

Media Backgrounder

February 28, 2012

One Step Forward... Results of the 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count

Key Findings

Note to reader: some numbers in the final report may differ slightly from the Preliminary 2011 Homeless Count Report. This is to be expected when the data is more closely analyzed. Where there is a discrepancy, this final report should be used.

- The total homeless population was virtually unchanged. 2,650 people were found in 2011 as compared to 2,660 counted in 2008. This change is statistically insignificant.
- Unsheltered homelessness decreased dramatically. In 2008, there were 1,574 people without shelter compared to 758 in 2011, a 52% reduction. This suggests that the increase in shelter beds across the region and continued efforts by outreach workers are paying off.
- Sheltered homelessness increased significantly. There was a 74% increase in the number of people in emergency shelters and similar facilities -- from 1,086 in 2008 to 1,892 in 2011. This increase would not have been possible without the added bed capacity.
- People stayed in emergency shelters for shorter periods of time. Overall, 77% of those surveyed in shelters reported that they stayed in shelters for less than 3 months during the previous 12 months. This is indicative of better shelter flow-through and efficiencies.
- Aboriginal people remained over-represented in the homeless population. Aboriginal people comprise about 2% of the general population of Metro Vancouver but they remain overrepresented at 27% of homeless people enumerated.
- Youth homelessness increased. A total of 397 unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 were found. This was the highest number of unaccompanied homeless youth ever found in the region – a 9% increase from 2008 and a 34% change from 2005.
- The female share of the homeless population increased. The proportion of females in the homeless population has been rising since 2005. In 2005, one of four homeless person (26%) was female but by 2011 nearly one in three (30%) was female.
- The number of homeless families counted increased. Fifty-six homeless families with 54 children were found. This was the highest number of families ever recorded in a Count. The majority of the children, 32 of the 54, were 12 years or younger. The majority of the homeless families (55%) reported being homeless due to family breakdown, abuse or conflict.
- More seniors remained homeless longer. Although their ranks did not increase from 2008, more than 200 people aged 55 years and older were found. Nearly 48% of the seniors were considered long term homeless – people who had been without a home for at least one year. Large segments of this population also faced health issues.

- Health conditions for people who are homeless have worsened. Incidence of multiple health challenges among the homeless increased significantly. Nearly two out of three homeless people surveyed (62%) reported multiple health conditions, including one in three (31%) that reported three or four health challenges.
- The unsheltered homeless population had difficulties accessing food. Nearly 70% of the unsheltered homeless population had not had a good meal for two or more days when they were encountered on Count Day. On the other hand, 75% of the sheltered reported eating a good meal within 24 hours of the Count.

About the Homeless Count

- The 2011 Homeless Count was conducted across the Metro Vancouver region on March 16, 2011. Count methods are applied consistently across the region.
- The Count was a 24-hour point-in-time snapshot and therefore the numbers are understood to be the minimum number of people who were homeless in the Metro Vancouver region during that period.
- Policy makers and community agencies have relied on the count conducted every three years (2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011) to inform program and service planning.
- The homeless count is an important tool to better understand Metro Vancouver's homeless population and is the best approach to determine if the homeless population is increasing or decreasing, as well as better understand trends within the population.
- People who are homeless in Metro Vancouver voluntarily participate in the homeless count survey.
- We are grateful to all homeless-serving agencies throughout the region, who lend their expertise and knowledge of working with people on a daily basis to the 2011 Homeless Count.
- Local Community Homeless Tables across the region take a strong leadership role in the counts as they continue to address homelessness in local communities.
- The homeless count would not be possible without the assistance of hundreds of volunteers across the region.
- Lessons learned from previous counts are used to refine future counts while maintaining comparability to previous count findings.
- The 2011 Homeless Count was funded by: United Way of the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Foundation, City of Vancouver and Surrey Homelessness and Housing Fund.
- The methods and implementation of the count are overseen by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness and the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee.

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