

Early-Life Health Impacts of Affordable Housing in Higher-Income Areas: Evidence from Massachusetts Chapter 40B*

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Abstract

Desegregation-focused housing policies aimed at reducing disparities in neighborhood conditions may also reduce disparities in health outcomes. This paper examines the effects of one such policy on the health of pregnant people and their newborn infants. Specifically, I study the impact of Massachusetts Chapter 40B, a major civil rights-era housing policy that increases the supply of affordable ownership and rental housing in higher-income areas to facilitate moves for lower-income households to those areas. Using a difference-in-differences approach that compares the health outcomes of birthing parents who move to 40B housing to those of demographically-matched birthing parents who move from similar origin neighborhoods, I find that moving to 40B housing produces meaningful improvements in birth outcomes and some gains in birthing parents' health only among 40B renters. I find no evidence of health effects among 40B owners. Among renters, improvements in birth outcomes are largest among Black beneficiaries, and are driven largely by people moving from neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty, more Black residents, and higher male incarceration rates. These results suggest that desegregation-focused housing policies like 40B could help improve racial and economic disparities in early-life health among certain populations.

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