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# Enumeration of the Homeless Population in Rural Communities

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**ENUMERATION OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

An Analysis of the Methods Available to Enumerate the Homeless Population in  
Rural Communities

**MPA RESEARCH REPORT**

Submitted to:

The Local Government Program  
Department of Political Science  
Western University

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July 28, 2017

## **Executive Summary**

Homelessness has become an increasingly complex issue in Canada. The government is making strides to develop relevant programs and policies to address the issue, and the legislated requirement for the enumeration of the homeless population in all Service Manager areas is the most recent tool in this quest.

As service communities move closer to implementing the homeless enumeration, pause must be given to the types of enumeration methodologies that best fit each community. Consistent metrics can only be applied when it is determined how the homeless population will be defined and also located. In this paper, rural homelessness has unique characteristics that must be understood and folded into the enumeration methodology.

Limited case studies by rural communities in Canada have left the topic of rural enumeration open for further exploration. While system users begin to develop their anticipated methodology, lack of previous examples offer the opportunity for the rural municipalities to develop their own type of enumeration, whether a hybrid of models or a “what works best” case.

This paper will examine the best methods to create a portrait of homelessness that will help to define the most efficient use of resources to meet the unique needs of rural communities and the individuals within their care.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Definition of Homelessness.....	5
1. Chronically Homeless.....	6
2. Episodically Homeless.....	7
3. Transitionally Homeless.....	7
Definition of Rural, Urban and Northern Ontario.....	8
Social Characteristics of the Homeless.....	10
Methodologies Available for Homeless Enumeration.....	13
1. Point-in-Time Count.....	15
2. Period Prevalence Count.....	19
3. Registry Week.....	22
Survey Structure and Best Practices.....	23
Case Studies from Rural Service Manager Enumerations.....	26
1. City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton.....	27
2. Stratford, Perth County and St. Mary's.....	31
3. Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.....	34
Next Steps.....	36
Conclusion.....	38
Bibliography.....	40

## Introduction

In many urban centres, emergency shelters and transitional housing residences exist to provide services to the homeless population in their respective cities. These emergency shelters and transitional homes have staff that collect data on the individuals who make use of these facilities. Data is collected to provide statistical evidence on the total number of visits, but it also provides further details as to the number of different users and how many times in a given period the individuals visit these types of facilities, either once or on a repeat basis. Data provides much needed insights on the typology of the population, patterns of usage including chronicity and frequency and the journey into homelessness. From this point, data may be easily totaled within the city in the respective Service Manager's area. This method has previously been recognized as a realistic manner of determining a count of the homeless population; however, as more knowledge is gained on the types of homelessness, it became apparent that the need for more varied and robust enumeration methods would be necessary.

It was once considered that homelessness counts in emergency or transitional shelters were a reliable representation of the actual homeless population within an urban setting. Now, it is understood that many individuals experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives do not ever make use of these types of facilities "given that many people who become homeless live with friends or relatives, and do not come into contact with emergency shelters".<sup>1</sup> Efforts to obtain the most accurate homeless enumeration counts possible have now grown to include

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<sup>1</sup> The Homeless Hub. (2017). Homelessness 101. Retrieved May 26, 2017 from: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/how-many-people-are-homeless-canada>.

other methods to capture the full range of homelessness types and the demographics of people who are homeless.

Rural areas also struggle to determine their homeless population, and in a much more difficult way. There are very limited emergency shelters, or none at all in many rural communities. Without emergency shelters as a base point to count the visits from individuals who may present as homeless, and thus provide the data on people who are homeless, the question then becomes how to consistently and accurately enumerate the homeless population in a rural area? Further to this, without emergency shelters and transitional homes to help identify who is homeless at that given point in time, how does the definition of homelessness come to be determined? Enumerating a mobile, diverse and statistically rare group of people is challenging, and all homeless enumeration methodologies have limitations.<sup>2</sup>

This research paper will seek to provide a definition of homelessness within rural communities, as homelessness looks very different in a rural setting as compared to an urban setting as rural homelessness has unique characteristics. The most obvious visible sign of homelessness in an urban setting is often seen as people sleeping on the sidewalks, often over heat grates with what appears to be their possessions close by. In a rural setting, homelessness is rarely obvious, since people are not seen sleeping outside on streets or other visible, public areas. Homelessness is very likely hidden, as homeless people often stay temporarily with family and friends, or perhaps pitch a tent or create a lean-to in the warmer months in wooded areas away from hiking trails. Hence, homelessness takes different forms in rural areas than in cities,

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<sup>2</sup> Rabinovitch, H. (2015). Snapshot of an Object in Motion: Quantifying Homelessness. Simon Fraser University. P. 15.

and may therefore need to be defined differently in the two settings. It is necessary to design an enumeration exercise using a clear and relevant definition of homelessness. By pre-determining the definition of homelessness prior to an enumeration, it is anticipated that a more complete count will be accomplished based on consistent metrics being utilized.

In addition to defining rural homelessness, this paper will seek to identify the most appropriate methods of enumerating the homeless population in rural communities based on the existing methodologies of enumeration. The three methodologies commonly used in homeless counts will be explained, and the associated benefits of each methodology, along with any drawbacks, will be detailed.

Without an accurate representation of the homeless population in a Service Manager area, it is extremely difficult for service managers to advocate for, and provide, services. Areas that have an accurate representation of their homeless population may then be able to identify the necessary policies and programs that will most efficiently provide assistance and work towards reducing the homeless population. The advocacy for provincial and federal housing and homeless funding dollars and programs can be based on more accurate homeless population counts once a methodologically sound and consistent enumeration process is determined, undertaken and completed.

The provincial Ministry of Housing has recently informed the 47 Service Manager areas in Ontario that the enumeration of the homeless population in each of the Service Manager areas has now been legislated to be completed by May 2018. This legislation is detailed under Bill 7,

the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016.<sup>3</sup> Enumeration of the homeless will be undertaken by all Service Manager areas in Ontario, and many of these geographic areas may be considered rural based on their small population. In particular, Huron County, with a population of 59,297<sup>4</sup>, is the Service Manager area in which I work as the Manager of Housing Services, and is identified as a rural Service Manager area.

Once a Service Manager obtains their statistical evidence of the scope of their homeless population, what happens next? Is this information utilized to help in planning policies, processes, funding levels, staffing, affordable housing, additional programs, and other actions? Will the benchmark information stand to improve the lives of those surveyed and what do the changing numbers of homelessness over the enumeration cycles mean to future funding? Clarity about the potential uses of enumeration data may provide further legitimacy to the enumeration process.

Within this report, three case studies will be reviewed from rural Service Managers who have completed an enumeration of their homeless population. The case studies will assist in providing practical evidence of the homeless population who reside in the area and evidence as to whether or not homelessness does exist in all types of communities. The case studies indicate the methodologies that were used, the mobilization of their enumeration efforts and practical information from lessons learned.

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<sup>3</sup> Government of Ontario. (2016). Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Retrieved from Bill 7, Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016.

[http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_details.do?locale=en&BillID=4118&detailPage=bills\\_detail\\_the\\_bill](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_details.do?locale=en&BillID=4118&detailPage=bills_detail_the_bill)

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. (2016). Retrieved May 28, 2017.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?B1=All&Code1=3540&Code2=35&Data=Count&Geo1=CD&Geo2=PR&Lang=E&SearchPR=01&SearchText=Huron&SearchType=Begins&TABID=1>



## Definition of Homelessness

A critical first step when developing an enumeration methodology for the homeless population is the definition of what constitutes being homeless. There are many variations of homelessness that should be considered, and an accurate definition at the onset of an enumeration is necessary for a quantitative measure of the homeless population and a reasonable certainty of accuracy.

It is possible to develop a very broad definition of homelessness and thus capture a higher number of individuals considered homeless. It is also possible to develop a definition that is restrictive and does not capture an accurate representation of the homeless population. Do we define homelessness based on a person's physical living situation or whether the person defines themselves as homeless?

A very restrictive definition of homelessness would be one that speaks to absolute homelessness as living on the streets or unsheltered, with no other options or variables. The United Nations definition within the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is a broad definition and states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."<sup>5</sup> The United Nations has identified a number of factors that comprise a standard of living, and housing has been identified to be a critical foundation upon which to build a person's well-being. Many

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)

communities are now developing and implementing “housing first” strategies to assist people who are homeless in their community. Housing first initiatives are predicated on assisting people transition from the street or shelter system into self-contained accommodation and recent studies have provided evidence that this approach can significantly reduce homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

When developing a definition of homelessness, it becomes more complicated when situational circumstances may be considered. An example of this would be a person fleeing a domestic violence assault, living in a protected shelter or second stage housing, someone residing in a transitional home, or a person living in a treatment facility with no defined residence upon release. It may be necessary to develop a definition that has identified different types of homelessness, offering a lens that considers one’s circumstances in which people may find themselves at a given point in time, such as when the enumeration occurs.

According to a report published by The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary, there are three types of homelessness identified by the ways in which people make use of shelter systems.

***Chronically homeless***, as an identified type of homeless, are those that would meet the more rigid original definition of homelessness in terms of living on the streets or making use of shelters. More often than not, these individuals have nowhere else to turn and no other options for any type of housing. Within shelter facilities, where homelessness has typically been measured, chronic homelessness is identified as utilizing only a few stays in shelters, however the stays are very long in length.

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<sup>6</sup> Pomeroy, S. (2015). Built to Last: Strengthening the Foundations of Housing in Canada. Federation of Canadian Municipalities. P. 16.

**Episodically homeless**, as a second type of homeless, are people who have many stays in shelter systems, however the stays are very short in length. This speaks to people who may have unstable and transient lifestyles, such as a disruptive home life, or spend time in institutional facilities such as treatment centres, incarceration, or hospitals.

**Transitionally homeless**, as the third type of homelessness identified, are people who use shelter facilities very few times and the length of each stay is very short. Interestingly, this group tends to make up the majority of shelter users. It is common for people to make use of shelters for just a few visits and then never make use of the shelter again.<sup>7</sup> This fact is corroborated by the city of Victoria, British Columbia, who determined over a four year study that 84.9 per cent of shelter users were transitional users.<sup>8</sup>

Studies on the definition of homelessness have also been undertaken by the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, commissioned by the Province of Ontario. The Panel recommended that the Province adopt a definition of homelessness and identified the types of homelessness, as follows:<sup>9</sup>

Unsheltered	Or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.
Emergency Sheltered	Including those staying overnight in shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by violence
Provisionally Accommodated	Referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure
At-Risk-of-Homelessness	Refers to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious and does not meet public health or safety standards. It should be noted that for many, homelessness is not a static state, but a fluid experience, were one's

<sup>7</sup> Kneebone, R., Bell, M., Jackson, N., Jadidzadeh, A. (2015). The School of Public Policy. *Who Are The Homeless? Numbers, Trends and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary*. Volume 8, Issue 11, March 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Rabinovitch, H., Pauly, B., Zhao, J. (2014). *Patterns of Homelessness in Greater Victoria*. Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness.

<sup>9</sup> Report of The Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness. (2015). *A Place to Call Home*. P. 62

	shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and often.
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Similarities in the definitions exist, with an extra category being included by the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness to further differentiate between unsheltered and emergency sheltered. As mentioned, it will be necessary for the enumeration process undertaken by each Service Manager area to determine the definition of homelessness prior to the beginning of the actual enumeration. A clear understanding of the terms used to identify the status of a person's situation at the time of enumeration will result in a more consistent count, as clear terms will help the people conducting the survey understand the range of different types of homelessness at any given point in time. Definitions will play a key role in the enumeration process, and as a result of the data gathered during the enumeration, policies and initiatives may be created to target the specific needs of the people who find themselves homeless.

Developing definitions of homelessness when emergency shelters do not exist will be necessary in rural communities. As enumeration is often conducted in collaboration with many staff and volunteers, a collective clear understanding of homelessness is critical. Because it is known that hidden homelessness is prevalent, the ability to develop questions in the survey to capture the rural characteristics of the different types of homelessness is important.

### **Definition of Rural, Urban and Northern Ontario**

The Ontario Ministry of Housing uses three identifiers for the service manager areas: urban, rural and northern; however, they have not created a formalized definition. It may be reasonable to assume that a rural municipality has a population below a pre-set amount and

northern would speak to the geographic areas administered by a separate District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSAB) for each Service Manager area. There are 11 Service Manager areas in located in the northern part of Ontario that are administered as a DSSAB<sup>10</sup>. A recent government program, the Enabling Accessibility Fund, made eligibility possible for small municipalities with a population of 125,000 or less<sup>11</sup>. This may be indicative of the smaller population size considered rural, without a significant urban centre. This would qualify a number of smaller Service Managers as rural in southern Ontario. A definition for what constitutes a rural area is identified within the State of Rural Canada Report 2015. This report states that all rural communities share the two dimensions of rural: low density and/or long distance to density.<sup>12</sup> The definition of low density and long distances is an easy to understand concept, however, putting actual numbers to low density and long distances is subjective and can be open to interpretation. In addition, the Rural Ontario Institute defines non-metro as having a population of 10,000 to 99,999<sup>13</sup>. For the purpose of this MRP the rural identifier will be a population of 125,000 people or less in the Service Manager area. An emphasis will be placed selecting case studies for this report from Service Manager areas with populations at this level or lower who have already completed enumerations of their homeless population.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1202.aspx>. Accessed June 24, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/enabling-accessibility-fund/eligibility.html>. Accessed June 25, 2017

<sup>12</sup> Markey, S., Breen, SP., Lauzon, A., Gibson R., Ryser, L., Mealy, R. (2015). Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation. *State of Rural Canada Report 2015*. CCRF: Halifax, ON. P. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Rural Ontario Institute. (June 2013). Focus on Ontario.

## Social Characteristics of the Homeless

When designing the types of enumeration methodologies to be used during a homeless count, it is necessary to first consider the social characteristics of people who may make up the homeless population. By pre-determining the demographics of people who may find themselves homeless, enumeration methods should then be developed to target locations where these individuals may visit on either a regular or sporadic basis to access support services and resources.

By identifying potential demographics of the homeless population, prior to the enumeration the Service Manager may engage community partners who typically assist the identified social demographic as part of their business process and services. Taking the time to identify demographics and social markers will then help to target the enumeration efforts with the agencies providing associated services. An example of this would be to people who identify as Indigenous in a community, and making contact with the organizations and agencies such as the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and First Nations communities in the respective Service Manager area.

Many demographics, such as youth, women, people with mental health and/or addictions issues, seniors, Indigenous people, veterans, immigrants, refugees, and members of the LGBTTQ communities experience homelessness<sup>14</sup> in general at a recognized disproportionate higher level than many other demographic groups in the Canadian profile. This may be the result of these populations being marginalized in society without receiving key supports, or not being in a position to receive the key supports necessary to avoid homelessness. By identifying the

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<sup>14</sup> Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness. (2015). Key Recommendations. P. 27.

demographic groups with higher percentages of homelessness the development of an enumeration process could focus its resources on making contacts with agencies that provide services to the homeless and/or precariously housed households and directly with the homeless population, based on the type of enumeration to be conducted.

There is not just one type, or even a few types, of social characteristics that would typify a person who is homeless. As stated previously in this paper, there are four factors that define homelessness. Within each of these four definitions, people with different circumstances and different demographics would fit in to one of the definitions at the time of the enumeration. From the demographic categories identified, combined with the four definitions of homelessness, the social characteristics and variables in situational circumstances are numerous as each person's journey into homelessness is unique to their circumstances. Chronically homeless individuals have been found to have a higher rate of psychiatric disabilities, substance abuse and medical co-morbidities.<sup>15</sup> Youth homelessness studies, ages 13-24, often reveal that young individuals have repeat episodes of leaving the home prior to a permanent break in their living situation. Notably, there are more female youth than male youth who are homeless, and the highest percentage of youth, at 43% are either 15 or 16 years old (25% are age 14 or younger and 28% are age 17 and 18)<sup>16</sup>. Veteran homelessness is often characterized by pre-existing health conditions, post-traumatic stress disorder, personal problems and chronic physical and mental health difficulties. This may lead to difficulty working, dysfunctional interactions with people,

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<sup>15</sup> Nino, M., Loya, M., Cuevas, M. (2010). Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless. *Who are the Chronically Homeless? Social Characteristics and Risk Factors Associated with Chronic Homeless*. Vol XIX, No. 1 & 2.

<sup>16</sup> Mackenzie, D., Chamberlain, C. (2008). Youth Homelessness in Australia 2006. Commonwealth of Australia. P. 17.

and subsequently, barriers to health care.<sup>17</sup> Further examples could be given of the circumstances experienced by each of the social demographics, however, it is clear that for each of the identified demographics experiencing homelessness urgent supports are required and assistance from social service agencies that provide services to these groups will be of great assistance when trying to develop enumeration practices that stand a stronger chance of reaching the potential homeless people and having the ability to count them in an enumeration process, thereby making them an ideal conduit for engaging homeless individuals in enumeration. The very essence of the pre-established relationship offers an advantage as lack of trust of authority is frequently a deterrent from participation.

Social agencies may include Indigenous groups, veterans' affairs, mental health agencies, youth supports, churches, addiction centres, women's shelters, first responders and transitional housing. The inclusion of hospital, police and parole services may also provide further opportunities to survey individuals transitioning from provincial institutions and who may not yet be accessing external support agencies. An expansive list could easily continue with even more identifiable agencies and organizations within the Service Manager area, and it would be prudent for the enumeration process to identify each and every agency that may have contact with identifiable groups, including those offering less formal homelessness services, such as faith groups and food banks. It is very important to speak with these agencies firsthand regarding the enumeration process and to work in collaboration with the agencies and not attempt to undertake the homeless enumeration process in isolation. In order to fully reach the hidden

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<sup>17</sup> Forchuk, C., Richardson, J. (2014) Government of Canada. *Homelessness Among Veterans. What the Research Shows.*



aspect of rural homelessness, they must utilize all partners and resources. Identifiable social characteristics will help to target agencies and areas where homeless individuals may utilize services.

## **Methodologies Available for Homeless Enumeration**

The purpose of conducting an enumeration of the homeless population in a community may at first appear to be only about determining the numbers of homeless people in the community at that point in time. Delving deeper into the reasons for conducting an accurate enumeration, on a bi-annual basis as required by the Ministry of Housing, will help to show any changes in the rate of homelessness in communities. All levels of government, policy makers, politicians and the media now increasingly demand statistics on homelessness and other social issues.<sup>18</sup> It also helps to set policy and provides vital data elements to strengthen funding proposals for prevention and response programs.

Although it is known that homelessness exists, there has never been a legislated enumeration of the homeless population to assist in determining an accurate count. Statistics are kept on the number of people entering homeless shelters but there is very little information about people who are sleeping outside or staying temporarily with friends. A bi-annual enumeration count in a Service Manager area, which would be less onerous for the Service Manager staff than an annual enumeration count as this would be a significant amount of work on an annual basis for a Service Manager without permanent staffing supports provided by the

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<sup>18</sup> Cloke, P., Milbourne, P., Widdowfield, R. (2001) Making the homeless count? Enumerating rough sleepers and the distortion of homeless. *Policy & Politics*. 29(3). P. 259-279.

Ministry to develop and implement the enumeration, yet arguably will still provide current information to track trends over time and allows time to implement response to the findings.

The provincial requirement for all Service Manager areas to complete a homeless enumeration will help the Ministry to better understand the scale and nature of homelessness across the province, as well as inform current and future policy and program design.<sup>19</sup> For consistency and a reasonable degree of presumed accuracy, it would be desirable to determine the best manner of enumeration at the onset of the required process, and to continue this method for the foreseeable future.

By offering the same method of enumeration every two years, it may be assumed that similar methods are being practiced year-over-year, that similar agencies are being contacted for assistance and co-operation, and that social demographics are consistently being identified and captured in the enumeration process. If a Service Manager were to initiate their enumeration process, and then change enumeration processes at the two year interval, they risk that similar circumstances and situations are not being compared and a reliable and valid survey has not necessarily been completed. For multi-year consistency and accuracy, a Service Manager should determine the best method of enumeration at the on-set of the process by thoroughly investigating the methodologies available and best determining the manner that fits within their respective area. Therein lies the challenge – how does a Service Manager know which is the most suitable methodology? The rural challenge offers limited opportunities to weigh the various methods as there are limited choices of enumeration methods.

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<sup>19</sup> Government of Ontario. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager. *Homeless Enumeration*.

In a rural community, enumeration processes for homeless populations have typically not been completed due to lack of homelessness prevention funding; now is the time to develop robust practices based on sound methodologies that fit appropriately and reasonably within the rural community. It may be that one of the identified methodologies works best in a community; however, it is also possible that using and combining different enumeration methods will be the best fit for another community. With all enumeration methods, it is necessary to avoid counting individuals twice. Often, unique identifiers such as name, date of birth and self-reported gender are recorded to avoid potentially counting someone more than once.

There are three methodologies available for the enumeration of the homeless population in rural communities.

### **1. Point-in-Time Count**

Point-in-time counts, often referred to as PiT counts, consist of a team of volunteers, called counting teams, completing a physical count of the homeless population over a set period of hours on a designated day, or potentially two days. This may be as a single 12 hour window, or perhaps the evening of one day and the daytime of the next day. The counting teams ask scripted questions and record answers on data sheets set up for the recording of information.<sup>20</sup> In terms of case selection for a PiT count, a large-N random survey is undertaken. The counting teams visit locations considered to be “hot spots” such as shelters, transitional housing and urban downtown cores and begin asking everyone in the area if they would be willing to participate in the homelessness survey. Once the counting team has determined that the person would be willing to participate in the survey, they are then asked the identical scripted questions. It is

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<sup>20</sup> 20,000 Homes Campaign. (2016). Registry Week Tool Kit.

theorized that this approach would provide a representative sample of the actual homeless population in the community. It is possible that key groups are not captured during a PiT count, such as those staying with friends or simply not enumerated, given the short time-frame of a PiT. Weather also factors as to the accuracy of a PiT, as cold weather tends to result in fewer people sleeping rough and who have temporarily found a place to stay, and also to fewer people volunteering in the cold-weather months, leading potentially to a lower number of locations included in the PiT.

For increased representation, magnet events are also used to draw people to an identified location on a given day and time frame to assist with the enumeration process. The magnet events are publicized in advance by the Service Manager, and perhaps community agencies who have formed a partnership with the Service Manager. The magnet events may consist of ideas to draw people in, such as free meals, a no-cost haircut, or entertainment events such as a concert. The ideas for magnet events would definitely be tailored to the community in order to develop a magnet event that would draw as many people as possible and offer an enticement to people who may be homeless, which is why free services and events may be effective in drawing people. The counting teams attend the magnet events and ask the identical scripted questions to people willing to participate in the survey.

Point-in-time counts typically work best in larger, urban centres where people are often present and visible. PiT counts represent a challenge for smaller, rural areas where crowds of people are never really present on a typical day, other than during working hours. People may be visible after hours at locations such as restaurants, or perhaps at a tourist attraction, such as the beach, waterfront or a festival, during warmer weather months, however, this wouldn't

necessarily be the biggest draw for the homeless population. Finding people to be included in the PiT count, and who may also be representative of actual homeless populations would be extremely difficult in communities where hidden homelessness is often the norm.

In order to obtain a representative sample of communities within a service manager area, a cross-section of the cities and towns in the Service Manager area should be represented during the PiT count. The Ministry recommends that the number of municipalities or census tracts selected for the enumeration should cover at least 30 per cent of the total population of the Service Manager area. To do so, Service Managers should add together the populations of the communities selected (towns, villages, etc...) and the sum of these populations is required to be equal to or greater than 30 per cent of the total population of the Service Manager area.<sup>21</sup> This becomes problematic in very rural communities, as many communities would need to have multiple counting teams completing the PiT counts, and may not necessarily have the capacity in their volunteer sector for multiple counting teams in each community. The following chart shows Huron County, with a population previously mentioned at 59,297, and the difficulty in meeting 30 per cent of the population (which would be 17,790):

Town	Population <sup>22</sup>
Goderich	7,536
Exeter	4,649
Clinton	3,049
Wingham	2,934
Total	18,168

<sup>21</sup> Government of Ontario. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager. *Homeless Enumeration*.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada. (2016). Retrieved June 4, 2017.

For Huron County to participate in a PiT count, and follow the requirements set forth by the Ministry of Housing, a minimum of four towns with the larger populations in the County would need to be surveyed. The chart identifies the four towns with the highest population in Huron County. This would involve certain logistical difficulties if the PiT counts are to be completed simultaneously (same day and time frames). Each of the four towns would need more than one team to complete the PiT count based on designated areas. It would be too random and difficult for PiT count teams to efficiently cover the entire town, rather, each team would have a designated geographic area and should stay within this area. This then increases the need for more volunteers in order to provide a more robust coverage of the town, and volunteers may be a difficult commodity to secure in a rural area. Additionally, transportation for volunteers may be an issue. There is no public transportation in Huron County to enable volunteers to get to their assigned areas; and, the people overseeing the PiT count may struggle with the distance between communities, as the drive time between the towns of Exeter and Wingham, for example, is 55 minutes. Any issues or concerns would take significant driving time to reach and resolve.

It is obvious there are drawbacks to PiT counts in a rural Service Manager area. The biggest factor is the potential lack of a representative sample as the population is just not visible on streets and around downtown core areas, and thus not available to survey. PiT counts tend to work better in urban centres where teams of volunteers can easily reach the areas of the city most often identified with having potential homeless individuals. Point-in-time counts have been criticized for over-sampling chronic homelessness and under-sampling other homeless

populations, such as families with children or the temporarily homeless.<sup>23</sup> Point-in-time counts that occur over a short period of time theoretically under-sample people experiencing homelessness over a short period of time<sup>24</sup> or those who are temporarily homeless.

## **2. Period Prevalence Counts**

Period prevalence counts (PPC) also consist of a counting process; however, the interviews and counts are conducted by agencies participating in the enumeration process and are largely conducted at the agency's service location. Period prevalence counts take place over a longer period, such as seven or more days.<sup>25</sup> This length of time allows for a reasonable period in which people would access services on perhaps a weekly cycle, such as a food bank or a church meal program. However, it is understood that some people do not use services on a weekly basis, and may be missed in the count if the PPC is scheduled the week they do not visit. Additionally, some services only operate on specific days of the month, and again, people may be missed in the enumeration if the PPC is not scheduled during a particular time-limited service. It stands to reason that the longer the period prevalence count is in place, the more accurate the enumeration results.<sup>26</sup>

Service based methods produce the most accurate and reliable results. Collecting data at a wide range of organizations providing front-line services can potentially capture nearly all of

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<sup>23</sup> Segaert, A. (2012). The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada. Retrieved from: [http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Homelessness%20Partnering%20Secretariat%202013%20Segaert\\_0.pdf](http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Homelessness%20Partnering%20Secretariat%202013%20Segaert_0.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Rabinovitch, H. (2015). P. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Kauppi, C., Pallard, H., Faries, E. (2015). Homelessness in Greater Sudbury: 2015 Period Prevalence Count. Report prepared for the City of Greater Sudbury. Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy, Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario. P. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p, 6.

the urban homeless population (90% to 95%).<sup>27</sup> As this paper is concentrating on enumeration methods in rural communities, a comparison of urban and rural metrics in service based enumeration methods could easily be done in this case. The reasoning behind collecting enumeration information at a wide range of agencies is simply because it casts a wider net on people accessing the service over the longer specified period of time. This would be applicable in both rural and urban settings as the reasoning is identical. More people would have a need or an opportunity to use a service over a longer period of time, and thus more people have the potential to be surveyed and enumerated, if qualifying. It is possible that not all homeless individuals will be identified using this method, as they may choose not to use any services, or possibly not visit the service agency during the timeframe of the period prevalence count.

Period prevalence counts involve the participation of as many community partners, service agencies, and organizations within the Service Manager area as possible who are willing to participate in this endeavour. This would include any shelters and transitional housing facilities, as people currently staying in these facilities would be considered under one of the definitions of homelessness, given this type of service is not considered permanent. A broad range of agencies should be contacted to participate in the PPC. Communication with these agencies is recommended to be initiated four to six months before the PPC is scheduled to begin. It is very important to ensure agencies are willing to participate and that they also have the capacity to participate. Capacity may be an issue in rural areas as smaller agencies often struggle to find the resources to complete additional tasks, as there are simply fewer resources from

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<sup>27</sup> Peressini, T., McDonald, L., Hulchanski, D. (2010). Towards a Strategy for County the Homeless. *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*. Chapter. 8.3. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.



which to draw. Resources would include staff, facilities, time and funding, or any combination of these.

Contact with agencies regarding the PPC should be initiated at least four to six months or more before the scheduled date of the enumeration process. This provides time for the agencies to obtain any necessary approvals to participate and determine any staffing needs. Agencies to be contacted are those that provide social services and food service programs to low-income people, counselling services, addiction services, mental health agencies and program centres, as some examples. Advisory committees within the Service Manager area would be able to identify the agencies that provide these types of services, as there are some that are unique to the special needs of the community. For example, Safe Homes for Youth is as a non-profit organization in Huron County for youth age 16 – 18 who are experiencing a crisis or difficulties in their home life and Safe Homes for Youth offers mediation as an effort to prevent homelessness. Although this type of agency is not unique in Ontario, it may be called something different in another Service Manager area in the province. It is therefore important to identify and contact the specific service agencies and community partners within the geographic area. A volunteer engagement strategy should be developed by the Service Manager as a significant portion of the PPC will involve volunteers. The strategy would include recruitment criteria, placement and training. As volunteers will be assisting with the PPC, a strong training component should be developed including sensitivity of trauma, safety and confidentiality.

### **3. Registry Week**

Registry weeks are a type of hybrid between a point-in-time count and a period prevalence count. A registry week consists of teams of trained volunteers, led by Service Manager staff who canvass the community and engage individuals and families who may be experiencing homelessness in completing the enumeration survey. The locations of areas canvassed would include emergency shelters, drop-in centres, and outreach service areas.<sup>28</sup> Other known areas where individuals who are potentially experiencing homelessness may congregate, including public libraries and events in public parks. Registry weeks also involve the coordination of service agencies and organizations participating in the enumeration process to assist with administering the survey. The more services, agencies and locations that are canvassed would lead to a wider population being surveyed and ultimately a more accurate count of the homeless population in a community. The sampling is not as large or as random as a PiT count, and is designed to contact people who have a greater likelihood of presenting as homeless than a completely random point-in-time count. A registry week also carries the purpose of developing a registry list, which is a by-name list of people identifying as homeless, with the intent that the respective Service Manager would begin to know everyone by name, and be able to offer services and housing geared for these individuals and families.

One of the issues of concern in conducting a registry week in a rural community involves the number of volunteers required. Some rural communities are geographically very large in size, for example Huron County is 3,399 square kilometers<sup>29</sup>, and reaching all areas, or even a

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<sup>28</sup> Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness. (April 2016). Working to End Homelessness. Simcoe County 20,000 Homes Campaign Registry Week.

<sup>29</sup> Census Profile. 2016 Census – Huron County, Ontario. Stats Can. 2016. Retrieved June 11, 2017.

significant portion of designated areas within each community would have capacity issues. Numerous volunteers would be required (120 volunteers were involved in the Simcoe County registry week<sup>30</sup> at 4,860 square kilometers) and simply finding the resources to recruit the volunteers, and the volunteers themselves, is a substantial challenge.

## Survey Structure and Best Practices

The development of the questions to be asked during the enumeration process is a vital part in ensuring the required information is gathered and that it is as accurate as possible. Recognizing the value of strong, reliable and consistent data to inform policy, programs and services at both the provincial and Service Manager levels<sup>31</sup> is instrumental in developing the set of questions to be asked during the enumeration process. The Service Manager needs to determine exactly what types of evidence-based information should be collected that will provide a snapshot of the community and provide information for the creation and the implementation of programs that would ultimately have an impact on people experiencing homelessness.

Service Managers are required to provide client-level information to the Ministry of Housing on 15 required data points following the completion of their homeless enumeration.<sup>32</sup>

Data Point	Definition
Type of Current Housing/Lodging	Where a person is staying or will stay on the day enumeration is conducted

<sup>30</sup> Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness. (April 2016). Working to End Homelessness. Simcoe County 20,000 Homes Campaign Registry Week.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Housing. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager Enumeration. *Homeless Enumeration*. P. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Housing. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager Enumeration. *Homeless Enumeration*. P. 11.

Chronicity of Homelessness	The length of time that someone is homeless
Frequency of Homelessness	The number of times that someone is homeless
Reasons for Homelessness or Housing Loss	Reasons that caused or contributed to a person becoming homeless/losing their housing
Age	Number of years a person has lived
Indigenous Identity	People that identify as First Nations, Metis or Inuit
Racialized Identity	A racialized person is someone who experiences racialization, which is “the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life” <sup>33</sup>
Gender Identity	Each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is their sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person’s gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex
Sexual Orientation	Sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that forms part of who one is. It covers the range of human sexuality from lesbian, gay, two-spirit, and queer to bisexual and heterosexual
Language	The language that a person predominantly uses to communicate. This may also include the language that a person would prefer to receive services in
Family Homelessness	One or more adults experiencing homelessness with one or more dependent children under 18 years of age
Military Service	Someone who has served in the Canadian military
Health	Someone who identifies as having a health issue, which includes physical health, mental health, addictions and disability
Child Welfare (History of Foster Care)	The placement of a child or youth in the home of someone who receives compensation for caring for the child but is not the child’s parent. The number of years since leaving care will be collected
Income Source	Sources of income including various forms of assistance, benefits and employment

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-race-and-racism-fact-sheet>

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Housing. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager Enumeration. *Homeless Enumeration*

The above list of data points is a comprehensive start to key indicators the Ministry of Housing believes a Service Manager would need to know in order to develop evidence based programs. Many of these data points could then potentially be developed further into survey questions that offer more detail for which the survey participants may respond. An example would be the data point for Reasons for Homelessness/Housing Loss. The drop down list could potentially include categories such as: unable to pay rent, unemployment, substance abuse, divorce, low wages, other, etc... Providing the respondent with choices may help the respondent frame the question and respond accordingly and potentially eliminate more “I don’t know” responses. This qualitative data would likely aid in forming substantive responses. The Ministry indicates in their guiding framework the relevance of the questions. Upon review of the brief explanations, phrases such as “tracks trends over time”, “inform the development of culturally appropriate provincial responses” and “to assess whether particular groups are represented”<sup>35</sup> may demonstrate that the Ministry is looking for long-term metrics to be developed to meet the needs of the communities based on the survey results. By indicating long-term references and including explanations for areas that will take time to develop, it may be an assumption that long-term solutions are required.

Service Managers may also ask additional questions in the survey. It is at this point that service managers would begin to structure their survey to gain data on locally relevant topics that will begin to drive forward policies based on quantitative data. An example of an additional question that may be included in the enumeration survey is determining the types and number

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<sup>35</sup>Ministry of Housing. (January 2017). Guidelines for Service Manager Enumeration. *Homeless Enumeration*. P. 11-14.

of services that the survey participant has used over the past year and providing a drop down list of services which may then be referenced by the respondent. In this example, the services used would have a social or health use perspective, and would indicate a shelter or transitional home, day centre, health care or hospital, case management, addiction services and counseling, churches, and schools. The list could be tailored to identify actual named services within the community as an additional identifier, and also tailored to list the support services and agencies within the Service Manager community. Some of the data point questions required by the Ministry of Housing have the potential to be rather probing and could make some participants uncomfortable. Examples would be the data points on Child Welfare and also on Health. Both subject categories could potentially elicit strong emotions in people, and the likelihood that some people may decline answering, or provide an “I don’t know” answer, or terminate the survey, is always a possibility. It may be preferable to provide very basic drop down lists for each of these categories, with generic information. An example of this would be for Health. The drop down lists could indicate the basic sub-categories within the Health data point for chronic/acute, physical, addiction and mental health and not delve any deeper into specifics of the conditions. Establishing the messaging around the required data points within the enumeration, and offering training to the people who will be conducting the enumeration surveys, may provide a higher response and completion rate.

### **Case Studies from Rural Service Manager Enumerations**

For the purpose of this research paper, the definition of rural will be a population base of 125,000 people or less, based on the criteria identified earlier. Emphasis will be placed on Service

Managers that have smaller populations than this, however, as homeless enumeration is a relatively new undertaking, many smaller areas have not yet completed enumerations of their homeless population, or the data is not yet made public.

The case studies selected for review will provide information and evidence of the types of enumeration processes conducted in their respective regions; the challenges and successes and the types of enumeration processes undertaken. The rural emphasis provides real-life examples of what has been undertaken and what has been learned.

### ***City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton***

The City of Kawartha Lakes (pop. 75,423) and the County of Haliburton (pop. 18,062)<sup>36</sup> is considered a rural community based on low population and long distances to density. These two areas joined forces due to their geographic proximity and completed an enumeration of their homeless population in August 2016. The City of Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton (CKLH) chose the methodology of a registry week for their homeless enumeration process. The registry week used local homelessness support agencies, public libraries in small towns and public events as their locations to ask individuals the survey questions over a period of three days. CKLH identified the types of homelessness that would be categorized and offered three defined types: completely unsheltered, living in an emergency shelter or provisionally accommodated without a permanent tenancy.

Volunteers and staff were assigned a private space at the selected registry week locations, and all volunteers participated in the training sessions to learn about the campaign details, the

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<sup>36</sup> Census Canada 2016

survey tool being used and also how to approach a person experiencing homelessness. By offering training in this last component, CKLH demonstrated sensitivity to the nature of the people and this increases the likelihood for people to agree to participate in the enumeration survey and an increased likelihood that they will complete the survey. During the course of the homeless enumeration, 136 people were identified as homeless and 111 completed the full survey. The survey locations were evenly divided between the City of Kawartha Lakes, and the County of Haliburton, as both areas each had 21 location sites used in the enumeration.

The limitations of the enumeration process were identified. The size of the area at 7,084 square kilometers made it impossible to be fully surveyed based on existing resources and presented challenges that were overcome by pre-identifying locations in which to concentrate the enumeration surveys. The timing of the survey in the summer months meant the possibility that people were living rough and may not have used any of the facilities manned by the volunteers during the three days of the enumeration. The challenge to individuals self-identifying as homeless without the possibility of collaboration or confirmation of this information was mentioned as a limitation, however, this may be the situation in many enumerations conducted outside of actual emergency shelters. The final limitation was the hesitancy of people to identify as homeless. The hesitancy may stem from fear of loss of services, or fear of failure to provide the basic necessities for their children and subsequent intervention from children's aid services, or other fears the individuals may have. This hesitancy to participate may be minimized by revisiting the definition of being homeless and discussion with the person being surveyed as to the changing circumstances a person may find themselves in and how they could fit into the definitions, with the knowledge that the survey information is completely confidential.



In terms of findings within CKLH's enumeration process, the final report indicates that the information will help to design and implement a collaborative service response and move their community towards ending homelessness.<sup>37</sup> It is the enumeration information that helps to define where the pressures are in a community and where the gaps in service areas may be. The intent is that next steps may begin to be useful for programming, additional housing units, staffing, funding and ongoing supports for high acuity individuals.

The findings have revealed information that has surprised people. A side bar graphics in the CKLH report revealed that 46% of respondents have been without permanent housing for 2+ years; furthermore, 27% of adults and 21% of seniors indicate that their physical health has caused them to lose their housing, offering insights into one's journey into homelessness, which is an important finding to tailor services. The CKLH report then ties this health related issue into even more information. The CKLH enumeration survey expands on the Ministry's 15 data points, particularly the Health question, by delving deeper into health issues and circumstances. The enumeration survey includes questions on the survey respondent's number of emergency room visits, hospitalization history, use of an ambulance and the use of a crisis service in the previous six months. A person's health status can be linked to their housing situation, with precarious housing and homeless situations often manifesting as increased visits to health care facilities or other facilities. It is documented that "when people live in safe and appropriate housing that is affordable to their particular circumstances, they typically have better health outcomes, experience less stress and are better able to access and make use of a range of services that they

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<sup>37</sup> City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton. (2016). *20,000 Homes Registry Week. Final Report*. P. 4.

may need.”<sup>38</sup> The CKLH final report examines the costs of unresolved homelessness to the health care system. Frequent visits to the hospital are common amongst the homeless population, and this was echoed in the CKLH enumeration results for their region. Homeless people may utilize a hospital because they are not well but also seek access to a hospital, or other institutions, as a relief from the conditions of homelessness.<sup>39</sup> In their next steps, CKLH has committed to reviewing the cost effectiveness of an improved response to housing and homelessness.<sup>40</sup>

The CKLH enumeration survey also asks further questions of the survey participants regarding interactions with police services and incarceration. At a rate of three or more occurrences in the previous six months, frequent users are found to account for 54% of all interactions with police and 25% of experiences with incarcerations. The CKLH survey also asked questions to the people completing the survey about risk factors such as being attacked, threatened or engaging in risky behavior. There are great similarities between the increased costs of health care and the increased cost to the police and justice systems regarding homelessness and precariously housed situations. By stabilizing housing for individuals in a safe and affordable format, it has been proven that the costs associated with these systems decreases. Indeed, it is critical to recognize that there is a cost to not acting.<sup>41</sup>

The CKLH enumeration survey offers one final step in the process. They asked two questions at the end of the survey of those interviewed: where is it easiest to find you and is

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<sup>38</sup> Org Code Consulting. (2014). A Long-Term Affordable Housing and Homelessness Plan for the County of Huron 2014-2024. P. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Kauppi, C., O’Grady, B., Schiff, R., Martin, F. and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. (2017). Homelessness and Hidden Homelessness in Rural and Northern Ontario. Guelph, ON: Rural Ontario Institute. P. 111.

<sup>40</sup> City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton. (2016). *20,000 Homes Registry Week. Final Report*. P. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Org Code Consulting. (2014). A Long-Term Affordable Housing and Homelessness Plan for the County of Huron 2014-2024. P. 12.

there a contact phone number or email where we may reach you<sup>42</sup>. Committed to their mission of identifying homeless and working towards ending homelessness in their community, CKLH has adopted a housing first approach and the enumeration process further helped them in bringing that vision to fruition by getting to know the names of the individuals in their community living without a home.

### ***Stratford, Perth County and St. Mary's***

With a combined population base of 76,796<sup>43</sup> this region is also considered rural through the prescribed definition and is located in southwestern Ontario. The biggest centre within Perth County is the city of Stratford, with a population of 31,465. Stratford-Perth, as the Service Manager, completed an enumeration of their homeless population in April 2017.

The methodology selected for the enumeration process was a combination of two processes. They chose to complete a registry week process with a PiT count, and utilized a screening tool called the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). The VI-SPDAT is a screening assessment tool used to quickly assess the health and social acuity needs of homeless persons and then match them with the most appropriate supports and housing options available.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton. (2016). *20,000 Homes Registry Week. Final Report. Appendix 1*

<sup>43</sup> Statistics Canada. 2017. *Perth, CTY [Census division], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released May 3, 2017.*  
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed July 3, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Org Code Consulting. (2014). Retrieved May 24, 2017 from:  
[http://orgcode.nationbuilder.com/vi\\_spdat](http://orgcode.nationbuilder.com/vi_spdat)

The registry week process involved the assistance of many community partner agencies and organizations that offer services and supports of a social nature. These included such agencies as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Choices for Change (a local addiction counselling service), John Howard Society, provincial correctional services and so forth. The locations selected for the registry week included community meal programs, the emergency shelter and transitional housing program, food bank distribution centre, local churches, social services drop-in centres and outdoor public spaces known to be frequented by people potentially experiencing homelessness. The surveys were conducted by social services staff within the service manager area and staff of the partnering agencies. Training on the use of the VI-SPDAT assessment tool and the PiT count survey was conducted by a consulting agency, OrgCode Consulting. By using OrgCode Consulting for the training process, the Service Manager has recognized the requirement for both accurate data collection and also the sensitivity directly attached to the subject of homelessness and as highlighted within Stratford-Perth's report to their local Council.

The definition of homelessness is provided in the Stratford-Perth enumeration process. They have chosen two definitions from which to base their assessment:

- Chronically homeless refers to individuals who are currently homeless and have been for six months or more in the past year;
- Episodically homeless refers to individuals who are currently homeless and have experienced 3 or more episodes of homeless in the past year.

It is interesting to note that Stratford-Perth's homeless definition captures what may be perceived as potentially a smaller group. The question of whether those who are considered precariously housed should be counted is not clear in Stratford-Perth's report. Stratford-Perth

did enumerate the individuals that were living in transitional types of programs, such as a correctional facility, shelter or transitional housing program, and this contributes to providing a more accurate count of their homeless population.

During the course of the enumeration, Stratford-Perth identified 57 individuals/families who presented as homeless. They also indicate that another 15 individuals/families are known to the staff and agencies participating in the enumeration but these people were unable to be contacted or refused to complete the survey.<sup>45</sup> It has previously been recognized in this report that a percentage of people will not want to participate in an enumeration process, and allowance should be made for this as under-representation may occur. An advantage in rural communities, staff at the agencies and the Service Manager's office often know people by name and are aware when specific individuals are not captured in the enumeration process. By offering a structured count to increase the likelihood of capturing all potentially homeless, and having one person enter all of the data, the accuracy of the data is improved, and potential duplications may be avoided. These are all possible in a smaller, rural Service Manager area.

Stratford-Perth has listed in their report a review of the questions related to health. Their categories include physical health, substance use, mental health, abuse and tri-morbidity. Included in the enumeration were emergency services used by individuals which are broken down by type of service and frequency. The risk of harm is also within the report and provides statistics on individuals in the enumeration survey who identified as having been attacked, beaten, threatened, harmed themselves, experienced legal issues, forced into activities or

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<sup>45</sup> The Corporation of the City of Stratford. Social Services Sub-Committee. Management Report to Council. June 14, 2017.

participated in risky behaviours. The health issues along with involvement with emergency and police services offers increased exposure to health and risk factors, which is often directly linked to the likelihood of incidents of homelessness.

In the analysis and summary of Stratford-Perth's report to Council, they acknowledge that although the findings are likely an under-representation of local homelessness, as it is not possible to reach all who may be homeless, it does shed light on the issue. The initial numbers will be used as a baseline, and they indicate in their report that they had lessons learned and ways to make the process even more representative in future years. The analysis draws attention to the significant number of individuals experiencing homelessness facing complex barriers to finding a home. The findings are being used as a basis for existing programs to be tailored to meet these needs, such as more dedicated case management.

### ***Cape Breton, Nova Scotia***

With a population base of 94,285<sup>46</sup> the regional municipality of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia is also considered a rural area, based on the pre-determined definition for a rural area.

In April 2016, Cape Breton undertook an enumeration of the homeless in their region using two distinct methodologies. The researchers conducting the enumeration chose to use a PiT count and a service-based method during the same time frame. A service-based count is similar to a period prevalence count and registry week as community-based organizations and government services that assist homeless populations were utilized. There were three

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<sup>46</sup> Statistics Canada. 2017. *Cape Breton, RGM [Census subdivision], Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia [Province]* (table). *Census Profile*. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released May 3, 2017. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed July 3, 2017).

definitions of homelessness used during the enumeration process, which assisted in counting individuals and families experiencing a range of homelessness situations. The three defined types of homelessness included unsheltered, emergency sheltered and provisionally accommodated.

The Cape Breton enumeration consisted of a 12 hour PiT count and a service-based count for the month of April 2016. The results show significantly different counts produced by the two methods. The PiT count measured 137 individuals/families identifying as homeless, and the service-based count measured 279 individuals/families identifying as homeless. It should be noted that unique identifiers were used to avoid duplication in counting the same person more than once for each enumeration method. Assuming that a PiT count is said to be representative of the homeless population at that given point in time, the numbers are strikingly different. Does this give pause to the validity of the PiT count as a methodology?

The final report on the Cape Breton enumeration speaks to the limitations of their enumeration processes. They have indicated that some key service providers and First Nations' communities declined to participate. This is similar to other Service Manager areas who also identified that some agencies did not wish to participate. Another limitation experienced was the commitment from the staff conducting the survey as the statistics reported by some organizations in the enumeration process appeared to be low based on the number of clients they serve and the time spent as an organization as a whole on homelessness issues.<sup>47</sup> There was concern mentioned that the service providers used their own knowledge and information from client files, which may have had an impact on the accuracy of the numbers. Preparing staff

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<sup>47</sup> Deveaux, F., Leviten-Reid, C. (2016). Measuring Housing and Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

and volunteers with specific survey questions, along with appropriate training to conduct the survey may assist in increasing the confidence and legitimacy of their enumeration results.

## Next Steps

Once the enumerated data is collected on the homeless populations for the respective Service Manager area, it is reasonable to question what happens with the data. The Ministry's data points speak to reasons why the data is being collected from their perspective. The Service Managers may also build on their data and begin to develop and fine-tune policies and processes already in place.

There has been a shift within the upper levels of government from managing the homeless situation to a focus on ending homelessness. The Ministry announced long-term work by setting a target to end chronic homelessness in ten years.<sup>48</sup> As referenced under the case studies section, there are significant costs in many different sectors attached to the issue of homelessness. Having large numbers of Canadians without housing exceeds the costs of solving homelessness or providing people with affordable housing.<sup>49</sup> The following are estimate of the average monthly costs of providing the following services: shelter bed - \$1,932; provincial jail - \$4,333; hospital bed - \$10,900 and social housing - \$200.<sup>50</sup> From these statistics it can be determined that there are significant financial benefits to having people housed in affordable units rather than staying in shelter beds, incarcerated or hospitalized.

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<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. (March 2016). Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update. Queen's Printer for Ontario.

<sup>49</sup> Gaetz, S. (2012). The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing? Toronto, ON: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. P. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 5.



It may be presumed and anticipated that the enumeration statistics will enable all levels of government to ensure that policies are tied to the development of programs that will provide solutions. Policies may take time and evidence to drive change, and homeless enumeration may be a contributing driver towards significant policy changes that allow funding to flow towards affordable housing while recognizing that there are associated costs in shelters, prisons or hospitals. In contemporary policy studies, grand theories are eschewed and have been replaced by the recognition that social problems and the government's response to them are affected by a range of factors<sup>51</sup>. The government's requirement for the enumeration of the homeless populations across Ontario may begin to offer evidence that the government will then act upon the information that has been learned, and use this information in policy change to meet the enumeration findings within the Service Manager areas.

There are no quantifiable measurables specifically related from the Ministry of Housing's direction to complete an enumeration process of a Service Manager's homeless population. The presumption that both high level and local level policies, programs, funding and supports will be a direct result of homeless enumeration may be overreaching. The data from year-over-year enumerations will provide a trend, yet it will be a tri-level government approach to then attempt solutions to the issue. The three levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) would have a bigger impact should they work cooperatively together towards solving the homelessness issue. Working in silos will not provide the multi-pronged approach that will be required to tackle such a far-reaching issue.

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<sup>51</sup> Howlett, M., Ramesh, M., Perl, A. (2009). *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles & Policy Subsystems*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press. P. 210.

## Conclusion

In this review, more than just the best method for conducting an enumeration of the homeless population in a rural community was found. It led to a bigger picture of next steps and what to do with the data. Rather than just reporting the data, as required, to the local level and the provincial level, it may give the impetus to tailor programs and develop new policies to meet the actual requirements that have been determined. Policy design is about choosing the most appropriate instrument to deal with the policy problems as it has been defined in order to achieve a given policy goal.<sup>52</sup> It is a reality that homelessness exists in rural Ontario. It may not be visible but the need is real.

There is certainly evidence of pros and cons for each of the three methodologies for enumeration. PiT counts may work best in urban environments, where lots of people on the streets is a more common sight; however, the potential to over-count one type of homelessness and under-count another type is possible. Period prevalence works well in rural environments assuming there is willing participation from a significant number of service providers in the Service Manager area as this requires a great deal of coordination and commitment from all. Registry weeks work well within Service Manager areas that have capacity to then follow up with the homeless individuals and families who have been identified and enumerated. It would be a Service Manager's responsibility to determine which would work best of these enumeration types, or perhaps a hybrid of the methodologies. It is not possible to capture every person who

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<sup>52</sup> Pal, L. (2010). *Beyond Policy Analysis: Public Issue Management in Turbulent Times*. Carleton University: Nelson Education, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. P. 144.

is experiencing homelessness, as the methodologies all have limitations and homelessness is a fluid state.<sup>53</sup>

Whichever method is chosen, it needs to be a useful way to measure homelessness that may then impact solutions. Homelessness is a complex problem with multiple layers. There is no one identifiable model; people have become homeless based on their experiences, and no two are alike. Determining solutions for homelessness may begin with determining exactly how many people are homeless, and identifying the significant factors contributing to their homelessness. Rural enumeration stands to further enable citizens to gain a comprehensive understanding of their community, minimize stigma and be a part of mobilizing change.

By conducting the most thorough and accurate enumeration possible, both rural and urban Service Managers will have representative numbers for their community to build evidence based programs to move towards the goal of ending chronic homelessness.

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<sup>53</sup> Rabinovitch, H. (2015). P. 70.

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