
**Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary:
Enumerated in Emergency and Transitional Facilities, by
Service Agencies, and On the Streets – 2004 May 12**

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The City of Calgary has conducted a census of absolutely homeless persons every two years since 1992. The *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons* provides a periodic snapshot of the size and characteristics of the “visible” homeless population in Calgary.

The level of detail of the information collected and reported about homeless persons has increased over time, beginning in 1992 with simply the “number of persons” who had slept in an identified facility or who were observed sleeping on the streets. This has evolved to include data on the *observed age, sex and racial characteristics* of the homeless persons who are enumerated, the number of homeless *families* enumerated, and the *child welfare status* of individuals staying in youth facilities on the night of the count. Institutional data are collected on the *bed capacity* of the facilities that are surveyed, the number of *persons refused shelter* on the night of the count, and the *reasons for refusal*.

For 2004, the report also includes data on *facility utilization by bed type* to show the number of homeless persons who are provided with *emergency* versus *transitional* beds on the night of the count. A qualitative analysis of how facilities define *transitional beds* is also provided.

Data on bed capacity and occupancy are listed by facility for the eight sectors involved in implementing *The Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008: Building Paths Out of Homelessness*. This more inclusive approach to data collection and analysis aligns the “demand data” reported for the *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons* with the “supply data” published by the Calgary Homeless Foundation in *The Calgary Community Plan*. This change in reporting practice has resulted in the inclusion of many facilities and services that were not surveyed for previous counts, increasing the number from 21 organizations for the 2002 count to a total of 50 for 2004.

Key Findings

A total of 43 facilities, seven service agencies, and 123 volunteer street enumerators participated in the *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary* on 2004 May 12. In total, 2,597 homeless persons were enumerated that night – 2,440 in facilities, 30 by service agencies, and 127 on the streets. This represents an overall growth rate of 49 percent from 2002. However, had the number of facilities and service agencies surveyed in 2004 not been increased (by 138 percent) to align with the supply data reported in *The Calgary Community Plan*, the growth in homelessness over 2002 would have been only 23 percent – a substantial drop from the 2002 increase of 34 percent and a reversal of the “over 30 percent growth rate” trend seen in the preceding four counts (1996 through 2002). This may indicate that the community response to homelessness in Calgary is beginning to gain ground.

Of **all 2,597 homeless persons enumerated**, 23 percent were *female* and 77 percent were *male*. When assessing the *observed race* of all homeless persons enumerated, 76 percent were *Caucasian*, 15 percent were *Aboriginal*, and 8 percent were *visible minorities*. When assessing the *observed age* of all homeless persons enumerated, 3 percent were *preschoolers*, 2 percent were *school-age children*, 3 percent were *youth*, 9 percent were *young adults*, 47 percent were *working age adults*, 33 percent were *middle-aged adults*, and 2 percent were *seniors*.

A total of 104 homeless *families* were enumerated on the night of 2004 May 12, 95 percent of whom stayed in facilities. Families are defined as *a couple, a couple with one or more children, or a lone adult with one or more children*. This is a significant increase in the number of homeless families counted since 2002 – demonstrating a growth rate of 148 percent. However, the increased number of facilities surveyed for 2004 may partly explain this dramatic rise.

A total of 2,440 beds were occupied by homeless persons ***in facilities*** on the night of 2004 May 12 – 46 percent of these were *emergency* beds and 53 percent were *transitional* beds. For *emergency* beds, 19 percent were occupied by females and 81 percent were occupied by males. For *transitional* beds, 27 percent were occupied by females and 73 percent were occupied by males. When assessing the *observed race* of persons enumerated in facilities, 77 percent were *Caucasian*, 13 percent were *Aboriginal*, and 9 percent were *visible minorities*. When assessing the *observed age* of the persons enumerated in facilities, 4 percent were *preschoolers*, 2 percent were *school-age children*, 3 percent were *youth*, 8 percent were *young adults*, 46 percent were *working age adults*, 34 percent were *middle-aged adults*, and 2 percent were *seniors*.

There is a considerable range of *housing forms* available to meet the needs of various sub-populations who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose. Moreover, only four of the 43 facilities surveyed (9 percent) do not provide transitional beds. Most others provide transitional housing that includes accommodation and access to a mix of support services to enable people to advance along the affordable housing continuum and move towards self-sufficiency. Across sectors and facilities, however, the *duration* of transitional shelter is also wide-ranging, extending from a few days or weeks, to months or even years.

While there are now 39 facilities in Calgary that are providing transitional shelter for homeless persons, the unspecified or indeterminate end dates for permissible lengths of stay may indicate there is an insufficient amount of *transitional housing* to meet the need in several sectors. Contributing factors may be the lack of available *non-market housing* (with or without supportive services) and the shortage of *affordable market housing*, both of which might enable individuals and families to move further along the affordable housing continuum. The City of Calgary, through its *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy*, is encouraging community partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors to provide more affordable housing in Calgary.

A total of 30 homeless persons were enumerated **by service agencies** on the night of 2004 May 12. Of those, 7 percent were *female* and 93 percent were *male*. When assessing the *observed race* of the persons enumerated, 80 percent were Caucasian and 20 percent were Aboriginal. There were no visible minority persons enumerated by service agencies on the night of the count. When assessing the *observed age* of the persons enumerated, 3 percent were youth, 17 percent were young adults, 50 percent were working age adults, and 30 percent were middle-aged adults. There were no children aged 12 or younger and no seniors aged 65 or older who were enumerated by service agencies on the night of the count.

A total of 127 homeless persons were enumerated **on the streets** on the night of 2004 May 12. Of those, 28 percent were *female* and 72 percent were *male*. This is close to the proportion of females and males enumerated overall (23 percent *female* and 77 percent *male*). However, as in previous counts, females formed a higher proportion of the homeless persons enumerated on the streets (28 percent) than were counted overall (23 percent). When assessing the *observed race* of the persons enumerated on the streets, 44 percent were Caucasian, 41 percent were Aboriginal, 3 percent were visible minorities, and 12 percent could not be assessed by race. A disproportionately high number of Aboriginal peoples were enumerated on the streets (41 percent) than were counted overall (15 percent). When assessing the *observed age* of the persons enumerated on the streets, 1 percent were youth, 18 percent were young adults, 57 percent were working age adults, and 24 percent were middle-aged adults. No children aged 12 or younger and no seniors aged 65 or older were enumerated on the streets. However, far more young adults aged 18 to 24 were counted on the streets (18 percent) than were enumerated overall (9 percent).

Homelessness remains a significant and growing problem in Calgary, as it is elsewhere in North America. However, the community serving homeless Calgarians has also come to understand much more about the challenges this population faces and the kinds of supports that homeless individuals and families need to enable them to secure a more stable housing situation. The number of facilities that are known to be serving Calgary's homeless population in 2004 may indicate that some of those needs are beginning to be met.