

The Cost of Homelessness

Cowichan Region

Cowichan Housing Association Snapshot Series

(We welcome your questions and feedback on these snapshots. Please contact us at admin@cowichanhousing.com.)



Cost of Homelessness in the Cowichan Valley

How does Homelessness impact our communities?

“Homelessness impacts everyone.

From the costs of emergency shelters, to institutional health and psychiatric services and the criminal justice system, to the individual physical and mental health impact on every homeless person, the causes and effects of homelessness cost all Canadians dearly.”¹

The Face of Homelessness

How many people are homeless nationally and locally? What does homelessness look like in the Cowichan Valley?

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Impacts of Homelessness

Symptoms of homelessness involves many sectors of our community. What are the economic impacts?

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The Case for Stable Housing

The cost of homelessness versus cost of housing and support services.

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The Face of Homelessness

The Cowichan Region Homelessness Report (2014) defines: ²

- **Absolutely Homeless;** people who were 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
- **Relatively Homeless;** 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.
- **Precarious Housing;** people who were paying for temporary, insecure or unstable housing situations, including overcrowded housing or unaffordable rents, given their income.

Homeless Point In Time Count 2017

Preliminary results of the 2017 Point In Time Count for the Duncan core area:⁵

Number of Surveys done: 192

Absolute Homeless Counted: 83 people (61 males, 22 females)

Hidden Homeless Surveyed: 74 people

At Risk of Homelessness: Surveyed: 35 people

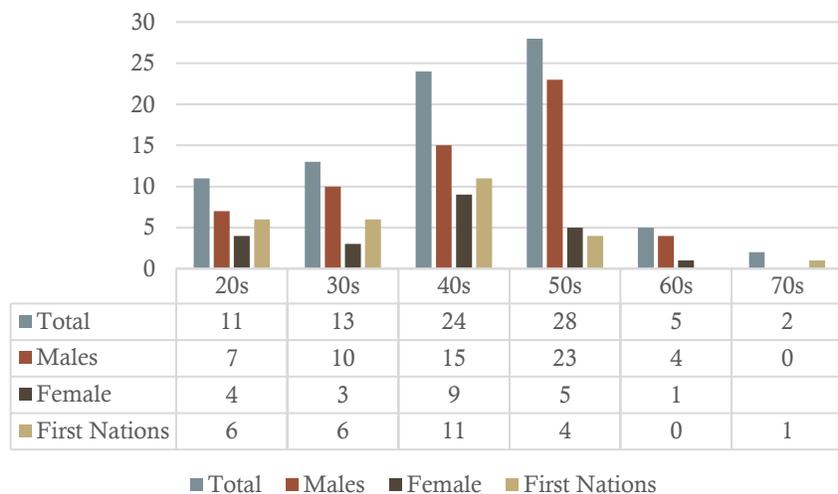
In Canada 2016,

- **35,000** people are **homeless** on a **given night**
- **235,000** people experience **homelessness** in a **year**
- 27.3% of homeless individuals are women and 18.7% are youth (13 – 24)
- 35,000- 40,000 young people experience homelessness over the year
- 24.4% of shelter users are older adults (50-64) & seniors (65+)
- 28-34% of shelter users are indigenous (4.3% of Canadians are Indigenous)
- Families stay in shelters twice as long as individuals
- About 2.2% of shelter users are veterans³

In the Cowichan Valley, 2014 research identified:

- **58 people** as **Absolutely Homeless** (sleeping rough, staying in shelters, living in vehicles, etc.),
- **76 people Relatively Homeless** (temporarily sheltered with friends, family, hospitals, holding cells, etc.) and
- **125 people** living in **Precarious Housing** (housing that is unaffordable, inadequate or overcrowded)
- 21% of Absolute Homeless people were Women and 26% were Aboriginal
- 42% of people living in Relative Homelessness were Women and 59% were Aboriginal
- Of the 125-people living in Precarious Housing surveyed, 71% had once been homeless; 47% for 1 year or more.
- When asked, what would help, the people surveyed in the count cited: affordable housing, higher and regular incomes, less discrimination and outreach services. ⁴

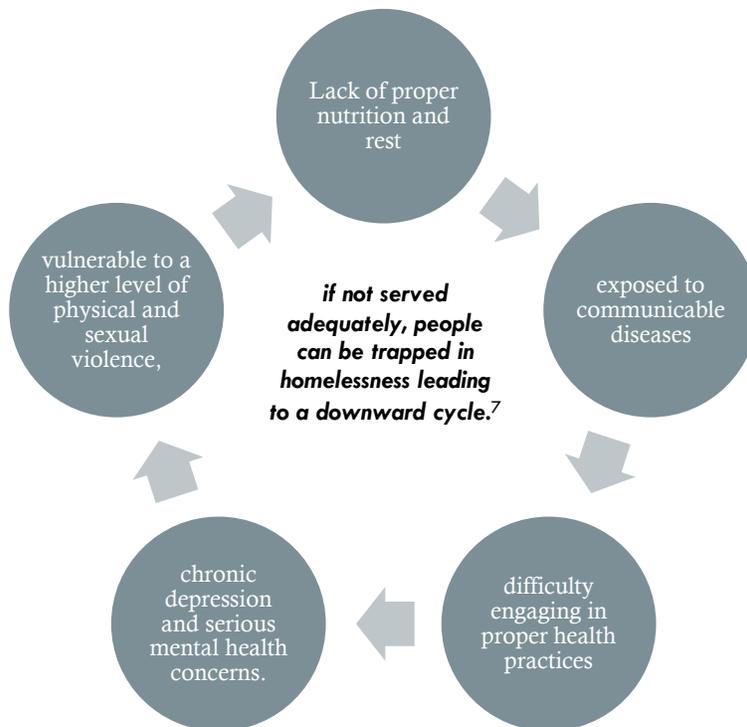
Figure 1 Demographics of Individuals Identified as Absolutely Homeless in the Winter 2017 Homeless Point in Time Count



Impacts of Homelessness

Health Impacts

Homelessness is correlated with increased incidence of illness and injury, and over time health problems accumulate.



Even with emergency supports, "...people who remain homeless for long periods of time see declines in their physical and mental health ... and an increase in trauma and injury because of a lack of safety ... All of these things can lead to higher rates of health care utilization".⁶

The death rate for homeless people is eight to ten times higher than housed people. Health Profiles show that the poorest neighbourhoods – those with the worst housing – have the poorest health.⁸

The Economic Impacts of Homelessness

The annual economic costs of responding to homelessness in Canada through emergency responses such as shelters, policing, and emergency medical services are estimated to be as high as \$7.05 billion, annually.⁹

A 2005 study of four Canadian cities estimated that annual cost of institutional responses (prison, detention centres, and psychiatric hospitals) was \$66,000 to \$120,000 per person.¹⁰



Impacts of Homelessness Continued...

The Justice System

Being homeless increases the likelihood of ending up in jail, while imprisonment increases the risk of homelessness and the length of time that homeless people spend in shelters.

In 2006, it cost the Canadian public a total of \$412 million to house the homeless in correctional institutions, and to provide parole supervision and police services.¹¹

Further, without stable housing and appropriate supports that help entry to the labour market, risk of re-offending rises. A 2010 Canadian study found that 22.9%, or roughly one in every five prisoners, was homeless when incarcerated. Within the general prison population, there is an even higher likelihood of becoming homeless after being discharged.¹²

In the Cowichan Valley

Emergency Shelters

Warmland: on average,

- 300 – 400 individuals use the Emergency Shelter or Extreme Weather Shelter each year
- 40 – 60 people live in on site transitional supported housing each year
- 15 – 20 people access off site transitional supported housing each year¹³

Somenos House:

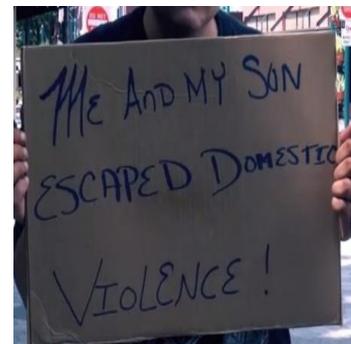
- In 2016 provided 1782 bed stays to women fleeing violence.¹⁴
- Provides 10 beds per night 365 days per year.
- The average cost for one person to stay at the shelter is \$168 per day, and over a month (4 weeks) \$4704.

Emergency Responses

Policing

During a one-week period in January 2017 Duncan/North Cowichan RCMP utilized the equivalent of two full time officers on issues related to homelessness. A total weekly cost for policing homelessness by the Detachment would be \$8,190 and over one month, \$32,760.¹⁵

Day Programs and Outreach (include services an individual might use daily)



Continued....

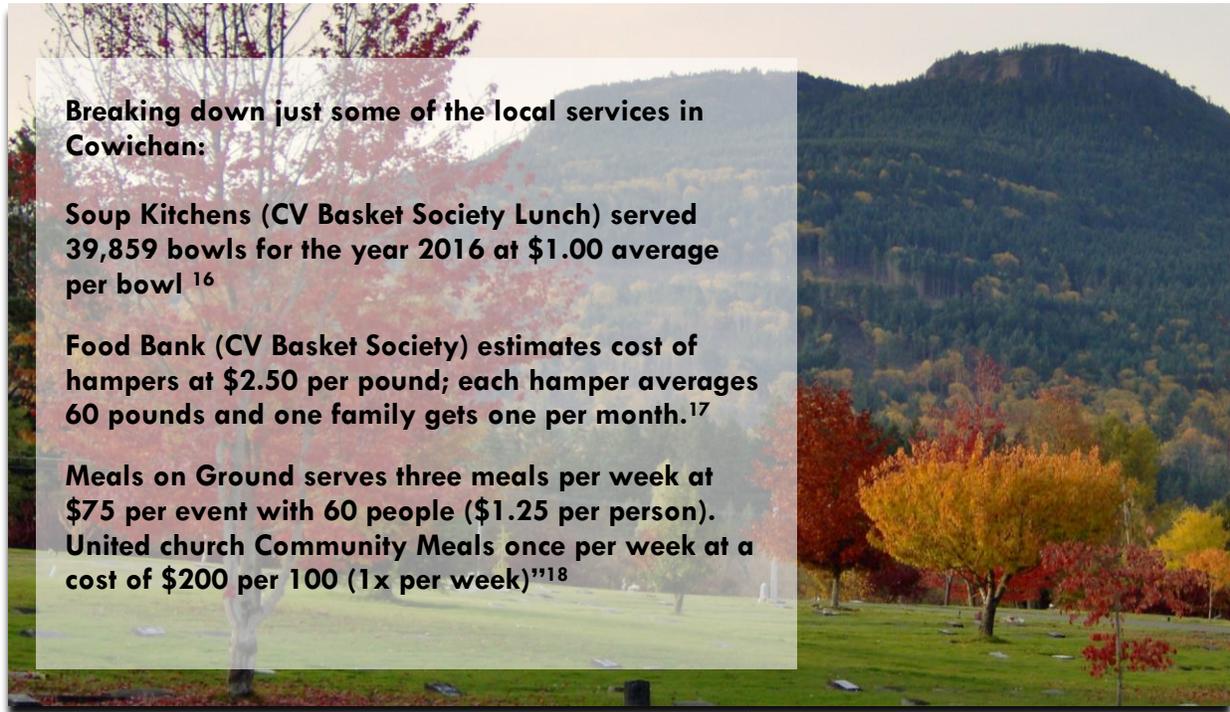
Impacts of Homelessness Continued...

Breaking down just some of the local services in Cowichan:

Soup Kitchens (CV Basket Society Lunch) served 39,859 bowls for the year 2016 at \$1.00 average per bowl¹⁶

Food Bank (CV Basket Society) estimates cost of hampers at \$2.50 per pound; each hamper averages 60 pounds and one family gets one per month.¹⁷

Meals on Ground serves three meals per week at \$75 per event with 60 people (\$1.25 per person). United church Community Meals once per week at a cost of \$200 per 100 (1x per week)¹⁸



Cost Comparisons

The cost gradient for responding to homelessness is highest for institutional uses, moderately high for emergency services and lowest for supportive and permanent affordable housing (even with supports).

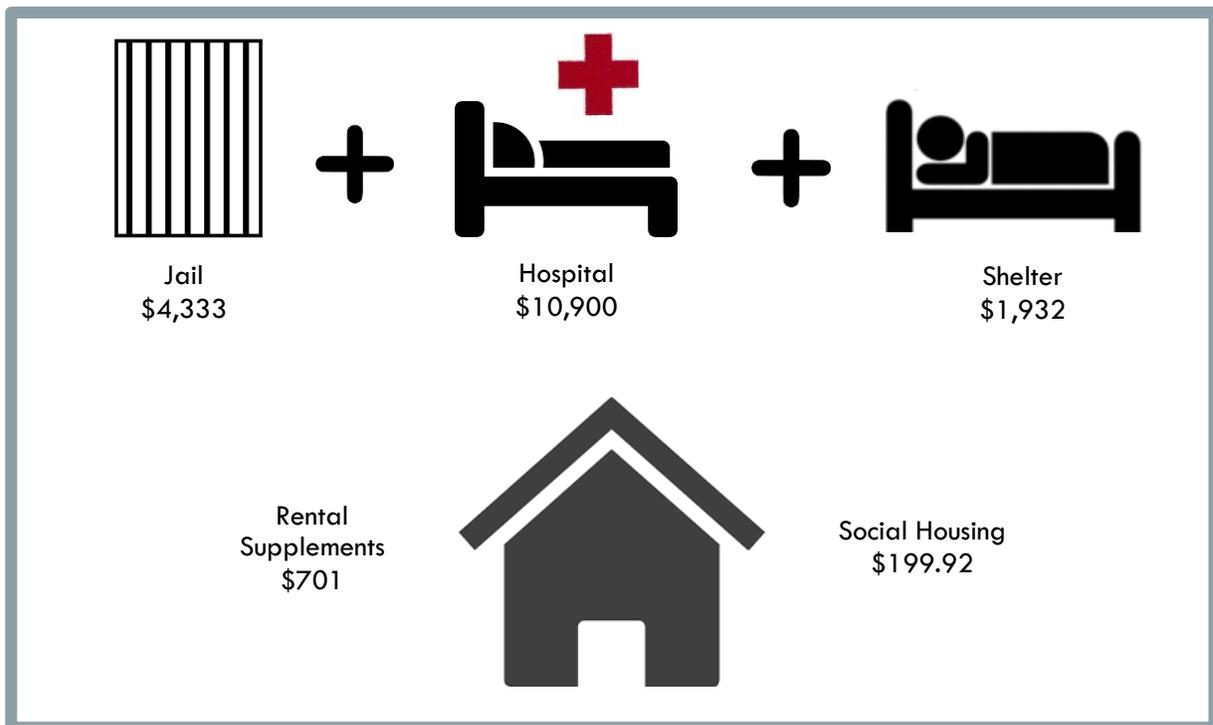
A 2001 BC study found that service and shelter costs for homeless people ranged from \$30,000 to \$40,000 on average per person for one year (including the costs of staying in an emergency shelter). The combined costs of services and housing for housed individuals ranged from \$22,000 to \$28,000 per person per year.¹⁹

A City of Calgary 2008 report calculated the annual costs of chronic homelessness at \$134,642 per person. The costs of supports (including health care, housing, emergency services) were \$72,444 for people who were transiently homeless.²⁰

The Case for Stable Housing and Supports

Studies have shown that investing in homelessness prevention costs less than it does to keep someone on the streets.²¹ By focussing on prevention and housing (with supports, if necessary), we would not only be responding appropriately and compassionately to a problem that harms individuals, families and communities, but we would also be saving money.²²

A Toronto study found that the average monthly costs of housing people while they were homeless were \$4,333 for provincial jail, or \$10,900 for a hospital bed while the average monthly cost for a shelter bed was \$1,932, rent supplements \$701 or social housing \$199.92.²³



If stable housing and ongoing supports can be provided to chronically homeless people with serious mental illness and addictions, the cost of housing is substantially offset by the reduced use of acute care services.²⁴

People who are housed when they leave prison are less likely to reoffend. The John Howard Society estimates that by providing supports to someone who would otherwise become homeless the life-time savings to the system is estimated to be \$350,000 per person.²⁵

Housing First approaches, even though they involve rent subsidies and in some cases intensive case management, can save money. Overall, for high service users, the annual cost savings to all of these systems is \$9,390 per person, per year.²⁶



End Notes

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- ⁴Awai, Greg and Worton, Jane. *Cowichan Region Homelessness Report*. Duncan: Social Planning Cowichan, 2014.
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- ⁸Cheung, Angela M., and Hwang, Stephen. *Risk of Death Among Homeless Women: A Cohort Study and Review of the Literature*. Toronto: Canadian Medical Association Journal 170, no. 8:1243-1247, 2004.
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- ¹⁵McNeil, Jack. *Cost to Local Policing of Homelessness in Duncan/North Cowichan Interview*. Duncan: RCMP, 2017.
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- ¹⁷Ibid.
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- ¹⁹Eberle, Margaret et al. *Homelessness Causes and Effects: The Cost of Homelessness in BC*. Victoria: BC Government, 2001.
- ²⁰RSM Richter and Associates. *Report on the Cost of Homelessness for the City of Calgary*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2008.
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- ²³The Wellesley Institute. *Blueprint to End Homelessness in Toronto*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute, 2007.
- ²⁴Poulin, Stephen et al. *Service Use and Costs for Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness in Philadelphia: A Population-Based Study, Psychiatric Service November 2010 Vol. 61 No. 11*. Arlington: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2010.
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