

## **Media Release & Backgrounder for 2023 Point in Time Homeless Count.**

August 3, 2023

### **The Lived Experts Advisory urges local leaders to use the 2023 Point in Time Count to end mass homelessness in our region.**

**Victoria, B.C. / Ləkʷəŋən Territory** — We are living in a community frozen in inaction. One that has yet to make significant progress on solving homelessness.

This revelation comes with yesterday's release of the 2023 Point In Time Homeless Count and Survey which, combined with results from the 2018, 2020, and 2023 PIT counts, offers discouraging news that the scope of homelessness is not diminishing.

In 2018, the PIT count found a minimum of 1,525 individuals homeless in Victoria. Fast forward to 2020, and that number remained virtually unchanged at 1,523. **As for 2023, the count stands at 1,665.** <sup>1</sup>

"All experiences of homelessness are fraught with danger and represent a humanitarian crisis on par with a flood or a forest fire. This demands an urgent, committed response," said Michelle Ferris, her voice echoing the lived experience of too many.

Ferris is part of a special assembly of Lived Experts — individuals who have been homeless and intimately know the reality of homelessness.

Despite our best efforts, the number of people living in limbo — unsheltered, couch-surfing, or living in temporary and unsafe spaces such as shelters and transitional programs — continues to grow. This shouldn't be a surprise as the number of homes built to transition people out of homelessness has never been more than a fraction of the homes required.

In an unsettling pattern, more than half of those surveyed had their first brush with homelessness when they were under the age of 24, a grim statistic that has not budged since the 2018 survey.

Hilary Marks, a member of the Lived Experts Committee, decries a harmful myth that perpetuates in our society: "Many suggest people choose to be homeless — an absurd lie that lends to the mistreatment and neglect of those experiencing homelessness. More than half of these individuals first experienced homelessness as youth. No child would choose this path."

---

<sup>1</sup> Participation in PIT counts vary from event to event, so enumeration results are not comparable. Each year the PIT count is done, it gives us the *minimum* estimate of the number of people who are experiencing homelessness. PIT counts are understood to be undercounts of homelessness.

Additionally, the consistent over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness is a stark reminder of our failure to act quickly on recommendations from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report. A report that emphasizes housing no less than 299 times.

Jennifer Johnson, an Indigenous woman, shares her personal story.

“I was torn away from my land, my culture, my family due to colonial policies like foster care and rampant racism. Indigenous-led housing initiatives offer me a path to reconnection with my Indigenous roots. Indigenous-led housing works. It's time to offer it to all those Indigenous people who are homeless.”

There's a count of people who are homeless, but there should really be a count of homes that rent for \$500 a month.

There's only one number that really matters in this story, according to experts, that should be measured, and it's 10,000.

The Lived Experts Committee call upon leaders to work together. They're asking Premier David Eby, Housing Minister Ravi Kahlon, the Capital Regional District, and the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region (formerly the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness) — **to build 10,000 homes over the next five years that rent for \$500 per month**, to ensure the Capital Region becomes the first region in Canada to prevent and end mass homelessness.

## **Media Contacts**

- Hillary Marks, Member, Lived Experts Advisory Committee on Homelessness (250) 812-9343
- Michelle Ferris, Member, Lived Experts Advisory Committee on Homelessness; (236) 508-8389 (available on and after Monday, August 7, 2023)

## **Backgrounder**

Backgrounder to follow, with snapshots of the Lived Experts Committee's Stories and facts about homelessness in Greater Victoria. FAQs.

## **Members of the Lived Experts Advisory Committee on Homelessness**

La Vonn Cham  
Michelle Ferris  
Jennifer Johnson  
Hilary Marks  
Shae Shwede

# BACKGROUND

## Key Facts

1. The homelessness crisis in Greater Victoria remains largely unchanged over the last five years, with the current Count of the number of people experiencing homelessness at 1,665 in 2023.
2. Participation in PIT counts vary from event to event, so enumeration results are not comparable. Each year the PIT count is done, it gives us the minimum estimate of the number of people who are experiencing homelessness. PIT counts are understood to be undercounts of homelessness.
3. More than half of the individuals experiencing homelessness had their first encounter with homelessness under the age of 24, and this statistic hasn't significantly changed since 2018.
4. More than one third of individuals experiencing homelessness are Indigenous, a statistic that is also unchanging. The consistent over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness highlights a failure to act promptly on recommendations from the Missing and Murdered Women and Girls report and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
5. In the Capital Region, a staggering 10,725 renter households are spending *at least* half of their income on rent, putting them at risk of homelessness. Some 93 per cent of those households are in the lowest income group. (Source: Canadian Rental Housing Index.)
6. In 2016, in Greater Victoria, there was deficit of 16,865 homes that rent for less than \$875 each month. (Source: Filling the Gap: Analytics to Support Housing for All in Greater Victoria.)
7. Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing do not provide security of tenure and lack necessary qualities for individuals to safely exit homelessness. Residing in shelters and transitional housing is a form of homelessness.
8. The Lived Experts Advisory Committee has urged regional leaders to construct 10,000 homes over five years that rent for \$500 per month, to effectively end mass homelessness in Greater Victoria.
9. The Lived Experts Advisory for the PIT Count were convened by The Housing Justice Project at UVIC and the Community Social Planning Council.

## FAQS & Key Concepts

### WHY \$500 PER MONTH?

In July 2023, the maximum shelter allowance for people receiving Provincial Disability Assistance was raised to \$500 monthly. The majority of people experiencing homelessness have a disability. Additionally, homelessness causes many disabling conditions. It is common for people exiting homelessness to rely on Provincial Disability Assistance for income. This \$500 each month is the amount of money allocated for total shelter costs by the provincial government.

### WHY 10,000 HOMES THAT RENT FOR \$500 PER MONTH?

In 2016, in Greater Victoria, there was deficit of 16,865 homes that rent for less than \$875 each month. A staggering 10,725 renter households are spending *at least* half their income on rent, putting them at risk of homelessness. Some 93 per cent of those households are in the lowest income group.

We conservatively estimate that an infusion of 10,000 homes that rent for \$500 each month is required to prevent new people from entering homelessness and to exit everyone from homelessness.

Source: [https://communitycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CSPC\\_Housing-Needs-Report\\_2022\\_Final\\_Oct12\\_2022-1.pdf](https://communitycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CSPC_Housing-Needs-Report_2022_Final_Oct12_2022-1.pdf)

### DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness defines homelessness in Canada as the inability of an individual, family, or community to access or acquire stable, safe, permanent, and appropriate housing.

**Homelessness is not a state of being**, and at different points in time, people may experience the following types of homelessness:

1. **Unsheltered or Absolutely Homeless:** including those living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.
2. **Emergency Sheltered:** including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence.
3. **Provisionally Accommodated:** referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks the security of tenure. Temporary accommodation may include residential facilities owned and operated by Island Health, temporary supportive housing such as the hotels leased and purchased by BC Housing in 2020/2021, or

couch-surfing for those who do not have the means to secure permanent housing in the future.

The Lived Experts Advisory Committee would like to emphasize that all of the above types of homelessness are dangerous and destabilizing. Being discharged from treatment programs, transitional housing, and temporary pandemic hotels is harmful. Shelters and transitional programs do not provide the security of tenure required to safely and permanently exit homelessness.

Source: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf>

## **INDIGENOUS DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS**

The definition of Indigenous Homelessness is broader than not having a safe place to call home. Indigenous Homelessness includes collective experiences of being disconnected from land, family, community, culture, and Indigenous identity. The definition of Indigenous Homelessness recognizes that ongoing colonialism, implemented via Canadian public policies including the Indian Act, the 'Sixties Scoop,' and the current child welfare system, are the most common and significant contributing factors to Indigenous Homelessness.

Source: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>

## **HOUSING FIRST MODEL IN FINLAND**

Finland, like Canada, conducts semi-annual Point In Time Homeless Counts which allows trends in homelessness to be explored over time. Finland conducted its first homeless count in 1987, whereas the federal government of Canada didn't get involved until 2015. **Another major difference is that Finland has used the data to drive the development of a social housing program and homelessness services to significantly drive down the numbers of people experiencing homelessness.**

The first phase of the Finnish homeless strategy (2008 - 2011) replaced and converted emergency shelters and institutional sheltering sites with supported housing units that offered permanent tenancies. This phase focussed on the production of social housing and the implementation of Housing First: housing offered with no preconditions required, choice offered to the individual with a harm reduction approach. The second phase of the Finnish homelessness strategy (2012 - 2015) expanded into homelessness prevention and hidden homelessness. Finland is now in the third phase of its homeless strategy, with a goal to eradicate homelessness by 2027 using the main strategy of increasing social housing production quotas from 20 per cent to 35 per cent.

The results?

Experiences of long-term homelessness fell by 28 per cent between 2008 and 2011 and Finland is the only country in the EU where overall homelessness is on the decline.

Finland has proven it is possible to significantly reduce homelessness in a seven-year time frame, especially long-term homelessness among adults with complex needs.

Over a 35-year span, Finland has reduced homelessness from just over 18,000 individuals to less than 4,000.

**TLDR. Finland has used its Point in Time Counts to drive down homelessness.**

Sources:

<https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/strategy-review-19029039682682325644.pdf>

<https://communitycouncil.ca/homelessness-housing-and-human-rights-a-look-at-housing-first-approach/>

