

# Executive Summary Document

## Community Advisory Board on Homelessness

### Point in Time Count, 2016

## **Background**

The PEI Community Advisory Board (CAB) on Homelessness is an interagency board whose mandate is to work to address homeless among populations and those at risk of becoming homeless in the designated communities of Charlottetown and Summerside. The CAB is made up of non-profit and public sector agencies.

The CAB received federal funding to conduct a point in time count within a defined period of time in the communities of Charlottetown and Summerside. This funding was limited to these designated communities, and while the CAB, for this point in time count, do not address other communities because of this limitation, it does recognize that homelessness is an Island issue.

Communities in Canada, including Summerside and Charlottetown, have previously undertaken point in time homelessness counts, each using their own methods and approaches. A point in time survey method is not a measure of everyone who experiences homelessness in a community over time. By focusing on a single day, a count will not include some people who cycle in and out of homelessness. What it does provide is an estimate of how many of these people are homeless at a given point in time.

## **The Method**

The count was conducted within the City of Summerside on March 30-31 and within the City of Charlottetown on April 6-7 contributing to a national count, using a comparable, coordinated approach. The count of unsheltered homeless (often referred to as a 'street count') occurred during a four hour period between 10 pm and 2 am, and a count of sheltered homeless occurring during the twelve hour period between 8 am and 8 pm.

On the identified dates the CAB also surveyed the hidden homeless, defined as those temporarily housed with a friend, hotel/motel, or similar, without a home and not using a shelter or transitional housing option. This survey occurred during a three hour housing event where people were provided a range of services, a meal, and could voluntarily complete the survey.

Other communities in Canada are using similar methods, administering the same questionnaire within the first 4 months of 2016. The results will contribute to an improved national picture of homelessness.

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## Results

The point in time count provides each community with information about the people experiencing homelessness as outlined. Some comparison with the 2015 Point in Time<sup>1</sup> survey have been made, though the method employed, time of year administered, and homelessness definition differed between the 2015 and 2016 surveys.<sup>2</sup>

### About the people surveyed:

- 94 people were surveyed, 13 were screened out
- There were no unsheltered homeless in Summerside or Charlottetown on the selected dates and times, which was not an un-expected result given the time of year and the nature of homelessness on PEI.
- More men than women self-identified as homeless at 66% and 34% respectively. This is consistent with the 2015 survey.
- The demographic profile was mixed. Though mostly adults, there were youth (3%), seniors (11%), people who identified as immigrant or refugees (9%), first nations and aboriginal heritage (14%), and veterans (2%). Though experiencing a shared problem, we expect that each group has unique challenges and needs.

### In order to learn about their housing situation on that day, we asked 'Where are you staying tonight?'

- The greatest proportions of people surveyed were sleeping in transitional housing at 50%. Given the challenge of availability to quality affordable housing stock identified by the My Place, Housing First Program, this is an added challenge for those moving between services to more independent living.
- The next greatest proportions of housing were hotel/ motel at 10.64%, someone else's place at 12.77%, and emergency shelters at 8.51%. Hotels and motels often act as temporary housing when no emergency shelters exist, such as in Summerside.
- Compared with the 2015 survey, a higher number were staying in emergency shelters, hotel/ motels in 2016, and transitional housing.
- It is important to note that the 2015 survey had a broader definition for survey inclusion, thus the 2016 is a more representative number of those in imminent need.

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<sup>1</sup>2015 survey was a caseload review conducted through an online survey from ~150 providers over a 24hr period on January 14-15 2015, who completed a survey for each person who met at least one of the homelessness definitions: Individuals or families who have been homeless: 6 months or more in the past year; 3 times or more in the past year; 1-2 times in the past year; housing ends in 1-2 months ; couch surfing, in a mental health institution or correction facility with no subsequent residence identified. Surveys were completed on 209 people.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages have been rounded to the nearest number

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**In order to learn about the experience of homelessness we asked- ‘Over the past year how much of the time have you been homeless?’, and ‘how many different times have you experienced homelessness?’**

- For most homelessness was not a short term problem- 46% were homeless 3 or more months
  - 33% were homeless for 0-2 months
  - 17% were homeless for 3-5 months
  - 29% were homeless for 6 or more months
- In 2015 the duration of homelessness for 61% was greater than 2 months, however the duration for 24% of people, was between 12 months and 2 years, where undetermined housing in an institutional setting was the more likely circumstance
- From the 78% of people who responded to this question, this was a repeated problem for many where 41% (38 people) has 2 or more episodes of homelessness in the last year
- 38% had emergency shelter stays

**In order to learn about some housing barriers we asked about housing loss and income sources**

- When we asked ‘what happened that caused you to lose your housing most recently?’, the most common reasons for housing loss were:
  - Addiction and Substance Use (40%)
  - Illness or Medical Condition (18%)
  - Eviction (12%) and Family Conflict (12%)
  - Job Loss (10%)
  - Unsafe Housing Situation (7%)
- While the question posed in 2015 was looking for the barrier or limiting factor in attaining housing (‘What is keeping you from finding permanent housing?’), some results could be compared based on the question....:
  - Addiction and Substance Use (52%)
  - Health Disability (19%)
  - Family Conflict (33%) (42% if we include domestic violence specific response)
  - Poor Housing Options/ Condition (40%)
- When we asked ‘Where do you get your money from?’, the most common responses were:
  - Welfare/ Social Assistance (33%)
  - Employment Insurance (18%)
  - Employment (16%)
  - Seniors benefit (10%)
  - Disability benefit (7%)
- In 2015 we found that the most common source of income was also welfare/ social assistance (31%), and only 10% had employment income

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**Conclusion:**

The information gathered by the CAB continues to contribute to our understanding of the complex problem of homelessness and the need to conduct point in time measures will help to set priorities, identify potential actions, and track progress in reducing homelessness over time.

In addition to the information gathered about people experiencing homelessness, an important outcome of the count was the collaborative actions taken and continued collaboration required, in aid of a social problem that extends across multiple sectors.

The CAB values and honors the willingness and contribution of people experiencing homelessness to share their experiences.