

Homelessness data snapshot : Analysis of chronic homelessness among shelter users in Canada 2017 - 2024

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Instantané de données sur l'itinérance : Analyse de l'itinérance chronique parmi les personnes utilisant des refuges au Canada de 2017 à 2024

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For more information, contact:

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada
180 Kent Street, Suite 1100
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 0B6
info@infcc.gc.ca

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Introduction

Chronic homelessness generally refers to long periods of homelessness that are associated with greater risks of harm and difficulty accessing stable housing. Experiences of chronic homelessness are often compounded by challenges related to mental illness, substance use, or disabilities. For many communities, preventing and reducing chronic homelessness is a priority.

This report provides an estimate and overview of chronic homelessness in Canada between 2017 and 2024. It also includes a demographic analysis of chronic homelessness in 2024, identifying the relative prevalence across specific populations.

Data

The national [definition of chronic homelessness](#) is inclusive of experiences of homelessness that occur in sheltered and unsheltered areas, as well as experiences of hidden homelessness. It includes individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- They have a total of at least six months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year, or
- They have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past three years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days).

To estimate chronic homelessness at a national level, an indicator based on shelter use patterns is used. While this excludes experiences of homelessness that occur outside of the shelter system¹, shelter use is the most consistent and

¹ When interpreting findings in this report, it is important to note that the national estimate of the number of shelter users who experience chronic homelessness refers to those who are accessing the emergency shelter system, and does not include those who only access domestic violence shelters, transitional housing, temporary shelters, or refugee shelters.

reliable source of data available for analyzing homelessness trends over time. The chronic homelessness indicator differs from the national definition to account for limitations in the available data. Without longitudinal data on experiences of homelessness outside of the shelter system, the indicator relies on shelter data to provide an estimate of how chronic homelessness is changing at the national level. The indicator identifies emergency shelter users as experiencing chronic homelessness 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, or
- Prolonged instability: accessed shelters at least once in each of the last three years.

Acute chronicity can be characterized as the experience of recent, persistent homelessness, whereas **prolonged instability** can be characterized as a longer-term lack of stable housing and repeated or prolonged homelessness. Some individuals exhibit both persistent homelessness within the past year, and recurrent returns to homelessness over the past three years. This exposure to both acute and repeated experiences of protracted homelessness is referred to as **combined chronic homelessness**.

Therefore, the indicator is able to categorize each shelter user into one of four distinct groups:

- Acute chronicity only,
- Prolonged instability only,
- Combined chronic homelessness (both acute chronicity and prolonged instability), and
- Not chronically homeless.

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, the sample included 26 communities that met the data requirements, representing 46.4% of national emergency shelter capacity. This percentage is slightly lower than in 2023 (48.8%, 24 communities), 2018 (51.6%, 21 communities), but higher than in other years: 2022 (44.6%, 17 communities), 2021 (39.4%, 17 communities), 2020 (40.3%, 17 communities), 2019 (46.1%, 16 communities), and 2017 (32.7%, 22 communities). While this sample covers a significant portion of shelter user experiences, some regional trends may not be captured.

Research findings

According to the [National Shelter Study 2024 Update](#), an estimated 119,574 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter in 2024, up from 118,329 in 2023. Shelter use has steadily increased each year since 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it saw a significant 25.6% decline. Between 2005 and 2020, the number of shelter users had generally trended downward, with the sharpest drop occurring in 2020. The 2024 figure remains close to the pre-pandemic estimate from 2019 (118,759)².

In 2024, an estimated 36,058 (30.2%) people experienced chronic homelessness. This represents an increase in both the proportion and number of shelter users identified as chronically homeless compared to 2023 (27.6%; 32,660). The estimated number of chronically homeless shelter users remained relatively stable from 2017 (28,900) to 2021 (28,631), but has steadily increased since 2022 (31,476 in 2022; 32,660 in 2023; 36,058 in 2024). This suggests that both the overall size of the shelter-using population and the number of chronically homeless individuals within that population are on the rise.

² Citing from [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2023 Update](#)

Figure 1: Chronic homelessness from 2017 to 2024

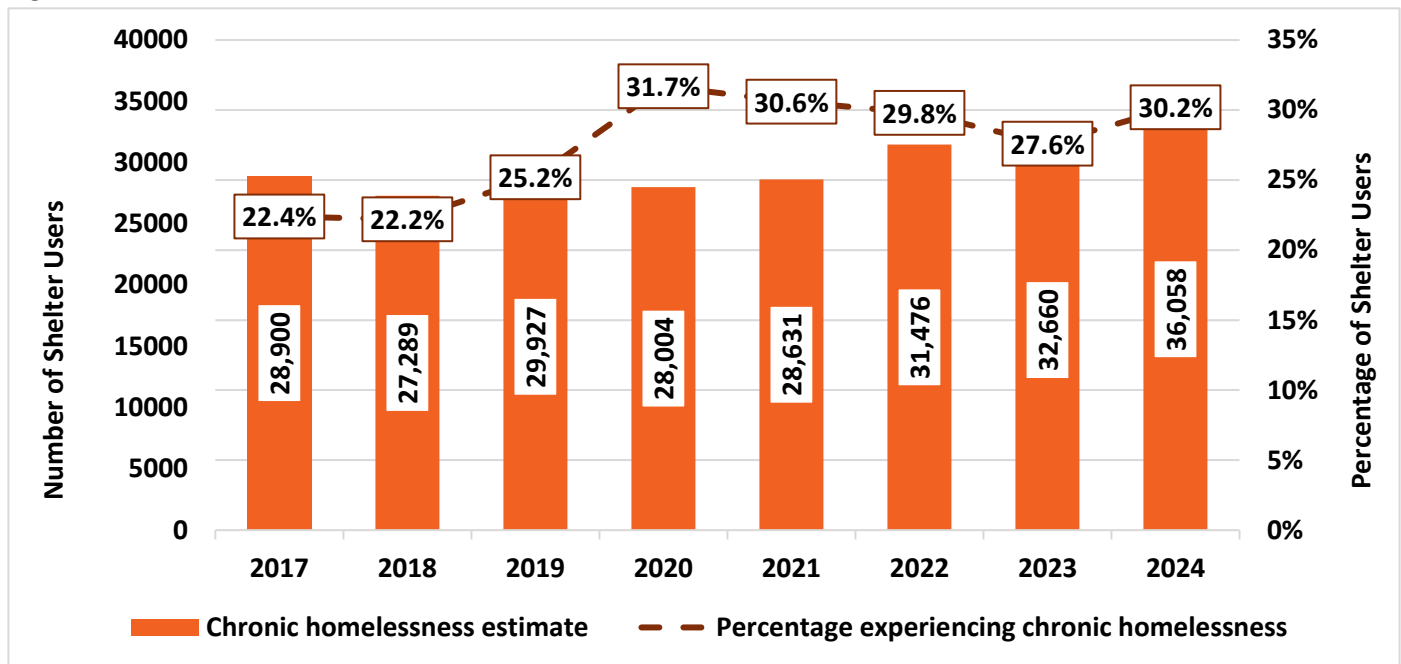


Figure 1 – Text version

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

The overall chronic homelessness estimate includes three categories of shelter users: those who meet the acute chronicity criterion, those who meet the prolonged instability criterion, and those who meet both criteria. Between 2017 and 2024, the proportion of shelter users meeting at least one of these chronicity criteria increased overall, rising most notably in the early pandemic years and fluctuating in the years following, with distinct trends across the three subgroups (Figure 2).

- Acute chronicity:**
 The prevalence increased steadily from 9.0% in 2017 to 16.0% in 2020, then declined slightly through 2023 (14.1%), before rising again to 16.3% in 2024, the highest level in the period.
- Prolonged instability:**
 This remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2020, then dipped to a slightly lower level in later years. It was 8.3% in 2023, and rose modestly to 9.0% in 2024.
- Combined chronic homelessness:**
 The prevalence was stable between 2017 (3.5%) and 2019 (3.8%), increased in 2020 (5.6%) and peaked in 2021 (7.2%), before declining in 2022 (6.6%), 2023 (5.1%), and further to 4.8% in 2024.

Figure 2: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability from 2017 to 2024

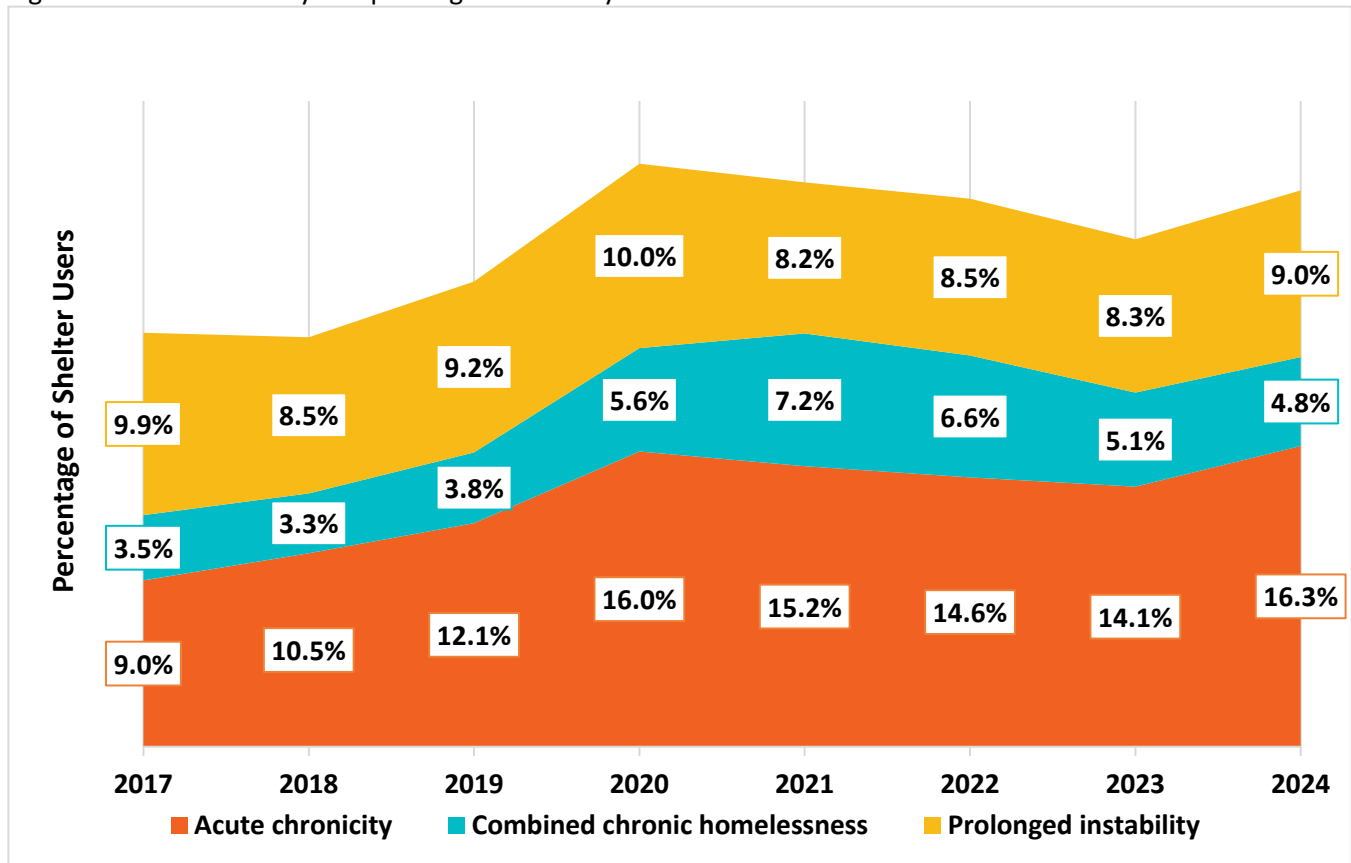


Figure 2 – Text version

Year	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
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%

To better understand how chronic homelessness impacts individuals over a longer timescale, shelter use patterns were examined over a 15-year period, from 2010 to 2024, for each chronic homelessness group in 2024 (Figure 3).

- For comparison, shelter users that did not meet any of the criteria for chronic homelessness spent a median of 50 nights in shelter from 2010 to 2024.
- Those experiencing prolonged instability spent a median of 288 nights in shelter from 2010 to 2024.
- Those who experienced acute chronicity spent a median of 325 nights in shelter from 2010 to 2024.
- Those who experienced combined chronic homelessness (meeting both criteria) tended to spend more nights in shelter overall. From 2010 to 2024, their median number of nights in shelter was 877, which was more than twice as many nights as any other group during this period.

³ Totals may differ from the sum of distinct categories due to rounding.

It is notable that the indicator for prolonged instability requires only one stay in shelter per year over three consecutive years, yet the median nights in shelter for this group is still similar to the median nights for shelter users experiencing acute chronicity. The difference between the minimum requirement and the median for this group suggests that they tend to experience persistent multi-year housing insecurity.

Figure 3: Median nights spent in shelter from 2010 to 2024

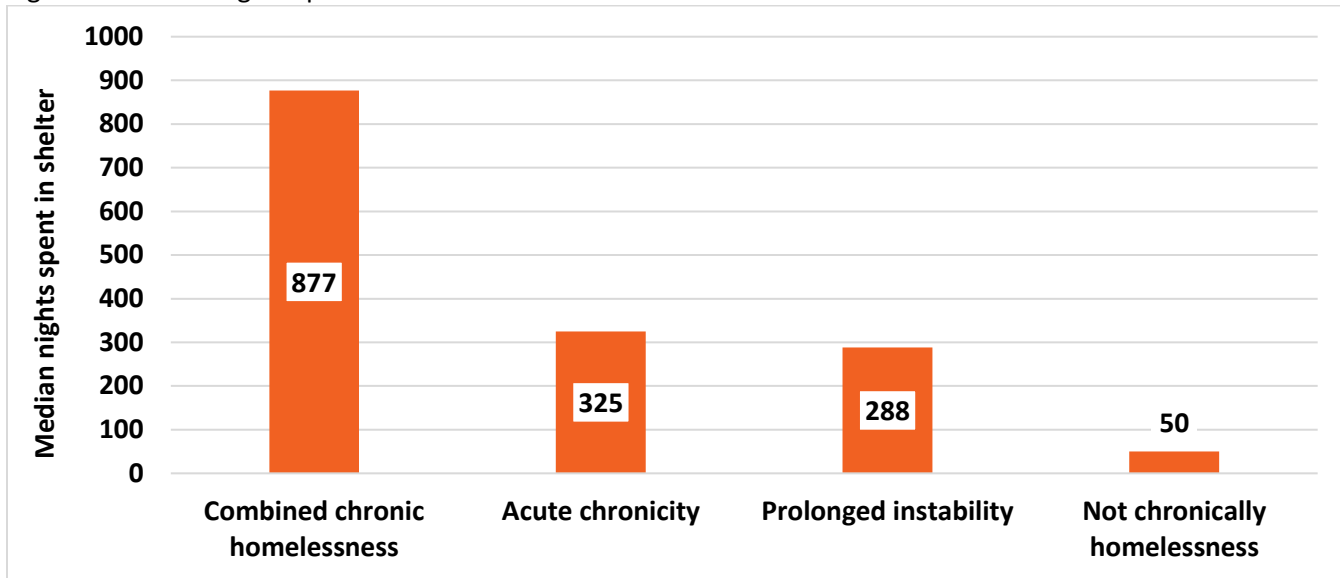


Figure 3 – Text version

Chronic status	Median nights spent in shelter
Combined chronic homelessness	877
Acute chronicity	325
Prolonged instability	288
Not chronically homeless	50

Demographic analysis

Age and chronic homelessness

Rates of chronic homelessness differed across age groups in 2024: 31.1% of children (0–16 accompanied), 26.4% of youth (13–24 unaccompanied), 29.8% of adults, 33.7% of older adults, and 30.9% of seniors.

Statistically significant differences were found in patterns of acute chronicity and prolonged instability across age groups (Figure 4).

- Acute chronicity was highest among children, followed by youth compared to adults.
- Prolonged chronicity was least common among children, followed by youth, older adults, and seniors, with adults aged 25–49 being the most likely to experience it.
- Combined chronic homelessness, which entails intensive and multi-year shelter use, was most common among older adults and seniors, followed by adults aged 25–49, then youth, and lowest among children.

Figure 4: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability by age in 2024

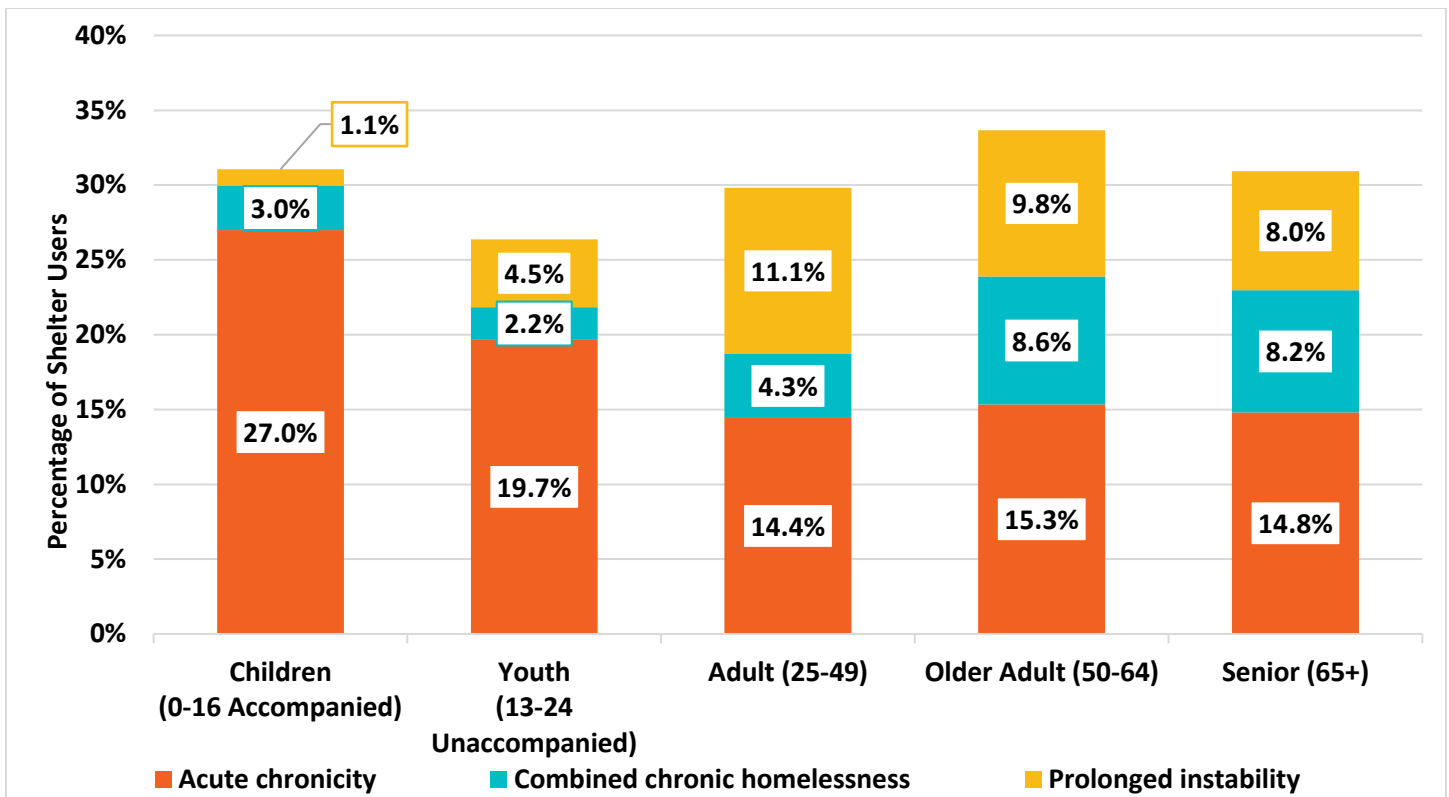


Figure 4 – Text version

Age group	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
Children (0-16 Accompanied)	27.0%	3.0%	1.1%	31.1%
Youth (13-24 Unaccompanied)	19.7%	2.2%	4.5%	26.4%
Adult (25-49)	14.4%	4.3%	11.1%	29.8%
Older Adult (50-64)	15.3%	8.6%	9.8%	33.7%
Senior (65+)	14.8%	8.2%	8.0%	30.9%

Chronic homelessness tended to increase with age. Older adults and seniors had the highest rates across all types of chronic homelessness. Unaccompanied youth had the lowest rates, while accompanied children showed high rates of acute chronicity, likely due to longer stays in family shelters².

Gender and chronic homelessness

Overall rates of chronic homelessness were similar across gender groups in 2024: 30.3% of men, 29.9% of women, and 29.3% of gender diverse shelter users experienced chronic homelessness.

Statistically significant differences can be seen in patterns of acute chronicity and prolonged instability by gender group (Figure 5).

- Men had higher rates of prolonged instability and combined chronic homelessness than women.
- Women had a higher rate of acute chronicity than men.
- There was not enough data to detect statistically significant differences for gender diverse shelter users.

Figure 5: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability by gender in 2024

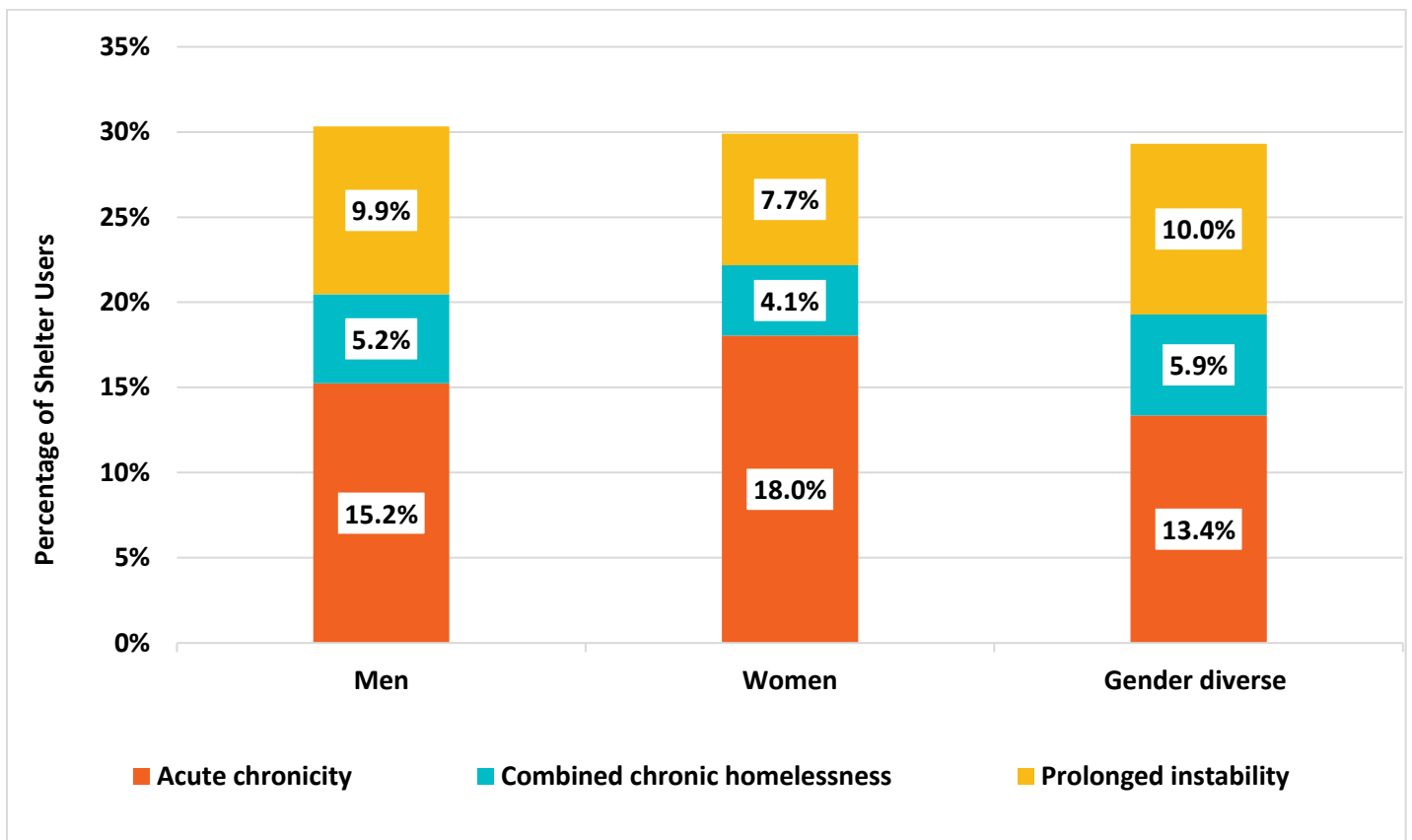


Figure 5 - Text version

Gender Group	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
Men	15.2%	5.2%	9.9%	30.3%
Women	18.0%	4.1%	7.7%	29.9%
Gender diverse	13.4%	5.9%	10.0%	29.3%

Indigenous identity and chronic homelessness

In 2024, the rate of chronic homelessness among shelter users who reported they were Indigenous (26.8%) was lower than the rate among non-Indigenous shelter users (32.8%).

Statistically significant differences were seen in patterns of acute chronicity and prolonged instability (Figure 6).

- Indigenous shelter users had a higher rate of prolonged instability than non-Indigenous shelter users.
- Indigenous shelter users had a lower rate of acute chronicity compared to non-Indigenous shelter users.

Figure 6: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability by Indigenous identity in 2024

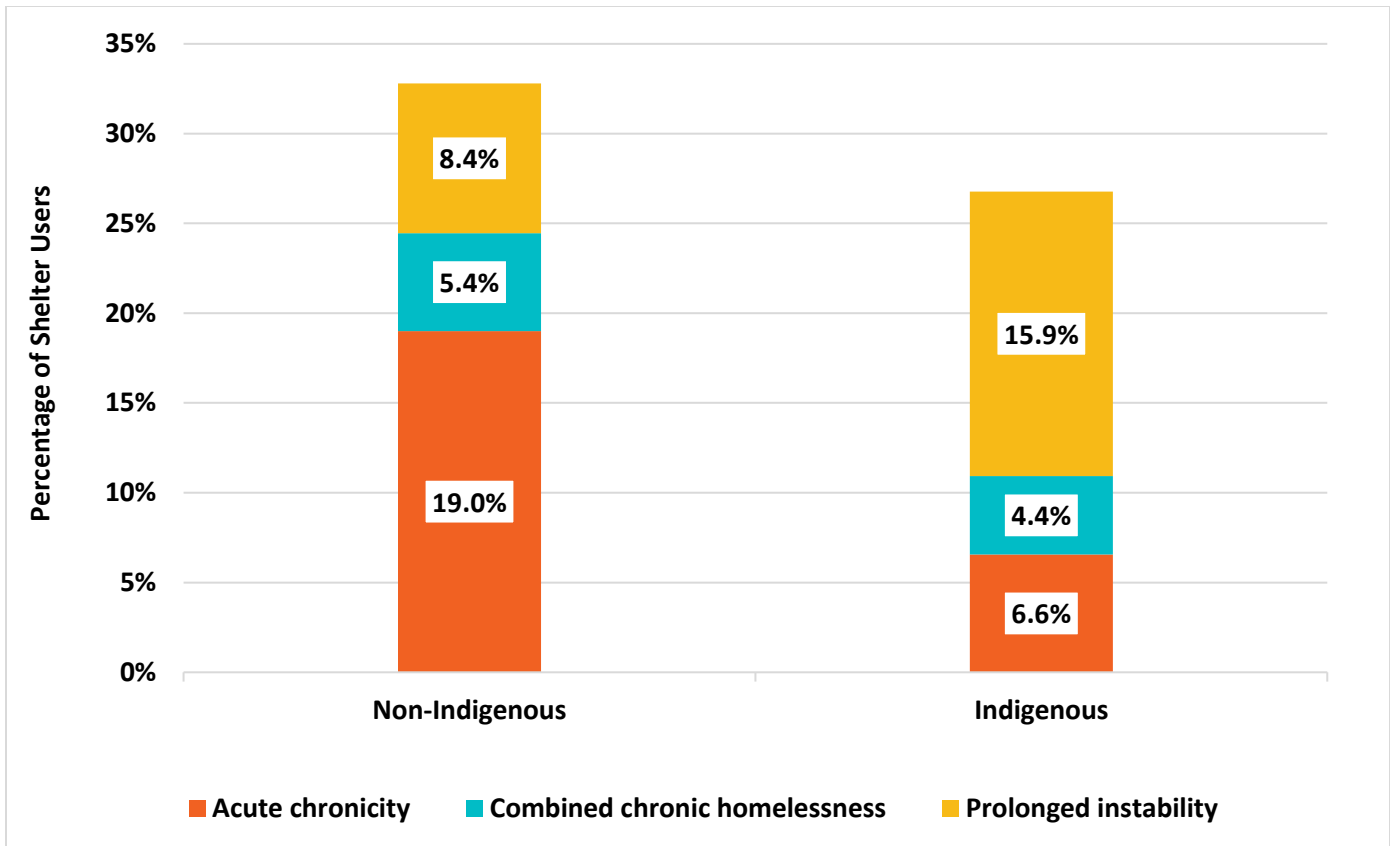


Figure 6 - Text version

Indigenous Identity	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
Non-Indigenous	19.0%	5.4%	8.4%	32.8%
Indigenous	6.6%	4.4%	15.9%	26.8%

Indigenous shelter users had lower chronic homelessness rates compared to those who did not identify as Indigenous in 2024. It is important to consider, however, that Indigenous respondents in the [Everyone Counts 2020-2022: Preliminary Highlights Report](#) were more likely to be in unsheltered locations, and to indicate that they had not used a shelter in the past year. As a result, their experiences of homelessness may be more likely to be missed by shelter system data, leading to an underestimation of chronic homelessness among Indigenous shelter users.

Veteran status and chronic homelessness

In 2024, the rate of chronic homelessness among shelter users who reported they were veterans (27.5%) was slightly higher than the rate among non-veterans (24.6%).⁴

Statistically significant differences can be seen in patterns of acute chronicity and prolonged instability (Figure 7).

- Veterans had a lower rate of acute chronicity compared to non-veterans.
- Prolonged instability was higher among veterans than non-veterans.
- The rates of combined chronic homelessness were higher among veterans compared to non-veterans.

⁴ The sample for this analysis includes data from 25 communities. One community was excluded from this analysis due to lack of data. Canadian Armed Forces, Veteran-Civilians, Veteran-Allies, and former RCMP were considered under the veteran category for this analysis.

Figure 7: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability by veteran status in 2024

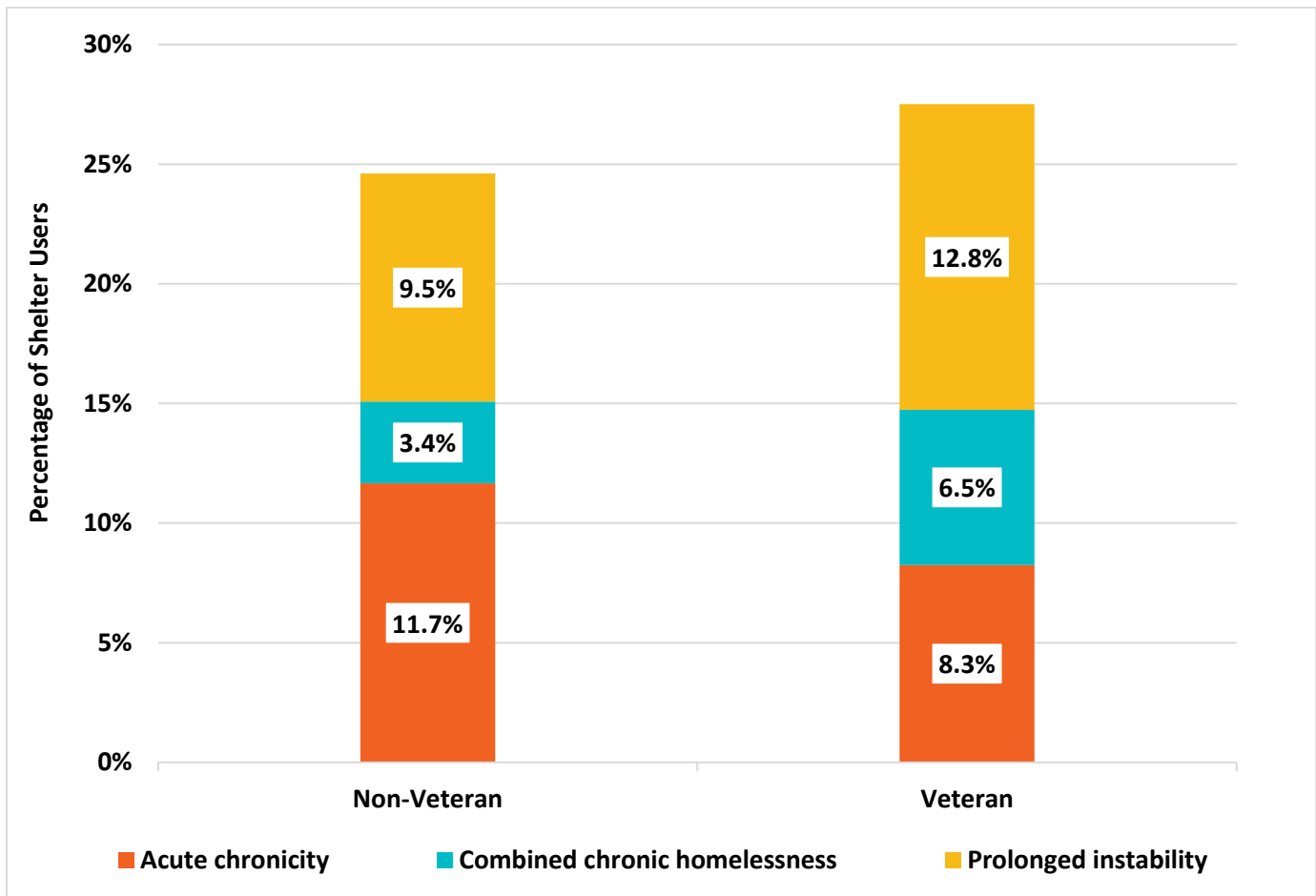


Figure 7 – Text version

Veteran status	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
Non-Veteran	11.7%	3.4%	9.5%	24.6%
Veteran	8.3%	6.5%	12.8%	27.5%

Citizenship status and chronic homelessness

In 2024, overall rates of chronic homelessness did not differ based on citizenship status. Chronic homelessness was experienced by 25.3% of Canadian citizens, 24.5% of Permanent Residents/Immigrants, and 24.3% of Refugees/Refugee Claimants.⁵

However, statistically significant differences can be seen in patterns of acute chronicity and prolonged instability:

- Acute chronicity: Canadian Citizens experienced a lower rate of acute chronicity compared to other citizenship categories, while Permanent Residents/Immigrants experienced a lower rate than Refugees/Refugee Claimants.
- Prolonged chronicity: Canadian Citizens were more likely to experience prolonged chronicity compared to all other citizenship categories.

⁵ The sample for this analysis includes data from 25 communities. One community was excluded from this analysis due to lack of data. Visa holders (shelter users with either a visitor’s visa, a student visa, or a work visa) were excluded from this analysis due to low numbers.

- Combined chronicity: Canadian citizens and Permanent Residents/Immigrants were more likely to experience combined chronic homelessness compared to Refugees/Refugee Claimants.

Figure 8: Acute chronicity and prolonged instability by citizenship status in 2024

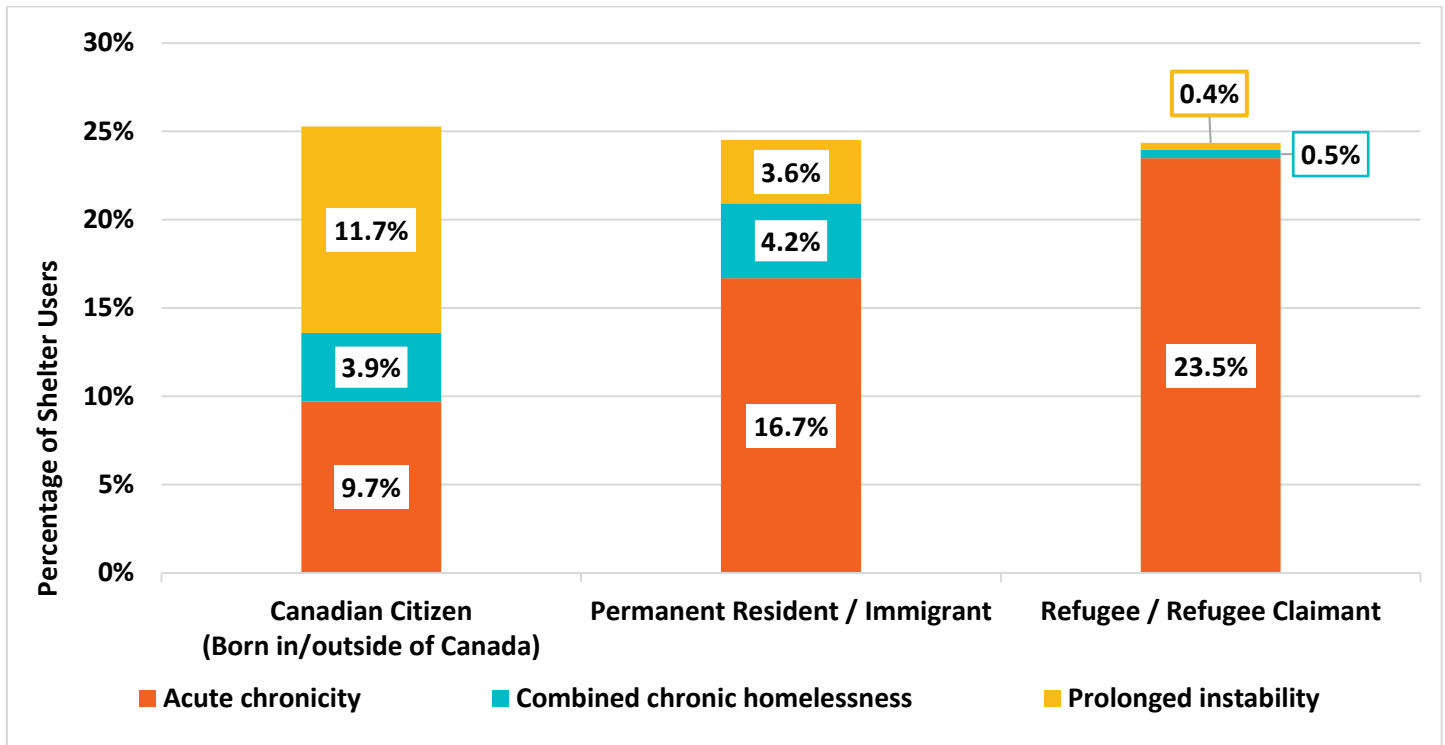


Figure 8 - Text version

Citizenship status	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Total chronic homelessness ³
Canadian Citizen (Born in/outside of Canada)	9.7%	3.9%	11.7%	25.3%
Permanent Resident / Immigrant	16.7%	4.2%	3.6%	24.5%
Refugee / Refugee Claimant	23.5%	0.5%	0.4%	24.3%

The rate among Refugees/Refugee Claimants nearly doubled from 13.7% in 2023 to 24.3% in 2024, likely due to increased numbers of arrivals combined with limited access to affordable housing, longer immigration processing times, and economic challenges faced by newcomer populations.

Key findings

- The estimated number of emergency shelter users experiencing chronic homelessness remained relatively stable between 2017 (28,900) and 2021 (28,631), before increasing in 2022 (31,476), 2023 (32,660), and 2024 (36,058). While a rebound in shelter use after the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to earlier increases, more recent growth likely reflects ongoing pressures such as housing affordability and demand for shelter services.
- As non-chronic shelter users fluctuated in the post-pandemic period, the proportion experiencing chronic homelessness rose from 27.6% (2023) to 30.2% (2024).

- Acute chronicity among shelter users was 16.3% in 2024, slightly higher than in 2023 (14.1%).
- Prolonged instability was 9.0% in 2024, up from 8.3% in 2023.
- Combined chronic homelessness was 4.8% in 2024, compared to 5.1% in 2023.
- Demographic findings in 2024 were largely consistent with those [observed in 2023](#):
 - Acute chronicity was generally higher among accompanied children (0-16), women, and non-Canadian citizen shelter users.
 - Prolonged instability was generally higher among adults (25-49), older adults (50-64), men, Indigenous shelter users, veterans, and Canadian citizens.

A summary table (Table 1) with the estimated rates of chronic homelessness for different groups and a list of the communities included in the analysis are provided in the Annex.

For more information

[Find out more about homelessness research](#)

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

Annex: Comparison of acute chronicity and prolonged instability within each population

Table 1: Summary of the prevalence of chronic homelessness among specific populations in 2024

	Acute chronicity	Combined chronic homelessness	Prolonged instability	Overall ³
Children (0-16 Accompanied)	27.0%	3.0%	1.1%	31.1%
Youth (13-24 Unaccompanied)	19.7%	2.2%	4.5%	26.4%
Adult (25-49)	14.4%	4.3%	11.1%	29.8%
Older Adult (50-64)	15.3%	8.6%	9.8%	33.7%
Senior (65+)	14.8%	8.2%	8.0%	30.9%
Men	15.2%	5.2%	9.9%	30.3%
Women	18.0%	4.1%	7.7%	29.9%
Gender diverse	13.4%	5.9%	10.0%	29.3%
Non-Indigenous	19.0%	5.4%	8.4%	32.8%
Indigenous	6.6%	4.4%	15.9%	26.8%
Non-Veteran	11.7%	3.4%	9.5%	24.6%
Veteran	8.3%	6.5%	12.8%	27.5%
Canadian Citizen (Born in/outside of Canada)	9.7%	3.9%	11.7%	25.3%
Permanent Resident / Immigrant	16.7%	4.2%	3.6%	24.5%
Refugee / Refugee Claimant	23.5%	0.5%	0.4%	24.3%