

**“ONE HOME, MANY GENERATIONS”: HOW
ADOPTING A UNIFORM DEFINITION OF
THE “MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY”
COULD BENEFIT MILLIONS OF
AMERICANS**

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For the past several decades, the number of Americans living in multigenerational homes has been steadily increasing. Multigenerational families may choose to live together for a variety of reasons; for example, some families achieve greater economic security by combining generations into one household, while others may wish to live together in order to better care for children or elder relatives. Furthermore, multigenerational families are often demographically distinct from other family structures, due to economic, geographic, and cultural factors.

Yet, despite the growing number of Americans living in multigenerational homes, and the unique characteristics of multigenerational families, there is still no widely accepted definition of the multigenerational family.

This Note addresses the need for a standardized definition of the multigenerational family. It describes the varying definitions of the multigenerational family, analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of these definitions, and argues that a standardized definition would help policymakers better understand the unique needs of multigenerational families. Finally, the Note proposes a model, standardized definition of the multigenerational family, which governments, organizations, and individuals can use as a helpful guideline.

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I. Introduction

For Sang Nguyen, a 25-year-old social worker, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was a particularly worrisome time.¹ Unable to work remotely, Nguyen worried about bringing the virus home to his parents, his 78-year-old grandmother, and his teenage siblings, all of whom live with Nguyen, and several of whom are at heightened risk for complications of COVID-19.² Upon returning home from work, Nguyen would enter through the garage, remove his clothes to disinfect them, and immediately shower.³ The Nguyen family was greatly relieved when they were finally able to begin receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations in March 2021.⁴

Mildred is a 59-year-old grandmother who is raising her two grandchildren.⁵ Mildred and her grandchildren suffer from food insecurity; however, because she does not hold legal custody of her grandchildren, she cannot qualify for certain government benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”).⁶ To afford nutritious meals for her grandchildren, Mildred has resorted to foregoing her medications.⁷ Nevertheless, she reports that her main concern is her grandchildren’s health, not her own.⁸ “I don’t worry about myself,” Mildred says, noting instead that her priority is to ensure that her grandchildren can “get the right amount of fruits, the right amount of vegetables. It’s stressful. And if [produce] wasn’t so expensive, we would have a lot more [food], and I wouldn’t have to skip my medicine.”⁹

Over a decade ago, when Anne-Marie Mecera and her husband were building their home, they added an in-law suite into their home

1. See April Simpson, Susan Ferriss, Taylor Johnston & Pratheek Rebala, *One Home, Many Generations: States Addressing Covid Risk Among Families*, NBC NEWS (Mar. 27, 2021, 8:22 AM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latino-multigenerational-households-risk-covid-states-address-vaccine-rcna511> [hereinafter *One Home, Many Generations*].

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. See Marie C. Gualtieri, *Why Some Grandparents Raising Grandkids Can’t Get Government Help*, FORBES (June 5, 2019, 11:26 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2019/06/05/why-some-grandparents-raising-grandkids-cant-get-government-help/?sh=72ce79f61335> [hereinafter Gualtieri].

6. *Id.*

7. *Id.*

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.*

to accommodate Mecera’s parents.¹⁰ For about ten years, Mecera’s parents mainly lived independently, while sharing regular family meals with Mecera and her husband.¹¹ However, after the sudden passing of Mecera’s brother—which triggered a decline in her father’s health—Mecera’s parents have come to rely on her and her husband to a greater extent.¹² Mecera reports both challenges (such as managing her mother’s declining physical ability and her father’s increasing cognitive impairment) and joys (such as reconnecting with her parents) as a result of her family’s living arrangement.¹³

Nguyen, Mildred, and Mecera are all members of multigenerational families.¹⁴ As different as their living arrangements may seem, their experiences share certain important commonalities. For example, all three worry about the health of their family members of different generations and feel a sense of responsibility to keep their family members safe.¹⁵ However, because of differences in state and federal agencies’ definitions of “multigenerational families,” state, federal, and public policy institutions may vary in whether they consider Nguyen, Mildred, and Mecera to be members of multigenerational homes.¹⁶

The number of Americans living in multigenerational homes is at an all-time high, and the percent of Americans living in these homes has been steadily increasing over the past several decades.¹⁷ Moreover, the percentage of Americans living in multigenerational homes has sharply increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as families have

10. See Ann Marie Mecera, *This Is What Happened When My Parents Moved In*, AGINGCARE, <https://www.agingcare.com/articles/what-happened-when-parents-moved-in-170770.htm> (last visited Jan. 28, 2023) [hereinafter Mecera].

11. *Id.*

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.*

14. See *One Home, Many Generations*, *supra* note 1; Gualtieri, *supra* note 5; Mecera, *supra* note 10.

15. See *id.*

16. See Gene Balk, *Washington State’s COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout: Do You Live in a Multigenerational Household?*, SEATTLE TIMES (Jan. 28, 2021, 6:44 AM), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/washingtons-covid-19-vaccine-rollout-do-you-live-in-a-multigenerational-household/> [hereinafter Balk].

17. See D’Vera Cohn & Jeffrey S. Passel, *A Record 64 Million Americans Live in Multigenerational Households*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Apr. 5, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/05/a-record-64-million-americans-live-in-multigenerational-households/> [hereinafter Cohn & Passel].

chosen to live together in order to offset financial difficulties associated with the economic downturn created by the pandemic.¹⁸

Yet, despite the growing rate of Americans living in these homes, there is no single definition of a “multigenerational home.”¹⁹ Federal and state agencies vary—sometimes widely—in their definitions.²⁰ The lack of a unified definition can create confusion for people trying to determine whether they qualify for benefits and government programs specifically designed for people living in multigenerational homes.²¹ It can also hinder the ability of social science researchers to draw comparisons between studies of multigenerational families, since studies may differ in how they define “multigenerational homes.”²² This makes it more difficult for researchers to draw conclusions about the entire population of multigenerational families.²³

This Note describes the varying definitions of multigenerational households and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of these definitions. It argues that federal, state, and local agencies should adopt a uniform definition, set forth in the Recommendation section of this paper, in order to best serve multigenerational families.

The Background section briefly describes the prevalence of multigenerational homes in the United States, particularly among elderly people. It also discusses common demographic characteristics of multigenerational households. Finally, it reviews the challenges that multigenerational households tend to face, since an awareness of these factors is key to developing an inclusive definition that will most effectively serve the population.

The Analysis section explains how public policy considerations favor developing a uniform definition of “the multigenerational

18. Joanne Binette, Angela Houghton, & Stephanie Firestone, *Pandemic's Economic Pressures Pushing Generations Under One Roof*, AARP (Jan. 2021), <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/community/info-2020/multigenerational-multicultural-living.html> [hereinafter Binette, Houghton, & Firestone]; Michele Lerner, *Together as a Family: Multigenerational Living Rises in Pandemic*, WASH. POST (May 13, 2021, 12:00 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate/together-as-a-family-multigenerational-living-rises-in-pandemic/2021/05/12/bd8598f6-a900-11eb-8d25-7b30e74923ea_story.html [hereinafter Lerner].

19. See Balk, *supra* note 16.

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.*

22. Duy Do, Renae Rodgers, & Julia A. Rivera, INTEGRATED HEALTH INTERVIEW SERIES, *Multigenerational Families and Food Insecurity in the United States, 1998-2013* INTEGRATED HEALTH INTERVIEW SERIES (June 2015) [hereinafter Do, Rodgers, & Drew].

23. See *id.*

family.” The Analysis also reviews the wide variety of definitions of “the multigenerational family,” as set forth by state governments, public policy organizations, and the Federal Census Bureau. Further, through a discussion of the similarities and differences between these definitions, the Analysis section presents a commentary about how each definition may be well-suited or poorly suited to address the needs of multigenerational households. The Analysis section then evaluates which elements should be included in a definition of “a multigenerational family,” as well as which elements should be excluded. It also provides a commentary on the appropriate level of detail for a standard definition of “the multigenerational family.”

The Recommendation section sets forth a proposed definition of “the multigenerational family,” which can be used by state, federal, and local government entities. This recommendation is based upon the factors considered in the Analysis section. The Recommendation section also discusses the reasons why governments and organizations should adopt this particular definition, and addresses recommended uses for the definition. Finally, the Conclusion section reiterates the importance of a uniform definition of the multigenerational family from a public policy standpoint.

Two final points are necessary before delving into the Background section. First, some sources use the term “multigenerational family,” while other sources use the phrase “multigenerational home.” Given the significant practical overlap between these two terms, they are used interchangeably throughout this Note.

Second, because there is no uniform definition of “a multigenerational family,” social science researchers do not always define the multigenerational family in the same way, which can make it difficult for readers to draw comparisons between studies.²⁴ This topic will be addressed in depth in the Analysis section of this Note. However, the reader should note that in this paper, except where otherwise indicated, the phrases “multigenerational family” or “multigenerational home” mean a household “including two or more adult generations, or including grandparents and grandchildren younger than 25.”²⁵ This definition

24. *See id.*

25. *See* Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

was developed by the Pew Research Center and is commonly cited by other sources.²⁶

II. Background

A. Demographic Characteristics of Multigenerational Families

In 2016, sixty-four million Americans, or 20% of the U.S. population, lived in a multigenerational household.²⁷ Moreover, multigenerational living is common among the elderly.²⁸ Twenty percent of all non-institutionalized adults over the age of sixty-five live in a multigenerational home.²⁹ Furthermore, an older adult's chances of living in a multigenerational home increase with his or her age; over 25% of all adults over the age of eighty-five live in a multigenerational household.³⁰

Demographically, multigenerational families differ from non-multigenerational families in several significant ways. First, multigenerational living is particularly common among people of color, as Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Black Americans are more likely than white Americans to live in multigenerational homes.³¹ Of these groups, Asian Americans are the most likely to live in multigenerational homes, with 29% of Asian Americans living in a multigenerational household in 2016.³² In the same year, 27% of Hispanic Americans and 26% of Black Americans lived in a multigenerational household.³³ By contrast, only 16% of white Americans lived in a multigenerational household in 2016.³⁴

Another way in which multigenerational families differ demographically from single-generation families is immigration status. Immigrants to the United States are more likely to live in

26. See *id.*; see, e.g., Shannon Rieger, *The Continued Growth of Multigenerational Living*, JOINT CTR. HOUS. STUD. HARV. UNIV. (Mar. 9, 2017) [hereinafter Rieger].

27. Madison Hoff, *Social Distancing May Be Harder for Families Who Live With Elderly Relatives. Here Are the 15 States With the Largest Share of Multigenerational Households.*, INSIDER (Apr. 25, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-states-with-the-most-multigenerational-households-2020-4>.

28. See Rieger, *supra* note 26.

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

multigenerational families than people born in the United States.³⁵ In addition, states whose populations have a high percentage of immigrants tend to also have a high percentage of multigenerational families.³⁶ This may explain why multigenerational living appears to be more prevalent in the southeastern and western United States than in other regions.³⁷ Of the 15 states with the largest share of multigenerational households, 7 (Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Georgia, Maryland, and Texas) are in the southeastern United States, while 6 (Utah, Alaska, Nevada, Arizona, California, and Hawaii) are in the western United States.³⁸

B. Economic Characteristics of Multigenerational Families

Multigenerational families, as compared with other families, have a unique economic profile.³⁹ A 2011 Pew Research Center analysis found that, while people in multigenerational households are generally less likely to live below the poverty line, multigenerational families made up of three members have a lower mean household income than people in standard households with three members.⁴⁰ This points to a complex relationship between multigenerational living and wealth, such that multigenerational living can be a cost-saving measure "only if the economies realized from living together exceed the costs of adding people to the household."⁴¹

Troublingly, one study shows that multigenerational families are slightly more likely than single-generation families to suffer from food insecurity.⁴² This analysis was conducted by the Integrated Health Interview Series ("IHIS"), which expansively defines multigenerational families to include two-generation families, three-generation families, skipped-generation families, and more-than-three-generation

35. See Haya El Nasser, *More Multigenerational Households in Immigrant Areas*, USA TODAY (Oct. 25, 2012), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/10/25/census-multigenerational-households/1653159/>.

36. *Id.*

37. *See id.*

38. *Id.*

39. RAKESH KOCHHAR & D'VERA COHN, FIGHTING POVERTY IN A TOUGH ECONOMY, AMERICANS MOVE IN WITH THEIR RELATIVES 1 (Paul Taylor, 2011). [hereinafter *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*].

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

42. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 3.

families.⁴³ Their study found that 15% of multigenerational families faced food insecurity during a two-year period from 2011 to 2013, compared to 11% of single-generation families.⁴⁴

C. Challenges Faced by Multigenerational Families

Multigenerational families face several unique challenges. First, multiple generations do not always willingly choose to live together; instead, many families must live in multigenerational households for economic reasons, as demonstrated by IHIS's discussion of how economic downturns have caused family structures in the United States to change.⁴⁵ While these arrangements can alleviate poverty, they may also create interpersonal conflicts between family members due to concerns about privacy, overcrowding, and disagreements about the roles that each family member should play in the household.⁴⁶ For example, parents and grandparents often report that they conflict with one another about how to care for children in the home, which can seriously damage relationships between family members.⁴⁷

Second, members of multigenerational households frequently need to make lifestyle changes to protect the health and safety of their family members.⁴⁸ For example, because homes are not always built to accommodate multiple generations, homeowners may need to change certain features of their homes in order to ensure the safety of elderly family members.⁴⁹ Likewise, grandparents whose grandchildren live with them must ensure that their homes are free of any common hazards for children.⁵⁰ Grandparents who help to raise their grandchildren must familiarize themselves with the latest medical recommendations

43. *Id.* at 8.

44. *Id.* at 3. (For a detailed description of all the household structures which fall under these categories, see discussion *infra* Section III.B).

45. *See id.*

46. Binette, Houghton, & Firestone, *supra* note 18.

47. Kelly Anderson, *Parents, Grandparents Disagree on How Grandchildren Are Raised, Poll Finds*, AARP (Aug. 21, 2020), <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2020/parents-grandparents-disagree-poll.html>.

48. *Id.*

49. See Melissa Rayworth, *9 Ways to Design Your Home for Multigenerational Living*, AARP (May 20, 2021), <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/your-home/info-2021/multigenerational-living-home-design-tips.html>.

50. Casey Kelly-Barton, *What Every Grandparent Should Know About Child Safety*, SENIORADVISOR.COM, <https://www.senioradvisor.com/blog/2016/08/what-every-grandparent-should-know-about-child-safety/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

for caring for children, as the most recent best practices can be quite different from those of previous generations.⁵¹

Finally, for older adults with health challenges and their families, traveling can be especially difficult.⁵² These families must plan their travel arrangements and vacation activities carefully to ensure that older adults can safely participate.⁵³ Conversely, when it is not possible or desirable for older adults to travel with their younger family members, families should arrange for them to receive temporary care from an external source.⁵⁴

D. Challenges for Multigenerational Families That Have Arisen Out of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional challenges for multigenerational families.⁵⁵ For example, throughout the pandemic, multigenerational families have struggled with social distancing.⁵⁶ Moreover, before COVID-19 vaccines were readily available, families with children and their grandparents living under one roof had to weigh the benefits of in-person schooling against the risks to older family members of catching COVID-19 from their grandchildren.⁵⁷ Most alarmingly, elderly people in multigenerational families may be at increased risk of complications from COVID-19, relative to elderly people who do not live in multigenerational homes.⁵⁸ A recent study conducted in the United Kingdom found that elderly individuals living in

51. *See id.*

52. Sheryl Leary, *Summer Travel Plans for Caregivers*, TODAY'S CAREGIVER, <https://caregiver.com/articles/summer-travel-plans-for-caregivers/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

53. *Id.*

54. *See id.*

55. Lenny Bernstein, *Young People are Infecting Older Family Members in Shared Homes*, WASH. POST (July 29, 2020, 6:50 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/young-people-are-infecting-older-family-members-in-shared-homes/2020/07/28/b8cdc810-cd0a-11ea-b0e3-d55bda07d66a_story.html.

56. *Id.*

57. Evan Anderson, *Back to School Concerns for Multigenerational Families*, NBCDFW (Aug. 7, 2020, 9:00 AM) [hereinafter Anderson], <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/back-to-school/back-to-school-concerns-for-multigenerational-families/2421783/>.

58. Vahé Nafilyan, Nazrul Islam, Daniel Ayoubkhani, Clare Gilles, Srinivasa Vittal Katikireddi, Rohini Mathur, Annabel Summerfield, Karen Tingay, Miqdad Asaria, Ann John, Peter Goldblatt, Amitava Banerjee, Myer Glickman, & Kamlesh Khunti, *Ethnicity, Household Composition and COVID-19 Mortality: A National Linked Data Study*, 114 J. ROYAL SOC'Y MED. 182, 196 (2021) [hereinafter Nafilyan et al.].

multigenerational homes were more likely to die of COVID-19, even when controlling for confounding factors.⁵⁹

Policymakers should pay attention to the common characteristics of multigenerational families, as well as the unique challenges these families face, in developing a uniform definition of the multigenerational family.⁶⁰ For example, given that many multigenerational families are immigrants or people of color, a definition should be sensitive to cultural differences in how people define their own families.⁶¹ Additionally, a definition should be especially responsive to those families in which elderly adults live, since elders are at increased risk of health complications, which may be aggravated by living with younger family members.⁶² Policymakers should be particularly attuned to the complex economic profile of multigenerational households, since understanding the economics of multigenerational living is crucial to developing solutions to poverty among multigenerational families.⁶³

II. Analysis

A. Public Policy Reasons for Developing a Uniform Definition of the Multigenerational Family

1. A SINGLE DEFINITION WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILIES TO DETERMINE THEIR ELIGIBILITY FOR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

Members of multigenerational families can benefit from a variety of existing government assistance programs.⁶⁴ These programs are often specifically targeted at multigenerational families in which at least

59. *Id.* As the authors of this study note, a possible explanation for this finding is that older adults face an increased risk of COVID-19 as a result of living with younger adults, who are more likely to contract the virus through work.

60. See discussion *infra* Section II.A.1, II.A.2.

61. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

62. Nafilyan et al., *supra* note 58, at 196.

63. Carmen Reinicke, *For Families with Multiple Generations Under One Roof, The Pandemic Has Brought Unique Challenges*, CNBC (Nov. 27, 2020, 9:30 AM), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/27/covid-19-brought-unique-challenges-for-multigenerational-families.html>; see generally Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

64. See ADVISORY COUNCIL TO SUPPORT GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN, *Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act Initial Report to Congress 14* (2021) [hereinafter *Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act Initial Report to Congress*], https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE_SGRG/SGRG-InitialReportToCongress_2021-11-16.pdf.)

one resident is an older adult.⁶⁵ For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development runs the Demonstration Program for Elderly Housing for Intergenerational Families, which funds intergenerational housing for low-income grandparents or other relatives over age sixty-two who are raising a child.⁶⁶

In addition, the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), administers Kinship Navigator Programs to grandparents raising their grandchildren, as well as other "kin caregivers," such as aunts and uncles raising their nieces and nephews.⁶⁷ The Kinship Navigator Programs assist these families by connecting them to social services programs and informational resources.⁶⁸ Another division of HHS, the Administration for Community Living, administers the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which funds initiatives to assist families in caring for elderly adults living in their homes.⁶⁹

Individuals living in multigenerational homes, however, are often unaware of the many social services programs that are available to them.⁷⁰ One problem compounding this issue is that people are not always sure whether their homes qualify as multigenerational.⁷¹ For example, when the state of Washington announced that it would permit people over age 50 who lived in multigenerational homes to receive their COVID-19 vaccination early, questions arose about whether households encompassing adult roommates or romantic partners with a substantial age gap could qualify as multigenerational.⁷² A standard definition of a multigenerational family could help people easily determine their eligibility for these programs.⁷³

65. *Id.* at 14.

66. *Elderly Housing for Intergenerational Families*, U.S. DEPT. HOUS. & URB. DEV., https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/mfh/progdsc/eldfam (last visited Jan. 31, 2023).

67. *See Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act Initial Report to Congress*, *supra* note 64, at 14.

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.*

70. *Id.*

71. *See Balk*, *supra* note 16.

72. *Id.*

73. *See id.*

2. **A UNIFORM DEFINITION OF THE MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY WOULD IMPROVE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILIES BY ALLOWING FOR DIRECT COMPARISONS BETWEEN STUDIES.**

As mentioned in the Background section, *supra*, social science researchers use many different definitions of “the multigenerational family.”⁷⁴ This lack of unity in defining “the multigenerational family” can impede researchers’ ability to fully understand the relationships between different research findings.⁷⁵ As an illustrative example, consider the IHIS study, mentioned in the Background section, *supra*, which found that multigenerational families were more likely than single-generation families to face food insecurity.⁷⁶ This finding seems to suggest that multigenerational families are particularly vulnerable to poverty.⁷⁷ However, another study, conducted by the Pew Research Center, tells a different story: that study found that multigenerational families are less likely than single-generation families to live below the poverty line.⁷⁸

Comparing the Pew Research Center study with the IHIS study thus presents a paradox. Taken together, the two studies suggest that multigenerational families are less likely to live below the poverty line, but they are more likely to face food insecurity.⁷⁹ One possible explanation for this finding is that, while multigenerational families are less likely overall to experience poverty, those multigenerational families who do live below the poverty line tend to experience more severe poverty than single-generation families.⁸⁰

There is, however, another plausible explanation for the paradox.⁸¹ The IHIS definition of the multigenerational family includes more family structures than the Pew Research Center definition; for example, IHIS’s definition would include a home in which an uncle raises his nine-year-old nephew, whereas Pew’s definition would only include households in which there are at least two adults who belong to different generations, or households in which a grandparent raises a

74. See discussion *infra* Section II; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 8.

75. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 7.

76. *Id.*; see discussion *infra* Section II.

77. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 7.

78. *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39.

79. See *id.*; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

80. See generally *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

81. See generally *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

grandchild.⁸² It is therefore possible that certain household structures which are considered multigenerational by the IHIS, but not by the Pew Research Center, are more likely to experience food insecurity than other kinds of households.⁸³ This disparity could explain the seemingly conflicting research findings between the two studies.⁸⁴

Having a uniform definition of the multigenerational family could alleviate this problem.⁸⁵ If researchers used a standard definition, they could more easily make comparisons between studies and draw conclusions about the entire population of multigenerational families.⁸⁶

This furthers an important public policy goal: by comparing studies with one another, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues facing multigenerational families, which in turn can influence government policy tailored to these families.⁸⁷ For example, if researchers could fully understand why one study shows that multigenerational families are less likely to live below the poverty line, while another shows that multigenerational families are more likely to be food-insecure, policymakers could develop programs specifically targeted towards alleviating the problems of poverty and food insecurity in multigenerational households.⁸⁸

B. A Review of Definitions of the Multigenerational Family

State and federal agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, have all set forth definitions of "the multigenerational family."⁸⁹

82. Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

83. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

84. Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

85. See *supra* Part II.A.1.

86. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

87. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

88. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

89. *Q & A: Multigenerational Households and Vaccination*, OREGON.GOV: OR. HEALTH NEWS BLOG (Mar. 31, 2021), <https://covidblog.oregon.gov/qa-multigenerational-households-and-vaccination/> [hereinafter *Q & A*]; *Moving to the Next Phase: Vaccine Expansion Plan Meant to Accelerate the Pace of Vaccinations Statewide*, WASH. STATE DEP'T HEALTH (Jan. 18, 2021), <https://doh.wa.gov/newsroom/moving-next-phase-vaccine-expansion-plan-meant-accelerate-pace-vaccinations-statewide> [hereinafter *News Release*]; Daphne A Lofquist, *Multigenerational Households: 2009-2011*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Oct. 1, 2012), <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2012/acs/acsbr11-03.html> [hereinafter *Multigenerational Households: 2009-2011*]; Rodney Harrell, Enid Kassner, & Carlos Figueiredo, *Multigenerational Households Are Increasing*, AARP PUB. POL'Y INST. (Apr. 2011), <https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/fs221-housing.pdf> [hereinafter Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo].

At the state level, Oregon and Washington have each developed a definition of “the multigenerational family” for purposes of COVID-19 vaccine eligibility.⁹⁰ Oregon defines “a multigenerational household” as “a home where people from three or more generations are living,” or a household “made up of people from two generations” in which “people live with and care for a relative who is not their own child, such as a grandchild, a niece, or a nephew.”⁹¹ By contrast, the Washington State Department of Health defines “a multigenerational household” as “a home where individuals from 2 or more generations reside—such as an elder or grandchild.”⁹²

While there are few federal definitions of the multigenerational family, the Federal Census Bureau describes multigenerational families as “family households consisting of three or more generations.”⁹³

Finally, public policy institutions may set forth their own definitions of “multigenerational families.”⁹⁴ For example, the AARP Public Policy Institute describes “a multigenerational household” as “one in which the ‘householder’ lives in any of the following combinations: householder, child, and grandchild[,] householder with parent[,] householder with parent and child[,] householder with grandchild[,] householder with parent, child, and grandchild[,] [and] householder with parent and grandchild.”⁹⁵

As mentioned in Section IIB, *infra*, IHIS has set forth a broad, highly detailed definition of “the multigenerational family.”⁹⁶ Under this definition, four categories of households are considered multigenerational: two-generation, three-generation, skipped-generation, and more-than-three-generation households.⁹⁷ For each category, the organization has enumerated which kinds of households would qualify.⁹⁸

All family structures are defined in relation to the head of the household.⁹⁹ For the purposes of IHIS’s study, a head of household’s aunt, uncle, or legal guardian can qualify as a member of the head’s

90. Q & A, *supra* note 89; News Release, *supra* note 89.

91. Q & A, *supra* note 89.

92. News Release, *supra* note 89.

93. *Multigenerational Households: 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

94. See Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89.

95. *Id.*

96. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

97. *Id.*

98. *Id.*

99. *Id.*

parent generation.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, a head of household's niece or nephew, or the child of the head's unmarried romantic partner, can be considered the head's "child" for the purposes of this definition.¹⁰¹

The simplest of the four categories are two-generation and three-generation families.¹⁰² Two-generation families may consist of a head of household and an adult child (age 19 or older); a head of household, an adult child, and a minor child; or a head of household and the head's parent.¹⁰³ Three-generation families may consist of a head of household, a minor or adult child, and a grandchild; a head of household, a minor or adult child, and the head's parent; or a head of household, a parent of the head, and a grandparent of the head.¹⁰⁴

Skipped-generation families and more-than-three-generation families are also considered multigenerational.¹⁰⁵ Skipped-generation families may include a head of household and a grandchild; a head of household, a parent of the head, and a grandchild of the head; a head of household and a grandparent of the head; a head of household, a child of the head, and a grandparent of the head; or a head of household, a grandparent of the head, and a grandchild of the head.¹⁰⁶

More-than-three-generation families may include any of the following combinations of family members: a head of household, a parent of the head, a grandparent of the head, and a child of the head; a head of household, a parent of the head, a child of the head, and a grandchild of the head; a head of household, a parent of the head, a grandparent of the head, a child of the head, and a grandchild of the head; a head of household, a grandparent of the head, a child of the head, and a grandchild of the head; and a head of household, a parent of the head, a grandparent of the head, and a grandchild of the head.¹⁰⁷

IHIS's definition is helpful because it is inclusive of a wide variety of family structures, including family structures that are relatively unique in the United States.¹⁰⁸ However, because of its high level of detail, the definition is very long.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it may not be realistic to

100. *Id.*

101. *Id.*

102. *See id.*

103. *Id.*

104. *Id.*

105. *Id.*

106. *Id.*

107. *See id.* at 9.

108. *See generally id.* at 8–9.

109. *Id.*

implement this definition as a basic definition of the multigenerational family.¹¹⁰ An overly long definition runs the risk of confusing the public, making it potentially counterproductive as a public policy measure.¹¹¹

C. Similarities and Differences Between These Definitions

A partner at the law firm of Helsell Fetterman writes that “the common theme in these definitions [Washington’s definition, the Census Bureau’s definition, the Pew Research Center’s definition, and AARP’s definition] is that a multigenerational household is one where either an elder like a grandparent lives, or the youngest generation resident is an adult. A household with a 55-year-old parent and a 15-year-old child would not, under any of these definitions, qualify as a multigenerational household.”¹¹² While this definition provides a framework for understanding the commonalities between most definitions, it is not inclusive of Oregon’s definition or IHIS’ definition.¹¹³

Oregon’s definition specifically provides that a household in which a person cares for a relative who is not their child—such as a niece or nephew—is considered a multigenerational home.¹¹⁴ Thus, for example, a home in which a forty-year-old woman raises her five-year-old niece would qualify as a multigenerational home in Oregon, but would not meet Helsell Fetterman’s definition, since no elder lives in the home, and the youngest resident of the home is not an adult.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Helsell Fetterman’s definition is not inclusive of IHIS’s definition of the multigenerational family.¹¹⁶ For example, IHIS would consider a home in which a forty-five-year-old father, his nineteen-year-old son, and his ten-year-old daughter all live together to be multigenerational.¹¹⁷ However, Helsell Fetterman would not consider such

110. *Writing Definitions*, PURDUE UNIV.: PURDUE OWL, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/definitions.html (last visited Jan. 31, 2023) [hereinafter *Writing Definitions*].

111. *See id.*

112. Scott Collins, “Multigenerational Household” for COVID-19 Vaccine Purposes, HELSELL FETTERMAN (Jan. 10, 2021), <https://www.helsell.com/2021/01/10/multigenerational-household-for-covid-19-vaccine-purposes/> [hereinafter Collins].

113. *See id.*; *see also Q & A, supra* note 89; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 9.

114. *See Q & A, supra* note 89.

115. *See id.*; *see also* Collins, *supra* note 112.

116. *See* Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 8–9; *see also* Collins, *supra* note 112.

117. *See* Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 8–9.

a home to be multigenerational, since no elderly adult lives in the home and the youngest generation resident is not an adult.¹¹⁸

In sum, Helsell Fetterman’s definition would encompass three of the definitions, but would not fully encompass Oregon’s definition or IHIS’s definition.¹¹⁹ A uniform definition of the multigenerational family may therefore include elements beyond those set forth by Helsell Fetterman.¹²⁰

Some of these definitions are more detailed, with more specific criteria for a multigenerational family, while others are broader.¹²¹ For example, the AARP and IHIS definitions of “a multigenerational family” list out all the family arrangements which would qualify.¹²² In contrast, the Washington State Department of Health’s definition only provides that “a multigenerational home” is “a home where individuals from 2 or more generations reside—such as an elder or grandchild.”¹²³ This difference between definitions points to an overarching question that will be addressed in a subsequent section of the Analysis: is a more detailed definition preferable to a less detailed one?

Most of these definitions would consider certain households with two or more generations to be multigenerational; in contrast, the Federal Census Bureau (FCB) definition requires that there be “three or more generations” in the household.¹²⁴ The FCB’s definition therefore excludes significantly more households than the other definitions.¹²⁵

For example, the Pew Research Center estimates that, of 64 million multigenerational households in 2016, fewer than half (28.4 million) consisted of “three or more generations.”¹²⁶ This figure indicates that

118. See *id.*; see also Collins, *supra* note 112.

119. See Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89, at 1; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 9; Collins, *supra* note 112; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89, at 1; *News Release*, *supra* note 89.

120. See Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89, at 1; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 9; Collins, *supra* note 112; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89, at 1; *News Release*, *supra* note 89.

121. See Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89, at 1; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 9; Collins, *supra* note 112; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89, at 1; *News Release*, *supra* note 89.

122. See Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89, at 1; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 9.

123. See Collins, *supra* note 112.

124. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 8–9; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89.

125. See Collins, *supra* note 112.; see also Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

126. Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

over 35 million U.S. households would be considered multigenerational by the Pew Research Center but not by the FCB, a problem which suggests that the FCB may be undercounting the total number of multigenerational families in the United States.¹²⁷

D. Relative Strengths and Weaknesses of the Definitions

Three overarching questions will guide the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these definitions. First, how detailed should a definition be? The answer to this question will provide guidance on how to answer the next two questions. Which elements must be included in a definition of the multigenerational question? Which elements are superfluous and should be excluded?

1. HOW DETAILED SHOULD A DEFINITION BE?

The College of Liberal Arts at Purdue University, through its Online Writing Lab, has identified several guidelines for developing an effective definition.¹²⁸ At its most basic level, a definition should include three elements.¹²⁹ First, the definition should include the word or phrase that will be defined.¹³⁰ Second, the definition should specify the class of object or concept to which the term belongs.¹³¹ Third, the definition should indicate the differentiating characteristics that distinguish it from all others of its class.¹³² As a rule of thumb, a definition should be just broad enough to include all members of the term being defined.¹³³

Keeping in step with these guidelines, a definition of “the multigenerational family” should explicitly define the term “multigenerational household” or “multigenerational family,” specify that these terms refer to living arrangements, and describe with particularity the qualities that multigenerational households possess which single-generational households do not.¹³⁴ The definition should only be as broad as is necessary to achieve these purposes.¹³⁵

127. *Id.*

128. *See Writing Definitions, supra* note 110.

129. *See id.*

130. *Id.*

131. *Id.*

132. *Id.*

133. *Id.*

134. *Id.*

135. *Id.*

2. WHICH ELEMENTS MUST BE INCLUDED IN A DEFINITION OF THE MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY?

All the definitions cited in this paper share two basic elements: they all require that a multigenerational family includes at least two people who live together, and that they belong to different generations.¹³⁶ Thus, for example, a thirty-year-old woman and her forty-two-year-old husband could not, under any of these definitions, qualify as a multigenerational family.¹³⁷ Although the couple's age difference is substantial, given that the average age difference between married partners in the U.S. is 2.3 years, the couple do not belong to separate generations, and thus cannot qualify as a multigenerational household.¹³⁸

Likewise, a forty-year-old woman and her sixty-five-year-old mother could not qualify as a multigenerational home if they do not live together on a permanent basis.¹³⁹ Frequent visits between the two would not be sufficient to make them a multigenerational family, even though they belong to different generations.¹⁴⁰ In sum, a multigenerational family must include people of different generations who share a permanent residence.¹⁴¹

3. WHICH ELEMENTS ARE SUPERFLUOUS AND SHOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM A DEFINITION OF THE MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY?

Some of the definitions listed above would consider a family multigenerational if it is one in which a family member, such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle, raises a minor child.¹⁴² However, none of the

136. *Id.*

137. See generally Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *News Release*, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

138. See Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *News Release*, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89; see also Mona Chalabi, *What's the Average Age Difference in a Couple?*, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT (Jan. 22, 2015), <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/whats-the-average-age-difference-in-a-couple/>.

139. See generally Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *News Release*, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

140. Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89.

141. *Id.*

142. *Id.*

definitions cited in this Note would consider a family in which a parent lives with his or her minor child to be a multigenerational family.¹⁴³

According to the Federal Census Bureau, 63.1 million people were parents of children under age 18 who lived at home with them.¹⁴⁴ It is unclear whether this statistic only includes families in which all children are under 18.¹⁴⁵ However, given that the Pew Research Center estimates that nearly 30% of all young adults age 18 to 24 do not live in their parents' homes, it is plausible that millions of U.S. families include those in which parents live with only their minor children.¹⁴⁶ Thus, if such families were included in a definition of the multigenerational family, the category of multigenerational families would expand significantly.¹⁴⁷ A definition should therefore specify that a home in which a parent lives with his or her minor child is not a multigenerational household, unless other family members of different generations live in the home.¹⁴⁸

IV. Recommendation

A. The Proposed Definition

Based on the foregoing Analysis, this Note proposes the following definition of a multigenerational home, to be used by government agencies, social scientists, and the general public:

A multigenerational home refers to a household in which two or more individuals, who belong to different generations, live together on a permanent basis. Individuals belong to different generations if the age difference between them is at least eighteen years. However, a multigenerational home does not include households in which a parent lives with only his or her

143. See generally Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; News Release, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

144. Press Release, Census Bureau Releases New Estimates on America's Families and Living Arrangements, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 2, 2020), <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/estimates-families-living-arrangements.html> [hereinafter Census Bureau].

145. See *id.*

146. *Id.*; see also *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39.

147. Census Bureau, *supra* note 144; *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39.

148. See *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 39.

child or children under the age of twenty-five. It also does not include households in which two parents who belong to the same generation live with only their child or children under the age of twenty-five.

B. Reasons to Adopt the Proposed Definition

This proposed definition is useful for several reasons. First, the definition excludes those family structures that are certainly not multigenerational, while remaining broad enough to include a wide range of nontraditional family structures.¹⁴⁹ For example, under the proposed definition, households in which parents live with only their minor children are not considered multigenerational.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, roommates and romantic partners of the same generation are not considered multigenerational.¹⁵¹ The definition also stipulates that the parties must live together on a permanent basis, as is consistent across all definitions discussed in this Note.¹⁵²

While the age of majority in the United States is eighteen years, I chose age twenty-five as the cut-off point for children living with their parents. This is because roughly 71% of all U.S. adults under the age of twenty-five live with their parents, so including them in the definition of a multigenerational family risks making the definition too over-inclusive.¹⁵³

Second, the definition provides a specific metric for determining whether individuals belong to different generations. The definition states that individuals belong to different generations if the age difference between them is at least eighteen years. This is a helpful metric for adults who live together, such as romantic partners, who wonder if their age difference qualifies them to be a multigenerational family.¹⁵⁴ I

149. *Id.*; see also *Writing Definitions*, *supra* note 110.

150. See generally discussion *infra* Sections IV.B, IV.C, IV.D.

151. See generally Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *News Release*, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

152. See generally Collins, *supra* note 112; Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22; Harrell, Kassner, & Figueiredo, *supra* note 89; Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; *News Release*, *supra* note 89; *Multigenerational Households, 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89.

153. Richard Fry, Jeffrey S. Passel, & D'Vera Cohn, *A Majority of Young Adults in the U.S. Live With Their Parents for the First Time Since the Great Depression*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Sept. 4, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/04/a-majority-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-live-with-their-parents-for-the-first-time-since-the-great-depression>.

154. See *Fighting Poverty in a Bad Economy*, *supra* note 39.

chose a cut-off point of eighteen years because the major generation categories (such as Baby Boomers and Millennials) are considered to last for eighteen years each.¹⁵⁵

Finally, the definition is phrased as a general rule, rather than a list of every possible living arrangement that could qualify as multigenerational.¹⁵⁶ This helps to ensure that non-traditional multigenerational families, such as a household in which a sixty-year-old woman raises her eight-year-old grandniece, are not inadvertently excluded from the definition.¹⁵⁷ This can also help avoid an unnecessarily long or unwieldy definition that may confuse the public, such as IHIS's definition.¹⁵⁸

C. Limitations of the Proposed Definition

The proposed definition may be somewhat overinclusive. For example, the definition would encompass a household in which a twenty-nine-year-old woman and her forty-seven-year-old husband live together. Such a couple is unlikely to experience many of the problems that are particularly relevant to multigenerational families overall. For instance, neither party is an older adult, so cohabiting likely does not disproportionately increase either one's risk of contracting COVID-19. In addition, the couple is unlikely to encounter many of the challenges facing parents and adult children who cohabit, such as negotiating privacy, childcare arrangements, and travel plans.

The proposed definition intentionally errs on the side of over-inclusivity, rather than under-inclusivity. This is because governments, researchers, and public policy organizations can always choose to narrow down a broad definition in order to address the needs of a specific subset of multigenerational families. This Note discusses this point in greater detail in the next section of this paper, entitled "Recommended Uses for the Definition."

155. *Age Range by Generation*, BERESFORD RSCH., <https://www.beresfordresearch.com/age-range-by-generation/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023). (R 18.1, T 10, T 12)

156. *But see* Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22 (showing IHIS's definition, which lists all possible living arrangements).

157. *See, e.g., Multigenerational Households: 2009-2011*, *supra* note 89, at 1 (providing that the Federal Census Bureau defines a multigenerational household as one including at least three generations; this would exclude a family structure in which, for example, a grand-aunt raises her grand-niece).

158. *See Writing Definitions*, *supra* note 110; *see also* Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

D. Recommended Uses of the Definition

This Note's proposed definition may be used by social science researchers; federal, state, and municipal policymakers; nonprofit organizations supporting multigenerational families; and the general public.¹⁵⁹ For example, social science researchers can use this definition to conduct a meta-analysis of the available studies on multigenerational families, allowing them to draw conclusions about the entire population of multigenerational families.¹⁶⁰ This would be particularly useful to social scientists because it would allow them to determine why multigenerational families have an unusual economic profile.¹⁶¹ Discovering the answer to this question could be key to developing policies to mitigate poverty among the most vulnerable multigenerational families.¹⁶²

In addition, nonprofit organizations that run programs and events for multigenerational families can use this definition to determine individual families' eligibility to participate in these programs.¹⁶³ Likewise, government agencies can use the definition to allocate resources to eligible families, while the public can use the definition to assess their own eligibility for government programs.¹⁶⁴ In general, having a single definition of "the multigenerational family" could raise awareness among the public of the unique joys and challenges associated with living within one of these family structures.¹⁶⁵ This could help those in multigenerational families feel more supported by their communities.¹⁶⁶

159. See e.g., Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

160. See generally *id.*

161. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17; see also Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22, at 7.

162. See generally Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22 (discussing the prevalence of food insecurity and SNAP beneficiaries among multi-generational families in the United States).

163. See, e.g., *Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act Initial Report to Congress*, *supra* note 64.

164. *Id.*

165. *Id.*

166. See, e.g., *Multigenerational Households*, GENERATIONS UNITED, <https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/multigenerational-households/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023) (stating that "[m]ultigenerational living is here to stay. Therefore, it's time for America to embrace this phenomenon as commonplace in American life among all socio-economic levels. We must prepare for a multigenerational family future, examining our policies and approaches to home building and design, family support and care, healthcare, communication, business and service-provision, jobs, and more.").

It should be noted, however, that the use of a single general definition should not preclude governments, organizations, and researchers from using a narrower definition in certain situations.¹⁶⁷ Definitions are necessarily context dependent, so adjustments to the proposed definition may be appropriate for specific purposes.¹⁶⁸ Thus, for example, a researcher studying older adults who raise their grandchildren may choose to restrict her analysis to only those multigenerational families in which a grandparent over the age of fifty-five is the primary caretaker for a grandchild.¹⁶⁹

Likewise, a state government may choose to implement COVID-19 policies that are specifically designed for elderly individuals living in multigenerational homes.¹⁷⁰ This is an especially important public policy goal, since, as previously discussed, elderly people living with younger family members are at particularly high risk for COVID-19 complications.¹⁷¹ In this scenario, the government may wish to specify that it will include only those multigenerational families in which a person over the age of sixty-five lives, so that the most vulnerable population receives priority for any rationed healthcare resources.¹⁷²

This Note's proposed definition is therefore not meant to be rigid or limiting. Instead, it provides a standardized definition of the multigenerational family, which governments, organizations, and individuals can use as a helpful guideline for the bulk of their operations. The definition can be tailored to specific situations as needed, in accordance with the goal of simplifying and improving public policy measures for multigenerational families.

167. See, e.g., *10.6 Definition*, UNIV. OF MINN. LIBRARIES, <https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/chapter/10-6-definition/> (last visited Jan. 31, 2023) (stating that "often words take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are used.") [hereinafter *10.6 Definition*].

168. See *id.*

169. See generally *id.*

170. See generally *id.*

171. See generally Anderson, *supra* note 57.

172. See generally *id.*

V. Conclusion

Numerous studies have demonstrated that multigenerational families are an increasingly common living arrangement for American families.¹⁷³ This is particularly true in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created economic hardships that forced many families to co-habit.¹⁷⁴ Multigenerational families enjoy unique benefits and face certain challenges, which public policy organizations should address.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, there is still no single definition of the multigenerational family among governments, organizations, and other public policy institutions.¹⁷⁶

Governments and organizations vary, often significantly, in their definitions of the multigenerational family.¹⁷⁷ This impedes the ability of public policy institutions to address the needs of multigenerational families.¹⁷⁸ For example, social science researchers have a limited ability to draw conclusions about the entire population of multigenerational families, since studies differ in how they define multigenerational families.¹⁷⁹

This is particularly troubling since multigenerational families are unique in their economic makeup.¹⁸⁰ Without a consistent definition of the multigenerational family, social scientists may struggle to understand the factors that influence poverty among multigenerational families, such as whether certain family structures are more likely to experience poverty than others.¹⁸¹ The lack of a single definition can also cause confusion for people who are unsure if their living arrangement qualifies them for benefits and programming specifically designed for multigenerational families.¹⁸²

To address these concerns, this Note proposes a single new definition of "the multigenerational family." This definition provides that "a multigenerational home" refers to a living arrangement in which two or more individuals, who belong to different generations, live together on a permanent basis. Individuals are considered to belong to

173. See Cohn & Passel, *supra* note 17.

174. See Lerner, *supra* note 18.

175. See, e.g., Mecera, *supra* note 10.

176. See Balk, *supra* note 16.

177. *Id.*

178. See Do, Rodgers, & Drew, *supra* note 22.

179. See *id.*

180. See *Fighting Poverty in a Tough Economy*, *supra* note 147.

181. *Id.*; see, e.g., Balk, *supra* note 16.

182. *Id.*

different generations if the age difference between them is at least eighteen years. However, a multigenerational home does not encompass living arrangements in which a parent lives with only his or her minor child or children, or those in which two parents who belong to the same generation live with only their minor child or children.

Governments, organizations, and individuals may find this definition useful as a way to improve consistency across studies and encourage members of multigenerational families to understand the benefits for which they are eligible.¹⁸³ The definition has several important strengths. For example, its phrasing as a general rule helps to ensure that a variety of family structures will be included. Moreover, the rule provides a helpful guideline for determining whether family members belong to different generations. It specifically excludes family structures that would not qualify as multigenerational.

However, the definition can be tailored in certain situations to suit the specific needs of a government, organization, or individual.¹⁸⁴ The definition should not be viewed as a restrictive measure.¹⁸⁵ Instead, it should serve as a helpful way to improve the lives of millions of multigenerational families by allowing governments and organizations to more effectively address these families' needs from a public policy standpoint.¹⁸⁶ As more Americans live in multigenerational households, a standard definition of "the multigenerational family" can promote social cohesion and improve the lives of millions of Americans.

183. See, e.g., 10.6 Definition, *supra* note 167.

184. *Id.*

185. *Id.*

186. *Id.*