



FACT SHEET: MULTIGENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS

Multigenerational Households are on the Rise and Here to Stay

Generation's United's 2011 study, "Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy,"¹ found 7 percent of Americans lived in a multigenerational household with three or more generations. In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to surge in our nation, and Americans hunkered down. We wanted to learn more about the effect of the pandemic on multigenerational living. At the end of January 2021, we commissioned a survey, conducted online by The Harris Poll² among over 2,000 U.S. adults,³ to determine the growth in multigenerational households and what makes them tick.

Our findings are clear: multigenerational living is indeed on the rise in 2021, with more than **1 in 4 Americans (26%) living in a household with 3 or more generations**. This finding indicates multigenerational living has **nearly quadrupled in the past decade** (a 271 percent increase from 7 percent in 2011⁴ to 26 percent 2021). This increase is incredibly striking, and our survey reveals some of the impetus for this remarkable growth.

As expected, the pandemic does play a strong role. Among those living in a multigenerational household, **nearly 6 in 10 (57%) say they started or are continuing to live with multiple generations because of the pandemic**.

Sixty-six percent of those living in a multigenerational household say the economic climate was a factor in their family becoming a multigenerational household. Other drivers that led to this type of living arrangement include the need for eldercare (34%), childcare or child education needs (34%), job losses, changes in job status or underemployment (30%), healthcare costs for one or more family members (25%), cultural and family expectations (23%), education and retraining expenses (23%), divorce or separation (16%), foreclosure or other housing loss of one or more family members (14%) and other reasons (9%).

"Families may come together from need, but they stay together by choice," says Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United. Indeed, multigenerational living is here to stay, with **more than 7 in 10 (72%) of those currently living in a multigenerational household planning to continue doing so long-term**.

The following is a brief overview of what we learned about Americans who live in a multigenerational household in our 2021 report, [Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay](#).

“ At the end of the day, we're family and we have to take care of one another.

- Dulce Medina, 46, Inglewood, California, who lives with her 70-year-old mother and her 22-year-old daughter

Key Findings



More than 1 in 4 Americans (26%) live in a multigenerational household.



66.7M

26% of Americans - an estimated **66.7 million** adults ages 18+ in the U.S. - are living in a multigenerational household.ⁱ



The number of Americans living in a multigenerational household has nearly quadrupled in the past decade.

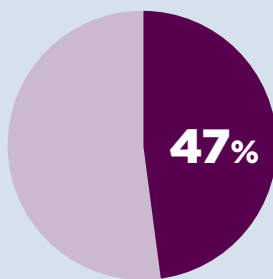
There was a 271% increase from 2011ⁱⁱ to 2021 (7% vs. 26%).



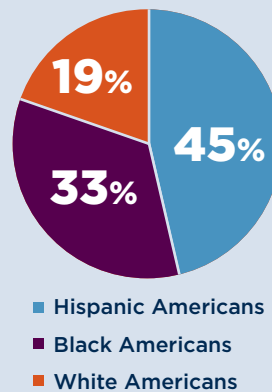
2011



2021



Nearly half of Americans who have children under 18 living in their home (47%) report living in a multigenerational household.



Among all Americans, **Hispanic Americans (45%)** and **Black Americans (33%)** are more likely than **White Americans (19%)** to say they live in a multigenerational household.

i U.S. Census Bureau. Population Division. Population and Housing Estimates of the Total Resident Population and Resident Population Age 18 Years and Older for the United States, Regions, States, and the District of Columbia. July 1, 2020 (SC-EST2020-18+POP-RES) Release Date: December 2020. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/research/evaluation-estimates.html> and <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2020/state/totals/sc-est2020-18+pop-res.xlsx>

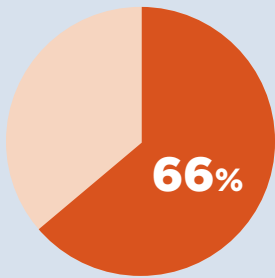
ii Please note that although both surveys were conducted by The Harris Poll, sample providers have changed from the 2011 "Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy" survey to the 2021 "Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay", survey.

Among those living in a multigenerational household:



The COVID-19 pandemic:

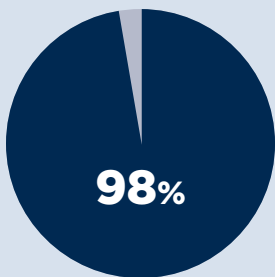
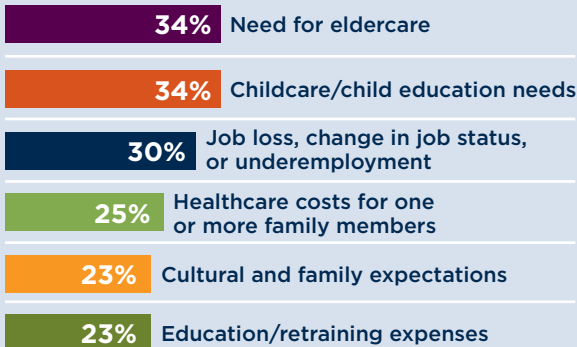
Nearly 6 in 10 (57%) report they started or are continuing to do so because of the pandemic.



Economic climate:

66% say the current economic climate was a factor in their family becoming a multigenerational household, with 16% saying it was the only factor.

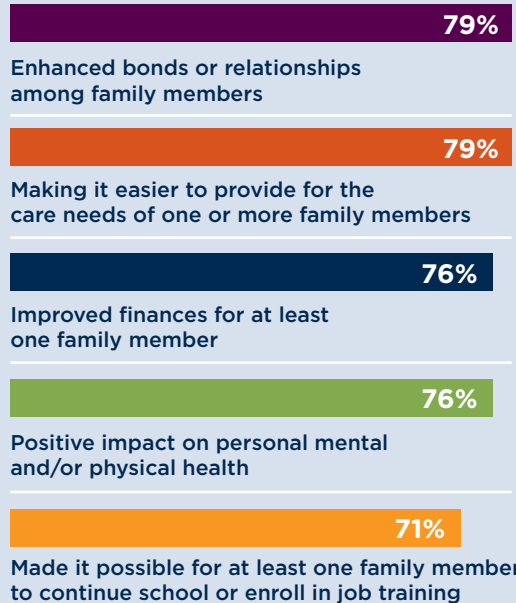
Multigenerational households are formed for a variety of reasons: The top causes for their family becoming a multigenerational household include:



Multigenerational living is a highly successful solution despite challenges.

Nearly all (98%) say their household functions successfully, although 75% say their household arrangement can contribute to stress among family members at times.

Multigenerational household arrangements have many benefits. The following benefits are cited:

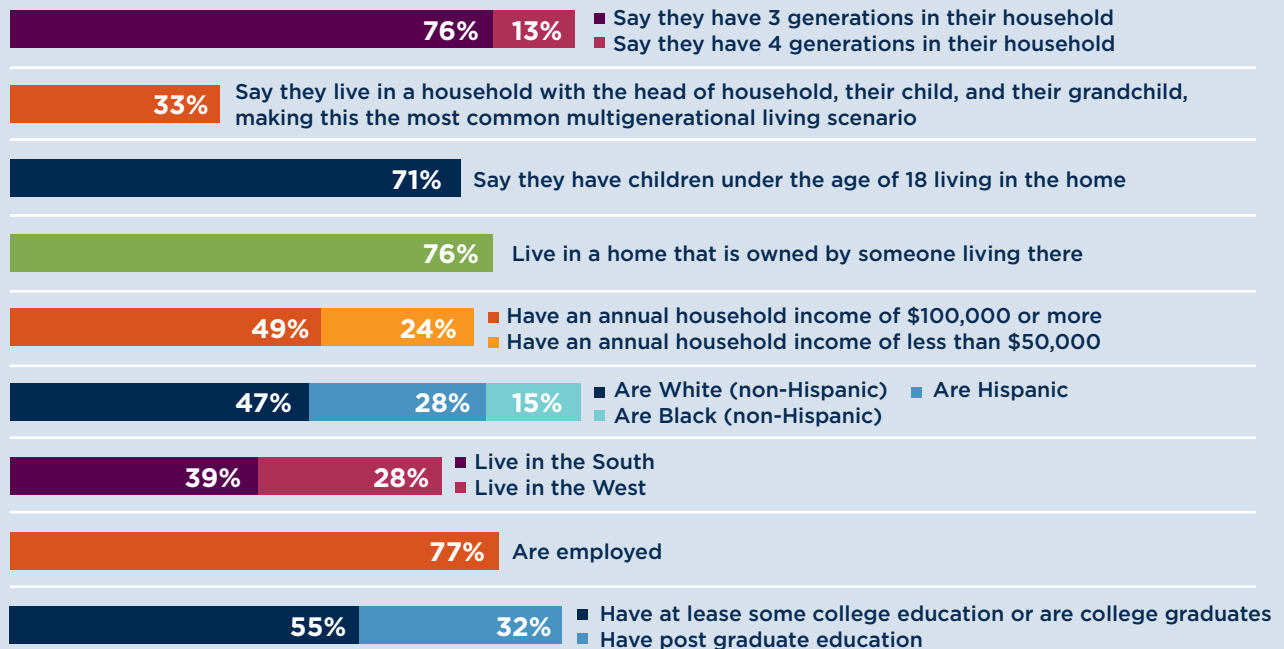


Multigenerational living is here to stay:

More than 7 in 10 (72%) plan to continue living in a multigenerational household long-term.

Who Lives in Multigenerational Households?

Multigenerational households are defined as those with **3 or more generations living together**. Among Americans who live in a multigenerational household:



“ I come with the babies and my grandmother sees them and it doesn’t matter how bad her day is, she “180s” immediately! We kind of bring in the light, we bring in the joy. It’s a lift of the spirit so that’s our role as grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Photos courtesy of Vivian Nixon

- Vivian Nixon, 36, Los Angeles, California, who lives in a household spanning four generations including her parents, her grandmother, her fiancé, and her two young daughters

Factors that Contribute to the Successful Functioning of a Multigenerational Household

Family Relationships/Interactions:

42% Intergenerational activities with household members of different generations

40% Family meals

39% Open communication

33% Consistency/routines

29% Realistic expectations and compromise

26% Regular family meetings

Home Design:

46% Number of bedrooms

43% Number of bathrooms

38% Private spaces

34% Common space for family to gather

30% Home modifications/additions

25% Having designated kitchen time/routines

Supports and Services:

27% Mental health support

26% Mortgage or rent assistance

24% Paid help with eldercare and/or childcare

24% Workplace support



Photo courtesy of Robin Whinnem

“ We’ve said, if something’s bothering you, tell me. My husband is not one to hide things and neither am I. But you need the rest of the family to be on board and be honest about their communication as well. If they’re not, it’s not going to work. If they need space to themselves, they need something, they’ve got to communicate it.

– Robin Whinnem, 55, Bristol, Connecticut, who lives with her husband, two stepsons, her daughter and grandson, as well as her mother-in-law who lives next door

Multigenerational Living: 10 Tips for Families

Every multigenerational family is unique and has a diverse set of strengths and needs. These tips may not apply to all families, but in general they can help the household function more effectively.

1. **Maximize the opportunity for intergenerational exchange**, celebrating and drawing upon each other's strengths. Build relationships through shared activities across the generations such as learning together, family cooking and meals, entertainment, sharing stories, sharing family and cultural history.
2. **Design or modify homes** to incorporate universal and inclusive design principles for all ages and abilities. Create private spaces for each family member as well as shared gathering spaces. Maximize the number of bathrooms and bedrooms and consider expanding household space, if possible, through home modifications or permanent/temporary accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that provide nearby, but separate, living space (such as an apartment over a garage, in a basement or in a separate tiny house in the yard).
3. **Discuss finances**, including agreement on a budget, who will pay for which expenses and how payments will be made.
4. **Promote open communication** and clarify rules, roles and responsibilities through family meetings, informal conversations or even a "suggestion box".
5. **Acknowledge stress** and arrange for **mental health support** for all household members when and if needed.
6. **Establish routines** as a tool to ease transitions as well as day to day functioning.
7. **Create realistic expectations**, including time spent together, privacy, responsibilities, compromises, the benefits, and the sacrifices that will be made.
8. **Encourage personal care time** by finding ways to allow each household member to have time and space for themselves.
9. **Find resources and supports** that meet your unique family situation/challenges.
10. **Be open about your multigenerational living situation**. Share the successes and seek support from friends for the challenges. Raise awareness about the benefits of living in multigenerational households.

Conclusion

Margaret Mead said "Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we've put it in an impossible situation." Our 2021 data prove that multigenerational living has experienced a resurgence and is here to stay. Our nation was built by multigenerational families, and a return to multigenerational households is a sign of strength and ingenuity. It's time for America to embrace and support it. We must prepare for a multigenerational future, examining our policies and approaches to home building and design, family support and care, healthcare, communication, business and service-provision, jobs and more.

Multigenerational living can positively impact our families, our nation, our society, our economy, and our environment as it enables families to draw upon the strengths of multiple generations, working together to create solutions in the best interests of family members of all ages. The result is resilient families who get through both good times and challenging times together.

Visit [Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay](#) to view the full report.

Additional Resources

Generations United has developed a number of resources accompany this report, including fact sheets, family profiles, and important references available [online](#).

About Generations United

The mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. For over three decades, Generations United has catalyzed cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if age diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. To learn more about Generations United, please visit www.gu.org.

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Endnotes

- 1 Generations United. “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy” survey report. 2011. <https://www.gu.org/resources/family-matters-multigenerational-families-in-a-volatile-economy/>. Please note that although both surveys were conducted by The Harris Poll, sample providers have changed from the 2011 “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy” survey to the 2021 “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay”, survey.
- 2 The Harris Poll is one of the longest running surveys in the U.S. tracking public opinion, motivations and social sentiment since 1963 that is now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, a global consulting and market research firm that delivers social intelligence for transformational times. We work with clients in three primary areas; building twenty-first-century corporate reputation, crafting brand strategy and performance tracking, and earning organic media through public relations research. Our mission is to provide insights and advisory to help leaders make the best decisions possible. To learn more, please visit www.theharrispoll.com.
- 3 Survey Methodology: The 2021 survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Generations United from January 28-February 1, 2021 among 2,051 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, among whom 441 live in a multigenerational (at least 3 generations) household. The 2011 survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Generations United from September 27-29, 2011 among 2,226 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, among whom 136 live in a multigenerational (at least 3 generations) household. These online surveys are not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodologies, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Generations United at gu@gu.org.
- 4 Generations United. “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy” survey report. 2011. <https://www.gu.org/resources/family-matters-multigenerational-families-in-a-volatile-economy/>. Please note that although both surveys were conducted by The Harris Poll, sample providers have changed from the 2011 “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living in a Volatile Economy” survey to the 2021 “Family Matters: Multigenerational Living Is on the Rise and Here to Stay”, survey.

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