



Americans are suffering from a housing crisis — and their health is getting hit

By Aimee Picchi

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- Severe housing burdens are creating an economic pinch for many Americans, with 1 in 4 renters spending more than half their income on housing costs, a new report finds.
- Severe housing burdens are linked with poorer health.
- The problem is impacting rural areas as well as expensive cities.

The high cost of housing is a problem that's impacting every U.S. county, with 1 in 4 renters spending more than half their income on housing costs, according to the County Health Rankings database. Severe housing burdens are linked with poor health, the study found.

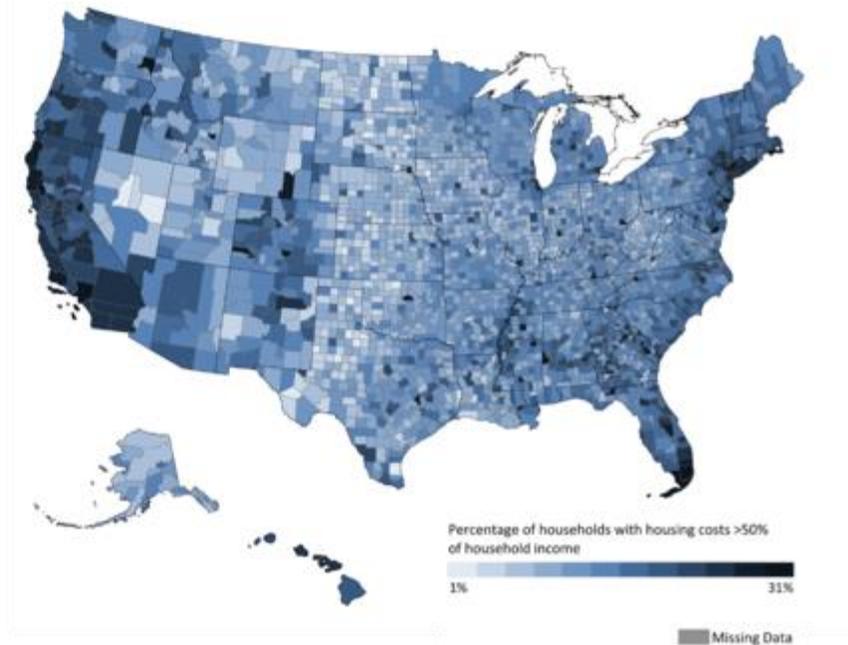
Counties where consumers struggle with severe housing costs — paying more than one-half of income toward housing — tend to have poorer health measures, such as more children living in poverty and higher rates of food insecurity. County Health Rankings, <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/> a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, examines county-level data on issues that influence health, such as jobs and access to health care.

In the post-recession economy, the problem has unfolded on two fronts, with higher housing costs harder to afford as many workers struggle with stagnant wages, the researchers noted. While the problem is touching every county in the U.S., some Americans are bearing more of the burden, including black workers, who typically earn lower incomes than white workers and therefore pay a larger share of their income toward housing.

"In every county, there are households that spend more than half of their income on housing," said Marjory Givens, County Health Rankings deputy director of data and science, University of Wisconsin, Population Health Institute. "When too much of the income goes to paying the rent or mortgage, people need to make these difficult tradeoffs, like paying for food and medication."

Severe Housing Cost Burden Among U.S. Counties, 2011-2015

countyhealthrankings.org



Despite the country's unemployment rate of less than 4 percent, she added, "I think there is a misnomer that the recession has passed and that we are on an upward trajectory with jobs and the unemployment rate, but many are left behind. The living wage is not something that is the reality in many communities."

While the severe housing cost burden is more prevalent in urban areas, rural counties are also suffering, the report found. About half of all rural counties experienced an increase in severe housing cost burdens since the housing crash of 2006-2010, the report noted.

Across counties, every 10 percent increase in the share of households facing severe housing cost burdens equates to an additional 84,000 people in fair or poor health, an additional 29,000 children living in poverty and 86,000 people who are food insecure, the report said.

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