

Prepared By Demos Partners  
**2026 Student Housing in  
Edmonton**  
**Needs Assessment Final  
Report**



# STUDENT HOUSING IN EDMONTON

## Needs Assessment Report

Prepared by Osmos Partners



Edmonton

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edmonton's approximately 150,000 post-secondary students navigate a private rental market where housing costs regularly exceed what student incomes can support. This assessment documents those experiences through two surveys administered to 18 post-secondary institutions (555 responses in Spring 2025; 1,573 responses in Fall 2025), discussion groups with priority population students, interviews with five post-secondary institutions, and engagement with the City of Edmonton Youth Council, the Edmonton Student Alliance, and private developers.

### **The Affordability Gap**

The gap between student income and housing costs is a central finding of this assessment. Among students who rent, median monthly income was \$667 against a median monthly rent of \$970. Additional costs - utilities, food, transportation - compound this pressure. As a result, the majority of students who found housing search difficult cited affordability as the primary barrier (88%), and many reported making trade-offs such as accepting longer commutes, sharing space, or reducing food and other essential spending to manage housing costs. The table below summarizes key affordability indicators from the Fall 2025 survey.

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Metric	Finding
Housing search difficulty	55% of respondents found housing search difficult
Median monthly income (renters only)	\$667
Median monthly rent	\$970
Students who encountered scams	25%
Students concerned about scams	44%
Students who reduced food spending to afford housing	54%

## Priority Population Challenges

Discussion groups were held with students from five priority population groups: international students, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and students with children. Key findings from these discussions are summarized below.

- Many participants relied on peer networks and informal support—such as WhatsApp groups and cultural association housing lists—to find housing.
- Post-secondary institutional listings, where available, offered more reliable pathways to safe housing than private market rentals.
- Several international student participants reported arriving in Edmonton without secured housing; searches upon arrival took between two weeks and four months.
- Participants with disabilities noted that private rental listings rarely include accessibility information, making it difficult to assess whether units meet their needs. Several noted that asking accessibility questions exposed them to risk of discrimination.
- Having a disability can come with increased costs. Several participants requiring caregivers described shouldering housing costs, tuition, and caregiver costs simultaneously.



- Several participants knew somebody who had been scammed.
- Participants in multiple discussion groups reported experiencing discrimination by landlords.
- Family-sized affordable housing near campus was described as scarce by participants with children. Frequent moves to chase affordability created instability for children's schooling.
- Several 2SLGBTQIA+ participants described having to choose between a safe neighbourhood and affordable housing. Others chose to live alone rather than risk discrimination from potential roommates.
- Proximity to transit was described as very important by many participants, consistent with Fall survey data showing 57% use public transit as their primary mode of transportation to campus.

### **What Students Said Is Working**

Despite these challenges, 61% of Fall survey respondents indicated they are somewhat or very satisfied with their current housing situation, compared to 21% who reported dissatisfaction.

When asked what solutions would help, respondents identified: education and training on leases and tenant rights (68%), guaranteed housing (58%), and rental assistance (56%).

Both survey respondents and discussion group participants identified a verified housing registry as a useful tool.

### **Youth Voices on Policy**

Investment in student housing was described by discussion group participants as investment in students themselves—and by extension, in the city's future. Participants observed that students burdened by housing costs direct their energy toward financial survival rather than their education. Access to employment was identified as important, but participants noted



that working additional hours cannot bridge the gap between available wages and actual costs—and attempting to do so comes at the expense of academic performance. Several participants connected these pressures to elevated dropout rates.

### **Student-Identified Solutions**

Students identified both practical supports and structural interventions as priorities. From the survey, the most commonly identified programs were a guaranteed housing program (58%), rental assistance or housing allowance (56%), and lease education and support (45%). The most requested services were housing inspection and quality assurance (60%), lease guidance and legal support (56%), and an online registry with verified, suitable listings (54%).

Discussion group participants reinforced these priorities and added context. A verified housing registry was seen as important not just for convenience but as a protection against scams and fraudulent listings. Lease and tenant rights education was identified as particularly important for international students navigating the private rental market for the first time. Participants also emphasized the value of institutional housing listings as a more reliable alternative to private market searches, and called for more family-sized affordable housing options near campus for students with children.

### **Post-Secondary and Developer Perspectives**

Post-secondary institutions identified affordability as the primary barrier to student housing, rather than supply. Institutions noted that even where housing exists or could be developed, cost remains the central obstacle. Construction costs and regulatory complexity were identified as secondary factors limiting supply. Private developers expressed interest in student housing projects but identified operational challenges affecting feasibility, including seasonal leasing patterns and the intersection of affordability targets with development financing requirements. Despite these barriers, developers indicated openness to student housing as a market segment.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Canada, students are underrepresented in housing data. Students are excluded from Core Housing Need, the primary national measure governments and planners use to identify housing challenges, on the basis that their housing situations are considered temporary. This gap means student housing conditions are not captured in the data municipalities rely on to make housing decisions.

At a Zoning Bylaw Renewal public hearing on October 16, 2023, students and post-secondary representatives identified a lack of housing choices across the city, and noted that existing affordable options are often located far from campuses or in areas with perceived safety concerns. In response, City Council passed the following motion:

*"Administration engage with post-secondary organizations, housing developers, youth, student groups, City of Edmonton Youth Council and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase the supply and affordability of housing options for students and youth in Edmonton."*

The Edmonton Student Alliance (ESA) made a request to the City of Edmonton to conduct a survey of students on their housing experiences. It was made possible through federal funding from the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF).

This Student Housing Needs Assessment was conducted and written by consulting partner Demos Partners. Data was gathered through the following activities:

- A spring survey was distributed to students across 18 post-secondary institutions in Edmonton, which yielded 555 responses.
- A fall 2025 survey was distributed online to post-secondary students in the Greater Edmonton Region from August 25 to October 3, 2025. A total of 1,573 students completed the survey.
- Discussion groups were held with students from several priority population groups.

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- Engagement with senior leadership from Edmonton's five largest post-secondary institutions.
- Engagement with the City of Edmonton Youth Council.
- Secondary research on student housing in Canada and developer perspectives gathered through the Downtown Student Housing Incentive Program engagement.

## 1.1. Methodology

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach including quantitative surveys and qualitative discussion groups and stakeholder interviews.

Source	Description	Sample/Participants
Spring 2025 Survey	Preliminary survey conducted April 7-21, 2025	n=555
Fall 2025 Survey	Comprehensive survey conducted August 25 – October 3, 2025	n=1,573
Discussion Groups	Targeted sessions with priority populations, September 2025 – January 2026	25+ participants across 5 sessions and two one-on-one interviews
Institutional Interviews	Interviews with PSI housing administrators	5 institutions
Youth Council Engagement	Two engagements with City of Edmonton Youth Council and Policy SubCommittee	23 participants
Developer Engagement	Leveraged recent engagement with housing developers	13 developers

Both surveys were distributed through student unions and institutional email lists across 18 Edmonton post-secondary institutions (PSIs), including the six major Post Secondary Institutions. Both surveys employed a multi-channel communications strategy: social media outreach across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter; digital advertising on Edmonton Transit Services (ETS) transit screens (LRT and bus), trackside displays, and Ice District blade screens;



and a communications toolkit distributed through student unions. For the fall survey, Demos and City of Edmonton staff also attended student orientation events and operated survey information booths at all larger post-secondary institutions. Surveys were conducted using the City of Edmonton's survey platform, utilizing an open-link method allowing any student with access to the link to participate.

Incentives for both surveys included entry into a draw for one of ten \$100 grocery gift cards, with winners drawn at the close of the survey. Due to the anonymous nature of participation, it is possible that some students responded to both surveys. As the respondents in the survey constitute a voluntary sample, the results are not necessarily representative of the entire student population in Edmonton. While these insights provide valuable perspective, the findings reflect the views of the respondents only and should be interpreted with caution when making broader inferences about the student population in Edmonton.

## **Qualitative Research**

### **Discussion Groups**

Discussion groups were conducted between September 2025 and January 2026, employing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate methodologies.

These approaches included providing participants with advance information about session content, allowing flexibility in how participants chose to share their experiences (verbally, in writing, or through polling), creating ground rules collaboratively with participants, offering breaks throughout sessions, and ensuring facilitators were trained in responding to disclosures of difficult experiences. For Indigenous student engagement, cultural protocols were observed including acknowledging treaty territory, offering tobacco, and ensuring Indigenous facilitators or co-facilitators were present where possible. Sessions lasted 75-120



minutes and included individual reflection, interactive polling using Mentimeter, group discussion, and solution-focused brainstorming. Live polling was used to gather anonymous responses on specific topics, prompting discussion and capturing participant perspectives on key themes. This approach allowed participants to share perspectives anonymously before group discussion, which was particularly valuable when exploring sensitive topics. Discussion groups were hosted using a combination of in-person and virtual mediums, depending on the preference of participants. A meal was provided to participants during each in-person session.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with housing administrators at five Edmonton post-secondary institutions, housing developers, and the City of Edmonton Youth Council to gather perspectives on supply and affordability options. Interviews with post-secondary institutions explored current housing capacity, challenges faced by students, institutional approaches to addressing housing needs, and perspectives on potential solutions. Of the 18 post-secondary institutions in Edmonton, five participated in interviews.

Outreach was focused on the six largest institutions (University of Alberta, MacEwan University, NAIT, NorQuest College, Concordia University of Edmonton, and The King's University); The King's University did not respond to interview requests. Smaller and specialized institutions were not contacted due to project scope and timeline constraints.

All data collection adhered to Alberta's *Protection of Privacy Act* (POPA). Survey responses were anonymous. Discussion group participation required informed consent; a City of Edmonton-approved consent form was provided to all discussion group participants at the beginning of each session. 642 survey respondents indicated they were open to participating



in a discussion group. Invitations to discussion groups or one-on-one interviews for target populations were sent to these individuals.

## 1.2. Limitations

Several limitations of this assessment should be noted:

- Findings reflect the views of respondents only and are not representative of the broader student population in Edmonton.
- Because the survey approach did not rely on a random sample of the population, a margin of error is not applicable to these results.
- The assessment captured currently enrolled students and cannot document experiences of prospective students who chose not to attend Edmonton institutions due to housing concerns.
- Experiences of discussion groups participants do not reflect experiences of the broader student population.



### 1.3. Survey Reach

A total of 1,573 post-secondary students responded to the Fall 2025 survey, of which 95% were full-time students and 5% were part-time students.

**Table 1: Survey Participation by Institution (Fall 2025) n=1573**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Survey Count</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
University of Alberta	844	54%
MacEwan University	262	17%
NAIT	149	9%
NorQuest College	130	8%
Concordia University	85	5%
King's University	51	3%
Other	52	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,573</b>	<b>100%</b>

Survey participation was predominantly from University of Alberta (54%), and MacEwan University (17%). Additional engagement came from NAIT (9%), NorQuest College (8%), Concordia University (5%), and The King's University (3%). The remaining responses (52 respondents, 3%) came from a variety of other institutions: Athabasca University (online) accounted for 8 responses; Yellowhead Tribal College had 19 respondents; Makami College had 3 respondents; CDI College had 3 respondents total; Academy of Learning had 2 respondents; and Reeves College and Robertson College each contributed 1 respondent. An additional 15 respondents indicated they were from other institutions including East-West College Edmonton, Campbell College, Northern Lakes College, University of Lethbridge, Portage College, City University of Seattle in Canada, Lokken College, and Emergency Services Academy.



## 1.4 Spring and Fall 2025 Survey: What the Evidence Shows

### A note on comparing the two surveys

The City of Edmonton conducted two surveys as part of this assessment. These results should not be read as a precise measure of change over time. The surveys differed in three important ways. First, question structure: the Spring survey used agreement-based affordability questions while the Fall survey collected specific income and rent figures, meaning some indicators are not directly comparable. Second, timing: Spring respondents were surveyed near the end of the winter semester when most students are already housed; Fall respondents were surveyed at the start of the academic year when housing demand is typically higher and many students had recently completed a housing search. Both surveys also used an open-link distribution method, meaning individuals could complete the survey more than once and results are not statistically representative of Edmonton's full student population. Differences between the two surveys may reflect who responded as much as actual changes in housing conditions. Results should be treated as directional observations, not statistically valid trend data.

### What was consistent across both surveys

Affordability was the most commonly reported barrier in both surveys. Rent costs were cited as the primary challenge in both surveys, and students across all groups described difficulty covering housing costs from income and financial aid alone. The reliance on parental and family financial support was high in both surveys, with approximately 40–50% of respondents depending on family contributions to cover housing costs. One-bedroom apartments were the most commonly preferred unit type in both surveys, reported by approximately 40% of respondents in each, reflecting a desire for independent living that median student income makes difficult to sustain. Safety concerns were reported in both surveys, though the questions were framed differently—in Spring, 22% of students whose housing didn't meet their needs reported feeling unsafe, while in Fall, 24% of all renters cited



an unsafe neighbourhood as a concern. These figures are not directly comparable but indicate safety as a persistent theme across both surveys. University residence accommodated a small minority of respondents in both surveys—2% in Spring and 9% in Fall.

### What changed between surveys

The proportion of students reporting difficulty with the housing search increased from 45% in Spring to 55% in Fall—a 10 percentage point increase. The proportion reporting their housing meets their needs decreased from 70% in Spring. The proportion renting off-campus increased slightly from 51% to 54%. Both the increase in search difficulty and the decrease in housing satisfaction are consistent with the seasonal and sample composition factors noted above, and should not be interpreted as a definitive measure of deteriorating conditions. However, they are also consistent with that interpretation, and no indicator across the two surveys points in the opposite direction. Table 1a summarizes key indicators across both surveys.

Table 1a Spring - Fall Survey Comparison

Indicator	Spring 2025	Fall 2025	Notes
Found housing search difficult	45%	55%	Same question both surveys
Found housing search easy	23%	28%	Same question both surveys
Rent off-campus	51%	54%	Same question both surveys
Live with parents/relatives	29%†	30%	Spring includes "Other" category, ~70% of which lived with family
University residence	12%	9%	Same question both surveys

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[See Appendix A: Fall Survey Results and Appendix B: Spring Survey Results](#)

### 1.5 Enrollment Context

Edmonton's six largest post-secondary institutions enrolled a combined 113,472 students (both full and part time) in 2023–24, up 13.7% from 99,789 in 2019–20. Total post-secondary enrollment in Edmonton across all institutions is approximately 150,000 students.

**Table 2: Total Enrollment at Edmonton Post-Secondary Institutions, 2019-2024 (Historical)**

Institution	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Rate of Growth (2019-2024)
University of Alberta	44,495	46,269	48,158	48,766	49,508	11.3%
NAIT	21,168	22,804	22,687	22,682	24,715	16.8%
MacEwan University	18,483	18,345	18,366	18,108	18,855	2%
NorQuest College	11,507	11,768	12,357	14,337	16,645	44.7%
Concordia University of Edmonton	3,230	3,319	3,248	2,923	2,859	-11.5%
The King's University	906	936	943	883	890	-1.8%
Total	99,789	103,441	105,759	107,699	113,472	13.7%

### Project Growth Table

Enrollment projections were calculated using each institution's 5-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR), derived from Alberta Advanced Education headcount data for 2019–20 to 2023–24, with 2023–24 verified headcounts as the baseline. Figures represent total headcount including both full-time and part-time students. The cumulative growth rates

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shown in the previous table and the CAGR figures used here describe the same trend at different scales—for example, the University of Alberta's cumulative growth of 11.3% over five years translates to an annualized CAGR of 2.2%. Based on these projections, combined enrollment could grow from 113,472 in 2023–24 to approximately 130,700 by 2028–29, with NorQuest College showing the highest annual growth rate (7.7%), the University of Alberta the largest absolute projected increase, and both Concordia University of Edmonton and The King's University showing slight projected declines.

**Table 3: Estimated Total Enrollment at Edmonton Post-Secondary Institutions, 2025-2034**

Institution	2023-24	CAGR	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
University of Alberta	49,508	2.2%	~50,600	~51,700	~52,800	~54,000	~55,200
MacEwan University	18,855	0.4%	~18,950	~19,000	~19,100	~19,150	~19,200
NAIT	24,715	3.1%	~25,500	~26,300	~27,100	~27,950	~28,800
NorQuest College	16,645	7.7%	~17,925	~19,300	~20,800	~22,400	~24,100
Concordia University of Edmonton	2,859	-2.4%	~2,790	~2,725	~2,660	~2,595	~2,530
The King's University	890	-0.4%	~886	~882	~879	~875	~872
Estimated Total	<b>113,472</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>~116,650</b>	<b>~119,900</b>	<b>~123,350</b>	<b>~126,900</b>	<b>~130,700</b>

*Note: 2023–24 figures are verified headcounts from Alberta Advanced Education's LERS database and include both full-time and part-time students. CAGR is calculated from 2019–20 to 2023–24 using the formula  $CAGR = (End\ Value / Base\ Value)^{(1/n)} - 1$ , where the base value is 2019–20 enrollment, the end value is 2023–24 enrollment, and  $n = 5$  years. Projected figures apply each*



*institution's annualized CAGR to the 2023–24 baseline. These projections assume continuation of recent trends and have not been verified by institutions. They do not account for policy changes, new program launches, or shifts in international student intake, and should be understood as trend-based estimates rather than institutional forecasts.*

**Indigenous Student Enrollment**

Indigenous students represent approximately 5.7% of total enrollment (approximately 6,500 students), with the highest proportions at NorQuest College (8%) and Concordia University of Edmonton (7%).

**Table 4: Current Indigenous Student Enrollment Proportions (From Institutional Interviews and Alberta Advanced Education Data)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Approximate Indigenous Student Share</b>	<b>2023-2024 Estimated Indigenous Students</b>
NorQuest College	~8%	~1,330
Concordia University of Edmonton	~7%	~200
NAIT	~6%	~1,480
MacEwan University	~5%	~940
University of Alberta	~5%	~2,475
The King's University	~5%	~45
Total	~5.7%	~6,470

*Notes: Percentages reflect Indigenous students as a proportion of each institution's total enrollment. Indigenous student identification is voluntary and self-reported, meaning actual populations may differ from institutional records.*

**Implications for Housing Demand**

If current housing patterns persist and institutions meet their stated growth targets, demand for off-campus rental housing and residence beds would increase. Enrollment projections are based on growth expectations reported by institutions during interviews and have not been verified against provincial data. Actual enrollment growth may differ, particularly given federal caps on international student enrollment introduced in 2024.

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None of the institutions interviewed indicated plans to expand residence capacity at a rate matching projected enrollment growth, suggesting the gap between institutional housing capacity and student demand could widen. With approximately half of respondents currently renting in the private market, significant enrollment growth would translate directly into additional rental housing demand—particularly for units near transit routes and campus areas where students concentrate.



## 2. THE STUDENT RENTER POPULATION

### 2.1. Housing Type and Tenancy

Student housing arrangements in Edmonton reflect limited purpose-built student housing and heavy reliance on private rental markets. This section covers housing type, tenancy arrangements, household composition, and length of tenure.

#### Who Students Live With

Understanding household composition provides context for housing needs.

#### **Q: What type of housing do you currently live in?**

Table 5: Current Living Arrangements (Fall 2025 Survey n=1573)

Living Arrangement	Percentage
Housing Type	Share of Respondents
Rent an off-campus apartment/house	42%
Living with parents/relatives	30%
Rent a room in someone else's apartment/house	12%
University residence or dormitory	9%
Own an off-campus apartment/house	4%
Temporary housing (e.g., couch surfing, short-term rentals, hotels)	1%
Affordable/subsidized housing	1%
Other	1%



## Who Students Live With

Understanding household composition provides context for housing needs.

**Q: Who do you currently live with? Select all that apply.**

Table 6: Who Students Currently Live With (Fall 2025 Survey) N=1568

Living Arrangement	Percentage
Parents/relatives	37%
Roommates	36%
Spouse or partner	18%
Live alone	11%
Children	6%
Other	4%

Among respondents with current housing, the most common living arrangements were with parents or relatives (37%) and with roommates (36%). A smaller proportion lived alone (11%), with a partner (18%), or with children (6%).

**Q: How many people in total live in your current housing unit (including yourself)? (n=1393)**

Table 7: Current Number of Roommates (Fall 2025 Survey)

Household Size	Percentage
2-3 people	56%
4-5 people	35%
6 or more people	9%

## Current Bedroom Size

**Q: What is the total number of bedrooms in your home?**

Table 8: Current Number of Bedrooms (Fall 2025 Survey) (n=1,568)

Bedrooms	Percentage
1 bedroom	15%
2 bedrooms	27%
3+ bedrooms	49%
Studio/bachelor	5%
Other	4%



## Ideal Housing Size

**Q: When looking for housing, which size would best suit your needs?**

Table 9: Preferred Number of Bedrooms (Fall 2025 Survey) (n=1,573)

Bedrooms	Percentage
1 bedroom	37%
2 bedrooms	22%
Studio/bachelor	16%
Shared with private bedroom	10%
3+ bedrooms	7%
Micro-unit	4%
Other	2%

Among the 31 students who selected "other" for preferred housing size, the most common responses referenced house-style accommodation, with respondents specifying detached houses, townhouses, or main-floor units, often with two or more bedrooms to accommodate partners, children, or pets.

Several respondents explicitly noted family circumstances as the driver, including spouses, children, and pet ownership. A smaller number indicated preferences for specific unit features—such as a private washroom, a den, or backyard access—rather than a distinct size category. Two respondents expressed interest in rent-to-own arrangements, and one noted a preference for shared housing only with known roommates due to a personal health condition.



### Actual Number of Bedrooms

**Q: What is the total number of bedrooms in your home?**

Table 10: Total Number of Bedrooms (Fall 2025 Survey n=1568)

Bedrooms	Percentage
1 bedroom	15%
2 bedrooms	27%
Studio/bachelor	5%
Shared room in larger unit	4%
3 bedrooms	24%
4 or more bedrooms	25%

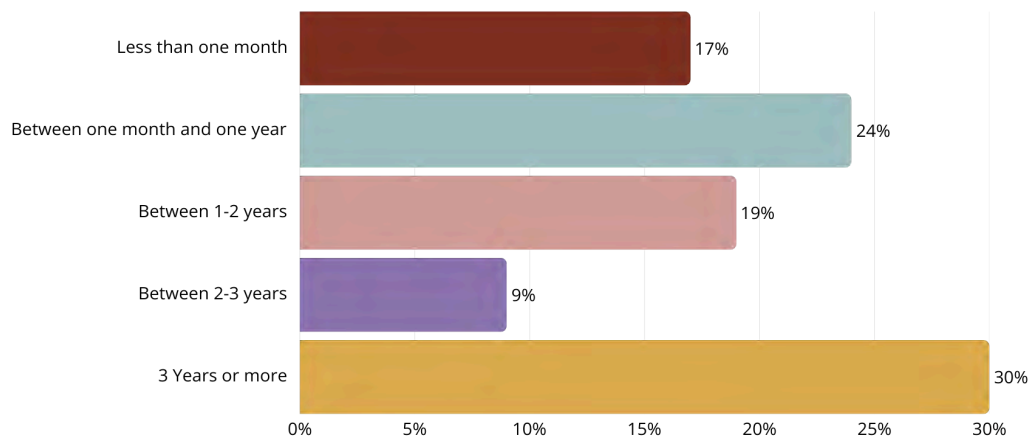
There is a gap between current and preferred housing. While 37% prefer a 1-bedroom apartment, only 15% currently live in one.



### Length of Tenure

For respondents who currently have housing (n=1,568), 60% have lived in their current housing for less than two years. This pattern is consistent with the composition of survey respondents, half of whom were in their first or second year of study. The Spring survey found similar patterns. Because the Fall survey was conducted at the beginning of the academic year (August-October 2025), many students had recently acquired housing.

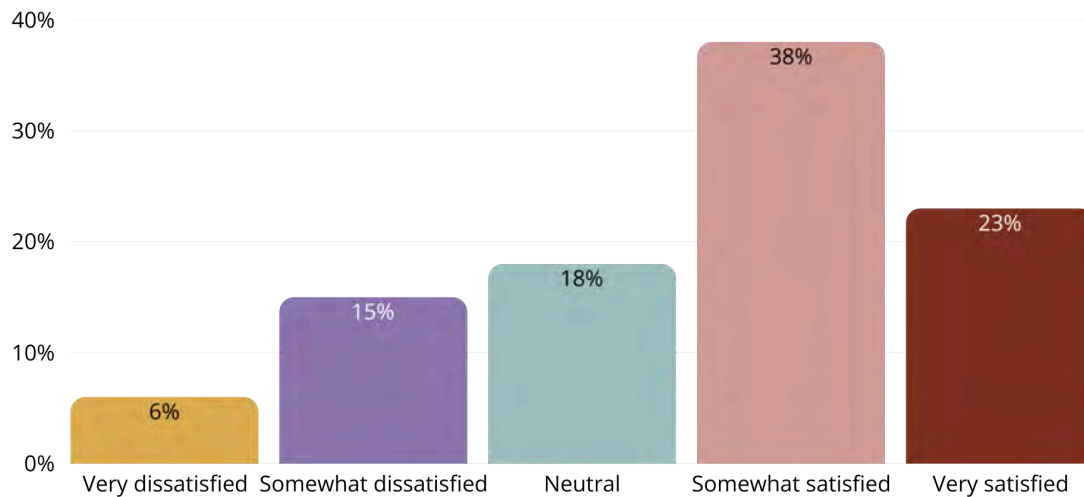
Figure 1: How long have you been living in your current housing? n=1,568





## Housing Satisfaction

Figure 2: How satisfied are you with your current housing situation?  
(Fall Survey, n=1,009)



Among respondents who do not live with their parents or relatives (n=1,099), the majority (61%) are satisfied with their current housing situation, while 21% express dissatisfaction. Among the 545 students reporting satisfaction, the most commonly cited factor was location and proximity—237 responses mentioned being close to campus, walkable neighbourhoods, or convenient transit access. Affordability and value were cited in 162 responses, often alongside references to utilities being included or landlords offering reasonable rates. Good landlord or management responsiveness was noted in 47 responses. Safety and security featured in 59 responses, and satisfaction with building quality or amenities appeared in 117 responses.

Among the 184 students reporting dissatisfaction, high costs were the dominant theme, appearing in 71 responses.

Students described rent consuming large portions of income, unaffordable increases, and having to choose between housing and food. Distance and commute challenges were cited

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in 28 responses, with students describing being forced into cheaper neighbourhoods farther from campus, resulting in commutes of 30 minutes to over an hour—reducing available study time and adding transportation costs. Poor building conditions—including mold, pests, inadequate heating, and slow or absent maintenance—appeared in 25 responses. Overcrowding or insufficient space was noted in 26 responses. Safety concerns, including references to unsafe neighbourhoods, drug activity, and inadequate building security, were raised in 18 responses. Several students described these challenges as interconnected: affordability pressure drove location trade-offs, which compounded access difficulties for students balancing transit with childcare, medical appointments, or employment.



## 2.2. Financial Situation

The financial reality for Edmonton students reveals a gap between earning capacity and housing costs.

### Sources of Income

**Q: What are your current sources of income for 2025? Select all that apply.**

Table 11: Sources of Financial Support (Fall 2025 Survey, n=1,573)

Income Source	Percentage
Part-time job off-campus	50%
Student loans	44%
Bursaries/scholarships	43%
Help from parents/family members	41%
Full-time job (including internship/co-op placement)	14%
Part-time job(s) on-campus	8%
Canada Child Benefit	6%
Employment Insurance	4%
AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped)	1%
Other government assistance	3%
None of the above	4%

Among respondents who specified other sources of income, Indigenous funding arrangements were the most commonly cited category, with approximately 10 responses referencing band funding, per capita distributions, territorial funding, the Northwest Territories Student Financial Assistance program, the YTC Post Secondary Student Support Program, and the Advancing Futures program (3 responses).

Disability-related income was the next most common category, with approximately 10 responses referencing the Canada Disability Benefit (5), disability tax credits (2), disability grants, and CPP disability benefits.

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Survivor and dependent benefits appeared across six responses, including CPP surviving child benefits and survivor's pensions received following a parent's death.

Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) savings were cited by five respondents. Smaller numbers referenced child support, social assistance, third-party sponsorships, MSc research funding, and federal benefit payments including the GST credit, Canada Carbon Rebate, and Canada Workers Benefit.

The Spring survey found nearly 47% of respondents relied on parental support, fairly consistent with Fall findings where 41% of respondents relied on parental/family member support. The high reliance on family support indicates that some students cannot cover housing costs from earnings and financial aid alone.

*Direct comparisons between spring and fall survey results should be interpreted with caution, as both surveys used open-link methods with different respondent pools.*

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**Q: What was your 2024 annual income? (Please enter numbers only without \$. If you did not have any income in 2024, please enter 0)**

Table 12: Student Income Summary (Fall 2025 Survey n=1573 )

Income Measure	Amount
<b>Annual Income (2024)</b>	
Median (all Respondents- n=1573)	\$5640
Median (Respondents who rent n=853)	\$8000
Average (Mean) (all Respondents- n=1573)	\$13,822
Average (Mean) (Respondents who rent - n=853)	\$14,952
<b>Monthly Income</b>	
Median (\$5640/12) (all Respondents- n=1573)	\$470
Median (Respondents who rent n=853)	\$667
Average (Mean) (\$13,822/12) (all Respondents- n=1573)	\$1,152
Average (Mean) (Respondents who rent n=853)	\$1,246

**Q: Which of the following monthly housing costs do you pay?**

Table 13: Monthly Housing Costs (Fall 2025 Survey n=1568 )

Payment Category	Responses	Median
Main rent payment	1,070	\$970
Mortgage payment	113	\$1,375
Electricity/gas (separate)	497	\$80
Water (separate)	184	\$70
Internet (separate)	621	\$68

Student housing costs in Edmonton reveal an affordability gap between student incomes and rents. The survey data from 1,070 students shows a median monthly rent of \$970, with considerable variation indicated by the high standard deviation of \$2,093. While this variation reflects diverse housing situations—from shared accommodations to independent



units—the central finding remains consistent: housing costs exceed many students' financial capacity.

When median rent (\$970) is measured against the median monthly income for students that rent (\$667) students face housing costs (not including utilities) well above their income. The Spring survey found approximately 30% of respondents paid between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per month on rent, utilities, and internet, with close to half (48%) reporting they could not comfortably afford their current housing costs.

### **Housing Cost Burden**

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) uses the 30% shelter-cost-to-income ratio as the affordability threshold within its Core Housing Need framework.<sup>1</sup> Core Housing Need identifies households whose housing fails to meet standards of affordability, adequacy (not requiring major repairs), or suitability (enough bedrooms for household size)—and who cannot access acceptable local housing without spending 30% or more of before-tax income. It is important to note that students are excluded from CMHC's Core Housing Need measure, on the basis that low student incomes are considered temporary. This means that housing challenges faced by the majority of Edmonton's post-secondary students renting in the private market are not captured in official housing need data.

The additional housing-related costs captured in the survey—utilities averaging \$80 for electricity and gas, \$70 for water, and \$68 for internet—compound these pressures. For students already stretching to cover baseline rent, these additional monthly expenses of \$200-300 further strain limited resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. "Identifying Core Housing Need."  
<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-research/core-housing-need/identifying-core-housing-need>



**Trade-offs to Afford Housing (Fall 2025 Survey n=1573)**

**Q: Did you make any compromises or trade-offs while searching for housing due to unexpected challenges (e.g. average rental rates were higher than expected)? Select all that apply.**

Table 14: Trade-offs Made to Afford Housing

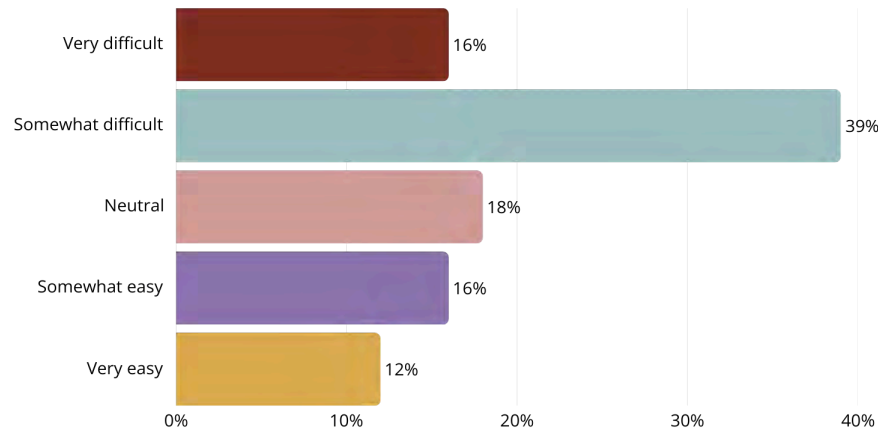
Trade-off	Percentage
Reduced spending on food or other necessities	54%
Live farther from campus than preferred	34%
Living in a shared space when I would prefer to live alone	33%
Working more hours at my job, which affects my studies	30%
Delayed or avoided medical/dental care	23%
Borrowed additional money beyond planned student loans	19%
Used food banks or other emergency supports	16%
Live in housing that does not meet my needs	18%
Live in temporary or unstable housing arrangements	10%
None of the above	10%
Not applicable	11%

Survey respondents reported making several compromises to manage housing costs. The most common were reducing spending on food or other necessities (54%), living farther from campus than preferred (34%), living in a shared space when preferring to live alone (33%), and working more hours at their job in ways that affected their studies (30%)<sup>S2.3</sup>.

Housing Search Difficulty



Figure 3: How difficult was it to find your current housing? (Fall Survey, n=1,099)



According to CMHC data (October 2025), average rents in Edmonton's primary rental market reached \$1,464 monthly, with one-bedroom units—the most common apartment type—averaging \$1,301 monthly and studios averaging \$1,108.

The overall vacancy rate stood at 3.8%, a slight increase from 3.1% the previous year but still below the 4.3% recorded in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Edmonton's purpose-built rental stock has grown from approximately 79,000 units in 2022 to over 90,500 by 2025, yet rents have risen steadily in this time. Year-over-year rent increases ranged from 1.5% in 2022 to 7.2% in 2024, before moderating to 3.5% in 2025—meaning rents grew faster than overall inflation for most of this period. The

<sup>2</sup> Data from CMHC Rental Market Report (October 2025) and CMHC Housing Market Information Portal (<https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmportal>). Edmonton-specific figures drawn from Primary and Secondary Rental Market Statistics tables.



secondary rental market (rental condominiums) showed even tighter conditions, with average rents of \$1,502 monthly and vacancy rates of just 1.7%.<sup>3</sup>

While CMHC does not track student-specific rental data, these market conditions shape the environment in which students search for housing. The survey asked students directly about their search process and the barriers they encountered.

In the Fall 2025 survey, among respondents who do not live with their parents or relatives (n=1,099), 55% reported difficulty finding housing (16% 'very difficult,' 39% 'somewhat difficult'), and 28% found the process easy (16% 'somewhat easy,' 12% 'very easy'). This represents an increase from the 45% who reported difficulty in the Spring survey. This difference may reflect both changes in market conditions and the timing of each survey—Fall respondents were surveyed shortly after their housing search, while Spring respondents were surveyed closer to the end of the school term.

In the Fall 2025 survey, among respondents who do not live with their parents or relatives (n=1099), 55% of respondents reported difficulty finding housing, compared to 45% in the April 2025 survey. This difference may reflect both changes in market conditions and the timing of each survey—Fall respondents were surveyed shortly after their housing search, while Spring respondents were surveyed closer to the end of the school term.

**Overall Difficulty (Fall 2025 Survey):** 55% of respondents reported difficulty finding housing (16% "very difficult," 39% "somewhat difficult"), and 28% found the process easy (16% said it was "somewhat easy" and 12% said it was "very easy").

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<sup>3</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Rental Market Report 2025 — Edmonton-specific figures (vacancy rates, average rents) drawn from Primary Rental Market Statistics tables via the CMHC Housing Market Information Portal: <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmportal>

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Prepared by: Student Housing

This represents an increase from the Spring survey, when 45% reported difficulty with their housing search.

**Q: What were the main challenges you experienced in finding housing? Select all that apply**

Table 15: Specific Housing Search Challenges (Fall 2025 Survey) (n=599)

Challenge	Percentage
Housing options are not within my budget	88%
Limited availability in desired area	66%
Proximity to public transportation	49%
Competition from other renters	42%
Scams or fraudulent listings	27%
Found the process confusing / lacked guidance	24%
Lack of housing references	23%
No credit history	20%
Housing didn't meet accessibility needs	16%
Need for a guarantor	15%
Sublease	7%
Other	8%

For respondents who find the housing search difficult (n=599), affordability dominates at 88%—the highest barrier. This reflects the fundamental mismatch between median student income for the students who rent (\$667/month) and median rent (\$970/month).

"Competition from other renters" (42%) signals supply shortage\

Meanwhile, 27% of respondents reported encountering scams or fraudulent listings, 23% cited a lack of housing references, and 20% reported having no credit history.

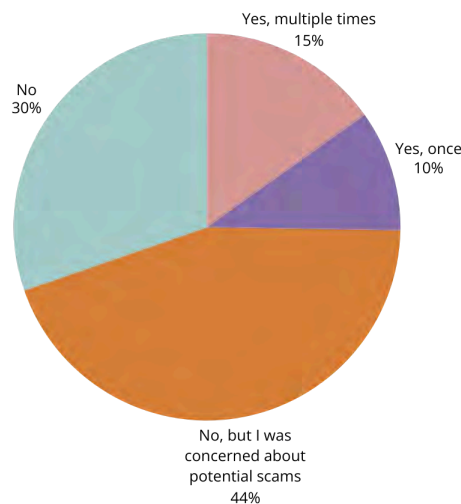
Other responses (n=48): Responses focused on pet restrictions (e.g., no pets allowed, limited dog or cat-friendly options), landlord and property management issues (e.g., lack of responsiveness, discrimination against student tenants), unit quality concerns (e.g., poor condition, infestations, illegal subdivisions), lease inflexibility (e.g., 12-month leases only, no



short-term options), and logistical barriers for students relocating from outside Edmonton (e.g., inability to view units in person).

## Housing Scams

Figure 4: Have you encountered any housing-related scams while searching for accommodation? (Fall Survey, n=1,099)



Among respondents, 15% reported experiencing scams multiple times and 10% reported at least one experience for a total of 25%, and an additional 44% are concerned about potential scams during their search. Combined, this means 70% of respondents searching for housing have either experienced or are worried about fraudulent schemes.

Among the 180 students who described their scam experiences, the two most frequently reported issues were requests for a deposit before any viewing (29 responses) and listings with fake or misrepresenting photos (29 responses). Students also reported phantom listings where no unit was actually available (11 responses), landlords claiming to be out of town and requesting remote payment (10 responses), rents advertised lower than the price ultimately



charged (8 responses), and predatory or sexually harassing rental situations (8 responses). Smaller numbers reported illegal or substandard units (6), requests for personal information (5), e-transfer payments without a lease (4), and application or viewing fees (3). Two respondents cited racial discrimination.

**Safety Concerns (Fall 2025 Survey n=1,568)**

**Q: Have you experienced any of the following safety concerns with your housing? Select all that apply.**

Table 16: Safety Experiences in Current Housing

Concern	Percentage
None of the above	51%
Unsafe neighbourhood	24%
Poor building security	17%
Poor lighting	17%
Landlord issues	15%
Harassment from other tenants	8%
Unsafe housing arrangements	7%
Other	7%

The data reveals that safety concerns extend beyond traditional crime-related issues. The 24% reporting experiences living in unsafe neighbourhoods represents 372 students, while the combined physical security issues (poor building security and lighting) affect nearly a quarter of respondents. The 15% reporting landlord issues suggests that safety concerns include problematic management relationships, not just environmental conditions.

Open-ended survey responses identify additional safety dimensions that standard categories miss, including infrastructure failures, pest infestations, maintenance neglect, and environmental hazards. These responses demonstrate that students define "safety" broadly,



encompassing physical security, building maintenance, pest control, and protection from environmental hazards.

**Helpful Housing Programs and Services (Fall 2025 Survey n=1,573)**

Survey respondents were asked to choose from a range of housing programs and services they would find most helpful. Respondents could choose more than one option.

***Q: If available, which of the following programs would be most useful for you?***

Table 17: Interest in Housing Programs

Program	Interest Level
Guaranteed housing program for students.	58%
Rental assistance and/or housing allowance program	56%
Lease education and support	45%
Housing search assistance	30%
Emergency housing funds	29%
Tenant rights education	24%
Co-living/shared housing matching	16%
Other	1%
None of the above	6%

The top two programs—guaranteed affordable student housing and direct financial assistance for rent—were selected by 58% and 56% of respondents respectively, indicating that reducing the cost burden of housing is the most commonly identified need, whether through supply-side guarantees or direct financial assistance.

Support services—including lease education, housing search assistance, emergency funds, and tenant rights education—were each selected by roughly one-quarter to nearly half of respondents, indicating demand for information and support infrastructure alongside financial interventions.

Among respondents who specified other programs, rent control and affordability measures were the most common themes (7 responses), including calls for rent caps, rent increase



protection, and government action to lower housing costs. Financial support such as bursaries, a livable wage, and allowances for students with children appeared in four responses, and family-inclusive housing for students with spouses or dependents was cited in three. Smaller numbers referred to pet-friendly housing, purpose-built residences with adequate amenities, and policy changes such as increased density near transit and reduced parking requirements. Two responses fell outside the scope of housing programming.

### 2.3. Transportation and Commute Patterns

Understanding how students travel to campus provides context for housing location decisions. The Fall 2025 survey collected data on current commute times, acceptable commute times, and transportation modes.

#### ***Q: How long does it take you to travel to class/campus from home?***

Table 18: Commute Times—Current vs. Acceptable (n=1,573)

Duration	Current Travel Time	Maximum Acceptable
Less than 15 minutes	19%	11%
15-30 minutes	27%	41%
31-45 minutes	22%	25%
46-60 minutes	17%	17%
More than 60 minutes	12%	6%
Online classes only	1%	1%

There is a slight mismatch between actual and acceptable commute times. While 29% of respondents (466) currently commute 46 minutes or longer, only 23% (354) find this duration acceptable. Most respondents identified 15-30 minutes as the maximum acceptable commute time (41%, 640 respondents), yet only 27% (429 respondents) currently experience



this duration. This gap suggests some students are accepting longer commutes than preferred, likely due to affordability constraints pushing them further from campus. This is corroborated by the survey question where 34% of respondents indicated they live farther from campus than preferred. Discussion group participants also confirmed this pattern, describing how affordable housing options often require lengthy transit trips that affect academic performance and limit employment opportunities.

**Q: What is your primary mode of transportation to campus in your current housing?**

**Table 19: Primary Transportation Mode (n=1,552)**

Mode	Percentage
Public transit (ETS)	57%
Walking	20%
Personal vehicle	17%
Bicycle/scooter	2%
Get rides from others	1%
Rideshare/taxi	<1%
Other	1%

Public transit serves as the primary transportation mode for 57% of respondents (891), making it the dominant travel method by a significant margin. This indicates substantial reliance on ETS service quality, frequency, and coverage for housing location decisions. Combined with the finding that 52% of respondents who identified 30 minutes or less as their maximum acceptable commute, transit accessibility functions as a primary determinant of where students can realistically live.



Responses to 'other' cluster into five patterns: students combining a personal vehicle with transit (park-and-ride or drive-to-LRT), those using transit only, those who walk (sometimes noting cost as a barrier to transit), students with no commute due to on-campus housing, and a small number using specialized options like Dedicated Accessible Transit Service (DATS) or the Campus Saint-Jean shuttle.

**Ideal Lease Length (Fall 2025 Survey n=1,573)**

***Q: What rental lease length would work best for you?***

Table 20: Preferred Lease Length

Lease Length	Percentage
12-month (full year)	40%
5-8 month (academic year)	31%
Month-to-month	13%
Flexible (varies by semester)	13%
4 months or less	2%
Other	3%

The majority of respondents prefer a 12-month lease (40%), followed by academic year leases of 5-8 months (31%). Month-to-month and flexible lease options combined represent 26% of preferences, indicating a substantial portion of respondents seeking shorter-term or adaptable arrangements.

Responses to 'other' reflect misalignment between available lease structures and student circumstances. The most common theme was a preference for leases aligned to program length—ranging from 8-month academic year leases to multi-year terms covering a full degree—with several respondents noting that standard 8- or 12-month options don't fit programs that run September to June or include summer internships.

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A smaller number expressed preference for flexible or month-to-month arrangements, sometimes paired with concern that shorter leases expose tenants to frequent rent increases. Two respondents noted they could not afford to remain in Edmonton over summer, defaulting to 8-month leases despite preferring year-round housing.



**Q: When looking for housing, how important are the following factors to you?**

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a range of factors when looking for housing, to better understand what students prioritize when making housing decisions.

**Table 21: Housing Factors by Importance Rating**

Factor	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Combined
Monthly rent within budget	88%	8%	96%
Kitchen facilities	69%	22%	91%
Laundry facilities	69%	23%	92%
Safe building with security features	67%	24%	91%
Safe neighbourhood	66%	26%	92%
Responsive management	56%	32%	88%
Close to public transit	61%	24%	85%
Good landlord relationship	50%	35%	86%
Close to campus	50%	36%	85%
All utilities included in rent	45%	33%	79%
Parking available	42%	21%	63%
Flexible lease terms	30%	34%	64%
Study spaces	27%	26%	53%
Getting along with neighbors	21%	34%	55%
Pet friendly	22%	15%	37%
Furnished unit	20%	20%	40%
Accessibility features	19%	18%	37%
Social/common areas	13%	25%	37%



Percentages reflect respondents who rated each factor as “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important.” Sorted by “Very Important” descending (n=1,573).

Monthly rent within budget is rated as somewhat to very important by 96% of respondents, the highest priority factor. Other critical factors include laundry facilities (92%), safe neighborhoods (92%), kitchen facilities (91%), and safe buildings with security features (91%). Responsive management is important to 88% of students, and proximity to public transit matters to 85% of respondents.

**Q: You indicated that accessibility features are important, which specific features do you need?**

Table 22 - Accessibility Features Required in Housing (Fall 2025 Survey, n=579)

Accessibility Feature	% of Respondents
Elevator access	62%
Accessible kitchen	48%
Accessible bathroom	45%
Accessible common areas	39%
Open floor plan	38%
Wide doorways	32%
Visual/hearing accessibility features	18%
Wheelchair accessible entrance	15%
Other	5%

Among the 579 students who indicated accessibility features are important, elevator access is the most needed feature (62%), followed by accessible kitchens (48%) and accessible bathrooms (45%).



Accessible common areas count for 39% of needs and open floor plans each account for 38% of needs. Wide doorways were identified as needed by 32% of respondents. Visual/hearing accessibility features (18%) and wheelchair accessible entrances (15%) represent smaller but specific needs. "Other" Accessibility Features Responses (29 responses, 5%): The open-ended responses reveal several important themes. Ten respondents indicated they don't personally need accessibility features but believe they're important for others or as a building standard.

Several respondents mentioned specific needs beyond the standard options: sensory-friendly spaces for neurodivergent individuals (quiet rooms, no bright lights, good soundproofing), in-unit laundry as an accessibility need for those with chronic fatigue or pain, and features that support social inclusion (ensuring visitors with mobility devices can access buildings). Some responses mentioned practical features like elevators and security access, while others specified building design elements like few stairs, wide doorways for moving furniture, and covered pathways. One detailed response from a student with chronic conditions emphasized in-unit laundry as essential for managing daily hygiene without physical strain.

### **Additional profile information**

Most respondents were between 18 and 24 years old (69%), reflecting the typical age range of full-time post-secondary students. A notable minority were 25 or older (28%), consistent with the presence of mature students, graduate students, and part-time learners across Edmonton's post-secondary institutions.

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**Table 23: Distribution of Respondents by Age (Fall Survey, n=1,573)**

Age Group	%
Under 18	2%
18-20	32%
21-24	37%
25-29	15%
30-34	8%
35-44	4%
45+	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%
Total	100%

**Table 24: Distribution of Respondents by Gender (Fall Survey, n=1,573)**

Women made up the largest share of respondents (65%), followed by men (27%). Five percent identified as non-binary and four percent as transgender. Because respondents could select multiple gender identities, percentages exceed 100%. The gender distribution of respondents does not mirror the overall Edmonton post-secondary population, where women comprise approximately 55-60% of enrollment, suggesting some over-representation of women in this sample.

Gender Identity	n	%
Woman (including combinations)	1,018	65%
Man (including combinations)	427	27%
Non-binary (including combinations)	75	5%
Transgender (including combinations)	56	4%
Two-Spirit (including combinations)	11	1%
Prefer not to answer	57	4%

*Note: Respondents could select multiple gender identities; percentages exceed 100%.*



**Table 25: Membership in Identity Groups (Fall Survey, n=1,573)**

Racialized students were the largest identity group represented (29%), followed by 2SLGBTQIA+ students (22%) and those born outside Canada (18%). Fourteen percent identified as persons with disabilities and eleven percent as Indigenous. Because respondents could select multiple groups, percentages exceed 100%. 24% selected none of the above. The sample includes proportionally higher representation of some equity-deserving groups relative to general population estimates, which may reflect targeted outreach through student unions and identity-based student organizations.

<b>Identity Group</b>	<b>%</b>
Racialized / visible minority	29%
2SLGBTQIA+	22%
Born outside of Canada	18%
New to Canada (less than 5 years)	14%
Persons with disabilities	14%
Indigenous	11%
None of the above	24%
Prefer not to answer	6%

*Note: Respondents could select multiple options; percentages exceed 100%.*

**Table 26: Types of Disability Reported**

Among the 214 respondents who reported a disability (14% of all respondents), mental health-related conditions were the most commonly reported (69%), followed by learning-related disabilities (46%) and pain-related conditions (32%).

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Prepared by: Student Services

Among respondents who reported having a disability (n=214)

Disability Type	% of those reporting
Mental health-related	69%
Learning-related	46%
Pain-related	32%
Mobility-related	18%
Developmental	16%
Vision-related	10%
Hearing Related	7%
Other	7%
Prefer not to answer	4%

Note: Respondents could select multiple disability types.

Table 27: Additional Circumstances (Fall survey, n=1,573)

A small number of respondents reported circumstances associated with acute housing vulnerability. While percentages are low individually, respondents experiencing homelessness (1%), fleeing domestic violence (2%), or with refugee status (1%) represent students with limited or no margin for housing instability.

Circumstance	%
Physical health or mobility challenges	6%
Female head of household / single mother	4%
Fleeing domestic violence	2%
Refugee	1%
Experiencing homelessness	1%
None of the above	79%
Prefer not to answer	8%

Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

# STUDENT HOUSING IN EDMONTON Needs Assessment Report

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**Table 28: Current Place of Residence (n=1573)**

90% of respondents reported living in Edmonton at the time of the survey. The remaining 10% lived in surrounding municipalities, primarily Strathcona County and St. Albert. This confirms that the findings primarily reflect housing conditions within Edmonton, while also indicating that a portion of students commute from adjacent communities.

Municipality	n	%
Edmonton	1,417	90%
Strathcona County	35	2%
St. Albert	32	2%
Spruce Grove	13	1%
Fort Saskatchewan	8	0.5%
Parkland County	8	0.5%
Beaumont	6	0.4%
Morinville	5	0.3%
Stony Plain	5	0.3%
Leduc	5	0.3%
Other	30	2%
Total	1,573	100%



**Table 29: Distribution by Forward Sortation Area (Top 15)**

Respondents were distributed across a wide range of Edmonton postal codes. T6G—the area surrounding the University of Alberta—had the highest concentration (14%), consistent with U of A comprising 54% of survey respondents. Beyond that cluster, respondents were spread across central, south, and southeast Edmonton, with no other single FSA exceeding 7%.

FSA	n	%
T6G	220	14.0%
T6E	109	6.9%
T5K	102	6.5%
T5H	81	5.1%
T6W	67	4.3%
T6H	59	3.8%
T6J	52	3.3%
T5T	50	3.2%
T5A	44	2.8%
T5J	41	2.6%
T6R	40	2.5%
T6L	40	2.5%
T6T	38	2.4%
T6B	37	2.4%
T5Y	35	2.2%
Other FSAs	302	19.2%
Not provided	156	9.9%

### Qualitative Engagement

This report combines quantitative and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive understanding of Edmonton students’ housing experiences.

The two student surveys help provide some scale of current housing need, though it’s important to note that the surveys are not fully representative of the broader student body. Qualitative data moves beyond the numbers to describe the lived experiences, circumstances, impacts, and causes of this need. This rich context was gathered through engagement with students from priority populations in discussion groups, as well as interviews with post-secondary institutions, the ESA, City of Edmonton Youth Council, and a

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secondary research scan of an engagement with private developers. The following section will report on findings from each of these groups identified.



### 3. DISCUSSION GROUP FINDINGS

The City of Edmonton's 2023-2026 Affordable Housing Strategy, *A Home for Everyone*, identifies priority populations who face systemic barriers to housing. This study adapted that framework to focus on several student populations who experience compounded challenges in the housing market. Priority populations for this assessment include:

- International students
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Indigenous students
- Students with disabilities
- Students with children

These groups were selected based on alignment with City priorities and input from the ESA. The following sections present findings from targeted discussion groups with individuals from these priority populations, supplementing quantitative survey data with in-depth qualitative insights.

The City of Edmonton's Affordable Housing Strategy identifies additional priority populations beyond those engaged in this study, including seniors, people fleeing domestic violence, people experiencing homelessness, and others. The focus on five student subgroups in this assessment reflects the scope and resourcing of this study and does not imply that the housing experiences of other priority populations are less significant. Future engagement may benefit from broadening this lens. Where findings from one session inform understanding of another population, this is noted in the text.



### **A Note on Intersectionality and Methodology**

Student identities do not exist in isolation. Across all discussion groups, participants described experiences shaped by multiple intersecting identities—as Indigenous students with disabilities, as international students with children, as 2SLGBTQIA+ students managing financial constraints. These examples illustrate some of the nuanced challenges inherent in student experiences. The sections below are organized by priority population for clarity, but readers should note that many findings emerged from students who belong to multiple groups.

### **3.1. International Students**

The City conducted two discussion groups with international students in Fall 2025, engaging 13 participants from the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and NAIT.

#### **Pre-Arrival Vulnerability**

International participants reported facing a distinct challenge during which they must secure housing from abroad without the ability to verify listings, view properties, or access Canadian banking and credit systems. Several participants reported arriving in Edmonton without confirmed housing, due to challenges with securing housing from abroad.

Once participants had arrived in Edmonton, search durations ranged from two weeks to four months, with participants viewing 10 to 15 properties before securing housing. Many spent \$100 to \$200 per night on hotels or Airbnb during their search period. Several participants suggested that verified housing information from trusted sources that they could access from their home countries (post-secondary institutions, City of Edmonton) would reduce their vulnerability.



### **Financial Mismatch**

Some participants described a fundamental disconnect between expected and actual housing costs. Several participants reported that the Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC)<sup>4</sup> required study permits provide approximately \$1,000 monthly, yet participants in the discussion groups described rents ranging from \$650 to \$1,200 per month before utilities.

### **Location as a Key Challenge**

Location emerged as a significant theme. Several participants reported living 30-45 minutes from campus. Some participants chose cheaper housing in areas farther from school, resulting in long commutes that reduced study time. The trade-off between affordability and location was reported to impact academic performance and well-being.

### **Documentation Barriers**

Landlords often require documentation that several participants were not able to provide: Canadian credit history, local guarantors, and job references. In addition, some landlords required six to 12 months of rent upfront—a practice reported by multiple participants—which created significant financial burdens.

### **Community as Infrastructure**

Several participants reported creating informal support networks to compensate for limited formal assistance. They established WhatsApp groups for housing alerts, translated documents for each other, maintained apartment lists through cultural associations, and attended property viewings together.

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<sup>4</sup> The Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) is a secure, fixed-term investment required by the Government of Canada as proof of financial resources for international study permit applicants. Students must deposit a set amount — currently approximately \$10,000 — into a GIC before arriving in Canada, which is then released in monthly installments of approximately \$1,000 over the course of their studies.



Meeting other international students was identified as the most helpful aspect of their housing experience. This underscores the importance of community connections and suggests that formal support systems could build on these organic networks.

### **3.2. 2SLGBTQIA+ Students**

The discussion group with 2SLGBTQIA+ students was held in Fall 2025 at Stanley A. Milner Library. Three students participated from the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and NorQuest College.

#### **Safety as the Primary Consideration**

Safety concerns dominated housing decisions for participants. All participants reported modifying their behavior for safety, and several experienced discrimination from landlords. Discrimination resulted in participants being rejected for units after landlords learned their identity, with some landlords indicating the unit was 'no longer available' following disclosure. Participants sought out landlords known to be 2SLGBTQIA+ accepting, relying on community networks and word-of-mouth, and some concealed this part of their identity during viewings as a precaution.

#### **The Safety Premium**

A couple of participants described paying more for housing in neighborhoods where they felt safe. This created a "safety premium"—participants selected more expensive housing in central areas like Oliver and Strathcona over affordable options in less accepting neighborhoods. This additional cost burden compounds already challenging affordability.



### **Discrimination Avoidance**

Participants described housing decisions shaped by the need to avoid discrimination. Several participants paid more for housing in central neighbourhoods like Oliver and Strathcona where they felt safer and less likely to face rejection—a cost burden that compounds already challenging affordability. Others described concealing their 2SLGBTQIA+ identity during viewings and avoiding disclosure to landlords or prospective roommates in order to secure housing. Participants reported being rejected for units after landlords learned their identity, with some experiencing this after an initial offer had been made.

### **Isolation and Community**

A couple of participants chose to live alone for safety, contributing to social isolation. Yet simultaneously, participants also described how the 2SLGBTQIA+ community supports each other through Facebook housing groups, word-of-mouth referrals for 2SLGBTQIA+-accepting landlords and available units, and felt supported by community organizations such as the Pride Centre<sup>5</sup>.

### **3.3. Students with Disabilities and Indigenous Students**

The City conducted a discussion group with students with disabilities in November 2025, engaging seven participants at the University of Alberta. This session demonstrated the highest degree of intersectionality across all discussion groups: five participants identified as Indigenous, two had children, and several served as caregivers for family members. Their experiences reflect the compounded barriers that arise when multiple identities intersect. Discussion group participants reported multiple disability types, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, fibromyalgia, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and mobility limitations.

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<sup>5</sup> The [Pride Centre of Edmonton](#) is a community hub offering programs, resources, and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.



### **The Disclosure Dilemma**

This dilemma manifests differently depending on disability type. Students with mobility limitations reported feeling unable to ask about the presence of elevators or stairs without revealing their condition. Participants with mental health conditions reported facing stigma when they disclose, particularly when landlords learned they receive disability support like Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). Students with neurodevelopmental conditions described hesitating to ask for written explanations of lease terms and tenancy obligations, instructions or additional time to review lease terms.

### **Lack of Accessible Housing Supply**

Participants with mobility limitations described rental listings as rarely including information about either building or unit accessibility—elevators, stair counts, ramp access, bathroom configurations, and door widths were seldom disclosed in listings. This left participants unable to assess whether a unit was physically suitable without visiting in person or asking directly, which itself risked disclosing their disability status. One participant described discovering only after moving in that a freshly renovated unit lacked basic fixtures such as light bulbs. For participants reliant on caregivers, proximity to caregiver accommodation added a further constraint that standard listings provide no way to assess.

### **Executive Function and Housing Search Barriers**

Participants with ADHD, learning disabilities, or other conditions affecting executive function described their housing search process as presenting significant barriers. Some participants described difficulty navigating viewing multiple listings, completing application paperwork, understanding lease terms, and managing the administrative tasks required to secure and maintain housing. Some participants expressed a need for workshops on financial management, budgeting, and housing search skills.



### **Service and Emotional Support Animals**

Several participants noted that people with disabilities often have pets for emotional support or as service animals, but many housing options do not allow pets. This further limits already constrained housing choices, particularly for students whose mental health conditions benefit from animal companionship.

### **Compounded Financial Pressure**

Several participants described managing disability-related costs as increasing financial pressure. Several participants reported monthly rent of \$2,000 or more, with total housing costs approaching \$2,800 in winter months when utilities were included. Disability-related expenses—medications, mobility aids, caregiver costs, and transportation to medical appointments—added further financial pressure beyond housing costs alone. Several participants noted that they are unable to live independently due to their disability, and therefore face higher housing costs when paying for caregiver accommodation. One participant described paying a portion of their sister's rent in exchange for caregiving support—an additional expense of being both a student and disabled.

Several participants who provide caregiving to family members described declining academic performance due to competing responsibilities.

### **Transportation and Energy Management**

Participants with chronic pain, fatigue-related conditions, or mobility limitations described how commute times affect their capacity for academics and employment. Living in affordable but distant neighbourhoods meant long transit trips. Another described the ongoing difficulty of locating services—medical appointments, grocery stores, transit stops—within a manageable distance given their limited energy and mobility. For several participants managing pain or fatigue, these commutes directly impacted academic performance and wellbeing.



### **Compounded Discrimination**

Several participants reported facing discrimination based on multiple intersecting identities simultaneously—disability status, Indigenous identity, and reliance on income support. Some landlords did not recognize Indigenous bursaries, band funding, or AISH as legitimate income for rental qualification, effectively disqualifying participants who were financially able to pay rent. Participants described receiving advocacy and navigation support through Native Counselling Services of Alberta when facing discrimination. Several noted that managing barriers across multiple fronts—housing search, income verification, and accessibility—compounds an already demanding experience for students balancing studies, health, and finances.

### **3.4. Indigenous Students**

Findings about Indigenous student housing experiences emerged from two sources: a dedicated discussion group conducted in January 2026 with four University of Alberta students, and the Students with Disabilities session where five of seven participants identified as Indigenous.

These sessions engaged participants at different life stages and provide complementary perspectives. The dedicated Indigenous Students session engaged primarily first- and second-year students, three of whom had recently moved to Edmonton from other communities (Calgary and Winnipeg). Indigenous participants in the Students with Disabilities session were generally older students with more complex life circumstances, including caregiving responsibilities for children and family members, chronic health conditions, and longer histories of housing instability. Their experiences illuminate how housing challenges compound over time when Indigenous identity intersects with disability, family responsibilities, and financial constraints.



### **Affordability**

Affordability was identified as a primary concern. Several participants in the dedicated session described affordable rent as under \$700 per month—significantly below median market rates. Several participants who moved from Calgary described the compounded costs of relocating to a different city while starting university. One participant secured housing at \$700/month through family connections. Several Indigenous participants in the disabilities session described more severe affordability challenges, with some reporting housing costs of \$2,000 plus utilities. These participants described being caught between limited incomes, disability-related costs, and caregiving expenses.

### **Cultural Connections**

Several participants who had relocated from outside Edmonton described finding it easier to connect with Indigenous community and cultural resources in Edmonton than in previous cities. They attributed this in part to the University of Alberta's Native Studies as a full degree program suggesting the offering attracts more indigenous students. The availability of cultural supports and community connections was cited as a factor in their decision to attend school in Edmonton.

### **Information Gaps**

Many participants emphasized that existing supports for students are not well publicized. Participants were unaware not only of available housing resources, but also of training on what to look for in housing, how to respond if a landlord attempts eviction, and how to access emergency or transitional housing.

### **Partnership Opportunities**

Several participants identified partnerships with existing Indigenous organizations as a priority. Several participants identified partnerships with existing Indigenous organizations



as a priority, specifically suggesting the development of Indigenous student and family housing near campus in partnership with local Indigenous-led housing organizations.

### **3.5. Housing Ventures**

#### **Students with Children**

Findings about students with children emerged from four participants across two sources: one-on-one interviews conducted in January 2026 with two student parents, and two participants with children who took part in the Students with Disabilities session.

#### **Affordability and Limited Options**

A couple of participants identified affordability as their primary challenge. One participant described rent over \$1,000/month for a one-bedroom as not feasible on student income, with an affordable range around \$700/month including utilities. Another participant relocated to Edmonton specifically because housing costs were lower. Families require at least two-bedroom units, which narrows available options and increases costs. Several participants described the challenge of finding affordable family-sized housing near campus while also considering school locations for children, safety of neighbourhoods, and stability. Moving frequently due to affordability issues creates instability for children's schooling.

#### **Location and Access to Services**

Multiple participants emphasized the importance of housing location relative to childcare, schools, grocery stores, and transit. Any housing would need to remain close to family support, as extended family provides essential backup for childcare. The desire to provide children with safe outdoor play space conflicted for these participants with what is affordable.



### **Transit Challenges**

Transit limitations significantly affected multiple participants, influencing where they could live and how they could structure their academic schedules. One participant described bus service running hourly, meaning a missed bus results in a missed class. Commute times of one hour each way by transit were reported.

### **Impact on Studies**

Several participants described significant impacts on their academic experience due to housing and childcare logistics. One participant was unable to schedule classes before 9:30am due to needing time to prepare children and commute, and could not participate in any on campus activities after 4pm due to childcare pickup requirements. One participant noted they had shifted to primarily online classes to accommodate family scheduling constraints.

### **Limited Supply**

On-campus housing options for students with children are limited or absent at most Edmonton post-secondary institutions. One participant found no family-appropriate options listed on their university's housing website and was directed to the private rental market, where finding units large enough for a family in neighbourhoods that were both affordable and safe for children proved difficult. The information gap is a consequence of limited supply rather than a separate barrier.

### **Reliance on Family Support**

Several participants depend heavily on extended family for housing (living in parents' home) or childcare support. Independent housing was not within their student budgets. They indicated that working while studying full-time and parenting is not realistic, limiting income to student loans, scholarships, and bursaries.



### 3.6. Cross-Population Analysis: Common Themes and Divergent Experiences

Across all discussion groups and survey data, several themes emerged consistently while others varied by population. Findings emerged from sessions with varying degrees of demographic overlap—particularly between Indigenous students and students with disabilities—which provided depth on how multiple identities compound housing barriers while also capturing experiences specific to each population.

#### Universal Themes

All discussion groups described affordability as their central challenge, though the causes varied. Several international participants described facing a mismatch between GIC funds and actual costs. Several 2SLGBTQIA+ participants paid a 'safety premium' to live in safer neighbourhoods that were more expensive. Several participants with disabilities incurred additional costs for caregiver accommodation.

*Information Gaps.* Every discussion group described lacking critical information during housing searches. International participants needed verified listings and tenant rights education. 2SLGBTQIA+ participants needed lists of accepting landlords vetted by a trusted source, such as the City of Edmonton or their post-secondary institution. Students with disabilities needed building accessibility information. Participants with children indicated a need for guidance on neighbourhood safety and school proximity. Indigenous participants emphasized that existing supports are not well publicized. All groups expressed a desire for centralized housing information offered through a single platform.

A cross-cutting need for verified listings and tenant rights education emerged across all groups. Platforms such as the Edmonton-based Elev Homes ([elevhomes.ca](http://elevhomes.ca)) connect students with verified homestay hosts, offering one model for addressing pre-arrival housing uncertainty.



*Informal Peer Networks.* When formal support systems fail, participants created their own. International participants formed WhatsApp groups and cultural association housing lists. 2SLGBTQIA+ participants maintained informal 'safe landlord' lists through Pride Centre connections. Participants with disabilities relied on family members for support. Indigenous students accessed cultural community connections. These peer networks functioned as essential infrastructure, compensating for inadequate institutional support.

*Discrimination.* Participants in all discussion groups reported experiencing discrimination, though its form varied. Some 2SLGBTQIA+ participants experienced direct discrimination after landlords learned their identity. Indigenous participants and participants with disabilities faced compounded discrimination from multiple identity-based biases. Participants with children encountered landlords who perceived families as high-risk tenants.

*Barriers to Access.* Participants across discussion groups reported barriers related to discrimination and systemic disadvantage, though the nature of these barriers varied by population. International participants faced structural disadvantages in the rental market—lacking Canadian credit history, local guarantors, and references—that limited their housing options regardless of their ability to pay rent. Some 2SLGBTQIA+ participants experienced direct discrimination after landlords learned their identity. Some Indigenous participants and participants with disabilities faced compounded barriers from multiple intersecting identities. Participants with children encountered landlords who perceived families as high-risk tenants.

### **Divergent Experiences**

*Safety Functions Differently.* For international participants, safety concerns focused on neighbourhood crime and building security. For 2SLGBTQIA+ participants, safety meant



freedom from identity-based harassment and the ability to be themselves. For participants with disabilities, safety included building accessibility and emergency egress. For Indigenous participants new to Edmonton, safety concerns centered on navigating an unfamiliar city without established community networks, particularly for those living independently for the first time.

*Vulnerability Windows Vary.* Several International participants were most vulnerable before their arrival in Canada, when they had to secure housing from abroad without awareness of how the system works or an ability to view units in person. Some 2SLGBTQIA+ participants faced ongoing vulnerability as they navigate disclosure decisions with each housing interaction. Several participants with disabilities experienced vulnerability during viewings when they wished to assess accessibility without disclosing their disability. Several Indigenous participants moving from other communities faced transition vulnerability as they navigate an unfamiliar city.

*Community Integration.* Several International participants valued the community for practical support and cultural connection. Several 2SLGBTQIA+ participants relied on their communities for safety and identity affirmation. Participants with disabilities and Indigenous participants valued community for mutual understanding and reduced isolation. Participants with children were looking for a community to find childcare and appropriate schooling.



## 4. ENGAGEMENT: WHAT WE HEARD

Between August and November 2025, five post-secondary institutions, housing developers and the City of Edmonton Youth council shared their perspectives through interviews and structured engagement sessions. This engagement falls within the "Advise" level of the City of Edmonton's public engagement spectrum, where participants were consulted to share feedback and perspectives that informed the assessment findings. Institutional interviews explored current housing capacity, student challenges, and institutional approaches. Developer engagement, conducted separately by the City between March and May 2025, examined barriers and opportunities for student housing development downtown. The Youth Council consultation session was held in December 2025.

### 4.1. Post-Secondary Institution Perspectives

Interviews were conducted with five Edmonton post-secondary institutions: University of Alberta, MacEwan University, NAIT, NorQuest College, and Concordia University of Edmonton. Together, these institutions serve approximately 115,000 students, with varying proportions of international students (8-30%), Indigenous students (4.9-7%), and different on-campus housing capacities ranging from zero beds (NAIT, NorQuest) to over 5,000 beds (University of Alberta).

The six largest publicly funded post-secondary institutions were invited to participate in interviews (the five above plus The King's University); The King's University did not respond. Smaller and specialized institutions among Edmonton's 18 post-secondary institutions were not contacted due to project scope and timeline constraints. Interviews explored current housing capacity, challenges faced by students, institutional approaches to addressing housing needs, and perspectives on potential solutions.

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The five institutions interviewed serve a combined enrollment of approximately 115,000 students, ranging from Concordia University of Edmonton with approximately 2,800 students to the University of Alberta with over 46,000. On-campus housing capacity varies considerably—the University of Alberta operates over 5,000 beds across three campuses, MacEwan University operates 860 beds, and Concordia University currently houses 96 students with a new 200-bed residence under construction. NAIT and NorQuest College have no on-campus housing. International students comprise between 8% and 30% of enrollment across the five institutions, and Indigenous students between approximately 5% and 7%.

Institutional approaches to addressing housing needs reflect these differences in size and capacity. The University of Alberta operates a self-sustaining residence model and has not pursued external partnerships, while MacEwan University is exploring private developer partnerships to meet growing demand. NorQuest College is developing a vetted housing registry and working with adjacent developers, while Concordia is constructing a new 200-bed student residence. All five institutions identified affordability—rather than supply—as the primary barrier to adequate student housing.

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**Table 30: Institutional Housing Capacity and Approach**

Institution	Students	Current Beds	Approach to Expanding Supply
University of Alberta	46,000+	5,000+	Operates a self-sustaining residence model. Has declined P3 arrangements. Revised housing capacity target from 25% to 13-15% of student population, reflecting commuter campus profile. Has land available for future development if needed.
MacEwan University	20,000	860	Exploring private developer partnerships to meet growing demand. Piloting "MacEwan rates" program to negotiate reduced rents with private landlords. <sup>6</sup>
NAIT	28,000	0	Currently no on-campus housing options.
NorQuest College	19,000	0	Developing a vetted housing list to help students identify safe rental options. <sup>7</sup> Working with developers on adjacent properties to explore potential partnerships. No on-campus housing currently available.
Concordia University	2,800	96	Constructing a new 200-bed residence (completion expected December 2026). <sup>8</sup> Has not pursued P3 arrangements.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.macewan.ca/c/documents/news\\_release\\_housing\\_pilot\\_project.pdf](https://www.macewan.ca/c/documents/news_release_housing_pilot_project.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.norquest.ca/NorquestCollege/media/pdf/about/publications-and-reports/annual-reports/norquest-college-annual-report-2024-25.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://concordia.ab.ca/about/futurecue/>



## Key Themes from Institutional Interviews

**Affordability is the primary barrier, not supply.** All institutions identified affordability as the central challenge. Housing inventory exists in Edmonton's private market, but price points strain student budgets.

**Safety functions as a secondary cost driver.** Safety concerns—particularly around transit, commuting, and certain neighbourhoods—affect housing decisions across all institutions. Students pay premium rents to avoid unsafe conditions or choose driving over transit, adding transportation costs. MacEwan noted parking waitlists exceeding 1,000 students, driven partly by safety concerns about transit.

**International students face systemic vulnerability.** Every institution identified that they are aware of international students who experience scams, discrimination, and exploitation in the housing market. Students making housing decisions before arrival, often under time pressure and without local knowledge face heightened vulnerability. Lack of Canadian guarantors or credit history compounds challenges for this group. NAIT and the University of Alberta noted reports of sex-for-accommodation exploitation.

**Indigenous students encounter discrimination and cultural barriers.** Multiple institutions identified that Indigenous students experienced discrimination during off-campus housing searches. Consistent themes included cultural discomfort with mainstream residence environments, isolation from home communities, and the need for cultural support. Housing challenges are often compounded for students who hold multiple identities—for example, Indigenous students with disabilities may face both systemic racism and accessibility barriers simultaneously.



**Lease structure creates barriers.** Two-bedroom units—the most common residence configuration—require students to find roommates and accept full lease liability. Students lack networks to find compatible roommates and are reluctant to sign leases with strangers who might leave mid-term.

**Students with disabilities face significant gaps.** Concordia representatives shared that over 40% of students self-identify as having some form of disability—a proportion described as significantly higher than comparable institutions. Concordia representatives noted that their current residence buildings do not have wheelchair accessible units, which presents a barrier for students. Accommodation requests for private rooms are difficult to meet given limited space. Representatives also noted that requests related to support animals are increasing, as current buildings are not equipped to accommodate them. Housing challenges are often compounded for students who hold multiple identities belonging to multiple priority populations—for example, Indigenous students with disabilities may face both systemic racism and accessibility barriers simultaneously.

**Geographic program boundaries create inequities.** NAIT's campus location falls outside the geographic boundaries of the City's downtown student housing accelerator program, limiting access to certain municipal incentives available to institutions with downtown campuses. This creates uneven access to city supports, despite NAIT being one of Edmonton's largest post-secondary institutions by enrollment and being located near downtown.

**No formal inter-institutional collaboration exists.** Despite shared challenges and geographic proximity, partnerships remain informal and capacity-dependent. Multiple institutions expressed interest in more structured collaboration.



Post-secondary institutions have developed a range of responses to student housing challenges. The University of Alberta operates an emergency housing program serving 25-30 students annually through a partnership between residences and student services, and provides anti-scam resources and tenant rights education for international students. MacEwan University is piloting a program to negotiate reduced rents with private landlords on behalf of students.

NorQuest College is developing a vetted housing registry with quality and safety standards for private rentals, and is working with two adjacent developers on purpose-built student housing. Concordia University is constructing a new 200-bed residence expected to open in December 2026.

### Options Identified by Institutions

Institutional representatives were asked to identify approaches they are currently pursuing or would consider to address student housing challenges. The following table summarizes options discussed across the five interviews.

**Table 31 - Institutional Housing Support Options: Current Status and Interest**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Institution Interest</b>
Vetted housing registries	Verified landlord lists to reduce scam exposure	NorQuest developing; all supportive
Developer partnerships	Negotiated rates in exchange for occupancy data	MacEwan piloting; NorQuest in discussions
Inter-institutional collaboration	Formal bed-sharing or joint procurement	Interest expressed; no current agreements
Emergency housing programs	Short-term support for students in crisis	University of Alberta operates (25-30 students/year)



## Summary

Senior leadership at Edmonton’s five largest post-secondary institutions identified affordability as the primary barrier to student housing, with private market price points consistently exceeding student budgets. Safety concerns function as a secondary cost driver, with students paying premiums to avoid unsafe conditions.

International and Indigenous students reported facing compounded vulnerabilities including scams, discrimination, and cultural barriers. Students with disabilities reported encountering significant gaps in accessible supply. Lease structures—particularly two-bedroom units requiring roommates—create additional barriers. Geographic boundaries of municipal incentive programs limit access for some institutions. While individual institutions have developed responses to these challenges, no formal inter-institutional collaboration currently exists, though multiple institutions expressed interest in more structured approaches.

## 4.2. Developer Engagement

The City of Edmonton’s Economic Investment Services Branch and Housing Action Team engaged housing developers, post-secondary institutions, and downtown advocacy organizations between March and May 2025 to inform the design of the Downtown Student Housing Incentive (HAF Initiative #13). Findings are summarized below to provide context for this needs assessment . The full findings are documented in the [What We Heard Report: Student Housing Accelerator Program \(May 2025\)](#). Engagement included 20 interviews with 13 housing developers, three post-secondary institutions, and six downtown advocacy organizations.



**Table 32: Developer Engagement Summary by Theme**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
Understanding of Student Housing	Familiarity varied widely; recognition of students as distinct tenant group with unique payment sources (loans, scholarships, guarantors); caution about market flexibility; interest in understanding program eligibility criteria
Project Readiness and Alignment	Most projects would be future phases rather than late-stage planning; regulatory complexity across City, Alberta Health Services (AHS), and Edmonton Fire Rescue Services (EFRS) creates delays; preference for flexible typologies (micro-suites to 4-bedroom shared units)
Program Design Input	Construction costs identified as largest barrier (not permitting or land costs); interest in upfront cash flow relief; support for mixed-market models; need for centralized regulatory guidance
Stacking and Leveraging Funding	Strong interest in combining City, provincial, and federal funding; challenges with mismatched disbursement schedules; CMHC's Apartment Construction Loan Program flagged as not viable for student housing in current form
General Insights	Uncertainty about student tenancy predictability; safety concerns particularly for women students; interest in tech platforms for student-housing matching; community-focused housing supports retention

### 4.3. Youth Council Engagement

The City of Edmonton Youth Council shared perspectives on housing challenges facing young people, including students. Twenty-three Youth Council members participated in a 60-minute engagement session on December 3, 2025, which included a presentation of student housing survey data and discussion group findings, followed by a facilitated discussion. Themes are identified below. Members offered perspectives both from their



advisory role as Youth Council members and, where applicable, from their own experience as students or young renters. Themes are identified below.

### **Transit as Housing Infrastructure**

Transit accessibility emerged as a central theme. Participants identified that affordable housing options often exist in areas poorly served by transit, forcing difficult trade-offs between cost and commute time.

One participant described a commute requiring multiple transfers across different LRT lines, ultimately taking 90 minutes each way. Others noted that LRT coverage does not extend to the edges of the city, making newer suburban neighbourhoods inaccessible to those who rely on public transit. Participants connected transit limitations to other affordability concerns, observing that groceries near campus cost more than at stores in less transit-accessible areas.

### **Housing Supply and Density**

Several Youth Council members expressed support for increased housing density, particularly near transit corridors. Participants also connected housing supply to ongoing City Council debates about infill development.

Participants suggested that decision-makers review housing data when considering infill proposals, noting that opposition often focuses on neighbourhood character or property values rather than housing need. They also observed that public hearings tend to draw older residents while students do not tend to participate in public hearings.

### **Youth Employment Barriers**



Multiple participants raised concerns about difficulty securing employment and the inadequacy of available wages to cover housing costs.

One participant shared that they had submitted over 200 applications before securing a minimum-wage position, noting this process would be even more challenging for students with limited English proficiency. Others described a fundamental mismatch between what student jobs pay and what housing actually costs. Even if students worked significantly more hours—sacrificing study time and academic performance—minimum wage earnings would still fall short of covering both tuition and housing. This creates a situation where students cannot work their way to financial stability without compromising the education they are working to afford.

Participants distinguished between types of student employment and their compatibility with academic demands, noting that customer service jobs may allow flexibility during quiet periods while food service positions are more physically demanding with no such flexibility.

### **Educational Retention**

Participants noted what they described as elevated dropout rates among current students, attributing this to cascading financial pressures affecting students and their families. Financial strain is not limited to students living independently—even those living at home face challenges when the household is struggling with cost-of-living pressures. In some cases, families who previously provided free housing now require rent contributions, or are simply unable to offer the financial support students had anticipated.

One participant framed housing investment as investment in human potential. When students are preoccupied with housing costs or instability, they have less capacity to focus on coursework, participate in campus life, or complete their programs.



From this perspective, inadequate student housing represents not just an individual hardship but a loss of potential talent and contribution to the broader community.

**Youth Council members identified potential solutions including:**

- Increased housing density near transit, scaled up from current efforts
- Transit expansion to underserved areas, particularly south Edmonton
- Programs to connect students with Edmonton residents who have informal housing resources
- Revitalized homestay programs with incentives for host families
- Accessible housing requirements in new construction
- Subsidies for students who rely on healthcare aides
- Financial literacy programs for students
- Review of university housing models from eastern Canada

A What We Heard summary will be shared with post-secondary institutions, Youth Council members, and discussion group participants for their review and feedback.

## 5. STUDENT IDENTIFIED SOLUTIONS

Participants across the broader post-secondary population also offered concrete suggestions through survey open-ended responses. Survey respondents were asked which programs and services would be most useful. The following additional solutions emerged from open-ended survey responses. The findings in this section draw on survey open-ended responses and discussion group input — distinct from the institutional interviews, developer engagement, and Youth Council session reported in Section 4.

### Most Helpful Housing Services



**Q: Which of the following housing services would be most helpful, if any? Select all that apply.**

Table 33 Student Interest in Housing Support Services n=1,573

Service	# of Selections	% of Respondents
Housing inspection and quality assurance	942	60%
Lease guidance and legal support	879	56%
Online housing registry with verified suitable housing	854	54%
Move-in/move-out support	807	51%
Roommate matching services	526	33%
Conflict resolution services	430	27%
Other (please specify)	18	1%
None of the above	122	8%

*Note: Percentages exceed 100% as respondents could select all applicable options.*

**Other responses (n=18):** Responses centred on rent affordability and rent control measures, transparency around market rental rates, advice on supplemental costs (utilities, internet, insurance), rent negotiation education, accessible housing supports, and neighbourhood safety resources. The survey results above reflect priorities identified by the 1,573 students who completed the questionnaire.

The discussion groups provided an opportunity for students from priority populations to elaborate on these findings, rate and discuss examples of relevant best practices, and raise additional more nuanced solutions not captured in the survey.



The following section summarizes what emerged from those conversations as recommendations to address student housing needs.

### **Information and Verification Systems**

- Accessibility information included in housing listings
- Multilingual resources, including platforms used by international students (e.g., Chinese apps)
- Pre-arrival access to housing information from students' home countries

### **Transitional and Short-Term Housing**

- Short-term housing at subsidized rates for arriving students (to avoid Airbnb costs)
- Flexible lease options (3–6 months)
- Emergency housing for students fleeing harassment or discrimination specifically

### **Affordability Measures**

- Subsidized on-campus housing without a required mandatory meal plan
- Rental increment caps
- Shared housing configurations (3–4 people) with common washrooms
- Financial support for students who pay higher costs to access safe housing

### **Peer Support and Community Connection**

- Formal peer mentorship programs matching new and experienced students
- Reunion/connection events for incoming students
- Partnerships with diaspora groups and cultural associations for verified homestay options



### **Education and Orientation**

- Dedicated housing orientation sessions separate from general orientation
- Pre-arrival training on navigating the private rental market available before students leave home countries
- Tenant rights workshops in multiple languages covering Alberta's legal framework
- Accessible financial management workshops for students with executive function challenges
- Guidance on identifying maintenance issues, building quality, and pest problems before signing

### **Identity-Specific Housing Options**

- 2SLGBTQIA+-specific floors or buildings, with gender-neutral housing options
- Verified inclusive landlord registries with community feedback mechanisms
- Dedicated housing coordinators for marginalized populations at each institution
- Anonymous systems to report discrimination with enforcement mechanisms
- Family housing near campus considering school locations and neighbourhood safety

### **Regulatory and Policy Changes**

- Anti-discrimination policies with clear enforcement and consequences
- Mandatory inclusivity training for housing providers
- Landlord licensing or registration for student rentals
- Required disclosure of pest problems and building conditions
- Recognition of diverse income sources (bursaries, subsidies) in rental applications

### **Institutional Capacity**

- Verification of all off-campus listings shared by institutions

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- Liaison officers for discrimination complaints
- Extension of housing support beyond first year



## 6. CONCLUSION

This assessment documents student housing conditions in Edmonton across Spring and Fall 2025. Edmonton's post-secondary students are a large and growing population navigating a rental market where housing costs routinely exceed what typical student incomes can cover, and this assessment documents affordability—not simply supply—as the central challenge in student housing. Evidence from two surveys, targeted discussion groups with priority populations, institutional interviews, and engagement with youth and developers indicates that housing conditions are closely intertwined with students' financial strain, well-being, and academic pathways, as well as with Edmonton's role as an education city.

The affordability gap appears consistently across data sources. Among student renters, median monthly income of \$667 dollars is set against median rents of \$970. Most of those who struggled cited affordability as the main barrier, alongside related trade-offs such as longer commutes, overcrowded or unsuitable units, or reduced spending on food and other essentials. Some populations experience additional challenges: international students, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and students with children reported discrimination, lack of accessible information in listings, higher costs associated with disability and caregiving, and limited family-sized options near campus.

Despite these challenges, students also identified aspects of their housing that are working. A majority of Fall 2025 respondents reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their current housing, pointing to stability, proximity to transit, and supportive roommates or landlords as contributing factors.

When asked about potential responses, survey respondents and discussion group participants commonly mentioned a range of practical measures they believed would improve their housing situations or reduce risks such as scams. Youth participants linked



housing pressures to decisions about course loads, program completion, and work hours, noting perceived connections between housing stress, increased work commitments, and the likelihood of reducing studies or withdrawing.

Across students, youth, institutions, and developers, several solution directions appeared frequently or showed clear crossover:

- A verified housing registry or similar vetted listing mechanism to reduce scams and improve the safety and reliability of private-market options
- Tenant education and rights training on leases, tenant protections, and how to navigate the rental market
- Rental assistance and financial supports, including subsidies, bursaries, and emergency funds that reduce the rent burden.
- Guaranteed or priority-access housing options for students, with particular relevance for international students, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and students with children
- Culturally safe and physically accessible housing, including design and management approaches responsive to Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and gender- and sexually diverse students
- Family-appropriate, transit-connected units that are affordable and suitable for students with children, located near campuses and services
- Revised residence and operating models within post-secondary institutions, including new residence projects and pricing structures that aim to align on-campus housing costs more closely with student incomes
- Incentives and risk-sharing mechanisms that could make student-focused projects more feasible for private developers, given seasonal leasing patterns and financing requirements.

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- Policy and program levers at municipal and institutional levels, such as zoning tools, funding programs, and partnerships, which link student housing to broader objectives like downtown activity, transit use, and talent attraction and retention.

Overall, the assessment presents a student housing landscape marked by a persistent income–rent gap, elevated search difficulty, and distinct vulnerabilities among priority populations, alongside examples of stability and satisfaction where housing is secure, well-located, and supportive. The findings indicate that students, institutions, youth bodies, and developers share a view of affordability as the central constraint, while also pointing to a set of informational, financial, design, and supply-side mechanisms that they believe could influence student housing conditions in Edmonton.



## **Appendix A: Fall Survey Results**

## **Appendix B: Spring Survey Results**