

Making Multigenerational Communities Happen



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Recommended bibliographic listing:

Urban Land Institute. *Making Multigenerational Communities Happen*. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2024.

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2001 L Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948

About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

Terwilliger Center for Housing

The goal of the Urban Land Institute Terwilliger Center for Housing is to advance best practices in residential development and public policy and to support ULI members and local communities in creating and sustaining a full spectrum of housing opportunities, particularly for low- and moderate-income households. Established in 2007 with a gift from longtime member and former ULI chairman J. Ronald Terwilliger, the center integrates ULI's wide-ranging housing activities into a program of work with three objectives: to catalyze the production of housing, provide thought leadership on the housing industry, and inspire a broader commitment to housing.

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In collaboration with ULI members and partners, the center drives industry transformation, cultivates leaders and champions, and helps foster solutions for sustainable, resilient, healthy, and equitable cities and communities. The center pursues these goals via cutting-edge research, global convenings, community technical assistance, and other strategies.

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- **Decarbonization:** Accelerating progress toward net zero with operational and embodied carbon real estate solutions.
- **Healthy Places:** Advancing health and social equity in real estate practice, and helping cities and communities foster inclusive well-being.
- **Urban Resilience:** Ensuring that buildings, cities, and communities are better prepared for the impacts of climate change.

The center is also home to ULI Greenprint, a global alliance of real estate companies dedicated to improving the environmental performance of buildings and enhancing real estate value.

Discover transformative practices for real estate and land use at uli.org/sustainability. Connect with the center at [sustainability@uli.org](https://twitter.com/sustainability@uli.org).



The Cottages on Vaughan, Clarkston, Georgia.

About This Report

A confluence of demographic change, economic challenges, and shifting consumer preferences has resulted in changes to household composition and, as a result, housing demand. After declining in previous decades, multigenerational living has grown since the 1970s. According to the Pew Research Center, between 1971 and 2021, the number of people living in multigenerational households quadrupled, while the number of people in other living situations is less than double what it was. The share of the [U.S. population living in multigenerational households in 2021 was 18 percent](#).

Increasingly, families are looking for housing and neighborhoods that can comfortably accommodate multiple generations and a variety of abilities as family needs change over time. With a growing number of families living in—or seeking to live in—multigenerational arrangements, there is a need for more housing and neighborhoods that can accommodate them.

As of 2021, 98 percent of Americans living in multigenerational homes [report that their households function successfully](#). The many reported [benefits of multigenerational arrangements include](#)

- Enhanced relationships among family members,
- Increased ability to provide care for family members,
- Improved financial situations for at least one family member,
- Positive mental and/or physical health impacts, and
- Increased opportunity for at least one family member to continue their education or to pursue vocational training opportunities.

Despite the growth in multigenerational households, and the benefits of different generations living together and interacting, many barriers stand in the way of individual families living in multigenerational ways, including

- Too few and insufficiently diverse housing units that offer space and design characteristics to accommodate multiple family members of different generations and their needs;
- Insufficient neighborhood, infrastructure, and built environment features—including limited multimodal transportation options and insufficient services and supports (such as health care);
- Zoning and other land use regulations that limit the location and scale of diverse housing types; and
- Lack of affordability for the limited number of homes and neighborhoods that can accommodate multigenerational living.

The 2022 ULI/[Charles H. Shaw Forum on Urban Community Issues](#)—which ULI convened in collaboration with AARP—brought together national and global industry experts with development, design, policy, and research backgrounds to share their expertise regarding growing demand for, opportunities in, and barriers to multigenerational housing and neighborhoods. Insights from the forum informed this report.

To realize the vision of multigenerational living, individual homes will need to be designed to meet the needs of people at different life stages and abilities. Various housing options and typologies will be required, and housing that is conducive to multigenerational living must be accompanied by investments in community space and infrastructure that facilitate social connections, safe and inclusive mobility, and access to services for all ages.

Making Multigenerational Communities Happen shares information for real estate developers, city leaders, community groups, and others related to the need to meet the demand for housing units that effectively serve multigenerational households. To make multigenerational communities happen, all groups must advance new narratives about the demand for, and benefits of, multigenerational living and they must work to create and implement conducive public policies.

Specifically, the report

- Provides considerations for multigenerational home design,
- Shares information on multigenerational housing typologies,
- Considers what is needed to build multigenerational neighborhoods, and
- Offers conclusions on how to make multigenerational communities happen.

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Multigenerational Living: Trends and Barriers

Elden Elms, Los Angeles, California.

A growing number of families are living in—or seeking to live in—multigenerational arrangements, which is leading to a need for more housing and neighborhoods that can accommodate them.

A confluence of demographic change, economic considerations, and cultural preferences is driving changes in household composition and, as a result, in housing demand. Increasingly, families are looking for housing and neighborhoods that can comfortably accommodate multiple generations and a variety of human abilities as families' needs change over time.

However, multigenerational families face multiple barriers in their search for homes or communities that meet their needs, including

- Too few and insufficiently diverse housing options with space and design characteristics to fit the needs of family members of different generations—such as accessible first-floor bedrooms and bathrooms and separate living areas; and
- Insufficient neighborhood features, including limited multimodal transportation options and a lack of nearby amenities, goods, and critical services like health care.

Housing offerings and neighborhood amenities are driven by land use, transportation, and tax policies. Regulations have driven the proliferation of automobile-oriented, single-family home communities. These paradigms will need to shift to make multigenerational living a more accessible option for more individuals and families.

Even when home designs and neighborhood infrastructure are inclusive of multigenerational living strategies, higher-income multigenerational households often compete to live in these homes and neighborhoods, and moderate- and lower-income households are priced out.

Housing attainability, which refers to modestly priced for-sale homes, is a particular challenge (and often a contributing factor) for those “sharing space” for economic reasons. Attainable housing represents as much as [60 percent of market demand](#) in some areas. Recent research indicates a national production shortfall of 3.79 million housing units, with [169 regions experiencing underproduction](#) as of 2019.

About Multigenerational Families

The U.S. Census Bureau [defines multigenerational families](#) as “households consisting of three or more generations.”

The ULI [Senior Housing Council](#) and [Community Development Council](#) have [defined multigenerational households](#) as “those that may include parents and their adult children who left and have returned home; parents, their adult children, and their offspring; great grandparents, grandparents, parents, and their children; [and/or] other relatives of other generations living with younger or older relatives.”

The AARP *Policy Book* [defines a multigenerational household](#) as referring to “people of different generations, whether related or not, who live together. This can be in the same house or in close proximity in the same residential building or neighborhood.”

However multigenerational families are defined, it is clear that demographic, social, and economic changes are driving an increase in multigenerational and intergenerational living and giving rise to the need for more multigenerational housing and neighborhood options.



Talavera Lofts, Austin, Texas.

Trends in Multigenerational Living

Multigenerational living is not a recent phenomenon—indeed, it was once a common living arrangement in the United States. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), 21 percent of households were multigenerational in 1950, but this figure declined to a low of 12 percent in 1980. The rapid growth of suburban living patterns, the decline in the share of immigrants in the overall population, and the significant rise in the health and economic well-being of adults over age 65 all contributed to the decline in multigenerational living.

Since 1980, the trend has shifted back in favor of multigenerational living, with the proportion increasing steadily to 18 percent in 2021. In addition, trends indicate that the percentage of U.S. children living in a household headed by a grandparent (which may not be captured in statistics that rely on a three-generation definition of multigenerational) has [consistently increased in the past 40 years](#), rising from 3 percent in 1970 to 7 percent in 2010. As of 2019, this figure had increased further to about [8.4 percent](#).



Elden Elms, Los Angeles, California.

Drivers of Multigenerational Living

There is a range of reasons for living in a multigenerational household, including family preferences or cultural traditions that prioritize providing mutual care and support for family members, which can allow families to enjoy a higher quality of life and develop a stronger sense of togetherness.

According to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, people of color and foreign-born individuals are [far more likely to live in multigenerational settings](#) than non-Hispanic white people and people born in the United States.

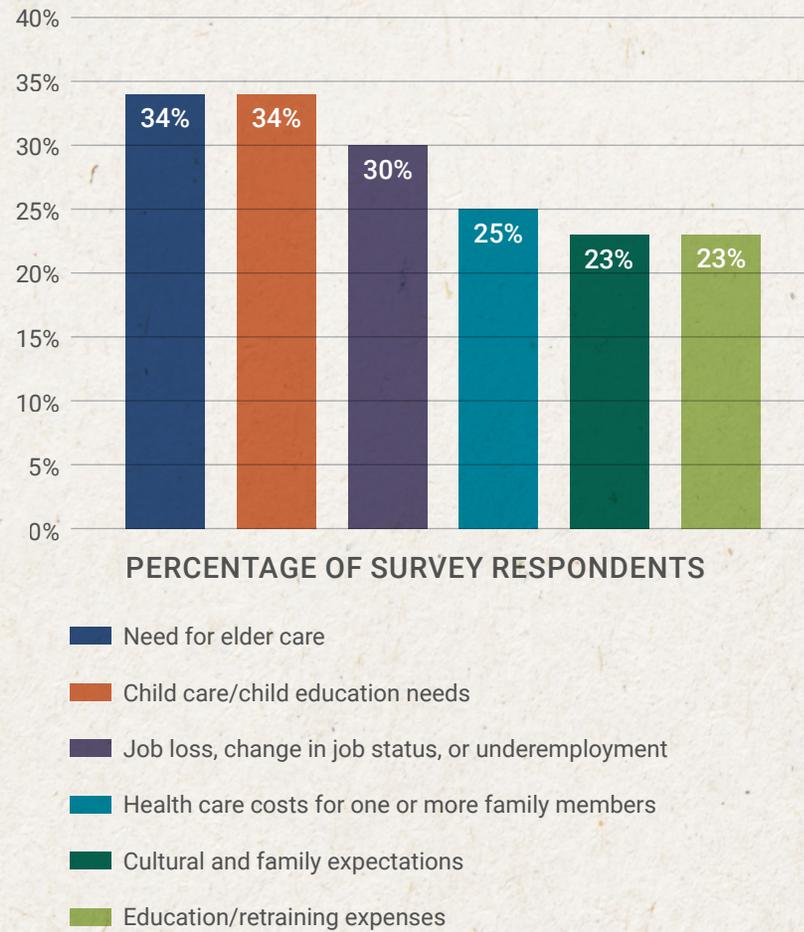
Since 1970, there has been a discernible growth in the immigrant population, mainly of Latino and Asian descent, where living in a multigenerational household is [often considered a cultural tradition](#).

By 2029, it is estimated there will be [14.4 million middle-income older adults](#) in the United States, 60 percent of whom will have mobility limitations and 20 percent of whom will have high health care and functional needs. A projected 54 percent of this cohort will not have sufficient financial resources to afford the level of care provided by age-restricted housing. For many of these older adults, multigenerational living presents an opportunity to address both their economic and care needs, if housing stock is available to accommodate them.

Recent data suggest that the [primary deciding factor](#) for the formation of multigenerational households is economic in nature (see Figure 1). Living with family creates opportunities to contribute income and share costs, build savings, and improve overall household financial stability (see Figure 2). In some cases, economic need—rather than choice or preference—drives decision-making because of insufficient income, rising costs of living, and/or an unexpected life event (job loss, divorce, foreclosure, etc.).

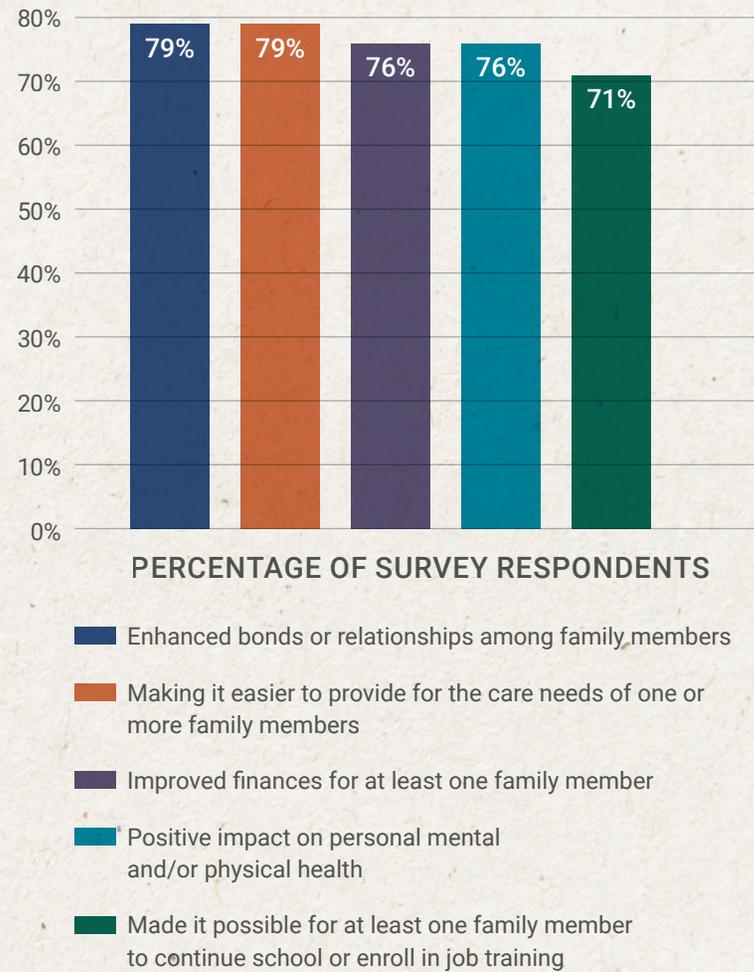
Unexpected economic events have also contributed to the expansion of multigenerational living. For example, the Great Recession of 2008 increased unemployment and foreclosures and had [spillover impacts on households](#) choosing to “double up” or delay household formation.

Figure 1. Reasons for Forming Multigenerational Households



Source: Adapted from Generations United, "[Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay](#)," 2021.

Figure 2. Cited Benefits of Multigenerational Households



Source: Adapted from Generations United, "[Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay](#)," 2021.

Barriers to Multigenerational Living

Despite the growth in multigenerational households and the benefits of intergenerational living, there are many barriers that stand in the way of individual families living in multigenerational ways. Barriers to multigenerational living include

- Too few and insufficiently diverse housing units that offer space and design characteristics to accommodate multiple family members of different generations and needs;
- Insufficient neighborhood, infrastructure, and built-environment features—including limited multimodal transportation options and insufficient services and supports (such as health care);
- Zoning and other land use regulations that limit the location and scale of diverse housing types; and
- Lack of affordability for the limited number of homes and neighborhoods that can accommodate intergenerational living. Home attainability is a particular challenge (and often a contributing factor) for those “sharing space” for economic reasons.

Given the multitude of key multigenerational household characteristics, no single housing type or neighborhood typology will address all needs. Rather, improving housing attainability and stability for these households requires an intentionality that aims to create more diverse housing options and to address specific barriers in the built environment.

Shaw Forum Finding: Beyond specific design approaches and urban planning strategies, cities should approach multigenerational housing with an ethos of humility and flexibility given that multigenerational needs and demand will continue to evolve. It is important to recognize this and pursue strategies and policies that have the ability to evolve with housing demand.

Financial Barriers

As of 2019, [37.1 million U.S. households](#)—about 31 percent—were “housing-cost burdened,” meaning they were paying 30 percent or more of their income on housing.

Renters are disproportionately affected by housing costs, with [46 percent of households](#) experiencing cost burden compared with 21 percent of homeowners. Since 2018, the share of people who say [affordable housing is a key issue in their communities](#) has risen across demographic categories.

To the extent that inventory is available, multigenerational households of greater means will have an advantage identifying a home that works best for their family. In some cases, the combined incomes from a multigenerational living arrangement are what enable households to find a home within their means.



Shaw Forum Finding: Financial systems and products are inherently risk averse, and reforms will be needed to enable new models of multigenerational development. Bond financing and tax incentives should be developed to support the development of multigenerational typologies, particularly those serving middle- and lower-income households.

Some lower-income households may have access to housing subsidies or income-restricted, affordable housing units specifically targeted to their needs. However, substantial gaps in quality remain and affordable units are challenging to secure.

Income-restricted affordability programs and units are nearly universally oversubscribed, leaving many lower-income households vulnerable. For example, the Washington, D.C., Housing Authority had 20,000 people on its [affordable housing waitlist](#) as of 2023 and had not accepted new applications in roughly 10 years. In addition, middle-income households may earn too much to qualify for housing supports but not enough to find a home on the open market without being cost burdened.



Age Restrictions

Grandfamilies—households led by grandparents that include young children without their parents in residence—confront specific housing availability and attainability challenges.

For example, some age-restricted communities prohibit children from residing in properties or have de facto limits based on a lack of family-sized units—limiting housing options for grandfamilies. Those who violate occupancy requirements are frequently [susceptible to eviction](#) if the children they are caring for are discovered. In addition, if grandparents lack formal custody of the children, they often face difficulty convincing regulatory agencies or private landlords to acknowledge their need for larger dwellings.

Housing Sizes

In some communities and for some households, affordable options may be limited for families searching for homes that have the space required to accommodate multiple family members under one roof.

For example, less than 12 percent of the existing multifamily rental housing stock (and less than one-third of all rentals) in the United States has [three or more bedrooms](#). Of the 368,000 multifamily units [built in 2022](#), only 11 percent had three or more bedrooms. Meanwhile, of the over one million single-family homes built in 2022, 91 percent had three or more bedrooms.

Though there is not a one-for-one correlation between housing type (multifamily versus single-family) and tenure (renter versus owner), the lack of family-sized multifamily units presents barriers for multigenerational renter households.



Considerations for Multigenerational Home Design

To realize the vision of multigenerational living, individual homes will need to be designed to meet the needs of people at different life stages and abilities.



Spring Flats, Washington, D.C.

AARP International’s Equity by Design initiative takes an inclusive approach known as “enabling design.” The [enabling design](#) concept, originally developed by environmental gerontologist Esther Greenhouse, focuses on designing a built environment that enables people to function at their highest level. This means that (a) a person should not have to constantly struggle to function in spaces, and (b) that the capacities a person has should be used to function in the built environment, so they do not atrophy.

Shaw Forum Finding: There is a need to expand thinking about what accessibility means, and how factors such as sound and lighting can improve the livability of homes for more neurodiverse populations.

Designing for Differing Abilities

Today's housing stock is not fit to accommodate the changing needs of multigenerational households. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [one in four U.S. adults](#) (61 million Americans) has a disability that affects major life activities. Despite this, most homes in the United States are [not fully accessible](#). Further, less than 1 percent of the housing stock is [accessible to people using a mobility assistance device](#), such as a wheelchair.

Though the specific standard for accessible design most appropriate for a given household may vary, a considerable gap exists between what is needed and what the current housing stock accommodates. In AARP's short film *Demand for Enabling Design*, Dr. Bill Thomas warns that most housing units will eventually be occupied by [someone with differing abilities](#).



Tahanan Supportive Housing, San Francisco, California.

To address this gap, new-home construction and existing home retrofits can incorporate the principles of universal design and visitability:

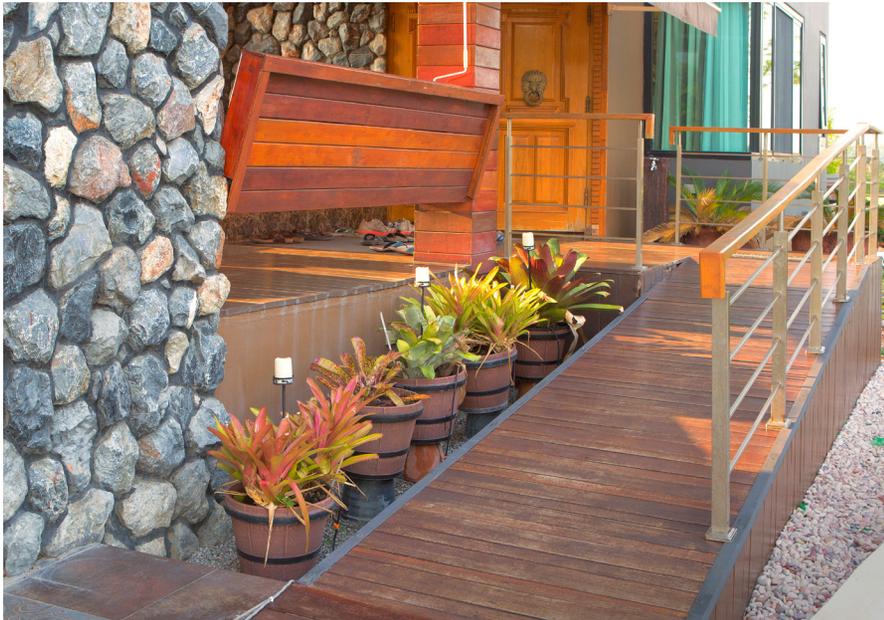
- **Universal design:** The Disability Act 2005 defines “universal design” as the design and composition of an environment so that it may be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest possible extent; in the most independent and natural manner possible; and in the widest possible range of situations, without the need for adaptation, modification, assistive devices or specialized solutions, by any persons of any age or size or having any particular physical, sensory, mental health, or intellectual ability or disability.
- **Visitability:** One of the [main concepts of universal design](#) is visitability, meaning that all dwellings must fulfill minimal accessibility standards to allow individuals with disabilities to freely visit and navigate other people's homes. Zero-step entry, broad doorways, and at least a half-bath on the first level are the fundamental prerequisites to achieve optimal visitability.

Improving building accessibility and visitability are important strategies for expanding the housing stock suitable for multigenerational households. Although accessibility requirements do not often apply to existing or smaller structures, some cities are expanding requirements. In Portland, Oregon, as of 2019, at least one housing unit is [required to be visitable](#) when there are three or more units in a development.

Retrofitting for Accessibility

Achieving a higher standard of accessibility at scale will require improvements to the existing building stock. Retrofits and alterations to existing homes can [improve the quality of life for residents](#), with thoughtful design considerations for people with both physical and cognitive differences.

Retrofits to facilitate healthier living environments for people with a range of abilities vary substantially in scale, cost, and complexity. Government, health, and nonprofit institutions can support households in these efforts through programs that provide assessments of existing conditions in the home, identify the modifications necessary to improve safety and quality of life, and facilitate the implementation of such improvements.



Rebuilding Together's Safe at Home Initiative

Rebuilding Together is a national nonprofit organization with a mission to repair the homes of people in need and revitalize communities. The organization's Safe at Home initiative provides free home modifications for families with mobility issues and other disabilities to "improve accessibility, reduce falls, increase independence, and facilitate aging in place."

Common repairs and modifications provided through the initiative include the following:

- Installing grab bars, handrails, and vertical rails
- Providing entry and threshold ramps and low-rise steps
- Widening doorways and passageways
- Modifying tubs and showers
- Adding raised toilets
- Removing tripping hazards
- Installing smoke and CO₂ detectors
- Improving interior and exterior lighting

For more information, visit [Rebuilding Together](#).

Flexible Spaces That Allow for Both Privacy and Togetherness

Thoughtful design features can better enable people to thrive within the home. One such feature is flexible space that allows families to strike the balance between privacy and togetherness.

Multigenerational living arrangements can alleviate feelings of isolation and foster closer relationships for members of the household. However, a lack of flexible spaces that allow privacy can be a [source of stress](#).

The pandemic also affected the need for flexible design because of the growing number of families who [required separate rooms for work and play](#). The insights gained from the pandemic can be applied to multigenerational households to create an environment that permits individuals to maintain their individual privacy while working but then come together later as the workday ends.

[Design considerations](#) that enable privacy when much of the home is “communal” include the following:

- A separate bedroom with its own bathroom on the first level of the home
- Bedrooms for each family member with ample space and storage
- A second kitchen and exterior stairs, or exterior access, to separate rooms from main house
- Private entries
- Flex spaces, which allow rooms to be easily converted from living space to workspace

Johns Hopkins University's CAPABLE Initiative

Johns Hopkins' Community Aging in Place—Advancing Better Living for Elders (CAPABLE) initiative assists older adults with home modifications and repairs, including by reducing the height of cabinets, tightening loose stair rails, or installing a second banister.

Through CAPABLE, a team that includes an occupational therapist, a nurse, and a repair person examines the home environment and works with the resident to prioritize interventions that improve functionality, safety, and independence of the resident. Some home modifications require small structural changes, but out of 500 Baltimore homes that were part of the program, no landlord denied a request to make the needed updates.

Initial funding to implement CAPABLE in Baltimore came from the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. Subsequently, a combination of local foundations and other stakeholders expanded the model to 12 locations.

An evaluation of the program found that of 281 adults age 65 and older who had difficulty performing activities of daily living, 75 percent had improved performance of activities after completion of the program, and symptoms of depression also improved.

For more information, see [“Housing for Seniors: Challenges and Solutions,” Evidence Matters](#).



Talavera Lofts, Austin, Texas.

Builders and architectural firms have begun marketing homes and floor plans that have extra, flexible space that can accommodate multigenerational living and can evolve to meet the needs of the household as it advances through different stages of life.¹

For example, a smaller room can serve as a nursery and later be converted to private space, an office, and a hobby room for an older adult as the children age. However, many of these design characteristics and unit features require more space, which often comes with a cost and may not be as readily available in a multifamily setting. In addition, state and local building and zoning codes may place limitations on certain features, such as a second kitchen.

Shaw Forum Finding: Cities should encourage flexibility within the home to enable the space to adapt over time as life circumstances change. Tools, such as movable internal walls, can allow residents to change the size of different spaces in the home as needed. Funding pilot programs can help spur further innovation in this area.

¹ For more information, see [“House Plans with Multigenerational Layouts”](#); [“The Benefits of Multigenerational Living”](#); [“Family First: Four Benefits of Multigenerational Living”](#); and [“5 Benefits of Living in a Multigenerational Home.”](#)



Understanding Multigenerational Housing Typologies

Expanded housing options and typologies will be required to facilitate multigenerational living. Developers and cities have a great opportunity to meet the demand for housing units that effectively serve multigenerational households.

Multigenerational housing—individual housing units in neighborhoods with the necessary infrastructure and supports to enable households of diverse sizes and needs to live with a high quality of life—is scarce.

Though intentional multigenerational housing typologies and developments exist, most multigenerational households currently live in “general occupancy” homes that may or may not be conducive to the diversity of their needs. Supply constraints combined with economic challenges can drive attainability issues for households of all types.

Purpose-built multigenerational communities are relatively rare but can be targeted to meeting specific needs. These communities are often tied to subsidies or other incentives for affordable housing.

Zoning policies and building codes may prevent new multigenerational homes from being built. Today, about [75 percent of land zoned for housing](#) in major U.S. cities allows only single-family homes and many policies do not allow [accessory dwelling units](#) (ADUs). Multifamily housing faces barriers that single-family homes do not face. Multiunit buildings are often subject to mandatory public hearings to gain approval whereas single-family housing rarely faces this barrier, because it is allowed by right.

To accommodate the varied needs of multigenerational households, cities may need to amend their zoning policies and building codes to allow for a diversity of housing types that focus on increasing the number of visitable and accessible units.

Shaw Forum Finding: To facilitate a more diverse housing stock, the public sector needs to modernize zoning regulations and design codes, and developers and homebuilders should embrace diverse housing typologies in their portfolios.

Single-Family Homes

Single-family homes are standalone, detached properties, generally with a single kitchen and direct street access. Single-family homes are typically the largest housing type and sit on individual lots, which can create opportunities for additions, bump-outs, or other modifications to add living space for a multigenerational household.

However, single-family homes are often more expensive than other housing types, and although the single-family rental market is growing, many neighborhoods may have fewer rental options of this type. For older adults and families in need of affordable, single-family housing, manufactured homes (formerly called mobile homes) can be a [lower-cost and unsubsidized alternative](#) to other forms of housing.

In addition to affordability, barriers to multigenerational single-family homes may include local zoning and building codes or homeowners association rules and private covenants that prevent certain types of modifications, such as a second kitchen or the creation of an ADU.

Because single-family developments are the dominant development paradigm in the United States, and the desire for multigenerational living is strong, there is great opportunity for developers to thoughtfully facilitate multigenerational living in new single-family developments.

Willowsford

LOUDOUN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Willowsford is a 4,125-acre (1,669 ha) master-planned community that includes a range of single-family housing and amenities—many related to fostering healthy lifestyles—including 45 miles (72.4 km) of multisurface trails, 300 acres (121.4 ha) of working farmland, and opportunities to participate in cooking classes and multigenerational educational activities.

Willowsford is located in the outer suburbs of the Washington, D.C., metro area in Loudoun County, Virginia. The project consists of four noncontiguous villages linked thematically and with shared amenities and outdoor spaces designed for social interaction.

The development includes a range of floor plan options, some of which can accommodate multigenerational households—including families with older parents moving in.

For more information, see [ULI Case Studies, Willowsford](#).





Queens Court, Arlington, Virginia.

Lakewood Ranch, MANATEE AND SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA

Lakewood Ranch is a 31,000-acre (12,545.3 ha) master-planned community in southwest Florida with multiple villages and was named by RCLCO as the [best-selling multigenerational development](#) in the United States as of 2023.

Many of Lakewood Ranch’s floor plans include multigenerational living features, such as first-floor owner’s suites with a second owner’s suite on the second level. Some plans feature separate wings for each generation, with [multiple living rooms](#), bedrooms, and bathrooms. Amenities at the development include fitness centers, pools, dog parks, event lawns, and trails—all which can facilitate multigenerational socialization.

One of the project’s developers is Forestar Group, a subsidiary of D.R. Horton. Quoted in the [Observer](#), Forestar West Florida Division president Tony Squitieri explained that trends Lakewood Ranch is responding to include developing closer family relationships, managing increased living costs, and the desire for seniors to age at home. “Buildings have designed floor plans that allow residents to balance together and privacy,” said Squitieri. “Multigenerational living offers families convenient places and activities to interact.”

For more information, visit the [Lakewood Ranch website](#).

Stanley Martin White Oaks Farm LEESBURG, VIRGINIA

White Oaks Farm is a new 161-home neighborhood by homebuilder Stanley Martin that is walking distance from downtown Leesburg, Virginia. Several of the new home models facilitate multigenerational living. For example, one model has an attached private residence with a separate entrance, kitchenette, living room, and bedroom with full bath. Another model has a private guest suite on the main level. Home prices in this development top \$1 million.

For more information, see [Stanley Martin, White Oaks Farm](#).

Missing Middle Housing

“Missing middle” housing refers to housing that encompasses a range of building types with multiple units—including duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, townhouses, and multiplexes—in walkable settings.

The diversity of these housing types can translate to more housing options in terms of tenure and affordability. Although, given market dynamics, “missing middle” housing may not always be synonymous with “middle-income” or “attainable” housing.

With mixed housing types in one area—potentially including single-family homes near missing middle or multifamily homes—multigenerational families can live adjacent to or near one another while maintaining a fully independent housing unit.



Alta Madrone, Sonoma, California.

Despite the demand for and utility of missing middle housing, the proportion of such housing has lagged in recent decades. From 2014 to 2019, the [total supply of homes in two- to four-unit structures](#) declined by 38,000, while homes in five- to 19-unit structures increased by only 790,000, compared with 3.3 million each for single-family homes and homes in multifamily properties of 20 units or more.

Barriers include restrictive land use and zoning codes and financing tools. Still, the demand for missing middle housing and mixed typology neighborhoods means that more and more developers are leaning in to creating these housing options.

— CASE STUDY —

Mid-Atlantic Builders

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

Mid-Atlantic Builders in Montgomery County, Maryland, constructs townhouses with flexible floor plans, including optional multigenerational suites on the ground floor, complete with a no-step entry. Interactive floor plans, available online, demonstrate the developer’s approach to meeting the needs of multigenerational families.

The company also builds multigenerational single-family homes that include private entrances, kitchenettes, walk-in closets, sitting areas, and full private baths. The focus on multigenerational living in the second phase of the company’s Villages of Savannah development was informed by the fact that some customers of the development’s first phase [requested conversions of standard studies into bedroom suites](#).

For more information, visit [Mid-Atlantic Builders’ website](#).



ALLOWING MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Action at the city and state levels has led to the elimination of exclusionary zoning provisions in certain jurisdictions to allow missing middle housing—a range of house-scale buildings with multiple units that are compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes. Missing middle housing commonly encompasses duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes.

Zoning that allows building multiple units on individual parcels can potentially play a role in reducing housing costs because the costs of development are spread across multiple units.

Eliminating single-family zoning alone is unlikely to solve the nation's housing affordability crisis, but it may set the stage for

complementary policies that reduce housing costs while also lessening racial segregation and associated disparities in health outcomes and economic opportunity.

Municipalities with recent policies to allow missing middle housing in areas formerly zoned for single-family-only development include Minneapolis, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon; Arlington, Virginia; and Decatur, Georgia. California, Maine, Oregon, and Washington have statewide policies.

As of 2022, the number of missing middle homes built in Minneapolis increased modestly, but the elimination of parking minimums citywide has so far played a more significant role in advancing increased development of smaller apartment buildings. As of 2023, Minneapolis's zoning update eliminating single-family zoning was paused because of a legal challenge.

La France Walk

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

[La France Walk](#) is a pocket community located in the Edgewood neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. With a total of 25 units on 2.5 acres (1 ha), the development consists of a mix of single-family homes, duplexes, and attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs), offering a range of housing choices and price points for multigenerational living.

Self-developed by regional architecture and planning firm Kronberg Urbanists + Architects (KUA) and informed by 15 years of research and market observation, the project was designed in accordance with core principles of walkability, inclusivity, and resilience in response to the growing demand for car-optional, in-town residential options, and in anticipation of a surging in-town population.

Owners have used the ADUs at La France Walk for a range of purposes, with one unit rented to a single young professional, another occupied by an aging parent, two used for short-term rentals, one serving as a home office, and three being used as bonus rooms.

KUA is a multidisciplinary design studio that uses architecture, urban design, real estate development, and policy to improve neighborhoods. To overcome the zoning and regulatory challenges faced in its work, KUA uses a “code hacking” approach. KUA then advocates to change the code, so that others will not have to hack it in the future.

For example, discretionary review processes were identified as major obstacles to the development of multigenerational housing. As a result, KUA advocates for streamlined entitlement processes, including providing by-right opportunities for the development of units appropriate for multigenerational households, to enable and encourage the development of needed housing types.

KUA emphasizes the need for predesigned, preapproved plans and financing solutions. Residential pattern books and other design templates can help reduce cost and time barriers for adding density. However, private agreements such as homeowners association guidelines were identified by KUA as a barrier to the provision of less-expensive housing options.

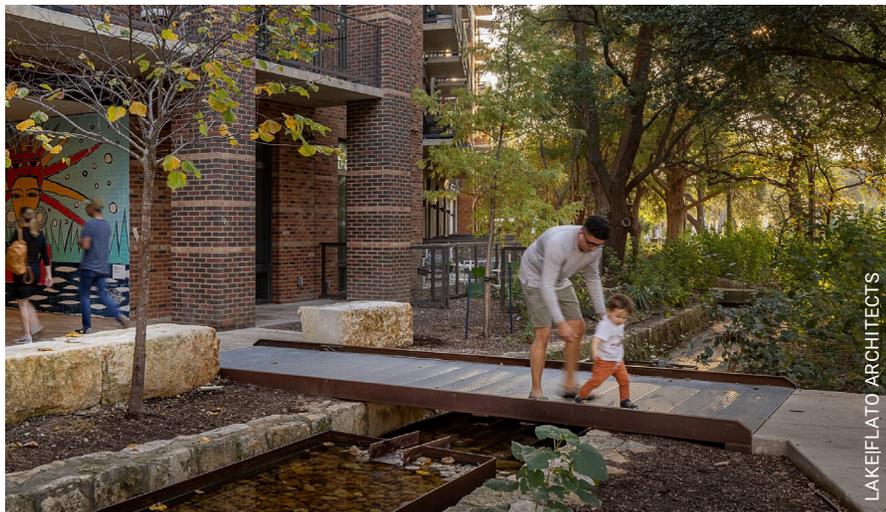
Modernizing these policies will help communities expand the design options and affordability of homes that meet multigenerational needs. KUA’s work demonstrates how developers and architects can positively influence regulatory change so that the right typology of housing is built for the community.

Multifamily Housing

Multifamily housing represents the majority of new rental housing developed in recent decades, but it can also provide homeownership opportunities in the form of condominiums.

Although multifamily housing typically has smaller unit sizes and bedroom counts, intentional efforts can be made to build multifamily housing that accommodates larger families and housing for multiple generations.

Multifamily properties can also benefit from affordable housing capital subsidy programs such as the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC). Land use and zoning codes can again be a barrier to multifamily development, and certain provisions of building codes (i.e., restrictions on single-stair apartments) make one- and two-bedroom apartments the “path of least resistance.”



The '68 Apartments at Hemisfair, San Antonio, Texas.

Plaza West Apartments

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Plaza West Apartments is a development that opened in 2018 in downtown Washington, D.C., that offers 223 affordable rental units. Fifty of the units are devoted to “grandfamilies,” composed of grandparents raising grandchildren in the absence of their parents. These units provide accommodation for grandfamilies with incomes between 30 and 60 percent of the area median income.

Developed by Mission First Housing Group, Plaza West is estimated to be [one of only nine](#) affordable housing developments in the country to target grandfamilies. The project was developed in partnership with the nearby Bible Way Church. To focus on older caregivers who may have greater needs and fewer housing options, the grandparents at Plaza West must be at least 50 years old.

Grandfamilies at Plaza West have their own areas, including a “grandparent library,” a fitness room with exercise equipment for seniors, and a youth activity room. Partnership with local organizations, including the YMCA, provide services for residents, and members of the Howard University School of Social Work lead support groups for grandparents and teens.

For more information, visit the [Plaza West website](#).

Celadon

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Celadon at Ninth and Broadway is a multigenerational, 17-story apartment building that opened in 2015. It was developed by BRIDGE Housing and consists of 250 apartments in a redeveloping region on the east side of downtown San Diego.

Celadon has [25 apartments set aside for youths aging out of foster care](#) under the [Mental Health Services Act](#) program, which is a program designed to “expand and transform California’s behavioral health system to better serve individuals with, and at risk of, serious mental health issues, and their families.”

Celadon also includes 63 apartments set aside for older adults with considerable health challenges under the [Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly](#), also known as PACE. The rest of Celadon’s units are within reach of families earning up to 60 percent of the area median income.

The development is three blocks from a major trolley stop and close to grocery stores, a library, post office, a park, and other essential healthy living community features. Residents of the building have access to three major common areas—all of which are integrated with the outdoors to take advantage of the San Diego climate.

For more information, visit [BRIDGE Housing’s website](#).

Patuxent Commons

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

Patuxent Commons is a planned 76-unit, mixed-income community in Columbia, Maryland, that will comprise three primary resident groups: adults with disabilities, older adults, and younger adults and families. The project will allocate 25 percent of units for adults with disabilities, and the remaining units are aimed for families and older adults.

The project concept was created by the Howard County Autism Society to help address housing needs of adults with disabilities. Patuxent Commons is being developed by [Mission First Housing Group](#), a 501(c3) nonprofit developer. The location was chosen because it is close to transit, shopping, recreation, and job opportunities—helping to facilitate the integration of residents with disabilities into the surrounding community and supporting independent lifestyles.

Of the 76 units, 70 percent will be affordable, and 30 percent market rate. When construction is complete, the plan is for the community’s residents to take an active role in helping their neighbors in manners appropriate to their abilities and interests.

For more information, visit the [Patuxent Commons website](#).

ENCORE!

TAMPA, FLORIDA

ENCORE! is a 40-acre (16.2 ha) mixed-use, mixed-income public housing redevelopment project in downtown Tampa, Florida, that integrates both age-restricted and family housing.

One of the apartments buildings, the Trio at ENCORE!, includes 141 multigenerational mixed-income, multifamily rental units that are designed for families, singles, couples, and friends. Completed in July 2014, Trio was fully leased within six months of opening. The building includes from one- to four-bedroom floor plans and it has received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification.

At full buildout, the LEED for Neighborhood Development Gold-rated community will have up to 1,513 housing units, plus 180,000 square feet (16,722.5 sq m) of office space, 200 hotel keys, and a 36,000-square-foot (3,344.5 sq m) grocery on its 12 city blocks.

For more information, see [ULI Case Studies, ENCORE](#).

Future Living

BERLIN, GERMANY

Future Living in Berlin, Germany, is a multifamily development with eight residential buildings and 90 apartments that began development in 2017, with families moving in by 2020. The project was intentionally [built to be multigenerational](#), and residents include a mix of singles, couples, families, seniors, and students.

Units range from one to four rooms—including shared apartments for seniors or students. The grounds feature communal spaces designed to encourage residents to socialize. A universal design approach supports those of all ages, with features including [voice- or app-controlled living environments](#) configured by experts to support daily living in ways tailored to specific residents. Systems are designed to control access to light, water, and unit entry with minimal effort.

For more information, visit the [Future Living website](#).

Cohousing

Cohousing is a [community-based living option](#) for people seeking strong social relationships, while maintaining individual living space and amenities. Residents have their own private dwellings, but community areas such as gardens, laundries, and gathering spaces are shared. Some cohousing developments are age restricted, while others are intentionally multigenerational.

While zoning and land use codes may restrict this type of housing or limit where such housing can be built, cohousing development is a growing movement that responds to increasing demand for housing that facilitates [social connection and environmental sustainability](#).



Orchards at 82nd, Portland, Oregon.

Aria Denver DENVER, COLORADO

In Denver, Colorado, Aria is a 28-unit cohousing project built inside a former convent building. It was developed in 2017 by UrbanVentures. Aria Cohousing is part of a larger Aria Denver development project, which will host 550 mixed-income residences, a production farm, and a small commercial strip when complete.

In addition to the residences—which all have their own kitchen, living and dining rooms, bedrooms, and bathrooms—the cohousing building includes several communal spaces, including a kitchen, dining room, television room, business center, visitor suite, and bike storage. Nine of the 28 homes in the cohousing development are permanently affordable, reserved for families making 80 percent of the area median income.

Developer Susan Powers of UrbanVentures worked with a small group of founders to plan and design the cohousing at Aria, which was born out of necessity: the campus’s convent building, originally erected for the Sisters of St. Francis, needed to be preserved, but it was not easily convertible to other uses. Together, Powers and the founders envisioned a new intergenerational, child-friendly community rooted in mutual inclusion and respect, connection, and ecological sustainability.

For more information, visit the [Aria Cohousing website](#).

Accessory Dwelling Units

ADUs are small residences that share a lot with a larger, primary dwelling. Such units may take different forms, including detached, attached, or fully internal to the primary unit.

As an independent living space, an ADU is self-contained, generally with its own kitchen or kitchenette, bathroom, and sleeping area. ADUs can be converted from an existing structure (such as a basement or a garage) or built new.

In some contexts, ADUs can be less expensive than other rental typologies. They can also provide a source of income for the owners of the “primary” property, which can contribute to the financial stability of low-income homeowners or help older adults on a fixed income age in place.

ADUs may also serve as a “caregiver suite” or enable an older adult or younger relative to move in with family members while maintaining independent, private space. In 2018, AARP found that two-thirds of persons over 50 would [contemplate living in a smaller ADU](#), and one-third would consider establishing a new one.

Shaw Forum Finding: Stakeholders should work with government-sponsored enterprises to develop mortgage loan products that offer credit for rental income from secondary residences on the site, such as ADUs, toward debt-to-income ratios.

However, [just eight states, plus the District of Columbia](#), have a statewide ADU policy, severely restricting housing alternatives for many multigenerational families. Yet local governments often have the authority to adopt more permissive standards than state law, and some communities (such as Alexandria, Virginia) have recently adopted zoning changes to encourage more ADU development.

Even where allowed, construction of ADUs can be a daunting prospect for homeowners, requiring financial resources, the time and ability to coordinate with architects and contractors, and overcoming other challenges. These barriers have limited the widespread construction of ADUs in many markets, and equitable access to ADU options will require thoughtful policy interventions.

— CASE STUDY —

Austin Alley Flats AUSTIN, TEXAS

The Alley Flat Initiative in Austin, Texas, facilitates the construction of small, detached ADUs that homeowners can use to generate additional revenue or to accommodate family members.

The initiative—a collaboration among the Austin Community Design and Development Center, Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation, and the University of Texas Center for Sustainable Development—has a comprehensive list of ADU options for income-qualified homeowners. It provides personalized support through the development process, including green design, financial education and prequalification, property management, and construction guidance.

For more information, visit [the Alley Flat Initiative website](#).

Tiny Home and Cottage Communities

Tiny homes are small, self-contained units that may resemble detached ADUs but they are not tied to a larger, primary unit.

Tiny homes may be built in “cottage clusters,” which can enable multigenerational neighborhoods by efficiently integrating a diverse and service-enriched housing type and price point into the existing built environment.

Railroad Cottages

FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Located in Falls Church, Virginia, about 30 minutes outside Washington, D.C., is the Railroad Cottages housing development, home to people ages 55 and older. The cottages were constructed in 2019 and the development features 10 fully built homes as of 2024. The 1,490-square-foot (138.4 sq m) homes are equipped with energy-saving systems and amenities. [Bwdarchitects](#) was the designer for the cottages, the developer was Robert Young, and a local real estate agent, Theresa Sullivan Twiford, oversaw the project.

The development is located immediately adjacent to a popular walking/biking trail and one common house contains a kitchen, dining area, guest room, and space for social interaction. The homes enable multigenerational living at the neighborhood level by providing a more diverse housing alternative in a predominantly larger single-family-home neighborhood.

For more information, visit the [city of Falls Church website](#).

– CASE STUDY –

Conversely, tiny homes may be mobile in nature, enabling “part-time” multigenerational living for older adults traveling to visit their families or for younger adults returning home.

Zoning and building code provisions related to lot size, unit size, and limitations on mobile structures can serve as barriers to tiny home development and occupancy.

The Cottages on Vaughan

CLARKSTON, GEORGIA

The Cottages on Vaughan is a pocket neighborhood on a half-acre lot a block from downtown Clarkston, Georgia, that includes eight micro-cottage homes that opened in 2021, a common green space for socialization, and edible landscaping. The cottages are a mix of 250 and 492 square feet (23.2 and 45.7 sq m). As of 2024, all the cottages were owner-occupied. They were developed by the MicroLife Institute.

The neighborhood includes residents with extra needs, such as foster children, people with developmental disabilities, and elderly residents, along with others who want to live within a caring community. The cottages are set within a walkable neighborhood and the development aims to [provide an alternative](#) to “concentrated institutional settings for elders and individuals with special needs.”

The cottages were designed with open and closed sides—the open sides have large windows facing side yards, while the closed sides have high windows and skylights to bring in ample light while preserving privacy. As a result, neighbors do not peer into one another’s living space. Room-sized front porches face common areas to encourage community interaction.

For more information, visit the [Cottages on Vaughan website](#).

– CASE STUDY –

Shared Housing

Shared housing refers to a situation in which a homeowner cohabits with a renter. With the exception of the resident's bedroom, the rest of the house, including the kitchen and dining space, is shared.

Shared housing [can be a solution](#) for residents young or old who need to share the property's financial or maintenance responsibility, or who want to move into a shared home as a tenant.

Shared housing and cohousing are options for individuals who are seeking housing arrangements that encourage interpersonal connections and combat isolation. However, some local codes may limit shared housing (particularly for nonfamily arrangements), predominantly through restrictions on the number of unrelated individuals living in a housing unit.



Alta Madrone, Sonoma, California.

— CASE STUDY —

HomeShare Vermont

[HomeShare Vermont](#) is a nonprofit that aims to reduce barriers to home sharing. The organization provides a range of services, including assistance with the screening and matching process.

Steps in the screening and matching process include conducting background checks, holding interviews, searching for matches based on lifestyle and personal preferences, match introductions and trial matches, and creating a match agreement outlining mutual expectations. HomeShare Vermont then provides match care and ongoing support.

— CASE STUDY —

Humanitas, Netherlands

In the Netherlands, social service organization Humanitas [integrates housing for students and older adults](#). Humanitas helps students pay for their dorm expenses in exchange for spending about 30 hours per month with older residents on activities such as preparing meals, grocery shopping, teaching, and accompanying them for recreational activities.



Building Multigenerational Neighborhoods and Cities

Housing that is conducive to intergenerational living must be accompanied by investments in community space and infrastructure that facilitate social connections, safe and inclusive mobility, and access to services for all ages.

Individual housing units do not exist in a vacuum. The benefits of a home built to the highest standards of enabling design will be muted if the surrounding community context is unsupportive of—or hostile to—healthy and active living for all ages.

The design of the built environment—homes, businesses, streets, sidewalks, parks, and other infrastructure—plays a major role in determining how conducive a neighborhood is to multigenerational living.



Pendana at West Lakes, Orlando, Florida.

Consistent with design considerations for the home itself, a community for all ages requires thoughtful attention to how individual components support or inhibit a high quality of life. There is evidence [documenting the connections](#) among built-environment characteristics and increases in chronic health problems, particularly those associated with obesity, lack of exercise, poor diet, and pollution.

Creating a supportive environment is beneficial not just to multigenerational households but to all members of a community. In planning for all ages, communities can create conditions that allow for people of different abilities, economic circumstances, and stages to maintain a high quality of life.

Shaw Forum Finding: Public policy plays a critical role in the geography, design, development, and cost of housing. Unfortunately, efforts to increase housing supply and make multigenerational living more attainable are impeded by policy-related obstacles including outdated building and zoning codes, inadequate infrastructure, lack of cross-sector coordination, and insufficient financing.

Building Inclusive and Connected Communities

Demographically and socially integrated communities provide a range of housing choices and neighborhood services that meet the needs of people from different backgrounds and of different income levels. Though some older adults may prefer to live in a community that specifically caters to their age cohort, others may prefer a more integrated lifestyle.

In addition to fulfilling the moral imperative to combat segregation, inclusive communities provide broad benefits: diverse housing options allow families to choose the neighborhood that meets their needs and stay if their circumstances change; integration allows employers to recruit from a broader range of prospective employees; and businesses have a broader consumer base, to name just a few benefits.

Options for staying in a neighborhood throughout various stages of life are strongly influenced by development patterns and housing-type diversity. If a neighborhood provides a range of housing choices, individual households have a greater likelihood of finding a nearby home that meets their needs, thus facilitating a multigenerational neighborhood.

Shaw Forum Finding: “Building community” does not mean simply putting people next to each other and hoping that they will develop neighborly relations. It is much more likely that an environment can facilitate real relationships—including those that are multigenerational in nature—if people are given things to do together and things to care about together.

In contrast, housing “monocultures” may make it more difficult to accomplish that goal if the predominant housing type is not accessible (from an income and ability perspective). Furthermore, intentional decisions related to the locations of age-restricted and/or service-enriched housing development can either facilitate or limit integration within the broader community.

Proximity alone will not automatically achieve integration. Social capital and community cohesion must be built through the intentional design of space and community programming.



Trojan Park, Wellston, Missouri.

Jackson Ward Development

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Enterprise Community Development, a nonprofit owner and developer of affordable homes in the Mid-Atlantic, has been advancing a multiphase redevelopment of a 200-unit age-restricted public housing development through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Rental Assistance Demonstration](#).

The [resulting three developments](#), which were [complete as of 2021](#), integrate affordable housing for older adults alongside developments for families to create multigenerational neighborhoods. In addition to the public housing replacement units, the [development](#) includes 36 workforce housing and 46 market-rate units as well as outdoor terrace patios, a fitness center, computer rooms, and planned retail space featuring a grocery store and restaurant.

The project was inspired by the history of the Jackson Ward neighborhood, which is listed as a National Historic Landmark District. During the early 20th century, Jackson Ward was the region's center of Black banking and commerce. The project not only redevelops this area, it also stitches together a portion of the neighborhood that was cut in half by the construction of Interstates 95 and 64.



East Clarke Place Senior Residence, Bronx, New York.

Combatting Racial and Economic Segregation

In addition to considerations related to age and ability, past and current patterns of [segregation \(both de jure and de facto\)](#) have limited opportunities for people of all ages that are part of racial and ethnic minority groups. Today, promoting communities that accommodate people of all ages requires bridging considerable income and wealth disparities (caused in large part by both explicit and implicit discrimination).

Neighborhood-level housing conditions—especially high housing prices, lack of rental inventory, and high rental costs—create barriers to entry for households with less financial security or with specific housing needs. To promote socially inclusive and economically diverse communities, cities must overcome a range of barriers related to land use and zoning, transportation, and more.

More than [half of Black and Hispanic renter households were cost burdened](#) before the pandemic, compared with 42 percent of Asian and white households. If these disparities persist across household type, those that are part of racial and ethnic minority groups—many of whom are part of cultural traditions that value sharing the responsibility of care across generations—may face disproportionate barriers to multigenerational living.

California Senate Bill 9

In September 2021, California passed Senate Bill (SB) 9, simplifying the process for constructing duplexes or subdividing existing lots, thereby creating a path to increase California's supply of low-rise, infill, missing middle housing.

This legislation follows similar [statewide legislation](#) to allow and promote construction of ADUs throughout the state. Existing missing middle housing in California is primarily concentrated in communities home to people with low and median incomes, where many of the residents are people of color. For example, due to Los Angeles's history of [exclusionary zoning](#) and racial segregation, close to [80 percent](#) of all two- to four-unit housing is located in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Proponents of SB 9 hope that allowing and expanding the construction of this housing typology in single-family detached neighborhoods (which tend to be more segregated by race and income) will expand housing opportunities for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds. If successful, such development could play a role in expanding opportunities for multigenerational living—potentially by reducing associated cost barriers.

Programming and Services

Family members of all ages can benefit from supportive programming and services that enhance quality of life. These supportive services can be provided by government agencies, grassroots organizations, churches, or other groups.

For older adults and persons with disabilities, assistance provided by families can be supplemented by services that expand capacity (for example, paratransit services) or provide a professionalized service (visiting in-home health aides).

For children, neighborhood-based daycare and child-care services, educational enrichment programs, and recreational activities can facilitate early childhood experiences that have a [lasting impact on a child's identity, health, and academic success](#).

— CASE STUDY —

Village to Village Network

As defined by the Village to Village Network, a membership-based organization that “brings ‘villages’ together to share best practices for enabling older adults to live independent, healthy, purposeful lives with connections to their communities,” “villages” are community-based, nonprofit, grassroots organizations formed through groups of caring neighbors who want to “change the paradigm of aging.” For example, villages promote staying active by coordinating recreational, social, educational, and cultural programs.

For examples and more information on how villages can potentially promote quality of life and support multigenerational living, visit the [Village to Village Network website](#).



Public plaza at 500 Northside Station, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Shaw Forum Finding: Sectors and systems that are inherently multigenerational should be included in efforts to further promote multigenerational living models. Educational systems, the health sector, faith institutions, and other service organizations are increasingly focused on housing and community development and can be powerful partners in this pursuit.



The Lofts on Arthington, Chicago, Illinois.

Shaw Forum Finding: Workforce development can be an effective tool for helping multigenerational communities meet age-related needs such as child care and home health support.

— CASE STUDY —

New York City and State Paratransit

Leveraging resources from multiple government agencies can [efficiently support programs and services](#) that improve quality of life for older people. For example, the New York City Department of Education has teamed with the Department of Aging to transport older New Yorkers for free from senior centers around the city to museums, parks, supermarkets, and other public places in school buses when the buses are not being used for children.

In rural New York state (Chenango County), the county government combined funds and services for disabled and older adult paratransit, Medicaid transit, and Meals on Wheels programs to form the core of a broader public transit system for users of all ages.

— CASE STUDY —

Integrated Wellness in Supportive Housing

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Integrated Wellness in Supportive Housing \(IWISH\) initiative](#) aims to help older citizens who live in affordable apartment communities gain access to health and wellness resources. Through the initiative, health care professionals make home visits to conduct basic health screenings and services. This service is potentially more productive and cost effective, because providing services to older adults in their homes is far [less costly than providing nursing-home care](#).

For more information, see the [Supportive Services Demonstration and Evaluation of IWISH](#).

Supportive Transportation Infrastructure

Infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks, transit, and bike paths provide connection between peoples' homes and locations that host all other aspects of their lives.

Multigenerational families often have diverse mobility needs. Disabilities and medical conditions associated with aging can complicate mobility.

Mobility systems that meet the needs of people at all stages of life must be multimodal, meaning they accommodate walking, biking, wheelchairs, cars, and other modes of transportation. Without suitable transportation options, [older residents may face isolation and increased dependence on family members](#), which could stress family dynamics.

Although automobile infrastructure will continue to play a role in mobility (particularly when mobility impairments severely limit a person's ability to walk), in many neighborhoods, automobile-centric systems have been built that can be inhospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists and make public transportation less efficient.

Shaw Forum Finding: Mobility is a form of engagement with society. The infrastructure and community surrounding a family's home are essential components of making multigenerational living more attainable and promoting social interaction.

Walkability provides both mobility and exercise, potentially contributing to [better health outcomes](#). Safe, dependable, and affordable public transit enables families to access jobs, educational opportunities, medical services, and other necessities situated both within and beyond their neighborhoods.

However, because walkable and multimodal neighborhoods are desirable, there is often a cost premium associated with them that can create barriers to access for lower-income households. As such, intentional strategies (including subsidies and land use tools) for inclusive and affordable housing are often necessary.

— CASE STUDY —

The Bonifant

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

[The Bonifant](#) in downtown Silver Spring, Maryland—a suburb of Washington, D.C.—is a mixed-income apartment community designed for older adults who want to live an urban lifestyle. Most of the units are affordable to residents earning between 30 and 60 percent of area median income.

The Bonifant is located in a mixed-use neighborhood with a WalkScore of 98; it is less than a one-half-mile walk to a [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Metrorail](#) station; and it is within walking distance of important services and amenities such as a library (colocated on site), grocery stores, and medical facilities.

Crucially, the Bonifant was the result of an [intentional public effort](#) in which the county government owned the property and prioritized the development of affordable housing and community facilities on the site.



Orchards at 82nd, Portland, Oregon.

— CASE STUDY —

Reimagined Bus Network Plan

HOUSTON, TEXAS

In 2015, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County—a public transportation agency based in Houston, Texas, that operates bus, light rail, bus rapid transit, high-occupancy vehicle and high-occupancy toll lanes, and paratransit service—authorized [the Reimagined Bus Network Plan](#), an innovative system of simplified routes aiming to build the bus network with improved connections and weekend service.

Individual routes on the map were color-coded based on their base network frequency, or how frequently the bus arrives at each stop along the route. On [the most frequent routes](#), local buses run every 15 minutes or less on main streets, at least 15 hours per day, seven days a week, serving communities, employment, education, medical care, and retail stores. Providing efficient, simplified routes that connect key destinations can support quality of life for people of all ages and abilities.

— CASE STUDY —

Austin, Texas

Leading Pedestrian Intervals

Infrastructure improvements, including pedestrian refuge islands, raised crosswalks, and leading pedestrian intervals (LPIs)—signals that allow pedestrians to enter the crosswalk several seconds ahead of turning vehicle traffic—support safer crossings for people of all ages and abilities, including children and older adults.

In 2019, in Austin, Texas, the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) implemented LPIs at [110 intersections](#) in the city's downtown to improve pedestrian safety in its most active pedestrian environment. The effort required collaboration between ATD Vision Zero program staff, traffic signal engineers, and public information personnel.

As of 2020, 87 percent of pedestrians surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safer crossing at an intersection with an LPI and 60 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they are more likely to use a crosswalk knowing that it has an LPI.

Inclusive Gathering Places

“Third places” are the businesses, service providers, faith-based communities, and gathering places that allow residents to meet their needs (and fulfill the need for connection) outside the home.

The elderly are at high risk of being cut off socially. Housing with common spaces that is near transportation and other community partners can help reverse the trend of “[self-segregated elderly enclaves](#),” with elaborate services but little contact with the outside community.”

Barriers to accessing third places often include zoning and land use policies that prohibit mixes of uses within a neighborhood and provisions, such as minimum parking requirements, that make creating such establishments difficult or cost prohibitive.

The continued increase in online shopping constitutes a barrier to local brick-and-mortar stores, which can serve as third places—though the negative consequences related to potential opportunities for connection may be offset by the convenience that delivery services provide, particularly for mobility-impaired residents.

Not all neighborhoods have the capacity to meet the need for third places, thus underscoring the importance of transportation and mobility infrastructure.

However, in general, proximity to third places eases related mobility burdens. The creation of inclusive gathering spaces and mobility infrastructure improvements can create a virtuous cycle: children and their families are more likely to walk or ride their bikes when there are convenient shopping options and pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly infrastructure and public transportation options nearby.



— CASE STUDY —

Gallery Alley WICHITA, KANSAS

An underused alleyway in downtown Wichita, Kansas, was transformed into [Gallery Alley](#) in 2017 by the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation (now Downtown Wichita) through an initially temporary pilot project that created a vibrant public space full of local public art.

In 2019, the city of Wichita permanently closed the alley to vehicular traffic to improve pedestrian safety, encourage walkability, and create a [permanent public space](#) with outdoor food and entertainment options. In 2021, Downtown Wichita worked with Envision, a group focused on improving quality of life for those who are visually impaired, to create intersensory art experiences in Gallery Alley.

Focusing on creating vibrant third places with inclusive design elements and experiences can serve to support multigenerational communities and provide spaces for social connection.

Accessible Parks and Outdoor Spaces

Parks, green spaces, and outdoor play areas are essential components of healthy communities. Safe access to parks and trails can be beneficial to family members of all ages.

Parks and trails can promote physical activity and community engagement and provide both environmental and mental health benefits. When well designed, parks have been shown to reduce stress and foster community interaction.

The interaction between outdoor space and mobility is especially important, as pedestrian infrastructure (i.e., trails and sidewalks) is critical for both transportation and outdoor active recreation.

Designing outdoor space that works for all ages—for example, by providing public restrooms and resting places—is also crucial for encouraging individuals to walk or visit parks while feeling confident and comfortable venturing from home. Several cities, including New York City, have [public bench initiatives](#) through which individuals may request benches in high-need areas.

Shaw Forum Finding: Without coordinating appropriate, accessible infrastructure with housing, we are at risk of creating gilded cages where homes fit residents' needs, but some people are unable to venture out. Solutions to this include creating paths and parks that are accessible to people of varying abilities and [that] connect homes to the surrounding community.

— CASE STUDY —

Playing Out

UNITED KINGDOM

[Playing Out](#) is a nonprofit organization focused on supporting the right of children to play outside to support their health, happiness, and sense of belonging. The organization began in Bristol, England, when neighbors came together to close their street to car traffic and open it up for play. After the idea spread, the Bristol City Council adopted a policy to expand the concept of using streets for play across the city.

The “play streets” idea has spread across the United Kingdom and beyond as a way to temporarily give children safe places to play directly outside their homes.

— CASE STUDY —

Free Play, Medicine Hat

ALBERTA, CANADA

The city of Medicine Hat, Alberta, invested just \$3,000 to support a grassroots community-led program that has resulted in better use of the city’s public parks and children’s playgrounds without investing millions of dollars in new infrastructure.

The “[free play](#)” initiative is a pop-up program where locals meet up at various city parks for play sessions using inexpensive and/or donated supplies. The initiative has promoted multigenerational interaction and it was supported by the city in part due to its low cost.

Although the city had recently replaced one local playground, it would have been unaffordable to replace every aging playset across the city. Free play also resulted more directly in increased park usage and social interaction than would likely have been achieved through infrastructure investment alone.

Conclusion: Making Multigenerational Communities Happen



New narratives about the demand for, and benefits of, multigenerational living, conducive public policies, and other shifts will be needed to make multigenerational communities happen.

Despite strong and growing demand for multigenerational living, progress toward building and retrofitting housing that works for people of all ages living together is slow. Today, there are too few, and insufficiently diverse, housing units that offer space and design characteristics to accommodate household members of different generations and needs.

As a result of this mismatch in supply and demand, multigenerational households frequently struggle to afford the homes and neighborhoods that meet their needs. In addition, the neighborhoods in which these homes are located, and the broader built environment, may lack the characteristics that facilitate a healthy quality of life for all generations.

Shaw Forum participants identified the need to change narratives and messaging related to the benefits of multigenerational living as well as the need to share successful examples. They also identified the need to address policy and institutional barriers to building multigenerational housing and communities.

Narratives framing housing and neighborhood development should communicate the many benefits of multigenerational living—from economic security and improved health to community connection and mutual care. And they should advance efforts to align stakeholders around the goal of providing inclusive housing that can evolve with changing household needs.

Although there are many barriers to multigenerational communities, real-world success stories, such as those in this report, demonstrate the viability and value of multigenerational housing and neighborhoods.

In the end, multigenerational living is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach to housing and communities. In fact, the very basis of it revolves around housing that evolves and changes over time according to people’s needs.

As cities move to enable and encourage the development of multigenerational models and typologies, they will better meet the growing demand for housing and places that support multigenerational households, while also meeting a variety of broader housing needs.

Multigenerational living is about making housing and communities work for more families and more people, and in doing so, allowing people to thrive at every stage of their lives.

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Support for this research was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation. ULI thanks the following industry leaders and stakeholders for providing their time and expertise for this research. Affiliations were correct at time of publication.

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