

Homelessness Action Week

October 7th - 13th



STOPHOMELESSNESS.CA

Community Values: A Public Opinion Survey About Homelessness in Metro Vancouver

September 2012

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“It is possible to have a community in which there will be a home for everyone that chooses to have one”

71% Agree



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Background

This report summarizes results from a survey of Metro Vancouver residents that examined attitudes on various aspects of homelessness. Since its founding in March 2000, the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness has put a great deal of effort into raising community awareness about homelessness through programs such as Homelessness Action Week without really being able to gauge results. This survey has been designed to give the Steering Committee some insight into how well it has done with its messaging, as well as ways to improve its work.

Methodology

From September 10 to 12, 2012, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,006 randomly selected adults in British Columbia's Lower Mainland who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1%. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of the Lower Mainland. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

Key Findings

1. **Homelessness is one of the major concerns** in the Lower Mainland, next to affordable housing and transportation.
2. For **nearly one in four residents, homelessness is personal** because they know someone who is either currently homeless or has been homeless in the last five years.
3. Only **one in three residents are satisfied with progress** made so far in addressing homelessness in the region.
4. Residents are **more concerned about homelessness among people with disabilities, children, youth and seniors** than any other group.
5. Residents regard the provision of **affordable housing with support services as the primary solution to homelessness** in the region.
6. Residents believe **priority must be given to preventing youth homelessness by increasing job training and employment opportunities** and increasing programs that build self-esteem and life-skills.

For youth who are already homeless, residents believe we must focus on increasing job training and employment opportunities, increasing access to drug treatment and rehabilitation services, and increasing programs that build self-esteem and life skills. More policing is not seen as a good solution to helping homeless youth.

7. The majority of residents also see **job training and employment opportunities** as the preferred way to address Aboriginal homelessness. Thirty-two percent see culturally appropriate programs and services for Aboriginal people as an important solution.
8. Overall, **residents are compassionate towards people who are homeless**. Approximately 9 out of 10 believe that homeless people should have access to services and information and also that homeless people should be treated with dignity and respect.
9. **Residents also remain optimistic about ending homelessness** with a significant majority believing that it is possible to have a community in which there will be a home for everyone that wants one.
10. While residents want all levels of government and community groups to take a greater role in addressing homelessness, they tend to **trust non-governmental agencies such as charities, foundations, and churches** more with the task of addressing homelessness issues.

Survey Questions & Detailed Findings

1. *We would like to ask you some questions about life in The Lower Mainland. All things considered, do you think each of the following is a problem in The Lower Mainland?*
 - The highest ranking for “major problem” is seen for affordable housing (77%), traffic/transit/transportation (60%), homelessness (53%) and drug use (53%).
 - Homelessness was a bigger issue in Vancouver/Richmond (61%) than in other Lower Mainland areas.
 - Women (62%) are more likely to cite homelessness as a major problem than men (44%).
 - There is no fluctuation on income—respondents in all three demographics (low, medium, high) felt roughly the same way about homelessness.

2. *How concerned are you about the level of homelessness within the following populations in The Lower Mainland?*
 - The biggest concerns are for people with disabilities (81%) and children (80%), youth (78%) and seniors (also 78%).
 - Concern for solving aboriginal homelessness ranked at 63% and immigrants and refugees at 54%.
 - Concerns were above the 50% mark for all groups tested.

3. *What, in your view, are the leading causes of homelessness in The Lower Mainland? You can select up to three causes.*
 - Two thirds (67%) mentioned drug and alcohol addictions as a leading cause, followed by mental illness and disabilities (51%) and the release of psychiatric hospital patients into the community without suitable support services (45%).
 - Lack of affordable housing (37%) is regarded as more of a problem for respondents than lack of economic opportunities (24%) or government assistance (14%).

4. *What, if anything, do you think should be done about homelessness in The Lower Mainland? You can select up to two ideas.*
 - The two main solutions are to provide more affordable housing with support services (58%) and more support services alone (37%).
 - Rent subsidies are not regarded as a particularly positive step (only 11%).

5. *What, if anything, do you think should be done to prevent youth homelessness? You can select up to two ideas.*
 - The two main courses of action are increasing job training and employment opportunities (51%) and increasing programs to build self-esteem and life skills (39%).
 - On youth, respondents tend to leave housing last, and focus more on jobs and skills.

6. *What, if anything, do you think should be done to help youth experiencing homelessness? You can select up to three ideas.*
 - The top three solutions are to increase job training and employment opportunities (62%), increase access to drug treatment and rehabilitation services (47%) and increase programs that build self-esteem and life skills (43%).
 - More policing is not a good solution (only 10%).

7. *Imagine a scenario where a 16-year-old child is leaving foster care. Up to what age should this child be eligible for government housing assistance?*
- The largest proportion of respondents (35%) would continue housing assistance until age 19 or 20, but a sizeable proportion would prefer to carry on well into the 20s.
 - Only 2% of respondents would remove all assistance.
8. *What, if anything, do you think should be done to reduce or prevent Aboriginal homelessness? You can select up to two ideas.*
- To address Aboriginal homelessness, more respondents (60%) would increase community development supports, such as job training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.
 - A smaller proportion (32%) would ensure that programs and services for Aboriginal people are culturally appropriate.
9. *Generally speaking, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the work that The Lower Mainland region as a whole is doing to address homelessness?*
- Satisfaction with the way the issue has been dealt with stands at 33%, dissatisfaction at 55%.
 - Women (27%) more critical than men (39%).
10. *Do you think each of the following should take a greater role in addressing homelessness in The Lower Mainland?*
- Respondents want all governments and groups to get involved, but are more likely to demand action from the provincial government (90%), municipal governments (86%) and community organizations (86%).
11. *Would you say that, within the past year, your sympathy towards people who are homeless in your community has increased, remained the same, or decreased?*
- 18% cite an increase in sympathy towards homeless people, 8% report a decrease.
12. *Do you know anyone who is currently homeless or has been homeless during the past five years?*
- One-in-four (23%) know someone who is currently homeless or has been homeless during the past five years.

13. *Below is a list of different types of organizations. Would you say you trust or distrust each one of these organizations to work on issues related to homelessness?*

- The most trusted organizations are charities and non-profits (86%), medical professionals (80%), foundations (77%), churches and religious organizations (75%) and housing cooperatives (74%).
- The least trusted organizations are private business (38%), realtors (20%) and for-profit property developers (also 20%).

14. *Here are some statements people have made about homelessness in general. We would like to know if you agree or disagree, moderately or strongly, with each one of these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. It is what you think that matters.*

- Practically universal agreement with two ideas: Homeless people should have access to services and information that they need (93%) and homeless people should be treated with dignity and respect (90%).
- Still, we see a majority (54%) saying that housing in their community should be there for the people who can afford it. This amounts to a majority in all regions as well.

15. *Do you agree or disagree with this statement? – “It is possible to have a community in which there will be a home for everyone that chooses to have one.”*

- 71% agree with this notion, 24% disagree.
Men (69%) slightly more skeptical than women (74%).