



## Rural Healthy Housing and Environmental Health 2023 Fact Sheet

Substandard housing is often seen as an issue for primarily urban settings, but rural populations experience their own unique and significant challenges and needs relating to poor housing quality. An **estimated 60 million Americans**, approximately 20% of the U.S. population, live in the **29 million-plus housing units located in rural communities**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, **migration to rural communities increased, with 63% of nonmetro counties witnessing a net inflow in 2021**, compared to 39% of nonmetro counties in 2019. While the majority of residents in rural areas (76%) remain non-Hispanic White persons, racial and ethnic diversity is increasing; for example, **the median rural county saw its population of color increase by 3.5% between 2010 and 2020**. This increased growth and diversity has brought further attention to the inequities faced by many residents of rural communities that result in inadequate availability of quality healthcare, less access to health resources than urban communities, and ultimately poorer health outcomes, which are further exacerbated by an aging, substandard housing stock.

### THE POWER OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Despite health-related disparities, rural communities have historically shown **strength and resilience** during natural disasters, demographic shifts, and economic declines. Rural communities have diverse populations whose strengths are seen in their **shared values and beliefs**. Most adults (62%) in rural communities believe they can make an impact in their community, including 27% believing they can make a **great impact**.

### At a Glance: Housing Health and Affordability in Rural Communities

- One out of five residents in rural communities have recently worried about the effects of housing on their family's health and safety.
- Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) residing in rural America are more likely to live in substandard housing than White residents.
- Over 1.4 million homes in rural America are severely or moderately inadequate.
- Approximately 11.5 million rural homes have at least one health and safety hazard, such as pests, peeling paint (which may contain lead hazards), water leaks, foundation problems, and mold.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of rural renter households are moderately cost burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing; 19% are severely cost burdened, using more than 50% of their income for housing.

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2023 Fact Sheet *(continued)*

## Specific Examples of Healthy Housing Issues in Rural Communities Include...



31.5% of rural counties had 60 to 150-plus heat-related emergency department (ED) visits per 100,000 residents compared to 8.4% of large metro counties.



12% of rural Americans report issues with their sewage systems.



48% of households on Native American reservations lack clean water or adequate sanitation.



Native American homes are 19 times more likely to lack indoor plumbing than those inhabited by Whites.



Rural Americans are more likely to use coal or wood-burning stoves as heating sources, which contribute to poor indoor air quality; 1.5 million rural households use wood, 70,000 use coal, and 1.9 million use fuel oil or kerosene.

## MOBILE HOMES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Twenty percent (20%) of rural housing consists of mobile homes with rural communities in southern states, such as South Carolina (39%) and North Carolina (36%), having higher percentages. Of rural Americans living in mobile homes:

- 33% have recently worried about their housing conditions affecting their family's health or safety.
- 40% have experienced problems with pests, bugs, or wild animals.
- 23% have problems with mold or other environmental problems.
- 27% have problems with inadequate heating and cooling.

Rural communities face unique challenges regarding housing quality and affordability. Addressing these challenges creates a significant opportunity to improve the health of millions of residents who deserve to occupy safer and healthier housing. To learn more about the connections between housing and health in rural America and federal programs providing healthy housing support specifically to rural communities, visit "[Healthy Housing in Rural Communities](#)."

National Center for  
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