

Deaths Among People Experiencing Homelessness in Simcoe Muskoka

JANUARY 2022 – DECEMBER 2025

Key Findings

Report Prepared: March 25, 2026

- From January 2022 to December 2025, the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario investigated **117 deaths among people experiencing homelessness¹** in the County of Simcoe, including Barrie and Orillia, and the District of Muskoka. This includes 25 deaths in 2025.
- Of these deaths investigated by the coroner's office **drug toxicity, mostly opioid-related, was a factor in two-thirds (66%) of these deaths.**
- More than two-thirds of these deaths (68%) also occurred among people living outside of the shelter system².

About this Work

This report is intended as a resource for community organizations and partners engaged in work to support people experiencing homelessness and substance use. It provides information about deaths among people experiencing homelessness in the Simcoe Muskoka region that have been investigated by the coroner's office, which means **only sudden and unexpected deaths** are included.

Sharing health data is one of the roles played by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) to help prevent and address the health impacts of homelessness and substance use. SMDHU leads the [Simcoe Muskoka Drug Strategy](#), and provides programs and services for substance use prevention and harm reduction.

Background

Homelessness is not just a housing issue, it is a deeply human challenge that affects health, well-being, and community connection. For people living without stable housing, the impact on physical and mental health can be severe and long-lasting. In Simcoe Muskoka, including Barrie and Orillia, many individuals and families are facing an unprecedented housing crisis that is reshaping lives and communities. Local surveys have counted over 1,000 people experiencing homelessness in the County of Simcoe (including Barrie and Orillia) in 2024 [1] and over 150 in the District of Muskoka in 2021 [2].

When we talk about homelessness or the drug toxicity crises, it's essential to remember that these numbers represent real people, neighbours, friends and family members, whose lives matter. Each person has a story, hopes, and connections. Behind every statistic is someone who deserves compassion, dignity, and care. These crises ripple through families and communities, leaving grief and loss in their wake. Addressing them calls for empathy, understanding, and collective action.

¹ The Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario (OCC) defines people experiencing homelessness as Individuals without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. May include living in a vehicle, tent, public space (bridge, bus shelter), provisionally accommodated (couch surfing) or no fixed address.

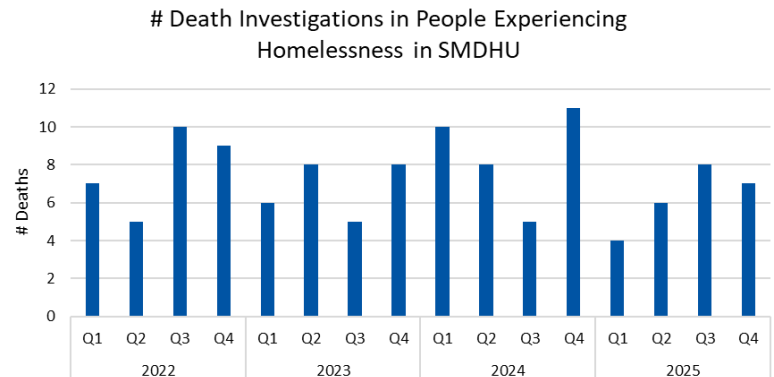
² Homeless shelters are defined by the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario as facilities providing temporary shelter for homeless individuals and may include emergency shelters, transitional shelters, or winter respite services.



What we know...

Deaths among people experiencing homelessness as reported by the Office of the Chief Coroner

- From January 2022 to December 2025, there were 117 deaths among people experiencing homelessness in Simcoe Muskoka investigated and reported on by the OCC [3].
 - October to December (Quarter 4) 2024 had the highest number of deaths in Simcoe Muskoka (11) compared to other quarters (average 7 deaths per quarter). Drug toxicity was the main cause of death in Q4, 2024.



- There were 25 deaths reported in 2025.
- More than three-quarters (79%) of these deaths were among males, and most commonly among those in their 30's (21%) and 50's (28%).
- More than two-thirds (68%) of these deaths were among people experiencing homelessness but not living in a shelter and about one-quarter (26%) were living in a shelter at the time of their death.
- More than half (57%) of these deaths occurred without a witness.
- In 43% of these deaths, the incident (e.g. substance use, injury) occurred outdoors, 16% occurred in a private residence and 8% occurred in a shelter.
- Drug toxicity was a factor in about two-thirds (66%) of these deaths, with over 90% of drug-related deaths involving opioids.
 - Among deaths where acute drug toxicity was a factor, a history of non-fatal drug poisoning was identified for 22 individuals (29%). Previous drug poisoning history was unknown for a majority (68%) of these deaths.
- A history of mental health conditions³ was identified in 57% of individuals where the coroner's investigation was closed and a history of chronic health conditions⁴ was identified in 41%.
- Three-quarters (72%) of deaths were considered accidental (among those with completed investigations).
- More than half (57%) of deaths were in Barrie (63), 16 (14%) were in Orillia and 29 deaths (25%) occurred across the rest of the County of Simcoe, with five (4%) deaths in the District of Muskoka. No deaths were reported in Muskoka in 2025.
- All of the deaths in the District of Muskoka have occurred among people living outside the shelter system.

³ Mental health conditions as described in the deceased individual's mental health history, medical history or through discussion with next of kin. May include any of anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, depressive disorders, suicidal ideation or attempts, schizophrenia, addiction disorders, substance use disorders or other mental health conditions.

⁴ Chronic health conditions as described in the individual's medical history or through discussion with next of kin. May include cancer, COPD, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, pain disorder, alcohol, drug, or smoking-related diseases, or other medical conditions.



How are deaths of people experiencing homelessness tracked and reported?

The Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) of Ontario shares reports with health units on death investigations among people experiencing homelessness in Ontario [3]. This information is intended to provide insight on deaths among people experiencing homelessness in our area, using data which describes geography (e.g. municipality) and demographics such as age, sex and living arrangements at time of death.

Coroners investigate ~20% of all deaths in Ontario, specifically deaths that occur suddenly and unexpectedly and deaths in specific circumstances, under the authority of the Coroner's Act. This **does not** represent all deaths among people experiencing homelessness, **most deaths from natural causes are not investigated** and would not be included in this data. Other limitations include deaths not reported to a coroner and unknown or potentially inaccurate assessment of living arrangements by the coroner at the time of death. The Coroner's Office has been asked how comprehensive or complete the data are, and the **reality is that it is not known**.

What's Next

We acknowledge that both mortality data from the coroner and homelessness enumeration surveys undercount the reach and extent of the homelessness crisis in Simcoe Muskoka. The SMDHU will continue to monitor trends in data received from the OCC and to explore other sources of knowledge and data that can inform our work and the work of our community partners to support the health and wellness of those experiencing homelessness. Updates of this report will be shared in the first quarter of the year, or as we identify new or emerging patterns. For further information about health and demographics in Simcoe Muskoka, see [SMDHU's HealthSTATS website](#).

References

[1] Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Everyone Counts 2024: Insights from Simcoe County's Homelessness Enumeration. <https://simcoe.ca/residents/community-services/homeless-enumeration/> [Accessed September 10, 2025].

[2] Muskoka Community Foundation. 2023 Muskoka Vital Signs Report. <https://muskokacommunityfoundation.ca/vital-signs/> [Accessed September 16, 2024].

[3] Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, Death Investigations among People Experiencing Homelessness in Ontario, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Received: February 26, 2026.

