2018

ABORIGINAL
HOMELESSNESS COUNT
IN METRO VANCOUVER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2018 ABORIGINAL HOMELESS COUNT
Results in Vancouver

ON MARCH 14, 2018
2,181
PEOPLE
WERE FOUND
TO BE
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS
IN VANCOUVER

40%
OF
RESPONDENTS
IDENTIFIED AS
ABORIGINAL

51%
OF THE
ABORIGINAL HOMELESS POPULATION
IS
UNSHELTERED
COMPARED WITH
40%
OF THE
NON-ABORIGINAL HOMELESS POPULATION

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
ARE
OVER-REPRESENTED
ON THE STREET

IN THE 2017 COUNT,
448
PEOPLE OR
39%
OF
RESPONDENTS
IN VANCOUVER
IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL

IN THE 2018 COUNT,
561
PEOPLE OR
40%
OF
RESPONDENTS
IN VANCOUVER
IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL

THAT'S AN
INCREASE OF
25%
OR
113
INDIVIDUALS

GENDER IN 2018

OF NON-ABORIGINAL RESPONDENTS	OF ABORIGINAL RESPONDENTS
80% IDENTIFIED AS MALE	**66%** IDENTIFIED AS MALE
19% IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE	**32%** IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE
1% IDENTIFIED IN ANOTHER WAY	**2%** IDENTIFIED IN ANOTHER WAY

DISPROPORTIONATE

2.2% OF **VANCOUVER'S GENERAL POPULATION** IDENTIFIED AS **ABORIGINAL** (2016 CENSUS)	**40%** OF **VANCOUVER'S HOMELESS POPULATION** IDENTIFIED AS **ABORIGINAL** (2018)

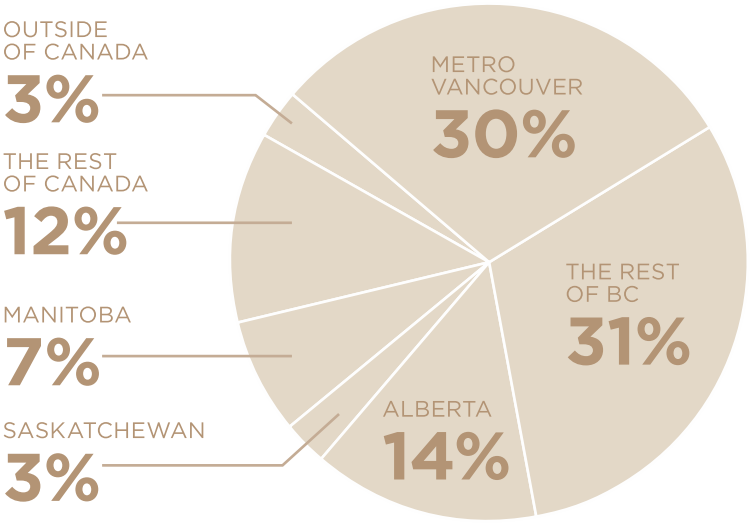
OF ALL HOMELESS WOMEN
53%
IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL

HOMELESS WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY
TO BE
ABORIGINAL

Canada
Lu'ma Native Housing Society
CITY OF VANCOUVER
This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

2018 ABORIGINAL HOMELESS COUNT
Results in Vancouver

WHERE ABORIGINAL RESPONDENTS CAME FROM



78% OF **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS** HAVE BEEN IN **VANCOUVER** FOR OVER A YEAR

RESPONDENTS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN **HOMELESS** WHEN THEY CAME TO **VANCOUVER**

HEALTH CONDITIONS

AGE	NON-ABORIGINAL	ABORIGINAL
UNDER 25	8%	10%
25-54	67%	76%
OVER 55	25%	14%

Canada
Lu'ma Native Housing Society
CITY OF VANCOUVER
This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

ABOUT THE 2018 METRO VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL HOMELESS COUNT

The 2018 Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Homeless Count (Count) is a 24-hour snapshot of Aboriginal Peoples who were homeless in the Metro Vancouver region on March 14, 2018. It also included people staying overnight in homeless shelters and those using homelessness services on the day of the Count.

The purpose of the Aboriginal Homeless Count is to estimate the number of Aboriginal people who are homeless in the Metro Vancouver region, obtain a demographic profile of this population, and identify trends compared to previous counts. This current information will be used in the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee (AHSC) Community Plan update.

Since 2002, homeless counts have been conducted across Metro Vancouver every three years. This is the first year the Federal government ran a dedicated Aboriginal count without appending it to a larger count. This dedicated Count required a rethinking of the overall methodology. This is discussed in detail later in the report.

Decision-makers, funders and community agencies have relied on the regional count to understand trends in the visible homeless population. Count numbers are understood to be the minimum number of people who are homeless on a given day in the Metro Vancouver region. We know the count underestimates the number of people who are actually homeless.

The AHSC in partnership with the City of Vancouver provided oversight for the count methodology. As in previous years, Infocus Management Consulting served as the Aboriginal Coordinator and coordinated the count of Aboriginal Peoples who were homeless in partnership with the AHSC and Aboriginal service agencies.

The 2018 Aboriginal Homeless Count was made possible through funding from the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the City of Vancouver.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this report, the term “Aboriginal” is used for consistency with previous reports, although we acknowledge the Federal Government's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and acknowledging that most Indigenous Nations globally refer to themselves by their own names.

With any discussion regarding Aboriginal homelessness, the methodology or findings must acknowledge history and intergenerational trauma. To adequately understand this intergenerational crisis, the reader must understand the ways in which Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have been impacted by continued colonization, their unique relationship with the Government of Canada and associated agencies, Christian churches and mainstream society.

The enduring effects of colonization, the legacy of the residential school system and the impact of child welfare and the foster care system continue to impact the daily experience of many Aboriginal Peoples and families, and directly contribute to the high incidence of Aboriginal homelessness. These underlying factors are emphasized throughout this

report, underpin the findings and are directly linked to the report's recommendations.

In 2012, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network released a Canadian definition of Homelessness, that attempted to capture the effect of homelessness as described by members of the community experiencing the issues firsthand:

> Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioral or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.[ii]

In 2013, the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee for Metro Vancouver agreed by consensus to the following community-based definition of homelessness which is integral to their Governance Manual:

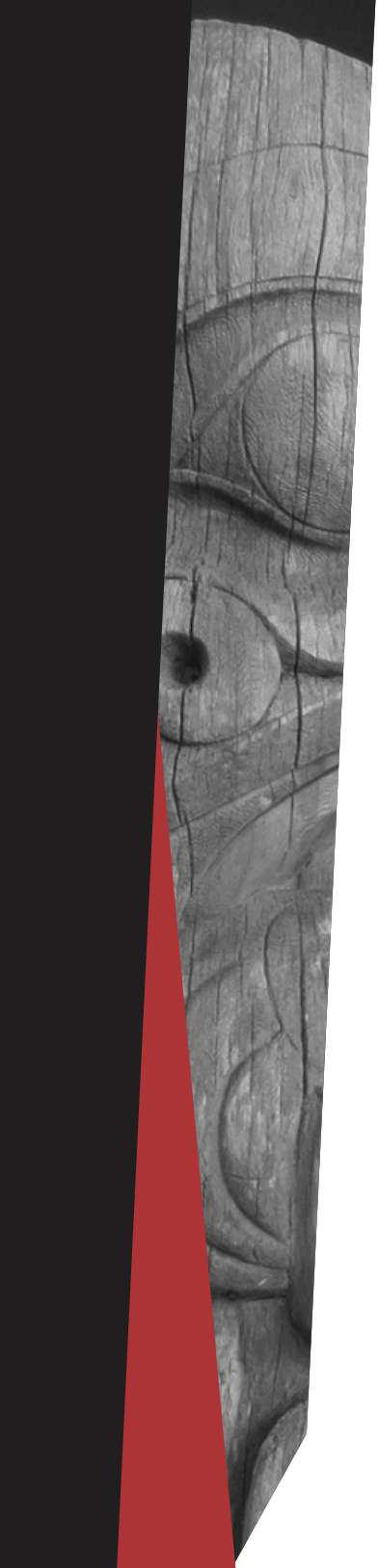
"Homelessness" refers to two groups of Aboriginal homeless. The first group is those who are considered "absolute homeless" and the second group is those who live "at risk of homelessness.[ii]

According to the United Native Nations Aboriginal Homelessness Report (2001):

"Homelessness"- included in its entirety - describes those who have suffered from the effects of colonization and whose social, economic, and political conditions have placed them in a disadvantaged position resulting in any one of the following situations:

"Absolute homelessness" (from a community perspective) is more likely to be described as those:

- who have no security of tenure beyond a thirty-day period;
- who suffer from family violence or family breakdown;
- who have no security of tenure, i.e. women and their children;
- who leave or flee family violence situation;
- who "couch surf" for a period of more than thirty days with no security of tenure;
- who are frequently involved in the street life;
- who are living in inadequate, substandard and/or unsafe accommodations that do not meet the minimal housing standards established by the United Nations or other local government agencies such as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation;
- who rely on emergency shelters or shelters as primary residences;
- anyone released from a mental-health facility, or prison with no security of tenure;
- who are prevented from leaving a mental-health facility or prison because of a lack of security of tenure (including those women or men who are unable to have children returned to them by the Ministry of Child and Family Development for want of decent affordable housing);
- who flee their home and who have no security of tenure as a result of sexual abuse (regardless of age);
- who alternate between being sheltered and unsheltered (whether those shelters are hospitals, hostels, SRO, or otherwise); and/or
- who suffer from discrimination and who cannot hold security of tenure for any reasonable period of time as a result of such discrimination;



'At risk of homelessness" (from a community perspective) is more likely to be described as those:

- who pay more than 25 per cent of their income for accommodations;
- who suffer from acute life crisis such as: family violence, divorce, eviction, release from institutions that jeopardize their housing;
- who are at risk of losing their accommodations as a result of a lack of income, overcrowding, redevelopment, or unemployment;
- whose income is below the Low-Income Cut-off;
- whose education level would place them in social distress or poverty below the Low-Income Cut-Off;
- who suffer from substance abuse, mental-illness, or those who suffer from structural and personal barriers that may lead to homelessness;
- who are denied an opportunity to acquire social housing to meet their socioeconomic needs;
- who are hard to house for whatever reason;
- those whose income requires them to use food banks to supplement their income for prolonged periods of time;
- who are entrenched in the sex trade on the streets; and/or
- who, because of systemic barriers, are unable to acquire accommodation of any kind.[iii]

As in prior years, the 2018 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver focused almost exclusively on "absolute homeless" individuals (all but long-term couch surfers) and excluded those who are "at risk of homelessness". This was a pragmatic decision, due mainly to three considerations:

- the difficulty determining an effective count methodology,
- the cost involved in collecting accurate data, and
- the need to be consistent with previous homeless counts.

This decision is problematic from an Aboriginal perspective, as it is difficult to segregate the issue of homelessness into finite boxes or categories. It also serves to under-report and mischaracterize the magnitude of Aboriginal homelessness in Metro Vancouver. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness characterizes the complexity of the issue:

> The pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear, nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable and lack adequate housing, income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness react in an intricate interplay between structural factors (poverty, lack of affordable housing), systems failures (people being discharged from mental health facilities, corrections or child protection services into homelessness) and individual circumstances (family conflict and violence, mental health and addictions). Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of these factors.[iv]

Thus, Aboriginal homelessness is a facet of the broader issues of colonization, the legacy of the residential school system and the foster care system, intergenerational trauma, discrimination (both overt and systemic), poverty, health and housing inadequacy.

METHODOLOGY

The 2018 Aboriginal Homeless Count employed a methodology similar to past City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver Regional Homeless Counts, although with funding autonomy this year, there are important methodological differences. Also, given the proportionally smaller number of participating Aboriginal organizations as compared to the Metro Vancouver effort, some modifications were necessary.

In the planning stage, every effort was made to ensure a consistent approach with past Counts for comparison purposes. Since the City of Vancouver was also conducting a city-wide homeless count on the same day, based on the traditional count methodology, a natural partnership was established. As a result, in the City of Vancouver the counts were harmonized and run simultaneously. This partnership maximized the use of resources and allowed for a more effective direct comparison of the data obtained.

The Aboriginal Count measured homelessness from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm on March 14th, 2018. In Vancouver the Count consisted of one component to enumerate the sheltered homeless and another for the unsheltered homeless. For both components, volunteers used a prepared questionnaire that included screening questions and survey questions. These same questionnaires were used by mainstream Count teams.

To ensure the count numbers were generally consistent outside of Vancouver, a number of locations were chosen, based on participating Aboriginal organizations and their geographical area of operations. The results from this Count will be shared with the Provincial Aboriginal Homelessness Committee (PAHC) for use in their upcoming planning activities. The participating organizations and their locations are as follows:

VANCOUVER

- Aboriginal Front Door Society (Vancouver)
- Aboriginal Friendship Centre (Vancouver)
- Aboriginal Mother Centre (Vancouver)
- Native Education College (Vancouver)
- Circle of Eagles Lodge Society (Vancouver)
- Vancouver transformative Justice Society (Vancouver)
- Anderson Lodge (Vancouver)
- Helping Spirit Lodge Society (Vancouver)

METRO VANCOUVER

- Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society (Surrey)
- Kekinow Native Housing Society (Surrey)
- Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) (Surrey)
- Spirit of the Children Society (New Westminster)

The organizations outside of Vancouver employed the same methodology and executed the count in a similar manner to previous years, the hypothesis being that if the experience was similar to the Vancouver component, and roughly the same numbers of Aboriginal People were identified, one could reasonably assume that the findings derived from the Vancouver Count could be extrapolated across Metro Vancouver.

The Aboriginal Count operated autonomously under the auspices of the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee as the Community Advisory Board and Lu'ma Native BCH Housing Society as the Community Entity. Careful planning was undertaken between the City of Vancouver Count team and the Aboriginal count team (both at a governance and operational level) to ensure that integration occurred where possible, redundancy was reduced to a minimum, and to guarantee that the overall count process was consistent with the overarching methodology and count design.

There was a good working relationship between the City of Vancouver and the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee at both the governance and operational levels through their respective consulting teams.

TOBACCO TIES

For the first time both the Aboriginal Count and the Vancouver Count employed a new participation icebreaker - tobacco ties were provided instead of cigarettes. In the Aboriginal community tobacco is considered a sacred medicine.

Within Aboriginal communities, tobacco is used as an offering to the person conducting the ceremony or as an offering to the Creator. It is also used as a form of reciprocity, if you receive something you also give something. In this case, the tobacco ties were used as a welcome in exchange for one's time filling out a survey.

Leading up to the Count, the Aboriginal community mobilized and produced over 7,000 ties. This process involved all AHSC organizations, elders and families, and was unifying and empowering for the community. This was a remarkable achievement considering the logistics involved and the two-month timeline for production.

On balance, the tobacco ties were well received by the homeless population regardless of heritage or ethnicity. It is the intention of the AHSC to permanently incorporate the tobacco ties into the count methodology.

COMMUNITY VOICEMAIL

Through Lu'ma Native BCH Housing Society, Community Voicemail was used to communicate with homeless individuals and members of the Aboriginal community ahead of the Count with the goal of raising awareness and mobilizing community volunteers. Community Voicemail provides local phone numbers with voicemail to people who are homeless and/or phoneless, giving them the resources they need to connect to employment, housing and social service opportunities, as well as to stay in touch with their families. In the months leading up to the Count, voicemail bulletins were provided to community members, announcing the Count date and allowing an opportunity to participate.

GIFTS

To facilitate the Aboriginal Count and mobilize community volunteers, gifts of $150 were provided to each of the 162 volunteers (for a 4-hour commitment including training). The volunteers were recruited by Aboriginal organizations located regionally throughout Metro Vancouver. By far, this was the largest engagement effort in the Aboriginal community in regards to any homeless count held previously.

MAGNET EVENTS

In addition to the use of volunteers walking a count route, the Aboriginal community supported a gathering in the Downtown Eastside at Oppenheimer Park and another large event at FRAFCA in Surrey. In addition to the large Magnet events, all participating organizations received a small budget to provide food to the homeless and transit tickets to Count volunteers. Each organization and magnet event offered food, promoted culture, provided logistical information and communicated the value of participation.

Regardless of the size of the event, the overall goal was to raise awareness, provide support, provide food, mobilize the community, and where appropriate, collect data. In retrospect, this series was very successful and empowering for those that participated.

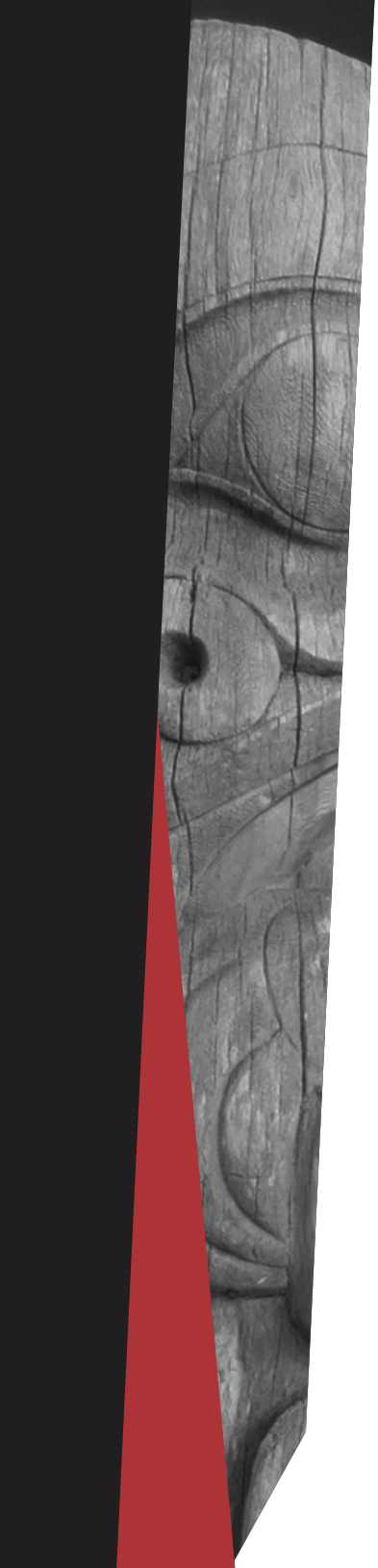
DATA ANALYSIS AND LIMITATIONS

The information collected through both City of Vancouver and AHSC Counts was synthesized by Metro Vancouver and then returned to the AHSC for analysis. This report details the results of this process.

There were two major challenges with the 2018 Count. The first concerns the size and scale of the Metro Vancouver's geography and the limited number of Aboriginal organizations located throughout the region. This challenge resulted in a concentrated focus on the Vancouver count and an extrapolation methodology for the rest of Metro Vancouver. The findings of this report should be viewed based on this approach. Conclusions reached in regards to Vancouver have a high validity rate, and any findings attributed to the rest of Metro Vancouver are effectively a projection (with some targeted counting).

Upon reflection, the hypothesis appears to have held up and the number of homeless people counted is consistent in regards to the Count locations and historical experience.
The second challenge was the decision to switch the icebreaker from cigarettes to tobacco ties. Previous counts had relied on cigarettes to invite participation. Over the years, this had become a critical component of the count methodology. The primary purpose of tobacco ties is ceremonial. In the planning phase, there was discussion about whether switching icebreakers may impact participation. However, based on experience of this year's count, the tobacco ties were positively received.
As in prior years, the Count was conducted in two ways – a shelter count and a street count. In the street count, most people were provided an opportunity to respond to survey questions. For the shelter count, in some cases this was not possible and so a head count was conducted without demographic information. As a result, the tables included in this report include a 'No Answer/Not Known' category and the calculations are based on known demographic data.

Regarding the Count itself, one of the challenges of conducting research on the experiences of poverty and marginalization is that everyone participating must focus on some of the most difficult realities of humanity, which may include: physical suffering, emotional and sexual abuse, social suffering, economic deprivation and structural injustices. This is often a very personal and emotional experience, particularly for the urban Aboriginal homeless count participants in Metro Vancouver. Thus, it was imperative for the AHSC to act in a sensitive, respectful and culturally appropriate manner to support all individuals that participated in the Count, including staff, volunteers and individuals experiencing homelessness.



COUNT FINDINGS

As noted above, Aboriginal organizations outside of the City of Vancouver were invited to participate in the 2018 Aboriginal Count to see if any measurable difference was experienced in regions outside of Vancouver. The second largest concentration of Aboriginal homeless people were reported in Surrey in the 2017 Metro Count. It was therefore felt that this City would be statistically significant for comparative purposes. Four specific areas were measured in the Count including three in Surrey and one new area in New Westminster to build a baseline for future studies in that community. The participating organizations were as follows:

- Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society (Surrey)
- Kekinow Native Housing Society (Surrey)
- Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) (Surrey)
- Spirit of the Children Society (New Westminster)

In the case of Surrey, the Count was conducted consistently with prior years with a similar number of Aboriginal counters, preparation and support. The same geography and Count times were examined. Each of the organizations reported a similar experience and a relatively consistent count response. This suggests that at a minimum, for the specific areas in Surrey and New Westminster, it can be assumed that the Aboriginal homeless numbers have remained consistent with, or increased slightly from, the 2017 Metro Homelessness Count.

The 2017 Metro Vancouver Count reported a total of 746 homeless survey respondents who identified as Aboriginal, representing 34% of all respondents in the Metro Vancouver region. Of these, 448 or 60% were located in Vancouver. In 2018, 561 homeless survey respondents identified as Aboriginal in Vancouver, representing an absolute increase of 25% year over year.

Conversely, Table 1 shows that the relative number of homeless individuals in Vancouver who identify as Aboriginal has not changed significantly. In 2018, 40% of Vancouver's homeless population identified as Aboriginal, compared to 39% in 2017. Extrapolating this to Metro Vancouver, we can conclude that the percentage of respondents who identified as Aboriginal has remained at least the same (34%) or has increased very slightly.

TABLE 1: ABORIGINAL IDENTITY – VANCOUVER HOMELESS COMPARISON

	2017 Total Homeless Vancouver		2018 Total Homeless Vancouver	
	#	%	#	%
Aboriginal	448	39%	561	40%
Non-Aboriginal	687	61%	846	60%
Total Respondents	1,135	100%	1,407	100%
No Answer/Not Known	1,003		774	
Total	**2,138**		**2,181**	

* In 2017, additional Extreme Cold Wet Weather shelters were open and homeless individuals were counted but did not complete the survey. This likely accounts for the decrease from 2017 to 2018.

In Vancouver, the data indicates that the incidence of Aboriginal identity continues to be higher for the unsheltered homeless (46%) than the sheltered homeless (35%).

TABLE 2: ABORIGINAL IDENTITY – SHELTERED VS UNSHELTERED HOMELESS, 2018

	Sheltered		Unsheltered		Total Homeless	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Aboriginal	273	35%	288	46%	561	40%
Non-Aboriginal	504	65%	342	54%	846	60%
No Answer/Not Known	777	100%	630	100%	1,407	100%
Total Respondents	745		29		774	
Total	**1,522**		**659**		**2,181**	

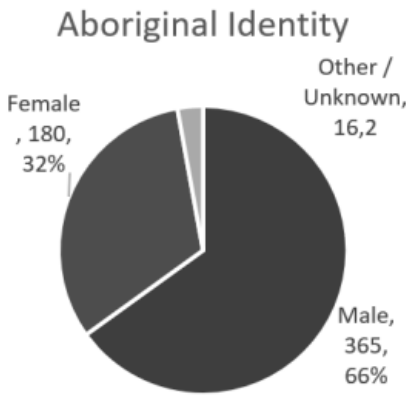
Table 3 demonstrates that 49% of the total Aboriginal population were sheltered on the night of the Count, while 51% were unsheltered. The bottom line shows that Aboriginal Peoples more likely to be homeless in Metro Vancouver than the non-Aboroginal population, and more likely to be unsheltered. This is consistent with studies that show that homeless Aboriginal individuals may avoid using shelters and other services because they experience discrimination from both workers and other homeless people and they are not barrier free.

TABLE 3: ABORIGINAL IDENTITY – SHELTER AND UNSHELTERED HOMELESS, 2018

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Sheltered	273	49%	504	60%	777	55%
Unsheltered	288	51%	342	40%	630	45%
Total	561	100%	846	100%	1,407	100%

In terms of demographics, there are relatively more female Aboriginal respondents than the non-Aboriginal population, and relatively fewer Aboriginal youth and elders than the non-Aboriginal population.

TABLE 4A: GENDER COMPARISON



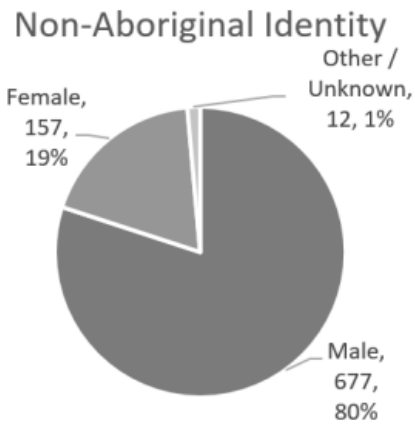
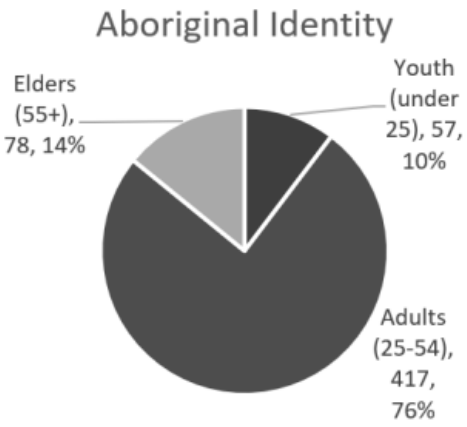


TABLE 4B: AGE COMPARISON



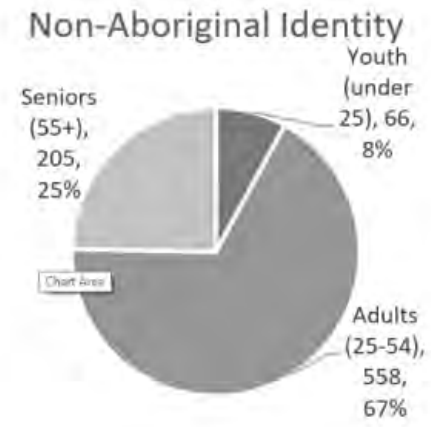
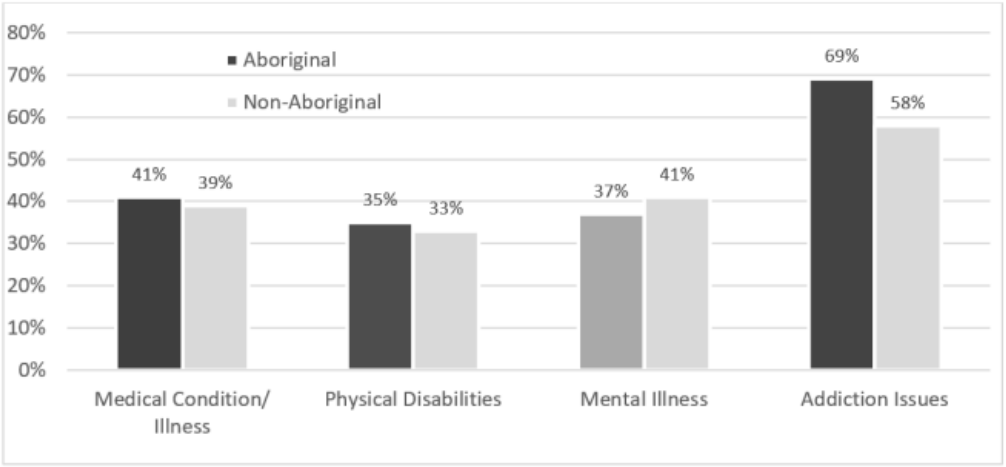
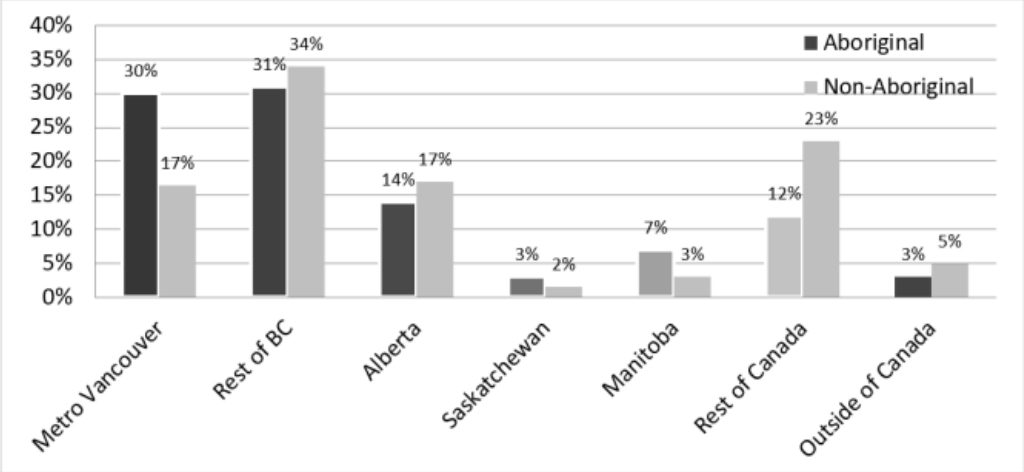


TABLE 5: HEALTH CONDITIONS



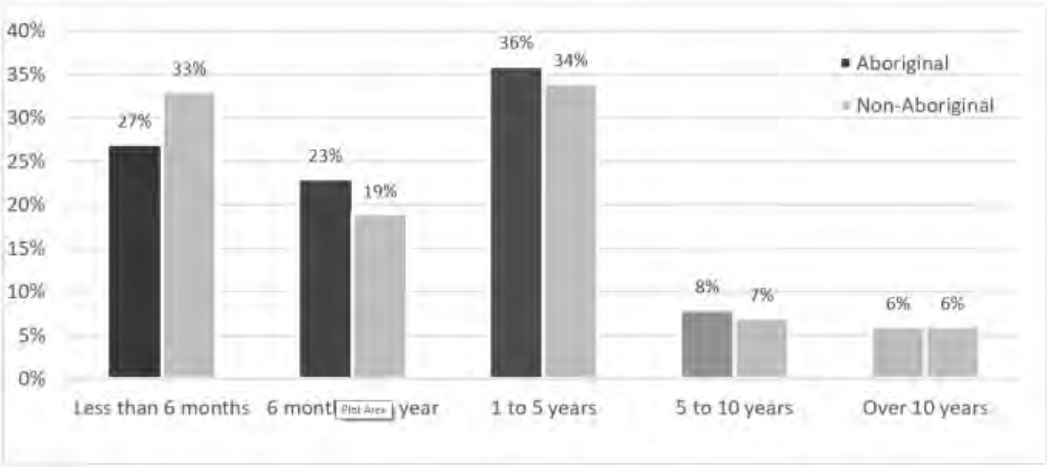
For those respondents who self-reported one or more medical condition/illness, physical disability or mental illness the findings are not statistically different. One notable exception, there were 12% more Aboriginal respondents who reported addiction issues than the total homeless population surveyed. Note that addiction issues include alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, opioids and other.

TABLE 6: WHERE WERE RESPONDENTS LIVING BEFORE METRO VANCOUVER?



Note that 78% of Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless have been in Metro Vancouver for over one year, and overall 61% are from Metro Vancouver and BC. This is 10.5% higher than for total respondents, who are more likely to be from the rest of Canada (36% for Aboriginal Peoples, 44.5% for all respondents).

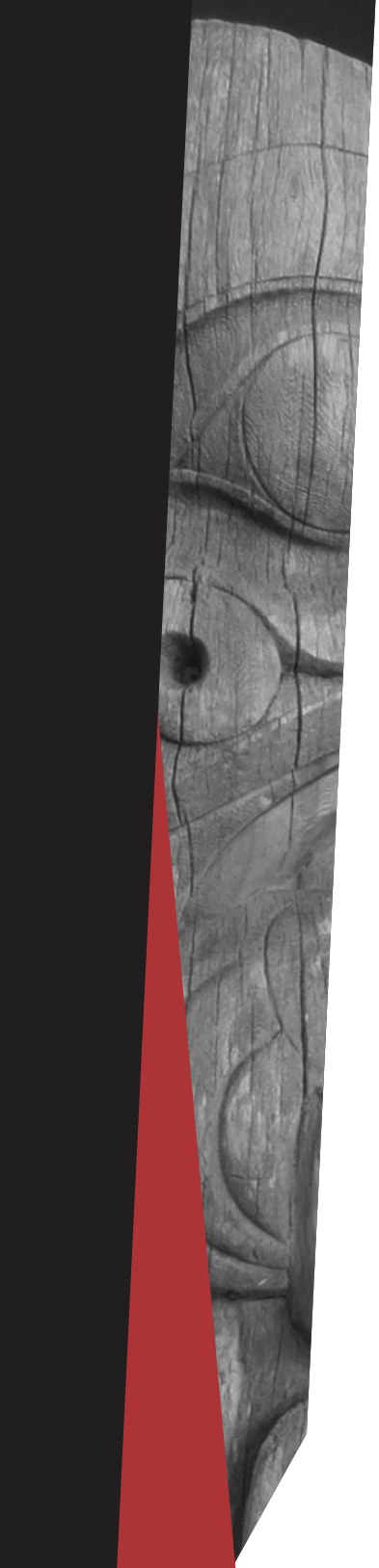
TABLE 7: LENGTH OF TIME HOMELESS



Finally, 50% have been without a place of their own for over 1 year. The duration of homelessness for Aboriginal respondents is not significantly different than for all respondents, and the rates of chronic homelessness is consistent for all respondents

TRENDS

Comparing the Count years from 2005 to 2018, both the absolute and relative number of Aboriginal homeless individuals is at its highest this year. Further, at 40%, persons of Aboriginal identity are clearly over-represented among the region's homeless population relative to the Metro Vancouver non-Aboriginal population. According to the 2016 Census data, there are 61,455 Aboriginal Peoples living in Metro Vancouver (or 2.5% of the City's population), the third largest Aboriginal population in Canadian urban centres, behind both Winnipeg (92,810 or 13%) and Edmonton (76,205 or 8%).



The 2016 Census data for the City of Vancouver reported 13,905 Aboriginal Peoples and a total population of 618,210. The Count results demonstrate that 4% of Vancouver's Aboriginal Peoples are homeless, while .27% of Vancouver's total population are homeless. Aboriginal Peoples are 15 times more likely to be homeless than the total population in Vancouver.

The reported number of homeless individuals is partly a reflection of the participation rate. It is important to point out that this Count only addressed the most acute form of homelessness – those individuals in shelters and on the street over one 24-hour period – and is therefore very conservative in that it fails to take into consideration those individuals who were simply not counted, hidden homeless and those who are at-risk of becoming homeless. One can speculate that the actual number of Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless or at risk of being homeless is extreme and much higher than actually reported.

DISCUSSION

The 2018 Homeless Count shows clearly that Aboriginal Peoples continue to remain overrepresented among the homeless population, and are 15 times more likely to be homeless than non-Aboriginal individuals. Why is this so? Researchers have long acknowledged that the urban Aboriginal Peoples face unique challenges.[viii] In addition to economic hardships, Aboriginal Peoples may experience a range of barriers when trying to make a life in cities. These barriers are an extension of 150 years of discrimination and oppression that have resulted in physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, interpersonal violence and racism.[viii] Research shows that among Aboriginal Peoples, education and training levels are typically lower, incarceration rates are higher, children in care rates are higher and unemployment rates are higher. As a result, incomes are lower than those of the non-Aboriginal Peoples.[ix]

IMPACT OF RACIAL, CULTURAL AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Race is not a biological fact but rather a socially constructed concept that was created and is maintained to establish disparities in the distribution of resources and power. There is only one race, the human race, and talking of multiple races is divisive. Clearly, racism has influenced the political, economic and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, where race-based colonizing powers attempted to socially isolate, culturally assimilate, and politically decimate Aboriginal Peoples as a way of rationalizing colonialism. Racism at a structural level, rooted in political actions and policies, goes beyond the individual and informs institutions that perpetuate racism. Legally sanctioned discrimination has hindered opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples to be self-determining and the harm done over generations is immeasurable.

This naturalized racism stemming from colonialism continues to influence how Aboriginal Peoples are viewed and treated and limits opportunities, and in particular challenges the ability to secure adequate and affordable housing. Housing discrimination occurs when a person is denied equal access to housing, or full enjoyment of housing, for reasons that are not related to their merit as a tenant or homeowner.[xii] Numerous studies indicate that Aboriginal Peoples encounter housing market discrimination as renters, as owners, and as prospective renters or owners.[xiii]

Housing discrimination has a range of effects including homelessness, overcrowding, higher rents, fewer options with respect to location, more frequent moves, and negative effects on health, education and employment.[xiv] Segregated and marginalized, it is difficult for urban Aboriginal Peoples to connect with culturally appropriate, local services.

IMPACT OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Increasing evidence from the growing number of mental health studies conducted in Aboriginal communities suggests that intergenerational trauma is a critical contributor to an array of personal, family, and community behaviors.[xv]

The historical context of Canadian social policy has been instrumental in creating institutions that have attempted to eradicate Aboriginal world views and value systems that have existed for thousands of years and replace them with ideological systems that continue to undermine life for Aboriginal Peoples.[xvi] For example, when Canada first became a country in 1867 with the passage of the British North America Act, Aboriginal Peoples and lands reserved for Aboriginal Peoples became controlled by the Federal government. Soon after Confederation, the Federal government established the Indian Act in 1876 as a coordinated approach to the policy of assimilation and when British Columbia entered Confederation, it did so on the agreement with that as a province it did not have to respect Aboriginal rights.

The effects of personal trauma have been handed down from one generation to the next and continue unabated as expressed through symptoms such as homelessness, foster care, addictions, mental health and medical issues.

IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Canadian government continued to use other mechanisms, including religion, to convert and assimilate Aboriginal Peoples. Residential schools were among the most aggressive efforts by the Canadian government to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples.

Residential schools for Aboriginal People in Canada date back to New France, although the current use of the term refers to schools established after Confederation in the 1870s. Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

During this era, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these schools often against their parents' wishes. Most were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture. While there are an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist.[xvii]

IMPACT OF CHILD WELFARE AND FOSTER CARE POLICIES

When the residential schools began to close, child welfare and the foster care system effectively became the government's new assimilation policy. It is through provincial child welfare legislation and social policy that an overwhelming number of Aboriginal children are

removed from their homes and communities by child welfare authorities and placed in foster care or made Crown wards[xviii] both at the provincial and federal levels.

Even today, most Aboriginal Peoples consider child welfare and the foster care system a vehicle to assimilate them into Canadian mainstream society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded in 2015 that more Aboriginal children are placed in foster care each year[xix] than attended residential school in any one year. Forced to assume the values of another culture that scorns their own belief system, Aboriginal children are left in a cultural vacuum, relating neither to mainstream culture nor to their own community. Thus, historically, social policies have affected multiple generations of Aboriginal Peoples. The severing of family, community and nation has left a legacy of traumatized individuals who frequently experience identity issues and who are often unable to make the most of their own abilities.[xx] The link between foster care and homelessness is documented in a 2016 study that showed that three out of every five homeless youth were part of the child welfare system at some point in their lives, a rate almost 200 times greater than that of the general population. Of those with a history in the child welfare system, almost two of every five respondents eventually "aged out" of provincial or territorial care, losing access to the sort of support that could have kept them from becoming homeless.[xxi]

The physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse experienced and/or witnessed by generations of children has left a significant number of Aboriginal Peoples with a variety of mental health conditions. This in turn has affected the ability of Aboriginal Peoples to achieve balance in regards to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When experienced by more than one generation, personal trauma has become institutionalized within families. This reality also creates an inherent vulnerability to further abuse.[xxii]

As adults, former residential school students and child welfare system survivors have lost culture and language and many have lost connection to their traditional territories and demonstrate symptoms of anxiety disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, depression, suicide, and low self-esteem that are significantly higher than that found in the general population.[xxiii] It is important to acknowledge that the impact of these policies still affects generations of Aboriginal Peoples today. Unfortunately, the legacy will inevitably continue for generations to come.

IMPACT OF MIGRATION

Large segments of the Aboriginal community move fluidly between their home communities and the urban environments in Metro Vancouver. Most reserves offer limited education and employment opportunities and insufficient, poorly funded services. While it is widely believed that the Federal government's fiduciary responsibility to Aboriginal Peoples applies to all Aboriginal Peoples regardless of whether they live on or off reserve, disparate policies and inadequate funding at the federal and provincial levels do not meet these obligations.

As a result of the migration, urban Aboriginal communities represent some of the largest and fastest growing Aboriginal communities in Canada. Although moving from a reserve to a city appears to offer benefits including increased access to social, economic, and

educational resources, this population, as a whole, has not reached the same levels of socio-economic status and well-being as the rest of the urban population.[xxiv]

Further, as migration occurs towards the urban centres, existing community support networks (social and financial) are eroded until new networks are established – this takes time and puts individuals at significant risk. In particular, this increases the likelihood of homelessness as individuals seek accommodation when moving from their home community to the city.[xxv]

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

Aboriginal Peoples also experience economic discrimination in securing adequate and affordable housing in cities, as either renters or owners.[xxvi] The housing selection process includes credit history checks, which automatically excludes many Aboriginal Peoples who often lack any credit history.[xxvii] From another perspective, across Canada, the proportion of urban Aboriginal Peoples who own or rent homes is lower than those in the non-Aboriginal population.[xxviii] This supports the conclusion that homelessness disproportionately affects Aboriginal Peoples regardless of where they reside in Canada.

IMPACT OF THE COST OF HOUSING IN METRO VANCOUVER

Metro Vancouver is one of the most unaffordable cities for housing in the world, adding to the systemic economic disadvantage facing Aboriginal Peoples. According to an annual international study, Vancouver ranks 3rd in the 2017 Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, down one spot from 2016.[xxix] As in all previous surveys, Vancouver is rated as having the worst housing affordability in Canada and is deemed 'severely unaffordable' in the study. Even more concerning, according to the survey, since 2004 Vancouver "has experienced the greatest housing affordability deterioration among major markets.[xxx] One can conclude that if obtaining housing is difficult for the non-Aboriginal population, systemic economic disadvantage and discrimination makes is far more difficult for Aboriginal Peoples.

IMPACT OF CHANGING GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mass modern homelessness in Canada emerged in the 1980s, following a massive federal government disinvestment in affordable housing in 1983 and structural shifts in the economy and reduced spending on social supports. Since then, organizations across Canada have tried and tested solutions to address the issue.[xxxi] These responses, largely based on the provision of emergency services, have not resulted in meaningful progress, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of homeless people identified in the Counts.

While the newly elected Federal government has renewed its interest in housing and homelessness by providing valuable short-term funding to reverse the historical disinvestment in affordable housing, and the 2016 federal budget committed $2.3 billion over two years in affordable housing through various channels, its policy only includes an emphasis on the Housing First approach.

Housing First, while a progressive and ambitious program, does not work well for the Aboriginal Community in Metro Vancouver. The cost of housing is so expensive that the federal dollars contributed only serve a very few individuals. There are simply not enough housing options available for the Aboriginal community. Further, the Housing First definition of homelessness includes only those individuals who are absolutely homeless and excludes those

who are at-risk of homelessness. As a result, services are severely restricted and cannot be provided to everyone who needs them in the Aboriginal community. This program makes people homeless before it can help.

Further, no new housing funding was added in Metro Vancouver. Dollars were generated by cannibalizing existing support programs that had been in place for years. These programs were full spectrum and were very effective at supporting Aboriginal People in acute homeless distress. Added to the fact that Aboriginal organizations continue to struggle with successfully applying for Housing First funding, the effective elimination of these programs has actually reduced the capacity of the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Community to serve its clients.

IMPACT OF THE HIDDEN HOMELESS

According to the State of Homelessness in Canada 2013 report, as many as 50,000 Canadians may be 'hidden homeless' on any given night.[xxxii] Often referred to as couch surfing, this includes people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have nowhere else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. This is a very tenuous housing option because couch surfers often put their hosts at risk of eviction as most landlords do permit long-term guests. There is no reliable data on the hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. In the Aboriginal community, this problem has reached epidemic proportions, with most community members considering this a normal and acceptable circumstance. For many years, researchers have aspired to gain a better sense of the magnitude of this effect on the Aboriginal community. However, to date, one can only speculate the impact that this form of homelessness has on individuals.

At the end of the day, the Aboriginal community is struggling to survive in an environment where all types of housing are unaffordable and the cost of living continues to climb. The Homelessness Count affirms this reality. The trend continues to worsen and the impact of homelessness on Aboriginal Peoples is disproportionally pronounced.

CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal homeless situation in Metro Vancouver continues to reflect the national crisis. In support of this fact, the mayors of Canada's largest cities first declared homelessness within our country "a national disaster" in 1998 and the United Nations declared homelessness in Canada a "national emergency" in 2007.[xxxiii] Some sources have suggested that Aboriginal homelessness in major urban areas ranges from 20 to 50 percent of the total homeless population,[xxxiv] while others have reported that the range may be much wider – from 11 to 96 percent.

As a society, we can do better, and we must do better. Not only is there a higher proportion of Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless, but they clearly face additional barriers in securing safe and affordable housing. In addition to the overall lack of safe, affordable housing across Canada, these barriers include issues related to: poverty and income inequality, health, low income, prejudice, racism, discrimination, justice, and displacement from their home communities.

These realities offer insight into why Aboriginal Peoples are overrepresented among the homeless population and should be essential considerations in any path forward. Trauma, in particular, has emerged as a central theme in much of the literature on Aboriginal homelessness and many articles about Aboriginal Peoples lead with this discussion to provide a contextual backdrop.[xxxvi]

"This is not a situation that can be ignored any further. More resources than what are currently being provided need to be directed to the Aboriginal community by all levels of government to address this unacceptable situation," says David Wells, Chair, Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee.

Housing inadequacy and poverty in homelessness can largely be attributed to social, systemic and historical factors.[xxxvii] Aboriginal-specific strategies towards healing and moving forward[xxxviii] and the broader struggle for self-determination and other forms of political justice for Aboriginal Peoples must be considered in addressing systemic racial discrimination and improving the socio-economic status and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

While it is laudable to set an aspirational goal to eliminate homelessness for all, it is important to understand that Aboriginal Peoples are disproportionately impacted. This is evidenced by the 2018 Count results. Greater investment in regards to culturally appropriate services, supports and funding is required to create parity and address this deficit. Clearly greater efforts are needed by all levels of government to ensure that Aboriginal Peoples experience homelessness at least proportionately to mainstream society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2018 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver definitively shows that there is a homeless crisis for Aboriginal Peoples. While there are many studies and recommendations that have been made at a National level, we provide some recommendations from our collective experience that relate specifically to Metro Vancouver.

1. The Metro Vancouver homelessness funding formula should be adjusted to provide an equitable allocation between Metro Vancouver Homelessness Steering Committee and

Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee based on Homeless Count data. For example, the disparity in Aboriginal population numbers could be utilized to provide a more equitable funding ratio.

2. Housing First has not been successful for the Aboriginal Community in Metro Vancouver. More flexibility in homelessness programming should be available to community organizations to meet the needs of the urban Aboriginal population. The program needs to be community based.

3. Aboriginal-specific, culturally appropriate supports designed to help healing and reconciliation should be provided (particularly for Aboriginal People experiencing intergenerational trauma, residential schools and the impact of colonial policy and racism). There needs to be more financial support to service providers to allow them to be more creative as they attempt to end homelessness in their community.

4. The administrative burden on Aboriginal organizations seeking funding and the reporting requirements should be made less cumbersome and strike an appropriate balance between efficiency and accountability. There should be flexibility in the 15% administration cap for Aboriginal organizations who face capacity issues.

5. Aboriginal housing providers should be provided with core funding that would allow for the development of capacity to deliver needed programs. The government needs to get away from competitive proposal-based funding models to one based on need.

6. The Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee should be provided additional resources to engage, coordinate and govern appropriately. The time has come for the federal government to stop running its Aboriginal homeless programs on the backs of volunteers.

7. The federal government should reinstate and increase funding for new social housing and ongoing operating subsidies under the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission's Aboriginal off-reserve programs. There is a demonstrated need for more housing units in urban areas.

8. The federal government should revisit the definition of 'affordable housing'. The new definition of 'affordable housing' that is linked to market rent less 10% is unaffordable in the Metro Vancouver market.

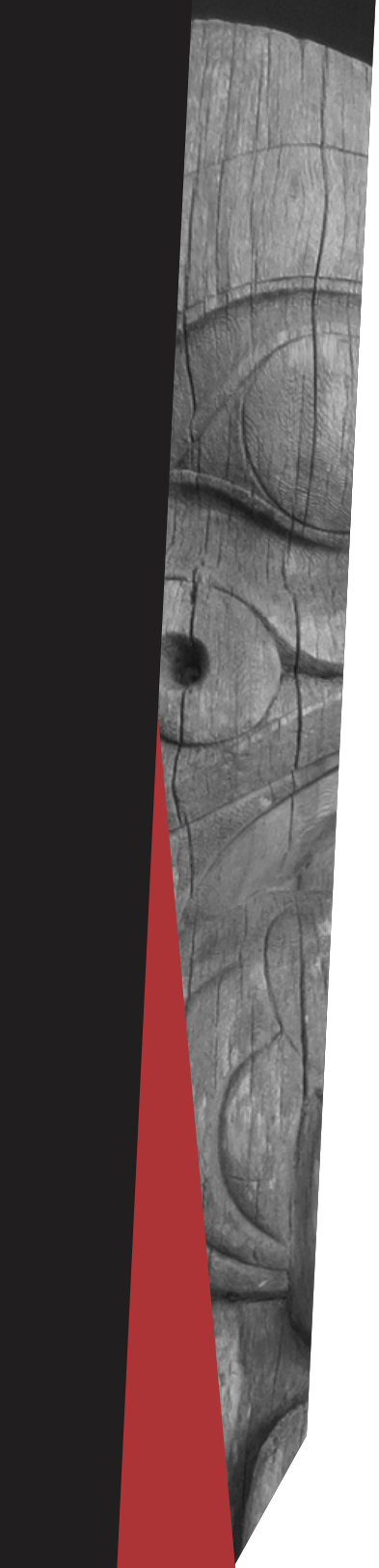
9. Government at all levels should provide ongoing, long-term rental subsidies as a cost- effective option where rental markets exist. These subsidies should be used in support of new housing units and not as a substitute for new housing units.

10. The Federal and BC government should create an independent Homelessness Ombudsman office to support the interests of homeless individuals that effectively have no voice in the current system.

11. Government at all levels should:
    1. Assess the continuum of housing for all British Columbians, similar to Child Welfare, and develop a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness.
    2. Develop a public education strategy to address systemic discrimination against Aboriginal Peoples.
    3. Conduct additional research, particularly housing audits, to document the extent of housing discrimination, with the goal of developing effective solutions to reduce discrimination in accessing affordable housing.
    4. Fund the development of a methodology to adequately enumerate the problem of hidden homelessness in the Aboriginal community as well as strategies to address the unique needs of those individuals.
    5. Develop strategies to help homeless Aboriginal People access affordable housing on an ongoing basis (for example, housing advocates or landlord educational campaigns).

12. Reduce youth homelessness by implementing an After-Care Guarantee, so that when young people are taken into care, government commits to providing ongoing support (as needed) until a young person reaches the age of 28.[xxxix] This is supported by literature that suggests that youth in care need to have the same gradual and extended transition to adulthood that most young people enjoy.

13. In terms of improving the Count in future years –
    1. Two of the Aboriginal Count teams in Vancouver reported that their count shifts were too late in the day and as a result it is likely that some homeless people may have been missed in the Count. For future Counts earlier start times would be advantageous and may serve to correct this issue.
    2. The Count focused predominately on the City of Vancouver due to the high concentration of Aboriginal organizations. Increased presence and count teams in areas outside of the City of Vancouver would likely result in a more accurate count across Metro Vancouver.
    3. Increased food planning across all participating organizations would be beneficial.
    4. Tobacco ties were successfully employed in the 2018 Count. This ceremonial component should be incorporated in all future Counts.
    5. The AHSC should develop a comprehensive Urban Aboriginal Strategy to address the issues noted in the 2018 Count.



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CITY OF VANCOUVER

Lu'ma Native Housing Society