

Made the Rent Report - Major Findings: Financial and Non-Financial Impacts

1. Higher Costs Than the Region's Low-Cost Alternatives But With Tradeoffs

Napa Valley's rent-restricted, income-based Affordable Housing units are roughly 18% to 28% less than median market-rate units of the same size. This makes those units accessible to lower-wage workers who might otherwise be at risk of being priced out of the Valley's housing market.

However, for many, the monthly rent still leaves little room for savings. Nearly 90% of respondents said they "sometimes," "often," or "always" experience financial stress related to housing costs. Key findings include:

- Just under half of respondents reported that their rent "never left them with enough" or "sometimes not enough" for other basic household needs.
- 1 in 2 households skipped a bill to pay rent in the past year; 40% skipped meals or reduced grocery spending.
- 6 in 10 residents considered taking on a second job, relocating, or using credit to stay afloat.

This tracks with national findings that many residents in Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) funded housing units continue to experience some level of cost burden. Further, rents in LIHTC-funded units may be slightly higher than what is available in the region's unsubsidized, low-cost market, where older or lower quality units may go for lower rents on the market.

Still, many respondents noted that even when their Affordable Housing rent is slightly higher than previous housing (e.g., living in converted garages or substandard units), the improved quality and stability made the cost worthwhile. As one resident remarked: "We used to live in a garage, and now we live in an apartment." This tradeoff of slightly higher costs for significantly better living conditions was a recurring theme, underscoring that affordability cannot be evaluated on cost alone.

2. Proximity to Jobs and Reduced Commutes Are the Major Benefits

The report finds that proximity to employment provided by Affordable Housing is one of the highest benefits cited by residents and subsequently one of the strongest predictors of reduced financial and emotional stress, even when residents experience other forms of financial stress. This benefit alone stands out as the primary reason residents enjoy their current Affordable Housing unit. Among the residents surveyed:

- A vast majority (nearly 89%) of respondents indicated that their affordable home allowed them to either move closer to their job or avoid having to move farther away.

- Meanwhile, three in 4 respondents (75%) predicted they would be “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to have moved farther away from their job if they had not been accepted into their current home.
- 60% of those who moved closer to work reported experiencing less financial stress, with most reporting stress only “sometimes” or “never.”
- Conversely, nearly 90% of those who had to move farther from work reported constant financial stress.

This geographic stability allows families to reduce commute costs, retain local jobs, and preserve ties to school and childcare, all of which contribute to broader household stability and mitigates financial stress that may come from living farther from a place of employment.

3. Access to Amenities and Quality Housing

Living near schools, public transit, and other essential services, as well as the physical quality and space of a home, also correlated strongly with reduced household stress. These findings affirm the value of placing Affordable Housing in high-amenity areas where unsubsidized low-cost housing may be particularly susceptible to aging, low-quality, and conversion or demolition.

- The share of residents reporting constant financial stress dropped from 25% to just 5% when they gained proximity to key services.
- 80% of those who experienced improved quality or more space in their new unit reported lower stress.
- In contrast, 45% of those whose housing quality remained unchanged continued to feel stress frequently.
- As one respondent shared: “I am closer to the things and services we need, and obviously there are more resources for what is offered.”

In these areas, deed-restricted homes offer stability, quality, and regulatory oversight that maintain livability over time. Many units constructed or preserved under LIHTC are newer, professionally managed, and subject to inspection standards, offering dignity and livability that cannot be assumed in lower-cost, market-rate options.

4. Community Ties and Long-Term Stability

- Over 80% of residents reported that their Affordable Housing unit allowed them to stay near family or school.
- Residents indicated they would rather take on a second job (35%) or seek rental assistance (20%) than move away to reduce rent.
- Half of all respondents said they expect to save enough for a down payment within ten years, marking a faster savings timeline than typically seen for low-income households.