

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING

City of Nanaimo's Initiatives and Programs

Overview

The City of Nanaimo provides safety and security through emergency response services such as fire, bylaw, and policing. In addition, the City has an important impact on some of the root causes of crime and social disorder through its influence on the design of the built environment, provision of community amenities (buildings, parks, etc.), and programs/initiatives that support social development, recreation, culture, and wellness. These programs and initiatives also provide supports to people experiencing homelessness.

Statistics Canada[i] reports a correlation between homelessness and criminal victimization. In addition, many people experiencing homelessness have experienced victimization and trauma prior to becoming homeless and report that these experiences were contributing factors to their homelessness[ii].

The findings of Everyone Counts: 2023 Point-in-time Count (Nanaimo) counted, in a 24-hour period, 515 individuals as homeless in the City of Nanaimo. This is an increase of 20% from the 2020 point-in-time count where 433 individuals were counted. Homeless Point-in-time counts are estimates and service providers in Nanaimo indicate that the real numbers of people experiencing homelessness are higher and likely between 800-1000[iii].

The following information identifies upstream, midstream, and downstream actions the City of Nanaimo is taking to support community safety and wellbeing for all people living in the city.



References

[i] <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00014-eng.htm>

[ii] <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/legal-justice-issues/trauma-and-victimization>

[iii] Page 7, Nanaimo Community Report, Everyone Counts: 2023 Point-in-time Count. United Way British Columbia & Canadian Mental Health Association Mid-island. January 2024.

Upstream Initiatives



Upstream approaches to community safety and wellbeing are about creating a healthy, safe and secure community where everyone has opportunities to grow, work, play, be valued and have belonging.

Housing Initiatives

The City is continuously working hard to ensure that Nanaimo has a range of housing types for people of all income levels. This includes temporary shelter, social or supportive housing, non-market housing, market rental housing and homeownership.

Detailed information regarding the many housing-related projects and initiatives that the City has undertaken to support affordable housing can be found on the City's Housing page. Here, you will find the most up-to-date information on current housing initiatives, including projects in partnership with BC Housing

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/community-safety-and-wellbeing/community-and-social-service-programs/housing>

Homelessness Prevention: Rent Bank & Rent Supplement Program

Nanaimo Region Rent Bank

In 2020, City of Nanaimo staff and the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition worked to establish a local rent bank. The Nanaimo Homeless Coalition selected the Nanaimo Region John Howard Society, now known as Connective, as the lead applicant to operate the local rent bank. The John Howard Society and the City submitted a successful application to BC Rent Bank (BCRB) and the NRRB began providing rent bank loans in January 2021. Between January 2021 and November 2024, the City has contributed \$202,000 from the Online Accommodation Platform (OAP) revenue for the rent bank program. In November 2024, Council dedicated an additional \$150,000 from the OAP revenue to support the rent bank in 2025.

Rent Supplement Program

Since 2016, the City provided \$125,000 in grant funds to the Nanaimo Region John Howard Society, now known as Connective society, to fund rent supplements through the Housing First Program. In 2023, Council dedicated \$150,000 of OAP funds to the rent supplement program and distributed the funds to service providers through a Expression of Interest process. In November 2024, Council dedicated an additional \$150,000 from the OAP revenue to support the rent supplement program in 2025.

Youth Resilience Strategy

To build a safer community, the City partnered with Public Safety Canada to provide programs and initiatives that address the root causes of youth engaging in gun and gang violence. The City was allocated \$1.8 million in funding to develop and implement the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy. The Strategy was endorsed by Council in 2023. Between 2023 and 2026, eight organizations including the City's Parks, Recreation & Culture Department, will receive funding for programs and initiatives that support youth at risk and fulfill the focus areas identified in the Strategy.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/projects-detail/building-safer-communities-gun-and-gang-violence-prevention>

Parks, Recreation & Culture Programs

The City's Parks, Recreation & Culture department provides safe gathering spaces, parks, facilities, programs and events for all ages and incomes to support youth and families for a healthy community.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/parks-recreation-culture>

Social Planning Grants

The City's Social Planning Grants supports the desired outcomes and policies in City Plan, in particular City Plan's goal for a 'Healthy Nanaimo: Community Wellbeing & Livability'. The grants provide funding to organizations that offer programs that support community vitality and wellbeing, enhance social cohesion, address the root causes of poverty, and foster social equity and inclusion. There is a total of \$85,000 in grant funding available annually.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/grants/social-development-grants>

Neighbourhood Associations

The City supports neighbourhood associations as an effective intermediary between the City and residents to address neighbourhood interests and concerns. This includes mitigating the impact of homelessness on residents and businesses.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/property-development/land-use-bylaws/neighbourhood-and-area-plans/neighbourhood-associations>

Midstream Initiatives



Midstream approaches to community safety and wellbeing help to support the City's more marginalized populations and work to reduce and respond to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of victimization and trauma.

Health & Housing Action Plan

The HHAP came about from work undertaken by the City's Health and Housing Task Force whose focus was advancing health and housing as community priorities. The HHAP serves as a roadmap for collaboration and bold action, working towards a shared vision of health and housing for all. The City is providing \$480,000 annually for 5 years to the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization (SPO) to implement the Health and Housing Action Plan.

Link: https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/default-document-library/healthandhousingactionplan-document_for-website.pdf

Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization

The Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization (SPO) provides research, data, analysis, education and information related to the community's homelessness response along with coordinated action and advocacy by Nanaimo's non-profit organizations, Snuneymuxw First Nation and other levels of government, the business sector and the broader community to address an end to homelessness in Nanaimo.

Link: <https://nanaimospo.com>

Community Policing Program

The Nanaimo RCMP Community Policing Volunteer Program is a joint effort between the City and the Nanaimo RCMP. The program supports a range of community-based crime prevention programs and community policing initiatives including: neighbourhood safety audits, speed watch, block watch, crime watch, 529 Garage Bike Registry, and other additional safety education and awareness campaigns and events.

Link: <https://www.nanaimocpvolunteers.ca>

Nanaimo Acute Response Table (Situation Table)

The City facilitates the Nanaimo Acute Response Table, bringing together frontline professionals from health, social services and public safety to respond rapidly to a vulnerable person or family in a high-risk situation that needs to be connected to services quickly.

Council has committed ongoing Staff support (until 2031) to the work of the Nanaimo Acute Response Table. Although the Table provides broad support to individuals living in acutely elevated risk, many of our referrals are for people living in homelessness (especially women and youth).

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/situation-table>



Downstream Initiatives



Downstream approaches to community safety and wellbeing focus on the City's ability to respond to emergencies and requires an immediate response to stop harm, minimizes victimization, and holds individuals accountable.

HEART and HEARTH MOU with the Ministry of Housing

On January 29, 2024 the City entered into a HEART and HEARTH MOU with the Ministry of Housing to receive and participate in the Provincial programs, Homeless Encampment Action Response Team (HEART), and Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH). The four sites selected in Nanaimo will provide 238 temporary housing spaces for people who have been staying in shelters long-term, which will in turn free up shelter space for people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo and reduce encampments.

- 250 Terminal Ave (Newcastle Place) – 50 units are occupied and the site is operated by Island Crisis Care Society.
- 1300 Island Highway – 50 units, occupancy is expected in late 2024/2025 and will be operated by Connective Society BC.
- 1298 Nelson Street – 78 units, occupancy is expected in late 2024. No operator has been announced yet.
- 1030 Old Victoria Road – 60 units, occupancy is expected early 2025 and will be operated by Vancouver Island Mental Health Society.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/projects/projects-detail/heart-and-hearth>

Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan

As part of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, endorsed by Council in 2022, the City hired 12 Community Safety Officers and 2 community Clean Teams to monitor the downtown area. In addition, CPTED assessments of City-owned spaces were conducted and a Vandalism Relief Grant was created. The City has committed \$2.5 million annually to increase community safety downtown.

In July 2023, the City received \$75,000 from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to evaluate the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, explore the feasibility of expanding the plan to other areas of the city and ensure that the action plan is aligned with the Health and Housing Action Plan, Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy, City Plan, the Nanaimo Acute Response Table and Nanaimo RCMP Strategic Priorities. The review was presented to Council on April 29, 2024.

Link: <https://pub-nanaimo.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42120>

Extreme Weather Response

Winter/Cold Response

The City spent \$474,095 to fund three warming centres for the 2023/2024 winter season. Approximately 138 spaces were provided to unsheltered individuals (at one time) over the 2023/2024 winter season however on average 199 individuals accessed the three warming centres on a daily basis. The City also provided support when extreme cold weather event thresholds were met as outlined by the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) and the Assistance to Shelter Regulation. The City accessed EMCR funds allowing for the warming centres to operate on a 24-hour basis daily for the duration of the extreme cold weather event between 2024-JAN-11 and 2024-JAN-17.

A summary of winter services was presented to the Finance and Audit Committee on June 24, 2024. At the following Council meeting on July 8, 2024 Council made a motion to allocate \$584,257 to match funds provided by the Federally funded Reaching Home Community Advisory Board (CAB) to support one to two year-round drop-in hubs that can also serve as warming and cooling centre services for the City of Nanaimo's extreme weather response starting in the 2024 winter season.

Staff are working with United Way (administrative agency supporting the CAB) and the successful proponents of the expression of interest process (led by United Way), Island Crisis Care Society and Nanaimo Family Life Association, to establish a drop-in hub for Winter 2024/2025. Staff continue to work with the SPO and BC Housing to identify locations and community partners to provide emergency weather response overnight shelters.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs/homelessness/services-and-supports>

Summer/Heat Response

The City has completed pre-season planning and have met with health and community partners to determine responses for extreme heat events. The City is guided by the Emergency Management Plan and the Extreme Weather Response Procedures which was informed by the Extreme Heat Mapping, Assessment and Planning Summary and Recommendations Report (2023). The report identifies the populations and neighbourhoods most at risk and allows the City to focus its limited resources on targeted areas. Extreme heat thresholds are set by the Provincial Heat Alerting Response System.

Shower Program

Since 2018, the City has provided \$206,015 to fund a shower service program at Caledonia Park for those experiencing homelessness. In December 2023, Council approved increasing funding for this program by \$16,450, to provide an additional hour of services daily Monday-Friday. A project was also added to undertake building improvements to Caledonia Park, where this program is currently located. Building improvements were completed in summer 2024.

Police Services (RCMP)

Four officers dedicated to Repeat Violent Offending Intervention Initiative, and eight officers who are specialists in dealing with social disorder and homelessness. Also, between 2020 and 2025, 15 new RCMP officers will be funded.

Nanaimo Fire Rescue

Nanaimo Fire Rescue answers more service calls per member compared to other similar fire departments. To protect our growing community and support fire fighters, City Council voted to hire 20 new fire fighters in 2023 plus 20 more in 2025, and agreed to purchase the equipment they need to do their work. Nanaimo firefighters are trained to an Emergency Medical Responder level, and provide safety and security responses throughout the City.

Breakfast Meal program

Council provided \$212,559 towards the Breakfast Meal Program to provide breakfast meals daily, seven days per week between August 2023 to December 2023. The City continues to advocate to the Provincial government to provide funding for meal programs.

Surviving in Nanaimo Guide

The City creates and maintains the Surviving in Nanaimo Guide which serves as a resource for individuals and families struggling to access services. This guide has information and contacts for low-cost and free resources available for individuals living in Nanaimo. It can be used to find shelter, clothing, water, food, medical clinics, counselling services and more.

Link: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/social-issues-and-community-safety/community-and-social-service-programs/surviving-in-nanaimo-guide>

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