



## **AGENDA**

### **COMMUNITY VITALITY COMMITTEE MEETING**

July 4, 2018, 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM

Board Room, Service and Resource Centre,  
411 Dunsmuir Street, Nanaimo, BC

Pages

1. **CALL THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY VITALITY COMMITTEE TO ORDER:**
2. **INTRODUCTION OF LATE ITEMS:**
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA:**
4. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES:**

- a. **Minutes**

3 - 7

Minutes of the Open Meeting of the Community Vitality Committee held in the Board Room, Service and Resource Centre, 411 Dunsmuir Street, Nanaimo, BC, on Wednesday, 2018-JUN-06 at 4:30 p.m.

5. **PRESENTATIONS:**

- a. **Affordable Housing Strategy Update by Karin Kronstal, Social Planner**
  - b. **Nanaimo's Homeless Coalition 5-Year Plan and Detailed Review of Point in Time Homeless Count by John Horn, Social Planner**

8 - 69

6. **REPORTS:**

**7. OTHER BUSINESS:**

**a. The Kidney Foundation of Canada's Organ Donation Program and Request for City Support**

Based on discussion at the 2018-JUN-06 Community Vitality Committee meeting, the following items will be considered:

1. A recommendation that Council endorse a Nanaimo-specific resolution similar to the UBCM resolution to "accept the Kidney Foundation's challenge to *Save Lives Through Organ Donation* and work with the Foundation to increase the number of people registered as organ donors in the community.";
2. a recommendation that Council consider creating and adopting a City-wide policy for ways in which the City can offer support to non-profit and special advocacy groups; and
3. a brainstorming of other creative suggestions for The Kidney Foundation's education and awareness campaign.

**b. Information Item: Heritage Façade Grant for 499 Wallace Street Approved by Council**

On 2018-JUN-18, Council approved a \$9,715.13 Heritage Façade Grant for an exterior repaint and the installation of lighting and window boxes at the Merchant's Bank of Canada located at 499 Wallace Street.

**c. Information Item: 2018/19 Street Banners Installed**

70

The 2018/19 street banners designed by local artist Robert Plante have been installed on lamp posts on major streets throughout Nanaimo.

**8. QUESTION PERIOD:**

**9. ADJOURNMENT:**

**MINUTES**  
OPEN COMMUNITY VITALITY COMMITTEE MEETING  
BOARD ROOM, SERVICE AND RESOURCE CENTRE  
411 DUNSMUIR STREET, NANAIMO, BC  
WEDNESDAY, 2018-JUN-06, AT 4:30 PM

---

PRESENT:   Members:   Dennis McMahon, Vice Chair  
                              Erin Hemmens  
                              James Bowen  
                              Julia Stevens  
                              Paula Waatainen  
                              Rob McGregor

                  Absent:   Councillor G.W. Fuller  
                              Ingrid Sly

                  Staff:     Dale Lindsay, Director, Community Development  
                              Chris Sholberg, Heritage Planner  
                              John Horn, Social Planner  
                              Rebecca Buckler, Recording Secretary

1.    CALL THE OPEN COMMUNITY VITALITY COMMITTEE MEETING TO ORDER:

The Open Community Vitality Committee Meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m.

2.    INTRODUCTION OF LATE ITEMS:

- (a)    Erin Hemmens advised that the Pride Week Flag Raising Ceremony would be taking place at 5:30 pm in the City Hall parking lot and suggested that members attend the ceremony if the meeting is adjourned in time for the event.
- (b)    Dennis McMahon requested that the Committee introduce themselves and provide a summary of their background and interests to the new committee members in attendance.

3.    ADOPTION OF AGENDA:

It was moved and seconded that the Agenda be adopted as amended. The motion carried unanimously.

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES:

It was moved and seconded that the Minutes of the Open Meeting of the Community Vitality Committee held in the Board Room, Service and Resource Centre, 411 Dunsmuir Street, Nanaimo, BC, on Wednesday, 2018-MAY-02 at 4:30 p.m. be adopted as circulated. The motion carried unanimously.

5. PRESENTATIONS:

(a) Organ Donation Program by Ron Walker, The Kidney Foundation of Canada

During the 2018-MAY-14 Special Council Meeting, Ron Walker and Randy Spensley of the Kidney Foundation of Canada provided a presentation regarding The Kidney Foundation of Canada's Organ Donation Program. Mr. Walker requested that the City of Nanaimo pass a resolution in support of the Organ Donor Program, in line with the resolution of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), which reads as follows:

“THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED that UBCM call upon Mayors and Council Members to accept the Kidney Foundation's challenge to Save Lives Through Organ Donation in their communities and to work with the Foundation to increase the number of people registered as organ donors in their respective communities.”

Council subsequently referred the item to the Community Vitality Committee for consideration.

Mr. Walker provided an overview of kidney disease, the Organ Donor Program, and the goal of reaching a 30% registration rate by 2020. The Foundation would like to partner with the City of Nanaimo to increase the registration rate, and some of their initial ideas included encouragement of City staff to register, advertising on City garbage trucks, and to place reminders alongside annual tax bills.

Committee discussion took place regarding:

- If someone expresses interest in registering, send them a reminder, or offer to register them “on the spot”.
- Request a booth at local Blood Donor clinics and offer to register interested people “on the spot”.
- City support should be provided to all non-profit and special advocacy groups consistently. The City should consider adopting an official policy or list of “services” that can be offered to groups with requests such as this.

Chris Sholberg, Heritage Planner, provided a list of staff-suggested ideas that the City currently offers to non-profit and special advocacy groups, noting that the City does not share third-party posts on Facebook or the City website:

- Light up the Bastion in a certain color (send request through Mayor's Office).
- Request a Proclamation of a specific day, month, or week (send request through Mayor's Office). Proclamations can be shared on the City's Facebook page and

the proclamation can be posted on the City's website (send request through Communications).

- Organize a flag raising (send request through Mayor's Office).
- Advertise in the Activity Guide using the reduced ad-rate for non-profit groups (send request through Parks & Recreation)
- Distribute posters to City facilities for display (distribute posters to Beban, Bowen, Ice Centre, Aquatic Centre, Oliver Woods, City Hall, Service & Resource Centre, Oliver Woods).
- Propose a "Mayor's Challenge" (send request through Legislative Services).
- Set up a booth at a City event, such as Canada Day (send request through Parks & Recreation).

It was moved and seconded that the presentation regarding The Kidney Foundation's Organ Donor Program be received for information. The motion carried unanimously.

It was moved and seconded the following items be discussed at the next regular Community Vitality meeting:

- recommendation that Council endorse a Nanaimo-specific resolution similar to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) resolution;
- recommendation that Council consider creating and adopting a City-wide policy for ways in which the City can offer support to non-profit and special advocacy groups; and
- brainstorming of other creative suggestions for The Kidney Foundation's education and awareness campaign.

The motion carried unanimously.

(b) Point in Time Homeless Census by John Horn, Social Planner

John Horn, Social Planner, provided an update on the Point in Time Homeless Census. He provided background on the census, noting that the count was conducted under the auspices of the federal government's Homeless Partnering Strategy. Communities across Canada and Vancouver Island have or will be conducting counts and for the first time we can expect a relatively accurate count of how many people are homeless in Canada.

The local count can be set against this larger national picture, but the value lies in the detailed demographic data about the local population that is collected via the survey instrument, and it is this fine-grained analysis that will be the basis for the staff presentation.

Questions asked in the survey were standard across Canada, and preliminary results are as follows:

- Total # of respondents: 335 (estimated true count is over 450)
- Total # of respondents from last count: 174
- 70% male and 30% female
- The majority of respondents were between age 25 to 44
- Most respondents identified as being Nanaimo residents and living here for more than six months. A total of 80% identified as being long-term Nanaimo residents

- 31% respondents identified as Metis or First Nation
- 30% of respondents said they became homeless under the age of 17
- Of the 335 respondents, 252 identified as being heterosexual
- Respondents cited the reason for homelessness, which included illness, addiction, ability to pay rent, and “other”

The “Homeless in Nanaimo – Everyone Counts: 2018 Point in Time Count Report” can be viewed online at <https://pub-nanaimo.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=6794>.

It was moved and seconded that the presentation regarding the Point in Time Homeless Census be received for information. The motion carried unanimously.

6. OTHER BUSINESS:

(a) Information Item: New Committee Members

On 2018-MAY-14, Council approved two new at-large members (James Bowen and Julia Stevens) to the Community Vitality Committee, for a term ending 2018-DEC-31.

(b) Information Item: High School Poetry Competition Winners

The winners of the 2017 High School Poetry competition and Nanaimo’s Youth Poet Laureate Kailey DeFehr will attend the 2018-JUN-11 Council Meeting to read their poems.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: “Untitled” by Jesse Nicholas Brittain
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: “Open Curtains; She is My Moon” by Isabella Cooper
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: “Ocean of Jubilation” by Rachel Ward

(c) Information Item: Temporary Public Art Installed in City Parks and Public Spaces

During Public Art Week (May 14 to 18, 2018), eleven new pieces of temporary public art were installed in City parks and public spaces.

7. QUESTION PERIOD:

There were no members of the public in attendance wishing to ask questions.

8. ADJOURNMENT:

It was moved and seconded at 5:27 p.m. that the meeting terminate. The motion carried unanimously.

---

CHAIR

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

---

CORPORATE OFFICER

# ***Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness 2018-2023***



**United Way**  
Central and Northern  
Vancouver Island

**Canada** 

Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition 



## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Executive Summary.....	5
Section One: Background.....	8
Profile of Nanaimo .....	8
Homelessness in Nanaimo .....	9
The need for a new action plan .....	10
Process for a new plan .....	10
Relationship to Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy .....	11
Section 2: Context for the 2018-2023 Action Plan .....	12
The demographic and economic context .....	12
Increased acuity in addictions and mental health .....	14
Service Context: Gap analysis .....	15
Section 3: Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023.....	18
Strategies to address homelessness .....	18
Overview .....	18
Discussion of recommended strategies .....	20
Strategy 9: An Indigenous-specific approach.....	30
Indigenous holism and the self .....	31
Housing as reconciliation .....	32
Conclusion.....	33
APPENDIX A: INVESTMENT IN NANAIMO FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES.....	34
APPENDIX B: NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION MEMBERS.....	35
References .....	36
Endnotes .....	37



## Introduction

On behalf of the **Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition**, I am pleased to present ***Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023***.

This plan has been developed with funding from Service Canada, the government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and the support of many agencies and individuals in Nanaimo and Oceanside who have shared their wisdom and experience in serving community members experiencing homelessness. On behalf of United Way, I want to thank each and every one of you for your contribution to this work.

*Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023* is the result of the collective research and voices of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition. The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is made up of non-profit societies, representatives from the three levels of government, faith groups and community members who have an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness. Building on the significant work invested in previous homelessness plans, the Coalition hired Springbok Consulting to conduct interviews and collaborate with the Coalition to develop this Action Plan.

**The Action Plan lays out a pathway to help us achieve a city where everyone has safe and stable housing.** We know ending homelessness is a journey of a thousand steps, and so with each step we aim to make life a little bit better for community members seeking long-term housing. In doing this work, in ending homelessness, we are also guided by a second vision: to ensure that people experiencing homelessness also find a secure place in the community, to feel that they belong in Nanaimo. We aim to make people feel that they have a home, in all the senses of that word.

Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023 reflects current circumstances, but it also reflects decades of experience in developing and implementing solutions that tackle the multiple causes of homelessness, including the high cost of housing, addictions, the long historical effects of colonization, trauma, and enduring poverty.

**But while our community has made significant progress, there remains much work to be done. We therefore invite your participation in this work and welcome your feedback.**

As you read through this document please keep in mind that this Action Plan focuses on services and programs. It adopts the language of non-profit organizations, of funders, and of other stakeholders who work together to help solve social issues. The Plan has been developed for the people that the services and programs are intended to help. It is also for our wider community that desires a clear and effective way to help the homeless and thus the health of our overall community.

A critical dimension of homelessness, then, is to understand the homeless as community members, as citizens; as more than the recipients of services. So, while this Plan speaks to



services, it does so only to speak to the human experience of those who are homeless and also for those in the wider community wanting to engage in helping our community become healthier.

Signy Madden  
Executive Director—United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island  
Community Entity, Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Service Canada



## Executive Summary

This report aims to help Nanaimo end homelessness, or where homelessness persists, to diminish the harms it produces. It does so by guiding and organizing the delivery of services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To meet this goal of helping Nanaimo to end homelessness, the report sets out a five-year plan for homelessness services. Building on previous plans and on the experience and knowledge of community agencies, *Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018 – 2023* (the “Action Plan”) aims to both coordinate programs for the homeless over the next five years and give them a strategic direction.

This Action Plan builds on the framework for homelessness services created between 2008 and 2017, which provides Nanaimo with a strong foundation to help community members who face housing challenges.

This Plan addresses homelessness, which is one dimension of the housing crisis facing Nanaimo. But this Plan also works in conjunction with the City of Nanaimo’s soon-to-be-developed affordable housing strategy. Together, the two strategies aim to address a broad range of housing issues in the community.

The Action Plan is aimed primarily at those who live in Nanaimo. But it also speaks to the fact that Nanaimo is a regional hub, serving individuals and families from places such as Oceanside, or Ladysmith.

To date, Nanaimo has done well in its response to homelessness. But times change, and as this Action Plan sets out, the service system in Nanaimo faces real challenges in current era that present substantial risk to community members if left unaddressed. Those challenges—for instance, changes in the rental market and in the nature of homelessness—can’t be met only with the existing services and will thus demand a different approach. A strategic shift is required.

*“Put bluntly, Nanaimo faces pressures that threaten the integrity and sustainability of the current service system if not addressed.”*

**Put bluntly, Nanaimo faces pressures that threaten the integrity and sustainability of the current service system if not addressed.** This report has found that a gap has opened up between community expectations, the needs of the homeless, and the strategies used by agencies to respond to these two pressures. This gap is real, and must be addressed if the service system is to retain community support and maintain its capacity to serve its clients.

Two issues in particular require attention.

**First, the service system in Nanaimo needs to account for the challenges posed by changes in the housing and labour markets;** in particular, sharp rises in housing costs, low vacancy rates, and precarious income. This change in the economic context is amplified by a social change; specifically, the need to recognize and respond to the increasing acuity and complexity of addictions and mental health issues in Nanaimo.



**Second, the current system of services needs to be modified to address gaps in services that were identified by service providers,** which range from lack of support to escape street involvement to the need for more graduations in supportive housing.

**It must be stressed that this Action Plan is intended as a mid-level strategic document, rather than a detailed operational plan.** This is to give it flexibility to respond to changes at the level of services and funding, and to ensure a consistent approach over a five-year or longer period. It guides operations, rather than mandating their contents.

In terms of strategic shifts in the system of homelessness services, the Action Plan recommends the following ten strategies.

#### **Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the perimeter of the shelter system**

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options.
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service-avoidant individuals.
- An intervention strategy designed to interrupt the pathways leading to street involvement.

#### **Strategy 2: Create a day space/Drop-in facility**

- Allow the users of the drop-in space to control some portion of the facility.

#### **Strategy 3: Remap social networks**

- Align social integration activities with the goal of shifting people into identified, pre-existing community networks or circles.

#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

- Provide incremental increases in rent supplements.
- Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development.

#### **Strategy 5: Supportive housing**

- Add to the number of dry housing units available; develop scattered site housing.
- Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.
- Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.

#### **Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

- Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.
- Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points.

#### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

- Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues.
- Integrate an 'acute lens' with transition management.



**Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity**

- **Implement a half-time position to coordinate homelessness services; the position should be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.**

**Strategy 9: Considerations in serving Indigenous people**

- **Integrate an 'Indigenous lens' into the services that flow from this Action Plan.**

**Strategy 10: Prevention through agency coordination**

- **Homelessness service providers should coordinate on an annual basis with other agencies in Nanaimo that provide prevention or support services.**

Each of the ten strategic directions are discussed in detail in Section 3.





## Section 1: Background

### Profile of Nanaimo

The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy famously wrote; “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” In writing these words, in telling us that families differ most—and most tellingly—in the circumstances of their sorrows, Tolstoy is asking us to pay attention to the specifics of suffering and trauma. He is inviting us to attend, in other words, to the way in which the expression of suffering or loss exposes, not just the experience of the individual, but also the local and the particular circumstances of that experience; to the way in which trauma or loss or even just indifference can make us confront the uncomfortable relationship between daily communal life and the experience of dislocation and abandonment. We sometimes think of being a member of a community as being like a warm embrace that brings us together. Tolstoy reminds us that being a member of a community can also mean deprivation and exposure.

So too with homelessness, which occurs in every city but is shaped, in the end, by the local situation and the specific dynamics in the community: the particularities of place and time, and the embodied texture of one’s local relationships.

Taking Tolstoy’s lead, this Report aims to make clear the circumstances that will, over the next five years, drive the experience of homelessness in Nanaimo, giving homelessness its local form and also conditioning the community’s response to this issue.

This five-year homelessness plan thus aims to guide service providers in understanding emerging challenges in homelessness in Nanaimo, and to suggest strategies that may be effective in diminishing the harms produced by precarious housing.

### **The Current Local Context in Nanaimo**

If this is so, what shapes homelessness in Nanaimo and the community response? What is the local context?

The first context is Nanaimo’s energy: the city hosts dynamism and change, displacement and settlement. The city is an active, diverse community located on the coast of Vancouver Island with a growing population; today, more than 91,000 people live within city limits.<sup>1</sup> As a hub for central and northern Vancouver Island, Nanaimo is a channel for the movement of people and goods for the region, attracting people from across Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. We should be careful to note that while a hub for the Island now, it has always been a hub for First Nations, who have long hosted Indigenous people from other parts of North America and elsewhere. Even the Coast Salish name for the area, *Snuneymuxw*, means ‘meeting place’.

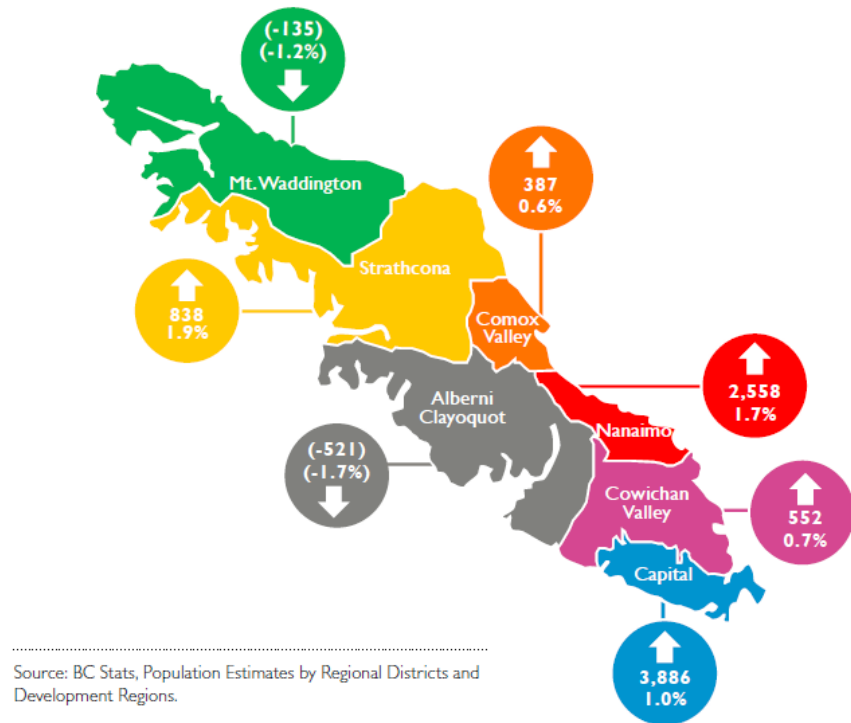
In contemporary times, population movement into Nanaimo came from those seeking a better life through international migration to Canada; from Indigenous people seeking education or employment opportunities; and from people from the Lower Mainland looking for a more affordable place to live.

As evidence of this dynamism, the City’s growth rate is well above the provincial average. Between 2011 and 2016, Nanaimo’s grew by 8%; in comparison, the rest of B.C. averaged just 5.5%. On the Island,



Nanaimo outpaces Victoria as a place to move to or raise a family.<sup>2</sup> If Nanaimo is growing, it is not just in absolute numbers, but also in its external connections and internal complexity. Through its role as both an economic centre and a destination for people from outside the City, Nanaimo is increasing its integration into a wide range of economic, social and familial relationships.

#### Population Growth BY REGION 2014 TO 2015



Graphic reproduced from The Vancouver Island Economic Alliance 2016 Report

### Homelessness in Nanaimo

But if Nanaimo is a diverse and active city, it can also be a difficult place to live.<sup>3</sup> While some people experience Nanaimo as a dynamic community, others experience it as a challenging place to live, with episodic employment opportunities, low wages and limited affordable housing. The non-Indigenous population in Nanaimo is also growing older, with larger numbers of people in fixed income, who struggle with the steady increases in housing costs that seem inevitable.

As a result, some members of the community find themselves living in the gap between the promise of Nanaimo as a place of growth, and the reality of Nanaimo as a place where stable, safe housing is tenuous, or at worst, unavailable. But one does not simply 'live' in this gap; one struggles, one succeeds, one fails, or one survives. Or sometimes, one does not survive. If Nanaimo is at the centre of a web of economic, social and familial relationships, it remains the case that this web sometimes fails, or breaks, leaving some community members exposed, without access to safe, affordable housing.

This is not a trivial problem, affecting a handful of people. While estimates of homelessness<sup>4</sup> are uncertain and subject to wide variation, the 2016 *Point In Time (PIT) Count*, identified a minimum of 174 people who experienced absolute homelessness<sup>5</sup> in Nanaimo. Given the limitations<sup>6</sup> of the PIT Count,





the real numbers might be closer to 300, if we include those community members who are episodically homeless. And beyond these of course are many more residents who stay on couches or live in unhealthy or dangerous places, or who cannot thrive because they are consumed by housing challenges.

### ***Service Planning and Coordination***

The community has not remained idle in the face of this issue. Nanaimo is, at its heart, a closely-knit place with a long history of collective action on social and economic issues. As a result of the work of agencies and individuals, Nanaimo has developed a broad range of programs aimed at helping people at risk of homelessness.

Over time, this system of services and support has grown in complexity and size, such that coordination and planning of services has become an essential feature of the system rather than a luxury. The most recent attempt to create a coordinated plan for homelessness in Nanaimo was in 2008, which produced the *Nanaimo's Response to Homelessness Action Plan*.<sup>7</sup> This Action Plan builds on that work, adding the changes needed to account for the issues that Nanaimo will face over the next five years, and for developments in services since the 2008 report.

### **The need for a new action plan**

Significant changes have occurred in Nanaimo and in homelessness since the 2008 action plan was drafted. Rising rents, increasingly complex mental health and addictions behaviours, and precarious employment; these and other changes have shifted the landscape for homeless services. In addition, the housing initiatives delivered in the ten years since the 2008 action plan have had a significant, positive, impact on the face of homelessness. All of these motivate the need for a new plan.

It should be stressed that much is at stake over the next five years. The need for a new five-year plan stems from the realization that while the current system is still working, pressures on services are rising, and changes must be made before the demand for services can no longer be accommodated at a reasonable level.

As described below, homelessness services face two systemic risks: increased pressure for highly complex, expensive services for acute addictions or mental health issues, and large numbers of more simple cases of people who are pushed out of the housing or labour markets.

### **Process for a new plan**

In early 2017, Kaleidoscope Consulting conducted an initial set of consultations with stakeholders in Nanaimo to set out the broad strokes for a new five-year homelessness plan. Subsequently, Springbok Management Services was hired to complete the plan. To achieve this, interviews with service providers and community advocates in Nanaimo and Oceanside were conducted. This was supplemented by a brief review of the relevant literature and a review of other homelessness plans in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

*Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023* was produced under the direction of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, and with the administrative support of the United Way Northern and Central Vancouver Island. The City of Nanaimo provided extensive technical and advisory support. The 2018 Action Plan is also informed by the input of community members and service agencies.



### Relationship to Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy

This Action Plan focuses on services for the homeless and those who are at risk of homelessness. It does not deal directly with the issue of affordable housing, which is aimed at reducing barriers to home ownership, or encouraging certain kinds of rental housing at below-market value, for instance, for seniors on fixed incomes.

While the Action Plan and Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy aim at different groups within the community, there is some overlap. Both concern themselves with the housing insecurity that comes when there is a substantial gap between income and housing costs, making it more likely that vulnerable people will slip out of market housing and into episodic homelessness. Both attempt to respond, that is, to situations where the alternative to expensive housing is not cheaper housing, but no housing at all.

This Action Plan speaks directly to the issue of affordability, as it should, given that the high cost of housing in Nanaimo is clearly pushing some people into homelessness. But the services called for in this Action Plan require a strong, active affordable housing strategy to be effective. This Plan then, needs to be implemented in close cooperation with an affordable housing strategy.





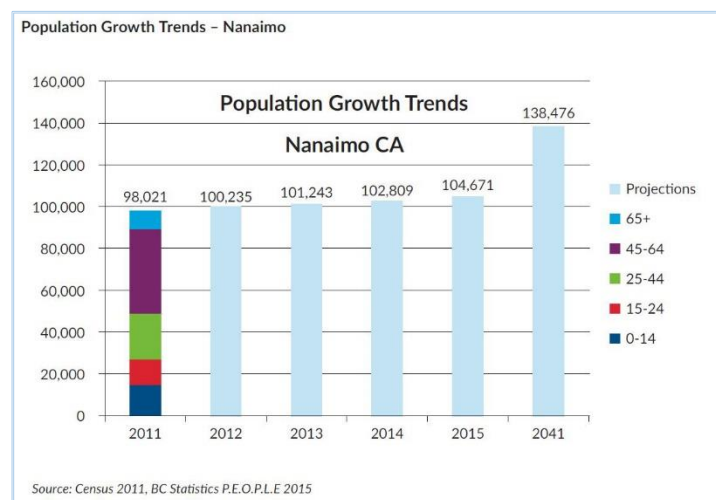
## Section 2: Context for the 2018-2023 Action Plan

To ensure that Nanaimo's strategies for ending homelessness remain effective in the face of changing circumstances, three major contexts need to be considered:

- ➡ The demographic and economic context, particularly population growth and market changes;
- ➡ The deepening opioid and mental health crises, and its impact on the ability to secure safe housing;
- ➡ The service context, both gaps in the current system and the capacity of providers.

### The demographic and economic context

Nanaimo is experiencing sustained population growth: between 2017 and 2035 the Nanaimo region is expected to grow by an additional 35,000 people.<sup>9</sup> This increase is most pronounced in the working age population, which tells us that many see Nanaimo as a place to come to when their communities experience economic distress. This and other data implies that the labour force in the community is both precarious and mobile, factors which increase the likelihood of episodic homelessness. All else being equal, an increase in population will itself create additional pressure on the service system. And the aging of the non-Indigenous population means that agencies will likely see an increasing number of older people on fixed incomes in the service stream.



While the percentage of international immigrants into Nanaimo (still largely drawn from Europe and Asia) has remained relatively stable in proportion to the total population, some agencies suggested that official statistics do not tell the whole story.

In the experience of agencies, Nanaimo is seeing more people coming from high conflict zones or escaping state-sponsored violence. The result is that housing vulnerability is accompanied, for some, by the trauma of forced dislocation, and of distrust of official systems. This is a familiar story in Indigenous communities, but it is now an issue in other populations as well. This follows a trend explored below: homelessness is becoming more complicated and more acute, and requires a different response than what was appropriate a decade ago.



### Market changes

As with other parts of southern B.C., housing prices in Nanaimo have risen sharply over the last five years, both absolutely and in relation to income. As the figure below shows, between 2015 and 2016 for instance, house prices grew by more than 14%.<sup>10</sup>

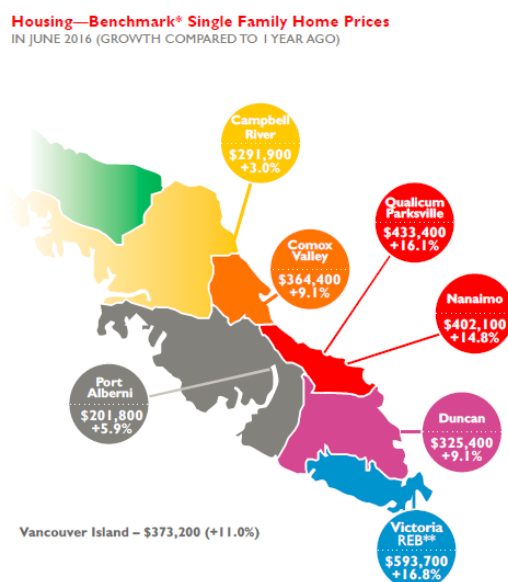


Figure 2: From the State of the Island Economic Report 2016

This increase in costs is also present in the rental market. Here, the problem of rising costs is exacerbated by low vacancy rates. Between 2014 and 2016, for instance, the average vacancy rate dropped from 2% to 1.5%.<sup>11</sup>

	Bachelor		1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3 Bedroom		Total	
	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016
Rents – Private	\$585	\$636	\$723	\$760	\$847	\$895	\$1,030	\$1,150	\$773	\$816
Vacancy Rates – Private	4.7%	2.3%	1.4%	0.9%	2.2%	2.2%	1.9%	2.5%	2.0%	1.5%

Table 1.

This tightening in the housing market is amplified by the fact that, while wages from employment are rising in Nanaimo, they continue to lag behind B.C. as a whole.<sup>12</sup> This constellation of market forces means that even as employment grows in Nanaimo the gap between income and the cost of housing is widening.

The gap between income and housing costs not only threatens those who are vulnerably housed. It also impacts service agencies, whose staff also face a widening difference between income and housing



costs. And there is no evidence to suggest that this trend will reverse, which risks creating a class of people whose access to housing is permanently tenuous.

### Increased acuity in addictions and mental health

A second consequential shift in the context for homelessness services is in changing patterns of drug use and in mental health issues.

In the consultations that led to this Action Plan there was consensus amongst providers that the homeless population and the vulnerably housed are experiencing much higher levels of acuity in mental health and drug use, particularly with respect to opioid use.

This experience is supported by the available evidence. According to the Coroners Service of British Columbia there were 24 deaths from suspected opioid use in Nanaimo from January 1, 2017 to July 31, 2017<sup>13</sup>. This is a fourfold increase since 2012. The same report indicates that the Central Island Health delivery area is in the top five health service areas with the highest rates of death from illicit opioid use.

Township	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Kamloops	11	7	7	10	2	5	8	7	7	42	27
Nanaimo	2	2	6	4	8	6	20	16	19	28	24
Maple Ridge	5	2	6	4	4	5	10	14	29	27	22
Langley	3	6	2	3	10	5	10	10	10	30	20

Table 3

These two environmental shifts—accelerating costs of rental housing against flat incomes, and sharp increases in the acuity of mental health and drug use issues—will present real service pressures over the next five years. These pressures will affect different parts of the system:

- ➡ Rental increases will impact the economically homeless, such as those people who are marginally attached to the workforce, but who may be otherwise ready to house;
- ➡ Increased acuity in addictions and mental health issues will create complicated cases. While the numbers in this group may be low, people experiencing mental health or opioid addictions are often difficult to house, and are more unstable when housed.

The social, economic, and demographic changes discussed here mean that gaps have appeared between the needs of homeless people and the current service system, a system which was designed for Nanaimo a decade ago. This position was confirmed in the consultations with service providers who also pointed to the unevenness in services to homelessness.

It is not only negative changes—such as the opioid crisis—that create the need to re-think the current system. It is also the positive impact of the services and housing provided over the last decade. The hard work of agencies and government has solved some problems and made others easier to address, and this Plan also tries to account for the changes introduced by a decade of interventions.



As discussed below, these changes and the positive impact of the work accomplished since 2008 mean that some shifts are required in the current system of services to ensure they remain effective.

### Service Context: Gap analysis

In developing this Plan, community agencies were invited to describe what needs to be changed in order to meet the needs of the homeless over the next five years. Their responses are as follows:

#### *The Housing Continuum*

A number of agencies talked about the need for a full “service continuum.” This refers to the need for a wide, but integrated range of housing and support options across a number of dimensions. Those services and options can be seen as moving from less intensive or intrusive (e.g., shelter beds) to more intensive housing and social supports, and finally to market housing as the preferred outcome to service interventions.



#### *Services as a flow or a network, not a box or silo*

It should be stressed that the continuum of services is just this: a continuum, not a set of self-contained activities. In a place like Nanaimo, service activities flow across and between social networks, overlapping and interacting with other services, people and places. While this Plan is organized around filling gaps in a service continuum, this ‘continuum’ is in truth an integrated flow of activities that all touch upon each other and that have multiple linkages backwards and forwards.

This is one of the strengths of Nanaimo as a mid-sized city: it is large enough to produce a comprehensive range of services and small enough to avoid producing isolated silos. It has not yet lost the ability to think about services, the people served, and the large community as a relational whole, and to see homelessness as structured by a range of cross cutting ties.

***“A strength of Nanaimo: large enough for a comprehensive range of services and small enough to avoid producing isolated silos”***

This description of services as woven into the fabric of the community has resonances with the way culture is understood in Indigenous communities. Culture is not an ‘activity’ or a service: it is rather an orientation and a resource that influences everything it touches. Accordingly, if this Action Plan speaks to ‘gaps’ in the system, these gaps should be understood as breakdowns or interstices in a web of relations or a network of overlapping service activities, rather than as an empty space between agency silos.





In the consultations, no consensus emerged as to a single point of change that should be at the core of the next five-year plan. The problem is diffused, nuanced, and systemic, not the result of a single major fault line. This is not surprising given the diversity of the community and its agencies.

Instead there was a variety of views about gaps in the current system, which, for respondents, occurred at a range of places along the continuum. The exception here is that there was broad agreement on the increasing acuity of addictions and mental health issues.

Gaps identified in the system of services include:

For shelters:

- lack of tools or capacity to reach those who access shelters only in cold weather or are otherwise service avoidant
- insufficient shelter beds due to continued pressure from population growth
- gaps in services to prevent street involvement
- lack of physical locations for homeless people to gather during the day



Material supports/rental supplements

- insufficient supports to those who are vulnerable from increasing rental costs

Supportive housing/behavioural supports

- inadequate supply of dry shelter or supportive housing suitable for those who need a drug-free or alcohol-free environment
- need for options outside of congregate housing, i.e., scattered site housing
- lack of transition support for acute mental health and addictions
- lack of interventions in early addictions pathways (13-16 year olds)
- lack of support for community and social integration
- gaps in the housing continuum between supportive housing and market rentals
- need for more cultural specific services, i.e., for Indigenous people

Rapid rehousing, and personal and service transitions

- lack of support for people making transitions out of care, or from institutions into more market-orientated housing

Market housing

- better landlord support, such as more ACT or HOST teams and other supports
- rent supplements for low-income people with moderate acuity



Sector capacity/coordination

- lack of dedicated staff person to provide coordination and support to providers
- wage lift for workers in the sector, who also face pressure from high housing costs
- need for a stronger data collection function across agencies to measure service pressures
- need for better access to or collation of outcomes measures
- lack of a service management function to help smooth service transitions for clients
- coordinated response to Supreme Court decisions, e.g., *Abbotsford (City) v Shantz*<sup>14</sup>







## Section 3: Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023

### Strategies to address homelessness

#### Overview

The Action Plan set out below moves Nanaimo towards a service system that addresses all relevant aspects of the service continuum. It is thus informed by the gaps in the continuum but also by changes in intensity produced by shifts in the social and economic context. Some issues are more pressing and others less so than they were in 2008.

An important finding should be emphasised: the review of the current system determined that the system in place is largely the right one: the strategies set out here are thus intended as revisions or additions to the current system, not as a replacement. The strategies aim to direct new resources and shape discretionary decision making.

*"Samaritan House is experiencing numbers like we have never seen ... in August our occupancy rates were 128% with women turned away 111 times."*

But the review also identified that new social stressors, including market changes and increasing addictions issues, have stretched the current system to the point where it risks losing the ability to manage the issues of homelessness. At a minimum, agencies risk losing the limited, but still real broad public support that exists for their work.

In light of the gaps identified in the consultations, the research on homelessness, and the socio-demographic trends facing Nanaimo, this Action Plan has identified eight strategic directions that should form the basis for the delivery of services over the next five years.

These are:

#### **Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the edge of the shelter system**

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options;
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service avoidant individuals
- An intervention strategy to interrupt the pathways leading to street

#### **Strategy 2: Create a day space/Drop in facility**

- Allow the users of the drop in space to control some aspects of the space.

#### **Strategy 3: Remap social networks to broaden clients' social worlds**

- Shift social integration activities to ensure the homeless are connected to wider social networks, especially networks not derived from the social services sector; for instance, to sports leagues, or professional networks.



#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

- Provide incremental increases in rent supplements
- Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development
- Develop affordable housing in the city and the region

#### **Strategy 5: Supportive Housing**

- Add to the number of dry housing units available, develop scattered site housing.
- Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.
- Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.

#### **Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

- Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.
- Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points
- Ensure that some of the support for transitions is aimed at the early stage, i.e., has a prevention focus

#### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

- Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues
- Integrate an 'acute lens' with transition management.

#### **Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity**

- Implement a half-time coordinator position, to be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.

#### **Strategy 9: Considerations in Serving Indigenous people**

- Integrating an 'Indigenous lens' in services that flow from this Action Plan.
- Appreciating the unique historical and cultural contexts of Indigenous communities.
- Seeing support for Indigenous people and agencies as a form of reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

#### **Strategy 10: Prevention through agency coordination**

- Homelessness service providers should coordinate on an annual basis with other agencies in Nanaimo that provide prevention services.





## Discussion of recommended strategies

### Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the edge of the shelter system

The current strategy for chronic or street-entrenched homelessness puts shelters at its centre. This is for good reason, since shelter beds are essential harm reduction tools, help connect people to other services, and are heavily utilized. But a review of gaps at the shelter end of the service continuum suggests that a shift is required, along three lines:

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options;
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service-avoidant individuals;
- An intervention strategy to interrupt the pathways leading to street involvement.

In public discussions of homelessness, shelters are highly visible symbols of the service system, acting as a proxy for the overall gap between the needs of the homeless and the limited supply of services or support. They thus enjoy a broad measure of public support as a visible manifestation of the community's commitment to ending homelessness.

***"A review of gaps for the shelter end of the service continuum suggests that a shift is required."***

And shelters are well-utilized; indeed, the supply of shelter beds in Nanaimo falls short of the demand. More than 3700 people used the Unitarian Church Shelter over the 2016-17 winter months, well above capacity. Other shelters such as Oceanside report 100% usage in January and February 2017.<sup>15</sup> Shelter services will need to form a core part of the service system into the foreseeable future. The Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS), for instance, comes to this same conclusion in their 2014 report, the *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*.

The *Summary* comments, in a discussion of recent expansions to supportive housing in the City:

*While these new additions to the continuum have succeeded in housing people, many of whom were formerly homeless, the need for emergency shelter and related services remains high. We therefore assume that emergency shelter will continue to be a need in the community for the foreseeable future....<sup>16</sup>*

In line with the ICCS's report, this Action Plan predicts continued high utilization of shelter beds. All things being equal, the pressure on the shelter system has a direct relationship to the continued creation of new supportive housing options. If new units are made available over the term of this Action Plan, then shelter utilization may remain flat or increase at the level of population increases. If the creation of new supportive housing remains flat or declines, there is likely to be increased pressure on available shelter beds.

Given this, the Action Plan recommends continued increases in the number of shelter beds to keep pace, at a minimum, with Nanaimo's growing population.



➤ **Strategy 1.1: Continued incremental increase in the capacity of the shelter system; at a minimum, to keep pace with increases in Nanaimo's population.**

While the creation of new shelter beds to keep pace with Nanaimo's increasing population is important, a focus on shelter capacity obscures two other, less noticeable gaps: lack of strong support for those who avoid shelters or are otherwise service averse; and lack of effective tactics for interrupting the pathways leading to street involvement.

On the first issue, there is a gap in the capacity to help those who, for various reasons, rarely access shelters<sup>17</sup> or don't actively seek other services (outside of e.g., food banks<sup>18</sup>). Given the make-up of the street-involved population, this means more outreach and support to older men, many of whom are Indigenous (24% in 2016).<sup>19</sup> Some may be suitable for a Housing First approach, but the intent of the strategy is to reach people who are not interested or able to move up the continuum. The 'service' here might be limited to social integration, material supports, and medical care.

➤ **Strategy 1.2: Increase outreach to the homeless who have little or no contact with the system of supports.**

There is a second gap for both those who avoid shelters and for those who do not progress to other services even when they access shelters and material supports: Nanaimo lacks an adequate process for intervening in the early stages of street involvement, before service avoidance or 'shelter only' patterns of homelessness become habitual.

This intervention would largely be aimed at young adults or older youth, but in any event its purpose is to interrupt the activities, social networks and pathways of street involvement. This service should not be confined to 'residents' of Nanaimo, since it may apply to people who are transient and are vulnerable because they have few or no other networks.

➤ **Strategy 1.3: Develop an intervention to disrupt street involvement.**

This strategy integrates with Strategy 5, below, which calls for better management of transitions (life transitions, and service changes) experienced by homeless people. Shelters represent one such transition point, and Strategy 1.3 seeks to divert people at the critical stage when they enter or exit a shelter system.

+



## Strategy 2: Create a day space/drop-in facility

From the perspective of homeless community members, the current system presents an obvious gap: a place to stay the night, but no place to go during the day. This absence is also noticeable from the perspective of harm reduction, given that the persistent wearing out of the body is one of the defining condition of homelessness. In the absence of a dedicated drop-in centre, homeless citizens end up in public or semi-public settings that are not conducive to their needs.

Notably, in the 2016 *Point in Time Count*, the majority of shelter residents listed ‘the library’ as the service they used the most, second only to the food bank. Adopting a strategy which responds to this lack of day spaces goes towards treating the homeless as whole people, not just people without homes, who deserve public settings and communal spaces that account for their unique needs and social relations.

*“...the persistent wearing out of the body is one of the defining condition of homelessness.”*

Drop-in centres are a well-known service, with visible benefits: mitigating the harms of outdoor living; strengthening social relations; allowing referrals and engagement, amongst others (Our Place in Victoria, for instance, provides a mail and messaging service for those without addresses). While there is some capacity for this in Nanaimo, what is available is not adequate to meet the need.

It should be noted that a drop-in centre has an ambivalent relationship to a Housing First framework: it may enable other services but it not a direct pathway to housing. This may make a dedicated day space harder to finance, but it also implies that it does not need to adhere to the principle of ‘low-barrier’.

Further, it needs to be pointed out that some service providers found day spaces present challenges in maintaining safety and order, especially given the increase in acute drug use and the behaviours associated with acute addictions or opioid use.

### ➤ Strategy 2.1: Develop day spaces/drop-in centre facilities for the homeless and street involved

One innovation to this model is to give over some control of the space to some of its users. A central and defining feature of homelessness is that the homeless lack any effective control over the services they receive or the rules that govern their use of communal spaces. Allowing users to control some aspects of the space can produce a qualitatively different experience for clients, affirming their agency and capacity rather than controlling it.

### ➤ Strategy 2.2: Allow the users of the drop-in space to control some aspects of the space.



## Strategy 3: Remapping social networks



In the consultations, multiple agencies mentioned that they saw the benefit of more attention to the social needs of the homeless, for instance, in bolstering the often fragile support networks of the homeless, and in reducing social isolation.

But there is a gap in this process of socialization support. Much of the current work is still focused on shoring up existing relationships the homeless have, such as family. But just as frequently, the work aims to link them to networks or social worlds connected to agencies.

We often assume that being homeless entails having little or no social network or a cramped communal life, but this is not true. To the contrary, many homeless people are embedded into local circuits and patterns of interaction; to others in their situation, to the police, to service providers, to the public. The vulnerability of the homeless means that they are defined by their relationships more than most citizens. Isolation is a strategy of the well-off.

The difficulty is that those relationships are not always productive; some are limiting, or even hostile; others may be supportive but don't offer a path into the world of stable employment and housing. This is one limitation to the social networks generated by congregate housing. They limit social isolation but don't always increase social productivity.

In contrast, this Strategy recommends that the homeless be better connected to organic social networks that are not mediated by agencies or populated by other vulnerable people.

Here, as is often the case, we can learn from Indigenous people. The case of Salish Lelum provides an illustration of integrating the homeless into broader community relationships. At Tillicum Lelum the residents are encouraged to create relationships with Elders and others to create positive social networks that span the generations and that emphasise cultural knowledge and community ties.

Another example, one that has been used successfully in Vancouver, might be in encouraging clients to become involved in sports teams, which are often linked into community networks that could be of benefit to homeless individuals. The goal is to support people in experiencing social worlds that are an alternative to the street, and to gain some entry to those worlds.

Accordingly, the Action Plan recommends increased attention to ensuring community members are integrated into social networks and local relations outside of the ones with their homeless peers or others in the service system. The Plan suggests a pilot project which emphasizes not expanding social integration but shifting it so that it connects better with networks outside of the social services system.

This strategy, and the case of Salish Lelum, supports an interesting finding in the ICCS *Summary Report*, which, citing research from the Vancouver Island Health Authority, argued spiritual support is a gap in the current shelter service system, which if remedied could provide psychosocial benefits:

***“A pilot project to explore the effectiveness in such links (to ... the community) in overall stability is warranted and overdue.”***

*“Currently there is no funding for linkages to spiritual communities and organizations in the community. A pilot project to explore the effectiveness in such links in overall stability is warranted and overdue”. (ICCS Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter Services in Nanaimo; p.18).*



- **Strategy 3.1: align social integration activities with the goal of shifting people into specific community networks or circles.**



#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

As noted, the system of services faces serious pressures from shifts in the housing and labour markets, in particular, rising housing costs in the South Island, low vacancy rates and the precariousness of the labour market.

These developments increase the number of people who are vulnerably housed because of low income, and also increase the costs of supportive housing. As well, high housing costs make it more difficult for agencies to recruit and retain staff.

This problem of affordability clearly overlaps with the focus of Nanaimo's *Affordable Housing Strategy*. Some of the response to this issue should come through that strategy.

##### ***Rental Supplements***

But some of the issue falls directly under the homelessness umbrella. Accordingly, this Action Plan anticipates that, at a minimum, rental supplements will need to keep pace with these market pressures. In the short term, rental supplements are a cost effective prevention measure: they can sometimes block the downward spiral where financial vulnerability results in episodic or long term homelessness. But over the long term, rent supplements are hard to sustain as a strategy, since they are always at risk of being reduced or capped as a budget item. They should act, as the term implies, as a supplement to the steady creation of affordable or supportive housing, and/or to labour market attachment.

*"... over the long term, rent supplements are hard to sustain as a strategy, since they are always at risk of being reduced or capped as a budget item."*

Since the issue, at least for some, is connected to the labour market, members of the Coalition should seek a more active working relationship with the employment side of Service Canada or the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to try to manage the pressures on this budget. This can, in part, be achieved by developing the employability of recipients. In sum; create a labour market solution to a housing market problem.

- **Strategy 4.1: Provide incremental increases in rent supplements and**
- **Strategy 4.2 Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development.**





## Strategy 5: Supportive Housing

Over the last decade, Nanaimo has built considerable capacity in supportive housing, and managed to achieve some shelter and emergency bed expansion.

Nonetheless, some gaps in the provision of supportive housing remain. First, the emphasis on low- or no-barrier housing that comes with a Housing First approach means that there are fewer options for community members who need or want an alcohol- and drug-free environment.

Second, the current supportive housing stock in Nanaimo favours congregate housing over, e.g., scattered sites, largely because congregate is more cost effective and easier to support with services. There are exceptions to this: rent supplements, for instance, are largely scattered across the private market. But this preference for facilities means that the homeless or vulnerably housed are not dispersed across the community, which means that it is harder for them to become part of the community or to be seen as community members.

Finally, there is a serious gap in the continuum of housing options. The gap is this: there is no intermediate step between supportive housing and market housing that does not depend on the goodwill of benevolent landlords. While the ACT Team and other providers offer support to landlords, this service is limited and largely confined to mental health, addictions, or behavioural disorders.

### Solutions

There is no simple solution to the gaps identified here. Some steps in the direction of closing these gaps might include adding to the number of dry beds available in the community; developing some scattered site options, perhaps through alignment with the affordable housing strategy, which has more incentives for this model; and trying to identify a 'close-to-market' housing option that sits between government-subsidized congregate housing and the open market.

*"... this preference for facilities means that the homeless or vulnerably housed are not dispersed across the community, with the result that it is harder for them to become part of the community."*

#### ➤ **Strategy 5.1: Add to the number of dry housing units available, develop scattered site housing.**

Also, some respondents argued that a flaw of supportive housing is that it was not 'fine grained' enough. That is, there were relatively large steps between, for instance, shelters and a 24-hour supported facility. Or, to take another example, between a staffed housing resource and the private market. The result is that clients sometimes end up in resources that are more (or less) intensive than they require, with the result that they are under- or over-served, and sometimes stay in a place that is a 'wrong fit' just because the next step is just out of reach.

Accordingly, the Action Plan suggests that more incremental steps be developed within resources to allow for better movement of people to their optimum placement.





**Strategy 5.2: Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.**

Finally, agencies argued that we are not fully utilizing the resources of the private rental market.

For instance, consider a house which has a vacant suite or a room that could be rented, in which the owners are 'casual landlords', who are not driven by the strict imperatives of the market. Such owners might be persuaded to offer their places up at below full market price for the greater good.

In Vancouver, the pressures of house prices mean these owners are rapidly going extinct. But in Nanaimo, with its more relaxed approach and longer history of collective action, this is a real possibility. But currently, there is no method to mobilize those people to contribute or consider how they might help in some way with their unused housing asset.

➤ **Strategy 5.3: Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.**



**Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

One of the interesting features of homelessness services is the importance placed on transitions. The hoped for move from subsidized to market housing is one example, but there are many more, such as the personal transition from 'shelter user' to 'tenant', or the personal and service transition between institutional and non-institutional settings.

Given their centrality, it is surprising that a focus on transitions is not more prominent in homelessness plans. In contrast to the majority of homelessness service plans, this report recommends funding transition management as a broad strategic priority. 'Transition management' here means services and activities that support clients at key transition points, such as:

- Moving from institutional care to supported housing
- Aging out of MCFD care
- Moving from drug experimentation to enduring opioid addictions
- Moving from episodic homelessness to street involvement
- Age-related movement into increased willingness to accept services and make lifestyle changes.

➤ **Strategy 6.1: Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.**



The Action Plan recommends that increased resources be dedicated to managing transitions in the lives of homeless people. One possible option is to adopt a modified version of Rapid Rehousing. Currently, Rapid Rehousing is:

“... a similar intervention to Housing First, but is less intense, and is intended for individuals and households with moderate acuity. Supports are delivered through Intensive Case Management for a time-limited period. There is the general expectation that at some point in the future, the household will be stably housed and be able to live without supports.”<sup>20</sup>

The modification would be to shift the program to attend more closely to transition points in community members who engage with service providers. This implies some coordination across programs, and between agencies given that transitions frequently occur across and between services.

➤ **Strategy 6.2: Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points.**



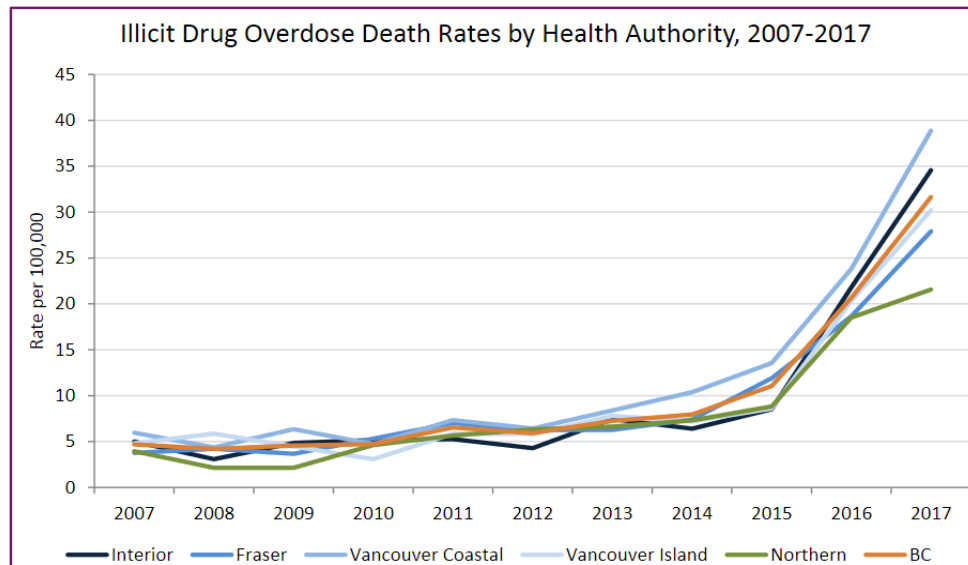
### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

The interviews for this Action Plan found consensus on one point: homelessness is becoming harder, more injurious, deeper, more complex, in a word, more acute (exemplified in the opioid crisis).

This problem raises difficult choices for service providers, since dealing with these cases is expensive and complex. The nature and usage of opioids today also produces behaviours that stretch the limits of willing landlords, and demand significant, repeated resources from agencies.

But this is a problem that cannot be avoided, since, in addition to the obvious human costs, it poses a risk to the system of services if left too long. The public and political nature of the opioid crisis also means that elected officials will insist on a response, and may well direct one if it does not come from service providers.

The Action Plan recommends integrating this issue with the transition management strategy described above. This ‘transition management with an acute lens’ would see funding be directed towards managing acute cases (short term), or increasing capacity to intervene early in the pathways to acute outcomes, whether mental health or addictions.



A second gap that was identified in this issue was the lack of interventions in the early stages of addictions, before drug use became entrenched or created irreversible effects. While this is consistent with the evidence about addictions pathways, and may be effective, its connection to homelessness involves a long and complicated chain of causality, and may be difficult to establish such a service when resources are needed for issues with much clearer, direct connections. This may be a case for collaboration with Island Health, and the new Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

*“the current arrangement is not sufficient, since agencies end up picking up the work of coordination without any resources.”*

- **Strategy 7.1: Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues.**
- **Strategy 7.2: Integrate an ‘acute lens’ with transition management.**

### Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity

The argument for increased steering and coordinating capacity for a system of services is obvious. But what level of coordination?

What emerged in the consultations is that Nanaimo is now complex and large enough that this capacity is more valuable than it was in the past. This coordinating/steering capacity could be less formal than the more centralized structure operating in the City of Victoria; Nanaimo, for instance, does not require a centralized intake process. But ‘informal’ does not mean invisible or voluntary.

The current arrangement is clearly not sufficient, since agencies end up picking up the work of coordination without any resources. This gap limits the effectiveness of the Coalition, hampering the



ability of the Coalition or agencies to pursue more effective partnerships, or to develop more effective, shared systems of tracking outcomes or monitoring service utilization.

There was substantial agreement that Nanaimo could benefit from a more robust capacity to coordinate between providers and other stakeholders, and to provide a centralized steering capacity.

- **Strategy 8.1: Implement a half-time position, to be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.**

One of the problems in managing services in a community like Nanaimo is the lack of good data that captures activities across services and organizations and coordination between services. This 'gap' occurs at three levels:

- Reliable, current information about service utilization and service pressures. It would be helpful to know how increases in shelter use impact the rest of the services system, or if we are witnessing a steady increase in requests from older women experiencing poverty. This would help align resources with service pressures.
- Some form of outcome tracking, so that funders can rationalize their allocations, and agencies can determine which interventions are effective;
- Some case management capacity to coordinate across services and agencies.

- **Strategy 8.2: Implement a half-time position that can coordinate data gathering and analysis, and help with complex case management issues across agencies.**





## Strategy 9: An Indigenous-specific approach

### *A shared fate...*

There is an important dimension to homelessness in Nanaimo that requires careful consideration: its impact on the Indigenous people who call Nanaimo home.

Like many other people, Indigenous community members face serious challenges that can lead to homelessness: precarious income, high rents, limited shelter beds, social stigma, increasing acuity in addictions, and the many other issues that make finding and keeping housing difficult.

As a result of this shared experience and common circumstances, much of this Action Plan is relevant to the needs of Indigenous individuals, agencies, and communities. To that extent, this Plan is an Indigenous plan that also applies to non-Indigenous people and organizations.

### *And a unique history...*

But there are critical differences in Indigenous homelessness.

First, and most importantly, Indigenous people are never without a 'home,' in the sense that they retain their spiritual ties to their territories and, as Indigenous people, always know where their home is, even if they live away from their territory and even when their ties to that territory are weakened by the forces of colonization and historical trauma. Indigenous people are often without a roof over their head, but they are never, strictly speaking, homeless.

But as we know, Indigenous people in Nanaimo also face additional issues which arise from the unique historical, cultural, and economic situation of Indigenous communities in Canada today. Some of those problems, such as the lingering effects of colonization or the stubbornness of racist beliefs about Indigenous people, make it considerably more challenging for Indigenous people who are homeless. But some of those unique circumstances, such as the role of extended family networks, or the vitality of communal cultural practices, provide important resources that communities can use to mitigate the harms of homelessness for Indigenous people.

For instance, elsewhere in this Action Plan, we describe how the Tillicum Lelum housing complex works to integrate Indigenous homeless people with others in their community, such as Elders, in a way that strengthens their cultural relationships and eases their path out of homelessness. Non-Indigenous society can learn much from these initiatives, which play on the unique strengths of Indigenous life, but can be applied to non-Indigenous circumstances.

But it is also necessary to attend to the very real difficulties faced by Indigenous people, and the significant impact this 'Indigenous difference' makes to service delivery and to the strategies used by the community to end homelessness.

It is not so simple to summarize these points in a short document. The rich and complex history of Indigenous people in Canada and their relationship to 'home' requires more than a few paragraphs in a report, and so this Action Plan encourages readers to immerse themselves in this topic, to learn from



Indigenous people themselves about what it means to 'have a home', or to be dispossessed of one, and what steps are effective in helping Indigenous people secure safe, affordable housing.<sup>21</sup>

But some important points are well known, and can guide the strategies set out in this Action Plan.

- ➔ Many Indigenous people and communities struggle with the traumatic after-effects of colonization. Providing an effective service requires an understanding of this dynamic and of some of the methods used to help Indigenous people to overcome this legacy in their personal lives and in their relationships;
- ➔ Cultural work, and the task of reconnecting people to their communities or to the local Indigenous community, are vital steps in Indigenous therapeutics. It cannot be emphasised enough that this activity should be clearly and firmly supported in the funding and program guidelines used to serve Indigenous people;
- ➔ The demographic and economic profile of Indigenous communities is different than the overall population. Indigenous communities in Canada are younger than the average, have larger families, and are more likely to share housing spaces. The income profile is also different: even off-reserve, in urban Nanaimo where the differences are smaller, Indigenous people make less income and experience longer periods of unemployment than their non-Indigenous neighbours;

As noted above, these points can find expression in each of the strategies in this Action Plan. It is worth reiterating, though, one specific strategy discussed above, which is the need to provide better support to homeless people who avoid services outside of cold weather shelters and food banks. This group is disproportionately made up of older Indigenous men, whose needs are not directly addressed in family- and youth-based models common in Indigenous programming.

**“The 12 dimensions (of Indigenous homelessness) underscore the loss of relationships endured by Indigenous Peoples through the processes of Canadian colonization and the disconnection from the Indigenous understanding of home as All My Relations.”**

#### Indigenous holism and the self

Indigenous communities provide a good example for non-Indigenous people in their understanding of homelessness as full community members, not just people defined by their lack of something. In Indigenous communities, even the homeless can inherit songs, own dances, speak and be spoken to in Big House ceremonies, participate in community decisions, and be known for their connections to their ancestors and their current relatives. Indigenous people are understood in all their dimensions, in a holistic framework, which makes it easier to avoid a narrow, and ultimately limiting, view of homeless people as defined by their housing situation.



## Housing as reconciliation

In operationalizing this Action Plan, we should understand ending Indigenous homelessness in the following way: as an act of reconciliation and as a means to undo the harms of colonization.

That is, the strategies recommended in this Plan—if given life and purpose with Indigenous individuals and agencies—should have the effect of meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 2015 call for action, in which non-Indigenous people work to “create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes... between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”<sup>22</sup>



## Strategy 10: Coordination as Prevention; networking with other agencies

Much of this Action Plan has been concerned with strategies with a direct connection to homelessness or homelessness services. But the work of agencies serving the homeless depends on a whole series of other services that work in the background to prevent or mitigate the circumstances that produce homelessness. One obvious example, mentioned above, is programs for labour market attachment.

But there are a number of other services that help stabilize families or individuals or try to influence their long term development in positive ways. One gap identified in the analysis for this Action Plan was the need to coordinate more closely between homelessness service providers and others.

- **Strategy 10.1: The Coalition host an annual discussion/event between homelessness service providers and other support agencies in the community.**





## Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, Nanaimo has developed a series of strategies to respond to contemporary forms of homelessness, some of which have been discussed in this Action Plan. Those strategies have enabled the community to generate a reasonably robust set of services and interventions that either prevent homelessness from occurring, or mitigate its harms for those who, for whatever reason, cannot secure stable, safe, affordable housing.

The analysis undertaken for this Plan suggests that while the current suite of strategies and services goes a considerable distance towards meeting the needs of the homeless, some critical dimensions of homelessness have changed. The strategic shifts recommended here attempt to account for those changes and to help the community fill in the remaining gaps in the system of supports for those experiencing difficulty with securing housing.

### *A question of voice....*

One final observation about homelessness in Nanaimo needs to be made. This is the possibility, or the imperative, that Nanaimo develop a unique 'voice' about homelessness in Nanaimo and the region. Here, we step outside strategies and services, and remind ourselves that one purpose of a planning process is to help the community and its agencies develop a sense of themselves as a collective; a community coming together around shared goals and shared commitment.

But this 'shared sense' is, inevitably, local and specific. The way in which Nanaimo responds to homelessness, in its public pronouncements, in the issues that engage or enrage citizens, in the terms it uses to discuss the homeless; all this will differ in Nanaimo than in Vancouver or Prince George.

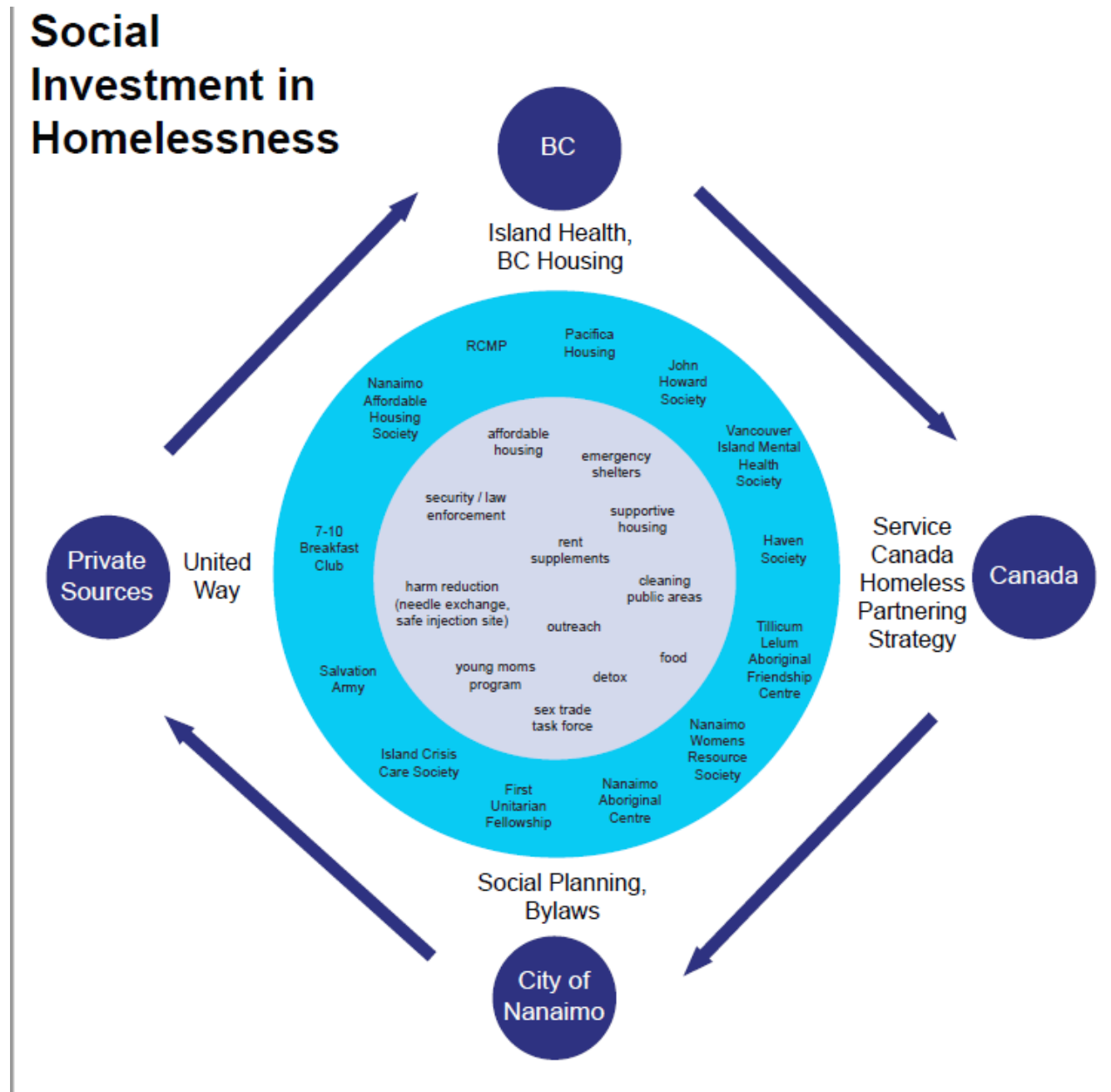
It is beyond the scope of this Plan to articulate that 'voice' and describe how it reflects Nanaimo as a distinct community. But it is worth noting that one can sense the difference by listening closely to, for instance, the discussions in Vancouver, which return repeatedly to the role of off-shore money in the metro Vancouver real estate market, when Vancouverites are not fixated on resolving trauma in the Downtown Eastside.

Or, to take Victoria, which is concerned with the position of the city in the world tourism economy or as a model for progressive mid-sized cities. It is fair to say that Nanaimo does not make these points the centre of its public dialogue on homelessness. One of the recommendations of this Action Plan, then, is that the Coalition members and the Coalition as a collective devote at least some time and attention to thinking about and understanding the specific, local, and very 'Nanaimo' (or 'Nanaimo and Oceanside') way that the community understands and responds to homelessness.





## APPENDIX A: INVESTMENT IN NANAIMO FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES



Appendix image courtesy of City of Nanaimo social planning staff.



## APPENDIX B: NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION MEMBERS

The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is made up of non-profit societies, representatives from the three levels of government, faith groups and community members who have an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness:

- AIDS Vancouver Island
- BC Housing
- City of Nanaimo
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo
- Haven Society
- Island Crisis Care Society
- Island Health
- Men's Resource Centre
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- Nanaimo Region John Howard Society
- Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- Pacifica Housing
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Service Canada
- Salvation Army
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- United Way
- Vancouver Island Mental Health Society
- Widsten Property Management
- 7-10 Breakfast Club
- Citizens at-large



## References

- Clapham, D. (2003). "Pathways Approaches to Homelessness Research." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 13(2): 119-127.
- Horn, C. and P. Kerrigan. (2006). "Homelessness Amongst Aboriginal Mothers in Vancouver's Eastside: A Research Strategy and Some Initial Findings," Paper presented at the Paper presented at Collective Visions: Dialogue on Aboriginal Policy and Research, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Jacobs, K., J. Kemeny, T. Manzi, S. Hutson and D. Clapham. (1999). *Homelessness: Public Policies and Private Troubles*.
- Jones, G. (1993). *Young People in and out of the Housing Market*.
- Larsen, L., E. Poortinga and D. E. Hurdle. (2004). "Sleeping Rough: Exploring the Differences between Shelter-Using and Non-Shelter-Using Homeless Individuals." *Environment and Behavior* 36(4): 578-591.
- Maguire, N. J., R. Johnson, P. Vostanis, H. Keats and R. E. Remington. (2009). *Homelessness and Complex Trauma: A Review of the Literature*.
- McNaughton, C. (2008). *Transitions through Homelessness: Lives on the Edge*.
- Our Home, Our Future: Projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need, Regional District of Nanaimo to 2036, BCNPHA, September 2012
- Quantz, D. and J. Frankish. (2002). *Homelessness Research in the Greater Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward*. Vancouver, Institute of Health Promotion, University of British Columbia: 1-90.
- Seal, M. (2005). *Resettling Homeless People*.
- Somerville, P. (2013). "Understanding Homelessness." *Housing, Theory and Society* 30(4): 384-415.
- Stockley, D., D. Canter and D. Bishopp. (1993). *Young People on the Move*.
- Watson, S. and H. Austerberry. (1986). *Housing and Homelessness: A Feminist Perspective*.
- Wente, M. (2000). *Urban Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.
- Woodward, J. (2002). *Research Project on Homelessness in Vancouver*. Vancouver, Greater Vancouver Regional District: 1-233.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca) 2016 Census. Accessed September 6, 2017 at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016>

<sup>2</sup> Data accessed from BC Stats, *BC Community Profiles, Nanaimo*, August 23, 2017, at [https://www.welcomebc.ca/getmedia/85f07785-204d-4daa-9d9e-0fd070c9dfc6/Nanaimo\\_CY.pdf.aspx](https://www.welcomebc.ca/getmedia/85f07785-204d-4daa-9d9e-0fd070c9dfc6/Nanaimo_CY.pdf.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, 2016. *"Continuing and Shifting Patterns in Nanaimo's Homelessness Population Based on the February 9, 2016 Point in Time Count"*.

<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) defines 'homelessness' as: "...a situation where an individual or family is without stable, permanent, or appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire it as a result of systemic or societal barriers that include the lack of affordable and appropriate housing, an individual's or household's financial circumstances, or because of their mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination..." See the CAEH report on the *"State of Homelessness in Canada 2013"*. (Toronto: Stephen Gaetz, Donaldson, Jesse; Richter, Tim; & Gulliver, Tanya (2013)). The CAEH draw their definition from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network.

<sup>5</sup> 'Absolute homelessness' included the unsheltered homeless, and those at emergency, extreme weather shelters, or transition houses.

<sup>6</sup> The Point in Time Count occurred at a time (February) when homelessness is less visible, and does not include people who are vulnerably housed.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/social-culture-environment/community-social-service-programs/response-to-homelessness.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The interviews were in-person and used a semi-structured question format. In this method, key questions are used to help define the topics to be explored while allowing the interviewees to explore or elaborate ideas or issues that are important to them. The interviews were conversational in nature and conducted in the workplaces of the respondents, and typically involved between one and four representatives of the organization. The results were codified and then analyzed in terms of themes, implied or explicit gaps, schemas, networks and topics. The questions were structured, in part, to elicit feedback on gaps in the current system of services in Nanaimo. Anonymized summaries of the interviews are available from Springbok Management Services upon request. Please send requests for information to: P.O. Box 38004, Victoria, BC, V8W 3N2, or a [charleshorn@shaw.ca](mailto:charleshorn@shaw.ca).

<sup>9</sup> Data from BC Stats population estimates, accessed August 22, 2017, at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

<sup>10</sup> Data taken from the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board, accessed September 2, 2017, at [http://www.vireb.com/assets/uploads/08aug\\_17\\_vireb\\_stats\\_package\\_64292.pdf](http://www.vireb.com/assets/uploads/08aug_17_vireb_stats_package_64292.pdf) See also the discussion in the *State of the Island Economic Report, 2016*, p.41.

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Housing Market Information: Rental Market Report British Columbia Highlights, 2016. [https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487\\_2016\\_A01.pdf](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487_2016_A01.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> See the data analysis at Economic Development Nanaimo: <http://www.investnanaimo.com/income-1/>. Median income for Nanaimo reported in the 2016 Census was \$28,200, BC's median income was \$31,713. Source data is the 2016 Census and Canada Revenue Agency. See also <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>



---

<sup>13</sup> British Columbia Coroner's Office, *Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths in BC January 1, 2007 – July 31, 2017, September 2017*. <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> *Abbotsford (City) v Shantz*, 2015 BCSC 190.

<sup>15</sup> See "Capacity Woes continue at Nanaimo Homeless Shelters", *Nanaimo News Now*, accessed September 2, 2017 at <http://nanaimonewsnow.com/article/539621/capacity-woes-continue-nanaimo-homeless-shelters>. See also the Island Crisis Care Society and Richard Powell (2014); *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*.

<sup>16</sup> *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Larsen, L., E. Poortinga and D. E. Hurdle. (2004). "Sleeping Rough: Exploring the Differences between Shelter-Using and Non-Shelter-Using Homeless Individuals." *Environment and Behavior* 36(4): 578-591.

<sup>18</sup> The 2016 *Nanaimo Point in Time Count* reports that almost 60% of shelter users also used the food bank, and 49% used the hot meal program.

<sup>19</sup> See the 2016 *Nanaimo Point in Time Count*, Figure 22 and Table 1, p.22.

<sup>20</sup> See the National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-rehousing-a-history-and-core-components/>

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion of Indigenous homelessness at: <http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHIndigenousHomelessnessDefinition.pdf>

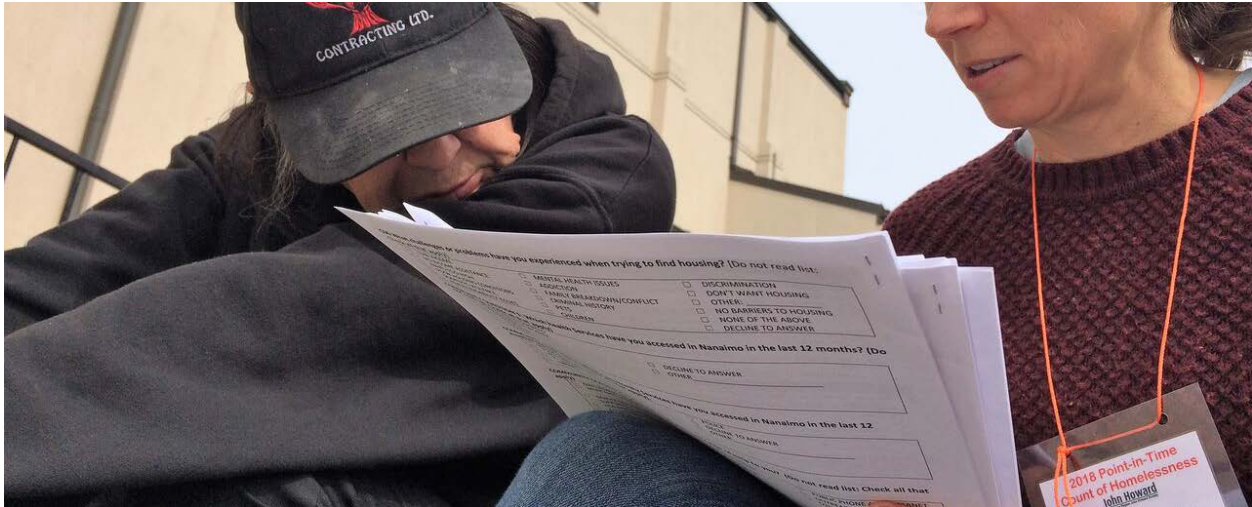
<sup>22</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, released at the TRC Closing Event, 2015.

---

# HOMELESSNESS IN NANAIMO

## EVERYONE COUNTS:

### 2018 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT REPORT



**PREPARED FOR THE NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION**

**MAY 29, 2018**



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition .....	3
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Absolute Homelessness: Nanaimo 2016 - 2018 .....	5
<b>Context .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Limitations of the PiT Count .....	8
Magnet event .....	8
Volunteers .....	9
Survey locations .....	9
Structure of the survey .....	10
Understanding enumeration .....	10
<i>Where are you staying tonight?</i> .....	10
 <b>SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 1: Responses to HPS-standardized questions.....</b>	 <b>12</b>
<i>What gender do you identify with?</i> .....	12
2018: Gender / age distribution .....	12
<i>How would you describe your sexual orientation?</i> .....	13
<i>What family members are staying with you tonight?</i> .....	13
Duration of homelessness.....	14
<i>In total how much time have you been homeless in the last 12 months?</i> .....	14
<i>In total how many different times have you experienced homelessness over the past year?</i> .....	14
<i>How long have you been in Nanaimo?</i> .....	15
2018 Breakdown: Length of time in Nanaimo .....	15
<i>What age were you when you first experienced homelessness? (2018)</i> .....	15
<i>Have you ever had any service in the Canadian Military or RCMP?</i> .....	15
<i>Do you identify as Indigenous or have Indigenous ancestry?</i> .....	16
<i>Have you stayed in an emergency shelter in the last year? (2018)</i> .....	16
<i>What are your sources of income?</i> .....	17
<i>What happened that caused you to lose your housing most recently?</i> .....	17
<i>What challenges or problems have you experienced when trying to find housing? (2018)</i> .....	18
 <b>SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 2: Responses to community-specific questions .....</b>	 <b>19</b>
<i>What community services have you used in the last 12 months?</i> .....	19
<i>What health services have you used in the last 12 months?</i> .....	19
<i>What other services would be helpful to you?</i> .....	20
Mental and physical health .....	20
Physical health.....	21
Mental health.....	21
<i>What are some of the ways we can solve homelessness?</i> .....	21
 <b>SUMMARY &amp; CONCLUSIONS OF THE NANAIMO 2018 PIT COUNT .....</b>	 <b>22</b>
<b>Appendix A: Definitions of homelessness .....</b>	<b>24</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Every day in Nanaimo there are people experiencing homelessness and the number is dramatically rising. There are many misconceptions about who they are (“they all suffer from addictions or mental illness”), where they come from (“they aren’t from here” or “they are shipped in from another province or big city”) and why they are homeless (“they don’t want to work or prefer to live outside”). Some have been living on the streets for a long time while others have only recently become homeless because of the lack of affordable housing and the inability to pay for food and rent, etc. Each and every one of them has a powerful story and each one deserves a safe, affordable place to live.

Just as there are misconceptions about those in our community experiencing homeless, there are misconceptions that nothing is being done to help. This 2018 Point in Time Count report is just one of the ways the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is working to understand who is homeless and to collect the data that will help drive solutions.

### Who is the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition?

The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is made up of non-profit societies, representatives from the three levels of government, faith groups and community members who have an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness:

- AIDS Vancouver Island
- BC Housing
- City of Nanaimo
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo
- Haven Society
- Island Crisis Care Society
- Island Health
- Men's Resource Centre
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- Nanaimo Region John Howard Society
- Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- Pacifica Housing
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Service Canada
- Salvation Army
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- United Way Central & Northern Vancouver Island
- Vancouver Island Mental Health Society
- Widsten Property Management
- 7-10 Breakfast Club
- Citizens at-large



### When Did the Count Take Place?

On April 18th, 2018, Nanaimo conducted the seventh homelessness count. The last count was held in 2016.

### How Was the Count Organized?

This was the second year that the Government of Canada funded a nationwide Point-in-Time count (PiT Count) through Service Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. United Way Central & Northern Vancouver Island received the funding and managed the project along with the PiT Count committee of the Homelessness Coalition. Staff from Nanaimo Region John Howard Society (NRJHS) were contracted to carry out the count and to organize the efforts of the volunteers from the community and many service agencies who donated their time the day of the count. The Nanaimo RCMP Bike Patrol Unit members were instrumental in planning the overall event and conducting a large number of surveys on the day. The VIHA Community Outreach Team also contributed key support in conducting surveys with hard-to-reach individuals.

More than 50 volunteers from the community and service agencies conducted surveys at the fixed locations and at the magnet event at St Peter's Roman Catholic Church.

### Thank You to Our Incredible Volunteers

Thank you to everyone who gave their time this year on the count. A big thank you to the NRJHS team and in particular Andrew Thornton, Research Director in the Justice Research Project at John Howard Society. Andrew crunched all the numbers from the count and wrote this report for the Coalition. A special thank you also to St. Peter's Church who was unstinting in their support for of the Count.

### Dedication

This report is dedicated to those experiencing homelessness as well as to the many Nanaimo service providers and funders who work tirelessly to provide shelter and food all year to the homeless and to help people move off the streets and into housing. I wish there was a way for the general public to hear, as did the Point-in-Time Count volunteers the day of the count, some of the powerful stories of how people became homeless and what they do to survive. I wish they could see first hand the incredible dedication and compassion shown by the non-profits and funders working to address homelessness here in Nanaimo.

Our community does care, and with this information (and the Action Plan to Address Homelessness 2018-2023 that the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition has created), we can move many more people off the streets and into homes.



Signy Madden, Executive Director  
United Way Central & Northern Vancouver Island

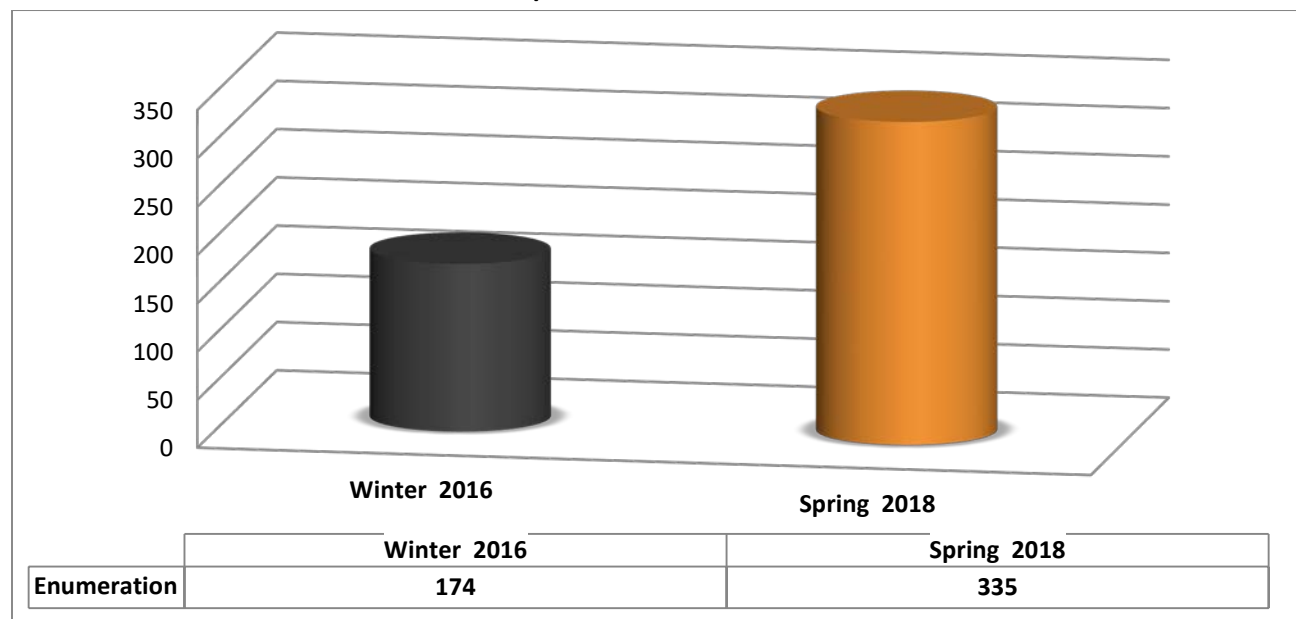
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The minimum number of individuals experiencing absolute homelessness in Nanaimo on April 18, 2018 was 335.

Although this figure is substantially higher than the previous PiT Count in 2016, it is entirely consistent with recent observations of Nanaimo social service agency workers and the local RCMP. The overall trends of the Nanaimo 2018 data are largely consistent with those from the 2016 Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Point-in-Time Count.<sup>1</sup>

On the day of the count, approximately 55% of those who completed a survey were staying in public spaces, vehicles, makeshift shelters or in places not intended for permanent human habitation. Almost one third did not know where they would be staying on that night.

### ABSOLUTE HOMELESSNESS: NANAIMO 2016 / 2018



The majority (68.3 %) of the persons surveyed in 2018 identified as male and 29% identified as female; 55% were between the ages of 25 and 44 (and another 22% between 45-54 years of age). Most respondents report they have always lived in Nanaimo or have been here anywhere from 5 - 40 years. Virtually none of the homeless are immigrants to Canada, recent or otherwise. (Only 3 respondents identified as being immigrants to Canada.) In short, people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo are from Nanaimo: They are members of our community, and possibly our friends, brothers, aunts, cousins, children, or parents.

Almost one-third (31%) of those surveyed identified themselves as First Nations, Métis or having Indigenous Ancestry, a notable increase from the 2016 survey figure of 24%. Approximately 11% of

<sup>1</sup> See The 2016 Nanaimo PiT Count Community Report written by Courtney Defriend in full here: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/social-culture-environment/community-social-service-programs/pit-count-nanaimo-2016-city-report-web.pdf>

those surveyed had become homeless in the 3 months prior to the April 2018 survey. Some 5% reported being homeless for the first time this year. While a relatively small figure, this number translates to, on average, one or two people in Nanaimo becoming 'newly' homeless every month. If one considers that most of those experiencing homelessness rarely regain stable housing, this is a worrying trend.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy PiT Count, conducted bi-annually, is intended to count the minimum number of people who are homeless in a community over one 24-hour period. As the HPS survey methodology identifies only the minimum numbers of those experiencing homelessness, we can assume that many more individuals were not located, or were not able to come forward on the day of the count. The collective numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo, over time, would likely be much higher. In fact, the RCMP Bike Unit (members of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition) estimate that based on their ongoing work with the homeless population, the total number of homeless in Nanaimo is well over 400.

## **CONTEXT**

In 2016, the Government of Canada conducted the first coordinated nationwide Point-in-Time Count (PiT Count). The count was used to identify overall trends, themes, challenges and characteristics of homelessness in Canada. It helped to clarify service needs at a local, provincial and federal level. The PiT Count, conducted bi-annually, is intended to count the minimum number of people who are homeless in a community over one 24-hour period.

The nationally coordinated 2018 PiT Count was funded through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and involved the collaboration of over 60 HPS-funded communities across Canada. The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, Nanaimo Region John Howard Society (NRJHS), and United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island (UWCNVI) organized the second consecutive HPS PiT Count in Nanaimo. The count was held on April 18th, 2018.

The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, formed in 2015, includes a number of non-profit agencies, government bodies, faith groups and residents of the community. The Coalition was preceded by the 'Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness' which has been working to reduce homelessness in Nanaimo since 2001. The name change from 'Working Group' to 'Coalition' reflects a more proactive approach to the development and implementation of programs and services for the homeless.

The Coalition and its members provide a range of responses to homelessness; emergency shelter beds for men and women, and for extreme winter weather conditions, transitional and supportive housing, free or low cost meal programs at breakfast, lunch and dinner, outreach support to homeless individuals, harm reduction services such as a needle exchange program, rent subsidies, and more. The Provincial Government through BC Housing, the Federal Government through Service Canada and the local government through the City of Nanaimo, Island Health, the Regional District and local non-profit organizations, provide funding for the above-noted programs and services, complemented by the charitable donations of Nanaimo residents.

In Nanaimo there are a number of services for transitional and emergency sheltering, including the *Island Crisis Care Society - Samaritan House* emergency shelter for women, *Unitarian Extreme Weather Shelter* - co-ed emergency shelter beds (winter months only); *Salvation Army - New Hope Centre* emergency shelter beds for men.

Supportive Housing units and systems include: *Wesley Street Supportive Housing* - 36 bachelor units each with its own small kitchen and bathroom; *Uplands Walk Supportive Housing* - 33 bachelor units each with its own small kitchen and bathroom. *Boundary Crescent Supportive Housing* - 41 furnished bachelor units, 12 dedicated to Haven Society, each with its own small kitchen and bathroom. Island Health Community Outreach Response and a Housing First program (administered by NRJHS) are among other supports in place.

The HPS-funded communities conducted PiT Counts from March 1 to April 30 of 2018 to apply a national lens to the issue of homelessness. The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition has, since 2005, attempted to track the number of homeless. However, the methods employed have varied over time and, as such, comparison with numbers prior to the 2016 HPS PiT Count should be made with caution, though they do provide some context for analyzing the longer term trends in homelessness.

Finding housing in Nanaimo is difficult for those with modest incomes and virtually impossible for those with support needs. The Vancouver Island Real Estate Board reports that as of March 2018 the price of a Nanaimo single-family home has jumped to \$470,000, a 21 percent increase from last spring.<sup>2</sup> Developers and construction companies are reporting that they are so busy that they cannot find enough workers for their new construction projects, which has resulted in a 6 month backlog of work. It is widely agreed that Nanaimo's proximity to Vancouver continues to have a major impact on housing prices. One impact of this spillover is that Nanaimo, like many communities, has very high rents and very low or non-existent available rental units. The *average* rent for a one bedroom apartment (if you can find one) in Nanaimo is approximately \$800; a two bedroom is more than \$1000/month. Overall vacancy rates are 1.6%.<sup>3</sup> This reality makes finding adequate housing especially difficult for those with (multiple) barriers to housing.

Landlords can and do select out anyone with any sort of problems in their tenancy or financial history. The impact on the hard-to-house and the homeless is amplified in this context. Given that many of the homeless population have poor credit records and/or mental and physical health problems, the likelihood of the homeless population finding housing is greatly diminished. Tylar Turnbull, Housing First Coordinator at the NRJHS, reports that, as of mid-April 2018, there was a waiting list of 200 clients looking for supportive housing. Other agencies in Nanaimo are facing similar overload.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Low inventory, high demand driving Nanaimo home prices up* <https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/low-inventory-high-demand-driving-nanaimo-home-prices-up-1.3442215>

<sup>3</sup> Figures as of February 2018: See *Primary Rental Market Statistics – Nanaimo* <http://www.multifamily.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Nanaimo-Rental-Market-Report.pdf>

## METHODOLOGY

The National PiT Count methodology was used to determine the minimum number of individuals experiencing “absolute homelessness” within a 24-hour period (Appendix A: Definitions of Homelessness). These are individuals living in public spaces, emergency shelters or transitional shelters with no stable residence to return to. Individuals experiencing ‘hidden homelessness,’ categorized as those in temporary or precarious housing, or corrections and medical health facilities, were not included in this count.

Surveys were conducted at fixed sites throughout the community, in unsheltered locations where people are known to habituate, and at a ‘magnet event’ at St. Peter’s Roman Catholic Church. In addition to the count, community agencies involved in serving the homeless were invited to submit their observations and comments to provide further background on the homelessness situation in Nanaimo.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE PiT COUNT

The focus of the Nanaimo 2018 PiT Count was to identify individuals who were absolutely homeless. PiT counts are designed to measure the *minimum* number of homeless people in a community on a given day. It is not possible to identify the exact number of people experiencing homelessness from a Point-in-Time survey. PiT Counts are not able to measure those individuals who may be housed on the specific day of the count, but who may be cycling in and out of homelessness. This includes precariously housed individuals who do not have any kind of secure housing contract, yet they are able to find means of temporary shelter for uncertain periods of time (e.g. “couch surfing,” “staying with a friend”).

Furthermore, while every effort was made to locate and survey individuals throughout the downtown core and other parts of Nanaimo, it is not possible to cover every location, and there will be many more individuals who were not surveyed. As our understanding increases of the homeless situation in Nanaimo, our ability to identify the situation and related needs of people experiencing homelessness will improve.

The PiT Count survey provides *a picture of general trends* of homelessness in a community. The data provided should be read as such, as identifying various *trends in the composition* of the homeless population. Thus it becomes possible to compare the 2018 PiT Count numbers with the previous count, in order to make comments about what is going on. This in turn provides a basis upon which we can compare our data with other communities where PiT counts have been done.

A more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the situation will require further research and resources. In particular, it seems reasonable to suggest that the results would be well served by the inclusion of in-depth qualitative research. Describing and analyzing the everyday lived experience of homelessness, for example, could shed light on the resilience strategies of the homeless, but also reveal where there are gaps and problems in the provision of housing and other social supports.

## MAGNET EVENT

A magnet event is a strategy used to draw people to a common place on a given day to share information and carry out the PiT Count enumeration for those willing to participate. Luckily on the day

of the Nanaimo PiT Count it was sunny and clear the entire day for our magnet event at St Peter's. To create awareness of the event the Housing Support Team from NRJHS (Tylar Turnbull, Jay Flett and Anne-Marie Tosh) posted flyers around Nanaimo to advertise the magnet event and also did a "walk-about" in the downtown core to advertise the event directly with business owners. The response from business owners was generally positive and supportive of the project goals. We made our partner agencies aware of the upcoming event and provided advertising to raise awareness of the event among service users. The magnet event was also promoted prior to April 18<sup>th</sup> via news media reports<sup>4</sup> and by Signy Madden and Jay Flett during an on-air interview with CHLY Radio.

The event had the intended effect of drawing many people to a key survey site where they could receive free services and participate in the survey. The event was so well attended that at least one agency that would normally support 40-50 clients, saw none of these during the hours of the actual magnet event. Survey respondents and anyone who chose to attend had access to various services: barber, hairdresser, donation table (which had clothing and other life necessities), hot food and beverages, smudging and brushing by local First Nations elders, Indigenous housing navigator, and the Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre. We estimate that 150-200 members of the public attended the event.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

PiT Counts depend heavily on volunteer labour from the local community, and people in Nanaimo were more than generous with their time. We held two training sessions for volunteers in order to provide guidance in conducting the survey and to prepare volunteers for their support roles in the 2018 Point-in-Time Count. More than fifty volunteers attended our training sessions and Jay Flett provided Naloxone training for everyone present. Many volunteers were from the partner social service agencies of the Homelessness Coalition. A number of volunteers from various academic programs at Vancouver Island University donated their time. The RCMP as well as Island Health sent outreach workers to conduct surveys at encampments and known areas of homeless habitation around the city.

## **SURVEY LOCATIONS**

### Fixed Sites

#### Unsheltered

- Magnet event at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church
- Women's Resource Centre
- 7-10 Breakfast Club
- Vancouver Island Regional Library (Nanaimo downtown)
- Wesley St./Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- Nanaimo Citizens' Advocacy Association
- Men's Resource Center
- Harris House needle exchange/harm reduction site

---

<sup>4</sup> See *Volunteers sought as 'important' Nanaimo homeless census approaches*:  
<https://nanaimonewsnow.com/article/574359/nanaimo-homeless-census-approaches-call-made-volunteers>

- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction ( 108 Richards Street)
- AIDS Vancouver Island Health Clinic
- Uplands Walk
- RCMP Bike Patrol: Nanaimo encampments
- Island Health COR Team: Nanaimo area

#### Sheltered

- Salvation Army – New Hope Men’s Center Shelter
- Samaritan House Women’s Shelter

The RCMP Bike Patrol unit, headed by Corporal David LaBerge, visited more than 40 encampments (public spaces, parks, alleys, bridges). The Island Health Community Outreach Response Team also travelled around the city to conduct surveys.

### STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY (APPENDIX A)

- 4 screening questions (some of which overlap with the core questions)
- 14 core questions from the national database
- 1 additional question from the optional pool (COH questions)
- 6 local questions (community specific interests)

The survey is composed of, in essence, two sections: The first contains standardized questions drawn from the HPS national database which includes one optional question. The second contains several questions that address community specific interests. The responses to the community questions are discussed in section 2 of the report. Everyone who completed a survey was provided with a ‘care package’ or a gift card for food.

### UNDERSTANDING ENUMERATION

In total some 330 surveys were filled out on April 18<sup>th</sup>, but after removing duplicates and ineligible surveys (‘data cleaning’) the final figure rests at 289. However, the final enumeration figure does include 11 dependent accompanying children identified in the survey, and 35 who were “observed as homeless” on the day of the count (which is one component of the HPS enumeration). While the observed figure is never precise, it is considered acceptable to use within the survey methodology.

### WHERE ARE YOU STAYING TONIGHT? (2018)

<b>Unsheltered</b> (vacant building, makeshift shelter, tent, or shack, other unsheltered location unfit for human habitation, public spaces, or a vehicle, don’t know)	<b>243</b>
<b>Unsheltered observed</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Sheltered</b> (transitional shelter / housing, emergency shelter, domestic violence against women shelter) (including 11 dependent children)	<b>57</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>335</b>

*Therefore, the total figure for the PiT Count enumeration is 335.* This is the figure that should be cited when identifying the minimum number of people experiencing absolute homelessness in Nanaimo. This figure is almost double the number (174) from the Nanaimo 2016 PiT Count. Most of the calculations, charts and figures in this report are based on 289 completed hard copy surveys.



## SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 1: RESPONSES TO HPS-STANDARDIZED QUESTIONS

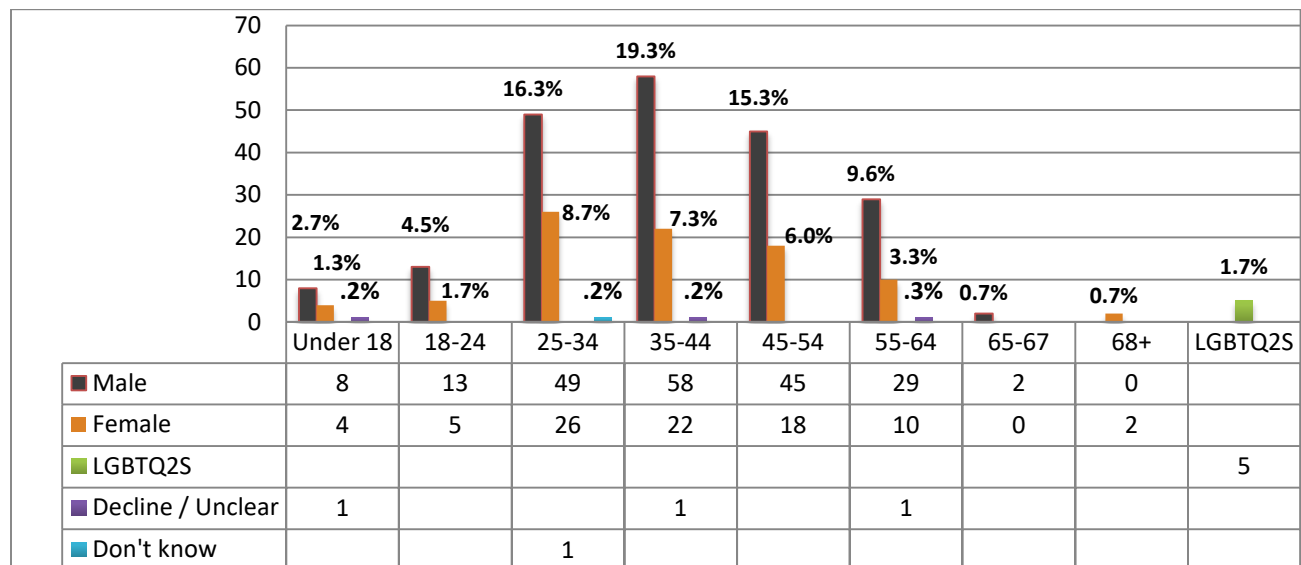
### WHAT GENDER DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH? <sup>5</sup> (2018)

Male	205	68.3 %
Female	87	29.0 %
Gender non-conforming	1	0.3
Two Spirit	1	0.3
Transgender	1	0.3
Don't know / Decline	5	1.8

In terms of age and gender the outcomes of the 2018 survey are consistent with surveys from previous years and other communities administering the HPS PiT Count. However, as noted in the 2016 PiT Count results<sup>6</sup> it appears as though the homeless population as a whole is continuing to age. In the City of Nanaimo 2007 homeless count (which did not employ the HPS survey methodology) the average age of respondents was 36.7, but in 2016 had risen to 39.7 (and the Median age rose to 43). In 2018 the average age of respondents was 41 and the median was 44 (based on 287 replies.) This trend is important as the mortality rates for the homeless in the 40-49 age cohort is 5 times higher than the rest of the population.

In comparing the 2016 and 2018 age distribution, the only change of any note appears to be a rise in the number and percentage of females in the 35-44 cohort. There is also a sizable decrease in the percentage of females in the 45-54 cohort.

### 2018: GENDER / AGE DISTRIBUTION<sup>7</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Age and gender distribution figures in this section include dependent children (n=11) in the calculations. Total sample size for these calculations is 300.

<sup>6</sup> Defriend, 2016, p.22

<sup>7</sup> This chart includes dependent children (not surveyed) making the sample size n = 300.

In the 2018 survey over half (52%) of people experiencing homelessness are between the ages of 25 and 44, and adding the next cohort 45-54 brings the total to almost 73%. Approximately 70% of the respondents were male, and 30% female. Despite general trends across Canada of increasing homelessness for young people, there appear to be relatively few young people in the 2018 Nanaimo survey (10% were under 25 years of age). However, in total approximately 20% of those who responded were less than 30 years of age.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION, FOR EXAMPLE STRAIGHT, LESBIAN GAY?**

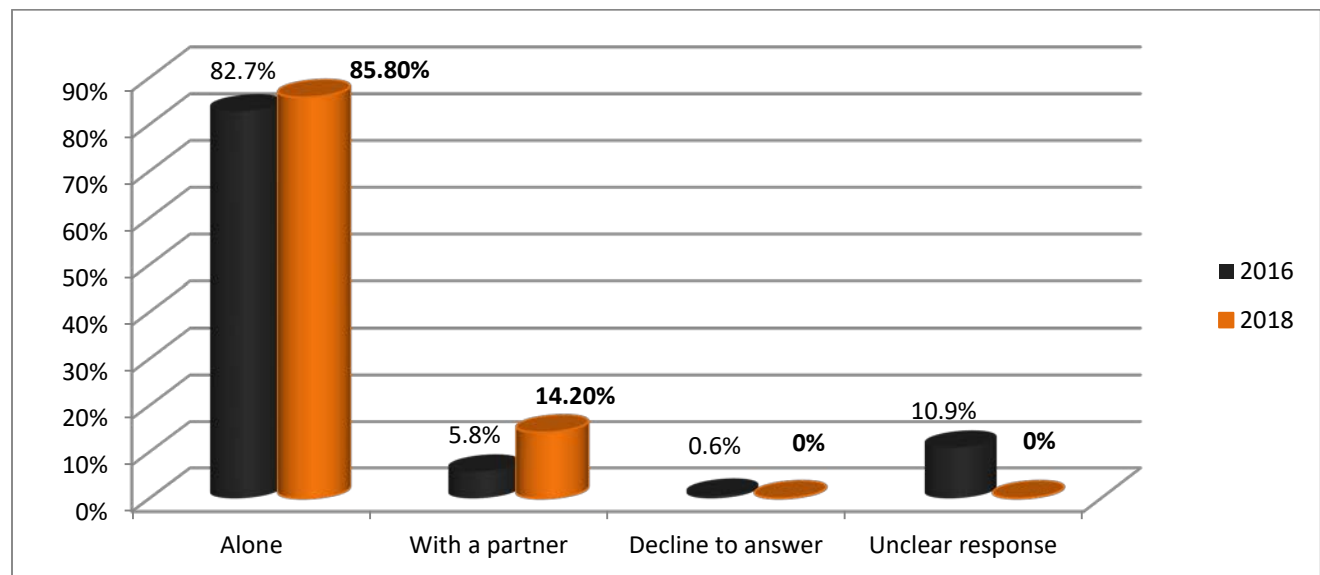
*(Respondents shown a list)*

Straight / Heterosexual	Bisexual	Decline	Two Spirit	Gay	Lesbian	Queer	Questioning	Don't know /Unclear
252	14	12	2	1	1	1	1	5

The vast majority of respondents identify as straight / heterosexual, though 14 respondents, 9 females, and 5 males identified as bisexual.<sup>8</sup>

**WHAT FAMILY MEMBERS ARE STAYING WITH YOU TONIGHT?**

Compared to 2016 there appeared to be a rise in the number of respondents staying with someone else in 2018. This finding is consistent with responses to later survey questions expressing the need for more couples-friendly shelters and/or housing as one potential method for decreasing homelessness.



<sup>8</sup> Data for 2016 not available

## DURATION OF HOMELESSNESS

A key measure of homelessness is the amount of time without a break that people do not have access to safe and consistent accommodation.

### IN TOTAL HOW MUCH TIME HAVE YOU BEEN HOMELESS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

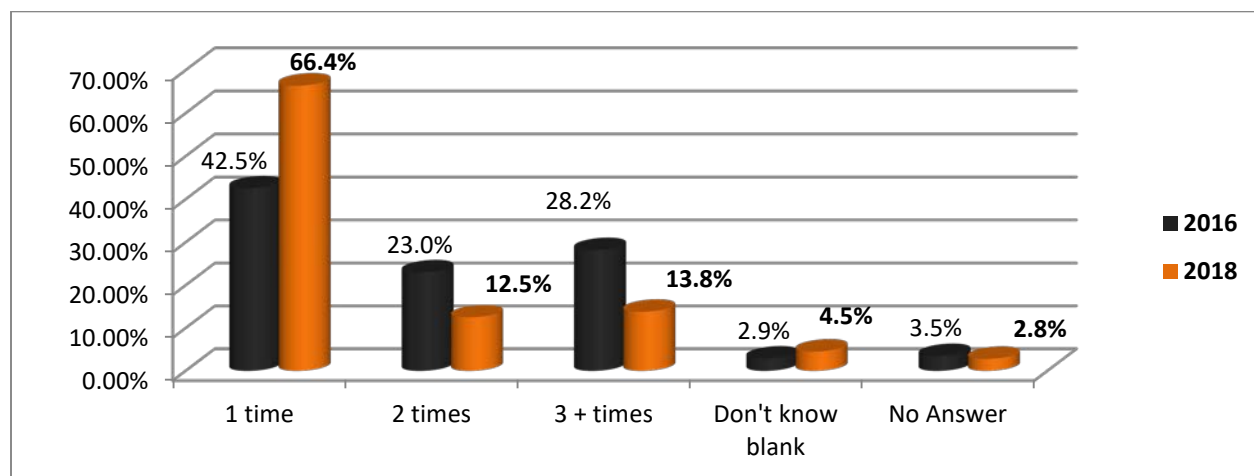
2018	0 to 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 12 months	12 months +	No answer
(n=289)	30	33	55	154	17
	10.4 %	11.4 %	19.0 %	53.3 %	5.9 %
2016	0-3 months	3 to 6 months	6 months or more	n/a	
(N=174)	18.4 %	17.8 %	59.8 %	n/a	4.0%

In 2018, 53% of respondents reported that they had been homeless for 12 months or more. Another 19% reported being homeless for 6 months or more in the previous 12 months which means that over 72% have been homeless for 6 months or more. Therefore a high percentage of people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo would be considered “chronically” homeless:

Individuals, often with disabling conditions (e.g. chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation).<sup>9</sup>

It was also reported that respondents had lived in Nanaimo for all or most of their lives. Over 80% of those surveyed had *not* moved to Nanaimo in the last year. As mentioned, above people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo are in large part *from* Nanaimo.

### IN TOTAL HOW MANY DIFFERENT TIMES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS OVER THE PAST YEAR?



<sup>9</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. Homelessness Partnering Strategy Directives 2014-2019. Retrieved from: <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/funding/directives.shtml>

Another measure of homelessness is the number of episodes of homelessness over a given period. The data in 2018 shows that 66% of respondents were homeless one time only in the past year. Therefore, we can conclude that homelessness in Nanaimo is primarily experienced as continuous and not episodic.

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN NANAIMO?**

	Less than 1 Year	More than 1 year	No answer
2018 (n=289)	40	233	16
2016 (n=174)	48	122	4

**2018 Breakdown: Length of time in Nanaimo**

0 to 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 12 months	1 - 5 years	5 - 40 years	Always been here	Decline / no answer
23	9	8	50	96	87	16
8.0%	3.1%	2.8%	17.3%	33.2%	30.1%	5.5%

Based on the data on duration of homelessness and length of time residing in Nanaimo it seems reasonable to suggest that once the homelessness barrier is crossed respondents are not able to cross back to secure housing. Homelessness in Nanaimo (and one suspects elsewhere) once realized is a quite permanent state of affairs. The obvious policy implication is to avoid homelessness by ensuring that community members are supported *before* they end up on the streets.

**WHAT AGE WERE YOU WHEN YOU FIRST EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS? (2018)**

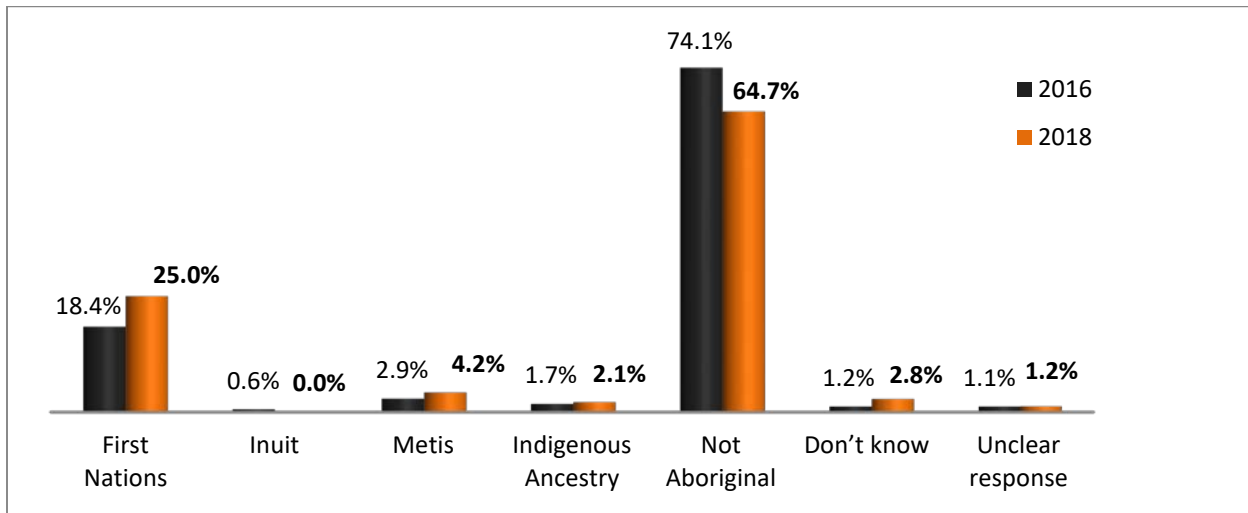
Age	17 or less	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	No answer
n = 289	80	46	56	46	35	12	14
	27.7%	15.9%	19.4%	15.9%	12.1%	4.2%	4.8%

Significantly, the data shows that many people first experience homelessness in their teenage years (28%) and as young as 5-10 years old. Having said this, approximately 5% of those surveyed are homeless for the first time in the past year. Some reported becoming homeless for the first time within days of the PiT Count.

**HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY SERVICE IN THE CANADIAN MILITARY OR RCMP?**

	2018	2016
No	275	167
RCMP	3	0
Military	8	6
Decline / Unclear	3	1

### DO YOU IDENTIFY AS INDIGENOUS OR HAVE INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY?



The indigenous population in the 2018 count represents around 31% of the number of people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo (of those who completed the survey). While this is somewhat higher than the previous survey (24%), it is consistent with trends from other jurisdictions. Given that Aboriginal populations represent about 6% of the local population they are highly overrepresented among the homeless population. Clearly this points to the need for specific measures to address the housing needs of the Indigenous population in Nanaimo.

	First Nations	Inuit	Metis	Indigenous Ancestry	Not-Aboriginal	Don't Know	Unclear response
2018	25%	0%	4.2%	2.1%	64.7%	2.8%	1.2%
2016	18.4%	0.6 %	2.9%	1.7%	74.1%	1.2%	1.1%

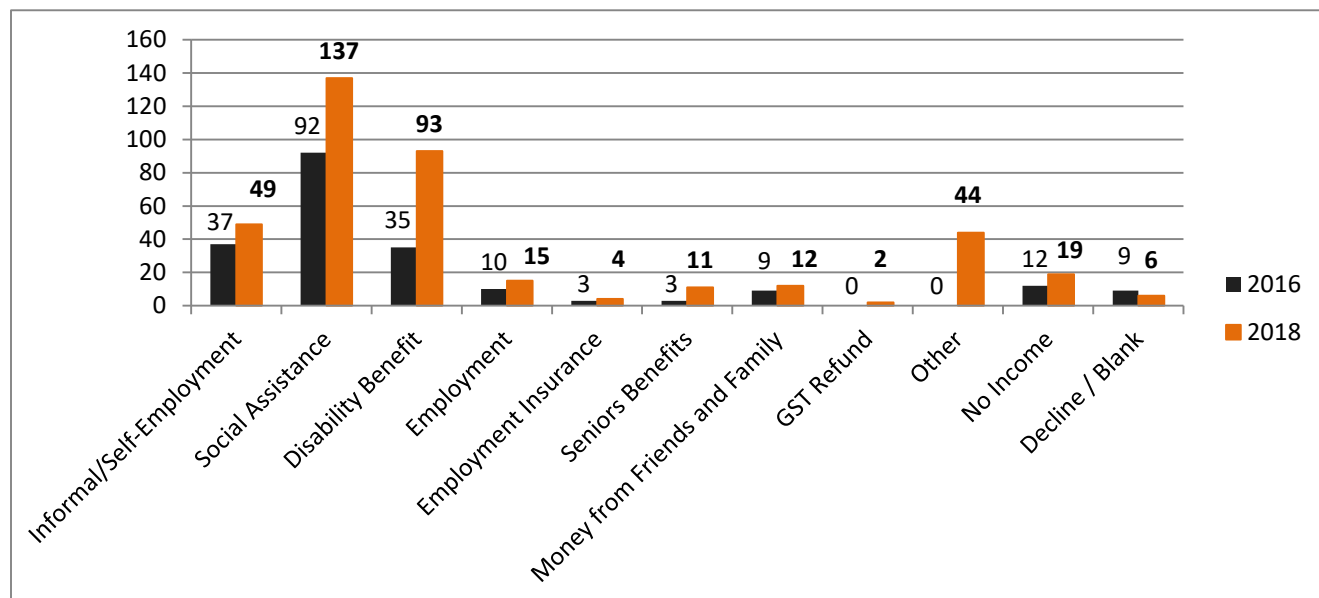
### HAVE YOU STAYED IN AN EMERGENCY SHELTER IN THE LAST YEAR? (2018)

USE SHELTER?	Total (n=289)	Percentage
YES	194	67.1%
NO	90	31.2%
Decline	5	1.7%

Similar to the 2016 survey figure (75%) the large majority of those surveyed in 2018 (67%) reported staying in a shelter in the previous 12 months. Although this represents a drop in terms of percentage, the *number* of people reporting use of shelters rose from 130 to 194, which represents a 50% increase.

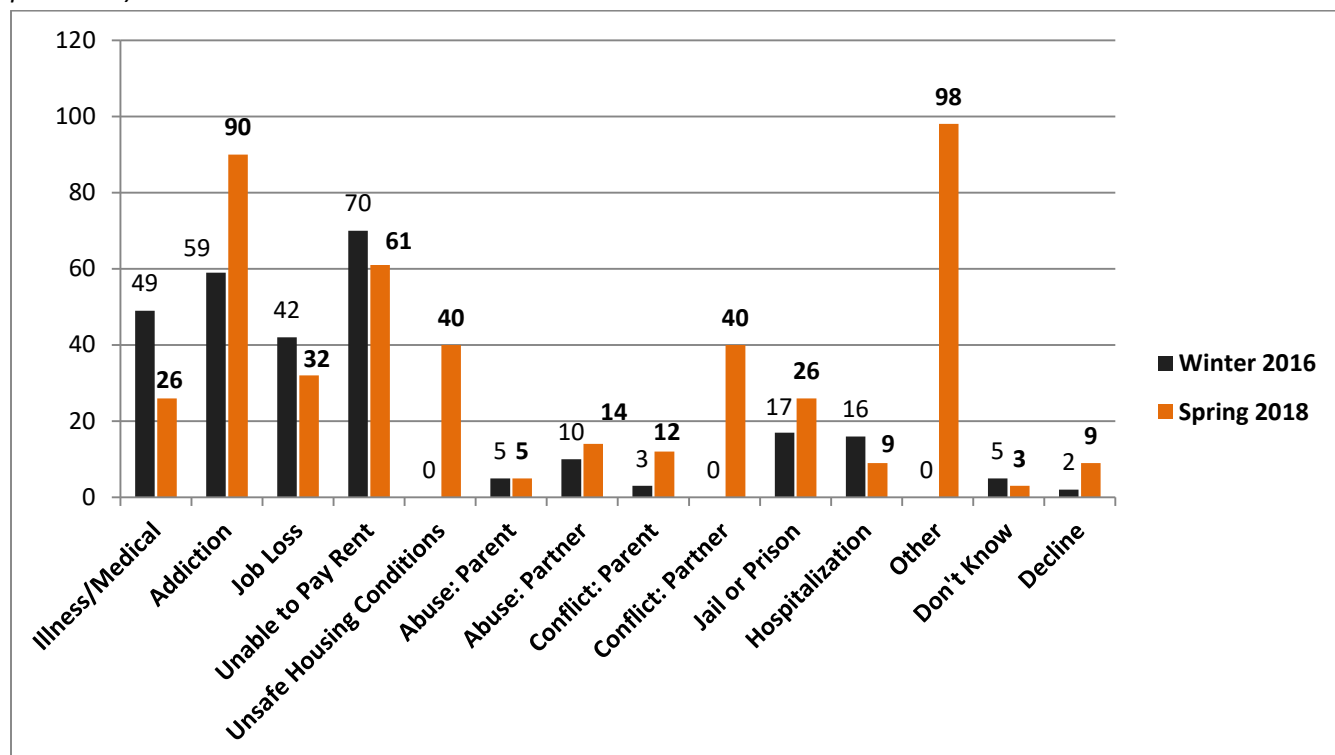
On the other hand, respondents gave many reasons for not staying in shelters. Frequently cited reasons were: fearing for one's safety and being worried about possessions being stolen. Other prominent reasons included not being able to stay in a shelter as a couple, and not wanting to be in an environment where others were using and/or selling drugs. There were more than a few comments to the effect that shelter staff "look down" on people who use shelters.

**WHAT ARE YOUR SOURCES OF INCOME?** (More than one answer possible.)



About 50% of respondents were getting social assistance and a further 30% disability benefits (though there is some overlap in these categories), but they also reported that these supports were entirely inadequate to meet rent prices in Nanaimo. Worryingly, 19 respondents reported that they had no income at all.

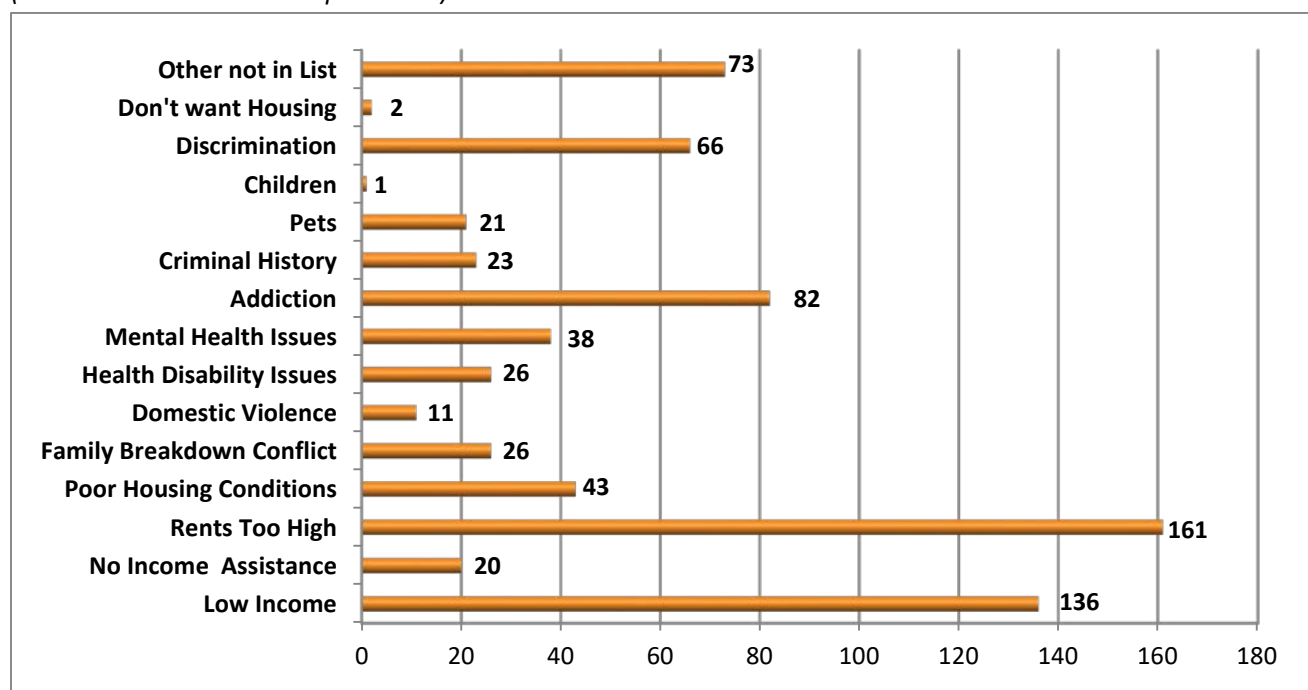
**WHAT HAPPENED THAT CAUSED YOU TO LOSE YOUR HOUSING MOST RECENTLY?** (More than one answer possible.)



In the current survey the major issues that have caused people to lose their housing most recently have been addictions or substance use (31%), inability to pay rent (21%), and unsafe housing conditions (14%). There was also a high incidence, almost 14%, of reports of conflict with a partner. As the data suggests, many respondents had multiple issues affecting the stability of their housing. (Respondents were able to give more than one response to this question).

So-called “renovation evictions” seemed to be a recurring problem for people losing their housing. Many verbally commented that they were evicted for one or more of the reasons above, including conflicts with landlords in relation to a number of issues. All levels of government will need to consider the problem of renovation evictions in attempting to alleviate the homelessness and housing crisis.

**WHAT CHALLENGES OR PROBLEMS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN TRYING TO FIND HOUSING? (2018, N=289)**  
(More than one answer possible.)



Increasingly high rents and low income were the most frequently cited *barriers to finding housing*. Also, the things that *cause* a loss of housing, such as addictions, substance use, and unsafe or poor housing conditions, were also reported as barriers to finding housing. For example, people choose to leave unsafe housing which makes them homeless, but then obviously do not want to enter a different but equally unsafe location. These trends are consistent with the 2016 survey where addictions and high rents or other financial reasons were barriers to housing for a very high proportion of respondents.<sup>10</sup>

It was notable that in 2018 people experiencing homelessness are reporting that they are discriminated

***“I am discriminated against because of what I look like.”***

<sup>10</sup> op.cit. Defriend, 2016, p. 24

against as ‘homeless people’ when they do seek housing: “People look at my appearance and make judgements about me.” Many First Nations persons experiencing homelessness reported that racism was a common reason that prevented them from obtaining housing.

In the “Other” reasons category a high number of people in the 2018 survey also reported that they had difficulty getting references from previous landlords, and or had trouble with credit checks. People also said that conflict with previous landlords or having difficult landlords were barriers to housing. These findings are largely consistent with the data from 2016.

## **SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 2: RESPONSES TO COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

***WHAT COMMUNITY SERVICES HAVE YOU USED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS? (More than one answer possible.)***

	Shelter	Food Bank	Hot Meal Program	7-10 Club	Library	Police	Other	None	Blank
<b>2018 (n=289)</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>31</b>
2016 (n=174)	128	103	85	125	98	28	45	n/a	n/a

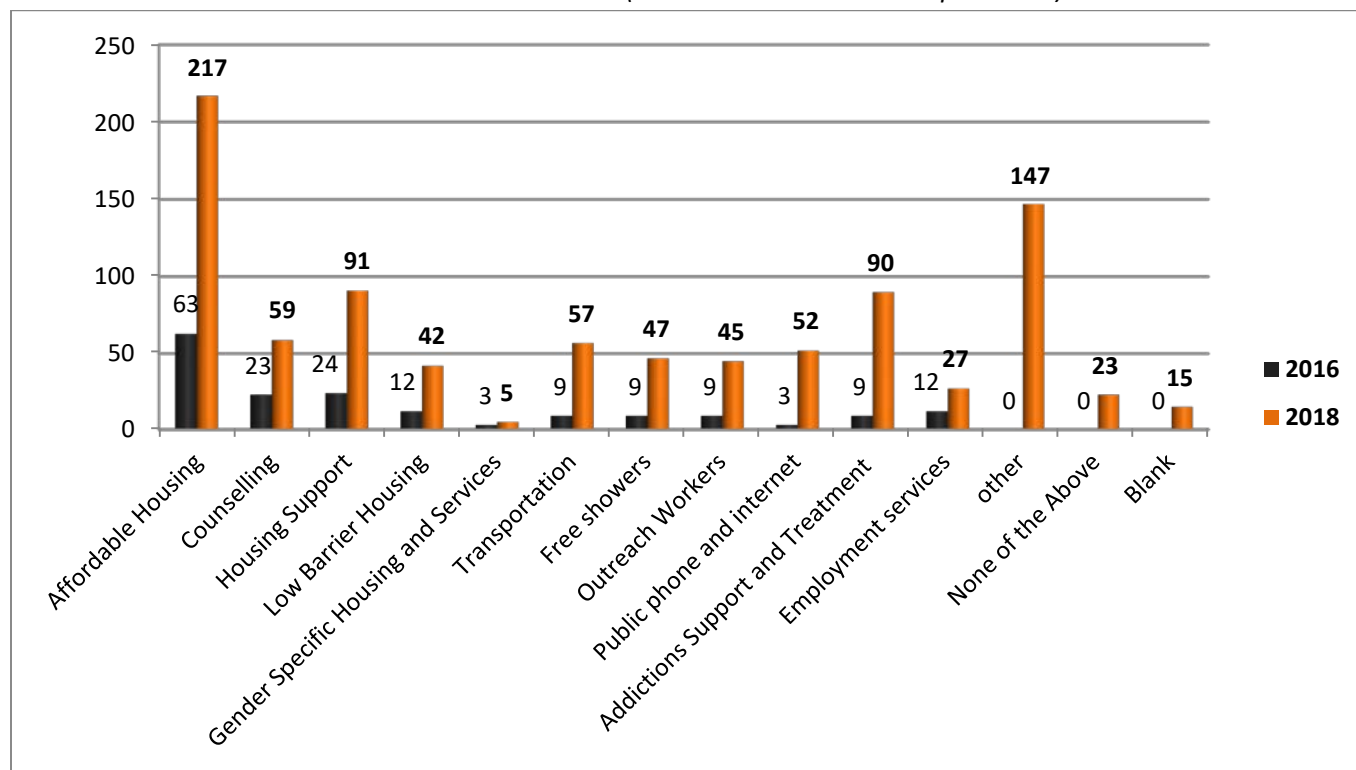
***WHAT HEALTH SERVICES HAVE YOU USED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS? (More than one answer possible.)***

	Doctor	Dentist	Optometrist	Emergency	Mental Health Worker	Mental Health Services	Decline to answer
<b>2018 (n=289)</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>31</b>
2016 (n=174)	100	24	7	69	72	50	n/a

It is plain from these tables that a very high percentage of people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo make use of some or most of the health and community services available to them. There is a notable increase in the number of respondents using mental health services in 2018. Among other responses Tillicum Lelum Friendship Centre and Salvation Army (shelter) were widely cited as community services that were used. It’s interesting to note that although close to 200 individuals reported using shelters in the last year, only 122 report use of a shelter as a ‘community service’.



**WHAT OTHER SERVICES WOULD BE HELPFUL TO YOU? (More than one answer possible.)**



Seventy-five percent of respondents (217/289) said that access to affordable housing would help them. When asked what additional types of services would be useful to them, a considerable proportion of people said they would like more housing support (31.5%) and more addictions support and treatment (30%),

Between 15 and 20% of respondents also said that each of the following would be helpful: counselling, low barrier housing, access to transportation, public phone and Internet, more free showers and more outreach workers.

The results show that respondents are well aware of what would help them in finding housing, but the figures also point to a lack of adequate services given that demand for these supports is so high. (Informants were able to select more than one option for the questions concerning services used and services desired.)

**MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

In 2016 almost 80% of survey respondents reported that their physical health was average (3) or better on a 5-point scale. The 2018 figure for the same measures are almost identical but there does appear to be a slight (5%) decrease in the overall assessment of the mental health of respondents compared to 2016.

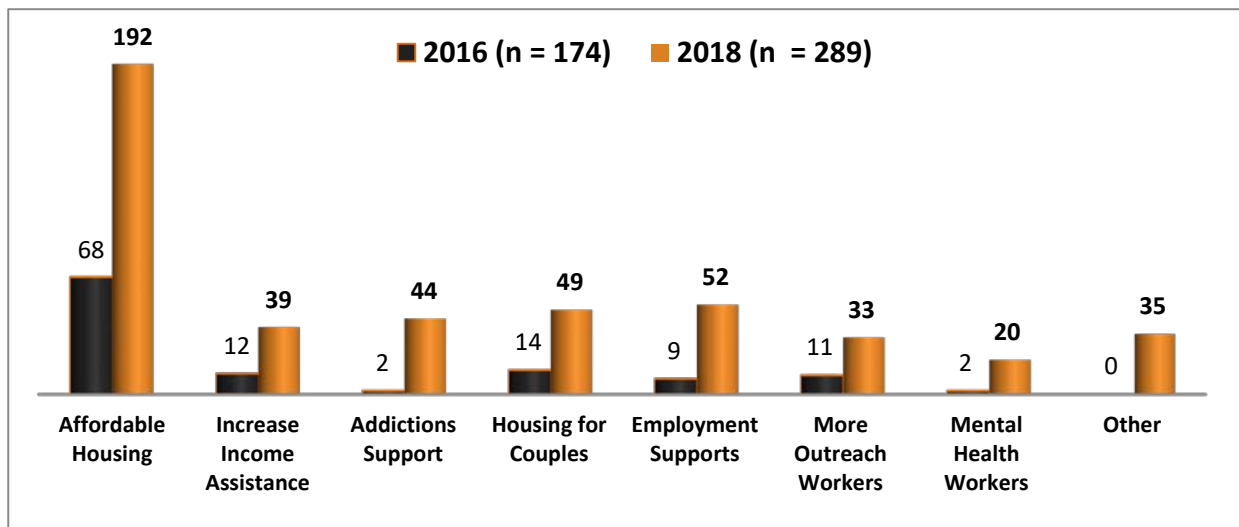
### PHYSICAL HEALTH

	Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5	No answer blank
<b>2018 (n=287)</b>	<b>7.3 %</b>	<b>11.1 %</b>	<b>32.8 %</b>	<b>28.2 %</b>	<b>19.9 %</b>	<b>0.7 %</b>
2016 (n=174)	5.9 %	14.6 %	35.7 %	27.0 %	17.0 %	n/a

### MENTAL HEALTH

	Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5	No answer
<b>2018 (n=286)</b>	<b>8.0 %</b>	<b>17.6 %</b>	<b>32.5 %</b>	<b>21.5 %</b>	<b>19.0 %</b>	<b>1.4 %</b>
2016 (n=174)	5.9 %	16.6 %	36.1 %	25.4 %	16.0 %	n/a

*WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS WE CAN SOLVE HOMELESSNESS? (More than one answer possible.)*



Although the total number of respondents is almost double from 2016, the 2018 data shows an increasing awareness of the range of issues that need to be addressed in order to effectively address the homelessness situation in Nanaimo. When asked how to solve homelessness, 66% of respondents agreed that it was important to have more affordable housing. Comments suggested that it is not just affordable housing that is needed, but access to housing of any kind. As many informants said, “We need more housing, period!” There appears to be a growing desire for housing for couples. Many also said they needed more addictions support and more mental health supports including outreach workers. One respondent offered the emphatic comment: “Outreach workers with more experience!”

There were a number of creative verbal responses to this question (identified as ‘Other’ on the survey). For example, one respondent suggested that a “Sweat Equity Rent Support Program” be developed where tenants could exchange their labour for rent. Many also stated that it would be helpful to get training in how to maintain tenancy (e.g. money management, good neighbour practices). It was also stated that it would help if there were some sort of rent cap (pro-rated to income) and/or stronger rent control and tenancy rights regulations in place.

## SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS OF THE NANAIMO 2018 PIT COUNT

The housing and homelessness crisis in Nanaimo has been in the news continuously over the last two years. There have been at least two “camp in” protests and, as mentioned above, the RCMP has noted that the geographic location of homeless encampments has spread more widely throughout the city than was the case in 2016. This increasing spread and visibility has, no doubt, been a major reason homelessness has become a concern for all community members and local businesses in Nanaimo.

**“Every night that someone  
spends being homeless  
should be counted as one  
episode of being homeless.”  
(PiT Count volunteer)**

The results of the Nanaimo 2018 PiT Count suggest that, at the very least, 335 people are experiencing absolute homelessness, and the majority of these have lived in Nanaimo for most or all of their lives.

In plain terms, homelessness in Nanaimo is getting worse: The numbers of people experiencing homelessness are increasing, the length of their homelessness experience is getting longer, and lack of access to affordable housing and adequate supports is keeping people on the streets in ever greater numbers. Many respondents noted that there is intense competition for existing housing vacancies, and they are last to be considered because of the way they present, their lack of references, and their poor credit histories. Addictions and mental illness are widely attributed as an additional barrier.

Many of our survey respondents have been homeless for the entirety of the past year or longer. However, in the HPS method of counting, this counts as only ‘one episode’ of being homeless. If one night of homelessness equalled one episode, the ‘episodes’ of homelessness in Nanaimo would number in the tens of thousands. And if the headlines were to read “Homeless experiencing thousands of nights of homelessness” we might have a more rapid response from all quarters to our homelessness and housing crisis. This insight provides an important reminder that when we employ numbers to examine human experience, we may, and often do, minimize the depth and degree of suffering and hardship. One night sleeping under a tarp under a bridge must be traumatic. How bad would 365 straight days of such an experience be? While homelessness affects individuals in a very individual and personal fashion, it is caused by a set of systemic forces. It is these systemic forces that the final figures in this report draw attention to: Homelessness is a local effect of the actions of higher-level political and economic systems.

So, where do we go from here? The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition has developed a five-year Action Plan to End Homelessness (2018-2023). The City of Nanaimo is developing an affordable housing strategy. The coalition has recent data to share with all three levels of government that underscores the urgency of finding funding and solutions.

A first step would be for the City of Nanaimo, Chamber of Commerce, and other stakeholders to embrace the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition's Action Plan to End Homelessness.

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

The individuals included in the 2018 Nanaimo PiT enumeration included persons who were experiencing 'absolute homelessness'. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness<sup>11</sup> defines variations of homelessness as the following:

Absolute Homelessness: Individuals who are living in public spaces, emergency shelters or public facilities and do not have a stable residence to return to.

The Nanaimo PiT Count included those who were considered unsheltered as well as emergency sheltered. In both cases, persons are considered to be absolutely homeless, as they do not have secure or permanent housing.

Unsheltered: Includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.

- a. People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract.
- b. People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation.

Emergency Sheltered: This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents a stop-gap institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profits, faith based organizations and / or volunteers.

The Nanaimo PiT Count **does not include** those who are considered "hidden homeless," temporarily or uncertainly housed at the time of the PiT Count:

Hidden Homelessness: includes those who are living in temporary accommodations, time-limited housing or whose tenancy is to be terminated. This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.

---

<sup>11</sup>Canadian Definition of Homelessness accessed at:  
<http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf>

## NEWS RELEASE

Distributed June 27, 2018

### **2018/19 City of Nanaimo Street Banners Installed**

*This year's design by Robert Plante*

In late 2017, the City of Nanaimo invited all amateur and professional artists to submit designs for the 2018/19 Street Banner Design Competition. Submissions were received by eight artists. The successful banner design, by local artist Robert Plante, has now been installed on lamp posts on major streets throughout Nanaimo.

"Street banners grace many streetlight poles during the spring and summer seasons creating a fun and festive atmosphere," said Chris Barfoot, Culture & Heritage Coordinator, "The City's street banner program aids in the promotion of Nanaimo and its offerings, and adds colour and excitement to Nanaimo."

This year's banner design reflects Nanaimo and what makes it unique. Having immigrated to Nanaimo from the Netherlands in 2009, Robert Plante is very active in the community with one of his goals being to help Nanaimo be a great place to live.

The banner program has been brightening our city streets and corridors for close to 30 years.

-30-

#### **Contact:**

Chris Barfoot  
Culture & Heritage Coordinator  
City of Nanaimo  
chris.barfoot@nanaimo.ca  
250-755-7522

Main Office  
Community & Cultural Planning  
City of Nanaimo  
250-755-4483



View the online edition for more information - <https://www.nanaimo.ca/NewsReleases/NR180627201819CityOfNanaimoStreet>