

Homelessness increases by 77 per cent in Nipissing District since 2021

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The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board released the findings from Nipissing Counts 2024, which tabulated the extent of homelessness in the district, in a press release from Feb. 26. The count found that the homelessness numbers had risen to 531 individuals in 2024, an increase of 77 per cent from the 2021 count of 300, and 81 per cent from the 2020 count of 293. Mark King, chair of the DNSSAB board comments on this increase and what DNSSAB will endeavor to do about it.

DNSSAB is a member of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association, and they voted with resolution 2024-98 at their meeting on Oct. 23 to join in the support of Ontario's Big City Mayors' Solve the Crisis campaign. It calls for action from the provincial government to address the escalating homelessness crisis, and that DNSSAB support key actions within this campaign including; the creation of a ministry and minister with appropriate powers and funding to address full spectrum of housing needs as well as mental health, addictions and wrap around supports, the creation of a task force by this minister with broad sector representatives including municipalities, healthcare, first responders, community services, the business community and the tourism industry to develop a Made in Ontario Action Plan, support for municipalities by providing the tools and resources to transition those in encampments to more appropriate supports, when deemed necessary, funding commitments to the appropriate services these individuals need, community by community, where there are gaps in the system, investment in 24 hour, seven day a week community hubs / crisis centres to relieve pressure on emergency centres and first responders.

SolveTheCrisis.ca was launched in August, 2024 by Ontario's Big City Mayors to address the homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis happening across the province. The OBCM includes mayors of 29 single and lower tier cities with a population of 100,000 or more, who collectively represent nearly 70 per cent of Ontario's population. They advocate for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities. After years of advocacy, they are acting to confront the homelessness crisis in municipalities and regions across Ontario. They launched this initiative to get the federal and provincial governments to come to the table to help out with this crisis, as Ontario municipalities of all sizes have stepped up, putting in place programs and housing options along with community partners and other stakeholders, advocating for funding that might be provided from other levels of government but that falls short without assistance from upper levels of government.

South Algonquin Township council voted to support a resolution from DNSSAB at their Nov. 6, 2024 meeting regarding the Solve the Crisis campaign against homelessness, an escalating crisis in municipalities across Ontario.

DNSSAB conducted a homelessness council called Nipissing Counts 2024 last October, and the results were released.

On Feb. 26 in a press release. The last count in 2021 found that there were 300 homeless people in the district, a three per cent increase since the 2020 count, although progress was made to help the homeless over that 19-month period, including nearly 100 new shelter, transitional and permanent housing units.

The latest results were achieved by conducting a count during a 24 hour period starting Oct. 9, 2024 by social service agencies, homelessness service providers, health care facilities, municipalities and correctional facilities across Nipissing District.

According to the Feb. 26 press release, and under the federal government's requirement to include individuals in emergency shelters, unsheltered locations, public institutions, hidden homelessness, and transitional housing, a total of 531 individuals were experiencing homelessness across the district representing a 77 per cent increase from the 2021 count of 300, and an 81 per cent increase from the 2020 count of 293.

DNSSAB oversaw the count, funded by the federal government's Reaching Home Strategy, with the support of members of the

Nipissing District Housing and Homelessness Partnership, who guided the project from planning through to execution of the count and surveys.

The objective of Nipissing Counts 2024 is to gather demographic, numerical and community need information on the district's homelessness population to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the district's homelessness. They acknowledge the difficulty in accurately measuring local homelessness and its extent so they also compare the results with other homelessness data to enhance understanding and population estimation.

Some of the key survey findings Nipissing Counts 2024 pointed out were as follows; single adults accounted for 81 per cent of the count, 61 per cent identified as male, 48 per cent identified as Indigenous, 138 individuals were staying in unsheltered situations including encampments and vehicles, 130 individuals were staying in emergency or violence against women shelters, 117 were staying in public institutions with no fixed address like health care, treatment or correctional facilities, 80 individuals were experiencing hidden homelessness including couch surfing, and 66 individuals were staying in a transitional housing program.

Mark King is the chair of the DNSSAB board and says that the findings highlight a growing and urgent challenge in Nipissing District, with more individuals and families experiencing homelessness. He said that this data provides them with crucial insight into the realities of homelessness in their communities and that these numbers represent real people facing increasingly difficult circumstances.

"Addressing homelessness in Nipissing comes with unique challenges, as the district spans over 17,000 square kilometers of mostly rural and remote communities, more than twice the size of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. With no public transit services and most social supports centralized in North Bay, individuals in outlying areas face significant barriers to accessing essential services. DNSSAB will continue working with community partners and advocating tirelessly to government officials at all levels," he says. "Advocacy is central to our work, and we remain committed to securing the funding, resources, and policy changes needed to address homelessness, improve access to affordable housing, and enhance community supports."