CITY OF
Grand Junction
COLORADO

UNHOUSED NEEDS SURVEY REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this report, terminology like **People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH)** is used instead of "homeless people." The goal is to shift the public perception of houselessness as a defining characteristic into an understanding of houselessness simply as an experience. Whenever possible, the words **"houseless"** or **"unhoused"** are used instead of "homeless" because of the social stigma historically associated with words like homeless and homelessness (though words like "homelessness" may appear when citing other resources). Additionally, many PEH may feel they have a home, even if they're not living in structures that one would typically define as a house.

It's important to note that people have diverse experiences of houselessness. In addition to the general terms outlined above, you may hear more specific categories used to describe experiences of houselessness. We define four (4) of those categories below (Open Doors, 2021).

Chronic Houselessness	In this survey, individuals were defined as **chronically houseless** if they had been without housing for more than a year, and/or if they had been without housing on at least four (4) separate occasions over the last three (3) years. **Note**: Other definitions of chronic houselessness may also require that individuals have a disability and are currently unsheltered in order to qualify as "chronically houseless." In our survey, we were primarily interested in understanding the differences between PEH who were unhoused for shorter amounts of time compared with those who were unhoused for longer amounts of time; hence, the less strict definition.
Episodic Houselessness	**Episodic Houselessness** is when a PEH experiences three or less episodes of houselessness within a calendar year. Often episodic houselessness affects teenagers and young adults, those living on a low wage income, or those living in unpredictable housing situations.
Transitional Houselessness	**Transitional Houselessness** describes the experiences of PEH who have been affected by a significant life change or a disastrous event. These changes are often the result of economic factors, such as rent increases, lack of available units, loss of employment, and termination of tenancy. People experiencing transitional houselessness are likely to be younger and only require services and/or temporary housing for shorter periods of time.

Hidden Houselessness	**Hidden Houselessness** describes experiences of houselessness that go undocumented and are underreported. People experiencing hidden houselessness may "couch-surf" or temporarily live with others with no guarantees for long-term, permanent accommodation. Individuals experiencing hidden houselessness may not feel that they need services due to embarrassment, mistrust of systems, or lack of awareness that they qualify for services. However, it is important to recognize that hidden houselessness may result in episodic or chronic houselessness if no services or interventions are made.

OTHER TERMINOLOGY IN THIS REPORT

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count: The PIT is an annual count of people experiencing houselessness on a single night in January, required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Sheltered PEH are counted every year, while unsheltered PEH are counted every other year. This is not a true reflection of the number of PEH in a community; many go uncounted. However, the PIT Count is still a useful metric to track increases and decreases in the number of PEH in a given community. Additionally, HUD uses this data to determine funding for states and municipalities for housing and houselessness solutions.

Sheltered: Refers to people experiencing houselessness who are residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other temporary settings.

Unsheltered: Refers to people experiencing houselessness who are residing in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, etc.

Cisgender: describes a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth. (Transgender describes a person whose gender identity does not correspond to their sex assigned at birth.)

NOTE: In this survey report, the words "vagrant" or "vagrancy" is never used to describe PEH. While the word vagrant has sometimes had legal definitions under American law, many U.S. courts have found vagrancy laws unconstitutional due to their vagueness and broadness ("Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville," 1972). For similar reasons, we refrain from using terms like "transient" and "hobo" because of the negative connotations, associated stigmas, and derogatory nature of these words. When we articulate the characteristics and experiences of PEH in this report, we opt for terminology defined by data-driven evidence, rather than words which have ambiguous definitions and/or emotionally charged associations.

INTRODUCTION

In the Fall of 2022, the City of Grand Junction's Housing Division developed a survey to hear directly from People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH), with the goal of pinpointing gateways of entry into, and barriers against exiting out of, houselessness in Grand Junction. The design of the survey was informed by a "systems-thinking" approach to solving houselessness, which views houselessness as a solvable systems problem (Acharya, 2021).

The impetus for developing and conducting this survey emerged from numerous conversations with unhoused individuals, local service providers for PEH, first responders that have regular contact with PEH, and Grand Junction business owners and residents. All groups have observed the growing rate of the unhoused population in Grand Junction and have felt a strain on their day-to-day activities as a result.

> **"…we encourage a broader systems approach to addressing homelessness. Focusing on three stages of the system – inflow, crisis response, and outflow – are necessary to move people out of homelessness into stable, permanent housing."**
>
> Housing Scholar Gregg Colburn and Data Journalist Clayton Page Aldern in *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, p. 30.

With feedback from partners like the Mesa County Public Health Research & Planning Team and CMU Sociology Professor Stephen Merino, a 40-question survey was developed. The survey was then conducted in December 2022 with the support of trained volunteers. Over a 2-week period, over 70 surveys were completed and returned to the City of Grand Junction Housing Division.

The process of developing, conducting, and analyzing the results of the survey showed numerous points in the "houselessness system" in which our community can intervene with solutions. However, the survey also revealed that more information and data are needed to create the most effective policy solutions. Therefore, the City of Grand Junction Housing Division is proposing a more robust, comprehensive "Unhoused Needs Assessment," which will be introduced in detail in the Conclusions/Recommendations section of this report.

ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL HOUSELESSNESS STRATEGIES

Comprehensive Plan Principle 5: Strong Neighborhoods and Housing Choices – Resolving Homelessness	"[…] the City has continued to work with its community partners to provide permanent supportive housing for its homeless population. The rate of homelessness and the amount of time spent in homelessness have fallen significantly. People of all income levels can meet their needs and have access to amenities that provide for a meaningful, high-quality life."
City of Grand Junction Housing Strategy #8	"Provide financial support to existing housing and homelessness services and promote resident access to services." *By collecting data, we can better inform the City's future funding decisions with regards to housing and houselessness services.*
Colorado Department of Local Affairs: Office of Homeless Initiatives - *Making Homelessness History in Colorado* **(2020)**	"Our vision is that everyone in Colorado has a safe, stable, and affordable place to live. Together we can create a future where homelessness is rare and brief when it occurs, and no one gets left behind."
Gov. Jared Polis's 2023 Colorado State of the State Address	"Making our state more affordable and creating more housing now is truly one of the most effective ways to reduce homelessness […] we continue seeking proposals from local government to utilize the $200 million that this legislature invested last year to reduce homelessness. […] There are many approaches that have worked in other states, and we hope to see those proven models replicated here."
***All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent & End Homelessness* (2022)**	"Homelessness has no place in America. *All In* is a multi-year, interagency blueprint for a future where no one experiences homelessness, and everyone has a safe, stable, accessible, and affordable home. […] The plan sets an ambitious interim goal to reduce homelessness by 25% by January 2025 and sets us on a path to end homelessness for all Americans."

PURPOSE

1. Understand the **characteristics** and **experiences** of People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH) in Grand Junction.
2. Understand how individuals **enter houselessness** in the Grand Junction Area.
3. Understand the **barriers against exiting houselessness and obtaining housing** in the Grand Junction Area.
4. Inform the City of Grand Junction's **policies** on and **solutions** for houselessness.
5. Fill the gaps in **education** for the public, elected officials, and City Staff on the experiences of unhoused people.

A SNAPSHOT OF EXISTING LOCAL DATA

Unless otherwise stated, data on this page is referenced from the Common Sense Institute's report "Homelessness in Grand Junction," published in February 2023.

As of 2021, Grand Junction's houseless population has increased by almost

43%

since 2019.

% of PEH in GJ that were unsheltered in 2021:

60%

% of PEH in GJ experiencing chronic houselessness in 2021:

70%

Grand Junction's Homeless Population Over Time (PIT)

- Total Homeless Population
- Chronically Homeless Population
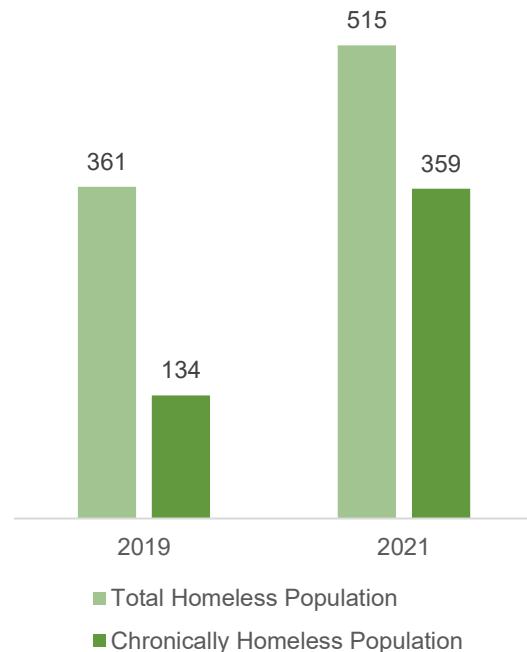
Local Service Provider Usage:

WC211: Housing calls have ranked #1 for the last 3 years (except for 2021).

HomewardBound: 414 unduplicated PEH served at their Family Shelter in 2022, 834 unduplicated men served at their North Ave. shelter in 2022.

GV Peace & Justice: Served 58 unduplicated individuals through Winter Emergency (WE) shelter; 36 failed drug/alcohol screening.

Joseph Center: Averaging 100 new intakes per month.

As a share of the city's total population, Grand Junction's houseless population is:

14% higher than Denver's

75% higher than Boulder's

165% higher than Colorado Springs'

801 students

& 482 families

in D51 facing houselessness or housing insecurity as of February 28, 2023, according to the D51 REACH program.

Colorado PIT Count 2022: **6,884**
Colorado Homeless Student Count 2021-22: **8,240**

From *State of Homelessness 2022-2023* by Metro Denver Homeless Initiative

22 PEH in the Grand Valley **passed away in 2022.** (Catholic Outreach)

METHODOLOGY

DEVELOPING THE SURVEY

RESEARCH

At the beginning of the survey development process, the City of Grand Junction researched similar surveys that had been conducted in other municipalities. There were three surveys that helped inform the design of the City of Grand Junction's Unhoused Needs Survey:

- [RAND Corporation Homelessness Survey](#) (1989-1995, Los Angeles)
- [The California Statewide Survey of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) (CSSPEH), conducted by UC-San Francisco's Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI) (2021-PRESENT, California Statewide)
- [Portland State University Survey on Needs of People Living Unsheltered](#) (2020, Portland)

Ultimately, Portland State University's *Survey on Needs of People Living Unsheltered* proved the most beneficial for the development of the City of Grand Junction Housing Division's survey. Prior to launching our survey, Housing Staff had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Marisa Zapata, the Director of the PSU Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative and the lead author of PSU's survey. The meeting provided helpful guidance around best methodological and ethical practices to consider while conducting a survey of this nature, and greatly influenced the final design of our survey instrument.

PARTNERS

We engaged with a number of different partners to provide feedback on survey questions. The organizations and individuals who provided feedback throughout the survey development process are listed below:

- Mesa County Public Health Research & Planning Team
- Dr. Stephen Merino, Associate Professor of Sociology at Colorado Mesa University
- Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative
- Jan Moorman – Retired Ethnographic Researcher
- Service Providers:
  - Grand Valley Peace & Justice
  - Catholic Outreach
  - HomewardBound
  - Hilltop
  - Veteran Affairs

Sandra Núñez Currier (Community Engagement Coordinator in the City's Communications Department) supported us in developing a Spanish translation of the survey after the original English version was written.

CONDUCTING THE SURVEY

Timeline	1. **Surveyor trainings:** November 30th & December 1st 2. **Survey conducting period:** November 30th – December 16th (app. 2 weeks) 3. **December – February:** Data is analyzed, report written
Reach	Our goal was to conduct the survey with as wide a cross-section of the unhoused population as possible. We aimed to conduct surveys with unhoused individuals who were both sheltered and unsheltered, and to reach people of all races, ages (except for minors), gender identities, and sexualities. While we designed our outreach methods with these goals in mind (see "survey locations" below), there were some demographics that were underrepresented in our eventual data compared to the Grand Junction Area population at large. These differences are discussed in the "Results" section of this report.
Incentives	To support us in achieving a robust response rate, and in alignment with general best practices around surveying, we provided incentives to individuals who completed the survey. Each respondent received one of the following incentives: • $10 Walmart gift card, or • $10 ARC card There were some respondents who chose to complete the survey without receiving an incentive.
Volunteer Surveyors	30+ individuals volunteered to help conduct the survey. All volunteers were associated with local service providers and either had experience engaging with the unhoused community prior to conducting this survey or had lived experience of houselessness themselves. Organizations represented among the volunteers: • Hilltop Family Resource Center • HomewardBound • Karis, Inc. • Mind Springs Health • Mutual Aid Partners • Solidarity Not Charity • Veteran Affairs

Volunteer Surveyor Trainings	The Housing Division hosted three (3) sessions of 1-hour volunteer trainings. Content included: • Background and purpose of survey • Volunteering logistics • Signing a Code of Ethics/Conduct • Trauma informed de-escalation training
Survey Locations	Each volunteer was assigned a location/organization from the list below to reach respondents. There were also several volunteers who reached PEH on the street or in encampments by the river. • Catholic Outreach Day Center • Hilltop Family Resource Center • Mutual Aid Partners (MAP) Tuesday Distribution Event • Whitman Park – Solidarity Not Charity Saturday/Sunday Feeds • HomewardBound Shelter • Central Library • Veteran Affairs • Grand Junction Area Peace & Justice • WE Shelter • Joseph Center • River encampments, streets, etc. Some locations that were not accessed by volunteers included organizations that specifically serve youth (including Karis, Inc.). Additionally, volunteers did not deliberately target individuals/families living in their vehicles or couch surfing, though some individuals who fit that description may be represented in the data.
# of Surveys Completed	• Original goal was 50 surveys. • 76 surveys were returned to the City of Grand Junction. • After an initial analysis of the surveys, we found two duplicates; therefore, a total of **74 unduplicated surveys** were completed.

ANALYZING THE DATA

After the conclusion of the surveying period, the paper copies of the survey were digitized and sent to the Mesa County Public Health Research & Planning Team, who assisted in analyzing and visualizing the data.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SURVEYS

SURVEY QUESTIONS

If this survey were conducted again in the future, the hope is to improve the survey instrument in three (3) main ways:

1. Writing questions that are easier to understand by respondents when read out loud. E.g., questions that asked respondents to choose their "top 3" options were skipped more frequently compared to other questions, perhaps because they were too difficult to aurally comprehend.
2. Changing write-in questions into multiple-choice questions, to allow for better quantitative analysis.
3. Adding additional questions about disability status, family makeup, etc.

OUTREACH

Although Housing Staff contacted the D51 REACH program and organizations within the Hispanic community to take the survey, families with children were underrepresented in this survey, and no Spanish surveys were administered (although a translated version of the survey was created). The lack of response from these communities could be due to a number of factors, including the timing of the survey (which was conducted near and during the winter holiday breaks), as well as fear of Child Protection Services and/or ICE involvement. If future surveys are administered, the Housing Division would like to see more dedicated outreach to these communities, particularly since these groups might be experiencing "hidden houselessness" and represent familial experiences of houselessness.

RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS & EXPERIENCES OF PEH IN THE GRAND JUNCTION AREA

"My disability is physical and mental, so it's hard to get work. [Lack of] transportation and [lack of] cleanliness when you are on the streets [also makes it] hard to get work. You carry all your stuff in a shopping cart, 'cause people steal your stuff, and then when you say, 'Can I please get a job,' they say 'Filthy – you're going to bring your shopping cart to work every day.' They say, 'Go away,' if they will even talk to you." **– M**
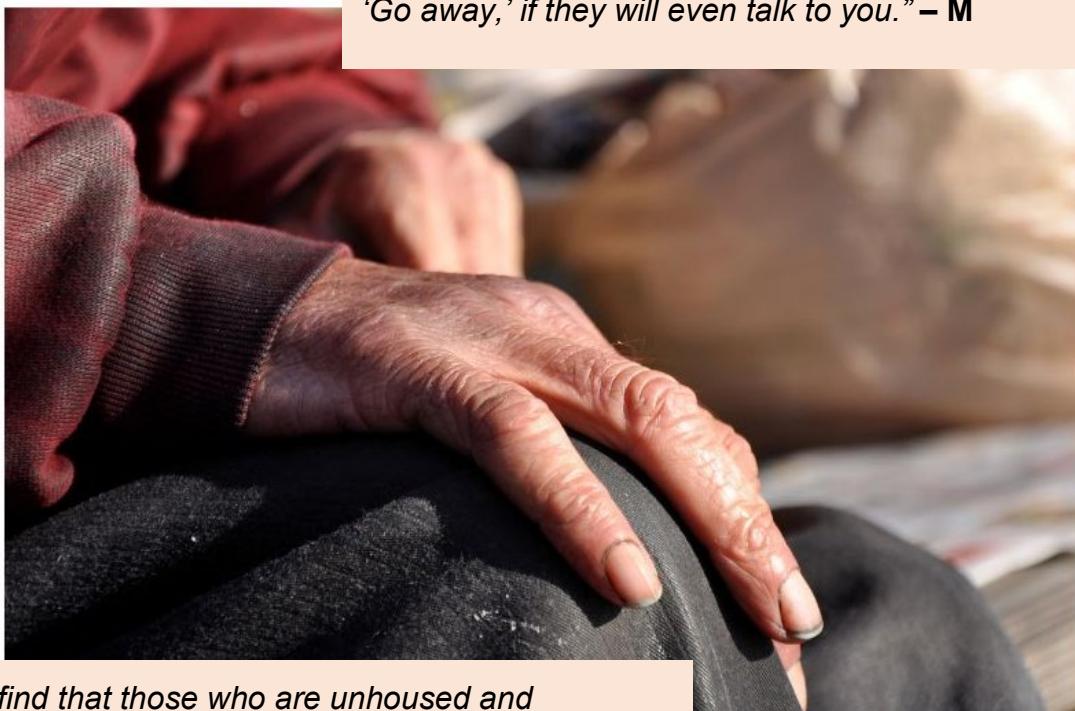
"We find that those who are unhoused and unsheltered are seeking answers to their suffering. They don't want to be seen as the problem, but instead seen as a reflection of society's problems. Recovering from living rough and sheltering takes time. The trauma does not go away overnight."

– Sherry Cole, Program Coordinator of Grand Valley Peace & Justice

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

Age Range	Count
18-24	6
25-34	14
34-44	18
45-54	20
55-64	11
65-74	5
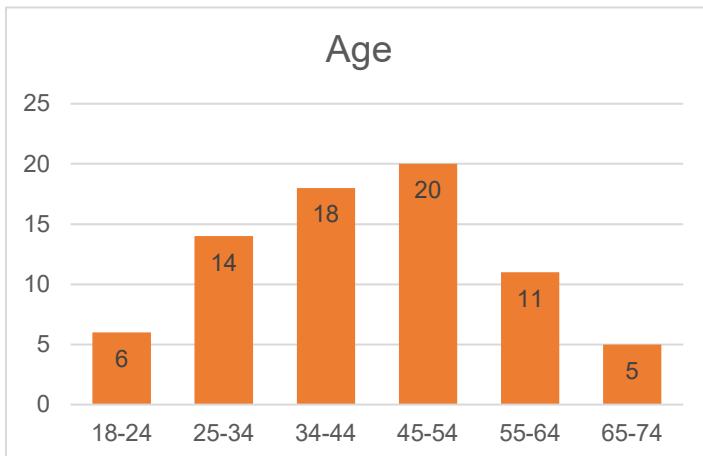
The survey was representative of PEH across different ages.

Gender

- Non-Binary or Transgender, 7%
- Man, 54%
- Woman, 39%
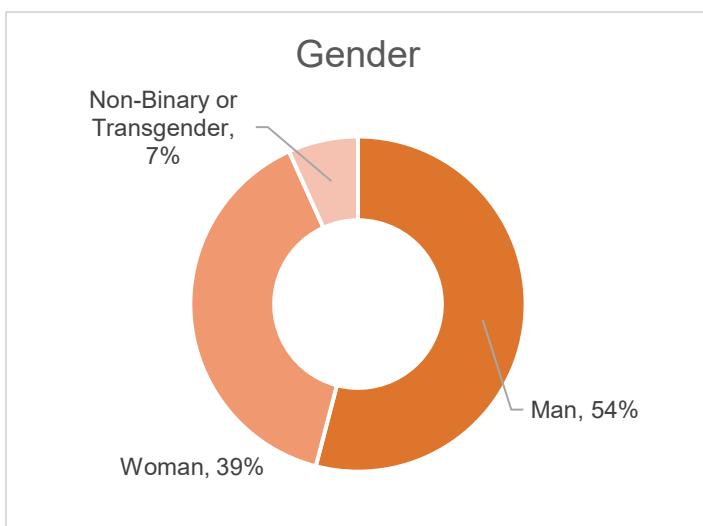
The survey was also representative of PEH across different genders, **including 7% of respondents who identified as non-binary or transgender**. This indicates that the houseless population in Grand Junction likely includes many non-cis-gendered people, who may have different needs from PEH who are cisgender.

Cisgender describes a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth.

Military Service

- Yes, 11%
- No Answer, 22%
- No, 68%
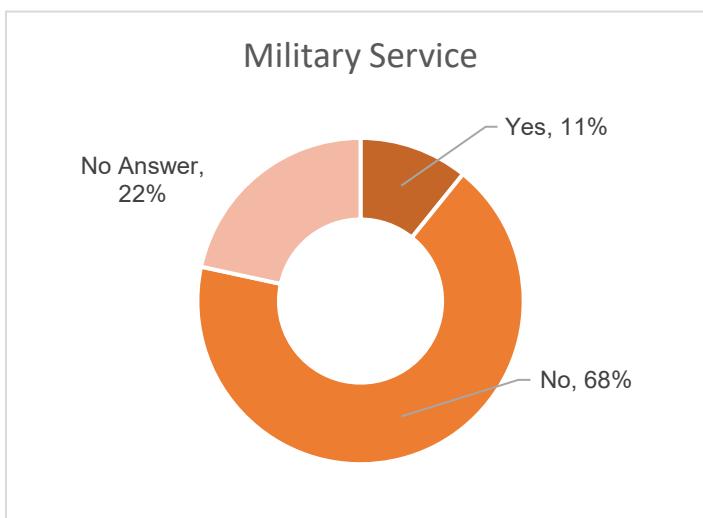
11% of survey respondents identified themselves as veterans. According to the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, approximately 15% of all adult PEH in Colorado are veterans (Metro Denver, p. 56).

DEMOGRAPHICS (cont'd)

Race
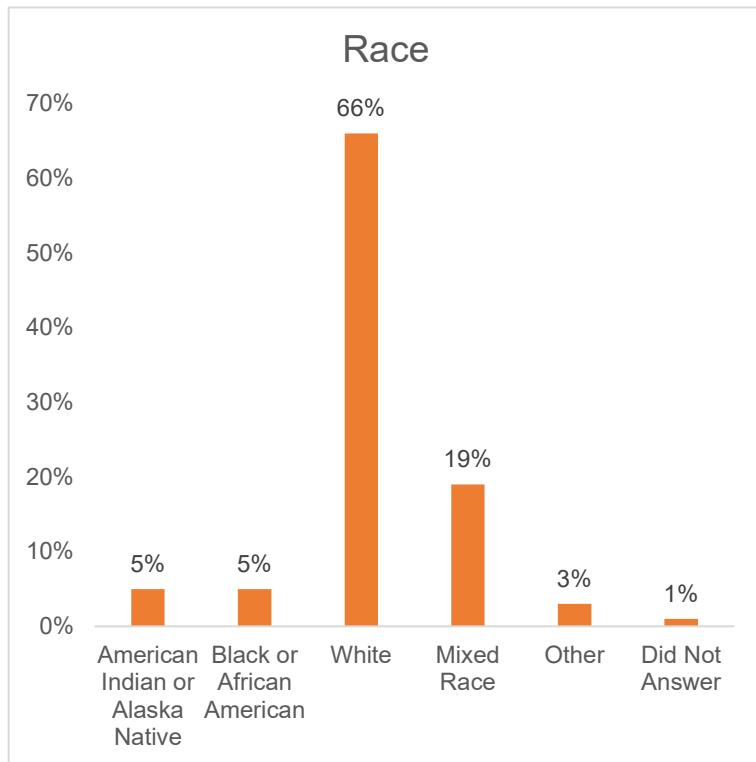
Survey respondents were more racially diverse than the Mesa County population at-large. In the 2020 Census, 94% of Mesa County residents identified as White alone, whereas **only 66% of survey respondents identified as white alone.** (See note on overrepresentation of BIPOC in Houseless population below.)

However, Mesa County's **Hispanic population was underrepresented in this survey of PEH.** Only 11% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic, while 15% of Mesa County residents identify as Hispanic (United States Census, 2022).

Ethnicity

No Answer, 4%

Hispanic, 11%

Non-Hispanic, 85%
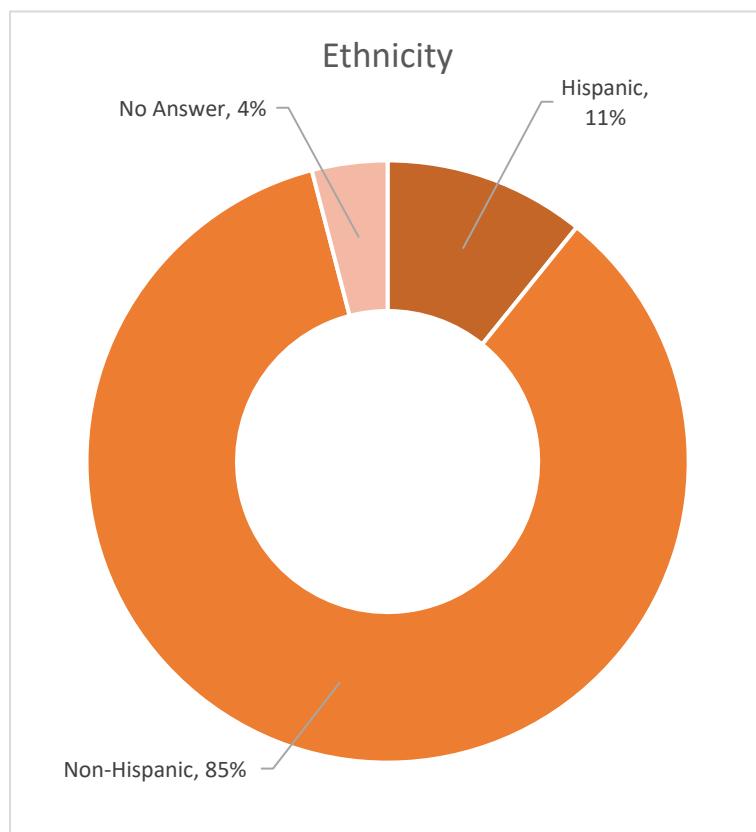
"**Most people of color are overrepresented in the homeless population.** The impacts of systemic racism and discrimination can be seen in federal homelessness data. Compared to their overall proportion of the U.S. population, people of color are overrepresented in the homeless population. Black Americans are especially overrepresented at a rate of 3 to 1 compared to the general population. For American Indians and Alaska Natives, the ratio may be as high as 5 to 1."

***ALL IN: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, p. 16.**

CHRONIC HOUSELESSNESS
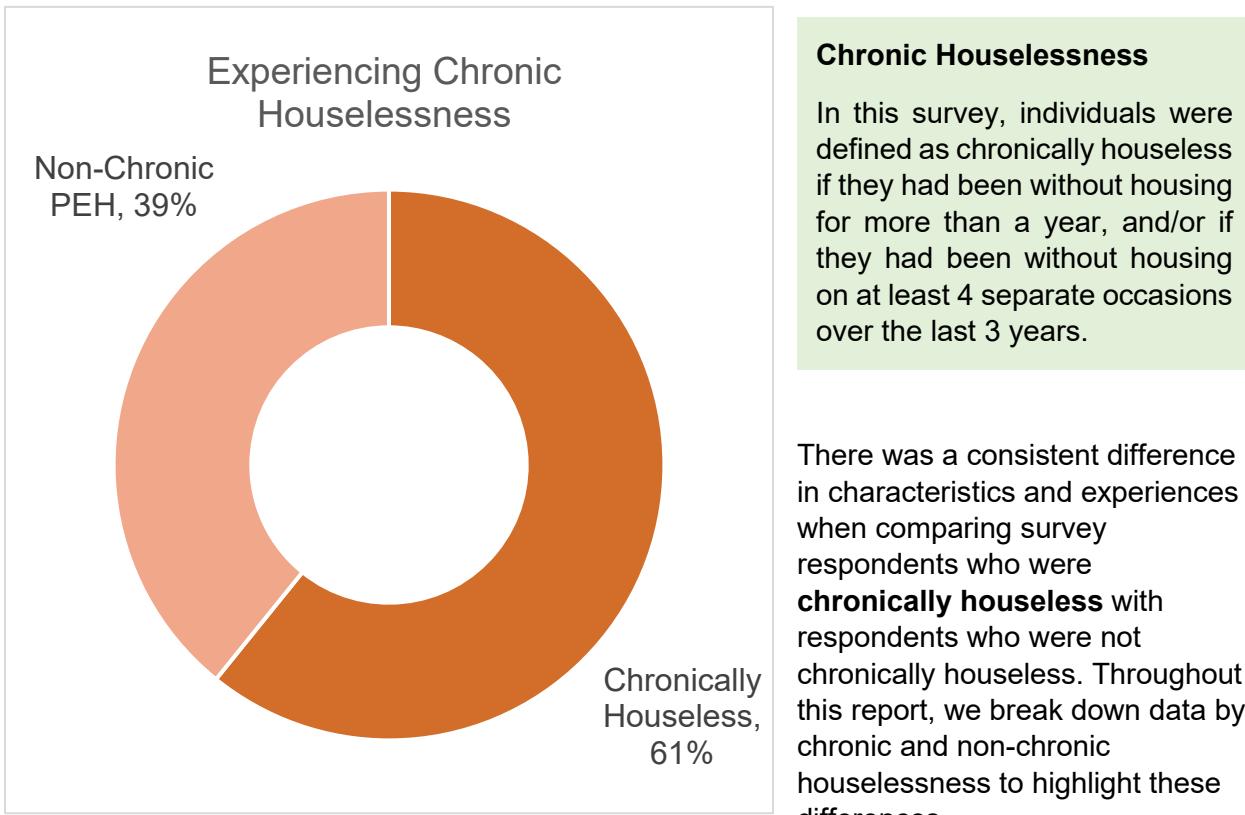
Chronic Houselessness

In this survey, individuals were defined as chronically houseless if they had been without housing for more than a year, and/or if they had been without housing on at least 4 separate occasions over the last 3 years.

There was a consistent difference in characteristics and experiences when comparing survey respondents who were **chronically houseless** with respondents who were not chronically houseless. Throughout this report, we break down data by chronic and non-chronic houselessness to highlight these differences.

It's significant to note that **Grand Junction's chronically houseless population is proportionally much higher compared to the average rate of chronic houselessness across Colorado and the United States.** Nationally, individuals experiencing chronic houselessness make up **only 27%** of the total population of PEH (Henry, 2020). However, 61% of this survey's respondents were identified as chronically houseless, and 70% of individuals were defined as chronically houseless in the 2021 PIT count (Common Sense, 2023).

The chronically houseless population in Grand Junction has also **nearly tripled between the last two complete PIT counts** – numbers that "are wholly unprecedented across the recent histories of Colorado's largest cities" (Ibid, 2023).

The longer someone is houseless, the harder and more expensive it becomes to re-house that person.

$36,000/year

The average cost of chronic houselessness on taxpayers. Other studies find even higher average costs.

(National Alliance, 2017)

49.5% reduction

(or $18,180 in savings) in taxpayer costs, after placing a chronically houseless individual in housing.

(National Alliance, 2017)

CHRONIC HOUSELESSNESS (cont'd)

Chronically Houseless, By Age

Non-Chronic PEH, By Age
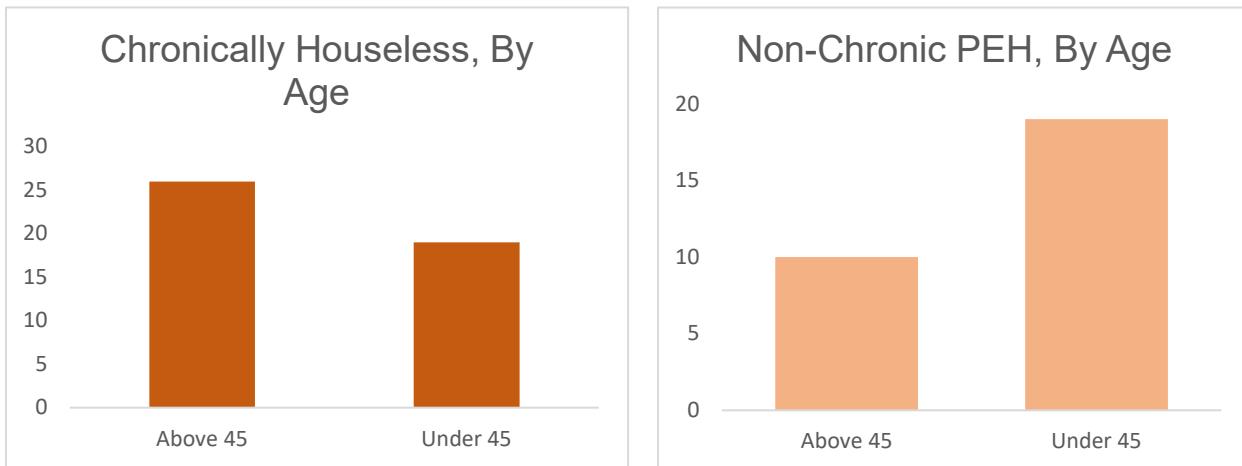
AGE & CHRONIC HOUSELESSNESS

- 58% of individuals experiencing chronic houselessness are above 45 years of age. Conversely, only 34% of non-chronic PEH are above 45 years of age.
- This aligns with service provider experiences; organizations such as The Joseph Center and Catholic Outreach have observed an increased number of seniors who are experiencing housing insecurity and require social services.

Chronically Houseless, by Gender

Non-Chronic PEH, by Gender
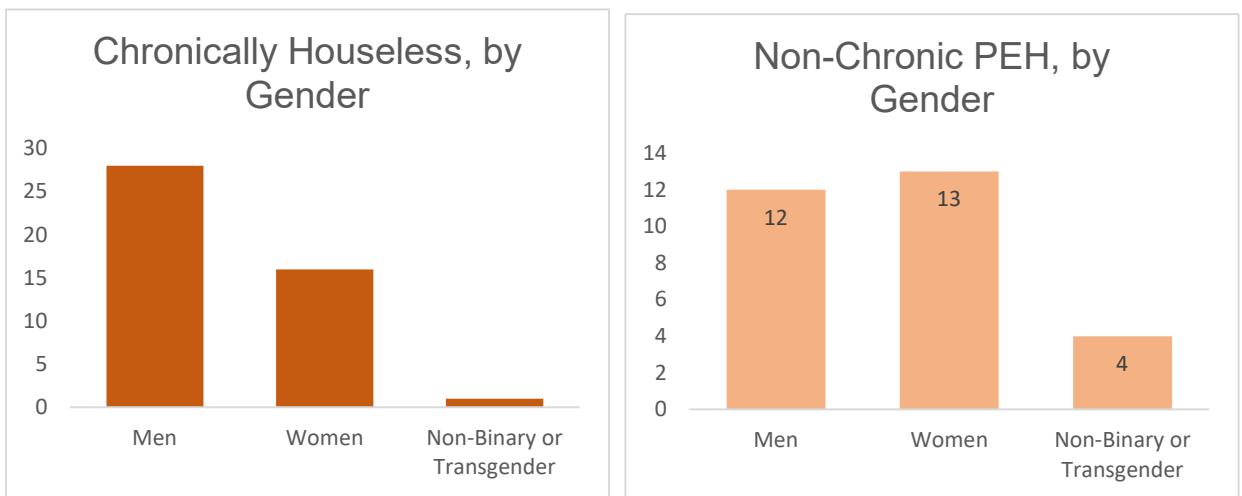
GENDER & CHRONIC HOUSELESSNESS

- 62% of individuals experiencing chronic houselessness are men. Comparatively, there is more equal representation of gender among non-chronic PEH.
- In alignment with national data, relatively more men than women experiencing houselessness were counted in this survey overall (Henry, 2020, p. 8).

MEALS

Where do you get your meals?

Location	Count
Catholic Outreach	49
Grocery stores	47
Community meals at Whitman Park	39
HomewardBound	35
Convenience stores	29
Community Food Bank	26
Mutual Aid Partners	22
Church "blessing boxes"	20
The Joseph Center	15
Grand Valley Peace & Justice	14
Dumpster diving	12
Other	11

Catholic Outreach, Grocery Stores, and Community Meals at Whitman Park were all selected by more than half of respondents. In an Unhoused Needs Assessment, it will be important to assess why certain places are utilized more than others with regards to food access. Identifying ways to support, scale, and replicate the entities that PEH rely on for access to nutritious food should be explored.

Do you use SNAP or WIC?

Response	Percent
Yes	64%
No	27%
No Answer	5%
Maybe	4%
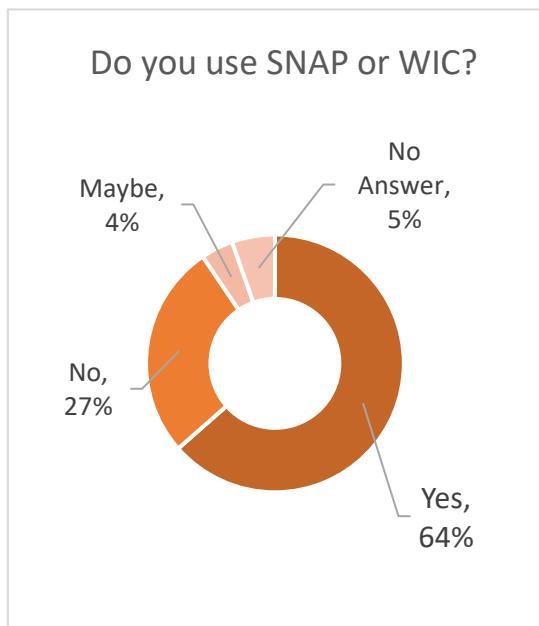
Interestingly, when asked to identify their top three (3) current needs, "access to nutritious food" ranked low for participants. While access to nutritious food is certainly still a need, this could speak to the success of intensive, collaborative community efforts to provide meals to PEH.

Andrew Escamilla, Western Colorado 2-1-1:

"The number of resources we're giving out for housing […] dwarfs most other needs. If you look at 2022, we connected people to 1,514 resources, and for food, it was only 341. **A lot of that has to do with the fact that most of our communities have established and reliable avenues for food help**, so a lot of people know about those resources and don't need to call 2-1-1."

SLEEP

Where are the places you've slept in Mesa County while houseless?

Legend:
- Sheltered (orange)
- Unsheltered (dark brown)
- Other (light peach)

Categories (left to right): Homeless shelter, Street, Hotel/motel, Friend's/family's home, Car/RV, River encampment, Public park, Public lands, Transit stop, Other:, Transit, Day center
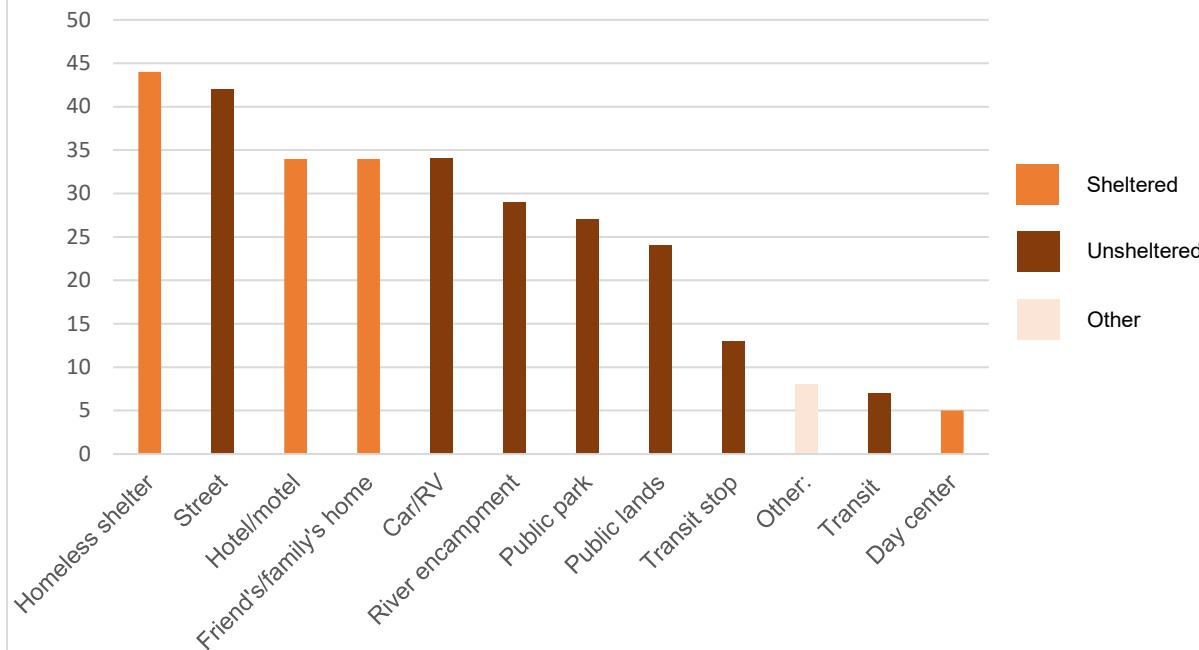
Where are the places you've slept in Mesa County while houseless? (Chronically Houseless & Non-Chronic PEH)

Legend: Chronically Houseless, Not Chronically Houseless
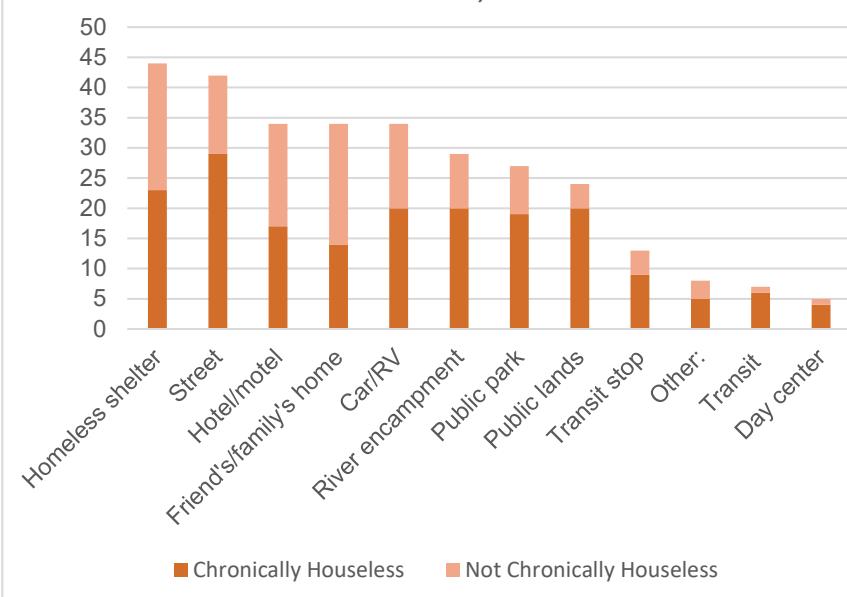
Individuals experiencing chronic houselessness more frequently selected unsheltered locations when responding to this question.

For individuals NOT experiencing chronic houselessness, the responses were the direct inverse – these individuals more frequently selected sheltered locations when responding to this question.

SAFETY & SUPPORT

Where do you feel safe?

Organization	15
Other	15
Everywhere	13
Nowhere	13
Park/River/Vehicle	6
Alone	3

Where do you not feel safe?

Nowhere	14
Everywhere	10
Criminal Justice System	9
Other	9
Streets	7
Night/dark	4
HomewardBound	3
With people	3
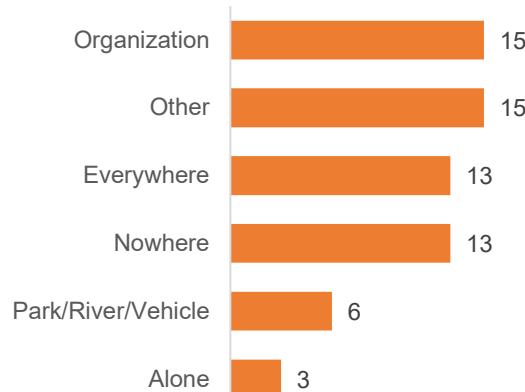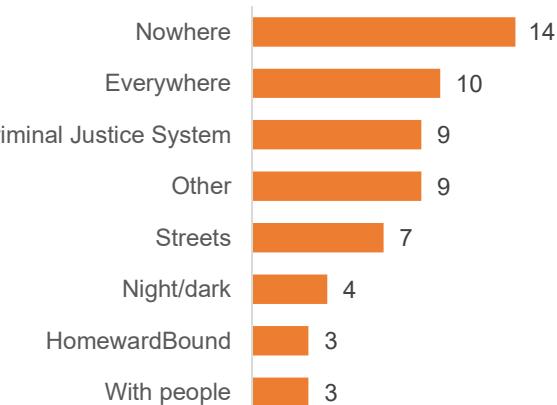
When asked "Where do you feel safe?" respondents most frequently answered with names of organizations. In another part of the survey, the survey asked, "What other organizations in the Grand Valley support you?" and in total, there were 36 different organizations mentioned, which are listed below in alphabetical order.

When asked "Where do you not feel safe?" respondents most frequently answered with "Nowhere," "Everywhere," or cited jail and/or police interactions. These latter responses were grouped together under the option "Criminal Justice System."

What other organizations in the GV support you?

- Did not answer, 37%
- One or more orgs, 47%
- None, 16%

AA
American Lutheran
Blessing Boxes
Catholic Outreach (7)
"Church"
Clifton Christian Church
CPS
Day Center (3)
DHS Office
District 51
Food Bank
Fourth House (2)
Front Range (clinic?)
GV Peace & Justice (4)
Hilltop
HBGV
HomewardBound (3)
Joseph Center (4)
Karis (2)

Laurel House
Medicaid
Methodone Clinic
Mind Springs Health (2)
Mutual Aid (2)
NA
OASIS Clubhouse (2)
OHP
Reach
Salvation Army (2)
"Shelter"
Solidarity Not Charity (3)
TANF
Urgent Care
WE Shelter
Work Force Center
Youth Home

CURRENT NEEDS

Top 3 Current Needs

Need	Count
Affordable housing	36
A place to shower & use the bathroom	28
A warm place to sleep every night	22
Employment	19
Physical health support	18
Access to nutritious food	16
Mental health support	14
Other:	14
Community & friends	8
Did not choose top 3	7
Addiction support	6
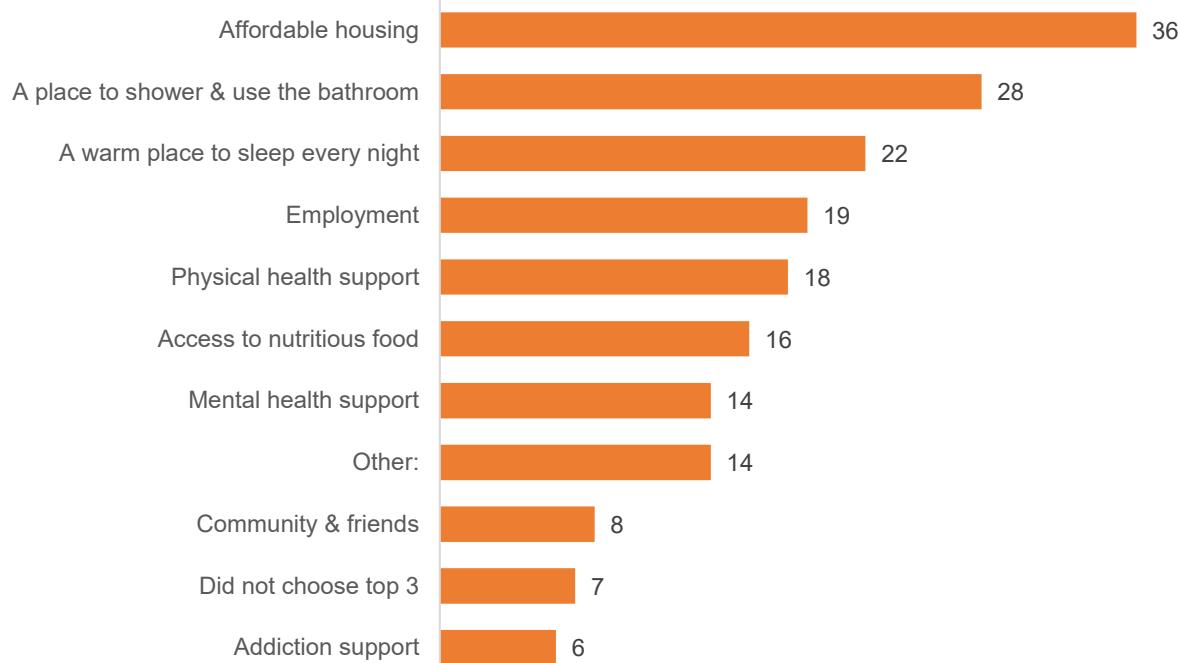
Top 5 Most Prioritized Current Needs

1. Affordable housing
2. Shower & bathroom
3. Warm place to sleep
4. Employment
5. Physical health support

Affordable Housing

Housing is one of the main solutions to houselessness, which is reflected in survey participants' responses to this question. Maintaining stable housing has become increasingly difficult when Colorado has the 7th highest cost of living compared to other states in the United States.

Interestingly, mental health support and addiction support are ranked at the bottom of this list, even though, when asked about the steps one needed to take to return to housing (p. 32), respondents frequently chose "no discrimination against mental health issues" or "addiction issues." This could be the result of asking respondents to prioritize their top three (3) needs, rather than share all of the needs they may have had at the point in time in which this survey was taken. This could also speak to the lack of willingness to state the need for mental health and addiction support, which are often stigmatized.

CURRENT NEEDS (cont'd)

Top 3 Current Needs, Chronic & Non-Chronic Houselessness

Need	Chronically Houseless	Not Chronically Houseless
Affordable housing	25	11
A place to shower & use the bathroom	17	11
A warm place to sleep every night	14	8
Employment	12	7
Physical health support	10	8
Access to nutritious food	13	3
Mental health support	7	7
Other:	8	6
Community & friends	6	2
Did not choose top 3	4	3
Addiction support	1	5

This page shows differences in prioritized current needs between those who are chronically houseless and those who are not chronically houseless. Some notable findings:

- **Chronically houseless respondents rank "nutritious food" in the top five (5),** which is ranked near the bottom for non-chronic PEH.
- **Addiction support was ranked much higher for non-chronic PEH**, with 19% indicating it, compared to 2% of chronically houseless PEH.

These findings may speak to the effect of trauma on how PEH prioritize needs - those who have been repeatedly exposed to the trauma of street life over a long period of time may only have the capacity to think about their immediate needs, such as nutritious food, rather than long-term, multi-step support such as addiction recovery. Conversely, those who have been unhoused for a shorter period may have more capacity to focus on complex, long-term needs.

Top 5 Most Prioritized Needs (Chronically Houseless)

1. Affordable housing
2. Shower & bathroom
3. Warm place to sleep
4. Nutritious food
5. Employment

Top 5 Most Prioritized Needs (Non-chronic PEH)

1. Affordable housing
2. Shower & bathroom
3. Warm place to sleep
4. Physical health support
5. Employment

INCOME

Monthly Income

A - No Answer	10
B - No Income - $0	40
C - $1-$249	4
D - $250-$499	1
E - $500-$999	10
F - $1000-$1999	7
G - $2000+	2

No Income vs. Some Income

No Answer, 14%
No Income, 54%
Some Income, 32%

Most respondents indicated that they earned no income. This aligns with later parts of the survey when respondents most frequently cited financial support as a requirement to help them stay in housing.

However, some respondents indicated that they *did* earn income. There were also some respondents who selected "no income" for this question but responded "Yes" to holding SNAP/WIC benefits.

This suggests that lack of income is not the only barrier to re-entering and staying in housing. Other supports are needed in order for PEH to successfully find and stay in housing.

ENTERING HOUSELESSNESS IN THE GRAND JUNCTION AREA

"My husband passed away 7 years ago this June; he was the sole provider. We had everything – a home, 5 acres, vehicles. I completely depended on him. I did my best to pay the bills, [but] I lost our home and everything we owned. I just couldn't do it anymore." **– M**

"More families are losing their housing and coming to us with hope that they'll only be staying in their car until they can find a place… then they come back weeks later and they haven't found anything on their own, so we refer them to housing resources, but then we see them again and still nothing. They start to lose hope, as they are told there is at least a 2-year waitlist. They come back excited when they get a housing voucher, and then we see them again 30 days later, nothing. They get an extension, but they're overwhelmed, tired and hopeless..."

- **Stephania Vasconez, Executive Director of Mutual Aid Partners**

LIVING IN MESA COUNTY

How long have you lived in Mesa County?

Category	Count
No answer	12
Less than 1 year	13
1-3 years	9
4+ years	24
All my life	16

What brought you to Mesa County?

Reason	Count
Grew up in the area	20
Other	19
Relatives and friends in the area	19
Left behind and couldn't figure out a way to leave	6
Work	5
Large number of homeless services	4
Bused from another location	3
Mental health and addiction services	2
Camping along the river on in public lands	1
Good weather	1

There are numerous theories about how people become unhoused and where they originally come from. In the Grand Junction Area, these are some of the common anecdotes you may hear about PEH:

- PEH come to the area because of our behavioral health services (mental health, addiction support), etc.
- PEH come to the area because of our houselessness services
- PEH come to the area for the temperate climate
- PEH are bussed here from other municipalities

> 16 respondents were born and raised in Mesa County. **Of these, 10 are experiencing chronic houselessness.**

This survey had different findings. While some respondents do acknowledge that they came to Mesa County for these reasons, many more respondents say that they grew up in Mesa County, had relatives and friends in the area, or came to the region for work – the same reasons why any other member in our community might choose to live and stay in this area. The "other" responses to this question also highlighted that many PEH originally came to Mesa County because they had a prior connection to the region. One respondent came because their "ex-wife is from here," another because of "medical care" and "to see same doctors."

However, even if some PEH did acknowledge that they came to Grand Junction for services and/or were brought here from neighboring municipalities or states, it should be emphasized that no one should be denied care or safe and stable housing based on how or why they arrived in our community.

LOSING HOUSING

Why do you think you lost housing?

Reason	Count
Other	23
Loss of job	20
Addiction	16
Mental illness	13
Eviction	12
Divorce	11
Disability	10
COVID-19	10
Criminal record	8
Rent increase	6
Domestic violence	6
Discrimination because of gender/sexuality	4

50% of respondents indicated **2 or more reasons** for losing housing.

16% Indicated **4 or more reasons** for losing housing.

The top articulated reasons for losing housing are loss of job and addiction, followed by mental illness, eviction, and divorce. **It's important to note that the category "other" here ranks high.** The high occurrence of "other" responses could indicate that respondents felt their stories were too complex to be encapsulated by the existing responses.

"Other" responses:

"social issues (Autism)"

"gave everything to a woman who was pregnant"

"father died – was his caregiver – lost house after"

"falling out with foster family"

"systematic increase in cost of living while also paying for education"

"husband passed away, his family took house"

Additionally, many respondents indicated multiple reasons for losing housing. This, again, illustrates the complexity around pinpointing definitive, singular causes for losing housing. It raises the question: can one say that individual experiences like a loss of job, addiction, or mental illness are root causes of houselessness, when so many people's stories of losing housing encompass a multitude of causes? (And when not everyone who loses a job or experiences addiction and mental health ultimately loses housing?)

Existing data-driven research shows that systemic factors – **such as lack of affordable housing** and **systemic social discrimination, including systemic racism** – are much more compelling root causes of houselessness than individual circumstances. What is helpful about understanding houselessness as a problem with systemic causes is that people can then create systems-driven solutions, identifying points in the system of houselessness at

which high-level interventions can be made in order to transform houselessness into a brief and rare occurrence in our community.

Living Situation Before Losing Housing

Living Situation	Count
Own house/apartment	41
Friend or relative's house/apartment	16
Jail/addiction treatment	5
Rented room	3
Foster care	3
AirBnB/Motel	2
Other:	2
Supportive Housing	1
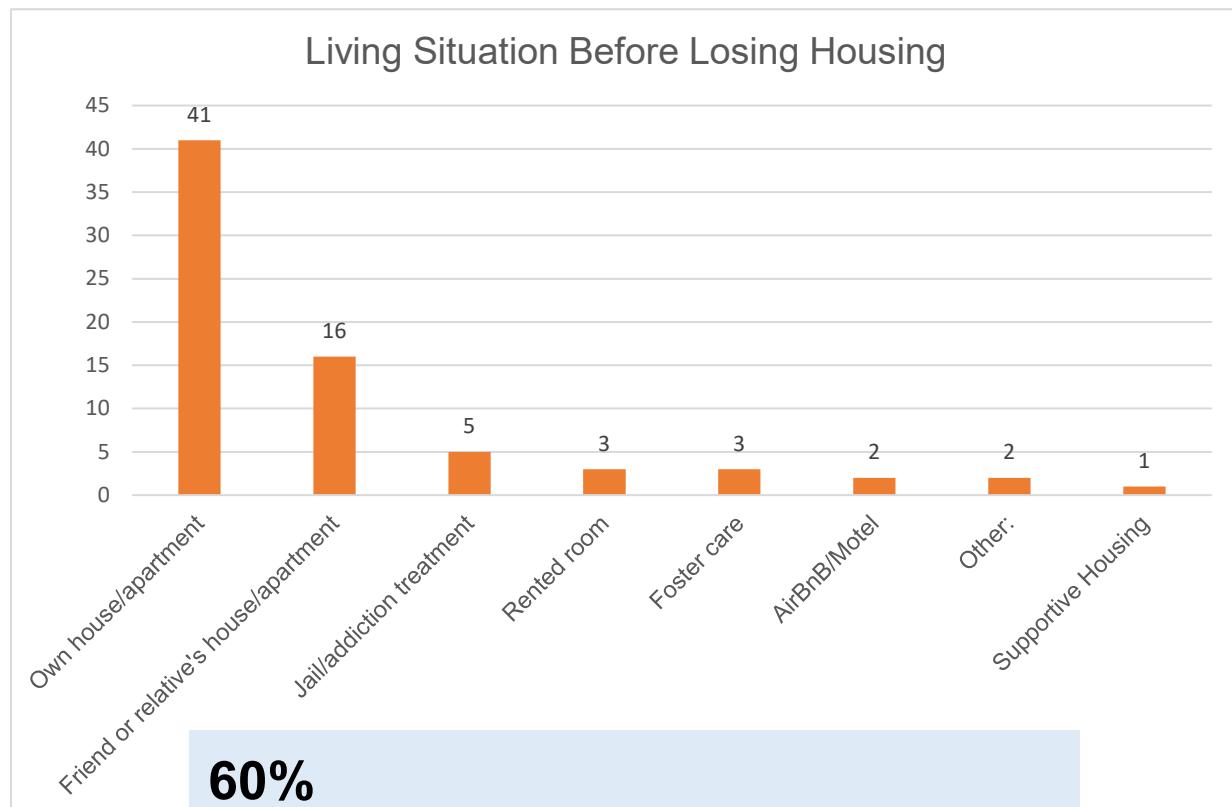
60%

of respondents were living in their own house/apartment or a rented room before their most recent experience of houselessness.

This shows that, before entering houselessness, many PEH were able to live and support themselves independently. Once someone has lost housing, however, it can be incredibly difficult to find housing again, especially in a tight housing market.

"[…] Personal vulnerabilities may explain *who* becomes homeless within a given community under a specific set of circumstances – but […] in aggregate, these vulnerabilities do not adequately explain regional variation in homelessness. This finding suggests that **broader structural explanations of homelessness – especially those that shape housing markets** – may have more explanatory power."

– Homelessness is a Housing Problem, Pg. 28

BARRIERS AGAINST EXITING HOUSELESSNESS & ENTERING HOUSING IN THE GRAND JUNCTION AREA

"I only have a 3rd grade education, so I don't know about how to get housing, if I wanted one. I need someone to help me do all the paperwork. I probably qualify for disability and food. I need someone keeping on me and helping with appointments." **– R**

*"Some of us are trying to improve our lives […] I am willing to do the work, I just need a chance. Doesn't seem like I have a very fair shake because of my felonies. There really are people like me who really do want a place to live and don't want to be living in a tent and depending on people for propane, [or to] have to go out and cut wood every night when it's freezing."* **– G**

"It can't be understated how important it is for someone to have a safe place to rest their head so they can focus on getting back to independence and self-sufficiency. People can't think about […] maintaining a steady job or planning for their medical needs when all they can think about is "Where am I going to live?" or "How am I going to be safe tonight?" If we expect people to pull themselves out of poverty, we need to provide safe, accessible housing."

**– Andrew Escamilla, Coordinator of Western Colorado 211**

LOOKING FOR HOUSING

Are you currently looking for housing?

- Financially Unattainable, 11%
- Maybe, 16%
- Yes, 48%
- No, 25%

What are you looking for in housing?

Clean space	26
Anything else?	24
Own bathroom	23
Own kitchen	19
Safe neighborhood	19
Convenient location	14
Sober environment	14
Accessible for disabled individuals	11
Outdoor area	8
Big space	7

Houselessness is rarely a choice. If given the opportunity, most people would choose to be housed.
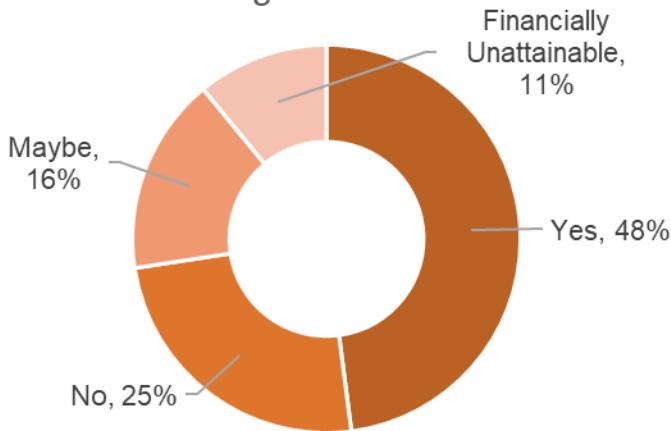
75%

of respondents answered "Yes," "Maybe," or "Financially unattainable" when asked "Are you currently looking for housing?"

This shows that a sizeable majority of PEH who were surveyed have interest in obtaining housing. It's possible that among respondents who said "no," there are still individuals who would be interested in obtaining housing given the right circumstances.
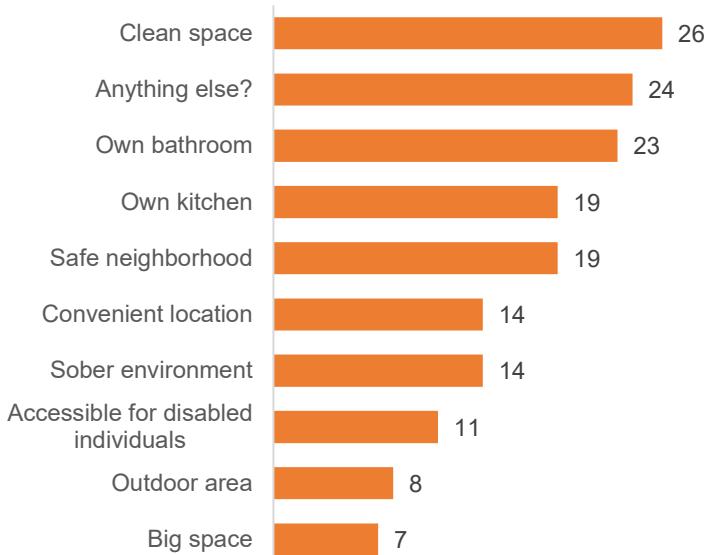
90%

of respondents answered the question "What are you looking for in housing?" which means that even when they answered "No" to the previous question of whether they were *currently looking for housing*, an overwhelming majority of respondents still had ideas, visions, and desires for what they would want in a future housing situation.

The top three (3) choices were "Clean space," "Anything else?" and "Own bathroom." In general, the top-ranking choices indicate a desire for dignified and private living spaces, which is difficult to find in many of the (congregate) shelters where PEH are often asked to live.

WORRIES ABOUT MOVING INTO HOUSING

Worries About Reentering Housing

Worry	Value
Paying for housing	29
Being alone	20
Anything else?	19
Rules	13
Different noises/smells	13
Being inside	8
Change in routine	8
Leaving friends	6
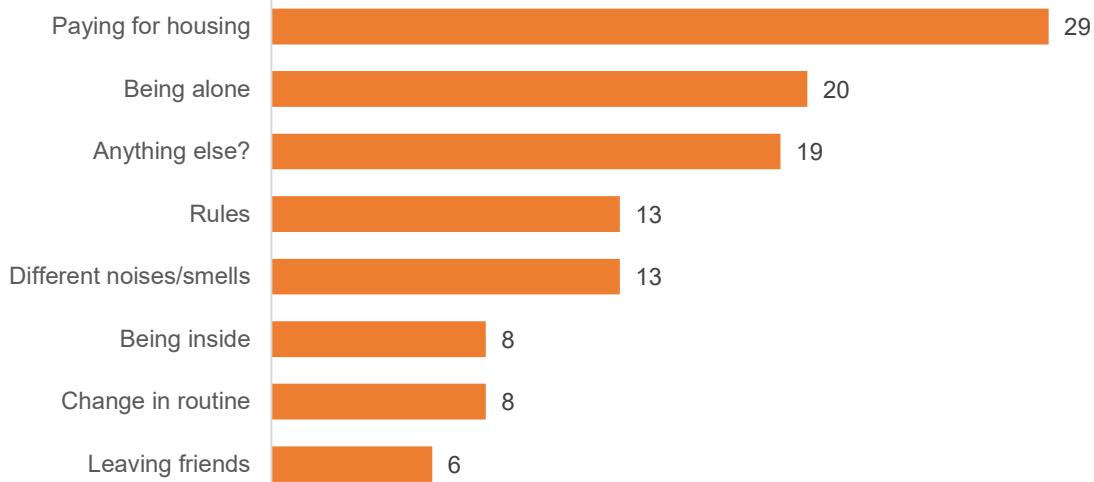
Worries About Moving Back Into Housing (Chronically Houseless)

Worry	Value
Paying for housing	19
Being alone	13
Anything else?	13
Rules	11
Different noises/smells	10
Being inside	5
Change in routine	4
Leaving friends	3
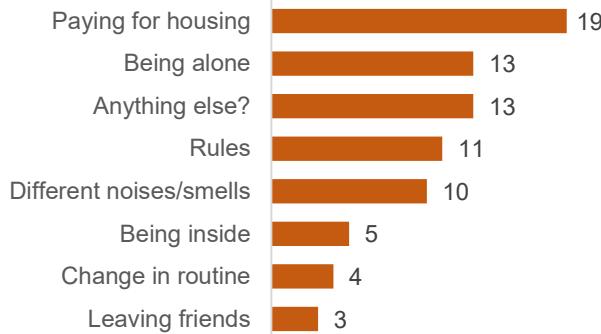
Worries About Moving Back Into Housing (Non-Chronic PEH)

| Worry	Value
Paying for housing	10
Being alone	7
Anything else?	6
Change in routine	4
Different noises/smells	3
Being inside	3
Leaving friends	3
Rules	2
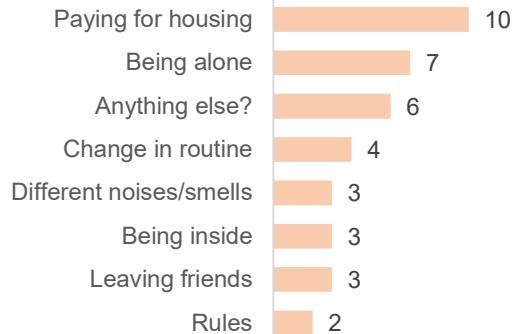
Though order sometimes varies, the top 3 worries for all groups are: **paying for housing, being alone, and "something else."** (Again, the prevalence of "other" answers speaks to the complexity of worries that a respondent may have.) When comparing those who are chronically houseless and non-chronic PEH, chronically houseless individuals cite rules and different noises/smells as a much larger concern than non-chronic PEH, where these worries rank at the bottom.

Notably, leaving friends ranked low for all demographics, but being alone ranked consistently high. These seemingly related items are not as closely correlated as one might expect. One possible explanation is that, while PEH belong to communities, they may lack close, mutually beneficial, secure social connections.

STEPS BEFORE MOVING INTO HOUSING

Steps Before Moving Into Housing

Step	Value
More money	56
Temporary housing while waiting for permanent housing	43
No discrimination against criminal history	38
No discrimination against credit history	37
No discrimination against drug/alcohol or mental health issues	35
Getting legal documents	31
Getting furniture	28
No discrimination against past evictions	25
Other steps:	15
Job	5

Top 3 Steps

1. More money
2. Temporary housing while waiting for permanent housing
3. Find a landlord who doesn't discriminate against criminal history, credit history, addiction, or mental health issues

The presence of the "no discrimination" steps at the top of this list – whether that's no discrimination against criminal history, credit history, or behavioral health issues – is a sign that there is not enough low-barrier housing in our community for individuals with these histories. Research shows that without housing and other kinds of healthcare, PEH will become further entrenched in crime, financial struggles, and behavioral health issues. Conversely, PEH with criminal records who can access stable housing after being released from jail/person, for example, often experience reduced rates of recidivism.

Two newer entities in our region who are working to solve issues of recidivism using housing, in addition to other healthcare interventions, include **The Freedom Institute** and **Mesa County's Multi-Agency Collaboration (MAC) team.**

READ: "Can Housing Interventions Reduce Incarceration and Recidivism?" by Kimberly Burrowes (Housing Matters: Urban Institute, February 2019)

READ: "To keep people from returning to jail, Mesa County follows other communities' reentry roadmap" by Sharon Sullivan (*The Colorado Sun*, November 2022)

NEEDS TO STAY IN HOUSING

Staying in Housing

| Category	Value
Employment	27
Support paying rent	27
Transportation	25
Support paying for things outside of rent, like food…	13
Someone to advocate for you	11
Visit from family and friends	10
Did not choose top 3	10
Addiction support	9
Other:	9
Physical health support	8
Mental health support	8

It's interesting to note that while "more money" ranked much higher than "getting a job" when respondents were asked about the steps they needed to take to get into housing (p. 32), "employment" is the top need among respondents in order to *stay* in housing. There is a recognition that staying in housing requires consistent financial stability, which employment can often provide.

It's also notable that many of the top responses to this question – employment, support paying rent, support paying for other things -- could be grouped under the larger category of "financial assistance." When comparing the number of respondents who need some type of financial assistance with those who do not, it was found that a majority of respondents – 69% -- require financial assistance in order to stay in housing.

"Financial Assistance" includes:

1. Employment
2. Support paying rent
3. Support paying for things outside of rent (food, childcare, etc.)

Staying in Housing (Financial Assistance)

Other 31%

Financial assistance 69%
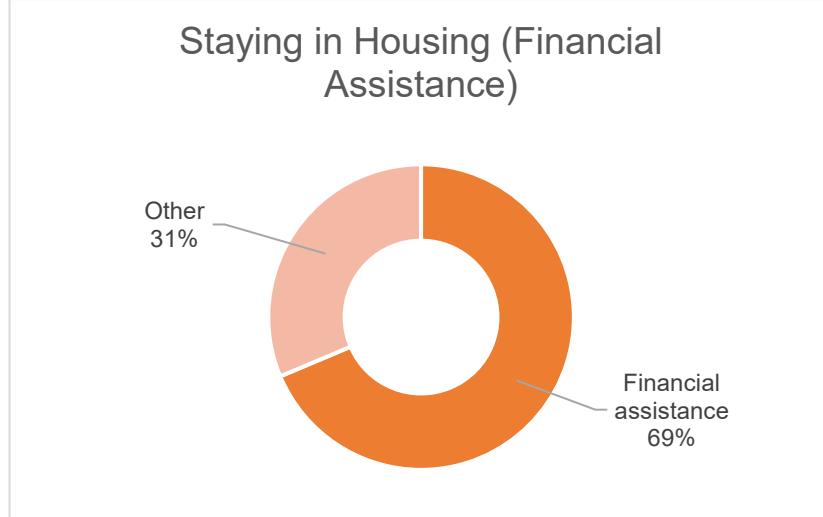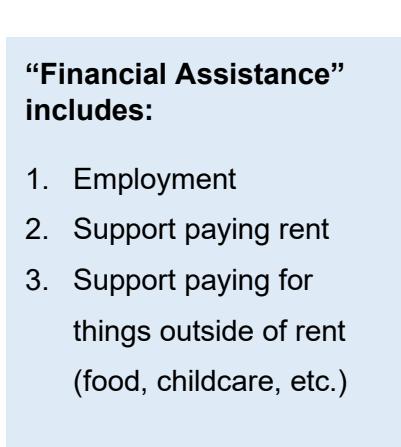
END OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

Interest in being interviewed?

Did not answer, 9%

No, 20%

Yes, 70%
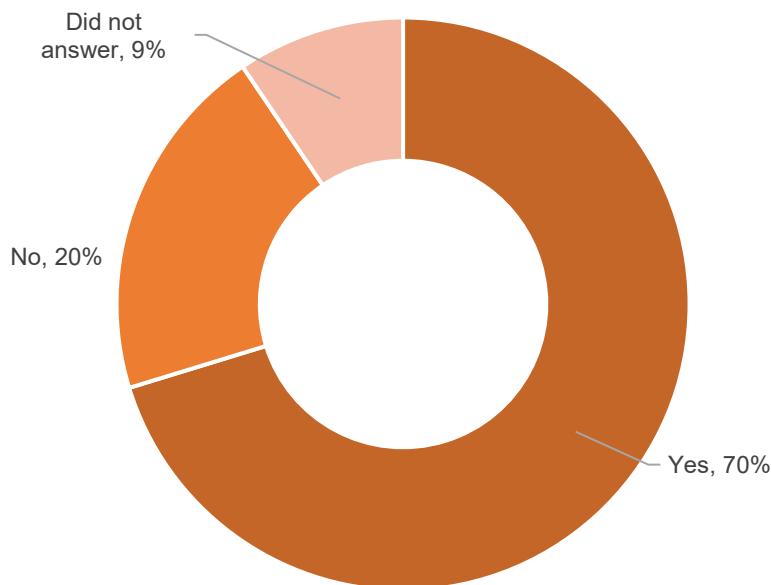
70%

of respondents had interest in being interviewed if the City of Grand Junction were to conduct a longer, qualitative survey in the future.

Need support in accessing services?

Did not answer, 42%

Yes, 39%

No, 19%
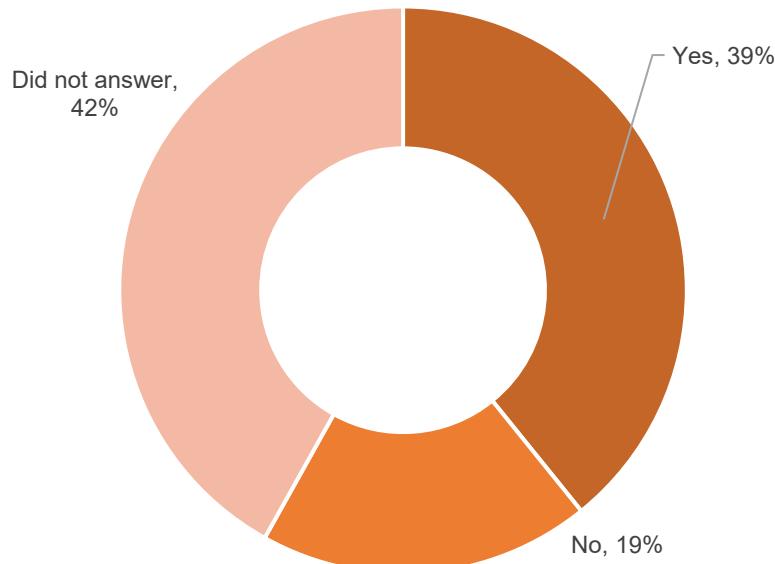
Housing Staff contacted each individual who responded "Yes" to this question (29 individuals in total) and referred them to Grand Valley Connects and/or other services.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of developing, conducting, and analyzing the results of the survey showed numerous points along the "houselessness system" at which our community can intervene with solutions. This system, according to housing scholar Gregg Colburn and data journalist Clayton Page Aldern, includes the stages of inflow, crisis response, and outflow (*Homelessness is a Housing Problem,* 2021).

A systems approach to solving houselessness encourages the creation of solutions that intervene at all three of these stages simultaneously. In a systems approach, one ask questions such as: (1) How can we reduce the rate of inflow into houselessness? (2) How do we respond to individuals' needs once they are experiencing houselessness? And (3), how can increase the rate of outflow from houselessness into housing? Solutions to all three parts of the system must happen simultaneously in order for the overall rate of houselessness to decrease.

This survey is a first step towards creating these kinds of solutions. The table on the following page (p. 36) illustrates the potential of this survey data to inform solutions at each stage of the system.

The survey also revealed a consistent difference between individuals who are chronically houseless compared to those that don't experience chronic houselessness. Given the sometimes-wide-ranging differences between these two groups, it will be important to tailor solutions to these different demographics.

However, what the survey ultimately showed is that more comprehensive data is needed to create effective policy solutions. This survey is a starting point, but it only provides a snapshot, and it doesn't help our community understand the financial investments or the numerical quantity of resources needed to efficiently support our houseless population.

Important logistical questions still need to be answered, such as: how many more low-barrier emergency shelters should be created, such as non-congregate shelters, pallet shelters, transitional or emergent shelters, or permanent supportive shelters? How many more case managers and social workers are required in our community to effectively serve PEH with behavioral health needs? What are current service provider organizations doing well, what potential service improvements need to be made and/or created, and how can currently provided, successful services be scaled and replicated?

An Unhoused Needs Assessment will support the City in arriving at answers for these questions and more. This data will then help the City formulate big-picture strategies, with the goal of transforming houselessness into a brief and rare occurrence in our community. The assessment is introduced in more detail on page 38.
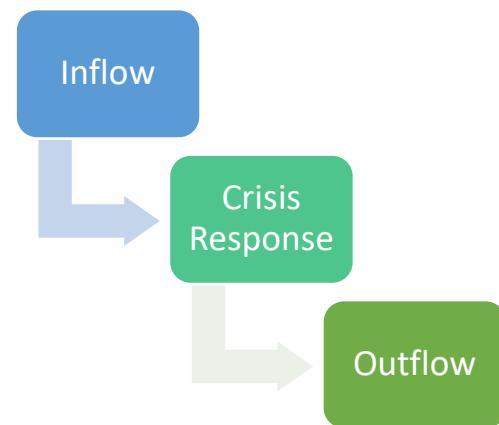
Stage of System	Research Question	Example Finding from GJ Unhoused Needs Survey	Potential Solution
Inflow	How can we systematically reduce the rate of inflow into houselessness?	Lack of affordable housing is a much more compelling root cause of houselessness than individual circumstances (p. 27).	Find ways to increase the availability of affordable housing as well as permanent supportive housing.

(This need is already partially being addressed by the City's Housing Strategies, though more work certainly needs to be done.) |
| **Crisis Response** | How can we effectively respond to individuals' needs once they are experiencing houselessness? | A top need for individuals currently experiencing houselessness is a place to shower and use the bathroom (p. 22). | Encouraging and incentivizing the creation of more facilities where people can safely shower and use the bathroom. |
| **Outflow** | How can we systematically increase the rate of outflow from houselessness into housing? | Low-barrier housing and financial support is needed for PEH to successfully leave houselessness and re-enter housing (p. 32-33). | Encouraging and incentivizing the creation of housing along the entirety of the housing spectrum (emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing).

Creating programs for PEH to receive more financial support, whether in the form of employment, rent support, etc. |

UNHOUSED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Unhoused Needs Survey provided a snapshot of the characteristics and experiences of People Experiencing Houselessness (PEH) in the city, and indicated a need for a deep dive into houselessness in our region by conducting a comprehensive Unhoused Needs Assessment and Strategies Report. This report will enable the development of a regional strategy for reducing houselessness, as envisioned in the 2020 One Grand Junction Comprehensive Plan.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to assess current conditions of houselessness in the Grand Junction Area and the needs of PEH in our community; assess service provider conditions and needs; make projections/predictions of future housing types (shelters, emergent, transitional, permanent supportive housing, and rapid rehousing); and provide recommendations for types of housing to build and types of services still needed, as well as policies, practices, and regulatory changes that should be implemented to address gaps in housing and other service needs and supply.

> "Needs assessments help states and communities understand the amount and types of additional investments needed to solve homelessness, allowing for more efficient use of resources. Local and state governments that have reduced homelessness began with clear numeric goals, goals typically based on data on need. Instead of asking, '*what do we have*,' needs assessments begin by asking, '*what would it take*.'"
>
> **The California Homeless Housing Needs Assessment, p. 2**

Assessment Research Topics:

Phase One: Grand Junction Area Unhoused Needs Assessment

A. Demographic Data

1. Population – Age, ethnicity, and race, special needs, educational attainment, income

   a   Aggregation of service provider data and other local/state/federal data on houselessness, including Point-in-Time (PIT), McKinney-Vento, Vulnerability Index, Homeless Management System (HMIS) data, permanent supportive housing services, domestic violence safe house data, Unhoused Needs Survey data, hospital discharge, Community Resource Network and bed utilization data, and other local programmatic and demographic data from our service providers including number of beds/units, current use of housing vouchers, and waitlists.

2. Service provider population & access – average length of stay in housing, where individuals are utilizing services, existing programs, where residents go after they leave services, vulnerability access to services, etc.

3. Qualitative data – interviews with those who have lived experience of houselessness, as well as interviews of service providers.

B. Special Populations
1. Housing with supportive services for disabled and other populations
2. Rate of chronic houselessness
3. Student housing needs, trends, and impacts
4. Rate of housing assistance, TANF, and welfare receipt

C. Economic Conditions
1. Local costs of houselessness on the community
2. Labor force, unemployment, and employment trends relevant to PEH
3. COVID impacts
4. Housing cost impact on houselessness
5. Medical concerns and/or costs impacting PEH
6. Other economic conditions impacting PEH

D. Existing Services Analysis
1. Services provided in the community by age, condition, type, density, tenure, group quarters status, accessibility, and location
2. Models, levels, and standards of care and if existing services meet those standards
3. Overcrowding, severe overcrowding, and habitability
4. Proposed future development
5. Community outreach to inform the public and/or reduce NIMBYism

G. Gap Analysis
1. Demand forecast of service and housing needs
2. Need-supply gap by household income, housing type, sub-geography, and tenure.
3. Forecast of needs to close gap such as drug and alcohol rehab beds, emergent/emergency housing needs, types of shelter, types of rapid rehousing, behavioral or mental health beds or resources and other supportive services that may include food, counseling, addiction support, etc.

H. Barriers Analysis
1. Barriers related to access of services
2. Additional types of services and/or housing needs
3. Mechanisms needed to prevent houselessness
4. Analysis of supply market, including costs for various types of housing and/or services
5. Households experiencing cost-burden and conditions problems that may lead to houselessness in the future
6. Fair Housing complaints and evictions impact
7. Community support

I. Other
      1. Other data pertinent to the scope of this request

Phase Two: Grand Junction Area Unhoused Strategies

J. Recommendations
1. Local, state, and federal and non-governmental funding sources
2. Numerical targets for supply by housing or shelter type
3. Recommendations and best practices for regulatory changes
4. Scalable strategies to address need-supply gaps
5. Strategies for public and private sector, including City services and housing and service partners/organizations
6. Tools and strategies needed to reduce and/or eliminate houselessness at the same rate at those entering houselessness
7. Tools and strategies to reduce harm, eliminate barriers, and increase access to services and/or housing for PEH
8. Other strategies pertinent to the scope of this request

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