

KEY DEFINITION #2

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

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The definition of family will vary depending upon what a policy or program is trying to accomplish. Existing definitions of family can be categorized in several ways, two that are mentioned below:

- **structural definitions** that specify family membership according to certain characteristics such as a blood relationship, legal ties, or residence; and
- **functional definitions** that specify functions that family members perform, such as sharing economic resources and caring for the young, elderly, ill, impaired, or members with disabilities.

Rather than seeking a single universal definition, either a structural or functional definition can be written to reinforce the intent of a specific policy or program. Structural definitions seem more appropriate for some policy goals and functional definitions for others.

Note. Adapted from *The Family Impact Rationale: An Evidence Base for the Family Impact Lens* (p. 10), by K. Bogenschneider, O. Little, T. Ooms, S. Benning, and K. Cadigan, 2012b, Madison, WI: Family Impact Institute. Copyright 2012 by the Family Impact Institute. Adapted with permission.