Rutherford County Housing Study

Rutherford County Commissioners

December 1st, 2025

RUTHERFORD COUNTY ~ NC
Vibrant Communities New Possibilities

FOOTHILLS
REGIONAL COMMISSION

RUTHERFORD COUNTY HOUSING STUDY

2025

RUTHERFORD COUNTY NC

Vibrant Communities
New Possibilities

Thank you

Rutherford County Housing Study Partners

Rutherford County
Rutherford County Municipalities
Rutherford County Habitat for Humanity
Rutherford Housing Partnership
Gateway Wellness Foundation
Dogwood Health Trust
The Public

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Methodology

Study Area

Rutherford County, Forest City, Spindale, Rutherfordton, Chimney Rock, Ruth, Ellenboro, Bostic and Lake Lure.

Demographic Analysis

Data acquired from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, Redfin, and the NC State Demographer.

Economic Analysis

Data acquired from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the NC Department of Commerce.

Public Engagement

Survey, public input sessions, and focus group sessions with residents, developers, community leaders, non-profits, and more.

Recommendations

These are for Rutherford County and the municipalities. The mixture of primary source data and data received from the public input sessions helped craft recommendations in line with Rutherford County values and to accurately estimate population projections.

Demographic Analysis

- Population
- Race
- Occupied Housing Type
- Occupancy Status
- Tenure of Occupied Units
- Owner-Occupied Units – Mortgage Status
- Housing Units Age
- Number of Rooms
- Number of Bedrooms
- Household Occupancy
- Vehicle Availability
- Lack of Essential Services

- Housing Value
- Income Distribution
- Housing Costs
- Household Earnings & Housing Cost
- Median Household Income (under 25, 25-44, 45-64, 65 and over)
- Monthly Housing Costs
- Income & Cost-Burden
- Ownership
- Property Tax
- Home Values
- New Housing Building Permits

Demographic Analysis
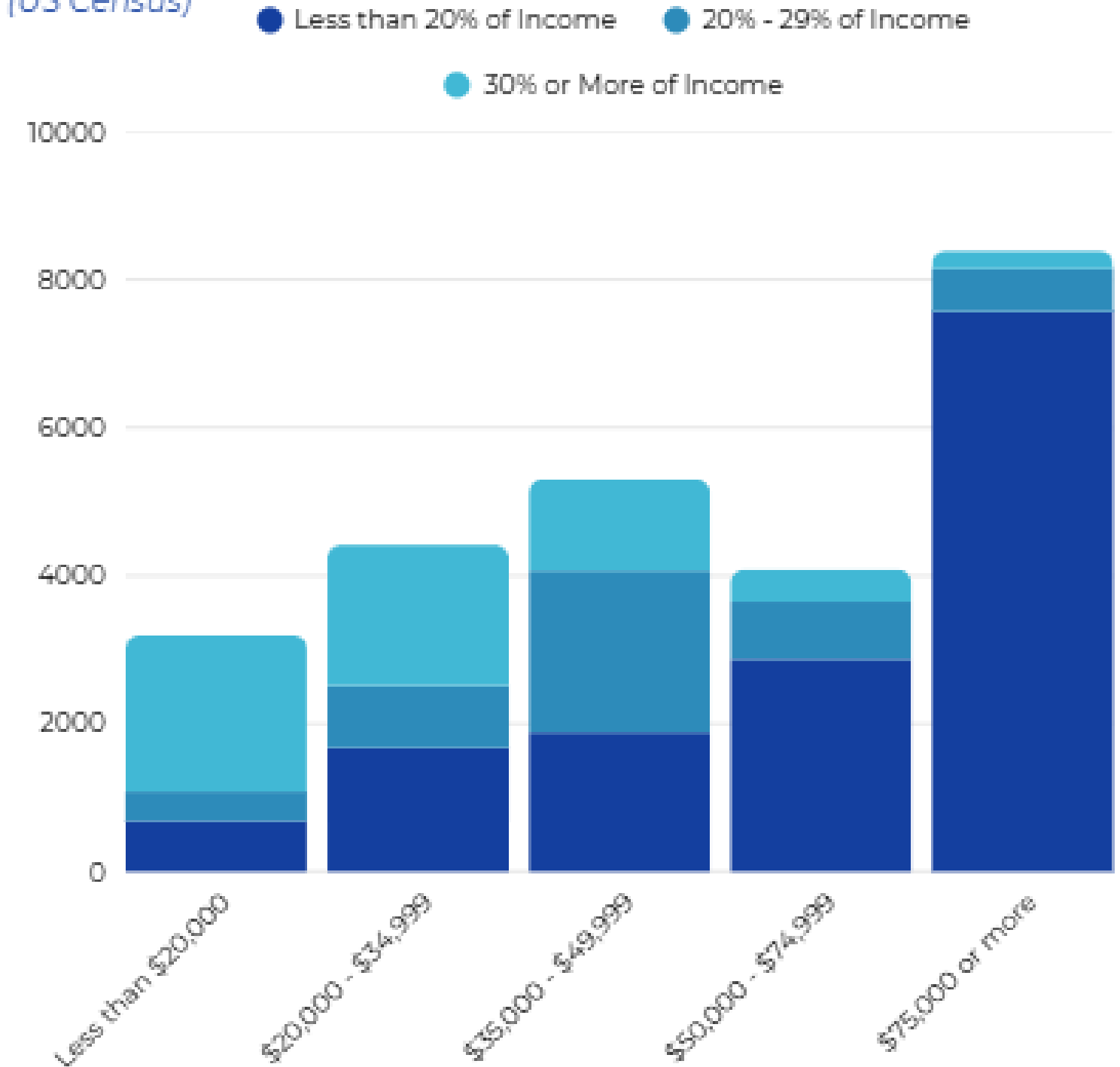
Figure 7. Housing Units Age (US Census)

Age of Housing Units	Total Housing Units
2020 or later	593 (1.8%)
2010 - 2019	1,945 (5.9%
2000 - 2009	4,120 (12.5%)
1970 - 1999	14,538 (44.1%)
1940 - 1969	8,440 (25.6%
1939 and earlier	3,363 (10.2%)

Demographic Analysis

Figure 14. Housing Costs, Owner- vs Renter Occupied (US Census)

Income	Owner-Occupied Households	Renter-Occupied Households	Total Households
Less than $300	3,106 (15.8%)	52 (0.27%)	3,158 (11.8%)
$300 - $499	3,894 (19.8%)	430 (2.2%)	4,324 (16.1%)
$500 - $799	2,941 (14.9%)	2,625 (13.3%)	5,566 (20.8%)
$800 - $999	2,990 (15.2%)	1,468 (7.4%)	4,458 (16.6%)
$1,000 - $1,499	3,646 (18.5%)	1,417 (7.2%)	5,063 (18.9%)
$1,500 - $1,999	1,773 (9.0%)	20 (.1%)	1,793 (6.7%)
$2,000 - $2,499	854 (4.3%)	0 (0.0%)	854 (3.2%)
$2,500 - $2,999	167 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	167 (.06%)
$3,000 or more	334 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)	334 (1.2%)

Figure 15. Household Earnings & Housing Cost (Rutherford County) (US Census)

Legend: Less than 20% of Income; 20% - 29% of Income; 30% or More of Income

Bar chart categories: Less than $20,000; $20,000 - $34,999; $35,000 - $49,999; $50,000 - $74,999; $75,000 or more

Demographic Analysis

Figure 18. Median Household Income (US Census)
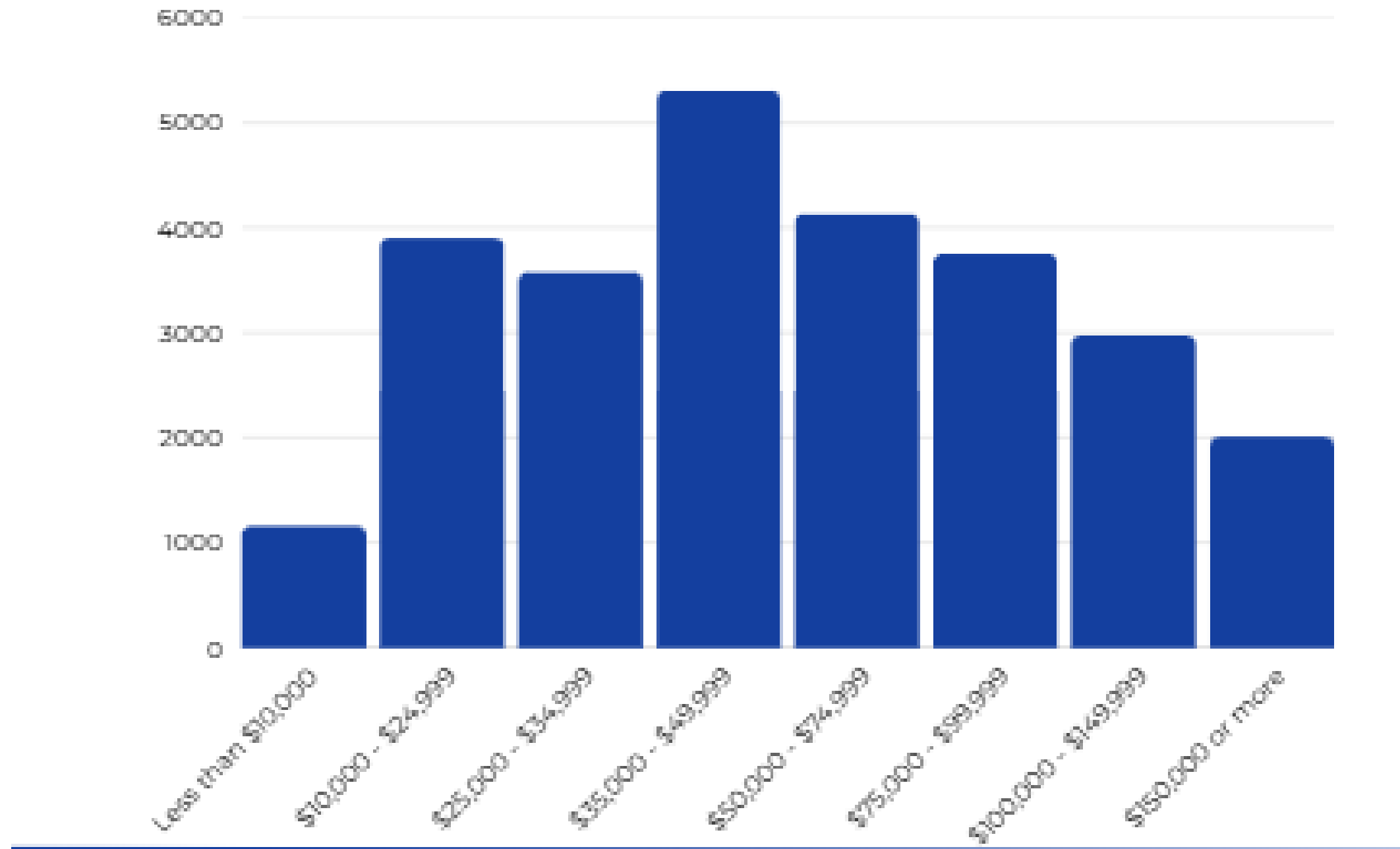
Economic Analysis

- Employment by Industry
- Place of Work vs Place of Residence
- Employment Outlook
- Unemployment Rates
- Top Employers

Economic Analysis

Figure 28. Employment Outlook
(US Census)

Economic Analysis

Figure 29. Unemployment Rates (US Census)

Year	Rutherford County	North Carolina	United States
2019	4.8%	3.9%	3.7%
2020	9.2%	7.2%	8.1%
2021	6.5%	4.9%	5.3%
2022	4.8%	3.7%	3.6%
2023	4.7%	3.5%	3.6%
2024	5.3%	3.6%	4.1%

Public Engagement

- Survey
- Public Engagement Sessions
- Focus Groups
- Rutherford County and Municipal Staff

Public Engagement (Survey)

Respondents were asked about their current living arrangements and connection to Rutherford County:

- **59.35%** live and work in Rutherford County.
- **36.59%** live in Rutherford County but work elsewhere.
- **3.25%** work in Rutherford County but live elsewhere.
- **0.81%** do not live or work in Rutherford County.

When asked about the type of housing they currently reside in, respondents reported the following distribution:

- **78.05%** Single-Family Homes
- **8.94%** Mobile Homes
- **4.06%** Multi-Family Apartments
- **0%** Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
- **2.44%** Townhouses
- **0%** Homes with Support Services
- **2.44%** No Permanent Housing
- **4.07%** Other

Public Engagement (Survey)

A significant portion of respondents are homeowners, but rental and other housing arrangements also play a role in the community's housing landscape:

- **39.84%** own a home with a mortgage.
- **21.95%** own a home without a mortgage.
- **25.2%** rent their home.
- **7.32%** live with family or friends.
- **4.07%** depend on others for housing.
- **3.25%** do not have permanent housing.
- **1.63%** reported "other" living situations.

CREATIVE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Public Engagement (Survey)

Housing affordability remains a primary concern among residents:

- **31.71%** are not cost burdened.
- **37.4%** are cost burdened, spending more than 30% of income on housing.
- **13.01%** are severely cost burdened, spending over 50% of income on housing.
- **11.38%** do not pay housing costs.
- **6.5%** were unsure of their housing costs.

Public Engagement (Survey)

When choosing a home, respondents prioritized the following factors:

1. Affordability .
2. Safety.
3. Close to Family and Friends.
4. Close to Work.

The following are the most pressing housing-related challenges according to community input:

1. High cost of housing
2. Limited availability of diverse housing options
3. Homelessness
4. Presence of unkept (or vacant) homes or properties

Focus Group Key Points

- **Housing Costs & Affordability**
- **Lack of Workforce, Transitional, Senior, Missing Middle, and Rental Housing**
- **Vacant & Dilapidated Structures**
- **Homelessness**
- **Aging Housing Stock**
- **Economic Development Opportunities**
- **Urban Sprawl Concern**
- **Farmland & Natural Resource Preservation**

Implications from Public Engagement

- **Inadequate Housing Diversity & Affordability**
- **Economic Development is Constrained (Businesses can and will struggle finding workers due to the workforce housing shortage)**
- **Aging and Deteriorating Housing Stock**
- **Urban Sprawl & Environmental Loss**
- **Homeless & Transitional Housing Issues.**

Housing Projections (2040)

Year	Households Needed	Housing Type	Households Needed
2024	0	Single-Family	3,279
2030	~1,987	Multi-Family	1,192
2035	~3,974	Affordable	894
2040	~5,962	Senior Living	597

- Rutherford County has been averaging approximately 0.45% growth each year since 2020.
- 2024 Population: 65,587
- Estimated 2040 Population: 70,156
- Current Households: 26,805
- Estimated 2040 Households: 29,354
- Estimated Housing Units Lost: 3,413 (.85% annually)
- Estimated Housing Units Needed to Replace Lost Units and Increase in Population: ~5,962

Recommendations

Any references to zoning regulations, unified development ordinances, development regulations, and/or land-use regulations apply to municipalities that already have zoning. The housing study does not recommend any form of county-wide zoning. County-wide zoning that limits or restricts residential development or economic development would contradict the recommendations in this study.

Goal 1: Expand Affordable and Workforce Housing

Objective 1: Promote development of Missing Middle House.

Objective 2: Identify and encourage land for mixed-income housing developments.

Objective 3: Promote incentives and zoning reform that appeals to developers.

Goal 2: Preserve and Improve Existing Housing Stock

Objective 4: Promote Home Rehabilitation Programs.

Objective 5: Implement incentives for renovating vacant and dilapidated structures to expand housing options.

Goal 3: Supply Housing for Seniors, Children, and Vulnerable Populations

Objective 6: Increase the supply of age-friendly housing, including assisted living and independent senior communities and mobile homes.

Objective 7: Develop transitional housing and emergency shelter options for residents in crisis.

Objective 8: Partner with nonprofit organizations to provide supportive housing for vulnerable populations.

Recommendations

Goal 4: Align Housing with Economic Development

Objective 9: Include housing in economic development strategies.

Objective 10: Attract housing developers.

Goal 5: Preserve Rural Character and Natural Resources

Objective 11: Implement smart growth and land use planning.

Objective 12: Educate the public and developers.

Goal 6: Follow the Strong Towns Housing Checklist (Towns Only)

Objective 13: Allow single-family home conversion to duplex or triplex, by right.

Objective 14: Permit backyard cottages in all residential zones.

Objective 15: Legalize starter homes in all residential areas.

Objective 16: Ease lot size requirements in existing neighborhoods.

Objective 17: Repeal parking mandates for housing.

Objective 18: Streamline the approval process.

Funding Sources

Community Development Block Grant

BEAD and Digital Equity Programs

Economic Development Administration

North Carolina Housing Finance Agency

Rutherford County Habitat for Humanity

Appalachian Regional Commission

GREAT Grant

Foothills NC Home Consortium

Federal Transportation Grants

State Transportation Grants

Dogwood Health Trust

Land Trusts

Rutherford Housing Partnership

Gateway Wellness Foundation