

Lethbridge 2022 Point-in-Time Count Full Enumeration and Survey Results Report

December 2022

Compiled by: Community Social
Development



Thank you to the many supporters, partners and volunteers who contributed their time, effort and resources to this year's Point-In-Time (PiT) count. Most of all, thank you to all those who participated in the survey and shared their stories with us.

Planning Support

The City of Lethbridge coordinated several aspects of the PiT count with the 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness such as the timing of the count, methodology, survey software tool, and collection of provincial administrative data. Streets Alive Mission helped coordinate the unsheltered count and provided their facility space for volunteer training and team headquarters.

Partners

Streets Alive Mission
Alpha House Shelter and Stabilization Centre
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)
Wood's Homes
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Alberta South Region
Southern Alberta Self Help Association (SASHA)
Blackfoot Family Lodge
Fresh Start Recovery Centre
Southern Alcare Manor
Alberta Health Services (AHS)
Lethbridge Police Services
University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Health Sciences
7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness
HelpSeeker Technologies

Funding

The Lethbridge PiT Count received support from Reaching Home, Government of Canada's Homelessness Strategy (Employment and Social Development Canada).

Many thanks to those who volunteered their time and donated supplies.

Our Plan to End Homelessness in Lethbridge

The City of Lethbridge works collaboratively with a dedicated network of social service providers, the community and all levels of government to address social problems in our city.

This work is part of our [Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy \(CWSS\)](#), a five-year strategic plan to inform and improve community wellbeing and safety in Lethbridge.

The Point-in-Time (PiT) Count supports the CWSS and the City's plans to end homelessness by enabling those experiencing homelessness to share their stories and provide a better understanding of their characteristics and service needs. It also underscores the urgent need for our community to work together to end homelessness by developing a range of housing and supports that meet the diverse needs of homeless people in Lethbridge. PiT counts provide valuable information about the causes of homelessness in our community and the barriers people face in accessing safe, stable, and permanent housing. In combination with homeless-serving agency data and other research, successive PiT counts allow us to monitor trends, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every two years, communities across Canada participate in Point-in-Time (PiT) counts that measure the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night. The PiT Count provides a community-wide measure of homelessness to support systems and service planning, and inform efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness. Coordination of the Point-in-Time Homeless Count occurs at federal, provincial and local levels. Federally, core standards are set for participating communities to allow for a snapshot of homelessness across the country. Provincially, the 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness coordinate specific elements of the count allowing for comparability between the cities. Locally, the City of Lethbridge leads the PiT Count with support from community partners to enable local customizations.

The City of Lethbridge's Community Social Development department, in partnership with homeless-serving agencies and outreach teams, conducted the 2022 count on the evening of Tuesday, September 27. Over the course of six hours, trained staff and volunteers enumerated and surveyed individuals staying in shelters, short-term housing and sleeping rough (without shelter). On September 27, there were *at least* 454 people experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge, of which 235 were experiencing unsheltered homelessness¹; 92 were temporarily sheltered in an emergency shelter facility; and 127 were provisionally accommodated² in a transitional housing facility, treatment/recovery centre, correctional facility, hospital, or at

¹ Unsheltered homelessness: staying outside, in a place not intended for human habitation and/or in a public or private space without consent or contract. This includes vehicle, tent, makeshift shelter, bus shelter, or abandoned building.

² Provisionally accommodated: staying in transitional housing, living temporarily with others without guarantee of continued residency, and/or staying in institutional care with no permanent housing arrangement.

someone else's residence. The 454 individuals represents the *minimum* number of people experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge in one day as it is difficult to estimate hidden homelessness³ numbers or the number of people experiencing homelessness during the course of a year.

The 2022 PiT Count total of 454 people experiencing homelessness is *double* the previous count in 2018 where 223 individuals were counted. The number of *sheltered* individuals has remained similar since 2018 [n=211 (2018); n=191 (2021), n=200 (2022)]. It is the number of *unsheltered* individuals that has dramatically increased from seven in 2018 to 235 in 2022.

The 2022 PiT Count results underscore the need for additional provisional accommodation in the form of transitional housing and treatment spaces, as well as emergency shelter spaces to accommodate the large increase of homeless individuals in Lethbridge in recent years. The survey results provide insight into some of the barriers individuals are experiencing in accessing sheltered facilities or permanent housing. The circumstances that lead to homelessness are incredibly diverse with some people identifying as being homeless from infancy to experiencing it for the first time as a senior. The top reasons stated for most recent housing loss were substance use/mental health issues, lack of income for housing, eviction, conflict, or unsafe/unfit housing. The top challenges to finding housing were low income/rent too high, addiction/mental health issues, discrimination and no income assistance.

³ Hidden homelessness: living temporarily with others without legal protection, guarantee of continued residency, or prospects of permanent housing (e.g., couch surfing).

KEY FINDINGS

The numbers reported for emergency shelters, transitional housing, and institutional settings are reflective of the true number of people who stayed in these settings on the night of the count. The true number of homeless individuals who stayed in unsheltered locations and at someone else's place is likely higher than the numbers reported here.



BACKGROUND

In April 2018, the Lethbridge PiT Count found 223 individuals experiencing homelessness. The PiT Count scheduled for Spring 2020 was postponed due to the uncertainty and risk associated with COVID-19. Communities across Alberta worked collaboratively to develop a provincial methodology and prepare for a modified PiT Count for 2021 that was ultimately postponed again. Alternatively, an “Administrative count” based strictly on data for the night of April 20, 2021, was conducted. An Administrative count relies on reported data from service facilities and systems (i.e. service providers, Justice and Solicitor General’s office, Alberta Community and Social Services, and Alberta Health Services) and does not capture survey data obtained from self-reported experiences of homelessness and street counts of unsheltered individuals. In the 2021 Administrative count, 191 people were enumerated as staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, treatment facilities, or correctional facilities.

It is important to note that the 2021 Administrative count is not comparable to other PiT counts due to the vastly different circumstances created by the pandemic and because it relies exclusively on Administrative data. Relative increases or decreases in sheltered homelessness compared to 2018 or 2022 may have been driven by methodological differences, decreased capacity in the emergency shelter system (due to public health regulations), or unseen changes in the number of people experiencing unsheltered or hidden homelessness. However, it does provide some useful comparisons for certain facilities. It also provides some insight into the facility and operational changes during the pandemic that undoubtedly changed how the homeless-serving sector accessed services and some of the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness.

In preparing for the 2022 PiT Count, there was a consistent provincial dialogue between 7 Cities partners. The provincial methodology developed in 2021 was agreed upon for use in 2022. This methodology outlines consistency across all cities in relation to the timing of the count, which facilities and unsheltered locations will be enumerated and surveyed, the screening and survey questions that are asked, the software tool to administer the survey, and who will be involved in the unsheltered PiT Count.

Unsheltered Count – Scope and Methodology

Unsheltered enumeration and surveying focused on “known locations” such as urban encampments and “designated geographic areas” which are places that individuals experiencing homelessness are known to frequent. The areas were determined based on local data, and the experience and capacity of local outreach teams. Local outreach and staff from the homeless-serving sector primarily conducted the unsheltered count. Some volunteers from the City of Lethbridge, Alberta Health Services, and University of Lethbridge Nursing Practicum students also assisted in the unsheltered count.

The unsheltered enumeration and surveying for the downtown and other identified areas occurred between 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. When a team encountered someone, they were asked a screening question - "Where are you staying tonight?" - to determine whether they were experiencing homelessness. A second question asked was, "Do you have access to a permanent residence where you can safely stay as long as you want?" This was to determine if they were experiencing hidden homelessness. Those who consented to participate in the Lethbridge survey were asked a series of questions to provide key data on gender, age, ethnicity, history of homelessness, health challenges experienced by those who are homeless and more. Participants were compensated for their involvement with backpacks filled with supplies (e.g. hygiene items, socks, gloves, etc.) and a \$5 gift card. Individuals who did not wish to participate, but demonstrated qualities consistent with homelessness, were recorded on a Tally sheet as 'observed homeless' with a description to validate their assessment (e.g. sleeping rough, carrying possessions, etc.). Surveyors were trained to administer the survey in a non-judgmental and neutral manner and to respect respondents' rights and personal space (e.g., to not wake anyone up). Respondents were informed that the survey was voluntary, their name would not be recorded, and they had the right to decline any question and/or the rest of the survey at any point.

Street Count Zones

Surveys were conducted in 14 street count zones across the City and concentrated on the downtown core. An additional team also visited locations outside these zones in which they had recently encountered individuals through outreach efforts. The locations were identified in consultation with outreach teams and maps were developed by Streets Alive Mission. Each team was assigned to a specific zone and provided with maps of their area, which included "hot spots" or known areas. Volunteers were instructed to cover as much of their area as possible, focusing on the hot spot locations, and to survey everyone they encountered.

Avoidance of Double Counting and Duplication

In order to avoid double counting individuals experiencing homelessness and to eliminate duplicate entries, every individual who was approached was asked if they had already completed a survey that evening, as well as the screening questions described above to determine homeless status. The backpacks used as honoraria were all the same and were helpful in identifying individuals already surveyed. Staff conducting surveys at the main shelter coordinated with the unsheltered outreach team based in their zone surrounding the shelter. Shelter staff only counted individuals within their facility and directly in front of their building. At the same time, the unsheltered outreach team counted and surveyed individuals in the vicinity of the shelter.

Sheltered Count – Scope and Methodology

Emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, and local detox facilities all fell within the scope of the sheltered count. The following facilities were included in the Lethbridge sheltered count: Lethbridge Shelter and Stabilization Centre (operated by Alpha House), CMHA Community Crisis Bed, Blackfoot Family Lodge, Streets Alive Exodus & Genesis programs, Wood's Homes Youth Connections: the CORE, Southern Alberta Self-Help Association Respite Bed, YWCA Harbour House, Fresh Start Recovery Centre, Southern Alcare Manor, and Lethbridge Police Services Holding cells. Additionally, provincial systems data was collected centrally for all 7 Cities (the same methodology used in the 2021 administrative count) to enumerate those experiencing homelessness in hospitals and urgent/acute care centres (AHS), prisons and remand (Justice and Solicitor General's office) and individuals staying in hotels/motels sponsored by Alberta Works or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Alberta Community and Social Services). Sheltered facilities enumerated through administrative data to include information and demographics of people staying at that location as of midnight on the night of the count. Each facility was asked to complete a facility enumeration form sent as a Survey Monkey link. Several facilities also conducted surveys with consenting clients. Survey completion was dependent on the capacity of facility staff and the PiT Coordinator worked with each facility to determine the best time to engage with participants. Participants were compensated for their involvement with a \$5 gift card.

2022 RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

2022 Enumeration

Number of people who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the PiT Count.

PiT Count Enumeration		
Overnight Location	Data Source	Count
Unsheltered – Surveyed	Number of unsheltered responses*	147 (32.4%)
Unsheltered – Observed	Number observed homeless from Tally	107 (23.6%)
Emergency Shelters/Stabilization	Systems data/Occupancy/Surveys	73 (16.1%)
Domestic Violence Shelters	Systems data/Occupancy/Surveys	19 (4.2%)
Transitional Housing	Systems data/Occupancy/Surveys	52 (11.5%)
Treatment Facilities	Systems data/Occupancy/Surveys	18 (4.0%)
Police Holding Cell	Systems data	2 (0.4%)
Alberta Correctional Services Division	Systems data	32 (7.0%)
Community & Social Services (Emergency Hotels)	Systems data	0 (0.0%)
Alberta Health Services (AHS)	Systems data	4 (0.9%)
	Total	454

*Refers to the number of people who responded with an **unsheltered location** to “Where are you staying tonight?” Includes the number of dependent children who were reported to be spending the night in the unsheltered location with their parent/guardian.

Family Homelessness

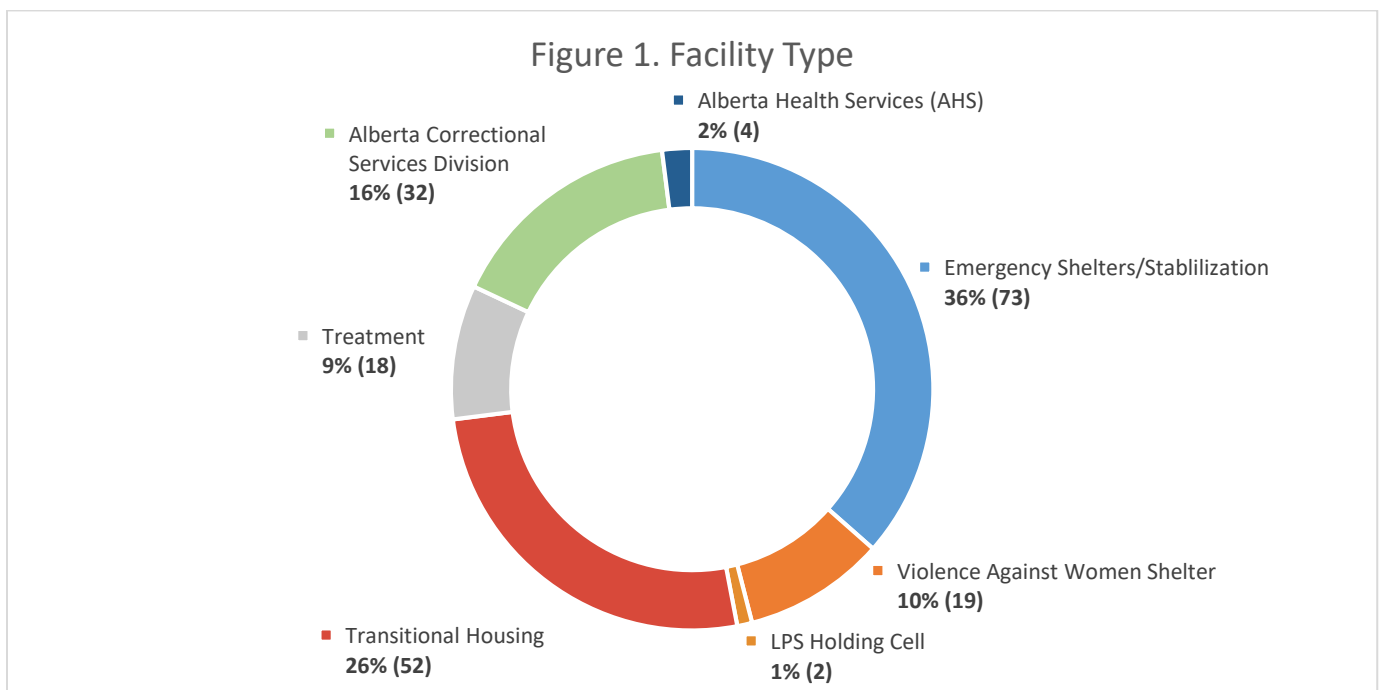
Family composition on the night of the count. It does not include dependents/partners who were not together that night. It also does not reflect the groupings/pairings in which many homeless people consider “friends as family.”

PiT Count Composition			
Population	Description	Count	Total # of Dependents*
Single	Number of people surveyed who spent the night without “family staying with them tonight”	196	
Couples	Number of people with a partner, but no dependent children	30	
Parents/ Guardians	Number of adults with 1+ dependent children	11	16

* Refers to the number of dependent children that were enumerated as currently staying with their parent or guardian.

Individuals at Sheltered Locations

Through the 2022 Administrative count, a total of 200 people were counted to be experiencing sheltered homelessness in Lethbridge. Most were in emergency shelters or stabilization centre (36%, n=73), violence against women shelter (10%, n= 19), transitional housing facilities (26%, n=52), treatment/detox facilities (9%, n=18), AHS acute care or emergency department (2%, n=4), Lethbridge Correctional Centre (16%, n=32), or Lethbridge Police holding cell (1%, n=2). When interpreting the data for transitional housing facilities, it is important to note that although these facilities have been identified as sheltered homelessness, transitional housing does represent stable living for many people, and the living conditions do not necessarily match those of other less stable temporary housing options, such as emergency shelters.



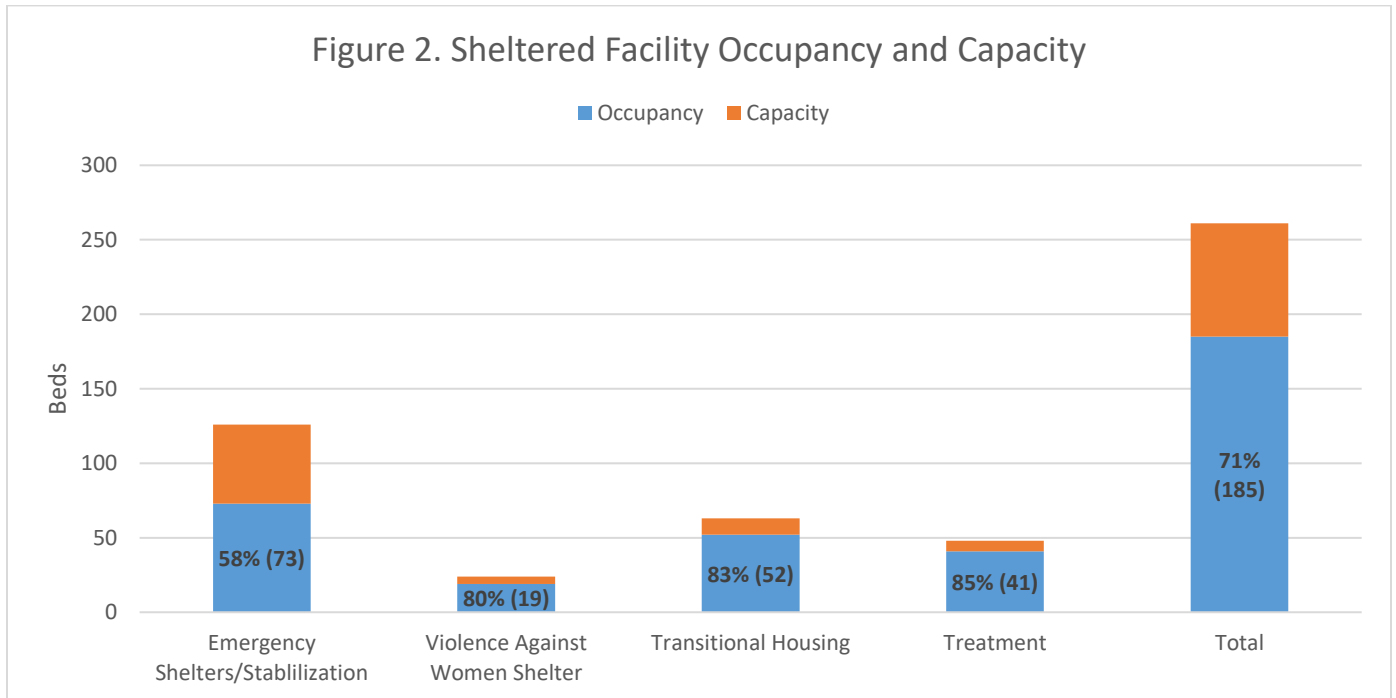
Facility Type Comparison to Previous Counts

The most notable changes from 2018 and 2021 can be seen in the increased number of people in transitional housing facilities [n=23 (2018); n=40 (2021); n=52 (2022)] and violence against women shelters [n=0 (2018); n=0 (2021); n=19 (2022)] and the decreased number of people in emergency shelters/stabilization facilities [n=136 (2018); n=97 (2021); n=73 (2022)]. Time of the year and weather likely play a role in emergency shelter usage. Previous counts were conducted in April 2018 and April 2021 with evening temperatures around 5°C and 10°C, respectively; versus September 2022 in which the evening temperature was around 20°C.

Facility Type	2018		2021		2022	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Treatment Facilities	16	8%	12	6%	18	9%
Transitional Housing Facilities	23	11%	40	21%	52	26%
Cold Weather Shelters	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Holding Cell	1	0%	0	0%	2	1%
Hotels/Motels	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%
COVID-19 Isolation Sites	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%
Violence Against Women Shelters	0	0%	0	0%	19	10%
Emergency Shelters/Stabilization	136	64%	97	51%	73	37%
Correctional	28	13%	36	19%	32	16%
Alberta Health Services	6	3%	3	2%	4	2%
Hotels/Motels sponsored by Alberta Works	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Total	211		191		200	

Sheltered Capacity

On September 27, a total of 261 beds were available in Lethbridge for individuals experiencing homelessness with most beds (48%) available in emergency shelter/stabilization facilities. As shown in Figure 2, 71% of all beds were occupied on the night of the count. Given that 75 beds were unoccupied and 235 individuals were counted as unsheltered, there remains about 160 individuals in Lethbridge without a safe place to stay if all facilities are at capacity.

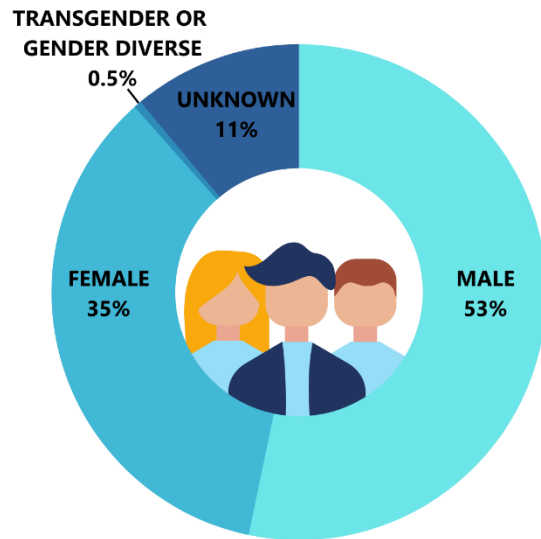


Demographics

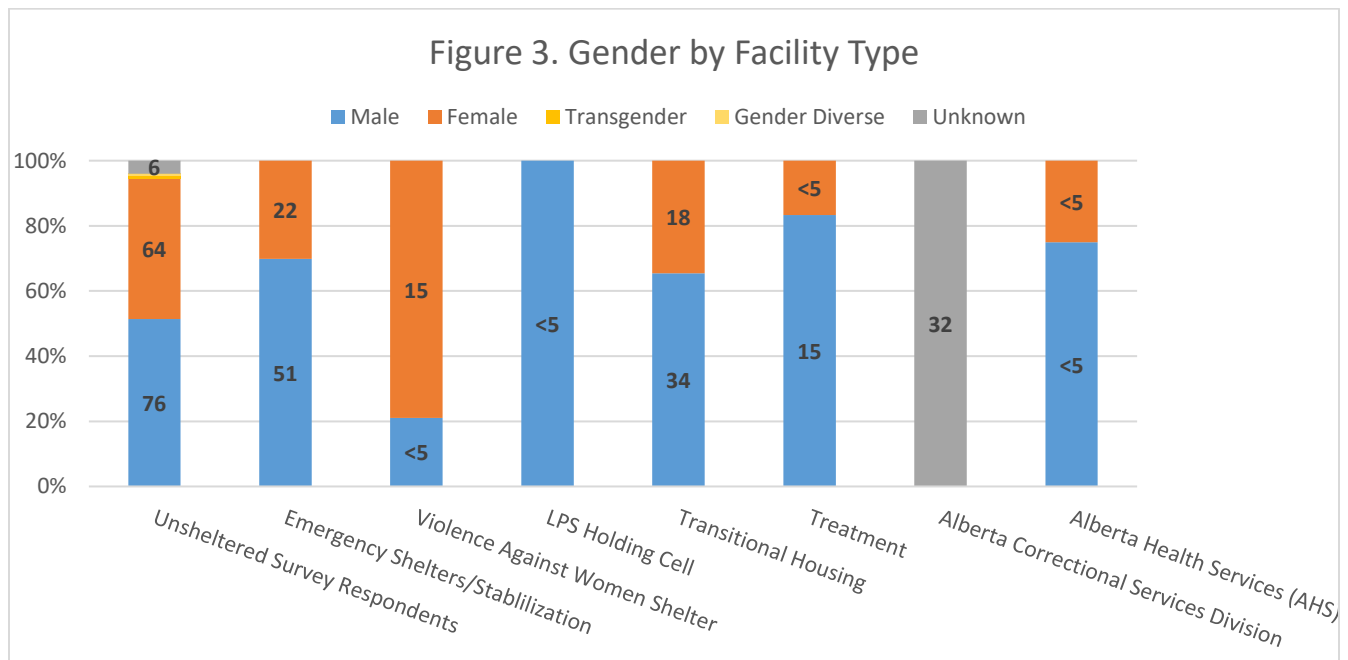
The PiT Count used a combination of survey and Administrative data to collect the following demographic data. The demographic data is based on administrated data collected and supplemented by survey information where Administrative data does not exist (i.e., for rough sleepers and the hidden homeless). Of the 254 individuals counted as unsheltered, only 148 (58%) participated in survey completion and have demographic data that can be compared to sheltered Administrative data. It is important to note that for the unsheltered demographic data, individuals were able to decline to answer any survey question they wished or in some cases did not know the answer to a question, therefore the total number of unsheltered individuals in each demographic category may not necessarily total to 148. Not everyone who was counted was surveyed, therefore the survey provides a sample for analysis from the overall number counted.

Gender

Overall, 53% of individuals identified as male, 35% as female, 0.5% as transgender or gender diverse, and 11% as unknown gender.



Of the 200 individuals counted staying in sheltered facilities on the night of the count, 55% (n=109) identified as male gender, and 30% (n=59) as female gender. There were no transgender or gender-diverse people identified in sheltered facilities; however, 16% (n=32) individuals were recorded with unknown gender identity as Correctional data was not available. Of the 148 unsheltered survey participants, 51% (n=76) identified as being male, 43% (n=64) as female, and 4% (n=6) declined to answer. As shown in Figure 3, males were over-represented in every category except the women’s shelter.

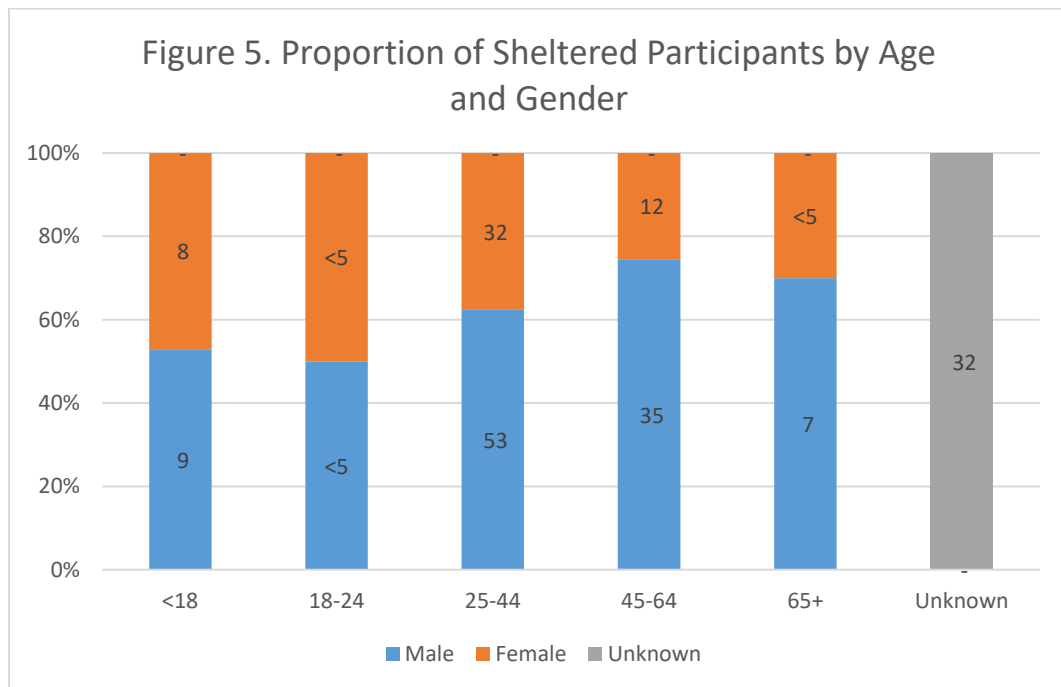
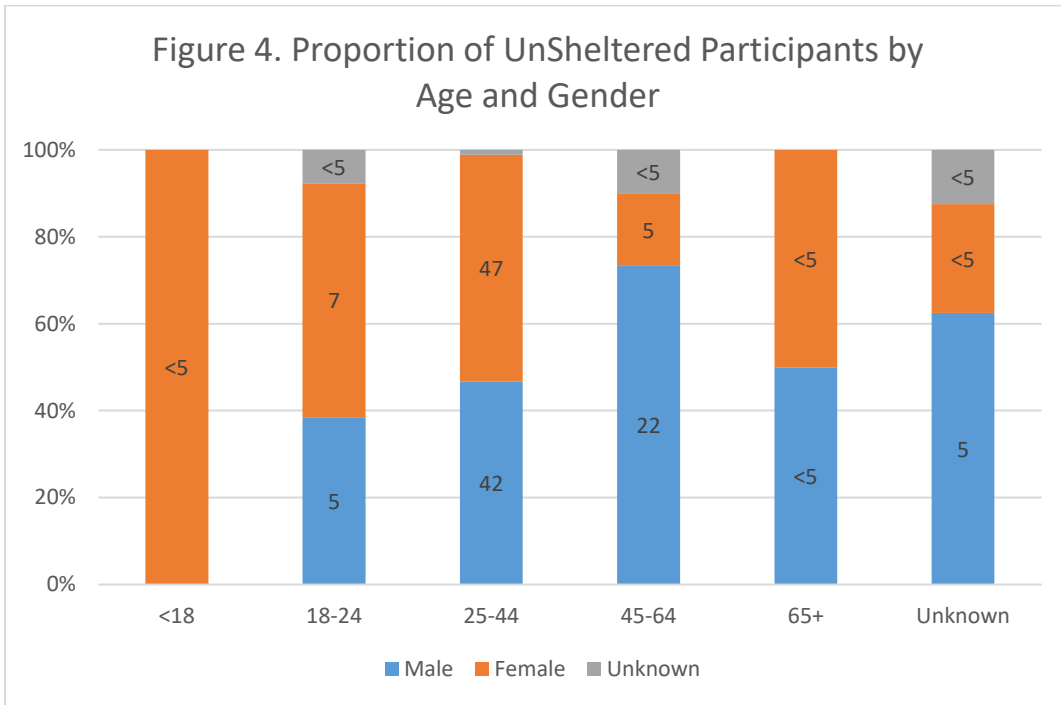


Age

Only one youth under the age of 18 was counted in the unsheltered count. The majority of unsheltered individuals were adults aged 25-44 at 61.5% (n=91). The ages of those reported through sheltered Administrative data ranged from young children under 5 years old staying in transitional housing with their parent/guardian to adults older than 65. The largest sheltered age group represented were adults aged 25 to 44 at 43% (n=85), followed by adults aged 45 to 64 at 24% (n=47). As shown in the table below, there were more unsheltered adults represented in 18-24 and 25-44 year-old categories compared to sheltered individuals.

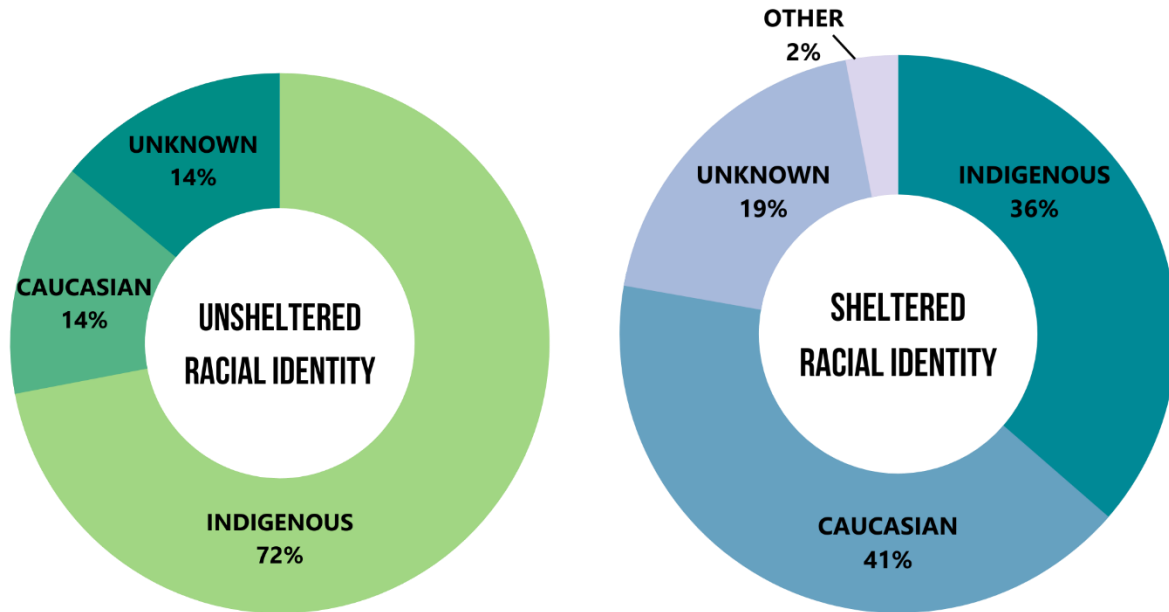
Age	Unsheltered Count	Unsheltered Percentage	Sheltered Count	Sheltered Percentage
5 and under	0	0%	6	3%
6-12	<5	1%	8	4%
13-17	0	0%	<5	2%
18-24	14	9.5%	8	4%
25-44	91	61.5%	85	43%
45-64	30	20%	47	24%
65+	<5	3%	10	5%
Unknown	8	5%	33	17%
Total	148	100%	200	100%

Gender and age comparisons are shown below in Figures 4 and 5. As shown in Figure 4, unsheltered females were over-represented in the younger age categories (below 44 years of age). Overall, there were more unsheltered males and a much larger proportion of males in the 45-64-year-old categories compared to similar-aged females.

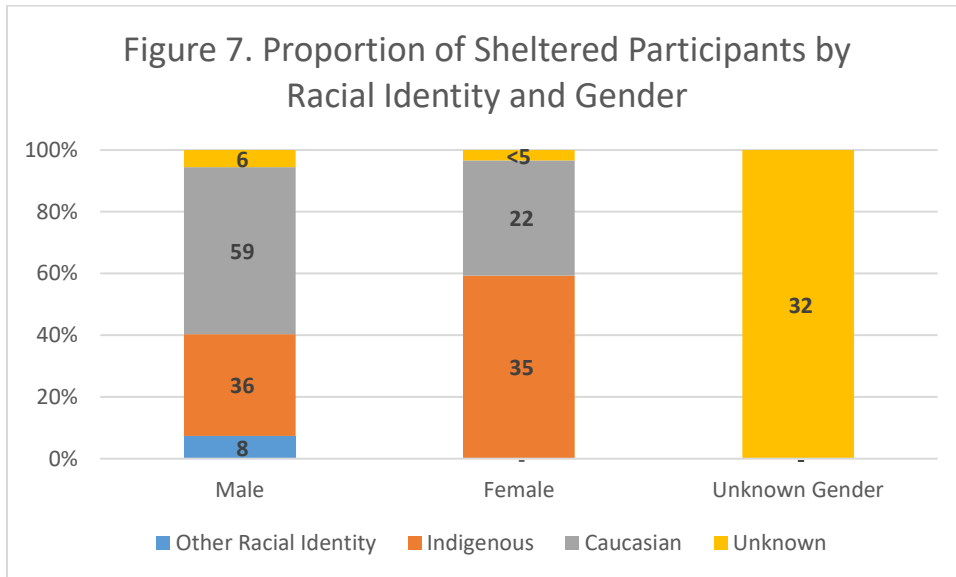
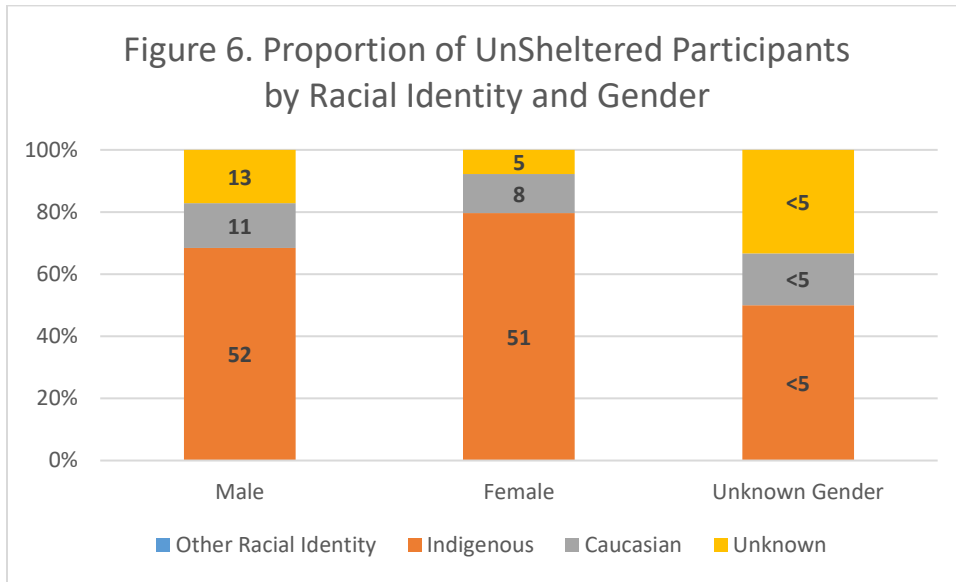


Racial Identity

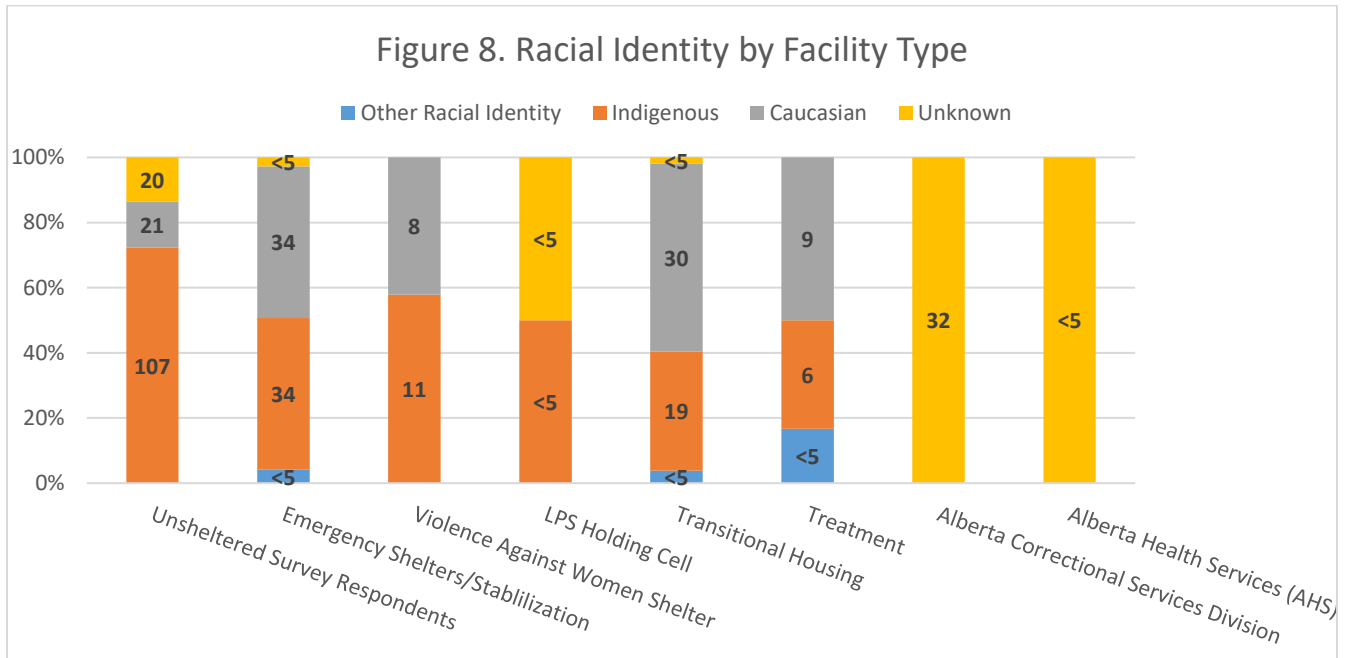
Of unsheltered individuals surveyed, 72% (n=107) identified as Indigenous which is much higher than the number of sheltered Indigenous individuals at 36% (n=71). Only 14% (n=21) of unsheltered individuals identified as Caucasian compared to 41% (n=81) of sheltered individuals. Overall, only 2% (n=8) of individuals identified as having another racial identity, and 13% (n=60) were recorded as unknown racial identity or declined to answer.



As shown in Figure 6 below, 79% of unsheltered females identified as Indigenous, and 68% of unsheltered males identified as Indigenous. While in Figure 7, 59% of sheltered females identified as Indigenous, and only 33% of sheltered males identified as Indigenous. The gender and racial identity comparison is quite stark and highlights the over-representation of unsheltered Indigenous men and women and the low proportion of sheltered Indigenous males.



As shown in Figure 8 below, the distribution of racial identity varies according to facility type with a higher representation of Indigenous individuals staying unsheltered (72%) and in emergency shelters (52%) compared to transitional housing or treatment facilities (35%).



Demographic Comparison to Previous Counts

The demographic data from the 2018 PiT Count is based on survey results alone, so it cannot be directly compared to 2021 and 2022 Administrative data. The proportion of sheltered males and females remained quite similar from 2021 to 2022, with males representing 59% in 2021 and 55% in 2022 and females representing 23% in 2021 and 30% in 2022.

In 2022, there were more children under 12 recorded as staying in transitional housing facilities (0% in 2021; 7% in 2022). Otherwise, the proportion of individuals in each age bracket was similar from 2021 to 2022.

The proportion of Indigenous sheltered participants decreased from 52% in 2021 to 41% in 2022. However, there was an increase in the number of individuals with unknown racial identity - from 9% in 2021 to 20% in 2022. The proportion identifying as Caucasian remained similar and those identifying as another racial identity increased slightly from 1% in 2021 to 4% in 2022.

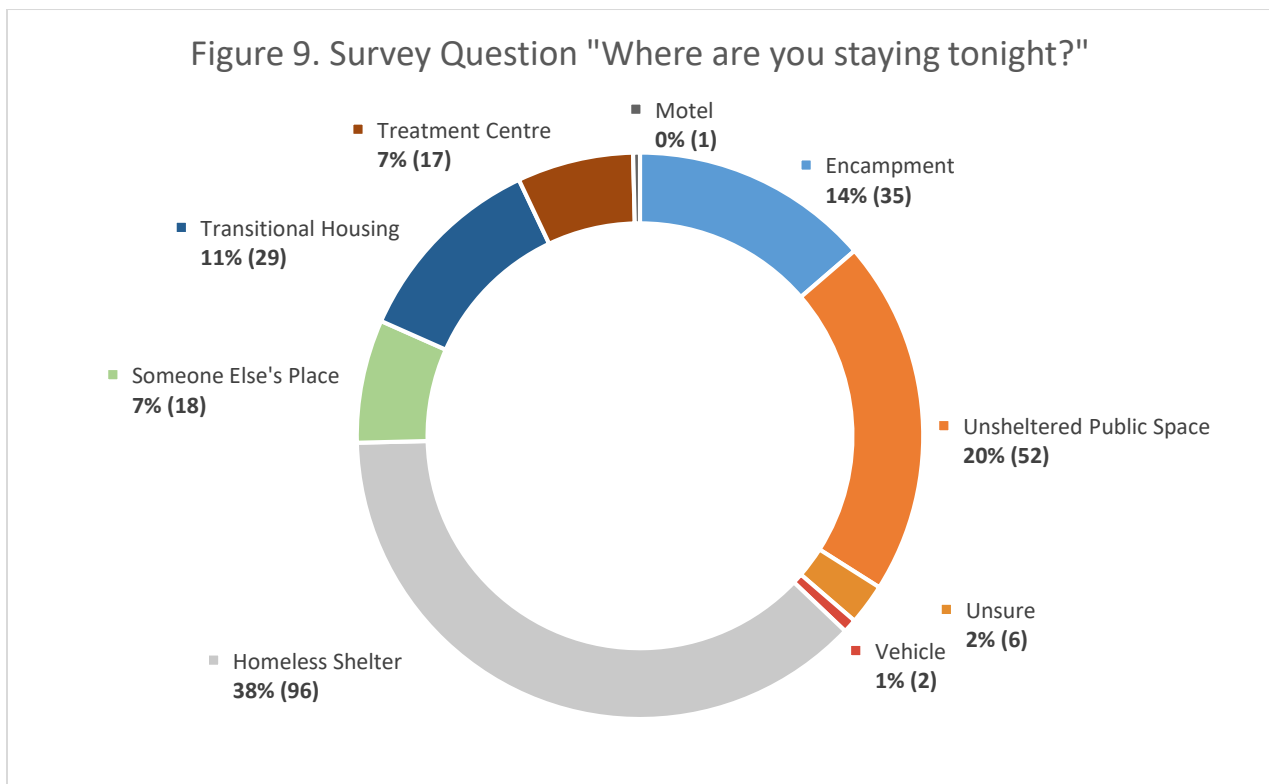
Key Findings from Survey Participants

Of the 454 people enumerated on the night of September 27, 256 individuals (56%) completed a survey. There were 15 federal core questions, 2 optional federal core questions, and 6 local questions developed in partnership with the Alberta Health Services Environmental Public Health department. Surveys took anywhere from 10-25 minutes to complete, depending on the

engagement level of participants and the complexity of their health and history of homelessness.

Where are you staying tonight?

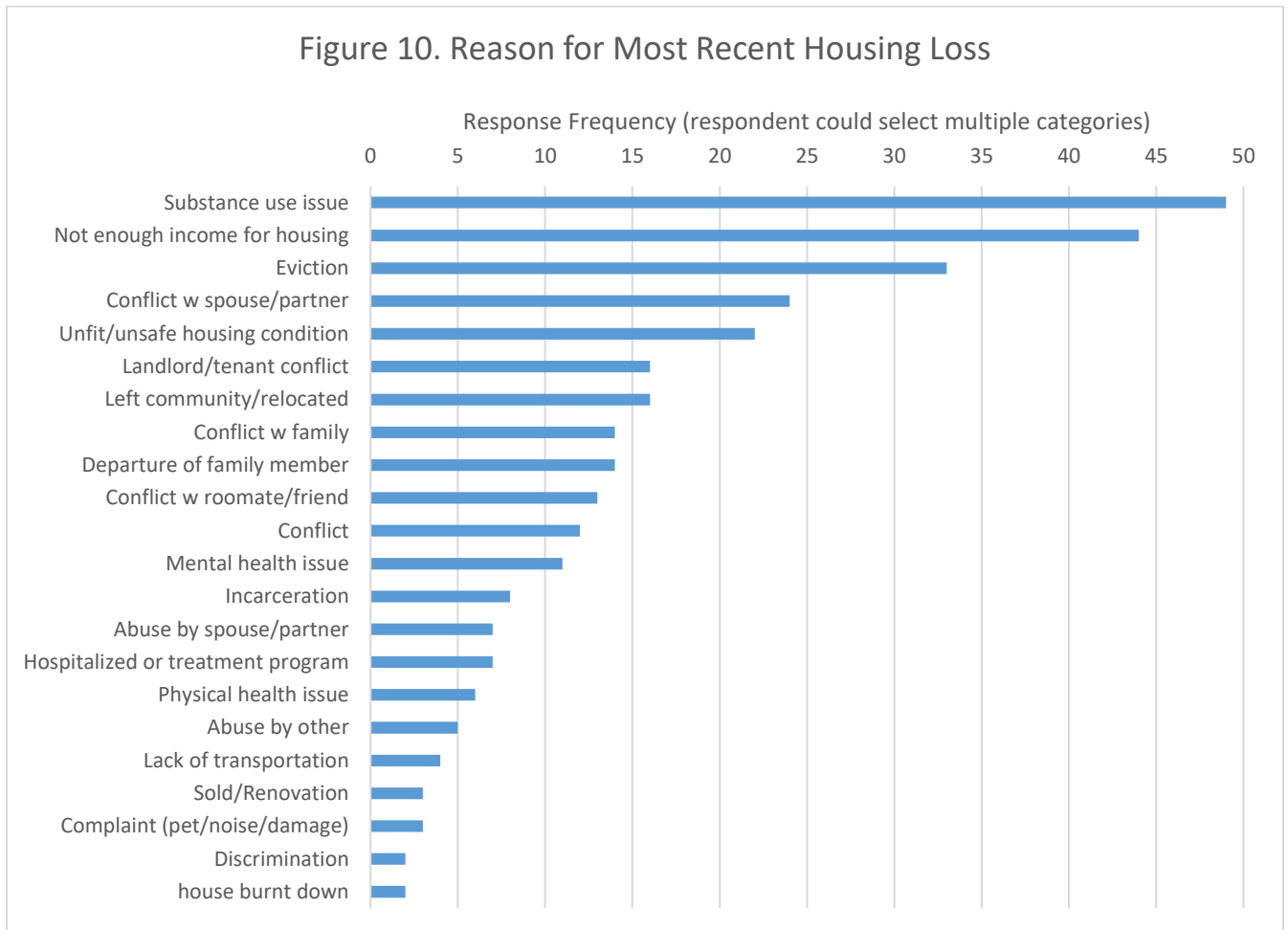
The first survey question asked was the screening question, "Where are you staying tonight?" The most common response was a homeless shelter at 38% (n=96), followed by unsheltered public space at 20% (n=52) and encampment at 14% (n=35). It is important to note that responses here do not translate directly to Administrative data due to the timing of surveys happening several hours before the Administrative count at midnight. Some individuals surveyed inside the shelter provided response locations outside the shelter and those surveyed through outreach teams may have indicated their intention (e.g., to stay at a homeless shelter) but this may not have been the actual location they ended up staying in.



History of homelessness

The average age at which survey respondents indicated their first time experiencing homelessness was 27 years of age. Age of first homelessness ranged from infancy to 78 years of age (Standard Deviation (SD) = 13.7 years) highlighting the diversity of experiences of homelessness among this population. The average number of days spent homeless in the past

year was 254 days (range: 2 to 365 days; SD = 137 days), excluding those who indicated 'no past year homelessness' due to staying in a transitional housing facility. On average, these individuals indicated 1.8 different times they had experienced homelessness in the past year (ranging from 1 to 20 times; SD = 2.4). Respondents reported a variety of reasons for which they attribute their most recent loss of housing as shown in Figure 10. The top reasons reported were substance use issue, lack of income for housing, eviction, conflict, unsafe/unfit housing, relocation, departure of a family member, mental health issues, incarceration, and experiencing abuse. About 9% of respondents indicated that COVID-19 had contributed to their most recent housing loss.



Chronic vs episodic homelessness

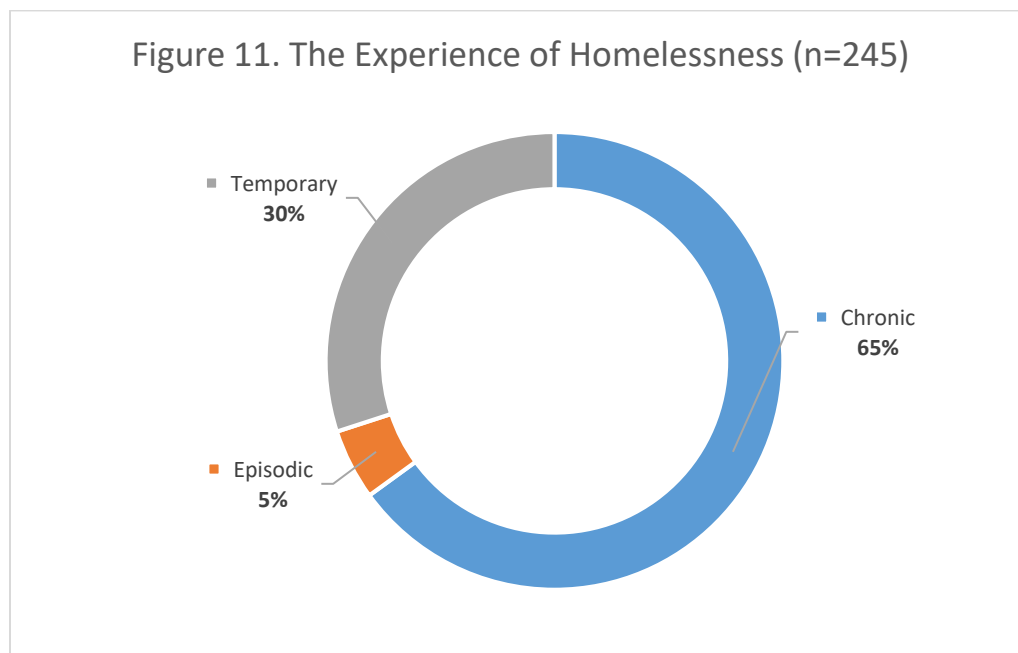
The majority of respondents indicated being homeless for a long period of time. To differentiate the chronicity of homelessness, the following categories are typically used:

Chronic homelessness: A period of six or more months of homelessness in the past year.

Episodic homelessness: Three or more distinct episodes of homelessness in the past year, adding up to less than six months.

Temporary homelessness: Less than six months and fewer than three episodes of homelessness over the past year.

Based on these definitions and excluding those who indicated 'no past year homelessness' due to staying in a transitional housing facility (n=11), 65% of participants were experiencing chronic homelessness and 5% were experiencing episodic homelessness. This shows that the experience of homelessness is overwhelmingly long and recurring. The remaining 30% of participants were experiencing temporary homelessness. These findings are quite similar to 2018 in which 62% were chronically homeless, 6% episodic, and 22% temporary (10% unknown).

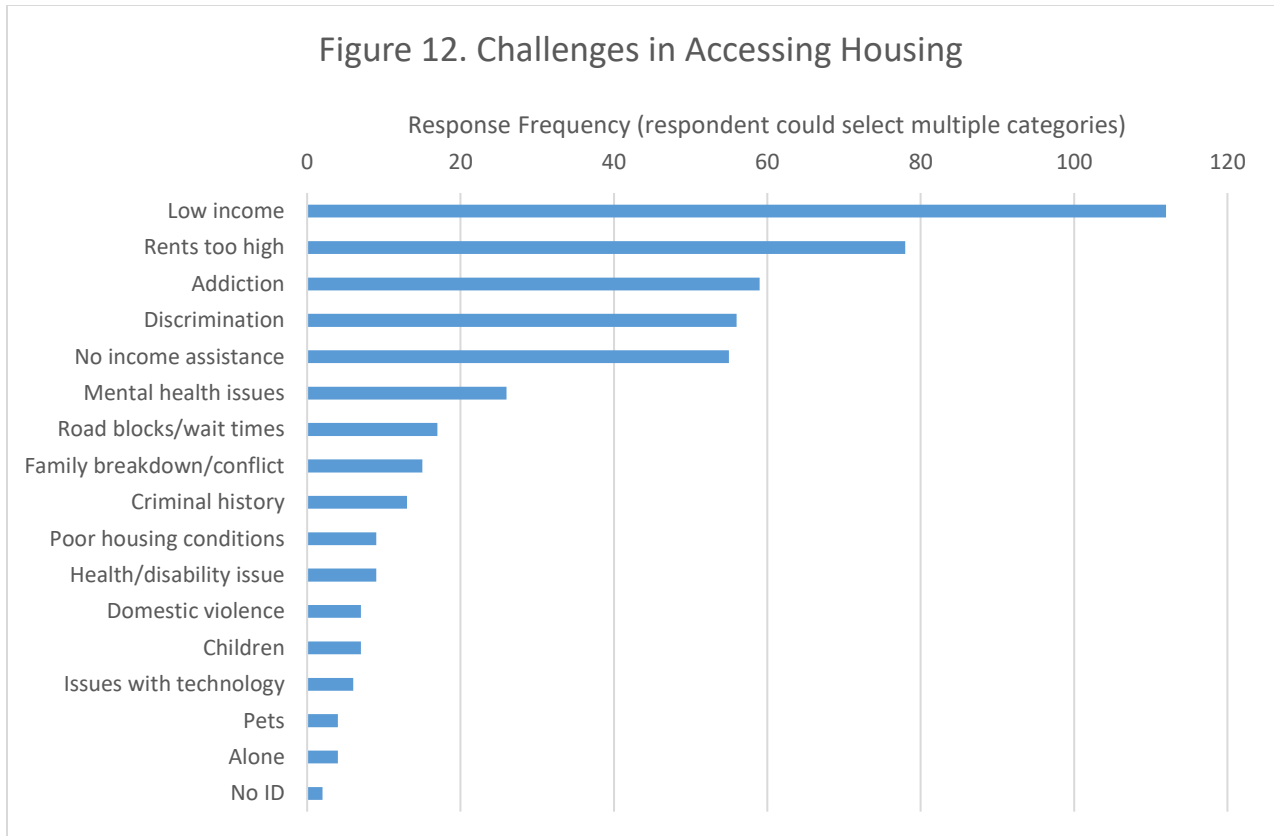


Emergency Shelter Usage

Of survey respondents, 70% indicated they had stayed in a homeless shelter in the past year. Of the 72 respondents who indicated that they had *not* stayed in a homeless shelter in the past year, 23 (32%) indicated it was because they had somewhere else to stay. The remaining 49 individuals indicated that the main reasons they had not stayed in a homeless shelter were due to fear of safety 51% (n=25), bed bugs or other pests 43% (n=21), cleanliness 22% (n=11), presence of substance use 16% (n=8), or it was crowded 14% (n=7). Other reasons indicated by one or two people were being turned away, banned, lacking transportation, having too many bags of possessions, theft, loudness, and pride.

Challenges in Accessing Housing

Only seven individuals (2.7%) did not want or didn't know if they wanted permanent housing. The most common challenges to finding housing as shown in Figure 12 were low income, rent being too high, addiction issues, discrimination, no income assistance, and mental health issues.

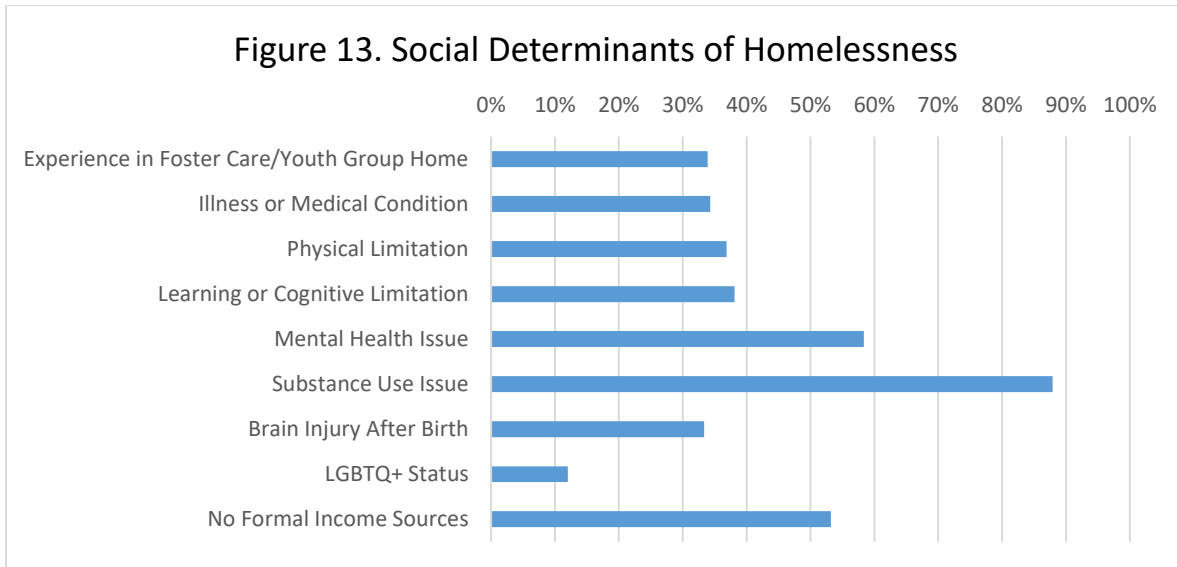


Migration into Lethbridge

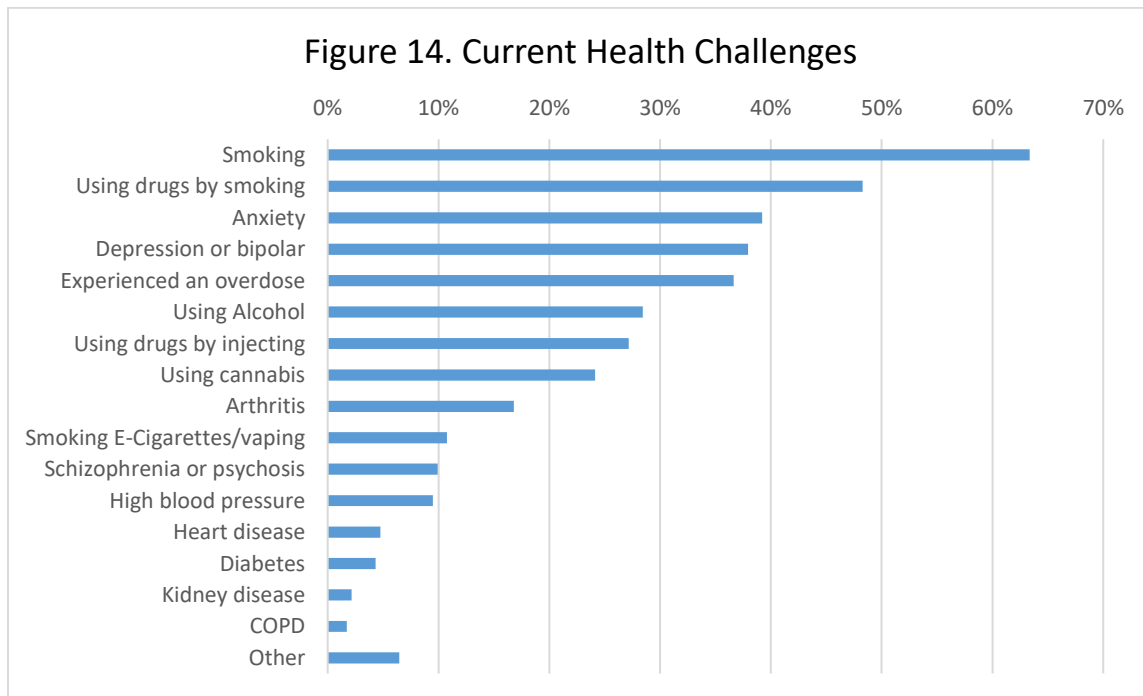
Of survey respondents, 25% indicated that they have always lived in Lethbridge and an additional 41% indicated they have lived here for more than 5 years or don't know how long. Of the 84 individuals (33%) who have moved to Lethbridge within the past 5 years, 1 had immigrated to Canada, 2 had come from British Columbia, 3 from Saskatchewan, 69 from somewhere in Alberta, and 9 were unknown. The main reasons these individuals moved to Lethbridge in the past 5 years were to access services and supports (40%), their family moved here or to visit friends/family (21%), for employment or school (10%), to access emergency shelter (7%), to find housing (6%), fear for safety (4%), and other personal reasons or don't know (12%).

Social Determinants

Homelessness is associated with many health inequities that are the result of accumulated adverse social, economic, and health conditions. Of those who answered health-related survey questions, it is not surprising to see many indicating the following adversities as shown in Figure 13.



When asked about specific current health challenges, the following health-specific challenges were identified as shown in Figure 14.



Support Services Identified

A follow-up question was asked about the participant's interest in accessing certain medical services related to some of the health challenges listed above. Of those who indicated the current usage of drugs by smoking or injecting, 67% indicated a desire for help with their drug addiction and 47% for access to medical detox services. Of those with current mental health issues, 61% indicated a desire to access mental health services. It is unclear from the way questions were asked what proportion are already accessing these services, but overall, approximately half or more of survey respondents who answered these questions indicated they were experiencing difficulties and might access these services if they were readily available to this population.

CONCLUSION

The 2022 Lethbridge PiT Count was a collaborative effort undertaken by the City of Lethbridge, the 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness, and local homeless-serving service providers. A total of 454 individuals were enumerated as experiencing both unsheltered and sheltered homelessness in Lethbridge. This represents a two-fold increase since the last full count in 2018, with the majority of the increase reporting from the number of unsheltered individuals. The Administrative data indicates similar numbers in terms of facility usage across the years 2018, 2021, and 2022. However, the number of emergency and transitional housing spaces has not increased at a pace to meet the needs of our community members experiencing homelessness.

The results from the survey data indicate very broad experiences of homelessness in terms of history and current experiences of homelessness. The average age that individuals are entering into homelessness is 27 years old. They are then, on average, experiencing 1.8 times of homelessness per year. Overall, men were over-represented compared to females. Of unsheltered and sheltered individuals, 51% self-identified as Indigenous. This is a significant over-representation of Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness when, according to 2021 Census data⁴, only 6.6% of Lethbridge residents self-identify as Indigenous. When you consider only those counted as being unsheltered, the number of self-identified Indigenous individuals climbs to 72%. This is similar to what was reported in the 2018 PiT Count (73%), indicating further work is needed in supporting the specific needs and barriers to housing for our Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness. Among the top reasons reported for losing housing were substance use/mental health issues, lack of income for housing, eviction, conflict, or unsafe/unfit housing. The top challenges to finding housing were low income/rent too high, addiction/mental health issues, discrimination, and no income assistance. A vast majority of respondents (97%) expressed a desire to get into permanent

⁴ 2021 Census Profile, City of Lethbridge. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Lethbridge&DGUIDlist=2021A00054802012&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

housing. Those that identified experiencing substance use and mental health challenges had a desire for access to wellness services. This indicates that with the appropriate choice and supports in place we can make a difference in the lives of these individuals and work towards our community goal of ending homelessness.

The findings from the 2022 PiT Count provide a snapshot of homelessness and some insight into the areas that need targeted attention. No single group or funding body can end homelessness on its own. It will take a collective effort – government, private and community-based sectors, volunteers, and researchers – working in a coordinated manner to address the current barriers this population experiences. We must find innovative solutions to improve outcomes for homeless individuals and the community of Lethbridge as a whole.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PiT COUNT

A homeless population count is not like conducting a census of households in which there are known fixed addresses for the vast majority of participants. Homelessness, by definition, involves housing instability, housing loss, or transience and, therefore, individuals living on the streets are not always easy to locate during a PiT Count or in a national Census. As a result, some of the following groups are under-represented in this report:

Unsheltered homeless: Persons staying outside, in a place not intended for human habitation and/or in a public or private space without consent or contract. This includes vehicle, tent, makeshift shelter, bus shelter, or abandoned building. As is common for research with marginalized populations, it is difficult to engage the most vulnerable individuals. It is also impossible to cover every corner of the city and volunteers were instructed to not enter private property, abandoned buildings, or go inside tents to verify number of individuals.

Hidden homelessness: Individuals living temporarily with others without legal protection, guarantee of continued residency, or prospects of permanent housing (e.g., couch surfing). This population is considered 'hidden' because they may not be accessing homeless supports or services despite not being adequately housed and as a result do not show up within the homeless-serving agency data. The PiT Count is not designed to measure the extent of hidden homelessness in a community, but some individuals surveyed did report staying with friends or family which provides some useful information about the experience of hidden homelessness in our community. Nationally, it is estimated that three people would be considered unhoused for every one person counted experiencing homelessness.⁵ Hidden homelessness represented 4.2% of the number of homeless individuals counted in Lethbridge on September 27, but the true number is likely higher.

⁵ Homeless Hub: Hidden Homelessness. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/hidden-homelessness>

While the benefits of the PiT Count outweigh its limitations, it is important to acknowledge these limitations and strive for improvement. The key limitations include:

- The count inherently undercounts the homeless population (particularly the groups identified above). Therefore, it represents the minimum number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a single day.
- It is a snapshot of homelessness on one particular day and does not provide information on system use throughout the year, including the seasonal variation that impacts an individual's options and choices for where they will stay.
- Not all areas of the city can be covered and the count focused on areas where homeless individuals are known to frequent or stay.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness may not wish to be seen or counted.
- Administrative data relies on service provider reports and staff capacity to administer surveys, which may contain errors or missing data.
- A web-based database was used to collect survey information and there were reports of technical issues among volunteers entering information. To minimize this impact, each volunteer was provided paper copies of surveys as a backup resource.
- While best efforts were made to optimize the survey design, there were database limitations on the ability to edit questions or core question ordering. Volunteer feedback indicated that question order, language, and response options would have improved data quality in some instances.