



This project is funded by
the Government of Canada.



MEDIA RELEASE

March 9, 2026

Point-in-Time Count Shows Continued Growth in Homelessness Across Cowichan

A need for coordinated action key to tackling homelessness

Cowichan, B.C. - Results from the 2026 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count show a **continued rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness** across the Cowichan region, reinforcing the need for sustained, coordinated action across sectors. The housing crisis is a complex issue with interconnected challenges from housing affordability and income security to health and systemic inequities. The Count reinforces the need for a collaborative approach between governments, local agencies, and Indigenous partners to address these issues.

On November 27, 2025, **428 people were identified as experiencing homelessness across Cowichan**, nearly double the 223 people counted in 2023, and significantly higher than the 180 people identified in the 2024 snapshot count. While Point-in-Time Counts represent a single-day snapshot and are widely understood to undercount the true scope of homelessness, the findings point to a growing challenge.

More than half of those counted (**240 people**) were **unsheltered**, staying in vehicles, encampments, or sleeping rough. The remaining 188 people were staying in shelters, transitional settings, or temporarily couch surfing. These results mirror trends seen in recent years, with unsheltered homelessness continuing to outpace available shelter and housing options.

"These numbers are deeply concerning, but they are not surprising to the organizations and frontline workers who support people every day," said Naomi Woodland, Director of Housing Initiatives, United Way British Columbia. "The PiT Count is more than a data exercise; it's a call to action. With sustained investment, shared accountability, and strong partnerships, we can make meaningful progress toward a future where everyone has a safe place to call home. United Way BC is committed to working alongside our partners to support coordinated, community-led solutions that prevent homelessness and help people move into stable housing."

The 2026 PiT Count was peer-led with community members, individuals with lived experience, and an outreach-focused approach that resulted in the highest level of engagement seen in a Cowichan PiT Count to date, strengthening the reliability of the findings while also highlighting ongoing gaps, including hidden homelessness and Indigenous homelessness, which remain undercounted.

"This count focused on the connection between community members and called on the collective knowledge of those with lived experience and frontline providers. This approach proved to be incredibly valuable," said Sarah Sadler, Coordinated Access Lead of the Cowichan Women's Health Collective. "We know the data is better when those who collect it are part of defining the process. This way of collecting data aligns with the common phrase of "Nothing About us Without Us." This approach is also relevant in regard to the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession of Indigenous Data or when establishing community-based governance. Inclusion is a minimum requirement to ethical community work."

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About United Way British Columbia

United Way BC helps build healthy, caring, and inclusive communities across our province. We strengthen vital connections that support people in need with a focus on emergency response, kids and youth, seniors, mental health, and food security.

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Interview Opportunities:

Interviews are available with Naomi Woodland, Director of Housing Initiatives United Way British Columbia. Follow up on questions related to process or data captured is available as well.

To coordinate interviews with local spokespeople, please contact Chantal Beesley
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