

Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2025 Update

Summary

The National Shelter Study is an ongoing analysis of more than 20 years of trends in homeless shelter use in Canada. The findings show an estimated 121,215 people used an emergency shelter in 2025. Shelter use has returned to levels seen prior to a sharp drop observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the capacity of the shelter system has expanded substantially in recent years, resulting in a lower average occupancy rate, the average length of shelter stays and the estimated number of people experiencing chronic homelessness continued to rise.

The population accessing shelter remained largely unchanged from previous years. Indigenous Peoples continued to be overrepresented, comprising 31.2% of shelter users compared with approximately 5% of the Canadian population. The proportion of shelter users identified as resettled refugees or asylum seekers declined, while the proportion identified as permanent residents or immigrants increased.

Together, these findings indicate that homelessness is becoming more prolonged for a growing share of shelter users. While emergency capacity has risen to meet this growing demand, efforts to prevent homelessness and provide long term housing solutions are needed to drive reductions.

Data

This analysis covers the period from 2005 to 2025 and uses data collected from:

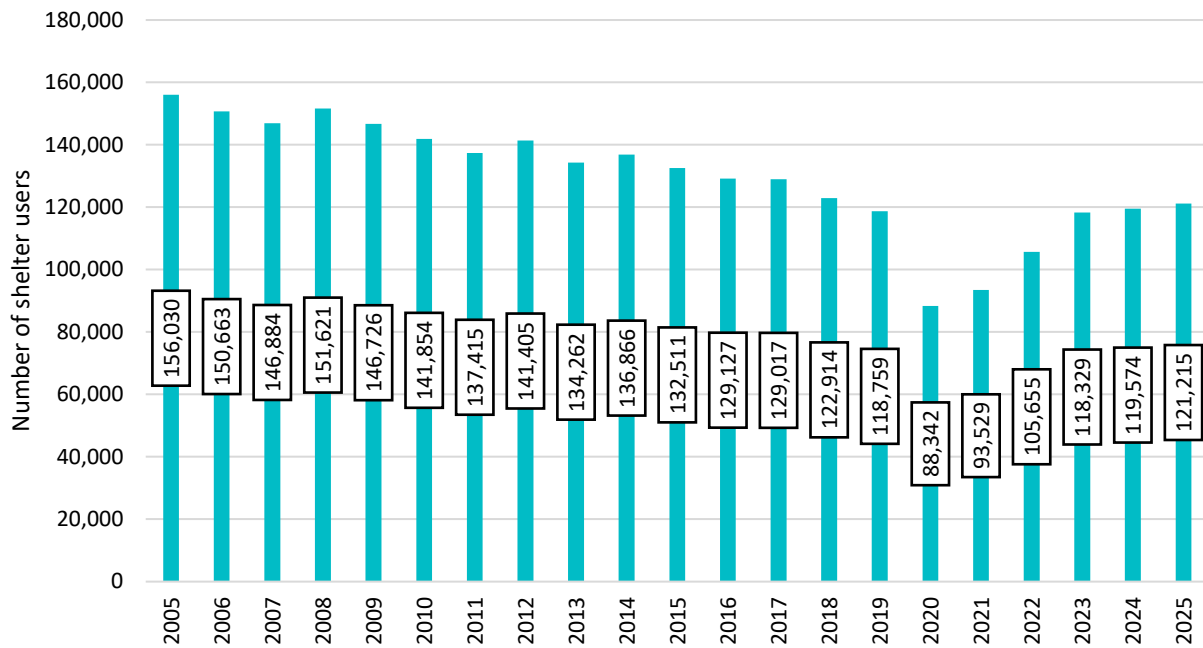
- the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), and
- provincial and municipal partners that have data sharing agreements with the Government of Canada.

Approximately 50% of emergency shelters in Canada were included in this analysis, representing about 71% 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 2025

In 2025, an estimated 121,215 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter, compared to 119,574 in 2024 (Figure 1). Between 2020 and 2025, there was an ongoing increase in shelter use following a dramatic drop at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of shelter users in 2025 was on par with pre-pandemic levels. On an average night in 2025, there were approximately 20,043 people staying in shelters, compared to 19,322 in 2024 (3.7% increase).

Figure 1: Number of shelter users from 2005 to 2025



- Figure 1 - Text version

Figure 1. Number of shelter users from 2005 to 2025

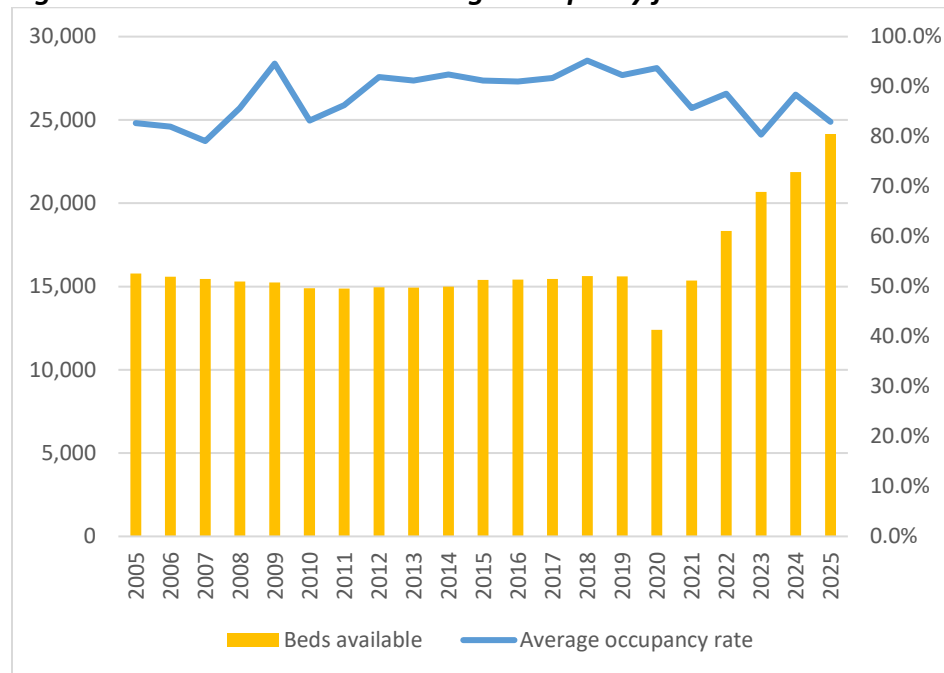
Year	Number of shelter users
2005	156,030
2006	150,663
2007	146,884
2008	151,621
2009	146,726
2010	141,854
2011	137,415
2012	141,405
2013	134,262
2014	136,866
2015	132,511
2016	129,127
2017	129,017
2018	122,914
2019	118,759
2020	88,342
2021	93,529
2022	105,655
2023	118,329
2024	119,574
2025	121,215

Shelter capacity and occupancy

The overall permanent emergency shelter system capacity grew by almost 10% between 2024 and 2025. In 2025 there were 24,150 permanent beds compared to 21,861 beds in 2024 (Figure 2). For overall trends on shelter capacity in Canada, please refer to the 2025 Shelter Capacity Report.

Shelter occupancy decreased significantly between 2024 (88.4%) and 2025 (83.0%).

Figure 2: Beds available and average occupancy from 2005 to 2025



- Figure 2 - Text version

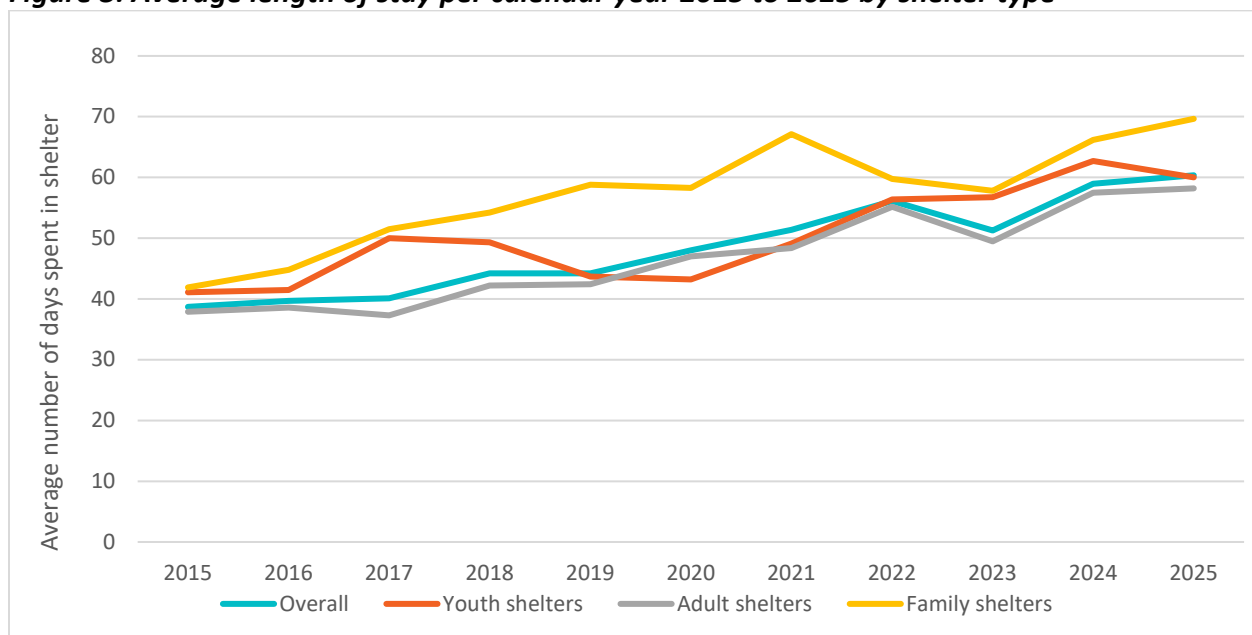
Figure 2. Bednights and occupancy from 2005 to 2025

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
2023	80.4%	20,676
2024	88.4%	21,861
2025	83.0%	24,150

The lower occupancy rate in 2025 was driven by both an increase in beds and consistent average length of stay. While adult shelter stays increased by 0.7 days, family shelter stays increased by 3.5 days, and youth shelter decreased by 2.7 days from 2024 to 2025. In 2015, the average shelter stay among all shelter users was 38.7 days, and it climbed to 60.4 days in 2025.

Figure 3: Average length of stay per calendar year 2015 to 2025 by shelter type



- Figure 3 - Text version

Figure 3. Average Length of Stay 2015 to 2025

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
2023	51.3	56.8	49.5	57.8
2024	59.0	62.7	57.5	66.2
2025	60.4	60.0	58.2	69.6

Demographics

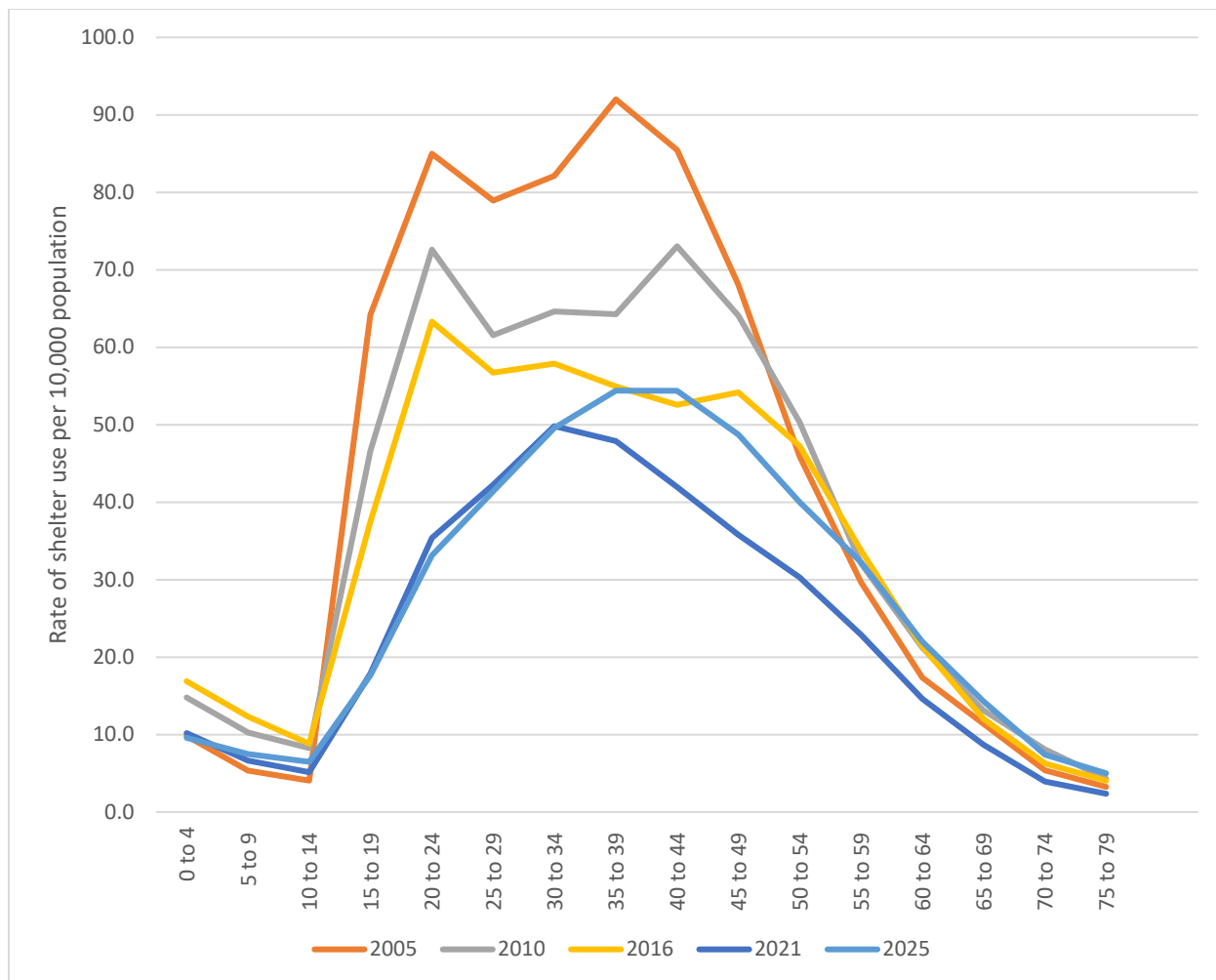
Age

The average age of shelter users in 2025 was 40.0 years. Accompanied children (aged 0-16) represented 4.4% of shelter users. Youth (aged 13-24) made up 10.7% of shelter users. The majority (60.0%) of shelter users were adults (aged 25-49). Older adults (aged 50-64) were 20.2% of the shelter user population and seniors (aged 65+) were 4.7%. The relative proportions of all age groups have remained relatively unchanged since 2015 with the exception of youth, which has dropped from 17.9% in 2015 to 10.7% in 2025.

While the relative proportion in most age groups has remained steady since 2015, the overall rate of shelter use per 10,000 population has dropped significantly over time for most age groups (Figure 4). The largest rate decrease between 2005 and 2025 was seen among youth between the ages of 15 and 19 (-46.5), 20 to 24 (-50.2), and 25 to 29 (-37.0). Rates for adults aged 30 to 49 also decreased significantly over this time period (a rate decrease between -19.5 and -36.2). Rates have not changed significantly between 2005 and 2023 for children under the age of 14 or older adults over the age of 55.

Figure 4 shows a post-pandemic rate recovery among individuals over the age of 30, though almost all age groups continue to see rates of shelter use that are lower than 2016. It also appears that the overall pattern of shelter use rates is shifting over time. In years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were rate peaks among the 20 to 24 age group. There was also a cohort effect showing another peak among those who were 35 to 39 in 2005, 40 to 44 in 2010 and 45 to 49 in 2016. In contrast, the 2021 and 2025 rates follow a more normal distribution with the peak occurring among those aged 35 to 49. Since 2021, the rate of shelter use has remained consistent among those under the age of 34, but increased for those above 35.

Figure 4: Rate of shelter use per 10,000 population by age group (2005, 2010, 2016, 2021, 2025)



• Figure 4. Text version

Figure 4. Rate of shelter use per 10,000 population by age group (2005, 2010, 2016, 2021, 2025)

Age Group	2005	2010	2016	2021	2025
0 to 4	9.8	14.8	16.9	10.2	9.6
5 to 9	5.4	10.3	12.3	6.7	7.5
10 to 14	4.1	8.2	8.8	5.1	6.5
15 to 19	64.2	46.6	37.5	17.9	17.7
20 to 24	85.0	72.6	63.3	35.4	33.1
25 to 29	78.9	61.6	56.7	42.2	41.4
30 to 34	82.1	64.6	57.9	49.8	49.6
35 to 39	92.0	64.3	54.9	47.9	54.4
40 to 44	85.5	73.0	52.6	41.9	54.4
45 to 49	68.1	64.1	54.2	35.8	48.7
50 to 54	45.9	50.4	47.3	30.3	40.0
55 to 59	29.7	32.1	33.8	22.9	32.2

60 to 64	17.3	21.2	21.4	14.6	22.0
65 to 69	11.4	13.1	12.1	8.7	14.3
70 to 74	5.4	8.1	6.3	4.0	7.4
75 to 79	3.2	4.3	4.0	2.4	9.6

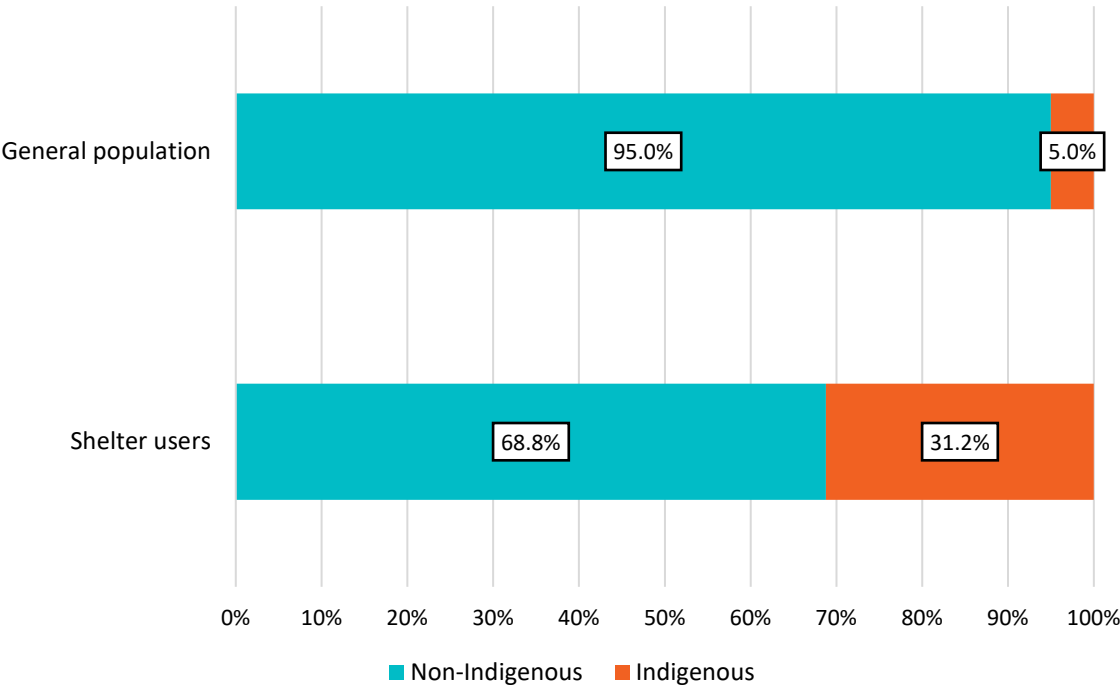
Gender

In 2025, 63.1% of shelter users were men, 33.3% were women, and 3.6% identified as gender diverse. The proportion of men and women has remained statistically unchanged between 2015 and 2025. A statistically significant increase in the proportion of shelter users reporting as gender diverse was observed between 2015 (0.5%) and 2025 (3.6%). This is likely due to better data collection over time.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples continued to be overrepresented in Canada's emergency shelters in 2025. According to the 2022 census, Indigenous Peoples represent about 5.0% of the Canadian population, yet the percentage of shelter users in 2024 who identified as Indigenous was 31.2% (Figure 5). The proportion of Indigenous Peoples among shelter users has not changed significantly since 2015 (31.2%).

Figure 5: Proportion of shelter-using population and general population by Indigenous identity (2025)



- Figure 5 - Text version

Figure 5. Proportion of shelter-using population and general population by Indigenous status

Population	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Shelter users	68.8%	31.2%
General population	95.0%	5.0%

Veterans

An estimated 1.3% of shelter users in 2025 reported serving as either Canadian Armed Forces, former RCMP, 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 dropped slightly since 2015 (1.9%), but the change is not statistically significant.

Citizenship

In 2025, the majority (85.1%) of shelter users were Canadian citizens, which has been the case for all years of analysis since 2015. The proportion of resettled refugees and asylum seekers in the shelter system was 4.6% in 2025, down from 2024 (6.6%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of non-citizens among shelter using population from 2015 to 2025

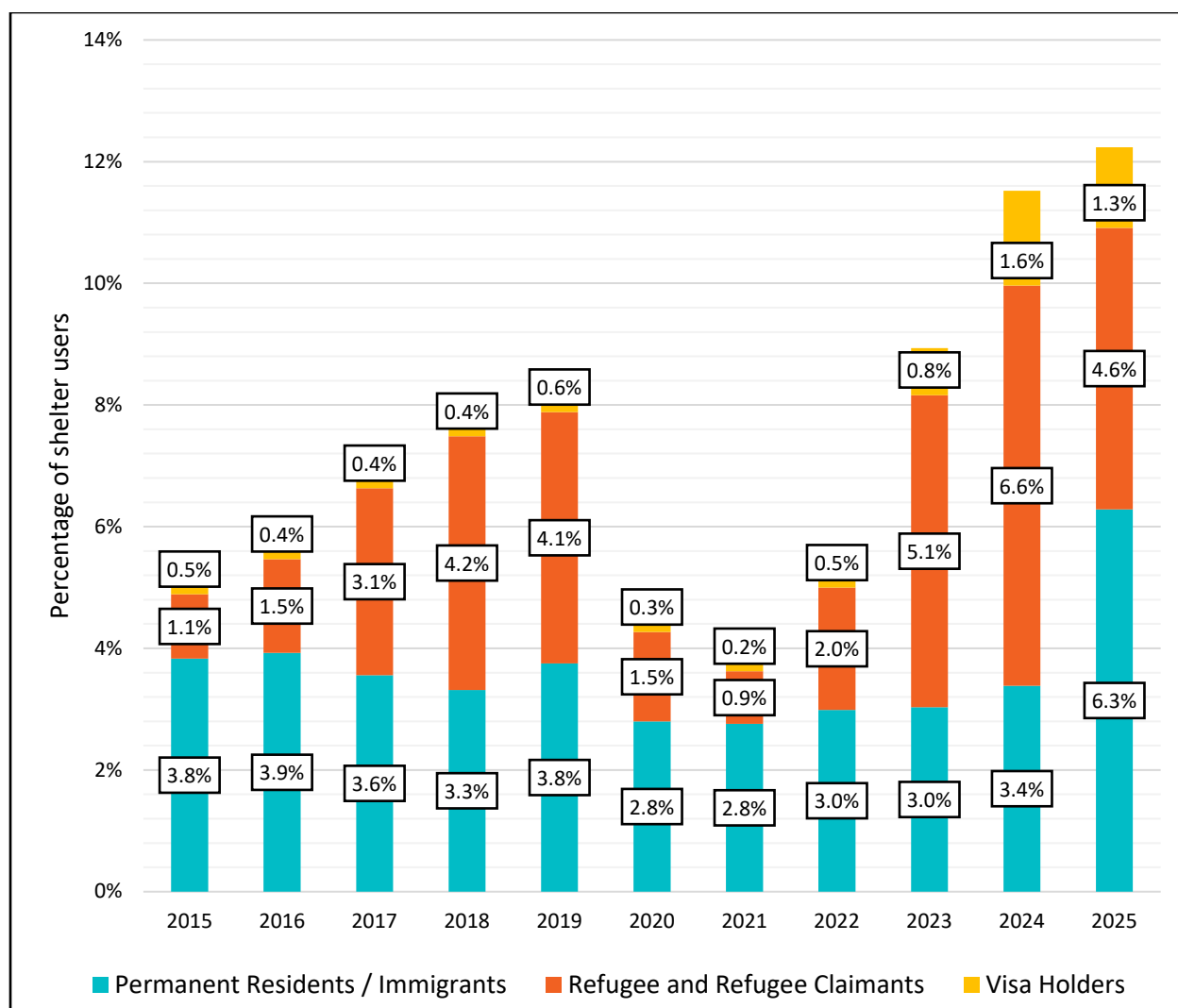


Figure 6 - Text version

Figure 6. Proportion of non-citizens among shelter using population from 2015 to 2025

Year	Permanent Residents / Immigrants	Resettled refugees and Asylum seekers	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%
2023	3.0%	5.1%	0.8%
2024	3.4%	6.6%	1.6%
2025	6.3%	4.6%	1.3%

Chronic homelessness among shelter users

Chronic Homelessness Overall

The national chronic homelessness indicator is calculated using data from communities that have complete coverage of their permanent emergency shelter system for three consecutive years, and annual estimates of national shelter use from the National Shelter Study. The data are collected by service providers and communities using the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and through data-sharing partnerships with jurisdictions that use similar systems.

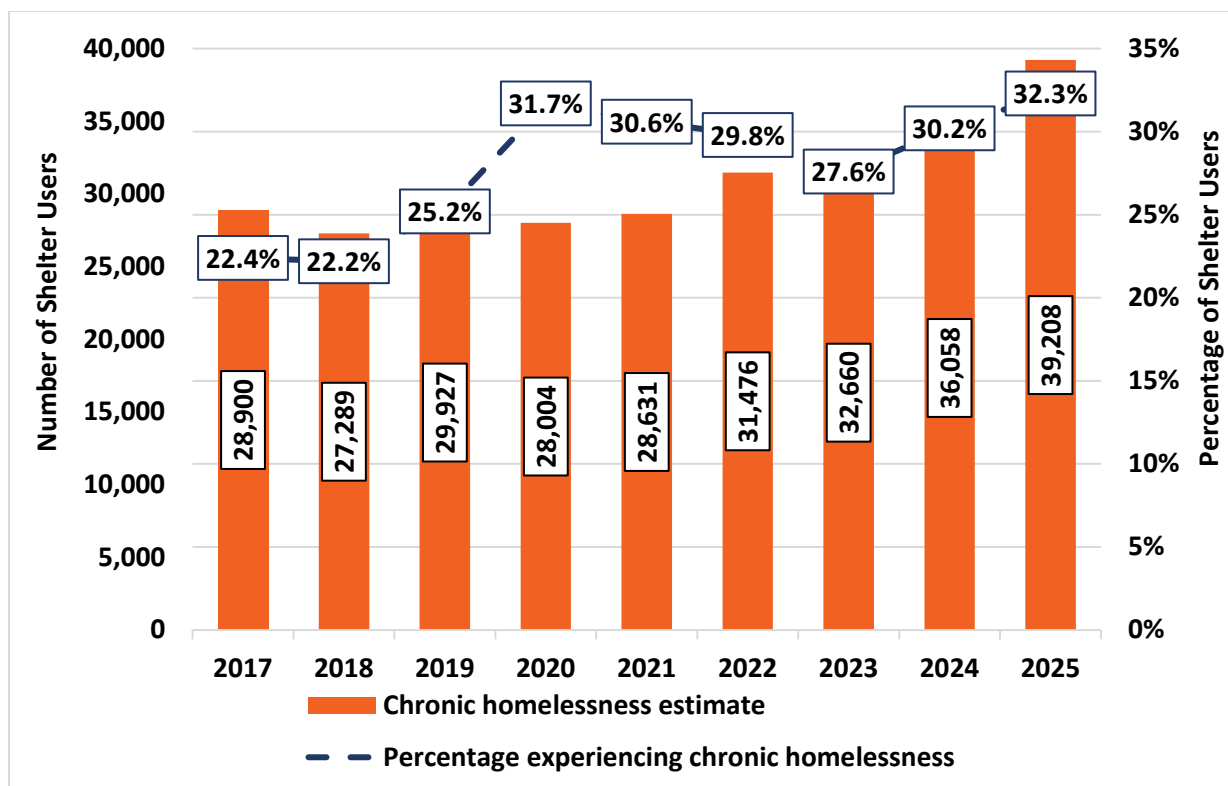
The sample used to estimate chronic homelessness varies annually as the set of communities that meet the eligibility criteria changes. In 2025, data from a subset of 30 communities were used to estimate chronic homelessness in Canada¹. Shelter users are considered chronically homeless if they meet at 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 2025, 32.3% of shelter users in the sample met one or both criteria for chronic homelessness, an increase from 30.2% in 2024. When this proportion is applied to the national estimate of shelter users, it suggests that approximately 39,208 individuals experienced chronic homelessness in 2025—representing an 8.7% increase from 2024 (36,058) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion and estimated number of chronic shelter users from 2017 to 2025

¹ The sample included 70,841 shelter users and accounted for 58.4% of total estimated shelter capacity in 2025.



- Figure 7 – Text version

Figure 7. Proportion and estimated number of chronic shelter users from 2017 to 2025

Year	Percentage experiencing chronic homelessness	Chronic homelessness estimate	Year-over-Year Change in Chronic Homelessness Estimate
2017	22.4%	28,900	
2018	22.2%	27,289	-5.6%
2019	25.2%	29,927	9.7%
2020	31.7%	28,004	-6.4%
2021	30.6%	28,631	2.2%
2022	29.8%	31,476	9.9%
2023	27.6%	32,660	3.8%
2024	30.2%	36,058	10.4%
2025	32.3%	39,208	8.7%

Chronic Homelessness by Type Among Shelter Users

Focusing specifically on shelter users who met the criteria for chronic homelessness in 2025:

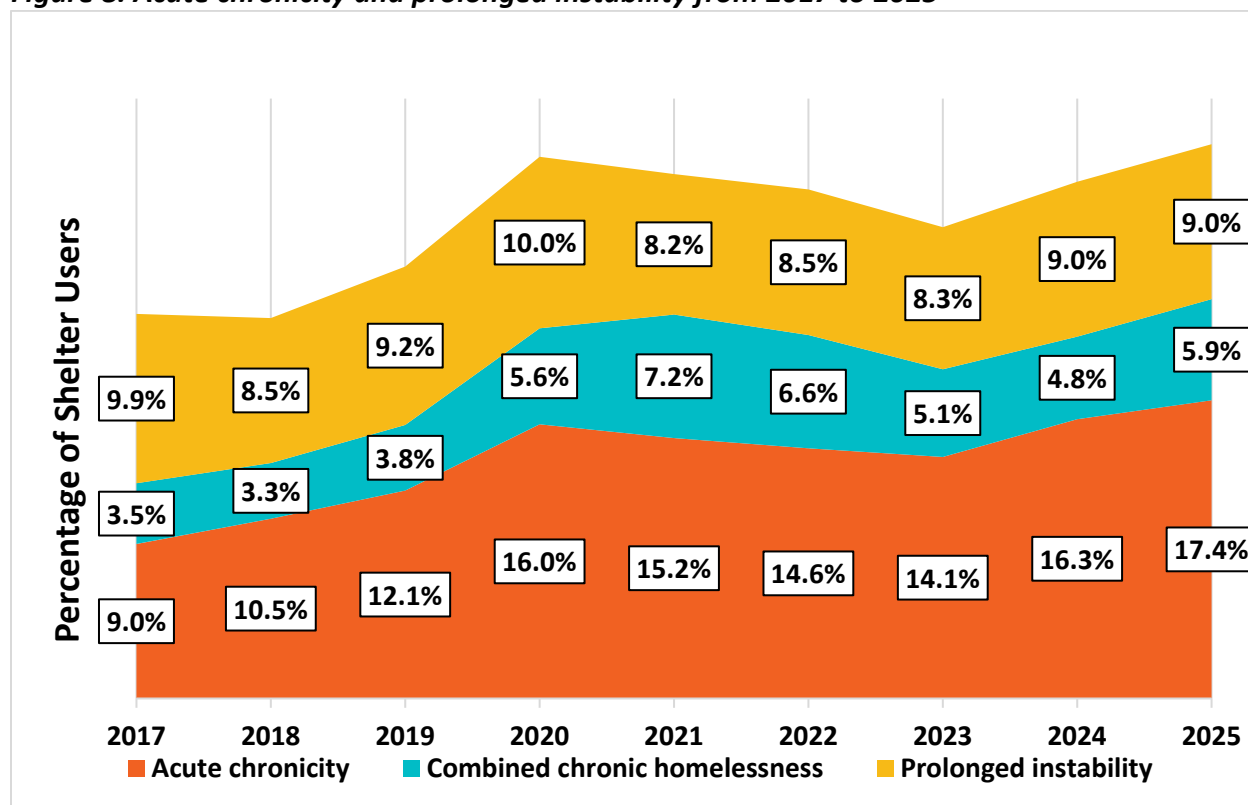
- 17.4% met the criteria for acute chronicity only
- 9.0% met the criteria for prolonged instability only
- 5.9% met the criteria for both types of chronic homelessness (see Figure 8)

There has been a long-term increase in acute chronicity. From 2017 to 2020, the proportion of shelter users meeting only the acute chronicity indicator increased from 9.0% to 16.0%, before declining slightly to 14.1% in 2023 and then increasing in both 2024 and 2025 to reach 17.4%.

The proportion of shelter users experiencing prolonged instability has remained relatively stable over time, ranging between 8.2% and 10.0%. In both 2024 and 2025, 9.0% of shelter users met the criteria for prolonged instability only.

The proportion of shelter users experiencing both types of chronic homelessness remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2019 (from 3.5% to 3.8%). Since 2020, it has remained relatively stable, varying between 5.1% and 7.2%. In 2025, 5.9% of shelter users met both criteria.

Figure 8. Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2025



- Figure 8– text version

Figure 8. Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2025

Year	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ²
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%
2023	14.1%	5.1%	8.3%	27.6%
2024	16.3%	4.8%	9.0%	30.2%
2025	17.4%	5.9%	9.0%	32.3%

² Totals may differ from the sum of distinct categories due to rounding.

Conclusion and key findings

Shelter use remained high in 2025, while longer shelter stays and rising chronic homelessness point to increasing persistence within the shelter system. Although expanded shelter capacity helped reduce occupancy pressures, prevention, housing, and support interventions remain critical to addressing the growing duration and persistence of homelessness. As shown in a recent report, [Homelessness data snapshot: Factors linked to stay length in shelters](#), improving housing affordability is also expected to play a role in reducing the duration of homelessness.

- In 2025, an estimated 121,215 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter, up from 119,574 in 2024. Average nightly shelter use increased by 3.7%, from 19,322 to 20,043 people.
- Shelter capacity expanded by nearly 10%, contributing to a decline in average occupancy from 88.4% in 2024 to 83.0% in 2025. This decline reflects increased capacity rather than reduced demand.
- Homelessness within the shelter system became more persistent, with the average shelter stay reaching 60.4 days in 2025, compared to 38.7 days in 2015.
- Chronic homelessness continued to increase. An estimated 32.3% of shelter users met the criteria for chronic homelessness, representing approximately 39,208 people, an 8.7% increase from 2024.
- Adults aged 25 to 49 continued to account for the largest share of shelter users, while the proportion of youth has declined over the past decade.
- Indigenous Peoples remained substantially overrepresented, accounting for 31.2% of shelter users compared with approximately 5% of the Canadian population.
- The proportion of shelter users identified as resettled refugees or asylum seekers declined from 6.6% in 2024 to 4.6% in 2025, while the proportion identified as permanent residents/immigrants increased to 6.3%, nearly double the levels observed in previous years (2.8% to 3.9%).

For more information

To find out more about homelessness research, visit the [Data analysis, reports and publications page](#).

If you have any questions about this report, [contact us](#).