

LAUNCH HOUSING CAPITAL CITIES
HOMELESSNESS INDEX 2023

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APPENDIX: CITY PROFILE VANCOUVER, CANADA



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Just like the three Australian cities, Vancouver was also rated in the top 10 most liveable cities in the world in the 2019 Global Liveability Index (based on a total of 140 cities worldwide). However, it is also the least affordable housing market in Canada. Based on the International Housing Affordability Index (which compares housing affordability in eight countries totalling 92 housing markets), Vancouver was ranked 90th least affordable of the 92 markets included in the Index.¹

Driven primarily by rising rents and low incomes, it is the poorest households bearing the burden of the affordable housing crisis.² Canada's first National Housing Strategy, launched in 2017, aims to provide access to safe, affordable housing to Canadians over the next decade, remove 530,000 families from housing need, and cut chronic homelessness by 50%.³

A 2022 Housing Needs Report estimated that up to 86,000 households were in current housing need in the Metro Vancouver area.⁴ Social housing stock remains low with thousands of households on the social housing waiting list. Between 2016 and 2021, households waiting for social housing increased by 39% but was not due to population growth.⁵

Like many of the major cities included in this report, homelessness remains persistent in Metro Vancouver. Based on Vancouver's 2020 Homeless Count, conducted every three years, there was little change to the number of people experiencing homelessness in the region when compared to the 2017 Homeless Count, including among those who experienced rough sleeping.⁶ However, the 2020 Homeless Count occurred just before a state of emergency being declared in the province of British Columbia and therefore, does not reflect how the pandemic impacted homelessness in the region.⁷

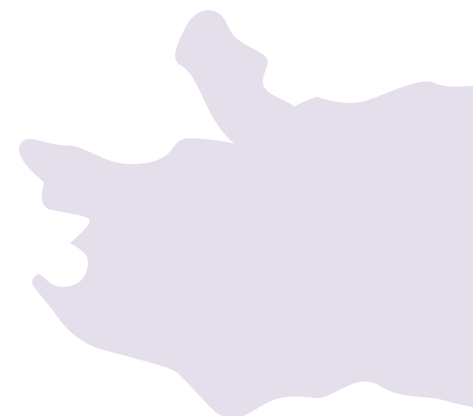
Findings did, however, show the extent of health issues impacting people experiencing homelessness. Up to 87% of participants reported at least one health difficulty including mental and physical issues or cognitive impairment. Among this group, 60% reported an addiction.⁸ This has been a major concern for authorities given that the province has been dealing with two public health emergencies: COVID-19 and an opioid crisis (public health emergency was declared in British Columbia in April 2016), with rates of death from overdose particularly high in Vancouver.⁹

Geographical area

Vancouver is a major urban area located in the province of British Columbia, in western Canada. With a population of 662,248 people, it is the most populous city in British Columbia¹⁰ The larger Metro Vancouver area has a population of 2,794,356 (2021 Census), which makes it the third largest metropolitan area in Canada.¹¹

The Metro Vancouver Regional District includes 23 local authorities and 21 municipalities and is roughly aligned to the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) a geographical unit defined by Statistics Canada.¹²

Data in this profile are presented for three geographical areas (or spatial units) and was determined by data accessibility. Two are closely aligned in terms of geography and population size and include the Vancouver CMA and Metro Vancouver. The third geographical unit presented (where data for the larger units were not accessible) is the City of Vancouver. They are all marked in the data tables.



1 Demographia International Housing Affordability, 2021 Edition, <http://www.demographia.com/dhi2021.pdf>

2 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver Final Data Report, https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

3 A Place to Call Home, Canada's National Housing Strategy, <https://www.placetocallhome.ca/what-is-the-strategy>

4 <https://council.vancouver.ca/20220427/documents/cfsc3.PDF>

5 http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/MV_HousingDataBook_2022.pdf (p.104)

6 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver Final Data Report (Table 3) https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

7 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver Final Data Report, https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

8 2020 Homeless Count Press Release; available at: <https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/2020%20HomelessCount%20PressRelease.pdf>

9 <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/drugs.aspx>

10 Capital city of British Columbia is Victoria

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Metro_Vancouver

12 Census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in what is called the urban core. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00001/tb1/tb1015-eng.htm>

Definition of rough sleeping and homelessness

The *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*, developed in 2012 by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and adopted by the Government of Canada, states that homelessness occurs when people have no stable, safe, appropriate and permanent housing, and they do not have the means or ability to acquire it.¹³

The definition provides for a broad interpretation of homelessness and covers a range of circumstances such as actual homelessness (rough sleeping or staying in places not intended for human habitation), staying in emergency shelters (homelessness shelters and women's refuges) or in temporary accommodation (which lacks security of tenure). It also refers to people at risk of homelessness, whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

Population and ratio of rough sleeping and homelessness

Homelessness numbers presented here are based on the **2020 Homeless Count**, which took place between 3-4 March across the whole Metro Vancouver area. Two weeks later, a state of emergency was declared by the provincial government of British Columbia.

The Homeless Count is conducted in the larger Metro Vancouver area every three years, while the City of Vancouver conducts its own independent count of homelessness within its city boundary every year. However, the 2021 and 2022 counts were both cancelled due to COVID-19. The next regional Homeless Count in the larger Metro Vancouver region is due in 2023.¹⁴

The point-in-time count provides a conservative estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness in a 24-hour period, and only includes people who were in the area at the time and who consented to complete the survey. Therefore, it is unlikely to reflect the true scale of rough sleeping. Nevertheless, the data are an important source of information on the scope, profile, and support needs of people experiencing homelessness in the Greater Vancouver area.¹⁵

As shown in [Table 1](#), during the 3rd and 4th March 2020:

- An estimated 1,029 people were enumerated sleeping rough in the Metro Vancouver Region (Vancouver CMA), representing a rate of nearly 40 people sleeping rough per 100,000 residents. It is the minimum number of people who were rough sleeping over a 24-hour period.
- Compared with the 2017 region-wide count, the number of people sleeping rough in the Metro Vancouver region has changed marginally, increasing by just 1% (or 29 people). However, this does not reflect the impact of the pandemic and the situation may have deteriorated since March.¹⁶

Table 1. Rough sleeping (point-in-time)

	Metro Vancouver Region
Number estimated unsheltered (sleeping rough) (2020)*	1,029 people*
Rate of rough sleeping per 100,000 residents	38.9 residents**

Sources:

* 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver, Final Data Report, November 2020, <https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/initiatives/2020-homeless-count>.

** Rate based on 2020 estimated resident population for Vancouver CMA: 2,642,825, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/profil/details/page>.

¹³ <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COHhomelessdefinition-1pager.pdf>

¹⁴ https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/HC2020_FinalReport.pdf

Overall homelessness

Apart from counting people who are destitute and living without any shelter, the Homeless Count also includes people staying in emergency shelters (including *Extreme Weather Response* shelters, transition houses for women and children fleeing violence, or safe houses for young people), as well as anyone without a fixed address who was in hospital or correctional facility, or temporarily with others, on the night of the count. This is generally referred to as sheltered homelessness.¹⁷

[Table 2](#) presents the number of people enumerated as experiencing homelessness, those with and without shelter, across the Metro Vancouver region in March 2020. As with [Table 1](#), data indicate the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness at a given point in time.

- In March 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in Canada, at least 138 people were homeless per 100,000 residents in the Metro Vancouver Region, based on an estimated 3,634 enumerated as homeless.
- The majority (72%) were staying in sheltered services, but rough sleeping (unsheltered homelessness) represented a relatively large proportion of total homelessness in the Metro Vancouver area.

- Overall, between 2017 and 2020, the change in the number of people experiencing homelessness increased only marginally by 29 people (less than 1%). But as noted, the reality of homelessness may have changed dramatically since the global health crisis began.¹⁸

Table 2. Types of homelessness (point-in-time)

	Metro Vancouver Region
Number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (rough sleeping)	1,029 (28.3%)
Number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness	2,605 (71.7%)
Total number of people estimated experiencing homelessness	3,634 (100%)*
Rate of homelessness per 100,000 residents	137.5 residents**

Sources:

* 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver, Final Data Report, November 2020 <https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/initiatives/2020-homeless-count>.

** Rate based on 2020 estimated resident population for Vancouver CMA: 2,642,825, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page_distribution in 2021.¹⁹

Structural factors affecting homelessness

Social and affordable housing

The lack of affordable housing is a key driver of homelessness in Vancouver.²⁰ Data presented in [Table 3](#) indicates the lack of affordable housing stock, whether social housing funded by the government or housing provided by the private rental market.

The role of social housing becomes especially important in the context of increasing private rental costs, and where the poorest households struggle the most to access affordable housing.

- Across the Vancouver region, there were less than 50,400 social housing dwellings, representing 5.2% of total dwellings; this is slightly higher compared to Canada's stock (4.8%) but below the OECD average (7%).²¹ In 2022, 14,857 applicants were on the social housing waitlist, up by 305 households on the previous year.²²
- This was exacerbated by the lack of affordable dwellings in the private rental market where just 230 dwellings, of a total of nearly 114,750 private rental stock, were affordable to the lowest 20% income

¹⁷ https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/Hc2020_FinalReport.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/Hc2020_FinalReport.pdf (p.59)

¹⁹ Rental Market Report, February 2022, available at: <https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/cmhc/professional/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/rental-market-report/rental-market-report-2021-en.pdf?rev=a5a0eaac-6f70-4058-8aa3-e6d307685910>

²⁰ Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, July 2022, http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/MV_HousingDataBook_2022.pdf

²¹ PH4.2 SOCIAL RENTAL HOUSING STOCK, 2020, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PH4-2-Social-rental-housing-stock.pdf>

²² Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, July 2022, http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/MV_HousingDataBook_2022.pdf (Table 6.1, p.144)

- And of the total low-income households renting in the private market in the Vancouver region, the vast majority struggled to pay for housing that was way too expensive, leaving them financially vulnerable and at risk of losing their housing.

Table 3. Social and affordable housing measure

Vancouver (CMA)	
Number of social housing rented dwellings (% of total dwellings) (2016)	50,349 (5.2%)*
Number of rental universe affordable for low-income households (bottom 20% income distribution) (2021)	230 (0.2%)**
% of low-income households in rental stress (paying 30% or more of income on housing) (2022)	86.0%***

Sources:

- * Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book 2019, (p.92: number social dwellings): http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/MV_Housing_Data_Book.pdf. Percent based on 960,895 total private dwellings in Vancouver CMA, available at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/pagecfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=933&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&SearchText=vancouver&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Housing&TABID=1&type=0>.
- ** Vancouver CMA - Total number of rentals in universe: 114,743, Rental Market Survey (Table 1.1.3), <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>.
- *** Applies to City of Vancouver, Housing Needs Report, April 2022, available at: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/pds-housing-policy-housing-needs-report.pdf> (Figure 33).

23 Australian Homelessness Monitor, 2018, available at: https://data.launchhousing.org.au/app/uploads/2018/05/LaunchHousing_AHM2018_Report.pdf

24 <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/pds-housing-policy-housing-needs-report.pdf>

25 <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/homeless-count.aspx#:~:text=2020%20Homeless%20Count%20in%20Metro%20Vancouver&text=The%202020%20Metro%20Vancouver%20count,hospitals%2C%20with%20no%20fixed%20address>

26 Vital Signs Report 2019-20; <https://torontofoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/VitalSigns2019.pdf> (p.28)

27 Canada's official poverty line is based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which refers to the measure of low income based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living developed by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

Level of income and poverty

Homelessness and poverty are interlinked.²³ The housing crisis is having the greatest impact on low-income households. Rental costs in Vancouver increased by 20% in just six months, which would have left many low-income households at increased risk of losing their housing and becoming homeless.²⁴ According to the 2020 Homeless Count, one of the most common reasons for experiencing homelessness was not having enough income for housing.²⁵

Table 4 shows the average cost of rental housing in the Vancouver CMA along with average income levels and poverty rates. Data show the extent of income disparity and just how unaffordable housing is for the poorest households.

In the Vancouver CMA, a typical rental cost around \$380.00 (CAN) per week, around 32% of the average weekly disposable income.

But it consumed almost 80% of the average income of low-income households (bottom 20% income distribution). After deducting for rent, this would leave just \$103.00 (CAN), or \$15.00 per day to pay for other essentials such as food and medical care.

The poverty rate across the Vancouver region, one of the highest in Canada²⁶, means almost one-in-six households struggled financially to pay for day-to-day necessities. Such financial stress would be intensified if an unexpected expense arose (medical or other emergency) because it could mean losing your housing and becoming homeless.

Table 4. Income and poverty measure

Vancouver (CMA)	
Average weekly rent (Oct 2021)	\$384.00*
Average weekly disposable household income (2021)	\$1,187.00**
Average weekly disposable household income – bottom 20% income distribution (2021)	\$487.00**
Poverty rate (2016)²⁷	17.0%***
Poverty rate – children (0-17 years) (2019)	17.1%+

Sources:

- * Rental Market Report, Vancouver, 2021 (Table 1.1.2), <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>.
- ** <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110019301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.13&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2020&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2020&referencePeriods=20200101%2C20200101>.
- *** Vancouver City Social Indicators Profile 2020, <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/social-indicators-profile-city-of-vancouver.pdf> (p.50).
- + 2021 BC Child Poverty Report Card, November 2021, available at: https://still1in5.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/First_Call_Report_Card_2021_Nov_23_web.pdf.

Family Violence

Domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children right across Canada.²⁸

Across the Vancouver CMA, there were a total of 26,068 victims of police-reported violence in 2019. As shown in [Table 5](#), of this total:

Close to 4,770 (or 18%) were family violence-related crimes, representing a family violence rate of 178 crimes per 100,000 population.²⁹

69% of all family violence victims were female³⁰ and would have left many at risk of homelessness, or homeless.

In Canada generally, many family violence incidents go unreported (due to stigma/shame; fear, or lack of trust in the justice system)³¹, so the real scale of family violence across the Vancouver region is difficult to determine.

Table 5. Family violence measure

	Vancouver (CMA)
Number of family violence reported crimes (2019)	4,765
Number reported family violence crimes per 100,000 population	178.0

28 <https://womenshomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/Key-Findings-State-of-Womens-Homelessness.pdf>

29 Rates are calculated per 100,000 population aged 89 years and younger. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00001/tbl/tbl01.5-eng.htm>

30 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00001/tbl/tbl01.5-eng.htm>

31 <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence-knowledge-centre/intimate-partner-violence.html>

POLICY CONTEXT



Rough sleeping and homelessness

The Canadian Government's flagship homelessness program, *Reaching Home*, was released in 2019. With \$2.2 billion in funding over 10 years, the program is aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada. A key target of the strategy is a 50% reduction in chronic homelessness nationally, by 2027-28.³²

Recent federal budget (2022) announcements include new investments and some proposed program changes under the National Housing Strategy (NHS) to more effectively address the housing crisis in Canada and end homelessness, for example:

*...the government will need to more than double the number of units the National Housing Strategy seeks to produce to a minimum of 300,000 deeply affordable units including at least 50,000 Permanent Supportive Housing units...and reforming programs to produce more and more affordable units will be key for preventing and reducing homelessness.*³³

As part of the NHS, the Canadian Government launched the Rapid Housing Initiative in 2020, which was designed to rapidly develop affordable housing for vulnerable Canadians at risk of or experiencing homelessness. With an investment of \$2.5 billion, the program was expected to deliver more than 10,000 affordable new dwellings across Canada.³⁴ Under the federal budget, this program has also been extended until 2024 with an additional \$1.5 billion to build 6,000 more affordable homes.³⁵

At the provincial level, the government of British Columbia established the *Homelessness Policy and Partnerships Branch* to ensure a coordinated response to homelessness focused on prevention; immediate response to anyone who is homeless; and ensuring stability by offering needed support.

Key programs include *Rapid Response to Homelessness*; *Supportive Housing Fund*, *Indigenous Housing Fund*; and *Women's Transition Housing Fund*.³⁶

With an investment of \$291 million, the *Rapid Response to Homelessness (2017)* provided for 2,000 modular supportive housing units (on local government land) for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness targeted at, in particular, young people, people with disabilities, older people and other vulnerable households. An additional \$75 million each year is aimed at the provision of 24/7 staffing and support services.³⁷

The Supportive Housing Fund (2018) is a 10-year investment of \$1.2 billion to build 2,500 supportive housing units for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, specifically targeting older people, people with disabilities, or mental health issues. There was also additional funding of \$550 million over 10 years allocated for 1,750 new social housing units for Indigenous households.³⁸

The *Women's Transition Housing Fund* specifically prioritises women and children who have experienced violence or are at risk of experiencing violence. With \$734 million funding over 10 years, it provides for 1,500 spaces across a range of short-term accommodation and longer-term housing that includes: transition houses (30-day stays), safe homes (10-day stays), second-stage housing and support (6-18 months), and long-term housing.³⁹

32 Homelessness in Canada, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/homelessness-in-canada>

33 <https://caeh.ca/budget-2022/>

34 <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs/all-funding-programs/rapid-housing>

35 <https://caeh.ca/budget-2022/>

36 Affordable Housing Action Plan, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/affordable-and-social-housing/homelessness>

37 <https://www.bchousing.org/projects-partners/Building-BC/RRH>

38 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/bc-government-addressing-housing-affordability-challenges>

39 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/bc-government-addressing-housing-affordability-challenges>

Investment in social and affordable housing

Following decades of decline and neglect of social housing, Canada's Government recommitted to playing a greater role in the provision of social and affordable housing, launching its *National Housing Strategy* (NHS) in 2017. And in 2019, Canada's Parliament passed the *National Housing Strategy Act* (NHTA), the first piece of legislation that acknowledges housing as a fundamental human right, in line with international law.⁴⁰

At the provincial level, the Government of British Columbia, in 2018, launched its *Homes for B.C. A 30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability in British Columbia*.⁴¹ The 10-year plan provides \$7 billion in funding to build 114,000 affordable rental housing, supported social housing, and owner housing. However, it has been highlighted that, overall, very little progress around has been made in the last four years, with less than 10% of the 114,000-unit target completed as of April 2021.⁴²

Moreover, based on a 2022 analysis of housing need in Vancouver, the government target falls short of what is needed. As emphasised in the report, the housing crisis is significant, affecting 86,000 existing households in current housing need, and around 50,000 additional households anticipated in the next ten years. It's a combined total that is much higher than the provincial government's target of 114,000.⁴³ It suggests that the housing crisis in Vancouver will continue for some time, and the poorest households, at the lowest end of the income distribution, will continue to be disproportionately impacted.⁴⁴

Responding to homelessness and the COVID-19 pandemic

As was the case in Australia, Canada did not implement a nationally coordinated response to COVID-19 and homelessness, leaving it up to provincial governments instead.⁴⁵

Across Canada, people experiencing homelessness were temporarily moved into hotels and motels, as part of the early response to COVID-19. As of April 23, 2020, throughout British Columbia, up to 2,750 hotel, motel and community centre spaces, across 93 sites, were temporarily secured for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness or at risk.⁴⁶

Across Metro Vancouver, it included 10 sites totalling 686 temporary spaces, which involved eight hotels and two emergency response centres. A number of these spaces were set aside for people with COVID-19 to recover and self-isolate. The temporary spaces meant that around 200 people living in just one encampment were able to be transitioned into safe accommodation and be provided with a range of health supports and other services, including daily meals and clean water.^{47,48}

Like the rest of Canada, the province of British Columbia is dealing with two public health emergencies: COVID-19 and the ongoing opioid crisis, which is now in its sixth year. In October 2021, 201 people in British Columbia lost their lives as a result of the opioid crisis. Vancouver was one of several urban areas in the province that recorded one of the highest rates of death.⁴⁹

"Now, more than ever, with the concurrent emergencies of the pandemic and the ongoing opioid crisis, it is time to implement long-term housing solutions that take care of and protect our most vulnerable people" (Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Shane Simpson, April 2020).⁵⁰

40 <https://www.equalityrights.org/resources/national-housing-strategy-act-primer>

41 https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2018/homesbc/2018_Homes_For_BC.pdf

42 <https://www.policynote.ca/housing-promises/>

43 City of Vancouver Housing Needs Report, April 2022, available at: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/pds-housing-policy-housing-needs-report.pdf>

44 http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/MV_HousingDataBook_2022.pdf (p.104)

45 https://www.csi.edu.au/media/More_than_temporary-Homelessness_NSW_Report_2021.pdf

46 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EMBC0020-000759>

47 <https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/news/b-c-enacts-provincial-order-to-move-homeless-at-3-encampments-into-hotels/>

48 <https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/news/b-c-enacts-provincial-order-to-move-homeless-at-3-encampments-into-hotels/>

49 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PSSG0099-002356#:~:text=Data%20is%20subject%20to%20change,about%206.5%20deaths%20per%20day>

50 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EMBC0020-000759>