

Homelessness

Cowichan Region

Cowichan Housing Association Snapshot Series



Homelessness in the Cowichan Valley

What is Homelessness?

“The causes and consequences of homelessness are complex. Homelessness affects a diverse cross-section of the population that includes youth, women with children, and seniors. Many factors can contribute to an individual being homeless, which can make it difficult for individuals to regain self-sufficiency the longer they have been homeless.”¹

The definition of homelessness includes people who are absolutely homeless, those living on the streets or in shelters, the hidden homeless who are staying with friends, family or institutions and those who are at risk of homelessness because of unstable economic and housing circumstances.²

What are the causes of homelessness?

What are the risk factors of homelessness?

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Who is homeless?

What are the faces of homelessness? What is hidden homelessness?

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How big is the issue of homelessness?

What is the current picture of homelessness in the Cowichan Valley?

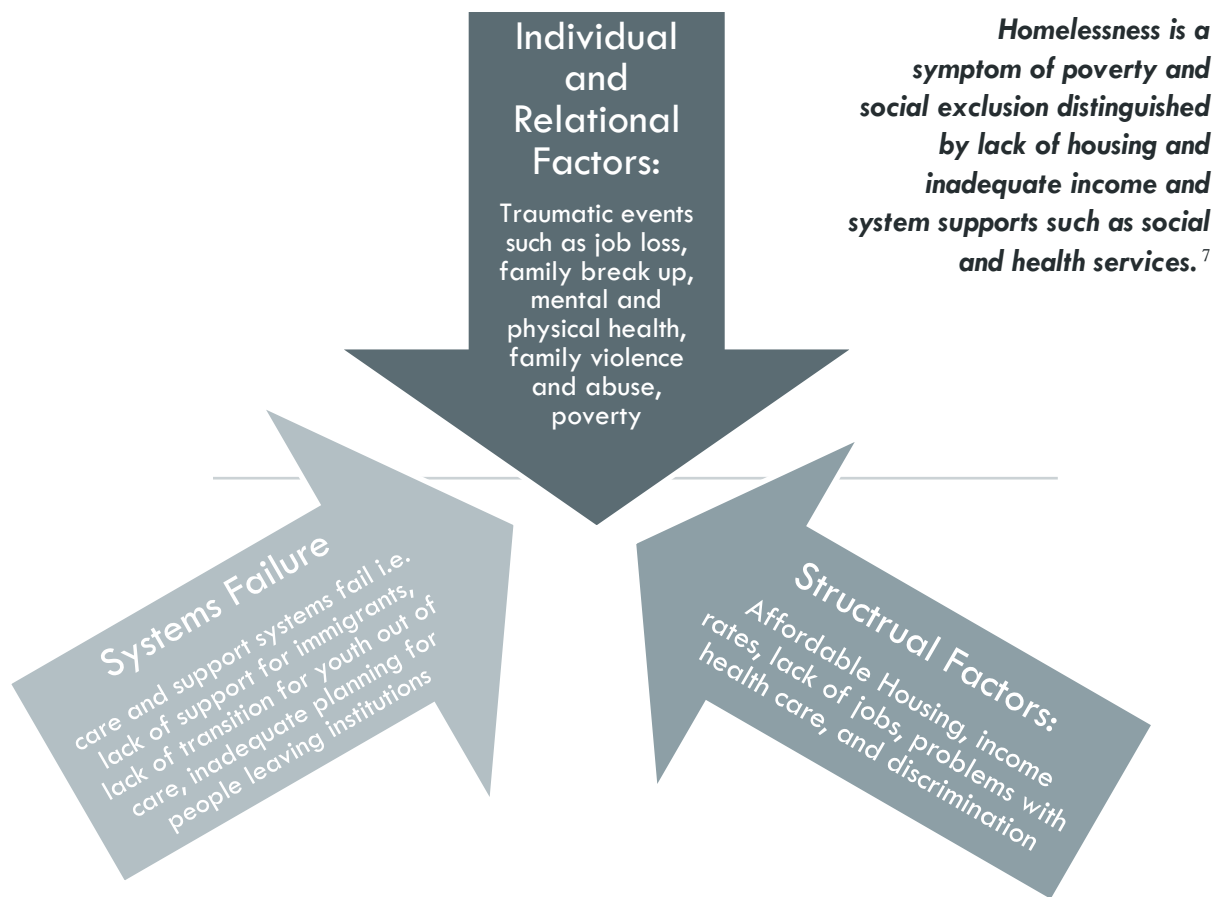
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What are the Causes of Homelessness?

Depending on the factors playing out in an individual's life, many people may go in and out of homelessness over time. Locally, we have unique factors that may put certain groups within our community more at risk for homelessness. In the Cowichan Valley,

- 1 out of 3 children live in poverty in Duncan, making it one of the highest child poverty rates in BC.³
- In 2014, Duncan was listed as having the highest domestic violence rates in BC. Women fleeing their abusers often find themselves and their children without a home.⁴
- 1 in 4 of households do not meet housing affordability or one or more standards for housing adequacy.⁵

Diagram 1 Causes of Homelessness⁶



Who Is Homeless?

Historically, individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada were older, single men, but recent research shows that more women, families and youth experience homelessness.⁸ This knowledge adds to the complexity of the issues and to how we must prevent and respond to homelessness.

People who are homeless are not a distinct, separate population; rather, they are people who are vulnerable to certain factors.⁹ More and more families, youth, seniors, First Nations and veterans are among those who find themselves without a home. In Canada:¹⁰

- 27.3% of the homeless population are women and 18.7% are youth
- 24.4% of shelter users are adults over the age of 50

- 28-34% of shelter users are Indigenous (Indigenous people make up 4.3% of Canada's total population)
- 2.2% of shelter users are Veterans

Each group has its own special needs and situational circumstances and need solutions that take a holistic approach.

Locally, in 2016 anecdotal reports indicated that 10 – 20 youth were among the visible homeless.¹¹

This trend is supported nationally; youth aged 16 – 24 are one of the fastest growing population of homeless in Canada along with children and families.¹²

Hidden Homelessness

A pilot study conducted in Vancouver in 2009 suggested that for every homeless person there was 3.5 persons suffering from hidden homeless.¹³

The hidden homeless are:

“people ... whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including interim (or transitional) housing, people living temporarily with others (couch surfing), or living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.”¹⁴

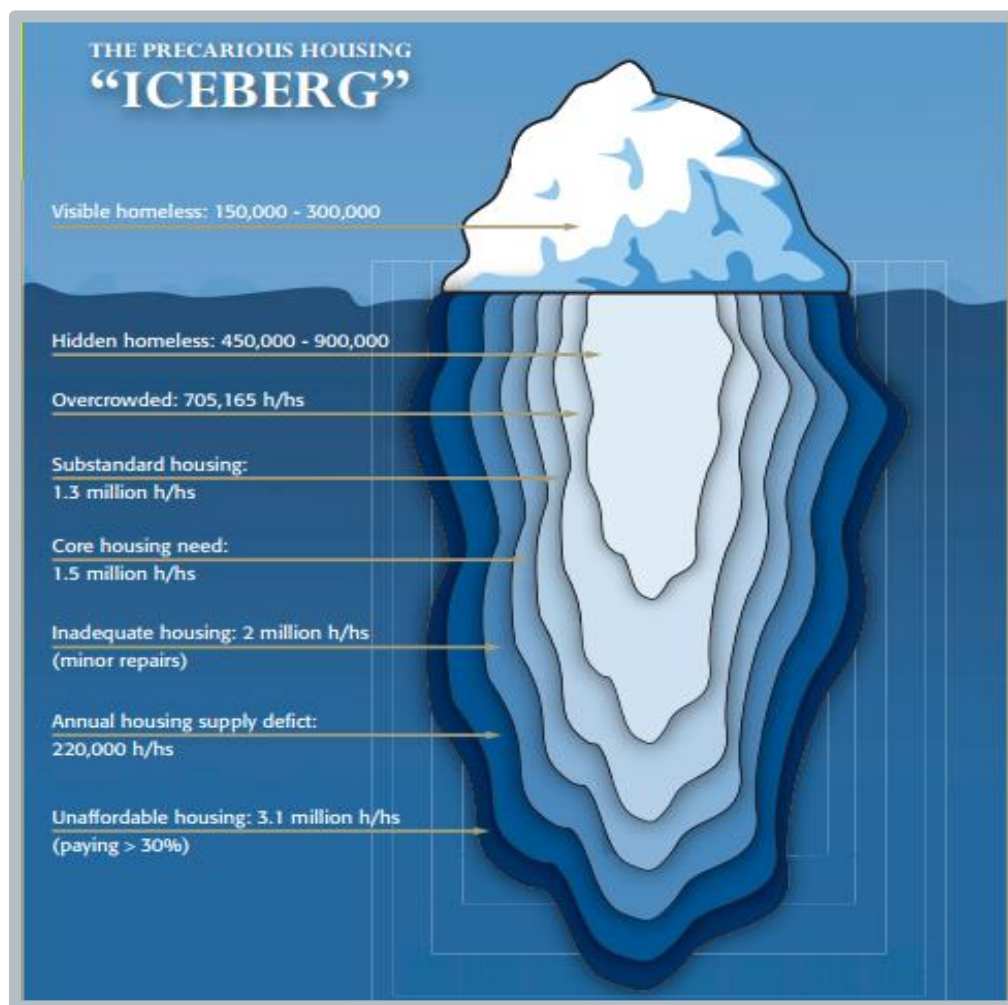
Reports and statistics often reflect absolute homelessness or the visibly homeless. It is hard to measure the hidden homeless population and there is limited reliable data on a national level or a community level because they don't often access supports and services.¹⁵



How Big is the Issue of Homelessness?

The “Precarious Housing Iceberg” illustrates (Diagram 3) the connection between precarious housing and homelessness.¹⁶ It shows that the visible homeless are just the tip of the iceberg and there are many layers that feed into homelessness. Nationally in 2010, it was estimated that 150,000-300,000 people were visibly homeless at one point in time, 450,000 – 900,000 were people suffering from hidden homeless, 1.5 million Canadians were in core housing need and 3.1 million Canadians were living in unaffordable housing.¹⁷

Diagram 3 The Precarious Housing Iceberg¹⁸



How Big is the Issue of Homelessness Continued...

In Cowichan....

In 2014, the Cowichan Region Homeless Report counted 76 people as relatively homeless and by looking at Ministry of Social Development and Innovation data the report predicts that there were 90+ people suffering from relative homelessness.¹⁹ The preliminary results from the Winter 2017 Duncan Homeless Point In Time count counted 74 people who were hidden homeless.²⁰

In the 2014 Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, over 75% of those people surveyed indicated that affordable and stable housing would help to improve their state of homelessness.²¹

The report also illustrated a strong correlation between precarious housing and homelessness. 71% of those surveyed that fell in the precarious housing category indicated that they had once been homeless and 58% had been homeless for more than 1 year.²²



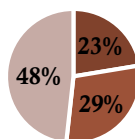
CTV News

A key recommendation coming out of the 2014 Cowichan Region Homeless Count was the need to develop an affordable housing strategy which includes increasing stock and protecting current stock of supportive housing, transition housing, subsidized housing and market housing. Supports are also needed to assist those living in precarious housing from becoming homeless.²³

In the Cowichan Valley, homelessness is present in all areas of the region, although the majority of people experiencing homelessness reside in the core areas of Duncan and North Cowichan.²⁴ The Cowichan Region Homelessness Report in 2014 and the Duncan 2017 Winter Homelessness Point In Time Count conducted surveys to find the number of people who are experiencing absolute homelessness, relative homelessness, and precariously housed.²⁵ Figures 1-4 provide a summary of the diverse groups of people facing absolute homelessness, relative homelessness, and precariously housed as surveyed in 2014 and 2017.

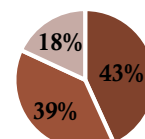
In 2014, 259 people participated in the survey and 58 of those surveyed were absolutely homeless, 75 were relatively homeless and 125 were precariously housed.²⁶

Figure 1 Types of homelessness in the Cowichan Valley 2014²⁷



- Absolute Homelessness
- Relative Homelessness
- Precariously Housed

Figure 2 Types of homelessness in the Duncan Point In Time Count Winter 2017^{28 29}



- Absolute Homelessness
- Hidden Homeless
- At Risk of Homelessness

Continued....

How Big is the Issue of Homelessness Continued...

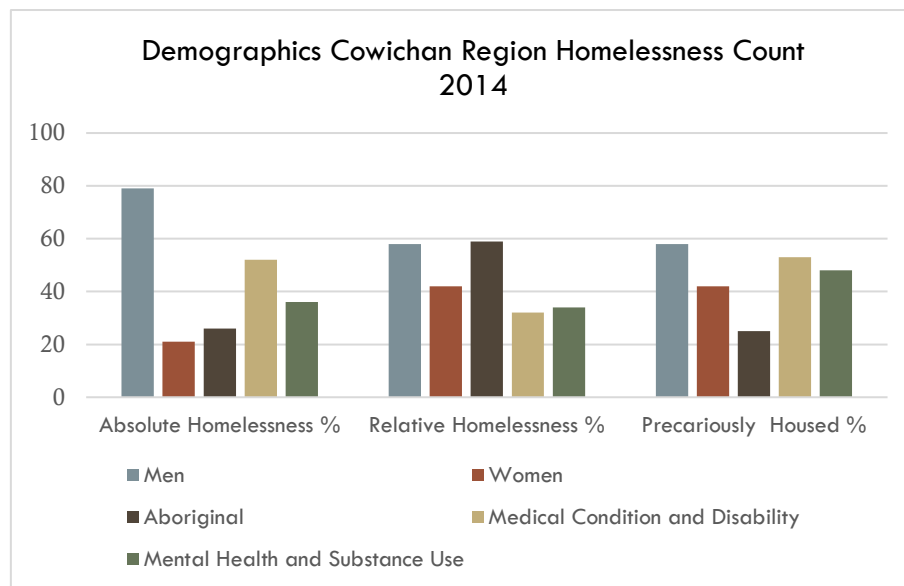
The preliminary results of the 2017 Winter Homeless Point In Time count showed an increase of people experiencing absolute homelessness. 192 people were surveyed and 83 people were absolutely homeless, 74 experienced hidden homeless and 35 were at risk of homelessness.³⁰

The 2014 Cowichan Region Homelessness Count found that men were highly over represented in the absolute homeless category; however, the gender gap closes to almost equal numbers in the categories of relative homelessness and precariously housed. Aboriginal people represent over half the people facing relative homelessness (59%).³¹

More than half of the absolute homeless population reported having a medical condition and/or a disability.³²

36% of people living absolutely homeless, 34% living in relative homelessness and 48% living in precarious housing reported having a mental health and/or a substance abuse condition.³³

Figure 3 Demographics, Cowichan Region Homelessness Count 2014³⁴

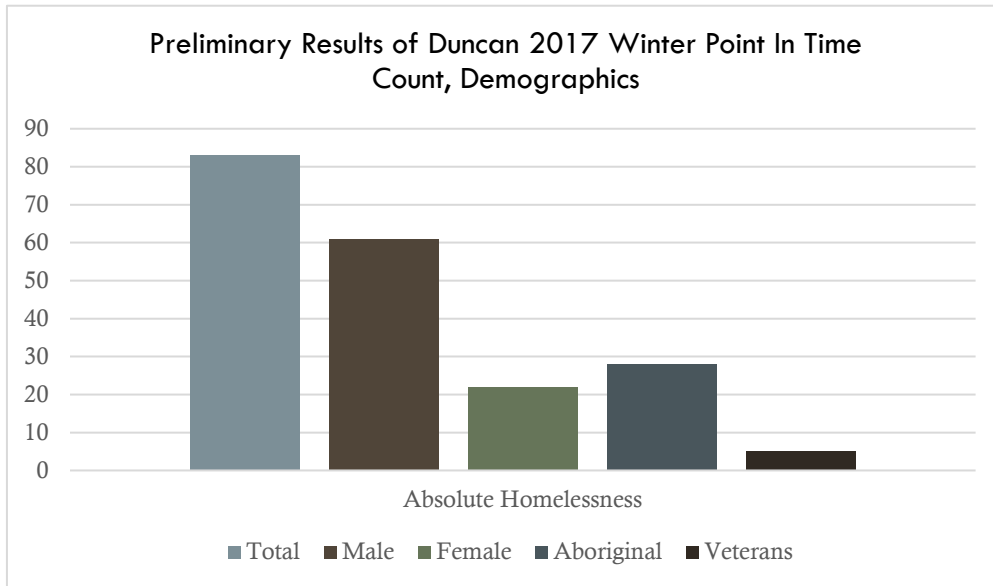


The preliminary results of the 2017 homeless point in time count showed that the 73% of those people experiencing absolute homelessness were men and 26.5% were females.³⁵ This is an increase of representation of females by 5.5% and a decrease in representation of males by 6%.

Aboriginal people represent over 33% of people facing absolute homelessness whereas the total population of aboriginal people in the Cowichan Valley only make up 10.6%.³⁶ 6 % of those facing absolute homelessness either served in the Canadian military or the RCMP.³⁷

How Big is the Issue of Homelessness Continued...

Figure 4 Preliminary Results of Duncan 2017 Winter Point In Time Count, Demographics³⁸



End Notes

- ¹ Understanding Homelessness and the Strategy – Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/understanding.html>. N.p. 2016. Web. 4 Apr 2017.
- ² Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. *CAEH Backgrounder*. Calgary and Toronto: Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2011.
- ³ First Call. *2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card*. Vancouver: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2016.
- ⁴ 2014 TAV Workshop A Success. *Cowichan Women Against Violence Society*. N.p. 2014. Web. 3 Mar 2017.
- ⁵ Housing Market Information Portal – CHMC. <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmiportal/en/#Owners>. N.p., 2017. Web. 20 Feb. 2017.
- ⁶ Causes of Homelessness. *The Homeless Hub*. N.p., 2017. Web. 3 Mar 2017.
- ⁷ Gaetz, Stephen et al. *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, 2013.
- ⁸ Gaetz, Stephen et al. *The State of Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016.
- ⁹ Causes of Homelessness. *The Homeless Hub*. N.p., 2017. Web. 3 Mar 2017.
- ¹⁰ Gaetz, Stephen et al. *The State of Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016.
- ¹¹ Homeless Hub: 40 – 60 have moved in behind Duncan School District Office. *Cowichan Valley Citizen*. N.p., 2016. Web. 3 Mar 2017.
- ¹² Facts and Figures. *Raising the Roof*. N.p., 2017. Web. 3 Mar 2017.
- ¹³ Eberle, Margaret et al. *Results of the pilot study to estimate the size of the hidden homeless population in Metro Vancouver*. Vancouver: Market Power Research Inc., 2009
- ¹⁴ Gaetz, Stephen et al. *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, 2013.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ The Wellesley Institute. *Precarious Housing in Canada*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute, 2010, p 4.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, February 2014: A Report of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ²⁰ Emmanuel, Joy. *Duncan Winter Point In Time Count; Some Preliminary Results*. Duncan: Joy Emmanuel, 2017.
- ²¹ Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, February 2014: A Report of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ²² Emmanuel, Joy. *Duncan Winter Point In Time Count; Some Preliminary Results*. Duncan: Joy Emmanuel, 2017.
- ²³ Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, February 2014: A Report of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Note: The Cowichan Region Homelessness Report done in 2014 defines absolute homeless as those individuals sleeping outside, in tents, sheds, barns or cars, or in shelters or transition houses or temporarily housed in a motel with a voucher from a government agency. Relative homeless as people who were staying with friends or family (sleeping on couches or with permission and rent-free in unheated, uninsulated structures), temporarily sheltered in a holding cell, or in the hospital but with no fixed address. Finally, precariously housed as people who are paying for temporary, insecure or unstable housing situations, including overcrowded housing or unaffordable rents, given their income.
- ²⁶ Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, February 2014: A Report of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Emmanuel, Joy. *Duncan Winter Point In Time Count; Some Preliminary Results*. Duncan: Joy Emmanuel, 2017.
- ²⁹ Note: The types of homeless in the 2014 count are labelled differently than the Winter count. However, the definitions correspond. For instance, in 2014 relatively homeless is defined as an individual staying with friends or family (sleeping on couches or with permission and rent-free in unheated, uninsulated structures), temporarily sheltered in a holding cell, or in the hospital but with no fixed address. In 2017, this same definition is applied to the label of Hidden Homeless.
- ³⁰ Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report, February 2014: A Report of the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Emmanuel, Joy. *Duncan Winter Point In Time Count; Some Preliminary Results*. Duncan: Joy Emmanuel, 2017.
- ³⁶ Kasting, Colleen. *Aboriginal Off Reserve Housing Needs in the Cowichan Region*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
- ³⁷ Emmanuel, Joy. *Duncan Winter Point In Time Count; Some Preliminary Results*. Duncan: Joy Emmanuel, 2017.
- ³⁸ Ibid.