

New report: State homelessness more widespread

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Nearly 53,000 Coloradans sought housing help last year — a much higher number than official homeless counts. Advocates say the new number, released this week in a first-of-its-kind report, provides a better understanding of housing instability across the state.

"This report highlights a pretty big affordability gap," said Jason Johnson, the executive director of the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, during a news briefing Tuesday. "To afford a two-bedroom apartment in Colorado, someone would need to work more than two full-time jobs at minimum wage to pay for that apartment."

The report's data is sourced from the Colorado Homeless Management Information System, the state's Department of Education and point-in-time counts of people experiencing homelessness. The Homeless Management Information System tracks individuals who have accessed housing and related services at government agencies and other providers. It keeps a tab on people experiencing homelessness, as well as those at risk.

Johnson said the new report, which is the first of what's expected to be an annual accounting, creates a baseline that pulls from different sources and goes beyond the standard point-in-time counts. That census typically occurs one night each January when individuals are counted at shelters, focus groups, meal programs and known encampments, Johnson explained.

"That data is limiting for a variety of reasons," he said.

Meanwhile, the tracking system "really gives us the ability to count the more true number of individuals who have reached out for some level of service," he added.

The newly reported number for Colorado — that 52,806 people "sought housing and services related to homelessness" through partner agencies — is higher than figures reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in its 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress.

That report, which drew from the point-in-time counts, put the number of people experiencing homelessness statewide in 2024 at 18,715.

The findings included in the Colorado Homeless Management Information System report detail that a majority of people experiencing some kind of homelessness — more than 28,000 — had disabilities. Close to 16,000 people, or 30%, experienced long-term homelessness, while nearly 8,500 people were considered newly homeless.

More than 3,000 people, or 6%, were military veterans.

However, Johnson noted that veteran homelessness fell statewide by 7% since 2023. "We can see progress," he said.

More than 45,000 households were in search of housing and other services in 2024, with the majority — 82% — made up of single adults who are 25 or older. More than 4,000 households, or 9%, consisted of families with at least one adult and one child.

And almost 4,000 households, or 8%, were classified as youths, meaning those with members who are 24 or younger, including minors under age 18.

When broken down by specific races and ethnicities, 53% of people included in the report identified as white, with about 17% as Black, 15% as Hispanic or Latino, 5% as multiracial and 5% as Indigenous.

"Across urban, suburban and rural communities, Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial residents experience homelessness at rates far higher than their representation in the overall population," the report

says. "This pattern remains constant year after year, across every region of the state."

The report's call to action lists several possible solutions to address homelessness, including funding more affordable housing, toughening eviction prevention measures and adding shelter options.

"There's not enough stock of affordable housing for people to live," said Jeri Erickson, the senior director at the Volunteers of America Colorado, during the news conference. "The low supply of affordable housing — rents being too high, wages being too low — all compound together and make it so that this problem can be difficult to solve."