

# Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2024 Update

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## Introduction

The National Shelter Study is an ongoing analysis of trends in homeless shelter use in Canada. The present report provides an update on trends in 2024.

## Data

This analysis covers the period from 2005 to 2024 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 70% 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 2024

In 2024, an estimated 119,574 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter, compared to 118,329 in 2023 (Figure 1). There was a gradual recovery from 2020 to 2024 in shelter use following a dramatic drop at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of shelter users in 2024 was on par with what we were seeing pre-pandemic. On an average night in 2024, there were approximately 19,322 people staying in shelters, compared to 16,627 in 2023 (16.2% increase).

**Figure 1: Number of shelter users from 2005 to 2024**



• Figure 1—Text Version

Figure 1. Number of shelter users from 2005 to 2024

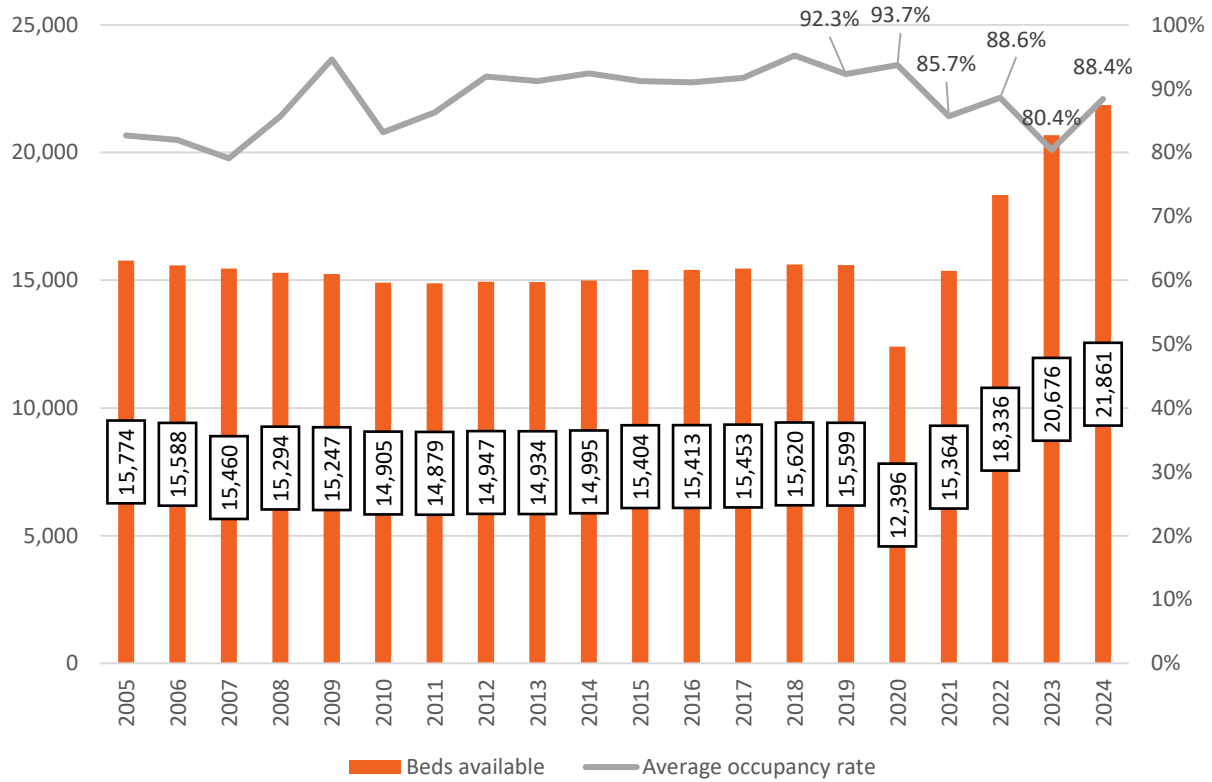
Year	Number of shelter users
2005	156,030
2006	150,663
2007	146,884
2008	151,621
2009	146,726
2010	141,854
2011	137,415
2012	141,405
2013	134,262
2014	136,866
2015	132,511
2016	129,127
2017	129,017
2018	122,914
2019	118,759
2020	88,342
2021	93,529
2022	105,655
2023	118,329
2024	119,574

### Shelter capacity and occupancy

The overall permanent emergency shelter system capacity grew by almost 6% between 2023 and 2024. In 2024 there were 21,861 permanent beds compared to 20,676 beds in 2023 (Figure 2). For overall trends on shelter capacity in Canada, please refer to the 2024 Shelter Capacity Report.

Despite the increased capacity, shelter occupancy increased significantly between 2023 (80.4%) and 2024 (88.4%).

**Figure 2: Beds available and average occupancy from 2005 to 2024**



- Figure 2—Text Version

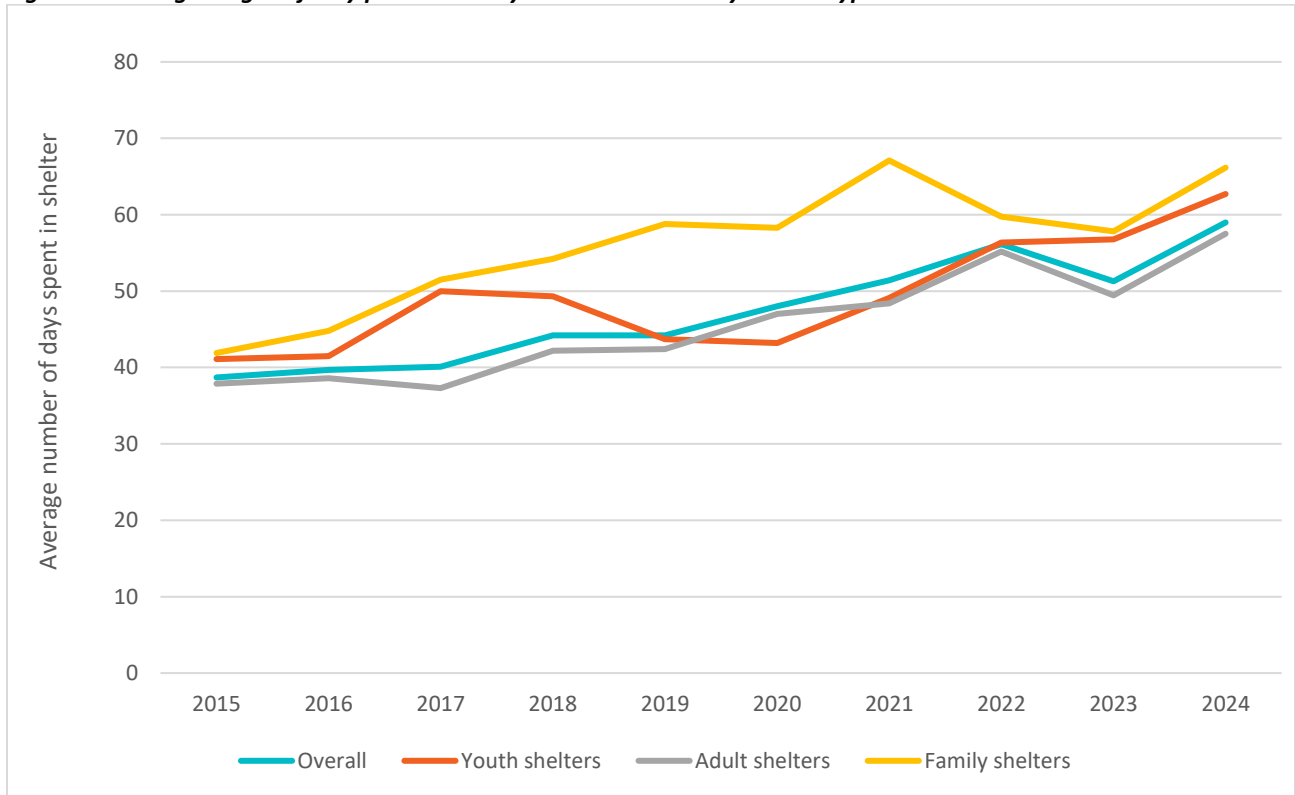
*Figure 2. Bed nights and occupancy from 2005 to 2024*

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

<b>2023</b>	80.4%	20,676
<b>2024</b>	88.4%	21,861

The higher occupancy rate in 2024 was driven by both an increased length of stay and an increase in shelter users (Figure 3), though youth shelter stays remained consistent. In 2015, the average shelter stay among all shelter users was 38.7 days. The average stay had climbed to 59.0 days in 2024.

**Figure 3: Average length of stay per calendar year 2015 to 2024 by shelter type**



- Figure 3—Text Version

*Figure 3. Average Length of Stay 2015 to 2024*

Year	Overall	Youth shelters	Adult shelters	Family shelters
<b>2015</b>	38.7	41.1	37.9	41.9
<b>2016</b>	39.7	41.5	38.6	44.8
<b>2017</b>	40.1	50.0	37.3	51.5
<b>2018</b>	44.2	49.3	42.2	54.2
<b>2019</b>	44.2	43.7	42.4	58.8
<b>2020</b>	48.0	43.2	47.0	58.3
<b>2021</b>	51.4	49.1	48.4	67.1
<b>2022</b>	56.1	56.4	55.2	59.8
<b>2023</b>	51.3	56.8	49.5	57.8
<b>2024</b>	59.0	62.7	57.5	66.2

## Demographics

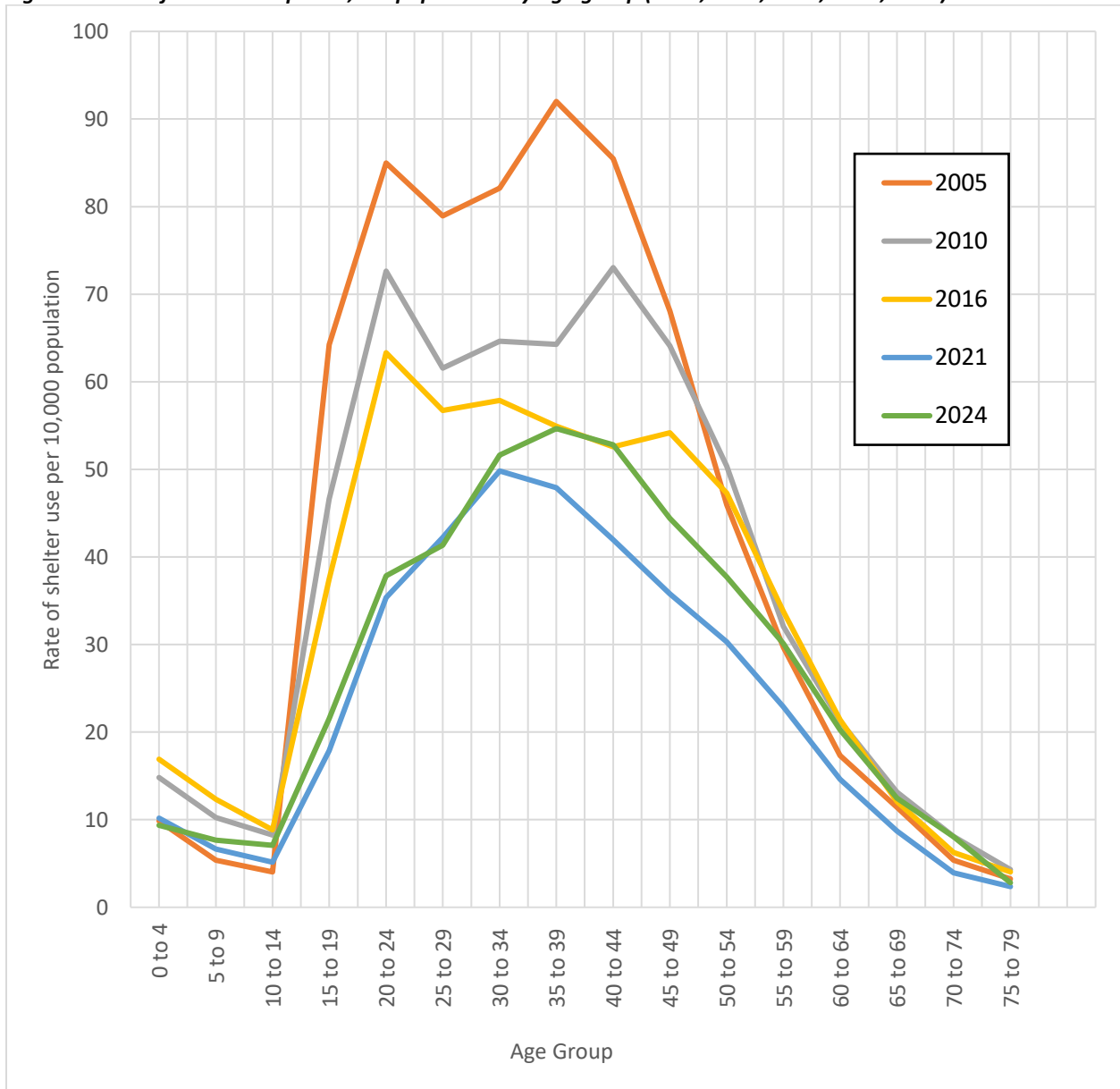
### Age

The average age of shelter users in 2024 was 39.4 years. Accompanied children (aged 0–16) represented 4.4% of shelter users. Youth (aged 13–24) made up 12.6% of shelter users. The majority (59.5%) of shelter users were adults (aged 25–49). Older adults (aged 50–64) were 18.6% of the shelter user population and seniors (aged 65+) were 4.9%. 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 12.6% in 2024.

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 2024 was seen among youth between the ages of 15 and 19 (-42.7), 20 to 24 (-47.2), and 25 to 29 (-37.6). Rates for adults aged 30 to 49 also decreased significantly over this period (a rate decrease between -23.7 and -37.3). 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 the 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 2024 rates follow a more normal distribution with the peak occurring among those aged 30 to 39.

**Figure 4: Rate of shelter use per 10,000 population by age group (2005, 2010, 2016, 2021, 2024)**



• Figure 4. Text Version

*Figure 4. Rate of shelter use per 10,000 population by age group (2005, 2010, 2016, 2021, 2024)*

Age Group	2005	2010	2016	2021	2024
0 to 4	9.8	14.8	16.9	10.2	9.4
5 to 9	5.4	10.3	12.3	6.7	7.7
10 to 14	4.1	8.2	8.8	5.1	7.1
15 to 19	64.2	46.6	37.5	17.9	21.6
20 to 24	85.0	72.6	63.3	35.4	37.8
25 to 29	78.9	61.6	56.7	42.2	41.3
30 to 34	82.1	64.6	57.9	49.8	51.6

<b>35 to 39</b>	92.0	64.3	54.9	47.9	54.7
<b>40 to 44</b>	85.5	73.0	52.6	41.9	52.8
<b>45 to 49</b>	68.1	64.1	54.2	35.8	44.4
<b>50 to 54</b>	45.9	50.4	47.3	30.3	37.7
<b>55 to 59</b>	29.7	32.1	33.8	22.9	30.1
<b>60 to 64</b>	17.3	21.2	21.4	14.6	20.3
<b>65 to 69</b>	11.4	13.1	12.1	8.7	12.5
<b>70 to 74</b>	5.4	8.1	6.3	4.0	8.1
<b>75 to 79</b>	3.2	4.3	4.0	2.4	2.8

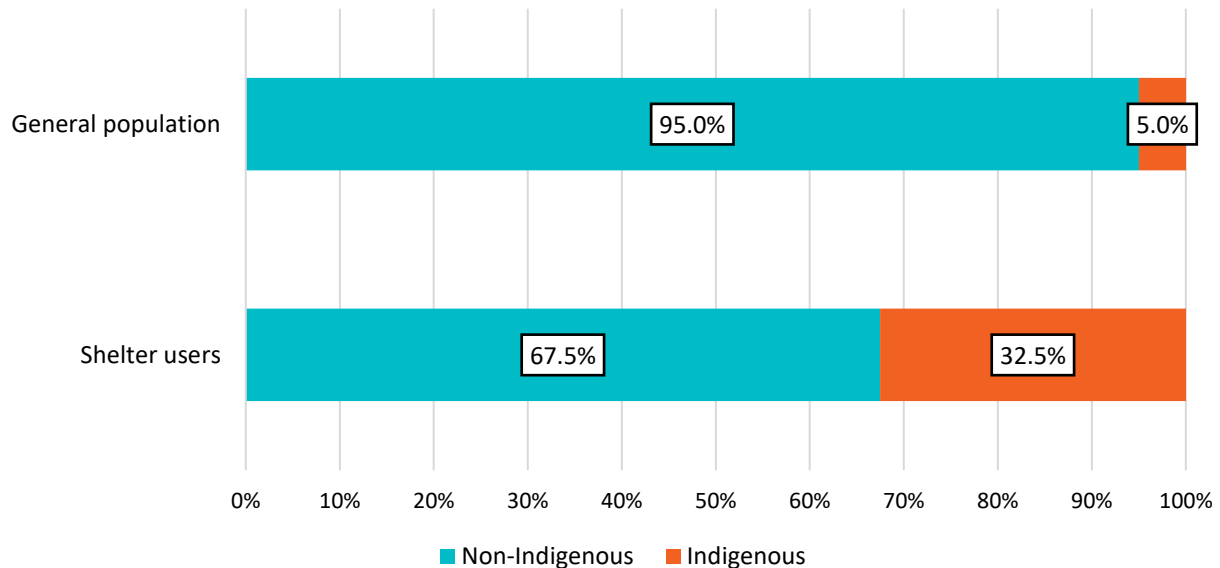
## Gender

In 2024, 64.7% of shelter users were men, 31.9% were women, and 3.3% identified as gender diverse. The proportion of men and women has remained statistically unchanged between 2015 and 2024. A statistically significant increase in the proportion of shelter users reporting as gender diverse was observed between 2015 (0.5%) and 2024 (3.3%). This is likely due to better data collection over time.

## Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples continued to be overrepresented in Canada’s emergency shelters in 2024. 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 32.5% (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 (2024)**



- Figure 5—Text Version

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

Population	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Shelter users	67.5%	33.2%
General population	95.0%	5.0%

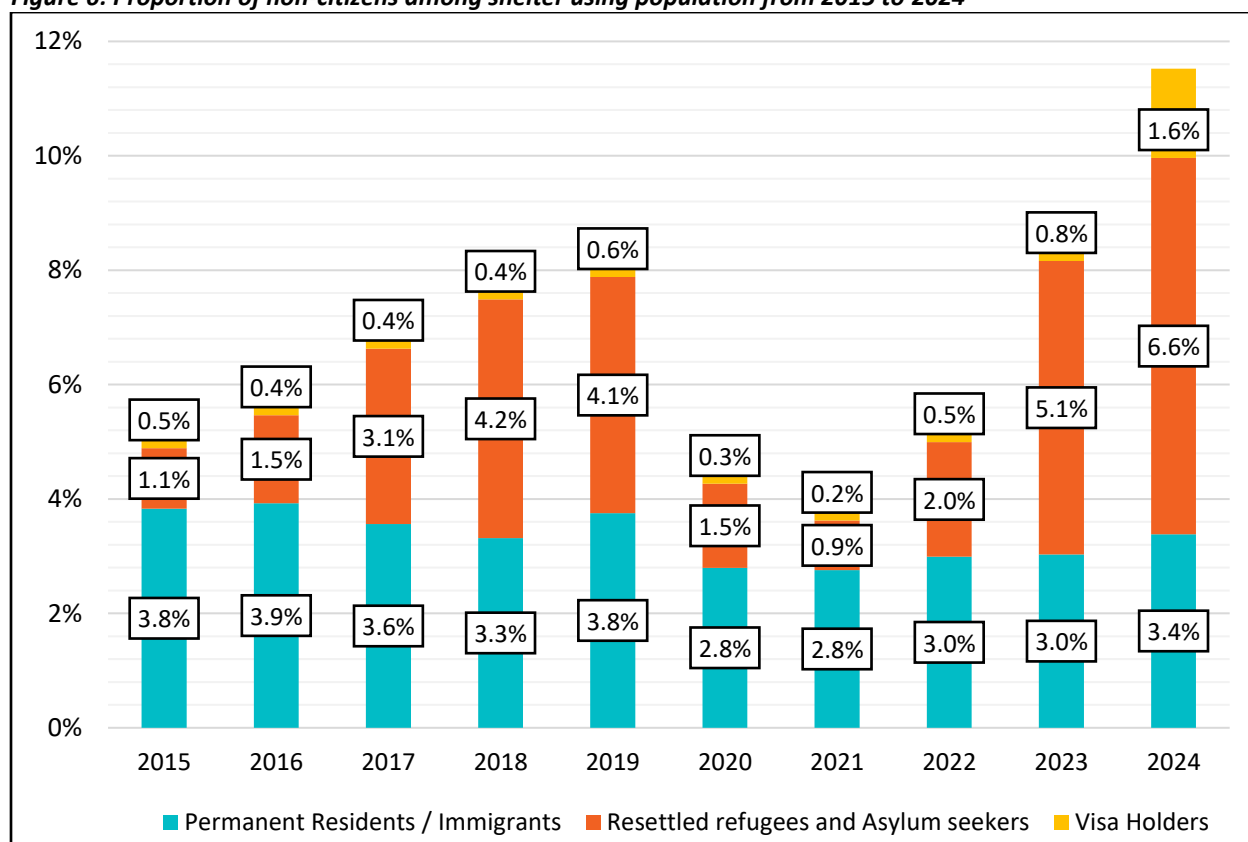
## Veterans

An estimated 1.1% of shelter users in 2024 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 2023, the majority (85.7%) 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 6.6% in 2024, up from 2023 (5.1%). The proportion of visa holders doubled between 2023 and 2024, though, the overall proportion remains relatively low (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Proportion of non-citizens among shelter using population from 2015 to 2024**



- Figure 6—Text Version

*Figure 6. Proportion of non-citizens among shelter using population from 2015 to 2024*

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%

<b>2021</b>	2.8%	0.9%	0.2%
<b>2022</b>	3.0%	2.0%	0.5%
<b>2023</b>	3.0%	5.1%	0.8%
<b>2024</b>	3.4%	6.6%	1.6%

## 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 2024, data from a subset of 26 communities were used to estimate chronic homelessness in Canada<sup>1</sup>. Shelter users are considered chronically homeless if they meet at least one of the following criteria:

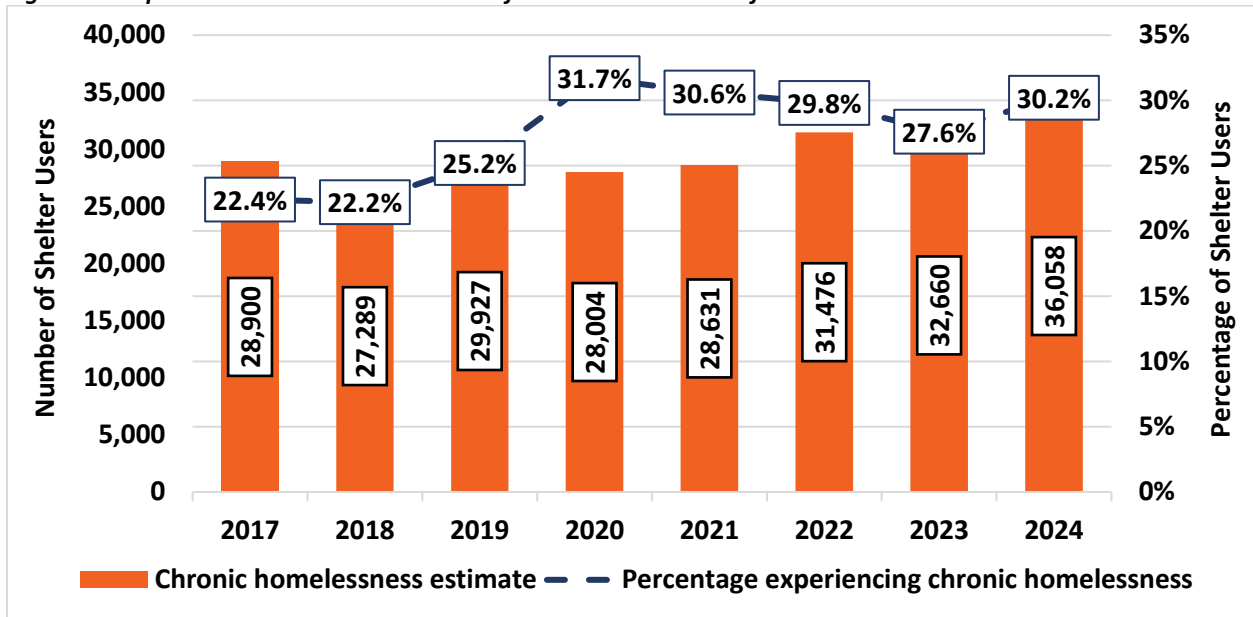
- **Acute chronicity:** used a shelter for six months (180 days) or more in the past year
- **Prolonged instability:** had shelter stays in each of the last three years

In 2024, 30.2% of shelter users in the sample met one or both criteria for chronic homelessness, an increase from 27.6% in 2023. When this proportion is applied to the national estimate of shelter users, it suggests that approximately 36,058 individuals experienced chronic homelessness in 2024—representing a 10.4% increase from 2023 (32,600) (see Figure 7).

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<sup>1</sup> The sample included 55,472 shelter users and accounted for 47.3% of total estimated shelter capacity in 2024.

Figure 7: Proportion and estimated number of chronic shelter users from 2017 to 2024



• Figure 7—Text Version

Figure 7. Proportion and estimated number of chronic shelter users from 2017 to 2024

Year	Percentage experiencing chronic homelessness	Chronic homelessness estimate
2017	22.4%	28,900
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
2023	27.6%	32,660
2024	30.2%	36,058

### Chronic Homelessness by Type Among Shelter Users

Focusing specifically on shelter users who met the criteria for chronic homelessness in 2024:

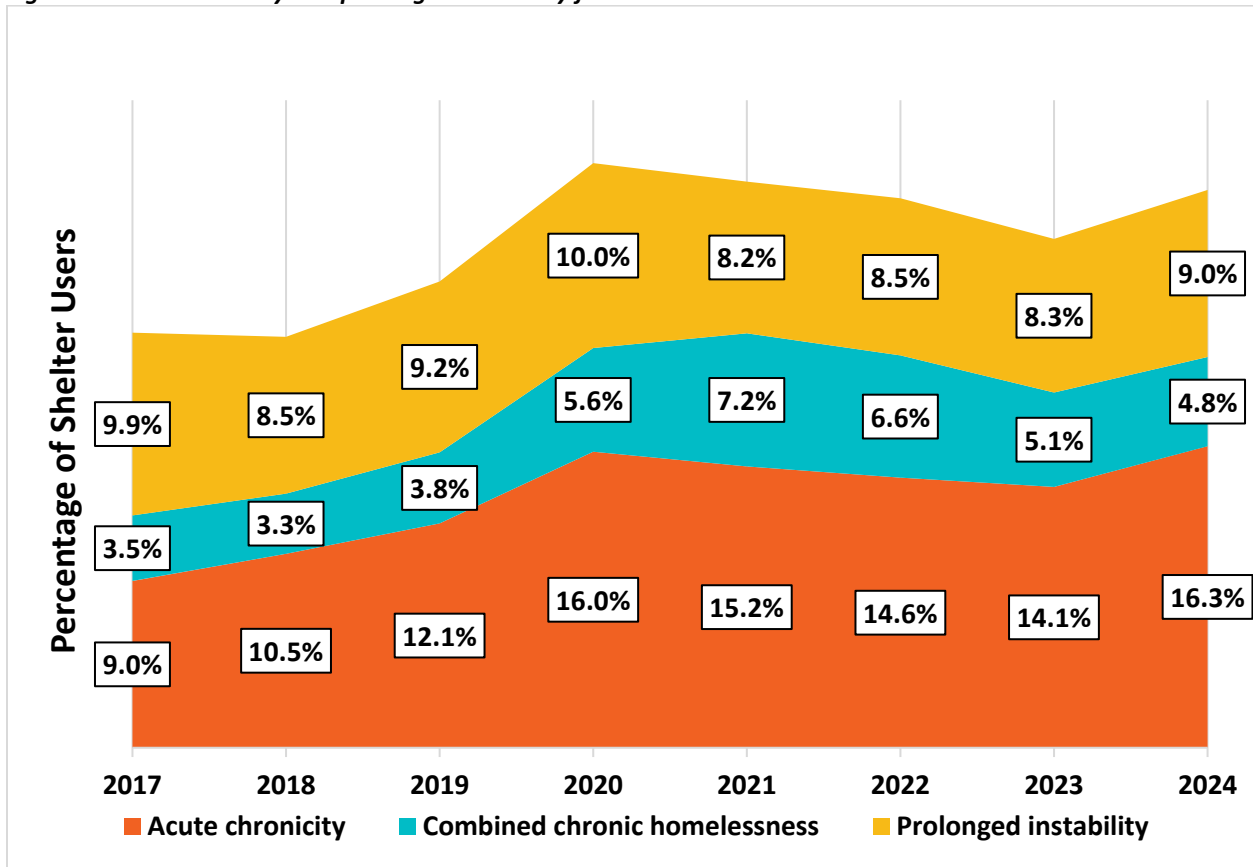
- 16.3% met the criteria for acute chronicity only;
- 9.0% met the criteria for prolonged instability only; and
- 4.8% met the criteria for both types of chronic homelessness (see Figure 7).

From 2017 to 2020, the proportion of shelter users meeting only the acute chronicity indicator increased from 9.0% to 16.0%, before falling slightly to 14.1% in 2023 and rising again to 16.3% in 2024.

The proportion of those experiencing prolonged instability has fluctuated over time, ranging between 8.2% and 10.0%.

The proportion of shelter users experiencing both types of chronic homelessness remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2019 (from 3.5% to 3.8%), increased to 7.2% in 2021, and then declined to 4.8% in 2024.

Figure 8. Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2024



• Figure 8—Text Version

Figure 8. Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2024

Year	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness <sup>2</sup>
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%

<sup>2</sup> Totals may differ from the sum of distinct categories due to rounding.

## Inflow among shelter users

The inflow refers to the rate at which people enter into the shelter system for the first time. This analysis provides insight into how inflow influenced trends of shelter use in 2024. It can help measure progress in the goal of reducing homelessness and provide insights on how to work upstream to prevent it.

The 2024 dataset of communities with complete data coverage included 53,750 unique individuals in 26 communities across 225 shelters, representing 47.3% of the national emergency shelter capacity. While this sample represented a significant portion of shelter user experiences, there may be some regional trends that are not captured. Since these results do not include shelter stays outside of the selected communities, shelter users within this dataset that have accessed shelters in other communities will not have those experiences reflected in the results.

To determine inflows, a shelter user was either newly or previously identified in the shelter system:

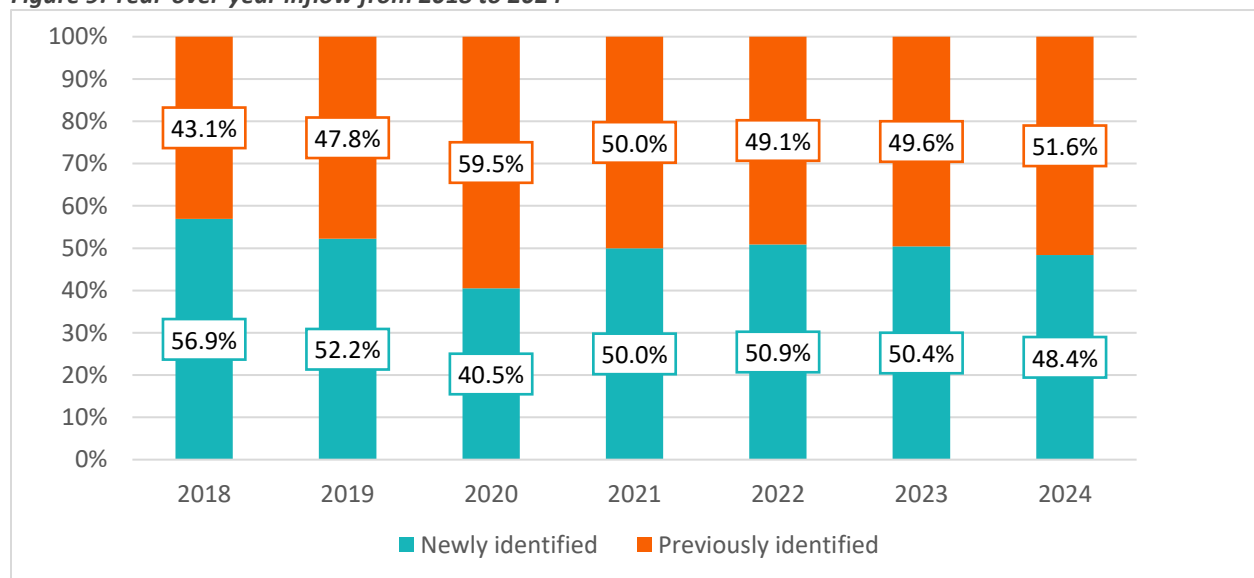
- **Previously identified:** A shelter user was considered to be previously identified in the shelter system if they had stays prior to 2024 within the study period.
- **Newly identified:** A shelter user was considered newly identified in the shelter system if their first stay in shelter within the study period was in 2024.

To be considered newly identified, a person's first day in shelter needed to start in 2024. Shelter users who had a stay prior to 2024 would be considered previously identified. If their first stay in shelter overlapped into 2024, they were considered to be previously identified since their stay started prior to 2024.

## Inflow Into the Shelter System 2018 to 2024

Among the 53,750 unique individuals who accessed a shelter in the 26 communities in 2024, 26,015 (48.4%) of them were newly identified in the shelter system. In recent years, approximately half of shelter users were newly identified in the shelter system. However, this was not the case in 2020, where the majority of shelter users were previously identified.

**Figure 9: Year-over-year inflow from 2018 to 2024**



- Figure 9 text version

Figure 9: Year-over-year inflow from 2018 to 2024

Year	Proportion newly identified	Proportion previously identified
2018	56.9%	43.1%
2019	52.2%	47.8%
2020	40.5%	59.5%
2021	50.0%	50.0%
2022	50.9%	49.1%
2023	50.4%	49.6%
2024	48.4%	51.6%

## For more information

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