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**COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES  
SOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT**

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# Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary: 2008 May 14

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## **Executive Summary**

## Fast Facts – 2008 Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary

<b>BIENNIAL COUNT OF HOMELESS PERSONS IN CALGARY – 2008 MAY 14</b>	
<b>HOMELESS PEOPLE ENUMERATED BY 61 <u>FACILITIES</u></b>	<b>3,195</b>
<b>GROWTH RATE</b> (PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE 2006 COUNT)	<b>13.2%</b>
PEOPLE ASSIGNED TO <i>EMERGENCY BEDS</i>	1,512
PEOPLE ASSIGNED TO <i>TRANSITIONAL BEDS</i>	1,683
<b>HOMELESS PEOPLE ENUMERATED BY 11 <u>SERVICE AGENCIES</u></b>	<b>296</b>
<b>GROWTH RATE</b> (PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE 2006 COUNT)	<b>60.9%</b>
ALBERTA WORKS – INCOME SUPPORT CONTACT CENTRE <i>(HOMELESS PEOPLE SEEKING EMERGENCY SOCIAL SERVICES FOR ADULTS)</i>	0
CALGARY AND AREA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES – SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE TEAM <i>(EMERGENCY CHILD WELFARE SERVICES)</i>	0
CALGARY HEALTH REGION <i>(HOMELESS PEOPLE SEEKING TREATMENT AT ALL FOUR HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND THE SHELDON CHUMIR URGENT CARE CENTRE)</i>	7
CALGARY POLICE SERVICE – ARREST PROCESSING UNIT <i>(PEOPLE IN CUSTODY WITH NO FIXED DISCHARGE ADDRESS)</i>	10
CALGARY REMAND CENTRE <i>(PEOPLE IN CUSTODY WITH NO FIXED DISCHARGE ADDRESS)</i>	190
CALGARY TRANSIT – REMOTE LRT STATIONS <i>(HOMELESS PEOPLE SURVEYED BY TRANSIT SECURITY STAFF)</i>	64
CALGARY YOUNG OFFENDER CENTRE <i>(YOUTH IN CUSTODY WITH NO FIXED DISCHARGE ADDRESS)</i>	25
<b>HOMELESS PEOPLE ESTIMATED TO BE LIVING <u>ON THE STREETS</u></b>	<b>569</b>
<b>GROWTH RATE</b> (PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE 2006 COUNT)	<b>14.0%</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE BELIEVED TO BE LIVING IN CALGARY ON THE NIGHT OF 2008 MAY 14</b>	<b>4,060</b>
<b>GROWTH RATE</b> (PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE 2006 COUNT)	<b>18.2%</b>

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# Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary: 2008 May 14

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## Executive Summary

The City of Calgary has conducted a point-in-time census or 'count' of homeless persons every two years in May since 1992. This enables us to determine, to the best of our ability, the number of people in Calgary on the night of the count "who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose" (City of Calgary, 2006: 4). The definition of homelessness used by The City includes people who are living on the streets, as well as those who are staying in emergency shelters or in facilities offering longer term shelter and support for people who would otherwise be living on the streets. The ninth biennial count was held on 2008 May 14. The findings provide a snapshot of the number of people in Calgary who are likely to be absolutely homelessness on any given night. In 2008, that number was determined to be **4,060**.

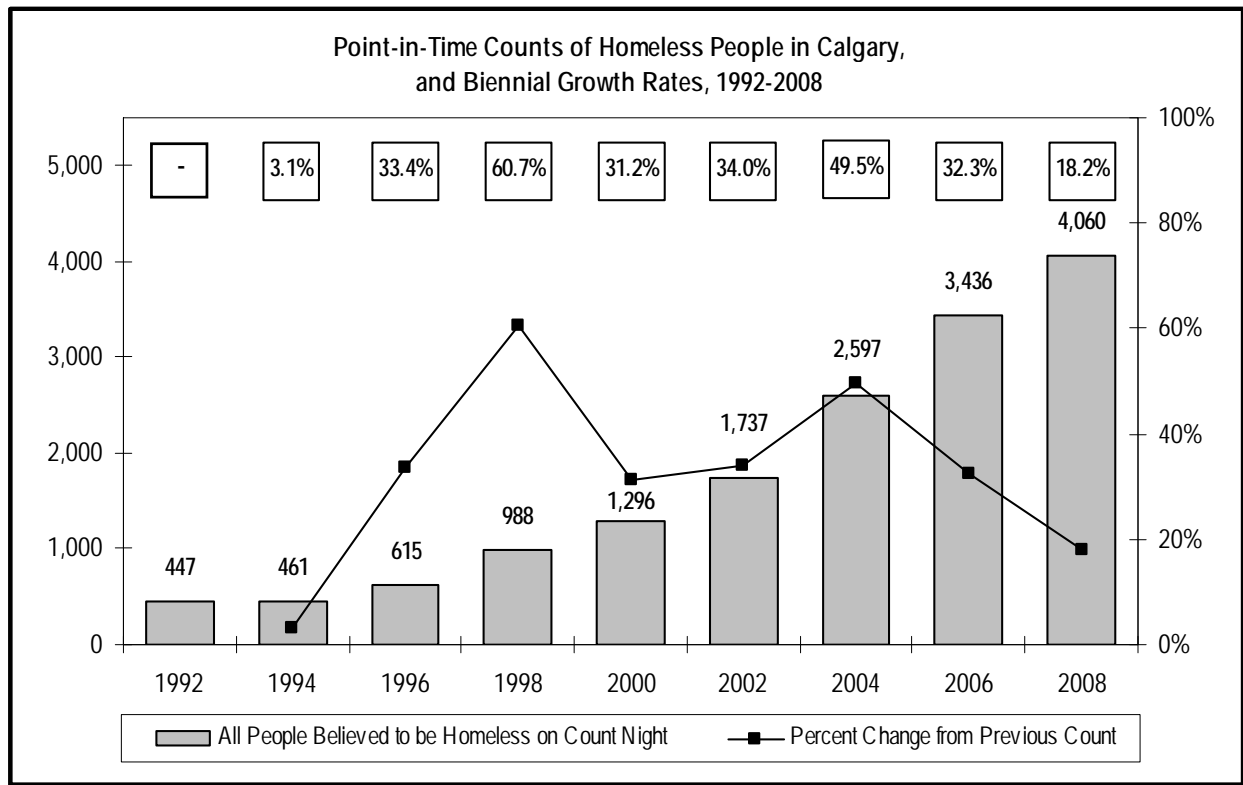
The methodology used for the count changed in 2008. The *survey of facilities and service agencies* was conducted the same way that it has been in the past. However, the spread of street homelessness (in location, not necessarily volume) has exceeded The City's ability to coordinate a point-in-time count that would locate and enumerate the entire street homeless population of Calgary. Therefore, *street homelessness has been estimated* for 2008 using a regression analysis based on past count data and weather conditions.

## AGGREGATE RESULTS

A total of 61 facilities and 11 service agencies participated in the *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary* on 2008 May 14. Facilities include emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities (such as homeless shelters, women's shelters, and supportive mental health or addictions facilities), where shelter is provided for people who do not have a permanent residence of their own. Service agencies report on people they *served* who have no permanent residence, are unable to seek emergency or transitional shelter, are likely to be discharged into homelessness, or who are observed at remote LRT stations that are outside the boundaries normally included in a street count.

A total of **4,060 people were believed to be absolutely homeless** on 2008 May 14 – 3,195 were staying in **facilities** (79%), 296 were counted by **service agencies** (7%), and as it was a 'dry weather' count, an estimated 569 people were living **on the streets** (14%). This represents an overall growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Calgary *on any given night* of 18% over 2006. Trend data show that the growth in homelessness in the city has previously been at or above 30% between biennial counts. The following graph shows the growth of homelessness in Calgary *on any given day* since 1992.

POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN CALGARY,  
AND BIENNIAL GROWTH RATES, 1992-2008



Although Civic Census data are not yet available for 2008, the population growth rate for Calgary from 2006 to 2007 was 2.8% (City of Calgary, 2007). As a general trend, the growth of point-in-time homelessness still far exceeds overall population growth in Calgary. Nonetheless, even though homelessness in Calgary increased in 2008, it only grew by 18%. This is a reversal of the 'over 30 percent' growth rate for point-in-time homelessness seen for most previous counts. Something that may have begun to shift the balance is the effect of two pilot projects that began in late 2007 as part of *Calgary's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008).

Since December 2007, the **Pathways to Housing** program based at The Alex Community Health Centre has enrolled 30 clients experiencing complex mental and physical health issues, addiction, and barriers to housing (Wyllie, 2008). It provides housing and wrap around support through an Assertive Community Treatment team that is available around the clock. It is also a far more cost-effective alternative to the current way of 'managing' these vulnerable people through the public safety, health, and justice systems (Thompson, 2008). In the same time period, the **CUPS Rapid Exit – Housing Families Program** has successfully re-housed 51 families in the private rental market, effectively moving 66 adults and 106 children out of homelessness (Wyllie, 2008). While it is too soon to attribute any reduction in the growth of homelessness to the projects emerging from the community-based initiative, *Calgary's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, the results of plan implementation bear watching.

In previous counts, data about where homeless people were observed to be staying on the night of the count were reported by location in the broadest sense – in *facilities*, by *service agencies*, or *on the streets*. To help deepen our understanding of the housing circumstances of homeless people in Calgary, all organizations participating in the 2008 count agreed to pilot test the use of the **ETHOS Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion**. ETHOS is the standardized classification system used by the European Union to report data on homelessness and housing stress.

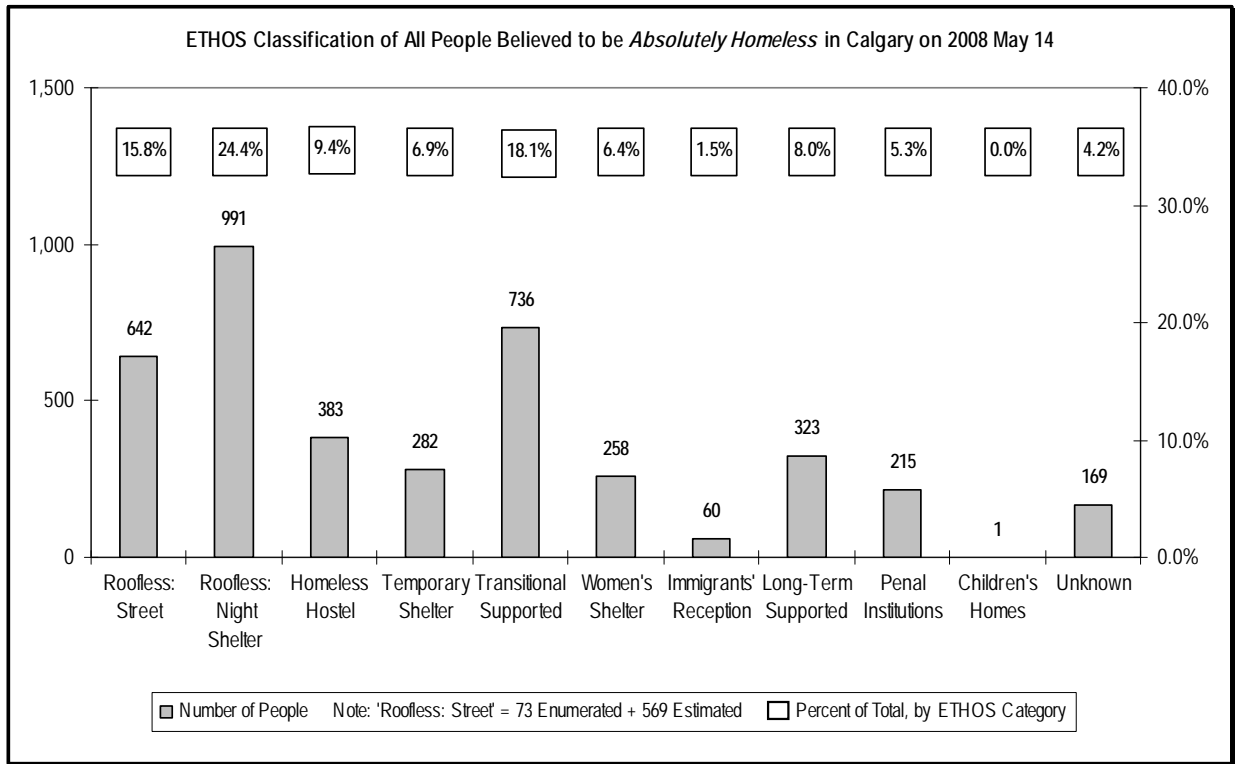
The use of the ETHOS classification system paints a much richer picture of the living situations of the 4,060 people in Calgary who were believed to be absolutely homeless on the night of 2008 May 14. Among all absolutely homeless people in the city on the night of the count, 2,258 were **houseless** (56%), 1,633 were **roofless** (40%), and the housing situation of 169 people (4%) could not be assessed.

Among the 2,258 people who were **houseless** on the night of the count, 1,401 (62%) were staying in *short-term accommodation* for the homeless, 323 (14%) were receiving *longer-term support* due to homelessness, 258 (11%) were staying in *women's shelters*, 216 (10%) had no permanent residence but were *about to be released from institutions*, and 60 (3%) were living in *accommodation for immigrants*.

Among the 1,633 people who were **roofless** on the night of the count, 991 (61%) were staying in emergency *night shelters* and 642 (39%) were *living rough*. Of the 642 people reported to be living rough, 73 people (11%) were *enumerated* and it was *estimated* that an additional 569 people (89%) were living on the streets.

The following graph shows a breakdown of the 4,060 people in Calgary who were believed to be absolutely homeless on the night of 2008 May 14, based on how their living conditions were described using the ETHOS classification system. As the community begins to implement *Calgary's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, the more detailed information provided by the ETHOS classification system may be useful for setting planning priorities and measuring changes in people's housing circumstances over time.

ETHOS CLASSIFICATION OF ALL PEOPLE BELIEVED TO BE  
ABSOLUTELY HOMELESS IN CALGARY ON 2008 MAY 14



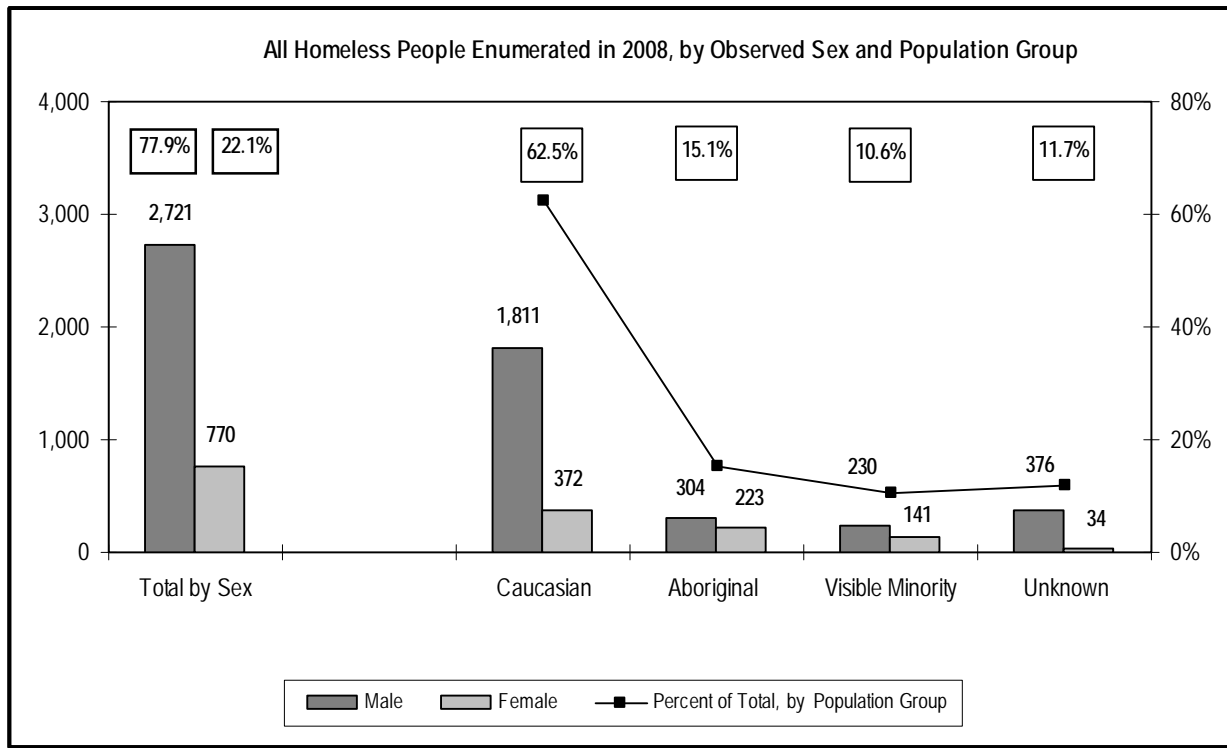
## INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Of the 3,491 homeless people *enumerated by facilities and service agencies* on 2008 May 14, 78% were observed to be **male** and 22% were observed to be **female**. When assessing the *observed population group* of the homeless people counted, 62% were **Caucasian**, 15% were **Aboriginal**, and 11% were **visible minorities**. The population group of 12% of the homeless people enumerated could not be determined.

Compared to the resident population of Calgary, the 2008 count again identified a disproportionately *high* number of homeless Aboriginal people and a disproportionately *low* number of homeless people who belong to a visible minority group. Statistics Canada (2007) found that only 3% of Calgarians reported having an Aboriginal identity in the 2006 Canada Census, whereas 15% of all homeless people enumerated on the night of the count were observed to be Aboriginal. Conversely, the visible minority population of Calgary is 24% of the resident population, but formed only 11% of the total number of homeless people counted on 2008 May 14. Service providers believe that many visible minority groups are among the 'hidden homeless' population that cannot be enumerated as part of a point-in-time count.

The following graph shows the *observed sex and population group* of the homeless people enumerated by facilities and service agencies on the night of 2008 May 14.

ALL HOMELESS PEOPLE ENUMERATED IN 2008,  
BY OBSERVED SEX AND POPULATION GROUP

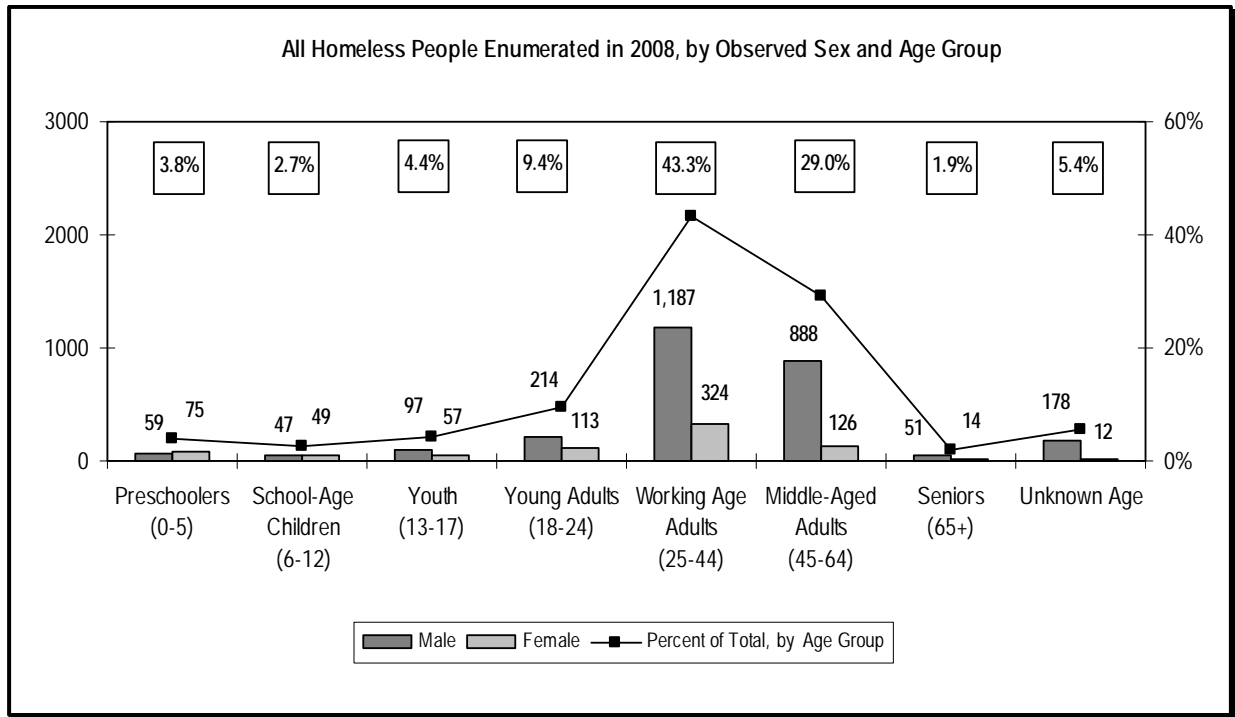


The majority of homeless people enumerated were **working-aged adults** (43%), followed by **middle-aged adults** (29%), **children and youth** (11%), **young adults** (9%), and **seniors** (2%), with 5% whose age could not be assessed. Indeed, among all 3,491 homeless people who were enumerated, a total of 1,535 (44%) were **Caucasian males aged 25 to 64**.

A particular concern is the number of children and youth who are homeless. A total of 384 **children and youth** under the age of 18 were enumerated by facilities and service agencies on the night of 2008 May 14, which is 11% of all homeless people counted. This represents an increase of 34% over 2006, when 287 children and youth were counted by facilities and service agencies.

The following graph shows the *observed age group* of the homeless people enumerated by facilities and service agencies on the night of 2008 May 14.

ALL HOMELESS PEOPLE ENUMERATED IN 2008,  
BY OBSERVED SEX AND AGE GROUP



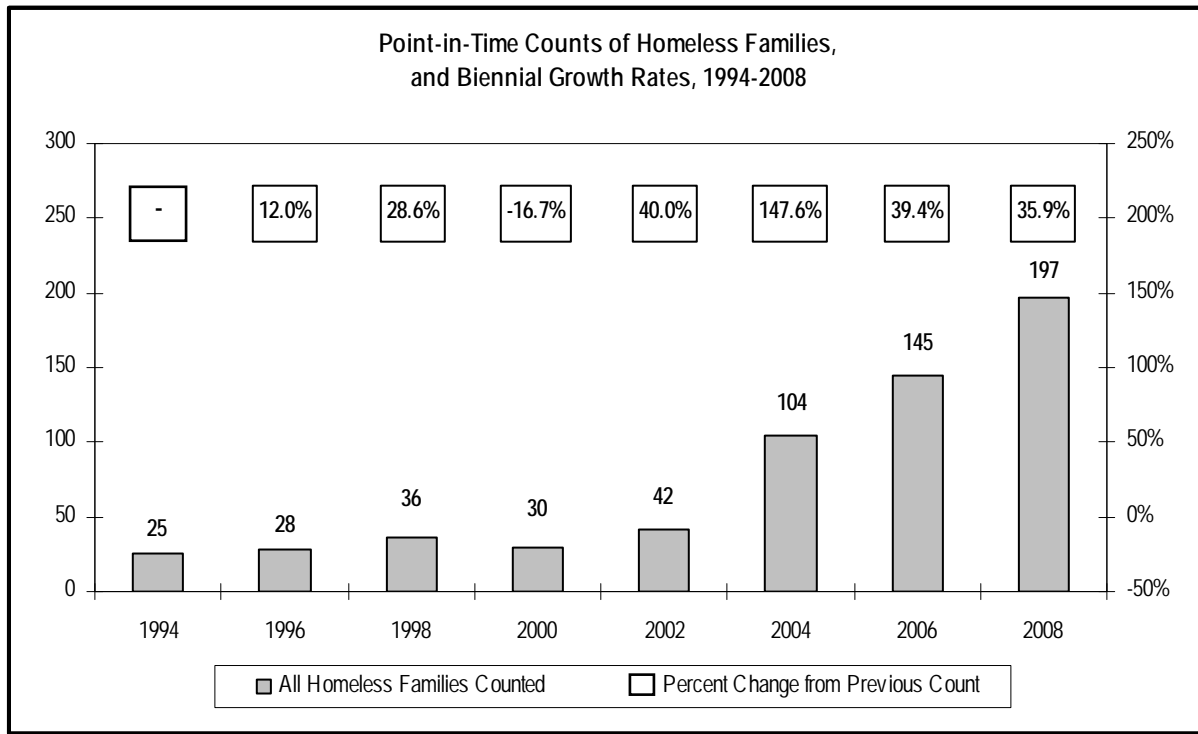
## FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

For the purposes of the *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary*, families are defined as a *couple, a couple with one or more children, or a lone adult with one or more children*. There were a total of 197 **homeless families enumerated** by facilities and service agencies on the night of 2008 May 14. Among the homeless families enumerated, all 197 were counted by facilities. Although service agencies counted a number of individual youth, none of them were in family groups. Of the 197 **families counted by facilities**, 162 were *in residence* (82%), 5 had been accepted but were *not yet in residence* (3%), and 30 were *refused shelter* (15%).

The 2008 count marks the first time that data for **homeless families with children** have been collected. Of the 197 homeless families enumerated, 190 of them included one or more children, which was 96% of all homeless families counted. All were counted by facilities. Of the 190 **families with children** counted by facilities, 155 of them were *in residence* (82%), 5 had been accepted but were *not yet in residence* (3%), and 30 were *refused shelter* (16%). The following graph shows the changes in family homelessness from 1994 to 2008.



POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS OF HOMELESS FAMILIES,  
AND BIENNIAL GROWTH RATES, 1994-2008



## FACILITY DATA

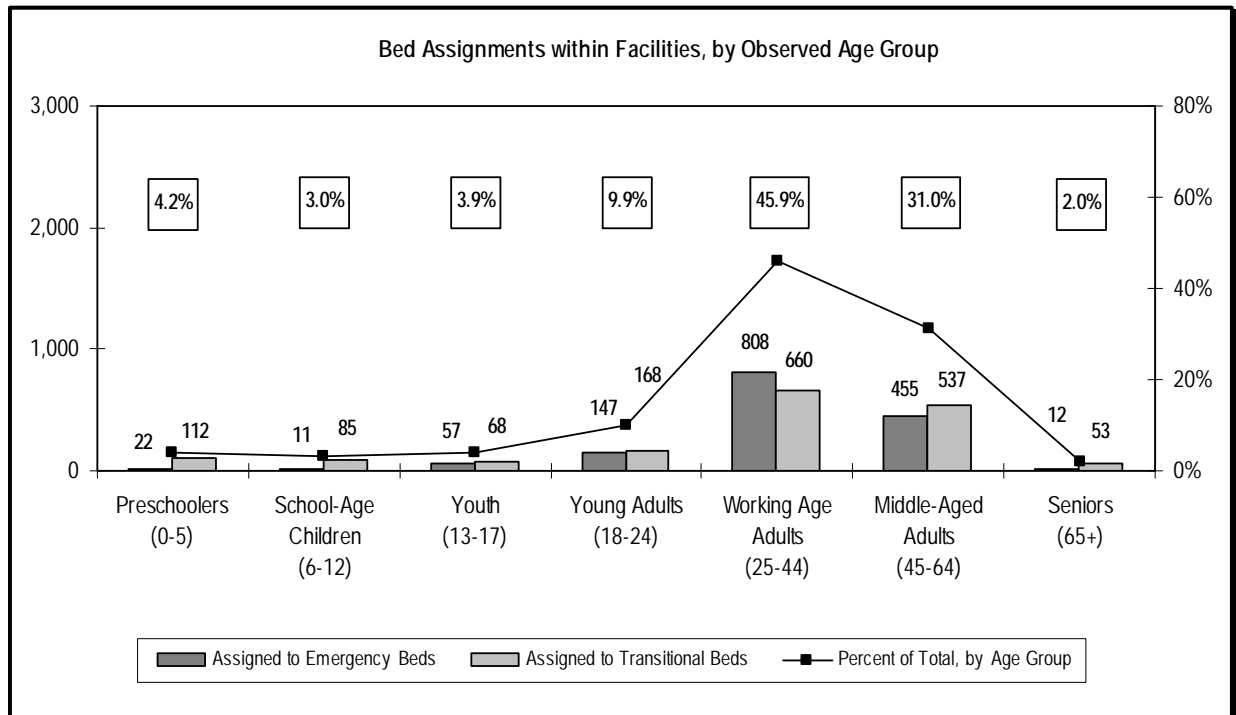
The vast majority of people who are absolutely homeless in Calgary *on any given night* receive shelter at a facility providing emergency or transitional accommodation. As always, only those people who ‘do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose’ were enumerated for the count. A total of 3,195 homeless people were **enumerated in facilities** on 2008 May 14 by the 61 facilities that participated in the count. This represents an overall increase of 13% since 2006, when 2,823 homeless people stayed in facilities on the night of the count. Of note, the number of facilities participating in the 2008 count also increased, by 20%.

Of the 3,195 homeless people *enumerated in facilities* on 2008 May 14, 77% were observed to be **male** and 23% were observed to be **female**. When assessing the *observed population group* of the homeless people counted in facilities, 67% were **Caucasian**, 15% were **Aboriginal**, and 11% were **visible minorities**. The population group of 7% of the homeless people enumerated in facilities could not be assessed. The majority of homeless people *enumerated in facilities* were **working age adults** (46%), followed by **middle-aged adults** (31%), **children and youth** (11%), **young adults** (10%), and **seniors** (2%). A total of 355 **children and youth** under the age of 18 were *enumerated in facilities* on 2008 May 14, which represents an increase of 26% over 2006, when 282 children and youth were counted in facilities.

## EMERGENCY AND TRANSITIONAL BED ASSIGNMENT

Of the 3,195 homeless people enumerated in facilities on 2008 May 14, a total of 1,512 of them were assigned to **emergency beds** (47%). The remaining 1,683 people were assigned to **transitional beds** (53%). The following graph shows bed assignment in facilities, by bed type and age group.

BED ASSIGNMENTS WITHIN FACILITIES, BY OBSERVED AGE GROUP



## BED CAPACITY, BED OCCUPANCY, AND FILL RATES

On 2008 May 14, facilities reported having the **total bed capacity** needed to shelter 3,672 homeless people, with 49% of the total capacity designated for **emergency beds** and 51% designated for **transitional beds**. In terms of **actual bed occupancy** on 2008 May 14, **emergency bed occupancy** was 83% of **emergency bed capacity** (the fill rate), and **transitional bed occupancy** was 87% of **transitional bed capacity**.

The **overall fill rate** for facilities was 85%, with total bed occupancy reported as 3,130. It should be noted that the **bed occupancy** numbers are 65 fewer than the total number of **individuals** who stayed in facilities on the night of the count, which was 3,195. This is largely due to the way in which some facilities report bed capacity and bed occupancy data (e.g., for **rooms** or **apartments**, rather than for the number of **beds** within them).

## SERVICE AGENCY DATA

A total of 296 homeless people were **enumerated by service agencies** on 2008 May 14 by the 11 agencies that participated in the *2008 Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary*. Only those people who 'do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose' were enumerated. This represents an overall increase of 61% over 2006, when 184 homeless people were served (or observed) by service agencies on the night of the count. Of note, the number of agencies participating in the 2008 count also increased, by 22%.

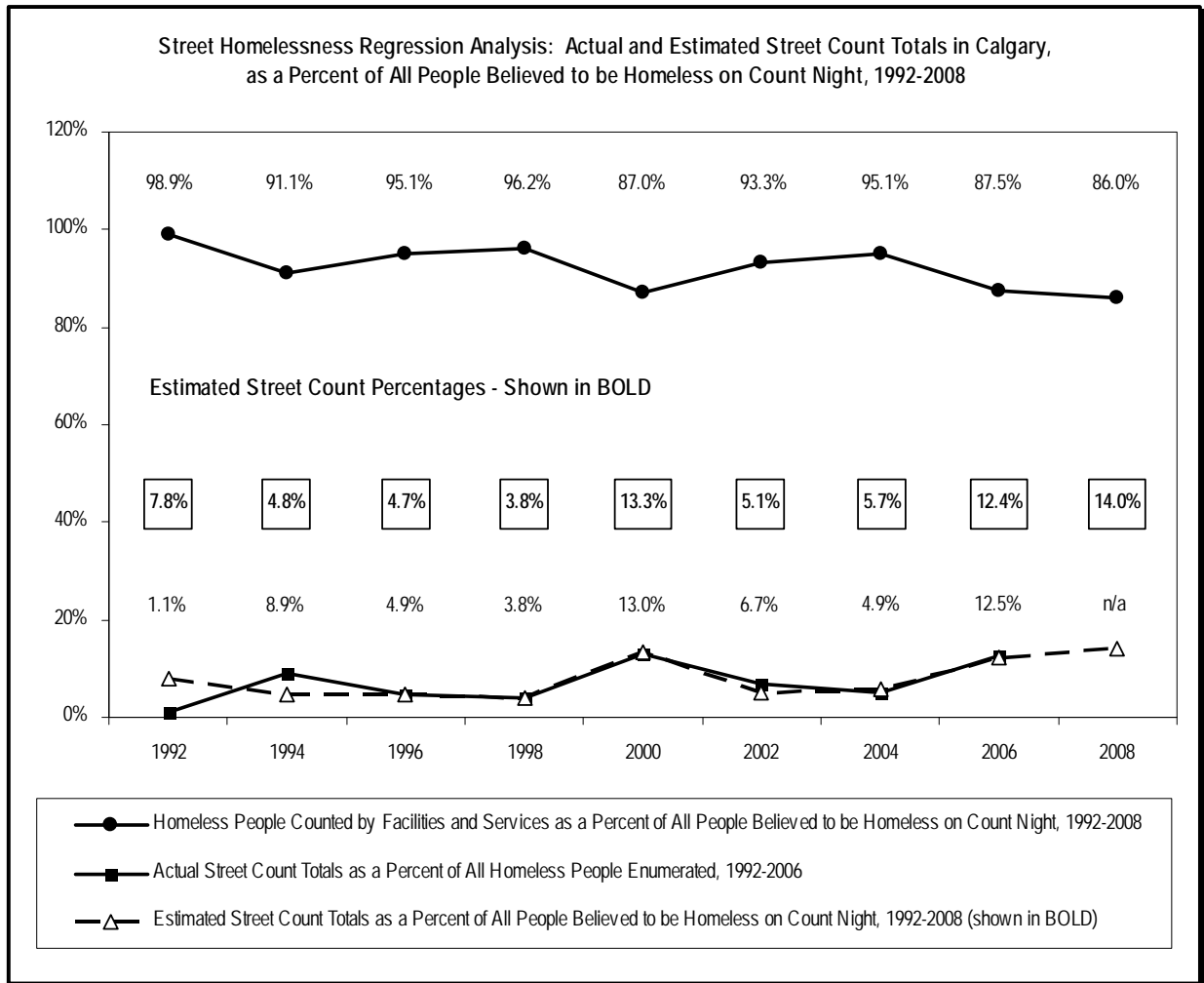
The vast majority of homeless people who were enumerated by service agencies were in the criminal justice system. A total of 190 homeless people (64%) were enumerated at the Calgary Remand Centre, 25 homeless youth (8%) were counted at the Calgary Young Offender Centre, and 10 other homeless people (3%) were enumerated at the Calgary Police Service arrest processing unit. A significant number of homeless people were observed by Calgary Transit staff, who counted a total of 64 people (22%). The rest were counted by the Calgary Health Region, which enumerated 7 homeless people (2%) over five service hubs on the night of the count. No homeless people were served by agencies providing emergency social services for either children or adults.

## STREET HOMELESSNESS

Based on weather data for May 7-15, 2008 in Calgary, the 2008 count can be classified as a 'dry weather' count. Using this information about the *weather* and the total number of homeless people who were counted in *facilities* and by *service agencies*, The City of Calgary's regression analysis **estimates that 569 people were living on the streets** on 2008 May 14. This is 14% of the total number of people believed to be homeless in Calgary on the night of the count. The graph on the following page shows how the model works for 1992 through 2008.

To complement the estimation of street homelessness, several community outreach programs were asked to provide data related to service provision, and various City of Calgary Business Units were asked to provide data that may be related to homelessness. Custom-run data were also provided by The City of Calgary's 3-1-1 Call Centre. In all cases, it is important to understand that *not all data reported can be attributed to homeless people*. While not fully representative of street homelessness in Calgary, the **proxy indicators** presented in this report help to illustrate a level of need or concern in the community about issues related to homelessness and housing stress. Data are also presented from an analysis of the intake forms completed at Calgary's inaugural Project Homeless Connect event held on 2008 April 26. This event brought together a wide range of service providers to enable people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to connect with many services they needed, all at one place and time.

STREET HOMELESSNESS REGRESSION ANALYSIS: ACTUAL AND ESTIMATED  
STREET COUNT TOTALS IN CALGARY, AS A PERCENT OF ALL PEOPLE  
BELIEVED TO BE HOMELESS ON COUNT NIGHT, 1992-2008



This graph shows that, for the most part, the number of homeless people who are *estimated* to be living on the streets is very close to the *actual* number of homeless people who were *counted* on the streets.

## CONCLUSIONS

A total of 61 facilities and 11 service agencies participated in the ninth *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary* on the night of 2008 May 14. The findings represent the number of people in Calgary who are likely to be experiencing absolute homelessness on any given night. In 2008, that number was determined to be **4,060**.

Consultations with facility operators in advance of the 2008 count revealed that, as in previous years, the *duration* of transitional shelter across sectors and facilities continues to be highly variable, extending from a few days or weeks, to months or even years. Contributing factors are the lack of available *non-market housing* (with or without supportive services) and the shortage of *affordable market housing*, both of which might enable individuals and families to move further along the affordable housing continuum. The City of Calgary, through its *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy*, is working to expand affordable housing opportunities and to create additional partnerships with other orders of government, non-profit groups, and the private sector in order to provide more non-market and near-market housing in Calgary.

The very broad definition used for transitional housing in Calgary does not lend itself to developing strategic interventions that would remove people from homelessness. Therefore, all organizations participating in the 2008 count agreed to pilot test the use of the ETHOS Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion. The results proved to be very interesting because of the richness of the information provided. There are a number of advantages to using the ETHOS classification system that extend well beyond its usefulness for conducting a point-in-time census like the *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons*.

Indeed, a fundamental goal of *Calgary's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* is to introduce a mandatory Homeless Management Information System or HMIS to provide “real-time data on how long people are homeless, what their needs are, what the causes of homelessness are, how people are interacting with our systems of care, how effective our interventions are, the number of homeless people, and detailed demographic and biographical information” (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008: 37). The ETHOS typology has the potential to be an important component of an HMIS in order to more fully understand and proactively end *absolute homelessness* in Calgary. Moreover, the ETHOS typology enables communities to identify the number of citizens who are experiencing *relative homelessness* and thereby begin to see the interconnected nature of all of the formal and informal systems of care and support that people use.

Ultimately, the ETHOS typology would help service providers better understand and assist people who are *sheltered* in a homeless-serving facility; receiving *institutional care* through the medical, legal or child welfare systems; relying on *informal systems* of support; or obtaining other *services* when housing is unavailable through formal means. Its applications are best described by the authors of the *Fifth Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Edgar and Meert, 2006: 53):

The ETHOS typology has a contribution to make in the development of policies on homelessness at national, regional and local level[s]. Importantly, it can inform debate regarding the appropriate definition of homelessness to employ for different policy purposes, and can provide a basis for co-ordination between different levels of government, or different ministries or agencies of government, whose collaboration is a necessary basis for the development of integrated strategies to prevent or tackle homelessness.

As a standardized means of reporting homelessness statistics, the ETHOS typology may also be highly relevant to the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, recently created by the provincial government. The Secretariat will develop a provincial 10-year strategic plan to address homelessness that will “outline a comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable approach to solving this core social issue” (Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs, 2008). Among other goals, the Plan will outline strategies for addressing the root causes of homelessness and create a provincial Homeless Management Information System. The use of the ETHOS typology during the *2008 Count of Homeless Persons* represents an important step forward towards ensuring that the data management system designed for Calgary, and perhaps Alberta, will serve a multitude of purposes as we seek to end homelessness in our city and beyond.

Combined, these two important 10-year plan initiatives might be expected to result in measurable declines in the overall growth of point-in-time homelessness in Calgary by the time of the next biennial count in the spring of 2010. There may be some early evidence of that change, as trend data have taken an interesting turn in 2008. While the number of people believed to be homeless in Calgary increased, the rate of growth was only 18%. This is a reversal of the ‘over 30 percent’ growth rate for point-in-time homelessness seen for most previous counts.

Something that may have begun to shift the balance is the effect of two pilot projects that began in late 2007 as part of *Calgary’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*: The Alex Community Health Centre’s *Pathways to Housing* program and the *CUPS Rapid Exit – Housing Families Program*. While it is too soon to attribute any reduction in the growth of homelessness to these projects emerging from *Calgary’s 10-Year Plan*, the results of plan implementation – both locally and provincially – bear watching.

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## Report Citation

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