

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
May 5, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

I Count 2021 A Profile of Homelessness in York Region

1. Recommendations

Council receive this report for information.

2. Summary

A Point-in-Time Count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness over a 24-hour period, providing a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness at that time. The information gathered through a Point-in-Time Count provides enhanced understanding of the people experiencing homelessness and conditions contributing to homelessness. York Region's 2021 Point-in-Time Count began at 6:00 pm on the evening of June 1, 2021, for a 24-hour period. A memorandum was presented to Council in [April 2021](#), outlining the plan to conduct the count.

The Point-in-Time Count was co-led with the United Way Greater Toronto and York Region. United Way Greater Toronto is the lead agency responsible for implementing the [Federal Homelessness Strategy: Reaching Home](#), program in York Region. The Region is designated by the province as the Service System Manager for housing and homelessness. The 2021 Point-in-Time Count is a requirement of both the Federal and Provincial governments. This report highlights key findings from the homeless count. The full report, *I Count 2021: York Region's Homeless Count Report*, is available as Attachment 1.

Key Points:

- The 2021 Point-in-Time Count was the third Point-in-Time Count for York Region. Previous counts were conducted in 2016 and 2018
- Strict public health measures for COVID-19 were followed to ensure the health and safety of everyone involved in the 2021 Point-in-Time Count
- The 2021 Point-in-Time Count was conducted over a 24-hour period and included locations where individuals were living unsheltered
- In York Region, 329 people were counted as experiencing homelessness on June 1 and 2, 2021, of which 192 people participated in a voluntary survey. This is compared

to 389 people who were counted as experiencing homelessness in 2018 and 263 people counted as experiencing homelessness in 2016

- Findings will inform investments and improvements in program delivery and future program planning. This will also support actions included in York Region's [10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan](#).

3. Background

Homeless counts are required by the Federal and Provincial Governments

In 2016, York Region, as the Service System Manager for housing and homelessness, was mandated by the Province of Ontario under the [Housing Services Act, 2011](#) to count people experiencing homelessness every two years, starting in 2018. York Region partnered with United Way Greater Toronto and completed a 2018 count and published [I Count - I'm Not Just a Number](#) in [April 2019](#).

In [August 2019](#), the Province paused the requirement that Service System Managers conduct local homeless counts. In March 2021, the Province of Ontario announced that Service System Managers were required to implement a homeless count by December 15, 2022.

As the Community Entity for the Federal Reaching Home Strategy, the United Way Greater Toronto is responsible for conducting a Point-in-Time Count every two years. A [2016 count](#) was led by United Way Greater Toronto, and supported by the Region. Community Entities were not required to conduct a count in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fall of 2020, the Federal government informed Community Entities that they would be required to conduct a count by the end of April 2021.

In 2021, the Region and United Way Greater Toronto co-led the 2021 Point-in-Time Count, meeting both Federal and Provincial requirements.

Staff completed the count and surveys with individuals and families experiencing homelessness to gather data on their social, health, and housing needs

Staff from York Region, United Way Greater Toronto, and other community partners worked together to conduct the count and survey which included people who were:

- In emergency, transitional, self-isolation (due to the pandemic) or violence against women shelters
- Unsheltered, and/or living outdoors or in places not intended for habitation in known locations
- People living temporarily with others, in hotels/motels, in medical, mental health institutions or treatment programs who lack permanent housing arrangements,

transitional and second stage housing, drop-in and drop-by locations, mental health and addictions beds, hospitals, and correctional facilities

Individuals who completed a survey were given a small thank you package comprised of a toque, socks, toothbrush, snacks, resource information and a \$10 gift card.

4. Analysis

On June 1 and 2, 2021, 329 people experiencing homelessness were counted in York Region

- The 2016 count conducted by United Way Greater Toronto found 263 experiencing homelessness; compared to 389 residents counted in 2018; and 329 residents counted in 2021. Further analysis is required when comparing the results from the 2021 Point-in-Time Count with the counts conducted in 2018, and 2016, as changes were made to the methodology used in conducting the 2021 count as a result of the pandemic and the need to follow public health guidelines including: Staff only visited known locations and encampments. For example, 10 outdoor locations were visited in 2021 whereas 44 outdoor locations were visited in 2018
- Fewer locations were visited to ensure safe implementation of the count (physical distancing)

While fewer people were counted in the Region's emergency housing facilities due to physical distancing rules which reduced capacity by about 25 beds, additional people were counted at the temporary Transitional and Self-Isolation Shelters established to support the pandemic response which added about 100 beds.

There may have been fewer people who were homeless due to the temporary provincial moratoriums on evictions with the most recent moratorium from April 8, 2021 to June 2, 2021.

Housing market changes that occurred during the pandemic may have increased homelessness. Service providers have reported difficulties accessing affordable units in the private market due to landlords selling or renovating the house/building(s) or rent rates being unaffordable.

Point-in-Time Counts should be considered a minimum number of people who are homeless

As is the case with all Point-in-Time Counts, the number of residents counted should be considered a minimum number as it is unknown if the count entirely reflects all of York Region's population experiencing homelessness. Since Point-in-Time Counts by nature are conducted at a snapshot in time, additional limitations include:

- It is more likely to count and survey people who have been experiencing homelessness for a longer period of time than people who are newly experiencing homelessness
- Data collected through this methodology may be generalized or skewed towards a certain segment of people experiencing homelessness (for example, those who frequently use York Region’s emergency shelters)
- Point-in-Time Counts are known to significantly undercount people experiencing hidden homelessness. Hidden homelessness refers to people who live temporarily with others but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing. It is estimated that up to 80% of homelessness is considered hidden or provisionally accommodated in Canada.¹
- Persons experiencing homelessness can also be transient, moving to other regions based on service availability

192 people of people counted during the 2021 Point-in-Time Count completed a voluntary survey

In addition to counting the number of people experiencing homelessness, we administered a survey to those who were willing to complete one.

In 2021, the homeless count had 192 completed surveys, compared to 224 in 2018 and 143 in 2016. Highlights of the 2021 survey include:

- 16 people were unsheltered (living in public spaces such as parks, ravines, cars, behind commercial buildings etc.); compared to 34 in 2018 and five in 2016
- 128 were sheltered (staying in emergency, transitional, isolation or in Violence Against Women shelters); compared to 96 in 2018 and 121 in 2016
- 48 were provisionally accommodated (staying in transitional housing, living temporarily with others, or in hotel/motel); compared to 94 in 2018 and 17 in 2016

From the 192 surveys, we learned that in York Region:

- 53% of people experiencing homelessness self-identified as male (compared to 56% in 2018 and 48% in 2016), 46% female (compared to 42% in 2018 and 52% in 2016), and the remainder (two %) were gender non-conforming or did not answer (compared to two % in 2018, an equivalent comparison is not available for 2016)
- Youth (16 to 24 years of age) comprised 14% of participants (compared to 26% in 2018 and 34% in 2016); which is comparable to the proportion of total youth (approximately 13%) in York Region

- Persons aged 55 and over comprised 29% of participants (compared to 18% in 2018, an equivalent comparison is not available for 2016). Persons aged 55 and older account for 28% of the York Region population
- 10% of those surveyed self-identified as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, compared to 8% in 2018 and 8% in 2016. Survey data suggests these individuals experience homelessness at a younger age
- People are experiencing homelessness for longer periods of time. Of the respondents, 53% self-identified as chronically homeless, meaning being homeless for longer than six months in the past year (compared to 45% in 2018 and 33% in 2016)
- 80% of respondents were single, which is relatively consistent with previous counts (79% in 2018 and 76% in 2016). In York Region, six % of residents are single
- Persons with Black identities (e.g., Black Canadian/American, African, Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Latinx) represented 10% of survey participants (13% in 2018, an equivalent comparison is not available for 2016). This compares to approximately 3% of the total population in York Region who identified as Black in the 2016 census
- Of the survey participants, 12% self-identified as Indigenous peoples and people with Indigenous ancestry, compared to 17% in 2018 and 13% in 2016. Indigenous peoples account for less than 1% of the York Region population
- A greater percentage of survey respondents reported having mental health issues compared to previous counts, 64% in 2021 compared to 48% in 2018. An equivalent comparison is not available for 2016. Mental health is an expansive category and supplemental data will be required to understand the needs further
- Almost one in five (19%) of respondents reported they had been in foster care or a youth group home at some point in their lives (19% in 2018, an equivalent comparison is not available for 2016). In comparison, among the general population in Canada, roughly 0.3% have had child welfare involvement

A significant number of people experiencing homelessness have been in York Region for more than one year

The majority (60%) of 2021 survey participants reported they had lived in York Region for over a year, including 21% who have always lived in York Region, and 23% who have lived in York Region for more than five years.

Thirty-one % of people experiencing homelessness have been in York Region for less than one year, of these 83% had moved to York Region from elsewhere in Ontario. The largest cohort identified Simcoe County as their place of origin followed by the City of Toronto.

Almost one in five reported their housing loss was a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Almost one in five (19%) reported their housing loss was related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top five reasons people identified contributed to their experiencing homelessness are:

1. Insufficient Income for Housing (e.g. Loss of Benefits (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, etc.), Income, or Job) (22%)
2. Unfit/Unsafe Housing Conditions (11%)
3. Landlord/Tenant Conflicts (9%)
4. Conflicts with Spouse / Partner (9%)
5. Experienced Abuse by Spouse / Partner (9%)

In comparison, in 2018 survey respondents' inability to pay rent/mortgage (14%) and job loss (16%) were separate responses in the survey and together they total 30%.

The number of people experiencing homelessness counted during the 2021 Point-in-Time Count has remained low compared to the Region's total population

Forty-seven Service System Managers across Ontario participated in local homeless Point-in-Time Counts in 2021. Table 1 summarizes Point-in-Time Count results from the Greater Toronto, Hamilton, and Simcoe Area jurisdictions.

Only two jurisdictions have released their 2021 Point-in-Time Count results; the City of Toronto, and Simcoe County (includes Barrie and Orillia) were available at the time of this report. Methodologies used to conduct 2021 Point-in-Time Count vary.

In comparison to Toronto and Simcoe County, the Region's 2021 Point-in-Time count results indicate a lower percentage of people experiencing homelessness compared to the Region's total population. In York Region, the number of people counted made up 0.04% of the total population in 2021, 0.32% in 2018 in Toronto and 0.15% in 2018 in Simcoe County.

Table 1
Homeless Point-in-Time Count Results from the Greater Toronto, Hamilton, and Simcoe County Area Jurisdictions

Municipality	Total Number of Homeless in 2018	Percentage of Total Population* (%)	Population Census 2021	Total Number of Homeless in 2021	Percentage of Total Population** (%)
Toronto	8,715	0.32	2,794,356	7,347	0.26
Simcoe County (includes Barrie and Orillia)	697	0.15	533,169	563	0.11
Hamilton	504	0.09	569,353	n/a	
Peel	875	0.06	1,451,022	n/a	
Halton Region	271	0.05	596,637	n/a	
York Region	389	0.04	1,173,103	329	0.03
Durham Region	291	0.05	696,992	n/a	

* Based on 2016 Census Data, Statistics Canada

** Based on 2021 Census Data, Statistics Canada

As the Service System Manager, the Region is working collaboratively with service providers to help residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness

As the Service System Manager, [the Region provides funding and supports](#) to a range of community agencies that provide services to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This is helping people to remain in housing, return to housing, or find permanent housing. For example, the Region continues to successfully help people through its diversion programs, diverting them from emergency housing into more stable housing accommodations.

The Region has used provincial [Social Services Relief Fund](#) to support programs to help residents stay safe and supported during the pandemic and help residents maintain and stabilize their housing, including financial assistance for residents to help pay rent and utility arrears.

5. Financial

The Region's financial contribution to the 2021 Point-in-Time Count was \$11,401 and was 100% funded by the province through the Social Services Relief Fund.

In 2021, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided \$15.7 million in regular program funding to the Region under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. This funding comes with criteria requiring the Region in its role as Service System Manager to address local priorities and meet the needs of individuals and families who are experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless in York Region. The Region also provided \$8.1M in tax levy funding to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

6. Local Impact

York Region collects data and designs programming with the support of its many partner agencies. This evidence-based programming helps to anticipate, prevent, and mitigate homelessness, especially as York Region's population grows.

Data from the 2021 Point-in-Time Count, combined with additional data collected by the Region, will continue to help inform service system planning and improve access to services for residents who are experiencing or at-risk of housing loss in all nine municipalities.

7. Conclusion

The Region, in partnership with United Way Greater Toronto has successfully completed the 2021 Point-in-Time Count. Due to the pandemic, changes in the approach to conducting the Point-in-Time Count were made to ensure the health and safety of all those involved.

York Region's focus is on investing in strategies to prevent homelessness and when necessary, to help people who become homeless find housing as quickly as possible with connections to the right supports to help them stay housed.

The data collected through this count will be used to support the design and ongoing delivery of a range of programs in the region, including the York Region's [10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan](#). Point-in-Time Counts are one data source that when combined with The Region's other data collection strategies and sources, will continue to help inform service system planning and programming.

For more information on this report, please contact Debbie Thompson, Director, Homelessness Community Programs, Community and Health Services Department at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 78194. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

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Approved for Submission:

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Attachment (1)
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