

OUR HOMELESS COUNT: SURVEY RESULTS FOR VERNON BC



OCTOBER 2019

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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:

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City of Vernon (Community Safety Office, Bylaw Department)
Upper Room Mission
Vernon Women's Transition House
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights

- **151 people** were counted as homeless in our community on the night of October 16, 2019. This is slightly down from the 2018 count of 161 people.
- Homelessness is a significant issue across the Province, not just in Vernon. Some smaller communities have even higher rates of homelessness than Vernon.
- Currently, Vernon is unable to bring everyone inside on a nightly basis. The additional 20 beds with the Temporary Weather Shelter program are needed to keep people warm during the winter.
- The annual surveys show that approximately 30% of people are new to Vernon each year, however the annual **homeless** rate does not increase by 30%. Just like any other demographic, people move in and out of the community.
- Although the point-in-time counts since 2016 show a trend of approximately 150 homeless people on any given night, the annual Gateway Shelter numbers of unique individuals is significantly higher.
- People come to Vernon from a variety of places and for a variety of reasons. Moving to Vernon to access services is not the most common reason.
- 60% of people surveyed indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections. Reconnecting with family members was the most common response when asked why they moved to Vernon.

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.

What Can We Do About Homelessness?

- In 2019, My Place opened and now provides 52 units of supported housing in Vernon. We need more supported housing like My Place to accommodate the number of people who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- The community can encourage senior levels of government to:
 - Increase income assistance rates, disability rates and minimum wage
 - Fund affordable and supportive housing projects in the Vernon
 - 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

INTRODUCTION:

Since 2016, the COOL Team has conducted an annual point-in-time census/survey to better understand homelessness in Vernon. The fourth annual point-in-time census/survey took place on the evening of October 16, 2019 and finished the morning of October 17, 2019.

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

2018 Homeless Count: BC Communities (compiled by HSABC)					
LOCATION	ACTUAL	Per/1000	LOCATION	ACTUAL	Per/1000
Terrace	96	8/1000	Nelson	115	11/1000
Nanaimo	301	3/1000	Penticton	108	3/1000
Greater Victoria	931	3/1000	Kelowna	286	2/1000
Port Alberni	147	8/1000	Vernon	161	4/1000

As can be seen by the **2018 BC Homeless Count**, homelessness is a Provincial issue, not just a local phenomenon. In addition to bigger cities, smaller and mid-sized communities in BC are also feeling the impacts of low vacancy rates and higher rents. This results in higher numbers of people sleeping in shelters and public spaces. Although Vernon is facing significant challenges, it is not as hard hit as some other communities in BC, such as Terrace, Nelson and Port Alberni.

SHELTER AVAILABILITY IN VERNON ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 16, 2019

2019	2018	2017	2016	Location
n/a	55	55	55	Howard House (closed in 2019)
46	n/a	n/a	n/a	Our Place (new modular Shelter opened in 2019)
40	25	25	25	Gateway Shelter (new location/ new beds added in 2019)
n/a	10	10	10	Temporary Weather Shelter
17	17	10	10	Bill’s Place (primary beds increased in 2018)
25	25	25	25	Vernon Women’s Transition House
128	132	125	125	TOTAL

Since 2018, there have been some shifts in the locations of shelter beds in Vernon, but the overall number of beds were similar compared to previous years. Here is a brief synopsis of changes in 2019:

- The Howard House closed its doors but most of its programming was shifted to Our Place and My Place.
- Our Place is the new modular shelter that opened next to the Howard House building.
- Gateway Shelter moved to the building next door which allowed the program to expand from 25 beds to 40 beds
- Bill’s Place provides primary recovery beds as well as longer term secondary accommodation. In 2018, the addition of Haven Place (the house next door to Bill’s Place) meant the primary recovery beds increased from 10 to 17 and are now available to women as well as men.
- The Vernon Women’s Transition House has 25 beds for women and children fleeing abuse. There have been no recent changes in the location or number of beds.

My Place is 52 units of supported housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These units are not included in the homeless census as they are permanent accommodation, and tenants are considered housed.

POINT-IN-TIME CENSUS RESULTS

2019	2018	2017	2016	Location
n/a	53	51	55	Howard House
46	n/a	n/a	n/a	Our Place
39	24	22	25	Gateway Shelter
n/a	10	6	10	Temporary Weather Shelter
14	10	9	11	Bill’s Place (identify as homeless)
15	14	20	10	Vernon Women’s Transition House (identify as homeless)
22	40	44	33	Observed sleeping outside
15	10	1		Other
151	161	153	144	TOTAL

Currently, Vernon is unable to bring everyone inside on a nightly basis, as there are more people who are homeless than available shelter beds. The approved Temporary Weather Shelter of 20 beds (located in the former Gateway Shelter facility) is needed in order to provide additional shelter and keep people warm during the winter.

THE SCOPE OF HOMELESSNESS IN VERNON

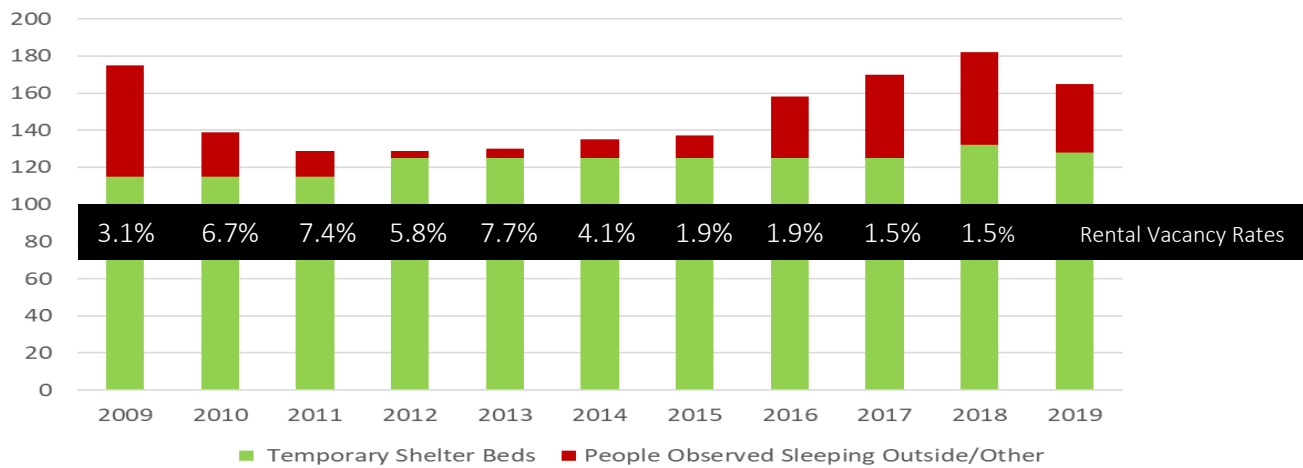
2019	2018	2017	2016	Annual Number of Different Individuals Who Stayed in Gateway Shelter:
n/a	244*	381	366	Gateway Shelter
2019	2018	2017	2016	Annual Point in Time Count
22	40	44	33	Observed Sleeping Outside
151	161	153	144	Total Number (Sheltered and Unsheltered)
128	132	125	125	Number of Shelter Beds Available

*In 2018, the Thirty Third Street temporary bridging program was established next door to Gateway Shelter.

Although the trend of the point-in-time count shows that the community has approximately 150 homeless people on any given night, the Gateway Shelter data indicates that the scope of homelessness on an annual basis is much larger. As with other demographics, people who are homeless move in and out of the community. There are also people who are homeless who find temporary accommodation (i.e. couch surfing) as well as people who find a home and no longer need services. This accounts for the difference between the annual shelter numbers and the point-in-time count.

HOMELESS COUNTS 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:

Homeless citizens were asked if they would like to participate in a survey to voice their needs and barriers in securing housing. People who consented to being surveyed were reassured surveys were anonymous and confidential. There was a 33% participation rate in the survey from those people who were homeless on the night of October 16, 2019.

Snapshot of Demographics:

- **63% were male and 35% were female; 2% indicated transgender/other**
- Average age for sleeping outside was **38 years (men)** and **33 years (women)**
- Average age in the shelters was **42 years (men)** and **38 years (women)**
- **31%** of respondents indicated they had been in the foster care system
- **36%** identified as having Indigenous ancestry
- **7 %** identified with the LGBTQ community
- **5%** indicated that they had served in the military
- **0** people indicated they were a newcomer (Immigrant or refugee in the last 5 years)
- **28%** have lived in Vernon for less than one year
- **60%** indicated that they had grown up in Vernon or had family connections

Where were you last living?

Less than one year	One to four years	Five to ten years	More than ten years
Kelowna (2) Ontario Abbotsford New Brunswick Prince George (2) Calgary Chilliwack Salmon Arm Kamloops Invermere	Eagle Bay Vancouver Regina Vanderhoof Dawson Creek Edgewood (2) Port Alberni Winnipeg Penticton	Edmonton (3) Kamloops Nelson Cranbrook (2) Calgary Kelowna Vancouver Penticton Valemont Canmore, AB	Burnaby (2) Ontario Surrey Prince George Williams Lake Kelowna North Vancouver Edmonton Calgary Grande Prairie Dawson Creek Vancouver Alberta Salmon Arm (2) Morley, AB

People come to Vernon from a variety of places and for a variety of reasons (most often cited reason is to reunite with family). Moving to Vernon to access services is not the most common reason. Kelowna, Prince George, Abbotsford, Calgary, Chilliwack and Kamloops all have services in place. Only Salmon Arm and Invermere have limited services. For the two people who named a Province, we are uncertain if services are in place. It is also worth noting that although the annual survey shows approximately 30% of people are new to Vernon each year, the annual rate of homelessness does not increase by 30%.

WORKING ON SOLUTIONS:

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, 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 significant¹.

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

The good news is that a significant number of new units were confirmed in 2018 by BC Housing (more than the total number of new units in the last decade):

- 46 beds - Our Place Shelter, Turning Point Collaborative
- 52 units - My Place Apartment, Turning Point 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

Partners in Action is now focusing on the next round of BC Housing funding (expected to be announced in Spring 2020) and is working with the housing non-profit sector to ensure that there is capacity and support to apply for more affordable units for Vernon.

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 homeless survey took place again in 2019. 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.

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

COMMUNITY INDICATORS (2008 – 2018)

HOMELESSNESS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
# 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	161
# of people observed sleeping outside (October Survey)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	33	44	40
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Gateway Shelter	n/a	138	490	252	267	318	286	293	366	381	244
# of Individuals Who Stayed at Howard House (temporary beds)	n/a	146	216	120	247	133	252	233	259	217	165

HOUSING	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.0%	3.1%	6.7%	7.4%	5.8%	7.7%	4.1%	1.9%	1.9%	1.5%	1.5%
# of new non-profit affordable housing units	0	42	6	0	0	20	0	0	10	0	0
# of new supported housing units	16	0	0	0	0	4	0	38	0	10	0
<u>Average Rental Rate</u>											
Bachelor	\$485	\$492	\$512	\$514	\$522	\$524	\$531	\$544	\$587	\$619	\$656
One Bedroom	\$653	\$632	\$638	\$635	\$641	\$636	\$649	\$674	\$705	\$765	\$793
Two Bedroom	\$764	\$780	\$788	\$773	\$782	\$785	\$794	\$821	\$860	\$913	\$944
Three Bedroom	\$802	\$831	\$827	\$814	\$830	\$851	\$844	\$906	\$935	\$998	\$1019
Shelter Allowance for Individual on Income Assistance	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375	\$375*	\$656

*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	2018
BC Income Assistance Monthly for a Single Person	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$610	\$710	\$710
Person with Disability Rate for a Single Person	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$906	\$983	\$1133	\$1133
Minimum Wage	\$8	\$8	\$8	\$8.75	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$10.45	\$10.85	\$11.35	\$12.65
Change in Annual Consumer Price Index	2.3%	.3%	1.8%	2.9%	1.5%	.9%	2.0%	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%	2.3%

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