



**Algoma District Services Administration Board**

**Conseil d'administration des services du district d'Algoma**

## **Algoma District Homelessness Enumeration Final Report**

**Version 1.0**

## **Background**

Pursuant to s. 19.1 of the *Housing Services Act, 2011* (the “Act”), the Minister of Housing directed that Service Managers complete a homelessness enumeration within their service areas starting in spring 2018 and continuing every two years thereafter.

The results of the enumeration will be used to assist in the planning of community homelessness prevention programming. As well, it will inform decision making when it comes to implementation of housing programs and the administration of affordable housing program funding. Enumerations will be used to better understand the scale of homelessness and to inform current and future policy. The 2018 enumeration will set the baseline for future progress.

The goal is to end chronic homelessness by 2025.

The Algoma District Services Administration Board contracted the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre to develop and implement the Algoma homelessness enumeration.

## **Definition of Homelessness**

For this enumeration, homelessness is defined in three broad groups:

1. Unsheltered (absolute homelessness – living on the street)
2. Emergency Sheltered (staying in an emergency shelter)
3. Provisionally Accommodated (Hidden homelessness)

Provisionally Accommodated is defined as people who are living temporarily in unsustainable circumstances and often overcrowded housing to avoid living on the street. Examples include:

1. Staying with family or friends
2. Couch Surfing
3. Squatting
4. Sleeping in overcrowded spaces (often sleeping in shifts)
5. Tied accommodation such as domestic service
6. Survival sex or partnering
7. Institutionalization leading to homelessness upon release
8. Bush camps

## **Methodology**

The District of Algoma is composed of many small communities within large rural areas, and while homelessness is rarely visible in the District, it does exist. Due to the non-visible aspect of homelessness, it was decided that a Period Prevalence Count approach to the enumeration was the most appropriate method to collect homelessness data for this area. This methodology involves a multi-day count of homeless persons and works with local service providers who may interact with people who are experiencing homelessness.

Only three communities within the Algoma District have sufficient concentrations of service providers required to undertake a successful enumeration. These communities are Elliot Lake, Blind River and Wawa. Other communities in Algoma are either too small or too close to Sault Ste. Marie to offer services. As a result, Elliot Lake and Wawa were selected for the enumeration. Wawa is in northwestern Algoma and Elliot Lake is in eastern Algoma. Blind

River was not selected due to the proximity to Elliot Lake (57 km). Elliot Lake also has a larger population of 10,741 people, compared to Blind River (3,472 people). Wawa has a population of 2,975 people. The combined population of Elliot Lake and Wawa is 13,716 people, which is 35% of the total population of the Algoma Service Manager Area (39,438 people total) and is greater than the required 30% population threshold required for the enumeration.

It was anticipated that most of the people in Wawa or Elliot Lake that were experiencing some form of homelessness would encounter one or more of the agencies participating in the enumeration over a time-period of a month. Some encounters may be monthly visits or bi-weekly visits or more random encounters. It was not clear if enough people experiencing some form of homelessness would encounter a participating agency in the span of one week, over which the enumeration was conducted.

To determine the agencies that would participate in the enumeration, the Algoma District Services Administration Board (ADSAB) identified two local planning groups that were the best aggregation of relevant service providers. One group, the North Algoma Mental Health and Addictions Planning Table, meets in Wawa and includes sixteen agencies located in Wawa. The second group is the East Algoma Local Systems Planning Table, which has eighteen members and generally meets in Elliot Lake. Most agencies in these planning tables would be exposed to any form of homelessness in Wawa or Elliot Lake.

In addition, 211 was used to determine all agencies in Wawa and Elliot Lake that would likely deal with or provide services related to homelessness. This list was compared to the agency list from the two planning tables. Eleven additional agencies that were not in the planning tables were identified, including such agency types as the Salvation Army, credit counseling services and food banks, etc. These agencies were invited to participate in the enumeration.

Indigenous organizations and communities were engaged through the East Algoma Local Systems Planning Table and through the North Algoma Local Systems Planning Table. Indigenous agencies and communities are members of these two planning tables and participate in some planning table activities. The Indigenous agencies and communities involved in the two planning tables includes: Michipicoten First Nation and Dilico Anishininabek Family Centre in North Algoma and Mississauga First Nation, Benbowopka Treatment Centre, N,Mninoeyaa Aboriginal Health Access Centre and Nogdawindamin Family and Community Services in East Algoma.

The Indigenous agencies and communities were invited to participate through the two planning tables, through SSMIC and ADSAB. Numerous emails and phone calls concerning participation were made to the Indigenous agencies and communities over a half-year period with no response. No Indigenous agency or community attended training for the enumeration or conducted enumerations at their locations. It is possible referrals to do the enumeration at other locations were made.

For the homelessness questionnaire, all provincially mandated questions were included plus three additional questions:

- Q11a. Follow up question to gather more information about Child(ren)/ Dependent(s) (optional):
- Q16. Did you move to [Community name] in the past year?
- Q17. Have you stayed in an emergency shelter in the past year?

All surveys, posters, consent forms and other documentation were available in English and French. Appendix 1 includes a sample English survey.

The Algoma District enumeration took place from May 7 to May 13, 2018. Due to the presence of winter-like conditions during the months of March and April in the Algoma region, May was determined to be the most appropriate time-period to conduct the enumeration. It is very likely that more transient homelessness would be observed in Algoma during the period of June to September as many homeless people hitchhike across the country or temporality make their way to Elliot lake for lower costs of living.

The following agencies attended training sessions related to completing enumerations:

#### **Elliot Lake**

- Algoma District Service Administration Board
- Algoma Public Health
- St. Josephs General Hospital
- Salvation Army
- OPP
- Maplegate House for Women
- College Boreal
- Health Sciences North
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Beehive
- Community Living Algoma
- Elliot Lake Food Bank
- North Shore Community Support Services

#### **Wawa**

- Algoma District Service Administration Board
- Algoma Public Health
- Chadwick Home
- Victim Services
- IRIS Place
- Lady Dunn Hospital
- Wawa Food Bank

Training included the following items:

- Confidentiality
- How to approach a participant
- Consent
- Questionnaire prescreening
- How to complete a questionnaire
- Tally sheets
- Gifts and gift receipts
- Available services
- Safety protocols
- Duty to report

The following agencies agreed to do enumerations at their locations:

#### **Elliot lake**

- Algoma District Service Administration Board
- Algoma Public Health
- St. Josephs General Hospital
- Salvation Army
- Maplegate House for Women
- CMHA – Beehive
- Community Living Algoma
- Elliot Lake Food Bank
- North Shore Community Support Services

#### **Wawa**

- Algoma District Service Administration Board
- Algoma Public Health
- Chadwick Home
- Victim Services
- IRIS Place
- Wawa Food Bank

The enumeration was advertised by placing posters in participating agencies in advance of the enumeration. The posters stated that the enumeration could be completed at this location during normal work hours during the period May 7 to May 13. Additional posters were put up at other locations, such as Tim Hortons, explaining the enumeration and stating that the enumeration could be completed at many public services offices such as the ADSAB office. Appendix 2 contains examples of posters used for advertisement. SSMIC staff also spoke with most agencies and many businesses in advance of the enumeration to explain the enumeration process, so that staff could make people aware.

Participants of the enumeration were given Tim Horton gift cards for their involvement. Two five-dollar gift cards were provided for completing a full enumeration. One five-dollar gift card was provided if a participant attempted to complete the enumeration but was screened out.

All participants that attempted to complete or completed an enumeration were provided with an available resources pamphlet for either Elliot Lake and Wawa. These pamphlets were created by SSMIC using 211 information and information from service providers. Appendix 3 contains the Elliot Lake and Wawa pamphlets.

Enumerations were completed at the locations of the participating agencies that agreed to do on site enumerations. No enumerations were done on the street or through door to door canvassing.

#### **Key Demographics (Elliot Lake and Wawa)**

Elliot Lake is small city of 10,741 people that sits midway between Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie with an average population age of 53 years old. Approximately 10% of the population identifies as Indigenous and 75% of the population are Caucasian (European origins). The average after-tax income for households, as of 2015, was approximately \$50,645. In comparison, Wawa is a smaller city of 2,905 people, just north of Sault Ste. Marie with

an average population age of 44 years. Almost 13% of the population identify as Indigenous and, similarly, 73% of the population are Caucasian (European origins). As of 2015, the average after-tax income is \$69,406.

According to the 2016 Census, Wawa has an unemployment rate of 6.3%, of the population 15 years and over in the labour force, which equates to 95 people who reported they were unemployed. Further, 5.2% of males in the labour force are unemployed and 7.5% of females in the labour force are unemployed.

In Elliot Lake, the unemployment rate is 11.3% of the population 15 years and over in the labour force, which is a total of 395 people who reported they were unemployed. 15.1% of males in the labour force are unemployed and 7.3% of females in the labour force are unemployed.

## Results

### Overall Summary

The homelessness enumeration took place in Elliot Lake and Wawa over the period of May 7<sup>th</sup> to May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018. In total, 44 homeless individuals were captured by the enumeration; 13 were observed homeless and 31 individuals completed the questionnaire.

The results show an almost even split in genders of those who completed the surveys; 16 (51.6%) identified as male and 15 (48.4%) identified as female. The average age of respondents was approximately 40 years old with the majority of respondents racially identifying as “White” (71%) and 9% of respondents identified as Indigenous.

The most common responses for current housing/lodging were Emergency Shelters (29%), Respondent did not know (19.4%), or Someone Else’s Place (19.4%). The most common sources of income came from Welfare/Social Assistance (35.5%), Disability benefits (22.6%), and Employment (16.1%). A comparison of questionnaire responses by males and by females showed no notable differences with one exception: more females identified with having a mental health issue compared to males (11 females answered “Yes” versus 4 males that answered “Yes”).

A break down for questionnaire responses for Elliot Lake and Wawa follows.

### ELLIOT LAKE

In total, 26 homeless individuals were captured by the enumeration. Of the 26, 6 were observed as being homeless by service providers and 20 completed the enumeration questionnaire. One survey completed was documented as a duplicate; only the questionnaire the respondent completed first (with respect to the date) was included in the results for Elliot Lake.

Questionnaire Summary:

- 11 (55%) respondents identified as Male; 9 (45%) identified as Female
- All respondents’ preferred language was English
- The average age of respondents was approximately 37 years old; 5 of the 20 respondents were under the age for 20
  - o Age of respondents ranged from 16 to 73 years of age
- 6 (30%) respondents identified as Indigenous or having Indigenous ancestry; 5 identified as First Nations and 1 identified as Métis
- 15 (75%) respondents racially identified as ‘White’

- 1 respondent indicated they had served in the Military
- When asked how long they've been homeless this past year, respondent answers ranged from 0 (has not been homeless this past year) to 12 months
  - o Additionally, the frequency of homelessness ranged from 0 to 10 times over the past year
- 6 (30%) respondents cited an Emergency Shelter as their current housing/lodging; 5 (25%) did not know where they were staying, and 3 (15%) respondents were staying with friends or family
  - o The remaining respondents cited abandoned or vacant lots, makeshift shelter or tents, or a vehicle as their current housing/lodging
- There were varied responses for the reason for loss of housing and included:
  - o Illness or medical condition
  - o Job loss
  - o Unable to pay rent/mortgage
  - o Unsafe housing conditions
  - o Conflict with roommates, spouse, family
  - o Eviction
- 9 (45%) respondents identified with having a mental health issue, 8 (40%) identified as having a chronic or acute medical condition, 3 (15%) identified as having a physical disability, and 2 (10%) identified with having an addiction
- 7 (35%) respondents said their income was based on Welfare payments, 5 (25%) said their income came from Disability payments; the remaining responses included informal/self-employment, GST refund, Seniors benefits, employment and Child and Family Tax Benefits
  - o Some respondents identified multiple sources of income, i.e. Disability benefits and Child and Family Tax Benefits, Welfare/Income Assistance and GST Refund as well as cash jobs.
- 9 (45%) respondents said they had moved to Elliot Lake within the past year
- 10 (50%) respondents said they have stayed in an emergency shelter this past year (at the time of the enumeration)

## **WAWA**

In total, 18 homeless individuals were captured by the enumeration. Of the 18, 7 were observed as being homeless by service providers and 11 completed the enumeration questionnaire.

### Questionnaire Summary:

- 5 respondents identified as Male; 6 identified as Female
- All respondents' preferred language was English
- The average age of respondents was approximately 45 years old; 4 of the 11 respondents were under the age for 40
  - o Age of respondents ranged from 19 to 65 years of age
- 3 (27.3%) respondents identified as Indigenous (First Nations) or having Indigenous ancestry
- 7 (63.6%) respondents racially identified as 'White'; 1 respondent declined to answer
- None of the respondents had military experience
- When asked how long they've been homes this past year, responses ranged from 4 days to 12 months (and longer)
  - o Additionally, the frequency of homelessness ranged from 1 to 4 times over the past year

- One individual responded as being homeless in total for over 200 days and over “200 times” this past year and was noted as an outlier
- 3 (27.3%) respondents cited an Emergency Shelter as their current housing/lodging; 3 respondents were staying with friends or family
  - The remaining respondents cited public space, a vehicle, transitional housing or other unsheltered locations as their current housing/lodging
- There were varied responses for the reason for loss of housing and included:
  - Addiction/substance abuse
  - Job loss
  - Unable to pay rent/mortgage
  - Conflict with parent or spouse
  - Eviction from current residence
  - No affordable housing
- 6 (54.5%) respondents identified with having a mental health issue, 5 (45.5%) identified with having a physical disability, and 4 (36.4%) identified with having an addiction and 3 (27.3%) identified as having an acute or chronic medical condition
- 4 (36.4%) respondents said their income was based on Welfare payments, 4 were Employed, 2 (18.2%) said their income came from Disability payments; and 1 respondent was self-employed
- 1 (9.1%) respondent said they had moved to Wawa within the past year
- 7 (63.6%) respondents said they have stayed in an emergency shelter this past year (at the time of the enumeration)

**Table 1: Summary of Homelessness Enumeration Questionnaire Responses**

	Elliot Lake		Wawa		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Total Number of Homeless Enumerated</b>	26	-	18	-	44	-
Observed Homeless	6	-	7	-	13	-
Questionnaires Completed	20	-	11	-	31	-
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS (Question 4, 5, 6 7)</b>						
Male	11	55.0%	5	45.5%	16	51.6%
Female	9	45.0%	6	54.5%	15	48.4%
Average Age	37.5	-	45.4	-	40.3	-
Median Age	36	-	50	-	40	-
Youngest Age	16	-	19	-	16	-
Oldest Age	73	-	65	-	73	-
Indigenous Identity	6	30.0%	3	27.3%	9	29.0%
Racialized Identity - White	15	75.0%	7	63.6%	22	71.0%
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION (Question 8)</b>						
Straight/Heterosexual	18	90.0%	9	81.1%	27	87.1%
Bisexual	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	3.2%
Declined to answer	2	10.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.7%
<b>LANGUAGE (Question 9)</b>						
English	20	100.0%	10	90.9%	30	96.8%
French	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
No preference	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	3.2%
<b>MILITARY SERVICE (Question 11)</b>						
Military service	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
<b>CHRONICITY OF HOMELESSNESS (Question 1)</b>						
Minimum Time	0 (not been homeless this year)		0 (not been homeless this year)		-	-
Maximum Time	12 months		12 months		-	-
<b>FREQUENCY OF HOMELESSNESS (Question 2)</b>						
Minimum	0 (not been homeless any other time this year)		0 (not been homeless any other time this year)		-	-
Maximum	10 times this year		4 times this year		-	-

<b>CURRENT HOUSING/LODGING (Question 1)</b>						
Someone else's place (family or friend)	3	15.0%	3	27.3%	6	19.4%
Emergency Shelter	6	30.0%	3	27.3%	9	29.0%
Transitional Shelter	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	3.2%
Public Space	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	3.2%
Vehicle	2	10.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.7%
Makeshift shelter, tent or shack	2	10.0%	0	0.0%	2	6.5%
Abandoned/vacant building	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
Other sheltered location	1	5.0%	1	9.1%	2	6.5%
Respondent doesn't know	5	25.0%	1	9.1%	6	19.4%
<b>FAMILY HOMELESSNESS (Question 10)</b>						
Has Children/Dependents	1	5.0%	1	9.1%	2	6.5%
Has Other Adult	1	5.0%	2	18.2%	3	9.7%
<b>REASON FOR HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING LOSS (Question 3)</b>						
Illness/medical condition	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
Addiction/substance abuse	1	5.0%	2	18.2%	3	9.7%
Job Loss	1	5.0%	2	18.2%	3	9.7%
Unable to pay rent/mortgage	3	15.0%	2	18.2%	5	16.1%
Unsafe housing conditions	3	15.0%	0	0.0%	3	9.7%
Experienced abuse by parent/guardian	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
Experienced abuse by spouse/partner	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
Conflict with parent/guardian	0	0.0%	1	9.1%	1	3.2%
Conflict with spouse/partner	2	10.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.7%
Incarcerated	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hospitalization/treatment program	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other reason	7	35.0%	5	45.5%	12	38.7%
No response	2	10.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.7%
<b>CURRENT HEALTH (Question 12)</b>						
Has Chronic or Acute Medical Condition	8	40.0%	3	27.3%	11	35.5%
Has Physical Disability	3	15.0%	5	45.5%	8	25.8%
Has Addiction	2	10.0%	4	36.4%	6	19.4%
Has Mental Health Issue	9	45.0%	6	54.5%	15	48.4%
<b>FOSTER CARE OR GROUP HOME (Question 13)</b>						
In foster care or group home	6		2		-	-
How long ago?	Varied responses: ranges from 1-12 years, and over 20 years ago		20 - 30 years ago		-	-

<b>SOURCE OF INCOME</b> (Question 14)						
Employment	1	5.0%	4	36.4%	5	16.1%
Informal/Self-Employment	3	15.0%	1	9.1%	4	12.9%
Employment Insurance	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Welfare/Income Assistance	7	35.0%	4	36.4%	11	35.5%
Disability Benefit	5	25.0%	2	18.2%	7	22.6%
Seniors Benefits	2	10.0%	0	0.0%	2	6.5%
GST Refund	3	15.0%	0	0.0%	3	9.7%
Child and Family Tax Benefits	1	5.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.2%
Money from family/friends	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>LOCAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION</b> (Question 15, 16)						
Moved to [Community] in the past year	9	45.0%	1	9.1%	10	32.3%
Stayed in emergency shelter in the past year	10	50.0%	7	63.6%	17	54.8%

## **Additional and Anecdotal Information**

When estimating the number of Tim Hortons gift cards to buy, most agencies that agreed to do the survey at their location overestimated the number of homeless people they would encounter. It appears that many people who were thought to be homeless were not actually homeless by the definition of this project, but were at high risk of homelessness and were living in poverty. Though the actual numbers of homeless in Wawa and Elliot Lake were relatively low, it is clear that there are very significant numbers of people who are at high risk of homelessness and living in poverty in both communities. It was noted that there were large numbers of visitors to IRIS place in Wawa and the Food Bank in Wawa. While doing the enumeration in Wawa, approximately seventy-five people attended the Wawa food bank during the two hours of operation on May 11.

Both Wawa and Elliot Lake also experience transient homelessness, though the duration of stay and reason varies significantly between the two communities. In Wawa, which is located on the Trans Canada Highway, homeless people who are hitchhiking across the country often only make it to Wawa before having to find another ride to move west. This occasionally results in being homeless in Wawa for a day or two.

In Elliot Lake, the situation is quite different. Elliot Lake is a thirty-minute drive off of the Trans Canada Highway, so hitchhikers moving across the country do not end up in Elliot Lake. Instead, people typically make their way from Southern Ontario to Elliot Lake in the summer months because of the low cost of living. In late May through the end of September, a number of people make their way to Elliot Lake and camp on the shores of nearby lakes. They are able to catch sufficient fish to survive on and apply to Ontario Works shortly after arriving. The income from Ontario Work goes farther in Elliot Lake than it does in Southern Ontario. However, this arrangement only works in the summer months due to the harsh climate during the rest of the year.

During the enumeration week of May 7 to 13, a few homeless people were already present at the lake side camps. Through discussion with the Salvation Army, the number of transient homeless people living at these lake side camps could be between ten and thirty individuals in the summer months.

## **Acknowledgements**

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