


The definition of *rural* varies federally, which causes variations in population size, location, terminology, and data. A [study published](#) in October 2021 assessed the relative performance of eight federal rural definitions in identifying rural urban disparities and found that, depending on the definition of *rural*, the rural population varied from 6.9 million people to 75.5 million people across the United States. The U.S. [Census Bureau](#) defines any population, housing, or territory that is not in an urban area (50,000 or more people) as rural. According to the [Census Bureau in 2017](#), 60 million Americans (one in five) live in rural communities; and the [Southern region](#), which encompasses 16 states and the District of Columbia, is home to nearly half (47%) of rural residents. According to the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI), [54% of Indigenous people live in rural and small-town areas](#), while 68% either reside in sovereign governed areas or live near tribal homelands. Though the population density of rural communities is low, the population is diverse, and the communities have

unique strengths and challenges. Rural communities are 

BIPOC group in rural America, with Black persons coming in close second. Immigrants account for 37% of the growth in rural communities between 2000 and 2018.

Housing and poverty create challenges for marginalized rural communities. Rural America has a higher poverty rate than urban areas. Rural counties that experience persistent poverty are primarily located in the South, and there are also significant racial disparities in who experiences poverty. Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hispanic rural residents experience higher rates of poverty than White residents, with Black residents having rates as high as 31% in some rural communities.

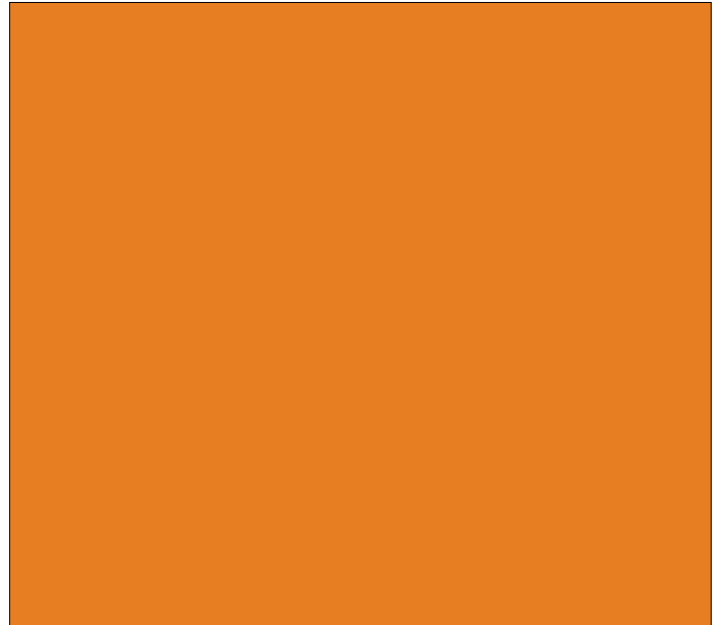
## What Are Some of the Housing Issues in Rural Communities?

Rural communities face unique challenges regarding housing quality and affordability. Sixty million American residents live in rural areas, occupying an estimated 29 million homes. Over 1.4 million of these homes are severely or moderately inadequate, and over 11.5 million rural homes have health and safety hazards, such as pests, peeling paint (which may contain lead hazards), water leaks, foundation problems, and mold. About 22% of rural adults worry about the conditions of their homes affecting their family's health or safety.

Indoor air quality is one housing condition that can affect the health of rural residents. Rural residents are more likely to use heating sources that contribute to poor indoor air quality, such as coal or wood-burning stoves, and kerosene heaters. Another issue affecting rural residents is water quality and access as rural households are disproportionately affected by poor or substandard water infrastructure. Private wells, which many residents of rural communities use, are not regulated by federal or, frequently, state laws and may have multiple health risks due to contaminated water.

For some rural residents, accessing and maintaining affordable housing may be a challenge. Rural communities not only experience substandard housing but also lack affordable housing; nearly half of rural renters are cost burdened, spending 30% to 50% of their income on housing expenses. Geographical isolation and low population density means that rural residents often have fewer housing choices, and services to address housing quality may be harder to access and hindered by higher supply and travel costs.

## Rural Population by Racial and Ethnic Group



## Why Does the Intersection of Race, Poverty, Housing, and Health Matter?

Housing is one of the foundational building blocks of health and well-being. Substandard, unsafe, and unaffordable housing can have a negative effect on physical and mental health, finances, school performance, and economic opportunity. Generally speaking, rural communities have an aging housing stock. Much of this housing is in need of repairs and renovations and, consistent with disparities observed nationally, BIPOC residents are more likely to live in substandard housing in rural America too.

Low-income communities, BIPOC residents, and immigrants are also disproportionately affected by housing insecurity. For example, 20% of Black households in rural America are extremely low-income, compared to only 6% of White households. Many low-income renters have high-cost burdens which increase the risk of housing instability, lower economic mobility, poor health outcomes, food insecurity, and lower academic achievement. Poverty can also exacerbate problems with substandard housing conditions as residents with lower incomes may have fewer options to address hazards in their current home, relocate to

a new home, or access medical care to help manage conditions caused or exacerbated by poor housing

