

Livable Communities

POSITION STATEMENT

Generations United is committed to creating truly livable communities. These are strong neighborhoods, villages, towns and cities – urban and rural – where people are not separated by age, race or economic status. The best communities offer a range of choices in transportation and housing that are accessible and affordable to people with diverse needs. A livable community should also be a safe one. Truly safe communities have lower crime rates, but also offer a secure, healthy environment.

IN ADDITION, GENERATIONS UNITED SUPPORTS:

- **Efforts to prepare communities for the aging of the population and how the coming demographic changes will affect the physical and social fabric of our nation, with an emphasis on making communities livable for all ages**
- **Measures which promote new livable, multigenerational communities**

Intergenerational Intersection

Generations United recognizes that livability is a key issue of concern across generations. Younger and older populations and their caregivers have a particular need for safe and accessible environments, transportation and housing. They are particularly reliant on public transit and public services, such as libraries and community centers. They are especially vulnerable to crime, including abuse and neglect, gun violence and other violent crime. At the same time, effective intergenerational policy recognizes that children, youth, and seniors can be resources to each other to help promote safe, accessible, livable homes and communities.

- **Accessible public transportation initiatives, which cater to the needs of children, young people, older adults and caregivers**
- **Initiatives that provide opportunities to create and sustain intergenerational shared sites**
- **Creating a National Housing Trust Fund to produce, rehabilitate, and preserve 2.5 million affordable housing units by 2023**
- **Legislation which recognizes and facilitates flexible work practices which can improve work-life balance for all, and help prevent intergenerational conflict in the workplace**
- **Measures which would ameliorate the skills shortage in the human services sector.**

Background

NATIONAL HOUSING TRUST FUND

Among the issues facing young and old Americans today, is the lack of safe and affordable housing. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is nowhere in the country where someone making minimum wage could afford the average rent for a two bedroom unit. A National Housing Trust Fund would serve as a dedicated source of revenue to produce safe and affordable housing, as well as to rehabilitate and preserve existing low-income housing. The Trust Fund would build on the success of over 400 state and local housing trust funds, which are being used across the country to provide affordable housing for families of all ages.

The Trust Fund would be capitalized with ongoing, permanent, dedicated and sufficient sources of revenue to meet the goal of 1,500,000 housing units over the next decade. The funds used to capitalize

“You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of your grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin.”

Chief Seattle, leader of the Suquamish

the Trust Fund will not be those that are currently funding other federal housing programs. The use of resources from the Trust Fund would be compatible with existing housing programs that serve younger and older people, including the Section 202 elderly housing and the Section 8 family housing programs.



Jeanette DeVore

Trust Fund resources would be used primarily for rental housing for the poorest families, reflecting the area of greatest need. Within its low-income targeting requirements, Trust Fund resources are flexible, with states and localities receiving allocations and making funding decisions based on local priorities and public participation. As a result, the Trust Fund would be available to support housing for multi-

generational families. As the number of grandparent and other relative-headed households increase and the number of affordable homes for low-income families decreases, the Trust Fund would serve as an important resource for providing affordable, safe and decent housing for low-income families.

Full funding for the LEGACY Intergenerational Housing Act at the authorized level of \$10 million would open up valuable opportunities for grandfamilies. More details of this program are printed in

the chapter: "Supports for Grandfamilies and Other Family Caregiving."

MULTIGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1960s, senior-only, "sun city" housing developments have been promoted as the promised land for new retirees seeking less responsibility and more relaxation. Changing demographics are leading some developers to re-think how they plan for the communities they will be developing over the next ten to twenty years and beyond. A Civic Ventures (2002) survey of today's aging boomers show 73% want to remain in age integrated communities; 78% report volunteering, in particular with children and youth, will be an important part of retirement; and 79% intend to keep working in some capacity. At the same time the most recent Census showed multigenerational households experienced the largest percentage increase of any family structure in the US. When looking towards retirement, boomers are taking into consideration not just their housing needs but those of their aging parents, adult children, and grandchildren. Policies and regulations that guide and encourage developers of new communities and those focused on revitalizing neighborhoods need to reflect these changes in demographics and lifestyle and support multigenerational community development.

TRANSPORTATION

Only one half of Americans 65 or older have access to public transportation to meet their daily needs. Compared with older drivers, older non-drivers in the United States make 15% fewer trips to the doctor, 59% fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants and 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities.⁷ Children, too, often rely on car rides to access every-

day activities like school and sports. Many public transit systems focus on commuters and offer a reduced service during the day when children and older adults are more likely to travel. Following the reauthorization of funding for surface transportation in 2005, it is vital that these programs address the needs of both young and old.

WORK FORCE

In an unusual set of circumstances, many US workplaces are currently trying to accommodate the skills and needs of four separate generations. This has led some to speculate that because very young workers and senior workers have such different sets of expectations (and, often, compensation and benefits), there are tensions brewing that will be difficult to resolve. More senior workers are staying on the job later in life, both because they remain in good health and because they may have not saved enough money for a comfortable retirement. And large numbers of early retirees have gone back to work in recent years primarily in order to receive health benefits.

Those coming behind them may feel frustrated at their limited opportunities to move up the career ladder. While this is an undeniable fact of life for some, it is likely to be a temporary situation; once the baby boomers begin to retire in large numbers over the next several years, there will be a heightened unfilled demand for a workforce that might not be adequately prepared to fill the gap. In the meantime, enlightened employers will be examining options for promoting harmony while maintaining productivity. Among the programs they can implement are:

- Flexible scheduling (good both for older workers who wish less than full-time work, and for parents of young children)

- Phased retirement (to enable older workers to enter retirement gradually, while still being available to pass along valuable institutional memory to younger colleagues)
- Cafeteria benefit programs that allow individual workers to select the benefits that best fit their situation (for example, caregiving support for older workers with aging parents; sabbaticals for younger and mid-career workers; fitness programs and opportunities to volunteer for all ages)
- Formal and informal mentoring programs that pair young and old in teams to tackle projects and foster mutual understanding
- Retraining older workers, in combination with redesigning jobs as necessary, in areas of high need such as health care, community and social services, and education.

Legislation should recognize and facilitate these flexible approaches.

Additionally, there is a growing shortage of skilled employees in the human service sector, and with the aging population, legislators and advocates need to consider the availability of training, including:

- On-going professional development
- Institutions of higher education establishing 2- and 4-year degree courses
- Compensation for those working in the service fields, in order to support the current generation of providers in the human service field, and to establish leadership and career ladders for the future human service workforce.

“In Africa, when an old person dies it is like when a library burns down.”

*Hampâté Ba,
Malian philosopher*