

BC Urban Mayors' Caucus

Housing Gaps Survey Results

May 30, 2025

Administered and compiled by the Union of B.C. Municipalities



Background

On request of the BC Urban Mayors' Caucus (BCUMC), UBCM conducted a survey of caucus member municipalities in January 2025 to explore gaps in Provincial delivery and funding of housing and associated cost implications for local governments. UBCM also assembled standardized public data on housing needs to supplement the survey data.

Survey Response and Data Assembly

UBCM received survey responses from 14 BCUMC member municipalities between January and March 2025:

- Abbotsford
- Burnaby
- Chilliwack
- Coquitlam
- Kamloops
- Kelowna
- Maple Ridge
- Nanaimo
- New Westminster
- Prince George
- Richmond
- Surrey
- Vancouver
- Victoria

UBCM drew on the following data sources to assemble relevant data on housing need:

- Housing target guidelines, for all 13 members assigned targets under the *Housing Supply Act*, and
- Housing needs data from Interim Housing Needs reports, mandated for completion by January 1, 2025, from all 16 members.

Survey Results

Does your municipality currently have housing projects on-hold due to lack of provincial funding?

Six of fourteen respondents (43%) answered yes to this question¹: Coquitlam, Nanaimo, New Westminster, Richmond, Vancouver and Victoria. Altogether, respondents identified 3,278 units on hold within 28 projects. Among the six respondents, Vancouver accounts for approximately half of all the units on hold. Aside from project funding, one respondent highlighted project delivery as another challenge, noting several examples of projects experiencing long delays, including a large development that will have been in the funding and development process for a decade since purchasing of the lands by the time of completion.

How many households are on the BC Housing social housing waitlist for your municipality?

This question was designed to gauge unmet demand for social housing broadly. These data are collected in a central database by BC Housing called the “Housing Registry²”. Waitlist data drawn from the registry is not considered exhaustive because there are non-profit housing providers who do not participate and keep their own waitlists of applicants for social housing. It may therefore be considered an under-assessment actual need³. Most respondents provided registry data from 2024-2025, but 3 respondents provided data from 2023.

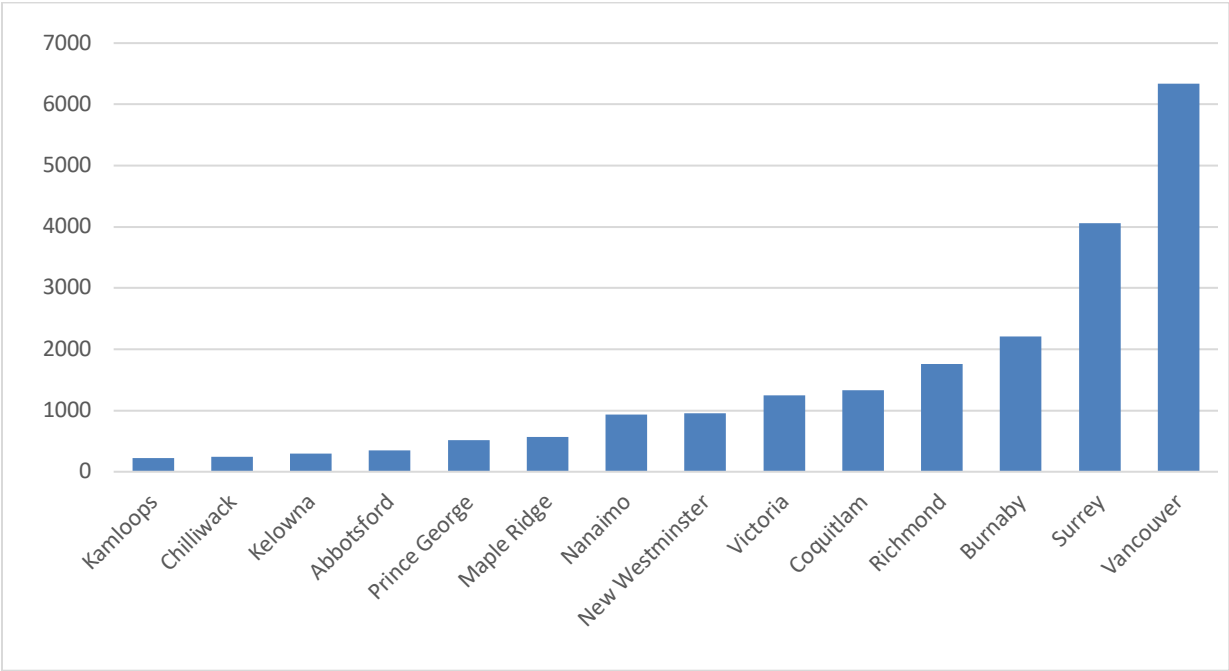
Based on the data provided, approximately 21,000 households are on the waitlist in the 14 respondent municipalities, broken down by municipality in Figure 1.

¹ This includes one respondent that didn’t explicitly state yes but noted that they had made multiple applications to BC Housing and are currently waiting for a next funding call.

² <https://www.bchousing.org/projects-partners/program-provider-information/housing-registry-for-housing-providers>

³ E.g. see: <https://globalnews.ca/news/11150055/metro-vancouver-housing-report/>

Figure 1: BC Housing social housing waitlist by municipality



While the survey sought data from each respondent at a single time point, some local governments track data over time. For example, Metro Vancouver periodically publishes a Housing Data Book⁴ that has tracked waitlist data across the region. Over the previous five years (2020-2024), the 8 caucus members falling in Metro Vancouver saw a 64% growth in their waitlists.

Costs incurred to address homelessness

The next survey question was designed as a preliminary review of what costs local governments are incurring to address homelessness. It identified the following categories of costs:

- **Shelter or housing provision** -including emergency weather shelters, land for affordable housing
- **Policing**
- **Fire**
- **Other** -including outreach services, community safety officers, grants to non-profits, sanitation services

⁴ Most recent release: February 2025; <https://metrovancover.org/services/regional-planning/housing-data-book>

For each category, the survey prompted:

- Has your municipality incurred costs to address homelessness that fall in this category?
- Are you collecting data on these costs?
- Please provide a brief description of the data being collected.

Overall results (Table 1) indicate that all categories of costs are incurred for most municipalities⁵. There are however notable gaps in data collection, especially for policing and fire related costs. In addition, the specific types of data that are collected vary substantially from municipality to municipality. Nonetheless, common themes in costs may be observed in the available data.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents incurring costs to address homelessness and percentage collecting associated data

Cost Category:	Shelter or Housing Provision	Policing	Fire	Other
Costs Incurred?	100%	93%	100%	100%
Data Collected?	86%	50%	57%	93%

Shelter & Housing

On shelter and housing, 100% of respondents indicated that they are incurring costs, with 86% collecting data.

Commonly cited costs include:

- *Land or cash for shelters, supportive and transitional housing*

Examples: Abbotsford since 2012, has contributed approximately \$14 million in land and cash for five supportive and transitional housing projects. Surrey spent \$2 million to lease 4 shelter/supportive housing sites in 2025. Burnaby's costs

⁵ Some communities have attempted to systematically quantify costs to address homelessness. As one example, Kelowna recently compiled data on unsheltered community costs: <https://kelownapublishing.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=48293>

include leases of land at nominal rates for two supportive housing sites and one year-round emergency shelter.

- *Fee waivers, tax exemptions*

Examples: Victoria has provided property tax exemptions for supportive housing sites. Chilliwack and New Westminster have waived fees for supportive housing and/or shelters.

Policing

With regards to policing, 93% of respondents indicated that they are incurring costs, with 50% collecting data.

Commonly cited costs include:

- *Dedicated teams or special units*

Examples: Richmond funds a Vulnerable Persons RCMP Unit with 2 dedicated officers addressing homelessness. Chilliwack similarly has a Community Response Team with staff costs associated with 2 police.

- *Calls to supportive housing sites, calls to no-fixed address*

Examples: Surrey, which noted 1,424 calls for service to 8-supportive housing facilities and temporary shelters in the City Centre area in 2024; and, Victoria, which also had a large call volume to shelter and supportive housing sites.

Fire

One hundred percent of respondents indicated that they are incurring fire-related costs. Of this number, 57% are collecting data.

Commonly cited costs include:

- *Response to overdoses and fire suppression*

Examples: New Westminster spent \$315,000 in 2024 responding to 802 incidents related to homelessness. 517 of these were emergency medical aid responses and 249 were related to a variety of fire incidents from open burning to structure fires. In Vancouver, an average of 152 overdose calls per week in 2024 resulted in costs of approximately \$2 million. Both Victoria and Abbotsford have noted significant escalation in calls related to homelessness and shelter response in recent years.

Other

One hundred percent of respondents indicated that they were incurring other costs, and 93% are collecting associated data.

Commonly cited costs include:

- *Community outreach, decampment, cleanup and waste removal, shower and toilet facilities, security patrols*

Examples: The City of Kamloops funds a Community Service Officer Outreach Program that partners outreach staff with Community Safety Officer teams to respond to vulnerable population calls. Maple Ridge employs 7 regular full time Community Safety Officers.

- *Homelessness research and response coordination, grants to non-profits*

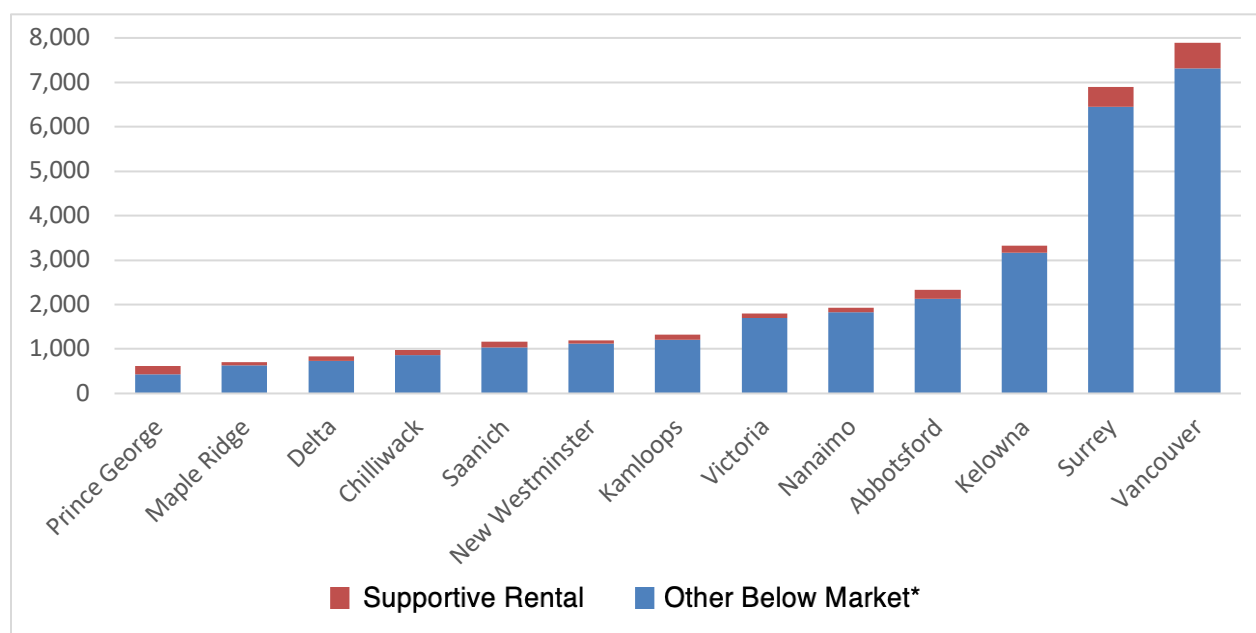
Example: Nanaimo provided five-year funding to a newly created non-profit to coordinate and optimize resourcing on homelessness response.

Data Collection – Housing Target Guidelines and Housing Needs Reports

Housing Target Guidelines

In addition to providing housing targets to designated municipalities under the *Housing Supply Act*, the Province has provided guidelines for specific unit types on the “recommended net new units to be completed within five years”⁶. These include guidelines for below-market rental and supportive rental, which have traditionally required significant supports by provincial and/or federal governments. Figure 2 summarizes the recommended net new units of these two unit types for the 13 caucus member municipalities that have been assigned targets. In total, for these 13 municipalities, the housing target guidelines recommend completion of 30,974 below market rental units, including 2,374 supportive rental units.

Figure 2: Recommended net new units to be completed within 5 years, by Municipality



*Supportive rental is included within the overall below market rental housing guideline

⁶ Note: the specific 5-year time frame depends on when targets were assigned. Targets/guidelines have been set in 3 tranches, with guidelines specified here:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BG_3rdSetHousingTargets_30July2024_FNL.pdf

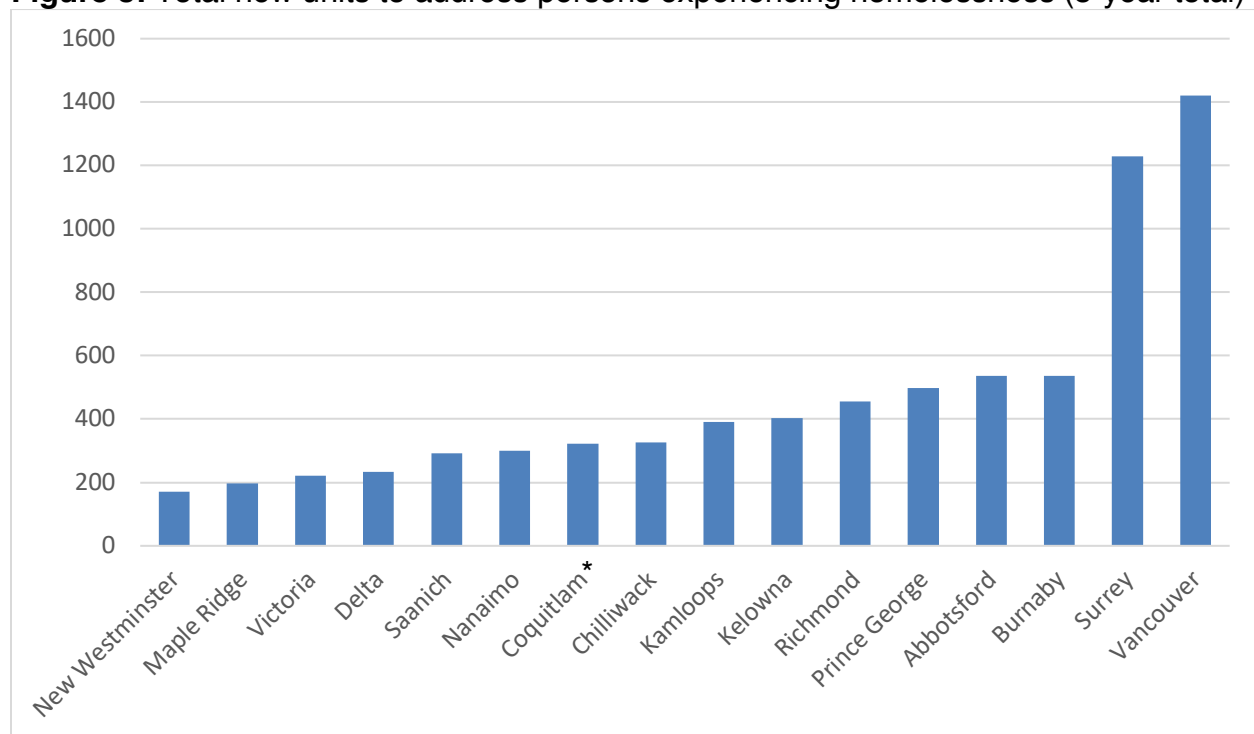
https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Housing_Target_Guidelines_BG.pdf

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/HousingTargetGuidelines.pdf>

Housing Needs Report data

As part of its proactive planning framework established via Bill 44, the Province requires that local governments update Housing Needs Reports (HNRs) using a standard method on a regular basis, incorporating projections of housing needs over 5 and 20-year timespans. Within this framework, Interim Housing Needs Reports were to be completed by January 1, 2025. The HNR Method consists of 6 components, of which UBCM compiled data on one: the supply of units to reduce homelessness. While this component does not directly specify unit types, it is likely to capture housing types that commonly require significant provincial or federal supports, such as deeply subsidized and supportive rental housing. For all 16 Caucus member municipalities, the 5-year total is 7,311 new units to address persons experiencing homelessness; the corresponding 20-year total is 14,624. Figure 3 illustrates the 5-year totals, by municipality.

Figure 3: Total new units to address persons experiencing homelessness (5-year total)



*Coquitlam figure derived using UBC BC HNR Calculator⁷

⁷ <https://hart.ubc.ca/bc-hnr-calculator/>

Local Estimates of Housing Need

Some municipalities went beyond base requirements in housing needs reporting to explore the assumptions underlying the Provincial HNR method and/or provide their own supplementary estimates of housing need. One example illustrates how projections are highly dependent on the underlying assumptions: New Westminster in applying their own methodology⁸, projected a supportive/transitional housing need over 5 years of 352 units, compared to the Province's guideline of 63 units. This in turn would mean increasing its supportive housing stock by 71%.

⁸ New Westminster HNR Method detailed in Section 5.2, Appendix D of Interim Housing Needs Report: https://www.newwestcity.ca/database/files/library/Interim_Housing_Needs_Report_2024_Final_.pdf

Conclusion

The results of this survey indicate that Provincial funding and project delivery delays are impacting several BC Urban Mayors' Caucus member municipalities. In addition, waitlists for social housing are significant, and in Metro Vancouver, they are growing. Local governments are incurring considerable expenditures to address homelessness that include: land or cash for shelters or housing, dedicated police teams or special units, fire department overdose response, community outreach and more. While data collection varies, with notable gaps in data collection for policing and fire related costs, most members are collecting at least some cost data. Finally, provincially sourced projections (housing target guidelines and Housing Needs Report data) also point towards considerable need over the next several years in the types of housing that require provincial or federal supports, including below market and supportive rental housing.