

REPORT:

# 2021 Point in Time Count

of People Experiencing Homelessness in the  
District of Thunder Bay



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

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The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board. *2021 Point in Time Count of People Experiencing Homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay*. January 13, 2022.

# Acknowledgements

The 2021 Point-in-Time (PiT) Survey was made possible by the collaboration of multiple community agencies, organizations, and individuals. As the lead for the 2021 PiT Survey, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) would like to thank the following organizations for their support:

- Lakehead Social Planning Council
- Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
- People Advocating for Change through Empowerment Inc.
- Shelter House Thunder Bay
- Salvation Army
- John Howard Society
- Lodge on Dawson
- Crossroads Centre Thunder Bay
- Beendigen Inc. Thunder Bay
- Grace Place

The TBDSSAB would also like to thank all the volunteers for their invaluable time and input in this project. Most of all, the TBDSSAB would like to thank all the participants who took the time to complete a survey and share their stories to help us better understand their experiences of homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.

Funding was provided by The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board.

# Executive Summary

The 2021 PiT Survey began at 6:00 pm on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and continued for 24 hours. The survey was available for completion in the City of Thunder Bay at the Canadian Lakehead Exhibition (CLE) which was the only public drop in site due to COVID-19. Additionally, clients staying at a variety of emergency shelter and transitional housing locations were also invited to participate at those locations. In addition, PiT Surveys were available for completion in Greenstone, Nipigon, Schreiber, Marathon, and Conmee. A total of 221 individuals completed the survey.

While the number of surveys completed in 2021 (221) was less than those collected in 2018 (474), and 2016 (289) this should not be interpreted as an indication of a decrease in the homeless population in the District of Thunder Bay. Due to the presence of COVID-19, the number of locations where the public could drop in and complete the survey was reduced from the 2016 and 2018 PiT Surveys.

Since 2018, there has been the addition of a number of programs and services that work towards reducing the number of homeless individuals. For example, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) has introduced the High Needs Homeless Community Housing waitlist category and the Home for Good program. Since 2018, 298 homeless individuals have been housed through these initiatives. Further, a number of organizations, including TBDSSAB, have come together to develop and implement a Coordinated Housing Access Table that was successfully launched in 2019.

For the past year, the TBDSSAB has managed a by-name list through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). At the beginning of October, there were 693 individuals active on the by-name list in the District of Thunder Bay. The by-name list is a much more accurate indicator of the number of people experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.

## Key Results from the 2021 PiT Survey:

- **68.3%** of respondents identified as Indigenous
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 79% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 67%
- **7%** of respondents identified as LGBTQ2S+
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 20.8% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 5.6%
- 43% of respondents were planning to stay in an emergency shelter that night
- **58%** of respondents are chronically homeless
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 20.8% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 62.9%
- **45%** of respondents had been in foster care
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 45% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 45%
- **78%** of respondents reported having used substances
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 87.5% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 76.27%
- **53%** of respondents reported having a mental health condition
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 62.5% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 52.3%
- **70%** of respondents have social assistance benefits as their main source of income (Ontario Disability Support Payment/Ontario Works)
  - ▶ Rural Communities: 37.5% ▶ City of Thunder Bay: 73.1%
- **27.4%** of respondents reported originally being from the City of Thunder Bay, and **29.2%** of respondents surveyed in rural communities reported being from that community

The PiT Survey focuses on those who are experiencing absolute homelessness on the day of the count, such as those experiencing unsheltered and emergency sheltered homelessness as well as the hidden homeless such as those that are couch surfing.

The information collected through the PiT Survey provides an understanding of the demographics of the homeless population in the District of Thunder Bay at that point in time, as well as local information associated with homelessness, including the child welfare system, substance use and mental health.



# The District of Thunder Bay Point in Time Count

October 2021

A Point in Time Count of people experiencing homelessness attempts to create a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homeless in a community during a 24 hour period using a mix of surveys and counting people. The District of Thunder Bay's Point in Time Count was conducted on October 2nd and 3rd, 2021.

221

Surveys Completed with People Experiencing Homelessness

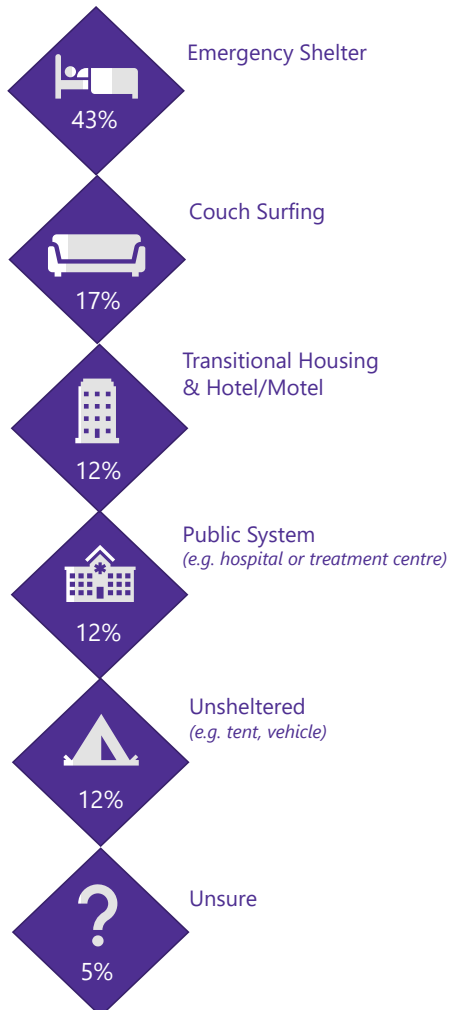
410

People Counted by Community Agencies (including surveys)

693

Active Clients on the By-Name List of People Experiencing Homelessness

Where respondents planned to sleep that night:

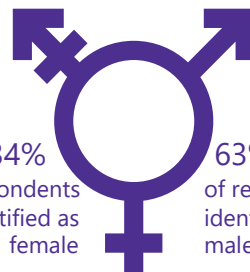


68% of respondents identified as Indigenous



7% of respondents identified as LGBTQ

1% of respondents identified as two-spirit or non-binary

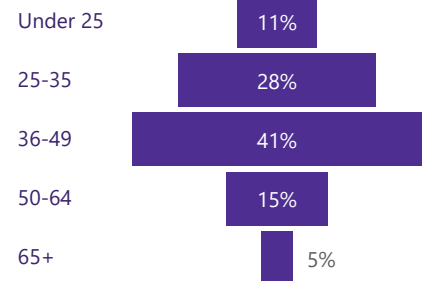


34% of respondents identified as female

63% of respondents identified as male

2% of respondents did not provide a gender identity

Age Range of Survey Respondents



3% of respondents identified as veterans

66% of respondents stayed in a homeless shelter in the last year



53% of respondents first experienced homelessness before turning 25

45% of respondents spent time in foster care





# The District of Thunder Bay Point in Time Count

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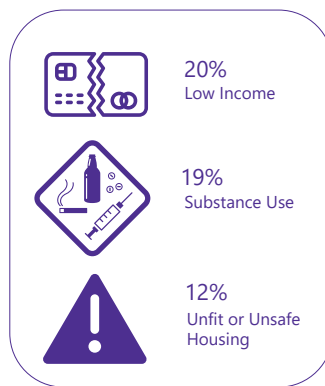
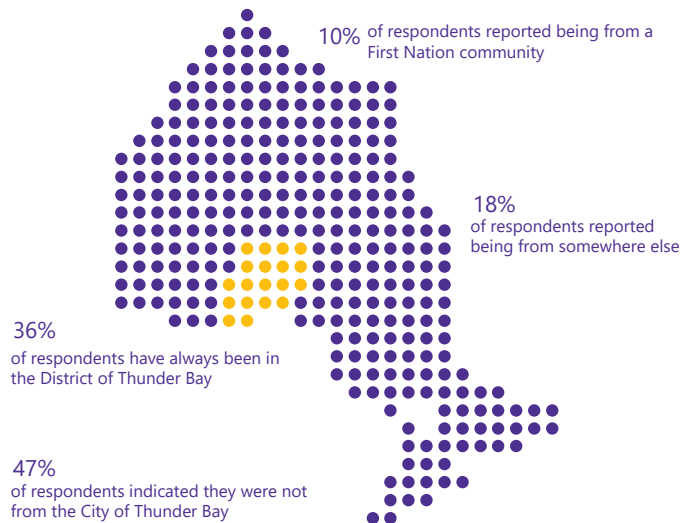
Active Clients on the By-Name List of People Experiencing Homelessness



58% of respondents were experiencing **chronic homelessness** – homeless for 6 months or more in the past year

20% of respondents were experiencing **episodic homelessness** – homeless 3 or more times in the past year

10% of respondents were experiencing **both chronic and episodic homelessness**



The most reported factors contributing to recent housing loss

69% in receipt of Social Assistance

13% Had no Income

The most reported sources of income by respondents

7% were participating in Employment



# Background

Housing is a basic human necessity and right, yet for many people, adequate and affordable housing is out of their reach. Having a home has significant meaning – belonging, comfort, security, and stability - and is the foundation for a decent standard of living. The loss of this foundation is caused by a complex interaction between structural factors (economic and societal issues), system failures (inadequate policy and services), and individual circumstances (e.g., mental health and addictions challenges). As a result, homelessness can lead to poor health, barriers to education and jobs, and social isolation.<sup>1</sup>

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) defines homelessness as “the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it”.<sup>2</sup> This definition categorizes homelessness in a typology that includes:

1. Unsheltered, or absolute homelessness: living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
2. Emergency sheltered: staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
3. Provisionally accommodated: accommodation is temporary and lacks security of tenure; and,
4. At risk of homelessness: people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.<sup>3</sup>

The overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in the homeless population is well documented,<sup>4</sup> therefore it is important to consider the colonization and cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples that has allowed for this disparity. Moving forward, this



knowledge and understanding needs to be at the forefront of efforts to end homelessness. As such, the definition of Indigenous homelessness is:

A human condition that describes First Nations, Metis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships. <sup>5</sup>

The 2021 PiT Survey began at 6:00 pm on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and continued for 24 hours. The survey was available for completion in the City of Thunder Bay at the Canadian Lakehead Exhibition (CLE) which was the only public drop in site due to COVID-19. Additionally, clients staying at Shelter House Thunder Bay, the Salvation Army Journey to Life Centre, The Lodge on Dawson, Crossroads Centre, Beendigen, the John Howard Society of Thunder Bay and District, and Grace Place were provided the opportunity to participate in the survey. In addition, PiT Surveys were available for completion at the Greenstone PACE Office, Nipigon PACE Office, Schreiber PACE Office, Marathon PACE Office and at the Rural Cupboard Food Bank in Conmee. A total of 221 individuals completed the survey.

While the number of surveys completed in 2021 (221) was less than those collected in 2018 (474) and 2016 (289), this should not be interpreted as an indication of a decrease in the homeless population in the District of Thunder Bay. Due to the presence of COVID-19, the 2021 PiT Survey was forced to reduce the number of locations where the public could drop in and complete the survey within the City of Thunder Bay. In 2018, any person wanting to complete a survey could attend any of the nine locations available. However, in 2021 only one central location in the City of Thunder Bay was available for everyone and the other participating organizations were only available to individuals staying at those locations on that night. The locations in Greenstone, Nipigon, Schreiber, Marathon and Conmee were available for drop in.

Of the 221 surveys completed, 24 valid surveys were from outside of the City of Thunder Bay. As no one community outside of the City of Thunder Bay collected more than 20 surveys, to maintain anonymity these surveys are aggregated into Rural Communities for this report. A total of 35 surveys were deemed ineligible based on where respondents were planning to sleep the night of the PiT Count. 28 of the ineligible surveys were from rural communities.

For the past year, TBDSSAB has managed a by-name list through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). A by-name list is a comprehensive list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs. At the beginning of October, there are 693 individuals active on the by-name list in the District of Thunder Bay.

The by-name list is a much more accurate indicator of the number of people experiencing homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay, however the data collected through the PiT Survey will be used to understand the characteristics of the homeless population, improve services and programs for them, and increase public awareness of homelessness. The information will also be used to study demographic changes, prioritize service needs, and to continue the dialogue about homelessness with organizations, government and community members.

# Methodology

## Data Collection

During the 24-hour period beginning on October 2<sup>o</sup>, 2021 at 6:00pm, approximately 100 trained volunteers administered surveys at 11 locations throughout the District of Thunder Bay.

Volunteers were trained to treat everyone with respect, informing those surveyed that they could refuse to answer questions or stop the survey at any time. Participants' safety and comfort were a priority. Consideration was taken to minimize any risks of harm from the survey questions. All COVID-19 precautions were taken, as per public health guidelines. At the end of the survey, all individuals were given an honorarium for their participation.

## Surveys

Before conducting the survey, several screening questions were asked to determine whether participants were eligible to continue. These questions were:

1. Have you already completed this survey with another volunteer?
2. Are you willing to participate in the survey?
3. Where are you staying tonight?
4. Do you have your own house or apartment you can safely return to?

These questions were used to control duplication and to ensure that participation was completely voluntary. If found to be ineligible, the survey interaction ends and data

collection does not continue. In the case of a paper survey with these questions incomplete, the surveys are ineligible.

The PiT Survey focuses on those who are experiencing absolute homelessness on the day of the count, such as those experiencing unsheltered and emergency sheltered homelessness as well as the hidden homeless such as those that are couch surfing.

The information collected through the PiT Survey provides a better understanding of the demographics of the homeless population in the District of Thunder Bay at that point in time, as well as local information associated with homelessness, including the child welfare system, substance use and incarceration.

## **Volunteers**

The PiT Survey would not have been possible without volunteers who contributed their time to the event. Approximately 100 people registered to volunteer. All volunteers were required to attend a training session before the enumeration event. Training topics included safety, background information about the PiT Survey, cultural awareness, roles and responsibilities of volunteers, and the survey tools.

## **Data Entry and Analysis**

Survey data from the PiT Survey was entered into the Government of Canada's Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). A data quality check was done to ensure that the survey responses were entered correctly into HIFIS.

The final results went through a data quality check to ensure that calculations were free of errors. For the PiT results, percentages were rounded, so the total may not add up to 100%.

The analysis looked at all of the survey participants as a whole and chose a few key subcategories to compare. The categories included demographic categories and some based on where the respondent was planning to sleep that night:

- people who reported couch surfing;
- people who reported shelter use;
- people experiencing absolute homelessness (unsheltered/living on the street);
- people experiencing chronic homelessness (180+ days of homelessness in 12 months);
- youth (people under 25 years old);
- people who reported Indigenous identity.

Most of these subcategories are not mutually exclusive; someone may fall into all five demographic categories and one based on their sleeping arrangements. The only categories that would be mutually exclusive from one another are those who reported couch surfing, shelter use or absolute homelessness as these categories are based on the answer to a single question.

This report will outline the main responses for the survey participants, as well as any significant deviations seen within the subcategories outlined above.

## Limitations

Although the PiT Survey is a useful tool to gather information about those experiencing homelessness, it is not a reliable tool for the enumeration of people experiencing homelessness.

**Statistical Significance** – Due to the difficulties in reaching people experiencing homelessness, a number of methodological issues arise in obtaining a statistically significant sample. The survey results are not random, only represent a single point in time, and are not large enough to be considered statistically significant to extrapolate to a larger population. Any comments herein about the population of people experiencing homelessness are only applicable to the group surveyed at a specific point in time.

**Minimum Count** – The PiT Survey is only a snapshot of homelessness; it is impossible to enumerate everyone experiencing homelessness in a community. It does not give a complete picture of people at risk of housing loss, people who are couch surfing, and people who cycle in and out of homelessness.

**Self-Reporting** – As the survey responses are self-reported, the results are dependent on the honesty of the participants. This issue is greater for sensitive topics such as Indigenous identity, sexual orientation and substance use, which participants may not be comfortable sharing with volunteers.

# Results

## Completed Surveys

A total of 221 people completed the 2021 PiT Survey. TABLE 1 shows the totals according to the typology of homelessness.

Communities outside of the City of Thunder Bay collected 24 valid surveys. As no one community collected more than 20 surveys, to maintain anonymity, these surveys are aggregated into Rural Communities for this report. 35 surveys were deemed ineligible based on where respondents were planning to sleep the night of the PiT Count. 28 of the ineligible surveys were from rural communities.

Table 1

Typology of Homelessness	
Unsheltered and Unknown	33
Emergency sheltered	95
Provisionally accommodated	93
Total	221



Figure 1:  
Valid Surveys by  
Area

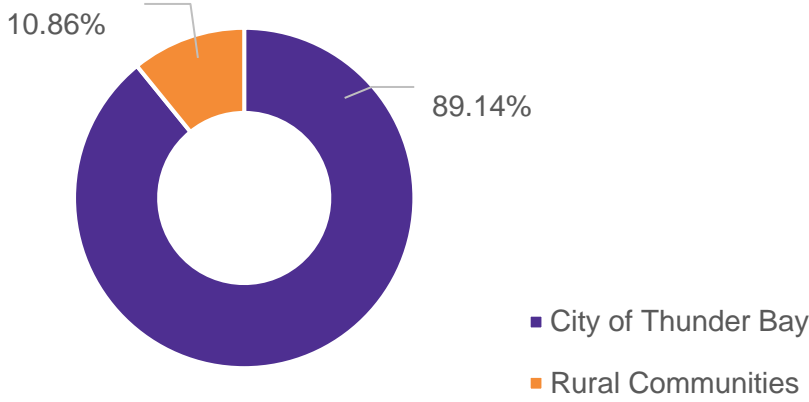
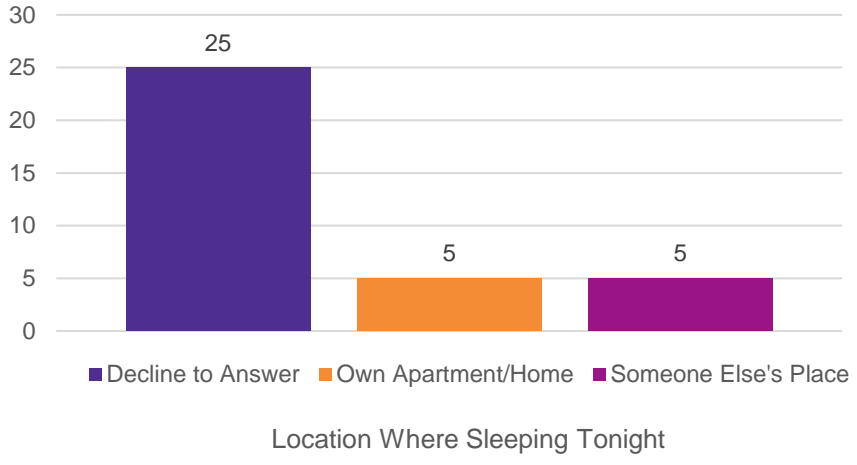


Figure 2:  
Where Screened Out  
Respondents Stayed  
That Night



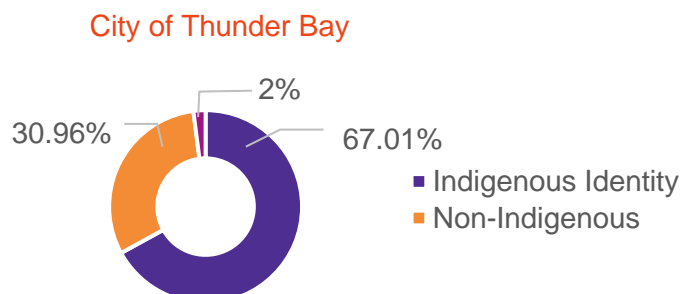
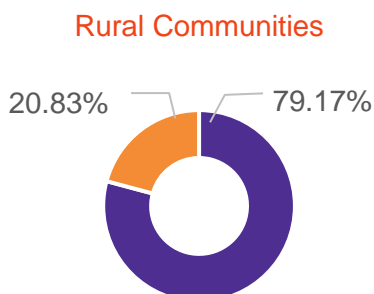
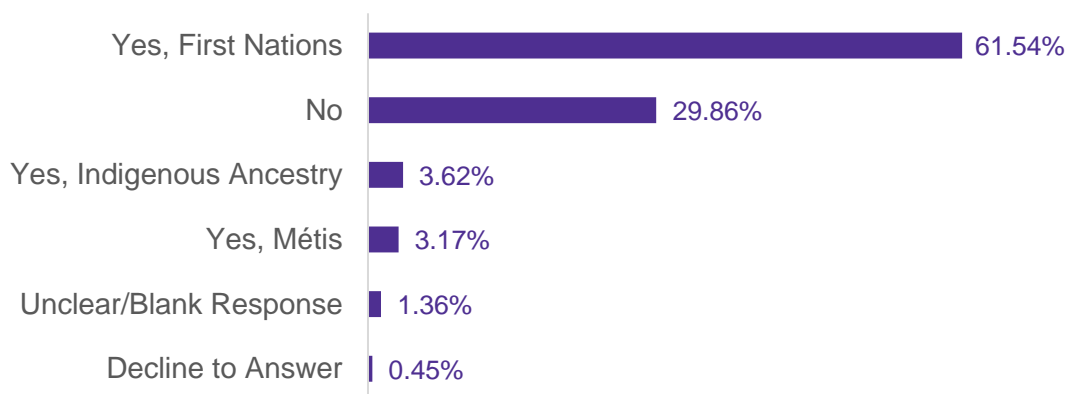
# Demographics

## Indigenous Participants

Participants were asked if they identify as having indigenous ancestry, as First Nations with or without status, or as Métis. The combined total of respondents that identified as Indigenous is 68.3%.

For the rural communities 79.2% identified as Indigenous and 81.8% of youth identified as Indigenous. For the City of Thunder Bay, 67% identified as Indigenous and 57% of youth identified as Indigenous.

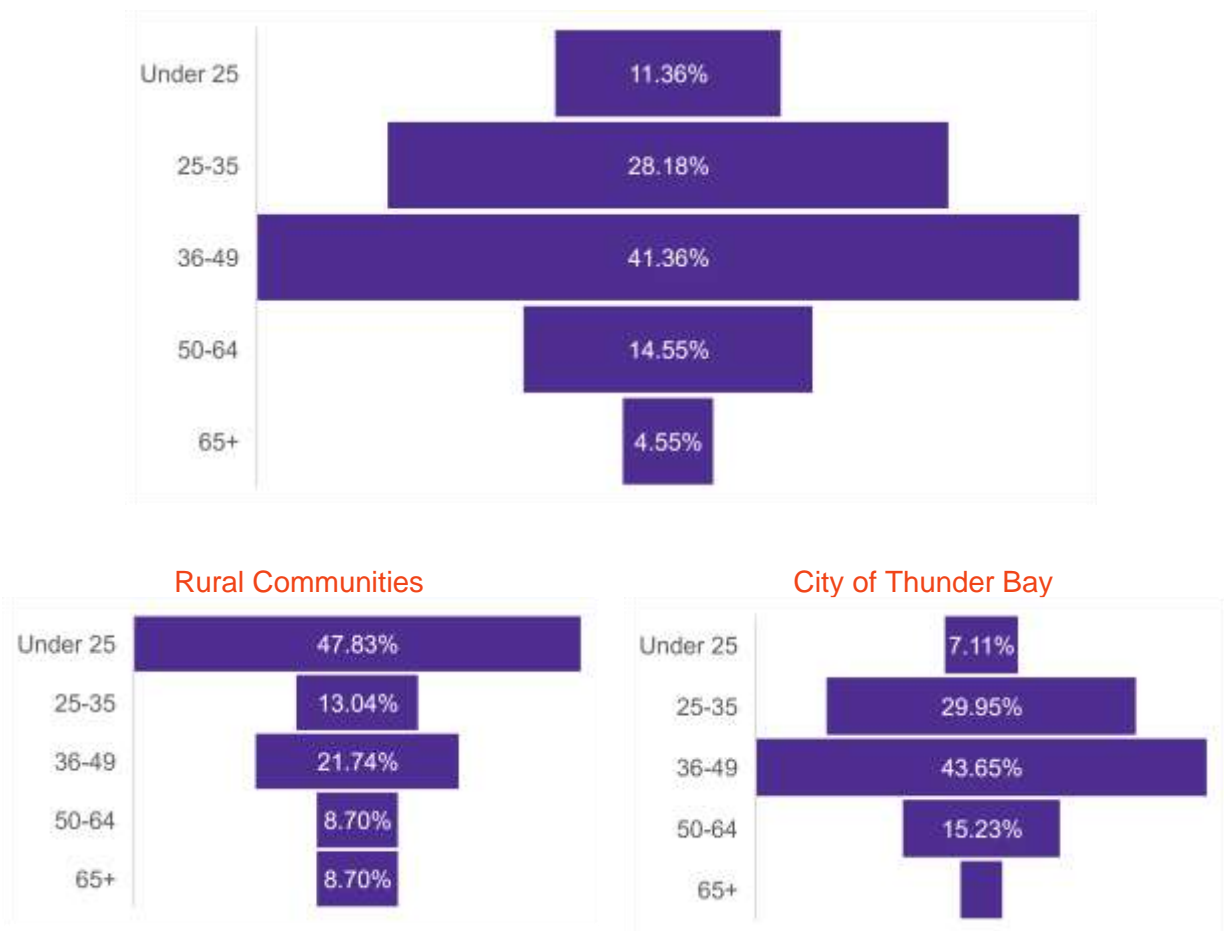
Figure 3: Respondents Identifying as Indigenous



## Age Range

The average age of all participants was 40. The average age for youth (under 25) was 18, with the youngest participant 16 and the oldest participant 73. The average age of the first homeless episode for survey respondents was 27 years old. For the rural communities the average age was 33 and the average age for youth was 20. The average age in the City of Thunder Bay was 41 and the average age for youth was 16.

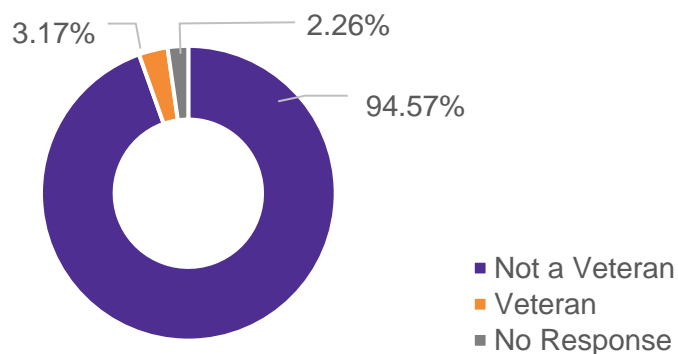
Figure 4: Respondent Age Range



## Veteran Status

When asked if they identified as veterans, 3% of participants responded “yes”. Of those who identified as veterans, 86% identified as Indigenous and 100% identified as male. There were no respondents who identified as veterans in the rural communities.

Figure 5: Veteran Status

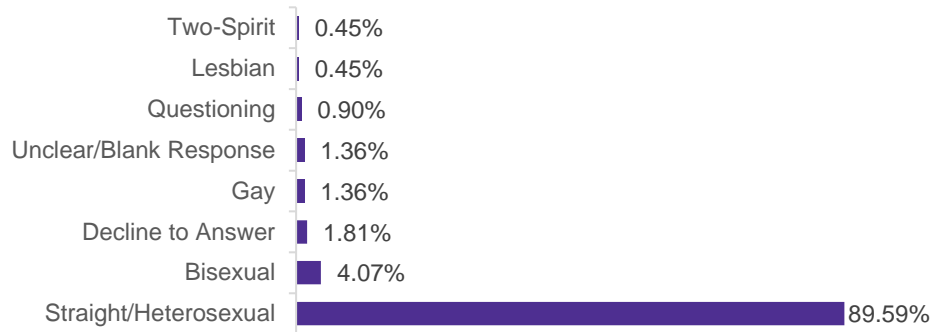


## Sexual Orientation

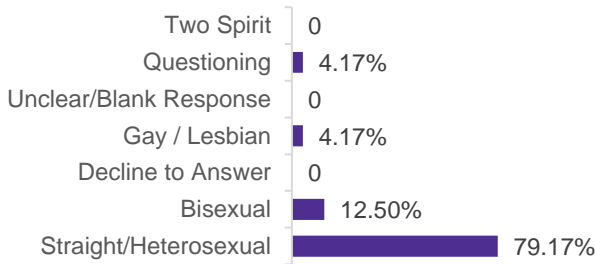
When asked about their sexual orientation, 7% of respondents identified as LGBTQ2S+. Of the youth surveyed, 2% identified as LGBTQ+. Of all the survey respondents 89.59% identified as straight/heterosexual, 4.07% identified as bisexual, 1.36 as gay, .9% questioning, .45% as lesbian and .45% as two-spirited.

For respondents in the rural communities 20.8% identified as LGBTQ2S+, 79.2% as straight, 12.5% as bisexual, 4.2% as lesbian, and 4.2% questioning. 5.6% of respondents in the City of Thunder Bay identified as LGBTQ2S+, 90.9% as straight, 3.1% as bisexual, 0% as lesbian, 0.5% as questioning, 0.5% as two-spirit, and 1.5% as gay.

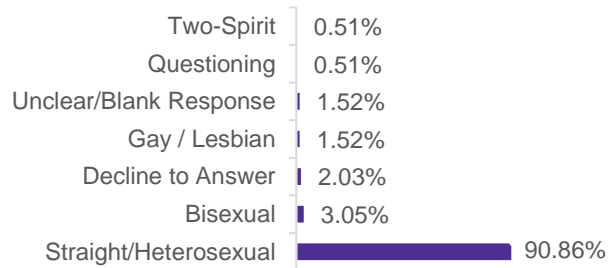
**Figure 6: Sexual Orientation of Respondents**



**Rural Communities**



**City of Thunder Bay**

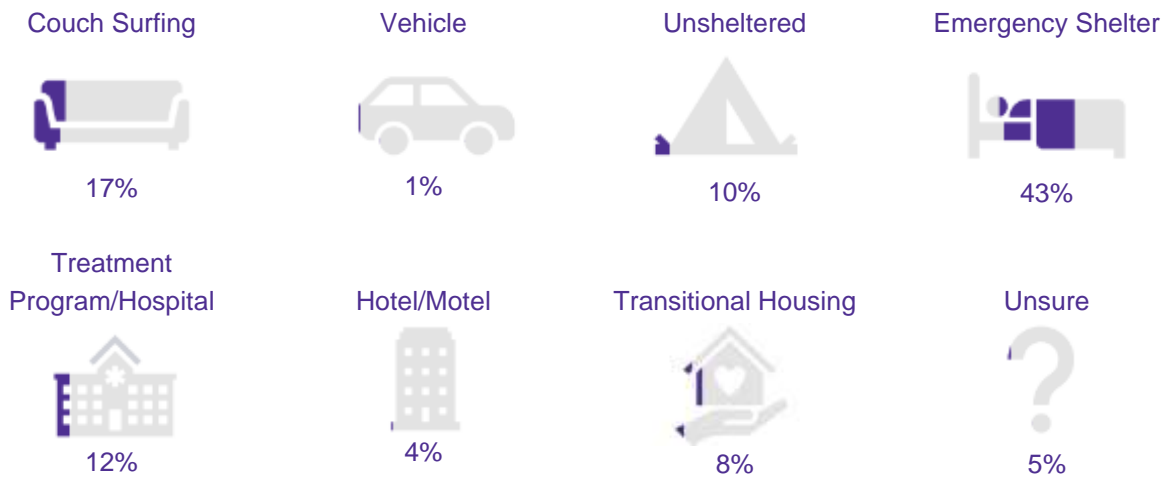


**Place to Stay at Night**

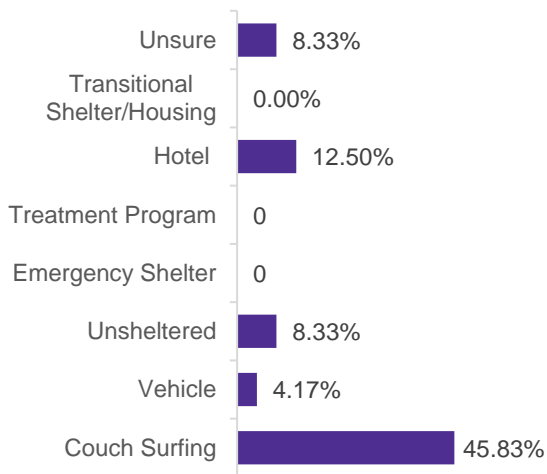
When asked where they were planning to stay that night, 17% of respondents planned to couch surf (stay at someone else’s place), 43% of survey participants were planning to stay in an emergency shelter, 10% unsheltered, 1% in their car, 12% in a treatment program/hospital, 8% in transitional housing, 4% in motel/hotel, and 5% were unsure.

Respondents in rural communities identified couch surfing (45.8%), transitional shelter/housing (20.8%), and hotel/motel (12.5%) as the top three places. In the City of Thunder Bay, emergency shelter (47.7%), couch surfing (13.7%), and treatment centre/hospital (13.7%) were the top three places identified.

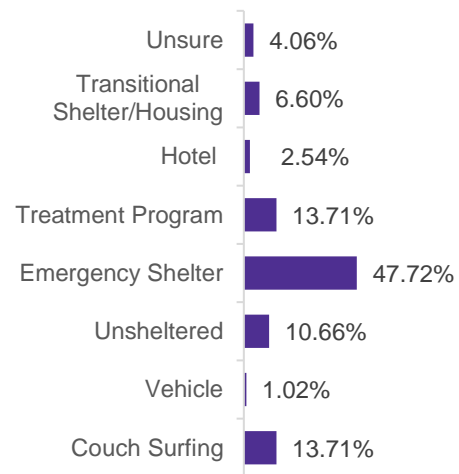
Figure 7: Locations Participants Planned to Sleep on October 2, 2021



Rural Communities



City of Thunder Bay



## Chronic and Episodic Homelessness

Chronic homelessness is defined as experiencing homelessness for 180 days or more in a 12-month time period. 58% of survey participants reported being homeless for more than 6 months and are classified as chronically homeless. 20.8% of respondents from rural communities and 62.9% from the City of Thunder Bay are chronically homeless.

Episodic homelessness is defined as experiencing 3 or more homelessness events in a 12-month period. These periods of homelessness have a time gap between them. 20% of survey respondents are classified as episodically homeless. In rural communities, 25% identified as episodically homeless and 19.8% of respondents in the City of Thunder Bay identified as episodic.

Figure 8: Chronic Homelessness

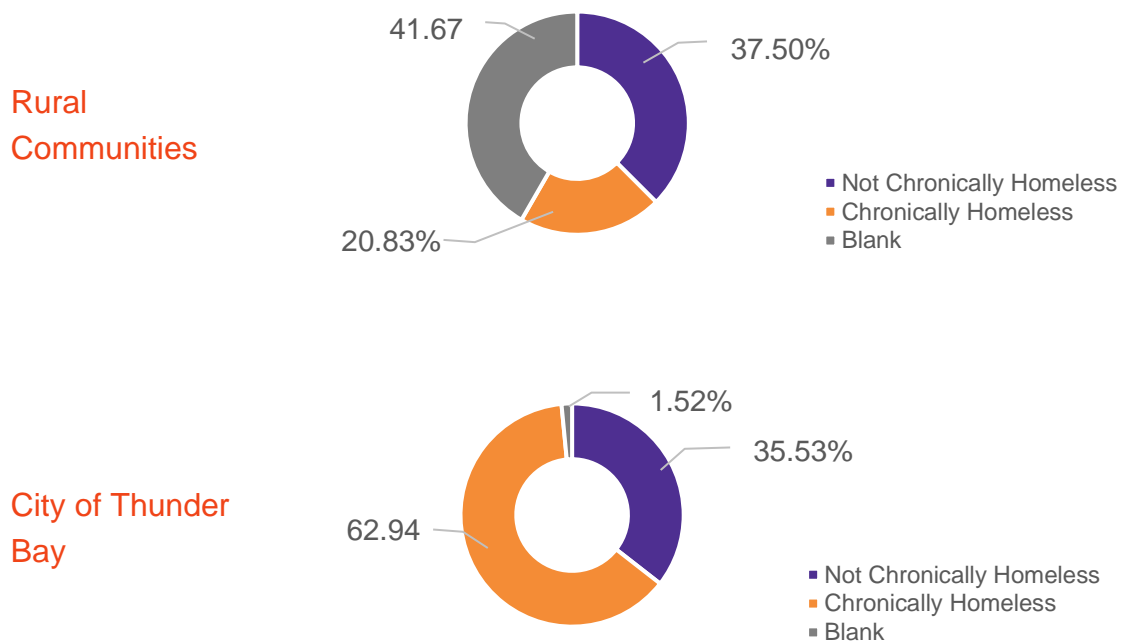
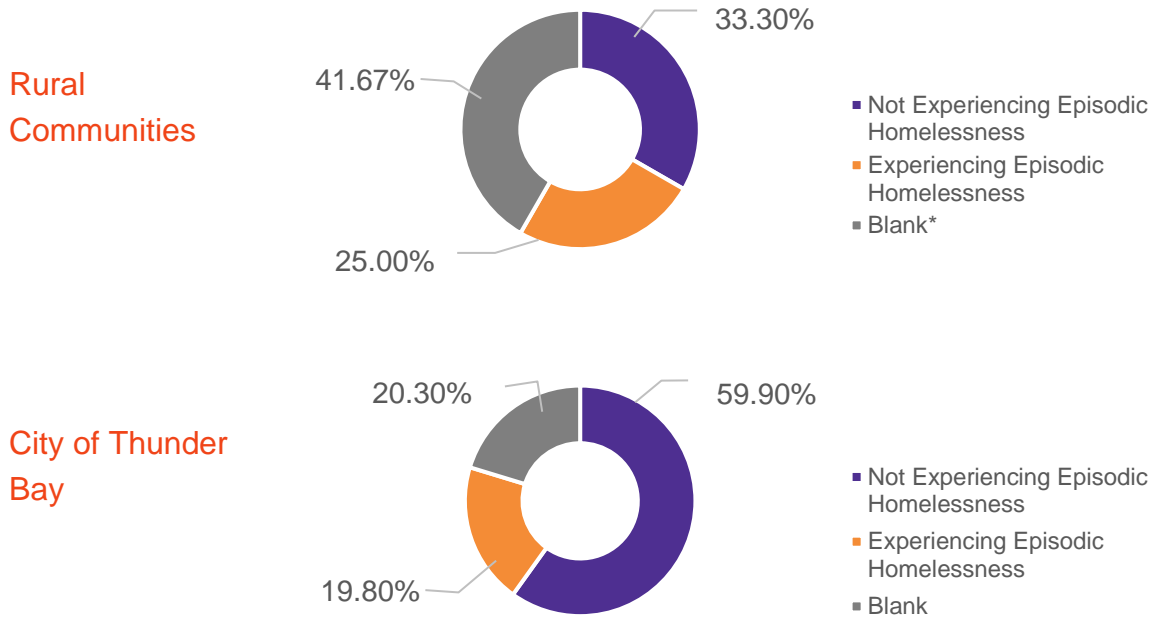




Figure 9: Respondents Experiencing Episodic Homelessness



\*Blank denotes no answer to the questions of how long and how many times in the last year have you experienced homelessness

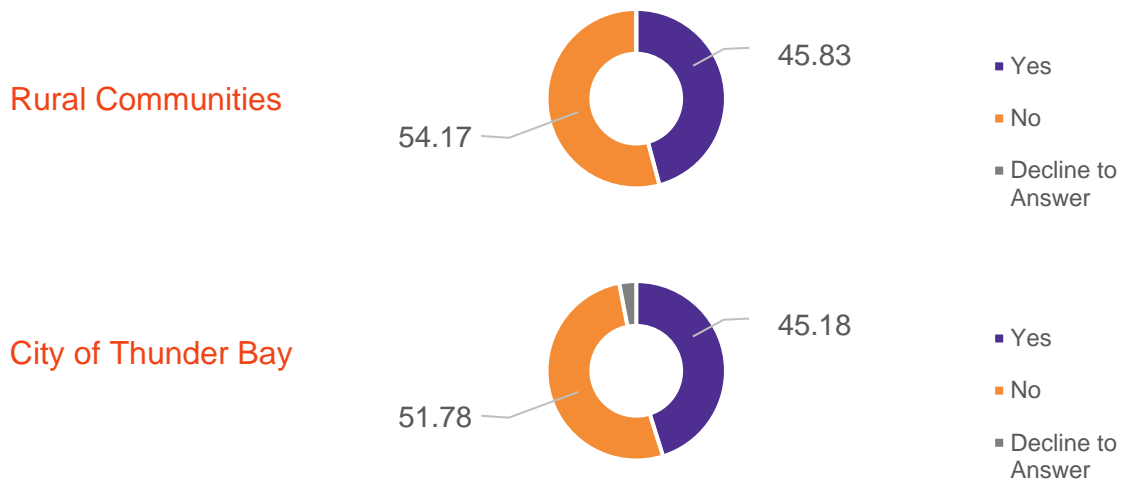
## Foster Care

Respondents were asked if they were ever in foster care; 45% of participants responded yes. That number jumped to 59% when looking only at youth under 25; a statistically significant difference from the total surveyed group. Indigenous survey participants also had a higher rate of experience in the foster care system than the rest of the respondents at 54%. When focusing on Indigenous youth, 61% had experience with foster care.

In rural communities, 54% responded that they had been in foster care. This number increased to 66.7% for youth under 25. Indigenous survey participants with experience

in the foster care system was 52.6%, whereas 30% of Indigenous youth had foster care experiences. In the City of Thunder Bay 45% responded that they had been in foster care. This number increased to 64.3% for youth under 25. Indigenous survey participants with experience in the foster care system was 53.8% and 100% of Indigenous youth had foster care experiences.

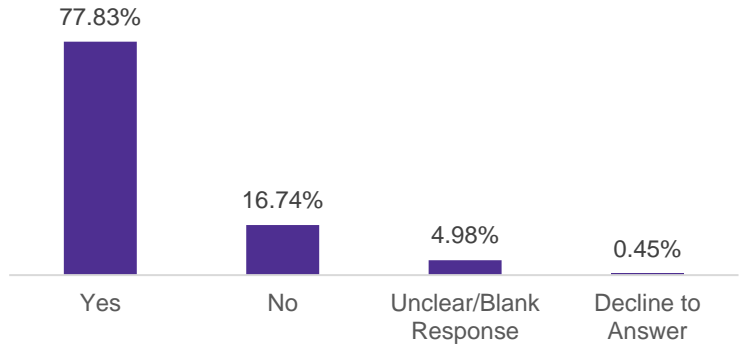
Figure 10: Respondents with history in the foster care system



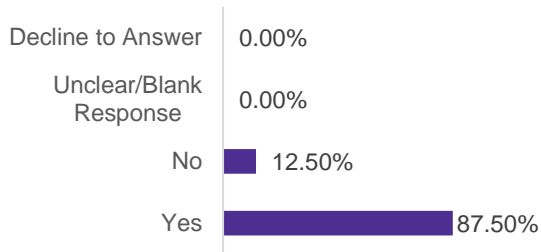
## Mental Health and Substance Use

Substance Use was the second most reported reason for homelessness. 78% of participants reported having used substances and 53% reported having a mental health condition. In rural communities, 87.5% reported having used substances and 62.5% reported having a mental health condition. In the City of Thunder Bay 76.7% reported having used substances and 52.3% reported having a mental health condition.

Figure 11: % Respondents Reporting Substance Use



Rural Communities



City of Thunder Bay

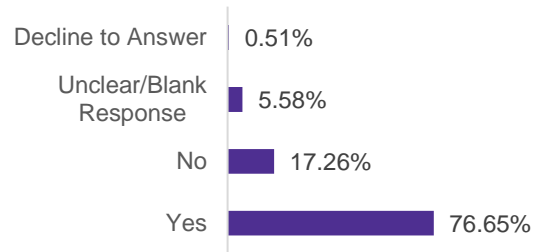
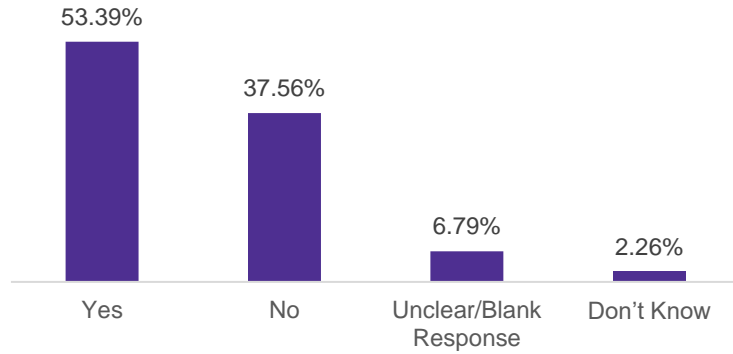
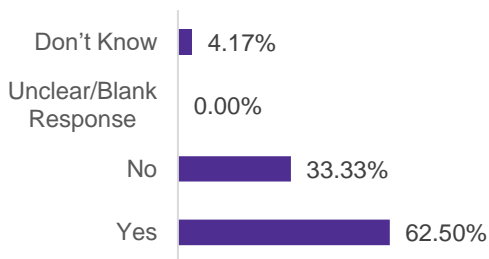


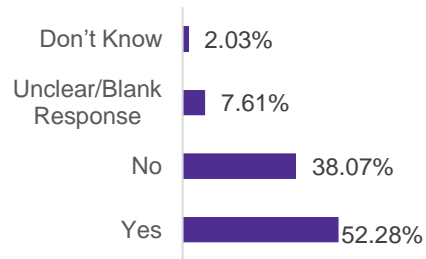
Figure 12: % Respondents Reporting a Mental Health Issue



Rural Communities



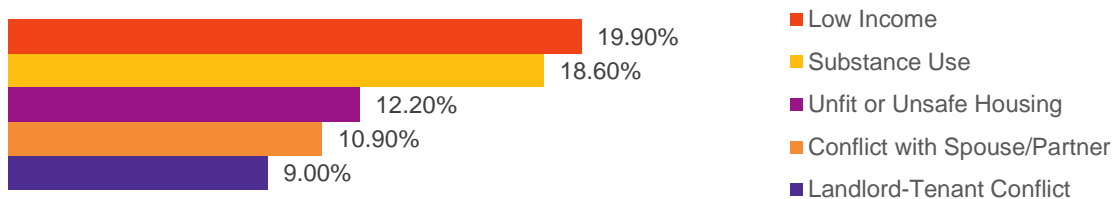
City of Thunder Bay



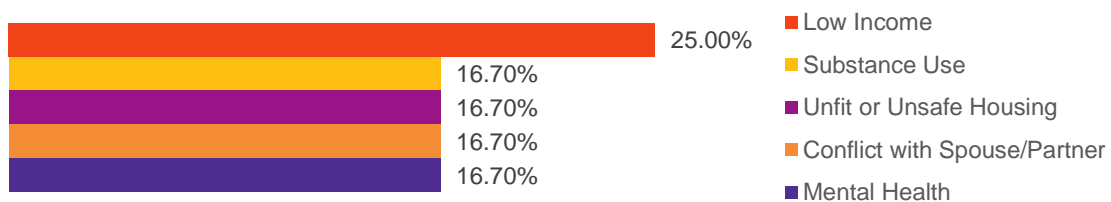
## Reasons for Homelessness

Participants were asked what they believe are the reasons for their homelessness. If the participant could not freely give reasons, the volunteer provided a list of examples, and the participant chose as many of those options as they felt applicable. The top five self-reported reasons for homelessness were low income (20%), substance use (19%), unfit or unsafe housing (12%), conflict with spouse or partner (11%), and conflict with landlord (9%). Low income and substance use were the first and second reason provided in both rural communities and in the City of Thunder Bay.

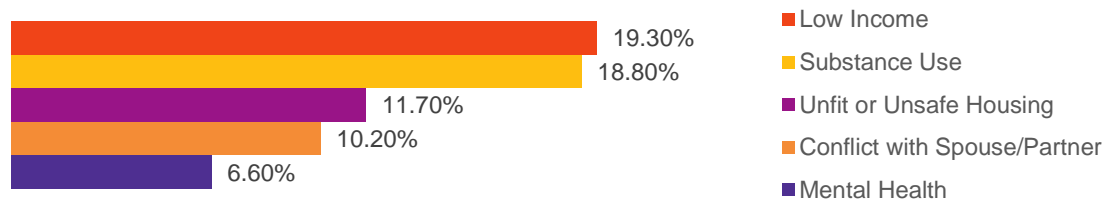
Figure 13: Five Most Frequently Reported Reasons for Housing Loss



### Rural Communities



### City of Thunder Bay

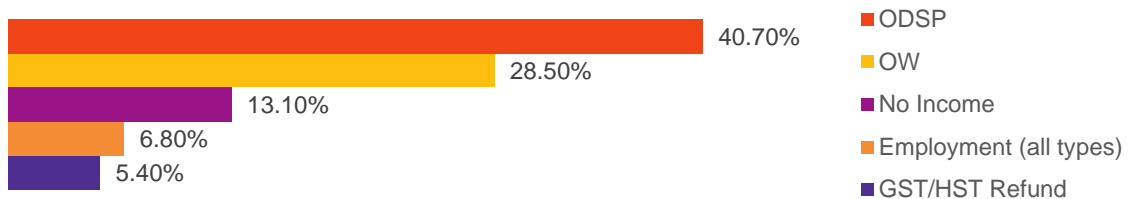


## Sources of Income

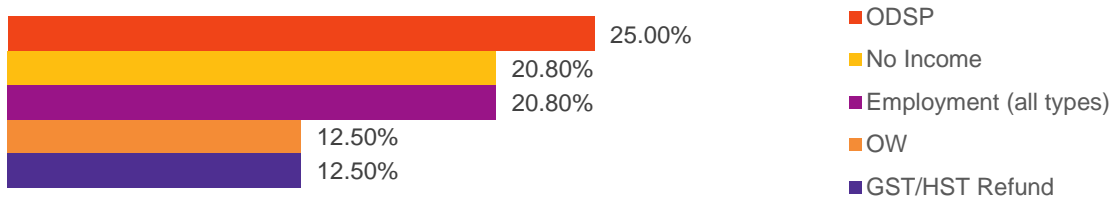
Social assistance benefits (Ontario Disability Support Payment/Ontario Works) were the main source of income for 70% of people who participated in the survey. The third most reported source of income was “No income” with 13% of respondents.

For respondents in rural communities, ODSP was the main source of income for 25%, no income for 20.8% and employment for 20.8%. In the City of Thunder Bay 42.6% of respondents received ODSP, 30.5% OW and 12.2% had no income.

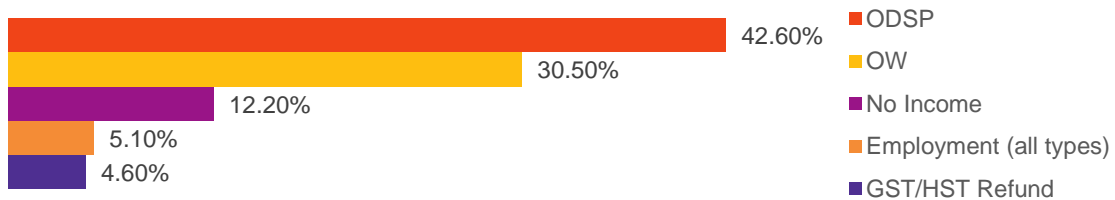
Figure 14: Most Reported Income Sources



### Rural Communities



### City of Thunder Bay



## Respondents not originally from the community surveyed

Survey participants were asked if they have always been in the current community. 27.4% of respondents that were surveyed in the City of Thunder Bay reported originally being from the City of Thunder Bay, and 29.2% of respondents surveyed in rural communities reported being from that community.

Of the people surveyed in the City of Thunder Bay, 14.2% came from a First Nation community, 7.6% came from another community in the District of Thunder Bay, and 20.8% reported being from outside the District. The respondents surveyed in rural communities chose not to provide an answer to this question.

## Conclusion

The PiT Survey focuses on those who are experiencing absolute homelessness on the day of the count, such as those experiencing unsheltered and emergency sheltered homelessness as well as the hidden homeless such as those that are couch surfing.

The information collected through the PiT Survey provides a better understanding of the demographics of the homeless population in the District of Thunder Bay at that point in time, as well as local information associated with homelessness, including the child welfare system, substance use and mental health.

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