

NUMBER AND PROFILE INFORMATION

November 2009

Number of Homeless:

New Westminster, similar to other municipalities in Metro Vancouver, experienced an increase in homelessness between the regional count conducted in 2005 and the regional count conducted in 2008. In fact, the homeless population increased from 92 to 124 or by 35% for the time period in question. Of the homeless who were counted in 2008, 72 or 58% were living on the street.

It should be emphasized that the counts, which are conducted over a 24-hour period and utilize volunteer enumerators, typically underreport the true extent of homelessness, as they seldom include people who are couch surfing or living rough or who are staying in detox facilities, holding cells, hospitals or recovery houses.

Profile of Homeless:

With regard to a profile of the homeless in 2008, limited information is currently available for New Westminster. It is known that the vast majority (74%) of the homeless were men and that just over a quarter (27%) of the homeless reported having aboriginal identity. By comparison, the percentages for the region were 72% and 32% respectively.

With regard to other profile information for the region in 2008, the following are some key findings:

- that 76% were between the ages of 25 and 44 years;
- that 76% lived alone;
- that 48% were homeless for a year or longer;
- that 80% lived in the municipality where they were counted for one year or more;
- that 71% considered there 'home' to be in Metro Vancouver;
- that 61% reported an addiction problem;¹
- that 33% reported a mental illness.

The homeless cited a range of reasons for being homeless. The largest share reported that their homelessness was due to lack of income (25%); high cost of housing (19%) or an addiction problem (17%).

¹ The incidence of specific health conditions is more pronounced among the street homeless. For example, 68% of the street homeless reported an addiction problem compared to 48% of the sheltered homeless.

SHELTER AND HOUSING INFORMATION

Facility	Provider	Beds	Description
Extreme Weather²			
Purpose Society	Purpose Society	10	Provides extreme weather mats for youth who are homeless
Salvation Army	Salvation Army	40	Provides extreme weather mats for men and women who are homeless
		50	
Emergency Shelter			
Elizabeth Gurney House	Elizabeth Fry Society	12	Provides units serving single women (10) and single mothers with children (2) who are homeless.
Fraser's Emergency Shelter	Fraser's Community Services	12	Provides beds for families with children and couples who are homeless.
Russell Residence	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	15	Provides beds for men who are homeless.
Stevenson House	Salvation Army	14	Provides beds for men who are homeless.
		53	
Transition House			
Monarch Transition House	Women In Need Gaining Strength	10	Provides temporary shelter for women and children fleeing violent abuse.
		10	
Transitional/Supportive			
Cliff Residence	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	23	Provides a combination of transitional and permanent housing for men and women.
Garfield Residence	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	24	Provides transitional (11) and independent permanent housing (13) for men and women.
Holbrook Block	Akira Women's Resource Society	27	Provides transitional housing to women and children who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.
Maria Keary Cottages	Westcoast Genesis Society	20	Provides transitional and supportive housing for men who are chronically homeless.
Russell Residence	Lookout Emergency Aid Society	40	Provides units serving men and women with a history of homelessness.
		134	
Under Development			

² Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life and/or health of people who are homeless in New Westminster, such as: temperatures at or below -2 degrees Celsius or 0 to -2 degrees Celsius with a wind chill; prolonged heavy rain in combination with low temperatures (close to 0 degrees Celsius); significant snow accumulation; or significant wind storms that present a risk to those living in wooded areas.

DOCUMENTED GAPS AND NEEDS

Based on a review of the Homelessness Needs Assessment and Action Strategy for New Westminster (2006) and recent meetings of the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition, the following gaps and needs were identified:

- A case management or wrap-around service delivery model to support homeless individuals with high needs who require intensive interventions by a number of different service agencies. This model would be client-focused and would improve client access to services as a result of a facilitated referral system. This model is currently under development and will be piloted starting in June 2009. The longer-term goal is to access sustainable funding in order to retain the services of a case coordinator.
- Additional transition house and second stage housing for women and children fleeing abuse. Currently, Monarch Place offers 10 transition house beds and Chrysalis Place offers 10 second stage housing beds in New Westminster. Between April 2007 and March 2008, Monarch Place received 553 calls from women for space, of which 365 calls met the admission criteria. During this time period, 151 women and 85 children were sheltered. With regard to Chrysalis Place, there is often three to four candidates for every available space.
- Additional resources for marginalized and street-involved youth, including safe house or shelter beds. According to The McCreary Centre Society, as part of its Profile on Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in BC (2007), about a third of surveyed youth reported that they had been sexually exploited and more than half of surveyed youth reported one or more emotional or mental health concerns. When asked about their needs, job training and shelter were the most often cited responses. While exact numbers are difficult to determine, given the transient nature of this population and its reluctance to use services targeting adults, over 330 marginalized and street-involved youth were surveyed (as part of the above profile) in Surrey and Vancouver alone.
- Non-market (social) housing for single adults with a history of homelessness. Based on the regional homeless count in 2008, 76% of those enumerated reported that they lived alone. Currently, the vast majority of non-market housing targets families and seniors. As such, the lack of non-market housing for single adults with a history of homelessness represents a major gap in the continuum of housing. This gap limits movement along the continuum and creates “bottlenecks” in the system, whereby emergency shelter beds and transitional housing are usually full.
- Improved access to medical and dental services for the homeless. The homeless are reluctant to access medical clinics in the community, including the CARE Clinic at Royal Columbia Hospital. As such, minor health issues can evolve in medical emergencies which require hospitalization. Discussions are currently underway to seek funding and/or staff support to operationalize an existing clinic located at the Purpose Society on Begbie Street.
- Improved access to addiction and mental health services. Based on the regional homeless count in 2008, 61% of those enumerated reported an addiction and 33% of those enumerated reported a mental illness. A number were also dual diagnosis, having both an addiction and a mental illness. As such, the lack of addiction and mental health services, as well as supportive housing, is seen as a major barrier to enabling the homeless to live more healthy and independent lives.