

Overview: Planning for Multigenerational Communities

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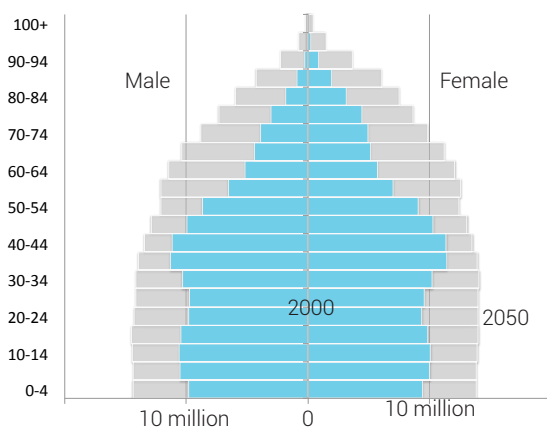
Multigenerational planning is a comprehensive approach to community and economic development that enables people of all ages and abilities to lead active and fulfilling lives. The Planning Across Generations Project has created a series of issue briefs which outline key points on how planners can successfully adopt multigenerational planning to **expand choices for families, increase independence** of people of all ages and **create stronger communities** across the U.S.

The Demographic Imperative

The demand for age inclusive communities grows from the strong desire among the elderly to remain rooted in their communities. At the same time, many cities and towns are also dealing with an expanding youth population, particularly in regions that are experiencing a high influx of immigration. [See Demographics Issue Brief.](#)

Population growth is occurring at both ends of the age spectrum. **There are more elementary students expected to enter the public school system than ever before** (NCES 2013) along with a growing senior population.

Young and Old: 2050 Population Projections



Author, based on raw data from "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century." U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.

Why Multigenerational Planning?

Shifting demographics imply changing needs and calls for a new planning approach ([Morken and Warner 2012](#)). Traditional planning methods that focus almost exclusively on able-bodied, tax-paying adults have left communities ill prepared to meet the unique needs of two age groups with distinct needs and desires: children and seniors.

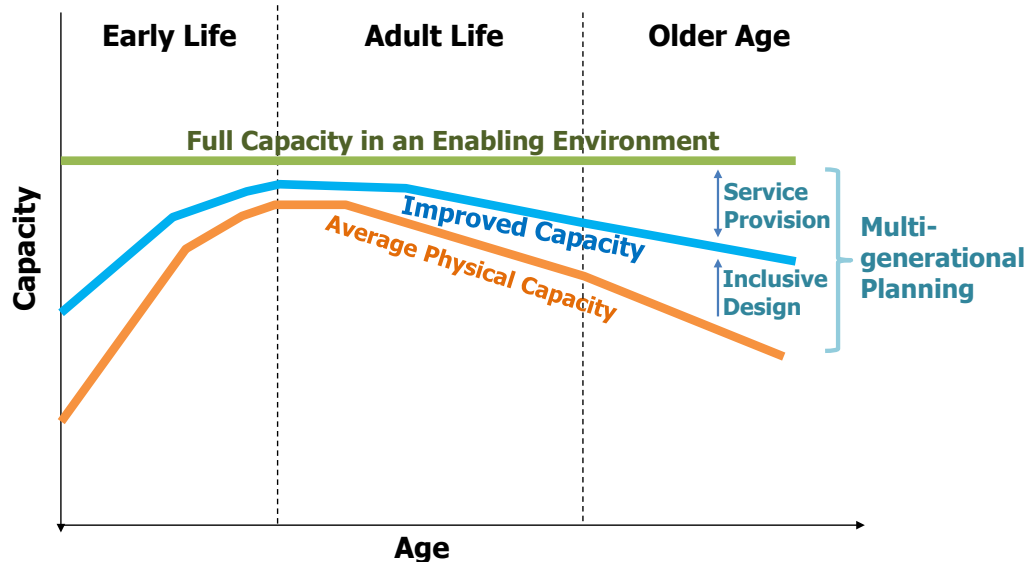
To compound matters, many communities are faced with shrinking budgets and are forced to do more with less, often leading to cuts in much needed services ([Warner and Morken 2013](#)). **Adults often find themselves caring for their elderly parents while also raising children**, which raises work life stress and undermines productivity.

As a solution, multigenerational planning specifically addresses the needs of all age groups and people of all abilities to create lively and healthy communities ([Ghazaleh et al 2011](#)). As communities across the U.S. experience dramatic shifts in demographics, the demand for age inclusive communities will intensify. **Age inclusive communities hold a distinct economic advantage** ([Warner and Baran-Rees 2012](#)).

Planning Across Generations project, directed by Mildred Warner, Professor of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Supported in part by the USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture research grant #2011-68006-30793. Additional issue briefs and case studies can be found at www.mildredwarner.org.

A Framework for Multigenerational Planning

Planners should recognize the needs of residents across the entire life course. **Physical capacity varies with age, rising as children grow and declining as people age.** Inclusive design promotes the independence of children and elders by making indoor and outdoor spaces accessible to all. **Planners complement inclusive physical design with formal service provision** to make sure the needs of all community members are met (Warner et al 2013). The promise of multigenerational planning is that it enhances the independence of children and elders and reduces dependence on caregivers, thus enhancing the capacity of all residents.



Author, based in part on WHO (2007) functionality curve

Although multigenerational planning is relatively new to the U.S., it has been an active component of planning internationally for over a decade. The two main organizations that have advocated for more age-friendly cities are the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). While WHO focuses on seniors and UNICEF focuses on children, a multigenerational planning approach recognizes the **complementarities between child and age-friendly principles.** While UNICEF gives more attention to rights (UNICEF 2004) and WHO gives more attention to civic participation (WHO 2007), both approaches share common principles regarding **well being, accessibility, safety and social inclusion in services and the built environment.** American planners can draw inspiration and borrow from these established principles.



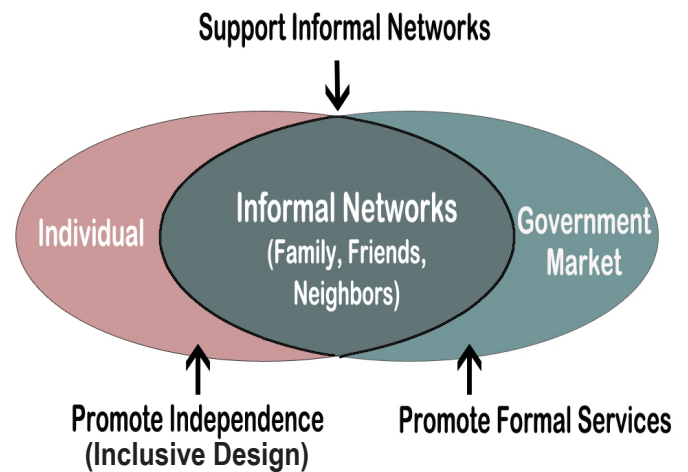
Author, based on UNICEF 2004 and WHO 2007

How Can My Community Adopt Multigenerational Planning?

Idea 1: Link individuals, informal networks and formal services

Multigenerational planning gives attention to both formal services, provided by the market and government, and the role of informal networks of family, friends, and neighbors. **Informal networks are useful in many different types of service delivery** ranging from transportation, to caregiving, to home maintenance and repair. These informal networks allow all members of the community to become self-supporting and can provide new opportunities for alternative forms of formal service delivery.

[See Informal Networks Issue Brief.](#)



Idea 2: Joint Use of Neighborhood Schools

Schools are a critical resource for multigenerational planning. Joint use **promotes healthy communities by providing valuable parks and recreational facilities** at a reduced cost to the public and supports lifelong fitness and education by integrating the community into school activities. According to the 2008 APA survey of Family Friendly Planning, 43 percent of responding planners work with school boards to co-locate schools with parks, recreational areas, libraries, and community centers ([Israel and Warner 2008](#)). **Planners are uniquely positioned to facilitate cross-departmental partnerships** necessary to attain joint use agreements ([Morken and Baran-Rees 2012](#)).

Regardless of the investment that communities and planners put into schools, they are often underutilized. Communities face the dual challenge of meeting the rising need for services by children and aging baby boomers. Planners can play a critical role in ensuring that the design of neighborhood schools supports the growth and well being of the entire community. **This requires careful attention to inclusive design and communication and collaboration between planners, architects, and the community.**

[See Issue Briefs on Joint Use Schoolyards and School Buildings.](#)

With more young children entering the U.S. school system than ever before, **planners need to ensure neighborhood schools are preserved and services expanded to serve the needs of the entire community, especially in poor neighborhoods.** Planners can work with schools to identify the needs of the most vulnerable members of society: children. In so doing planners will strengthen neighborhoods for all.

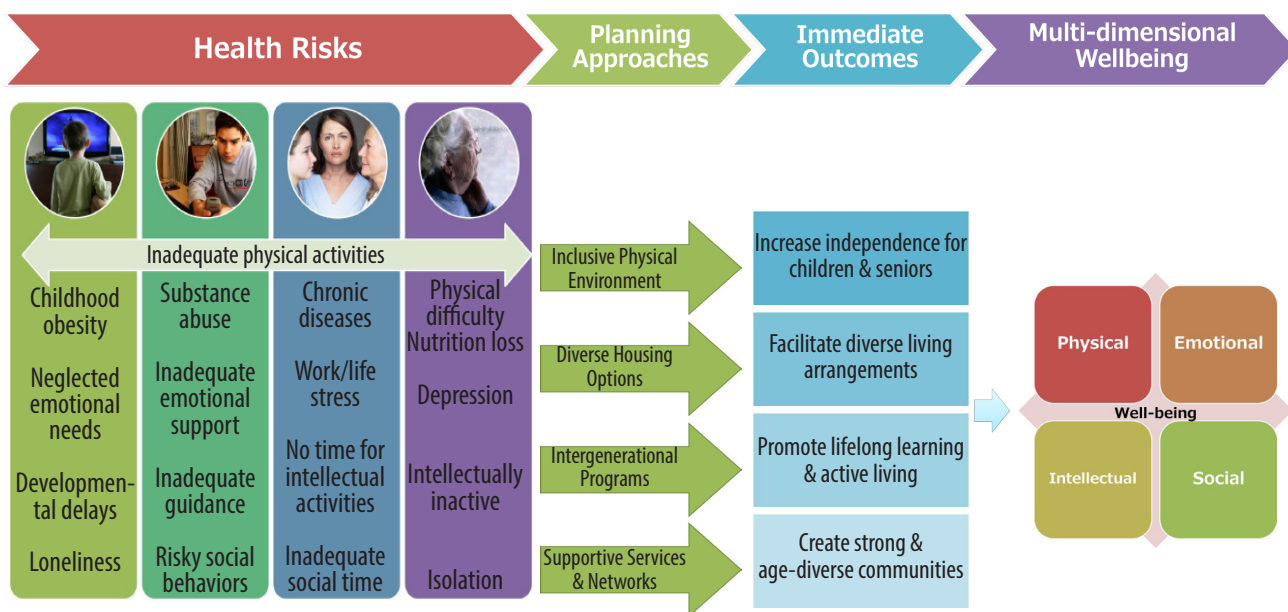
[See Issue Brief on Communications.](#)

Idea 4: Reconnect planning to health

In the face of skyrocketing health care costs and chronic health concerns of the US population, **multigenerational planning can be an effective tool to tackle health challenges**. Multigenerational planning links each age group's diverse yet complementary health needs, addresses the multidimensional elements of health, promotes well being, and enhances equity and efficiency. It also brings more funding opportunities to planners to create healthier communities for people of all ages.

[See Health Issue Brief.](#)

A comprehensive approach linking planning to health



Idea 5: Address gender differences

Multigenerational planning aims to **address the needs of traditionally underserved groups**, particularly children and elders. This is the perfect platform for planners to address the needs of women, who are traditionally underserved and intimately affected by the needs of both children and elders.

Women need housing, communities, transportation, child care, and elder care that work for them. This has huge implications for the planning profession and is a great opportunity for planners to work to **bring down structural barriers in planning, zoning and service design**. In so doing, planners will reduce stress on women by giving women their time back and creating communities that **overcome gender bias**.

[See Issue Briefs on the Planning Gender Gap and on Incorporating Gender in Economic Analysis.](#)

Funding

Many funding opportunities exist to help transform communities into more child and age friendly places. From federal grants to coordinating with your local Area Office on Aging, there are a variety of ways to finance multigenerational planning initiatives in your community.

[See Issue Brief on Funding.](#)

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