



# Still Dying on the Streets

Homeless Deaths in British Columbia, 2006-2014  
(Second Edition, 2016)

**Still Dying on the Streets:  
Homeless Deaths in British Columbia, 2006-2014  
(Second edition, 2016)**

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# Executive Summary

At least 46 homeless people died in British Columbia in 2014—a 70 per cent increase from the year before.<sup>1</sup> It is the highest number of homeless deaths in a single year in this province since 2008 and it marks a stark increase in the number of vulnerable lives that were unnecessarily lost.

*Still Dying on the Streets* updates Megaphone's landmark report on homeless deaths, *Dying on the Streets* (which looked at homeless deaths from 2006-2013), with the most recently available data from 2014.

As municipalities across B.C. continue to struggle with a lack of affordable housing and appropriate harm reduction services, a growing number of homeless people are dying on the streets and in shelters.

With overdose deaths rising dramatically in 2015, evictions of residents in low-income buildings

<sup>1</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals*.

increasing, and affordable housing still not meeting demand, the number of homeless deaths in this province promises to only increase.

## Who is dying

The BC Coroners Service only investigates roughly a quarter of all deaths in the province. According to the coroner, 325 homeless people died in this province between 2006 and 2014.<sup>2</sup> However, due to the nature of their deaths, homeless deaths are often investigated at a higher rate. Therefore, the BC Coroners Service estimates the true number is roughly twice as high.

Acknowledging the coroner's data is an undercount is important. If we are not getting an accurate number, we are not getting a thorough understanding of this crisis and not able to respond with the proper solutions.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Since homeless deaths are largely preventable, not fully counting these deaths means we are not acknowledging that they are a tragic result of governments' failure to provide proper housing and social services.

The vast majority of homeless deaths continue to be men. However, as noted in *Dying on the Streets*, women make up a much higher percentage of the hidden homeless population, which would likely skew this data. Homeless women face an increased risk of assault and sexual abuse, which is why many women avoid the shelter system and the streets, often remaining in abusive and violent relationships.

Aboriginal homeless deaths were once again not released as part of the updated data. The BC Coroners Service is working with the First Nations Health Authority to improve how it counts Aboriginal deaths and will release data at a later date.

However, Megaphone was able to obtain updated numbers last year in a separate report, which show that Aboriginal people account for 15.6 per cent of all homeless deaths between 2006-2013, despite making up just 5.4 per cent of the province's general population.<sup>3</sup> The BC Coroners Service acknowledges that is likely an undercount, as well.

## How homeless people are dying

Homeless deaths are still largely preventable. In 2014, the BC Coroners Service determined that 52.2 per cent of homeless deaths were "accidental" (48.3 per cent between 2006 and 2014). In contrast, "accidental" deaths account for just 16.5 per cent of all deaths in the general population investigated by the BC Coroners Service. The percentage of homicide and suicide deaths for homeless individuals is also roughly double that of the general population.

Homelessness puts people in an extreme state of vulnerability and greatly increases their chance of dying through violent means.

The BC Coroners Service classifies drug and alcohol related deaths as "accidental". Drug and alcohol deaths still account for the largest number of homeless deaths—30.4 per cent in 2014 and 29.9 per cent between 2007 and 2014. With illicit drug overdose deaths in B.C. dramatically rising to 465 deaths in 2015, homeless deaths will likely increase when updated data is released for 2015.

## Where homeless people are dying

The doubling of homeless deaths in the Fraser and Northern regions and the tripling of deaths in the Interior region show a need for improved housing and

<sup>3</sup> BC Coroners Service. (February 12, 2014). *Deaths among Homeless Individuals 2007-2013 (Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity)*.

services in these communities. Government failure to respond to this crisis will have fatal consequences for our most vulnerable citizens.

The highest overall number of homeless deaths in 2014 occurred in the Fraser region, which doubled to 14 deaths from seven the year before. A combination of rising housing prices and a lack of appropriate social and health services has put increased pressure on the region and made homeless people more marginalized.

Cities such as Abbotsford, New Westminster, Surrey, and Maple Ridge have seen a rise in tent cities and camps—which give homeless people some sense of security and community. However, these municipalities have responded by aggressively dispersing these camps, causing displacement and disconnecting people from the services they need to survive.

## When homeless people are dying

The newly released figures confirm that homeless people continue to die at a much earlier age than the general population. The median age of death for a homeless person in the province is between 40 and 49 years of age.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with the general population's average age of death of 76.4 years of age<sup>5</sup> and a 2014 average life expectancy of 82.92 years.<sup>6</sup>

Homelessness is a health crisis and an early death sentence.

By illustrating the deadliness of homelessness, and demonstrating that these deaths are largely preventable, Megaphone aims to galvanize governments to do more to end homelessness. It is estimated that there are as many as 15,500 homeless people in B.C.—municipal, provincial, and federal governments can and must do much more to support this population and help get them out of harm's way.

*Still Dying on the Streets* is written in commemoration of every homeless person who has died in British Columbia—many died violently and anonymously. This report aims to honour their lives and fight for those who are currently experiencing homelessness.



Sean Condon  
Executive Director  
Megaphone

<sup>4</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals*.

<sup>5</sup> British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. *Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators: One hundred and Fortieth Annual Report 2011*.

<sup>6</sup> BC Stats, Ministry of Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services (June 2015). Life Expectancy at Age 0.

## Key Findings

**46**

homeless people died in 2014—70 per cent increase from 2013.

**14**

homeless people died in the Fraser region in 2014—a 100 per cent increase from 2013.

**48.3%**

of all reported homeless deaths are "accidental", compared to just 16.5 per cent of all deaths in the general population.

**15.6%**

of all reported homeless deaths are Aboriginal people, despite making up just 5.4 per cent of the general population.

**40-49 years old**

is the median age of death for a homeless person in B.C., compared to an average age of death of 76.4 years of age in the general population.

**27%**

Illicit drug overdose deaths rose 27 per cent in 2015, meaning homeless deaths will likely increase again when 2015 data is released.



Photo by Colleen Flanagan/Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News

## PROFILE: ANITA HAUCK

Anita Hauck spent her whole life helping others. When she was a child she would stand up for classmates she thought had been wronged. As an adult, she became a spokesperson for the homeless tent city in Maple Ridge, advocating for homeless people's rights.

Tragically, it would also be how she died. On September 27, hearing that a fellow homeless person was struggling to get warm, Anita climbed into a clothing donation bin, like she had done many times before, to get them a jacket and blanket. But this time she got stuck.

By the time the rescuers were able to free her from the donation bin, she was unconscious. She died in the hospital the next night, with her family at her side. She was 44 years old and left behind five children.

Anita was born in Vancouver, where she was a precocious and thoughtful child—often giving away the few Christmas gifts she received to less fortunate kids.

"She was amazing," says Karen Peters, Anita's sister. "She was a very intelligent girl, very artistic, very caring. They say good ones die young, and she was a good soul."

However, things took an awful turn when she was 15 and was raped by a group of men. It wasn't long after that she began a long battle with drug addiction.

She moved to Maple Ridge roughly 10 years ago, where she became an active member with the Salvation Army's Caring Place—going through its treatment program and volunteering at its kitchen. But continued struggles with a domestic partner

and addiction pushed her back on the street.

Despite her struggles, she continued to fight for others. She was a constant at city council meetings, pushing the mayor to do more to help the city's homeless. At an all-candidates mayoral debate in 2014, she implored the candidates to do something about the high cost of housing. When a homeless camp sprang up on Cliff Avenue in May 2015, Anita moved in and became one of the spokespeople.

"Helping out with the tent city gave her hope, peace and happiness," says Karen. "She was able to help others even though she was down herself."

Anita fought to keep the Salvation Army shelter open after city council opted to switch to a new temporary low-barrier shelter run by RainCity Housing—arguing the city needed both. She also advocated that homeless people needed their own parcel of land to manage, saying cities need to empower homeless people.

Her passing has left a deep scar on the many people who were close to her.

"I was with her when she died," says Loretta

Sundstrom, Anita's mother. "She was on life support. I did not want her to leave; I tried to keep her. It hit me so hard. The bottom dropped right out of me."

Anita was a week away from getting into an apartment when she died. Her family says more needs to be done to support people experiencing homelessness.

"People think they can just ignore homelessness and it will go away," says Karen. "We need to provide shelter, food, and clothes for people. They are somebody's family. They're our family. We have to stop shying away from the fact that we are putting people on the street."

Anita's death is still under investigation by the BC Coroners Service.

## Homeless Deaths Data

The BC Coroners Service has determined that 325 homeless people have died in B.C. over the past nine years. In 2014, there were 46 homeless deaths—a 70 per cent increase from the year before and the highest number of homeless deaths in this province since 2008.

The BC Coroners Service only investigates roughly a quarter of all deaths in the province. Due to the nature of their deaths, homeless deaths are often investigated at a higher rate. However, the coroner is unable to get a full accounting because of how homeless deaths are counted and the difficulty of tracking the hidden homeless. Therefore, the BC Coroners Service estimates the true number is roughly twice as high.

The BC Coroners Service considers someone homeless at their time of death “if ‘no fixed address’ was given as the home address, the injury premise was a ‘homeless shelter’ or if the words ‘homeless’, ‘no fixed address’, ‘living on the streets’, or ‘transient’ were noted text searches.”<sup>7</sup>

The BC Coroners Service does not count:

- People who do not have a permanent residence, but are temporarily residing and paying rent in a motel, a hotel, or another form of rental accommodation
- People residing in structures intended for habitation without ownership, a rental agreement, or consent (‘squatters’)
- People in correctional institutions, hospitals, or residential drug or alcohol treatment facilities
- People who have a permanent residence, but are considered at high risk of homelessness because of unemployment, domestic violence, or other factors.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### Homeless Deaths in B.C.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Street	21	26	30	32	17	10	16	7	19	<b>178</b>
Shelter	10	16	13	10	11	6	9	15	20	<b>110</b>
Unknown	-	1	7	1	4	9	3	5	7	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>325</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

Acknowledging the data is an undercount is important: homelessness is a health hazard and an early death sentence. The BC Coroners Service and regional health authorities must do more coordinating in order to get all data on this crisis.

From 2006 to 2012, ‘street’ homeless deaths consistently outnumbered ‘shelter’ homeless deaths. The past two years of data show the reverse. While there have been increased efforts by governments to create more shelter spaces across the province (sometimes just a mat on the floor), the coroner’s data shows that just creating shelter spaces does not guarantee an increase in safety for a homeless individual.

While temporary and low-barrier shelter spaces are an important tool to help homeless people get off the street, a shelter is not a home. The best way to prevent homeless deaths is to end homelessness, both street and shelter. All levels of government need to work in coordination to create the social and affordable housing needed to address this crisis.

## Homeless Deaths Demographics

According to the BC Coroners Service’s data, the vast majority of homeless deaths in 2014 were male (41 deaths, or 89.1 per cent), which is consistent with previous years.<sup>9</sup>

However, as noted in *Dying on the Streets*, women make up a much higher percentage of the hidden homeless population, which would likely skew this data. Homeless women face an increased risk of assault and sexual abuse, which is why many women avoid the shelter system and the streets, often remaining in abusive and violent relationships.

The BC Coroners Service offers age ranges for homeless deaths. In 2014, the median age of death of a homeless person in B.C. was between 40 and 49 years old, which is consistent with the overall median age of death from 2006 to 2014.

In contrast, the average age of death in B.C. was 76.4 years in 2011, the most recent available data.<sup>10</sup> Homeless people in this province are dying roughly three decades

<sup>9</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals*.

<sup>10</sup> British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. *Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators: One hundred and Fortieth Annual Report 2011*.

earlier than the general population.

When looking at life expectancy in B.C., homeless individuals are dying much earlier than the averages. In 1976 (roughly when many of the recently deceased homeless people were born), the average life expectancy in the province was 74.03 years. In 2014, the average life expectancy was 82.92 years.<sup>11</sup>

Homelessness is an early death sentence. Governments must address this crisis through this lens and take immediate action toward ending homelessness.

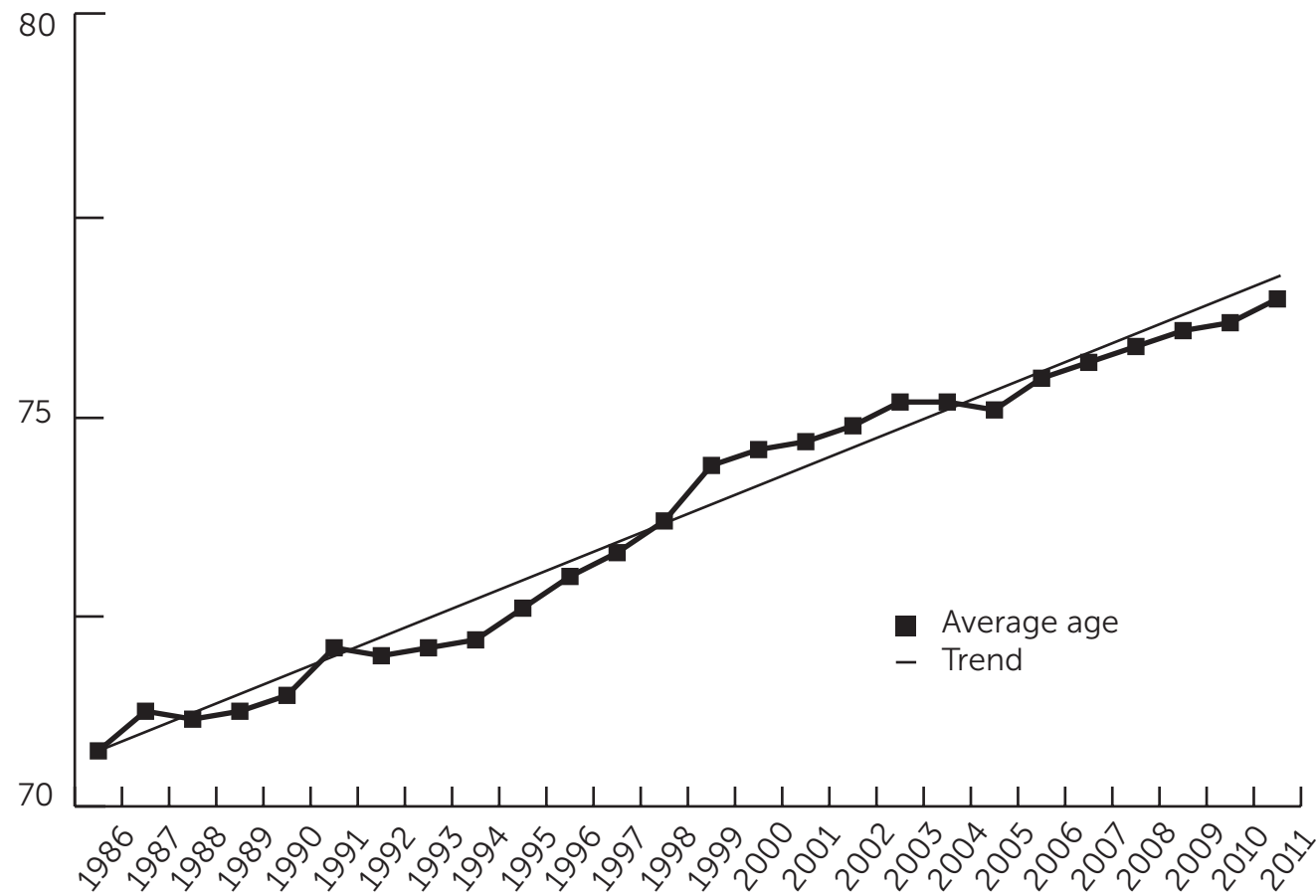
<sup>11</sup> BC Stats, Ministry of Technology, Innovation and Citizens’ Services (June 2015). *Life Expectancy at Age 0*.

### Homeless Deaths by Age

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
10-19	0	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	<b>2</b>
20-29	4	5	6	1	4	4	5	3	5	<b>37</b>
30-39	7	6	9	6	11	4	5	8	9	<b>65</b>
40-49	10	17	14	19	8	5	10	7	9	<b>99</b>
50-59	9	12	16	14	6	7	4	4	16	<b>88</b>
60-69	1	2	4	2	2	5	2	5	4	<b>27</b>
70-79	0	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	<b>5</b>
80+	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>325</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

## Average Age at Death, BC, 1986-2011



Source: British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency

## Aboriginal Homeless Deaths

Once again, the BC Coroners Service did not release Aboriginal homeless deaths as part of its data. The BC Coroners Service says it is working with the First Nations Health Authority to improve its accounting, which is a positive development.

However, Megaphone obtained separated Aboriginal homeless deaths numbers for 2007 to 2013 from the BC Coroners Service, which show that Aboriginal people accounted for 15.6 per cent of all homeless deaths between 2006-2013, despite making up just 5.4 per cent of the province's population.<sup>12</sup>

The BC Coroners Service admits the numbers of Aboriginal homeless deaths are a probable undercount. "Aboriginal identity is determined by information gathered during the coroner's investigation from family and friends, or notation on the Vital Statistics Registration of Death. As such, these statistics may not capture all deaths of homeless or aboriginal individuals, representing only cases that could be identified and confirmed via this method."<sup>13</sup>

It is likely that Aboriginal people make up an even higher percentage of homeless deaths in B.C. According to the 2015 Vancouver Homeless Count, Aboriginal people account for 32 per cent of the city's homeless population, despite making up just two per cent of the city's population.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, the coroner's data does not offer greater detail into where Aboriginal homeless deaths occurred or why. To gain a better understanding of the impacts homelessness is having on the most marginalized members of the province, the BC Coroners Service must present a more robust data analysis when updates

<sup>12</sup> BC Coroners Service. (February 12, 2014). *Deaths among Homeless Individuals 2007-2013 (Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity)*.  
<sup>13</sup> BC Coroners Service. (February 12, 2014). *Deaths among Homeless Individuals 2007-2013 (Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity)*.  
<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Matt. (July 2015). *Vancouver Homeless Count 2015*.

### Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	%
Aboriginal	6	8	7	2	4	6	6	<b>15.6</b>
Non-Aboriginal	33	45	35	32	21	23	22	<b>84.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>53*</b>	<b>42*</b>	<b>34*</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28*</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Total numbers have since been updated by the BC Coroners Services  
 Source: BC Coroners Service

to Aboriginal homeless deaths are released.

## How Homeless People Died

The BC Coroners Service provides data that examines the means of death for homeless individuals in British Columbia. According to its data, 157 deaths, or 48.3 per cent of all homeless deaths over the past nine years, were deemed “accidental”—which includes drug and alcohol overdoses, motor vehicle incidents, and drowning.

In 2014, there was an increase in accidental deaths, both in number and percentage—attributing for 24 of the 46 deaths, or 52.2 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

15 BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of*

Each year the BC Coroners Service investigates approximately 25 per cent of all deaths that occur in the province. Examining the means of death for the investigated deaths of the general population in B.C. between 2006 and 2011 (the last year of publicly available data) the coroner’s statistics shows the most common way to die is by natural circumstances (73.1 per cent), while accidental deaths account for just 16.5 per cent of all investigated deaths.<sup>16</sup>

When comparing the means of death of the homeless population against that of the general population, homeless individuals are almost three times as likely to die by accidental means and roughly twice as likely to die by suicide or homicide.

*Homeless Individuals.*

16 BC Coroners Service. 2011 *Annual Report.*

### Classification of Deaths, Homeless

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
Accidental	12	26	25	22	16	10	12	10	24	157	48.3
Natural	10	10	16	9	5	10	6	8	12	86	26.5
Suicide	4	3	4	7	6	3	5	3	7	42	12.9
Undetermined	2	4	2	3	4	1	5	5	1	27	8.3
Homicide	3	-	3	2	1	1	-	1	2	13	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>325</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service

### Classification of Deaths, General Population

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	%
Accidental	1,383	1,318	1,389	1,449	1,600	1,740	7,490	16.5
Natural	5,668	5,420	5,819	5,473	5,480	5,390	33,270	73.1
Suicide	461	476	483	510	531	528	2,989	6.6
Undetermined	288	160	158	159	150	161	1,076	2.4
Homicide	133	103	122	132	115	93	698	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,953</b>	<b>7,477</b>	<b>7,971</b>	<b>7,723</b>	<b>7,876</b>	<b>7,912</b>	<b>45,523</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service

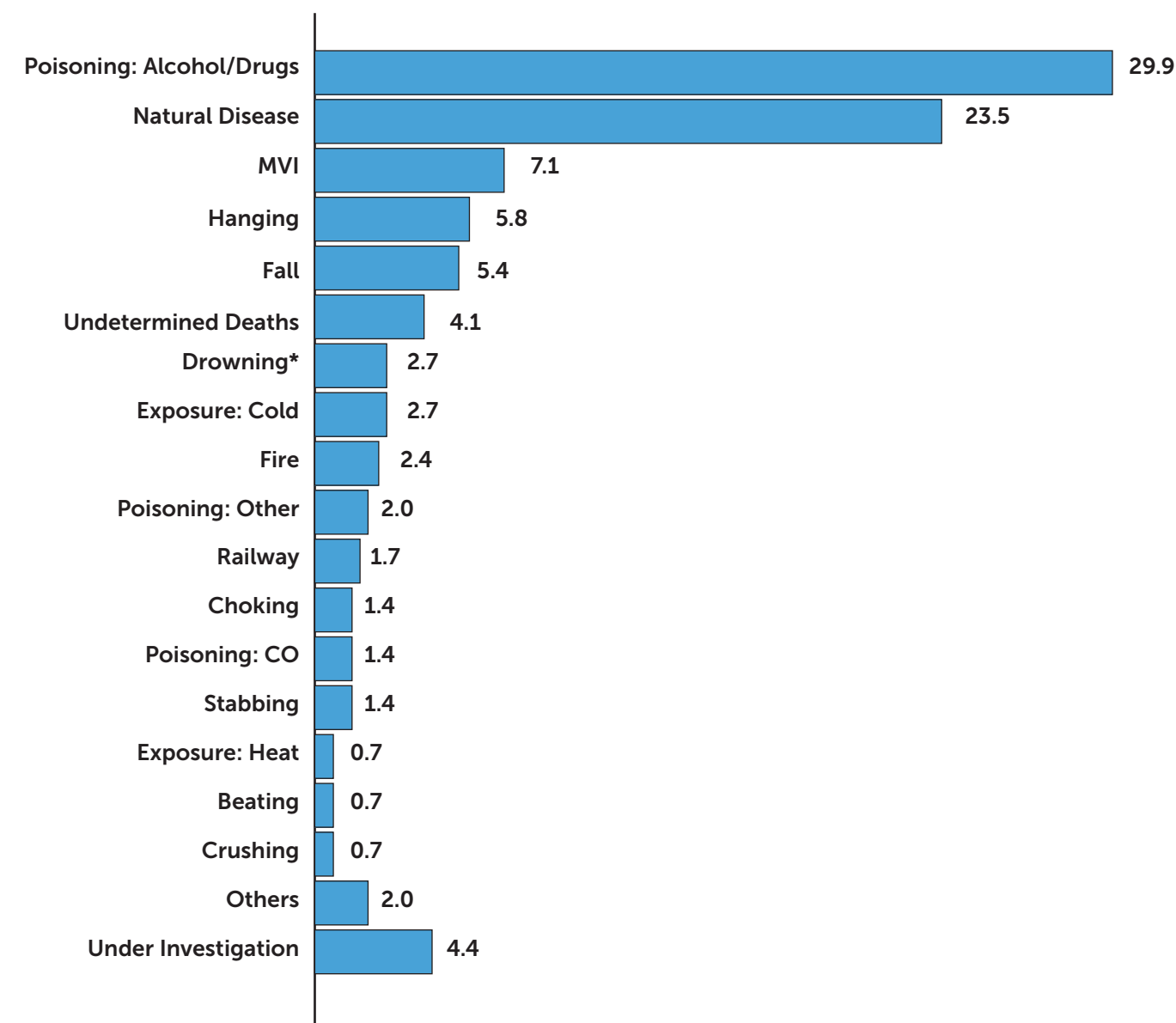
These numbers continue to show how dangerous homelessness is and how much more likely a homeless person is to die by violent means. It also reinforces the point that most homeless deaths are largely preventable if adequate housing and health supports are provided.

The number one cause of death for homeless people in B.C. continues to be “poisoning” by drug and alcohol overdose. In 2014, poisoning by drug and alcohol overdoses accounted for 14 deaths, or 30.4 per cent and for 29.9 per cent of deaths from 2007-2014.<sup>17</sup>

Sadly, illicit drug overdose deaths are rising dramatically in B.C., reaching 465 deaths in 2015 (fentanyl was detected in roughly a third of those deaths)—a 27 per

17 BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals.*

### Percentage of Reported Deaths by Means of Death - Homeless Individuals, 2007-2014



Source: BC Coroners Service

cent increase from 2014.<sup>18</sup> With overdose deaths having a disproportionate impact on homeless individuals, we expect to see an increase in homeless deaths numbers in B.C. when the 2015 data is released.

The region most affected by the increase in overdose deaths was the Fraser region, where homeless deaths also rose the most significantly in 2014. Unless all levels

<sup>18</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 6, 2016). *Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths in BC 2006-2015*.

of government and regional health service providers create more affordable housing and harm reduction services, this region will likely continue to see an spike in homeless and overdose deaths.

### Illicit Drugs Overdose Deaths, General Population

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Accidental	224	197	182	194	206	282	264	314	354	418
Undetermined	5	5	1	7	5	10	10	16	12	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>465</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

### Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths by Region, General Population

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total	%
Metro Vancouver	68	66	48	75	62	93	88	112	131	155	<b>898</b>	<b>32.6</b>
Island	40	36	44	34	24	47	46	59	56	60	<b>446</b>	<b>16.2</b>
Fraser	74	54	63	51	75	99	90	88	111	166	<b>871</b>	<b>31.6</b>
Interior	38	32	20	33	35	37	31	49	44	57	<b>376</b>	<b>13.7</b>
Northern	9	14	8	8	15	16	19	22	24	27	<b>162</b>	<b>5.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>2,753</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service

## Where Homeless People Died

The BC Coroners Service provides data that examines both the region and township in which homeless deaths occurred in British Columbia. It uses the following boundaries for the geographical regions:

**Northern Region:** Includes the region north, east and west from 100 Mile House to all provincial borders, and Haida Gwaii.

**Metro Region:** Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky Corridor, North Shore, Vancouver, UBC, Burnaby, Richmond, and Delta.

**Fraser Region:** Includes Coquitlam and Surrey to the Coquihalla Highway summit, east to Manning Park and north to Jackass Mountain bordering Merritt.

**Interior Region:** Includes the region north to 100 Mile House and Blue River, east to the Alberta border, south to the USA border and west to the Manning Park gate, including Ashcroft, Lytton and Lillooet.

**Island Region:** All of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and Powell River.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> BC Coroners Service. (January 31, 2016). *Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals*.

### Homeless Deaths by Region

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
Metro Vancouver	7	11	18	15	12	9	12	7	8	<b>99</b>	<b>30.5</b>
Island	8	14	12	10	6	5	7	8	10	<b>80</b>	<b>24.6</b>
Fraser	11	8	10	9	8	5	6	7	14	<b>78</b>	<b>24</b>
Interior	4	8	7	6	3	5	-	2	8	<b>43</b>	<b>13.2</b>
Northern	1	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	6	<b>25</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>325</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service



## General Population Deaths by Region

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	%
Metro Vancouver	1,591	1,438	1,431	1,487	1,652	1,069	<b>8,668</b>	<b>20.2</b>
Island	1,678	1,712	1,902	1,812	1,758	803	<b>9,665</b>	<b>22.5</b>
Fraser	2,064	1,788	1,917	1,850	1,881	987	<b>10,487</b>	<b>22.4</b>
Interior	1,813	1,882	2,008	1,907	1,874	852	<b>10,336</b>	<b>24.1</b>
Northern	634	649	710	669	660	423	<b>3,745</b>	<b>8.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,780</b>	<b>7,474</b>	<b>7,968</b>	<b>7,725</b>	<b>7,825</b>	<b>4,134</b>	<b>42,901</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service

The highest number of homeless deaths in 2014 occurred in the Fraser region, which accounted for 14 deaths, or 30.4 per cent. When compared with the general population, the Metro Vancouver region continues to have a disproportionate number of homeless deaths.<sup>20</sup>

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of homeless camps and tent cities in municipalities in what the BC Coroners Service deems the Fraser region—specifically Abbotsford, Surrey, Maple Ridge, and New Westminster.

While homeless count data does not suggest a drastic rise in overall homeless numbers in these cities over the past few years, homeless advocates assert that a lack of affordable housing and health services has pushed homeless people further to the margins in these municipalities, thus making them more vulnerable.

According to BC Coroners Service data, the number of homeless deaths in New Westminster jumped dramatically from just two (between 2007 and 2013) to 10 (between 2007 to 2014).

In 2015, a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of British Columbia held that the City of Abbotsford's bylaws that prohibited homeless people from being in parks overnight or from setting up shelter in any public place were unconstitutional. Hopefully, this will force both Abbotsford and other municipalities to change how they treat their homeless citizens and do more to provide safe and healthy spaces for them.

Homelessness is not confined to just the major municipalities. As housing prices rise in suburban and smaller cities across the province, homelessness grows with it. These smaller cities are often both unequipped

<sup>20</sup> BC Coroners Service. 2011 Annual Report.

## Homeless Deaths by Township, 2007-2014

	Deaths	%
Vancouver	71	24.1
Victoria	40	13.6
Surrey	23	7.8
Kelowna	11	3.7
New Westminster	10	3.4
Campbell River	9	3.1
Prince George	9	3.1
Kamloops	8	2.7
North Vancouver	8	2.7
Chilliwack	7	2.4
Burnaby	6	2.0
Mission	6	2.0
Abbotsford	5	1.7
Duncan	5	1.7
Nanaimo	5	1.7
Hope	4	1.4
Penticton	4	1.4
Terrace	4	1.4
Langley	3	1.0
Maple Ridge	3	1.0
Quesnel	3	1.0
Vernon	3	1.0
Coquitlam	2	0.7
Courtenay	2	0.7

	Deaths	%
Cranbrook	2	0.7
Delta	2	0.7
Fort St. John	2	0.7
Nelson	2	0.7
Port Coquitlam	2	0.7
West Vancouver	2	0.7
Other	31	10.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

## Recommendations

**Recommendation #1:** The BC Coroners Service should broaden its definition of homelessness and work with regional health authorities to better capture the true state of homelessness in British Columbia.

**Recommendation #2:** The BC Coroners Service should track the deaths of women in violent relationships. Examining whether a woman has vacillated in and out of a dangerous living arrangement, while depending on her partner financially for housing, should be considered in determining whether she is effectively homeless and whether a death at the hands of a violent domestic partner should be assessed as a homeless death.

**Recommendation #3:** The BC Coroners Service should offer more robust and detailed data on Aboriginal homeless deaths so it can gain a better understanding of how homeless deaths impact the province's Aboriginal population, a group disproportionately represented in British Columbia's overall homeless population.

**Recommendation #4:** The Province of British Columbia should develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy.

**Recommendation #5:** The Government of Canada should develop and implement a national housing plan.

**Recommendation #6:** All levels of government should commit to building shelters, social housing, and supports equally across the province, so homeless individuals can receive the necessary housing and health supports in their communities.

**Recommendation #7:** Municipalities should repeal anti-harm reduction and anti-camping bylaws as they increase the risks to homeless individuals and exacerbate displacement.

**Recommendation #8:** All levels of government should work to provide more harm reduction services (e.g. safe injection sites), in municipalities across the province to reduce overdose deaths and increase access to health care for homeless drug users.

**Recommendation #9:** The Province of British Columbia should fund the BC Coroners Service to create an annual report that offers deeper analysis and data about homeless deaths across the province.



Photo by Jackie Dives

## ABOUT MEGAPHONE

Megaphone is a monthly magazine sold on the streets of Vancouver and Victoria by homeless and low-income vendors. Vendors buy each issue for 75 cents and sell it for \$2, keeping the profit.

Megaphone also publishes the annual Hope in Shadows calendar, which features photos taken by Downtown Eastside residents of their community. Vendors buy each calendar for \$10 and sell it for \$20, keeping the profit.

Megaphone provides low-threshold employment for marginalized individuals who struggle with various barriers—poverty, addiction or mental or physical illness. By selling the magazine, vendors gain a sense of pride and financial security.

In 2015 Megaphone trained 168 vendors to sell the magazine and calendar, helping put more than

\$125,000 directly into the pockets of people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Published by professional journalists and designers, Megaphone magazine features award-winning journalism, community news, and independent arts. It also includes stories from Megaphone's community writing workshops, which give marginalized writers an opportunity to have their voices heard across the province.

For more information:

**MegaphoneMagazine.com**

