

AIRDRIE'S 2024 HOUSELESSNESS ESTIMATION STUDY



Highlights Report

In spring 2024, the City of Airdrie, with expert guidance from the Rural Development Network, and support from participating service providers, conducted Airdrie's first ever Houselessness Estimation Study. The survey data, along with insights from front-line service providers in Airdrie, form the basis of this Highlights Report.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Airdrie is located on Treaty 7 territory. We acknowledge this land as the traditional home of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai, the Tsuut'ina Nation and Stoney-Nakoda Nations, including the Goodstoney, Chiniki, and Bearspaw, and Métis Nation of Alberta, District 4.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Housing security is a fundamental human right and is essential to the well-being of an individual and to building a sustainable and complete community. Given the Canada-wide housing and affordability crisis, communities across the country are experiencing sharp increases in housing insecurity and social service demand. Airdrie is no exception.

Airdrie's 2024 [Housing Needs Assessment](#) and the 2023 [Housing Landscape Opportunity Analysis](#) show that Airdrie is facing unprecedented pressure across the housing spectrum. While the City of Airdrie has done extensive research into the housing supply and need, and is actively working on affordable housing solutions outlined in the [2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan](#), the extent of "homelessness" and "hidden homelessness"¹ in Airdrie had not been previously investigated. To begin to more fully understand the housing needs across the entire housing continuum (see Figure 1) in Airdrie, the City commissioned the Rural Development Network (RDN) to conduct a Homelessness² Estimation Study. The purpose of the study was to begin to quantify homelessness in Airdrie; help determine what service gaps exist; and further inform the City's work on Airdrie's *2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan*.

FIGURE 1: THE HOUSING CONTINUUM



¹ "Hidden homelessness" refers to those who do not have a safe, stable or permanent place to live, and who may be couch surfing, living in crowded or unsuitable accommodations, including living in their vehicles.

² Housing advocates in Canada and other countries are using new terms to describe "homeless" individuals and "homelessness". This terminology seeks to offer greater dignity to people without stable or appropriate housing. While people without housing may lack the physical structure of a house, they are not necessarily without a "home" or connections to place, people, or community. To reflect this, new terms for homelessness include: "unhoused", "housing insecure", "houseless" or people experiencing "houselessness". Importantly, Indigenous homelessness is not simply defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully understood as a loss or breakdown of relationships between individuals, families, and/or communities and their land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities (Thistle, 2017). The City uses the terms "homelessness", "houselessness" and "housing insecurity" interchangeably throughout this report.

REPORT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Airdrie would like to acknowledge the RDN's leadership and guidance in this critically important research. Specifically, the RDN developed the Airdrie-specific Houselessness Estimation Survey based on their award-winning [Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness](#), trained local service providers on how to administer the survey, analyzed the data, and assembled the key findings presented within this *Highlights Report*.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS/HOUSELESSNESS?

For the purposes of this study, we employed the Canadian definition of the term “homelessness”:

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family 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. (Gaetz et al., 2012)

As per the definition above, homelessness or houselessness encompasses more than just people who are living on the street. Houselessness involves four types of living situations:

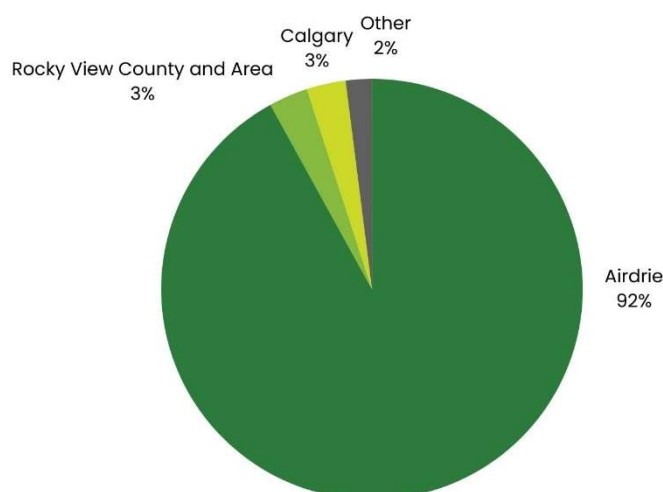
- **Unsheltered:** Living on the street, or in a place that is not secure or does not meet public health and safety standards (for example, living on sidewalks, in parks, alleyways, in abandoned buildings, or in a vehicle or garage).
- **Emergency Sheltered:** Staying in overnight emergency shelters as a result of homelessness/houselessness or domestic/family violence.
- **Provisionally Accommodated:** Living in a place that is temporary or lacking security (for example, couch-surfing, living in an RV or trailer, or living in transitional housing).
- **At Risk of Homelessness:** At-risk of losing current accommodations (for example, if you are unable to afford high rent, or in a housing unit on the verge of being condemned for health, by-law or safety violations, or living in an unsafe environment due to domestic/family violence).

THE HOUSELESSNESS ESTIMATION SURVEY

The *2024 Houselessness Estimation Survey*, conducted between March 11 and May 15, 2024, was a targeted, voluntary, and anonymous survey. The survey was administered by local service providers to housing insecure clients, as well as shared online.

A total of **166** Airdrie residents experiencing housing insecurity completed the survey. In addition, survey respondents also reported that another **173** dependent children (under the age of 18) and **191** adults were also living with them at the time of the survey. Survey results indicate that there were **530 housing insecure residents in Airdrie** during the survey period. Given that the “hidden homeless/houseless” population can be hard to reach, and that many housing insecure residents chose not to participate in the survey due to feeling overwhelmed, the 530 residents likely represents a conservative estimate of the housing insecure population in Airdrie. Nonetheless, the 166 respondent surveys represent information-rich cases which offer new and critical insights into the nature of housing insecurity, and characteristics of the population experiencing housing insecurity, in Airdrie. Figure 2 shows that the **92% of the 166 respondents**

FIGURE 2: BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS BY LOCATION.



were from Airdrie. Important to note is that 63% of respondents have lived in and around Airdrie for three or more years. This suggests that housing insecurity in Airdrie is mainly experienced by longer-term residents rather than by individuals from other communities only coming to Airdrie infrequently or to access services. Figure 3 below provides a detailed demographic breakdown of the 166 survey respondents.

FIGURE 3: DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS



At the time of the survey, **166 community members were housing insecure.**

67% identified as women, **30%** as men, **2%** as gender non-conforming, **1%** as trans-men, and **1%** were unsure of their gender identity.



Age Breakdown

15-24	14%
25-44	54%
45-64	25%
65+	7%

Sexual Orientation

- **82%** were straight
- **10%** were bisexual/pansexual
- **4%** were asexual
- **2%** were unsure of their orientation
- **1%** were lesbian/gay
- **1%** were two-spirit
- **1%** self-disclosed as queer

Indigenous Identity

11% were Indigenous

Métis	71%
First Nations	23%
Other Indigenous ancestry	6%

77% were white, while 26% were racialized

66%

were born in Canada while 34% immigrated to Canada.



- **3%** served in the Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), or emergency services:
 - **25%** served in the Canadian Armed Forces
 - **25%** served in emergency services
 - **50%** served in the RCMP

KEY FINDINGS

- During the enumeration period, **530** community members were experiencing housing insecurity in Airdrie. Of these community members:
 - **166** were survey respondents and identified as housing insecure
 - **173** were dependents under the age of 18, living with the survey respondents
 - **191** were adults, living with the survey respondents
- With **93%** of respondents falling between the ages of 15 and 64, this group consists of many people who belong to Airdrie's labour force.
- Notably, **55%** of respondents were employed at the time of the survey, with the majority employed full time.
- As outlined in Table 1 below, **34%** of respondents reported a household annual income of between \$22,001 and \$55,000 and **19%** of respondents reported a household annual income of between \$55,001 and \$88,000. This suggests that respondents who reported moderate income levels were experiencing housing insecurity, and again speaks to the spectrum of housing insecurity – respondents can and were making moderate income while unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and/or at risk of housing insecurity.

TABLE 1. SURVEY RESPONDENTS' REPORTED HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN 2023

Total Household Income in 2023	% of Respondents
Less than \$22,000	34%
Between \$22,001 and \$55,000	34%
Between \$55,001 and \$88,000	19%
Between \$88,001 and \$132,000	11%
More than \$132,001	2%

WHO IS EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSECURITY IN AIRDRIE?

Based on the survey data and findings from the service provider engagement sessions, five main groups of residents were identified as experiencing housing insecurity. These narratives speak to the lived and living experiences of some of the key groups facing houselessness in our community and the factors underlying their situations.

Women between the ages of 25 and 44 with children

These residents are staying in unsafe home environments, couch-surfing, or staying in shelters. Most of these women were fleeing domestic violence. Many were food insecure and struggled to access supports and services for their children. In some cases, youth (15-18 years old) had to couch surf with friends to avoid stays in emergency shelters with their mom and/or to avoid domestic violence/family conflict. These women faced multiple barriers to securing employment and a sustainable income, including childcare often falling solely on them; high cost of childcare and lack of childcare options in the community; time away from the workforce; and experiences of violence and trauma. Further, due to high legal costs associated with separation and divorce, lengthy delays in separating assets, and lack of affordable housing in Airdrie, many of these women and mothers were without the necessary resources to set up a new safe space for themselves and their children. It is common to see these women and mothers forced to relocate to larger urban centres to start over, removing children from their schools and community environments, and away from the family's natural supports.

Newcomers to Canada, mainly between the ages of 25 and 64, with children

These residents experienced a lack of available housing to accommodate their families' needs. Many found themselves living with extended family members, or in their car or RV. Many were food insecure and spent more than 30% of their monthly income on housing. Transportation was another identified barrier for newcomers. In some cases, newcomer residents walked over an hour in cold winter conditions or hot summer conditions to get food from the food bank. Similarly, language barriers were common when attempting to access supports and services to stabilize their housing situation, and securing a job was even more challenging. Further, some newcomers had experienced significant stress and trauma which made transitioning to a new environment and culture difficult even without the added stress of attempting to access affordable housing and stable employment.

Youth of all genders, between the ages of 15 and 24

Members of this group often reported coming from unstable homes, where they had already experienced housing insecurity, family conflict, and/or domestic violence. In some cases, youth are forced into housing insecure situations because their families were unable to find affordable housing with enough space to accommodate the entire family, younger children included. As a result, many of these youth end up couch surfing with friends, extended family, coworkers, and even strangers. Others choose to or are forced to leave their homes after experiencing family conflict or family violence. In every case, the experience of housing insecurity and how it came about, can be incredibly stressful to the point of impacting residents' mental health, feelings of security, and their ability to prepare for the next stages of life, including completing school, planning for post-secondary education, transitioning into the workforce, understanding how to process emotions, and even how to have healthy relationships.

Older adults, men and women aged 65+

These older adults often lived in inadequate housing that required major repairs. Relying solely on “seniors” benefits and/or their pension, older adults spent more than 30% of their monthly income (according to service providers, sometimes closer to 50%) on housing. Many also had health conditions and disabilities that made it challenging to secure employment to supplement their income, which, in turn, made finding adequate housing a challenge. Given the high cost of housing and difficulties securing stable employment, these residents often had to forgo buying food, medication, and other necessities due to a lack of income.

Single men between the ages of 25-44

These residents were unsheltered, living in their cars, RVs, or in hotels/motels. Given their experiences of being unsheltered, some of the respondents reported having substance use issues and regular interactions with the justice system. Some were able to secure seasonal employment during spring and summer months, but in colder months, had little to no access to an income, making securing housing difficult. Further, without adequate housing, securing and maintaining sustainable and long-term employment was not possible. Instead, many of these residents remained unsheltered such as living in their cars, RVs, or in hotels/motel.

The top three reasons for houselessness in Airdrie as reported by survey respondents:

1. **High housing costs.** *My rent/mortgage is too high for my current income.*
2. **Health challenges.** *Illness/medical condition, mental health concerns, and/or physical disability.*
3. **Low vacancy rates.** *There is almost no vacancy/no rentals available within the City.*

Reported living situations

Respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation by choosing which of a variety of provided statements best applied to them. Statements included, but were not limited to, “I slept in a vehicle”, “I slept in a hotel overnight because I had nowhere to go”, “I live in a house that needs major repairs”. Respondents were able to select more than one statement. To accurately represent what housing insecurity might look like for respondents over a month, all responses have been included and in Table 2 below. When considering the results, it's important to note that people experiencing housing insecurity often move in and out of their situation. Someone who was unsheltered one night may have been emergency sheltered or provisionally accommodated the next. As a result, we have highlighted every incidence of housing insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the complexities of housing insecurity in Airdrie.

TABLE 2. INCIDENCE OF HOUSING INSECURITY BY LIVING SITUATION CATEGORY

Living situation category	% of incidence in each category
Unsheltered	5%
Emergency Sheltered	1%
Provisionally Accommodated	25%
At Risk of Houselessness	69%

Respondents reported living in the following conditions

Respondents reported diverse experiences with housing insecurity in Airdrie, demonstrating that houselessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside.

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

- staying in violence against women shelters,
- staying in emergency shelters, and/or
- staying in makeshift shelters such as a vehicle, tent, or shack.

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

- staying in a hotel,
- staying with friends/family,
- staying with a stranger,
- staying in a home where they experienced violence because they had nowhere else to go,
- enduring unwanted sexual activity to have a place to stay,
- staying in a medical/detox facility or jail/prison/remand centre,
- living in accommodations provided by their employer,
- living in accommodations provided by a First Nation or Métis Settlement,
- staying in an RV/trailer, and/or
- staying in a home with unsafe conditions (e.g., exposed wiring, physical hazards, no electricity).

Respondents identified as **at risk of homelessness** reported:

- difficulty paying their rent or mortgage,
- spending more than 30% of their monthly income on housing,
- staying in a home needing major repairs (e.g., heating or plumbing problems, mould, leaky roof), and/or
- living in overcrowded accommodations with not enough bedrooms for the number of people staying in the unit.

Missing Household Amenities

Approximately **32%** of respondents (out of a total of 166 respondents) indicated that they lacked specific household necessities or “amenities” in their current housing situation. Table 3 below further details these missing household amenities.

TABLE 3. BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS’ MISSING HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES

Missing Household Amenities	% of respondents missing the identified amenities*
Cooking facilities	38%
Laundry facilities	36%
Fire protection (e.g., smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	34%
Sufficient and affordable heating	34%
Internet	26%
Safe drinking water	26%
Refrigeration	19%
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	15%
Electricity	13%

*Please note that because this question allowed respondents to select all responses that applied to them, the table does not total 100%.

Services accessed by survey respondents in Airdrie

The top three reasons respondents accessed services in Airdrie were for:

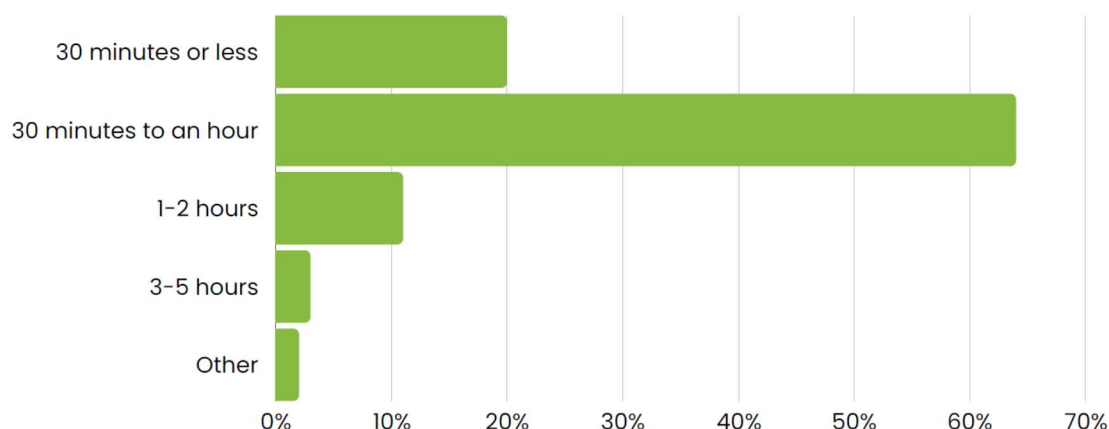
1. **Basic needs.** Food bank, clothing donations, public washrooms.
2. **Health and wellness.** Addictions support, mental health care, physical health care, spiritual or cultural well-being.
3. **Family/parenting services.** Childcare, parental resources, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals.

100% of respondents expressed the need for more housing and social services in Airdrie.

Services accessed by respondents outside of Airdrie

44% of respondents reported accessing services outside of Airdrie. Of the services accessed outside of Airdrie, most travelled one hour or less to access them as seen Figure 4 below.

FIGURE 4: DISTANCE RESPONDENTS TRAVELLED TO ACCESS SERVICES OUTSIDE OF AIRDRIE



In the survey, **25%** of 166 respondents reported needing emergency shelter services at some point in the past 12 months, but did not access them. The top three reasons for not accessing shelter services included: 1. No pet policy; 2. Right kind of shelter was not available; 3. Shelters were full.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SERVICE PROVIDER ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

In-person engagement sessions with several Airdrie service providers were held in May 2024. Further, three service providers submitted written input in lieu of attending the engagement sessions. Highlights from these Airdrie service provider engagement sessions are detailed below.

The top three reasons for housing insecurity in Airdrie include:

1. A lack of accessible and affordable housing.
2. Increasing underemployment and unemployment rates.
3. Domestic and intimate partner violence.

Barriers to accessing services in Airdrie include:

- Language differences
- Wait times for programming (including health and wellness services and financial supports)
- Lack of awareness of service offerings
- Transportation challenges (within Airdrie and to Calgary)
- Communication challenges (due to phone services being cut off)
- Pride (feeling too proud or ashamed to ask for help/support)

Gaps in services in Airdrie

Service providers indicated that housing availability and affordability were the main service gaps in Airdrie. Specifically, they highlighted the need for a hub for clients experiencing housing insecurity where they can access case management services and use bathing facilities, particularly during after-hours or on the weekends. Related, service providers indicated no programming or ability to do “wellness” checks with housing insecure residents. It was noted that doing “wellness” checks with housing insecure residents was outside of all participating service providers' organizational mandates, leaving a service gap in Airdrie. This type of holistic housing and hub service would likely lend itself to more prevention work, supporting housing insecure clients from becoming chronically housing insecure. Service providers also indicated a need for affordable and transitional housing to support housing insecure clients who are looking to transition back into the community after being unsheltered or emergency sheltered. It was also shared that Airdrie needed prevention for houselessness, a focus on long-term solutions, and the City to advocate on their behalf for structural changes.

Another service gap identified by service providers in Airdrie was the lack of childcare services, specifically affordable childcare. Service providers spoke to the difficulty for single parents and mothers to access childcare services and how prohibitive a lack of childcare is to a client's ability to stabilize their housing situation. Of the affordable childcare that exists in Airdrie, the wait list was over one year long at the time these engagement sessions were held.

OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED IN THE STUDY

This report aims to guide and support efforts to address housing insecurity in Airdrie by:

- Inspiring collaboration between service providers, community members, residents experiencing housing insecurity, and key decision-makers, including all levels of government, to address housing insecurity in the community.
- Emphasizing the need for systems navigation and increased social service delivery to support housing insecure residents.
- Continuing to build an understanding and awareness of housing insecurity in the community.
- Advocating for the importance of community engagement, including the need to engage with residents experiencing housing insecurity on decisions related to housing.
- Highlighting the feasibility of improving the quality of life for residents.
- Communicating the need to address housing insecurity in Airdrie.

Based on the findings outlined in this report, and recognizing the need to address housing insecurity, RDN has identified four opportunities to address housing insecurity in Airdrie moving forward:

1. Invest and commit to the targets and actions outlined in Airdrie's [2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan](#) and address emergency response service gaps in Airdrie.
2. Implement a Coordinated Access System or philosophy in Airdrie that prioritizes systems' navigation and wraparound services.
3. Engage in advocacy efforts to support the development of a more robust social services sector in Airdrie, including social service supports and transportation.
4. Continue to build community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity in Airdrie.

Successfully undertaking each of these opportunities can help address housing insecurity in the community and ultimately meet the City of Airdrie's vision of a "vibrant, caring community rich in urban amenities and opportunities for everyone" (City of Airdrie, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Housing security is a fundamental human right and is essential to the wellbeing of an individual and to building a sustainable and complete community. Residents in Airdrie and across the country have the right to accessible and affordable housing that meets their needs.

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

And maybe the most critical consideration of all: residents experiencing housing insecurity have the right to be part of the solutions to address housing insecurity. It is critical to continue to engage residents experiencing housing insecurity in conversations and activities geared toward addressing housing insecurity in Airdrie. This means designing activities that allow housing insecure residents the opportunity to participate, along with intentionally seeking out feedback from housing insecure residents throughout the process. Their input will be incredibly valuable in addressing housing insecurity in Airdrie.

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

From a community perspective, housing insecurity strains community resources, including health and wellness services, policing services, and social services. From an economic perspective, it is important to recognize that addressing housing insecurity benefits municipalities on many levels. Evidence-based research makes the case that investing in people experiencing housing insecurity improves the local economy (Cruz, 2022, July 8; Griffiths, 2023, August 29). Improvement in the local economy increases job opportunities, which, in turn, increases population growth, which then increases housing demand. Essentially, addressing housing insecurity can create and increase community investment. Consequently, community investment increases community resiliency and sustainability.

Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study is an important first research step in beginning to more fully understand residents' needs across the entire housing continuum. Importantly, this research provides the early foundation we need for continued planning, advocacy, and investment in multi-pronged solutions which support a community where all residents have safe, stable and affordable housing and an opportunity to thrive.

As current and robust social data supports effective planning for the future, the City will continue its efforts in social research to better understand what is needed to support a complete and sustainable community. This social research includes a social needs assessment and other locally commissioned and evidence-based reports.

We thank you.



CommunityLinks

*Strong Individuals
Strong Families
Strong Communities*



PROSPECT

Break barriers. Employ change.



Airdrie Houselessness Estimations Study

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