Benton County HIA

Benton County, Oregon, was awarded an OPHD HIA capacity-building grant to research the health impacts and policy options associated with building permanent accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also called in-law suites.

After completing a literature review, five policy options were analyzed:

- No policy change.
- Restrict current rules.
- Allow dependent ADUs.
- Allow independent ADUs.
- Allow independent ADUs in urban growth boundary.

The health impacts of all five policy options were considered using 18 indicators selected from the Healthy Development Measurement Tool. The Benton County Health Department worked closely with the Benton County Community Development department to conduct the HIA.

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Based on the HIA’s results, the Benton County Health Department recommended allowing the construction of ADUs with some specific restrictions. The recommended restrictions are:

» An ADU resident must be the homeowner, a relative, or a caregiver.
» The units cannot be offered as rentals.
» Review the policy after adoption to identify any unpredicted impacts.
» Cap the number of annual permits allowed to limit potential negative impacts.

The HIA enabled the Benton County Health Department to comprehensively and objectively consider options and rationales for the ADU policy.

The department completed the HIA, which will inform the Benton County Board of Commissioners’ decision on ADU policy, in three months. The process of completing the HIA has greatly improved the relationships between health department staff and staff from county and city planning departments and served to reinvigorate the conversation about the ADU issue with both planners and the larger community.

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