A New Era of Risk and Resilience

Rebuilding Safety and Wellbeing in Strathmore Beyond COVID

SPRING 2025

Prepared for True North

truenorth
a safe place for those impacted by abuse

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About this Report

With the goal of supporting True North's strategic initiatives in program development, community partnerships, fundraising, and resource allocation, this analysis, prepared by HelpSeeker Technologies, identifies current and emerging challenges to community safety and social wellbeing.

ANALYSIS OF SERVICE DATA, SYSTEMS, AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK PROVIDE INSIGHTS TO SUPPORT MEANINGFUL INTERVENTION AT A CRITICAL MOMENT IN TRUE NORTH'S DEVELOPMENT.

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered social support systems in ways that continue to affect community safety. Lockdowns exacerbated vulnerabilities in domestic violence, mental health challenges, and economic instability.

Added pressure in these areas did not disappear when lockdowns ended, but has instead evolved into new patterns of need and vulnerability that, without intervention and change, will continue to persist into the future.

Crisis calls to service providers are often now about circumstances that are more complex and higher-risk.

Traditional service boundaries between mental health, housing, and family support have become increasingly fluid. Serving rural populations means dealing with geographic isolation and digital connection gaps, which create additional barriers to support.

Community safety rests on interconnected social, economic, and structural pillars. In Strathmore, these connections include:

1. Housing security
2. Mental-health supports
3. Rural isolation
4. Online youth environments

5. Discrimination patterns and social marginalization
6. Economic conditions
7. Family relationships

Each of these domains act as both indicators and influencers on experiences of violence and abuse. Therefore, we must consider current patterns of violence, but also how socioeconomic adaptations will shape the community's capacity for long-term resilience.

Violence Through A Structural Lens

Traditional definitions of violence that focus exclusively on physical harm miss the reality that violence is often a symptom of support-system deficits. Economic control, institutional barriers, and social isolation can inflict serious harm, just as direct aggression can.

This complexity demands a wider lens:

- It requires us to look beyond single incidents or individual choices alone, and instead to the relationships, systems, and structures that connect the personal experience to the institutional. It also requires us to look at intersections between different types of violence, including violence in domestic, family, and intimate-partner settings, as well as structural violence.

- Violence manifests in multiple forms. This analysis draws on diverse sources—from interpersonal violence and violent crime to family violence, domestic abuse, elder mistreatment, sexual violence, and gender-based harm—while also examining the ramifications of colonialism and structural violence.

- This analysis employs an intersectional lens to explore how overlapping identities—race, gender, social class, and sexuality—shape vulnerability. Systemic discrimination, racism, and misogyny intensify the effects of violence, creating conditions where multiple forms of harm can amplify and reinforce each other.

The analysis has limitations. It does not incorporate Indigenous perspectives, or capture the full range of lived experiences that people experiencing violence may overcome, relying instead on the best available evidence and conversations with survivors as was possible within the realm of this project. Despite these constraints, the analysis aims to inform strategies that promote equity, justice, and healing across communities.

RECOGNIZING THESE INTERCONNECTIONS TRANSFORMS HOW WE UNDERSTAND BOTH VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION. THE QUESTION SHIFTS FROM "WHAT CAUSED THIS INCIDENT?" TO "WHAT CONDITIONS MAKE VIOLENCE PREDICTABLE AND PREVENTABLE?"

Geographic Context

Strathmore is located on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including Siksika Nation, North and South Piikani Nations, and the Kainai Nation. The area is a part of Treaty 7, which also includes the Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda (Stoney Nakoda), which include Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. Strathmore is also home to the Métis people of Battle River.

Strathmore is at the centre of this analysis, but violence and safety transcend municipal boundaries.

At True North's guidance, this analysis also includes selected data from surrounding rural communities where available, acknowledging the shared challenges and interconnected nature of rural service delivery.

Where local data is limited, provincial and national statistics provide essential context and help identify broader patterns that shape local conditions. This approach also helps to fill gaps in important data, particularly around phenomena that are difficult to measure at a local level, such as unreported domestic violence or systemic discrimination patterns.
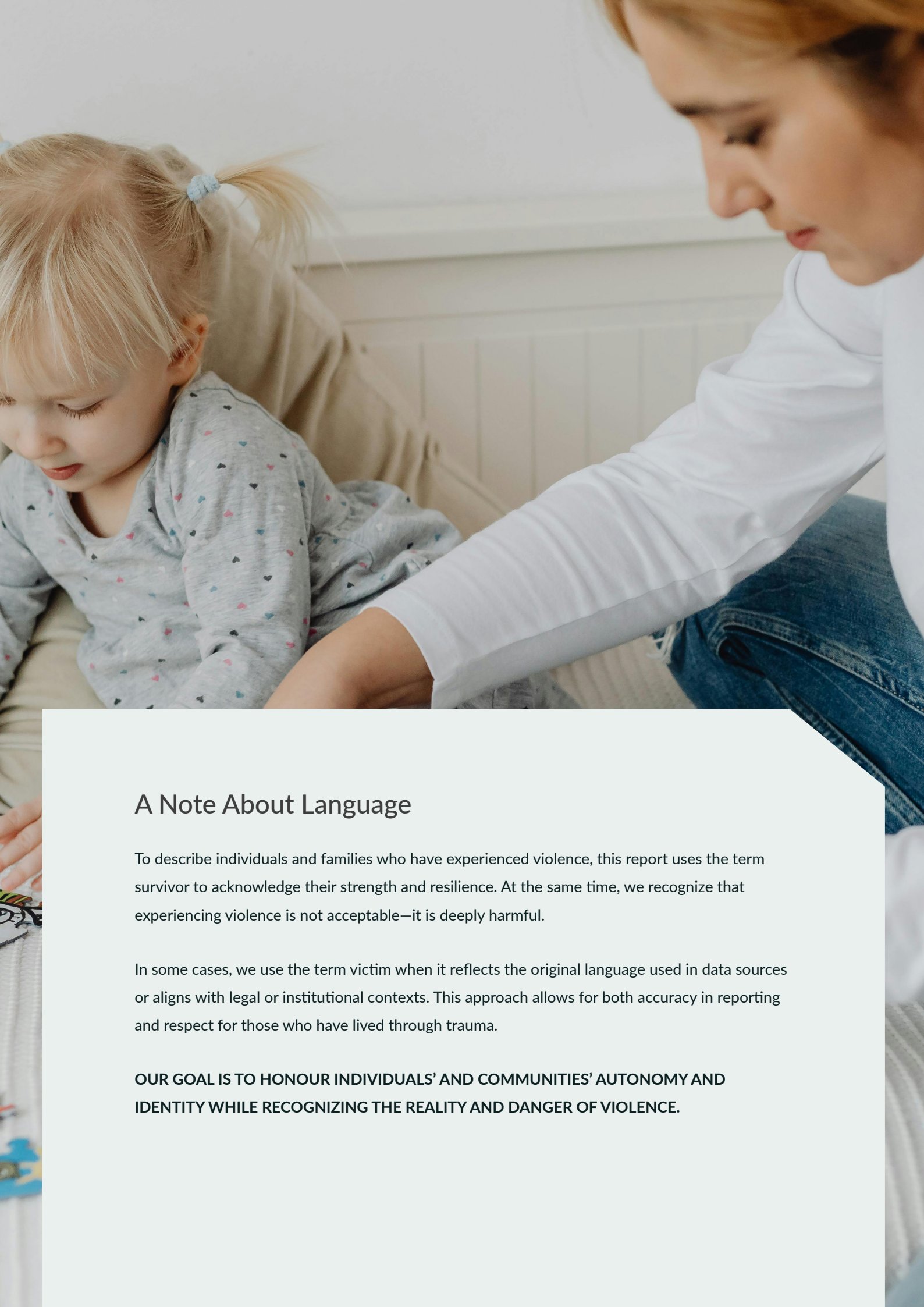
A Note About Language

To describe individuals and families who have experienced violence, this report uses the term survivor to acknowledge their strength and resilience. At the same time, we recognize that experiencing violence is not acceptable—it is deeply harmful.

In some cases, we use the term victim when it reflects the original language used in data sources or aligns with legal or institutional contexts. This approach allows for both accuracy in reporting and respect for those who have lived through trauma.

OUR GOAL IS TO HONOUR INDIVIDUALS' AND COMMUNITIES' AUTONOMY AND IDENTITY WHILE RECOGNIZING THE REALITY AND DANGER OF VIOLENCE.

Housing

Safe and stable housing is fundamental to individual and community wellbeing. When people lack access to affordable, appropriate housing, they face a greater risk of encountering violence. This section examines how housing insecurity intersects with violence, focusing on barriers to stability, systemic inequities in housing access, and the role of housing in prevention and recovery.

CORE HOUSING NEED, COMMONLY FACED BY SURVIVORS, CAN ALSO BE AN INDICATOR OF THOSE WHO FACE GREATER RISK FROM VIOLENCE.

Core housing need, an indicator of housing instability, refers to households living in conditions that are unaffordable, overcrowded, or inadequate, without the financial means for a suitable alternative. Households in core housing need are at heightened risk of housing disruption or prolonged exposure to unsafe environments.

Tracking core housing need helps identify demographic groups and geographic areas of concentrated vulnerability. In the absence of direct data on safety or wellbeing, core housing need rates can indicate a greater risk of harm.

The relationship between housing insecurity and violence is bidirectional: lack of safe, affordable housing increases the risk of violence, and experiences of violence often lead to housing instability (Schwan et al., n.d.). This creates a dangerous cycle that is difficult to break without intervention.

As of 2021, there were 335 households in Strathmore in core housing need. While more recent local data is unavailable, the presence of broader economic pressures since the pandemic suggest this number has likely grown. There are direct implications for shelter systems: a 2023 ACWS survey found that 76% of survivors accessing shelter services faced moderate to high barriers in securing safe, affordable housing.
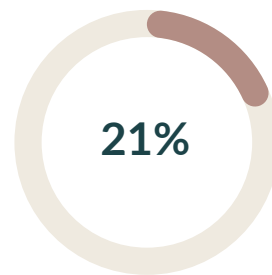
National data shows that women-led households in Canada are more likely to be in core housing need (Schwan et al.), affecting:
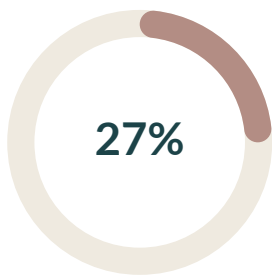
27% **of single-mother families**
(almost double the rate of single-father households, at 16%)

21% **of senior, women-led households**
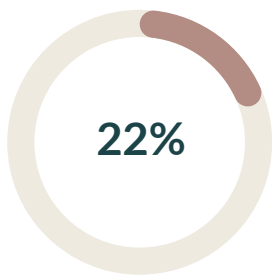
22% **of young, women-led households**
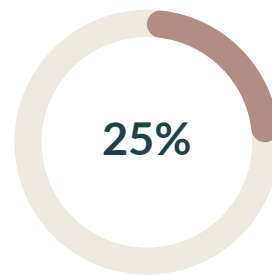
25% **of Indigenous, women-led off-reserve households**

These rates reflect intersecting factors, including income inequality, childcare responsibilities, limited access to affordable housing, gaps in social assistance, and systemic discrimination.

LOCAL DATA MIRRORS THESE NATIONAL PATTERNS.

Housing challenges are more acute for those already facing social and economic marginalization.

Single mothers often struggle to secure stable housing, shaped by childcare demands, income gaps, and discrimination in the rental market. Indigenous households also experience higher rates of housing insecurity due to both historical and ongoing systemic inequities.

Percentage of population in core housing need by community and demographic

Source(s): Statistics Canada, 2021 • (some data may be suppressed for privacy)

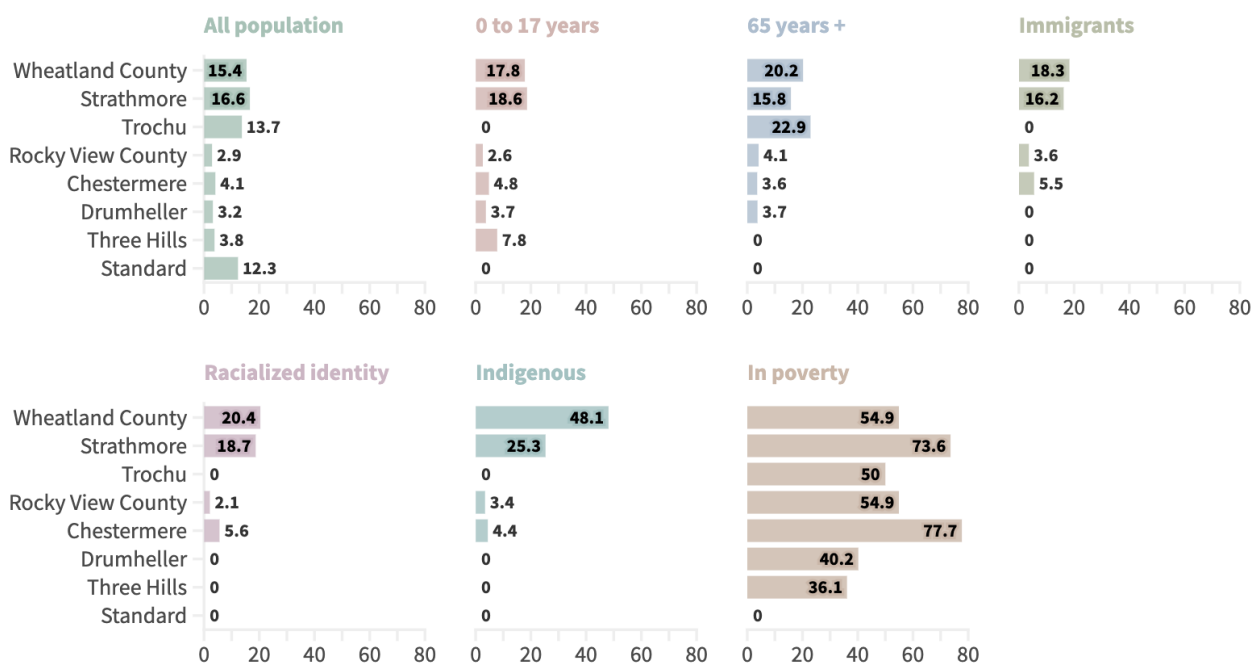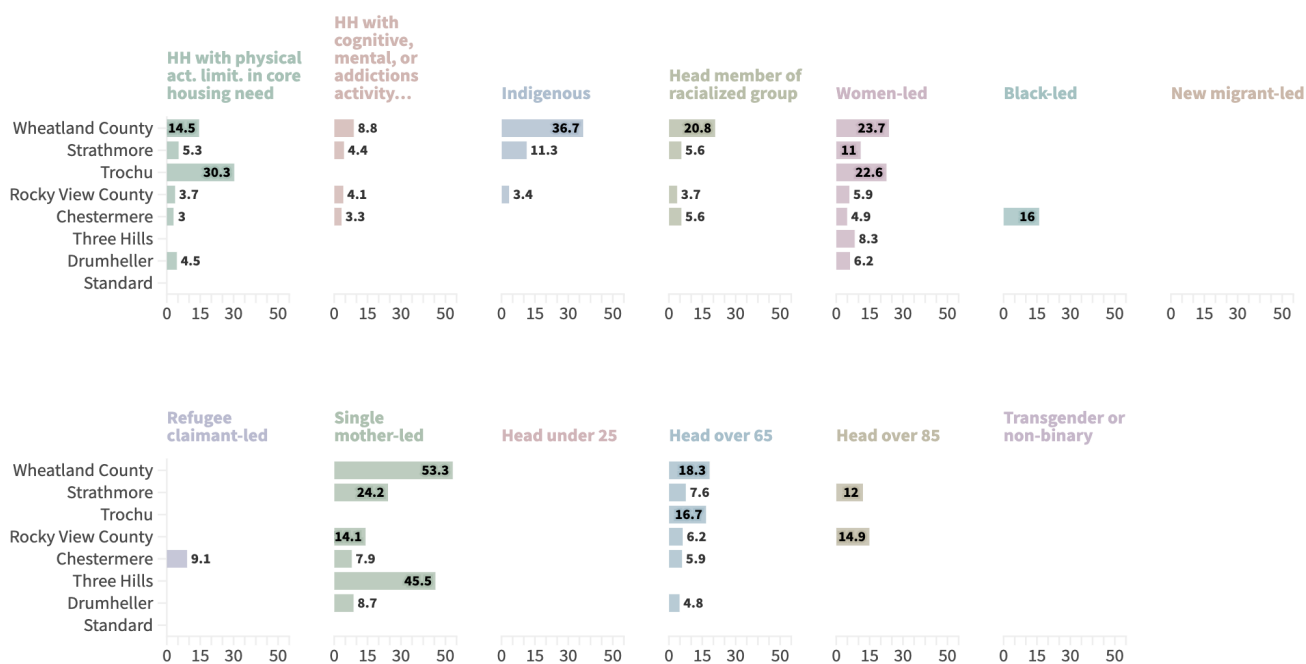| Community	All population	0 to 17 years	65 years +	Immigrants
Wheatland County	15.4	17.8	20.2	18.3
Strathmore	16.6	18.6	15.8	16.2
Trochu	13.7	0	22.9	0
Rocky View County	2.9	2.6	4.1	3.6
Chestermere	4.1	4.8	3.6	5.5
Drumheller	3.2	3.7	3.7	0
Three Hills	3.8	7.8	0	0
Standard	12.3	0	0	0

Community	Racialized identity	Indigenous	In poverty
Wheatland County	20.4	48.1	54.9
Strathmore	18.7	25.3	73.6
Trochu	0	0	50
Rocky View County	2.1	3.4	54.9
Chestermere	5.6	4.4	77.7
Drumheller	0	0	40.2
Three Hills	0	0	36.1
Standard	0	0	0

Percentage of households in core housing need by priority population - 2021

Source(s): Housing Assessment Resource Tool • (some data may be suppressed for privacy)

Community	HH with physical act. limit. in core housing need	HH with cognitive, mental, or addictions activity…	Indigenous	Head member of racialized group	Women-led	Black-led	New migrant-led
Wheatland County	14.5	8.8	36.7	20.8	23.7		
Strathmore	5.3	4.4	11.3	5.6	11		
Trochu	30.3				22.6		
Rocky View County	3.7	4.1	3.4	3.7	5.9		
Chestermere	3	3.3		5.6	4.9	16	
Three Hills					8.3		
Drumheller	4.5				6.2		
Standard							

Community	Refugee claimant-led	Single mother-led	Head under 25	Head over 65	Head over 85	Transgender or non-binary
Wheatland County		53.3		18.3		
Strathmore		24.2		7.6	12	
Trochu				16.7		
Rocky View County		14.1		6.2	14.9	
Chestermere	9.1	7.9		5.9		
Three Hills		45.5				
Drumheller		8.7		4.8		
Standard						

GROWTH WITHOUT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT DEEPENS RISK, AS THE MARKET FOR AFFORDABLE SPACES TIGHTENS.
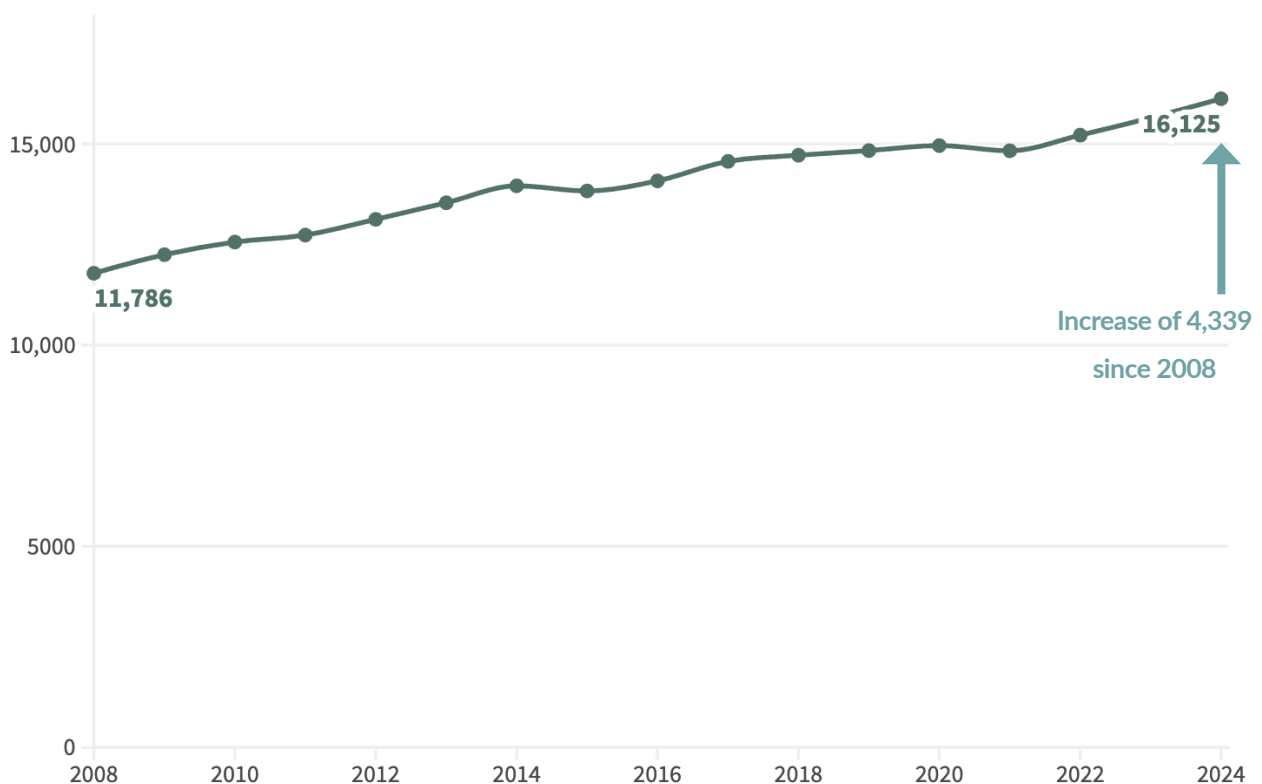
When housing development lags behind population growth, pressures on housing security intensify. Strathmore illustrates this trend: between 2008 and 2024, the town's population grew by nearly 37%, but housing construction did not keep pace. In 2023, only 31 new housing units were started, and no new apartment buildings have been built since 2018.

This growing gap between demand and supply has increased vulnerability, especially for renters. As more income is directed toward housing, less remains for basic needs. Housing insecurity triggers stress, family tension, and limits options for those needing to leave violent situations. These compounding conditions leave the most vulnerable with few paths to safety.

Population of Strathmore, AB (CSD)

Source(s): Office of Statistics and Information, Alberta Treasury Board and Finance

Population

16,125

11,786

Increase of 4,339 since 2008

15,000

10,000

5000

0

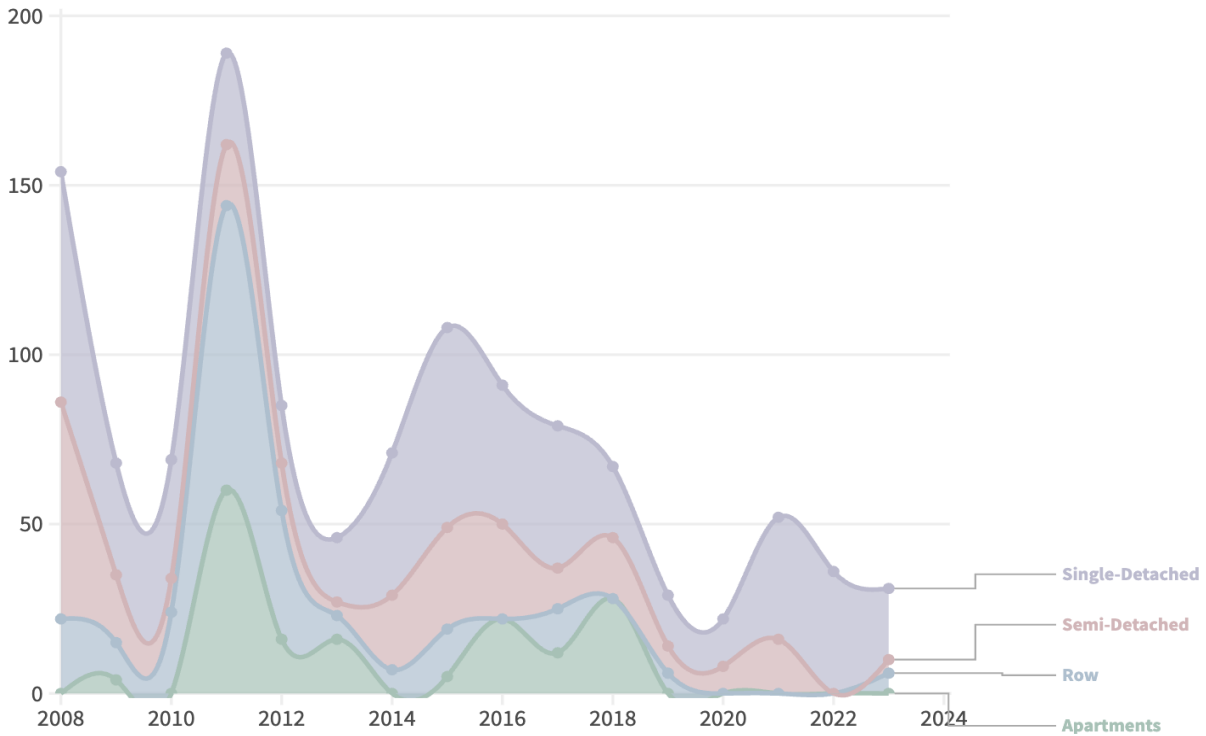2008 2010 2012 2014 2016 2018 2020 2022 2024

New housing starts - Strathmore, Alberta

Source(s): Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts in all centres 10,000 and over

● Apartments ● Row ● Semi-Detached ● Single-Detached

Units

In Strathmore, nearly 40% of renters, and about 16% of homeowners, spend more than 30% of their income on housing, which is a standard benchmark for housing affordability. Although renters make up a smaller portion of the population, they are more likely to live in housing that is unaffordable or unsuitable, and are more vulnerable to evictions tied to renovations or redevelopment.

Tenant and owners spending more than 30% of income on shelter costs - Strathmore, Alberta, and Canada
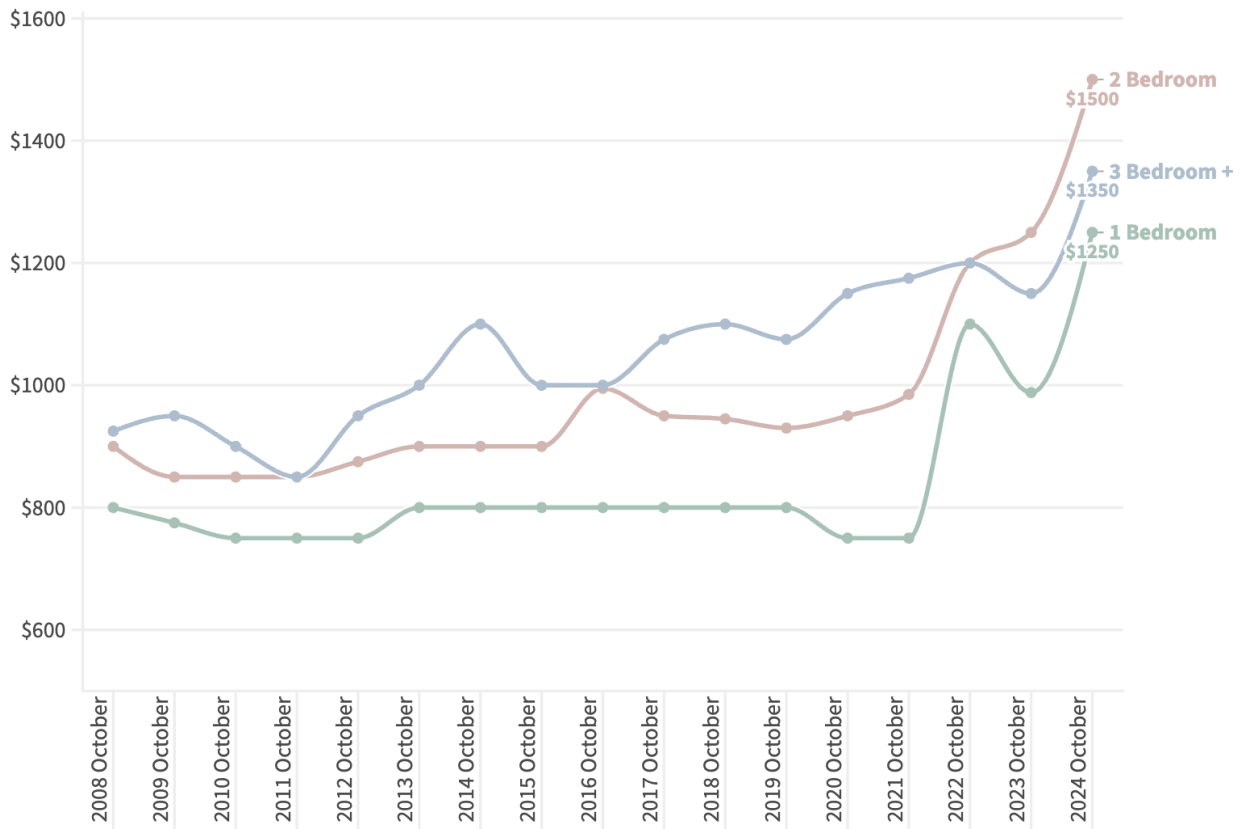
Source(s): Statistics Canada Census, 2016, 2021

● Tenant Households ● Owner Households
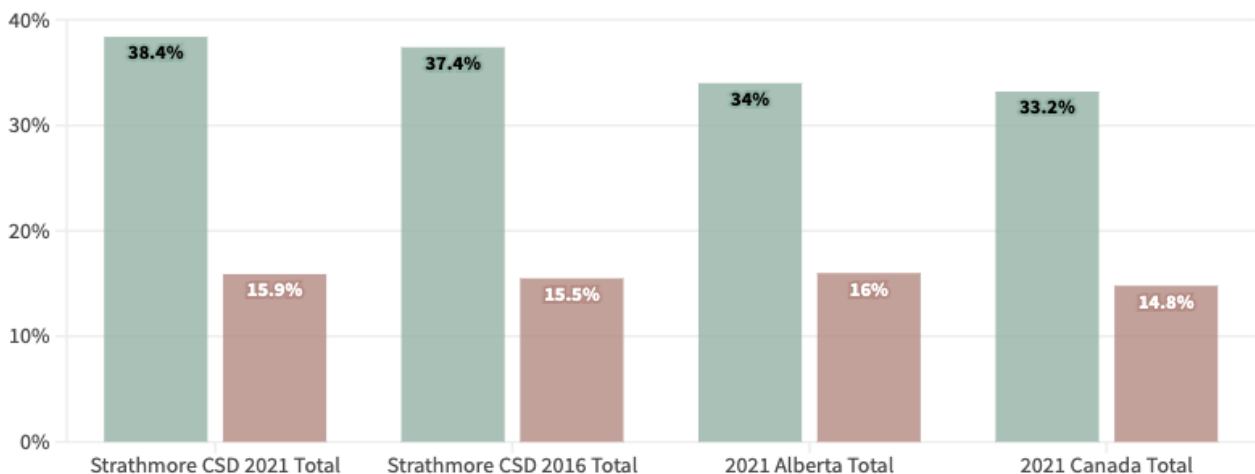
Median rent prices, primary rental market - Strathmore, Alberta

Source(s): CMHC Rental Market Survey, Strathmore (T)

Median Rent ($)

These conditions pose challenges to leaving situations of violence. Limited rental availability leaves few safe options, increasing the risk of cycling between shelters, temporary accommodations, and unstable rentals.

A LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING BOTTLENECKS THE SHELTER SYSTEM.

A lack of affordable housing bottlenecks the shelter system. When stable housing is unavailable, emergency shelters are forced to operate beyond their intended short-term role, leading to extended stays and added strain on limited resources.
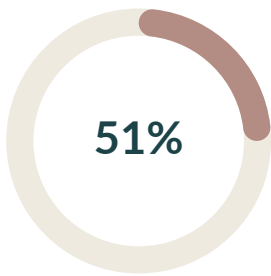
The effects are measurable:
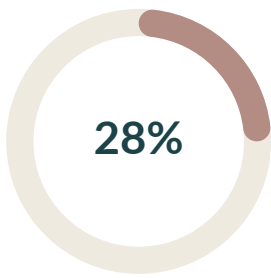
28% of survivors across Alberta now stay in shelters longer than 3 weeks
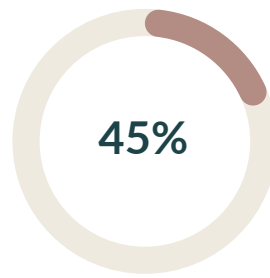
45% Shelter stays are 45% longer than they were 30 years ago (ACWS, 2023)

51% 51% of survivors surveyed leaving shelters return to their abusers due to lack of affordable housing options

(Women's Shelters Canada)

Percentage of survivors leaving shelter by housing situation upon exit - n=216

Source(s): Women's Shelters Canada

Housing Situation	% of respondents
Precarious Housing	69%
Unsuitable Housing	53%
Return to Abuser	51%
Unaffordable Housing	47%
Homelessness	36%
Inadequate Housing	33%
Don't Know	14%

% of respondents
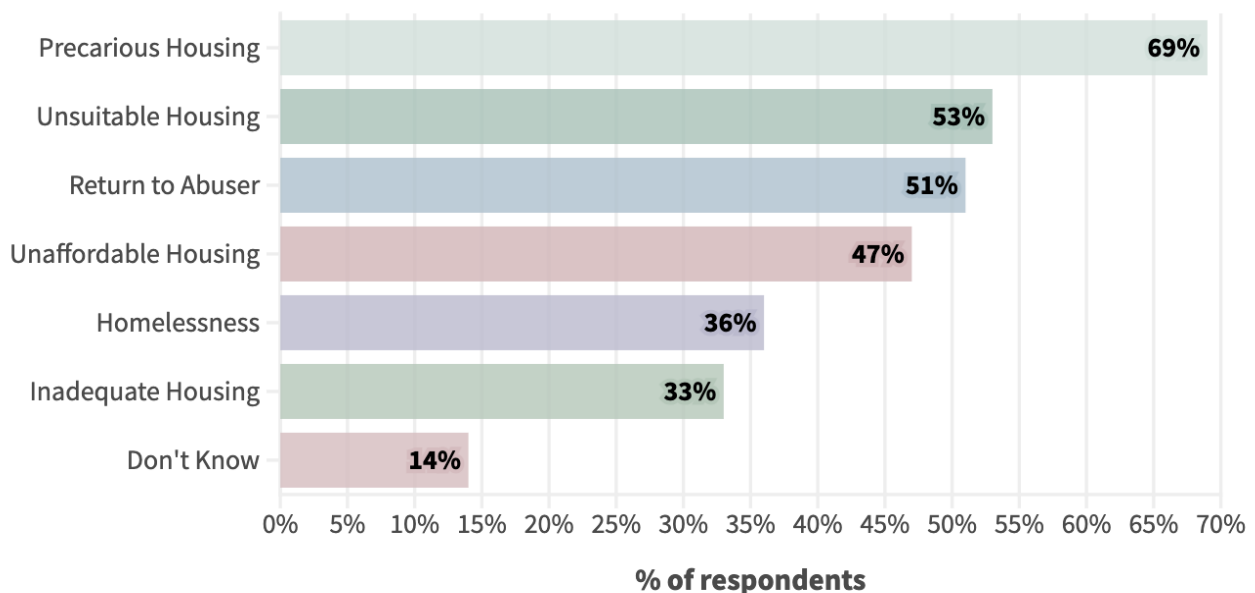
Strathmore reflects these trends. In 2023–2024, 19 people were discharged from True North's shelter into motels, other shelters, or unstable arrangements. Some returned to rough sleeping. Placements into second- and third-stage housing remained limited.

Types of housing after discharge for True North clients

Source(s): Data provided by True North. • Not adjusted for shelter utilization or capacity.

Legend:
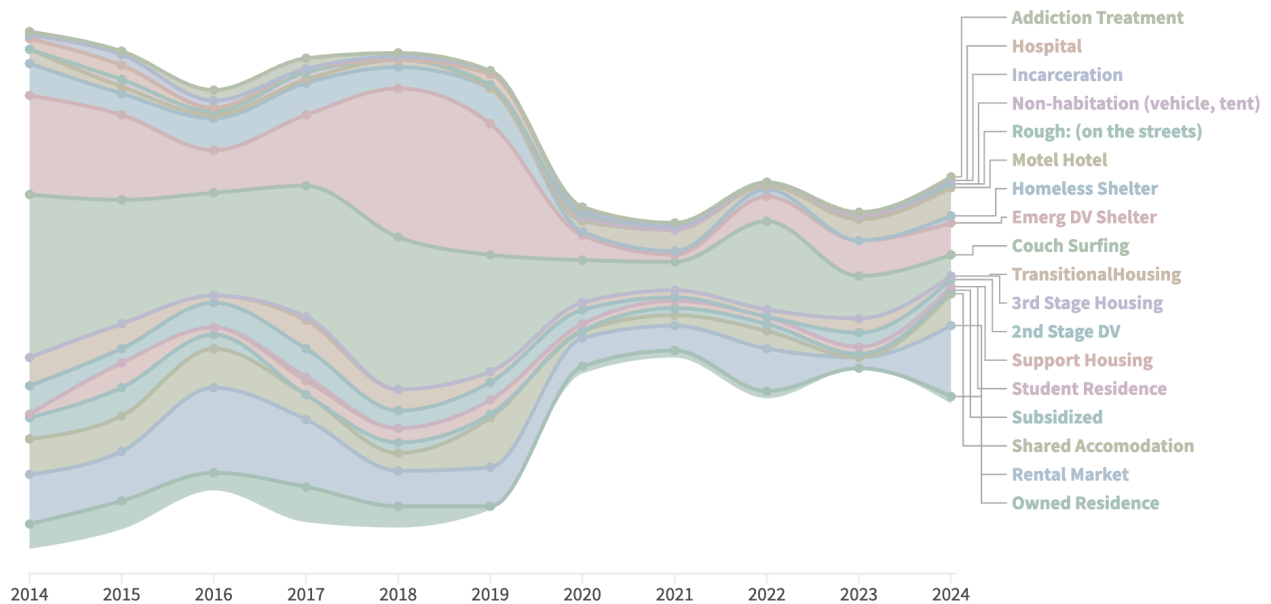- Addiction Treatment
- Hospital
- Incarceration
- Non-habitation (vehicle, tent)
- Rough: (on the streets)
- Motel Hotel
- Homeless Shelter
- Emerg DV Shelter
- Couch Surfing
- TransitionalHousing
- 3rd Stage Housing
- 2nd Stage DV
- Support Housing
- Student Residence
- Subsidized
- Shared Accomodation
- Rental Market
- Owned Residence

Average length of shelter stay - Clients at True North

Source(s): Data provided by True North

Length of stay in days

Average Length of Stay

Year	Value
2014	19.77
2015	16.04
2016	14.31
2017	13.66
2018	14.74
2019	13.99
2020	16.65
2021	15.71
2022	22.38
2023	23.21
2024	31.5

These patterns show serious gaps in the housing continuum. Without viable exit pathways, shelters become congested, services are stretched, and survivors face prolonged instability.

As clients leave the shelter, many would benefit from a temporary place to stay, second-stage shelters that offer longer-term, safe accommodation (up to two years) and provides support for women and children as they rebuild their lives and transition to permanent housing. Such supports do not exist in Strathmore today.

Based on 2022-2024 data from True North's reports on the housing status of clients exiting the shelter (adults only), we estimate that approximately 40 individuals would benefit from this service annually. If each client was to stay for a two-year term, and a buffer was built to account for +/- 10% in the second-stage housing system would require capacity to support about 87 individualsin the community at any given moment. With an average household size of 2.6 people, this would represent about 33 second-stage units.

Survey data from True North reinforces this demand. The two preferred top locations for shelter clients' type of housing as their next steps were to find their own place to live, followed by affordable housing (although these are arguably not mutually exclusive). That said, second-stage housing is often a necessary bridge to affordable places or having one's own place, and was found as the next most common preference. Additionally, the vast majority of clients in the shelter reported wanting to live in Strathmore and Area or Calgary.

HOUSING IS A FORM OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION, AND KEEPS PEOPLE AWAY FROM DANGER.

Safe, affordable housing plays a key role in supporting violence prevention and long-term recovery. When survivors are able to secure permanent housing, their likelihood of returning to unsafe situations decreases. Stable housing creates the conditions needed for safety planning, separation from abusers, and protection from further harm.

The evidence is clear: 98% of women who accessed stable housing reported no further victimization.

Housing is not just shelter, it's a foundation for safety and stability. Addressing housing challenges is essential to reducing the risk of violence and supporting community wellbeing.

> In my experience it's like the deadline kind of puts a little bit of like crunch time [on housing]... like I remember when I first came here I was a bit like panicked because the last place I stayed at was very clear that there will be no extensions. [in stay]"
>
> *Service user*

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ The housing data highlights more than a shortage of units—it reveals the structural conditions that can trap people in cycles of instability and harm. When housing is scarce, unaffordable, or inaccessible, people have fewer options to leave unsafe situations or rebuild after a crisis.

+ These constraints are not distributed evenly; they fall more heavily on those already navigating systemic barriers. As demand continues to outpace supply, especially in growing communities like Strathmore, the resulting pressures are felt across the full spectrum of services—from emergency shelters to transitional supports.

+ In this context, housing becomes more than a basic need; it functions as a social determinant that shapes safety, autonomy, and long-term wellbeing.

Mental Health

Mental health and substance use challenges intersect with violence through complex and bidirectional relationships. These intersections manifest differently across communities and populations, particularly when access to care is limited. This section explores how mental health needs, service availability, and support systems interact in Strathmore's context.

UNADDRESSED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES OR ADDICTION FUELS VIOLENCE, INCREASING THE RISKS THAT PEOPLE AT RISK OF VIOLENCE MAY FACE.

Unaddressed mental health or addiction issues can increase the risks faced by those already vulnerable to violence. These challenges often occur alongside other stressors and, when left untreated, may escalate into crises that strain emergency response systems.

The link between intimate partner violence (IPV) and mental health is well documented:

- Mehr et al. (2023) found that IPV-exposed women face heightened risk of transitioning from substance misuse to substance use disorder, often with severe mental health comorbidities

- Substance use is frequently a coping response to the physical and emotional pain of abuse (Smith et al.; Simonelli et al.; Gezinski et al.)

- IPV survivors also face elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Mehr et al., 2023)

The interaction between trauma and substance use increases vulnerability. Nationally, 16.5% of adults report experiencing at least one emotionally abusive behaviour from a partner. Of those, 13.1% express concern about violence in their home—compared to 3.7% among those without such experiences (Lowe et al., 2024).

In Alberta, ACWS data finds that 73% of survivors completing the 2022–2023 MOSAIC danger assessment survey reported moderate to high psychological or emotional effects related to abuse.

All forms of IPV—physical, emotional, sexual, and coercive control—can produce deep trauma. Survivors often experience depression, anxiety, PTSD, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts. Without access to supports, these effects often persist and worsen, driving further instability.

LIMITED OPTIONS INHIBIT ACCESS TO SUPPORT THAT COULD BE ESSENTIAL TO SAFELY LEAVE ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS.

Limited options can block access to the supports survivors need to safely leave abusive environments. Leaving violence is often a gradual process, requiring emotional support, mental healthcare, and consistent services—especially in cases involving fear and control. But these supports are not always available when most needed.
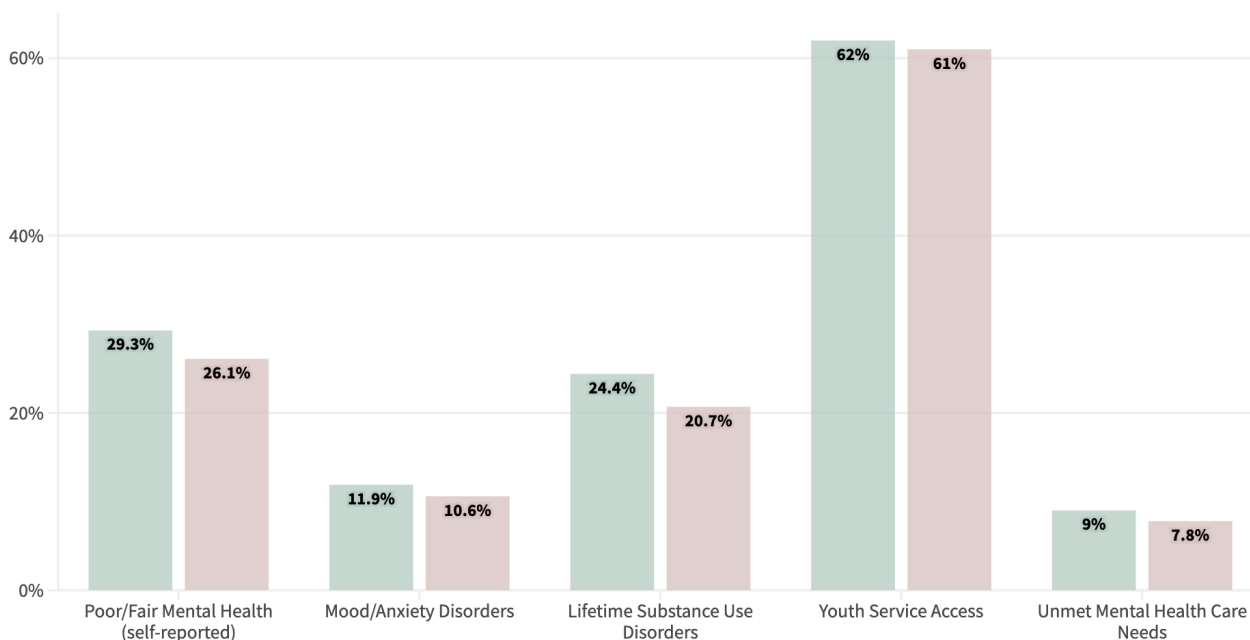
Alberta's mental health and substance use data point to ongoing service gaps. The province reports 14.3 suicide deaths per 100,000 people, exceeding the national average of 10.9. Opioid toxicity deaths are nearly double the national rate (39.4 vs. 20.8 per 100,000) (Lowe et al., 2024). Despite a relatively strong overall supply of providers, access remains uneven—particularly in rural areas. Alberta also has fewer psychiatrists per capita than the national average, limiting access to specialized care.

Selected mental health indicators as a percentage of population

Source(s): Canadian Mental Health Association, State of Mental Health Report (2024)

Alberta ▮ Canada

Percent of Population

Indicator	Alberta	Canada
Poor/Fair Mental Health (self-reported)	29.3%	26.1%
Mood/Anxiety Disorders	11.9%	10.6%
Lifetime Substance Use Disorders	24.4%	20.7%
Youth Service Access	62%	61%
Unmet Mental Health Care Needs	9%	7.8%

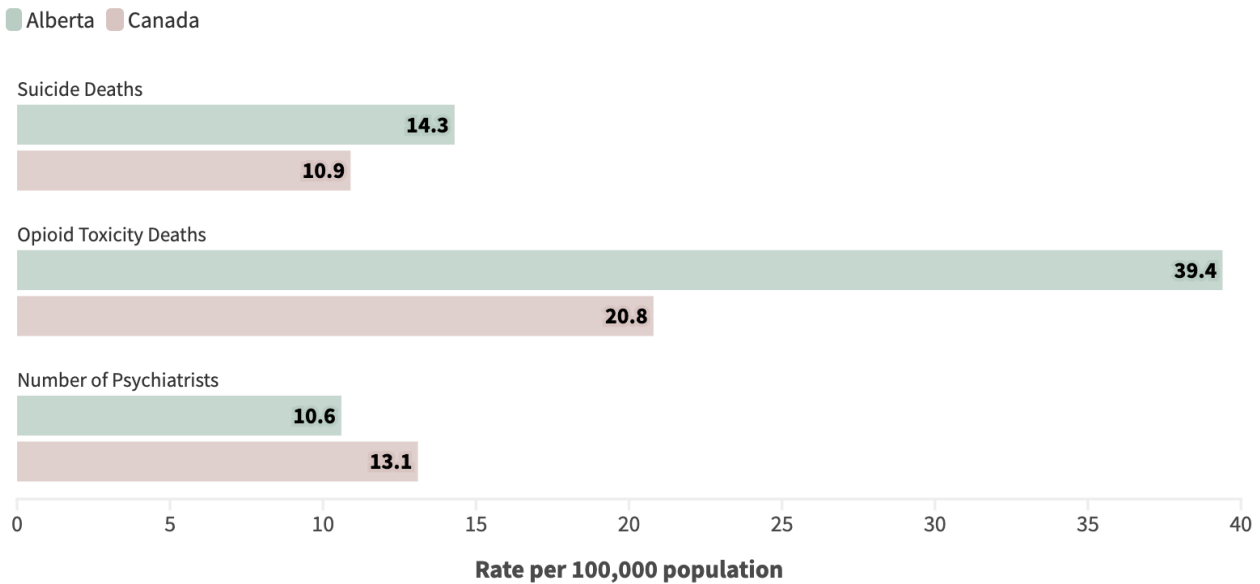**Selected mental health indicators**

Source(s): Canadian Mental Health Association, State of Mental Health Report (2024)

■ Alberta ■ Canada

Suicide Deaths
Alberta: 14.3
Canada: 10.9

Opioid Toxicity Deaths
Alberta: 39.4
Canada: 20.8

Number of Psychiatrists
Alberta: 10.6
Canada: 13.1

Rate per 100,000 population (axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40)

Rate per 100,000 population

These gaps create added challenges for people leaving violence: long waitlists, fragmented services, and eligibility barriers delay efforts to plan for safety and recovery.

In Strathmore, service gaps are especially prominent in substance use support. While Siksika First Nation offers addiction services, these are not available to non-band members. Strathmore residents with complex needs have limited local care options.

Service providers report rising visibility of drug use in public spaces, indicating deepening addiction and mental health crises. Strathmore lacks detox facilities, severely limiting immediate support for those struggling with substance use disorders, and creating major barriers to treatment and recovery.

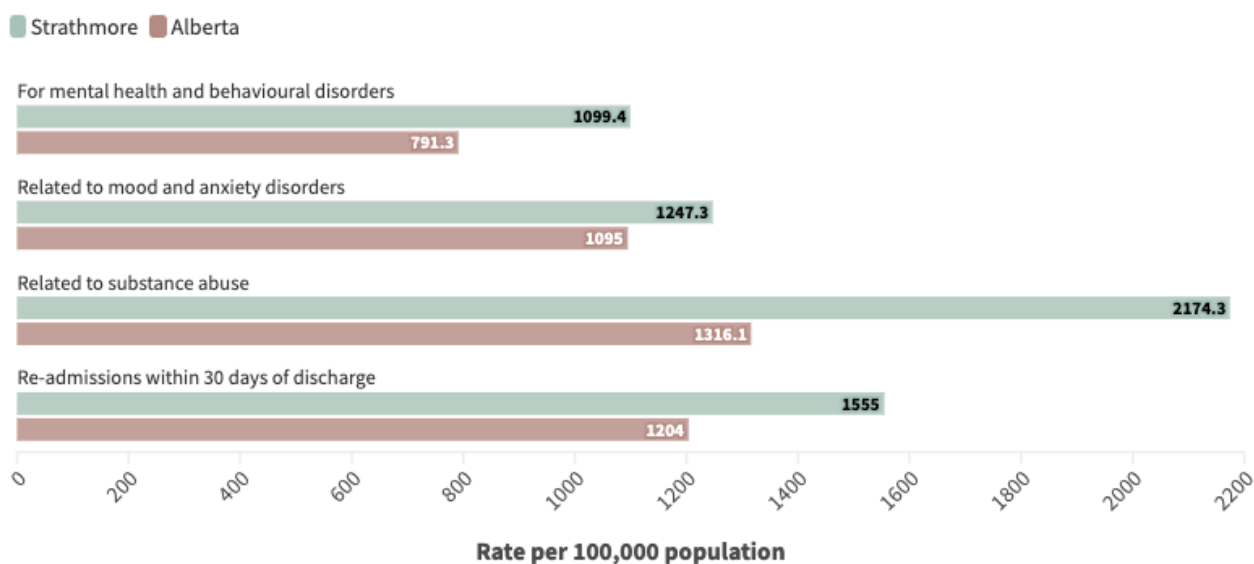*Strathmore Social Needs Assessment, Service Provider Design Labs, 2022*

Without access to critical supports, survivors remain trapped, facing prolonged harm and limited options for escape.

LOCAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT SURGES HIGHLIGHT THE INTERSECTION OF VIOLENCE, MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, AND LIMITED CARE PATHWAYS.

Increases in local emergency department use illustrate the intersection of violence, mental health challenges, and limited care pathways. When community-based services are unavailable, people in crisis often turn to emergency rooms, whether or not these settings are equipped to help. A single hospital visit may reflect a longer history of trauma, declining mental health, and unaddressed substance use.

Emergency department utilization rates

Source(s): Community Profile: Strathmore Health Data and Summary. 5th Edition, August 2022

Strathmore ■ Alberta

For mental health and behavioural disorders
Strathmore: 1099.4
Alberta: 791.3

Related to mood and anxiety disorders
Strathmore: 1247.3
Alberta: 1095

Related to substance abuse
Strathmore: 2174.3
Alberta: 1316.1

Re-admissions within 30 days of discharge
Strathmore: 1555
Alberta: 1204

Rate per 100,000 population

In Strathmore, these trends are increasingly visible, at times surpassing provincial averages. The lack of detox beds, trauma-informed programming, and coordinated care contributes to greater reliance on emergency departments. While hospitals are crucial in crisis response, they are not designed for long-term mental health or addiction recovery.

Strathmore providers report increased emergency calls related to opioid overdoses, reflecting escalating substance dependence, worsened by post-pandemic stressors.

Strathmore Social Needs Assessment, Service Provider Design Labs, 2022

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ The mental health and substance use landscape in Strathmore reflects layered
  pressures that compound when support systems are fragmented or unavailable.
  The local data suggests a pattern of recurring crisis, in which people facing
  violence, trauma, or addiction encounter few consistent touchpoints for care.

+ These challenges don't exist in isolation; they overlap and amplify each other,
  especially when services are siloed or out of reach. The result is a strain not just
  on individuals, but on emergency response systems and community infrastructure.
  Understanding these patterns helps surface where vulnerabilities persist, not
  as isolated issues, but as interconnected conditions that shape the broader
  experience of safety and recovery in the community.

Rurality and Isolation

Rural communities face distinct challenges around safety, support access, and service delivery. Geographic distance combines with social and cultural dynamics to create unique conditions that shape how violence occurs and how communities respond. This section examines the specific ways rurality affects safety and support in Strathmore.

RURAL CHALLENGES ARE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD AS SIMPLY A MATTER OF DISTANCE, BUT THEY INVOLVE LAYERED, SYSTEMIC ISSUES THAT GO FAR BEYOND GEOGRAPHY.

While isolation is a factor, distance alone does not define rural risk. Youngson et al. write that, "Without having neighbours close by, it could increase risk because people are not keeping their eye on you or are not aware of what is going on." Survivors in rural communities experience intersecting structural, geographic, and cultural barriers that reduce their options and increase danger.

Too often, rural safety is reduced to a matter of miles—long distances to the nearest shelter, police station, or clinic. But geography is only the surface. Survivors in rural communities face overlapping structural, geographic, and cultural barriers that increase their risk and reduce their options.

In 2021, Statistics Canada reported that the gender-related homicide rate in rural Canada was more than 2.5 times as high as in urban areas (1.13 vs. 0.44 per 100,000 women and girls).

> **Rates of homicide in Canada for women and girls**
>
> **Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Gender-related homicide of women and girls in Canada (2023)

Rates per 100,000 population in 2021

Rural 1.13

Urban 0.44
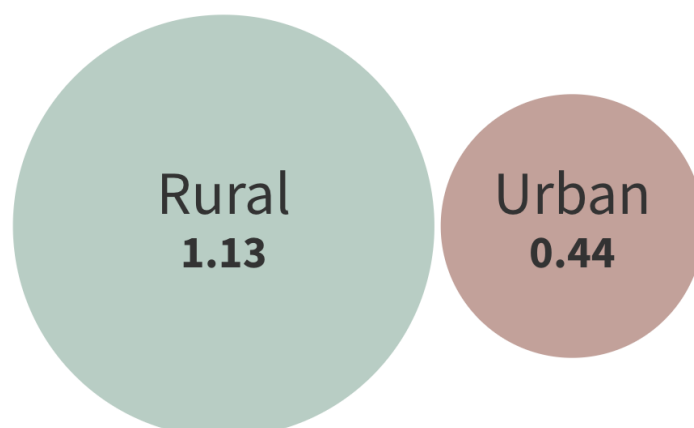
This reflects a broader trend: intimate partner violence is not only more frequent in rural areas, but more likely to be fatal. In 2022–2023, 73% of women in smaller towns and rural areas who completed a Danger Assessment were found to be at severe or extreme risk of being killed by a partner (ACWS). Despite smaller populations, rural and remote communities in Alberta also account for a disproportionate share of help-seeking: 44% of all calls to women's shelters and 42% of shelter stays (ACWS, 2023), placing risk on those who experience violence in these areas.

Percentage of calls received and shelter stays - Urban and rural shelters in Alberta

Source(s): Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2023 Data Release

Rural   Urban

Calls Received

44%

56%

Shelter Stays

42%

58%
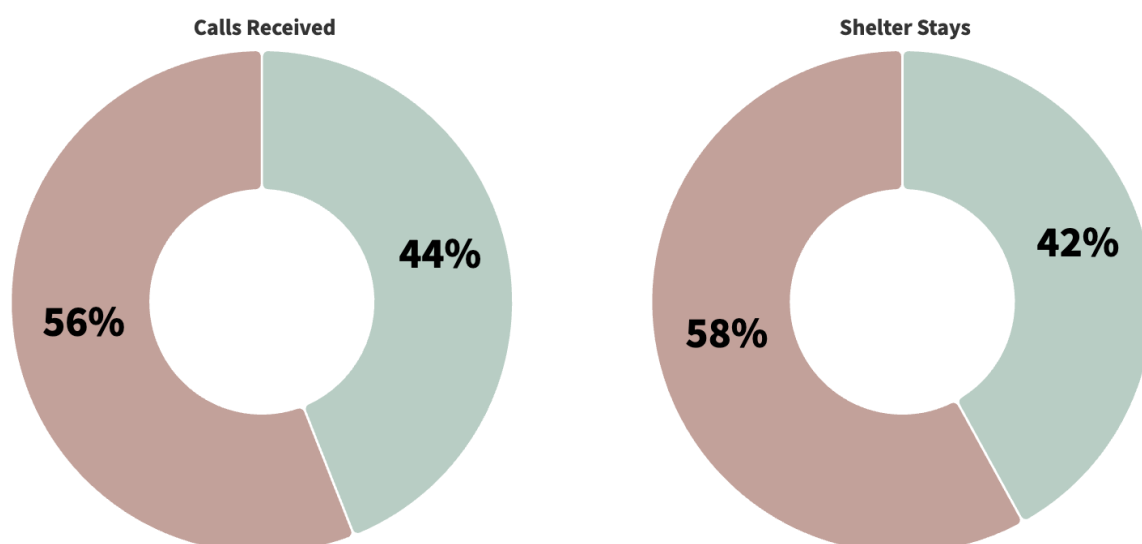
ADDRESSING RURAL SAFETY REQUIRES DESIGNING FOR THE UNIQUE CULTURAL AND LOCATIONAL BARRIERS THAT DEEPEN RISK.

Improving rural safety means designing for the unique cultural and locational barriers that deepen risk. It requires moving beyond urban assumptions, and understanding how geography, infrastructure, social dynamics, and systemic design interact to either enable or interrupt violence.

Geographically, rural survivors face heightened risks due to physical isolation, limited transportation, and fewer nearby services. These barriers reduce opportunities to discreetly seek help and delay emergency response, increasing vulnerability to escalating violence (Youngson et al., 2021).
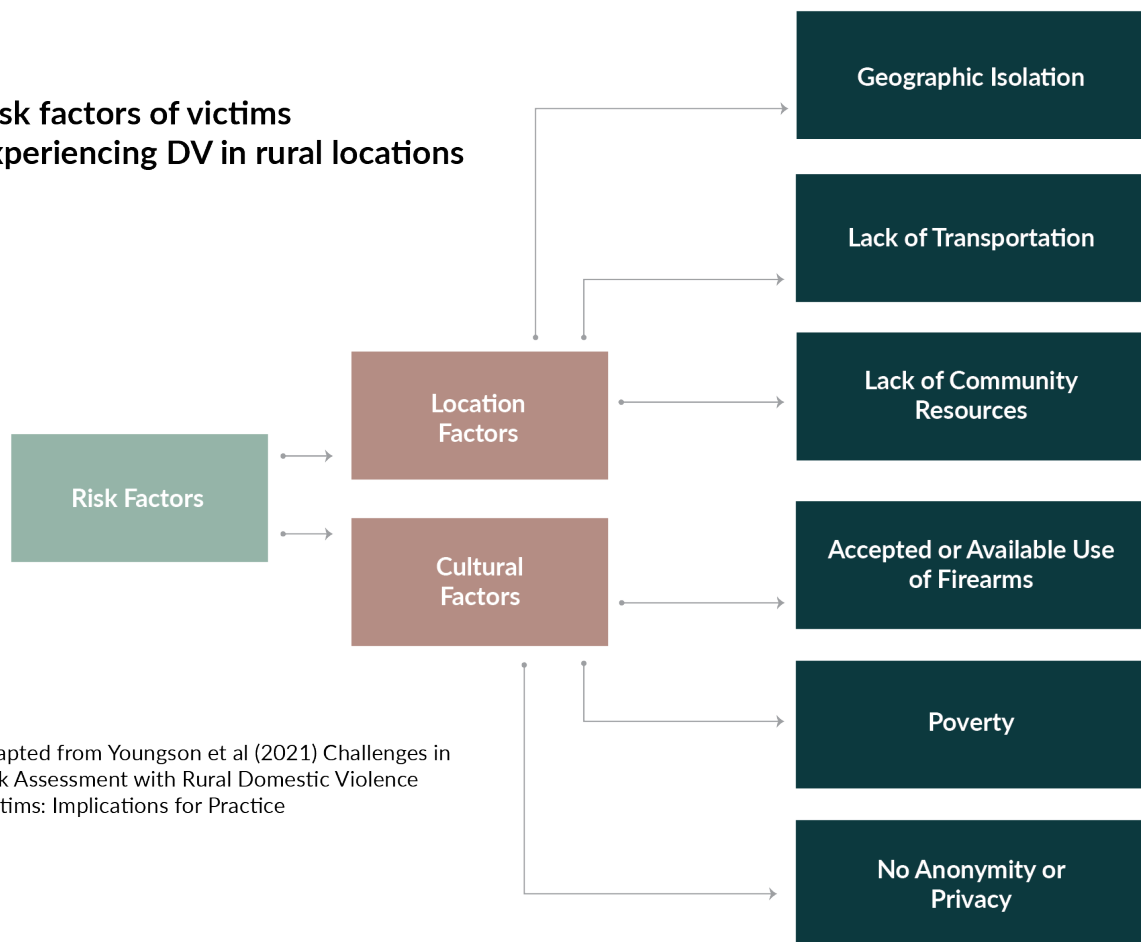
Culturally, rural norms can compound danger. Common factors include normalized firearm ownership, traditional gender roles, and stigma around seeking help. In close-knit communities, fear of gossip and breaches of confidentiality often deter survivors from using available services (Youngson et al., 2021).

"I don't ask for help when I probably need to... and it's simple things"

Service user

Risk factors of victims experiencing DV in rural locations

Risk Factors → Location Factors → Geographic Isolation

Lack of Transportation

Lack of Community Resources

Risk Factors → Cultural Factors → Accepted or Available Use of Firearms

Poverty

No Anonymity or Privacy

Adapted from Youngson et al (2021) Challenges in Risk Assessment with Rural Domestic Violence Victims: Implications for Practice

While rural communities vary, many share geographic and cultural conditions that shape domestic violence. These realities demand service models that reflect rural contexts—addressing distance, transportation, confidentiality, and local norms. Effective support must be grounded in the specific strengths and challenges of rural life.

SURVIVORS IN SMALL COMMUNITIES FACE A PARADOX OF VISIBILITY: EVERYONE KNOWS EACH OTHER, YET THEIR EXPERIENCES OFTEN REMAIN UNSEEN.

Rural communities are often described as close-knit, which can be a source of resilience. According to the Canadian Social Survey (2022), 56% of rural residents reported a strong sense of belonging, compared to 45% in urban areas. However, only 24% of rural residents expressed high confidence in institutions, compared to 28% of urban residents (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Informal networks can step in where formal systems fall short, as neighbours watch out for each other. But these same networks can also reinforce silence. Being socially connected doesn't always mean being supported. Survivors may feel surrounded yet isolated—especially when stigma, fear of judgment, or concerns about personal reputation prevent them from disclosing abuse.

For example, survivors may worry that disclosing abuse will damage their reputation, their children's standing, or their family's position in the community (Youngson et al., 2021). Accessing support often means being seen, which can expose survivors to social pressure, backlash, or unwanted attention.

Discretion becomes a survival strategy. Survivors weigh when, how, and whether to disclose their experiences. This dynamic—being visible but not acknowledged—can normalize silence and downplay abuse. The risks of reporting are real, especially when confidentiality can't be guaranteed and community responses are uncertain (Belotti et al., 2021; Nolet et al., 2020; Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Intiative 2019).

> **"Lots of families just don't understand or want to understand and they take sides and they judge."**
>
> *Service user*

SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION CAN BECOME A TOOL OF CONTROL, MAKING GETTING HELP IMPOSSIBLE.

Rural and remote environments increase the risk of intimate partner violence, not only because of limited services, but because isolation itself can be weaponized. Research shows that coercive control—intimidation, surveillance, and restriction—is often amplified by geographic and social conditions in rural areas (Wood et al., 2024). Survivors may be cut off from support by poor cell coverage, unreliable transportation, and a lack of safe places to go. These structural barriers are often exploited by perpetrators to maintain control.

Transportation challenges compound the risk. As one participant in a Strathmore-based design lab noted, "Most services in the community are located centrally," leaving rural residents with limited options. Survivors may face the impossible choice of either staying with an abuser, or hitchhiking to safety, made more dangerous by winter storms, wildfires, or impassable roads.

Population density per square kilometre, 2021

Source(s): HelpSeeker Technologies
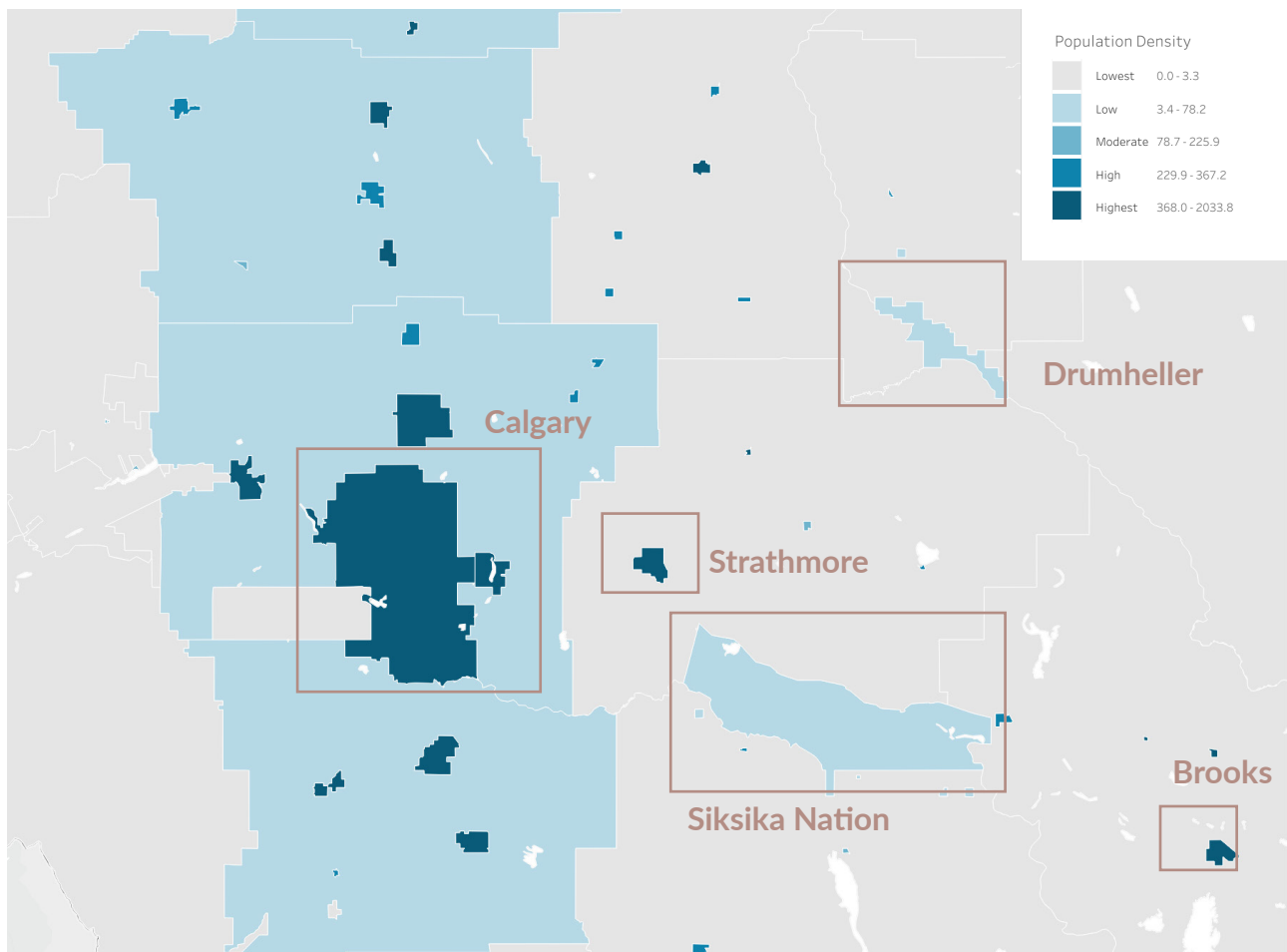
"I don't have a vehicle either, so yeah, it's kind of difficult to like get out of the house"

Service user

In rural settings, coercive control frequently involves threats, surveillance, financial restriction, and forced isolation. Survivors report being monitored, denied access to communication or money, and prevented from making independent decisions. Common patterns include threats to harm animals, the presence of firearms, and the strategic use of distance to delay emergency response (Wood et al., 2024).

These tactics and conditions drastically limit a survivor's space for action—the ability to seek help, plan for safety, or escape. Rurality and isolation are not neutral; they can actively compound risk, creating environments where abuse becomes harder to name, harder to escape, and harder to address.

RURAL SHELTERS IN ALBERTA HANDLE SOME OF THE MOST SEVERE CASES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) WITH THE FEWEST RESOURCES.

These organizations cover vast geographic areas with limited staff and funding, often serving as the only point of contact for miles. Despite rising demand and increasingly complex needs, they're expected to do more with less, and with minimal backup.

This pressure is worsened by the centralization of social services. According to Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), multiple provincial agencies have reduced or eliminated in-person support in rural areas, shifting instead to centralized phone lines and online portals. As RMA notes:

> "The ongoing centralization of social services in Alberta has generated significant challenges for rural FCSS programs and rural citizens — challenges that have only multiplied with the recent decision to fast-track a transition to telephone intake lines and online web portals for a variety of provincial social service supports (especially Alberta Supports) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic."

While centralized systems may improve efficiency in urban settings, they create serious equity issues in rural ones. Many FCSS offices are "the only shop in town." Without stable internet or cell service, rural residents are often cut off from essential supports, or unaware they exist. While centralized systems for social services can offer benefits like streamlined administration and economies of scale, especially in densely populated urban areas, they can inadvertently create barriers and inequities for people in rural communities.

THIS DIGITAL DIVIDE CREATES A SERIOUS EQUITY ISSUE, AS RURAL RESIDENTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY THE CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING SOCIAL SERVICES IN A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM.
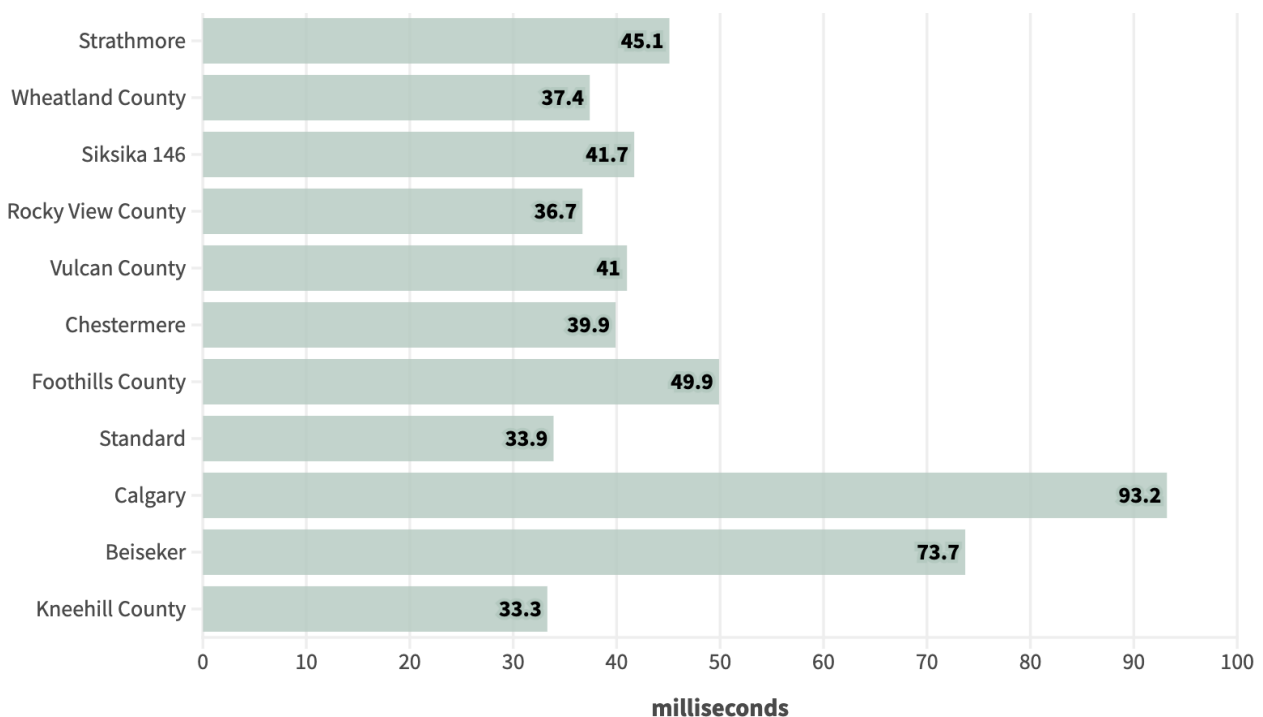
"**I knew that Strathmore had services available for people. I didn't know how to access them. I didn't know if my case would have been acceptable for accessibility. I didn't know what services particularly were offered. Was there legal, financial, sheltering? I didn't know. I knew there was something, but I knew nothing of it.**"

Service user
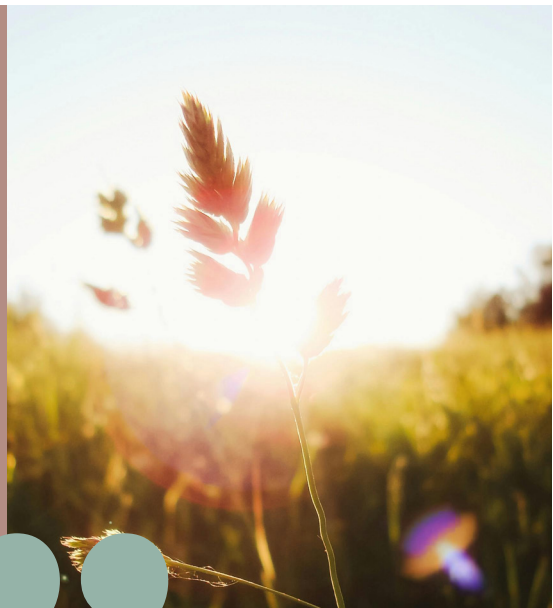
Average internet latency of Strathmore and top 10 nearest communities - 2022

Source(s): Government of Alberta Regional Dashboard, adapted from information provided by M-Labs NDT data set

Community	Latency (ms)
Strathmore	45.1
Wheatland County	37.4
Siksika 146	41.7
Rocky View County	36.7
Vulcan County	41
Chestermere	39.9
Foothills County	49.9
Standard	33.9
Calgary	93.2
Beiseker	73.7
Kneehill County	33.3

milliseconds

The lack of reliable internet and cell phone service can make it difficult or impossible to complete online applications, access online resources, or participate in virtual appointments. This can lead to delays in receiving assistance, or even prevent people altogether from accessing the support they need. The lack of awareness of available services can further marginalize rural residents, as they may not know where to turn for help or how to navigate the complex social service system.

Distance further compounds these barriers. For people experiencing IPV, traveling hours to reach a shelter or healthcare service is often impossible, especially without safe, confidential transportation (Wood et al., 2024). While service digitization may offer some promise, it cannot replace on-the-ground support in rural and remote areas.

PERSISTENT FUNDING CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES (FCSS), ADD TO THE STRAIN.

The RMA reports that the provincial contribution to the FCSS program has remained stagnant at $100 million since 2015, with a modest $5 million increase in 2023. As costs rise and community needs grow, local programs are under increasing pressure.

This reality is echoed in province-wide survey data:

83%

of FCSS directors rated the lack of funding increases since 2015 as "very challenging"—the highest rating among all issues.

Many rural municipalities now contribute well beyond the required 20% to sustain services, in some cases covering up to 60% of a program's budget.

THESE SHIFTS REVEAL A GROWING DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE INTENT OF THE FCSS FUNDING MODEL AND THE REALITIES OF RURAL SERVICE DELIVERY.

When FCSS programs are under-resourced, their ability to offer upstream supports—like parenting programs, youth outreach, and social connection initiatives that reduce risk factors for violence—is substantially reduced.

What does this mean for Strathmore?

\+ Strathmore's rural context reveals how geographic and social conditions can quietly shape risk. The issue isn't only distance—it's the way isolation, community norms, and service centralization interact to narrow the space for help-seeking and safety.

\+ Survivors are not just navigating personal experiences of violence; they're also contending with structural gaps that make disclosure harder, options fewer, and responses slower.

\+ These dynamics strain the resilience of rural communities and service providers alike, highlighting a persistent tension: how to support safety and wellbeing in places where both need and distance are high, but resources are thin.

Youth and Digital Spaces

Digital environments increasingly shape young people's social connections, relationships, and exposure to harm. Online interactions create new pathways for both risk and support, particularly as technology becomes more integrated into daily life. This section considers how digital spaces affect youth wellbeing and safety in Strathmore.

YOUTH LIVES ARE INTERTWINED WITH WHAT IS ONLINE, CREATING NEW DIMENSIONS OF THEIR CORE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES.

Youth lives are deeply intertwined with digital spaces, shaping how they communicate, learn, and socialize. In 2022, 99% of Canadians aged 15 to 24 used the internet, and 91% engaged with social networks (Statistics Canada, 2024). While these platforms offer connection and participation, they also expose youth to harmful experiences.

Online experiences of young Canadians

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Young people and exposure to harmful online content in 2022
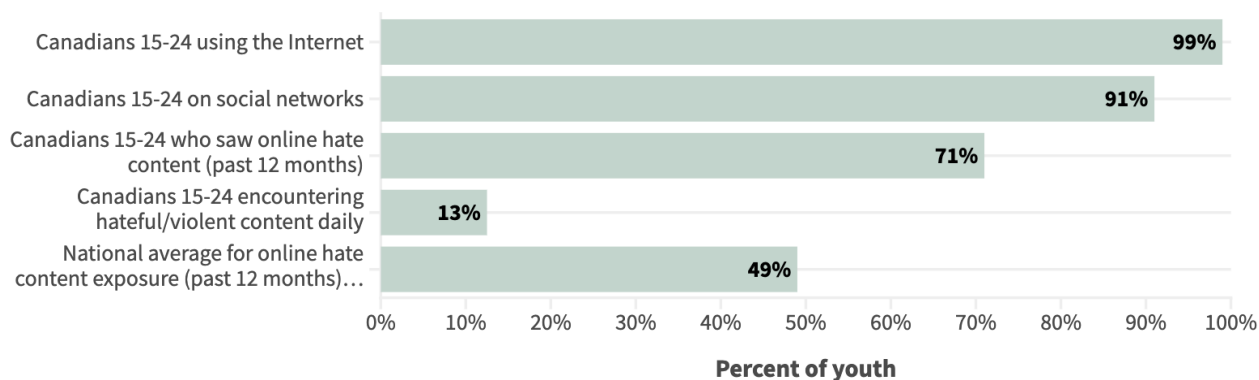
71% of youth in this age group reported encountering online hate content in the past year—substantially higher than the national average of 49%. About one in eight reported seeing hateful or violent content daily (Statistics Canada, 2024).

These findings reflect how online environments can rapidly amplify a broad spectrum of social interactions—both supportive and harmful.

HARM DOESN'T JUST OCCUR IN DIGITAL SPACES—IT CAN BE AMPLIFIED THERE. NOT ALL YOUTH FACE EQUAL RISK ONLINE; EXISTING SOCIAL INEQUITIES OFTEN CARRY OVER INTO DIGITAL INTERACTIONS.

52%
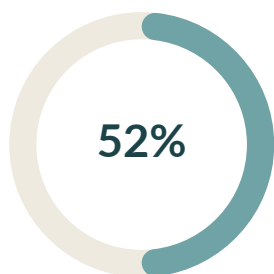
**Non-binary youth aged 12 to 17 reported the highest rates of cyberbullying at 52%**

—more than double the rates reported by boys or girls (Statistics Canada, 2023). Higher rates of online victimization were also reported among LGBTQ2S+ youth and First Nations youth living off-reserve.

Frequent use of social media correlates with increased exposure to bullying. Youth who reported using social networks or messaging apps "constantly" were more likely to experience online harassment than those who used them infrequently (Statistics Canada, 2023). While privacy settings and parental controls may reduce exposure, they do not eliminate risk.

Online experiences are also gendered. Among Canadians aged 18 to 29,

32%
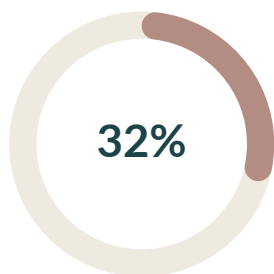
of women reported experiencing online abuse,

17%
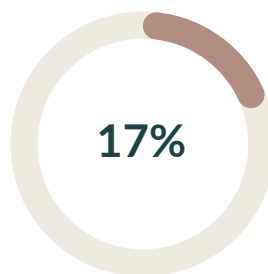
compared to 17% of men.

Many of these incidents involved unsolicited sexual content. Nearly one-third of women responded by blocking the person responsible, while only 13% of men did the same (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Meanwhile, New forms of violence are emerging. Tech-enabled intimate partner violence (IPV)—including tracking, surveillance, stalking, and harassment—has become increasingly common. These tactics can severely limit survivors' ability to seek help and access support (Bailey et al., 2023).

A SHIFT TO ONLINE INTERACTIONS DURING COVID HAS AFFECTED THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH.

Research shows that the pandemic's forced shift to primarily online social interactions created distinct mental health challenges for youth. Studies have found that increased screen time and digital-only communication correlated with higher reported anxiety and depression symptoms among adolescents (Atwal et al., 2022).

The replacement of in-person social connections with virtual ones disrupted normal development patterns, while simultaneously increasing exposure to harmful content. This digital transformation of social life contributed substantially to the documented rise in mental health challenges during the pandemic period.

Canadians' self-perceived poor mental health by age group during the pandemic

Source(s): Mental Health Commission of Canada. Lockdown Life: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth in Canada

Percentage of respondents

Age group	Percentage
15–24	63.8%
25–34	61.9%
35–44	60.3%
45–54	53.6%
55–64	44.8%
65 and older	35%
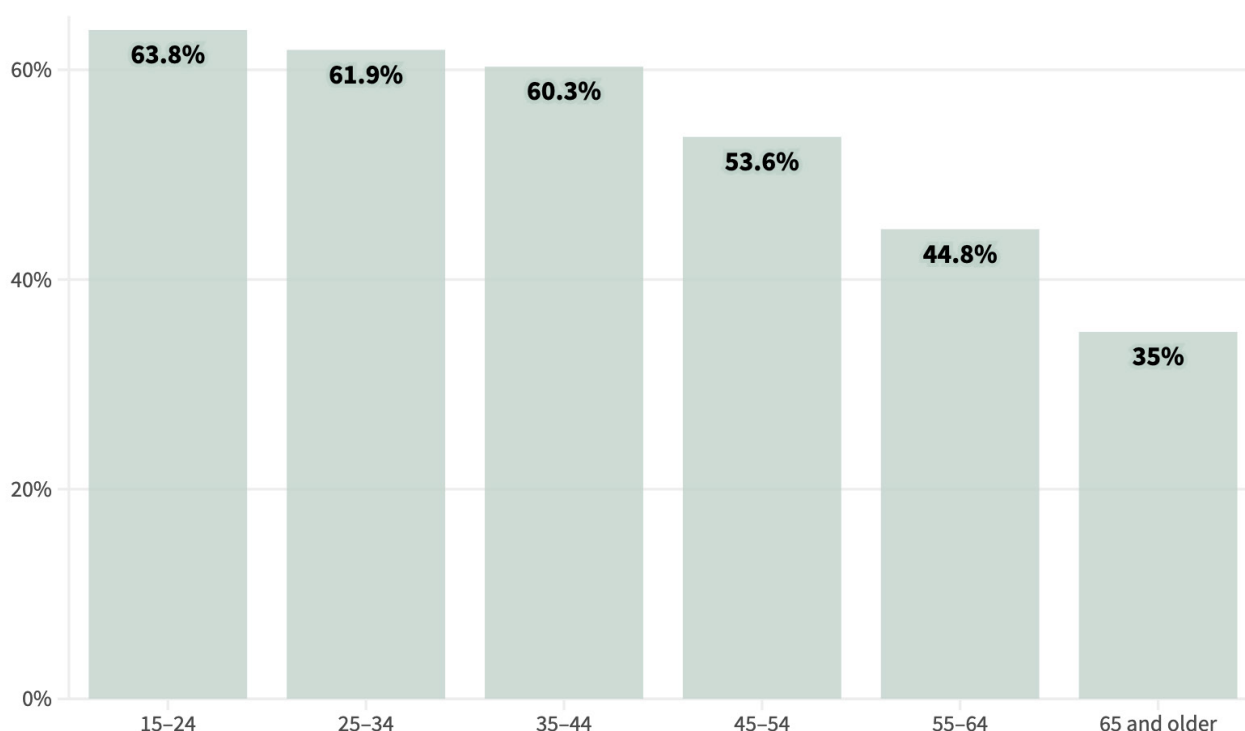
Similarly, research from the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) found that many youth experienced mental health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. These effects were more pronounced among those with pre-existing conditions. Half of the respondents with prior mental health concerns also reported disruptions in access to services and support. In the early stages of the pandemic, 18% of all respondents reported experiencing suicidal thoughts.

These mental health challenges occurred alongside broader shifts in social interaction. Conditions such as social distancing and increased reliance on technology also contributed to greater exposure to online risks, including cyberbullying. While not all people experience online targeting, research from Statistics Canada (2023) shows that those who do are more likely to report related offline harms, including stalking, fraud, or physical assault.

YOUTH WITH STRONG FAMILY AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS EXPERIENCE LESS DIFFICULTY AND HARM IN ONLINE SPACES.

Looking ahead, addressing online harms may require new approaches tailored to the evolving digital landscape. Despite the complexity of online environments, parents, educators, and community members continue to play an important role.

- Youth whose parents were "always" or "often" aware of their online activities reported lower rates of cyberbullying (22%) compared to those whose parents were "sometimes" or "never" aware (29%) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

- Similarly, teens who reported fewer difficulties making friends experienced less online harassment. These findings suggest that strong offline social connections and open communication at home may help reduce the risk of online victimization (Statistics Canada, 2023).

YOUTH WELLBEING IS SHAPED NOT JUST BY THEIR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS BUT BY THEIR DIGITAL ONES.

As more of their social, educational, and emotional lives unfold online, the risks they face there—cyberbullying, hate, harassment—could lead to real-world consequences: increased anxiety, social withdrawal, disrupted learning, and, in some cases, serious mental health crises.

Ignoring these dynamics means overlooking how young people experience the world today.

But with the right awareness, support, and digital literacy strategies, families, educators, and communities can help protect youth, strengthen resilience, and create support adapted to the online world we exist within.

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ Strathmore's youth are growing up in a landscape where digital spaces are central to how relationships form, harm occurs, and support is sought. These environments carry both potential and risk—amplifying connection for some while deepening isolation or exposure for others. What happens online does not stay online; it shapes how young people feel, relate, and cope in the offline world.

+ The patterns emerging around mental health, online victimization, and digital surveillance reflect more than individual experiences—they point to a generational shift in how safety and wellbeing are negotiated in increasingly hybrid lives.

Discrimination and Social Marginalization

Experiences of discrimination and social exclusion connect to violence through multiple channels, from individual vulnerability to systemic barriers. These patterns affect different populations unevenly, creating layered challenges for safety and support. This section examines how discrimination affects safety and wellbeing in Strathmore.
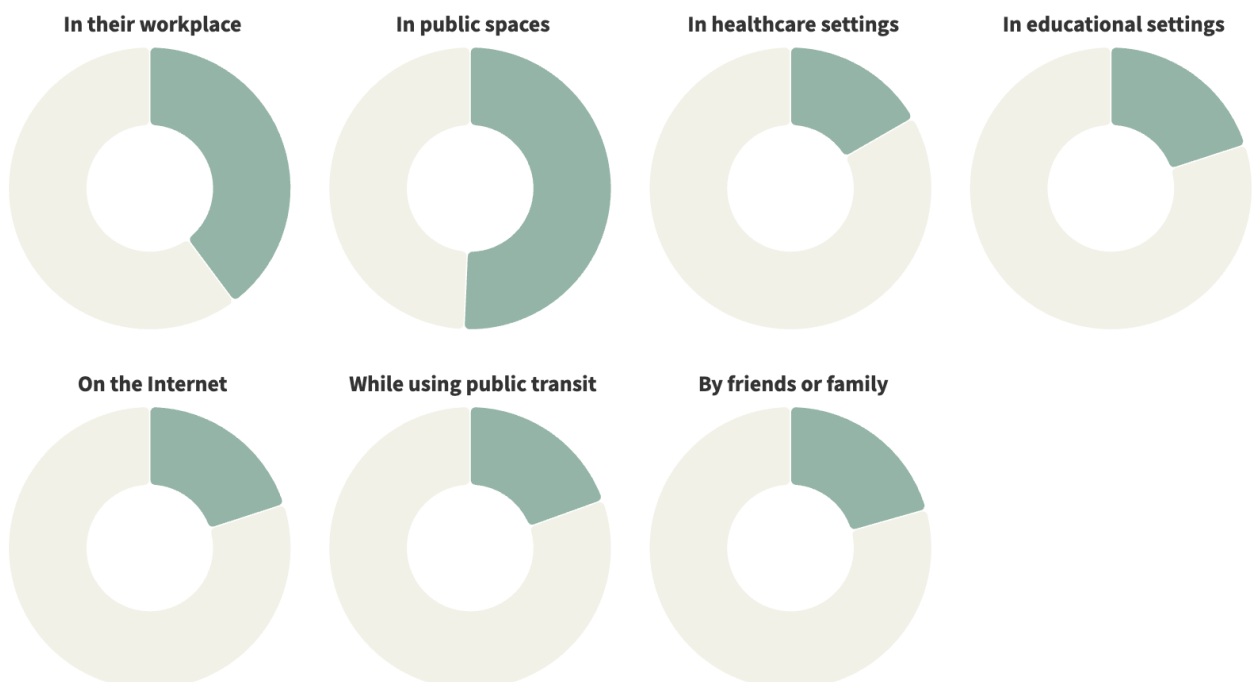
DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION INCREASE THE RISK OF BOTH EXPERIENCING AND PERPETRATING VIOLENCE.

According to the Canadian Social Survey, over one in three Canadians aged 15 and older (36%) reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years. While not all people who report discrimination are at risk of violence, tracking these patterns is vital for prevention. Repeated experiences of discrimination may reduce trust in institutions and strain social connections.

For many young people, early exposure to bias—in public spaces, workplaces, or healthcare settings—can erode trust in institutions and weaken social ties. These experiences often shape how they perceive others and interact with the world. Over time, this can lower thresholds for aggression or lead to social withdrawal, increasing the likelihood of both victimization and perpetration.

Percent of Canadians ages 15+ who have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment by setting

Source(s): Statistics Canada. Discrimination and unfair treatment by gender and other selected sociodemographic characteristics. Table 45-10-0101-01. • Data from Q4 2024
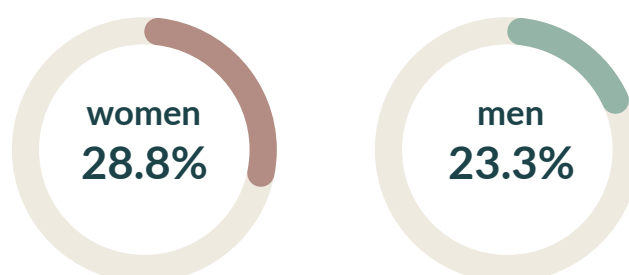

In their workplace

In public spaces

In healthcare settings

In educational settings

On the Internet

While using public transit

By friends or family

Research shows that the stress and isolation caused by discrimination can fuel both violent behaviour and vulnerability to harm (Tung et al., 2020; Brinker et al., 2022). According to CMHA Ontario, violence is often the means through which discrimination is expressed. It is also strongly linked to substance use and mental health issues. In contrast, freedom from violence is one of the strongest determinants of mental wellbeing.

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION DIFFER BY POPULATION AND SETTING, REVEALING HOW SOCIAL POWER PLAYS OUT IN DAILY LIFE. THUS, SOME ARE AT HIGHER RISK OF EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE THAN OTHERS.

Data from Statistics Canada finds that across the country, more women (28.8%) report experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment than men (23.3%).

women
28.8%

men
23.3%

The context varies:

- Men report slightly higher rates in the workplace (41.3% vs. 38.6%) and other unspecified settings (24.5% vs. 18.3%).

- Women report higher rates in healthcare (19.7% vs. 13.0%) and public spaces like stores and banks (52.5% vs. 48.3%).

- In personal relationships, 24.1% of women report discrimination from friends or family, compared to 16.4% of men.

- Online, both genders report similar levels, with women slightly higher (20.7% vs. 19.1%).

Marginalized communities—including immigrants, visible minorities, LGBTQ2S+ people, and people with disabilities—face additional structural barriers. When certain groups are treated as "less deserving," perpetrators may use those messages to justify abuse. By contrast, inclusion—economic, social, and political— helps build autonomy, confidence, and the conditions that protect against violence. Social isolation increases vulnerability, while social inclusion strengthens protective networks and collective resilience. Structural barriers—economic, cultural, or institutional—can limit access to these supports.

Percent of Canadians who experienced discrimination or unfair treatment by population groups

Legend: ■ Age ■ Disability ■ Immigrant Status ■ LGBTQ2S+ ■ Urban/Rural ■ Visible Minority

Population group	Percent
15 to 24 years	38.7%
25 to 54 years	30.3%
55 to 64 years	21.4%
65 years and over	11.6%
Immigrants	34.7%
Non-immigrants	22.8%
LGBTQ2S+ people	53.6%
Non-LGBTQ2S+ people	24.2%
Visible minority population	39.9%
Not a visible minority	20.3%
Persons with a disability	34.1%
Persons without a disability	20.3%
Urban areas	27.6%
Rural areas	15.3%

Percent of Canadians
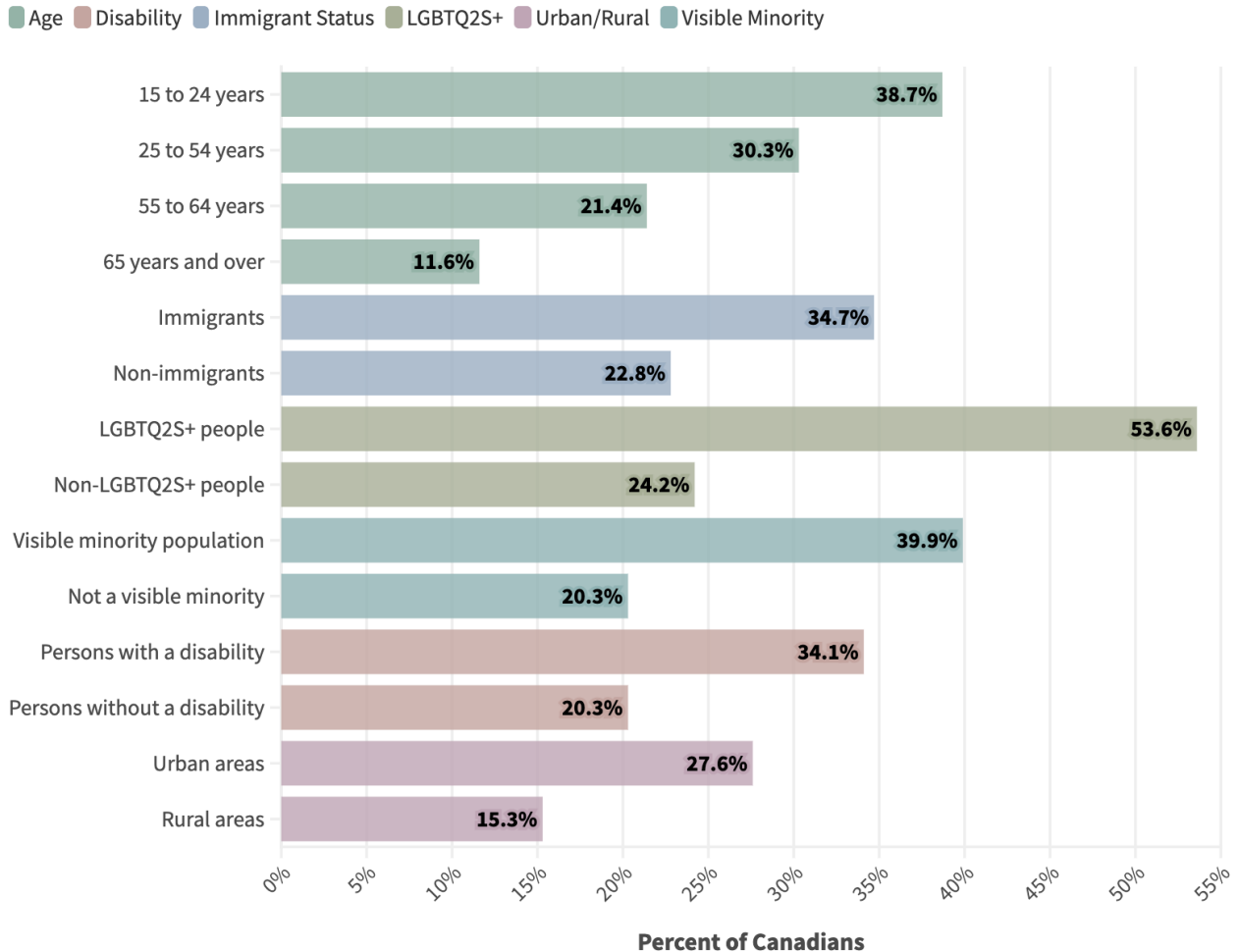
National data highlights further disparities:

- Younger people report more discrimination than older adults, suggesting early exposure may shape perceptions of boundaries and power.

- Immigrants and racialized populations report higher rates of unfair treatment, often compounded by cultural and economic marginalization.

- LGBTQ2S+ people report much higher levels of discrimination, and also experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than non-LGBTQ2S+ Canadians.

- People with disabilities face more discrimination than those without, often intersecting with caregiving or support dynamics.

- Urban residents report higher rates of mistreatment than rural residents. However, reporting discrimination may be more difficult in rural settings due to tight-knit social networks. Rural residents also tend to report higher life satisfaction and stronger community connection than those in urban areas.

IN STRATHMORE, YOUTH REPORT STRONG COMMUNITY TIES ALONGSIDE PERSISTENT BARRIERS TO INCLUSION, SAFE SPACES, AND SUPPORT.
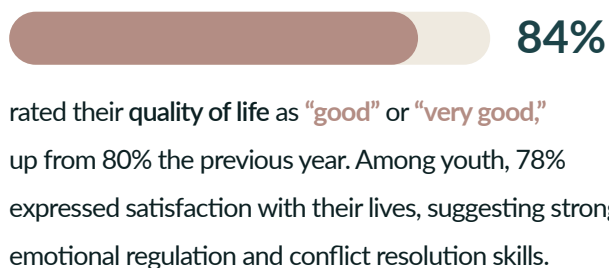
Local assessments reflect national trends while highlighting the importance of supports—like social networks, third spaces, and access to professionals—in mitigating exclusion. While many residents express high life satisfaction, youth also report concerns about bullying, discrimination, and barriers to accessing programs in Strathmore's latest needs assessment.

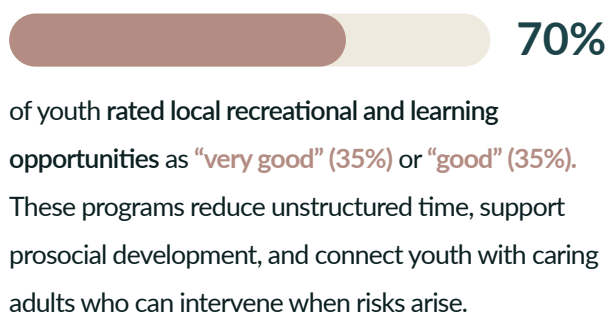According to the Town of Strathmore's most recent social needs assessment:
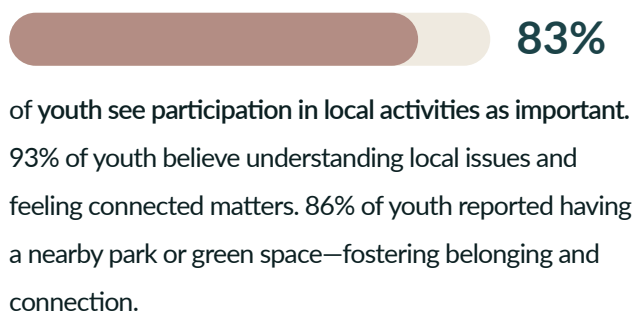
Strengths in Strathmore

High life satisfaction.

In 2022,

84%

rated their **quality of life** as "good" or "very good," up from 80% the previous year. Among youth, 78% expressed satisfaction with their lives, suggesting strong emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills.

Access to opportunities.

70%

of youth **rated local recreational and learning opportunities** as "very good" (35%) or "good" (35%). These programs reduce unstructured time, support prosocial development, and connect youth with caring adults who can intervene when risks arise.

High community engagement..

83%

of **youth see participation in local activities as important.** 93% of youth believe understanding local issues and feeling connected matters. 86% of youth reported having a nearby park or green space—fostering belonging and connection.

Challenges in Strathmore

Discrimination remains a concern.

Nearly **three-quarters of youth raised it as an issue,** with over **one-quarter reporting direct experiences.** Barriers to accessing recreation and youth spaces persist, with just under one-third of youth citing cost, transportation, or lack of facilities as obstacles.

60% agreed that not having enough to do is a top concern.

Professional supports are underutilized.

Resources like **school nurses and crisis lines received low importance ratings,** with school nurses averaging only 1.87 out of 5. This suggests that while informal networks are strong, many youth do not find formal systems accessible or trustworthy, leaving them unsupported during challenges.

Barriers to community engagement.

Community **feedback emphasizes the need for connection, safety, and being heard,** whether through close relationships or inclusive public spaces. Many youth find meaning through local activities, but ongoing barriers point to the need for culturally responsive supports, particularly for Indigenous peoples, newcomers, and racialized communities.

While Canada promotes multiculturalism and inclusion, some groups in Strathmore continue to face structural and social exclusion. These conditions can increase vulnerability to both experiencing and perpetrating violence. Recognizing these dynamics helps communities better understand how discrimination and isolation contribute to broader patterns of harm.

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ Discrimination doesn't exist in isolation. It shapes how people move through their communities, who they trust, and how they access support. In Strathmore, patterns of exclusion—whether tied to identity, ability, or social circumstance—intersect with young people's access to belonging, safety, and wellbeing.

+ These dynamics don't just affect individuals; they accumulate into broader conditions that shape how violence emerges and is addressed.

+ Understanding the role of marginalization helps reveal where risk is concentrated— not because of personal factors alone, but because of the uneven ways support, opportunity, and recognition are distributed.

Economic Environment

Economic factors influence both vulnerability to violence and capacity for safety through various pathways. Changes in employment, income security, and market conditions affect household stability and community resources. This section explores how economic conditions in Strathmore shape safety and support needs.

ECONOMIC WELLBEING CAN AFFECT VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENCE.

The relationship between economic systems and gender-based violence operates through multiple, interconnected pathways. Economic insecurity is both a risk factor for experiencing violence and a major barrier to leaving it.

Research consistently links financial vulnerability with increased risk of danger (WomanACT).

According to the Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse,

underemployment and low income

50%

was a top challenge facing residents (Statistics Canada, 2018).

In 2021,

7.7%
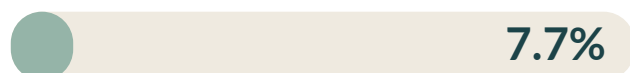
of women and girls in Canada lived below the official poverty line (Statistics Canada, 2023).

In Alberta,

11%

of people aged 65 and older and about 1 in 20 children under 18 live in low-income households. This may limit access to critical resources for basic needs such as grocery stores, jobs, and more.

Percentage of individuals in low-income status - Alberta, 2021–2022

Source(s): Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type

All persons

6 — 8
2021 — 2022

Persons under 18 years

7 — 5
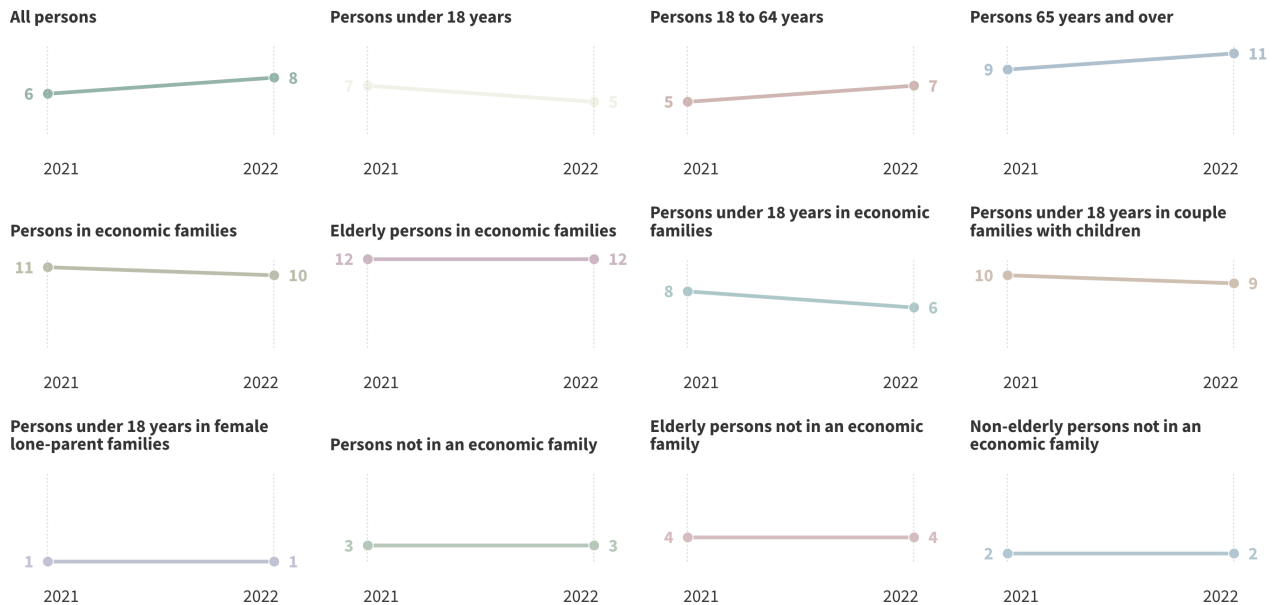2021 — 2022

Persons 18 to 64 years

5 — 7
2021 — 2022

Persons 65 years and over

9 — 11
2021 — 2022

Persons in economic families

11 — 10
2021 — 2022

Elderly persons in economic families

12 — 12
2021 — 2022

Persons under 18 years in economic families

8 — 6
2021 — 2022

Persons under 18 years in couple families with children

10 — 9
2021 — 2022

Persons under 18 years in female lone-parent families

1 — 1
2021 — 2022

Persons not in an economic family

3 — 3
2021 — 2022

Elderly persons not in an economic family

4 — 4
2021 — 2022

Non-elderly persons not in an economic family

2 — 2
2021 — 2022

Although not all people living in poverty experience economic abuse, this is a topic that has gained global attention.

That said, there is less research on the Canadian context, and limited studies have approached the topic.

A report from the Canadian Centre for Women's Economic Empowerment (2023) finds that coerced debt, damaged credit files, inhibited employment and education, and bankruptcy are all consequences of economic abuse.

COERCION, THREATS, INTIMIDATION, ISOLATION, AND OTHER FACTORS CAN BE USED TO EXPLOIT FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY.

Some research does exist in sparsity about the prevalence of economic abuse in Canada. For example, a recent study in Canada found Indigenous women are three times as likely to experience economic abuse than non-Indigenous women. (Heidinger, 2021). Among the women surveyed, 16% of Indigenous women (compared to 6% of non-Indigenous women) were forced to give money or possessions to their partners, and 13% of Indigenous women were denied access to employment, money, or financial resources of their own (compared to 3% of non-Indigenous women).

ALBERTA'S ECONOMIC OUTLOOK REMAINS UNCERTAIN AND WILL TAKE TIME TO RECOVER FROM THE PANDEMIC.

According to its Economic Outlook, Alberta's real per capita consumption, after declining in 2020, rebounded in 2021, but has yet to return to pre-pandemic trends. Ongoing affordability challenges, labour market shifts, and global volatility are likely factors. Many households appear to be cutting discretionary spending, contributing to stagnant consumption levels.

Households will remain cautious about spending this year amid softer labour market conditions and heightened uncertainty.

Chart 17: Uncertainty will slow the recovery in per capita spending
Real per capita consumption in Alberta
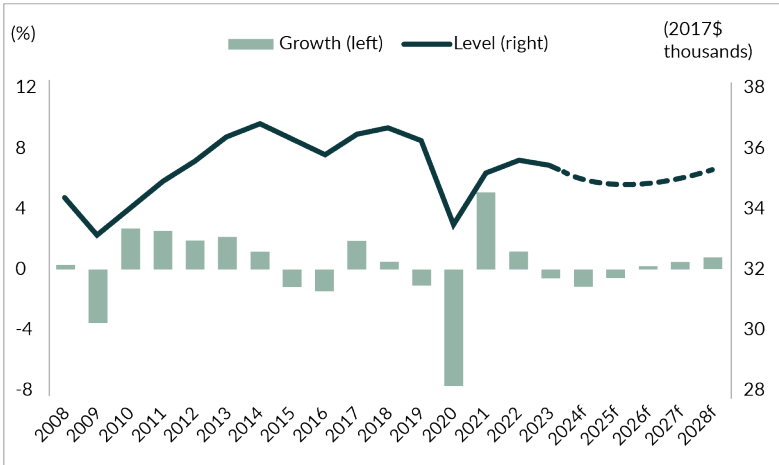
Sources: Statistics Canada, Haver Analytics and Alberta Treasury Board and Finance; e-estimate, f-forecast calculations

Screenshot from Alberta's Economic Outlook

Economic policy uncertainty—both domestic and international—has increased. Shifting trade policies, geopolitical instability, and fluctuations in global energy markets have led to more cautious business and consumer decision-making, potentially delaying investment and long-term planning. This can affect employment trends and dampen consumer confidence.

Economic policy uncertainty has surged in Canada and globally since November 2024, driven in large part by escalating U.S. trade protectionism.

Chart 3: Uncertainty has increased sharply amid trade tensions
Economic Policy Uncertainty Index (Mean = 100)
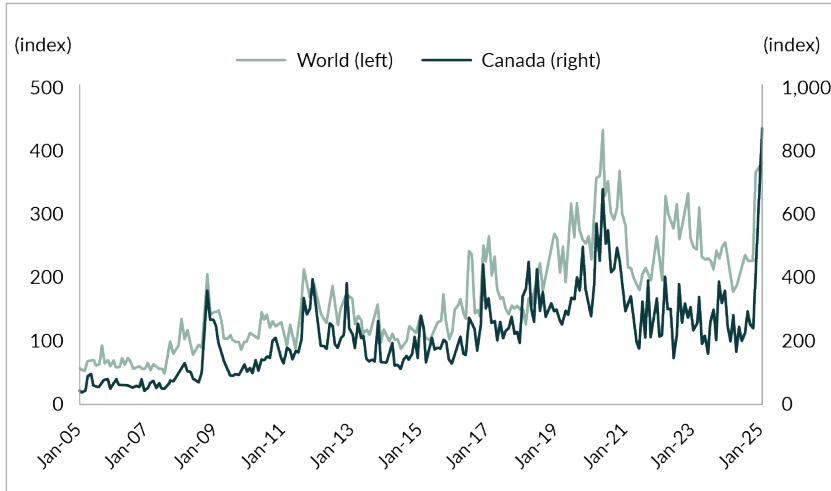

Sources: PolicyUncertainty.com and Haver Analytics; Canada's News-Based Policy Uncertainty Index is based on news articles from the Canadian Newswire and from five Canadian newspapers. Each paper-specific series is normalized to standard deviation 1 prior to 2011 and then summed. The series is normalized to mean 100 prior to 2011.

Screenshot from Alberta's Economic Outlook

Alberta's real GDP growth has slowed. After a strong rebound in 2021 and continued gains in 2022, forecasts project annual growth below 2% from 2025 onward. This reflects Alberta's exposure to external markets, especially the U.S., and its sensitivity to changes in global trade and energy demand. For local governments, nonprofits, and community organizations, slower growth and ongoing uncertainty complicate planning and budgeting.

Chart 2: Trade conflict will dampen prospects for Alberta economy
Alberta real GDP, level and growth
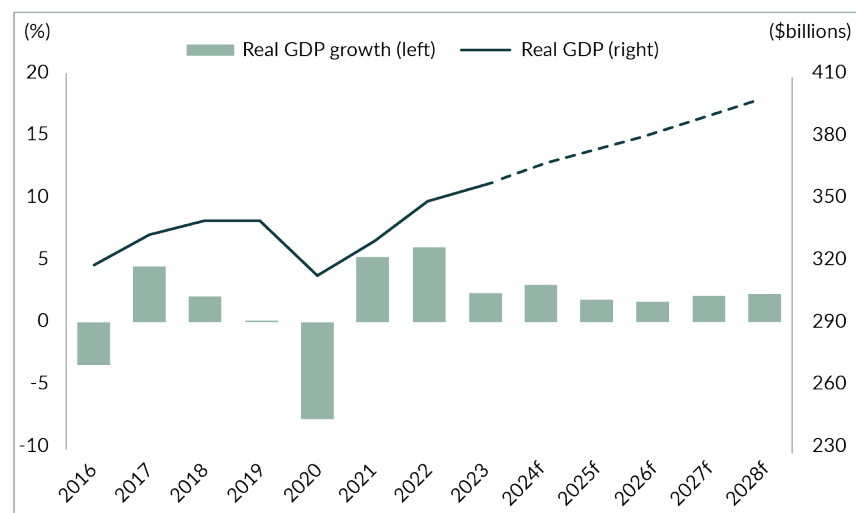
U.S. tariffs and Canada's retaliatory tariffs will slow Alberta's real GDP growth to below two per cent in 2025 and 2026.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Haver Analytics and Alberta Treasury Board and Finance; e-estimate, f-forecast

Screenshot from Alberta's Economic Outlook

These economic shifts affect household spending patterns in ways that influence community wellbeing. Families may cut back on wellness services, preventative healthcare, or recreational activities. Over time, limited access to these supports can increase stress and reduce capacity to cope with financial or day-to-day pressures.

SHIFTS IN EMPLOYMENT MARKETS ARE AFFECTING HOUSEHOLD FINANCIAL STABILITY.

Stable employment, predictable income, and supportive workplace policies reduce financial strain—a major risk factor for conflict and violence. But structural changes in the labour market have introduced new vulnerabilities.

Key shifts include a rise in precarious work, increased concentrations of women in lower-paying jobs, and declining job stability in sectors that are traditionally secure.

These trends increase income volatility, reduce access to benefits, and make it harder to maintain consistent hours, all of which contribute to economic stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted multiple sectors, with public health measures forcing closures in retail, manufacturing, and agriculture. Supply chain issues and labour shortages led to layoffs and reduced hours. Some workers exited the labour force due to health concerns or limited opportunities, pushing down participation rates and increasing reliance on social supports.
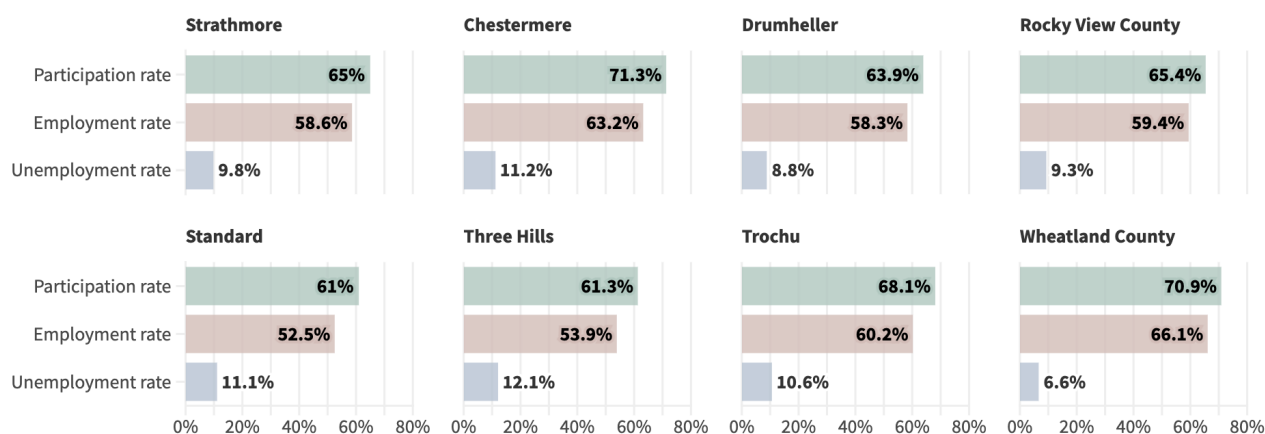

In communities reliant on small enterprises and everyday services, these disruptions led to sudden income loss and heightened insecurity.

The economic strain increased demand on social services, while limited revenue challenged local governments' ability to respond.

Communities dependent on a narrow set of industries—like agriculture or resource extraction—face greater volatility. Seasonal or commodity-driven shifts can trigger layoffs, increasing household stress and the risk of family violence or substance misuse. These patterns also reduce municipal tax revenue, limiting investment in social services and violence prevention.

Percentage of population ages 15 years or over by labour force status - 25% Sample Data, 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada

Strathmore		Chestermere		Drumheller		Rocky View County	
Participation rate	65%	Participation rate	71.3%	Participation rate	63.9%	Participation rate	65.4%
Employment rate	58.6%	Employment rate	63.2%	Employment rate	58.3%	Employment rate	59.4%
Unemployment rate	9.8%	Unemployment rate	11.2%	Unemployment rate	8.8%	Unemployment rate	9.3%

Standard		Three Hills		Trochu		Wheatland County	
Participation rate	61%	Participation rate	61.3%	Participation rate	68.1%	Participation rate	70.9%
Employment rate	52.5%	Employment rate	53.9%	Employment rate	60.2%	Employment rate	66.1%
Unemployment rate	11.1%	Unemployment rate	12.1%	Unemployment rate	10.6%	Unemployment rate	6.6%

Percentage of labour force aged 15 years and over by industry – sectors – North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2017 - 25% sample data, 2021

	Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	Utilities	Construct...	Manufact...	Wholesale trade	Retail trade	Transport...	Information and cultural industries	Finance and insurance	Real estate and rental and leasing
Drumheller	3.5%	5.9%	1.8%	5.1%	3.8%	2.4%	10.9%	3.4%	0.4%	2.6%	1.1%
Strathmore	4.2%	4%	1.1%	8.7%	5.7%	3.1%	13.2%	5.7%	1.4%	2.4%	1%
Chestermere	0.5%	4.6%	1.5%	9.1%	7%	4.1%	10.9%	8.3%	1.4%	3.9%	2.3%
Rocky View County	5.6%	6.4%	1.2%	10.7%	4%	3.5%	8.3%	4.9%	1%	3.7%	2.5%
Three Hills	3.8%	3.8%	0.7%	9.3%	3.4%	3.4%	10.3%	2.8%	1.7%	2.4%	0%
Wheatland County	27%	3.6%	1.4%	11.2%	3.8%	3.5%	7.2%	4.5%	1%	2.3%	1.4%
Trochu	8.9%	4.5%	0%	8.9%	17.	8.9%	10.7%	4.5%	0%	6.3%	0%
Standard	19.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	16.7	5.6%	0%	11.1%	0%

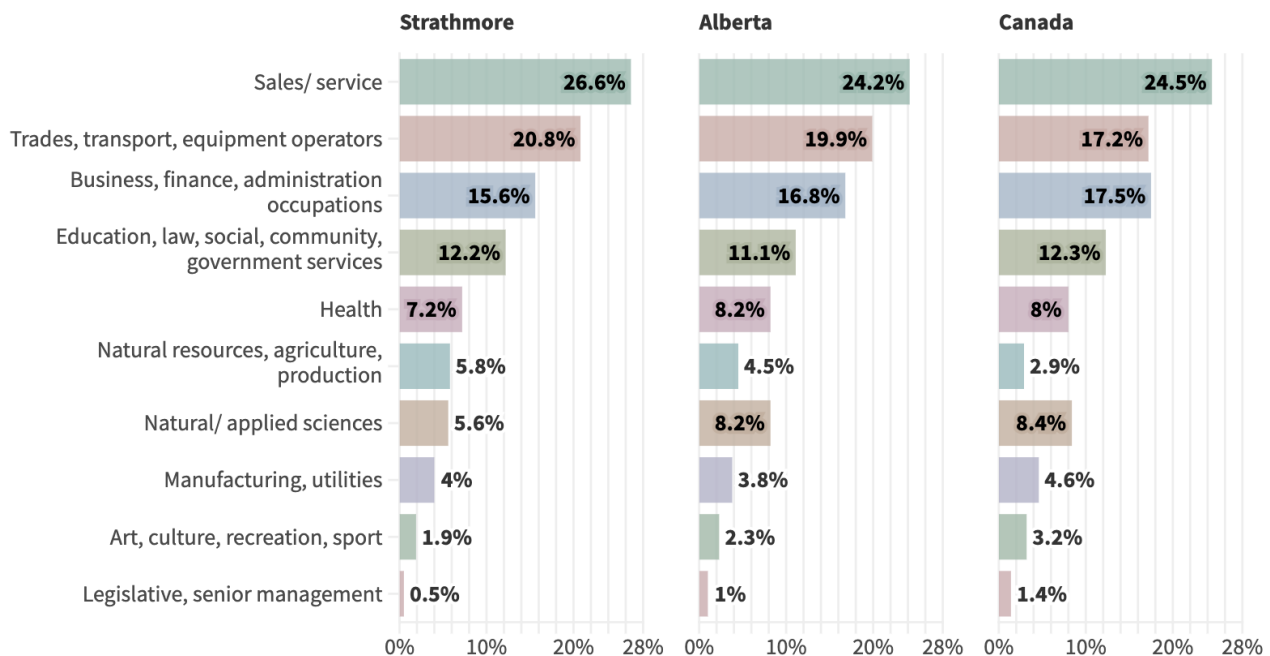|	Professio...	Managem...	Administr...	Educational services	Health care and social assistance	Arts, entertain...	Accommo...	Other services (except public administr...	Public administr...	Industry - not applicable
Drumheller	3%	0.3%	2.8%	4.7%	15.1	3.8%	11.5%	4.6%	12.1%	1.5%
Strathmore	6%	0.3%	4.6%	7.6%	11.9%	1.7%	6.1%	4.1%	5.3%	2%
Chestermere	8.3%	0.2%	3.9%	5.6%	10.3%	2%	4.4%	4.4%	3.9%	3.4%
Rocky View County	11.6%	0.6%	4.4%	4.8%	9.8%	2.6%	3.7%	4.3%	3.7%	2.7%
Three Hills	5.2%	0%	1.4%	11.4%	14.5	2.4%	9%	7.2%	4.5%	2.8%
Wheatland County	4.8%	0.3%	3.3%	4.9%	6.6%	1.4%	1.9%	5.2%	3.5%	1%
Trochu	5.4%	0%	0%	5.4%	4.5%	0%	1.8%	5.4%	2.7%	0%
Standard	0%	0%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	8.3%	5.6%	5.6%

Local labour market trends show differences across the region.

- Wheatland County, Trochu, Standard: High concentration in agriculture, forestry, and fishing

- Drumheller: Substantial employment in tourism-related sectors (arts, entertainment, hospitality)

- Chestermere and Rocky View County: More diverse labour markets in professional services, retail, and construction.

- Strathmore: Growing concentration in sales and service, now over one-quarter of the workforce—many roles held by women. While this shift broadens the economic base, it also brings challenges: lower wages and more variable schedules.

Workforce patterns evolve with economic and demographic change. But as job quality shifts, so do the foundations of household stability and community wellbeing.

Percentage of labour force by occupation – broad category – National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021 - 25% sample data, 2021
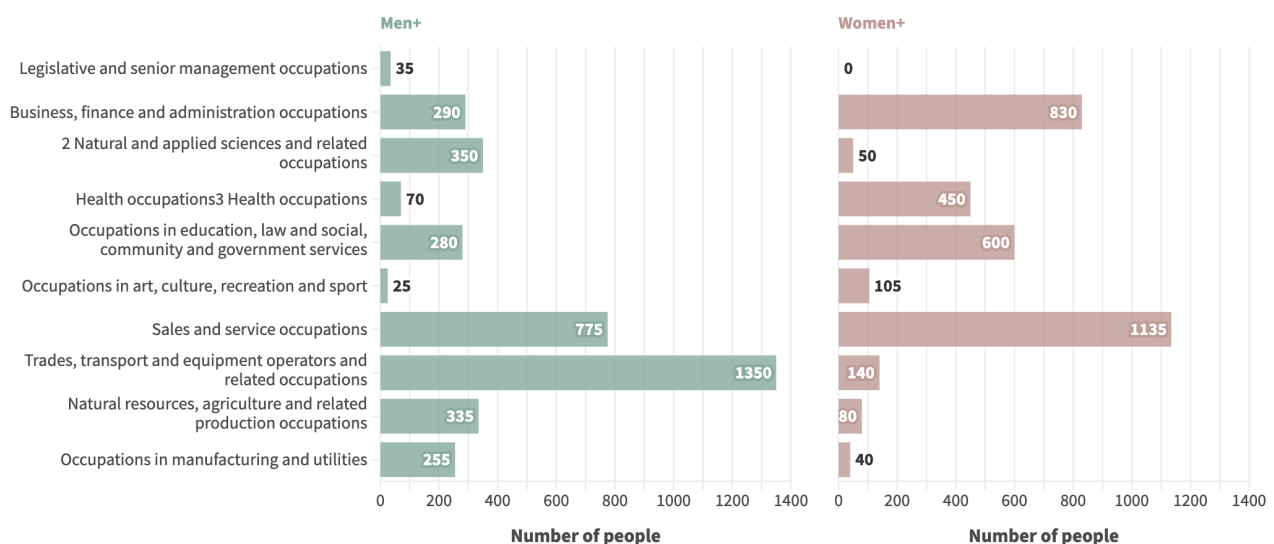
Source(s): Statistics Canada.

	Strathmore	Alberta	Canada
Sales/ service	26.6%	24.2%	24.5%
Trades, transport, equipment operators	20.8%	19.9%	17.2%
Business, finance, administration occupations	15.6%	16.8%	17.5%
Education, law, social, community, government services	12.2%	11.1%	12.3%
Health	7.2%	8.2%	8%
Natural resources, agriculture, production	5.8%	4.5%	2.9%
Natural/ applied sciences	5.6%	8.2%	8.4%
Manufacturing, utilities	4%	3.8%	4.6%
Art, culture, recreation, sport	1.9%	2.3%	3.2%
Legislative, senior management	0.5%	1%	1.4%

Trades, transport, and construction continue to provide a stable foundation for the local economy, particularly among men+. Although these sectors have not seen as much recent growth, they still represent about one-fifth of employment, maintaining a strong presence in hands-on and resource-based occupations. The balance between service-oriented and trades-related work contributes to the region's overall economic profile.

Strathmore's labour force aged 15 years and over by occupation – broad category – National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021 - 25% sample data, 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada.

	Men+	Women+
Legislative and senior management occupations	35	0
Business, finance and administration occupations	290	830
2 Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	350	50
Health occupations3 Health occupations	70	450
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	280	600
Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	25	105
Sales and service occupations	775	1135
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	1350	140
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	335	80
Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	255	40

Number of people

INCOME ASSISTANCE HELPS—BUT REMAINS INSUFFICIENT FOR THE MOST ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE.

Economic downturns increase reliance on social assistance as families face job losses or reduced income. In these periods, well-resourced and accessible programs are crucial for managing financial strain and supporting recovery.

Alberta's social assistance system is shaped by both short-term economic shifts and long-term structural change.

Two primary programs—Income Support and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH)—reflect these evolving needs.

As of 2023–24:

Roughly 4.1% of Albertans under 65 rely on one of these programs—about 1 in every 24 adults.

There were 125,120 social assistance cases on average
(family units and single adults).
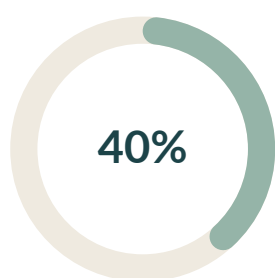
40%   **(49,752 cases) received Income Support, with 87,125 beneficiaries (claimants, partners, and children).**

60%   **(75,371 cases) received AISH.**

Percentage of social assistance beneficiaries relative to the total under 65 population in Alberta

Source(s): Maytree Foundation

* % of Cases
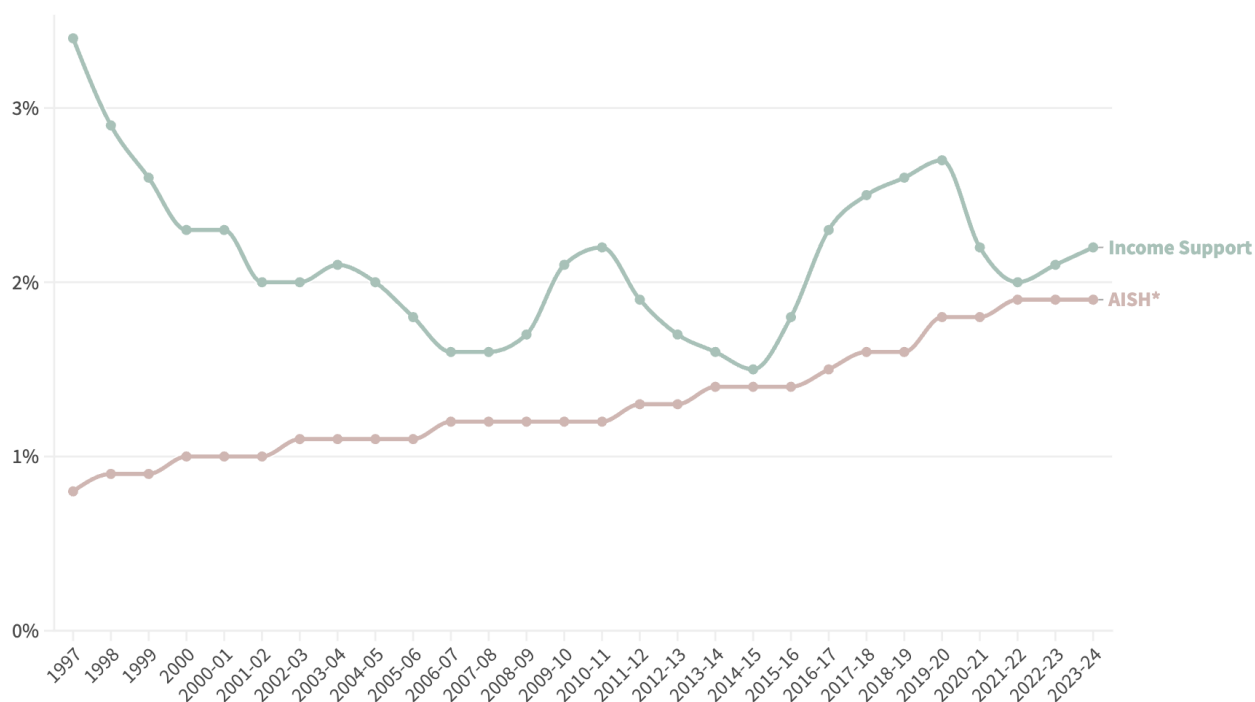
Social assistance caseloads grew by about 6,200 over the year, driven by increases in both programs. Income Support rose by 7%, reversing pandemic-era declines and demonstrating renewed financial pressure. However, the "Barriers to Full Employment" (BFE) stream declined slightly, possibly reflecting transitions to AISH or other supports.

AISH continues to represent a majority (60%) of all assistance cases. Its steady long-term growth reflects sustained demand for disability-related income support. 16% of AISH recipients report some employment income, highlighting the need for flexible program models that accommodate supported work.

The rising use of AISH suggests broader systemic challenges beyond temporary economic conditions, linked to population health, shifting labour markets, and limited workforce inclusivity.

Recent policy changes have added strain. In March 2025, Alberta announced it would deduct the new $200 Canada Disability Benefit from monthly AISH payments, citing higher-than-average provincial rates. This move has raised concerns among recipients and advocates, especially as many people with disabilities already live at or below the poverty line.

Despite their importance, both Income Support and AISH fall short of meeting basic needs.

- AISH's maximum benefit remains below the annual poverty line for a single adult.

- Income Support's maximum leaves recipients with less than half the resources required for basic necessities (based on Market Basket Measure estimates).

Welfare incomes and poverty thresholds for unattached single households - Alberta, 2023

Source(s): Maytree Foundation

🟩 Deep Income Poverty Threshold (MBM-DIP) 🟫 Official Poverty Line (MBM) 🟦 Welfare Income

Welfare income ($)

	Unattached single considered employable	Unattached single with a disability (SAID)
Official Poverty Line (MBM)	$28,954	$28,954
Deep Income Poverty Threshold (MBM-DIP)	$21,716	$21,716
Welfare Income	$11,262	$12,820
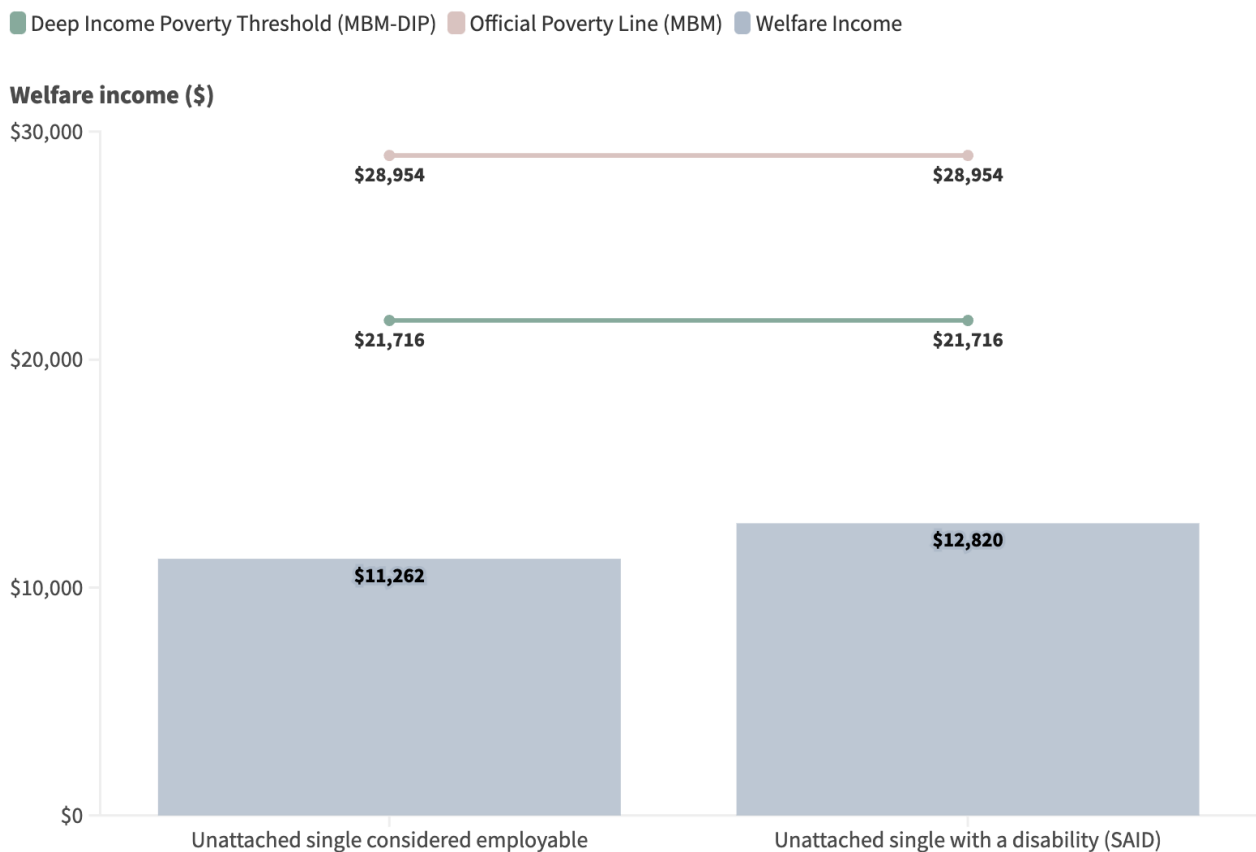
THESE GAPS FORCE MANY RECIPIENTS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HOUSING, FOOD, AND HEALTHCARE—UNDERMINING LONG-TERM STABILITY EVEN WHILE RECEIVING ASSISTANCE.

Caseload profiles reveal additional complexity:

- Single adults make up about two-thirds of Income Support cases and over 80% of AISH cases.

- Within Income Support, many dependents are linked to single-parent households, which, while fewer in number, often face greater need due to caregiving responsibilities.

This demonstrates a key dynamic: the number of people affected by social assistance extends well beyond the number of active cases.

Social assistance cases and beneficiaries by household type in Alberta

Source(s): Maytree Foundation

Income Support Cases · Income Support Beneficiaries · Income Support (BFE only) Cases · Income Support (BFE only) Beneficiaries

	Unattached singles	Single parents	Couples with children	Couples without children
2021-22				
Income Support Cases	28,679	11,556	2308	1017
Income Support Beneficiaries	28,679	34,821	12,068	2035
Income Support (BFE only) Cases	14,723	3281	507	604
Income Support (BFE only) Beneficiaries	14,723	9482	2625	1208
2022-23				
Income Support Cases	30,913	12,249	2460	1075
Income Support Beneficiaries	30,913	36,670	12,535	2150
Income Support (BFE only) Cases	13,908	3043	503	567
Income Support (BFE only) Beneficiaries	13,908	8781	2624	1134
2023-24				
Income Support Cases	33,282	12,267	2985	1218
Income Support Beneficiaries	33,282	36,571	14,836	2436
Income Support (BFE only) Cases	13,387	2746	558	613
Income Support (BFE only) Beneficiaries	13,387	7985	2915	1226

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ Strathmore's economic landscape reflects a shifting foundation where household stability, employment security, and public supports intersect with safety. As more families navigate uncertain labour markets and rising living costs, financial stress becomes a backdrop to daily life, shaping how people cope, seek help, and respond to crisis.

+ The effects of economic strain are not evenly distributed; for some, persistent insecurity can narrow the options available to leave harmful situations or recover from them.

+ These patterns surface how economic conditions—far from abstract—can quietly but powerfully shape the social conditions in which violence occurs.

Healthy Family Relationships

Early relationships and family environments play a central role in shaping long-term outcomes around safety and wellbeing. These influences extend across generations, affecting individual development and community patterns. This section examines how family dynamics connect to violence and resilience in Strathmore.

EXPERIENCES WITH NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT YOUNG AGES HAVE EFFECTS ACROSS ALL AGES.

Research shows that negative relationship experiences in childhood—particularly with caregivers and family members—have lasting effects. Children exposed to hostile, inconsistent, or neglectful relationships often develop altered stress response systems and relational patterns that persist into adulthood. These early templates influence future intimate partnerships, parenting styles, workplace dynamics, and even interactions with healthcare systems.

The relationship dimension of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is especially influential, increasing the likelihood of both experiencing and perpetrating violence later in life.

"We're still seeing the effects in children who were exposed to intensified violence during the pandemic years," observed one shelter worker in 2024. "Kids who started witnessing more violence when everybody was stuck at home are showing complex trauma responses years later."

(ACWS, 2023)

To fully understand the implications of these local patterns, broader research on ACEs from the World Health Organization Collaborating Centres for Investments for Health and Wellbeing for Violence Prevention (Bellis et al., 2023) offers vital context.

A World Health Organization (Bellis et al., 2023) report estimates:

40% of adults in Europe experienced at least one ACE;

20% reported more than one ACE.

In North America,

58% reported at least one;

35% reported more than one ACE.
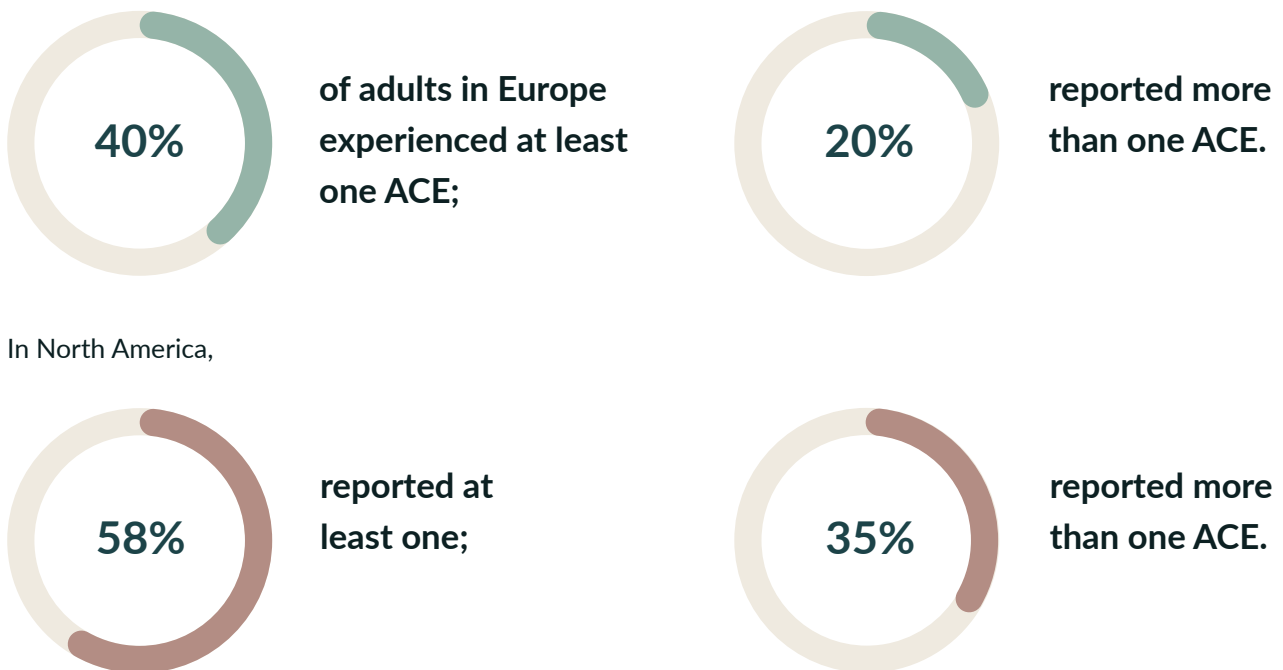
ACEs include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; neglect; exposure to domestic violence; and living with household members affected by substance use, mental illness, or incarceration. These experiences have measurable effects on brain and body development.

The relationship between ACEs and violence is well documented:

- People with 4 or more ACEs have **7.5x higher** risk of being victims of violence

- And **8.1x higher** risk of perpetrating violence

The economic effect of these outcomes is considerable. Annual costs related to ACEs have been estimated at $581 billion for the European region (equivalent to 2.7% of GDP) and $748 billion in North America (3.6% of GDP). These costs include healthcare expenses, lost productivity, criminal justice involvement, and special education needs.

Importantly, not all people with ACEs experience negative outcomes.

Resilience—the capacity to adapt positively despite adversity—can buffer harmful effects. Key factors that promote resilience include the following.

- **Individual:** Sense of control, hope, self-regulation

- **Relational:** Supportive relationships with adults

- **Community:** Access to social networks and resources

- **Cultural:** Meaningful traditions and practices

- **Systemic:** Effective systems that support recovery

Among these, trusted relationships with adults consistently emerge as one of the most protective factors against long-term harm from ACEs.

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS CAN BUFFER THE EFFECTS OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES).

Following the discussion on the prevalence and effect of ACEs, this section focuses on protective factors—particularly supportive relationships—that can interrupt harmful patterns, even under severe stress.

According to the U.S. National Council on the Developing Child, regardless of whether adversity stems from poverty, parental substance use, mental illness, violence, or neglect, the single most common finding is that children who do well have had at least one stable, committed relationship with a supportive adult. These relationships offer personalized responsiveness, protection, and "scaffolding" that buffer children from developmental disruption. They also build core skills—like self-regulation, planning, and adaptability—that are essential for navigating adversity and thriving.

Research confirms the harm that family stress and violence cause children, especially during the pandemic. Feinberg et al. (2021) observed major increases in children's emotional and behavioural challenges during COVID-19, driven by job loss, school closures, and caregiving pressures. Pereda and Díaz-Faes (2020) found that pandemic conditions, such as isolation, had cascading effects on factors that can drive, precipitate or exacerbate potential stressors. There is also research that suggests healthy relationships can offset these harms.

Research also shows that healthy relationships can mitigate these harms. Beckmann (2020) found that while childhood exposure to parental violence increases adolescent aggression, family cohesion reduces this risk, even in families with abuse histories. Noble-Carr et al. (2019) analyzed children's accounts of living with domestic violence. Many described fear, sadness, and loss of trust in caregivers, but also shared coping strategies, like caring for siblings or seeking trusted adults. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing both emotional and physical safety needs.

> **"I really firmly believe that we need to see what healthy [relationships] look like. It's too hard [and late] to sit in a seminar, sit in a classroom, sit in a counselling session and have someone tell you what it looks like."**
>
> *Service user*

Together, this body of research illustrates how stressors—economic hardship, parental mental health, disrupted routines, and limited community support—increase children's risk of violence and mental health difficulties. However, it also highlights children's capacity for resilience, and the protective power of supportive relationships.

The next section will explore how healthy family environments contribute to self-regulation and secure attachment, forming the foundation for long-term wellbeing.

STRENGTHENING SELF-REGULATION AND SECURE ATTACHMENT IN CHILDHOOD CAN REDUCE LONG-TERM VIOLENCE RISK.

Children exposed to chronic conflict or abuse often struggle with emotion regulation and relationship skills. These early disruptions in self-regulation and secure attachment are linked to later involvement in interpersonal violence. However, access to safe, nurturing environments has been shown to reduce these risks and support broader community wellbeing.

"**I think that maybe even when they get to your shelter…make awareness, just try to have a community of people. That really helped me…It took me time and it was hanging around healthy people with healthy boundaries.**"

Service user

Research illustrates the effects of relationships on families:

- In a study, Hatkevich et al. (2021) found that emotional abuse—belittling, harsh criticism, or humiliation—was strongly linked to difficulties in emotion regulation. Youth in these environments struggled more with flexible coping than those exposed to physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse disrupts adolescents' ability to process distress and problem-solve, contributing to both internalizing and externalizing behaviours.

- Further, a systematic review by Zhang et al. (2025) found that exposure to psychological aggression at home affects children's ability to regulate impulses, manage emotions, and focus attention. When aggression is modeled as a response to stress, children lose opportunities to develop constructive coping strategies, increasing the risk of mental health issues, interpersonal aggression, and violent relationships.

- Bender et al. (2022) found that parental violence affects children's social-emotional development, including empathy, cooperation, and communication. Adolescents exposed to intimate partner violence often face challenges in peer relationships and emotional regulation—factors that can perpetuate family conflict and distress.

Strong caregiver–child relationships and support for emotional regulation can help buffer these effects. This emphasizes the value of early, family-focused interventions that build emotional awareness and communication skills.

> **"Where do we get them before that crisis situation? I believe it needs to be way, way young in school…There's a lot of people, they just think [violence] is normal, because they grew up like that. And if you don't catch a kid quick enough, it's too late."**
>
> *Service user*

PEER RELATIONSHIPS ALSO PLAY A PROTECTIVE ROLE.

Nam et al. (2025) found that peer support was associated with lower rates of violence inflicted on parents by adolescents, even among youth with histories of severe maltreatment.

Supportive friendships can buffer emotional stress when home environments are unsafe.

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ The connection between early family environments and later experiences of violence is not incidental; it's foundational. Patterns of safety, conflict, and emotional support in childhood shape how people navigate relationships, regulate emotions, and respond to stress throughout life.

+ In Strathmore, as elsewhere, these dynamics can quietly echo across generations. But the research also shows that the presence of even one healthy, responsive relationship can shift outcomes.

+ This emphasizes how family dynamics are not only personal, they are also deeply linked to the broader social patterns communities observe around wellbeing, resilience, and safety.

Population Spotlights

Women and Girls

Violence against women in Canada represents a persistent social challenge with far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities. This analysis examines the complex realities of gender-based violence through a comprehensive lens, exploring its patterns, effects, and connections to housing insecurity. Centring women's lived experiences provides better understanding of both the systemic barriers women face and the resilience they demonstrate in navigating these challenges.

Prevalence and Patterns

Recent data shows a gender disparity in experiences of violence across Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2024), women and girls account for two-thirds (68%) of all family violence victims, and nearly four in five (78%) victims of intimate partner violence. The rate of family violence for women and girls (473 per 100,000 population) is over twice as high as that for men and boys (220 per 100,000), while the rate of intimate partner violence is nearly four times higher for women and girls (549 per 100,000) than for men and boys (155 per 100,000).

Victims of police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence, by type of violence, gender and year - Canada, 2009 to 2023

Source(s): Statistics Canada *(1) Includes a relatively small number of victims whose gender was coded as unknown and those with unidentifiable human remains.*

Rate per 100,000 Population
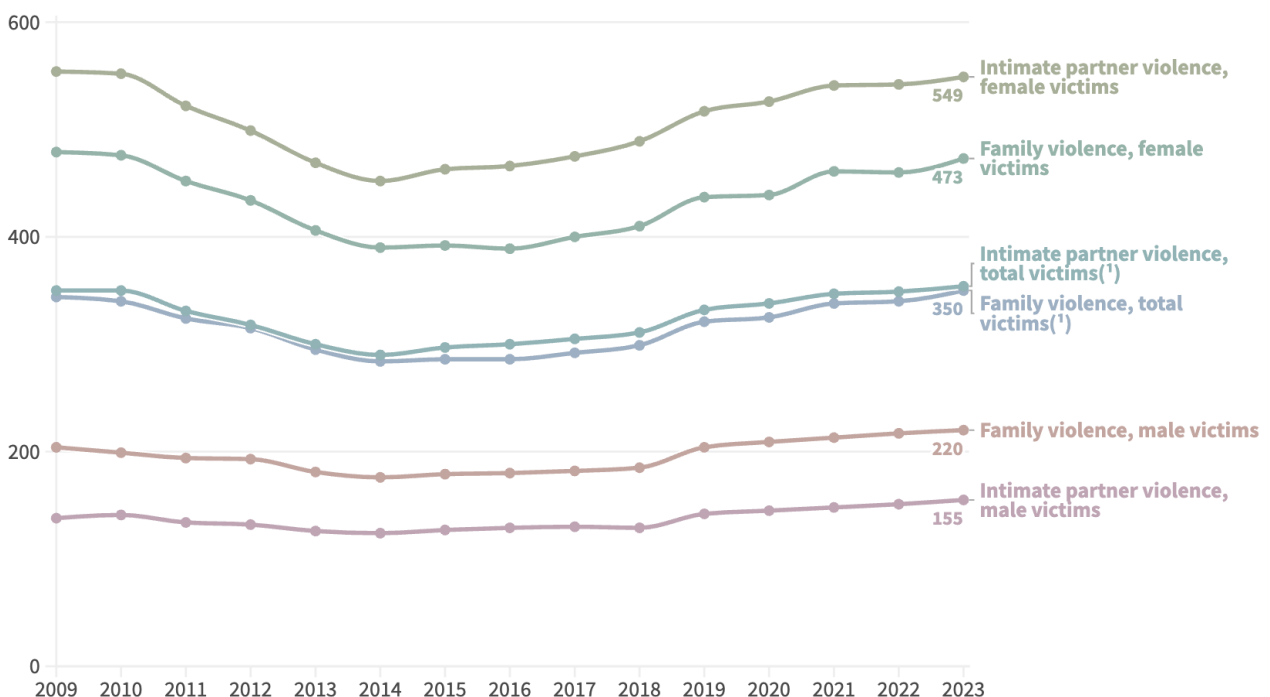
These disparities are even more pronounced for specific age groups.

Young women between the ages of 12 and 24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence (752 per 100,000), which is nearly seven times higher than the rate for young men in the same age group (111 per 100,000) (Statistics Canada, 2024). For adult women aged 25 to 64, intimate partner violence rates remain more than three times as high as for men of the same age range.

In 2023, a firearm was present for 1.2% (1,038) of victims of intimate partner violence in Canada, and 84% of these victims were women and girls (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Police-reported intimate partner violence rates by age group and gender of victim in Canada, 2023

Source(s): Statistics Canada. Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2023

■ Women/Girls ■ Men/Boys

Rate per 100,000 Population

Age of Victim	Women/Girls	Men/Boys
12 to 24	752	111
25 to 64	688	210

Age of Victim
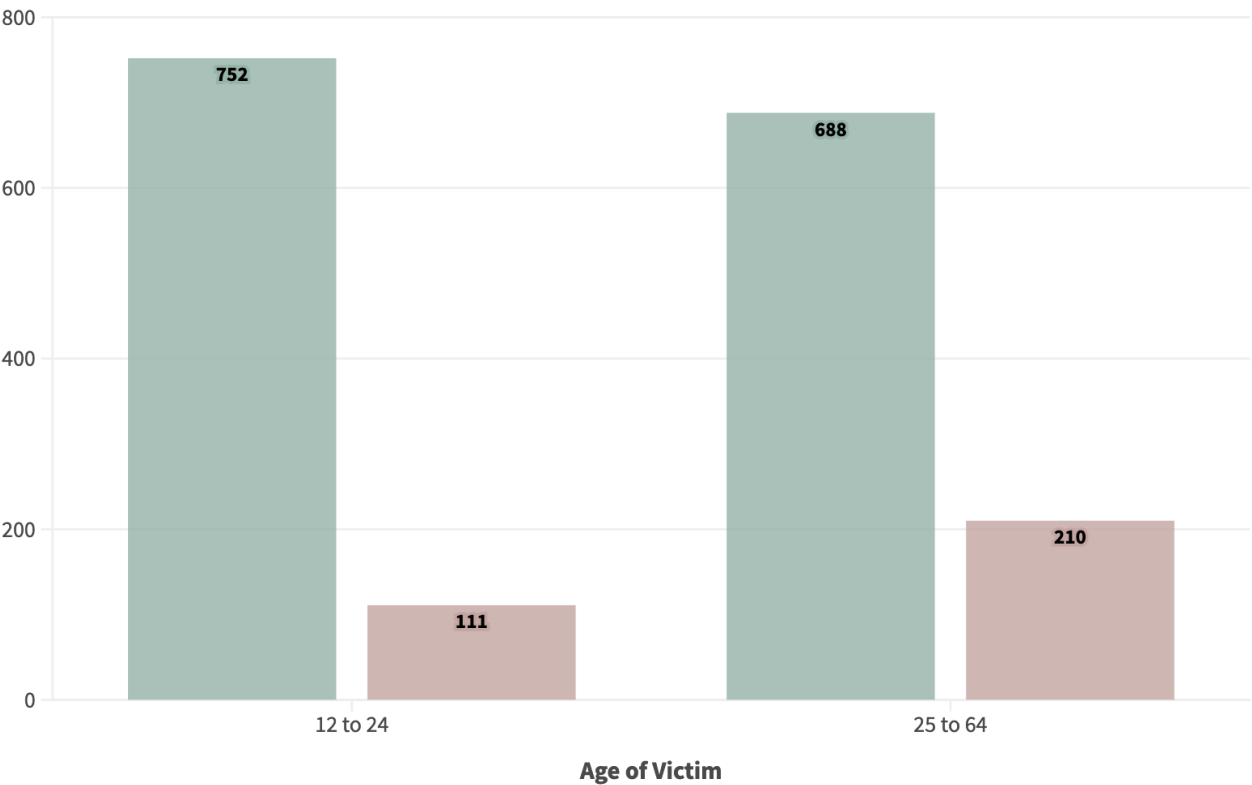
Sexual violence is also more prevalent for women and girls than men and boys. In 2020, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services released its Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Childhood Sexual Abuse in Alberta survey with the following results:

56% of women have experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime.

44% of girls have experienced sexual abuse under the age of 18.

41% of women have experienced sexual assault over the age of 18.
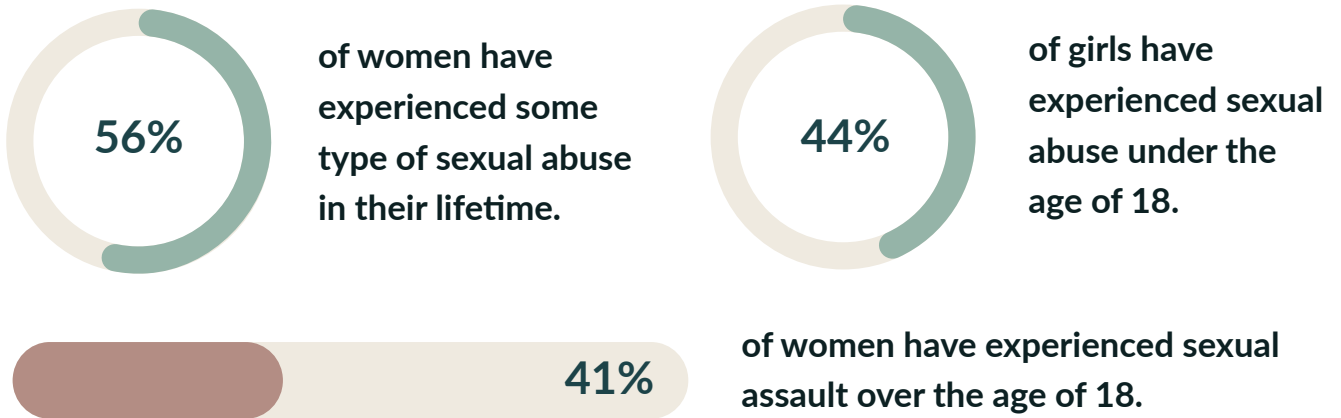
THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL ABUSE AS A CHILD ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL ASSAULT AGAIN AS AN ADULT.

Women and girls are almost twice as likely as men and boys to experience sexual abuse (60% compared to 31%).

women
60%

men
31%

Regional Context

The prevalence of violence against women varies substantially across geographic regions in Canada, with northern, rural, and remote communities facing the greatest challenges. The territories consistently report the highest rates of both family violence and intimate partner violence, with the highest in Nunavut (5,574 victims of family violence and 5,670 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000), followed by the Northwest Territories (3,631 victims of family violence and 4,002 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000) and Yukon (1,076 victims of family violence and 1,306 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000). Among the provinces, the highest rates were in Saskatchewan (741 victims of family violence and 710 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000) and Manitoba (588 victims of family violence and 628 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000) (Statistics Canada, 2024).

In Alberta, the rate of family violence was reported at 366 per 100,000 in 2023, which, while lower than some other provinces, still represents thousands of people, especially women and girls, experiencing violence annually (Statistics Canada, 2024). The geographic distribution of violence corresponds with substantial gaps in support services, particularly in northern and remote communities.

Challenges and Barriers

Housing Insecurity

One of the most important findings in current research is the connection between experiences of violence and housing insecurity for women. Women's homelessness often remains invisible because women are more likely to rely on precarious arrangements—such as staying with friends, family, or in unsafe relationships—to avoid absolute homelessness (Schwan et al., 2020).

The top challenge facing women when they leave abusive situations is the lack of affordable and appropriate long-term housing options (Statistics Canada, 2019). Data indicates that when women leave Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, 21% return to live with an abuser, 36% do not know where they are going upon departure, and 11% enter another VAW shelter (Statistics Canada, 2019). Many women must make the impossible choice between remaining in violent situations or facing potential homelessness.

Limited Support Services

Across Canada, there is a serious shortage of women-specific support services, particularly emergency shelter beds. According to Employment and Social Development Canada (2019), 68% of shelter beds are co-ed (38%) or dedicated to men (30%), compared to only 13% dedicated to women. VAW shelters across the country turn away almost 1,000 women and their children on an average day due to capacity constraints (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Intergenerational Effects

Research also shows a connection between mothers' experiences of housing instability and violence and the risk of intergenerational homelessness. Canadian data shows that 50% of people experiencing homelessness had their first experience before the age of 25 (ESDC, 2019). When mothers lose housing due to violence or economic precarity, their children often experience disruption, trauma, and instability that can have lasting effects.

The challenges are intensified by contradictory policies across systems that create barriers for women seeking safety. For example, many social assistance systems cut entitlements for mothers as soon as a child is apprehended by child welfare, putting women in a position of losing their housing, which then prevents them from regaining custody (Schwan et al., 2020).

Men and Boys

Canadian data shows that men and boys experience violence in ways that are distinct from women and girls, requiring approaches that address their specific needs and circumstances.

Prevalence and Patterns

Family Violence and Intimate Partner Violence Trends

Although reported incidents are lower than for women and girls, men and boys also are subject to family violence and intimate partner violence across Canada, and at increasing rates.

While family violence rates and intimate partner violence rates increased over the past years regardless of gender, the rates of increase were larger for men and boys (+19% for family violence and +20% for intimate partner violence) than for women and girls (+15% for family violence and +12% for intimate partner violence). These rate increases also coincide closely with the closure of many institutions in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic.

Rates of police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence for male victims - Canada, 2018–2023

Source(s): Statistics Canada. Trends in police-reported family violence and intimate partner violence in Canada

Legend: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Rate per 100,000 Population

	Family violence, male victims	Intimate partner violence, male victims
2018	185	129
2019	204	142
2020	209	145
2021	213	148
2022	217	151
2023	220	155
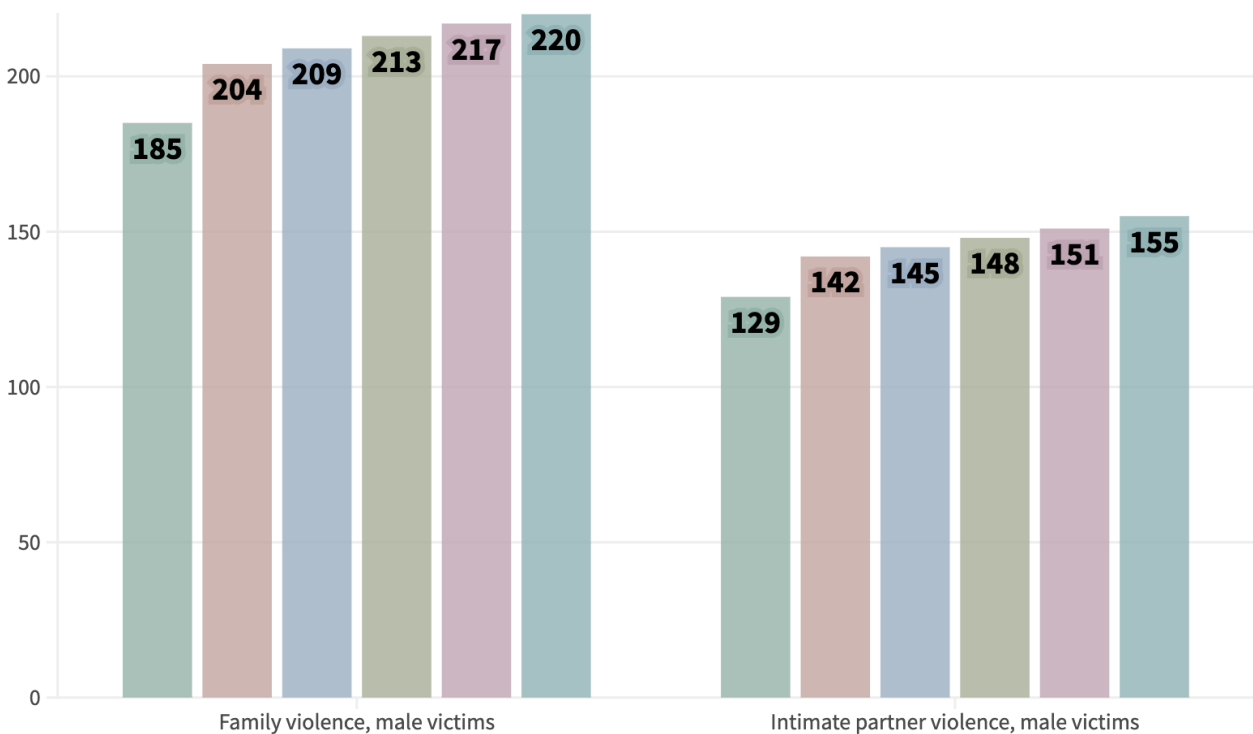
Research has also shown that men and boys who experience intimate partner violence may be more reluctant to report it to authorities because of the stigma surrounding male victims (Taylor et al., 2021). In fact, in a study of 147 men in the UK who self-identified as being subject to abuse from female partners revealed that cultural stereotypes and masculinity norms strongly shape how male victims of intimate partner violence approach and experience help seeking. Participants' responses clustered around one overarching idea of "stigmatized gender."

THEY REPORTED THAT THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A MALE VICTIM NOT ONLY DEEPENED THEIR PERSONAL SENSE OF SHAME AND ISOLATION BUT ALSO AFFECTED THE WAY OTHERS AND FORMAL SERVICES REACTED TO THEIR DISCLOSURE.

Barriers to Help Seeking (Taylor et al., 2021)

- Men feared that admitting victimization might undermine their reputation and challenge their role as strong, competent providers and caregivers.

- They worried about being labelled as weak or unfit parents, and faced threats of false allegations that could jeopardize their legal or social standing.

- Emotional and psychological concerns, such as deep-rooted feelings of shame or self-doubt, made moving from denial to an acknowledged victim status extremely risky

- The lack of services specifically geared toward men further reinforced their reluctance to disclose their experiences.

Responses to Initial Help Seeking (Taylor et al., 2021)

- A large number of men encountered dismissive or discrediting responses from professionals, family members, and friends. This left many feeling blamed, ridiculed, and emotionally isolated.

- Some men experienced active devaluation when authorities or service providers sided with the abuser or minimized their account, which only reinforced their internalized stigma.

- A smaller group reported helpful responses that validated their experience. Finding relief and support when professionals, friends, or family members broke the cycle of disbelief and offered reassurance that they were indeed victims.

Violent Crime Trends

While family violence and intimate partner violence are prevalent, violence often takes other forms as well. Statistics Canada defines violent crime as incidents involving offences that deal with the application, or threat of application, of force to a person. These include homicide, attempted murder, various forms of sexual and non-sexual assault, robbery, and abduction (but excludes traffic incidents that result in death or bodily harm). Violent crime incidents may take place in domestic or non-domestic settings.

Men compose a substantial portion of victims of violent crime, with 192,413 men and boys (representing 46% of all victims) being victimized by police-reported violent crime in 2021 (Sutton, 2023). From 2018-2023, violent crime rates in Canada increased by 20% (Statistics Canada, 2024).

The data shows that violence against men follows specific patterns, depending on the age of the victim. The rate of victimization consistently increases for boys and young men, peaking between ages 25-29 at 1,741 per 100,000 population, before declining with age. Men aged 25-34 experience the highest overall rates of violent crime victimization (1,681 per 100,000), followed closely by those aged 18-24 (1,660 per 100,000) (Sutton, 2023).

Male victims of homicide by age group and year - Canada, 2011 to 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey

Violent incidents involve offences that deal with the application, or threat of application, of force to a person. These include homicide, attempted murder, various forms of sexual and non-sexual assault, robbery and abduction.
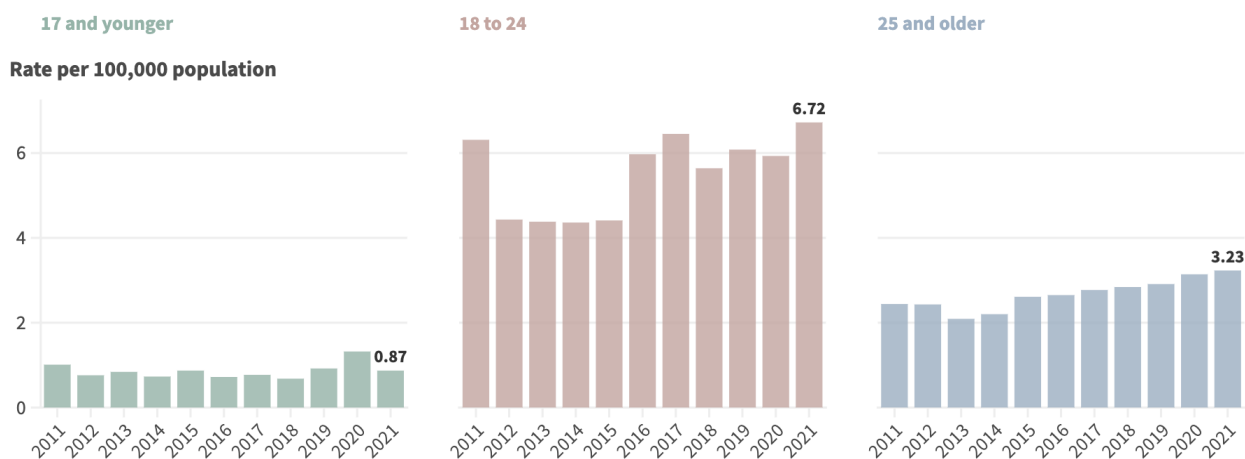
Note: There may be a small number of homicides included in a given year's total that occurred in previous years. Homicides are counted according to the year in which they are reported to Statistics Canada. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations are based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Excludes victims where gender or age was coded as unknown. Includes solved and unsolved homicide (i.e., homicides with and without a known accused).

Men and boys who experience violence early in life, a form of an adverse childhood experience, can develop risk factors that may predispose them to intimate partner violence later. Witnessing or enduring aggression can also build a heightened stress response and altered perceptions of relationship dynamics. These early experiences weaken coping strategies and self-worth, and they normalize violence as a part of interpersonal conflict. When boys transition to adolescence and early adulthood, they may carry forward the trauma from childhood, increasing their vulnerability to both perpetrating and experiencing IPV.

Men and boys often also experience more severe forms of violence compared to women and girls. They face higher rates of homicide (three times higher than women), attempted murder, assault with a weapon, robbery, aggravated assault, and extortion (Sutton, 2023). Physical force was used against half of all male victims of violent crime, and 30% experienced violent crime involving weapons, double the rate for female victims. Four in ten male victims sustained physical injuries from their violent crime victimization (Sutton, 2023).

The relationship between victims and perpetrators shifts substantially by age.

While most boys under 11 experience violent crime by family members

59%

older boys and men are increasingly victimized in violent incidents by people outside their family network.

Boys aged 12-17 are most often harmed by casual acquaintances

39%
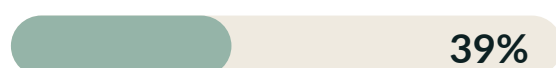
while men 18 and older are most frequently victimized by strangers (Sutton, 2023).

For homicides,

83%

of men and boys aged 12 and older were killed by non-family members, most commonly friends, acquaintances, or strangers (Sutton, 2023).

Victims of police reported violent crime by victim, gender and relationship of accused to victim- Canada, 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

■ Family ■ Non-family
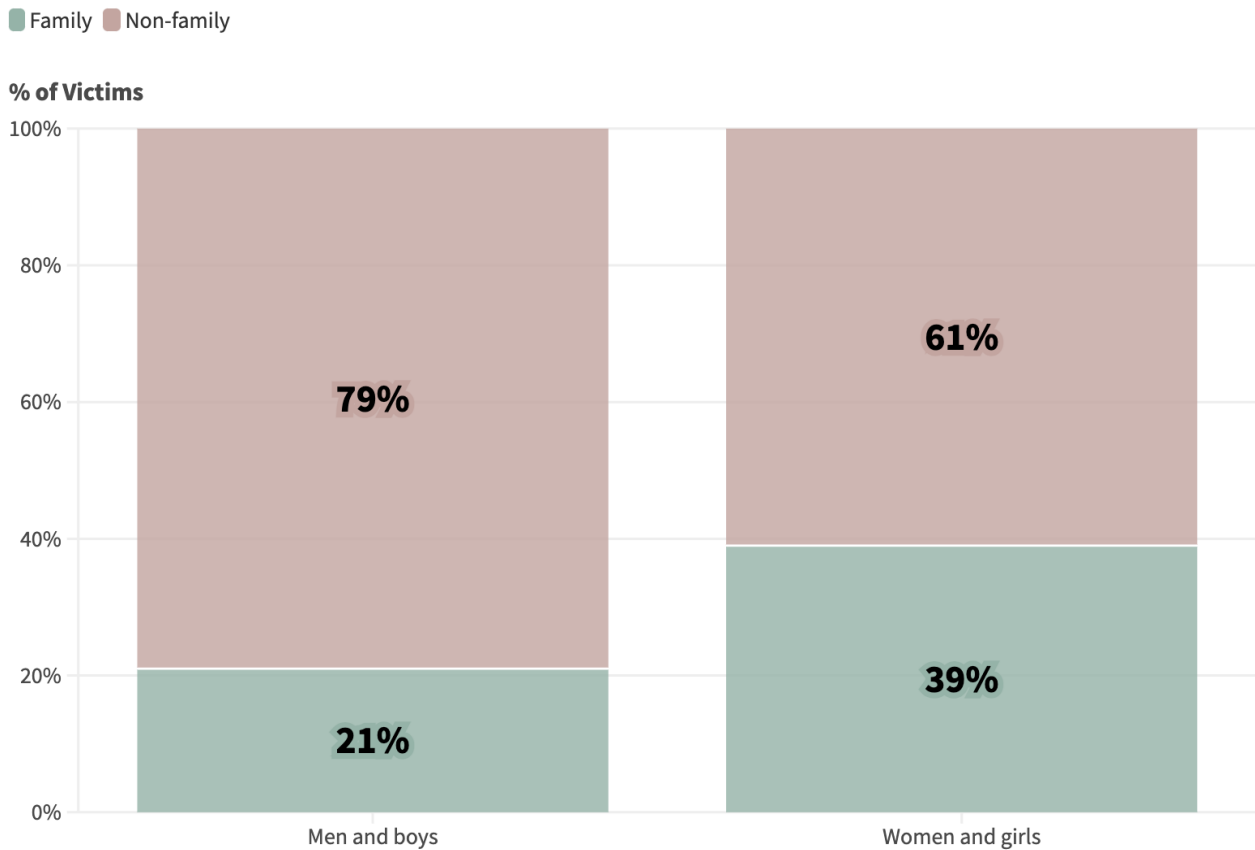
% of Victims

Note: Excludes victims where gender or age was coded as unknown and those where age was greater than 110 are excluded from analyses due to possible instances of miscoding. Excludes some Quebec data and victim data reported by Canadian Forces Military Police. Family includes spousal relationships, parents, children, siblings, and all other family members by blood, marriage, fostering or adoption. Non-family includes intimate partners, friends, acquaintances, authority figures, strangers, etc. Percent calculations exclude unknown relationships.

Location patterns also reveal important insights. Two-thirds of young boys who encountered violent crime had it happen on private property, but as age increases, more victimization occurs in public spaces. Nearly half of men aged 18-24 experienced violent crime in outdoor and commercial locations, and the majority are victimized during evening and nighttime hours, suggesting connections to nighttime activities and routines (Sutton, 2023).

Regional Context

While Alberta-specific data is limited, national trends show that men in rural areas, particularly in Canada's northern regions, face violence rates as high as triple or nearly quadruple as those in urban areas (Sutton, 2023). This geographic pattern suggests that men in Alberta's rural and northern communities may face elevated risks compared to their urban counterparts.

Challenges and Barriers

Hidden Emotional Effects

The emotional effects of violence on men often remain invisible. According to the General Social Survey, 72% of men who experienced non-spousal violence reported emotional consequences. The most common reactions were anger (46%), feeling upset, confused, or frustrated (37%), and being annoyed (33%). Importantly, 29% reported longer-term psychological effects, with 20% feeling constantly on guard or watchful, 17% trying to avoid thinking about the incident, and 13% feeling numb or detached from others and their surroundings (Sutton, 2023).

Barriers to Reporting and Help-Seeking

Despite these effects, only 7% of male victims sought formal assistance following victimization from violent crime, compared to 18% of women (Sutton, 2023). This reluctance to seek help appears in intimate partner violence reporting as well, where for every ten female victims who contact police, only one male victim does so (Dutton, 2012, as cited in Sutton, 2023). Men who experience violent crime face multiple barriers to reporting, including fear of not being believed, concerns about being seen as weak, and anticipated negative responses from the justice system (Dim & Lysova, 2021; Roebuck et al., 2020, as cited in Sutton, 2023).

Populations at Higher Risk

- Indigenous men and boys experience much higher rates of victimization from violent crime, with 30% of all male homicide victims under 17 being Indigenous despite comprising only 5% of the Canadian population (Sutton, 2023).

- Men in rural areas, particularly in Canada's northern regions, face violent crime rates up to three or four times as high as those in urban areas (Sutton, 2023).

- Young men between 15-24 report the highest rates of victimization in self-reported surveys (Sutton, 2023).

- Emerging forms of technology-facilitated violence are also disproportionately affecting boys and young men. Sextortion—in which someone threatens to share intimate images to extort money or additional images—has increased dramatically, with 87% of reported incidents affecting boys, typically aged 15-17 (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2022b, as cited in Sutton, 2023). One in twenty boys or men between 15-24 reported someone sharing embarrassing photos of them online, at twice the rate of similarly aged girls or women (Sutton, 2023).

Support Systems and Resources

The unique victimization patterns of men and boys require targeted approaches. Prevention strategies need to be age-specific, prioritizing family violence for young boys, peer violence for adolescents, and stranger violence in public spaces for young adults.

SUPPORT SERVICES MUST BE TRAUMA-INFORMED AND ACCESSIBLE, RECOGNIZING THAT MEN OFTEN REMAIN SILENT ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES DESPITE SUBSTANTIAL EMOTIONAL EFFECTS.

Programs that meet men where they are—physically, emotionally, and linguistically—show the most promise (Wells & Pascoe, 2021; Wells et al., 2023). Engaging men through key life transitions like fatherhood and adolescence, and in settings where they naturally gather, helps overcome resistance (Wells & Pascoe, 2021). Creating spaces where men can discuss their experiences without judgment, while building healthy relationships with other men, addresses a fundamental need in violence prevention work (Wells et al., 2023).

Taking a strength-based, solution-focused approach that frames men as co-beneficiaries of gender equality, rather than solely as perpetrators of gendered discrimination, helps overcome defensive reactions (Wells et al., 2023). Research shows that approaches grounded in shame and blame are ineffective, while those that recognize men's capacity for positive change foster greater engagement (Casey, 2010; Crooks et al., 2007, as cited in Wells et al., 2023).

Youth

Recent data from Statistics Canada (2009–2023) provides insight into the different forms of violence affecting young people in Canada. These patterns reflect evolving dynamics across relationships, including intimate partnerships and family settings, and help inform a more comprehensive understanding of youth experiences.

Prevalence and Patterns

Intimate Partner Violence

From 2010 to 2023, reported rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) among young women aged 12 to 24 declined from 824 to 752 per 100,000. This decrease may reflect a range of factors, including increased awareness, changes in reporting practices, or shifts in social norms.

Youth victims of police-reported intimate-partner violence in Canada, rates per 100,000 population

Source(s): Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database (3302)

■ Female victims – Aged 12 to 24   ■ Male victims – Aged 12 to 24

Number of people

Year	Female	Male
2009	909	127
2010	924	138
2011	884	132
2012	837	130
2013	789	115
2014	745	117
2015	773	118
2016	782	115
2017	779	119
2018	781	111
2019	806	118
2020	777	111
2021	807	116
2022	787	115
2023	752	111
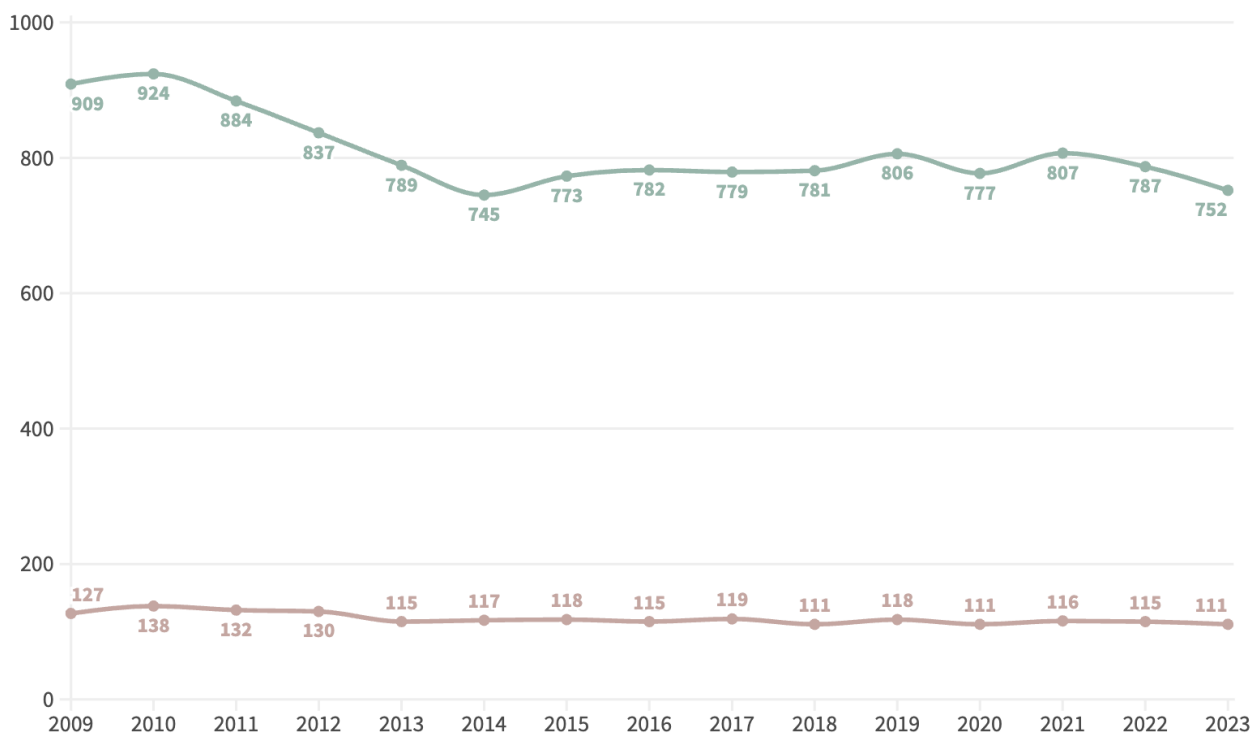
Note: Includes data from 2009 to 2023. Rates are based on populations from July 1 estimates by Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Excludes victims with unknown or miscoded age, those older than 110, or where the victim–accused relationship was unknown. As of 2009, the database includes data for 99% of the Canadian population.

Despite the decline, gender differences in IPV rates remain consistent.

In 2023, young women experienced IPV at a rate nearly seven times higher than young men—752 per 100,000 compared to 111 per 100,000. This disparity has been stable across the reporting period.

Family Violence

Reported rates of family violence among youth have risen in recent years. From 2018 to 2023, rates for female youth increased from 344 to 439 per 100,000, while rates for male youth rose from 208 to 259 per 100,000. These increases suggest greater recognition or reporting of violence within family settings, or changes in underlying risk factors.

Youth victims of police-reported family violence in Canada

Source(s): Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database (3302)

■ Female victims – Children and youth ■ Male victims – Children and youth

Rate per 100,000 population
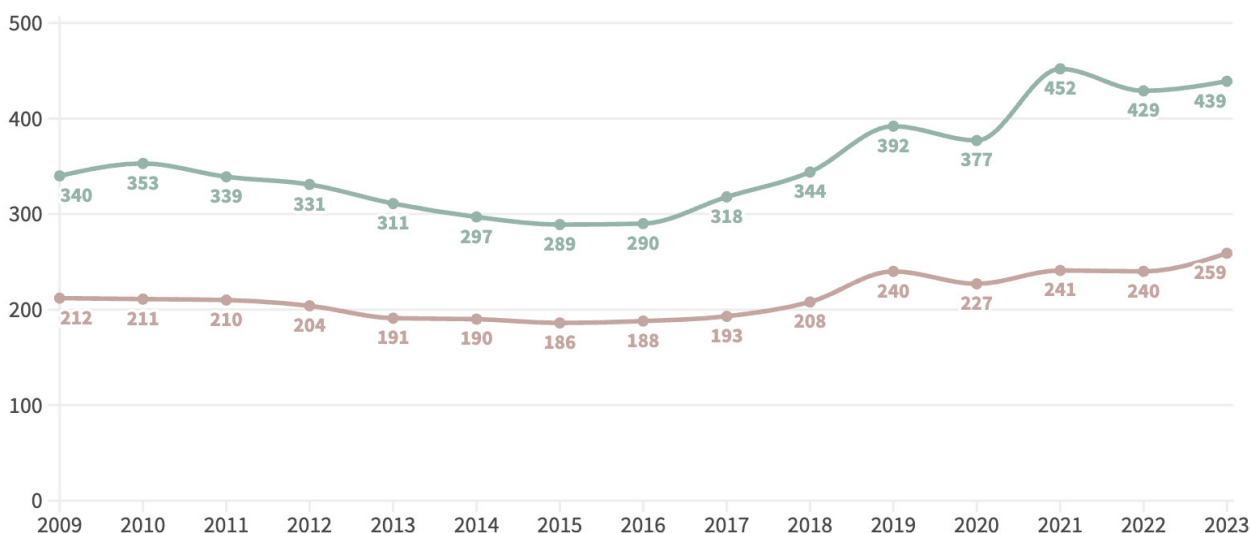
Note: Rates are based on the population per 100,000 and July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Victims include those aged 110 and younger. Children and youth refer to those aged 17 and younger. Excludes victims with unknown age, unknown accused–victim relationship, and certain miscoded entries. The database includes data for 99% of the Canadian population as of 2009.

While female youth continue to experience family violence at higher rates than male youth, the difference is less extreme than in IPV.

COVID-19 Period Effects

Between 2019 and 2021, trends during the pandemic period varied by context. Reported IPV rates remained relatively stable for youth overall, with only minor year-over-year changes. In contrast, family violence rose notably. Reported rates among female youth rose from 392 to 439 per 100,000 by 2021, indicating potential changes in household dynamics or additional stressors during this period.

Regional Context

Strathmore Youth Experiences

Access and mobility is a main concern for youth in Strathmore. As the Strathmore Social Needs Assessment (2022) observes, "many youth are unable to drive, and do not have access to public transportation," which may limit their ability to report incidents or access support services. The assessment further notes that younger people "may be unaware that they are being victimized, may not know how to seek help, may be unable to report their victimization, and may be dependent on the perpetrator."

THE LOCAL YOUTH SURVEY SHOWS THAT DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING ARE SERIOUS CONCERNS.

Among respondents, 64% identified discrimination as their greatest issue, and 48% reported experiencing bullying in the previous 12 months. 69% of those bullied did not seek help, suggesting barriers to accessing support. This corresponds with feedback from Indigenous community members who noted "discrimination during the course of everyday life activities" and "appearance-based racism" as ongoing challenges.

Challenges and Barriers

Mental Health Concerns

Mental health emerges as another important aspect of youth experience. The youth survey found frequent or occasional feelings of sadness (86%), depression (77%), anxiety (86%), and stress (90%). These mental health considerations often connect with experiences of violence and discrimination. As one youth respondent stated, there is a need for "help with focusing more on our mental health."

Youth reports of emotional state - Strathmore, 2020

Source(s): Strathmore Youth Survey, 2020

Legend: ■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Never

Category	Sometimes	Never	Often
Depressed	55%	23%	21%
Sad	69%	17%	14%
Anxious	46%	40%	14%
Stressed	46%	44%	10%

(x-axis: 0% to 100%)
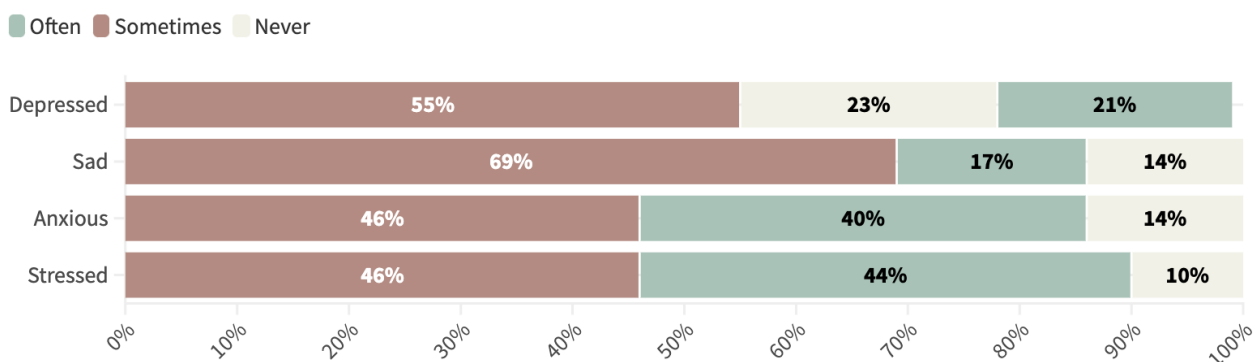
Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Percentage of respondents reporting selected mental health supports and experiences - Strathmore, 2020

Source(s): Strathmore Youth Survey (2020)

👤 = 1%

Have someone to turn to while anxious	72%
Don't have someone to turn to for support	20%
Reported experiences of being bullied	48%
Did not seek help in response to bullying	69%
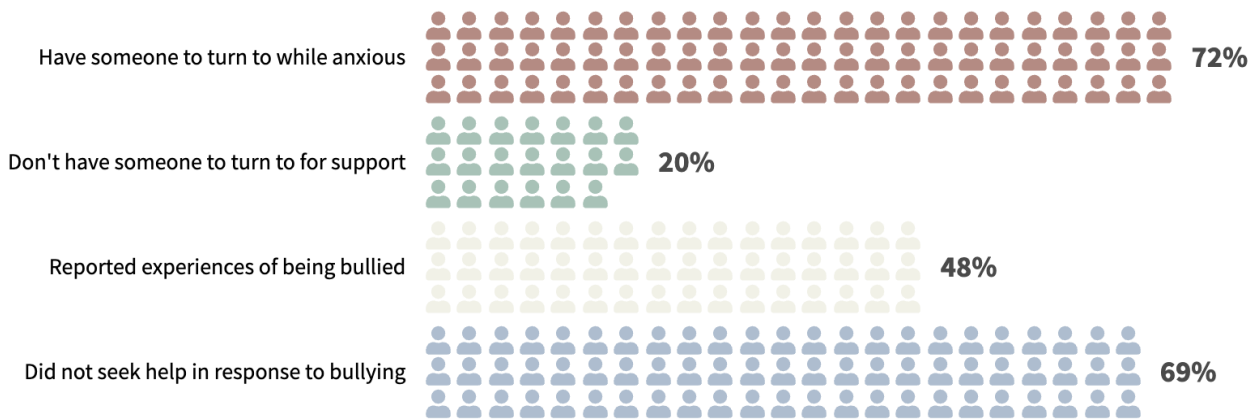
Access to Services and Opportunities

Access to spaces and activities presents both challenges and opportunities. While 75% of respondents felt there were sufficient opportunities to learn and do things in Strathmore, certain obstacles to participation exist. Transportation limitations (27%), affordability concerns (25%), and "finding stuff to do" (60%) were mentioned as barriers. Responses also showed that youth value recreational spaces, with 86% reporting access to parks or green spaces near their homes, and 70% rating access to activities and recreational opportunities as good or very good.

Support Systems and Resources

The data from Strathmore's youth survey shows that many young people maintain positive perspectives despite challenges. 78% of youth survey respondents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their lives. This ability for young people to find meaning and connection even during difficult times can be acknowledged when developing approaches.

Young people demonstrate interest in community involvement. The survey found that 93% of respondents considered it important to feel connected to their community, and 85% valued having input in community decision-making. This interest in engagement represents a resource that can be utilized to address youth concerns. As noted in the assessment, "there is clear importance of community engagement and participation for youth in Strathmore."

These findings indicate that youth experiences with violence involve multiple factors, with young people not only requiring support but also having the capacity to contribute to community solutions. Young people's adaptability, interest in community connection, and clear communication of needs demonstrate their potential to participate in developing effective approaches.

Single-Parent families

Single-parent families, most often single mothers, are disproportionately affected by economic and social pressures (Statistics Canada, 2024). They experience higher rates of low income, housing insecurity, and food insecurity than couple families with children, which can intensify certain forms of risk, including potential exposure to violence or coercion. These vulnerabilities point to systemic structures that single parents, especially women, navigate daily.

Prevalence and Patterns

Gender Distribution

In 2021, women accounted for the majority of one-parent households across Canada. Although this pattern has shifted slightly since the 1980s, single mothers remain overrepresented, often juggling limited resources or precarious work to meet their families' needs (StatsCAN Plus, 2024).

Consequently, census data indicates that

26% **low-income rates in Canada for people in one-parent families**

notably higher than for those in couple families with children (6.7%), particularly single-mother households (27.4%).

Economic Vulnerability

According to research by the Maytree Foundation, single-parent families experience a higher poverty rate compared to other family types in Canada.

In 2016,

the poverty rate for single-parent families was nearly **30%** **compared to the national average of** **11%**
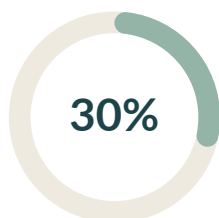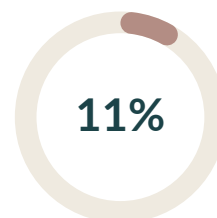
Single-parent families are unique in having only one potential earner responsible for supporting children. This economic structure contributes to their higher poverty rates, which are four times higher than those of two-parent households with children (Maytree Foundation, 2018).

Percent employed
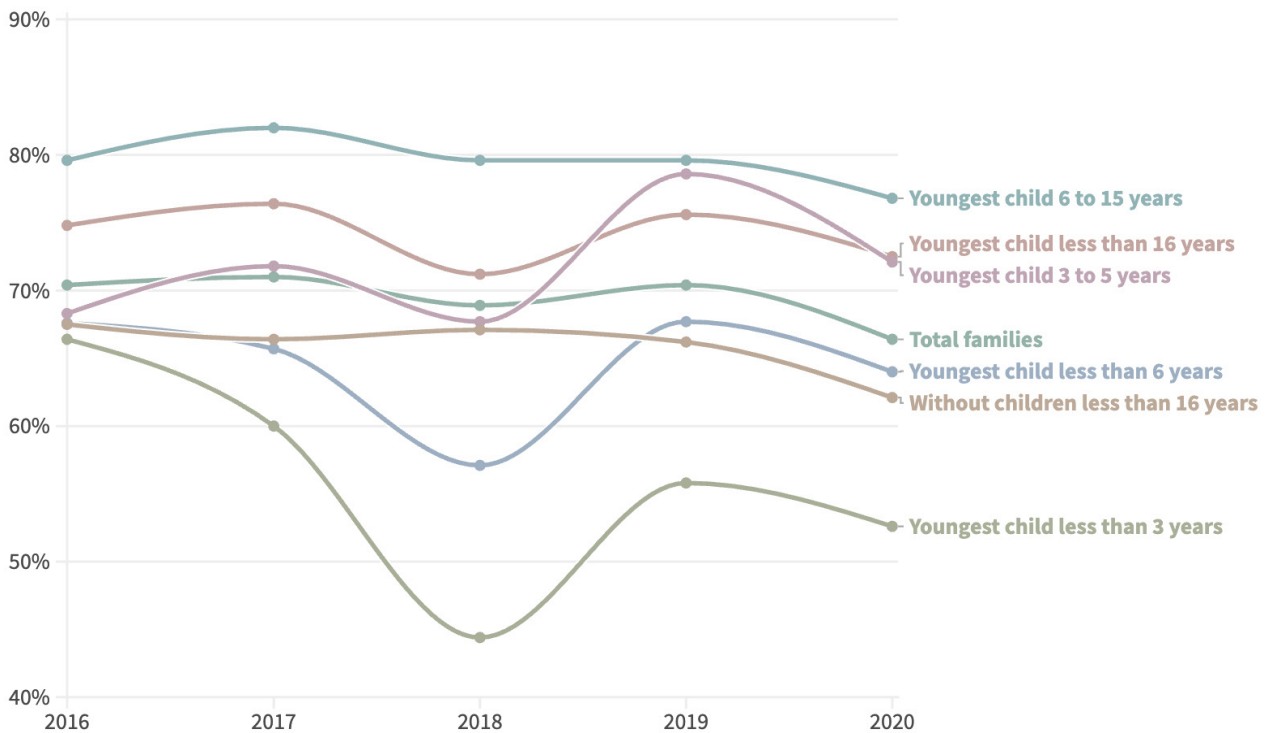
Regional Context

In Wheatland County, Alberta, 53% of single-mother households faced core housing need in 2021, up from 35% in 2016, demonstrating both the breadth and urgency of housing challenges for single mothers.

Challenges and Barriers

Employment Challenges

Single mothers' employment rates increased from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, but have since stabilized. In 2014, working single mothers earned an average hourly wage of $23.14, approximately $3 less per hour compared to mothers in dual-income households (Maytree Foundation, 2018).

Educational attainment varies among single parents. Approximately 62% of non-working single mothers lack post-school qualifications, which can limit employment opportunities. Single parents also face distinct challenges in workforce participation, particularly related to childcare availability and scheduling (Maytree Foundation, 2018).

The employment rate for single mothers also varies depending on children's ages. The employment rate for single mothers of children under 3 years old is much lower than for older childen, particularly after starting full-time education. However, single mothers maintain a slightly lower employment rate compared to mothers in two-parent households.

Food and Housing Insecurity

Economic stressors, including wage gaps and rising costs of living, frequently compound the risks of violence and insecurity. The increased burden of single-handedly providing for children can constrain the physical, financial, or emotional resources needed to avoid or escape harmful environments. Food security remains a concern, with nearly half of those in single-mother families reporting food insecurity in 2022 (StatsCAN Plus, 2024). These financial strains can create contexts in which violence occurs or persists.

Support Systems and Resources

Childcare, employment patterns, and income sources all shape the economic experiences of single-parent families. Federal child benefits introduced in 2015 and 2016 have provided additional income support, though their full effect on poverty rates continues to be evaluated.

Many mothers expand their education, take on multiple jobs, and rely on supportive networks. Some, especially younger women, encounter steep low-income rates, but are able leverage community supports or extended-family households to stabilize living conditions.

Indigenous and First Nations

Indigenous women in Canada continue to face disproportionate rates of violence. This discussion explores the patterns and prevalence of violence against Indigenous women, with particular focus on Alberta where possible, while acknowledging both challenges and addressing systemic factors.

Prevalence and Patterns

Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls represent a longstanding crisis that stems from colonial policies, systemic racism, and socioeconomic inequities. Indigenous women and girls face violence at disproportionately high rates, including sexual assault, physical abuse, and homicide. Communities report that law enforcement often underinvestigates these cases, leaving many families without answers and justice. Activists and Indigenous leaders call for comprehensive reforms, improved data collection, culturally sensitive support, and accountability from authorities.

Inquiries by government and human rights organizations have increased and broadened awareness of these disparities, yet many cases remain unresolved. Indigenous communities continue to push for change by demanding that society address the root causes of the violence and support measures that honour Indigenous rights and traditions.

According to data from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS), 63% of Indigenous women reported experiencing physical or sexual assault in their lifetime, compared to 45% of non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022b). This disparity exists across various forms of violence, including unwanted sexual behaviours in public spaces, with about 40% of First Nations and Métis women reporting such experiences compared to 32% of non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2019). In Alberta specifically, Indigenous women reported experiencing physical assault at a rate of 30%, somewhat higher than the national average of 26% (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Homicide data shows particularly stark disparities. Between 2009 and 2021, the rate of homicide against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and girls in Canada was six times higher than the rate among their non-Indigenous counterparts (Burczycka & Cotter, 2023). While Indigenous women represent approximately 5% of the female population in Canada, they accounted for almost one-quarter of all women homicide victims between 2015 and 2020 (Heidinger, 2022b).

Indigenous Women as a percentage of IPV victims and Canada's female population - 2019–2023

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Facts, stats and WAGE's impact: Gender-based violence
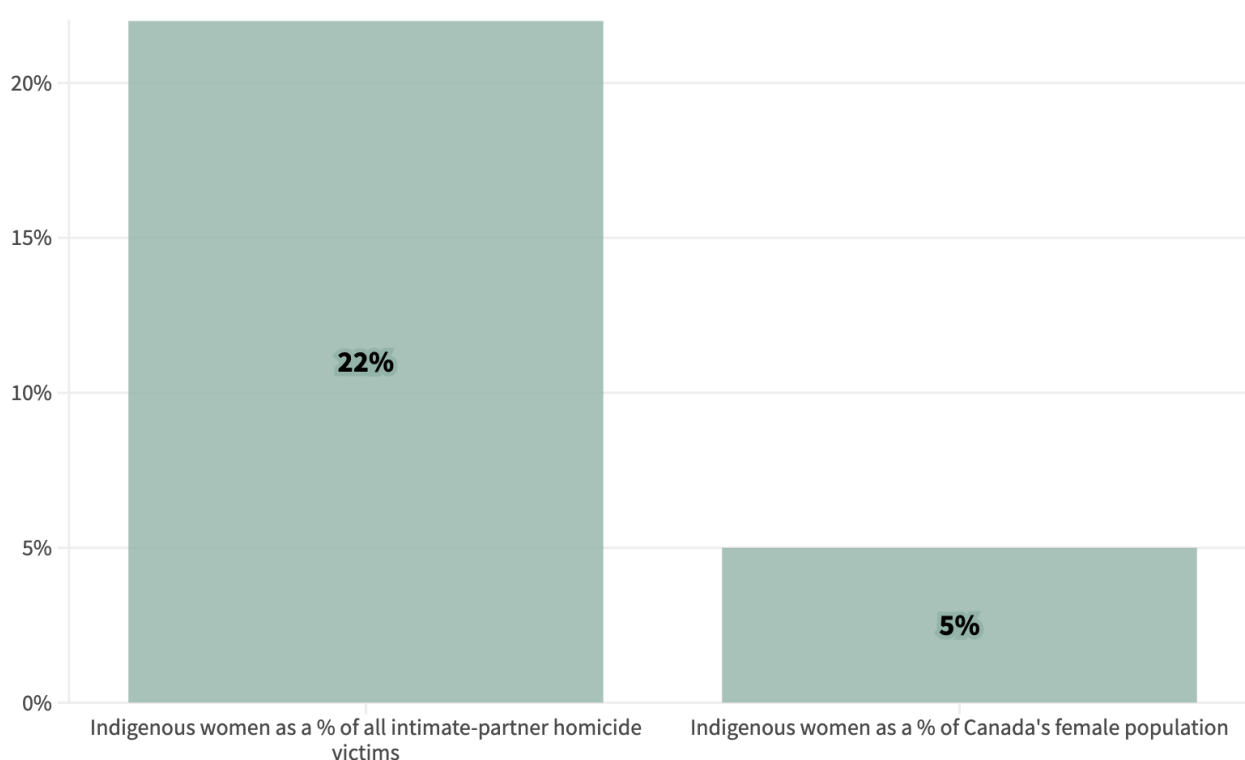
Regional Context

Situated just northwest of the Siksika Indian Reserve #146, Strathmore is located on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy includes Siksika Nation, North & South Piikani Nations, and the Kainai Nation. The area is a part of Treaty 7, which also includes the Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda (Stoney Nakoda) which include Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. Strathmore is also home to the Métis people of Battle River.

As a proportion of the total population in Strathmore, Indigenous populations are rising, growing by 14.9%, from 805 to 925, between 2016 and 2021. For reference, the general Strathmore population only grew 4.2% over the same period. Based on 25% sample data from Statistics Canada, it is estimated that in 2021, 445 of these 925 people were First Nations, 445 Métis, 10 Inuit, and 20 with multiple Indigenous responses.

The Census also provides information about the self-identified cultural and ethnic identity of those surveyed. The most commonly reported Indigenous ethnocultural identity in Strathmore was Métis (455 people), followed by Cree (230) and Blackfoot (105).

Ethnic or cultural origin	Total
Métis	455
First Nations (North American Indian)	230
Cree	160
Blackfoot	105
North American Indigenous	60
Ojibway	20
Inuit	15
Mohawk	10

Data from case notes suggest that Indigenous people are using services provided by True North. From April 2013 to April 2025, there were over 500 Indigenous adults and children repsectively who used the emergency shelter program. For the outreach program, there were 81 adults and 11 children respectively.

81 adults   **11** children

Historical Context and Root Causes

The disproportionate violence experienced by Indigenous women cannot be understood outside its historical context. Current patterns of violence reflect the traumatic and destructive legacy of colonization that continues to affect Indigenous families, communities, and Canadian society as a whole.

As noted by the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics: "Indigenous peoples were subjected to racist and oppressive laws and regulations that suppressed language and religion, destroyed culture, and dismantled Indigenous families and communities" (Heidinger, 2022b).

Prior to colonization, women held important positions of leadership and decision-making power in many Indigenous societies.

Colonization forcibly altered traditional matrilineal views and contributed to the normalization of violence against Indigenous women.

Policies such as the Indian Act denied Indigenous women many rights and excluded them from community governance (Heidinger, 2022b).

THERE IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT CONNECTION BETWEEN HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND CURRENT EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE.

Indigenous women (42%) were more likely than non-Indigenous women (27%) to have been physically or sexually abused by an adult during childhood (Heidinger, 2022b). Additionally, Indigenous women (11%) were almost six times as likely than non-Indigenous women (2%) to have ever been under the legal responsibility of the government (Heidinger, 2022b), reflecting the ongoing effect of policies like residential schools and the Sixties Scoop.

Challenges and Barriers

Justice System Interactions

There are complex relationships between Indigenous women and the justice system. Indigenous women (17%) were more than twice as likely to report having not very much or no confidence in the police compared with non-Indigenous women (8%) (Heidinger, 2022b).

Court outcome data shows that police are less likely to lay or recommend a charge of first-degree murder—the most serious type of homicide charge—when the victim was Indigenous (27%) compared to when she was not (54%) (Burczycka & Cotter, 2023). Instead, charges of second-degree murder (60%) and manslaughter (13%) are more common. These patterns suggest potential systemic biases in how violence against Indigenous women is perceived and processed within the justice system.

Overall, two-thirds (65%) of cases linked to homicides of Indigenous women and girls resulted in a guilty finding (Burczycka & Cotter, 2023).

Progression of homicides of women and girls through the criminal justice system - Canada, 2009–2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey and Integrated Criminal Court Survey

Legend: Homicides of Indigenous women and girls (%) · Homicides of non-Indigenous women and girls (%)

Category	Indigenous (%)	Non-Indigenous (%)
Victims of homicide where a charge was laid	79%	71%
Victims of homicide where the incident went to court	48%	44%
Guilty decisions	55%	55%
Adult cases sentenced to custody	91%	94%
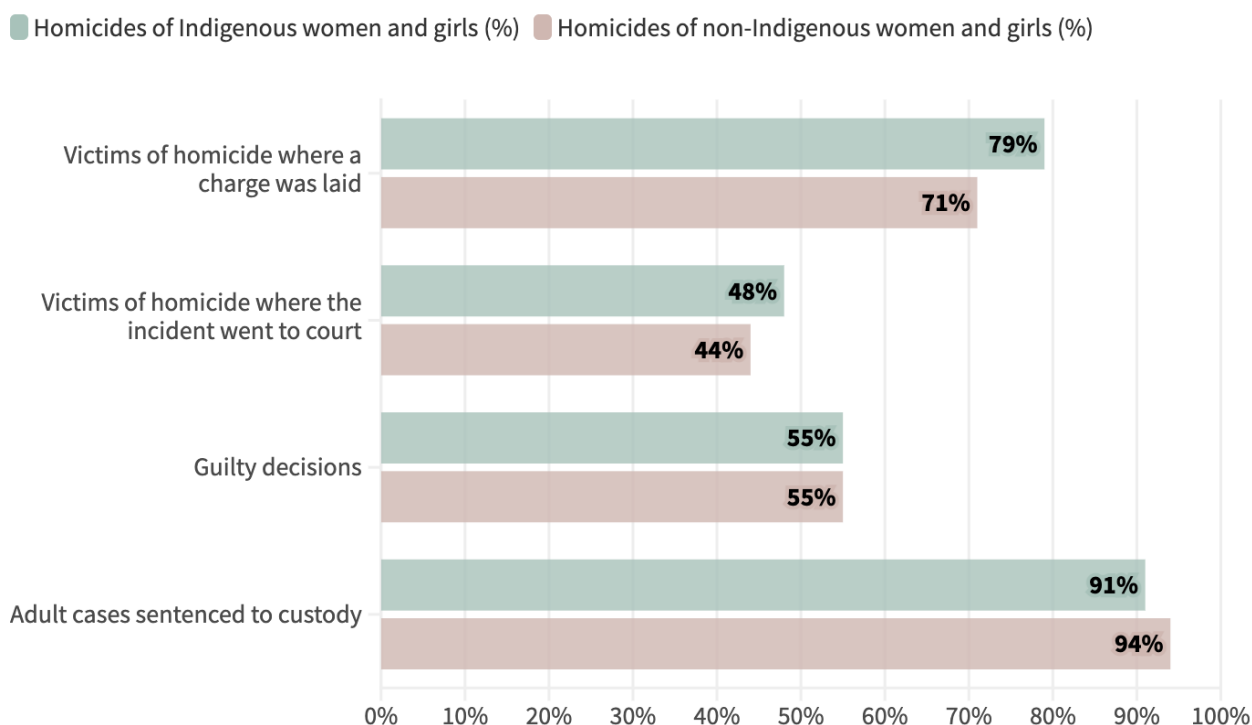
Note: Indigenous identity is reported by the police and determined through documentation or information from sources such as Status cards, family members, community members, or forensic evidence.

Charges laid or recommended by police in solved homicide incidents - Canada, 2014–2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey

■ First-degree murder   ■ Second-degree murder   ■ Manslaughter

Accused person is Indigenous   **Accused person is non-Indigenous**

Percent

Accused person is Indigenous		
Indigenous women and girls	Non-Indigenous women and girls	
17.8% / 65.4% / 16.8%	28% / 56% / 16%	

Accused person is non-Indigenous		
Indigenous women and girls	Non-Indigenous women and girls	
35.5% / 54.8% / 9.7%	44.3% / 47% / 8.6%	

Indigeneous Identity of Victim

Note: Indigenous identity is determined by police through documents like Status cards or information provided by families or forensic evidence. Victims and accused with unknown Indigenous identity as reported by police are excluded from this table.

Community Safety Concerns

Indigenous women were more likely to perceive indicators of social disorder in their neighbourhoods, with 71% reporting at least one small, moderate, or big problem in their neighbourhood, compared to 57% of non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022b).

Support Systems and Resources

Similar proportions of Indigenous women (70%) and non-Indigenous women (68%) who experienced intimate partner violence spoke with someone about the abuse they experienced (Heidinger, 2021). This willingness to seek support demonstrates agency in the face of trauma.

The SSPPS data reveals that 48% of Indigenous women reported residing in a place where they know most or many people, compared to 34% of non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022b). This greater level of community connectedness may confer additional social support.

LGBTQ2S+

LGBTQ2S+ individuals and communities in Canada encounter various forms of violence and harassment. Government and national survey data indicate that gender-based violence (GBV)—violence committed against people because of their gender identity, expression, or perceived gender—is widespread and occurs more frequently among sexual minority and transgender people (Government of Canada, 2024).

Prevalence and Patterns

Intimate Partner Violence

Data from the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces show that 67% of sexual minority women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) since the age of 15, compared with 44% of heterosexual women, while 49% of sexual minority women reported having been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner, compared with 25% of heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2021).

Impacts, consequences, and actions taken by victims of IPV in the past 12 months among sexual minority and heterosexual women - Canada, 2018

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces

Legend: ● Incident had an emotional impact ● Spoke with someone ● Victim was injured ● Separated due to violence ● Symptoms consistent with PTSD ● Used or contacted a service ● Victim lost consciousness

Percent of victims

Category	Value 1	Value 2
Incident had an emotional impact	92%	92%
Spoke with someone	72%	68%
Victim was injured	19%	
Separated due to violence	34%	16%
Symptoms consistent with PTSD	28%	12%
Used or contacted a service	19%	12%
Victim lost consciousness		3%
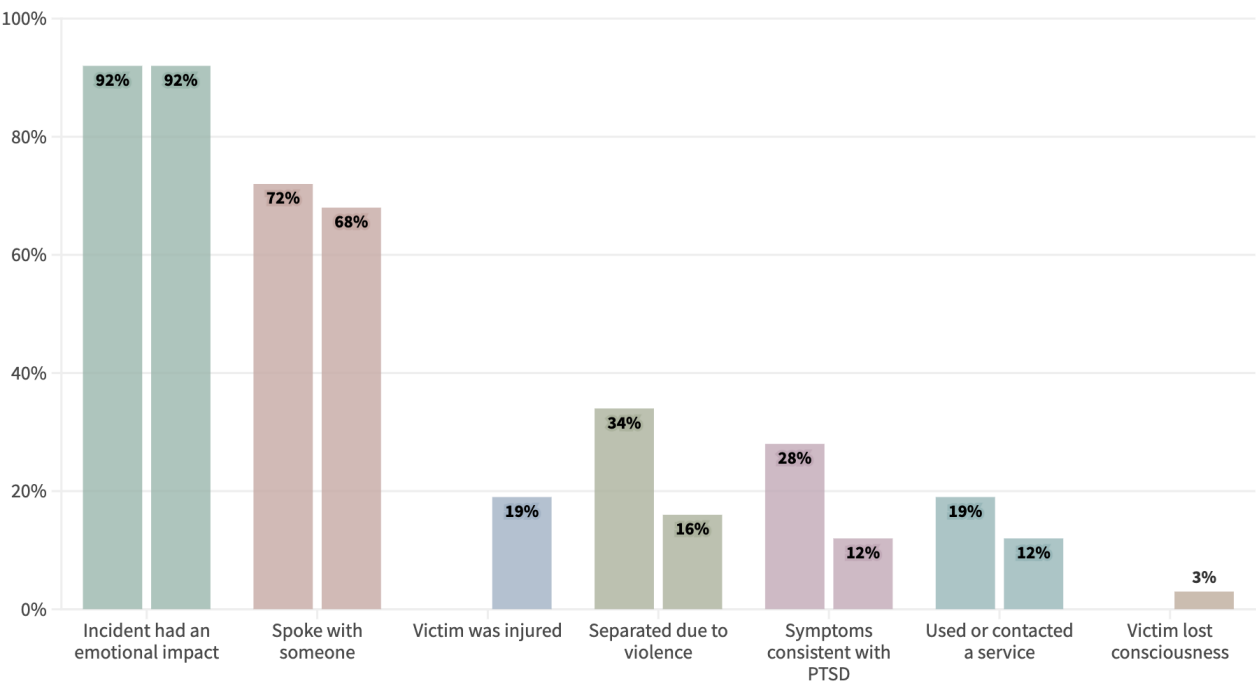
Note: Blank figures are due to data being too unreliable to publish. Percent calculations are based on those who experienced some form of intimate partner violence (emotional, physical, or sexual violence) committed by a current or former intimate partner.

Psychological abuse was the most frequently reported form of IPV, with 65% of sexual minority women reporting such experiences compared with 42% among heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2021).

65% of sexual minority women reporting such experiences

compared with **42%** among heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2021).
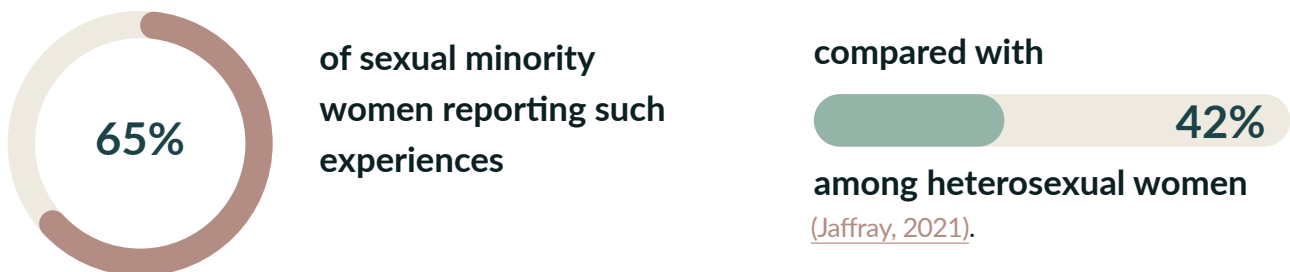
Bisexual women are over three times as likely to report sexual assault by an intimate partner (34% versus 11% among heterosexual women) and also report elevated rates of physical assault and psychological abuse (Jaffray, 2021). 20% of sexual minority women reported experiencing IPV in the 12 months preceding the survey, indicating that these incidents remain a current problem (Jaffray, 2021).

Other Forms of Victimization

Beyond intimate relationships, sexual minority Canadians are more likely to experience violent victimization in other contexts. According to the survey, 59% of sexual minority people have experienced physical or sexual assault at some point since the age of 15, compared with 37% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020). In the past 12 months, 11% of sexual minority Canadians reported violent victimization, compared to 4% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020).

THESE DIFFERENCES REMAIN STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT EVEN AFTER CONTROLLING FOR AGE, SUGGESTING THAT THE INCREASED RISK IS NOT SOLELY ATTRIBUTABLE TO DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS.

Unwanted sexual behaviours that do not necessarily meet the criminal threshold also contribute to the overall experience of GBV. In public spaces, 57% of sexual minority Canadians report experiencing inappropriate sexual behaviours, compared with 22% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020). Online, 37% of sexual minority people experience unwanted behaviours versus 15% of heterosexual people, and 44% of sexual minority employees report similar challenges in the workplace compared with 22% of heterosexual employees (Jaffray, 2020). Bisexual women are particularly affected in public spaces, with 69% reporting unwanted sexual behaviours compared with 31% of heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2020).

Regional Context

Alberta-specific and Strathmore-specific data was not available, though the national trends indicate patterns of violence and harassment that likely affect LGBTQ2S+ communities across all provinces, including Alberta.

Challenges and Barriers

Transgender-Specific Challenges

Transgender Canadians represent approximately 75,000 people—0.24% of Canadians aged 15 and older—and report more experiences of violence and harassment than cisgender Canadians, with higher lifetime rates of both physical and sexual assault (Jaffray, 2020).

They also experience unwanted behaviours in public and online more frequently. For example, transgender respondents more often receive unsolicited comments about their gender or sexual orientation and encounter unwanted sexual attention. In the workplace, transgender Canadians report higher rates of unwanted physical contact and comments regarding how they should behave, compared with their cisgender counterparts (Jaffray, 2020).

Mental Health Effects

32% of sexual minority Canadians describe their mental health as poor or fair, in contrast to 11% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020). In addition, 41% of sexual minority people report having been diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder, compared with 16% of heterosexual people (Jaffray, 2020).

Suicidal ideation is also more prevalent among sexual minority Canadians, with

40%

reporting that they have seriously contemplated suicide compared to 15% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020). Similar patterns are observed among transgender Canadians, who also report poorer self-rated mental health and higher rates of mood or anxiety disorders than cisgender Canadians (Jaffray, 2020).

Substance Use Patterns

Substance use patterns further illustrate the consequences of these experiences. Sexual minority Canadians are more likely to engage in binge drinking, non-medicinal cannabis use, and use of non-prescribed drugs than heterosexual Canadians; over half of bisexual Canadians report binge drinking, compared with 44% of heterosexual Canadians (Jaffray, 2020).

Bisexual women report non-prescribed drug use at a rate nearly five times higher than that of heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2020). Many sexual minority and transgender people also report using alcohol or drugs as a means to cope with past abuse or violence (Jaffray, 2020).

Systemic Factors

It is important to note that these elevated rates of violence, unwanted behaviours, and associated mental health challenges are not indicative of any inherent vulnerability in LGBTQ2S+ communities. Instead, they reflect broader systemic factors—such as structural discrimination, social stigma, and institutional barriers—that increase the risk of victimization for sexual minority and transgender people (Government of Canada, 2024).

The data shows significant disparities that persist even after accounting for variables such as age and socioeconomic status, indicating that these issues arise from external factors rather than individual shortcomings.

People with Disabilities

Violence affects the lives of many Canadians, but people with disabilities face disproportionate risk. This discussion examines the prevalence, nature, and effects of violence experienced by people with disabilities, with particular attention to gendered dimensions of these experiences in Alberta.

Prevalence and Patterns

Research consistently demonstrates that people with disabilities face elevated risks of experiencing violence compared to those without disabilities (Conroy and Cotter 2017; Cotter 2018; Cotter and Savage 2019; Perreault 2020a). According to the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS), 57% of women with disabilities across Canada have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, substantially higher than the 37% reported by women without disabilities (Savage 2021).

Physical and sexual assault since age 15, by disability status and relationship to perpetrator - Canada, 2018

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces

■ Physical assault ■ Sexual assault ■ Total violent victimization

Women with disabilities

Percent of victims

	Intimate Partner	Non-Intimate Partner	Total
Physical assault	31.8	35.5	46.3
Sexual assault	17.9	39.2	43.4
Total violent victimization	35.8	49.7	57.4

Women without disabilities

	Intimate Partner	Non-Intimate Partner	Total
Physical assault	17.2	20.1	27.6
Sexual assault	7.3	24.4	26.7
Total violent victimization	19.1	31.5	37.2
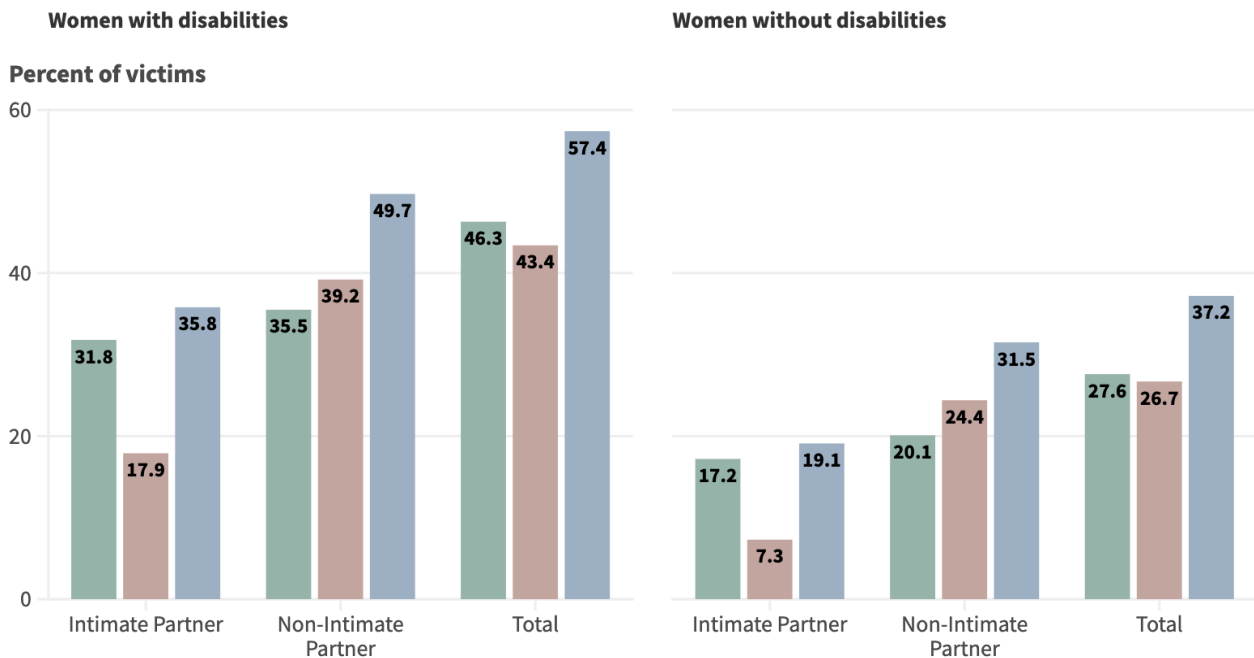
Note: Includes violence committed by a current or former spouse, common-law partner, dating partner, or someone with whom the victim was in another type of intimate relationship. Percent calculation excludes respondents who reported that they have never been in an intimate partner relationship.

Men with disabilities also experience violence at higher rates than other men. The SSPPS found that 44% of men with disabilities have experienced IPV since age 15, compared to 32% of men without disabilities (Savage 2021).

Regional Context

In Alberta specifically, the overall prevalence of violent victimization is higher than the national average. Women in Alberta reported higher rates of physical assault (30% versus the national average of 26%) and sexual assault (35% versus the national average of 30%) since age 15 (Cotter and Savage 2019). For Albertans with disabilities, these already elevated provincial rates translate to even greater vulnerability, following the national pattern where disability status consistently increases risk of violence.

In Alberta, men reported higher rates of physical assault (39% versus the national average of 33%), suggesting that men with disabilities in Alberta may face particularly heightened risks (Cotter and Savage 2019).

Alberta's urban centres show concerning patterns regarding public safety, with 34% of women overall in Alberta experiencing unwanted sexual behaviours in public places, higher than the national average of 26% (Cotter and Savage 2019).

Challenges and Barriers

Public Spaces and Workplace Safety

Nationally, in public spaces, 45% of women with disabilities reported unwanted sexual behaviour that made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable, compared to 28% of women without disabilities (Perreault 2020a).

In Alberta's resource-based economy, which includes male-dominated sectors like oil and gas, women with disabilities who work in these environments may face particular challenges. Nationally, women working in male-dominated environments reported higher rates of workplace harassment (39% compared to 27% in female-dominated workplaces), suggesting that Alberta's industrial composition may create additional vulnerability for women with disabilities in the workforce (Cotter and Savage 2019).

Diverse Forms of Abuse

The violence experienced by people with disabilities often differs in both nature and effect compared to that experienced by people without disabilities. While psychological abuse was the most common form of IPV for all women, women with disabilities reported higher rates of physical and sexual violence. 32% of women with disabilities reported being physically assaulted by an intimate partner, and 18% reported sexual assault by a partner, figures nearly double those for women without disabilities (Savage 2021).

ALBERTA'S HIGHER OVERALL RATES OF VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION SUGGEST THAT THESE DISPARITIES MAY BE EVEN MORE PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE PROVINCE.

With 5.3% of women in Alberta reporting experiencing violent victimization in the 12 months preceding the survey (compared to the national average of 4.3%), women with disabilities in Alberta likely face substantial risks of recent victimization (Cotter and Savage 2019).

Emotional and Psychological Effects

The emotional effects of violence are also more severe for people with disabilities. Women with disabilities who experienced IPV were more likely to report lowered self-esteem (44% versus 21% of women without disabilities) and were more than twice as likely to report symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (18% versus 8%) (Savage 2021). These heightened effects may reflect both the cumulative nature of violence experienced and the additional barriers faced when seeking support.

Barriers to Reporting and Support

People with disabilities face serious barriers to reporting and accessing support services. 91% of women with disabilities who experienced IPV did not report it to police. While women with disabilities were more likely than women without disabilities to use victim services (16% versus 9%), most did not access formal supports (Savage 2021).

Common reasons for not seeking help included believing the incident was too minor (50%) or not wanting or needing help (52%) (Savage 2021). However, structural barriers likely also play a role, including accessibility challenges, lack of information about available services, and difficulties with transportation (DAWN Canada 2014). In Alberta's remote or isolated communities, these barriers are often intensified by limited availability of specialized services.

Populations at Higher Risk

Multiple Disabilities

Reported lifetime rates of IPV were particularly high for women with mental health-related disabilities

68%

or cognitive disabilities

65%

The co-occurrence of multiple types of disabilities increased risk, with approximately 69% of women with three or four types of disability reporting experiencing IPV in their lifetime (Savage 2021). 31% of women with three or more types of disabilities had been victims of sexual IPV, a proportion almost four times higher than that of women without disabilities (8%) (Savage 2021).

Alberta's mental health landscape presents additional challenges, with the province experiencing higher rates of some mental health issues compared to the national average.

Support Systems and Resources

Alberta has developed various support systems for survivors of violence, including the Family Violence Info Line and specialized programs for people with disabilities. However, the high rates of violence experienced by Albertans with disabilities suggest that continued enhancement and expansion of these services is needed.

Many who experienced violence reported taking proactive steps to protect themselves and maintain their wellbeing. For instance, those who experienced unwanted behaviours online were more likely to take protective measures such as limiting internet use, changing usernames, or blocking other users (Cotter and Savage 2019). Many spoke with friends or family members about their experiences, highlighting the importance of informal support networks alongside formal services.

Understanding these patterns is essential for developing effective prevention strategies and support services that address the unique needs of people with disabilities in Alberta.

Rather than viewing these elevated risks as inevitable consequences of disability, they should be recognized as manifestations of societal barriers, power imbalances, and inadequate supports that can be addressed through thoughtful policy and practice.

Seniors

The experiences of seniors with violence are shaped by various factors including gender, geographic location, health status, social connections, and support systems. This discussion explores these experiences with special attention to the Alberta context where relevant.

Prevalence and Patterns

In 2023, the rate of police-reported family violence against seniors reached 94 victims per 100,000 population, the highest recorded level since comparable data became available in 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2024). This represents a 42% increase over 2018 levels.

However, according to the General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety, seniors experience violence at rates five times lower than younger Canadians (20 versus 100 incidents per 1,000 population) (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This suggests that while violence against seniors is increasing, older adults as a group continue to face lower overall rates of victimization compared to other age demographics.

Senior victims of police-reported violence by age group and year - Canada

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database
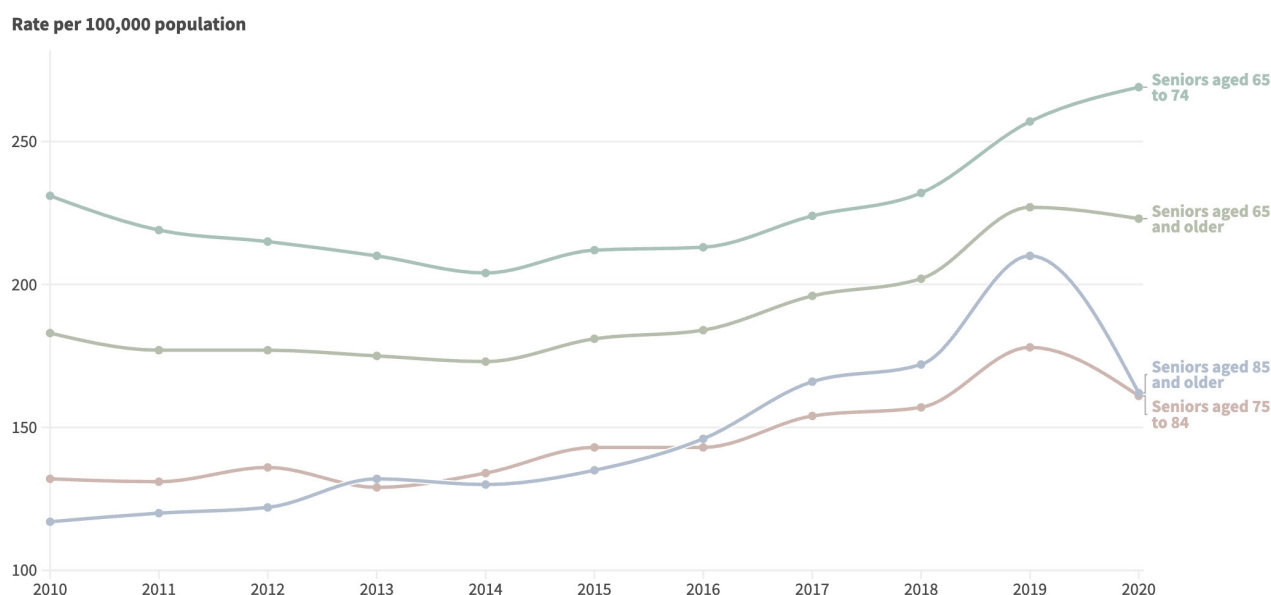
Note: Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. Populations based on July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Seniors include those aged 65 and older. Excludes victims where age was coded as unknown and those where age was greater than 110 due to possible instances of miscoding. Based on the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database, which, as of 2009, includes data for 99% of the population in Canada.

The experience of violence differs greatly between senior men and women, with senior women experiencing slightly higher rates of family violence (99 per 100,000) than senior men (87 per 100,000). Senior women who experienced police-reported violence were also more than twice as likely to have been victimized by an intimate partner compared to senior men (16% versus 7%) (Conroy & Sutton, 2022).

Recently, there has been a more rapid increase in reported violence against senior men. Between 2010 and 2020, police-reported violence against senior men increased by 25%, compared to 18% for senior women (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This trend may reflect changing patterns in reporting rather than actual victimization rates, as research suggests men have historically been more reluctant to report victimization due to stigma.

Regional Context

In Alberta, the challenges facing seniors reflect both provincial realities and national trends. Alberta has a relatively smaller proportion of seniors compared to other provinces, with approximately 15% of the population aged 65 and older compared to 19% nationally (Statistics Canada, 2021). However, this demographic is growing rapidly, highlighting the increasing importance of addressing violence against seniors within the province's social policy framework.

Senior population by gender - Strathmore, 2024

Source(s): Office of Statistics and Information, Alberta Treasury Board and Finance

Men ▪ Women

Age	Men	Women	Total
0-4	452	394	846
5-9	543	537	1080
10-14	614	627	1241
15-19	564	546	1110
20-24	424	408	832
25-29	404	344	748
30-34	556	480	1036
35-39	517	536	1053
40-44	590	584	1174
45-49	518	531	1049
50-54	540	533	1073
55-59	493	487	980
60-64	455	507	962
65-69	431	490	921
70-74	365	416	781
75-79	272	351	623
80-84	158	239	397
85-89	79	128	207
90+	52	76	
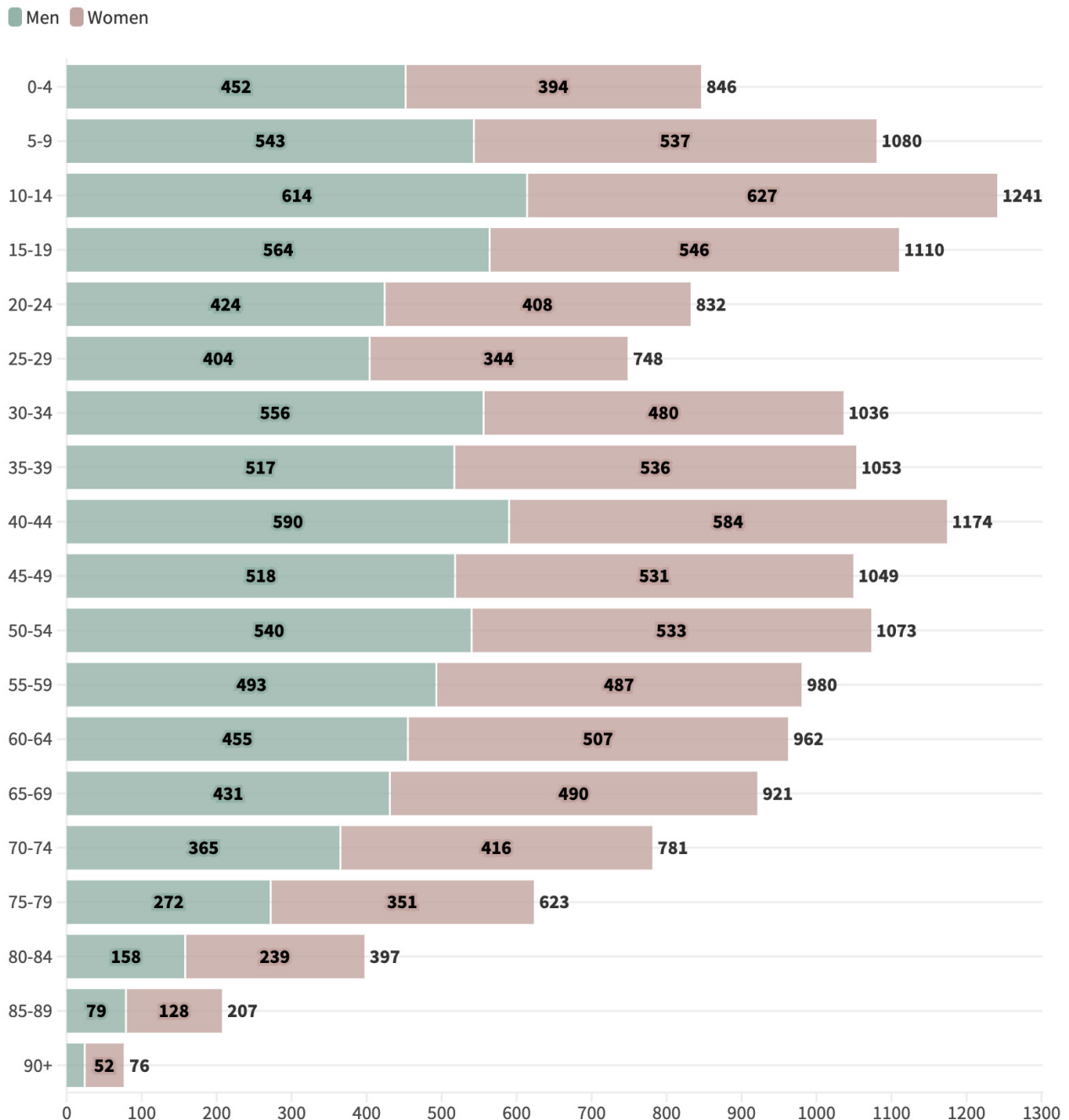
In Alberta, organizations like the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters have developed specific guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic to address domestic violence affecting older women. These guidelines highlighted the need for special consideration of older adults who might face additional barriers in seeking help during crisis periods (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2020).

As Canada's fourth-largest province by land area, Alberta has substantial rural and remote populations. The province's rural seniors may face additional barriers accessing services, particularly in northern regions where communities are more dispersed. Organizations providing services to older adults in Alberta must navigate these geographic realities when developing outreach strategies and service delivery models.

Challenges and Barriers

Relationship Dynamics

Contrary to common assumptions, nearly two-thirds (64%) of senior victims of police-reported violence were victimized by someone other than a family member or intimate partner (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). Acquaintances were implicated in 28% of cases, while strangers accounted for 24%.

However, family violence remains a serious concern. When family members were perpetrators, they were most often the victim's

child

35%

spouse

27%

sibling

11%

extended family member

27%
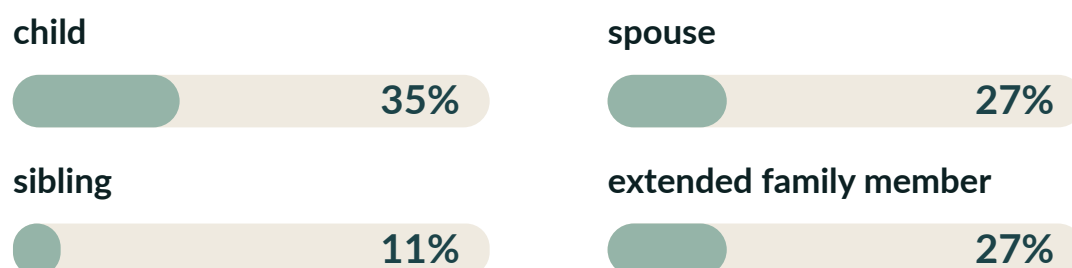
(Conroy & Sutton, 2022).

In Alberta, legal frameworks have been adapted to address these relationship dynamics. For example, during the pandemic, Alberta Courts developed protocols for telephone applications for Emergency Protection Orders, making it easier for older adults to seek protection without physical attendance at court, in recognition that many older adults experiencing abuse might be isolated with their abuser and need remote access to legal protections.

Geographic and Rural Factors

Rural seniors face higher victimization rates (247 per 100,000) than urban seniors (214 per 100,000) (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This disparity likely reflects multiple factors, including limited access to support services, greater social isolation, and potential challenges in reporting incidents.

The highest rates of violence against seniors nationally were found in Canada's territories and the northern regions of provinces. This pattern mirrors broader trends in violent crime across Canada, but raises important questions about service accessibility and culturally appropriate supports for older adults in these regions.

Institutional Settings

While most seniors live independently in the community, those in institutional settings face unique risks. Among seniors victimized inside residential locations in 2020, 15% were in communal residences like retirement or nursing homes (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This is disproportionately high, considering only about 7% of Canadian seniors live in such settings.

Pandemic-Related Challenges

In Alberta, pandemic response measures had particular implications for seniors. Social isolation, already a serious risk factor for elder abuse, intensified as older adults were encouraged to self-isolate due to heightened vulnerability to the virus. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and other domestic violence organizations developed interim guidelines specifically addressing pandemic circumstances, recognizing the increased vulnerability of older adults isolated with potential abusers (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2020). These guidelines included practical advice for friends and family members on how to support older adults who might be experiencing abuse during lockdown periods.

As noted by Han and Mosqueda (2021), "older adults were disconnected from informal and formal social support structures in their lives that represented important sources of protection against mistreatment" (Burnes & Beaulieu, 2023). Community programs, healthcare services, and informal gatherings that would normally provide social connection and opportunities for abuse detection were greatly restricted.

The pandemic also placed greater strain on informal caregivers. With supplemental caregivers less available due to COVID restrictions, primary caregivers experienced elevated levels of stress and burden without access to the same levels of respite support (Burnes & Beaulieu, 2023). This created conditions where caregiver stress—a known risk factor for elder abuse—was exacerbated.

Populations at Higher Risk

Seniors with Disabilities

Certain groups of seniors face heightened vulnerability. Physical, cognitive, or functional limitations can increase dependency on others and reduce capacity for self-protection. Seniors with disabilities reported violent victimization rates nearly three times as high as seniors without disabilities (31 versus 11 incidents per 1,000 population) (Conroy & Sutton, 2022).

Indigenous Seniors

Indigenous seniors were more likely to report having "not much" or "no confidence" in police compared to non-Indigenous seniors (10% versus 5%), potentially affecting their willingness to report victimization (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). In Alberta, with its substantial Indigenous population, culturally appropriate approaches to elder abuse prevention and response are particularly important.

PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE HISTORICAL AND ONGOING EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH INDIGENOUS LEADERS TO DEVELOP SUITABLE SUPPORTS.

Racialized Group and Immigrant Seniors

Seniors who are members of racialized groups reported weaker sense of community belonging (61%) compared to non-visible minority seniors (74%), suggesting potential gaps in social support networks. As Alberta continues to welcome immigrants from around the world, ensuring that older adults from diverse cultural backgrounds have access to appropriate supports becomes increasingly important.

Support Systems and Resources

According to the General Social Survey, 82% of seniors reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their personal safety from crime, higher than the 77% of younger Canadians who felt similarly (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This suggests that many older adults maintain a sense of security and wellbeing, despite the increased risks they face.

Additionally, seniors reported stronger community connections compared to younger Canadians.

72%

of seniors reported a somewhat or very strong sense of community belonging, substantially higher than the 58% reported by younger Canadians (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This social capital represents an important protective factor that can be leveraged in prevention and intervention strategies.

Seniors also demonstrated higher levels of trust in community institutions. Across all measures of police performance, a greater proportion of seniors believed police were doing a good job relative to younger Canadians (Conroy & Sutton, 2022). This trust in authorities represents a strength that can facilitate reporting and help-seeking behaviours when needed.

In Alberta, organizations like Sagesse and IMpact developed specific domestic violence community protocols during COVID-19 that recognized the unique vulnerabilities of different populations, including older adults (Sagesse & IMpact, 2020).

THESE PROTOCOLS EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF PROACTIVE OUTREACH AND CONNECTION WITH VULNERABLE SENIORS WHO MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO SEEK HELP INDEPENDENTLY.

Newcomers

Alberta has become an increasingly diverse province, welcoming thousands of newcomers each year through various immigration streams. In 2022 alone, Alberta's Provincial Nominee Program welcomed 11,618 immigrants (IRCC, 2023). Understanding their experiences with violence, including the challenges they face, is essential for fostering an inclusive society where all Albertans can thrive.

Prevalence and Patterns

While immigrants across Canada generally experience lower rates of violent victimization than non-immigrants (Ibrahim, 2018), certain forms of violence demonstrate concerning trends in Alberta specifically. Immigrant women were far more likely than immigrant men to experience sexual assault (20% versus 6%, respectively) (Cotter & Savage, 2019).

In terms of intimate partner violence (IPV), Alberta's rates (400 per 100,000 overall, with IPV against women at 626 per 100,000) are lower than in Saskatchewan and Manitoba but still exceed the national averages (322 and 507 per 100,000, respectively) (Burczycka, 2019).

While IPV is not more prevalent among newcomer populations than in the Canadian-born population, newcomers' experiences with violence are shaped by unique factors related to their immigration journey, cultural background, and settlement experiences (Rossiter et al., 2018; Tabibi et al., 2018).

Regional Context

In Strathmore, 1,250 immigrants were identified in the most recent 2021 census. This represented a 14% increase from the figure recorded in 2016 of 1,095. Overall, there were at least 1,460 first-generation Canadians in Strathmore in 2021.

Immigrant status and period of immigration for the population in private households - 25% sample data, Strathmore 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada Census
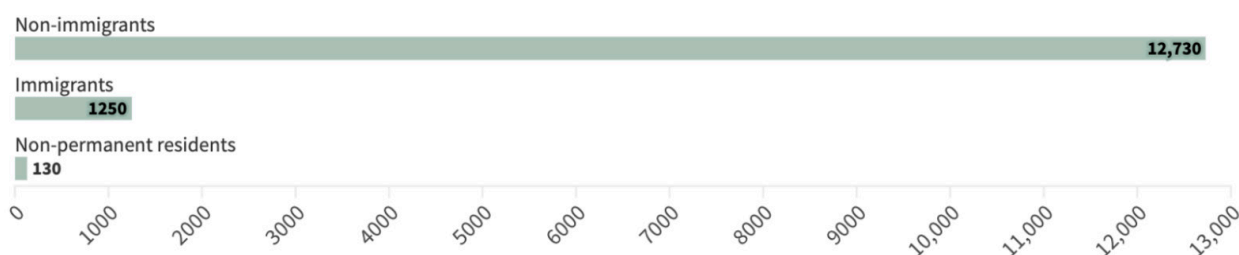
Generation status for the population in private households - 25% sample data, Strathmore 2021

Source(s): Statistics Canada Census

■ Men+ ■ Women+
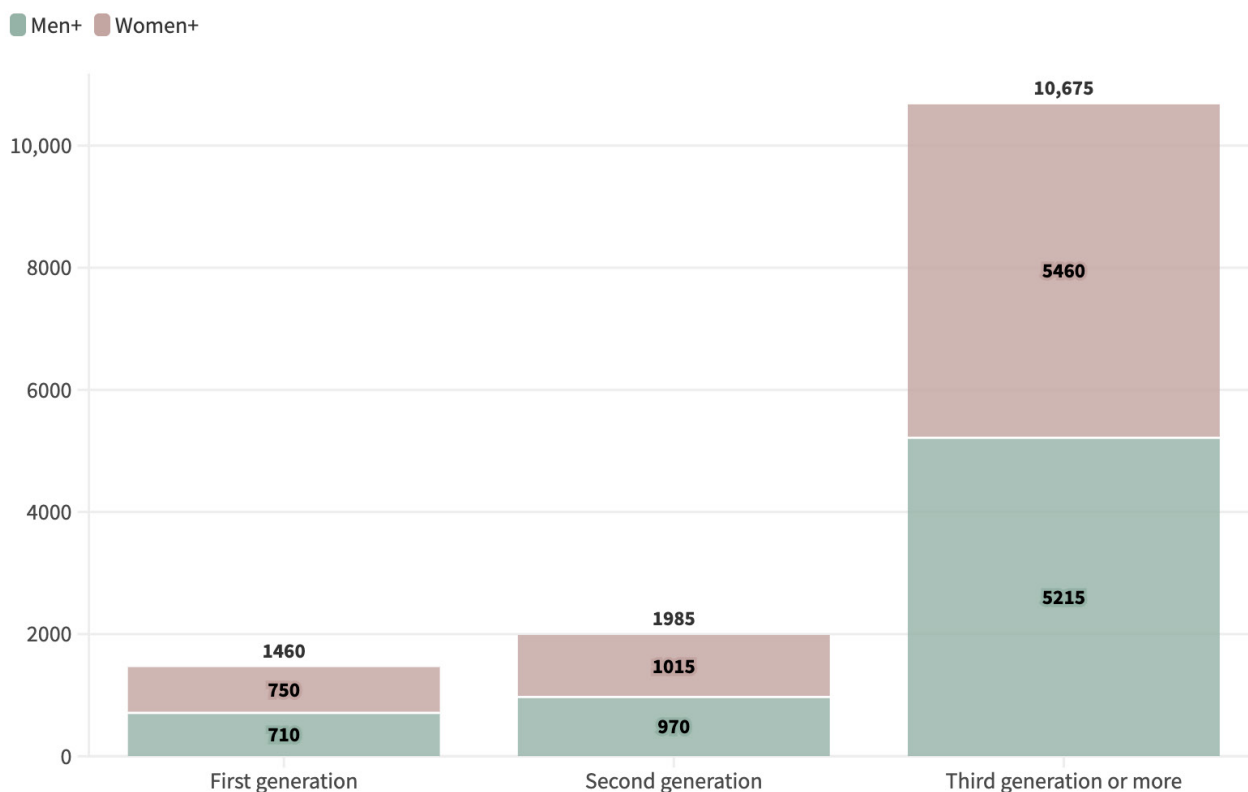
Note: 'Generation status' refers to whether or not the person or the person's parents were born in Canada.

The self-reported ethnocultural identities in Strathmore in 2021 show a dominance of European ethnicities.

The only non-European identities in the top 15 most frequent were Métis at 12th most common (3.2%) and Filipino at 15th (2.8%).

THIS MAY INDICATE A CONTINUATION OF HISTORICAL PATTERNS OF PRIMARILY EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT IN THE AREA.

Ethnic or cultural origin in Strathmore, 2021		Total	Percent of Total Population
1	English	3,435	24.4%
2	German	3,025	21.4%
3	Scottish	2,935	20.8%
4	Canadian	2,510	17.8%
5	Irish	2,510	17.8%
6	French	1,305	9.3%
7	Ukrainian	1,205	8.5%
8	Dutch	750	5.3%
9	British Isles	595	4.2%
10	Norwegian	585	4.1%
11	Polish	545	3.9%
12	Métis	455	3.2%
13	Swedish	405	2.9%
14	Russian	400	2.8%
15	Filipino	390	2.8%

Newcomers in Alberta navigate complex challenges when experiencing violence, particularly intimate partner violence. Their experiences are shaped by multiple factors including isolation, language barriers, immigration status, cultural contexts, and the availability of supportive networks.

One service provider in Alberta observed: "With newcomer immigrant women of colour...they're visible minorities. They deal with that extra added barrier of isolation. There's the language barrier, and so much of their socialization is based on community that it's really tough to leave that situation or even leave the abuser." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020)

Pre-migration context is also a major dimension of newcomers' experiences, with many newcomers in Alberta having come from regions affected by conflict or instability. As one service provider explained: "This shame thing is pretty much not the issue. And the pressure from the family or anything like that. But it's the trauma from war, right, because they come from countries with guerrilla...they have been tortured. They have been, you know, taken by them. There's drug dealers or they are guerrilla people. And so it's different dynamics, but still that compounds to the stress or say, anything coming into this new country." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020)

Challenges and Barriers

Unique Forms of Control

Newcomers in Alberta experience various forms of violence and control that often intersect with their status as immigrants.

Beyond physical violence, these include:

- **Immigration-Related Control.** Some abusive partners manipulate immigration status as a means of control. As one worker in Alberta noted: "And then we have other cases in the shelter where the women's status—and I think this has happened to most of our clients that we've seen at shelter, with that specific issue—where the abuser has used that to exert control over them and basically falsely inform them and told them they were going to be deported. And so they use that as a tactic of control over the women. And that continues after they leave." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020)

- **Social Isolation.** Newcomers may be deliberately isolated from potential support networks. One newcomer woman in Alberta described her experience: "I've talked to many women that they are in a way coerced or lied to come to another country and then they end up here and they're isolated, and it's hard for them to be able to go back. Even to visit family....A lot of times that's in [partner's] hands or it feels like it." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020)

- **Financial Control.** Economic abuse can be particularly damaging for newcomers, who may have limited financial resources or employment opportunities. This can include controlling access to bank accounts, appropriating income, or manipulating benefits like the Canada Child Benefit.

Language and Cultural Barriers

Language barriers can substantially affect newcomers' ability to seek help, understand their rights, or navigate complex service systems. These barriers may prevent them from accessing information about available supports or fully explaining their situation to service providers.

Support Systems and Resources

For survivors of violence, important ways of gaining agency and autonomy include actively seeking information, building connections, and accessing supports that help create safety and stability. Newcomers in particular may benefit from means such as learning English, pursuing education, securing employment, and rebuilding social networks after experiencing violence.

As one newcomer survivor in Alberta said: "It's really hard living with someone that's perpetrating family violence. Is there hope? I've heard that there is, that people can change, but I would want to say to women or men in this type of situation, you don't have to wait around for them.

You need to take care of yourself and your kids. That's your number one priority." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020) Another shared: "That was something really helpful, advice I received both in the States and Canada. When I was coming back up here particularly, I needed...the first priorities were myself and my son. I needed to not worry about anything else." (Giesbrecht et al., 2020)

Supportive Policies

Alberta has implemented policy frameworks that can support newcomers experiencing violence. Employment Standards Code changes implemented in 2018 provide employees who have been with the same employer for at least 90 days with 10 days of unpaid domestic violence leave per year (Government of Alberta, 2018a, 2018b). This allows newcomers to attend to needs such as medical appointments, legal proceedings, or relocating, without fear of losing their employment.

Social support networks serve as important protective factors for newcomers.

According to the 2014 GSS,

94%
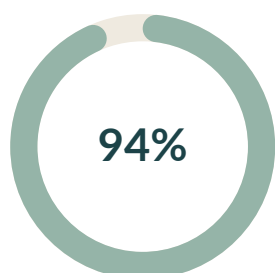
of immigrants had at least one relative or friend not living with them who they felt close to and could call on for help, which may include practical assistance, emotional support, or guidance (Ibrahim, 2018).

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ The population spotlight findings illustrate that gender, age, family structure, cultural background, and disability create distinct patterns of vulnerability. The risks and effects of violence are deeply influenced by long-standing societal forces and marginalizing practices. Intersecting social and economic pressures, coupled with historical legacies of discrimination and exclusion, shape individual and collective realities.

+ The cumulative effect of these factors increases the strain on community support systems, and challenges traditional notions of safety and wellbeing. It also highlights the importance of community-centred responses that take into account the deep complexity of these populations' experiences.

Investment Returns on Prevention

The economic dimensions of violence prevention extend across multiple systems and timeframes. Understanding these effects helps illuminate the full scope of violence's costs to communities and institutions. This section analyzes the economic effects of prevention and response efforts in Strathmore.

THE ECONOMIC BURDEN OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS HIGH FOR INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND GOVERNMENTS.

In Alberta, the cost of addressing family violence for women who fled abuse exceeded $600 million between 2007 and 2012. Of that, $521 million came from public spending on services (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012). Nationally, intimate partner violence costs an estimated $7.4 billion annually, while sexual violence adds approximately $4.8 billion, figures that are likely higher today. (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012).

These costs span multiple systems: healthcare, criminal justice, social services, and employment. In 2023, Alberta reported 336 victims of intimate partner violence per 100,000 people—16 points higher than the national average—highlighting the province's elevated prevalence.

The financial toll includes both direct and indirect costs. Preventing a single case of domestic violence avoids an estimated $11,370 in downstream spending (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012). The burden affects hospitals, courts, shelters, and workplaces, often in the form of lost productivity, prolonged service demand, and long-term care needs.

PRIMARY PREVENTION APPROACHES ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AND GENERATE MEASURABLE SOCIAL RETURNS.

Rather than responding after harm occurs, primary prevention aims to stop violence before it starts.

It targets root causes by shifting cultural and structural conditions, disrupting pathways to perpetration, building protective factors for vulnerable groups, and addressing social determinants of health (Wells et al., 2023).

The social return on investment (SROI) framework helps quantify the value of these efforts. It blends quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methods to calculate how much social value is created relative to investment costs (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023). The result is a ratio that illustrates the monetary benefit of prevention strategies.

SROI analyses of violence prevention consistently show strong returns:

- $2 to $20 returned for every dollar invested (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012).

- 3:1 to 15:1 returns from Calgary housing-focused family violence interventions (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023).

- 4:1 to 7:1 returns from family-focused support programs (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023).

These findings demonstrate that investing in prevention is not only socially effective, it's economically sound.

HOUSING STABILITY IS A POWERFUL PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST VIOLENCE, WITH WIDE-REACHING BENEFITS.

Secure housing plays an important role in preventing violence. For families facing homelessness or domestic violence, access to stable housing can be the difference between safety and continued risk. For example, Calgary's Inn from the Cold program—offering emergency shelter, supportive housing, and prevention services—demonstrated a 6.79:1 return on investment. For every dollar invested, nearly seven dollars in social and economic value were created (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023).

Families repeatedly identify housing stability as essential to avoiding violence. Without it, many report they would remain in unsafe relationships, face street homelessness, or sleep in vehicles.

As one mother in affordable housing stated: "Without this [housing] I wouldn't be on the path to getting my kids back" and "Everything good came with this house. I got my own car, and I got my job, and I got my Permanent Resident card in this house." (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023)

Housing with supportive services creates multiple measurable returns across eight categories: healthcare utilization reductions, social support and community connectedness, access to amenities and community resources, education and literacy improvements, employment and income stability, environmental benefits, reduced justice system interactions, and decreased social services costs (CMHC, 2019).

These returns benefit not only the families receiving housing support but also government systems and the broader community.

HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION THROUGH EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION.

Healthcare providers are important access points for violence prevention. Programs like Alberta's Nurse-Family Partnership—which provides intensive home visits by public health nurses to pregnant women and new mothers—have reduced domestic violence incidents by approximately 37% and delivered a 5.7:1 return on investment. For every dollar spent, nearly six dollars in benefits are generated across health, education, child protection, and employment outcomes.

Healthcare-based prevention strategies include (Montesanti, 2023):

- Promoting parental social and emotional wellbeing.

- Identifying families in need of social or financial support.

- Integrating violence prevention into health promotion.

- Supporting child and adolescent mental health in collaboration with schools.

- Providing education on healthy relationships.

Healthcare systems also play a role in identifying upstream risk factors for violence, such as poverty and food insecurity. For example, Alberta Health Services has developed a poverty screening tool and published guidelines on screening for food insecurity in clinical settings (Montesanti, 2023). Addressing these social determinants helps reduce long-term violence risk.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH SERVE AS KEY LEVERAGE POINTS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS.

The connections between social determinants of health and domestic violence are well-established. Research has demonstrated interrelationships between structural factors like housing stability, income, and food security with interpersonal violence (Montesanti, 2023). When basic determinants of health are not met, people, particularly women and children, become more susceptible to interpersonal violence.

> **"The pandemic may have accelerated and intensified patterns of violence,"** explains one shelter director, **"but the underlying factors— gender inequality, economic insecurity, and gaps in our support systems—were present before and remain with us today."**
>
> *(ACWS, 2023)*

Economic supports directly address financial stressors that contribute to violence. Housing subsidies and rent supplements provide housing stability, workplace policies like parental leave and flexible arrangements serve as protective factors, and food security initiatives decrease family stress (Montesanti, 2023).

Climate change further compounds these social determinants, with research confirming significant correlations between climate events and increases in gender-based violence and sexual assault (Montesanti, 2023). Women are more likely to experience domestic violence because of extreme events such as flooding, and displacement from homes resulting from natural disasters can leave women and girls at heightened risk of experiencing physical or sexual violence.

Effectively addressing social determinants requires understanding how they interact with one another. For example, food and housing insecurity are interrelated issues and key indicators of financial stress, which is known to precipitate domestic violence (Montesanti, 2023). These interconnections highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that address multiple social determinants simultaneously.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES THAT INTEGRATE MULTIPLE INTERVENTIONS DEMONSTRATE THE STRONGEST EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS AND HIGHEST RETURNS.

Evidence indicates that combining multiple interventions—housing, economic support, healthcare, education— offers the highest returns on investment. When families receive integrated supports, they experience improved outcomes across housing stability, health, education, employment, and family cohesion.

The Inn from the Cold program illustrates this comprehensive model. By providing prevention and diversion programming, emergency shelter, and supportive and affordable housing, it addresses diverse needs of families experiencing or at risk of homelessness (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023). This holistic approach contributes to a strong SROI ratio of 6.79:1. Family perspectives highlight how supports went beyond basic needs, connecting them to resources and services that promoted personal wellbeing and stable transitions to new housing.

The economic analysis of prevention programming in Alberta suggests that benefits outweigh costs by as much as 6:1 (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012). Potential cost savings for Alberta are substantial; implementing prevention programs at an approximate cost of $9.6 million could generate net cost-benefits of over $54 million (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012).

THE VALUE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION EXTENDS BEYOND IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC RETURNS TO INCLUDE GENERATIONAL EFFECTS AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING.

While SROI analysis provides a valuable framework for understanding the economic returns of violence prevention, the full value extends beyond what can be readily quantified. Prevention efforts create compounding benefits that extend across generations, particularly through their impact on children.

Research has established links between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and chronic health problems, mental illness, family violence, substance misuse, and imprisonment in adulthood (Wells et al., 2023). By preventing violence and supporting family stability, prevention initiatives help break these intergenerational cycles.

The economic return on investment tells only part of the story. Quotes from survivors show how comprehensive supports open up new avenues for healing.

"We were able to talk about a lot of things that we probably wouldn't have talked about had we not had the support of that group."

Service user

Others expressed what could have helped them when they were navigating the support system.

> **Just having the support and the programs to choose whether or not we wanted to go to the programs or not...yeah I think that was extremely helpful.**
>
> *Service user*

> **Outlines for people as to what services are available, what to watch for, what to be aware of, what they need to know about where they are, what expectations they need to make about the situation that they're finding themselves in.**
>
> *Service user*
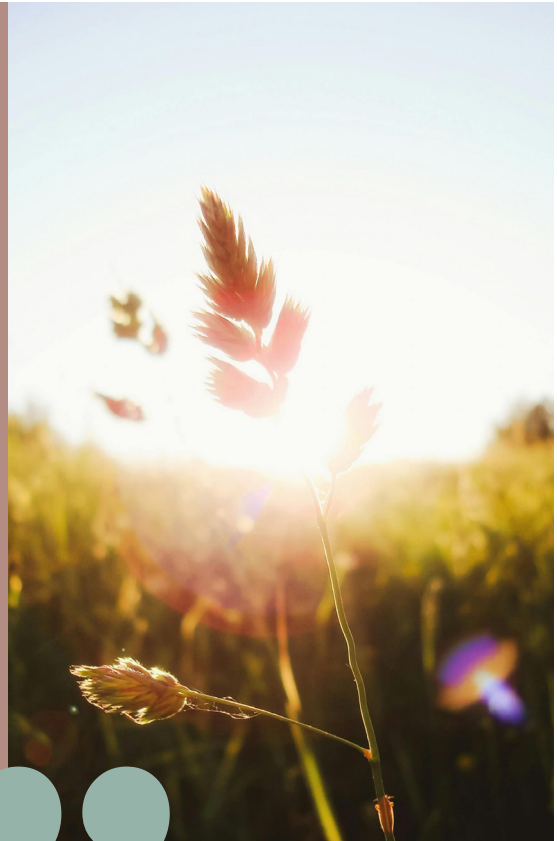
Community wellbeing also improves through violence prevention efforts. While this value is difficult to quantify fully within SROI analyses, the benefits of decreased social disorder, increased community participation, and enhanced social cohesion are important contributors to overall societal wellbeing (Constellation Consulting Group, 2023).

In conclusion, the evidence demonstrates that investing in violence prevention and response creates substantial social and economic returns.

FROM HOUSING STABILITY TO HEALTHCARE INTERVENTIONS TO COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS, PREVENTION INITIATIVES GENERATE VALUE ACROSS MULTIPLE DOMAINS AND FOR MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS.

What does this mean for Strathmore?

+ Violence leaves a wide economic footprint, affecting systems far beyond those tasked with direct response.

+ The data from Strathmore and Alberta demonstrates that investments that reduce risk upstream often generate greater value than responses after harm occurs.

+ These benefits are not only fiscal, but extend to long-term wellbeing, stability, and intergenerational resilience. When prevention efforts address multiple, intersecting needs—housing, income, health, and safety—they don't just reduce costs; they create the conditions that allow individuals and communities to thrive.

Conclusion

The evidence presented throughout this report demonstrates that violence prevention operates within interconnected systems where economic, social, and structural factors converge to create either vulnerability or protection.

The post-pandemic landscape has not returned to pre-crisis stability, instead revealing deepening challenges across multiple domains.

In Strathmore and the communities in the surrounding areas, data shows how housing insecurity extends shelter stays, how mental health service gaps compound crises, how rural isolation amplifies risk, how youth navigate increasingly complex online environments, how discrimination patterns create uneven safety outcomes, and how economic instability undermines family resilience.

The rising demand for crisis services, coupled with the growing obstacles to sustainable exits from violent situations, indicates concerning trends for long-term community safety. These findings illustrate the multifaceted nature of violence prevention, where multiple systems interact to determine outcomes for individuals and families. The relationship between these domains creates an ecosystem in which challenges in one area frequently increase pressures in others. These factors reinforce cycles that become increasingly difficult to interrupt without addressing underlying structural conditions.

THIS COMPLEX INTERPLAY HELPS EXPLAIN WHY, DESPITE INTERVENTION EFFORTS, INDICATORS OF VIOLENCE AND SAFETY CONCERNS CONTINUE TO SHOW CONCERNING PATTERNS IN THE AFTERMATH OF BROADER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISRUPTION.

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Appendix: Program Utilization Data

Introduction

Emergency shelters and community-based outreach programs sit at the confluence of interpersonal violence, housing systems, public health, and local economies. Day-to-day records from such services act as a barometer; shifts in their use can foreshadow and also show symptoms of broader social currents. A ten-year view of True North's data traces how the first pandemic period disrupted help-seeking and how that disruption still reverberates through the organization's daily work.

Data foundations and cautions

True North has collected program data since the early 1990s, with the most consistent methodologies in place from 2014 onward. Several methodological considerations apply:

- **Moment-of-crisis reporting:** Shelter data is recorded at intake, when immediate safety is prioritized. As a result, disclosure may be incomplete.

- **Capacity ceilings:** Outreach enrollment is limited by available staffing. Lower participation figures may not correspond to lower levels of community need. Where feasible, trends are analyzed in relation to the number of individuals served.

- **Instrumentation drift:** Modifications to forms and coding processes, particularly during the pandemic, affect comparability across years. Thus, the analysis prioritizes directional patterns and proportions over absolute counts.

- **Housing exit labels:** Classification of post-shelter destinations and abuse types may have changed over time. To maintain comparability, broader categories are used for decade-long analysis.

DESPITE THESE CONSIDERATIONS, THE DATASET PROVIDES A CONSISTENT BASIS FOR EXAMINING SHIFTS IN SERVICE DEMAND IN THE COMMUNITY.

Emergency Shelter and Outreach Programs

Admissions to programs are a narrowing doorway for help

Shelter entries, as a means of last resort for many, often gauge the frequency and severity of crises that people may be encountering in the home. People seeking help from shelters are often indicative of safety emergencies. Similarly, outreach programs that clients can contact for support may be less pressing emergencies but nonetheless signal safety concerns.

In the years leading up to the pandemic, True North's shelter discharges declined gradually, while outreach discharges remained stable. The onset of movement restrictions reduced access to both services. Recovery since that time has been uneven: shelter entries have increased slightly but remain below pre-pandemic levels, while outreach enrollment has declined.

Although these trends may suggest a decrease in service demand, service utilization, determined in part by capacity—contracted and has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. This is mirrored across the province, where no less than 31,248 people were turned away from shelters, representing four people denied for every one sheltered.

Funding for these supports has proven to be a gap, according to recent data from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (2025).

- In 2023, 30% of surveyed domestic violence shelters reported that they have had to cut programs since April 1, 2023.

- No less than 88% of domestic violence shelters that had to cut programs indicated it was because they did not have enough funding (ACWS, 2025).

- Government wages for domestic violence shelter staff have not increased since 2014-2015. The average wage of domestic violence shelter staff is now 15% lower than what the average Albertan makes.

- 94% of shelter staff who were thinking about leaving their job reported that it was because of insufficient pay.

Discharges from emergency shelters and outreach programs

Source(s): Data provided by True North

Number of people discharged
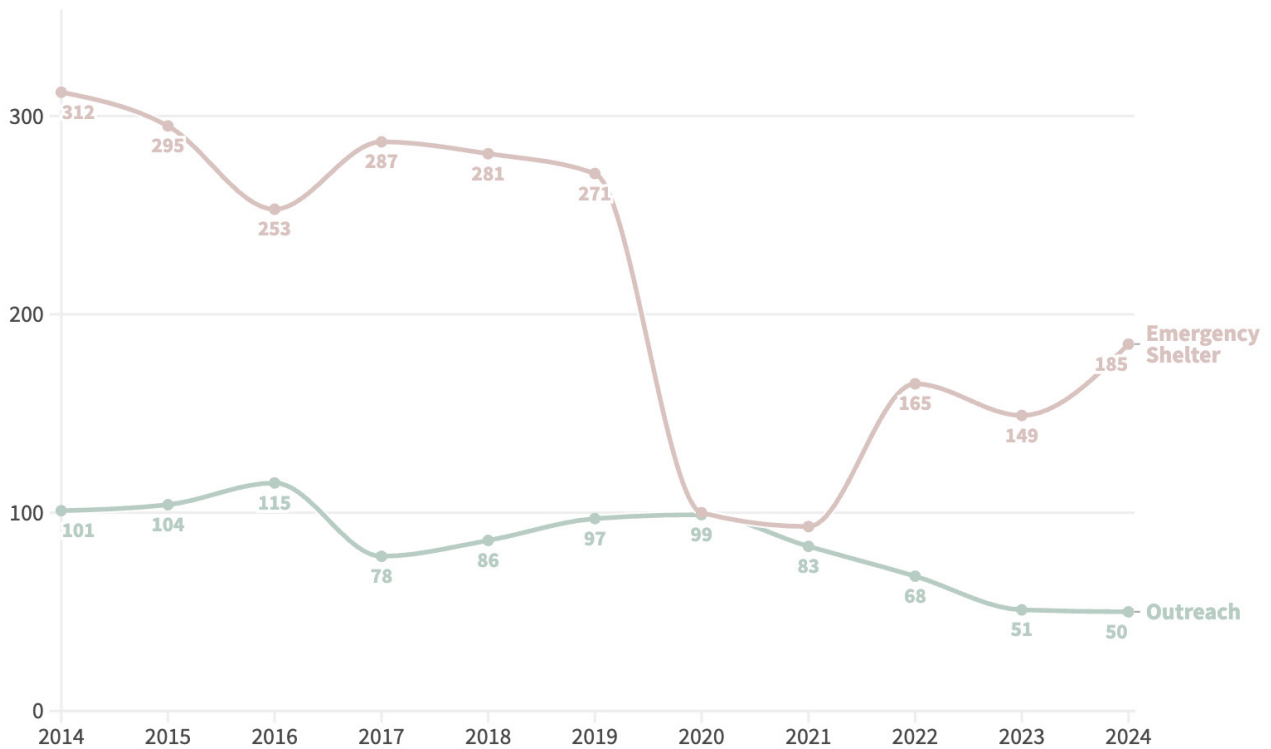
Crisis accommodation is being stretched into longer-term residence

Prior to the pandemic, most residents passed through the emergency shelter relatively quickly. Once restrictions began, stays lengthened and have continued to extend each year.

The facility now shelters fewer residents, yet operates at similar occupancy because each individual remains substantially longer. In effect, beds designed for short-term crisis use have taken on the characteristics of transitional housing.

Average length of stay in the emergency shelter

Length of stay in days

Programme notes indicate that departures to stable housing, such as private rentals, ownership, or social housing, do take place, but are not a consistently achieved outcome due to a number of barriers.

TRANSITIONS TO SHARED ACCOMMODATIONS, TRANSITIONAL HOUSING, OR OTHER VIOLENCE-SPECIFIC SHELTERS, ALTHOUGH NOT LONG-TERM OPTIONS, ARE COMMON.

In fact, in Alberta, recent reports suggest that second-stage units (a critical transition between shelter and longer-term housing) frequently remain full, with a 22% drop in admissions per capita over the past 10 years, suggesting slower turnover.

Types of housing after discharge for True North clients

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Not adjusted for shelter utilization or capacity.

- Addiction Treatment
- Hospital
- Incarceration
- Non-habitation (vehicle, tent)
- Rough: (on the streets)
- Motel Hotel
- Homeless Shelter
- Emerg DV Shelter
- Couch Surfing
- TransitionalHousing
- 3rd Stage Housing
- 2nd Stage DV
- Support Housing
- Student Residence
- Subsidized
- Shared Accomodation
- Rental Market
- Owned Residence
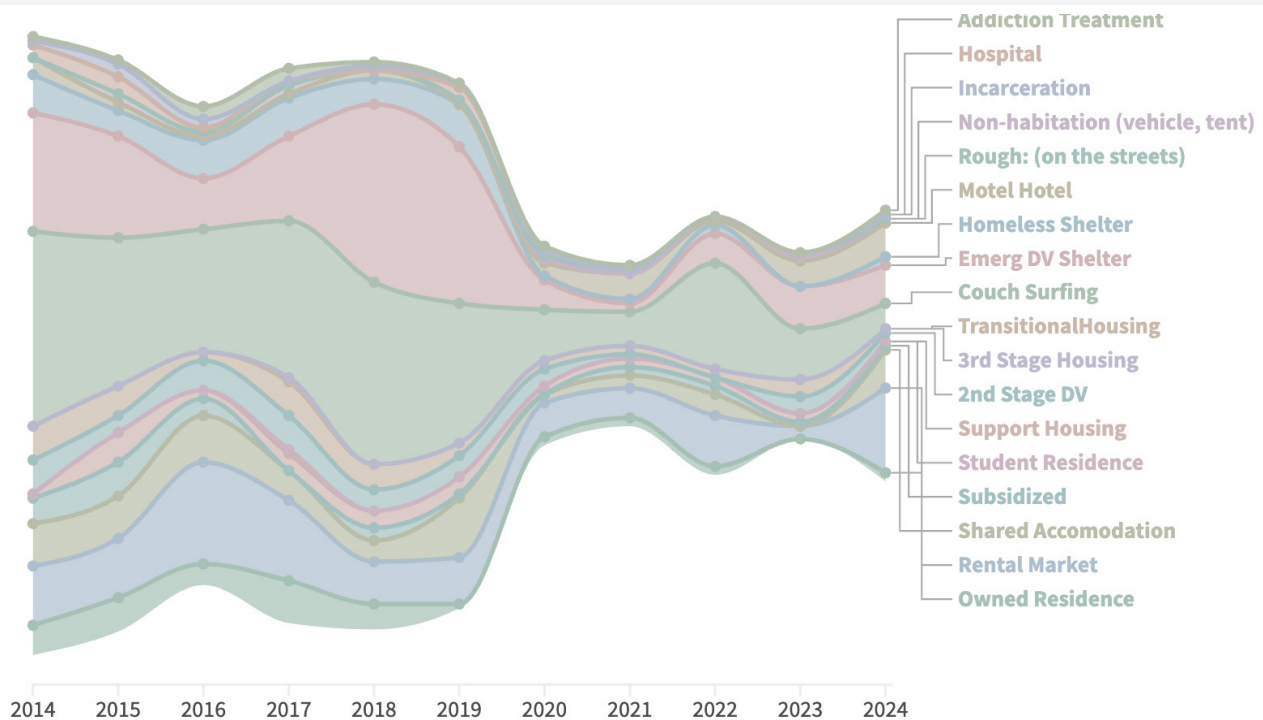
Types of housing after discharge for True North clients

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Not adjusted for shelter utilization or capacity.
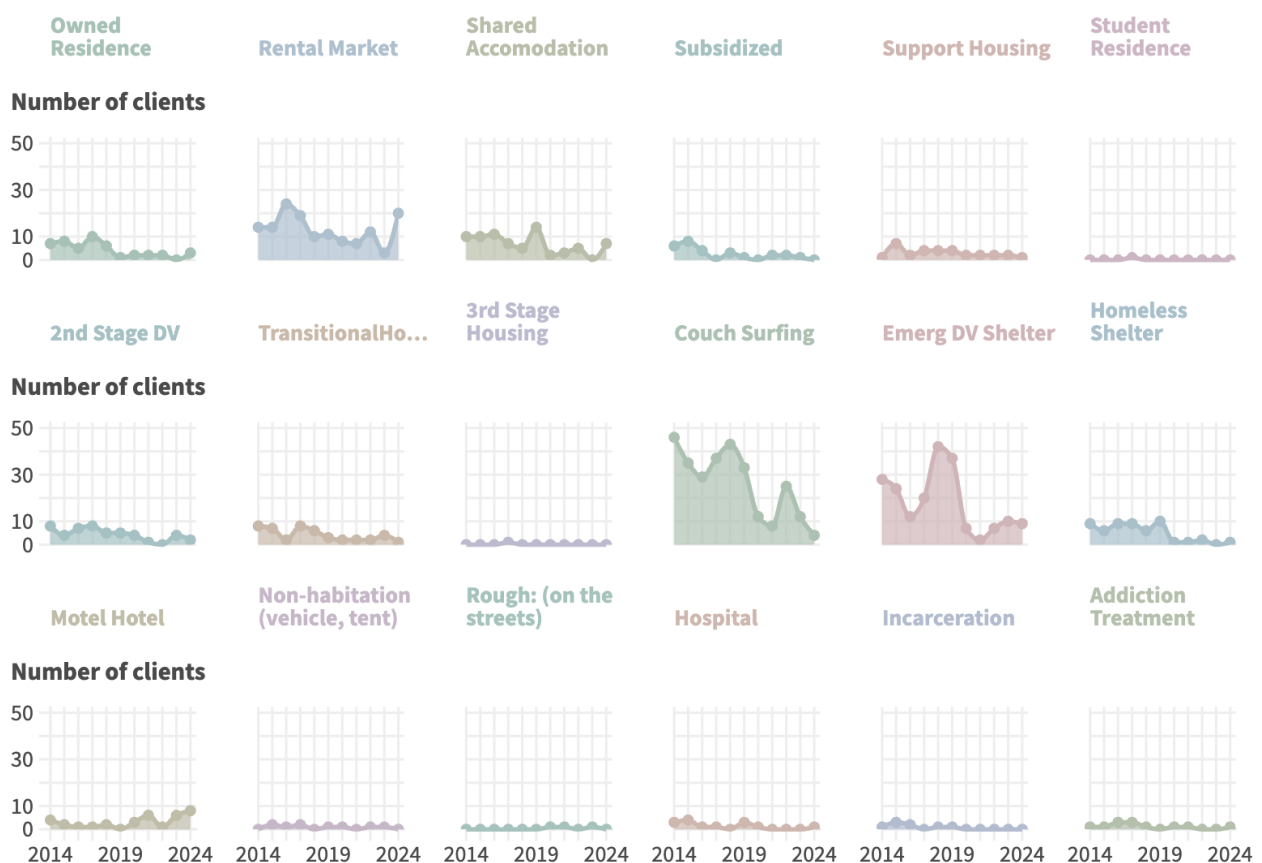
Staff have noted a shortage of affordable rental options in Strathmore, reflecting broader housing availability challenges in the province. These constraints may contribute to longer shelter stays, shifting the shelter's role from a short-term intervention to a longer-term residence for some individuals.

Calls for help are dropping, but more complex

From 2014 to 2017, True North's crisis line more than doubled. Calls held steady through 2018–19 before collapsing 45 percent in 2020 (to 1,561) amid COVID-19 lockdowns. After the pandemic, a strong rebound followed before another decline in 2024, representing just 2.8 percent of Alberta's 53,391 helpline contacts that year.

Calls to help line

Source(s): Data provided by True North

Note: Calls have provided info about programming, crisis support given (suicide intervention), questions about abuse, hang-ups, dead-air, seeking other community resources, etc. The majority of calls are related to domestic violence.

Although total calls are down over the past 2-3 years, a greater proportion of survivors now request shelter than at any point since 2016. This may suggest that community members now find information or support in places other than the crisis line, but that those who do reach out are in more immediate crisis.

## Layered experiences after the pandemic shock

From 2014 onward, clients in True North's outreach program have reported an increasingly complex mix of abuse types at discharge. After a gradual climb through the late 2010s, numbers dropped again due to COVID disruptions to reporting. They accelerated again since then, with an average client reporting about four distinct abuse categories in 2024.

Average count of types of abuse reported per discharged client

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Not adjusted for shelter program utilization or capacity.

Based on the total number of clients discharged from each program. Each report may include up to 13 types of abuse measured by True North.

Average count of types of abuse reported per client
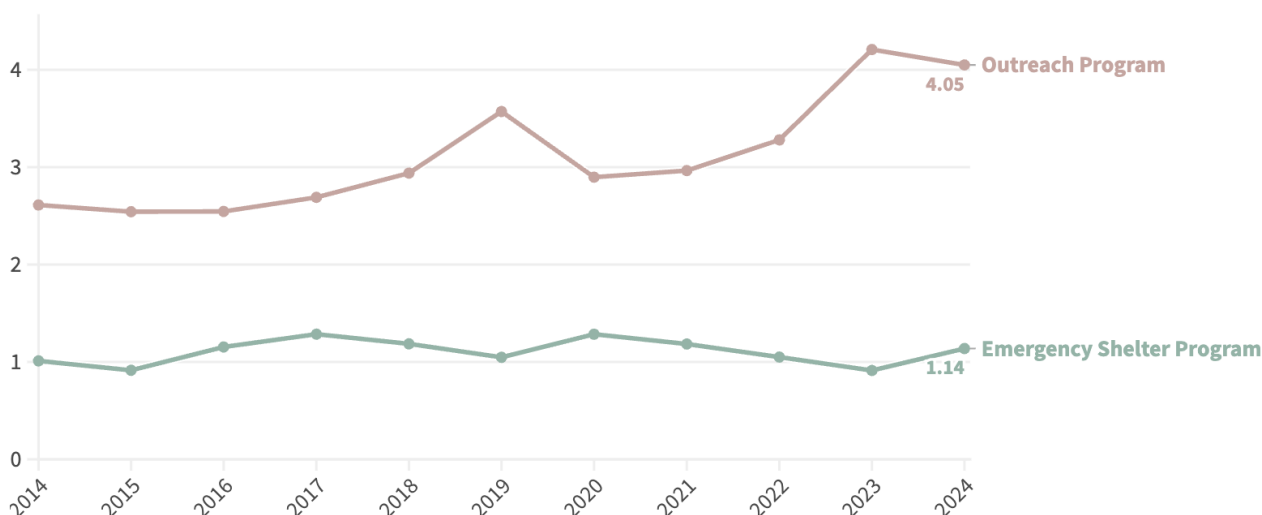
Note: While True North has been operational since 1992, data collection practices have evolved over time. The most consistent data are available from 2014 onward. Despite improvements, recorded figures likely underrepresent actual occurrences due to inconsistencies in staff reporting. In particular, types of abuse documented in emergency shelter services may be underreported relative to outreach programs, even though shelter admissions typically exceed outreach admissions annually.

By contrast, the number of abuse types reported for clients in the emergency shelter shows far less volatility. Its average reports hovered around 1.1 abuse types per client for much of the decade.

The number of abuse types per client in 2024 was similar to that of pre-pandemic levels. However, this may be due to under-reporting in the data.

The data with a detailed breakdown of types of abuse experienced by clients is included below, but the types of abuse recorded for emergency shelter clients should be interpreted with caution when drawing comparisons against the outreach program.

IMPORTANTLY, CLIENT ESCALATION IN HIGH-CRISIS CONDITIONS (IE, THE SHELTER PROGRAM) REDUCES CAPACITY TO RECORD ALL TYPES OF ABUSE ACCURATELY.

Shorter shelter stays and escalated danger levels mean staff must prioritize safety over data collection. By contrast, the outreach program operates longer, outside the acute "fight or flight" context. That extended engagement gives both client and worker time to explore—and therefore report—emotional, physical, financial, neglect and sexual harms more fully.
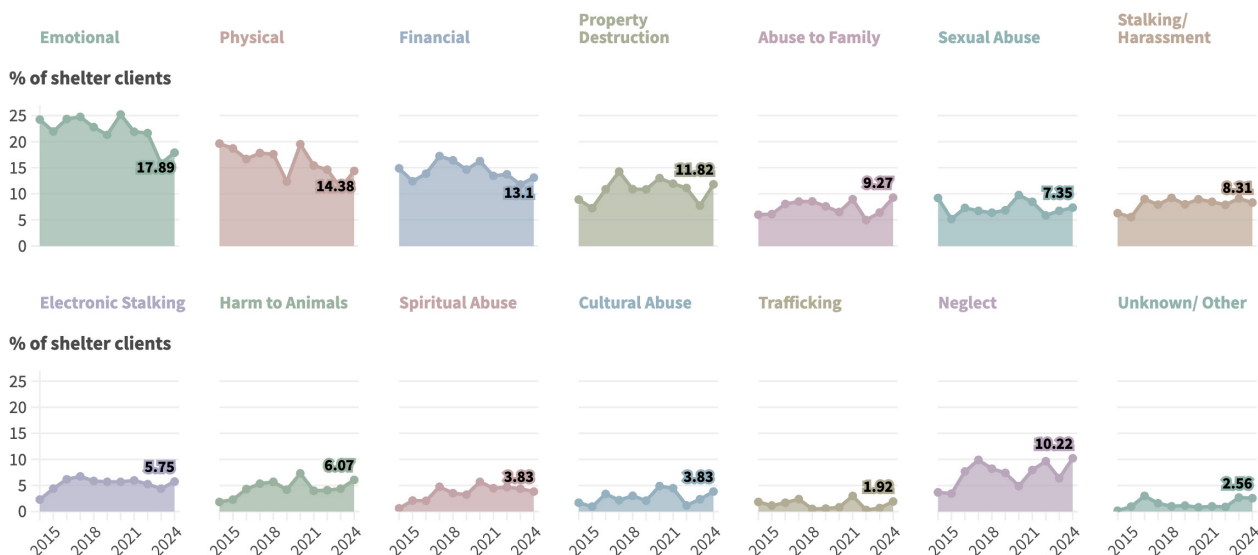
- In the Emergency Shelter program, survivors continue to name emotional, physical and financial abuse as their primary concerns, even as staff have begun to document growing reports of neglect and sexual violence. Behind those steady headline figures lies a more profound truth: many people in crisis shelters face multiple, overlapping harms that don't always make it onto formal assessments. Short stays, intake timing and trauma-response protocols can all limit how fully complexity is captured.

- On the other hand, outreach clients are routinely disclosing a broad spectrum of abuse, from property destruction and family threats to digital stalking, cultural and spiritual harms, and neglect, which are all slowly increasing.

Putting these together, we see two sides of the same coin: the "core" abuses of emotion, physical force, and financial control remain urgent entry points for help, but they sit atop an increasingly complex web of other harms in both settings. To serve everyone equitably, data that captures the full range of survivors' experiences—whether in an emergency bed or ongoing outreach- can guide program development decisions.

Percentage of clients reporting different types of abuse - Client reports from emergency shelter program

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Not adjusted for shelter program utilization or capacity.

Based on the total number of clients discharged from the emergency shelter program

Note: While True North has been operational since 1992, data collection practices have evolved over time. The most consistent data are available from 2014 onward. Despite improvements, recorded figures likely underrepresent actual occurrences due to inconsistencies in staff reporting. In particular, types of abuse documented in emergency shelter services may be underreported relative to outreach programs, even though shelter admissions typically exceed outreach admissions annually.

Percentage of clients reporting different types of abuse - Client reports from outreach program

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Not adjusted for shelter program utilization or capacity.

Based on the total number of clients discharged from the outreach program

Note: While True North has been operational since 1992, data collection practices have evolved over time. The most consistent data are available from 2014 onward. Despite improvements, recorded figures likely underrepresent actual occurrences due to inconsistencies in staff reporting. In particular, types of abuse documented in emergency shelter services may be underreported relative to outreach programs, even though shelter admissions typically exceed outreach admissions annually.

Client profile

Next, understanding the profile of clients in the shelter can also offer important insights for program design. Different demographics may experience harm differently or require different types of support.
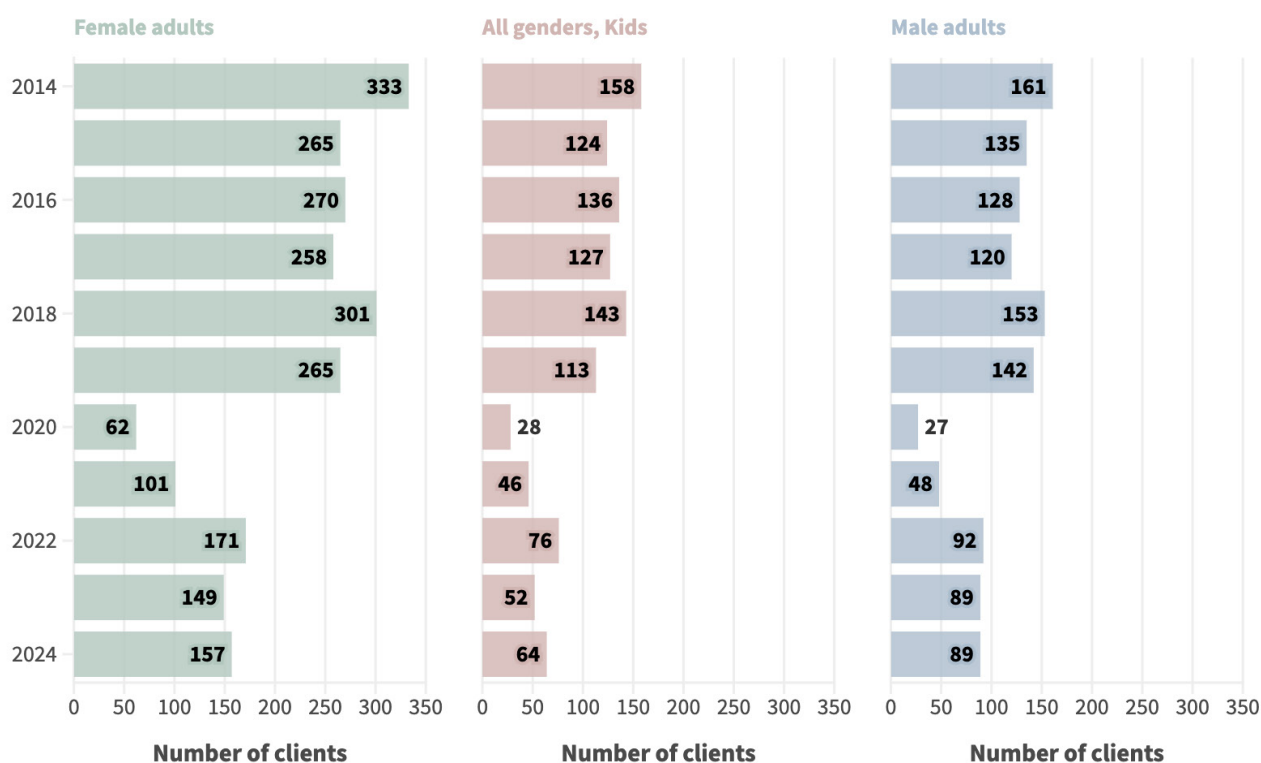
True North's shelter population has remained remarkably consistent across the decade, except for 2020, when fewer children stayed (likely due to safety concerns in the pandemic).

Generally speaking, adults identifying as women and their children account for the overwhelming share of stays, while adult men appear only in small, fluctuating numbers and gender-diverse clients register as single-digit intakes in the most recent records. The pattern is typical of violence-specific shelters and signals that the facility functions primarily as a mother–child safety space. —often close to parity with adult women—adds a developmental lens to every aspect of shelter life, from mealtime routines to counselling approaches.

Children are frequently present in shelters across Alberta too, representing 43% of admissions overall. At the same time, there is still a gap for children's spaces in shelters, as kids represent 41% of those who have to be turned away (Alberta Council of Women's Shelters).

Discharges from emergency shelter by demographic

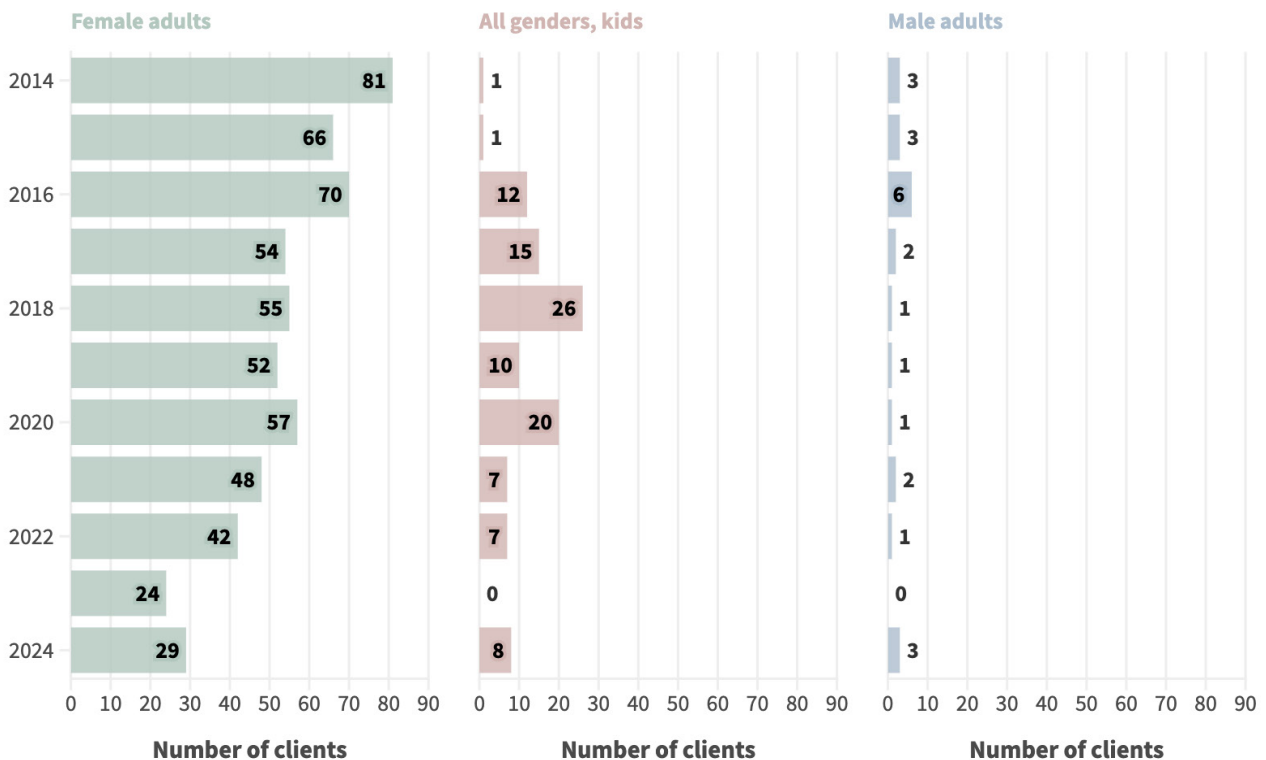**Source(s):** Data provided by True North

Year	Female adults	All genders, Kids	Male adults
2014	333	158	161
	265	124	135
2016	270	136	128
	258	127	120
2018	301	143	153
	265	113	142
2020	62	28	27
	101	46	48
2022	171	76	92
	149	52	89
2024	157	64	89

Number of clients

Note: Shelter users who identified as transgender or non-binary are not included in this graph in order to maintain confidentiality of these individuals. The gender of children is also not recorded. Only adult admissions have a recorded gender.

Outreach clients tend to have a more female user base than the emergency shelter, when considering the ratio of female adults to male adults. Comparing children's service use patterns is more difficult due to the lack of a dedicated children's outreach function, though a family support worker does offer some of these services.

Discharges from outreach program by demographic

Source(s): Data provided by True North

Female adults

Year	Number of clients
2014	81
	66
2016	70
	54
2018	55
	52
2020	57
	48
2022	42
	24
2024	29

All genders, kids

Year	Number of clients
2014	1
	1
2016	12
	15
2018	26
	10
2020	20
	7
2022	7
	0
2024	8

Male adults

Year	Number of clients
2014	3
	3
2016	6
	2
2018	1
	1
2020	1
	2
2022	1
	0
2024	3

Note: Shelter users who identified as transgender or non-binary are not included in this graph in order to maintain confidentiality of these individuals. The gender of children is also not recorded. Only adult admissions have a recorded gender. There is no children's outreach at this time, though a family support worker does complete some child outreach duties.

Notably, the fact that there is relative demographic stability over the years despite an increasing complexity (more diversity in types of abuse) underscores that a new client mix is not necessarily driving observed utilization shifts, but rather, that a similar population is experiencing a different service journey or set of needs in recent years.

Services delivered inside the shelter

When clients access the shelter, they may access a diverse array of services beyond a room and bed. Daily support activities in the shelter primarily concentrate on immediacies: food, clothing, safety planning, and information provision. Across the decade, these core tasks hold the highest share of service interactions. Case planning appears with similar frequency, reflecting the program's emphasis on structured exit pathways even as housing options remain scarce.

Percentage of emergency shelter clients accessing different services

Based on number of clients discharged from the emergency shelter program
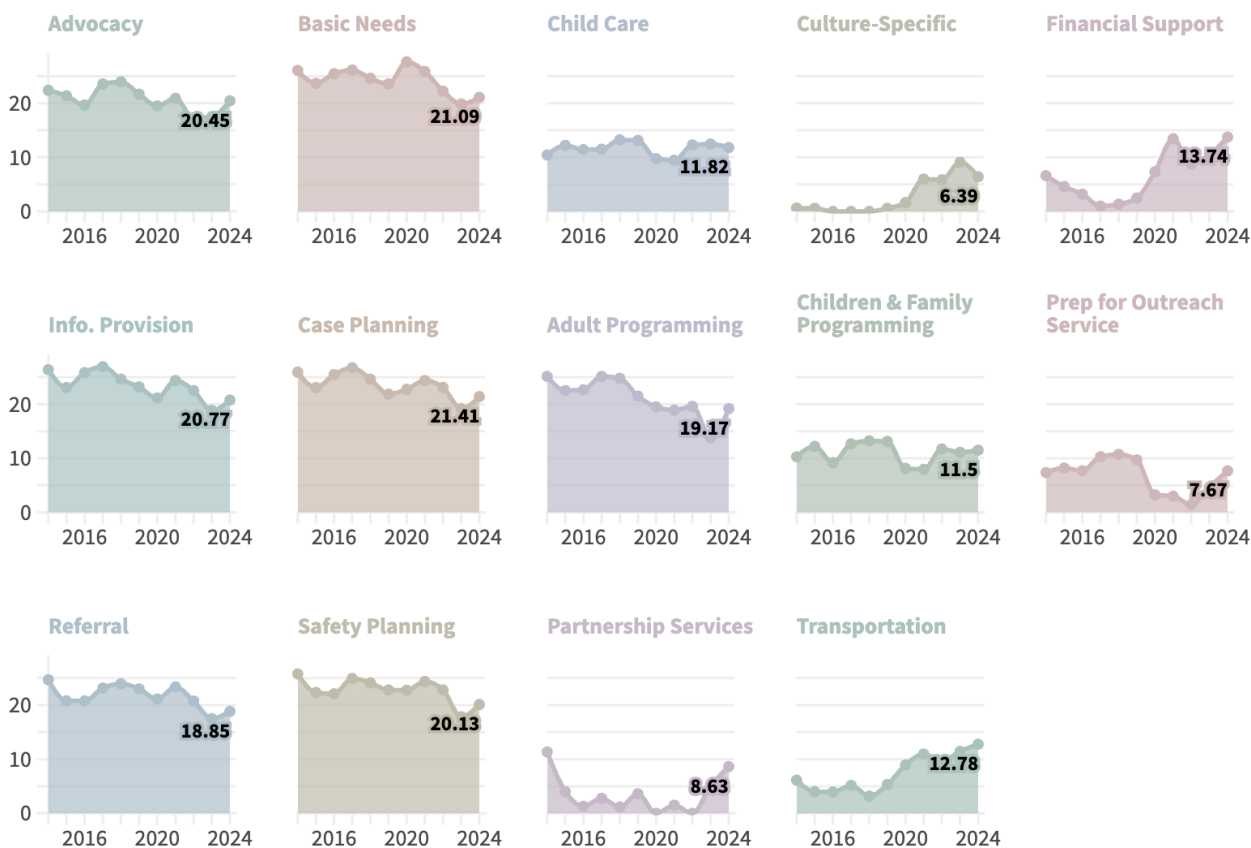
Note: While True North has been operational since 1992, data collection practices have evolved over time. The most consistent data are available from 2014 onward. Despite improvements, recorded figures likely underrepresent actual occurrences due to inconsistencies in staff reporting. Data was not recorded for the following services after 2014, and therefore is not reported: Indigenous Programming, Health Services, Housing Support, Legal Support, and Life Skills.

Referrals for emergency shelter clients to outside organizations have also shown variance over the years. Referrals for some services have increased after COVID, while others have remained steady. The most common referrals for emergency shelter clients are other community agencies (WYN, Trellis), housing, and basic needs.

Referrals for emergency shelter clients as a percent of total emergency shelter clients

Based on total number of client discharged from emergency shelter

Small multiples of line charts showing referral percentages from 2014 to 2024 for the following categories, with latest-year values labeled:

- Aboriginal Supports — 3.22
- Addictions Counselling — 0.46
- Agency Services (In-House Outreach) — 3.07
- Community Agency (WYN/Trellis) — 7.36
- Basic Needs (foodbank) — 4.75
- Counselling — 2.76
- Education Sources — 1.07
- Other DV Shelter — 2.91
- Employment — 0.77
- Financial — 3.68
- Housing — 4.91
- Immigrant — 0.61
- Legal and Justice — 1.99
- Medical Health — 3.22
- Mental Health — 2.91
- Parenting Supports — 1.23
- Police RCMP — 2.76
- Pregnancy Outreach — 0
- 2nd, 3rd stage Shelter — 1.38
- Seniors Services — 0.15
- Sexual Assault — 0.31
- Services for Children — 0.77
- Workplace — 0.46
- CFSA — 1.84
- DFNA — 0
- Spiritual Services & Support — 0
- Suicide — 1.23
- Victim Services — 0.31
- Other — 0.31

Note: The data reflect types of abuse recorded by True North services. While True North has been operational since 1992, data collection practices have evolved over time. The most consistent data are available from 2014 onward. Despite improvements, recorded figures likely underrepresent actual occurrences due to inconsistencies in staff reporting.

Services and referrals in outreach

Outreach interactions share similarities with emergency shelter services but also include distinct features. Referrals are primarily made to community agencies (WYN, Trellis), counselling, and financial services. Referral destinations that have seen a drop include the RCMP, other DV sheltered, and legal and justice. The rise in the average number of referrals per outreach client suggests increasing case complexity rather than increasing client volume. This may be associated with individuals accessing services later in the harm timeline, often managing multiple concurrent issues.

Referrals for outreach clients made as a percent of total outreach shelter clients discharged

Source(s): Data provided by True North

Although emergency shelter residents also receive external referrals, the outreach program serves primarily as a connection point to broader community systems, coordinating longer-term supports after immediate safety concerns have been addressed.

The combination of basic needs support and intensive safety planning in True North's service profile corresponds with longer program stays, indicating that staff use this time to provide structured assistance until clients can exit safely.

The expanding referral network within outreach also aligns with increases in multi-faceted abuse disclosures, reflecting a broader pattern of complex and interconnected needs.

TOGETHER, DEMOGRAPHICS, SERVICE DELIVERY, AND REFERRAL PATTERNS CONFIRM THAT PANDEMIC-ERA DISRUPTIONS DID NOT CHANGE WHO NEEDS HELP SO MUCH AS HOW LONG THEY NEED IT AND HOW MANY SYSTEMS MUST BE ENGAGED BEFORE STABILITY IS RESTORED.

Public Education

In addition to the direct supports that True North offers, preventing violence before it occurs is another core activity. This is done through the public education program.

Public education—delivered through workshops, classroom presentations, community-event booths, and online awareness campaigns—anchors any evidence-based violence-prevention strategy. It raises baseline literacy about risk, drives early help-seeking, and shifts community norms long before crisis services intervene.

People reached through public education (workshops, presentations, community booths, online campaigns)

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Community Engagement

■ Reported on Calendar Year (January to December) ■ Reported on Fiscal Year (April to March)
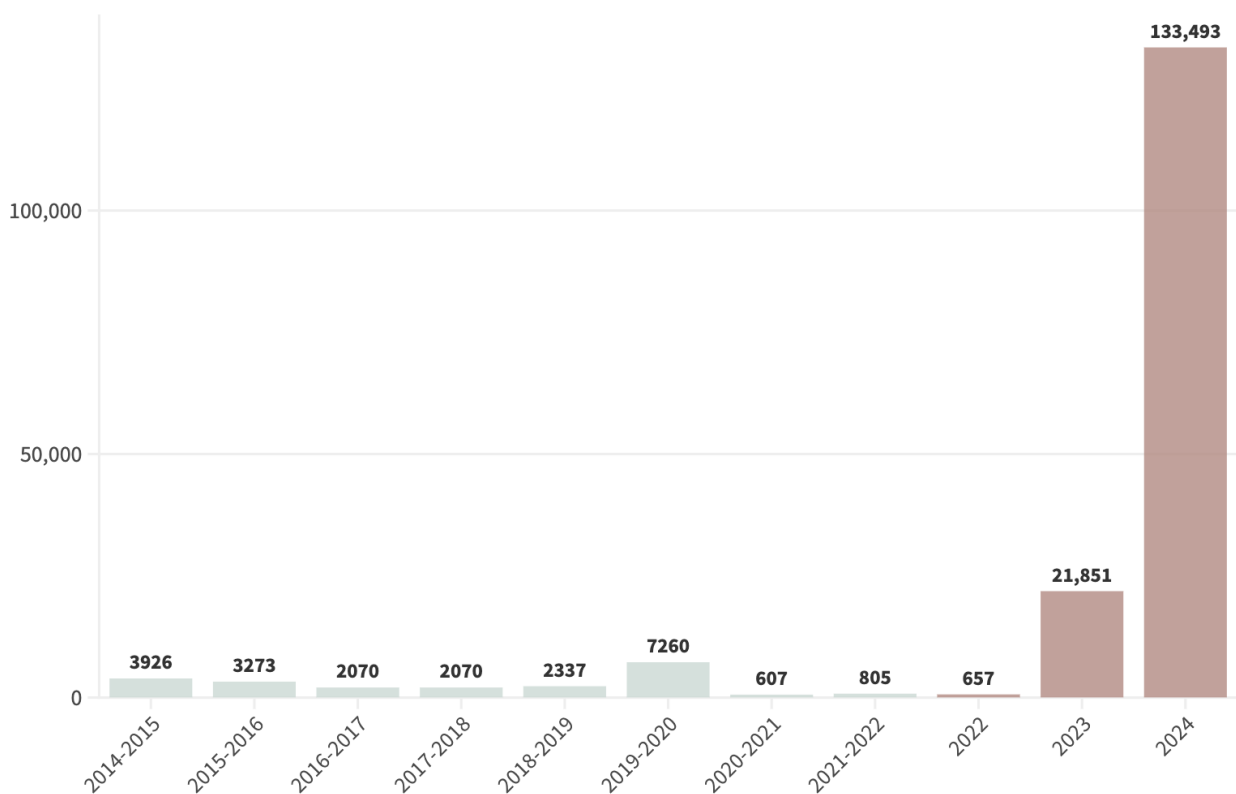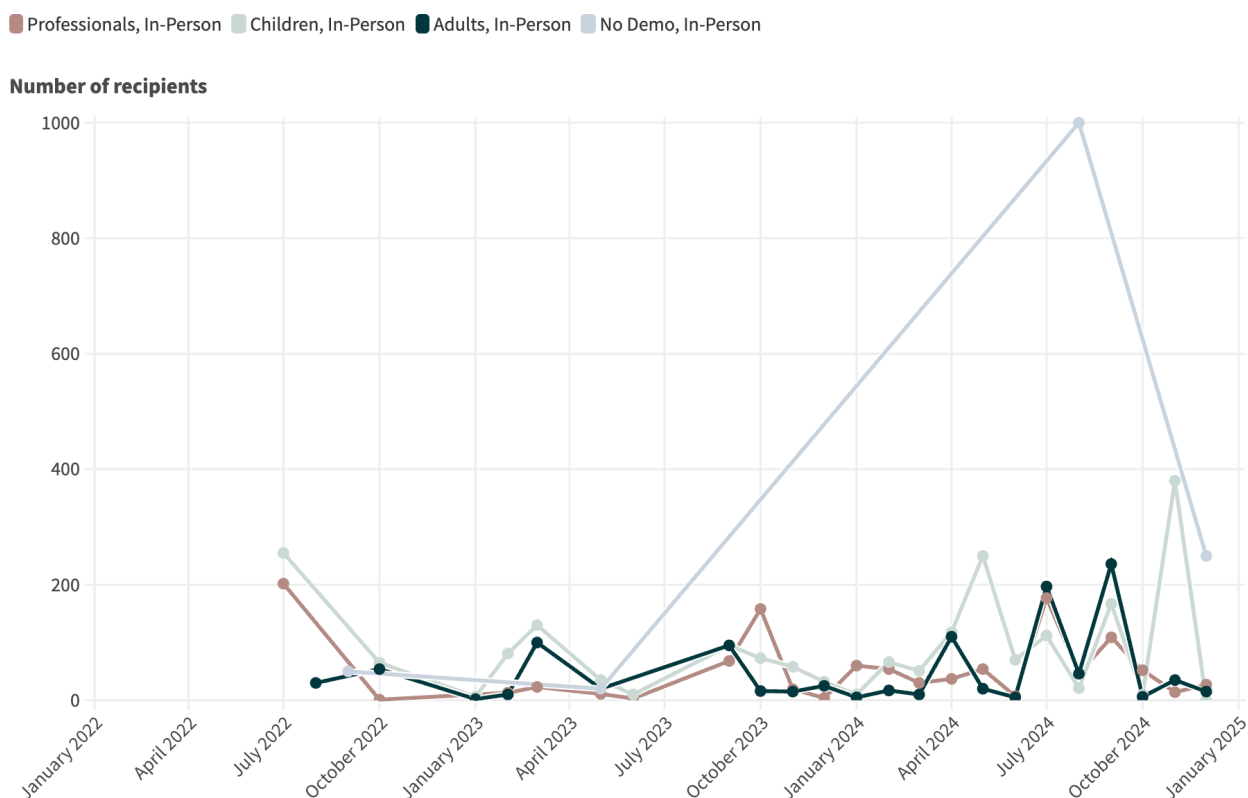

Note: Public Education program reflects demographics collected from in-school presentations, community workshops and community events (booths, fairs), and awareness & health campaigns (often online). In 2023, True North began recognizing distinct users who interacted with its online content (social media, website, and newsletter). Prior to 2023, users were recorded as totals, not unique users.

Since September 2023, True North has deliberately scaled and diversified this function, moving from occasional outreach to a sustained, multi-channel program. Digital platforms now reach tens of thousands monthly, while in-person sessions, though smaller, occur more consistently and engage varied audiences. Together, they have pushed total annual reach from fewer than 1,000 individuals in 2022 to more than 133,000 in 2024. This growth signals organizational intent rather than a simple spike in demand: staff allocated resources, scheduled campaigns, and adopted analytics to track unique online users—an improvement over pre-2023 data, which counted aggregate contacts only. Notably, True North is the only known provider of public education related to domestic violence operating in Strathmore, making it a critical channel for engagement.

People reached through public education by medium of communication (workshops, presentations, community booths, online campaigns)

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Community Engagement

Number of people
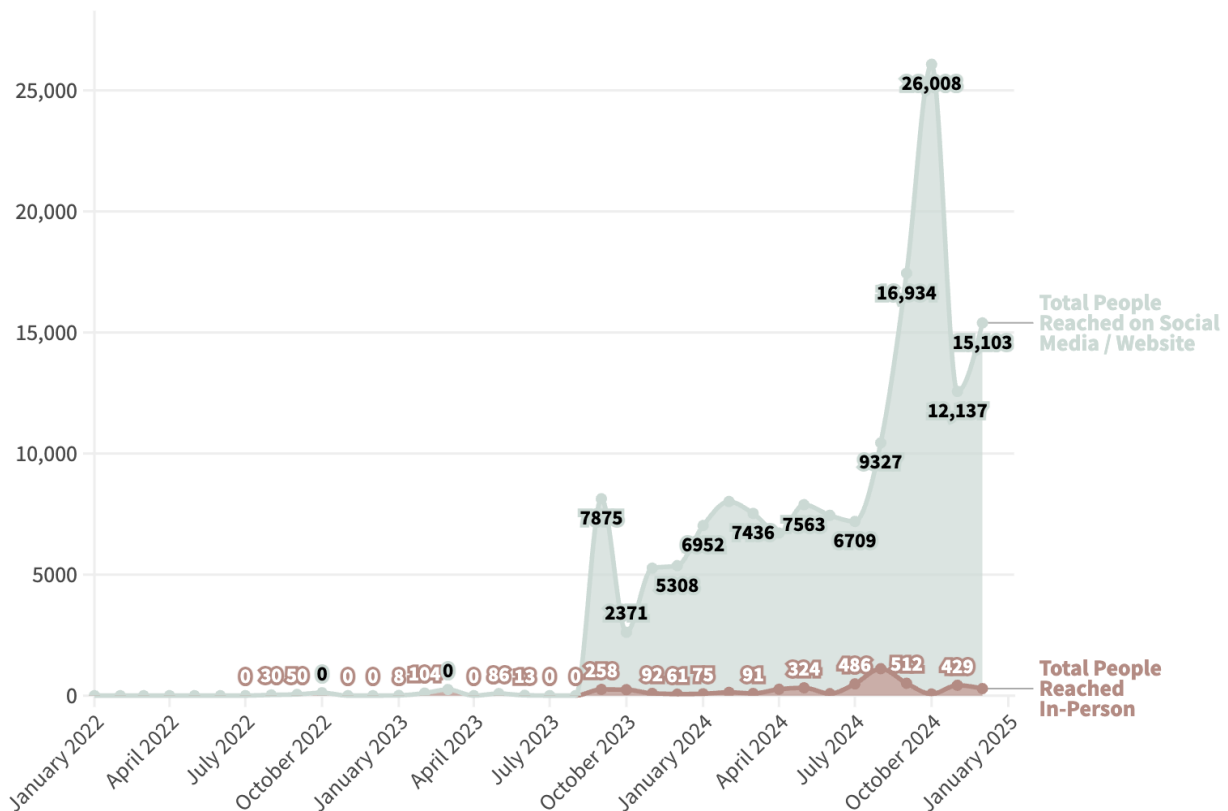
Note: Public Education program reflects demographics collected from in-school presentations, community workshops and community events (booths, fairs), and awareness & health campaigns (often online). In 2023, True North began recognizing distinct users who interacted with its online content (social media, website, and newsletter). Prior to 2023, users were recorded as totals, not unique users.

A larger footprint, however, does not by itself guarantee impact. Digital and face-to-face formats offer different depths of interaction; they complement rather than substitute for one another. Further metrics and evaluation would be required to measure this impact.

Demographics of in-person public education recipients (workshops, presentations, community booths, online campaigns)

Source(s): Data provided by True North - Community Engagement

Note: Public Education program reflects demographics collected from in-school presentations, community workshops and community events (booths, fairs), and awareness & health campaigns (often online). Reporting templates tallied participants in groupings of Professionals, Adults (Parents), Children, and No Demographics (large groups like parade attendees).

Importantly, in-person sessions continue to attract a wide range of professionals, caregivers, and children, ensuring prevention messages circulate among those who influence culture and those at immediate risk. This is largely attributable to the rebuilding of the outreach program after COVID.

In sum, True North's strategic expansion of public education since 2023 strengthens the preventive ecosystem by amplifying reach, diversifying audiences, and embedding violence-prevention literacy across multiple touchpoints.

References

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), Strength in Numbers: The 2023-2024 ACWS Report on Domestic Violence Shelter Impact in Alberta (2025).

Appendix: Systems Map Analysis

Introduction

In an age of rapidly shifting social conditions, using an evidence-informed approach is essential to achieving lasting impact. Violence and abuse—pressing social issues in their own right—also sit at the intersection of many others: safety, income, housing, mental health, and family relationships. Preventing and responding to violence, then, requires more than targeted services. It calls for attention to the broader leverage points that influence how communities function.

COMMUNITIES REDUCE VIOLENCE MOST EFFECTIVELY WHEN THEY INVEST ACROSS THE FULL PREVENTION SPECTRUM—FROM BROAD CULTURAL CHANGE TO LONG-TERM REINTEGRATION. ONE TOOL THAT CAN SUPPORT THIS WORK IS A SYSTEMS MAP, DEVELOPED BY HELPSEEKER TECHNOLOGIES FOR TRUE NORTH.

Systems Mapping Methodology

The HelpSeeker team undertook a multi-step data-gathering and processing approach focused on standardizing organizational-level information. This methodology ensured consistency, comparability, and comprehensiveness in how organizations were represented.

1. Defining the Scope and Identifying Data Sources

Our first step was to establish the scope of the systems map and what organizations would be included. This involved identifying relevant organizations using three key data sources:

- Publicly available datasets, including the Canada Revenue Agency's charities registry and regional resource directories.

- Targeted online keyword searches, which helped surface additional organizations not captured in standard datasets.

- The Google Places API, to ensure that all entities included were using the most recent information available.

2. Web Scraping and Data Extraction

Once the list of organizations was compiled, we used a custom web scraping tool to systematically visit the websites of each identified organization. The scraper collected all publicly available text content from these sites to build a raw dataset.

To transform this unstructured data into a usable format, we applied generative AI tools to extract and structure key pieces of information. This included:

- Organizational names and contact information (e.g., addresses, phone numbers, emails)

- Rich service descriptions derived from site content, capturing what the organization does in its own words

The use of generative AI allowed for consistent formatting and depth across the organizations mapped, enabling effective comparison and synthesis later in the mapping process.

Figure 1: Web scrapers use extract and structure information from websites
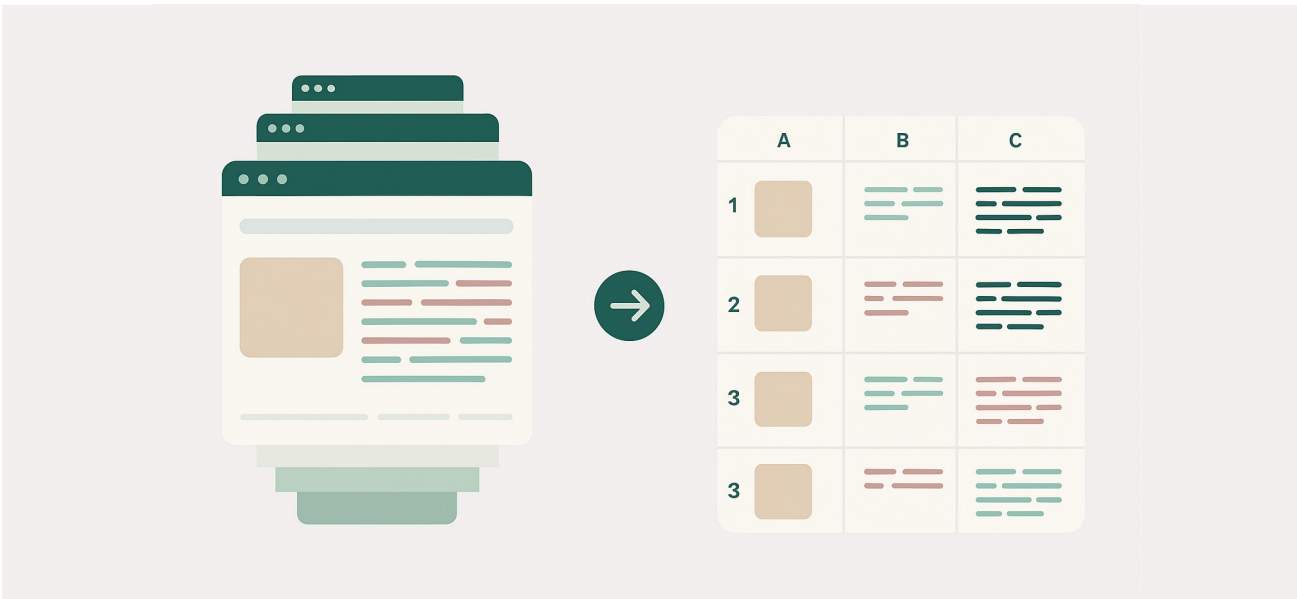
Figure 2: Number of organizations identified on the systems map

Number of organizations on systems map

Strathmore listings	154
Wheatland county listings	110
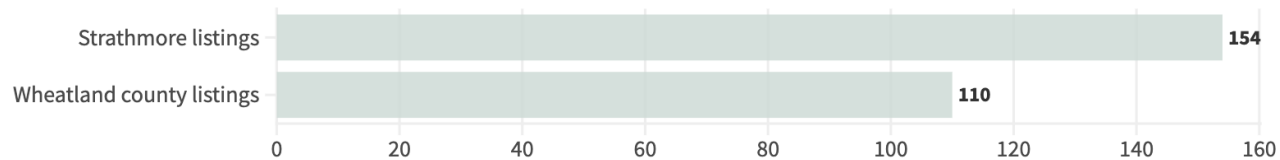
3. Standardization and Quality Assurance

To ensure uniformity and reliability, the collected data was structured at the organizational level only. Program- or service-level details were not included in this phase. Each organization's information was distilled into a standardized format to allow for "apples to apples" comparisons.

We implemented a "human-in-the-loop" process for quality assurance. Team members manually reviewed samples of entries throughout the workflow to confirm the accuracy of extracted information and the relevance of the content. This helped catch outliers and ensure that the AI outputs were reasonable and aligned with the source material.

Figure 3: Sample of the Systems Map

Organization Name	About Us - Visible	About Us - URL	Address
Strathmore Wheatland Addictions Team (SWAT)	Strathmore Wheatland Addictions Team..	http://swatteam.ca/who-is-swat/	Hwy 1 RR 1
Hope Flies	Hope Flies works to give an..	https://hopeflies.ca/about-us/	112 Cambrille Cres
Strathmore Overnight Shelter	It seems obvious, but..	https://www.strathmoreovernightshelter.ca	102 Canal Gardens
Wheatland County Food Bank	The Wheatland County Food Bank..	https://wheatlandfoodbank.ca/	122 Canal Gardens
Wheatland County Counselling (Strathmore)	Wheatland County Counselling offers..	https://www.wheatlandcountycounselling	95 Brent Blvd Unit 101
The Strathmore & Wheatland County Christmas Hamper	The Strathmore & Wheatland County..	https://www.christmashampersociety.com	Po Box 2492 Stn Main
5 For Life Early Childhood	Promoting positive early childhood..	https://5forlife.ca/who-we-are	650 Westchester Rd
Meals on Wheels	We are facing challenging times,..	https://www.wfcss.org/meals-on-wheels	84 Cambridge Glen Dr
Calgary Rural Primary Care Network	The Calgary Rural Primary Care..	http://www.crpcn.ca/	320 2 St #101

Statement of Positionality and Interpretive Lens

The systems map that anchors this brief captures what is visible for services and supports, not what is effective. It lists who offers what, to whom, and, occasionally, when. It does not confirm scale, outcomes, client experience, or cultural fit of the services.
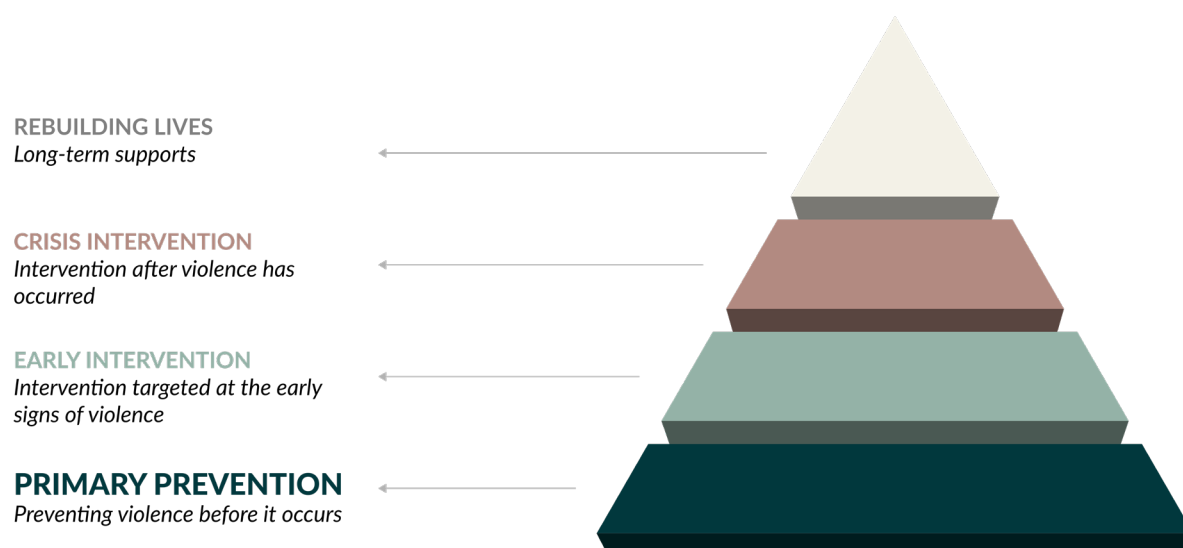
The dataset also carries an inherent selection bias. HelpSeeker scraped, cleaned, and classified publicly available material; choices about keywords and domains that were explored inevitably shaped the final corpus. Our positionality as an outsider to Strathmore and relying on what is publicly available, therefore, is reflected in the data, and many informal or Indigenous community supports likely remain out of view. We are also mindful of the consent that would be required to map First Nations services, and have thus opted not to include them without obtaining proper consent.

At the same time, however, the overall trends in what is visible are an incredibly powerful tool for understanding where the leverage points for impact in Strathmore and Wheatland County may lie.

To make use of this dataset, HelpSeeker applied a four-level prevention continuum recognized in provincial public health and justice policy. This framework offers a shared language for planning and coordination, helps identify where current energy is concentrated, and suggests where deeper investment or integration may be needed. It enables communities to assess their prevention capacity without relying on incomplete performance evidence.

Prevention Continuum Framework

Figure 4: Alberta's Primary Prevention Framework

REBUILDING LIVES
Long-term supports

CRISIS INTERVENTION
Intervention after violence has occurred

EARLY INTERVENTION
Intervention targeted at the early signs of violence

PRIMARY PREVENTION
Preventing violence before it occurs

Source: Wells, L. (2022). Understanding primary prevention. University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence.

Level	Operational Focus	Example Activities*	Intended Result
Primary Prevention	Change social norms and structural conditions before violence starts.	Universal education, broad community engagement initiatives, school-based curricula, workplace culture programs, and policy reform.	Lower incidence of violence across the whole population.
Secondary Prevention	Interrupt early warning signs or elevated risk.	Screening, safety planning, emergency shelter, crisis counselling, short-term protective measures.	Rapid de-escalation and prevention of immediate harm.
Tertiary Prevention	Address established patterns of violence.	Long-term therapy, legal advocacy, extended transitional housing, perpetrator intervention programs.	Recovery, accountability, and relapse prevention.
Rebuilding Lives	Support sustained reintegration and generational change.	Multi-year mentorship, career development, restorative justice, affordable permanent housing with wraparound supports after violence has occurred.	Stable, violence-free lives and community healing from experiences of violence.

Activities illustrate the scope of each level; the list is not exhaustive.

It is important to note that this framework does carry subjectivity, depending on where, when, how, and by whom the service is accessed. It very well may be the case that an organization can operate across multiple levels of prevention. Our place in this analysis is not necessarily to claim or quantify what organizations fall into what levels of prevention, but to draw out overall trends and cross-cutting themes from the systems map that can strategically guide True North and other community leaders as they continue to evolve the social safety net.

This analysis also surfaces and applies an important tension in how we think about prevention. On one hand, prevention can be understood as a deliberate practice or professional philosophy—programs and services designed to intervene early, reduce risks, and build protective factors. On the other hand, prevention also exists at the level of broader community conditions: the structural, social, and economic environments that either support well-being or contribute to vulnerability.

These two interpretations are deeply interconnected, yet often considered in isolation. As such, we do not assess whether Strathmore and Wheatland County are "under-resourced" in prevention by looking at programming alone. Rather, we focus on identifying trends overall on what is present in the map, while also acknowledging that much of the community's capacity for preventing and responding to violence may lie outside of our traditional definitions of prevention work.

Findings

1. Under-Signalled Primary Prevention

Strathmore–Wheatland's service map includes several crisis-focused listings. While this suggests robust capacity, it reflects a component of the system built to respond to harm more than prevent it. The high visibility of crisis services can, and should be, reassuring. At the same time, though, it should not be read to create a false sense of sufficiency among funders and policymakers, who may interpret this saturation as justification to shift focus away from prevention.

Scattered across the service map of Strathmore–Wheatland are programs that speak the language of community, but not necessarily the language of traditional prevention definitions. Arts organizations, libraries, sports clubs, early-years initiatives, and multicultural festivals are present and active. Their mission statements centre on creativity, inclusion, literacy, and belonging. Yet, few, if any, explicitly reference violence, gender norms, or bystander intervention.

This is notable because primary prevention often lives in the soft infrastructure of the community: shared spaces, reciprocal relationships, and cultures of participation. These elements create the social conditions that reduce the risk of violence over time, and social cohesion is a well-researched preventative factor against violence. But when programs contributing to that fabric do not name their role in prevention, they risk being overlooked in strategic planning and underrepresented in system assessments. They may do the work, but remain outside the frame.

Therefore, opportunities that could be leveraged to build community capacity for prevention include:

- **Visibility through explicit framing.** Programs that connect belonging-oriented language to prevention outcomes rise higher in system scans and funding reviews, indicating an accessible pathway to greater recognition.

- **Micro-content integration.** Brief violence prevention prompts embedded in routine moments (e.g., registration, orientation) could be a realistic mechanism for aligning soft infrastructure with prevention goals.

- **Cross-sector touchpoints.** Collaborations pairing community spaces with crisis-response agencies could be natural amplifiers for prevention messaging.

These programs represent upstream potential channels for primary prevention work, but they sit at the periphery of visibility. The map arguably contains prevention-supporting assets, yet without a clear label or metric, they float beneath the surface of policy dialogue. While response infrastructure commands attention, the quiet architecture of cohesion may remain an untapped opportunity for building violence prevention capacity.

2. The "Violence Void" in Organizational Language

Across the Strathmore–Wheatland service map, only a small subset of listings explicitly name violence or abuse in them. Terms like domestic violence, coercive control, or sexual assault appear are not mentioned, with the exception of True North. More often, services are framed in general terms—well-being, health, support, or healing—even when their activities clearly intersect with violence prevention or response.

This matters because language itself functions as a system infrastructure. It shapes who sees themselves in a service, who feels entitled to access it, and who understands its purpose. A person experiencing something as serious as sexual assault may not connect with a program labelled simply as "wellness." Similarly, providers operating within the same ecosystem may miss opportunities to align or collaborate if violence remains unnamed.

Further, the choice of neutral or euphemistic terminology walks a line. On one hand, soft language can reduce stigma, offering a gentler entry point: that person experiencing coercive control could feel safer reaching out to a general support group. On the other hand, it can dilute collective recognition of violence as a systemic issue, fragmenting the very discourse needed for coordinated prevention.

AS A RESULT, A POTENTIAL LEVERAGE POINT FOR IMPACT FOR TRUE NORTH AS THEY BUILD COMMUNITY PREVENTION CAPACITY MAY BE, THEREFORE, CULTIVATING A SHIFT IN SELF-PERCEPTION. MANY ORGANIZATIONS IN STRATHMORE–WHEATLAND ARE ALREADY WORKING UPSTREAM—THROUGH FAMILY SUPPORTS, WELLNESS PROGRAMS, HOUSING STABILITY, OR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. BUT WITHOUT EXPLICIT FRAMING, THEY MAY NOT RECOGNIZE OR ARTICULATE THEIR PLACE WITHIN THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION CONTINUUM. HELPING THESE GROUPS NAME THEIR ROLE AND ALIGN THEIR MESSAGING DOESN'T JUST INCREASE VISIBILITY—IT ACTIVATES THEM AS PARTNERS IN A SHARED SYSTEM RESPONSE.

Prevention visibility isn't just a programmatic challenge—it's semantic. Even where services exist, the language used to describe them can blur their function and limit the system's ability to act early. Without shared vocabulary, the continuum fractures: interventions may be present, but the narrative that links them remains incomplete.

3. Reintegration Supports May Lack Coordination

Listings tied to long-term recovery —such as transitional housing, employment supports, mentorship networks, and life-skills workshops—are present on the Strathmore–Wheatland service map. But they tend to appear as isolated offerings. Few describe themselves as part of a sequenced or coordinated pathway guiding individuals from post-crisis stabilization to long-term autonomy.

This fragmented visibility carries weight. Reintegration to the community and healing after violence occurs—whether as a survivor or former perpetrator—requires sustained access to housing, income, health care, and community belonging. When these supports are siloed, individuals are left to navigate a patchwork system, often with limited guidance. The result is diminished leverage: services that could interrupt cycles of revictimization or reoffending may lose their effectiveness when not positioned as part of a continuum.

GIVEN THIS OBSERVATION, A POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPACT COULD BE TO ARTICULATE A COMMUNITY-WIDE APPROACH THAT LINKS THESE SUPPORTS INTO A VISIBLE CONTINUUM CAN CHANGE THIS DYNAMIC.

Integration clarifies next steps, enhances partnership models, improves referrals, enables strategic case planning, and reinforces that healing is a collective responsibility, not the burden of a single program. By positioning reintegration and healing after violence as an intentional, shared process—not an afterthought—the region can build its capacity to prevent future violence and strengthen long-term community safety.

4. Indigenous-Led Structural Prevention vs. Western Service Dominance

Within the service landscape, programs based in Siksika Nation bring a distinct perspective. They emphasize healing, language revitalization, and sovereignty—grounded practices that address the roots of violence through cultural continuity. Yet across the broader dataset, Western clinical and charitable paradigms seem to be more prevalent. These include counselling, case management, and service brokerage models rooted in Euro-Canadian systems.

THIS IMBALANCE FUNCTIONS AS A STRUCTURAL LIMITATION FOR FIRST NATIONS MEMBERS WHO MIGHT NEED SUPPORT. WHEN INDIGENOUS MODALITIES OF CARE ARE UNDERREPRESENTED, THE SYSTEM COULD LOSE KEY LEVERAGE POINTS FOR ADDRESSING THE COLONIAL CONDITIONS THAT DRIVE INTERGENERATIONAL HARM. IT ALSO REVEALS ASYMMETRIES IN HOW PREVENTION IS RESOURCED AND RECOGNIZED.

A potential avenue for change, therefore, may lie in working with First Nations to redistribute recognize, and resource, and influence Indigenous-led models—treating them not as adjuncts to mainstream services in the community, but as central to the architecture of prevention. This requires shifting how systems track, describe, and evaluate prevention efforts, ensuring Indigenous modalities are not only visible but structurally supported.

Enhancing cultural safety in non-Indigenous services, increasing geographic access to culturally grounded programs, and co-creating shared definitions of prevention with First Nations partners are critical strategies. Ultimately, system transformation depends not just on broader access to services, but on whose definitions of healing and safety are allowed to lead.

5. Town-Centred Visibility, Rural Gaps

Service listings in Strathmore–Wheatland show a clear spatial pattern: dense clusters within Strathmore itself, a tapering presence across nearby hamlets, and a second pulse of activity along Calgary's rural fringe. In contrast, areas like Carseland, Gleichen, and Rockyford, for example, appear sparsely populated on the service map. Whether this reflects a true absence of services or blind spots in data collection, the result is the same—reduced visibility for community members.

Geography mediates every point along the prevention continuum. When services are distant, transportation is limited, or visibility is low, the threshold for early help-seeking rises. Sustained engagement becomes harder to maintain, especially in rural settings where stigma may already deter disclosure.

THESE GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES SHIFT THE CONVERSATION: RATHER THAN FOCUSING SOLELY ON ADDING MORE PROGRAMS, SYSTEMS MAY NEED TO INVEST IN ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE—TRANSPORTATION, OUTREACH, AND DIGITAL ACCESS—THAT LOWERS BARRIERS ACROSS ALL PREVENTION LEVELS.

This geographic lens adds nuance to our thesis. The visibility and accessibility of the prevention continuum, therefore, is not just thematic—it's spatial. Strong service presence in the urban core coexists with low-density service zones elsewhere, where leverage may depend less on new programs and more on structural access. In this way, the map not only illustrates what's available, but where systems must stretch to ensure that prevention is truly equitable.

Takeaways for True North

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The first through-line is that service visibility ≠ sufficiency, underscoring a distinction between the mere presence of service providers and the actual accessibility and adequacy of support for individuals at risk.

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The systems map may present a seemingly comprehensive inventory of response agencies and programs operating within the region. However, the sheer volume of listed resources does not necessarily translate into a cohesive and easily navigable network for those who need assistance.

Several factors contribute to this disconnect. Information about services may be fragmented, difficult to locate, or presented in a way that is not easily understood by the intended users. Eligibility criteria, intake processes, and service delivery models can vary significantly across agencies, creating barriers for individuals attempting to access the right support at the right time.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights a concerning absence of explicit language surrounding violence or violence prevention within the documented services. This lack of clear articulation inadvertently obscures the recognition of potential risks and diffuses the assignment of responsibility for addressing violence-related issues. Consequently, even a dense catalogue of services may fail to provide sufficient protection and support if the underlying issues are not identified and addressed within the system's framework. This invisibility can perpetuate cycles of vulnerability and hinder effective intervention.

2

The second key through-line identified is that leverage for primary prevention lies in narrative alignment.

This principle emphasizes that the true potential for systemic change and effective prevention is not solely dependent on individual programs or interventions existing, but rather on the degree to which these diverse elements coalesce around a shared understanding and articulation of their roles in prevention. When upstream programs, such as those focused on early childhood development or community well-being, explicitly acknowledge their contribution to preventing downstream crises, the system begins to function with greater coherence.

Similarly, the integration of Indigenous worldviews, which often hold holistic perspectives on individual and community well-being and emphasize preventative approaches, can significantly enrich the overall narrative. Finally, when reintegration supports for individuals who have experienced challenges are framed as crucial components of a preventative strategy, the system can more intentionally meet its commitment to long-term solutions rather than simply managing immediate crises. It is not the individual listing of each service that holds the key to transformative change, but rather the collective story that these services tell – or fail to tell– about the pathways to prevention.

A clear and consistent narrative that emphasizes shared responsibility and interconnectedness among various stakeholders can effectively shape where collective energy and resources are directed to proactively address the root causes of vulnerability.

While acknowledging that meaningful enhancement of this system will necessitate a sustained and thoughtful effort over time, the initial insights derived from the review of the Strathmore and Wheatland service network point to a critical and potentially high-impact starting point: building alignment across the community.

Shared understanding and common language around prevention is a foundational step towards systemic change. The choices made by the community – what it collectively chooses to notice as significant issues, what it explicitly names as priorities for intervention, and what it actively nurtures in terms of supportive relationships and preventative initiatives – will ultimately determine the trajectory of the system. Without a shared vision and a coherent narrative, the system risks remaining a patchwork, potentially missing critical opportunities for early intervention and failing to effectively address the underlying drivers of vulnerability.

Appendix: Survivor Interviews

Insights from Survivors of Violence

UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THOSE AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT THAT ARE EQUITABLE, EFFECTIVE, AND RESPONSIVE.

This report shares insights from a group of participants in Southern Alberta who generously contributed their perspectives on what supports have been helpful, what gaps they have encountered, and what services they would like to see strengthened.

Our approach to interviewing and analysis was guided by trauma-informed and strengths-based principles.

We focused on centering participants' agency and insights, with careful attention to both individual narratives and the broader systemic contexts in which they are situated. The themes presented in this report reflect the experiences shared and the structural realities that shape them.

Context for the Qualitative Study

True North, formerly known as Wheatland Crisis Society, is in the process of transitioning into a new space with the goal of strengthening and expanding its support for individuals affected by violence in Wheatland County.

AS PART OF THIS TRANSITION, TRUE NORTH ENGAGED HELPSEEKER TO DEEPEN ITS UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY'S EVOLVING SOCIAL NEEDS, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THOSE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY VIOLENCE.

Interviews were designed to complement a community social needs assessment and to ensure that lived experience meaningfully informs future programming and services.

Methods

The semi-structured interviewing process was developed collaboratively to ensure that questions were sensitive, accessible, and centred on understanding support needs without re-traumatization or presumption.

1. SAMPLE

All participants self-identified as having experienced violence or abuse in the past. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before beginning the conversation.

2. PARTICIPATION

Interviewees chose between audio recording or note-taking, with all audio recordings securely deleted following transcription.

Identifying details were removed from the transcriptions to protect participant privacy, and data access was limited to a small, designated team at HelpSeeker. Participants received an honorarium in recognition of their time and insights.

3. ETHICS

Ethical considerations emphasized confidentiality, respect for autonomy, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Direct quotes are used in the report only where appropriate and are presented in a way that maintains participant anonymity.

4. THEMATIC & SOMATIC INSIGHTS

While somatic observations were incorporated where available to enrich the analysis, not all interviews included somatic notes, and their integration is used cautiously to ensure accuracy and respect.

The findings presented reflect careful thematic analysis of participant narratives, centered on amplifying strengths, identifying systemic gaps, and contributing to a fuller understanding of the community's support landscape.

Themes from the Interviews

During the interviews, nine themes emerged. Each theme is related to the others, but pulled out as a spotlight in order to give space to each unique finding and honour the breadth of input we gathered.

Theme 1: Autonomy and Choice as Foundations for Healing

Theme 2: The Value of Community and Relational Support

Theme 3: Systems Navigation and Practical Support

Theme 4: Recognition and Understanding of Abuse Dynamics

Theme 5: Rebuilding Identity and Confidence Beyond Survival

Theme 6: Prevention Through Education and Early Awareness

Theme 7: Employment and Financial Empowerment

Theme 8: Navigating Social and Cultural Expectations

Theme 9: Trauma Responses and Healing Processes

Theme 1: Autonomy and Choice as Foundations for Healing

On autonomy and choice

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of having agency in their healing journeys, particularly through the ability to make their own choices after experiences where their autonomy had been compromised.

HAVING PERSONAL SPACE, PRIVACY, AND THE FREEDOM TO OPT IN OR OUT OF PROGRAMMING EMERGED AS SIGNIFICANT COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTS.

Participants described how choice in everyday matters—from participation in activities to personal time management—not only provided immediate comfort but also served as an important element in rebuilding their sense of self and dignity.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of having agency in their healing journeys, particularly through the ability to make their own choices after experiences where their autonomy had been compromised. The contrast between environments that respected personal boundaries versus those that imposed mandatory participation highlighted how critical autonomy is to creating conditions where survivors can begin to heal.

Participant Perspectives

Creating personal boundaries through physical space emerged as essential for emotional well-being.

> **"Previously in my learning situation, I wasn't allowed to have privacy. So it feels very nice to have my own space to decompress here."**

The respectful approach of service providers who recognized individual agency made a significant difference in participants' experiences.

> **"I think that would be the biggest difference is the understanding here. I think they're very nice about offering choice here."**

Having invitations rather than obligations allowed participants to engage on their own terms.

> **"They put a movie night on sometimes, so you can join if you'd like, or you can stay in your room if you'd like... They put a sticky on everybody's door about the craft session, and you could sign your name."**

Personalized support that adapted to changing needs helped participants feel respected and understood.

> **"I think the workers do a really good job at like keeping up to date with like how your progress is going and assisting anywhere that like you need."**

The Power of Choice

Participants' emphasis on being able to make their own choices about what programming they access demonstrates how crucial autonomy is for rebuilding confidence and self-determination after experiences where control may have been systematically restricted.

Theme 2: The Value of Community and Relational Support

On community and relational support

Participants highlighted the profound impact of genuine community connections and supportive relationships on their journey toward safety and healing.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS WHO UNDERSTOOD THEIR EXPERIENCES—WHETHER STAFF, OTHER SHELTER RESIDENTS, OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS—CREATED AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PARTICIPANTS FELT TRULY SEEN AND SUPPORTED.

For example, shared mealtimes, group activities, and even informal conversations were identified as powerful moments that facilitated connection and reduced isolation.

Significantly, these community supports were most valued when they offered participants both connection and respect, without judgment or prescribed expectations, allowing participants to engage authentically at their own comfort level.

Participant Perspectives

Shared everyday experiences created natural opportunities for meaningful connection.

> "I like that there's shared mealtimes. That helps a lot. I feel like that's how I first started opening up to people here, through sitting down and having dinner together, those kind of things."

Group-based approaches offered unique benefits through shared understanding with others navigating similar challenges.

> "We were able to get into a mother-daughter workshop... that was absolutely fabulous. And we both look back at it now and go, wow... just the opportunity to be able to work through our issues with groups of other people that were going through the same thing."

Having professional support that recognized the importance of both individual and shared experiences reduced feelings of isolation.

> **"[It helped] just knowing that I wasn't alone in the process. I had that counsellor... I knew that we were both having the support that we needed to make the decisions that made the best sense for us."**

The quality of relationships with service providers shaped participants' overall experiences of support.

> **"The staff here [act like] we're all people and they treat [us] really nice here."**

These community connections appear to be particularly meaningful for participants as they navigate their healing journeys, offering validation, practical support, and the opportunity to rebuild trust in relationships.

Theme 3: Systems Navigation and Practical Support

On navigating systems

Participants articulated significant challenges navigating complex systems—legal, financial, housing, and social services—particularly during times of crisis and transition.

THEIR STORIES REVEALED A "MISSING MIDDLE" WHERE THOSE NOT IN ABSOLUTE CRISIS BUT STILL IN VULNERABLE POSITIONS STRUGGLED TO ACCESS THE TAILORED SUPPORT THEY NEEDED.

Participants valued concrete, practical assistance that helped bridge these gaps, such as housing search support, help understanding government systems, and financial guidance.

When participants received this targeted practical support, they reported feeling more confident and capable of taking the necessary steps toward independence and safety, underscoring how instrumental these navigation services are in facilitating sustainable transitions.

Participant Perspectives

The gap in social assistance for those looking to relocate to a safer place created significant barriers to accessing needed support.

> "I feel like there's a gap there... it's either you're incredibly poor and have absolutely nothing and live on the street and then you can get a lot of resources or you're out of luck unless you're really rich. There's just nothing in the middle there."

Having someone to navigate complex systems on behalf of participants, particularly with legal matters, emerged as a critical unmet need.

> "[We need] advocates. Absolutely advocates... My entire objective has been to get my son away from [the abuser]... and there's nobody to advocate for [us]"

Flexibility with program timelines reduced stress and allowed for more sustainable transitions.

> "The deadline [for how long you can stay] kind of puts a little bit of like crunch time... but then the staff reassured me if you have nowhere else to go, we won't just kick you out."

Practical considerations like affordable transportation significantly affected participants' ability to access resources and rebuild independence.

> "I moved here to work...I spent about a year there and then COVID happened and I got laid off... I don't have a vehicle either, so it's kind of difficult to like get out of the house."

This focus on practical navigation support highlights how essential these services are for helping participants move from crisis to stability, addressing concrete barriers while empowering them toward sustainable independence.

At the same time, when supports don't exist, navigation efforts can only take survivors so far. Improving supports for survivors means ensuring they are not only accessible but also available in the first place.

Theme 4: Recognition and Understanding of Abuse Dynamics

On recognizing abuse dynamics

A recurring theme across interviews was the challenge participants faced in recognizing and naming their experiences as abuse, particularly when those experiences didn't align with common stereotypes about domestic violence.

Participants described the gradual realization of harmful patterns in their relationships, often facilitated through education, supportive conversations, or exposure to healthier relationship dynamics.

THIS RECOGNITION WAS DESCRIBED AS ONE OF THE STEPS THAT ENABLED PARTICIPANTS TO VALIDATE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND SEEK APPROPRIATE HELP.

Insights from participants emphasize the importance of broader public education about the full spectrum of abuse, including psychological, financial, and coercive control, to help individuals identify unhealthy dynamics earlier in their development.

Participant Perspectives

Internalized misconceptions about who was responsible for harm created significant barriers to seeking help.

> **"I didn't even know I was being abused. I had no idea. I thought I was abusing because I was reacting [to the harm]... If I had known what was going on, if there had been somebody that asked me who could have made that ascertation for me, that would have been helpful."**

Supportive conversations with knowledgeable individuals helped participants understand patterns they were experiencing.

> **"One of the ladies sat up with me at night... I sat there and told her my... story... I've never heard of [these types of abuse] and she explained all this to me"**

Narrow conceptions of what constitutes abuse prevented participants from recognizing their eligibility for services.

> "I didn't know if my case would have been acceptable for accessibility... it was subversive and covert and I didn't recognize it for what it was... I mean, he never laid a hand on me. I didn't think that I could come here because he'd never [used] violence."

Understanding the terminology and patterns of different forms of abuse helped participants make sense of their experiences.

> "[My abuser] lied... when I went for counseling... [the counselor] said, it happens all the time. Abuse will do that. It's called coercion."

The processes of recognizing harm appears to be a critical turning point for participants, allowing them to validate their experiences and begin to seek help based on an accurate understanding of their situation rather than continuing to normalize harmful behaviours.

Theme 5: Rebuilding Identity and Confidence

On rebuilding identity and confidence

Participants shared powerful insights about the journey of rebuilding their sense of self and identity beyond the immediate crisis of leaving an abusive situation.

THOSE WHO WERE INTERVIEWED DESCRIBED HOW THEIR EXPERIENCES ALTERED HOW THEY VIEWED THEMSELVES AND THEIR FUTURES, REQUIRING TIME AND INTENTIONAL EFFORT TO REDISCOVER THEIR STRENGTHS AND ASPIRATIONS.

Participants valued supports that recognized this need for identity reconstruction—opportunities to explore interests, develop skills, and envision new possibilities for themselves and their families.

Their accounts reveal how critical this dimension of healing is, extending well beyond immediate safety needs to encompass the full reclamation of personhood and potential.

Participant Perspectives

Being recognized as an individual with valuable perspectives represented a significant contrast to previous experiences.

> "In my personal life, people don't really ask me questions about myself, so it's a little bit nice… I don't know, have someone be interested in my opinion, I guess."

Surrounding oneself with healthier relationships provided models for new ways of being.

> "It took me time and it was hanging around healthy people with healthy boundaries… I started hanging around them and I was like, oh, these are healthy things. Oh, this is what boundaries are. You know, it was kind of like a real life show and tell."

Moments of transition became opportunities to envision different possibilities for the future.

> "I had a university acceptance letter in my hand, and I was like, I don't know what I'm gonna do… I feel like I'm at a crossroads here. Like, I feel like I can move forward."

Concern for children's well-being catalyzed important realizations about the need for change.

> "I remember having a shower one night and I was crying and I was like, I got to get out of here. I cannot have these [kids] looking at this. This is crazy."

Onwards and Upwards

This process of identity rebuilding represents a profound act of reclamation for participants, moving beyond simply surviving violence to reimagining and actively creating futures defined by their own values, strengths, and aspirations.

Theme 6: Prevention Through Education and Early Awareness

On prevention and education

Participants reflected on their experiences with recognizing abuse, frequently expressing that earlier education about healthy relationships and warning signs of abuse could have altered their trajectories.

INTERVIEWEES EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING AGE-APPROPRIATE EDUCATION ON BOUNDARIES, WARNING SIGNS, AND RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS, BEGINNING IN SCHOOL-AGE YEARS AND CONTINUING THROUGH ADULTHOOD.

Participants noted that many people remain unaware of the full spectrum of abusive behaviours, particularly psychological and financial control tactics, until they are already deeply entrenched in harmful relationships.

Interview insights suggest that proactive education efforts across community settings—schools, healthcare environments, workplaces, and faith communities—could empower individuals to recognize concerning patterns sooner and seek help before crisis points.

Participant Perspectives

Age-appropriate education in schools emerged as a potential prevention point.

> **"I think in school, you can teach children about violence…And I don't think it's a bad thing…I mean, it's a fine line. But there has to be some sort of education going on."**

Earlier recognition of warning signs might have changed the course of harmful relationships.

> **"If I had known what he was…I would have been gone when I still had the ability to do other things on my own … I would have left the first time you forced yourself on me."**

Unfamiliarity with terminology for abuse tactics delayed recognition of harmful patterns.

> **"I didn't know what gaslighting was. I haven't heard narcissism…I had no idea."**

Limited awareness of rights and resources affected help-seeking behaviours, particularly among those experiencing abuse.

> **"They don't know that it's not illegal to punch your wife in the face. They don't even know how to get out. They have no idea."**

The focus on preventive education represents participants' desire to spare others from similar experiences, highlighting their capacity to transform personal pain into community wisdom that could protect future generations.

Theme 7: Employment and Financial Empowerment

On financial empowerment

Financial considerations emerged as significant factors in participants' ability to leave abusive situations and establish independence.

INTERVIEWEES IDENTIFIED HOW SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYERS AND TARGETED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED CRITICAL PATHWAYS TO AUTONOMY, WHILE FINANCIAL ABUSE AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS PROLONGED THEIR EXPOSURE TO HARMFUL ENVIRONMENTS.

Some participants noted that existing financial or employment support systems failed to account for the complex realities of their situations, particularly for those who lacked sufficient resources to establish safety and independence.

Their experiences highlight the importance of flexible, accessible financial supports and employment opportunities that recognize the unique challenges faced by those rebuilding their lives after abuse.

Participant Perspectives

Workplace support created crucial stability during periods of transition.

> "I had a great employer at the time who was 100% supportive, so that was massive. I was able to [tell them] what was going on, and so therefore they understood."

Even relatively small financial barriers could create significant obstacles to independence.

> "I remember just bursting into tears because I felt... I was grateful and I paid my debt back but I also was, like, how did I get here? [I'm an adult and] I don't have $200."

The gap in social assitance systems particularly affected those in transitional situations.

> "It was just really frustrating. It just seemed like there was nothing in the middle to help, like any transition."

Housing and financial considerations created complex, interconnected challenges.

> "[My plan is based on] my housing situation, who's paying the bills and where am I going to go and how long is it going to take and what happens to my kids."

Financial empowerment represents a crucial but potentially overlooked dimension of safety planning, directly affecting participants' ability to envision and implement pathways to independence and security.

Theme 8: Navigating Social and Cultural Expectations

On cultural and social expectations of survivors

Participants described significant challenges navigating social and cultural expectations surrounding relationships, family structures, and help-seeking behaviors.

Some reported feeling pressure from family members, cultural communities, or social networks to maintain relationships despite abuse, often due to deeply ingrained beliefs about family unity, gender roles, or stigma associated with relationship dissolution.

MEANWHILE, OTHERS WHO WERE INTERVIEWED NOTED THAT THESE PRESSURES INTENSIFIED THEIR SELF-DOUBT AND DELAYED THEIR RECOGNITION OF ABUSE OR PURSUIT OF SAFETY.

Their experiences highlight how cultural narratives and social expectations can create additional barriers for individuals attempting to establish safety, while also suggesting the potential power of counter-narratives that prioritize safety over relationship preservation.

Participant Perspectives

Family expectations about maintaining relationships created additional emotional burden.

> **"My kids said, Mom, why are you doing this to us? We had a perfect family and everything was great. Why are you doing this to us? And my family felt the same way."**

Deeply ingrained beliefs about family structure sometimes persisted despite awareness of harm.

> **"I had one [family member] that spent 20 years supporting my [abuser], even after they knew what they did and what we went through. It just, they couldn't see beyond the family nucleus... and you just stay there for for the rest of your life."**

Internalized stereotypes about who "deserves" support created barriers to help-seeking.

> "[I didn't know] what constituted toxicity and abuse and so on and so forth. I didn't know, would I be turned away? Would I be, given a platitude and patted on the head and told there are people far worse off than you?"

Concerns about future stability influenced decisions about seeking safety.

> "[What could have helped with the abuse?] There's a stigma around it, so knowing that you're going to land on your feet on the other side. But lots of people don't still, right? So, it's scary."

Understanding how social and cultural expectations influence help-seeking behaviors offers important context for developing services that acknowledge and address these invisible barriers to safety and healing.

Theme 9: Trauma Responses and Healing Processes

On rebuilding identity and confidence

While participants demonstrated tremendous strength in being able to survive and share their experiences, their stories also revealed profound insights about trauma responses and healing processes.

Following harmful experiences, the participants described feeling sof confusion, self-doubt, and cognitive disruption during abusive situations—manifestations of trauma that affected their ability to recognize danger and pursue safety.

THEY ARTICULATED HOW HEALING INVOLVED NOT JUST PHYSICAL SAFETY BUT ALSO RESTORATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING.

The accounts highlight the importance of trauma-informed approaches that recognize the neurological and psychological impacts of abuse, while also honoring survivors' innate capacity for healing when provided with appropriate support and resources.

Participant Perspectives

Practices that restored connection to self emerged as important elements of healing.

> **"It's like grounding, ...just re-centering."**
>
> 99

Creating space for emotional processing emerged as a fundamental healing need.

> **"It was just that chance to take a deep breath, and that was huge."**
>
> 99

The cognitive impacts of trauma affected participants' ability to understand their experiences.

> **"I've had a brain fog for a decade [due to the trauma]"**
>
> 99

Understanding trauma as both a physiological and psychological response to abuse offers important context for developing services that address the full spectrum of healing needs, from immediate crisis support to long-term recovery and growth.

Cross-Cutting Insights

The lived experiences shared by participants reveal several systemic patterns that intersect across multiple themes. Participants described navigating a complex web of services and systems that often seemed designed for either extreme crisis or complete self-sufficiency, with insufficient support for the transitional space between these states. This "missing middle" has distinct impacts on those experiencing forms of abuse not readily recognized by traditional service frameworks or mainstream culture.

Additionally, participants highlighted the critical importance of coordinated, trauma-informed approaches. Their experiences demonstrate how fragmentation between basic needs (ie housing, justice, finances) and emotional support services can create significant barriers to safety and healing. When participants encountered service providers who understood the interconnected nature of these needs and could help them navigate these systems cohesively, they reported positive outcomes and greater feelings of empowerment.

The cultural context surrounding domestic violence also emerged as a significant factor affecting help-seeking behaviour. Participants described how stigma, misconceptions about what "counts" as abuse, and societal expectations about family unity often delayed recognition and disclosure of unsafe situations. Their insights suggest a potential need for broader societal education about the full spectrum of violence, beginning early in schools and continuing throughout the lifespan.

Closing Reflection

The insights generously shared by participants in this small qualitative study offer a depth of understanding that statistical data or desk research alone cannot provide. Through their lived experiences, we gain valuable perspective on both the challenges and resilience that characterize the journey away from violence and toward safety and healing. While the sample size is small, the richness of participants' reflections illuminates important patterns in service needs and highlights opportunities to strengthen support systems.

THE CONSISTENCY WITH WHICH PARTICIPANTS EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY, GENUINE CONNECTION, PRACTICAL ADVOCACY, EDUCATION ABOUT ABUSE DYNAMICS, AND IDENTITY RECLAMATION SUGGESTS THESE ELEMENTS MAY BE FOUNDATIONAL TO EFFECTIVE SERVICE PROVISION.

THEIR EXPERIENCES REMIND US THAT THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM VIOLENCE IS BOTH DEEPLY PERSONAL AND INHERENTLY RELATIONAL, REQUIRING APPROACHES THAT HONOR INDIVIDUAL AGENCY WHILE PROVIDING ROBUST COMMUNITY SUPPORT.

These narratives affirm the critical importance of centring the voices of those with lived experience in the development and refinement of services for True North.

Their expertise, born from navigating the complex circumstances of abuse, offers invaluable guidance for creating trauma-informed, accessible, and effective supports that truly meet people where they are while honoring their capacity for growth and transformation.

Appendix: Estimates of Second-Stage Housing Need

Introduction

This analysis models demand and capacity for a second-stage housing program over a one-year timeframe. By examining demand across living situations and applying continuous averages for arrivals and lengths of stay, we can estimate the ideal number of people in a second-stage housing system given its throughput and the average time each person occupies a second-stage unit, and infer how many units the community may require.

Demand Assumptions

We segment need into four categories based on clients' housing stability and support requirements.

- First, we classify low-need individuals (no more than 10 percent of total demand) as those in stable market rentals, owner-occupied homes, or student residences; they rarely require DV-specific wraparound services.

- Second, moderate-need clients (15–40 percent) reside in shared, subsidized, or general-support housing; they face ongoing financial or social challenges but often manage without full DV-tailored counselling and safety planning.

- Third, high-need individuals (80 percent or more) include people without stable, private housing—couch surfers, motel dwellers, emergency-shelter guests, or those on the street. We also count anyone already in second-stage housing, since that placement already matched their level of need.

- Finally, we assume third-stage housing never funnels people back into second-stage care (0 percent demand), transitional general housing overlaps significantly with second-stage goals (70 percent could shift to a DV-specific model), and clinical settings (hospitals, addiction treatment, incarceration) generate have no demand.

Model Assumptions

We build the model so that capacity equals demand under steady-state conditions. We use one year as our time unit and continuous averages for arrivals and departures rather than discrete dates. We assume 100 percent utilization—plus a 10% buffer for demand variability with no queue.

Results

Applying these assumptions, our model yields:

87.16	39.62	2
PEOPLE IN THE SYSTEM ON AVERAGE	**ARRIVALS PER YEAR**	**YEARS AVERAGE STAY PER PERSON**

Discussion

If each client occupies a unit for two years on average, the system should be able to serve roughly 87 people at any given moment and have an annual intake of about 40. Because an average household size in Strathmore is 2.6 persons, we can infer that this demand equates to roughly 33 households.

Three factors influence this outcome:

Longer stays. As clients remain in housing longer, the system would admit fewer new clients. As client stays shorten, the system would require less capacity.

Rising complexity. More complex needs could slow transitions out of housing, further reducing turnover and available units.

Larger households. Serving more children and large families could consume additional space, limiting the number of households who can be accommodated.

> Because the model assumes full utilization, any increase in average stay or household size would constrain capacity immediately. Likewise, streamlining departure processes—through case management enhancements or targeted supports—would shorten time-in-system of a client and open up capacity.