Homelessness in Canada leading up to the pandemic and how it may be changing

Homelessness in the time of COVID-19

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Contributors

This presentation draws on the work of analysts from the Homelessness Policy Directorate.

Annie Duchesne: National Shelter Study
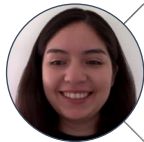
Siqin Guo: Chronic Homelessness Estimates

Sajidul Quayum: Point-in-Time Counts

Rachel Campbell: Point-in-Time Counts

Indya Boucher-Martin: Shelter Capacity

Naomi Garrido: Shelter Capacity

Outline

Understanding homelessness at a national level

- Data sources
- Measuring the impact of the pandemic

Pre-pandemic trends

- Shelter use
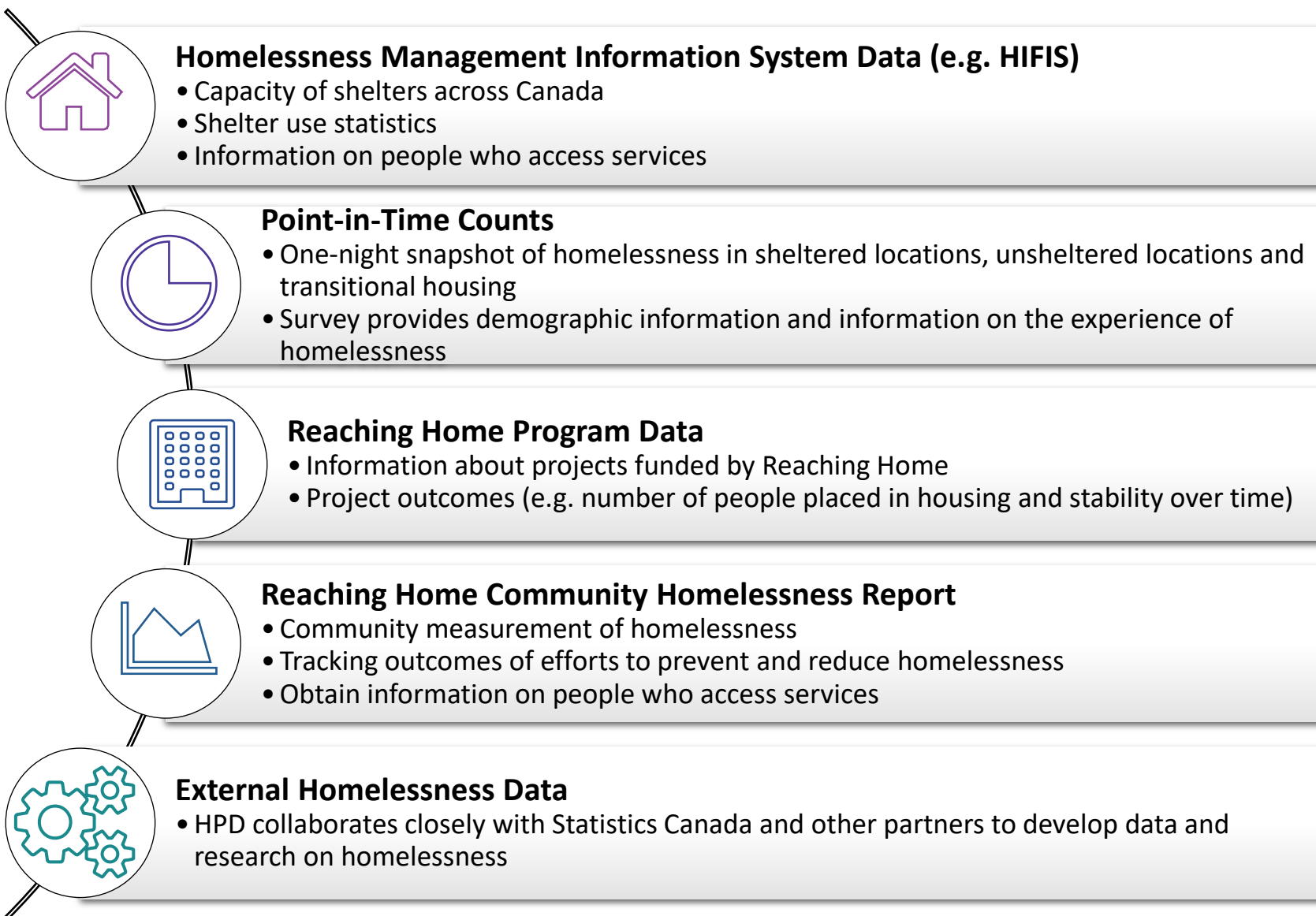- Chronic homelessness
- Shelter capacity

Assessing the impact of the pandemic

- Changes seen in 2020 and 2021 Point-in-Time counts

Improving homelessness data

- Forthcoming data
- The national data strategy

National data sources on homelessness

Homelessness Management Information System Data (e.g. HIFIS)
- Capacity of shelters across Canada
- Shelter use statistics
- Information on people who access services

Point-in-Time Counts
- One-night snapshot of homelessness in sheltered locations, unsheltered locations and transitional housing
- Survey provides demographic information and information on the experience of homelessness

Reaching Home Program Data
- Information about projects funded by Reaching Home
- Project outcomes (e.g. number of people placed in housing and stability over time)

Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report
- Community measurement of homelessness
- Tracking outcomes of efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness
- Obtain information on people who access services

External Homelessness Data
- HPD collaborates closely with Statistics Canada and other partners to develop data and research on homelessness

Measuring the impact of the pandemic

With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, it was critical to understand how people experiencing homelessness were affected. However, the frequency of reporting presented a challenge for achieving an updated picture:

Shelter Data

Analyzed on an annual basis, but results are only available once exports are received, and data are cleaned and integrated into an annual data set.

Program Data

Project outcomes data rely on annual reporting, but service providers and community entities were dealing with the impact of COVID-19

PiT Count Data

PiT Counts typically relied on community volunteers, and most were postponed due to the ongoing pandemic

BNL/UIL Data

The Community Homelessness Reports were just introduced, and the majority of communities were still in the process of putting their lists in place
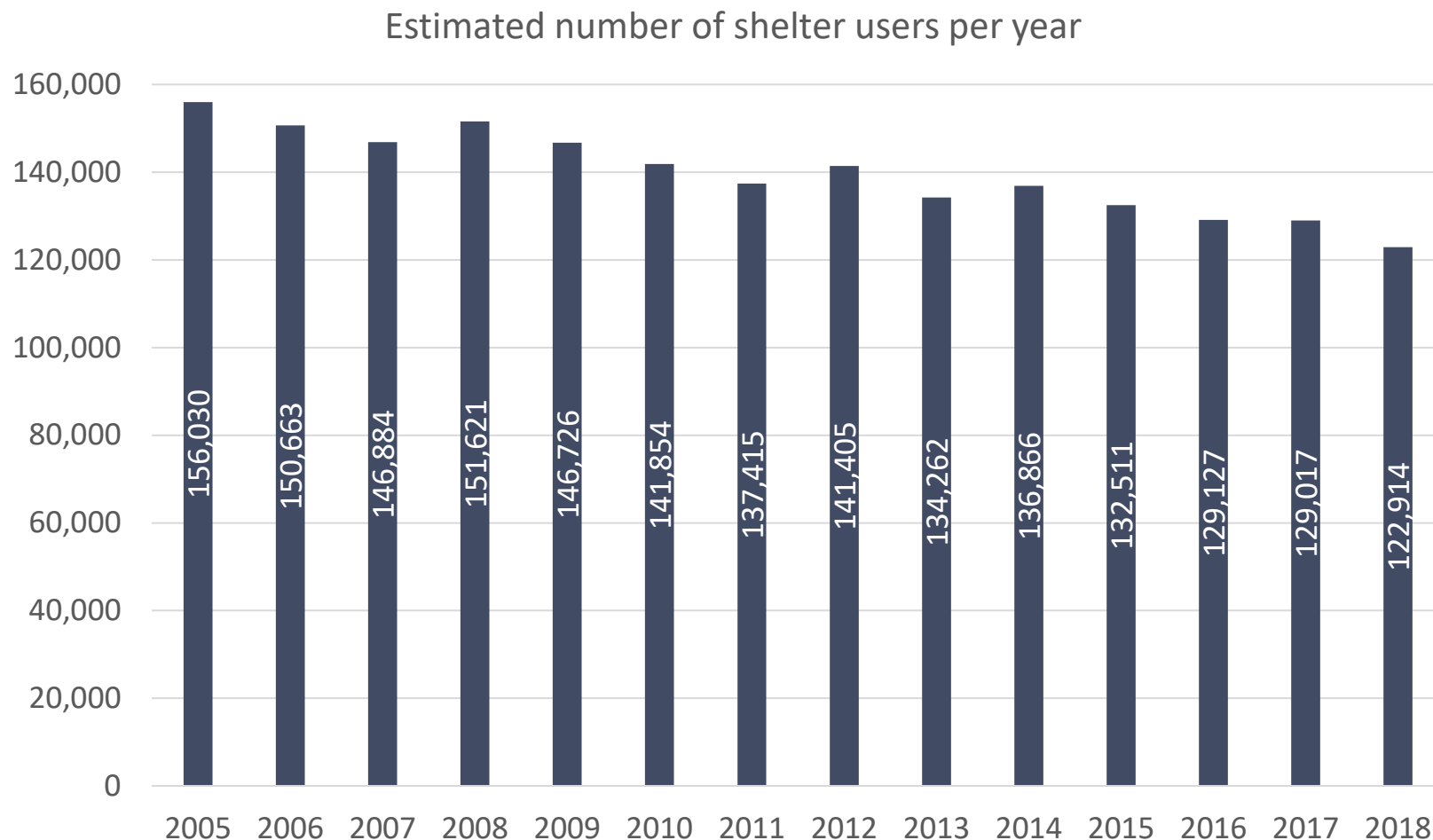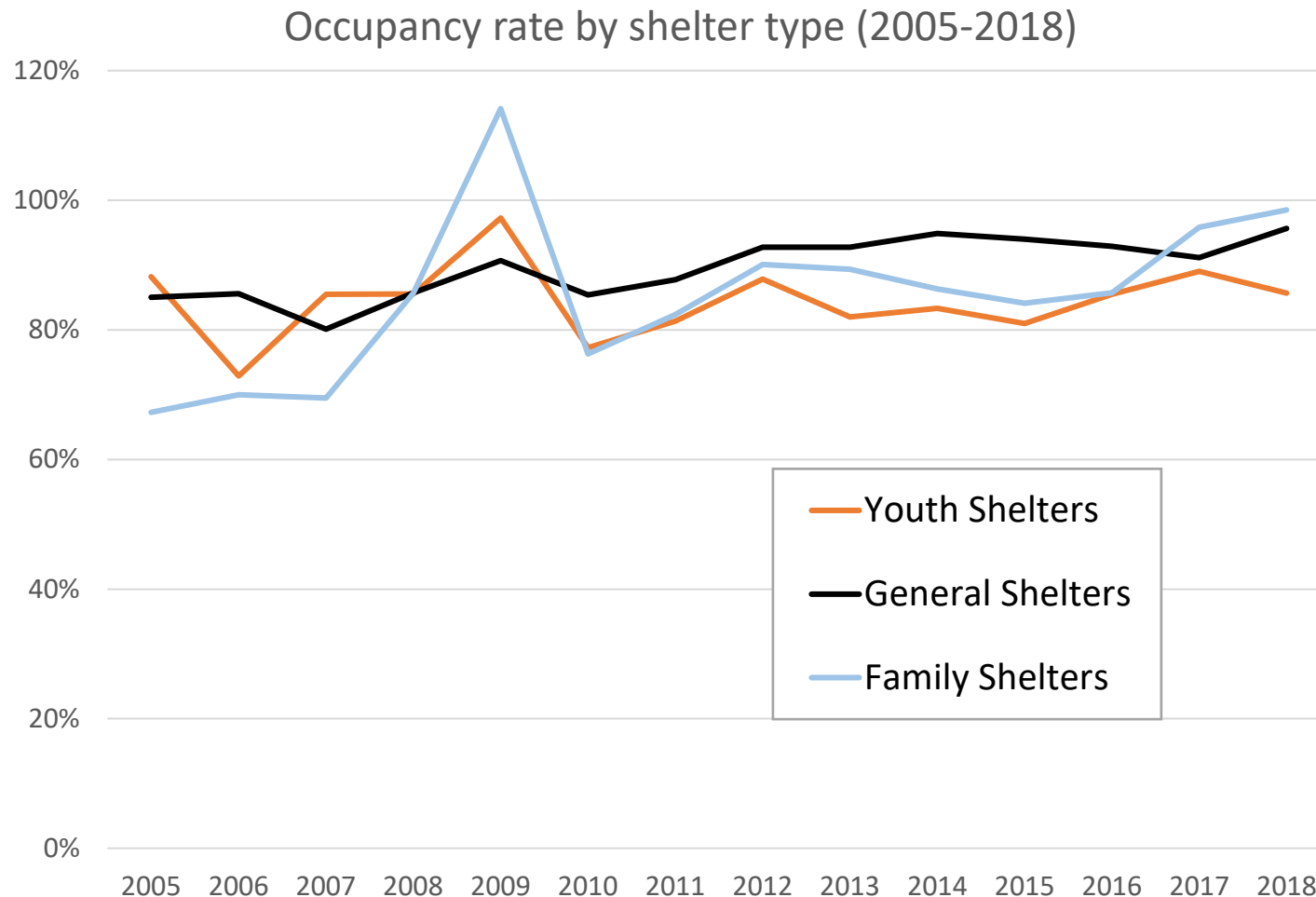
Pre-pandemic trends

Trends in shelter use and shelter capacity leading up to March 2020

Emergency shelter use

- Shelter use has been the most robust, longitudinal data available on homelessness in Canada.

- Estimates, based on a sample of service providers, are published as part of the ongoing National Shelter Study.

- Although they only capture a part of the picture of homelessness in Canada, they can demonstrate long term trends.

- The total estimated number of shelter users has been trending downwards between 2005 and 2018, despite slight increases after the 2007 recession and other economic downturns.

Estimated number of shelter users per year

Year	Estimated number of shelter users
2005	156,030
2006	150,663
2007	146,884
2008	151,621
2009	146,726
2010	141,854
2011	137,415
2012	141,405
2013	134,262
2014	136,866
2015	132,511
2016	129,127
2017	129,017
2018	122,914

7

Occupancy rates across shelter type

Occupancy rate by shelter type (2005-2018)

Legend:
- Youth Shelters
- General Shelters
- Family Shelters

- Although fewer people have been accessing shelters, those that have are staying longer. This is particularly true for shelters primarily serving families.

- It is important to consider what is not included when looking only at emergency shelters. These trends do not include:
  - Off-site overflow spaces (e.g. hotels)
  - Shelters set up to address a temporary need (e.g. extreme weather) and which are not open the whole year

Chronic Homelessness

- With these trends, notably with longer shelter stays, it might be expected that the percentage of shelter users affected by chronic homelessness would increase.

- Reductions in chronic homelessness is one of the key metrics for the Reaching Home program.

- For those unfamiliar with the Reaching Home definition of Chronic Homelessness, it is as follows:

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)

Chronic homelessness includes time spent in the following contexts:

1. Staying in unsheltered locations, that is public or private spaces without consent or contract, or places not intended for permanent human habitation (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) Typology: 1.1 and 1.2).
2. Staying in emergency shelters, including overnight shelters for people experiencing homelessness (including those for specific populations, such as youth, families, and newcomers), shelters for people impacted by family violence, and emergency shelters for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation (COH Typology: 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3).
3. Staying temporarily with others without guarantee of continued residency or the immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing, or short-term rental accommodations (for example, motels) without security of tenure (COH typology: 3.2 and 3.3).

- It does not include situations where individuals have access to **secure, permanent housing**, whether subsidized or not. The definition also does not include time spent in **transitional housing** or in **public institutions** (for example, health and corrections), although individuals who are discharged into homelessness from transitional housing or public institutions can be considered chronically homeless if they were experiencing chronic homelessness upon entry to transitional housing or the public institution.

Definition of National Housing Strategy Chronic Homelessness Indicator

The challenges with this definition is that the most reliable national data available are shelter data, meaning that those who are not accessing shelters are not included. As a result, Reaching Home relies on a Chronic Homelessness indicator, which can help to track changes in chronic homelessness over time, but which is limited to shelter users.

The indicator includes people who

- used a shelter for six months (180 days) or more in the past year, and/or;

- had shelter stays in each of the last three years.

Short Term

Long Term

Unlike previous measurements of chronic homelessness, it does not require that a person spend most of the past three years in a shelter, but rather that there is evidence of repeated shelter use over this time.

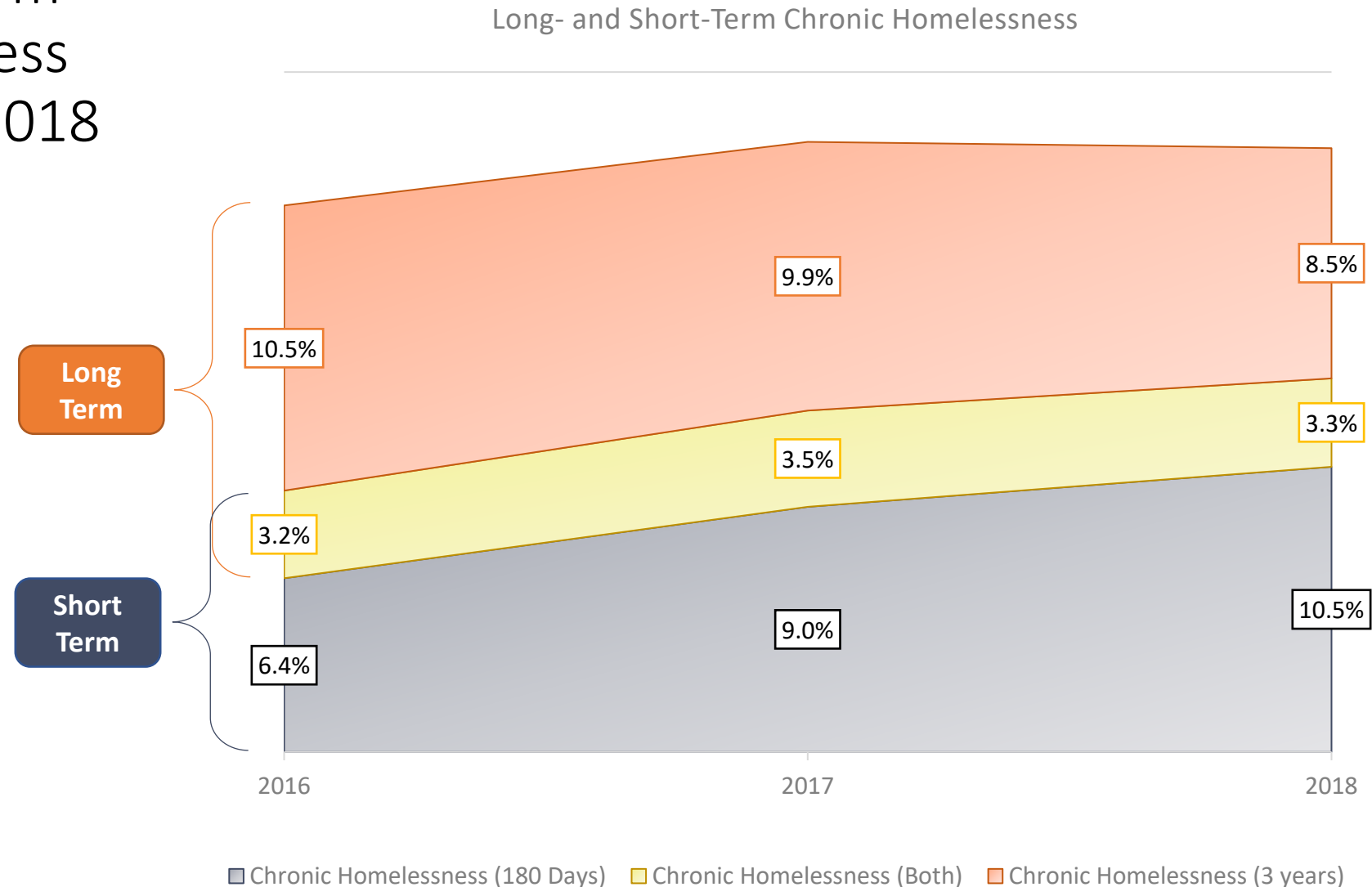# Comparison of 2016-2018 Estimates of Chronic Homelessness among Shelter Users

• Consistent with expectations from the increasing shelter stay lengths, the estimated number and percentage of shelter users experiencing chronic homelessness does showed a small increase in 2017, but was nearly unchanged in 2018.

• Factors such as improving data quality (e.g. reduced number of duplicates in community data) may contribute to this, but likely do not fully explain this trend.
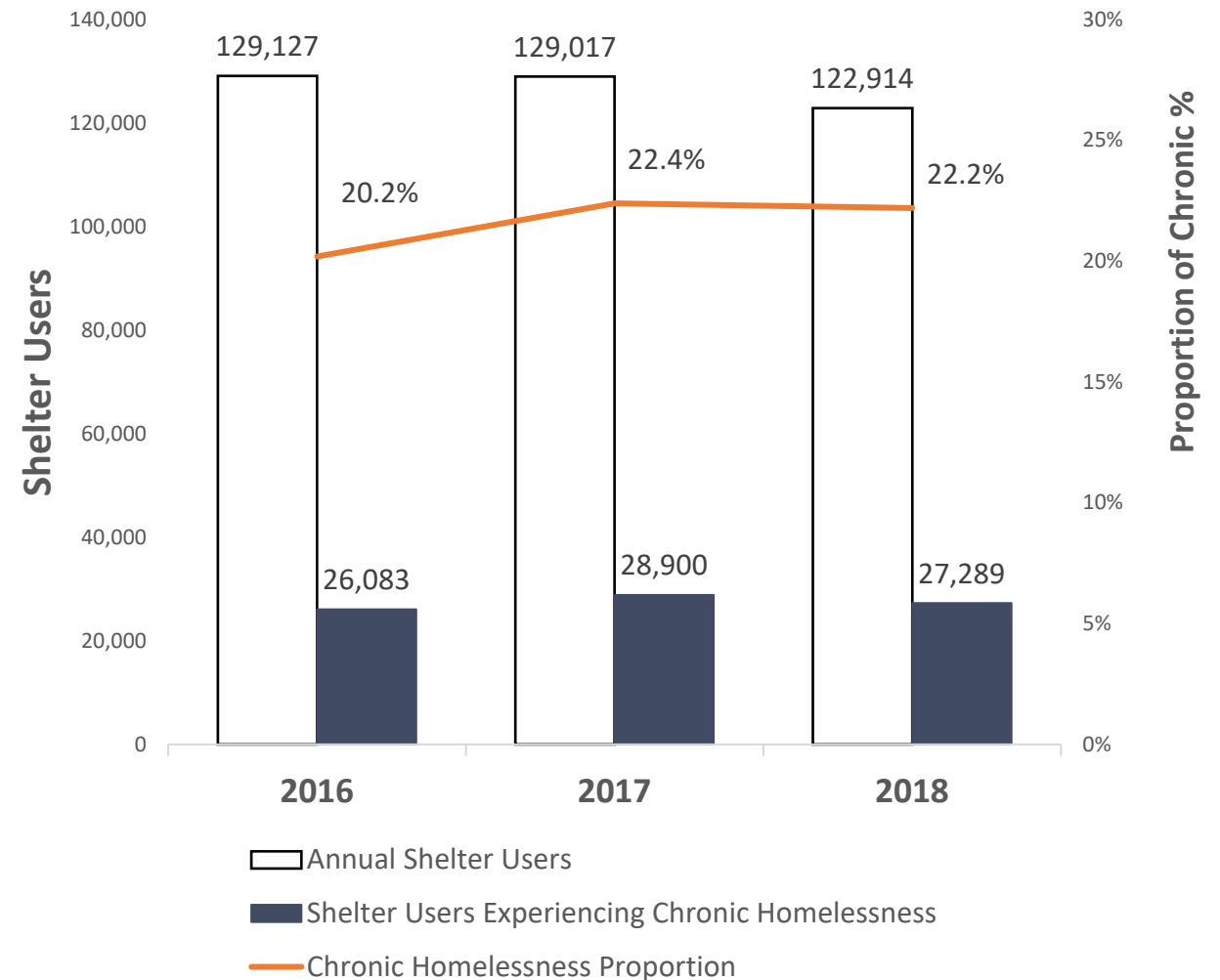
Long- and short-term chronic homelessness between 2016 and 2018

Differences can be seen in patterns of long-term and short-term chronic homelessness.

- Long-term chronic homelessness trended downwards from 13.7% in 2016 to 11.8% in 2018.

- Over the same period, short-term chronic homelessness has shown a small, but steady increase from 9.6% of shelter users to 13.8%.

Long- and Short-Term Chronic Homelessness

Long Term

10.5%

9.9%

8.5%

3.2%

3.5%

3.3%

Short Term

6.4%

9.0%

10.5%

2016   2017   2018

■ Chronic Homelessness (180 Days)   ■ Chronic Homelessness (Both)   ■ Chronic Homelessness (3 years)

Emergency Shelter Capacity

The National Service Provider List is a list of Canadian shelter services and their bed capacity updated annually. It includes capacity statistics for:
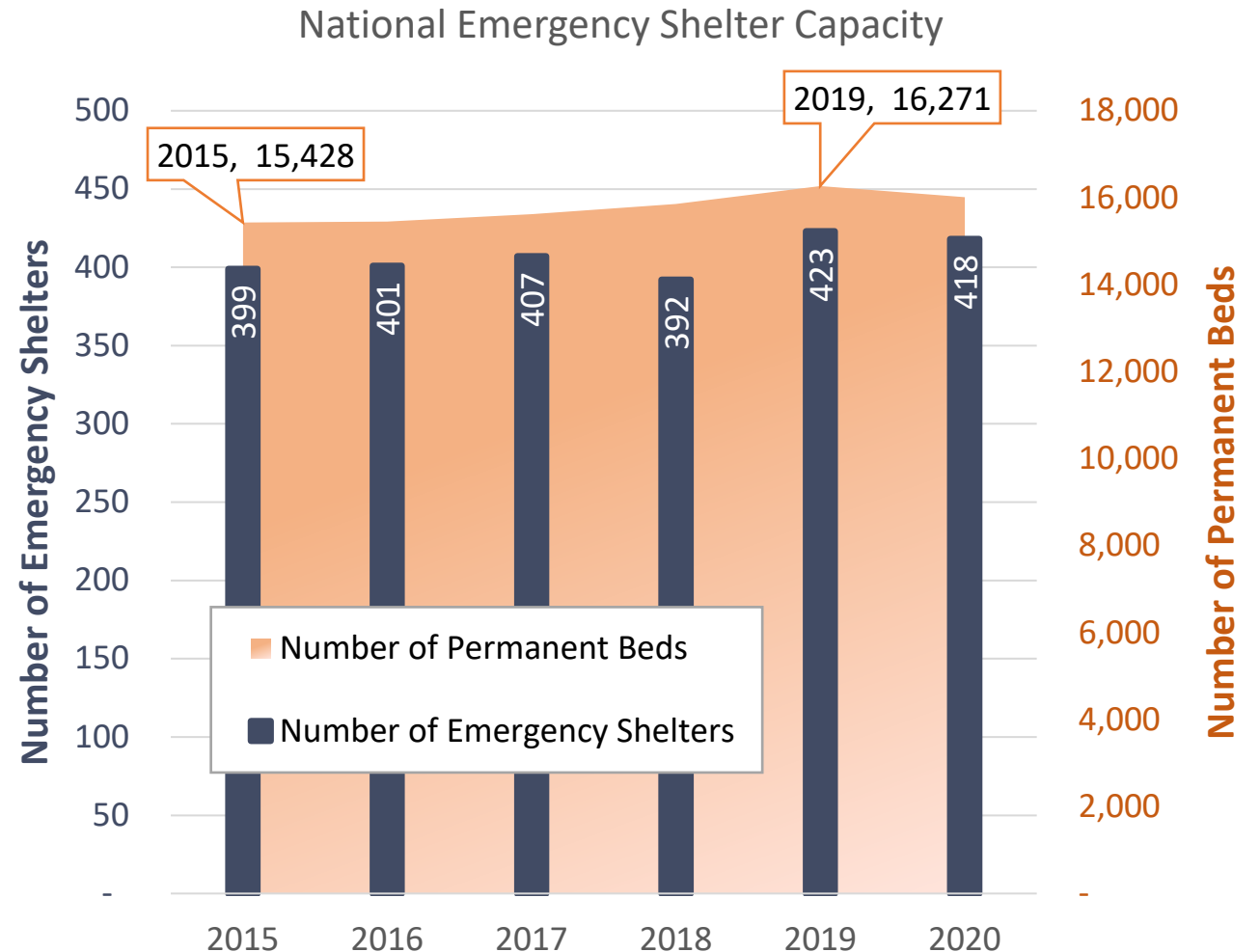
- Emergency shelters (including those that serve a specific population)

- Domestic Violence shelters

- Transitional housing services
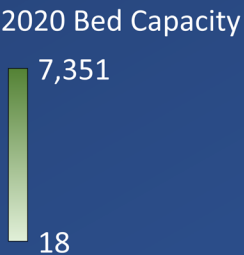
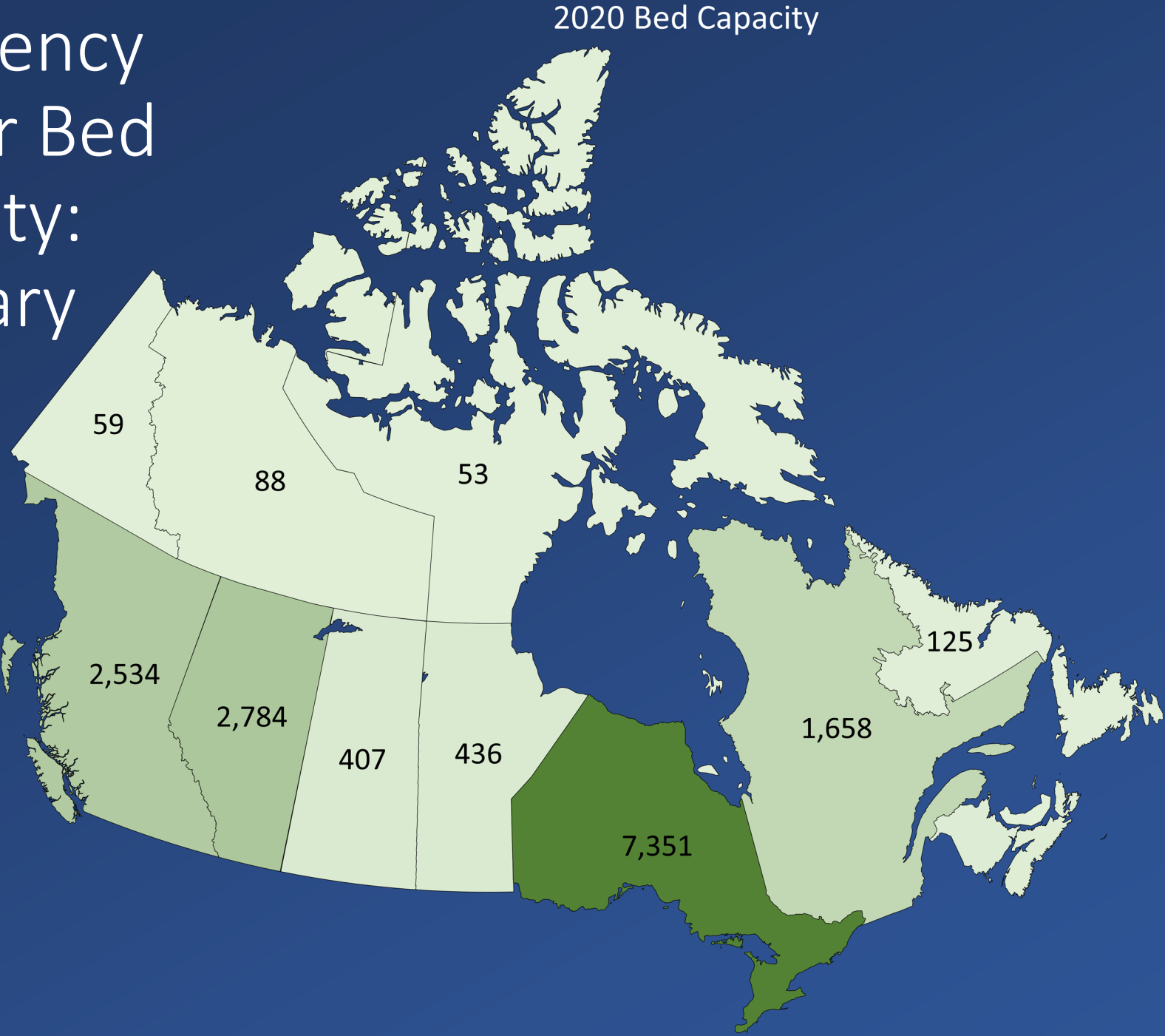# Changes in Shelter Capacity: 2015 to 2020

Shelter capacity is relatively stable with a small upward trend in bed capacity over time, although it may have peaked in 2019.

The 2020 data point reflects shelter capacity in February, before the pandemic.

A picture of the impact of the pandemic on permanent bed capacity is expected from the 2021 update, expected later this year.
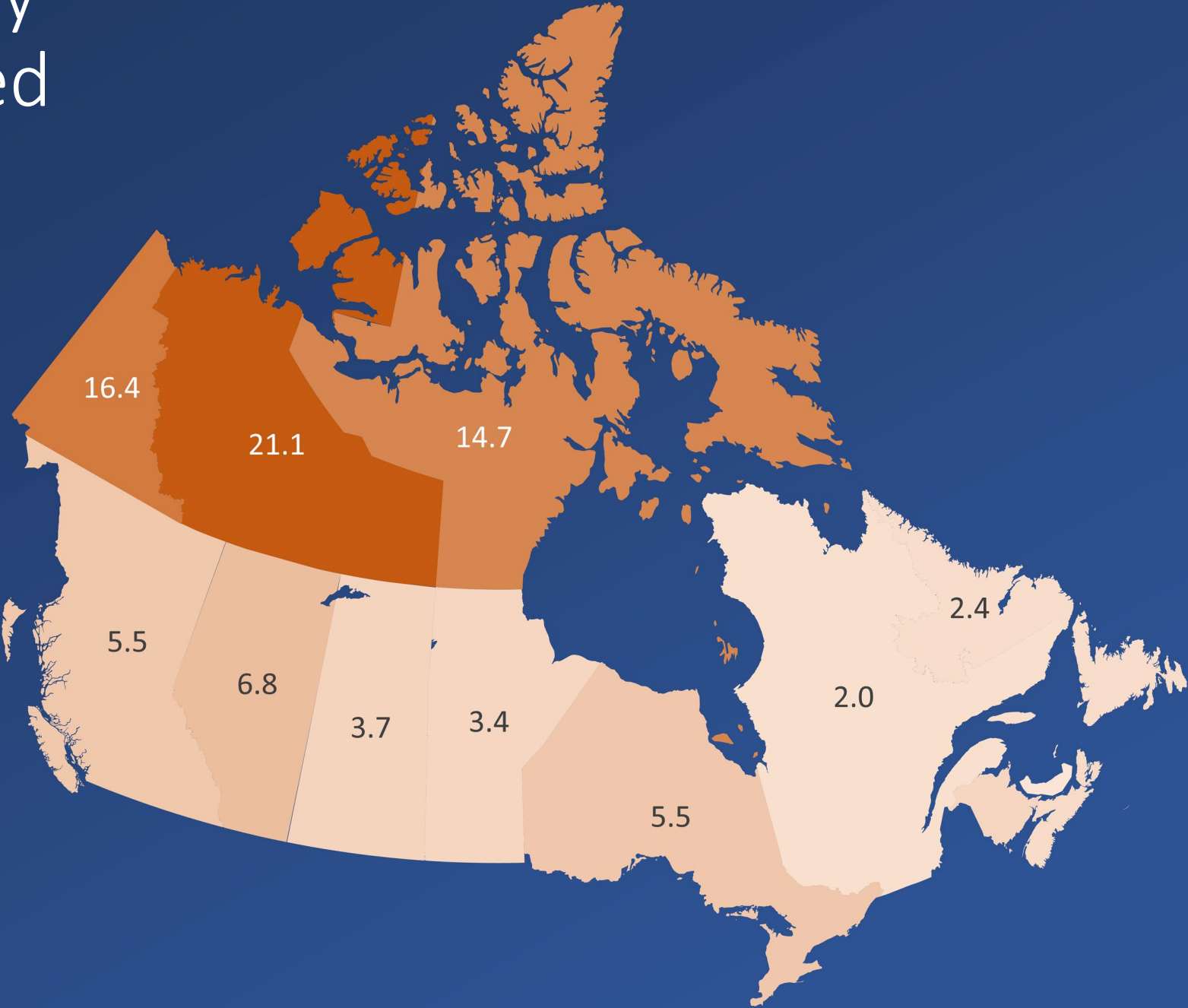
National Emergency Shelter Capacity

Chart: National Emergency Shelter Capacity

Number of Emergency Shelters: 2015: 399, 2016: 401, 2017: 407, 2018: 392, 2019: 423, 2020: 418

Number of Permanent Beds: 2015, 15,428; 2019, 16,271

Legend: Number of Permanent Beds; Number of Emergency Shelters

Emergency Shelter Bed Capacity: February 2020

2020 Bed Capacity

2020 Bed Capacity
7,351
18

Emergency Shelter Bed Capacity: February 2020

2020 Shelter Beds per 10k People

Beds per 10,000 People

21.1

1.3

16.4

21.1

14.7

5.5

6.8

3.7

3.4

2.4

2.0

5.5

17
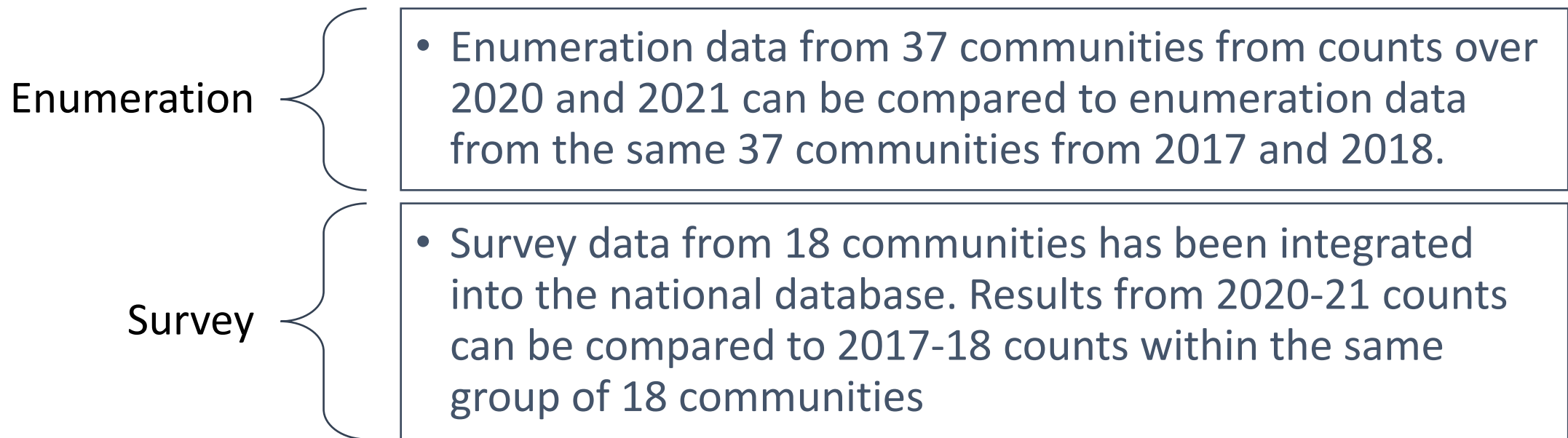
Powered by Bing
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Assessing the Impact of the Pandemic

The ongoing 2020 – 2021 – 2022 Point-in-Time Counts offer some insight into how homelessness was changing directly before and during the pandemic

The 2020/2021/2022 PiT Counts so far...

The third nationally-coordinated Point-in-Time Counts were scheduled to take place over March and April 2020. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, only 8 counts were completed, with the rest being postponed over 2021 and 2022.

An analysis has been conducted of data received from early PiT counts conducted over 2020 and 2021, prior and during the pandemic. This analysis includes the following data:

Enumeration

- Enumeration data from 37 communities from counts over 2020 and 2021 can be compared to enumeration data from the same 37 communities from 2017 and 2018.

Survey

- Survey data from 18 communities has been integrated into the national database. Results from 2020-21 counts can be compared to 2017-18 counts within the same group of 18 communities

Results will speak to trends in these communities, but data from other regions are needed to understand trends at the national level.
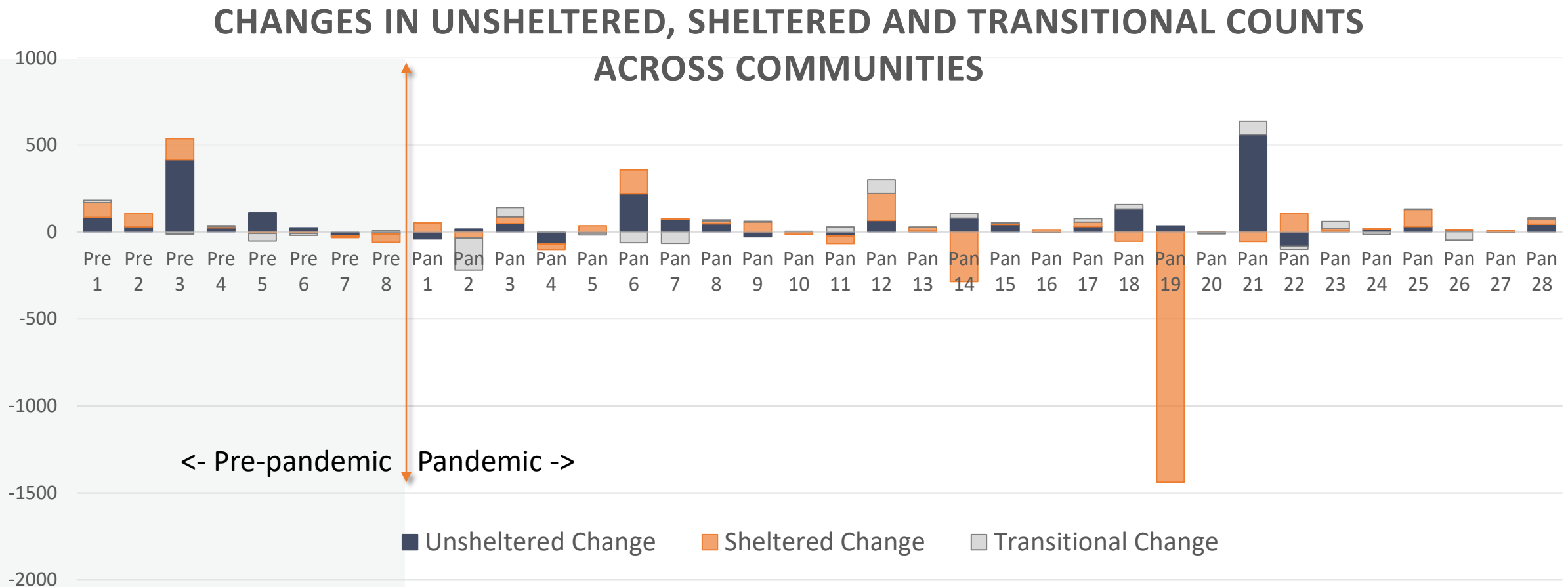
Enumeration Results: 37 Communities

- The enumeration includes people who spent the night:
  - **Unsheltered:** outside or in a place not fit for human habitation
  - **Sheltered:** in an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, extreme weather shelter, or a hotel/motel program
  - **Transitional:** in fixed-term housing units intended to transition residents to permanent housing

- While the number of people enumerated are similar between the two periods, a slight increase is seen in 2020-21

Enumeration across 37 communities

	2017-18	2020-21
	19,807	20,669
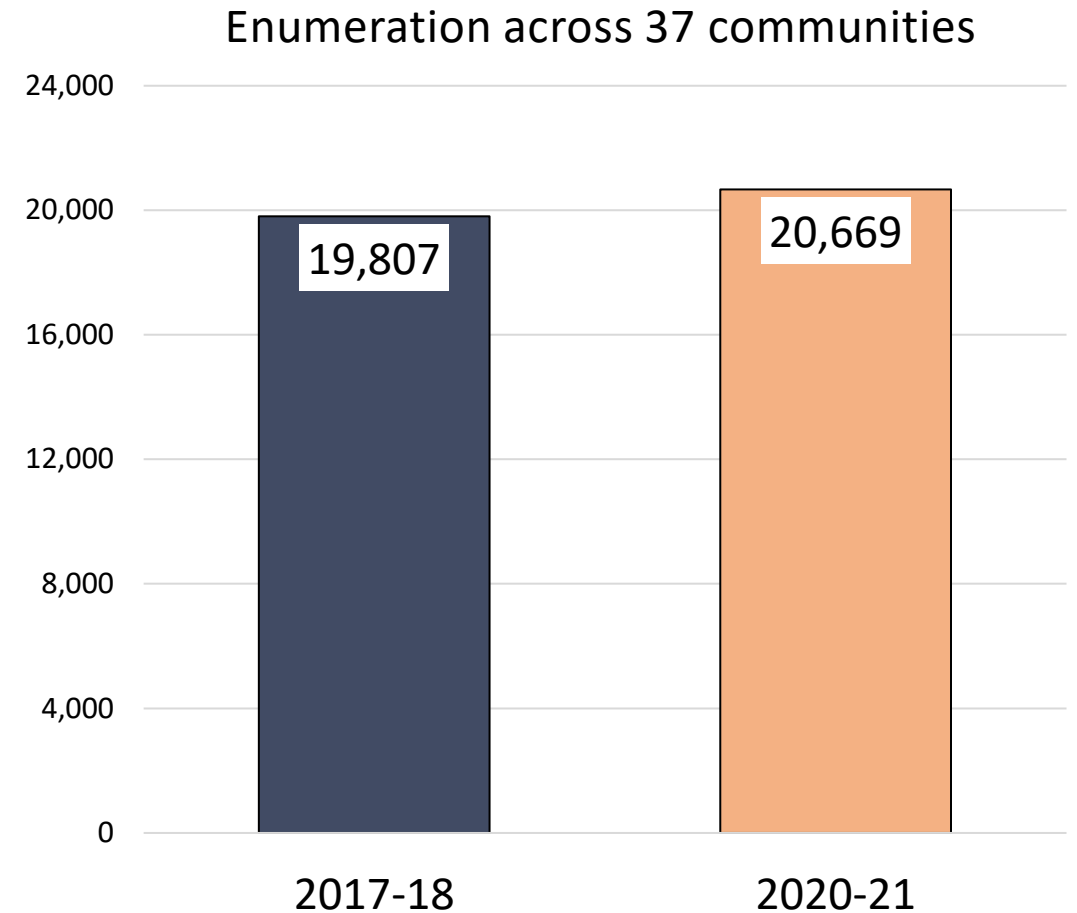
Enumeration Results: 37 Communities

- Most of the increase was seen in unsheltered counts, including those that took place pre-pandemic.

CHANGES IN UNSHELTERED, SHELTERED AND TRANSITIONAL COUNTS ACROSS COMMUNITIES

<- Pre-pandemic | Pandemic ->

Legend: ■ Unsheltered Change   ■ Sheltered Change   ☐ Transitional Change

Enumeration Results: 37 Communities

- Percentage changes reveal the relative impacts of changes in homelessness regardless of community size.

- It can be seen that some smaller communities, for which the absolute change was small, nonetheless saw significant changes relative to their size.

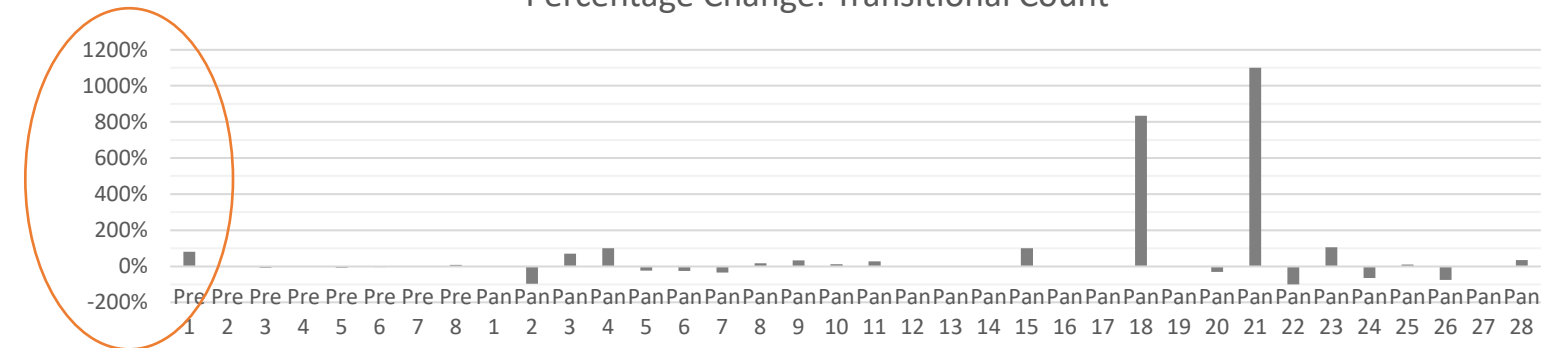- Note the differences in scale across overnight locations, however.

Percentage Change: Unsheltered Count
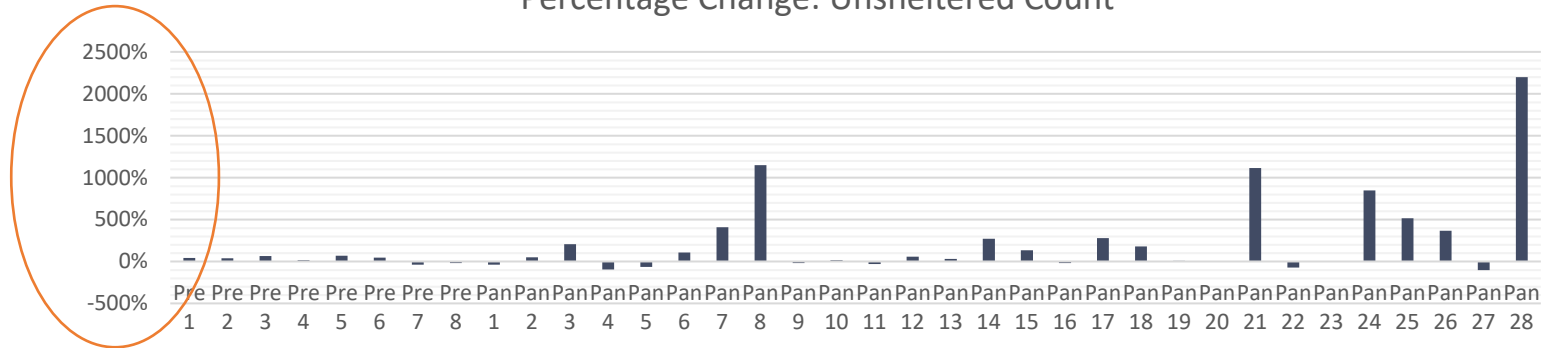
Percentage Change: Sheltered Count
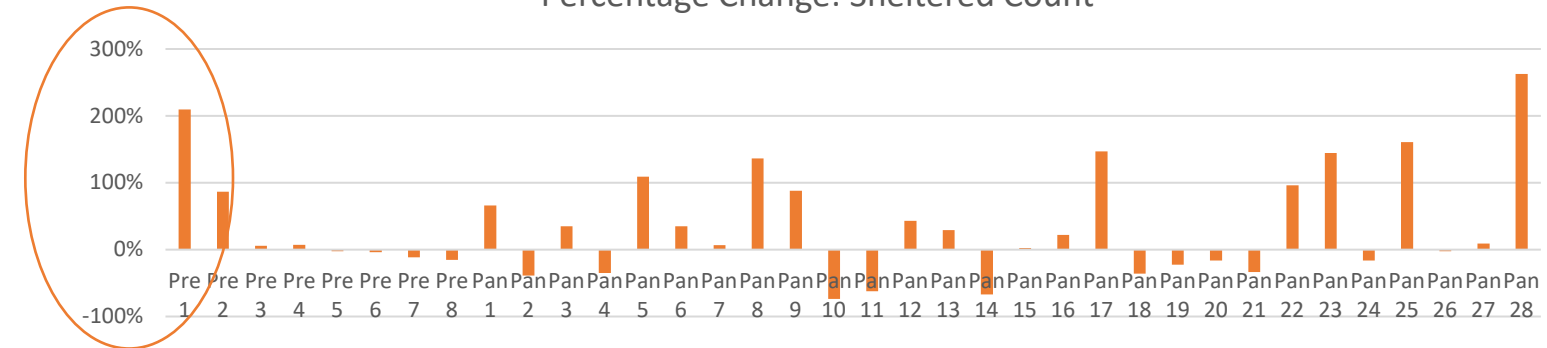
Percentage Change: Transitional Count

22

Chronic Homelessness: 18 Communities

- The PiT Count survey assesses one of the two criteria for chronic homelessness: whether the respondent has experienced homelessness for 180 days or more over the past year

- In this group of 18 communities, nearly three quarters (73.2%) of respondents reported experiencing chronic homelessness, an increase from 63.3% in in 2017-18

Percentage of respondents who report chronic homelessness between counts

<- Pre-pandemic | Pandemic ->
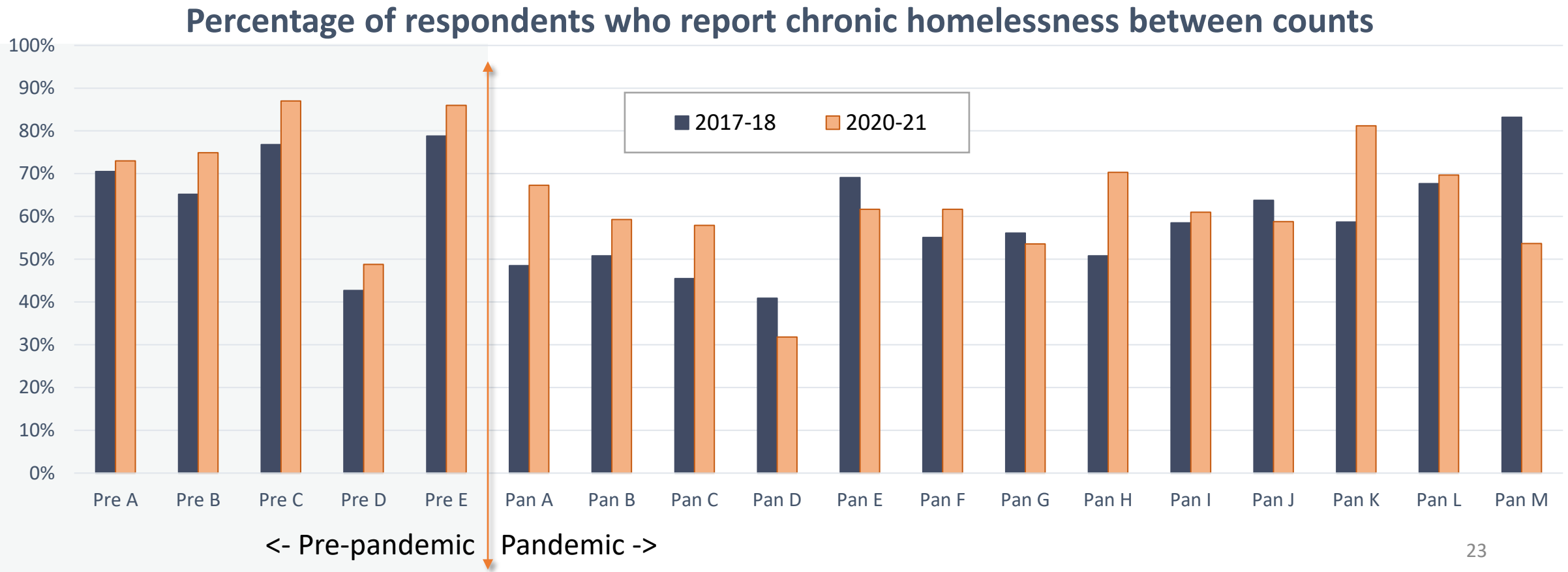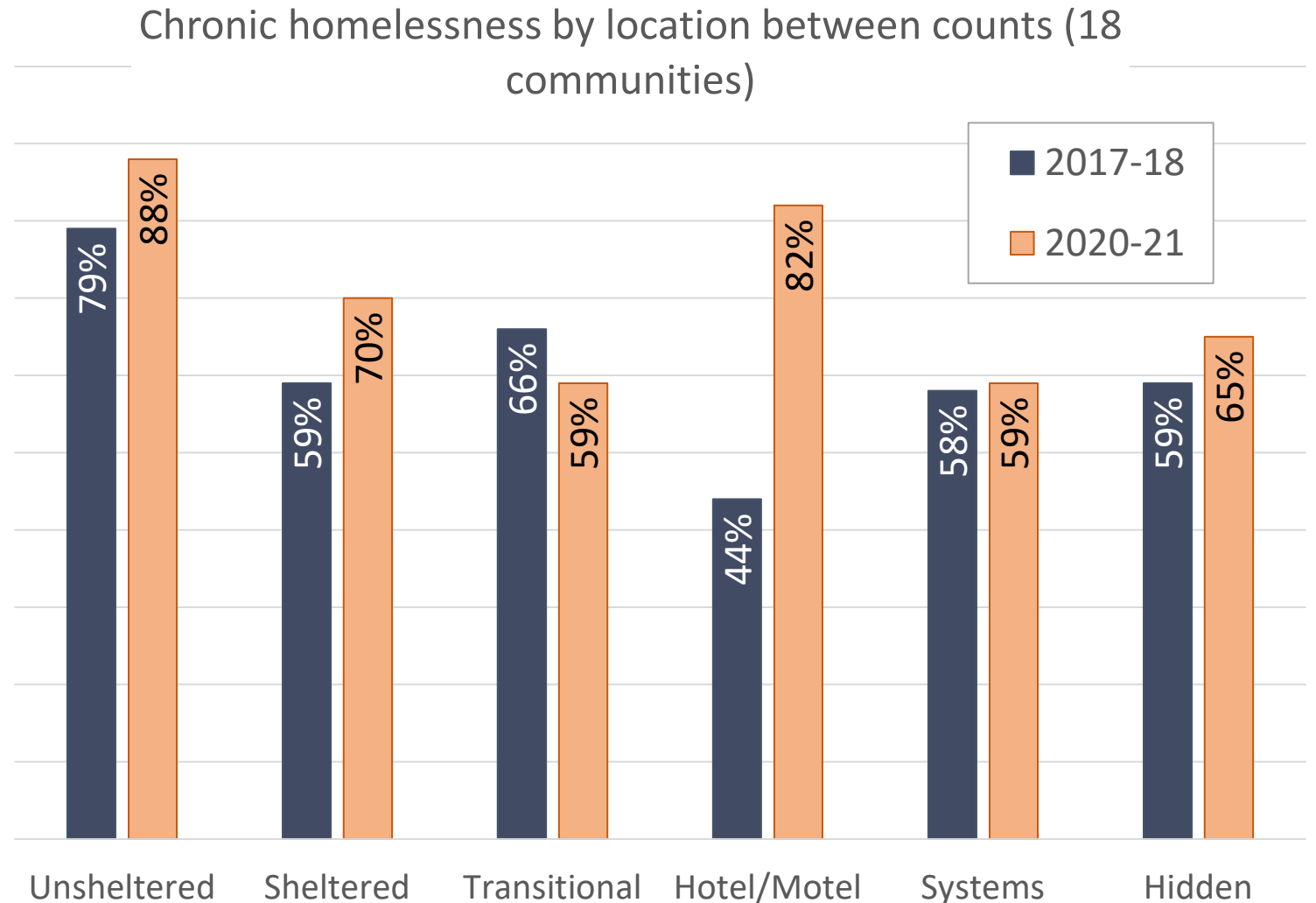
Chronic Homelessness

- The percentage of respondents reporting chronic homelessness can be affected by multiple factors. For example, a decrease could represent an absolute reduction in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness or an increase of people experiencing short-term homelessness.

- In fact, the largest decreases in chronic homelessness were seen in communities with little change in enumeration, suggesting that they had successfully reduced the number of people affected by chronic homelessness.

Changes in chronic homelessness and in enumeration
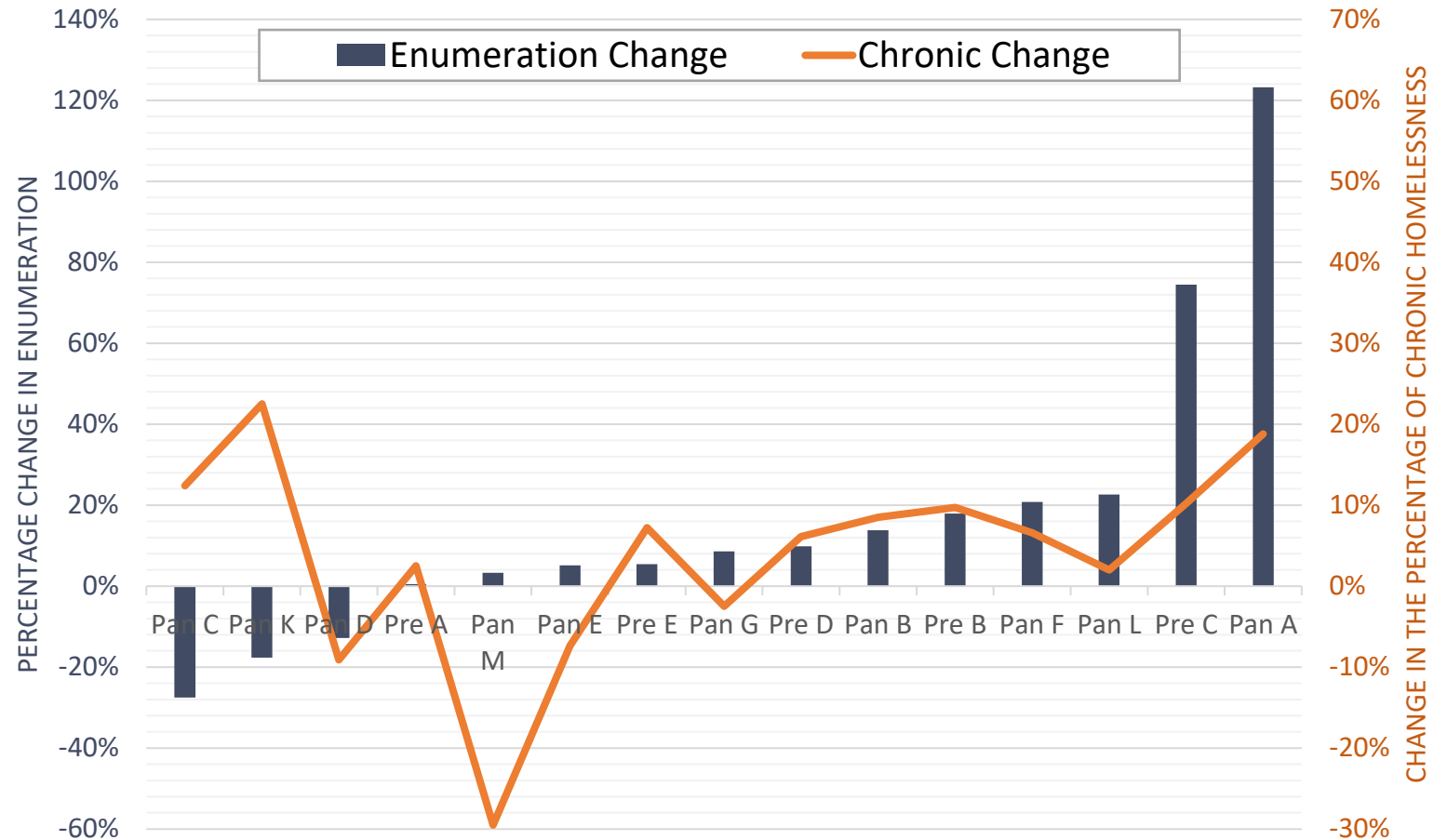
Chronic Homelessness

- Combining data across the 18 communities, the greatest increases in chronic homelessness were seen in respondents staying in hotels or motels.

- This may be due to the fact that many communities used hotels to compensate for reduced capacity in the shelter system.

Chronic homelessness by location between counts (18 communities)

	2017-18	2020-21
Unsheltered	79%	88%
Sheltered	59%	70%
Transitional	66%	59%
Hotel/Motel	44%	82%
Systems	58%	59%
Hidden	59%	65%

Improving homelessness data

Over the coming year, more data are expected to become available:

- Updated shelter capacity numbers for 2021 expected in fall 2022
- National shelter use and chronic homelessness estimates for 2020 expected this year
- A final report from the national PiT Counts, including survey data expected in spring 2023
- Community Homelessness Report data

The pandemic highlighted the need for more reliable and current homelessness data. Some factors are going to help:

- We are working on accelerating the availability of national shelter data through improvements to our data infrastructure and processes
- As more communities implement quality By-Name Lists/Unique Identifier Lists, it opens up the possibility of dashboarding. This has been done effectively in Toronto and Ottawa, for example.

Annex A : HPD Homelessness Data Products

National Shelter Capacity

- [Shelter Capacity Report 2020 - Canada.ca](#)
- [Homeless shelter capacity, bed and shelter counts for emergency shelters, transitional housing and violence against women shelters for Canada and provinces, Employment and Social Development Canada annual (number) (statcan.gc.ca)](#)
- [National Service Provider List - Open Government Portal (canada.ca)](#)

National Shelter Use Data

- [The National shelter study - Emergency shelter use in Canada 2005 to 2016 - Canada.ca](#)
- [Homelessness Data Snapshot: The National Shelter Study 2018 update](#)
- [Homelessness Data Snapshot: Homelessness Migration in Canada](#)

Point-in-Time Counts

- [Highlights: 2016 Coordinated Point-in-time Count of Homelessness in Canadian Communities – Canada.ca](#)
- [Everyone Counts 2018: Highlights - Report - Canada.ca](#)
- [Report on addiction, substance use and homelessness - Canada.ca](#)