

Essential But Excluded: Housing Insecurity and Health Impacts in Steamboat Springs.

Understanding the intersection of rising housing costs, public health, and workforce sustainability in a medically underserved mountain town.

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Steamboat Springs, Colorado is experiencing a severe housing affordability crisis that is disproportionately affecting essential workers. Rising home prices and rental costs have far outpaced wage growth, leaving many workers—including teachers and healthcare professionals—unable to afford stable housing. This economic pressure is contributing to increased rates of poor mental health days and threatening workforce retention and public service stability.

Analyzing data and trends from the United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, and County Health Rankings and Roadmaps show a sharp rise in housing costs and psychological distress between 2015 and 2023. While the data were drawn from multiple sources and not linked at the individual level, they collectively suggest that housing insecurity may be contributing to declines in both mental and physical well-being among residents. Routt County, where Steamboat Springs is located, is federally designated as a medically underserved area, further highlighting the strain on essential services.

Future research, including a retrospective cohort study, is recommended to explore causal pathways between housing affordability, mental and physical health outcomes, and essential worker attrition.