

Counting Those that are Experiencing Homelessness: A Community Support and Service-Based Count in the Western Zone of Nova Scotia



A Community Support and service-based count will be conducted in the Western Zone of Nova Scotia in November 2024, and we need your help!

What is a Community Service Based Count?

Similar to Point in Time (PiT) counts, Community Support and Service-Based Counts are a method used to understand how many people are experiencing homelessness by having service providers complete surveys after client/patient/participant visits. These counts are suitable for rural environments where PiT counts can be challenging due to the hidden nature of rural homelessness. Community Support and Service-Based Counts also help to identify trends in gender, race, age, family status, desired living situation, income types, etc. among homeless populations in our rural communities. The more service providers and community organizations involved in the count the more accurate our results.

Community Support and Service-based counts are happening in other rural regions across Nova Scotia, including the Eastern Zone, who just held their most recent count in the Spring of 2024.

Empirical evidence from the Service Based Count empowers us to champion the cause of the homeless with precision and purpose. Data-driven advocacy is the key to unlocking real change for the homeless in our community. Partnerships like ours with Acadia University transform insights into impactful actions for those in need.

Russ Sanche Executive Director of the Portal Youth Outreach Assosication



Training

In October, the research team will host numerous training sessions for anyone who is interested in participating. The training session will include a 20-minute presentation and then open space for a Q&A. During the training, you will be able to test out the survey.

The training session will cover:

- Study objectives
- Expectations of participants, participant consent
- How to complete the surveys online
- How individual identities will be protected
- How you and the community will benefit from this study

How the survey works:

The participant/informant (staff member of organization) would fill out a survey based on charted information on an individual (client, patient, participant, etc.) in their organization who fits the study criteria and with whom they have had contact with during the month of November. Contact could be an in-person meeting, a phone conversation, an email, or text exchange.

To be counted in this study, the three criteria are:

- 1) the individual resides or obtains services in the study site region (the Counties of Queens, Lunenburg, Shelburne, Yarmouth, Digby, Annapolis, Kings, West Hants),
- 2) they are 16 years of age or older, and
- 3) they meet the definition of homelessness defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, which include four types (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, at risk of homelessness, and provisionally accommodated).

This study relies on data that already exists in the individual's file and information known to the participant/informant, which allows this study to be non-invasive and protects the individual's identity. The participant/informant does not interview the individual in order to fill out the survey, therefore it is okay to leave questions blank.





Ethics

We are following rigorous ethical guidelines and adhering to the Tri-Council policy standards. This research has been approved by NSHA (REB File #: 1030781) and Acadia University (REB File #: 22-46).

We are committed to conducting our Community Support and Service-Based count with the highest ethical standards. There are inherent risks and harms in research involving human subjects. We are following a rigorous plan to mitigate these risks and protect the privacy of individuals, and to ensure the data remains confidential and private:

Survey:

- Each individual who meets the study criteria will be assigned a unique identifier according to the following format: birth year, gender identity and the last two letters in client's last name.
- The survey tool only collects descriptive, non-identifiable demographic information.
- Only information available on the individual's chart/file will be included in the study.
- Questions can be left unanswered on the survey. Assumptions on demographic or housing situation should not be made, and only available charted information should be recorded.

Data Management:

- The unique identifier codes are needed to manage any duplications. The linkage will be done using a statistical software (SPSS). Once duplicates are removed, the unique identifiers will be replaced with a random, meaningless identifier.
- Only the Acadia research team will have access to the data survey tools and data sets.
- Lime Survey will be used for the electronic version of the survey. This is approved for use by Acadia University and the data/servers are located in Canada.
- The data sets will be saved on an encrypted file on a password protected computer (double lock) using Acadia University endorsed software and network endorsed by Acadia University (Office365).
- Research records will be stored in a secure location for the designated 5 years post study completion (as required by Acadia University). At the end of the retention period, electronic information will be permanently erased by the PI in collaboration with Acadia University's IT department.

Reporting:

- Dissemination of research findings on a vulnerable population carries a risk of stigmatizing the population which could feed into stigma and discrimination already experienced by the population.
- Participants' organizations will not be reported, but generalized to sector. For example, health, non-profit organizations, justice.
- Personal health information abstracted from the charts (e.g., housing status, number of children) will be summarized and shared only in aggregate form.
- We will suppress categories of variables that have fewer than five individuals.

Testimonies

'The Service Based count allows services and communities to acquire a more accurate count of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. This information is vital in understanding and demonstrating the need, advocating for appropriate supports and services, and applying for funding applications.'

The length of time is a few minutes per person experiencing homelessness. Honestly it wasn't overly burdensome to complete if the information was completed regularly.'

Kimm Kent, Program Director/Co-Founder, The POSSE Project

'Having an idea of how many people are experiencing homelessness at a given time helps when writing asks for specific homelessness supports. It also helps to see the change in numbers over time, whether that be to ask for more supports or to look at the success homelessness supportive services have provided in reducing homelessness.'

Hannah Scott, Provincial Lead Project H.O.P.E.



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