

OUR HOMELESS COUNT: SURVEY RESULTS FOR VERNON BC



OCTOBER 2018

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We would like to acknowledge that the geographical scope of this report is within the ancestral, traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx Nation.

Acknowledgement of Action Team Members:

Turning Points Collaborative
City of Vernon (Community Safety Office, Bylaw Department)
Upper Room Mission
Vernon Women's Transition House
Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Interior Health
Partners in Resources
Salvation Army
NOYFSS – Street Clinic
North Okanagan Community Chaplaincy Service
Social Planning Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Who Are Our Homeless (Based on the 2018 Survey Results)?

- **161 people** were counted as homeless in our community on October 29, 2018.
- **31%** were female and **65%** were male; **4%** indicated transgender/other
- Average age for sleeping outside was **43 years (men)** and **34 years (women)**
- Average age in the shelters was **47 years (men)** and **47 years (women)**
- **30%** of respondents indicated they had been in the foster care system
- **34%** identified as having Indigenous ancestry
- **38%** have lived in Vernon for less than one year (the majority of people have lived in Vernon more than one year)
- **50%** indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections

What Are The Main Causes of Homelessness in Vernon?

- The main cause of homelessness in Vernon is low income, high rents and lack of available rentals – this was the overwhelming response by survey participants and is supported by local data and community indicators.
- When rental vacancy rates are low, people with barriers (such as mental health and substance use issues) are pushed out of the rental market. Although, for many people with multiple barriers, supported housing is more appropriate than a private rental.
- There is not enough supported housing in Vernon to accommodate the number of people who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness.

What Can We Do About Homelessness?

- Community members can educate themselves regarding the causes of homelessness and the true cost of homelessness to the tax payer.
- It costs the taxpayer \$55,000 per year to ignore homelessness (due to increased costs to health care and the criminal justice system). The average cost to provide supported housing to an individual is \$37,000 per year¹.
- We can support efforts to:
 - Increase income assistance rates, disability rates and minimum wage
 - Fund affordable and supportive housing projects in the community
 - Extend supports into early adulthood for children in the foster care system
 - Address the generational trauma within Indigenous communities caused by the impact of colonization

¹ Ministry of Health, Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia, April 2006

METHODOLOGY/NUMBER OF HOMELESS:

From 2009 until 2016, biannual homeless censuses were conducted to count the *number of camps* in public places in Vernon. Since October 2016, the COOL Team has instead conducted a more detailed Fall census/survey to count the *number of people* who are homeless in Vernon and to better understand the demographics, causes of homelessness and additional needs of our homeless population. The third annual Fall census/survey took place over a 17-hour time span, in various locations, starting on the evening of October 29, 2018 and finishing the morning of October 30, 2018:

Overall Census Results:

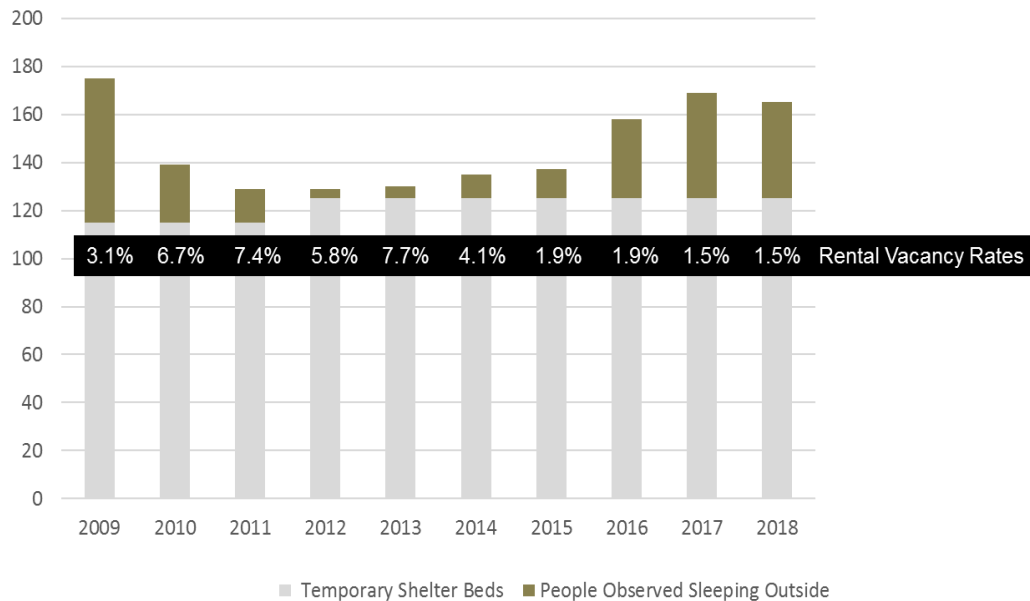
2018	2017	2016	Location
53	51	55	Howard House
24	22	25	Gateway Shelter
10	6	10	Temporary Weather Shelter
10	9	11	Bill's Place (identify as homeless)
14	20	10	Vernon Women's Transition House (identify as homeless)
40	44	33	Observed sleeping outside
10	1		Other (Cells, Hospital)
161	153	144	TOTAL

HOMELESSNESS ACROSS BC – WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OTHER COMMUNITIES?

2016 Homeless Count: BC Communities (compiled by BC Rental Housing Coalition)					
LOCATION	ACTUAL	Per/1000	LOCATION	ACTUAL	Per/1000
Terrace	63	5/1000	Cranbrook	111	6/1000
Nanaimo	174	2/1000	Nelson	116	11/1000
Greater Victoria	1387	4/1000	Penticton	128	4/1000
Port Alberni	73	4/1000	Vernon	144	4/1000
Vancouver	1847	3/1000	Kelowna	233	2/1000

VERNON: OVER THE LAST DECADE

Vernon has had a homeless problem for many years and the Partners in Action Committee have been tracking trends since 2009. **There is a strong correlation between the rental vacancy rate and the number of people sleeping outside.**



SURVEY RESPONSES:

Surveyors participated in an orientation session to ensure consistency in questioning participants. Homeless citizens were asked if they would like to participate in a survey to voice their needs and barriers in securing housing. Citizens who consented to being surveyed were reassured surveys were anonymous and confidential. There was a 31% participation rate in the survey from those people who were homeless on the night of October 29, 2018. This is down slightly from previous years where the response rate was closer to 40% but the team was pleased with the response as this is still a relatively high rate of return.

Snapshot of Demographics:

- **31%** were female and **65%** were male; **4%** indicated transgender/other
- Average age of a man sleeping outside was **43** years
- Average age of a woman sleeping outside was **34** years
- Average ages of men in the shelters was **47** years
- Average ages of women in the shelters was **47** years
- **30%** of respondents indicated they had been in the foster care system
- **34%** identified as having Indigenous ancestry
- **13 %** identified with the LGBTQ community
- **11%** indicated that they had served in the military
- **0** indicated they were a newcomer (Immigrant or refugee in the last 5 years)
- **38%** have lived in Vernon for less than one year with the majority of people having lived in Vernon for more than a year.
- **50%** indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections

WORKING ON SOLUTIONS:

The cause of our homelessness crisis is the Provincial housing shortage combined with a record low vacancy rate. The solution is more housing. Since 2008, the affordable housing stock in Vernon has increased by 30% but many more units are needed.

The good news is that a significant number of new units were confirmed by BC Housing in 2018:

- 46 beds - Our Place Shelter, Turning Points Collaborative
- 52 units - My Place Apartment, Turning Points Collaborative
- 38 units – Vernon Native Housing Society
- 41 units – Vancouver Resource Society
- 30 units - Canadian Mental Health Association, Vernon and District
- 12 units – City of Vernon/Land Trust
- 36 units - Vernon Pensioners Accommodation Society
- Up to 8 Units - Highlands of East Hill – City of Vernon/Land Trust

We look forward to more announcements in the future as our community is well organized, extremely collaborative, and continues to apply for more affordable units.

The Cost of Homelessness:

The cost of homelessness on government systems has been studied across Canada and the United States and the research results are consistent. According to a Ministry of Health report commissioned in 2006, a total of **\$55,000 per homeless person** is spent on health, corrections and social services each year. If housing and support were provided, it would cost the system **\$37,000 per person** per year. The cost savings to the taxpayer is significant².

Vernon as a Designated Community:

The federal government has announced plans to expand the number of designated communities to receive funding under their Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Being a designated community, means access to significant federal funding to address homelessness in Vernon and to implement a Housing First model. Vernon will be applying once the application process is announced.

Updating the Homelessness and Attainable Housing Strategies:

The Social Planning Council, in conjunction with City of Vernon, have hired Urban Matters to review and update the Homelessness and the Attainable Housing Strategies, to be completed by March 2019.

CONCLUSION:

Turning Points Collaborative, the Community Safety Office and the Social Planning Council would like to thank all the members of the COOL Team who have participated in the homeless census over the years and who stretched their resources to ensure that the expanded homeless survey took place again in 2018. Most importantly we wish to thank our homeless population who took part in the survey, told their truth, and trusted the COOL Team with their story. We want each and every person who is homeless in Vernon to know that they count and that their voices have been heard.

² Ministry of Health, *Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia*, April 2006

COMMUNITY INDICATORS (2008 – 2017)

HOMELESSNESS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
# of homeless camps in public spaces (Spring/Fall)	n/a	30/12	13/16	7/4	0/2	2/3	5/3	3/6	10/9	--
# of homeless people (total)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	144	153
# of people observed sleeping outside (October Survey)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	33	44
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Gateway Shelter	n/a	138	490	252	267	318	286	293	366	381
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Howard House (temporary beds)	n/a	146	216	120	247	133	252	233	259	217

HOUSING	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.0%	3.1%	6.7%	7.4%	5.8%	7.7%	4.1%	1.9%	1.9%	1.5%
# of new non-profit affordable housing units	0	42	6	0	0	20	0	0	10	0
# of new supported housing units	16	0	0	0	0	4	0	38	0	10
<u>Average Rental Rate</u>										
Bachelor	\$485	\$492	\$512	\$514	\$522	\$524	\$531	\$544	\$587	\$619
One Bedroom	\$653	\$632	\$638	\$635	\$641	\$636	\$649	\$674	\$705	\$765
Two Bedroom	\$764	\$780	\$788	\$773	\$782	\$785	\$794	\$821	\$860	\$913
Three Bedroom	\$802	\$831	\$827	\$814	\$830	\$851	\$844	\$906	\$935	\$998
Shelter Allowance for Individual on Income Assistance	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375*

*Although the overall income assistance rates were increased in 2017, the shelter rate remained the same.

INCOME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
BC Income Assistance Monthly For a Single Person	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$710
Person with Disability Rate for a Single Person	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$983	\$1133
Minimum Wage	\$8	\$8	\$8	\$8.75	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.45	\$10.85	\$11.35
Change in Annual Consumer Price Index	2.3%	.3%	1.8%	2.9%	1.5%	.9%	2.0%	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%

Indicator Sources: Turning Points Collaborative, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Social Planning Council, Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, Statistics Canada