

EVERYONE COUNTS:

ST. JOHN'S HOMELESS POINT-IN-TIME COUNT 2016



SUMMARY



Thank you to the many supporters, partners and volunteers who contributed time, effort and resources to this project. Most of all, thank you to all those who participated in the survey and shared their stories with us.

THE 'EVERYONE COUNTS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The committee met 4 times prior to the count and 2 times after the count. It provided guidance for the implementation of the project and for the final version of the report. The committee consisted of representatives from the following organizations (in alphabetical order):

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Choices for Youth
City of St. John's
End Homelessness St. John's
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency
Stella's Circle
United Way Newfoundland and Labrador

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Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy
City of St. John's
United Way Newfoundland and Labrador
Memorial University Centre for Social Enterprise

PARTNERS

Academy Canada Massage Therapy Program
AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
Association for New Canadians Reception House
Ben Said Services Limited
Breen's Deli
Canadian Mental Health Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Cavanagh Financial Services
Choices for Youth
Choices for Youth – Youth Leadership Council
City of St. John's
Correctional Services Canada
Eastern Health
End Homelessness St. John's
Gower Street United Church

Iris Kirby House
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Justice and Public Safety
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network
Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency
Panago Pizza
Paul Walden and Cheyne Holdings
Pleasant Manor Corporation
Rod Hand Art
Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
Salvation Army
Sound Salon Spa
St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program
St. John's Native Friendship Centre Association
Stella's Circle
The Gathering Place
The John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
The Pottle Centre
The Travelling Hygienist
Thrive

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada, City of St. John's, Memorial University Centre for Social Enterprise, United Way Newfoundland and Labrador, or any of the partners listed above.

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End Homelessness St. John's

ABOUT END HOMELESSNESS ST. JOHN'S

End Homelessness St. John's is a community-led, 'collective impact' Board which brings together all sectors to implement a plan to prevent and end homelessness in St. John's.



ST. JOHN'S

Canada 



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABBREVIATION	DESCRIPTION
AESL	NL Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour
CPP	Canada Pension Plan
COH	Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
EHSJ	End Homelessness St. John's
GED	General Education Development
GIS	Guaranteed Income Supplement
HIFIS	Homeless Individuals and Families Information System
HPS	Homelessness Partnering Strategy
OAS	Old Age Security
LGBTQ2S	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit
PiT	Point-in-Time: Homeless Point-in-Time Count
YLC	Youth Leadership Council

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Absolute homelessness: staying in an unsheltered location or in an emergency shelter.

Administrative data: information collected from residential facilities (e.g. emergency shelters, transitional houses, hospitals, jails, etc.) where people meeting the definition of homelessness stayed on November 30, 2016. Facilities reported the number of homeless people who stayed at their facility on the night of the Count and provided aggregate information for observed gender, age and ethnicity.

Chronic homelessness: a period of six or more months of homelessness in the past year.

Emergency shelters: facilities that provide short-term accommodation for homeless individuals and families, which may include essential services such as food, clothing and counseling.

Episodic homelessness: for the purpose of the PiT count, episodic homelessness is defined as three or more distinct episodes of homelessness in the past year, adding up to less than six months.

Hidden homelessness: living temporarily with others without legal protection, guarantee of continued residency, or prospects of permanent housing (e.g. couch surfing).

Housing First: recognizes that housing is a basic human right. As a recovery-oriented approach, Housing First is focused on quickly moving people from homelessness into housing and then providing supports necessary to maintain it. Rather than requiring those experiencing homelessness to first resolve the challenges that contributed to their housing instability, including mental health or addictions issues, Housing First is based on the belief that recovery should begin with stable housing.

Institutional settings: correctional facilities, community-based residential facilities (e.g. halfway houses), addiction treatment centers, and health and mental health programs

Provisionally accommodated: staying in transitional housing, living temporarily with others without guarantee of continued residency, and/or staying in institutional care with no permanent housing arrangement.

Supportive housing for youth: affordable, longer-term housing for youth. Participants receive individualized and regular supports.

Temporary homelessness: less than six months and fewer than three episodes of homelessness over the past year.

Transitional housing: an intermediate step between emergency shelter and permanent housing. It can be differentiated from emergency shelters by the longer length of stay (between three months and three years) and greater intensity of support services offered to clients. Clients do not pay a fixed rent.

Unsheltered homelessness (e.g. rough sleeping): staying outside, in a place not intended for human habitation and/or in a public or private space without consent or contract. This includes in a vehicle, tent, makeshift shelter, bus shelter or abandoned building.

Youth: includes those aged 16 to 24 years at the time of the survey. Dependent youth or children who were residing with their parents or guardians were not included in the overall proportion of youth and were not surveyed.

A MESSAGE FROM SHAWN SKINNER, CHAIR OF END HOMELESSNESS ST. JOHN'S



*Shawn Skinner,
Chair of End Homelessness St. John's*

On behalf of End Homelessness St. John's and our partners, I'm pleased to share the results of 'Everyone Counts', our first biennial homeless Point-in-Time (PiT) Count.

The PiT Count supports our 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness by enabling those experiencing homelessness to share their stories and provide us with a deeper understanding of their characteristics and service needs, and underscores the urgent need for all of us to work together to end homelessness.

Our plan is rooted in community engagement and coordination, the development of a range of housing and supports with our partners to meet diverse needs, and driven by evidence-based decision making. PiT Counts provide us with valuable information about the causes of homelessness in our community and the barriers people face in accessing safe, stable, permanent housing. In combination with annual shelter data and other research, successive PiT Counts allow us to monitor trends, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and measure our progress toward ending homelessness in St. John's.

Using the knowledge obtained from this Count (and our next Count in Spring 2018), we will continue to work with people with lived experience of homelessness, our community partners, and government (federal, provincial and municipal) to set priorities for action for long-term solutions to homelessness in St. John's. While we still have a long way to go, I am confident that together we can achieve our goal.

The PiT Count was made possible through the support of many volunteers, people with lived experience of homelessness, community groups, local businesses and government partners. My thanks to all those who contributed time, effort and resources to this initiative. Most of all, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in the survey and shared their experiences with us. We are committed to working with you and for you as we implement our plan and work towards ending homelessness in St. John's.

OUR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS IN ST. JOHN'S

End Homelessness St. John's is a community-led, 'collective impact' Board bringing together all sectors to implement a plan to prevent and end homelessness in our city. Our Board is chaired by Shawn Skinner, and includes representatives from the federal government (Service Canada), provincial government (Department of Children, Seniors & Social Development, Department of Advanced Education, Skills & Labour, Department of Health & Community Services, and NL Housing), the City of St. John's (Community Services Department), United Way Newfoundland and Labrador, Choices for Youth, The Gathering Place, and Stella's Circle.

End Homelessness St. John's also convenes a regular Frontline Members Forum for all homeless-serving organizations in the city. EHSJ's *2014-2019 Community Plan to End Homelessness*¹ proposes a vision to end chronic and recurring homelessness in St. John's by 2019, and to prevent homelessness for those at imminent risk. The Plan builds on, and is informed by, the experience gained since 2000 by EHSJ and its predecessor, the St. John's Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness.

PRIORITY AREAS: 2014-2019 ST. JOHN'S PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

Based on the consultations and the research undertaken, the following priority areas have been established for action by End Homelessness St. John's together with its partners:

1. System Coordination: A coordinated approach to housing and supports following the Housing First philosophy.

- ▶ Organize the homeless-serving system.
- ▶ Implement coordinated access and assessment.
- ▶ Develop discharge/transition planning measures.

2. Integrated Information System & Research: Integrated information system and research to support ending homelessness efforts.

- ▶ Implement an integrated information system.
- ▶ Build partnerships with the research community.

3. Housing & Supports: Developing a range of housing and supports choices to meet diverse client needs.

- ▶ Support measures to increase housing affordability and reduce homelessness risk.
- ▶ Introduce and ramp up a range of Housing First programs.
- ▶ Tailor supports to meet the needs of diverse groups.
- ▶ Support the enhancement of service quality and impact.

4. Leadership & Resources: Securing the necessary leadership and resources to support the Plan to End Homelessness.

- ▶ Develop the infrastructure necessary to implement the Plan.
- ▶ Coordinate funding to maximize impact.
- ▶ Champion an end to homelessness.

¹EHSJ (2014). St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness. Retrieved from <http://www.nlhcn.org/PDF/YT-Community-Plan-2014-2019.pdf>

OUTCOMES

The implementation of the actions outlined in the Priority Areas will result in the following outcomes:

1. End chronic and episodic homelessness.
2. Re-house and support 523² homeless persons: of these, a minimum of 160 will be chronically and/or episodically homeless.
3. Reduce average length of stay in emergency shelters to seven days.
4. Develop a coordinated homeless-serving system.
5. Enhance the integration of public systems to reduce discharging into homelessness
6. Align resources and funding across diverse sectors to support the St. John's Plan to End Homelessness.

St. John's first homeless population count reveals the urgent need for housing and support services:

Snapshot represents the tip of the iceberg:

An estimated **800 persons** experience homelessness in St. John's annually



² Although EHSJ estimates that 800 people experience homelessness annually in St. John's, not all 800 would require direct housing and/or supports intervention through the Plan's programs to resolve their homelessness. Therefore, the Plan's directly-developed and delivered housing and supports initiatives are designed to serve those most in need of a response, including those who face persistent and recurring barriers to housing stability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On a cold, snowy November 30, 2016 End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ), its partners and over 100 volunteers, conducted St. John's first biennial homeless point-in-time (PiT) count, titled 'Everyone Counts.' This initiative included a count of the number of people experiencing homelessness³ in St. John's on a single day as well as a focused youth outreach approach during the count week to enhance our knowledge of homelessness among this population. On November 30, 2016 there were at least 166 people experiencing homelessness in St. John's, including 38 youth aged 16 to 24 years. This number represents the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in St. John's on one day. This is just the tip of the iceberg, however: during the course of a year, EHSJ estimates that approximately 800 people experience homelessness in St. John's.⁴

The city's emergency shelter data reveals the persistence of homelessness at these levels between 2010-2015, the years prior to EHSJ introducing its *2014-2019 Community Plan to End Homelessness*, which is focused on providing the housing, support services and system coordination needed to prevent and end homelessness in St. John's. The Count also affirms that homelessness is not a choice, with 95.2% of respondents stating they want permanent housing, but face barriers obtaining it.

While the primary purpose of the count was to enumerate the number of people experiencing homelessness in St. John's on a single day, it also provided an opportunity for those experiencing homelessness to share their stories. One hundred and one trained volunteers and front-line staff conducted surveys with individuals experiencing homelessness on the day and night of the St. John's count. Participating youth-serving shelters and service providers conducted surveys over the following five days with youth who were homeless on November 30. In addition, 21 facilities and programs provided administrative data (e.g. observed age, gender and ethnicity) for clients affected by homelessness who used their services on the night of the count. The data presented in this report represents information collected from:⁵

- ▶ 14 street count zones;
- ▶ 10 shelters (including non-profit community-based shelters, privately operated shelters and provisional accommodation for immigrants and refugees);
- ▶ 8 institutional settings (treatment centres, correctional facilities, community-based residential programs, and mental health and addictions programs);
- ▶ 6 community sites (food banks, outreach centres, meal programs and community centres)
- ▶ 1 transitional housing program
- ▶ 2 supportive housing programs for youth⁶

³ The Canadian Definition of Homelessness is available in Appendix 1.

⁴ EHSJ (2014). St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness. Retrieved from <http://www.nlhnh.org/PDF/YYT-Community-Plan-2014-2019.pdf>

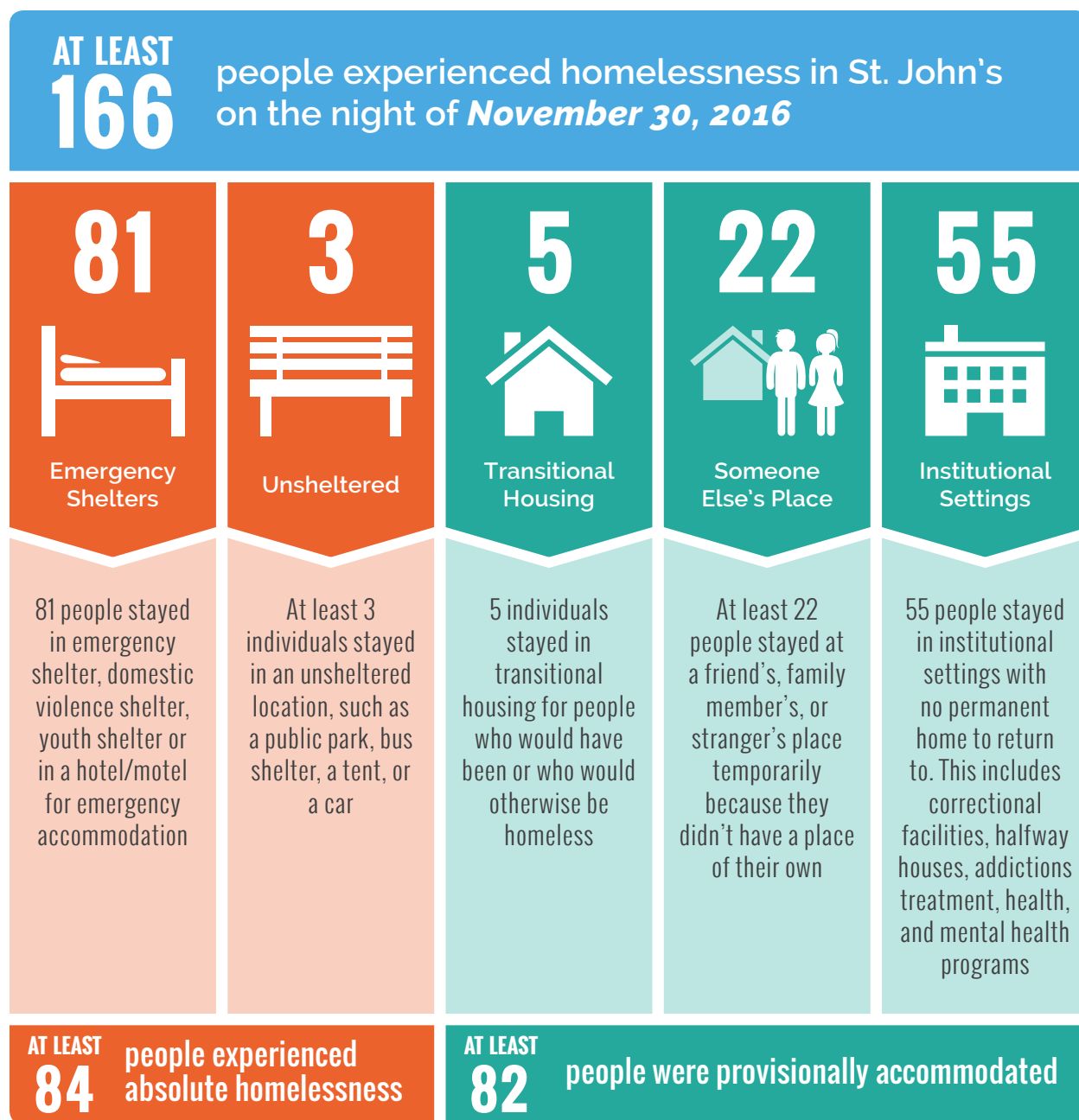
⁵ A full list of participating agencies where data was collected from is available in Appendix 2.

⁶ Youth who resided in supportive housing were not included in the main PiT count number and analysis as these housing arrangements do not fit within the definition of homelessness. Tenure of these accommodations is based on age and need of support. As this programming is age-based, youth residing in supportive housing will require permanent and affordable housing when they exit the program. Given that youth in supportive housing had experience with homelessness or had been at risk of homelessness in the past, those who wished to participate were surveyed and their responses were included in the youth analysis. In most cases, including or excluding this population did not impact the results.

Through the administration of surveys, PiT counts provide useful information about the demographics and service needs of those experiencing homelessness. Importantly, counts provide information about rough sleepers (e.g. people staying in unsheltered locations such as parks, abandoned buildings, etc.), the hidden homeless (e.g. people staying at someone else's place temporarily because they don't have a place of their own), and people who are homeless but are provisionally accommodated in institutional settings, as data about these groups is limited and difficult to obtain. An understanding of the demographics and service needs of those experiencing varying levels of homelessness in a community allows service providers and government agencies to make evidence-based decisions and target resources where they are needed most. Importantly, successive counts will allow EHSJ to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and measure our community's progress toward ending homelessness.

While there are many benefits to conducting a count, there are limitations to this approach. The most important limitation to keep in mind is that a PiT count inherently undercounts the homeless population in a community. Secondly, a PiT count is only a snapshot of homelessness in a community on a single day. It does not provide information about the number of people who experience homelessness over the course of a week, month, or year. Therefore, the number presented in this report likely just scratches the surface of the true extent of homelessness in St. John's - hence, it is just a snapshot revealing the tip of a much larger iceberg.

1.1 KEY FINDINGS



The numbers reported for emergency shelters and transitional housing are reflective of the true number of people who stayed in these settings on November 30. The true number of homeless individuals who stayed in unsheltered locations, at someone else's place, and in institutional settings are likely higher than the numbers reported here.

Of the 166 people enumerated for the November 30, 2016 count, 84 (50.6%) participated in the survey. The following points emerged from the survey data collected.⁷

HOMELESSNESS CAN AFFECT ANYONE AT ANY TIME.

The survey sample was inclusive of males, females, and other gender identities; Indigenous and Non-Indigenous individuals; and a mix of ages, ranging from 16 to 76 years (those under 16 were not eligible to participate). Respondents came from all walks of life – their household income during childhood ranged from low income to above average income; the highest level of education they completed varied from elementary to graduate school; some were employed while others had no income at all. The age at which respondents first became homeless ranged from 3 to 63 years and the factors that led to their homelessness were diverse. Each respondent had a unique story to share through the survey questions and their diversity shows that homelessness can affect anyone at any time.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WANT HOUSING BUT ENCOUNTER BARRIERS OBTAINING IT.

In most cases, homelessness is not a matter of choice. 95.2% of respondents indicated a desire to get into permanent housing, however, the majority (92.5%) indicated that they had barriers to obtaining it. The most commonly cited barriers were low or no income (47.5%), rent is too high (28.8%), mental health issues (22.5%) and addiction (21.3%). When asked "What would help you find permanent, stable housing?" the most common answers given were support (40.0%), employment (18.5%), more money (16.9%) and more affordable housing options (7.7%).

MOST HOMELESS PEOPLE IN ST. JOHN'S CITE THE NEED FOR SUPPORT SERVICES TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE.

More than half of the respondents (54.9%) indicated that they needed services relating to four or more services. The most common service need reported was supportive services (71.4%). Based on details added to some surveys, this included supports such as social workers, housing officers, lawyers and trauma specialists. Services relating to mental health (59.5%), employment (58.3%), education (46.4%) and addiction or substance use (44.0%) were also frequently selected.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN THE HOMELESS POPULATION.

19.2% of respondents identified as Indigenous. In comparison to their percentage in the general population (2.5%)⁸, individuals who identify as Indigenous are overrepresented among the homeless population in St. John's. This means that those who identify as Indigenous are 7.7 times more likely to experience homelessness than those who do not.

⁷ The maximum sample size for each analysis was n=84. The maximum sample size for the youth analysis was n=34. Those who declined to answer or selected "Don't Know" as a response for a question were excluded from the analysis for the corresponding question. Therefore the sample size for each result shown may vary. The sample sizes are shown within the main body of the report.

⁸ See Appendix 3 for data sources for comparisons to the general population

INDIVIDUALS WHO IDENTIFY AS PART OF THE LGBTQ2S COMMUNITY ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN THE HOMELESS POPULATION.

21.7% of respondents identified as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) community. When the data is broken down by age, it shows that 32.4% of youth respondents (those aged 16 to 24 years) identified as part of the LGBTQ2S community. In comparison to their percentage in the general population (4.7% for the Atlantic Provinces)⁹, those who identify as part of the LGBTQ2S community are overrepresented among the homeless population in St. John's.

NEARLY HALF OF RESPONDENTS HAD INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES DURING THEIR LIFETIME.

47.0% of respondents indicated they received services from Child Protection Services while they remained in their family home or resided with another family member and/or lived in foster care and/or group home.¹⁰ This increases to 70.6% when only youth respondents are considered.

A little over one third of respondents (35.8%) lived in foster care and/or in group homes. When asked if they felt Child Protection Services was helpful in their transition to independence, 62.1% felt that they were not.¹¹ Furthermore, 50.0% of respondents who lived in foster care and/or in group homes became homeless less than a year after leaving.

FOR MANY, THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS BEGAN AT A YOUNG AGE.

The median age at which respondents first became homeless was 19 years and the most common age was 18 years. Nearly three out of five (57.6%) respondents first became homeless by age 24. Approximately one quarter (23.8%) of respondents first became homeless between the ages of 16 to 18 years. Conflict with a parent or guardian was cited as the most common reason people first became homeless (33.7%), followed by addiction or substance use (24.1%).

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS CAN BE LONG AND RECURRING.

38.3% of respondents experienced chronic homelessness – that is, six or more months of homelessness in the past year. An additional 7.4% experienced episodic homelessness – three or more distinct episodes of homelessness in the past year, adding up to less than six months.

⁹ See Appendix 3 for data source. Local LGBTQ2S activists estimate that the percentage of individuals who identify as LGBTQ2S in the general population in St. John's ranges from 5% to 10% and that this likely increases in the youth population. However, no data is available to confirm these estimates.

¹⁰ In Newfoundland and Labrador, youth can reside in open-custody group homes under the supervision of the corrections system without ever coming into contact with Child Protection Services. However, the number of youth who reside in group homes through Child Protection Services is significantly higher than the number of youth who reside in open-custody group homes. Therefore, we do not expect that this would impact the results shown.

¹¹ Three respondents moved to St. John's from outside of Newfoundland and Labrador so their experience may be related to Child Protection Services in another province.

INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN ST. JOHN'S REPORTED A NOTABLE USE OF PUBLIC SYSTEMS IN THE PAST YEAR

- ▶ 59.5% visited an emergency room for a combined total of 176 visits.
- ▶ 31.3% were hospitalized. Respondents reported a combined total of 46 hospitalizations for a combined total of at least 418 days spent in hospital in the past year.
- ▶ 62.7% interacted with the police at least once including for tickets, searches or arrests for a combined total of 180 interactions.
- ▶ 42.9% were incarcerated at least once. In total, respondents reported 74 periods of incarceration for a combined total of 4126 days spent in jail.

Institutional responses to homelessness including prison and psychiatric hospitals can cost as much as \$66,000 - \$120,000 per year.¹² This is significantly higher than the cost of providing housing with supports, which End Homelessness St. John's is offering homeless persons (between \$13,000 and \$18,000 annually). In addition to the significant benefits people receive through housing, such as improved health and well-being, significant cost savings can be achieved when people have housing. The Mental Health Commission's national study of *Housing First, At Home/Chez Soi*,¹³ estimates that about \$9,250 per person per year is saved when clients received housing and supports compared to those who did not.

LONG-TERM RESIDENTS AND THOSE WHO CAME TO ST. JOHN'S FROM ANOTHER PART OF NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR OR CANADA ARE AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS

38.1% of respondents moved to St. John's within the past five years. Of those who moved to St. John's within the past five years, 50.0% came to St. John's from another part of Newfoundland and Labrador and 50.0% came to St. John's from another province or territory in Canada. Respondents were not asked where they were born, therefore it is unclear whether some respondents were originally from St. John's and had returned to their home province. Two respondents did indicate that the reason they came to St. John's was because they were originally from here.

The 2016 Demographic and Opinion Survey conducted by the City of St. John's¹⁴ found that 13.9% of the general population have been in St. John's for five years or less. Given this, individuals who have moved to St. John's in the last five years are overrepresented among the homeless population in comparison to their rate in the general population. Of those who moved to St. John's within the last five years, one in five came to access services and supports (21.9%), including mental health services, methadone programming, medical treatment, and specific agencies.

¹² Pomeroy, S. (2005). *The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of Alternate Responses in Four Canadian Cities*. Ottawa, ON: National Secretariat on Homelessness.

¹³ Mental Health Commission of Canada (2012) *At Home/Chez Soi Interim Report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/document/5032/home-interim-report>

¹⁴ See appendix 3 for data source.

1.2 DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS

The findings in this report are sobering. The high representation of Indigenous people, of those who identify as part of the LGBTQ2S community, and of those who had involvement with Child Protection Services are of great concern. It is alarming that nearly three out of five respondents first became homeless before age 24 years and two out of five respondents experienced six or more months of homelessness over the past year. These results are not unique to St. John's – the 2016 Homelessness Partnering Strategy Coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) Count,¹⁵ in which 32 communities across Canada participated, found that those who identify as Indigenous are nine times more likely to experience homelessness than those who do not. In addition, *Without A Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey*¹⁶ found that 29.5% of youth experiencing homelessness identified as part of the LGBTQ2S community and 57.8% had some involvement with Child Protection. However, there is no comfort in knowing St. John's fits within these national trends. It indicates that we, as a society, have failed somewhere along the way to address the issues that lead to homelessness and perpetuate its recurrence.

End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) believes the value in conducting a PiT Count is that it catalyzes the work we do to implement our *2014-2019 Community Plan to End Homelessness in St. John's*¹⁷ based on Housing First principles. Housing First recognizes that housing is a basic human right. As a recovery-oriented approach, Housing First is focused on quickly moving people from homelessness into housing and then providing supports necessary to maintain it. Rather than requiring those experiencing homelessness to first resolve the challenges that contributed to their housing instability, including mental health or addictions issues, Housing First is based on the belief that recovery should begin with stable housing.

Ending homelessness using a Housing First approach does not mean that we will never have someone who needs emergency shelter or loses housing; that would not be realistic. But we can have a community with the coordination and supports in place to reduce average shelter stays to seven days or less by 2019, with the ultimate goal of ensuring no one in our city will live on the streets or in emergency shelter for longer than seven days before having access to the supports they need. The Count contributes to the plan by setting a baseline of data and improving our understanding of the characteristics and service needs of our local homeless population. We see progress in other communities that have tied their PiT counts to plans to end homelessness. Communities like Medicine Hat, Alberta, have already achieved their goal of ending homelessness.¹⁸ EHSJ aims to end chronic and episodic homelessness in St. John's by 2019. Through system coordination and the provision of housing and supports based on a Housing First approach, and through a commitment to conduct PiT counts and other research regularly, communities like St. John's, Medicine Hat and many others have made evidence-based decisions that are resulting in real change – for individuals and for the community as a whole.

¹⁵ Hunter, P. (2017). Homelessness Partnering Strategy Coordinated Canadian Point-in-Time Counts. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development.html>

¹⁶ Gaetz S., O'Grady B., Kidd S., & Schwan K. (2016). Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Retrieved from: <http://homelesshub.ca/YouthWithoutHome>

¹⁷ EHSJ (2014). St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness. <http://www.nlhcn.org/PDF/YYT-Community-Plan-2014-2019.pdf>

¹⁸ Smith, C. (2017). Homeless Find a Champion in Canada's Medicine Hat. Retrieved from https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/02/26/world/canada/homeless-canada-medicine-hat-housing-first.html?emc=edit_th_20170301&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=10750031&referer=

The success of this approach underscores the fact that homeless persons want housing with real choice and appropriate supports, and that individuals who once experienced homelessness can thrive once these critical needs are met. However, no single group can end homelessness on their own. It will take all of us – government, the private and community-based sectors, labour, faith communities and researchers – working in a coordinated manner and building upon the strong foundation of cooperation we already have in place here in St. John's. Together we can address the convergence of vulnerabilities that lead to homelessness, and we can find real solutions to improve outcomes for individuals, families and our community.

NEXT STEPS:

- ▶ The results of this Count will be used to inform EHSJ's 2014-2019 Community Plan to End Homelessness in St. John's, and the development of future plans.
- ▶ EHSJ will continue to work with people with lived experience of homelessness, community partners and government (federal, provincial and municipal) to set priorities for action as we work toward long-term solutions to homelessness.
- ▶ This report will be made available to other organizations, government and the public.
- ▶ EHSJ will continue to conduct counts on a biennial basis and will use the lessons learned from the 2016 Count to improve the methodology for the spring 2018 Count. Through successive counts, EHSJ will be able to monitor trends and measure the effectiveness of interventions and community progress in ending homelessness.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE COUNT DATA

Of note, some groups are admittedly not well-represented in this report for the following reason: A homeless population count is not like conducting a census of households or businesses, in which there are known fixed addresses for the vast majority of participants. Homelessness, by definition, involves housing instability, housing loss, and transience and, therefore, persons who are living on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or couch-surfing at someone else's place are not easy to locate during a PiT Count (or in a national Census, for that matter). As a result, the following groups are under-represented in this report.

Unsheltered homeless: Persons who experience unsheltered homelessness stay outside, in a place not intended for human habitation and/or in a public or private space without consent or contract. This includes in a vehicle, tent, makeshift shelter, bus shelter or abandoned building. As is common for research with marginalized populations, it is difficult to engage the most vulnerable individuals.¹⁹ Only three individuals who were surveyed stayed in unsheltered locations therefore the population represented in this report is mostly connected with support services. This is likely due to limitations with the street count – it is impossible to cover every inch of the city and volunteers were instructed not to enter abandoned buildings, which were identified as known areas where those experiencing homelessness stay or frequent.

¹⁹ Flanagan, S.M. and Hancock, B. (2008). Reaching the 'hard to reach'. Retrieved from <http://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-10-92>

Hidden homeless: The hidden homeless are individuals who stay with family, friends, or others because they have nowhere else to go. The PiT Count is not designed to measure the extent of hidden homelessness in a community but those surveyed provide useful information about the experience of hidden homelessness in our community. The State of Homelessness in Canada report (2014) estimates 35,000 Canadians experience homelessness on any given night but approximately 42% more - as many as 50,000 - make up the hidden homeless.²⁰ The hidden homeless represent 13.3% of the number of homeless persons counted in St. John's on November 30, 2016 but the true number of those experiencing hidden homelessness in St. John's is likely higher.

Families: Very few respondents (3.6%) reported staying with a family member (dependent, partner, or other relative) on the night of the Count. However, in 2015, 16.1% of shelter users in St. John's accessed shelters as part of a family²¹ therefore families are under-represented in the report.

Females: Females represented 38.9% of the counted population and 44.0% of the PiT Count Survey Sample. These findings are consistent with 2015 local shelter data, in which females accounted for 43.3% of shelter users in St. John's. However, in comparison to the general population in which females represent 52.4%, females are under-represented among the homeless population in St. John's. This does not mean that women are less likely to become homeless - instead it is the nature of their homelessness that differs from males, who are more likely to use shelter services. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, when women become homeless, they are at increased risk of violence and assault, sexual exploitation and abuse.²² As a result, women are less likely to enter the shelter system and more likely to experience hidden homelessness, live in overcrowded conditions and/or stay in dangerous and unhealthy relationships to avoid living on the streets.

To read the full report, visit:

https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/community_point_in_time_count_reports/st_johns_2016

²⁰ Gaetz S., Donaldson J., Richter T., & Gulliver T. (2013). The State of homelessness in Canada 2013. Homeless Hub Paper #4. Retrieved from <http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC2103.pdf>

²¹ Community Progress Indicators Report: St. John's. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.nlhcn.org/PDF/CPIR-SJS-2015.pdf>

²² Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017). Who is homeless? Retrieved from <http://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/who-homeless>