



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2024 OTTAWA POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

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Background

The City of Ottawa, in collaboration with the Indigenous Sector and a core team of seven community partners, coordinated and implemented the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count. The PiT count is a nationally coordinated effort that fulfills both provincial and federal requirements. Moving forward Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC) mandates yearly counts and a survey to be completed every three years. The PiT Count consists of two components, the enumeration and the survey. The 2024 PiT Count enumeration took place over a 24-hour period from noon on Wednesday, October 23rd 2024, 2024, until noon on Thursday, October 24th, 2024. This year the survey was completed over a five-day period from Wednesday October 23rd, 2024, until Monday October 28th, 2024. The purpose of the PiT Count is to gather important information to deepen the understanding of those experiencing homelessness in our city. This information will inform the development and implementation of services, programs and policies to reflect the needs of our community.

2024 Ottawa Point-in-Time Count

The 2024 PiT Count is the third Count conducted by The City of Ottawa.

Table 1: Metric comparison year-over-year

Metric	2018	2021	2024
People experiencing homelessness	1654	2612	2952
Surveys completed	1400	1346	2595
Enumeration sites	118	114	141
Participating community partner agencies	59	53	75
Outreach routes	27	15	20

For the 2024 PiT Count we were presented with many new opportunities to expand our reach, increase our numbers and collect more surveys through changes in our methodology. Many changes were made to the survey collection method including involving more partner agencies, the creation of a core team for planning and implementation, collecting the survey digitally through survey monkey and extending the survey period from the traditional 24 hours to five days.

Enumeration locations included: day and drop-in programs, emergency shelter, youth and domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, Indigenous agencies, community health and resource centres, social service agencies, hospitals, correctional centres, transitional housing, and addiction and mental health treatment programs. The unsheltered population was surveyed by outreach workers with designated routes, and areas of the city including encampments. The option to complete the survey over the phone by calling 3-1-1 was helpful for homeless residents who could not attend an

enumeration site. All homeless individuals who completed the survey received an honorarium in the form of a \$10 gift card.

Methodology

Adopting a flexible and person-centered approach was instrumental in the planning and implementation of the 2024 PiT Count. Changes to the methodology were carefully considered and implemented to increase participation in the survey and accuracy of that data.

For the first time in 2024, PiT Count communities were allowed to extend the survey collection to up to 30 days, while the count remained over a 24-hour period. In consultation with our co-led and collaborative core team, it was recommended to extend our survey period over a five-day period. In addition, we transitioned from a paper-based survey collection to a digital platform, Survey Monkey, to improve accuracy and reporting abilities. This digital collection will allow for increased data use.

As part of the objective to provide a more person-centric survey, the core team of community partners, with support from those with lived experience, reviewed the questions that made up the survey. Each question was reviewed and modified, if needed, to soften the language and encourage engagement.

As in 2021, no community volunteers were used in the PiT count. All additional surveyors were recruited from experienced staff from homelessness serving agencies. This was done to ensure that staff were able to address and support those being surveyed throughout the PiT and to leverage existing relationships and trust in the community.

In an effort to reach people experiencing homelessness who could not attend an enumeration site, there was an option to complete the survey over the phone in English or French. Residents were encouraged to complete the telephone survey by calling 3-1-1. They were then connected to Housing and Homelessness Services staff to complete the survey. The 3-1-1 operators also gave out the locations of enumeration sites if the caller wanted to complete the survey in person. Telephone surveys were available noon Wednesday, October 23 to 8pm Thursday, October 24, 8am to 8pm October 25 to October 27 and 8am to 4pm on October 28.

All participating outreach teams, agencies and survey sites were provided with necessary digital resources to collect the survey, supporting resources and documents, contact cards and honorariums for participants. In addition, a dedicated phone line was created for staff to ask any questions or to obtain additional resources throughout the survey period.

2024 PiT Count survey and sample

The survey consisted of 29 questions that related to the respondents' demographics, family status and history, citizenship, health conditions, race, sexual orientation, language, Indigenous ancestry, reasons for homelessness, military service and source of income.

The nationally coordinated PiT Count approach includes a set of common core questions that are asked across all participating communities. This includes screening questions that determine whether someone is selected to answer the full survey. In addition, the City added additional survey questions to respond to our local information needs. The answers to these questions are used by communities to help understand the experience of homelessness locally and to plan services to prevent and end homelessness. They also contribute to the understanding of homelessness across Canada.

The number of homeless individuals who completed the survey from noon on October 23 to 4pm on October 28, was 2820. In total, 225 surveys were excluded from the analyses:

- Four were flagged as test entries to test the program
- 35 declined to answer where they were staying that night
- 132 indicated they were staying in their own apartment/house that night
- Six declined to answer if they had access to a permanent residence, and;
- 48 replied **Yes** to having access to a permanent residence

Following these exclusions, **the total number of respondents was 2595.**¹

Results from the 2024 PiT Count

Questions on the survey were divided by the following themes:

- Demographics
- Location of homelessness
- Experiences of homelessness
- Health
- Income and education
- Services

¹ Minimal duplication may be present given the transient nature of some of the survey respondents. We worked closely with the community to ensure each survey taker participated only once.

Demographics

Age

The PiT Count survey was administered to dependant adult individuals who were experiencing homelessness on the referenced night and who consented to participate. Of the 2595 completed surveys, 2444 provided information about their age.

- The age of those surveyed ranged from 14 years to 90 years old
- The average age of those experiencing homelessness was 40
- The average age of someone experiencing homelessness for the first time was 32
- The largest age category was 36 to 49 at 31.9 per cent

Gender

Of the 2595 completed surveys, 2406 individuals provided information on their gender. Fifty-six per cent of respondents identified as male, 36 per cent of people identified as female, and two per cent responded as Two Spirit, trans-women, trans-man or non-binary.

Sexual orientation

2256 individuals provided information on their sexual orientation. Eleven per cent identified as two-spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, or not listed (2SLGBTQQIA+). Of that 11 per cent, 21 per cent are under the age of 25 and 35 per cent experienced homelessness at 19 years of age or younger.

Racialized

Fifty-six per cent of the respondents in 2024 identified as racialized. Of those who identified as racialized, 64 per cent identified as Black, seven per cent Asian, seven per cent Arab and Other at two per cent.

Indigenous or Indigenous ancestry

It is widely known that there is an over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. Overall, 19 per cent of those surveyed identified as First Nations, Metis, Inuit or having Indigenous ancestry. While this percentage is lower than the 34 per cent reported in the 2021 PiT Count data, it should be noted that the number of those identifying as Indigenous increased by 12 per cent, from 428 to 479 individuals.

The over-representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness spans across all locations – in shelters, on the street, in corrections and hospitals, and the hidden homeless populations at various percentage degrees. The City recognizes that the

Indigenous community feels the actual overall percentage is higher as many Indigenous individuals and families do not identify for fear of discrimination and ostracism from mainstream services.

Immigrant, refugee or refugee claimant status

The total number of survey respondents identified as coming to Canada as an immigrant, refugee, or refugee claimant increased to 42 per cent of survey respondents up from 20 per cent in 2021. Of the 1101 respondents 56 per cent have been in Canada for less than one year with 20 per cent for five years or more.

These findings suggest that housing supports for newcomers need to address both those who have arrived in Canada recently and those who have been here for many years. More investments in newcomer services that provide specialized settlement supports are needed.

Veterans

Veteran's homelessness is a priority for Housing and Homelessness Services, who is working collaboratively with Veteran Services, Built for Zero (BFZ) Canada, emergency shelters, outreach services and other stakeholders to end Veteran's homelessness in our community. This approach is structured, supportive, and maintains a data-driven focus on optimizing local homeless systems, accelerating the adoption of proven practices, and driving continuous improvement.

The percentage of individuals who previously served in the Canadian Military, or RCMP and are now experiencing homelessness has remained consistent, at four per cent in 2024 which was similar to those surveyed in 2021. Among them, almost half (43 per cent) identified as Indigenous.

Language

Of those surveyed 66 per cent spoke English, 16 per cent spoke French. While there were those who indicated no preference between the two official languages, 10 per cent indicated "other" which included Arabic, Spanish, Inuktitut, Somali, Turkish, Kirundi, Swahili, Amharic, Kinyarwanda and Yoruba.

Location of homelessness

During the PiT Count, survey respondents were asked to identify the location where they were staying the night of October 23rd, 2024. Forty-three per cent of respondents reported that they were staying in emergency shelters.

Twenty-four per cent of respondents reported they were staying in transitional housing, this is an increase from 13 per cent in 2021. This is as a result of increased transitional housing locations up from five in 2021 to 45 in 2024 in response to the increase in new immigrants in Ottawa. This increase in locations includes many transitional scattered homes for newcomers in addition to those for vulnerable Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, second stage housing for women and children fleeing abuse, and individuals requiring post-incarceration and post-treatment services.

Participants were asked “if you did not stay in an emergency shelter in the past year, what were the main reasons?”. In response to this question:

- 31 per cent of respondents reported fear of safety
- 12 per cent reported that they had other temporary housing
- 12 per cent reported that the emergency shelters are too crowded
- 11 per cent indicated concerns about bed bugs and other pests in shelters

Experiences of homelessness

Chronicity

Forty-nine per cent of survey respondents were identified as chronically homeless. This is a decrease from the 57 per cent of homeless individuals who identified as experiencing chronic homelessness in 2021. Chronic Homelessness is defined as persistent or long-term homelessness where people have; been homeless for at least 180 days at some point over the course of the last year (not necessarily consecutive days); and/or experienced recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total at least 18 months.

Of those who reported experiencing chronic homelessness 18 per cent identified as Indigenous, representing 78 per cent of the homeless Indigenous population surveyed. This tells us that there is a need for more investment and support for Indigenous service providers.

Family homelessness

Although singles made up the majority of respondents of the PiT Count, 270 respondents (10 per cent) were accompanied by children. Among them, 72 per cent were women, 85 per cent identified as racialized, and 49 per cent who identified as immigrants or refugees had been in Canada for less than a year.

Finding affordable housing in Ottawa that is large enough to accommodate a family is difficult. Two-bedroom rental units in the lowest rent bracket (under \$1450 per month) had a vacancy rate that was under one per cent in 2024, with those between \$1450 and

\$2,149 seeing only a two per cent vacancy rate. Rental rates saw an increase by five per cent in 2024, the largest increase since 2020.²

Foster care

Of those who responded to this question, 19 per cent of respondents said they had previous experiences in foster care. Among those with previous foster care and group experiences in October 2024, 29 per cent became homeless less than one year after leaving foster care and 46 per cent of those with experience in foster care or group homes identified as Indigenous.

Reason for housing loss

People experiencing homelessness also struggle to meet their basic needs, which is crucial for obtaining and maintaining employment. Housing Loss Prevention Programs work with individuals and families to maintain their housing by providing supports and case management after someone is housed. Maintaining housing significantly increases quality of life. The 2024 PiT Count revealed that 30 per cent of individuals surveyed identified the top reason for their housing loss is not enough income to address the increased rents and cost of living expenses.

Other top reasons for housing loss from those surveyed include conflicts with either spouse or partner, parent or guardian, landlord, or others (878), discrimination (411), substance abuse issues (315), mental health issues (289), and physical health issues (149).

Violence Against Women (VAW) / Domestic Violence

The PiT Count survey was administered in several different types of programs and services supporting violence against women and domestic violence, including VAW shelters.

- 11 per cent of respondents said that their most recent housing loss was related to conflict with their spouse/partners.
- 45 individuals reported staying at a VAW shelter the night of the PiT count

Sheltered homelessness

A total of 2396 individuals were identified as sheltered on the night of October 23rd, 2024. In addition to those individuals there were 1204 dependent children, for a total of

² Based on estimates for 2024 from the [Rental Market Report](#) released by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

3600 people experiencing sheltered homelessness. Sheltered homelessness includes people who stayed in the shelter system, including emergency shelters, violence against women shelters, transitional housing, systems such as health care or correctional facilities, as well as motels/hotels.

In 2024 we saw a significant increase in the number of people living in transitional housing programs which correlated with the increase in transitional housing spaces within our community to address the increase of newcomers and refugee claimants from 2021 to 2024.

Unsheltered

The estimated number of unsheltered individuals increased from 190 identified in the 2021 PiT Count, to 556 people living unsheltered or in encampments on the night of the October 23, 2024. This significant increase is also a result of being able to collect increased data in 2024 by having outreach teams collect surveys over five days vs. the 24 hours in 2021. However, the number of unsheltered individuals and homeless encampments in our city continues to increase. This has required a coordinated response by the City of Ottawa's Housing and Homelessness Services, leading the Unsheltered Task Force of multiple community partners, city departments, outreach services and other stakeholders including the National Capital Commission, Indigenous outreach providers, and homeless service providers in order to respond to the emerging needs of this population.

The City of Ottawa continues to work with community partners to offer overnight respite for individuals to have an opportunity to come in from the cold weather and access supports.

Provisionally accommodated

People experiencing homelessness who were temporarily attached to Provincial and/or Federal correctional and health facilities also received an opportunity to participate in the PiT Count. In partnership with the John Howard Society of Ottawa, we surveyed incarcerated individuals with no fixed address at the Ottawa Detention Centre and two supervised bail residence programs over the 24-hour period. Collaborating with our four local hospital, social workers administered the surveys to patients with no fixed address. Fifty-three respondents identified as homeless who were staying at public health and correction systems on the night of the 2024 PiT Count.

Hidden homelessness

Hidden homelessness refers to individuals who live temporarily with others but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing. Often known as "couch surfing", this includes people who are staying with

relatives, friends, neighbours, or strangers because they have no other option. Collaborating with community partners including Ottawa Community Housing, Options Bytown and Salus, 176 individuals surveyed indicated they are staying with others in a temporary arrangement. This has increased since the 2024 PiT Count, where 149 individuals were identified. This population is "hidden" because they usually do not access homelessness supports and services even though they are unstably or inadequately housed. Since these individuals do not access services, they are not captured on standard statistics regarding homelessness.

Health

Within the 2024 survey we asked individuals about their number of visits to hospitals, and their health care professional. This was a new question to the survey to measure health care visits. Within the last 12 months, 44 per cent of those surveyed reported they had a hospital emergency department visit, of those 25 per cent had more than five visits, and 63 per cent of respondents reported having a hospital stay in the last year.

When it comes to primary care visits, 33 per cent reported they were able to visit their primary care health professional, and of those 40 per cent had five or more visits within the last year.

Health conditions

The 2024 PiT Count survey questioned participants regarding their health and wellness conditions under five categories:

- Illness or medical condition
- Physical Limitation
- Learning or Cognitive Limitations
- Mental health issue
- Substance use issue

Thirty-seven per cent) of respondents reported a substance use issue, while 42 per cent reported a mental health issue. Individuals experiencing homelessness often have more severe symptoms and face increased barriers to accessing services. This information suggests that the system must increase capacity to address complex needs.

Acquired brain injury

People who are homeless or precariously housed are especially vulnerable to traumatic brain injuries, but the true rates of occurrence are difficult to determine due to challenges in tracking and reporting cases. The percentage of individuals who are homeless and have an Acquired Brain Injury was 13 per cent of respondents. Additionally, learning, or cognitive limitations were reported by 20 per cent of respondents.

Physical illness

It is widely known that people experiencing homelessness have high rates of physical illness/conditions. The results from the 2024 PiT Count confirm that people experiencing homelessness have high incidents of both physical illness and other serious health conditions which affected 26 per cent of the survey participants. Additionally, 24 per cent responded that they were facing physical limitations.

Income and education

Regarding income and employment 15 per cent of respondents indicated they were employed. This was broken down by, five per cent working full-time, six per cent part-time, and four per cent of respondent who had casual employment. In addition, nine per cent reported having informal sources of income, that includes such things as bottle returns and panhandling. When asked about their sources of income 23 per cent of respondents indicated having one or more sources, with 46 per cent of respondents indicated they receive provincial welfare and/or social assistance and 20 per cent receiving provincial disability benefits. Additionally, 15 per cent of respondents responded that they had no income.

The education levels of those surveyed varied from primary school to graduate degrees. The highest percentage of respondents, 28 per cent, indicated they had their high school diploma, 17 per cent graduating post-secondary, eight per cent with graduate degrees and only one per cent with no formal education.

Services

It should come as no surprise that there is an increased need for services among the homelessness population. This is one area of focus to add additional supports and services to way assist their transition out of the shelter system and into permanent housing. The top identified services include access to financial support, supporting housing services, food security support and mental health supports. Sixty-one per cent indicated that they had a need for three or more of these services, while 35 per cent identified a need for five or more.

Discussion and next steps

Structural factors of homelessness

The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors, systems failures, and individual circumstances. Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of several factors, rather than a single cause. Certainly, insufficient income and a lack of affordable housing contributes to homelessness and makes it difficult to exit homelessness. Loss of employment, family breakdown, family violence,

mental illness, poor physical health, substance use, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, and lack of affordable housing can contribute to why people enter homelessness and struggle to leave.

The statistical analysis of the data collected this year is somewhat consistent with past years results, however with the implementing digital data collection and extending the survey period, we were able to gather data from a much larger percentage of the homeless population that improves the reliability of our results. With this increased accuracy, this data will help inform and support recommendations within the 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan Refresh, support future planning and help identify where the gaps to barrier free supports and services for those experiencing homelessness.

The data collected shows us that homelessness affects everyone, but there are some groups that are unproportionally represented. By leveraging this data, we will be able to focus on areas which need more support, and developing long-term plans to address solutions to chronic homelessness.

The health problems facing homeless individuals may result from various factors, including a lack of housing, racism and discrimination, barriers to health care, a lack of access to adequate food and protection, limited resources for social services, and an inadequate public health infrastructure where homeless individuals can feel safe and comfortable to access the health services without judgement.

Moving forward

While considerable work has been done in our community to transform the homelessness system of care into a housing-focused approach through our 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, additional work needs to be done within the homelessness system and across other service delivery systems.

As we envision a future where everyone has a home, we need to better understand the impacts of chronic and/or complex trauma, intergenerational economic poverty, discrimination, migration to address economic uncertainty, dislocation due to war or genocide, as well as the impacts of the historic and ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands. The 2024 PiT Count is not a stand-alone exercise, but rather another series of data points to be considered as part of our ongoing efforts to improve policies, programs and services for people experiencing homelessness.

[Dashboard: Survey results for Point-in-Time counts](#)