

OUR HOMELESS COUNT: SURVEY RESULTS FOR VERNON BC



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
METHODOLOGY/NUMBER OF HOMELESS:	5
SURVEY RESPONSES:	6
COMMUNITY INDICATORS (2008 – 2016)	7
THE TRUE COST OF HOMELESSNESS:	9
CONCLUSION:	9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Who Are Our Homeless (Based on the 2017 Survey Results)?

- **153 people** were counted as homeless in our community on October 18, 2017.
- **24%** were female and **74%** were male; **2%** indicated transgender/other
- **18%** have lived in Vernon for less than one year; **44%** have lived here more than 10 years.
- **76%** indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections (including half of the people who have lived in Vernon for less than one year)
- **33%** of respondents indicated they had been in the foster care system
- **42%** identified as aboriginal or having indigenous ancestry
- Average age for sleeping outside was **38 years (men)** and **38 years (women)**
- Average age in the shelters was **50 years (men)** and **34 years (women)**

What Are The Main Causes of Homelessness in Vernon?

- The main cause of homelessness in Vernon is low income, high rents and lack of available rentals – this was the overwhelming response by survey participants and is supported by local data and community indicators.
- When rental vacancy rates are low, people with barriers (such as mental health and substance use issues) are pushed out of the rental market.
- There is not enough supported housing in Vernon to accommodate the number of people who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness.

What Can We Do About Homelessness?

- Community members can educate themselves regarding the causes of homelessness and the true cost of homelessness to the tax payer.
- It costs the taxpayer \$55,000 per year to ignore homelessness (due to increased costs to health care and the criminal justice system). The average cost to provide supported housing to an individual is \$37,000 per year.
- We can support efforts to:
 - Increase income assistance rates, disability rates and minimum wage
 - Fund affordable and supportive housing projects in the community
 - Extend supports into early adulthood for children in the foster care system;
 - Ensure aboriginal communities have the resources needed to address homelessness

METHODOLOGY/NUMBER OF HOMELESS:

Prior to October 2016, biannual homeless censuses were conducted to count the number of camps in public places in Vernon. The purpose of the census was to track trends over a longer period of time. It was recognized that this was a “snapshot” of the number of camps, rather than a detailed accounting of the number of homeless people.

Although the census has been useful for tracking trends, a more detailed survey was developed in the Fall of 2016 for two reasons. Firstly, to gain a more accurate accounting of the number of citizens who are homeless in Vernon and secondly, to provide more detailed information on the demographics, causes of homelessness and additional needs of our homeless population. The second annual survey took place over a 17-hour time span, in various locations, starting on the evening of October 18, 2017 and finishing the morning of October 19, 2017:

Target Population	Location	Time
People accessing shelter services	Howard House, Gateway, Vernon Women’s Transition House and the Youth Safe House	Evening of October 18, 2017
People sleeping outside	Homeless camps in public spaces in Vernon	Early morning of October 19, 2017
People staying with friends or family (couch surfing)	Upper Room Mission	Morning of October 19, 2017 during breakfast

Surveyors participated in an orientation session to ensure consistency in questioning participants. Homeless citizens were asked if they would like to participate in a survey to voice their needs and barriers in securing housing. Citizens who consented to being surveyed were reassured surveys were anonymous and confidential.

Overall Census Results:

2017	2016	Location
51	55	Howard House
22	25	Gateway Shelter
6	10	Temporary Weather Shelter:
9	11	Bill’s Place (identified themselves as homeless)
20	10	Vernon Women’s Transition House (identified themselves as homeless)
44	33	Observed in homeless camps*
1		Other (Cells, Hospital)
153	144	TOTAL

Camp Census Numbers:

Number of People	Location
27	Linear Park
15	North End of Town
2	Other
44	TOTAL

SURVEY RESPONSES:

There was a 44% participation rate in the survey from those people who were homeless on the night of October 18, 2017. The survey teams were pleased with this response and it shows the level of trust that is in place between the outreach teams and people who are homeless in our community.

2017	2016	Location
44	53	Local Shelters
23	13	Homeless Campers
67	66	TOTAL

Snapshot of Demographics:

- **24%** were female and **74%** were male; **2%** indicated transgender/other
- Average age of a man sleeping outside was **38** years
- Average age of a woman sleeping outside was **38** years
- Average ages of men in the shelters was **50** years
- Average ages of women in the shelters was **38** years
- **33%** of respondents indicated they had been in the foster care system
- **42%** identified as aboriginal or having indigenous ancestry
- **4** people identified as having served in the military
- **3** people were homeless with their children
- **3** people identified with the LGBTQ community
- **0** indicated they were an Immigrant

Connection to Vernon:

- **18%** have lived in Vernon for less than one year; **44%** have lived here more than 10 years.
- **76%** indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections (including half of the people who have lived in Vernon for less than one year)

COMMUNITY INDICATORS (2008 – 2016)

HOMELESSNESS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
# of homeless camp in public spaces (Spring/Fall)	n/a	30/12	13/16	7/4	0/2	2/3	5/3	3/6	10/9
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Gateway Shelter (Fiscal Year)	n/a	138	490	252	267	318	286	293	380
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Howard House	n/a	146	216	120	247	133	252	233	250

HOUSING	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.0%	3.1%	6.7%	7.4%	5.8%	7.7%	4.1%	1.9%	1.9%
# of new non-profit affordable housing units	0	42	6	0	0	20	0	0	10
# of new supported housing units	16	0	0	0	0	4	0	38	0
<u>Average Rental Rate</u>									
Bachelor	\$485	\$492	\$512	\$514	\$522	\$524	\$531	\$544	n/a
One Bedroom	\$653	\$632	\$638	\$635	\$641	\$636	\$649	\$674	
Two Bedroom	\$764	\$780	\$788	\$773	\$782	\$785	\$794	\$821	
Three Bedroom	\$802	\$831	\$827	\$814	\$830	\$851	\$844	\$906	
Shelter Allowance for Individual on Income Assistance	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375

FOOD SECURITY	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
# of Food Bank Clients Served	3139	3863	4212	4262	4210	4098	—	—	—
Monthly Food Cost for Family of Four in BC	—	\$872	—	\$868	—	\$914	—	\$974	—
TOTAL Meals Served: Upper Room Mission*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	69,319	—
Average Number of Meals Per Day: Upper Room Mission	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	259	—

*There has been a 14% increase in total meals served when comparing January – June of 2015 to the same period in 2016.

INCOME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
BC Income Assistance Monthly For a Single Person	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610*
Person with Disability Rate for a Single Person	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$983*
Minimum Wage	\$8	\$8	\$8	\$8.75	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.45	\$10.85
Increase in Consumer Price Index	2.3%	.03%	1.8%	2.9%	1.5%	.09%	2.0%	1.1%	n/a

- Rates have since been increased by \$100 in the summer of 2017

Indicator Sources:

John Howard Society, Upper Room Mission, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Social Planning Council, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Statistics Canada, Provincial Health Services Authority

Housing Inventory:

Shelters/Transitional Housing		
Target Population	Number of Units	Program Providers
Men and Women	<p>25 low barrier beds at Gateway Shelter (13 for men, 15 for women) with an additional 10 temporary mats in winter</p> <p>24 dormitory beds at Howard House with an additional 10 temporary mats in winter</p> <p>22 transitional rooms at Howard House</p> <p>9 recovery beds at Howard House and 19 at Bill's Place</p>	John Howard Society
Youth at risk	4 beds	First Nations Friendship Centre
Women leaving violent relationships	25 beds	Vernon Women's Transition House Society
Non-Profit Housing Units		
Target Populations	Number of Units	Program Providers
Low income adults and families	<p>478 units (variety of unit types and sizes)</p> <p>There is a waiting list for the majority of the units.</p>	John Howard Society, Vernon Native Housing Society, CMHA, Kindale Developmental Association, First Nations Friendship Centre, Vernon Women's Transition House Society, Land Trust, Habitat for Humanity

THE TRUE COST OF HOMELESSNESS:

The cost of homelessness on government systems has been studied across Canada and the United States and the research results are consistent. Although the cost of shelters and supported housing is high due to the need for 24 hour staffing and/or additional programs, it is actually costlier to the taxpayer to have a person living on the street.

Indirect costs to the public system include:

- Heavy use of health services such as ambulances, emergency rooms, acute care beds and psychiatric beds;
- Need for policing and greater demand on police officers to be trained in mental health and addictions when there is street homelessness;
- Increased likelihood to be arrested and imprisoned for property or drug crimes and “behavioural” crimes like uttering threats and public intoxication.

There are also significant links between homelessness and health. Homeless people are:

- More poorly nourished and unable to get proper rest;
- Have difficulty following a health plan, or doctor’s orders when they are diagnosed with an illness leading to greater use of emergency health services;
- Are vulnerable to higher rates of physical violence, sexual violence and psychological distress;
- Suffer from much higher rates of depression, drug use, and serious mental health problems.

With average monthly costs for hospital beds running as high as \$30,000, it’s not difficult to see the value of ensuring people stay out of hospital. In April 2006, the Ministry of Health commissioned a report, entitled *Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia*, to determine numbers and associated costs of homelessness.

According to the report (written by five academics at Simon Fraser University, the University of B.C. and the University of Calgary) a total of **\$55,000 per person**, or an annual total of \$644.3 million in health, corrections and social services is spent on the homeless in B.C. If housing and support were provided, it would cost the system **\$37,000 per person** per year. With an estimated 11,700 homeless people in BC, the cost savings to the taxpayer is significant.

CONCLUSION:

The John Howard Society and the Social Planning Council would like to thank all the members of the COOL Team who have participated in the homeless census over the years and who stretched their resources to ensure that the expanded homeless survey took place in 2016 and again in 2017. This information is invaluable to our community and the hope is that this data will help to tell the real story of homelessness in Vernon and that the funding, policies, and programs needed to solve homelessness will soon follow.

Most importantly we wish to thank our homeless population who took part in the survey, told their truth, and trusted the COOL Team with their story. We want each and every person who is homeless in Vernon to know that they count and that their voices have been heard.