

CITY OF NANAIMO'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS & COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Overview

In December 2023, the Province of British Columbia, in partnership with BC Housing, released new estimates of the number of people experiencing homelessness in the province. According to the 2021 Estimate of the Homeless Population in British Columbia report, the number of individuals who experienced homelessness in the Nanaimo Region was 996 (0.58% of the total population).

The estimates are based on the government's Preventing and Reducing Homelessness Integrated Data Project. The project links de-identified data from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the Ministry of Health and BC Housing to estimate the number of people who experienced homelessness in BC. The data counts people who accessed income assistance who reported having no fixed address and people who accessed a shelter over the course of 2021.

The findings of Everyone Counts: 2023 Point-in-time Count (Nanaimo) counted, in a 24-hour period, 515 individuals as homeless in the City of Nanaimo. This is an increase of 20% from the 2020 point-in-time count where 433 individuals were counted. 78.4% of those individuals counted in 2023 are unsheltered, meaning they have no access to shelter of any kind on a daily or nightly basis.

The following information identifies the upstream, midstream and downstream actions the City of Nanaimo is taking to respond to homelessness and its impact on the community.



Upstream Initiatives



Upstream approaches to responding to homelessness are about creating a healthy, safe and secure community where everyone has opportunities to grow, work, play, be valued and have belonging.

Housing Initiatives

The City is continuously working hard to ensure that Nanaimo has a range of housing types for people of all income levels. This includes temporary shelter, social or supportive housing, non-market housing, market rental housing and homeownership.

Detailed information regarding the many housing-related projects and initiatives that the City has undertaken to support affordable housing can be found on the City's Housing page. This includes Nanaimo's Affordable Housing Strategy and initiatives such as the Community Amenity Contribution Policy and Development Cost Charge Bylaw which incentivize the development of not-for-profit and non-market rental housing.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs/housing>

Housing Needs Report

In June 2023, Council received the 2023 Housing Needs Report. This report uses data to help identify current and future gaps in housing supply, type and affordability. The Housing Needs Report helps to inform plans, policies and development decisions in response to the community's needs.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/housing-needs-assessment>

Increasing Housing Options

Increasing Housing Options is a series of recommended changes aimed at making housing more attainable in Nanaimo. These four projects seek to increase rental housing stock and diversity by amending existing suite regulations, encouraging gentle infill in existing neighbourhoods and requiring family-friendly and adaptable units in multi-unit housing developments.

Link: <https://www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca/housing-initiatives>

Provincial Housing Bills

In 2024, the City will be proceeding with several projects in response to four provincial housing bills enacted by the Province in October and November 2023 (Bills 35, 44, 46 and 47). These four bills are part of the provincial Homes for People plan and significant work is required to amend and establish bylaws related to these bills.

Link: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes_For_People.pdf

Partnerships with BC Housing

The City has been actively working with BC Housing since 2008 to respond to the need for non-market housing in Nanaimo. Securing new sites for non-market housing is a priority for the City.

2019 Memorandum of Understanding

In 2019, the City entered into a MOU with BC Housing for supportive and affordable housing units on six sites. This MOU included new development on six sites around the city, including three affordable rental developments and four permanent housing developments at the following locations:

702 Nicol Street

Opened for occupancy March 2022. Contains 52 units of permanent supportive housing as well as 14 bridge to housing beds for women. The Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS) operates this building and provides 24 hour, 7 days per week staff support.

250 Terminal Avenue

This site is owned by BC Housing who plan to build approximately 50 supportive housing units and approximately 50 affordable housing units. Currently it is serving as a 78-unit temporary supportive housing site operated by ICCS.

285 Prideaux Street

This 51-unit permanent supportive housing site is opening in 2024. Previously the City's Community Services Building, 285 Prideaux was leased to BC Housing in September 2021 to provide 51 new permanent homes with supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Connective Support Society Nanaimo (formerly known as Nanaimo Region John Howard Society) has been identified as the operator of this site.

355 Nicol Street

Owned by BC Housing, this supportive housing site will include 35 studio apartments for Snuneymuxw members and other Indigenous people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Snuneymuxw First Nation has been selected to be the operator for this project.

1425 Cranberry Avenue

Currently a vacant, City-owned lot, BC Housing proposes to build approximately 46 affordable housing rental units for families, seniors and low-income individuals.

564 Fifth Street (Te'tuxwtun Project)

A collaborative community development project involving four "Knowledge Partners" which include the City, BC Housing, Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN) and Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (SD68). The housing component of this project is proposed to include 34 non-market rental homes (to replace the old Sanala homes), plus 356 new rental homes including both affordable and market rental.

Link: <https://letstalkhousingbc.ca/nanaimo>



Ongoing Advocacy & Next Steps

Behind the scenes there is much work underway to secure a range of housing needed in Nanaimo. This includes a navigation centre (announced by the Province in 2020), complex care housing (announced by the Province in 2022) and many other initiatives. Staff from the City and BC Housing meet on a regular basis to ensure these projects, and others, are moving forward.

Nanaimo Council have consistently advocated for increased provincial investments in shelter beds, rent supplements and other housing supports in Nanaimo and will continue to do so. More information will be shared once confirmed.

Homelessness Prevention: Rent Bank & Rent Supplement Program

In 2023, Council dedicated \$75,000 to fund the Nanaimo Regional Rent Bank program, administered by Connective Society. Council also dedicated \$150,000 to support the rent supplement program with funds from the Online Accommodation Platform (OAP) fund. An additional \$200,000 in OAP funds have been allocated in 2024 to provide continued support to both programs.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs>

Youth Resilience Strategy

To build a safer community, the City partnered with Public Safety Canada to provide programs and initiatives that address the root causes of youth engaging in gun and gang violence. The City was allocated \$1.8 million in funding to develop and implement the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/projects-detail/building-safer-communities-gun-and-gang-violence-prevention>

Parks, Recreation & Culture Programs

The City's Parks, Recreation & Culture department provides safe gathering spaces, parks, facilities, programs and events for all ages and incomes to support youth and families for a healthy community.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/parks-recreation-culture>

Social Planning Grants

The City provides Social Planning Grants to organizations that offer programs related to social cohesion, root causes of poverty, community vitality and social equity. There are two categories of funding available, with a total of \$85,000 in grant funding available annually:

- Social Response Grants (for larger projects)
- Community Vitality Grants (for smaller projects)

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/grants/social-development-grants>

Neighbourhood Associations

The City supports neighbourhood associations as an effective intermediary between the City and residents to address neighbourhood interests and concerns. This includes mitigating the impact of homelessness on residents and businesses.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/property-development/land-use-bylaws/neighbourhood-and-area-plans/neighbourhood-associations>

Midstream Initiatives



Midstream approaches help to support the City's most marginalized populations and work to reduce and respond to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of victimization and trauma.

Health & Housing Action Plan

The Health and Housing Action Plan (HHAP) came about from work undertaken by the City's Health and Housing Task Force whose focus was advancing health and housing as community priorities. To build the Plan, the Task Force led a community engagement and research process over the course of 2020 that identified needs and priorities for Nanaimo. The HHAP serves as a roadmap for collaboration and bold action, working towards a shared vision of health and housing for all.

Link: https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/default-document-library/healthandhousingactionplan-document_for-website.pdf

Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization

The City is providing \$480,000 annually for 5 years to the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization (SPO) to implement the Health and Housing Action Plan. The creation of the Nanaimo SPO was one of the key recommendations from the HHAP.

The SPO is responsible for several key areas of plan implementation, focusing especially on improved coordination and organization of existing health and housing resources. The SPO provides research, data, analysis, education and information related to the community's homelessness response along with coordinated action and advocacy by Nanaimo's non-profit organizations, Snuneymuxw First Nation and other levels of government, the business sector and the broader community to address an end to homelessness in Nanaimo.

Link: <https://nanaimospo.com>

Community Policing Program

The Nanaimo RCMP Community Policing Volunteer Program is a joint effort between the City and the Nanaimo RCMP. The program supports a range of community-based crime prevention programs and community policing initiatives including neighbourhood safety audits, speed watch, block watch, crime watch, 529 Garage Bike Registry and other safety education and awareness campaigns and events.

Link: <https://www.nanaimocpvunteers.ca>

Nanaimo Acute Response Table (Situation Table)

The City facilitates the Nanaimo Acute Response Table, bringing together frontline professionals from health, social services and public safety to respond rapidly to a vulnerable person or family in a high-risk situation that needs to be connected to services quickly.

Council has committed ongoing Staff support (until 2031) to the work of the Nanaimo Acute Response Table. Although the Table provides broad support to individuals living in acutely elevated risk, many of our referrals are for people living in homelessness (especially women and youth).

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/situation-table>



Downstream Initiatives



Downstream approaches to community safety and security focus on the City's ability to respond to emergencies and requires an immediate response to stop harm.

HEART and HEARTH MOU with the Ministry of Housing

On January 29, 2024 the City entered into a HEART and HEARTH MOU with the Ministry of Housing to receive and participate in the provincial programs Homeless Encampment Action Response Team (HEART) and Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH). The two sites selected in Nanaimo will provide 100 temporary housing spaces for people who have been staying in shelters long-term, which in turn will free up shelter space for people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo and reduce encampments.

250 Terminal Ave (Newcastle Place)

Fifty (50) temporary spaces at Newcastle Place will remain open once the current residents move to Cornerstone (supportive housing at 285 Prideaux Street). Island Crisis Care Society will continue operating Newcastle Place.

1300 Island Highway South

Fifty (50) units of temporary transitional housing will be built at this location. BC Housing issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) in late 2023 to identify potential operators for HEARTH sites in Nanaimo and will announce the operator for this site once they have been selected.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/projects-detail/heart-and-hearth>

Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan

As part of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, endorsed by Council in 2022, the City hired 12 Community Safety Officers and 2 community Clean Teams to monitor the downtown area. In addition, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments of City-owned spaces were conducted and a Vandalism Relief Grant was created. The City has committed \$2.5 million annually to increase community safety downtown.

In July 2023, the City received \$75,000 from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to evaluate the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, explore the feasibility of expanding the plan to other areas of the city and ensure that the action plan is aligned with the Health and Housing Action Plan, Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy, City Plan, the Nanaimo Acute Response Table and Nanaimo RCMP Strategic Priorities. This review is expected to be complete in spring 2024.

Link: <https://pub-nanaimo.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42120>

Warming Centres

Council has provided \$496,763.78 to fund three daytime warming centres in winter 2023-2024, operated by Risebridge Society (520 Prideaux Street), 7-10 Club Society (5 Victoria Road) and Island Crisis Care Society (2025 Bowen Road). The three centres provide refuge, support and access to basic needs and services for approximately 138 unsheltered individuals during cold weather conditions.

Staff are working with community partners to identify locations for emergency weather response overnight shelters. At the annual Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention that took place in September 2023, the City of Nanaimo brought forward a resolution on appropriate resourcing of emergency warming shelters which was endorsed.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs/homelessness/services-and-supports>

Shower Program

Since 2018, the City has provided \$206,015 to fund a shower service program at Caledonia Park for those experiencing homelessness. In December 2023, Council approved an increase in funding for this program by \$16,450, to provide an additional hour of services daily Monday-Friday. A project was also added to undertake building improvements to Caledonia Park, where this program is currently located.

Police Services (RCMP)

Beginning in 2020, the City committed to providing funding for three new RCMP officers each year for five years, for a total of 15 new members. Four officers in Nanaimo are dedicated to the Repeat Violent Offending Intervention Initiative, and eight officers are specialists in dealing with social disorder and homelessness.

Nanaimo Fire Rescue

Nanaimo Fire Rescue answers more service calls per member compared to other similar fire departments. To protect our growing community and support fire fighters, City Council voted to hire 20 new fire fighters in 2023 plus 20 more in 2025, and agreed to purchase the equipment they need to do their work. Nanaimo firefighters are trained to an Emergency Medical Responder level, and provide safety and security responses throughout the City.

Breakfast Meal program

Council provided \$212,559 towards the Breakfast Meal Program to provide breakfast meals daily, seven days per week between August 2023 to December 2023. The City continues to advocate to the Provincial government to provide funding for meal programs.

Surviving in Nanaimo Guide

The City creates and maintains the Surviving in Nanaimo Guide which serves as a resource for individuals and families struggling to access services. This guide has information and contacts for low-cost and free resources available for individuals living in Nanaimo. It can be used to find shelter, clothing, water, food, medical clinics, counselling services and more.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs/surviving-in-nanaimo-guide>

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