

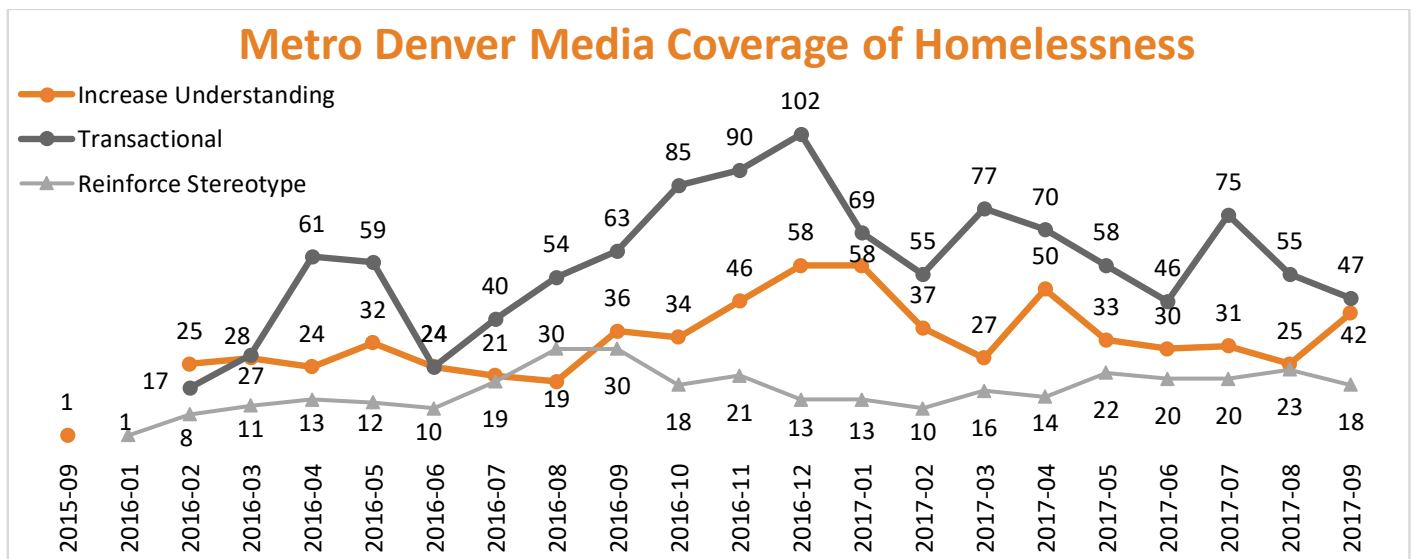


Tips & Considerations for Reporting on Homelessness

It's tough to gain public support for solutions to societal challenges when people don't have a clear understanding of the problem. A public opinion poll of Metro Denver residents' perceptions of homelessness showed that even as they view the issue as an "extremely or very serious" problem, most have a fairly narrow understanding of it.¹ Comparing the poll findings to data from the Metro Denver Point-In-Time report⁴ demonstrates key disconnects:

FACTS	PERCEPTIONS
WHO IS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS	
Nearly half of those experiencing homelessness in the metro area are families and children. A greater number of women than men experience homelessness in Douglas County, with near equal numbers in Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield and Jefferson counties.	Metro Denver residents' predominant image of homelessness is that of single males. Few were aware that nearly half of those experiencing homelessness are families and children.
WHERE HOMELESSNESS EXISTS	
Homelessness exists across the seven-county Metro Denver region.	Outside of Denver, few residents believe homelessness is a significant concern in their own city or town; the majority see it as a serious problem in Denver.
CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS	
High housing costs, job loss and low wages, difficult family situations, physical and mental health challenges and substance abuse are the leading causes of homelessness.	Few residents are aware that changed family circumstances (i.e., domestic violence, divorce, death of a family member) and physical illness are among the leading causes of homelessness.

Media coverage can improve understanding of the causes and broad reach of homelessness, and increase support for solutions. Conversely, media reports can perpetuate misperceptions and limit efforts to prevent or decrease homelessness. Close To Home's tracking of media coverage related to homelessness in the seven-county metro area shows coverage that increases understanding occurs slightly more often than does coverage featuring stereotypical views of homelessness. While our categorization of reporting is subjective, it nevertheless serves as a tool to help explore ways in which reporters can avoid stereotyping and increase public understanding of homelessness.



Increase Understanding: Coverage acknowledges or features less well-known populations experiencing homelessness; explains causes of homelessness in terms of personal challenges and systemic inadequacies (e.g., got sick, lost job, expensive housing market); is non-judgmental; features solutions, provides hope

Reinforce Stereotype: Coverage includes labels, is judgmental or features a narrow aspect of homelessness (i.e., individuals who choose to be homeless, commit a crime, panhandle, etc.); reinforces views that these circumstances, actions or beliefs apply to all people experiencing homelessness

Transactional: Story is purely informational and does not provide links or present insights into causes, experiences or solutions to homelessness (i.e., charitable fundraiser, affordable housing development).

These tips and considerations are provided to help broaden understanding, advance solutions and decrease misperceptions about homelessness.

Avoid labels and stereotypes. Refer to ‘people experiencing homelessness.’ Avoid labels that stereotype (e.g., ‘homeless people’ or ‘the homeless’). Recognize there is no singular representation of people experiencing homelessness.

Consider relevancy. Consider whether a person’s housing status is relevant to the story or if it will mainly serve to reinforce stereotypical views of homelessness.

Define homelessness. While there are multiple definitions of homelessness, the fundamental reality is that someone without reliable shelter – a safe, stable place to call home – is considered homeless.²

Make it clear that losing a home can happen to anyone. Homelessness is often a result of personal challenges colliding with inadequate systems, not simply ‘personal failings.’ Take the approach of ‘what happened to you?’ not ‘what’s wrong with you?’³

Shed light on those who are ‘invisible.’ Most homelessness is not visible.³ The majority of people experiencing homelessness are families and individuals transitioning among short-stay motels, doubling-up with friends or family members, sleeping in cars, or in transitional housing or shelters. Less than one-fifth of people experiencing homelessness in the Metro Area live on the streets.⁴

Provide context. Give a balanced view by reporting on and showing images of lesser-known aspects of homelessness and populations broadly affected by homelessness, including women, children, families and seniors in communities across the Metro Area, not only in Denver.

Focus on solutions. Exposing the problem isn’t always enough. People in our communities need and want ways to respond. Ask what is needed, what is working and how it could be scaled up, and report on progress made.⁵

Include the views of people with personal experience. People who have experienced homelessness are viewed as the most credible messengers.⁶ It is important to include a wide variety of their voices and perspectives while ensuring they fully understand and consent to sharing their story publicly, and will not be (re)traumatized by doing so.

Don’t perpetuate fear. People who are experiencing homelessness are more likely to be the victim of violence than the perpetrator.⁷

Tell us what’s missing.

Let us know if you have additional considerations and reporting tips that may be helpful to include in this resource. Contact us at info@CloseToHomeCO.org.

Close To Home is shining a bright light on the broad reach of homelessness and mobilizing people to take action and support solutions. Started by The Denver Foundation in response to community listening sessions across the seven-county metro area, the grassroots campaign is made up of individuals with personal experience of homelessness, together with housing, education, domestic violence, health care, usiness, faith and homelessness-focused organizations and agencies. Together, we focus on communications, education and advocacy efforts to gain public support for meaningful solutions to homelessness.

The Close To Home Storytellers Network is made up of students, veterans, moms, dads, grandparents and others all with personal experiences of homelessness. They are powerful messengers committed to sharing their experiences through media reporting and presentations to groups to increase understanding and help others facing similarly challenging circumstances.

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¹ [Public Opinion Poll](#) conducted by Fairbanks, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies, January 2015

² Understanding Homelessness, <http://www.understandhomelessness.com/www.understandhomelessness.com>

³ [How media coverage on homelessness falls short \(and what reporters can do about it\)](#), Hye-Jin Kim and Meka Boyle, San Francisco Public Press, June 22, 2016

⁴ [Metro Denver Homeless Initiative 2017 Point-In-Time Report](#)

⁵ [Solutions Journalism Toolkit](#), Solutions Journalism Network, January 2015

⁶ Focus groups conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies for The Denver Foundation, 2015

⁷ [Media Guidelines for Reporting on Homelessness](#), Homelessness Australia, June 27, 2017