



FINAL RURAL HOMELESSNESS
ESTIMATION PROJECT
REPORT 2019 (002)
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Final Report

STRATHMORE & AREA

RURAL HOMELESSNESS/UNSTABLE HOUSING ESTIMATION PROJECT

Background Information

In 2014, Schiff and Turner studied twenty (20) rural communities to develop a better understanding and context of rural homeless in Alberta. They did not find a single community without homelessness. What they found was that though there is small groups of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping in rural Alberta that it is more common to find people couch surfing, living in un-affordable housing, overcrowding, staying in hotels, and staying in in humane conditions.

(<http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/rural-alberta-homelessness.pdf>)

The Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is a partnership of nine Albertan colleges and universities, working together to support and enhance rural development. ARDN has three key pillars: vulnerable populations, workforce development and municipal sustainability. ARDN works to fill gaps and facilitate access to services in rural communities. ARDN helps achieve this by coordinating and integrating stakeholders and services to build capacity. (<https://www.ardn.ca/about-us/about>).

In 2017, the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) published a Step-By-Step Guide to Estimate Rural Homelessness. The Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) was funded by the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS, the Federal Government's National Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy) to organize rural homelessness counts across the province of Alberta in 2018-2019. The Town of Strathmore was one of the 21 Alberta Municipalities participating in what was one of the largest coordinated rural homelessness data collection projects to ever be completed.

What is Homelessness?

“Homelessness is the situation of an individual or family without stable, 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, stressful and distressing. Individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations. These various living situations include”: (Canada Homeless Hub: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/>).

- *Unsheltered: Absolutely homeless, living on the street or in places not intended for human habitation.*
- *Emergency Sheltered: People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness or family violence.*
- *Provisionally Accommodated: People with accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure.*
- *At Risk of Homelessness: People who are not yet homeless, but their current economic situation is precarious.*

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Why is it Necessary to Estimate Homelessness?

1. Track progress in reducing homelessness.
2. Direct public attention towards the homelessness issue.
3. Improve homelessness and housing agencies planning programs.
4. Inform local, provincial and federal policies.
5. Establish standards for performance measurement.
6. Provide data for the community and the service providers.
7. Help secure funding to improve resources to help people that are homeless.
8. Provide demographic information to identify where community resource are needed most.
9. Help target interventions for subpopulations experience higher levels of homelessness.
10. Apply for specific support based on the makeup of the local homeless population; for example, additional support for veterans, seniors or youth.

Project Timeline

1. **Application to participate:** To participate in the count, we were required to submit a proposal application with letters of support. We were successful in our application and received \$5000.00 to hire a project coordinator. The project Coordinator was hired in August 2018.
2. **Establish a Task Force:** Key service providers were invited to be part of the collaborative task force and encouraged to invite others to the table. Members include representation from the following organizations: Strathmore Legion, Wheatland County Foodbank, Strathmore Overnight Shelter Primary Care Network, AHS-Mental Health & Addiction, Wheatland Crisis Society, Strathmore Pregnancy Care Centre, Town of Strathmore Community & Social Development, Victim Services, Alberta Works/ Income Support, Foothills Community Immigrant Services, Gleichen Medical Clinic, Wheatland Housing Management Body, Strathmore Public Library.
3. **Determine the Purpose of the task Force:** The intent of the Task Force was to bring together community leaders that will build a regional coordinated response for those in unstable housing situations and/or those who are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless. The Rural Homeless Count is just one of the first initiatives of the task force.

The long-term goal is to provide education, identify resources and develop policy that will assist and reduce the number of individuals and families experiencing unstable housing situations and homelessness in our communities. Advocacy for low income, supportive and affordable housing along with streamlining services will be key in developing a roadmap as we collectively and strategically respond to this growing issue in our community.

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4. **Training/Understanding of Homelessness with Task force:** Common language, consistency and how to properly complete and report the survey data accuracy, referrals available, marketing and informing the community were discussed during a half day training session.
5. **The Estimation Count/Collect Data:** The survey is implementation timeline is 30 days. We chose October 1st to November 1st, 2018 for service providers to complete the surveys for each client/resident that visits their agency for support. Unfortunately, we were not able to collect the data that was originally thought we would collect due to the following reasons: Time commitment, Level of Understanding of the issue, Indigenous Communities and Indigenous Protocol, Lack of Coordinated Access, FOIP, HIA, physical and agency boundaries, Agency policies, old information (homeless camps), and client accessibility during this time frame.

We were informed that there are some homeless camps and that there is an average of up to 20 people sleeping outside. We developed an action plan with the assistance of the Town Protective Services Officers to visit these camps. Upon visiting the 6 sites, there was no active “homeless camps”. Protective services mentioned there have been some homeless clients in the past but only two that had come to mind. They also stated that the homeless clients that we typically see in Strathmore are very transient.

6. **Project Results:** These results are only a small ‘snapshot’ of the region. Service providers have shared that the numbers are much higher for those in unstable housing situations. The Following are the survey results:

- ▶ 55 total number of surveys completed
- ▶ 32 respondents live in Strathmore
- ▶ 9 respondents live in Wheatland County (Rural)
- ▶ 7 respondents live at Siksika Nation
- ▶ 7 respondents stated that they were transient (no fixed community/just passing though, etc)
- ▶ 43 were Housing Unstable (HU); 12 were Housing Stable (HS); only 75% of HU had lived in Strathmore longer than a year
- ▶ 21 respondents were Caucasian, 19 respondents were Indigenous, 8 respondents were Immigrant or Refugee, and 7 respondents preferred not to answer
- ▶ 12 respondents were Employed, 10 respondents had No Income, 28 respondents had Benefits, and 5 respondents Preferred not to answer
- ▶ 30 respondents were male, 23 respondents were female, and 2 preferred not to answer

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- ▶ Number of children living with HU respondents = 10 (Strathmore had 2,795 children in 2016; so just over 0.3%)
 - ▶ 3 Respondents served in the Canadian Military or Emergency Services
 - ▶ Responses for how long respondents have lived in the community were "years" at 53%, "always lived in the community" at 24% and "days" at 13%.
 - ▶ "Low Income" at 37%, "Addiction/Substance Use" at 20% and "Unable to Pay Rent or Mortgage" at 14% were identified as the top 3 reasons primary responsible for Housing Unstable (HU)
 - ▶ 36% of respondents indicated they were staying with family. Of those staying with family, 82% indicated they are staying with "Children", 29% with "Extended family", 24% with "Parents" and 12% with "Partner".
7. **Next Steps, Report, Evaluate:** Ongoing data analysis is being completed by ARDN from the municipalities that participated.

The Town of Strathmore was invited to present with ARDN at the FCSSAA Provincial Conference on November 28-30th, 2018 to share on our project successes and challenges.

The intent of the Task Force is to provide education, identify resources and develop policy that will assist and reduce the number of individuals and families experiencing unstable housing situations and homelessness in our communities. Advocacy for low income, supportive and affordable housing along with streamlining services will be key in developing a roadmap as we collectively and strategically respond to this growing issue in our community.

The Task Force has an opportunity to identify community service needs, build stronger partnership, provide community education, learn and share Indigenous Protocol best practices, develop coordinated access among service providers which includes supportive referrals and seek to a Regional Poverty Reduction Coalition.

The Town of Strathmore FCSS has been invited by ARDN to be part of the review committee for the Second Edition of the Step-By-Step Guide to Estimate Rural Homelessness. ARDN will publish The Town of Strathmore FCSS in the acknowledgment section of the guide.

The Town of Strathmore FCSS is proud to become a member of the Alberta Rural Coalition on Housing & Homelessness (ARCH2). ARCH2 is a multi-sectoral, province-wide coalition that was formed to address the challenges of housing and homelessness in rural Alberta. The coalition works to ensure common issues are identified, information is shared, and appropriate solutions are implemented to serve individuals that are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. It has representation from each geographical area of rural Alberta, and from a variety of stakeholder groups.

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Parallel to this report, the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is releasing its own report on data gathered from the same survey within the region.

The ARDN followed a strict, “self-report-only” model of identifying individuals who were facing housing instability. In addition to capturing those same individuals who described themselves as “housing unstable”, our report identified additional people who fall within the definition of housing instability, based on follow up questions that identify current living conditions.