

Homelessness data snapshot: Youth homelessness in Canada

Introduction

This report presents key findings about youth homelessness in Canada, as observed through the 2020-2022 Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts.¹ Youth homelessness, defined in this report as homelessness experienced between the ages of 13 and 24, differs from adult homelessness due to the causes, consequences, and interventions required to address this issue. As many youth who experience homelessness have a history of experiences and exposure to conditions that interfere with their capacity to maintain safe and stable housing later in life, it is of particular importance to understand the causes and impacts of youth homelessness.

Data

Data used in this report were collected through the 2020-2022 PiT Counts, which surveyed over 26,000 people across 87 communities and regions in Canada to provide a one-day snapshot of homelessness. Survey respondents were experiencing homelessness in different contexts, including shelters for the general population, families, youth, and those fleeing domestic violence (40%), unsheltered areas (24%), transitional housing (11%), hotel or motel programs (9%), facilities within health or correctional systems (4%), and hidden homelessness, defined as staying temporarily with others because they had no place of their own (13%). As part of the survey, respondents were asked their current age. For the purposes of our analysis, age groups are defined as follows: children (aged 0 to 12), youth (aged 13 to 24), adults (25 to 49), older adults (50 to 64), and seniors (65+). During the survey, youth who were accompanied by a parent or guardian were counted as dependents and were therefore not surveyed. Survey respondents were also asked the age at which they first experienced homelessness. The resulting age categories are the same as are used for current age, with the exception that youth (13 to 24) are separated into teens (13 to 17) and young adults (18 to 24).

Limitations

There are certain limitations to consider when interpreting the results presented in this report. Many communities require a minimum age of 16 to respond to the survey, meaning that youth experiencing homelessness under the age of 16 are likely underrepresented by PiT Counts. Furthermore, youth have been found more likely to experience hidden homelessness, which is an experience of homelessness that is not comprehensively covered by PiT counts. While most communities attempt to capture data on hidden homelessness through surveys conducted at non-shelter services such as meal providers, ID clinics, health clinics, or magnet events, it is probable that these harder-to-reach populations are underrepresented by PiT data. Additionally, since PiT Counts capture data regarding people experiencing homelessness on a single night, this method is more likely to count individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness and are facing complex barriers to exiting homelessness.

Survey Findings

Across all communities participating in the PiT Count survey, more than 3,000 youth (13 to 24) were identified as experiencing homelessness on one night, representing 12% of survey respondents experiencing homelessness. Similarly, in the 2018 PiT Counts, 13% of respondents were youth. According to the 2021 Census, youth accounted for 16% of the population 13 years of age and older.² This implies that there may be proportionally fewer youth experiencing homelessness compared to the national population. Due to the limitations described in the previous section, however, PiT Counts may underestimate the representation of youth among the homeless population.

¹ [Infrastructure Canada - Everyone Counts 2020-2022 – Results from the Third Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts of Homelessness in Canada](#)

² [Age \(in single years\), average age and median age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

This lower proportion of youth survey respondents does not mean that youth are less vulnerable to housing loss than older populations. Respondents were asked about the age at which they first experienced homelessness. Approximately 44% of all respondents (or 9,654 people) experienced homelessness for the first time when they were less than 25 years of age. This is much higher than the 17% of respondents and dependants who were under the age of 25 (12% youth and 5% dependent children). This could indicate that experiences of homelessness earlier in life may be associated with greater risk of chronic housing precarity throughout adulthood, which is explored further in the section on chronic homelessness.

Figure 1. Age of first experience of homelessness

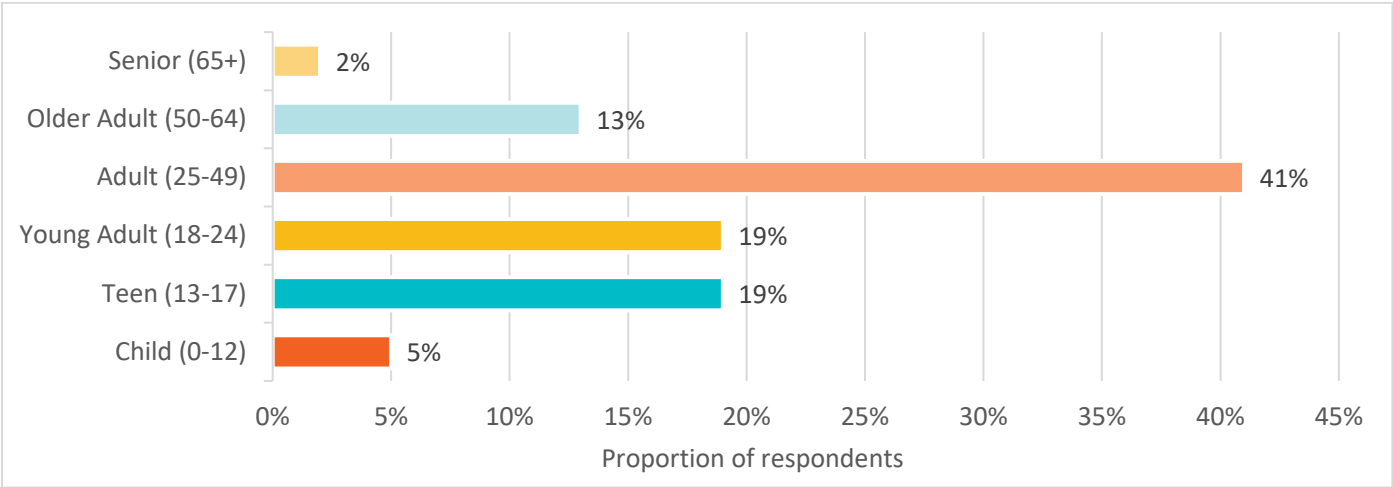


Figure 1 – Text version

Figure 1. Age of first experience of homelessness

Age range	Proportion of respondents
Child (0-12)	5%
Teen (13-17)	19%
Young Adult (18-24)	19%
Adult (25-49)	41%
Older Adult (50-64)	13%
Senior (65+)	2%

The majority of youth who were surveyed regarding their family role indicated that they were experiencing homelessness as a single individual (63%). Approximately 16% of youth were identified as a dependant child, accompanied by a parent or guardian. Other youth indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with a partner or another adult (19%). A smaller percentage (3%) indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with a dependant. This distribution of family roles among youth highlights the diversity of experiences and service needs within this age group.

Gender and sexual identity

There is a higher proportion of women (42%) and gender-diverse people (6%) among youth aged 13-24 experiencing homelessness, compared to adults aged 25 and above (32% women and 2% gender-diverse). This is also seen in a lower average age for women experiencing homelessness (37 years of age) than for men (42).

Overall, 12% of respondents identified as 2SLGBTQI+. The rate of 2SLGBTQI+ responses were highest among youth (26%) and this proportion decreased with age, where 13% of adults, 7% of older adults, and 6% of seniors identified as

2SLGBTQI+. Respondents who identified as 2SLGBTQI+ were more likely to report experiencing homelessness for the first time under the age of 24 (61%, compared to 41% of non-2SLGBTQI+ individuals), shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Proportion of respondents reporting age of first experience of homelessness, by 2SLGBTQI+ identity

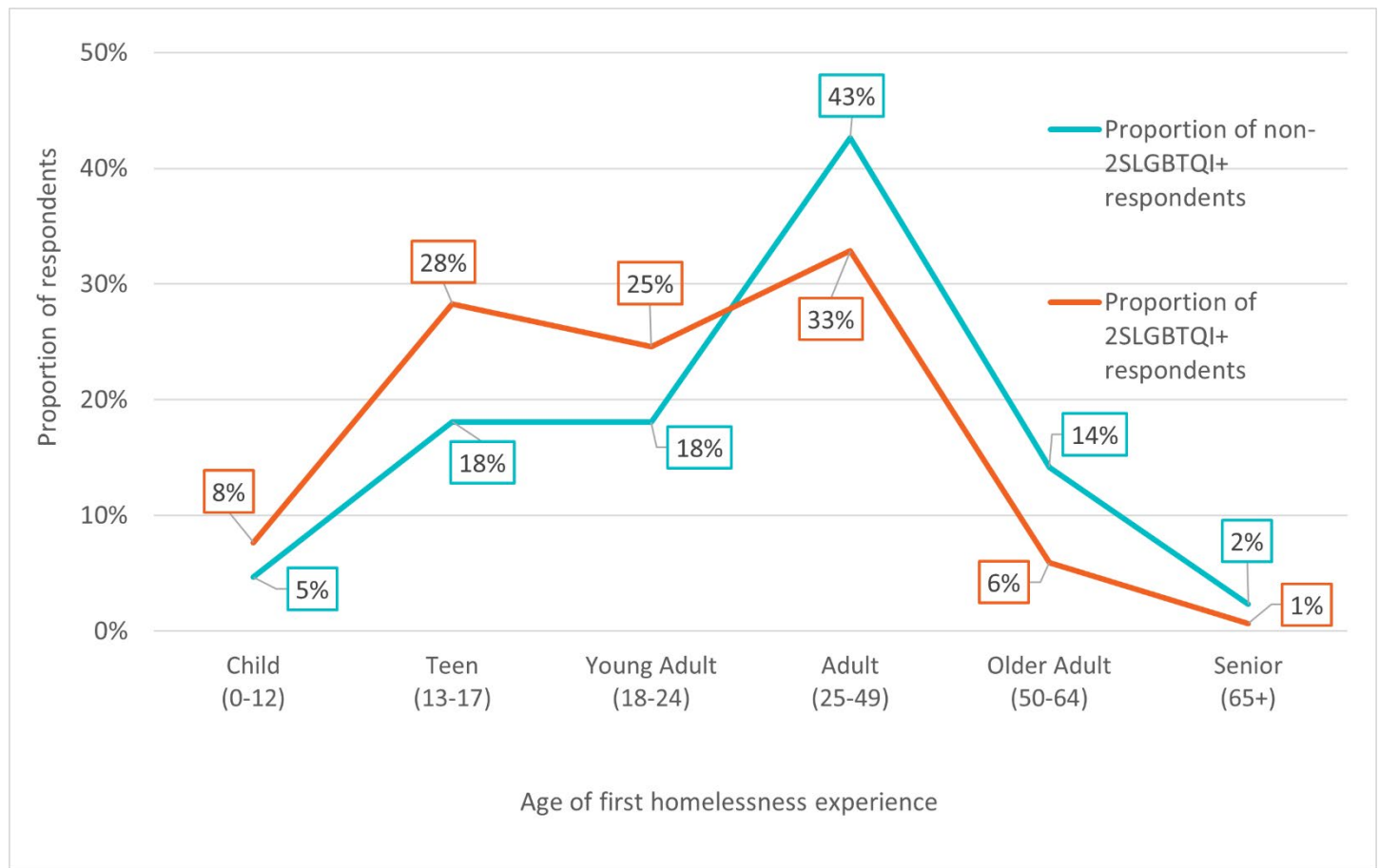


Figure 2 – Text version

Figure 2. Proportion of respondents reporting age of first experience of homelessness, by 2SLGBTQI+ identity

Age range	Proportion of non-2SLGBTQI+ respondents	Proportion of 2SLGBTQI+ respondents
Child (0-12)	5%	8%
Teen (13-17)	18%	28%
Young Adult (18-24)	18%	25%
Adult (25-49)	43%	33%
Older Adult (50-64)	14%	6%
Senior (65+)	2%	1%

Overnight location

Overnight locations with the highest proportion of youth respondents were transitional housing (22%) and hidden homelessness (17%). Since youth are more prone to hidden homelessness, a hard-to-reach population, it is likely that PIT Counts underestimate the prevalence of youth homelessness.

Figure 3. Age group distribution, by overnight location

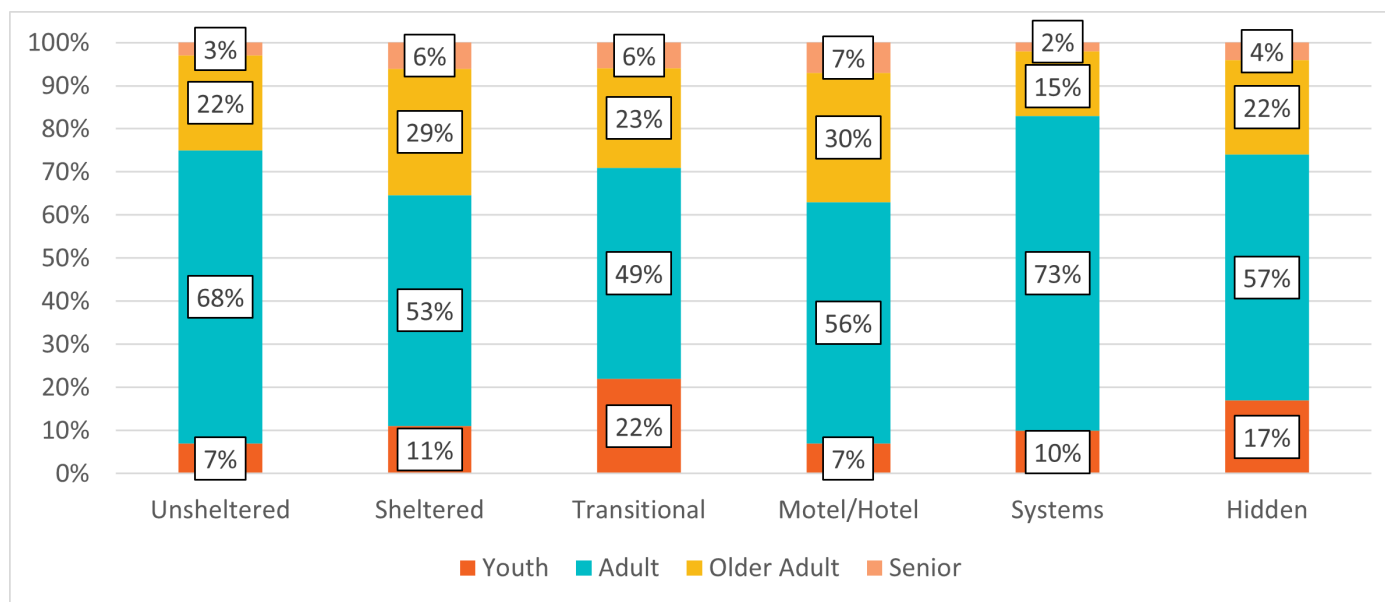


Figure 3 – Text version

Figure 3. Age group distribution, by overnight location

Age group	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Transitional	Motel/Hotel	Systems	Hidden
Youth	7%	11%	22%	7%	10%	17%
Adult	68%	53%	49%	56%	73%	57%
Older Adult	22%	29%	23%	30%	15%	22%
Senior	3%	6%	6%	7%	2%	4%

Youth represented 11% of survey respondents staying in shelter on the night of the Count. When asked if they had used a shelter in the past year, 69% of youth had used a shelter, which was lower than the proportion for all other age groups (76%).

Figure 4. Overnight location, by age of first experience of homelessness

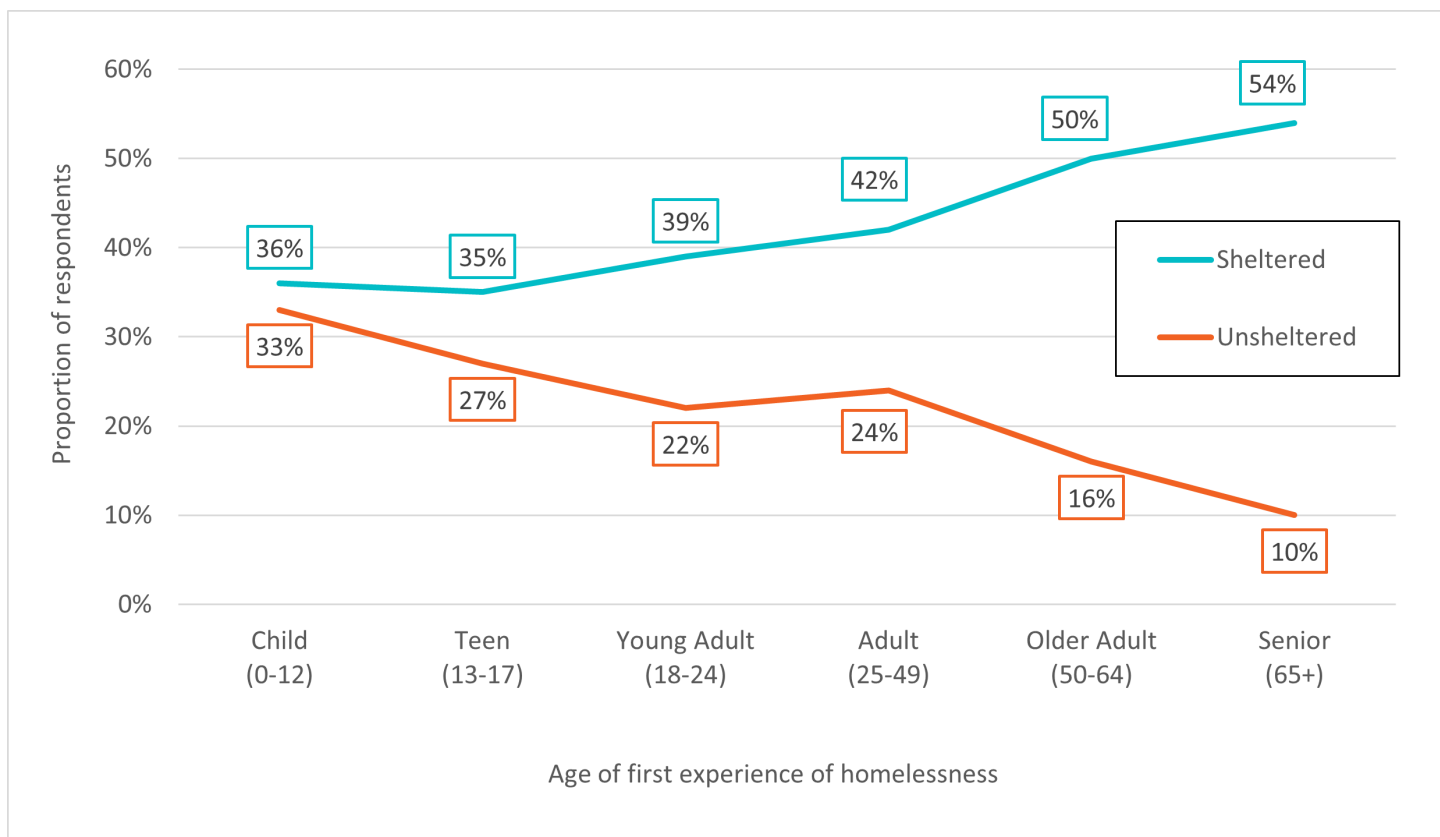


Figure 4 – Text version

Figure 4. Overnight location, by age of first experience of homelessness

Age range	Unsheltered	Sheltered
Child (0-12)	33%	36%
Teen (13-17)	27%	35%
Young Adult (18-24)	22%	39%
Adult (25-49)	24%	42%
Older Adult (50-64)	16%	50%
Senior (65+)	10%	54%

As shown in Figure 4, first experiences of homelessness earlier in life were associated with a greater likelihood of sleeping in an unsheltered location, rather than a shelter. People who experienced housing loss as a child (aged 0-12) were similarly likely to report staying in a shelter (36%) and sleeping unsheltered (33%) on the night of the Count. As the age of first housing loss increases, the likelihood of respondents reporting that they were sleeping outside decreases and the likelihood of respondents staying in shelter increases. People who first experienced homelessness as a young adult (aged 18-24) were 77% more likely to use shelter than to sleep unsheltered. This supports the rationale for early intervention and homelessness prevention programs for youth, as experiences of housing loss prior to adulthood are associated with greater risk throughout their life of unsheltered homelessness, which poses significant dangers to personal health and safety.

Chronic homelessness

Chronic homelessness is defined as experiences of homelessness lasting at least half of the past year, or recurrent episodes totaling at least 18 months of least the past three years.³ The 2020-2022 Point-in-Time Counts assessed the first component of chronic homelessness, identifying whether respondents experienced homelessness for 6 months or more within the past year. Youth were less likely to experience chronic homelessness compared to other age groups (58%, compared to 71%). Almost a quarter of youth (24%) had experienced homelessness for two months or less in the past year, compared to 16% of older respondents. However, chronic homelessness has risen since 2018 when 53% of youth experienced chronic homelessness.

The earlier a person first experiences homelessness, the more likely they are to experience chronic homelessness later in life. For example, 78% of respondents who experienced homelessness for the first time as a child were experiencing chronic homelessness on the night of the Count. This generally decreased with age of first homelessness, where 55% of respondents who experienced homelessness for the first time as a senior were experiencing chronic homelessness.

Reasons for housing loss

Over half of youth (51%) reported interpersonal issues as the reason for their most recent housing loss, compared to 31% for all other age groups, shown in Figure 5. Interpersonal issues include conflict with or abuse by a parent/guardian, spouse/partner, or other personal relation. Financial issues (e.g., not enough income) were the second most commonly cited reason, followed by housing related issues (e.g. unsafe housing conditions, building sold or renovated, owner moved in, landlord/tenant conflict, or complaint).

³ [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives](#)

Figure 5. Most common reasons for housing loss, by age group

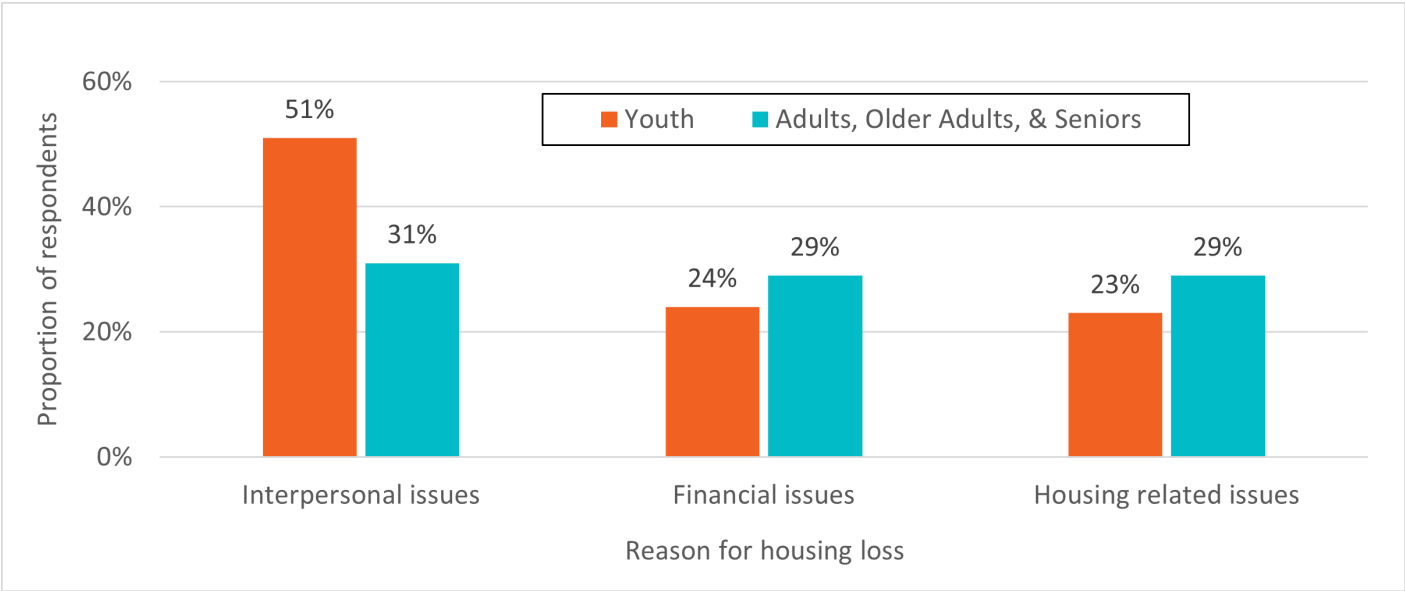


Figure 5 – Text version

Figure 5. Most common reasons for housing loss, by age group

Age group	Youth	Adults, Older Adults, & Seniors
Interpersonal issues	51%	31%
Financial issues	24%	29%
Housing related issues	23%	29%

Differences are also observable between youth and other age groups when examining more specific reasons for housing loss within these categories. Conflict with a parent or guardian was a reason for housing loss for 30% of youth, compared to 5% for those 25 years of age or older. Similarly, abuse by a parent or guardian was more commonly cited as a reason for housing loss among youth than adults (9%, compared to 1%). Youth were less likely to report a conflict with a landlord (10%, compared to 15% of older age groups) or a spouse/partner (10%, compared to 14%) as reasons for housing loss. They were slightly more likely to cite mental health issues as a reason for housing loss (13% of youth, compared to 10% of older age groups).

For 2SLGBTQI+ youth, when asked about their reasons for housing loss, 59% indicated interpersonal issues (compared to 48% for non-2SLGBTQI+ youth) and 18% indicated health issues (compared to 13%). 2SLGBTQI+ youth were over twice as likely to cite abuse by a parent or guardian (15%, compared to 7% of non-2SLGBTQI+ youth) and slightly more likely to report abuse by a spouse or partner, conflict with a parent or guardian, or experiences of discrimination as a reason for housing loss compared to non-2SLGBTQI+ youth. 2SLGBTQI+ youth were more likely to cite mental health issues as a reason for housing loss (17%) than non-2SLGBTQI+ youth (12%).

Sources of income

The proportion of respondents who reported no income decreased with age, from 11% among youth, to 9% among adults, 6% among older adults and 2% among seniors. However, as illustrated in the previous section, youth were slightly less likely to cite financial issues as a reason for housing loss (24%, compared to 29% for all other age groups). This may be attributed to the fact that many youth are financially dependent upon their parents or guardians, meaning that their living situation is more susceptible to be materially impacted by their relationships with other household members. Although youth are the most likely to have no income source, they are also twice as likely as older

respondents to have employment income (reported by 21% of youth, compared to 10% of older respondents). Youth are less likely to cite social assistance (43%, compared to 54%) and disability benefits (14%, compared to 27%) as sources of income.

Health challenges

Information on an individual's current health challenges was collected for the first time during the 2020-2022 Point-in-Time Counts. Respondents were asked to identify if they currently were living with health challenges in the following categories: illness or medical condition, physical limitation, learning or cognitive limitations, mental health issue, and substance use issue.

Health conditions varied widely by age. Youth were more likely to have a learning or cognitive limitation or report a mental health issue, shown in Figure 6. They were less likely to have an illness or medical condition or physical limitation. While substance use issues were most common among adults aged 25-49, over half of youth respondents (56%) reported experiencing substance use issues.

Figure 6. Health challenges, by age group

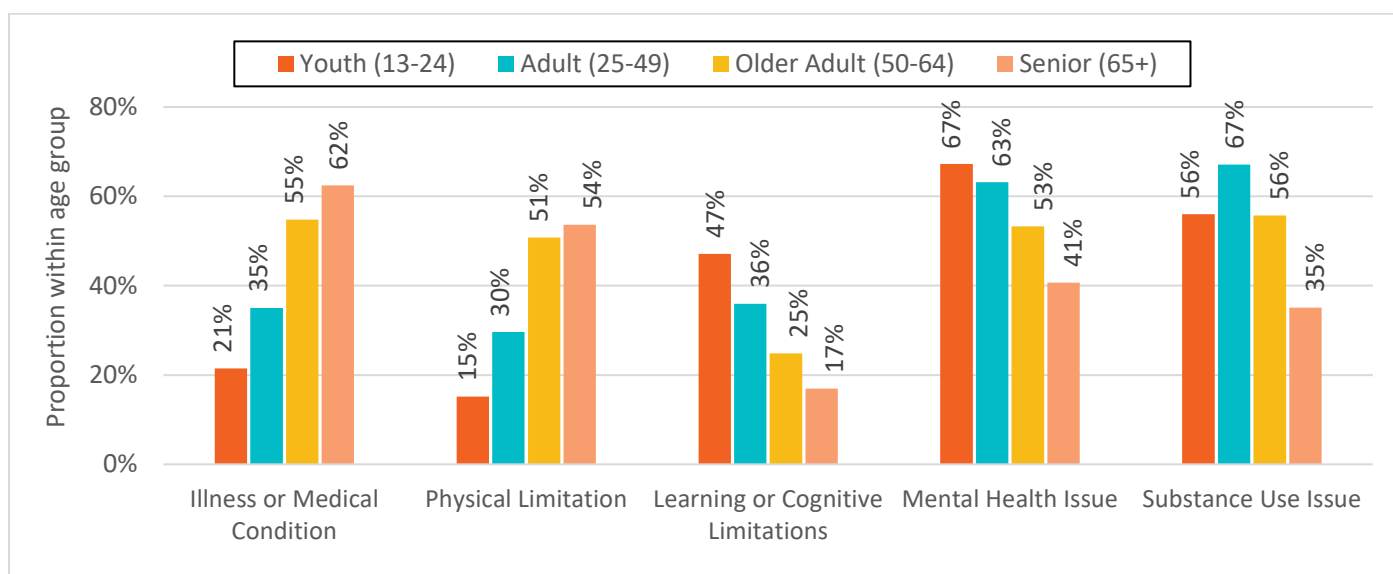


Figure 6 – Text version

Figure 6. Health challenges, by age group

Age group	Illness or Medical Condition	Physical Limitation	Learning or Cognitive Limitations	Mental Health Issue	Substance Use Issue
Youth (13-24)	21%	15%	47%	67%	56%
Adult (25-49)	35%	30%	36%	63%	67%
Older Adult (50-64)	55%	51%	25%	53%	56%
Senior (65+)	62%	54%	17%	41%	35%

First experiences of homelessness earlier in life were associated with greater risk of experiencing two or more health challenges concurrently. People who have experienced homelessness before the age of 18 were more likely to live with learning or cognitive limitations, mental health issues, and substance use issues, shown in Figure 7. The risk of experiencing any of these health conditions decreases as age of first housing loss increases into adulthood. People who experienced homelessness for the first time before the age of 18 were also more likely to live with illnesses or medical

conditions and physical limitations, which suggests that homelessness experienced early in life has lasting impacts on both physical and mental health and development. People who lost housing for the first time as older adults and seniors were also more likely to report illnesses or medical conditions and physical limitations, indicating that the correlation between health conditions and housing insecurity is bidirectional; homelessness during formative years is associated with greater risk of health challenges later in life, but the onset of health challenges due to aging may increase a person's risk of housing loss.

Figure 7. Health challenges, by age of first experience of homelessness

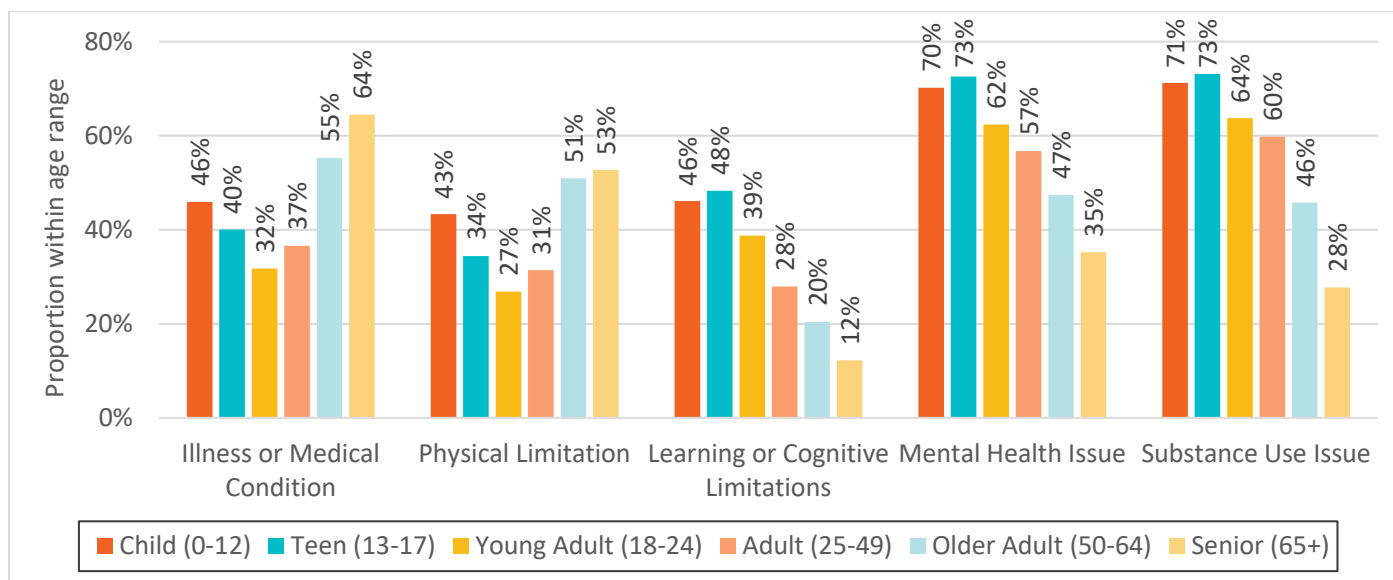


Figure 7 – Text version

Figure 7. Health challenges, by age of first experience of homelessness

Age range	Illness or Medical Condition	Physical Limitation	Learning or Cognitive Limitations	Mental Health Issue	Substance Use Issue
Child (0-12)	46%	43%	46%	70%	71%
Teen (13-17)	40%	34%	48%	73%	73%
Young Adult (18-24)	32%	27%	39%	62%	64%
Adult (25-49)	37%	31%	28%	57%	60%
Older Adult (50-64)	55%	51%	20%	47%	46%
Senior (65+)	64%	53%	12%	35%	28%

Youth in care

Nearly one in three (31%) survey respondents reported having had an experience in foster care, a youth group home, or other child welfare program, with almost half of youth respondents (45%) having had experiences in government care. About half (51%) of all Indigenous respondents identified as having experience as a youth-in-care, as compared to 23% of non-Indigenous respondents identifying similar experiences. Experiences being a youth in care are associated with elevated risk of experiencing housing loss earlier in life, as shown in Figure 8. Those who reported past history as a youth in care were three times as likely to experience homelessness for the first time as a child (0-12) and were twice as likely to first experience homelessness as a teen (13-17). People with past experience being a youth in care were 34% more likely to first experience homelessness as a young adult. Once the age of 25 is reached without an incidence of housing loss, people with past experience as a youth in care were less and less likely over time to enter homelessness.

Figure 8. Age of first homelessness and experience as youth in care

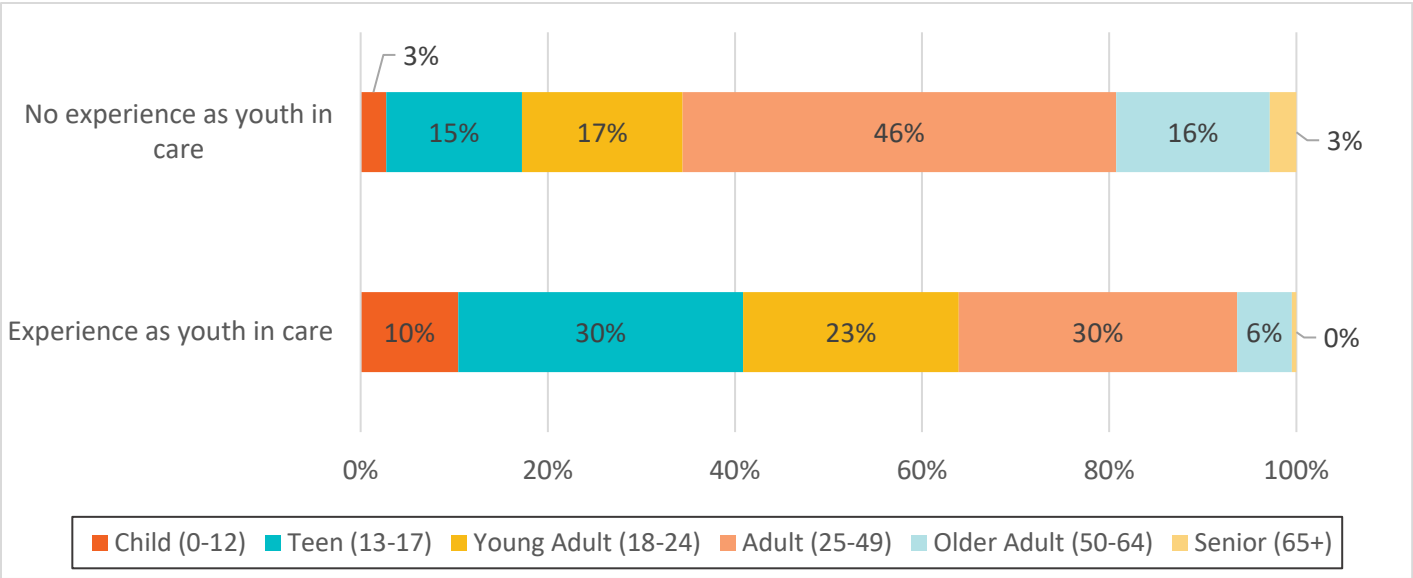


Figure 8 – Text version

Figure 8. Age of first homelessness and experience as youth in care

Age range	Experience as youth in care	No experience as youth in care
Child (0-12)	10%	3%
Teen (13-17)	30%	15%
Young Adult (18-24)	23%	17%
Adult (25-49)	30%	46%
Older Adult (50-64)	6%	16%
Senior (65+)	0%	3%

These results do not illustrate any direct causal effects, as the survey did not ask respondents for the chronological order of events. However, they do identify a heightened risk of homelessness for those with a history of being a youth in care.

Respondents who reported experience being a youth in care were overrepresented in hidden homelessness (constituting 39% of the population experiencing hidden homelessness). The representation of those with an experience as a youth in care were was also higher among those experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations (38%) and in healthcare or correctional systems (35%).

When asked about their reason for housing loss, substance use was cited more often (21%) among prior youth in care, compared to those without any experience in youth-in-care systems (16%). Similarly, respondents with experiences of youth in care reported all health challenges at higher rates than those without experience as youth in care, particularly learning or cognitive disabilities (which prior youth in care were 61% more likely to report), substance use issues (29% more likely), and mental health issues (25% more likely).

Key findings

- During the Point-in-Time Count surveys across 87 communities in 2020-2022, 12% of survey respondents experiencing homelessness were youth, aged 13 to 24.
- The representation of women and 2SLGBTQI+ respondents was higher among youth than among older age groups.

- Youth accounted for a higher proportion of respondents in transitional housing and experiencing hidden homelessness than in shelters, unsheltered areas, motel programs, and health and correctional systems. The difficulties engaging with people experiencing hidden homelessness likely means that youth homelessness is undercounted.
- Approximately 44% of all respondents experienced homelessness for the first time when they were less than 25 years of age. First experiences of homelessness during youth were associated with higher rates of chronic homelessness, unsheltered homelessness, and health challenges. Respondents who identified as Indigenous and respondents with experience as youth in care tended to experience homelessness for the first time earlier in life.
- Over half of youth reported interpersonal reasons as the reason for their most recent housing loss, particularly through conflict with a parent or guardian.
- Respondents between the ages of 13-24 were more likely to report having challenges related to a learning or cognitive limitation, or mental health. First experiences of homelessness during youth, experiences as youth in care, and 2SLGBTQI+ identity were associated with higher rates of all health challenges.

For more information

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