



Immediate Release

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Criminalization, Camping Bans, and “Treatment First” Approaches Proven Ineffective: New Fact Sheet on Housing First Solutions to Denver’s Homelessness Crisis

DENVER— The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless [released a fact sheet today](#) explaining the ineffectiveness of criminalization, camping bans, and the disproven decades-old theory of “treatment first.” While the Coalition does not endorse candidates, the 38-year-old organization, which serves over 22,000 community members experiencing homelessness each year through housing solutions and health care, is compelled to dispel myths and counter the current narrative happening in the public debate for Denver’s upcoming Mayoral election.

[Available in its entirety here](#), the fact sheet summary is as follows:

- **On Camping Bans:** Bans and the resulting sweeps create mistrust between law enforcement and unhoused people, and often result in confiscated or lost personal property, displacement, and injury from exposure. Sweeps disrupt the progress people experiencing homelessness may be making towards a long-term housing solution, including preventing them from getting medical results or treatment and forcing people to miss housing-related appointments.
- **On Criminalization:** People experiencing homelessness are 11 times more likely to be arrested than people with housing, often for crimes that would be legal if they were housed. Some of the activities that are deemed illegal in Colorado include; camping, sleeping, sitting, lying down, loitering, storing property, sharing food, and asking for money or supplies in public. Criminalization not only has a devastating effect on community members, but is also costly to taxpayers, with no proven results.
- **On “Treatment First:”** While purported to be a new solution, “Treatment First,” the policy of involuntarily committing unsheltered people experiencing homelessness to mental health or substance use treatment programs, is a decades-old approach that has been proven time and time again to be less effective than Housing First. According to the National Library of Medicine, for those individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and desiring housing, the treatment-first approach presents “a series of hurdles” for individuals experiencing homelessness.” [Vox cites numerous studies over past 20 years that demonstrate Housing First’s superior outcomes.](#)
- **On Solutions that Work:** Investing in people through a model of Housing + Supportive Services can break the homelessness-incarceration cycle and help people gain stability, while also reducing costs to taxpayers. The Coalition has found that we can provide supportive housing and services for approximately \$13,400 per person annually, compared to the \$21,000-\$40,000 spent by taxpayers for medical care, incarceration, detox treatment, and shelter services for each person living on the streets. The Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative (SIB)

implemented in Denver in 2016 managed to increase housing stability while reducing police contacts by 34% and arrests by 40% and significantly cutting the amount of time participants spent behind bars. The full independent report from the Urban Institute on the impact of SIB is located [here](#). In addition to Housing + Supportive Services Model, other proven solutions include affordable housing solutions to prevent homelessness, access to health care, and street outreach services.

The Coalition's Chief Communications and Public Policy Officer Cathy Alderman added: "The homelessness crisis in Colorado cannot be solved by criminalizing members of our unhoused community." Alderman continued "Passing unconstitutional laws and reinstating decades-old policies that have been disproven time and time again is not only bad policy, but also dehumanizing. We know that Housing First policies help people achieve stability and reduce interactions with the criminal legal system and have also been proven through independent study to be cost-effective here in Denver. Make no mistake, housing is and will always be the solution to homelessness."

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless will be hosting upcoming virtual Education Series sessions on the third Thursday of each month on topics related to homelessness. [More information is available here](#). The Coalition will also be joining with All in Denver, Warm Cookies of the Revolution, and Youth on Record to host a Mayoral Palooza, a debate with Denver Mayoral runoff election candidates on May 1 at the Sie Film Center.

About the 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, 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 22,000 individuals and families each year. Learn more at www.coloradocoalition.org.