

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

Why Housing Quality Matters

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

Supporting the health of all Asheville residents.

In Asheville, where housing costs continue to rise and more residents are living in apartments, duplexes, townhomes, and other forms of middle housing, the quality of our homes and neighborhoods plays a critical role in community health and well-being. Housing is not just shelter—it shapes physical health, mental health, and long-term stability.

As the city considers policies that support middle housing as a way to expand housing options and improve affordability, it is critical that housing quality remains central to the conversation. Strong building standards, consistent enforcement of safety codes, and investments in healthy housing—such as lead protections, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and programs that support safe, well-maintained homes—can help ensure that both new and existing housing supports the health of all Asheville residents.

At the same time, Asheville is facing a housing affordability challenge that directly affects health and housing stability. The median home sale price in Asheville is roughly \$455,000–\$515,000, depending on the data source, well above

national averages. Rental costs are also high, with average monthly rents typically around \$1,400–\$1,600 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,750–\$1,800 for a two-bedroom unit.

When households spend a large share of their income on rent or mortgage payments, it becomes harder to afford basic necessities such as health-care, food, utilities, childcare, and home maintenance. These financial pressures increase stress and make it more difficult for families to remain housed long term. As a result, discussions around middle housing—such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and smaller units—are especially relevant in Asheville's housing policy debates around Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

An ADU is a secondary, self-contained living space located on the same lot as a primary home. ADUs can be detached, such as a small backyard cottage; attached, such as an addition to the main house; or converted from an existing space like a basement, attic, or garage. Each ADU includes its own living area, bathroom, and kitchen.

ADUs are often promoted as a middle-housing option that can increase housing supply within existing neighborhoods. However, their impacts depend heavily on where they are built, who benefits, and what protections are



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Red Angle Photography

in place.

Before discussing ADUs, it is important to understand the historical and ongoing experiences of Asheville's Black communities. Historically Black neighborhoods such as Shiloh, East End/Valley Street, and Southside were once vibrant centers of Black culture, businesses, churches, and community life dating back to the 19th century.

Mid-20th-century urban renewal projects devastated these neighborhoods, displacing thousands of Black residents and destroying homes and institutions.

In more recent decades, rising housing costs and redevelopment pressures have contributed to a significant decline in Asheville's Black population. Long-time residents are priced out and community networks are disrupted. This history shapes how new housing policies—including ADUs—are experienced today.



ADUs can provide smaller, more flexible living options.

Potential Negative Implications of ADUs in Historically Black Neighborhoods

While ADUs are often promoted as a tool to increase housing supply, their impacts are not neutral in neighborhoods already facing gentrification and

displacement pressures.

First, the addition of ADUs often occurs alongside broader market forces that raise property values. While rising values may benefit some homeowners, they can also lead to higher property taxes, making it harder for long-time residents—particularly Black homeowners with fewer financial resources due to historic discrimination—to remain in their homes.

Second, new development, including ADUs, can contribute to cultural and community displacement. Even without direct eviction, residents may experience a loss of cultural identity, neighborhood cohesion, and a sense of belonging as long-standing social networks and traditions are replaced.

Third, building an ADU typically requires access to capital, credit, and stable homeownership. As a result, ADU policies tend to benefit property owners rather than renters—many of whom are more vulnerable to displacement and were historically excluded from homeownership through redlining and discriminatory lending practices.

Finally, across the United States, exclusionary zoning practices were used to concentrate Black residents in certain neighborhoods while limiting housing options elsewhere. Allowing ADUs without equity safeguards can unintentionally reinforce these historic patterns by accelerating



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change in historically Black neighborhoods without protecting existing residents.

Why These Concerns Matter for Policy in Asheville

ADUs are not inherently harmful. When implemented thoughtfully, they can expand housing choices and provide smaller, more flexible living options. However, in neighborhoods with long histories of displacement and disinvestment, ADU policies must be paired with intentional safeguards to avoid repeating past harms.

Key policy considerations include pairing ADU policies with anti-displacement

strategies such as property tax relief, renter protections, and support for community land trusts; ensuring affordable housing strategies explicitly acknowledge Asheville's racial history and current disparities; and centering community leadership and engagement from residents of historically Black neighborhoods in decisions about where and how ADUs are encouraged.

A housing strategy that prioritizes quality, affordability, and equity can help ensure Asheville's growth supports long-time residents as well as newcomers—while fostering healthier, more stable communities for all.



Common Cold or Flu?

by Kelly White, MHE, MPH, ABIPA Health Education Program Manager

The holidays have come and gone and the year is off to a great start!

All of a sudden you are feeling sick and just about everyone else in your family is now feeling the same way. You do not want to go to an urgent care or emergency department due to the fear of having to sit for hours. Wouldn't you just like to know if it's a common cold or the flu that's taking you down?

The key to identifying whether it's the flu or a common cold can boil down to how bad you are feeling and how quickly your symptoms began. Since symptoms can feel the same, some of the tell-tell signs for the flu may include high fever, body aches, or fatigue. These tend to be the most common. It is always best to see your provider when, or if, things seem to worsen.

Handwashing and staying away from others are one of the best ways to prevent the flu from spreading. You should also be mindful of those in your home who may be considered high risk or have a weakened immune system and stay away from them. Seek out treatment if you are unable to contain your symptoms, some of us may need medication to lessen the severity!

Lastly, think about getting a flu shot. While people can get the flu anytime during the year, the actual flu season runs from October through March, with new cases showing up around the winter holiday season through February. Since the shot could take up to two weeks to "sink in," getting it before the season is your best protection!

Source: cdc.gov

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ABIPA promotes economic, social, and healthy parity achievement for African Americans and other underserved populations in Buncombe County through advocacy, education, research, and community partnerships.

