THE COLORADO STATE OF HOMELESSNESS REPORT 2023

COLORADO COALITION FOR THE Homeless *Creating Lasting Solutions*

INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DATA

This report documents the state of homelessness in Colorado in 2023. An exact count is difficult to determine due to many factors including: reliance on self-reporting and volunteers, count methodology, levels of community participation, and other influences. However, by assessing several metrics including the Point in Time count, the McKinney-Vento count, data from the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS), and more, we can gain an understanding of the statewide levels of homelessness in 2023 and some trends over time.

14,439 Total number of Coloradans experiencing homelessness according to PIT count

134,197 Individuals without stable housing covered by Medicaid in 2022

17,957 Students experiencing homelessness, doubled-up, or unstably housed in the 2021–2022 school year

30,409 People who accessed homelessness services in Denver between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023

39% Increase in overall homelessness in the last year according to PIT count

150% Increase in people experiencing chronic homelessness over the last ten years from PIT data

Overall, the Coalition estimates that the true number of people experiencing homelessness falls somewhere between 14,439 (as identified in the Point in Time count) and 134,197 (the number of individuals without stable housing covered by Medicaid).

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2023 POINT IN TIME COUNT

- Overall homelessness in CO increased by 39% from 2022-2023. This was the fourth-largest percentage increase in the country, behind New Hampshire, New Mexico, and New York.
- Chronic homelessness increased by 20% in the last year.
- Unsheltered homelessness increased by 50% in the last year.
- Over the last ten years, chronic homelessness in CO increased by 150% (1,780 to 4,457).
- 3,641 (25%) individuals experiencing homelessness are in a household with at least one adult and one child (also defined as a family in PIT reports).
- Colorado had a 69% increase in family homelessness, from 2,151 in 2022 to 3,641 in 2023. This was the most significant statewide increase in the nation.
- Most people are in households without children (10,697 or 74%).
- 1,265 people experiencing homelessness in Colorado report experiencing domestic violence.
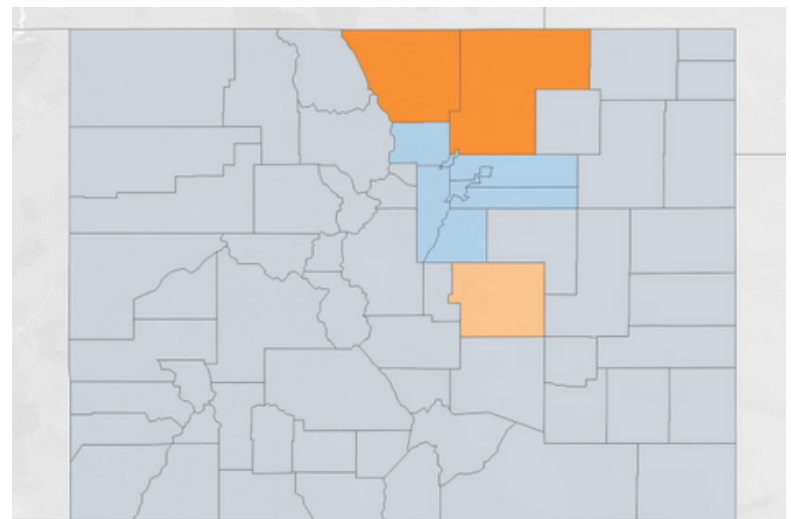
POINT IN TIME COUNT (PIT): BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that states use a Continuum of Care (CoC) model to support nonprofit and government efforts to actively work towards preventing and ending homelessness. A CoC is a planning and resource coordination body that supports the provision of housing and services for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. CoCs collect data, bring together leaders working on homelessness, provide guidelines for service delivery, and coordinate resources for direct services like permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, outreach, and shelter.

Each CoC is required to conduct an annual Point in Time (PIT) Count of individuals and families meeting the HUD definition of homelessness on a single night, along with demographic characteristics. Although the PIT is a valuable tool that provides a snapshot of homelessness, it is not a perfect tool and is almost certainly an underestimate of the unhoused population. The 2023 point in time count was conducted on January 30 during a 24-hour period among Colorado's four CoCs:

- Metro Denver Homeless Initiative – Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, City of Aurora, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties
- Northern Colorado – Larimer and Weld counties
- Pikes Peak – El Paso county
- Balance of State Region – 27 of the 54 non-metro and rural counties (fluctuates year-to-year)

For the **sheltered count**, CoCs includes all individuals and families living in shelters that provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs). The **unsheltered count** includes those with a primary nighttime residence that is not designed for human habitation, including a car, park, bus or train station, camping ground, or abandoned building. In odd years, CoCs are required to conduct both unsheltered and sheltered counts. Even years only require a sheltered count, but CoCs often choose to do both. Due to the pandemic, CoCs that conducted an unsheltered count in 2020 were able to opt out of the 2021 count, and only the Balance of State region conducted an unsheltered count in 2021. The Balance of State region did not do an unsheltered count in 2022, so HUD carried over the figure from the previous year.
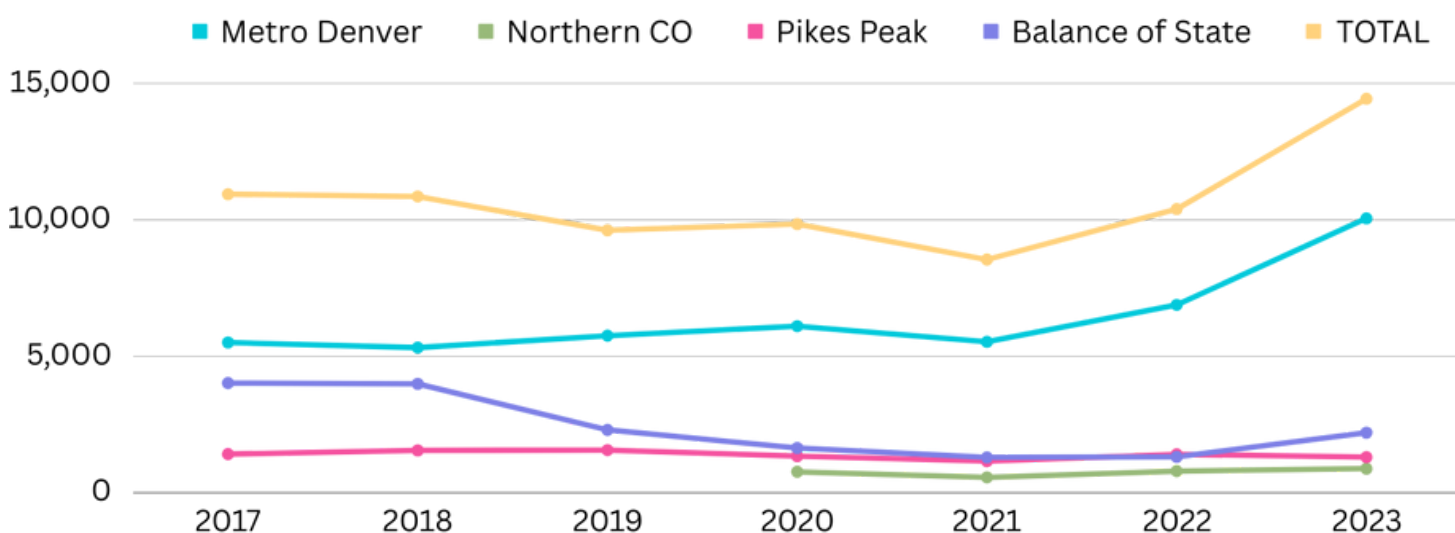

Colorado Department of Local Affairs

- ☐ Balance of State
- ☐ Metro Denver
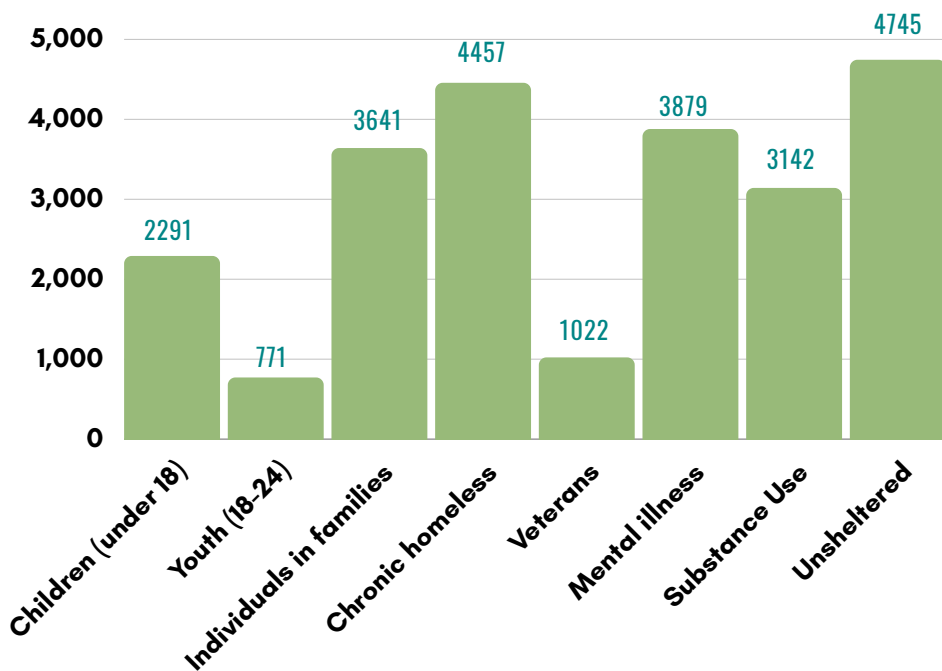- ☐ Northern Colorado
- ☐ Pikes Peak

PIT counts are important because they are the only count conducted nationally each year, they provide data to quantify the scope of homelessness on one night, and they help national, state, and local policymakers track progress and allocate funding towards the goal of ending homelessness. In addition, the count helps identify trends and service needs, and allows for volunteers to connect with the homeless community and generate awareness. It is important to recognize that despite their importance, Point in Time counts also have limitations and should not be the only metric used to understand the population of people experiencing homelessness.

Due to the transient nature of the population and the large geographic areas that these surveys cover, it is extremely difficult to identify and count all individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Comparisons over time are also challenging due to changes in methodology, definitions, volunteer support, and winter weather conditions each year. In addition, PIT counts rely on self-reported data. Individuals may be unwilling to disclose certain information, especially disabling conditions or health factors that carry stigma. The count also does not include people who are in hospitals, motels, jails, or doubled up on the night of the count, and is therefore not a comprehensive count of people experiencing housing instability and homelessness. Lastly, COVID has caused additional challenges for people experiencing homelessness and providers. For these reasons, CoC leadership recommends caution in interpreting PIT data over time, and note that the counts should be considered an underrepresentation of homelessness across the state.

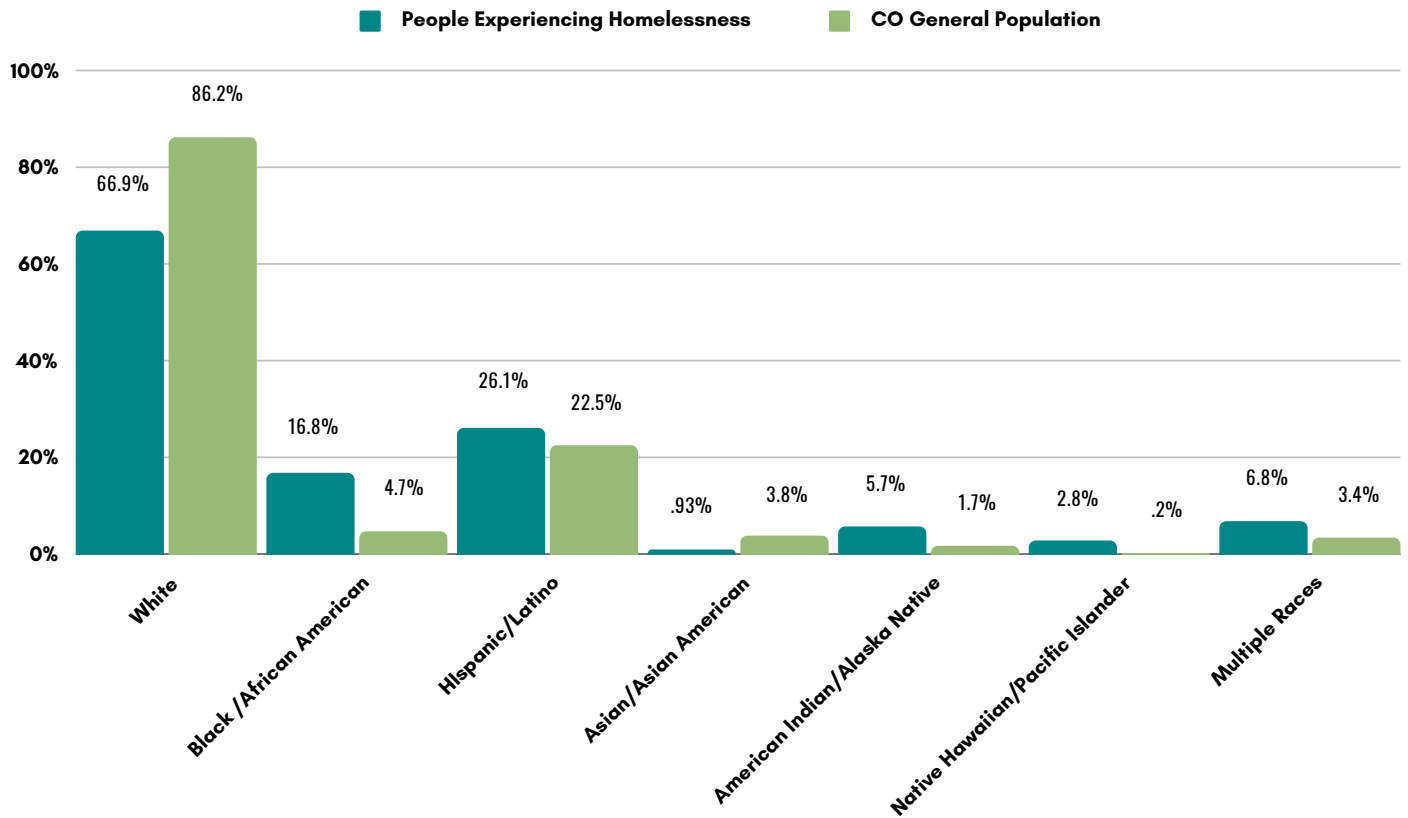## TOTAL HOMELESSNESS IN COLORADO- POINT IN TIME COUNT

DEMOGRAPHICS- POINT IN TIME COUNT

- 16% of Coloradans experiencing homelessness are under 18.

- Approximately 5% are between 18 and 24 years of age.

- 27% of people report a mental health concern.

- 22% report issues with substance use or chronic substance abuse.

- Colorado had a 69% increase in family homelessness (2,151 in 2022 to 3,641 in 2023).
  - This was the most significant percentage increase in the nation.

The numbers in the above graph represent overlapping groups and do not constitute parts of a whole.
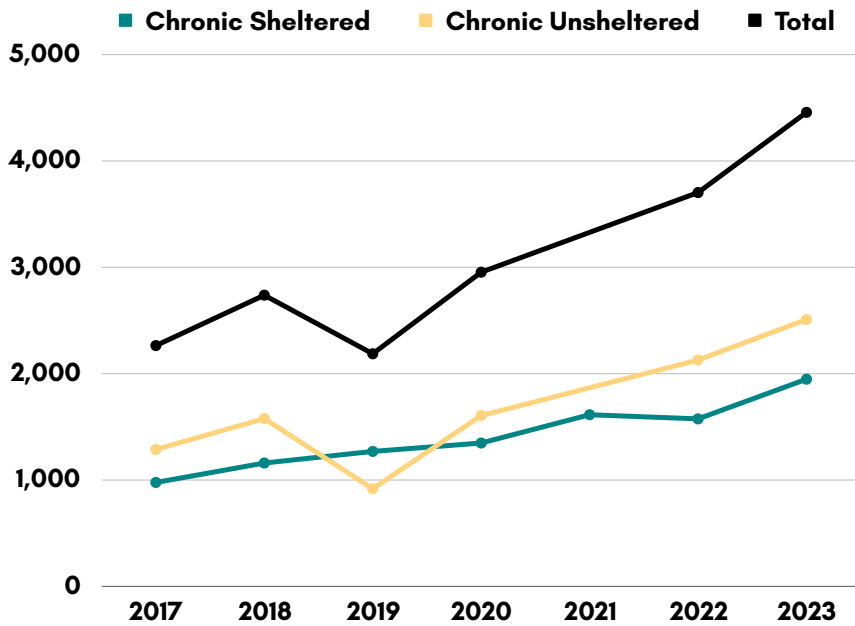
RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF PIT COUNT

■ People Experiencing Homelessness　**■ CO General Population**

Chart data (People Experiencing Homelessness vs. CO General Population):

- White: 66.9% vs 86.2%
- Black/African American: 16.8% vs 4.7%
- Hispanic/Latino: 26.1% vs 22.5%
- Asian/Asian American: .93% vs 3.8%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 5.7% vs 1.7%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 2.8% vs .2%
- Multiple Races: 6.8% vs 3.4%

- People of color are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness.
- Black/African American/African Coloradans are more than 3x overrepresented in the homeless population compared to the general population (17% vs 5%).
- People who identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander are 14x overrepresented compared to the general population (2.8% vs 0.2%).
- Those who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native are also more than 3x overrepresented in the homeless population.
- Hispanic/Latino and multiracial Coloradans are also overrepresented.

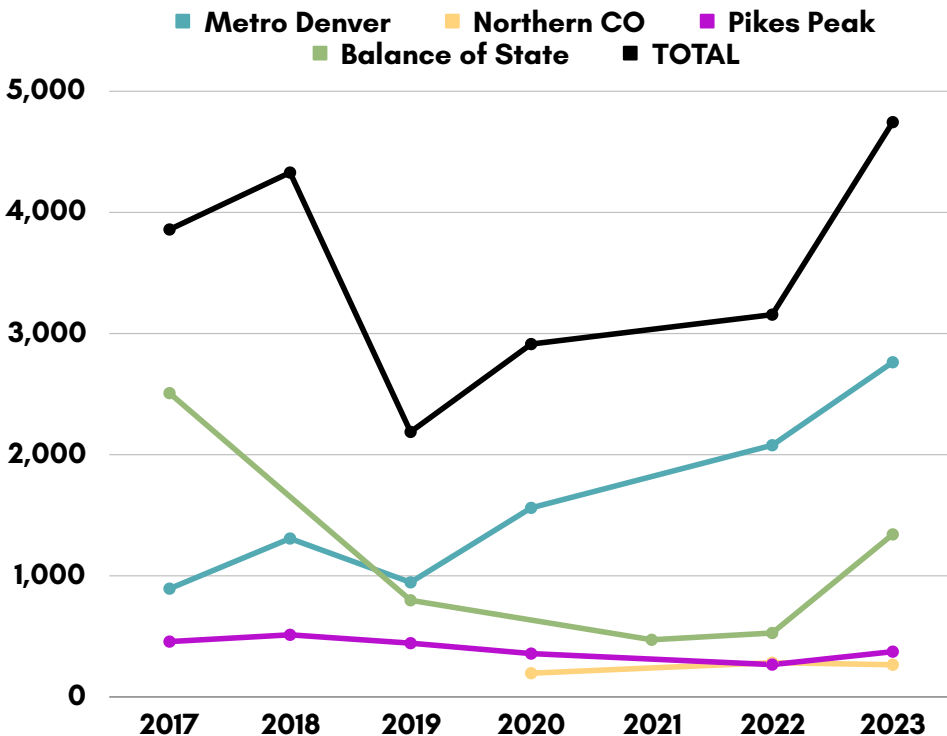| CoC	Children (<18)	Youth (18-24)	People in households with children and adults	Chronic homeless	Veterans	Mental illness	Substance abuse	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Total
Metro Denver	1,726	507	2,701	2,964	653	2,931	2,245	2,763	7,291	10,054
Northern Colorado	122	41	196	227	47	216	150	266	616	882
Pikes Peak	240	103	403	470	115	346	213	374	928	1,302
Balance of State	203	120	341	796	207	386	534	1342	859	2,201
TOTAL	**2,291**	**771**	**3,641**	**4,457**	**1,022**	**3,879**	**3,142**	**4,745**	**9,694**	**14,439**

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS - POINT IN TIME COUNT

Chronic homelessness describes people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year, or in repeated instances adding up to a year, while living with a disabling condition such as a physical disability or mental illness.

- Chronic homelessness has risen steadily over the last few years.

- Roughly 31% of the unhoused population is experiencing chronic homelessness.

- Most people (56%) experiencing chronic homelessness were unsheltered.

UNSHELTERED COUNT

HUD considers individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds) as "unsheltered."

- 33% of people experiencing homelessness were unsheltered.

- Unsheltered homelessness increased by 50% in the last year.

- The Balance of State region conducts full unsheltered and sheltered counts in odd years only. In even years, they only do the sheltered count.

*Only the Balance of State region held an unsheltered count in 2021

DENVER 7-COUNTY METRO AREA

- 3,996 (44%) people identified as newly homeless. This is an increase from 2,455 (36%) individuals in 2022.
- The CoC had the 5th largest number of people experiencing homelessness behind New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Diego.
- The CoC also had the second largest increase in homelessness since last year, behind Chicago.
- The region had the largest increase in families with children experiencing homelessness (117%).

PIKES PEAK

- The PPCoC reported the fewest people experiencing homelessness since 2016 (excluding 2021 when the CoC did not conduct an Unsheltered count).
- There were 104 fewer people experiencing homelessness than in 2022 (1,406). This is a 7.98% reduction.
- The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased from 267 in 2022 to 374 in 2023.

BALANCE OF STATE

- 60% of people experiencing homelessness in the region were unsheltered.
- 11% of people experiencing homelessness in the region were fleeing domestic violence.
- 65% of adults reported at least one disabling condition.
- 36% of adults met the definition of chronically homeless.

NORTHERN COLORADO

- The CoC improved their outreach to more rural areas in the region.
- People of color are overrepresented in the homeless population even when accounting for poverty rates.
- There was a 6% reduction in unsheltered homelessness, despite improved surveying.

UNDERSTANDING POINT IN TIME COUNT DATA

The 2023 Point in Time Count demonstrates that the overall number of people experiencing homelessness has increased significantly in the last year. The 2023 Point in Time count reported 14,439 people experiencing homelessness, compared to last year's 10,397. Representatives from Colorado CoCs attribute part of this increase to increases in shelter capacity, improved methodology, enhanced training for street outreach volunteers and volunteers with lived experience, and more volunteers overall. In addition, one Continuum of Care reported an influx of around 1,500 migrants leading up to the Point in Time Count.[1] While this population faces unique challenges, they also often arrive without stable housing and may have been included in the count of people experiencing homelessness. Since December of 2022, approximately 38,000 migrants have arrived by buses from the Texas border, most of them coming to Denver.[2]

TOP REPORTED CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Point in Time Count	Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
1. Relationship problems or family breakup	1. Lost employment or could not find work
2. Unable to pay rent/mortage	2. Unable to pay rent/mortgage
3. Lost employment or could not find work	3. Asked to leave or evicted
4. Asked to leave or evicted	4. Alcohol or substance abuse problems
5. Abuse or violence at home	5. Relationship problems or family breakup

In addition to statistics on homelessness, the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative included self-reported causes of homelessness in this year's annual report. An overwhelming 91% of Point in Time Count respondents and 94% of HMIS respondents indicate that they did not choose to be homeless.[3] In addition, they refute the idea that people come to Colorado from other states, either to seek services or to access marijuana, demonstrating that 9,085 out of 10,276 people's last permanent address was within Colorado. These data points demonstrate that common myths and misperceptions that describe homelessness as a choice or a personal failure are flawed. Instead, systemic failures have created an environment where housing is unaffordable, and people do not have enough support to fall back on when they face difficult times and lose their housing. Traumatic life events or sudden financial shocks often create instability, and without adequate support, far too many Coloradans fall into the cycle of homelessness.

However, the reported increase in the unhoused population likely represents an actual increase in homelessness. As housing becomes increasingly unaffordable, more people are pushed towards housing instability and homelessness. A 2020 study showed that every $100 monthly increase in median rent was associated with a 9% increase in homelessness in the area.[4] To afford a 2-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent in Colorado, a household must earn $32.13 per hour or $66,830 annually. For a minimum wage worker who earns $13.65 per hour (2023 minimum wage), they must work 94 hours per week to afford that same unit.[5] Furthermore, there is a shortage of affordable housing across the state. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates a deficit of 124,989 units for extremely low income households, who earn 30% of the area median income, and 164,529 for those at or below 50% of the area median income here in Colorado.[6]

MCKINNEY-VENTO DATA

In addition to the PIT count, other estimates and observations help inform our understanding of the population of people experiencing homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program collects information on students experiencing homelessness through the Department of Education. The most recent data is from the 2021-2022 school year, where 17,957 students met their definition of homelessness. This is 3,240 more than the overall Point in Time count figure, which highlights the degree to which the PIT is an undercount.
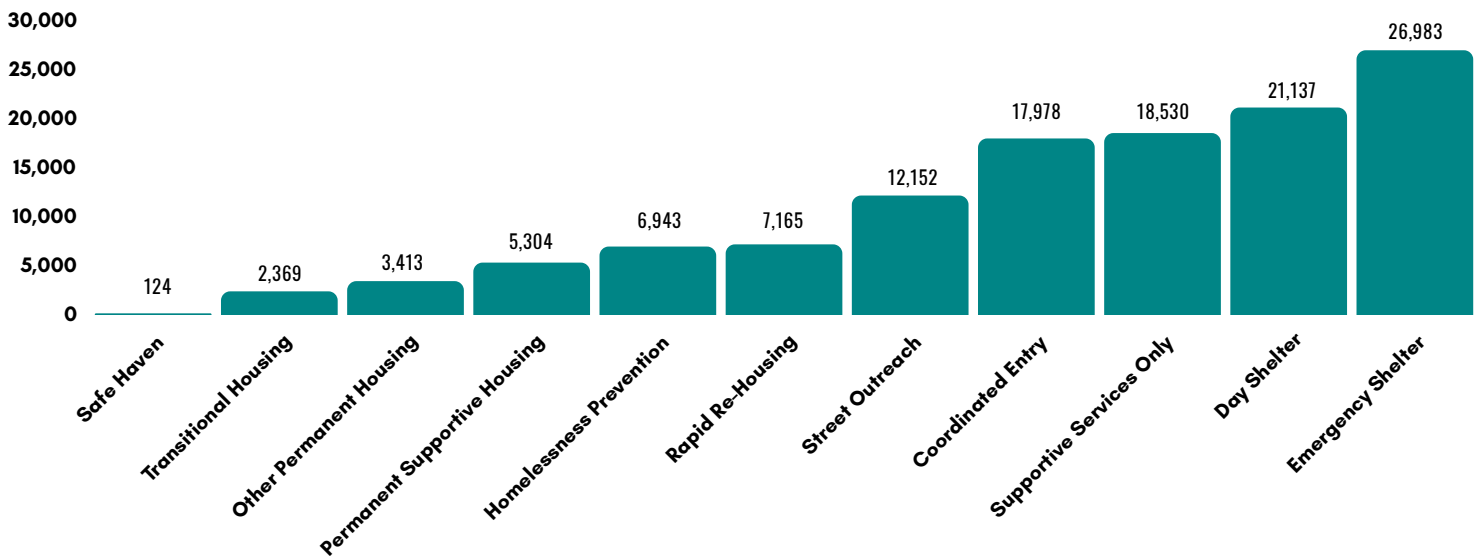
Although this number has decreased in recent years, we also know that school enrollment is down. In fact, statewide enrollment in K-12 public schools has fallen to the lowest level in a decade, and three of the last four years have seen a decline.[7]

CoC	PIT COUNT	MCKINNEY-VENTO
MDHI	10,054	9,820
Northern CO	882	3,262
Pikes Peak	1,302	1,174
Balance of State	2,201	3,423

Another metric that the State uses to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness is the number of Medicaid members who report homelessness and housing instability. While there are no updated figures for 2023, data from 2022 show that 134,197 people enrolled in Medicaid are experiencing homelessness. This includes those whose living arrangement is listed as emergency housing, homeless shelter, hotel, or lack of a stable residence. This is a large jump from the 2019 figure that showed that just over 53,000 individuals without stable housing were covered by Colorado Medicaid.[8]

STATEWIDE HMIS SERVICES BY PROJECT TYPE

Another source is Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS), information technology systems used by Continuums of Care to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. While the PIT count provides a snapshot of people experiencing homelessness on a single night, HMIS shows a picture of homelessness over the course of the year. Between July 1st, 2022 and June 30th, 2023, 30,409 people accessed services or housing related to homelessness in Denver. Across the state, over 75,000 individuals in over 60,000 households accessed services.

Project Type	Count
Safe Haven	124
Transitional Housing	2,369
Other Permanent Housing	3,413
Permanent Supportive Housing	5,304
Homelessness Prevention	6,943
Rapid Re-Housing	7,165
Street Outreach	12,152
Coordinated Entry	17,978
Supportive Services Only	18,530
Day Shelter	21,137
Emergency Shelter	26,983

75,038 Individuals who accessed HMIS services statewide

35,996 People who reported a disabling condition

6,076 Veterans

SOLUTIONS

To address the ongoing homelessness crisis, it is crucial that the local, state, and federal governments focus on implementing long-term solutions that strategically invest in affordable housing and supportive services. Solving homelessness begins with the availability of quality affordable and supportive housing through a housing first model. But, housing first does not mean housing only and the critical success of the model depends on crisis intervention, rapid access to housing, follow-up case management, and support services to prevent the recurrence of homelessness. For those experiencing homelessness with physical and/or behavioral health needs, addressing these challenges is exceedingly difficult when also trying to meet immediate shelter, food, and sleep needs on the street. When people have a stable place to call home, it becomes much easier to seek other services and focus on stability holistically.

In advancement of our mission to provide lasting solutions to homelessness, CCH operates over 2,400 units of affordable, transitional, and/or supportive housing through 23 properties throughout the state, and on any given night, is responsible for housing over 4,400 households. The Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative (SIB) implemented in Denver in 2016 provided targeted interventions to people experiencing who were frequent users of emergency systems such as emergency rooms, emergency shelter, jails and prisons, detox centers, and hospital emergency rooms. The findings showed that getting people into housing without mandating that participants meet conditions or requirements was an effective strategy to keep people housed over the long term while also reducing expensive interactions with emergency systems. The program reduced police contacts by 34%, decreased arrests by 40%, and reduced time in shelters by 40%.[9]

The healthcare outcomes for the Social Impact Bond participants with housing were overwhelmingly positive. Compared to the control group, the intervention group had an average of eight more office-based visits with a psychiatric diagnosis, ten more office-based visits with a psychiatric diagnosis, and six fewer emergency visits. The housed individuals also received three more unique prescription medications over the course of two years.

Preventing and ending the homelessness crisis will require substantial investments in affordable housing, particularly for low and fixed income households and those trying to exit the cycle of homelessness who have the greatest housing needs. While the lack of affordable housing affects households across the state, those living with low or fixed incomes are impacted the most.

For households living at 80-100% of area median income, there are 102 units available for every 100 households. Compare that to extremely low income earners at or below 30% of area median income, for whom there are only 26 available units for every 100 needed leaving almost 75% of these households with extremely limited affordable housing options. Furthermore, 87% of extremely low-income households are cost-burdened, meaning that they spent 30% or more of their income towards rent, and 78% are severely cost-burdened, spending over half of their income on rent. When households are cost-burdened, they must reduce spending on other life necessities like healthcare, education, transportation, and food. Meaningfully addressing homelessness will require that public funds be targeted to those who have historically suffered the most significant barriers to housing access. According to the Colorado Futures Center, nearly half of Colorado households (650,000 statewide) have annual incomes below $75,000, comprising 86% of cost-burdened households. These households' excess spending on housing costs represents an estimated $5.6 billion in foregone spending in Colorado's economy.[10]

In addition to long term measures, we must act urgently to provide immediate shelter and relief for those living on the streets. This year's Homeless Death Review revealed 311 deaths in Denver among those experiencing homelessness, the highest number recorded since the report was launched. These deaths are preventable. We can save lives by expanding access to shelter and transitional housing, improving winter homelessness practices, and increasing access to lifesaving overdose treatment and medication. Providing temporary transitional spaces to those experiencing homelessness such as hotels, motels, and pallet shelters is showing early signs of promise in getting people off the streets and into safe, secure spaces in Denver.

In 2023, Mayor Mike Johnston's administration implemented an initiative to move 1,000 people indoors in less than six months. The administration met this goal, and continues to track success on their dashboard, a huge step forward for preventing the deaths of unsheltered individuals and providing the stability necessary to resolve homelessness for these individuals. However, the true measure of the success and health of this new system will be the rate at which people move out of these transitional locations into long-term housing options.

We must focus on making these options more available while also investing resources for lasting solutions at the local, state, and federal levels, and pursuing policy change to systems that perpetuate homelessness, as outlined on the following page.

RECOMMENDED POLICY CHANGES:

- Ensure there are meaningful affordability provisions in bills to address transit-oriented development, accessory dwelling units, and in any state, regional, or local housing needs planning and goals. Limited funds should be targeted to those with the greatest need. **Supply without affordability does not create more AFFORDABLE housing.**

- Ensure that allowances for new or more dense housing development does not displace current residents and businesses and that sufficient displacement mitigation measures are in place prior to development.

- Support efforts to preserve and protect existing affordable housing and stabilize households.

- Support broader coverage for supportive services in housing to help keep people stably housed and save money on emergency healthcare and other services.

- Reduce barriers for low-income households and people experiencing homelessness in accessing critical resources like necessary documents / IDs which are required for housing, employment, healthcare access, educational opportunities, etc.

- Establish statewide strategies and funding sources for homelessness resolution to prevent the cliff effect from expiring American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

- Stabilize households with eviction prevention and rental assistance. Hold landlords and property owners, those who are getting the benefit while still increasing rents, accountable to sustained stabilization.

- Consider impacts of policies on CAPITAL A Affordable Housing—housing that is rent or income-restricted or publicly funded or subsidized.

- As recommended by the Affordable Housing Transformational Task Force in 2022, create a Statewide Housing Needs Assessment and Plan that includes standardized information from local and regional communities. This must include consistent, measurable, identified data points to get to demonstrated community housing needs. All communities in Colorado must be required to participate and the state should have a role in setting goals and plans. There must be transparency and strong accountability measures in tracking progress towards goals.

For more suggestions, read the 2023 report, Colorado's Affordable Housing Crisis: It's Time for Strategic Investments.

REFERENCES

The information in this report comes from Point in Time data from the four Continuums of Care, HUD reports, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education program. Additional References:

1 https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-AHAR-Part-1.pdf
2 https://coloradonewsline.com/2024/01/18/denver-mayor-colorado-federal-support-migrants/
3 https://www.mdhi.org/s/MDHI-State-of-Homelessness-Report-2023.pdf
4 https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-433
5 https://nlihc.org/oor/state/co
6 https://nlihc.org/gap/state/co
7 https://www.denverpost.com/2024/01/17/colorado-public-school-enrollment-2023/
8 https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/images/doh_ahttf_presentation_9-21-21.pdf
9 https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104501/breaking-the-homelessness-jail-cycle-with-housing-first_1.pdf
10 https://www.coloradofuturescsu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CFC_Colorado_Housing_Affordability_Update_Summer2023.pdf