

DATE OF MEETING May 12, 2025
AUTHORED BY CHRISTY WOOD, MANAGER, SOCIAL PLANNING
ROSALIE SAWRIE, SOCIAL PLANNER

SUBJECT BASIC NEEDS SERVICES OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To provide the Governance and Priorities Committee with an overview of the basic needs services available for people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo.

BACKGROUND

At the Regular Council Meeting on 2024-NOV-04, Council directed Staff to prepare an update for a future Governance and Priorities Committee meeting regarding heating, cooling, and feeding centres, shelter spaces, and the role of community partners such as Snuneymuxw First Nation, BC Housing, Island Health, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, and the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization in delivering basic needs services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness in Nanaimo continues to grow in both visibility and complexity, driven by factors such as a lack of affordable housing, income inequality, trauma, mental health challenges, and substance use. Existing services are often at or over capacity, with critical gaps in areas that support basic needs including meal programs, emergency shelters, supportive housing, hygiene facilities, daytime services, and health care.

The 2023 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count identified 515 individuals experiencing homelessness. Preliminary results from the 2024 PiT Count estimate this number has increased to 621, with nearly 70% identified as unsheltered, meaning they lack access to any form of daytime or overnight shelter. Sector professionals estimate that between 800 and 1,000 individuals experience homelessness in Nanaimo over the course of a year. In December 2023, the Province of British Columbia and BC Housing reported that 996 individuals experienced homelessness in the Nanaimo region in 2021.

Basic need services play a vital role in supporting individuals who are unsheltered. These services form part of the essential infrastructure that promotes public health and safety while providing a pathway to stability. They are often the first point of contact for individuals, helping to build trust and connect them with support workers, healthcare professionals, housing programs, and mental health or substance use supports. These services are foundational to long-term solutions. Consultations with people with lived

experience highlight the urgency of ensuring consistent access to food, hygiene, rest, warmth, safety, and health supports.

Despite increasing demand, access to basic needs services in Nanaimo has declined over the past decade. In the past five years, the city has lost two indoor daily meal programs, a shower program, the outshop and a drop-in centre. In response, the City has provided full or bridge funding to fill critical service gaps where able. Most recently, in order to address year-round needs, the City funded a drop-in hub which limited its ability to support additional general daytime warming centres as it has in previous years.

This report outlines currently available basic needs services in Nanaimo, including types, locations, and available performance data. While many community groups and volunteers provide food, clothing, and supplies, only services that are consistently offered at fixed locations are low-barrier and are dedicated to people experiencing homelessness are included. Outreach services, such as those provided by Community Safety Officers, Ministry Community Integration Specialists, and the Street Reach Team, are excluded due to variability in programming and location. However, their role remains vital for supporting individuals who cannot or do not access services directly. |

DISCUSSION

Meal Services

Six organizations currently provide a range of dedicated emergency meal services to individuals who are unsheltered or precariously housed in Nanaimo. The summary table below outlines key details of these meal programs, including the operator, location, schedule, and approximate number of meals served. A map of meal service locations is included as Attachment A.

There is a limited number of indoor, drop-in meal options available. Most meals are distributed outdoors or through outreach at various locations throughout the community. Funding for these programs is limited, with the majority sourced from private donations and community grants. The Federal Reaching Home Designated Funding program for Nanaimo contributes some financial support for meal provision under its client-based services category, contingent upon applicants meeting specific grant criteria.

Historically, the 7-10 Breakfast Club (7-10 Club) operated a regular breakfast program for vulnerable populations in Nanaimo. However, following the 2021 closure of their City-leased location (repurposed to accommodate permanent supportive housing) the organization has not secured a new facility. To address the resulting service gap, the City allocated \$36,122 from the Daytime Resource Centre budget to the Salvation Army to provide an indoor breakfast program from September to December 2021. An additional \$416,106, with \$252,132 supplemented with one time funding from the Strengthening Communities Fund, was used to provide additional funds to the breakfast program and food provisions to three warming centres between November 2022 and December 2023.

Despite these efforts, no ongoing, permanent funding source has been identified to sustain the breakfast program. Nevertheless, the 7-10 Club and the Salvation Army have continued to offer limited breakfast services through outreach, supported by private donations when available.

The table below provides an overview of the meal services currently available for people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo.

Table 1 (Meal Services)

Meal Program Operator	Schedule	Location(s)	Meal Provision Capacity Averages
Nanaimo 7-10 Breakfast Club	Daily bagged lunch, 7 days per week	Outreach (Caledonia Park, 55 Victoria, 520 Prideaux Street and 1 Port Drive)	200 bagged lunches daily
	Daily hot breakfast, 7 days per week (prepared by Salvation Army)	Outreach (Caledonia Park, 55 Victoria, 520 Prideaux Street and 1 Port Drive)	70 to 80 breakfasts daily
Harvest Church	Weekly dinner meal provided on Sundays (except July & August)	6553 Portsmouth Road	50 dinner meals served weekly
Nanaimo Foodshare	Weekly lunch meal provided on Mondays	St. Paul's Anglican Church, 100 Chapel Street	50 meals served weekly
Selby Mission	Weekly lunch meal provided on Thursdays	St. Andrew's Church, 315 Fitzwilliam Street	75 meals served weekly
Snuneymuxw Hulit Lelum – Health	Weekly lunch BBQ provided on Tuesdays (except winter months)	1 Port Drive	150 meals served weekly
Wisteria Community Association / Stone Soup	Daily bagged dinner served between 5:30 pm and 8:30 pm, 7 days per week	Outreach (411 Wallace Street, 736 Nicol Street, 90 Commercial Street, 205 Terminal Avenue North, and Bowen Park West)	300 bagged dinner meals daily

Hygiene Services

Access to showers and washrooms is essential for individuals living unsheltered. These facilities support public health, uphold personal dignity and mental well-being, and are critical for maintaining cleanliness. Cleanliness directly impacts how individuals are treated when accessing services such as healthcare, housing, employment, and public transit. Moreover, public washrooms and showers provide a safe and private space for personal care, and access to sanitation is recognized as a basic human right.

Due to the ongoing lack of shower and hygiene facilities in the community, the City has continued to fund the only dedicated shower program for unsheltered or precariously housed individuals, located at Caledonia Park. From 2018 to 2024, the City provided \$348,526, with \$76,000 supplemented with one time funding from the Strengthening Communities Fund to the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo and then in 2024 to Nanaimo Family Life Association (NFLA) to operate the shower program at a City-owned facility. In 2024, an average of 30 individuals accessed the showers daily and a total of 7541 showers were provided. The overall shower usage has increased by 392% from 2018 to 2024.

At present, there are no other free or drop-in shower services available in the City. The New Hope Centre, operated by the Salvation Army, historically provided drop-in showers but ceased these services during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have indicated they do not plan to resume shower access for the general public, limiting availability to shelter guests only. All other existing shower services in the City are restricted to individuals already staying in emergency shelters.

The Leisure Economic Access Pass (LEAP) program has been expanded to include organizations serving people experiencing homelessness which has helped to complement the Shower Program. Through this program, individuals can access recreational facilities, which also offer shower amenities. NFLA, for example, collaborates with City staff to adjudicate LEAP applications, enhancing access to recreational services and hygiene facilities for clients accessing emergency shelter and other support programs where appropriate.

The City also maintains a network of public washrooms and drinking water fountains throughout the community. These facilities are often the only sanitation resources available to individuals who are unsheltered. A full list of public washroom and water fountain locations, including hours of operation, is available on the City's website under the [Emergency Services and Supports](#) page. More recently, the Overdose Prevention and Supervised Consumption Site (OPS) has installed two portable washrooms. See Attachment B for a map of hygiene services in the city.

Daytime Services

In recent years, the City has partnered with community organizations to provide daytime warming services during the winter months, supplementing its role in coordinating emergency responses during extreme cold weather. These efforts have underscored the importance of having established daytime services, not only to enhance emergency response capacity but also to meet the ongoing basic needs of unsheltered individuals. Warming centres have acted as essential lifelines, offering food, clothing, and safe spaces, while reducing strain on other overstretched social services. After these centres closed, downtown service providers reported a sharp increase in demand for basic supports. The RCMP Bike Patrol and Community Safety Officers (CSO) also noted difficulties relocating unsheltered individuals from public areas due to the lack of appropriate daytime alternatives. In the absence of purpose-built drop-in or warming spaces, facilities such as recreation centre lobbies and public libraries have been used increasingly, despite not being designed to support individuals with acute or complex needs. These facilities have provided temporary relief during extreme weather but are not suitable for individuals who are heavily substance-affected, highlighting the urgent need for dedicated daytime services.

In collaboration with the federally funded Reaching Home program, the City has allocated \$584,257 to operate a year-round drop-in hub (the Hub) that also provides warming and cooling services. Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS) operates the daytime services. The Hub offers access to basic needs such as food, hygiene supplies, and clothing, as well as connections to emergency shelter, housing, healthcare, mental health, and other community-based services.

BC Housing is also using the Hub as an access point for the Province's Homelessness Encampment Action Response Team (HEART) and Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH) programs, linking unsheltered individuals to supports and temporary housing. A coordinated Encampment Response Plan (ERP) has been developed in collaboration with community partners to guide the transition of people sheltering outdoors into shelter and housing. At this time, the City does not have a large, centralized encampment, therefore, community partners are prioritizing outreach to individuals sheltering in the downtown area, particularly the area around the Hub. The Hub is the first point of contact for many people sheltering downtown, making it essential to the success of the ERP. Additionally, BC Housing is funding 20 temporary overnight shelter beds at the Hub, which is operated by NFLA with confirmed funding until May 31, 2025.

Since opening in January 2025, the Hub has recorded 6170 visits. It has welcomed 156 first-time daytime visitors and provided overnight shelter to 206 unique individuals. A full review of the Hub's operations will be presented to Mayor and Council in early summer 2025.

In addition to the Hub, Risebridge Society offers weekly daytime drop-in services on Tuesdays from 9 am to 12 pm. This program is provided by a group of dedicated volunteers who provide snacks, coffee and clothing.

As previously noted, due to the limited availability of purpose-built daytime spaces, the City's recreation centre lobbies and Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) branches in Nanaimo continue to serve as informal daytime spaces for individuals experiencing homelessness. These facilities are accessed for rest, washroom use, internet or technology access, and social interaction, including during extreme weather events when warming or cooling is needed. See Attachment C for the locations of these daytime locations.

Emergency Shelter Services

In Nanaimo, there are three organizations that receive year-round funding from BC Housing to provide emergency shelter services, although permanent shelter capacity remains limited. The Salvation Army New Hope Centre offers 24 emergency shelter beds specifically for men, Samaritan Place, operated by ICCS, provides 14 beds for women, and the Unitarian Shelter, operated by NFLA, offers 25 beds with a true drop-in model, meaning clients do not need a referral and can access shelter on a nightly basis when there is bed capacity. Additionally, the Friendship Lelum Aboriginal Youth Safe House provides 8 beds for at-risk youth aged 12 to 18, however this is funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Each shelter has unique parameters regarding length of stay, with individuals typically allowed to remain for periods ranging from 30 days to two years depending on their circumstances. Currently, the only shelter operating with temporary funding from BC Housing is the Hub, which is funded until May 31, 2025, and has 20 beds. Attachment D provides the locations of emergency shelter beds currently operating as of May 1, 2025.

In total, Nanaimo has 63 BC Housing funded permanent emergency shelter beds for adults, plus 8 beds designated for youth. Preliminary numbers for the 2024 PiT count enumerated 621 individuals as experiencing homelessness. In comparison, Kelowna reported 263 year-round emergency shelter beds and 297 individuals experiencing homelessness in their 2020 count, while Kamloops had 209 year-round emergency shelter beds, and 312 individuals identified in their 2023 count. Based on our most recent PiT Count data BC Housing currently funds about 10% of the need for permanent Emergency Shelter Beds in Nanaimo in comparison to approximately 89% in Kelowna and 67% in Kamloops.

To try and meet the need, service providers in Nanaimo have demonstrated creativity in stretching limited resources to meet community needs. For example, the Salvation Army internally funds an additional 10 transitional beds to help individuals stabilize and move from emergency shelter beds into longer-term supportive housing. Similarly, the NFLA internally funds two emergency shelter beds to assist individuals discharged from hospital or facing other crisis situations.

The following summary outlines the emergency shelter beds for adults experiencing homelessness that were available year-round and the average occupancy rate in 2024 as reported by service providers.

Table 2 (Emergency Shelter Services and Occupancy Rates)

Shelter Name	Total # beds	Occupancy Rate	Notes
Unitarian Shelter (co-ed) 595 Townsite Road (Nanaimo Family Life Association)	27	85%	2 beds are held for community agencies needing support for external clients i.e. high acuity
New Hope Centre (men only) 19 Nicol Street (Salvation Army)	34	88%	10 of the beds are internally funded and offered to long-term shelter guests that have stabilized. These beds can be empty if there are no suitable shelter guests.
Samaritan Place (women only) 702 Nicol Street (Island Crisis Care Society)	14	80%	Beds are held for guests for up to 30 days with occasional absences which can affect the occupancy rate.

In addition to year-round emergency shelter beds, additional temporary winter shelter beds were funded by BC Housing in 2024.

Table 3 (Winter Shelter Services and Occupancy Rates)

Shelter Name	Total # beds	Occupancy Rate	Notes
St. Peter's Winter Shelter 301 Machleary Street (Nanaimo Family Life Association)	40	90%	Open November to March annually
Risebridge Winter Shelter - 520 Prideaux Street (Risebridge Society)	24	NA	Open November to April. Reports of occupancy unavailable
Extreme Weather Response Shelter - 6553 Portsmouth (7-10 Club Society)	30	28%	Only open three days in 2024 during BC Housing's extreme weather thresholds

Shelter occupancy rates are affected by weather with highest occupancy reported during winter months and lowest occupancy rates in summer months. Occupancy rates are also lowest during social assistance cheque week when individuals have the finances to utilize other shelter options.

Supportive Housing Services

In 2019, the City of Nanaimo and BC Housing signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build new housing on six sites, aimed at improving access to housing for Nanaimo’s vulnerable populations. The MOU outlines the development of approximately 608 supportive and affordable housing units across the city, expanding options along the housing continuum. The City is providing support for these projects by providing land for lease at a nominal cost. Four of the six sites will provide permanent supportive housing specifically for people experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

Table 4 (2019 MOU Supportive Housing Services)

2019 MOU - Property Address	Operator	Total # units
702 Nicol Street (open now)	Island Crisis Care Society	51
285 Prideaux Street (open now)	Connective	51
250 Terminal Avenue	TBD	50 approx.
355 Nicol Street	Snuneymuxw First Nation	35

In addition, the City has signed an MOU with the Ministry of Housing to participate in the provincial Homeless Encampment Action Response Team (HEART) and Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH) programs. HEARTH units provide long-term housing for people staying in emergency shelters, which frees up shelter beds for the HEART program to coordinate encampment response efforts. Four sites in Nanaimo have been selected to provide a total of 237 temporary HEARTH supportive housing units. The City is supporting the HEARTH program by providing land for lease at a nominal cost and up to \$750,000 for capital improvements at 1030 Old Victoria Road and is contributing approximately \$394,000 to support the lease for 1298 Nelson Street. The four sites identified, the operators and number of units are summarized below.

Table 5 (HEARTH MOU Supportive Housing Services)

HEARTH MOU - Property Address	Operator	Total # units
250 Terminal Avenue (open now)	Island Crisis Care Society	50

1300 Island Highway	Connective	50
1030 Old Victoria Road	Vancouver Island Mental Health Society	59
1298 Nelson Street	Pacifica Housing Advisory Society	78

Additionally, BC Housing is partnering with Island Health to develop approximately 20 units of Complex Care Housing at 1850 Boxwood Road. This project is proposed to support individuals experiencing homelessness who have complex health needs. The City received a rezoning application for this proposed project in February 2025.

Other supportive housing sites already operating in Nanaimo include:

- 1597 Boundary Crescent - 41 permanent supportive housing units – operated by Vancouver Island Mental Health Association,
- 2060 Labieux Road - 66 temporary supportive housing units – operated by Pacifica Housing Advisory Society,
- 6025 Uplands Drive - 34 permanent supportive housing units - operated by Pacifica Housing Advisory Society, and
- 437 Wesley Street - 36 permanent supportive housing units – operated by Canadian Mental Health Association – Mid Island Branch.

Currently, Nanaimo has approximately 329 permanent and temporary supportive housing units in operation for people experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, with an additional 292 proposed units in various stages of development. Attachment E provides the location of current and proposed permanent and temporary supportive housing sites.

Health Services

In response to the growing challenges of homelessness, a range of health services have been implemented to serve the needs of individuals living unsheltered. These services include mental health support, substance use supports and treatment options, and integrated care models designed to address the complex needs of this population. The following summary lists low-barrier health services frequently accessed by people experiencing homelessness. These services provide general medical care, mental health support, substance use services, harm reduction, addiction support, and detox.

Table 6 (Health Services)

Service Name and Location	Operator	Service Type
Overdose Prevention & Supervised Consumption Site (250 Albert Street)	Canadian Mental Health Association – Mid Island	Harm Reduction
Medical Arts Centre Walk-in Clinic	Island Health	Medical Health

(650 Terminal Avenue South)		
Nanaimo Regional General Hospital (1200 Dufferin Crescent)	Island Health	Medical Health
Nanaimo Sobering & Assessment Centre (126 Haliburton Street)	Vancouver Island Mental Health Society	Detox
Central Island Access Services – Brooks Landing (2000 Island Highway North)	Island Health	Mental Health and Substance Use
Primary Care Outreach (110 Wall Street, 250 Albert Street, 1 Port Drive)	Island Health	Medical Health
AIDS Vancouver Island - Nanaimo (55 Victoria Road)	AIDS Vancouver Island	Harm Reduction
Nanaimo Addiction Clinic (55 Victoria Road)	Nanaimo Addiction Clinic	Addiction Services
Trew Beginnings (55 Victoria Road)	Trew Beginnings	Addiction Services
ARC Addiction and Recovery Clinic (55 Victoria Road)	ARC Clinic	Addiction Services
Outreach Pharmacy (55 Victoria Road)	Outreach Pharmacy Ltd	Addiction Services

Attachment F provides a map of these health service locations in the City of Nanaimo.

Social Service Management Mapping Project

The Social Services Management Mapping Project is a collaborative initiative between the City’s Public Safety and IT & GIS Departments. Its goal is to develop a data-driven interactive tool that helps Staff analyze the relationship between social services and neighbourhood vitality, identify underserved areas or those at risk of social conflict and disorder, and support the strategic placement of new, essential services, including basic needs programs while balancing neighbourhood considerations.

Key data elements that will be included in the mapping project include:

- Social Service Locations:
 - Shelters (e.g., homeless shelters, emergency housing)
 - Basic need services (e.g. meal programs, shower programs, warming/cooling centres)
 - Supportive housing (e.g., transitional or permanent housing programs)

- Health services (e.g., clinics, mental health services, addiction centers)
- Positive Activity Generators:
 - Educational institutions (e.g., schools, universities, libraries)
 - Parks, recreation, culture and wellness spaces
 - Primary and secondary urban centres
 - Transit exchanges
 - Libraries
 - Walking distances to services and amenities
- Overlay and Contextual Data:
 - Population density
 - Vacant buildings
 - Fire orders
 - Public Safety - Calls for Service
 - Crime rates
 - Proximity to residential zones
 - Zoning regulations
 - Socio-economic indicators

Staff are currently compiling geospatial data and will use mapping tools to visualize service locations using symbols and, where applicable, heat maps to illustrate density or overlap. As a preliminary example, Attachment G displays the locations of all identified basic needs services in the downtown area and their proximity to one another. A future demonstration of this tool will be presented to Council at a later date in 2025. |

CONCLUSION

This overview of basic needs services is accompanied by a scheduled discussion at the 2024-MAY-12 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting with representatives from Snuneymuxw First Nation, BC Housing, Island Health, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, and the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization. Staff have invited these partners to share updates on their current and planned activities in Nanaimo related to homelessness and the provision of basic needs services. They have also been asked to present relevant program statistics and offer their perspectives on the following questions:

- What is working well in addressing homelessness and meeting the basic needs of unsheltered individuals in Nanaimo?
- What additional supports or services are needed to address homelessness and the critical needs of unsheltered individuals?
- How can access to basic needs services, housing, and health care be improved for unsheltered individuals?

SUMMARY POINTS

- In November 2024, Council directed Staff to prepare an update for a future Governance and Priorities Committee meeting regarding heating, cooling, and feeding centres, shelter spaces, and the role of community partners in delivering basic needs services to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Basic need services play a vital role in supporting individuals who are unsheltered. Despite increasing demand, access to basic needs services in Nanaimo has declined over the past decade.
- City of Nanaimo partners from Snuneymuxw First Nation, BC Housing, Island Health, the Vancouver Island Regional Library and the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization have been invited to the 2024-MAY-12 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting to speak about the state of homelessness in Nanaimo and the basic needs being provided to people experiencing homelessness.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Meal Services

ATTACHMENT B: Hygiene Services

ATTACHMENT C: Daytime Services

ATTACHMENT D: Emergency Shelter Services

ATTACHMENT E: Supportive Housing Services

ATTACHMENT F: Health Services

ATTACHMENT G: Social Services Management Mapping Project – Sample Map

Submitted by:

Christy Wood
Manager, Social Planning

Concurrence by:

Kerry Ing
Director, IT/CIO

Dave LaBerge
Director, Public Safety

Laura Mercer
General Manager, Corporate Services