

# Affording America - Cost of Living Analysis

Title	Intro	Executive Summary	Metro vs...	Family Size & Living Expenses..	Expense Breakdown	Cost Category Share of Expenses	Regional Affordability
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## Affording America: A Cost-of-Living Analysis for U.S. Families

*Exploring Affordability Gaps Across Counties and Regions*

Presented By: Kayla Grosso

Data Source: [US Cost of Living Dataset ..](#)



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## Introduction

### *Why Affordability Is a Growing Crisis for American Families*



#### Background

The cost of living has surged across the U.S., especially in urban areas, making it harder for families to meet basic needs. Wages have not kept pace with rising expenses in many regions, putting pressure on household budgets.

Families of four – a common baseline in public policy – face particularly sharp cost increases in childcare, healthcare, and transportation.

#### Purpose

This analysis aims to uncover key cost drivers and demographic or geographic patterns that affect affordability. Insights will help explain where and why certain counties are more financially sustainable for average families.

Problem Statement: How can we identify the most and least affordable U.S. counties for families of four in 2024 by comparing total living costs (including housing, food, childcare, transportation, etc.) to median household income?



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## Executive Summary

### *Key Findings on U.S. Cost-of-Living Affordability*



### Key Insights

Metro counties remain significantly more expensive and variable than non-metro areas, placing a disproportionate burden on family budgets.

Larger families face sharply rising costs, especially in **childcare, healthcare, and food** — with transportation, healthcare, and housing together consuming over **50%** of total living expenses.

Over **57%** of U.S. counties are unaffordable for a family of four, where living expenses exceed local median income.

Affordability ratio analysis reveals deeper insight than binary labels. States like **Rhode Island, North Dakota, and New Hampshire** emerge as top performers, with income often exceeding expenses.

While many counties in the South and Midwest are still relatively affordable, some high-population states like Texas and Georgia fall behind when average ratios are considered.

Metro counties, despite higher incomes, frequently experience **income-expense imbalance**, confirming that urban areas face systemic affordability challenges not offset by wage gains.

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## Metro Counties Have Higher and More Variable Living Costs

### Findings

Metro counties have higher median total costs.

Metro areas show greater variability with more extreme outliers.

Non-metro counties generally have lower and more stable living costs.

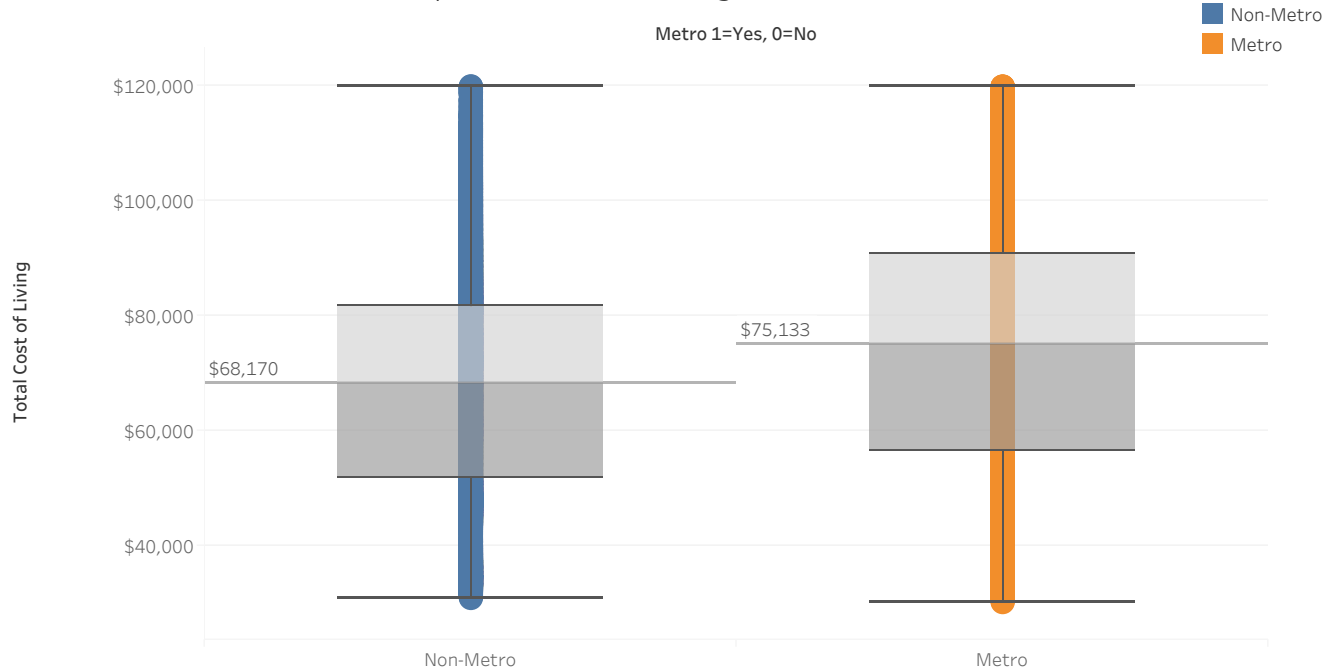
### Key Insights

Living in a metro area typically comes with a higher financial burden.

Urban cost variability may reflect differences in housing markets, services, and transportation needs.

These disparities highlight how geography plays a si..

Metro vs. Non-Metro Areas: Impact on Cost of Living



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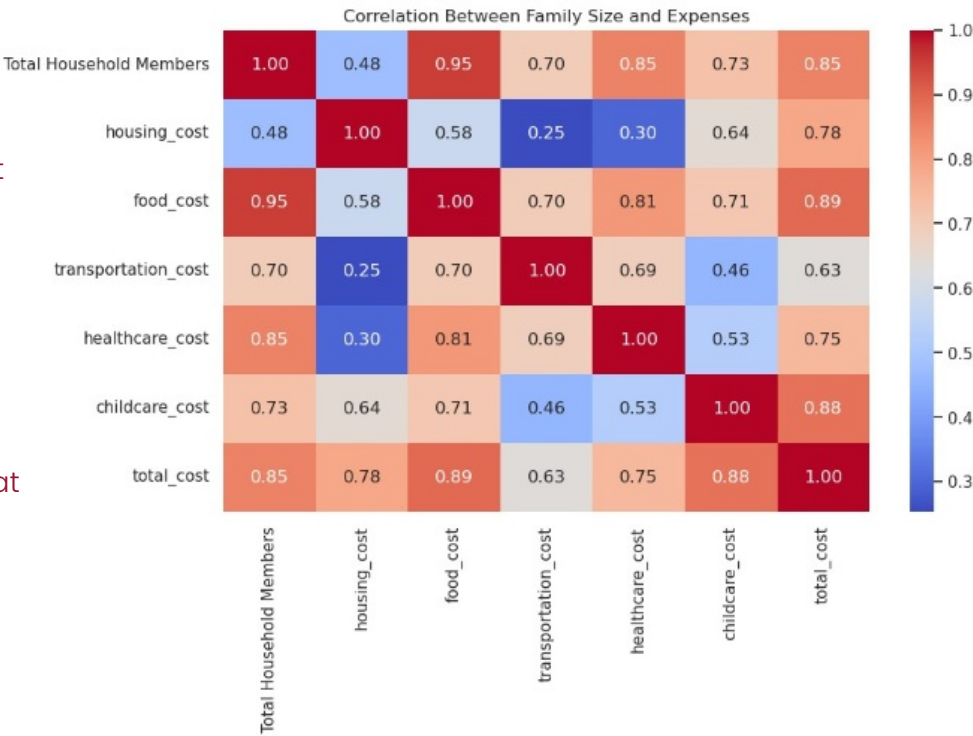
## Larger Families Face Higher Costs Especially for Food, Healthcare, and Childcare

### Findings

Food and healthcare costs have the strongest positive correlation with household size.

Childcare and transportation also increase substantially.

Housing costs increase at a slower rate.



### Key Insights

As household size grows, expenses rise dramatically - especially in essential categories.

Housing appears less sensitive to household size, likely due to shared fixed costs.

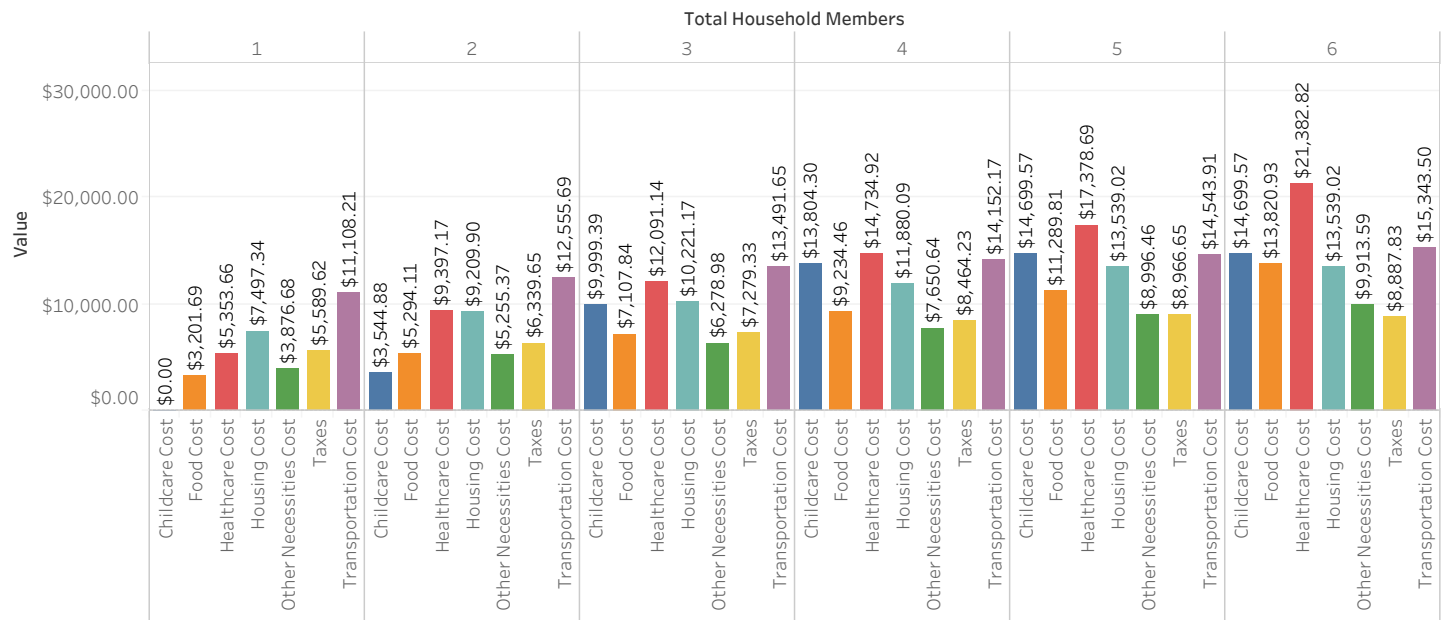
Larger families face disproportionately higher financial strain in areas like food, healthcare, and childcare.

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## Healthcare, Childcare, and Food Drive Sharp Cost Increases for Larger Households

Average Expenses by Household Size



### Findings

Average expenses rise with household size across all categories.

Healthcare and childcare see the steepest increases.

### Key Insights

Essential services like healthcare and childcare create the most pressure on larger families.

The data suggests these are key targets for affordability interventions.

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## Transportation, Healthcare, and Housing Make Up Over Half of Household Costs

### Findings

Transportation (~20%) is the largest share of total household costs.

Healthcare (~18%) and housing (~16%) follow closely.

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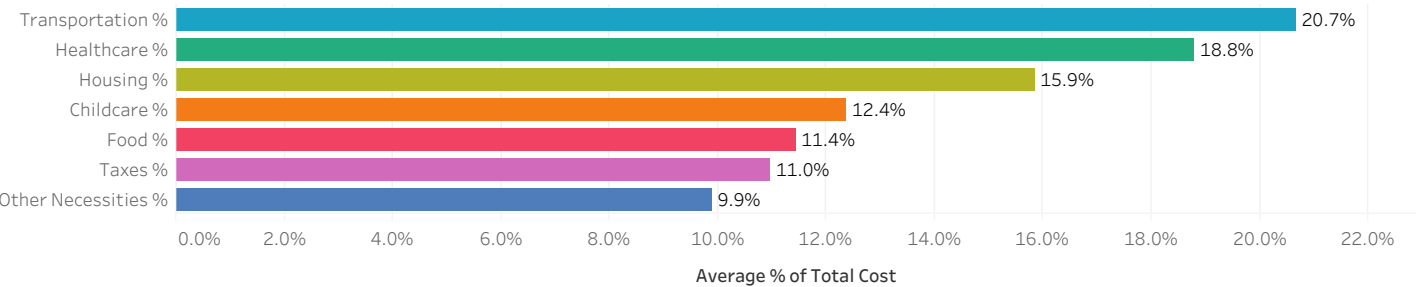
### Key Insights

These three categories account for over half of average household expenses.

Fixed and essential costs like commuting, medical care, and housing make up the bulk of financial pressure.

Households have limited flexibility to cut costs in these areas, which heightens affordability co..

Avg % Share of Total Cost



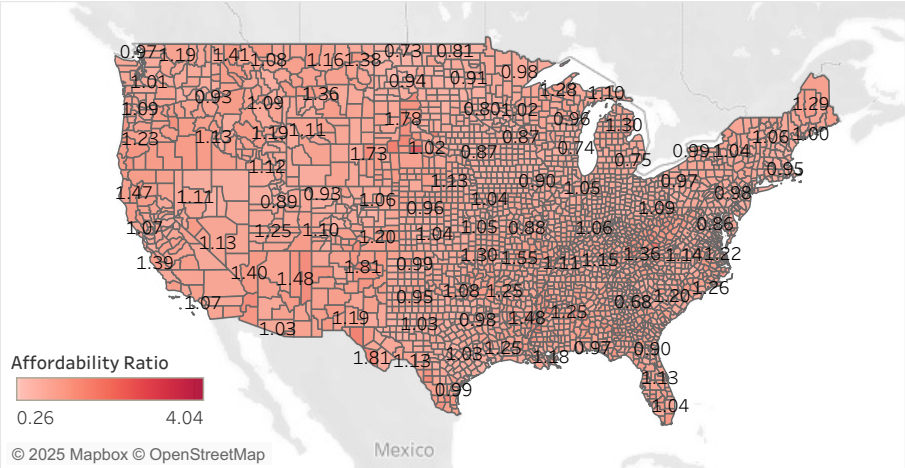


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## Most U.S. Counties Spend More Than They Earn on Living Costs

Regional Affordability: Cost of Living vs. Median Family Income



### Findings

The median affordability ratio is 1.07 — meaning most families spend more than they earn.

25% of counties exceed 130% cost burden.

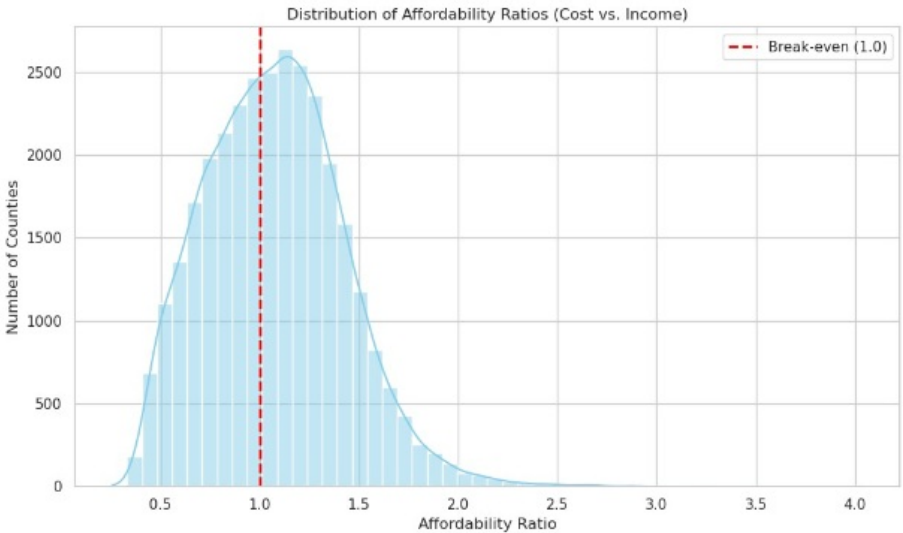
Some counties surpass 400%, sig..

### Key Insights

The average U.S. family cannot cover essential costs on current income in over half of all counties.

The affordability crisis is widespread, not limited to high-cost urban areas.

Policy responses need to address income growth and cost containment in tandem.





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## 57% of Counties Are Unaffordable for a Typical Family of Four

### Findings

The majority of counties are classified as unaffordable.

Over 1,700 U.S. counties fail to meet the basic threshold of cost < income.

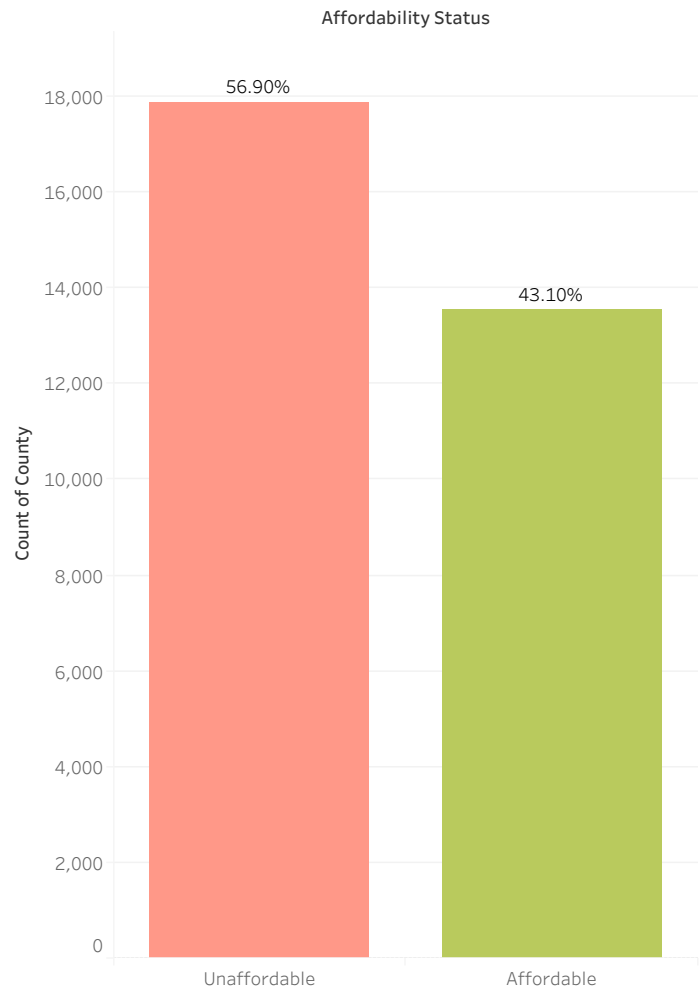
### Key Insights

The affordability gap is not theoretical — it affects the majority of families across the country.

Binary threshold analysis offers a clear view into where families are most financially at risk.

These figures support systemic interventio..

Affordability Threshold: Family of Four



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## Top Affordable States Have the Lowest Average Cost-to-Income Ratios

### Findings

Rhode Island, North Dakota, and New Hampshire have the best affordability ratios.

These states offer cost conditions where income more consistently outpaces expenses.

Some states previously thought affordable (like TX and GA) no longer rank well when using ratio-based metrics.

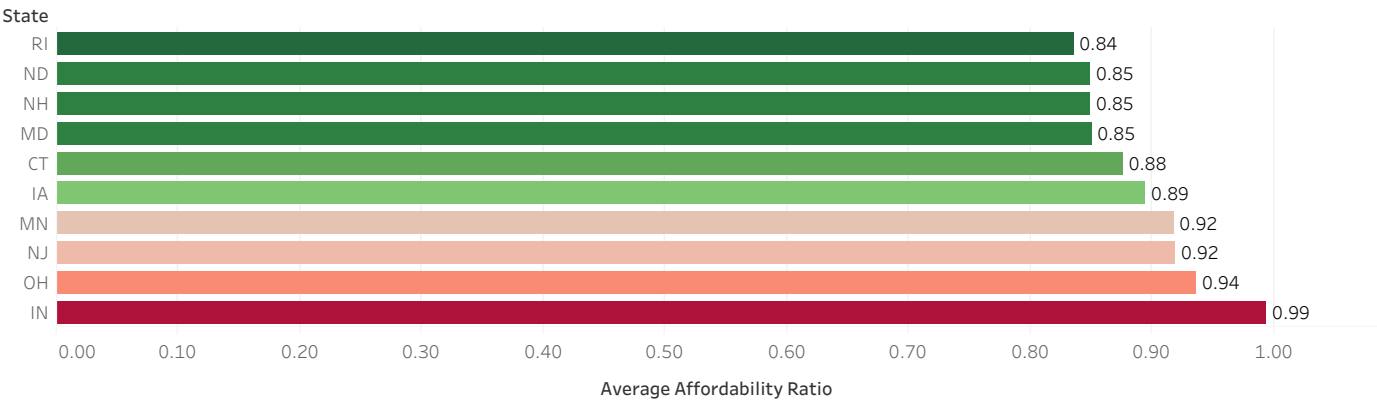
### Key Insights

Ratio-based analysis provides a more accurate measure of affordability than raw county counts.

Smaller and non-coastal states outperform on sustainable living metrics.

This shift challenges assumptions and reveals overlooked affordability champions.

## Top 10 States with the Most Affordable Cost of Living



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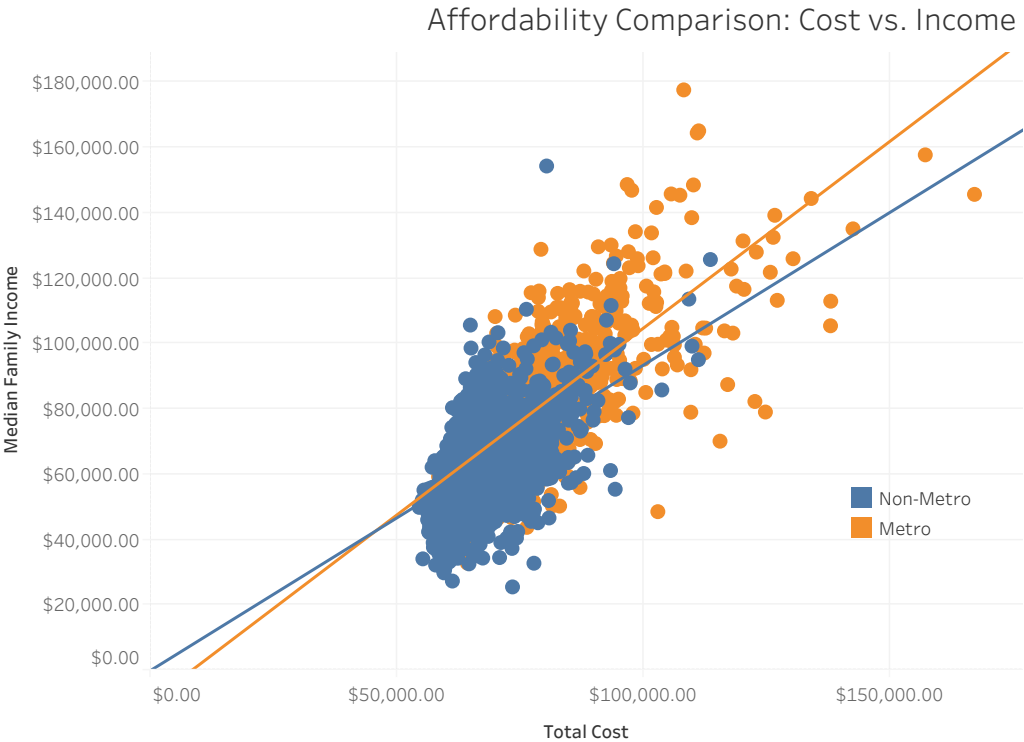
## Non-Metro Counties Show a More Balanced R..

### Findings

Metro counties have higher costs and income but often fall above the affordability line.

Non-metro counties show a stronger, more linear relationship between cost and income.

Metro areas have more variability and outliers.



### Key Insights

Metro counties may offer higher incomes, but not enough to consistently offset higher living costs.

Non-metro areas, while earning less, maintain better cost-income alignment.

Structural affordability is more stable in rural areas, suggesting where resources and support might ..