



National State of Homelessness

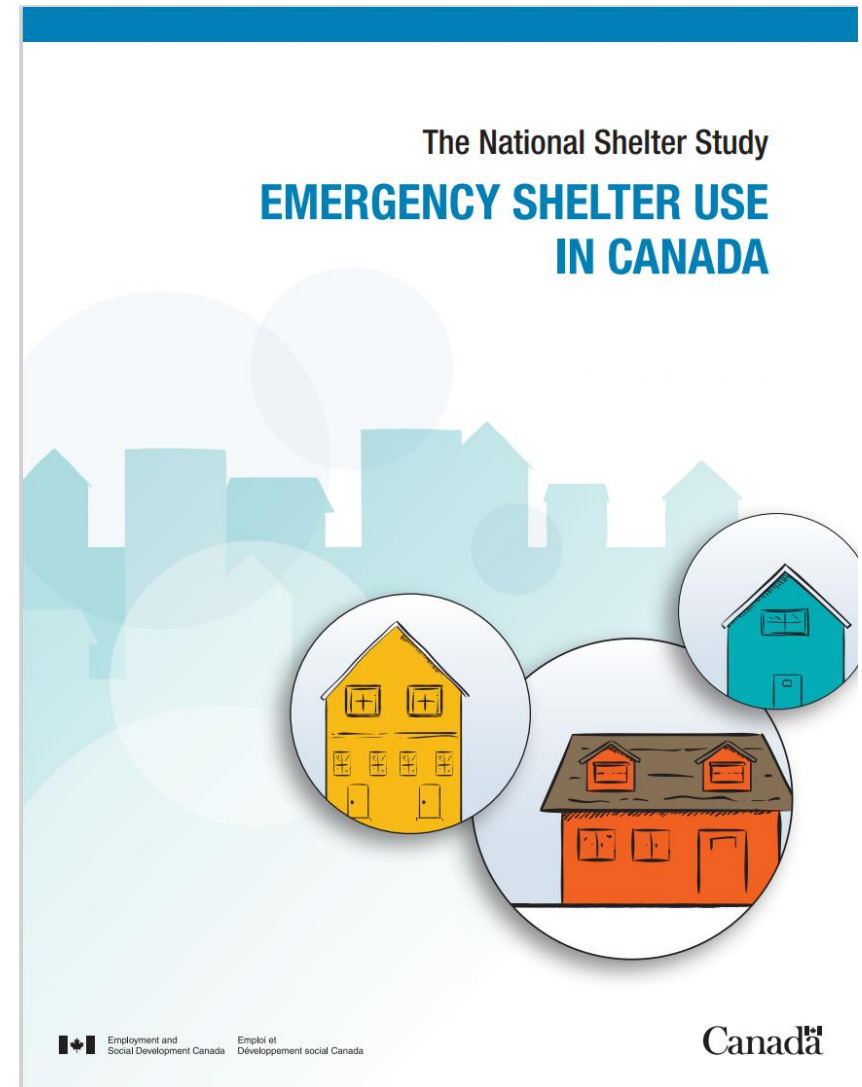
Infrastructure Canada

November 2023



National Shelter Study

The National Shelter Study estimates the people who experience homelessness in shelters each year.



The National Shelter Study Design and Purpose

- The National Shelter Study employs a stratified cluster sample design, where the primary sampling units are emergency shelters.
- The study is designed to obtain accurate estimates of gender, age and other demographic characteristics at the national level.
- It also tracks occupancy rates at the national level to determine the overall pressure on the shelter system.
- This analysis is essential for a general understanding of homelessness trends in Canada.

Calculating capacity

- Capacity is a key part of the study design. Previous iterations of the study assumed a fixed capacity for shelters for the year but this was not the case during the pandemic.
- During the annual National Service Provider List update, researchers asked for the number of shelter beds pre-pandemic (February 2020) and post-pandemic (August 2020).
- However, information on post-pandemic capacity was not available for all permanent emergency services.

Estimating covid capacity for permanent emergency shelters

- COVID-19 capacity adjustment factor** = $\exp\left\{\frac{1}{n}\sum_j \ln(x_j)\right\}$
 - Where x_j is equal to a service's average number of emergency shelter users per night in 2020 divided by the service's average number of emergency shelter users per night in 2019.
 - Where n is equal to the total number of services where $\ln(x_j)$ is not missing.

Type of Service	Feb 2020 Capacity Collected?	August 2020 Capacity Collected?	# of services in 2020	Beds pre-COVID-19	Beds post-COVID-19
Permanent emergency	yes	yes	357	Beds in Feb 2020	Beds in August 2020
Permanent emergency	yes	no	66	Beds in Feb 2020	Beds in Feb 2020 x COVID-19 capacity adjustment factor



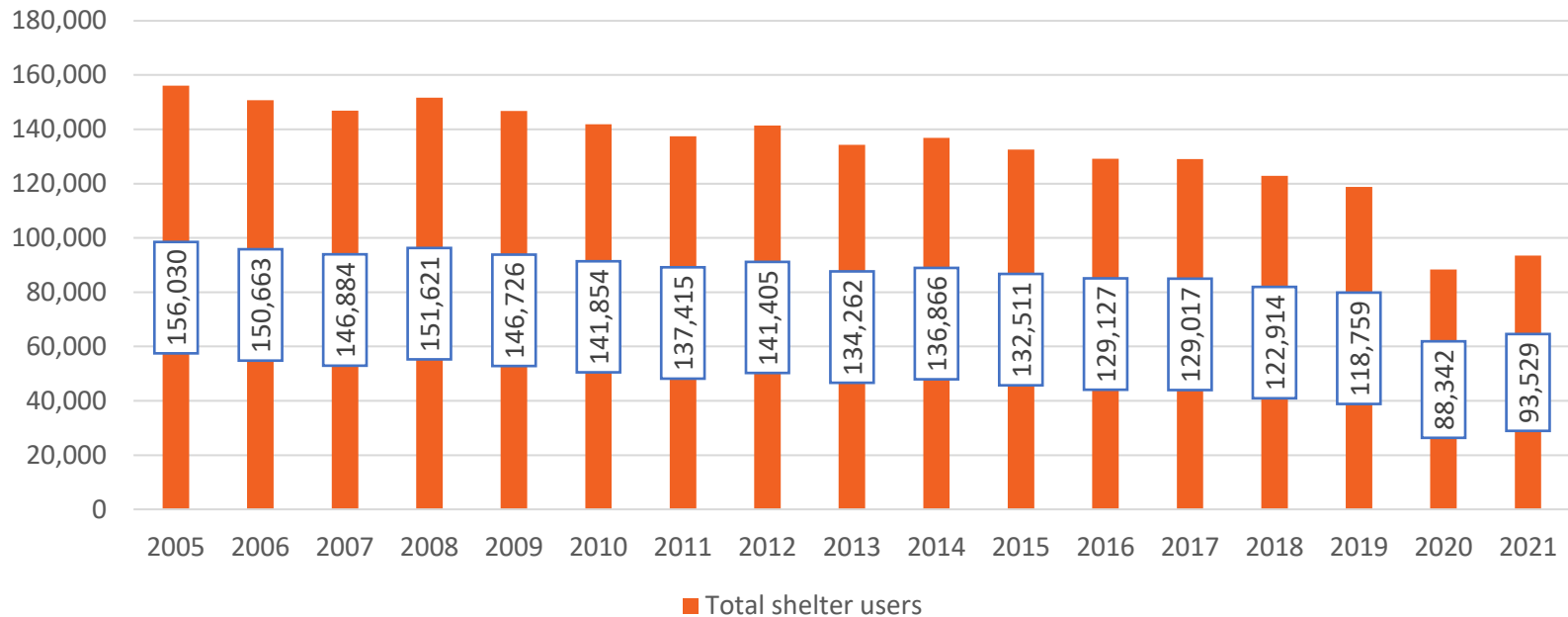
- The homelessness service landscape changed considerably because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There was a 25.6% decrease in permanent emergency beds from March to April 2020.
- The overall system capacity had largely recovered by 2021, a 1.5% decrease compared to 2019.

- The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to reductions in shelter use, however, this should not necessarily be equated with a reduction in homelessness.
- This analysis does not capture homelessness outside of the permanent shelter system.
- While this is true of all years, it is an especially important point to remember in 2020 and 2021 because it excludes those who could not access shelter due to capacity reductions or those who chose not to access the permanent shelter system to avoid exposure to the virus.

Results: Shelter Use

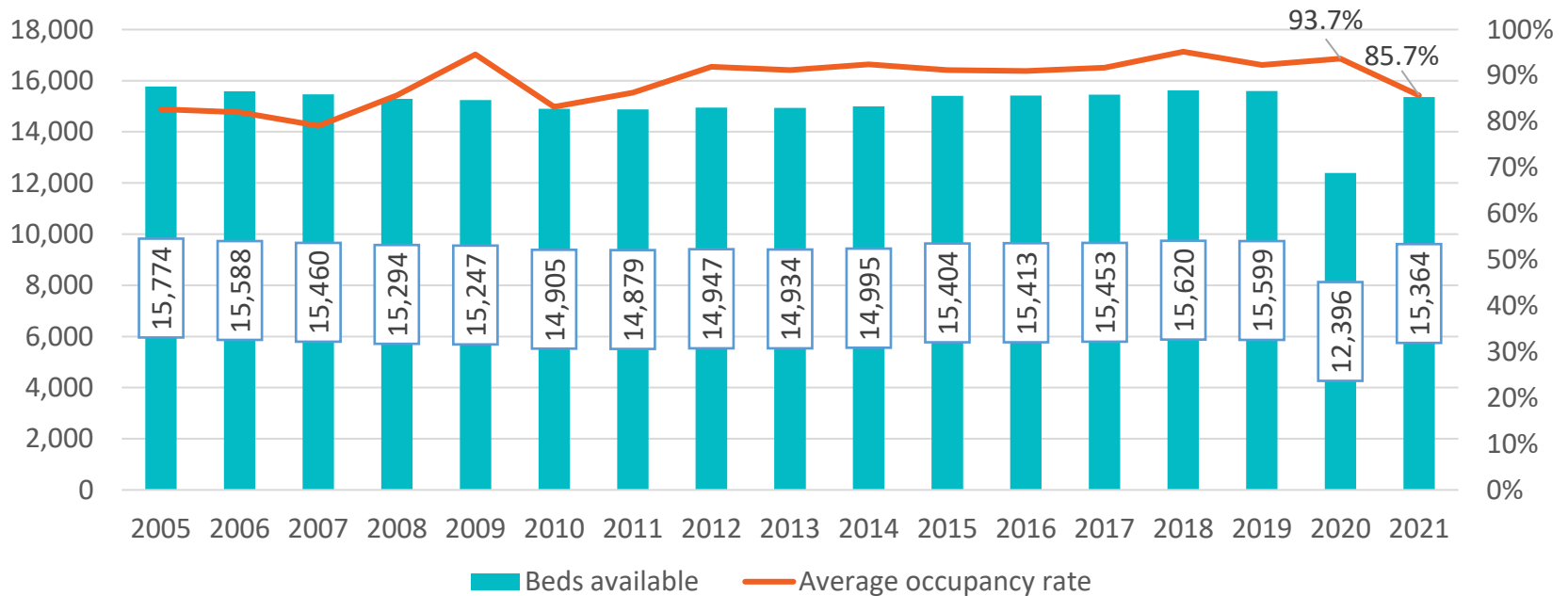


Shelter Users



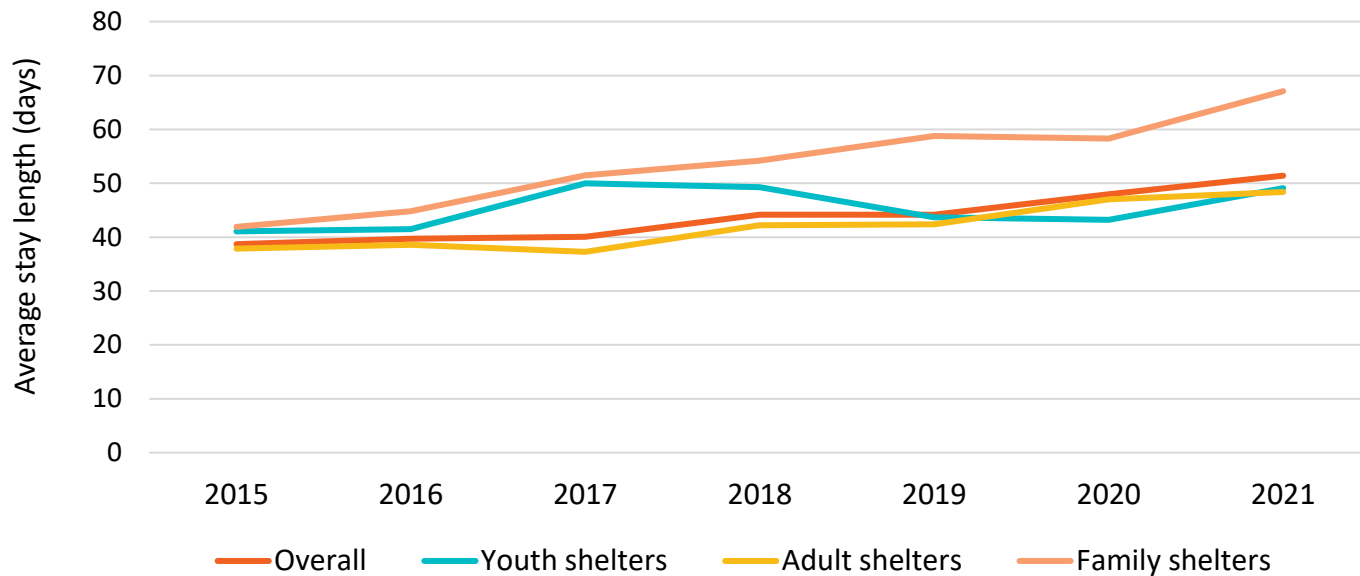
- In 2021, an estimated 93,529 people experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter.
- On an average night, there were approximately 13,170 people staying in shelters, compared to 11,600 in 2020.

Shelter occupancy



- Shelter occupancy dropped between 2020 and 2021.
- In 2020, there were fewer beds, but the beds were full.
- In 2021, the bed numbers had mostly recovered, but shelter use did not increase at the same rate.

Average length of stay

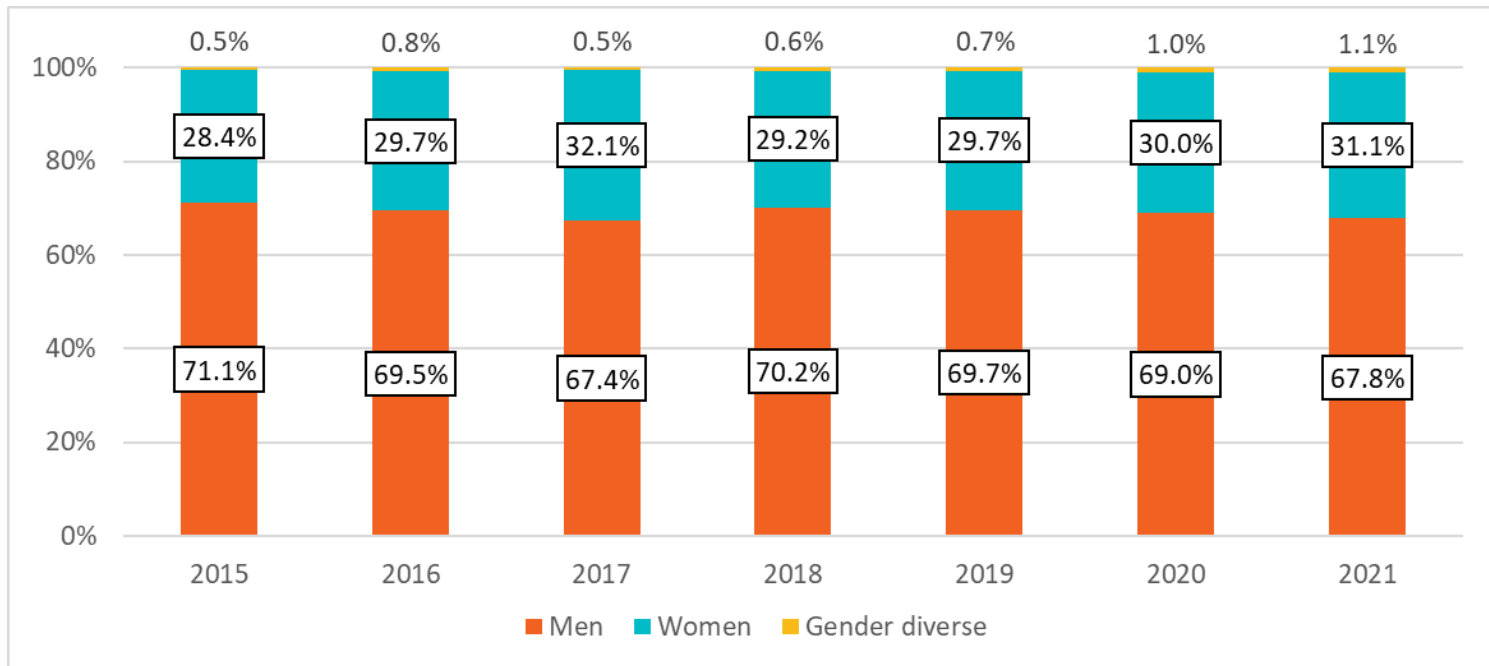


- The high occupancy rate over the past several years was driven by longer stays in shelter.
- Among family shelter users, the average length of stay increased by over 25 days. Compared to youth shelters where the average length of stay increased by 2 days, and adult shelters which increased by 9 days.

Results: Demographics

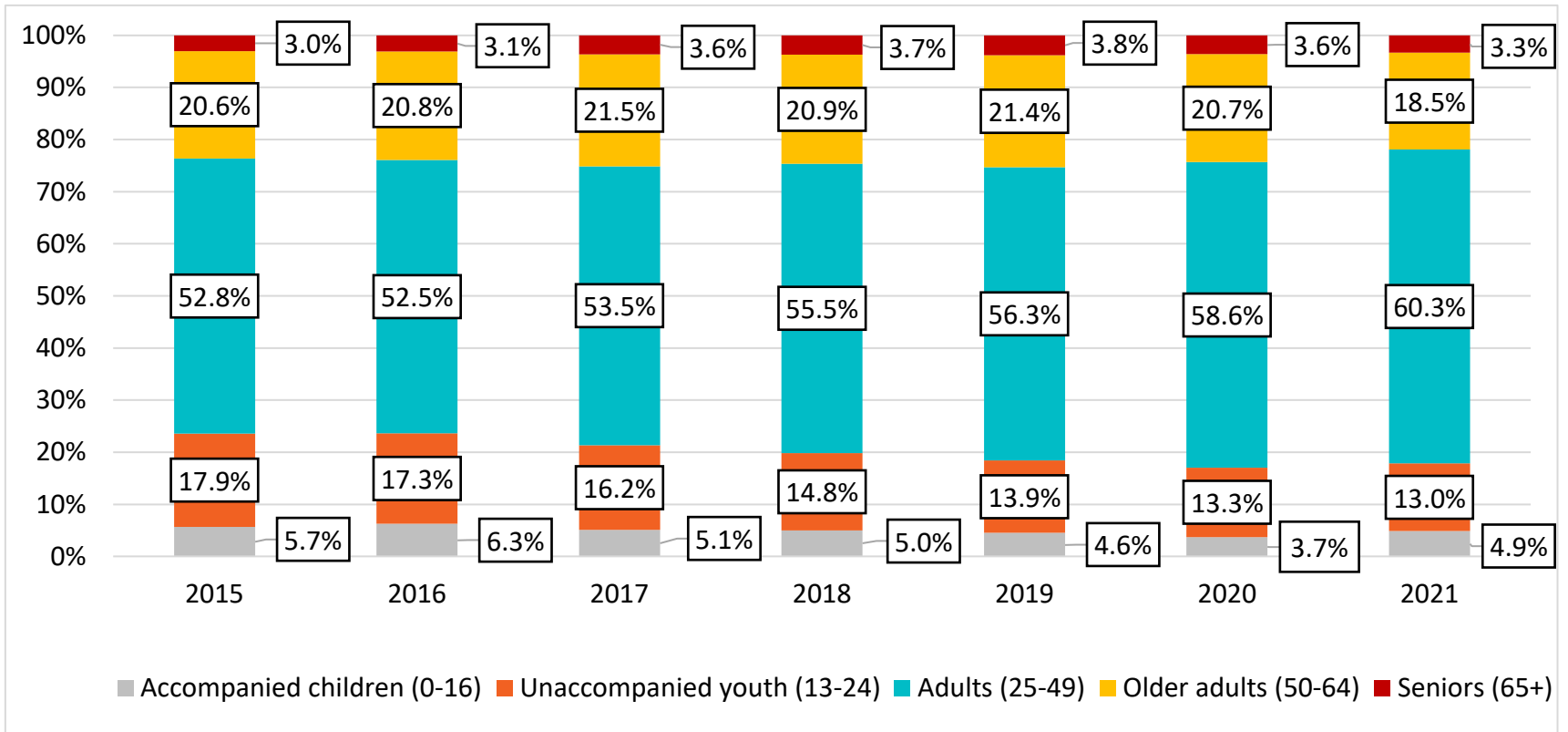


Gender



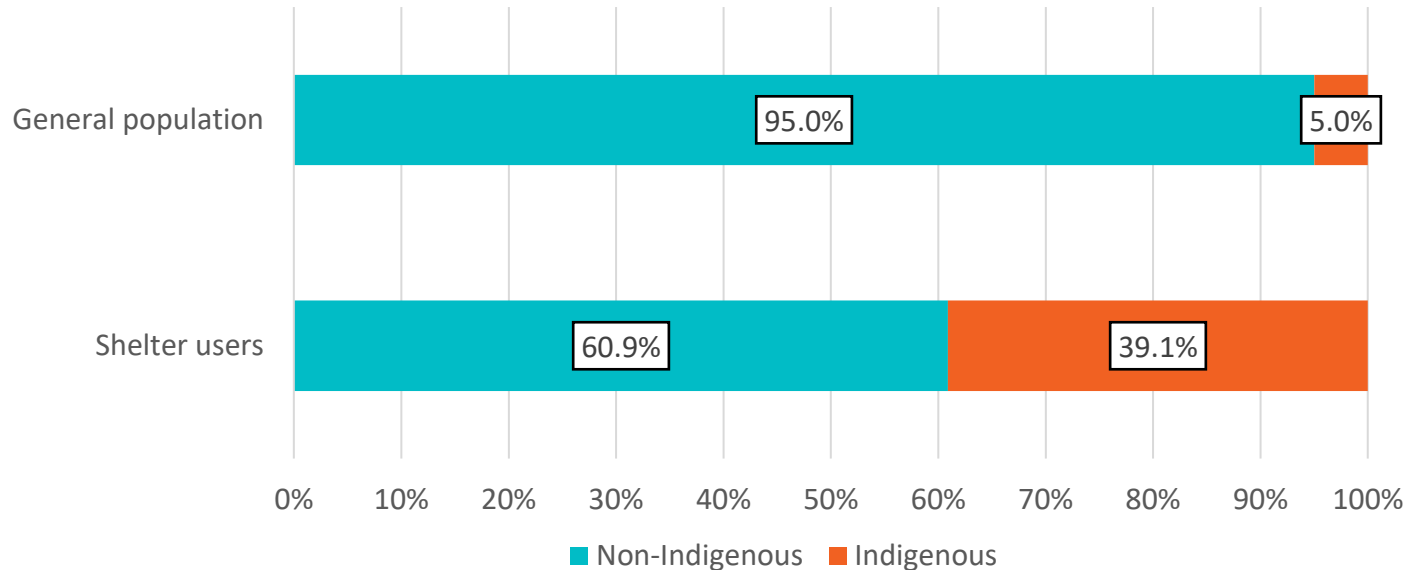
The proportion of men and women has remained statistically unchanged between 2015 and 2021. A statistically significant increase in the proportion of shelter users reporting as gender diverse was observed between 2015 (0.5%) and 2021 (1.1%).

Age



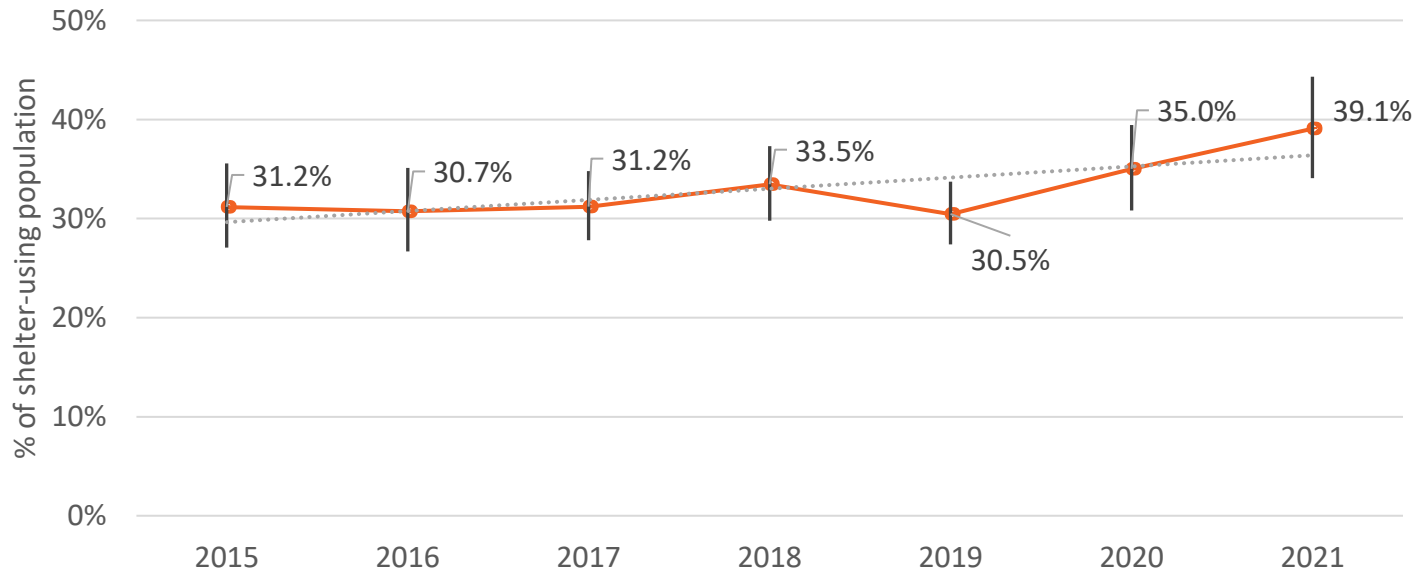
The age distribution among shelter users has remained relatively stable over time. With the exception of youth, which has decreased over time. In 2021, the average age of shelter users was 38.0 years.

Indigenous identity



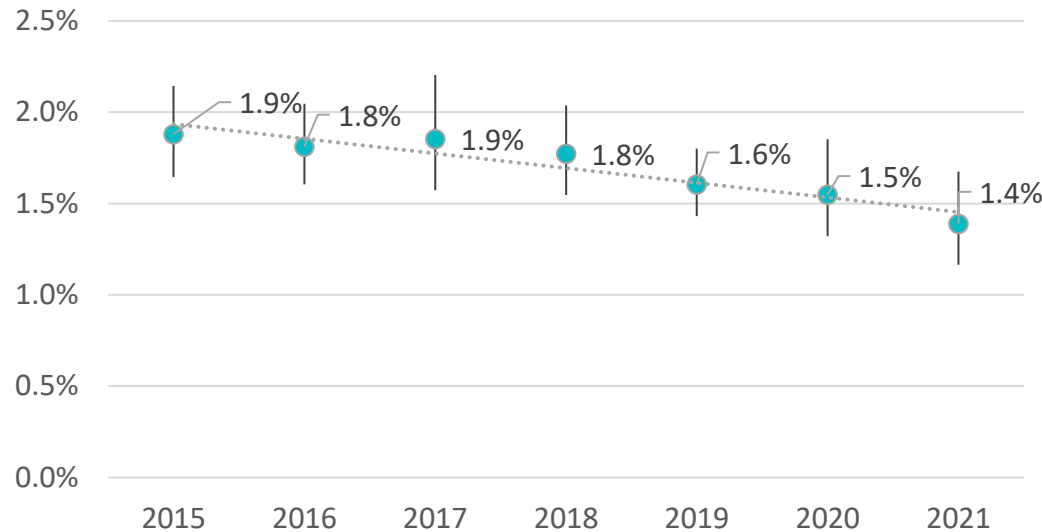
Indigenous persons were much more prevalent among shelter users in 2021 (39.1%), compared to their representation among the general population (5.0%)

Indigenous identity



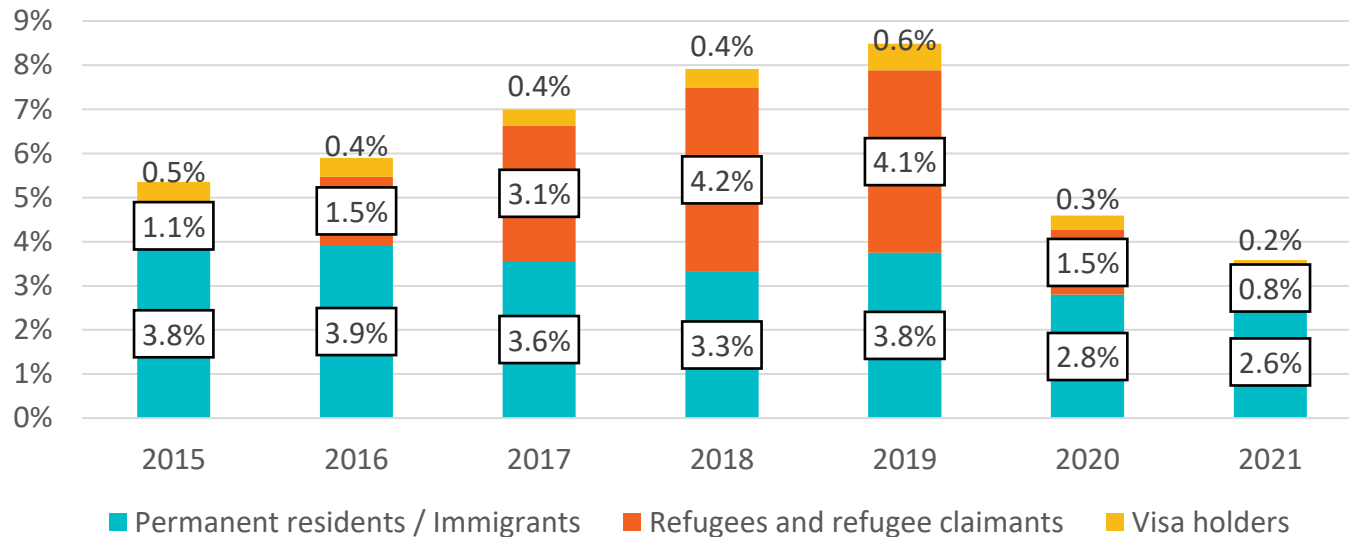
There has been an increase in the proportion of Indigenous-identifying shelter users since 2015, though the trend is not statistically significant at $p > 0.05$.

Veteran Status



- An estimated 1.4% of shelter users in 2021 were veterans. This is consistent with the estimated overall proportion of veterans in Canada.
- While there was a steady downward trend in veterans accessing shelters in Canada between 2015 and 2021, the difference in proportion is not statistically significant.
- Veterans tended to be older than non-veterans, with 39.9% being over the age of 50 compared to 19.6% of non-veterans. They were also more likely to identify as men (81.9%) than non-veterans (70.2%).

Citizenship



- In 2021, the majority (85.8%) of shelter users were Canadian citizens.
- The proportion of refugees and refugee claimants in the shelter system decreased from a peak of 4.1% in 2019 to 0.8% in 2021, which may have resulted from a pandemic travel restrictions and a decrease in the number of asylum claims in 2020 and 2021.

Results: Chronic Shelter use



Chronicity

Chronic homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness AND who meet at least 1 of the following criteria:

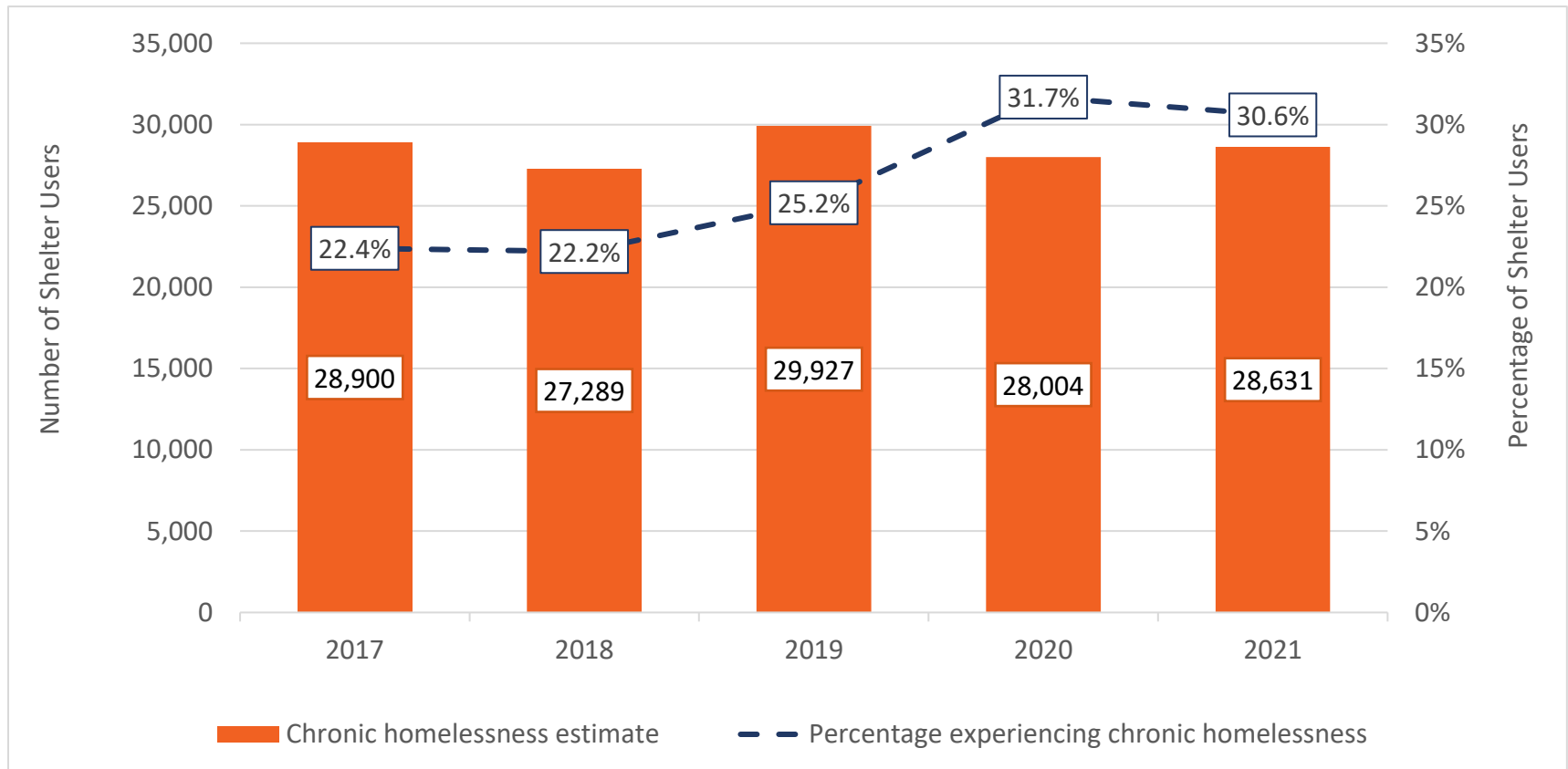
- they have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year
- they have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days)

To estimate changes in chronic homelessness over time, Infrastructure Canada uses an indicator based on shelter-use data. Shelter users are considered chronically homeless if they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- **Acute chronicity:** used a shelter for six months (180 days) or more in the past year;
- **Prolonged instability:** had shelter stays in each of the last three years.

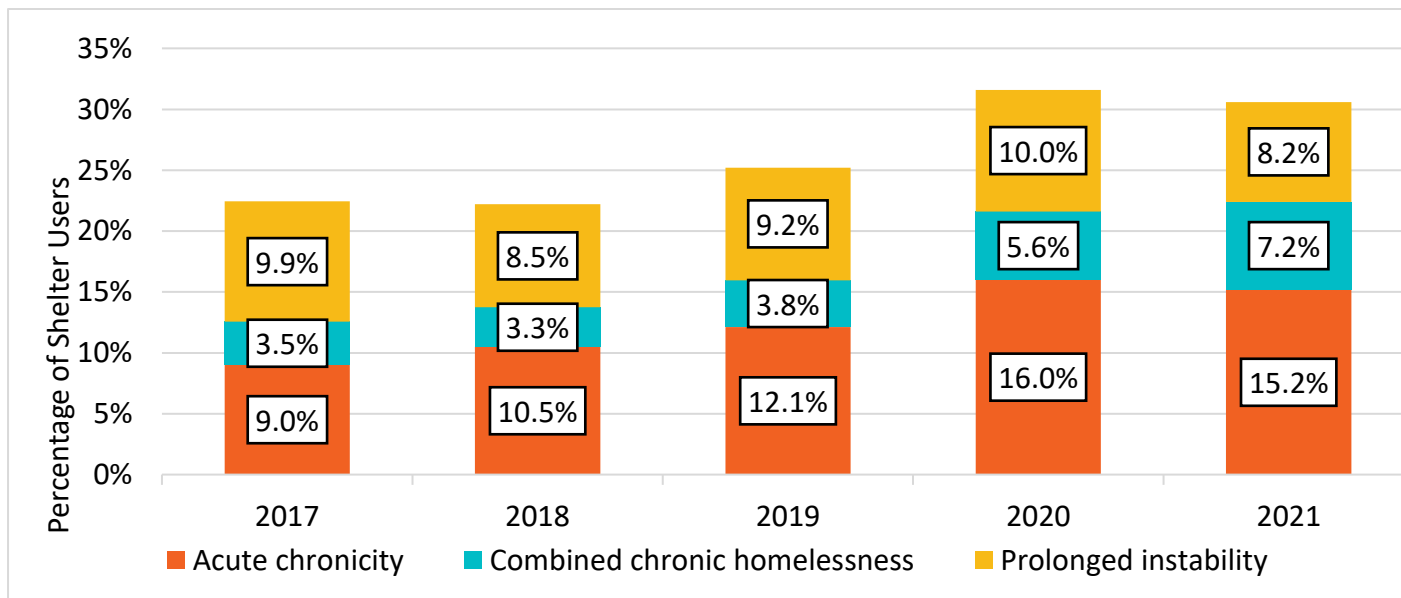
Chronicity

In 2021, an estimated 28,631 (30.6%) people experienced chronic homelessness.



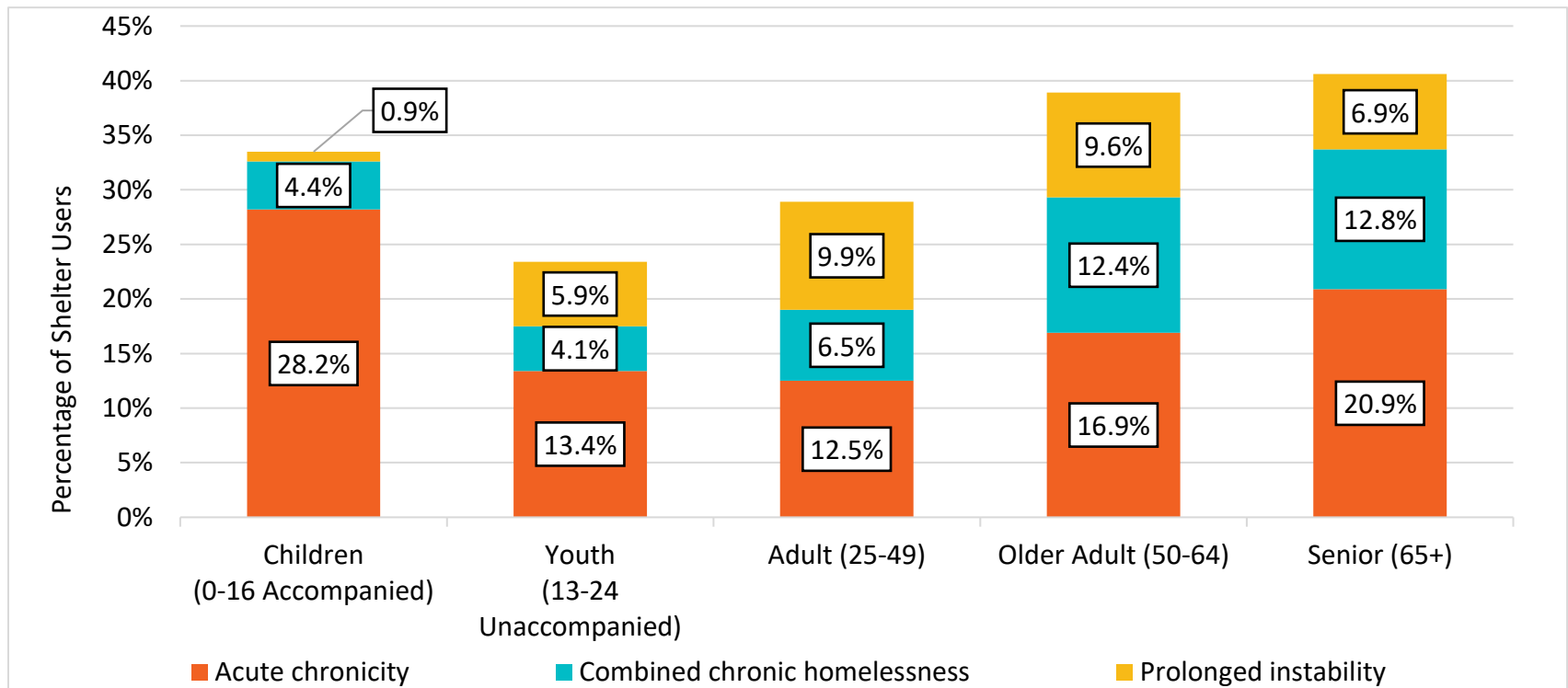
Chronicity

- While the total number of people experiencing chronic shelter use remained stable, the profile changed over time.
- Acute chronicity increased steadily from 2017 to 2020, and then remained relatively stable in 2021.
- Prolonged instability remained relatively stable from 2017 to 2020, then decreased in 2021.
- Combined chronic homelessness was relatively stable between 2017 and 2019, then increased in 2020 and 2021.



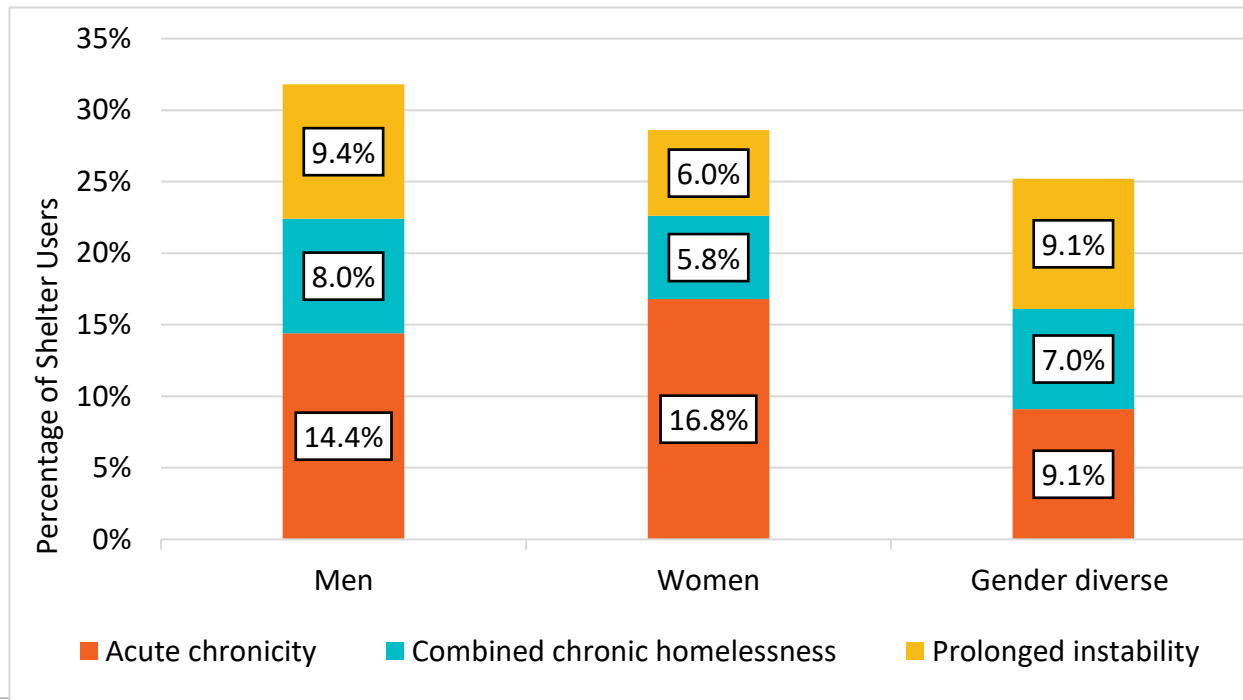
Chronicity: Demographics

Rates of chronic homelessness differed across age groups. Children were most likely to experience acute chronicity. Youth were least likely to experience any kind of chronic homelessness. Older adults and seniors had the highest prevalence of combined chronic homelessness.



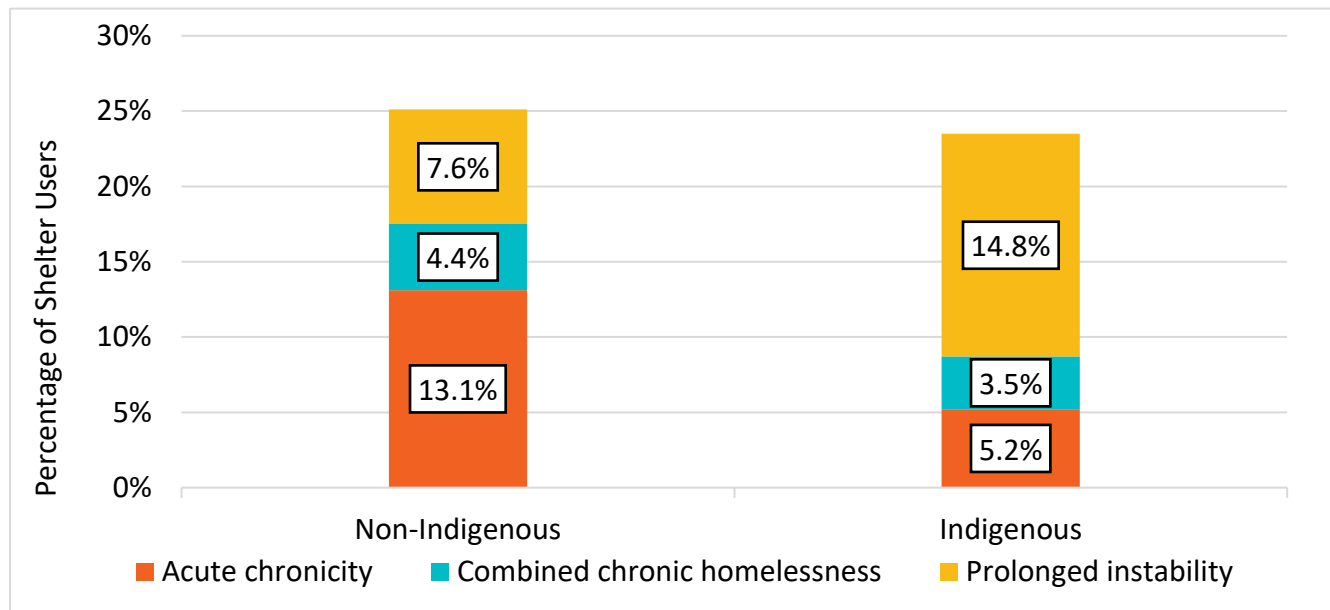
Chronicity: Demographics

- Men were most likely to experience prolonged instability and combined chronic homelessness.
- Women had a higher rate of acute chronicity.
- There was not enough data to detect statistically significant differences between gender diverse shelter users and either men or women.



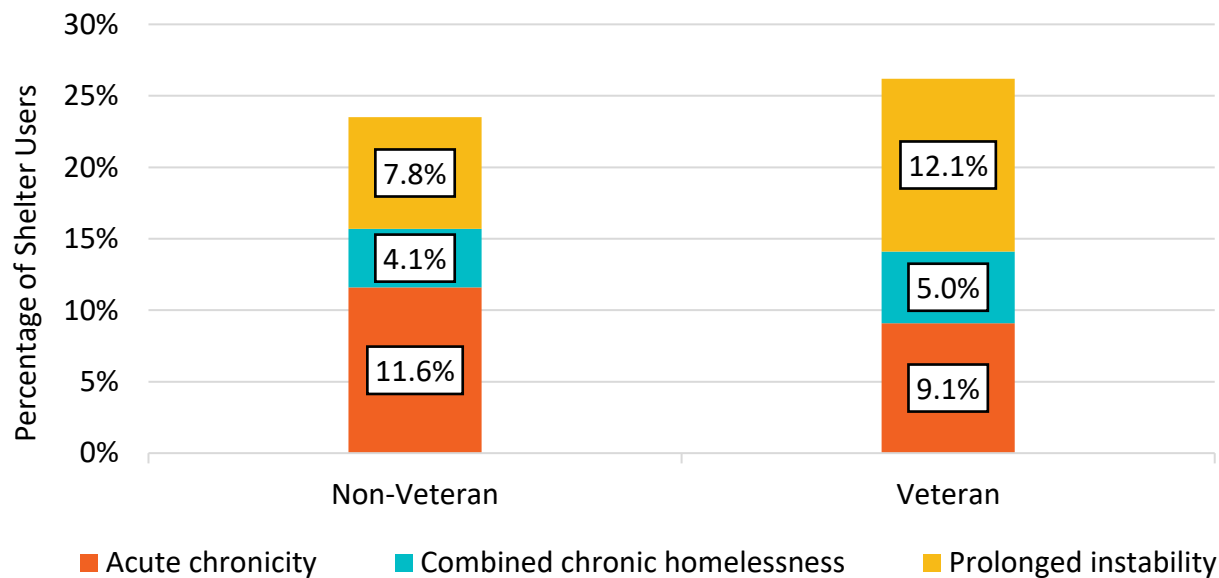
Chronicity: Demographics

- In 2021, the rate of chronic homelessness among shelter users who reported they were Indigenous (23.5%) was similar to the rate of non-Indigenous shelter users (25.1%).
- Indigenous shelter users had a higher rate of prolonged instability.
- Non-Indigenous shelter users had a higher rate of acute chronicity.



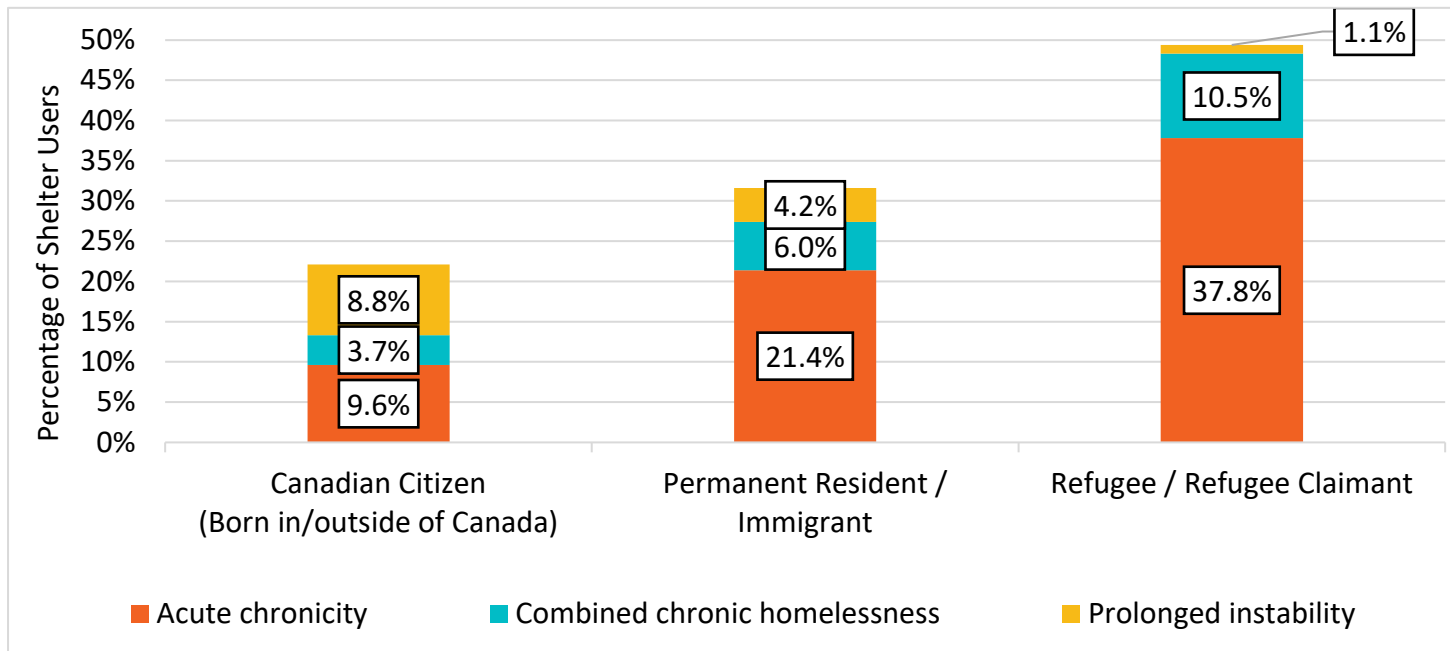
Chronicity: Demographics

- In 2021, the rate of chronic homelessness among shelter users who reported they were veterans (26.2%) was slightly higher than the rate among non-veterans (23.4%).
- Veterans had a higher rate of prolonged instability than non-veterans.
- Non-veterans had a higher rate of acute chronicity than veterans.



Chronicity: Demographics

- In 2021, Refugees / Refugee Claimants had the highest prevalence of chronic homelessness.
- Canadian citizens had a higher rate of prolonged instability.
- Non-citizens were more likely to experience acute chronicity and combined chronic homelessness.



For any questions, please feel free to contact me:
Annie.Duchesne@infc.gc.ca

Or the INFC Homelessness Analysis Team:
hpd.data-donnees.dpmi@infc.gc.ca

Thank you!

