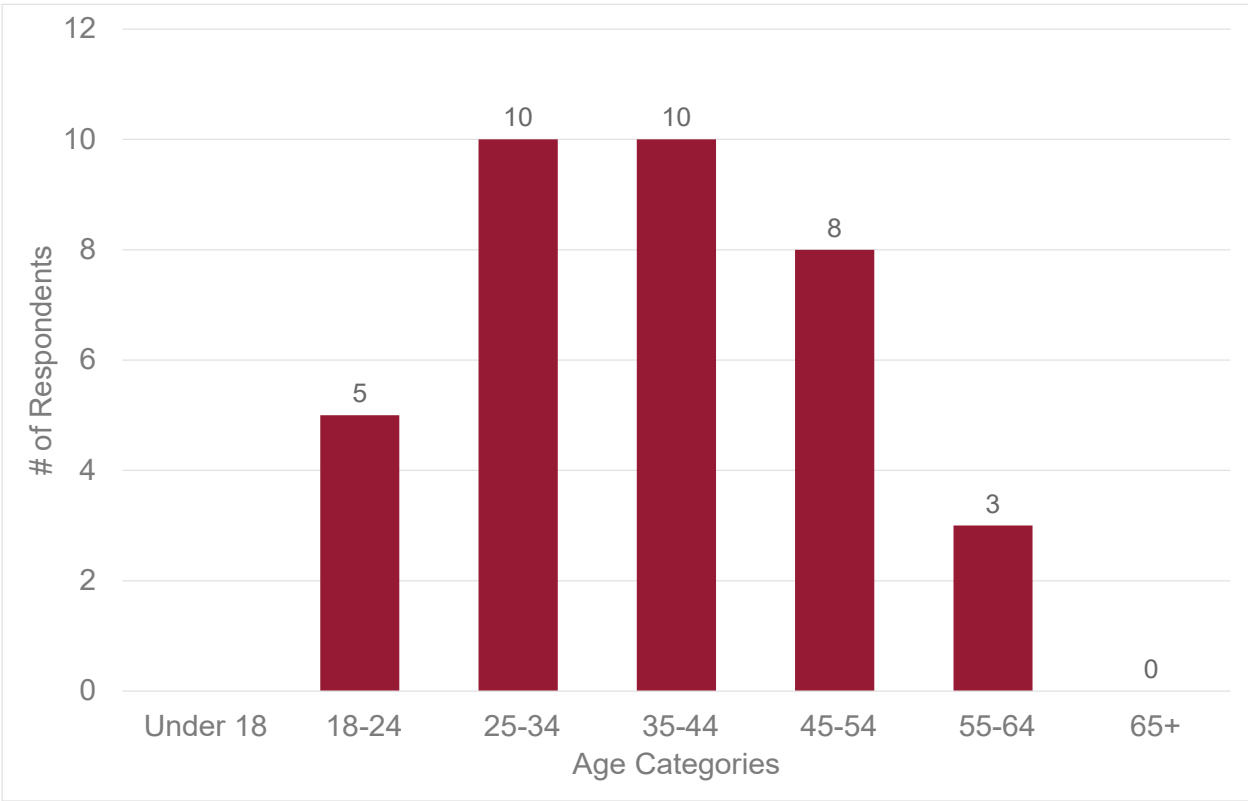
**Table 4 -** Respondents' answer the question "why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?"

# Demographics of those facing Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

The following sections of ‘Demographics’, ‘Household Makeup’, ‘Shelter Services’, ‘Community Residency’, and ‘Employment and Income Sources’ report results from those respondents who were found to be housing-insecure.

## Age, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

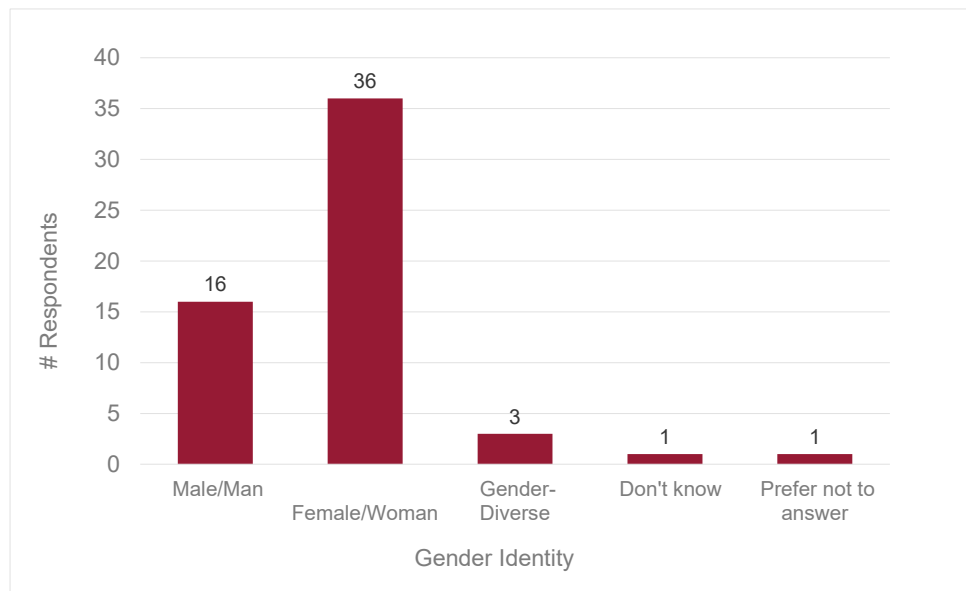
Respondents were asked about their current age. The average age of individuals experiencing housing insecurity was 44 (Figure 5).



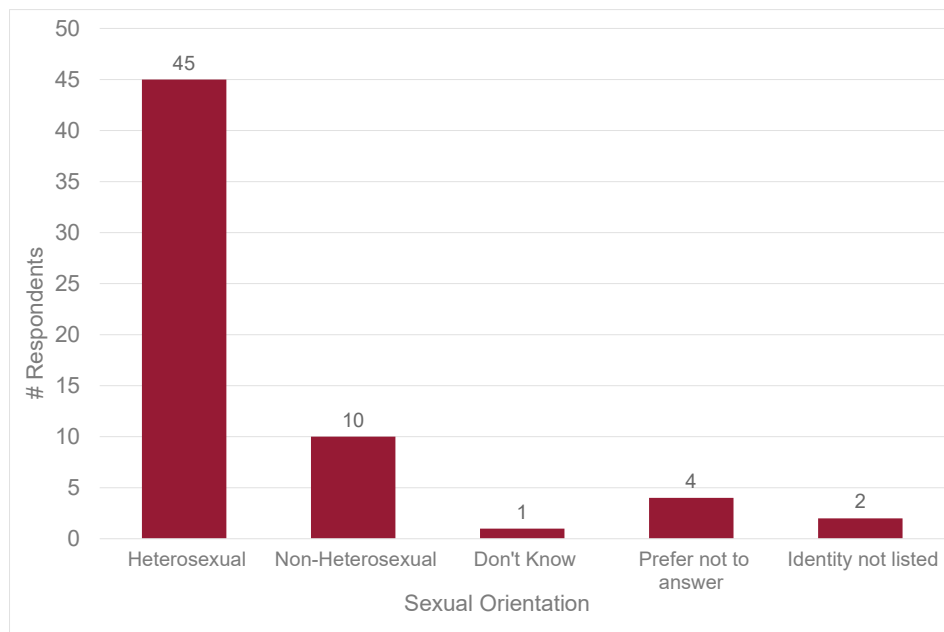
**Figure 5** - Age distribution of respondents in housing insecurity

The reported gender of insecure respondents can be seen in Figure 6. Due to low response rates for some possible answers, this figure uses “Gender Diverse” to account for the following responses in the survey: Two-Spirit, Trans Male/Trans Man, Trans Female/Trans Woman, Non-binary, and Identity Not Listed. This is to avoid the use of identifying information due to low numbers.

The reported sexual orientation of respondents can be seen in Figure 7.



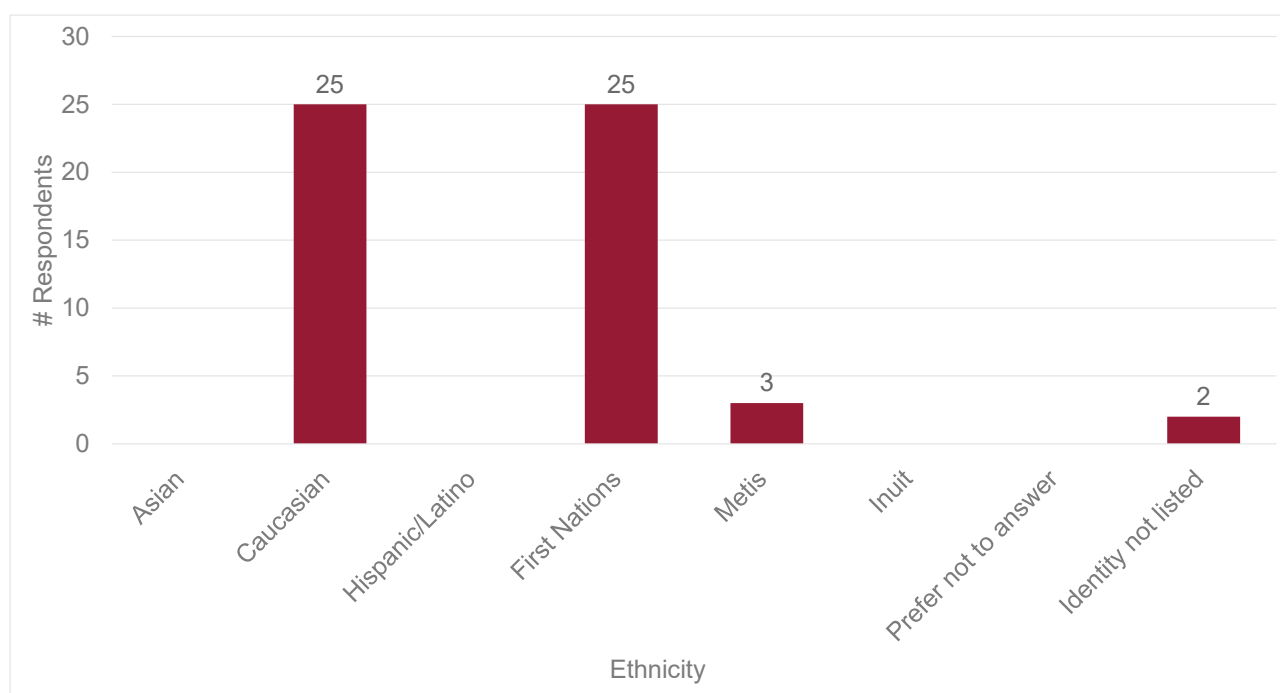
**Figure 6** – Respondents answer the question “how do you describe your gender identity?”



**Figure 7** – Respondents answer the question “how do you describe your sexual orientation?”

## Ethnicity and Migration Status

Of housing-insecure respondents surveyed, 25 identified as Caucasian, 25 as First Nations, 3 as Métis, and 2 as 'other'. (Figure 8).



**Figure 8** – Respondents answer the question “what ethnicity do you identify with?”

The vast majority of respondents experiencing housing-insecurity were born in Canada. 2 individuals indicated that their migration status was Permanent Resident.

## Education

Of all survey respondents, the majority indicated that the highest level of education they had completed was either some grade school, high school diploma, or college certificate. Detailed responses can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. "What is the highest level of education you've completed?"	# of respondents
No Formal Education	0
Some Grade School	9
High School diploma or GED	9
Apprenticeship, trade certificate	4
College Certificate or diploma	9
Some Post-Secondary	6
Post-Secondary degree (bachelor's)	6
Graduate/Professional degree (Masters, PhD, MD, JD etc)	1
Prefer not to answer	2

**Table 5 -** Respondents' answer to the question "What is the highest level of education you've completed?"

## Household Makeup

The survey included questions regarding household or family members who are currently sharing accommodations with each respondent.

1 housing-insecure respondent reported that either they or someone in their household was pregnant, and 13 said that they were currently a single-parent household.

43.1% of housing-insecure respondents were living with dependents under the age of 18. Of those, 8 had one dependent, 7 respondents had two, and 4 had three- for a total of at least 34 dependents sharing living conditions with housing-insecure respondents.

Some housing-insecure respondents reported that they had other adults living with them. The total number of adults sharing respondents' living situation was 66. 16 were indicated to be partners, 4 were parents, 4 were children, 3 were extended family, and others preferred not to answer.

Taken together, the number of dependents (34) and adults (66) who were reported to be sharing living conditions with respondents reveal 100 individuals not directly surveyed who are potentially housing-insecure.

Table 6. "If you needed a shelter in the past year and didn't access one, what were the reasons?"	# of respondents
I didn't need shelter services	31
No shelters in my area	9
Separation from family/partner	3
Prefer not to answer	3
The shelter was full	1
Hours of operation	1
I didn't feel safe	0
Health concerns (bed bugs, dirty etc)	0
Lack of disability accommodations	0
Lack of transportation	0
No pets allowed	0

**Table 6 –** Respondents' answer to the question "If you needed a shelter in the past year and didn't access one, what were the reasons?"

## Shelter Services

Of 44 respondents experiencing housing insecurity, 6 reported accessing a shelter within the past year. Of respondents who needed a shelter but did not access shelter services within the past year, those reasons were provided in Table 6.

## Community Residency

Respondents were asked about how long they have been part of the community. 17 indicated they have always lived in the community, 28 replied that they have lived in the community more than a year, 2 indicated less than a year, and 2 preferred not to answer.



**Figure 9** – Respondents answer the question “Where do you currently reside?” Responses are weighted by frequency.

Figure 9 indicates where housing-insecure respondents to the survey currently reside. Overwhelmingly respondents live within Slave Lake. Of those who moved to the community at some point, Table 7 describes the primary reasons for the move.

Respondents were asked about the number of times they had moved in the past year; frequent moves can be an indicator of insecurity and precarious housing. Most of those facing housing insecurity have not moved in the past year (21). Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 8 had moved 1-2

Table 7. “What is the main reason you came to this community?”	# of respondents
To look for work	11
To start a job	11
To move in with spouse/partner	7
My family moved here	7
To visit family/friends	5
To find housing	4
Environmental displacement	2
Fear for safety	1
To attend school	0
To access emergency shelters	0
Prefer not to answer	0

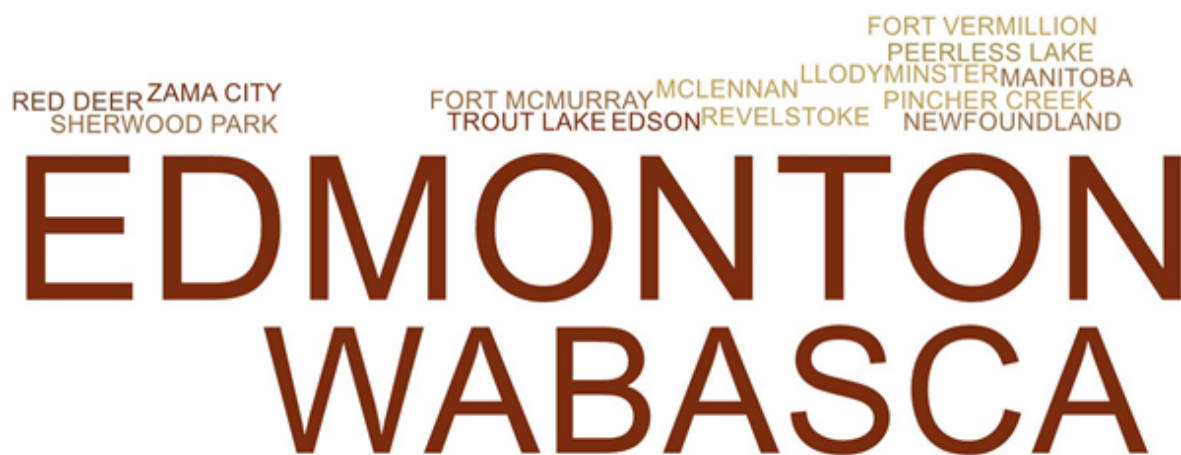
**Table 7** – Respondents’ answer to the question “what is the main reason you came to this community?”



times, 1 moved 3–6 times, and 2 moved more than 6 times.

Respondents were also asked if they would have stayed in their previous community if they had better access to services or programs. 21 respondents said “Yes”, while 12 said “No”, with 3 “prefer not to answer”, with almost twice the number of respondents responding “yes” than “no”.

Of the 27 who had moved to the community at some point, their responses are indicated in Figure 10, weighted by frequency of response.



**Figure 10** – Respondents answer the question “Where did you reside before you moved to the community?” Responses are weighted by frequency.

## Employment

Of respondents who are experiencing housing insecurity, exactly half (22) reported being employed in some capacity. 18 of those employed were working full-time, 3 part-time, and 1 was working casual. These respondents reported being employed in the following industries (Table 8).

Table 8. If employed, "which area do you work in?"	# of respondents
Not Listed	8
Health	5
Forestry	3
Retail/Personal services	3
Cleaning/Housekeeping	1
Education	1
Finance	1
Food and Beverage	1
Human/Social Services	1
Marketing	1
Oil and Gas	1
Technology	1

**Table 8** – Respondents' answer to the question "which area do you work in?"

## Sources of Income

Identifying sources of income can provide a better snapshot to the personal situations of respondents needing increased supports. For employed individuals, it can also provide insight into the disparity between wages and costs-of-living in the community.

Table 9. "What are your sources of income?"	# of respondents
Employment	23
Child and Family Tax Benefits	15
Informal Income (ie. bottle returns)	9
My Partner's income	8
Money from family and friends	6
Income Assistance	5
Employment Insurance (EI)	5
Senior's Benefits	5
Not listed	4
Disability Benefits	1
Student Loans	1
Veteran's Benefits	0
Canadian Emergency Benefits (CERB, CEWS, CESB)	0

**Table 9 –** Respondents' answer the to question "What are your sources of income?"

41 people facing housing-insecurity reported employment as their main source of income. Sources of income varied though, and respondents were encouraged to select all that apply as shown in Table 9.

# Qualitative Findings

To compliment the large amount of quantitative data encompassed in this report, we also included some of the qualitative findings that respondents included in their surveys. In addition to respondents providing answers to multiple-choice questions, some parts of the survey collected responses, to allow respondents to provide additional information.

## Reasons for Homelessness, or being at-risk

When asked to provide the main reason why respondents find themselves to be homeless or at-risk, we received the following unique replies:

I couldn't keep a job due to disclosing mental illness. No reason was given, and no misconduct occurred. I expect that I will be on disability or welfare soon.

Rentals are just too pricey in Slave Lake. For a two bedroom two bathroom rental I pay \$1400 PLUS utilities. I'm a single parent, I make \$32 hourly but still struggle to pay all the basic bills required to live for my daughter and I.

Rent is too high for the old buildings that are available to rent. There myself and kids need to live with my parents

Rent is so expensive it's almost impossible for single parents to survive. Throw Covid into the mix and I don't qualify for assistance.

High Taxes = no money left for repairs

No such thing as low income housing

Taxes and utilities

With the cost of utilities, I have to make choices about when I can eat or not.

Retired fixed income, increasing utilities/expenses

Currently on Mat leave from a great job but husband lost his job, hoping he will find employment soon.

My family is unable to grow with the size of home we can afford. Repairs need to be made and labourers are expensive, we lack the time to make repairs quickly and efficiently.

UCP have made my job position tenuous

Due to COVID-19 my job hours have taken a blow.. not only that but with the price of rent as well as taxes on top of bills it is quite a lot on an \$1800 income. Especially when the housing needs repairs such as new ceiling..

I pay more in rent and basic needs than I actually take home.

My rent is 1 of my 2 monthly pay checks. The place needs constant repairs. My rent went up....Again

Family rejection, concern about if there is an incident at the camp, RCMP can shut it down

I feel at home here - bush/tent/camp

Encampment could be removed, might get cold

Living in a tent compound in the Slave Lake, winter, getting kicked out

Rent is high

Too much money

Too many people (dependents), landlord might sell trailer court

Cause I always drink quite a bit. My spouse put me in the doghouse cause I drink too much.

Rent is too high

Rent is too expensive, can't afford a place

Rent is too high

I'm homeless. Rent here is expensive.

High rent

Financial, lack of affordable housing, medical condition

Rent is too high

I can't make rent/mortgage

If there is an incident in our bush camp, we could get shut down. Rent was too much. I lost work due to Covid

Legal aid: foreclosure on house in Calgary; possible separation

Living costs vs. salaries is not sustainable.

# Community Improvements

When asked “What would you like to see more of in your community?”, respondents provided the following verbatim responses:

More unbiased and discriminatory people and companies, more supports that are accessible to people that aren't below the poverty line, better mental health support, better support for disabled people, less cliquey municipal government representatives, more Indigenous municipal representation

Resources for adults with disabilities

Affordable housing

Not sure

Family friendly activities

Affordable housing/rentals would be a great start.

More affordable housing especially for single parents and more kids groups

Affordable PET FRIENDLY housing

more restaurants and small businesses not owned by the “Big money” people

People learn to get along

24 hour shelter

Affordable housing and shelter for homeless

Indoor recreation

Organizations that could help people in my situation, not low income, but a single parent struggling. I make sure I pay my rent each month, but I have went without a furnace since May. Now I'm trying to figure out how to juggle overdue bills and be able to get the Natural Gas bill paid in order to get my furnace turned back on

Independent retail stores. Specialist healthcare providers.

Family dedicated services (e.g. parent link, groups), housing at affordable rates for those who don't qualify for housing subsidy.

Affordable rent

Affordable housing that is actually affordable and not falsely advertised by the higher ups of our community

More affordable housing that is structurally sound..

Affordable housing, more employment in my field

Not such high rent prices

Affordable living, affordable housing

People take care of each other, free swimming, concerts (free outdoor), arts exchange program (provide art supplies, etc)

Porta potties

How to be a family helping one another, housing first program, Mat program with less rules

Matts program – place to sleep that is safe

More free children's activities, more rental housing

Build little houses with gardens for old folks, don't stick them in a room; round dances – everything is cancelled right now

Affordable housing, a proper shelter that doesn't kick people out at 7 in the morning, someplace for people to hang out with activities, pool table or cards

Things for young people to do besides drink, help the homeless, detox centre because people have nothing to help them, counselling for trauma

More places to eat, soup kitchen, like community, Christian church

Kindness, Emergency shelters

More rental options

More housing

Shelter

Affordable housing

More subsidized housing

More work and lower priced houses

More housing for lower income families



## Where help is needed

When asked “In your own words, which area(s) do you feel you need the most help with?”, respondents provided the following verbatim responses:

Finding a job that supports employees with mental illness

Affordable housing .... Not ghetto like

Mental Health and Housing

Financial. It's going to be hard to support myself with just my current job.

I need access to more affordable housing plain and simple. Someone who is knowledgeable with separations and the procedures that go along with that and assistance to understand and fill out appropriate forms would also be greatly appreciated. Affordable day homes would be nice as well, along with access to financial aid should I require it during the 4th wave of Covid. I need financial help, I need a break somehow, I'm barely staying afloat.

Childcare and affordable rent that allows pets

House repairs

Homelessness

Medical

Cost of housing

Physical and mental health care

Utilities

Accessing health care.

Utility assistance/food bank

Access to health care locally I.e. some services are not provided here for my children, so we travel to Edmonton for these.

Lower rent

Mental health is a major thing for me

Family, health and wellness

Getting and keeping a job without discrimination

Making enough money that I can pay my rent, meet my basic needs, and stop being dependent on others for supplemental income to meet those needs.

Housing. Rent is expensive for the space we need.

Everything

Clothes, food, shelter from cold

Cooperation and understanding with the community, stop discrimination

Financial help

Finding a place to live

Rent, building repairs

Find my phone, family got mad, people pay me back money owed

Housing, reasonable rent, house without mold or leaks

Mental health - takes too long, red tape, stressful

More places to eat, soup kitchen, like community, Christian church

Groceries

Work

Resume

Lower rent

Mental health is a major thing for me

Family, health and wellness

Housing for my gr son, disable son

Food, shelter

Housing

Housing and food

Work and financial services, housing for lower prices

Get IDs back (catch 22 homeless), get a job or go back to school, subsidized housing

# What does homelessness look like?

In a report that is ostensibly composed of data and graphs, it is possible to overlook the humanity behind the numbers. Using the most common responses from the survey, we were able to compile a profile of the most common circumstances facing respondents in housing insecurity.

## At-Risk

59 individuals (including partners and dependents of respondents), were facing conditions identified to put them 'At-Risk' of homelessness (as outlined on page 8). These were most commonly women, finding it difficult to pay rent, and have lived in their current situation for more than 2 years. They primarily live with their partner, and have about a 55% chance of being employed, and employment is their primary source of income. Housing affordability was identified as the primary reason for their situation.

## Provisionally Accomodated

70 individuals (including partners and dependents or respondents) were found to be provisionally accommodated. They were most commonly women, facing an illness or medical issue, who have been living in their accommodations for less than a year.

## Emergency Sheltered

11 individuals (including partners and dependents or respondents) were found to be living in emergency shelter conditions, including staying at a women's/domestic violence shelter, staying with someone they don't know, or sleeping in a shelter. They were most commonly men, and addictions/substance use issues were the primary reason given, closely followed by inadequate income and not being able to afford rent/mortgage.

Most had lived in the community over a year or more, and most had indicated they moved in order to find work.

## Unsheltered

13 individuals belonged in the most vulnerable group: are those living in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or sleeping in a public space. This group was divided almost equally among men and women. This group sought Emergency Shelter care more than any other, and most replied that they hadn't sought shelter because there were "no shelters in [their] area". "Addictions/Substance Use" and "I can't afford rent/mortgage payments" were the most common reasons given, and half indicated they have always lived in Slave Lake.

The above are averages, and the true diversity of the respondents is of course illustrated in the Survey Results section, but this serves to highlight what someone in-need might look like within the Slave Lake area.

# Conclusions

This report refrains from offering explicit recommendations because in-depth dialogue between RDN, decision-makers, advocates for the homeless, and administrators within the locale have not informed the findings within this report. However it is the goal of the report to support decision-making at all levels by providing a credible, evidence-based document that can be used and referred to in the community.

It appears from the survey that those living within the Town of Slave Lake and surrounding area face a wide-spectrum of housing insecurity. On one end, you have those that are facing unaffordable living conditions, paying more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing. And on the other end, there exist individuals who are unsheltered and vulnerable to the upcoming winter conditions. Indigenous representation is high, proportionally-speaking, on par in terms of raw numbers as with those who identified as Caucasian.

The conservative estimate of this report is that there are 155 people – including partners and children – within Slave Lake that are living in the described conditions. Given the difficulties in administering these surveys to everyone, the true number is likely higher. An additional ~15% of surveys were not able to be counted, as those individuals declined to give consent, or withdrew it following the survey.

Solutions discussed within the community would be recommended to be multi-faceted, with efforts to address the needs of all groups within this report.

- Highlight the need for an affordable housing project and other economic development strategies
- Initiate development of coordinated community response programs
- Address emergency shelter availability for the most vulnerable

# Definitions of Homelessness

1. Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.
2. Gaetz, S.; Donaldson, J.; Richter, T.; & Gulliver, T (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press
3. Shinn, M. (2007). International Homelessness: Policy, Socio-Cultural, and Individual Perspectives. Journal of Social Issues 63(3): 657–677.
4. 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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