

## HEALTH & HOUSING IN NANAIMO - BACKGROUNDER

The City of Nanaimo has seen significant growth in its homeless population in recent years. The April 2018 Point-in-Time (PiT) homelessness count documented 335 individuals struggling with homelessness in Nanaimo. This represents a near doubling of the homeless population since 2016. It is estimated that there are an additional 150-200 homeless individuals who were not captured by the 2018 PiT count. At the same time, our community has been greatly impacted by the national health crisis related to the use of opioids and other substances.

Council and the City of Nanaimo recognize that health and housing challenges are complex, often interrelated and frequently the root causes of homelessness. Council also understands the impact that these challenges are having on our community.

As health and housing is a multi-jurisdictional matter, it takes a collective effort to address our current homelessness crisis, and appropriate action is required from all levels of government. How issues are handled and what action is taken may differ based on the mandate of each level of government and ministry. We also acknowledge the important role that non-profit organizations play in supporting vulnerable community members as we all work together towards solutions.

### WHAT FACTORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE HEALTH AND HOUSING CRISIS?

April 2018's PiT count and survey revealed many factors that create housing barriers, including high rent, low income, addiction, mental health, discrimination, criminal history, pets, and family breakdown and conflict. Of those experiencing homelessness who agreed to be interviewed as part of the PiT count, only 2 out of 288 reported that they did not want housing.

#### *Affordability*

Financial security for families and individuals begins with addressing housing affordability. Currently in Nanaimo, almost half of all renters (48%) are in core housing need, which means they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

Canada's inflation rate tends to average at about 2%, but between October 2017 and October 2018, the cost of renting a two-bedroom apartment in Nanaimo increased nearly 10%. This increase far outpaced the average BC wage increase of 2.4% in 2018.

#### *Poverty / Low Income*

It can be confusing to figure out what the poverty line is in BC because Canada has no official definition of poverty. There are three main measures of poverty in Canada but the most common measure is the

Low Income Measure (LIM). LIM is a fixed percentage (50%) of median adjusted household income, where "adjusted" refers to the household size or the number of members in a household.

One of the difficulties of using median income to determine the poverty line is that the median income in Nanaimo is already quite low (\$27,850 for those living alone or with non-relatives). 45.5% of those living alone or with non-relatives earn less than \$25,000 per year, while 29% of single parent families, and 5% of families with or without children also fall into this category. Now more than ever, having a job doesn't necessarily mean being able to afford a place to live.

Tragically, this has the greatest impact on our children. According to the 2018 BC Child Poverty Report, nearly one in four children in Nanaimo live in poverty, which is significantly higher than the BC average. In some areas of our community, roughly 40% of children live in poverty.

#### *Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders (Addictions)*

People with mental illness experience homelessness for longer periods of time and have less contact with family and friends. In general, 30-35% of those experiencing homelessness and up to 75% of women experiencing homelessness have mental illnesses. It is estimated that 20-25% of people experiencing homelessness suffer from concurrent disorders (severe mental illness and addictions).

While not all those who are homeless have substance use disorders, and not all those who are substance users are homeless, there is a high proportion of those who are homeless who suffer with substance use that is typically related to an underlying mental health challenge. The opioid crisis in Nanaimo has complicated the issue of addressing the needs of homeless and street-involved people.

#### *Other findings:*

- [The Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) reported between 25-50% of the homeless population in Canada suffer from a mental illness(es). More critically, the [National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness](#) found that well over 50% of the 1054 youth experiencing homelessness in their 2014 National Needs Assessment reported a mental health issue of some kind.
- [The 2007 report by the City of Victoria Mayor's Task Force](#) reported that out of 162 homeless individuals with a substance or mental health condition recorded, 75% had disorders due to psychoactive substance use, 23% had personality disorders, 23% had schizophrenia, 22% had mood disorders and 9% had neurotic/stress related disorders.
- [A study at St. Michaels Hospital in Toronto](#) found over half of homeless individuals had suffered at least one traumatic brain injury in their lifetime, often (70%) before they were homeless.



## WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO FIX THESE HEALTH & HOUSING ISSUES?

All levels of government have a role to play in resolving these complex and interrelated issues: The Federal Government provides financial investment to Provincial entities like BC Housing and Island Health, sets policy directives and undertakes market research. The Provincial Government is responsible for providing housing solutions through BC Housing. Funded through the Province, Island Health is mandated to provide physical and mental health care, including substance use and dependency treatment. Municipal governments can create strategies and plans that support affordable housing initiatives through tax incentives, facilitate partnerships, and adopt bylaws which encourage the development of affordable and accessible housing.

Over the past twenty years, the City of Nanaimo has provided land, supported bylaw changes and has offered a range of financial incentives (such as reductions in development cost charges and costs associated with works and services) in order to facilitate the development of numerous affordable and supportive housing projects across the City.

Understanding how each level of government plays its part can be gained through a closer look at their roles:

### *Federal Government Investment*

- Partners with provincial governments and invests in affordable and social housing through funding transfers
- Since 2001, the Federal Government chose Nanaimo as a Designated Community to receive Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding. An annual allocation of approximately \$811,000 is distributed via the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition to local non-profits to address ending homelessness. The federal government renewed this program in 2018 for a further 10 years under the name "Reaching Home."
- Committed to a 10-year reinvest in affordable and social housing through the 2018 National Housing Strategy
- Provides financial assistance to home owners through tax credits and exemptions (e.g. the First Time Home Buyer's Tax Credit)
- Researches the housing market and related topics through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)
- CMHC provides mortgages, low interest loan insurance, and loan money for purpose-built rental units

### *Provincial Government Investment*

- Partners with local governments, non-profit agencies and housing stakeholders through BC Housing, a crown corporation with the mandate to develop affordable and supportive housing
- Offers strategic funding programs based on strategic priorities
- Provides the legislative framework for land use planning, landlord-tenant relations and strata housing
- Funds Island Health services and health promotion activities, including mental health and substance use disorder service and supports (including local outreach workers)
- Maintains the BC Building Code, ensuring safe housing

### *Municipal Government Investment*

- Adopts long-term Regional Growth Strategies and Official community plans that encourage a diversity of affordable housing units and lay the foundation for future and current land use
- Adopts zoning bylaws that support a diversity of affordable and accessible housing types (e.g. legalizing secondary suites)
- Adopts housing strategies to address issues of housing affordability and accessibility
- Offers property tax incentives, Works and Services and/or Development Cost Charge reductions for supported and affordable housing projects (e.g. 2020 Estevan)
- May provide land and/or buildings for housing and community health uses
- Can play a leadership role in planning and facilitating collaboration to address health and housing issues with other funders/partners. For example, the City has a long-standing role on the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, which coordinates the allocation of federal dollars and created the Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness (2018)

## **WHAT ACTIONS IS THE CITY TAKING TO SOLVE THESE HEALTH AND HOUSING ISSUES?**

### *Affordable Housing Strategy:*

The City of Nanaimo has created an Affordable Housing Strategy (2018), with objectives:

- To increase the supply of rental housing
- To support infill and intensification in existing neighbourhoods



- To diversify housing form in all neighbourhoods
- To continue to support low income and special needs housing &
- To strengthen partnerships and connections

Current projects underway with the Affordable Housing Strategy include:

- Short-term rental accommodation regulation
- Adaptive Housing Bylaw
- Community Amenity Contribution review
- Inventory/mapping of existing rental stock
- Affordable housing site acquisition criteria

#### *Health & Housing Task Force*

On May 13, 2019, Council approved the creation of a City staff-led task force aimed at taking action around these issues. Terms of Reference state that the task force will be required to:

- Work with the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition (the “Coalition”) to:
  - fulfill the Community Plan requirements of the Federal “Reaching Home” (Designated and Aboriginal) funding
  - determine the optimal governance structure to implement the Nanaimo Action Plan to End Homelessness
- Oversee the implementation of the Coalition’s Action Plan to End Homelessness and Nanaimo’s Affordable Housing Strategy
- Provide recommendations to Nanaimo City Council on other issues arising from and giving rise to homelessness in our community (poverty, mental health, substance use disorders)
- Provide status updates on the progress of the task force to the Coalition
- Determine the connection between the Regional District of Nanaimo affordable housing initiatives and those within the City of Nanaimo
- Advocate for additional resources from all levels of government for housing, health and poverty reduction initiatives

- Participate in the creation of a health, housing and homelessness communications strategy
- Address other issues as the task force sees fit

Membership will include two members of City Council and 9 additional members, including representatives from Snuneymuxw First Nation, RCMP, VIHA, BC Housing, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Service Canada, a “Reaching Home” Community Entity representative, and non-profit organization representatives.

## TEMPORARY SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

### *What is it?*

To address the Tent City that was established in Nanaimo during Spring 2018, BC Housing (a provincial crown corporation) installed temporary housing on land that they purchased at 250 Terminal Avenue. Temporary housing was also installed on a portion of the City’s Public Works yard at 2020/2060 Labieux Road. The housing is former modular work force housing and allowed for a rapid response to the close of Tent City by winter 2018. These sites house approximately 170 of the 260 campers who registered for housing.

For more information on the temporary supportive housing visit: [www.bchousing.org/partner-services/public-engagement/projects/nanaimo-supportive-housing](http://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/public-engagement/projects/nanaimo-supportive-housing)

### *Who manages it?*

Non-profit housing providers are contracted by BC Housing to manage the temporary housing on a 24/7 basis. Island Crisis Care Society manages Newcastle Place at 250 Terminal Avenue and Pacifica Housing manages Nikao at 2060 Labieux Road. Residents at both sites are provided with access to a range of services by Island Health and other social service agencies.

### *Are residents of the temporary modular housing allowed to use drugs there?*

Many (but not all) homeless people struggle with mental health related substance use disorders regardless of their housing situation. Supportive housing permits substance (drugs and alcohol) use so that users don’t hide what they are doing and put themselves and others at risk of overdose or other health risks. Stable housing with supports sets the stage for residents to get the help they need. A range of primary care and mental health services are offered through Island Health to support those living in the temporary housing sites. Outreach workers report that since December 2018, an increasing number of residents are accessing these supports.

### *What kind of services are available on-site at the temporary modular housing locations?*

Housing staff at both sites provide access to a range of mental and physical health supports. This includes facilitating and arranging transport to counselling and medical appointments. This is in



addition to Island Health workers who regularly attend the sites as part of providing wrap-around services to residents. There are offices at each site for health workers to support residents. This allows for consistent and continuous physical and mental health care that is critical for those struggling with addictions to stabilize and access the detox supports being offered.

*Where do homeless go if they can't access the temporary modular housing or permanent housing?*

There are several shelters set up in Nanaimo with emergency beds. These include 24 beds for men at the Salvation Army New Hope Centre (19 Nicol Street) and 14 emergency beds for women at the Island Crisis Care Society Samaritan house (355 Nicol Street). There are also 30 beds available for men and women at an emergency shelter run by the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo (595 Townsite Road), which is usually a winter-only shelter but currently open until March 31, 2020. For youth at risk (between 12-18 years old), there is a year-round shelter at the Friendship Lelum Youth Safe House.

Provincial and Supreme Court rulings have affirmed the rights of those who are homeless to shelter in public spaces by upholding Section 7 of the Charter, which protects individuals' safety and security of person. Consistent with these rulings, the City has defined areas in some City parks where a person without shelter options may shelter between 7pm one day and 9am the following day. The shelter must be entirely dismantled and removed from the park by 9am each day. As an added support, the City of Nanaimo and the First Unitarian Shelter have partnered to operate a daily shower program at Caledonia Park (110 Wall Street).

Food can be accessed through the Loaves and Fishes Community Food Bank (1009 Farquhar St), and both the 7-10 Breakfast Club (285 Prideaux St) and the Salvation Army New Hope Centre (19 Nicol St) provide hot meals. Other non-profits in the City offer meals/food, clothing and other supports to their clients, some of which may be homeless.

The City of Nanaimo's '[Surviving in Nanaimo Guide](#)' provides a range of additional resources for those who struggle to meet their daily health and housing needs.

*What is the City doing to address rising crime rates and public safety around the temporary modular housing sites?*

City Bylaws, Parks, Public Works and Planning continue to collaborate and coordinate efforts across departments and with the RCMP, School District 68, BC Housing and the Housing Operators to address Safety Concerns in neighbourhoods near the temporary crisis housing sites

Specific Activities include:

- City staff actively participate in Community Advisory Committees for both housing sites. This includes providing feedback and taking action on a range of safety concerns
- Feedback on site design to improve public safety and access to the temporary modular sites

- Design improvements and landscaping of parks and other public space near the housing sites, to improve safety
- Coordination with internal City departments and SD68 to address needle disposal, shopping carts, garbage and other materials posing health and safety risks
- Provision of public safety information on how to address different concerns through customized 'who to call' brochures for each neighbourhood
- Fire safety support to improve on-site safety of residents and the surrounding community

The City is working actively with BC Housing to find permanent housing solutions to replace the temporary crisis/modular housing. City Council is in the process of establishing a Health and Housing Task force that will address many of these issues.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE ISSUES:**

- Visit [www.nanaimo.ca/goto/affordablehousing](http://www.nanaimo.ca/goto/affordablehousing)
- Visit [www.nanaimo.ca/goto/homelessness](http://www.nanaimo.ca/goto/homelessness)

**WHO DO I CALL IF I:**

- FIND NEEDLES & OTHER DRUG RELATED REFUSE? Call Public Works at 250-758-5222
- WITNESS CRIME OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY? Call 911, or for non-emergency assistance, call the RCMP office at 250-754-2345
- NEED HELP ACCESSING ADDICTIONS SERVICES AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES? Bc211 can be reached by dialing 211
- For more Public Safety and Community Response contact numbers, visit [www.Nanaimo.ca/GoTo/WhoToCall](http://www.Nanaimo.ca/GoTo/WhoToCall)