PREVENTING AND ENDING HOMELESSNESS

# Evaluation of Denver's All In Mile High Initiative

*2025 Interim Report*

**Samantha Batko** **Pear Moraras** **Anna Doñate** **Brendan Chen**

**Alyse D. Oneto**

URBAN INSTITUTE

RESEARCH REPORT

December 2025

## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization founded on one simple idea: To improve lives and strengthen communities, we need practices and policies that work. For more than 50 years, that has been our charge. By equipping changemakers with evidence and solutions, together we can create a future where every person and community has the opportunity and power to thrive.

Copyright © December 2025. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.

# Contents

**Acknowledgments** **v**

**Executive Summary** **vi**
- Background vi
- AIMHigh Implementation to Date vii
- Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments viii
- Facilitators and Challenges x
- Looking Forward and Sustainability xi
- Recommendations xi
- Conclusion xii

**Evaluation of Denver's All In Mile High Initiative** **1**
- Background 1
- All In Mile High Theory of Change 3
- Evaluation 6
- Implementation to Date 7
  - AIMHigh Activities and Milestones 7
  - AIMHigh Shelter and Housing Placements 14
- Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments 17
  - Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness 17
  - Reduced Prevalence of Encampments and Public Health Risks 19
- Facilitators 26
  - Political Will and Mayoral Prioritization 26
  - Leveraging Real-Time Data 27
  - Noncongregate Shelter Options 29
- Challenges 31
  - Balancing Urgency and Change Management 32
  - Agency and Staff Capacity 34
  - Permanent Housing Access and Referrals 35
  - Facilities and Maintenance Costs 37
- Looking Forward and Sustainability 38
  - Impending Resource and Capacity Challenges for AIMHigh Activities 38
  - AIMHigh Incorporation into the Broader Homelessness Response System 39
- Recommendations 39
- Conclusion 41
  - Implications and Considerations for Other Jurisdictions 41
  - Next Steps for the Evaluation 42

**Appendix A: Data Collection and Analysis** 43

**Appendix B: Other All In Mile High Initiative Strategies** 47

**Notes** 48

**References** 49

**About the Authors** 50

**Statement of Independence** 51

# Acknowledgments

This report was funded by the City and County of Denver. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

We thank our partners at the City and County of Denver for providing important insights and programmatic knowledge for this evaluation. We also appreciate the contributions of city staff, services providers, and program participants who shared their experiences and perspectives about the All In Mile High initiative during our data collection; without these conversations, this study would not have been possible. Additionally, we thank City and County of Denver staff Midori Higa and Cole Chandler for their review and comments on a draft of this report. Finally, we thank Judah Alexrod at the Urban Institute for his review of quantitative analysis methods and Sarah Gillespie at the Urban Institute for her feedback during the drafting of this report.

# Executive Summary

**In February 2024, Denver Mayor Mike Johnston announced the All In Mile High (AIMHigh) initiative. This announcement followed years of increasing unsheltered homelessness and built on efforts his administration had already undertaken between July and December 2023. The primary goal of AIMHigh is to effectively end unsheltered homelessness in Denver by the end of 2026. To achieve this, AIMHigh seeks to reduce encampments and unsheltered homelessness and to maintain that reduction by first transitioning people to temporary shelter in noncongregate facilities, then stabilizing them in permanent housing. To date, AIMHigh has successfully reduced visible unsheltered homelessness and encampments in the city by moving thousands of people into shelter and housing. This report documents the early implementation of AIMHigh, assesses its progress toward goals, identifies facilitators and challenges, and makes recommendations for the final year of AIMHigh implementation.**

## Background

In January 2023, more than 1,400 people in Denver were experiencing unsheltered homelessness on any single night despite more than a decade of attention to the issue, which included efforts to criminalize homelessness as well as efforts to create safe, sanctioned outdoor spaces for people—neither of which effectively decreased unsheltered homelessness.

In June 2023, Mike Johnston was elected mayor of Denver following a runoff election. Shortly after taking office in July, he signed an emergency declaration to launch House1000, an initiative to bring 1,000 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness indoors before the end of the year. After reaching this goal, Mayor Johnston applied lessons learned from House1000 to a next-step initiative, AIMHigh, which he announced in February 2024.

The AIMHigh initiative set a citywide goal of reaching functional zero for unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026, where "functional zero" means that unsheltered homelessness is rare, but when it occurs, the system has the capacity to resolve it through rehousing people quickly (Denver 2024). AIMHigh would accomplish this goal by moving people out of unsheltered homelessness and stabilizing them through temporary shelter and permanent housing. Researchers at the Urban Institute, a

nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization, are documenting the implementation and outcomes of AIMHigh through an independent evaluation. (For more details about the evaluation, see box ES.1.)

BOX ES.1

### Evaluation of AIMHigh

The City and County of Denver engaged researchers at the Urban Institute to evaluate AIMHigh. The evaluation measures progress toward the goal of ending unsheltered homelessness and is designed to document how AIMHigh implements its activities and strategies, and to measure the initiative's system- and individual-level outcomes. Key research questions addressed in the evaluation include the following:

- What are the key components of AIMHigh? In what ways did AIMHigh change over the course of implementation?
- Was Denver successful in achieving functional zero in unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026? What factors contributed to the success or failure of this goal?
- What outcomes have participants experienced regarding the program overall, housing enrollment, lengths of stay, housing stability, health, and other factors?

This interim report assesses AIMHigh's implementation and outcomes to date, including partners, milestones, facilitators, challenges, and progress toward meeting goals, as perceived by people served through AIMHigh and by partners and staff responsible for implementing and conducting the initiative. A final report will be published in 2027.

**Note:** For more information on data collection and analysis, see appendix A.

## AIMHigh Implementation to Date

Following the announcement of the AIMHigh initiative, multiple city agencies and departments began collaborating to resolve encampments and move people into shelter and permanent housing. The city implemented several strategies as a part of AIMHigh, including (1) applying a place-based encampment resolution approach; (2) moving individuals to new noncongregate shelters with supportive services on site; (3) connecting people to permanent housing; and (4) providing people with rapid rehousing and supportive housing.

The mayor's office tracks AIMHigh shelter and housing placements through a public dashboard. As of November 2025, the city had successfully placed thousands of people into shelter and housing.[1] This

report does not include an Urban Institute analysis of individual outcomes for people served through AIMHigh because these data were not available at the time of publication. However, future evaluation reporting will include analyses of person-level shelter placements, housing placements, returns to homelessness, and interactions with other systems.

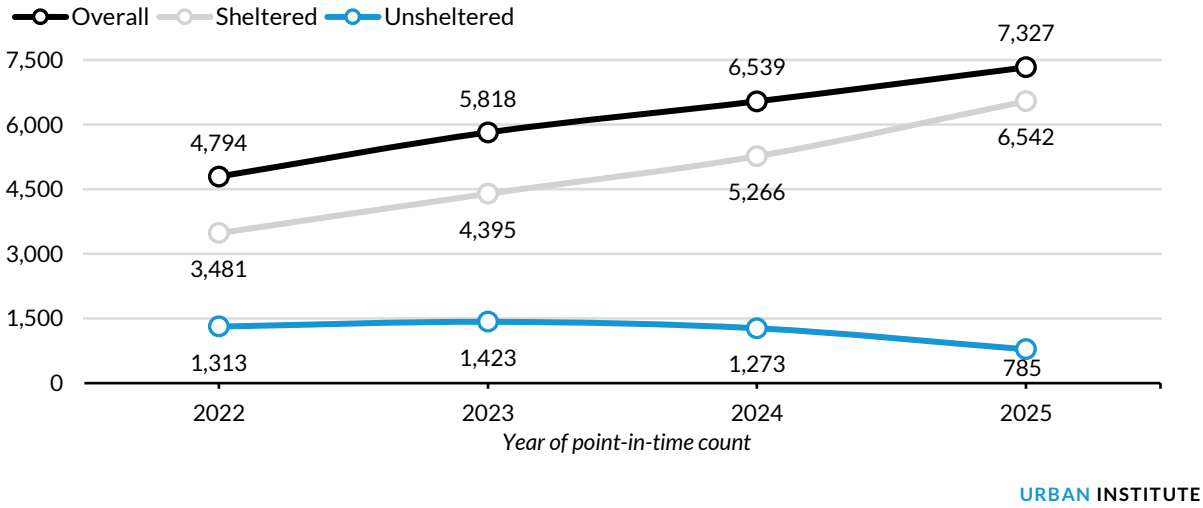
## Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments

As noted, the primary goal of AIMHigh is to effectively end widespread unsheltered homelessness in Denver. To assess this, Urban researchers are using a variety of system-level measures for unsheltered homelessness, including monitoring point-in-time counts and measuring the prevalence and composition of encampments. Early findings indicate that unsheltered homelessness and encampments have significantly decreased over the course of AIMHigh implementation. AIMHigh has provided an opportunity for people to escape the challenges of unsheltered homelessness and access safety and privacy in noncongregate shelter options (see box ES.2).

Since House1000 and AIMHigh activities were implemented, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on a given night in January has decreased by 45 percent, from a high of more than 1,400 in January 2023 to fewer than 800 in January 2025. This reflects a substantial shift from unsheltered to sheltered homelessness (see figure ES. 1).

FIGURE ES.1

**Denver County Point-In-Time Counts, 2022–25**



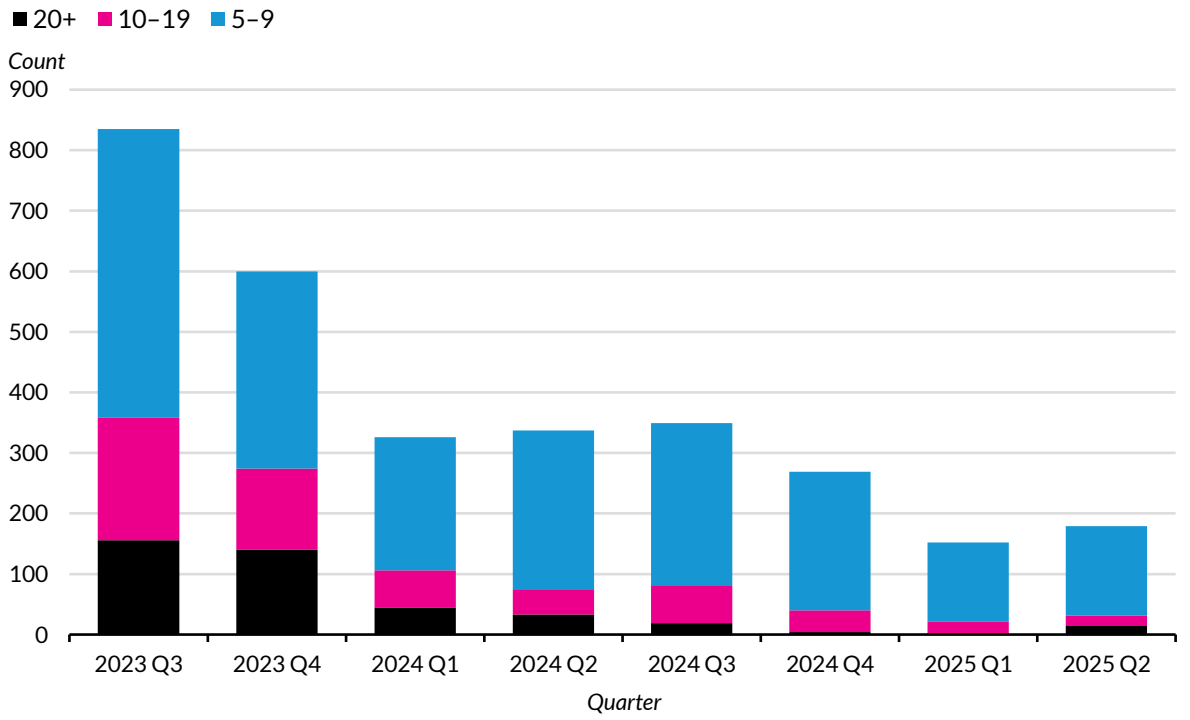

**Source:** Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, "Point-in-Time Count Vizzes," Tableau Public, accessed November 2025, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mdhi/vizzes.
**Note:** Point-in-time counts occur in January of each year.

An intermediate goal for AIMHigh is to reduce encampments, particularly large encampments in the Denver area. An analysis of 311 reports of encampments as well as interviews with partners and staff indicate that efforts to reduce encampments have been successful. From July 2023 (Q3 2023) to June 2025 (Q2 2025),

- the number of unique encampments decreased by 46 percent (from 3,002 to 1,633);
- the number of unique encampments with a reported size of 10 or more tents/structures decreased by 91 percent (from 359 to 31; see figure ES.2);
- the proportion of encampments that had a reported presence of multiple hazards, such as feces, needles, or trash, decreased by 18 percentage points (from 43 to 25 percent); and
- the number of large encampments in downtown Denver decreased by 93 percent, dropping from 192 large encampments reported in Q3 2023 to only 14 reported in Q2 2025.

FIGURE ES.2

**Number of Encampments by Size and Quarter, Q3 2023–Q2 2025**




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** 311 report data provided by the City and County of Denver.
**Note:** See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

BOX ES.2

### Experiences of People Served by AIMHigh

During a site visit to Denver in April 2025, the research team conducted two focus groups and a one-on-one interview with people served by AIMHigh. This report highlights some of their experiences, focusing on topics that illustrate participants' perspectives and insights:

- **Experiences of homelessness in Denver before AIMHigh:** Participants described severe challenges prior to AIMHigh, including living outdoors in harsh winter conditions, feeling unsafe due to violence and theft, and enduring poor conditions in sanctioned campsites; many expressed gratitude for AIMHigh providing a pathway to safer, more stable housing.
- **Experiences with encampment resolution:** Participants reported positive experiences with encampment resolution and entry into AIMHigh sites, noting that some outreach workers offered choices and personalized support as well as consistent follow-up for shelter connections.
- **Experiences waiting for a housing placement:** Participants expressed gratitude for AIMHigh sites but were frustrated by long waits for permanent housing, citing delays in voucher access, application limits, and challenges finding affordable units near services. While housing navigation support was appreciated, limited resources made the process slow and difficult for some participants.
- **Experiences in AIMHigh shelter sites:** Participants felt grateful for AIMHigh shelter sites, describing them as safe and private, and appreciated access to resources such as help with documentation, transportation, and employment support. Many contrasted these benefits with the unsafe and unsanitary conditions they experienced before AIMHigh.

**Source:** Summaries of focus groups and interviews with seven people served through AIMHigh in April 2025.

## Facilitators and Challenges

A key goal of the evaluation is to understand how AIMHigh was implemented, including what facilitated success and what challenges were faced and navigated. This information provides important lessons for Denver and other locations across the country hoping to reduce unsheltered homelessness.

Mayor Johnston prioritized the initiative and applied political will to give AIMHigh an early push of resources and urgency to get the project off the ground. With access to real-time data on encampments across Denver, AIMHigh staff could identify the highest-need areas and prioritize outreach resources to immediately move people into noncongregate shelter sites, which provided private and safe spaces for

people to reside while looking for permanent housing. Together, these tools have helped AIMHigh staff work toward the initiative's goals.

Denver faces many of the same systemic challenges as other major cities addressing unsheltered homelessness, an observation that several respondents confirmed during interviews. The city's high cost of living and limited affordable housing options make it especially difficult for individuals to secure and maintain stable housing. These challenges are persistent and compounded by internal pressures, such as the need to balance urgency with thoughtful change management, limited agency and staff capacity, limited access to permanent housing, and the ongoing costs of maintaining AIMHigh sites.

## Looking Forward and Sustainability

At the time of this report, approximately one year remains to meet the AIMHigh goals. Ongoing AIMHigh implementation faces two pressing challenges—resource and capacity challenges and incorporating AIMHigh activities into the broader homelessness response system. These two factors are prominent sources of tension among the partners and staff implementing AIMHigh. Budget challenges have led to staffing reductions across municipal agencies, and partners fear that agency capacity may continue to decline given the uncertainty of future funding. AIMHigh is also facing housing resource constraints, with lower than anticipated access to housing vouchers and rapid rehousing. In addition to the projected decrease in housing resources, the noncongregate shelter capacity will decrease with the closure of two sites in 2026. Additionally, the AIMHigh initiative is largely isolated from the other programs addressing homelessness in the City and County of Denver, which has drawn criticism from stakeholders in the Department of Housing Stability and the community. Successfully navigating these challenges in the coming year will be critical to meeting AIMHigh goals.

## Recommendations

AIMHigh faces significant challenges in its final year of implementation, and efforts to build on and maintain progress may have an uncertain future. A key opportunity involves addressing the number of people who can be moved from shelters into permanent housing, thereby increasing shelter capacity. While resource constraints may encumber the success of any recommendations, there are several areas with potential for progress and solutions: (1) modifying the AIMHigh rapid rehousing model to stretch assistance for longer than 12 months and/or to serve a larger number of people with rapid rehousing

through adjustments to the implementation of the model, (2) connecting more people to employment and workforce services, and (3) exploring more assisted-living housing solutions.

## Conclusion

Current data—both quantitative and qualitative—indicate that AIMHigh has successfully reduced unsheltered homelessness, particularly the large, highly visible encampments that were concentrated in downtown areas. For other communities looking to learn from Denver's progress, the primary lesson is that AIMHigh is reaching its goals by providing meaningful connections to shelter and housing through coordinated and targeted outreach—not by criminalizing homelessness.

However, important questions remain regarding AIMHigh's implementation and outcomes for those served. Over the coming year, we will continue to analyze data collected from a range of sources, including 311 reports, program and administrative data from public safety and the Homeless Management Information System, interviews, direct observation, and document review. The evaluation will focus on the following key questions:

- In what ways did AIMHigh implementation change in the final year?
- Did Denver achieve functional zero in unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026?
- What were the outcomes for people served in terms of program and housing enrollment, lengths of stay, housing, health, and other factors?
- What were the key lessons learned?
- What program types and sizes are needed to successfully scale AIMHigh to achieve and sustain functional zero for unsheltered homelessness?

A final report from the evaluation will be published in 2027.

# Evaluation of Denver's All In Mile High Initiative

The goal of the All In Mile High (AIMHigh) initiative, announced by Mayor Mike Johnston in February 2024, is to essentially end unsheltered homelessness in Denver by the end of 2026. This report documents the development and implementation of AIMHigh to date, analyzes and presents available data on unsheltered homelessness and encampment outcomes, and discusses implementation facilitators and challenges.

## Background

On any given night in January 2023, more than 1,400 people endured unsheltered homelessness in Denver County—sleeping outside, in cars, and in other places not meant for human habitation.[2] As with communities nationwide, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Denver County had been increasing in recent years. Unsheltered homelessness has negative impacts on the people enduring it and is also costly for local governments (Batko, Oneto, and Shroyer 2020).

Over more than a decade, Denver has attempted different strategies to address unsheltered homelessness. In 2012, then Mayor Michael Hancock and the Denver City Council approved an ordinance that outlawed unauthorized camping. In 2019, Denver voters upheld this law by rejecting an initiative that would have overturned the 2012 ordinance. Denver's Department of Transportation and Infrastructure regularly led encampment cleanups during this time, though they stated that these were unrelated to the unauthorized camping ordinance.

In October 2019, Mayor Hancock pivoted, founding the Department of Housing Stability (HOST) to expand Denver's capacity to address homelessness and streamline efforts across other government agencies. Soon after HOST was formed, the city managed challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including concerns about the spread of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness. HOST partnered with local service providers to increase outreach efforts and create safe and sanctioned outdoors spaces.

To bring more Denver residents indoors, Mayor Hancock and HOST set a goal in the fall of 2021 to house 200 households experiencing homelessness in 100 days (dubbed the "housing surge"). Denver used emergency housing vouchers available through funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and

coordinated with rapid resolution, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing providers to work toward this goal. Through two rounds of the housing surge, HOST placed 597 individuals from 359 households into housing. Despite these efforts, many Denver residents remained unhoused. On any given night in 2022, 1,313 people experiencing homelessness were living in unsheltered situations across Denver County.[3] And consistent with the multiyear increase in the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness over the broader metro Denver area, the Denver County number rose to 1,423 individuals in 2023.[4]

Mike Johnston was elected mayor of Denver in June 2023, following a runoff election. Shortly after taking office in July, he signed an emergency declaration to launch House1000, an initiative to bring 1,000 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness indoors before the end of the year. After reaching this goal and applying lessons learned from the program, Mayor Johnston announced the AIMHigh initiative in February 2024, which set a citywide goal of functional zero unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026 (Denver 2024). Functional zero means that unsheltered homelessness is rare, but when it occurs, the system has the capacity to resolve it by quickly rehousing people. Box 1 describes the experiences of AIMHigh participants prior to the initiative's launch.

BOX 1

### Experiences of Unsheltered Homelessness in Denver Prior to AIMHigh

As part of the AIMHigh evaluation, Urban researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with program participants during a site visit to Denver in April 2025. Participants shared the challenges they faced while living unsheltered in Denver prior to AIMHigh's launch. They described their experiences with living alone outside, staying in large encampments, or cycling in and out of temporary shelters or motels. One resident at an AIMHigh noncongregate site recalled the difficulty of surviving through Denver's harsh winters: "Emergency shelters, they don't open until it's 20 degrees or lower. So, I'm living under this viaduct right here and freezing at 21 degrees because they're not opening the shelters.... I remember I was sleeping on a bus bench by the light rail station. I remember getting to a point wondering if I was going to make it much longer. I was going to lay down on those railroad tracks."

In addition to the danger of low temperatures, participants reported feeling at risk of being attacked while living outside, describing how people living unsheltered would get robbed or stabbed. Many participants shared that they felt hopeless and unsafe while enduring unsheltered homelessness prior to the availability of AIMHigh sites.

**Source:** Urban Institute interviews with people served through AIMHigh in April 2025.
**Note:** Read more about Safe Outdoor Spaces and Denver's sanctioned campsites at https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Department-of-Housing-Stability/News/Council-Approves-Safe-Outdoor-Space-Support-Through-2024.

# All In Mile High Theory of Change

AIMHigh planned to reach functional zero for unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026 by moving people out of unsheltered homelessness and stabilizing them in housing. In addition to this primary goal, AIMHigh set specific intermediate goals with intermediate and long-term outcomes, which are identified in the logic model that details the AIMHigh theory of change (see figure 1).

To meet these goals, AIMHigh has endeavored to end unsheltered homelessness by working across multiple city agencies and departments to close encampments and move people into interim and permanent housing. Utilizing emergency powers to mobilize response across city agencies, and deeply engaging both housed and unhoused community members, the city designed and implemented several AIMHigh strategies, including (1) implementing a place-based approach to resolving encampments, (2) providing dignified shelter space with wraparound supportive services on site and a clear path to permanent housing, (3) connecting people to permanent housing by quickly and affordably adding units that facilitated rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing, and (4) permanently closing encampments and ensuring they stayed closed.

FIGURE 1

## Denver All In Mile High Initiative Logic Model

*Goals, activities, and intermediate and long-term outcomes associated with the AIMHigh model implementation*

**Goals:** Achieve functional zero for unsheltered homelessness in Denver by December 31, 2026; successfully stabilize people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in housing

**Target population:** People experiencing unsheltered homelessness, particularly those grouped in encampments within the city limits

| | Individual-Level Outcomes | | Community-Level Outcomes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity/strategy** | **Intermediate** | **Long-term** | **Intermediate** | **Long-term** |
| **Encampment resolution**<br>▪ Prioritizing encampment zones to address using information from 311, public health and law enforcement assessments, and HOST information<br>▪ Developing by-names lists through multiweek encampment strategies that connect HOST outreach teams to appropriate shelter solution and/or housing<br>▪ Employing facilities and sanitation to clean sites<br>▪ Preventing re-encampment through enforcement<br>**Shelter**<br>▪ Develop a mix of shelter programs (noncongregate, microcommunities) that house people while connecting them to permanent housing<br>▪ Convert/rehab hotels and motels<br>▪ Maintain shelter facilities (particularly hotels) | ▪ Individuals/ households are successfully connected to interim shelter.<br>▪ Individuals/ households apply for healthcare (including mental and behavioral health), housing, benefits, and income. | ▪ Individuals/ households are stabilized in permanent housing.<br>▪ Individuals/ households also obtain healthcare, benefits, and income. | ▪ Decreased number of encampments<br>▪ Decreased number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness<br>▪ Reach functional zero unsheltered veteran homelessness by the end of 2024<br>▪ Reduce unsheltered homelessness by 50 percent by the end of 2025<br>▪ Sustain existing encampment closures<br>▪ Increase shelter capacity<br>▪ Increase coordination and operational efficiency, including new data systems, for addressing unsheltered homelessness across HOST, DDPHE, and law enforcement, facilities | ▪ Achieve a sustainable approach to unsheltered homelessness and encampment closures within a broader, equitable approach to homelessness<br>▪ Maintain existing encampment closures<br>▪ Expand permanently affordable housing by adding more than 3,000 permanently affordable housing units per year (2023 to 2026)<br>▪ Increase safety and decrease public health risks for the city<br>▪ Reduce law enforcement effort expended on homelessness |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ▪ Decommission microcommunities<br>**Street to housing services**<br>▪ Integrate case management and shelter services to connect people to interim and permanent housing<br>**Housing**<br>▪ Identify ~250 direct rapid rehousing slots<br>▪ Identify permanent supportive housing (including potential conversion of interim hotel buildings) | | ▪ Increase safety in resolved sites<br>▪ Increase capacity and staff retention in city and nonprofit agencies/organizations | ▪ Broaden distribution of encampment resolution efforts |

**Source:** Urban Institute review of secondary documents and meetings with key AIMHigh stakeholders between September and October 2024.

**Notes:** HOST = City and County of Denver Department of Housing Stability; DDPHE = City and County of Denver Department of Public Health and Environment.

# Evaluation

In 2024, HOST engaged the Urban Institute to evaluate AIMHigh. The evaluation measures progress toward reaching the goal of ending unsheltered homelessness in Mayor Johnston's first term (July 2023 to July 2027) by conducting implementation and outcomes studies and contributing to developing a model that identifies factors needed to successfully scale a strategy to reach functional zero for unsheltered homelessness.

The evaluation is designed to document how AIMHigh's activities and strategies are being implemented, measure the initiative's system and individual-level outcomes, and contribute to developing a model to measure ongoing progress toward goals and project sustainability. The evaluation will address the following key research questions:

- What are the key components of AIMHigh? Who are the key partners, and what are their roles? How was AIMHigh implemented? In what ways did AIMHigh change over the course of implementation?
- Was Denver successful in achieving functional zero in unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026? What factors contributed to the success or failure of goal attainment? How did AIMHigh contribute to the city's efforts to reach functional zero for veteran homelessness? Did AIMHigh improve public safety and conditions of public spaces?
- What are the characteristics of the people served through AIMHigh implementation? What resources and services were available to people served? What outcomes did participants experience regarding program and housing enrollment, length of stay, housing, health, and other factors?
- What did people experience through AIMHigh and individual AIMHigh components? What worked well for them? What could be improved? What challenges did implementers face during implementation? What key lessons were learned and what areas for improvement were identified?
- What program types and sizes would successfully scale AIMHigh to achieve functional zero for unsheltered homelessness and sustain it? What resources would be needed to scale?

This report assesses AIMHigh implementation to date, as perceived by the people served by AIMHigh and the people responsible for implementing the initiative. The assessment will evaluate

milestones, facilitators, and challenges as well as progress toward the goal of reducing unsheltered homelessness and encampments. Data collected and analyzed for this report include 19 interviews with 23 partners and staff as part of biannual implementation data collection and a site visit to Denver; focus groups and interviews with seven people served through AIMHigh; and direct observation of AIMHigh activities, including street outreach, document review, and 311 reports. For more information on data collection and analysis, see appendix A. Of note, this report does not include individual-level outcome data for people served through AIMHigh; these data will be included in future reporting. A final evaluation report on AIMHigh will be published in 2027.

# Implementation to Date

The strategies and activities outlined in figure 1 have guided the implementation of AIMHigh to date. This section describes the key strategies, activities, and milestones implemented by AIMHigh between July 2023 and June 2025, drawing on document review and interviews with AIMHigh partners and staff (see figures 2 and 3 for key milestones during this period).

## AIMHigh Activities and Milestones

To meet AIMHigh goals, multiple city agencies and departments collaborated to close encampments and move people into interim and permanent housing (see table 1 for a list of AIMHigh partners involved in encampment resolution). Employing emergency powers to mobilize response across city agencies, and deeply engaging both housed and unhoused community members, the city implemented several AIMHigh strategies, including (1) implementing a place-based encampment resolution approach, (2) moving individuals to shelter with wraparound supportive services on site, (3) connecting people to permanent housing through quickly and affordably adding units, and (4) providing people with rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing.

TABLE 1

## AIMHigh Encampment Resolution Partners

| Category | Organization(s) | Role |
|---|---|---|
| **Government** | | |
| *Leadership* | ▪ Department of Housing Stability<br>▪ Mayor's Office | Directs AIMHigh implementation and monitors program outcomes |
| *Encampment resolution partners* | ▪ Department of Community Planning and Development | Planned for acquisition of new AIMHigh sites and conducts building inspections |
| | ▪ Department of Housing Stability | Conducted encampment outreach alongside its contractor, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Denver Outreach Collaborative |
| | ▪ Facilities Management Division | Maintains AIMHigh sites |
| | ▪ Department of Public Health and Environment | Conducted public health assessments of encampments and zones identified for resolution; provides basic necessities to people in encampments; inspects and monitors AIMHigh sites for livability |
| | ▪ Denver Parks and Recreation | Coordinates with city departments to plan appropriate timing of park events with encampment resolution activities |
| | ▪ Department of Public Safety | Coordinated with AIMHigh to pause enforcement of the camping ban or other punitive approaches to unsheltered homelessness during active encampment resolution activities; monitors encampments and zones to ensure permanent closure |
| **Consultants** | ▪ Clutch Consulting | Provides technical assistance with encampment outreach and data modeling |
| **Nonprofit service provider** | ▪ Bayaud Enterprises<br>▪ The Salvation Army<br>▪ Colorado Village Collaborative<br>▪ St. Francis Center<br>▪ The Gathering Place<br>▪ Colorado Coalition for the Homeless<br>▪ Housing Connector | Provides outreach, housing search, navigation assistance, and case management to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and/or placed in AIMHigh's sites |

**Source:** Urban Institute review of secondary materials and interviews with AIMHigh staff and partners.

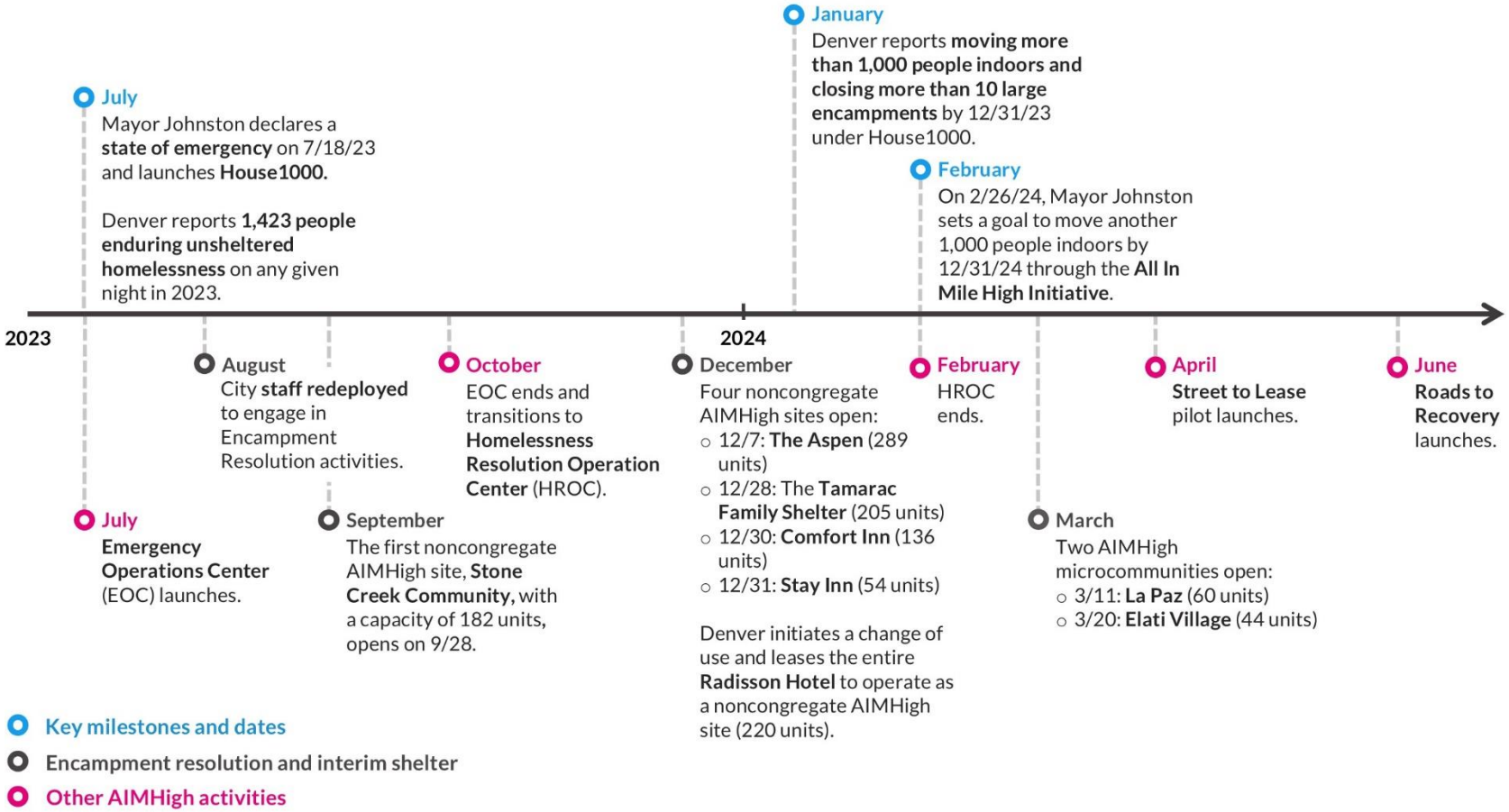
### *Encampment Resolution*

In its first year, Denver prioritized encampment resolution activities through a coordinated, citywide effort under AIMHigh and the transition from House1000, which involved activating the Emergency Operations Center and redeploying staff across departments. The mayor's office worked closely with the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Public Health and Environment, and HOST.

City partners identified target zones based on the volume of public health and safety reports received through the 311 and 911 systems, and determined shelter and housing resource availability in these areas. If the target zone was located in a public park, AIMHigh leadership collaborated with the Department of Parks and Recreation to schedule resolution activities and coordinated with the police department to temporarily suspend enforcement of the camping ban and other punitive measures. The Department of Public Health and Environment then conducted health assessments within the zone, while HOST developed a by-name list of individuals residing in the encampment. This process was typically completed within three days, after which residents were transported to designated AIMHigh sites. Once relocation was complete, the zone was deemed "permanently closed" and received enhanced police and security presence to prevent re-encampment. Between September 2023 and July 2024, Denver successfully closed 16 encampments and moved 1,673 people indoors (Denver 2024).

FIGURE 2

## All In Mile High Initiative Timeline of Key Events, July 2023–June 2024 (Year 1)




**Source:** Urban Institute evaluation interviews and review of secondary materials.
**Note:** For program descriptions of other AIMHigh activities, see appendix B.

In its second year, AIMHigh shifted focus toward resolving smaller encampments, responding to reports of new sites, and maintaining the closure of previously resolved areas. By the end of 2024, Denver had achieved its goal of moving an additional 1,000 people indoors, bringing the total number of people moved to 2,046 since the initiative launched in July 2023.[5]

### *Shelter*

As part of AIMHigh, Denver rapidly expanded its shelter capacity by acquiring or leasing former hotels and motels and developing microcommunities. The hotels and motels were converted into noncongregate shelter facilities, offering private units for individuals experiencing homelessness. Microcommunities, often composed of tiny homes or similar single-occupancy units, provide temporary housing with shared bathroom and sanitation facilities. These shelter options serve as short-term placements for individuals relocated from encampments. All AIMHigh sites offer 24/7 on-site staff support. Currently, the city operates over 1,000 units across nine AIMHigh sites (table 2), supporting the broader encampment resolution strategy.[6]

TABLE 2

## AIMHigh Shelter Sites

*Noncongregate hotels and microcommunities used as shelter*

| AIMHigh site | Type | Population | Number of units | Opening date | Closing date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stone Creek | Noncongregate hotel | Adult, single men and women | 182 | 9/28/2023 | |
| The Aspen | Noncongregate hotel | Adult, single men and women | 289 | 12/7/2023 | |
| The Radisson | Noncongregate hotel | Adult, single men and women | 220 | 12/15/2023 | 3/31/2025 |
| Tamarac Family Shelter | Noncongregate hotel | Families with minor children | 205 | 12/28/2023 | |
| Comfort Inn | Noncongregate hotel | Adult, single men and women | 136 | 12/30/2023 | |
| Stay Inn | Microcommunity | Adult, single men and women | 54 | 12/31/2023 | |
| La Paz | Microcommunity | Adult, single men and women | 60 | 3/11/2024 | |
| Elati Village | Microcommunity | Single, adult, nonbinary, trans and women | 44 | 3/20/2024 | |
| Monroe Village | Microcommunity | Adult, single men and women | 43 | 1/1/2025 | |
| Steele Village | Microcommunity | Adult, single men and women | 40 | 1/1/2025 | |

**Source:** Urban Institute review of secondary documents.

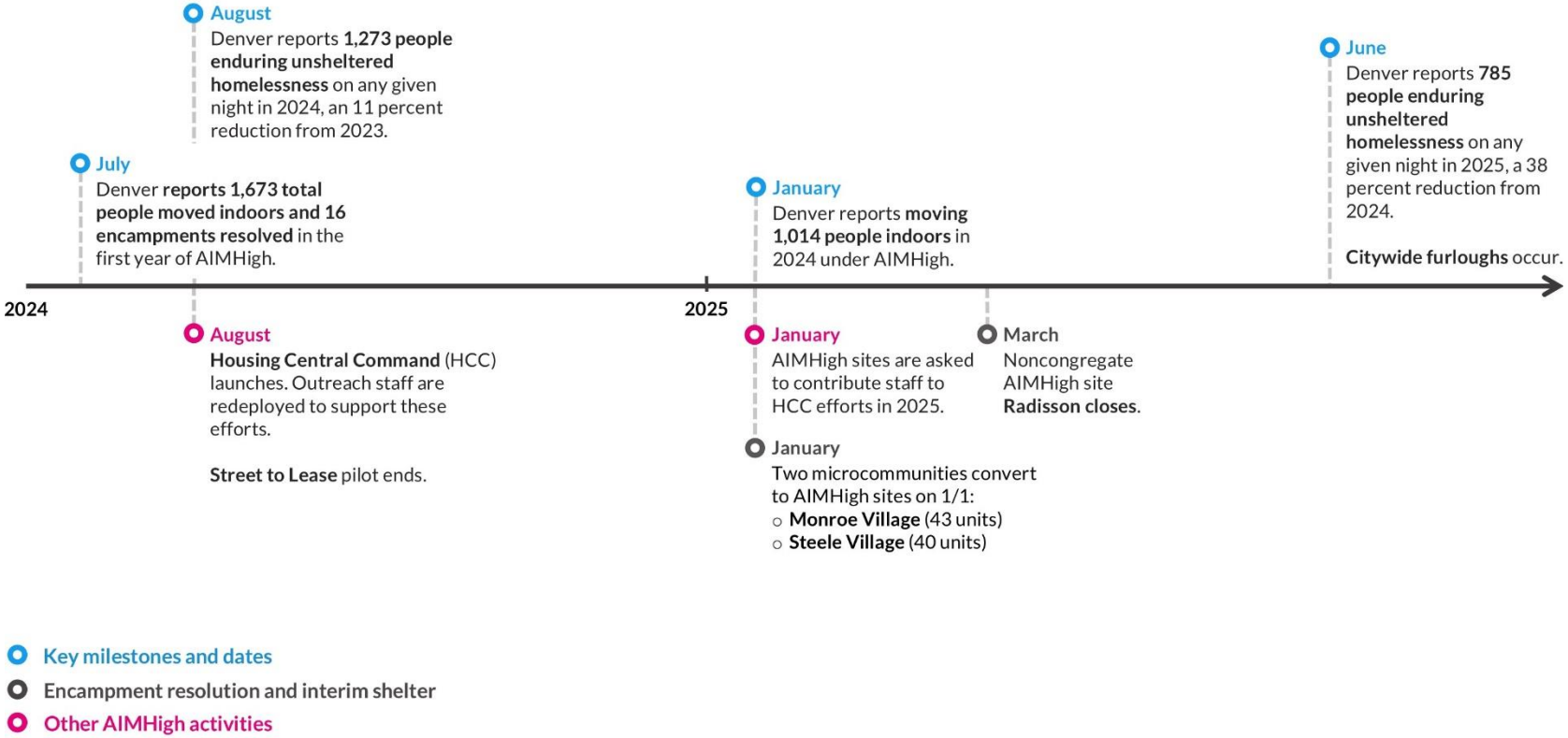
### *Street to Housing Services*

As large-scale encampment resolution efforts continued during the first year and half of implementation, individuals at an encampment resolution site were added to the by-name list and matched with interim housing—either at an AIMHigh microcommunity site or in a traditional congregate or noncongregate shelter. Regardless of the placement type, each person was connected to a comprehensive suite of wraparound services, including permanent housing navigation; physical, mental, and behavioral health support; addiction treatment services; and workforce and employment assistance.

Between April and August 2024, AIMHigh piloted the Street to Lease model, where individuals were rapidly housed directly from encampments. AIMHigh staff estimated that approximately 250 rapid rehousing placements were set aside for the Street to Lease pilot; however, the city ultimately moved away from this model because it lacked the staffing capacity to directly rehouse people from both the streets and the shelter facilities.

FIGURE 3

## All In Mile High Initiative Timeline of Key Events, July 2024–June 2025 (Year 2)




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** Urban Institute evaluation interviews and review of secondary materials.
**Note:** For program descriptions of other AIMHigh activities, see appendix B.

### *Housing*

AIMHigh uses a range of rehousing strategies—from rapid rehousing to deeply affordable housing through permanent subsidies (such as Section 8 housing vouchers), to permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness (i.e., deeply subsidized housing with individually tailored services for people with disabilities experiencing long-term homelessness). The housing resources for people served through AIMHigh are a mixture of resources dedicated to the initiative as well as those available more broadly in the community. Future evaluation reporting will include details of the mix of housing types that people served by AIMHigh received.

Service providers and case managers work to transition individuals residing in shelters into permanent housing. This includes helping clients search the private rental market, secure housing subsidies, and access permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing programs. According to staff, stays in microcommunities or converted hotel units typically range from two weeks to six months, depending on individual needs and housing availability. However, staff reported that some participants may stay up to a year or longer. During this time, staff continue to support residents in securing long-term housing solutions.

For deeply affordable and permanent supportive housing, the city relies on turnover in existing stock as well as any new acquisition or development, or potential conversion of interim shelter options, still to be determined.

## AIMHigh Shelter and Housing Placements

As previously noted, Denver reached its initial House1000 milestone—bringing 1,000 individuals indoors—in December 2023. As of November 2025, the city has successfully made thousands of placements into shelter and housing. [7] (These figures reflect moves into shelter rather than distinct individuals, as some individuals may be placed in shelter multiple times). The mayor's office tracks AIMHigh shelter and housing placements through a public dashboard, summarized in table 3.

TABLE 3

## AIMHigh Public Dashboard Summary

*Shelter system and street engagement efforts from July 18, 2023, to November 5, 2025*

| | Year | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **AIMHigh Shelter and Housing Progress** | **2023** | **2024** | **2025** |
| **Moves to shelter (total)** | **2,938** | **4,620** | **2,805** |
| *Sheltered to:* | | | |
| AIMHigh NCS | 1,032 | 1,014 | 1,125 |
| Family NCS | 1,664 | 3,162 | 1,310 |
| Other NCS | 242 | 444 | 370 |
| **Moves to housing (total)** | **1,680** | **3,439** | **2,602** |
| *Housed from:* | | | |
| AIMHigh NCS | 17 | 517 | 539 |
| Family NCS | 550 | 1,207 | 554 |
| Street to housing | 680 | 530 | 441 |
| Other NCS | 198 | 302 | 229 |
| Family CS | 46 | 122 | 58 |
| Other CS | 189 | 761 | 781 |

**Source:** "Citywide Progress Report," City and County of Denver, updated November 5, 2025, https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Mayors-Office/Programs-and-Initiatives/Homelessness-Initiative/All-In-Mile-High-Dashboard.

**Notes:** NCS = noncongregate shelter; CS = congregate shelter. The 2023 point-in-time count was measured prior to the start of the AIMHigh initiative. Moves to shelter and moves to housing reflect the total number of moves, not the number of distinct persons who moved; individual persons may experience multiple moves.

This report does not include Urban Institute analysis of individual outcomes for AIMHigh participants because these data were not available at the time of publication. Future evaluation reporting will examine person-level shelter placements, time spent in shelter, housing placements and retention, returns to homelessness, and interactions with other systems.

### *Costs of Core Activities*

Between June 2023 and September 2025, Denver spent more than $106 million implementing AIMHigh strategies, the majority of which (91 percent; $96.7 million) was spent on acquiring several hotel properties used as noncongregate shelters. This represents a significant investment and expansion in shelter capacity for the city. It is important to note that unsheltered homelessness also accrues costs; this cost analysis does not compare resources spent on AIMHigh activities with resources that would have been spent managing unsheltered homelessness in the absence of AIMHigh, and it does not compare costs of AIMHigh strategies with other strategies to address homelessness in Denver. Future analysis and reporting will help local leaders understand the benefits and tradeoffs to this historic investment in shelter within the context of outcomes for people served through AIMHigh.

*Noncongregate Hotels and Microcommunities*

Beginning in 2023, Denver began purchasing or leasing hotels to use as noncongregate shelters for AIMHigh and other housing programs. It also purchased supplies and building infrastructure for sites that would eventually become AIMHigh's microcommunities. These transactions were funded using a combination of federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act and state housing funds. Table 4 summarizes the approximate purchase or lease costs for each AIMHigh site.

TABLE 4

## Capital Acquisition Costs

| AIMHigh site | Purchase/lease costs |
|---|---|
| **Noncongregate Hotels** | **$96,700,000** |
| The Aspen (Double Tree) | $43,000,000 |
| Stone Creek (Best Western) | $26,000,000 |
| Comfort Inn[a] | $17,300,000 |
| The Radisson[a] | $10,400,000 |
| **Microcommunities** | **$6,412,719** |
| **Total** | **$103,112,719** |

**Source:** Denver Department of Housing Stability budget presentations.
[a] Reflects total leasing costs.

*Facilities and Maintenance*

Facilities and maintenance costs associated with the upkeep of the various sites are also an important AIMHigh cost consideration. Some project stakeholders noted that noncongregate sites that were former or leased hotels were not designed to operate at maximum capacity. Program staff noted that as AIMHigh participants moved into these sites, the strain on facilities led to higher repair and maintenance costs than initially expected. Table 5 summarizes the annual maintenance and facilities costs for noncongregate hotels and microcommunities.

TABLE 5

## AIMHigh Facilities and Maintenance Costs

| Year | Noncongregate hotels | Microcommunities | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | $216,847 | $54,737 | $271,584 |
| 2024 | $1,934,740 | $28,658 | $1,963,398 |
| 2025 | $1,365,498 | $27,698 | $1,393,196 |
| **Total** | **$3,517,085** | **$111,093** | **$3,628,178** |

**Source:** Urban Institute review of AIMHigh budget documents.
**Note:** Cost data for 2025 include those incurred through September 2025.

This report does not include an analysis of staffing costs associated with AIMHigh, but future reporting may include these data. According to the mayor's office, the annual cost for AIMHigh in 2025 was approximately $57.5 million.[8]

# Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments

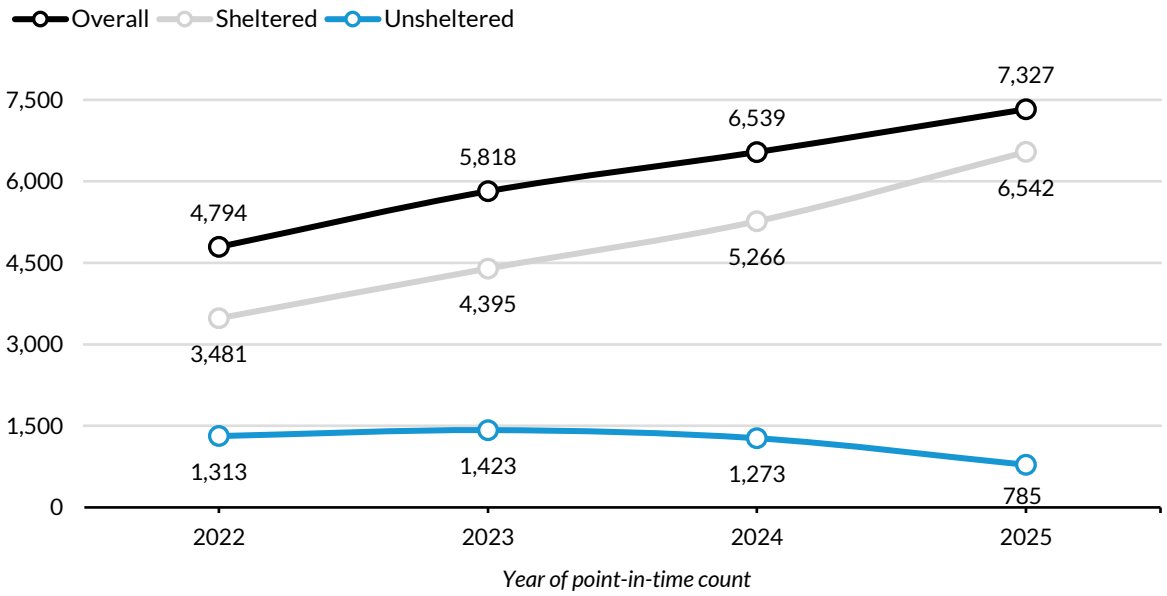
The primary goal of AIMHigh is to reduce, and eventually end, widespread unsheltered homelessness in Denver. To measure progress toward this goal, Urban is using a range of system-level data, including point-in-time counts and prevalence and composition measures for encampments in the city from 311 reports. Early findings indicate that unsheltered homelessness and encampments have significantly decreased over the course of AIMHigh implementation.

## Reduced Unsheltered Homelessness

Like other communities across the country, Denver conducts annual point-in-time counts to enumerate people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. Since the implementation of House1000 and AIMHigh activities, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on a given night in January has decreased by 45 percent, from a high of more than 1,400 in January 2023 to fewer than 800 in January 2025, reflecting a substantial shift from unsheltered to sheltered homelessness (see figure 4).

FIGURE 4

## Denver County Point-In-Time Counts, 2022–25




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, "Point-in-Time Count Vizzes," Tableau Public, accessed November 2025, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mdhi/vizzes.
**Note:** Point-in-time counts occur in January of each year.

Regarding the city's progress toward reducing unsheltered homelessness, one interview respondent commented, "Denver has changed dramatically in terms of visible encampments. You don't see them like they used to be. They're now small and move often. You used to see 40-person encampments and now you never see that anymore. We saw 100–120-person encampments before." Others cautioned that, despite visible progress, more work remains: "I think considerable progress has been made [but] I don't think we're on track.... We really need to be able to ratchet up our housing placements—the number of slots that we have for housing and number of placements that we're able to operationally achieve. We need both of those things. And considering the budget environment that we're in, it's really hard to figure out how we get there. I'm really proud of the progress we've made and recognize we have a long way to go and have an uphill battle to achieve it." Another respondent reflected on AIMHigh's ability to support long-term stability: "Overall, I think it's a good initiative to be able to house people and give them the opportunity. I just hope that it can be longer term, to be able to provide stability and a sense of community for all the participants that are involved, because we've gotten that feedback. Even somebody that exited the program not on good terms, reached out to our CEO to let him know that it still made a big impact."

## Reduced Prevalence of Encampments and Public Health Risks

Another AIMHigh goal was to reduce the number of encampments, particularly large encampments, and the public health risks associated with them, and to ensure that closed encampments remained closed. As previously noted, AIMHigh leveraged 311 and 911 public health and safety reports to identify outreach areas and move the people residing in them to shelter. By analyzing Denver's 311 reports data, we identified unique encampments using location and time parameters (see appendix A for more information on the 311 data analysis).

Our 311 reports analysis revealed a substantial decrease in the number of unique encampments, especially large encampments, and reduced public health threats from July 2023 to June 2025. Additionally, the analysis showed that encampments concentrated in Denver's downtown area were reduced and the reductions were maintained.

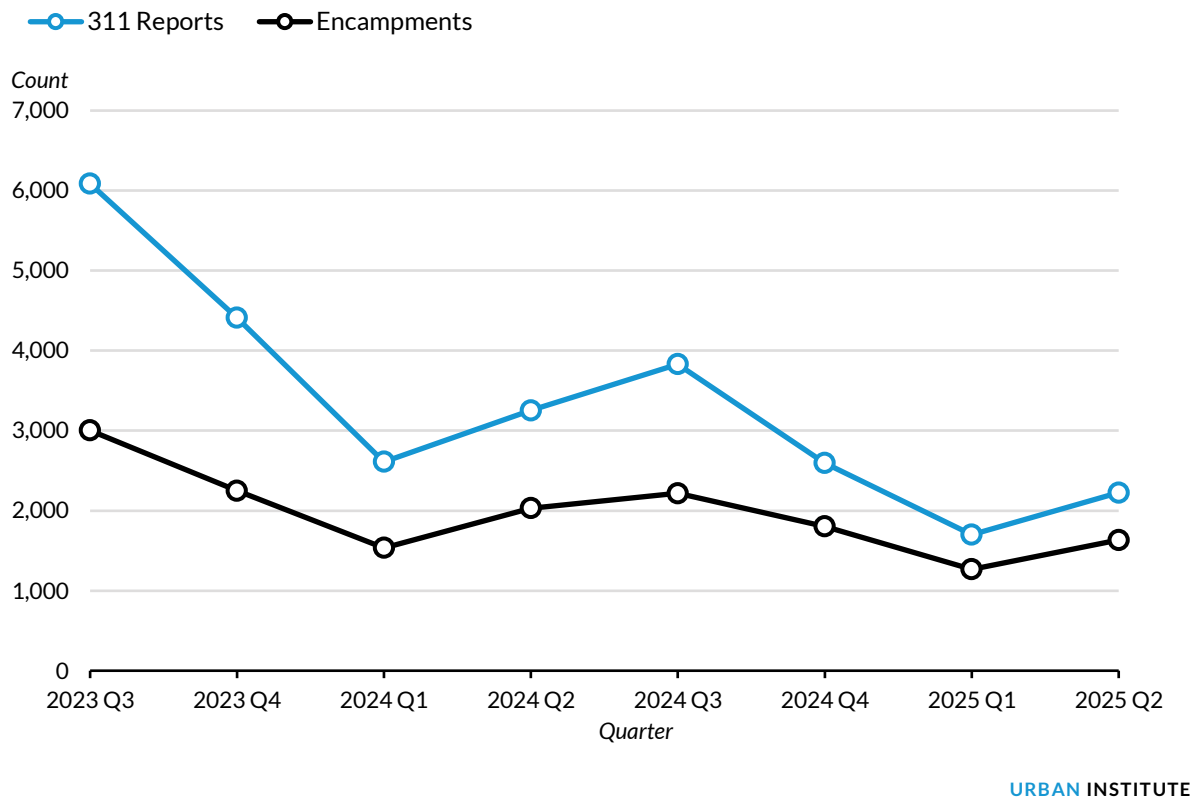
The 311 data analysis of encampments has limitations. First, it is not possible to confirm the accuracy of individual 311 reports regarding the actual presence of an encampment in the reported location or the reported size, hazards, or other characteristics. Second, reporting individuals may be inclined to exaggerate encampment characteristics in hopes that doing so would increase the likelihood of the camp being prioritized for resolution. Finally, staff indicated that 311 reports were concentrated in areas where people commute to work, so encampments in areas with less commuter or other traffic may be missing from the 311 data, resulting in an incomplete picture of Denver encampments. However, by aggregating reports into both unique encampments and overall counts, we believe these data still captured the larger trends and accurately reflect reality. Additionally, the findings are consistent with information that staff reported during interviews.

### *Reduced Encampments*

From July 2023 (Q3 2023) to June 2025 (Q2 2025), the number of unique encampments decreased by 46 percent, from 3,002 to 1,633 (see figure 5). However, decreases in 311 reports and unique encampments were not always consistent from quarter to quarter; both 311 reports and encampments increased during the summer months covered by Q2 and Q3 in 2024 and Q2 in 2025.

FIGURE 5

## 311 Reports and Encampment Counts by Quarter, Q3 2023–Q2 2025

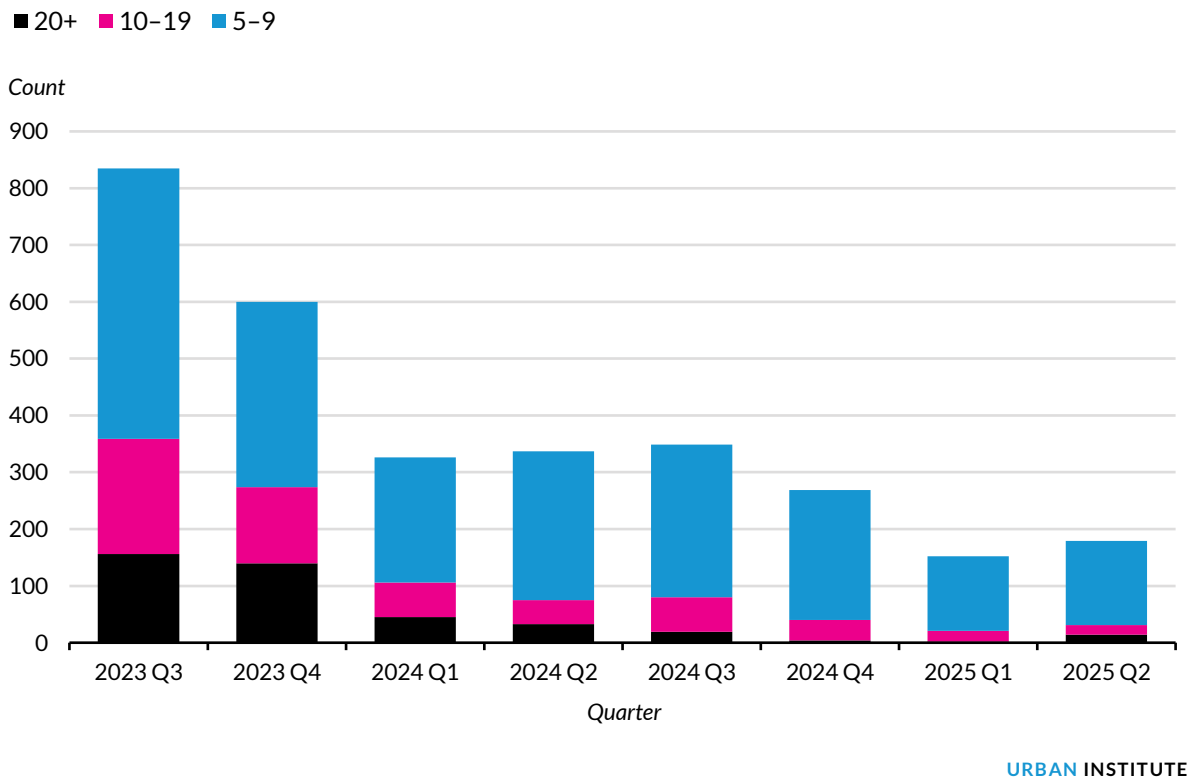



**Source:** 311 report data provided by the City and County of Denver.
**Note:** See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

Importantly, the large decrease in encampments over this period was accompanied by a shift in the characteristics of reported encampments. Between Q3 2023 and Q2 2025, not only did the number of unique encampments with a reported size of 10 or more tents/structures decrease from 359 to only 31 (a 91 percent decrease), but the share that these larger encampments represented among all encampments also decreased from 12 to 2 percent (10 percentage points). See figure 6.

FIGURE 6

## Number of Encampments by Size and Quarter, Q3 2023–Q2 2025



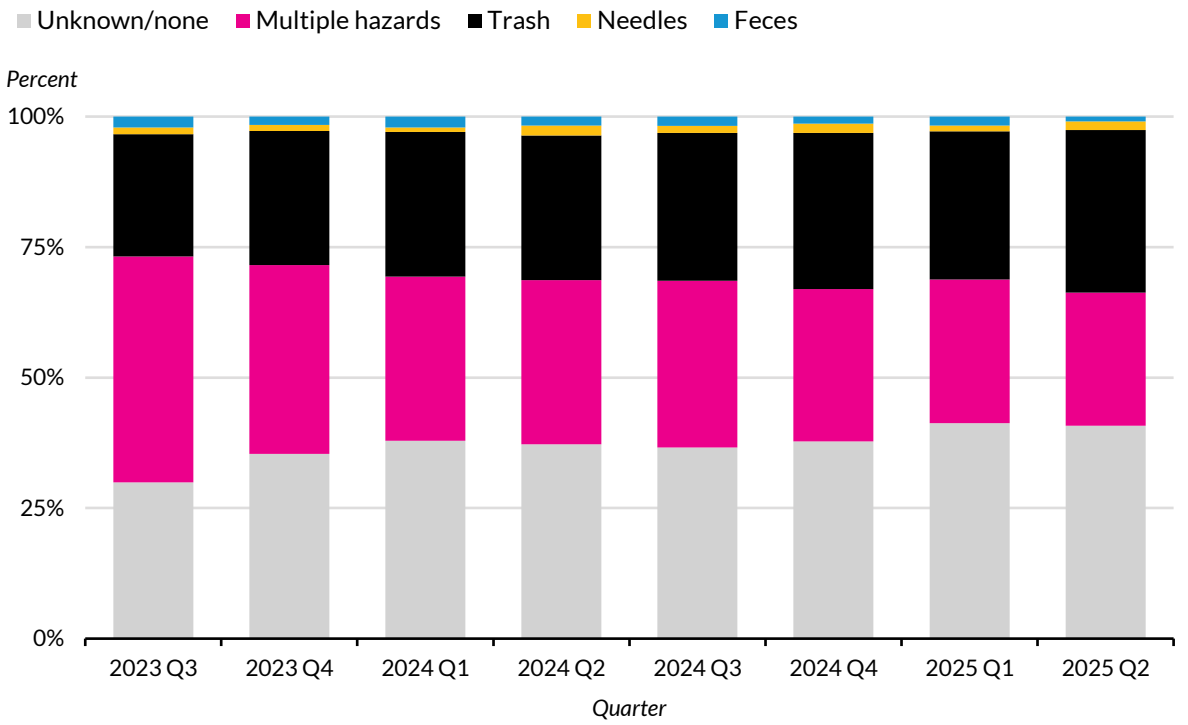

**Source:** 311 report data provided by the City and County of Denver.
**Note:** See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

### *Reduced Public Health Risks in Encampments*

In addition to encampment size, other reported encampment characteristics were observed to change over time. Additional factors that can be reported through the 311 system include the presence of feces, needles, trash, or multiple hazards in an encampment. Over the analysis period, the proportion of encampments with a reported presence of multiple hazards decreased from 43 to 25 percent (18 percentage points) and the proportion of encampments with hazards reported as either "unknown" or "none" increased during that same period, from 30 to 41 percent (11 percentage points). See figure 7.

FIGURE 7

**Reported Hazards at Encampments by Quarter, Q3 2023–Q2 2025**




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** 311 report data provided by the City and County of Denver.
**Note:** See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

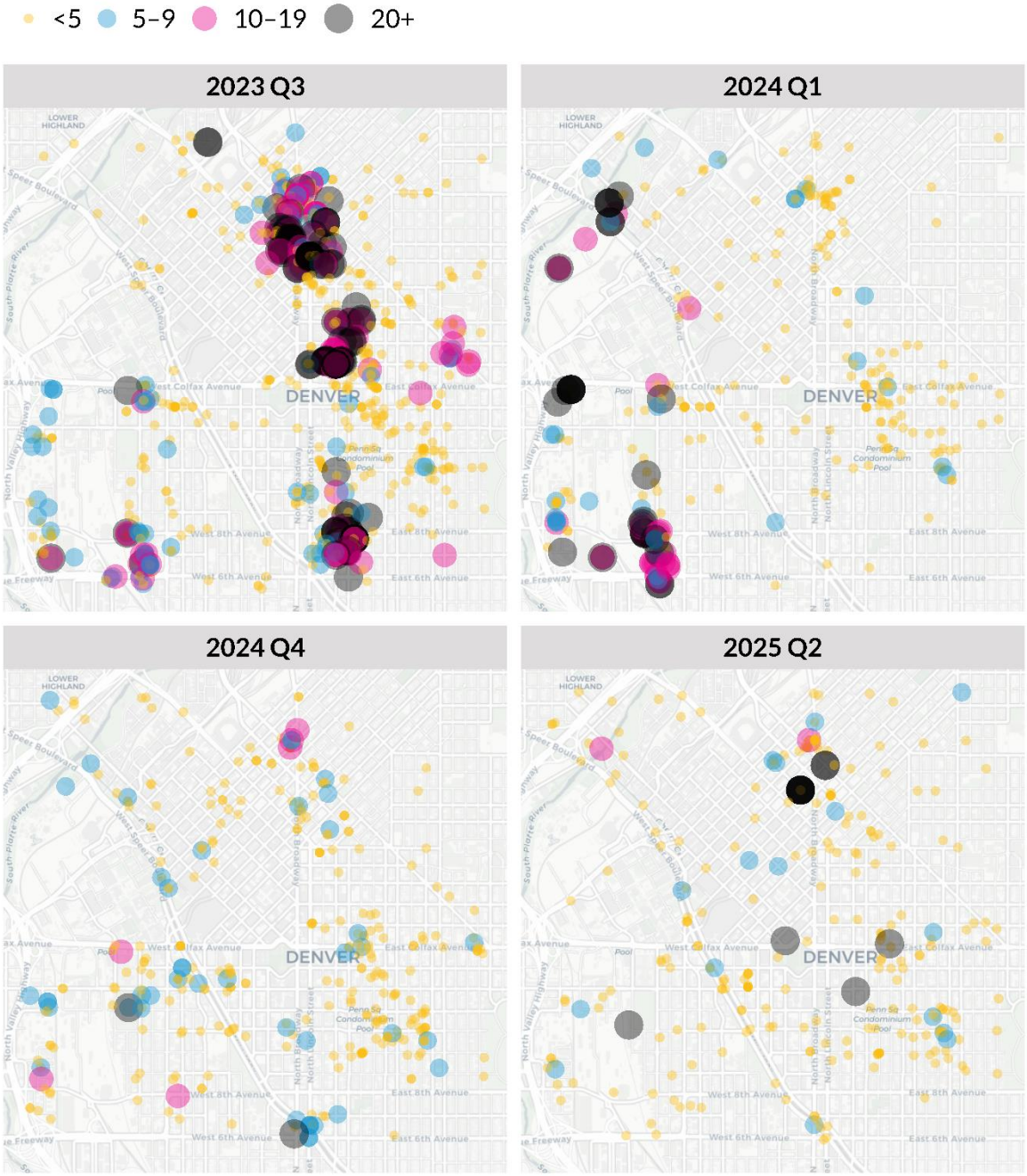
### *Decreased Concentration of Large Encampments in Downtown Denver*

Downtown Denver was an area of particular focus for AIMHigh efforts because of its concentration of large encampments. During the analysis period, downtown Denver experienced a particularly large decrease in the number and size of reported encampments, and the geographic analysis showed that the city sustained the decreased number of encampments over the course of AIMHigh implementation to date.

Figure 8 shows the approximate locations and reported sizes of unique encampments in downtown Denver across four selected quarters in the dataset. Between Q3 2023 and Q2 2025, the area experienced an overall decrease in unique encampments, dropping from 736 to 276, a 63 percent decrease. Notably, reports of large encampments decreased even more sharply (93 percent), falling from 192 to just 14 over the same time period.

FIGURE 8

## Locations and Sizes of Encampments in Downtown Denver, Q3 2023–Q2 2025




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** 311 report data provided by the City and County of Denver.
**Notes:** Circle size represents the number of reported tents/structures in an encampment, not the physical area of the encampment. See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

### *Sustaining Encampment Resolution*

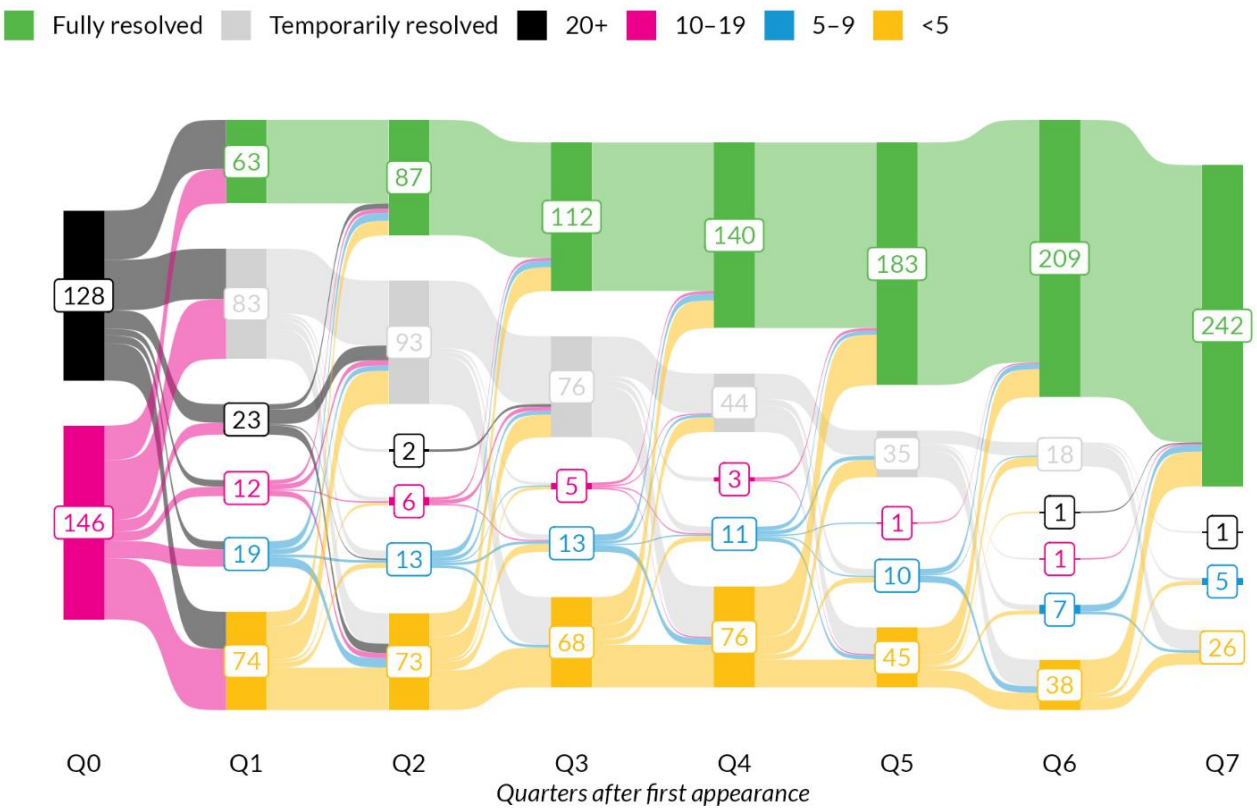
Another key goal of AIMHigh's encampment resolution strategy was to prevent resolved encampments from reappearing in that location. For the purpose of this analysis, we focused on larger encampments (those with 10 or more structures or tents reported at any point)—given the more temporary nature of smaller encampments, it was difficult to determine whether a location was clear of encampments because of AIMHigh activities or because individuals moved from a location for other reasons (see appendix A for details on the methodology used to analyze sustained encampment resolution).

From July 2023 to June 2025, large encampments did not remain large for extended periods. Of the 274 encampments reported to have 10 or more tents/structures, only 35 (13 percent) were at least the same size or larger in the following quarter. At the one-year mark after a large encampment first appeared, more than half (51 percent) of those locations were clear of any encampments for the remainder of our analysis period, with only three (1 percent) remaining large encampments with 10 to 19 tents/structures; all others were reported as smaller encampments (see figure 9).

FIGURE 9

## Sustained Resolution of Large Encampments, Q3 2023–Q2 2025

*Tracking the sustained resolution of encampments with 10 or more tents/structures*




URBAN INSTITUTE

**Source:** Administrative data provided by the City and County of Denver.

**Notes:** The number box label represents the number of encampments of that size. The x-axis represents each subsequent quarter following the first time a location was flagged as an encampment size with 10–19 or 20+ tents/structures. For example, the respective Q2s for encampments that first appeared in 2023 Q3 and 2024 Q4 would be 2024 Q1 and 2025 Q2. "Fully resolved" means a location has no further encampment reports for the remainder of the data collection period. "Temporarily resolved" means the location had no encampment reports during a given quarter, but reports appeared in a later quarter. See appendix A for details on the methods used for this analysis.

# Facilitators

AIMHigh stakeholders identified key facilitators to the success of the initiative to date. Mayor Johnston's political will and decision to prioritize the initiative provided AIMHigh with an early push of resources and urgency to get the project off the ground. With access to real-time data on encampments across Denver, AIMHigh staff could prioritize outreach resources to the highest-need areas. Once identified, outreach staff could immediately move people in the high-need areas into noncongregate shelter sites, which provided private and safe spaces for people to reside while looking for permanent housing. Together, these tools helped AIMHigh staff work toward the initiative's goals.

## Political Will and Mayoral Prioritization

AIMHigh staff we interviewed attributed progress toward the initiative's goals to the unprecedented accessibility of resources leveraged by the mayor's office. For example, AIMHigh's systemwide structure involved departments across the city in the homelessness response effort. These departments assume different roles throughout the AIMHigh process, including identifying areas in the city for targeted outreach, providing health services at the noncongregate sites, and connecting program participants with permanent housing. The Department of Public Health and Environment, Denver Police Department, Department of Parks and Recreation, Community Development and Planning, Department of Finance, and other city agencies collaborate under the direction of HOST to achieve the initiative's goals—and through this process, they strengthen relationships and build new partnerships. Staff described this collaboration across Denver as a key facilitator in AIMHigh's success because it has allowed the initiative to benefit from the expertise and resources available across city agencies. Stakeholders described this involvement across Denver as being driven by the political will from Mayor Johnston's office, which directed funding and staff to support the initiative. Interviewed staff agreed that they had never before witnessed this level of political drive and support for an issue across the City and County of Denver.

> **"I would say that something I tell people a lot is that there's been success in the collaboration amongst city agencies because so many city agencies have to be involved. Between HOST and the Mayor's Offices and general services and finance and all of the different people at the table, I think that didn't exist at the same level prior to these efforts."**
>
> *—HOST staff*

Some AIMHigh staff shared that the drive behind the initiative's urgency came from the mayor's desire to provide Denver residents experiencing unsheltered homelessness with greater stability, and to also address the concerns of constituents who regularly cite homelessness as a top issue. Leadership in the mayor's office shared how voters expressed support for spending money toward resolving homelessness, which allowed Denver to allocate funding for this initiative. With this push from the mayor's office and HOST, AIMHigh has moved thousands of people indoors and begun connecting people to permanent housing. Housing navigators reported having greater access to housing vouchers and furniture than they did prior to AIMHigh, which allows them to stabilize clients in units. Some AIMHigh program participants also described how outreach workers who connected them with the AIMHigh noncongregate shelters were better resourced than outreach workers they had engaged with in the past; these enhanced resources provided participants with more frequent outreach and greater levels of support.

The initiative's interim goals, such as moving 2,000 people indoors by the end of 2024, were viewed by staff as nonnegotiable deadlines that would be met regardless of the challenges they faced. One staff from HOST said, *"There will never be a change on the goal. It is clear to me with this administration that once it is said, it is then the thing that's going to happen. There's not any wiggle room on that."* Staff described being asked to work with urgency, take on new responsibilities, and spend time outside of their typical work hours to achieve the initiative's goals. And while many staff believe that this level of effort is unsustainable long-term, they agreed that they could not have housed and stabilized so many people as quickly as they did without this surge of support across Denver.

> **"But even with all that and the urgency and burnout of HOST staff, I have nothing but admiration and respect for what this administration has done for this population. Their commitment has saved people's lives and at least temporarily provided stability for thousands of people."**
>
> *—AIMHigh leadership*

## Leveraging Real-Time Data

Denver's HOST staff described the availability of real-time data as a key facilitator of the encampment resolution process. Denver residents report encampments around the city to 311 and 911 and these data populate in a map that HOST uses to identify priority areas for outreach. Early in the initiative, AIMHigh focused on resolving large encampments by identifying a zone, adding encampment residents to a by-name list, and moving them to noncongregate shelter sites. Staff relied on these real-time data

to identify encampments around the city, select an area to resolve, and plan the resolution. After people in that area were moved to noncongregate shelter, this area was deemed "closed," and a new report of a person experiencing homelessness in that area would alert staff through the map so they could respond and enforce the closure. One staff member described the data as useful for prioritizing outreach efforts when the initiative does not have the capacity to immediately address every report of an encampment. By populating a map with 311 and 911 reports, HOST staff can quickly identify priority areas and use resources more efficiently. These staff members agree that access to these data was instrumental in reducing large encampments in Denver.

> **"I have a map that is populated by 311 or nonemergency calls about reports of people experiencing homelessness.... I can look at a bunch of 911 calls to inform trends and identify areas where we might need to focus efforts, because we can't respond everywhere; we want to respond to the area that needs the most help."**
>
> *—AIMHigh program staff*

Once the number of large encampments in Denver decreased, AIMHigh staff used the real-time data to shift the AIMHigh strategy to a focus-area approach, where outreach targets a larger geographic area rather than an encampment. Denver residents can now report a "disturbance by person" to 311 or 911, which outreach teams use to anticipate where people experiencing homelessness might be located, allowing teams to make contact, provide resources, and connect them with the noncongregate shelter sites. Denver also continues to enforce closed zones through the collaboration of HOST outreach, Denver Police Department, and the Street Engagement Team. On days that AIMHigh staff conduct outreach, staff across city agencies meet on a conference call to discuss the day's focus areas and each partner's responsibilities for maintaining closed zones and engaging people experiencing homelessness. This process reflects how real-time data and collaboration across city partners facilitate a coordinated homelessness resolution strategy. (For more information on how people experienced encampment resolutions see box 2.)

BOX 2

### Participant Experiences with Encampment Resolution

Participants we interviewed described their experiences with the encampment resolution process and their transition into AIMHigh sites as generally positive. Some participants noted that outreach workers offered all the encampment's residents a choice between moving into a noncongregate hotel site or a microcommunity—both of which provide meals, services, and a pathway to permanent housing. For participants who had a choice between the two options, preferences varied based on factors such as room size and outdoor access. For example, couples could choose hotel sites for the larger rooms, while individuals with pets may have preferred microcommunities for easier outdoor access.

Other participants described entering into the noncongregate shelters through one-on-one interactions with outreach workers, rather than during a large encampment resolution. For example, one participant told us he was connected to a housing case manager while receiving care at Denver Health, which eventually led him to an AIMHigh noncongregate site. Another participant approached an AIMHigh outreach worker he saw on the street and asked for resources. This outreach worker quickly connected the participant to an AIMHigh noncongregate site. The participant said he had asked other outreach workers in Denver for housing resources in the past, but this was the first time an outreach worker followed up with a connection.

> *"He contacted me, I was on the streets still, but [the outreach worker] was keeping in touch with me, helping me get my ID, got me approved to go down there to the day shelter, stuff like that. It was pretty neat, he called me on my phone and said, 'I put you over for that' and then two days later they called me and said they had a spot."*
>
> *—Resident at an AIMHigh noncongregate site*

**Source:** Urban Institute interviews with people served through AIMHigh in April 2025.

## Noncongregate Shelter Options

To immediately end people's experience of unsheltered homelessness, AIMHigh outreach staff offer people the option to live in one of the initiative's noncongregate shelter sites. Prior to AIMHigh, the main options presented to people experiencing homelessness in Denver included congregate shelter sites and sanctioned camping sites. Several AIMHigh participants shared with us that they often felt unsafe or uncomfortable in congregate shelter sites. By offering people the option to move to a noncongregate site—where people have their own private living space—AIMHigh outreach staff could quickly move people indoors. As one staff at a microcommunity noted, *"The microcommunities were created to meet a need, a gap in the system.... We are a part of a variety of options for folks experiencing unsheltered homelessness."* AIMHigh stakeholders agreed that by adding noncongregate shelters to

Denver's system, the initiative created more options to meet the different needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The noncongregate shelters were brought online quickly and offered a large capacity, which facilitated the encampment resolution process by allowing entire encampments to be quickly moved into shelter.

In particular, AIMHigh staff appreciated the noncongregate sites for providing dignified living spaces where people could access resources and work with housing navigators to find permanent housing. Noncongregate shelter site staff described how they offered three meals a day, regular access to mental health and behavioral health services, housing navigation services, community support groups, and access to other basic needs, such as hygiene items. AIMHigh staff noted that the communal spaces create environments for case managers and housing navigators to engage with residents. Many AIMHigh noncongregate shelter staff felt the sites served as a transition between living unsheltered to living alone in a rental unit. One noncongregate shelter staff said, *"I love the fact that it does give folks a taste of what it feels like to live on your own, in your own little spot in your own little community."* Overall, AIMHigh stakeholders view the noncongregate shelter sites as a safe space for people to reside while they receive resources and find permanent housing. Box 3 describes the experiences of some participants staying in AIMHigh sites.

BOX 3

### Experiences in AIMHigh Noncongregate Shelter Sites

Overall, AIMHigh participants that we interviewed felt grateful for the opportunity to live in the initiative's shelter sites. Many participants described living in unsafe conditions immediately before they moved into an AIMHigh site. For example, people described enduring cold winters outside or unsanitary living spaces prior to AIMHigh. While reflecting on moving from a sanctioned campsite to a microcommunity, one resident said, "Coming from there to here made you realize how bad in the end we were living over there."

Interviewed residents of AIMHigh shelter sites shared that they felt safe in the noncongregate hotels and microcommunities and were grateful to have their own private space. They also shared that they appreciated having access to resources, such as assistance with documentation and transportation to their employment: "They said they're willing to help pay for the driver's test. I'm like what? And now I have my driver's license. All that helps. My birth certificate. They helped me get my birth certificate and all that stuff too. I hadn't had that in years."

> *"I felt very protected and at times it was kind of a curse that we couldn't have our friends come in from outside to see us, but I could see how the place could get overrun if that were allowed. But it would've been cool to have visitors once in a while. And we weren't allowed to [go] in each other's rooms either, so it was kind of isolated in a way. But if you didn't feel like dealing with the outside world you didn't have to, and that was nice."*
>
> *—Former resident at an AIMHigh noncongregate site*

Participants who lived in Denver's sanctioned campsites immediately prior to moving to an AIMHigh site shared that, while they were grateful to have a space to live, the campsite conditions were poor. For example, the tents often collapsed on people from the weight of accumulated snow, the pipes froze and made the showers unusable, and the sites felt unsanitary. However, they described the sanctioned campsites as an improvement from where they were previously, and many were grateful they resided in the sanctioned campsites because being there ultimately led to a referral for an AIMHigh noncongregate site.

**Source:** Urban Institute interviews with people served through AIMHigh in April 2025.

# Challenges

Denver faces many of the same systemic challenges as other major cities in addressing unsheltered homelessness, an observation that several respondents confirmed during interviews. The city's high cost of living and limited affordable housing options make it especially difficult for individuals to secure and maintain stable housing. As one respondent noted, "It's such an inaccessible city. It's so absolutely

outrageous to be able to afford an apartment here, I won't even think about a home." Even when resources are available, barriers such as criminal history or poor credit often inhibit access to the private rental market. One AIMHigh participant shared, "We've both been in prison… [and] nobody would take us." NIMBYism also poses an additional barrier, with some neighborhoods expressing hostility toward AIMHigh sites and the individuals they serve. One service provider commented, "No matter how much you communicate … they don't want you there." These challenges are not only persistent, but are also compounded by internal pressures, such as the need to balance urgency with thoughtful change management, and the need to navigate limited agency and staff capacity, limited access to permanent housing, and the ongoing costs of maintaining AIMHigh sites. The following sections explore each of these challenges in greater detail.

## Balancing Urgency and Change Management

When Mayor Johnston took office on July 17, 2023, he signed an emergency declaration and announced the House1000 initiative the very next day. Over the following five months, the city moved quickly to meet the ambitious goal of closing Denver's 10 largest encampments and moving 1,000 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness indoors by December 31, 2023. To achieve this, the city redeployed staff across agencies and divisions and opened five shelter sites to accelerate encampment resolution efforts. Following the successful completion of House1000, Mayor Johnston launched AIMHigh in February 2024, setting a new goal to bring another 1,000 people indoors by the end of the year. The rapid rollout of House1000 and the swift transition into AIMHigh created a strong sense of urgency across city agencies. While this urgency helped to focus attention on and shift resources to unsheltered homelessness, it also meant that many processes were developed reactively rather than proactively. Staff often described the experience as "building the plane while flying it," with expectations and processes changing mid-implementation. This section describes three key areas where balancing the urgency of the initiative with effective change management proved especially challenging.

### *Shifting Priorities and Program Models*

The pace of implementation created an environment where priorities and program models shifted frequently. In addition to shifting from House1000 to the AIMHigh initiative in 2024, the housing and shelter model evolved from the Housing Connector and Street to Lease model—offering 12-month leases and stabilization services—to a noncongregate shelter approach, and later to a rapid rehousing model tailored specifically for individuals in AIMHigh sites. Additionally, staff shared that referral processes and encampment resolution strategies were often revised with little notice, making it difficult to maintain consistency in service delivery and communication to frontline staff and participants. In one

example, changes to voucher eligibility resulted in participants being mistakenly informed they would receive housing support, only to later find out they were ineligible—potentially undermining trust and highlighting the need for clearer protocols. Without a strong structure for communication and change management, these shifts often led to confusion among both staff and participants. Additionally, some staff shared that these pressures resulted in staff turnover and complaints of burnout, which ultimately resulted in challenges to agency capacity and quality service delivery.

> **"The lack of clarity on goals and constantly competing priorities ... meant that we didn't do justice to all of our folks. ... The ideal thing would have been like, 'Okay, let's pause and actually figure out a solid solution.'... And I feel like, because we had all these competing priorities, it was kind of a wasted pilot. It wasn't best practice focused. It was how-fast-can-we-do-it focused."**
>
> *—AIMHigh program staff*

***Data Sharing and Infrastructure***

One of the more persistent challenges respondents identified under AIMHigh was the lack of a cohesive and well-managed data infrastructure to coordinate services for AIMHigh participants. While the Homeless Management Information System served as the primary reporting tool, a consistent platform for data sharing across partners did not exist. Staff described fragmented recordkeeping practices that led to duplication, disorganization, and concerns around participant privacy. The rollout of new partnerships and processes further complicated coordination because agencies used separate systems. Some attempts to centralize data, such as an inventory module to track site availability, were initially unsuccessful due to poor usability, prompting providers to rely on internal tracking methods.

Expectations for Homeless Management Information System reporting also increased under AIMHigh, which some staff welcomed as a move toward accountability. However, frequent changes to reporting categories and requirements created confusion. Without a structured change management approach, staff navigated evolving systems with limited guidance, resulting in what one respondent described as a "free-for-all" for managing participant data. Another reflected on the fragmented landscape and the difficulty of adapting to shifting infrastructure: "We've had to modify the data infrastructure internally in the city significantly, and we are still working on it. ... Every outreach team, every department, every division, every program had their own data. ... Sometimes it's in spreadsheets, sometimes it's in Excel, sometimes it's in SharePoint, sometimes it's in Teams. ... The amount of duplication, the amount of redundancy. ... It's like a mountain to shift."

### *New Service Expectations*

The evolving nature of AIMHigh also brought new service expectations, particularly around case management and health integration. The city introduced requirements mid-implementation, such as conducting initial case management meetings within 48 hours of entering an AIMHigh site, and expanding health services through partnerships with the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment. Behavioral health teams and public health nurses began joining outreach efforts as well, adding needed support. As the pace of housing placements slowed, staff were able to better integrate these services, but the initial rollout without such services underscored the importance of balancing speed with thoughtful planning. One interview respondent commented, "I think it would have been more successful in retaining people in housing and actually getting permanently housed if we would have gone a little bit slower and included addressing people's underlying physical and behavioral health needs at the same time. We are in many ways playing catch-up now."

While urgency helped accelerate action and mobilize resources in Denver, it also revealed the limitations of reactive implementation. AIMHigh demonstrated the city's commitment to addressing unsheltered homelessness, but it also underscored the need for intentional change management to support effective and sustainable service delivery.

## Agency and Staff Capacity

The rapid implementation of AIMHigh placed considerable pressure on agency and staff capacity. While the successful launch, including site procurement and staffing, was seen as a major milestone, the speed of implementation often exceeded what teams were prepared to handle. Staff described being tasked with opening new shelters on extremely short timelines, sometimes while simultaneously closing others, hiring dozens of staff, and building new programs with little lead time.

> **"I was told we needed to open Best Western by September 1, but we also had to close another shelter then, so that was two weeks to close a shelter while hiring and trying to start building program for another shelter. ... We found out in like mid-November that we were opening Double Tree and needed to do all the hiring and have the building open by December 1, but Thanksgiving was in the middle of that. Between the two locations, we have staffing slots for 107 employees, which are all different types of teams with different goals and different focuses, and we had literally a couple days to hire. Which meant that we hired a lot of people ... and it's difficult to find people that want to work in shelters. The work is really hard."**
>
> *—AIMHigh service provider*

The urgency to meet ambitious goals also led to role adaptations across city agencies and service providers. Staff were frequently reassigned to fill capacity gaps; for example, shelter staff were redeployed as housing navigators, and outreach workers took on case management responsibilities. While this flexibility helped meet immediate needs, it disrupted operations, created role confusion, and contributed to staff turnover and dissatisfaction. Interview respondents shared that these challenges were compounded by workforce shortages and limited access to behavioral health services and de-escalation training, particularly within noncongregate AIMHigh sites. Many staff expressed concern that the initiative's focus on moving people indoors was out of balance with the need for long-term support and stability, with programmatic and individual outcomes often overlooked in favor of meeting numerical targets.

### Permanent Housing Access and Referrals

AIMHigh's approach to permanent housing access and referrals presented ongoing challenges for staff and participants. Staff raised concerns about equity in placements, pointing out that some groups, such as individuals in congregate shelters or those with higher needs, did not receive consistent prioritization. Interview respondents described the distribution of housing vouchers as uneven and unpredictable, with vouchers arriving in batches at selected AIMHigh sites rather than being allocated consistently across the system. This approach forced staff to act quickly to lease up participants within tight windows, often without adequate preparation. One staff member explained, "Dropping 10 [vouchers] at one time is not the most sustainable for us.... Probably December to March there was literally no movement or traction in housing, and then all of a sudden, they drop these [vouchers],

expectation is April." Participants also described long waits for housing, with one noting, "Hurry up and wait. It's been like that for a little over a year now.... My name has been on like 50 different calling lists."

Staff also expressed concern about the overreliance on rapid rehousing as the primary intervention, particularly for individuals with complex needs who may require more intensive, long-term support. Many viewed rapid rehousing as a temporary solution that lacked a clear pathway to permanent housing, such as Housing Choice Vouchers or permanent supportive housing. As one staff shared, "We are really leaning very, very heavily on rapid rehousing.... I don't think a year is enough time for people to financially sustain themselves. In Denver, Colorado, rent is $1,600. I can't afford that, why do we think our clients can?" At the same time an implementer described the tension between giving people rapid rehousing or nothing: "At times we're over assigning rapid rehousing but it's like, I can guarantee you this resource for the next 12 months. It's something that we have without an abundance of the other resources and certainly not an ability to direct them."

Staff also described how the referral process lacked transparency and consistency. In some cases, staff asked participants to sign program agreements promising housing opportunities within three months, but many waited a year or more. As one respondent reflected, "We made them sign program agreements ... and for most folks that did not come true until a year in." These experiences raised concerns about fairness, communication, and the adequacy of available housing options, and staff emphasized the need for a more balanced, participant-centered approach to housing referrals. For more information about people's experiences waiting for housing, see box 4.

BOX 4

### Participant Experiences Waiting for a Housing Placement

Participants shared their gratitude for living in an AIMHigh site but also expressed an eagerness to move into permanent housing. At the time of the focus groups, participants we spoke with had been living at the noncongregate sites for longer than they had anticipated, ranging from several months to a year. They shared some frustration for the long process, saying they were waiting to get access to a housing voucher, or for those who had vouchers, were waiting for one of their housing applications to get accepted by a property manager. Many were appreciative of the housing navigation assistance they had received, including help with obtaining necessary documents, completing paperwork, touring units, and getting financial assistance for application fees. However, participants shared that the limited housing vouchers and resources made this process challenging and lengthy at times.

One participant who received a voucher explained that housing navigators could only pay for one rental application at a time. This meant that participants had to wait for the outcome of each application before submitting another. The limited funding made it challenging to quickly lease up after receiving a voucher. As they commented, "I need three or four [applications] out there, especially with my barriers and the expiration date on my voucher coming up. So, I'm going to use some of my own money."

Participants agreed that it can be challenging to find a unit that will accept them, given the barriers often faced by people who have experienced homelessness. Participants also shared that it can be difficult to find a unit that meets their needs, like living near support services and public transportation. In addition, participants found it difficult to find units in a price range they could afford after their housing subsidy ends.

**Source:** Urban Institute interviews with people served through AIMHigh in April 2025.

## Facilities and Maintenance Costs

Facilities and maintenance emerged as a significant operational challenge for AIMHigh, particularly within the noncongregate shelter sites. Staff reported frequent maintenance issues, especially in hotel-based shelters, that not only disrupted daily operations but also reduced available capacity when units had to be taken offline for repairs. Plumbing problems, broken appliances, and lack of laundry access were common, and in some cases, a single incident could cause multiple rooms to become unusable. As one provider explained, "Just because there's 300 rooms in the building doesn't mean we can have 300 people in here all the time.... We've seen a lot of damage in the buildings, a lot of things that limit our ability to fill rooms quickly."

Staff also noted that larger hotel sites presented unique challenges compared with microcommunities. These included more frequent security incidents, overdoses, and a lack of

community cohesion. Staff emphasized that while hotel sites offer more units, they also require more intensive maintenance and operational support, leading to higher costs. As one interview respondent described, "We see a lot more damage to our rooms in the hotel rooms because there's just more stuff that can break. There's showers, there's toilets, there's sinks. And when the toilet backs up because someone is unstable and is putting all their belongings down the toilet, that can turn ten rooms offline when it floods. Those are costly, but they're operationally costly in terms of that's [fewer] people we can serve."

# Looking Forward and Sustainability

At the time of this report, approximately one year remains to meet the AIMHigh goals. Two pressing challenges face AIMHigh implementation: resource and capacity challenges and incorporation of AIMHigh activities into the broader homelessness response system. Both of these challenges featured prominently as sources of tension among partners and staff implementing AIMHigh; successfully navigating both challenges is critical to meeting goals.

## Impending Resource and Capacity Challenges for AIMHigh Activities

With the expiration of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and unexpected budget cuts across Denver, AIMHigh staff are doubting their ability to meet the initiative's goals. Budget challenges have led to staffing reductions across municipal agencies, and partners fear that agency capacity may continue to decline given the uncertainty of future funding. AIMHigh is also facing housing resource constraints, with less access to housing vouchers and rapid rehousing than leadership anticipated. With this decline, some AIMHigh staff worry that they will not have enough resources to connect all the noncongregate shelter residents to permanent housing.

In addition to the projected decrease in housing resources, AIMHigh will be decreasing the noncongregate shelter capacity with the closure of two sites in 2026. Leadership planned to close these sites with the expectation that as people move into permanent housing, fewer people will be in noncongregate shelter sites. With permanent housing resources declining, however, some AIMHigh staff are concerned that the pace of moving residents into permanent housing will not keep up with the site closure timeline.

### AIMHigh Incorporation into the Broader Homelessness Response System

The AIMHigh initiative operates largely in isolation from the other programs addressing homelessness in the City and County of Denver, which has drawn some criticism from HOST and community stakeholders. Critics have questioned the equity of the AIMHigh referral pathway since the program's services are, for the most part, only offered to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness who are added to a by-name list through AIMHigh outreach staff. Therefore, those who enter one of Denver's congregate shelter sites are not eligible for a referral into the AIMHigh program and instead must wait to be connected to a housing solution through coordinated entry. Because entry into the AIMHigh program means being put on a pathway to permanent housing, some staff believe that excluding the congregate shelter sites from eligibility puts those people at a disadvantage.

> **"[A] really big pain point [is] we have all these congregate shelters with folks who have been staying in them for years and they just have to sit and wait for a match to coordinated entry and wait for their turn and hope it comes up. And that's just a big part of it, is we have these folks who took themselves off the streets, put themselves into a shelter, and they're just truly getting left behind."**
>
> *—HOST staff*

Stakeholders worry that the initiative's process of prioritizing people experiencing unsheltered homelessness may exclude from the referral process other populations of people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, staff expressed concerns about how the referral process feels random at times, and is often dependent on interacting with HOST outreach staff on a day when noncongregate shelter spots happen to be available. Looking forward, AIMHigh leadership is exploring ways to fold the initiative into Denver's larger homelessness response system, which would include expanding referral sources and incorporating the program into Denver's Continuum of Care.

## Recommendations

AIMHigh faces significant challenges in its final year of implementation, and efforts to build on and maintain progress face an uncertain future. A key opportunity involves addressing the number of people who can be moved from shelters into permanent housing, thereby increasing remaining shelter capacity to create more space for those in need. While resource constraints may encumber the success of any recommendations, areas where progress could still be made include:

- **Considering modifications to the rapid rehousing model:** Currently, AIMHigh provides 12 months of rapid rehousing assistance, covering the full amount of rent. AIMHigh implementers could consider having participants pay a portion of their rent, which could either extend the rapid rehousing support beyond one year (potentially increasing the duration of housing stability) or allow more people to be rehoused (by reducing the cost per person).
- **Increasing employment and workforce supports:** People living in AIMHigh noncongregate facilities receive some supports for finding work and getting to it, including transportation assistance, but they still struggle to find employment that provides enough income to afford housing; they often work in temporary jobs. AIMHigh staff could consider ways to enhance employment and workforce services to help people access higher paying jobs and thereby decrease their dependence on rehousing assistance provided by the city.
- **Exploring more assisted and supported living options:** AIMHigh implementation staff noted in interviews that a small proportion of participants are unable to complete activities of daily living. These individuals require a disproportionate share of resources in shelter environments and are unlikely to stabilize in rapid rehousing, or in some cases, even in supportive housing. Like many other communities across the country, Denver needs more assisted-living access.

Beyond the final year of AIMHigh implementation, Denver must reconcile what has become a bifurcated system that funnels people experiencing unsheltered homelessness into separate shelter systems with independently allocated housing resources. Reconciling the current two systems into a single system that functions efficiently, effectively, and fairly for all people experiencing homelessness must be a top priority to ensure sustainability of AIMHigh's progress toward ending unsheltered homelessness. AIMHigh leadership should consider ways to

1. integrate AIMHigh and broader coordinated entry and housing prioritization processes;
2. retain noncongregate shelter capacity and determine the best use of congregate and noncongregate facilities across the system to maximize the number of people who can be safely sheltered, while also prioritizing rapid exit to housing; and
3. maximize organizational and agency capacity and skills across the broader system.

# Conclusion

An analysis of the available quantitative and qualitative data indicates that AIMHigh has successfully reduced unsheltered homelessness, particularly in highly visible large encampments that were concentrated in downtown areas. Overall, despite implementation challenges, partners, staff, and people served by AIMHigh agree that Denver has achieved an important goal by substantially decreasing the number of people living outside in unhealthy spaces and conditions, and providing them with shelter in safe and private settings.

## Implications and Considerations for Other Jurisdictions

Numerous respondents described Denver as "leading the nation" in responding to unsheltered homelessness. While the evaluation does not compare Denver's efforts with those of other communities, it highlights important lessons from Denver's work that may benefit other jurisdictions:

- A galvanizing champion can leverage the political will and resources needed to gain momentum and make significant progress, but it is important to balance the urgency with deliberative system planning and sufficient organizational capacity.
- Real-time data, even data with significant limitations, can be used to coordinate a rapid response to unsheltered homelessness, helping people to access shelter and other resources more quickly.
- Noncongregate shelter is a preferred option because it helps people stabilize with safety and privacy and accommodates individual situations, such as partners, pets, and possessions. However, providing noncongregate shelter creates challenges that must be addressed, such as high facility and maintenance costs that jurisdictions need to plan for.
- Successful exits to permanent housing are the driving force behind maintaining sufficient shelter capacity to house people newly experiencing homelessness.

A critical key to AIMHigh's success is that it provides people with meaningful connections to shelter and housing through coordinated and targeted outreach—not by criminalizing homelessness. This is especially important in light of the growing criminalization efforts surfacing across the country.

## Next Steps for the Evaluation

Important questions remain about AIMHigh implementation and outcomes for those served by the initiative. In the coming year, we will continue to analyze data collected from a range of sources, including 311 reports, program and administrative data from public safety and the Homeless Management Information System, interviews, direct observation, and document review. The evaluation will focus on the following key questions:

- In what ways did AIMHigh implementation change in the final year?
- Did Denver achieve functional zero in unsheltered homelessness by the end of 2026? What factors contributed to the success or failure of this goal achievement? Did AIMHigh sustain or continue to improve public safety and conditions of public spaces?
- What are the characteristics of the people served by AIMHigh implementation? What resources and services were available to people served? What were the outcomes for people served in terms of program and housing enrollment, lengths of stay, housing, health, and other factors?
- How did people experience AIMHigh and individual AIMHigh components? What worked well for them? What could be improved? What challenges did staff face during implementation? What were the key lessons learned and areas for improvement?
- What program types and sizes are needed to successfully scale AIMHigh to achieve and sustain functional zero for unsheltered homelessness? What resources are needed to achieve the necessary scale?

A final report from the evaluation will be published in 2027.

# Appendix A: Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources for this report include interviews with partners and staff during biannual implementation reviews and site visits, focus groups and interviews with AIMHigh participants, direct observation of AIMHigh activities, document review, and data from 311 call reports. Additional details on each source are provided below.

## Biannual Interviews

Up to three interviews with key program staff every six months were tailored to provide context for outcomes and collect ongoing information about the progress, milestones, and challenges associated with AIMHigh (see table A.1).

TABLE A.1
**Summary of Biannual Interviews**

| Time period | Number of interviews | Type(s) of respondents | Focus |
|---|---|---|---|
| February 2025 | 3 | Government partner; service provider | Encampment resolution |
| August–September 2025 | 3 | Government partner | Street outreach and rehousing |

**Source:** Urban Institute interviews with AIMHigh partners and staff.

## Site Visit

The research team conducted an annual site visit to Denver to observe AIMHigh implementation, including encampment resolution, shelter, and rehousing components. During these site visits, we also interviewed key staff, partners, and participants.

- **Observations.** We coordinated with AIMHigh staff and partners to observe selected program components and collaboration activities, such as ride-alongs with outreach teams, coordination meetings, shelter sites, case management, and rehousing efforts. Observations were strictly nonparticipitory, meaning the research team did not engage in service delivery and remained

visible to those being observed. Consent was obtained from AIMHigh participants whose service delivery was observed.

- **Staff and partner interviews.** We conducted semistructured, in-person interviews with AIMHigh staff and partners to document implementation activities and understand successes, challenges, and lessons learned. Respondents were prioritized in coordination with AIMHigh leadership based on implementation status and availability. When necessary, we followed up by phone with staff who were unavailable during the site visit.
- **Participant focus groups and interviews.** We held semistructured interviews and small focus groups with a subset of AIMHigh participants to gather insights on their experiences, perceptions of program success, and suggestions for improvement. Timing of these sessions was coordinated with AIMHigh leadership to ensure alignment with participants' stage in the intervention.

Table A.2 shows a summary of these data collection activities conducted during the first site visit to Denver in April 2025.

TABLE A.2

## Overview of April 2025 Site Visit Data Collection Activities

| Data collection activity | Description | Number of interviews | Number of respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Observations** | ▪ Encampment resolution pre-meeting<br>▪ Outreach team ride-along<br>▪ Tour of two AIMHigh sites: one noncongregate hotel and one microcommunity | N/A | N/A |
| **Staff and partner interviews** | | | |
| Government partner | | 8 | 9 |
| Service provider | | 5 | 8 |
| **Participant focus groups and interviews** | | | |
| Focus groups | | 2 | 6 |
| Interviews | | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | | **16** | **24** |

**Source:** Urban Institute AIMHigh site visit conducted in April 2025.

# Document Review

Throughout the evaluation period, we requested program policy manuals, training tools, reports, and other documents generated by key stakeholders involved in planning and implementing AIMHigh strategies. Additional documentation was collected during observation data collection activities, such as meeting agendas, presentation materials, and outreach flyers.

# 311 Reports

While a major goal of AIMHigh is to reduce the number of encampments in Denver, there is currently no definitive measure of how many encampments exist citywide. In the absence of a formal count, we relied on data from Denver's 311 system to estimate the number of encampments at any given time. Below we describe the methods used to calculate this estimate.

## Aggregation Methodology

The 311 system allows individuals to report encampments, including details such as location, size (number of tents or structures present), and hazards like feces or needles.[9] However, because multiple reports may refer to the same encampment, we aggregated 311 reports to produce a more accurate estimate. More specifically, we considered reports to represent a single encampment if they met both of the following criteria:

- Reports that were within about one city block (approximately 500 feet) of each other
- Reports that are within three days of any previous report in the same one-block radius

When multiple 311 reports referred to what we would consider a single encampment, we retained the most common response for size, hazards, and other attributes. In cases where there was a tie, we used the description from the earliest report among the tied options.

## Dataset Overview

The 311 dataset spans July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025, and includes

- 26,709 individual reports submitted to the 311 system, and
- 15,740 "encampments" aggregated from those reports.

## Analyzing Sustained Encampment Resolution

To assess AIMHigh's effectiveness in keeping locations clear of encampments, we slightly modified the aggregation method described above. Instead of defining a new encampment when a report occurred at the same location but more than three days after a previous report, we removed the time constraint. We then examined whether each approximate one-block area had any encampment reports during each quarter of the analysis period.

Our analysis focused on encampments with reported sizes of 10–19 tents/structures or 20+ tents/structures. We excluded smaller encampments because their temporary nature makes it difficult to determine whether a location was cleared due to AIMHigh activities or because individuals moved voluntarily. Larger encampments, by contrast, were more likely to be targeted by AIMHigh's encampment resolution teams and included in enforcement activities aimed at keeping locations permanently clear.

We compiled a subset of the sample that included encampments flagged as having 10–19 or 20+ tents/structures at any point. For these "large" encampments, we tracked the spatial location and subsequent size of any reported encampments within the same one-block radius. When multiple reports occurred in a quarter, we used the most common reported size to represent that location for the quarter.

Definitions:

- **Fully resolved:** The location had no further encampment reports for the remainder of the dataset period.
- **Temporarily resolved:** The location had no encampment reports during a given quarter, but reports reappeared in a later quarter during the analysis period

# Appendix B: Other All In Mile High Initiative Strategies

TABLE B.1

**Other All In Mile High Initiative Programs and Strategies, 2023–25**

*Descriptions of other programs and strategies used to support All In Mile High activities*

| Program | Description |
|---|---|
| Emergency Operations Center | The Emergency Operations Center is place where Denver leadership and staff can coordinate a response during an emergency or disaster. The Emergency Operations Center was activated at the start of AIMHigh until October 2023, allowing staff to be redeployed across departments to address the citywide emergency declaration on unsheltered homelessness. |
| Homelessness Resolution Operation Center | The Homelessness Resolution Operation Center is a division within Denver HOST that aims to help people experiencing homelessness regain permanent housing. Homelessness Resolution Operation Center activities include outreach efforts, shelter system operations, and resolution planning initiatives. |
| Street to Lease | The Street to Lease pilot connected people from encampments directly to permanent housing, skipping interim housing. |
| Housing Connector | Housing Connector is a nonprofit organization that partners with landlords and property managers and uses a Zillow search engine to speed up the housing search process for housing navigators and case managers working with people experiencing homelessness. Housing Connector supported the Street to Lease pilot. |
| Roads to Recovery | The Roads to Recovery program diverts people with mental health needs or substance use disorder from the criminal justice system to stabilization and long-term treatment. |
| Housing Central Command | The Housing Central Command centralizes the housing search process by coordinating the resources, service providers, and landlords to streamline the process of moving a client into housing. |

**Source:** Urban Institute review of secondary materials.

**Note:** This table is not intended to be a comprehensive list of programs and strategies used under AIMHigh.

# Notes

[1] "Citywide Progress Report," City and County of Denver, updated November 5, 2025, https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Mayors-Office/Programs-and-Initiatives/Homelessness-Initiative/All-In-Mile-High-Dashboard.

[2] "2023 Point In Time Count," Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, Tableau Public, accessed November 2025, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mdhi/viz/MDHI2023PointinTimeCount/Overview.

[3] "2022 Point In Time Count," Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, Tableau Public, accessed November 2025, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mdhi/viz/MDHI2022PointinTimeCount/Overview.

[4] "2023 Point In Time Count," see Note 2.

[5] "Citywide Progress Report," see Note 1.

[6] "All In Mile High Communities," City and County of Denver, accessed November 2025, https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Mayors-Office/Programs-and-Initiatives/Homelessness-Initiative/All-In-Mile-High-Communities.

[7] "Citywide Progress Report," see Note 1.

[8] "Mayor Johnston's All In Mile High Frequently Asked Questions," City and County of Denver, accessed November 2025, https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Mayors-Office/Programs-and-Initiatives/Homelessness-Initiative/FAQ.

[9] "Report an Issue," City and County of Denver, accessed November 2025, https://denvergov.org/Online-Services-Hub/Report-an-Issue/issue/new-report.

# References

Batko, Samantha, Alyse D. Oneto, and Aaron Shroyer. 2020. *Unsheltered Homelessness: Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Denver (City and County of Denver). 2024. *One-Year Report 2024: All In Mile High: Leading the Nation in the Fight to End Unsheltered Homelessness.* Denver, CO: Denver.

# About the Authors

**Samantha Batko** is a senior fellow in the Housing and Communities Division at the Urban Institute, where her research focuses on homelessness, housing instability, housing assistance, and supportive services. She has expertise in several US Department of Housing and Urban Development homelessness programs, including homelessness prevention, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing. She served as principal investigator of an evaluation of Tipping Point Community's Chronic Homelessness Initiative in San Francisco, an evaluation of Hamilton County's FUSE permanent supportive housing project, development of the Emergency Rental Assistance Priority Index and targeting tool, a study of COVID-19 homelessness responses, and a study on the monetary and nonmonetary value of ending homelessness.

**Pear Moraras** is a senior research associate in the Housing and Communities Division. With more than 12 years of experience in data analytics, research, and program evaluation, she has worked extensively in the public and nonprofit sectors, specializing in community health and human services. Before joining Urban, she led housing and homelessness evaluation efforts at the King County Department of Community and Human Services in Seattle, Washington, where she oversaw performance measurement, provided operational support, and conducted research and evaluation projects for the King County Homeless Response System. As a mixed-methods researcher, her work at Urban explores the intersection of housing and health, studying the impacts of interventions on homelessness response systems, people, and communities.

**Anna Doñate** is a research assistant in the Housing and Communities Division. Her research interests include community development, climate adaptation strategies, and homelessness. Before joining Urban, Doñate earned a BS in policy analysis and management from Cornell University.

**Brendan Chen** is a research analyst in the Housing and Communities Division. His research interests include housing affordability and homelessness. Chen holds bachelor's degrees in economics and international development studies from the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Alyse D. Oneto** is former senior research associate in the Housing and Communities Division.

## Statement of Independence

The Urban Institute strives to meet the highest standards of integrity and quality in its research and analyses and in the evidence-based policy recommendations offered by its researchers and experts. We believe that operating consistent with the values of independence, rigor, and transparency is essential to maintaining those standards. As an organization, the Urban Institute does not take positions on issues, but it does empower and support its experts in sharing their own evidence-based views and policy recommendations that have been shaped by scholarship. Funders do not determine our research findings or the insights and recommendations of our experts. Urban scholars and experts are expected to be objective and follow the evidence wherever it may lead.

500 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20024

www.urban.org