



**United Way**  
British Columbia

Working with communities in BC's  
Interior, Lower Mainland, Central  
& Northern Vancouver Island

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**Canada**

NEWS RELEASE  
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## **Local responses to homelessness for those in need**

### *Government of Canada invests additional \$3.7 million to support programs addressing homelessness in Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Duncan, including Indigenous and urban communities*

**Nanaimo, B.C.** – Homelessness, the housing crisis, and inflation are issues at the forefront of Canadian and British Columbian minds. These concerns touch lives in personal and visible ways. From seniors to young families worried about rent increases, food costs, and living on a fixed income – their unease is real and valid.

Addressing these concerns while also helping individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness in accessing or sustaining safe, stable, and affordable housing is the focus of the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy. The federal government is investing more than \$3.7 million through the Reaching Home program in central and northern Vancouver Island. In 2024-2025, \$2,957,025 will be invested in services and programs offered in Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Duncan, including Indigenous and urban communities. An additional \$802,788 this past winter has allowed the Community Advisory Boards to top up funding for cold weather supports. This funding has helped many agencies to continue supporting the most vulnerable population.

"Homelessness impacts every community across Canada, and there is no single cause or blanket solution," said the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, on behalf of the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities. "That is why we are investing in community-led projects in Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Duncan. By working closely with provincial partners and supporting grassroots networks, we can continue building on local solutions and making sure all Canadians have paths to safe and stable housing."

During the 2023 Nanaimo PIT Count, the survey indicated that individuals experiencing homelessness increased by 18.9% since it last took place in 2020. This increase comes as no surprise. The report also notes that the number may be much higher because of hidden homelessness. It further demonstrates that 80% of those surveyed have no access to shelter.

The PIT Count, funded by Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, is an important tool in gauging the current reality of homelessness, and helps inform agencies working on the frontline and all levels of government working to address the issue.

"Homelessness is something we know is increasing in our communities. The latest Point in Time (PIT) Counts have indicated significant jumps, and we hear about the struggles many face with increasing costs and their fears of losing their homes or not being able to afford living in their apartment. Reaching Home funding is crucial to addressing the unique issues and causes within a community," says Vicky Trill, United Way British Columbia Reaching Home Manager, Central & Northern Vancouver Island. "Our team supports local agencies one-on-one to help them continue delivering services where they are needed."

While the current state of homelessness, including those who are at risk of homelessness, paints a raw and somber picture, the responses to addressing the concerns are inspiring. The Snuneymuxw First Nations' Wrapping Blankets program provides the Indigenous population with low barrier access to a social worker, peer support, and cultural supports. At Nanaimo Family Life Association's SHINE program,

seniors who are actively unhoused or at high risk of losing their current housing can find personalized assistance. These are just two examples of local programs in their community to help those in need.

Since 2012, United Way British Columbia has been a trusted partner and the Community Entity (CE) for the Reaching Home program for Nanaimo as a Designated Community, and in 2013 became the CE for Nanaimo Indigenous Homelessness. The organization has fostered close relationships with agencies and First Nations in the region to address many issues, including homelessness. Since 2019, Reaching Home has helped 472 individuals in Nanaimo, Cowichan, and Duncan find more stable housing and over 1300 to maintain their current housing. Over 65% of people who accessed services funded by Reaching Home remained housed or successfully exited the program. A further 97% of individuals who accessed programs remained housed three months after receiving prevention services.

As social challenges continue to increase so does the need, and the funding opportunity was oversubscribed this year. Thirty-five (35) applications were received and 22 agencies were approved for funding by the Community Advisory Boards (CAB) with some receiving a partial portion of their request.

“It was a difficult choice and the Advisory Boards had to consider priorities and sustainability for programs,” says Julie Rushton, United Way BC’s Community Impact Manager. “As much as we would like to fund everybody, we have to make decisions based on the Board’s community priorities, the Government of Canada’s priorities, and desired outcomes.”

To learn more about the projects, visit [www.uwbc.ca/program/reaching-home/](http://www.uwbc.ca/program/reaching-home/).

To learn more about Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, visit: <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/index-eng.html>.

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## **About United Way British Columbia – working with communities in BC’s Interior, Lower Mainland and Central & Northern Vancouver Island**

United Way supports healthy, caring and inclusive communities by strengthening vital connections that support people in need. Representing the seven regions of Central and Northern Vancouver Island, North, East Kootenay, Lower Mainland, Southern Interior, Thompson Nicola Cariboo, and Trail and District, our organization serves a population of more than 4 million people, with a focus on kids and youth, seniors, poverty, mental health and food security.

[www.uwbc.ca](http://www.uwbc.ca)

### **About [Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#)**

Launched in April 2019, Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada. This program provides direct support and funding to Designated Communities (urban centres), Indigenous communities, territorial communities and rural and remote communities across Canada to help them address their local homelessness needs. Through Reaching Home, the federal government has committed \$4 billion over 9 years to address homelessness.

### **Interview Opportunities**

Interviews are available with Julie Rushton, Manager, CNVI Region, United Way British Columbia.

To coordinate interviews with local spokespeople, please contact Chantal Beesley  
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