



Canadian
human rights
commission

Commission
canadienne des
droits de la personne

Monitoring the Right to Adequate Housing for People with Disabilities

Outcome Indicator Results for Homelessness

**Canadian Human Rights Commission and Office of the Federal
Housing Advocate**

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Introduction

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate (OFHA) have legislated mandates to monitor human rights. Together, we are establishing a framework to monitor the right to adequate housing for people with disabilities in Canada. This framework helps to assess whether Canada is meeting its human rights obligations under Canadian and international laws, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Our work is designed to assist the Government of Canada in fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and report on its human rights obligations.

This monitoring framework tracks housing outcomes, policy efforts and government resources (i.e., spending) in the following eleven areas: institutionalization; homelessness; accessibility; the availability of supports and services; discrimination and dignity; affordability; security of tenure; safety; habitability; location; and cultural adequacy. You can find the indicators for all [eleven areas on our website](#). This report presents the results for the outcome indicators on homelessness.

Homelessness is a serious violation of the right to adequate housing.¹ It occurs when people do not have a stable, safe, and permanent place to live. Homelessness can be visible, such as sleeping outside or in shelters, or hidden, such as temporarily staying with friends or family without secure housing. For many people with disabilities, their risk of becoming homeless is shaped by barriers like poverty, inaccessible housing, and the lack of appropriate supports and services.

We are creating a baseline of results that can be updated as new data becomes available and to help measure progress. We use a variety of data sources to track outcomes, since no single source captures the lived experiences of all people with disabilities in Canada. We also recognize that there are gaps in the data being collected at the time of writing this report.² We primarily drew on data from the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) from 2017 and 2022 and the Canadian Housing Survey (CHS) from 2021. These two surveys use the social model of disability to identify people with disabilities.³ We disaggregated data to the greatest extent possible, applying an intersectional approach, but due to data gaps we were unable to disaggregate fully. Notable results for particular intersections of identities were included when the data was available.⁴

¹ Please see: [Fact sheet on the Right to Adequate Housing | United Nations](#)

² Please see: [The right to housing for people with disabilities: Data gaps | Canadian Human Rights Commission](#)

³ Unlike the medical model, which focuses on people's impairments, the social model focuses on the barriers people with disabilities face when interacting with their environments.

The CSD and CHS both allow for comparisons between people with disabilities and people without disabilities, but they count people with disabilities in different ways. CSD respondents are individuals with disabilities, whereas CHS respondents are individuals answering on behalf of their households. If people with disabilities are not the CHS respondents for their households, they may not be counted in CHS data. We have been advocating for Canada to address this data gaps.

⁴ We were unable to disaggregate data by province and territory due to budgetary and time constraints.

What people told us

People with disabilities told us they experienced homelessness because they lived in poverty, they could not work and they could not survive on their disability benefits.

- “When you’re homeless, every day is a struggle. It’s a struggle to meet basic needs like staying warm, dry, and fed. We are shunned, displaced, and harassed. We don’t have security, heat, a shower, or a toilet. We don’t have privacy or stability. We get robbed and abused. Police and bylaw officers criminalize us. They make us move. This is making my PTSD and health problems worse.”
- “I moved in with family members after leaving an abusive relationship. Shelters seem unsafe and unhealthy. Staying at a shelter would have a negative impact on my mental and physical health.”
- “I’m disabled, homeless and hungry all the time. I can’t think about anything else.”

Analysis

Indicator 1: Experiences of homelessness for people with disabilities

- **People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to experience hidden homelessness.** In 2021, about 1,023,330 people with disabilities (16.2%) said they had experienced hidden homelessness. This was compared to 564,310 people without disabilities (6.5%).⁵
- **People with disabilities are nearly four times more likely to experience homelessness than people without disabilities.** In 2021, about 3.9% of people with disabilities (244,580 people) said they had experienced homelessness in their lifetime. This was compared to only 1.1% of people without disabilities (91,520).⁶

⁵ **Description:** People were asked if they ever had to temporarily live with someone else (family, friends, others) because they had nowhere else to live. This includes couch surfing or crashing with friends and does not include living in any accommodations where the respondent is paying rent (hotels, hostels) or living in temporary accommodations for people without housing (such as homeless shelters, extreme weather shelters, and domestic violence shelters). **Data source:** The Canadian Housing Survey (2021).

⁶ **Description:** People were asked if they had ever experienced homelessness, including having to live in a shelter, on the street or in parks, in a makeshift shelter or in a vehicle or an abandoned building. This includes living in locations not intended for human habitation, such as cars, laneways, sidewalks, or in temporary accommodations such as homeless shelters, extreme weather shelters, and domestic violence shelters. **Data source:** The Canadian Housing Survey (2021).

Indicator 2: Percentage of people with disabilities in homeless shelters who feel that shelters and services meet their needs

- **Results:** Not available. This data is not currently collected through national or provincial / territorial surveys. We are advocating for better data collection and transparency in this area.

Indicator 3: Duration of homelessness

- **People with disabilities experience chronic and temporary hidden homelessness for longer periods of time than people without disabilities.**
 - **Chronic hidden homelessness:** 35.8% of people with disabilities who experienced hidden homelessness (363,960 people) said their longest period of homelessness was more than 6 months. This is compared to 29.2% of people without disabilities who experienced hidden homelessness (164,460 people).
 - **Temporary hidden homelessness:** 64.2% of people with disabilities who experienced hidden homelessness (651,940 people) said their longest period of homelessness was less than 6 months. This is compared to 70.8% of people without disabilities who experienced homelessness (398,820 people).

- Among the 117,920 people who had experienced homelessness for more than six months, more than twice as many were people with disabilities (87,250 people) compared to people without disabilities (30,670 people) (see figure 1). However, the proportion of people who experienced homelessness for more than six months was relatively similar for the two groups – 36.2% of people with disabilities reported that their longest period of homelessness was more than six months, compared to 33.8% of people without disabilities (see figure 2).⁷

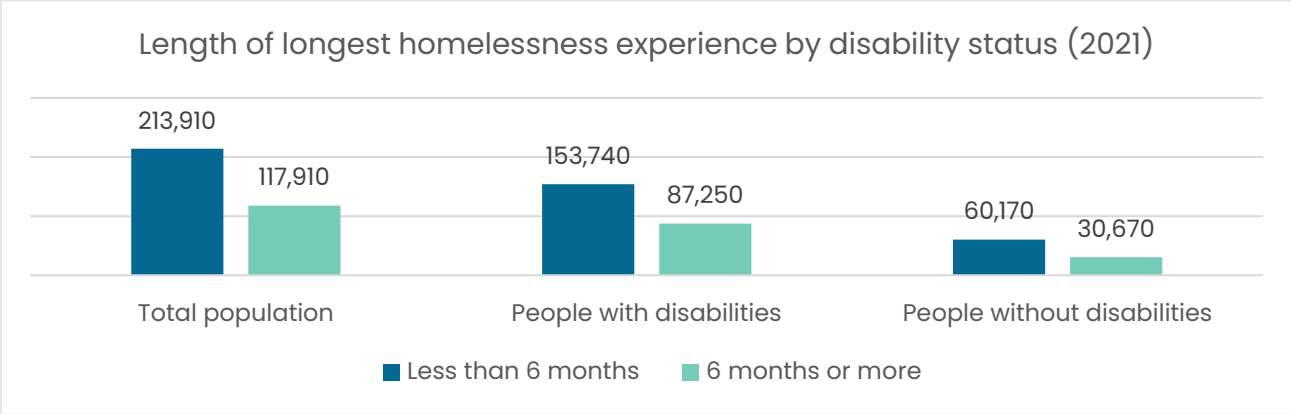


Figure 1: Length of longest homelessness experience (<6 months vs. 6+ months) by disability status, CHS 2021

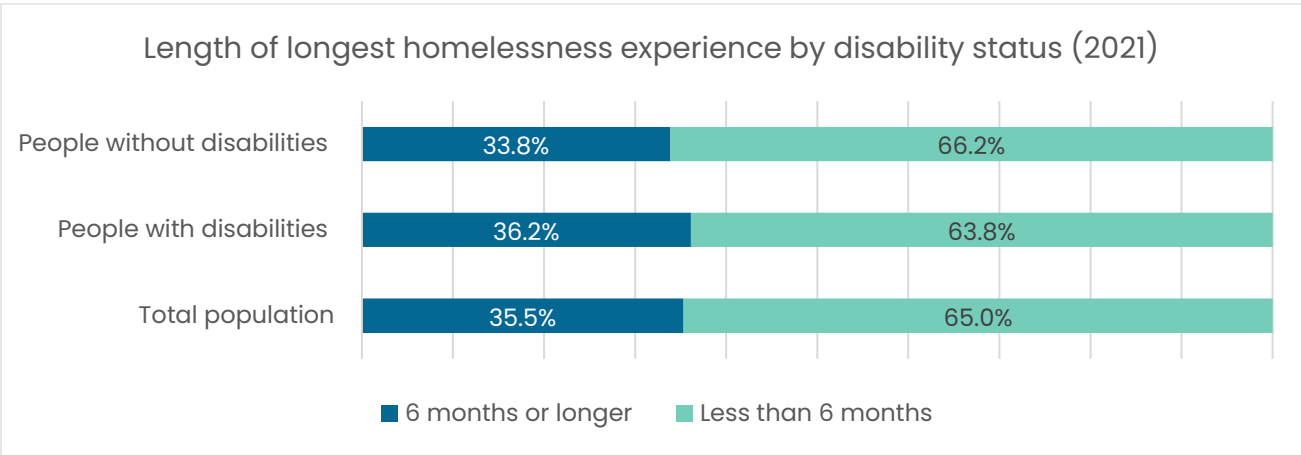


Figure 2: Length of longest homelessness experience (% within each group who experienced homelessness) by disability status, CHS 2021

⁷ It should be noted that the confidence intervals are quite wide for all point estimates. The confidence intervals for the total population and people with disabilities estimates range from approximately +/- 5%, and the confidence intervals for the people without disabilities estimate range from approximately +/- 9%. Point estimates should be treated with caution. **Description:** People that had experienced homelessness were asked to identify their longest period of homelessness. **Data source:** The Canadian Housing Survey (2021)

- Among the 528,420 people who have experienced chronic hidden homelessness, more than twice as many were people with disabilities (363,960 people), compared to people without disabilities (164,460 people) (see figure 3). Among people who experienced hidden homelessness in their lifetime, 33.5% of people stayed with someone else for 6 months or more (528,420 people). The percentage of people with disabilities who stayed with someone for 6 months or longer was higher at 35.8% (363,960 people), compared to people without disabilities at 29.2% (164,460 people).⁸

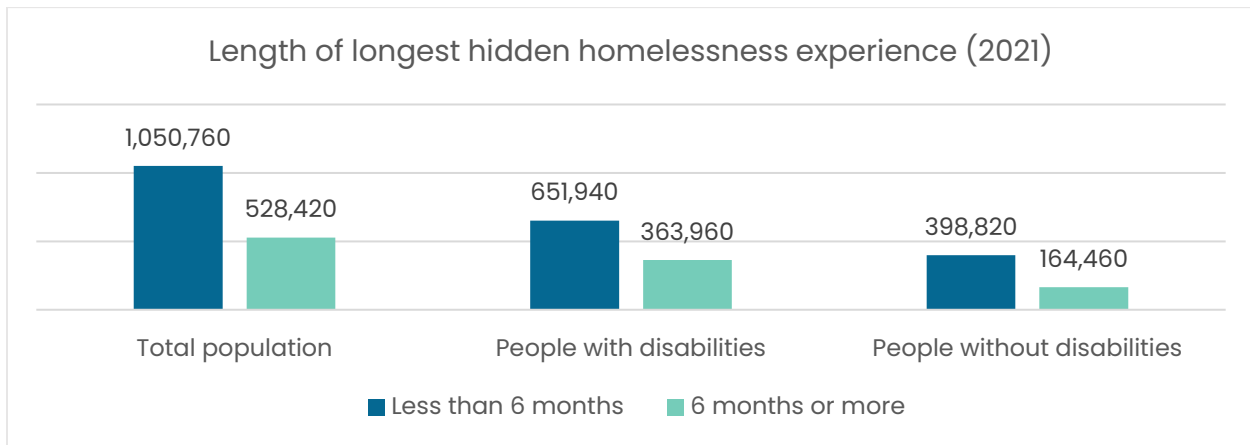


Figure 3: Length of longest hidden homelessness experience (<6 months vs. 6+ months) by disability status, CHS 2021

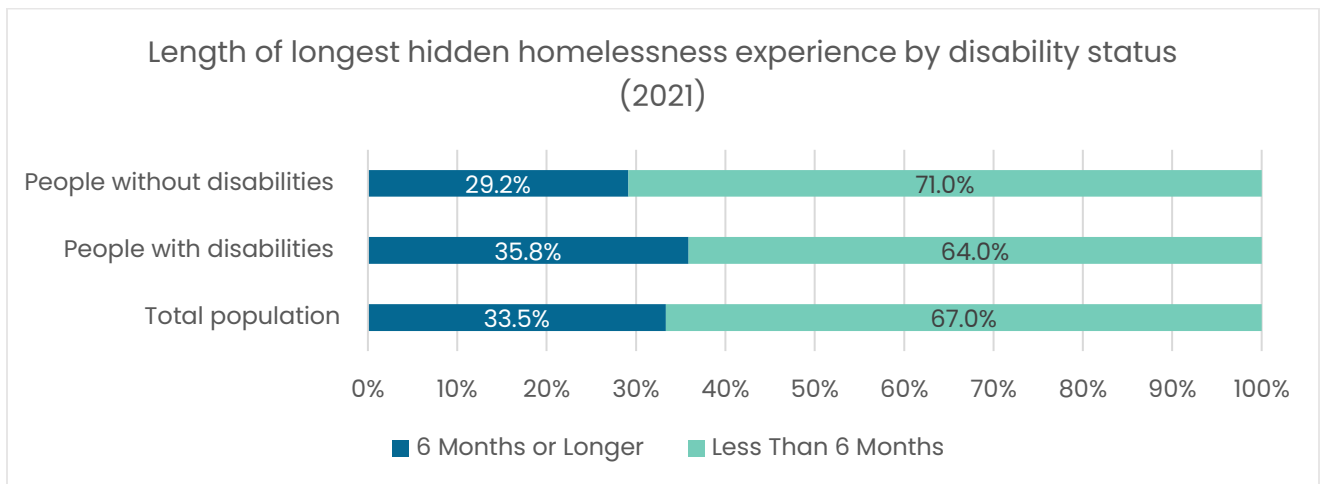


Figure 4: Length of longest hidden homelessness experience (% within each group who experienced homelessness), by disability status, CHS 2021

⁸ **Description:** People that had experienced hidden homelessness were asked to identify the longest period that they experienced hidden homelessness. **Data source:** The Canadian Housing Survey (2021)

Indicator 4: Reasons for homelessness

- **Almost three times as many people with disabilities reported that economic issues contributed to their most recent experience of homelessness.**⁹ Of the people with disabilities who experienced homelessness, 108,140 reported that economic issues contributed to their most recent experience of homelessness (44.9%), compared to 36,190 people without disabilities (40.1%).
- **More than four times as many people with disabilities reported that relationship breakdown contributed to their most recent experience of homelessness.** Among people with disabilities who experienced homelessness, 111,260 reported that relationship breakdown contributed to their most recent experience of homelessness (46.9%), compared to 27,380 people without disabilities (30.4%).
- **People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to report that their most recent experience of homelessness was due to health issues, compared to people without disabilities.** Among people with disabilities who experienced homelessness, approximately 47,370 (19.7%) reported that their most recent experience of homelessness was due to health issues, compared to just 8,010¹⁰ (8.9%) of people without disabilities (see figure 5).

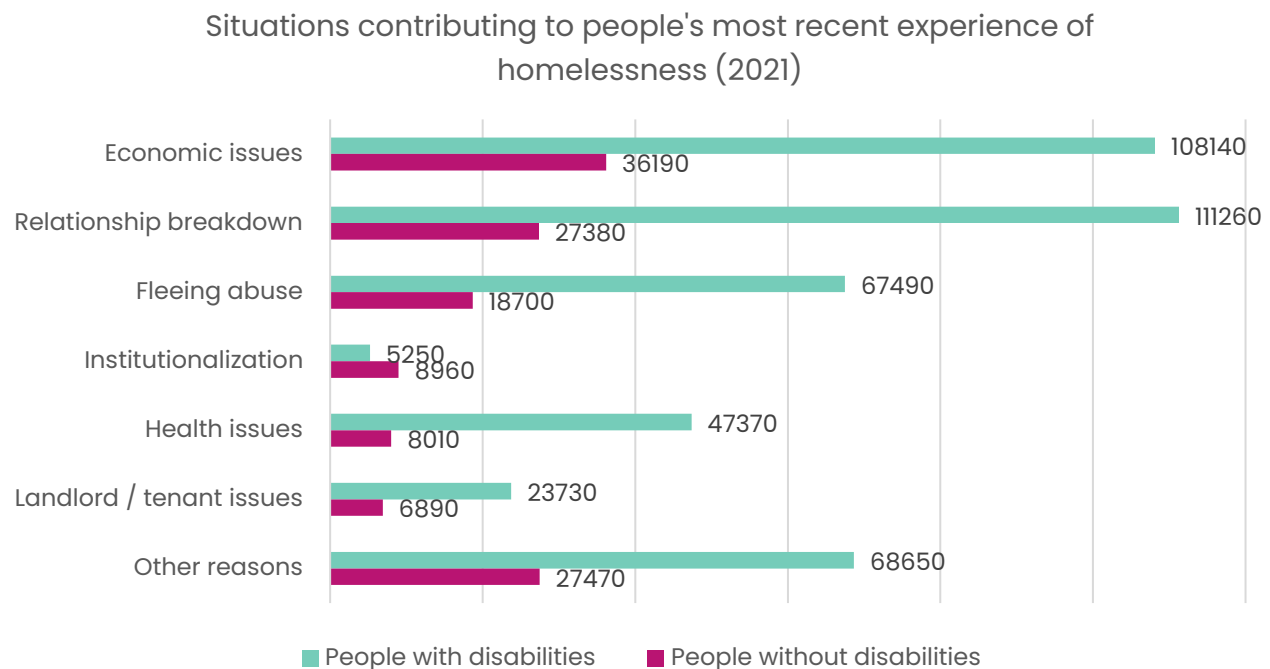


Figure 5: Situations contributing to people's most recent experience of homelessness, by disability status, CHS 2021

⁹ **Description:** People were asked whether different situations contributed to the loss of their housing and their most recent experience of homelessness. These issues included ten different options including health, financial, landlord-tenant, and relationship or interpersonal issues. **Data source:** The Canadian Housing Survey (2021)

¹⁰ The confidence intervals for these estimates are quite wide (PWD CI: 36,090-58,650 and PWOD CI: 2,730-13,300) so counts should be interpreted with caution.

Indicator 5: Number of people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness but who now have acceptable housing

- **Less than half of people with disabilities that experienced homelessness now live in acceptable housing.** 46.1% of all people who experienced homelessness are now in acceptable housing (154,920 people). Among people with disabilities who also experienced homelessness (244,580 people), the percentage is lower for those now in acceptable housing at 43.7% (106,900 people). Among people without disabilities who also experienced homelessness (91,520 people), the percentage is higher for those now in acceptable housing at 52.5% (48,020 people) (see figure 6).¹¹

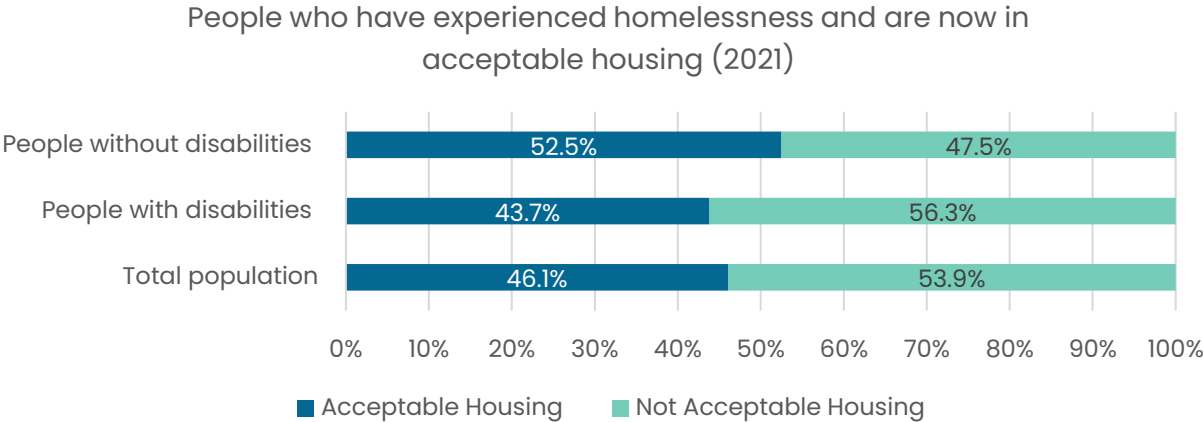


Figure 6: Percentage of people who have experienced homelessness and are now in acceptable housing, CHS 2021

Conclusion

In conclusion, the available data indicates that people with disabilities face significant barriers to housing and are disproportionately affected by homelessness and hidden homelessness across Canada. They are far more likely than people without disabilities to experience these forms of homelessness, and they often remain in these situations for longer periods. People with disabilities also face heightened risks of homelessness driven by economic hardships, relationship breakdowns, and health-related challenges. Additionally, fewer than half of people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness now live in acceptable housing. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort from all levels of government to ensure access to safe, accessible, and affordable housing for people with disabilities.

Read our [report with recommendations](#) to address these issues.

¹¹ Acceptable housing is housing that is affordable (i.e., costs no more than 30% of the households before tax income), not crowded (i.e., suitable according to national occupancy standards), and in good condition (i.e., not in need of major repairs).
Data source: The Canadian Housing Survey (2021)