

Point in Time - Everyone Counts 2025

Cowichan Women's Health Collective

January 31st, 2026

Unceded Quw'utsun Territory

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Territorial Acknowledgement

The 2025 Point in Time Count was conducted on the unceded territories of Quw'utsun, Lyackson, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, Malahat, Ts'uubaa-asatx, and Ditidaht Peoples. The participants in this count raise our hands to honour the past and present ancestors and guardians whose footsteps have marked these paths for generations; stewarding the lands, winds, waterways, and skies.

Background

The Point in Time count is required and funded by the Federal Governments' Reaching Home Program. This count is the only national snapshot of homelessness which uses consistent methodology on a regular basis. The number of survey questions varies from year to year. In the Cowichan region, this count has occurred six times since 2014. The most recent count, 2025, was the year of the enumeration; a shortened set of survey questions intended to gather knowledge of unsheltered and sheltered homelessness in the region. The count occurred on November 27th, 2025. There were 4 planning meetings held between November 1st and the day of the count to discuss approach, routes, participants and logistics.

Point in Time counts are effective in gathering a high-level view of homelessness because they help to gauge overall trends of homelessness. Hidden homelessness is one of the known gaps in the Point in Time Count process. Some examples of these gaps are those who avoid accessing services because of poor experiences, folks who are out of community on the day or those who are couch surfing, which can create overcrowding in a residence.

Compared to other local counts of homelessness such as the Front Line Provider Count, the Point in Time Count does not capture Indigenous homelessness effectively. This is because Indigenous people experience increased barriers to accessing services and therefore are not necessarily around in areas where the count is happening. Historically the count has not included those living on reserve, and common definitions of homelessness are not sufficient in describing the context of Indigenous Homelessness. This enumeration count did not specifically ask about Indigenous identity, however future PiT counts will, and it is important that these systemic factors are taken into consideration at that time. Any data collected about Indigenous people needs to be done utilizing the [OCAP \(Ownership, Control, Access and Possession\)](#) framework.

Context

The 2025 count unfortunately occurred after three significant events in community:

1. During a Public Health outbreak where Shigella, a gastro-intestinal infection, was disproportionately affecting those experiencing homelessness.
2. Notice from Local Authorities declared that on November 17th, Lewis Street was to be cleared. Lewis Street was an encampment that was situated in front of well accessed services

like Warmlands Shelter, Sobering Centre and the Overdose Prevention Site. This resulted in many individuals who had been residing in that area to relocate into hard to reach and untenable locations such as the Somenos Marsh.

3. On November 18th, directly following the displacement of 76 community members, the Cowichan Community set a provincial record for the most 911 calls for overdoses in a single night. By the time that the enumeration day arrived, many individuals had yet to be seen by their support teams.

Definitions of Homelessness – Used in this Count

Below is a breakdown of how Unsheltered and Sheltered homelessness is understood in terms of data collection in our community. These definitions were developed by Front Line Providers and are referenced in other data collection efforts in the Cowichan Region. In order to provide continuity of understanding, these definitions were used for the analysis of results for this count.

| Unsheltered | Sheltered |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Vehicle | Transitional Housing |
| Tenting | Shelter |
| Encampment | Hotel/Motel |
| Sleeping Rough | Hospital |
| | Couchsurfing |
| | Shacks |

Methodology

For any data collection effort, it is important that those who will be collecting the data help to shape the process. The 2025 Point in Time Count would not have been successful without the inclusion and direction of the Peer Leads and Front Line Staff in our community. These individuals were called in because of their living knowledge and expertise. Because these voices shaped the design and led the implementation of the count, the Cowichan Region captured the most engagement the community has seen with the PiT survey to date. The associated organizations are listed here:

- CAT Peer Leads
- CMHA Cowichan
- Cowichan Women Against Violence Society
- Public Health
- Island Health SUIT Team
- Lookout Housing and Health Society
- Cowichan Tribes
- BC Housing

- Ladysmith Resource Centre Association
- Cowichan Lake Community Services Society
- United Way BC
- Cowichan Valley Basket Society
- Chemainus Neighborhood House
- Chemainus Harvest House

Routes were assigned to staff who felt comfortable and familiar with their zone. For the anticipated “busy zones” like Somenos Marsh & the Lewis Street area or along Canada Avenue & Beverly St, Peer Leads teamed up with outreach staff to conduct the surveys. Survey conductors felt like they were seeking connection with community members rather than simply conducting research. This shift in approach led to participants having a positive take away from the experience.

Headquarters were established at the Warmland Shelter in the heart of town. Participating teams came by the shelter to check in and pick up their supplies. If supplies ran out through the day, then participants were able to come back to the central location to replenish. Surveys were collected 2 ways. For volunteers and Peer leads who had cellphones, a Microsoft Forms Link was created with the survey questions. Survey results were being updated in real time which was an added element of excitement for PiT participants who checked in throughout the day. For those without cellphone access, we had paper copies of the survey that folks were able to complete and return.

Survey Conductors asked 5 questions:

1. Have you already spoken to someone today about Point in Time? (if yes end survey)
2. Are you willing to answer brief questions about housing and homelessness in our community? (if no end survey)
3. Where did you stay last night?
4. Do you have access to a permanent residence where you can safely stay as long as you want?
5. Open ended - any thoughts about services, efforts or general comments you think are important to share.

In exchange for completing the survey, respondents were given the option of a gift card to either Subway or Tim Hortons with the value of \$10. While supplies lasted, the option of choice was another positive take away from the day.

Results

In total, 428 people were counted as experiencing homelessness.

| Geographical | Sheltered | Unsheltered | Total |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|-------|
| Ladysmith | 23 | 89 | 112 |

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| North Cowichan | 48 | 57 | 105 |
| City of Duncan | 114 | 84 | 198 |
| Other CVRD | 3 | 10 | 13 |
| Total | 188 | 240 | 428 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Unsheltered | 240 |
| Vehicle | 92 |
| Sleeping Rough | 89 |
| Encampment | 59 |
| | |
| Sheltered | 188 |
| Hospital/Jail/Treatment | 11 |
| Hotel/Motel/Transitional/Precarious | 57 |
| Shelter | 98 |
| Couchsurfing | 22 |

Other than the 4 required questions, survey administrators asked an open-ended question about what other services or feedback folks have. Full results are available upon request, some comments of interest are included here:

- At least 30 people asked for more affordable housing, many specified “Rent Geared to Income” style buildings.
- Many people said they appreciated outreach staff being out in community asking questions like these and connecting.
- Many asked for a building where many wellness services were under one roof (Acupuncture, nursing, massage etc.) especially for seniors.

Identified Successes and Learnings:

- Continue to use the “Right People”
 - Lived and Living experience community members shared invaluable knowledge in the planning. In particular, they were able to share where the “hot spots” were along the 12 different routes. In years past, survey conductors have found that engagement is challenging. Often staff who conduct the surveys are in uniform or are not a familiar face. This year we sent Peer leads out with familiar outreach staff and the feedback from providers and peer leads alike was positive.
- Start the Count Earlier in the day
 - As per local Bylaw, tear down of structures in parks is by 8am. If we want to catch folks in their exact spot of town, we need to start before then!
- Allow more time for planning

- Due to circumstances, only 3 weeks of planning time was available prior to enumeration day. While the count was largely deemed a success, it was not sufficient to ensure everyone who needed to be included was. Some areas such as Crofton got missed because of inadequate preparation time.
- Ensure the Margaret Moss health unit and the Slhexun Sun'ts'a' Clinic are both designated as a survey site within their locations on the maps. Outreach teams were deployed from these clinics to other locations but did not have surveys available on site.
- Volunteers really enjoyed having the two options for submitting results through the Microsoft forms link and by a paper copy.
- Gift cards worked well for folks. They were easy to carry around for survey conductors and allowed for choice.
- In future counts, we hope to integrate data from local institutions such as Hospitals. As there was an active outbreak for Shigella where hospital admissions were occurring, this data would have been helpful. Hospital admission data has been included in reports past.
- Have clear direction about how RV's are counted as some have hook ups and can be driven when needed compared to dilapidated RV's that cannot be moved.
 - Also determine how Boat's are counted. This is particularly relevant in the Cowichan Bay & Ladysmith areas as there are many boat dwellers who fit the understanding of homelessness but may not have been captured.
- Continue to use definitions of homelessness defined by Front Line Provider Count.

Acknowledgements:

This count was possible because of those who contributed before, during and after the enumeration day. Dianne Hinton, the Cowichan Coalition to End Homelessness Coordinator, was integral in bringing together the finer details and brought a keen eye to logistical planning that ensured the day was successful.

There were approximately 25 Peers and other volunteers who showed up for planning meetings and carried out surveys on the day. Their integrity and dedication to quality data collection ensured that the results were accurate and folks answering the survey felt heard and respected. This alternative approach to data collection should guide future research opportunities in the Cowichan Region.

The funding required for this count was provided by the Housing and Infrastructure Communities Canada branch of the federal government. Locally, these funds were distributed by the United Way BC team who were responsive and ensured this count had the resources we needed to get the work done in a good way. Huy tseep q'u