



# **Dying on the Streets**

Homeless Deaths in British Columbia, 2006-2015  
(Third Edition, 2017)

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**Author:**

Jessica Hannon

**Research Support:**

Sean Condon  
Samara Mayer

**Cover photo:**

Kayla Isomura

**Design:**

April Alayon

**Contact:**

Jessica Hannon  
Executive Director  
604-255-9701 x 138  
[jessica@megaphonemagazine.com](mailto:jessica@megaphonemagazine.com)



Megaphone  
121 Heatley Ave.  
Vancouver, BC  
V6A 3E9

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# Executive Summary

More people died homeless in British Columbia in 2015 than in any year on record. At least 70 homeless people died in 2015, more than one person per week. This is a 56 per cent increase from the year before, and a 40 per cent increase from the previous high of 50 deaths in 2008. This is a crisis on our streets that demands an emergency response.

Homelessness is a solvable issue that has lost its urgency.

*Dying on the Streets* (Third Edition, 2017) updates Megaphone's report on homeless deaths *Still Dying on the Streets* (which looked at homeless deaths from 2006-2014) with the most recently available data from 2015.

The number of homeless deaths has shown a disturbing and sharp upward trend in the last two reported years. With the overdose crisis taking an unprecedented 922 lives in 2016, the number of

people experiencing homelessness who die largely preventable deaths will have likely increased in 2016.

## Who is dying

According to the BC Coroners Service, 394 homeless people died in this province between 2006 and 2015. The coroner investigates roughly a quarter of all deaths in the province. However, due to the nature of their deaths, deaths of people experiencing homelessness tend to be investigated at a higher rate. The BC Coroners Service estimates that they investigate roughly half of all homeless deaths in the province. Therefore, the true number of homeless deaths is likely twice as high.

The coroner's data is an undercount. This is in part because the coroner does not investigate all deaths. It is also because the definition of 'homeless' used by the

## Key Findings

**70**

homeless people died in 2015—a 56% increase from the previous year and the highest of any documented year.

**16**

homeless people died in Metro Vancouver in 2015, a 100% increase from 2014.

**50.7%**

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

**97%**

of coroner investigated homeless deaths from 2006 to 2015 were premature (<75 years of age).

**40-49 years old**

is the median age of death for a person experiencing homelessness in BC, compared to an average age of death of 76.4 years in the general population.

**114%**

increase of homeless deaths in the Fraser Region, from 14 people in 2014 to 30 people in 2015.

BC Coroners Service does not capture everyone who is experiencing homelessness. Examples of individuals who were not considered homeless for the purposes of the BC Coroners Service report include:

- 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 in correctional institutions, hospitals, or residential drug or alcohol treatment facilities who may have no permanent residence to return to.
- People who have a permanent residence, but are considered at high risk of homelessness because of unemployment, domestic violence, or other factors.<sup>1</sup>

The vast majority of reported homeless deaths continue to be men. However, due to the nature of women's experiences of homelessness, deaths of women who are homeless may be undercounted. Women make up a higher percentage of the hidden homeless population and are less likely to be counted on the streets and in shelters.

Aboriginal homeless deaths were once again not released as part of the updated data. However, Megaphone was able to obtain updated numbers in a separate report from 2013, which shows that Aboriginal people account for 15.6 per cent of all homeless deaths between 2006 and 2013, despite making up just 5.4 per cent of the province's general population. The BC Coroners Service acknowledges this is likely an undercount as well.

## How People Experiencing Homelessness are Dying

People experiencing homeless are more likely to die preventable deaths. Overall, there has been a significant increase in the number of people dying preventable deaths. In 2015, the BC Coroners Service determined that 57.1 per cent or 40 of 70 homeless deaths were "accidental".

This is almost double the number of accidental deaths from 2014 (23 of 45 total deaths) and a six percent increase from 2014 when 51.1% of homeless deaths were "accidental". Overall from 2006 to 2015, 49 per cent of homeless deaths were "accidental". This is compared with just 16.5 per cent accidental deaths in the general population.

There has been a large increase in the number of homeless people who have died from poisoning

<sup>1</sup> BC Coroner's Service, Deaths of Homeless Individuals

(alcohol and drugs). In 2014, 28.8 per cent of homeless deaths were attributed to "Poisoning: Alcohol/Drugs." In 2015, that number increased to 48.5 per cent of all homeless deaths.

The BC Coroners Service data does not specify directly or break down the numbers to determine whether these deaths are associated with illicit drugs or prescription drugs. But trends in opioid overdoses in 2015 suggest a large number of reported homeless deaths from alcohol and drug poisoning are associated with illicit drug overdose, in particular fentanyl.<sup>2</sup>

People experiencing homelessness are more likely to die by violent means. Homeless people are roughly twice as likely to die by suicide (12.4 per cent of homeless deaths are by suicide, compared to 6.6 per cent of the general population in British Columbia) or homicide (3.8 per cent of homeless deaths are by homicide, compared to 1.5 per cent of the general population in British Columbia).

## Where people experiencing homelessness are dying

For the second year in a row, the highest number of homeless deaths occurred in the Fraser Region, with 30 people or 42.8 per cent of all homeless deaths occurring there. This more than doubles the Fraser Region's 2014 high of 14 homeless deaths.

The BC Coroners Service deems the Fraser region to be "Coquitlam and Surrey to the Coquihalla Highway summit, east to Manning Park and north to Jackass Mountain bordering Merritt."

The 2017 Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) Homeless Count found 603 people without a home, an increase of 74 per cent from 346 in 2014, and well above the previous recorded high of 465 persons in 2008.<sup>3</sup>

The number of people experiencing homelessness has risen alongside housing costs in the Fraser Region and across B.C. Advocates point to a lack of affordable housing, as well as limited provision of harm reduction and shelter services in asserting that people experiencing homelessness in the Fraser Region experience marginalization that makes them increasingly vulnerable. Homeless deaths in the Fraser Region are expected to continue to increase.

The Metro Vancouver region also saw a significant increase, with 16 homeless deaths in 2015, an increase of 100 per cent from 2014.

According to the BC Coroners Service data, the

<sup>2</sup> (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> Preliminary Findings, 2017 FVRD Homeless Count, March 22 2017

number of homeless deaths in Maple Ridge jumped dramatically from just three (between 2007 and 2014) to 10 (between 2007 and 2015) an increase of 233 per cent. Maple Ridge stands out as a municipality that has extremely limited services for people experiencing homelessness. Efforts to open a shelter in 2016 were halted by local groups and the provincial government. Open hostility from some Maple Ridge residents and alleged violence against people experiencing homelessness in Maple Ridge pushes people into the fringes and leaves them unable to access needed services to survive and maintain basic health.

Nanaimo and Langley also saw notable increases in homeless deaths in just one year. Nanaimo increased from five (between 2007 and 2014) to nine (between 2007 and 2015). Homeless deaths in Langley doubled in one year, increasing from three to six.

Homelessness is not an issue confined to dense urban centres. Homeless count data and BC Coroners Service data show that people experience homelessness in communities across B.C. Currently, many suburban and smaller municipalities are ill-equipped and resistant to address this crisis. Government and public reactions in many of these places range from neglect to open hostility. The effect is to endanger people experiencing homelessness. Unable to access proper supports, health services, or housing options, people experiencing homelessness die largely preventable deaths.

To prevent homeless deaths in B.C., municipal governments of all sizes must accept there is a homeless crisis in their cities and treat it with the urgency of a public health emergency. In turn, provincial and federal governments must support under-resourced municipalities to reduce poverty, improve harm reduction services, and build affordable and social housing.

## **When people experiencing homelessness are dying**

People experiencing homelessness die – on average – roughly three decades earlier than people in the general population. Homelessness cuts years off of a person's life. The median age of death for someone who is homeless in B.C. is between 40 and 49 years of age. This contrasts with the general population's average age of death of 76.4 years of age. Premature deaths (<75) from 2001 to 2010 accounted for just 37.8 per cent of all deaths in B.C. in the general population. 384 out of 394 homeless deaths investigated by the coroner from 2006 to 2015 were premature (counted here as deaths <70 years of age). That means 97 per cent of coroner investigated homeless deaths were premature (<75 years of age).

Homelessness has severe, long-term health effects. It puts individuals in vulnerable situations, exacerbates existing medical conditions, and prevents them

from accessing proper care. Homelessness is a life-threatening situation and ought to be treated with the urgency it deserves.

This report is written in honour of Megaphone vendor and friend Michael, and every person who has died while homeless in B.C. Many died violently and anonymously. You are more than a statistic. You deserved better. We honour your memories and resolve to fight to end homelessness.



Jessica Hannon  
Executive Director  
Megaphone



# PROFILE: Michael



Photo by Megaphone Staff

Michael was fiercely talented, creative, and kind. He lived a full life: traveling extensively from a young age, building an array of skills and knowledge, marrying, and becoming a father.

He died in an alley behind First Ravioli Store on Commercial Drive on December 7th, 2016, during Vancouver's coldest month in almost a decade.

On nights where Michael couldn't stay in the emergency shelter a few blocks away, he had been sleeping behind the store. Michael's good friend who worked in the store came out to check on him as the temperatures dipped low that day. "Hey, Mike! Are you ok?" she remembers saying. He had been getting rest there for the afternoon. He stood up, and said, "I'm ok. Are you ok?" When a coworker went outside hours later, Michael was unresponsive.

Born in Ottawa, Michael spent his first 5 years in Iran, where his father worked. After extensive worldwide travel from a young age and stints living across Canada, including in Halifax while working for the Coast Guard, Michael settled in Vancouver. He worked in the film industry, using his creative and carpentry skills to design sets.

The Vancouver Commercial Drive community was a vital, anchoring and supportive centre for Michael for more than 20 years, where he established a home base and a community of friends.

Michael's death hit the Megaphone community and the Commercial Drive community hard. Michael regularly sold Megaphone magazine outside the JJ Bean at East 6th Ave. and Commercial Drive, and the BC Liquor Store at Grant Street and Commercial Drive. He was known for his creativity, his kindness on even his toughest days, and his intellect.

For his family, who Michael had lost touch with for about a decade, the news of Michael's death was a painful shock.

"Even when Michael at times had very little, he always had something to give in some way. A kindness, a helping hand, a smile or something else," his brother David said. "Michael will be most remembered for the caring, gentle, active kindness at his core."

"Replacing our disdainful view and lens with a truly empathetic one is needed across our society—and it is a difficult shift for many to make. Unfortunately, it took the death of my homeless brother for me to really understand and appreciate the dire and sad predicament of so many."

Michael is loved and remembered by his family, his Megaphone community, and his Commercial Drive community including the Clean Start laundry program.

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

# Homeless Deaths Data

The BC Coroners Service has determined that 394 people experiencing homelessness have died in B.C. over the past ten years. In 2015, there were 70 homeless deaths. This is a 56 per cent increase from 2014 and the highest number of homeless deaths on record in a single year in this province. 2015 saw 40 per cent more homeless deaths than the previous high of 50 in 2008. This 56 per cent increase from 2014 to 2015 comes on top of a 70 per cent increase from 2013 to 2014, meaning that from 2013 to 2015 the number of homeless deaths in B.C. increased 156 per cent.

The BC Coroners Service only investigates roughly a quarter of all deaths in the province. Due to the nature of their deaths, the deaths of people experiencing homelessness are often investigated at a higher rate. However, the coroner is unable to get a full accounting of homeless deaths because of their narrow definition of homelessness and the difficulty of tracking people who are “hidden homeless.” Hidden homeless means those who stay temporarily with friends or family, remain in violent relationships for lack of housing options, and are otherwise not visible or counted by traditional homeless count methods. Therefore, the BC Coroners Service estimates the true number of homeless deaths 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 circumstances of death suggested homelessness.”

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, hotel, or another form of rental accommodation.

- 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.

Acknowledging the data is an undercount is important: homelessness takes decades from a person’s life. People experiencing homelessness overwhelmingly die premature, largely preventable deaths.

From 2006 to 2012, ‘street’ homeless deaths consistently outnumbered ‘shelter’ homeless deaths. In 2013 and 2014, the data showed the reverse. 2015 shows a return to higher ‘street’ homeless deaths than ‘sheltered’. The brief reversal may be a reflection of increased efforts by governments to create more shelter spaces across the province. The most recent spike in street homeless deaths may demonstrate the impact of a dire lack of affordable housing, low vacancy rates, and lack of treatment options for addictions.

The best way to prevent homeless deaths is to end homelessness by treating it with the urgency of an emergency. All levels of government need to work in coordination to address this crisis.

## Homeless Deaths in B.C.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total	%
Street	21	26	30	32	17	10	16	7	20	36	178	54.5
Shelter	10	16	13	10	11	6	9	15	20	23	110	33.7
Unknown	-	1	7	1	4	9	3	5	5	11	37	11.6
<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>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service



# Homeless Deaths

## Demographics

According to the BC Coroners Service's data, the vast majority of homeless deaths in 2015 were male (62 deaths, or 89 per cent), which is consistent with previous years.

However, as noted in previous reports, women make up a much higher percentage of the hidden homeless population, and may not be counted in the coroner's definition of homelessness. Women experiencing homelessness face an increased risk of assault and sexual assault, which is why many women avoid the shelter system, the streets, and homeless services, often remaining in abusive relationships.

The median age of death for a homeless person in 2015 is between 40 and 49 years old. This is consistent with the median age of death from 2006 to 2014. This is roughly three decades shorter than the average age of death in B.C. of 76.4 years, according to the most recent available data.<sup>5</sup>

Premature deaths (<75) from 2001 to 2010 accounted

for just 37.8 per cent of all general population deaths. In comparison, 384 of 394 homeless deaths investigated by the BC Coroners Service from 2006 to 2015 were premature (<70 years due to the nature of the homeless deaths data). This means that 97 per cent of coroner investigated homeless deaths were premature (<75 years of age).<sup>7</sup>

People experiencing homelessness are dying far earlier than the average life expectancy at birth. In 1976, roughly when many of those counted in this homeless deaths report were born, the average life expectancy in the province was 74.0 years.<sup>7</sup>

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

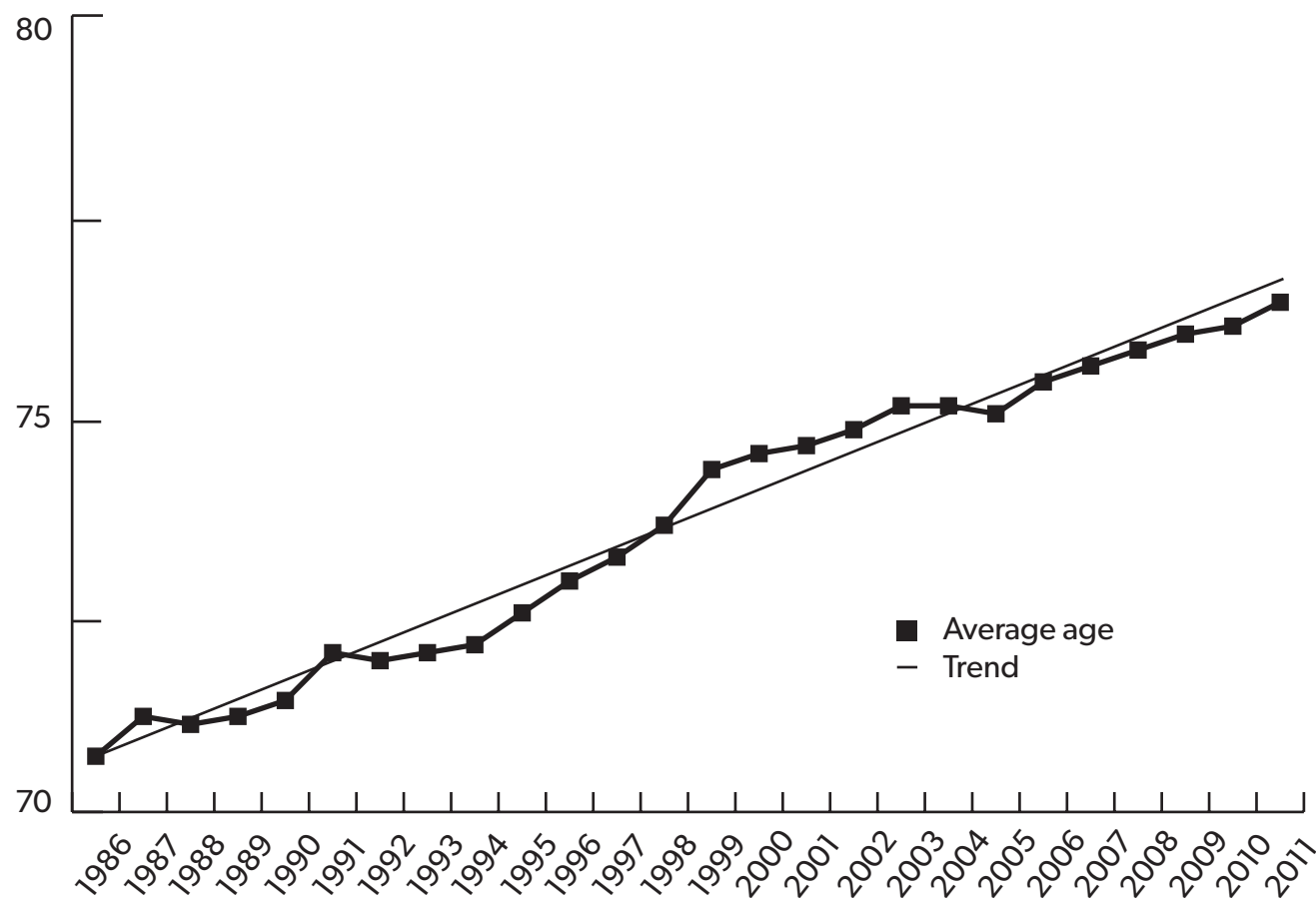
<sup>6</sup> British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. *Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators: One hundred and Fortieth Annual Report 2011*.

<sup>7</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	2015	Total	%
10-19	0	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	0.5
20-29	4	5	6	1	4	4	5	3	5	11	48	12
30-39	7	6	9	6	11	4	5	8	8	13	77	20
40-49	10	17	14	19	8	5	10	7	9	24	123	31
50-59	9	12	16	14	6	7	4	4	16	14	102	26
60-69	1	2	4	2	2	5	2	5	4	5	32	8
70-79	0	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	3	8	2
80+	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	0.5
<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>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>394</b>	

Average Age at Death, BC, 1986-2011



Source: British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency

# Aboriginal Homeless Deaths

The BC Coroners Service again did not release Aboriginal homeless deaths information as part of its data. Homelessness disproportionately impacts First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people. 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, Megaphone has again requested updated data on Aboriginal homeless deaths for 2014 and 2015.

Previously, 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 in BC in that period, despite making up just 5.4 per cent of the province's population.<sup>8</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>9</sup>

It is likely that Aboriginal people make up an even higher percentage of homeless deaths in B.C. According to the 2016 Vancouver Homeless Count, Aboriginal people account for 38 per cent of the city's homeless population, despite making up just 2.5 per cent of the city's population.<sup>10</sup>

The data presented for Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity is limited, and does not include further details around where or how Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness died. The BC Coroners Service ought to present more detailed data and a more robust data analysis to better understand the disproportionate impacts of homelessness on Indigenous peoples.

8 BC Coroners Service. (February 12, 2014) *Deaths Among Homeless Individuals 2007-2013 (Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity)*.

9 Ibid.

10 Thomson, Matt. (May 2016). Vancouver Homeless Count 2016.

## Homeless Deaths by Aboriginal Identity

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	%
Aboriginal	6	8	7	2	4	6	6	15.6
Non-Aboriginal	33	45	35	32	21	23	22	84.4
<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

# How Homeless People Died

According to the BC Coroners Service, 196 deaths, or 49.7 per cent of all homeless deaths investigated in the last decade, were deemed “accidental”—which includes motor vehicle accidents, drug and alcohol overdoses, and drowning.

In 2015, 40 of 70, or 57 per cent of deaths were deemed “accidental.” This is the second year showing an increase in “accidental” deaths.

Each year the BC Coroners Services investigates approximately 25 per cent of all deaths in the province. For the general population, the coroner’s statistics show the most common way to die is of “natural” causes (73.1 per cent of the general population in B.C.). Accidental deaths account for just 16.5 per cent of all coroner-investigated deaths in B.C.

When comparing the means of death of the homeless population against that of the general population, homeless individuals are more than three times as

likely to die by accidental means and roughly twice as likely to die by homicide or suicide.

These numbers demonstrate both how preventable many homeless deaths are, and how much more likely a person experiencing homelessness is to die by violent means.

The beginnings of the overdose crisis in 2015 appear to be evident in these numbers. The number one cause of death for people experiencing homelessness in 2015 continues to be “Poisoning: Alcohol/Drugs.” This number more than doubled from 2014 to 2015, from 13 to 34 deaths by “Poisoning: Alcohol/Drugs,” an increase of 161.1 per cent. Overdose deaths in B.C. have continued to rise, reaching an unprecedented high of 922 deaths in 2016.

We expect to see another increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who die from drug or alcohol overdose when the 2016 homeless deaths data is released.

## Classification of Deaths, Homeless

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total	%
Accidental	12	26	25	22	16	10	12	10	23	<b>40</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>49.7</b>
Natural	10	10	16	9	5	10	6	8	12	<b>13</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>25.1</b>
Suicide	4	3	4	7	6	3	5	3	7	<b>7</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>12.4</b>
Undetermined	2	4	2	3	4	1	5	5	1	<b>8</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>8.8</b>
Homicide	3	-	3	2	1	1	-	1	2	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3.8</b>
<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>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>394</b>	

Source: BC Coroners Service

## Means of death

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Poisoning:Alcohol/Drugs	15	12	10	13	5	9	10	13	<b>34</b>
Natural Disease	8	16	9	5	10	6	7	8	<b>13</b>
MVI	5	5	2	1	3	1	2	2	<b>1</b>
Hanging	2	2	4	1	1	3	2	2	<b>6</b>
Fall/Jump	3	5	3	1	2	-	-	2	<b>1</b>
Undetermined Deaths	5	0	2	1	-	2	1	1	-
Drowning*	2	3	-	2	-	-	-	1	<b>1</b>
Fire	-	2	3	-	-	2	-	-	-
Exposure: Cold	1	1	2	1	2	-	1	-	-
Poisoning: Other	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	2	-
Railway	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	3	-
Stabbing	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	-
Poisoning: CO**	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	-
Choking	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-
Crushing	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beating	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Exposure: Heat	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other***	1	1	-	3	-	1	-	-	-
Under Investigation	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	8	<b>14</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>70</b>

\* "Drowning" does not include deaths with a means of death of "Fall" or "Motor Vehicle Incident"

\*\* "Poisoning: CO: does not include deaths with a means of death of "Fire"

\*\*\* Categories with <2 deaths for 2007-2015 were grouped under "Other"



## 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	<b>7,490</b>	<b>16.5</b>
Natural	5,668	5,420	5,819	5,473	5,480	5,390	<b>33,270</b>	<b>73.1</b>
Suicide	461	476	483	510	531	528	<b>2,989</b>	<b>6.6</b>
Undetermined	288	160	158	159	150	161	<b>1,076</b>	<b>2.4</b>
Homicide	133	103	122	132	115	93	<b>698</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<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

## Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths, General Population

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>922</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

## Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths by Region, General Population

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Vancouver Coastal	68	64	47	69	52	81	72	95	117	154	252	<b>1,071</b>
Island	40	35	43	33	23	44	44	58	55	62	153	<b>590</b>
Fraser	74	57	65	58	86	115	104	106	126	208	309	<b>1,308</b>
Interior	38	35	22	35	37	38	31	54	47	64	158	<b>559</b>
Northern	9	11	6	6	13	16	18	19	21	25	50	<b>194</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>922</b>	<b>3,722</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

# Where Homeless People Died

The BC Coroners Service provides data that examines both the region and the 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>11</sup>

For the second year in a row, the highest number of homeless deaths occurred in the Fraser Region, with 30 people or 42.8 per cent of all homeless deaths occurring there. This more than doubles the Fraser Region's 2014 high of 14 homeless deaths.

The 2017 Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) Homeless Count found 603 people without a home, an increase of 74 per cent from 346 in 2014, and well above the previous recorded high of 465 persons in 2008.<sup>12</sup>

With housing costs on the rise in the Fraser region and across B.C., homelessness is on the rise. Advocates point to a lack of affordable housing, as well as limited provision of harm reduction and shelter services in asserting that people experiencing homelessness in the Fraser Region experience marginalization that makes them increasingly vulnerable. Homeless deaths in the Fraser Region are expected to continue to increase.

The Metro Vancouver region also saw a significant increase, with 16 homeless deaths in 2015, an increase of 100 per cent from 2014.

According to the BC Coroners Service data, the number of homeless deaths in Maple Ridge jumped dramatically from just three (between 2007 and 2014) to 10 (between 2007 and 2015) an increase of 233 per cent. Maple Ridge stands out as a municipality that has extremely limited services for people experiencing homelessness. Efforts to open a shelter in 2016 were halted by local groups and the provincial government. Open hostility from some Maple Ridge residents and alleged violence against people experiencing homelessness in Maple Ridge pushes people into the fringes and leaves them unable to access needed services to survive and maintain basic health.

Nanaimo and Langley also saw notable increases in homeless deaths in just one year. Nanaimo increased from five (between 2007 and 2014) to nine (between 2007 and 2015). Homeless deaths in Langley doubled in one year, increasing from three to six.

Homelessness is not an issue confined to dense urban centres. Homeless count data and BC Coroners Service data show that people experience homelessness in communities across B.C. Currently, many suburban and smaller municipalities are ill-equipped and resistant to address this crisis. Government and public reactions in many of these places range from neglect to open hostility. The effect is to endanger people experiencing homelessness. Unable to access proper supports, health services, or housing options, people experiencing homelessness die largely preventable deaths.

To prevent homeless deaths in B.C., municipal governments of all sizes must accept there is a homeless crisis in their cities and treat it with the urgency of a public health emergency. In turn, provincial and federal governments must support under-resourced municipalities to reduce poverty, improve harm reduction services, and build affordable and social housing.

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<sup>11</sup> BC Coroners Service. (February 22, 2017). Reportable Deaths of Homeless Individuals, 2007-2015.

<sup>12</sup> Preliminary Findings, 2017 FVRD Homeless Count, March 22 2017

## General Population Deaths by Region

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
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

## Homeless Deaths by Region

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	<b>%</b>
Metro Vancouver	7	11	18	15	12	9	12	7	8	16	29.8
Island	8	14	12	10	6	5	7	8	9	13	23.1
Fraser	11	8	10	9	8	5	6	7	14	30	26.7
Interior	4	8	7	6	3	5	-	2	8	7	12.7
Northern	1	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	6	4	7.7
<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>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: BC Coroners Service

### Homeless Deaths by Township, 2007-2015

	Deaths	%
Vancouver	81	22.3
Victoria	43	11.8
Surrey	33	9.1
New Westminster	15	4.1
Kelowna	14	3.9
Campbell River	11	3
Prince George	11	3
Maple Ridge	10	2.8
Kamloops	9	2.5
Nanaimo	9	2.5
North Vancouver	9	2.5
Abbotsford	8	2.2
Chilliwack	8	2.2
Burnaby	6	1.7
Duncan	6	1.7
Langley	6	1.7
Mission	6	1.7
Vernon	5	1.4
Other	73	20.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>

# Take Action on Homeless Deaths: Recommendations

## **Conduct a Death Review Panel**

In light of the unprecedented number of homeless deaths in British Columbia in 2015, Megaphone calls upon the next provincial government to support the BC Coroners Service to conduct a Death Review Panel on homeless deaths.

A Death Review Panel can examine the circumstances in a group of deaths with similar factors to develop recommendations to reduce the likelihood of similar deaths in the future. For example, more detailed data on Aboriginal homeless deaths or on cause of death compared with place of death. This would provide a basis for clear recommendations to reduce homeless deaths.

2015 shows the highest number of homeless deaths in a single year on record, 40 per cent higher than the previous high in 2008. This is a crisis on our streets that demands an emergency response.

## **Fund the BC Coroners Service to report on homeless deaths**

The incoming provincial government ought to fund the BC Coroners Service to create an annual report on Homeless Deaths, with detailed data and deeper analysis into homeless deaths in British Columbia.

## **Implement a Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Megaphone further calls upon the incoming provincial government to implement a poverty reduction strategy with legislated targets and timelines. British Columbia is the only province without a plan.





Photo by Jackie Dives

## ABOUT MEGAPHONE

Megaphone creates meaningful work for people experiencing poverty while amplifying marginalized voices and building support to end homelessness.

Megaphone publishes a monthly magazine and annual calendar, which are sold on the streets of Vancouver and Victoria by homeless and low-income vendors. Vendors buy each magazine for 75 cents and sell it for \$2. They keep the money earned from every sale.

Megaphone provides flexible, low-barrier employment for people living with various barriers—poverty, homelessness, mental and physical health challenges, and addiction. By selling Megaphone magazine, vendors earn needed income, develop skills, and build bridges between communities. Megaphone is a survival strategy for people experiencing poverty, and a catalyst for positive social change.

In 2016, Megaphone worked with roughly 150 vendors, who collectively earned more than \$150,000 through magazine and calendar sales.

Published by professional journalists and designers, Megaphone magazine features award-winning journalism, community news, and independent arts alongside stories and poems from Megaphone's vendors and Megaphone's community writing workshops.

For more information visit:  
[MegaphoneMagazine.com](http://MegaphoneMagazine.com)

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