

Homelessness in Colorado Springs

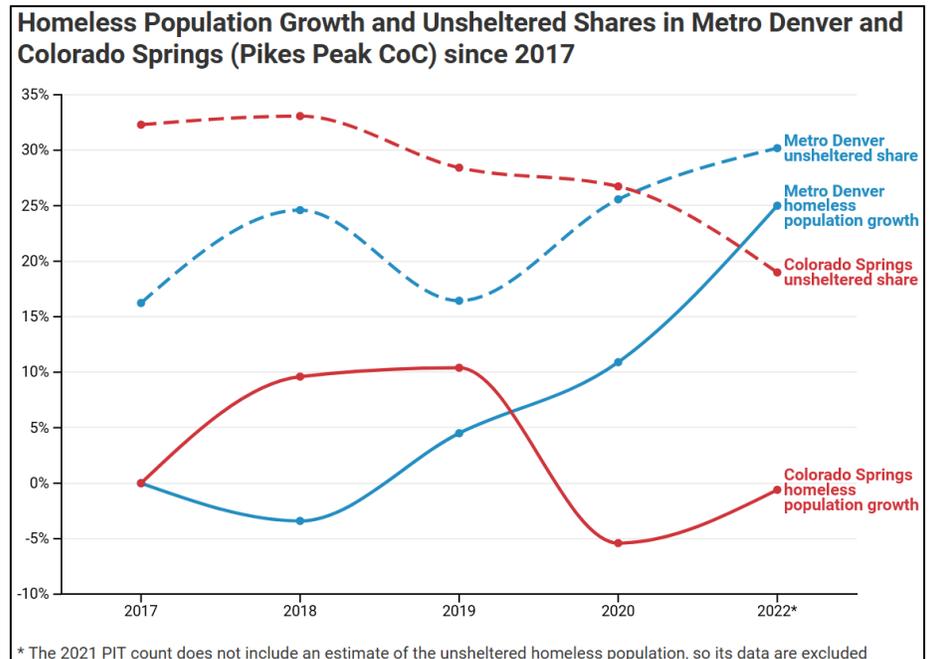
February 2023

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 Colorado Springs.

As spending on homelessness has increased throughout Colorado, the state’s 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. Colorado Springs, however, is facing much more promising trends, with respect to its homeless population and shelter supply, than the Denver metro area. The city’s experience offers evidence that local policy innovations, good governance, and strong public-private partnerships can lead to improved outcomes.

- Over the last several years, Colorado Springs’ homeless population has been on a much different trajectory than those in most other cities along the Front Range.
 - In contrast to the Denver metro area, its homeless population is stable and its unsheltered population is rapidly decreasing.
 - Over the last five years, its homeless population has actually decreased.



- Much of Colorado Springs’ success can be traced to the \$18 million expansion of the Springs Rescue Mission, the city’s largest homeless shelter.ⁱ
 - The project, partially funded by \$6 million of contributions from the city government, grew the campus to over 14 square acres and improved its services and security.

- As part of the expansion, the facility increased its shelter capacity from just 37 to 450. Before this upgrade, Colorado Springs had an unusually high unsheltered rate.
- Other cities in Colorado, particularly Aurora, are working to replicate Colorado Springs' success by exploring similar practices.

Still, Colorado Springs needs to remain prepared to accommodate additional pressure on its resources that could result from sustained economic strife and system failures elsewhere in Colorado.

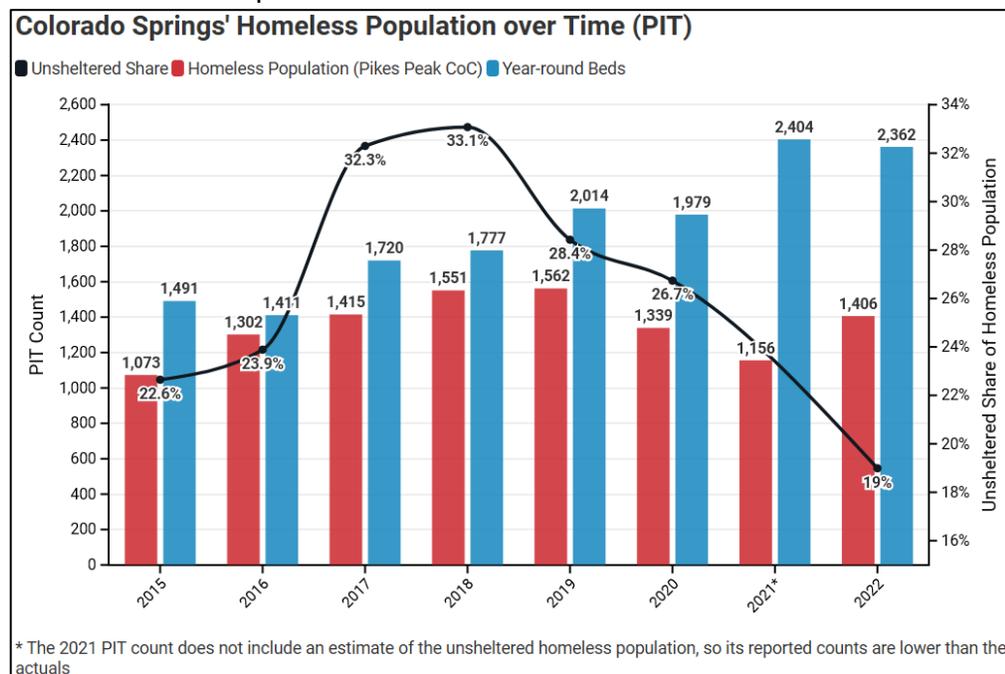
Population

The following table presents three estimates of the homeless population in Colorado Springs: the PIT count, 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 Colorado Springs who accessed homelessness services during the year based upon Metro Denver Homeless Initiative's count of such people in the Denver metro area.

Colorado Springs' Homeless Population						
2022 PIT count			2022 PIT count * 2.5			MDHI State of Homelessness (est.)
Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	
1,139 (81%)	267 (19%)	1,406	2,848	668	3,515	6,583

Unlike several places in the Denver metro area and the region as a whole, Colorado Springs is not experiencing a significant rise in its homeless population. Its 2022 PIT count identified 1,406 homeless people, which is lower than was reported in three of the five prior years despite sustained total population growth over that whole period. The decline of the unsheltered share of the homeless population from a towering 33.1% in 2018 to a modest 19% in 2022 suggests that providers and policymakers within Colorado Springs have responded effectively to the city's shortage of shelter.

- Since 2015, Colorado Springs has maintained a relatively stable homeless population. Though it's 31% higher than it was in 2015, it's also 10% lower than it was in 2019.



- The city’s unsheltered rates in 2017 and 2018 indicate that Colorado Springs provided a large undersupply of shelter space during that time. That the unsheltered rate has consistently fallen since then, even through a slight homeless population increase in 2022, demonstrates that the problem is less severe now than it was before.

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 Colorado Springs, though they have presided over a relatively stable homeless population and an adequate supply of shelter since the expansion of the Springs Rescue Mission campus, 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 Colorado Springs an opportunity to steer policy in a beneficial direction and help their city maintain its positive trajectory.

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.ⁱⁱ 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. 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.springsrescuemission.org/srm-celebrates-completion-of-community-of-hope-campus-photo-gallery/>

ⁱⁱ <https://commonsenseinstitute.org/homelessness-in-metro-denver/>