

Apr 2026

Local 196 SPOTLIGHT



EDMONTON, ALBERTA CITY OF CHAMPIONS AND FROSTBITE CAPITAL

Not exactly the title we want to be known for....so why has our city been deemed this statistic and what's the contributing factors?

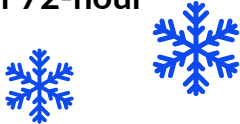


Edmonton has been beating its own frostbite amputation rates year after year hitting a 10 year high the winter of December 2022

The unsheltered population in Edmonton has grown exponentially since 2019, now almost three times as many unhoused in comparison



26% of 144 patients who left prior to being seen – 26% (38 patients) returned later with severe frostbite outside of 72-hour treatment window.



Additionally, EMS dispatches for opioid related events continues to rise, responding up to 30 calls per day.

Precipitating Factors in Frostbite Cal/Edm 22/24

Homelessness	40%
Substance Intoxication	28%
Time Outside/Walk/Smoke	19%
Alcohol Intoxication	12%
Work	7%
Medical Event	5%
Lock Out (House or Car)	5%
Psychiatric Disorder	4%
Shoveling or outdoor Maintenance	2%
Lost or Inadequate Heat or Power / MVC	2% / 2%
Sports / Ice Pack Application	2% / 1%



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“Since 2021, a total of 188 frostbite amputations have been performed on patients experiencing homelessness in Edmonton.” - Taylor Lambert, CBC News 2025

The number of diagnoses of frostbite or excessive cold in Edmonton’s emergency departments last winter jumped to 1,307 from 896 – the largest increase since at least 2011, as well as by far the most of any single year in that time period. Edmonton hospitals have been dealing with severe overcrowding, complicating the timely treatment of these cases.

Scott MacLean, an emergency physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, said there are multiple factors at play. “We lost a lot of shelter space last year, especially during the winter in the daytime,” he said.

“So many of our patients were coming in saying, ‘Yeah, I was in shelter last night,’ and they left in the morning and then they got frostbite.” (Taylor Lambert, CBC News 2025)

Policies perceived as unfriendly to temporary residents could have downstream effects on recruitment and retention, making it harder to attract qualified nurses.



Encampment evictions, inadequate shelters and delayed care are major contributors to why we are now struggling to manage the spike in our emergency departments. Combined with substance use and the rising numbers of homelessness, Edmonton will be faced acknowledging its new title.

Lost to Followup...

Substance Use/Alcohol use disorder → 5x increase in Left AMA frequency → incomplete initial treatment

Need to attend daily wound care → Inability to access primary care/wound care

Need to attend plastic surgery clinical followup → Lack of phone, transport, health card, ID, etc

Our Community partners are vital and increasing their capacity is important

References:

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