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## Albertans struggling to find place to rent: survey

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File photo of a rental sign. Getty Images/iStockphoto

Albertans are struggling to find a place to rent as the province is flooded with a river of newcomers.

The time spent searching for a rental stretches more than six months for one in every six renters, according to a survey by rentals.ca. But even fewer are spared the frustration of looking for one — nearly two-thirds of respondents say securing a spot has been very difficult.

The survey was conducted among 600 participants in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta by rentals.ca, a platform for rental listings.

Alberta had the highest proportion of renters seeking housing for the first time with over 29 per cent, while 21 per cent were on the hunt for a spot because they had moved to a new city. In addition, a little more than half of renters were single, and the price of renting a space prevailed over its location for nearly two-thirds of respondents.

These findings reflect a shifting landscape of the province's housing sector forced by an unprecedented growth in interprovincial migration, a shortage of affordable housing and higher interest rates, which has pinched supply and ratcheted up rental prices.

Rent prices in Alberta ballooned by 20 per cent year-over-year in March, the highest increase across the country, bringing the average rent of a one-bedroom in Calgary to \$1,711 a month.

Higher demand has squeezed the vacancy rate in Calgary to one per cent, pushing up rents even in shared apartments.

Despite large increases in rent prices, Alberta cities still retain their lure of affordability when compared to other major centres such as Vancouver and Toronto, where renting a one-bedroom costs an average of \$2,653 and \$2,495 a month, respectively.

However, a drop in available spaces may have led to poor experiences in finding shelter. Two-fifths of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the rentals they had seen, although 22 per cent were very disappointed.

An overwhelming majority of participants answered negatively to questions about housing availability, affordable options in their preferred location and the challenges of finding a place.

“In the face of escalating inflation and affordability challenges, residents in rent-controlled markets are inclined to remain in their current accommodations, benefiting from minimal rental hikes,” the survey stated.

However, Alberta doesn't have any form of rent control.

The Alberta NDP recently introduced legislation — Bill 205 — which calls for a cap on annual rent increases and the creation of affordable housing. The bill's second reading was adjourned on March 11.

In addition to rent and vacancy control, the legislation would mandate the minister responsible for housing to release minimum targets for the construction of affordable and social housing units each fiscal year — including single-family residences, multi-unit apartment buildings and social housing for different groups, such as seniors — which would then be published in the province's annual report.

The UCP has made clear its opposition to the bill, saying it increases the risk of homelessness while implying landlords may find legal loopholes to evict tenants.

“Shutting people out of the rental market and discouraging new construction is not the path forward,” Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services Jason Nixon said in the legislature March 11.

Alberta NDP housing critic Janis Irwin, who introduced the bill, said in a statement issued on March 11, “My office has been flooded with stories of Albertans being priced out of their homes and being forced to make choices between food, utilities, rent payments and other basic needs.

“I sincerely hope the UCP reverses their position and supports this legislation as a tool to make this province more affordable, because skyrocketing rents are hurting Albertans.”