

Introduction to homelessness

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Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Land and Peoples

SFU is located in the heart of the traditional territories of the **Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh** and **Sto:lo** First Nations.

They are members of the **Coast Salish people** and have been stewards of this land for thousands of years.

In addition to the local First Nations, Burnaby's Aboriginal population is also comprised of **Métis, Inuit** and **First Nations** drawn from across Canada and North America.

Source:
<http://www.seattleu.edu/artsci/ethnobotanical/default.aspx?id=15866>



What does **home** mean to you?

What would you lose if you
didn't have a home?

“Most Canadians recognize that having a home is essential to everything we value in life. Without a home, it is extremely difficult to meet basic physical needs or maintain family, friends, community involvement and work.”

Homeless Action Plan, City of Vancouver, 2005

Homelessness, therefore, can be described as the lack of these things that encompass what it means to have a home:

- You lack security and safety
- You have no place to call your own
- You are always the intruder into other people's spaces
- You have no place for your things
- It is extremely difficult if not impossible to maintain your physical and emotional health, relationships, work, school, treatment regimes or regular meals or food preparation

Homelessness impacts everything

physical, emotional, mental and spiritual



Photo by Judy
Graves
Vancouver, 2011

Where do you call home?

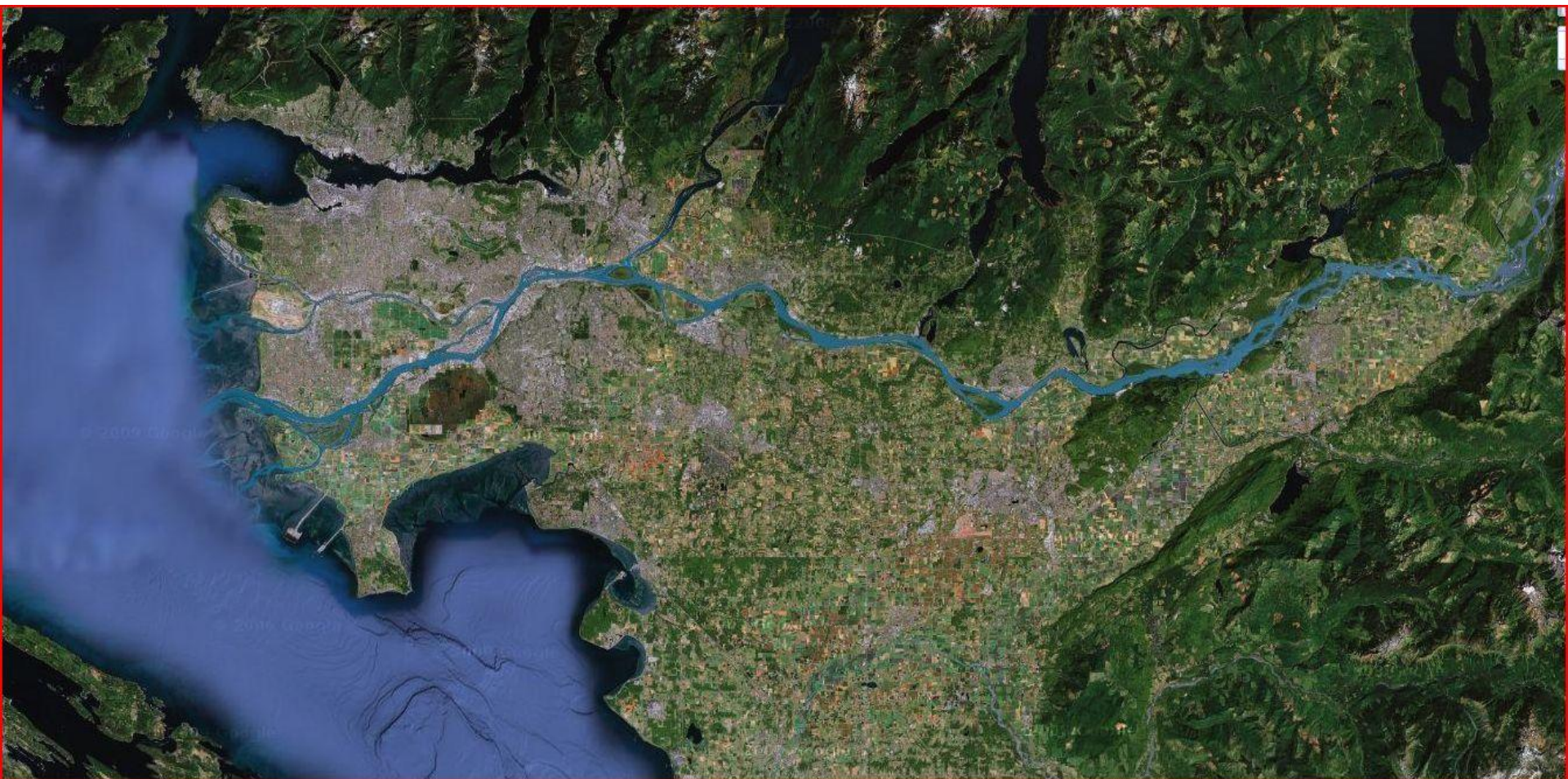


Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Political_map_of_Canada.png

The Metro Vancouver Regional District In British Columbia



Source: <http://www.shakeoutbc.ca/districts/index.php/Metro%20Vancouver>



Source: <http://cityhallwatch.wordpress.com/regional-growth-strategy/>

Metro Vancouver Regional District

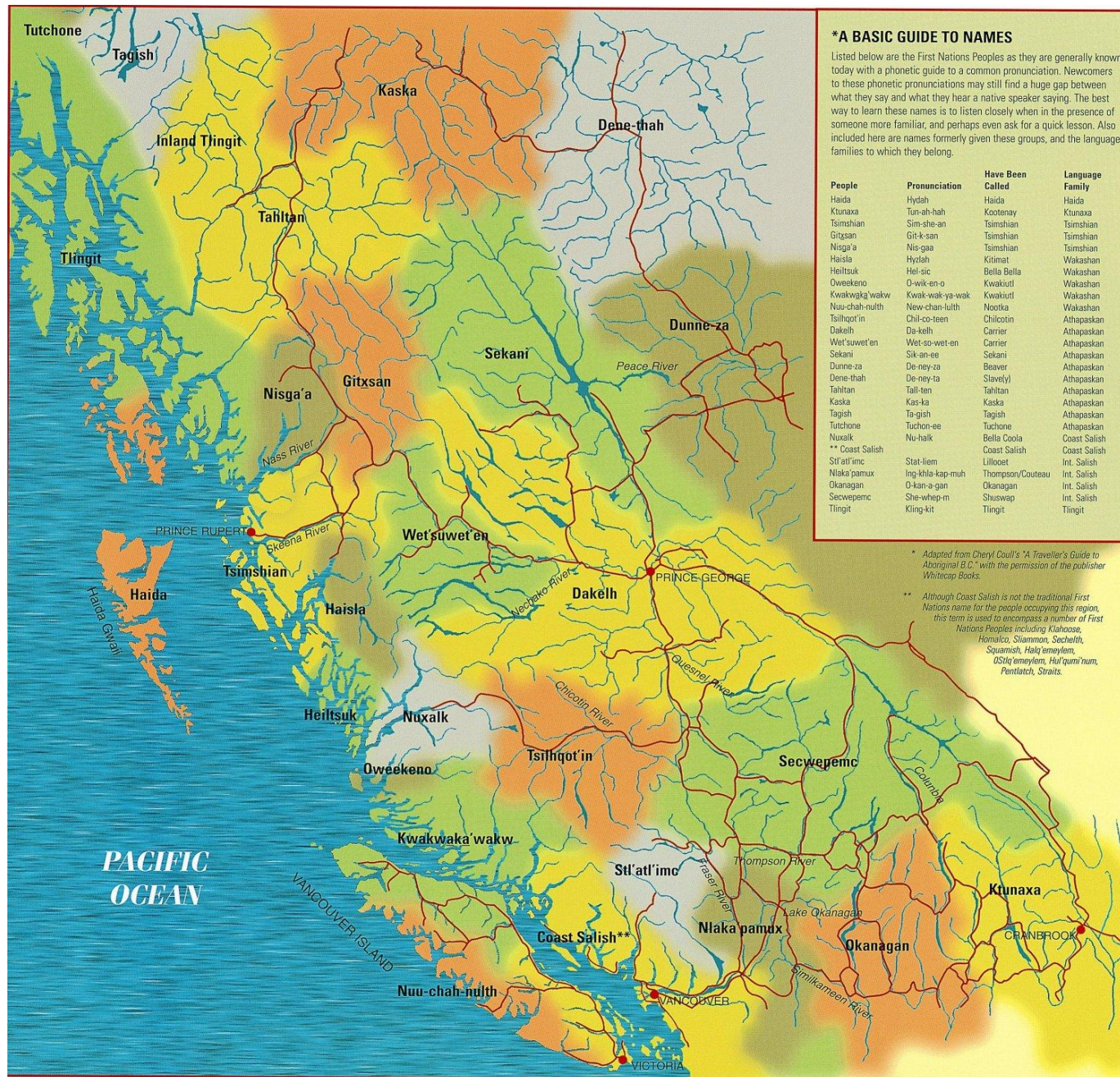
21 municipalities
1 First Nations government
1 unincorporated area



Source: http://trek.ubc.ca/files/2010/08/Metro_Van.gif



Source: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/livablecentres/Pages/vancouver.aspx>



Coast Salish Land



Source: <http://bcheritage.ca/salish/ph2/map/bc.htm>

The Metro Vancouver Regional District In British Columbia



Source: <http://www.shakeoutbc.ca/districts/index.php/Metro%20Vancouver>

11 First Nations in Metro Vancouver

1. **Hwlitsum** First Nations (*without lands today; originally near Ladner on Fraser R.*)
2. **Katzie** First Nations (*Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge, Langley*)
3. **Kwantlen** First Nations (*Langley, Whonnock, originally along banks of Fraser River near what is now Whalley and New Westminster*)
4. **Kwikwetlem** First Nations (*originally part of Chilliwack Band; today Coquitlam*)
5. **Matsqui** First Nations (*Langley and north Abbotsford area*)
6. **Musqueam** Indian Band (*area along north arm of Fraser River; SW corner of Vancouver; originally much of what is now Vancouver*)
7. **Qayqayt** First Nations (*without lands today, but originally along banks of Fraser River near what is now Whalley and New Westminster*)
8. **Semiahmoo** First Nations (*south of Whiterock at Canada-US boundary*)
9. **Squamish** Nation (*today, the largest First Nation in Metro Van; originally Squamish, Howe Sound, Burrard Inlet, parts of Vancouver (e.g. Point Grey, Jericho, False Creek, Kitsilano) Indian Arm...*)
10. **Tsawwassen** First Nations (*Delta*)
11. **Tsleil-Waututh** Nation (*today: near Indian Arm, North Van; originally, north and south sides of Burrard Inlet*)

Homelessness

Absolute Homelessness

Shelterless or
street homeless

In emergency
shelters

Hidden homeless, i.e.
have no money to pay
rent and staying with
friends/family/strangers
("couch surfing")

At Risk of Homelessness

Have some kind of shelter and typically pay for that shelter but are at risk of becoming absolutely homeless because that shelter is unsafe (e.g. abusive, unhealthy) OR unaffordable (paying majority of income on rent) AND inadequate (needs immediate major repairs) or overcrowded

Homeless counts are...

- **Estimates** at a single point in time of the number of people who are absolutely homeless
- A **demographic profile** of the homeless population at that time
- Not a measure of total number of homeless over a month or year
- Understood as the **minimum** number of people homeless in a region at that point in time
- **Undercounts**

Precarious Housing Iceberg Paradigm



Source: *3 Ways to Home: One Step Forward...Results of the 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count*, Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, February 28, 2012, Metro Vancouver. <http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/ResourcesPage/2011HomelessCountFinalReport28Feb2012-FinalVersion-Tuesday.pdf> (p. 1)

Number of Homeless in **Metro Vancouver** according to “point-in-time” homeless counts

Homeless Category	Jan 15 2002	March 15 2005	March 11 2008	March 16 2011	change 2002-2011
Sheltered	788	1047	1086	1892	
Street/service (unsheltered)	333	1127	1574	758	
Total	1121	2174	2660	2650	136%

Source: *3 Ways to Home: One Step Forward...Results of the 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count*, Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, February 28, 2012, Metro Vancouver.
<http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/ResourcesPage/2011HomelessCountFinalReport28Feb2012-FinalVersion-Tuesday.pdf>

Number of Homeless in **Burnaby** in 2008 and 2011

Homeless Category	March 11, 2008	March 16, 2011
Sheltered	9	8
Street/service (unsheltered)	77	70
Total	86	78

Number of Homeless in **Vancouver** in 2008 and 2011

Homeless Category	March 11, 2008	March 16, 2011
Sheltered	765	1427
Street/service (unsheltered)	815	154
Total	1580	1581

Source: 2008 and 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Counts

<http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness/Pages/Resources.aspx>

Brief overview of homelessness

- BC: approx **10,500** homeless (SFU study, 2008)
- **Metro Vancouver: 2650** homeless (2011)
- **More men than women** live on the street and in emergency shelters (about 70% men)
- **Women may be undercounted** because they tend to be part of hidden homeless
- High incidence of **chronic medical conditions**
- High incidence of severe addictions and mental illness (**SAMI**) both closely related to high levels of stress often resulting from life on the street

- The number of **youth** living on the street is growing in Metro Vancouver and other parts of Canada
- The homeless population is **aging**
 - Homeless seniors are more likely to have medical conditions
- People of **Aboriginal** origin are massively over-represented in poverty and homelessness across BC and Canada
 - In Metro Vancouver in 2011, Aboriginal people represented 2% of the region's general population, but **27%** of the region's homeless population
 - Great need for housing options that meet Aboriginal peoples' unique cultural and health needs
- People in **shelters** were more likely to access housing and support services

Reasons for homelessness in general

People are vulnerable to homelessness as a result of a **combination** of factors:

- They **lack income**, *and*
- They live in a place where **rents are high and there is a low supply of affordable housing**, *and*
- They **do not have access to a range of well-coordinated support services** if they need them and/or that meet their specific needs (e.g. Aboriginal, SAMI, youth...)

Youth Homelessness

The causes of homelessness are typically not the same as for the adult population, e.g.:

- family problems/conflicts
- physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- previous involvement with the child welfare system

Aboriginal homelessness

“An exploration of Aboriginal homelessness must consider the historical and colonial legacy that has destroyed families, communities and an Aboriginal way of life... The roots of Aboriginal homelessness lie in the multi-generational experiences of residential schools, wardship through the child welfare system, and economic and social marginalization from mainstream Canadian society”

Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction, Department of Health Sciences, SFU, 2008

The Role of the Market and of Governments

The homelessness we see on the streets today and have seen over the past decade is a *new* phenomenon. It has emerged as the product of two major trends:

1. **Market forces** have increased economic inequality in Canada, and
2. **Successive governments** have made decisions that have left our society's most vulnerable people without access to income, affordable housing and support services

Home-breaking

“The vast majority of Canadian studies accept the view that the homeless are not the authors of their own fate and have been rendered vulnerable by underlying structural/systemic factors.”

Buckland, Jackson, Roberts & Smith (2001), *Structural and systemic factors contributing to homelessness in Canada: An analysis of research gaps and proposed research directions*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

“Thus, the assertion can be put forward that politics, economics, and social issues have all played a role in the dramatic increase in homelessness in Canadian cities.”

Van Wyk, A., & van Wyk, R. (2011). *Homeless in the Fraser Valley: Report on the 2011 Fraser Valley Regional District Homelessness Survey*. Fraser Valley Regional District. (p. 18)

What can be done?

Governments (city, provincial, federal) can create and implement **policies** that

- Raise **incomes** (i.e. income assistance and minimum wage) to ensure a basic and adequate income for poor people
- Increase the **supply and range of affordable housing** options built by governments and private developers
- Increase the **supply, range and coordination of support services** that meet the needs of specific groups, including people of Aboriginal origin, youth, people with SAMI, HIV/AIDS, head/brain injuries, and people with concurrent disorders/multiple challenges

Where will the money come from?

- Choose to spend money on addressing homelessness – i.e. political will
- Raise it through taxation
 - In BC income tax rates have been declining for 15 years. 1995, tax rate on income > \$125,000 was about 55%. Today it is about 45%.
 - Raising income taxes (or stopping their decline) would raise revenue that can be used to transfer resources to poor households and individuals, to build housing, and provide support services.

What will it take?

- Ending homelessness is not complicated, though it is expensive.
- We know how to do it and have done it before. We had much less homelessness with more social programs and publicly-funded housing options in the past.
- It takes commitment on the part of citizens and governments to make things happen.

“You simply cannot look at this happening to people without being angry. If there were no solution, then I would just be sad and it would just break my heart. It’s not rocket science. The solution to homelessness is housing.

It is your responsibility as a citizen of a democracy to go to everyone who is running for office or has been elected into office and let them know that you hold them absolutely accountable for the suffering of every single person that is on the street.”

Judy Graves, Advocate for the Homeless, City of Vancouver