



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
BC Coroners Service

Deaths of unhoused British Columbians rose sharply in 2023

VICTORIA – At least 458 people experiencing homelessness died in British Columbia in 2023, according to data from the BC Coroners Service.

This reflects an increase of 23% from 2022 (373) and is nearly three times the number of people who died while experiencing homelessness in the province in 2020 (155).

“The data speaks to the tragic reality of the struggles many face in our communities throughout B.C.,” said Dr. Jatinder Baidwan, chief coroner. “During the period studied, between 2016 and 2023, the deaths of 1,940 people were reported to the BC Coroners Service, identified as experiencing homelessness.”

For the purpose of the report, an individual experiencing homelessness was defined as:

- unsheltered: a person living outdoors, in a make-shift shelter, a parked vehicle, a vacant home or any other structure not intended for habitation;
- sheltered: a person staying at an emergency shelter (overnight) or who is temporarily sheltered (suspected to be for less than 30 days) by friends or family, in a short-term shelter, safe house for youth, or transition house for women and children fleeing violence; and
- persons residing in short-term shelters, safe houses, or transition houses for an unknown length of time.

More than half of deaths reported in 2023 were people between the ages of 30 through 49, and 79% of decedents were males. The data also shows that nearly half of those deaths were males who were unsheltered (47%).

In 2023, 91% of deaths of people experiencing homelessness were classified as accidental (419), and 86% were due to accidental unregulated drug toxicity (394).

Additional notable findings from the report include:

- about 46% of individuals met the criteria for unsheltered homelessness, versus 35% for sheltered homelessness;
- in 2023, 41% of female decedents were sheltered, compared to 34% of males;
- the highest proportion of deaths of people experiencing homelessness occurred in winter (28%), followed by spring (27%) in 2023;
- 26% of deaths of people experiencing homelessness in 2023 occurred in the Fraser Health Authority (117), followed closely by 25% within Island Health (114); and
- in 2023, the health service delivery area of Vancouver had the highest number of deaths (77), followed by central Vancouver Island (55), which includes the Cowichan Valley,

Nanaimo and Tofino, and then Fraser East (50), which includes Abbotsford and Hope.

Note that mortality rates within the report should be interpreted with caution. The BC Coroners Service does not investigate all deaths of individuals experiencing homelessness and the number of deaths within the report excludes individuals experiencing homelessness that did not meet the legal criteria of the Coroners Act for reporting. Additionally, the data is preliminary and subject to change as coroners' investigations conclude.

Learn More:

To read the report, Deaths of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness in British Columbia, 2016-2023, visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/statistical/250212_homeless_web_report_2016-2023.pdf

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