

**CONTINUING AND SHIFTING PATTERNS  
IN NANAIMO'S HOMELESS POPULATION:  
BASED ON THE SEPTEMBER 2008 HOMELESS COUNT**

**CONDUCTED BY  
THE NANAIMO WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS**



Data Analysis and Report by Rebecca Tubbs

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2008**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document reports the findings of the census of the homeless population in Nanaimo, British Columbia conducted by the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness on September 18, 2008. The Working Group has conducted four prior censuses - April 2005, November 2005, July 2006, and September 2007.

## **THE NANAIMO WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS – CENSUS METHODOLOGY**

In carrying out this census of homeless persons in Nanaimo, the Working Group used a one-page questionnaire, revised again from those used previously. The form is appended to this report.

The count was conducted largely between 8:00 pm and midnight, Thursday September 18, 2008 on streets in the downtown core and in selected outlying neighbourhoods where it was believed homeless persons might be found. The night-time interviewing was done by volunteers in two- or three-person groups, with each group having a designated geographic area to cover. Other forms were completed by staff of shelters and resource centers for the homeless. Respondents' cooperation was acknowledged by an honorarium composed of comfort and hygiene items. Interviews were also conducted on the Saturday following the census at the "Homeless Connect Day" at Maffeo-Sutton Park.

In this report, numbers of responses do not always add up to the total reported since some questions were not answered by everyone - as occurs on virtually any survey. Means (averages) are often used as are medians (where half the sample was below that number and half above) to convey an overall pattern. Differences between groups (e.g., length of homelessness for men vs. women) are reported chiefly when they are statistically significant as ascertained by standard tests. Some findings that fall just shy of the required significance level are referred to as "non-significant" or words to that effect.

## **NMHAS DOWNTOWN OUTREACH TEAM - METHODOLOGY & STATISTICS**

### **(Independent report compiled June to August, 2008)**

In addition to the findings of the Working Group's census are those collected by Nanaimo Mental Health and Addictions Services' Downtown Outreach Team. This team of two nurses has been in operation for almost 2 years, based at the Salvation Army's New Hope Centre. They are a mobile team working out in the community directly with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Downtown Outreach Team's data indicates a much larger homeless population than the Working Group's census results. These results be a more accurate picture of Nanaimo's homeless population because the information was collected over a three-month period as opposed to the "snapshot" the Working Group captured in their census.

The Team's most recent caseload for the three months ending August, 2008 stands at 302 individuals.

The total caseload of the NMHAS Downtown Outreach Team has increased by 30% since statistics were first collected in August, 2007. Because many on the Team's caseload are new and the relationship between client and outreach worker in the beginning stages not all information on every client has been requested or reported. For that reason, percentage calculations have been based on the number of clients reporting rather than the total caseload unless indicated.

Of these clients, 66% are men and 92% are between the ages of 18 and 65. Almost 90% of clients report they are single. 44% report that they are from Nanaimo while another 38% are from elsewhere in BC. 80% of clients receive income assistance or a disability pension.

Not all of those the Team works with are homeless. Of the total responding, 83 (23%) are living outdoors. 64% are unsuitably or marginally housed and are therefore at risk of becoming homeless. These latter individuals are staying in local emergency shelters, temporary transitional housing or are couch surfing with friends or strangers. 22% percent of clients have been unsuitably housed from one to five years, while another 39% one year or less. It is important to note that information collected in the 3-month period may reflect one or a number of "slices of time" in that period. People's circumstances often change rapidly, for example, people may be evicted, homeless, housed, then evicted again multiple times in one information collection period.

Reporting of health status highlights that many clients on the caseload have significant health challenges that may present as a single condition but more often presents as co-morbid conditions. The following statistics offer a glimpse into the health status of these clients:

<b>Condition</b>	
HIV/Hep C	61
Physically Disabled	32
Mentally Handicapped	10
Mentally Ill	62
Brain Injured	13
FAS/FAE	6

The Downtown Outreach Team notes that in many cases a mental illness may be suspected but not officially diagnosed and therefore not recorded in the statistics. Only ten clients report that they do not use alcohol or drugs.

## THE NANAIMO WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS – CENSUS RESULTS

### Number of homeless persons

The total number of census forms returned was 109; of those, ninety-seven had sufficient information to allow a count. Of those ninety-seven, 74 persons were alone, 11 with a partner (who may or may not have also been counted), six with someone else (again, we don't always know

74 persons alone
11 (respondent + partner)
6 (respondent + someone else)
4 (respondent + child(4))
2 did not respond
12 incomplete surveys
2 known of but did not participate in survey

**115 TOTAL**

**Table 1.**

if that person was counted), four had children with them (4 children which have been added to the final count), and two that did not answer the question. The best count then of homeless persons on this census night, including the twelve who declined participation and the two that are known to be homeless, is 115.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Gender and age breakdowns

Males outnumbered females by a wide margin: 59 males (61%) to 38 females (39%). Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 66. The mean age was 41.39, the median was 42, and the mode was 29 and 39, but males in the sample were decidedly older than the females: males' mean age was 43.29, females' only 38.24. For women, the largest percentage of respondents were in their 20's (32%); for males, the largest number was found in their 40's (64%). 74% of those 40-50 were males and 67% of those 50+ were also males.

Age Groups	Number	Percent	Cumulative
< 20	3	3.37%	3.37%
20-29	15	16.85%	20.22%
30-39	19	21.34%	41.56%
40-49	31	34.83%	76.39%
50-59	19	21.34%	97.73%
60+	2	2.24%	99.97%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2. Age distribution of sample**

### **Ethnic breakdown**

Thirty-five persons (36% of those responding) identified themselves as Aboriginal, Métis or First Nations (referred to hereafter as AMFN). Most of those (20) simply said “yes,” without providing details, while four specified First Nations, five Métis and six Aboriginal.

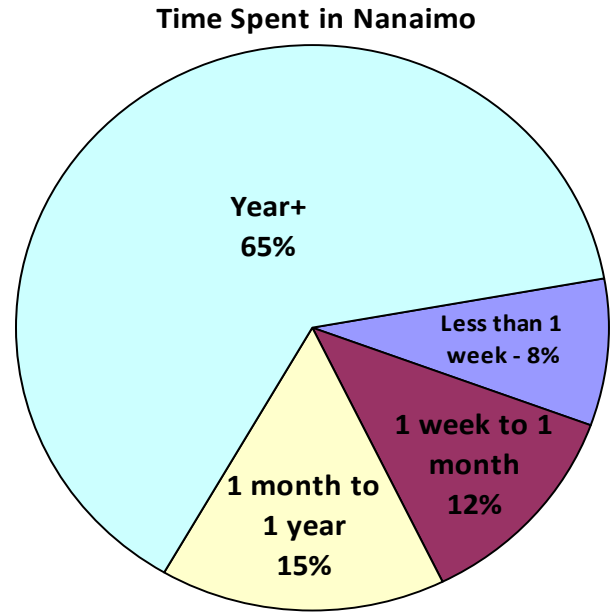
Six of the 79 who responded to another question said they identified with an ethnic or cultural group, with one specifying Ukrainian, one specifying French Canadian, and one specifying Catholic. A much larger proportion of men were AMFN than women - 60% to 40%. The mean age for AMFN respondents was similar to that of the whole sample (40.43 years).

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<sup>1</sup> The mean is the average; the median is the middle number in a list arranged from youngest to oldest; the mode is the one age most frequently recorded.

**Time in Nanaimo**

Newcomers to the city make up a small proportion of this sample of homeless persons: eight (8%) have been here less than a week and 12 more (12%) between a week and a month. About 1 in 7 (15 persons or 15%) have been here between a month and a year. The largest contingent are the 62 (65%) who've been here for over one year.



Men are far more mobile, it appears, in that they are disproportionately represented in the most recent arrivals: 75% of those in

Nanaimo less than week are men. Women are disproportionately represented among those here over a year - 53% of that group (vs. the 39% that women represent in the overall sample).

The non-aboriginals subsample respondents are more recent arrivals: 19% of them have been in Nanaimo less than a month, contrasted with only 2% of the Aboriginal/Métis/First Nations.

Asked where they were previously, 69 of the respondents moved here from a variety of places across the country. Of those not from Nanaimo, 33 (48%) were from Victoria or other Vancouver Island communities, and 13 (19%) were from Vancouver or other Lower Mainland communities. The BC interior was the former place of residence for seven (10%), Sunshine Coast, Alberta and Ontario each home for three ((4%) each), and 11 (16%) were from scattered other places, with none mentioned more than twice.

Place	Number	Percent
Victoria	9	11
Elsewhere on Van. Island	24	28
Vancouver & Mainland	13	15
BC Interior	7	8
Sunshine Coast	3	5
Alberta	3	5
Ontario	3	5
Elsewhere	11	13

Table 3. Previous place of residence

**Being alone or with others**

The vast majority of the 95-respondent sample (74 respondents or 76%) were homeless alone. The 21 who were accompanied included 11 (12%) with a partner, four with children (4%), and six with someone else (6%). Five persons (5%) had pets with them.

**BECOMING HOMELESS**

**Length of homelessness**

Approximately two-thirds the sample had been homeless for over a year and one-third for less than one year. Table 4 below displays the precise figures.

<b>Time</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than a week	8	8%
1 week to 1 month	12	12%
1 month to 1 year	15	15%
Year +	62	64%
<b>TOTAL respondents</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4. Length of homelessness**

Persons living alone have been on the streets for a longer time: 82% of them have been homeless six months or more contrasted with only 18% of those who are accompanied by someone.

**Conditions leading to homelessness**

The cost of housing was the factor most frequently mentioned as leading to a person’s homelessness: 51 of 95 (54%) who responded to the question listed that. Next were two financial factors: no income at 45 mentions (25%) and addictions and health conditions at 31 (17%). Other, lesser contributing factors were abuse or conflict at 14 (8%), eviction at 15 (8%), moving or being stranded at nine (5%), and assorted other factors at 15 (8%). It should be noted that one could mention as many factors as applied in their case.



Some of those factors leading to homelessness were more prevalent or less prevalent among certain subgroups in the sample:

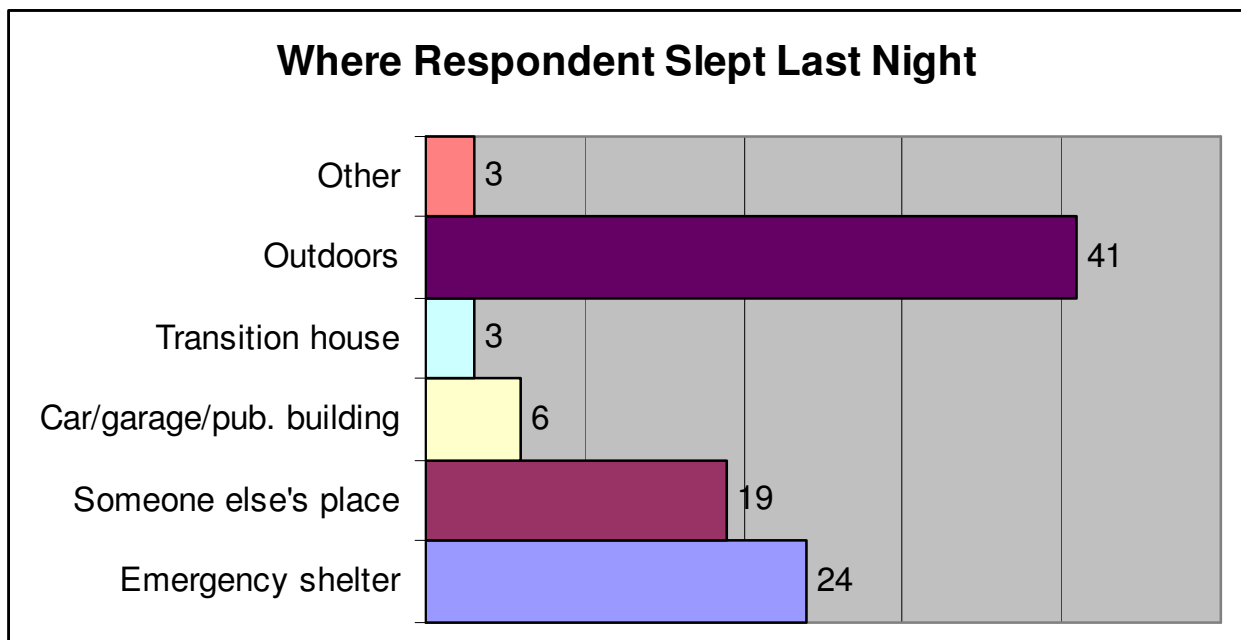
Factor	More prevalent among	Less prevalent among
Abuse/conflict	Women: 11 (12%)	Men: 3 (3%)
Addiction/health issues	Women: 16 (17%)	Men: 15 (16%)
Eviction	Men: 8 (8%)	Women: 7 (7%)
Housing Costs	Men: 28 (29%)	Women: 22 (23%)
Lack of income	Men: 25 (26%)	Women: 20 (21%)

**Table 5. Factors leading to homelessness**

## THE HOMELESS EXPERIENCE

### Current housing situation

Data from the question about where one stayed last night showed that sleeping outside or sleeping rough was the most common response at 41, representing 43% of the 96 respondents. An additional six (6%) also slept rough but in cars, garages, or public buildings. A total of 27 (28%) were in social agency facilities (24 in emergency shelters, and another three in transition houses). Someone else’s place provided the roof over the heads of 19 respondents (20%), while a hotel or motel was used by one (1%).



**Table 6. Where respondent slept last night**

**Shelter/Safe House Use**

Respondents were asked the reason they did not stay in a shelter or safe house the previous night. Disliking it was the number one reason, cited by 16 persons, followed by the shelter being full (13) and being able to stay with family or friends (11). Table 7 shows the full range of responses.

Reasons for not using shelter	Number	Percent
Dislike it	16	25%
Turned away: Shelter full	13	20%
Able to stay w/ family or friend	11	18%
Turned away as inappropriate	3	5%
Couldn't get to it/None in area	2	3%
Didn't know about it	0	0%
Other reasons	19	30%
<b>TOTAL respondents</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 7. Why respondent didn't use shelter of safe house**

*\*Respondents could list as many as applied.*

Respondents under age 30 cited "Dislike" 33% of the time contrasted with 14% for those over age 30.

**Health conditions**

Two questions were aimed at ascertaining respondents' self-assessments of their physical and mental health: a rating system of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) was employed for each. The two tables show most respondents rated both their physical and mental health about 3 or 4. For physical health, the mean was 3.19 while it was 3.47 for mental health. On both physical and mental health, the aboriginal subsample showed similar ratings with a mean of 3.38 for physical health and 3.32 for mental health.

Rating	Count	Percent	Cumulative	Rating	Count	Percent	Cumulative
1 (very poor)	6	7%	7%	1 (very poor)	9	10%	10%
2	20	22%	29%	2	9	10%	20%
3	30	33%	62%	3	29	31%	51%
4	23	25%	87%	4	22	24%	75%
5 (excellent)	12	13%	100%	5 (excellent)	24	26%	100%

**Table 8. Self-reported physical health**

**Table 9. Self-reported mental health**

Another health question asked what health concerns respondents had, offering four choices as well as space for additional comments. Of 88 respondents, 51 persons (34%) cited a drug or alcohol concern, 41 persons (28%) a medical condition, 21 (14%) a mental illness concern, and 26 (17%) a physical disability. Ten persons (7%) named something else, but these were mostly elaborations on the items already checked. Some groups within the sample were more or less likely to have health concerns, as shown below:

Health concern	More prevalent among	Less prevalent among
Have medical condition concern	Women: 21 (24%)	Men: 20 (22%)
Have alcohol/drug concern	Men: 31 (35%)	Women: 20 (22%)
Have physical disability	Men: 17 (19%)	Women: 9 (10%)
Have mental illness	Men: 12 (14%)	Women: 9 (10%)

**Table 10. Health concerns**

*\*Respondents could list as many as applied.*

### **Use of health services**

A list of eight health services was presented and respondents queried as to which, if any, of them they have used recently. The table below contains the list.

Health service	Mentions	Percent
Doctor	65	44%
Hospital emergency room	29	19%
Mental health worker	11	7%
Dentist	10	6%
Ambulance	9	6%
Needle exchange	8	5%
Other services	6	4%
Mental health clinic	7	5%
Optometrist	4	2%
<b>TOTAL mentions</b>	<b>149</b>	
<b>TOTAL respondents</b>	<b>84</b>	

**Table 11. Use of health services**

*\*Respondents could list as many as applied.*

Only one inter-group difference was discernable: The female use of doctors was at 42 % contrasted with 58% for males.

Use of the emergency room tended to increase with time one is homeless. Women use the services of the mental health worker far more than men: 64% vs. 36%.

While 7% of the under 50 group used the needle exchange recently, 9.5% of the over 50 group did. How long one had been homeless is statistically related to use of the needle exchange also: those homeless under one year show 0% utilization of the needle exchange while 13% of those homeless over one year have used it recently.

**Use of community services**

Use of other community services was also explored. The table below shows the relative use of a half-dozen programs or facilities in rank order. Men tended to utilize food services more than women - the Food bank (61% vs. 39), Hot Meal Program (71% vs. 29%), and 7-10 Club (66% vs. 34%).

Service or Facility	Number	Percent
Food bank	59	24%
Hot meal	49	20%
Shelters	41	17%
7-10 Club	35	14%
Library	30	12%
Other community services	20	8%
Police	8	3%
<b>TOTAL respondents</b>	<b>88</b>	

**Table 12. Use of community services and facilities**

*\*Respondents could list as many as applied.*

**Getting money**

Respondents’ reports of how they regularly get money show a wide variety of responses. A ten-item check list was used, with a place to indicate “other” as well. On average, respondents identified 1.2 ways they gained money, with Income Assistance by far and away the most common: 50 persons or 52% of those answering this particular question. Seven people (7%) reported they get no money at all. The table below contains the breakdown, categorized by general categories of work, public assistance, and other. It shows public assistance is most critical for this sample, 73% receiving one form or another of public assistance. Work brought in some money for 16. (17%)

<b>From work</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Public assistance</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No.</b>
Full time employ.	5	Income Assistance	50	Illegal Activities	3
Part time employ	3	Disability	27	Other	8
Sex trade	4	Employment Insurance	1		
Recycling	2				
Creative Work	1				
Pension	1				
<b>TOTAL respondents</b>					<b>96</b>

**Table 13. Sources of income**

*\*Respondents could list as many as applied.*

**No income**

As noted, there were seven people reporting no income whatsoever. Having no income was more common among men and those over age 30 (6%) than women among those 30 and under (2%).

**What’s needed**

An open-ended question inquired about “what other services would be of help” to respondents. Thirty persons responded with one or two items, and responses were categorized as much as possible to discern any pattern.

<b>Needed services</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
Housing (rental, affordable)	17
Shelter (more places, more beds)	3
Food (soup kitchen, more 7-10s, etc.)	6
Work, help finding work	3
Free clothing	1
Detox & similar services	1
Bus passes	2
Living Room type facility	2
Dental programs	2
Women’s treatment centers	2
Public storage	3
Other (no more than once each)	16

**Table 14. Other services wanted**

A second open-ended question asked “How do we solve homelessness?” 66 respondents offered a suggestion or two, and again those were categorized into the following patterns, with the responses very similar as on the previous question:

<b>Proposed solutions</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
Housing (affordable, rental, etc)	34
Shelter (more places, more beds)	5
Rent control, lower rents	7
Detox & similar services	1
Public education acceptance	1
It’s impossible	1
Work	6
Education, schooling	2
More resources	3
Increase social assistance rates	1
Other suggestions (once each)	6
Tent City	3

**Table 15. Proposed solutions to homelessness**

## COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS CENSUSES

With this being the fifth census of the homeless in Nanaimo, the data obtained on it was compared and contrasted with the findings of the four previous counts to see what trends might exist. Since several questions were altered, as has happened with each census, not all the comparisons can be made.

Points of comparison	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008
Total count (including others with the respondent)	149	99	300	173	115
In all five censuses, males outnumbered females, with the margin very consistent until the 3rd count, after which males outnumbered females	54%-46%	57%-43%	56%-44%	63%-37%	61%-39%
The proportion of the homeless population that's Caucasian (C) stayed quite consistent throughout all five counts. Other nationalities are heavily outweighed and almost non-existent.	C: 68% FN: 25% M: 1% O: 5%	C: 73% FN: 14% M: 6% O: 7%	C: 68% FN: 14% M: 13% O: 5%	C: 68% A+M+FN: 32% Question altered	C: 62% A+M+FN: 38%

Points of comparison	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008
Age range was roughly similar across four counts	15 - 71 years	16 - 63 years	15 - 78 years	14-73 years	19-66 years
Average age was almost identical on first two and two years older on third count, & right in the middle on the 4th and five years older on the 5 <sup>th</sup> .	35.6 years	35.5 years	37.9 years	36.7 years	41.39 years
Median age (½ above, ½ below) was almost identical on the first two counts, about three years older on the third, right in the middle on the fourth count and six years older on the 5 <sup>th</sup> .	36	35.7	39	36	42
Males continue to be older, on average... in their 40's. Females tend to be younger... in their 20's. Makes are more represented among the 50+ group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (m) 38.3 to (f) 31.5 yrs • 6 of 8 under 20 were females • 15 of 16 over 50 were males</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (m) 37.6 to (f) 33.1 yrs • all 4 under 20 were females • 6 of 8 over 50 were males</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (m) 40.1 to (f) 35.5 yrs • too few &lt;20 to compare • 23 of 32 over 50 were males</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (m) 39.7 to (f) 31.9 yrs • 4 of 5 &lt;20 were females • 16 of 21 over 50 were males</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (m) 43.3 • (f) 38.2 • too few &lt;20 to compare • 14 of 21 over 50 were males</li> </ul>
Average and median time in Nanaimo continue to increase across the first three counts, while the range continues to be very wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 58 years</li> <li>• 8.6 years on average</li> <li>• median of 3 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 45 years</li> <li>• 10.5 years on average</li> <li>• median of 6 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 57 years</li> <li>• 12.7 years on average</li> <li>• median of 9 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9% less than week;</li> <li>• 8% week to a month;</li> <li>• 24% month to a year;</li> <li>• 60% year +</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8% less than week;</li> <li>• 12% week to month;</li> <li>• 15% month to year;</li> <li>• 64% year+</li> </ul>
Most common reasons for being in Nanaimo looked similar on the first two censuses, but a different mix showed up on the third count Family decision Wanting to be closer to family Grass looked greener... Followed partner here For alcohol or drug treatment Work or search for work Born here Got stuck, ran out of money Family problems or conflict Visiting or passing through	16 cases 12 7 6 6 7 5 4 4 -	23 cases 8 4 6 3 7 6 2 5 -	4 case 2 4 0 0 7 0 0 0 7	Question not asked	Question not asked



Points of comparison	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008
The proportion of respondents who were alone has fluctuated over four counts, but the spread on the last three counts is only 9%	66% alone, 34% not	86% alone, 14% not	77% alone, 23% not	80% alone, 20% not	74% alone, 26% not
Males were more likely to be alone on all four counts	m: 72% f: 62%	m: 94% f: 75%	m: 83% f: 69%	m: 86% f: 74%	m: 66% f: 34%
The average time being homeless shows some fluctuation over the first three counts, while the median showed increases; comparisons on the fourth count are hard to make with categories having been changed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 19 years</li> <li>• average: 1.02 years</li> <li>• median: 3 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 15 years</li> <li>• average: 1.42 years</li> <li>• median: 5 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few days to 16 years</li> <li>• average: 1.17 years</li> <li>• median: 6 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ over 6 months, ½ under</li> <li>• 23% less than month</li> <li>• 32% over a year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ?????</li> <li>• 21% less than month</li> <li>• 64% over a year</li> </ul>
The proportion homeless more than a year showed a big jump between the first and second census and has remained up; the proportion homeless 3+ years rose significantly from April to November and marginally in July. The figure for September cannot be calculated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 86% &lt; a year, 14% over a year</li> <li>• 3+ years: 8%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 64% &lt; a year, 36% over a year</li> <li>• 3+ years: 12%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65% &lt; a year, 35% over a year</li> <li>• 3+ years: 14%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 68% &lt; a year, 32% over a year</li> <li>• 3+ years: can't say</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36% &lt; a year, 64% over a year</li> <li>• 3+ years: can't say</li> </ul>
<p>The reasons cited for becoming homeless show large increases in addiction and financial problems on the third &amp; fourth counts. Addiction, Family conflict, Eviction, Financial reasons, i.e., poverty, housing costs, Assorted other reasons.</p> <p>On the fifth count, the cost of housing was a big concern at 50 mentions. Health/addictions, Conflict/abuse, Eviction, Financial reasons (no income, housing costs), Other reasons.</p>	<p>30% 17% 16% 18% 19%</p>	<p>42% 15% 14% 28% 1%</p>	<p>(multiple responses allowed) 60% 18% 32% 95% 41%</p>	<p>(multiple responses allowed) 53% 16% 12% 71% 28%</p>	<p>(multiple responses allowed) 33% 15% 16% 100% 25%</p>
Each of the first two censuses found about a third of respondents sleeping outside; that percentage soared on the third (i.e., summer) census & returned to 1/3 on the latest count	32%	35%	51%	34%	43%

Points of comparison	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Summer 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008
The fall census saw a sharp reduction in the number who rated their physical health as good (g) vs. fair (f) or poor (p) Poor (1-2) Fair (3-4) Good (5)	g: 40% f: 35% p: 25%	g: 29% f: 44% p: 27%	g: 40% f: 40% p: 20%	g: 43% f: 33% p: 24%	g: 13% f: 59% p: 28%
Likewise, reports of good mental health were down in the fall '05, but rebounded by the summer and saw a spike in the fall 2007 count. Poor (1-2) Fair (3-4) Good (5)	g: 36% f: 32% p: 32%	g: 25% f: 50% p: 23% f-p: 2%	g: 34% f: 41% p: 26%	g: 42% f: 38% p: 20%	g: 26% f: 55% p: 19%
The proportion who didn't have a meal the day of the census remains at about one in six or seven	17%	16%	13%	Question not asked	Question not asked
Shelters (SH) and the Salvation Army (SA) were the most likely places respondents had eaten on the first three counts	SA: 34% SH: 20%	SA: 18% SH: 31%	SA: 33% SH: 23%	Question not asked	Question not asked
The spring finding of females being more likely to have eaten was been reversed in the fall census; no difference on the summer count	f: 91% m: 77%	f: 77% m: 94%	f: 81% m: 84%	Question not asked	Question not asked
The first two censuses found about one in three having made any money on census day	34%	33%	Question altered	Question not asked	Question not asked
The fall data show less reliance on drug dealing and relatively more reliance on panhandling from the spring to the fall '05 count, & large increases in employment & illegal activities in fall '07 Sex trade Other employment Panhandling Drug dealing (or other illegal activities)	14 10 5 4	7 7 6 0	Question altered	8 26 0 15	4 8 2 3
The proportion receiving no public assistance has been inconsistent over the last five counts; Social Assistance (SA) and Disability Assistance (DS) continue to be most common among those receiving some help	None: 32% SA: 27 DS: 25	None: 39% SA: 17 DS: 19	None: 29% SA: 68 DS: 25	None: 45% SA: 74 DS: 6	None: 26% SA: 50 DS: 27
Economic poverty looms larger and larger among major barriers to getting a place of one's own: Lack of money or job, or lack of affordable housing Addictions Transportation Mental illness	37 28 1 0	46 19 5 3	163 43 4 6	Question not asked	Question not asked

## CONCLUSIONS

### Total numbers

The Working Group's count of 115 represents a large drop from the 2007 count of 173. As with any research, the findings are a function of at least two factors: the true situation (often unknowable) and the tools used to gather information about the situation. With no evidence that 58 formerly homeless people are now housed since the 173 count of 2007, and no evidence that 58 of that 173 have left the city, it's a fair conclusion that the number of homeless in Nanaimo is something more than 115.

*Total* numbers aside, the data reveal a remarkable consistency on any number of characteristics of the city's homeless population:

### Continuing trends

- ⇒ The majority of the homeless population continues to be male.
- ⇒ The percentage of Aboriginal, First Nations, and Metis population has steadily increased over the five counts, ranging from 27% to 38%.
- ⇒ The age range remains fairly consistent from the mid-teens to the mid-seventies.
- ⇒ Mean or average age has a variance of only 6 years across five censuses.
- ⇒ Median age (where ½ are above and ½ below) also shows a tight variance of only six years.
- ⇒ Men among the homeless continue to be older, on average, than women. This shows up in the mean, the median, and the predominance of females in the 20-29 age group and males in the 40+ age groups.
- ⇒ Past counts documented that the majority of Nanaimo's homeless people are from the city, not already homeless people drawn here. However, on the fifth count, 69 people indicated that they lived somewhere else previously, before moving to Nanaimo. 52 people indicated that they came from surrounding Vancouver Island communities.
- ⇒ Comparisons on length of homelessness are difficult to make this time around because of a change in the question, but the proportion homeless under a year hovers in the 64-68% range on previous counts, but drops to 36% on the fifth count.
- ⇒ Although the range here is not as tight as on some of the above demographic characteristics, being alone (not accompanied by anyone) continues to characterize 75-80% of the homeless population. This is more true of males than females, but the margin fluctuates.
- ⇒ Addiction and financial factors (no or inadequate income and high housing costs) are consistently the two leading factors on the path to homelessness.

⇒ One-half of Nanaimo's homeless population is sleeping outdoors at least during the spring and fall counts; half, however, were sleeping rough on the summer 2006 and fall 2008 census.

### **Shifting patterns**

⇒ The latest count shows more positive self-assessment on mental health: the 26% checking "good" (5 on the scale) is the highest seen yet and the 19% checking "poor" (1 or 2 on the scale) is the lowest seen thus far.

⇒ On this fifth count, a larger proportion has jobs (about 23%).

⇒ The latest count finds a substantial increase in the proportion receiving public assistance - about 81%.

