



Accounting for Homelessness

November 8, 2023 | Halifax, NS
National Conference on Ending Homelessness

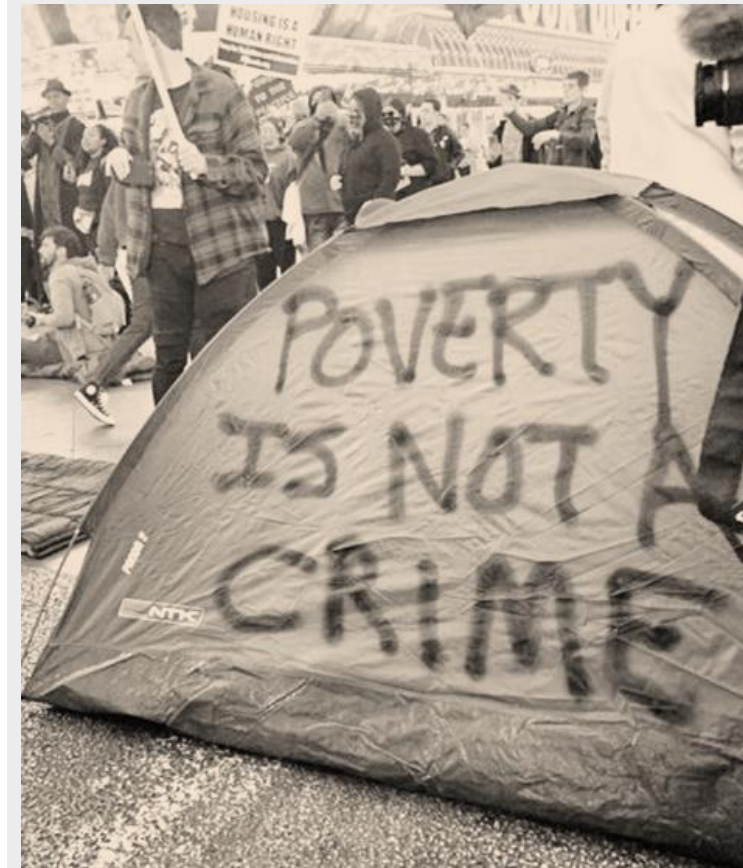


Outline

1. What are we measuring when measuring homelessness?
2. Homelessness data sources
 - a) Coverage
 - b) Frequency
 - c) Quality
3. Efforts to address data gaps

What is homelessness?

- Homelessness is the situation of an individual or family who does not have a permanent address or residence
- It is often the result of a combination of structural, individual, and systemic factors, including:
 - lack of affordable and appropriate housing
 - individual/household financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges
 - discharge from correctional and health facilities
 - aging out of care (e.g. foster care, group homes)
 - racism and discrimination



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What are we measuring

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness developed the Canadian Definition of Homelessness¹, with a typology based on overnight locations



Provisionally Accommodated

- Interim housing (Transitional)
- Short-term rentals
- Institutional care
- Staying with others



At risk of homelessness

- Imminent risk of eviction
- Subject to violence
- Core Housing Need



Emergency Sheltered

- Overnight homeless shelters
- Domestic Violence shelters
- Extreme weather shelters

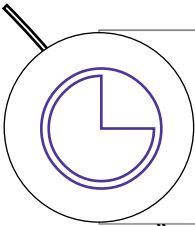


Unsheltered

- Public spaces
- Encampments
- Places not fit for human habitation (e.g. cars)

HOMELESSNESS DATA SOURCES

Homelessness Data Sources



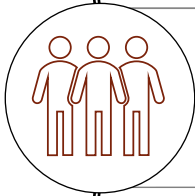
Point-in-Time Counts

- Enumeration: One-night snapshot of homelessness, counting the number of people in sheltered locations, unsheltered locations and transitional housing
- Survey: Providing information on demographics and experiences of homelessness



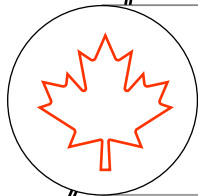
Homelessness Management Information System Data (e.g. HIFIS)

- Administrative data from homelessness services, including shelters, outreach, etc.
- Statistics on service use and on those who access them, as well as case management information



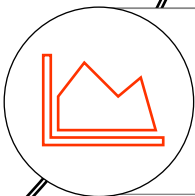
Unique Identifier List / By Name List

- Community-level “real-time” list of people who access shelter (and consent to be on the Unique Identifier List or By Name List)
- Allows for long-term tracking of inflow, outflow, and returns to homelessness



National Surveys

- Questions on homelessness in the Canadians’ Safety cycle of the GSS, the Canadian Housing Survey, etc.
- Census shelter counts

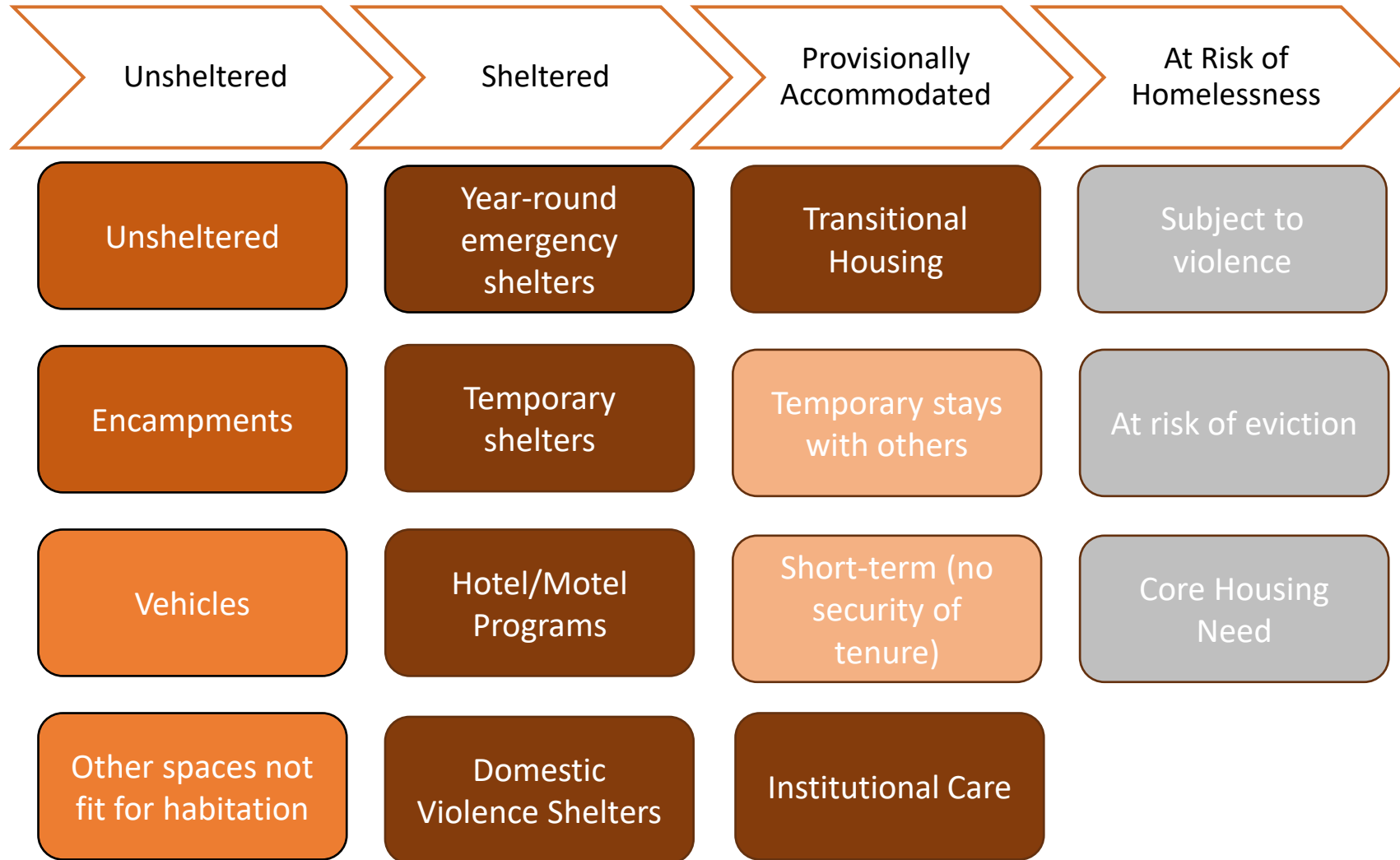


Emerging Data Sources

- Research underway to identify indicators of homelessness in other data sources, such as health data (e.g. Ontario’s ICES database), to add indicators of housing status to some data sources (e.g. Coroner data), and to link data sets (e.g. BC’s Integrated Data Project)

Data Sources

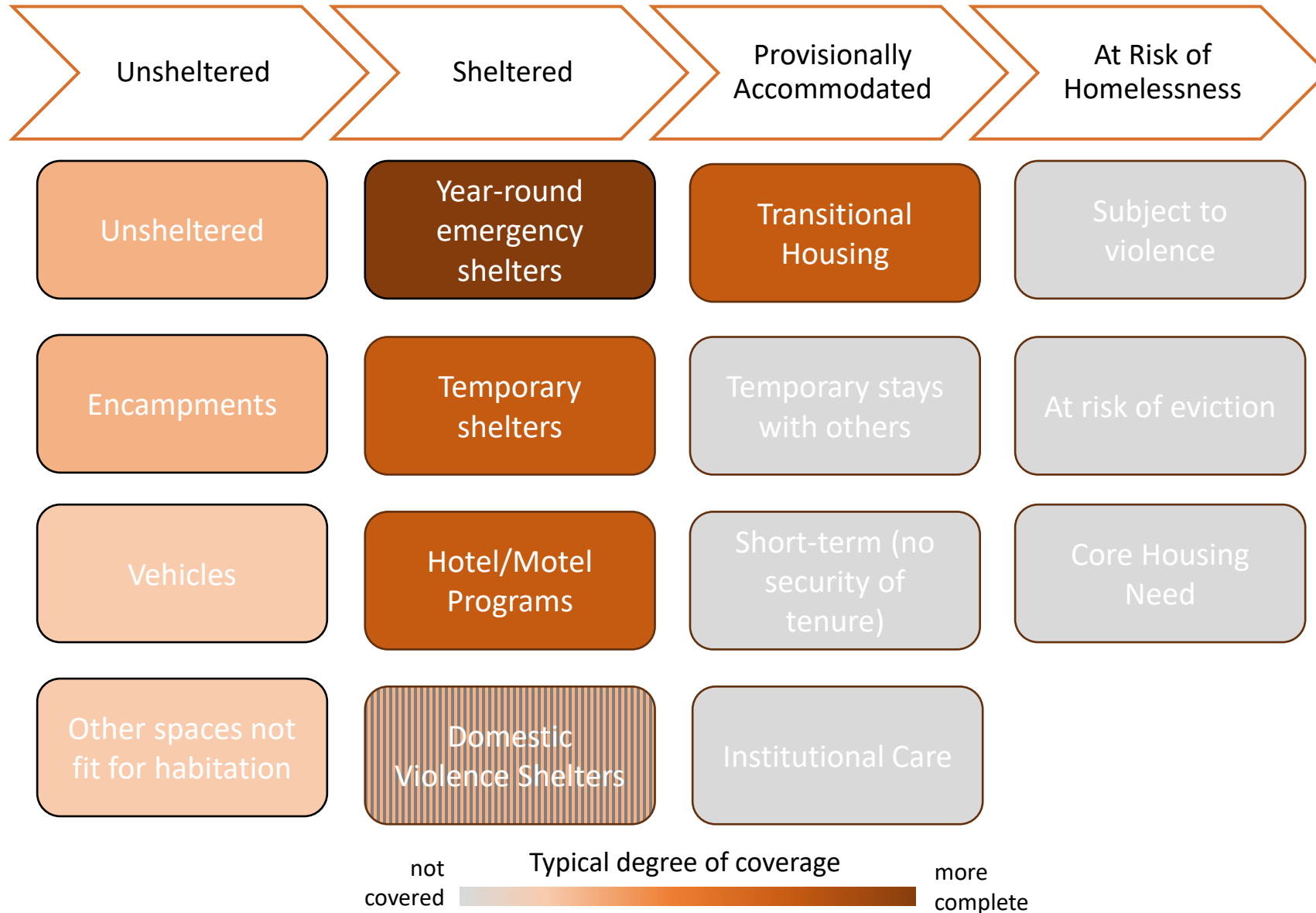
Point-in-Time Counts



not covered Typical degree of coverage more complete

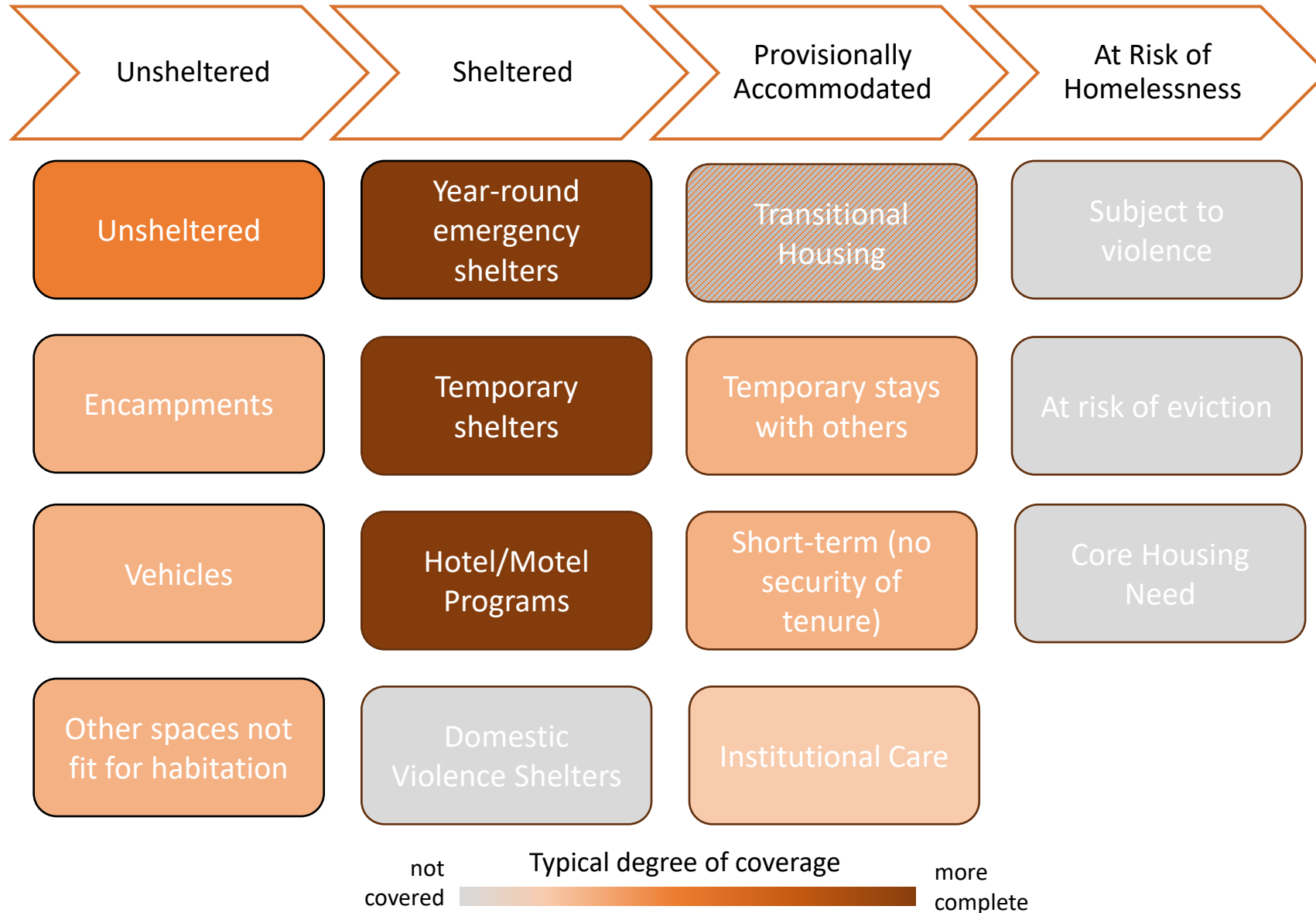
Data Sources

Administrative Data



Data Sources

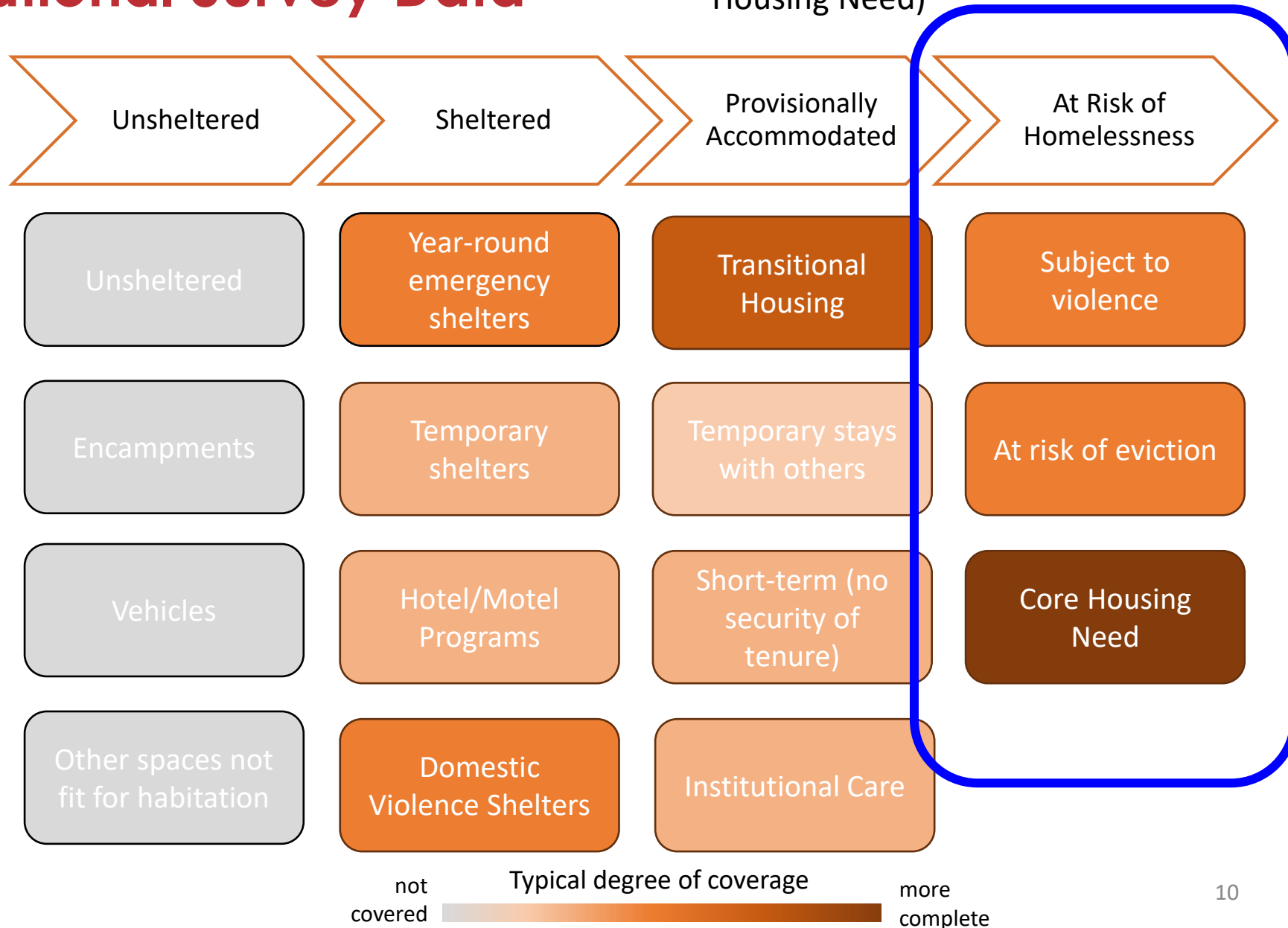
Unique Identifier List / By Name List



Data Sources

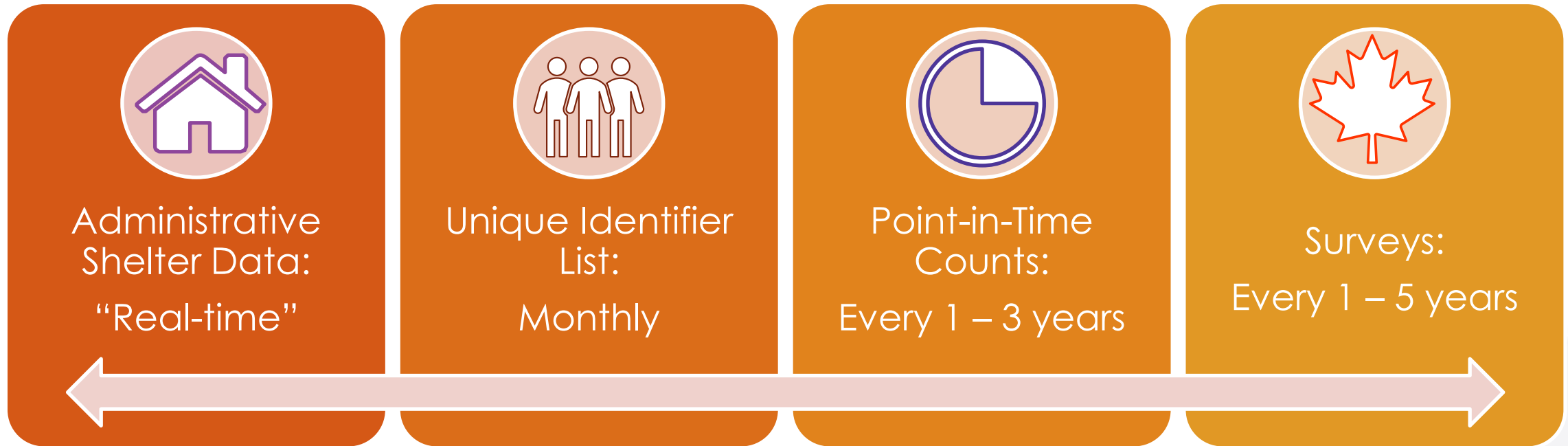
National Survey Data

* Coverage varies depending on the data source (e.g. Census population vs. Core Housing Need)



Data Sources

Frequency of Collection

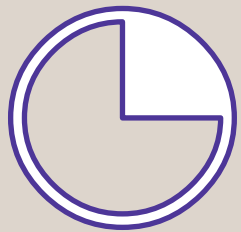


A key consideration is how frequently you need an updated picture. If planning is done on an annual basis, there are multiple options, but if planning is done more frequently, administrative or person-specific data is needed.

Data Sources

Data Quality Considerations

Do the data accurately represent what you are trying to measure?



Point-in-Time Counts:

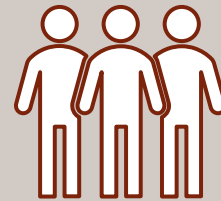
Depends on implementation and rigour.

A “minimum” count of unsheltered homelessness.



Administrative Shelter Data

Very good on numbers of people accessing shelter facilities. Client information depends on quality of data entry.



Unique Identifier List:

Very dependent upon quality and frequency of updates.

Better if using an administrative data system.



Surveys:

Excellent. Statistics Canada data has to meet a high data quality bar in order to be released.

Be mindful of scope, however.

ADDRESSING DATA GAPS

Data Coverage and Gaps

Combining Data Sources

How to develop a comprehensive picture given limitations with existing tools? For now, the answer is to combine and compare sources

Unsheltered

- **Collect in HIFIS/HMIS**
- **Supplement with UIL/BNL**
- **Verify with PiT Count**

Sheltered

- **Collect in HIFIS/HMIS**
- **Supplement with UIL/BNL**
- **Verify with PiT Count**

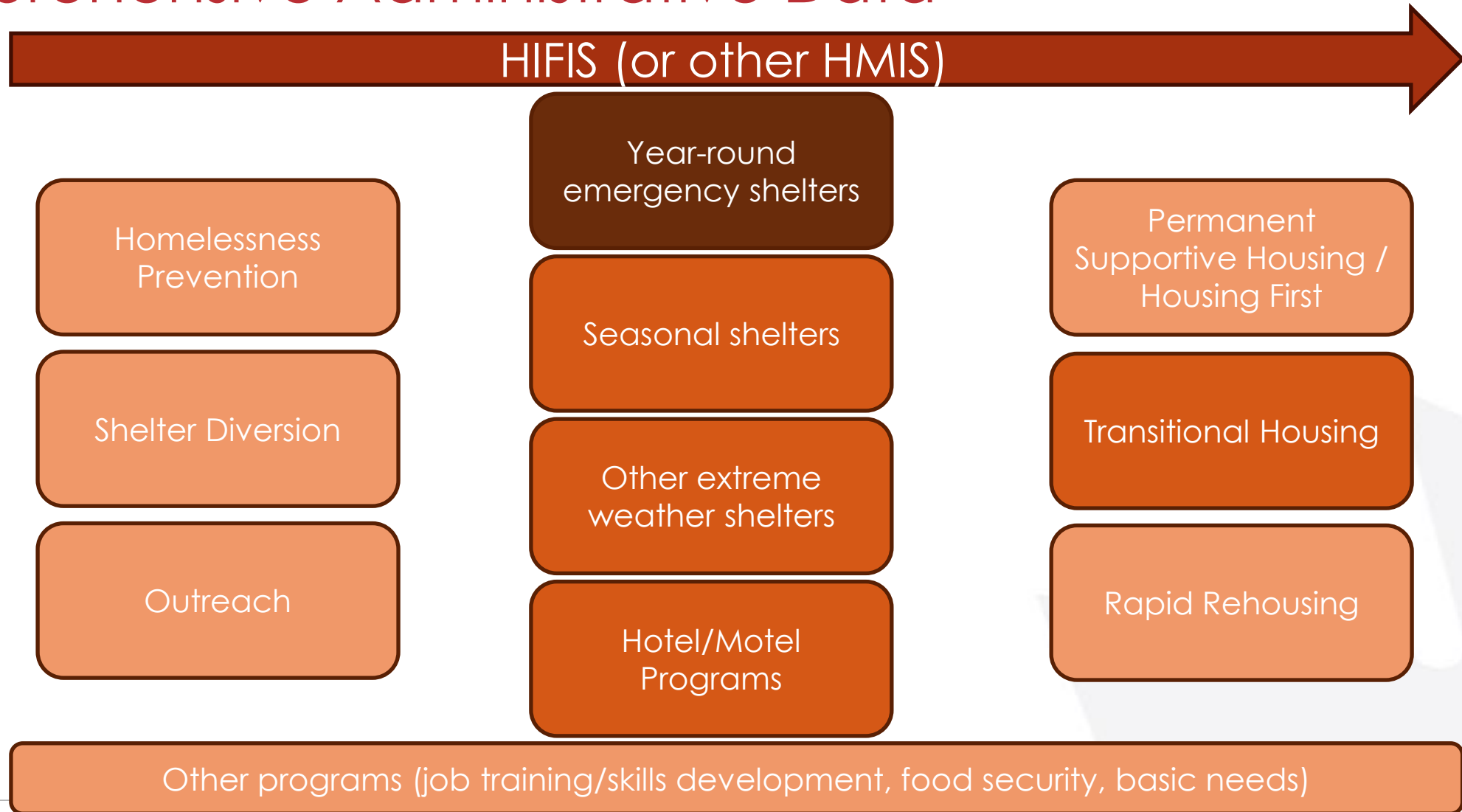
Provisionally Accommodated

- **Collect with UIL/BNL (those accessing services)**

At Risk of Homelessness

- **Select statistics from Statistics Canada and Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation**

Data Coverage and Gaps: Comprehensive Administrative Data



Addressing Data Gaps

Even with all of these data sources, gaps remain in our picture of homelessness. They include:

- How does unsheltered homelessness fluctuate over time?
- How many people experience “hidden homelessness” staying temporarily with others?
- How many people experience homelessness in rural areas?
- How many people experience homelessness in health and correctional systems?

Addressing Data Gaps

Unsheltered Homelessness

Infrastructure Canada is seeking to support a shift to more frequent data collection on people experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations (e.g. encampments) through two initiatives:

Annual Enumeration

Not a full Point-in-Time Count, but an annual update of how many people are sleeping unsheltered.

Comprehensive HIFIS

Shifting HIFIS from a shelter management tool to a comprehensive system tool.

Addressing Data Gaps

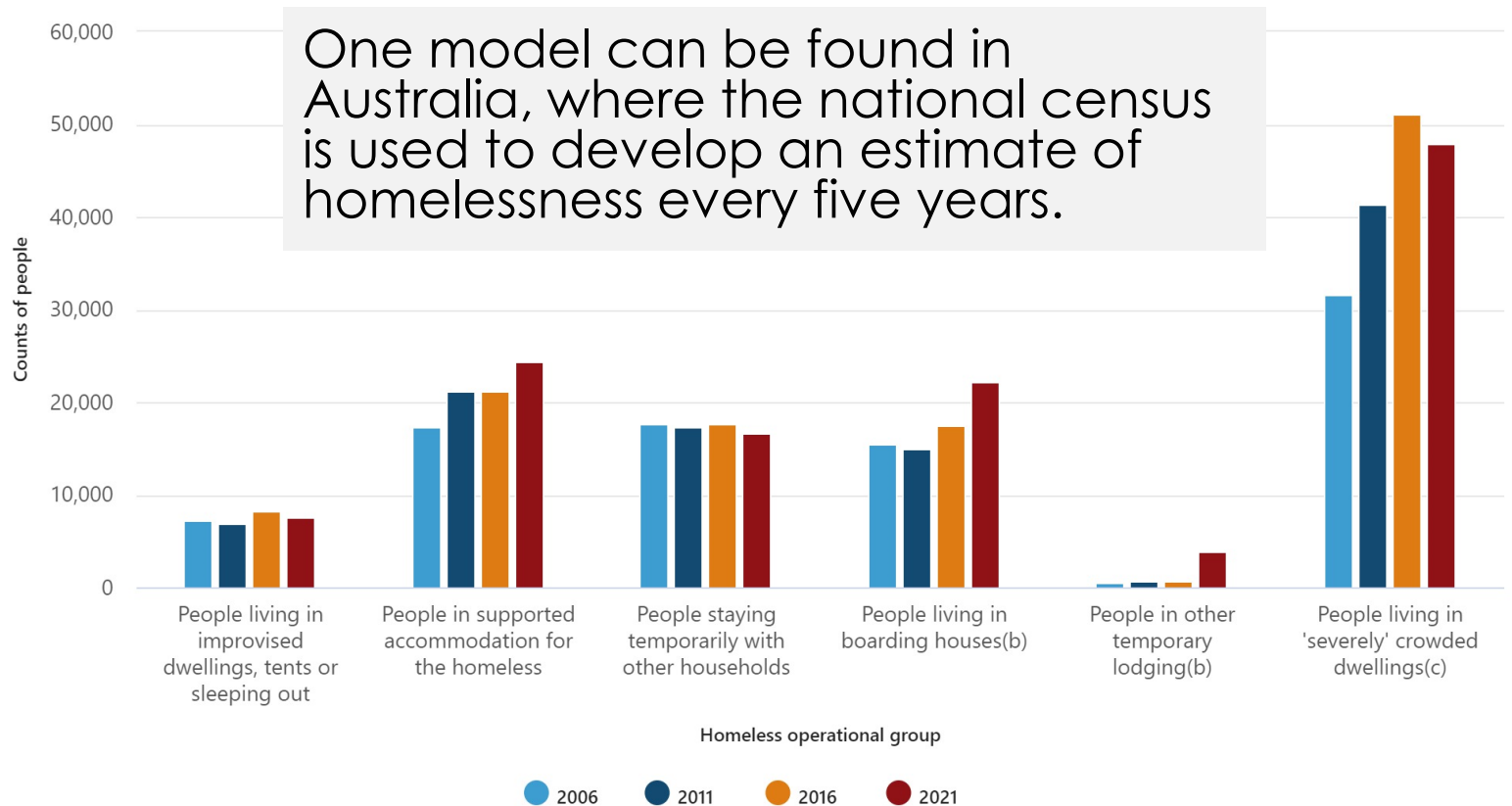
Hidden and Rural Homelessness

Because people staying temporarily with others may or may not be accessing services, national surveys may be the only way to get a complete picture.

Similarly, service-based data may undercount homelessness in rural and remote areas, which have fewer services.

Infrastructure Canada is working with Statistics Canada to explore options to estimate this population.

Graph 2. Counts of people experiencing homelessness by homeless operational group(a), Australia, 2006 to 2021



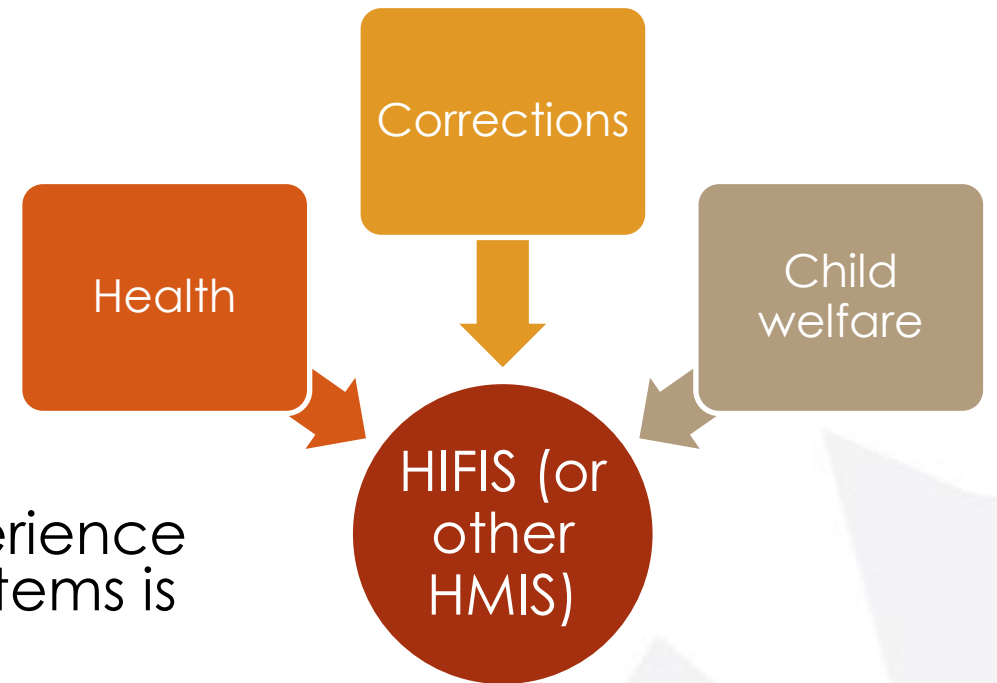
Addressing Data Gaps Systems Homelessness

Experience with certain social systems may put people at risk of experiencing homelessness upon discharge.

Data can be collected on flow from these systems as part of intake (e.g. to a Unique Identifier List), but this will always be retrospective.

Understanding how many people may experience homelessness after discharge from these systems is challenging:

- Privacy laws can prevent data sharing
- Transition may not be direct (e.g. child welfare systems)



Addressing Data Gaps Systems Homelessness

Some communities use Point-in-Time Count surveys or data on people within these systems who have no fixed address to provide a rough estimate, but these require the active engagement of those responsible for these systems.

Other promising approaches are being explored:

- Data linkages across systems
 - [Preventing and reducing homelessness: An integrated data project - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-services/mental-health/substance-use/preventing-reducing-homelessness-integrated-data-project)
- Using algorithms to identify homelessness in systems
 - [Getting the data on homelessness | Lawson Health Research Institute \(lawsonresearch.ca\)](https://www.lawsonresearch.ca/getting-the-data-on-homelessness)

Importance for our National Understanding

Our national understanding of homelessness is largely built upon data collected in communities.

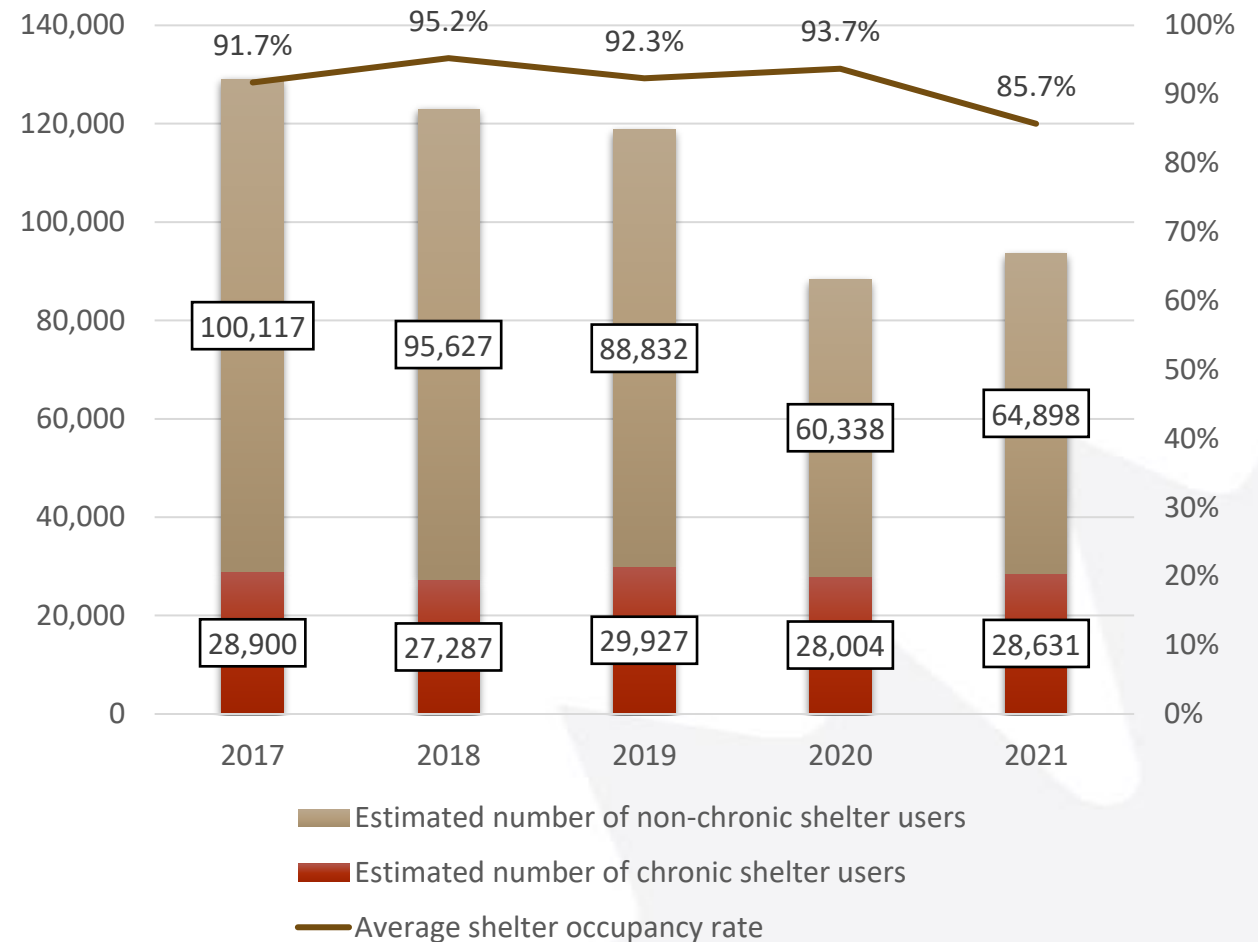
Comprehensive community data not only lead to better local understanding and less burden on people accessing services, they also lead to better national understanding.

In 2020 and 2021, we saw major drops in the number of people accessing the emergency shelter system. Did this indicate a drop in homelessness?

Point-in-Time count data helped to identify that there was a 91% increase in unsheltered homelessness in counts that took place over 2020-21 compared to 2018.

Comprehensive community data collection will help to provide more accurate information to understand the scale of housing needs among people experiencing homelessness.

National Shelter Study 2021



Thank you

For any questions, please feel free to contact me:

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Or the INFC Homelessness Analysis Team:

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To find out more about national homelessness statistics:

[Infrastructure Canada - Data analysis, reports and publications](#)

- [Shelter Capacity Report 2021](#)
- [A profile of workers in the homelessness support sector, 2021 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)
- [Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2021 Update](#)
- [Everyone Counts 2020-2022: Preliminary Highlights Report](#)
- [Homelessness data snapshot: Homelessness experienced by Newcomers to Canada](#)
- [Homelessness data snapshot: Veteran homelessness in Canada](#)
- [Infrastructure Canada - Report on addiction, substance use and homelessness](#)