



OPPORTUNITY STARTS AT HOME COLORADO

Mental Health and Homelessness

Millions of Americans are at risk of poor health outcomes in the face of unaffordable and unstable housing. Poor housing can be destructive to an individual's emotional, psychological, and behavioral health and development. Young children, people with disabilities, veterans, communities of color, LGBTQ+ and those within the criminal justice system are among the most impacted by a lack of affordable, stable housing.

71%

of people experiencing homelessness have a

**MENTAL HEALTH
ILLNESS OR POST-
TRAUMATIC STRESS.**

- Research shows that 71 percent of people experiencing homelessness have a mental illness or post-traumatic stress. Additionally, 59 percent are struggling with long-term substance use disorders (SUDs).¹
- Housing insecurity is associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes, including a direct increase in instances of depression.²
- Mothers with children who were recently evicted report significantly **higher levels of depression.**³
- **The emotional toll of housing instability falls heavily on people of color** who faced disproportionately higher rates of job loss and evictions in 2020, leading to increased anxiety and stress.⁴
- Children experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience cycles of trauma, are more likely to be sick and hungry, face learning disabilities, and experience major mental disorders than their housed children counterparts.⁵

¹ <https://www.coloradocoalition.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Issue%20Brief-Health%20and%20Homelessness%20FINAL.pdf>

² Distressed Public Housing Linked to Poor Mental Health | National Low Income Housing Coalition (nlihc.org)

³ Eviction Moratoriums Improved Food Security and Decreased Mental Stress during Pandemic | National Low Income Housing Coalition (nlihc.org)

⁴ More Housing Vouchers Needed for People With Behavioral Health Challenges | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (cbpp.org)

⁵ How Homelessness Affects Children's Mental Health — The HomeMore Project

Not Enough Resources

- According to Mental Health America, **Colorado ranks last in the nation in access to mental health care for adults.** The state ranks 13th in access to care for youth.⁶
- Roughly half a million people in Colorado are not getting the mental health care they need. People typically access treatment 8-10 years after the onset of symptoms.⁷
- Unmanaged mental illness costs Colorado in lost productivity and overuse of emergency services like jail, detox, and emergency department visits.
- Despite their high need for mental health services, **children and families living in poverty are least likely to be connected with high-quality mental health care,** especially when they are already stressed with housing costs.⁸

HOUSING IS A COMPLEX AND IMPORTANT SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH.



I couldn't have done any of my recovery without being housed. I believe part of the issue in the unhoused community is that a lot of people aren't aware that they are traumatized, and that the trauma has escalated towards substance use or multiple mental health conditions.

Myra Nagy, longtime Colorado Coalition for the Homeless client, now has a safe place to live and says finding time to sew and make art is part of her own therapy.

⁶ <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2022/ranking-states>

⁷ <https://www.mentalhealthcolorado.org/the-lagging-state-of-mental-health-care/>

⁸ Improving Mental Health Access for Low-Income Children and Families in the Primary Care Setting - PMC (nih.gov)

Moving Forward

All Coloradans benefit when housing and mental health are addressed jointly in policies and programs. For instance, reducing homelessness among children creates better health outcomes and significantly reduces the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences.⁹ An environment where people can be both physically and mentally healthy is a basic human right that can be achieved under a housing first approach.

In Colorado, Denver's Social Impact Bond (SIB) project demonstrates that investing in housing results in substantial cost savings to governments and taxpayers. It cost half as much to provide housing and supportive services than to provide emergency services to people experiencing homelessness.

In addition, to increasing housing stability, this approach led to a 65% reduction in use of detox services among people with SUDs.¹⁰

“For those who are mentally ill, it’s about ensuring they have access to ongoing medication and counseling that they need. And then, when they hit a bump in the road, they don’t end up losing their home and have to start all over again,” explains CCH President and CEO, John Parvensky.

Investment in affordable, accessible housing along with mental and behavioral health services is crucial to disrupting the cycle of homelessness.



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 and see coalition partners at www.ColoradoCoalition.org/OSAH

⁹ Relationship Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Homelessness and the Impact of Axis I and II Disorders - PMC (nih.gov)

¹⁰ <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/metropolitan-housing-and-communities-policy-center/projects/denver-supportive-housing-social-impact-bond-initiative>