

Did you know? A community is considered rural if it has a population of less than 10,000.

Rural Homelessness

Availability of affordable and suitable housing, permanency of living conditions, and accessibility of social services are harder to address with the more limited resources of smaller communities.

Report on Homelessness in Claresholm, Coaldale, and Pincher Creek:

Rural Alberta Homelessness is a 2014 report outlining the dynamics of homelessness in 20 communities across the province. Each of the communities chosen for the study has a population of less than 25,000. The study made six recommendations to combat rural homelessness in Alberta, among them: increasing awareness of rural homelessness, exploration of shelter alternatives appropriate for rural communities, and integrating homelessness with emergency response preparations in order to combat “disaster homelessness.”

- Between 16% and 24% of households live in unaffordable housing
- Between 5% and 8% of housing in Coaldale and Pincher Creek requires major repairs
- Many individuals requiring specific social services are referred to the existing programs in Lethbridge, as the same services do not exist in their rural community

(Source: [Rural Alberta Homelessness](#), Government of Alberta Community and Social Services)

Homelessness in Fort Macleod

The survey on homelessness in Fort Macleod was conducted in 2015 by researchers at the University of Lethbridge, and looked at self-identified homeless residents of the town. The study concluded that per capita, Fort Macleod has a greater homeless population than either Lethbridge or Calgary. Many live in a state of flux between being housed and being within housing risk—living within unsafe or untenable conditions. The study also notes that, though they acknowledge the issue of homelessness in the community, local political and business leaders believe the response should come from outside the community, rather than from within. As a result, a lack of local resources creates major barriers for individuals and organizations working to address the issue.

(Source: “Business, Political and Front Line Perspectives,” from *Evaluating Rural Homelessness in Southern Alberta: A Case Study of Fort Macleod*)

The 2015 survey found that Fort Macleod has a low vacancy rate, and has few appropriate rental options for families. The vacancy rate increased by 14% in 2016, however, rental options for families remained roughly the same. In total, 47 residents identified themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness, with a majority indicating they were insecurely housed. 87.6% identified as victims of intimate partner violence, 66% were suffering from mental or physical health issues, and 29.8% of those surveyed had children

Since 2013, Fort Macleod Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) has employed a Housing Liaison Worker to support the ongoing challenges of homelessness within Fort Macleod. This program has helped to house 179 people, including children.

(Sources: Affordable Housing Committee, Town of Fort Macleod; FCSS Fort Macleod; [2016 Apartment Rental Cost and Vacancy Survey](#), Government of Alberta Seniors and Housing)

Homelessness in Lethbridge

The City of Lethbridge's Social Housing in Action (SHIA) initiative offers a variety of social services intended to reduce homelessness and housing insecurity. Having helped over 700 people since 2009, SHIA uses a Housing First approach: the principle that shelter is a basic human right. Participants are moved directly from the street or shelter into their own home. All program participants are assessed, and depending on level of need, are referred to one of many public or private agencies.

Centralized intake programs in Lethbridge received 895 individuals in the 2015-16 program year. Depending on different factors, program participants go through the intake procedure with one of two organizations. HomeBase, operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association, took in 678 individuals of all ages, while McMan's YouthHUB, which offers intake for youth age 24 and younger, received 217 participants.

A majority of participants report that problems due to substance abuse or mental or physical health conditions affect day-to-day living. Mental and physical health issues in particular can affect whether an individual is able to work, which forces many individuals to rely on government programs like AISH or Alberta Works for their income.

- Of the 152 new participants that were housed in 2015-16:
 - 18.4% of were recently released from correctional facilities
 - 11.2% suffer from Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
 - 80% of all participants suffered from a mental health condition
- The 2015-16 program year saw 83% of participants remain housed

(Source: [Bringing Lethbridge Home](#))

Access to Food

Food Banks

The HungerCount is an annual survey of food bank and food program use in Canada. The 2016 HungerCount, reporting data collected from over 4,000 institutions, found that in March, 863,492 people across Canada accessed a food bank—1.3% higher than the previous year and 28% higher than 2008, the year of the economic downturn. Food bank use saw an increase in eight of the 10 provinces. The report recommends four areas for policy change that would reduce need for food banks: a national strategy for poverty reduction, exploration of a universal basic income, reworking social assistance, and devoting more resources to food security for residents of Northern Canada.

- 78,293 Albertans accessed food banks in March 2016—a 17.6% increase in users from 2015
- 39.4% food bank users were under the age of 18
- 49.4% are women
- 63.7% of all food bank users in Alberta are renters
- 16.9% of users are social housing tenants
- 16 food banks in Southwestern Alberta served 6,077 users in 2016—up 20% from 2015

(Source: [HungerCount 2016](#) and Diana Stapleton, Food Banks Canada)

The Interfaith Chinook Country Kitchen

The Interfaith Chinook Country Kitchen offers instruction to those with limited income on how to cook

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healthy meals. Offered in partnership between Interfaith Food Bank and the Lethbridge Family Centre, free cooking classes are available for adults, youth, and support agencies.

- 3,260 total participants in 2016
- 493 cooking classes offered
- 163 volunteers assisted

(Source: Danielle McIntyre, Interfaith Food Bank)

How the Community Foundation Helps

Grant given to: Interfaith Food Bank

For: Building renovations that will increase the capacity and efficiency of their services