A Snapshot of the Metro Denver Homeless Ecosystem in 2023

COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

Over the last three years, Colorado has spent nearly $2 billion on homelessness, concentrated largely in the Denver metro region. While metro areas across the country have seen a surge of people experiencing homelessness, the Denver metro area has some of the highest levels of growth.

Concerning Trends Across Metro Denver Homeless Populations

- Over the past 6 years there has been a 58% increase in the Denver metro's unhoused population.
- The unsheltered population has grown 247% over that same period.
- 240% increase in newly homeless population in 2023.
- 305% increase in chronic homeless population in 2023.
- In 2023, Roughly one in seven of the 1,383 unhoused persons in the Denver area were under 18, a 73% rise over the 2022 total.
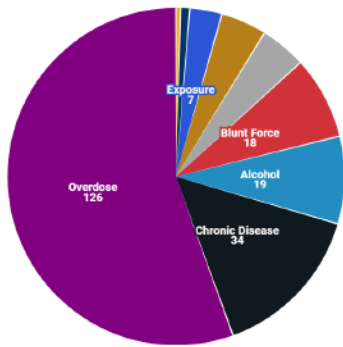

Annual Total, Unsheltered, Newly, and Chronically Homeless Populations in Denver Metro Area
2016-2023
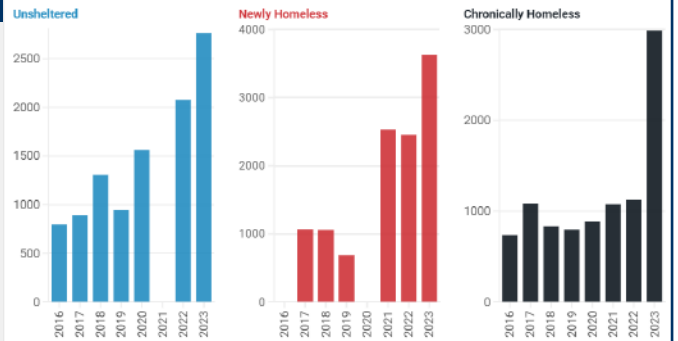
Source: HUD • *2020 Newly and 2021 Unsheltered Homeless data not available

Deaths of homeless persons by type
Denver, 2022

Exposure 7
Blunt Force 18
Alcohol 19
Chronic Disease 34
Overdose 126

Source: Denver Office of the Medical Examiner

Mortality rate

- One in every 21 of Denver's unhoused persons died in 2022, according to the annual PIT count and data from the Denver Office of the Medical Examiner.
- More unhoused persons died in Denver in 2022 than any of the previous four years.
- In 2022, there were 227 unhoused persons who died from various causes, a 67% increase from 2018.

Spending is Growing

- Programs and service expenditures supporting individuals experiencing homelessness grew from $465 million in 2021 to $749 million in 2023.
- Some of the recent growth in spending has been from one-time federal fundings which will not be there in coming years.
- Public services including healthcare are stressed, and downtown Denver has yet to recover its pre-COVID economy.


Estimated Denver Metro Area Total Spending on Homelessness (2021–2023)

Annualized baseline (2021)	$465M
2022	$688M
2023	$749M
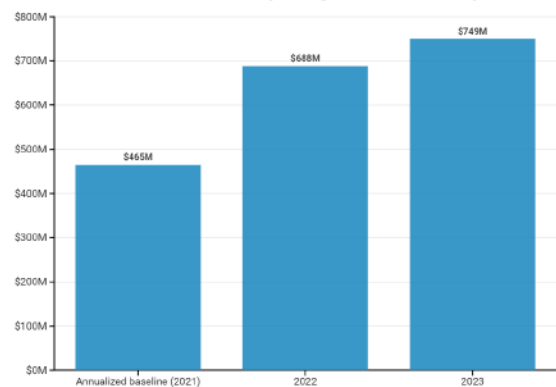
Shelter and Bed Occupancy Remains Unclear

- HMIS participation rates for emergency shelters have climbed rapidly, from 43% in 2016 to 82% in 2022. Rates for other housing options, however, have either stayed flat or fallen.

- Transitional housing participation rates have fallen from 73% to 45% in the same time. Safe Haven housing rates have stayed relatively flat from 62% to 60%.

- Permanent supportive housing HMIS participation rates have fallen from 90% to 67%.

- Other permanent housing rates have fallen from 100% to 36%.

HMIS Participation Rates In Denver Metro COC
% reporting in 2022

Rapid Re-housing
Emergency Shelter
Permanent Supportive housing
Safe Haven Housing
Transitional Housing
Other Permanent Housing

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
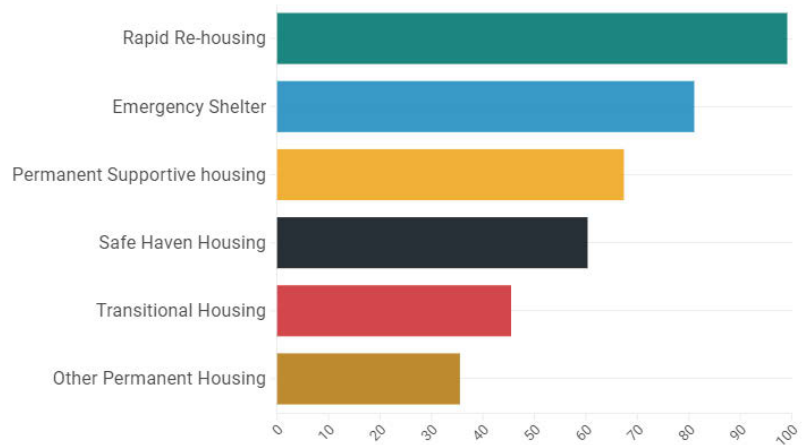
Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development Housing Inventory Counts 2016-2022

COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

Need for System Accountability and Transparency

Going forward, enhanced real-time data tools are needed both to better serve individuals experiencing homelessness, but to also provide greater transparency and accountability for growing expenditures. Other regions such as San Antonio, Indianapolis and Miami have developed such tools that provided information in crucial areas.

Improving System Level Accountability Data to Measure Outcomes

HUD Stella P Performance Metrics

- Number of days homeless

- Exits from the homeless system to permanent destinations

- Returns to the homeless system after exits to permanent destinations

Additional Metrics to Track

- Dollars spent and revenue source by resource area

- Origin details of newly homeless

- City-specific data to monitor outcomes related to local policy