

# Collecting Meaningful Data to Leverage Change in Rural and Remote Communities

Rebecca Schiff, Ph.D.

Ashley Wilkinson, MHSc.

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness - National Conference on Ending Homelessness

November 2, 2022



Grand Ol'e  
**BARBER SHOP**  
4612 Greig Avenue



NO PARKING  
ANYTIME

B LE  
50 077

1C  
387 961



# Overview

- Background / context
- Approach / Methods
- Results
- Recommendations



# Research Team & Acknowledgements

- Ashley Wilkinson, MHSc.
- Terrilee Kelford
- Shane Pelletier
- Jeannette Waegemakers Schiff, Ph.D.

Schiff R, Wilkinson A, Kelford T, Pelletier S, and Waegemakers Schiff J. *Forthcoming*. Counting the Undercounted: Enumerating Rural Homelessness in Canada. *International Journal on Homelessness*.

This research was supported by way of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Grant # 1004-2019-0007 and Partnership Engage Grant # 1008-2020-



Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Canada 

# Background

- Homelessness in rural places understudied
- Most reports focus on qualitative methods to understand the nature of rural homelessness - issues such as:
  - rural-urban migration (Waegemakers Schiff et al, 2015)
  - pathways into and out of rural homelessness (Christensen, 2012)
  - hidden aspects of rural homelessness (MacDonald & Gaulin, 2020)
  - specific groups of people experiencing rural homelessness such as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) peoples (National Advisory Council on Poverty, 2021; Christensen, 2013)
  - victims of domestic violence (Waegemakers Schiff et al, 2015)
  - youth (Waegemakers Schiff et al, 2015)

# Background

- Less attention to scope and scale of (quantifying) rural homelessness
- Focus on rural homelessness as primarily “hidden”
- Perceived methodological challenges with rural enumeration
  - locating people who are unhoused can be difficult due to:
    - dispersed geography
    - prevalence of people living in undeveloped areas at the edge or outside of towns and settlements

# Background

- Enumeration provides critical information to inform program and policy development
  - National coordinated PiT count does not specifically include / analyse at rural level
- Recent efforts to develop and implement methods in rural settings
  - PiT counts (Ontario & B.C.)
  - Period – Prevalence
  - RDN and other hybrid approaches

# Approach / Methods

- Assumption that most (if not all) published electronically
- Began with two repositories:
  - B.C. Housing website
    - <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre/housing-data/homeless-counts>
  - RDN website
    - <https://www.ruraldevelopment.ca/publications/2020-rural-housing-and-service-needs-estimation-project>
- Internet searches using key words (such as PiT count or Period Prevalence count) combined with rural place names in each province / territory



# Approach / Methods

- Focus on most comprehensive current assessment:
  - included all reports regardless of methodology
  - avoided comparisons between reports using different methodologies
  - comparative analysis to identify discrepancies between reports
    - such as those methodologies which seemed to report lower / higher per capita rates of homelessness or did not report on certain aspects of the scope of homelessness

# Approach / Methods

- Each enumeration entered into a row of an Excel spreadsheet
  - Data from each count were entered into columns for information that was reported consistently across counts including:
    - geography / location; enumeration method; # individuals counted; proportion of population experiencing homelessness (# PEH/2016 census pop.); eligibility criteria; gender; age
  - also included data extraction categories for additional characteristics that were frequently reported and have been identified as significant in previous studies of rural homelessness:
    - Indigenous identification; migration data (if individuals had moved to the location from a different region); history of homelessness / youth homelessness history; chronic v. episodic homelessness; hidden homelessness indicators and; health information
  - Column for “additional information”

# Results

- 54 counts:
  - 22 PiT counts; 10 Period prevalence count; 22 Hybrid enumerations (RDN and others)
  - 8 Provinces/ Territories: AB, BC, MB, NB, NWT, NS, ON, YT
    - AB, BC, and ON large proportion of counts
  - Conducted between 2018 - 2021

# Findings: Scale of rural homelessness

- High per capita rates compared to urban centres

	Community	Population Count (2016 Census)	Homeless Count	Homeless Percentage
Urban Communities	Calgary	1,239,220	2,911	0.23%
	Thunder Bay	107,909	221	0.20%
	Toronto	2,731,571	8,715	0.32%
	Vancouver	631,486	2,181	0.35%
Rural Communities	District of Kenora	65,533	393	0.60%
	Drumheller	7,982	36	0.45%
	Fort Macleod	2,967	46	1.55%
	Greenview	5,583	65	1.16%
	Hinton	9,882	51	0.52%
	Lac Lac Biche County	8,330	45	0.54%
	Manitoulin-Sudbury	15,692	122	0.78%
	Merritt	7,139	43	0.60%
	Port Alberni	17,678	125	0.71%
	Prince Rupert	12,220	118	0.97%
	Quesnel	9,879	121	1.22%
	Rainy River District	10,492	111	1.06%
	Thompson	13,678	130	0.95%
	Yellowknife	19,569	338	1.73%



# Findings: Scale of rural homelessness

- Length & type of homelessness

- Many counts (48%) contained data that differentiated between hidden and absolute homelessness
- BC counts documented the number of persons sleeping in vehicles:
  - Ranged from low of 11% in Vernon to 26% Parksville / Qualicum and a high of 61% in Squamish
- Most counts (29) outside of Alberta (53% of all counts; 94% of those outside of Alberta) documented information related to episodic v. chronic homelessness
  - Many (17 of 29) reported high rates of chronic homelessness - 50% of more had been experiencing homelessness for more than 6 months
  - Several reported that over 50% had been experiencing homeless for 1 year or longer
    - Smithers BC: 80% were experiencing chronic homelessness

# Findings: Scope of rural homelessness

- Almost all of the rural enumerations (96%) reported on and found high proportions of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness
- All but one count reported on ages
  - Most counts reported on youth (30) and seniors (33) however the reports used varying criteria for defining these age groups
  - Most counts reported rates of youth homelessness lower than national average and senior homelessness higher than national average
- Many counts (27) reported on family homelessness
  - Usually identified as # single parent households and / or the number of adults who were caring for minors

# Recommendations

- Expand and support consistent approaches to rural homelessness enumeration
  - Approaches that take into account the reality of absolute and high per capita rates of non-hidden homelessness
  - Use culturally safe approaches
  - Refine urban enumeration
- Revise federal and provincial homelessness funding formulas
- Indigenous experiences of homelessness in rural Canada

# Thank you!

[rebecca.schiff@unbc.ca](mailto:rebecca.schiff@unbc.ca)

Schiff R, Wilkinson A, Kelford T, Pelletier S, and Waegemakers Schiff J. *Forthcoming*. Counting the Undercounted: Enumerating Rural Homelessness in Canada. *International Journal on Homelessness*.