
The Role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Solving the Housing Gap in the US for Low-Income Families

[Adedotun Ademowo](#)*

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Article

The Role of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Solving the Housing Gap in the US for Low-Income Families

Adedotun Ademowo

Bowie State University, College of Business, USA; peter.ademowo@yahoo.com

Abstract: The affordable housing crisis in the United States disproportionately affects low-income families, with millions facing severe housing cost burdens and limited access to adequate housing. This article explores the potential of generative artificial intelligence (AI) to address this housing gap by providing innovative, data-driven solutions that optimize housing development, design, and construction processes. By leveraging AI for predictive analysis, automated design, and construction optimization, stakeholders can significantly reduce costs, increase efficiency, and create sustainable housing that meets the needs of low-income populations. The article examines how AI can accurately predict future housing demand, generate efficient building designs, and streamline construction processes, while also addressing challenges such as equity, bias in AI models, and technical and financial barriers to implementation. Additionally, recommendations are provided for policymakers, developers, and community organizations to ensure that AI-driven housing solutions are deployed equitably and effectively. This paper concludes that while AI is not a standalone solution to the housing crisis, it has the potential to complement existing strategies and significantly improve access to affordable housing for low-income families across the U.S.

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI); generative artificial intelligence (AI); housing gap; low-income families; affordable housing

1. Introduction

The housing crisis in the United States has reached a critical point, particularly for low-income families, where affordable housing is increasingly out of reach. The demand for housing far exceeds the supply, driving up prices and leaving many families vulnerable to homelessness or being severely cost-burdened. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), the United States faces a shortage of over 7 million affordable and available rental homes for extremely low-income families. For every 100 low-income renters, there are only 37 affordable rental homes available, meaning millions are left without viable housing options (NLIHC, 2022).

Several factors contribute to this housing gap, including rising land and construction costs, restrictive zoning regulations, and economic disparities that limit low-income households' ability to afford market-rate housing. The situation is further exacerbated by stagnant wage growth, leaving many unable to meet the rising costs of homeownership or rental properties. The implications of this shortage are profound: increased rates of homelessness, overcrowded housing conditions, and displacement from urban areas due to gentrification and unaffordable living costs.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a potential tool that can be leveraged to address these challenges in innovative ways. Unlike traditional artificial intelligence, which is programmed to perform specific tasks, generative AI is capable of producing new data, simulating scenarios, and generating content that closely mimics real-world inputs (Goodfellow et al., 2014). This ability to generate and simulate opens new possibilities for addressing complex challenges in housing, including design optimization, predictive analytics, and the efficient use of materials and resources in construction.

In this paper, I explore how generative AI can be applied to mitigate the housing crisis in the U.S., particularly for low-income families. I will examine the potential of AI to enhance housing development through predictive analysis, design automation, and construction efficiency. Additionally, I will address the challenges and barriers that must be overcome to fully realize the benefits of generative AI in affordable housing, including equity concerns and the need for interdisciplinary collaboration.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of how generative AI can be a transformative tool in solving one of the most pressing social issues in the U.S. today: the lack of affordable housing for low-income populations. By leveraging AI's predictive capabilities, optimizing design processes, and improving resource allocation, we can develop housing solutions that are not only affordable but also sustainable and scalable. As we will explore, the potential of AI in this context goes beyond technological advancements—it represents a shift toward more data-driven, efficient, and inclusive housing policies and practices.

2. Understanding the Housing Gap

The affordable housing gap in the U.S. is a complex issue influenced by multiple economic, social, and regulatory factors. As the demand for affordable housing continues to outpace supply, the crisis has particularly affected low-income families, who are increasingly unable to find homes within their financial means. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University (JCHS), nearly one in four renters in the U.S. is considered severely cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 50% of their income on housing (JCHS, 2022). This burden not only limits disposable income for essentials such as food, healthcare, and education but also forces many families to live in substandard conditions or risk eviction.

Several interrelated factors contribute to the housing gap. Firstly, rising construction costs, driven by increased prices for building materials, labour shortages, and regulatory hurdles, have made it more expensive to build new homes. This is particularly true in high-demand urban areas, where land prices have skyrocketed, and zoning regulations often restrict high-density or affordable housing developments. The result is a market in which developers are incentivized to build luxury units that promise higher returns on investment, rather than affordable homes for low-income families.

Additionally, zoning laws in many cities impose restrictions that limit the development of affordable housing. These regulations, often referred to as "exclusionary zoning," include minimum lot sizes, height restrictions, and parking requirements that make it difficult or impossible to build affordable housing units. While these laws were originally designed to control urban growth and maintain property values, they have inadvertently contributed to the housing crisis by reducing the supply of affordable homes.

Another significant factor in the housing gap is wage stagnation. Over the past few decades, the cost of housing has risen at a much faster rate than wages, particularly for low- and middle-income earners. This widening gap between wages and housing costs has left many families unable to afford even modest rental units, pushing them into overcrowded housing or forcing them to relocate to areas far from their workplaces or schools.

The consequences of this housing gap are wide-ranging. For low-income families, the lack of affordable housing can lead to instability, poor health outcomes, and limited access to educational and economic opportunities. Homelessness rates have surged in many urban areas, and those who are housed often live in overcrowded or unsafe conditions. Moreover, the housing crisis disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including people of colour, immigrants, and individuals with disabilities, who are more likely to experience housing insecurity.

Addressing this complex issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy reform, financial investment, and innovative solutions. This is where generative AI can play a crucial role, offering new ways to analyse, predict, and optimize housing solutions in ways that traditional methods cannot achieve.

3. Generative AI: An Overview

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is a subset of AI that focuses on creating new data, designs, or content based on patterns and input data. Unlike traditional AI models that are typically programmed to analyse or predict based on existing data, generative AI can produce entirely new outputs. This capacity for innovation is particularly promising in fields like urban planning, architecture, and housing, where creative problem-solving is often necessary to address complex challenges.

At the core of generative AI are algorithms such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Variational Autoencoders (VAEs), which have been used extensively in areas like image generation, text synthesis, and even drug discovery (Goodfellow et al., 2014). These algorithms can learn from existing datasets and create new data that mimics or expands upon the original. For example, a GAN can be trained on a dataset of architectural designs to generate new housing models that are optimized for space, efficiency, and cost.

In the context of housing, generative AI can be employed in several key areas. One of the most promising applications is in predictive analysis. By analysing large datasets that include demographic information, housing trends, economic indicators, and geographic data, AI can predict where future housing demand will be highest. This allows developers and policymakers to focus resources on areas that are likely to experience the greatest shortages of affordable housing, ensuring that new developments are built where they are most needed.

Another critical application of generative AI is in design automation. Traditionally, architectural design is a time-consuming and expensive process, particularly for affordable housing projects that often face budget constraints. Generative AI can streamline this process by producing multiple design iterations in a fraction of the time it would take a human architect. These designs can be optimized for various factors such as space efficiency, natural lighting, and energy use, resulting in homes that are not only affordable but also environmentally sustainable and liveable.

Generative AI also has the potential to revolutionize construction methods. For instance, AI can be used to optimize material use and reduce waste during construction. Techniques such as 3D printing, guided by AI algorithms, are already being explored as cost-effective solutions for building affordable homes. These methods can significantly reduce construction costs, making it possible to build high-quality homes at a fraction of the cost of traditional methods.

Furthermore, generative AI can assist in the policy-making process by simulating the effects of different housing policies. For example, AI can model how changes to zoning laws, tax incentives, or rent control policies will impact housing affordability and availability. This allows policymakers to make data-driven decisions that are more likely to have a positive impact on housing outcomes.

While the potential applications of generative AI in housing are vast, there are also challenges to consider. Ensuring that have widened the gap between wages and housing costs. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, causing disruptions in housing markets and further straining low-income households. The economic fallout from the pandemic has left many families unable to afford rising rents, and many regions have seen significant increases in housing instability.

Traditional approaches to affordable housing development, such as government subsidies and public-private partnerships, while essential, have not been sufficient to close the gap. There is an urgent need for innovative solutions that can address the multifaceted challenges of the housing crisis, particularly for low-income populations.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a powerful tool that can help address these challenges. By leveraging large datasets and machine learning models, generative AI can simulate various development scenarios, optimize resource allocation, and provide new design solutions that reduce costs and increase efficiency. AI's ability to process vast amounts of data and generate insights makes it particularly useful in tackling complex problems like housing shortages, where numerous variables—such as geographic location, demographic trends, and economic factors—need to be considered simultaneously.

Generative AI's potential goes beyond traditional predictive models. It offers a unique capability: the ability to create novel solutions based on existing data. In the context of housing, this means AI can be used to generate innovative design solutions, optimize construction methods, and forecast future housing needs with greater accuracy than ever before. By automating time-consuming tasks such as zoning analysis and building design, AI can also significantly reduce the time and costs associated with housing development projects.

This paper aims to explore the role of generative AI in addressing the affordable housing gap for low-income families in the U.S. Specifically, it will examine how AI can be applied in predictive analysis, design automation, and construction optimization to reduce costs, increase the availability of affordable housing, and ensure that housing developments meet the needs of low-income populations. The paper will also consider the challenges and limitations of using AI in this context, including concerns about equity, bias in AI models, and the technical and financial barriers to implementation.

By the end of this paper, it will be evident that while generative AI is not a silver bullet for the housing crisis, it offers a powerful set of tools that can complement existing approaches to affordable housing development. If implemented thoughtfully, AI has the potential to transform the way housing is developed, making it more affordable and accessible to those who need it most. As we continue to grapple with the growing housing crisis, integrating AI into housing policy and development strategies could represent a significant step forward in closing the gap.

4. Applications of Generative AI in Housing

Generative AI has several promising applications in the housing sector, particularly in addressing the affordable housing gap for low-income families. By applying AI to different aspects of housing development—such as predictive analysis, design optimization, and construction methods—stakeholders can unlock new efficiencies, reduce costs, and create more sustainable and accessible housing solutions.

4.1. Predictive Analysis and Planning

One of the key challenges in affordable housing development is accurately predicting where and when housing will be needed. Generative AI can be used to analyse large datasets on demographics, income levels, geographic trends, and economic conditions to predict future housing demand with a high degree of accuracy. For example, AI models can analyse factors such as population growth, migration patterns, and job market trends to determine which areas are likely to see the greatest increase in demand for affordable housing in the next 5 to 10 years.

This predictive capability is invaluable for governments and developers as it allows them to proactively allocate resources and plan housing developments in areas where the need is greatest. Traditional methods of predicting housing demand often rely on historical data and linear projections, which may not fully account for complex, dynamic factors such as economic downturns, population shifts, or changing migration patterns. Generative AI, on the other hand, can integrate a wide range of variables, producing more nuanced and accurate predictions that adapt as conditions change.

For instance, AI models could predict how an economic recession might affect housing demand in certain regions or how urbanization trends will increase the need for affordable housing in growing cities. By doing so, policymakers and developers can better prioritize areas for affordable housing projects, ensuring that low-income families are not left behind in areas where housing demand is soaring.

Demographic Home Buying Trends

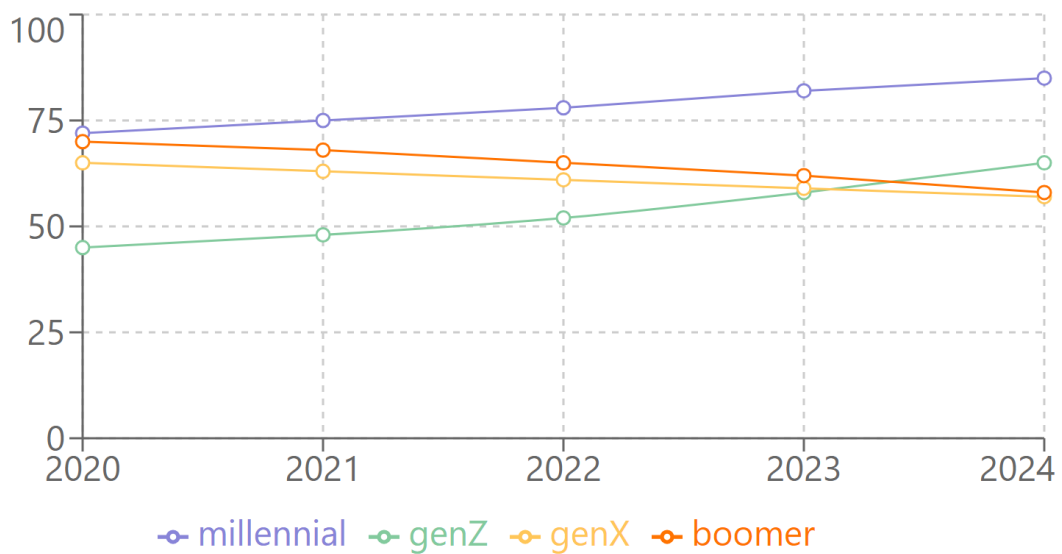


Figure 1. Demographic Home Buying trends.

Regional Housing Demand Forecast

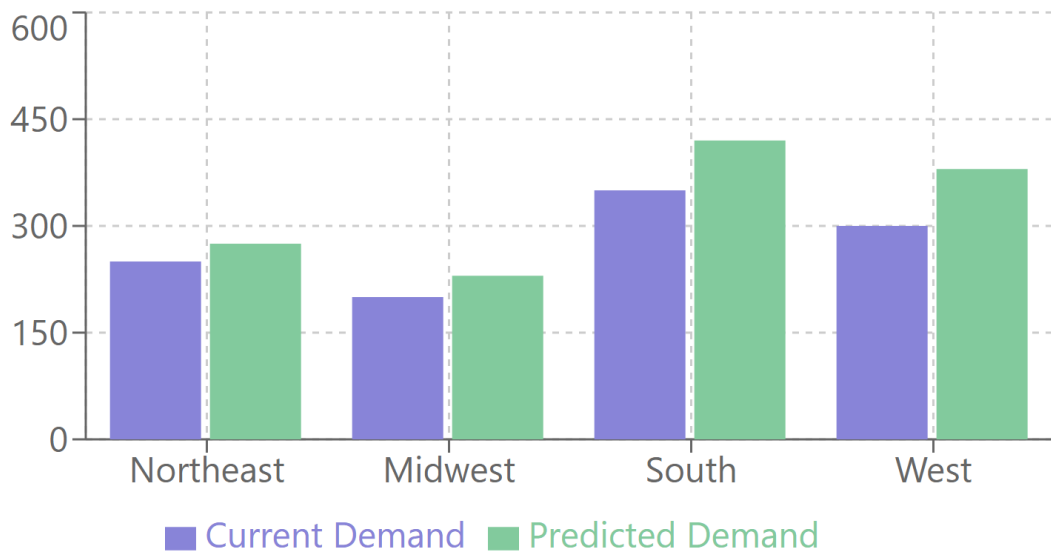


Figure 2. Regional Housing demand forecast.

Income Distribution of Home Buyers

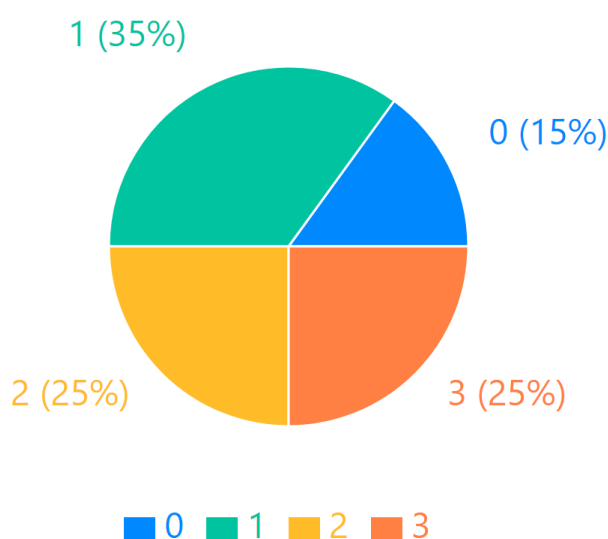


Figure 3. Income distribution of Home buyers.

4.2. Automated and Efficient Design

Another critical application of generative AI in housing is in the design phase. AI can automate the architectural design process, generating multiple design options that optimize for factors such as space utilization, energy efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. This ability to rapidly generate and evaluate various design scenarios makes AI particularly useful in the development of affordable housing, where budget constraints often limit the options available to developers.

For example, generative design algorithms can create hundreds of potential building layouts for a given plot of land, each tailored to maximize the use of space while minimizing material costs and energy consumption. These designs can then be evaluated against criteria such as natural light exposure, ventilation, and overall liveability, ensuring that the final design is both cost-effective and conducive to a high quality of life for residents.

This approach not only reduces the time and cost associated with the design process but also allows for greater flexibility in meeting the specific needs of low-income populations. For instance, AI-generated designs could prioritize communal spaces or incorporate modular construction techniques that allow for future expansion. Moreover, by optimizing building materials and reducing waste, generative AI can help lower construction costs, making it more feasible to develop affordable housing on a large scale.

4.3. Optimizing Construction Methods

In addition to design, generative AI can be used to optimize construction methods, reducing costs and increasing efficiency. Construction is one of the most expensive and time-consuming aspects of housing development, particularly in low-income housing projects where tight budgets often lead to delays and cost overruns. AI-driven solutions can streamline the construction process by optimizing supply chains, reducing material waste, and even automating certain aspects of construction.

One example of AI's potential in construction is the use of 3D printing technology, which is already being explored as a way to produce affordable homes at a fraction of the cost of traditional construction methods. Generative AI can be used to design 3D-printed homes that are structurally sound, energy-efficient, and cost-effective, making it possible to build affordable housing quickly and

at scale. AI can also be applied to modular construction, where prefabricated units are built off-site and then assembled on-site. By optimizing the design and production of these units, AI can significantly reduce construction time and costs.

Generative AI can also help in managing construction projects by predicting potential delays or resource shortages. AI models can analyse factors such as weather patterns, material availability, and labour schedules to forecast potential bottlenecks in the construction process. This allows developers to proactively address issues before they become major problems, ensuring that projects stay on time and within budget.

The generative AI offers a range of applications that can help reduce the cost and time associated with affordable housing development. By predicting housing demand, automating design processes, and optimizing construction methods, AI can play a key role in closing the affordable housing gap for low-income families. However, while the potential benefits are significant, there are also challenges to implementing these technologies, particularly in terms of ensuring equity and overcoming technical and financial barriers.

5. Challenges and Considerations

While the potential of generative AI in addressing the affordable housing crisis is immense, its implementation is not without challenges. Several critical considerations must be taken into account to ensure that AI-driven solutions are both effective and equitable. These include the risks of bias in AI models, the technical and financial barriers to implementation, and the need for regulatory frameworks that support the responsible use of AI in housing development.

5.1. Equity and Bias in AI Models

One of the most significant concerns associated with AI, particularly in applications that affect public welfare such as housing, is the risk of bias. AI models learn from historical data, and if that data reflects existing inequalities or discriminatory practices, the AI may perpetuate those biases in its outputs. For example, an AI model trained on historical housing data might favour certain geographic regions or demographic groups over others, reinforcing existing disparities in access to affordable housing.

Bias in AI models can have serious consequences, particularly for low-income and marginalized communities. If an AI model is used to predict where affordable housing should be built, and that model is biased, it could result in housing developments being concentrated in certain areas while others are neglected. This could exacerbate existing inequalities and leave low-income families in underserved regions with even fewer housing options.

To mitigate these risks, it is essential to ensure that AI models are trained on diverse and representative datasets that capture the full range of housing needs and demographics. Additionally, AI models should be regularly audited for bias, and developers should adopt transparent and accountable practices when designing and deploying AI systems. Involving community stakeholders in the development and oversight of AI-driven housing solutions can also help ensure that these technologies are used equitably.

5.2. Technical and Financial Barriers to Implementation

The implementation of generative AI in housing development requires significant technical expertise and financial investment. Many smaller developers, particularly those working in low-income housing, may lack the resources or knowledge to adopt AI technologies. The upfront costs of implementing AI-driven solutions, such as acquiring the necessary software and hardware, hiring skilled professionals, and integrating AI into existing workflows, can be prohibitive for many organizations.

Moreover, the construction industry has historically been slow to adopt new technologies, and there may be resistance to incorporating AI into housing development processes. Developers and construction firms may be hesitant to invest in AI-driven solutions without clear evidence of their cost-effectiveness and scalability. Overcoming this reluctance will require robust case studies and

pilot projects that demonstrate the tangible benefits of AI in reducing costs and improving efficiency in affordable housing development.

Governments and public agencies can play a crucial role in addressing these barriers by providing funding, incentives, and technical support to developers interested in adopting AI technologies. Public-private partnerships can also help bridge the gap, with tech companies offering AI solutions and expertise to developers working on affordable housing projects. By reducing the financial and technical barriers to AI adoption, it will be possible to expand the use of AI in housing development and ensure that low-income families benefit from these innovations.

5.3. Regulatory and Ethical Considerations

The use of AI in housing development raises important ethical and regulatory questions. As AI becomes more integrated into the decision-making processes that affect housing access, it is essential to establish clear guidelines and regulations to ensure that these technologies are used responsibly. This includes developing standards for transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI systems, as well as ensuring that AI-driven housing solutions comply with existing housing laws and regulations.

Regulators will need to work closely with developers, tech companies, and community stakeholders to create a regulatory framework that supports the responsible use of AI in housing. This may include guidelines on data privacy and security, as well as measures to prevent discrimination and ensure that AI-driven housing solutions are accessible to all. By establishing a robust regulatory framework, it will be possible to harness the full potential of AI in housing development while protecting the rights and interests of low-income families.

6. Recommendations

To fully realize the potential of generative AI in addressing the affordable housing gap, several key recommendations must be considered. These recommendations focus on policy support, community engagement, collaboration between stakeholders, and ensuring the equitable deployment of AI-driven solutions in housing development.

6.1. Policy Support and Government Incentives

Governments at all levels play a critical role in facilitating the adoption of AI technologies in affordable housing development. One of the most effective ways to encourage the use of generative AI is through the provision of targeted incentives and funding. By offering grants, tax credits, or low-interest loans to developers who incorporate AI into their housing projects, governments can reduce the financial burden of adopting these technologies and encourage innovation in the housing sector.

Additionally, governments should prioritize the development of AI-driven housing solutions through public-private partnerships. These partnerships can bring together tech companies, developers, and public agencies to create AI-powered tools and platforms that streamline the housing development process. By fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, governments can ensure that AI technologies are used effectively to meet the needs of low-income populations.

6.2. Community Engagement and Stakeholder Participation

Community engagement is essential to ensure that AI-driven housing solutions are responsive to the needs of low-income families. One of the risks of implementing AI in housing development is that it may lead to top-down decision-making that overlooks the specific concerns and preferences of the communities it is intended to serve. To mitigate this risk, developers and policymakers should involve community members in the planning and design of affordable housing projects that use AI technologies.

This can be achieved through participatory design processes, where local residents have a voice in determining the features and amenities that are most important to them. By incorporating community feedback into the AI models used to generate housing designs, developers can create housing that better meets the needs of residents. In addition, community members should be

involved in the oversight and evaluation of AI-driven housing projects to ensure that these technologies are used equitably and effectively.

6.3. Collaboration Between Developers, Tech Companies, and Nonprofits

Collaboration is key to scaling the use of generative AI in affordable housing development. Tech companies that specialize in AI solutions can offer valuable expertise and resources to developers working on affordable housing projects, while nonprofits can provide insights into the needs and challenges of low-income communities. By working together, these stakeholders can create AI-powered tools and platforms that make it easier to develop affordable housing at scale.

For example, tech companies can develop AI platforms that automate the design and construction processes, while developers and nonprofits can provide the on-the-ground knowledge needed to ensure that these solutions are tailored to the needs of low-income families. Collaborative efforts can also help reduce the cost of implementing AI technologies by sharing resources and expertise across different organizations.

6.4. Ensuring Equity in AI Deployment

Equity must be a central consideration in the deployment of AI technologies in housing development. As discussed earlier, there is a risk that AI models may perpetuate existing inequalities if they are not designed with equity in mind. To prevent this, developers and tech companies must ensure that AI models are trained on diverse and representative datasets that capture the full range of housing needs and demographics.

In addition, AI-driven housing solutions should be subject to regular audits to ensure that they do not disproportionately benefit certain groups over others. Developers should adopt transparent and accountable practices when deploying AI technologies, and regulators should establish clear guidelines to ensure that AI-driven housing solutions comply with anti-discrimination laws and promote fairness in housing access.

7. Conclusion

Generative Artificial Intelligence holds significant promise for addressing the affordable housing gap in the United States, particularly for low-income families. By leveraging AI's capabilities in predictive analysis, design optimization, and construction efficiency, policymakers and developers can create more affordable, sustainable, and accessible housing solutions. However, while the potential benefits of AI are considerable, it is essential to address the challenges associated with equity, bias, and the technical and financial barriers to implementation.

AI can play a transformative role in housing development by predicting future housing demand, automating the design process, and optimizing construction methods. These applications can significantly reduce the time and cost associated with affordable housing projects, making it more feasible to build housing that meets the needs of low-income populations. However, ensuring that these AI-driven solutions are deployed equitably is critical. AI models must be designed to avoid perpetuating existing biases, and developers must engage with communities to ensure that housing solutions are tailored to their specific needs.

To fully realize the potential of AI in housing development, governments, tech companies, developers, and nonprofits must work together to create an ecosystem that supports the responsible use of AI. This includes providing funding and incentives for AI adoption, engaging with communities to ensure that AI solutions are equitable, and developing regulatory frameworks that promote transparency and accountability in AI-driven housing projects.

In conclusion, while generative AI is not a silver bullet for solving the housing crisis, it offers a powerful set of tools that can complement existing approaches to affordable housing development. If implemented thoughtfully and equitably, AI has the potential to transform the way housing is designed, built, and managed, making it more accessible and affordable for low-income families across the United States. As the housing crisis continues to evolve, integrating AI into housing policy

and development strategies will be essential to closing the affordable housing gap and ensuring that everyone has access to safe, affordable, and sustainable housing.

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