

# Homelessness prevention and first-time emergency shelter users in Canada

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# Context

## Homelessness Prevention Framework:

- Primary prevention: stop people from becoming homeless
- Secondary prevention: stop people from returning to homelessness
- Tertiary prevention: end long-term homelessness

# Research project

## Research Question:

- How do the transition patterns into and out of homelessness differ between those who are new to homelessness (first-time shelter users) and those who have a history of homelessness (recurrent shelter users)?

## Objectives:

- Describe and compare housing transition and shelter use trends between first-time and recurrent users
- Estimate the effect of various factors on the probability of transitioning from entering an emergency shelter to exiting into housing

## Hypothesis:

- That the pathways are distinct for first-time shelter users

# Data & methods

## Data:

- Administrative data from community homeless information management systems
- 2010-2016
- Emergency shelters only

## Methods:

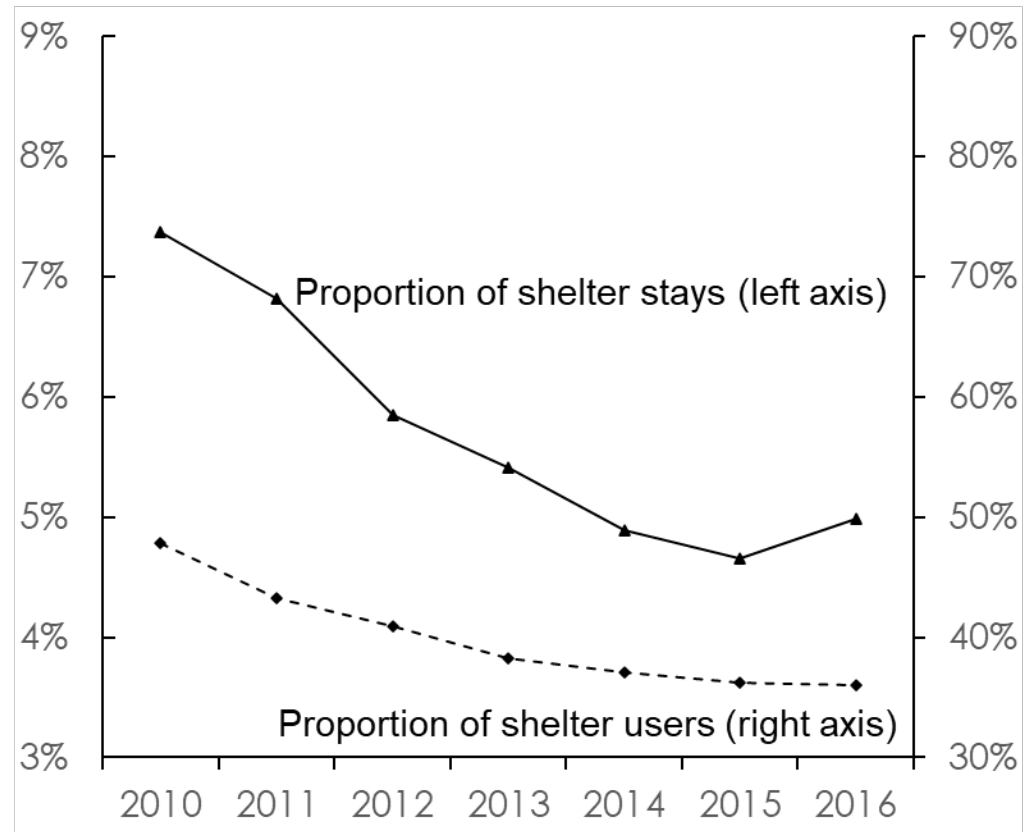
- Descriptive statistics
- Multinomial logit regression model

## Sample:

- 172 shelters in 37 communities (about 50% of all beds in Canada)
- Descriptive statistics:
- 171,441 first-time and 256,821 recurrent shelter users
- Regression sample (aged 25+):
- 42,880 first-time shelter and 212,823 recurrent shelter users

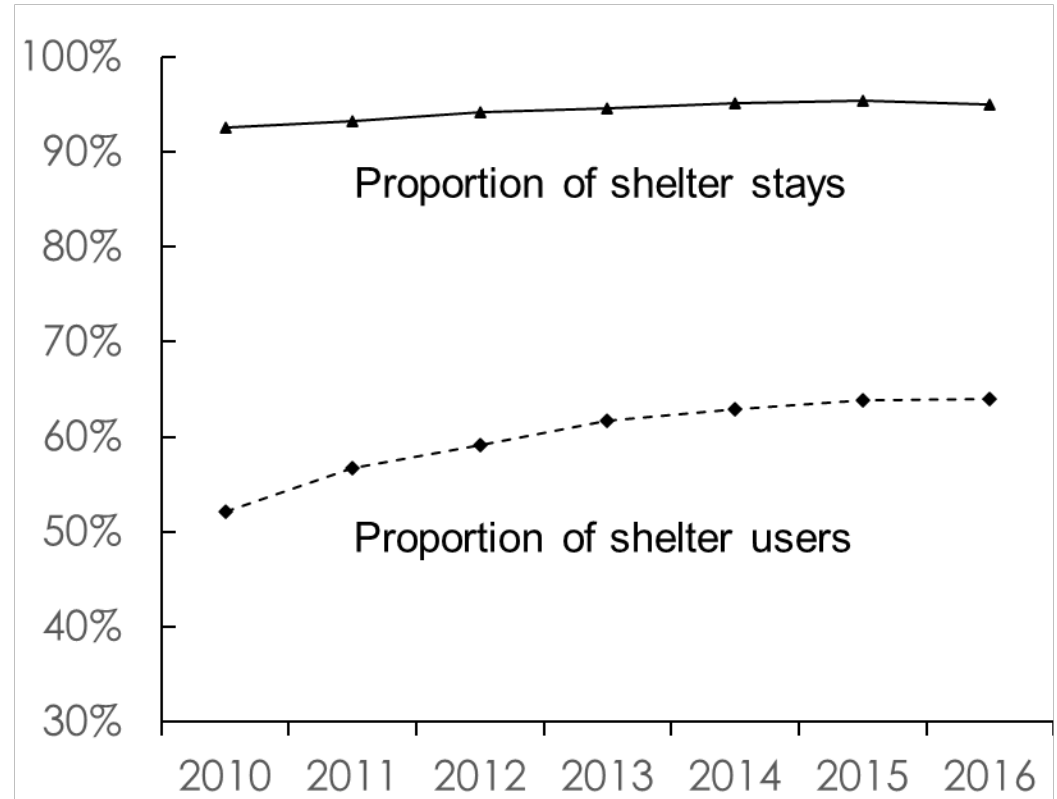
# Descriptive statistics: **first-time** shelter users

- First-time user: shelter stay between 2010-2016 and no previous stay back to 2005
- The proportion of first-time users decreased from 47.9% in 2010 to 36.0% in 2016
- The proportion all of shelter stays by first-time users declined from 7.4% to 5.0%



# Descriptive statistics: **recurrent** shelter users

- Recurrent user: shelter stay between 2010-2016 and at least one more stay between 2005-2016
- The proportion of all shelter users who are recurrent users increased steadily from 52.1% in 2010 to 64.0% in 2016
- The proportion of stays by recurrent users increased from 92.6% to 95.0% over this period



# Descriptive statistics: demographics

- First-time users were younger on average, and a larger proportion entered as part of a family
- Recurrent users were more likely to be older, male and single

Demographics (%)	First-time users (N=171,441)	Recurrent users (N=256,821)
Family	23.8%	3.9%
Single adults	54.6%	79.6%
Indigenous	17.4%	19.2%
Age (Mean)	30	39
Male	65.5%	84.0%

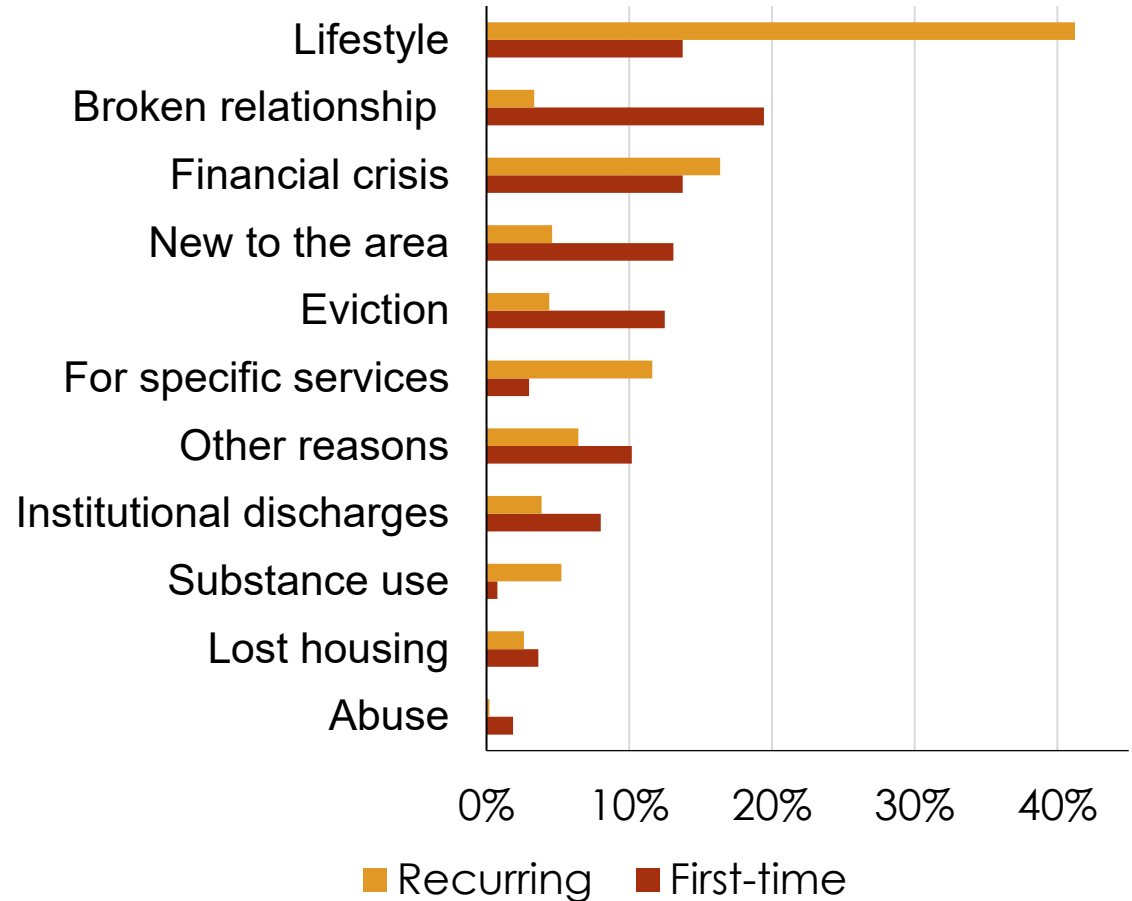
# Descriptive statistics: reasons for shelter entry

First-time users most frequently reported:

- broken relationship
- lifestyle
- financial crisis

Recurrent users most frequently reported:

- lifestyle
- financial crisis
- specific services





# Descriptive statistics: exit by reason of entry

	New housing		Other housing		Non-housing	
	<u>First-time</u>	<u>Recurring</u>	<u>First-time</u>	<u>Recurring</u>	<u>First-time</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
<b>Broken relationship</b>	57.1%	27.6%	18.7%	22.4%	24.2%	50.0%
<b>New to the area</b>	48.3%	25.9%	16.0%	11.0%	35.7%	63.1%
<b>Eviction</b>	45.3%	25.3%	14.9%	10.2%	39.8%	64.5%
<b>Abuse</b>	40.1%	33.0%	26.0%	24.0%	33.9%	43.0%
<b>Other reasons</b>	37.4%	12.4%	19.4%	7.3%	43.2%	80.3%
<b>Lost housing</b>	37.1%	12.4%	19.3%	9.0%	43.6%	78.6%
<b>Institutional discharge</b>	28.2%	16.8%	19.8%	9.3%	52.0%	73.9%
<b>Financial crisis</b>	21.4%	7.7%	8.8%	3.8%	69.8%	88.5%
<b>Substance use</b>	13.1%	0.8%	11.5%	0.5%	75.4%	98.7%
<b>Lifestyle</b>	11.3%	4.9%	6.9%	2.8%	81.8%	92.3%
<b>Specific services</b>	2.2%	0.4%	4.6%	2.2%	93.2%	97.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>	<b>84.2%</b>

# Regression analysis: variables

Three separate regression models:

- All shelter users
- First-time users
- Recurrent users

Dependent variable = housing outcome:

- Newly acquired housing
- Other housing
- Non-housing

Independent variables:

- Personal characteristics:
  - Gender, age, family status, Indigenous status

Structural factors:

- Average rental price, province/territory, federal policy cycle (2007-14 vs 2014-19), homelessness duration (recurrent users only)

Situational factors (reason for shelter entry):

- Abuse
- Addiction/substance use
- Broken relationship
- Lifestyle
- New to the area/community
- Financial crisis
- Discharge from institution
- Eviction
- Non eviction housing loss (e.g. fire/flood)
- Specific services
- Other reasons

# Regression statistics: exit into new housing (**all shelter users**)

Positive Factors:

**First-time (2.03 times)**

**Families (5.88 times)**

**Reason: broken relationship (odds 2.87)**

**Reason: fleeing abuse (odds 2.62)**

Reason: being evicted (odds 1.40)

Reason: being new to area (odds 1.26)

Negative Factors:

**Male (24.8%)**

**Indigenous (13.9%)**

**Average rent increase (26%/\$100)**

**Reason: substance use (odds 0.70)**

**Reason: financial crisis (odds 0.64)**

Reason: lifestyle (odds 0.37)

Reason: specific services (odds 0.37)

# Regression statistics: exit into new housing (**first-time shelter users**)

Positive Factors:

**Families (5.9 times)**

**Indigenous (12%)**

**Reason: broken relationship (odds 2.62)**

**Reason: fleeing abuse (odds 1.95)**

Reason: being evicted (odds 1.17)

Reason: being new to area (odds 1.05)

Negative Factors:

**Male (29%)**

**Average rent (25%/\$100)**

**Reason: financial crisis (odds 0.61)**

Reason: substance use (odds 0.44)

Reason: lifestyle (odds 0.40)

Reason: specific services (odds 0.34)

# Regression statistics: exit into new housing (**recurrent shelter users**)

Positive Factors:

**Families (5.72 times)**

**Housing First cycle (12%)**

**Region: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia**

**Reason: fleeing abuse (odds 2.99)**

**Reason: broken relationship (odds 2.78)**

Reason: being evicted (odds 1.50)

Reason: being new to area (odds 1.36)

Negative Factors:

**Male (21%)**

**Indigenous (17%)**

**Rent increases (22%/\$100)**

**Duration of homelessness increases  
(1.2%/month)**

**Region: Manitoba, New Brunswick, NWT,  
Quebec, Saskatchewan**

**Reason: financial crisis (odds 0.68)**

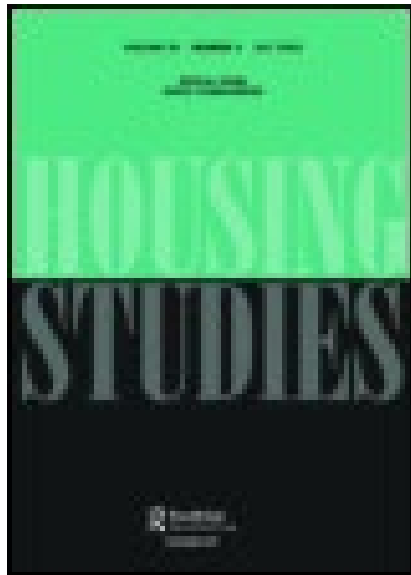
Reason: lifestyle (odds 0.40)

Reason: specific services (odds 0.40)

## Discussion and conclusion

- First-time shelter users make up a large share of all shelter users (36%), but account for a small share of all shelter stays (5%)
- The pathways into and out of shelter are unique for first-time users:
  - More likely to be female and to enter as part of a family
  - More likely to have diverse reasons for shelter entry
  - More likely to exit homelessness into newly acquired housing, irrespective of the reason for shelter entry
- Findings suggest that existing primary and secondary prevention strategies in Canada do not meet the needs of those experiencing financial and substance use challenges
- For recurrent users, the promotion of Housing First policies appears to increase exits into housing. However the more time spent in shelter negatively influences housing outcomes, reinforcing the need for early intervention prevention initiatives

# For more information



Chen, X., Cooper, I. & Rivier, J. (2021):  
Homelessness prevention and determinants of  
housing among first-time and recurrent emergency  
shelter users in Canada, *Housing Studies*

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