



Photo: Caitlin Mae Burke

Executive Summary

Our families, our society, and our economy are in trouble. One in five children lives in poverty. More than a third of older adults have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line. The U.S. is still in a recession, a recession that has highlighted how important the generations are to each other. Child, parent, and grandparent are coming back together and living in the same home, dependent on each other for financial support and caregiving.

The interdependence of these multigenerational households is reflected in our society as a whole. Good public policies – Social Security, public education, affordable health care – do not impact one generation at the expense of the others. They are policies that help us all. If parents die or become disabled, our nation’s young children and youth are going to need Social Security to prosper. If our children are not properly educated for 21st Century challenges, will they be able to fuel tomorrow’s economy, keep America competitive and contribute to Social Security for our aging population? Without adequate health care will we be able to care for our children, parents, and grandparents? These practical realities are what we need to consider when engaging in effective public policy making.

Now is the time to create and implement policies that help generations help each other, thereby strengthening our economy. Investing in people will strengthen our future workforce, ensure quality of life and well-being, make America more competitive, and help achieve fiscal sustainability. If we neglect smart investments in human capital across the lifespan and abandon support for the growing interdependence of generations, we risk failure in the form of wasteful spending, increased public divisiveness, and policies injurious to American families and communities. We must look at the generations as interdependent. We need to make budget decisions while considering all government spending, but not by framing a false policy distinction between policies for the young versus policies for the old. It is not a choice between the generations. Investments of our nation’s resources should ensure adequate income and health care for all ages, in addition to supports for caregivers across the generations.

The public agrees with this intergenerational frame for effective public policy making. According to a new poll commissioned by Generations United, and conducted by Harris Interactive, 76% of respondents believe publically funded programs targeted to a specific age group such as K-12 education or Social Security are not burdensome responsibilities to certain age groups but investments that benefit all generations. Furthermore, 83% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that politicians pit one generation against another in order to limit public support for government funded child care, health care, Social Security, or other programs. Although the public is aware that many policy makers and opinion leaders engage in this intergenerational warfare construct, they reject this divisive approach.

Reflecting this support from the public, this report promotes an intergenerational approach to public policy making and looks at key policy issues of mutual interest to young and old: Social Security, Health Care, Taxes, and the Budget and Fiscal Conditions. Exploring these key policy issues and developing consensus on a set of intergenerational principles will go far towards breaking down our silos of old and young. As part of this process, Generations United recommends a White House Conference on the Generations to replace the White House Conference on the Aging and the never convened, although frequently advocated, White House Conference on Children and Youth. Let's come together at the national level and reflect and support what is going on in our homes, streets, and communities. It is not a fight, it's a family. Let's approach our policies with one holistic intergenerational lens that values all of us.

In addition to the unified White House Conference, GU makes a series of concrete recommendations in this report:

Investments Across the Lifespan

- Invest in key supports at transitional phases such as policies from early learning, flexible workplace, to hospice care.
- Provide incentives and raise awareness about the value of shared spaces and services, programs like joint senior/child care centers.
- Look at existing policies and ensure that funding streams do not act as barriers to providing cost effective co-housed approaches.

Health

- Support efforts - including the implementation of the Affordable Health Care Act - to address the rising cost of health care while providing quality care to all ages.
- Examine health care policies from the perspective of all generations and address the rising health care costs by addressing inefficiencies in health care delivery and fraud.

Social Security

- Protect and improve Social Security as a program that provides lifetime financial security to workers, people with disabilities, children and family members, and retirees.
- Reinstate the student benefit.
- Improve Social Security support for grandparents and other relatives raising children – grand-families – in addition to other nontraditional family structures.
- Provide Social Security credits to caregivers.
- Eliminate the reduction in benefits for in-kind support and maintenance, increasing SSI’s resource limit and increasing the income disregard.

Taxes/Revenue

- Subject all spending, including entitlements and tax expenditures, to the principles of lifetime productivity and shared sacrifice based on people’s ability to pay.
- Make permanent the 2009 improvements to the Earned Income Tax Credit that addressed the issue of the marriage penalty.
- Expand benefits for larger families.

Budget Process and Analysis

- Apply intergenerational principles, which recognize how different generations will be engaged as resources to each other, to budgetary decision-making.
- Refer to “generational impact” statements which analyze and weigh the effects of investments on the productivity of all generations, the quality of life across the lifespan, and the security of our safety net.

Done well, these collective recommendations will pay off for all of us. We will conserve resources through shared sites and services, and have a more financially secure and mutually respectful population.



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