

# Still on our streets ....

## Results of the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count

Commissioned by:

*Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness*



**DECEMBER 2008 EDITION**

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# Message from the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

“We care about homelessness” is the overwhelming message the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) received from residents of the Metro Vancouver region on March 11<sup>th</sup>, the day of our homeless count. In 2005, we had the assistance of 300 people. This year, the public response exceeded all expectations, with upwards of 800 people volunteering their time to participate in this effort.

We recognize that a count doesn't solve homelessness; however, it's an important step in gaining a better understanding of the problem we need to solve. We spell out our plan to solve homelessness in *Three Ways to Home*, which outlines the need for adequate affordable housing, support services and adequate incomes. (Available at our web site: [www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/](http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/))

The count provides a progress report against previous counts in 2002 and 2005, and benchmarks the absolute minimum number of people who are without housing and who need emergency shelter and other types of support services. We know the number we develop is a conservative estimate.

Who did we count? We spoke with people who did not have a place of their own where they could expect to stay for more than 30 days, and for which they paid rent. They may have been sleeping in temporary emergency shelters, living rough, in parks, under bridges, or in doorways. We were assisted in this process by the front line workers, who reach out daily to people who face a complex web of problems.

This count does not assess the full extent of ‘hidden homelessness’ – people who stay temporarily with family or friends, unable to acquire or keep their own place or those ‘at-risk’ of homelessness.

The RSCH includes representatives from over 40 groups including service providers, community-based organizations, business and all levels of government. Our Committee's objective is to work for the end of homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region. While there have been a number of federal and provincial announcements addressing homelessness recently, we know a sustained multi-year commitment is needed.

We want to thank United Way of the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Foundation, The Government of Canada' Homelessness Partnering Strategy for their support and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC) for their research and coordination of Homeless Count 2008.

Alice Sundberg and Susan Papadionissiou, Co-Chairs,  
Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

## Acknowledgements

A project of the size and complexity of the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count required the participation and support of a vast number of individuals and organizations.

A host of agencies, service providers, governments, and others too numerous to mention, assisted in organizing and implementing the count. Without their valuable contribution, the count would not have been possible.

The members of the Homeless Count Coordinating Committee (a sub-committee of the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness) provided invaluable guidance and advice in planning for the 2008 Homeless Count. The Committee included Michael Anhorn, BC Housing; Hazel Cardinal, Healing Our Spirit, Jenny Cleathero, United Way of the Lower Mainland; Lorraine Copas, Metro Vancouver Policy and Planning, Andrea Gillman, Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, Peter Greenwell, Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, Amy Jordan, Housing Policy Branch, Val MacDonald, Seniors Services Society; Sue Noga, Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, Judy Roberts, Metro Vancouver Homelessness Secretariat, Annie Smith, McCreary Centre Society, Neil Spicer, Metro Vancouver Policy and Planning, and Andy Wachtel, United Way of the Lower Mainland.

We would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by local area coordinators: Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society New Westminster, Sandy Burpee, Tri-Cities Housing Coalition, Randy Emerson, Cloverdale Christian Church, Maureen Joyce, Stepping Stone Community Services Society, Langley, Annie Mauboules, District of North Vancouver, Pat Petrala, Semiahmoo Planning Society, South Surrey/White Rock, David Speers, Alouette Home Start Society, Ridge Meadows, Pastor Ed Temple, Burnaby Alliance Church, Michelle Van Keith, Pacific Community Resources Society, Newton, and Annette Welsh, Front Room, Surrey.

We also acknowledge the contribution of the City of Vancouver through the participation of Judy Graves, Co-ordinator, Tenant Assistance Program. Once again, Ms. Graves' years of frontline experience provided an invaluable resource to the project. We also wish to thank Martyn Woolley who assisted in volunteer training.

SPARC BC would also like to thank the permanent and cold/wet weather emergency shelters, safe houses and transition houses and the many agencies across the region that participated in this year's count. Count 2008 could not have been undertaken without the assistance of the more than 800 volunteers who gave so generously of their time. We especially want to thank the Aboriginal Community who recruited 71 volunteers for the count. We acknowledge the special assistance of Helping Spirit Lodge Society, Kla How Eya, Aboriginal Front Door, Reclaiming Our Spirit and Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society.

SPARC BC would like to acknowledge the funders for their contributions to this project – Homeless Partnering Strategy (HRSDC), United Way of the Lower Mainland and the

Vancouver Foundation. The opinions expressed in this report, however, are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

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SPARC BC

June 2008

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# 1 Key Findings

Homeless counts are conservative estimates and widely recognized as undercounts. It is difficult to find people who are homeless and not in shelters. They live in parks, stay temporarily with friends and may not access any services for the homeless population (see Appendix D). The following are the key findings of the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count:

- There were 2,660 homeless people counted in Metro Vancouver on March 11, 2008 during a 24 hour point-in-time count. A person was considered homeless if they did not have a place of their own where they could expect to stay for more than 30 days and if they did not pay rent. This includes people staying in emergency shelters, safe houses, and transition houses, as well as those sleeping outside or in other public places or places unfit for human habitation.
  - While 2,660 homeless people were counted on count day, 2,409 of those individuals completed the demographic portion of the survey for the demographic profile included in this report.
  - In addition, there were 402 people perceived as homeless but not included in the overall total, as they refused to be interviewed, were asleep and could not be roused, or were otherwise unconfirmed as homeless.
- The 2,660 total includes 94 accompanied children and 59 unaccompanied children (under the age of 19).
  - In addition, MCFD reported that they had 51 homeless youth on their caseload in the Vancouver Region and 16 homeless youth in the Fraser Region on the day of March 11, 2008. These 67 homeless youth are not reported in the total because we do not know whether or not any of them were enumerated elsewhere on Count Day. The additional 37 homeless youth reported by the North Shore schools were not included in the totals for the same reason.
- Of the 94 accompanied children, 85% were sheltered. The total number of accompanied children increased by 27% between 2005 and 2008; however, the number of accompanied children among the street/service homeless population declined by more than a third.
- Despite the difficulties in finding youth, 270 unaccompanied youth (people under the age of 25 years, not accompanied by a parent) were enumerated on count day. Of these youth, 104 (39%) reported Aboriginal identity. For context regarding youth on count day, see Appendix C.
- The homeless population have been without a home for a longer period of time. The number of people who were homeless for a year or more increased by 62% between 2005 and 2008. Almost half of the homeless population had been homeless for a year or more in 2008, but the number of people who were homeless for less than one week decreased by 30% between 2005 and 2008.

- The proportion of the homeless population aged 45 years and over increased significantly between 2005 and 2008. The number of people between the ages of 45 and 54 years increased by 49%. The median age of the homeless population increased from 38 to 41 years between 2005 and 2008.
- The number of homeless people with two or more health conditions increased by 67% between 2005 and 2008.
- Homelessness is a regional issue. There has been significant growth in the number of homeless people found in Metro Vancouver municipalities outside of the City of Vancouver on the day of the count. In 2008, 43% of the region's homeless population was found in Metro Vancouver's municipalities outside of the City of Vancouver, compared to 37% in 2005.
- The number of homeless people found in Metro Vancouver's municipalities outside of the City of Vancouver increased by 35% between 2005 and 2008. Although the City of Vancouver still has the largest homeless population, its homeless population only grew by 6% between 2005 and 2008.
- The number of street/service homeless increased by 41% between 2005 and 2008 while the number of sheltered homeless increased modestly.
- There were 1,574 street/service homeless on March 11<sup>th</sup>, which represents 59% of the total homeless population in the region. This is the first Metro Vancouver homeless count where the street/service homeless significantly outnumbered the sheltered homeless.
- One in five of the street/service homeless population (19%) tried to stay in a shelter on the night of the count, but was turned away either because the shelter was either full or the person was inappropriate for the shelter.
- Almost half of those enumerated during the homeless count (43%) slept somewhere that was not fit for human habitation (such as on the street, in a car, in a public building or space that is not meant for living or sleeping).
- Over half (52%) of the homeless population enumerated on count day said they had lived in the municipality where they were found for at least five years before their current episode of homelessness.
- People with Aboriginal identity continue to be over-represented among the region's homeless (32% of the total homeless enumerated) compared to their share of the total population (2% as reported in the 2006 Census).
- Almost three quarters (73%) of the Aboriginal homeless population did not stay in a shelter, safe house, or transition house on the night of the count.
- Almost half (45%) of the homeless women enumerated on count day reported Aboriginal identity.

- Employment was a source of income for over one quarter of the sheltered homeless people enumerated. This was mostly from part-time or casual employment. However, almost 100 sheltered homeless individuals (11% of the 849 sheltered homeless who completed the survey) reported full-time employment income.
- Almost half of the homeless population (43%) identified income assistance as their major source of income, an improvement over the 30% of the homeless people who were able to access income assistance in 2005. Despite having access to welfare, they still cannot afford a place to rent in the region.
- Almost half of the homeless population reported that they had been to the emergency department in the past year. Over a quarter had been to some form of addiction services.

## 2 Introduction

This document presents the findings of the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count. It provides demographic information on a sample of the region's homeless population *on one day* in March 2008, and a comparison of the 2008, 2005 and 2002 count results. The report primarily presents facts based on findings revealed through the interviews on count day.

Both the *2001 Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* and the *2003 Three Ways to Home Update* recommended that a regular homeless count be undertaken to obtain current information, identify changes and trends, and help monitor the implementation of the homelessness plan.

This count measured homelessness in the region at a point-in-time – one 24-hour period (from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm) on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008. A point-in-time count tells us how many homeless people were counted in the one 24-hour period. The figure produced in a 24-hour count is lower than the number of different people who experience homelessness over a period of time. Homelessness is often episodic. A point-in-time count does not capture the number of people that move in and out of homelessness throughout the course of a year.

### 2.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the count is to provide:

- An updated enumeration of homeless persons by municipality in Metro Vancouver;
- A demographic profile of those enumerated on the day of the count; and
- Information on trends in relation to the 2002 and 2005 homeless counts.

This is essential information for government, private foundations and service providers so that they can plan and fund appropriate programs to address homelessness.

### 2.2 Definitions

Someone was considered homeless for the purpose of this count if they did not have a place of their own where they could expect to stay for more than 30 days and if they did not pay rent.

This included people who:

- had no physical shelter – staying on the street, in doorways, in parkades, in parks, and on beaches;
- were temporarily sheltered in emergency shelters, safe houses for youth, or transition houses for women and their children fleeing violence; or
- were staying at a friend's place where they did not pay rent.

For example, someone who stayed in a garage would be considered homeless, because they do not pay rent, even if they considered the garage to be their home. Someone who stayed in an emergency shelter usually cannot stay for more than 30 days, and was therefore homeless.

Someone who stayed at a friend's place where they did not pay rent was also homeless for the purposes of this count, because they had no security of tenure. Homelessness in suburban municipalities often takes the form of 'sofa surfing' (especially by youth), partly due to the lack of local services and facilities for homeless people.<sup>1</sup> To exclude these individuals from the estimate and profile of homelessness in the region would underestimate the extent of homelessness in these areas. However, the homeless count would likely only find people who are sofa surfing if they also access services used by homeless persons or congregate where homeless people stay. People who were sofa surfing were included in the count of homeless persons *if we found them*. Sofa surfers as a population will be significantly undercounted using this methodology. Similarly, families that double up with other families due to financial hardship were not included in the count if they did not access services on that day. Doubling up with other families (overcrowding) is particularly common among immigrant and refugee populations. Additional research on these populations is recommended.

For the purpose of this report, the term "enumerated," when used together with homeless refers to that segment of the homeless population that agreed to provide pertinent demographic information to interviewers during the count. In other words, it refers to the homeless who agreed to complete the demographic portion of the nighttime or daytime questionnaire administered during the count. This includes unaccompanied children under the age of 18 who were found in shelters, safe houses, and transition houses. Except in very few instances, the analysis in this report is based on this population.

Similarly, the term "total" when used in combination with homeless refers to not only the homeless population that was "enumerated", but also to those who were known to be homeless because they used shelter beds but could not be administered the count questionnaire, and therefore for whom there is no vital information, such as how long they have been homeless, ethnicity, sources of income, or health status. Thus, the "total" homeless population represents the absolute number of homeless people that was tallied under the guidelines of the 24 hour point-in-time count. Finally, the term "count" is used in its ordinary/common sense or context.

### **2.3 Geographic scope**

The geographic scope of the profile is Metro Vancouver. Data is provided on a regional basis as well at the municipal level, where possible. The following municipalities were covered by the count:

Burnaby  
City and Township of Langley  
City of Vancouver and UBC  
Coquitlam

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Kraus, Deborah et al. 2001. Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness. CMHC.

Delta  
District and City of North Vancouver  
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows  
New Westminster  
Port Coquitlam  
Port Moody  
Richmond  
Surrey  
West Vancouver  
White Rock

Appendix A provides a table outlining basic demographic information of the homeless populations in the municipalities where the numbers are sufficient to report.

## 2.4 Method

The 2008 Homeless Count conducted on March 11 2008 used the same method as the 2002 and 2005 Homeless Counts. It consisted of two components designed to enumerate the sheltered homeless and the street/service homeless. For the nighttime component, staff at emergency shelters, transition houses and safe houses were asked to complete a brief survey form for each client who stayed with them on the night of March 10/11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.<sup>2</sup> These people are called the ‘sheltered homeless’ for the purposes of this study.

A modification was introduced in 2008 to address the large number of shelter clients for whom incomplete information was obtained in 2005. Interviews were conducted at 6 large shelters in Vancouver where circumstances made it difficult for staff to conduct interviews themselves. Interviews at these locations took place during the intake period of each shelter using the nighttime interview guide. Intake took place from 4:00 pm to midnight on the evening of March 10<sup>th</sup>. Interviews were completed either in a line up outside the shelter or inside the shelter itself after client intake was completed.

In addition, the format of the nighttime questionnaire was changed in 2008. Rather than complete a grid or table, shelters were asked to use a questionnaire similar to that used in the daytime component of the count, one for each client. As in previous years, each nighttime facility was also asked to complete a Shelter Statistics form, indicating the number of beds used that night and the number of turnaways.

The daytime component enumerated homeless people who did not stay in emergency accommodation the night before but who may have slept outside, in a parkade or at someone else’s place, and were termed the ‘street/service homeless’. They were interviewed at locations used by homeless people such as meal programs, drop-in centres, some social services, and congregating areas such as parks and certain streets.

Beginning early in the morning (5:30 am) on March 11th, interviewers approached people who were using services, such as drop-in centres, and in locations such as parks

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<sup>2</sup> Staff was asked to count persons who effectively were in the shelter beginning at 12:01 am on March 11th and to add anyone who came to the shelter prior to daylight (around 5:00 am) on March 11th.

frequented by the homeless. Local community agencies and service-providers identified these daytime locations in advance to researchers. Once again, Aboriginal organizations were able to identify areas where Aboriginal people who are homeless congregate.

Individuals at these locations were asked a series of screening questions to determine if: a) they had already answered the survey, b) they were homeless and c), they did not stay in emergency accommodation covered by the nighttime component. If the interviewee qualified, the interviewer would ask the questions and complete the questionnaire.

In addition, outreach workers and service agencies that frequently had contact with sofa surfers were asked to complete interviews with these individuals. To the extent that the method captured sofa surfers, they are included with the street/service homeless population.

The March 11, 2008 daytime count was enhanced by the increased number of volunteers that were available compared to 2005 and better knowledge of homeless congregating locations in some sub-regions compared to 2005. Approximately 800 volunteers participated in 2008 compared to 300 volunteers in 2005, and less than 100 in 2002.

## 2.5 Limitations

Homelessness by its very nature is difficult to measure. All counts underestimate homelessness, because of the difficulty in finding those who do not use services or spend time where homeless people congregate. This initiative was especially challenging because of the vast geographic scope. **Thus, the Homeless Count did not enumerate every homeless person in the region on March 11, 2008, and is an undercount.** It does not include all people staying in detox facilities, recovery houses or hospitals who do not have a place to go when they leave. It does not include all people who were sofa surfing.

The homeless count process used in Metro Vancouver was designed to avoid double counting. People approached are offered candies and cigarettes prior to being asked the three screening questions described in section 2.4. This approach ensures that there is no incentive for homeless people to complete an interview more than once. Interviewers are instructed to record the person's age and gender as best they can if people are perceived to be homeless but do not agree to participate in the study. These surveys are not included in the reported number of homeless people found on the day of the count, as these people may decide to participate later in the day (and would therefore be double counted) or they may not, in fact, be homeless. There were individuals documented 'perceived as homeless' on the day of the count, but as they were not enumerated for various reasons, they are not included in the count in order to minimize any potential for double counting. Some people refused to be interviewed because it would take time away from earning money (e.g. binning, panhandling, or illegal activities), while others may have been asleep and did not wish to wake up. Some people said they did not see the point in participating in the survey and others said they would only participate for money. The number of perceived homeless that is not included in the total number of homeless people found during the count serves to highlight that the Homeless Count is an undercount.

That being said, the information obtained from the count provides the best available current data using established methods. Service based counts tend to provide a better estimate (though still an undercount) of the number of unsheltered homeless people in a community compared to a nighttime street count since many people try to hide at night for their own safety and may deliberately avoid a nighttime street count.<sup>3</sup>

“The Count, involving as it does so many volunteers, is itself positive, sensitizing the people participating, to the reality of the homeless.”

- *Interviewer*

## 2.6 Report organization

Section 3 provides the count and profile of the homeless population in the Metro Vancouver region as a whole, with Section 4 describing the characteristics of the sheltered and street/service homeless. Section 5 describes trends and changes in characteristics of the homeless population since 2002 and 2005. Section 6 profiles specific sub-populations of homeless, such as women and Aboriginal people and Section 7 contains municipal data. The report concludes with Section 8 that provides the authors’ perspectives on the implications of the study. Appendix A provides gender, age, and Aboriginal identity for many Metro Vancouver municipalities. Appendix B provides a detailed description of the count method. Appendix C provides some information about the number of people without fixed addresses in hospitals and detox facilities. Appendix D provides information about the volunteer distribution. The remaining appendices include the questionnaires used in the daytime and nighttime components of the 2008 count.

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<sup>3</sup> HUD. *A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*. October 2004. p. 53.

### 3 Metro Vancouver's homeless

This section presents the findings of the count of homeless people on March 11, 2008 and the change since the 2002 and 2005 counts. Included are individuals who slept outside or 'on the street', in three types of emergency accommodation, or who stayed with someone else temporarily where they did not pay rent and did not have assured long-term accommodation (e.g. sofa surfing) on the evening of March 10/11, 2008. Note that the term 'street/service homeless' referred to here is comparable to the term 'street homeless' used in 2005. Street/service more accurately describes the population found in the daytime, as some were found on the street but others at service locations and may have sofa surfed the night before.

#### 3.1 Growth in homelessness

The number of homeless people counted in the region has increased by 22% since the previous count, from 2,174 people in 2005 to 2,660 persons in 2008. Most of this increase is in the street/service homeless population, which grew by 40% over the past three years. **There were almost 450 more street/service homeless persons counted in 2008 than in 2005.** In addition, there were 402 people who were 'perceived as homeless' but not included in the overall total as they were not counted and every attempt to avoid double counting has been made. The number of sheltered homeless counted remained relatively stable because few new shelter beds have been added since 2005.

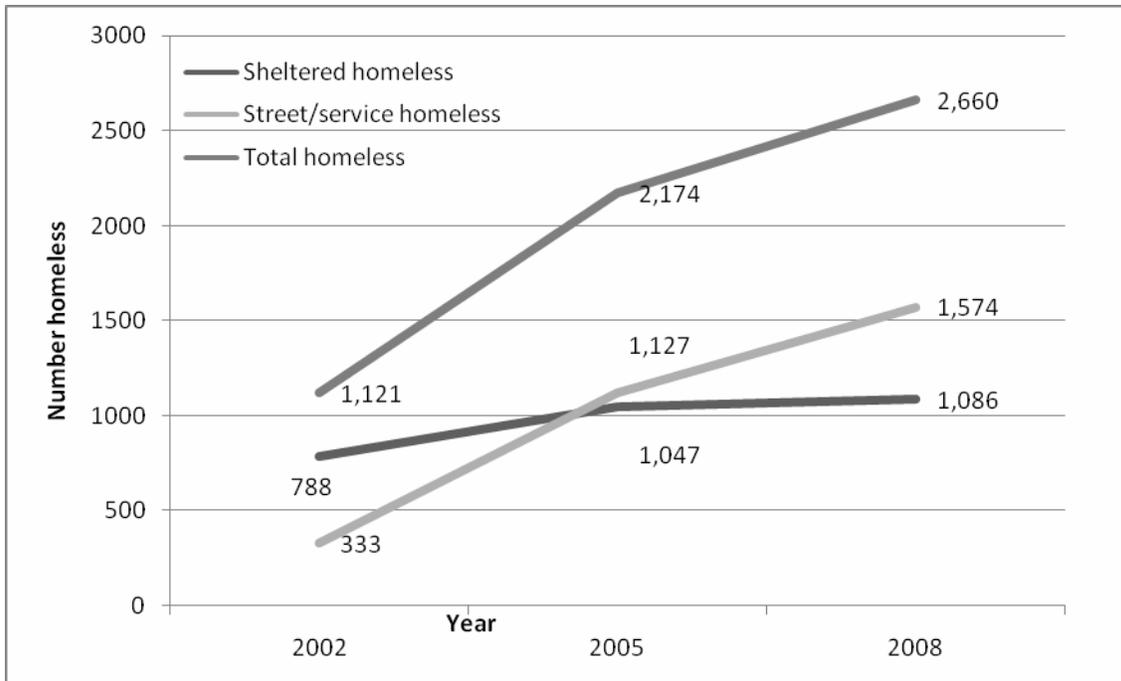
Table 1 – Growth in number of homeless since 2002 and 2005

Homeless category	2002	2005	2008	Change 2002 to 2008	% Change 2002 to 2008	Change 2005 to 2008	% Change 2005 to 2008
Sheltered homeless	788	1,047	1,086	298	38%	39	3%
Street/service homeless	333	1,127	1,574	1,241	373%	447	40%
Total homeless	1,121	2,174	2,660	1,539	137%	486	22%

This level of growth is consistent with the expectations of service providers and others involved with the homeless around the region. Most observers expected a smaller increase than what occurred between the 2002 and the 2005 count. While many of the drivers of homelessness such as mental illness, addiction, and lack of affordable housing remain, there has been some progress since 2005 in helping street homeless people in particular gain access to housing through outreach teams.

The number of homeless people that were counted in each of the three counts, in 2002, 2005 and 2008 is shown graphically below. It shows that the number of street/service homeless counted in 2008 is greater than the total number of homeless counted in 2002.

Figure 1 – Growth in homeless population, 2002 to 2008



### 3.2 Homelessness in 2008

On March 11, 2008 there were 2,660 homeless people counted region-wide. Almost 60% of the individuals slept rough or sofa surfed on the night of March 10/11th. Among the sheltered homeless, shelter and safe house clients predominated. There were 2,566 adults and unaccompanied youth and 94 homeless children who were with their parents during the count.

Table 2 – Sheltered and street/service homeless in Metro Vancouver<sup>4</sup>

Homeless category	Adults and unaccompanied youth		Accompanied children		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Sheltered homeless	1,006	39%	80	85%	1,086	41%
Shelters/safe houses	925	36%	26	31%	951	36%
Transition houses	81	3%	54	57%	135	5%
Street/service homeless	1,560	61%	14	15%	1,574	59%
Total homeless	2,566	100%	94	100%	2,660	100%

Shelter, safe house and transition house providers were also asked to note how many people were turned away the night of March 10/11th; either because the shelter was full or the individual seeking shelter was not appropriate for their facility. They reported that they turned away 208 adults, youth and children. Most of those turned away were attempting to access beds in shelters and safe houses (76%). Some of the individuals turned away may have been enumerated as street/service homeless in the daytime component or may have found accommodation in another shelter.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The figures in Tables 1 to 3 include 154 sheltered homeless individuals for whom complete records are not available, but who stayed in a shelter that night. Their numbers are included in Tables 1 to 3, but not in the demographic information reported on the following pages. Accompanied children (children under the age of 18 years who were found with a parent) are also not included in the demographic tables, since individual information for them was not collected. In Tables 1 to 3, unaccompanied youth (children under the age of 18 years who are not with a parent) are included in the demographic profile, as interviews were conducted with youth under 18 years that were not with an adult. In subsequent tables (Tables 4 and on), youth refers to people under the age of 25 years who are not with a parent (therefore interviews were conducted with them).

<sup>5</sup> Some of the individuals turned away may have been included in the count as street homeless, if they spent the night somewhere else that meets the definition of homeless for this project and were interviewed on March 11th. (See Section 2.5)

Table 3 – Turnaways, 2008

Shelter category	Total adults, youth and children	
	Number	Percent
Shelters/safe houses	159	76%
Transition houses	49	24%
TOTAL turnaways	208	100%

## 4 A profile of sheltered and street/service homeless persons

The following profile presents a demographic picture of the homeless adults and unaccompanied youth counted in Metro Vancouver on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008. It also describes some pertinent characteristics of their homeless experience, for example, the length of time they have been homeless. Separate results are presented for the sheltered and street/service homeless as well as for the total homeless population.

While the total number of homeless counted on count day was 2,660, the demographic profile provides information on 2,409 people who completed the survey forms (Appendices E and F). Profile data excludes the 94 accompanied children for whom separate demographic information was not collected<sup>6</sup>, and 154 individuals who were counted on count night, for whom no corresponding demographic data is available.<sup>7</sup>

As in 2005, there was a relatively high rate of non-response to some parts of the survey questionnaire, particularly among the sheltered homeless. Age and gender questions were well-answered, but other variables had a higher non-response rate, ranging from 8% to 13%. This may cause demographic data for the sheltered homeless to be less reliable than that for the street/service homeless.

### 4.1 Gender

Men continue to represent about three quarters of the homeless population counted in the region, and women just over one quarter. However, women tend to be part of the hidden homeless population, often doubling up with families, friends, or staying in inappropriate relationships rather than be on the street or accessing services for the homeless. As well, three transition houses with a potential capacity of 30 persons did not participate in the count, resulting in an underestimate of the number of homeless women. There was a larger share of women within the sheltered homeless population (33%) than within the street/service homeless population (23%).

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews were not conducted with children under the age of 18 years if they were with a parent on count day. Demographic information is available for unaccompanied youth, which is included in the demographic profile.

<sup>7</sup> This occurred because some individuals refused to be interviewed, shelter staff was unable to complete interviews with all clients or in the case of one shelter, and clients were admitted early, before interviewers arrived. Nonetheless, the beds were used and the individuals would have reported being in a shelter the night before and thus not interviewed had they been approached during the daytime count.

Table 4 – Gender<sup>8</sup>

Gender	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Men	541	66%	1,138	76%	1,679	72%
Women	268	33%	351	23%	619	27%
Transgendered	12	1%	10	1%	22	1%
Total respondents	821	100%	1,499	100%	2,320	100%
Not known	28		61		89	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

## 4.2 Age

Table 5 shows that adults aged 35 to 44 years comprised the largest cohort among the homeless counted (30%), followed by those aged 45-54 years (28%). Overall, adults aged 25-54 represented 76% of the region’s homeless. There were 270 unaccompanied youth under age 25 years enumerated during the count, representing 12% of the total. Of these, 59 people were under age 19. Roughly double the number of homeless youth under age 24 stayed outside or sofa surfed (181) than stayed in a shelter on count night (89). Nine percent or 212 people enumerated on count day were aged 55 years or older and most of these were between the ages of 55 and 64 years.

“[I] also noticed that some people do not want to talk about it – or dodge you completely – which makes me realize this is an undercount by a fair margin.”

- Interviewer

The median age of both the street/service and sheltered homeless is 41 years of age (half are younger, half are older). This compares with the median age of 39 among Metro Vancouver residents in 2006, so that the homeless are slightly older.

<sup>8</sup> Interviewers were instructed to record gender based on observation.

Table 5 – Age

Age group	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 19 <sup>9</sup>	104	11%	49	3%	153	6%
19-24	65	7%	146	10%	211	9%
25-34	157	17%	279	19%	436	18%
35-44	257	29%	469	31%	726	30%
45-54	221	24%	440	29%	661	28%
55-64	87	10%	93	6%	180	8%
65+	14	2%	18	1%	32	1%
Total respondents <sup>10</sup>	905	100%	1,494	100%	2,399	100%
Not stated	24		80		104	
Total	929		1,574		2503	

### 4.3 Aboriginal identity

Table 6 shows that 32% of the homeless population identified as Aboriginal. This suggests that persons of Aboriginal identity are over-represented among the region's homeless population, compared with their share of the Metro Vancouver population (2%).<sup>11</sup> The number and share of Aboriginal people was highest among the street/service homeless (502 people or 35%).

Table 6 – Aboriginal identity

Aboriginal identity	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Aboriginal	186	27%	502	35%	688	32%
Not aboriginal	507	73%	946	65%	1,453	68%
Total respondents	693	100%	1,448	100%	2,141	100%
No answer	156		112		268	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

<sup>9</sup> Includes 94 sheltered children accompanied by adults, 10 sheltered children unaccompanied by adults, and 49 unsheltered children unaccompanied by adults. Of the accompanied children and youth, 80 were sheltered and 14 were unsheltered, while 24 of unaccompanied youth were sheltered, and 35 were not.

<sup>10</sup> The total number of respondents in this table differs from other tables elsewhere in this report because it includes 94 sheltered children. While those children were not enumerated, their ages were known and therefore included here.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. Community Profile. Vancouver CMA. 2006 Census.

#### 4.4 Accompanying the homeless

The purpose of this question was to determine if homeless people are alone or accompanied by others. Overall, 76% of the homeless population who responded to this question reported that they were alone. Eleven percent reported they were with a partner and 2% reported they were with children.

The sheltered homeless were more likely to be alone (85%) compared to the street/service homeless (71%). They were also more likely to report being with children (5% versus 1% of the street/service homeless). The street/service homeless were more likely to report being with a partner (13%). The street/service homeless were also more likely to have pets with them (4%). A significant share of the street/service homeless (14%) reported being accompanied by other persons, such as friends or non-immediate family members, with many respondents referring to their friends as their “street families”. The comparative figure for the sheltered homeless was only 4%.

Table 7 – Accompanying the homeless

Family status (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Alone	624	85%	1,046	71%	1,670	76%
With Partner/spouse	48	7%	195	13%	243	11%
With children <sup>12</sup>	34	5%	9	1%	43	2%
With pet	5	1%	54	4%	59	3%
With other	30	4%	199	14%	229	10%
Total respondents	732		1,468		2,200	
Not stated	117		92		209	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

#### 4.5 Ethnic or cultural group

Homeless people enumerated during the count were also asked to self-identify their ethnic or cultural group. This is a difficult question to answer, given that many people are of mixed ethnicity or identify as “Canadian”. In cases where more than one ethnicity was reported, only the first two were coded. If they answered "Canadian", they were coded as “Canadian”. The findings from this question need to be treated with caution given a high non-response rate, especially for the street/service population.

Over half of the respondents self-identified as “Canadian” (51%). Almost one third of those that responded to this question identified themselves as European/Caucasian, with many of those respondents reporting English, Irish, and Scottish ancestry. While 32% of respondents self-identified as Aboriginal in the previous question, 20% of respondents reiterated their Aboriginal identity in response to the question about ethnicity by

<sup>12</sup> Some had two or more children.

providing their ancestry. Only 3% of respondents identified as Asian. Eight percent of those that responded to this question identified as being French Canadian or with French ancestry.

Table 8 – Ethnic or cultural group

Ethnicity (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Canadian	392	57%	618	48%	1,010	51%
European/Caucasian	162	25%	380	30%	542	28%
Aboriginal	114	17%	284	22%	398	20%
Francophone	41	6%	111	9%	152	8%
Asian	32	5%	30	2%	62	3%
African-Canadian	24	4%	17	1%	41	2%
Hispanic	15	2%	20	2%	35	2%
Middle Eastern	6	1%	11	1%	17	1%
Other	12	2%	26	2%	38	2%
Total respondents <sup>13</sup>	686		1,288		1,974	
No answer	163		272		435	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

#### 4.6 Reason for being homeless

Isolating the cause of homelessness is difficult, given its complex and multi-dimensional nature. It is particularly difficult to capture in a brief questionnaire such as the one used for the count.

Nonetheless, the count asked respondents for the main reasons why they did not have a place of their own. This year, the question format was changed. In the past, the question included pre-codes for the interviewer to check off as appropriate during the interview. This year, the question was an open-ended question and was coded by the research team. The codes from previous counts remained applicable in 2008, but some new codes were added to capture some of the answers that were provided this year.

As expected, survey participants cited a range of reasons. The largest share reported that their homelessness was due to lack of income (25%), cost of housing (19%) and addictions (17%). The 2008 count also revealed poor conditions of the housing available (8%) and non-availability of housing (7%) as reasons for homelessness. When referring to the poor condition of housing, respondents pointed to bug infestations and poorly maintained housing. An

“I was surprised by how friendly and willing people were to talk to me about being homeless... I also enjoyed the humour and charm of some of our un-housed citizens!”

- Interviewer

<sup>13</sup> This total represents those who responded to the question. because many respondents indicated multiple ethnic affiliations and were therefore counted more than once.

additional 7% cited health reasons to explain why they are homeless. For instance, someone may have been in the hospital for an extended period of time and got behind on their rent or they may be unable to maintain housing due to a mental illness. The sheltered homeless were more likely to identify moving as a reason for their homelessness than the street/service population (5% of sheltered compared to less than one percent of the street/service homeless). Moving includes people who just recently moved to the municipality where they were found. For example, some people may have recently moved for employment. The sheltered population was also more likely to point to abuse or family breakdown as the reason for being homeless than those on the street/service, recognizing that the sheltered homeless include women staying in transition houses while they flee abusive relationships.

Table 9 – Reason homeless

Reason (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of / low income	181	26%	345	25%	526	25%
Cost of housing	105	15%	305	22%	410	19%
Addiction	128	18%	240	17%	368	17%
Abuse, Family Breakdown, Conflict	133	19%	83	6%	216	10%
Poor condition/infested housing	56	8%	122	9%	178	8%
Health	64	9%	91	7%	155	7%
Availability of housing	30	4%	107	8%	137	7%
Evicted	39	6%	71	5%	110	5%
No income assistance	14	2%	64	5%	78	4%
Don't want a home	12	2%	78	6%	90	4%
Moving/ Stranded	34	5%	1	< 1%	35	2%
Other	106	15%	281	20%	387	18%
Total respondents	706		1,406		2,112	
No answer	143		154		297	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

#### 4.7 Length of time homeless

More than 1,000 people or almost one half of those who provided information on the length of time they were homeless had been homeless for a year or more (48%). The street/service homeless were even more likely to have been homeless for a year or more (56%). The largest share of the street/service homeless reported that they had been homeless for more than five years (14%). Only 13% of the homeless people who responded to this question had been without a home for a short period of time, less than one month.

The sheltered homeless tended to be homeless for a shorter period than the street/service homeless. Almost one quarter (23%) of the sheltered homeless were newly homeless (less than 1 month) compared to only 8% of the street/service homeless. In contrast, 31% of the sheltered homeless reported a long period of homelessness (one year or more), compared to 56% of the street/service homeless.

The median length of time homeless reported by the street/service homeless population is 12 months. For the sheltered homeless it was only four months.

Note that the long-term homeless tend to be over-represented in point-in-time counts because they are more likely to be enumerated on any given day.<sup>14</sup>

Table 10 – Length of time homeless

Length of time	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 1 week	61	9%	44	3%	105	5%
1 week to under 1 month	99	14%	68	5%	167	8%
1 month to under 6 months	234	34%	322	23%	556	26%
6 months to under 1 year	81	12%	190	13%	271	13%
1 year or more	218	31%	799	56%	1,017	48%
Total respondents	693	100%	1,423	100%	2,116	100%
Not stated	156		137		293	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

#### 4.8 Length of time in the municipality

The homeless population is relatively settled in the municipality where they were found. Eighty percent of those enumerated had lived in the municipality where they were found for one year or more. When asked how long they have lived in the city where they were enumerated on count day 2008, the largest share of homeless individuals who responded to this question reported ten years or more (46%). Another 15% had been there between five and ten years. Only twenty percent had been in the municipality where they were found for less than a year.

The street/service homeless population appear to be more settled than the sheltered homeless population. The former were more likely to have lived in the municipality where they were found for five years or more (65%) compared to the sheltered homeless (51%). The sheltered homeless were most likely to report living in the municipality where found for less than one year (30% compared to 15% for the street/service homeless). The street/service homeless were also living on average longer in the city found (median 10 years) compared to the sheltered homeless (median 5 years).

<sup>14</sup> Martha Burt. "Demographics and Geography: Estimating Needs." P. 1-6. In Linda B Fosburg and Deborah Dennis (eds.) *Practical Lessons: 1998 National Symposium on Homeless Research*. Period data shows that the vast majority of homeless people using shelters are first-time or short-term clients.

Table 11 – Length of time in municipality

Length of time	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 1 year	208	30%	208	15%	416	20%
1 year to under 5 years	131	19%	278	20%	409	19%
5 years to under 10 years	80	11%	232	16%	312	15%
10 years or more	278	40%	694	49%	972	46%
Total respondents	697	100%	1,412	100%	2,109	100%
Not stated	152		148		300	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

#### 4.9 Where do you call home?

Table 12 shows where the homeless individuals enumerated in the count “call home”. This question was meant to shed some light on where people consider their home, which might be related to where they were born, or where they last had a permanent home. The largest share of respondents said a location within Metro Vancouver (71%). Nine percent said a location elsewhere in BC, and 18% reported that home was elsewhere in Canada. 2% reported their home is outside of Canada.

There are a number of differences among the two homeless populations. The street/service homeless were most likely to call Metro Vancouver home (74%) compared to 64% of the sheltered homeless. The sheltered homeless were more likely to report a home somewhere else in Canada (23% compared to 16% for the street/service homeless).

Table 12 – Where do you call home?

Call home	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
GVRD	437	64%	1,050	74%	1,487	71%
Rest of BC	69	10%	109	8%	178	9%
Elsewhere in Canada	155	23%	231	16%	386	18%
Outside Canada <sup>15</sup>	23	3%	22	2%	45	2%
Total Respondents	684	100%	1,412	100%	2,096	100%
Not stated/not known	165		148		313	
Total	849		1,560		2409	

<sup>15</sup> While the interviews did not directly ask respondents for information about their immigrant status, it could be assumed that people who called a location outside of Canada home are immigrants.

## 4.10 Sources of income

Respondents were asked to list their sources of income, with more than one being possible.<sup>16</sup> The most frequently noted source of income of those enumerated in the homeless count was income assistance or a related training program (43%). This was followed by “binning or bottle collecting” (22%), and full-, part-time or casual employment (19% or over 420 respondents).

The sheltered homeless were less likely to report income assistance (40%) compared to the street/service homeless (45%), but they were more likely to report disability benefits (23%) as a source of income.

Employment was a source of income for over one quarter of the sheltered homeless people enumerated, 27% of whom reported some employment income. This was mostly from part-time or casual employment. However, almost 100 sheltered homeless individuals (13%) reported full-time employment income. Conversely, binning and bottle collection (22%) and panhandling (13%) was more likely to be reported by the street/service homeless population. Illegal activities, such as prostitution or theft, formed a source of income for 10% of the street/service homeless and only 3% of the sheltered homeless (although this source of income may be under-reported). Eight percent of the enumerated homeless population reported no income at all.

Table 13 – Sources of Income

Source (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Government transfers</b>						
Income assistance or training program	294	40%	666	45%	960	43%
Disability benefit	168	23%	235	16%	403	18%
Employment Insurance	9	1%	17	1%	26	1%
OAS/GIS/PPP	23	3%	30	2%	53	2%
<b>Other sources</b>						
No income	71	10%	111	7%	182	8%
Employment	196	27%	225	15%	421	19%
Binning, bottle collecting	50	7%	428	29%	478	22%
Panhandling	24	3%	253	17%	277	13%
Financial support from family	15	2%	45	3%	60	3%
Illegal	25	3%	151	10%	176	8%
Other	51	7%	145	10%	196	9%
Total Respondents	729		1,490		2,219	
Not stated	120		70		190	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

<sup>16</sup> In previous Metro Vancouver Homeless Counts, this question asked for only the major source of income (interviewers were instructed only to select one response, whereas this year they were permitted to select multiple sources of income).

## 4.11 Health conditions

The 2008 Homeless Count survey asked about people’s health, specifically whether they had a medical condition, physical disability, addiction, and/or mental illness. Medical condition refers to chronic problems like asthma and diabetes, and physical disability refers to an impairment affecting mobility or movement. The information provided in Table 14 relies either on the homeless individual’s willingness to self-report or on the subjective opinion of shelter providers or interviewers. In these cases, the interviewer's perception was coded for the homeless individual. While perceived health conditions need to be treated with some caution, it may act to offset the potential for under-reporting some health conditions such as addiction and mental illness.

Table 14 shows that 27% of the homeless population had one health condition and 45% were reported to have two or more health conditions so that 72% of those counted had one or more health conditions. Only 28% reported no health conditions.

The street/service homeless and the sheltered homeless fared evenly in terms of incidence of health conditions. They were both less likely to report no health concerns and more likely to report two or more health conditions.

Table 14 – Incidence of health conditions

Number of conditions	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No health conditions	200	27%	416	28%	616	28%
One health condition	205	28%	396	26%	601	27%
Two or more conditions	323	44%	693	46%	1,016	45%
Total respondents	728	100%	1,505	100%	2,233	100%
Not stated	121		55		176	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

Over 60% of the homeless people interviewed on the day of the count were reported to have an addiction problem. The next most common health problem was a medical condition (46%).

The incidence of specific health conditions is more pronounced among the street/service homeless, where 68% reported an addiction and 47% a medical condition. The street/service homeless were generally worse off than the sheltered homeless for all types of health conditions, including mental illness.

“It struck me that homeless people are extremely resilient and that the heavy stigma attached to them is fundamentally unfounded.”

- Interviewer

Table 15 – Type of health conditions

Health condition (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Addiction	348	48%	1,017	68%	1,365	61%
Medical condition	317	44%	706	47%	1,023	46%
Mental illness	223	31%	502	33%	725	33%
Physical disability	216	30%	483	32%	699	31%
Total respondents <sup>17</sup>	728		1,501		2,229	
Not stated	121		59		180	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

The numbers presented in Tables 14 and 15 include both self-reported health conditions, as well as the health conditions identified by interviewers. Table 16 shows the number of cases of health conditions as perceived by interviewers. Daytime interviewers were more likely to perceive addictions and mental illness in situations where the interviewee did not report such a health condition than the nighttime interviewers. The table below shows that the number of perceived conditions is relatively small.

Table 16 – Perceived health conditions

Perceived condition (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered	Street/service
	Number	Number
Addiction	12	63
Medical condition	4	20
Mental illness	17	86
Physical disability	2	15
Total respondents <sup>18</sup>	27	148

#### 4.12 Health services used

A new question in 2008 asked interviewees about their use of health services in the past year. Table 17 shows that health clinics were used by 53% of the homeless who responded to this question. This was followed by hospital emergency department (44%). One third of respondents had also visited the hospital as an in-patient or out-patient. Addictions services were used by about one quarter of the respondents and about one fifth reported using no health services at all.

<sup>17</sup> This total represents the number of people who reported at least one health condition. The column total exceeds 728 because many respondents reported more than one health condition.

<sup>18</sup> This total represents the number of people who were perceived by interviewers to have at least one health condition. The column total is less than the sum of the row numbers because several respondents reported more than one health condition.

The sheltered homeless were more likely to report using a health clinic (62%) compared to the street/service homeless (49%). The sheltered homeless were also slightly more likely to report using all of the services listed in the table.

Table 17 – Health services used in the past year

Health service (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Health clinic	435	62%	708	49%	1,143	53%
Emergency department	321	46%	616	43%	937	44%
Hospital (non-emergency)	251	36%	449	31%	700	33%
Ambulance	217	31%	366	25%	583	27%
Addiction services	200	28%	362	25%	562	26%
Dental clinic or dentist	157	22%	231	16%	388	18%
Mental health services	127	18%	194	13%	321	15%
Other services	66	9%	113	8%	179	8%
None	111	16%	291	20%	402	19%
Total respondents <sup>19</sup>	706		1,447		2,153	
Not stated	143		113		256	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

## 4.13 The street/service homeless

### 4.13.1 Where they stayed last night

The survey asked some additional questions of the street/service homeless. Individuals approached by interviewers in the daytime were asked where they stayed the previous night in order to determine if they qualified for the survey. Of the 1,494 street/service homeless who responded to this question, the largest share, 58% or 860 individuals reported staying outside. Another 7% reported staying in cars, garages, public buildings, vehicles and other places that are not considered fit for human habitation. In total, 65% are considered to have slept rough. Almost one quarter (23% or 348 people) stayed temporarily at someone else's place, where they did not pay rent and had no security of tenure, or sofa surfed. Other locations the street/service homeless stayed were 24-hour drop-in centres or clinics where they are permitted to stay overnight but not sleep, such as Dusk to Dawn, the Front Room and the

“Our big surprise was perhaps the visibility of the homeless once you look. We found that although we traipsed through the back alleys and near parks that all of our homeless people were located in busy pedestrian areas.”

- Interviewer

<sup>19</sup> This total represents the number of people who reported using at least one health service. The actual total exceeds 706 because many respondents reported using more than one health service and as such were counted in more than one row.

Health Contact Centre. Recovery houses or detox facilities were reported by a small number of people. Similarly, a few people indicated that they stayed in their own place on count night, but knew they had to get out within the month because they were being evicted. The remaining 5% of street/service homeless population stayed in other places the night of the count, such as jail, hospitals, hostels or hotels (on a night-to-night basis – not guaranteed for another 30 days). Some people did not sleep the night of the count, but just wandered around or worked (prostitution or binning).

Table 18 – Where street/service homeless stayed

Location	Number	Percent
Outside	860	58%
Someone else's place	348	23%
Car/garage/public building/camper/truck/shed	110	7%
Drop-in service overnight	80	5%
Recovery/detox	12	1%
Own place inside (not for more than 30 days)	10	1%
Other	74	5%
Total Respondents	1,494	100%
No answer	66	
Total	1,560	

#### 4.13.2 Reasons for not staying in a shelter

The most frequent reason street/service homeless said they did not stay in a shelter on count night is because they do not like them – 32%. Disliked shelters and the most frequent responses were rules, noise, theft, and restrictions on length of stay. Some people stayed with a friend for the evening and therefore did not need a shelter. A significant number (261 or 19%) did try to stay in a shelter but did not because it was full or because they were inappropriate.

“One thing that seemed fairly common was that they had given up on shelters, particularly if they were encumbered by belongings.”  
- Interviewer

Some people were considered ‘inappropriate’ for a shelter if they are too young to stay in an adult shelter, or there were no beds available for their gender. Someone can also be considered inappropriate if they are intoxicated or “high”. Interestingly, shelters and safe houses reported 208 adults and children turnaways on count night.

About 13% of the street/service homeless did not stay at a shelter because they couldn’t get there, didn’t know about one, or arrived too late. Although there were many homeless people who did not stay in emergency accommodation on count night and who are called the street/service homeless in this profile, many of these individuals have clearly had experiences with the shelter system in the past and indeed some tried to stay at a shelter on count night. Only 2% said they prefer to sleep outside.

Almost a fifth (17%) of the street/service homeless provided other reasons for not staying in a shelter the night before. Some people were staying elsewhere, such as jail, a hospital, recovery house, or drop-in service overnight. Others had a sheltered place to stay outside, such as a camper, car, van, or parking garage. Some people said they are too proud or embarrassed to stay in a shelter or that there are people who need it more

than them. Some people said they did not stay in a shelter because they were with a partner and that it is difficult to find a shelter where they can stay together. People who said they were using drugs as a reason for not staying in the shelter (with no other information or explanation) were also put in the other category. This is because it is unclear if the person tried to stay in a shelter, but was turned away because they were “high” or if they did not try because they knew they would be turned away.

Table 19 – Why street/service homeless did not use a shelter

<b>Reason</b> (select only one)	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Dislike shelters	450	32%
Turned away – full	225	16%
Able to stay with friend	215	15%
Couldn't get there	99	7%
Turned away - inappropriate	36	3%
Didn't know about	48	3%
Too late (didn't get there in time)	35	3%
Can't bring in pets and belongings	27	2%
Prefer outside	21	2%
Other	239	17%
Total respondents	1,395	100%
No answer	165	
Total	1,560	

#### 4.13.3 Previous use of shelter

A new question this year asked the street/service homeless if they have stayed in a shelter in the past year. Table 20 shows that 53% of the street/service homeless had stayed in a shelter at some point in the preceding year. Over half of those who have not stayed in a shelter at all in the past year had been homeless for a year or more (57%).

Table 20 – Stayed in a shelter in the past year (street/service homeless only)

<b>Stayed in shelter</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	790	53%
No	689	47%
Total respondents	1,479	100%
Total not stated	81	
Total	1,560	

## 5 Homeless trends 2002 - 2008

The following tables compare the demographic and other characteristics of homeless individuals enumerated in the Metro Vancouver 2002, 2005 and 2008 counts.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.1 Gender

Men and women made up roughly the same proportion of the region's homeless population in 2008 as in 2005, although absolute numbers of both men and women increased over 2005. The number of women counted in 2008 increased by 16% over 2005, while the number of men rose by 13%. Note that several transition houses serving women and children fleeing violence do not participate in the count each year, so women are likely under-represented among the sheltered homeless each year.

Table 21 – Gender trends

Gender	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Men	700	68%	1,483	73%	1,679	72%	196	13%
Women	333	32%	534	26%	619	27%	85	16%
Transgendered	n/a		9	0.4%	22	1%	13	144%
Total respondents	1,033	100%	2,026	100%	2,320	100%	294	15%
Not known <sup>21</sup>	17		31		89			
Total	1,050		2,057		2,409			

### 5.2 Age

Table 22 compares the age groups of the homeless population in each count. The largest share of the homeless population continues to be the 35-44 year age group. However, the 45-54 age group was the fastest growing age group between 2005 and 2008, with an increase of almost 50%. This helps to explain why the median age of the homeless population increased from 38 years to 41 years between 2005 and 2008. In comparison, according to the 2006 Census population data released by Statistics Canada, the median age of Metro Vancouver's (Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area) population reached 39.1 in 2006, an increase from 37.4 in 2001, so the homeless population is slightly older than the regional population.

In 2005, 45-54 year olds accounted for 22% of the total homeless population and today they account for 29%. The next fastest growing age group is the 55-64 year olds, which increased by 29% since 2005.

<sup>20</sup> See GVRD. 2002. *Research Project on Homelessness in Greater Vancouver*. Jim Woodward and Associates et al. and SPARC. 2005. *On our streets and in our shelters: Results of the 2005 Greater Vancouver Homeless Count*.

<sup>21</sup> Interviewers were instructed to record gender based on observation. "Not known" was used in cases where they could not determine gender, either because of clothing or for other reasons.

The share of the homeless population counted that is under age 25 has declined by 9% since 2005 and in fact fewer youth in the two age groups were enumerated on count day in 2008 compared to 2005. Finding youth during a point-in-time count is very difficult, which might explain the decline. The count may have been less successful in finding youth who tend to sofa surf and avoid services, thus remaining hidden.

Table 22 – Age groups trends

Age group	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 19 <sup>22</sup>	124	13%	76	4%	59	3%	-17	-22%
19-24	148	15%	220	11%	211	9%	-9	-4%
25-34	216	22%	435	22%	436	18%	1	0.2%
35-44	299	30%	634	32%	726	32%	92	15%
45-54	151	15%	443	22%	661	29%	218	49%
55-64	37	4%	139	7%	180	8%	41	29%
65+	14	1%	32	2%	32	1%	0	0%
Total respondents	989	100%	1,979	100%	2,305	100%	326	
Not stated	61		78		104			
Total	1,050		2,057		2,409			

### 5.3 Aboriginal identity

Table 23 shows the results from the Aboriginal identity question from the 2005 and 2008 counts.<sup>23</sup> The 2008 figures show faster growth among the Aboriginal identifying population (34%) compared to the non-Aboriginal identity population (21%). The result is a slightly larger share of the total homeless population reporting an Aboriginal identity in 2008 (32%) compared to 2005 (30%).

Table 23 – Aboriginal identity trends

Aboriginal identity	Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Aboriginal	515	30%	688	32%	173	34%
Non-Aboriginal	1,205	70%	1,453	68%	248	21%
Total respondents	1,720	100%	2,141	100%	421	
Not stated	337		268			
Total	2,057		2,409			

<sup>22</sup> Includes only unaccompanied youth under 19 years old

<sup>23</sup> 2002 data is not comparable, as the question was worded differently.

## 5.4 Accompanying the homeless

In 2008, the proportion of Metro Vancouver’s enumerated homeless that was living alone (76%) was lower than in 2005 (82%). In 2008, the homeless were somewhat more likely to report being accompanied by a partner or spouse. There was a 37% increase in the number of homeless people with partners. However, one of the largest increases occurred in the number of homeless people found with pets (58 compared to 34 in 2005), a 71% increase over 2005. Unfortunately, the total number of homeless adults accompanied by children increased from 40 to 43.

The number of people saying they were with someone ‘other’ than a child or a partner increased by 201%, with the vast majority saying they were with friends. Many people referred to their friends as their “street family.”

Table 24 – Accompanying the homeless trends

Accompanying the homeless	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total Homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Alone	743	90%	1,502	82%	1,670	76%	136	9%
With Partner/spouse	60	7%	178	10%	243	11%	65	37%
With Children <sup>24</sup>	n/a		40	2%	43	2%	3	8%
With pet	n/a		34	2%	51	2%	24	71%
With other	23	3%	76	4%	229	10%	153	201%
Total respondents <sup>25</sup>	826	100%	1,830	100%	2,200	N/A	321	
Not stated	170		227		209			
Total	996		2,057		2,409			

## 5.5 Length of time homeless

In 2008, more homeless people have been without a place of their own for a longer period of time. The largest increase between 2005 and 2008 occurred among those who have been homeless for one year or more. Table 25 shows that over 1,000 people had been homeless for a year or more in 2008, compared with 628 people in 2005. This represents an increase of 62%. In 2008, almost one half of the homeless population counted had been homeless for a year or more. The comparable figure in 2005 was 35%.

Similarly, the number counted who had been homeless for a short period of time, for example, less than a week, declined by 30% between 2005 and 2008, as did the number homeless for between 1 week and 1 month decline by 39%.

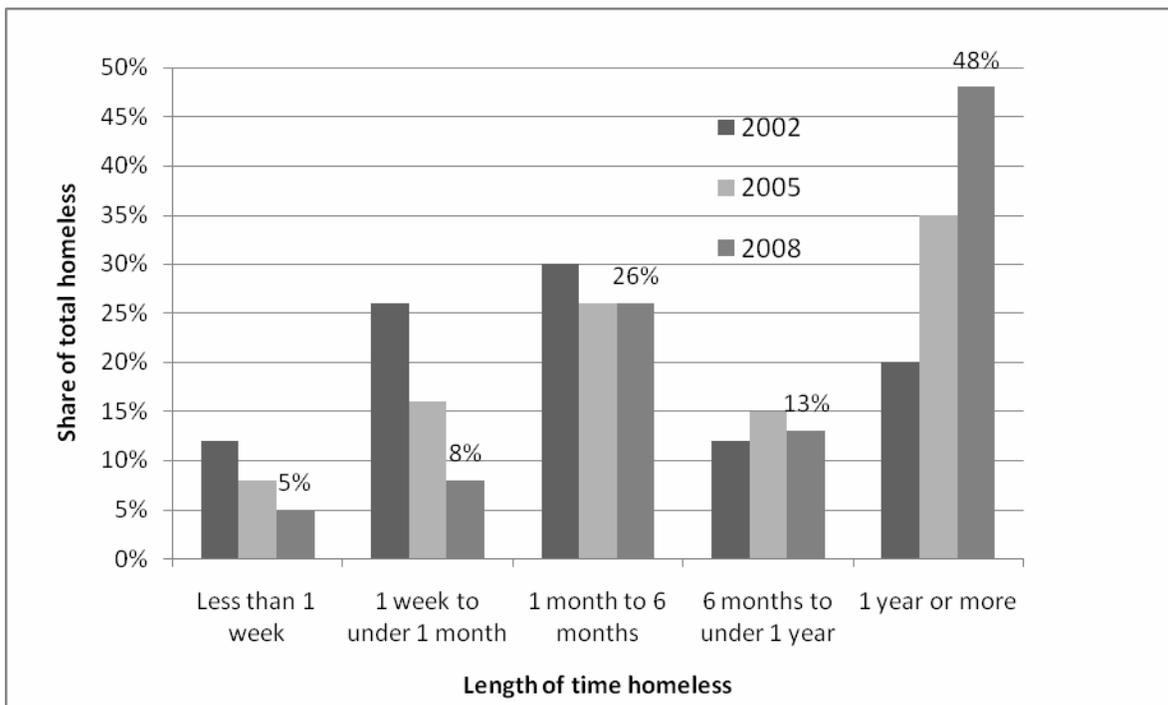
<sup>24</sup> Some adults were with two or more children

<sup>25</sup> For the 2008 Count, the total number of respondents is less than the sum of the column because multiple responses were allowed. In other words, if a person had a partner and a pet, he/she was counted twice.

Table 25 – Length of time homeless trends

Length of time homeless	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total Homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 1 week	98	12%	149	8%	105	5%	-44	-30%
1 week to under 1 month	222	26%	275	16%	167	8%	-108	-39%
1 month to 6 months	253	30%	460	26%	556	26%	96	21%
6 months to under 1 year	100	12%	262	15%	271	13%	9	3%
1 year or more	166	20%	628	35%	1,017	48%	389	62%
Total respondents	839	100%	1,774	100%	2,116	100%	342	
Not stated	211		283		293			
Total	1,050		2,057		2,409			

Figure 2 – Length of time homeless trends



## 5.6 Income

The question regarding income source was changed in 2008 to allow multiple responses. In 2005 and earlier, this question allowed only a single response. The purpose for the change in 2008 was to identify the full range of income sources used. The data is therefore not comparable with 2005 or earlier count data.

For example, while binning, bottle collection and panhandling may have been used to supplement income in 2005, it may not have been selected because it was not the

respondent’s “major” source of income. We do not know if the growth in the number reporting binning is actual growth or just a reflection of respondents being able to indicate all their income sources. The same applies to illegal activities.

What may be comparable is the share reporting income assistance as a source of income. Presumably, if asked in 2005 those receiving income assistance would also have selected it as their major source of income. It is not unreasonable to see an increased share of homeless persons receiving income assistance, since changes in eligibility and application procedures (primarily through the direct access and outreach programs) have potentially increased the opportunities for take-up or enrolment among this population. The work of the outreach workers may also have contributed to the increase in the number reporting disability benefits.

## 5.7 Health

Table 26 suggests that the health of Metro Vancouver’s homeless population has been getting worse over time. The number of people reporting no health conditions increased by 38% in 2008 compared to 2005, although as a proportion of those enumerated it remained roughly the same as in 2005. At the same time, the number reporting one health condition declined by 10%, while the number reporting more than one health condition increased by 67%. This is fairly consistent with an aging homeless population, and an increased length of time that the respondents reported being homeless.

Table 26 – Incidence of health conditions trends

Health condition	Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No health conditions	445	26%	616	28%	171	38%
One health condition	666	39%	601	27%	-65	-10%
2 or more health conditions	608	35%	1,018	46%	410	67%
Total respondents	1,719	100%	2,233	100%	514	30%
Not stated	338		178			
Total	2,057		2,409			

The incidence of reported health conditions has increased with every count. There is a significant relationship between the length of time homeless and the presence of health conditions, with those being without a home for more than a year also being much more likely to have at least one health condition. In 2008, 91% of those who had been without a home for more than a year also had at least one health condition compared to 84% of all homeless.

Table 27 – Type of health conditions trends<sup>26</sup>

Health condition (more than 1 possible)	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Addiction	337	39%	838	48%	1,365	61%	527	63%
Medical condition	256	30%	601	35%	1,023	46%	422	70%
Mental illness	195	23%	389	22%	725	33%	336	86%
Physical disability	132	15%	364	21%	699	31%	335	92%
Total respondents <sup>27</sup>	864		1,731		2,229		498	
Not stated	186		338					
Total	1,050		2,069					

The incidence of virtually every type of health condition has increased significantly since 2005, with the number of people with physical disabilities almost doubling.

## 5.8 Reasons for Homelessness

Several new categories were added to explain reasons for homelessness in 2008. Many people mentioned the poor condition of the housing available, in that the housing is in a poor state of repair or is infested as a reason for being homeless (8%), or that there is simply no housing available (7%). The inclusion of new categories helps to explain some of the decreases in the number of people reporting reasons mentioned in the 2005 count. As such, comparisons should be done with caution. The 2008 Count did reveal a 9% increase in the number of people reporting health or addiction problems as a reason for being homeless. The number of people reporting evictions or a move as the reason they are homeless decreased most significantly between 2005 and 2008.

<sup>26</sup> This table includes both self-reported and perceived health conditions. This was done to ensure that numbers from all reporting years are comparable.

<sup>27</sup> This total represents the number of people who reported health issues. The actual total exceeds 864 because many respondents reported more than one health condition and as such were counted more than once.

Table 28 – Reason Homeless trends

Reason (more than 1 possible)	Total homeless 2005		Total Homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of/low income	837	44%	526	25%	-311	-37%
Health/Addictions	482	25%	523	25%	41	9%
Cost of housing	417	22%	410	19%	-7	-2%
Abuse, Family Breakdown, Conflict	313	16%	216	10%	-97	-31%
Evicted	276	14%	110	5%	-166	-60%
Moving/ Stranded	223	12%	35	2%	-188	-84%
Availability of housing	-	-	137	7%		
No income assistance	-	-	78	4%		
Poor condition/infested housing	-	-	178	8%		
Don't want a home	-	-	90	4%		
Other	269	14%	387	18%	118	44%
Total respondents <sup>28</sup>	1,909		2,112			
No answer	148		297			
Total	2,057		2,409			

## 5.9 Where street/service homeless stayed

There was a 52% increase in the number of street/service homeless who reported sleeping outside in 2008 compared to 2005. The number of street/service homeless who slept in a car, garage, public building, or other covered place outside increased by 41% between 2005 and 2008. The number of people sleeping at some else's place also increased by almost a third (31%).

Table 29 – Where street/service homeless stayed trends

Location	Street/service homeless 2005		Street/service homeless 2008		Change 2005 to 2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Outside	566	51%	860	58%	294	52%
Someone else's place	266	24%	348	23%	82	31%
Car/garage/public building	78	7%	110	7%	32	41%
Other - squat, etc	195	18%	176	12%	-19	-10%
Total Respondents	1,105	100%	1,494	100%	389	
Not stated	0		66			
Total	1,105		1,560			

<sup>28</sup> This total represents the number of people who responded to the question. The actual total exceeds 1,909 because many respondents reported more than one reason for being homeless and as such were counted more than once.

## 6 Homelessness among sub-populations

A profile for six sub-groups of homeless individuals is provided in Table 30 below. The sub-populations are: women, Aboriginal people, unaccompanied youth aged 24 or younger, seniors (persons aged 55+), and the ‘long-term homeless’. Note that these sub-populations are not mutually exclusive – someone could be a member of two or more groups; for example, an Aboriginal senior.

### 6.1 Women

This year, 619 women were included in the count.<sup>29</sup> Almost three quarters were adults between the ages of 25 and 54 years (73%) and 21% were youth. Fewer women reported being on their own this year compared to 2005 (63% in 2008 compared to 71% in 2005). More women reported being with “other” people, such as friends in 2008 than in 2005. Seven percent were accompanying their children. Compared to other sub-groups within the homeless population, women were more likely to identify as having an Aboriginal identity (45%).

Homeless women tended to be homeless for a shorter time period than all other sub-groups. Seventeen percent had been homeless for less than one month. Their major source of income was income assistance (46%) or disability benefit (22%). Almost three quarters of the women reported their home as being in the Metro Vancouver region (71%), but 17% said they call somewhere else in Canada home. Over half of the women reported having addictions or medical conditions (60% and 51% respectively). About one third of the women were reported to have a mental illness or physical disability.

A higher proportion of the women mentioned illegal activities as a source of income than the general homeless population (15% of the women compared to 3% of the general homeless population). Most of the women relying on illegal activities as a source of income said they were involved in prostitution.

Almost half of the women enumerated during the daytime portion of the count (street/service) said they slept outside on the day of the count, but 37% stayed at someone else’s place. Street/service women (and youth) were more likely to sleep at someone else’s place than the other sub-populations.

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<sup>29</sup> Total numbers in the sub-populations table may differ from the numbers provided in sections 4 and 5. This happens because the information provided in this table is a cross-tabulation and only includes the number of people who are part of the sub-population and answered the particular question being analyzed. For instance, there were 619 women enumerated in the count, but the total number of women in the section around age is only 606. The total number of women is lower because not all women responded to the question asking about their age.

## **6.2 Persons with Aboriginal identity**

There were 688 Aboriginal people enumerated on count day. The Aboriginal homeless population had a higher proportion of women (38%) than the total homeless population (27%). The homeless Aboriginal population had a smaller proportion of seniors compared to the other sub-groups. Like the total homeless population, most Aboriginal respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54 years (81%), while 15% of the Aboriginal homeless were under the age of 25 years.

Almost three quarters of Aboriginal people identified during the count stated that they were alone (72%), but 13% said they were with a partner and an additional 13% said they were with someone else, such as a friend. Half of the Aboriginal population said they were long-term homeless in 2008. The proportion of long-term Aboriginal homeless increased from 39% in 2005.

The Aboriginal population's main sources of income were similar to the total homeless population. Almost half of the Aboriginal respondents identified income assistance as one of their main sources of income (47% of Aboriginal people compared to 43% of the total homeless population). As with the general homeless population, binning and bottle collection was also the second most significant source of income for the Aboriginal homeless population. Likewise, the Aboriginal homeless reported similar rates of health conditions as the total homeless population.

A smaller proportion of the Aboriginal homeless population called a Metro Vancouver municipality home compared to the general homeless population (66% of Aboriginal people compared to 71% of the total homeless population). Slightly more Aboriginal people said they were from other parts of BC (12% of the Aboriginal homeless compared to 9% of the total homeless population).

## **6.3 Unaccompanied youth**

During the 2008 count, 270 unaccompanied homeless youth under age 25 were enumerated. As previously mentioned, homeless youth are extremely difficult to find. The following information of unaccompanied youth provides a profile of those that were enumerated on the day of the count.<sup>30</sup>

The homeless youth were more evenly split between men and women than the general homeless population, with 48% of homeless youth being women. Homeless youth were the least likely to be alone than any of the other sub-populations. Only 61% of homeless youth reported being on their own. They were the most likely, however, to be with a friend or non-immediate family member, with 20% saying they were with someone other than a partner or children. Homeless youth more often reported Aboriginal identity than the total homeless population (41% of homeless youth said they were Aboriginal compared to 32% of the general homeless population). Two thirds of homeless youth

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<sup>30</sup> For more information about homeless youth in BC, see "Against the Odds: A Profile of Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in BC", produced by the McCreary Centre Society in 2007.

said they call a Metro Vancouver municipality home. Most had been without a home for over a month, with 40% having been without a home for a year or longer.

Just over one third of the homeless youth reported income assistance as a source of income, which is lower than the general homeless population. More youth reported having no income or panhandling as a source of income than the general homeless population. Homeless youth were also more likely than the other sub-groups to engage in illegal activities as a source of income.

Fewer homeless youth reported having health conditions than the general homeless population. For instance, only 29% of homeless youth reported having a medical condition compared to 46% of the general homeless population; and 16% of youth reported having a physical disability compared to 31% of the total homeless population.

Street/service youth were the least likely of the sub-populations to have slept outside the night of the count. The largest proportion of street/service youth (38%) was able to stay at someone else's place that night.

## **6.4 Seniors**

For the purposes of this profile, seniors are defined as persons aged 55 and over. There were 212 homeless seniors counted in 2008, up significantly from 171 persons in 2005. Homeless seniors were mostly men (81%) and alone (85%). They were less likely to report Aboriginal identity (14%) than all other sub-groups.

The largest share of homeless seniors had been homeless for more than one year (56%). Only 8% of homeless seniors had been without a home for less than a month. Just over half of the street/service senior population said they slept outside the night of the count (53%).

Almost a third of seniors reported income assistance as a major source of income, but 25% reported binning or bottle collection as a major source of income. Seniors were more likely to report OAS/GIS and CPP as a major source of income than the general homeless population (15% compared to 2% of the general homeless population).

Homeless seniors reported higher incidences of physical disabilities than the general homeless population (45% of seniors compared to 31% of the total homeless population). Seniors were also more likely to have a medical conditions (61% of seniors compared to 46% of the total homeless population). Seniors were less likely to report addictions, with only 39% of seniors reporting addictions compared to 61% of the total homeless population.

## **6.5 The long-term homeless**

The long-term homeless are individuals who have been homeless for one year or longer. It is the largest homeless sub-population, consisting of 845 people in 2008. The proportion of women in this sub-group rose from 18% in 2005 to 24% in 2008. One

tenth of the long-term homeless were seniors, but 80% were adults aged 25 to 54 years. Just over a third (34%) of long-term homeless considered themselves Aboriginal. About three quarters of the long-term homeless said they were by themselves on the day of the count, while 71% called a Metro Vancouver municipality home.

The long-term homeless population was more likely to report panhandling and binning/bottle collection as a source of income than the general homeless population. While 29% of the long-term homeless reported binning or bottle collection as a source of income, only 22% of the total homeless population indicated this was a major source of their income.

The long-term homeless were somewhat more likely to have health conditions than the general homeless population. For example, 69% of the long-term homeless had an addiction, compared to 61% of the general homeless population; and 51% of the long-term homeless had medical conditions compared to 46% of the general homeless population.

The long-term street/service homeless were more likely than the general homeless population to have slept outside the night of the count (65% of the long-term street/service homeless slept outside compared to 58% of the total street/service homeless population).

Table 30 – Sub-population profiles

	Women			Aboriginal identity			Youth (24 and under)			Seniors			Long-term homeless			Total Homeless								
	Street's service	Shelter	Total	%	Street's service	Shelter	Total	%	Street's service	Shelter	Total	%	Street's service	Shelter	Total	%	Street's service	Shelter	Total	%				
Gender																								
Men	320	84	414	61%	97	42	139	52%	94	74	168	81%	608	140	748	75%	1,138	541	1,679	72%				
Women	158	98	256	38%	82	45	127	48%	14	24	38	18%	172	71	243	24%	351	268	619	27%				
Total respondents	482	185	677		179	87	266	100%	108	99	207	100%	784	214	998	100%	1,489	821	2,320	100%				
Age groups																								
Youth	82	45	127	21%	75	29	104	15%					82	16	98	10%	181	89	270	12%				
Adults (25-54)	242	199	441	73%	399	146	545	81%					635	186	801	80%	1,188	635	1,823	80%				
Seniors (55 plus)	14	24	38	6%	16	10	26	4%					67	33	100	10%	111	101	212	9%				
TOTAL Respondents	338	268	606	100%	490	185	675	100%					784	215	999	100%	1,480	825	2,305	101%				
Accompanied by																								
Alone	183	179	362	63%	332	147	479	72%	83	81	164	85%	554	197	751	76%	1,046	624	1,670	76%				
With partner/spouse	84	23	107	19%	70	18	88	13%	8	42	50	5%	97	14	111	11%	185	48	243	11%				
With children	9	33	42	7%	5	12	17	3%									14	37	51	2%				
With pet									13	0	13	5%	5	0	5	3%	0	54	59	3%				
With other	54	15	69	12%	77	12	89	13%	44	8	52	20%	13	7%	113	12%	189	30	229	10%				
Total respondents	327	246	573		483	185	668		174	83	257		775	217	992		1,468	732	2,200					
Aboriginal identity																								
Aboriginal	158	98	256	45%					75	29	104	41%	16	10	26	14%	270	59	329	34%	502	185	688	32%
Not Aboriginal	175	141	316	55%					96	53	149	59%	89	65	154	86%	500	148	648	66%	946	507	1,453	68%
Total respondents	333	239	572	100%					171	82	253	100%	105	75	180	100%	770	207	977	100%	1,448	692	2,141	100%
Length of time homeless																								
Short term	24	73	97	17%	33	46	79	12%	20	20	40	16%					112	160	272	13%				
Medium term	125	90	215	39%	173	71	244	37%	66	40	106	43%					512	315	827	39%				
Long term	172	71	243	44%	270	59	329	50%	82	16	98	40%					789	218	1,017	48%				
Total respondents	321	234	555	100%	476	176	652	100%	168	76	244	100%					1,423	689	2,116	100%				

Table 30 – Sub-population profiles (cont'd)

	Women			Aboriginal Identity			Youth (24 and under)			Seniors			Long-term homeless			Total Homeless										
	Street/S service	Shelter	Total	Street/S service	Shelter	Total	Street/S service	Shelter	Total	Street/S service	Shelter	Total	Street/S service	Shelter	Total	Street/S service	Shelter	Total								
Major source of income																										
Welfare	166	107	273	46%	237	79	315	47%	64	28	90	35%	37	21	58	30%	355	95	450	45%	666	234	900	43%		
Disability	63	67	130	22%	72	47	119	18%	7	6	13	5%	14	24	38	20%	119	56	174	17%	238	168	403	18%		
EUCAS/CCP	8	16	24	4%	11	8	19	3%					16	14	30	15%	18	10	28	3%	47	32	79	4%		
No Income	32	32	64	11%	27	19	46	7%	31	17	48	19%	6	7	13	7%	48	15	61	6%	111	71	182	8%		
Employment	17	20	47	8%	23	23	46	14%	23	23	46	18%	12	24	36	19%	102	45	147	15%	225	196	421	19%		
Penalizing	49	7	56	10%	71	6	77	11%	43	6	49	16%				5%	157	12	169	17%	253	24	277	12%		
Benefit/Boths	57	8	65	11%	126	14	140	21%			26	10%			40	25%	250	20	269	29%	428	50	478	22%		
Collecting	11	6	17	3%	18	5	23	3%	14	5	19	7%	2	0	2	1%			25	3%	45	15	60	3%		
Family	74	16	90	15%	66	13	79	12%	20	12	32	13%	3	0	3	2%	79	10	89	9%	151	25	176	8%		
Legal	35	17	52	9%	42	17	59	9%	20	12	32	13%			22	11%	90	12	102	10%	145	51	196	9%		
Other	344	245	589		492	185	677		173	82	255		110	84	194		786	213	999		1,490	720	2,210			
respondents																										
Last permanent home																										
GMVD	241	159	400	71%	331	94	425	66%			156	68%														
Rest of BC	33	27	60	11%	45	31	76	12%			20	8%														
Elsewhere in Canada	53	42	95	17%	84	45	129	20%			53	22%														
Outside											7	3%														
Canada			11	2%	5	5	10	2%																		
Total	329	227	556	100%	455	175	630	100%			236	100%														
respondents																										
Health condition																										
Addiction	348	106	454	60%	363	105	468	69%			143	59%			27	74	38%	564	129	693	59%	1,017	348	1,365	61%	
Mental condition	177	122	299	51%	250	88	338	50%			74	26%			47	117	61%	401	111	512	51%	706	317	1,023	46%	
Mental illness	123	87	210	35%	154	55	209	31%			70	27%			35	69	36%	265	82	347	37%	502	223	725	33%	
Physical disability	102	84	186	32%	155	60	215	33%			42	16%			37	66	45%	272	80	352	35%	483	216	699	31%	
Total	342	244	587		495	183	678				151	250			108	83	101		765	214	979		1,501	728	2,229	
respondents																										
Where stayed last night																										
Outside someone's place	155			46%	250			57%			60	35%														
Caravan/park/ilo building	126			37%	129			26%			66	38%														
Other	18			5%	27			6%			7	4%														
Total	40			12%	55			11%			40	23%														
respondents	339			100%	491			100%			173	100%														
respondents																										

## 7 Homelessness by municipality

This section presents the homeless count results by municipality within Metro Vancouver.

### 7.1 By municipality found 2008

Table 31 presents the distribution of the 2008 homeless population according to the municipality in which they were counted. This table is based on the total number of homeless, as presented in Table 2 of the report (i.e. this table includes accompanied children and homeless people who were counted, but who did not complete the demographic questions). Most homeless people were located in Vancouver (59%), followed by Surrey (15%). The Tri-Cities had 4%, while New Westminister and North Vancouver District and City (combined) each had 5% of the total homeless population. Looked at another way, almost 60% were found in Vancouver with just over 40% located in all other municipalities.

The distribution of the street/service homeless population differs from the sheltered homeless. The street/service homeless were more evenly distributed throughout the region. There was a smaller share in Vancouver (52%), and proportionately more in Surrey (20%), Burnaby, the Langleys and the Tri-Cities. The sheltered homeless were concentrated in Vancouver (70%) where the majority of shelter, transition house and safe house beds are located.

Table 31 – Homeless population by municipality found

Municipality found	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Burnaby	9	1%	77	5%	86	3%
Delta/White Rock	6	1%	11	1%	17	1%
Langleys	12	1%	74	5%	86	3%
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	50	5%	40	3%	90	3%
New Westminister	52	5%	72	5%	124	5%
North Vancouver District and City	60	6%	63	4%	123	5%
Richmond	19	2%	37	2%	56	2%
Surrey	95	9%	307	20%	402	15%
Tri-Cities	18	2%	76	5%	94	4%
Vancouver	765	70%	811	52%	1,576	59%
West Vancouver	0	0%	4	0.3%	4	0.2%
Total Respondents	1,086	100%	1,572	100%	2,658	100%
Not stated	0		2		2	
Total	1,086		1,574		2,660	

Table 32, below, shows the distribution of the total homeless population by the municipalities in which they were found during the 2008, 2005 and 2002 counts.<sup>31</sup> The Table shows that between 2005 and 2008, the City of Vancouver had the largest increase in its total homeless population (212), followed by the Tri-Cities (54), Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows (46), Burnaby (44), with North Vancouver (36) rounding up the top five.

While Vancouver experienced the highest absolute growth in total homelessness between 2005 and 2008, the rate of growth in total homelessness was faster in the suburban municipalities than in Vancouver. In the Northeast and Ridge Meadows suburbs, the Tri-Cities saw a 135% growth, while Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows saw 105% growth. In the Inner Municipalities, Burnaby experienced about 100% growth, Richmond saw about 60% growth, North Vancouver District and City had about 41%, while Vancouver saw about 16%. At the same time, the South Fraser sub-region saw about 51% growth in the Langleys, 41% in Delta/White Rock, and 3% in Surrey.

Table 32 – 2002, 2005, 2008 total homeless population by municipality found<sup>32</sup>

<b>Municipality found</b>	<b>Total homeless 2002</b>	<b>Total homeless 2005</b>	<b>Total homeless 2008</b>	<b>Change 2002-2005</b>	<b>Change 2005-2008</b>	<b>Change 2002-2008</b>
	Number	Number	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent
Burnaby	18	42	86	133%	105%	378%
Delta/White Rock	11	12	17	9%	42%	55%
Langleys	18	57	86	217%	51%	378%
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	66	44	90	-33%	105%	36%
New Westminster	74	97	124	31%	27%	66%
North Vancouver District/City	33	88	123	167%	41%	276%
Richmond	31	35	56	13%	60%	81%
Surrey	171	392	402	129%	3%	135%
Tri-Cities	14	40	94	186%	135%	571%
Vancouver	670	1,364	1,576	104%	16%	135%
West Vancouver	14	2	4	-86%	100%	-71%
Total respondents	1121	2,173	2,658	94%	22%	137%
Not stated	0	1	2	-	100%	-
Total	1,121	2,174	2,660	94%	22%	137%

<sup>31</sup> As more people refused to complete the count questionnaire during the 2008 count than in 2005, coupled with the fact that accompanied children were not enumerated, the distribution of the total homeless found in the municipalities may offer a more meaningful portrait of relative homelessness across Metro Vancouver than the distribution of those who agreed to be enumerated.

<sup>32</sup> Because of changes in the enumeration process over the three counts, it was difficult to assign those who were not enumerated during the 2002 and 2005 counts to the municipalities. In all, 71 people were not enumerated in 2002 and 117 in 2005. For the purpose of this table, those people were assigned to the municipalities according to the proportion of homeless people who were enumerated in each year. Sensitivity analysis showed that an alternative allocation process would not have made any difference in the distribution.

Table 32 also shows that while the short-term growth in total homelessness was relatively faster outside the City of Vancouver, the long-term trend (2002 to 2008), although still biased towards the suburban communities, was more evenly distributed, likely mirroring the growth in the street/service homeless population within the region. Specifically, despite the fact that total homelessness increased by over 300% in Burnaby, the Langleys, and the Tri-Cities, the larger communities like Vancouver and Surrey saw more than 100% growth in their numbers at the same time.

Table 32a, below, shows the changes in the enumerated homeless population<sup>33</sup> according to the municipality found since 2002. In keeping with the relative growth in the total homeless population discussed above, the largest percent increase in the enumerated homeless population since 2005 occurred in the Tri-Cities (140%), followed by Burnaby and Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows. Delta/White Rock and Richmond saw significant increases as well. Both Surrey and Vancouver had small percentage increases in the number of homeless found in those municipalities, mainly because they had substantial homeless populations in 2005. Vancouver had the largest absolute increase in the number of homeless found there (81) compared to 2005, followed by the Tri-Cities (53).

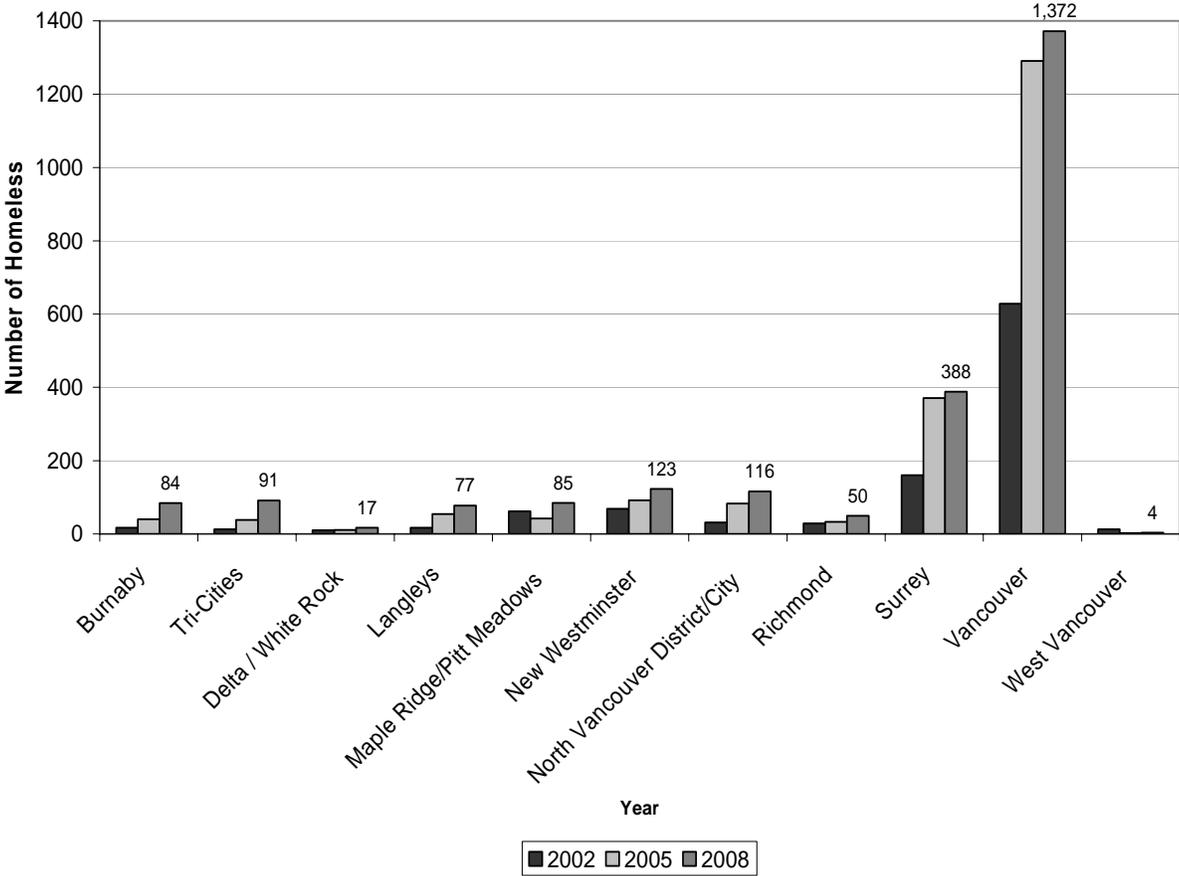
Table 32a – 2002, 2005, 2008 adult homeless population by municipality found<sup>34</sup>

Municipality found	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005-2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Burnaby	17	2%	40	2%	84	4%	44	110%
Delta/White Rock	10	1%	11	1%	17	1%	6	54%
Langleys	17	1%	54	3%	77	3%	23	43%
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	62	6%	42	2%	85	4%	43	102%
New Westminster	69	7%	92	4%	123	5%	31	34%
North Vancouver District/City	31	3%	83	4%	116	5%	33	40%
Richmond	29	3%	33	2%	50	2%	17	52%
Surrey	160	15%	371	18%	388	16%	17	5%
Tri-Cities	13	1%	38	3%	91	4%	53	140%
Vancouver	628	60%	1,291	63%	1,372	57%	81	6%
West Vancouver	13	1%	2	<1%	4	< 1%	2	100%
Total respondents	1,050	100%	2,057	100%	2,407	100%	350	
Not stated	0		0		2			
Total	1,050		2,057		2,409			

<sup>33</sup> See definition in section 2.2.

<sup>34</sup> In order to be consistent with reporting methods in previous years, this table is based on the number of homeless people who were enumerated, but does not include accompanied children.

Figure 3 – 2002, 2005, 2008 adult homeless population by municipality found



**7.2 By municipality identified as home 2008**

The 2008 count questionnaire asked respondents what city they “call home”. Vancouver was viewed as home for the largest share of respondents (37%), followed by locations “elsewhere in Canada” (18%) and Surrey (11%). The sheltered homeless were more likely to call Vancouver home (39%) compared to the street/service homeless (36%), and the street/service homeless were more likely to call Surrey home (12%) compared to the sheltered homeless (8%). A larger proportion of the sheltered homeless (23%) considered their home “elsewhere in Canada” versus 16% of the street/service homeless.

Table 33 – Homeless population by where call home

Municipality call home	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Burnaby	17	3%	42	3%	59	3%
Delta/White Rock	3	< 1%	16	1%	19	1%
Langley	5	1%	54	4%	59	3%
Maple Ridge	26	4%	46	3%	72	3%
New Westminster	20	3%	62	4%	82	4%
North Vancouver City/District	22	3%	53	4%	75	4%
Richmond	4	1%	30	2%	34	2%
Surrey	52	8%	172	12%	224	11%
Tri-Cities	18	3%	58	4%	76	4%
Vancouver	264	39%	512	36%	776	37%
West Vancouver	6	1%	5	< 1%	11	<1%
Rest of BC	69	10%	109	8%	178	8%
Elsewhere in Canada	155	23%	231	16%	386	18%
Outside Canada	23	3%	22	2%	45	2%
Total respondents	684	100%	1,412	100%	2,096	100%
No answer	165		148		313	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

Where someone was found on count day 2008 is not necessarily the place they view as their home. This was particularly true for homeless people found in Vancouver. Comparing the figures in the previous two tables shows that while 57% of homeless persons enumerated were located in Vancouver, a much smaller proportion (37%) viewed Vancouver as their home. In other sub-regions, there was a closer relationship between the number found and the number viewing it as their home.

Table 34 below shows trends over time in where the homeless call home. There are more homeless people today who consider Maple Ridge /Pitt Meadows, Richmond, and West Vancouver home than in 2005; however, the actual increase in numbers is small. The largest absolute increase occurred in Vancouver (143 people) followed by elsewhere in Canada (127). The absolute number of homeless people who call Surrey home declined by 105 persons or 32%.

Table 34 – 2002, 2005, and 2008 adult homeless population by municipality call home<sup>35</sup>

Municipality call home	Total homeless 2002		Total homeless 2005		Total homeless 2008		Change 2005-2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Burnaby	29	4%	70	4%	59	3%	-11	-19%
Delta/White Rock	13	2%	17	1%	19	1%	2	12%
Langley	12	1%	49	3%	59	3%	10	20%
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	44	5%	29	2%	72	3%	43	148%
New Westminster	31	4%	61	3%	82	4%	21	34%
North Vancouver City/District	25	3%	61	3%	75	4%	14	23%
Richmond	18	2%	16	1%	34	2%	18	113%
Surrey	153	19%	329	19%	224	11%	-105	-32%
Tri-Cities	24	3%	51	3%	76	4%	25	49%
Vancouver	234	28%	633	36%	776	37%	143	23%
West Vancouver	3	<1%	5	<1%	11	< 1%	6	120%
Rest of BC	80	10%	146	8%	178	9%	32	22%
Elsewhere in Canada	138	16%	259	15%	386	18%	127	49%
Outside Canada	21	3%	24	1%	45	2%	21	88%
Total respondents	826	100%	1,750	100%	2,096	100%	346	
No answer	224		307		313			
Total	1,050		2,057		2,409			

### 7.3 Length of time in municipality where found before current episode of homelessness

Respondents tended to have lived in the communities where they were found for a significant period of time before they became homeless. This is especially the case for the street/service homeless. The median length of time the street/service homeless had been in the municipality where they were found before their current episode of homelessness was 6 years. Over half of the total homeless population had been in the communities where they were found for at least 5 years before their current episode of homelessness. By comparison, the median length of time the sheltered population had been in the municipality where they were found before their current episode of homelessness was 3 years. As shown in Table 35, the sheltered population was more likely than the street/service population to report living for less than a year in the municipality where they were found before becoming homeless (39% versus 29%).

<sup>35</sup> The wording on this question changed in 2008 to “where do you consider home” from “where was your last permanent address.” Comparisons between different reporting years should be made with caution.

Table 35 – Length of time in municipality found before current episode of homelessness

Length of time here before current episode of homelessness	Sheltered homeless		Street/service homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 1 year	264	39%	400	29%	664	32%
1 year to under 3 years	64	9%	124	9%	188	9%
3 years to under 5 years	34	5%	97	7%	131	6%
5 years or more	317	47%	753	55%	1,070	52%
Total respondents	679	100%	1,374	100%	2,053	100%
Not stated	170		186		356	
Total	849		1,560		2,409	

## 8 Implications

In reflecting on the study, the team members identified some potential implications of the count results. These are presented in terms of planning issues, methodology/implementation, and future research.

### 8.1 Planning Issues

- The 22% growth rate in the number of people counted as homeless in 2008 represents a significant increase in the homeless population region wide. It suggests that much remains to be done to stem the tide of rising homelessness, particularly among the street/service homeless. While the policy of focusing new shelter beds only in areas with gaps in supply make sense from a ‘housing first’ perspective, the number of new permanent supportive housing units built has clearly not been adequate to meet growing demand.
- Over half of the street/service homeless was enumerated in the City of Vancouver and only 37% of the total homeless considered the City of Vancouver their home. The 2008 Count showed that homelessness remains a growing problem in the region’s suburbs. This finding provides a continued rationale and perhaps an impetus to municipalities and the provincial government to work to fill gaps in shelter beds in outlying areas.
- The 2008 count showed that the street/service population was also more likely to be with a partner or spouse than the sheltered population. This may be due to the limited spaces for couples in shelters. The 2008 count also showed an increased proportion of homeless people with pets. When the street/service homeless were asked why they did not stay in a shelter the night before, many said that they did not go to a shelter because they could not bring their pet or other belongings, such as carts with their possessions or bottles from binning, or because they were with a partner. Emergency shelters in particular, should look into ways of accommodating people with partners and/or pets and belongings.
- Although more homeless people are accessing income assistance according to the 2008 count, the shelter allowance is clearly inadequate to cover the cost of housing in the region. Almost half of the homeless population received income assistance, but still could not secure a stable housing.
- The incidence of self-reported and perceived addiction was much higher among the street/service population. The higher rate of addictions among the street/service homeless may reflect the fact that people who are “high” may be barred from some shelters or that people who are “using” do not try to access shelters because they assume they will be turned away. While there are low-barrier housing options, they are insufficient for existing need. Consideration should be given to developing both dedicated facilities and scattered sites that can provide housing to those still addicted as part of a “harm reduction” approach. Previous research has shown that such facilities and programs can only work when they are accompanied by appropriate support services (see *Housing and Services for People with Substance Use and Mental Health Issues* available at [www.sparc.bc.ca](http://www.sparc.bc.ca); resource and publications section).

## 8.2 Methodology/implementation

- While the non-response rate to individual questions in the nighttime count was lower in 2008 compared to previous years, there was an absolute increase in the number of individuals who were just counted with no other information provided. Filling in the forms can be a burden for already busy shelter staff, especially as people are coming in and trying to get settled. The BC Housing shelter database would be a more effective and efficient way of gathering information for the sheltered homeless in the future.
- The meal program line-ups are a good place to find large numbers of the homeless population. Volunteers, however, find the line up situation very hectic, as they need to interview as many people as possible before the line-up begins to move. More interviewers should be placed at line-ups to ensure better coverage. It might also be useful to have a separate training session for people volunteering in the line-ups.
- Given the unpredictability of determining the number of homeless people that volunteers will find on their shift, it would be useful to have central stations set up around the region to hand out supplies. Volunteers would check in before their shift at their designated station and drop the forms and extra materials off after their shift at the same location. Having volunteers check in before their shifts and returning their forms and materials at the end of the shift would reduce delays in receiving the daytime forms and their supplies could be recycled throughout the day to reduce expenses. At the same time, this would require more drop-off locations than previously used given the geographic distances in all of the municipalities and sub-regions.
- Future homeless count planners must be careful not to confuse the number of volunteers with the ability to carry out a successful count. Although there is merit in involving the general public in the count in this way from an educational perspective, the number of volunteers should be determined by the number of locations to be canvassed.
- During the 2008 count, more people than ever refused to be interviewed. In some cases volunteers noted the reasons. For example, some people could not be woken up, some people did not want to take the time away from their binning, and others said there was no point in doing the survey. If someone is sleeping and counted as homeless, they may be enumerated later, which would lead to double counting. Future count surveys should ask interviewers to indicate the reasons as to why perceived homeless people are not participating in the interviews. This would help to understand why people are not participating and to identify ways to achieve better participation rates in subsequent counts.
- While the current questionnaire does ask about ethnicity and where people consider home, the questions do not directly inquire about immigration or refugee status. The immigrant and refugee homeless population should be targeted for better inclusion in future counts.

### 8.3 Future Research

- The Homeless Count should continue to be repeated every three years to track changes and trends. There should be a nighttime and daytime component to the count and future counts should take into consideration the methodological changes suggested above.
- The median age of the homeless population is increasing which appears to be correlated to the increasing proportion of the homeless who have been homeless for over one year. Additional qualitative research could be useful to better understand the factors and dynamics that are contributing to the growth in the long-term homeless sub-population and to identify potential solutions as seen by the sub-population itself.
- The 2008 count also showed that there were an increasing proportion of homeless people with health conditions. Additional research could be conducted at the key health facilities used by the homeless as identified in this report such as at health clinics and emergency departments to obtain a better understanding of the health needs of this population. Other research such as the report on *Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia* has shown that there could be significant reductions in public expenditures by addressing these issues. It could also be worthwhile to do some more research specifically around addictions on the street (e.g. are people becoming homeless because of addictions or do homeless people become addicted once they are homeless?).
- The street/service population on average was homeless longer than the sheltered population. This suggests that there may be a tendency for homeless people to move outside the longer they remain homeless. It could also mean that people in shelters get help exiting homelessness. The sheltered homeless were also more likely to have been in the municipality where they were found for a shorter period of time than the street/service population. This suggests that perhaps people have to travel to stay at homeless shelters temporarily. It is also possible that some people use shelters as temporary accommodation when they move to a city, say for employment. Research could be conducted to look at whether sheltered homeless are cycling out of homelessness or if they are moving to the street.
- The proportion of Aboriginal people was higher among the street/service homeless than the sheltered homeless, suggesting that Aboriginal people who are homeless avoid shelters, that shelters do not serve this population well or that they are under-reported in the sheltered homeless data provided by the shelters. It could be worthwhile to pursue some additional research to better understand why homeless Aboriginal people are not accessing shelters as much and to determine what can be done to ensure that homeless services are accessible for Aboriginal people.

# Appendix A – Municipal Breakdowns

Table A1: Age, Gender, and Aboriginal Identity by Municipality 2008

	Burnaby		Tri-Cities		Langley		Maple Ridge/Pit Meadows		New Westminster		North Shore		Richmond		Surrey		Vancouver		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
<b>Gender</b>																			
Men	63	78%	62	70%	57	79%	61	72%	68	74%	102	86%	32	73%	252	67%	948	73%	
Woman	17	21%	26	30%	15	21%	24	28%	31	26%	16	14%	12	27%	126	33%	348	27%	
Total respondents	80	100%	88	100%	72	100%	85	100%	119	100%	118	100%	44	100%	378	100%	1,296	100%	
<b>Age groups</b>																			
Youth	5	6%	18	21%	9	13%	7	8%			13	12%			53	14%	154	12%	
Adults (25-54)	69	86%	63	72%	57	79%	69	81%			87	77%			287	77%	1,044	80%	
Seniors (55 plus)	6	8%	6	7%	6	8%	9	11%			13	12%			35	9%	114	9%	
Total Respondents	80	100%	87	100%	72	100%	85	100%			113	100%			375	100%	1,312	100%	
<b>Aboriginal identity</b>																			
Aboriginal	21	27%	10	11%	18	25%	15	18%	26	27%	27	25%	5	13%	108	30%	456	36%	
Not Aboriginal	57	73%	77	89%	54	75%	68	82%	72	73%	79	75%	35	88%	248	70%	749	60%	
Total respondents	78	100%	87	100%	72	100%	83	100%	98	100%	106	100%	40	100%	356	100%	1,205	100%	

## Appendix B – Method

The 2008 Homeless Count used the same methodology as the 2002 and 2005 snapshots, with some modifications to improve coverage.

To be consistent with the timing in the 2005 Count, the 2008 Count was held mid March. It was conducted from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm on March 11, 2008. It was important to conduct the count at a similar time of year as the previous counts (January 2002 and March 2005), and when cold wet weather strategy beds were operating (November to April). The day of the count was selected prior to when income assistance cheques are issued, as this is a time when homeless people are most likely to seek service of some kind. March 11<sup>th</sup> was selected as the 2005 Homeless Count report recommended that the count not take place during the school spring break.

The 24-hour enumeration of homeless individuals through the 2008 Homeless Count was divided into two parts:

- A. The enumeration of all shelters, safe houses and transition houses for the night of March 10, called the nighttime component. This measured the size of the *sheltered homeless* population.
- B. The enumeration of ‘locations’ where street/service homeless people may be found, such as outdoor congregating areas, meal programs and other services, during the hours of 5:30 am to midnight on March 11, 2008. This was designed to identify those homeless persons who had not spent the previous night in a shelter, safe house or transition house. This is called the daytime component and counts the *street/service homeless*.

### **Nighttime component**

Lists of shelters (including cold wet weather facilities), safe houses and transition houses operating in Metro Vancouver were updated. The lists included some facilities that are not strictly shelters but are open during the night to provide refuge for homeless people. All facilities were sent a package of materials with instructions approximately two weeks in advance. Then, a few days before count day, all nighttime providers were telephoned to ensure they received the package and to answer any questions they may have had about completing the forms. Those facilities that had not received or could not find their package were re-sent materials.

Changes in the Nighttime Approach:

Two modifications were made to the way the night time portion of the 2008 count was conducted. First, the format of the nighttime questionnaire was changed. Rather than a grid or table as had been used in 2002 and 2005, shelters were asked to complete a questionnaire for each individual similar to that used in the daytime component of the count. This was necessary because of the increased number of questions and the addition of questions that

required an interview (i.e. could not be completed by shelter staff based on their knowledge alone). As in previous years, each night time facility was also asked to complete a Shelter Statistics form, indicating the total number of beds used that night and the number of people turned away (turnaways).

Another modification was introduced to address the large number of shelter clients for whom incomplete information was obtained in 2005. Interviews were conducted at six large shelters in Vancouver where circumstances make it difficult for staff to conduct interviews themselves. Together they represented about 340-60 beds or about one third of all shelter beds in the region<sup>36</sup>. Interviews at these locations took place during the intake period of each shelter using the night time interview guide. Intake occurred from 4:00 pm to midnight on the evening of March 10<sup>th</sup>. Interviews were completed either in a line up outside the shelter or inside the shelter itself after client intake was completed. This approach may not be necessary in the future as more shelters become 24/7.

Approximately 30 volunteers were recruited and trained to conduct the interviews at shelters. They were scheduled in teams of two for three hour shifts. The shelters themselves provided support to interviewers and to the count team. There were no reported incidents.

One of the six shelters (35 beds) admitted guests before interviewers arrived and thus no interviews were completed there. However, staff completed the Shelter Statistics form, so the total number of individuals that stayed there that night was included in the overall count figures. In addition, during the daytime count, several people were approached who stayed at this shelter (and who insisted that they had not been interviewed the previous evening) in which case we were able to include their demographic details in the nighttime database.

For the first time, the nighttime questionnaire included a question about how many nights respondents had been in the shelter they were interviewed at, as well as a question about how many times they have stayed in a shelter in the past year. The responses, however, often did not match the question (e.g. people listed the shelters they stayed at rather than the number of times they have stayed in shelters). Analysis on these questions is not possible, as in many cases it is unclear as to what is meant by the response.

## **Daytime component**

The daytime component again used a census approach to enumerate street/service homeless people at service and other locations throughout the region. This approach was used for safety and security reasons and to avoid the difficulties associated with a nighttime street/service count, particularly in a large regional setting.

There were two general types of locations – line up locations such as soup kitchens and meal programs, and indoor and outdoor congregating areas such as drop in centres, community centres, malls, parks, street/service panhandling locations etc. A list of all such locations was compiled in advance based on discussions with key informants in each municipality/sub-

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<sup>36</sup> One is a mat program that will take every person that seeks shelter for any given evening.

region. Interviewers attempted to visit all pre-identified locations on count day. Interviewers at line-up locations were instructed to count the size of the line-up with a hand held counter.

Area coordinators from local agencies or a member of the consulting team oversaw the process of identifying locations and volunteers for each sub-region or municipality. Several of the sub-regions or municipalities have local homeless planning tables and/or outreach workers who also helped identify locations and volunteers. The members of the local planning tables and outreach workers also provided support on count day.

The questionnaire begins with screening questions to ensure that only qualified homeless individuals take part in a complete interview. To qualify for inclusion in the daytime component, an individual at one of these locations:

- Must not have been interviewed earlier that day;
- Must be homeless according to the project's definition; and
- Must not have stayed in a shelter, safe house or transition house the night before (where they would have been counted in the nighttime component)

The daytime questionnaire gathered the same information as the nighttime count forms plus two questions about the use of shelters. The one page questionnaire took only a couple of minutes to complete.

Volunteer interviewers, many from local service providers, conducted the screening and personal interviews for the daytime component. They were put into teams of two. The vast majority of the volunteers attended one of the training sessions provided around the region. Interviewers traveled to their assigned locations at various times on count day to conduct interviews. Approximately 800 interviewers participated consisting of staff and volunteers of homeless service providers, social planners, youth outreach workers, researchers and consultants.

Interviewers were instructed to avoid interviewing in the presence of media in order to preserve interviewee confidentiality. They wore identifying buttons and carried candies and cigarettes as icebreakers. Most teams spent an average of three hours in the field.

Posters, similar to those used in the 2005 Count, were provided to agencies in advance to notify people about the upcoming count and urge them to visit a pre-identified location to be enumerated. Service agencies also agreed to complete interviews with clients who were homeless, who came to them for service on count day. These two strategies were used to help identify some of the hidden homeless, who would otherwise be missed during the Count.

Staff at the Kits shower program interviewed people at their program on the Saturday before the count. This Kits shower program caters to those who primarily live in the woods in Pacific Spirit Park. Most are known not to frequent other services for the homeless. The homeless at the shower program were instructed not to participate in another interview should someone with the identifying yellow badge approach them on Tuesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. This

group of homeless is very difficult to contact so the interviews completed at the shower program were included in the count data.

While interviewers do not go to the hospitals and detox centres on the day of the Count, the Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health authorities did provide the research team with the number of people without fixed addresses staying in their hospitals and detox centres on the night of the count. These numbers were not included in the total number of homeless found on count day, as there is no way of ensuring that these people were not interviewed at a later point in the day. These numbers are included in Appendix C.

#### Changes in the Daytime Approach:

The survey questionnaires collected virtually the same data to facilitate comparison, although there were some changes in wording to improve clarity. Some new questions were added as identified by the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count Committee.

Other changes that would affect the scope or reach of the daytime count included:

- more volunteers (approximately 800 volunteers were recruited for 2008 compared to 300 in 2005 and less than 100 in 2002. The larger number of volunteer interviewers for the daytime count meant that all the identified locations could be covered during some part of the day and that the volunteers could provide 3 hours, on average, for their shift on March 11<sup>th</sup> compared to close to 8 hours, on average, in 2002.) However, there were actually too many volunteers in some locations and some were not able to obtain a shift.
- more locations (additional congregating areas and trails out of parks were identified as potential locations beyond those known in 2002 and expanded on those identified in 2005)
- continuing with Aboriginal interviewers and identification of Aboriginal locations as was initiated in 2005
- some volunteers were asked to return to 24 hour shelters to see if people had arrived during the day that were not counted the night of March 10<sup>th</sup> or during the day on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Three Vancouver shelters were visited late in the day on March 11<sup>th</sup> and in all three cases there were no persons who had been admitted that day.

#### Item Non-response

The item non-response for the survey questions ranged from negligible for age and gender, to between 8 and 13% for most of the other questions. To facilitate comparison, the tabulation is made only for complete records for each of the specific characteristics. *It is important to note that the characteristics of those shelter clients who did not respond to a question may not necessarily be proportionally identical as those who did respond.*

There were 154 sheltered homeless individuals for whom complete records are not available, but who stayed in a shelter count night. It appeared that obtaining the participation of shelters was more difficult this year. Some facilities ended up asking shelter clients to complete the

forms themselves in spite of the offer by the research team to provide volunteers to complete the interviews. This may be directly related to the survey format requiring interviews compared to having the shelter providers fill in a spreadsheet as was done in the past or that the busy staff at the shelters felt they did not have the time to complete the interviews.

However, item non-response improved this year for shelter clients, likely due to the introduction of night time volunteer interviewers at large shelters. For example the number of sheltered homeless that did not identify if they were Aboriginal decreased from 274 in 2005 to 156 sheltered homeless in 2008. Given the difficulties experienced in all three homeless counts in obtaining demographic information on the sheltered homeless it is strongly suggested that a BC Housing database for reporting on sheltered homeless be used in the next count.

A new question was asked on both the nighttime and daytime surveys about the number of times respondents had stayed in shelters in the past year, but the results of these questions could not be used. Many people stated the number of days instead of the number of times or put a non-specific number (such as “a few”) and the results could not be properly categorized. It is likely that people’s recall is not good enough to obtain reliable results to this kind of question. Again, a shelter database should produce this information easily.

One factor that might have increased the number of refusals in the daytime count is the fact that the Count occurred the Tuesday after the shift to Pacific Standard Time, so potential survey respondents might have been more tired than usual.

## **Extent of coverage**

The nighttime enumeration was essentially complete; however three transition houses with a total of 30 beds did not participate in the count. This will result in an under-representation of women and children as these facilities serve women and their children fleeing violence.

If these three facilities were full on the night of March 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>, it would add an additional 30 individuals to the number of homeless in the region.

A very thorough inventory of all locations throughout the region was compiled for the daytime component using the knowledge of local experts. As well, the interviewers were recruited from people who worked regularly with the homeless, and could add locations, if some were missing from the list. Conceptually, if all of the locations were enumerated during all hours of March 11<sup>th</sup>, then the number of homeless missed would be extremely low. Under coverage would only come from having missed a location with homeless people that went nowhere else that day. Also, as enumeration progressed throughout the day, more and more people approached would fall into the ‘previously screened’ category, to the point where no new homeless people were being identified at the end of the day.

It was, of course, not feasible to enumerate all locations during all hours. The number of people screened and enumerated at each meal line-up location was made to coincide with the peak hours of operation. At peak times, it might not be possible to screen all persons waiting

for a meal. Accordingly, interviewers were also asked to count or estimate the number they were not able to screen. Peak hour enumeration was also adopted for bottle depots and drop-ins; other congregating areas (parks, streets, etc.) were scheduled to fill in the remaining time. Outside of the meal program locations, interviewers were not asked to keep track of persons they might have, but were unable to screen.

Notwithstanding the care that went into maximizing the coverage of the homeless, some were missed and cannot be estimated. These fall into three categories:

- **Those who could not be enumerated by the methodology** – (i.e. those that were not sheltered on March 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> and who passed through none of the listed locations during their peak enumeration hours). These are likely to be people who sleep ‘rough’ and who avoid contact with services, at least during peak hours. They could only be found in the early morning hours at their isolated sleeping locations (something that was considered not appropriate and a violation of privacy). The other group that falls into this category is those staying temporarily with friends on March 10/11 and who had no need for services. The size of this group is unknown.
- **Those who slipped through the screening** –In some cases, volunteers ran out of time to screen everyone in a line-up and it is not known how many of these would have been enumerated at some other time on the day of the count.
- **Those who refused to participate or to be interviewed** (in the daytime).

## Limitations

In summary, the following are reasons why the numbers reported for the 2008 Count reflect an undercount of the actual homeless in Metro Vancouver on March 11th:

- time and place issues on the particular day the count was undertaken e.g.
- detox/and recovery houses not included in count due to budgetary reasons
- sofa surfers undercount
- hospital and jail not included in count due to budgetary reasons
- shelter enumeration non-response for some questions
- three missing nighttime facilities
- people refusing to be interviewed
- inability to screen everyone at some daytime locations with line-ups

## Appendix C – Homeless People who Stayed in Hospitals and Detox Facilities, Reported as Part of MCFD Caseloads, and Homeless Students in North Shore Public Schools

In an attempt to understand the number of homeless people who may have stayed in facilities not included in the count due to budgetary reasons, the Homeless Count Coordinating Committee asked Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health Regions to provide information on the number of homeless people (people with no fixed address) staying in their hospitals and detox facilities overnight on the night of the count (March 10/11<sup>th</sup>).

On the night of March 10/11, 2008, Fraser Health reported that they had 12 people without a fixed address admitted to their hospitals and 2 people staying in one of their detox facilities. Vancouver Coastal Health reported that they had 37 people admitted to their hospitals without a fixed address and 47 people staying in their detox facilities on the night of the count. This represents a total of 98 homeless individuals.

Table C1 – Homeless People in Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health Hospitals and Detox Facilities on the night of March 10, 2008

<b>Location</b>	<b>Fraser Health</b>	<b>Vancouver Coastal Health</b>	<b>Total</b>
Hospital	12	37	49
Detox	2	47	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>98</b>

These numbers cannot be included in the overall number of homeless people enumerated on count day, as it is not known whether the people identified by the health authorities were also enumerated by volunteers during count day in another location. Some homeless individuals that were enumerated did indeed indicate that they stayed in a detox or recovery facility the night before.

These numbers are simply meant to show that these facilities do indeed accommodate homeless people and to give a sense of the order of magnitude. In future, it would be worthwhile adding these facilities to the nighttime component of the count. It also further demonstrates that many homeless people may not be counted.

As previously mentioned, homeless youth are very difficult to find during a point-in-time count, mostly because youth tend to be part of the hidden homeless. The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness consulted with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to determine the number of homeless youth that were part of the MCFD caseloads in the region. Again, this number cannot be included in the total homeless count numbers, as it is possible that some of these youth were enumerated in

another location on the day of the count. MCFD reported that they had 51 homeless youth on their caseload in the Vancouver Coastal Health Region and 16 homeless youth in the Fraser Health Region on the day of March 11, 2008.

A volunteer also went around to the North Shore public schools on the day of the count and asked the school administrators to fill in the survey questions on behalf of their homeless students. Again, the information collected through this effort cannot be included in the total number of homeless people enumerated on count day because we have no way to ensure that the students counted through this effort were not also enumerated in another location during the 24 hour period. North Shore public schools reported a total of 37 homeless students.

## Appendix D – Local Context

One of the factors that can impact the results of a homeless count is the number of volunteers, which influences the extent of coverage. Volunteer recruitment for the 2008 Count was extremely successful; over 800 volunteers participated, in comparison to 300 volunteers in 2005, and volunteer recruitment targets were met or exceeded in all of the sub-regions. The large numbers, while demonstrating keen interest in the homeless and the count, proved difficult to coordinate.

Even with the large numbers of volunteers and partially due to some coordination challenges, it was impossible to cover the entire geography of the Metro Vancouver area completely. In areas like Vancouver's Downtown East Side, volunteers were assigned to individual streets and blocks, ensuring full coverage of those areas. However, even in Vancouver, volunteers were concentrated in neighbourhoods where homeless people were more likely to be found. For example, while the banks of the Fraser River were covered, many areas of South Vancouver were not. In more sparsely populated municipalities, volunteers were assigned to areas where the homeless were more likely to congregate, including identified campsites, service sites, meal programs, etc. Shift times were set to correspond to the times where the homeless were likely to be found in particular areas. For example, volunteers were posted at the "exits" to Stanley Park at dawn to intercept the park campers as they emerged from the park. In order to provide the best possible coverage, the Count coordinators worked with local police, RCMP, service providers, outreach workers, municipal parks and bylaws staff to identify locations where the homeless might be found. These service providers were also asked to refrain from moving the homeless on in the days prior to the Count. Despite this work, it is impossible to identify all the locations where homeless people might hide, and in fact, there were several instances where homeless people had been located in the weeks prior to the Count, but they could not be found on the day of the Count.

Volunteer recruitment targets were set based on population, and number of count sites identified. Targets for recruitment were met or exceeded in all count sub-regions.

Table D1 – Volunteers by Area

Municipality	2006 Population	% of Metro Vancouver Population (2006)	Volunteer Recruitment Target	Actual No. of Volunteers 2008	No. Street or Service Homeless Found
Burnaby	202,799	9.6%	29	58	77
New Westminster	58,549	2.8%	20	48	72
Tri-Cities	194,764	9.2%	28	45	77
Langley	117,332	5.5%	17	42	74
Ridge Meadows	84,572	4.0%	12	18	40
North Shore	169,858	8.0%	24	60	67
Richmond	174,461	8.2%	25	51	35
Surrey/Delta/White Rock	344,319	16.3%	72	125	308
Aboriginal, Surrey			35	35	
Vancouver	578,041	27.3%	82	250	786
UBC, Spirit Park	11,050	0.5%	2	2	incl. above
Aboriginal, Vancouver			35	36	
Other <sup>37</sup>		8.6%	0	0	
TOTAL	2,116,581	100.0%	381	770	1547
Shelter volunteers			36	36	
Grand Total			417	806	

Area coordinators provided their impressions on how the count proceeded in their area, as well as any limitations or problems that occurred. These can be used by readers to better understand the municipal and sub-regional level figures, as well as overall figures. They can also be used to inform future count planning. It appears there were no serious issues in any of the local areas that would have affected the count figures.

### Vancouver

Vancouver is relatively compact, and there are more services for the homeless here, making them relatively easy to find. Volunteers at several sites reported being unable to locate homeless people in their “regular” spots, or noticed fewer on certain streets on count day. At three of the count sites (First United at 320 E Hastings, Sisters of the Atonement, Cordova and Dunlevy, the Dugout, Alexander and Carrall), volunteers reported being unable to interview everyone in the line ups because of large numbers, or they reported that there were still people who had not been interviewed when the last shift of the evening came to an end at 11 p.m. Other areas that could have used more coverage include bottle depots and the Kerrisdale area. Given the large volume of locations and volunteers in this city, it is suggested that Vancouver be divided into sub-areas with separate area coordinators for the next count.

Interviewers at UBC reported fewer homeless people than last count due to large volumes of construction disturbing sleeping sites and some instances where known homeless persons have been moved off campus for a variety of reasons.

<sup>37</sup> Includes Lions Bay, Bowen Island, Anmore, and Belcarra

**Ridge/Meadows**

The areas where the homeless congregated were relatively compact and the outreach workers had excellent intelligence on the homeless population. The local coordinator had a suspicion on count day that several of the homeless camps had been roused in the day or two before the count, but was unable to confirm. However, since the outreach workers know most of the homeless they were able to find them for interviews at other locations.

**Langley**

Langley had a larger number of volunteers than in 2005 which proved important in covering such a large area, as well as the involvement of the outreach workers.

**Tri-Cities**

The Tri-Cities benefited from having a very active homeless task force with a large membership and a chairperson who agreed to be the local coordinator and did a terrific job from beginning to end. The sub-region also benefited in that the organization that employs the homeless outreach workers had recently completed a six month outreach project that identified approximately 140 homeless people in the Tri-Cities and had developed relationships with many.

**Burnaby**

The Burnaby homeless task force has been active since the last count in 2005 and this was an advantage in organizing the 2008 count. The Burnaby coordinator was able to recruit more than enough volunteers.

**New Westminster**

The local coordinator decided to use a centralized organizing model whereby all volunteers began and ended their shifts at the coordinating centre. This appears to have worked very well. The shelter in New Westminster neglected to interview the homeless on the night of March 10<sup>th</sup>, but interviewed the clients who were still in the shelter the next day.

**North Shore**

Involvement of the homeless outreach workers was valuable in locating the homeless on count day. The Salvation Army hosted a meal for the homeless, as they had done on count day in 2005, and this helped to draw people to that Count site. This year, the Salvation Army also hosted a foot care clinic for the homeless on the day of the count. Bottle depots proved to be good places to locate homeless people, and some of the volunteers from the Salvation Army site were reassigned to the bottle depots to ensure full coverage. Given the geography of the North Shore, there were particular difficulties with counting individuals who are camping or otherwise hidden. A few recently-vacated camps were found on count day. Information was collected on homeless youth through the school counselors in North and West Vancouver, but these numbers were not included in the overall Count numbers, as there was no way to ensure that youth were not double counted. The total number was provided in Appendix C for context purposes only.

**Richmond**

A mobile sandwich van delivering sandwiches to the homeless proved to be a positive draw and helped the volunteers to find homeless people on the day of the Count. While night shift staff at the airport noted that homeless people did stay at the airport overnight on a regular basis, none were found and interviewed for the Count.

**Surrey/Delta/White Rock**

A number of special meal programs were offered on count day to encourage the homeless to attend at count sites. For the purposes of the Count, Surrey was divided into four sub-areas, with local coordinators in each area that were familiar with the area and the homeless population in their particular areas. This ensured good coverage. Surrey coordinators also used a centralized organizing model whereby all volunteers began and ended their shifts at a coordinating centre, which worked well.

# Appendix E – Daytime Questionnaire



## DAYTIME QUESTIONNAIRE

PEOPLE OBSERVED TO BE HOMELESS BUT NOT INTERVIEWED

Perc'd Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Perc'd Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Nearest Intersection or Facility to where found: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Location (Nearest Intersection or Facility) \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you already answered this survey?

- yes           END
- no             GO TO 2
- no answer    END

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you have a place you pay rent for?

- yes            END
- no             GO TO 3
- no answer    GO TO 3

3. Where did you stay last night?

- Outside                                   GO TO 4
- Someone else's place                 GO TO 4
- Car/garage/public building           GO TO 4
- Recovery house                         GO TO 4
- Safe house                               END
- Detox                                     GO TO 4
- Transition house                        END
- Shelter                                  END
- Own place inside (specify \_\_\_\_\_)   END
- Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)           GO TO 4
- No answer                               END

### START SURVEY

4. How long have you been without a place of your own?  
 \_\_\_\_\_days   \_\_\_\_\_weeks   \_\_\_\_\_months   \_\_\_\_\_years

5. How long have you lived in this city?  
 \_\_\_\_\_days   \_\_\_\_\_weeks   \_\_\_\_\_months   \_\_\_\_\_years

6. Where do you call home? (probe for city \_\_\_\_\_)

7. What are the main reasons you do not have your own place?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your age/year of birth? age \_\_\_\_\_ yr of birth \_\_\_\_\_

9. (Do not ask) Observed Gender  
 male    female    transgendered    not seen

10. Why did you not stay in an emergency shelter, safe house or transition house last night?

- Turned away - Full
- Turned away - Inappropriate
- Didn't know about them
- Dislike (specify \_\_\_\_\_)
- Couldn't get to it/ None in area
- Able to stay with friend
- Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

11. Have you stayed at a shelter in this past 12 months?  
 yes    no

If yes, how many different times in the 12 months have you stayed at a shelter in Metro Vancouver? \_\_\_\_\_

12. I'd like to ask you about who is with you today.  
 Are you: (read list)

- Alone
- With a partner/spouse
- With child(ren) Age(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- With a pet
- Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

13. Do you consider yourself to be an Aboriginal person?    yes    no    no answer

14. What ethnic or cultural groups do you identify yourself with? (Canadian, French, English, Salish, Metis, Chinese, African, Mexican, etc.)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

15. Where do you get your money from?

(Check all that apply) If more than one source— Ask what is the major source of your income? (Place \* by the major source)

- Welfare/IA
- Disability benefit
- EI
- OAS / GIS
- No Income
- Employment (FT)
- Employment (PT/Casual)
- Panhandling
- Binning/Bottle collecting
- Financial support from family
- Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

16. Do you have the following health problems? (Read list)

- |                     |                              |                             |                          |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Medical Condition   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Physical Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Addiction           | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mental illness      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

17. What health services have you used in the past 12 months? (Check all that apply)

- Emergency department
- Ambulance
- Hospital (non-emergency)
- Health Clinic
- Dental clinic or dentist
- Mental health services
- Addiction services
- Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)
- None

### END - THANK YOU

# Appendix F – Night-time Questionnaire



**HOMELESS  
COUNT  
2008**

## NIGHTTIME QUESTIONNAIRE

PEOPLE OBSERVED BUT DECLINED INTERVIEW

Perc'd Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Perc'd Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

### START SURVEY

1. How long have you been without a place of your own?  
 \_\_\_days \_\_\_weeks \_\_\_months \_\_\_years

2. How long have you lived in this city?  
 \_\_\_days \_\_\_weeks \_\_\_months \_\_\_years

3. Where do you call home?(probe for city)\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are the main reasons you do not have your own place?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your age/year of birth? age \_\_\_\_\_yr of birth\_\_\_\_\_

6. (Do not ask) Observed Gender  
 male  female  transgendered  not seen

7. Including tonight, how many nights in a row have you stayed at this shelter? \_\_\_\_\_ nights.

8. How many different times in the past 12 months have you stayed at this or another shelter in Metro Vancouver?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9. I'd like to ask you about who is with you today.  
 Are you: (read list)  
 Alone  
 With a partner/spouse  
 With child(ren) Age(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 With a pet  
 Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)

10. Do you consider yourself to be an Aboriginal person?  yes  no  no answer

11. What ethnic or cultural groups do you identify yourself with? (Canadian, French, English, Salish, Metis, Chinese, African, Mexican, etc.)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

12. Where do you get your money from?  
 (Check all that apply) If more than one source- Ask what is the major source of your income? (Place \* by the major source)

- Welfare/IA
- Disability benefit
- EI
- OAS / GIS
- No Income
- Employment (FT)
- Employment (PT/Casual)
- Panhandling
- Binning/Bottle collecting
- Financial support from family
- Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

13. Do you have the following health problems?  
 (Read list)

- |                     |                              |                             |                          |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Medical condition   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Physical Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Addiction           | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mental Illness      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. What health services have you used in the past 12 months? (Check all that apply)

- Emergency department
- Ambulance
- Hospital (non-emergency)
- Health Clinic
- Dental clinic or dentist
- Mental health services
- Addiction services
- Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)
- None

**END OF SURVEY - THANK YOU**