

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Year-Over-Year Flows in Annual Homelessness (2019 – 2024)

Last Updated: March 30, 2026

Summary:

B.C. produces annual homelessness estimates using de-identified administrative data. This document summarizes year-over-year flows into and out of homelessness.

- Annual homelessness increased each year from 2020 to 2023, then rose more modestly in 2024: +1,960 in 2021, +2,761 in 2022, +3,488 in 2023, and +599 in 2024.
 - Inflow rose from 11,771 to 14,665 between 2021 and 2023, then dipped slightly to 14,053 in 2024.
 - Outflow rose more slowly, from 9,811 in 2021 to 11,177 in 2023, then increased more sharply to 13,454 in 2024.
- Return to homelessness rates were consistent across cohorts and declined over time.
 - About 22% of people who outflowed in 2019, 2020, and 2021 were re-identified within two years.
 - For the 2019 cohort, 14.1% returned after one year, 22.0% within two years, 27.3% within three years, and 31.5% within four years.

Background:

The Preventing and Reducing Homelessness Integrated Data Project is undertaking analyses of de-identified administrative data related to homelessness to better understand, respond to, and prevent homelessness in B.C. This includes producing annual estimates of people experiencing homelessness; those estimates are currently produced and released by BC Stats, through the [Data Catalogue](#).¹ For the purposes of this work, an individual is considered to have experienced homelessness if at minimum they have:

1. Spent three consecutive months on income or disability assistance (BC Employment and Assistance program) with a No Fixed Address (NFA) flag;
2. Stayed one night in a BC Housing-affiliated shelter; or

¹ Annual Estimates of the Homeless Population in B.C. (BC Stats)
<https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/annual-estimates-of-the-homeless-population-in-b-c->

3. Had both experiences

The administrative data sources used in this project include:

- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction: BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) data²
- BC Housing: Shelter and Homeless Outreach Private Market Rent Supplements³
- Ministry of Health: Client Roster (for demographic data)⁴

Further information on the production of the annual estimates of the homeless population in B.C. is available in the Technical Documentation included within the Data Catalogue.⁵ Further context on privacy and security of these data, including the internationally recognized Five Safes model, are described on the [Data Innovation Program website](#).⁶

Flows Approach / Methodology:

In this analysis, we examined how people move in and out of homelessness across BC each year. Various terms are used in reference to year-over-year flows:

- *Outflow* refers to people who were counted as experiencing homelessness one year but were not counted as experiencing homelessness the next year.
- *Inflow* refers to people who were not counted as experiencing homelessness one year but were counted as experiencing homelessness the next year.
- *Continued* homelessness refers to people who were counted as experiencing homeless for consecutive years.

² Metadata for BC Employment and Assistance <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/metadata-for-bc-employment-and-assistance>

³ Metadata for Shelter and Homeless Outreach Private Market Rent Supplements <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/metadata-for-shelter-and-homeless-outreach-private-market-rent-supplements>

⁴ New in 2025, the Client Roster has replaced the Central Demographic file, historically maintained by PopData (and the source for past estimates and associated research). The Client Roster is now the authoritative and standardized source of registration and demographic data from the Ministry of Health. <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/metadata-for-client-roster>

⁵ Technical Documentation: Annual Homelessness Cohort Data Set (2026-01-23). <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/fbb1584f-7f93-47e7-8001-16e3087bddea/resource/6afe3123-27ff-426d-9202-0b23b85a2591/download/homelessness-cohort-data-technical-document.pdf>

⁶ Privacy and security for the Data Innovation Program <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/finding-and-sharing/data-innovation-program/privacy-security>

Overview Diagram

Estimates for the annual flows of people into, or out of homelessness, were first introduced in the context of inflow and outflow in the 2020 Homelessness Cohort Update report, in narrative form.⁷ An overview diagram was introduced in the subsequent 2021 report.⁸ The current diagram format was first introduced for the 2019-2022 flows in annual homelessness, and provides an overview of year-over-year inflow, outflow, net flow, and continued homelessness.

An updated overview diagram is presented on the following page (Figure 1).

Trends in Inflow into & Outflow from Homelessness

As is shown below in Table 1, year-over-year inflow into homelessness increased both as a number and as a rate of the B.C. population until 2024, when inflow into homelessness declined for the first time over the study period (-612, or -4.2%, compared to the inflow going into 2023).

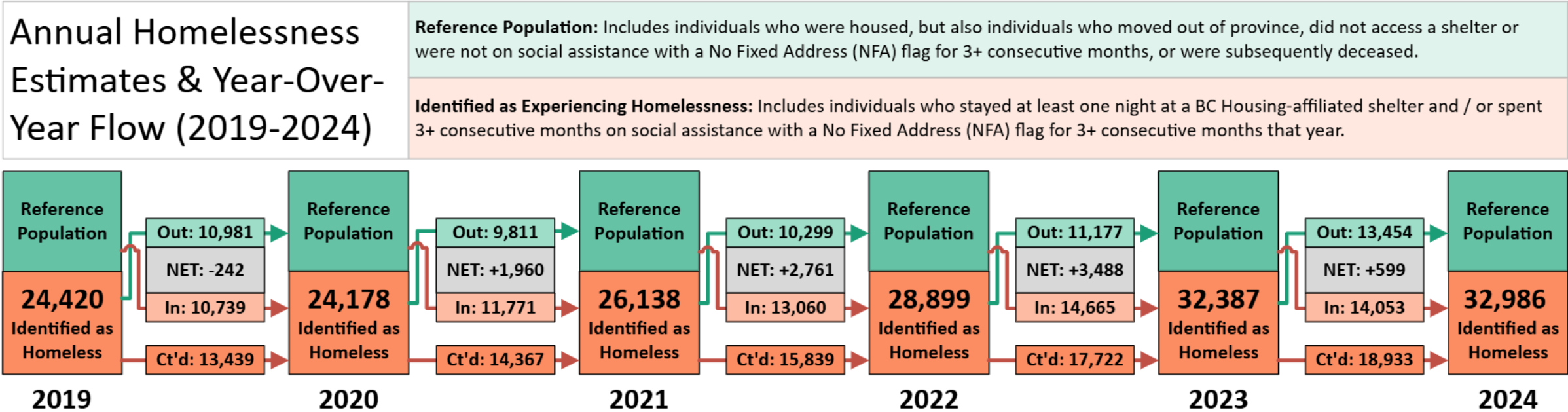
The outflow from 2020 homelessness fell in comparison to outflow from 2019 homelessness. Outflow then rose over time after that, but did not grow as fast as inflow until outflow from 2023 homelessness (+20.4% increase in outflow year-over-year, compared to the -4.2% drop in inflow).

Table 1: Inflow to / Outflow from Annual Estimates of Homelessness Over Time					
	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024
Year-Over-Year Inflow	10,739	11,771 (+9.6%)	13,060 (+11.0%)	14,665 (+12.3%)	14,053 (-4.2%)
Year-Over-Year Outflow	10,981	9,811 (-10.7%)	10,299 (+5.0%)	11,177 (+8.5%)	13,454 (+20.4%)

⁷ Preventing & Reducing Homelessness: An Integrated Data Project - 2020 Homeless Cohort Update
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/housing-and-tenancy/social-housing/supportive-housing/report_2020_homelessness_cohort_update.pdf

⁸ Report: 2021 Estimate of the Homeless Population in British Columbia
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/housing-and-tenancy/social-housing/supportive-housing/2021_idp_cohort_report_homeless_population_in_bc_final.pdf

Figure 1: Annual Homelessness Estimates and Year-Over-Year Flow (2019-2024)



Trends in Returns to Homelessness

Some people who exit homelessness are later re-identified in the homeless cohort. Of the 10,981 people who outflowed from homelessness in 2019, 31.5% were re-identified between 2021 and 2024. Most, 68.5%, were not re-identified by 2024.

Return rates were consistent across cohorts. About 22% of those who outflowed in 2019, 2020, and 2021 were re-identified within two years. Returns also declined over time: among the 2019 cohort, 14.1% were re-identified after one year, 22.0% within two years, 27.3% within three years, and 31.5% within four years.

Table 5: Cumulative Returns Over Time by Outflow Cohort					
Outflow by Period		1-Yr Returns	2-Yr Returns	3-Yr Returns	4-Yr Returns
2019 to 2020	10,981	1,548	2,420	2,998	3,459
		14.1%	22.0%	27.3%	31.5%
2020 to 2021	9,811	1,364	2,173	2,672	
		13.9%	22.1%	27.2%	
2021 to 2022	10,299	1,487	2,296		
		14.4%	22.3%		
2022 to 2023	11,177	1,444			
		12.9%			
2023 to 2024	13,454				

Limitations – Annual Estimates & Flows:

Annual homelessness estimates and flow analyses should be interpreted in light of how the estimates are produced, as outlined above and in the technical documentation. Current estimates capture only people identified in the two available administrative datasets whose records could be linked. They do not include people who avoid shelters and do not receive income or disability assistance, or those receiving assistance who are not recorded as having No Fixed Address. As a result, these data are best understood as showing broad population patterns rather than precise population counts.

Calendar-year flow analysis also has limitations. The distinction between continued homelessness and outflow can be imperfect. For example, a person with a shelter stay in January 2019 and another in December 2020 would still be counted as experiencing continued homelessness. Limited time coverage, currently 2019 to 2024, also restricts the ability to distinguish new homelessness from returns to

homelessness. Outflow may also include people who remain homeless but left the province, as well as those who died.

Despite these limitations, the estimates and analyses provide useful insight into homelessness patterns based on the integrated administrative data currently available.

Future Research

This descriptive analysis of flows between annual estimates of homelessness provides additional context on patterns of annual homelessness across the current study period. Future studies using different methodologies and additional datasets could explore these trends at a monthly level, and / or include additional context on where people flow from and flow to.