

2020 HOMELESS COUNT IN METRO VANCOUVER

Preliminary Data Report

Prepared by BC Non-Profit Housing Association
for Reaching Home's Community Entity for Metro Vancouver

August 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver is a community-driven initiative of the Reaching Home Designated and Indigenous Community Entity, [Lu'ma Native Housing Society](#), in partnership with [Vancity Community Foundation](#) together with the Community Advisory Boards and the [Council of Community Homelessness Tables](#). The count was conducted by [BC Non-Profit Housing Association](#) (BCNPHA).

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy:

Canada



With support from:



The 2020 Homeless Count was made possible due to the ongoing and dedicated work of local Community Homelessness Tables and hundreds of volunteers across the region. Thank you!

Please contact research@bcnpha.ca with any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the information provided in this report.

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ABOUT THE 2020 HOMELESS COUNT IN METRO VANCOUVER

The 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver took place on the evening of March 3rd and throughout the day on March 4th. The count provides a **24-hour snapshot of the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in Metro Vancouver**. The purpose of the count is to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness, obtain a demographic profile of those individuals, and identify trends compared to previous counts.

The count included **people who did not have a place of their own where they could expect to stay for more than 30 days and did not pay rent**. This includes people who:

- stayed overnight, on the night of March 3rd, in homeless shelters including transition houses for women fleeing violence and youth safe houses, people with “No Fixed Address” (NFA) staying temporarily in hospitals, jails or detox facilities;
- lived outside or stayed temporarily with others (couch-surfing) and/or those using homelessness services on March 4th.

Point-in-Time (PiT) counts have been conducted in Metro Vancouver every three years since 2002 and annually in the City of Vancouver since 2010. Decision-makers, funders and community agencies have relied on the regional count to understand trends in visible homelessness. Due to the nature of the methodology, some people may be less likely to be included in the count such as women, youth, and those experiencing hidden homelessness.

What was the same?

The 2020 Homeless Count followed the same research methodology as past years. **Information was collected through service agencies and by volunteers who were deployed on streets and in shelters to conduct interviews with people experiencing homelessness.**

Throughout the planning phase, representatives from the Reaching Home Community Advisory Boards, Community Homelessness Tables, and various municipalities provided oversight for the count methodology.

During the implementation phase, the consultants were directed and assisted by local Community Homelessness Tables, local governments such as the City of New Westminster, Richmond, Surrey and Vancouver, and homeless-serving agencies throughout the region. Sixteen local coordinators were engaged to assist with managing volunteers, liaise with local service providers and lead efforts in their respective communities on count day. Around 1,200 volunteers participated in the count by attending one of 22 formal training sessions and covering street and/or shelter shifts where they were tasked with conducting surveys to obtain demographic information from those included in the count. **Data on the number of people staying at sheltered locations was collected from shelters, jails, hospitals, detox facilities, transition and safe houses.**

For the second time since 2002 (the first being in 2017), **Extreme Weather Response (EWR)** shelters were open across the region on the night of the count (March 3rd). It is important to note that shelter providers and community partners report that those who access EWR shelters are typically more street entrenched than those who access regular shelters and would more likely be unsheltered if EWRs were

not in operation. Where possible, EWR and shelter data has been separated to account for this difference in population.

What was different?

As in past years, InFocus Consulting led the **Indigenous Homeless Count** by working in partnership with the Indigenous Homelessness Steering Committee (IHSC) and Indigenous service providers across the region. The 2020 Indigenous Count was more expansive than previous counts as it included additional communities, agencies, volunteers, and routes.

The 2020 Homeless Count introduced a question to capture the **racial identities** of people experiencing homelessness in the region. This was developed in partnership with Hogan's Alley Society and Dr. Carl James, Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora at York University. This data will provide a basis to better understand how racialized groups are impacted by homelessness.

For the first time since 2002, the 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver did not use cigarettes as a means to initiate conversation with potential survey participants i.e. as "icebreakers." Instead, volunteers were trained to offer a series of items including granola bars, candy and **tobacco ties**. Tobacco ties were prepared and provided by Indigenous community partners and have been used in the City of Vancouver's homeless count in recent years in lieu of cigarettes. Previous research indicated that this shift in methodology would not significantly impact survey participations rates.

Building on lessons learned from the 2018 Youth Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver, the 2020 count included a broad **school strategy** whereby school districts across the region were included in the surveying process. Throughout February, counselors and youth workers were trained to use the survey instrument and on March 4th obtained information from youth experiencing homelessness in schools across Metro Vancouver.

The 2020 Homeless Count also included an **extended count pilot** process on the North Shore. For five additional days following the count, service providers continued to collect basic information from clients accessing services on the North Shore. The goal of the extended count was to explore alternative methods for homelessness data collection in the region. Results of the pilot will be released in the fall.

Notably, the 2020 Homeless Count took place in the early stages of the **COVID-19 outbreak** in British Columbia but prior to the provincial government declaring a state of emergency on March 18th. During the count period no pandemic-related restrictions were in place and the implementation process was not markedly impacted. However, it is crucial to note that, at the point of this report's release, the data may no longer adequately reflect the state of homelessness in the region given the economic impacts and policy responses around homelessness and housing stemming from the pandemic. Many individuals were directly affected by the outbreak and many new supports and services were deployed in the weeks and months following count day.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Preliminary results are subject to minor changes pending completion of the final analysis and report, which is set to be released in fall 2020.

Total Number of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

- On March 3rd/4th 2020, 3,634 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness in Metro Vancouver. Of those, 1,029 individuals were unsheltered and 2,605 were sheltered.
- The sheltered total (2,605 people) includes 2,172 individuals who stayed in emergency shelters across the region and an additional 192 individuals who stayed in jails, hospitals, and detox facilities.
- At least 241 individuals stayed in EWR shelter beds. Those staying in EWR beds would likely have been unsheltered if an Extreme Weather Alert had not been activated on count day.
- The unsheltered population includes 1,029 individuals who were living outside, in makeshift accommodations, in tents, in warming centres, in vehicles or staying temporarily indoors (couch-surfing).
- The largest number of individuals experiencing homelessness were counted in Vancouver (2,095), followed by Surrey (644).

Table 1. Total sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness by Metro Vancouver sub-region (2020)

Sub-Region	Unsheltered Total	Sheltered				Total Homeless
		EWR ¹	Shelters ²	No Fixed Address ³	Total	
Burnaby	19	8	86	11	105	124
Delta	9	3	5	0	8	17
Langley ^{4 5}	108	0	93	8	101	209
New Westminster	41	11	62	9	82	123
North Shore ⁶	46	18	53	4	75	121
Richmond	25	0	58	2	60	85
Ridge Meadows ⁷	35	12	60	7	79	114
Surrey	173	68	375	28	471	644
Tri-Cities ⁸	24	4	53	5	62	86
Vancouver	547	105	1,327	116	1,548	2,095
White Rock	2	12	0	2	14	16
Total	1,029	241	2,172	192	2,605	3,634

¹ Refers to Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelters.

² Includes shelters (temporary nightly shelters, winter response shelters, and other shelter programs), safe houses and transition houses.

³ Includes jails, detox facilities and hospitals.

⁴ It was not possible to distinguish between EWR and regular clients.

⁵ Includes the Township of Langley and the City of Langley.

⁶ Includes the District of West Vancouver, City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and Bowen Island.

⁷ Includes the City of Maple Ridge and the City of Pitt Meadows.

⁸ Includes the City of Coquitlam, City of Port Coquitlam and the City of Port Moody.

Changes in the Number of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Since 2017

- Since 2017, the data indicates that homelessness in Metro Vancouver has overall remained stable, with only a slight increase by 29 individuals from 3,605 to 3,634 individuals.
- Five communities saw an increase in numbers of people experiencing homelessness: Burnaby (55), Surrey (42), North Shore (21), Richmond (15), and Langley (3).
- Six communities saw a decrease in homelessness: Vancouver (-43) Tri-Cities (-31), White Rock (-11), Ridge Meadows (-10), New Westminster (-10), and Delta (-2).
- The largest increase in homelessness was found in Burnaby with an increase of 80%. It should be noted that in 2019 Burnaby opened its first year-round shelter and several warming centres, which allowed volunteers to identify and count individuals experiencing homelessness who otherwise may have remained hidden.

Table 2. Changes in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness by Metro Vancouver sub-region (2005-2020)

Sub-Region	2005	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020	2017-2020 Change	
							#	%
Burnaby	42	86	78	58	69	124	55	80%
Delta/White Rock	12	17	14	19	46	33	-13	-28%
<i>Delta</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	19	17	-2	-11%
<i>White Rock</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	27	16	-11	-41%
Langley	57	86	103	92	206	209	3	1%
New Westminster	97	124	132	106	133	123	-10	-8%
North Shore	90	127	122	119	100	121	21	21%
Richmond	35	56	49	38	70	85	15	21%
Ridge Meadows	44	90	110	84	124	114	-10	-8%
Surrey	392	402	400	403	602	644	42	7%
Tri-Cities	40	94	48	55	117	86	-31	-26%
Vancouver	1,364	1,576	1,581	1,803	2,138	2,095	-43	-2%
Unspecified	1	2	13	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	2,174	2,660	2,650	2,777	3,605	3,634	29	<1%

Changes in Sheltered and Unsheltered Homelessness Since 2017

- At 28% (1,029 people), the proportion of unsheltered individuals was comparable to 2017 (29%, 1,032 people). As in 2017, the proportion of unsheltered to sheltered individuals may have been impacted by EWR shelters being open and any changes in shelter capacity.

Table 3. Unsheltered and sheltered homelessness in Metro Vancouver (2005-2020)

Homeless Category	2005		2008		2011		2014		2017		2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Unsheltered	1,127	52%	1,574	59%	758	29%	957	34%	1,032	29%	1,029	28%
Sheltered	1,047	48%	1,086	41%	1,892	71%	1,820	66%	2,317	64%	2,364	65%
EWR									256	7%	241	7%
Total	2,174	100%	2,660	100%	2,650	100%	2,777	100%	3,605	100%	3,634	100%

Unsheltered Homelessness

The unsheltered homelessness category includes individuals who answered the count survey and indicated that on the night of March 3rd they stayed outside, such as in a makeshift shelter or tent, in a vacant building, in a vehicle, or were staying temporarily indoors (couch-surfing).

- There were 1,029 individuals living in unsheltered conditions on March 4th 2020. This represents a slight decrease from 2017 (by 3 individuals).
- The largest number of unsheltered individuals were living in Vancouver (547), Surrey (173), and Langley (108).

Table 4. Changes in unsheltered homelessness by Metro Vancouver sub-region (2017-2020)

Sub-Region	2017 Unsheltered Total	2020 Unsheltered Total	Absolute Change (2017 to 2020)
Burnaby	49	19	-30
Delta	19	9	-10
Langley	79	108	29
New Westminster	30	41	11
North Shore	11	46	35
Richmond	29	25	-4
Ridge Meadows	30	35	5
Surrey	203	173	-30
Tri-Cities	41	24	-17
Vancouver	537	547	10
White Rock	4	2	-2
Total	1,032	1,029	-3

Sheltered Homelessness

The category of sheltered homelessness includes people who stayed in emergency shelters, transition houses for women fleeing abuse, and safe houses for youth on the night of March 3rd. The sheltered category also includes people with "No Fixed Address" (NFA) who stayed in jails and health or detox facilities on the night of the count. EWR shelters are also included separately.

- A total of 2,605 individuals were identified as sheltered on the night of March 3rd 2020, which is a slight increase from 2017 (by 32 individuals or 1%).
- The majority of communities saw a decrease in sheltered homelessness compared to 2017, with the exceptions of Burnaby (85 more individuals), Surrey (72), Richmond (19) and Delta (8).

Table 5. Changes in sheltered homelessness by Metro Vancouver sub-region (2017-2020)

Sub-Region	2017 Sheltered			2020 Sheltered			Absolute Change ⁹ (2017 to 2020)
	Shelters & NFAs	EWR	Total	Shelters & NFAs	EWR	Total	
Burnaby ¹⁰	13	7	20	97	8	105	85
Delta	0	0	0	5	3	8	8
Langley	96	31	127	101	0	101	-26
New Westminster	76	27	103	71	11	82	-21
North Shore	78	11	89	57	18	75	-14
Richmond	25	16	41	60	0	60	19
Ridge Meadows	84	10	94	67	12	79	-15
Surrey	355	44	399	403	68	471	72
Tri-Cities	43	33	76	58	4	62	-14
Vancouver	1,537	64	1,601	1,443	105	1,548	-53
White Rock	10	13	23	2	12	14	-9
Total	2,317	256	2,573	2,364	241	2,605	32

⁹ It is important to note that changes in weather on the day of the count, as well as local shelter capacity, can affect these numbers from year to year.

¹⁰ Burnaby provides sleeping mats at four Warming Centres. On the night of the count, 38 adults who spent a full night at one of the centres were counted as sheltered.

Homelessness by Indigenous Identity

All survey participants are asked if they identify as First Nations (with or without status, Treaty or Non-Treaty), Métis, or Inuit and whether they have other North American Indigenous ancestry.

- In total, 711 individuals identified as Indigenous representing a slight decrease (-35) in the total number of Indigenous individuals who responded to the survey in 2017.
- Indigenous people represent one-third (33%) of people experiencing homelessness in the region. At 33%, Indigenous people continue to be heavily overrepresented when compared to the proportion of people who identify as Indigenous in the general population (which, according to the 2016 census, was 2.5%).¹¹

Table 6. Indigenous homelessness in Metro Vancouver (2008-2020)

Indigenous Identity	2008 Total Homeless		2011 Total Homeless		2014 Total Homeless		2017 Total Homeless		2020 Total Homeless	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Indigenous	688	32%	394	27%	582	31%	746	34%	711	33%
Non-Indigenous	1,453	68%	1,074	73%	1,282	69%	1,453	66%	1,417	67%
<i>Total Respondents</i>	2,141	100%	1,468	100%	1,864	100%	2,199	100%	2,128	100%
Unsure ¹² /No Answer ¹³	519		1,182		913		1,406		1,506	
Total	2,660		2,650		2,777		3,605		3,634	

¹¹ Statistics Canada. 2018. Vancouver [Census metropolitan area], British Columbia (table). Aboriginal Population Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-510-X2016001. Ottawa. Released July 18, 2018.

¹² In consultation with the Indigenous Homelessness Steering Committee, the Indigenous survey question was altered to include an “unsure/no answer” option.

¹³ Those 711 individuals included in the data set reflect those who participated in the survey and self-identified as Indigenous. This number is in part a reflection of the participation rate. Indigenous homelessness is more accurately expressed as a share of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. Assuming that the share of 33% is reflective of the total population, then up to 1,214 individuals who identify as Indigenous were homeless.

Indigenous Homelessness by Sub-Region

- The majority of Indigenous respondents were living in Vancouver (58%), followed by Surrey (20%).
- The majority of Indigenous respondents were living in unsheltered conditions (366 individuals or 51%). This is a higher proportion than the population of people experiencing homelessness overall (28%).¹⁴ Hence, Indigenous people are not only more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous people, but Indigenous people also more likely to be unsheltered compared to non-Indigenous people.

Table 7. Unsheltered and sheltered Indigenous homelessness by Metro Vancouver sub-region (2020)

Sub-Region	Unsheltered Total	Sheltered Total	Total	
			#	%
Burnaby	6	13	19	3%
Delta	4	0	4	<1%
Langley	24	13	37	5%
New Westminster	12	10	22	3%
North Shore	5	15	20	3%
Richmond	4	10	14	2%
Ridge Meadows	7	15	22	3%
Surrey	70	71	141	20%
Tri-Cities	6	7	13	2%
Vancouver	227	188	415	58%
White Rock	1	3	4	<1%
Total Indigenous Survey Respondents	366	345	711	100%

¹⁴ The total share of 28% of people living unsheltered includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Homelessness by Racial Identity

For the first time, the 2020 Homeless Count survey included a question on race, in which respondents were asked whether they identify with any racial group(s) and then were able to select one or more options from the list provided.¹⁵

- 98 respondents identified as “Black”¹⁶ (6%), 53 as “Asian – South” (3%), and 52 as “Latin American” (3%).
- Black people are particularly overrepresented among identified racialized groups experiencing homelessness; 6% of respondents identified as Black compared to 1.2%¹⁷ of the general population.¹⁸
- 132 respondents wrote in a response to the question under the “not listed” category. The majority of write-in responses referenced nationalities (87), while other responses included references to mixed or multiple racial/cultural identities (11), ethnicities or ethno-religious groups (10). Another 24 respondents did not specify their racial identity beyond selecting “not listed.”¹⁹

[Refer to Table 8 on the following page]

¹⁵ The racial identity question followed the question on Indigenous identity and a skip logic question. Responses to these questions indicated there was confusion during data collection and the skip logic was not always followed as intended. Some respondents (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) were erroneously asked (or not asked) the racial identity question. As such, it can be assumed that the skip logic potentially skewed the results in an unknown direction.

¹⁶ The category of “Black” includes respondents who selected “Black – Caribbean and Latin American,” “Black – African,” “Black – Canadian/American” and 2 non-specific “Black” responses in the “Not Listed” category.

¹⁷ The data is considered a minimum number and does not include people with multiple identities. Follow footnote 18 for more information.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. 2017. *Vancouver [CMA]. Census Profile*. Visible minority population. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.

¹⁹ As we continue to evolve the methodology of this question in future counts, the write-in responses will inform how the racial identity question is formulated to more accurately reflect some of the nuances from this data.

Table 8. Homelessness by racial identity in Metro Vancouver (2020)

Racial Identity (more than one response possible) ²⁰	Total	
	#	%
Arab	19	1%
Asian – East	40	2%
Asian – South-East	31	2%
Asian – South	53	3%
Asian – West	28	2%
Asian – Not specified	1	<1%
Black	98	6%
<i>Black – Caribbean and Latin American</i>	23	1%
<i>Black – African</i>	42	3%
<i>Black – Canadian/American</i>	31	2%
<i>Black – Not specified</i>	2	<1%
Latin American	52	3%
White	1,302	79%
Not Listed ²¹	132	8%
<i>Nationality</i>	87	5%
<i>Mixed, multi-racial/cultural (not specified)</i>	11	<1%
<i>Ethnicity or ethno-religious group</i>	10	<1%
<i>Not specified²²</i>	24	<1%
<i>Total Respondents</i>	1,652	
Don't Know/No Answer	1,982	
Total	3,634	

²⁰ As respondents were able to select more than one answer, percentages may not add up to 100%.

²¹ In total, 235 individuals selected the “Not Listed” category, 216 of whom provided a write-in response. Another 26 non-responses (e.g. “animal,” “plant”) were removed from the category and a further 68 references to indigeneity were removed as these respondents were already included as Indigenous respondents. Nine “Caucasian” references were recoded to “White.”

²² This category includes 19 respondents who did not provide a write-in answer after selecting “Not Listed.”

Homelessness by Age

- A total of 54 children under 19 years of age (2%)²³ and 139 youth between 19 and 24 years (6%) were found experiencing homelessness on March 4, for a total of 193. Young people under 25 years thereby represented 8% of the homeless population in 2020 compared to 16% in 2017 and 20% in 2014. Young people are the only age group where the count results showed a reduction, continuing a decreasing trend.
- Those over age 55 continue to represent about a quarter (25%) of respondents, which is a slight increase from 23% in 2017. This continues an upward trend in homelessness among seniors.

Table 9. Changes in homelessness by age in Metro Vancouver (2011-2020)

Age Groups	2011		2014		2017		2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Under 19 years	102	6%	191	9%	199	8%	54	2%
19-24 years	221	13%	219	11%	179	8%	139	6%
Youth - unknown age	74	4%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
25-34 years	275	17%	332	16%	419	18%	422	19%
35-44 years	328	20%	413	20%	504	21%	508	23%
45-54 years	397	24%	512	25%	524	22%	533	24%
55-64 years	210	13%	281	14%	380	16%	380	17%
65+ years	58	3%	90	4%	176	7%	167	8%
<i>Total Respondents</i>	1,665	100%	2,038	100%	2,381	100%	2,203	100%
Don't Know/No Answer	985		739		1,224		1,431	
Total	2,650		2,777		3,605		3,634	

²³ Due to changes in the survey questionnaire we were not able to include children under 19 who were found unsheltered with their parents. This accounted for 7 children under 19 in 2017 and 9 in 2014.

Homelessness by Gender Identity

- A total of 546 individuals who answered the survey identified as women and 1,570 individuals identified as men. The proportions of those who identify as men (73%) and women (25%) remained relatively consistent with the past two counts when 72% identified as men and 27% as women.
- 42 individuals are included in the “Non-binary” category, representing 2% of survey respondents.²⁴

Table 10. Homelessness by gender identity in Metro Vancouver (2011-2020)

Gender Identity	2011		2014		2017		2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Man	1,452	69%	1,419	73%	1,688	72%	1,570	73%
Woman	652	31%	527	27%	628	27%	546	25%
Non-binary ²⁵	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	1%	42	2%
Transgender ²⁶	8	0%	9	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Total Respondents</i>	2,112	100%	1,955	100%	2,341	100%	2,158	100%
Don't Know/No Answer	538		822		1,264		1,476	
Total	2,650		2,777		3,605		3,634	

²⁴ For the 2020 data, “non-binary” includes 16 individuals who identified as “two spirit,” 10 individuals who identified as “non-binary” and 16 individuals who selected the “Not Listed” category.

²⁵ The 2017 survey options for gender identity did not include “two spirit” or “non-binary” as categories, just “man/male,” “woman/female” and “another gender identity.” The 2020 survey included “man,” “woman,” “non-binary,” “two spirit” and “not listed.”

²⁶ Information on transgender experience will be included in the final report.

Final Report

The final report is set to be released in the fall of 2020.

The report will provide additional analysis on the remaining questions included in the 2020 Homeless Count survey instrument such as: length of time experiencing homelessness, health issues, sources of income, and service usage.