



Recent trends and new directions

What new data tell us about the state of homelessness in Canada and what gaps remain

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Outline



Nightly trends: New findings from the 2025 Point-in-Time Count Enumeration



Monthly trends: Monthly changes in the National Homelessness Indicators



Long-term trends: Shown in 20 years of National Shelter Study



Explaining trends: New research on structural factors



Missing trends: Persistent gaps and next steps





Nightly trends

**New findings from the 2025 PiT
Count Enumerations and how
trends differ by geography.**

A Snapshot of Homelessness

Everyone Counts 2025

- 75 communities conducted a PiT Count in 2025 covering every province and territory across Canada.

First stand-alone PiT Count enumeration (no survey)

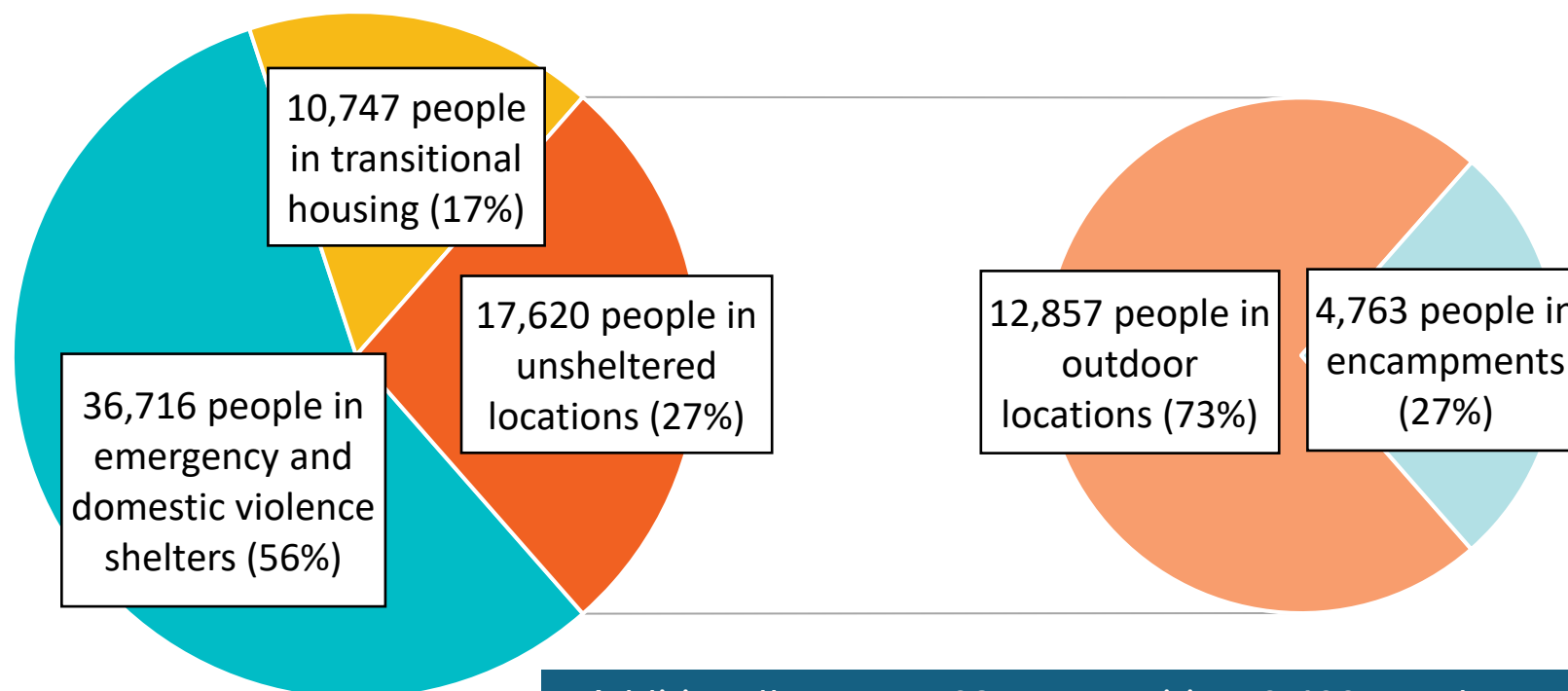
- Enumerations from shelters and transitional housing are determined by administrative data (or reports from shelters)
- Enumerations from encampments and other unsheltered locations collected by outreach teams or canvassing teams



Enumeration results

In 2025, over **65,000 people** experienced homelessness on a single night across 75 Canadian communities.

- Majority of people were staying in shelters (~56%);
- Among those staying in unsheltered locations over a quarter (27%) were staying in an encampment; and
- Rate of homelessness: ~22 people per 10,000 in population.



Additionally, among 62 communities, 6,466 people were enumerated staying in systems (e.g. correctional and health), facing imminent discharge to no fixed address.



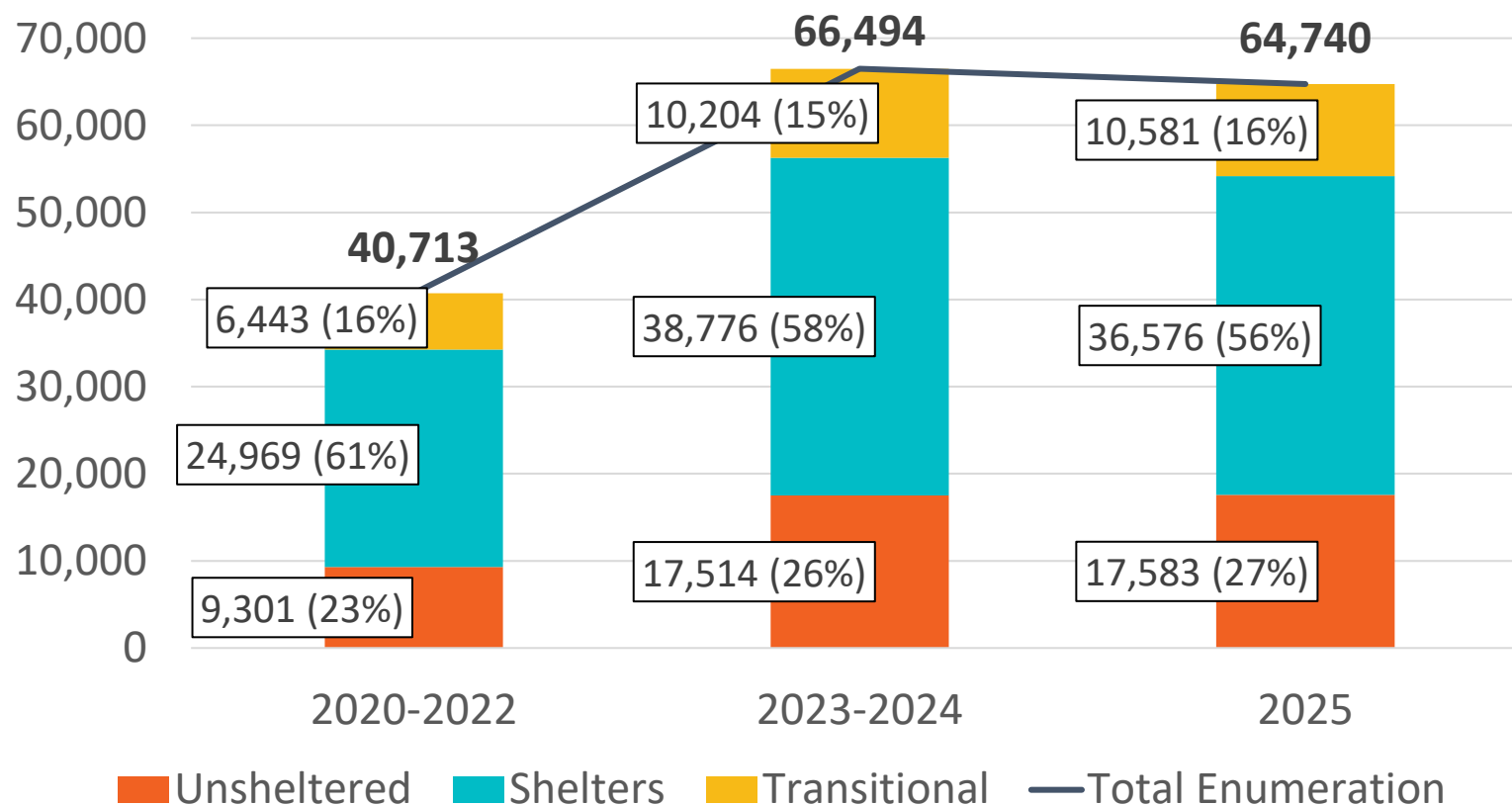
Trend over time

Homelessness has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in unsheltered locations and encampments, but stabilized between 2024 and 2025. Persisting high rates of homelessness highlight the need for expanded housing and support services.


In communities that participated in the past three counts, there was a **59% increase from 2020-2022**, including:

- 64% increase in transitional housing;
- 47% increase in shelters; and
- 89% increase in unsheltered areas.

72 communities participated in 3 consecutive counts



Context underlying changes

 **58%** of communities reported an increase in their enumerations since 2023–2024

Reasons for increases include:




Forest fires and building fires



Expanded capacity in homeless-serving sector resulting in increased access to shelters and transitional housing



Improved data collection and partnerships

 **42%** of communities reported a decrease in their enumerations since 2023–2024

Reasons for decreases include:



Increased supply of long-term supportive housing



Reclassification of transitional programs as long-term supportive housing



Successful implementation of community encampment response initiatives



Geographic patterns - Regions

Single-night rates of homelessness varied by region:



Western and Northern
28 people
per 10,000

Central
19 people
per 10,000

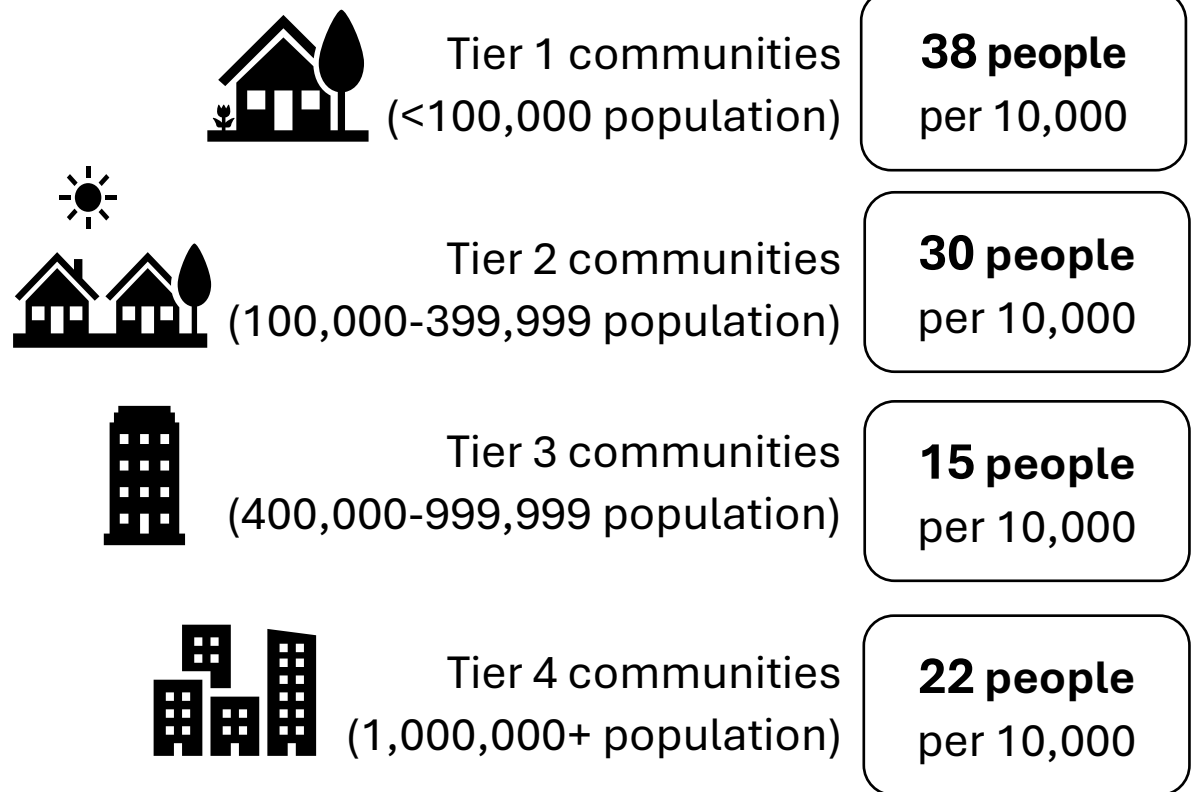
Atlantic
24 people
per 10,000

Change since 2024	Change since 2020-2022
+3.9%	+47%
-5.9%	+65%
-1.6%	+94%



Geographic patterns – Community size

Single-night rates of homelessness tended to decrease with community size, with the exception of the largest, most urbanized metropolitan areas.



Change since 2024	Change since 2020-2022
+1%	+60%
+13%	+76%
+6%	+83%
-10%	+46%





Monthly trends

**Changes in rates of homelessness
and chronic homelessness.**

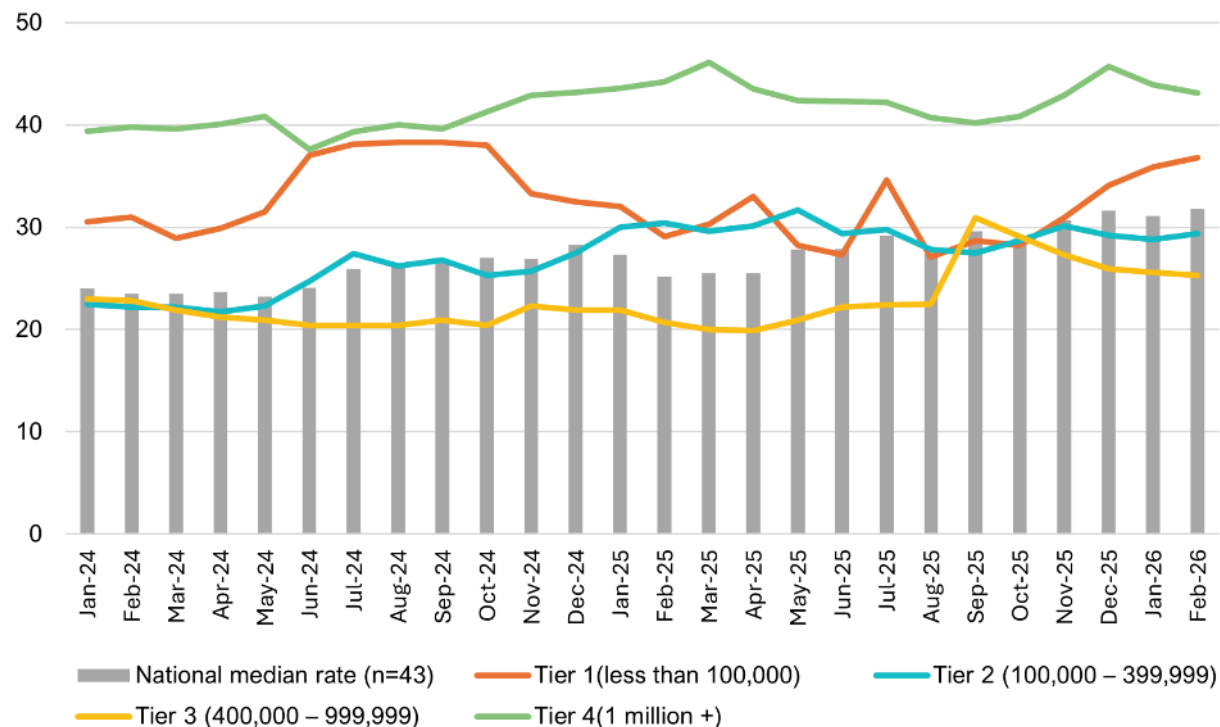
National Homelessness Indicators

Overall homelessness is defined as the number of unique individuals who experienced homelessness for at least one day during the reporting month.

The **most recent national median rate of overall homelessness** (Feb. 2026) is 31.8 per 10,000 people.

- The **national median** for overall homelessness ranged between 23.2 and 31.8. Rates continue to trend upwards.
- **Rates of overall homelessness are generally higher in tier 4** communities (populations over 1 million), although some smaller communities have among the highest rates, particularly in the North.

Median rates of Chronic Homelessness per 10,000 people
43 participating communities



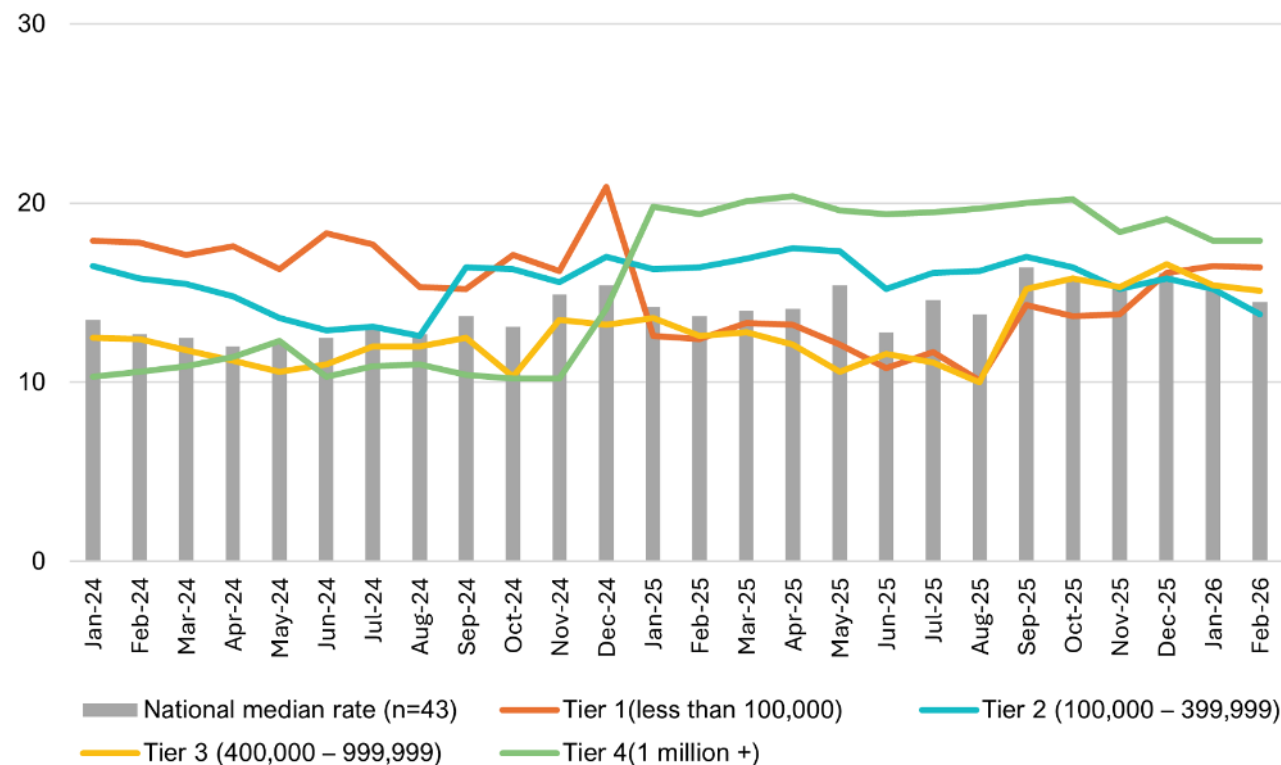
National Homelessness Indicators

Chronic homelessness is defined as the number of unique individuals who experienced homelessness for at least one day during the reporting month.

The **most recent national median rate of overall homelessness** (Feb. 2026) is 14.5 per 10,000 people.

- The **national median** for overall homelessness ranged between 12.0 and 16.4, with the highest rates reported through fall and winter 2025-26.
- **Rates of chronic homelessness are close among the tiers, although typically higher in tiers 1 and 4** communities, with populations under 100 thousand or over 1 million.

Median rates of Overall Homelessness per 10,000 people
43 participating communities





Long term trends

**What the National Shelter Study
tells us about changes in
homelessness over time.**

The National Shelter Study

- The National Shelter Study estimates the people who experience homelessness in shelters each year.
- The National Shelter Study covers the period from 2005 to 2024.
- The study focuses on shelter data because of our reliable access to it.
- 70% of the emergency shelter capacity is represented in our national database and the data continues to improve thanks to the efforts of community partners who continue to work towards coordinated access and quality data.



The National Shelter Study

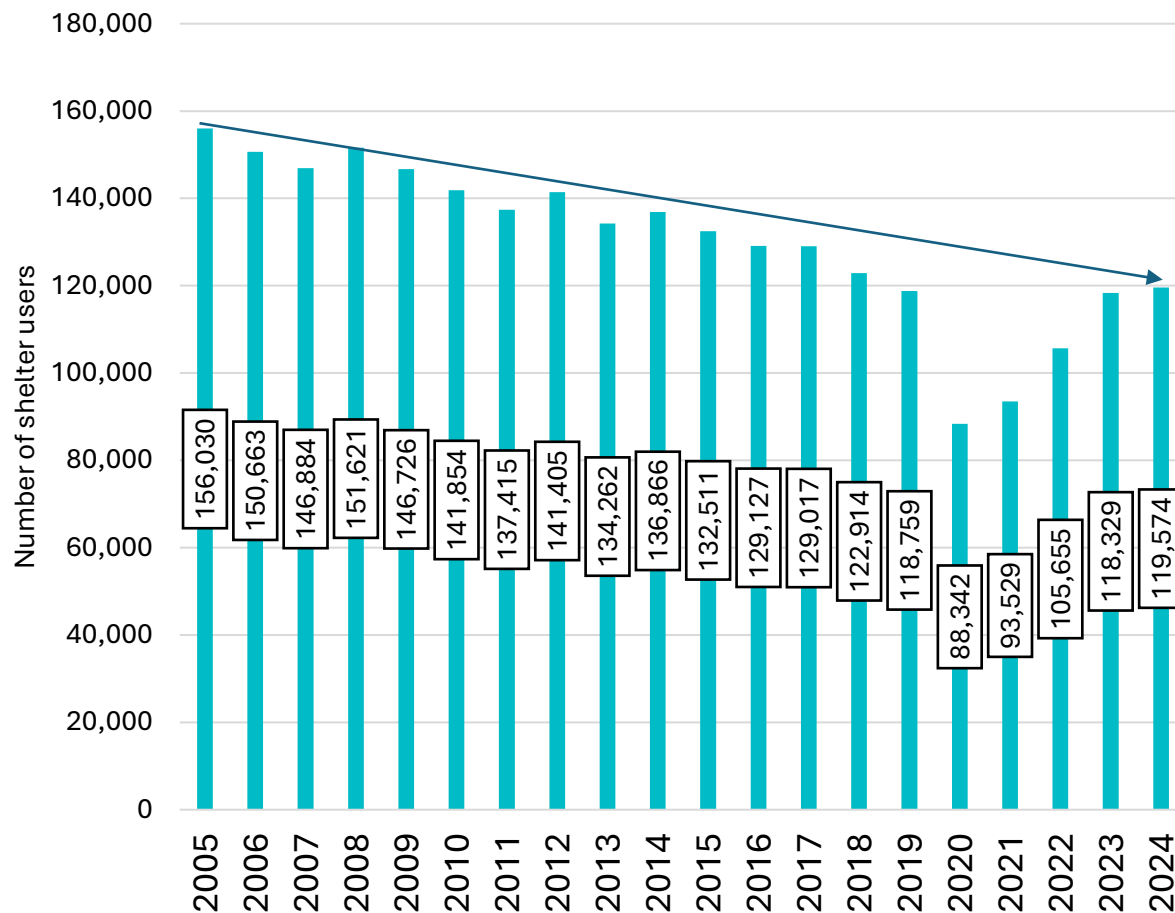
- The National Shelter Study employs a stratified cluster sample design, where the primary sampling units are emergency shelters.
- The study is designed to obtain accurate estimates of gender, age and other demographic characteristics at the national level.
- It also tracks occupancy rates at the national level to determine the overall pressure on the shelter system.
- This analysis is essential for a general understanding of homelessness trends in Canada.



Overall Shelter Use

In 2024, there were 36,400 fewer people who used shelters on an annual basis compared to 2005.

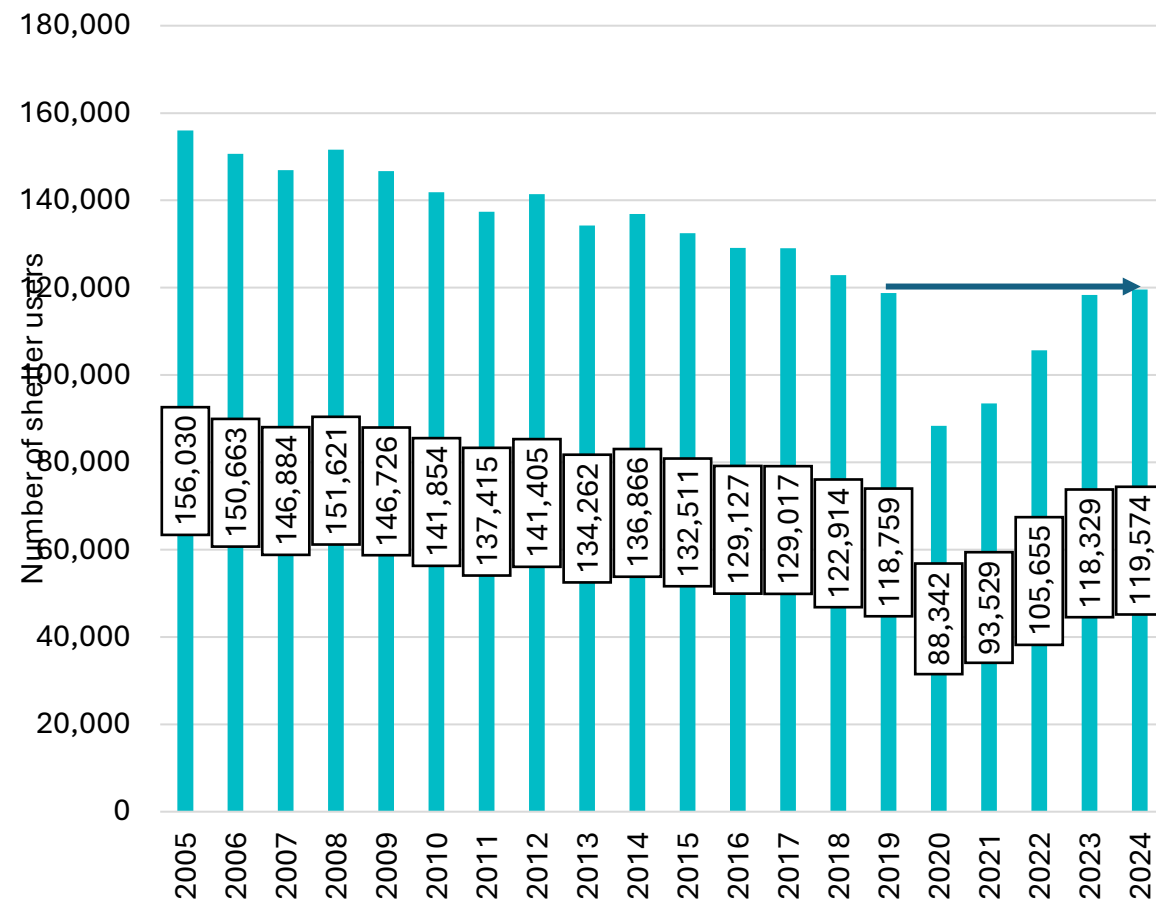
This is not because there are fewer shelters or beds than there were 20 years ago. Progress is being made in that fewer people experiencing homelessness in shelters on an annual basis.



Overall Shelter Use

The number of shelter users in 2024 is about the same as it was pre-covid (2019). In 2024, there were 119,574 shelter users compared to 118,759 in 2019.

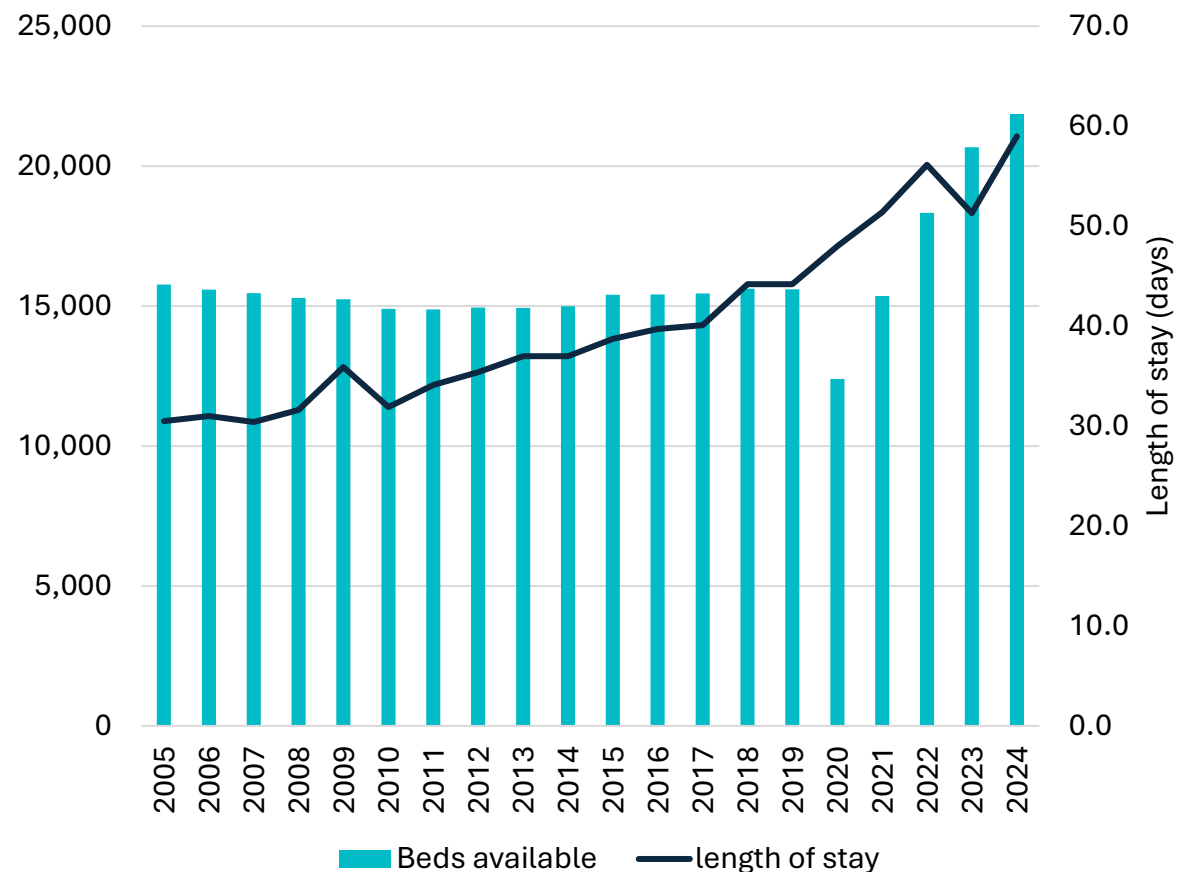
However, there are some major changes to **how** people use shelters.



Overall Shelter Use

We currently have the most emergency shelter beds ever recorded and fewer people in a year are using shelters. However, the length of stay in shelters keeps creeping up over time.

Between 2005 and 2024, the average length of stay in shelter increased by approximately 30 days (from 30.5 to 59.0).



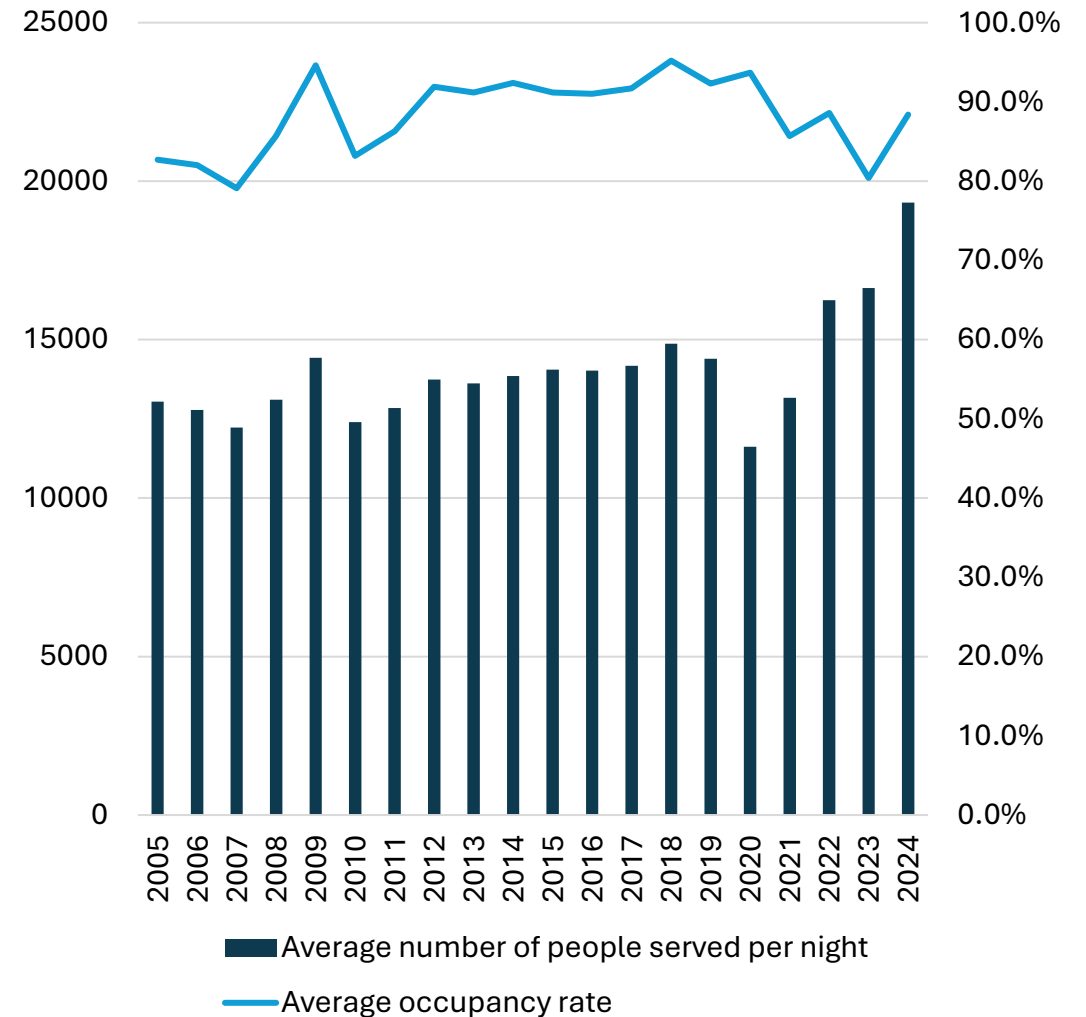
Overall Shelter Use

Average shelter occupancy remains high (88.4% in 2024).

Additionally, in 2024 there was a record number of people in shelter on a given night. There were almost 5,000 more individuals served on average per night in 2024 compared to 2019.

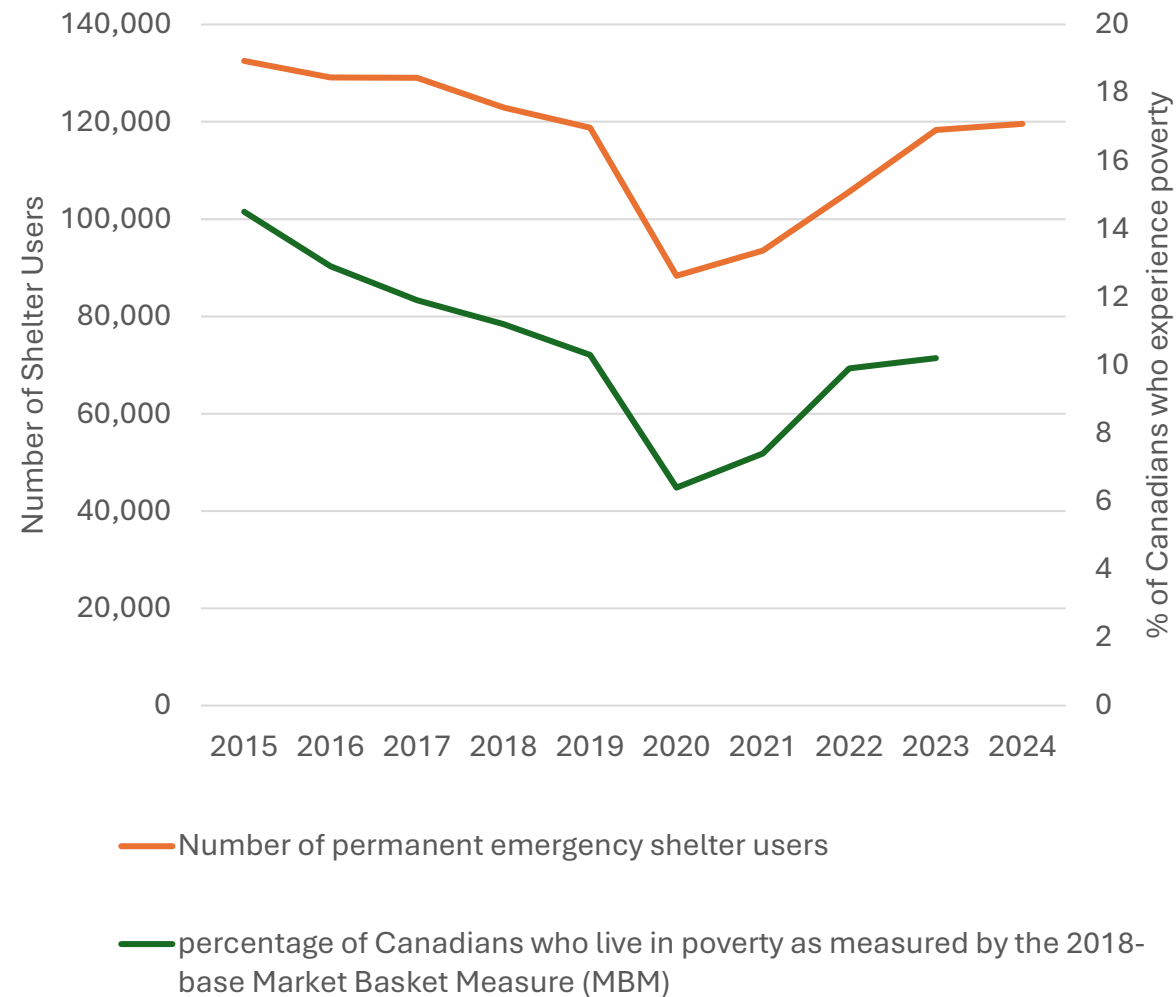
What we are seeing is a bottleneck effect, which has consequences for frontline staff and people using homeless shelters.

People are coming into shelter but having a harder time leaving. We are experiencing an outflow issue.



Overall Shelter Use

A comparison of the annual national poverty rate according to statistics Canada and the national estimate of shelter users shows similar trend patterns with a downward trend from 2015 to 2019, dip in 2020 and gradual recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic.





Explaining trends

New research on structural factors that are linked to the longer shelter stays observed over recent years.

New research: Factors linked to stay length in shelters

Most research on structural factors affecting homelessness is from the United States. Higher rents are consistently associated with increased local rates of homelessness (Byrne et al., 2013; Hanratty, 2017; Lee et al., 2003; Quigley et al., 2001).

Canadian studies examining the relationship between structural factors, shelter capacity, and homelessness admissions report similar findings (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2016; 2021).

Falvo and Jadidzadeh (2024) found that minimum wage, social assistance income, and first-quartile rents were most strongly associated with total shelter admissions.

However, the literature has yet to adequately examine how **changes in municipal or provincial structural conditions affect length of stay in shelters.**



Methods

- A fixed-effects panel regression was used to account for the structure of the data. Year fixed effects control for factors affecting all communities, such as pandemic-related disruptions and inflation. Multiple model specifications were tested.
- The study used shelter data from 2017-2024 from communities that represent multiple provinces and a range of city sizes.

Dependent Variable:

Average cumulative number of days spent
in shelter per community

Independent variables

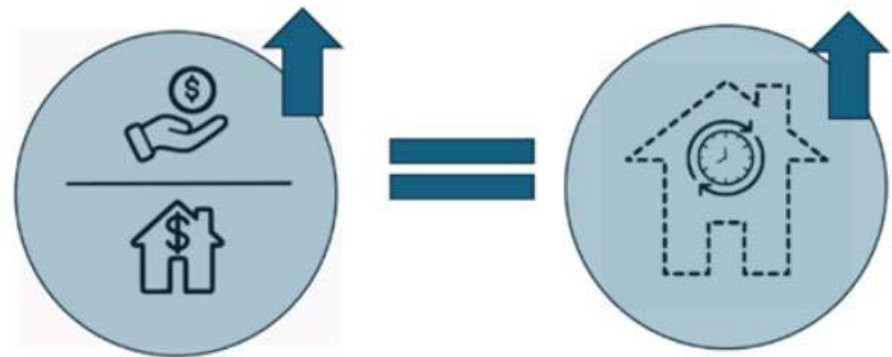
Data point	Frequency	Jurisdictional level	Source
Historical Primary Rental Market Vacancy Rate (%)	Annual	Municipal	CMHC Rental Market Survey
Historical Primary Rental Market Median Rent	Annual	Municipal	CMHC Rental Market Survey
Monthly social assistance (average)	Annual	Provincial	Maytree Welfare in Canada Report
Year	Annual	n/a	
Unemployment Rate	Annual	Municipal	Statistics Canada. Unemployment rates used by Employment Insurance program, three-month moving average, seasonally adjusted



ratio

To determine how the elements of this ratio drive differences between communities, we broke the ratio down into its individual components:

- Share due to social assistance: **37% of observed variation between communities.**
- Share due to rent: **117% of observed variation between communities.**
- Share due to relationship between rent and social assistance: **reduces observed dispersion by 57%.** This is because where rents are higher, benefits are also higher.



Results

- As housing affordability worsens within a community over time, the average length of shelter stays increases. A 0.1 increase in the rent-to-assistance ratio—indicating that rent becomes less affordable relative to social assistance—is associated with an increase of approximately 10.6 days in the average shelter stay within communities over time.
- In contrast, a community's unemployment rate and vacancy rate were not significantly associated with length of time spent in shelter. This lack of relationship is consistent with analyses of structural factors affecting homelessness rates in the United States (Byrne et al., 2013; Fargo et al., 2013; Hanratty, 2017; Ji, E. G. (2006); Quigley et al. (2001)) and Canada (Kneebone & Wilkins (2021)).

What does this mean?

- Housing affordability has multiple effects on a local shelter system. Not only are less affordable rents associated with an increase in the number of admissions and prevalence of homelessness but this study finds that they are also associated with longer lengths of stay.
- Together, these dynamics substantially increase demand for shelter services, resulting in a greater number of individuals being served on any given night. Consequently, shelter occupancy rises and already constrained resources face additional strain.



Missing trends

Persistent gaps and paths forward
to addressing them

Takeaways across data sources

2005 and 2020

While annual homelessness dropped steadily between 2005 and 2020, shelter occupancy remained high and stay lengths increased.

2024 and 2025

Comparing 2024 and 2025 suggests homelessness may have stabilized overall, but most communities still reported an increase. Monthly rates of homelessness show continued increases.

COVID-19 resulted in a temporary drop in shelter use in 2020, that began to reverse in 2021. At the same time, unsheltered homelessness increased substantially.

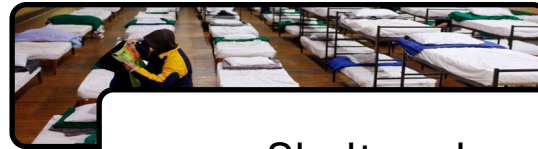
2020



State of coverage



Unsheltered



Sheltered



Provisionally
Accommodated

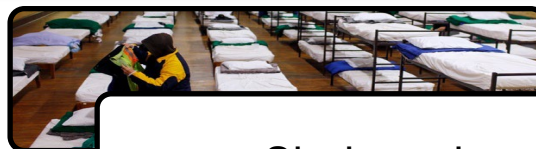
Unsheltered (e.g. parks, street locations)	Year-round emergency shelters	Transitional Housing
Encampments	Temporary shelters	Temporary stays with others
Vehicles	Hotel/motel programs	Short-term rentals (no security of tenure)
Other areas not fit for habitation	Domestic Violence shelters	Institutional Care



State of coverage



Unsheltered



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Unsheltered (e.g. parks, street locations)	Year-round emergency shelters	Transitional Housing
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Data gaps remaining: **Temporary shelters**

Temporary shelters include:

- Extreme weather shelters and seasonal shelters
- Overflow spaces
- Hotel and motel programs.

Challenges:

- Many of these program are using the community's HIFIS / HMIS, but not all.
- Because these services can change year over year, it is difficult to determine how many are active at any given time and what capacity they have.

Addressing the Challenges:

- Communities are including temporary shelters in PiT counts, which is helping to fill gaps, but services may not be active when the PiT Counts take place.
- Onboarding services to community data systems.

Data gaps remaining: Hidden homelessness

Describing Hidden Homelessness:

- Often staying temporarily with others, without security of tenure. Some still access homelessness services and will be included in monthly data, but many will not.
- Approximately 8% of Canadians over 15 report a previous experience of hidden homelessness.*

Challenges:

- Because people who experience hidden homelessness may not access services and are not in public locations, estimating the extent of this issue is not possible using existing data sources.

Addressing the Challenge:

- HICC worked with Statistics Canada to include questions on homelessness experience in the national Census in 2026, including questions on recent and current hidden homelessness.
- Because the Census is a household survey, it cannot capture current unsheltered homelessness, which means complimentary data sources are important.
- A report on homelessness from the Census is expected in December 2027.



National data = Local data

- Thank you to everyone who works with people experiencing homelessness, entering data into your community's data system, and the people experiencing homelessness who agree to share their data
- Thank you to all of the community data leads who support service providers, review and clean data, and share extracts with HICC to advance our national understanding
- Thank you to HICC's Homelessness Analysis Team:
 - Annie Duchesne
 - Siqin Guo
 - Naomi Garrido
 - Indya Boucher-Martin
 - Randalin Ellery
 - Rachel Campbell
 - Sajidul Quayum
 - Michelle Roberts



Thank you!

For any questions, please reach out to us at HPD.Data-Donnees.DPMI@infcc.gc.ca

HICC Homelessness Publications can be found here

Point-in-Time Count reports: <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/index-eng.html#pit-counts>

National Homelessness Indicators: <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/index-eng.html#stats>

National Shelter Study updates and brief research reports: <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/index-eng.html#national-shelter-study>