

ABORIGINAL HOMELESSNESS



2 0 1 7 C O U N T
I N M E T R O V A N C O U V E R



OPENING

The 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver (2017 Count) paints a troubling picture of homelessness across the Metro Vancouver region, specifically when considering the disproportionate number of Aboriginal People experiencing homelessness.

The 2017 Count revealed that 746 of total survey respondents identified as Aboriginal, representing 34% of all participants. This is an astounding 28% increase from the 2014 Count, which found that 582 of total respondents identifying as Aboriginal were living in emergency shelters or on the streets, without a place to call home. This increase has outstripped homelessness increases in non-Aboriginal populations, with Aboriginal People now accounting for 34% of homelessness in Metro Vancouver (up from 31% in the 2014 Count).

The 2017 numbers are the highest reported to date in a regional count and constitute a strong over-representation of Aboriginal People compared to the total homeless population in Metro Vancouver.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this report, the term “Aboriginal” is used for consistency with previous reports, although we acknowledge the Federal Government's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

With any discussion regarding Aboriginal homelessness, the methodology or findings must acknowledge history and intergenerational trauma. To adequately understand this intergenerational crisis, the reader must have a detailed understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have been impacted by colonization, their unique relationship with the Government of Canada and associated agencies, Christian churches and mainstream society.¹

The enduring effects of colonization, the legacy of the residential school system and the impact of child welfare and the foster care system continue to impact the daily experience of many Aboriginal Peoples and families, and directly contribute to the high incidence of Aboriginal homelessness. These underlying factors are emphasized throughout this report, they underpin the findings and are directly linked to the report's recommendations.

In 2012, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network released a Canadian definition of Homelessness, which effectively captures the effect of homelessness as described by members of the community experiencing the issues firsthand:

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioral or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.ⁱⁱ

In 2013, the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee for Metro Vancouver agreed by consensus to the following community-based definition of homelessness which is integral to their Governance Manual:

“Homelessness” refers to two groups of Aboriginal homeless. The first group is those who are considered "absolute homeless" and the second group is those who live "at risk of homelessness."

According to the United Native Nations Aboriginal Homelessness Report (2001):

"Homelessness"- included in its entirety - describes those who have suffered from the effects of colonization and whose social, economic, and political conditions have placed them in a disadvantaged position resulting in any one of the following situations:


“Absolute homelessness” (from a community perspective) is more likely to be described as those:

- who have no security of tenure beyond a thirty-day period;
- who suffer from family violence or family breakdown;
- who have no security of tenure, i.e. women and their children;
- who leave or flee family violence situation;
- who "couch surf" for a period of more than thirty days with no security of tenure;
- who are frequently involved in the street life;
- who are living in inadequate, substandard and/or unsafe accommodations that do not meet the minimal housing standards established by the United Nations or other local government agencies such as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation;
- who rely on emergency shelters or shelters as primary residences;
- anyone released from a mental-health facility, or prison with no security of tenure;
- who are prevented from leaving a mental-health facility or prison because of a lack of security of tenure (including those women or men who are unable to have children returned to them by the Ministry of Child and Family Development for want of decent affordable housing);
- who flee their home and who have no security of tenure as a result of sexual abuse (regardless of age);
- who alternate between being sheltered and unsheltered (whether those shelters are hospitals, hostels, SRO, or otherwise); and/or
- who suffer from discrimination and who cannot hold security of tenure for any reasonable period of time as a result of such discrimination;

“At risk of homelessness” (from a community perspective) is more likely to be described as those:

- who pay more than 25 per cent of their income for accommodations;
- who suffer from acute life crisis such as: family violence, divorce, eviction, release from institutions that jeopardize their housing;
- who are at risk of losing their accommodations as a result of a lack of income, overcrowding, redevelopment, or unemployment;
- whose income is below the Low-Income Cut-off;
- whose education level would place them in social distress or poverty below the Low-Income Cut-Off;
- who suffer from substance abuse, mental-illness, or those who suffer from structural and personal barriers that may lead to homelessness;
- who are denied an opportunity to acquire social housing to meet their socioeconomic needs;



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- who are hard to house for whatever reason;
 - those whose income requires them to use food banks to supplement their income for prolonged periods of time;
 - who are entrenched in the sex trade on the streets; and/or
 - who, because of systemic barriers, are unable to acquire accommodation of any kind.ⁱⁱⁱ

As in prior years, the 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver focused exclusively on “absolute homeless” individuals and excluded those who are “at risk of homelessness”. This was a pragmatic decision, due mainly to three considerations:

- the difficulty determining an effective count methodology,
- the cost involved in collecting accurate data, and
- the need to be consistent with previous homeless counts.

This decision is problematic from an Aboriginal perspective, as it is difficult to segregate the issue of homelessness into finite boxes or categories. It also serves to under-report and mischaracterize the magnitude of Aboriginal homelessness in Metro Vancouver. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness characterizes the complexity of the issue:

The pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear, nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable and lack adequate housing, income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness react in an intricate interplay between structural factors (poverty, lack of affordable housing), systems failures (people being discharged from mental health facilities, corrections or child protection services into homelessness) and individual circumstances (family conflict and violence, mental health and addictions). Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of these factors.^{iv}

Thus, Aboriginal homelessness is a facet of the broader issues of colonization, the legacy of the residential schools system and the foster care system, intergenerational trauma, discrimination (both overt and systemic), poverty, health and housing inadequacy.

METHODOLOGY

As explained above, the 2017 Homeless Count employed a similar methodology as past City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver Regional Homeless Counts. It measured homelessness from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm on March 8th, 2017, and consisted of one component to enumerate the sheltered homeless and another for the unsheltered homeless. For both components, volunteers used a prepared questionnaire that included screening questions and survey questions.

The Aboriginal component of the Count operated somewhat autonomously under the auspices of the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee as the Community Advisory Board and Lu'ma Native Housing Society as the Community Entity. Careful planning was undertaken between the mainstream and Aboriginal count teams (both at a governance and operational level) to ensure that integration occurred where possible, redundancy was reduced to a minimum, and to guarantee that the overall count process was consistent with the overarching methodology and count design.

There was a good working relationship between the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Steering Committee and the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee at both the

governance and operational levels through their Community Advisory Boards and respective consulting teams.

Through Lu'ma Native Housing Society, Community Voicemail was a primary tool to communicate with homeless individuals and members of the Aboriginal community ahead of the Count, with the goal of raising awareness and mobilizing community volunteers. Community Voicemail provides local phone numbers with voicemail to people who are homeless and/or phoneless, giving them the tools they need to connect to employment, housing and social service opportunities, as well as to stay in touch with their families. In the months leading up to the Count, voicemail bulletins were provided to community members, announcing the Count date and allowing an opportunity to participate.

To facilitate the Aboriginal Count and mobilize community volunteers, honorariums of \$150 were provided to each of the 61 volunteers (for a 4-hour commitment including training). The volunteers came from Aboriginal organizations located regionally throughout Metro Vancouver. The participating organizations included:

Aboriginal Mother Centre Society	20 Count participants
Native Education College	15 Count participants
Aboriginal Front Door Society	5 Count participants
Fraser River Aboriginal Friendship Center	7 Count participants
Fraser River All Nations Aboriginal Society	2 Count participants
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center	10 Count participants
Independent Counters	2 Count participants

The count teams were provided with geographical maps, and with specific timeframes in which to conduct the Count. These teams targeted critical areas throughout Metro Vancouver including:

- Kingsway Corridor and adjacencies (Vancouver/ Burnaby)
- Downtown Eastside and adjacencies (Vancouver)
- Stanley Park partition (Vancouver)
- Whalley City Centre (Surrey)
- Fraser River waterfront (Surrey)
- Core area (New Westminster)
- Core area (Maple Ridge)
- Waterfront (North Vancouver)

In addition to the use of volunteers, the Aboriginal community supported a gathering in the Downtown Eastside at Oppenheimer Park, with over 100 attendees. The event provided food and information, designed to raise awareness and provide support.

The information collected through both mainstream and Aboriginal counts was synthesized by Metro Vancouver and then returned to the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee for analysis. This report details the results of this process.

Regarding the Count itself, one of the challenges of conducting research on the experiences of poverty and marginalization is that everyone participating must focus on some of the most difficult realities of humanity, which may include: physical suffering, emotional and sexual abuse, social suffering, economic deprivation and structural injustices.^v This is often a very personal and emotional experience, particularly for the urban Aboriginal homeless count participants in Metro Vancouver. Thus, it was imperative for the AHSC to act in a sensitive, respectful and culturally appropriate manner to support all individuals that participated in the Count, including staff, volunteers and individuals experiencing homelessness.



COUNT FINDINGS

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY

Table 1 shows that one-third (34%) of Metro Vancouver's homeless population identified as Aboriginal. Persons of Aboriginal identity are over-represented among the region's homeless population relative to the Metro Vancouver mainstream population. According to the 2011 Census data, there are 58,100 Aboriginal Peoples living in Metro Vancouver (or 2.5% of the region's population), the third largest Aboriginal population in Canadian urban centres, behind Winnipeg (72,335 or 11%) and Edmonton (50,300 or 5.3%).

In Metro Vancouver, the data indicates that the incidence of Aboriginal identity is higher for the unsheltered homeless (41%) than the sheltered homeless (29%). For the Extreme Weather Response (EWR) 35% of the population identified as Aboriginal, which is higher than other shelters (28%).

Table 1: Aboriginal Identity - Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless, 2017¹

Aboriginal Identity	Sheltered						Unsheltered Total		Total Homeless	
	Total		Shelters		EWR		#	%	#	%
	#	%	#	%	#	%				
Aboriginal	359	29%	312	28%	47	35%	387	41%	746	34%
Mainstream	885	71%	798	72%	87	65%	568	59%	1,453	66%
Total Respondents	1,244	100%	1,110	100%	134	100%	955	100%	2,199	100%
No Answer/Not Known	1,329		1,207		122		77		1,406	
Total	2,573		2,317		256		1,032		3,605	

Table 2 demonstrates that 48% of the total Aboriginal population were sheltered on the night of the Count, while 52% were unsheltered. The bottom line shows that Aboriginal Peoples are 18 times more likely to be homeless in Metro Vancouver than the mainstream population, and more likely to be unsheltered. This is consistent with studies that show that homeless Aboriginal individuals may avoid using shelters and other services because they experience discrimination from both workers and other homeless people.^{vi}

Table 2: Aboriginal Identity - Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless, 2017

	Aboriginal Identity		Mainstream Identity	
	#	%	#	%
Sheltered	359	48%	885	61%
Shelters	312		798	
EWR	47		87	
Unsheltered	387	52%	568	39%
Total Respondents	746		1,453	

¹ The total number of Aboriginal People is a count of those who participated in the survey and self-identified as Aboriginal.

TRENDS

According to Table 3, a total of 746 homeless survey respondents identified as Aboriginal in 2017, representing 34% of all respondents in the region. Over the Count years from 2005 to 2017, both the absolute and relative number of Aboriginal homeless individuals is now at its highest and constitute a strong over-representation compared to the total population.

The reported number of 746 is simply a reflection of the participation rate. It is important to point out that this Count only addressed the most acute form of homelessness – those individuals in shelters and on the street over one 24-hour period – and is therefore very conservative in that it fails to take into consideration those individuals who were simply not counted and those who are at-risk of becoming homeless. One can speculate that the actual number of Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless or at risk of being homeless is extreme and much higher than actually reported.

Table 3: Aboriginal Identity - Total Homeless (2005 to 2017) - Trends²

Aboriginal Identity	2008 Total Homeless		2011 Total Homeless		2014 Total Homeless		2017 Total Homeless	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Aboriginal	688	32%	394	27%	582	31%	746	34%
Mainstream	1,453	68%	1,074	73%	1,282	69%	1,453	66%
Total Respondents	2,141	100%	1,468	100%	1,864	100%	2,199	100%
No Answer/Not Known	519		1,182		913		1,406	
Total	2,660		2,650		2,777		3,605	

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY AND MUNICIPAL SUB-REGION

Table 4 shows the major concentrations of Aboriginal homeless individuals. Sixty percent (60%) of Aboriginal homeless respondents were found in the City of Vancouver and another 18% were located in Surrey. According to the data, an Aboriginal homeless person is more likely to be homeless in Vancouver and Surrey, two of the largest urban centres in Metro Vancouver.

With the concentration of services in these two areas, one could question whether homeless individuals migrate towards the urban areas because of the prevalence of Aboriginal and mainstream community and government services, or whether the services are provided there because they are needed by the population.

² The reported number of 746 is only a reflection of the participation rate. Aboriginal homelessness is more accurately expressed as a share of the total number of homeless people. Assuming that the share of 34% is reflective of the total population, then up to 1,226 individuals who identify as Aboriginal were homeless on March 8.

Table 4: Aboriginal Identity by Municipal Sub-Region - Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless, 2017

Sub-Region	Sheltered						Unsheltered Total		Total Homeless	
	Total		Shelters		EWR		#	%	#	%
	#	%	#	%	#	%				
Burnaby	3	1%	1	0%	2	4%	11	3%	14	2%
Delta	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	1%	5	1%
Langley	13	4%	11	4%	2	4%	24	6%	37	5%
New Westminster	19	5%	9	3%	10	21%	12	3%	31	4%
North Shore	10	3%	8	3%	2	4%	0	0%	10	1%
Richmond	6	2%	1	0%	5	11%	10	3%	16	2%
Ridge Meadows	15	4%	13	4%	2	4%	8	2%	23	3%
Surrey	62	17%	55	18%	7	15%	75	19%	137	18%
Tri-Cities	10	3%	3	1%	7	15%	13	3%	23	3%
Vancouver	220	61%	210	67%	10	21%	228	59%	448	60%
White Rock	1	0%	1	0%	0	0%	1	0%	2	0%
Total Respondents	359	100%	312	100%	47	100%	387	100%	746	100%

DISCUSSION

The 2017 Homeless Count shows clearly that Aboriginal Peoples remain overrepresented among the homeless population in Metro Vancouver. Why is this so? Researchers have long acknowledged that the urban Aboriginal population faces unique challenges.^{vii} In addition to economic hardships, Aboriginal Peoples may experience a range of barriers when trying to make a life in cities. These barriers are an extension of 150 years of discrimination and cultural oppression that have resulted in physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, interpersonal violence and racism.^{viii} Research shows that among Aboriginal Peoples, education and training levels are typically lower, incarceration rates are higher, children in care rates are higher and unemployment rates are higher. As a result, incomes are lower than those of the non-Aboriginal population.^{ix}

Impact of Racial and Cultural Discrimination

Race is not a biological fact but rather a socially constructed concept that was created and is maintained to establish disparities in the distribution of resources and power.^x Clearly, racism has influenced the political, economic and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, where race-based colonizing powers attempted to socially isolate, culturally assimilate, and politically decimate Aboriginal Peoples as a way of rationalizing colonialism. Racism at a structural level, rooted in political actions and policies, goes beyond the individual and informs institutions that perpetuate racism. Legally sanctioned discrimination has hindered opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples to be self-determining and the harm done over generations is immeasurable.^{xi}

This naturalized racism stemming from colonialism continues to influence how Aboriginal Peoples are viewed and treated and limits their opportunities, and in particular challenges their ability to secure adequate and affordable housing. Housing discrimination occurs when a person is denied equal access to housing, or full enjoyment of housing, for reasons that are not related to their merit as a tenant or homeowner.^{xii} Numerous studies indicate that Aboriginal Peoples encounter housing market discrimination as renters, as owners, and as prospective renters or owners.^{xiii}

Housing discrimination has a range of effects including overcrowding, higher rents, fewer options with respect to location, more frequent moves, and negative effects on health, education and employment.^{xiv} Segregated and marginalized, it is difficult for urban Aboriginal Peoples to connect with culturally appropriate, local services.

Impact of Intergenerational Trauma

Increasing evidence from the growing number of mental health studies conducted in Aboriginal communities suggests that intergenerational trauma is a critical contributor to an array of personal, family, and community behaviors.^{xv}

From a historical context, Canadian social policy has been instrumental in creating institutions that have attempted to eradicate Aboriginal world views and value systems that have existed for thousands of years and replace them with ideological systems that continue to undermine life for Aboriginal Peoples.^{xvi} For example, when Canada first became a country in 1867 with the passage of the British North America Act, Aboriginal Peoples and lands reserved for Aboriginal Peoples became controlled by the Federal government. Soon after Confederation, the Federal government established the Indian Act in 1876 as a coordinated approach to the policy of assimilation.

Impact of Residential Schools

The Canadian government continued to use other mechanisms, including religion, to convert and assimilate Aboriginal Peoples. Residential schools were the most aggressive effort on behalf of the Canadian government to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples.


Residential schools for Aboriginal People in Canada date back to the 1870s. Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

During this era, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these schools often against their parents' wishes. Many were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture. While there are an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist.^{xvii}

Impact of Child Welfare and Foster Care Policies

When the residential schools began to close, child welfare and the foster care system effectively became the government's new assimilation policy. It is through provincial child welfare legislation and social policy that an overwhelming number of Aboriginal children are removed from their homes and communities by child welfare authorities without warning and placed in permanent foster care or made Crown wards.^{xviii}

Even today, most Aboriginal Peoples consider child welfare and the foster care system a vehicle to assimilate them into Canadian mainstream society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded in 2015 that more Aboriginal children are placed in foster care each year than attended residential school in any one year.^{xix} Forced to assume the values of another culture that scorns their own belief system, Aboriginal children are left in a cultural vacuum, relating neither to mainstream culture nor to their own community. Thus,



historically, social policies have affected multiple generations of Aboriginal Peoples. The severing of family, community and nation has left a legacy of traumatized individuals who frequently experience identity issues and who are often unable to make the most of their own abilities.^{xx} The link between foster care and homelessness is documented in a 2016 study that showed that three out of every five homeless youth were part of the child welfare system at some point in their lives, a rate almost 200 times greater than that of the general population. Of those with a history in the child welfare system, almost two of every five respondents eventually "aged out" of provincial or territorial care, losing access to the sort of support that could have kept them from becoming homeless.^{xxi}

The physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse experienced and/or witnessed by generations of children has left a significant number of Aboriginal Peoples with a variety of mental health conditions. This in turn has affected the ability of Aboriginal Peoples to achieve balance in regards to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When experienced by more than one generation, personal trauma has become institutionalized within families. This reality also creates an inherent vulnerability to further abuse.^{xxii}

As adults, former residential school students and child welfare system survivors have demonstrated symptoms of anxiety disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, depression, suicide, and low self-esteem that are significantly higher than that found in the general population.^{xxiii} It is important to acknowledge that the impact of these policies still affects generations of Aboriginal Peoples today. Unfortunately, the legacy will inevitably continue for generations to come.

Impact of Migration

It is no secret that large segments of the Aboriginal community move fluidly between their home communities and the urban environments in Metro Vancouver. Because most reserves are small and often remote, they offer limited education and employment opportunities and insufficient, poorly funded services. While it is widely believed that the Federal government's fiduciary responsibility to Aboriginal Peoples applies to all Aboriginal Peoples regardless of whether they live on or off reserve, disparate policies and inadequate funding at the federal and provincial levels do not meet these obligations.

As a result of the migration, urban Aboriginal communities represent some of the largest and fastest growing Aboriginal communities in Canada. Although moving from a reserve to a city appears to offer benefits including increased access to social, economic, and educational resources, this population, as a whole, has not reached the same levels of socio-economic status and well-being as the rest of the urban population.^{xxiv}

Further, as migration occurs towards the urban centres, existing community support networks (social and financial) are eroded until new networks are established – this takes time and puts individuals at significant risk. In particular, this increases the likelihood of homelessness as individuals seek accommodation when moving from their home community to the city.^{xxv}

Impact of Economic Discrimination

Aboriginal Peoples also experience economic discrimination in securing adequate and affordable housing in cities, as either renters or owners.^{xxvi} The housing selection process includes credit history checks, which automatically excludes many Aboriginal Peoples who often lack any credit history.^{xxvii} From another perspective, across Canada, the proportion of urban Aboriginal Peoples who own or rent homes is lower than those in the mainstream population.^{xxviii} This supports the conclusion that homelessness disproportionately affects Aboriginal Peoples regardless of where they reside in Canada.

Impact of the Cost of Housing in Metro Vancouver

Metro Vancouver is one of the most unaffordable cities for housing in the world, adding to the systemic economic disadvantage facing Aboriginal Peoples. According to an annual international study, Vancouver ranks 3rd in the 2017 Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, down one spot from 2016 when it was second.^{xxxix} As in all of the previous surveys, Vancouver is rated as having the worst housing affordability in Canada and is deemed 'severely unaffordable' in the study. Even more concerning, according to the survey, since 2004 Vancouver "has experienced the greatest housing affordability deterioration among major markets."^{xxxix} One can conclude that if obtaining housing is difficult for the mainstream population, systemic economic disadvantage and discrimination makes it far more difficult for Aboriginal Peoples.

Impact of Changing Government Policy

Mass homelessness in Canada emerged in the 1980s, following a massive disinvestment in affordable housing, structural shifts in the economy and reduced spending on social supports. Since then, stakeholders across Canada have tried and tested solutions to address the issue.^{xxxi} These responses, largely based on the provision of emergency services, have not resulted in meaningful progress, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of homeless people identified in the Counts (see Table 3).

While the newly elected Federal government has renewed its interest in housing and homelessness by providing valuable short-term funding to reverse the historical disinvestment in affordable housing, and the 2016 federal budget committed \$2.3 billion over two years in affordable housing through various channels, its policy includes a strong emphasis on the Housing First approach.

Housing First, while a progressive and ambitious program, does not work well for the Aboriginal Community in Metro Vancouver. The cost of housing is so expensive that the federal dollars contributed only serve a very few individuals. There are simply not enough housing options available for the population. Further, the Housing First definition of homelessness includes only those individuals who are absolutely homeless, and excludes those who are at-risk of homelessness. As a result, services are severely restricted and cannot be provided to everyone who needs them in the Aboriginal community.

Further, no new Housing First funding was added in Metro Vancouver. Dollars were generated by cannibalizing existing support programs that had been in place for years. These programs were full spectrum and were very effective at supporting Aboriginal People in acute homeless distress. Added to the fact that no Aboriginal organization has been successful in applying for Housing First funding to date, the effective elimination of these programs has actually reduced the capacity of the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Community to serve its clients.

Impact of the Hidden Homeless

According to the State of Homelessness in Canada 2013 report, as many as 50,000 Canadians may be 'hidden homeless' on any given night.^{xxxii} Often referred to as couch surfing, this includes people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have nowhere else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. There is no reliable data on the hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. In the Aboriginal community, this problem has reached epidemic proportions, with most community members considering this a normal and acceptable circumstance. For many years, researchers have aspired to gain a better sense of the magnitude of this effect on the Aboriginal community. However, to date, one can only speculate the impact that this form of homelessness has on individuals.



At the end of the day, the Aboriginal community is struggling to survive in an environment where all types of housing are unaffordable and the cost of living continues to climb. The Homelessness Count affirms this reality. The trend continues to worsen and the impact of homelessness on Aboriginal Peoples is disproportionately pronounced.

CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal homeless situation in Metro Vancouver reflects the national crisis. In support of this fact, the mayors of Canada's largest cities first declared homelessness within our country "a national disaster" in 1998 and the United Nations declared homelessness in Canada a "national emergency" in 2007.^{xxxiii} Some sources have suggested that Aboriginal homelessness in major urban areas ranges from 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population^{xxxiv}, while others have reported that the range may be much wider – from 11 to 96 percent.^{xxxv}

As a society, we can do better, and we must do better. Not only is there a higher proportion of Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless, but they clearly face additional barriers in securing safe and affordable housing. In addition to the overall lack of safe, affordable housing across Canada, these barriers include issues related to: poverty and income inequality, health, low income, prejudice, racism, discrimination, justice, and displacement from their home communities.

These realities offer insight into why Aboriginal Peoples are overrepresented among the homeless population and should be essential considerations in any path forward. Trauma, in particular, has emerged as a central theme in much of the literature on Aboriginal homelessness and many articles about Aboriginal Peoples lead with this discussion to provide a contextual backdrop.^{xxxvi}

"This is not a situation that can be ignored any further. More resources than what are currently being provided need to be directed to the Aboriginal community by all levels of government to address this unacceptable situation," says David Wells, Chair, Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee.

Housing inadequacy and poverty in homelessness can largely be attributed to social, systemic and historical factors.^{xxxvii} Aboriginal-specific strategies towards healing and moving forward^{xxxviii} and the broader struggle for self-determination and other forms of political justice for Aboriginal Peoples must be considered in addressing systemic racial discrimination and improving the socio-economic status and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

While it is laudable to set an aspirational goal to eliminate homelessness for all, it is important to understand that Aboriginal Peoples are disproportionately impacted. This is evidenced by the 2017 Count results. Greater investment in regards to culturally appropriate services, supports and funding is required to create parity and address this deficit. Clearly greater efforts are needed by all levels of government to ensure that Aboriginal Peoples experience homelessness at least proportionately to mainstream society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver definitively shows that there is a homeless crisis for Aboriginal Peoples. While there are many studies and recommendations that have been made at a National level, we provide some recommendations from our collective experience that relate specifically to Metro Vancouver.

1. The Metro Vancouver homelessness funding formula should be adjusted to provide an equitable allocation between Metro Vancouver Homelessness Steering Committee and Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee based on demonstrated need. For example, the disparity in Aboriginal population numbers could be utilized to provide a more balanced funding ratio.
2. Housing First has not been successful for the Aboriginal Community in Metro Vancouver. More flexibility in homelessness programming should be available to community organizations to meet the needs of the urban Aboriginal population.
3. Aboriginal-specific, culturally appropriate supports designed to help healing and reconciliation should be provided (particularly for Aboriginal People experiencing intergenerational trauma, residential schools and the impact of colonial policy and racism).
4. The administrative burden on Aboriginal organizations seeking funding and the reporting requirements should be made less cumbersome and strike an appropriate balance between efficiency and accountability.
5. The Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee should be provided additional resources to engage, coordinate and govern appropriately.
6. The federal government should reinstate and increase funding for new social housing and ongoing operating subsidies under the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission's Aboriginal off-reserve programs.
7. The federal government should revisit the definition of 'affordable housing'. The new definition of 'affordable housing' that is linked to market rent less 10% is unaffordable in the Metro Vancouver market.
8. Government at all levels should provide ongoing, long-term rental subsidies as a cost-effective option where rental markets exist.
9. The Federal and BC government should create an independent Homelessness Ombudsman office to support the interests of homeless individuals that effectively have no voice in the current system.
10. Government at all levels should:
 - a. Assess the continuum of housing for all British Columbians, similar to Child Welfare, and develop a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness.
 - b. Develop a public education strategy to address systemic discrimination.
 - c. Conduct additional research, particularly housing audits, to document the extent of housing discrimination, with the goal of developing effective solutions to reduce discrimination in accessing affordable housing.
 - d. Develop a methodology to adequately enumerate the problem of hidden homelessness in the Aboriginal community as well as strategies to address the unique needs of those individuals.
 - e. Develop strategies to help homeless Aboriginal People access affordable housing on an ongoing basis (for example, housing advocates or landlord educational campaigns).
11. Reduce youth homelessness by implementing an After Care Guarantee, so that when young people are taken into care, government commits to providing ongoing support (as needed) until a young person reaches the age of 25. This is supported by literature that suggests that youth in care need to have the same gradual and extended transition to adulthood that most young people enjoy.^{xxxxix}

ⁱ Patrick, Caryl. (2014). *Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

ⁱⁱ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, "Canadian Definition of Homelessness", 2012. Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition/.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.urbancenter.utoronto.ca/pdfs/elibrary/UNNS_Aboriginal_Homelessn.pdf

^{iv} Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, "Canadian Definition of Homelessness", 2012. Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition/.

^v Patrick, Caryl. (2014). *Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

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