



**National
Prevention
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WEBINAR

A Data Sharing Success Story

Colorado's Prevalence of Youth Homelessness Study

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Building a Sustainable and Replicable Approach to Estimate the Prevalence of Youth Homelessness with the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC)



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Overview of Today's Presentation



- **Study Design and Approach**
- **Iterative Approach**
- **Findings from Statewide Estimates**
- **Findings from Characteristics Analysis**
- **Study Implications**



Primary Goal: generate a more accurate estimate of the number of youths experiencing homelessness by linking data across administrative systems used to track youths receiving services across Colorado.



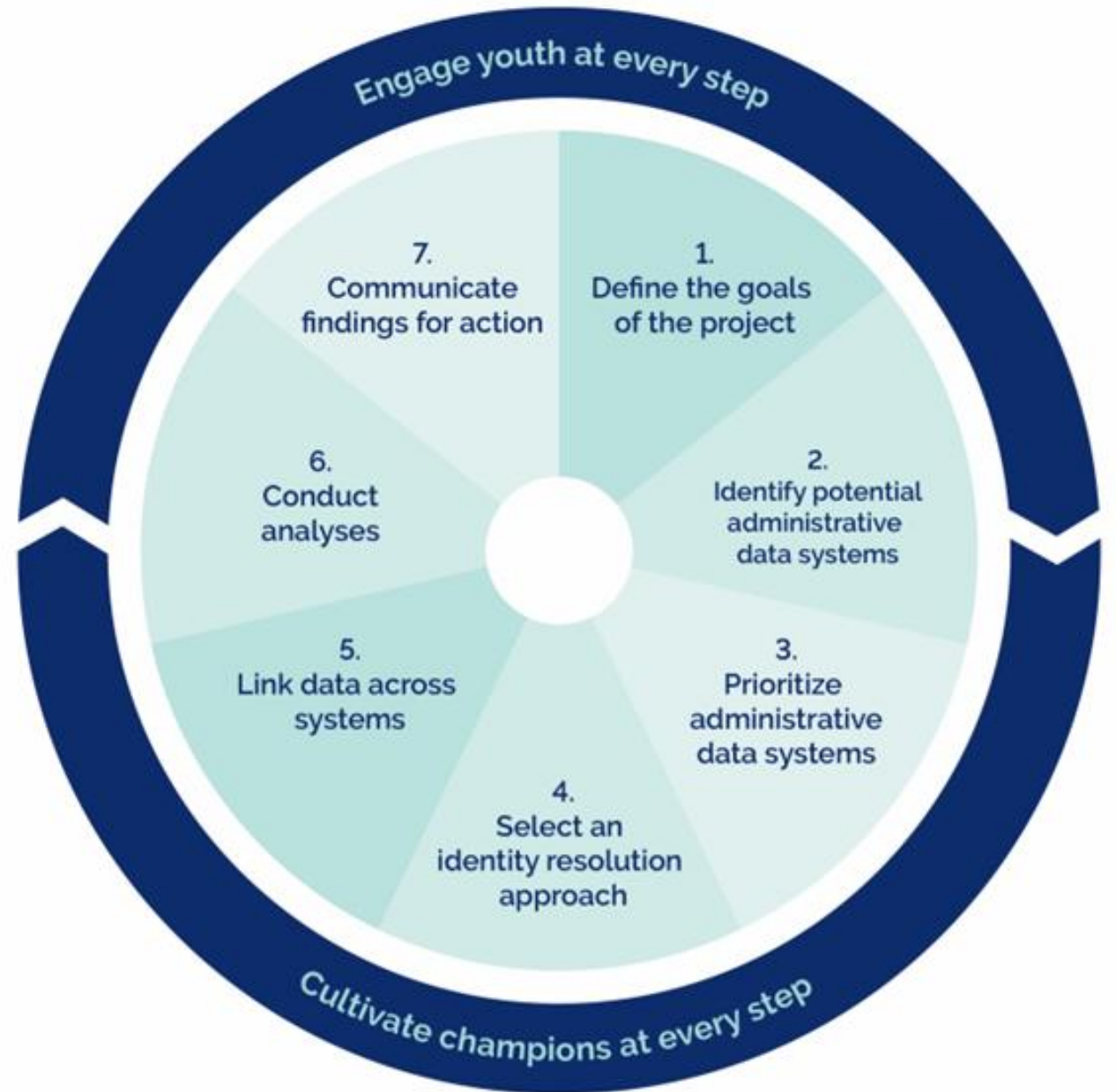
Research Questions:

1. What administrative data linkages can be leveraged to build a sustainable and replicable approach to estimate homelessness of youths ages 14–24 in states where data are siloed at different geographic levels?
2. What are the incidence of youth homelessness in the Denver area and across Colorado?
3. What are the K–12 educational, child welfare-related, public-assistance program participation, and histories of youths associated with homelessness as older youths (i.e., ages 18–24)?

Study Approach

- Created an iterative approach to estimating youth homelessness.
- Piloted Novel Data linkages across three administrative data systems. Pilot study in the City and County of Denver and then applied lessons learned to generate a statewide estimate of youth homelessness.
 - Count Youths Known to systems by linking administrative records across three major systems that identify and support youths experiencing homelessness:
 - Estimate youth unknown to systems using a multi-system estimation process
 - Add known count to unknown count to generate a total estimate of youth homelessness in Colorado
- Conducted a Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to group youth by characteristics to better understand the educational, child-welfare related, and public assistance histories of youth identified as experiencing homelessness.

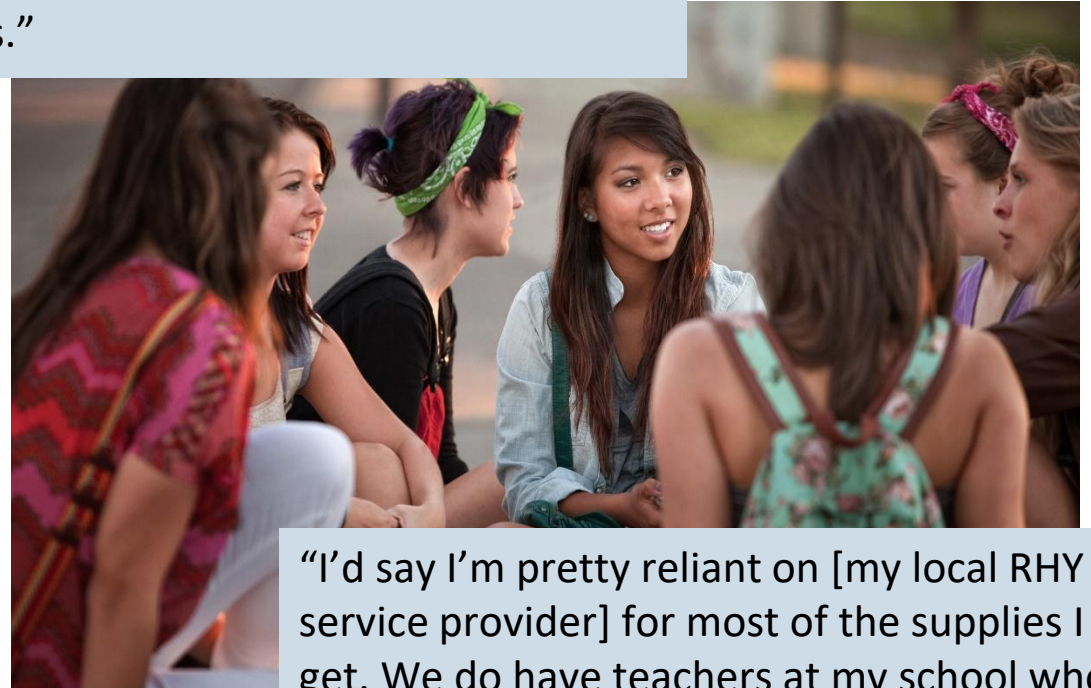
Iterative Approach for a Sustainable and Replicable Approach to Estimate Homelessness



Engaging Youth at Every Step

- 44 youth between the ages of 14-24 receiving services from RHY providers across the state
- Youths with lived experience of homelessness provided input and guidance in the following ways including:
 - how best to define homelessness
 - how youth are identified (or not) in systems
 - Providing context and reactions to the statewide estimates

“The definition of homelessness is vast. It’s not just sleeping on the street. Homelessness is not only not having a roof, but also not having community, or family, or friends, or a lot of different things.”



“I’d say I’m pretty reliant on [my local RHY service provider] for most of the supplies I get. We do have teachers at my school who can provide some resources, but [my local RHY service provider] is the main resource I’ve gotten basic needs from.”

Cultivating Champions at Every Step

“Youth fall through the cracks all the time for lack of data sharing across service providers. Broadening the definition of homelessness would allow for more flexible use of both federal and state funds.”

– DOH Representative

- Key partner agencies using LINC:
 - Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative (MDHI)
 - Youth MOVE Colorado
 - Colorado Dept. of Human Services, Child Welfare
 - Colorado Dept. of Education
 - State CoCs,
 - COACT Colorado
 - Colorado Dept. of Local Affairs, Homeless Youth Services
- One-on-one interviews:
 - To understand definitions of homelessness, and how partners collect, use, and share data with other organizations.
- Two half day meetings:
 - First Meeting (after pilot study): Shared pilot results and gathered feedback to inform the statewide estimate.
 - Second Meeting (after statewide estimate): Shared statewide results and gathered input on dissemination strategies.



Prevalence of Youth Homelessness in Colorado

“I was homeless and working two jobs, that is why I dropped out of school. I couldn’t focus on school, work, and living on the streets”

– unhoused youth in Denver

Definitions of Homelessness

Source	Definition
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Literally Homeless: Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
<p>Department of Housing and Urban Development</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Imminent Risk of Homelessness: Individuals of families who are losing housing in 14 days or less Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes: Youth and families who are homeless according to other federal statutes. Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence: Youth and families fleeing domestic violence and lacking housing
<p>Department of Education -</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in an emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals; Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and Migratory children who qualify as homeless
<p>US Department of Health and Human Services</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals who are “less than 21 years of age for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.” This definition includes only those youth who are unaccompanied by families or caregivers. This definition is used in connection with the Basic Center Program and the Transitional Living Program.
<p>Youth with Lived Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The definition of homelessness is vast. It’s not just sleeping on the street. Homelessness is not only not having a roof, but also not having community, or family, or friends, or a lot of different things [basic needs].” (Homeless youth in Colorado) “Homelessness is suffering. It’s painful. It’s because we have gone through painful things, because people didn’t care for us.” (Homeless youth in Colorado)

Reactions and Key Focus Group Takeaways

- Youth are **unaware** of how they are identified as homeless within most systems
- Youth **define homelessness broadly** including lack of safety and social support in their definition. In discussions of the definition youth actively tried to counter some of the stigma and stereotypes associated with homelessness.
- Youth are **multisystem involved** but not always within the **same geographic area**
- Youth are **highly mobile**
- Being homeless **prevents** youth from **attending traditional schools**
- Youth rely on **RHY providers** across the state to get many basic needs met

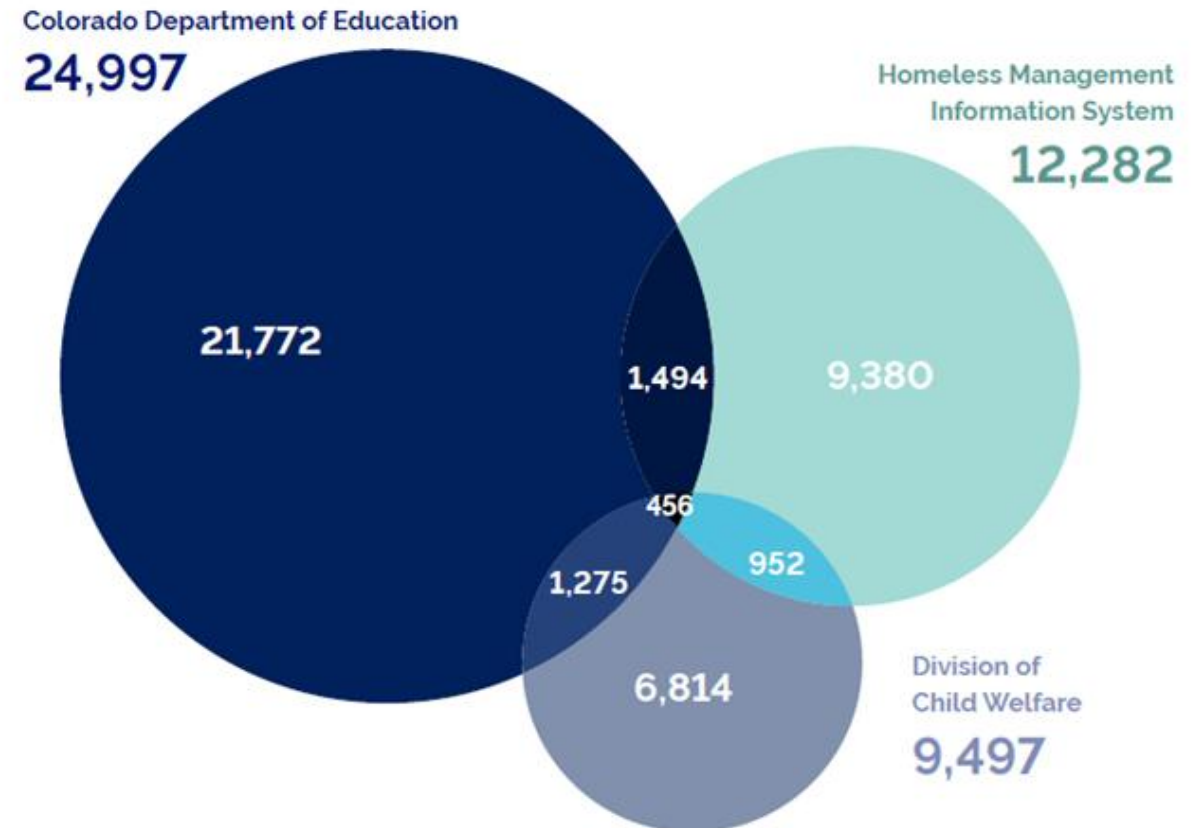


Attachment of Youths to Systems

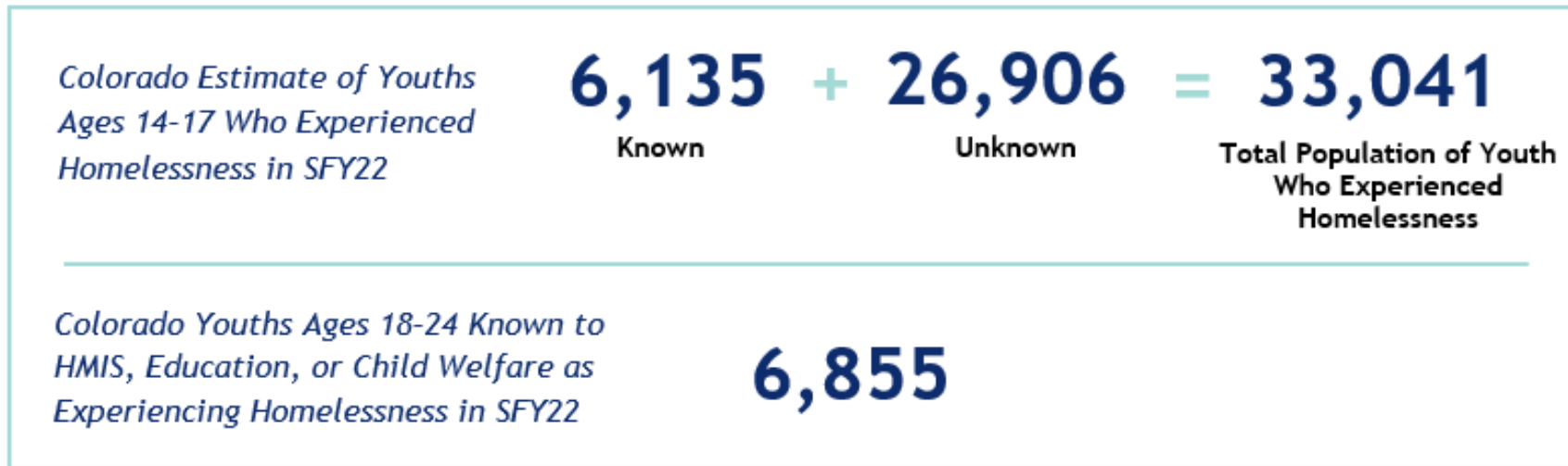
There is little overlap across systems. Youth were typically only identified as experiencing homelessness in one of the administrative datasets.

- 90.1% of the youths identified during the 5-year period appeared in one system alone.
- 8.8% appeared in two out of three systems
- 1.1% of the sample, appeared in all three systems at some point during the five-year period.

Unduplicated count of youth in all three systems SFY 2018-2022: 42,143

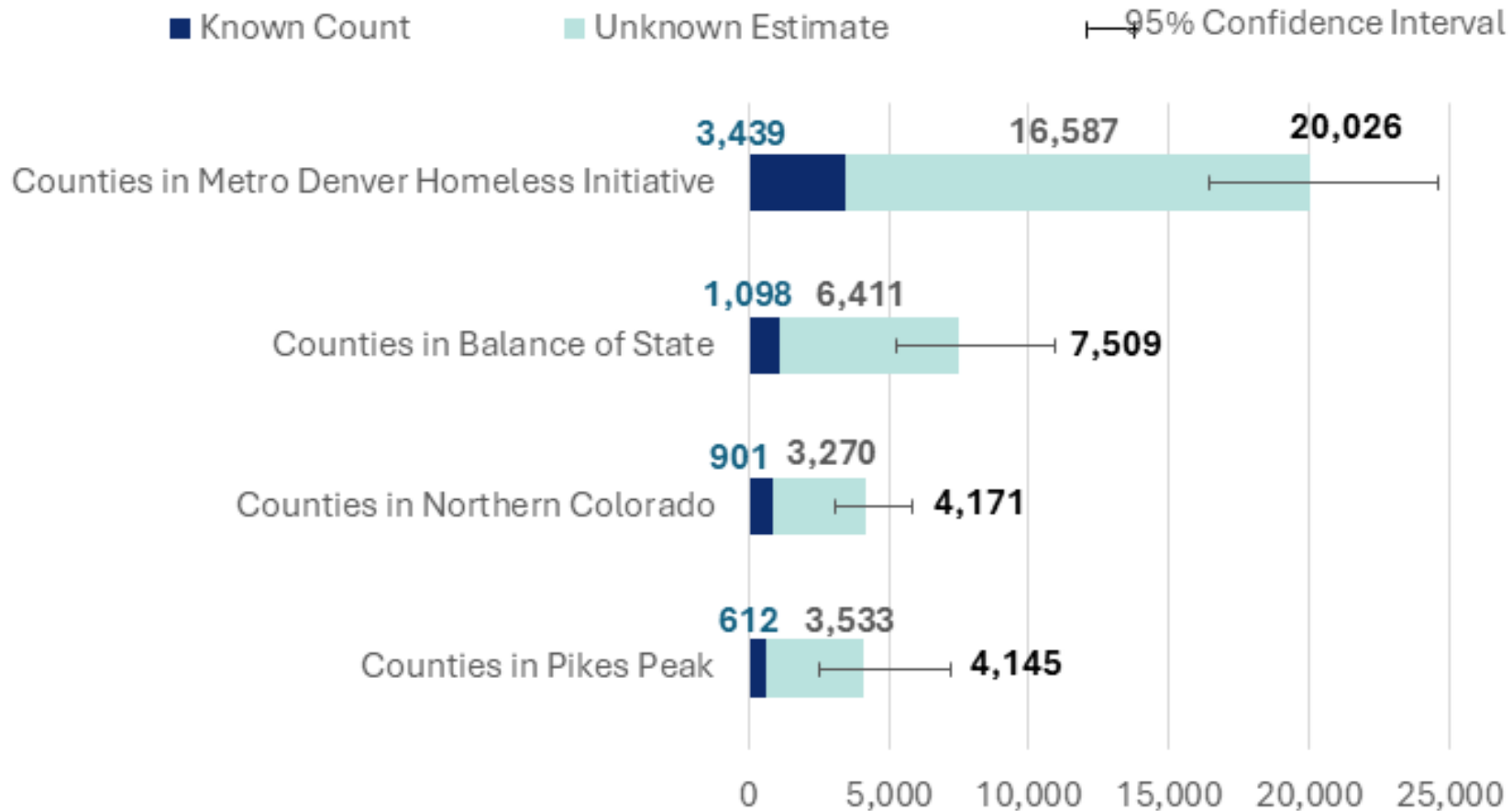


Statewide Estimates of Youth Homelessness



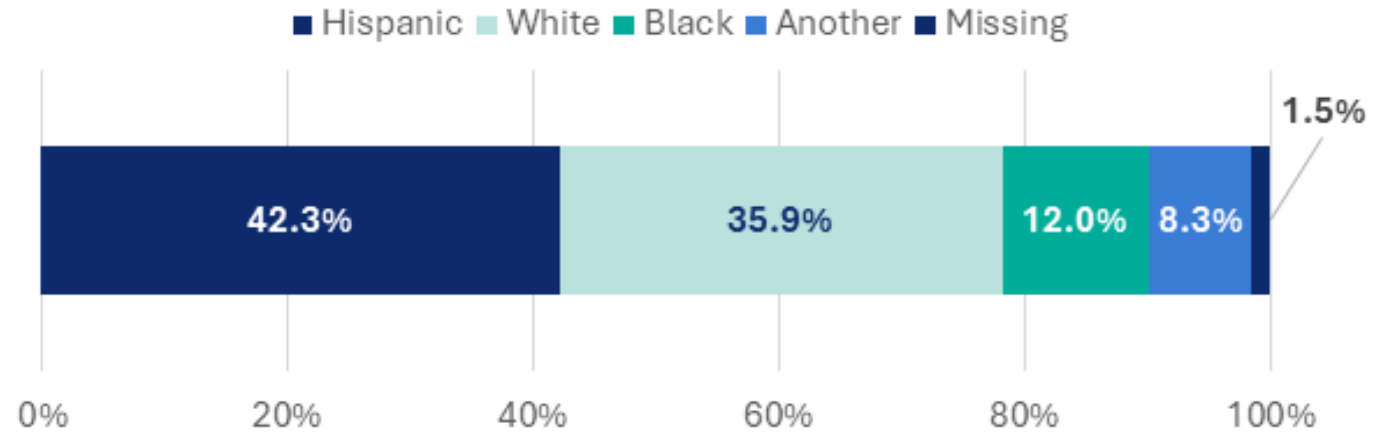
Estimates of Youth Homelessness by CoC

State Fiscal year 2022

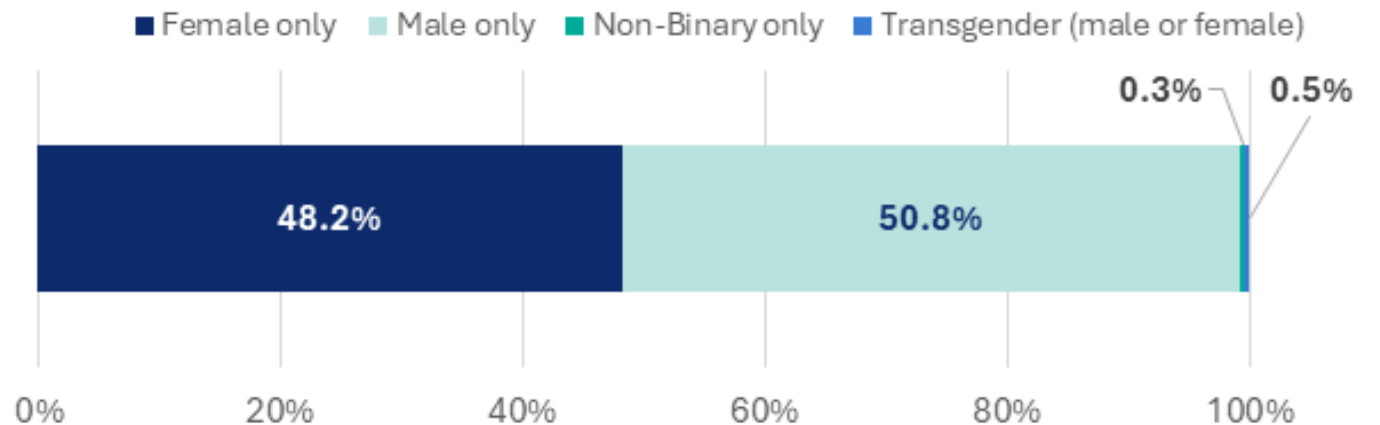


Demographics of Youths Identified as Experiencing Homelessness in Colorado

Racial & ethnic identity of youth flagged as experiencing homelessness, Colorado, State fiscal years 2018 - 2022



Gender identity of youth flagged as experiencing homelessness, Colorado, State fiscal years 2018 - 2022





Characteristics of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Characteristics of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- **Youths with Limited Child Welfare Experience.** Nearly two-thirds of the young people who experienced homelessness as young adults were either not child welfare involved or had limited child welfare involvement. They were most frequently identified by the education system.
- **Youths with Behavioral Challenges and Extensive Child Welfare Involvement.** Approximately one-quarter of young people who experienced homelessness as young adults were best described by this group of experiences. They were most frequently identified by child-welfare data.
- **Youths with Early Child Welfare Involvement.** The smallest group in this study, these young people had an extensive life history of being served by child welfare and their families by CoCs. They were most frequently identified by HMIS data.

Study Implications

- **Resource Routine Use of Multisystem Estimation Methods**
- Integrating multiple data sources can provide a more accurate estimate of youth homelessness.
- Use multisystem estimate to track progress annually on reducing youth (and adult) homelessness.
- Set benchmarks based on the total count so that it is inclusive of the known and unknown population of youths.
- Build on the study to incorporate additional data sources such as health care that can provide an even more comprehensive picture of what systems youth experience homelessness interact with. This can inform cross-system intervention and support.
- Consider using integrated information on the histories of homelessness among youths to prioritize those experiencing long-term homelessness.

Study Implications

Reach Youths Unknown to Major Data Systems

Youths not captured in official homeless counts still have needs that can be addressed by service providers.

- Advocate at the federal, state, and local levels to allocate funds and/or provide incentives to service providers to increase outreach to youths to:
 - Connect them to systems, so they are “known”, and
 - Ensure they receive needed services and support regardless of whether they are “known” to a system.

Study Implications

- **Improve Service Delivery**
- Utilize these estimates to inform equitable resource allocation
- Use findings to target geographic areas for improved services delivery.
- Leverage information from research, like the LCA in this project, that can inform the prevention of homelessness

Thank you!

Questions?

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Resources:

[Centerforpolicyresearch.org](https://centerforpolicyresearch.org)

<https://centerforpolicyresearch.org/publications/building-a-sustainable-and-replicable-approach-to-estimating-the-prevalence-of-youth-homelessness-final-report/>





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