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Vancouver Homeless Count 2015

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1 Key Findings

The Vancouver Homeless Count conducted on March 24, 2015 is the ninth homeless count measuring the number of homeless people in Vancouver. 1,746 homeless persons were counted, comprised of 488 unsheltered homeless persons and 1,258 sheltered homeless.

The total number of homeless persons counted in Vancouver is up from 2013, which marked the end of a three-year plateau, where the homeless population stayed relatively stable in Vancouver. 2014 saw an increase in the homeless population, where the total grew from 1,600 to 1,803. The 2015 Homeless Count shows a reduction from 2014.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND TRENDS

The count shows that Vancouver's homeless continue to be disproportionately male, Aboriginal, middle-aged and older, and in poor health. Overall, the population continues to age and health conditions remain poor. The number and proportion of older individuals (55+) in the homeless population is higher than in all other previous years except 2013, with 222 individuals representing 19% of the total homeless population. Overall this shows an increase over 2005, when older individuals were 10% of the homeless population.

In 2015, children and youth (aged 24 and under) represent a lower proportion of the population (17%) than in 2014 (21%); however, this is still higher than or equal to all other years. The absolute number of children and youth has increased from 179 children and youth in 2005, to 199 in 2015.

In 2015 the Aboriginal population is still over-represented among the homeless, representing 32% of the homeless population and only 2.5% of Vancouver's population.¹ The incidence of Aboriginal identity is higher among the unsheltered population (35%) than the sheltered population (29%). The share of Aboriginal persons within the homeless population has ranged from a high of 38% in 2008 to a low of 30% in 2013. The number of Aboriginal homeless persons counted in 2015 was 342.

The 2015 Count results show that Vancouver's homeless are in poorer health today than 2005, but faring better than they did in 2013. In 2013, 58% reported two or more health conditions; this is now down to 54%. Eighty-one percent of the homeless population reports one or more health conditions; this is up from 2005 (74%), but a slight decline since 2013 (84%). Rates of physical disability (35%) and medical conditions (46%) are at their highest since 2008, while addiction/substance use (58%) and mental illness (42%) also continue to trend high. The data suggest that while the sheltered population were more likely to have no health conditions (21% for sheltered, 16% for unsheltered), the unsheltered population was also more likely to have two or more health conditions (52% for sheltered compared to 54% for unsheltered).

A larger share of the homeless population reported income from OAS/GIS/CPP and other pensions - 6% in 2015, up from 2% in 2008, which may be related to the aging of the

¹ Statistics Canada. Community Profile. City of Vancouver. 2011 Census.

homeless population. Additionally, while a high proportion of the homeless population relies on income assistance (37%), this has decreased from its peak in 2010 (47%), while reliance on disability benefits has increased from 20% in 2011 to 26% in 2015.

One year or more is the most common length of time respondents reported being homeless (45%), followed by one month to six months (30%). The figures also show that 114 people were newly homeless in the month before the count. Responses vary among the sheltered and unsheltered homeless. Among the sheltered population, an equal proportion of the population (36%) had been homeless for 1-6 months and 1 year or more. Fifty-seven percent of the unsheltered population have been homeless for 1 year or more.

HEAT/WINTER RESPONSE SHELTER CLIENTS

Compared with Other Shelter clients, individuals counted in the HEAT/Winter Response Shelters were more likely to:

- Be male
- Between the ages of 25 and 54 years
- Be of Aboriginal identity
- Be receiving income assistance or employed
- Have one or more health conditions, though it is less likely that one of these is a mental illness, and more likely that this is an addiction/substance use

Thus, HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients fit the unsheltered profile more closely in terms of gender, age Aboriginal identity and incidence of addiction/substance use than do clients of Other Shelters.

2 Introduction

This document presents the findings of the 2015 Vancouver Homeless Count. It provides an estimate of the Vancouver's homeless population *on one day* (March 24, 2015). The count is therefore a 'point-in-time' count that provides a snapshot of homelessness in a 24-hour period. This picture can fluctuate over the course of the year, but represents the best method for collecting data on homelessness at this single point in time. The City of Vancouver commissioned this report to better understand the characteristics of the population and trends in Vancouver since 2005.

2.1 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the count is to provide:

- an updated enumeration of homeless persons in Vancouver;
- a demographic profile of those enumerated on the day of the count; and,
- an analysis of trends in homelessness since 2005;
- a profile of the difference between HEAT/Winter Shelter users and Other Shelter users.

2.2 Definitions

Homelessness - The 2015 Homeless Count uses the same definition of homelessness used in previous City and regional homeless counts. 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, etc.; or,
- were temporarily accommodated in emergency shelters, safe houses for youth, transition houses for women and their children fleeing violence, or detox facilities; or,
- were staying at someone else's place (friend or family) where they did not pay rent (i.e. sofa surfing), or
- were people with no fixed address found at hospitals or jails.

For example, someone who stayed in a garage would be considered homeless if they did not pay rent, even if they considered the garage to be their home. Emergency shelters are not considered permanent housing, thus shelter clients are included in the homeless population.

Someone who stayed at a friend's place where they did not pay rent (i.e. a sofa surfer) was also homeless for the purpose of this count, because they had no security of tenure.

People who stayed at someone else's place were included in the count *if we found them* (included as part of the unsheltered homeless population). People who stay at someone else's place as a population are undercounted in most homeless counts because they are difficult to find and enumerate. Similarly, families staying with other families and not paying rent were only included in the count if they visited a place where they could be counted. Someone paying rent in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) building is not considered homeless for the purpose of this count.

Unsheltered homeless - People who had no physical shelter, but stayed outside, on the street, in doorways, parkades, parks and on beaches, and people who stayed at a someone's place where they did not pay rent (sofa surfing).

Sheltered homeless - Stayed in an emergency shelter, safe house, transition house for women and children fleeing violence, or detox facility and people with No Fixed Address (NFA) staying overnight in hospitals or jails.

Children - Young people under the age of 19 who were accompanied by a parent during the count.

Youth - Young people under the age of 25 who were not accompanied by a parent during the count.

Seniors - People aged 55 years and older.

HEAT Shelters - Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) Shelters are temporary low barrier shelters in place until planned permanent supportive housing is opened.

Winter Response Shelters - Winter Response Shelters are temporary low barrier winter shelters operating in the City of Vancouver from November to April each winter.

Year-round Shelters - Permanent shelters funded by BC Housing and others, open year-round. Offer 24/7 service, meals and other services including case management.

Seasonal Shelters - Formerly known as 'cold/wet weather' services, these shelters typically open from November through March. Support services are on a more limited basis than in year-round service.

Extreme Weather Response (EWR) - EWR shelters provide extra overnight shelter spaces during periods of extreme weather. They are dependent on volunteers and have limited support services. No EWR shelters operated on the night of the Homeless Count in 2015.

Other Shelters - The term 'Other Shelters' is used in Section 6 to group all non-HEAT/Winter Response Shelters. Normally this would include all year-round, seasonal and EWR shelters, though none of the EWR shelters were open on March 23rd, 2015.

2.3 Method

The 2015 Vancouver Homeless Count used the same method as past City of Vancouver and regional homeless counts to ensure comparability. It measured homelessness from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm on March 24th, 2012, and consisted of two components to enumerate the sheltered homeless and the unsheltered homeless. For both components there was a prepared list of questions, including screening questions and survey questions that volunteers asked respondents.

Screening Questions

Volunteers began by asking respondents three screening questions designed to avoid double counting the same individual. Screening questions for the unsheltered homeless eliminate those who have already been interviewed, who paid rent, or who stayed in a shelter, safe house, transition house or facility where they were included in the sheltered count. Screening questions for the sheltered homeless ensured they were staying in a shelter that night, and eliminated those who had already been interviewed or who paid rent. People approached are offered a candy or cigarette prior to being asked the three screening questions. This approach ensures there is no incentive for homeless people to complete an interview more than once.

Survey Questions

Following the screening questions were a set of survey questions to elicit demographic and other data. The survey questions for both the sheltered and unsheltered components included six key variables from previous years: age, gender, Aboriginal identity, income source, health conditions and length of time homeless. New survey questions for both components were added in 2015 asking respondents whether they had slept outside in the last 12 months, where else they had stayed in the last 12 months, including whether they had stayed somewhere where they paid daily rent, barter/traded in exchange for a place to stay or did not pay rent, how long they had lived in Vancouver, where they lived previously, whether they felt safe where they were staying the night before, and whether they had served in the Canadian Forces². In 2015, the survey questions for the unsheltered component also asked respondents whether they felt safe where they stayed the night before and whether they had slept in a shelter in the last 12 months.

Enumerating the Sheltered Homeless

The sheltered component of the count enumerated homeless individuals staying at emergency shelters, transition houses, detox facilities and safe houses overnight on March

² The question about serving in the Canadian Forces was included in the 2014 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count surveys, and was included in Vancouver's 2015 count because recent data from Canadian communities suggests that a small but consistent number of Canadian veterans are experiencing homelessness. Asking this question can provide a better understanding of what scope of services homeless veterans may require.

23/24. These individuals are referred to as the 'sheltered homeless'. Three approaches were used to gather information on people staying in shelters.

1. Transition house, safe house and detox facility staff, as well as staff of two emergency shelters, used the sheltered survey to gather the necessary information from clients.
2. Volunteers conducted interviews in the remaining 20 emergency shelters that were open on the night of the count. Included in this group are the HEAT/ Winter Response Shelters and Other Shelters. Volunteers visited these shelters on the evening of March 23rd to interview those staying overnight.³
3. Agencies such as Vancouver Coastal Health, Providence Health Care and the Vancouver Police Department provided anonymous information on individuals staying in their facilities on count night who have No Fixed Address (NFA).

In addition, each shelter, transition house, safe house and detox facility was asked to complete a shelter statistics form to provide the total number of occupants and turnaways on count night. This served as a cross check against the surveys, and helped ensure that all shelter clients were enumerated, including people who were missed by the survey or who refused to participate.

On the evening of March 23, volunteers approached people in the shelters they were assigned to, in order to request an interview. If they agreed to participate, individuals at these locations were asked a series of screening questions to determine if:

- a) they were staying at that shelter for the night of the 23rd/24th;
- b) they had already answered the survey; or,
- c) they had a place they paid rent for.

In past years, the sheltered component has also included a data package from BC Housing. This year, with surveys being conducted at all shelters, the BC Housing data is not included in the analysis. Instead the analysis relies solely on the sample collected through the shelters. The data that BC Housing did provide was used to double check survey data and to ensure there were no anomalous findings. This is the approach used by Metro Vancouver, and 2015 response rates align with the response rates from Metro Vancouver counts historically. Table 1 shows the response rate for the shelter survey in 2015.

Table 1 – Shelter survey response rates

	Number	Percent
Survey respondents	625	54%
Survey non-respondents	538	46%
Total surveyed	1,163	
Not asked (children and NFAs)	95	
Total sheltered population	1,258	

³ No Extreme Weather Shelters (EWRs) were open on March 23rd, 2015.

There are numerous reasons why shelter response rates are not higher. Volunteers are assigned to shelters for a 2 to 3 hour shift, and in many shelters clients may choose to arrive after the volunteers have left. Homeless individuals may also choose not to participate in the survey. The City of Vancouver works each year with shelters to strengthen shelter response rates. However, the shelter response rate conforms to the rates common to the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count.

Enumerating the Unsheltered Homeless

The unsheltered count took place in the daytime hours on March 24. Trained volunteers interviewed homeless people at pre-identified locations such as meal programs, drop-in centres, some social services offices, parks, alleys and public spaces. In addition, staff of some service agencies completed the survey with their clients on count day (e.g. organizations that preferred to have their staff fill out surveys, rather than have volunteers enter the space). People found in the daytime who stayed overnight in these places are referred to as the 'unsheltered homeless'. People who stayed in emergency accommodation the night before were screened out from completing the unsheltered survey.

In advance of the count, the City's Homelessness Services Department, in consultation with outreach staff and others knowledgeable about where the homeless may be found, created a series of maps marking known homeless locations to guide volunteers in their assigned area.

Beginning early in the morning on March 24, volunteers approached people in their assigned areas to request an interview. If they agreed to participate, individuals at these locations were asked a series of screening questions to determine if:

- d) they had already answered the survey; or,
- e) they had a place they paid rent for; or,
- f) they had stayed in emergency accommodation covered by the sheltered component, including hospitals, jails etc.⁴

The interview ended if individuals answered positively to any of the above questions. If the respondent qualified for the survey, the volunteer proceeded to complete the survey with the respondent.

Like in all previous years except 2011 (when volunteers were instructed not to wake homeless individuals), count volunteers on morning shifts were allowed to wake people to interview them.

In addition, some agencies in frequent contact with people who stay at someone else's place where they do not pay rent, particularly youth and women, were asked to complete interviews with these individuals on count day.

⁴ People who stayed in an overnight location covered by the sheltered component (shelter, safe house, transition house, detox facility, or participating NFA facility) were not interviewed.

Volunteer and Count Coordination

Skilled outreach workers, social service personnel or people with relevant experience, including participation in previous counts, were recruited as volunteer interviewers. This helped ensure surveys would be completed as accurately as possible, reduce volunteer training requirements, and limit the number of volunteers needed. All volunteers were required to attend training.

For the unsheltered portion of the count, the City was divided into four areas with an Area Coordinator responsible for each. A Shelter Count Coordinator was responsible for the sheltered portion of the count. The City recruited volunteers and the Coordinators managed training registration, assigned locations, coordinated volunteers on count night/day, and collected and returned completed packages at the end of their shifts. On the night of the shelter count (March 23rd), shelter volunteers went to their assigned shelter, where they picked up count packages. These packages were left with shelter staff and picked up the following day by volunteers. On count day an “area station,” managed by an Area Coordinator, was set up in each of the four areas, allowing for volunteer sign in, pick up and return of completed packages, and the ability to shift volunteers around in case of “no shows.”

2.4 Limitations

All homeless counts underestimate the number of people who are homeless at any one time. The Vancouver count is no different. It did not enumerate every homeless person in the city on March 24, 2015. Although every effort was made to enumerate all homeless people, it was not possible to assign volunteers to all parts of the city for an entire day or interview all homeless people; some parts of the city were missed, some homeless people did not wish to be identified, and some were not possible to find. For example, this method does not count all people who are staying at someone else’s place, as they are, by their very nature, hidden.

It should also be noted that a point-in-time count, such as this, does not reflect the number of people who move in and out of homelessness over a longer period of time, for example, one year. However, the point-in-time approach is consistent with past counts and allows for comparisons.

People who refuse to be interviewed 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. If they are homeless, then they are missed, emphasizing that the count is an undercount. That being said, the count provides the best available information on the size, composition and trends in the homeless population in Vancouver.

Historically, when asking about health conditions, volunteers are requested to observe any medical conditions not reported by individuals surveyed. These have always been included in the totals for all health issues. As such, this year observed or perceived health conditions

have been included in the total. These perceived conditions should be treated with caution. While they offer an opportunity to offset under-reporting of health conditions, volunteers are also not generally trained health practitioners, so observed conditions may not be wholly accurate. Depending on the health condition and sub-population (unsheltered or sheltered), observed conditions accounted for anywhere from 2% to 8% for the unsheltered population and 10% to 20% of unsheltered population responses. For the total population observed conditions account for 8% to 16% of total responses.

For the first time this year, an attempt was made to enumerate the hidden homeless in order to gain a better insight into the needs of this sub-population, a group that is, by its very nature, challenging to identify and therefore difficult to serve. However, the sample size of individuals counted was too small for conclusions to be drawn or comparisons to be made, indicating that the Homeless Count is not a good tool for surveying this population, and that a research approach designed specifically to capture the needs of this community would better serve the hidden homeless. Please see Appendix A for more information.

2.5 Report organization

Section 3 provides the total number of people identified as homeless, the breakdown by type of homelessness, and overall growth trends in Vancouver. Section 4 describes the characteristics of the sheltered and unsheltered homeless in 2015. Section 5 discusses trends in the characteristics of the homeless population since 2005. Section 6 profiles clients of HEAT and Winter Response Shelters.

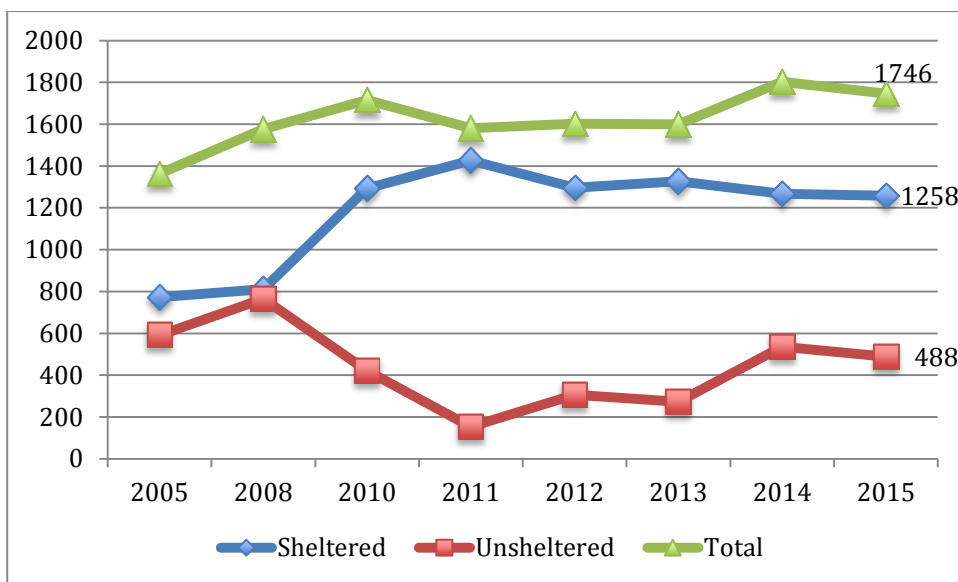
3 Growth and distribution of Vancouver's homeless

There were 1,746 homeless people counted in Vancouver on March 24, 2015, an increase of 2% or 57 persons since 2010, and a small decrease since 2014 (3% or 57 persons).

Figure 1 and Table 2 show the number of homeless counted in Vancouver in 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. After an initial decrease between 2010 and 2013, from 1,715 in 2010 to 1,600 in 2013, the total number climbed again between 2013 and 2014, to 1,803. In 2015, this number decreased somewhat to 1,746.

Homelessness grew at a rate of an average of 5%/year from 2005 to 2008, and an average of 4.5%/year from 2008 to 2010, and decreased by nearly 8% between 2010 and 2011. Between 2011 and 2013 the number of homeless stayed relatively stable. Since 2013 the number has climbed at an average of 4.5% annually. Figure 1 also shows a sharp decline in the number of unsheltered homeless and corresponding rise in the number of sheltered homeless between 2008 and 2011, and then subsequent rise in unsheltered homeless between 2011 and 2015, while the sheltered population stayed relatively stable.

Figure 1 - Vancouver homeless population trends 2005 to 2015



What has changed most since 2011, when the unsheltered population was at its lowest, is the number of unsheltered homeless, going from 154 in 2011 to 488 in 2015, an increase of over 200%. In the same period, the sheltered homeless population has decreased by only 12%.

Table 2 - Vancouver homeless population trends 2005 to 2015

Year	Sheltered homeless	Unsheltered homeless	Total homeless
2005	773	591	1,364
2008	765	811	1,576
2010	1,294	421	1,715
2011	1,427	154	1,581
2012	1,296	306	1,602
2013	1,327	273	1,600
2014	1,267	536	1,803
2015	1,258	488	1,746

In 2015 there were 488 people who stayed outside or at someone else's place where they did not pay rent on the evening before the count, whereas in 2011, this number was only 154, increasing to 306 in 2012. 2014 saw the highest number of unsheltered individuals surveyed since 2008. The number of unsheltered homeless persons remained high (488) in 2015 but is down from 2014.

Figure 2 depicts the changing distribution of Vancouver's homeless population in terms of its sheltered and unsheltered status. Between 2011 and 2013 a high proportion of the homeless population in Vancouver was sheltered (90% in 2011, 81% in 2012 and 83% in 2013). However, in 2014 and 2015 the proportion of homeless persons in shelters declined to 70% in 2014 and 72% in 2015. This still remains higher than the proportion of homeless persons in shelters in 2008 (49%), and is accounted for largely by an increase in the unsheltered homeless population rather than a decrease in the sheltered population.

Figure 2 – Sheltered and unsheltered homeless population trends, 2005-2015

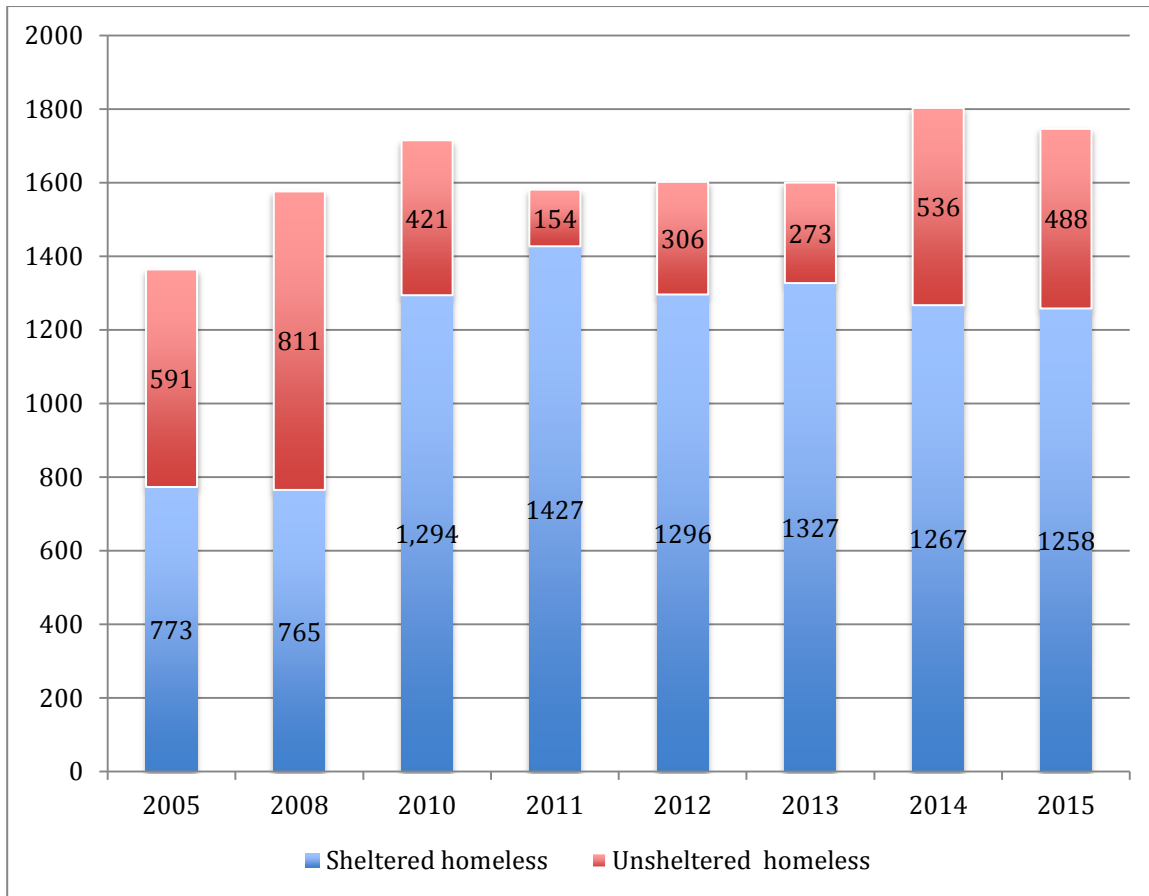


Table 3 shows the changes in homelessness that have occurred in three time periods: 2005 to 2008, 2008 to 2015 and 2013 to 2015. Between 2005 and 2008, there was an increase in the total homeless population from 1,364 to 1,576, or 16% (approximately 5% a year). This included an increase in unsheltered homeless persons, from 591 to 811, or 37%.

Between 2008 and 2015, the homeless population rose by 170 persons, or 10% (approximately 1.5% a year). This included a decline in unsheltered homeless population from 811 to 488, or -77% and an increase in the sheltered population from 765 to 1,258, or 38%.

In recent years, between 2013 and 2015, the homeless population in Vancouver increased by 9% (approximately 4.5% a year). This included a decrease in the sheltered population from 1,327 to 1,258, or -5% and an increase in unsheltered homeless persons from 273 to 488, or 51%.

Table 3 - Change in homelessness by time period

Number of homeless	Change 2005-2008		Change 2008-2015		Change 2013-2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Sheltered homeless	-8	-1%	493	38%	-69	-5%
Unsheltered homeless	220	37%	-323	-77%	215	51%
Total homeless	212	16%	170	10%	146	9%

About 30% (488) of the 1,746 individuals counted in 2015 slept outside or stayed at someone else's place on the night of March 23rd (Table 4). Most of the homeless were adults or unaccompanied youth (1,701 or 97%). Forty-five accompanied children (under 19 years of age, with a parent or guardian) were counted. Of these children, 25 stayed in a year-round shelter, 18 stayed in transition houses and two were found at a hospital.

Table 4 – Sheltered and unsheltered homeless in Vancouver, March 23 (night) and March 24, 2015

Homeless category	Adults and youth		Children		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Sheltered homeless	1,213	71%	45	100%	1,258	72%
Year-round Shelters	865	51%	25	56%	890	51%
HEAT/Winter Response Shelters	218	13%	0	0%	218	12%
Transition houses	29	2%	18	1%	47	3%
Safe houses	8	0%	0	0%	8	0%
Detox facilities	43	3%	0	0%	43	2%
No fixed address (NFA)	50	3%	2	4%	52	3%
Unsheltered homeless	488	29%	0	0%	488	28%
Total homeless	1,701		45		1,746	

Shelter, safe house, transition house and detox facility providers were asked to report how many people were turned away the night of March 23rd, either because the facility was full

or the individual seeking shelter was not appropriate for their facility. In total they reported 191 turnaways in 2015 on March 23rd (Table 5). Individuals turned away are not included in the total count figures, as they may have been enumerated as unsheltered homeless in the daytime component or may have found accommodation in another shelter. The number of turnaways provides some indication of the volume of individuals that shelters are turning away on the night of the count.

Table 5 - Turnaways, night of March 23, 2015

Shelter category	Total Turnaways	
	Number	Percent
Year round shelters	137	72%
Winter Response / HEAT shelters	40	21%
Transition houses	7	4%
Safe houses	2	1%
Detox facilities	5	3%
Total turnaways	191	100%

4 Demographic profile

The following profile presents a demographic picture of the homeless adults and youth counted in Vancouver on March 24th, 2015. Each table shows results for the sheltered and unsheltered homeless as well as for the total homeless population.

As in past counts, response rates varied by question. Generally, for those 1,113 individuals who completed the survey, response rates were quite high. Many sheltered individuals chose not to complete the survey, but were counted by shelter staff on a shelter statistics form submitted to the City. Included on the form was the person's gender and whether they were an adult, youth or accompanied child.

4.1 Gender⁵

Males represented nearly three-quarters of the homeless population counted in Vancouver, and females about one-quarter (Table 6). Females comprise a larger share of the sheltered homeless population (27%) compared to the unsheltered homeless (21%). A total of 15 homeless persons who identified as transgender were counted, 10 of whom were sheltered and 5 unsheltered. There were 8 individuals who identified as 'other' in the unsheltered population.

Table 6 - Gender⁶

Gender	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male	691	72%	366	76%	1,057	74%
Female	255	27%	101	21%	356	25%
Transgender	10	1%	5	1%	15	1%
Other	0	0%	8	2%	8	<1%
Total respondents	956		480		1,436	
Not stated	302		8		310	
Total surveyed	1,258		488		1,746	

⁵ For the first time in 2015 an additional gender category of other was created for individuals who do not identify as male, female or transgender.

⁶ This table has a high response rate due to reporting from shelters and NFA sites.

4.2 Age

Adults aged 45-54 years comprised the largest group of the homeless counted (24%) followed by those age 35-44 years (21%) (Table 7). Overall, adults aged 25-54 years represented slightly less than two-thirds of the city's homeless. There were 199 children and youth under age 25 enumerated during the count, representing 17% of the total. Fifty-nine of these young people were under age 19. Forty-five of these were sheltered children accompanied by a parent or guardian (Table 4) and the remaining 14 were unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, and would be considered youth.

Two hundred twenty two homeless people enumerated on count day were age 55 years or older and most of them were between the ages of 55 and 64 years, and over one-third of these were unsheltered. Vancouver residents 55 and older represent 26% of Vancouver's population, making this group under-represented among the homeless. The sheltered homeless were more likely to be 55 and over (21%) when compared with the unsheltered (17%) whereas the unsheltered population had a higher proportion of young adults, aged 25 to 34 (23%), when compared to the sheltered population (17%).

Table 7 - Age⁷

Age groups	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 19	51	7%	8	2%	59	5%
19-24	78	11%	62	13%	140	12%
25-34	120	17%	108	23%	228	19%
35-44	151	21%	99	21%	250	21%
45-54	168	24%	117	25%	285	24%
55-64	118	17%	46	10%	164	14%
65+	26	4%	32	7%	58	5%
Total respondents	712		472		1,184	
Not stated	4		16		20	
Total surveyed	716		488		1,204	

The median age of Vancouver's homeless population was 42 years (half are younger, half are older), only somewhat older than Vancouver residents in general (with a median age of 39.7 years according to the 2011 Census). The youngest unaccompanied person counted was under 1 year old and the oldest person counted was 87 years of age.

⁷ This table includes data from the survey and from NFA sites on age, including 45 children counted at shelters and NFA sites.

4.3 Aboriginal identity

Table 8 shows that nearly a third (32%) of Vancouver's homeless population identified as Aboriginal. Persons of Aboriginal identity are over-represented among the city's homeless population, compared with the Vancouver population (2.5%). The incidence of Aboriginal identity is higher for the unsheltered homeless (35%) than the sheltered homeless (29%).

Table 8 – Aboriginal identity

Aboriginal identity	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Aboriginal	177	29%	165	35%	342	32%
Not Aboriginal	429	71%	302	65%	731	68%
Total respondents	606		467		1,073	
Not stated	19		21		40	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.4 Length of time homeless

Table 9 displays the results for length of time homeless for the sheltered and the unsheltered homeless. One year or more is the most common length of time homeless reported for both groups, followed by 1-6 months. However, responses vary between the sheltered and unsheltered. Among the sheltered population, individuals were equally likely to have been homeless for 1-6 months or 1 year or more (36% each), while 57% of the unsheltered population has been homeless for 1 year or more. The table also shows that 114 people (sheltered and unsheltered combined) were newly homeless (became homeless in the month before the count), suggesting a flow into homelessness from other precarious housing situations. This figure has fluctuated from a high in 2005 (of 253 individuals) to a low in 2013 (of 76 individuals) (Table 27).

Table 9 – Length of time homeless

	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 1 month	82	13%	32	7%	114	11%
1 month to under 6 months	221	36%	104	23%	325	30%
6 months to under 1 year	87	14%	61	13%	148	14%
1 year or more	219	36%	264	57%	483	45%
Total respondents	609		461		1,070	
Not stated	16		27		43	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.5 Sources of income

Respondents were asked to identify their sources of income, with more than one being possible. Income assistance was the most frequent response (37%), followed by disability benefit (26%) (Table 10). Other common income sources were employment (21%), pension/OAS/GIS (6%), panhandling (5%), binning (4%), and “other” (7%). Examples of other income sources include Workers Compensation, non-CPP pensions (e.g. union and military pensions), selling things, student loans, trusts, child tax benefits, and WCB. Fourteen percent of Vancouver’s homeless population reported no income at all.

The sheltered homeless were less likely to report income assistance (35%) compared to the unsheltered homeless (39%). The sheltered homeless reported employment income at a higher rate than the unsheltered (28% versus 12%). Other forms of work (e.g. panhandling, binning, etc.) were more likely to be a source of income for the unsheltered homeless enumerated than the sheltered population.

Table 10–Sources of Income

Source of Income	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Government Transfers						
Income assistance or welfare	218	35%	185	39%	403	37%
Disability benefit	159	26%	123	26%	282	26%
Employment Insurance	20	3%	4	1%	24	2%
OAS/GIS/CPP	42	7%	25	5%	67	6%
Other sources						
No income	84	14%	66	14%	150	14%
Employment	171	28%	58	12%	229	21%
Binning, bottle collecting	12	2%	32	7%	44	4%
Panhandling	10	2%	44	9%	54	5%
Sex work	3	0%	8	2%	11	1%
Criminal activity	2	0%	10	2%	12	1%
Family and friends	12	2%	5	1%	17	2%
Other	34	5%	47	10%	81	7%
Total respondents	620		471		1,091	
Not stated	5		17		22	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.6 Health conditions

The 2015 Vancouver Homeless Count survey asked about people's health, specifically whether they had a medical condition or illness, physical disability, addiction/substance use, 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 numbers presented in Tables 11 and 12 include both self-reported health conditions, as well as the perceived health conditions identified by volunteers.⁸ In these cases, the volunteers' perception was coded for the homeless individual. These perceived conditions should be treated with caution. While they offer an opportunity to offset under-reporting of health conditions, volunteers are also not generally trained health practitioners, so observed conditions may not be wholly accurate.

Table 11 shows that 27% of the homeless population had one health condition and 54% had two or more health conditions, meaning that that 81% of those counted had one or more health conditions. 19% were reported to have no health conditions.

The unsheltered homeless were more likely to have a health condition than the sheltered homeless. Eighty-four percent of the unsheltered homeless had one or more health conditions, when compared to 79% of the sheltered population. The unsheltered population was more likely to have two or more health conditions (58%) than the sheltered population (52%). Those who were sheltered were more likely to report not having a health condition (21%) than those who were unsheltered (16%).

Table 11– Incidence of health conditions

Health condition	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No health conditions	131	21%	76	16%	207	19%
One health condition	165	27%	129	27%	294	27%
Two or more conditions	324	52%	268	57%	592	54%
Total respondents	620		473		1,093	
Not stated	5		15		20	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

*Includes self-identified and perceived

Table 12 shows that addiction/substance use was the most common health issue. Fifty-eight percent of those who responded had an addiction/substance use. The next most common health problem was a medical condition (46%).

⁸ Perceived conditions represented a small proportion of the unsheltered population responses (from 2-8%) but a higher proportion of the sheltered population responses (approximately 10-20%). In the total population, observed conditions account for 8% to 16% of total health conditions.

The incidence of specific health conditions was more pronounced among the unsheltered homeless, where nearly two-thirds (63%) had an addiction/substance use and 44% had a mental illness. Physical disabilities and medical conditions were similar for the sheltered and unsheltered populations.

Table 12– Type of health conditions

Health condition (more than 1 possible)	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Medical condition	293	47%	215	45%	508	46%
Physical disability	221	36%	165	35%	386	35%
Addiction/substance use	332	54%	300	63%	632	58%
Mental illness	249	40%	210	44%	459	42%
Total respondents	620		473		1,093	
Not stated	5		15		20	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.7 Military Service

A total of 95 homeless individuals surveyed said they had served in the Canadian Forces, 9% of the total respondents (Table 13). A slightly higher proportion of the unsheltered population had served in the Canadian Forces over the sheltered population (10% versus 8%).

Table 13– Military Service in the Canadian Forces

	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	51	8%	44	10%	95	9%
No	569	92%	416	90%	985	91%
Total respondents	620		460		1,080	
Not stated	5		28		33	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.8 Time in Vancouver and place of residence prior to Vancouver

While Table 9 examines the length of time respondents have been homeless, Table 14 looks at how long surveyed persons have lived in Vancouver. Individuals were asked how long they have been living in Vancouver. Seventy nine percent have been living in Vancouver for 1 year or more. Eleven percent have been in Vancouver for 1 month to under 6 months, while 5% have been in Vancouver for under 1 month. Six percent of the homeless population has been in Vancouver for between 6 months and 1 year.

The majority of the unsheltered population (75%) and the sheltered population (84%) have been in Vancouver 1 year or more.

Table 14 – Length of time in Vancouver

	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 1 month	38	6%	11	2%	49	5%
1 month to under 6 months	87	14%	33	7%	120	11%
6 months to under 1 year	29	5%	30	7%	59	6%
1 year or more	453	75%	382	84%	835	79%
Total respondents	607		456		1,063	
Not stated	18		32		50	
Total	625		488		1,113	

Individuals were asked where they resided prior to coming to Vancouver. Table 15 shows the results for individuals who have been in Vancouver for under 1 month (49 individuals or 5% of the surveyed homeless population). A high proportion were from BC (44%), with 20% (10) from Metro Vancouver and 22% (11) from other parts of the province. 24% (12) of new arrivals were from Ontario and 14% (7) were from Alberta.

Table 15 – Where new arrivals are from

	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Metro Vancouver	7	20%	3	21%	10	20%
Rest of BC	10	29%	1	7%	11	22%
Alberta	7	20%	0	0%	7	14%
Ontario	8	23%	4	29%	12	24%
Saskatchewan	0	0%	1	7%	1	2%
Outside Canada	1	3%	1	7%	2	4%
Unknown	2	6%	4	29%	6	12%
Total respondents	35		14		49*	

4.9 Where else the homeless stayed in the last 12 months

Forty-one percent (41%) of sheltered homeless individuals had not slept outside in the last 12 months, compared to 15% of unsheltered homeless individuals (Table 16).

Table 16 – Homeless who slept outside in the last 12 months

	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	367	59%	407	85%	774	70%
No	256	41%	70	15%	326	30%
Total respondents	623		477		1,100	
Not stated	2		11		13	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

Table 17 shows where sheltered and unsheltered individuals stayed in the last twelve months other than shelters and outside. Respondents were allowed to answer more than once. More than half (59%) said they slept at someone else's place in the last 12 months.⁹ Nearly one quarter had slept at their own place inside¹⁰ (24%). The percentage of homeless who had slept at their own place inside in the last 12 months, was higher for sheltered (33%) than unsheltered (12%) individuals. Over forty percent of respondents indicated that they slept at an 'other' location. These include hotels and hostels, jail, a vehicle, outside, another building or with family and friends.

⁹ In a sub-question, these individuals were asked whether any type of payment was offered. 57% said they did not pay any rent, 19% paid rent daily, and the remaining 24% paid some mix of barter/trade, daily rent or no rent payment.

¹⁰ Respondents indicated through a sub-question that of those who had had their own place, 94% paid rent (monthly), while 6% did not pay rent.

Table 17 – Where else the homeless slept in the last 12 months

Where the homeless stayed in the last 12 months (multiple responses allowed)	Sheltered homeless		Unsheltered homeless		Total homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Someone else's place	316	55%	262	66%	578	59%
Detox	70	12%	54	14%	124	13%
Parent/guardian's	65	11%	35	9%	100	10%
Safe house	39	7%	17	4%	56	6%
Transition house	43	7%	17	4%	60	6%
Own place inside	190	33%	47	12%	237	24%
Other	297	51%	134	34%	431	44%
Total respondents	578		396		974	
Not stated	47		92		139	
Total surveyed	625		488		1,113	

4.10 The unsheltered homeless

4.10.1 Where they stayed last night

One of the screening questions for the unsheltered homeless was where the individual stayed the previous night. Of the 488 respondents who were found unsheltered in Vancouver, all provided a specific answer (Table 18). The largest share (69% or 338 individuals) reported staying outside, or in a garage, public building, vehicle or other place not considered fit for human habitation. One quarter of the unsheltered homeless (24% or 119 people) stayed temporarily at someone else's place (where they did not pay rent and had no security of tenure). Other places reported included cafes or fast food restaurants and hostels. Some people did not sleep the night of the count, but just wandered around or worked (prostitution or binning).

Table 18 - Where the unsheltered homeless stayed on March 23rd

Location	Number	Percent
Outside or in a vehicle	338	69%
Someone else's place	119	24%
Parent or guardian (if over 25)	4	1%
Other	27	6%
Total respondents	488	
Not stated	0	
Total	488	

4.10.2 Reasons for not staying in a shelter

Some unsheltered homeless did not stay in a shelter because they dislike them (33%) (Table 19). Reasons for this include bedbugs, crime, overcrowded conditions, and the presence of drugs and alcohol. Fourteen percent of the unsheltered population said they were turned away from a shelter because it was full; an additional 7 individuals (2%) noted that they did try to stay in a shelter, but were turned away because they were considered inappropriate for the shelter.¹¹ Twelve percent said they were able to stay with a friend for the evening and therefore did not need to stay in a shelter. Shelter facilities reported 191 turnaways on count night (Table 5). “Other reasons” was selected by 30% of street homeless, often citing similar concerns as those individuals who dislike shelters.

Table 19 – Why unsheltered homeless did not use a shelter

Reason (select only one)	Number	Percent
Dislike	143	33%
Bedbugs and other pests	21	5%
Noise	4	1%
Crime	35	8%
Drugs and alcohol are present	3	1%
Overcrowded	5	1%
Other dislike	49	11%
Turned away – full	63	14%
Able to stay with friends	51	12%
Turned away - inappropriate	7	2%
Didn't know about	5	1%
Couldn't get to it	16	4%
Other reasons	154	35%
Total respondents	439	
Not stated	49	
Total	488	

When asked about shelter usage in the last year, more than half of the unsheltered homeless (57% or 269 individuals) had used a shelter in the 12 months prior to the count.

¹¹ An individual is considered ‘inappropriate’ for a shelter if, for example, 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.

4.10.3 Safety

When asked whether they felt safe where they were staying the night before, nearly one-fifth of males (19%) and 17% of females in the unsheltered population said they did not feel safe.

Table 20 – Safety

	Male		Female		Transgender		Other	
Did you feel safe where you stayed last night?	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Did not feel safe	68	19%	17	17%	0	0%	2	29%
Felt safe	283	81%	83	83%	4	100%	5	71%
Total respondents	351		100		4		7	
Not stated	15		1		1		1	
Total surveyed	366		101		5		8	

5 Homeless trends 2005 - 2015

This section reports on the demographic and other trends of homeless individuals in Vancouver as enumerated in the Metro Vancouver and City of Vancouver Homeless Counts since 2005.¹²

5.1 Gender

Males continue to comprise the majority of homeless persons counted (Table 21). The share of males among the homeless has been similar in all counts (72-74%) except 2010 when males were 78% of the homeless population and 2014 when males were 76% of the homeless population. Females tend to comprise about 26-27% of the homeless counted; however, more homeless females were counted in 2012 (347) than in 2010 (333) or 2011 (327). In 2015 females represent a slightly lower proportion of the population than in many years past (25%), while people who identify as transgender represent 1% of the population and those identifying as other represent less than 1%.

Table 21 – Gender trends in the homeless population trends¹³

Gender	2005		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	928	73%	948	72%	1,155	78%	901	73%	960	73%	1,017	73%	907	76%	1,057	74%
Female	330	26%	348	27%	333	22%	327	27%	347	26%	361	26%	282	24%	356	25%
Transgender	8	1%	15	1%	n/a	n/a	5	<1%	6	<1%	7	<1%	7	<1%	15	1%
Other	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	<1%
Total respondents	1,266	100%	1,311	100%	1,488	100%	1,233	100%	1,313	100%	1,385	100%	1,196	100%	1,436	
Not stated	25		61		21		264		21		40		10		310	
Total	1,291		1,372		1,544		1,497		1,334		1,425		1,206		1,746	

¹² Data provided by the City of Vancouver. A full list of references, including a list of all Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Homeless Count reports, can be found at the end of this report. In 2015 the category of 'other' was used for the first time for individuals who do not identify as male, female or transgender.

¹³ This sub-total differs from other tables as it includes gender statistics provided by shelters and NFA sites and shelters in addition to the sample data.

5.2 Age

The largest proportion of Vancouver's homeless population continues to be between 35 and 54 years old (45%) (Table 22). In recent years, homeless persons 55 or older have represented a larger proportion of the homeless population. This group accounted for 10% of all homeless persons in 2008; in 2015 it represents 19% of all homeless persons. Young adults aged 25-34 years, represent nearly one-fifth of Vancouver's homeless population (19%). This has fluctuated slightly from 22% in 2005 to a low of 17% in 2011 and back up to 19% in 2015.

In 2015, children and youth (aged 24 and under) represent a lower proportion of the population (17%) than in 2014 (21%); however, this is still higher than or equal to all other years. The absolute number of children and youth has increased from 179 children and youth in 2005, to 199 in 2015. Generally, the count is less successful in finding youth who tend to sofa surf and avoid services, thus remaining hidden. In 2015 there were 59 homeless individuals under age 19. Forty-five of these persons were children accompanied by parents, while 14 were unaccompanied youth.

Table 22 – Age groups trends¹⁴

Age groups	2005		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Under 19	30	2%	19	1%	25	2%	44	4%	57	4%	36	3%	93	8%	59	5%
19-24	149	12%	135	10%	159	11%	146	13%	137	10%	139	10%	162	13%	140	12%
25-34	273	22%	258	20%	264	18%	197	17%	267	20%	256	19%	224	18%	228	19%
35-44	402	33%	425	32%	363	25%	251	22%	316	24%	358	26%	251	20%	250	21%
45-54	260	21%	361	28%	445	30%	250	22%	339	26%	324	24%	300	24%	285	24%
55-64	98	8%	95	7%	163	11%	122	11%	163	12%	195	14%	162	13%	164	14%
65+	23	2%	19	1%	41	3%	33	3%	40	3%	69	5%	43	3%	58	5%
Total respondents	1,235	100%	1,312	100%	1,460	100%	1,133	100%	1,319	100%	1,377	100%	1,235	100%	1,184	100%
Not stated	56		60		84		114		45		48		14		20	
Total	1,291		1,372		1,544		1,176		1,364		1,425		1,249		1,204	

¹⁴ This sub-total differs from other tables as it includes gender statistics provided by the NFA sites and the sample data.

5.3 Aboriginal identity

Table 23 shows the results from the Aboriginal identity question for 2005 to 2015. The share of homeless people with Aboriginal identity has ranged from a high of 38% in 2008 to a low of 30% in 2013 and is 32% in 2015. When compared to the counts from 2005 to 2010, the share of Aboriginal persons within the homeless population is the lowest since 2013.

Table 23 - Aboriginal Identity trends

Aboriginal ID	2005		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Aboriginal	352	35%	456	38%	448	36%	268	31%	362	32%	369	30%	415	36%	342	32%
Not aboriginal	658	65%	749	62%	805	64%	594	69%	768	68%	867	70%	738	64%	731	68%
Total respondents	1,010	100%	1,205	100%	1,253	100%	862	100%	1,130	100%	1,236	100%	1,153	100%	1,073	100%
Not stated	281		167		291		290		204		189		53		40	
Total	1,291		1,372		1,544		1,157		1,334		1,425		1,206		1,113	

5.4 Income

Table 24 displays the results for income sources for the 2008 to 2015 counts. There have been some changes since 2011. A lower proportion of people reported income assistance as a source in 2015 (37%) than at any other time since 2008. The portion reporting disability benefit in 2015 (26%) was higher than all other years. Six percent also reported income from OAS/GIS/CPP, up from 2008; this may be related to the aging of the homeless population. Fewer people reported income from employment in 2015 (21%) than 2008 (19%), either full or part-time or casual. Fourteen percent of the population reported no income, higher than in any other year. More than one-fifth of persons (20%) reported 'other' income sources, such as binning, panhandling, crime or sex work, as a source of income, up from 2012, but down from highs of 49% in 2008 and 50% in 2011.

Table 24 - Income source trends

	2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Government transfers														
Income assistance or welfare	533	43%	632	47%	286	44%	339	41%	381	38%	459	41%	403	37%
Disability benefit	258	21%	286	21%	132	20%	176	21%	239	24%	218	20%	282	26%
Employment Insurance	13	1%	35	3%	17	3%	16	2%	15	2%	15	1%	24	2%
OAS GIS and CPP	4	0%	48	4%	28	4%	38	5%	56	6%	89	8%	67	6%
Other sources														
Part-Time Employment	163	13%	151	11%	97	15%	96	12%	135	14%	59	5%	229	21%
Full Time Employment	79	6%		0%							191	17%		
No income	83	7%	130	10%	71	11%	135	16%	157	16%	107	10%	150	14%
Other	611	49%	409	30%	329	50%	160	19%	148	15%	120	11%	219	20%
Total Respondents	1,242	100%	1,344	100%	655	100%	834	100%	999	100%	1,107		1,091	
Not stated	130		200		506		500		426		99		22	
Total	1,372		1,544		1,157		1,334		1,425		1,206		1,113	

5.5 Health

The 2015 Count results show that while a high proportion of the homeless population have one or more health conditions (81%), the proportion of those with two or more health conditions (54%) is higher than any other year except 2013 (54%). Over 886 homeless people (81% of total) reported one or more health conditions in 2015, up from 74% in 2005. The proportion reporting no health conditions (19%) is down overall from 2005 (26%), but up since its lowest in 2013 (16%).

Table 25 – Incidence of health conditions trends

Health condition	2005		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
No health conditions	263	26%	369	29%	277	21%	55	10%	156	17%	179	16%	237	22%	207	19%
One health condition	396	39%	329	26%	415	32%	208	38%	290	32%	289	26%	358	33%	294	27%
2 or more health conditions	349	35%	556	44%	622	47%	289	52%	451	50%	636	58%	481	45%	592	54%
Total respondents	1,008		1,254		1,314		552		897		1,104		1,076		1,093	
Not stated	283		118		230		605		437		321		130		20	
Total	1,291		1,372		1,544		1,157		1,334		1,425		1,206		1,113	

Table 26 reports on trends in specific types of health conditions. It shows that the incidence of reported and perceived mental illness among the homeless is slightly lower in 2015 (42%) than the peak in 2013 (46%). Addiction/substance use has increased over time, up to 58% in 2015 from 51% in 2008, but down from the peak in 2013 (63%). Physical disabilities and medical conditions also represent health conditions on the rise: reported and perceived physical disabilities rose from 26% in 2005 to 35% in 2015 and reported and perceived medical conditions rose from 39% in 2005 to 46% in 2015.

Table 26 – Type of health conditions trends

Health condition (more than 1 possible)	2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Addiction/substance use	643	51%	721	55%	344	56%	532	59%	694	63%	519	48%	632	58%
Physical disability	324	26%	368	28%	157	25%	265	30%	375	34%	302	28%	386	35%
Medical condition	495	39%	503	38%	186	30%	325	36%	469	42%	439	41%	508	46%
Mental illness	354	28%	471	36%	251	41%	361	40%	512	46%	361	34%	459	42%
Total respondents	1,254		1,314		n/a		897		1,104		1,076		1,096	
Not stated	118		230		n/a		437		321		130		17	
Total	1,372		1,544		1,157		1,334		1,425		1,206		1,113	

5.6 Length of time homeless

The 2015 count results for length of time homeless show that people reporting a homeless period of one year or more have consistently formed the largest share of the homeless population, varying between 45% and 49% since 2008 (Table 27). A small share reported under 1 month as their length of time homeless (11%), one of the smallest shares since 2005. Proportionally fewer homeless people reported 1 to 6 months as the length of time homeless in 2015 at 30% compared to 33% in 2014; however, this is still up overall since 2005 (26%). A question about the length of time homeless was not asked in 2012.

Table 27 – Length of time homeless trends

Length of time Homeless	2005		2008		2010		2011		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Under 1 month	253	24%	145	12%	177	13%	145	12%	76	10%	180	16%	114	11%
1 month to 6 months	271	26%	319	27%	371	28%	319	27%	268	34%	365	33%	325	30%
6 months to under 1 year	134	13%	152	13%	173	13%	152	13%	93	12%	91	8%	148	14%
1 year or more	376	36%	585	49%	595	45%	585	49%	363	45%	473	43%	483	45%
Total respondents	1034		1201		1316		1201		800		1109		1070	
Not stated	257		171		228				52		97		43	
Total	1291		1372		1544				852		1206		1,113	

5.7 Where the unsheltered homeless stayed

As in 2005 to 2014, most of the street homeless stayed outside or in a car/garage or public place (69%) overnight on March 23, 2015 (Table 28). The share staying at someone else's place was 25%, similar to most years. 2011 was an unusual year, with a high proportion reporting staying at someone else's place (47%). Six percent reported staying at "other" places, lower than in 2005, but up from its lowest in 2013. Examples of other locations reported include hostels/hotels, walking, and halfway houses.

Table 28 – Where unsheltered homeless stayed trends

Location	2005		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outside and car/garage and public bldg	411	70%	548	71%	284	69%	49	33%	205	69%	180	66%	339	64%	338	69%
Someone else's place	111	19%	129	17%	101	25%	69	47%	74	25%	87	32%	181	34%	123	25%
Other	69	12%	90	12%	24	6%	29	20%	17	6%	6	2%	13	2%	27	6%
Total Respondents	591	100%	767	100%	409	100%	147	100%	296	100%	273	100%	533	100%	488	100%

5.8 Why the unsheltered did not stay in shelters

In 2015 a lower proportion of the unsheltered homeless population did not go to shelters because they disliked them (33%) than in most previous years, except for 2014. Since 2012 a 13% to 14% of individuals have been turned away from full shelters. Thirty-five percent of individuals surveyed stated other reasons for not going to a shelter, up from 2014, but at the same level as 2010.

Table 29 – Why the unsheltered did not stay in shelters

Reason (select only one)	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Dislike	131	37%	46	33%	109	40%	109	42%	97	23%	143	33%
Bedbugs and other pests					13	5%	18	7%	10	2%	21	5%
Noise					10	4%	1	0%	15	4%	4	1%
Crime					16	6%	10	4%	37	9%	35	8%
Drugs and alcohol are present					5	2%	6	2%	1	0%	3	1%
Overcrowded					24	9%	11	4%	20	5%	5	1%
Other dislike					15	6%	35	13%	19	5%	49	11%
Turned away – full	29	8%	4	3%	36	13%	33	13%	58	14%	63	14%
Able to stay with friends	49	14%	58	42%	24	9%	42	16%	101	24%	51	12%
Turned away - other reason	5	1%	1	1%	5	2%	8	3%	18	4%	7	2%
Didn't know about	6	2%	1	1%	2	1%	2	1%	6	1%	5	1%
Couldn't get to it	10	3%	1	1%	13	5%	12	5%	3	1%	16	4%
Other reasons	123	35%	27	20%	81	30%	56	21%	89	21%	154	35%
Total respondents	353		138		270		262		419		439	
Not stated	67		9		36		11		114		49	
Total	420		147		306		273		533		488	

6 Profile of Heat and Winter Response Shelter clients

Clients of two different groups of shelters operating in Vancouver at count time are profiled: low barrier shelters operated on a temporary basis beginning in 2008 called HEAT and Winter Response Shelters, and Other Shelters composed of year-round and seasonal shelters, are profiled in the following tables.¹⁵

The unsheltered homeless are included for comparison. This information has been included in this report to obtain a better understanding of the population using the HEAT and Winter Response Shelters (that have a low barrier approach that differs from Other Shelters) and compare this population to the population in Other Shelters and the unsheltered homeless.

On March 23, 2015, 218 people stayed overnight in HEAT and Winter Response Shelters, while 890 stayed in other shelters. The response rate for HEAT/Winter Response Shelters was about 53%, while for other shelters it ranged from 55% to 57%.

Table 30 shows that HEAT and Winter Response Shelter clients were more likely to be male than Other Shelter clients. Other Shelters accommodated a greater proportion of homeless females than HEAT/Winter shelters. Overall the gender distribution in HEAT/Winter Response Shelters has a higher proportion of males than even the unsheltered population.

Table 30 - Gender

Gender	HEAT/Winter		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male	100	85%	385	76%	366	76%
Female	17	15%	112	22%	101	21%
Transgender	0	0%	6	1%	5	1%
Other	0	0%	1	0%	8	2%
Total respondents	117		504		480	
Not stated	1		3		8	
Total	118		507		488	

¹⁵ There were no EWR shelters operating on March 23rd.

HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients tended to be between 25 and 54 years of age (Table 31). Very few clients under 25 used the HEAT/Winter Response Shelters (3%), while they accounted for 14% of the Other Shelter clients (excluding accompanied children) and 15% of unsheltered homeless. Older homeless persons (55 and over) also represented a smaller proportion of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients (19%) in comparison with Other Shelters (22%).

Table 31 – Age

Age groups	HEAT/Winter Response Shelters		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 19	1	1%	5	1%	8	2%
19-24	2	2%	67	13%	62	13%
25-34	27	23%	82	16%	108	23%
35-44	34	29%	107	21%	99	21%
45-54	30	26%	133	26%	117	25%
55-64	20	17%	91	18%	46	10%
65+	2	2%	22	4%	32	7%
Total respondents	116	100%	507	100%	472	100%
Not stated	2		0		16	
Total	118		507		488	

HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients were more likely to be of Aboriginal identity (38%) compared to Other Shelter clients (27%) (Table 32). Aboriginal identity was highest among the HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients.

Table 32 - Aboriginal identity

Aboriginal identity	HEAT/Winter Response Shelters		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Aboriginal	44	38%	133	27%	165	35%
Not aboriginal	72	62%	357	73%	302	65%
Total respondents	116		490		467	
Not stated	2		17		21	
Total	118		507		488	

HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients had generally not been homeless as long as unsheltered respondents (Table 33). Forty-one percent of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients had been homeless for less than 6 months, compared with 30% of unsheltered respondents and 52% of Other Shelter clients. Unsheltered respondents and respondents in Other Shelters were more likely to have been homeless for a year or more (57%) when compared with HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients (42%).

Table 33 – Length of time homeless

Time Homeless	HEAT/Winter		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 1 month	9	8%	73	15%	32	7%
1 month to under 6 months	38	33%	183	37%	104	23%
6 months to under 1 year	20	17%	67	14%	61	13%
1 year or more	49	42%	170	34%	264	57%
Total respondents	116	100%	493	100%	461	100%
Not stated	2		14		27	
Total surveyed	118		507		488	

A higher proportion of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients reported income assistance as a main source of income (38%) than clients of Other Shelters (34%) (Table 34). The incidence of disability benefits in both shelter types was comparable, at 26% for HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients and 27% for Other Shelter clients. The same was the case for clients reporting no income (26% HEAT/Winter Response Shelters and 27% Other Shelters). Employment income was more prevalent among HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients (17%) than Other Shelter clients (11%).

Table 34 –Sources of Income

Source of Income	HEAT/Winter Response Shelters		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Income assistance or welfare	45	38%	173	34%	185	40%
Disability benefit	30	26%	129	26%	123	27%
Employment Insurance	3	3%	17	34%	4	1%
OAS/GIS/CPP	5	4%	38	8%	25	5%
Other sources	13	11%	71	14%		
No income	30	26%	138	27%	51	11%
Employment	20	17%	56	11%	66	14%
Binning, bottle collecting	4	3%	8	2%	32	7%
Panhandling	3	3%	7	1%	44	9%
Sex work	1	1%	2	0%	7	2%
Criminal activity	0	0%	2	0%	10	2%
Family and friends	2	2%	10	2%	5	1%
Self-employment	1	1%	2	0%	7	2%
Other	9	8%	25	5%	46	10%
Total respondents	117		503		464	
Not stated	1		4		24	
Total	118		507		488	

Fifty-five percent of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients reported having two or more health conditions, compared to a 52% incidence in Other Shelters (Table 35). A lower proportion of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients reported no health conditions (14%) compared with Other Shelters (23%). The unsheltered homeless had a lower proportion of individuals with no health conditions (16%), but a comparable proportion of individuals with one or more health conditions (84% of unsheltered homeless compared to 86% of HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients).

Table 35 – Incidence of health conditions

Health condition	HEAT/Winter Response Shelters		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No health conditions	17	14%	114	23%	76	16%
One health condition	36	31%	128	25%	128	27%
Two or more conditions	65	55%	260	52%	269	57%
Total respondents	118		502		473	
Not stated	0		5		15	
Total	118		507		488	

The rates of mental illness were lower in HEAT/Winter Response Shelters (31%) than in Other Shelters (42%) and for unsheltered respondents (44%) (Table 36). HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients had a higher rate of addiction/substance use (65%) than the unsheltered population (63%) and the Other Shelter population (51%). Incidence of medical conditions and physical disabilities were comparable in HEAT/Winter Response Shelters to Other Shelters.

Table 36 – Type of health conditions¹⁶

Health condition (more than 1 possible)	HEAT/Winter Response Shelters		Other Shelters		Unsheltered homeless	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Medical condition	56	47%	237	47%	217	46%
Physical disability	42	36%	179	36%	165	35%
Addiction/substance use	77	65%	255	51%	300	63%
Mental illness	36	31%	213	42%	210	44%
Total respondents	118		502		476	
Not stated	0		5		12	
Total	118		507		488	

¹⁶ Health conditions include self-reported and perceived figures.

In summary, individuals counted in the HEAT/Winter Response Shelters were more likely than clients in Other Shelters to be any of the following:

- Male
- Between the ages of 25 and 54 years
- Of Aboriginal identity
- Receiving income assistance or employed
- Experiencing no health conditions or two or more health conditions, though the likelihood that one of these conditions is an addiction/substance use is greater than it being a mental illness

Thus, HEAT/Winter Response Shelter clients fit the unsheltered profile more closely in terms of gender, age, Aboriginal identity and incidence of addiction/substance use than do clients of Other Shelters.

Appendix A: Profile of Hidden Homeless

For the first time this year, an attempt was made to identify the hidden homeless through questions asking if they had used shelters or slept outside in the last year.

Hidden homeless - For the purposes of this report, the hidden homeless are defined as individuals who had been without a place of their own where they pay monthly rent and who had not used shelters or slept outside in the last 12 months (regardless of length of time homeless), but instead found other places to stay where they did not pay rent or have security of tenure. Someone who found a place to stay on the night of March 23rd where they did not pay rent but had made use of a shelter or slept outside in the previous twelve months *would not* be considered hidden homeless.

Only 21 individuals were identified as not having made use of a shelter or slept on the street in the last 12 months. Of these, only 11 individuals had been homeless for a year or more and were therefore able to answer this question for the full 12 months.

This very small sample size indicates that the Homeless Count is not a good tool for surveying this population to determine their needs, and cannot provide a meaningful sample from which to draw conclusions about the hidden homeless, or from which to compare the hidden homeless populations with the sheltered and unsheltered populations. Further, the survey questions do not provide a nuanced insight into the nature of hidden homelessness: the timeframe of 12 months for shelter use and sleeping on the street was selected to conform to questions asked in previous years (which have asked about shelter use in the last 12 months). However, this may be an inappropriate timeline by which to define hidden homelessness.

This section therefore presents some demographic data of the 21 individuals interviewed who had not made use of a shelter or slept on the street, regardless of how long they had been homeless. The demographic analysis of this small group suggests that there *may* be important differences in this group, compared with the sheltered and unsheltered populations and the homeless population as a whole (e.g. a proportion of females and Aboriginal persons, health conditions). However, this warrants further research and would require an approach geared toward refining the definition of hidden homelessness and interviewing a larger sample of hidden homeless individuals.

Of the 21 people identified as hidden homeless in 2015, over half (52%) were male, while 38% were female and 10% identified as other (Table 37). The hidden homeless who were surveyed tended to be either youth or young adults (with 47% between 19 and 34) or middle age (with 38% between 45 and 54). A small proportion (14%) was 65 or older (Table 38). Forty-five percent of the hidden homeless interviewed were Aboriginal (Table 39). More than half of the hidden homeless population interviewed (55%) had been homeless for a year or more, while 15% had been homeless for less than one month (Table 40). Nearly half (48%) of the hidden homeless individuals interviewed received income from income

assistance (Table 41). Twenty-nine percent of the hidden homeless surveyed receive income from a disability benefit. Other sources of income include family and friends (10%), employment (5%), sex work (5%) and other sources (14%).

Of the 21 hidden homeless individuals surveyed about half have two or more health conditions, while nearly one-quarter have no health conditions, or one health condition (Table 42). More than half the hidden homeless individuals interviewed (52%) had an addiction/substance use issue, making it the most common health condition amongst those surveyed (Table 43). Forty-eight percent of the hidden homeless interviewed had a physical disability, 33% had a mental illness and 43% had a medical condition. Ninety percent of the hidden homeless interviewed had been in Vancouver for more than one year or more and none had been in Vancouver for less than a month (Table 44). No hidden homeless had served in the Canadian Forces. The hidden homeless interviewed were able to sleep indoors on March 23, with 86% sleeping at someone else's place, 5% at a parent or guardian's and 10% at another location (Table 45). Eighty-five percent of the hidden homeless interviewed had couch-surfed in the last year, with one-fifth having stayed in their own place (Table 46). Shelters were not used among the group of hidden homeless surveyed, primarily because they were able to couch-surf, with only 14% saying they disliked shelters, and 14% stating other reasons for not staying at a shelter (Table 47). Generally, the hidden homeless who were interviewed felt safe where they had stayed on March 23, with only one individual stating they did not (Table 48).

A general comparison with both unsheltered and sheltered populations is not possible due to the small sample size of the hidden homeless captured in the Count. However, some differences from the hidden homeless population suggest the need for further research to better understand this group. Of the hidden homeless interviewed through the Count, there was a lower proportion of males than in the homeless population as a whole, a higher proportion of Aboriginal persons, and a health profile appearing to be more like the sheltered homeless than the unsheltered. These findings indicate that the hidden population *may* in some ways be similar to the sheltered population (e.g. health), and may also be distinctive from both sheltered and unsheltered populations (e.g. gender and Aboriginal identity). However, a larger sample size is required for a more definitive analysis.

Table 37 - Gender

Gender	Hidden Homeless	
	Number	Percent
Male	11	52%
Female	8	38%
Transgender	0	0%
Other	2	10%
Total respondents	21	
Not stated	0	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 38 - Age

Age groups	Hidden Homeless	
	Number	Percent
Under 19	0	0%
19-24	3	14%
25-34	7	33%
35-44	0	0%
45-54	8	38%
55-64	0	0%
65+	3	14%
Total respondents	21	
Not stated	0	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 39 - Aboriginal Identity

Aboriginal identity	Hidden Homeless	
	Number	Percent
Aboriginal	9	45%
Not Aboriginal	11	55%
Total respondents	20	
Not stated	1	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 40 – Length of time homeless

Length of time homeless	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
Under 1 month	3	15%
1 month to under 6 months	5	25%
6 months to under 1 year	1	5%
1 year or more	11	55%
Total respondents	20	
Not stated	1	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 41 - Income

Source of income	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
Government Transfers		
Income assistance or welfare	10	48%
Disability benefit	6	29%
Employment Insurance	0	0%
OAS/GIS/CPP	0	0%
Other sources		
No income	1	5%
Employment	1	5%
Binning, bottle collecting	0	0%
Panhandling	0	0%
Sex work	1	5%
Criminal activity	0	0%
Family and friends	2	10%
Self-employment	1	5%
Other	3	14%
Total respondents	21	
Not stated	0	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 42 – Incidence of health conditions

Health condition	Hidden Homeless	
	Number	Percent
No health conditions	5	24%
One health condition	5	24%
Two or more conditions	11	52%
Total respondents	21	
Not stated	0	
Total surveyed	21	
Not stated	0	
Total	21	

Table 43 – Type of health condition

Health condition	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
(more than 1 possible)		
Medical condition	9	43%
Physical disability	10	48%
Addiction/substance use	11	52%
Mental illness	7	33%
Total respondents	21	
Not stated	0	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 44 – Length of time in Vancouver

	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
Under 1 month	0	0%
1 month to under 6 months	1	5%
6 months to under 1 year	1	5%
1 year or more	19	90%
Total respondents	21	100%
No answer	0	5%
Total	21	

Table 45 – Where they stayed on March 23rd

Location	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
Outside or in a vehicle	0	0%
Someone else's place	18	86%
Parent or guardian (if over 25)	1	5%
Other	2	10%
Total respondents	21	

Table 46 – Where else they stayed in the last 12 months

Where the homeless stayed in the last 12 months (multiple responses allowed)	Hidden homeless	
Location	Number	Percent
Someone else's place	17	85%
Detox	0	0%
Parent/guardian's	2	10%
Safe house	0	0%
Transition house	0	0%
Own place inside	4	20%
Other	3	15%
Total respondents	20	
Not stated	1	
Total surveyed	21	

Table 47 – Why they did not use a shelter

Reason (select only one)	Hidden homeless	
	Number	Percent
Dislike	3	14%
Bedbugs and other pests	2	10%
Noise	0	0%
Crime	0	0%
Drugs and alcohol are present	0	0%
Overcrowded	0	0%
Other dislike	0	0%
Turned away – full	0	0%
Able to stay with friends	14	66%
Turned away - inappropriate	0	0%
Didn't know about	0	0%
Couldn't get to it	1	5%
Other reasons	3	14%
Total respondents	21	

Table 48 - Safety

Did you feel safe where you stayed last night?	Male		Female		Transgender		Other	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Did not feel safe	1	9%	0	0%	0	n/a	0	0%
Felt safe	10	91%	8	100%	0	n/a	1	100%
Total respondents	11		8		0		1	
Not stated	0		0		0		1	
Total surveyed	11		8		0		2	