

Contact

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Deaths for People Experiencing Homeless (PEH) Grows Again in 2021—An Increase of 12% since 2020 and 83% Over the Past Five Years.

Discrepancy in data for housed and unhoused individuals reinforces that housing saves lives

DENVER – (December 30, 2021): Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (The Coalition, CCH) presents *We Will Remember: Homeless Death Review*, a report on the deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness (PEH) to bring attention to the troubling trend of increased deaths among our unhoused neighbors and effective solutions that our community can deploy to prevent and mitigate these deaths.. The report is [available here digitally](#).

According to the data available through [Metro Denver Homeless Initiative](#) (MDHI) which is comprised of fourteen local organizations dedicated to serving those in the Denver community experiencing homelessness, at least 269 people experiencing homelessness passed away in metropolitan Denver, Colorado, in 2021. This is the third consecutive year that this number could not be specially cross-referenced with the Denver Medical Examiner's Office (OME) data due to a change in the OME's information-sharing policies. **The Coalition is certain this resulted in an undercount of the number of people experiencing homelessness who passed away in 2021.**

Based on the available data from OME, accidental death, which includes most overdoses and environmental exposure deaths, accounted for 56% of all cases. Natural deaths, defined as those resulting from disease or the aging process accounted for 21%. It is important to note that PEH are at increased risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes and **have an average life expectancy of 30 years less than the housed population.**

The Coalition compared the causes and manner of death among 168 people who died while experiencing homelessness in 2021 to 50 people recovering from homelessness who died while in the Coalition's housing program. The data demonstrated that those with access to housing are more likely to die of natural causes and less likely to die as the result of an accident, drugs or alcohol, or blunt force trauma.

In response to the devastating 2021 numbers, The Coalition highlights the promising practice of Housing First and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) efforts, such as the Denver's Social Impact Bond project. Nearly 400 of the most frequent visitors to emergency rooms, jails, and detox were housed using Housing First and PSH models over the last five years. 86% of residents in these programs remained housed after one year, and there was a substantial decrease

in police contacts, use of detox services, and emergency department visits. These efforts substantially improved lives while also resulting in substantial cost savings to local governments and taxpayers.

Other key efforts to improve the lives of PEH include expanding acquisition and conversion of underutilized properties for housing. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, CCH, in partnership with the City and County of Denver and with support from the State, was able to house approximately 5,000 people at hotels and motels converted to activated respite and protective action sites. In addition, The Coalition supports continued use of federal funds like those provided in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for the conversion of properties like motels to temporarily and permanently house households experiencing homelessness and is hopeful the Colorado General Assembly's Interim [Affordable Housing Transformational Task Force \(AHTTF\)](#) will include this use in their recommendations, forthcoming in the 2022 legislative session which begins on January 12.

The *We Will Remember Homeless Death Review* is published annually at the end of the calendar year in concert with the We Will Remember: Homeless Persons' Memorial Vigil, which took place on December 21, 2021, at the Denver City and County Building. Hundreds gathered to honor our unhoused neighbors through a luminary memorial. It was the only memorial service conducted for many of these individuals. At this year's 32nd annual event, the program was once again amended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A video featuring the reading of all 269 names by community members as well as a collective eulogy is available online at coloradocoalition.org/vigil.

About Colorado Coalition for the Homeless:

The mission of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless is to work collaboratively toward the prevention of homelessness and the creation of lasting solutions for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness throughout Colorado. The Coalition advocates for and provides a continuum of housing and a variety of services to improve the health, well-being and stability of those it serves. Since its founding more than 30 years ago, the organization has earned state and national recognition for its integrated healthcare, housing and service programs. The Coalition's comprehensive approach addresses the causes of homelessness, as well as the consequences, offering critical assistance to over 20,000 individuals and families each year. Learn more at www.coloradocoalition.org.

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