Northumberland county

Northumberland County
Report on
2021
Enumeration

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

Territorial Land Acknowledgement

Northumberland County respectfully acknowledges that Northumberland County is located on the Mississauga Anishinaabek territory and is the traditional territory of the Mississauga. Northumberland County respectfully acknowledges that the Mississauga Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters in perpetuity, and that they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come.

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Special Thanks

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Reflecting on the 2021 Enumeration

The 2021 enumeration marks the third time local agencies have collaborated on a point-in-time count to bring greater visibility to the state of homelessness in Northumberland.

These data collection initiatives, mandated by the provincial government to be completed at least every two years, provide critical insight for strengthening local programs and services as well as coordination between agencies across Northumberland.

Northumberland County's first enumeration was completed in 2016, with a follow-up in 2018. This biennial process ensures that our by-name list of individuals and families needing support is up to date, so we can create connections to the right resources and services. Listening to the unique stories and experiences of those affected by homelessness has helped us to further tailor our programs to meet the evolving needs of our community, and has reinforced our collective commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive Northumberland for all.

For many, the COVID-19 pandemic has added complexity to existing challenges of housing insecurity as well as created new pressures. Data collected during the 2021 enumeration – as well as details in the County's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, Affordable Housing Strategy and Community Safety and Well-Being Plan – will help inform decision-making in this new context, as we plan for a strong and coordinated system of supports.

The 2021 enumeration would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our partners, who engaged with community members to collect this data: Campbellford Memorial Hospital, Cobourg Police Service, Community Health Centres of Northumberland, Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre, Four Counties Addiction Services Team, Habitat for Humanity Northumberland, Northumberland Hills Hospital, Peterborough Aids Resource Network, Port Hope Police Service, The Salvation Army, The Help Centre and Transition House Coalition. I want to thank our partners for their continued collaboration to reduce the incidence of homelessness in Northumberland, and to deliver impactful programs for people in need.

Lisa Horne,
Director of Community & Social Services
Northumberland County

Participating Community Partners

Northumberland County Community and Social Services would like to thank their staff and the service agencies and community partners who volunteered staff resources to ensure a successful enumeration on September 29, 2021.

Campbellford Memorial Hospital

Cobourg Police Service

Community Health Centres of Northumberland

Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre

Four Counties Addiction Services Team

Habitat for Humanity Northumberland

Northumberland Hills Hospital

Peterborough Aids Resource Network

Port Hope Police Service

The Salvation Army

The Help Centre

Transition House Coalition

Introduction

Executive Summary

Northumberland County's enumeration took place on September 29, 2021. With multi-sectoral collaboration and the support of community partners, we interacted with a total of 166 Northumberland residents. These citizens volunteered their time and experiences to allow us to better understand the current context of homelessness and housing in our community.

The results of this year's enumeration suggest that chronic homelessness remains a key issue in Northumberland County, with 54% of individuals experiencing homelessness reporting homelessness for 6 or more months in the past year. Most individuals experiencing homelessness in our community were adults between the ages of 22 and 55. Individuals identifying as Indigenous were overrepresented within our enumeration sample, as was the case in previous Northumberland enumerations. Many individuals experiencing homelessness reported experiencing mental health and substance use issues, and illnesses and other medical conditions.

Although most participants reported having an income source, most often social assistance, not having enough income was consistently cited as a reason for recent homelessness or housing loss. For individuals who agreed to complete an acuity assessment (VI-SPDAT), 50% scored in the high acuity range, suggesting a need for permanent supportive housing.

Overall there is a sustained need for a cohesive, collaborative, and responsive homelessness system to support Northumberland County residents. Examining the interconnectedness of human services, health care, justice, and other social and community supports in Northumberland will be integral in addressing homelessness and improving quality of life for all Northumberland County residents.

Background and Purpose

Northumberland County Context

Northumberland County is an upper-tier municipality that includes seven individual municipalities. Located along the 401 from Port Hope to Brighton, and North to Trent Hills, Northumberland is bordered by Lake Ontario in the South and Rice Lake in the North. The rich natural diversity of Northumberland includes waterfront locations, picturesque towns, and rolling rural hills. The main

urban centres of Northumberland County are Cobourg and Port Hope, with many other smaller towns located throughout the rural landscape. Northumberland County Community & Social Services is the Service Manager responsible for homelessness programming across the County.

Enumeration in Northumberland County

On March 12, 2021 the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued a Minister's Directive to Service Managers under Section 19.1 of the *Housing Services Act, 2011*.[1] This Directive mandated the completion of a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count (also referred to as an enumeration) of individuals experiencing homelessness within the Service Manager's service area. This directive required that various demographic indicators specified by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing be collected, with the results provided electronically to the Minister by December 31, 2021. Two previous enumerations have been conducted in Northumberland County, in 2016 and 2018.

Strategic Plan and Priority Alignment

Enumeration is a fundamental practice to understanding homelessness.[2] Given the multi-faceted impacts of homelessness, enumeration has relevance for the implementation of several strategic priorities in Northumberland.

The Northumberland County 2019-2023 Strategic Plan identifies a number of priorities for Northumberland County Council in providing leadership, programs, and services for Northumberland residents.[3] The strategic priority of Economic Prosperity and Innovation highlights the need for an ample supply of attainable housing at all points of the housing continuum.[4] Further, the priority area of Thriving and Inclusive Communities seeks to enhance quality of life in Northumberland through social infrastructure, including poverty reduction strategies.

Addressing homelessness is also central to strategic plans in Community & Social Services. The Northumberland County Housing and Homelessness Plan[5] sets a 10-year vision and plan for working towards affordable housing goals in our community, as well as the goal of reaching a functional end to homelessness in Northumberland. Additionally, one of the four central priorities in Northumberland County's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan[6] is homelessness and affordable housing, and within this priority, the completion of enumeration is included as a measure of success.

Methodology

Engagement of Community Partners

Community agencies involved with service provision and programming related to homelessness, harm reduction, mental health and addictions, policing, and healthcare provided staff members to assist with data collection on the day of enumeration. In total, 15 staff members from community partners and agencies and 6 Community & Social Services staff members assisted with data collection.

Planning

Enumeration planning was carried out by Northumberland County Community & Social Services staff, working in conjunction with the Northumberland County Information Technology and Public Works departments for technological and software considerations.

Location and Volunteer Planning

Efforts to have survey coverage for the member municipalities of Northumberland County were balanced with ensuring adequate volunteers for more densely populated areas of Northumberland (e.g., where more services are available, and the number of eligible participants was expected to be higher). Pairs of volunteers were assigned to a specific geographic area, typically encompassing known locations where individuals experiencing homelessness engaged with services providers or community resources.

Locations that volunteers were directed to included shelters for people experiencing homelessness, transitional housing programs, motels/hotels, food banks, libraries, public beaches, hospital emergency rooms, and other service provider locations. Additionally, a staff member was stationed at Northumberland County Community & Social Services if participants arrived at the County headquarters to complete a survey, or preferred to complete the survey over the phone. Although suggested locations were provided, volunteers were encouraged to research other eligible locations within their prescribed geographic areas. Volunteers attending rural locations travelled through their assigned areas to find locations where potential participants may be located.

Volunteer Training Sessions

Prior to the enumeration date, two training sessions were held for volunteers who would be assisting with data collection. The first training session included general information about enumeration, Community & Social Services homelessness programming, best practices for approaching potential survey participants, survey locations, health and safety, and participant remuneration.

The second training session (offered on multiple dates) included information about the technology that would be used to collect survey responses, the overall logic and flow of the survey (see Figure 1), a demonstration of the survey questions, review of all materials included in the enumeration packages (see below), key contacts for problem solving, and the planned components of the reporting and knowledge translation strategy.

"Habitat for Humanity Northumberland was pleased to participate in the 2021 Enumeration for people experiencing homelessness or housing instability in Northumberland County. Habitat Northumberland prides itself on working alongside community partners offering services across the housing continuum to support members of our community in need of housing. Habitat's vision is a world where everyone has a decent place to live and we work to bring communities together to help families and individuals achieve and maintain affordable housing."

Meaghan Macdonald
Executive Director
Habitat for Humanity
Northumberland
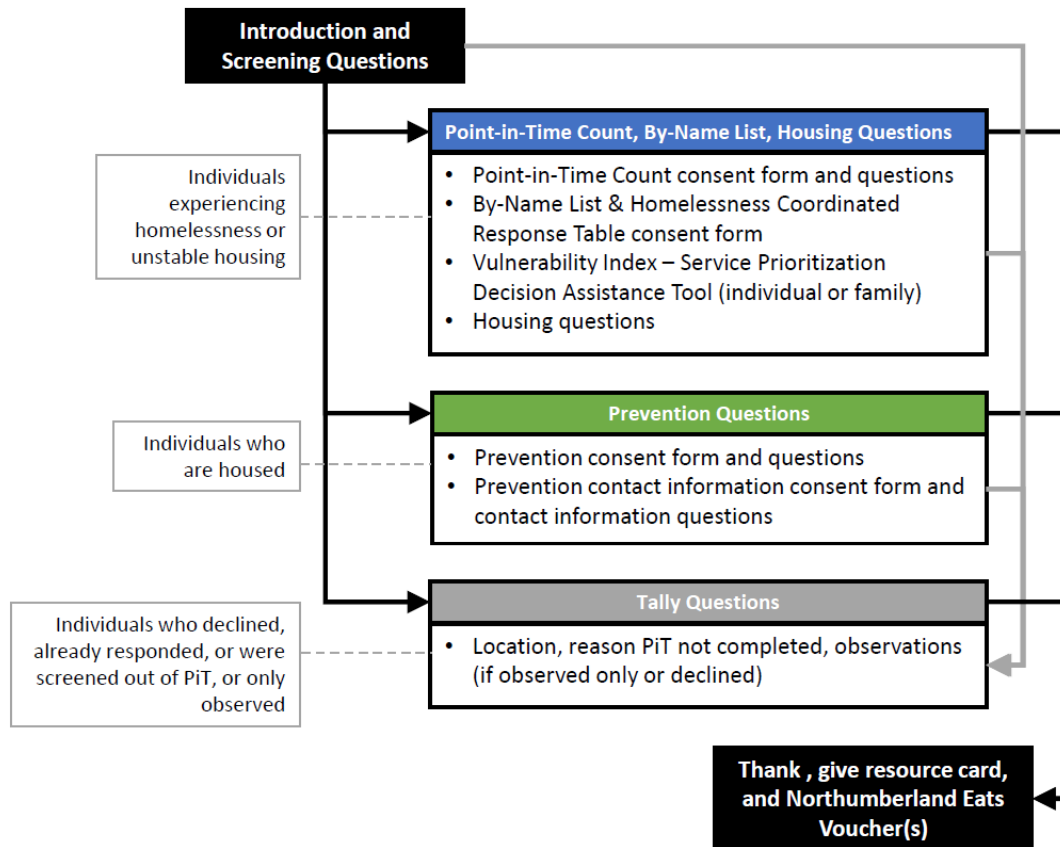
Figure 1. Flowchart of survey components and groups of eligible participants. Black lines signify participants moving through the survey if all questions are answered. Grey lines signify participants who declined to participate or complete the survey, for whom the tally questions would be presented instead.

Enumeration Materials

All volunteers who assisted with data collection were given a package of materials prior to the enumeration day. This package contained an iPad (equipped with the Survey123 app), a charging cable for the iPad, a stylus pen, a portable power bank, paper copies of the survey, hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment, contact information for Northumberland County Community & Social Services staff members, Northumberland Eats vouchers for participant remuneration, a copy of the flowchart for reference, a list of survey tips, and required agreements to be signed (i.e., a confidentiality agreement, completed by all staff interviewers, and a receipt of technology agreement, completed by the staff person who received the enumeration materials on behalf of the pair of staff members to which it was assigned).

Data Collection Procedure

Electronic Data Collection

To facilitate data collection, we utilized Apple iPads equipped with an app called Survey123.[7] The Survey123 app contained all possible combinations of survey questions that might be required in the field during an enumeration interview. Conditional logic was programmed into the survey to display required questions based on a participant's prior responses.

Screening and Eligibility Criteria

All participants were initially presented with screening questions to determine which parts of the survey they were eligible to complete. If at any point throughout the survey the participant did not want to participate or continue, the survey ended and the participant was tallied (see "Tally Questions" below) by the interviewer. Following the introductory script, a potential participant was asked if they were interested in participating; if they were, they were presented with the screening questions, if they were not, they were tallied by the interviewer. Next, participants were asked if they had already answered this survey (to reduce duplicate responses). If they had, the participant was tallied (recorded as "already responded"), and if they had not already participated, the interviewer then confirmed their interest in participating. If the participant did not want to complete the survey, they were tallied by the interviewer; if they wished to continue, the interviewer proceeded to the main screening question to determine which survey items participants were eligible for.

The main screening question was "Where are you staying tonight?" to which participants could select an option from a pool of pre-determined responses. If participants declined to answer, they were tallied. If participants stated that they were staying at their own apartment/house, they were then eligible to complete the Housing Loss Prevention branch of the survey. If participants responded by stating that they were staying at a homeless shelter, a hotel/motel (funded by a homelessness program), transitional shelter/housing, unsheltered in a public space, encampment, vehicle, or that they were unsure where they would be staying, they were eligible to complete the PIT questions. If participants responded by stating that they were staying at someone else's place, a motel/hotel (self-funded), hospital, treatment centre, or jail, prison, or remand centre, an additional follow-up screening question was asked to determine housing stability. Specifically, participants were asked: "Do you have access to a permanent residence where you can stay as long as you want?" If

participants declined to answer this follow-up question, they were tallied. If participants responded with "Yes", they were eligible to complete the Housing Loss Prevention branch. If participants responded to this item with "No" or "Don't Know", they were eligible to complete the PIT questions.

Data Elements Collected

Data collected depended on which branch of the survey participants were eligible to complete. Participants were either eligible to complete the PIT questions, the Housing Loss Prevention questions, or were tallied (if they did not want to participate, had already participated, or were observed only). Specific data elements collected for each group of participants are outlined below.

Point-in-Time Count Eligible Participants

Ministry-Mandated Point-in-Time Questions

Participants who were eligible to complete the PIT questions required by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing were read a script outlining the purpose of the survey. Next, the interviewer confirmed that the participant was still interested in participating; if the participant did not want to participate, they were tallied by the interviewer. If they wished to continue, participants were read a consent form. If participants did not provide consent to participate, they were tallied by the interviewer. If they did provide consent, the interviewer proceeded to the 12 PIT questions.[8]

By-Name List and Homelessness Coordinated Response Table Participation

Following the completion of the PIT items, the interviewer provided information about the By-Name List (BNL) and Homelessness Coordinated Response Table (HCRT), and key aspects of Community & Social Services' homelessness programming. If participants opted to be added to the BNL and participate in HCRT, they were read a consent form specific to these services. If participants did not provide consent to participate in the BNL and HCRT, the interviewer proceeded to the next set of questions (Housing Services and Supports). If participants provided consent to participate in the BNL and HCRT, the interviewer administered the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) in either the individual[9] or family version.[10]

Housing Services and Supports

Following the BNL and HCRT section of the survey (see Figure 1), participants were presented with additional items concerning Northumberland County Housing Services and Supports (see Appendix

14

C). These items assessed if the participant was currently on the waitlist for subsidized housing, and if they were able to update their application every 2 years (as required). Additionally, participants were asked to provide suggestions for supports to maintain waitlist participation. Participants were also asked if they required supports to maintain their housing, and if so, suggestions for supports that would help.

Housing Loss Prevention Eligible Participants

For participants who responded to the screening question "Where are you staying tonight?" with the response of "own apartment/house," (e.g., those who were housed at the time of enumeration) we administered a set of questions concerning housing loss prevention. Participants were read a consent form specific to this section of questions. If participants did not provide consent they were tallied by the interviewer. If they decided to participate, they were first asked if they were worried about losing their housing in the next 2-3 months. If participants responded affirmatively, additional questions were asked regarding reasons for potential housing loss, if the participant required help to prevent them from losing their housing, if they were currently receiving help with their housing (and if yes, where), and finally if they would like Social Services to follow up with them to connect them to people or programs that might help them keep their housing. If participants indicated that they were not concerned about losing their housing in the initial question, these follow-up questions were not asked. If participants were concerned about losing their housing and opted to provide their contact information for follow-up, participants were read a script outlining how Social Services would connect with them, and proceeded to complete a consent form. If participants provided consent, the interviewer recorded their contact information. If the participant did not provide consent to be contacted, their contact information was not recorded.

Tally Questions

To ensure an accurate overall count of individuals experiencing homelessness on the day of enumeration, a set of tally questions was included in the survey logic to account for participants who did not complete the PIT survey questions with the interviewer. Specifically, the interviewer recorded the reason that the individual was not surveyed (e.g., declined to participate, already participated, or were not eligible to complete the PIT survey). If the individual declined to participate or was observed only, the interviewer recorded if the individual was observed experiencing

15

homelessness, their approximate age, observed gender, and if applicable, indicators of homelessness that were observed.

Survey Completion

Upon completion of any of the survey components, the interviewer thanked the participant, provided a resource card which contained a QR code and URL for the Housing Help Northumberland website,[11] information for 211 (phone number and URL), as well as phone numbers for Northumberland County Community & Social Services, Four County Crisis, Transition House, and Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre. In appreciation of their time, participants were provided with $5 Northumberland Eats vouchers,[12] redeemable at local restaurants and businesses.

Data Quality

Using the Survey123 app for data collection ensured that the correct questions were administered for each participant, based on their previous responses. Additionally, data validation features in Survey123 were utilized that ensured completeness of responses (e.g., if a question was left blank, the survey could not be submitted until an answer was provided) as well as ensuring the correctness of certain types of information (e.g., that numbers were input for an age field instead of words). These features prevented data quality issues that are often encountered with paper-and-pencil surveys (e.g., incorrect questions administered or incomplete responses).

98.2% of survey responses (including tallies in which an interaction did not result in a submitted survey), were completed electronically using the iPad and Survey 123 app, and 1.8% of responses were submitted using a paper version of the survey. All survey responses submitted electronically were usable for data analysis, with no responses excluded for incompleteness or incorrect survey item administration. Conversely, 100% of paper responses were excluded due to incomplete items or survey items administered in the incorrect order based on the screening questions answered. In total, 98.2% of collected survey responses were used for analysis.

Given the small number of responses for some items, results that returned percentages smaller than 5% have been suppressed and will be signified by the use of "< 5%" as the result.

Limitations and Assumptions

One of the main limitations of the enumeration data is that the survey relies exclusively on self-reported information. In contrast to other sources and records (e.g., hospital admissions data), self-reported information can be influenced by social factors (e.g., responding in the "correct" way to appease an interviewer), concerns related to judgment and disciplinary action, or an individual's ability to recall specific events. However, analyses of the accuracy of self-reported utilization of health care use by individuals experiencing homelessness have been found to be accurate,[13] as is self-reported utilization of health, justice, and income assistance services among individuals experiencing homelessness and mental illness.[14]

An additional limitation concerns the PIT count methodology utilized for the enumeration, as it results in a "snapshot" of homelessness in a community at a particular point in time. Due to the narrow window (typically one day) during which the PIT count occurs, it is possible (and indeed likely) that the sample of participants engaged with does not include all individuals experiencing homelessness within a given community. Additionally, there are different ways that PIT counts can be conducted. For example, a PIT count may be a count of all individuals currently occupying shelter beds, or it could be conducted "on the ground" where only those who are visibly experiencing homelessness are enumerated.[15] This variability in methodology presents challenges for comparing PIT counts across jurisdictions, and even within a jurisdiction across time (due to differences in PIT count practices from year to year within a specific community). In Northumberland, this means that in order to be included in the enumeration, a volunteer would have to have interacted with someone on the exact date of the enumeration (during business hours) in order for them to be counted in the total count. It is likely that this count does not represent a full county picture of all individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland. However, trends identified during the enumeration can be used in homelessness systems planning.

Although care was taken to ensure adequate interviewer coverage across Northumberland County, conducting an exhaustive PIT count across a largely rural area presents logistical challenges. For example, it is possible that the locations that were attended by volunteer interviewers did not cover all areas where individuals experiencing homelessness may have been on that day, or even during that time of day. Related to this limitation is "hidden homelessness" or situations in which individuals obtain provisional accommodations and are not seeking out further supports and services.[16] In rural

contexts, front-line support services for individuals experiencing homelessness such as shelters tend to be in more densely populated areas, resulting in a greater reliance on these hidden, temporary arrangements such as "couch surfing".[17] Given the predominantly rural nature of Northumberland, it is likely that our enumerations may underestimate the extent of homelessness in our community.

Finally, our enumeration was completed during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This may have limited the number of individuals in the community who were available to be surveyed on the day of enumeration due to changes in mobility.[18] The pandemic conditions may have also decreased willingness to answer survey questions (e.g., engaging in social interactions with an interviewer). We mitigated these concerns by having telephone interviewers available on the day of enumeration should a participant have felt more comfortable not completing the interview in-person. The pandemic may have also had an impact on the number of individuals seeking services in our community, as well as the locations that people experiencing homelessness were able to access available services. For example, capacity limitations in some front-line services shifted available supports to other locations (e.g., some spaces from a shelter facility shifted to a motel/hotel space funded by a homelessness program). Furthermore, additional income supports were implemented throughout the pandemic,[19, 20] some of which were still in effect when our enumeration was conducted. These factors may have had an influence on the number of people experiencing homelessness in our community, and therefore the number of potential enumeration participants.

Knowledge Translation Strategy

A brief overview of the initial enumeration results was provided to community partners who assisted with enumeration during a debrief and feedback session. The mandatory data points required by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing[21] were presented to the Community & Social Services Standing Committee of Northumberland County Council as a Report for Information in December 2021.[22] These indicators were then submitted to the Ministry electronically.

The present report represents the main medium through which enumeration results will be communicated. Following the presentation and adoption of this report by Northumberland County Council, the Community and Social Services Department plans to engage each of Northumberland's member municipalities and relevant community partners and groups to summarize and present key enumeration findings.

Results

Participation and Screening

On the day of enumeration, 166 interactions with Northumberland County residents took place. From this point, participants were either eligible to complete the PIT questions or the Housing Loss Prevention questions. A total of 52 participants completed the PIT questions, and 62 completed the Housing Loss Prevention questions.
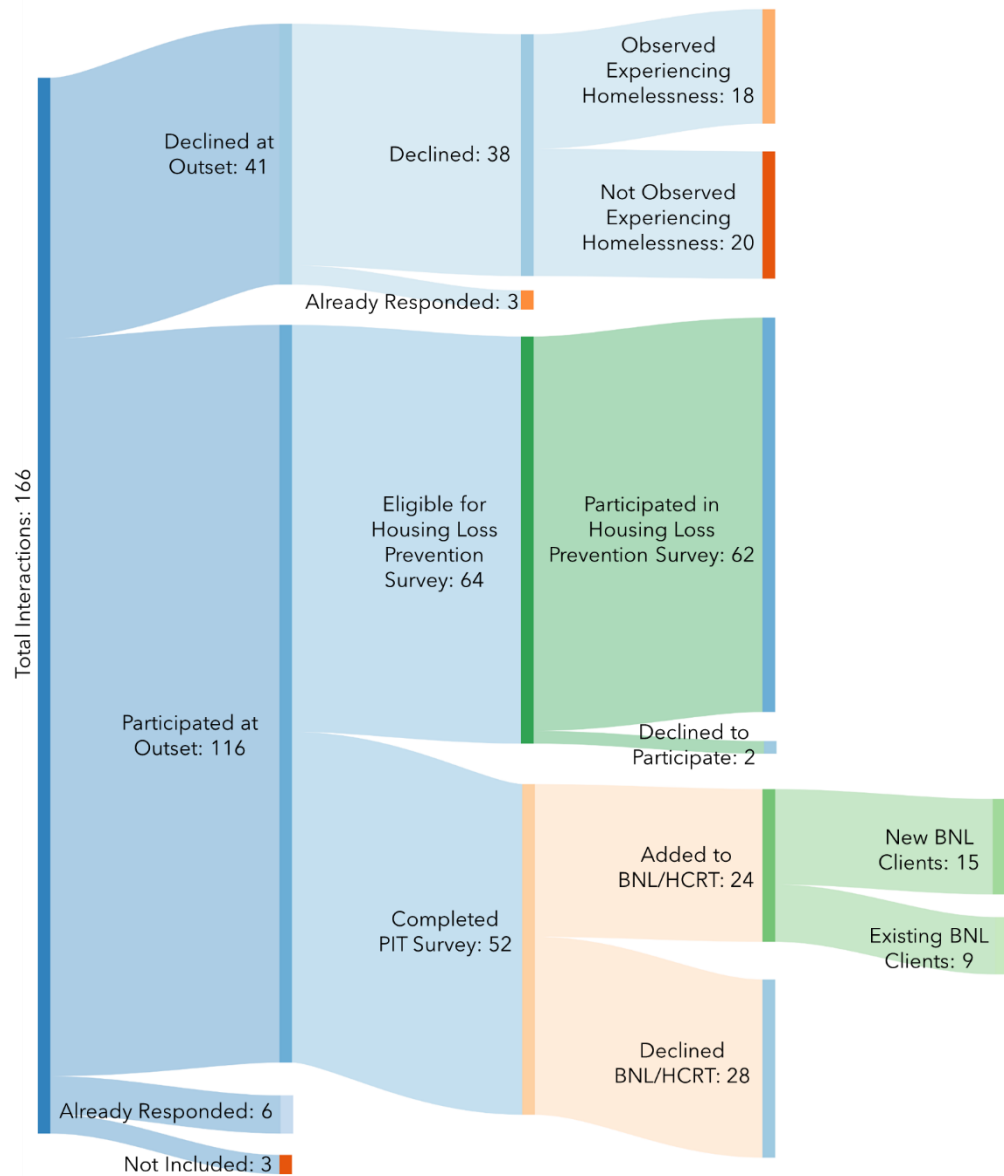
Figure 2. Flow of all enumeration interactions that took place on September 29, 2021 in Northumberland County.

Key Findings

In total, volunteers interacted with 72 individuals who were experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County on the night of the enumeration. The majority of individuals who were eligible to complete the PIT questions were in Cobourg (81.9% of PIT eligible participants). The full breakdown of what percentage of interviews took place in each Municipality can be viewed in Figure 3.
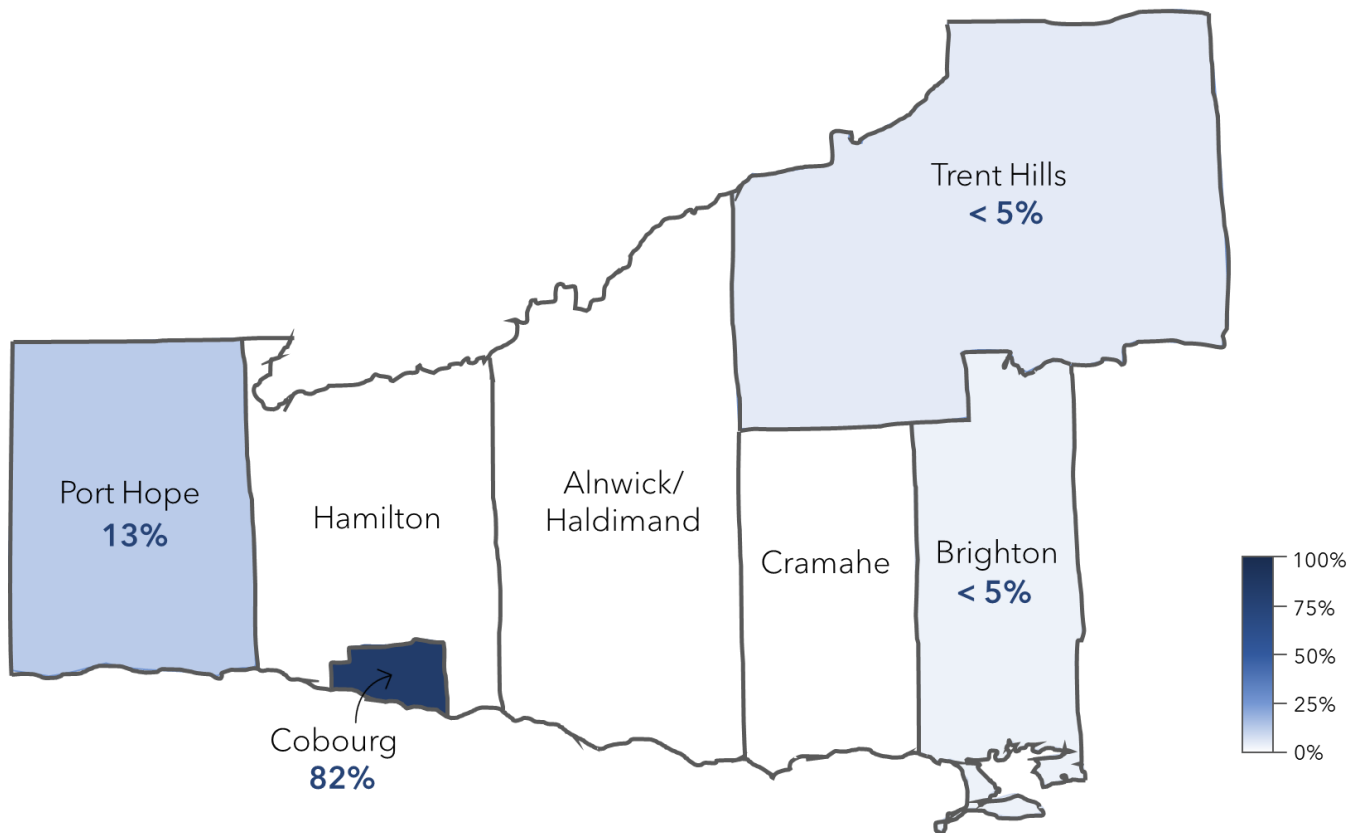
Figure 3. Percentage of PIT eligible participants that were interviewed in each member Municipality.

Demographics

Age

Of participants who completed the PIT count questions and provided their age or year of birth, the minimum age reported was 21 years, and the maximum age reported was 71 years. The average age reported was 41.80 years. In total, 17.3% of PIT participants were seniors (over age 55), 73.5% were

adults (between the ages of 25 and 55), and 7.7% were youth (younger than 25). Of all PIT participants, 5.8% did not provide an age or year of birth.

Indigenous Identity

Participants were asked if they identified as First Nations (with or without Status), Métis, Inuit, or as having North American Indigenous ancestry. Of the participants who completed the PIT questions, 11.5% of participants reported Indigenous identity, specifying First Nations as their Indigenous identity, and an additional < 5% of participants reported Indigenous Ancestry. 78.8% of participants who completed the PIT questions reported that they did not identify as First Nations (with or without Status), Métis, Inuit, or as having North American Indigenous ancestry. An additional < 5% of participants responded that they did not know if they identified as having an Indigenous identity, and < 5% declined to answer the question.

Racialized Identity

Most participants who completed the PIT questions identified as White[1] (67.3%). 5.8% of participants identified as Indigenous only, < 5% identified as Black-Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Latinx, < 5% of PIT participants identified as Black-Canadian/American, and an additional < 5% identified as Latin American. 11.5% of PIT participants responded that they did not know which racialized identity they identified with, and an additional 7.7% declined to answer.

"That Indigenous people are disproportionately represented as being homeless is not surprising, but rather common in urban centres across Ontario, for various reasons. Two most noted by our Intervention Team are intergenerational trauma and stereotyping by landlords. We need more resources for housing and homelessness, if we are to better serve and support our people; to find them safe, adequate and affordable housing. Resources would enable the Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre to support more people and reduce Indigenous representation amongst homeless populations in Northumberland."

Lori Flynn
Executive Director
Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre

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[1] In addition to those who chose the response "White," < 5% of participants indicated that their racialized identity was not listed and subsequently specified their racialized identity. Analysis of this follow-up question revealed only responses indicating "Caucasian" and were therefore combined with responses of "White" on the initial item.

Gender Identity

When asked which gender they identified with, 61.5% of the PIT question participants indicated that they identified as a Man, 34.6% identified as a Woman, < 5% identified as Non-Binary/Genderqueer, and < 5% declined to answer. When asked how they would describe their sexual orientation, 88.5% of participants indicated that they were straight/heterosexual, < 5% identified as bisexual, and < 5% identified as pansexual. An additional 7.7% of participants declined to answer the question.

Family Composition

Participants were asked if they had family members or anyone else staying with them on the night of enumeration. If participants responded that they had children with them, they were asked to specify how many. For this item, participants could select multiple options. Most participants (73.1%) responded that they did not have any family members or others staying with them that night. The next most selected option was that the participant had a partner staying with them that night, with 15.4% of participants selecting this option. A total of 9.6% of participants indicated that they had a child(ren)/dependent(s) staying with them. < 5% of participants declined to answer the question. Excluding those who declined to answer the question, nearly all participants only selected one response item (98%).

Military Service

When asked if they had every served in the Canadian Military or RCMP, 86.5% responded that they had not. An additional 7.7% of participants identified that they had served in the military; no participants identified RCMP service or a combination of Military and RCMP service, and an additional 5.8% of participants declined to answer the question.

Experience of Child Welfare System

In total, 21.2% of participants responded that they had been in foster care or a youth group home as a child or youth. Conversely, 73.1% of PIT participants responded that they had not been in foster care or a youth group home as a child or youth. An additional 5.8% of participants declined to answer this question.

Health Challenges

Participants were asked if they experienced a range of health challenges, separated into categories. For each category, participants were given response options of Yes, No, Don't Know, or Decline to Answer. Participants were asked if they were experiencing any illness or medical condition at the present time, to which 46.2% responded with Yes, 48.1% responded with No, and 5.8% declined to answer. Participants were asked if they were experiencing any physical limitations, to which 32.7% of participants responded with Yes, 63.5% responded with No, < 5% responded with Don't Know, and < 5% declined to answer. In the next category, participants were asked if they were experiencing learning or cognitive limitations, to which, 32.7% responded with Yes, 55.8% responded with No, 5.8% responded with Don't Know, and an additional 5.8% declined to answer. Next, participants were asked if they were experiencing a mental health issue, to which 69.2% of the participants responded with Yes, 25% responded with No, < 5% responded with Don't Know, and < 5% declined to answer. Finally, participants were asked if they were experiencing a substance use issue, to which 51.9% of participants responded with Yes, 40.4% responded with No, < 5% of participants responded with Don't Know, and < 5% declined to answer (see Figure 4).
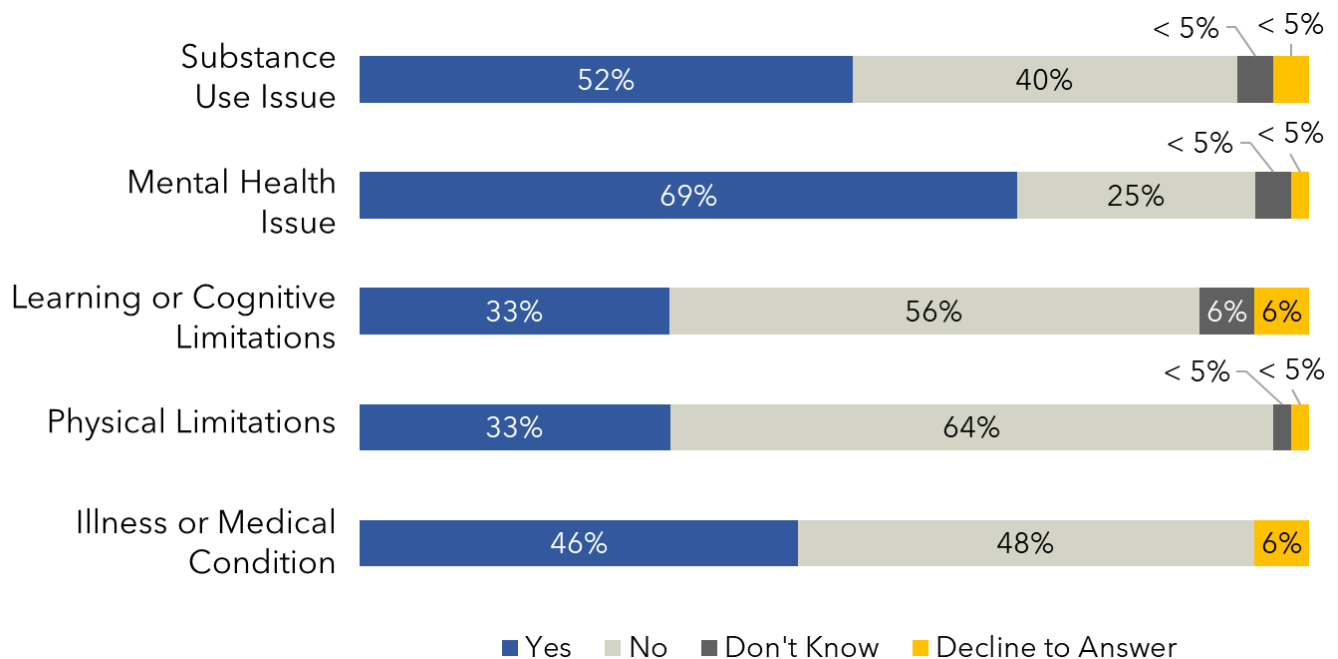
Figure 4. Percentage of PIT participants' responses regarding health concerns in each of 5 health categories.

Income Sources

Only 11.5% of participants who completed the PIT questions responded with "No Income" when asked about their sources of income. An additional < 5% of the participants declined to answer the question. Therefore, 84.7% of participants who completed the PIT questions reported some source of income. The most commonly reported type of income among PIT participants who provided an income source was Welfare/Social Assistance, with 34.6% of participants reporting this source. The second most commonly reported income source was Disability Benefit, with 23.1% of PIT participants reporting this income type. The remaining income categories were each reported by less than 10% of participants (see Figure 5).
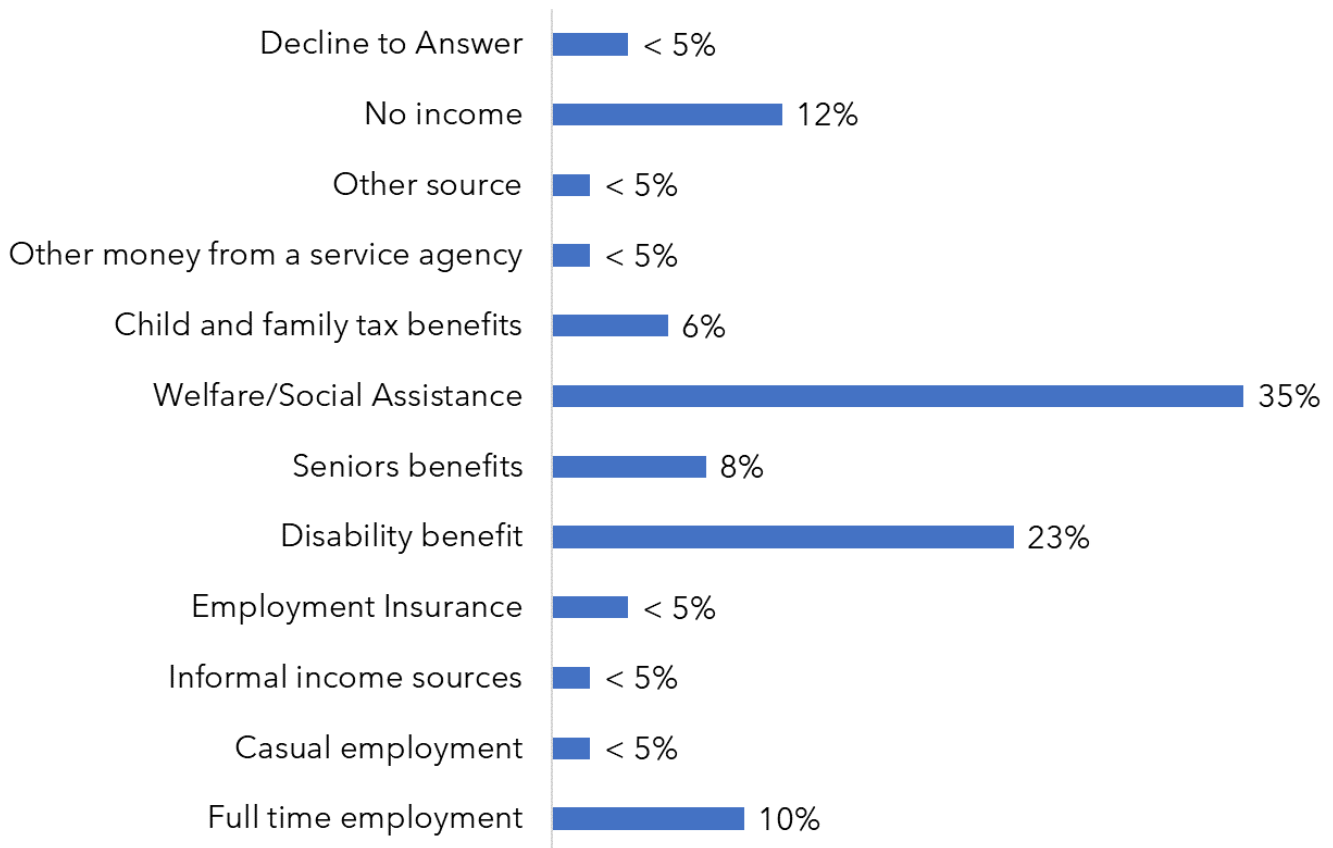
Figure 5. Percentage of PIT participants who reported receiving income in each category.

Excluding participants who declined to answer the income source question, most participants reported a single source of income (94%), with a small number reporting multiple sources of income (6%)

Experience of Homelessness in Northumberland County

Of those individuals who were eligible for and opted to complete the PIT questions, 53.85% reported experiencing chronic homelessness, or experiencing homelessness for 6 or more months in the past year. Participants who reported non-chronic homelessness of fewer than 6 months in the past year made up 40.38% of the PIT survey participants.

For individuals experiencing homelessness on the night of September 29th, 2021 in Northumberland County, the average length of time experiencing homelessness was 10.84 months, with a minimum of 0 months and a maximum of 72 months. As would be expected, there were differences in the average length of homelessness between participants who reported experiencing chronic and non-chronic homelessness. Those experiencing non-chronic homelessness reported an average length of homelessness of 2.25 months, (minimum of 0 months, maximum of 5 months), whereas those experiencing chronic homelessness reported average length of homelessness of 17.29 months (minimum of 6 months, maximum of 72 months).

As can be seen in Figure 6, the most reported overnight location on September 29th, 2021 for individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County was a shelter for people experiencing homelessness. The second most common response to this question was "unsure," potentially suggesting that a number of participants had not yet found a location to stay in for the night of the enumeration. The third most common location reported was someone else's place.

"Northumberland County is known for being a vibrant and resilient community. However, the lack of affordable housing, and its scarcity of availability in the County represent a large obstacle for the healthy socio-economic development of our community.

Having stable, affordable, and safe housing is essential to family well-being, mental health, food security, and the ability to actively participate in our community.

Adequate, suitable and affordable housing are key elements for a strong and secure community."

Patricia Orantes
Executive Director
The Help Centre
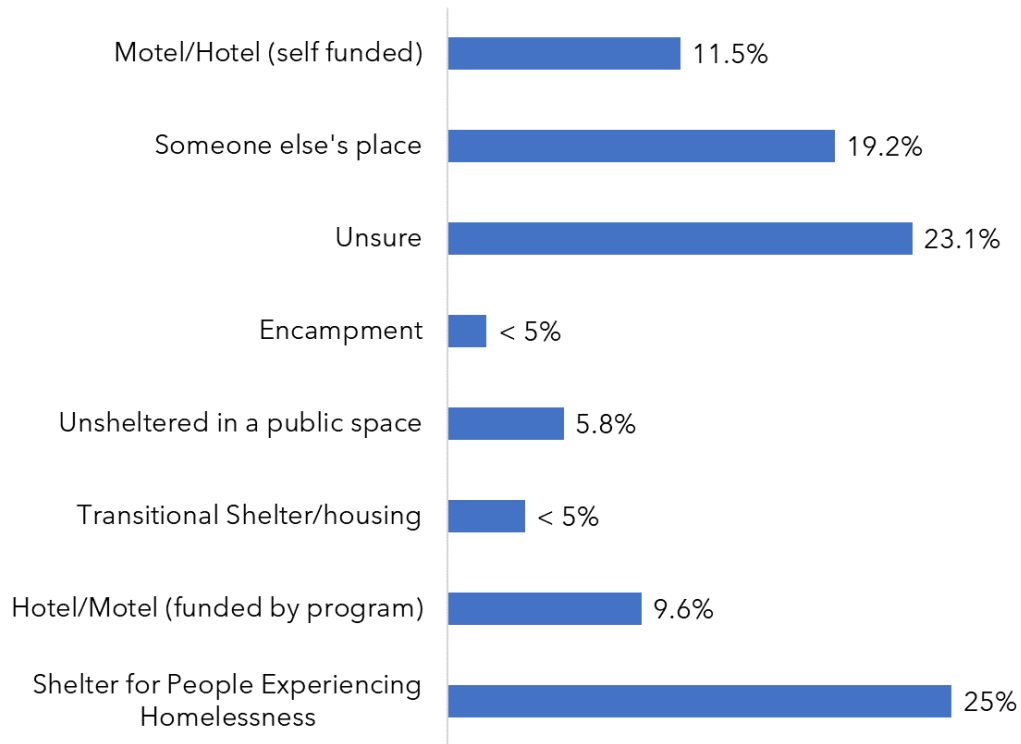
Figure 6. Overnight location on September 29, 2021 of individuals experiencing homelessness who completed the Point-in-Time Questions.

Reasons for Experiencing Homelessness

To understand reasons for homelessness and housing loss, PIT survey participants were asked: "What happened that caused you to lose your housing most recently?" with pre-determined reasons provided in 3 categories, and an additional option to provide other reasons. For these items, participants could select multiple responses that applied to them. In the category of Housing and Financial Issues, the most reported reason for homelessness and housing loss was not enough income (reported by 32.7% of participants). In the category of Interpersonal and Family Issues, the most reported reason for homelessness and housing loss was conflict with a spouse or partner (23.1% of participants). In Health or Corrections, two reasons for homelessness and housing loss were reported equally frequently and more than any other option: mental health issue and substance use issue (both reported by 30.8% of participants).

Table 1

Housing and Financial	% of Responses in Category	% of PIT Participants
Not enough income	28.80%	32.70%
Unfit/unsafe housing condition	13.60%	15.40%
Landlord/Tenant Conflict	6.80%	7.70%
Building sold or renovated	< 5%	< 5%
Owner moved in	< 5%	< 5%
Complaint	< 5%	< 5%
Left the community/relocated	< 5%	< 5%
None of the above	44.10%	50.00%

Table 2

Interpersonal and Family	% of Responses in Category	% of PIT Participants
Conflict with spouse/partner	19.70%	23.10%
Conflict with other	16.40%	19.20%
Conflict with parent/guardian	11.50%	13.50%
Experience abuse by spouse/partner	6.60%	7.70%
Experience abuse by parent/guardian	6.60%	7.70%
Experience abuse by other	6.60%	7.70%
None of the above	32.80%	38.50%

Table 3

Health or Corrections	% of Responses in Category	% of PIT Participants
Mental health issue	20.80%	30.80%
Substance use issue	20.80%	30.80%
Physical health issue	14.30%	21.20%
Incarceration	9.10%	13.50%
Hospitalization/treatment program	< 5%	< 5%
None of the above	32.50%	48.10%

Some participants reported multiple reasons for homelessness within a category. Among those who reported multiple reasons related to Housing and Financial Issues (excluding those who indicated "none of the above" for this reason category), the most common reason reported was not enough income (85.7% of participants who reported multiple reasons for this category). For Interpersonal and Family Issues, the most common reason among those who reported multiple reasons (after excluding those who indicated "none of the above" for this category) was equally endorsed for 3 options: conflict with a spouse or partner, conflict with a parent or guardian, and experiencing abuse by someone other than a spouse/partner or parent/guardian (with each of these reasons being endorsed by 42.9% of participants who reported multiple reasons for this category). For the category of Health or Corrections, the most common reason among those who reported multiple reasons (after excluding those who indicated "none of the above" for this reason category) was a substance use issue (81.3% of participants who reported multiple reasons for this category).

Differences emerged after examining the number of participants who endorsed single compared to multiple reasons for homelessness. After excluding individuals who selected the "none of the above option," 73.1% of participants who endorsed reasons for homelessness in the Housing and Financial Issues category reported one reason. For the Interpersonal and Family Issues category, 78.1% of participants reported one reason. In contrast, for the Health or Corrections category, only 40.7% of participants reported one reason. For Housing and Financial Issues and

"As the only emergency shelter in Northumberland County, Transition House has seen an increase in the number of individuals seeking emergency shelter services, and an even larger increase in those individuals needing support for mental health, physical health and addiction. With Transition House most often at maximum capacity, only 25% of individuals were in shelter on the night of Enumeration, we know that the needs far outweigh the services currently available."

Anne Newman
Executive Director
Transition House Coalition

Interpersonal and Family Issues, the majority of reasons (e.g., total number of reasons that all participants submitted) were reported by those who only gave a single reason (e.g., 57.6% of responses in the Housing and Financial Issues category came from single response participants and 62.5% of responses in the Interpersonal and Family Issues category came from single response participants). However, for Health or Corrections, only 21.2% of responses reported came from single response participants. This suggests that the majority of the responses in this category were submitted by participants who endorsed multiple reasons within this category (e.g., co-occurring mental health and substance use concerns).

Only < 5% of participants who completed the PIT questions responded with "None of the above" for all three categories of reasons for homelessness or housing loss. In total, 17.3% of participants responded to this section of questions with "Don't know" and did not provide reasons for homelessness or housing loss. An additional 28.8% participants declined to answer the question. Finally, 11.5% of participants responded with additional reasons for homelessness or housing loss other than what was provided in the categories of responses. These other responses included housing safety concerns, such as a fire, or condemned housing; financial concerns, such as late rent and problems with disability benefits; and housing characteristics, such as rurality and limited potential for growth.

Acuity Level and Connections to Supports

Participants who completed the PIT survey were asked if they wanted to be added to Northumberland County BNL and participate in the HCRT process. Of the 52 participants who completed the PIT survey, 46.15% opted to participate in BNL/HCRT.

In terms of acuity level, VI-SPDAT scores in the low range suggest no housing intervention is needed, medium scores suggest the need for a rapid re-
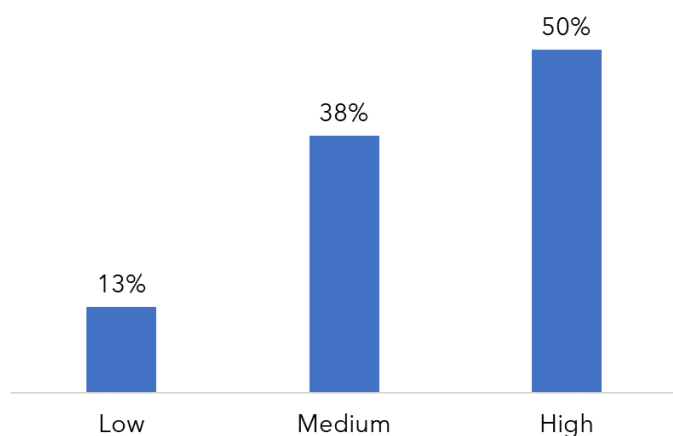
Figure 7. Number of participants scoring in each VI-SPDAT category.

housing assessment, and high scores suggest the need for a permanent supportive housing assessment.[23] The percentage of participants scoring in each of these categories is displayed in Figure 7.

Of those who completed the individual VI-SPDAT, 59.1% reported having physical health challenges, 27.3% reported having substance use challenges, and 40.9% reported having mental health challenges. Overall, 18.2% participants who completed the individual VI-SPDAT assessment exhibited tri-morbidity.

Housing Services and Supports

Of the participants who completed the PIT survey, 30.8% indicated that they were currently on the County waitlist for subsidized housing, 61.5% were not currently on the waitlist, and 7.7% declined to answer. 50% of participants indicated that they could update their application every two years, as required to stay active on the waitlist, 23.1% said that they could not, and 26.9% declined to answer. In terms of suggestions for staying on the waitlist and keeping the application up to date, participants indicated that phone calls/reminders of when the 2-year mark was approaching, or providing technology would be helpful strategies in keeping the waitlist application up to date. 69.2% of participants indicated that they did not require supports in order to maintain their housing, and 17.3% indicated that they did; 13.5% of participants declined to answer the item. In terms of suggestions of supports to maintain housing, participants provided suggestions in the areas of health, income, finances and employment, application and case management, affordable housing, and social assistance programs.

Participants were asked about which lower-tier municipality they most recently had permanent housing in. Just over half (53.8%) of participants indicated that they had housing most recently in Cobourg, 25% indicated that their most recent housing was outside of Northumberland County, 13.5% indicated their most recent housing was in Port Hope, and < 5% indicated that they were most recently housed in Alnwick/Haldimand. 5.8% of participants declined to answer the question.

Priority Population Profiles

People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

There were differences between individuals experiencing non-chronic and chronic homelessness in terms of overnight location on the night of the enumeration. For example, those experiencing non-chronic homelessness more frequently reported staying in a shelter for people experiencing homelessness or a motel/hotel that was self-funded. Those experiencing chronic homelessness more frequently reported staying in hotel/motel funded by a program, being unsheltered, staying at someone else's place, and being unsure of where they were staying that night. Only individuals experiencing chronic homelessness reported staying in transitional shelter/housing and encampments.

A greater percentage of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness reported their gender identity as a Man than those experiencing non-chronic homelessness. Relatedly, a greater percentage of individuals experiencing non-chronic homelessness reported their gender identity as a Woman, and individuals reporting a Non-Binary (Genderqueer) gender were only represented among individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (see Figure 8).
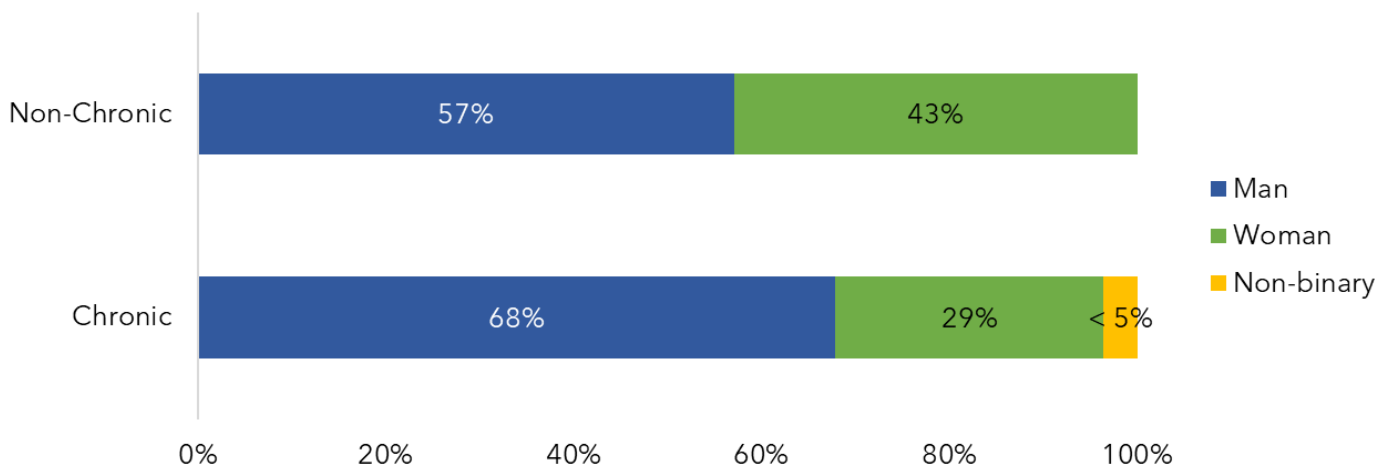
Figure 8. Reported gender for individuals reporting chronic and non-chronic homelessness.

Excluding individuals who declined to answer, a greater percentage of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in Northumberland County reported having prior child welfare involvement (27%), compare to those who were experiencing non-chronic homelessness (19%; see Figure 9).

31
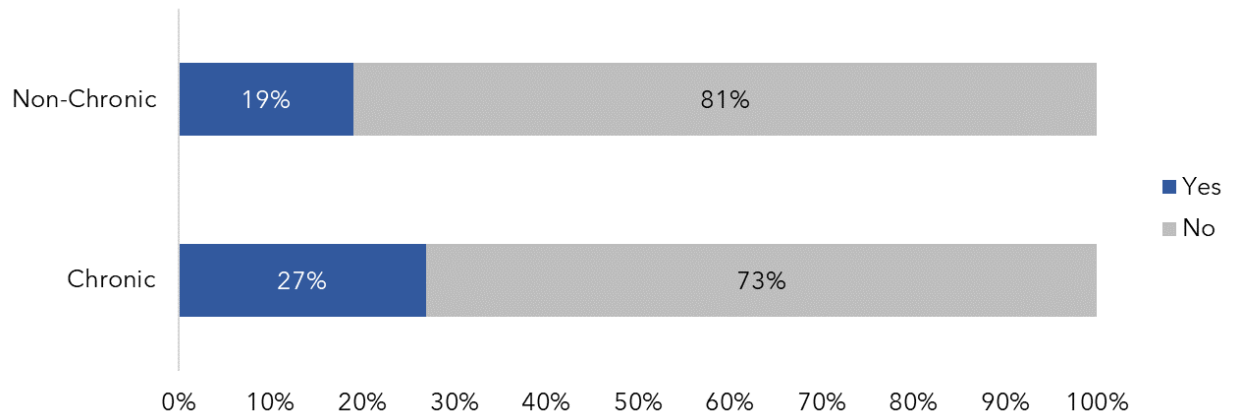
Figure 9. Child welfare involvement for individuals reporting chronic and non-chronic homelessness.

Individuals Identifying as Indigenous

Of all individuals who completed the PIT survey, 15% reported Indigenous Identity or Ancestry. Of those who identified as having Indigenous Identity or Ancestry, 63% reported experiencing homelessness on their own (e.g., without family, a partner, or children), 38% reported experiencing homelessness with a partner, and no individuals reported experiencing homelessness with children.

For individuals who indicated how long they had been experiencing homelessness, the average length of time spent homeless for individuals who identified as Indigenous was 15.14 months, with a minimum of 1 month and a maximum of 72 months. 42.9% of individuals who identified as Indigenous reported experiencing chronic homelessness, and 57.1% reported experiencing non-chronic homelessness. In terms of overnight location, 12.5% of individuals identifying as Indigenous reported staying in an unsheltered location, 37.5% indicated that they were staying at someone else's place, 37.5% indicated that they were staying at a motel/hotel that was self-funded, and 12.5% indicated that they were unsure where they were staying on the night of the enumeration.

Overall, 62.5% of individuals experiencing homelessness who identified as Indigenous reported prior experience with the child welfare system. In terms of gender identity, 50% of individuals who identified as Indigenous reported identifying as a Man, 37.5% identified as a Woman, and 12.5% identified as Non-Binary (Genderqueer).

In terms of reasons for experiencing homelessness, 50% of individuals identifying as Indigenous who reported experiencing homelessness on the night of the enumeration reported not enough

32

income as a cause of their recent homelessness, and 25% of participants reported unfit/unsafe housing conditions as something that caused their recent homelessness. For interpersonal reasons, 25% of participants reported conflict with a spouse/partner, 12.5% reported conflict with a parent/guardian, and 25% reported another type of conflict. Further, 37.5% of participants reported experiencing abuse by a parent/guardian, and 12.5% reported experiencing abuse by someone other than a spouse/partner or parent/guardian as a cause of their recent homelessness. Reasons for experiencing homelessness in the areas of health and corrections revealed that 12.5% of individuals reported a physical health issue, 25% reported a mental health issue, 50% reported a substance use issue, 12.5% reported a hospitalization/treatment program, and 12.5% reported incarceration.

Youth Experiencing Homelessness

In total, 8% of the individuals who participated in the PIT questions reported being youth, or less than 25 years of age at the time of enumeration. Of those who indicated that they were youth, 75% indicated that they were experiencing homelessness on their own, with 25% indicating that they were experiencing homelessness with a partner. No youth indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with children.

For youth who indicated how long they had been experiencing homelessness, the average length of time experiencing homelessness was 10 months, with a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 12 months. 100% of all youth who reported how long they had been experiencing

"Younger children are negatively impacted by the precarious housing and homelessness experienced by their parents/caregivers, leading to negative mental health and behavioural outcomes for children and youth both at home and at school. Homelessness in older youth is often not noticeable as many older youth couch surf between friends for shelter and support – often unnoticed, and therefore falling beneath the support framework available at the community level."

Carol Beauchamp
Rebound Child and Youth Services

homelessness reported experiencing chronic homelessness. In terms of overnight location on the night of enumeration, 25% of youth indicated that they were staying in a shelter for people experiencing homelessness, 50% indicated that they were unsure where they would be staying, and another 25% indicated that they were staying in a motel/hotel that was self-funded.

Half, or 50%, of youth experiencing homelessness on the night of the enumeration indicated that not having enough income caused them to lose their housing most recently. All youth reported that experiencing conflict and/or abuse was a reason for experiencing homelessness. For reasons related to health and corrections, 50% of youth reported a physical health issue, 75% reported a mental health issue, 50% reported a substance use issue, 50% reported a hospitalization/treatment program, and 50% reported incarceration as causing their recent homelessness. Additionally, 50% of youth experiencing homelessness reported First Nations or Indigenous Ancestry, and none reported prior experience with the child welfare system. In terms of gender, 25% of youth identified as a Man, 50% identified as a Woman, and 25% identified as Non-Binary (Genderqueer).

Families Experiencing Homelessness

Of the individuals that participated in the PIT survey, 9.6% indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with children, and 15.4% reported that they were experiencing homelessness with a partner. The item assessing family composition allowed respondents to select multiple options, and one participant indicated that they were experiencing

"At Cornerstone supporting single women and families navigate homelessness during the COVID 19 pandemic, shortages of stock of affordable units and barriers they face in being able to find housing, we have seen the demand for housing services increase drastically over the last year. Despite these challenges associated with finding housing, we wish to touch on those individual's resiliency and the importance of community and human connection that continues to be observed despite facing these tough conditions."

Nancy Johnston
Executive Director
Cornerstone Family Violence
Prevention Centre

homelessness with both a partner and children. Therefore, 23.1% of PIT responses were from individuals who indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with a partner and/or children. No survey respondents indicated that they were experiencing homelessness with other friends or family members.

For families that reported the length of time they had been experiencing homelessness, the average length reported was 7.18 months, with a minimum of 1 month and a maximum of 12 months. Furthermore, 45% of families reported experiencing chronic homelessness. For overnight location on the night of the enumeration, 25% of families reported staying at a hotel/motel funded by a homelessness program, 25% reported staying at someone else's place, 25% reported staying at a motel/hotel that was self-funded, and 8.3% reported staying at a shelter for people experiencing homelessness. Another 16.7% of families reported being unsure where they were staying on the night of the enumeration.

50% of all families indicated that not having enough income was a reason for their homelessness, and 16.7% indicated that a landlord/tenant conflict was a reason for their homelessness. Finally, 8.3% of families indicated that their homelessness was related to leaving the community or relocating. For interpersonal reasons related to homelessness, 16.7% of families identified conflict with a spouse/partner as a reason, 25% indicated conflict with someone other than a spouse/partner or parent/guardian as a reason, and finally 8.3% of families indicated that experiencing abuse by a parent/guardian was a reason. For health and corrections, 25% of families indicated that a physical health issue was related to their homelessness, 8.3% indicated a mental health issue was related, and 8.3% indicated that a hospitalization or treatment program was related.

Of the families who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the enumeration, 25% indicated that they identified as Indigenous. When asked about gender, 41.7% of the individuals completing the PIT questions (who belonged to/represented each respective family) indicated that they identified as a Man, 50% identified as a Woman, and 8.3% identified as Non-Binary (Genderqueer). In total, 33.3% of individuals completing the PIT questions who were associated with a family experiencing homelessness had experience with the child welfare system.

Comparisons with Previous Enumerations

Individuals Experiencing Homelessness in Northumberland County

Figure 10 presents a comparison of the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness who spoke with volunteers in Northumberland County across our 3 enumerations. When responses were sorted based on household composition, a similar number of respondents in each group were recorded for the 2021 enumeration compared to the 2016 and 2018 enumerations.
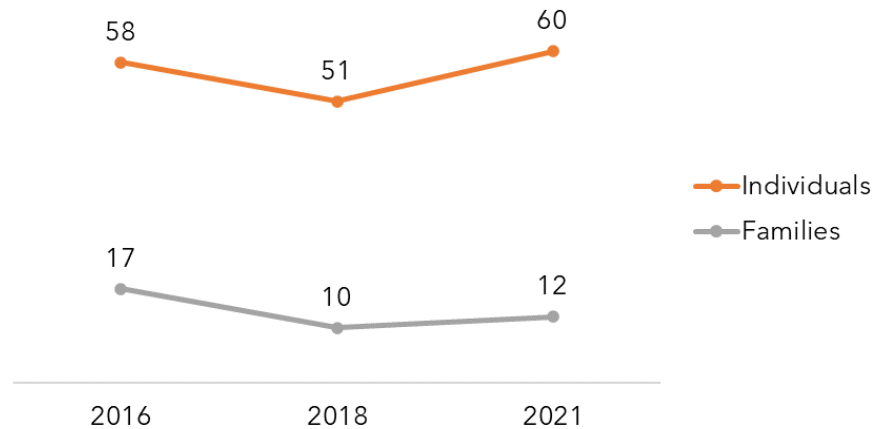
Figure 10. Number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in previous and current enumerations in Northumberland County.

Additionally, key characteristics measured across all three enumerations are outlined below. Overall, a smaller percentage of youth were represented in this year's enumeration compared to previous years, and a slightly greater percentage of adults was reported. Similar levels of chronic homelessness were reported across all three enumerations, and a similar percentage of individuals experiencing episodic homelessness was observed compared to the 2018 enumeration. Acuity levels on the VI-SPDAT remained in line with previous enumerations, with all three acuity categories for the 2021 enumeration landing between the 2016 and 2018 levels reported.

Table 4

Key Characteristics	2016	2018	2021
16-24 years old	19%	19%	8%
25-59 years old	71%	71%	82%
60+ years old	10%	10%	10%
Experiencing chronic homelessness	48%	63%	54%
Experiencing episodic homelessness	16%	6%	7%[2]
Individuals who have experienced homelessness for 2+ years	33%	16%	8%
Scored low acuity (0-3) on VI-SPDAT	11%	8%	13%
Scored moderate acuity (4-7) on VI-SPDAT	53%	32%	38%
Scored high acuity (8+) on the VI-SPDAT	36%	60%	50%
Indigenous Identity or Ancestry	27%	26%	15%

Comparison Limitations

The main limitation in comparing the present enumeration results with previous enumerations concerns the survey methodology. Enumerations undertaken in 2016 and 2018 were Registry Week events, in which volunteers administered surveys at various community locations over a 5-day period.[24] With a Registry Week structure, there is more opportunity for interviewers to engage with Northumberland County residents, compared to the 2021 enumeration strategy which consisted of interviews conducted on a single day. Therefore, the present methodology may result in an undercount of residents experiencing homelessness compared to previous enumerations.

Due to the small percentage of participants who completed a VI-SPDAT assessment, the number of PIT participants who had experienced homelessness for 2 or more years was determined by the length of time spent experiencing homelessness question from the PIT survey (excluding individuals who did not provide the length of time they had been experiencing homelessness). This item was framed as a length of time over the past 12 months, introducing a potential ceiling on responses where individuals experiencing homelessness for over 2 years may have responded with a

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[2] Based on number of PIT eligible participants who completed a VISPDAT and provided an answer for the number of times they had experienced homelessness in the past year.

maximum of 12 months. However, despite this question structure, many responses greater than 12 were recorded, potentially indicating that the question structure wasn't adhered to, and that this may be an accurate estimate. These limitations should be considered when comparing Northumberland enumeration results across years.

Housing Loss Prevention

Of the Northumberland County residents engaged with on September 29, 2021, 64 were eligible to complete the Housing Loss Prevention branch of the enumeration survey. That is, these participants indicated that they were either a) housed in their own accommodations, or b) housed in accommodations that were not theirs (e.g., "someone else's place"), but that they had access to a permanent residence where they could stay as long as they wanted. Of these 64 eligible participants, 62 elected to complete the Housing Loss Prevention survey questions.

The majority of participants (61.3%) who completed the Housing Loss Prevention survey were affiliated with the Municipality of Cobourg. The next most frequent municipal affiliations were Cramahe (11.3%) and Port Hope (9.7%). Less than 5% of the participants reported affiliations with other municipalities (see Figure 11).
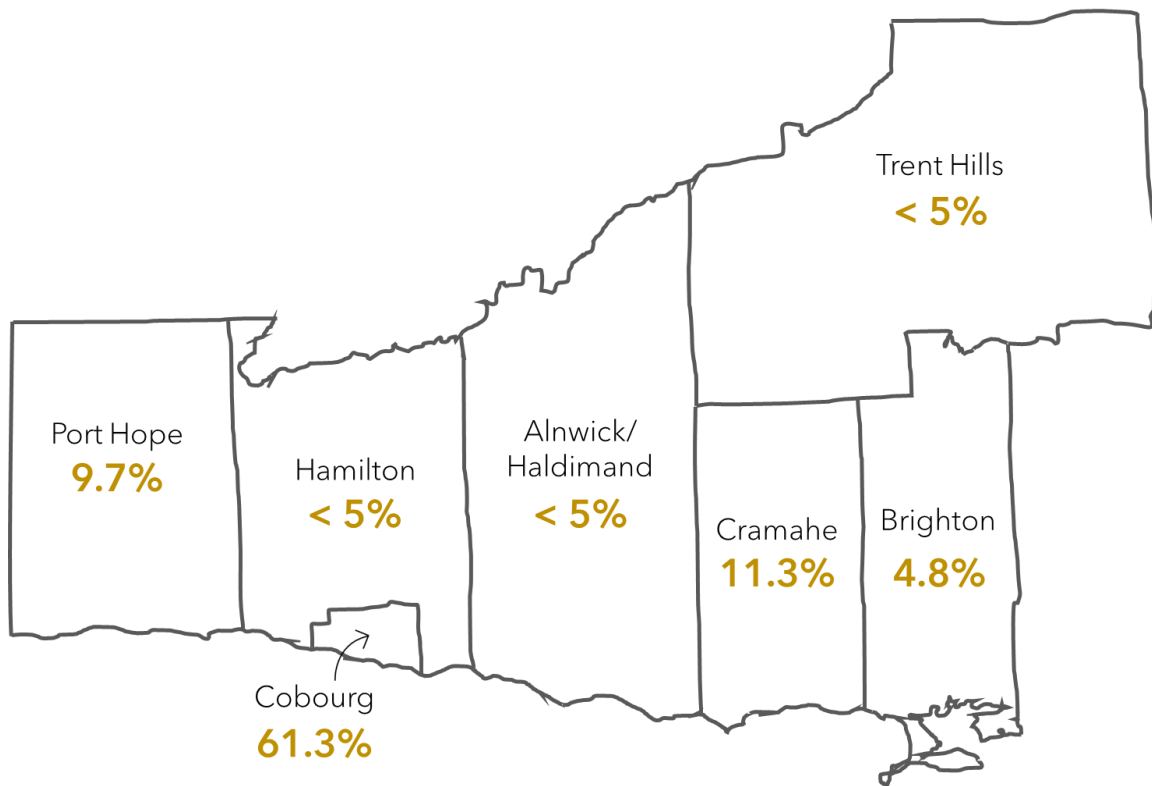
Figure 11. Percentage of participants who completed the Housing Loss Prevention survey, by reported Municipal Affiliation. Note that < 5% of participants reported "Outside of Northumberland County" and are not included in the figure.

Most participants who completed the Housing Loss Prevention survey reported that they were not worried about losing their housing in the next 2-3 months (82.3%), with 17.7% of participants reporting that they were worried about losing their housing in the next 2-3 months. These participants indicated a number of reasons for potential housing loss, with themes centered around eviction and landlord issues, employment and income issues, addictions, and issues with the housing situation itself.

Of the participants who were worried about losing their housing within the next 2-3 months, 72.7% reported needing help with housing loss prevention, and 27.3% did not. Of the participants who were worried about losing their housing, 45.5% were already receiving help with their housing, and 54.5% were not.

When given the opportunity, 72.7% of the participants who indicated that they were worried about losing their housing in the next 2-3 months provided their contact information so that social services

could follow up with them and connect them to services and supports to prevent their housing loss, and 27.3% did not. Of participants who wanted to be contacted, 12.5% had contact information that was incomplete and therefore could not be followed up with. All remaining follow-ups were attempted by Community & Social Services staff. In total, 71.4% of follow ups were successful, and 28.6% of follow ups could not be reached based on the contact information provided. All successful follow-ups were completed within 37 days of enumeration (80% were completed within 28 days of enumeration). For clients who were successfully followed up with, 100% were still experiencing unstable housing at the time of follow-up. Although no follow-ups resulted in funds being issued for housing stability, 100% of follow-up clients were referred to other supports in the community to help prevent housing loss from occurring.

Discussion

Results and Findings

Overall, the number of individuals who volunteers spoke with that were experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County on September 29, 2021 were comparable to previous enumerations conducted in 2016 and 2018. As previous enumerations were Registry Week events that occurred over multiple days, and the current enumeration utilized a PIT methodology conducted on a single day, this could suggest an overall increase in homelessness in our community.

Compared to the general population in Northumberland County, the results of our enumeration suggest that individuals identifying as Indigenous are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness in our community. Though individuals identifying as Indigenous make up < 5% of Northumberland County's population,[25] 15% of those experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County on September 29, 2021 identified as Indigenous. Similar findings have been observed in all three enumerations that Northumberland has undertaken. Although the percentage of respondents identifying as Indigenous in this year's enumeration decreased slightly compared to the previous two enumerations, the overrepresentation is still apparent. The consistency of this finding across all three enumerations – a 5-year time frame in total – suggests a sustained gap in our homelessness system. Given ongoing calls to action regarding Reconciliation in Canada,[26] these findings further reinforce the critical importance of addressing systemic racism and injustice and ensuring access to appropriate services and supports in our community. As a step towards these goals, Northumberland County Community and Social Services has begun to engage with urban Indigenous organizations to consider and support programs and services geared to Indigenous people in our community. This work is under way in Early Years, Housing and a cross-departmental initiative. One example that is currently under way is a co-designed and jointly developed affordable housing development with units geared towards Indigenous households, in partnership with Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, Habitat for Humanity Northumberland and Northumberland County Housing Corporation.[27] Future programs and investments should continue to reflect this local need and priority.

Individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County on September 29, 2021 who opted to complete the PIT count survey items were largely in receipt of income assistance, either

social assistance, or disability benefits. Specifically, 35% reported being in receipt of social assistance (e.g., Ontario Works), and 23% reported being in receipt of disability benefits (e.g., Ontario Disability Support Program or other type of disability benefit). Where applicable, this may suggest that current provincial benefit amounts are not sufficient to meet housing needs in our community. In line with this, one of the most often reported reasons for experiencing homelessness was "not enough income" which was reported by just over one third of PIT participants (32.7%).

That social assistance was one of the most common forms of income reported suggests that many of those experiencing homelessness in our community may already connected to services and supports, such as if there is a caseworker assigned to managing the receipt of their social assistance or disability benefit. This suggests that current caseworker relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness may represent a productive avenue of engagement with these individuals and a means to introduce additional supports to address homelessness and housing concerns where applicable. The renewal plan for social assistance Ontario places a greater emphasis on life stabilization approaches,[28] suggesting a recognized need to provide enhanced supports to individuals in receipt of social assistance income supports in Ontario. Further emphasis on connections across human services disciplines and to other community services (e.g., health care, justice) to encourage collaboration and coordinated service delivery may enhance supports and outcomes for those experiencing homelessness in our community.

More than half of the individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland County reported experiencing chronic homelessness, or experiencing homelessness for 6 or more months in the past 12 months. This is in line with other estimates from Canadian jurisdictions[29] and with our previous enumerations.[30] There were distinct differences in key areas for individuals experiencing chronic, compared to non-chronic, homelessness. These included reported overnight location on the night of enumeration, gender, and child welfare involvement. For example, the most common overnight location on the night of enumeration for those experiencing chronic homelessness was "unsure," whereas those experiencing non-chronic homelessness most often reported staying in a shelter for people experiencing homelessness. Those experiencing chronic homelessness were more likely to identify as a Man, whereas individuals experiencing non-chronic homelessness were more likely to identify as a Woman. Those identifying as Non-Binary (Genderqueer) were only represented among individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Furthermore, those experiencing chronic

homelessness more often reported engagement with child welfare and foster care as children, compared to those experiencing non-chronic homelessness. Understanding how the experience of homelessness differs between those experiencing chronic and non-chronic homelessness allows for more appropriate and impactful programming and planning for Northumberland's homelessness system as a whole.

Overnight location on the night of the enumeration highlights the critical importance of shelter services in Northumberland, as this was the most commonly reported overnight location of PIT participants overall. The second most reported overnight location was "unsure." This could be due to concerns regarding disclosing specific locations or confidentiality, or could be indicative of individuals facing often-changing and unstable accommodation sources within our community. The third most commonly reported location was someone else's place, which could be indicative of couch surfing, or moving from one temporary location to another,[31] often with friends or family.

When examining specific priority populations, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and those identifying as Indigenous both reported average lengths of time experiencing homelessness longer than the overall sample average. For youth and families, average length of time experiencing homelessness was slightly less than the overall sample average. 100% of all youth surveyed reported experiencing chronic homelessness. In line with the overall sample, 50% of individuals in each of the priority groups of individuals identifying as Indigenous, youth, and families identified that not enough income was a cause of their recent housing loss or homelessness. This suggests that current income supports and/or employment opportunities are not sufficient to meet the needs of these priority populations in our community.

Finally, of those who were surveyed who were currently housed, most individuals were not concerned about losing their housing in the next 2-3 months, suggesting low levels of precarious housing. However, this and other related indicators should be monitored throughout our community given increasing concerns about housing affordability and supply.[32]

Enumeration Lessons Learned

A number of survey items may be useful to include in future enumeration surveys in Northumberland County. The age at which homelessness was first experienced may provide greater insight into the overall trajectory of homelessness in Northumberland County, and potentially

vulnerable age groups in our community for which prevention efforts could be focused. Relatedly, it may also be helpful to know if individuals experiencing homelessness first experienced homelessness in Northumberland County specifically, or another community. This would allow insight into how our community fits into the broader provincial and/or national homelessness system and context.

Additionally, given the current COVID-19 pandemic, many services and supports have had to adopt alternative service delivery models, including virtual or telecommunications-based services. Access to communications technologies including the internet, personal computers, and smartphones may be an important factor in ensuring connectedness to supports and service providers in Northumberland County. Future surveys conducted in our community, or future enumerations, could include questions about access to technologies and the Internet to better understand current access levels and needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in our community.

Interviewer Feedback

Following enumeration, Northumberland County Community and Social Services gathered feedback from interviewers regarding their experience. Regarding the use of technology (e.g., iPads, Survey123 App), interviewers indicated that they liked that the technology was easy to use, was more secure, less to handle, and faster than using paper surveys, and also that the survey app showed the right questions in the right order, depending on eligibility/prior responses. Interviewers enjoyed that the technology training was virtual, that multiple training dates were offered, and the demonstration of the survey app and interview instructions. On the day of enumeration, most interviewers indicated that they had enough time to cover the area that was assigned to them, and some found additional areas to survey that were not originally on their list of locations and suggested additional locations for future enumerations. This reinforces the importance of relying on the collective wisdom of community partners and agencies in Northumberland when planning data collection activities.

Suggestions from enumeration interviewers included greater consultation with people with lived/living experience of homelessness for location planning, as well as further consideration of the timing of data collection. For example, some interviewers expressed concerns about only collecting data during the day, which may have limited the number of individuals that could be surveyed.

Additionally, concerns were raised about the timing of the enumeration date within the month, noting that September 29, 2021 roughly coincided with the timing of provincial social assistance payments, and that this may have impacted interviewers' ability to engage with individuals experiencing homelessness. These suggestions should be considered when planning future enumerations in Northumberland County.

Conclusion

Summary

Northumberland County's 2021 enumeration revealed trends consistent with previous enumerations and new findings. Overall, there is a continued need to address barriers to housing, supports related to income and employment, as well as connections to programs addressing physical health, mental health, and substance use. Chronic homelessness and homelessness among individuals identifying as Indigenous continue to be areas of concern in our community. These results reaffirm the role and commitment of Community & Social Services to improving quality of life for all Northumberland County residents and continuing to support the health and well-being of our community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Screening Questions

Do you have time for me to ask you a few questions?

- Yes
- No

Have you answered this survey already?

- Yes
- No

Are you willing to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

Appendix B: Housing Loss Prevention Questions

Are you worried about losing your housing in the next 2-3 months?

- Yes
- No

What are the two main reasons you think you may lose your housing?

- Free text
- Free text

Do you need any help to prevent you from losing your housing?

- Yes
- No

Are you getting any help with your housing already?

- Yes
- No

If yes, where?

- Free text

May I take down your name so that someone from Social Services can follow up with you? We'd like to make sure you are connected to people or programs that might help you to keep your housing.

- Yes
- No

Appendix C: Housing Services and Supports Questions

Are you currently on the County waitlist for subsidized housing?

- Yes
- No
- Refused

A requirement to remain on the County waitlist for subsidized housing is to update your application every 2 years, is this something that you're able to do?

- Yes
- No
- Refused

If no, are there one or two things that the County could do to support you in staying on the waitlist?

- Free text
- Free text

Do you require any supports in order to maintain housing?

- Yes
- No
- Refused

If yes, can you tell us one or two supports that would help?

- Free text
- Free text

Appendix D: Tally Questions

Reason Not Surveyed:

- Declined
- Already Responded
- Screened Out
- Observed

Observed Homeless?

- Yes
- No

Approximate Age?

- 16 - 17
- 18 - 29
- 30 - 39
- 40 - 49
- 50 - 59
- 60 - 69
- 70 - 79
- 80+

Observed Gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Two-Spirit
- Trans Woman
- Trans Man
- Non-Binary (Genderqueer)
- Don't Know

Indicators of Homelessness:

- Free text

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