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**Subject:** Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, July 17, 2018

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## **Recommendations**

That Report COM 16-2018 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- Niagara Counts 2018, Niagara's second homelessness Point-in-Time (PiT) Count, was conducted in late March 2018. Niagara's inaugural PiT Count took place in early April 2016.
- Homeless Enumeration is a bi-annual mandatory requirement of municipal Service Managers by the Ministry of Housing (MHO) following an amendment to the Housing Services Act, 2011, in December 2016.
- In 2018, over 60 communities throughout Canada conducted a PiT Count. By using a common methodology, Niagara contributed to measuring the extent of homelessness on a local, provincial and national level.
- Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) awarded Niagara \$50,000 (the maximum available) to assist with the costs associated with participating in the coordinated PiT Count.
- Niagara's PiT Count found 625 people to be experiencing homelessness on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in emergency and Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, in transitional housing programs, and in unsheltered locations. This number includes 144 children aged 0-15 years.
- As part of the Count, 408 surveys were completed, providing valuable information on the demographics, experience and service needs of Niagara's homeless population.

## **Financial Considerations**

Niagara Region received \$50,000 in federal funding to conduct "Niagara Counts 2018." The majority of this funding was allocated towards agency administrative costs and honoraria for volunteers and survey participants.

## **Analysis**

Niagara's PiT Count, termed Niagara Counts 2018, was planned by a steering committee comprised primarily of community agency staff from across the region, with representation from emergency and Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, homelessness prevention and outreach services providers, transitional housing

providers, and the Niagara Aboriginal Working Group on Homelessness. It also included Regional staff, with a member of the Homelessness Services team functioning as the Niagara Counts Coordinator, and a member of the banking community.

A PiT Count is intended to provide a snapshot of homelessness at a single point in time through a homeless enumeration and an accompanying survey.

The homeless enumeration total was achieved through:

- Occupancy data from emergency and VAW shelters, transitional housing programs, and crisis bed providers
- Counting survey responses indicating an unsheltered overnight location, or with an “I don’t know” response to “Where are you staying tonight?”
- A tally of observed individuals in unsheltered environments, where it was not possible to conduct the survey or the individual declined the survey

The PiT Count survey was administered to everyone over 15 years old who was experiencing homelessness on the reference night and who consented to participate. It included mandatory federal and provincial survey questions as well as optional questions deemed locally important by the steering committee. The survey population also included a small number of people experiencing hidden homelessness<sup>1</sup> who were not included in the homeless enumeration.

All survey participants were given an honorarium for their participation, which consisted of a \$5 TimCard, a 2-ride bus ticket and mini chocolate bars, generously donated by Cadbury.

In order to be thorough in the enumeration and maximize the number of surveys from different population groups and geographical areas, Niagara’s PiT Count involved numerous Count events taking place over the course of two days (still referencing the night of March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

The Sheltered Count took place March 27<sup>th</sup> between 7:30 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. Seventy-five agency staff from 34 different programs providing emergency and VAW shelter, crisis beds, and transitional housing, conducted the Count and administered the survey to guests/clients. The response rate in sheltered environments was 80%. Agencies received an honorarium to cover any costs incurred as a result of their participation in Niagara Counts.

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<sup>1</sup> “...living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for access to permanent housing” (3.2 in the Canadian Definition of Homelessness). Also called “couch-surfing.”



Over 85 volunteers participated in the Street Count, which took place March 27<sup>th</sup> between 8:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Teams of two to four volunteer surveyors, including a team leader with relevant experience, were assigned to 22 walking routes in Welland, Niagara Falls, St Catharines, Fort Erie, and Thorold to conduct surveys and tally observed homeless individuals. The walking routes were created through meetings of a mapping sub-committee<sup>2</sup> to identify locations where individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness would be encountered.

All agency staff and volunteer surveyors attended mandatory training prior to the Count, covering methodology and survey administration. Training for volunteer surveyors also covered logistics and safety.

The Niagara Counts steering committee and mapping sub-committee determined that the best way to conduct the Count in some areas of Niagara was through Service Counts, meaning that surveying and tallying would take place at existing programs in which people experiencing homelessness may already participate. Trained surveyors were located at several meal programs, Niagara Mobile Outreach Program stops and food banks in Port Colborne, Fort Erie (including Crystal Beach), Lincoln (specifically, Beamsville) and Grimsby on March 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

In order to gain information about, and more adequately capture, homeless youth, Indigenous homelessness, and hidden homelessness in general, three Magnet Events were held. Food and giveaways were provided to attendees during these events to encourage participation. Trained surveyors were located at each Magnet Event, two of which took place the evening of March 27<sup>th</sup> and the other taking place the afternoon of March 28<sup>th</sup>.

Lastly, during the day on March 27<sup>th</sup> teams of outreach workers from community agencies were deployed to hard-to-reach areas with possible encampments and other areas not covered by street teams for safety or logistical reasons.

### Homeless Enumeration Results

Based on the PiT Count, at least 625 people were experiencing homelessness in Niagara on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Included in this number are 144 children aged 0-15 years and 101 youth aged 16-24 years.

In 2016, 465 people were found to be experiencing homelessness in Niagara on the night of the PiT Count. The higher number in 2018 is primarily due to increases in shelter occupancy. Whereas the occupancy rate of participating emergency shelters on the night of the Count in 2016 was 82%, it was 117% in 2018.

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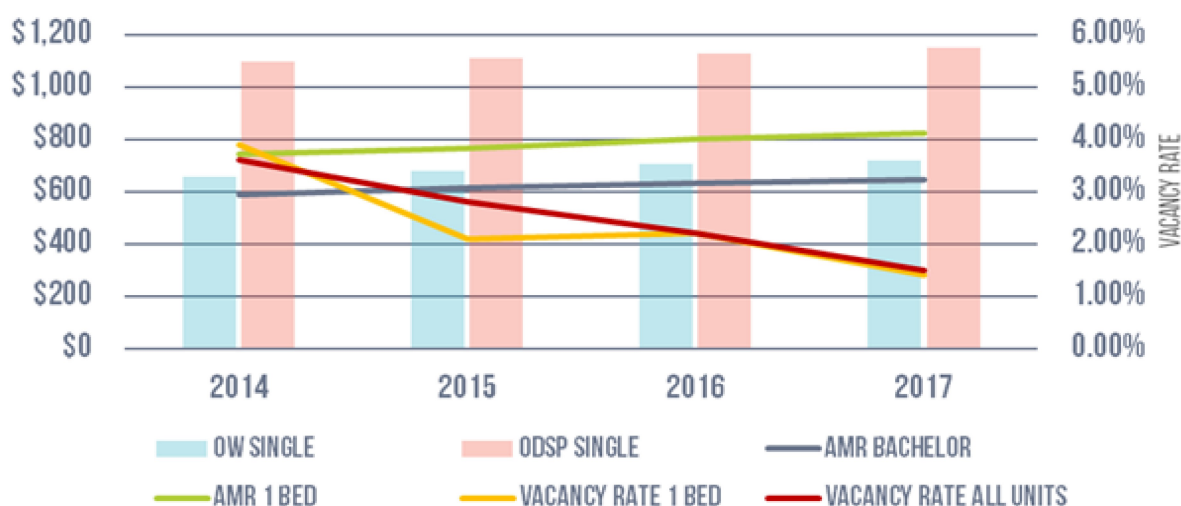
<sup>2</sup> The mapping sub-committee was made up of Regional staff, community agency outreach workers and case managers, and representatives from Niagara Regional Police and Niagara Emergency Medical Services. Walking routes were further vetted by planning, public works and fire department staff.

Based on Homelessness Services system data from Region-funded emergency shelters, following a decline in rental vacancy rates and a dramatic increase in housing prices in spring of 2016, annual occupancy rate of shelters rose markedly from a relatively consistent rate of 85% over a number of years up to 2015, to 98.2% in 2016 and 107.6% in 2017. In the first four months of 2018, the occupancy rate of Region-funded emergency shelters was 109.4%.

Despite this, the number of unique households served by these shelters annually has remained relatively stable (1607 in 2015, 1682 in 2016, 1641 in 2017). What has increased is the length of stay in shelters, from an average length of stay per admission of 11 days in 2015, to 13 and 19 days in 2016 and 2017, respectively<sup>3</sup>.

Overnight Location on the night of the Count	2018		2016	
	Surveys (#)	Individuals Counted (#)	Surveys (#)	Individuals Counted (#)
Unsheltered, "I don't know" survey response	20	38	5	41
Emergency and VAW shelters, crisis beds	226	350	147	210
Transitional housing	125	237	129	214
Hidden homelessness	29	0	0	0
Motel homelessness	8	0	0	0
<b>Total Surveys</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>---</b>
<b>Total Homeless Enumeration</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>465</b>

### CHANGES IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES, VACANCY RATES, AND AVERAGE MARKET RENTS (AMR) - SINGLES



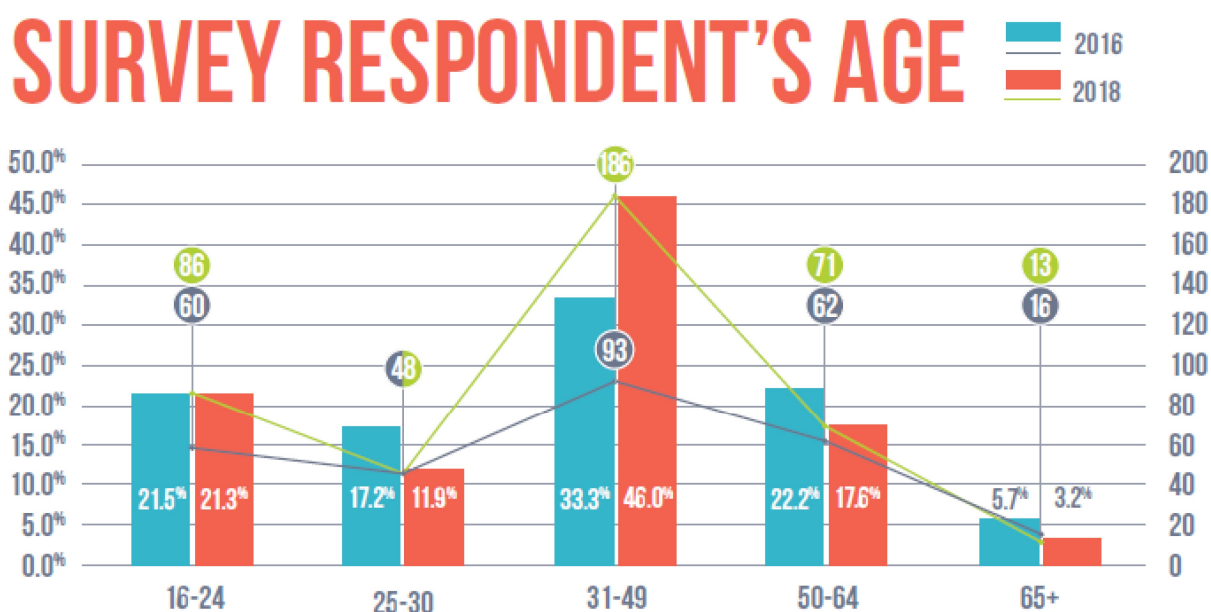
<sup>3</sup> Excluding Out of the Cold stays



High rental costs and low vacancy rates in the rental market have made it more difficult for people to move out of shelter. For example, according to The PadMapper Canadian Rent Report, St Catharines is the 14<sup>th</sup> most expensive city in Canada to rent an apartment, with a rental cost increase in listed units of about 15% compared to June 2017. Furthermore, Niagara has been experiencing declining vacancy rates for the past four years, with the St Catharines-Niagara census metropolitan area vacancy rate dropping to 1.5% in 2017<sup>4</sup> from 2.8% in 2015, lower than both Hamilton<sup>5</sup> and London<sup>6</sup>.

### Survey Results

In total, 408 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.



More than 1 in 5 respondents (21.3%) were youth aged 16-24 years, which was similar to the proportion of youth among 2016 respondents. It is also interesting to note that the 2018 respondent population was made up of proportionately fewer people in every age group than in 2016, except for the 31-49 year olds.

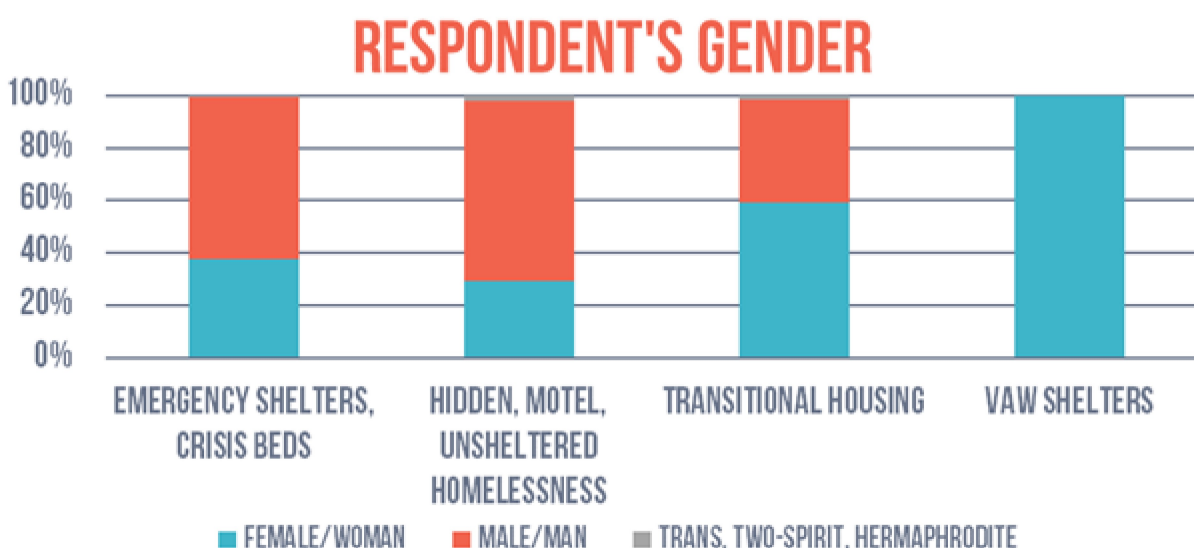
<sup>4</sup> Source: CMHC, Rental Market Report: St. Catharines-Niagara CMA, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Source: CMHC, Rental Market Report: Hamilton CMA, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Source: CMHC, Rental Market Report: London CMA, 2017

Almost one quarter (24.3%) of respondents identified as Indigenous or as having Indigenous ancestry. This is vastly disproportionate to the 2.8% of Niagara's overall population with Aboriginal identity<sup>7</sup>. People with Indigenous identity and/or ancestry are dramatically overrepresented in the homeless population across the country.

Nearly 12% of respondents had come to Canada as a refugee or refugee claimant, the majority of whom (79.2%) had arrived in the past year<sup>8</sup>. A further 5.2% of respondents had come to Canada as an immigrant, although almost all of them (85.7%) had been here over 15 years.



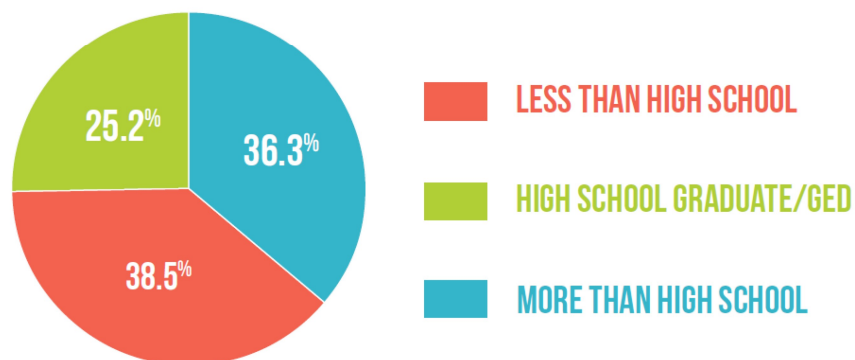
The majority (62.0%) of respondents staying in emergency shelters and crisis beds were men, as was the case for hidden and unsheltered homeless respondents (69.1% were men). Almost three quarters (72.4%) of respondents staying in transitional housing programs were women.

Just over 10% of respondents described their sexual orientation as non-heterosexual.

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. 2017. Niagara, RM [Census division], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed June 22, 2018)

<sup>8</sup> Three refugee shelters participated in the PiT Count.

## RESPONDENT'S HIGHEST EDUCATION

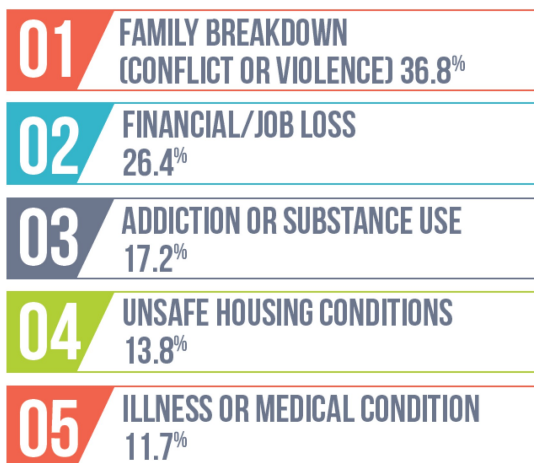


38.5% of respondents had less than a high school diploma, as compared to 18.2% of all Niagara residents. More than one third of respondents (36.3%) had more than a high school education.

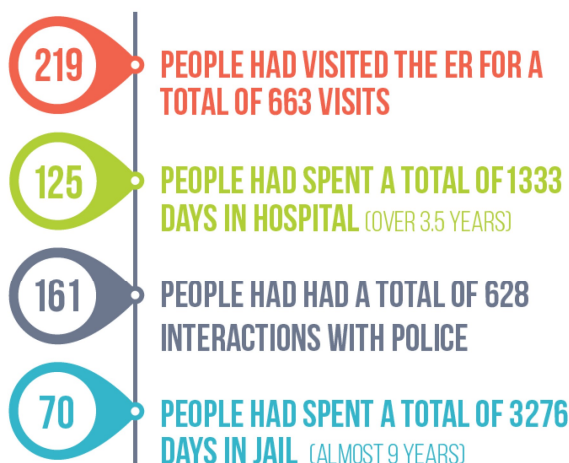
Almost 95% of respondents indicated they had a source of income. Almost 4 out of 5 respondents (78.4%) indicated their source of income as welfare/social assistance and/or disability benefit. Over 10% indicated that formal employment was a source of income for them.

Over three quarters (76.4%) considered Niagara to be their home community. Just over 60% of the respondents who did not identify Niagara as their home community identified somewhere else in the province as their home community.

### TOP FIVE REASONS GIVEN FOR MOST RECENT HOUSING LOSS:



### SYSTEM INTERACTIONS OVER THE PAST YEAR (SELF-REPORTED)



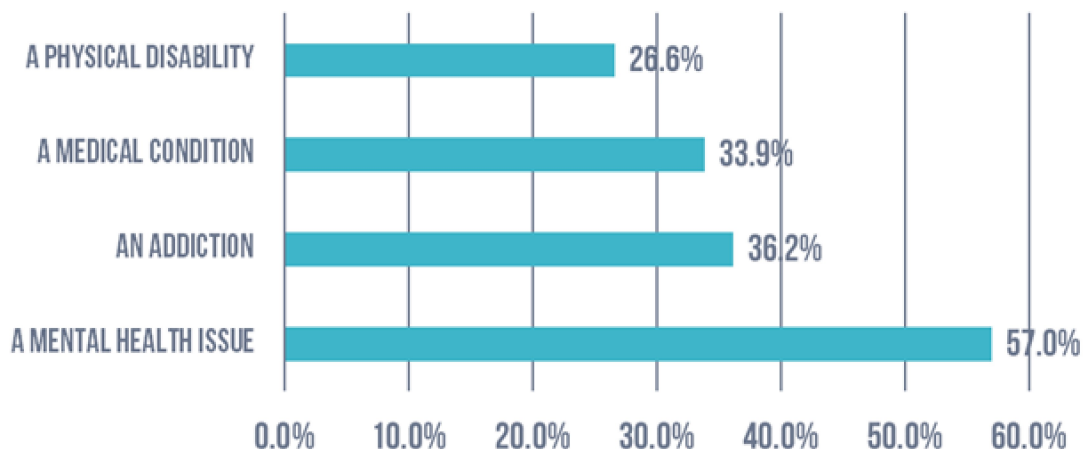


Over the past year, 55% of respondents had been homeless 6 or more months (i.e., chronically homeless) and 16% had been homeless 3 or more times (i.e., episodically homeless).

Over half (53.0%) of respondents had experienced homelessness for the first time as a child or youth (i.e., under 25 years old), with over a third (35.6%) of respondents having experienced homelessness for the first time before age 18.

Almost 30% of respondents had been in the child welfare system and of these, 27.4% became homeless within one year of leaving the child welfare system

## RESPONDENTS SELF-IDENTIFIED AS HAVING:



More than 1 in 4 respondents (26.6%) self-identified as having a physical disability. This is much higher than the rate of reporting any disability in the general Canadian population, where it is 1 in 7.<sup>9</sup>

More than one third of respondents self-identified as having an addiction and more than half of respondents identified as having a mental health issue. The provincial rate of fair or poor perceived mental health and any substance use disorder in the past 12 months were 8.2% and 4.2% in 2012, respectively<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017008-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 13-10-0465-01 Mental health indicators](#)



Almost 80% of respondents indicated that rents being too high and/or a low income were challenges for them when trying to find housing. Around half (51.5%) of respondents reported that mental health, addiction and/or health and disability issues were challenges when trying to find housing. Other challenges reported were poor housing conditions and discrimination (e.g., income/social status, age, racial), by 27.7%, and 21.4% of respondents, respectively.

#### Implications and Use of Results

Conducting a PiT Count further supports the work associated with the goals of A Home for All, Niagara's 10-year Housing Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP). The data captured from the PiT Count will assist Niagara, as the municipal Service Manager, to continue to build system capacity, create population-specific responses to improve client outcomes, and improve the effectiveness of the housing system.

The Niagara Counts steering committee will assist in the promotion of awareness about the PiT Count and its results and identify ways to improve the next PiT Count in 2020.

Niagara's PiT Count data will be submitted to the Provincial and Federal governments to support their ongoing work to enumerate and understand homelessness.

#### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not Applicable.

The Point-in-Time Count is a federal initiative as well as a mandatory provincially legislated requirement (homelessness enumeration) for municipal Service Managers.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Niagara Counts 2018 relates to the Community Symptoms dial and the Homelessness Funding dashboard.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

- COM 14-2016 Point in Time Count Preliminary Information
- COM C 4-2017 Homelessness Partnering Strategy Point-in-Time (PiT) Count

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