CONTINUING AND SHIFTING PATTERNS IN NANAIMO'S HOMELESS POPULATION: BASED ON THE
FEBRUARY 9, 2016 FIRST NATION-WIDE POINT IN TIME COUNT

Conducted by

The Nanaimo Homeless Coalition

March 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 9, 2016, Nanaimo conducted their sixth homelessness count. This was the first year that Service Canada conducted a Nation-wide Point in Time count (PiT Count). The federal data was used to influence federal funds for homelessness as well as trends for federal census. The sample of the study consisted of 174 people who were asked a series of federal and local questions about their experience being homeless. A magnet event and fixed sites throughout the city enabled Nanaimo to control the count to the best of their ability. Although over 200 surveys were done, after cleaning, 174 were reported on. Continuing trends over time included gender, ethnicity, sources of income, location, and suggestions to implement change. This year's count enabled us to track themes since 2005 as well as conclude with some recommendations for the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition to help end homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Government of Canada conducted it's first ever Nation-wide Point in Time count. The purpose of a PiT Count is to grasp a snapshot of the minimum number of homeless people in Canada as well as key themes about homelessness. Each community was given the opportunity to survey their population with 12 core questions as well as 14 additional questions relevant to the local community in shelters, on the streets, and in community resource settings.

The information obtained through the PiT count can be used to identify key challenges and characteristics with the homeless demographic. Thus, informing services and resources to the homeless at a local, provincial, and federal level.

On February 9, 2016 trained volunteers conducted the count in shelters, at fixed sites, at a magnet event, and on the streets of Nanaimo. The Nanaimo Homeless Coalition identified sites around the community where the number of homeless population would be best captured. Over a period of 24 hours, 17 locations and an additional mobile team surveyed the homeless population in Nanaimo. Although we received a satisfactory number of surveys to best reflect the minimum homeless demographic, the PiT Count methodology has some transparent limitations: not every person was captured in the 24 hour time period, however we were able to collect data to inform themes within the community. Furthermore, only those that experienced "absolute homelessness" were reflected in this count not including those who experienced "hidden homelessness". As shown in the findings, the female and Aboriginal demographics were low. Because of shelter more available to women (exploitation), they might be better represented in a hidden homelessness context. The federal government did not measure homeless on-reserve and therefore, this played a role in limiting our Aboriginal demographic. Moreover, based on collectivist culture and more cultural norms around mental health, addictions, and family violence, Aboriginal families are more commonly hidden homeless as well. The important information collected is included in this document as well as trends throughout time based on previous local counts.

BACKGROUND

The Nanaimo Homeless Coalition, formed in 2015, addresses the issue of homelessness; its membership includes a number of non-profit agencies, government bodies, faith groups and residents of the community.

The Coalition was preceded by Nanaimo's Working Group on Homelessness, which has been working to reduce homelessness in Nanaimo since 2001 and whose make up was very similar to the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition. The name change from "Working Group" to "Coalition" reflects a shift in the structures used to develop and implement programs and services for the homeless in Nanaimo. As such

the Coalition includes a number of sub structures; the Nanaimo Community Advisory Board (NCAB) which allocates the federal dollars received under the Homeless Partnering Strategy, the Community Plan committee, which is responsible for developing a community plan to end homelessness, the Data and Research committee which collects data on key indicators like shelter bed usage and conducts research on aspects of homelessness, an Events committee which puts on a summer BBQ for the homeless and a Communications committee that focuses on public engagement with respect to homelessness in our community.

The Coalition and its constituent members provide a range of responses to homelessness; 64 Emergency Shelter beds for men, women and for extreme winter weather conditions, transitional and supportive housing including 108 units for the hard to house with 24 hour staff support, free or low cost meal programs at breakfast, lunch and dinner, outreach support to homeless individuals, harm reduction services such as a needle exchange program, rent subsidies and more. The Provincial Government through BC Housing, the Federal Government through Service Canada and the local government through the City of Nanaimo, Island Health, and the Regional District provide funding for the above noted programs and services, complemented by the charitable donations of Nanaimo residents[1]

United Way of Central and Northern Vancouver Island obtained funding to conduct the Point in Time Count. United Way then contracted Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre to coordinate the count. The entire Nanaimo Homeless Coalition worked together to conduct the count from a community stance.

Members
- AIDS Vancouver Island
- BC Housing
- Canadian Mental Health Association (Mid Island)
- City of Nanaimo
- Haven Society
- Island Crisis Care Society
- Island Health
- John Howard Society
- Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation
- Nanaimo Citizen Advocacy
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- NARSF
- Pacifica Housing
- Salvation Army
- Service Canada
- The Women's Centre

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[1] Background information produced by John Horn, City Social Planner of City of Nanaimo

- The Men's Centre
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Society
- Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo
- United Way Central and North Vancouver Island
- Vancouver Island Mental Health Society
- Widsten Properties

METHODOLOGY

The PiT Count was used to measure the number of "absolute homelessness" in Nanaimo. By definition of the Government of Canada (2016) "absolute homelessness" means:

Unsheltered homelessness: includes people who are sleeping in places unfit for human habitation, including the following locations: streets, alleys, parks and other public locations, transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles, ravines and other outdoor locations where people experiencing homelessness are known to sleep.

Sheltered homelessness includes people sleeping in the following locations: emergency shelters (general and specific to men, women, youth, etc.), extreme weather shelters, Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and transitional housing. It may include people who receive hotel/motel vouchers in lieu of shelter beds. It does not include people in Housing First programs or in social or subsidized housing.

Point in Time Count

The Method of Point in Time Count was chosen with intent to capture a minimum number of the homeless demographic at a given time. The method had no intention to capture the entire homeless population given that there are many contributing factors to the issue and can change rapidly at an individual level. The purpose of a PiT count is to capture information about the homeless population within a 24 hour period; capturing what an average day (point in time) would look like for a community.

Surveys

The Government of Canada required 12 core questions to be answered and inputted into the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). An additional 4 questions allowed surveyors to screen surveyees to ensure they are experiencing absolute homelessness. Because 2016 had its first Nation-wide count, the core questions allowed the federal government to draw clear themes from all participating communities, which can best inform funding and resources at a federal level. Many communities spoke to the significance of having more information and therefore the federal government also provided supplemental questions (known as Canadian Observatory of Homelessness/COH questions) that could be also measured in the HIFIS system but would not be considered in the federal analysis. Finally, some communities wanted further information specific to local programming and therefore they were given the opportunity to add additional questions specific to the interests of their

community. Nanaimo's survey expanded one question into two to increase clarity, meaning our survey reflected 13 core questions. As a result, our 24-question survey consisted of:

- 4 screening questions
- 13 core questions
- 1 COH question
- 6 local questions

Magnet Event

A Magnet Event is an event held at one location to draw in the desired demographic to be surveyed. The event was hosted by Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, which contributed to the need for Aboriginal engagement and was funded by United Way's PiT Count funds. The event took place at a gym with a kitchen in the downtown area (where many of Nanaimo's homelessness population are represented). Many volunteers from United Way and Tillicum Lelum participated at this event. Honorariums[2] were offered to all surveyees. The Magnet Event additionally offered a hot meal[3], haircuts, acupuncture, nail esthetics, door prizes, a veterinarian, and community health nurses. There was also media coverage thanks to United Way's communications coordinator. The Magnet Event hosted and honored 168 participants at their event, many of which were surveyed, while others were already surveyed at other fixed sites around the community.

Fixed Sites

Previous counts have indicated that the method of combing the city for homeless people could be carried out in a different way. Because Nanaimo has many services directed at issues contributing to homelessness, such as mental health and addictions, survey stations were set up around the community where the homeless demographic frequently accessed. Furthermore, because some choose not to access any services (see in findings section) the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) bike unit also offered a mobile site, which would approach those who may not be attending any of the fixed sites. The Nanaimo Homeless Coalition identified 16 fixed sites in the community beyond the magnet event where surveyors would set up based on peak times, which were identified prior to the count. Four of the fixed sites were shelters. The fixed sites in Nanaimo included:

Sheltered:

1. Tillicum Lelum Youth Safe House
2. Samaritan House Women's Shelter
3. Salvation Army's New Hope Men's Homeless Shelter

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[2] Honorariums were made by Tillicum Lelum and the Women's Resource Centre with donations as well as funds from United Way's PiT Count Contract

[3] Hot meal was provided by Salvation Army in-kind as well as United Way funds

4. Extreme Weather Shelter (male and female)

Unsheltered:

5. Bottle Depot on Old Victoria Rd.
6. Bottle Depot on Kenworth Rd.
7. Aids Vancouver Island
8. Harris House Needle Exchange
9. RCMP Bike Unit
10. 7-10 club
11. HOST Office
12. Tillicum Lelum Health Centre
13. Nanaimo Women's Centre
14. Library
15. Canadian Mental Health Association
16. Income assistance building on Richards street

SAMPLE

After cleaning data, the sample for this report consisted of 174 people experiencing absolute homelessness. The sample consisted of 120 males, 52 females, and one transgender. The age range of the sample was from 16-70 years.

FINDINGS

Number of Homeless Persons in Nanaimo

On February 9, 2016 there were at least **174** people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo

Family Members

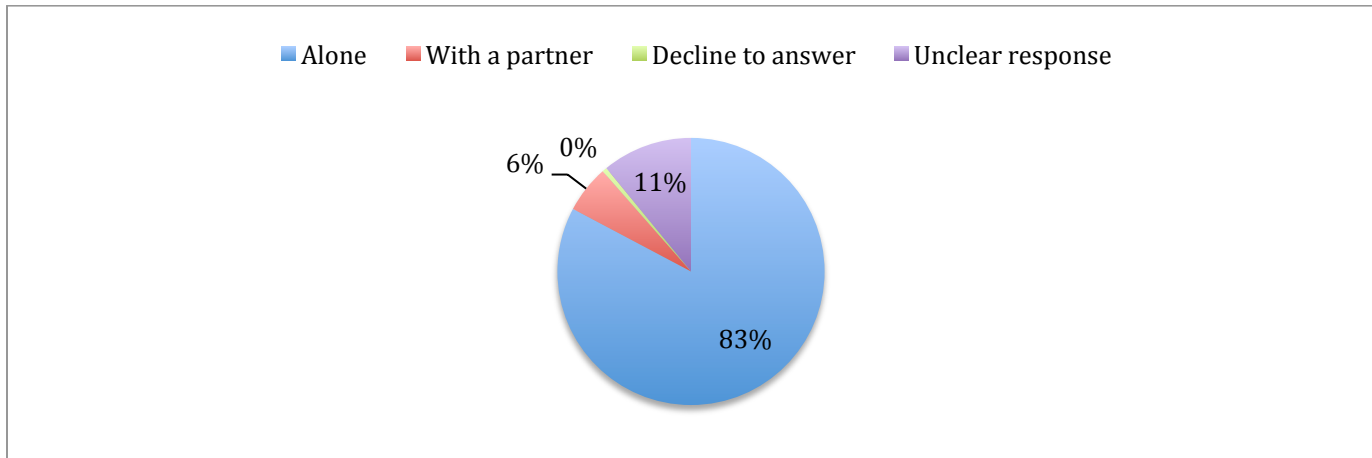Most of the participants surveyed were not with any family members.

Figure 1: Family Members

Gender and Age Breakdowns

Of the homeless population in Nanaimo, 68.97% identified as male, 29.89% identified as female, and .57% identified as transgender. The overall average age of a homeless individual in Nanaimo was 40 years.
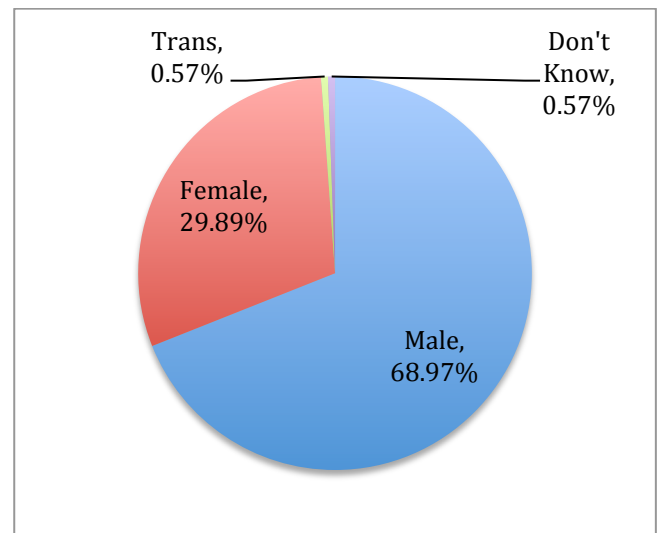

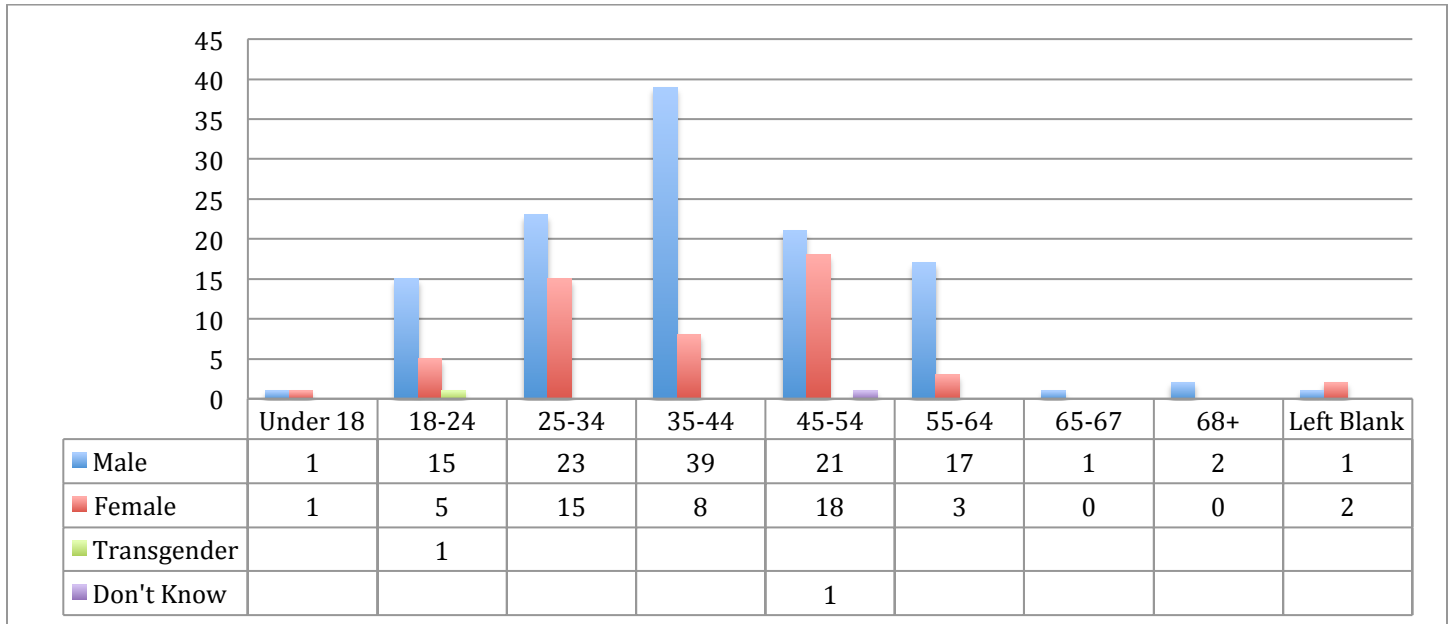*Figure 2: Percentages of Gender*

Gender and Age Continued

	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-67	68+	Left Blank
Male	1	15	23	39	21	17	1	2	1
Female	1	5	15	8	18	3	0	0	2
Transgender		1							
Don't Know					1				

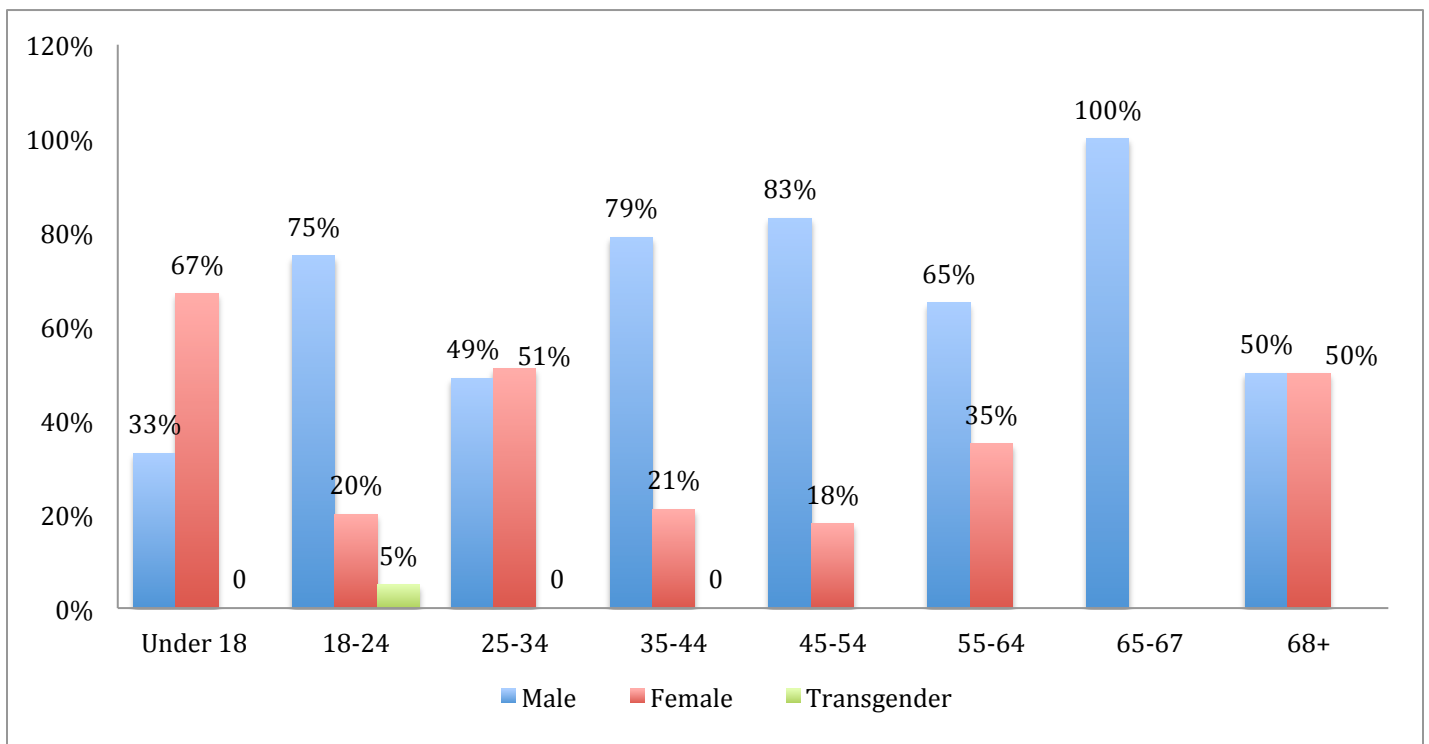*Figure 4: Number of Males, Females, Transgender persons from Sample*

Figure 5: Percentages of Gender within Age Groups

Ethnicity

The core question around ethnicity did not provide opportunity for those that are Non-Aboriginal to define their background, but focused on the breakdown of Aboriginal participants' heritage. Non-Aboriginal populations were significantly represented over Aboriginal populations surveyed.

Of 174 surveyed people:

- 32   Identified as First Nations
- 1   Identified as Inuit
- 5   Identified as Metis
- 3   Identified with as a Non-status First Nation
- 129 Defined as Non-Aboriginal
- 2   Did not know
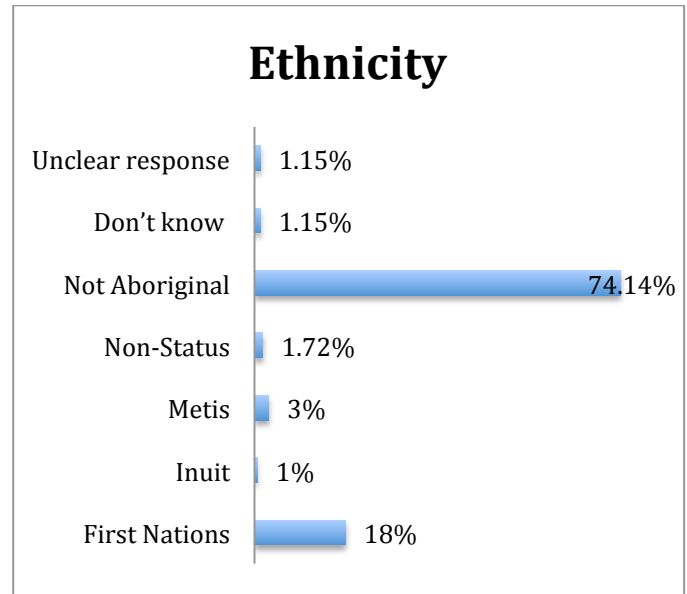- 2   Were unclear or left a blank response

Figure 6: Ethnicity

Time in Nanaimo

Surveyees were asked if they had moved to Nanaimo in the past year. While 48 individuals answered yes, they were new to Nanaimo, 122 had lived in Nanaimo for the past year. The remaining four answers were unclear or left the question blank.
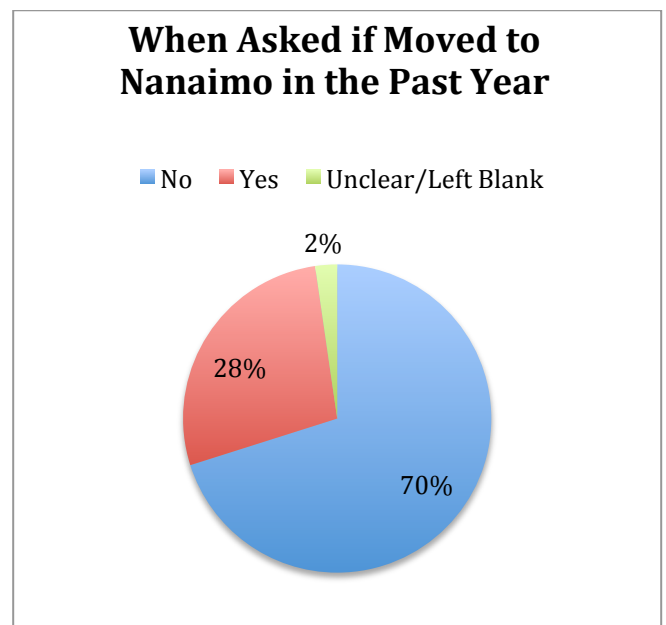

Figure 7: Moved to Nanaimo in the Past Year

Chronic Homelessness

167 of 174 participants were able to articulate the timeline that they had been absolutely homeless. The Nanaimo homeless population proved to be chronically homeless, meaning there were no gaps in their homelessness episode. More than half of the individuals identified to have been homeless for over 6 months.
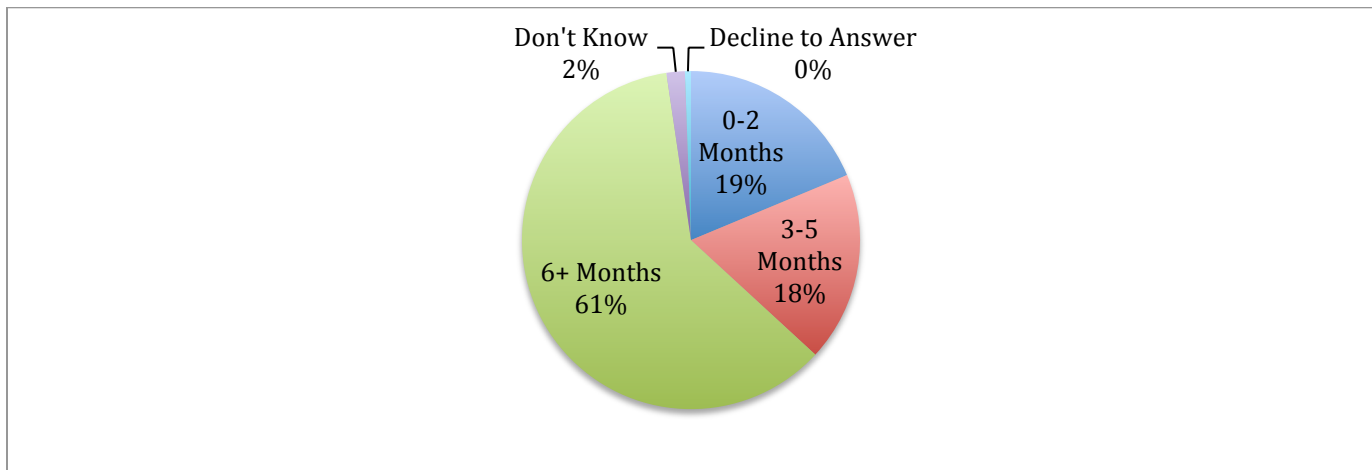

Figure 8: Chronic Homelessness

Episodic Homelessness

When asked how many times participants had been homeless, over 42% stated they were homeless one time, meaning they were not successful in finding housing at all throughout their experience whereas others indicated they had periods of housing which resulted in being homeless more than once.
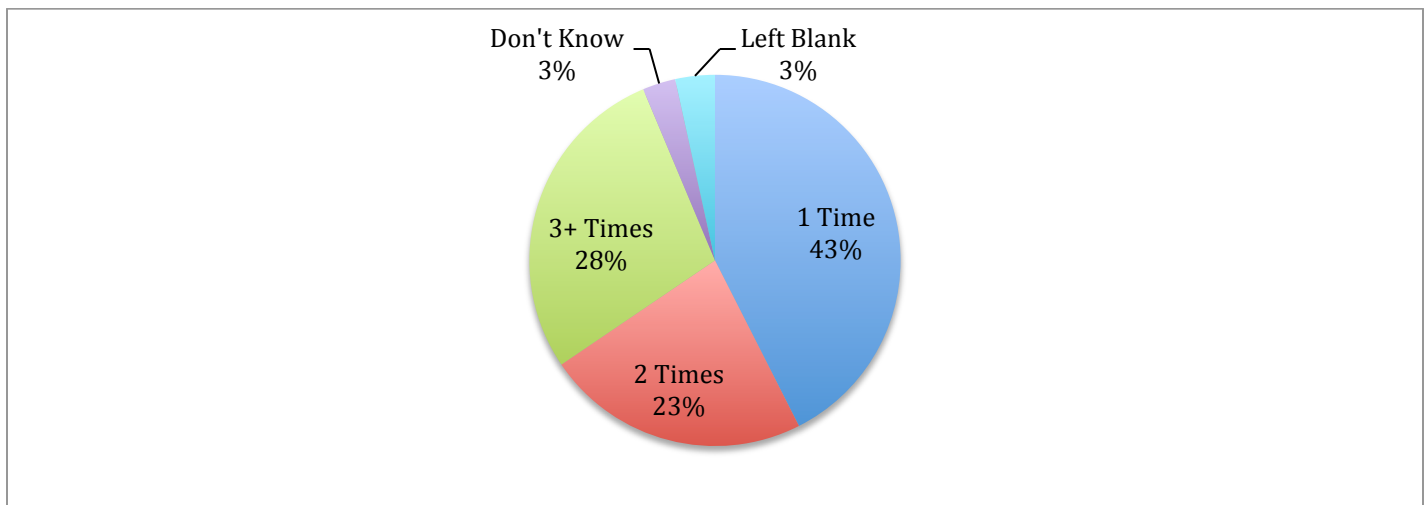

Figure 9: Episodic Homelessness

Reasons for Becoming Homeless

Participants defined the primary reasons for being homeless as both inability to pay rent and substance use and addictions. As outlined in further needed services and recommendations to solve homelessness, participants stated that income assistance is not enough to live off of. Furthermore, some participants stated shelters and affordable housing were not low barrier enough to accommodate to their lifestyles.
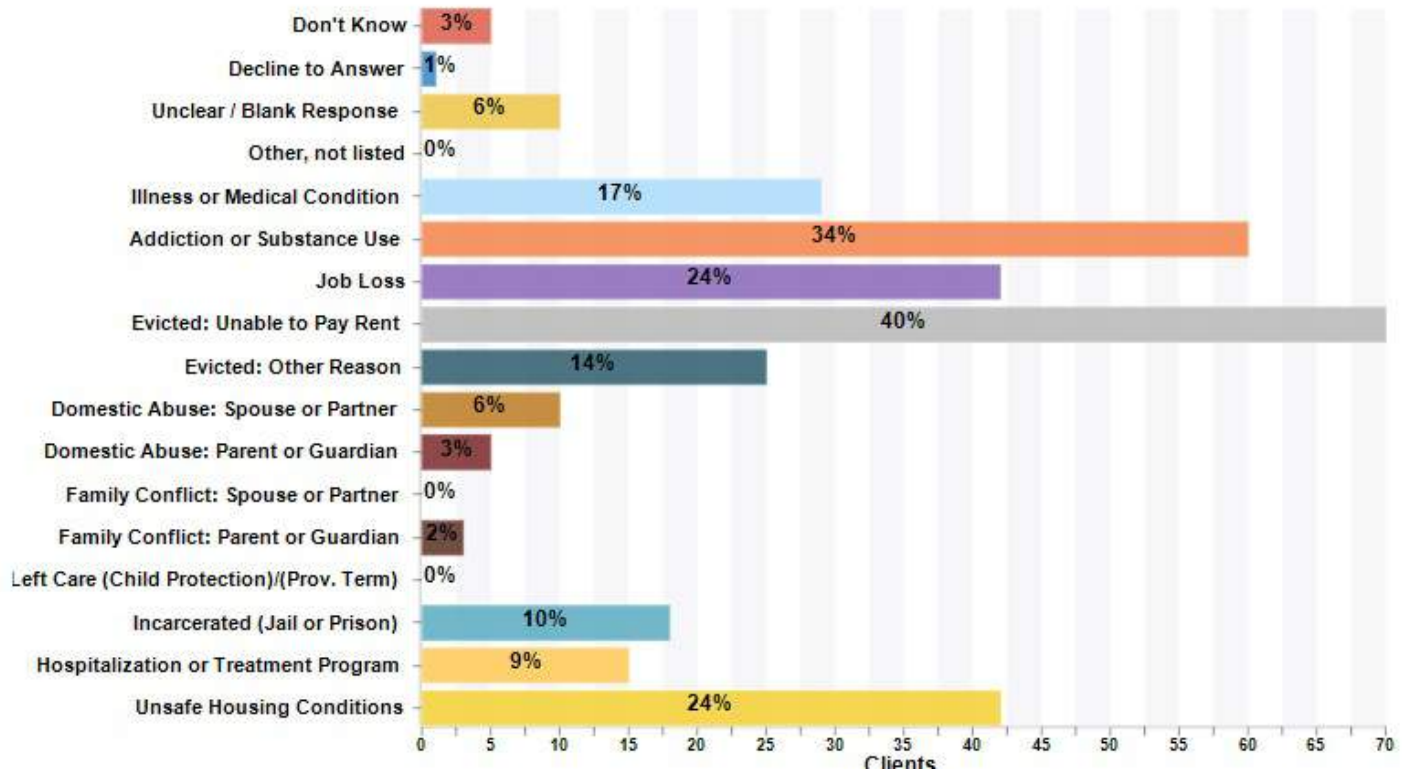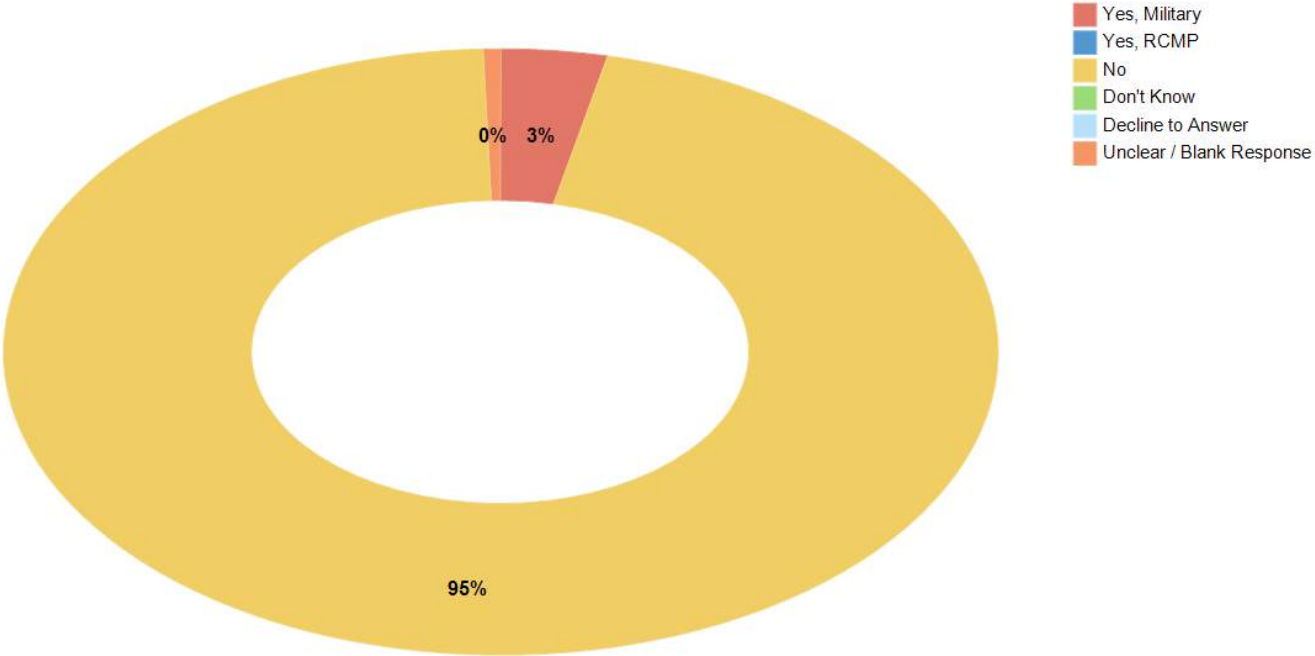

Figure 10: Reasons for Becoming Homeless

Military or RCMP History

Of the 174 participants asked, six had previously served in the military and one left an unclear response.

Legend:
- Yes, Military
- Yes, RCMP
- No
- Don't Know
- Decline to Answer
- Unclear / Blank Response

(Chart values: 0%, 3%, 95%)

Where the Respondent is Sleeping Tonight

The participants were screened for absolute homelessness based on the below criteria. The most consistent response was that the individual did not know where they were going to stay. Of 174 responses

- 4 declined to answer
- 22 were in a domestic violence or emergency shelter
- 21 were in transitional housing
- 24 were in a public space
- 12 in a vehicle
- 17 in a makeshift shelter
- 3 in an abandoned or vacant building
- 13 in other unsheltered area unfit for human habitation
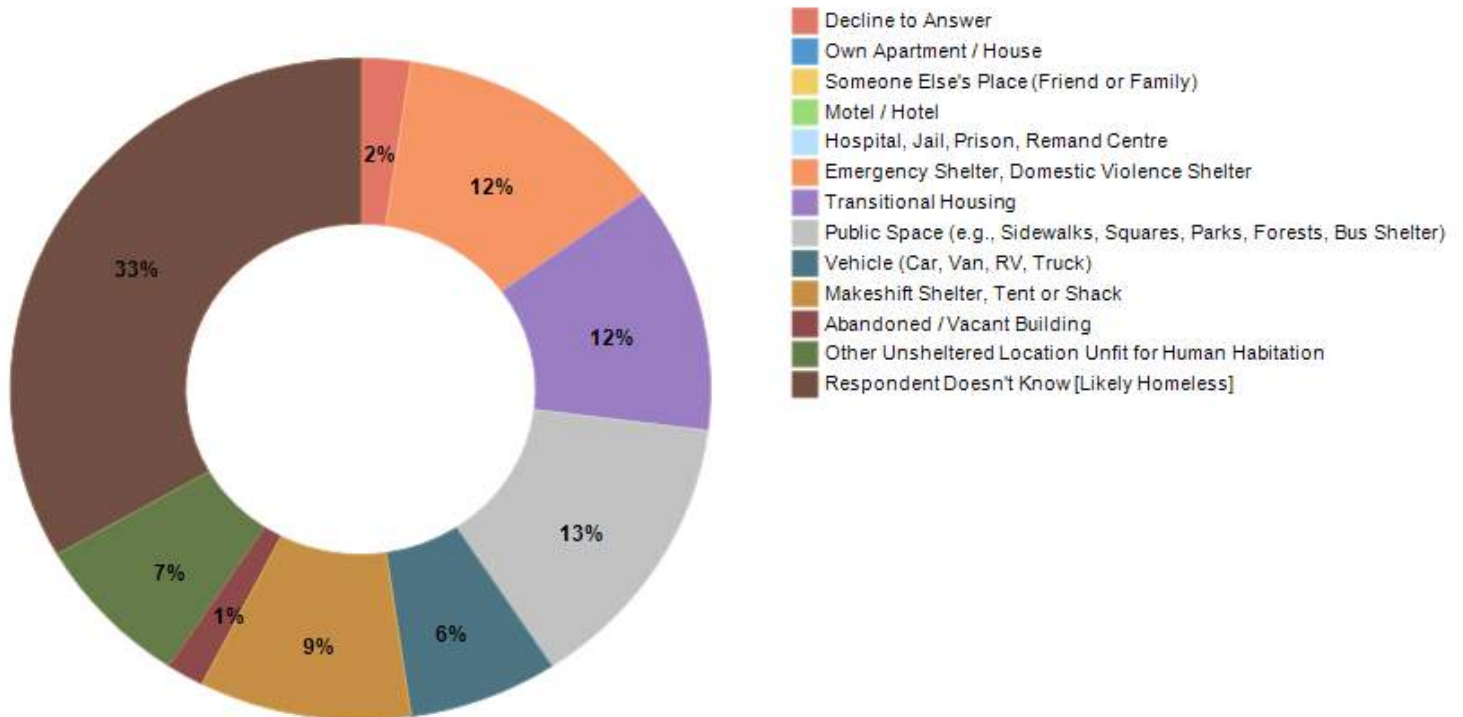- 58 did not know

Figure 11: Where the Respondant is Sleeping Tonight

Shelter Use

When asked if the participants had ever accessed a shelter, 130 people answered yes. 38 answered no, often because of addiction or violence, one did not know, one declined to answer and four left the question blank. Overall the survey indicated that most homeless people in Nanaimo access the shelter services: either New Hope Centre, Extreme Weather Shelter, Youth Safe House, or Samaritan House.
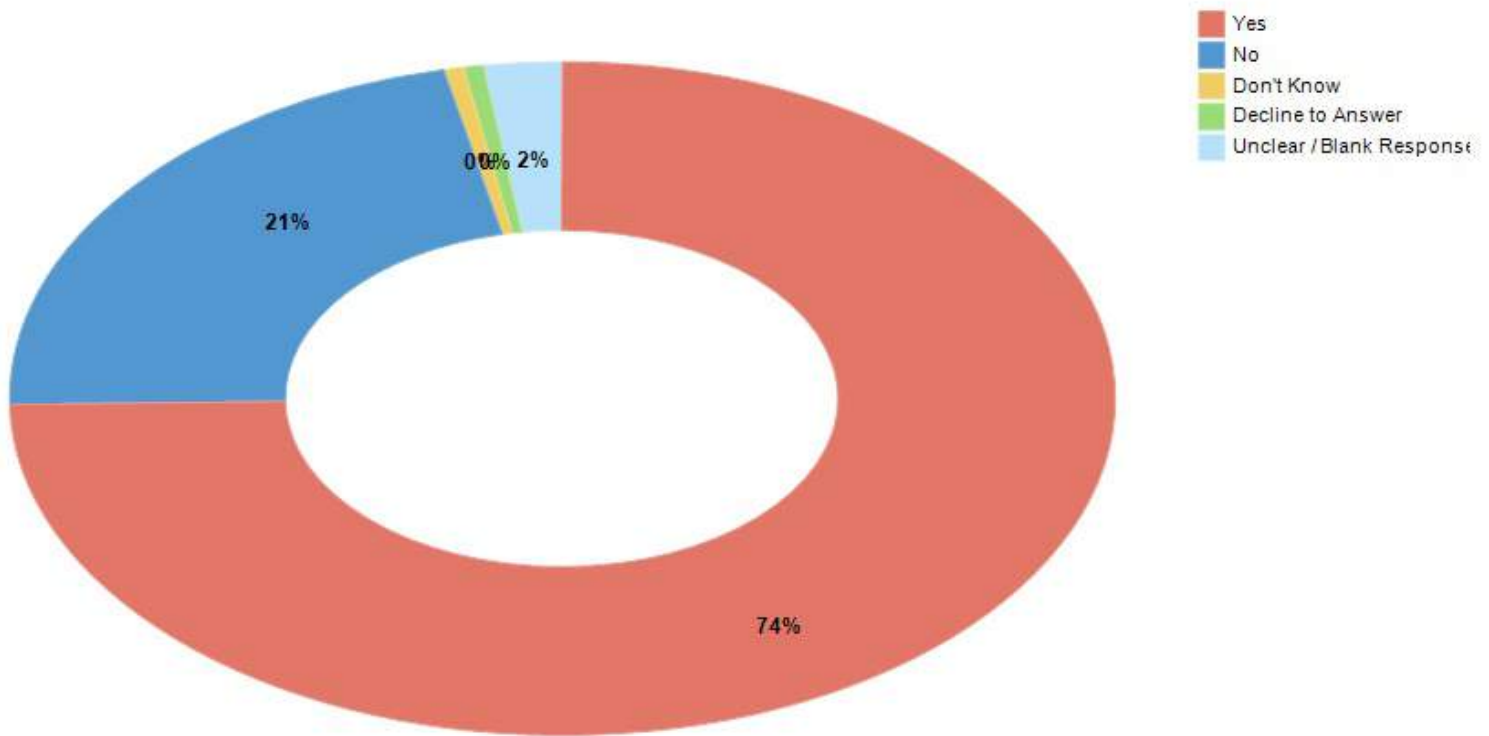

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Decline to Answer
- Unclear / Blank Response

21% 0% 0% 2% 74%

Figure 12: Percentages of Gender

Sources of Income

153 participants answered the question "What are your sources of income?". Of those participants,

- 92 people received income assistance
- 10 received money from employment
- 37 received money via informal/self-employment
- 3 were on employment insurance
- 35 received a disability benefit
- 3 received seniors benefits
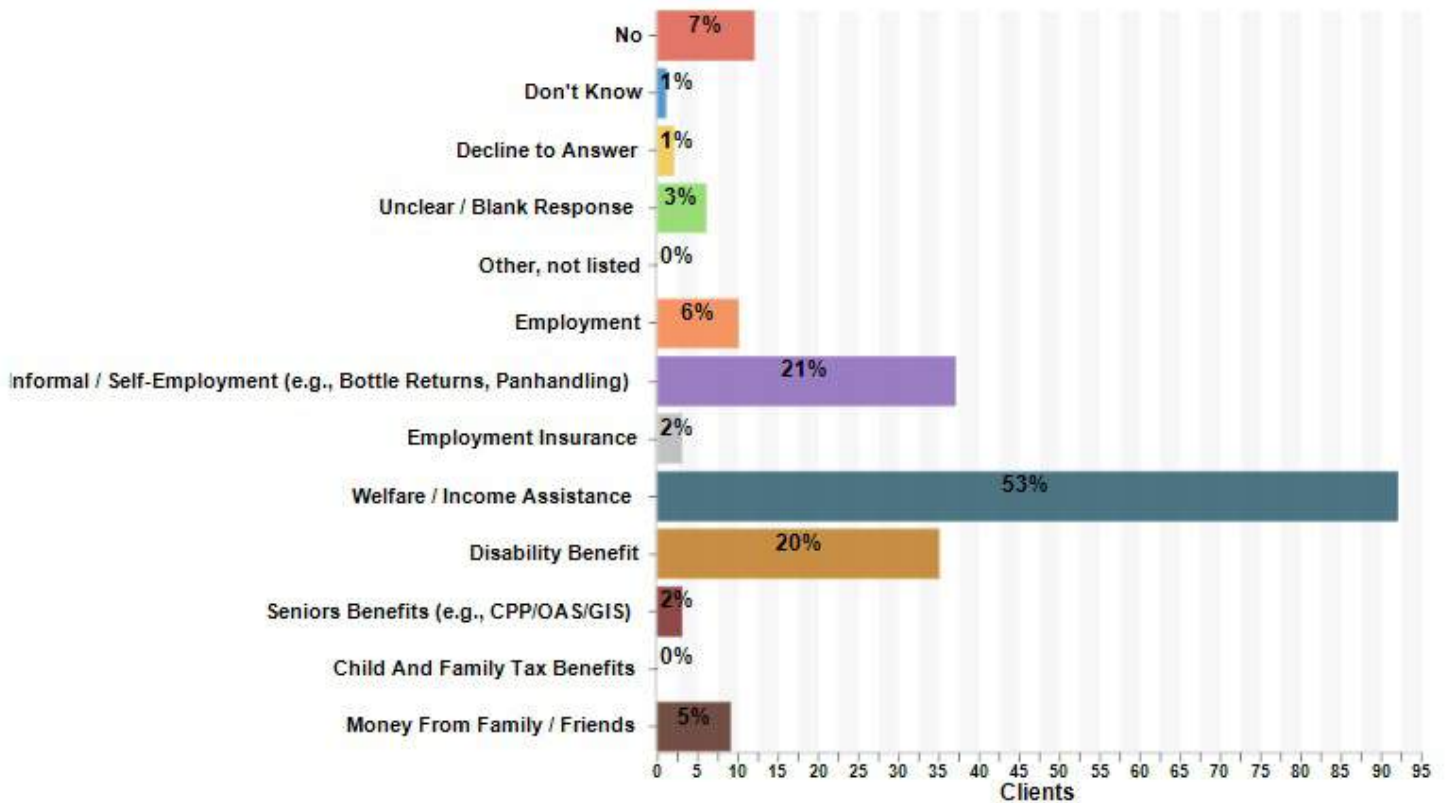- 9 received money from family or friends

Figure 13: Sources of Income

Physical Health

Participants were asked where they rated their personal physical health on a scale of one to five. One represented very poor and five represented excellent. Most participants rated themselves as average.

	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Unanswered
Physical Health	10	25	61	46	29	3

Bar chart values: Unanswered 1.75%, Excellent 16.95%, Good 26.9%, Average 35.67%, Poor 14.61%, Very Poor 5.85%

Figure 14: Physical Health

Mental Health

Participants were asked where they rated their personal mental health on a scale of one to five. One represented very poor and five represented excellent. Most participants rated themselves as average.

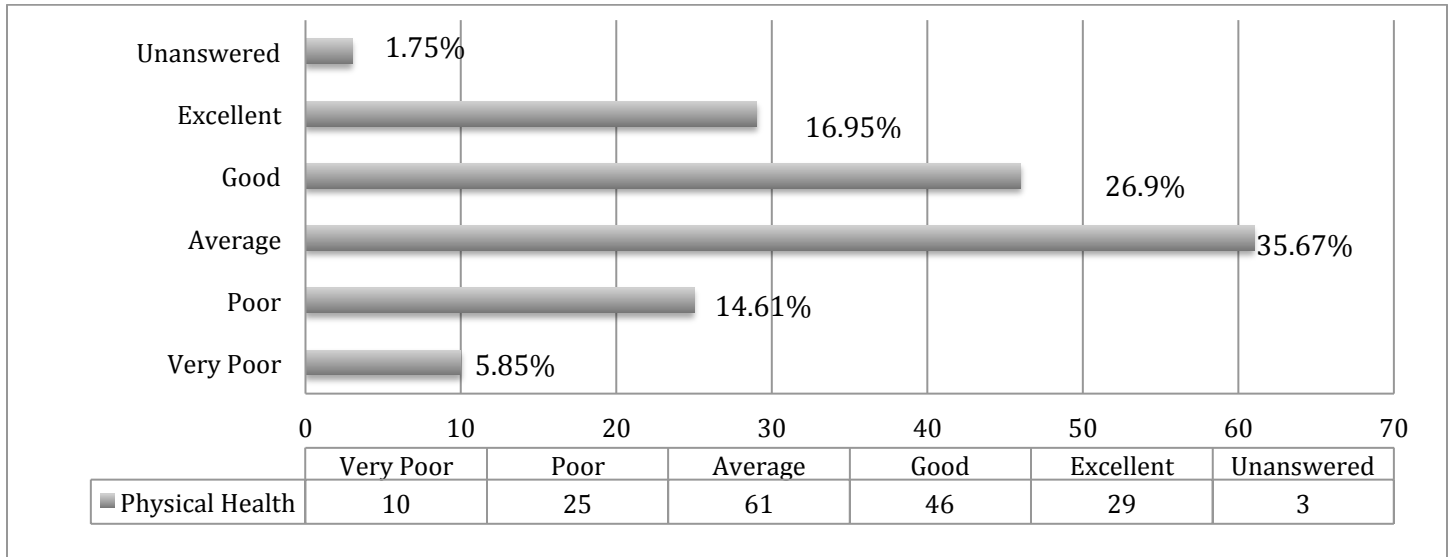|	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Unanswered
Mental Health	10	28	61	43	27	5

Bar chart values: Unanswered 2.95%, Excellent 15.97%, Good 25.44%, Average 36.09%, Poor 16.56%, Very Poor 5.91%
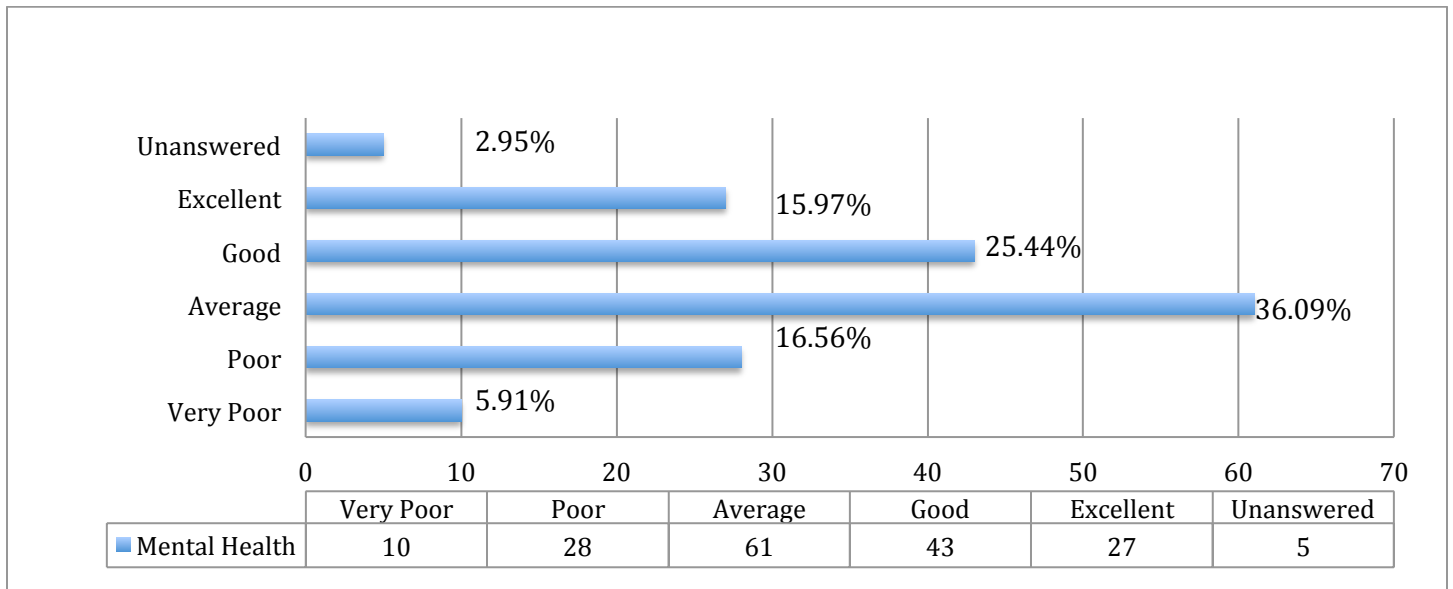
Figure 15: Mental Health

Health Services Accessed in Nanaimo

Participants were asked which health services they accessed and were given the option to choose more than one. Access to the doctor was used a significant amount by over half of the homeless population in Nanaimo. Second and third most utilized health services were a mental health worker and emergency medical services. As shown in *Needed Services* and *Proposed Solutions*, participants reiterated the usefulness of mental health and outreach services.
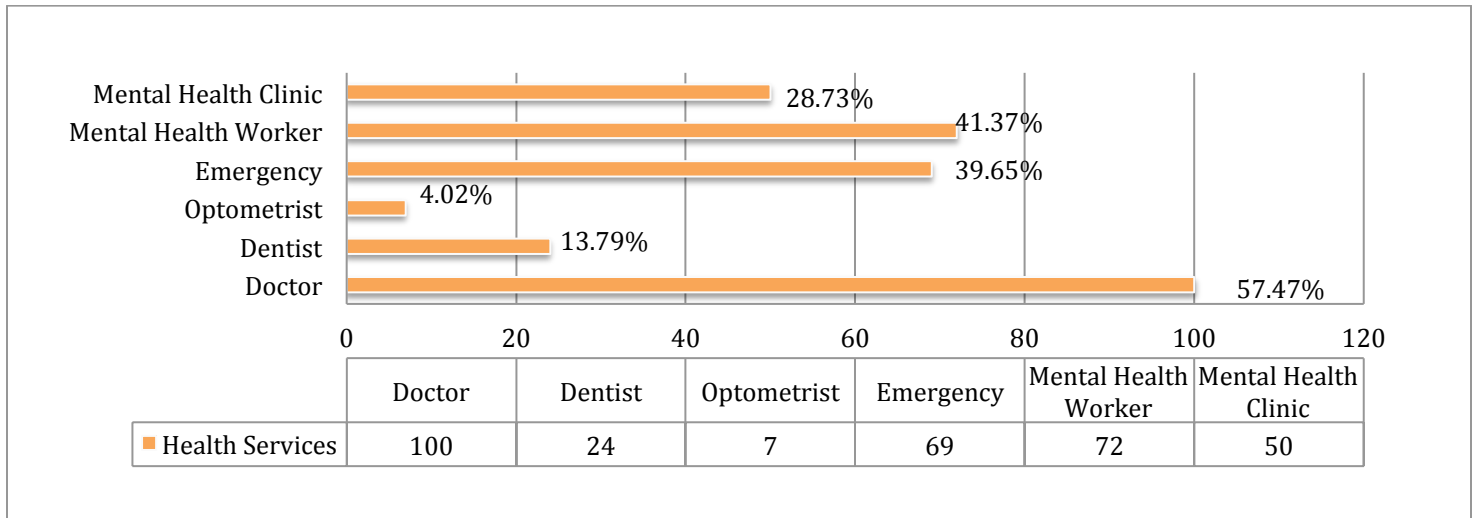

	Doctor	Dentist	Optometrist	Emergency	Mental Health Worker	Mental Health Clinic
■ Health Services	100	24	7	69	72	50

Figure 16: Health Services Accesed in Nanaimo

Community Services Accessed in Nanaimo

Participants were asked which community services they accessed and were given the option to choose more than one. Access to the 7-10 club and shelters were significant for the homeless population in Nanaimo. Moreover, the food bank and library were highly accessed services. As shown in *Needed Services* and *Proposed Solutions*, participants reiterated the usefulness of access to computers and Wi-Fi. Furthermore, some participants suggested access to the 7-10 club on Sunday would be useful.
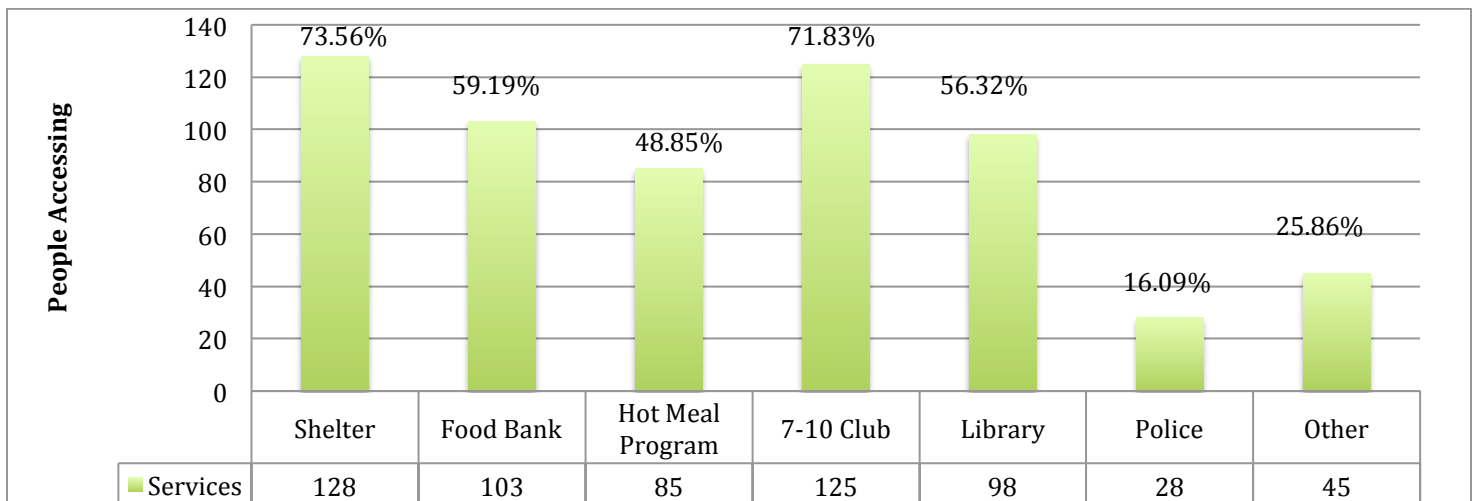

	Shelter	Food Bank	Hot Meal Program	7-10 Club	Library	Police	Other
■ Services	128	103	85	125	98	28	45

Figure 17: Community Services Accesed in Nanaimo

Needed Services

101 people answered the question "What other services would be of help to you?", affordable housing and contributing services to obtain housing were highly outstanding.
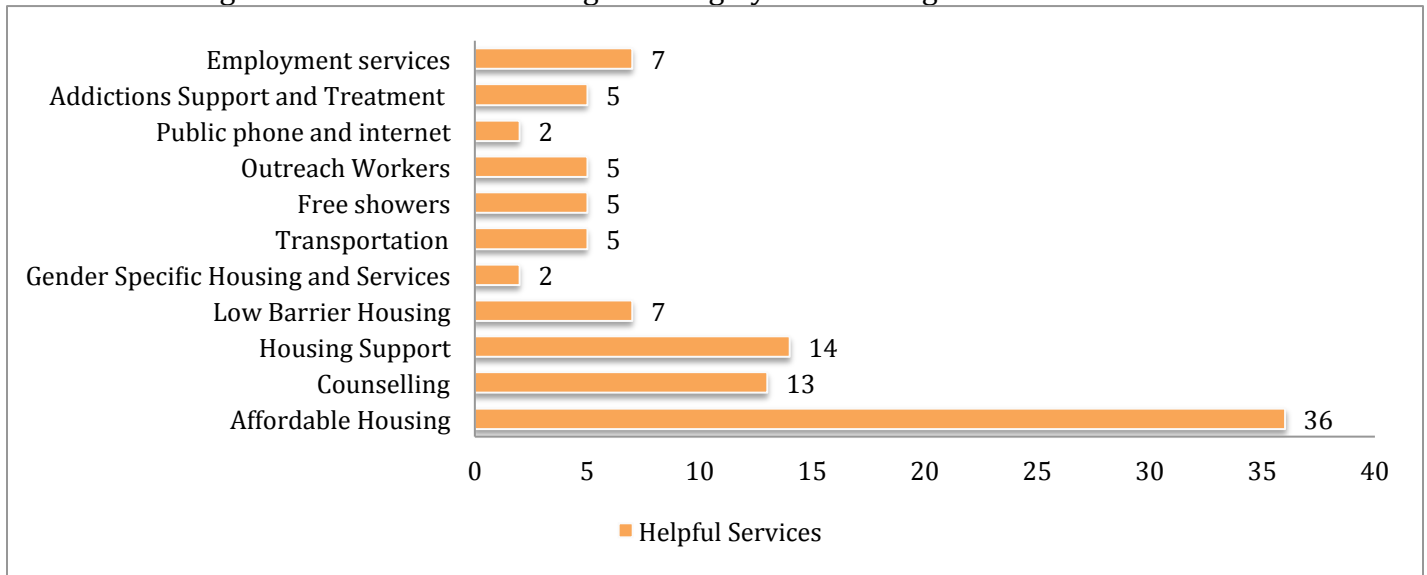

Figure 18: Needed Services

Proposed Solutions

124 people answered the question "How do we solve homelessness?", affordable housing and contributing services to obtain housing were highly outstanding.
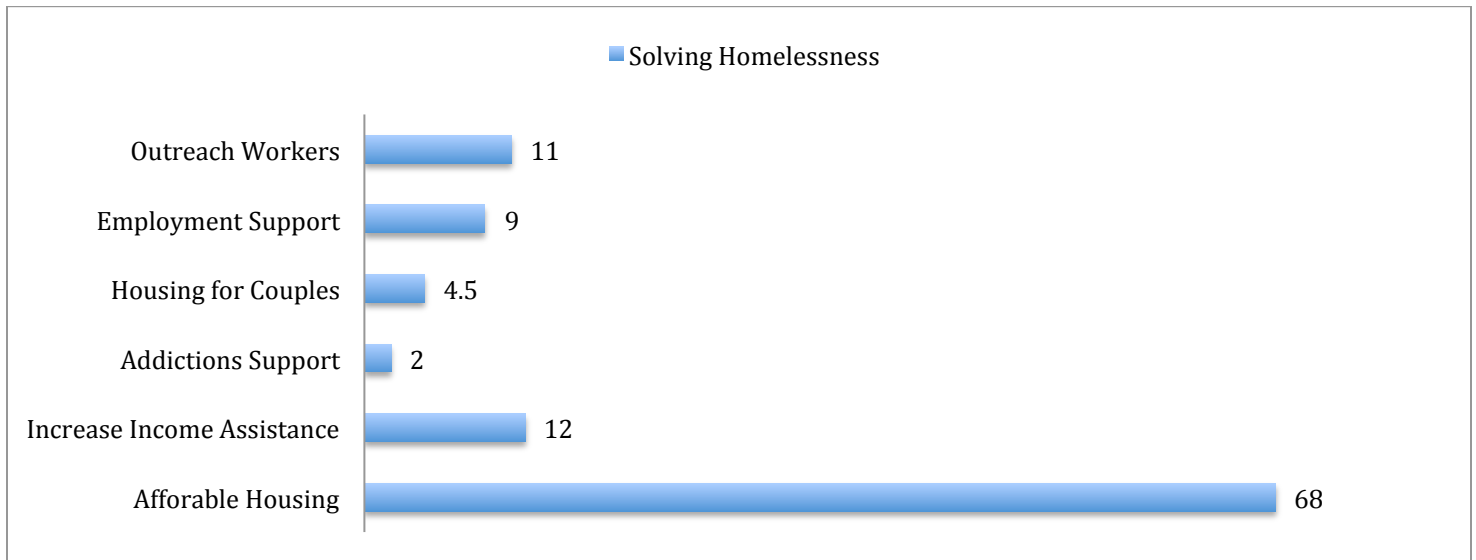

Figure 19: Proposed Solutions

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CONTINUING TRENDS

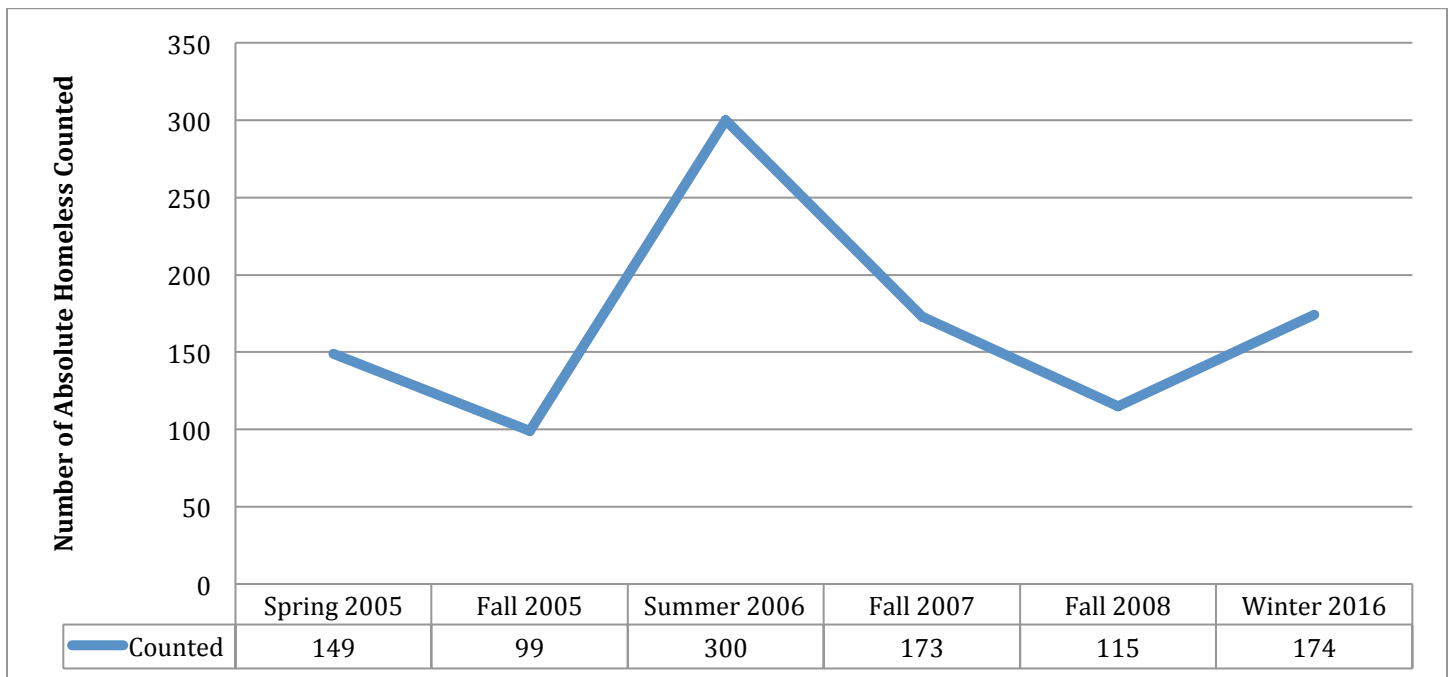## *Total Count*

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Counted	149	99	300	173	115	174

Figure 20: Total Count Comparison

Gender

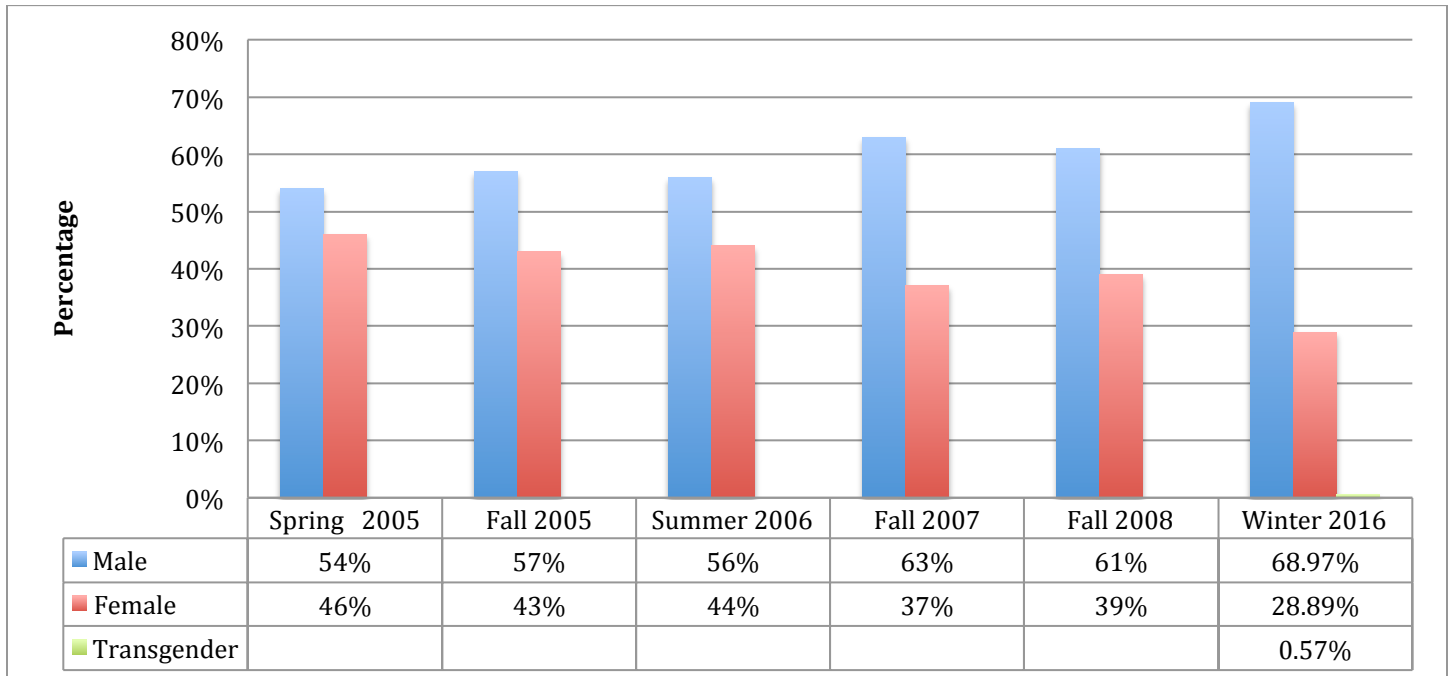|	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Male	54%	57%	56%	63%	61%	68.97%
Female	46%	43%	44%	37%	39%	28.89%
Transgender						0.57%

Figure 21: Percentages of Gender Comparison

Ethnicity

Points of comparison from 2005-2016 indicated that Non-Aboriginal[4] populations highly outnumbered Aboriginal and Metis population in Absolute Homelessness.
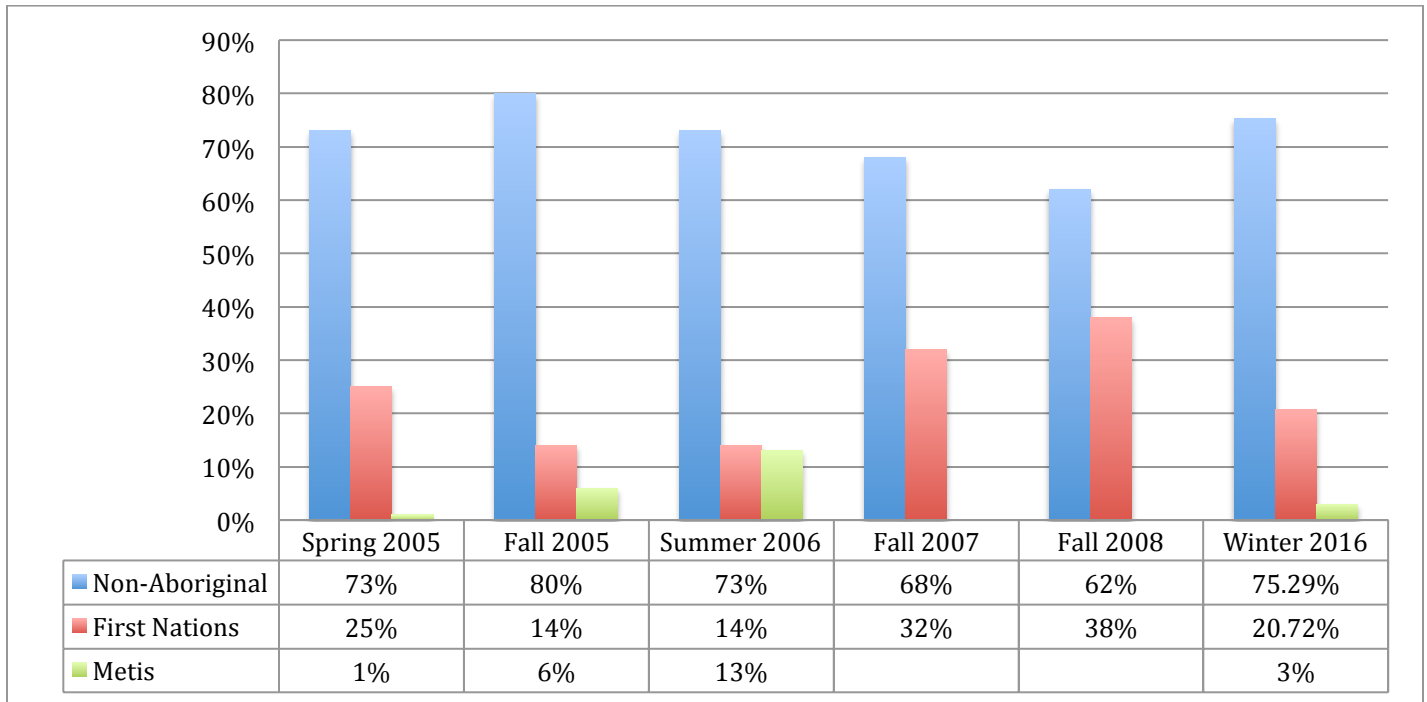

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
■ Non-Aboriginal	73%	80%	73%	68%	62%	75.29%
■ First Nations	25%	14%	14%	32%	38%	20.72%
■ Metis	1%	6%	13%			3%

Figure 22: Ethnicity Comparison

Age Range of Counted Participants

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Age Range (Years)	15-71	16-63	15-78	14-73	19-66	16-70

Table 1: Age Range Comparison

Average age of Counted Participants

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Average Age (Years)	35.6	35.5	37.9	36.7	41.39	39.66

Table 2: Average Age of Counted Participants Comparison

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[4] Fall 2007, Fall 2008, and Winter 2016 altered the question on ethnicity, which created slightly different results than previous years. Previously, the option for Caucasian was available, which was the highest representative in the "Non-Aboriginal" column. For this report, "Caucasian" was combined with "Other". Fall 2007 and 2008 consolidated all Aboriginal Ancestry, including "Metis" into "First Nations"

Median Age

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Average Age (Years)	36	35.7	39	36	42	43

Table 3: Median Age Comparison

Time Spent in Nanaimo

Previous years asked about time spent in Nanaimo in a different form. Service Canada provided a supplemental question in the form of "Have you moved to Nanaimo in the past year?" which has altered the points of comparison over time[5]. Points of comparison still remain, however, that other than in 2006, most of the homeless population in Nanaimo have resided in Nanaimo for more than one year.
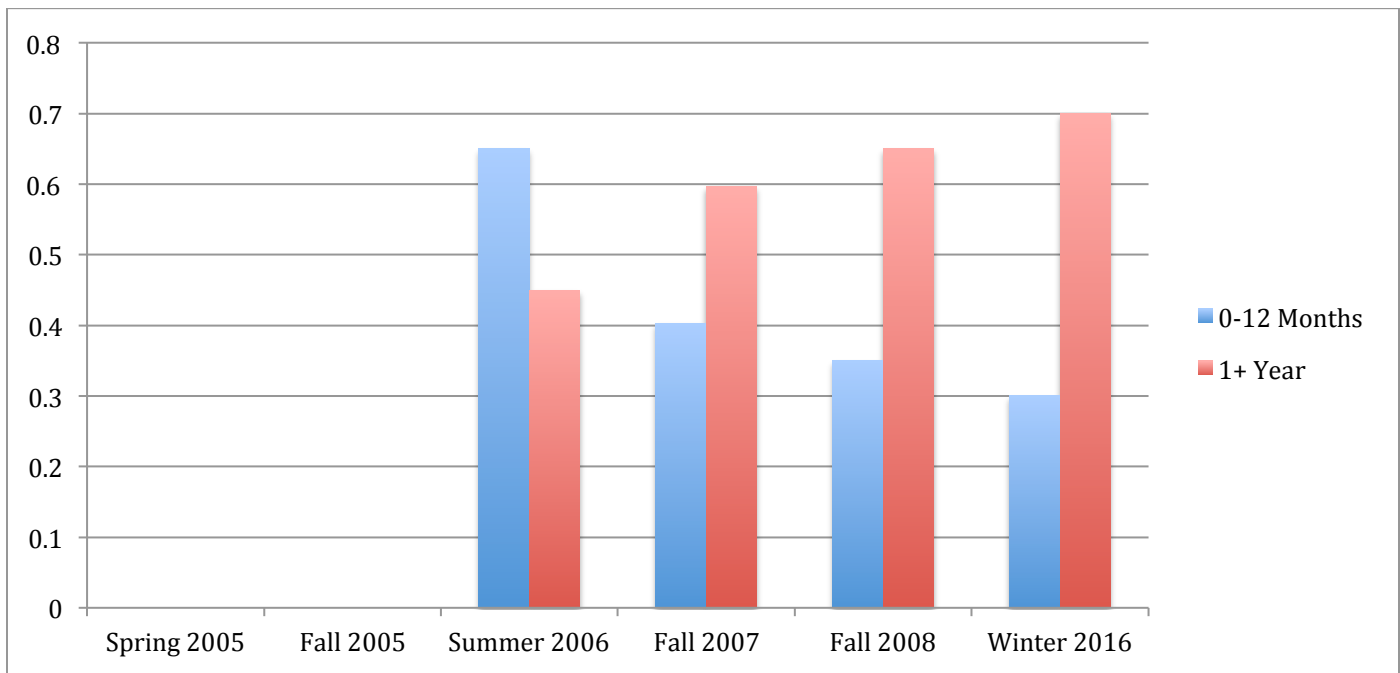

Figure 23: Time Spent in Nanaimo Comparison

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[5] Historical overview irrelevant to current reports as questions have been altered. In 2016, time spent in Nanaimo was measured based the previous year. See *"Time in Nanaimo"* in **FINDINGS.**

Time Spent Being Homeless

Other than 2008, the comparison of time being spent homeless shows most of the population has been homeless for less than one year. However, this data cannot confirm that the homeless population is renewing as this may indicate episodic homelessness, meaning the demographic can be successful in finding housing but perhaps not maintaining it.
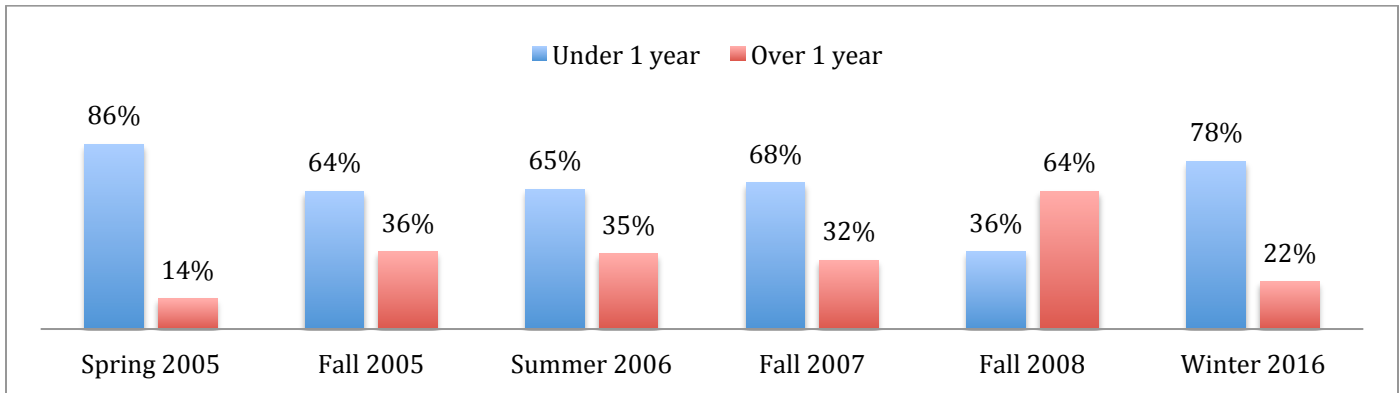

Figure 24: Time Spent Being Homeless Comparison

Reasons for Becoming Homeless

As correlated with solutions for homelessness, consistently over time participants have stated that finances are the primary barriers to obtain housing.[6]
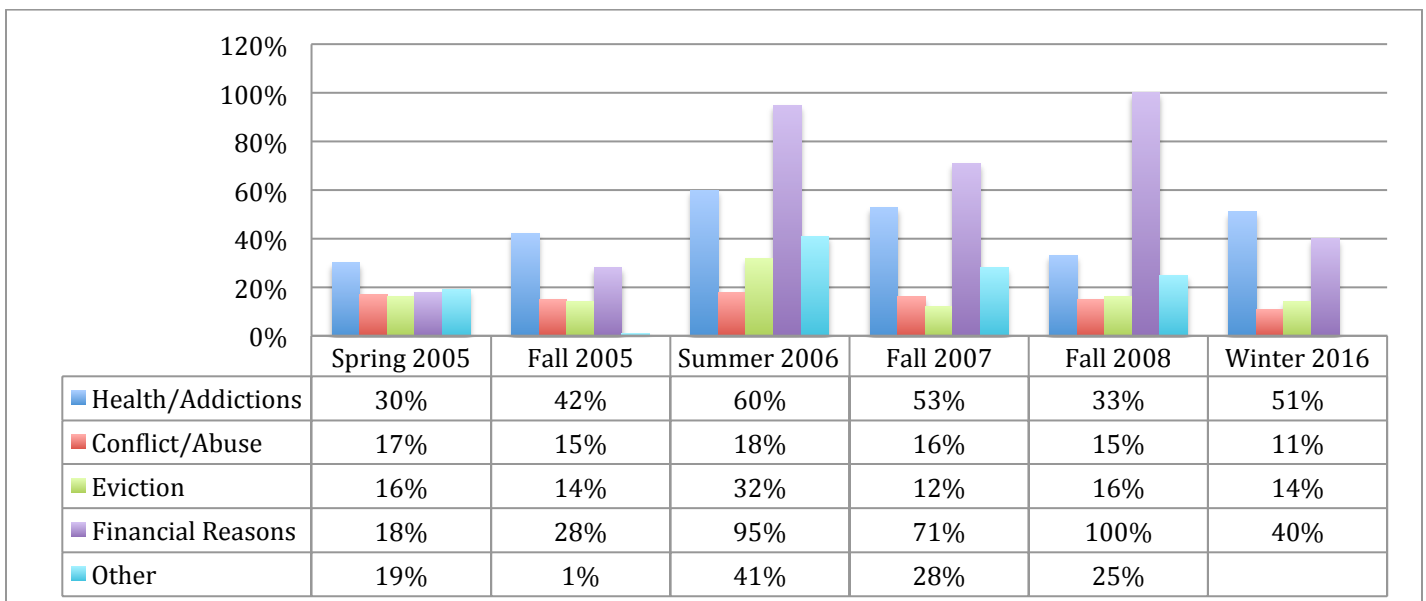

	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Winter 2016
Health/Addictions	30%	42%	60%	53%	33%	51%
Conflict/Abuse	17%	15%	18%	16%	15%	11%
Eviction	16%	14%	32%	12%	16%	14%
Financial Reasons	18%	28%	95%	71%	100%	40%
Other	19%	1%	41%	28%	25%	

Figure 25: Reasons for Becoming Homeless Comparison

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[6] From 2006-2016, multiple answers were allowed

Sleeping Outside

The amount of people sleeping outside is at its lowest in 2016. However, considering the time of the counts, the data indicates that the cold weather plays a role in whether or not people are sleeping outside. As 2016 was the only count conducted in the Winter season, it correlates with the amount of people sleeping outside.
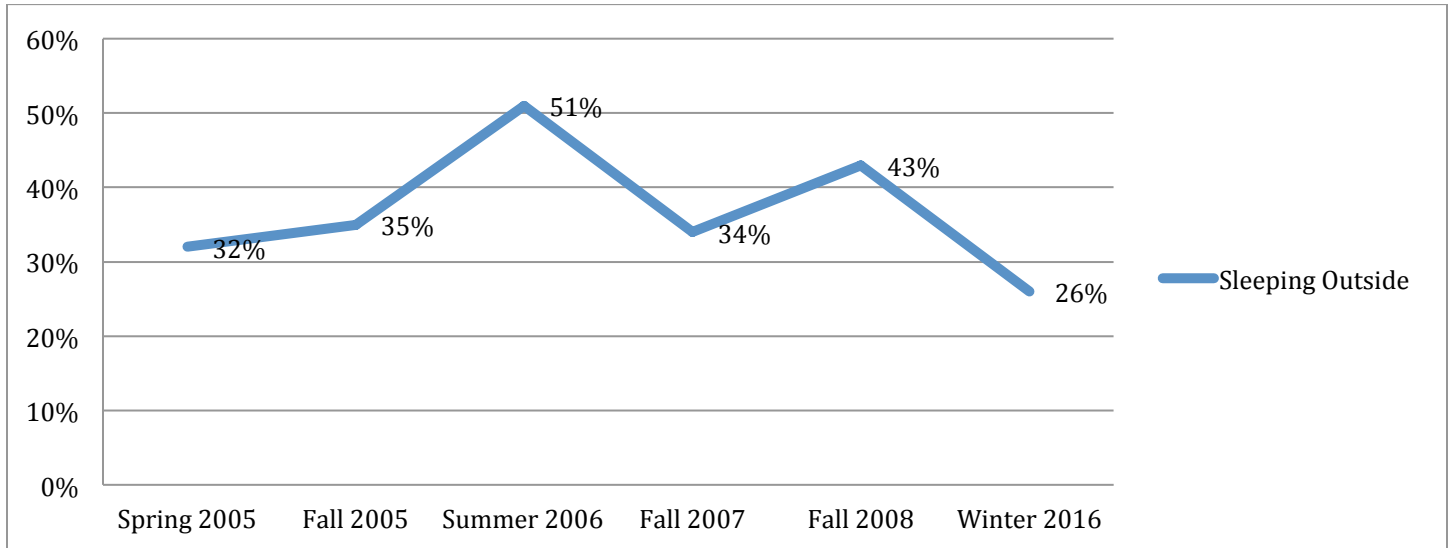

Figure 26: Sleeping Outside Comparison

Physical Health

Counts in earlier years indicated an equal spread across poor, fair, or good physical health. In more recent years, individuals more often rated themselves as in fair physical health.
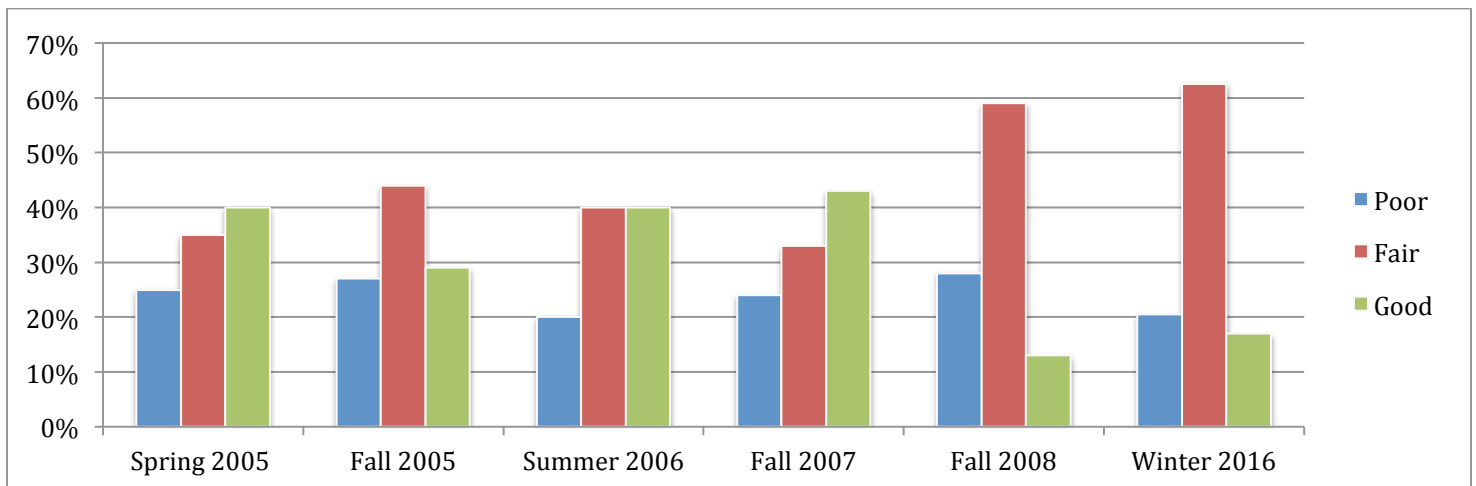

Figure 27: Physical Health Comparison

Mental Health

When asked to rate their own mental health, participants often rated themselves as in fair or good mental health over poor mental health.
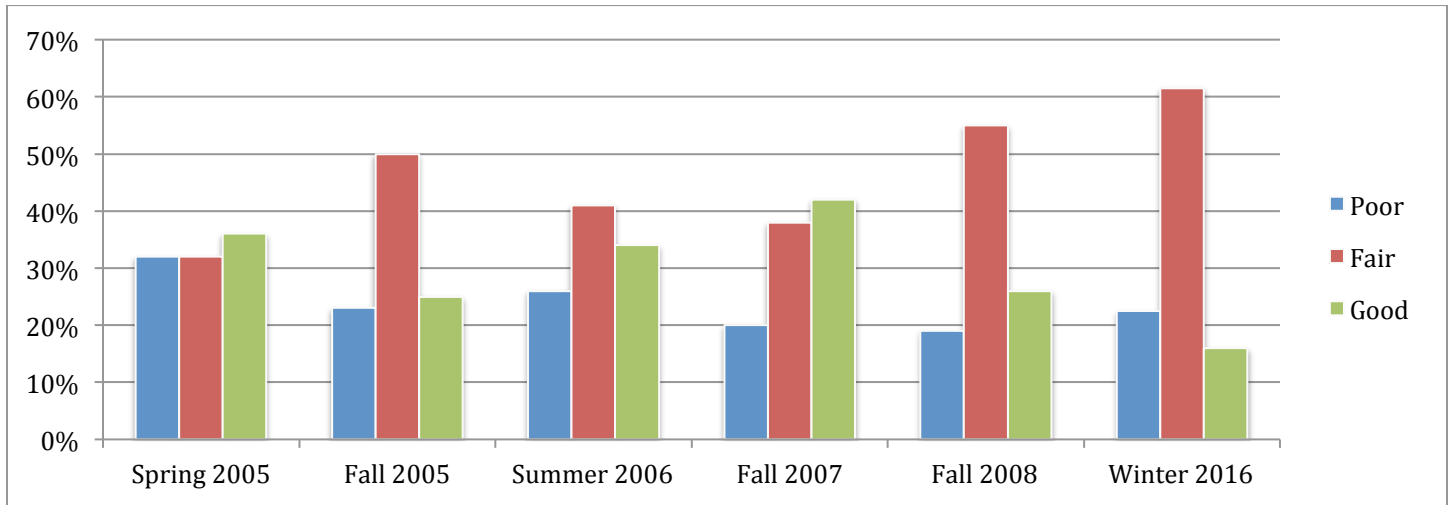

Figure 28: Mental Health Comparison

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http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/pit_countguide.shtml#TOC3

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