

Zoning policies that boost affordable housing: Good for the heart?

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Inclusionary zoning policies that increase the supply of affordable housing may be good for the heart. So says a first-of-a-kind study published today by researchers at the George Washington University.

The study notes that such zoning programs were associated with lower rates of heart disease.

"Many cities around the country are facing a severe shortage of [affordable housing](#)," Antwan Jones, lead author of the study and an associate professor of sociology at GW, said. "Our study suggests that inclusionary zoning programs can help not just boost the supply of safe, affordable [housing](#), but may also reduce the risk of [heart disease](#)."

Jones and his colleagues relied on data from the [500 Cities Project](#), as well as zoning and demographic information, to find out if there were links at the municipal level between so-called inclusionary zoning policies and coronary heart disease.

More than 880 cities and counties across 25 states have adopted inclusionary zoning policies or programs that give developers incentives (like a tax break, exemptions from selected regulations and other financial inducements) in return for setting aside a share of new housing units for low- to moderate-income families.

The study found that jurisdictions with inclusionary zoning policies had fewer residents with [high blood pressure](#) and higher cholesterol compared to communities without these programs. People living in cities with such zoning policies also were less likely to be taking medication to lower their blood pressure and less likely to have already developed [coronary heart disease](#), which kills more than 365,000 people in the United States each year.

The observational study demonstrates that inclusionary zoning policies are associated with better markers of cardiovascular health and lower rates of heart disease. Jones adds that the links persisted even after the team controlled for factors linked to heart disease including poverty, [health insurance](#) and smoking rates.

"Stable, affordable housing in healthy communities can reduce stress and increase access to fresh produce, parks, jobs, safe streets and other amenities that help people stay healthy," Gregory Squires, a co-author of the paper and professor of sociology and public [policy](#) at GW, said.

Mandatory inclusionary zoning programs in which developers were required to prioritize rentals or set aside a larger share of affordable housing units had the biggest impact on markers of heart health, Squires added.

More research needs to be done to learn more about the links between inclusionary zoning and cardiovascular health, the authors said. However, the GW researchers say that this study suggests that inclusionary zoning programs can address some of the complex health challenges faced by struggling families in cities across the U.S.

The study, "Ecological Associations between Inclusionary Zoning Policies and Cardiovascular Disease: Risk Prevalence: An Observational Study," was published September 8, 2021 in the peer-reviewed journal *Circulation*.

More information: Ecological Associations between Inclusionary Zoning Policies and Cardiovascular Disease: Risk Prevalence: An Observational Study, *Circulation* (2021).

Provided by George Washington University

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