The affordability of safety: COVID and Affordable Housing in Gwinnett County

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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many of the underlying inequalities and injustices in America over the past two years. Key among those is the unavailability and unaffordability of housing. The amount of people paying rent paycheck to paycheck became apparent as soon as a drop in unemployment occurred, and national eviction moratoriums had to be put in place to prevent mass eviction and homelessness.

Less clear has been the impact of housing on COVID-19. When households must be larger and more dense to afford rent, quarantining and social distancing becomes more difficult. When workers are unable to lose income without becoming unable to pay rent, they may have to make tough decisions after a potential exposure or showing symptoms. If more affordable housing does help slow the spread of disease, this should inform policy makers and add one more social benefit to the creation of more affordable living situations.

This paper examines the impacts of affordable housing availability on the spread of COVID-19, focusing specifically on Gwinnett County in Georgia as it compares to the rest of the Atlanta metro area. While there is insufficient evidence to establish a relationship between low income housing units and COVID spread, there is indication that larger household size may increase exposure rates. This could warrant further study into the relation of policy, household size and disease spread.