



Strathcona County

2020 Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project

Community Report

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About This Report

This project is funded in part 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 2020 Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project took place on the traditional territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8.

Strathcona County’s Estimation Count occurred on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional meeting grounds, gathering place, and travelling route to the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene and Nakota Sioux. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose footsteps have marked these territories for centuries. The RDN also recognizes the direct connection between homelessness and colonization¹, and it is our hope that this project provides one small step towards righting wrongs.

Rural Development Network

Lead Data Analyst	Managing Editor	Project Manager	Executive Director
Azam Khattak	Scott Travis	Julia Juco	Dee Ann Benard

Data Specialists

- Adam Letal
- Alana Tollenaar
- Brady Bailey
- Daniel Waring
- Hashim Khattak
- Julia Orlova
- Katelyn Paccagnan
- Sarah Nocente
- Sydni Zastre
- Tannis Serben
- Victor Eng

Acknowledgement

Coordinating Organizations

- Strathcona County Family and Community Services

List of partner organizations

altView Foundation	Robin Hood Association
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton	SAFFRON Centre
Boys & Girls Club of Strathcona County	Sherwood Park Alliance Church
Brittany Lane Housing Co-operative	Sherwood Park Strathcona Primary Care Network
Community Adult Learning and Literacy Society	Strathcona County Food Bank
County Clothes-Line Foundation	Strathcona County Health Centre
Davidson Creek Housing Co-operative	Strathcona County Library
Government of Alberta - Addiction & Mental Health	Strathcona County
Government of Alberta - Children, Youth & Families	Recreation, Parks and Culture
Heartland Alliance Church	RCMP and Enforcement Services
Heartland Housing Foundation	Transit
Hope in Strathcona	Trinity Baptist Church
Parents Empowering Parents	YESS—Youth Empowerment & Support Services
R.C.M.P.	

This report and the information within was made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front line staff at participating service agencies across the Strathcona County area for their tireless efforts during this challenging time.

Executive Summary

In November 2020, Strathcona County participated in a large-scale effort to estimate housing and service needs across 25 rural communities in the province

Funded by Reaching Home, the Government of Canada's official homelessness strategy, the Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimations' Project (Estimations' Project) was led by the Rural Development Network (RDN) following the methodology outlined in the "Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness".

Homelessness and housing insecurity in rural areas is critically underreported, and this lack of data makes it difficult to understand its nature, causes and the actions required to address it. The data gap limits the ability of communities to advocate for the resources they need to support residents. There is also a connection between rural and urban homelessness that is not well-addressed in narratives about homelessness prevention and reduction. A better understanding of rural homelessness and housing insecurity will contribute to ending homelessness in all areas.

This project provides essential information on the housing experiences and needs of residents, including those at risk of, or experiencing, housing insecurity and homelessness. This will be the first homeless estimate in Strathcona County and will create a baseline of data to track future trends.

Strathcona County partnered with community organizations to prepare and coordinate the local count. Local organizations invited residents accessing support services during a consecutive 30-day period to fill out a 30-question survey on residents' housing experience. While the survey was publicly

available, it was targeted to residents at risk of, or experiencing housing insecurity.

Surveys were intended to gather a holistic view of the interlocking needs that affect an individual's ability to access/maintain safe, stable housing, which includes their ability to access services and resources within the community.

Strathcona County's data was collected through paper and online surveys, where respondents had the choice to complete the survey by themselves or with assistance from staff. 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges to a process that relies on interactions between residents and local service agencies. Although alternative survey delivery methods were employed (online options, etc), this may have hindered the participation rate.

Out of 126 people surveyed, 37 (29.4%) were found to be living in situations defined as 'housing-insecure'.

There were 39 dependents and 38 adults that live with housing insecure respondents. The survey identified 114 individuals within Strathcona County that are living in insecure housing conditions.

The most common factors affecting respondents' current living situation were: "I don't make enough money", "I can't afford rent/mortgage payments", "I lost my job", "Mental health issues", and "Illness/Medical condition".

Housing-insecure respondents were highly educated: 55.7% had a post-secondary diploma or degree (including trades). According to the most recent national census, 46,235 (47.1%) of a total of 98,044² Strathcona County residents have a post-secondary diploma or degree¹, a similar proportion. This suggests that the types of respondents included in the survey are those who are reflected in the community profile, and largely are not outliers in the community.

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.

The results of the survey provide a window into experiences of housing insecurity in Strathcona County. The survey results are not intended to be a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity in the community, but rather to provide a representation of local need and service utilization.

¹ *The National Census identifies post-secondary qualifications as "university certificate, diploma, or degree, as well as apprenticeship/trades, diploma, certificate, etc.";*

Definitions

“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 Homelessness⁴

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 2020 questionnaire to determine respondents' housing security. Refer to Appendix A for full questionnaire.

The accompanying typology³ identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

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.

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.

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

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)'s Core Housing Need

Acceptable housing and core housing need

A household is in core housing need if its housing does not meet one or more of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax income to access acceptable local housing.

Acceptable housing is adequate in condition, suitable in size, and affordable.

- **Adequate housing** does not require any major repairs, according to residents. Major repairs include those to defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings.
- **Suitable housing** has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of resident households, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements. Enough bedrooms based on NOS requirements means one bedroom for each cohabiting adult couple; lone parent; unattached household member age 18 or older; same-sex pair of children under age 18; and additional boy or girl in the family, unless there are two opposite sex children under 5 years of age, in which case they are expected to share a bedroom. A household of one individual can occupy a bachelor unit (i.e., a unit with no bedroom).
- **Affordable housing** costs less than 30% of before-tax household income. For renters, shelter costs include, as applicable, rent and payments for electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services. For owners, shelter costs include, as applicable, mortgage payments (principal and interest), property taxes, condominium fees, and payments for electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services.

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. Experiences 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, and often leverage the relationships around them for support.

The 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, which limits the ability of rural communities to advocate for better resources for their residents in greatest need. The method of estimating housing insecurity in urban areas, the Point-in-Time (PiT) count, is not suited to rural and remote areas, where large service areas can be difficult to cover and housing insecurity is less visible. The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective, and addresses the difficulties that come with conducting standard 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 service delivery within the community.

Methodology & Data Collection

The methodology employed in the 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 RDN. In this model, service agencies invite clients accessing services to participate in a survey on their housing experience. This approach leverages existing infrastructure (service agencies such as Family and Community Services, libraries, Friendship Centres, churches, food banks etc.) within the community to connect with individuals who may be at risk of, or experiencing, housing insecurity. Due to the sensitivity and the associated stigma surrounding homelessness and housing insecurity, this method relies on the relationships that service providers have established and cultivated over time with their clients to ensure respondents feel comfortable and safe at all times during the survey process.

The current survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definition of homelessness and housing insecurity. However the term "homelessness" was not emphasized in the survey, primarily because of the misunderstanding of the term and the stigma associated with it. Instead, the survey was advertised as a better way to understand the housing and support services needed within the community. By re-framing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage a range of participants to take the survey.

Previous findings suggest that individuals are often reluctant to label themselves as either 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.

Some individuals who do not consider themselves to be housing-insecure may underreport their circumstances and be objectively experiencing housing insecurity, based on national definitions.

Insecure Housing is when a person experiences difficulty paying rent, spends a major portion of the household income on housing, frequently moves, lives in overcrowded conditions, or doubles up with friends and relatives.

Process

To align and coordinate the process throughout the 25 communities, Strathcona County took part in training sessions held by the RDN. Partners were trained on the objectives, needs, and overall goal of the project, which was to collect information on housing and service needs from individuals accessing local services.

Emphasis during training was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing their informed consent. During these training sessions, resources were provided to improve outreach for both community members and potential agency partners. Training also covered various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive

manner, and prioritized addressing individuals' reasons for visiting the service agency before offering the survey.

The survey was promoted through various communication channels including on the County website, social media and targeted communications to community associations and groups, interagency networks, non-profits and other local organizations.

Strathcona County's data was collected through paper and online surveys, where respondents had the choice to complete the survey by themselves or with assistance from staff. Surveys were administered over the Family and Community Services call line and community partners were encouraged to refer residents experiencing housing insecurity to the call line to access additional supports and complete the survey. An additional step characterized as "known location counts" included staff visiting locations that act as informal residences for individuals experiencing homelessness to provide care packages and the survey. Known location counts were conducted by Strathcona County on November 23 and November 27.

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. It's important to note that due to exclusion of non-responses and skipped questions, subtotals and percentages may not exactly reflect absolute totals.

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

Limitations

The results of the survey provide a window into experiences of housing

insecurity in Strathcona County. The survey results are not intended to be a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity in the community, but rather to provide a representation of local need and service utilization.

Survey responses will not be reflective of all residents experiencing housing insecurity. Participating in the survey was voluntary, and accessing services was not contingent on survey completion. Residents experiencing housing insecurity may not have connected with a participating service agency during the designated 30-day collection period, particularly given the ongoing pandemic. Some service agencies may have promoted the survey rather than administering it on the spot, given the urgency of the services they provide and the length of time required to complete the survey. The survey itself was also conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and although alternative survey delivery methods were employed (online options, etc), it is likely that this hindered the participation rate. As a result, although trends and highlights of the data are very informative, this report presents a limited picture of the service needs and housing insecurity in the community as a whole.

The data found in this report is survey data. There are no significance values, p-values, tests, or inferential statistics of any sort within this report. It is therefore not RDN's intention with this report to:

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

The RDN encourages individual community members and organizations 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.

“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 Perspectives⁵

Survey Results

Across the participating agencies, 126 people were surveyed. Of those, 49 completed paper surveys, and 77 responded through an online survey. A copy of the survey questions used can be found on ruraldevelopment.ca.

Support Services

The results in this section outline results for all respondents who completed a survey, regardless of their housing security. This was done to capture overall service needs of service participants in Strathcona County across partner organizations that participated in the Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation project.

All survey respondents (n=126) were asked about where they most often sought services, and what kind of services they needed during their visits to local service providers. Taking into account the nature of interlocking needs, respondents were able to provide multiple responses (see Table 1).

Table 1: Main reason(s) for visiting the office today	# of respondents
Health and wellness	24
Family/parenting	18
Basic Needs	16
Financial	16
Support services	15
Transportation needs	9
Crisis financial support	3
Legal	3
COVID-19 assistance	2

Table 1 - Table of reasons for respondents' visit to the service agency (multiple responses possible)

Respondents primarily sought services in Sherwood Park, however residents also accessed services elsewhere in the County, in Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan and elsewhere in the region.

Of the options provided, the top three types of support services sought by all survey respondents were “Health and Wellness Support” (24), “Family/ Parenting Support” (18), and “Basic Needs Support” (16).

Respondents were then asked to specify the main reason for their visit in an open response field. Due to the freeform structure of the question, answers varied but the most common keywords are listed in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Word Cloud of the most common responses to the “Primary Reason” for visiting the service agency

When asked about the perceived socio-economic opportunities available within the community, most respondents felt that the community provided enough free or accessible recreation and social opportunities, sufficient social services, while most respondents felt that the community can do better at providing accessible, affordable housing (see Table 2).

Does the community provide enough:	Yes	No	Not Sure
Employment Opportunities?	36 (30.8%)	30 (25.6%)	51 (43.5%)
Free or Accessible Recreation and Social Opportunities?	58 (49.2%)	29 (24.5%)	31 (26.2%)
Sufficient Social Services?	54 (46.2%)	18 (15.3%)	45 (38.5%)
Accessible Affordable Housing?	17 (14.3%)	53 (44.5%)	49 (41.1%)

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

Housing Needs

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 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.

After analysis, there are approximately **37 respondents (29.4% of total)** whose housing conditions are considered to be 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.

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	66
I rent the apartment I'm currently in	32
I live in accommodations provided by my employer	2
I live in a house that is owned/rented out by the Band	0
I share a house/apartment with roommates	5
I live in a house/apartment that I share with family/dependents ¹	47
I find it difficult to pay rent and I spend more than a third of my monthly income on my housing	27
I live in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.)	10
There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house I'm in	4
I live in supported housing (e.g. Housing First)	3
I stayed in a medical/detox/rehabilitation facility	0
I slept in a friend's/family house because I had no other place to stay	3
I stayed in a jail/prison/remand centre	0
I stayed at a women's/domestic violence shelter	0
I stayed with someone I didn't know because I had no other place to stay	1
I slept in a shelter	0
I slept in a makeshift shelter, vehicle, tent, or shack	2
I slept in a public space (sidewalks, park benches, bus shelter, etc.)	1

¹ Responses underneath the bolded line are living/shelter conditions that are indicators of housing insecurity.

18 of the total 126 respondents who self-reported that their housing situation is secure, objectively live in insecure housing situations. 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.

Of all surveyed respondents, 4 (19.0%) respondents stated they had once stayed or are currently staying in foster care or youth group home.

Finally, respondents were asked how long they have been staying in their current living arrangements. Their responses can be seen in Figure 3.

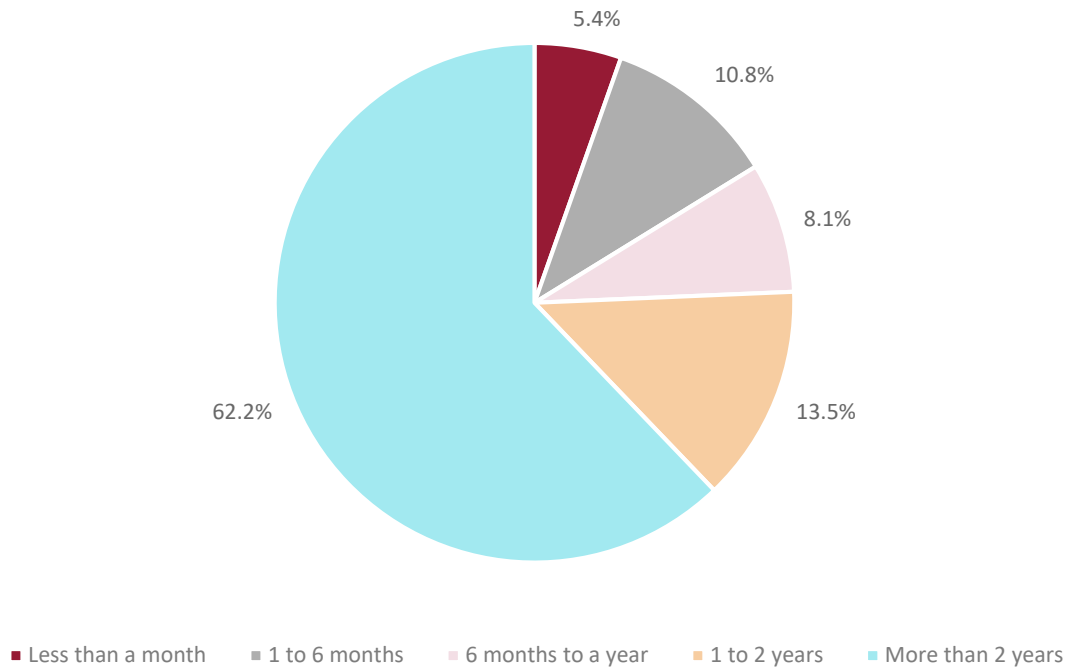


Figure 3 - Respondents answer the question “how long have you been staying in your current living arrangements?”

Reasons for Housing Insecurity

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) (Table 4).

Table 4 – “Why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?”¹

Objectively
Housing Insecure
respondents

I don't make enough money	14
I can't afford rent/mortgage payments	11
I lost my job	8
Illness/Medical condition	5
Mental health issues	5
Physical disability	2
COVID-19-related	4
My rent went up	3
Mental disability	2
Conflict	3
My house needs major repairs (mould, etc.)	5
Domestic/Family violence	0
Lack of Transportation	2
Spouse/Partner lost their job	3
Family rejection	1
Prefer not to answer	0

¹ 8 respondents who answered “Yes” when asked if their housing situations is unstable do not meet the criteria to objectively identify them as housing insecure.

Table 4 – Respondents answer the question “why do you feel your housing situation is insecure?”

Respondents who were found to be objectively living in insecure housing conditions identified the following reasons as main contributing factors to their living situations: **14 responses for “I don’t make enough money”; 11 for “I can’t afford rent/mortgage payments”; 8 for “I lost my job”; 5 for “Mental health issues”, and 5 for “Illness/Medical condition”.**

Respondents were then asked in an open response field to identify the main factor that affected their housing security, whether from the list they had seen previously, or from their own experience. While most of the responses can be seen under the Qualitative Data section of this report, the most common responses can be found on page 24.

Ownership vs Renting

On its own, home-ownership was an excluding factor when determining which respondents were housing-insecure. However, when coupled with responses such as “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.)”, and “There are not enough rooms for the number of people in the house” those respondents fall within CMHC’s definition of Core Housing Need⁶, and are considered to be housing-insecure. In the survey, we found that 24.3% of housing-insecure respondents were home-owners. Additionally, 40.5% of housing-insecure respondents were renters. The remaining respondents did not have a primary address, as shown in Table 3.

Seniors and Housing

3 individuals in housing-insecure households were above the age of 64. 66.6% of these households said they owned the home they lived in, 33.3% stated that their home required major repairs. This could categorize these households as being in Core Housing Need, according to the CMHC.

"House needs some major repairs. Furnace, windows, flooring from water damage, & paint repairs from water damage.

Carpets need replacing 30 yrs old. Shower needs replacement. Problems with plumbing.

"I don't make enough money."

"Cannot get a job due to mental health issues - don't qualify for assistance; rent went up"

"Affordable housing is not affordable if you are a working single parent."

"Not living in a healthy relationship. Spouse doesn't have any vision. Like to move out with two girls."

"Housing costing too much to run, not enough income; taxes way too high, so is utilities, cost of distribution 2-3 times more than product used."

"My checks go to rent; pay check to pay check"

"My rent/ utilities is not a good ratio to pay."

Demographics

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 (n=37).

Age, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Respondents were asked about their current age. The median age of individuals experiencing housing insecurity was 42. The reported age breakups can be seen in Figure 4.

The reported gender of housing-insecure respondents can be seen in Figure 5. 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. 4 (12.2%) housing insecure respondents identified as being non-heterosexual.

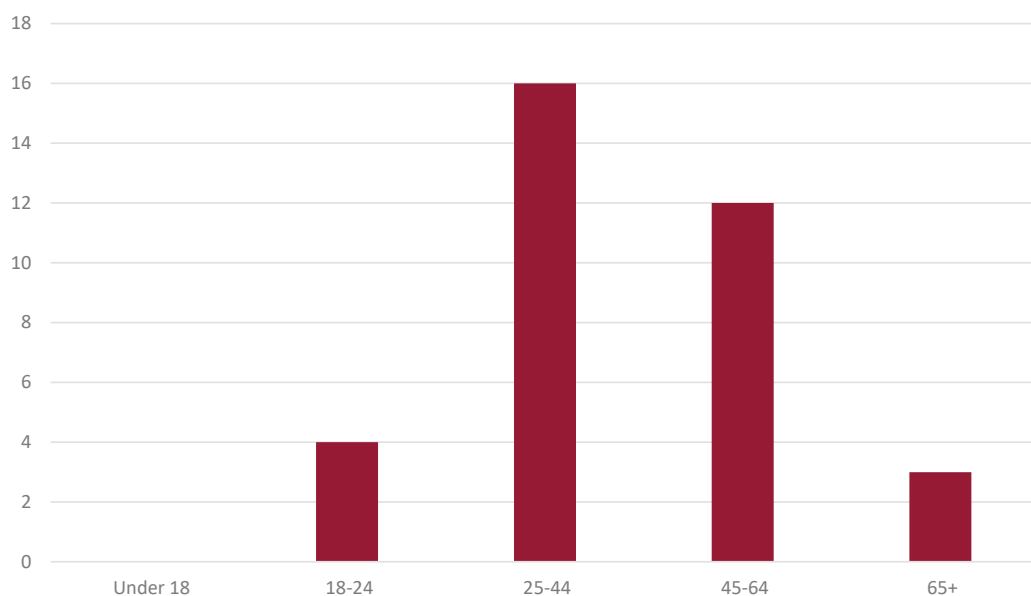


Figure 4 - Age of Respondents

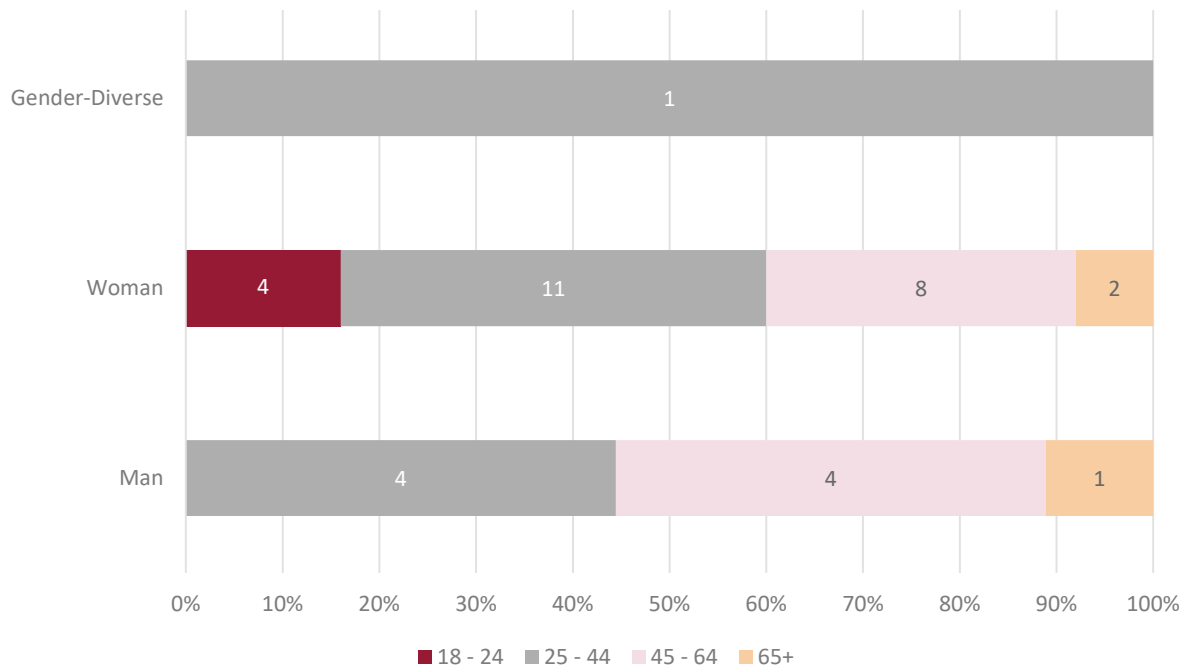


Figure 5 - Respondents answer the question “how do you describe your gender identity?”

Ethnicity and Migration Status

Of housing-insecure respondents surveyed who responded to the question, 25 (73.5%) identified as Caucasian, 3 identified their ethnicity as African, 2 as Asian, 1 as Hispanic/Latino, 1 as Indigenous, and 2 identified with other ethnicities. Of the respondent who identified as Indigenous, they identified themselves as Inuit (Figure 6).

The majority (81.1%) of respondents experiencing housing-insecurity were born in Canada. 2 respondents had arrived as Landed Immigrants, 2 as Permanent Residents, 1 as a Refugee Claimant, and 1 as a Temporary Foreign Worker.

The majority (89.2%) of respondents identified as Canadian Citizens, as shown in Figure 7.

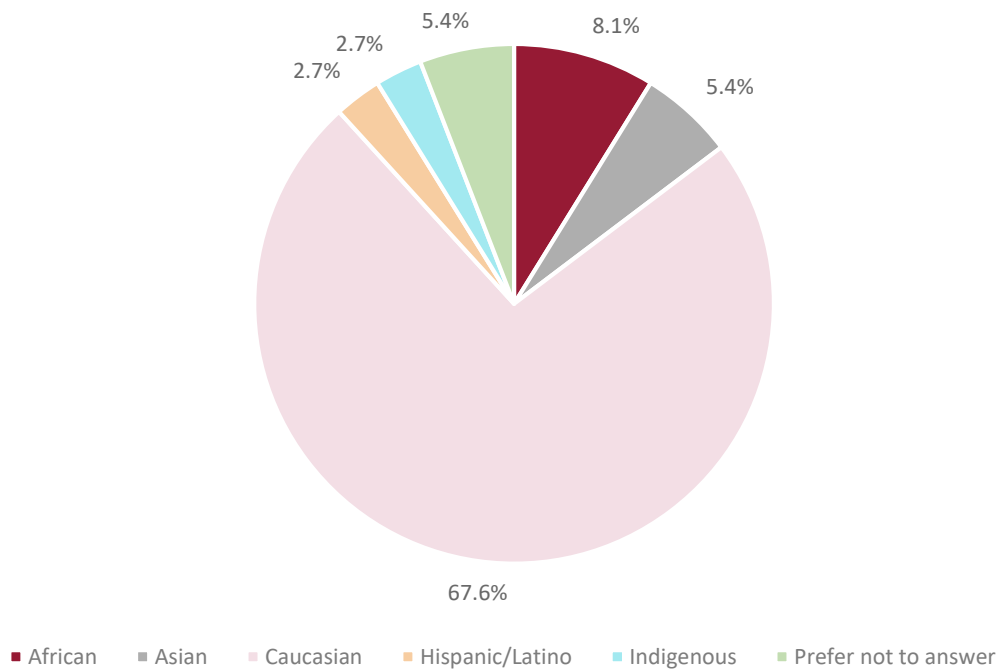


Figure 6 - Respondents answer the question “what ethnicity do you identify with?”; Other possible answers with no responses: Middle Eastern.

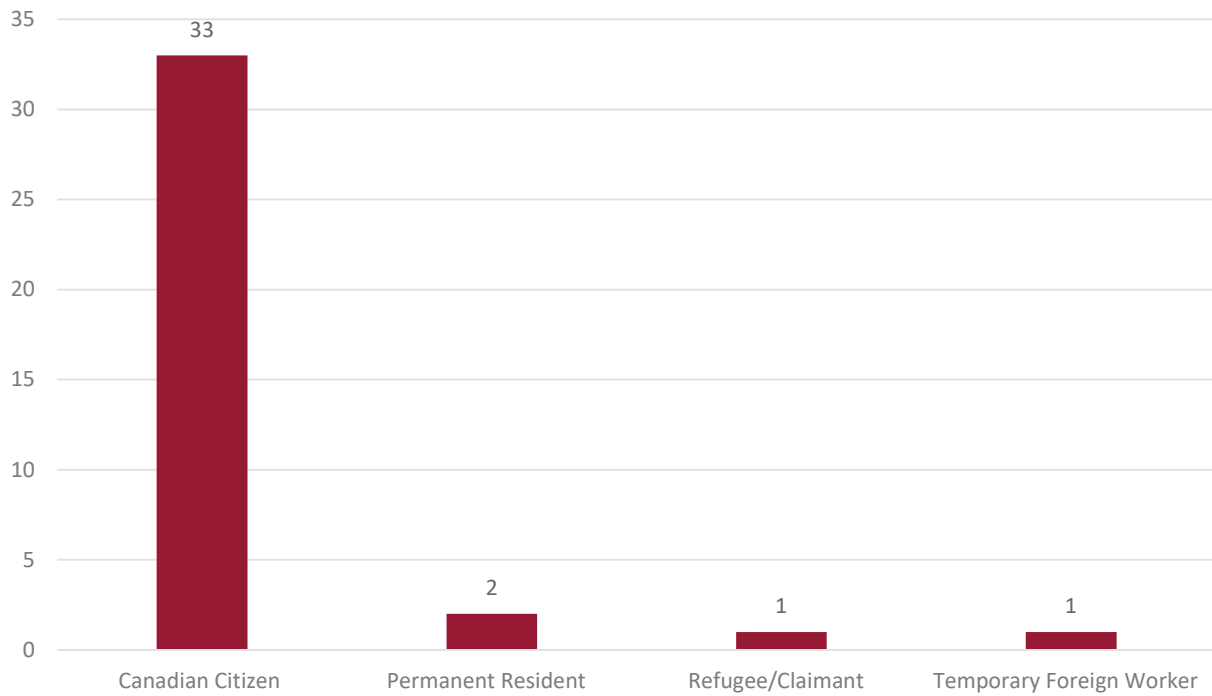


Figure 7 - Respondents answer the question “what is your current migration status?”; Other possible options with no responses: Economic Migrant Worker, Landed Immigrant, Student Visa, and Prefer not to answer.

Education

Table 5 – “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?”	# of total respondents	# of housing insecure respondents
College certificate or diploma	37	10
Post-secondary degree (bachelor's)	21	8
High school diploma or GED	20	6
Some post-secondary	19	1
Some grade school	7	4
Apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma	7	7
Some high school	5	0
Graduate/Professional Degree (Master's, PhD, MD, JD, etc.)	5	1
Prefer not to answer	4	0
Don't know	1	0

Table 5 - Respondents answer the question “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?”.

A significant proportion (55.7%) of all housing insecure respondents indicate that they’ve completed a college certificate/diploma, a post-secondary degree/a trade certificate/diploma/graduate degree. This is followed by respondents who completed a High school diploma or their GED (15.9%). Detailed responses can be seen in Table 5.

Household Makeup

The survey included questions regarding household or family members who are currently sharing accommodations with each respondent. Experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness for children and youth contributes to toxic stress, which impacts brain development and can increase health risks across the lifespan.

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.

24 (64.9%) of housing-insecure respondents were living with dependents under the age of 18. Of those, 7 had one dependent, 7 had two, 2 had three, 3 had four or more, and 5 responded “other”, for a total of at least 39 dependents in the community sharing living conditions with those living in housing-insecure conditions.

For respondents that listed out the number of dependents staying with them, 15.0% of listed dependents were between 0 and 4 years of age, 35.0% were between 5 and 9, 42.5% were between 10 and 14, and 7.5% were between 15 and 17. There were slightly more boys (55.2%) than girls (44.8%) as dependents.

Some housing-insecure respondents reported that they had other adults living with them. The total number of adults sharing respondents’ living situation was 38, an average of 1 per respondent. The relationships of these cohabitants can be found in Figure 8.

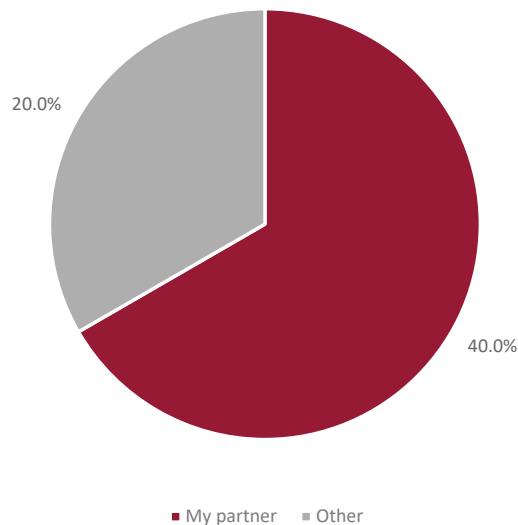


Figure 8 - Co-habitant relationships to housing-insecure respondents. Other possible options with no responses: My parent(s), My adult children, My extended family, My co-workers, There are no other adults staying with me, Prefer not to answer.

Shelter Services

Of respondents experiencing housing insecurity, none reported accessing a shelter within the past year. Of respondents who needed a shelter but did not access shelter services within the past year, the following reasons were provided (Table 6).

It is important to note that Strathcona County has limited shelter services in the community, and no shelters that are universally accessible. Those who wish to access a shelter may need to leave the community and would not be represented in the data.

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	27
I didn't feel safe	3
Reason not listed	3
No shelters in my area	1
Health concerns (bed bugs, dirty, etc.)	1
Prefer not to answer	1

Table 6 - Respondents answer the question "If you needed a shelter in the past year and didn't access one, what were the reasons?"; Other possible answers with no responses: The shelter was full, Hours of operation, Lack of disability accommodations, Lack of transportation, No pets allowed, Separation from family member/partner.

Community Residency

Respondents were asked to indicate where they currently reside. Figure 9 displays those responses, weighted by frequency.

Respondents were asked about how long they have been part of the community. 16.2% of respondents facing housing insecurity reported that they have always lived in the community (Figure 10).



Figure 9 - Word Cloud of responses to “where do you currently reside?”

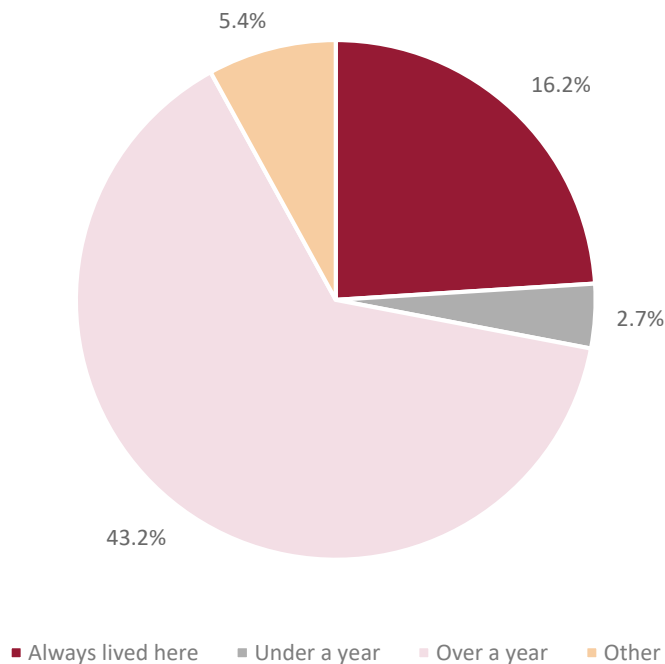


Figure 10 - Respondents answer the question “How long have you lived in this community?” Other possible options with no responses: Prefer not to answer, Other.

Of those who moved to the community at some point, Table 7 describes the primary reasons for the move.

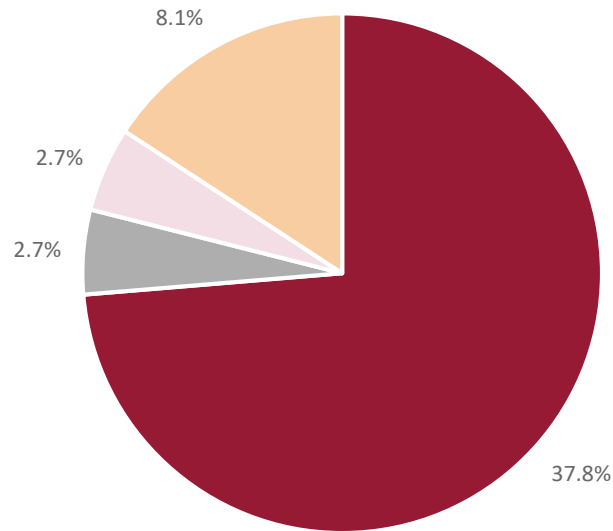
Of those who had moved to the community at some point, Figure 11 describes where they had resided previously.

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. 29.7% of those facing housing insecurity have not moved in the past year. Of respondents who had moved in the past year, 8.1% had moved 1-2 times, and 2.7% moved 3-6 times (Figure 12).

Respondents were also asked if they would have stayed in their previous community if they had better access to services or programs. 3.2% of respondents said “Yes”, while 48.4% said “No”.

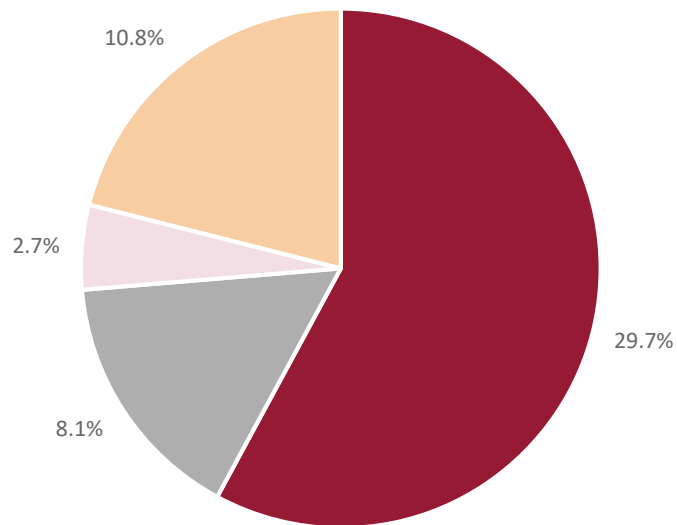
Table 7 – “What is the main reason you came to this community?”	# of respondents
To start a job	4
To access services/supports	3
To find housing	3
My family moved here	3
To visit family/friends	2
To look for work	1
To attend school	1
To move in with spouse/partner	1
Prefer not to answer	1
Other	5

Table 7 - Respondents answer the question “what is the main reason you came to this community?”;



■ Another Community in the Province ■ Another Country ■ Prefer not to answer ■ Does not apply to me

Figure 11 - Respondents answer the question “Where did you live before you came to this community?”; Other possible options with no responses: A First Nations Community, A Métis Settlement, An Inuit Community, Another Province.



■ I have not moved in the past 12 months ■ 1 to 2 times ■ 3 to 6 times ■ Does not apply to me

Figure 12 - Respondents answer the question “How many times have you moved in the past 12 months?”;

Employment and Income Sources

Of respondents who are experiencing housing insecurity, 20 (54.1%) reported being employed in some capacity. 11 (55.0%) of those employed were working full-time, 5 (25.0%) part-time, and 1 was working casually with no set schedule. These respondents reported being employed in the following industries (Table 8).

Military/Emergency Service

Out of all respondents experiencing housing insecurity, 1 identified as a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Table 8 – “If employed, “which area do you work in?”	# of respondents
Health	4
Retail/Personal Services	4
Not Listed	4
Human/Social Services	3
Education	2
Oil and Gas	1

“Table 8 – “If employed, “which area do you work in?” Other possible options with no responses: Agriculture, Finance, Forestry, Food and Beverage/Restaurant, Hunting/Trapping, Marketing, Technology, Tourism, Prefer not to answer.

Sources of Income

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

19 people facing housing-insecurity reported employment as their main source of income. Sources of income varied, and respondents were encouraged to select additional sources of income as it applied to them, shown below (Table 9).

Table 8 - "What are your sources of income?"	# of respondents
Employment	19
Child and Family Tax Benefits	15
GST refunds	13
Money from family and friends	8
Employment Insurance	7
Informal income (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, etc.)	7
My partner/spouse's income	5
Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB)	5
Income assistance	5
Alimony/Child Support	4
Seniors Benefits (CPP, OAS, GIS, etc.)	4
Not Listed	2
Disability Benefits	1
Student loans	1

Table 9 - Respondents answer the question "What are your sources of income?"; Other possible answers with no responses were: Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), Veteran's Benefits, Prefer not to answer.

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.

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

- Affordable housing is not affordable if you are a working single parent
- Behind on bills due to being very ill
- Can't afford mortgage payment
- Cannot get a job due to mental health issues, don't qualify for assistance rent went up
- Cant afford rent
- Covid 19
- House needs some major repairs. Furnace, windows, flooring from water damage, & paint repairs from water damage. Carpets need replacing 30 yrs old. Shower needs replacement. Problems with plumbing.
- Household income
- Housing costing to much to run, not enough income, taxes way too high, so is utilities, cost of distribution 2-3 times more than product used.
- I don't make enough money
- I have a temporary job that is going to expire in a month if not extended
- In the past month, i had to leave the house (rented apartment) i had with my spouse due to drug abuse/family violence
- My checks go to rent pay check to pay check
- My rent/utilities is not a good ratio to pay
- Physical disability
- Relationship with partner not working out
- Rent always increases each year

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 a “typical” respondent facing housing insecurity.

In the case of Strathcona County, this turns out to be a woman, in her 40s, who has lived in the community for over a year. She finds it difficult to pay rent and feels like she spends more than a third of her monthly income on housing. She lives in housing that needs major repairs (heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof, etc.). She is employed, and there is a 62% chance she has at least one dependent sharing her living situation.

The true diversity of the respondents is of course illustrated in the Survey Results section.

Conclusion

This report provides a summary of primary data collected by service agencies in Strathcona County throughout November 2020. It is an overview of the needs and factors that affect housing security for individuals who accessed services during the survey period.

This project was coordinated in the midst of a global pandemic where in-person services offered by organizations has been severely reduced. Strathcona County’s participation represents a unique set of data that provides insight into the resiliency and strength of individuals even in times of crisis.

The intention of this report is to provide means for agencies and leadership to determine their community's needs. It is the first step to understanding homelessness and housing instability in Strathcona County.

Disclaimer

The data and information in the data set provided here are intended for use by persons possessing technical skill and knowledge in data management and analysis. While the data is provided in good faith and to the best of RDN's knowledge, RDN does not commit to it being updated.

While every effort is made to ensure data quality and integrity, the data is provided "as is". The accuracy of any external user's statistical analysis and any reported findings are not the responsibility of RDN. Nothing arising from the data should be taken to constitute RDN's professional advice or as a formal recommendation.

Endnotes

1 Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

2 Statistics Canada. (2016). *Census Profile, 2016 Census - Strathcona County, Specialized municipality [Census subdivision], Alberta and Canada [Country]*. [online] Available at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CS-D&Code1=4811052&Geo2=PR&Data=Count&B1=All> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

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info@ruraldevelopment.ca

11443 - 143 Street NW Edmonton, AB