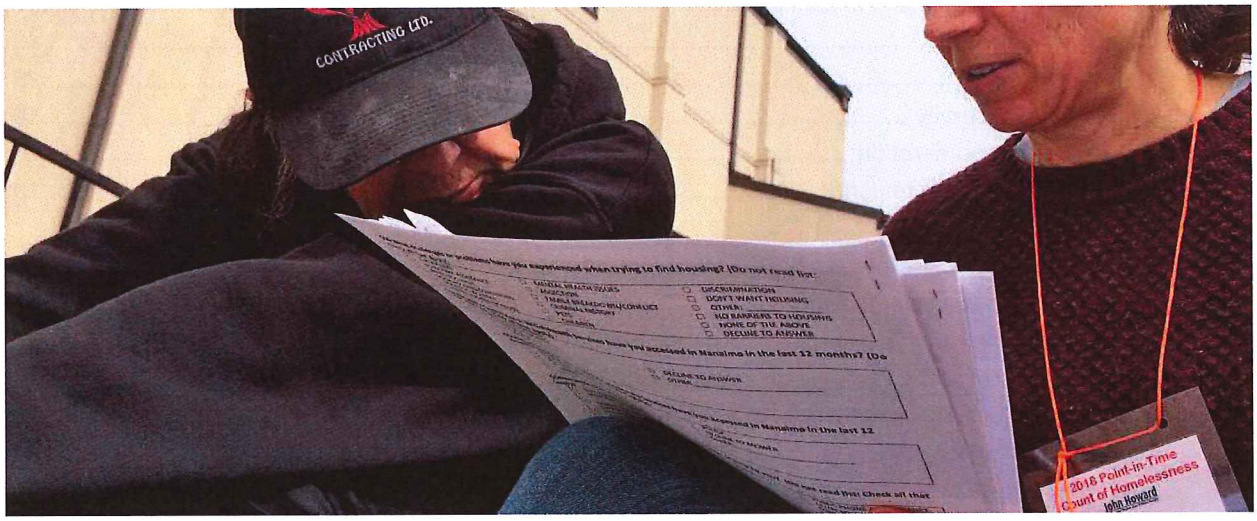
HOMELESSNESS IN NANAIMO

EVERYONE COUNTS:

2018 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT REPORT



PREPARED FOR THE NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION

MAY 29, 2018

United Way
Central and Northern
Vancouver Island

Canada

Table of Contents

Introduction **3**
Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition 3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **5**
Absolute Homelessness: Nanaimo 2016 - 2018 5
Context **6**
Methodology **8**
Limitations of the PiT Count 8
Magnet event 8
Volunteers 9
Survey locations 9
Structure of the survey 10
Understanding enumeration 10
Where are you staying tonight? 10

SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 1: Responses to HPS-standardized questions **12**
What gender do you identify with? 12
2018: Gender / age distribution 12
How would you describe your sexual orientation? 13
What family members are staying with you tonight? 13
Duration of homelessness 14
In total how much time have you been homeless in the last 12 months? 14
In total how many different times have you experienced homelessness over the past year? 14
How long have you been in Nanaimo? 15
2018 Breakdown: Length of time in Nanaimo 15
What age were you when you first experienced homelessness? (2018) 15
Have you ever had any service in the Canadian Military or RCMP? 15
Do you identify as Indigenous or have Indigenous ancestry? 16
Have you stayed in an emergency shelter in the last year? (2018) 16
What are your sources of income? 17
What happened that caused you to lose your housing most recently? 17
What challenges or problems have you experienced when trying to find housing? (2018) 18

SURVEY RESULTS SECTION 2: Responses to community-specific questions 19
What community services have you used in the last 12 months? 19
What health services have you used in the last 12 months? 19
What other services would be helpful to you? 20
Mental and physical health 20
Physical health 21
Mental health 21
What are some of the ways we can solve homelessness? 21

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS OF THE NANAIMO 2018 PIT COUNT 22
Appendix A: Definitions of homelessness 24

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

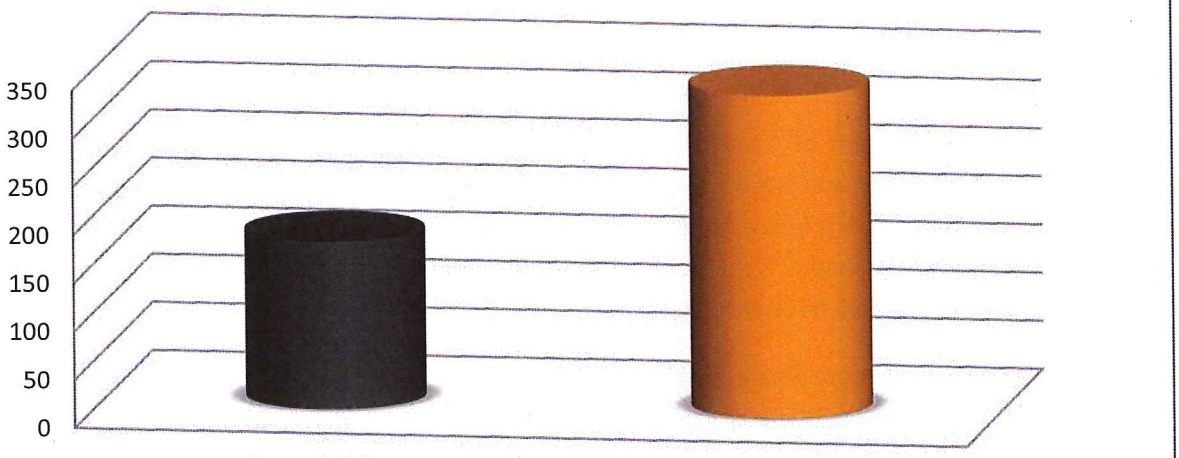
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.[1]

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



	Winter 2016	Spring 2018
Enumeration	174	335

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

[1] 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.[2] 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%.[3] 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.

---

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

[3] 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 18th via news media reports[4] 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

[4] 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 18th, 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)**

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

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

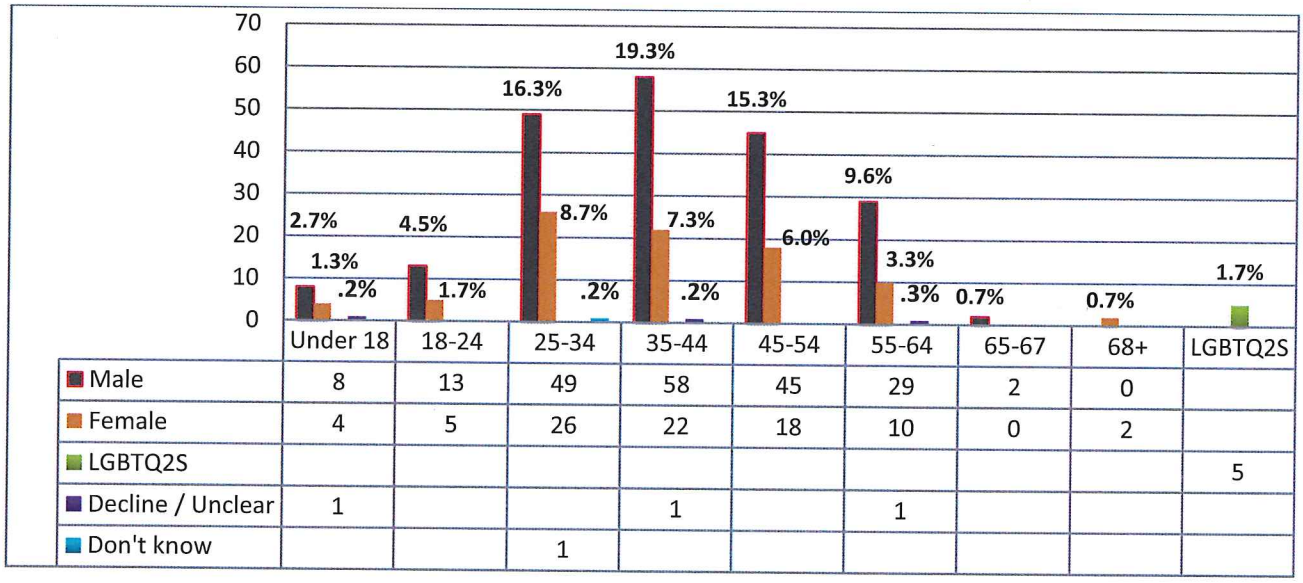
WHAT GENDER DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH? [5] **(2018)**

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[6] 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[7]



	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-67	68+	LGBTQ2S
Male	8	13	49	58	45	29	2	0	
Female	4	5	26	22	18	10	0	2	
LGBTQ2S									5
Decline / Unclear	1			1		1			
Don't know			1						

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

[6] Defriend, 2016, p.22

[7] 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?

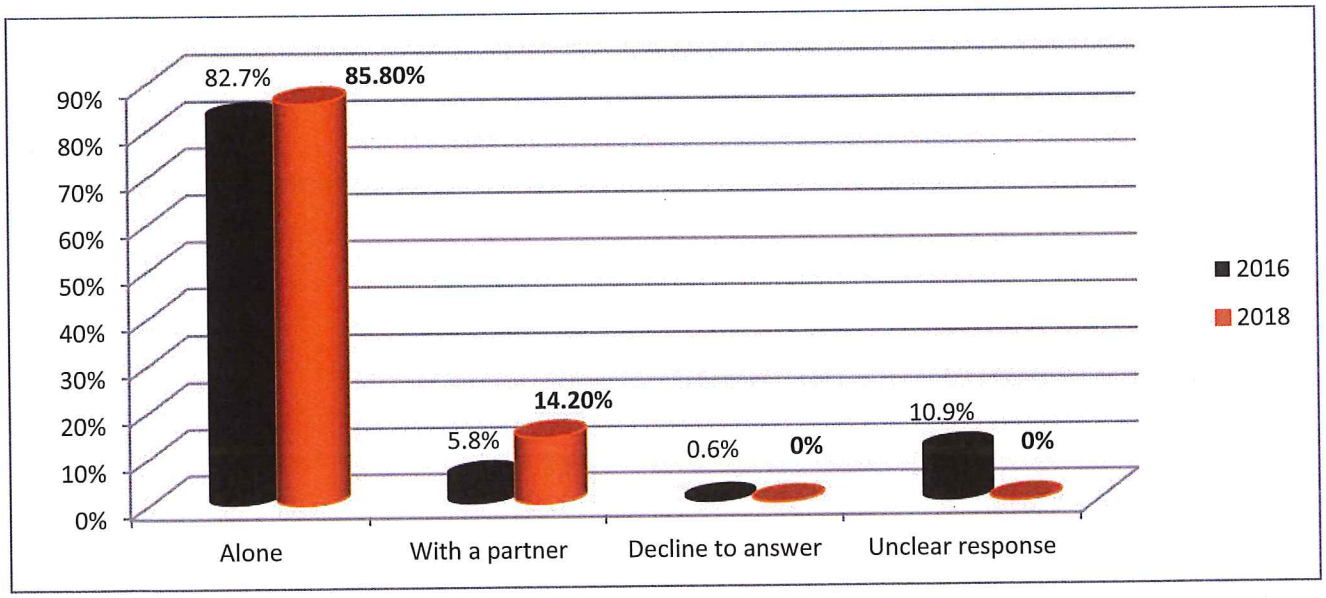
(Respondents shown a list)

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.[8]

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.



[8] 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?

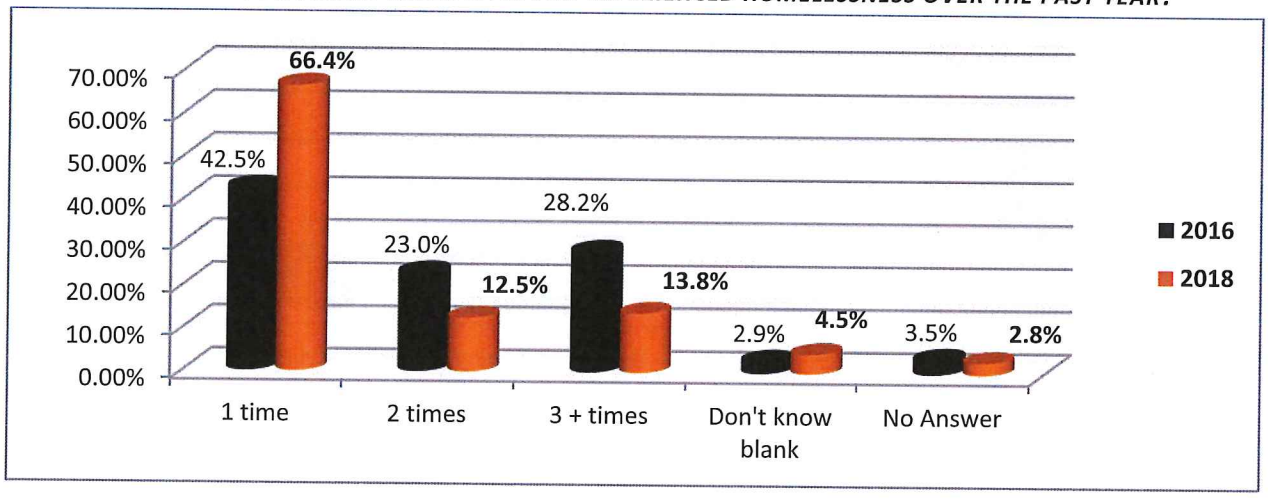
2018	0 to 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 12 months	12 months +	No answer
(n=289)	30	33	55	154	17
	10.4 %	11.4 %	19.0 %	53.3 %	5.9 %
2016	**0-3 months**	**3 to 6 months**	**6 months or more**	**n/a**	
(N=174)	18.4 %	17.8 %	59.8 %	n/a	4.0%

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). [9]

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?



[9] 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)

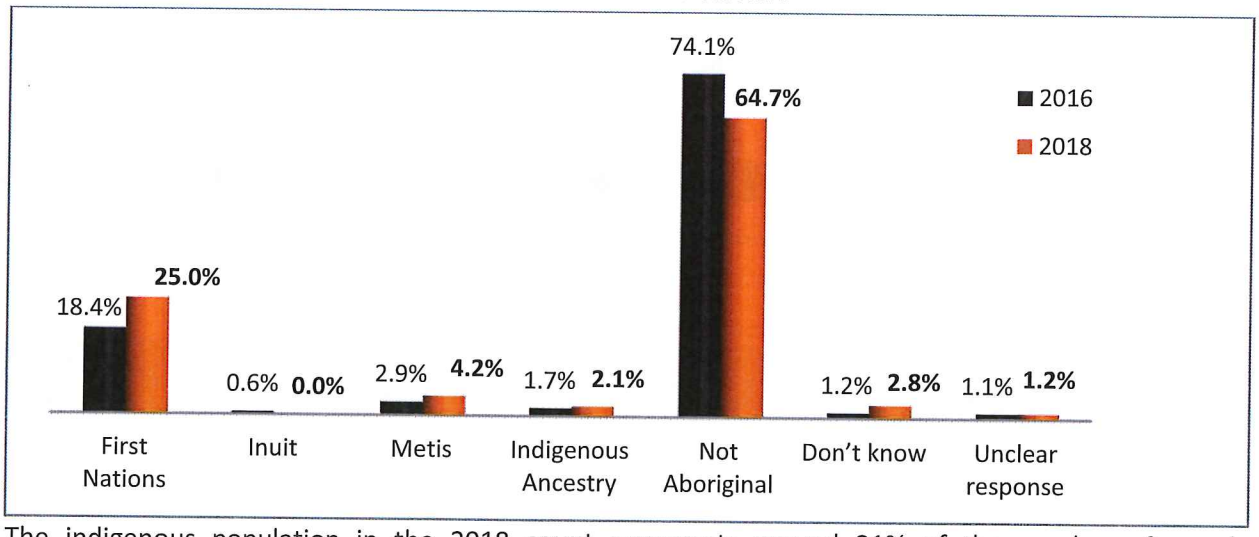
Age	17 or less	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	No answer
n = 289	80	46	56	46	35	12	14
	27.7%	15.9%	19.4%	15.9%	12.1%	4.2%	4.8%

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%

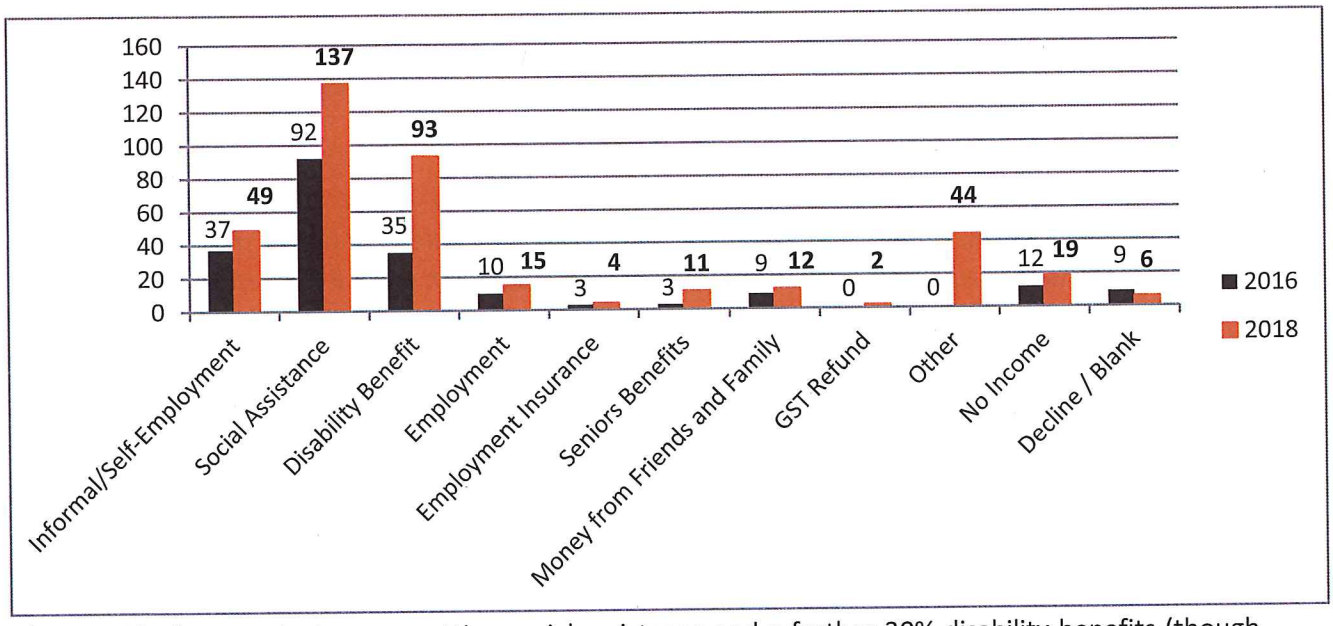
HAVE YOU STAYED IN AN EMERGENCY SHELTER IN THE LAST YEAR? (2018)

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.

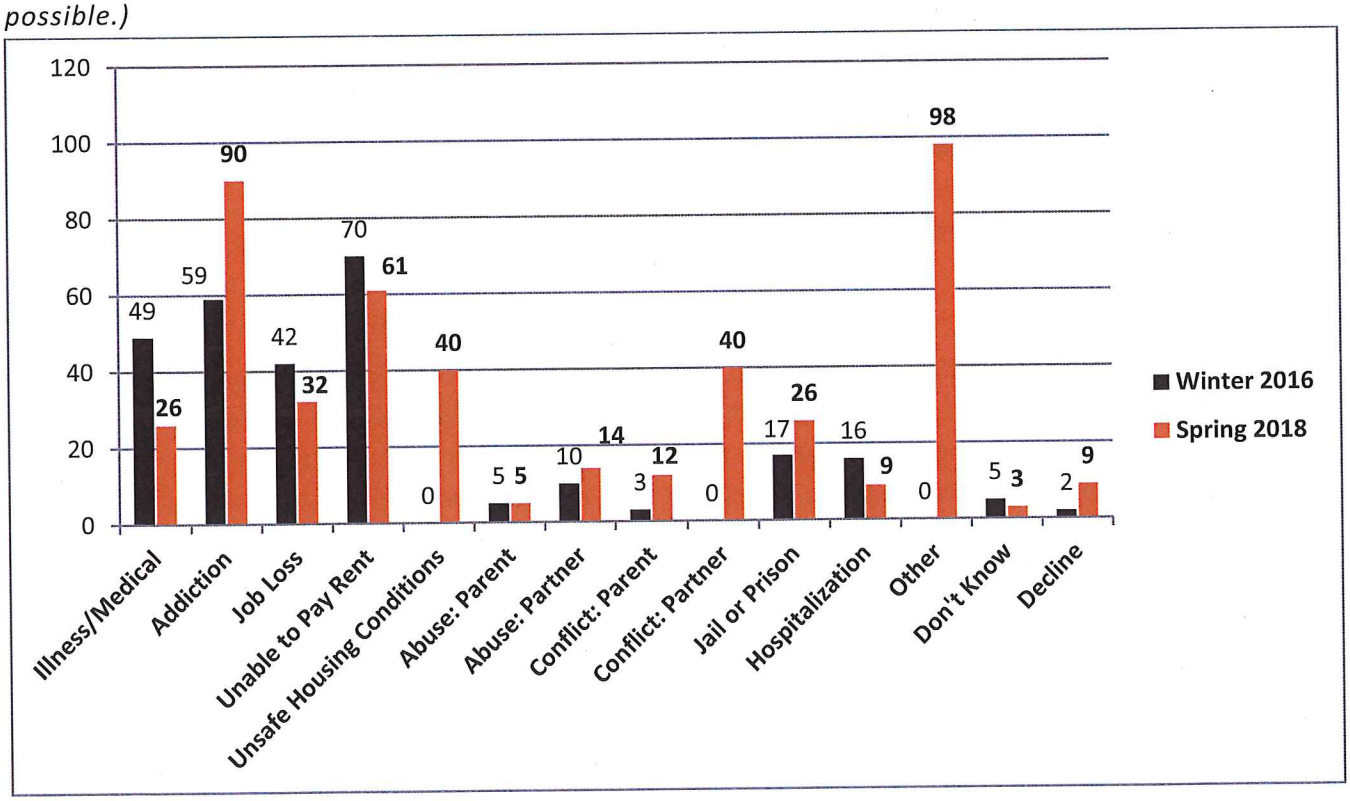
On the other hand, respondents gave many reasons for not staying in shelters. Frequently cited reasons were: fearing for one's safety and being worried about possessions being stolen. Other prominent reasons included not being able to stay in a shelter as a couple, and not wanting to be in an environment 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.

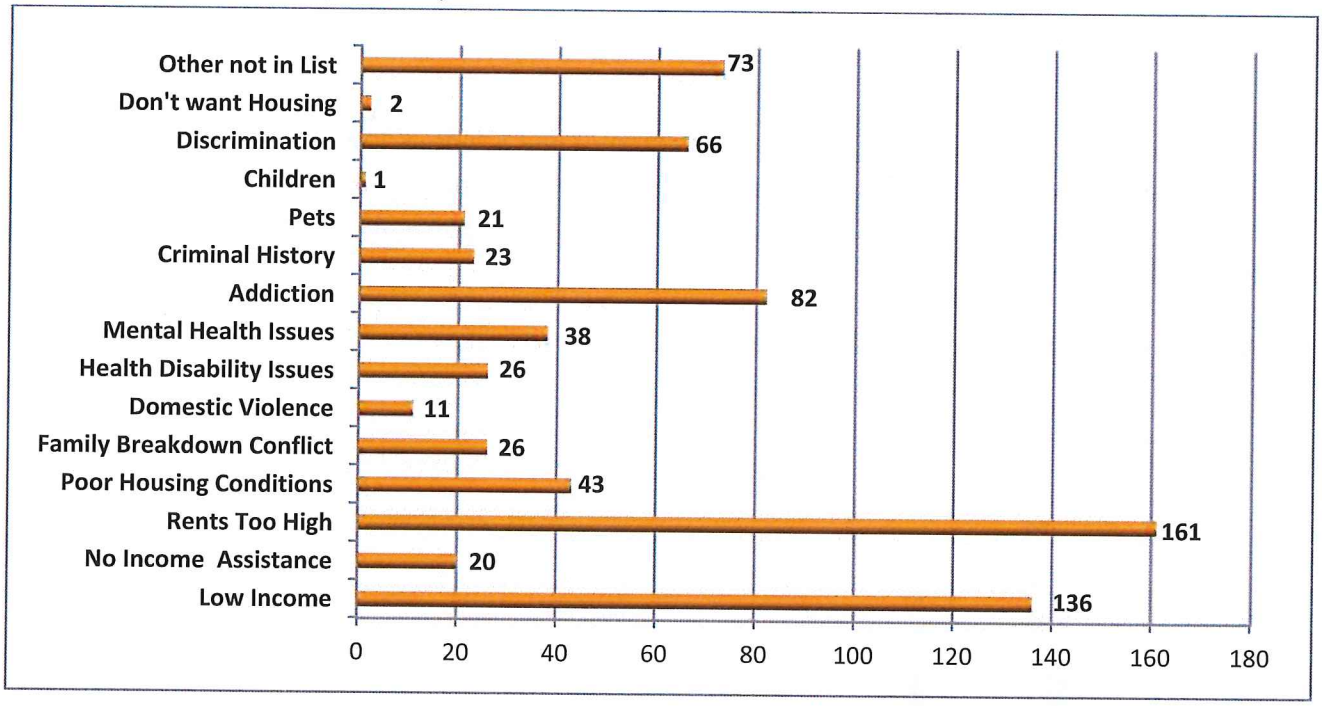
WHAT HAPPENED THAT CAUSED YOU TO LOSE YOUR HOUSING MOST RECENTLY? *(More than one answer possible.)*



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.[10]

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."

[10] 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.)*

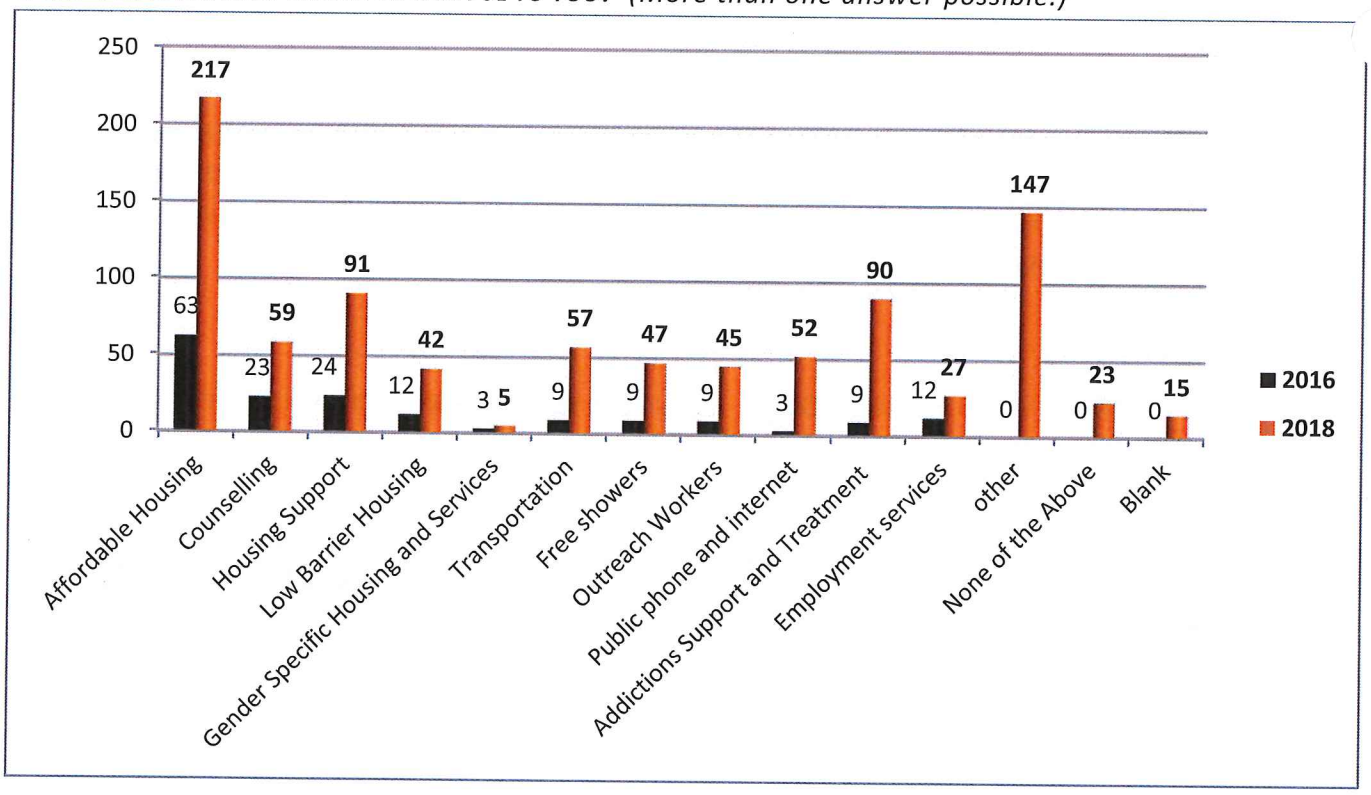
	Shelter	Food Bank	Hot Meal Program	7-10 Club	Library	Police	Other	None	Blank
2018 (n=289)	**122**	**84**	**91**	**156**	**87**	**21**	**13**	**12**	**31**
2016 (n=174)	128	103	85	125	98	28	45	n/a	n/a

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
2018 (n=289)	**112**	**22**	**4**	**91**	**65**	**94**	**31**
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.

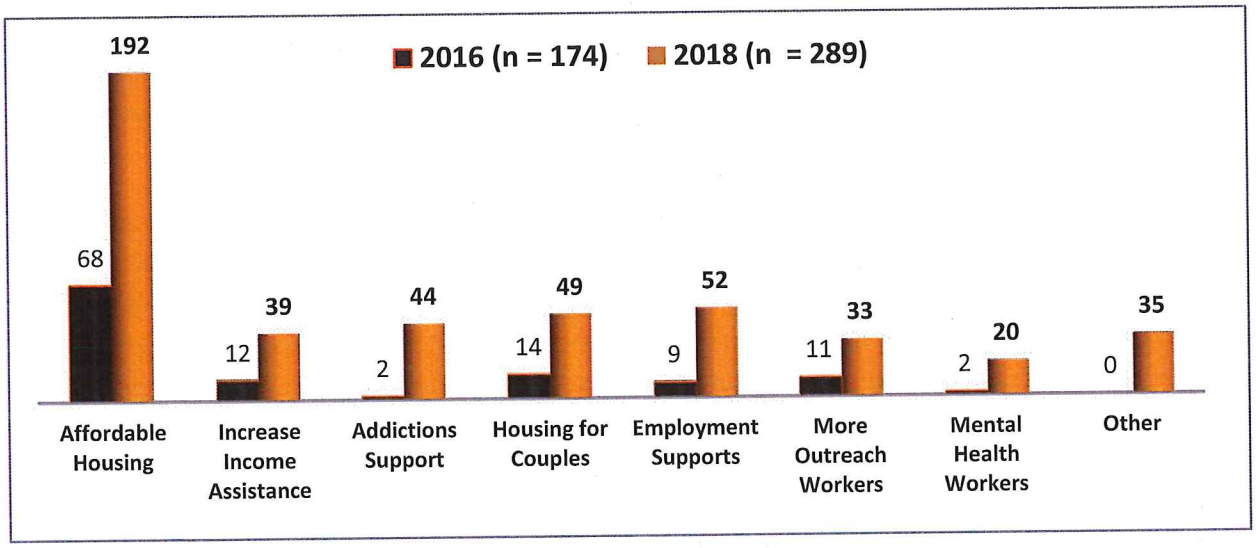
PHYSICAL HEALTH

	Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5	No answer blank
2018 (n=287)	**7.3 %**	**11.1 %**	**32.8 %**	**28.2 %**	**19.9 %**	**0.7 %**
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
2018 (n=286)	**8.0 %**	**17.6 %**	**32.5 %**	**21.5 %**	**19.0 %**	**1.4 %**
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

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

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.

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 [11] 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.

[11] *Canadian Definition of Homelessness* accessed at: http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf