

“Bridging Health, Housing, and Generations: What the United States Might Learn from Germany’s Multigenerational Housing Demonstrations” by Jennifer Molinsky, Anne Marie Brady, and Bailey Hu

## Foreword

This report describes several communities supported by a German federal government program to encourage intentional multigenerational communities, which are defined as “residential settings that are open to residents of all ages, including children and older people, and that have a deliberate focus on fostering intergenerational interaction and relationships.” This program, “Wohnen für (Mehr) generationen—Gemeinschaft stärken, Quartier beleben,” was administered by the German Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth between 2009 and 2015. It offered small grants to support housing developments that are designed and marketed to attract older and younger adults and families, incorporate universal design, and are integrated into the neighborhood.

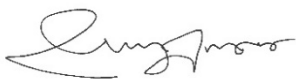
In these developments, each household lives in their own unit and shares common amenities, such as common rooms or gardens. These developments include owner-occupied units, rental units or mixed tenure. Several of the developments include subsidized rental units to attract young people, who are less likely to have the savings to buy a housing unit.

The report includes five case studies from the “Wohnen für (Mehr) generationen” demonstration, as well as a discussion of several similar American models for comparison. The U.S. cases include market-rate cohousing, subsidized multigenerational housing, subsidized housing for foster families, and subsidized housing for grandparents raising grandchildren. Some of the lessons learned from this comparative study include: physical design is as critical to fostering social interaction; building community requires sustained, intentional effort; and formal supports and services are important for many individuals living within intentional multigenerational communities.

Policymakers in Germany and elsewhere in Europe are interested in multigenerational housing because it may help older adults age in place and delay transitions to nursing home care. Multigenerational housing can also meet the needs of younger people—especially young families—for more affordable housing in inclusive, well-designed, and mixed-age communities. In the United States, like Germany, we also have an aging population and face growing affordability challenges, so we can learn from the German experience.

The authors identify federal programs in the U.S. that could support multigenerational housing, including HUD’s Section 811, HOME, and Community Development Block Grant program. They also identify barriers to creating and sustaining multigenerational residential communities in the U.S. including local zoning laws and building codes, as well as policies that prevent unrelated individuals from living together and financing restrictions.

This study, conducted by the German Marshall Fund and Harvard’s Joint Center on Housing Studies, is one of PD&R’s many efforts to learn from our international partners through comparative research. The notion of dedicating funding to intentionally building multigenerational communities is novel in the U.S., and the study presented here provides a starting point for thinking about the pros and cons of such an effort.



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