

Point-in-Time Count 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Capital Regional District | July 2020

Why do a Point-in-Time Count?

A Point-in-Time (PiT) Count is a strategy to help determine the extent of homelessness in the community on a given night while also providing important insight into the nature and extent of homelessness and the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness. A PiT Count is also an important part of a community's response to homelessness through increasing a community's ability to take action by:

- Identifying the characteristics of the local population.
- Increasing capacity to undertake a local needs assessment.
- Enhancing system planning and program development.
- Increasing public awareness about homelessness.
- Providing important information for local, provincial and national homelessness servicing systems.

How often is a PiT Count done?

There was an initial PiT Count and survey completed in 2016 in Greater Victoria, alongside 30 other communities across Canada. This was replicated in 2018 in an even larger number of communities using a common methodology.

What are the numbers for 2020?

The 2020 PiT Count identified people who were without a home and experiencing a variety of circumstances, including:

• Unsheltered and sleeping outdoors	270
• Staying in an Emergency Shelter	350
• Living in Provisional Accommodations*	888
• Unsure or unknown location of sleeping location	15
TOTAL	1523

*Respondent was in a transitional shelter or housing, a treatment facility or other facility including corrections, or provisionally accommodated at self-funded hotel/motel or someone else's place (i.e. "couch surfing")

Point-in-Time Count 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Capital Regional District | July 2020

Is homelessness increasing and can the 2020 findings be compared to the 2018 findings?

The method used to collect this data does not allow for the identification of trends. The fact that the number is slightly lower compared to the 2018 total of 1,525 is not an indicator of homelessness decreasing in the region, it simply indicates that the count was able to reach 1,523 people this year. Also, further data cleaning could change the number that the report provides. Changing circumstances and differences in methodology mean the results from count to count are not comparable. Some of the factors that influenced the count this time include:

- A number of transitional facilities that participated in 2018 did not participate in 2020 due to methodological and personal reasons.
- In 2018, the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre (VIRCC) reported 84 homeless individuals staying in prison on the night of March 15, 2018. This year, the PiT Project team reached out to the VIRCC and they were unable to get an enumeration for the 2020 PiT Count.

How do these findings fit with the research used to support the planning of new resources?

For approaches addressing homelessness to work well, projects and services have to reflect the needs and characteristics of those they are intended to serve. This means having a sense of the scale of the challenge by looking at shelter data and use patterns, but also understanding the unique stories of those surveyed through the PiT Count. The survey data provides vital insight that is used to complement existing data sets by “filling in the gaps” and giving context. Ultimately, a range of data sources is essential to supporting a holistic approach to addressing homelessness.

What is the impact of COVID-19 on these findings?

The requirements for physical distancing and isolation within the COVID-19 public health emergency measures contributed to a significant increase in the number of people sheltering out-of-doors in parks and along boulevards following the March 11 count and survey. A number of extreme weather shelters could not remain open beyond their planned March 31 closures and established shelters had to substantially reduce their nightly admissions due to the need to ensure individuals were provided with the ability to maintain an appropriate

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physical distance. As well, many people had to leave informal sheltering spaces (“couch surfing”) with family and friends due to the need for physical distancing. Correction and health institutions were forced to discharge people into homelessness during the emergency because there were no new sheltering options available in the community as the pandemic deepened.

The closure and significant curtailment of outreach services during the pandemic also contributed to the congregation of large numbers of unsheltered people in areas where limited services remained available (Pandora Avenue) and in public spaces where emergency services were provided (Topaz Park).

Does this represent all the people in the region who are experiencing either homelessness or housing stress in the region?

No. While a comprehensive PiT Count offers important information about a community, the count cannot provide an exact number of people experiencing homelessness in a given community. For example, those who are provisionally accommodated or disconnected from homelessness-serving agencies are less likely to be counted. However, the limitations of this method should not prevent communities from undertaking a PiT Count, which will yield worthwhile data.

How will the PiT Count findings be used?

The findings of the survey, in particular, will add voice to the needs of people with lived experience of homelessness in the planning and implementation of a variety of significant programs in the region, including:

- The CRD initiated Regional Housing First Program partnership with BC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, through which each partner has committed to investing \$40 million (\$120 million total) in the development of 400 housing units for people experiencing chronic homelessness. Island Health is also a partner, committed to providing health resources, where needed.
- The CRD’s administration of the Government of Canada’s Reaching Home Program, including recommendations for funding by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Board of Directors, which acts as the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board.
- The development of a Coordinated Assessment and Access system and a Homelessness Management Information System to support the improved coordination of services throughout the region.

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Summary of Findings:

- **The 1,523 homeless individuals** on the night of March 11, 2020, were found across transitional housing, temporary shelters, couches, vehicles and outdoors. Some 854 individuals participated in the survey, over half of those who were enumerated.
- **More people were reached who were 'couch surfing' or experiencing hidden homelessness** – 145 survey respondents were found to be staying at someone else's place with no permanent housing of their own. While this number is higher than in 2018, it is still an undercount as it is difficult to reach this group.
- **Homelessness is a fluid rather than static experience.** There is movement of people between couch surfing, shelters and sleeping rough. Over half of those that had couch surfed on the night of March 11 had used a shelter in the past year.
- **Youth, Indigenous people and seniors have unique experiences of homelessness** – Nearly one in five survey respondents (20%) are 55 and older, and 10% are youth under the age of 25. There are culture and age-related barriers to accessing housing as well as services. Homelessness often starts at an early age: 38% had their first experience of homelessness at 18 years of age or younger.
- **More than one in three (35%) identify as Indigenous.** This is much higher than the rate in the broader population (4.7%).
- **Many have been homeless for long periods** – 82% had been homeless for more than six months over the past year, and 61% report having been homeless for the past 365 days or more.
- **A significant majority were British Columbians** – 84% had lived in Greater Victoria for more than one year, and 22% have lived in the region their entire lives. Of those who have moved from another place, 60% had lived somewhere in British Columbia before coming to Victoria. The most common reasons for moving include: family moved here, to visit friends and family, and employment (seeking and secured).
- **There are homeless families with children** in the region. Families with children experiencing homelessness account for 30 (3.5%) of the survey respondents and include 42 children or dependents, over one-quarter (28%) of whom slept unsheltered or in vehicles on the night of March 11. While this is a relatively small number, it does show that there are families with children experiencing homelessness in the community.

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The Point-in-Time Count is a partnership between:



Funded by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy



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