



# OPPORTUNITY STARTS AT HOME COLORADO

## Hunger and Homelessness

Access to healthy reliable food, like housing, is critical to health and well-being. For people experiencing homelessness (PEH), access to food can be unreliable and sporadic which further exacerbates health issues and their ability to take care of themselves. Nearly one in ten Coloradans live below the poverty line<sup>1</sup>, often forcing an impossible choice between housing and putting food on the table. Food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”<sup>2</sup>

### Food Insecurity

- In 2020, 1 in 6 Americans were food insecure.<sup>3</sup> State numbers paint a grimmer picture, with **1 in 3 Coloradans struggling with hunger** in 2021.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2021, 513,900 Colorado residents (9% of the total population) received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.<sup>5</sup>
- Housing insecurity, instability, and homelessness are leading predictors of food insecurity.<sup>6</sup>
- **Renters who pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent are 23 percent more likely to face food insecurity.**<sup>7</sup>
- **People experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of food insecurity than the general population** due to lack of access to healthful foods, lack of reliable storage options, and lack of tools for preparation, resulting in poorer health outcomes.<sup>8</sup>
- In many states, criminalization of poverty, homelessness, distributing and sharing food outside with and among the homeless also lead to food insecurity.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/colorado-2020-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=90022>

<sup>3</sup> More Than One in Six Adults Were Food Insecure Two Months into the COVID-19 Recession | Urban Institute

<sup>4</sup> HFC\_FactSheet\_8.5x11\_vF.indd (hungerfreecolorado.org)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_colorado.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_colorado.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12571-020-01115-x>

<sup>8</sup> HoUSed-Build-Back-Better-Factsheet.pdf (nlihc.org)

<sup>9</sup> The Criminalization of Homelessness: Explained - The Appeal

## Special Populations and Hunger

- **1 in 6 Colorado children are experiencing hunger and poor nutrition.**<sup>10</sup> Children in families experiencing food and housing insecurity are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, including developmental delays, behavioral problems, and chronic health conditions.
- Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) disproportionately struggle to access nutritious food, with **43% of BIPOC Coloradans experiencing food insecurity compared to 29% of white Coloradans.**<sup>11</sup> At the same time, BIPOC Coloradans are disproportionately housing cost burdened, housing insecure, and overrepresented in the homeless population.<sup>12</sup>
- Programs like SNAP are not inclusive of all Coloradans since applicants must be United States citizens or have acceptable immigration status. Fear of government interaction and immigration enforcement further deters many families from seeking benefits.<sup>13</sup> This is compounded by housing cost concerns, with 1 in 5 immigrant families worried about their ability to pay their rent.<sup>14</sup>
- Transgender adults face food security at substantially higher rates than cisgender adults,<sup>15</sup> and 1 in 5 have also experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.<sup>16</sup>



Having affordable housing and access to food is so hard. You need a car. What if you already have 2 to 3 jobs and the food at the food bank is high in cholesterol and then you have to walk 30 to 45 minutes to get healthier food?"

Wendolyne Omaña, Colorado resident, has been working vehemently for rent-burdened Latino families in her community, specifically those living in Westside Home Park.

<sup>10</sup> HFC\_FactSheet\_8.5x11\_vF.indd (hungerfreecolorado.org)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Issue Brief-Race Ethnicity and Homelessness\_final.pdf (coloradocoalition.org)

<sup>13</sup> Learn About Colorado Food Stamps Requirements | my-food-stamps.org

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104280/adults-in-low-income-immigrant-families-deeply-affected-by-pandemic-yet-avoided-safety-net\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104280/adults-in-low-income-immigrant-families-deeply-affected-by-pandemic-yet-avoided-safety-net_0.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Food Insecurity Among Transgender Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic - Williams Institute (ucla.edu)

<sup>16</sup> <https://transequality.org/issues/housing-homelessness>

## Moving Forward

Housing instability, food insecurity, racial and ethnic and class disparities, LGBTQ status, and other identities and experiences are deeply connected. Barriers to affordable and accessible housing can force people to make impossible choices between food and rent. Policy solutions may include:

- Developing housing affordable to individuals and families with limited income and assets;
- Funding universal housing vouchers so all eligible households can access subsidies;
- Providing supportive services including case management and guidance on food preparation;
- Integrating food service or food retail into affordable housing;
- Expanding and protecting access to school meals; and
- Increasing accessibility to SNAP and other public benefits programs.

Access to healthful foods is an important determinant of health and wellbeing, and either can sustainably be achieved without housing as a foundation.

**“A large part of food insecurity comes from the lack of means to cook or a place to store food. Lack of a proper home often leaves people with no other option but to be undernourished.”**

—Ashley Wheeland, Hunger Free Colorado



### Opportunity Starts at Home: Colorado

From better health to food security to good education, housing is foundational to every aspect of well-being, building stronger communities, promoting economic growth, and providing opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Our Colorado-based, multi-sector coalition is working in coordination with the National Low-Income Housing Coalition to generate widespread support for local, state, and federal policies that correct long-standing racial inequities and economic injustices that have prevented access to affordable, quality housing for people with low incomes.

**LEARN MORE AT [WWW.COLORADOCOALITION.ORG/OSAH](http://WWW.COLORADOCOALITION.ORG/OSAH)**