



# Affordable Housing in America’s Counties

## A survey report

In January 2003, the National Association of Counties conducted a survey of several of its members to determine the status of the affordable housing effort across the Nation. This survey, which consisted of 17 questions, was emailed or faxed to members of the Economic Development Steering Committee, the Large Urban County Caucus Steering Committee and the Joint Center for Sustainable Communities Steering Committee. Each of these committees work to develop policy and legislation for NACo.

Survey responses were received from 68 counties ranging in size from less than 10,000 population, up to 15 counties with populations that exceed 1 million. Responses were received from 21 states that represent nearly all regions of the country. Results of this survey will be used to influence NACo policies in the areas of funding for affordable housing.

### Survey Responses by Size

|   | <b>Population</b>        | <b>Total</b> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|
| A | <b>Below 10,000</b>      | <b>1</b>     |
| B | <b>10,000 - 24,999</b>   | <b>7</b>     |
| C | <b>25,000 - 49,999</b>   | <b>6</b>     |
| D | <b>50,000 - 99,999</b>   | <b>8</b>     |
| E | <b>100,000 - 249,999</b> | <b>9</b>     |
| F | <b>250,000 - 499,999</b> | <b>8</b>     |
| G | <b>500,000 - 999,999</b> | <b>14</b>    |
| H | <b>1,000,000+</b>        | <b>15</b>    |
|   | <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>68</b>    |

## Survey responses by State

| State          | Total     |
|----------------|-----------|
| Arizona        | 1         |
| California     | 7         |
| Colorado       | 1         |
| Florida        | 1         |
| Illinois       | 3         |
| Kansas         | 2         |
| Maryland       | 1         |
| Michigan       | 2         |
| Minnesota      | 4         |
| Missouri       | 3         |
| Montana        | 1         |
| Nevada         | 1         |
| New Jersey     | 1         |
| New York       | 2         |
| North Carolina | 26        |
| Ohio           | 2         |
| Oregon         | 1         |
| Pennsylvania   | 3         |
| Texas          | 2         |
| Utah           | 1         |
| Virginia       | 3         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>68</b> |

## What Kind of County are You

Counties were asked to characterize their counties. Thirty eight percent of responding counties characterized themselves as urban (26 counties) and 34 percent characterized themselves as rural. Eighteen counties (26 percent) said that they were suburban and only 1 county responded that it was exurban.

All counties that described themselves as urban had populations of 100,000 or above, while all of the counties that described themselves as suburban had populations of 50,000 and above. All counties describing themselves as rural had populations of less than 250,000.

## Types of Housing

Counties were asked about the types of existing housing that is currently available to residents. All responding counties report having single family housing while 93 percent report having multifamily housing. Ninety seven percent say that they have rental

housing but only 71 percent report having supportive housing. Mobile homes are available in 97 percent of the responding counties and manufactured housing is available in 90 percent of the counties. All counties above 1 million report having multifamily, single family and rental housing. Only 36 percent of counties with populations below 100,000 report having supportive housing but 87 percent of counties above 100,000 report having these types of housing available.

## **Number of Housing Units**



Twenty four counties or 35 percent report having less than 50,000 housing units. All of these units had populations of less than 250,000. Only counties with populations of more than 250,000 report having more than 100,000 households. Only six percent of responding counties report having 1 million housing units or more and, as expected, all were above 1 million in population.

## **Median Age of Housing**

The next question asked counties to estimate the median age of the housing in their counties. Forty nine percent report that the housing available is between 25 and 50 years old. Only 4 percent report that the housing is between 5 and 10 years old and no counties report a median age of less than 5 years. Only four percent of counties report a median above 50 years and 35 report between 10 and 25 years is the median age. All of the counties reporting a median age of between 5 and 10 years are below 250,000 in population indicating that they may be newly suburbanized counties.

## **Rental Costs**

How much does it cost to rent housing in counties across the nation? According to the survey responses the median rent in 31 percent of the counties is between \$600 and \$750 a month. However, 24 percent have a median between \$500 and \$600 a month and 24 percent have a median of less than \$500 a month. Only 6 percent of responding counties report median rents at between \$1000, to \$1500 a month. No counties report medians that exceed \$1500 a month. Only one county with a population above 500,000 reports median rents below \$500 a month, while only 2 counties in the 25,000 to 50,000 population range report median rents of \$750 to \$1000 a month. All counties with medians above \$1000 a month have a population above 250,000.

## **Homeownership Rates**

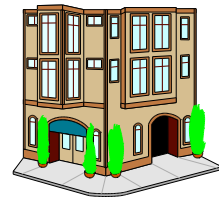
Rates of homeownership vary widely among the counties, with some 6 percent reporting only 20 to 30 percent ownership rates, but 34 percent reporting ownership rates of between 60 and 70 percent, which is in line with the national rate. Twenty four percent of responding counties, all with populations above 25,000, report ownership rates in excess of 70 percent. Twenty two percent of counties in all population ranges report ownership rates of between 50 and 60 percent.

## **Median Cost of Housing**

The median cost of homes continues to rise, but according to this survey, 34 percent of counties report a median cost of between \$100,000 and 150,000, while 26 percent report a cost of up to \$100,000. Only 4 percent of responding counties, all with populations above 500,000 report median housing costs of \$300,000 or more, while 6 percent of counties in the same population group report a median cost of between \$250,000 and 300,000. Twenty two percent of the counties all above 25,000 in population, report median costs of between \$150,000 and 200,000.

## **Amount of Available Rental Housing**

The amount of rental housing varies greatly, with the largest percentage at between 20 and 30 percent reported by 40 percent of the counties. Twenty six percent of counties report available rental housing at 30 to 40 percent, with only one county reports the local percentage of rental housing at between 60 and 70 percent. No counties report a larger percentage.



## **Vacancy Rates**

The current vacancy rate in the aforementioned rental property is low in most counties with 82 percent reporting a vacancy rate of less than 10 percent. Nine percent of counties, all with populations of less than 100,000, have a vacancy rate of less than 2 percent. Only 2 percent of counties report a vacancy rate of more than 20 percent.

## **Section 8 Usage**

Counties were asked if they could provide a percentage that reflects the usage of Section 8 vouchers by eligible recipients in the county. Only 47 of the responding 68 counties provided this data. Twenty eight percent of those responding report a usage rate in excess of 70 percent, and 45 percent report usage at less than 20 percent.

## **Obstacles to Section 8 Usage**

The reason reported by the largest percentage of counties for not using Section 8 vouchers was the lack of vacant units (reported by 37 counties.) The stigma of Section 8 use was reported by 33 counties and 27 counties report that homeowners are opting out of the program. Gentrification was reported only by 9 respondents.

## **Community Development Block Grant Funds**

Eighty five percent of responding counties, including all counties with populations above 500,000, report using Community Development Block Grant funds for housing. More than 75 percent report using them for sewer projects and 63 percent report using them for infrastructure development. Sixty percent have used CDBG funds for revitalization and 69 percent have used them for other moderate and low income projects. On 7 percent of counties report not receiving these funds, none of which are above 250,000 population.

## **HOME Funds**

Twenty five percent of the responding counties, all below 250,000 population report that they do not receive HOME funds. Of those that receive these funds, 46 percent have used them for down payment assistance programs, 35 percent have used them for closing costs, 18 percent used them for rental assistance and 57 percent have used them for construction. All counties with more than 1 million population report using HOME funds for construction. Forty six percent use these funds for acquisition and 22 percent use them for other eligible purposes.

## **Describe Your County**

Seventy five percent of responding counties work regionally on growth and planning issues and 66 provide emergency shelter for the homeless and 59 percent provide transitional housing for the homeless. Sixty tow percent have zoning ordinances that regulate housing construction and 56 percent report having land available for housing development. Only 37 percent report having affordable housing near public transit and 41 percent say the county has existing buildings that can be rehabbed in to housing units. On the other hand, only 7 percent of counties sponsor an employer assistance homeownership program and only 1 county says it has predatory lending ordinances.

## **Shortage of Affordable Housing**



Of the counties that report a shortage of affordable housing, 81 percent say that the shortage is caused by a lack of housing supply, while only 28 percent say the shortage is caused by land use decisions and only 26 percent it is caused by zoning or regulatory barriers. Twelve percent report that there is no shortage of affordable housing.

## **Federal Resources**

Of the 61 counties that responded to this question, more than 93 percent say that the federal resources are insufficient to meet the affordable housing needs in their counties. Only 11 percent say they receive sufficient funds to meet their needs.

## **What can NACo Do to Help?**

Counties were asked to rank the top three things that NACo could do to help counties with the affordable housing issues. There was a tie for number one with 26 percent of the vote between conducting workshop sessions at conferences and references and resources on the website. References and resources on the website was also selected as the top choice for rank number 2, followed by workshop sessions at the conferences. Articles in County News received the top vote for rank number 3, followed by special training at conferences and manuals.



## National Association of Counties

### Affordable Housing Survey

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| County _____                                       | State _____           |
| Name of Person completing survey _____ Title _____ |                       |
| Phone _____  | Fax _____ Email _____ |

This survey is being conducted by the National Association of Counties in order to determine what issues face counties in their efforts to provide affordable housing. Go to <http://www.naco.org/surveys/affordhousing/index.cfm> for an electronic version of the survey that can be completed on the Internet. The results of this survey will be used to prepare a report that will be presented at the Legislative Conference in February. The report will also be available on the NACo web page.

1. How would you characterize your county?

- Urban\_38%\_(1)
- Suburban\_26%\_(2)
- Exurban\_1%\_(3)
- Rural\_34%\_(4)

2. What kinds of housing stock do you currently have in your county? (*Check all that apply*)

- Single Family \_\_100%\_(5)
- Multifamily\_\_93%\_(6)
- Rental\_\_97%\_(7)
- Manufactured Housing\_\_88%\_(8)
- Mobile Homes\_\_97%\_(9)
- Supportive Housing (includes support services) \_\_71%\_(10)
- Other\_\_\_\_\_12%\_(11)

3. What is the total number of housing units in the current housing stock in your county?

- Up to 50,000\_\_35%\_(12)

- 50,000 to 100,000 \_\_\_ 9% \_ (13)
- 100,000 to 250,000 \_\_\_ 16% \_ (14)
- 250,000 to 500,000 \_\_\_ 22% \_ (15)
- 500,000 to 750,000 \_\_\_ 6% \_ (16)
- 750,000 to 1 million \_\_\_ 4% \_ (17)
- More than 1 Million \_\_\_ 6% \_ (18)

4. What is the median age of the housing units in your county?

- Less than 5 years \_\_\_ 0% \_ (19)
- 5 to 10 years \_\_\_ 4% \_ (20)
- 10 to 25 years \_\_\_ 35% \_ (21)
- 25 to 50 years \_\_\_ 49% \_ (22)
- More than 50 years \_\_\_ 4% \_ (23)

5. What is the median rental cost for housing in your county?

- Up to \$500 per month \_\_\_ 21% \_ (24)
- \$500 to \$600 per month \_\_\_ 24% \_ (25)
- \$600 to \$750 per month \_\_\_ 31% \_ (26)
- \$750 to \$1,000 per month \_\_\_ 13% \_ (27)
- \$1,000 to \$1,500 per month \_\_\_ 6% \_ (28)
- More than \$1,500 per month \_\_\_ 0% \_ (29)

6. What is the homeownership (owner occupied) rate in your county?

- Up to 20% \_\_\_ 0% \_ (30)
- 20 to 30% \_\_\_ 6% \_ (31)
- 30 to 40% \_\_\_ 3% \_ (32)
- 40 to 50% \_\_\_ 7% \_ (33)
- 50 to 60% \_\_\_ 22% \_ (34)
- 60 to 70% \_\_\_ 34% \_ (35)
- More than 70% \_\_\_ 24% \_ (36)

7. What is the median cost of a single-family house in your county?

- Up to \$100,000 \_\_\_ 26% \_ (38)
- \$100,000 to \$150,000 \_\_\_ 34% \_ (39)
- \$150,000 to \$200,000 \_\_\_ 22% \_ (40)
- \$250,000 to \$300,000 \_\_\_ 4% \_ (41)
- \$250,000 to \$300,000 \_\_\_ 6% \_ (42)
- More than \$300,000 \_\_\_ 4% \_ (43)

8. What percentage of housing in your county is rental housing?

- Up to 20% \_\_\_ 12% \_ (44)
- 20 to 30% \_\_\_ 40% \_ (45)
- 30 to 40% \_\_\_ 26% \_ (46)
- 40 to 50% \_\_\_ 16% \_ (47)
- 50 to 60% \_\_\_ 1% \_ (48)
- 60 to 70% \_\_\_ 1% \_ (49)
- More than 70% \_\_\_ 0% \_ (50)

9. What is the current vacancy rate for habitable rental property in your county?
- Less than 2% 9% (51)
  - 2 to 5% 44% (52)
  - 5 to 10% 32% (53)
  - 10 to 20% 8% (54)
  - 20 to 30% 1% (55)
  - More than 30% 1% (56)

10. What percentage of eligible Section 8 recipients in your county used vouchers to pay for housing during the last calendar year? *(based on 47 responses)*
- Up to 20% 45% (57)
  - 20 to 30% 4% (58)
  - 30 to 40% 1% (59)
  - 40 to 50% 4% (60)
  - 50 to 60% 6% (61)
  - 60 to 70% 11% (62)
  - More than 70% 21% (63)

11. Which of the following are obstacles to providing Section 8 housing in your county? *(Check any that apply)*
- Gentrification 13% (64)
  - Lack of interest by new homeowners 25% (65)
  - Stigma of Section 8 39% (66)
  - Owners opting out of program 40% (67)
  - Lack of vacant units 54% (68)

12. Has your county received Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG) since 1997? *(Check all that apply)*
- Yes, used funds to create or rehabilitate housing units 85% (69)
  - Yes, used funds for water and/or sewer projects 75% (70)
  - Yes, used funds for infrastructure improvements 63% (71)
  - Yes, used funds for revitalization activities 60% (72)
  - Yes, used funds for some other low or moderate income projects 69% (73)
  - No 7% (74)

13. Does your county receive HOME Investment Partnership (HOME) funds? *(Check all that apply)*
- Yes, uses funds for downpayment assistance 46% (75)
  - Yes, uses funds for closing cost assistance 35% (76)
  - Yes, uses funds for tenant based rental assistance 18% (77)
  - Yes, uses funds for new construction 57% (78)
  - Yes, uses funds for rehab of existing units 63% (79)
  - Yes, uses funds for acquisition of housing units 46% (80)

Yes, uses funds for other purposes 22% (81)  
No 25% (82)

14. Which of the following statements are true about your county? (*Check all that apply*)
- County has a growth management plan or ordinance 43% (83)
  - County has a regulatory environment that encourages rehab and renovation of existing buildings for housing 31% (84)
  - County works regionally on growth/planning issues 76% (85)
  - County has affordable housing near public transit 37% (86)
  - County ordinances target revitalization and development in distressed areas 19% (87)
  - County has land available for housing development 57% (88)
  - County has existing buildings that can be rehabbed into housing units 42% (89)
  - County has zoning ordinances that regulate housing construction 63% (90)
  - County has predatory lending ordinances 1% (91)
  - County has inclusionary zoning ordinances 12% (92)
  - County administers Section 8 housing assistance 42% (93)
  - County has programs that target senior housing needs 55% (94)
  - County has programs that provide emergency shelter for the homeless 67% (95)
  - County has programs that provide transitional housing for the homeless 60% (96)
  - County has programs that provide permanent housing for the homeless 36% (97)
  - County uses McKinney Act funds to assist the homeless 48% (98)
  - County has affordable housing trust fund for housing for low- income families 22% (99)
  - County sponsors an employer assistance homeownership program 7% (100)

15. Is there a shortage of affordable housing in your county? (*Check any that apply*)
- Yes, because of zoning or regulatory barriers 26% (101)
  - Yes, because of land use decisions 28% (102)
  - Lack of housing supply 81% (103)
  - No 12% (104)

16. In your opinion, are the federal resources available to your county sufficient to meet its affordable housing needs?
- Yes 10% (105)
  - No 79% (106)

17. Which of the following types of assistance can NACo provide that will be the most useful to your county? (Rate the top three)
- Workshop sessions at conferences 1 (107)
  - Special Training at conferences      (108)
  - NACo Task Force      (109)
  - Satellite Broadcasts      (110)
  - Manuals      (111)

References and Resources on Website \_\_2\_\_ (112)  
Articles in County News \_\_3\_\_ (113)  
Separate workshop sessions \_\_\_\_ (114)  
Issue Briefs \_\_\_\_ (115)  
Special Publications \_\_\_\_ (116)

**If you have any examples of successful programs that address affordable housing issues in your county, we would like to hear about them. Please send written information to [cmatthew@naco.org](mailto:cmatthew@naco.org).**

### **Survey Responses Due by February 12, 2003**

**Thank you for your assistance with this survey. Please fax it back to 202-737-0480 if you do not complete on the Internet. If you have any questions, please contact Cassandra Matthews at 202-942 4204 or Jacqueline Byers at 202-942-4285.**