



More Than a Number: 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count Summary Report

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This report is dedicated to all of the individuals living in homelessness in our community. Your stories and strength inspire us.

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Introduction

The 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count (PiT Count) provides an estimate of the extent of homelessness as well as a snapshot of some of the needs of those who are homeless in our region on a single night. The last count and needs assessment was completed through the 2007 Homeless Needs Survey conducted by Victoria Cool Aid Society and the Community Social Planning Council. Starting in 2011, the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, in collaboration with Centre for Addictions Research of BC and Community Social Planning Council, have conducted an annual Facility Count that estimates the number of people staying in emergency shelters and temporary accommodations in the capital region¹. Successive annual counts have allowed for year-over-year comparisons to help understand our community's progress towards ending homelessness in the region. In addition to these "point-in-time" estimates, a yearly estimate of the number of unique individuals experiencing homelessness with at least one stay in an emergency shelter is conducted annually using data from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS).² The 2016 PiT Count was funded through the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and involved the collaboration of 30 HPS funded communities across Canada. These 30 HPS funded communities conducted PiT Counts within the first four months of 2016 to apply a national lens to the issue of homelessness across Canada.

The 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count sought to find out how many people were experiencing homelessness on a given night in Greater Victoria, why they were experiencing homelessness and hear their stories in the hopes of creating change. To do this, the 2016 Point in Time Count used a combination of approaches to provide a snapshot of the number of people who are either experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness in Greater Victoria, with a specific focus on those who were unsheltered, emergency sheltered, and provisionally accommodated as per the Canadian Definition of Homelessness.³ All of these groups are considered to be homeless because they do not have a safe and permanent place to call home.

On the night of February 10, 2016, there were at least 1,387 people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. We cannot forget that behind each number is an individual with their own personal story, meaning there were 1,387 individuals with 1,387 stories, who on the night of February 10th, did not have a safe place they could call their home. They shared their stories and time graciously and patiently, in the hope and belief that this information will lead to change.

Methodology

While Canadian researchers are working to improve the methodologies used to measure the number of people experiencing homelessness in a given geographic area, point in time homelessness counts are frequently used to establish **an estimate** of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a given day, **not a census** of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness.⁴ A PiT Count is a strategy to help determine the extent of homelessness in a community on a given night or at a single point in time. A PiT Count combined with a needs survey can allow a community to better understand the nature and extent of homelessness and the people who are homeless in a community. Such assessments can support better planning, and when done on more than one occasion, may allow communities to assess their progress in reducing homelessness. PiT

¹ See the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness report website: <http://victoriahomelessness.ca/get-informed/coalition-reports/>

² The National Homeless Information System (NHIS) is an initiative of the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) designed to facilitate the collection of data from homeless service providers in support of creating a national portrait of homelessness. The NHIS funding stream supports the implementation and deployment of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) software, which facilitates the collection of shelter data at the local level (Government of Canada, 2016). Accessed online at: <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/nhis/index.shtml>

³ Homelessness is defined by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network as:

- **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
- **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as Violence Against Women shelters;
- **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary and who do not have their own home or security of tenure;
- **Insecurely Housed**, referring to people who are 'at-risk' of homelessness, and whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

⁴ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2015

Counts most often result in underestimates of homelessness overall and certain groups such as women, youth and family are usually underrepresented in the findings.

The 2016 Greater Victoria PiT Count included an enumeration of those unsheltered, using emergency shelters, and staying in temporary accommodations, as well as a voluntary needs assessment survey that asked questions about participants' experiences of homelessness and their needs.

The PiT Count and Needs Assessment took place on February 10th, starting at 12:00pm and ending at 12:00am on February 11th. The PiT Count took place across Greater Victoria in outdoor spaces, emergency shelters and temporary accommodations. The PiT Count combined an enumeration strategy (counting individuals sleeping outside, sheltering in emergency shelters or temporarily accommodated, as well as individuals who were turned away from emergency shelters or similar facilities) with a voluntary housing needs survey. Individuals were surveyed largely between 8pm and 11pm on the night of February 10th, although some were surveyed earlier in the day at targeted day programs for individuals who would not be sheltering outdoors or seeking shelter in facilities between 8pm and 10pm. Trained volunteers and program staff conducted the voluntary survey. In addition, program staff provided anonymous data on the number of individuals staying in their facilities and the number of individuals turned away.

The survey was completely voluntary and ethical approval for conduct of the PiT Count was obtained through the University of Victoria/Island Health Ethics Review Committee.

Enumeration results

Individuals enumerated on the night of the count

A total of 1,387 individuals were enumerated (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and turned away) on the night of the count. For a breakdown of individuals enumerated by age and gender, please see Table A in the Appendix on page 16.

Table 1

Overall number of people experiencing homelessness on February 10th, 2016	
Facility Count (1,077 sheltered and 65 turned away)	1,142
Surveyed individuals - unsheltered (vacant building, makeshift shelter, tent, or shack, other unsheltered location unfit for human habitation, public spaces, or a vehicle)	192
Provisionally Accommodated: Surveyed individuals staying at someone else's place	53
Total	1,387

Table 2

Where People Stayed on February 10 th , 2016				
		Frequency	Total of Category	Percent of Total
Unsheltered				
absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation ⁵	Surveyed– those who indicated they unsheltered	192	192	13.8%
Emergency sheltered				
those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as Violence Against Women shelters ⁶	Emergency shelters (138 sheltered and 13 turned away) ⁷	151	353	25.5%
	Seasonal shelters (195 sheltered and 7 turned away)	202		
Provisionally Accommodated				
Those whose accommodation is temporary and who do not have their own home or security of tenure. ⁸	Transitional Housing (573 sheltered and 43 turned away) ⁹	616	842	60.7%
	Treatment (38 sheltered and 2 turned away)	40		
	Hotel/Motel (21 sheltered and 0 turned away)	21		
	Someone else's place (from survey)	53		
	Other** (112 sheltered and 0 turned away)	112		
Total			1,387	100.0%

** Other category includes correctional facilities, detox beds, police cells, a halfway house, and emergency room beds.

⁵ Canadian Homelessness Research Network, Canadian Definition of Homelessness

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ It is important to note that on the day of the count, the Extreme Weather Protocol was no in effect.

⁸ Canadian Homelessness Research Network, Canadian Definition of Homelessness

⁹ Individuals are turned away from Transitional Housing facilities if they have no vacancies.

Where individuals were counted

Individuals who were unsheltered were enumerated in 9 different geographic areas across Greater Victoria, predominantly in public spaces.¹⁰ Sheltered and provisionally accommodated individuals were enumerated at 68 different emergency and temporary housing facilities in 2016. This does not include individuals who were identified as “staying at someone else’s place” on the night of the count as these individuals were enumerated through the survey. For more detail, please see Tables B and C, and for information on occupancy rates for the participating facilities *on the night of the count*, please see Table D in the Appendix on page 16.

Summary of the Enumeration

There were 1,387 individuals counted on one night who were unsheltered, staying in emergency shelters or provisionally accommodated in other facilities in Greater Victoria. In 2007, there were 1,242 unsheltered, emergency or provisionally accommodated individuals who were enumerated as part of the Homeless Needs Survey.¹¹ Compared to 2007, this is an increase in the number of individuals enumerated. In 2014/15, the number of unique individuals identified as homeless and using emergency shelter at least once during the year was 1,725.¹² The fact that the PiT Count number is slightly lower than the period prevalence estimates of unique individuals using emergency shelters is not surprising in that the HIFIS¹³ data provides an overview (period prevalence) of all the individuals who used the shelters through the entire year. So the HIFIS numbers of unique individuals is likely to capture those who might be homeless at times during the year and not just on the night of the count. It is important to note that the facilities involved were all over 90% capacity on the night of the count. At the same time 65 individuals were turned away while many more were unsheltered on the night of the count, which indicates a lack of capacity in the system to accommodate all of those in need.

¹⁰ The Victoria and Saanich Police Departments, the WestShore RCMP, and municipal and regional by-Law officers helped to identify outdoor and public spaces areas most frequently used by unsheltered individuals.

¹¹ Victoria CoolAid Society, 2007

¹² Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, 2015

¹³ Homeless Individuals and Families Information System

Framing the Issue

The Majority of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Did Not Move to Victoria in the Past Year

There is a general misperception that individuals experiencing homelessness in Greater Victoria are from other places and that homelessness is not a home grown issue in our region. Survey participants shared important information that counters this assumption. Almost three quarters (72%) of survey participants indicated they have been in Greater Victoria longer than a year, while only 28% indicated they had moved to Victoria in the past year.

Chart 1

Moved to Victoria in the Past Year (n=717)

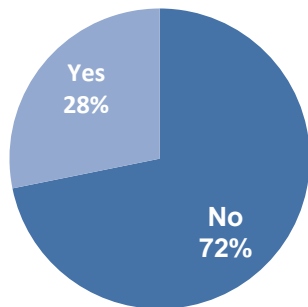
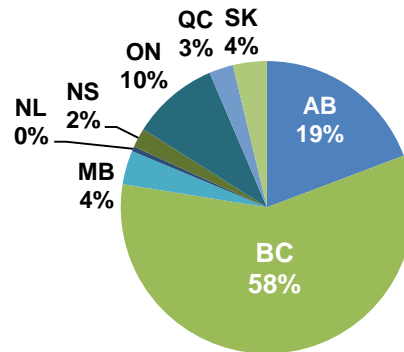


Chart 2

Province living in before moving to Victoria (n=202)



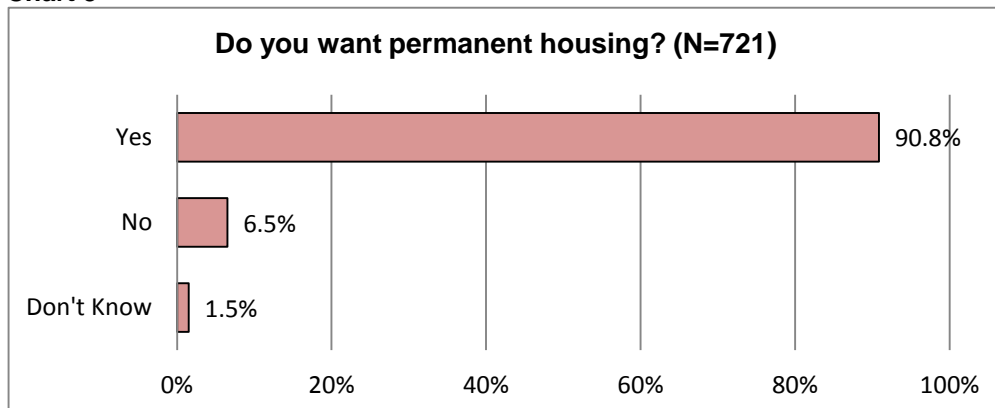
Most Individuals Experiencing Homelessness are Local and from British Columbia

Out of the survey participants that did move to Victoria in the past year, the majority had moved from somewhere else in BC, most predominantly from Vancouver Island/Coast and the Mainland/Fraser Valley. This means that 87% of those surveyed were residents of British Columbia.

People Experiencing Homelessness Want Permanent Housing

No one grows up wanting to experience homelessness. Individuals become homeless for a variety of reasons, and the majority of people experiencing homelessness do not wish to remain that way. Survey participants were asked if they wanted permanent housing and 90% responded a resounding yes.

Chart 3



Housing Needs Survey Results

On the night of February 10th, 2016, 721 individuals experiencing homelessness participated in the housing needs survey.

A core set of 12 questions were provided by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH). The survey also included 16 additional questions that reflected important information needs for the region which were developed locally by working closely with the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness and the member of the Community Advisory Committee.

An additional opt-in substance use survey was conducted by the Centre for Addictions Research (CARBC) that consisted of questions related to patterns of substance use and harms as well as survey participant access to treatment and harm reduction services. This survey included 120 individuals across multiple venues and was directed toward gaining a better understanding of the substance use and health/support needs of those who are homeless. Individuals were provided with stipends for participating in one or both surveys.

Demographics

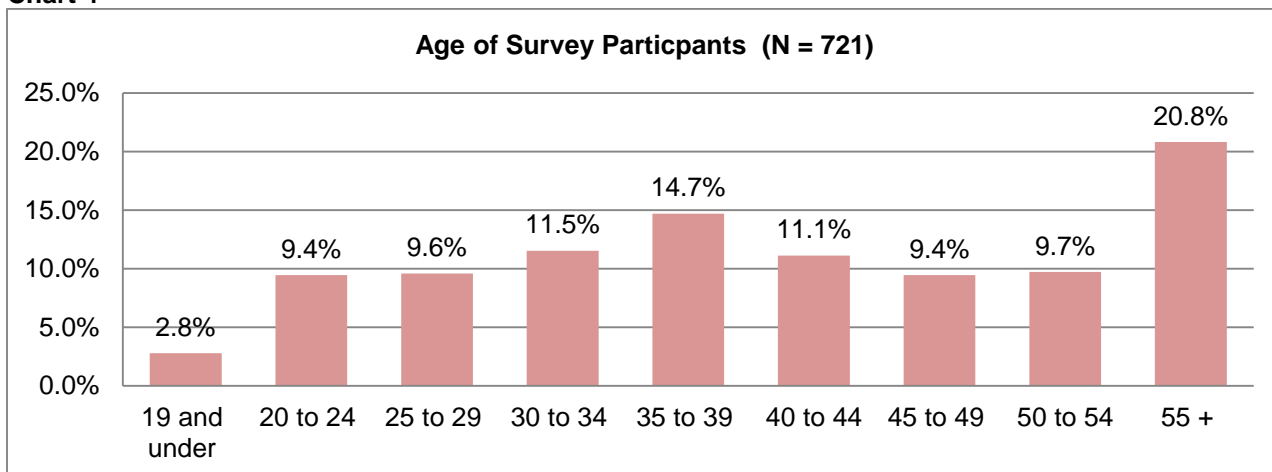
Gender

The majority of survey participants identified as male (67.7%), and a third (30.7%) of the survey participants identified as female. The number of survey participants that identified as transgender or another gender identity was too small to support effective data analysis and the number is suppressed to protect the identity of the survey participants.

Age

Over 1 in 5 survey participants were below the age of 30 (21.8%), and individuals over the age of 50 represented a similar proportion (20.8%) of survey respondents. Over a quarter (26.2%) of the survey participants were in their 30s, and 20.5% reported they were in their 40s. In comparison to the general population of the Victoria CMA, individuals under the age of 30 represent over a third (33%) of the population, and individuals over the age of 50 represent approximately 40% of the population¹⁴, a much higher rate than individuals experiencing homeless in Greater Victoria. People who are homeless often experience poor health and are subject to early and premature deaths with age of death occurring decades earlier than for the general population.¹⁵

Chart 4



¹⁴ 2011 Census Profile

¹⁵ Hwang, S. W., et al. (2009); Megaphone (2016)

Aboriginal Identity

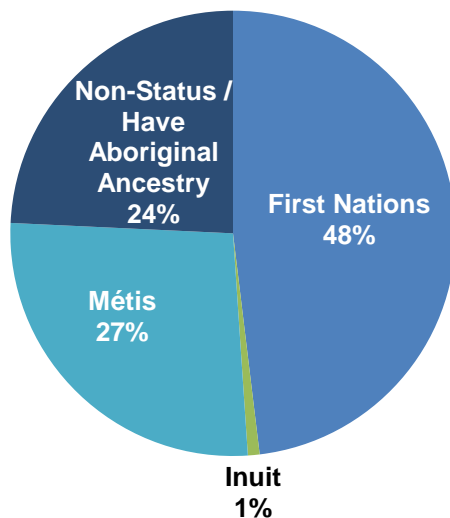
Survey participants were asked if they identified as Aboriginal or had Aboriginal ancestry. For the sake of this report, Aboriginal is defined as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or Non-Status persons who claim Aboriginal ancestry. Approximately a third of survey (32.6%) respondents identified as Aboriginal. These results clearly indicate that Aboriginal individuals in Greater Victoria experience homelessness at a disproportionate level when compared to non-Aboriginal individuals. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, Aboriginal individuals represented approximately 5%¹⁶ of the general population, whereas they represent 32.6% of individuals experiencing homelessness who participated in the survey.

Table 3

Aboriginal Identity of Survey Participants (N= 721)	
	Percentage ¹⁷
Aboriginal	32.6%
Not Aboriginal	63.7%

The chart below shows that out of the 235 Individuals who identified as Aboriginal, almost half identified as First Nations, over a quarter identified as Métis, almost a quarter identified as non-status and having Aboriginal ancestry, and approximately 1% identified as Inuit.

Chart 5



Sources of Income

When asked to share their sources of income, respondents were able to provide more than one answer which means the sources described in the table below are not mutually exclusive categories, and income sources may be reported as concurrent across respondents. The largest group of respondents (37.4%) indicated that they received income assistance benefits, followed by a quarter who reported receiving disability benefits (there was no distinction between federal or provincial disability benefits). Although the survey question did not provide distinction around the type of income assistance, it is safe to assume that the income assistance reported referred to the basic income assistance category as defined by provincial income security programs.

¹⁶ 2011 National Household Survey Profile

¹⁷ Percentages will not add up to 100% due to missing/blank data.

A little more than 23% of survey respondents informal self-employment income, including bottle returns, sex work, drug-dealing, panhandling and other activities.

There is often a misconception that individuals experiencing homelessness are not formally employed yet 13% of the survey participants indicated that one of their income sources was employment.

Table 4

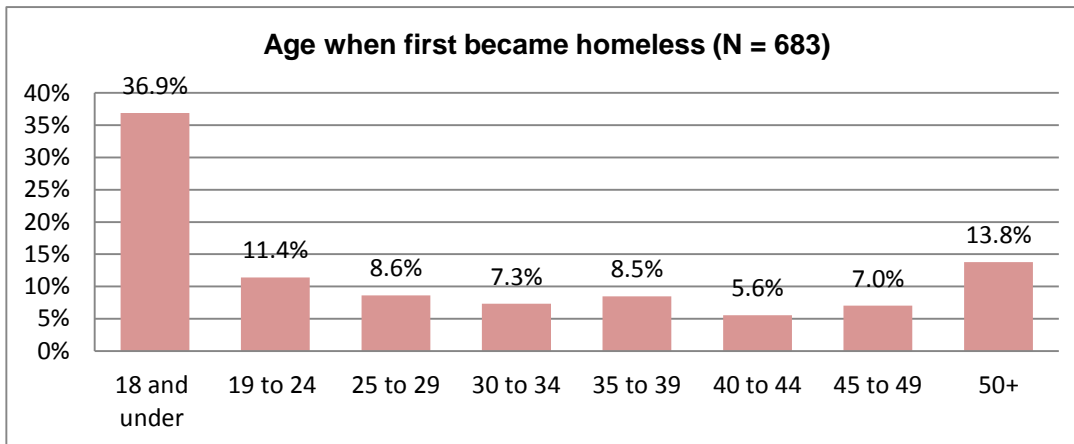
Top 6 Sources of Income** (N = 721)	
	Percentage
Welfare income assistance	37.4%
Disability benefit	24.4%
Informal self-employment	23.4%
Employment	13.0%
Seniors benefit	4.4%
Money from family and friends	2.9%

** Survey participants could provide more than one answer to this question.

First experiences of homelessness

Canadian research on experiences of youth and adult homelessness draw a strong connection between experiences of homelessness as a child or youth and the likelihood of experiencing homelessness, and even chronic homelessness as an adult.¹⁸ Almost half of the survey respondents identified that their first experience of homelessness was as a youth (youth is considered being under the age of 25). See Chart 6 for further details.

Chart 6



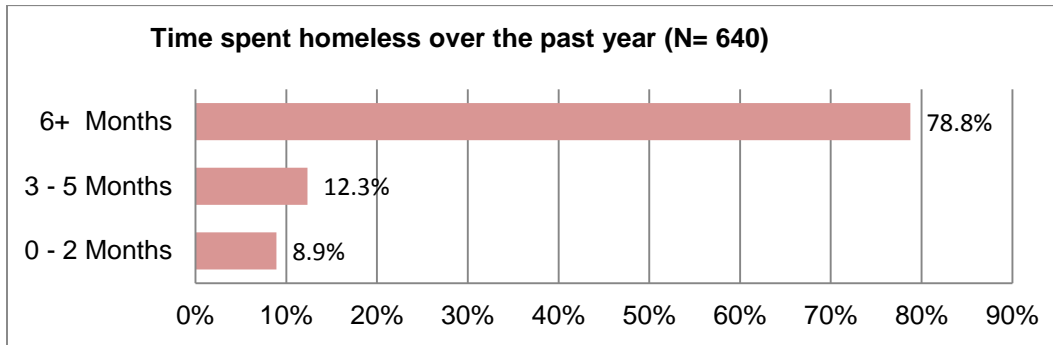
¹⁸ Baker Collins (2013).

Experiences of homelessness in the past year

Survey participants were asked to share an estimate of how much of the time over the past year they had experienced homelessness. Of the respondents that answered this question (N=640), the majority 78.8% (N= 504) had been homeless for more than six months. See Chart 7 for specific details.

When asked about how many different times they experienced homelessness, 68.1% of the survey respondents indicated they had experienced homelessness less than three times. A further 15.1% had experienced homelessness between three to four different times.

Chart 7



Loss of housing

Survey participants were asked to share what caused them to lose their housing. Table 5 shows that one in five respondents indicated that their most recent loss of housing was due to addiction or substance use issues, while a similar proportion reported job loss as the main reason for becoming homeless. Other common reasons for housing loss included eviction for a variety of reasons, illness, incarceration and hospitalization. Survey participants were able to choose multiple options hence responses are not mutually exclusive, and often occur concurrently. It is important to remember that this was the most current loss of housing and that the pathways into homelessness are often complex and influenced by multiple factors such as poverty, lack of housing supply, personal experiences of trauma and abuse, all of which can exacerbate pre-existing conditions related to addiction or substance use. These results suggest the need for Housing First approaches that incorporate harm reduction approaches and strategies to prevent eviction. As well, these findings point to the need for strategies to assist people who are suffering financial crises due to employment loss or unanticipated health complications or family conflict.

Table 5

Top 6 Reasons for Housing Loss**(N=721)	
	Percentage
Addiction or substance use	20.8%
Job loss	18.9%
Evicted unable to pay rent	13.6%
Evicted other reason	12.6%
Illness or medical reason	12.1%
Family conflict: spouse or partner	10.1%

** Survey participants could provide more than one answer to this question.

Barriers to finding a home

Table 6 presents the top six barriers survey participants reported encountering when trying to secure stable housing. When asked what factors were keeping them from finding a home, close to two-thirds of survey participants indicated that having a low income was a barrier; similar to reasons why many survey participants' lost their housing. Over half of the participants indicated that rents are beyond the reach of their current income, while one in five indicated that their addiction interfered with their ability to secure housing. These findings suggest the need to address the availability of affordable housing while also examining policies related adequate income. The findings also suggest the need for increased options for housing that is accessible to those individuals who use substances or have chronic and debilitating health issues.

Table 6

Top 6 Barriers to Housing** (N = 721)	
	Percent
Low Income	60.1%
Rents too High	56.2%
Addiction	20.9%
Discrimination	14.8%
Health/Disability Issues	14.4%
Mental Health Issues	12.8%

** Survey participants could provide more than one answer to this question.

Services needed

Survey participants were asked to identify the types of services needed in relation to a particular self-described health conditions. The top six service needs identified are listed in the Table 7. Almost half of the respondents indicated they needed services related to their addiction (48.7%) while approximately 40% indicated they needed services for serious or on-going medical conditions. This was followed by those who identified a need for services related to their mental health condition. A third of the respondents indicated they needed support related to a physical injury, and almost 1 in 5 indicated they needed services related to a brain injury. Close to 1 in 5 also indicated they needed services related to their learning disability. Once again, it is important to note that participants were allowed multiple responses to this question.

Table 7

Top 6 Service Needs (N=721)	
	Percentage
Addiction or substance use	48.7%
Serious or ongoing medical condition	39.9%
Mental health	37.6%
Physical disability	30.4%
Brain injury	18.9%
Learning disability	17.8%

** Survey participants could provide more than one answer to this question.

Conclusion

The results of 2016 Greater Victoria PiT Count clearly demonstrate that the region requires a focused, and nuanced investment in housing and a range of service interventions to support individuals experiencing homelessness. A large number of people are experiencing long periods of homelessness, not by choice, but mostly due to economic conditions or the lack of availability of appropriate housing with supports. A vast majority of these individuals are also seeking long-term housing solutions. The evidence points to the fact that preventative action with a focus on youth is needed to help reduce homelessness in the future. As well, services and supports must reflect various cultural needs, as is evidenced in the number of Aboriginal people currently facing homelessness in the region. There are also specific needs for those who use substances and suffer from mental health issues that must be met. This points to the need for more effective health and harm reduction services to support these individuals. Through concerted efforts in all of these areas, regional initiatives to address homelessness are more likely to be successful in future.

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Appendix

Supplementary Data Tables

Table A:

Total Individuals Enumerated by age category and gender, 2016					
	Unsheltered	Emergency Sheltered (emergency and seasonal)	Provisionally Sheltered	Turned away (includes all shelter and provisionally sheltered categories)	Total
Adult male	122	254	428	12	816
Adult female	33	65	193	28	319
Adult trans* ¹⁹	**	**	**	**	8
Adult Unknown	**	**	**	**	
Total adult	158	320	625	40	1143
Youth male	10	9	32	**	55
Youth female	22	**	32	**	59
Youth trans*	**	**	**	**	6
Total youth	33	12	69	6	120
Child male	0	**	62	**	64
Child female	0	0	41	18	59
Child trans*	0	0	0	0	0
Child unknown gender	0	0	0	0	0
Total children	0	**	103	19	123
TOTAL	192	333	797	65	1,387

*** is used for cell sizes less than 6 to protect individuals' identities.

Table B

Geographic Areas and Routes for the Unsheltered Enumeration, 2016	
Area	Description
1	Route 1 – James Bay Route 2 & 3 – Beacon Hill, Holland Park and South of Burdett to Southgate Route 4 – Ross Bay, Fairfield, Oak Bay
2	Downtown Core –South of Yates to Burdett/Belleville (including Tent City)
3	Downtown Core – South of Bay to Yates
4	Fernwood/Jubilee
5	Hillside/Mayfair

¹⁹ trans* is an umbrella term, referring to individuals who self-identified to facility staff as transgender, transvestite, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, agender, non-gendered, as a trans man, a trans woman, or as two spirit. We recognize that individuals that are trans* may also identify as males or females, or as men or women, and so we made a choice to separate self-identified trans* individuals from males and females in our data collection process out in order to build up information about their experiences in homelessness, as there is limited research about trans* individuals and homelessness.

Geographic Areas and Routes for the Unsheltered Enumeration, 2016	
Area	Description
6	Vic West & Burnside-Gorge
7	Cuthbert Park & Esquimalt
8	Saanich
9	West Shore

Table C

Total Number of Facilities²⁰ 2012 to 2016	
Year	Number of Facilities
2016	68 ²¹
2014	87
2013	82
2012	73

Table D

Occupancy by Facility Type – Beds, 2016				
	Emergency Shelter	Extreme Weather	Seasonal Emergency	Transitional Housing
Total beds available	160	N/A	180	496
Total individuals in beds only	154	N/A	165	486
Occupancy rate of beds	96%	N/A	92%	98%

** It is important to note that the occupancy rates included in this table are what facilities reported on the night of the count only and do not represent the overall occupancy rates for the year.

²⁰ This is a count of the number of emergency and seasonal shelters, and provisional accommodations, but excludes those who were counted as "staying at someone else's place).

²¹ The reduction in the number of facilities participating in the sheltered portion of the 2016 Point in Time Count was driven by a number of factors. These factors include: 5 facilities on Salt Spring Island which had participated in previous enumerations were not included in 2016 because the geographic scope was changed for 2016; 4 facilities have closed since the 2014 enumeration (Empress, Edith Gulland, Fernwood and Sooke EWP); 10 Island Health facilities did not participate; and 2 hotels that had participated previously were not included (totals 21). There were also 5 new facilities, and 3 more that didn't participate in 2014 but did participate in 2016 which translates into a net loss of 13 facilities participating in the enumeration. The reduction in the number of participating facilities compared to previous enumerations highlights the challenge of undercounting individuals experiencing homelessness.