
Subject: Homelessness Point-in-Time (PiT) Count Report

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Recommendations

1. That report COM 7-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) count in Niagara, including the process, participants and findings.
- The Point-in-Time (PiT) count is a measure of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in a community and a key component of provincial and national homelessness programs.
- A PiT count includes two components:
 - A PiT Count Enumeration – an estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness in a geographic area on a single night.
 - A Survey on Homelessness – a set of standardized survey questions administered directly to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- The Niagara PiT counts took place from October 22 to October 24, 2024 with the support of 66 agencies (both funded and non-funded) and 81 community volunteers.
- To further build on the survey information, two magnet events were held to gather insights on homeless youth and Indigenous homelessness, capturing personal stories and lived experiences.

Financial Considerations

Costs associated with conducting the PiT count were included in the 2024 approved operating budget.

Analysis

Point-in-Time Count

A PiT Count is a community-level measure of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. It is comprised of two components a PiT Count Enumeration, an estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness at a specific point in time in a specific area, and a

Survey on Homelessness, a set of survey questions asked of individuals experiencing homelessness. A PiT count is an important tool to collect information necessary to identify populations that are overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness, to better understand pathways into homelessness to strengthen prevention in those areas, and to direct resources to areas of greatest need.

Niagara's PiT Count approach and strategy was developed collaboratively with a steering committee representing emergency shelters, homelessness prevention providers, transitional housing programs, Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, Community Oriented Response and Engagement Unit (CORE) Police Team, Grimsby Benevolent Fund, City of St. Catharines, City of Niagara Falls, City of Welland, St. Catharines Downtown Association, and the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) team. The PiT count was held on the night of October 22, 2024. All agency staff and volunteer surveyors attended mandatory training prior to the Count, covering PiT Count methodology, survey administration, and safety.

Capturing individuals staying in an emergency shelter: Sixty-six agencies collaborated to conduct the count and to administer the survey. Capturing individuals unsheltered on the night of the PiT count: Eighty-one volunteers participated in the Street Count in teams of two to four, including a team leader with relevant experience. There were 27 walking routes in Welland, Niagara Falls, St Catharines, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, and Thorold to conduct surveys and electronically tally the number of observed individuals experiencing homelessness.

Capturing individuals at encampments: Teams of outreach workers from NASO enumerated and surveyed unsheltered and encamped individuals, using the Region's Geographic Information System (GIS) encampment mapping tool to identify active encampments and record the number of individuals counted and surveyed at each site.

Two magnet events were held to capture information about homeless youth, Indigenous homelessness, and hidden homelessness in general, using trained surveyors. The Indigenous Magnet event on October 24 was organized by Indigenous partners, and the youth event on October 22 was organized by The Raft.

Although every effort was made to ensure a comprehensive count, the PiT Count data does not fully represent the experiences or support needs of hidden homeless and individuals fleeing violence because of limits to the methodology.

Homeless Enumeration Results

The count on October 22, 2024 of individuals in emergency shelter, unsheltered and in encampments identified 701 people experiencing homelessness in Niagara. This includes 101 children aged 0-15 years, 37 youth aged 16-24 years, 327 adults aged 25-54 years, 64 older adults aged 55-64 and 25 seniors aged 65 and older. Six individuals declined to answer this question.

Niagara Region's By Name List shows 1,136 individuals experiencing homelessness at the end of 2024, down 8% from 1,229 at the end of 2023. The By Name List is a more complete capturing of the number of persons experiencing homelessness, as the PiT Count is specific to those individuals who were encountered on the day of the count. The PiT Count does however provide valuable information through the survey results noted below, to support programming decisions.

Survey Results

In total, 460 unique surveys were completed, providing valuable information on the demographics, experience, and service needs of Niagara's homeless population. The results that follow are based on self-identification in survey responses.

Previous PiT Count data indicate that Indigenous populations have been disproportionately affected. This report does not include an analysis of Indigenous-specific data; however, a comprehensive analysis, led by Indigenous partners, will be provided to Council at a later date.

Gender

Respondents described their gender as men (47.8%), women (48.9%), Two-Spirit (1.1%), Trans Men (0.2%), Trans Women (0.2%), and Non-Binary/Genderqueer (0.4%).

Survey Respondent Age

The 2024 PiT Count reveals a steady decrease in youth experiencing homelessness compared to 2021 survey respondents (10.5%), a trend that contrasts with patterns observed across Ontario. In Niagara, this positive outcome is largely attributed to the success of shelter diversion and family reconnection programs for youth by the RAFT. The data reveals an increase in older adults (55+) experiencing homelessness. In the survey, 19.6% of respondents were aged 55 or older, compared to 18.2% in 2021 and 17% in 2018. As Niagara's population continues to age, this trend is expected to persist.

Education Level

Reported education levels among respondents are as follows 30% have less than a high school diploma, 26% graduated from high school or had received their GED and 43% have more than a high school education (e.g. post-secondary, trades apprenticeship experience, graduate degree). The percent of individuals with more than a high school education experiencing homelessness saw an increase of almost 4% over the 2021 response outcomes.

Source of Income

The primary sources of income among survey respondents were social assistance (Ontario Works) at 43% and disability benefits (ODSP) at 35.9%. Overall, 78.9% of respondents reported relying on social assistance and disability benefits as their primary source of income, an increase from 71% in 2021. Persistently low social assistance rates force recipients to live more than 60% below the poverty line, contributing to a rise in evictions, homelessness, and encampments. The monthly social assistance rate for a single individual on Ontario Works is \$733/ month and on Ontario Disability Support Program is \$1,368/month.

Family Strategy and Child Welfare

38.4% of respondents reported having experienced homelessness for the first time as a child or youth. 24.6% of respondents reported that they had been in the child welfare system.

Chronicity

61% of respondents reported that they have been homeless 6 or more months (i.e., chronically homeless). This is an increase from the 42% chronic homeless response in the 2021 PiT Count.

Reasons for Housing Loss

The top five reasons for recent housing loss include: conflict with landlord (24.8%), financial hardship (20.7%), conflict with spouse/partner (13.5%), abuse by spouse/partner (12.8%), and unsafe housing conditions (12.2%). Financial hardship has consistently remained a top reason for homelessness since 2018, highlighting the ongoing need for affordable housing development and enhanced rent support programs. "Experienced abuse by spouse/partner" appeared as a new reason in 2024, marking its first occurrence in survey data since PiT Count data collection.

Self-identified Health Conditions

More than 70% of respondents reported having a mental health issue, up from 61.4% in 2021, while 54.1% reported a substance use issue, up from 40.5% in 2021. Although having a mental health or substance use issue does not necessarily equate to experiencing or being at risk of homelessness, individuals experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected by these challenges. The stress of homelessness can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or substance use issues and may also contribute to the onset of anxiety or depressive disorders.

System Interactions

275 individuals reported visiting the Emergency Room (ER) for a total of 1,182 visits, reflecting a steady increase since 2018. Additionally, 156 individuals spent a cumulative total of 2,253 days in the hospital across 416 hospitalizations. These metrics point to the critical need for further enhancement in preventive healthcare and access to primary care services for those experiencing homelessness.

There was also a marked increase in the total number of days spent in jail, with 101 individuals reporting incarceration for a total of 22,745 days. The data indicated that half of the individuals reported jail stays of less than 40 days, while a smaller group contributed disproportionately to the total days.

What Does Home Mean? – A Qualitative Exploration of Housing Preferences

The question, “What kind of living situation would make you feel most at ease and secure? Would you like to live alone, with friends, or with family?” provided valuable insight into the deeply personal and varied definitions of home among survey respondents. Their answers not only provided their preferences for living arrangements but also their desires for stability, safety, and support as they envision a path to a more secure and fulfilling future.

The majority of respondents (48%) expressed a desire to live independently, valuing autonomy and privacy, while 25% wished to live with family, often with their children.

"Live with my family in my own home—not temporary. I’m constantly scared it will be taken away." – Respondent

"Would like to live alone, wants to get her life together, work on her addiction and mental health." – Respondent

"Something that would stimulate (me) to want to thrive instead of just survive. Something that will motivate (me), feel that (my) efforts won't be swept under the carpet. Some people just need a little nudge. Opportunity. Counseling to help them navigate their way through it." - Respondent

"The kind of living situation that is something secure that I would not be on ground level and would feel safe from stalkers or human traffickers". – Respondent

"Lock on my door. To feel safe to leave my girlfriend at home." – Respondent

"I suffer from too much mental health. I prefer to be alone" – Respondent

Alternatives Reviewed

The PiT Count is a key component of the federal, Reaching Home funding issued by Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. It is also a mandatory requirement for municipal service managers under recently implemented provincial legislation.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The PiT count process and report relates directly to the Council Strategic Priority: Equitable Region, to promote affordability with a diversity, equity and inclusion lens, by identifying underlying issues and trends impacting affordable and attainable housing needs and barriers.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [COM-C 2-2025 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jan07_2025/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM-C%202-2025%20Homelessness%20Point-in-Time%20Count.pdf)
https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jan07_2025/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM-C%202-2025%20Homelessness%20Point-in-Time%20Count.pdf
- [COM 17-2021 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun15_2021/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2017-2021%20Homelessness%20Point%20in%20Time%20Count%20Report.pdf)
https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun15_2021/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2017-2021%20Homelessness%20Point%20in%20Time%20Count%20Report.pdf

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