

EDSON HOUSING & SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATION: COMMUNITY REPORT

2022



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

RDN acknowledges the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands. RDN's physical office is on Treaty 6 Lands and home to Metis Nation Region 4. The Town of Edson is also located on Treaty 6 Lands and is home to Metis Nation Region 4.

We acknowledge that we are all Treaty people; we do this to affirm our commitment and responsibility to improve relationships between nations and improve our understanding of local Indigenous people and their cultures.

We thank you.

This report and the information within were made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front-line staff at participating service agencies in Edson, the Edson Housing and Homelessness TaskForce, and the residents of Edson for their support, dedication, and commitment to this project.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2022, Edson participated in a large-scale housing and service needs estimation to better understand what homelessness looks like in their community. The project was also an opportunity to understand the service needs of residents in Edson and to collect meaningful data to support decisions making moving forward. Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, developed in 2017 by the Rural Development Network (RDN), RDN worked with the Edson Housing & Homelessness Taskforce to develop a customized survey that reflected their community context. Surveys were administered to community members at six service provider locations, two municipal buildings, one school, and online as an open Survey Monkey link. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of 5 weeks; from March 28 - May 3, 2022.

A total of 163 survey respondents were identified as housing-unstable. An additional 53 dependents and 92 adults reported as living with survey respondents. In total, 308 people are living in unstable housing situations in Edson.

Respondents identified a variety of reasons for housing instability, though the top five reasons cited were low wages, inability to afford rent/mortgage, their housing needs major repairs (i.e. no windows, no heat, water or mould damage, leaky roof), mental health concerns, and physical disability.

This report breaks down the demographics of housing stable versus housing unstable respondents as well as their education, employment, and income sources, living situations, community supports, perceived safety, and future opportunities. Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN also suggests six opportunities to consider as the community continues to address issues of homelessness in Edson.

DEFINITIONS: WHAT DOES HOMELESSNESS MEAN?

Homelessness

Homelessness is the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/ household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

Further, Indigenous homelessness considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. It is described as a "human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing...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."

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing. Individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations. These various living situations include:

Unsheltered: Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation. (e.g. living on sidewalks, squares, parks; vehicles, garages, etc.).

Emergency Sheltered: People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness as well as those staying in shelters due to family violence.

Provisionally Accommodated: People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g. couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).

At-Risk of Homelessness: People who are not yet homeless but their current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. (e.g. people who are one rent payment missed from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.).

(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, 2012).

NOTE: For the purposes of this report, we will be using the term **“Unstable Housing”** to encompass the entire spectrum of homelessness which includes unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at-risk of homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

In early 2021, the Town of Edson launched the Shelter Pods Pilot Program to provide emergency shelter to residents experiencing homelessness in Edson. Without a dedicated emergency shelter, the number of individuals sleeping unsheltered was high, and a major concern given the winter conditions. The Shelter Pods Pilot Program was a collaborative effort between the Edson Friendship Centre Housing+ Program, Edson Reflections Empowering People to Succeed (Reflections), and the District Recycling Society (EDRS). Alberta Health Services, the Town of Edson, and local RCMP also played a big role in launching the pilot and continue to play a role in supporting the Pods. Five (5) “pods” were built at the back of the Recycling Depot and intended to serve as emergency shelter for those without shelter or means of accessing shelter. Each pod is made up of a small room with a door that closes and locks, a bed mat, water, and space to put any bags or gear individuals have with them. They are all heated, and also provide access to a heated outdoor bathroom facility and a safe needle disposal bin. Funding to build the Shelter Pods and launch the pilot program were provided through municipal, provincial, and federal grants, while a number of local organizations donated money, building materials, and labour in-kind. In the first year since its’ launch, the Pods have been incredibly successful, with almost a 100% capacity rate in winter months and an approximate 70% capacity rate in warmer months.

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes though, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the “visibility” of individuals experiencing homelessness in urban centres. The issue of homelessness in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its “hidden” nature.

Recognizing this, the Edson Housing & Homelessness Taskforce and Reflections contracted the Rural Development Network to conduct a housing and service needs estimation in the Town of Edson in an attempt to better understand what homelessness looks like in their community. The purpose of the estimation was to:

1. Develop a contextually relevant process for local service providers to engage and collect informed data with those who are at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.
2. Provide a comprehensive picture of housing instability and homelessness in Edson, including demographic information on who is experiencing homelessness and which services are being accessed and which services are missing.
3. Help inform service providers and municipal, territorial, and federal policies, practices, and funding decisions on homelessness, housing, and support services.
4. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
5. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing homelessness in the solutions to end homelessness.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimate comes from the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, published by the Rural Development Network. The Rural Development Network initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural homelessness. A lack of data limits the ability of rural communities like Edson to advocate for better resources for their residents.

The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective, and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting a standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas. It instead uses a service-based population estimation approach, which allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs without adding additional strain in workloads and capacities.

Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide, RDN worked with the Edson Housing & Homelessness Taskforce to develop a customized survey that reflected their community context. The survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definitions of homelessness. However, the survey itself was advertised as a housing and service needs assessment; this is as a result of feedback from multiple service providers that are committed to minimizing stigma that could cause distress to their clients. By re-framing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage all clients to participate, instead of pointedly targeting certain individuals.

To further minimize stigma throughout the survey, rather than asking respondents to label themselves as homeless or housing-unstable, they were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure and to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing situation. Based on responses to the latter survey question along with subsequent data analysis, RDN was able to determine which respondents were housing-unstable. As shown in the results, below, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be homeless or at-risk of homelessness actually qualify based on the national definitions

of homelessness. At the same time as the survey was being designed, a customized survey administration process was created to ensure the greatest level of participation possible. For Edson, this looked like surveys being advertised as six service provider locations, two municipal buildings, one school, and online as an open Survey Monkey link, across the community. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of 5 weeks; from March 28 - May 3, 2022.

Before the survey period began, RDN conducted orientation and training sessions with staff from participating agencies. Emphasis during the training was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and securing their informed consent. During each training session, resources were provided to staff to improve their understanding with the project and comfort in administering the survey. Training and resources also included the various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra consideration for meeting the individual's reasons for visiting the agency before offering the survey.

Important to note about the survey; to ensure the trust and anonymity of participants, each respondent was asked to give consent at the beginning and end of the survey, and create a unique identifier. The unique identifier allows RDN to maintain the integrity of the data without knowing respondent identities. The unique identifier is a combination of letters and numbers from a participant's name and birthdate.

Q1. Anonymous Unique Identifier
[ex. John Smith, born on 15th November 1964]

J	O	What are the first two letters of your FIRST name?
S	M	What are the first two letters of your LAST name?
1	5	What is the DAY you were born?
6	4	What are the last two numbers of the YEAR you were born ?

Figure 1: Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Question #1: Anonymous Unique Identifier

We received 520 survey responses during the 5 weeks; 399 were completed online and 121 were completed as paper copies. Of the 520 surveys, 85 were excluded. Surveys were deemed unsuitable and excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Survey respondent declined to give consent
2. Survey respondent declined to provide the unique identifier or provided improper unique identifier information (i.e. characters instead for numbers, etc.)
3. Survey respondent submitted multiple surveys (determined based on unique identifier)

Based on this, 435 were determined to be suitable for further analysis and will be the focus of the results outlined below.

LIMITATIONS

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase accessibility of the survey, not all clients who were offered a survey chose to participate. Additionally, staff at participating agencies were informed that participants under the age of 14 years old required guardian consent to participate in the survey. We recognize that this is inherently problematic and exclusionary, as most youth experiencing homelessness would not have a guardian to provide consent, however to maintain survey ethics, this requirement is in compliance with the Alberta College of Social Workers.

45 respondents did not provide enough information for us to determine their place on the homelessness spectrum and therefore, their housing status (stable vs. unstable) remains unknown.

As a result, there remains a portion of people experiencing homelessness or housing instability whose voices and lived experiences were not captured in this project. Therefore, while the trends, highlights, and recommendations made are very informative, it is important to remember that this report presents a conservative picture of the housing and services needs in Edson as a whole.

RESULTS

OBJECTIVE HOUSING SITUATION

As part of the survey, participants were asked the following question: “Do you feel like your housing situation is unstable or like you could easily lose your housing?” 102 of respondents responded “yes”. Through further analysis, we were able to identify an additional 61 respondents experiencing housing instability according to the national definitions. Therefore, a total of 163 survey respondents are housing-unstable.

An additional 53 dependents and 92 adults reported as living with survey respondents. In total, 308 people are living in unstable housing situations in Edson.

Respondents who self-identified as housing unstable were then asked to specify why they feel that their housing situation is unstable. Respondents identified a variety of reasons for housing-instability, though the top five reasons cited were low wages, inability to afford rent/mortgage, their housing needs major repairs (i.e. no windows, no heat, water or mould damage, leaky roof), mental health concerns, and physical disability. Other responses included lack of transportation, addictions/substance misuse, increasing rent prices, job loss, family rejection, domestic violence and abuse, COVID-19, and racism/discrimination.

EXPLORING THE SPECTRUM OF HOMELESSNESS IN EDSON

Knowing that homelessness is a complex term that refers to several stages of housing situations across a spectrum, it is important to better understand what homelessness looks like in Edson. This can be achieved by exploring the experience of the 163 housing-unstable respondents across the homelessness continuum. In order to accurately place respondents along the continuum, we used a series of measures to understand their situations, including their self-identified housing stability response, their current housing situation, and the amenities they lack in their current home. For their current housing situation, respondents were able to choose all situations that applied to them from a variety of statements that ranged from “I own the house I am currently in” to “I lived in supportive housing” to “I slept in a public space” and more. For consistency, we calculated respondents place on the

homelessness spectrum based on the highest-risk living situation each respondent noted in their survey responses.

Table 1: Respondents by housing situation in the homelessness spectrum

Place on the Homelessness Spectrum	# of Respondents in each category
Unsheltered	31
Emergency Sheltered	3
Provisionally Accommodated	28
At-Risk of Homelessness	101
Unknown Housing Status	45
Not at Risk	227

This table demonstrates the diversity of respondents' experiences with housing instability and outlines that homelessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside. Respondents that have been identified as “At-Risk” emphasized their difficulty in being able to afford their rent/mortgage and that their home is in need of major repairs. Many of these respondents also live in overcrowded housing, where there are too many people for the number of bedrooms in the home.

Some respondents noted that they have to stay with a stranger, at an emergency shelter, or at a domestic violence shelter to be sheltered at night. Other respondents have an even different experience of homelessness; staying in their cars, in abandoned out-buildings, and in public spaces. An important thing to consider when reading this table is that people experiencing homelessness often fluctuate in and out of their situation, so while it is helpful to understand where survey respondents in Edson fit on the homelessness continuum, it is not guaranteed that this is where they will all fit next week, next month, or next year.

EDSON POPULATION OVERVIEW

In 2021, Statistics Canada reported Edson's population size as 8,374; 4,300 (51.35%) men and 4075 (48.6%) women. The average age of the population is 39 years old. By age breakdown, there are 1,535 youth aged 0-14, 985 people aged 15-24, 2,485 people aged 25-44, 2,230 people aged 45-64, and 1,140 people aged 65+. Of the 8,374 Edson residents, 7,170 are born in Canada and 660 (7.8%) immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). 10.9% (920) of the Edson population is Indigenous; 210 are First Nations, 680 are Métis, 10 are Inuit, and 20 listed multiple responses (Statistics Canada, 2016). Additionally, 91.8% (7,694) of the Edson population is white, with 680 (8.1%) people identifying as a visible minority.

Edson's population in 2021 made up 0.19% of Alberta's total population.

Please note that the Edson population does not account for the surrounding population of approximately 3,500 County residents that live within the local service area.

HOUSING & SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATION SURVEY POPULATION OVERVIEW

435 people responded to the Housing & Service Needs Estimation survey in Edson; 321 (74%) of which identified as female, 88 (20%) as male, 1 (0.23%) as trans-male, 1 (0.23%) as trans-female, and 1 (0.23%) respondent was unsure of their current gender identity. Additionally, 7 (1.6%) preferred not to answer and 16 (3.68%) gave no response.

Of those 435, no one (0%) under than age of 18 filled out the survey, though 21 (5%) people indicated they were between 18-25, 184 (42%) people between 26-45, 161 (37%) people between 46-65, 54 (12%) people over 65, and 15 (3%) people did not respond to the question.

94% (407) of survey respondents reported they were born in Canada, while 2.9% (13) reported immigrating to Canada. 15 (3.45%) provided no response to this question.

63% (274) of survey respondents are white, with 28 (6.5%) people identifying as a visible minority. 28 respondents preferred not to answer and 71 respondents did not answer the

question. Further, 15.6% (68) of total respondents self-identified as Indigenous. Of the 68 Indigenous respondents, 23 (33.8%) identified as First Nations, 37 (54.4%) as Métis, 4 (5.8%) as Inuit, and 4 (5.8%) as having other Indigenous ancestry.

87% (379) of respondents identify as straight, 0.45% (2) as gay or lesbian, 2% (9) as bisexual or pansexual, 0.45% (2) as questioning, and 0.45% (2) as unsure. Additionally, 22 respondents preferred not to answer and 20 respondents skipped the question.

18 (4%) of 435 respondents stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement in the past. An additional 6 (1.38%) respondents preferred not to answer. Of note here is that 72% of respondents that have stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement are Indigenous.

HOUSING STABLE VS. UNSTABLE POPULATION OVERVIEW

Table 2: Housing & service needs estimation survey population overview comparison by housing stability

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Stable	Housing Unstable
Number of survey respondents	227	163
Gender	Male: 43	Male: 41
	Female: 179	Female: 116
	Trans-Male: 1	Trans-Male: 0
	Trans-Female: 1	Trans-Female: 0
	Don't Know: 0	Don't Know: 1
	Prefer no to answer: 2	Prefer no to answer: 3
	Did not answer: 1	Did not answer: 2

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Stable	Housing Unstable
Age	0-17 years old: 0	0-17 years old: 0
	18-25 years old: 8	18-25 years old: 9
	26-45 years old: 106	26-45 years old: 64
	46-65 years old: 86	46-65 years old: 63
	65+ years old: 26	65+ years old: 26
	Did not answer: 1	Did not answer: 1
Immigration Status	Born in Canada: 218	Born in Canada: 158
	Immigrant to Canada: 8	Immigrant to Canada: 4
	Did not answer: 1	Did not answer: 1
Indigenous Identity	First Nations: 5	First Nations: 18
	Métis: 11	Métis: 22
	Inuit: 0	Inuit: 1
	Other Indigenous ancestry: 1	Other Indigenous ancestry: 3
	Did not answer: 5	Did not answer: 6
Racial Identity	White: 164	White: 93
	Visible minority: 13	Visible minority: 14

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Stable	Housing Unstable
Sexual Orientation	Straight: 209	Straight: 141
	Gay/Lesbian: 2	Gay/Lesbian: 0
	Bisexual/Pansexual: 4	Bisexual/Pansexual: 5
	Questioning: 1	Questioning: 1
	Unsure: 0	Unsure: 1
	Prefer not to answer: 9	Prefer not to answer: 11
	Did not answer: 2	Did not answer: 4
Time in foster care, youth group home, or youth/young adult agreement	Spent time in care: 6	Spent time in care: 11

Based on this survey population overview breakdown, we can determine the following:

- Non-Indigenous respondents in Edson are 5.2x more likely to live in stable housing situations compared to their Indigenous counterparts.
- Racialized respondents are 2x more likely to live in unstable housing situations than their non-racialized counterparts.
- Respondents who identify as ‘straight’ and who are cisgendered are 1.7x more likely to be in stable housing than queer respondents.
- Respondents who did not spend time in foster care, a youth group home, or in a youth/young adult agreement are 3x more likely to be housing stable than respondents who have interacted with the care system.

****Note that the rest of the reported results will focus on those respondents that have been identified as housing-unstable unless otherwise indicated. Additionally, responses of “None Given” (i.e. respondent skipped the question) and “Not Applicable” have automatically been excluded from analysis.***

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND INCOME SOURCES

Respondents indicated a variety of education levels when responding to: “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” 18% of respondents have some high school education, 25% have a high school diploma or GED, 6% have an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma, 23% have a college certificate or diploma, 6% have some post-secondary education, 7% have a bachelor’s degree, and 2% have a graduate or professional degree (Master’s, PhD, MD, etc.).

Additionally, 31% of respondents indicated they were employed full-time, 10% noted they were employed part-time, and 2% were employed casually, while 42% stated they were currently unemployed.

Recognizing that many respondents are not employed full-time, we asked them “What are your sources of income?” Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply from the following list of options: Job-related (e.g. employment, partner/spouse’s income, alimony/child support, etc.), Government-related (e.g. Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit, Seniors Benefits, Veterans’ Benefits, Disability Benefits, Employment Insurance, Student loans, etc.), Tax-related (e.g. child and family tax benefits, GST refunds, etc.), or Informal (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, money from family and friends, etc.).

122 respondents noted they receive job-related income, 96 receive government-related income, 76 receive tax-related income, and 54 receive informal income.

LIVING SITUATION

To better understand respondents' current living situations, we were able to determine that 91.5% of housing-stable respondents own their home as opposed to the 53.6% of housing-unstable respondents who own their home. Comparatively, 8.5% of housing-stable respondents rent their home while 46.4% of housing-unstable respondents rent their home. Interestingly, respondents who own their own home are 8.5x more likely to be in a stable housing situation than respondents who rent. That being said, among those who rent and own, several respondents are lacking in basic amenities that would make their homes considered livable. Important to note is that 16% of respondents do not have sufficient heating in their home and 7% of respondents do not have access to safe drinking water.

Table 3: Breakdown of missing amenities by rent/own status

Missing Amenities	# of Respondents Missing Amenities Who Own Their Home	# of Respondents Missing Amenities Who Rent Their Home
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	6	3
Sufficient and affordable heating	12	14
Safe drinking water	8	4
Refrigeration	6	1
Electricity (or equivalent - i.e. solar power)	9	3
Cooking facilities	5	3
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	12	14

This breakdown highlighted respondents who lack basic amenities and is one of the ways in which we were able to calculate the objective housing unstable number. Several respondents self-identified as housing stable, but lack amenities that would consider their housing situation stable according to the Canadian definition of homelessness.

105 respondents, 51 of whom are housing-unstable, have always lived in Edson. Of those housing-unstable respondents who were not born in Edson, 58 came to Edson to look for work or because they accepted a job offer, 33 followed their family to Edson, and 14 came looking for housing. Additionally, some respondents moved to Edson for better access to services, fearing their safety in their previous community, and to reconnect with their culture, community, and traditions. Noteworthy here is that 15 housing-unstable respondents have moved between three and six times in the past 12 months and 7 housing-unstable respondents have moved more than six times in the past 12 months.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

In an attempt to better understand service needs and gaps in Edson, respondents were asked: “What is your main reason(s) for accessing support services?” The main reasons respondents access support services are to help with basic needs, health and wellness, and support services.

Table 4: Main reasons respondents access support services

Services Accessed	# of Housing-Stable Respondents Who Accessed These Services	# of Housing-Unstable Respondents Who Accessed These Services
Basic Need - Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	0	81
COVID-19 - PPE, information, supports	8	18
Crisis Financial Support - Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	6	33
Family/Parenting - Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals etc.	18	17
Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	8	41
Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	27	60
Legal - Separation/divorce/custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanour, etc.	8	23

Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	11	46
Transportation - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	3	22

To further understand respondents' abilities to access the necessary support services, we asked: "Which of these services were you able to access in your community, either in-person or over the phone/online?" and "Which of these services did you have to access in another community and how far did you have to travel to access these services?"

Respondents were most likely to access health and wellness, basic need, parenting, and support services in Edson. In comparison, respondents more often accessed legal services outside of Edson, though they also often accessed health and wellness services as well. Of the services accessed outside of Edson, respondents noted they were traveling to Devon, Edmonton, Grand Prairie, Hinton, or British Columbia.

Table 5: Services accessed by respondents based on location

Services Accessed in Edson	# of Respondents Who Accessed These Services	Services Accessed Outside of Edson	# of Respondents Who Accessed These Services
Basic Need - Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	16	Basic Need - Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	1
COVID-19 - PPE, information, supports	6	COVID-19 - PPE, information, supports	0
Crisis Financial Support - Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	5	Crisis Financial Support - Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	0

<p>Family/Parenting - Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals etc.</p>	10	<p>Family/Parenting - Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals etc.</p>	1
<p>Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.</p>	7	<p>Financial - Employment, housing, training/education, etc.</p>	0
<p>Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.</p>	31	<p>Health and Wellness - Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.</p>	20
<p>Legal - Separation/divorce/cu stody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.</p>	3	<p>Legal - Separation/divorce/cu stody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.</p>	5
<p>Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.</p>	9	<p>Support Services - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.</p>	3

Transportation - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	3	Transportation - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	1
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Additionally, several respondents noted they either accessed all of their services in Edson, none of their services in Edson, or generally did not access services at all.

Of those that noted traveling outside of Edson for health and wellness needs, the majority traveled to access a medical specialist that couldn't be found in Edson. That being said, many respondents also noted that while they currently access mental health services in Edson, the long wait times have them considering leaving Edson to receive mental health support. Lastly, the respondent who noted traveling out of Edson for basic needs was referring specifically to shelter as they were unable to secure emergency shelter in Edson. This comment aligns with the experience of many respondents who have needed emergency shelter services over the past year. Many respondents noted not accessing shelter services when they needed them, mainly due to lack of space.

Table 6: Reasons respondents did not access shelter services when needed

Reason For Not Accessing Shelter Services	# of Respondents
The shelter was full/there was no shelter available	35
Safety or health concerns	21
Staying would require separation from partner or family member(s)	11
Shelter does not allow pets	10
Lack of transportation to get to the shelter	8

Limited operating hours	5
Shelter was not accessible for respondents with physical disabilities	3

PERCEIVED SAFETY IN EDSON

In response to concerns of safety in the community, the Housing & Homelessness Taskforce requested an additional question on the survey, which is unique to Edson’s housing and service needs estimation. The question asked respondents: “Where are three (3) places you feel safe and three (3) places you feel unsafe in Edson?”

Of the responses to safe places, respondents most often listed their home (78), work (34), stores (31), their friends/family’s home (16), the library (15), downtown (15), public parks (15), church (12), the hospital (12), public spaces (11), and school (11). Less common places with multiple responses included the leisure centre (9), the arena (6), Reflections (6), trails (6), the Friendship Centre (3), and Shelter Pods (2). Of all 435 respondents, 23 stated that they felt safe everywhere in Edson and 7 said they felt safe nowhere in Edson.

In contrast, when noting unsafe places, respondents most often listed the recycling depot (71), public spaces at night (47), trails (43), downtown, (18), 7 Eleven (17), and the Shelter Pods (11). Less common responses included bars (7), public parks (6), alleys (5), the skate park (4), the highway (3), home (3), the Mission (3), and Reflections (3).

Interestingly, several places were identified as both safe and unsafe. Public spaces, downtown, trails, public parks, the police station, Reflections, Shelter Pods, stores, and home were all identified as safe to some respondents and unsafe to others. This suggests that respondents likely have different risk tolerances and assess safety differently based on their housing situation. For example, the 3 respondents who consider their home to be unsafe (in comparison to the 78 who noted home as a safe place), are considered to be living in unstable housing situations. Similarly, respondents who have experienced housing instability are more likely to have interacted with the police, which could be why they identified it as an unsafe place in comparison to respondents whose housing situations are stable.

"WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF IN YOUR COMMUNITY?"

Respondents outlined hundreds of things they would like to see more of in Edson. Upon further analysis, we have grouped their responses into five categories: recreation and social opportunities, housing, support services, safety, and basic needs. Interestingly, three of these categories align perfectly with respondents' answers to a previous question they were asked: "Does Edson provide enough...employment opportunities; free/accessible recreational and social opportunities; social services; accessible and affordable housing?".

Table 7: Respondents perceptions on Edson's provision of services

Does Edson Provide Enough:	# of Respondents that Believe Edson Provides Enough	# of Respondents that Believe Edson Does Not Provided Enough	# of Respondents that Do Not Know if Edson Provides Enough
Employment opportunities	134	69	87
Free/accessible recreational and social opportunities	104	127	62
Social services	73	103	119
Accessible & affordable housing	21	204	72

Recreation and Social Opportunities: Respondents frequently mentioned their desire to see more family and children-friendly recreation opportunities. Similarly, there were many requests to introduce recreation opportunities for children with disabilities and for seniors. It was also brought up that current recreation programs can be costly; more financially accessible and/or free recreation programming would benefit many respondents and their families. To support the addition of recreational activities, respondents also noted their interest in improved sporting and pool facilities. These facilities could be used for recreation, sports, and after-school programming. Another theme among respondents was the desire for cultural and community social events; COVID-19 has left many respondents

feeling disconnected from their neighbours and fellow community members. And lastly, several respondents noted that improved maintenance and safety to the outdoor trail system would be appreciated.

Housing: Almost all survey respondents noted improved housing as something they want more of in Edson. Some referred to it as wanting to see more affordable housing units while others referred to needing subsidized housing, though everyone agreed that it should be designated specifically for low-income families, seniors, and youth without a guardian. Several respondents also noted the need for a transitional housing unit in Edson. And then many respondents also discussed their desire to see a more stable housing market, more market-priced rental units, and land zoning changes to allow for tiny homes.

Support Services: Respondents outlined a variety of support services they want to see available in Edson. These include Indigenous-specific support services, transportation services, employment services, family supports, mental health supports, addictions services, and basic needs services. More specifically, those who noted employment services detailed the need for employment training and employment opportunities with living wages. Similarly, respondents who highlighted family supports specifically mentioned the need for parenting support groups and classes as well as supports for single-parent households. Mental health supports were also outlined to include FSCD supports (Family Support for Children with Disabilities) and FASD supports (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders). Overlapping with the housing category, respondents also noted their interests in seeing a rehabilitation or detoxification facility located in Edmonton to support those struggling with alcohol or substance use. And lastly, many respondents noted the need for public washrooms to be made accessible to people experiencing homelessness.

Safety: Increased community safety was a major desire among respondents. Specifically, respondents noted that they would like to see increased or improved snow removal services on public and private sidewalks, cleaner public parks, maintained public trails with added lights, and more wheelchair accessible sidewalks, businesses, and rental units. One respondent also emphasized the importance of increased community awareness and empathy for people experiencing homelessness.

Basic Needs: Respondents emphasized their wish to see expanded emergency shelter

services and increased or improved access to affordable and healthy foods. It was mentioned several times that a womens'-specific shelter is needed in Edson.

FUTURE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A customization made to the housing and service needs survey was the addition of an optional question around affordable housing units. The question asked: "If income-based affordable housing were available in Edson, would you be willing to...share a building; share a common room; share a kitchen; share a washroom?" 264 respondents answered the question; 139 of which are considered to have stable housing and 125 of which are experiencing housing instability or homelessness (76% of the housing-unstable population). Their responses can be seen here:

Table 8: Respondents' affordable housing configuration preferences

Affordable Housing Sharing Configuration	# of Respondents Willing to...	# of Respondents Not Willing to...
Share a building	146	78
Share a common room	85	132
Share a kitchen	67	149
Share a washroom	53	161

Not surprisingly, respondents with stable housing more often said "no" to sharing space than those in unstable housing situations. 75% of respondents living in unstable housing situations noted that they would be willing to share a building in comparison to 54% of housing-stable respondents. Similarly, 50% of housing-unstable respondents are willing to share a common room compared to 27% of housing-stable respondents. 39% of housing-unstable respondents and 22% of housing-stable respondents are willing to share a kitchen, and 34% of housing-unstable respondents and 14% of housing-stable respondents are

willing to share a washroom. This difference in willingness to share likely stems from housing-unstable respondents' desire for stable housing in any form that it is available to them. Housing-unstable respondents are also more likely to have had to share housing with others in the past and would therefore be more willing to do so again.

Respondents were also asked if a sober living facility would best suit their needs. 29 housing-unstable respondents noted that a sober living facility would meet their needs, 22 respondents noted a facility without sobriety requirements would better meet their needs, 56x respondents noted the question as not applicable to their situation, 8 respondents preferred not to answer, and 48 skipped the question.

WHAT DOES HOMELESSNESS LOOK LIKE FOR SOMEONE IN EDSON?

In a report that is comprised of mainly quantitative data, it can be easy to overlook the humanity behind the numbers reported. Using the most common responses from the survey, we were able to compile a profile of a “typical” respondent facing housing instability.

The true diversity of respondents is, of course, illustrated in the results section, but this serves to highlight what someone experiencing homelessness or housing instability might look like in Edson.

In the case of Edson, this turns out to be a woman, between the ages of 26 and 45, with no dependents, who has lived in Edson for less than one year. She is currently unemployed, relying on informal income, and finds it difficult to pay rent, feeling like she spends more than a third of her monthly income on housing. She notes that she has needed to stay in an emergency shelter in the past year, but was unable to find space. Because she fluctuates between renting and accessing shelter services, she has only lived in her current home for less than one month.

OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN has identified several opportunities moving forward. They are:

- 1 Increase community awareness and understanding of homelessness.** Community conversations around homelessness should have two goals; first, broaden general understandings and empathetic reactions to issues of homelessness, and second, help people to understand the various experiences of homelessness. 61 respondents self-identified as housing stable, but through further analysis, were determined to be housing-unstable based on Canadian definitions of homelessness. Given that they self-identified as housing stable, it is possible that these 61 respondents have never accessed supports related to their housing situation. Facilitating community conversations on issues of homelessness will help to ensure more people better understand their current housing status and encourage other community members to show empathy and understanding to housing-unstable residents. Considering 16% of respondents do not have sufficient heating and 7% do not have access to safe drinking water, community conversations should also include sharing information and resources about human rights, tenant rights, and homeowner rights.
- 2 Conduct a safety audit of community spaces.** Many respondents noted safety concerns around Edson. Specifically, respondents feel unsafe at the recycling depot, in public spaces at night, on community trails and in public parks, and downtown. A conducting a safety audit from a community wellness lens could lead to several recommendations to increase community comfort in Edson. Included in the safety audit should be an accessibility audit of storefronts, public sidewalks, and rental units as several respondents noted many public and rental spaces are not disability-friendly.

- 3 Expand the number of available shelter pods from 5 to 7.** With shelter pods often at 100% capacity and respondents noting a lack of shelter availability in Edson, it is important to consider increasing the number of pods available to housing-unstable residents.
- 4 Expand low-income/below-market-rate rental and purchasing options.** Increasing the number of affordable housing options in Edson is necessary to ensure all residents can access stable housing.
- 5 Develop a transitional housing unit.** A transitional housing unit would significantly benefit housing-unstable respondents. Consider both sober and non-sober requirements when planning for the project and look into wrap-around and coordinated access service models as a means to provide on-site support services to residents.
- 6 Improve access to support services.** Many respondents noted their need for Indigenous-specific support services, transportation services, employment services, family supports, mental health supports, addictions services, and support with basic needs. These were identified as service gaps according to respondents. If these services currently exist in Edson, consider why respondents still consider them a gap. This might mean rethinking certain services, increasing access to these services, and/or looking for ways to promote these services to increase awareness across the community. Respondents also noted their desire for more affordable and accessible healthy foods and interest in more community events. Consider merging the two interests together and host a community market or community garden.

CONCLUSION

This report is intended to support organizational, funder, and governmental decision-making around issues of housing and homelessness by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs in Edson. It can also be used and referred to in the community for program and advocacy purposes related to housing, homelessness, and service needs.

After receiving 520 survey responses over a 5 week period, 435 were determined to be suitable for further analysis. 163 of survey respondents are considered housing-unstable. An additional 53 dependents and 92 adults reported as living with survey respondents. In total, based on this survey, 308 of people are living in unstable housing situations in Edson.

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