

# Study highlights concern for homeless seniors

September 17 2014, by Suzanne Ahearne

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A new study for the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, co-authored by researchers at the University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University, has found that a disproportionate number of people chronically staying in Victoria's emergency shelters are seniors.

Hannah Rabinovitch, a Simon Fraser University public policy master's student, conducted the [longitudinal study](#) on emergency shelter use patterns in Victoria, under the supervision of Bernie Pauly of UVic's Centre for Addictions Research of BC, and Doug McArthur, a professor and director of SFU's Public Policy program.

The study examined nearly 46,000 shelter records of 4,332 individuals between April 2010 and May 2014. More than 85 per cent of users accessed shelters for short periods, meaning only once or twice—findings that point to the need for affordable housing and preventative measures, according to the study.

Another 13.6 per cent accessed the shelters five times over the four years with average stays of 30 days. The remaining 1.5 per cent, many of them seniors, had stayed four to five times with average stays of six months.

As a former front-line [emergency shelter](#) worker in Victoria, Rabinovitch, now a Vancouver resident, says she finds that worrisome but not shocking. "I was stunned by the number of seniors with complex physical and [mental health problems](#) regularly seeking refuge in

emergency shelters," says Rabinovitch. "I kept thinking emergency shelters aren't supposed to become discharge plans for hospitals that aren't equipped to keep them long term."

Rabinovitch says the data also indicates that "women and youth are underrepresented in this study," meaning their numbers don't adequately reflect the extent to which they are homeless.

"For example, it's widely known in research," says Rabinovitch, "that [homeless](#) women avoid emergency shelters for fear they're unsafe and that their children will be apprehended, and because they lack women's beds."

Dr. Pauly says it's important to maintain strategies that address the needs of different groups and make efficient use of resources. "Those experiencing temporary homelessness would benefit from rapid re-housing, more emergency cash assistance and rental subsidies to prevent or quickly address homelessness," she says. "Those with reoccurring episodes of homelessness would benefit from programs that combine intensive supports with housing."

Patterns of homelessness were found to be comparable to those in Ottawa, Toronto and Guelph in a 2013 study.

**More information:** The current study is available online: [victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-con ... omelessnessFINAL.pdf](http://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/homelessnessFINAL.pdf)

The 2013 study is available online: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/1 ... 013.773585#tabModule](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/103773585#tabModule)

Provided by University of Victoria

Citation: Study highlights concern for homeless seniors (2014, September 17) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-highlights-homeless-seniors.html>

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