

12th Annual Report Card on Homelessness for Nelson



Mural: Bryn Stevenson <https://muralroutes.ca/mural/nelson-together/> Photo: Rebecca Martin

September 2020

Researched and prepared by:
Nelson Committee on Homelessness

Purpose of Report Card

The 12th Annual Report Card on Homelessness for Nelson aims to bring the reader a better understanding of the current state of local homelessness, what contributes to homelessness, and what we can and are doing about it. It is an educational tool designed to increase awareness, encourage questions, and inform solutions.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary Infographic.....4

Context: Definitions & Causes of Homelessness.....6

Context: The Importance of Housing.....8

Current State: Community Indicators10

Current State: Homelessness, Overdose & COVID-19 Crises.....14

Current State: NCOH’s COVID-19 Response18

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: Need for Supportive Housing.....19

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: NCOH Programs.....20

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: Strong Partnerships22

References23

Acknowledgements.....24

Letter from the NCOH Co-Chairs.....25

Interested in Joining Nelson Committee On Homelessness?

Please contact Rebecca Martin, NCOH Community Coordinator, at ncoh@nelsoncares.ca or 250-352-6011 ext. 5266

Website: <https://nelsoncares.ca/portfolio-items/committee-on-homelessness/>



Facebook Page: [Nelson Committee on Homelessness](#)

Overview of Nelson Committee On Homelessness (NCOH)

Nelson Committee on Homelessness is a volunteer committee of **service agencies, government representation, and concerned citizens** dedicated to leading a collaborative and coordinated response to homelessness.

Founded in 2001, we work with members of the community, businesses, governments, and other stakeholders to **identify and implement evidenced-based solutions to homelessness and poverty & support entitlement to safe, affordable, and sustainable housing as a human right**. Acting as Nelson’s Community Advisory Board for *Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy*, we **make recommendations** to our Community Entity (Nelson CARES Society) **on the distribution of federal funding** aimed at achieving the goals of *Reaching Home*.

We encourage **collaboration**, new initiatives, research, information-sharing, knowledge-building, community partnerships, and engaging the **voice of people with lived experiences** of homelessness in all decision-making.

NCOH acknowledges our respect for, and deep gratitude to, all the ancestors and keepers of the land on whose traditional territories we are honoured to live and work.

Homelessness in Nelson

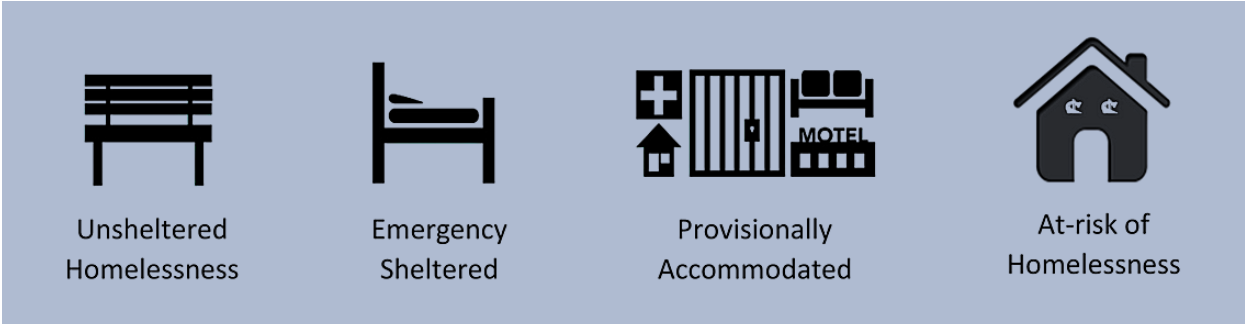
Homelessness is happening **right here, right now in Nelson**. People **living without shelter** may be more visible in our community, yet this is only the tip of the iceberg. There are also many people living in **temporary, precarious, substandard, or dangerous housing situations** – children through to seniors – **hidden from sight or at-risk of homelessness**. Many young girls and single moms end up living with predators. While **some groups are more likely to experience homelessness due to systemic barriers & inequities**, such as racism and discrimination (for example, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities or mental health issues, and people fleeing violence), **homelessness affects people from all walks of life**.

No one is immune to becoming homeless; it can happen to anyone.

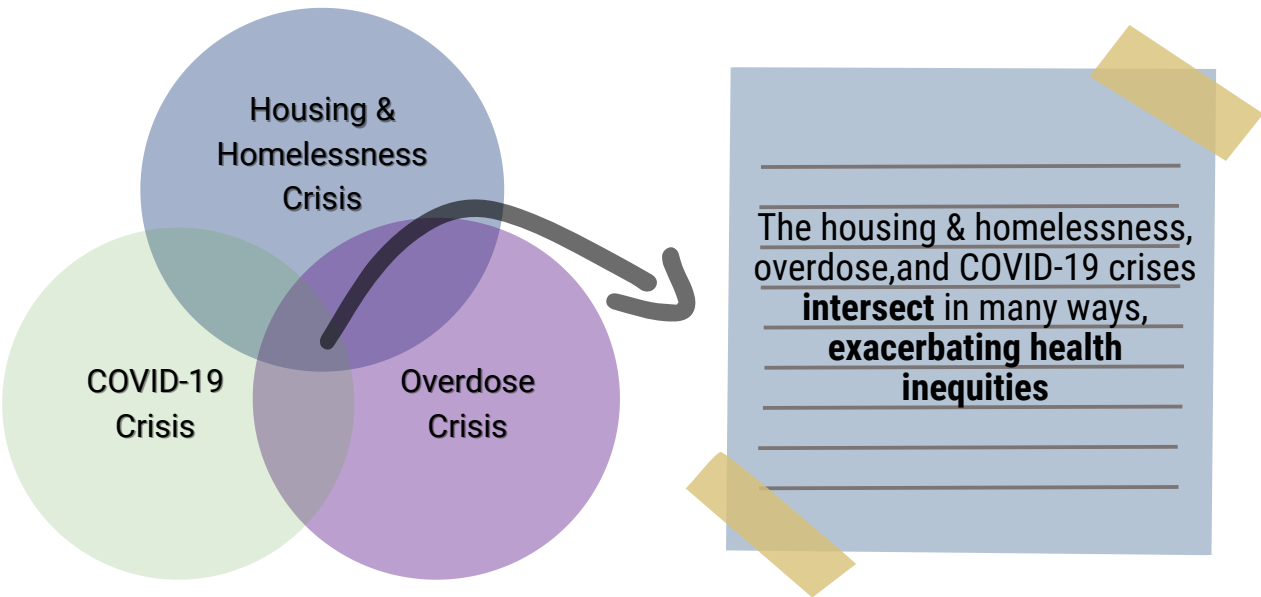
HOMELESSNESS IN NELSON

2020 Report Card Summary

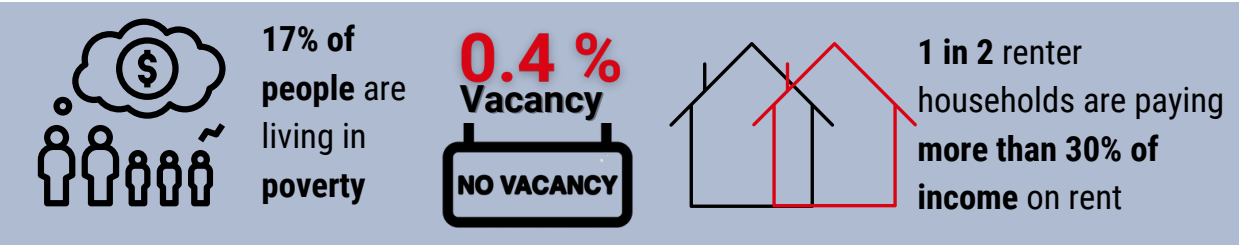
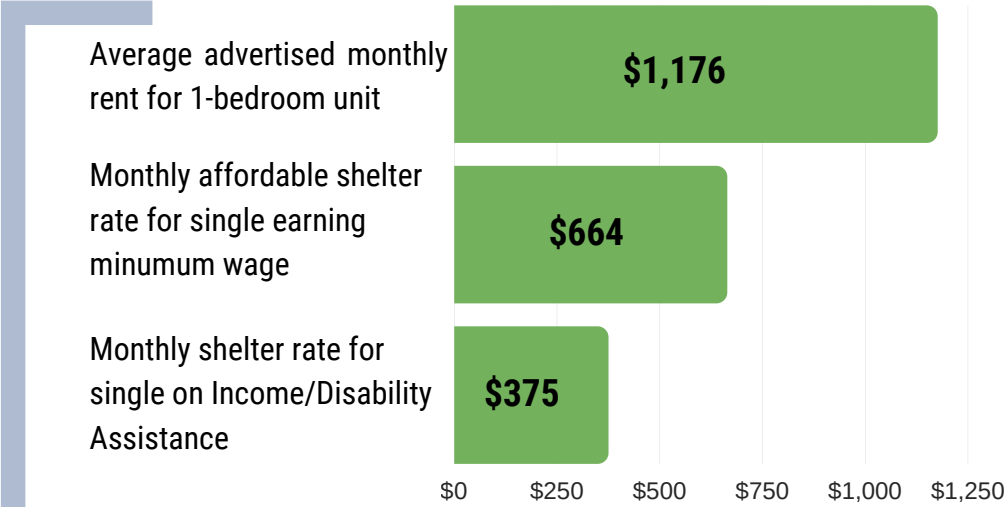
Homelessness includes a range of living situations



The Housing & Homelessness Crisis is not the only public health crisis we are facing.



Nelson is in a housing affordability and vacancy crisis



Ending homelessness requires enough affordable, safe, appropriate housing that people can access in our community

- Having **supportive housing** in Nelson would make a big difference in reducing local homelessness
- **Nelson currently has no supportive housing**—a type of social (subsidized) housing with on-site supports for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.



Context: Definitions & Causes of Homelessness

Canadian Definition of Homelessness

“Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.

Homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations:

- 1) **Unsheltered (also known as Absolute Homelessness)**, including people who lack housing and are living on the streets or other places not intended for human habitation;
- 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless (e.g. *Stepping Stones*), in shelters for those impacted by family violence (e.g. *Aimee Beaulieu Transition House is for women and children fleeing violence*), or in emergency shelters for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods, etc.;
- 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including hidden homelessness such as ‘couch surfing’, temporarily living at a motel/hotel, or staying in an institutional setting (e.g. *hospital*);
- 4) **At Risk**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious, does not meet public health and safety standards, or is the only available ‘option’, leading the person to be trapped in that living situation (e.g. *many local single mothers/young women live in these conditions*).¹



Unsheltered
Homelessness



Emergency
Sheltered



Provisionally
Accommodated



At-risk of
Homelessness

¹ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2012.) Canadian Definition of Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. www.homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition
Image: Gaetz, S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T., & Gulliver, T. (2013). The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Context: Definitions & Causes of Homelessness

Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

“...Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships. (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012)”²

Causes of Homelessness

Systems failure, structural barriers, and relational/individual challenges are the root causes of homelessness, such as:

- **A lack of affordable, safe, appropriate housing**, especially following federal disinvestment in affordable housing starting in the 1980’s
- **A lack of access to needed social & health supports**
- **Structural economic changes/Fewer secure, full-time, well-paying jobs**
- **Poverty**, minimum wages below living wages, and income supports that have remained effectively unchanged despite rising costs of living
- **Racism, discrimination, stigma & effects of historical trauma**
- **A lack of acknowledgement** of the depth of local poverty in our community
- **Financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, physical challenges** – and stigma around these challenges – that can make obtaining or keeping housing difficult
- **Family conflict, neglect, or violence** (especially for youth and women)

² Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COHIndigenousHomelessnessDefinition.pdf

Context: The Importance of Housing

Safe, affordable, appropriate housing is a basic necessity & human right.

Compared to the general population, people without safe, affordable, and appropriate housing are at **greater risk** of:

- Respiratory diseases (e.g. COVID-19)
- Diabetes & Hypertension
- Wounds & Skin conditions
- Infections (e.g. tuberculosis)
- Foot problems
- Dental health problems
- Depression, anxiety, & other mental health challenges
- Substance use challenges
- **8 to 10 times more likely to die³, even amongst youth**

***“Housing means life. Housing means stability.
It means a way of getting your own life back on track.”***

– Canadian who was formerly homeless (Recovery for All campaign video)



A safe, affordable, appropriate home is more than a roof overhead.

- Security
- Stability
- Privacy
- A place to store things
- Hope & Opportunity
- A sense of pride & belonging

Imagine not having an address, regular shower access, a safe & private place to sleep.

How would you get or keep a job?

Imagine always being in the public eye, fearing for your safety, feeling rejected by society.

How healthy would you be?

Imagine not knowing if you'll be able to make next month's rent & having to choose between keeping your family fed or keeping the heat on in the winter?

How would you make such a difficult decision?

³ Raphael, D., & Mikkonen, J. (2010). Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management.

Context: The Importance of Housing

Safe, affordable, appropriate housing is vital for community health.

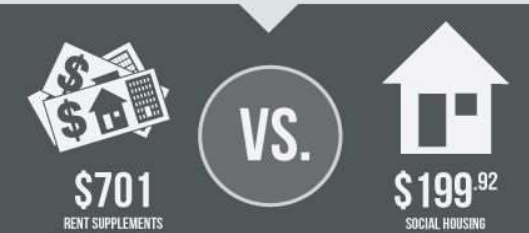
Homelessness costs us all.

\$7,000,000,000

*annual cost of homelessness
to Canadian economy⁴*

Housing people is cost-effective.

THE AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS OF
HOUSING PEOPLE WHILE THEY ARE HOMELESS



Source: Wellesley Institute's Blueprint to End Homelessness (2007)

A range of housing options - including social & affordable rental options - supports the health & resiliency of communities, local economies, & society:

- Allows people with a **range of jobs, skills, and incomes to live & work in the same community, contributing to a more varied, vibrant local economy.** Anecdotally, in Nelson, local businesses and other employers are negatively impacted because workers can't find housing or afford to live in Nelson.
- Housing people is **cost-effective** compared to the costs associated with homelessness.
- As COVID-19 has highlighted, the **health of individuals has a direct impact on the health of the entire community.** **We are all interconnected.**

⁴ Gaetz S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T., & Gulliver, T. (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press

Image: Wellesley Institute's Blueprint to End Homelessness (2007)

Current State: Community Indicators

Community Indicators are a standardized method to document the context of homelessness, housing, and poverty in Nelson and monitor changes over time.

Rental Housing	2019 Report	2020 Report	Change ⁵	% Change
CMHC Rental Market Survey ⁶ :				
Rental Vacancy Rate (Overall)	0.0%	0.4%	↑	
- Studio, 1 Bdrm, 2 Bdrm	0.0%	0.0%	↔	0%
Total Number Purpose-built Units	515	509	↓	-1.2%
Average Rents ⁷ (Overall)	\$852	\$913	↑	7.2%
- Studio	\$634	\$650	↑	2.5%
- 1 Bedroom	\$757	\$803	↑	6.1%
- 2 Bedroom	\$936	\$1,037	↑	10.8%
- 3+ Bedroom	Supp. ⁸	\$1,241		
Average Advertised Rents (NCOH Survey ⁹):				
Room (96 units in sample)	\$624	\$633	***	
Studio (9 units in sample)	\$880	\$979	↑	11.3%
1 Bedroom (14 units in sample)	\$1,068	\$1,176	↑	10.1%
2 Bedroom (12 units in sample)	\$1,452	\$1,472	***	
3 Bedroom (12 units in sample)	\$1,971	\$1,842	***	
4+ Bedroom (5 units in sample)	\$2,367	\$2,235	***	
City of Nelson Statistics:				
# Secondary Suites Reported ¹⁰	509	533	↑	4.7%
- # Reported as Short-Term	21	30	↑	42.9%
- % Reported as Short-Term	4.1%	5.6%	↑	36.6%

Nelson’s Vacancy Rate has been near 0% since 2014, *one of the lowest in Canada.*

0%

Vacancy

This is important to consider when looking at the average rental rates from CMHC. The average rates include non-vacant units with rental rates that have been controlled under the Residential Tenancy Act. This Act regulates rent increases for current tenants but does not apply to new tenants. So even if you were able to secure a purpose-built rental amid the low vacancy and turnover rates, the rent could be much higher than these average rates. The advertised rental rates may give a better picture of the rent prices new tenants can expect to pay.

⁵ *** indicates not ‘statistically significant’ changes. The “change” may simply reflect differences in sample characteristics rather than real change.

⁶ Annual survey each October. Targets only purpose-built structures with at least 3 rental units which have been on the market for at least 3 months.

⁷ Changes in Rates reflect increases in rent for existing tenants and contextual factors that can drive up rates, such as changing tenants or renovations.

⁸ Data suppressed by CMHC because the reliability was too poor to report. See CMHC’s Methodology for Rental Market Survey for more details.

⁹ NCOH Advertised Rental Market Survey, April – May; Black Press; I Love Nelson; Kijiji; Craig’s List; WK Rentals; Remax; Prop2Go; Selkirk College Off-Campus Hsg. List; Facebook – Nelson, BC Homes & Rooms for Rent, WK Available Rentals, Trail & Area Rentals; Bhubble.com; realestate.mitula.ca

¹⁰ Secondary suites refer to full secondary suites only; does not include 1 or more rooms in a house. Of the 509 secondary suites reported in 2018 (the 2019 Report Card), 63 had waivers (i.e. were being used by the owner and not for rent). Of the 533 secondary suites reported in 2019 (the 2020 Report Card), 65 had waivers.

Current State: Community Indicators

Housing is affordable if a household spends less than 30% of gross income on rent & utilities

47% Nelson Renter Households paying more than 30% on shelter ¹¹

Household Type & Income Source	Monthly Income	Monthly Affordable Shelter Rates ¹²
Single on Income Assistance	\$760	\$375
Single on Disability Assistance	\$1,183	\$375
Senior on OAS & GIS (for July – Sept 2020 quarter)	\$1,530	\$459
Single earning Minimum Wage (35 hrs/wk)	\$2,214	\$664
Single earning Living Wage (35 hrs/wk)	\$2,800	\$840
Median 1-Person Household Income (2016 Census)	\$2,475	\$742
Median Renter Household Income (2016 Census)	\$3,054	\$916
Average Advertised 1-Bedroom in Nelson		\$1,176

Average advertised rental rates¹³ are also high in other areas of our region:

Area (Sample Size)	Room	Studio	1-bdrm	2-bdrm	3-bdrm	4 + bdrm
Rural Nelson (44)	\$618	\$875	\$1,215	\$1,501	\$1,708	
Salmo & Area (7)	\$750		\$750	\$1,350		
Castlegar & Area (36)	\$630	\$700	\$1,014	\$1,130	\$1,550	\$2,000
Slocan Valley (11)	\$600	\$900		\$1,433	\$1,100	
Trail & Area (45)	\$569	\$667	\$885	\$1,107	\$1,525	\$1,600
Rossland (12)	\$575	\$1,100	\$1,350	\$1,450	\$2,111	\$2,075
Kaslo (3)			\$1,250		\$1,200	

Waitlists for social and affordable housing are long & the turnover rate is low:

Example	Housing Mainly For:	# on Waitlist ¹⁴	# Units
Kiwanis Projects	Seniors	42	62
Cicada Place	Youth	34	10
Anderson Gardens	People with Disabilities (PWD) & Seniors	136	33
Nelson CARES	Singles, Families, Seniors, PWD	176	132
In progress: Lakeside	Seniors & PWD	*249	47
In progress: Hall Street	Singles & Families	*182	41
In progress: SHARE	Singles	*TBD	39

¹¹ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population (Nelson, City)

¹² 30% of monthly income. Exception: Shelter Rate of \$375 used for Singles on Income/Disability Assistance

¹³ NCOH Advertised Rental Market Survey, April – May 2020. See footnote 9 for more details.

¹⁴ Waitlists can fluctuate frequently, and it does not reflect exact overall need in our community. However, it does indicate that many more people are in need of subsidized or lower-end of market rentals than what is currently available in Nelson. Numbers are as of summer 2020 (exact dates vary by location).

*Prospect/Interest lists, not formal waitlists. If you would like to be on the interest list for the SHARE Housing development, contact info@sharehousing.ca

Current State: Community Indicators

Income & Rent Supplements	2019 Report	2020 Report	Change	% Change
Minimum Hourly Wage	\$13.85	\$14.60	↑	5.4%
Living Wage	\$18.21	\$18.46	↑	1.4%
Monthly Income Assistance (Single)	\$760	\$760	↔	0%
Monthly Disability Assistance (Single)	\$1183	\$1183	↔	0%
# BC Housing Rent Supplements ¹⁵ :				
- Families (RAP)	39	55	↑	41.0%
- Seniors (SAFER)	89	94	↑	5.6%
- Homeless (HPP/HOP)	30	30	↔	0%
Annual Unemployment Rate ¹⁶ (Kootenays)	5.3% (2018)	5.3% (2019)	↔	0%
Annual Unemployment Rate ¹⁶ (BC)	4.7% (2018)	4.7% (2019)	↔	0%

\$375

Shelter Rate

The monthly Income and Disability Assistance rates are divided into ‘support’ and ‘shelter’ portions. The **shelter rate of \$375 for singles has not changed since 2007**, despite drastic rent increases¹⁷. Unlike BC, many provinces provide a single Assistance rate, which offers recipients greater flexibility & reduces administrative costs.

Food ¹⁸ & Shelters ¹⁹	2019 Report	2020 Report	Change	% Change
# Food Bank Visits	Unavailable	18,206		
# Meals Served	30,194	26,642	↓	-11.8%
# Transition House Shelter Beds	8	8	↔	0%
# Women Who Stayed at Transition House	74	87	↑	17.6%
# Children Who Stayed at Transition House	33	31	↓	-6.1%
# Emergency Shelter Beds ²⁰	17	17	↔	0%
# Individuals Who Stayed at Shelter	220	188	↓	-14.5%

The **lower number of individuals who stayed at Stepping Stones emergency shelter** between April 2019 to March 2020 (188), compared to April 2018 to March 2019 (220), **does not indicate a reduced need for this service**. Instead, there are **more individuals with complex care needs who are staying at the Stepping Stones shelter for longer periods of time**.

¹⁵ Statistics from BC Housing as of March 31st, 2019 and March 31st, 2020

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0090-01 Labour force characteristics by province, territory and economic region, annual](#) 2019 Report = 2018 rate; 2020 Report = 2019 rate. Rates have sharply increased since the coronavirus pandemic (see page 17 for more details).

¹⁷ 56% allowed increase in rent from 2007 to 2020, based on the annual allowed % increases in rent under the Residential Tenancy Agreement

¹⁸ # Food Bank Visits: Total food bank visits at Salvation Army, Nelson Community Food Centre, and St. Saviour’s Food Pantry, as well as Salvation Army Christmas hampers and school lunches. # Meals Served: Total number of breakfasts and lunches served at Our Daily Bread and Salvation Army. 2019 Report = 2018 data; 2020 Report = 2019 data.

¹⁹ Aimee Beaulieu Transition House & Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter data. 2019 Report = April 2018-March 2019; 2020 Report = April 2019-March 2020

²⁰ Note that there were also 5 additional winter beds available from November to March/April

Current State: Community Indicators

Market Basket Measure of Poverty

% Individuals Living in Poverty	2016 Census Data ²¹		
	Nelson	BC	Canada
Total Individuals	17.3%	15.2%	12.9%
Singles or people living with roommates	31.9%	32.3%	29.2%
People living in lone-parent families	36.6%	31.7%	26.5%

“The Market Basket Measure establishes poverty thresholds based on the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation & other necessities. Families with disposable income less than the applicable thresholds, given family size & region of residence, are deemed to be in poverty.” - [Statistics Canada](#)

Living Wage for Nelson

The **living wage** calculation²² is based on what a family of four (2 parents and 2 children ages 4 & 7) needs to **meet basic family expenses, based on the actual costs of living in Nelson**. It is the hourly wage both parents need to make while both working 35 hours/week.

\$18.46

per hour



Nelson At Its Best regularly calculates the living wage for Nelson:

Actual Family Expenses (based on cost of living in Nelson)	=	Income from Employment (Living Wage)	+	Income from Government Transfers	-	EI, CPP, Federal & Provincial Taxes
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Although many people in Nelson may be making \$18.46 or more per hour, they may not work enough hours to cover basic family expenses and may not be eligible for benefits. Both wage per hour and the number of hours worked per week are important.

²¹ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016148

²² Ivanova, I. & Saugstad, L. (2019). Working for a Living Wage: 2019 Calculation Guide. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/livingwage2019>
Images by unknown authors, under licenses (from left to right): [CC BY-NC-ND](#), [CC BY-SA](#), [CC BY-SA-NC](#), and [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Current State: Homelessness, Overdose & COVID-19 Crises²³

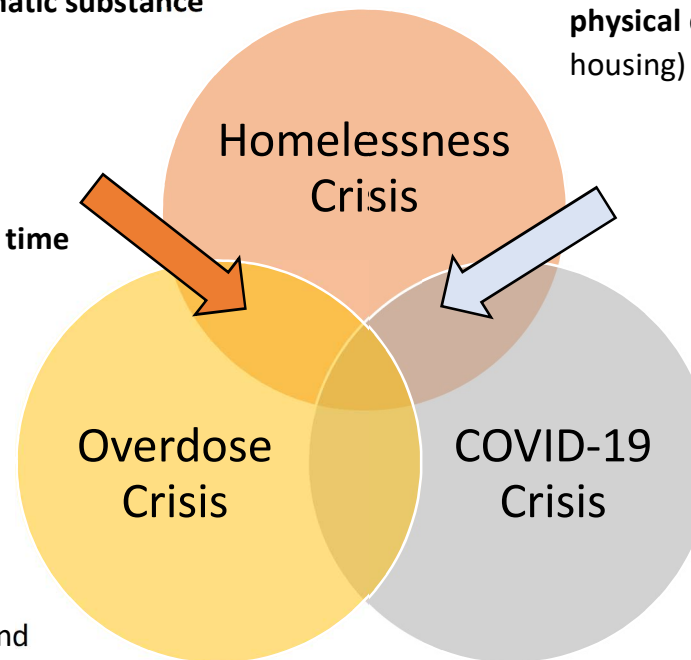
*The affordable housing & homelessness crisis is not the only crisis we are facing.
The overdose crisis has been a public health emergency in BC since April 2016.*

Intersection of Homelessness & Overdose Crises:²⁴

The **interplay between homelessness, substance use, and mental health is complex and non-linear**. People experiencing homelessness are more likely to face problematic substance use than the general population, however, **many people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness do *not* face problematic substance use**.

Problematic substance use can be a **contributing factor to, and consequence of, homelessness**:

- People with problematic substance use can have a **harder time holding down a stable job or finding/keeping housing**, including because of **stigma and discrimination**. Street-entrenched people with mental health and substance use challenges are some of the **most vulnerable** members of our society.
- Many people use substances as a **way of coping** with trauma, discrimination, isolation, anxiety, depression, and difficult life situations. Given the trauma, chronic stress, and ongoing threats to physical safety and well-being from living on the streets, it makes sense that unsheltered homelessness can **cause or exacerbate poor mental health and problematic substance use**.



Current State: Homelessness, Overdose & COVID-19 Crises

*The affordable housing & homelessness crisis is not the only crisis we are facing.
COVID-19 has been a public health emergency in BC since March 2020.*

Intersection of Homelessness & COVID-19 Crises:²⁵

1. People who are experiencing homelessness or living in crowded housing conditions are more likely to contract COVID-19:

- Preventative behaviours like frequent **hand washing, disinfecting surfaces, physical distancing** and **self-isolation** (especially in crowded shelters or housing) are very **challenging or impossible** to do independently
- People with lower incomes may be less likely to work from home. **Many lower wage jobs in Nelson** are in the service and retail industries (restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, tourism, etc.) and **necessitate at least some in-person contact & being physically present** at the workplace

2. Many people who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or living in poverty are at greater risk of a dangerous or deadly outcome if they contract COVID-19:

- Underlying health conditions are more common in the homeless population and people living in poverty than the general population (**health inequities**)
- **Poor housing and low socioeconomic status** are strong **social determinants of poorer health**, including **diabetes and 'heart and lung' conditions** that increase risk of a dangerous or deadly COVID-19 outcome

²³ Venn diagram credit: [A Pandemic Response and Recovery Toolkit for Homeless Systems Leaders in Canada](#). Prepared for Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness by OrgCode Consulting, Inc., June 2020, p. 6

²⁴ Didenko, E. & Pankratz, N. [Substance Use: Pathways to homelessness? Or a way of adapting to street life?](#) Reprinted from "Housing and Homelessness" issue of Visions Journal, 2007, Volume 4, p. 9-10.

Homeless Hub. [Substance Use and Addiction](#).

Palepu, A. et al. (2013). [Substance use and access to health care and addiction treatment among homeless and vulnerably housed persons in three Canadian cities](#). PLoS ONE, 8, e75133.

²⁵ Patel et al. (2020). [Poverty, inequality and COVID-19: The forgotten vulnerable](#). Public Health, 183, p. 110-111.

Perri, M., Dosani, N., & Hwang, S. (2020). [COVID-19 and people experiencing homelessness: Challenges and mitigation strategies](#). Canadian Medical Association Journal, 192, p. 716-719.

Tsai, J. & Wilson, M. (2020). [COVID-19: A potential public health problem for homeless populations](#). The Lancet, Public Health, 5, p. 186-187.

Current State: Homelessness, Overdose & COVID-19 Crises²⁶

Overdose Crisis:

Since 2016, over 5,900 people have died from an illicit drug overdose in BC, including at least 16 people in Nelson. At least 921 people have died from overdose in BC between January – July 2020 alone.²⁷

Any death is one too many.

“The number of people dying in BC due to an unsafe drug supply continues to surpass deaths due to homicides, motor vehicle incidents, suicides and COVID-19 combined.”

– [Lisa Lapointe, Chief Coroner, August 25, 2020](#)

Although people experiencing unsheltered/sheltered homelessness are over-represented among people dying from overdose, **most deaths from overdoses occur in private residences** (around 66% in the Interior²⁷) and **are people who lived in private residences** during the month preceding their death (around 82% in the Interior²⁸).

Intersection of Overdose & COVID-19 Crises:

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the overdose crisis.

Increased social isolation/using alone, changes to drug supply/increased toxicity, and reduced services in some areas are thought to explain the increase in overdoses since the pandemic.

- **May, June, and July 2020 have been the deadliest months to date in BC for overdoses, with 180, 181, and 176 deaths.** These numbers are more than **twice as high** as the number of deaths for the same months in 2019. Before COVID, the deadliest month was December 2016 with 161 deaths.²⁷
- People dying from overdose in BC decreased by 38% from 2018 (1,546 deaths) to 2019 (981 deaths). Since the COVID-19 crisis began, however, deaths have once again risen, with at least **921 people dying from overdose only 7 months into 2020**.²⁷

²⁶ Venn diagram credit: [A Pandemic Response and Recovery Toolkit for Homeless Systems Leaders in Canada](#). Prepared for Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness by OrgCode Consulting, Inc., June 2020, p. 6

²⁷ BC Coroners Service. [Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC](#). Numbers as of September 23, 2020. Numbers may change as investigations are concluded.

²⁸ BC Coroners Service. [Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths in BC: Findings of Coroners' Investigation](#), Table 2, p. 9. Published online September 27, 2018.

Current State: Homelessness, Overdose & COVID-19 Crises

COVID-19 Crisis:²⁹

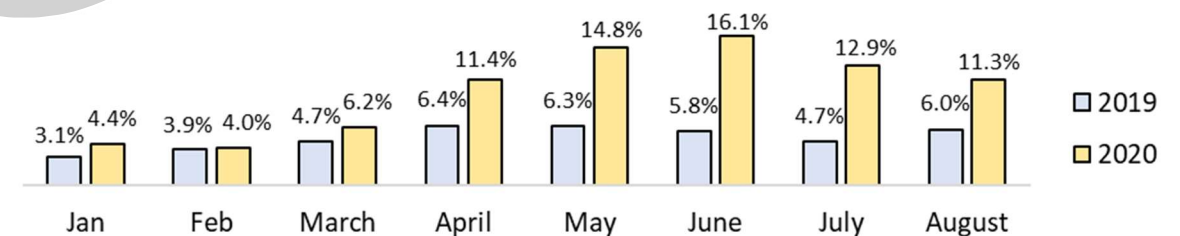
The pandemic has highlighted how **interconnected** we all are & how **our individual actions can have big consequences on others** – our families, our neighbours, our communities, and even people we've never met and never will meet.

The pandemic has also **shown how important housing is for an individual's health & safety and the health & safety of the whole community**. It has shone a light on – *and exacerbated* – **health inequities arising from systemic racism and discrimination**. People of colour, Indigenous peoples, people living in poverty or poor neighbourhoods, and people experiencing homelessness or living in inadequate housing conditions are **more likely to contract COVID-19 & experience a dangerous outcome due to poorer health**.

“Some people thought COVID-19 would be the great equalizer. But it isn't the great equalizer. COVID actually exacerbates existing differences in communities. Racialized people are more likely to live in poverty, poor housing, or work precarious jobs – all of these things lead to worse health and worse social circumstance, and COVID loves those things.”
– [Dr. Kwame McKenzie, CEO of Wellesley Institute](#)

It's likely COVID-19 has/will have a big impact on people who are provisionally housed – including the 'hidden homeless' population – and who are at-risk of homelessness right here in Nelson. **Many Nelsonites were already struggling to make ends meet before COVID-19, and it's uncertain how long some government financial supports and policies aimed at helping people cope with lost income will remain in place.**

The unemployment rate³⁰ for the Kootenays has risen sharply since COVID-19, with rates twice as high in April – August 2020 as they were in these months in 2019:



²⁹ McKenzie, K. (2020). [Toronto and Peel have reported race-based and socio-demographic data – now we need action](#).

Patel et al. (2020). [Poverty, inequality and COVID-19: The forgotten vulnerable](#). *Public Health*, 183, p. 110-111.

Poteat, T., Millett, G. A., Nelson, L. E., & Beyrer, C. (2020). [Understanding COVID-19 risks and vulnerabilities among black communities in America: The lethal force of syndemics](#). *Annals of Epidemiology*, 47, p. 1-3.

Power, T. et al., (2020). [COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples: An imperative for action](#). *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 29, p. 2737-2741.

³⁰ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0293-01 [Labour force characteristics by economic region, three-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, last 5 months](#)

Current State: NCOH’s COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 is shining a light on the importance of safe and appropriate housing, access to basic necessities, and access to harm reduction and health supports, for both individual and community health.

Since the pandemic, Stepping Stones shelter has had to reduce their capacity in order to ensure proper physical distancing. Additional sites providing safe spaces to self-isolate or physically distance have been implemented, including two hotel sites and a sanctioned encampment behind the Civic Centre until June 30, 2020. In addition to spaces to isolate/distance, NCOH identified the following community priorities for the response:

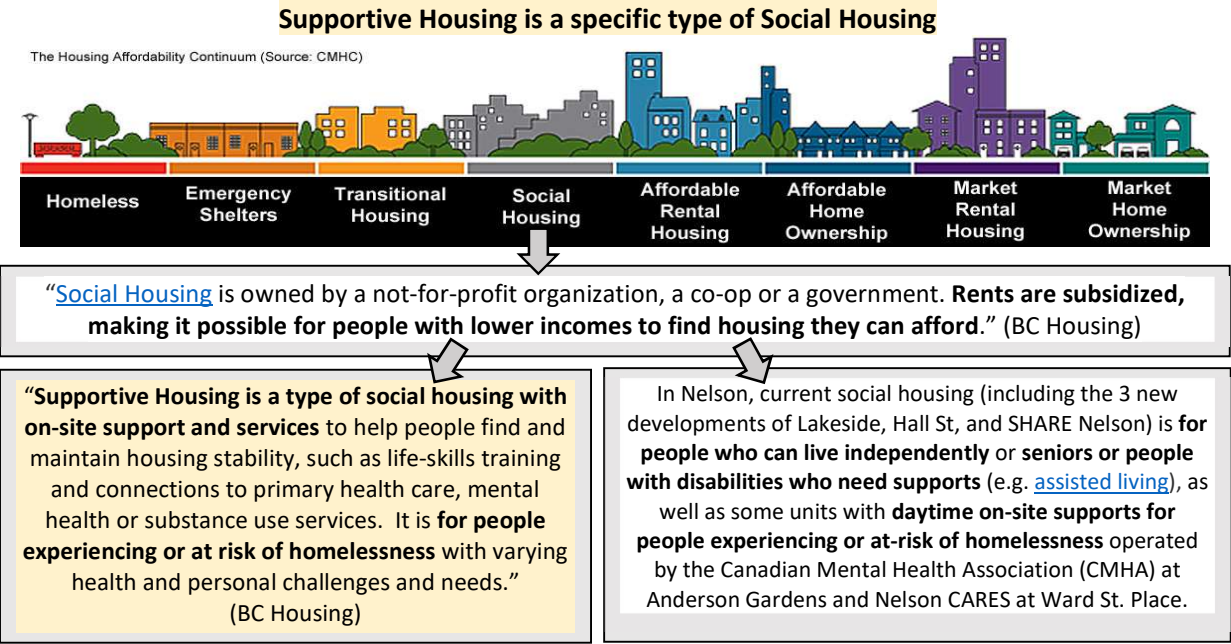
Priority	Why this is a priority	How this priority is being met
Hygiene	Maintaining good hygiene (e.g. regular hand-washing) is key for reducing the risk of contracting COVID. Reduced services, including public washroom hours at the beginning of the pandemic, have made accessing some hygiene services challenging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Showers offered twice a week• 24/7 hand wash stations set up• 24/7 porta potty set up• Working on supported laundry
Communication & Technology	Finding new ways to stay connected with clients/community members is key during a time of social isolation and reduced in-person services. Ensuring service providers and clients have up-to-date info on local services and COVID-19 is also important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported use of cell phones• Phone & in-person check-ins• Weekly ‘State of Services’ posted online and at some agencies• COVID-19 info posted at key places
Access to PPE	Masks, hand sanitizer, and gloves can help reduce the risk of transmission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PPE distributed on as-needed basis
Harm Reduction	Access to safe supply and other harm reduction resources was crucial for reducing the risk of overdose and virus transmission even before the pandemic. COVID-19 has greatly exacerbated the overdose crisis & highlighted the need for continued safe supply and harm reduction strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly OAT clinic with COVID prescribing at Sanctioned Civic Encampment & hotel site• Providing harm reduction supplies and information at all sites
Physical & Mental Health Support	Helping clients connect with physical and mental health services/service providers is important at any time, and especially during times of social isolation and reduced access to services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doctor or nurse practitioner on-call or on-site; opportunities for clients to connect with a GP• Mental health workers available to support clients in-person
Food Access	COVID-19 introduced some food service changes and unknowns around funding and food security. Outreach workers reported that people were going hungry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On-site food deliveries• ‘No cook’ food bags• Grocery cards (independent access)
Coordinated Management	Coordination is essential for achieving these priorities and offering wraparound services/supports. Partnership between NCOH agencies, City of Nelson & Nelson City Police, RDCK, BC Housing, Interior Health, local businesses & Nelson Vulnerable Population Emergency Response Group.	

Ultimately, this response offers clients a **safe place to stay + wraparound services and supports**, partially resembling a supportive housing model. The success of the response is **demonstrating a strong need for supportive housing in Nelson & the benefits this would bring for individuals and our community** (see next page).

On behalf of NCOH, thank you to everyone who is working tirelessly to support our vulnerable population during this difficult time.

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: Need for Supportive Housing

Ending homelessness requires enough affordable, safe, appropriate housing that people can access, and a range of housing options to meet a variety of needs – *including Supportive Housing.*



Nelson does not currently have 24/7 harm-reduction-focused Supportive Housing, but **Nelson is approved for 24/7 [Supportive Housing Funding](#) by BC Housing. We just need the land.**

Evidence suggests 24/7 Supportive Housing in Nelson would greatly help reduce local homelessness:

Several studies in high-income countries & local data from CMHA and Nelson CARES have found that Supportive Housing:

- ✓ **Reduces homelessness & increases long-term housing stability**
- ✓ **Helps people stabilize** their lives & **reintegrate** into society
- ✓ **Promotes physical/mental/social health** and overall **well-being**
- ✓ **Cost-effective** (off-sets costs to the health and justice systems)

NCOH’s COVID-19 Response has provided **further evidence for the benefits of 24/7 Supportive Housing locally**, with many services providers noting increased stability & well-being among clients who stayed at the sanctioned Civic Encampment or the North Shore hotel where they received regular staffing supports.

“The sanctioned Civic Encampment in Nelson provided a safe place & essential services for residents during the early stages of the pandemic. The success of this project has demonstrated the potential for our community to work together in addressing the critical need for harm reduction housing.”
- Ryall Giuliano, Street Outreach Worker

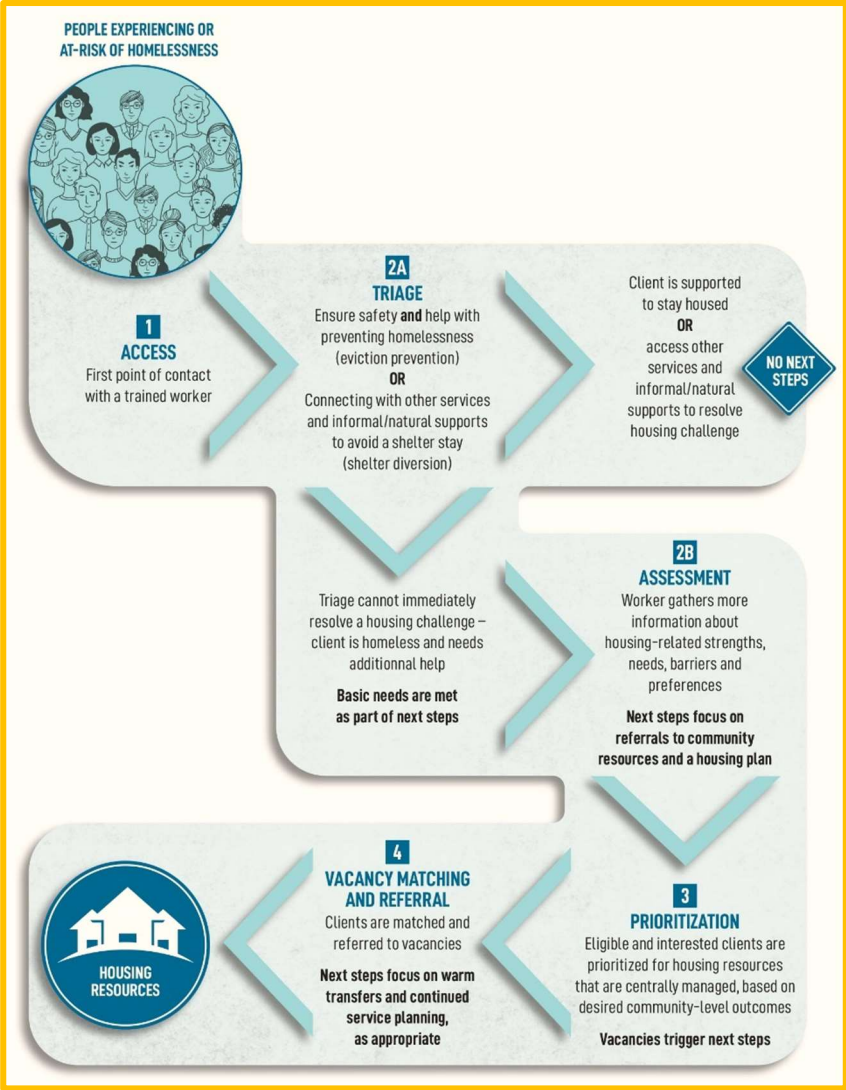
Pathways to Ending Homelessness: NCOH Programs

Ending homelessness requires multifaceted, systems-focused, evidence-based solutions & strong partnerships.

Since 2007, NCOH has received federal funding. As of April 2019, the *Homeless Partnering Strategy* was replaced with ***Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy***, which aims to **REDUCE**:

- Chronic homelessness
- Overall & for specific populations

- New inflows into homelessness
- Returns to homelessness



All designated communities receiving *Reaching Home* funding are required to have a **Coordinated Access** system in place by **March 2022**.

“Coordinated Access makes it possible to take a comprehensive systems-based approach to addressing homelessness, rather than an agency-by-agency or program-centered approach. It supports better service integration, ensuring that service providers are working together to reach shared, community-level outcomes using a person-centered approach.”

Image and Quote from:
[Reaching Home: Coordinated Access Guide by Employment and Social Development Canada](#)

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: NCOH Programs

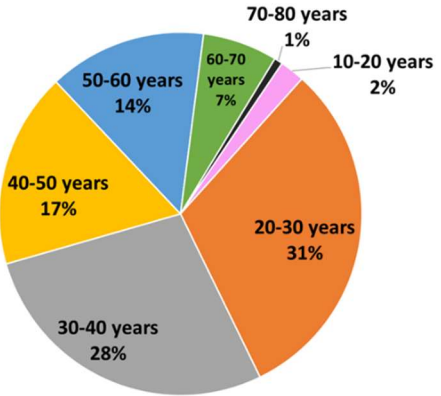
Funding through *Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy* has allowed NCOH to fund & support:

NELSON STREET OUTREACH

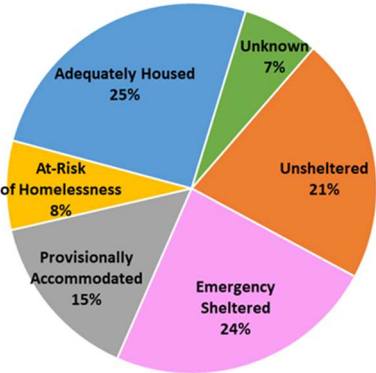
Mission: “To work in collaboration with relevant service providers to identify members of Nelson’s ‘street culture’ population, assess their immediate and long-term needs for health, safety, and basic needs, and offer a range of supports and services designed to meet these needs. To support downtown business owners and the general public in their increased understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of the challenges of the ‘street culture’ population and to foster a culture of mutual respect.” (*NCS website*)

- 270 clients served in Year 3 of Street Outreach. 589 clients served in past 3 years combined.
- Most frequent services provided in Year 3 of Street Outreach:
 - Basic Needs
 - Relationship-building
 - Information
 - Transportation
 - Funding/Financial Assistance
 - Housing Support

Age of Street Outreach Clients (Year 3)



Housing Status at Intake (Year 3)



TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Clients in the **Transitional Assistance Program** live in transitional housing at Nelson CARES’ Ward Street Place for 3 months to a year or more, and are supported by a **Transitional Housing Worker** to gain life and tenancy skills.

The goal is to **move to a Residential Tenancy Agreement** once ready.

Transitional Housing Program	2019-2020
Clients Supported in TAP Housing	14
New Referrals	72
All Clients Placed in TAP/non-TAP Housing	26

Pathways to Ending Homelessness: Strong Partnerships

Ending homelessness requires **collaboration & strong partnerships** across several agencies, levels of government, and individuals.

There are many local organizations who sit at the NCOH table & are working hard to reduce/prevent homelessness in our community, including (but not limited to):

Organization	Main Service Area	Phone/Email
Kootenay Christian Fellowship (ODB)	Food	250-352-1722
Nelson Community Food Centre	Food	250-354-1633
St. Saviour’s Food Pantry	Food	250-352-5711
The Salvation Army	Food	250-352-3488
ANKORS	Harm Reduction	250-505-5506
Nelson Mental Health & Substance Use	Mental Health & Harm Reduction	250-505-7248
Kootenay Career Development Society	Employment	250-352-6200
Circle of Indigenous Nations Society	Indigenous	250-231-4968
Kootenay Kids Society	Children/Families	250-352-6678
Nelson & District Women’s Centre	Women	250-352-9916
Freedom Quest	Youth	250-304-2676
Nelson & District Youth Centre	Youth	250-352-5656
Nelson Community Response Network	Adults/Seniors	250-777-1110
Selkirk College Students’ Union	Students	250-365-1262
City of Nelson Mayor & Councillors	Varied	250-352-2131
CMHA Kootenays Branch	Varied	250-426-5222
Nelson At Its Best (formerly SPAN)	Varied	info@bestnelson.org
Nelson CARES Society	Varied	250-352-6011
Nelson Community Services	Varied	250-352-3504

NCOH’s **State of Services** has info on services offered during COVID-19, updated weekly on Nelson CARES’ website: nelsoncares.ca/state-of-services-in-nelson/

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Images: a) Gaetz, S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T., & Gulliver, T. (2013). The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. b) Wellesley Institute’s Blueprint to End Homelessness (2007). c) Unknown authors under licenses CC BY-NC-ND, CC BY-SA, CC BY-SA-NC, and CC BY-NC-ND. d) A Pandemic Response and Recovery Toolkit for Homeless Systems Leaders in Canada. Prepared for Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness by OrgCode Consulting, Inc., June 2020. e) The Housing Affordability Continuum from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. f) Reaching Home: Coordinated Access Guide by Employment and Social Development Canada.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Letter from the NCOH Co-Chairs

Dear Citizens of Nelson

Nelson Committee on Homelessness (NCOH) is producing its 12th Annual Report Card on Homelessness in Nelson. The focus this year (one that will always be remembered as the year of Covid -19) is demonstrating the need for supported housing in Nelson, highlighting the impact of the intersection of Covid-19 crisis with the Opioid crisis and promoting the value of Coordinated Access in meeting the needs of a very vulnerable population. We come from a position **that adequate, affordable housing is a basic human right.**

There are three affordable housing developments being built in Nelson at this time. One targets low income seniors and those with disabilities; another targets low income single workers and the third will accommodate families and individuals. **All three are desperately needed.** None of these projects will meet the needs of the street entrenched population or those who suffer from mental health issues and addiction.

We are entering our 7th year in Nelson with a 0% vacancy rate. More people in our community have become vulnerable and less able to meet their most basic needs because of a pandemic. It demonstrated how close much of our middle-class population is to losing their homes, not being able to feed themselves and their children as well as how dependent we all are on each other for essential supports. Significant government support delivered quickly has prevented many of these people from finding themselves living in poverty or in some cases homeless.

The report card also notes the ongoing Overdose crisis. Covid and the Overdose crisis intersect with the homeless population compounding the challenges already faced. Like the Covid pandemic, the Overdose Crisis affects everyone and needs all of us to demand that our government provide a safe drug supply as well as a broad range of therapeutic services so all of us can be safe and healthy.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that governments can provide resources to tackle major social challenges effectively and efficiently. Across the country CERB and rental supplements prevented homelessness by ensuring that many people could pay their mortgages and rents PREVENTING them from losing their homes. Fear of spreading Covid-19 led to major supports for a large number of the chronically homeless across the country. Housing was found in the form of hotels, large empty spaces, campgrounds as well as other options and those being housed were supported by safe drug supplies, adequate food and other necessary services that promote health. By in large these supported housing efforts have been extremely successful in keeping many of the most

vulnerable individuals in our society safe and healthy. There is extraordinarily little evidence that those receiving these services have abused them in any way. **SUPPORTED HOUSING** works.

Our letter last year accompanying the report card asked that you support the development of supportive housing in Nelson. We pointed out that the resources had been made available to provide supported housing and that all we need was land. A year later we are in exactly the same position in this regard. **We need land on which to build supportive housing.** Supportive Housing is a type of social housing with “on-site supports and services to help people find and maintain housing stability, such as life-skills training and connections to primary health care, mental health or substance use services. It is for people who are homeless or at-risk.” (BC Housing) The Social Return on Investment (SROI) in Supportive Housing study was carried out in B.C. in 2018 by Constellation Consulting Group. This study demonstrated that not only are people stabilized in this type of housing, but for every dollar invested in this housing, there is a four to five dollar gain in social and economic value created. **Without supported housing, we will not reduce homelessness significantly.** Again, we ask for your support in developing supportive housing in Nelson.

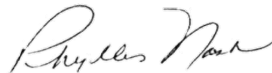
You can help. The following is a list of effective strategies for promoting change:

- Put pressure on your City Council to provide land for supportive housing. Talk to them and write them.
- Put pressure on your provincial and federal governments to provide a safe drug supply for those dealing with addiction. Letters do make a difference.
- Write your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) letting them know that supportive housing is a priority in addressing the needs of the homeless including the less visible populations living in substandard housing
- Support compassionate approaches to assisting those who are experiencing homelessness, poverty, and addiction.
- Support efforts to create more affordable youth housing in Nelson. We have an excellent but small program in Cicada Place. We know it can work and is effective.
- When you see street entrenched people, smile warmly. Let’s begin with compassionate support for people who are homeless. Be kind and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

NCOH challenges all readers of this report card to act to support the building of supportive housing in this community for the most difficult individuals in our society to house and to demand a safe drug supply for those who need it.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Nash



Cheryl Dowden

