



COLORADO **SAFE PARKING INITIATIVE**



Photo: DreamsforChange.org

No one should have to live in their vehicle, but for those who must, providing a safe, legal place to sleep provides stability on the path toward more permanent housing.

The Colorado Safe Parking Initiative

The Colorado Safe Parking Initiative is a citizen-led organization working to encourage safe, legal parking locations for individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are living in vehicles in Colorado communities. Working collaboratively with local communities, agencies, municipalities and organizations, the initiative is calling for a safe parking program to:

- Allow for people living in their vehicles to do so without criminal penalty
- Provide people who are experiencing vehicular homelessness to be safe and secure at night
- Help people to achieve their personal goals related to housing

The Safe Parking Model

Safe parking programs provide access to safe, legal overnight parking for individuals and families living in their vehicles, along with case management and outreach. Santa Barbara, California, launched the nation's first official safe parking program in 2004, and safe parking programs have since been established in other locations, including Breckenridge and Golden. In some locations, faith communities use their parking lots to provide safe parking overnight.

Safe parking is not intended to be a permanent solution, but instead helps people to stay safe while on the path to finding stable housing.

The safe parking model typically includes:

- Community collaboration and input
- An intake process with on-site housing navigation assistance
- Defined hours of operation at specific locations, such as existing parking lots
- Restroom facilities, security personnel and on-site outreach, such as food distribution
- Guest accountability
- A path to housing including financial and other types of support



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Safe parking programs are proven to provide:

- Increased safety and security for people and their property
- Increased access to services and employment and/or education opportunities
- Improved rest, which can lead to better outcomes in areas such as physical and mental health and employment
- More day-to-day stability

The Need for Safe Parking

According to the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative Point-in-Time Survey and various municipal and county-level counts, hundreds of individuals and families are estimated to be sheltering in vehicles in the seven-county Denver metro area, and there are nearly a thousand statewide. But because most surveys of people experiencing homelessness exclude or undercount people living in their vehicles, the actual number of individuals experiencing vehicular homelessness may be even higher.

Sheltering in vehicles is often a first stop for individuals who lose permanent housing. Without intervention and support, many fall deeper into homelessness and may eventually end up on the streets.

The reasons that people experiencing homelessness reside in their cars rather than in shelters are many and may include:

- Long waiting lists for transitional and/or affordable housing
- Lack of available shelter space (particularly for couples, families with children, LGBTQ individuals and people with pets)
- Available shelter space may be inaccessible to people with disabilities or inappropriate for some individuals (e.g., some people with PTSD)
- Shelter hours are incompatible with work schedules or are too far from work locations
- Desire for stability, autonomy and privacy

Get Involved

The Colorado Safe Parking Initiative is growing its network of stakeholders and community collaborators. Contact ColoSafeParking@gmail.com for more information or to get involved.