Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2022 Update

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Introduction

The National Shelter Study is an ongoing analysis of trends in homelessness shelter use in Canada. The present report provides an update on trends in 2022.

Data

This analysis covers the period from 2005 to 2022 and uses data collected from:

- the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), and
- provincial and municipal partners that have data sharing agreements with the Government of Canada.

Approximately 50% of emergency shelters in Canada were included in this analysis, representing about 60% of available emergency shelter beds. The methodology takes into account people who use more than one shelter to ensure that individuals are only counted once. Domestic violence shelters, immigrant and refugee shelters, and transitional housing are not included due to insufficient data coverage.

Shelter use in 2022

In 2022, an estimated 105,655 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter, compared to 93,529 in 2021 (Figure 1). This increase was expected. As COVID-19 social distancing requirements were lifted, there was a gradual recovery in shelter beds and shelter use. On an average night in 2022, there were approximately 16,248 people staying in shelters, compared to 13,170 in 2021 (23.4% increase).

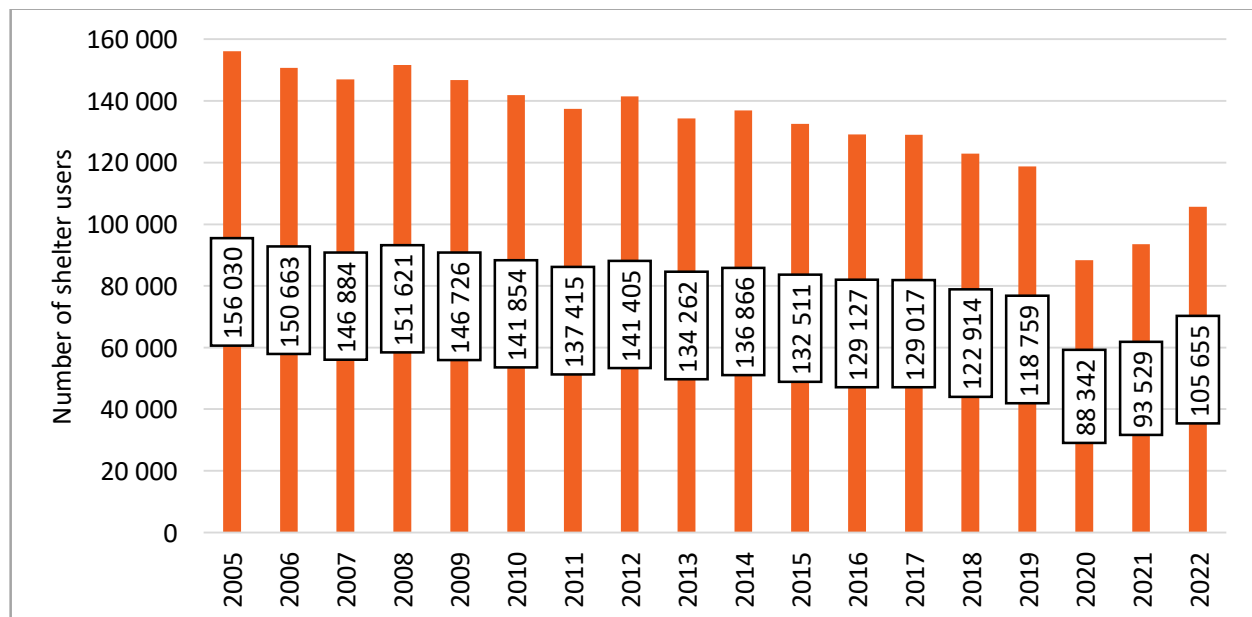Figure 1: Number of shelter users from 2005 to 2022

Figure 2 - Text version

Year	Number of permanent emergency shelter users
2005	156,030
2006	150,663
2007	146,884
2008	151,621
2009	146,726
2010	141,854
2011	137,415
2012	141,405
2013	134,262
2014	136,866
2015	132,511
2016	129,127
2017	129,017
2018	122,914
2019	118,759
2020	88,342
2021	93,529
2022	105,655

Shelter capacity and occupancy

The overall permanent emergency shelter system capacity grew by almost 20% between 2021 and 2022. In 2022 there were 18,336 permanent beds compared to 15,364 beds in 2021 (Figure2). However, growth was uneven across shelter types. Family shelter capacity increased 33.7%, adult shelter capacity increased 18.0% and while youth shelter capacity increased by 2.9% compared to 2021.

Despite the increase in capacity, shelter occupancy was slightly higher in 2022 (88.6%) compared to 2021 (85.7%), though it did not approach pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2).

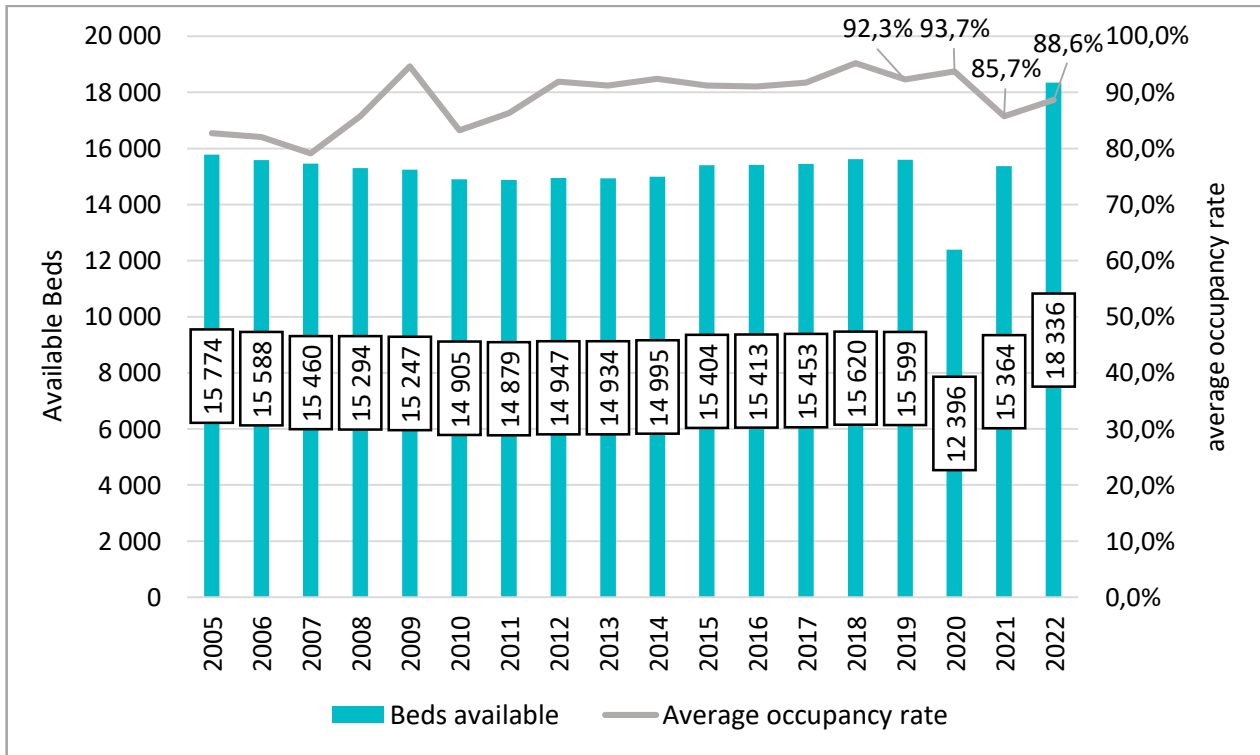Figure 2: Beds available and average occupancy from 2005 to 2022

Figure 2 - Text version

year	Average occupancy rate	Beds available
2005	82.7%	15,774
2006	82.0%	15,588
2007	79.1%	15,460
2008	85.7%	15,294
2009	94.6%	15,247
2010	83.2%	14,905
2011	86.3%	14,879
2012	91.9%	14,947
2013	91.2%	14,934
2014	92.4%	14,995
2015	91.2%	15,404
2016	91.0%	15,413
2017	91.7%	15,453
2018	95.2%	15,620
2019	92.3%	15,599
2020	93.7%	12,396
2021	85.7%	15,364
2022	88.6%	18,336

The higher occupancy rate in 2022 was driven by both an increased number of clients and longer shelter stays (Figure 3). In 2015, the average shelter stay among all shelter users was 38.7 days. In 2022, the average stay had climbed to 56.1 days.

Figure 3: Average length of stay per calendar year 2015 to 2022 by shelter type
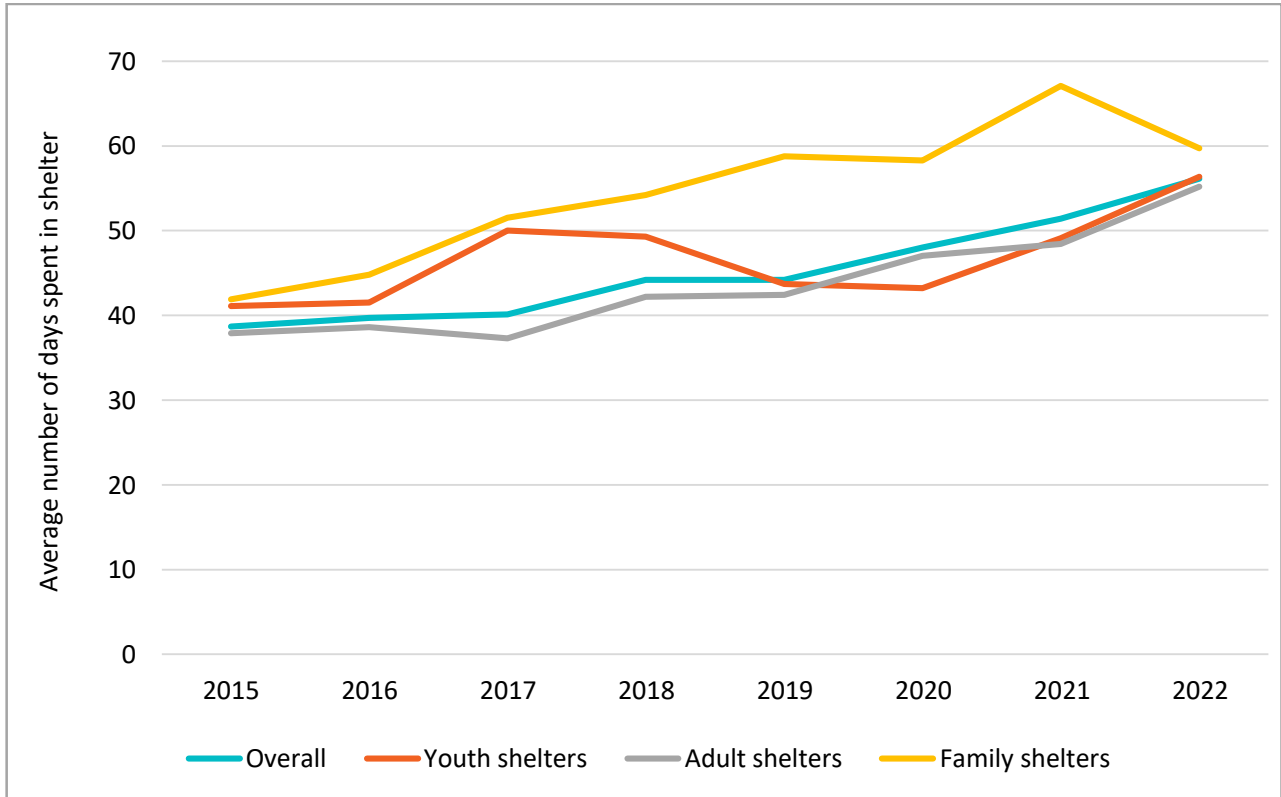

Figure 3 - Text version

Year	Overall	Youth shelters	Adult shelters	Family shelters
2015	38.7	41.1	37.9	41.9
2016	39.7	41.5	38.6	44.8
2017	40.1	50.0	37.3	51.5
2018	44.2	49.3	42.2	54.2
2019	44.2	43.7	42.4	58.8
2020	48.0	43.2	47.0	58.3
2021	51.4	49.1	48.4	67.1
2022	56.1	56.4	55.2	59.8

Demographics

Age

The average age of shelter users in 2022 was 39.2 years. Accompanied children (aged 0-16) represented 4.2% of shelter users. Youth (aged 13-24) made up 11.4% of shelter users. The majority (60.4%) of shelter users were adults (aged 25-49). Older adults (aged 50-64) were 19.9% of the shelter user population and seniors (aged 65+) were 4.0%. The relative proportions of all age groups have remained relatively unchanged since 2015 with the exception of youth, which has dropped steadily from 17.9% in 2015 to 11.4% in 2022.

Gender

In 2022 66.7% of shelter users were men, 32.2% were women, and 1.1% identified as gender diverse. The proportion of men and women has remained statistically unchanged between 2015 and 2022. A statistically significant increase in the proportion of shelter users reporting as gender diverse was observed between 2015 (0.5%) and 2022 (1.1%).

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples continued to be overrepresented in Canada's emergency shelters in 2022. According to the 2021 census, Indigenous Peoples represent about 5.0% of the Canadian population, yet the percentage of shelter users in 2022 who identified as Indigenous was 33.1% (Figure 5). The proportion of Indigenous peoples among shelter users has not changed significantly since 2015 (31.2%).

Figure 4: Proportion of shelter-using population and general population by Indigenous identity (2022)
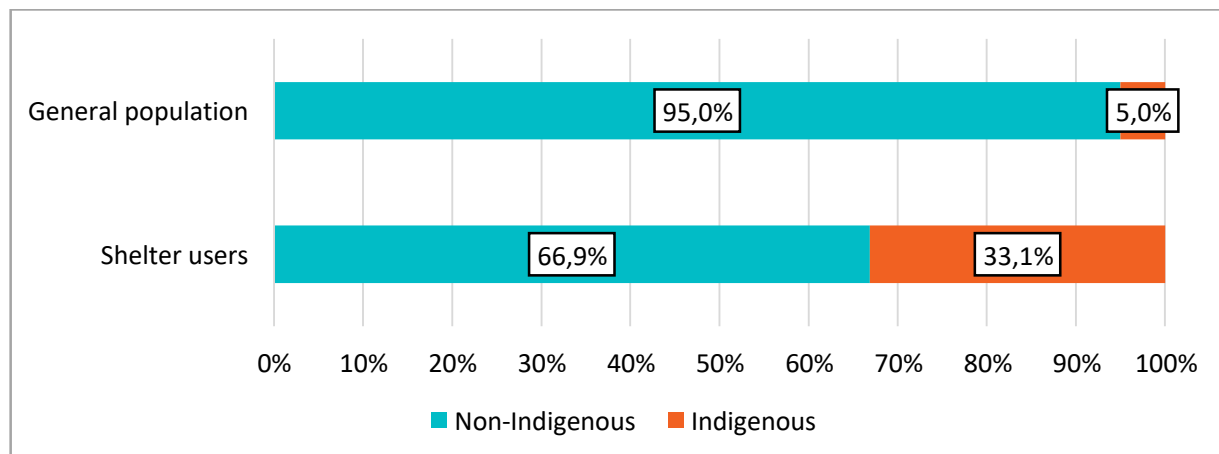

Figure 4 – Text version

Population	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Shelter users	66.9%	33.1%

General population	95.0%	5.0%

Veterans

An estimated 1.4% of shelter users in 2022 reported serving as either Canadian Armed Forces, former RCMP officers, veterans of allied countries, or civilian veterans. This is consistent with the estimated overall proportion of veterans in Canada (1.7%). The proportion of veterans has not changed significantly since 2015 (1.9%).

Citizenship

In 2022, the majority (90.3%) of shelter users were Canadian citizens, which has been the case for all years of analysis since 2015. The proportion of refugees and refugee claimants in the shelter system was 2.0% in 2022, up from 2021 (0.9%) but down compared to pre-pandemic (2019, 4.1%). Pandemic travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021 may have contributed to a decrease in the number of asylum claims, with a partial recovery in 2022.

Figure 5: Proportion of non-citizens among shelter using population from 2015 to 2022
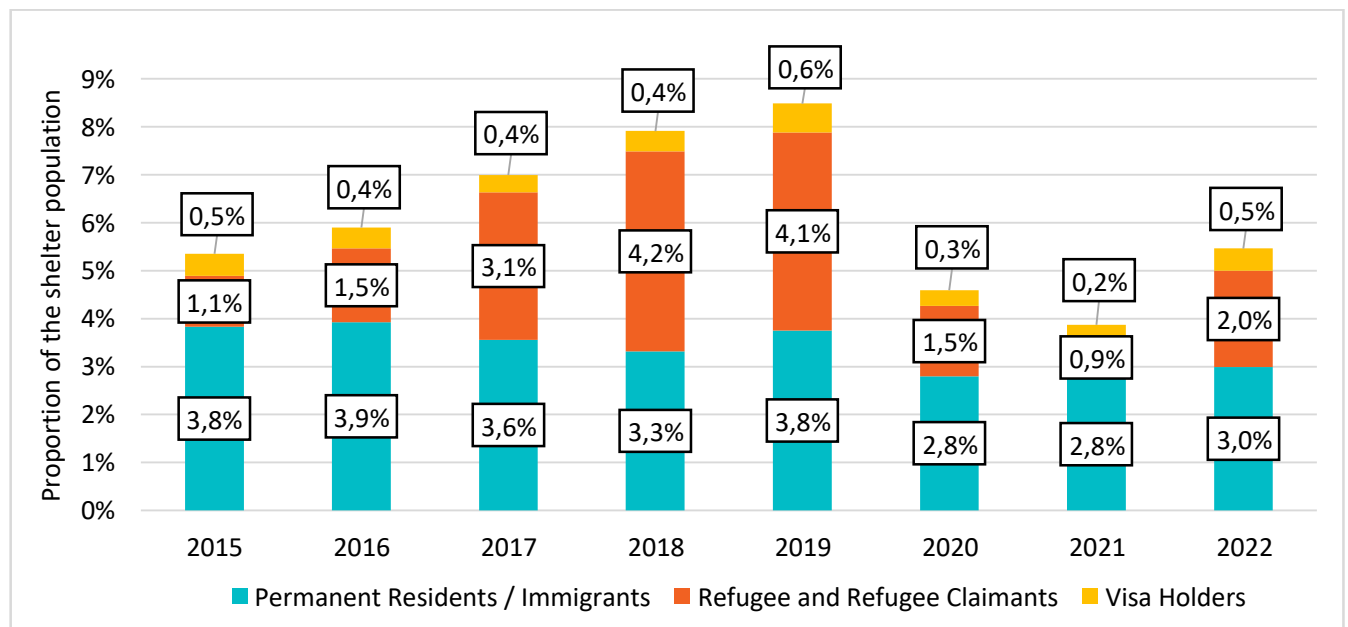

Figure 5 - Text version

Year	Permanent Residents / Immigrants	Refugee and Refugee Claimants	Visa Holders
2015	3.8%	1.1%	0.5%
2016	3.9%	1.5%	0.4%
2017	3.6%	3.1%	0.4%

2018	3.3%	4.2%	0.4%
2019	3.8%	4.1%	0.6%
2020	2.8%	1.5%	0.3%
2021	2.8%	0.9%	0.2%
2022	3.0%	2.0%	0.5%

Chronic homelessness among shelter users

In 2022, data from a subset of 17 communities were used to estimate chronic homelessness in Canada[1]. Shelter users are considered chronically homeless if they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Acute chronicity: used a shelter for six months (180 days) or more in the past year
- Prolonged instability: had shelter stays in each of the last three years

In 2022, 29.8% of shelter users in the sample met one or both of the criteria for chronic homelessness (down from 30.6% in 2021). By applying this proportion to the national estimate of shelter users, an estimated 31,476 shelter users experienced chronic homelessness in 2022, representing an increase of 9.9% from 2021 (28,631) (see Figure 6).

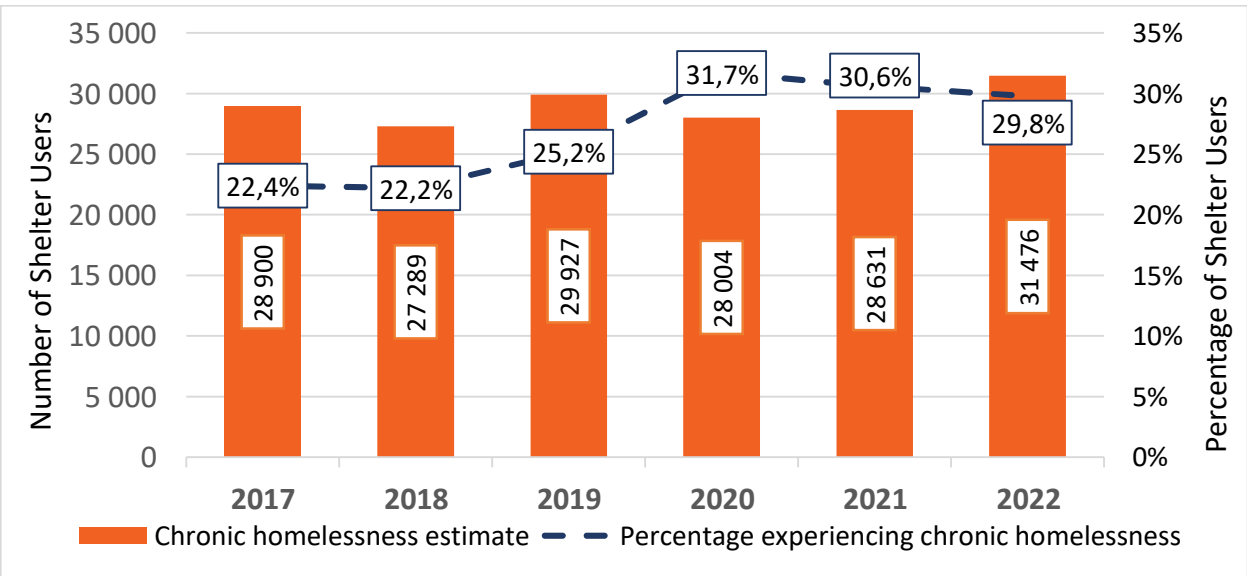Figure 6: Proportion and estimated number of chronic shelter users from 2017 to 2022

Figure 6 - Text version

Year	Percentage experiencing chronic homelessness	Chronic homelessness estimate
2017	22.4%	28,900

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[1] The sample included 47,098 shelter users (accounting for 44.6% of total estimated shelter users in 2022).

2018	22.2%	27,289
2019	25.2%	29,927
2020	31.7%	28,004
2021	30.6%	28,631
2022	29.8%	31,476

Looking more specifically at shelter users who met each criterion of chronic homelessness, 14.6% of shelter users met the criteria for acute chronicity only, 8.5% for prolonged instability only, and 6.6% met the criteria for both types of chronic homelessness (Figure 7).

From 2017 to 2020, there was an increase in the proportion of shelter users who met only the acute chronicity indicator (from 9.0% to 16.0%), but has since fallen slightly in 2022 to 14.6%. The proportion who experienced prolonged instability has fluctuated over time (between 8.2% and 10.0%). The proportion of shelter users who experienced both types of chronic homelessness was stable between 2017 and 2019 (from 3.5% to 3.8%), yet this proportion has since increased, resting at 6.6% in 2022.

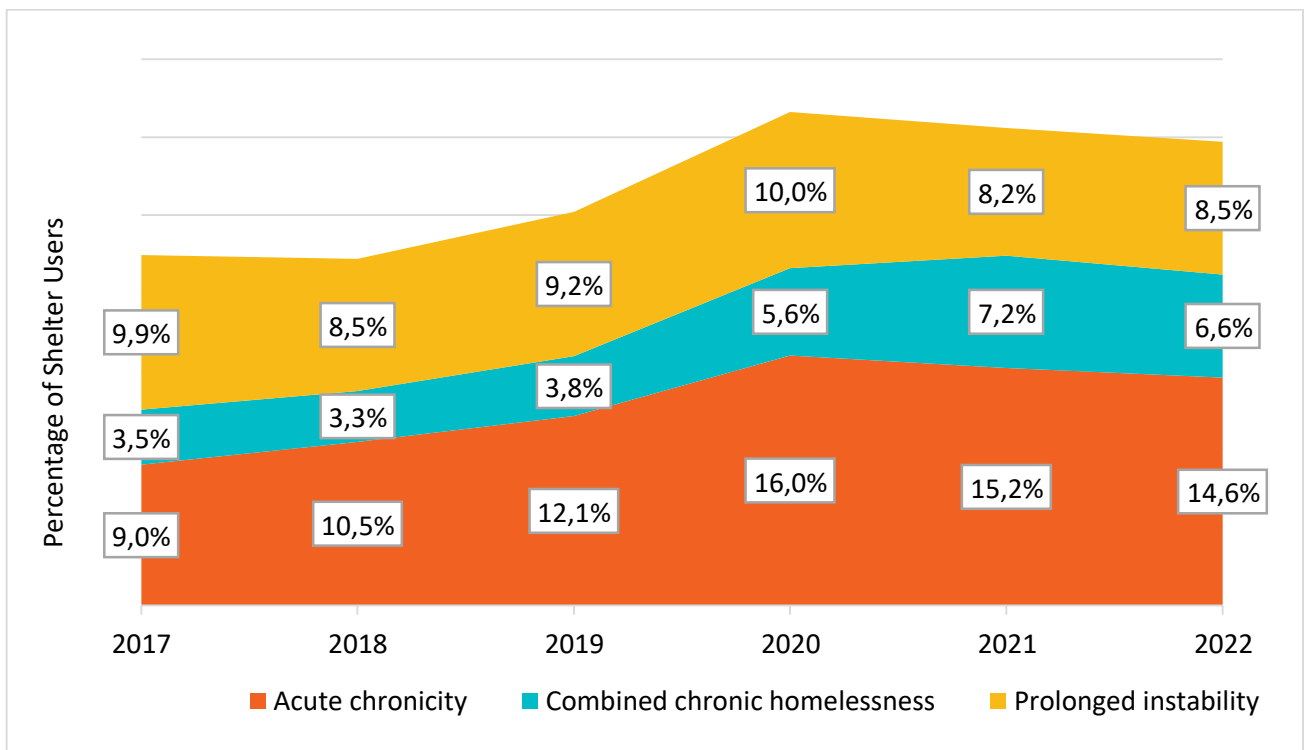Figure 7. Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2022

Figure 7– text version

Year	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness*
2017	9.0%	3.5%	9.9%	22.4%
2018	10.5%	3.3%	8.5%	22.2%
2019	12.1%	3.8%	9.2%	25.2%

2020	16.0%	5.6%	10.0%	31.7%
2021	15.2%	7.2%	8.2%	30.6%
2022	14.6%	6.6%	8.5%	29.8%

* Totals may differ from the sum of distinct categories due to rounding.

For more information

To find out more about homelessness research, visit the Data analysis, reports and publications page.

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