

# Impacts of COVID-19 on Aging in the Right Place

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**SSHRC**  **CRSH**  
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# AIRP: Aging in the Right Place

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- AIRP examines best practices for supportive housing provision for older people experiencing homelessness
- Where an older person lives impacts their ability to age optimally and must match their unique lifestyles and vulnerabilities.
- AIRP involves supporting older adults to live as long as possible in their homes and communities.



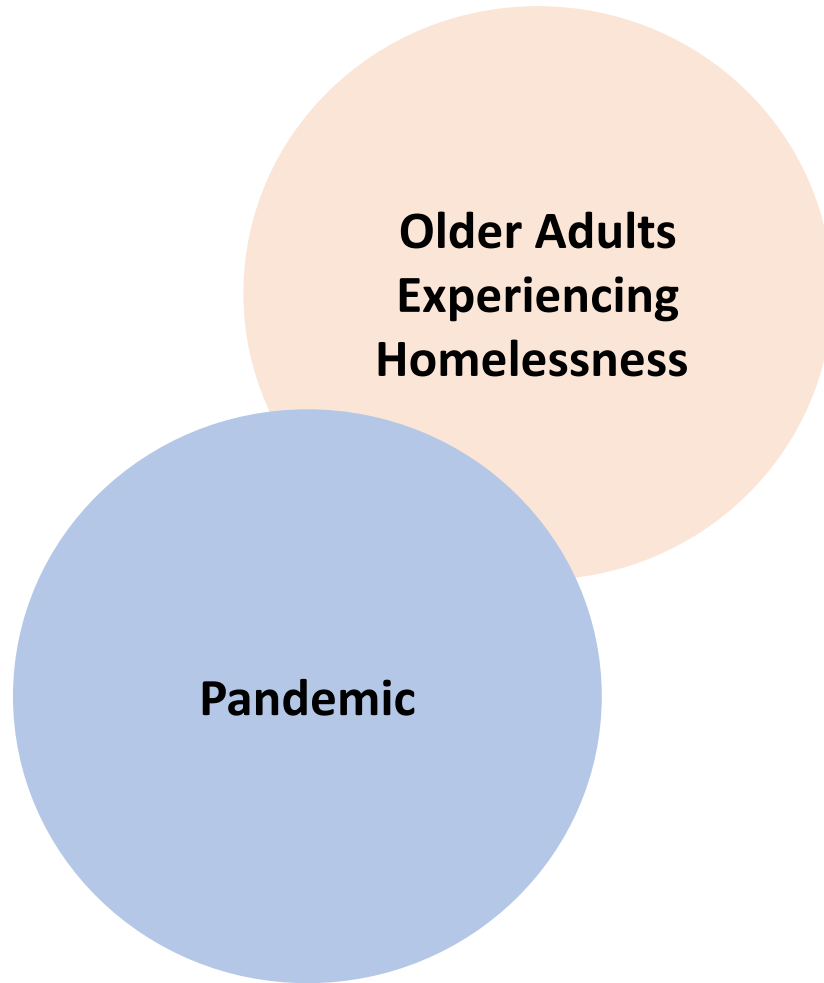
# Significance of Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness during COVID



**Older Adults  
Experiencing  
Homelessness**

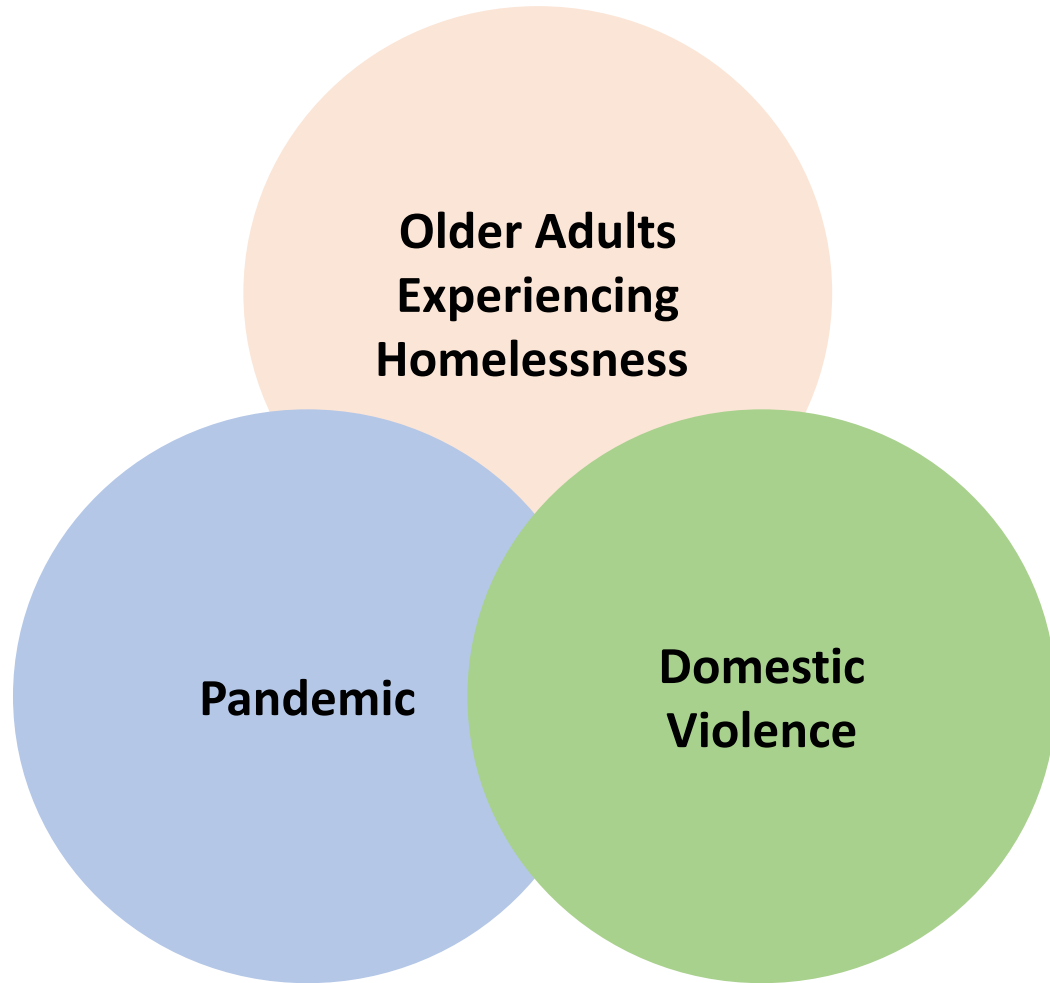
- In Calgary 45% of people experiencing homelessness are aged 45 and over (Calgary Homelessness Foundation, 2018).
- By 2030, all baby boomers will be 65 or older, and incremental demands are expected for shelter and service provision for older people experiencing homelessness (Statistics Canada, 2022).

# Significance of Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness during COVID



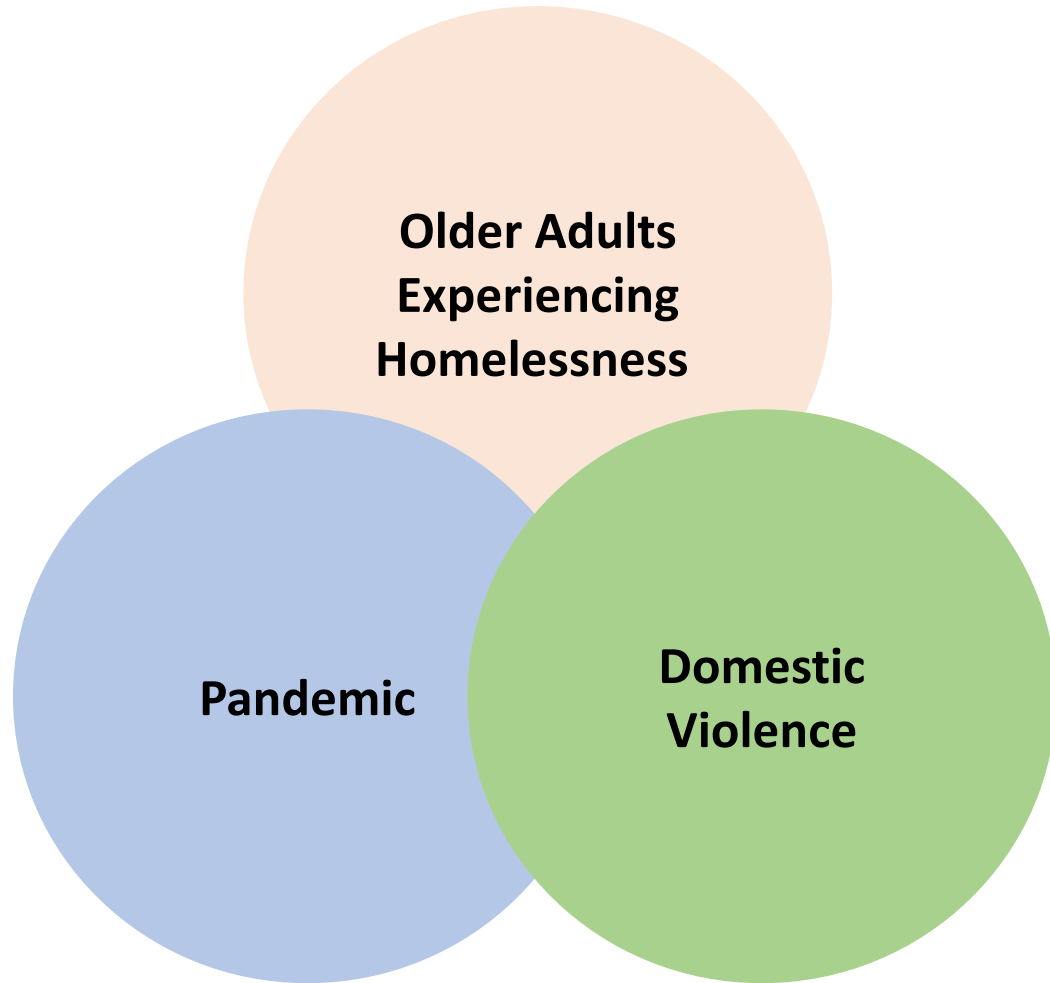
- The pandemic has not impacted all Canadians equally. Inequalities in health outcomes such as life expectancy and the likelihood of contracting chronic and infectious diseases have been well documented in Canada and globally (Government of Canada, 2018; WHO, 2008).
- Between the end of March 2020 and mid-May 2021, there were over 353,000 deaths in Canada, with those aged 65 and older accounting for almost 80% of those deaths (Statistics Canada, 2021).

# Significance of Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness during COVID



- In Alberta, calls to specialized crisis lines for intimate partner violence increased by 30-50% in the first month following the pandemic (Bradley et al., 2020)
- Abuse affects between 4-10% of seniors in Canada; only one in five incidents of elder abuse comes to the attention of those who can help (Government of Canada, 2012)

# Significance of Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness during COVID



- Lack of supportive services, increased number of shelter users pose additional risks, and public health measures including physical distancing create challenges for those who experience elder abuse.
- This issue has been under-examined within scholarship.

# Research Questions

This research aims to answer two main questions:

1. What have been the effects of COVID-19 restrictions on adults residing in a shelter for homeless abused older adults in Calgary, Alberta?
2. How has the provision of shelter services changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?



# Methodology

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- A qualitative secondary data analysis of data from interviews with service providers (n=5) at the Kerby Shelter.
- Interviews were conducted via Zoom between March and April 2021.
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to understand the impact of Covid-19 on residents and service provision at the Kerby Shelter.



# Kerby Shelter



- The Kerby Shelter provides a safe place for all people of any gender over 55 years of age who are fleeing abuse.
- A private bedroom
- A variety of supportive services:
  - Communal kitchen & dining room
  - Gym
  - Weekly programs such as art classes and more
  - Kerby Centre's education and recreational Programs

## Social Experience of Physical Distancing

### **Shelter Users**

- High levels of interpersonal tension/conflict
- Concern for mental health during quarantine

### **Service Providers**

- High turnover (stress)
- High levels of concern because of stressed clients
- Safety concern for contracting COVID

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## Disrupted Service Provision

### **Limited Social Activities in Facility**

- Closed common area
- No visiting services (nutritionist, art program, volunteer, dog therapy)
- No visitors (guests, friends)

### **Closure of Public Facilities**

- Public library
- Gym

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## Changed Service to Overcome Limited Social Activities

### Helping Service Users to Go Out

- Low-income transit pass

### Utilizing Technology

- iPad
- Online ESL course
- Cellphone
- Virtual experience (FaceTime, Zoom)

# Social Exclusion during Physical Distancing

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"I would say that the mental health of residents due to Covid was substantially negatively impacted because when they first come in from there, you know, traumatic situation, then they were put into almost what I feel is another traumatic situation where they were quarantined for 14 days ..."

*Service Provider at Kerby Shelter, March 2021*

# Discussion & Implications

- Physical distancing and its impacts on shelter users
  - Potential concern of high risk of loneliness and increased social isolation due to decreased social activities in the shelter and community
- Shelter users already have been through elder abuse which is a traumatic situation.
- Limited social interactions can result in social exclusion, which negatively impacts shelter residents' wellness.
- Virtual experience (video calls, Zoom meetings) can alleviate negative effects of physical distancing among this population. However, technology use differs by age; seniors have more challenges to use phones or computers than younger cohorts (Emerson, 2022).
- Utilizing social network services and targeted intervention for older groups of seniors (e.g., hotline services for older adults feel lonely) may reduce social isolation (Emerson, 2020).

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