

A Housing Profile



As North Carolina assumes a larger role in formulating and implementing housing programs than in the past, policymakers need a central data bank of housing-related information on which to base decisions. Currently, state officials depend primarily on U.S. Census data, coordinated and reported in North Carolina by the Office of State Budget within the Governor's Office. The Census provides useful raw data but does not provide an analytical framework on which to base policy decisions.

For example, the Census does not define a "substandard" unit. It only reports on certain criteria, such as "lacking complete plumbing" (hot and cold piped water, a flush toilet, and a bathtub or shower), overcrowded (more than one person per room), lack of electricity, and lack of heat. With a variety of criteria to use in determining what is substandard, officials interpret the Census data without uniform guidelines. This can lead to different conclusions on which policy decisions are based.

Other sources of housing information also exist. These assist in coordination in some cases but further diffuse the data base in other instances. In 1981, the N.C. Department of Human Resources conducted a federally funded survey which had a housing component. Meanwhile, 11 of the 18 regional Councils of Governments in the state have developed analyses of the housing problems in their particular areas, using primarily Census data. At the local level, some cities and counties, as a requirement of receiving federal Community Development Block Grant funds, have prepared "housing assistance plans" based on data from house-to-house surveys. The N.C. Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development accumulate housing data through their program efforts (see articles on pages 2 and 16, respectively). Other information sources include the Attorney General's Office (consumer complaints) and the Department of Insurance (building code and mobile home regulations); see box on page 38.

Currently, no single state agency is coordinating these various efforts. Past reports on housing, including the state's three official housing "elements," found the absence of a comprehensive state data bank a barrier to a more aggressive state role in housing. The housing elements, produced

in 1968, 1972, and 1977, recommended that the state collect more housing-related information and provide it to a wide range of governmental units, agencies, and private-sector organizations and individuals that might benefit from such data. The Housing Finance Agency (HFA), in conjunction with the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has begun a comprehensive analysis of the newly-available 1980 Census results. This effort could provide a broader statewide understanding of various housing issues, if the next critically important step is put into place: Some coordinating mechanism is needed to focus on the lessons learned from this study effort and the ongoing information gathering done in other departments.

Until some state agency undertakes a larger data-gathering and analytical function, the Census data provides the major data base for an overview of the state's housing conditions. In addition to supplying raw data, the Census figures reveal important trends and provide a basis for comparative analysis. The sections below review the latest data regarding housing type, ownership patterns, household size, age and condition of housing stock, and distribution of substandard housing in North Carolina. The source for all tables is the U.S. Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Housing Type. A declining portion of North Carolinians are living in single-family structures. From 1970-1980, the portion of the state's housing stock in single-family units declined from 82 to 76 percent. In contrast, the portion of mobile homes and multifamily housing units increased. From 1960-1970, the portion of the housing stock that was mobile homes jumped from one to six percent; from 1970-1980, the figure climbed to almost ten percent. From 1970 to 1980, the portion of the total housing units in buildings with five or more units nearly doubled, from 4.3 to 7.6 percent (see Table 1).

Ownership Patterns. Home ownership increased slightly during the last decade, from 65 to 68 percent of the state's occupied units. Condominiums, a type of housing becoming more and more attractive to upper- and middle-income groups, accounted for less than one percent of the owner-occupied units in 1980. Black North Carolinians were less likely to own their home than were whites. Blacks, who make up 22 percent of the state's population, comprise 19 percent of the state's households and occupy only 14 percent

**Table 1. Number and Percent of Total Year-Round Housing Units
by Type of Structure for North Carolina, and Percent for the Nation, 1960-1980.**

Type of Structure	1980			1970			1960		
	North Carolina Number of Units	%	U.S. %	North Carolina Number of Units	%	U.S. %	North Carolina Number of Units	%	U.S. %
Single-family (one unit)	1,698,675	75.9	66.2	1,333,579	82.3	69.1	1,198,754	90.6	75.0
Duplexes (2-4 units)	152,124	6.8	11.2	117,552	7.3	13.3	71,453	5.4	13.0
Multifamily (5 units and over)	170,541	7.6	17.5	69,943	4.3	14.5	33,499	2.5	10.7
Mobile Homes	216,842	9.7	5.1	98,474	6.1	3.1	19,133	1.4	1.3
Total	2,238,182	100.0	100.0	1,619,548	100.0	100.0	1,322,839	100.0	100.0

Sources: 1960 Census of Housing, Volume 1, Part 6, Table 4.

1960 U.S. Summary, Table 11.

1970 Census of Housing, Volume 1, Part 35, Table 35 and Part 1, Table 22.

1980 Census of Population and Housing, "Provisional Estimates of Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics: North Carolina and United States," N.C. Office of State Budget and Management, July 1982.

of the owner-occupied units. Almost three of every four white households own their home while only one of every two black households owns a home (see Table 2).

Household Size. In North Carolina and throughout the country, households are getting smaller, a trend which has significant impact on the type of housing needed. From 1970-1980, the average North Carolina household declined from 3.24 to 2.78 persons, a 14 percent decrease. (The national household size in 1980 was 2.75.) During the 1970s, as the state's population increased by 16 percent, the number of households increased at more than twice that rate, from 1,509,564 to 2,043,291. The growing number of elderly and single-parent families account for much of this increase. By 1980, an astounding one of every five North Carolinians lived in one-person households, twice the percentage of 1970.

Age of Housing Stock. Houses in North Carolina are generally newer than those across the nation. Almost one-third of the state's year-round occupied housing stock is less than ten years old; only one-fourth of the nation's housing stock is that new. Over half of the state's occupied units were built since 1960. By 1980, only one of six

occupied housing units in the state was at least 40 years old (one out of four nationally). One in five rental units in the state was built before 1940 compared with one in seven owner-occupied dwellings.

Condition of Housing Stock. Using Census data to define the condition of housing stock, as explained at the beginning of this article, results in a variety of interpretations. One Census measure of substandard housing, for example, is the absence of complete plumbing inside the unit for the exclusive use of its occupants. This variable "alone is almost certain to result in an underestimate of the real problems," concluded the *North Carolina Housing Element* of 1972. In 1970, North Carolina ranked ninth nationally in the percent of its housing units lacking complete plumbing. In 1980, despite a decline in such units from 252,000 to 115,000, the state ranked seventh in percent of units lacking complete plumbing.

Another often-used measurement of substandard housing is overcrowding — more than one person per room to a housing unit. Combining the complete plumbing and overcrowding criteria, 8.7 percent of the total North Carolina housing stock was substandard in 1980. The number of units

Table 2. Occupied Housing Units, 1980, by Race and Ownership

	White Households		Black Households		Total Households*		
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	% White	% Black
Owner Households	1,182,390	72.8	199,828	51.0	1,397,425	84.6	14.3
Rental Households	442,288	27.2	192,174	49.0	645,866	68.5	29.8
Owner and Rental Households	1,624,678	100.0	392,002	100.0	2,043,291	79.5	19.2

* Totals include all households — white, black, American Indian, Asian, and other. Hence, the "% white" and "% black" do not add up to 100%.

Sources: 1980 Census of Population and Housing, "Provisional Estimates of Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics: North Carolina and United States," N.C. Office of State Budget and Management, July 1982.

Table 3. Condition of Year-Round Housing Units, Number and Percent for North Carolina, and Percent for the Nation, 1970 and 1980.

Type of Unit	1980			1970		
	North Carolina Number of Units	%	U.S. %	North Carolina Number of Units	%	U.S. %
Total Year-Round Units ^a	2,223,007	100.0	100.0	1,618,103	100.0	100.0
Lacking Plumbing	115,928	5.2	2.7	252,319	15.6	6.9
Overcrowded	91,854	4.1	4.2	153,718	9.5	7.7
Subtotal	207,782			406,037		
Overcrowded and Lacking Plumbing ^b	- 13,951			- 55,124		
Substandard	193,831	8.7	6.6	350,913	21.7	13.5

^aTotal Housing Units minus vacant seasonal and migratory housing.

^bSubtracting the Units which are both overcrowded and lacking complete plumbing from the subtotal avoids double counting.

Sources: 1970 Census of Housing, Vol. I, Part 35, Tables 2 and 3 and Part 1, Tables 3 and 4.

1980 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 1A, North Carolina and United States.

lacking plumbing and/or overcrowded dropped during the decade from 350,900 to 193,800 (see Table 3).

The N.C. Department of Human Resources, in its 1981 survey, found that 15 percent of the state's housing stock was still substandard. This survey defined a dwelling as substandard if it lacked at least two "amenities" such as a toilet and electricity, or if it had at least two structural problems such as a leaking roof or broken windows.

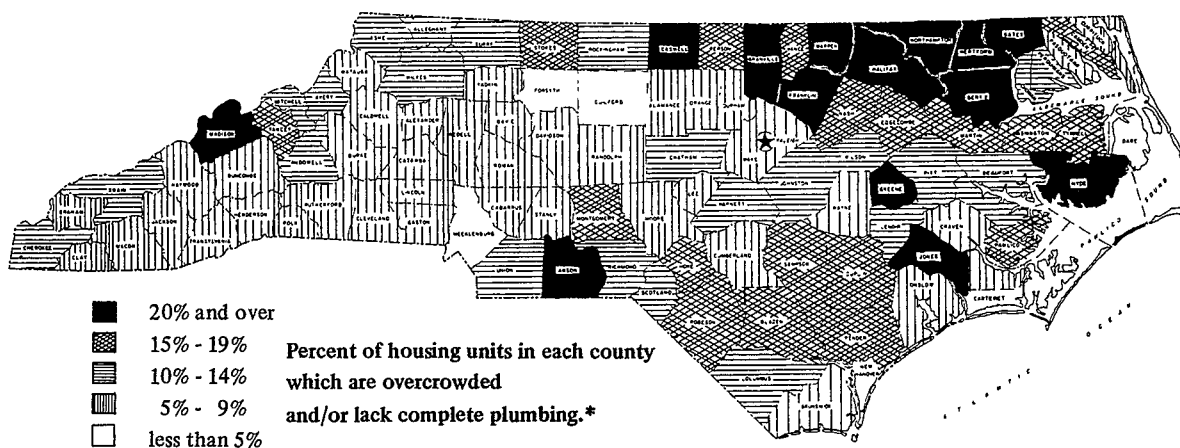
Distribution of Substandard Units. The Census data indicates that persons have different levels of substandard housing depending on where they live, whether they rent or own their units, and whether they are black or white.

- In 1980, more than 80 percent of the state's households lacking complete plumbing were in rural areas. In contrast, only 57 percent of the overcrowded households were in rural areas.

- The counties with the worst housing, based on the plumbing and overcrowding variables, were concentrated in the state's coastal plain region in 1980 (see map).

- In 1980, 21 percent of all non-white households occupied substandard housing (overcrowded and/or lacking complete plumbing).

- Rental housing is more likely to be substandard (13.4 percent) than owner-occupied housing (5.3 percent), based on 1980 plumbing and overcrowding data. □



*Percentages for each county derived as follows: (total of overcrowded units + units lacking complete plumbing) — units both overcrowded and lacking plumbing ÷ total year-round units. This procedure avoids double counting.

Source: North Carolina, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, County Summary Data, March 1982, N.C. State Data Center, Office of State Budget and Management.