

# The Health Benefits of Rent Control

**A policy brief for public health practitioners**

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Health in  
Partnership



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# Introduction

## Housing instability is a public health emergency

A stable, affordable, quality home is a basic human need and a bedrock of health. Whether one rents or owns, a home should provide shelter, dignity, and allow us to be a part of a community's social, political and economic fabric. Yet, more people are unhoused than ever before, and one million renters received eviction notices last year.<sup>1-3</sup> Half of all renter households, including those residing in formerly lower-cost rural areas, pay unaffordable rents, or more than a third of their income.<sup>4</sup> That is equivalent to every household in DC, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina struggling with rent each month. This isn't just a housing problem; it's an urgent public health emergency. As part of a broader effort to make housing a right for all people, rent control is a key tool to help slow rent growth, keep households and communities stable and powerful, and in doing so, protect health.

"I had to choose whether to pay the rent or take [my child] to a specialist. ... It was really sad to see my child wake up, trying to breathe; it pained my heart not to have the resources to address this," Alma, a Colorado tenant, told Health in Partnership research staff. With rent control, she said, "we would feel safe."<sup>5</sup>

## How to use this resource

Though widely supported by voters across the political spectrum, the movement for rent control faces stiff real estate industry opposition. The partnership of the public health field could help win passage of this important policy, and by doing so, improve health.<sup>6-15</sup> This paper briefly presents the evidence concerning rent control and health and discusses the roles that public health practitioners and organizations can play in advancing rent control. We hope that it provides a helpful starting point for the public health field to support rent control and allows housing justice advocates to bring a health perspective to their work.

This report highlights and directly draws from the work of HIP's Sukhdip Purewal Boparai and other co-authors of a report produced by PolicyLink, Popular Democracy in Action, and Right to the City: [\*Our Homes, Our Future: Building the Power to Win Rent Control for Stable Communities\*](#), July 22, 2025.<sup>16</sup>



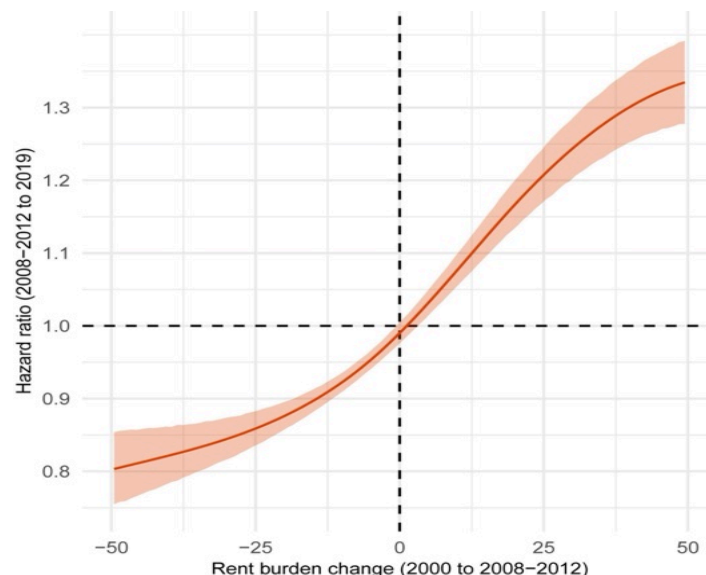
# Rent Control and Health

Modern rent control policies, also called rent stabilization, create a schedule of predictable rent changes —not a strict ceiling of maximum rents — while ensuring landlords a fair return. Rent control is often paired with just cause eviction policies, which limit evictions to certain “just” or defensible causes. Rent control is intended to slow rent growth in the homes it covers and help people remain in those homes for longer periods — and the research is clear that it does so.<sup>17–27,27–30</sup> Affordability and stability are both linked to positive health outcomes.

## Housing affordability improves health

**Reduced financial strain:** Low-income families that can comfortably afford their housing are able to spend four times more on healthcare and 50 percent more on food than their severely cost-burdened peers.<sup>31–42</sup> In contrast, households paying unaffordable rents sacrifice these and other basic needs to pay rent and face deleterious health effects like hypertension, arthritis, increased use of sick days, maternal stress and depression, poor mental and behavioral health in children, and poor self-rated health.<sup>30–32,32–4</sup> Research has also associated a 10 percentage point increase in rent burden (rent going from 30% to 40% of one’s income, for example) with an 8 percent higher risk of death.<sup>37</sup>

**Fig 1. Hazard ratio for all mortality associated with changes in rent burden**



Source: Graetz N, Gershenson C, Porter SR, Sandler DH, Lemmerman E, Desmond M. [The impacts of rent burden and eviction on mortality in the United States, 2000–2019](#). Soc Sci Med. 2024;340:116398. Adjusted hazard ratio for all-cause mortality from 2008–2012 to 2019 associated with changes in rent burden from 2000 to 2008–2012

## Housing stability improves health

**Improved household stability:** There is a wealth of evidence showing that stable housing is a foundation of good health.<sup>43,44</sup> By contrast, being forced to move from one's home is linked to nutritional deficiency, low birth weight, and other health challenges for children, and can prove fatal for seniors and those with a disability or chronic illness.<sup>37,45-53</sup> Evictions, which are often caused by unaffordable rents,<sup>54</sup> are associated with high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, increased emergency room visits, preterm birth, low birth weights, and behavioral and academic issues for children.<sup>55-64</sup> One study found that eviction judgements (a final court decision) were associated with a 40% increase in mortality.<sup>37</sup>

**Reduced homelessness:** Stable rents help reduce homelessness and its negative health outcomes. The Department of Housing and Urban Development found that rent increases were associated with increased homelessness (median \$100 rent increases corresponded to a 9% increase in homelessness),<sup>65</sup> and other studies have reported similar results. Homelessness catastrophically erodes health and increases mortality.<sup>66-68</sup> One study found a ten times higher all-cause mortality rate among unsheltered adults than the general population.<sup>69</sup> These health impacts are exacerbated by the upsurge in criminalization of unhoused people and by encampment sweeps, which push unhoused people into increasingly desperate situations.<sup>70</sup>

**Stronger, more cohesive communities:** Rent control keeps communities stable, which fosters community cohesion, increasing communities' ability to collectively address problems, build political power, and help each other during emergencies.<sup>71-78</sup> Rising rents can fracture communities and force residents to move away from the resources and relationships that keep them healthy, including schools, jobs, medical care, and social and political networks.<sup>71,73,79-82</sup> By setting limits on rent increases, rent control discourages corporate investors from buying more affordable homes and dramatically raising rents, which could otherwise increase housing costs and evictions.<sup>83</sup>

## Rent control improves health by addressing health inequities

**Increased health equity and tenant power:** Rent control is an important tool for promoting health equity because it disproportionately benefits groups who have been harmed by the continued legacy of racism and other injustices, such as Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, low-income households, families with children, women, people with disabilities, and immigrant families.<sup>4,37,84-86,86-93</sup> Rent control can also help remedy the power imbalance between landlords and tenants — especially those facing discrimination — and allow tenants to assert their individual and collective rights.<sup>5,71,94-96</sup>

# Addressing Opposition to Rent Control

The most consistent and well-funded opposition to rent control comes from real estate industry lobbyists, whose business models rely on extracting ever-higher rents. These groups frame rent control as a threat to housing supply, but their evidence is often anecdotal or selective, and their interest is in protecting profit margins, not affordability or health. Some economists echo industry talking points, drawing on oversimplified supply-and-demand theory to argue that rent control decreases housing production, raises rents in uncontrolled units, and discourages maintenance.<sup>17,97,98,95</sup> These arguments treat housing purely as a commodity, rather than a basic human need and a determinant of health. Many studies are biased, misused, and outdated, and rely heavily on simplified models that don't capture actual market dynamics, such as concentrated landlord power, speculative investment, and algorithmic rent-setting.<sup>95,98,99</sup> As economist Mark Paul eloquently writes in [Economists are Rethinking Rent Control](#), some of these oversimplified perspectives are changing as our understanding of markets changes and new evidence comes in.<sup>98</sup>

**Housing markets are not delivering affordability:** The evidence — and many economists — says that existing markets are not yielding homes people can afford. We have less of a housing shortage and more of a mismatch between the high-cost housing being produced and the actual income of US households.<sup>100–102</sup> Part of this mismatch is due to landlord market power to set rents,<sup>98</sup> which has become more concentrated in recent years as corporate landlords have taken ownership of almost half of rental units in the country.<sup>83</sup> This market power has manifested most clearly in the widespread use of algorithmic pricing software to inflate rents, which the Justice Department has argued amounts to “systematic coordination of rental housing prices — undermining competition and fairness for consumers in the process”.<sup>103–105</sup> Government intervention is needed to correct these market failures and provide non-market alternatives like [social housing](#).

**Often-cited oppositional studies are misinterpreted, biased, and out of date:** Rent control critics often cite high-profile research to justify their opposition, especially Diamond et al.'s series of papers on San Francisco<sup>97,106–108</sup>, or Kholodilin's more recent (2024) international literature review. Yet Diamond et al.'s 2017 paper actually identifies a net benefit of rent control of several billion dollars and notes additional unquantified benefits that “presumably were also quite large”, although this calculation was omitted in their later 2019 paper.<sup>97,107</sup> Diamond et al.'s research is often held up as an example of rent control driving down housing supply. Yet their findings are actually more nuanced — supply reductions come primarily from landlords, especially corporate landlords, exploiting loopholes like condo conversions, tenants in common, and *renovictions* (where landlords use renovations to evict otherwise protected tenants) to exempt homes from rent control.<sup>97,108</sup> The authors point to this as evidence against rent control itself, rather than the simpler conclusion that these loopholes can and

should be closed. Kholodilin's literature review has also received significant attention as an authoritative source, yet its applicability to the US context is questionable. For instance, Kholodilin's analysis of the impacts of rent control on housing supply and construction includes 12 US-based articles, but only two that are less than 25 years old (rent control policies have changed a lot in that time) show a negative impact on supply. One of these does not actually make a statistical claim that rent control limits supply and the other was commissioned by the California Apartment Association — a powerful trade association that has spent over \$200 million since 2017 on lobbying and contributions to defeat rent control and advance landlords' interests.<sup>109</sup>

**Rent control doesn't decrease housing production, and many studies show rent control has little or positive impacts on the affordability of homes that aren't covered:** Many empirical studies have shown no negative impacts of rent control on construction,<sup>72,23,27,110–116</sup> and others have found that repeals of rent control policies did not lead to new construction or lower rents.<sup>21,117,118</sup> This is because rent stabilization does not limit initial rental income for new construction, and it still allows landlords to make a fair rate of return and developers to finance new development.<sup>113,114</sup> However, as per Diamond, et al.'s findings, policymakers should work to eliminate condominium conversion, renoviction, and other loopholes that allow buildings or households to be removed from rent protections. And while shorter exemption periods for new construction are more helpful for protecting tenants, jurisdictions can consider real estate pro-formas and financial calculations to set exemption periods at a level that will support new development.<sup>119</sup>

Nearly all studies agree that rent control keeps covered units more affordable and stable. Findings for non-regulated units vary, although it's worth noting that Kholodilin's review finds nearly twice the average percentage of rent savings (9.4% across studies) in controlled homes than rent increases related to rent-control in non-controlled homes (4.8% across studies).<sup>17</sup> Pastor, Carter, and Abood's literature review indicates that rent regulations generally do not increase costs in non-controlled homes, and in some cases can keep them more affordable.<sup>72</sup>

**Rent control laws should be designed, implemented, and enforced — along with complementary policies — to keep housing safe and well-maintained:** Many studies have found that landlords do choose to make fewer repairs to rent-controlled units.<sup>17</sup> Some others have found the opposite,<sup>120</sup> potentially because rent control can give tenants more safety to request repairs without retaliation.<sup>71</sup> When considering rent control, jurisdictions should pass or enforce complementary policies like proactive code enforcement and rental escrow programs and should tie allowed rent increases to compliance with habitability standards.<sup>17,72,115,121,122</sup> East Palo Alto's rent control ordinance, for instance, requires landlords to complete repairs ordered by the city before increasing rents.<sup>123</sup> Strong tenant-centered oversight of policy implementation and enforcement is also essential to monitor outcomes and identify unintended harms or loopholes landlords exploit.

# Pursuing Comprehensive Action

Rent control is not a standalone solution — but without the immediate relief and support for tenants' power it provides, other tools have little room to work. Comprehensive action is needed to ensure affordable, quality, and stable homes for all, including long-term efforts to bring permanently affordable, community-controlled, non-market housing to scale. The Five Ps framework, developed by San Mateo County Health System, refined by the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, and adapted by HIP below, is a helpful tool for understanding the range of actions needed: <sup>124,45,125</sup>

- **Production:** Build homes that working-class and Black, Indigenous, and other residents of color can afford, prioritizing healthy, green, permanently affordable, community-controlled housing.
- **Protection:** Prevent eviction and foreclosure, cost increases, discrimination, unhealthy housing, housing instability and homelessness, and the displacement of working-class communities and Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.
- **Preservation:** Keep existing homes habitable and affordable, keep communities intact, and ensure residents can return after renovations, redevelopment, or disasters.
- **Power:** Support the power of those most affected by housing injustices, such as working-class communities and Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, to determine their futures.
- **Place:** Ensure homes are near opportunity and away from health risks. Target resources to disinvested communities and undo exclusionary policies in more resourced places.

## Ending state bans on locally adopted housing policies

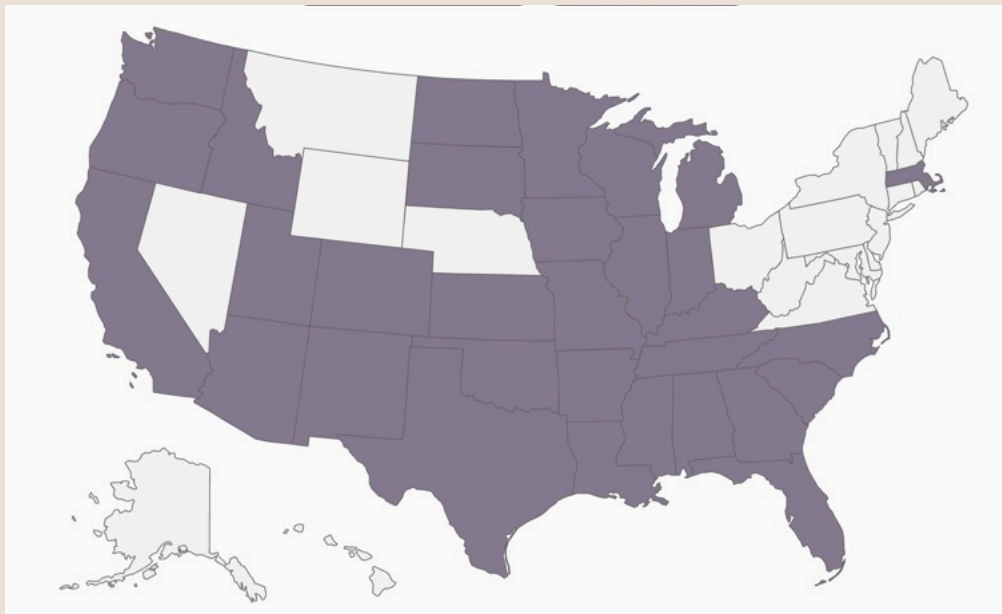
In public health, we've seen this playbook before. Preemption — when a higher level of government restricts the authority of cities or counties on a specific issue — has been used for decades to block local solutions that protect health and advance equity.<sup>126</sup> Industry-backed legislators have wielded it to stop paid sick leave ordinances, limit local firearm regulations, and overturn anti-discrimination protections.<sup>127–129</sup> The tobacco industry perfected this tactic in the 1980s, pouring resources into state preemption laws to dismantle and prevent stronger local smoke-free protections. Public health advocates have been battling those laws ever since.<sup>130,131</sup>

The real estate industry is using the same strategy. Since the 1980s, corporations and conservative politicians have worked with the American Legislative Exchange Council and other formations to push state legislatures into banning rent control altogether. Today, 34 states have some form of rent control preemption.<sup>16,132–134</sup> As a result, most states prevent communities from adopting one of the most effective tools we have to stabilize housing, prevent displacement, and protect health.

Just as lifting preemption was necessary to pass strong smoke-free laws, lifting state bans on rent control is essential to give communities the power to respond to their own housing and health crises.

For a broader discussion of preemption and rent control, see [\*Our Homes, Our Future: Building the Power to Win Rent Control for Stable Communities\*](#) (pages 81-86).<sup>16</sup>

**Fig 2. States with some form of rent control preemption, as of 2020**



Source: Local Solutions Support Center “Rent Control Preemption Map”, 2020. Note: See [Our Homes. Our Future: Building the Power to Win Rent Control for Stable Communities](#) and [Temple University’s State Preemption Laws](#) for changes to state laws since 2020 and statute language. Many states have partial preemption or preemption only in certain localities.



# Public Health's Critical Role

Surging rents and an upsurge in tenant organizing have brought the push for rent control to an ever-increasing number of places, including a coordinated national campaign by the [Right to the City Alliance](#), a national formation of 90+ community-based organizations. Yet housing justice movements still face steep, well-funded opposition. They will be far stronger with the credibility, data, and trusted relationships of the public health field working towards housing as a core determinant of health. The [10 Essential Public Health Services](#) offer a useful lens for understanding how the field can advance rent control:<sup>135</sup>

## 1. Policy Development Functions:

Framing housing as a health issue is one of the most persuasive ways to promote rent control and other housing justice policies.<sup>136–138</sup> Public health organizations and practitioners can:

- Advocate for rent control in op-eds, reports, and public testimony, or, when direct advocacy is not feasible, use these tools to frame the issue without naming specific policy solutions
- Work as “insider” allies within government, helping to develop, assess, and refine policy<sup>139</sup>
- Resource and partner with community power-building organizations, using tools like HIP’s [Five Dimensions of Inside-Outside Strategy Guide](#) to bridge organizers and officials

*Example:* [Leading public health organizations directly supported](#) the Tenant Union Federation’s (TUF) rent cap campaign that contributed to the Biden administration [adopting rent caps](#) for some federally supported housing.

## 2. Assessment Functions:

Public health organizations, including government agencies, can collect and analyze data to monitor housing instability and affordability, their effects on health and health equity, and the root causes of these issues.

*Example:* The [Alameda County Public Health Department](#) collected data, partnered with organizers Causa Justa/Just Cause on two reports, and communicated with decision makers about the health burdens and root causes of housing instability. Oakland subsequently passed enhanced rent control and just cause eviction ordinances.<sup>140</sup>

### 3. Assurance Functions:

Public health organizations can train staff to screen for housing insecurity and connect the people they serve to legal assistance and community organizers. They can also evaluate rent control policies from a health perspective, helping to build the evidence base.

*Example:* [Health organizations and practitioners have been helpful in the movement for legal counsel](#) for renters facing eviction. Public health researchers' testimony helped pass Connecticut's right to counsel policy, and some of the same researchers are evaluating the law's contribution to health improvements.<sup>141,142</sup> The health field could play a similar role for rent control.

## Ready to take action?

Public health has stepped into other high-stakes policy fights — from tobacco control to environmental justice — and won. Housing stability deserves the same level of urgency and leadership, and without it, other public health interventions will struggle to take root.

For more information or to connect with the movement for rent control, contact Will Dominie at Health in Partnership: [Will@healthinpartnership.org](mailto:Will@healthinpartnership.org).

*Thank you to our additional reviewers Angela Acker, MPH, CPH, Narrative Infrastructure Team Lead, University Wisconsin Population Health Institute and Lael Grigg, MPA, Senior Evidence Analyst, University Wisconsin Population Health Institute for supporting this brief.*

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