

Housing Stability

Value Statement

Safe, secure and affordable housing is a cornerstone of well-being for Boulder County residents. Affordable housing along the income spectrum strengthens and protects the economic and cultural diversity of Boulder County..

Recommendation

The HSA encourages all decision makers to adopt the following in order to address the housing issues in our county:

- Provide safe, temporary shelter for everyone in our community who is experiencing homelessness.;
- Support both short and longer-term rental and utility financial assistance programs that stabilize families and individuals and prevent them from becoming homeless
- Support programs that promote and create pathways to independent, stable housing, for priority groups, including seniors, people with disabilities, people leaving domestic violence and homelessness, among others;
- Advocate for the expansion of permanently affordable housing units, following the Boulder County Regional Housing Partnership targets to promote sustainable and diverse communities throughout the County.

Background

Housing insecurity has continued to increase across Boulder County. The 2019 Point in Time Survey which counts the homeless population on a single day in January found 623 households experiencing homelessness, 72 percent of whom were individuals and 28 percent families with children. Over the full year of 2019, 755 children were registered as experiencing homelessness in the two school districts serving Boulder County, and homeless individuals were processed through the County's coordinated entry system.

For those that are able to retain housing, rising housing costs make the situation very precarious. As of 2018, 55 percent of Boulder county renters were considered housing cost burdened (spending over 30 percent of their income on housing), and one-quarter of residents were paying over half of their income on housing costs, qualifying them as severely cost-burdened. The median monthly gross residential rent in Boulder County was \$1,637 in 2019. The situation only worsened during COVID, with home prices increasing at almost 20 percent and average rents increasing by 9.9 percent, while unemployment more than tripled.

The availability of permanently affordable housing units falls far short (one-third) of the communitywide goal of 12 percent as set forth by the Boulder County Regional Housing Partnership. Longer-term rental assistance is also limited to help address the situation. Each year there is a lottery for Section 8 vouchers, with the numbers of eligible households far outnumbering the available vouchers. As important, due to the shortage of housing units,

landlords are less likely to accept a housing voucher because they can get a much higher rent on the open market.

The effects of housing instability result in economic insecurity, where people spend an inordinately high share of their income on housing costs, crowding out other critical expenditures, like nutritious food, health services, investments in children, and savings for retirement or education. Rapidly rising rents force people into episodes of homelessness, often difficult to reverse when evictions are on their record. Toxic stress from frequent moves, episodes of couch surfing, and going without to pay rent affect everyone on the household.

Suggesting workers and lower-income residents relocate outside of the County is neither a sustainable nor desirable solution. Commuting time increases, air quality decreases and poor access to transport are among the negative direct effects of such a policy. Children pay the price through the effects of longer time away from home for commuting parents. Further, the loss of economic diversity within a community harms individuals across the income spectrum.