

# What Front-Line Service Providers for People Experiencing Homelessness Know About



University of Colorado  
Anschutz Medical Campus

## Body Lice and Associated Diseases - Colorado 2022

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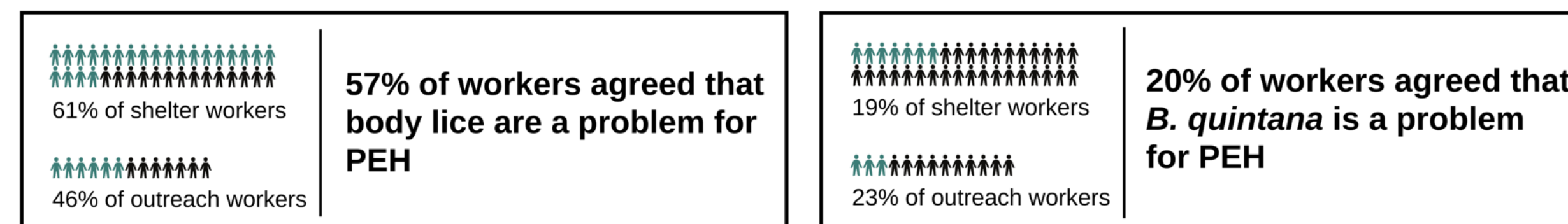
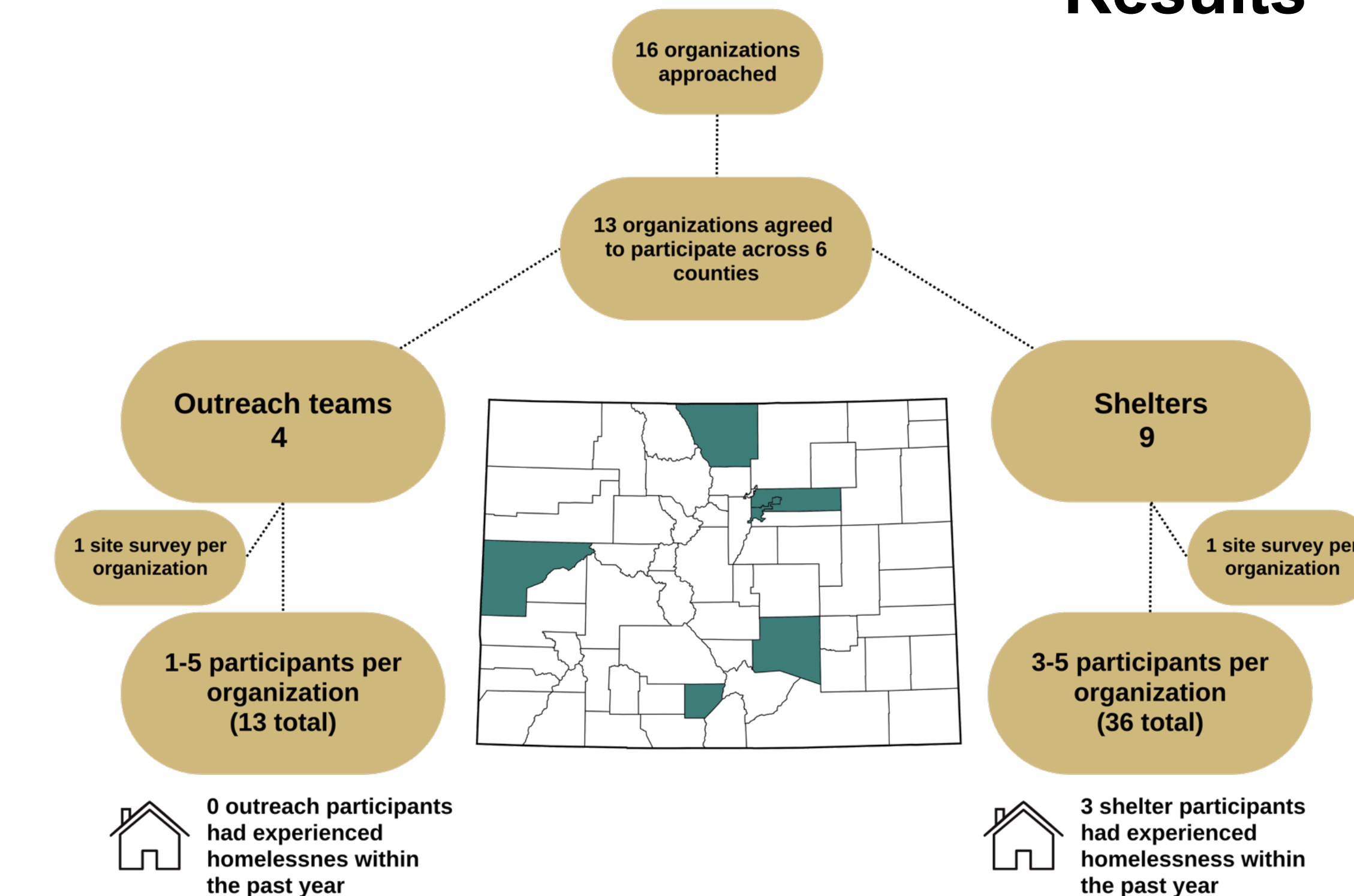
### Background

- Body lice (*Pediculus humanus corporis*) are spread by close physical contact or by sharing clothes and bedding
- Bartonella quintana*
  - Fastidious gram-negative bacteria
  - Transmitted by infected body lice bites
  - Can cause chronic bacteremia and culture-negative endocarditis
  - In the U.S., infection occurs almost exclusively in people experiencing homelessness (PEH)
  - Recent outbreaks have occurred among PEH, including in Denver, CO

### Methods

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) invited organizations serving PEH to participate
- Organizations identified staff or volunteers with regular client interaction
  - 1 - 5 staff completed a 20-minute, in-person, standardized survey on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding body lice prevention and treatment
  - 1 senior staff member completed a site-level standardized assessment of policies and resources
- Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify knowledge gaps, barriers to implementing control measures, and preferred education modalities

### Results



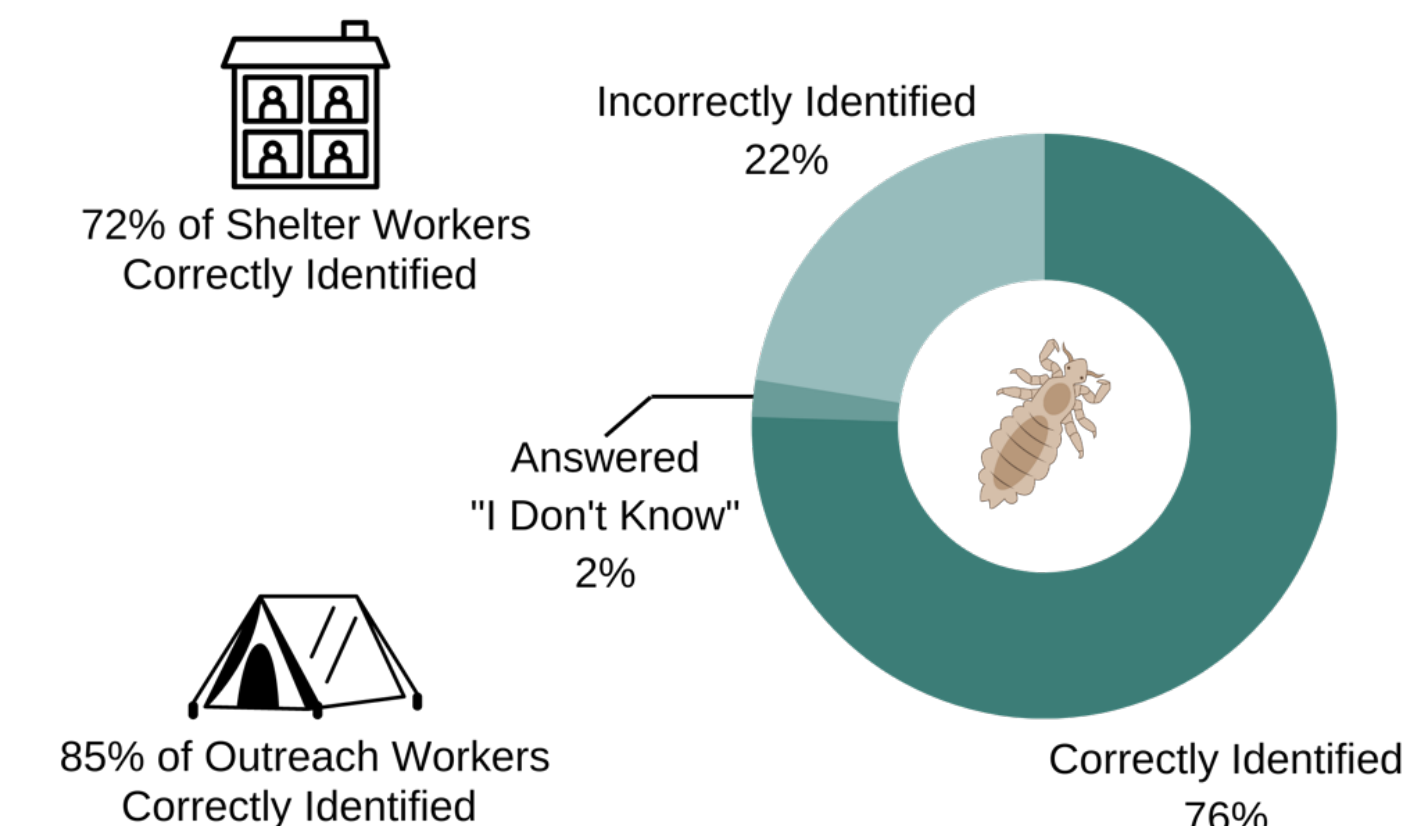
#### What happens at this shelter when a client is found to have body lice?

6 out of 36 shelter workers were able to recall shelter protocols appropriate for lice management.

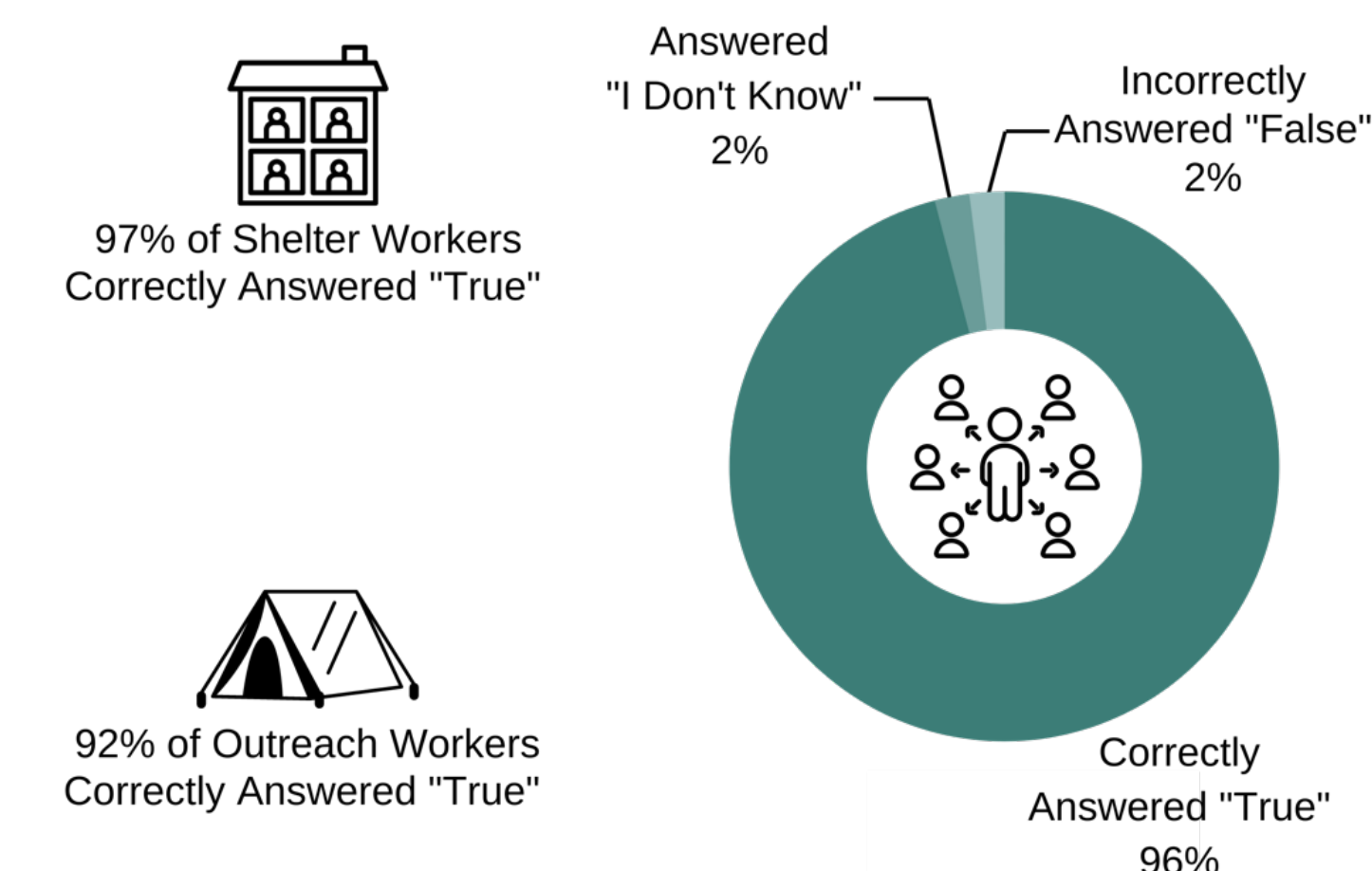
Common misconceptions among shelter workers:

- "Ask them to leave the shelter"
- "Get rid of mattresses"
- "Need documentation of treatment to re-enter"
- "Probably everyone would get it"
- "Wipe down and mop area"
- "Everyone in the dorm must leave for pest control"

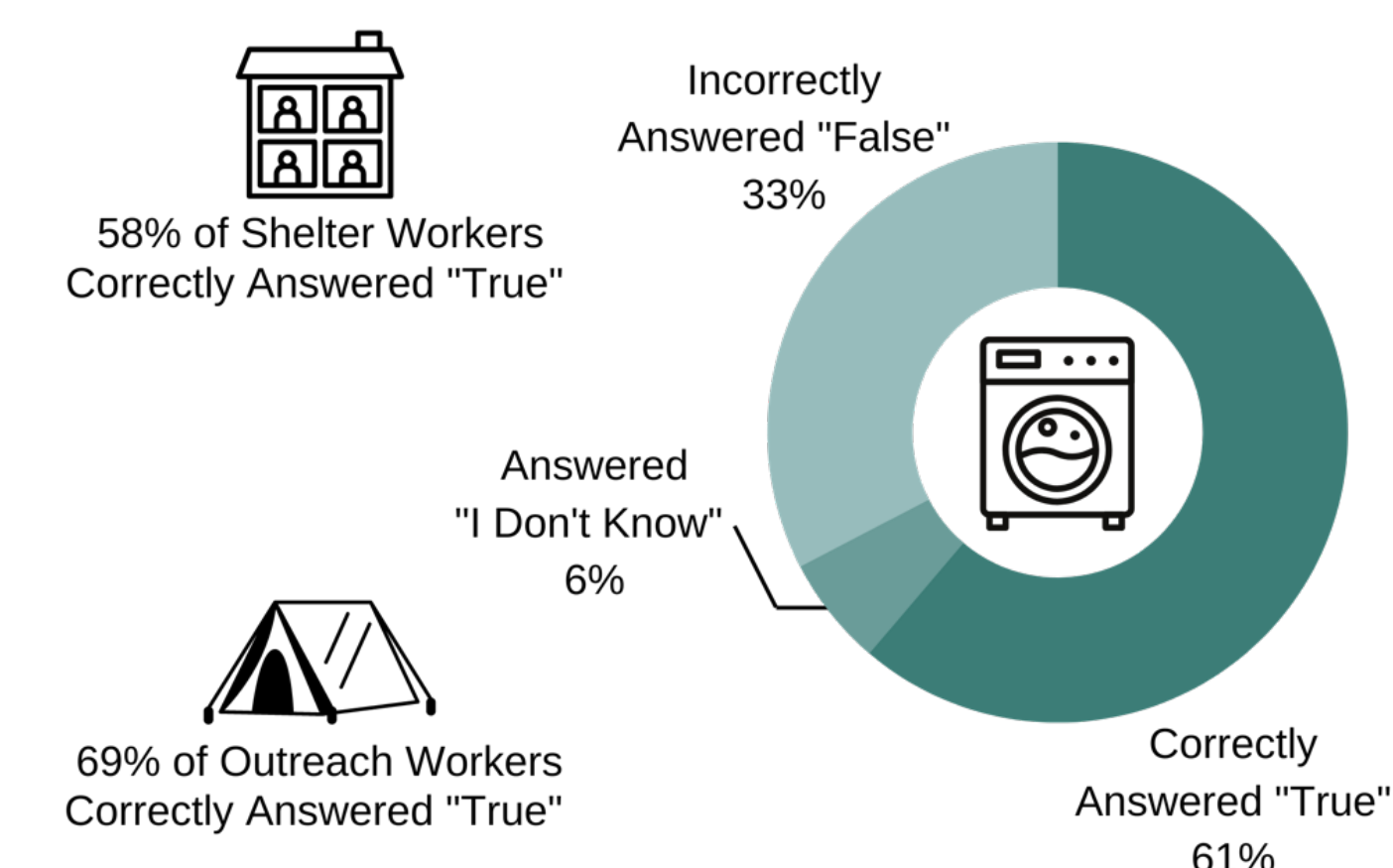
#### Identification of body lice by photograph.



#### Sharing clothes, sleeping bags, or bedding can lead to body lice moving from one person to another?



#### Washing clothing and bedding can kill body lice?



### Conclusions

- Most front-line service workers:
  - ✓ Correctly identified body lice
  - ✓ Correctly identified methods of body lice transmission
  - ✗ Had limited knowledge of body lice management protocols
  - ✗ Had limited knowledge and concern about *B. quintana* infection in PEH
- PEH in shelters reportedly had regular access to and used hot showers and laundry; unsheltered PEH did not

### Implications

- Education about body lice and *B. quintana* is needed for front-line service workers in homeless shelters and street outreach organizations in Colorado
  - Should focus on prevention, recognition, and management of body lice infestations
- Communities should ensure that unsheltered PEH have consistent, easy access to shower and laundry facilities to prevent louse-borne diseases

No conflicts of interest.

The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Photographs courtesy of VisualDX.