

Homelessness in Grand Junction

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2023 Local Elections and Homelessness

In 2023, Coloradans will have municipal elections in our most populated cities. To inform these debates CSI produced reports on the most pressing issues facing Colorado cities: crime, housing, and homelessness for Fort Collins, Denver, Grand Junction, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Aurora. This brief report features data and key insights on homelessness in Grand Junction.

The system of resources addressing homelessness is at a critical point. Though funding has increased significantly in recent years, much of the increase is from one-time federal, state, and municipal spending that will decline over the next few budget cycles. As spending on homelessness has increased annually, the unsheltered and chronically homeless populations have also increased. Housing affordability in Colorado has plummeted, overall price levels are at record highs due to inflation, and the state’s housing inventory is dangerously low. This is a concerning precursor for sustained elevated levels of newly homeless. These risks and others are already manifesting in Grand Junction—the city is experiencing an increase of homelessness which is overwhelming its capacity to provide services and move people off the streets. City officials have scrambled to fund solutions, like by leveraging \$9 million of federal relief money, but that may not be enough to control the existing problem or mitigate its long-term harms.ⁱ

Population

The following table presents three estimates of the homeless population in Grand Junction: the point-in-time (PIT) count,ⁱⁱ which is a survey of the homeless population on a single night in January, the PIT count multiplied by 2.5, which is the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless’ estimate of the number of homeless across a full year, and an estimate of the number of people in Grand Junction who accessed homelessness services during the year based upon Metro Denver Homeless Initiative’s count of such people in the Denver metro area. In the Colorado Balance of State Continuum of Care, which includes Grand Junction, PIT counts of unsheltered homeless are only conducted on odd-number years.

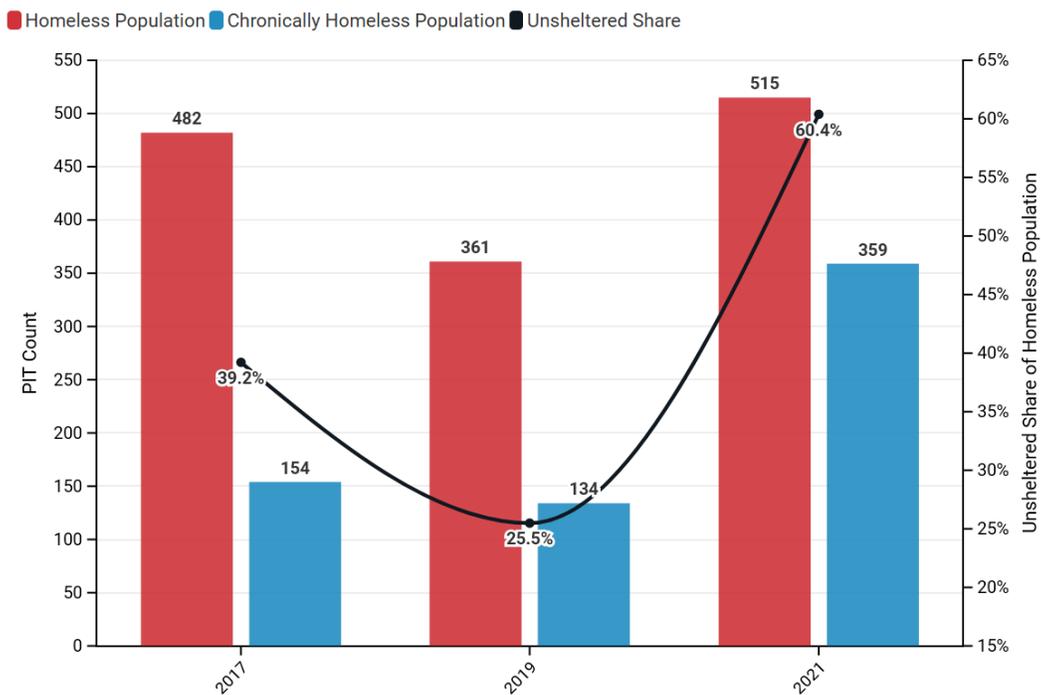
Grand Junction’s Homeless Population						
2021 PIT count			2021 PIT count * 2.5			MDHI State of Homelessness (est.)
Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	
204 (40%)	311 (60%)	515	510	778	1288	2411

Grand Junction has experienced a significant rise in its homeless population recently. Its homelessness problem stands out among Colorado’s largest cities—as a share of the city’s total population, its homeless population is 14% higher than Denver’s, 75% higher than Boulder’s, and 165% higher than Colorado Springs’. Of especial concern are Grand Junction’s unsheltered and chronically homeless populations, both of which exploded between 2019 and 2021. Although events associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are partially to blame, Grand Junction’s

unsheltered rate of over 60% and chronic homelessness level of nearly 70% are wholly unprecedented across the recent histories of Colorado’s largest cities.

- Though Grand Junction’s homeless population has only grown by 6.8% since 2017, it’s grown by almost 43% since 2019. This outpaces its total population growth by nearly 600%.
- In 2019, about a quarter of Grand Junction’s homeless were unsheltered. Just two years later, that figure had grown to 60.4%. This suggests that the city is struggling immensely to cope with rising levels of homelessness.
- Grand Junction's chronically homeless population nearly tripled between the last two complete PIT counts.

Grand Junction's Homeless Population over Time (PIT)



State Budgeting and Local Policy

As homelessness has emerged as a growing problem in Colorado, particularly in the Denver metro area, many municipalities appear to have dramatically increased their direct and indirect spending on homelessness resolution. Likewise, the state government has decided to undertake homelessness spending obligations that dwarf its usual ongoing contributions: through FY24, it plans to spend an additional \$200 million on homelessness initiatives atop another \$45 million that it already distributed in FY21.

New State Homelessness Spending Initiatives			
Bill	Description	Year	Amount
SB21-242	Funds local purchases of hotel/motel space to be repurposed into homeless shelter	FY21	\$45,063,310
SB22-211	Repurposes an existing youth services center in Watkins into a residential facility for the homeless	FY23	\$45,126,522
HB22-1377	State-run grant program for local governments' homelessness reduction efforts	FY23 and FY24	\$104,800,000
HB22-1378	Grant to be awarded to one new or repurposed homelessness-prevention facility in metro Denver	FY23	\$50,081,965
TOTAL:			\$245,071,797

Much of this and other new spending has been enabled by a windfall of federal funds—an exhaustible resource which governments cannot expect to persist long into the future. With this in mind, leaders in Grand Junction, a city facing high levels of unresolved homelessness, should strive to adopt practices conducive to the proper management of public resources, transparent recordkeeping, and efficacious policy. The upcoming local election presents the residents of Grand Junction an opportunity to steer policy in a beneficial direction and help their city reverse its grim trajectory. Evidence from Colorado Springs, whose unsheltered population has fallen by 43% since 2018, suggests that this can be achieved.

CSI’s 2022 report on homelessness spending in metro Denver finds that, though it’s possible to track most of the money spent on homelessness, understanding the actual supply of homelessness resources is much more difficult.ⁱⁱⁱ It’s important that, at both the state and local levels, policymakers develop frameworks for understanding what kinds of support (like shelter, medical care, mental health treatment, and skills training) are lacking, in excess, or in need of redeployment. A survey by the city government of Grand Junction’s homeless in December, 2022, may help partially achieve that objective.^{iv} Local and statewide efforts to increase public oversight of homelessness initiatives and resource allocation, likewise, can help communities find effective solutions.

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Teams & Fellows Statement

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ⁱ <https://www.kjct8.com/2022/09/07/city-grand-junction-utilizing-american-rescue-plan-money-tackle-homelessness-mental-behavioral-health/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.coloradocoalition.org/BoSCoCPITHIC>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://commonsenseinstituteco.org/homelessness-in-metro-denver/>

^{iv} https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/city-conducting-homelessness-survey/article_334f2f16-728b-11ed-9b42-bf82bedb159b.html