



WHAT CAN I DO?

A GUIDE TO PERSONAL ACTION

Here at the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, we believe that the crisis of homelessness does not have just one solution—it takes efforts of all kinds, including permanent supportive housing, integrated health care, supportive services, and advocacy efforts that protect renters and increase the affordable housing stock. Visit ColoradoCoalition.org/CommunityAction to learn more.

But many community members simply want to know “what can I do to help my neighbors?” This is a quick guide with answers to common questions.



MY NEIGHBOR IS LIVING OUTSIDE. WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF THEY WENT TO A SHELTER?

In the Denver area, about 30% of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered. There are many well-considered and valid reasons people choose to remain unsheltered, which housed people often don't think of. For instance, couples often choose not to go to shelter because a husband and wife would have to go to separate facilities. In addition, shelters often require those on site to bring limited possessions with them leaving people to abandon belongings or even pets. Shelters also often keep particular hours that could interfere with work and childcare schedules.

If you see someone camping outside, and want them to move, consider a few things before asking them to move, or considering calling the police: Is this person a danger to themselves or others? Are they doing something that would cause you to take action if a housed person was doing it?

Calling the police is **not** shown to resolve homelessness and in fact is usually a barrier to resolution. However, for many housed people, this is a first thought of what to do, even when the unhoused person is doing an activity that wouldn't illicit a response if a housed person did it. If you don't normally call the police if a housed person is sitting in a park, smoking marijuana, or drinking a beer, consider not doing so in this instance.

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO SOMEONE I OFTEN PASS ON THE STREETS?

If you see neighbors in need and feel comfortable doing so, approach the person, introduce yourself, and ask if they need assistance. The best statewide resource is 211colorado.org which lists various resources by distance from your location. The Denver Department of Housing Stability (HOST) is also a great resource for those in the City and County of Denver. Unfortunately, due to the shortage of affordable housing across Colorado, current wait times for housing opportunities are often 18 months to two years, so your neighbors may have already attempted to work within current systems and are still experiencing homelessness. Therefore, personal community assistance is often welcome. You can choose to offer food items, clothing, other necessities, or money which is a personal decision.



WHAT IF I SEE SOMEONE WHO APPEARS NEEDS ASSISTANCE FOR INJURY OR ILLNESS?

If the person is conscious, ask if they would like help and wait for a response. If the person is unresponsive or otherwise requires immediate medical assistance, dial 911, and wait with them until help arrives. You can also consider carrying Narcan which can help to stop overdoses.

I SEE A PERSON EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WHO IS BEING HARASSED OR ATTACKED



If you feel a person is in imminent danger, call 911 immediately, and wait for the police to arrive. Video record the incident if you have the capability to do so. Stay on-scene to give witness statements. Crimes against people experiencing homelessness are much higher than for housed individuals. We must be vigilant to protect our most vulnerable citizens. If a person is being mistreated but is not in imminent danger, video record the incident. Send it to concerns@coloradocoalition.org with the date, time, location, and any other details.

I SEE A PERSON WHO ACTING ERRATICALLY OR SEVERELY UNDER THE INFLUENCE



If the person is a danger to themselves or others, it is best to call for assistance. In the City and County of Denver, the STAR Response Team is specially trained to address mental health concerns. That phone # is 720-913-7827. You can also call Colorado Crisis Services at 1-844-493-8255.

If you think that is appropriate to directly call the police, ask that they send a trained mental health professional, sometimes called a "co-responder", to come alongside police officers to assist. Make it clear that a crime has not occurred but that you are concerned about the individual in crisis and are asking for a welfare check or assessment for mental health intervention or detox services.

WHAT IF SOMEONE ON THE STREET ASKS ME FOR MONEY OR FOOD?

You can choose to give or not to give. However, if you choose to purchase food for a person, please ask what they would like before purchasing it. Some people experiencing homelessness may have trouble chewing hard items or may have health issues that are exacerbated by certain foods. Choice, even in small details like snacks, is often removed for people experiencing homelessness but something that is deeply valued by all of us. Buying food is great, but better yet, sit down with our unhoused community members for a meal. There is much we can learn over lunch with a perfect stranger.



Sometimes, people experiencing homelessness just need a few dollars for a meal, bus pass, or essential care items that can make a huge difference. We suggest you give without stipulation or have ready-to-go essentials. The Coalition outreach teams suggest making ziploc bag packets with essentials such as RTD passes, \$5 gift cards to McDonalds or Starbucks, socks, underwear, gatorade packets, pre-packaged snacks, lip balm, toothbrush/toothpaste, and specialized winter and summer goods.

If you prefer your money to be used in a specific way, consider donating to service organizations who provide essential care items to people experiencing homelessness.