

# Public Works & Homelessness in Colorado: A Path Forward

By Matt Hirschinger

## Homelessness

5,755 Metro Denver Count (2019)<sup>(8)</sup>  
 2,302 Non-Metro Denver Count (2019)<sup>(1)</sup>  
 Approx. 300+ counted deaths annually<sup>(16)</sup>

Expected rise in economic inequity in coming years due to increases in technology, misinformation, and other pressures...<sup>(2)</sup>



Individuals suffering homelessness represent a diverse group of varying levels of employment, duration,<sup>(7)</sup> external causes, and situations (family, mental health, veteran status, etc.)<sup>(9)</sup>



Tragic



Immoral



Natural Phenomenon



Just Like Us

Those of us in authority choose how to define homelessness<sup>(4)</sup>

## Public Works

Public Works maintains public spaces & infrastructure...  
 Homelessness occurs in public spaces...

**Public Works and homelessness share the same space** <sup>(14), (17)</sup>

One Actor Among Many <sup>(17), (18), (19)</sup>

Public Works | Law Enforcement | Elected Officials

State & Federal Agencies

Shelters | Advocates

Health & Human Services | Businesses | Residents



# Challenges



No allotted space (18)



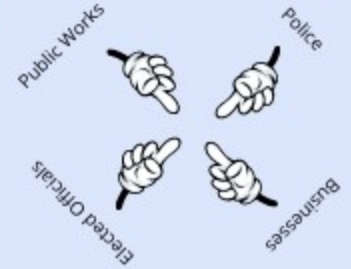
Safety for employees from hazardous materials(18)



High costs (17)



Bias/Prejudices against the poor (17)



Blame Game/Lack of Accountability (16)



Issues beyond PW's expertise (12)



Lack of time (13)



Failures within Safety Nets (9)



Criminalization of homelessness (10)



Human Rights violations(10, 16)

# Choose a Path

## Cause Harm



Actively punish individuals facing homelessness in an attempt to drive them away, remove them from sight, or even cause irreparable harm. (6), (16)



## Be Passive



Play "whack-a-mole" and spend money, time, and resources on fighting a continuously uphill struggle without solving the root problem (13)

## Be Proactive, Take Ownership

Recognize the strong, unique position Public Works is in to take action (11)



Choose compassion and responsibility over stigma and apathy (6), (15)



Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate! (5), (19)

Track spending, build data and evidence of growing problems and costs of inaction (13)



Take a seat at the table with those in your community already working on homeless outreach (19)

Develop sanctioned areas where homelessness isn't illegal, where outreach, services, and other assistance can take root (3)





# Next Steps



**Self-Evaluate**, where your department is at in regards to its budget, internal beliefs, and external relationships.

**Network** with other Public Works Departments on best practices, training, leadership, and more!



**Connect to Resources**

- Advocacy Groups
- DOLA
- Health and Human Services
- HUD
- Law Enforcement
- Street Outreach
- Others not named...

(15), (16), (17), (18), (19)

# Disclaimer

This infographic is a final project for Sociology 5440 Poverty and Social Inequality, a class taught by Professor E. Sullivan at the University of Colorado Denver. The topic of how Public Works can work and deal with rising homelessness was chosen by representatives of the American Public Works Association, Colorado Chapter. This project should not be treated as a fully vetted scholarly article, but instead as graduate-level work. The intent of this work is not to be a definitive or final opinion on the matter of Public Works and homelessness, but as a starting point for Public Works Departments to be proactive on homelessness in their respective communities.

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